

Faculty Senate Passes Resolution Supporting Free Speech

MEGAN REAGAN
Reporter

Tech's Faculty Senate recently passed a resolution requesting that university president Phil Oldham reaffirm Tech's policy on freedom of speech and expression.

The resolution comes from the Faculty Senate at the request of the Backdoor Playhouse's artistic director, Dr. Mark Creter, who says that actions from recent controversy have placed targets on the backs of student organizations.

"I have mostly held my tongue in the hopes that it would blow over as 'controversial' things so often do in this day and age of social media outrage. I make the following statement not to refute the statement released by President Oldham — the president is my boss, and he absolutely has the right and responsibility to comment on any and all events that happen on his campus — but as a 30-year member of the faculty of Tennessee Tech and resident of Cookeville, as well as a man who has spent more time in the Playhouse than anyone on this campus, it is also my right and responsibility to comment on this latest event."

The event, regarding a minute-long social media clip at a drag performance on campus, garnered attention from Robby Starbuck, a Tennessee politician, who berated the university and its administration for "allowing" such an event to take place.



A protest was held on campus Saturday in support of queer students' right to freedom of speech. Photo by Briley Barnett.

Oldham responded, saying all events by the student organizations involved are canceled indefinitely pending an "investigation."

Creter said the Backdoor Playhouse has put on many shows, both hated and loved by many, including Rocky Horror Show, Chicago, Midnight Summer's Dream and the Vagina Monologues.

"All the beloved shows had critics and all the difficult shows had ardent fans. That is the nature of live theater and live performance," he said. "It engages, pleases, and

often, enrages audiences — or to put it more simply, it makes you feel things. The recent reactions to a one-minute clip from a two-hour drag show performed in the Backdoor Playhouse has left me disturbed and dismayed. How can a one-minute clip inspire such anger and resentment?"

Some have said they view Oldham's statement as an attack on freedom of speech and expression on campus and criticize him for his passiveness in regard to other issues.

One faculty member, who wished to

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24th U.S. Poet Laureate Performs at Backdoor Playhouse



Ada Limón was named poet laureate of the U.S. in July 2022, replacing the previous laureate Joy Harjo. Photo by Luke Hayslette.

LUKE HAYSLETTE
Managing Editor

On Tuesday, Sept. 20, the current United States poet laureate, Ada Limón, performed a poetry reading at the Backdoor Playhouse.

The event drew a crowd of an estimated 155 people to the theater where Lemón recited 13 poems from her newest book, "The Hurting Kind," with subjects ranging from love, family, friendships and birds.

Limón also hosted a poetry workshop during dead hour on Tuesday in Henderson Hall, where she shared her insight on the nature of poetry writing.

"The deep intention and the

looking is a way of loving the world. It's also a way of unraveling it. Sometimes, it's a way in so you can kinda figure out what is going on with me."

Lemón explains, "Everytime we say we're writing about something, we are always writing about something else. There is always two snakes in a poem."

The event is part of the free-to-attend Center Stage Series, which seeks to promote fine arts appreciation and to connect students to diverse world cultures. The event was hosted by the Backdoor Playhouse. The Women's Center provided staff.

Limón was named the 24th poet

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Chief Diversity Officer Aims to Make Tech a Welcoming Campus

FRANKLIN MCCARTHY
Reporter

"What does it look like for a student who has a single parent who worked hard, but they just barely made ends meet, and they were poor. What does it look like for that student to come to Tennessee Tech?"

This is the type of question Dr. Rob Owens aims to answer as Tech's chief diversity officer.

During the summer of 2019, Marc Burnett became the inaugural chief diversity officer at Tech. Following Burnett's retirement in December of the same year, Dr. Owens was appointed

to the position after being an educator at Tech since 2006. "[Burnett] sort of launched that position, and I'm thankful that the president of the university saw the value of having such a position and role at Tennessee Tech University," Owens said.

Owens, who acted as assistant vice president of student affairs before assuming his current position, contrasts the two roles, emphasizing the university-wide scale of the chief diversity officer's responsibilities.

