

# UTIA Advisory Council Meeting

April 21, 2025

## Attendance:

In person: Vermont Dia, Liz Eckelkamp, Lannett Edwards, Molly West (representing Jennifer Richards), Joe Zhuang, Juan Luis Jurat-Fuentes, Andy Pulte, Mark Wilber; Executive Members: Keith Carver, Hongwei Xin, Justin Rhinehart, David White, Charley Deal, Doug Bohner, Bill Jackson, Lisa Stearns, and Paul Plummer

Zoom: Ethan Parker, Amy Willis Price, Elizabeth Renfro, Richard Gerhold Jr.

Meeting began at 1:04pm.

Meeting minutes from Fall had a correction from \$10 million to \$15 million for PIC.

Previous meeting minutes with the correction approval: Juan Luis made the motion and Lannett seconded. Previous meeting minutes were approved unanimously.

Report from UTIA Senior Vice President and Senior Vice Chancellor, Keith Carver

- High level project updates:
  - State budget was approved week of April 14, 2025, ~\$50 million in funding was approved.
    - Was not successful in precision agriculture funding. Will have follow-up conversations with President Boyd for strategies to reach legislators and reframe the benefits to state-level stakeholders.
      - Reframe may focus on impacts on land-loss and being more efficient and effective with remaining farmland, in terms of food security and food safety.
      - Will be a large focus of money raising in the capital campaign (north of \$200 million)
      - Governor is supportive, but it did not make the cut off this year. Reframe for him specifically will focus on beef cattle efforts
    - Not successful on expansion of small animal hospital at UTCVM (\$45 to \$46 million expansion)
      - Roughly \$14 million secured from donors
      - Will explore the option of self-funding to move this project forward this year

- This is needed to match the enrollment expansion of the vet school
  - New chemistry building on UT Knoxville campus was a big win this year, and had been a priority area for the last 5 years
  - Received a historic amount for 4H and FFA funding (\$46 million from state budget)
    - It was originally \$46 million for each (4H and FFA, respectively) but it was backed down by 3% per organization
    - Focus is on STEM (STEAM) and workforce development
  - Non-formula units (units that do not typically qualify for quality assurance funding) had funds secured for quality assurance funding impacts; Human health impact programs are the focus this year.
    - \$2.5 million for the vet school in new operating equipment
- Extension Dean Search
  - First interviews begin next week (4/28/2025)
  - Candidates will spend time in each region (East, Middle, & West) during interviews & focus on consumer & stakeholder engagement
  - Details on candidates will be released ~48 hours before interviews
  - Acceptable and unacceptable candidates list is asked for, Carver will do the reference calls and does not want a ranked list. Expects a decision to be made quickly after interviews
- Uncertainty:
  - Grant funding being frozen and released, others being canceled entirely and those soft-funded positions have been lost (6 FTEs)
  - Climate smart initiatives under scrutiny/paused
  - Focused on “controlling the controllable”
  - Kudos to the government relations team at the state and national level
- McClain Survey on attitudes about work
  - Data on specific divisions has been shared with leadership
  - Positive feedback on current leadership and positive outlook for the future
  - Someone from McClain will be included in discussions with faculty, etc. when they are available
  - Positive feedback:
    - Individuals feel that we are tied to the land grant mission and work makes a difference and is impactful
    - Positive feedback on colleagues
  - Negative feedback:

- Pay scale and compensation improvements
    - Particularly between UT-Knoxville and UTIA
    - This was also the number 1 priority across all other UT campuses
  - Parking
- Questions:
  - Juan Luis asked about Hatch funding and if it was in danger; Carver remains optimistic that they will continue, focused on using the funds to support initiatives and maximizing our effectiveness with those funds.
  - Lannett focused on recruitment of future ag students and helping ensure they are able to be admitted to UTIA. Carver recognizes that it can be a tough situation, indicated that David White is working on this. Molly followed up with students transferring in from other universities because they want to be a part of our ag program.
- Final thoughts: constantly impressed with the quality of work of our leaders across units, missions, labs, and classrooms. Highly complementary of the overall leadership teams at the University during these times of uncertainty.

