



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Minutes

April 28, 2026 3:00 p.m.

Loughman Living Room, Scanlon Hall

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

MEMBERS ABSENT: George Gilmer, and Theresa Jasmin.

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

Board Chair Salehi called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m. He announced that the meeting was being livestreamed and recorded.

MOTION made by Trustee Williams and seconded by Trustee O'Rourke, to approve the meeting minutes of February 19, 2026. There being no discussion, a roll call was conducted, **motion passed unanimously.**

General Announcements

- Reminder of upcoming leadership changes at the board, a new slate of officers will be nominated and voted on, June 11, 2026.
- Acknowledgment of challenges facing higher education. Emphasis on wise spending and budgeting practices. Importance of not becoming complacent in financial management.

President's Report

Strategic Plan Approval

- 2026-2030 strategic plan, Infinite Opportunities, approved by the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education on April 7, 2026.
- Reflects shared vision and dedication of faculty, staff, students, trustees, alumni, and community partners.
- Aims to strengthen academic excellence, expand access, and advance student success.
- Prepared to move forward with a comprehensive campaign alongside the Facilities Master Plan.

Commencement Season

- Ceremony scheduled for May 15, 2026 at the Mass Mutual Center.
- Four individuals to receive honorary degrees:
 - Maurice Watson - Doctor of Law for leadership in education, health care, and public service.
 - Kevin Queenin - Doctor of Public Service for support of Westfield State University.
 - Lawrence Gwodz - Doctor of Humane Letters for philanthropic impact.

- General Claire Adams Zinder - Doctorate of Humane Letters awarded at Military Veterans Graduation Ceremony.

Community Engagement

- **Hot Stove Event:** Featured former Boston Red Sox pitcher Roger Clemens.
 - Brought together students, fans, and community members for conversation. Clemens shared insights from his distinguished Major League Baseball career. Hosted in partnership with the Westfield Starfighters.
- PI Sigma Alpha hosted Congressman Richard Neal for discussions titled "From Campus to Media, Politics and Public Service."
 - Welcomed students from Putnam Vocational Technical Academy.
- Environmental Studies students Courtney Giles and Taylor Knapp presented wildlife assessment findings to the Westfield Conservation Commission.
 - Conducted through a course led by Assistant Professor Laura De Carlo. Recorded over 420 observations using motion sensing cameras.
- Westfield State University's Model United Nations team participated in the National Model United Nations Conference in New York City. Earned the Honorable Mention Delegation Award. Addressed global issues including sustainability and nuclear disarmament.
- Climate Change Forum: Co-sponsored a panel on climate change and public health.
 - Featured Georges Benjamin, Janice Hutchinson, and Regina Rajini Srikant.
 - Discussed connections between climate change, public health, and inequality.
- Nonprofit Innovators Forum: organized by Dr. Charles DiStefano, focusing on "Innovating for Sustainable Growth."
 - Featured sector-based roundtables and a sponsor showcase.
 - Highlighted the essential role of nonprofits in addressing community challenges.
- Advocacy Efforts: Represented Westfield State University before the Joint Ways and Means Committee.
 - Advocated for continued investment in public higher education. Emphasized the importance of campus appropriations and funding for collective bargaining obligations.

Sports Teams Update

- Dick Lenfest, Director of Athletics, discussed the women's softball team.
 - They had an extraordinary successful season, winning two games at Bridgewater and two at home against Keene State.
 - Their second win marked their 33rd win of the season, breaking the record of 32 wins set by the 1975 baseball team.
 - Currently ranked 11th in the country in the NPI ranking, which is important for postseason.
 - MASCAC tournament will be hosted on the 7th, 8th, and 9th.

Faculty Recognition

- Congratulations extended to faculty on tenure and promotions.

Brittney Kraus's AGB Conference Report

- Brittney Kraus, assistant to the Board of Trustees, attended a professional conference in Denver.
 - Attended as a first-time participant after two years in her role.
 - Noted that the University of Maryland has 55 board members, which provided a fresh perspective on board management.
- The conference included:
 - An app for scheduling and selecting lectures. Topics included board independence, engagement, and operational excellence.