He said, "Not that the student affairs role was not [university-wide], but this is a role that's really about the university at

large. Something the president says that I take as one of the taglines as I'm thinking about this work is, 'We want to try our best to make this a place where every campus stakeholder—specifically student, faculty, administrative, clerical staff—where they can feel welcome and feel like they belong here.'"

Owens identifies with these words on a personal level, and he attributes this connection to the moral values his parents ingrained in him from a young age.

"I was raised to see other

See Diversity Officer Pg. 3



In addition to his responsibilities at Tech, Dr. Owens is the vice-chairman of Cookeville's Highland Residential Services. Photo from Tech's faculty directory.

Corrections from Previous issue

"Oldham Cancels Student Group's Events"

The article stated that the event was free to attend, however it was not free to attend.

"Tech Faculty File For Preliminary Injunction"

The cutline for pg.1 photo should refer to Andrew Smith as Mr. Smith instead of Dr. Smith.

"Vote of No Confidence..."

It was stated that raises were approved in March of 2022, but it needs to be clarified those raises were approved for the 2021-2022 academic year. It was also stated that a "vote of no confidence" was issued for the Vice President D. Claire Stinson. However, the vote was tabled pending an investigation.

SPORTS

Tech football is set to play UT Martin and review their game against 24th-ranked Samford.

Signs: A Way of Dealing With the Times

MEGAN REAGAN
Reporter

If you go into any houseware store, or locally owned boutique, you'll find wooden signs speaking to our ways of life.

Each one is different, but yet the same; however, when you see them in someone's home, office and personal space, you begin to get glimpses into their humor or character.

I get a kick out of it when I see them on the desks of colleagues.

Our distribution manager at The Oracle, Bee Goodman, has a sign that says, "Maybe coffee is addicted to me." She also owns seven coffeemakers.

One of my colleagues at the Herald-Citizen, Jim Herrin, has a sign that reads, "I'm not arguing. I'm explaining why I am right." If you know Jim, you know how spot on this is – he's quite the contrarian.

These sometimes playful placards share hints about owning up to quirks, and some share cheerful optimism and love for family.

While filing away wisdom from the signage, I came to the realization that just as some feel you can learn a lot about a person by looking at their bookshelf, you can also learn a lot about a home dweller by reading their signs.

The signs are definitely trendy at the moment.

As a writer, it should come as no surprise that I have a fondness for a medium that

glorifies the stringing together of words and phrases, salty sentiments, and anything that announces our personalities, our quirks, our manifestos and mantras.

I am 100% a fan of the sign.

However, when I thought a little more deeply about these signs and how they serve as a means of emboldening ourselves and proclaiming who we are, I started to think about how I wish it were just as easy for us to proclaim exactly how we are.

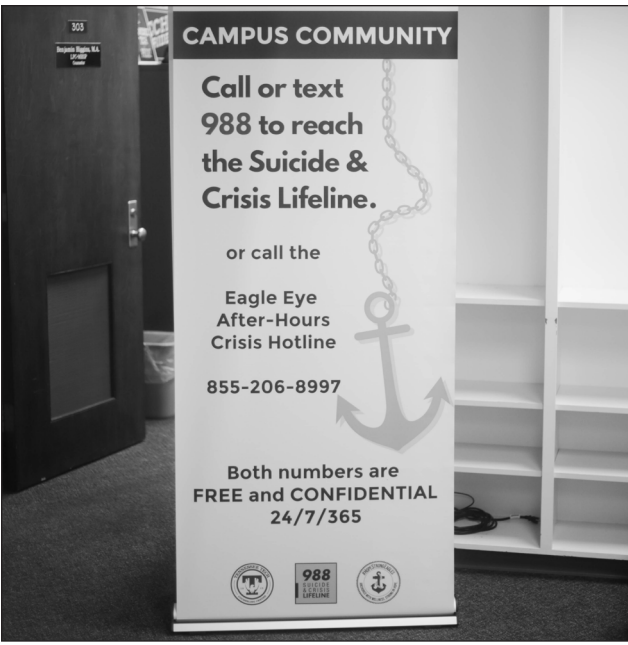
In our society, we are very adept at creating neat presentations, sticking on decals, polishing exteriors, and framing our experiences so they are ready for hanging or posting on social media. What we aren't so great at is living in our reality and embracing that well-known catchphrase: it's OK to not be OK.

