



Board of Trustees Special Meeting Agenda

October 10, 2025

3:30 p.m.

Zoom (Meeting ID: 978 7304 7012)

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

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| 1. Call to Order | Board Chair Ali Salehi |
| 2. Items for Discussion | Board Chair Ali Salehi |
| a. President's Evaluation | |
| 3. Items for Action | Board Chair Ali Salehi |
| a. Motion – President's Evaluation | |
| 4. Adjournment | Board Chair Ali Salehi |

Attachments:

- a. Trustees' Questionnaire
- b. Trustees' Anonymous Feedback
- c. Draft Presidential Evaluation for 2024-2025 Academic Year
- d. Motion - Presidential Evaluation

President Thompson FY24-25 Evaluation
Input from Board Members

The mission of the board is to ensure Student success, affordability, and access as well as University success and sustainability. Based on this mission, please provide feedback on the following questions. Answers will be managed with utmost confidentiality. Please provide the feedback directly to Brittney Kraus.

- I. The tone or climate that the President has set for the campus.
- II. The President's plan and KPI's on reporting "Student Success and Economic Mobility" progress for all students and underserved and first-generation college students.
- III. The President's communication with the campus and with the Board.
- IV. The President's effectiveness as a leader and ability to develop a productive and cohesive team.
- V. The President's articulation of an agenda and set of priorities (consistent with the University's Strategic Plan, values, and mission) and the development of clear, identifiable strategies to achieve these. Items such as innovation funds, developing innovative programs and weeding out/plan to weed out low performing/attending programs.
- VI. The President's effectiveness as a representative of the University to the broader community.
- VII. The President's effectiveness in addressing new and challenging issues seldomly faced by the higher education institutions in the past, such as mental health of students, faculty, and staff.
- VIII. The President's effectiveness and benchmarking KPI's in general
- IX. The President's handling of the unfamiliar environment created in D.C.
- X. The President's handling of the budget and financial matters
- XI. The President's handling of challenges presented to the University.
- XII. Other comments:

President Thompson FY24-25 Evaluation
Input from Board Members

The mission of the board is to ensure Student success, affordability, and access as well as University success and sustainability. Based on this mission, please provide feedback on the following questions. Answers will be managed with utmost confidentiality. Please provide the feedback directly to Brittney Kraus.

I. The tone or climate that the President has set for the campus.

Dr. Thompson has set a positive tone for the campus despite the challenging times that we live in. She made clear during a recent Board meeting that we should be optimistic, though we should take challenges seriously and address them accordingly. She has also engendered a positive climate on-campus focused on belonging. Her new emphasis on belonging I believe is the right direction for us as an institution.

The tone of the campus is extremely positive thanks in large part to the approach of President Thompson. She is strategic, welcoming, positive and always posts a smile.

From what I have observed and heard, it seems evident that President Thompson has set a positive and inclusive tone for the campus, fostering a welcoming environment for all students, faculty, and staff. Her efforts have significantly contributed to a sense of community and collaboration, which is evident in the overall campus atmosphere.

President Thompson has set a positive and inclusive tone for the campus, fostering a climate of collaboration, respect, and innovation. This leadership approach has contributed to a welcoming environment where students, faculty, and staff feel valued and empowered to succeed. A good example is the creation of the RIDE Center – where faculty, staff, and students get the opportunity to become creative thinkers and entrepreneurs.

The President has fostered positive climate for campus with her strong presence.

Based on my observations, the President sets a positive, inclusive and focused campus climate.

President Thompson has established a tone of transparency, collaboration, and inclusion across the campus community. Her approachability, frequent presence on campus, and willingness to engage with both students and faculty have created a positive climate rooted in respect, shared governance, and a unified focus on student success.

Dr. Thompson has set an incredibly positive tone for the campus. Days of mistrust and lack of transparency have been replaced with trusting relationships. Obviously not every single person on campus would be happy with every single decision. However, the future looks bright. Our enrollment numbers seem to have bottomed out and we are getting back up and looking strong. All of these are happening, because we have a president that works tirelessly, enthusiastically, collaboratively, and passionately.