#### Report from Ag Extension, Justin Rhinehart

- 2024 UT Extension Impact Report handed out
  - Total expenditures are not included
    - \$111 million is budgeted in 2025, primarily in salary (<10% is Federal Funding)
  - Service-minded jobs that rely on job satisfaction, but salary equivalency is still important
  - Nearly 900 employees across all 95 counties in TN
- ANR framework for developing and reporting on programming has been evaluated and a plan to update it has been implemented.
- CED (community and economic development) involvement
  - Extension has been meeting with CES and CED faculty to build out more recognition and support
- FCS has been negatively impacted by federal funding and competitive grant programming cuts, thankfully many programs impacted were nearing the end of their grant periods. David and Justin are working together to see if there is an opportunity to partner in teaching to help offset these funding losses.
- 4H funding for STEM/STEAM, deferred maintenance and security on 4H centers.

- Central Region office is the next focal area on the Extension master plan, pursuing a potential partnership with TN Dept of Agriculture to flush out these updates
- Needs are on funding for agents, starting salaries, and compression in careers. Wants to avoid losing high-quality mid-career individuals. Looking at innovative funding mechanisms to meet the shortfall in funding. Working closely with advancement on this.
  - Tenure-track faculty members in Extension with the potential of doing a 9-month appointment. Working on a 75% FTE and filling out the remainder of the salary with other funding (grants, programmatic funds, etc.) and recognizes that Extension is not tied to the academic calendar year. Thinks this would be a benefit for recruitment and retention of faculty.
- Questions:
  - Lannett: do you see more opportunities for meaningful joint-appointments in teaching and/or research with extension? Rhinehart: definitely, the missions fit together well, and the biggest limitation is on staying reportable to funding lines for faculty.

#### Report from Herbert, David White

- Academic updates
  - Environmental and soil sciences moving to environmental sciences, drop off in soil health students leading to the change.
    - 52% urban students in HCA instead of rural students.
    - Soil health will remain as a concentration with the option to become a major in the future
  - Collaboration with the law school for a new joint program (3+1 program, this is within ALEC only)
    - Interest in expanding beyond just one program (Animal Science, etc.)
  - Low percentage we are actually losing to Martin (11%)
    - Over 900 in-state applications to Martin as opposed to 400 in-state applications to UTIA
    - Biggest issue is the incoming ACT/SAT score
    - Focus is on transfer programs and finding a pathway to UTIA
      - Potential to partner with an advisor to ensure that those students take classes that can transfer over easily
  - ALEC PhD is coming online in Fall of 2025; ALEC MS is the fastest growing program at UTIA

- Hiring 2 new advisors – both start May 1. David sending out information on them soon.
  - One joining Animal Science (Micah)
  - One joining SNR (Aliah)
- One candidate for community engagement and coordinator position
  - Engage career fairs, ensure opportunities for graduates
- Veterans initiative with the veterans success center
  - Joint Service Transcript equates military service with courses, piloting opportunities for service to be equated with class credit in relevant areas
- Graduation is May 16, 2025. In conjunction with Haslam College of Business, and they have taken over the graduation ceremony outline.
  - May 15 from 2 to 4pm in the ANR Ballroom will be a celebration of our students and a big party.
    - Ideally each department has a table and is represented
  - Several students no longer want to go to graduation, and faculty are upset.
  - 290 undergraduates are graduating and 77 MS & PhDs graduating
- Two new Haslam Scholars coming into HCA
  - Lexi Roth (ANSC)
  - Caroline Garroll (Natural Resources and Environmental Economics)
- Callie Robinson won National Cattleman’s Young Farmer and Ranchers Program
- Recruitment/Enrollment:
  - Over 200 tours just for UTIA, over 28 new Herbert ambassadors
  - 1,681 applications (up 300+), 583 admitted (up from last year)
  - \$1.2 million in scholarships awarded
- Sent a survey on student services and advising
  - 72% feel very welcome
  - 73% feel very supported by HCA faculty (97% feel somewhat or more supported)
- 29 events since Fall 2024
- Creamery Updates:
  - New creamery serving location in new torchbearer dormitory
    - \$1.5 million
- Thinking of starting a TN summit across all the ag schools in Tennessee
  - Wants feedback/thoughts on if this is a good idea
    - Lannett is supportive, several of these schools have general ag degrees and they want to pursue a more specific degree.

