



TENNESSEE FARM BUREAU FEDERATION

2019 Policy Development

Leading the Way

UTK/UTIA Unification

Issue

The University of Tennessee (UT) Board of Trustees recently voted to approve a resolution to unify the UT Institute of Agriculture (UTIA) and UT Knoxville (UTK), this change was effective July 1. The final plans of implementation will be presented to the Board at its November meeting for adoption. Specifically, it is expected the unification will raise the ranking of the new unified UTK in the National Science Foundation (NSF) rankings of research institutions. The stated aim is to elevate the reputation of the two entities and establish more opportunities for collaboration that will benefit our state.

Background

Today the NSF's Higher Education Research and Development Survey has UTK currently ranked 107 of the research institutions in the United States, while UTIA is ranked 170. By combining the two entities, they will immediately move up the rankings to 84 in the overall national ranking and 55 nationally for public institutions. Other land grant universities, with similar structures, such as Wisconsin, Cornell, Texas A&M, Ohio State, Penn State, Florida, Michigan, Illinois, Purdue, Virginia Tech, North Carolina State, are within the top 50 by NSF.

UT leadership has been aware for several years the ranking process does not consider the long-standing structural ties between UTK and UTIA. The UT system has appealed to the NSF that the relationship between the two campuses justifies combining the research numbers. The appeals for an exception were denied because NSF contends the rankings are based upon separate campuses. NSF aims to provide fairness in institutional rankings nationally and a separate campus with a separate chancellor requires a single rank and cannot be aggregated with another campus. With appeal efforts unsuccessful, UT System President Randy Boyd and the UT Board of Trustees chose to address the situation and make change happen to benefit the UT system.

The UT System had a study completed by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems to examine its structure and compare it to other Land-Grant Universities among the top 25 public universities in research funding nationally and the Southeastern Conference Schools. The report found that in comparison to other systems, the UT structure is unique in several respects, particularly the relationship between UTIA and its Deans (Extension, Research, College of Veterinary Medicine, and Herbert College of Agriculture) and the UTK Campus. In all the other Land-Grant universities included in the review, deans of the schools/colleges of agriculture report directly to the provost/vice president/chancellor of the university, with dotted lines to the system wide vice president/vice chancellor who is responsible for statewide agriculture-related functions: the University of Tennessee was the opposite. The report made recommended changes to elevate the status of the UT System, including the decision ultimately made by the UT Board of Trustees.

The Board of Trustees made special note that UTIA has been a driving force for success for the University of Tennessee for many years and that they would like to see increased support of its efforts. UT expresses that strong partnership between UTIA, Tennessee farmers, and the agricultural industry is critical for our state's success and this new alignment with UTK will only enhance these relationships.

The resolution by the Board of Trustees charges the system to create an implementation plan to be submitted to the UT Board of Trustees at the November meeting. The plan will be based on guiding principles and feedback received from internal and external stakeholders through town halls, listening sessions, work groups, and other methods of input. The Trustees also emphasized the need for input from all those who are associated with UTIA and UTK. The UTIA-UTK Land-grant Unification Team is charged to identify and engage stakeholders. While the team will not determine the final policies or initiatives, they will identify stakeholder groups and devise ways to gather input. Once the team has engaged stakeholders and gathered input, it will synthesize and summarize the feedback, identify common themes, organize recommendations, and present the findings. They will report to the Board of Trustees details of the plan at the November Board meeting.

A significant part of the realignment is the UTIA chancellor title change to senior vice president / senior vice chancellor for agriculture, reporting both to the UT System President and UTK Chancellor. In the systemwide executive team, the senior vice president will rank to follow only the president and executive vice president. A 2009 title change for the UTIA leader from vice president to chancellor had unintended consequences as it relates to how UTIA and the UTK campus report their research activity. While UTK and UTIA continued to share many services (including one accreditation, the same faculty handbook and all degrees conferred by the UTK chancellor), by changing the title of the UTIA leader to chancellor, the system was no longer recognized as one entity by the NSF, eliminating the opportunity to combine research reporting and suppressing the research rankings.

UTIA program funding, priority-setting, and personnel decisions will all continue to be handled within the Institute. The UTIA brand will remain, and all UTIA advancement efforts will continue to support the land-grant mission. All reporting lines within UTIA, including Deans, Directors, and Department Heads, will remain unchanged. The UTIA leader will participate in the President's One UT Leadership Council meetings and will represent UTIA at Board of Trustee meetings, while also serving as a staff member of the Education, Research and Service committee.

Questions

1. Are you and farmers in county aware of the changes at UT?
2. With the potential for elevated rankings and increased opportunities for UTIA and UTK, what do you feel are the potential positives and negatives of this unification?

Farm Bureau Policy

The University of Tennessee (Partial)

The Institute of Agriculture of the University of Tennessee has played an important role in the development of agriculture and the rural economy of this state. As the Board of Trustees considers efforts to streamline the University of Tennessee System, it is imperative the Institute of Agriculture maintains the prominent position in the overall university structure it enjoys today.

The Board of Trustees should understand the Institute of Agriculture has a much broader mission than other colleges within the university. The College of Veterinary Medicine, UT Extension, the Herbert College of Agriculture, the Agricultural Research and Education Centers and the Center for Profitable Agriculture constitute an organization that is a vital extension of the university to the communities and people throughout the state. In that role, the representatives of these entities can facilitate the overall mission of the university. We urge the Board to do nothing that would weaken the effectiveness of these entities, but rather to enhance their ability.

We commend the University of Tennessee for its efforts in moving agricultural research to a new, unprecedented level. From agricultural mechanization to plant and animal genomics, bioengineering, and biofuels research, the University of Tennessee has poised itself and the state to move to the forefront in agriculture. We encourage the university to continue these efforts at all of its Tennessee Research and Education Centers and educational campuses.

It is our resolution that the university continues to strengthen and evolve its outreach programs. We appreciate the University for expanding its web-based information to meet the needs of progressive and aggressive food and fiber producers located throughout our state. However, this is by no means a proclamation to abandon the core and strength of UT Extension, that being its people. From the smallest home gardener to the largest animal operation, it is imperative the university continues to support and strengthen its adult and youth extension programs. Without this "personal touch", foundation support of agriculture in this state could be severely eroded.