Based upon feedback gathered this past fall, there seems to be a general consensus that there is an outward appearance that the tone set for the campus was very positive. However, there seems to be mixed feelings/feedback that the current climate campus climate

II. The President's plan and KPI's on reporting "Student Success and Economic Mobility" progress for all students and underserved and first-generation college students.

With the implementation of the new SUCCESS Grant and the hiring of the Provost last year, we are starting to get much more data in this area and we have a commitment that more accurate data will follow in the years ahead. The President is committed to ensuring that our retention rate and graduation rate, particularly among underserved groups, grows in the coming years. The plans presented by the Assistant Provost have been strong and I know that the President will work with Academic Affairs to ensure that resources are maximized.

The University is making significant strides in enrollment, retention and supporting underserved and first generation college students. KPI's are improving but still have an opportunity for improvement which the cabinet and President Thompson are focused on.

The President has laid a strong foundation for monitoring and reporting progress through KPI's. Her collaboration with the board and her ongoing efforts to refine these metrics are moving us in the right direction. The reporting at every meeting on the metrics of programs such as the Lead Scholars Program supports that this is a priority. Being able to then track these KPI's over time will be a benefit to the board and our ability to meet our responsibilities as a board.

President Thompson has taken encouraging steps toward promoting "Student Success and Economic Mobility," especially for underserved and first-generation college students. The plan reflects a strong commitment to equity and access, with clearly defined goals and key performance indicators (KPIs) aimed at measuring progress. While these efforts are promising and have laid a solid foundation, continued focus on transparent reporting and consistent follow-through will be essential to ensure meaningful, measurable outcomes for all students. There is positive momentum—and with sustained attention, an even greater impact is within reach.

The President has presented such a plan for student success for the underserved and first generation college students and is charting progress with out strategic plan.

In all my interactions with the President she views her mission, and the mission of the University, to ensure all student are prepared to meet the challenges of the modern economy. Through discussions with her, I have come to a greater appreciation of the role Westfield State University plays in working with those underserved and first-generation college students that I previously had not considered. I applaud her for focusing on this issue and educating me.

The President has consistently emphasized the importance of equitable outcomes for all students. I appreciate the focus on clear metrics and disaggregation of data by student group. However, there is room for improvement in how this data is shared with the board and public stakeholders. Continued refinement of KPIs tied to economic mobility and student progression—especially for first-generation students—will be key in the years ahead.

This is an area where the entire University needs to do BETTER to be able to provide accurate data on student success, retention, economic mobility, and other factors to the board. KPI's are planned to be integrated in the Strategic Plan set to be unveiled shortly. The board has set a top

priority on this one subject. Dr. Thompson is visible on campus, and speaks with students, faculty, and staff alike. She communicates with campus frequently in various formats.

A response to this question requires quantifiable continual hard-fact evidence presented by the president in order to ascertain how effective her decision-making has moved the university forward in the area of student success for all students.

III. The President's communication with the campus and with the Board.

The President has maintained a strong record of communication with the campus and with the Board. She regularly communicates with the campus community via email, including through her "Connecting with You" newsletter. The Board is apprised of pertinent developments on campus at its meetings and through email communications.

President Thompson communicates effectively with the Board. President Thompson has an awareness of potential issues and escalates or communicates them to the appropriate board members timely. Board meetings are an effective partnership between the board and President Thompson and the Cabinet.

The President's communication with the campus to be effective and of a cadence that is regular and not too much. Communication with the board is transparent and frequent, and I feel that I am well-informed, keeping me engaged. The regular updates, meetings, and open forums have helped build trust and a shared sense of purpose.

In my opinion, President Thompson has exceeded expectations in communication by maintaining a strong, visible presence at numerous campus events and consistently engaging with students, faculty, and staff. This accessibility has fostered a sense of trust and approachability, creating an open line of communication across the campus community. Additionally, President Thompson communication with the Board has been clear, timely, and strategic, ensuring alignment on institutional goals and priorities. This proactive and transparent communication style has greatly contributed to a cohesive and well-informed campus environment.

The President uses her superb communications skills with the campus and our Board.

A one-word answer is enough. Excellent.

Communication from President Thompson has been one of her strongest qualities. She provides regular, thoughtful updates and is responsive to questions or concerns. Her candor and clarity ensure the Board is well-informed and aligned. She has also maintained strong communication channels with the broader campus community, helping to reinforce trust and transparency.