- Molly seconded this point and provided a real-life example of collaboration working out well
- Questions:
  - Vermont: with the number of admits, how many confirmed? White: 221 confirmed
    - Andy: students he's communicating with don't know about scholarships or if they have received anything. Molly and Vermont added context on when we receive scholarship applications. Who is the holdup? Molly – enrollment management. White: with the DOE practically dead, he is unsure how it will impact FAFSA for future rounds of need-based scholarships.
      - White is saying all 4H and FFA state officers will have scholarships
      - White says another focus is on reaching students younger on how to be a successful applicant to UTIA and have education nights/FAFSA submission “parties”
  - Vermont asked about undeclared students, White shared some of their outreach efforts.
  - Joe: will there be changes in BESS name? White: Not at this time
  - Liz: What will the other creamery be? White: ice cream dip shop similar to the UT Creamery location in the old visitors center

#### Report from UTIA Advancement, Charley Deal

- Bad news: DOW is down 3.12% today, donors are losing a lot of money
- Good news:
  - Advancement is fully staffed
  - New position joint with Extension working on the TN River Line project
  - Annual giving program has done very well, and as of last week we were the only one in the UT System to be up in donors (21% increase)
    - Expects UTK to close the gap, and counted the orange and white game as donors
  - Raised ~\$18.4 million with 4,699 donors (goal was \$16 million)
  - Showed postcard and highlighted donors across CVM, Herbert, AgResearch, and Extension
    - Did not meet the Extension goal; feels the county connections are being missed and are an opportunity for improvement
- Big Orange Give starts November 5, 2025

- We are \$4 million over where we were last year, we are tracking to meet our aspirational goal of \$30 million in fundraising. We are currently at 5,047 donors (aspirational goal is 5,175)
- Alumni engagement is ~13,000
  - White: do we have a breakdown of who they are? Deal: Yes
  - Molly: as a faculty alumni, can only indicate one thing, does that matter? Deal: No, it is still tracked
- What can we do to help advancement, particularly if you don't like asking for money:
  - Make: Make UTIA one of your top philanthropic priorities, give a gift, get a gift, attend events and invite others to attend
    - They are asked how many people on staff support the UTIA mission, even a \$5 gift helps with this total
  - Assist: Assist with Prospect Identification; provide or identify names of people who may be engaged;
  - Open: Open new doors; introduce development officers to prospects and help to open the door
  - Share: Share your Passion; tell others why you support and believe in UTIA, be an ambassador and share the elevator speech points
- Questions:
  - None

Report from UTIA COO and/or OSP, Doug Bohner (updates from Hollie Schreiber were presented)

- Hollie was unable to attend
- Thanks everyone for their time on office of general services interviews
- Soft-opening for the new café in ANR on Friday (4/25/25) this week (Orange Acres)
  - Limited hours during the summer (breakfast to 3pm); breakfast to 5pm during the semester
  - Menu features UT Beef, chicken sandwiches, BLT, and sandwiches can be converted to salads for a fee
    - \$7 to \$8 for sandwiches, \$9 to \$10 for a salad
  - There are currently no plans to close Mabels.
- OSP Updates:
  - OREID and UTK has created a hub to track federal funding landscape
    - Monitoring work order stoppages, freezes, etc.
      - 5 contracts completely terminated, about \$38.5 million had not been spent