My preoccupation with how we're feeling on the inside has everything to do with September being National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month.

While the month is nearing its end, I believe it is more important to keep the conversation going year-round because of my growing understanding of how mental health struggles are so common in our communities.

Besides, if we never speak of it, we don't generally find the support we need.

According to the National Network of Depression Centers, two-thirds of those who experience depression never seek treatment,



National Suicide Prevention Week took place Sept. 4-10. Tech's counseling center has made a push to bring awareness of emergency resources available by placing posters like these in Tech's dorms. Photo by Luke Hayslette.

which is devastating.

As the season changes, and perhaps you modify the decor in your home to share an impression of who you are, I hope you'll spend a moment on yourself and assess just how you are on the inside as well.

Until we're all comfortable displaying our true signs and proclaiming just how wonderfully imperfect we are, or even just how much we can't do any of this on our own, hang onto this thought: You belong here.

You're not alone in your fear, your uncertainty, your anger and trepidation.

Student on the Street

BEE GOODMAN
Reporter

ELLIOT PAYNE
Photographer

What is some advice you can offer to anyone who might be struggling with suicidal thoughts right now?



Laila Hinson
Freshman
Secondary Education

"Ask for help. Talk to a friend. I know it can be hard but it can really make a difference to you later, even if it doesn't feel like it."

Charlie Garsia Hernandez
Junior
Political Science

"Be open. Don't think you're a burden to someone because you may be able to relate with them." about it. Be open."



Megan Garner
Senior
Secondary Education

"Taking the step and opening up to somebody, just anybody, will help. Don't be afraid."

Laurelle Campbell
Senior
Secondary Education

"Try to take life day by day, class by class even. Remember, too, that nothing is permanent."



Counseling Center Resources Aimed at Helping Students

EMILY HIGDON
Reporter

With over 10,000 students on campus in the fall of 2022, students should be aware of the university's health and safety resources.

Leigh Ann Ray, director of JJ Oakley Health Services, stated, "There are lots of resources on campus to help with mental health issues. Students are always welcome to come to Health Services for any needs. The Counseling Center is one of the biggest resources on campus."

Tech's website states, "The TN Tech Counseling Center offers brief, short term, solution fo-

cused, therapeutic interventions for TN Tech University Students. The staff of the Counseling Center is available to assist students with their personal and social concerns in hopes of helping them achieve satisfying educational and life experiences."

Tech offers assistance on campus at the Counseling Center. Office hours are 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Additional service is offered after hours as needed.

Benjamin Higgins, a mental health counselor, stated, "First, it is perfectly okay to admit the need for help! This tends to be the first hurdle for many people. Students have access to free and

confidential services through the Counseling Center. We have both urgent and non-urgent Rapid Access Appointments available during business hours and an after hours hotline for nights, weekends, and holidays."

Higgins stated, "If a student is in need of assistance, they can contact the Counseling Center at 931-372-3331, the Eagle Eye After Hours Crisis Hotline at 855-206-8997, university police can be contact for emergent needs at 931-372-3234, or it students could also call 988 which is the new number for the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline."

"It is increasingly common for

students to ask for help as students become more interested in personal growth and stigmas to reach out for help decline. We see students steadily through the semester but some find the need to reach out during higher stress times such as adjusting to a new semester of classes and also as classes wind down and finals approach," Higgins said.

For students struggling with mental health, Tech encourages reaching out to the Counseling Center on campus for assistance.

The Counseling Center is determined to put students first on campus and never wants anyone to go unheard.

The Oracle

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Voice Your Opinion

The Oracle encourages readers to write letters and commentaries on topics of interest. A few guidelines:
Letters should not exceed 300 words. Commentaries should not exceed 500 words and include a picture of the writer.