Dr. Thompson's reports to the board are detailed and informative. Dr. Thompson has set a strong personal relationship with the members of the board based on trust and free exchange of ideas. She communicates well with the board.

The president effectively communicates through e-mails and public publication, and through her president's report during board meetings. However, more frequent updates, in general, would be appreciated.

IV. The President's effectiveness as a leader and ability to develop a productive and cohesive team.

Dr. Thompson has a team behind her that is competent and well-positioned for success in the years ahead. She appears to have ensured that Cabinet camaraderie is maintained and that everyone's focus be on the institution. She has helped to remove silos between divisions as a result and promote collaboration across the campus – beyond the Cabinet.

President Thompson has managed through Sr level changes in the cabinet. I have been impressed with her dedication to ensuring the new team members have technical skills to meet the needs of the role as well as ensuring their culture fits as well.

In terms of leadership, the President has demonstrated exceptional effectiveness. Their ability to develop a productive and cohesive team is apparent, as is their skill in motivating and guiding the University towards its strategic goals.

In a short period of time, President Thompson has demonstrated exceptional effectiveness as a leader by successfully building a strong, collaborative cabinet team that is deeply aligned with the university's strategic goals and mission. Through clear vision, inclusive leadership, and a focus on shared purpose, the President Thompson has cultivated a cohesive and high-performing team. This unity and strategic alignment have significantly advanced institutional priorities and created a strong foundation for continued growth and success. The President's leadership has truly been a driving force in fostering a culture of excellence and collective achievement across the university.

In her 3 years at WSU, she has demonstrated leadership and is developing a productive and effective team.

A good leader surrounds themselves with a competent, able, and forceful team. I have been impressed with President Thompson's cabinet picks. Her cabinet of Freeman, Hearn, Lenfest, McMahon, Phelps, Salka and Taksar have demonstrated effective campus leadership and work effectively to move the University forward with focused purpose which is the way organizations achieve success. An example of them working together as a cohesive team has been the process by which they have collectively produced a sound budget for FY'26.

President Thompson has brought together a high-performing leadership team that reflects a variety of perspectives and strengths. Her ability to delegate effectively, foster collaboration, and hold individuals accountable has resulted in a culture of shared responsibility. Morale among leadership appears strong, and the campus community has benefited from this stability.

Another strong trait for Dr. Thompson. She, in her quite way, has been able to build a team that is strong, collaborative, and innovative. The team is not a "Yes Ma'am" Team. They discuss their issues openly and sometimes passionately, but, in the end, once the decision is made, they all fall in line. She has removed obstacles within the ranks in a prompt fashion and effectively. She has brought strong talent and nurtured talent that was not noticed before. Changes that have been made over the last four years have been significant, positive, and fundamental.

The president demonstrates leadership ability and has developed a cohesive team of leaders to assist her with the goal of attaining specific goals.

- V. The President's articulation of an agenda and set of priorities (consistent with the University's Strategic Plan, values, and mission) and the development of clear, identifiable strategies to achieve these. Items such as innovation funds, developing innovative programs and weeding out/plan to weed out low performing/attending programs.

The President has a vision for the University, and I'm sure that at future meetings her presentations will be closely tied to the Strategic Plan (as she did a few years ago at Board meetings). The Innovation Fund has funded a number of initiatives, though I would be interested in a report on return on investment in the years since and the impact on the campus community (and wider community). It is a great idea, but more information should be presented to the Board on its success.

Dr. Thompson is committed to the development of innovative programs, and has indicated that she wants to focus time and energy on DGCE where some new innovative programs could be housed. Her commitment to certificates, micro-credentials, and non-credit programs is important in light of changes in the higher education landscape.

I'm concerned that there is not much of a public plan to weed out low performing programs. I agree with Dr. Salka that efforts need to be made to reimagine or reinvigorate those majors to increase interest, but a clear, substantive plan should be developed, including benchmarks programs should achieve and a timeline on weeding out consistently poor performing majors.

President Thompson and the cabinet have made significant progress on the next version of the Strategic Plan. President Thompson has ensured engagement by the board and key stakeholders within the University. The outcome of this effort is critical to the long term sustainability of the University. I am looking forward to the final output of this work.

