



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Minutes

February 19, 2026 4:00 p.m.

President's Boardroom, Horace Mann Building

A live stream of the meeting for public viewing will also take place at the following link: <https://www.westfield.ma.edu/live>

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Ali Salehi, Vice Chair Melissa Alvarado, and Trustees, Barney Garcia, George Gilmer, Theresa Jasmin, Tessa Lucey, Chris Montemayor, Jason Queenin, Michael O'Rourke, William Reichelt and Gloria Williams.

Also present and participating was Westfield State University President Dr. Linda Thompson.

Board Chair Salehi called the meeting to order at 4:02 p.m. He announced that the meeting was being livestreamed and recorded.

MOTION made by Trustee Gilmer and seconded by Trustee Lucey, to approve the meeting minutes of December 18, 2025. There being no discussion, a roll call was conducted, **motion passed unanimously.**

MOTION made by Trustee Jasmin and seconded by Trustee Gilmer, to approve the meeting minutes of February 2, 2026. There being no discussion, a roll call was conducted, **motion passed unanimously.**

General Announcements

Innovation and Restructuring

- The University must restructure human and financial resources to support student success.
- Reorient enrollment strategies to reach adults and certificate-seeking learners.
- Strategic and facilities master plans should guide action, investment, and transformation.

Strategic Plan Monitoring

- Every standing committee will review and monitor progress on the strategic plan.
- Performance indicators will be reviewed regularly.
- The goal is to provide accessible, affordable, and exceptional education.

Faculty Union Meeting

- A listening meeting was requested by faculty union members.
- Dr. Thompson, Vice Chair Alvarado, and Chair Salehi met with two faculty members.
- Conflicting reports and perceptions were received from other faculty members.
- Trustee Alvarado and Chair Salehi reported Dr. Thompson is effectively involved with executive functions. Dr. Thompson and her entire cabinet have the Board's full support and unwavering confidence.

Chair's Term and Acknowledgements

- Chair Salehi's term is ending after three years. The Board will nominate Slate Officers which

will be voted on at the June 11, 2026 meeting.

President's Report

Challenges Facing Higher Education

- Declining demographics, shifting federal and state requirements, financial pressure, and changing workforce demands. Cannot rely on past solutions or successes.
- Demographic cliff: sharp decline in traditional college-age students leading to increased competition. The value of an undergraduate degree is being redefined due to free community college, three-year bachelor's programs, and scrutiny on return on investment.
- Federal priorities are shifting, causing funding gaps. The state government has been innovative in helping fill those gaps, but it's not enough.

Strategic Plan: Infinite Opportunities

- Built on four pillars:
 - Innovative learning: Aligning programs with future careers.
 - Student success: Ensuring community and resources for graduation and meaningful work.
 - Strategic stewardship: Aligning people, finances, and facilities.
 - Institutional impact: Cultivating scholars who drive research and transformative partnerships.
- The goal is to align these pillars to meet challenges head-on. Requires bold action and challenging the status quo.

Human Health and Life Science Innovation Center

- Proposal to create a human health hub on campus. Represents a proposed investment of more than \$140 million. The BRIGHT Act includes a \$100 million appropriation for Westfield State.
- Aims to address healthcare workforce shortages and health inequities in Western Massachusetts with collaboration between Westfield State University, Holyoke Community College, and Baystate Health.
- Aligns with the Commonwealth's priorities in public health, workforce development, higher education modernization, and regional economic resilience.

As Schools Match Wits 65th Anniversary Documentary

- The Media Services team, especially Alex Simisky, produced a documentary celebrating the 65th year anniversary of As Schools Match Wits. The film honors the program's history and impact on students, educators, and families in Western Massachusetts.
- The documentary was produced in partnership with New England Public Media and features archival footage, interviews, and behind-the-scenes stories from 1961 to today.
- Westfield State has carried on the legacy of the program since WWLP canceled it in 2006.

