

UT HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER. minutes

University Council Meeting

February 4, 2026

2:00pm-3:30pm

Attendees:

Peter Buckley	Cindy Russell	Paul Wesolowski	Ashley Harkrider	George Ninan
Raaj Kurapati	Jessica Snowden	Reginald Frye	Vikki Massey	Mike Ebbs
Mike Hocker	Karen Derefinko	Jon Wall	Wendy Like	David Mills
Melisa Moore	Peggy Ressler	Samantha Townsend		

Absent: Ken Tilashalski (Jon Ryder- attended), James Haynes (Giuseppe Pizzorno-attended), Karla Leeper, Jessi Gold, Debbie Long, Brian Wilcox

Chancellor Buckley called the meeting to order 2:00 pm central.

Chancellor Updates (Dr. Buckley)

With a moment of reflection, followed by gratitude for the Vice Chancellor of Advancement. Appreciation is also expressed for progress on the new College of Medicine Interdisciplinary Building and the collaborative work occurring throughout the legislative session. An acknowledgment of ongoing federal and state executive orders and related legal and research considerations.

Rural Health Transformation Program...progress and possibilities (Wendy)

UT leaders received an update on the deployment of \$207 million in state-directed rural health funds, accompanied by an additional \$125 million in the Governor's budget to support the Will Help initiative. The Department of Health is rapidly staffing to manage the RFP process, with the first opportunities expected between February and March. Also, UT is actively aligning its Rural Health Task Force Recommendations with the Grand Challenge Grant, ensuring strategic cohesion across the system and minimizing competing proposals. This unified approach is intended to strengthen the university's competitiveness for major statewide awards.

Accreditation status 2026 and upcoming SACSCOC submission (Cindy)

The institution is nearing completion of its SACSCOC 5th-year interim report, which is due March 1 and remains one of the highest institutional priorities. The report is in its final review stages, with multiple standards already drafted and under leadership review. Program-level accreditations across numerous colleges are progressing as scheduled, with several site visits, follow-up reports, and self-studies planned for 2026–2027. Leadership emphasized that accreditation is foundational to all institutional progress—affecting program viability, expansion, state partnerships, and funding opportunities.

Federal Financial Aid updates-(Cindy)

Significant federal revisions to student loan programs will take effect on July 1, 2026, including the elimination of Grad PLUS loans for all new borrowers. Please use link to review presentation

Meeting Adjourn at 3:30pm central