- New indirect cost rates are effective July 1, 2025
- Subaward threshold is increasing from \$25,000 to \$50,000
- Uniform fringe rate has been announced
- Huron Grants and Agreements will replace Cayuse, planned to go live in January 2026
- Staffing changes:
  - Allyson Graves and Hope Seaman are both leaving OSP April 30, 2025
    - Will be backfilled and job postings are expected soon
  - Melissa Harrison joined in March as associate proposal coordinator
  - Coordinators located in McCord 103, Hollie in 207 ANRB
- Independent assessment of OSP over the previous calendar year around service levels
  - External consultant later this year will be coming in to do an assessment, meet with faculty, OSP, etc. to define what is really needed from OSP (both pre and post award)
- Questions:
  - Mark: What is the timeline on OSP coming back in one building? Bohner: not ideal, but many of those folks are remote. We do not have an answer on timeline.
  - Lannett: Will they continue to be remote optional? Bohner: yes.
  - Vermont: What percentage of is working remotely? Bohner: 2/3 to half
  - Liz: When does the increase go into effect? And will that impact existing grants that have subawards not issued yet? Xin: Thinks it will be in new fiscal year; Bohner: unclear on if it will apply to existing grants.

#### Report from Human Resources, Bill Johnson

- Team status – have a full team in place;
  - Tennion Reed serving extension camps, centers, and campus departments
  - Allyssa Thom: works with Chris Clark and HCA, UTIA Operations, and promotion & tenure process
    - All P&T cases are out and moving according to their normal timeline
- Background on Executive Order Impacts
  - EO 14173 & EO 14151 both related to DEI
    - Cultural impacts in terms of practices around DEI
      - University has to be and will be compliant
    - EOA is less visible and active
    - Removed DEI from performance appraisals
    - Federal audits involving DEI stopped or in the process of changing

- DASH
  - Human capital management side more stable than the financial access side.
    - Foundational functionality needs to be improved from report creation and evaluation. Analytics are non-existent in DASH currently
    - Payroll – strict deadlines and no flexibility
      - Transactions cannot be backdated or transferred
  - It is taking up a LOT of time for all involved.
- Impacts on Exempt Staff hiring process
  - Recruiting business partner will kick-off all committees and she is familiar with us. Microsoft teams used for notes, no more primary and secondary pools or pool approvals, search exemption is simplified. Resources are added on the employee hub.
  - Pros are that this will be more efficient.
- Questions:
  - Vermont and Lannett: Why can't we move costs? And how long will it take to fix it. Johnson: part of it is the steep learning curve, and the other piece is the lack of functionality through DASH and that it is not where it needs to be.
    - DASH office hours every day except Tuesday. There is a “coffee and DASH” standing event on Tuesdays.
  - Juan Luis: the personnel review has changed, individuals must initiate their review, is that expected to stay the same? Johnson: Some things will stay the same, others will shift over time.

#### Report from Marketing and Communications, Lisa Stearns

- Strategic marketing plan:
  - Review of marketing and communication strategy for UTIA, brought in a consultant who did both internal and external interviews and held meetings with leadership teams
  - Objective was to develop a roadmap for marketing and establish a templated approach and tool development.
    - Eliminate one-offs and improve UTIA reputation
    - Lack of alignment on priorities and expectations
    - Lack of consistency and connectivity in efforts
    - Service-based vs. strategic
    - Underfunded
  - Discussion themes:
    - Reputation building is key

- Enrollment/access is mission critical and we are all responsible for student experience and success
  - And mission alignment is required across leadership
    - Reputation enhancement can't only come from one team sitting in Morgan Hall
    - Brand clarity is needed
  - Long-term phase plan
- UTIA strategic goals, UTIA SVC/SVP Goals, and UTIA Dean goals informed overall M&C goals
  - Continue to build and enhance UTIA reputation
  - Increase and promote digital footprint
  - Develop storytelling connectivity between all marketing channels and communicators
  - Refine brand guidelines and resources
  - Optimize measurement results
- Expand educational opportunities
  - Digital education platform to enhance online information, Extension publications, and resources for self-guided learning.
    - Paid media to drive people to our websites; AgFlix similar to Netflix
- Foster innovation and discovery
  - Promote individuals through proven venues
    - The Conversation
    - EurekaAlert!
    - Outstanding In Their Field
      - Student, faculty, staff, and alumni
  - Work with Government Relations to provide timely information
  - Assist in elevating research profile for both AgResearch and UTCVM
- Encourage and increase collaboration
  - New UTIA Communicators Council to share info and best practices
  - Develop and share M&C playbook
  - Relationship build with UTK and UT system
- Share our collective success
  - Develop key messages for UTIA and units
  - Leverage Keith's excellent reputation
  - Add to available resources
    - Shared media (PhotoShelter site with approved photos/assets)

