



Board of Trustees

Special Meeting/ Board Retreat

August 8, 2025
8:30 am – 5:00 pm

The Starting Gate at GreatHorse
128 Wilbraham Road, Hampden, Massachusetts

Board Members Present: Board Chair Ali Salehi, Vice Chair Melissa Alvarado, Members: Barney Garcia, George Gilmer, Theresa Jasmin, Tessa Lucey, Michael O'Rourke and William Reichelt.

Members Excused: Chris Montemayor, Jay Queenin and Gloria Williams.

Also present were Westfield State University President Dr. Linda Thompson; Provost Dr. William Salka; Institutional Advancement Vice President Ms. Lisa McMahon; Vice President of Enrollment Management, Marketing & Student Affairs, Dr. Kevin Hearn; Vice President of Administration & Finance Stephen Taksar; Chief of Staff and Special Assistant to the President on University Strategies, Dr. Michael Freeman; Director of Athletics, Richard Lenfest; General Counsel, Vice President for Government and Community Relations, Melinda Phelps; Dean of Division of Graduate and Continuing Education, Dr. Nora Padykula; Dean of Arts & Sciences Dr. M.K. Balasubramanya; Assistant Provost for Educational Excellence and Retention, Dr. Hilary Sacket-Taylor; Dean of Students, Maggie Balch; Senior Associate Athletics Director, Nancy Bals; Assistant Athletic Director for Recruitment, Marlee Berg-Haryasz; Executive Director of Westfield State University Foundation, Bill Hynes; and special guests, Dr. Shannon Brown and JG Staal of Action Logics.

Board Chair Ali Salehi called the meeting to order at 8:37 AM and welcomed all in attendance.

Dr. Thompson introduced special guests and presenters, Dr. Shannon Brown and JG Staal of Action Logics.

Action Logics and AI Implementation

- Historical Context of AI was presented.
- Catalysts for AI Development in the Mid-90s
 - Algorithms: Breakthroughs like Transformers and neural networks enabled new possibilities.
- In November 2022, OpenAI released GPT with a chatbot interface, leading to rapid adoption.
 - Reached 1 million users in two days and 100 million in two months.
- Focus has shifted to AGI (Artificial General Intelligence) and ASI (Artificial Superintelligence).
- Despite rapid advancements, AI is still in its early stages.
- Universities are beginning to explore what they need to do regarding AI.
- AGI is defined as a computer performing any cognitive task a human can.
- ASI goes further, enabling computers to do things humans cannot, including creativity.

Automation vs. Augmentation

- Automation is common, but augmentation is where significant changes are occurring.
- Humans provide instruction at the beginning and end, with AI expanding its role in the middle.
- Skills must adapt to work with AI, leveraging its strengths in computation and pattern recognition.

Challenges and Concerns

- AI has biases and raises privacy concerns.
- There are risks associated with consolidating power in AI without frameworks or boundaries.
- AI is already used in hiring decisions, raising questions about control.

Rapid Pace of AI Development

- Anthropic and OpenAI released new AI models (GPT5) with improved benchmarks.
- Google created a video generation model that allows users to interact within the generated world.

Market Growth

- OpenAI has grown from a niche product to a \$12 billion annual revenue company in 2.5 years.
- They have 125 million daily users, one billion API calls, and three billion chat requests.

Infrastructure, Security, and Talent

- Universities need to control how information is shared with public AI platforms.
- It's important to manage AI talent and address the potential for AI to stifle creativity.
- Brainstorming sessions with humans can generate more ideas than AI.

Questions and Concerns

- Concerns about integrity, intellectual property, and the impact on basic learning.
- AI can assist with research but requires human oversight to ensure accuracy.
- Studies are being conducted on AI's impact on the brain.

OpenAI's Latest Model

- OpenAI's new model can answer questions and provide information, including visuals with interactive slides.
- The model can generate code and visuals to demonstrate concepts, such as how planes fly, based on user questions.

Testing and Learning with AI

- Teaching methods may need to change to leverage AI for individual certification, studies, and direction.
- The University is seen as a breeding ground for ideas and a safe place to make mistakes.
- There is hesitation in education regarding AI, with concerns about cheating, but it can be beneficial.
- Institutions should think about how they want the future to look for faculty, academics, and research.
- Create an AI mission and policy, and give it to students, as they are already using AI.
- Being a fast follower can be advantageous, learning from universities with more resources.

Advisory Councils and Risk Management

- Should create an advisory council with students, faculty, staff, and administration to discuss AI.
- Address the risks associated with AI, such as privacy issues and IP concerns, by providing guardrails.
- Develop guidelines on how to use AI and dig deeper into its capabilities.

Group Exercise Instructions

- Participants were divided into five groups to conduct group exercises.