The President has articulated a clear and compelling agenda that aligns with the University's Strategic Plan, values, and mission. She has identified priorities that resonate with the campus community and has developed strategies to achieve these goals. In my conversations with her, she is always looking at innovative ways to grow the programs and enrollment. She is an out of the box thinker which is critical at this time in higher education.

President Thompson has clearly and effectively articulated an agenda that aligns closely with the University's Strategic Plan, values, and mission as the new Strategic Plan is in its final stages for implementation. With a forward-thinking approach, the President Thompson has introduced bold and innovative strategies, such as the creation of innovation fund and the development of cutting-edge academic programs designed to meet the evolving needs of students and the workforce. At the same time, there will be a thoughtful and data-driven plan in place to evaluate and phase out low-performing or low-enrollment programs, ensuring that resources are invested in high-impact areas. This balanced approach demonstrates a strong commitment to academic excellence, sustainability, and continuous improvement across the university.

The President is implementing the University Strategic plan and has been exploring the development of the innovative programs and weeding out low performing programs.

Innovative Programs: I believe that the President's focus is on preparing Westfield State University students for the modern economy. Many discussion that I have had with her privately, and also at the Board level, have centered around this topic. I feel that she is executing this priority well.

Low Performing / Attending Programs: This is a difficult but necessary discussion. The good news is that we spend a considerable amount of time talking about this issue at Board meetings. I am confident that President Thompson and Dr. Salka will analyze the data and make the difficult decisions over the next year to address this problem and focus our limited resources on innovative programs that will better prepare our students.

President Thompson has remained focused on the strategic plan and has successfully prioritized key areas such as student retention, community partnerships, and academic innovation. Initiatives like the innovation fund and the ongoing program review process show a willingness to be both bold and pragmatic in moving the university forward. A continued focus on marketing and enrollment strategy alignment with academic strengths is necessary to further these efforts.

Linda Thomson is a visionary. She thinks freely. She has realized and well-articulated, the fact that future success of our university may very well depend on expanding DGCE, non-traditional students and certificate programs. We are facing an enrollment cliff. This is a fact. Dr. Thompson is trying tirelessly to avert this cliff by looking at different strategies. However, she has faced serious resistance by certain stakeholders. I strongly recommend formation of a "Think Tank" to vet these ideas for financial, space, skill set and other resource capacities. Once vetted, then push forward with the idea and pursue folks to follow the lead and take ownership.

VI. The President's effectiveness as a representative of the University to the broader community.

The President is a beloved figure in western Massachusetts and beyond. She radiates positive energy wherever she goes and is an effective and vocal advocate for the needs of Westfield State University and its students. She knows how to talk to different audiences, including political leaders, business professionals, and potential donors. She is particularly effective in talking with donors, and I think having her front and center will be critical as we approach a capital campaign.

President Thompson is very visible at campus activities, sporting events and community activities. She represents the University in the Western Ma region as well as within the State University System. Her leadership role within the State University system creates visibility for WSU and enables her to enact policy that benefits the University.

President Thompson is an outstanding representative of the University, effectively engaging with the broader community and building strong relationships with key stakeholders. Her commitment to the University's mission is evident in her external communications and partnerships.

President Thompson has been highly effective as a representative of the University to the broader community, consistently demonstrating a strong presence and deep engagement across a wide range of events and initiatives. Whether attending local gatherings, partnering with community organizations, or advocating for the university's role in state development, President Thompson has shown a genuine commitment to building meaningful relationships and representing the institution with integrity and enthusiasm. This visible and active involvement reflects a clear understanding of the importance of community connection and has significantly strengthened the university's reputation and impact beyond the campus.

The President strongly represents the University in the Community with her attendance at events outside the campus and also uses the media well.

Grade A+. As a lifelong resident of Westfield, she is the most engaged University president the City of Westfield has ever had.

I have been particularly impressed with President Thompson's presence and engagement throughout the region. Her consistent involvement with business, civic, and K-12 partners has enhanced the university's visibility and positioned it as a vital contributor to the area's growth and wellbeing.

