



**Fall Faculty Meeting
Friday, August 21, 2015
10 a.m., Tucker Theatre**

Dr. Sidney A. McPhee, President

Good morning.

I am delighted to welcome each of you to our annual fall faculty meeting as we begin the new academic year.

Each fall, for the past 15 years, it has been my pleasure to be among the first to welcome back returning faculty and staff — and extend warm greetings to our newest employees.

Today in my remarks, I would like to accomplish three goals.

First, I would like to highlight a few university achievements from this past year.

Next, I would like to give an update on our ongoing efforts regarding the Quest for Student Success.

And finally, as I do annually, I would like to reflect on some of the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead in this new academic year.

But first...let me take a few moments to recognize some individuals who are:

- extremely important to this institution;
- committed to our mission; and

- invaluable to me in working to ensure the successful management and operation of this University.

I'll begin by introducing my senior executive team, a group of outstanding individuals who serve as my key advisers and are involved in much of the overall decision-making on our campus.

- Dr. Brad Bartel, university provost;
- Mr. John Cothorn, senior vice president;
- Dr. Deb Sells, vice president for student affairs and vice provost for enrollment and academic services;
- Mr. Joe Bales, vice president for university advancement;
- Mr. Andrew Oppmann, vice president for marketing and communications;
- Mr. Bruce Petryshak, vice president for information technology and chief information officer; and
- Mrs. Kimberly Edgar, executive assistant to the president.

These individuals are doing an outstanding job on behalf of our University. Please join me in expressing appreciation to this dedicated team of campus leaders.

I would also like to take a moment to recognize other members of the President's Cabinet.

Before I ask the entire group to stand, I would like to give special recognition to two individuals who have been added to our cabinet membership since last year: Dr. Tricia Farwell, Faculty Senate president for 2015-16 and an associate professor of journalism; and Lindsay Pierce, Student Government Association president for 2015-16.

Please join me in thanking these individuals for their service and leadership.

Next, I would like to introduce our deans:

- Dr. Robert Fischer, dean, College of Basic and Applied Sciences;
- Dr. Harold Whiteside, dean, College of Behavioral and Health Sciences;
- Dr. David Urban, dean, Jennings A. Jones College of Business;
- Dr. Lana Seivers, dean, College of Education;
- Dr. Mark Byrnes, dean, College of Liberal Arts;
- Mr. Kenneth Paulson, Dean, College of Media and Entertainment, formerly the College of Mass Communication;
- Ms. Bonnie Allen, dean, Walker Library;
- Dr. Jackie Eller, dean, College of Graduate Studies;
- Dr. Mike Boyle, dean, University College; and

- Dr. John Vile, dean, University Honors College.

We also have some other very special guests with us that I would like to acknowledge.

From the Tennessee General Assembly:

- State Sen. Bill Ketron, 13th District;
- State Sen. Jim Tracy, 16th District;
- State Rep. Bryan Terry, 48th District;
- State Rep. Mike Sparks, 49th District;
- State Rep. Rick Womick, 34th District; and
- State Rep. Dawn White, 37th District.

I am pleased to recognize from our local government the mayor of Rutherford County, the Honorable Ernest Burgess, and the mayor of Murfreesboro, the Honorable Shane McFarland. Also with us on the stage today is Mrs. Kathy Jones, president of the MTSU Foundation Board of Trustees.

Now, as we embark on this new academic year, as an institution – there are many reasons to celebrate some absolutely amazing accomplishments this past year by our faculty and staff.

Here is just a very brief sampling of our good works:

- MTSU was recently ranked by NurseJournal.org, a

social community website for nurses and healthcare professionals, as the top nursing school in Tennessee and the 15th best in the southeastern region. Our colleagues at Vanderbilt, by comparison, ranked No. 389, while our friends at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville were No. 401. I'd like to recognize Dr. Jenny Sauls and our nursing faculty at this time.