Strategic Planning

Goal 1

- Goal one is focused on academics but is not the sole purview of academic affairs.
- All goals focus on one area, but many divisions participate in implementing the objectives and action items.
- The goal enhances admissions and retention.
- Assess faculty development, focusing on teaching high impact practices.
- Review process to ensure relevance as disciplines and employer needs evolve.
- Focus on majors that attract students in both professional studies and arts and sciences.
- Work is most needed in arts and sciences, especially humanities and social sciences.

Data Needs

- In desperate need of better data.
- Student success data expected this fall through Huron contracts.
- Focus on why students leave Westfield State University.
- Restart faculty development, using success money to pay for it.

Performance Measures

- Track standards, retention, graduation rates, number of majors revised, certificates created, high impact practices, and faculty participating in professional development.
- Compensate faculty for their time in development activities.
- Workshops will be one to two days with takeaway assignments and syllabi for implementation.
- New faculty center director hired to develop training for late August and fall semester 2025.

Goal 2

- Goal two concerns student success, including psychosocial development, graduation, and employment.
- When the plan refers to students, it means all students.
- Goal number two addresses student success from application through graduation and service in local and regional communities.

Objectives

- Objective one focuses on becoming a student-ready campus and prioritizing student success through continuous quality improvement.
 - Students will be a driving force in measurement and accountability.
 - Survey engagements and a leadership course will be developed.
- Objective two aims to foster a stronger, collaborative environment for all members of the University community.
 - Development of a master calendar.
 - Redesigning academic support and creating a peer mentor program.
 - Ongoing assessment of student engagement and climate.
- Objective three addresses a holistic model of student wellness, including physical and mental health.
 - Creating spaces that support students' physical and mental health.
 - Expansion of services for part-time, graduate, and off-campus students.
 - Bringing offices like the health center, counseling center, and Interfaith center together.

- Collaboration between the dean of students and the student provost to address student concerns and create alert systems.
- Objective four involves identifying and investing in new programs, including academic programs.
 - Development of a long-term strategic enrollment plan.
 - Exploring the feasibility of new athletic programs.

Goal 3

- Overall goal: Optimize resources and enhance stewardship of resources at the University.
- Resources are categorized into three main buckets: people, financial, and facilities.
 - People: 750 full-time positions, 500 part-time positions.
 - Financial: \$132 million budget, \$80 million in cash reserves, \$21 million in foundation assets.
 - Facilities: \$600 million in facilities (replacement cost), \$250 million in deferred maintenance, 1.5 million square feet of space, 22 buildings, 256 acres.

Main Themes for Human Resources (HR)

- Support changes in staffing based on new initiatives and strategies.
- Focus on recruitment, retention, and recognition of employees, enhancing leadership development training.
 - Reshaped HR to provide dedicated training and development staffing.
- Use more data-informed processes for administrative decision-making.
- Address campus culture through biennial surveys and implement the "Leadership for Public Purpose" concept.
- Leverage volunteers and boards as external resources.

Financial Focus

- Main focus: education, training, and communication.
 - Develop and adhere to an ongoing communication plan.
- Improve systems and management of financial resources, addressing limitations of the banner system.
- Establish a data warehouse for financial information, building from academic affairs' work with Huron.
- Focus on financial reporting and strategic investments to support the strategic plan.
- Generate a cohesive and integrated multi-year plan.
- Diversify revenue streams, grow graduate programs and certificates, and push for fundraising.

Facilities

- Address significant infrastructure issues, cyber protections, and campus connectivity.
- Leverage the BRIGHT Act for deferred maintenance needs.
- Utilize the Master Plan to prioritize facilities, leverage spaces, and improve space utilization.
- Advance sustainability efforts.
- Consider surplus property and its potential financial benefits for Westfield State.

BRIGHT Act

- Major higher education bond to support deferred maintenance needs.
- A report was submitted to the legislature last fall to talk about the needs at the state universities, UMass, community colleges, what's the approach and what's the plan.
- Potential \$2.5 billion bond issuance for higher education.
- Current allocation model: 50% to UMass, the rest shared by community colleges and state universities.

Capital Project Funding

- A large sum of money could equate to one major project on every campus, roughly \$50 to \$80 million.
- Funds are also being allocated for specific activities supporting facilities and deferred maintenance, which would allow for smaller projects with a more immediate impact.
 - Parenzo Hall project took five years to complete.
- The state is considering smaller allocations for quicker impact projects, achievable within a year or two.

Financial Data and Dashboards

- The University needs to improve its use of financial data by creating dashboards for real-time reporting and decision-making.
 - An example dashboard from a professional association called Nuclear was shown.
- Metrics will be used over the next few years, tying directly to the plan.
 - The top five KPIs relate to institutional metrics reported to the board.
 - Metrics are connected to strategic objectives, including how the formula will be calculated, frequency, and baseline.