The University could not have a better ambassador to the city, the state, the region, the nation and internationally. She is everywhere. In Boston, Dublin, DC, Denver, Atlanta, Naples, and any place that needs a presence. On Saturday, Sunday, 9 PM or 6 AM, anytime or any place. She is the face of the University. We all should be proud of the ambassador she has become at our university. Mayors, the Governor, BHE, legislators all praise Linda Thompson for what she does. The president extends herself to the broader as much as possible by attending community events. It would be helpful if the broader community recognized her as the "face of WSU."

VII. The President's effectiveness in addressing new and challenging issues seldomly faced by the higher education institutions in the past, such as mental health of students, faculty, and staff.

The President is keenly aware of the issues facing students and appears to be committed to increasing resources and ensuring that the quality of the resources is there for students. She has spoken to faculty representatives about their particular mental health issues and I'm sure she will look for innovative ways to solve this issue.

The University has embraced the need to develop and maintain KPI's to evaluate performance and highlight areas of key concern. This effort is critical and is just starting. Looking forward to continued progress in this area.

The President has shown great foresight and adaptability in addressing new and challenging issues, such as the mental health of students, faculty, and staff. Having dedicated time on the agenda of the board meetings to discuss issues such as student mental health has been very informative. Her proactive approach has included the implementation of support services and initiatives designed to promote well-being across the campus.

Because of President Thompson medical background this is an area dear to her heart. She has shown strong leadership in addressing emerging and complex challenges in higher education, particularly around the mental health and well-being of students, faculty, and staff. Under the President's guidance, important steps have been taken to expand resources, promote awareness, and prioritize mental health as a core component of campus life. These efforts reflect a compassionate and proactive approach to a pressing issue. However, while a solid foundation has been established, we recognize that we can—and must—do more to enhance and better market these vital services so they are more visible, accessible, and utilized by those who need them most.

The President has brought to our Board the current mental health crisis at WSU and has taken steps to address challenges head on and develop strategies.

From what I have observed, the president is unafraid to address new issues that arise including mental health.

President Thompson has taken a proactive approach in addressing mental health needs, investing in expanded services and partnerships. She recognizes the growing demand and complexity of these issues and has worked to ensure that the university is both responsive and supportive. Additional resources will likely be necessary as these needs continue to grow.

The President's style of management is to lead by example of kindness and care toward students, faculty, and staff. She understands the consequences of the global mental health crisis which started by the exponential growth of social media, the pandemic and the general environment created by the winds of change from Washington and elsewhere. She has dealt with these issues working with the health center and the counseling. Making fundamental changes. Having them attend the board meeting and report on the general mental health of our students. When there were unfortunate incidents of personal and self-inflicted harm, she faced the problem head on with compassion and kindness and care for the students, faculty, staff, and families. She has set up an effective contingency system as well to deal with these issues effectively and swiftly.

The president has placed great emphasis on the mental health of WSU constituents. She is vocal about this concern.

VIII. The President's effectiveness and benchmarking KPI's in general

We have started developing KPIs tied to the Strategic Plan and I am sure that these KPIs will be presented to the Board once the Strategic Plan is in effect.

Overall, the President's effectiveness and benchmarking KPI's are evident in the positive outcomes and achievements of the University. Their leadership has been instrumental in driving the institution forward and ensuring its success and sustainability. I am fully confident that our ongoing input and refinement along with her efforts will continue and move the needle towards KPI's that give us the ability to do our job better.

The President is meeting the standard in establishing and tracking key performance indicators (KPIs), demonstrating an understanding of the importance of data-driven decision-making. There has been steady progress during the strategic plan process in aligning institutional efforts with strategic goals. However, to strengthen this work further, we need more comprehensive retention

and student success data to develop measurable, targeted KPIs that can more effectively guide progress and assess outcomes. With enhanced data collection and analysis, the President Thompson efforts in benchmarking will be even more impactful and aligned with long-term institutional success.

The president takes necessary improvements to achieve success.

I believe the President and her cabinet are data driven and use data to make good management decisions.

The President has made progress in identifying and reporting KPIs across multiple domains, from student success to fiscal health. Continued refinement of these metrics, along with consistent benchmarking against peer institutions, will help sharpen our strategic focus and assess impact.