- o Interest in Robert's Rules class and AI's impact on board experience.
- Networking opportunities were valuable, building connections with colleagues from various universities. Returned with new ideas and a sense of camaraderie.
 - o Expressed desire to attend the next conference in Washington D.C. in 2027.

Student Trustee Report

Trustee Barney Garcia provided updates:

- Focus on community engagement, programming, advocacy, and coalition building.

Budgeting and Student Activity Reserve

- SGA has a reserve pool of approximately \$440,000 for programmatic uses.
- Approved \$130,000 from reserves, pending board approval.
 - o \$65,000 allocated for construction of WSU lettering as a campus landmark.
 - o \$65,000 budgeted for improvements to Park Arbor apartment complex.

Events and Celebrations

- Owl Ball event held on April 3, 2026 described as a fun atmosphere.
- Senior Sendoff event on April 24, 2026 for graduating students.
- Affinity groups hosted celebrations, including the Rainbow Celebration and Sankofa ceremony.

Advocacy and Political Engagement

- Advocacy Day on February 26, 2026 aimed at investment in public higher education.
- Congressman Richard Neal visited campus on April 10 for a discussion on politics and journalism.
- SGA advocates for legislation like the BRIGHT Act and increased state appropriations for operational support and student financial aid.
- Focus on maintaining Westfield State as a crucial pillar for representation in the Valley.
- Emphasis on building relationships with upstate schools, such as Worcester State, for future higher education advocacy.

Transition of Leadership

- Introduction of Student Trustee Elect Maria Rento-Marrero.
- Maria is an undergraduate pursuing a degree in Management with a concentration in Entrepreneurship and working on her MBA.
- Committed to advancing student success and focusing on diverse student populations.

Student Success and Learning Committee

Committee Chair Chris Montemayor updated the Board:

- Committee met to review exceptional faculty recommended for promotion.
- Recognition of students receiving Academic Excellence awards.
- Introduction of a new dashboard for data analysis on enrollment outcomes, retention rates, and KPIs. The board has been pressing for clean data for decision-making. Reliable information was presented for the first time in a long time, credited to Vice President Safa and his team.
- The University's faculty and students are highly regarded, with appreciation for their hard work and dedication.

MOTION made by Trustee Montemayor and seconded by Trustee Queenin; to approve the granting of promotion to the rank of Professor, effective September 1, 2026, to: Dr. Paul Cacolice, Sports Medicine and Human Performance; Dr. Andrew Hafner, Education; Dr. Tracy McLeod, Education; Dr. Edward Orgill, Music; Dr. Jamie Rivera, Nursing; Dr. Amanda Salacinski, Sports Medicine and Human

Performance; Dr. Susan Scott, Nursing; Dr. Francesa Spina, Criminal Justice. To approve the granting of promotion to the rank of Associate Professor, effective September 1, 2026, to: Dr. Timothy Honig, Music. There being no discussion, **ROLL CALL VOTE**, motion passed by majority.

MOTION made by Trustee Montemayor and seconded by Trustee Queenin; the Student Success and Learning Committee recommends to the full Board: to approve the granting of promotion to the rank of Professor, effective September 1, 2026, to: Professor Ashley Evanowski-Cole, Chemistry & Physical Science; Professor Beverly St. Pierre, Health Sciences; Professor Francesca Spina, Criminal Justice; Professor Kathryn Weglarz, Biology. To approve the granting of tenure with automatic promotion, effective September 1, 2026, to: Professor Michelle Duffelmeyer, Health Sciences; Professor Juliet Lee, Education; Professor Nicholas Morrison, Psychology; Professor Jessica Stephens, Biology. There being no discussion, **ROLL CALL VOTE**, motion passed by majority.

University Success Committee

Committee Chair William Reichelt updated the Board:

- Highlights from the past couple of months were presented.
 - A brand launch is underway, with an 11-person camera crew on campus for an anthem video.
 - Undergraduate admissions and deposits are on track, with increases noted over previous years.
- Strategic Enrollment Plan
- Continued increases in graduate and undergraduate enrollment.
 - Discussion on addressing the demographic cliff expected in 2028.
 - Faculty development plan to prepare for the implementation of the new general education curriculum.