- This is the sixth consecutive year that MTSU has had two or more students who have won Fulbright Awards. That brings us to 13 in six years. This year's winners are from the College of Liberal Arts: Tandra Martin, who will study in South Africa, and Davis Thompson, who will study in Slovakia.
- We graduated our first class of Honors Transfer Fellows, a program that will grow in importance as the Tennessee Promise program directs more students to community colleges. MTSU remains the No. 1 choice of transfer students in Tennessee – and we're expecting another record-breaking year in transfer enrollment. Thank you, Dean Vile, and Ms. Wendi Palfrey, our interim director of admissions.
- The MTSU Experimental Vehicles lunar rover team

regained its status as best in the nation during the NASA Human Exploration Rover Challenge at the U.S. Space and Rocket Center. The student-built rover, nicknamed “The Beast,” placed third overall behind Russia and runner-up Germany. I’d like to recognize Dr. Saeed Foroudastan and his team for their work.

- The field of precision agriculture has made great technological strides in recent years. Dr. Song Cui was hired to lead MTSU into national prominence in this cutting-edge field. His focus on working with the aerospace program to develop sophisticated Unmanned technology is yielding impressive results. Dr. Cui received one of the largest new grants at MTSU, valued at nearly \$300,000 to enhance unmanned aerial systems–based precision agriculture education and research.
- Mechatronics engineering, one of MTSU’s newest majors, received a three-year, \$615,000 grant from the National Science Foundation for scholarships to help expand the program, which combines mechanical, computer and electrical engineering, systems integration, and project management. At least 15 incoming freshmen for each of the next three years will

receive scholarships of up to \$10,000. I'd now like to recognize Dr. Walter Boles, head of the program, and his colleagues for these accomplishments.

- The Department of Physics and Astronomy has been nationally recognized for improving undergraduate physics education. On May 16, MTSU was one of three universities honored by the American Physical Society, a physics and science education advocacy organization. I'd now like to recognize Dr. Ron Henderson and his colleagues in the department.
- The newest columnist for The Washington Times has an MTSU pedigree. Professor Colby Jubenville now contributes his views on self-reliance in both column and blog formats for the newspaper. He also recently won the Young Professionals Nashville Impact Award from Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce, an honor given for his dedication to community leadership and professional development.
- In March, MTSU College of Education research professor Wilburn "Wil" Clouse — also an MTSU alumnus — was recognized for decades of work promoting entrepreneurship with this year's John E.

Hughes Award for Entrepreneurial Advocacy from the U.S. Association of Small Business and Entrepreneurship. His works sow the spirit of entrepreneurship within disciplines throughout the campus.

- Dr. Jill Austin in the Jones College of Business was the 2015 Athena Leadership Award winner. She was recognized for her efforts in supporting, honoring and developing other women leaders. Also nominated were English Professor Emerita Dr. B. Ayne Cantrell; Web management coordinator Suma M. Clark; English professor, director of Women's and Gender Studies and the new interim vice provost for academic affairs, Dr. Tina Johnson; and Deans Eller and Seivers.
- Also in the Jones College, I'd like to note that our accounting graduate students ranked ahead of Vanderbilt and Belmont in terms of pass rates on the Certified Public Accountant exam. This is yet another feather in the cap of this world-class Department of Accounting. Congratulations to Dr. Stephen Salter and his colleagues.
- I'd like to recognize lecturer Lori Kissinger in the College

of Liberal Arts for her leadership with the 40 Days Around the World project, an international digital festival coordinated by VSA Tennessee, the state's organization on arts and disability. In July, a special quilt that was part of the project was presented at the U.S. Capitol and unveiled to an audience of dignitaries, government officials and ambassadors and was accepted into the State Department's Arts in Embassies program.

- Dr. Marc Barr, a professor in electronic media communication, recently returned from Los Angeles, where he was chairman of SIGGRAPH 2015, the largest conference in the world for computer graphics and interactive techniques. More than 20 EMC students also attended the international conference. I'd like also to note that the College of Mass Communication is now the College of Media and Entertainment! As it prepares a new generation of students for opportunities in an ever-changing media environment, the college will build on its strengths of teaching and research with an infusion of innovation and hands-on experiences.

Academic and Program Changes

I would like to spend a few moments now to recap some of our major academic and programmatic initiatives for the coming year.