- New photographer/videographer joining M&C on April 28<sup>th</sup> will be doing this
  - Provide a shot list for M&C if there are things you want available
    - Refresh M&C website
      - Engage in professional development opportunities
      - Employ tools and processes that lead to greater efficiency
  - The Playbook:
    - Guidance and best practice
    - Writing and social media guidelines
- Lisa Stearns and her team won gold awards and highest professional honor for land life and science issue and cultivate issue.
- Questions:
  - Xin: What is the best way to get ideas to for things happening? Stearns: Get a list of potential ideas to M&C, shot list ideas, potentially scheduling with Rafi.
  - Juan Luis: can you elaborate on paid media? Stearns: paying search engines or adds to push people to our sites.
  - Juan Luis: can faculty provide pictures for the PhotoShelter site? Stearns: yes, can coordinate with Rafi on this.

#### Report from UTCVM, Paul Plummer

- Updates on CVM
  - One of 33 CVMs in the country; there are 14 set to open soon
    - Impacts student recruitment (2,343 applications for 100 spots at UTCVM)
      - 300 were in-state applications; LMU is also a TN vet school
        - They have 3 classes per year, but do not have a teaching hospital. 3 years of course work, and then partner with a private practice in the 4<sup>th</sup> year
        - Don't have to worry about managing their own hospital or room for student within the vet school teaching hospital
      - Other new campuses are opening up in our region
    - 75% of UTCVM classes are in-state
    - Also impacts faculty, lots of opportunities for them to leave and work elsewhere. UTCVM is also restricted by ensuring faculty are also board certified and can work in the veterinary hospitals (large and small animal)

- Tuition hasn't been raised in 2025, but the market is very complex and student expectations are changing.
  - Working 5 days in a row is stressful and students feel they should have more time off.
    - Reality of vet medicine is also changing, some students are employed at 3 day work weeks
    - Impacting rural veterinary medicine heavily
- April 15<sup>th</sup> was the deadline for early acceptance. Should have 100 to 105 students in incoming class.
  - Goal is to increase up to 130, limitation is hospital space.
    - See Keith's update on the priority area on expanding UTCVM hospital
    - Reiterated mechanisms to move this forward without state-funding
- Focus on improving marketing via UTCVM M&C team in collaboration with UTIA M&C and UTK M&C
  - External evaluation was done
  - Strategic marketing trying to reach the right audiences
    - Crisis communication is also a big focus
      - Building out a playbook to deal with that as efficiently as possible
      - One of the highest suicide rates across the country is in veterinary medicine in Tennessee.
        - As a profession as a whole, this is a high occurrence.
  - Looking for areas to continue growing research infrastructure, particularly with bench level and animal model studies
    - HPAI is a good example of this issue (no BSL3, limited BSL2)
- Some UTCVM faculty will be moving into UT Orthopedic building 3<sup>rd</sup> floor research space in regenerative medicine
  - Clean room with printer that can do custom orthotics
- Launching strategic planning process for UTCVM this month (April 2025)
  - Will be seeking input from external stakeholders
- Questions:
  - Vermont: difficulty partnering with pathologists; Plummer: difficulty keeping them as faculty, they can get highly paid jobs remotely. Looking into hiring a research-focused pathologist instead of partnering with teaching pathologists.