The one area that the board sees a fantastic opportunity for improvement and growth is in the KPI's and bench marking. To make data driven, effective and well-informed decisions, folks need to have the measuring stick in front of them. At this stage, there are no effective KPI's to accomplish that. There are financial ratios that the board can look at. There are budget numbers that folks sink their teeth to. But other areas lack meaningful and dependable KPI's in place. That is the one area that the board will insist on having the KPI's in place by the fall of 2025.

This requires an updated report/analysis from the president in conjunction with the board.

IX. The President's handling of the unfamiliar environment created in D.C.

The President has been on top of the issues coming out of Washington. The recent hiring of a General Counsel and Vice President of Community & Government Relations has been timely and keeps us a step ahead. As noted earlier, she has remained optimistic and is pushing forward in moving the campus forward, not backward.

President Thompson has demonstrated remarkable resilience and composure in navigating the complexities and uncertainties of the current environment. Her ability to address the challenges, while maintaining a positive outlook and unwavering commitment to the University's mission, is truly commendable. As a person of color, she exhibits an extraordinary level of strength and perseverance in circumstances that undoubtedly demand extraordinary resolve. Her leadership continues to inspire confidence and admiration, reaffirming her as the ideal figure to guide the University during this critical juncture.

The President has navigated the evolving and often uncertain environment in D.C. with focus and adaptability, ensuring that the university remains responsive to changes while staying true to its mission. By closely monitoring state and federal legislation, grants, and funding opportunities, President Thompson has kept the university well-positioned to advocate for its interests and access vital resources. At the same time, DEI efforts have remained a priority, with continued momentum and thoughtful strategies to sustain progress in an increasingly complex political landscape. This balanced and proactive approach reflects the President's strong leadership and commitment to advancing the university's values, even in challenging external conditions.

The President takes a strong stand against the environment created in D.C.

The climate is challenging but she is navigating the new world well.

President Thompson has demonstrated sound judgment in responding to the evolving political and regulatory landscape. She has remained engaged with national associations and maintained alignment with key advocacy priorities that support our students and mission.

Dr. Thompson has been wise, deliberate, yet firm, insisting on the values of the University and the mission that stands for. These are uncharted territories for the institutions of higher education that require wisdom, tolerance and staying under the radar and do not attract unnecessary attention. She has been spearheading to combat the efforts to throw the institutions of higher education off their mission of supporting free speech, free and critical thinking and educating free and spirited students.

This is a great challenge for university/college president. However, there is a level of confidence that with adequate support, the president can make competent decisions related to the unfamiliar events that have been created.

X. The President's handling of the budget and financial matters

I credit Dr. Thompson, along with Steve Taksar and his team, for moving us in the right direction on proper budgeting and fiscal management. It is nice to see a balanced budget before the Board and easier-to-understand reporting. Keep up the great work!

The president engaged with the finance team and cabinet to deliver a budget for the upcoming year that is breakeven. This effort took coordination between the entire cabinet and the leadership of President Thompson. President Thompson was effective in communicating the goal of the total budget and managed the process with the VP of finance to accomplish the desired result.

President Thompson, along with the Board of Trustees were faced with a very challenging task in revamping the university's budgeting process and financial reporting systems. Despite these complexities, there has been meaningful progress toward aligning operational financial statements with the university's actual financial position. The President has recognized the need for greater transparency, accuracy, and strategic alignment in financial matters and has initiated important changes to ensure that financial reporting tells a clearer, more comprehensive story. While the work is ongoing, these efforts mark a critical step toward long-term financial sustainability and informed decision-making, reflecting the President's commitment to responsible and forward-looking fiscal leadership.

The President is very mindful of the budget and financial matters.

Based on the budgeting process this year for FY'26, and working with V.P Taskar, I am confident the University is on sound financial footing. I applaud VP Taksar for his hard work and the guidance and support the President provides.

Fiscal management has remained steady under President Thompson's leadership, even amidst headwinds. She has shown a commitment to transparency, cost containment, and strategic

investment. That said, with continued enrollment pressures, there will be an increasing need to align spending with areas of growth and impact.

I can personally attest to the fact that Dr. Thompson, after many weeks of debate within the cabinet, finally made the decision and instructed the team that enough ideas have been exchanged and it is time to move the ball forward. Originally suggested budget that represented multi-million dollars deficit, came to a balanced budget, due to leadership and insistence of the board and the President. A job Well Done. Tough times require complex decisions. A difficult decision was wisely made.