I am proud that MTSU has been recognized year after year by national publications such as Military Times and G.I. Jobs magazine as being one of the top universities in the U.S. for veteran education. But we also recognize that there is much more that needs to be done here to better serve this important community. I believe the recent creation of a Veterans and Military Family Center on campus is just the latest step in MTSU becoming the most military-friendly university in America.

The new, 2,600-square-foot designated space will be located on the first floor of the Keathley University Center and will be the largest and most comprehensive Veterans and Military Family Center in Tennessee.

The official dedication of the Center will take place on Thursday, Nov. 5. Recently, Gov. Bill Haslam announced that MTSU would receive a \$91,000 state grant to support its ongoing vet success efforts.

I want to personally thank MTSU's new senior adviser for veterans and leadership initiatives, retired Lt. Gen. Keith M. Huber, and our new director of the military center, Dr. Hilary Miller, for their hard

work on this and other vet-friendly initiatives currently underway on campus.

Our University College, the College of Behavioral and Health Sciences and the Metropolitan Nashville Police Department recently reached an agreement that gives officers an incentive to get their degrees. Officers who complete the department's five-and-a-half month training academy can now potentially receive more than a year of college credits.

MTSU announced a similar partnership in the spring with the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation that gives wastewater management workers opportunities for course credits and certifications. Partnerships such as these create more pathways for them to earn their degrees. Dr. Peggy Carpenter has been instrumental in these efforts.

Several new academic programs have been launched this past academic year, including:

- new undergraduate degree approvals in anthropology, history, international relations, philosophy, speech language pathology, and theatre.
- new graduate approvals in liberal arts, library science, and finance.
- new MBA concentration approvals in music business and

health care management.

Also, the creation of our new “Flex MBA” in the Jones College of Business is a great example of adapting to the needs and expectations of our students and citizens.

Let’s thank the faculty and administrators who worked on these projects.

Advancement efforts continue to bring in valuable resources that support all areas of the University. During the past fiscal year, gifts to MTSU exceeded \$11 million, making fiscal year 2015 one of the top five fundraising years in University history.

Support from our alumni and friends helped with the establishment of a new international scholarship program, added major gifts to our Honors College and the College of Behavioral and Health Sciences, and made it the most successful year ever for our Blue Raider Athletic Association.

With less than six months left in our Centennial Campaign, we have achieved many of the milestones that were set, and we are continuing to increase financial support. The campaign has moved into a greater focus on the needs of academic departments and programs, and we are continuing to build a culture of philanthropy

among alumni of all ages. We have also broadened our development team by increasing involvement and engagement of University leadership and faculty partners. I'd like to thank Mr. Joe Bales, our vice president for university advancement, and his advancement team for their efforts.

The compliance audit for our reaffirmation of accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, or SACSCOC, will be submitted in the coming weeks.

Importantly, the development of our new Quality Enhancement Plan, or QEP, as part of the reaccreditation process, is well underway. The plan, branded MT Engage, was announced to the campus in the fall of 2014. MT Engage focuses on providing professional development to faculty that helps infuse existing courses with high-impact, engaging pedagogy. The intended result is an increased ability by our students to use integrative and reflective thinking, to enhance their academic engagement, to foster a University-wide culture of engaged learning, and, in the end, to improve student retention and graduation.

I encourage each of you to read the current draft of the plan and to make suggestions so that we can produce the best QEP possible. Representatives of the SACSCOC will visit our campus in March 2016 to review both our compliance audit and our QEP. We will

then fully launch MT Engage in the fall of 2016. Ms. Faye Johnson in the Provost's Office yet again has shown considerable overall leadership on this project, along with Dr. Dianna Rust, chair of the QEP Committee, and Professor Tricia Farwell for her work with MT Engage.

Athletic Accomplishments

I am proud to use the occasion of this address to acknowledge the success of our Athletic Department, both in the classroom and on the playing fields, during the previous academic year.

- The Blue Raiders won two Conference USA championships, had three teams advance to postseason play, and had four athletes compete for national championships.
- The men's basketball team advanced to the league championship game.
- The baseball team won more games than in any season since 2010.
- Our outdoor track team finished 30th nationally.
- And the Blue Raider women's golf team won the CUSA Conference Championship and made their first NCAA Regional appearance.

