

## The Core Values of Faculty

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On May 7, at our final meeting of the academic year, the UTK Faculty Senate passed a resolution that censured particular recent actions of UT System President Joe DiPietro, including the unseemly manner in which Chancellor Davenport was dismissed. As part of the meeting, Senate President Elect Misty Anderson presented a statement clarifying three core values we share as faculty members; (1) a commitment to academic excellence, (2) working towards a culture of civility, and (3) upholding the dignity of work. While much of the press coverage of the censure resolution was focused on the dismissal of Chancellor Davenport, the basis for the motion of censure was broader, and called for a conversation about the core values, mission, and operational structure of the university. It is important for the public to know that the UT System, which has 226 personnel, does not have any faculty or academic programs, and is principally funded through service charges assessed on the campuses. We think this system merits review, especially with a new Board of Trustees starting on July 1.

The UT System uses the terms “teach, discover and connect” to define our mission. These are reflected in the areas of activity that every tenured faculty member documents as part of our rigorous annual workload report, which is the basis for our annual performance rankings. This year the UTK Faculty Senate has conducted an audit of all colleges and department bylaws to make sure the criteria for rank that is the basis for evaluating faculty performance are clearly defined. Having a shared understanding of our performance standards are essential to achieving academic excellence. The vast majority of faculty members take this responsibility seriously, and for more than 20 years, our colleagues who do not meet expectations for rank have to improve or face termination. Many of those found lacking chose to retire quietly, some improved, and the process is still in effect. This spring the current UT Board of Trustees added additional bureaucratic processes on top of our current post-tenure review system which seemed to us duplicative, expensive, and inefficient.

The best faculty are entrepreneurial by nature and work to bring new knowledge to their disciplines and their profession. Our challenge is to keep these best faculty in Knoxville. While financial compensation is important, faculty who perceive that the university respects the work they are doing are mostly likely to succeed and to stay. That is why cultivating a community of civility is so important; because when civility is undermined by our system leadership, in a competitive national academic marketplace, some of our best and most principled colleagues consider jumping ship.

Another part of the final Faculty Senate meeting was our Living Wage Report and resolution. Over the past 18 years the Faculty Senate has conducted periodic Living Wage Studies and pressed our campus to move toward our current target of \$13.48/hour plus benefits. Today 455 full time staff at UTK and UTIA still fall below this goal, but it is a significant improvement over the last time we conducted the study seven years ago, when 1,141 full time workers fell below our goal. Our campus has never looked better, and this is in great part a reflection of our commitment to the dignity of work.

At the commencements held last week we celebrated the accomplishments of our students. We have prepared them to go into the world with a commitment to excellence, giving them the tools to engage in civil discourse, and to value the dignity of hard work. These are the core values we strive to pass onto the next generation. We want to see this great university succeed, which is why we are calling for a conversation about reforming adversarial and expensive structures that stand in the way of our success.