Recognition

- Dining services team received the Employer of the Year Award from Viability. The award recognizes inclusive, sustainable hiring practices. Director Melissa Sikes and staff will receive the award in Boston in April.
- Dr. Princey from the psychology department is using a new insect incubator for student research. Students are using genetically altered fruit flies to study sleep, wake cycles, alcohol sensitivity, and anxiety.
- Dr. Zara Khan Caldwell published her book, *The Fiercest Kind- Five Black Women in Art, Performance and Renaissance from 1937 to 1965*. The book explores how African American artists fought racism and sexism. There may be a book signing in the fall.

- The facilities and operations team is thanked for their work during the winter storm on January 25th and 26th. They worked to keep roads, walkways, resident halls, and essential operations safe.

Student Trustee Report

Trustee Barney Garcia provided updates on the Student Government Association's activities since the December meeting.

SGA Floor Renovation

- The SGA floor was renovated over winter break to digitize weekly governance operations. Two large televisions were installed to replace the old projector and screen setup. Meetings can now be paper free as agendas and meeting materials are now posted on the screens. Digital clickers will soon be implemented for members to cast their votes.

Finance Policies Review

- Increased patterns and understanding around clubs have prompted a review of finance policies.
- Exploring the possibility of proactively allocating funds to clubs with an initial budget upon the beginning of each fiscal year.

Senior Festivities

- Hundreds of seniors gathered at the Westfield River Brewing Company to celebrate 100 days until commencement. The event marks the kickoff of a series of events leading down to the end of the spring semester put on by the Senior class council of 2026.

BRIGHT Act Advocacy

- The State Universities of Massachusetts Council Presidents will be hosting an Advocacy Day at the State House on February 26th. Students will be traveling to Boston to speak with elected officials on the BRIGHT Act. The goal is to see the inclusion of \$125 million in the FY27 budget to address deferred maintenance needs and increase state contributions towards student financial aid.

Western Massachusetts SGA Summit

- Prospectively engaging regional partners in hosting a Western Massachusetts SGA Summit, bringing together community college and state university peers.
- The intention is to plant the seed towards interest in future engagement with other universities.

Civic Engagement and Freedom of Speech

- The SGA held a listening session between leadership, the Dean of Students, and campus affinity groups. The SGA President has worked with the President's Office to collaborate on communications pertaining to freedom of speech and concerns surrounding Turning Point USA's presence on campus.

Unity Fest

- Preparations are underway for the second annual Unity Fest. This is a week-long event that pulls in organizations such as the Black Student Union, Muslim Student Organization, Latina association for Empowerment, Queer Straight alliance, etc.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Concerns

- Chair Ali Salehi has expressed a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. He has acknowledged student concerns about belonging and safety on campus due to federal actions related to ICE and the reduction of opportunity and equity programs. Recent court actions, such as the Young Americans for Freedom vs. Department of Education case, are dismissing equity and inclusion programs as unconstitutional. There are concerns about the removal of references to diversity, equity, and inclusion from the University website.
- Assurance that the Board's commitment to underserved and underprivileged students remains unchanged, regardless of external pressures.

Student Success and Learning Committee

Committee Chair Chris Montemayor updated the Board:

- Dr. Salka shared an update on the success grant, which supports “at-risk” students. The student support program is broken down into two broad categories: supporting a unique targeted population and supporting all students in general through the Banacos Center.
 - Programs include the LEAD Scholar program (formerly Urban Ed program) and the TRIO program, which provide structured support, advising, and academic preparation. Other programs include academic advising and transfer transition support, and the Course Achievement Center, which provides success coaches offering wraparound support services.
- KPIs were reviewed, including first-year retention trends, which have shown steady improvement from 86% to 89.5% over the last four years.
 - Academic warning data highlighted persistent challenges among lower GPA students, with academic warnings increasing from 14% in fall 2024 to 16.5% in fall 2025.
 - Rising academic warning rates and high DWF rates from lower GPA students underscore the need for sustained and targeted intervention.
- The University's athletic program is thriving both in athletics and in the classroom.
 - The average GPA is 3.11 among over 490 students, with 302 having a GPA average of 3.0.
 - 189 students were named to the MASCAC honor roll, and 23 were named to the Middle East honor roll.
- Fall sports achievements include MASCAC championships in women's cross country, field hockey, and women's soccer. The field hockey and women's soccer teams appeared in the NCAA tournament. The University is currently in second place for the Smith Cup.
- Support systems for athletes include athletic training and health services, a fueling station for nutrition and strength and conditioning, and mental health support and services.