Originality is required, no plagiarism. For verification, letters and commentaries must include your name, email, hometown and classification or title.
Letters may not run every edition due to space. The Oracle reserves the right to edit for style, grammar, length and clarity.
Submissions must be sent to oracle@gmail.com and received by 3 p.m. the Wednesday before publication.

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Tech Welcomes Families for Annual Family Weekend



Current student, Holly Eaton, shows a ball python to guests at reptile event for family weekend. Photo by Elliot Payne.

JONAH HALL
Reporter

Tech held its annual Family Weekend on the weekend of Sept. 16. It consisted of many activities including: family golf and bowling, a bus tour of Cookeville, and as a Tech football game against Samford University on Saturday night.

As students welcomed their families, SGA emphasized the importance of family weekend and all it offers. According to student body president, Addison Dorris, the weekend provided families the opportunity to see what their students’ lives are like on campus.

“It gives families an idea of

how they can better support their students, and it allows students to create wonderful memories with their support system,” Dorris said. “Having the chance to show the people that you love the place that you love is very special and I have always enjoyed doing that with my family too.”

Dorris, who formerly served as a student coordinator within the Office of New Student and Family Programs said family weekend can produce a sense of encouragement some students may need in order to continue working toward the academic success they desire.

“Midterms and college life

can be stressful as we all know, so family weekend can provide some encouragement in that way. Sometimes just being reminded that you have people in your corner is all you need to keep pushing,” Dorris said. “Being able to fall back on the memories they’ve made will help students remain positive when they are feeling overwhelmed or stressed.”

Dorris noted she understands the importance of the position she fulfills and the duties which follow the title. She believes in the importance of involvement not only as student body president, but as a student herself. Dorris said she holds great value and pride in her position and tries to be involved in as many campus events as possible.

“Events such as family weekend, homecoming and SOLO concerts are what make college worthwhile. Sure, we’re all here for the academic aspect of college, but your best memories won’t come from the classroom,” Dorris said. “Getting out of your comfort zone and making the effort to be involved in campus life will make all the difference in your college career.”

A feeling of connection and family on campus is what attracts many parents, such as

Vicki Phillips, and their children, to Tech. As a member of the university’s Parents Association, Phillips’ understanding of how to help and encourage her children throughout college has grown.

“From what I’ve seen, college is so different now than it was compared to when I was in college, especially with the improved technology,” Phillips said. “The resources available to the students are great, but parents still need to give that emotional support when it’s needed to help their kids keep pursuing their goals, so that’s what I try to do with mine.”

Phillips’ son Ryan said he is very appreciative of Tech and all of the opportunities the school provides not only to himself, but his entire family. He believes the amount of care and resources available to him have certainly impacted his academic success.

“After high school, you have a lot more freedom in school, but I think understanding Tech has my best interest in mind, just like I do, helps me a lot,” Ryan said. “I think college is more about learning mentally than it is learning academics, so now since I am more familiar with everything that goes into college here, I’m more comfortable.

U.S. Poet Laureate Continued from Pg.1

laureate in July of this year, following the release of “The Hurting Kind.” In addition to writing and publishing books of poetry, Lemón hosts a podcast dedicated to exploring the depths of the world through poetry. Her podcast is titled,

“The Slowdown,” originally hosted by the 22nd poet laureate Tracy K. Smith, who held the position from 2017 to 2019.

“I want to focus on how useful poetry can be in our daily lives. Poetry is one of the few art forms that has breath built right

into it,” Lemón states.

Born in Sonoma, California in 1976, Limón attended the University of Washington where she studied theater. She went on to receive her MFA from New York University before beginning a career working in mag-

azines such as Martha Stewart Living and GQ.

Lemón took over as poet laureate of the U.S. from Joy Harjo, who had held the position since 2019. Poet laureates are appointed by the Library of Congress, and their role is to bring attention

and promote a greater appreciation for the reading and writing of poetry. The U.S. has only had a national laureate since 1937, but before that, many states had state poet laureates dating back to 1915.