## Report from Ag Research, Hongwei Xin

- New record in research expenditures at \$83.6 million
- Sponsored research grew 43% from 2020 to 2024 (\$23.2 million to \$33.2 million)
- 10 new faculty hires in 2023
- Over 100 faculty research FTE's across 150 faculty for the first time
- Modernizing 10 AgRECs
- National & global prominence, notably with FIFA research project
- Relevance:
  - Hurricane Helene damage
    - Impacts on farm damages
    - Cross-disciplinary efforts
    - Growth guidelines on soils impacted by flooding
      - Funding from TN Dept of Agriculture to carry out research objectives
  - New partnership with TN Dept of Ag Division of Forestry
    - New WolfRiver State Forest at Ames REC (5,477 acre forest)
      - Allows research and education on the forest
  - Research collaborations with TSU
    - 4<sup>th</sup> annual Joint Research Summit at TSU
    - Joint seed funding program is set to catalyze collaborations
      - \$60 to \$70K in funding across 2 to 3 years
- Major infrastructure updates:
  - Next-gen Broiler Research Facility at MTREC – Spring Hill
    - Commercial scale broiler farm meeting all 3 missions
      - \$10 million price tag when it was budgeted at \$3 million
  - Center for Protein Innovation at ETREC – Blount Unit
    - 15,000 sq. ft. with \$15 million investment
    - Money must be spent by December 2026
  - New Greenhouse Facility at ETREC – Plant Science Unit
  - Beef PLF Barn at PREC in Crossville
- Near-term priorities and plans:
  - Challenges from contracts and grant terminations
  - Provide seed funding to faculty
  - Seek additional resources to enhance UTIA/AgResearch mission
    - PLF minors in Animal Science as an example
  - Increase faculty/staff honorifics locally, regionally, and nationally
    - Hongwei will cover membership fees under some circumstances

- Support faculty/staff professional development
- Develop AgResearch Strategic Action Plan to align with UTIA Strategic Plan
- Questions:
  - Andy: request to continue creating venues for awareness of what others are involved in and increase opportunities for collaboration. Xin: completely understands and agrees. Is working on an institute-wide seminar per department.
    - Food motivated faculty!
    - Door prizes as a motivator
  - Juan Luis: concerns with comparing future progress with COVID years; Xin: acknowledges that and takes it into account
  - Juan Luis: focusing on industry funding, but they do not like F&A, what can we do about that? Xin: we can honor F&A reduced rates from companies if they have that documentation on file.
  - Juan Luis: the F&A for NIH are outside of the budget, unlike other systems, which will make federal funding very difficult in the future. Xin: yes, it will be. Focus will have to be on being innovative with our funding. If there is a way to increase funding ceilings, how much is available and left to do on research fundings.
  - White & Xin: will also take things into consideration when evaluating junior faculty.
  - Juan Luis: where did the Center for Protein Innovation name come from? Xin: it was a brainstorm with Neal Schrick to avoid thoughts on slaughter houses. Juan Luis: questions about including insects? Xin: it isn't set up for that right now, focus is on livestock species (poultry, sheep, goats, beef)
  - Liz: keep in mind the impact of higher graduate stipends on AgResearch outcomes, Extension outcomes, and physical deliverables (papers, Extension publications); Xin: absolutely, we'll have to take that in to account. White: added that we are putting in philanthropic funding for graduate students. Vermont: we could stop paying tuition if we have the higher salary cost. Juan Luis: MS and PhD are both paid the same? They have the same minimum; Xin: addressed the top-off dollars. White echoed that the top-off dollars need to go to stellar students, and probably only PhD students. Joe: some people view a high stipend as the program is not good enough and we are trying to attract students with high dollars.
  - Mark: DASH impacts with no clarity on what we are spending. Xin: echoes that he has heard frustration on what is available and how we can get access to the ledgers.

- Juan Luis: all these programs are growing, but we do not have growth in admin staff; White: admins were not allowed on the cluster hires, so now we have to catch up.
- Juan Luis: expressed gratitude to Xin and White for staying for the entire meeting. All in-person attendees echoed the sentiment.

Final Wrap-up/Adjourn

Meeting adjourned – motioned by Liz, seconded by Juan Luis. (meeting ended 4:57pm)