MOTION made by Trustee Williams and seconded by Trustee Gilmer, the granting of the honorary Doctor Humane Letters to General Clara Adams-Ender (Ret), effective February 19, 2026. There being no discussion, **ROLL CALL VOTE**, motion passed.

MOTION made by Trustee O'Rourke and seconded by Trustee Montemayor, the granting of the Honorary Doctor of Public Service to Mr. Kevin Queenin effective February 19, 2026. There being no discussion, **ROLL CALL VOTE**, motion passed.

MOTION made by Trustee Jasmin and seconded by Trustee Lucey, the granting of the honorary Doctor Humane Letters to Lawrence Gwozdz effective February 19, 2026. There being no discussion, **ROLL CALL VOTE**, motion passed.

MOTION made by Trustee Jasmin and seconded by Trustee Gilmer, the granting of the honorary Doctor of Laws to Maurice A. Watson effective February 19, 2026. There being no discussion, **ROLL CALL VOTE**, motion passed.

University Success Committee

Committee Chair William Reichelt updated the Board:

- It was reported on a conversation with the provost about retention, noting that the numbers are getting better.
- Residence Life reported that students are generally happy living on campus and are receiving various services.

- Inclusion and Belonging will be added as a discussion point with this committee.

Finance Committee

Committee Chair George Gilmer updated the Board on the following:

- The committee discussed the university cash summary, budget to actual, FY27 budget planning, and the fourth quarter investment report.

University Cash Summary

- The University has \$89 million in cash for 2026, compared to \$79 million in 2025.
- There is \$19 million of working capital for day-to-day operations.

Budget to Actual

- Through the end of January, the university is \$11.4 million better than last year.
- Favorable revenue variances are driven by higher state appropriation and grant revenue.

Fiscal Year 27 Budget Planning

- The goal is to have a balanced budget.
- Strategic investments are about \$4 to 5 million outside of the budget.

Fourth Quarter Investment Report

- The portfolio grew by \$5.3 million, ending December at \$43.7 million.
- There was discussion about investments in the Magnificent Seven and potential rate reductions next year.

MOTION made by Trustee Jasmin and seconded by Trustee Gilmer, to approve the consolidation of Westfield State University's two investment accounts into one, as recommended by investment advisors, Fund Evaluation Group (FEG). The consolidation will simplify reporting and account management. The aggregated account will reflect the integration of the current asset allocation of equities and fixed income. There being no discussion, a roll call was taken, **motion passed unanimously.**

MOTION made by Trustee Montemayor and seconded by Trustee Garcia, to approve the FY27 tuition and fee schedule, as presented. There being no discussion, a roll call was taken, **motion passed unanimously.**

Audit Committee

Committee Chair Theresa Jasmin updated the Board on the following:

- Presentations by external, internal auditors, and the IT department.
- External auditors presented results of two recent audits:
 - Massachusetts Office of Student Financial Aid: Received a clean opinion. This audit is completed every three years as long as there is a clean opinion.
 - Uniform Guidance Report: Clean opinion, but one repeat finding related to the timeliness of reporting enrollment changes for students.
- Internal auditors (Boston Consortium) talked about planning for internal audits.
 - Recommended internal audit related to Clery Act compliance.
 - Recommended audit of institutional advancement, (to start in May or June).
- Alan Blair presented the results of the audit for compliance with payment card industry (PCI) security standards. The University passed this audit.