Goal 4:

- Goal 4 aims to foster a vibrant community of engaged scholars and learners who drive innovation, applied research, and creativity through purposeful scholarship and transformative partnerships.
- The vision is for Westfield State University to be a leader in equitable, high-quality education in Massachusetts, increasing retention and graduation rates for all students, especially those from historically underserved populations.
- The goal focuses on expanding workforce alliance programs and increasing student engagement in community service and civic learning.
- Goal 4 is about civic and community engagement and the power of connection, providing students with firsthand experience in addressing real-world problems.

Objectives

- Strengthening impact through strategic partnerships with government, community, industry, and internal constituents to foster innovation.
 - Developing strategic partnerships with outside constituents, campus members, other institutions, and national/international entities.
 - Examples include the nursing program's trips to Puerto Rico and the environmental science program's research in Costa Rica.
- Cultivate support to address local, state, and regional needs through applied research, entrepreneurship, and societal applications.
 - Increasing grant funding and leveraging university funds through public-private partnerships.
- Strengthen platforms for community engagement and disseminate research and creative work through deliberate engagement.
 - Connecting students with community organizations to address local issues.

Alignment and KPIs for Goal 4

- Goal 4 aligns with the University's mission, vision, and values, particularly strategic priority number four, which is strengthening partnerships for experiential learning.
- It also covers statewide system initiatives such as student success, innovation, economic mobility, and public good.

- Key performance indicators (KPIs) include the number of community partnerships, student engagement initiatives, and alumni involvement in mentorship programs.
- The goal is to leverage the Ride Center to develop an institute of innovation over the next five years.
- Forming more advisory boards and recognition programs to honor faculty, staff, and community partners.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

- The board has been requesting KPIs for several years.
- The focus is on students and student success.

Strategic Considerations

- The board wants to examine the number of students per major and graduation rates.
- Right-sizing and streamlining may be necessary.
- The board must do what is necessary to sustain the University and advance students.

International Students

- International students typically pay full tuition and stay in dormitories.
- The University is exploring opportunities in Ireland.
- The climate's role in attracting international students is being examined.
 - There is a struggle because people are worried.
- Identifying the majors that international students are interested in.
 - Most students from China are interested in business and go to schools with accredited business programs.
 - International students are interested in health sciences, engineering, and other areas.
- A proposal before USAID involved a relationship with Ireland.
 - Need to reimagine that program.
- Western Massachusetts has a lot of power in advanced manufacturing.

Board Self-Evaluation

- The evaluation aligns with AGB standards and the board's evaluation.
- The board is among the few state institutions conducting its own board evaluation.
- "The board's self-evaluation process provides useful information on board performance."
- Major accomplishments noted by the board were discussed.

Policy Review and Streamlining

- There is a focus on what are true board policies and which are not.
- Some policies were added due to past circumstances and may no longer be necessary.
- A suggestion is made to overhaul and group policies for a future board meeting to streamline the process.
- The governance committee could vet the policies.
- State law should be considered when determining board-mandated requirements.
- Some campuses allow the cabinet, not the board, to decide on policies.
- Student progression should be an academic issue, not a board issue.

Areas for Improvement

- Identifies broader participation in activities as an area for improvement.
- Suggests proactive scheduling of trustee representation at key events like Interfaith breakfast, winter pinning ceremony, and homecoming.
- Aims to improve communication and scheduling of trustee time for events.

- Emphasizes the importance of trustee participation for education, networking, and visibility.

Campus Community Engagement

- Suggests restructuring meetings to allow time for campus community members to share their work and achievements.
- Proposes streamlining activities during campus visits to maximize engagement.
- Mentions past campus visits by Ali Salehi and George Gilmer and suggests organizing more opportunities for trustees to spend time with students.

Board Structure & Committees

- The meeting discussed external evaluation and board structure, including the number of committees.
- Currently, the board has an all-day meeting with seven committees, and trustees participate in every subcommittee.
- Full board meetings involve five-minute committee reports, which gives the impression of redundancy.
- Concerns were raised about spending too much time "in the weeds" instead of focusing on the big picture, data, and student success.

Time Management and Committee Issues

- Time management is a concern, with committee meetings often running over schedule.
- The Board Chair questions whether the board is concentrating on the big picture and student experience.
- A key question is whether to reduce the number of committees and combine them.
- The Board Chair believes that the current structure with too many committees is not conducive to concentrating on important issues.