Here are a few more recent achievements by MTSU student-athletes and the athletic program:

- During the spring 2015 semester, nine of 17 athletic teams had a semester team GPA of 3.0 or higher. Ninety-eight student-athletes made the Dean's List with a GPA of 3.5 or higher; 37 student-athletes achieved a perfect 4.0; and 170 of MTSU's total of 312 student-athletes, or 54 percent, had a GPA of 3.0 or higher.
- For the sixth consecutive year, all 17 Middle Tennessee athletic teams earned a multiyear Academic Progress Rate, or APR, of more than 930, as announced by the NCAA.
- The Blue Raiders had 10 of 17 sports with an APR of 970 or better. Men's and women's golf had perfect grades of 1,000. Football had an impressive multi-year score of 973.
- Six Blue Raider squads recorded perfect scores of 1,000 for 2013–14: baseball, women's basketball, women's cross country, men's golf, women's golf, and volleyball.

I would like to recognize Athletics Director Chris Massaro, along with our coaches, administrators and athletes here today, for their wonderful accomplishments.

Campus Facilities

The MTSU campus facilities continue to be transformed and upgraded as the university implements its long-range plans aimed at providing students the best possible educational experience at a great value.

The following projects are completed or currently underway.

Renovations to MTSU's older science buildings — Davis Science Hall and Wiser-Patten Science Building — are scheduled for completion by late fall 2016. Full occupancy is anticipated in January 2017, before the start of the spring semester. This major renovation will benefit all 11 departments of the College of Basic and Applied Science.

The Department of Physics and Astronomy will significantly expand its footprint on floors of both buildings. Geosciences—the newest department in CBAS—will gain a new home. Formerly part of the College of Liberal Arts, it will relocate from Kirksey Old Main to the second floor of Davis Science. This move will allow expansion of the Computer Science Department.

Other completed or ongoing facilities projects this past year include:

- the renovation of the McFarland Building for the Photography Department;
- the opening of a new flight simulator building on our

- aerospace campus at the Murfreesboro Airport; and
- the renovation of the Bell Street Center, which will house:
 - a new Center for Executive Education in the Jones College of Business;
 - the offices for our University College;
 - the Center for Counseling and Psychological Services; and
 - the new Center for Chinese Music and Culture.

Finally, on July 15, the City of Murfreesboro and MTSU officials unveiled the long-anticipated Adams Indoor Tennis Complex, an eight-court facility that greatly enhances the Blue Raider tennis program while increasing playing and tournament opportunities for area residents. The new \$6.2 million, 70,000-square-foot complex, which is at Old Fort Park in Murfreesboro, is the most recent partnership between the city, MTSU, and the nonprofit Christy-Houston Foundation.

Budget and Salary

The new budget for this fiscal year included increased funds for higher education based on the formula outcomes. Funds for higher education employee salary increases that would equate to a 1.5 percent salary pool were part of the governor's budget.

As in previous years, the state appropriation will not fully fund higher education salary increases and institutions will be required to

fund a portion of the increase from their existing budget. At the June 2015 quarterly meeting of the Tennessee Board of Regents, a tuition increase was approved to fund the institutions' portion of the 1.5 percent salary pool plus additional funds to increase the pool to 2 percent.

In this regard, I have proposed to TBR a cost-of-living-adjustment strategy for an across-the-board salary increase for eligible MTSU employees using the 2 percent pool of funds.

The salary increase will be distributed to all unrestricted and restricted regular full-time and part-time benefit eligible employees and participants in the post-retirement service program on the payroll as of June 30. Eligible employees will receive an increase equal to 2 percent of their June 30 salary, or \$750, whichever is greater. The minimum payment will be prorated for part-time employees. However, unfortunately due to limited funds, these increases will not apply to adjunct faculty, temporary employees, graduate assistants, or student workers.

If my recommendation is approved by the TBR at its September quarterly meeting, increases will be effective in the October pay period and will include retroactive pay to July 1.

Recognizing Student Success Examples

Now, as we all know, Tennessee's new funding model for higher education — implemented in 2011 — places the highest priority on student progress, matriculation, and graduation success.

