



To: President Joe DiPietro  
From: The Graduate Student Senate Executive Board  
Date: May 11, 2018  
RE: Leadership Change at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Dear President DiPietro,

On Wednesday, May 2, 2018 when the termination of Dr. Beverly Davenport as Chancellor of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville was announced, there was a range of emotion and reaction from graduate and professional students. It was difficult to understand and part with an individual who resiliently fought for the interests of students. The timing of the decision was also less than ideal as it drew focus from end of the year activities such as studying for exams and celebrating the achievements of our students and faculty.

While many organizations immediately took a stance on the decision and future directions, the Graduate Student Senate heard the impactful news, immediately alerted students, and due to the limited information at the time, refrained to comment. After taking some time to reflect and hear responses from graduate and professional students, we have observed that our students are concerned about the circumstances under which Dr. Davenport was removed.

During her historic appointment as the first female Chancellor, Dr. Davenport advocated for students and we are saddened to see her leave. We would like to acknowledge some of her accomplishments and show appreciation of her service as chancellor for the past year. Dr. Davenport fought for the reinstatement of the Pride Center despite attacks from lawmakers against our students. She was outspoken against outsourcing which would have had a detrimental impact on many of our campus workers. In short, Dr. Davenport fought for an inclusive university and worked to support and defend all students regardless of race, orientation, background, etc. We looked forward to the opportunity to work with Dr. Davenport in the coming year on further initiatives and being a small part of her legacy as Chancellor.

Graduate and professional students have voiced concern over the publicly released letter that notified Dr. Davenport of her firing. Students did not witness the actions and behavior addressed in the letter; many felt the letter was particularly scathing and questioned its public release. As the Faculty Senate points out in its resolution for censure, the letter attributes personal blame on Dr. Davenport for the increased system-flagship tensions which is a national problem according to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. While we recognize that the university is unable

to share evaluations, we ask for an opportunity to meet with you in person to better understand your decisions. The perceived lack of transparency surrounding the firing of Dr. Davenport threatens the trust students have in the UT system administration. By meeting with you, our goal would be to strengthen that trust.

We had the opportunity to meet with Interim Chancellor Davis earlier this week and congratulated him on his new position. He shared with us his ideas to aid graduate and professional students and we believe that he will serve the university well in this next year. We look forward to working with him.

We recognize that an undergraduate student represented the entire student body in the search for the eighth chancellor of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. We request that in the search for the ninth chancellor, a graduate student is included in the search committee. Undergraduate and graduate students have different needs and we would like to ensure that the next chancellor is able and willing to support graduate students. In the next chancellor, we would like to see someone who embodies the best qualities of Dr. Davenport and will continue to fight on behalf of students.

As we transition to new leadership, the Graduate Student Senate will continue to support the interests and well-being of all graduate and professional students. We thank you for service as President and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,  
The Graduate Student Senate Executive Board