Proposed Committee Structure

- Proposal suggests having three committees: Student Success, University Success, and Finance and Audit, along with an Executive Committee.
- The Executive Committee would include the chair, vice chair, past chair (if still on the board), and chair of audit.
- The Student Success Committee could include academic programs and success, student life and mental health, arts, aesthetics and music, community engagement, internships and co-ops, placement after college, equity, belonging and diversity, and safety and security.
- The University Success Committee would cover enrollment management and recruiting, community engagement and involvement, retention, institutional research and data analysis, faculty success and enrichment, alumni affairs, strategic plan and KPIs.
- The University Finance and Audit Committee would include audit, financials, capital planning and facilities, long term planning and finances, investment and reserve management, human resources and mental health, risk management, institutional advancement, marketing and branding.
- The Executive Committee would handle governance, Trustee nomination, legal, external representations and relations, executive matters, strategic plan and KPIs.
- Dr. Freeman, along with cabinet members, contributed to the proposal, drawing from best practices.
- The proposed changes, if approved, would not take effect until January 1, 2026, to allow time for review and to ensure compliance with Board of Higher Education and state mandates.

Meeting Structure and Focus

- The goal is to avoid discussing every subject in every committee and to allow committees to focus on specific subjects as needed.

- The aim is to move away from all-day meetings and consider holding subcommittee meetings on different days via Zoom or in person.
- The speaker wants to be able to question the Cabinet and the University on important matters, rather than discussing minor expenses.
- Question of whether committees are recommending bodies or deciding bodies.
 - Board Chair envisioned committees as recommending committees to the full board.
 - Full board would then provide approval.
- This approach would allow for more discussion with all board members.

Topic Placement Discussion & Concerns

- Strategic planning and KPIs are under both University Success Committee and Executive Committee.
- DGCE (Division of Graduate and Continuing Education) is in a university group while the rest of the students are in a different group.
- Concern that listing all the bullets underneath each committee makes it seem like a continuation of the status quo.
- Emphasis on shifting and transforming board operations.
- Focus should be on critical things rather than routine updates.
- A suggestion is made to align four committees with the four goals.
 - This raises the question of where audit and finance would fit, as audit isn't always part of stewardship.
- Another idea involves combining audit with executive, making executive focus exclusively on legal issues.
 - The aim is to refocus efforts on strategic issues and avoid unnecessary meetings.

Alternative Committee Structure

- An alternative committee structure is proposed: learning, resources, and relationships.
 - Learning would focus on faculty and academics, resources on financial matters, and relationships on external partnerships and community engagement.
- Board Chair notes that the current goals already encompass these areas, such as innovative learning and student success.

Audit Committee and University Comparisons

- The need for a separate audit committee is questioned, with confirmation needed.
- Information on committee structures at nine other universities is available for reference.
- Westfield State University is the only one where all committees meet five times a year, although Bridgewater State has the most committees overall.

Strategic Plan Alignment, Committee Structure and Focus

- Aligning committees with the strategic plan conceptually is good but avoid strict categorization.
- Ensure all areas, including audit and compliance, are covered.
- There is a suggestion on separating "Learning Finance" and "Student Success" into distinct committees.
- Integration of technology and AI, as suggested by Dr. Shannon, is crucial, especially regarding innovation.
- There is a need to schedule topics based on relevance (e.g., enrollment in September/October, budgeting in December).
- Some topics are broad and require dedicated time for discussion, such as tuition discount policies and their impact on enrollment strategy.
- Looking at other state universities and how they structure their committees.

Committee Meetings and Board Meetings

- The Board Chair suggests having committee meetings on different days, either via Zoom or in person, and then having a shorter board meeting.
- Board Chair proposes that committee reports be submitted in advance of the full board meeting and adopting a consent agenda.
 - This would allow more time to discuss more meaningful matters.
- Question of whether to have committee meetings on separate days or to keep them in the morning of the board meeting day.
- If committee meetings are on separate days, trustees may only need to call in for two days a month, plus attend the board meeting.
- It was acknowledged that there will need to be some overlap in committee assignments to ensure enough people are present.
- Ensure that the committees focus on progress and suggests discussing KPIs, such as enrollment percentages, at least every other meeting.

There being no further business, **MOTION** made to adjourn the meeting. There being no discussion, **motion passed unanimously**. Meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

Attachment(s):

- a. AI Presentation
- b. Workshop Exercises
- c. Workshop Exercises Cheat Sheet
- d. Strategic Plan
- e. Goal 1 Presentation
- f. Goal 2 Presentation
- g. Goal 3 Presentation
- h. Goal 4 Presentation
- i. WSU KPIs
- j. Board Evaluation – Summary
- k. Board Evaluation – Strongly Agreed Statements
- l. Board Chair Presentation
- m. Committee Assignments
- n. Bylaws Brochure
- o. Academic Affairs Committee Charter
- p. Audit Committee Charter
- q. Enrollment Management & Student Affairs Committee Charter
- r. Executive Committee Charter
- s. Governance and Nomination Committee Charter
- t. Financial Affairs Committee Charter
- u. JEDI Committee Charter

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, Special meeting held on August 8, 2025.

Gloria Williams, Secretary

Date