Faculty Senate Resolution Continued from Pg.1

remain anonymous, said Oldham’s statement breaks state law and university policy which guarantees freedom of speech for students and student groups.

“This university is beset by scandal and lawsuits by faculty and students because of university policy not being followed by administration, and this is just the latest example,” they said.

“In the past, this president has consistently refused to issue statements in support of minority student groups to affirm their safety during times of increased threat against them,” another faculty member said. “Now, when he finally does make an official statement, it is the furthest thing from protecting or supporting students’ safety and rights.”

Following Oldham’s statement, Creter said that he is trying to be there for his students, who are shaken by the anger and vitriol coming their way.

The resolution passed by the Faculty Senate reaffirms the student organizations’ rights to invite guest artists to the Backdoor Playhouse and calls Oldham to restore such rights as provided in Policy 007 rights to all Tech student groups “in an equitable and expedient manner.”

Many critics of Oldham’s statement also have raised concern over the issue of diversity and inclusion.

Dr. Robert Owens, Tech’s chief diversity officer, said he spoke with Oldham regarding the official statement that has drawn

much criticism, but he said he does not see it as a diversity and inclusion issue, but rather a student affairs issue.

“I still view things from the student affair professional lens,” he said. “I’ve served as faculty advisor for many organizations, primarily Greek organizations. I have shut down events before, even for student groups that serve underrepresented or marginalized students.”

Owens said the difference in the controversy in question is that it surrounds the LGBTQIA+ community and the amount of sensitivity around the issue.

“I think this has become a huge situation because of the sensitivity around diversity and inclusion,” he said. “I talked to Oldham out of concern that this does not become a freedom of speech issue, and that the student organizations in question will still have their rights – and they are.”

“We also have the right as administrators, especially the president or the vice president of student affairs, to pause all activities in question to talk about it. It doesn’t mean you can’t do anything else, but in this particular situation it means we’re going to have some conversations about this.”

Owens said he understands students’ frustrations, especially as a student advocate.

“One of the things I was watching, the following week after all this happened, I was excited to see some of the student groups in question. They had a table on the first floor



“Let queer space be queer,” written on the patio outside the RUC. Photo by Elliot Payne.

of the RUC. It was heavily populated,” he added. “There was chalk art all the plaza and in front of Derryberry Hall. It was good and we want to see those things.”

Owens is in support of every student on campus and every student organization.

He added that during times of controversy such as this, when people are looking for statements to be made, statements are what people get wrapped in.

“I’m not saying the president was right or wrong,” he said. “I support our president, but I also support our students. As a person of color, I’m more about: ‘What are we doing at the institution to progress diversity and inclusion?’ Yes, statements need to be made in some context, but our passions and emotions rise and fall with a statement. The actions are what tell the tale.”

Chief Diversity Officer Continued from Pg.1

people. I was raised to serve; I saw my parents not only work—both my parents are educators, so I saw them work in a paid capacity as educators—but I also watched them serve in the community ... I also saw them treat people fairly and not look down on folks and help folks,” he said.

Owens recalls learning more about his parents’ struggles with

racism and inclusion, however, through his own research. He said, “They didn’t really talk about segregation and going to separate schools. They didn’t talk about some of the negative experiences they had; I think they tried to shield me from that stuff—me and my little sister.”

This ambiguity sent Owens on a search for knowledge about

the impact slavery and historical prejudices have on society from both the black perspective and a variety of others.

His fundamental values and sociological analyses ultimately guide Owens’ work as chief diversity officer.

“We’re the least diverse public university in the state, so we need somebody at the institu-

tion that it’s sort of their job to provide a better experience for the majority students, but also provide opportunities to come here for students of color from underrepresented groups, because it’s a fantastic institution.”groups, because it’s a fantastic institution.”

Sports

Tech to Battle 15th Ranked UT Martin



Tennessee Tech Golden Eagles took on the 24th ranked Smaford Bulldogs during family weekend. On Saturday Sep.17 the final score was 33-28. Photo provided by Jim Dillon

BRADEN WALL
Reporter

The Tennessee Tech football team will take on the UT Martin Skyhawks this upcoming Saturday in Martin, Tennessee at 2:00 p.m. This will be the first Ohio Valley Conference game of the season.

