

Major Shakeup at Tenn. State Univ.

Contributed by Marshall Latimore -- Black College Wire
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Officials dismissed, reassigned; budget cuts announced

Several top Tennessee State University officials, including those connected to a recent security breach, have been reassigned or dismissed.

TSU President Melvin N. Johnson announced the actions in an Oct. 7 letter to faculty and staff. Johnson said in the past he has "emphasized and reiterated the importance of serving students in an effective and customer-focused manner."

The letter, initially distributed to faculty and staff in e-mail form, announced the reassignment of Provost/Executive Vice President Robert L. Hampton, who will now be on special assignment until January, though he is to assume a tenured faculty position in the sociology department effective Nov. 1. Hampton's role as provost/executive vice president was the chief academic officer and responsible for overseeing all academic processes.

Additionally, the unidentified financial aid employee who lost a flash drive containing 9,000 students' personal information, also has been dismissed from the university. Human resource officials said the employee's name would not be released.

Johnson also announced \$10.5 million in budget cuts this fiscal year, with more than half coming from an approximately \$6 million budget shortfall, largely the result in a decline in out-of-state enrollment.

Other administrative changes included John Cade, who was associate vice president for Enrollment Management. He is to remain at TSU as academic protocol officer. He also will remain responsible for planning and logistics for the university's three annual commencement ceremonies and fall Convocation.

National searches for these vacated positions, as well as the Director of Financial Aid, are to begin as early as January. Mary Chambliss, who was Financial Aid director, has been dismissed from the university. An interim director will be appointed, the letter said.

Taking over a portion of Hampton's duties is Kathleen McErney, dean of the College of Health Services, who will now serve as interim vice president for Academic Affairs, effective Oct. 7, the letter explained.

The letter also stated that the duties of overseeing the Division of Enrollment Management have been transferred to Michael A. Freeman, vice president for student affairs. The registrar's office, which had been in Enrollment Management, will remain a unit of Academic Affairs.

Additionally, the university's call center, which was a part of Academic Affairs, has been reassigned to Dennis Gendron, vice president for Communication and Information Technologies, the letter stated.

"All employees must be willing to be held accountable for their performance and contributions, and especially for decisions that directly impact the quality of services we provide to our students," Johnson said in the letter.

Cheryl Bates-Lee, director of TSU Public Relations, said in a phone conversation with The Meter that Johnson was unavailable for comment but more details would follow.

The letter also explained that the university would have to give approximately \$1.37 million back to the State of Tennessee, in addition to the \$3.16 million appropriation cut approved by the Tennessee General Assembly in June.

Universities across the state are feeling the effects of budget cuts and state reversions. In Knoxville, University of Tennessee President John Peterson said the state has told his university to cut an additional \$17 million in spending, on top of what had been an earlier announced \$21.1 million spending cut. The University of Tennessee is the state's largest public university.

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Marshall Latimore writes for the TSU Meter, the Tennessee State University student newspaper, which originally published a version of this article.