Finance Committee

Committee member Jay Queenin updated the Board on the Finance Committee meeting held on April 13, 2026 with the following:

- **Investment Portfolio Update**
 - Fund Evaluation Group reported investment returns up around 2.5% as of mid-April, equating to over a million dollars.
 - Historical performance during midterm elections suggests potential for improvement in the second half of the year.
 - Investment advisor noted the need to monitor oil prices and interest rates.
 - Overall optimistic tone from the investment advisor regarding market resilience.
- **University Cash and Budget**
 - University cash is down due to funding the deficit; market decline in March impacted cash but rebounded by April.
 - FY26 budget expected to end within 1-2% of budget target; a \$2 million shortfall in revenue discussed.
 - Need to continue capital investments despite budget difficulties; Trustee Garcia emphasized addressing capital needs.
- **Provisional Operating Budget**
 - Notified of a \$1.4 million hit on fringe benefits due to collective bargaining, adding to existing structural deficit.
 - Current deficit estimated between \$4-5 million; emphasis on achieving a balanced budget next year.

- Multi-year projection indicates positive outlook for the next five years, contingent on difficult decisions today.

MOTION made by Trustee Williams and seconded by Trustee Avarado, the Finance Committee recommends approval to the full Board: To approve the revised Trust Fund Management Policy (0604), as presented. There being no discussion, a roll call was conducted, **motion passed unanimously.**

MOTION made by Trustee Williams and seconded by Trustee O'Rourke: to approve a preliminary and partial capital projects budget of \$1,412,702 which will enable the University to begin the procurement process to bid the proposed work for this summer. The projects are listed on the FY27 Preliminary Capital Budget Plan with a brief description. Early approval of these specific projects is critical to solicit competitive bids and award these projects as soon as possible. The full capital budget, including all projects and Information Technology requests, will be provided in June 2026 with the FY27 Provisional Campus Budget. There being no discussion, a roll call was conducted, **motion passed unanimously.**

Audit Committee

Committee Vice Chair Melissa Alvarado updated the Board on the Audit Committee meeting held on April 13, 2026 with the following:

- One item for action and one for information.
- Information update on internal audit regarding Clery Act.
 - Audit about 80% complete; draft report to be provided in advance.
- Engagement of financial audit services for fiscal year 26.
 - Participated in statewide RFP process led by Bridgewater State University.
 - Contract period runs through June 30th, 2029, with two optional one-year extensions.
- Recommendation to select Withum, Smith and Brown P.C.
 - Extensive experience with Massachusetts higher education.
 - Competitive pricing for FY26 at \$90,000.

MOTION made by Trustee Williams seconded by Trustee Queenin: to appoint Withum Smith & Brown PC, as the University's auditors and to engage their services for FY26 in response to the state-wide request for proposal with Bridgewater State University (RFP-0026). The contract is for three years with a possibility of two, one-year extensions. A roll call was completed. **Motion passed.**

There being no further business,

MOTION made by Trustee Queenin, and seconded by Trustee O'Rourke, to adjourn. A roll call was conducted, **motion passed unanimously.**

Meeting adjourned at 4:18 p.m..

Attachments:

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

Student Success & Learning Committee

- a. Minutes of February 19, 2026
- b. Motion for Faculty Promotion
- c. Promotion Candidate Summaries
- d. Promotion Personnel Action
- e. Motion for Tenure
- f. Tenure Candidate Summaries
- g. Tenure Personnel Action
- h. Academic Excellence Awards List

University Success Committee:

- a. Minutes – February 19, 2026
- b. University Success PPT

Finance Committee:

- a. Motion – Trust Fund Management Policy (0604)
- b. Trust Fund Management Policy (0604) CLEAN
- c. Trust Fund Management Policy (0604) TRACK CHANGES
- d. Motion – FY27 Preliminary Capital Budget
- e. FY27 Preliminary Capital Budget (Narrative)
- f. FY27 Preliminary Capital Budget

Audit Committee:

- a. Motion – Engagement of Financial Audit Services for FY26
- b. Engagement of Financial Audit Services for FY26

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 April 28, 2026.

Dr. Gloria Williams, Secretary

Date