Tech is coming off a bye week after a last-minute loss on September 17 to the Samford Bulldogs.

With the loss to the Bulldogs, the Golden Eagles fell

to 1-2 overall (0-0 in Ohio Valley Conference). The Bulldogs improve to 2-1 overall.

“It was a well-played game,” said Golden Eagles’ head coach Dewayne Alexander about the loss to Samford. “During the game versus Samford, The Golden Eagles took a 28-27 lead with just under three minutes left in the game after an 18-yard run from quarterback Jeremiah Oatsvall. On the Bulldogs’ following drive, they

found the end zone with 25 seconds left, completing a 26-yard pass to make it 33-28.

The Golden Eagles seemed to have a chance at another thrilling finish after a big catch over the middle to Bradley Clark went 28 yards and out of bounds, but the play was called back for holding. The Golden Eagles tried for a miracle, but their efforts ran dry as the Bulldogs pulled out the late win.

Oatsvall threw

for 255 yards, completing 19 of his 34 passing attempts. He also finished with 9 carries for 51 yards.

Running back David Gist led the rushing attack with 19 carries for 93 yards, and he caught three passes for 29 yards and a touchdown.

Tight end Hunter Barnhart led the Golden Eagles through the air with four receptions for 111 yards. Willie Miller followed with three receptions for 73 yards. Miller also

had a 42-pass on a trick play to Barnhart.

Overall, the Tech offense finished with 161 yards on the ground (3.8 average per carry) and 297 through the air (8.5 average per pass), and both teams finished with one turnover.

“We still had a red-zone turnover (an interception) which you can’t have. Our defense held them to a field goal after that.”

Tech completed four of its 16 third-down tries and two of its three fourth-down tries.

Despite punting on their first drive, it didn’t take the Golden Eagles long to get out to a lead after a fumbled Samford punt gave TTU the ball back on the 10-yard line. Gist capped the 3-play drive with an over-the-shoulder catch from Jeremiah Oatsvall in the left corner of the end zone (7-0).

Samford fired right back with a 65-yard drive to level the score at 7-7.

Tech was forced to punt on their next drive. After a 60-yard Samford completion, the Tech defense stood strong on their own 10 to force a field goal. The Bulldog kicker whiffed the close kick, and the score stayed level.

Late in the first quarter, Oatsvall launched a bomb to Willie Miller that went for 53 yards and past the pylons to make it 14-10. After the half, Tech started a 14-play, 93-yard drive that ended in a 3-yard punch-in touchdown from Gist (21-10).

SU roared back with a 39-yard touchdown pass to get within a score. After the half, Samford took its first lead of the game with a 91-yard drive capped by an 11-yard touchdown pass.

“We’ve got a very competitive, good football team. We have eight opponents left and we certainly could line up and play with all eight of them. Right now, we’re 0-0 in conference play. We still have a clean slate. I believe in our team.”

Tech Sweeps Southern Indiana in Two Game Series



(Left) Taylor Dorsey Tech’s middle blocker reached 1,000 career kills. Dorsey helped Tech win against Southern Indian winning all three sets. Jordan Karlen (above) number 2 jumps up to block Southern Indiana. Karlen also scores for Tech. Tech won 3-0 against Southern Indiana. Photo by: Avery Nettles



Brooke Amann jumping up to block the ball against Southern Indiana. Tech won all three sets. Photo by: Avery Nettles

Tech Soccer Narrowly Loses to Samford



Tech lost 1-0 against Samford Thursday Sep.15. Photo by: Bee Goodman



Tech soccer has played three games since their close loss against Samford winning two and tying one. Photo by Bee Goodman



Junior Selma Askildsen defends an attack from a Samford player. Photo by Bee Goodman



Yao Giada Zhou number 10 Tech’s forward/middle forward running with the ball trying to score a goal. Photo by: Bee Goodman



Tech throws the ball in after Samford knocks it out of bounds. Photo by: Bee Goodman