Gov. Bill Haslam's Drive to 55 initiatives seek to improve the state's workforce by increasing the percentage of Tennesseans with postsecondary degrees or certificates to 55 percent.

Last academic year, we made great strides in helping our students stay enrolled and on a clear path to earning a degree. Our achievements can be largely attributed to our ambitious Quest for Student Success, which has proven to be an effective roadmap in the effort to improve retention and graduation rates.

Within the first six months of implementing just two key components of the Quest — a new advising model and a predictive analytics software system to better monitor student progress — we observed encouraging increases in student persistence rates.

Here are specific results recorded last academic year:

- Persistence rates increased by 2.2 percentage points for new freshmen, 4.5 percentage points for transfers, and 2.1 percentage points for sophomores.

- These improvements resulted in approximately \$1.5 million in additional spring 2015 revenue.

The future also looks bright. We are currently on pace for an increase in our enrollment of new undergraduate students. And although official data will not be available until census on Sept. 7, trend projections have consistently indicated that MTSU will achieve record or near-record retention increases in the upcoming semester for first-time freshmen, new transfer students, and sophomore students.

The Quest is helping redefine and refocus our efforts and investments in classroom teaching, recruitment, and advising to better meet the needs of our students.

With broad support from the University's administrative team, led by Provost Brad Bartel and Dr. Rick Sluder, vice provost for student success — and the oversight of the deans, department chairs, and faculty, and vice presidents — our plan has shown tangible progress.

We believe that there are several new initiatives that are driving those increases:

- The redesign of more than 20 courses has enhanced the learning environment for students, enabling them to better master the material and offering a greater chance for success.

- By the close of the fall 2015 semester, 28 courses will have been through some form of redesign. Eleven of MTSU's top 12 most predictive of student success and most enrolled courses will have been redesigned.

For the last several years, I have used this occasion to recognize a particular department with the President's Student Success Award. I have awarded it to recognize innovation and proven results in helping our students succeed. Last year, it was given to the Department of Mathematical Sciences. I believe the team we will honor today measures up well to the high standards and results put forward by our previous honorees.

It gives me great pleasure today to announce that our team of college-based academic advisers, led by our academic deans and under the direction of Dr. Sluder, our vice provost for student success, will receive the 2015 award. Provost Brad Bartel nominated the academic advisers for this award.

The recent hiring of 47 new academic advisers more than doubled our advising team. As a result, we have greatly enhanced our ability to effectively address critical advising and academic support needs of our students. The new advisers joined a dedicated group of veteran advisers to support our Quest initiatives.

This group of advisers, with the support of new predictive analytics software has helped us sharpen our focus on areas that have the greatest opportunity to positively affect academic needs and achieve measurable, sustainable results.

From Oct. 29, 2014, through April 30, 2015 — the first six months of the system's use — our academic advisers:

- met in person with 19,464 students;
- conducted 5,727 advising sessions by email or online;
- advised 772 students by phone;
- reviewed the files of 12,627 students and reached out to assist them; and
- altogether made 40,206 contacts with students!

I am proud to say these early successes have not gone unnoticed by publications and peers across the country.

- An article in the March 13 the Chronicle of Higher Education noted that MTSU is at the forefront nationally of efforts to improve retention and graduation.
- MTSU's student success efforts also were pointed out in special report in The Washington Post on June 14.
- And most recently, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities named MTSU one of five national finalists for its Project Degree Completion Award, which recognizes

institutions that employ innovative approaches to improve retention and degree completion.

I'd like to ask Dr. Sluder and all of our academic advisers to stand and allow us to recognize them for these achievements.

Clearly, the University is committed to the success of every student, and we have committed considerable resources to making MTSU a success-oriented institution. However, the interactions you have in your classrooms, offices and centers, and in your encounters with students form the basis of everything we do.

I would urge each of you to take a look at your own students and classes, asking yourself, "What can I do to make their experience better, more meaningful, and more effective resulting in their success?"

I ask each of you to help take us to an even higher level of achievement. Much can be done if we all work together.

I ask each of you to remember that no matter what you do, as a member of the faculty, staff or administration, all of us are responsible for student success. And, always, REMAIN TRUE BLUE.