MOTION made by Trustee Gilmer seconded by Trustee Jasmin, to accept the agreed upon procedures report pursuant to the Massachusetts Office of Student Financial Assistance attestation guide for fiscal year ending June 30, 2025, as

prepared by the firm of WithumSmith and Brown P.C., and to authorize the submission of this report to the State Comptroller's Office and the Department of Higher Education. A **roll call** was completed. **Motion passed.**

MOTION made by Trustee Lucey seconded by Trustee Jasmin to accept the audit report on the audit procedures required pursuant to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Uniform Guidance for fiscal year ending June 30, 2025, as prepared by the firm of WithumSmith and Brown P.C., and to authorize the submission of this report to the Federal Audit Clearinghouse and to other parties as required by OMB Uniform Guidance and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. A **roll call** was completed. **Motion passed.**

MOTION made by Trustee Gilmer seconded by Trustee Williams to approve the internal audit plan as recommended by the Boston Consortium group in the February 2026 memorandum. A **roll call** was completed. **Motion passed.**

There being no further business,

MOTION made by Trustee Williams, and seconded by Trustee Lucey, to adjourn. A roll call was conducted, **motion passed unanimously.**

Meeting adjourned at 5:25p.m..

Attachments:

- a. Draft Minutes of
- b. President's Presentation
- c. Student Trustee Presentation

Student Success & Learning Committee

- a. Draft Minutes of December 18, 2025, Academic Affairs Committee
- b. Draft Minutes of December 18, 2025, JEDI Committee
- c. Power Point: SU SUCCESS Grant
- d. Power Point: Athletics Success Feb 2026
- e. Motion. Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters recipient, General Clara Adams-Ender (Ret)
- f. Supporting documents: General Clara Adams-Ender (Ret)
- g. Motion. Honorary Doctor of Public Service recipient, Mr. Kevin Queenin
- h. Supporting documents: Mr. Kevin Queenin
- i. Motion. Honorary Doctor of Laws recipient, Mr. Maurice Watson, J.D.
- j. Supporting documents: Mr. Maurice Watson, Esquire
- k. Motion. Honorary Doctor of Human Letters recipient, Mr. Lawrence Gwozdz
- l. Supporting documents: Mr. Lawrence Gwozdz

University Success Committee:

- a. Minutes – 12.18.25

- b. WSU Revised Board Committee Topics
- c. University Success PPT

Finance Committee:

- a. Minutes 12-18-25 (Draft)
- b. University Cash Summary
- c. FY26 Monthly Budget to Actual (Narrative)
- d. FY26 Monthly Budget to Actual (YoY)
- e. FY27 Budget Planning
- f. 4Q Investment Report
- g. Motion – Merging Investment Accounts
- h. Merging Investment Accounts (Memo)
- i. Motion – FY27 Tuition and Fee Schedule
- j. FY27 Tuition and Fee Schedule (Narrative)
- k. FY27 Tuition and Fee Schedule (Day)
- l. FY27 Tuition and Fee Schedule (DGCE Narrative)
- m. FY27 Tuition and Fee Schedule (DGCE)
- n. Policy - Information Security Policy (0580) TRACK CHANGES
- o. Travel Expenses for the President/ President’s Direct Reports July 25 – December 25

Audit Committee:

- p. Minutes 10-21-25 (Draft)
- q. Motion – Massachusetts Office of Student Financial Aid Report (OSFA)
- r. Massachusetts Office of Student Financial Aid Report (Draft)
- s. Motion – Uniform Guidance Report
- t. Uniform Guidance Report (Draft)
- u. Motion – Internal Audit Plan
- v. Internal Audit Plan (Memo)
- w. External Audit Update – Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard
- x. Internal Audit Tracker (Summary)
- y. Internal Audit Tracker

Secretary’s Certificate

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of the approved minutes of the Westfield State University Board of Trustees meeting held on February 19, 2026.

Dr. Gloria Williams, Secretary

Date