The president has convened a competent financial team that provides up-to-date information in this area

XI. The President's handling of challenges presented to the University.

The President is optimistic in the face of challenges. The positive tone she has set I believe will suit us well in the years ahead as more and more challenges present themselves.

The President has demonstrated steady and strategic leadership in navigating the various challenges presented to the University. Whether addressing shifting enrollment trends, financial pressures, or broader societal changes impacting higher education, President Thompson has approached each issue with thoughtfulness, resilience, and a focus on long-term solutions. By fostering collaboration, maintaining open lines of communication, and remaining committed to the University's mission and values, President Thompson has helped the institution adapt and continue moving forward, even in the face of significant obstacles.

The President is ready for challenges and knows how to delegate to get positive results.

All good.

Whether dealing with enrollment pressures, workforce shifts, or the pandemic's lingering effects, President Thompson has shown a calm, measured, and forward-thinking approach. She is not afraid to make tough decisions and does so with the university's long-term sustainability in mind.

The president has become the face of the university in Westfield, Boston, the region, and the nation. She has been wise, methodical, deliberate, and thoughtful in dealing with challenges. Handling of some difficult HR issues, with patience and thoughtfulness, she has been able to remove obstacles and build a loyal, trusting team that is coordinated with her thinking and direction. She has given the team the independence to think freely, put forward ideas, discuss them (sometimes passionately) and make a collective decision and move on. She has tried hard not to put a target on the back of WSU, during these challenging times in D.C. She has stuck to the mission and the values of the university, without compromising them.

Certain situations could/can be handled more effectively.

XII. Other comments:

Dr. Thompson came in at the end of the pandemic and set us on the right path to take on the challenges of low enrollment and a divided campus. She is poised to succeed as we face our next set of challenges out of Washington and the State House/BHE.

In closing, President Thompson has shown strong, visionary leadership that continues to move the university in a positive direction. Through a deep commitment to student success, community engagement, and institutional excellence, she has built trust across campus and beyond. The ability to connect with diverse stakeholders, foster innovation, and maintain focus on the university's mission has been truly commendable. While there is always more work to be done, President Thompson leadership has laid a solid foundation for continued growth and long-term success.

Overall, I am very pleased with the direction of the university under President Thompson's leadership. Her vision, engagement, and communication have all been exemplary. As we move forward, I encourage continued investment in enrollment strategy, digital marketing, and the university's public profile. These areas will be essential for future growth and differentiation in a competitive higher education landscape.

Linda Thompson is the right person, at the right time for the right place. She has been transformative, visionary, deliberate, compassionate, and kind. She has been transparent, thoughtful, and able to build a trusting relationship with the STUDENTS, the FACULTY and STAFF. She is the face of the university, to the point that as a four-year president, she is serving as the chair of Presidents Council, receiving awards nationwide and sought after by the state and the BHE. I am proud to have known Linda and been working with her closely since 2021.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Evaluation of President Linda Thompson for the 2024-25 Academic Year

I. Executive Summary

Having completed her fourth year as Westfield State's president and entering her fifth, Dr. Thompson continues to show that she has a clear vision of the future, has communicated it widely, and has had success in setting a new direction for the University. She recognizes that the higher education environment is undergoing substantial and transformative changes, and she is working to position the University to adapt successfully through the identification of potential new student populations and the development of new programs and partnerships. Her focus on the 2025-2029 strategic plan for the university has been commendable, with a strong emphasis building on the mission of Horace Mann and developing leaders for public purpose. The student success plan is focused on four key areas: fostering innovative learning; improving student success, aligning resources, and enhancing institutional impact. While the University continues to face some challenges, similar to other institutions in our region and beyond, prominently among them declining enrollment and the resulting financial strain, President Thompson has approached these challenges with an optimistic outlook. She is joining forces with her colleagues in determining how best to maneuver the external environment and as evidenced in her recently being asked to serve as the Chair of the State Universities Council of Presidents. She continues to be heavily involved in both the internal and external community and has enhanced relationships with key political and business supporters. As a Board we continue to support President Thompson and strongly believe she has the vision and energy for Westfield to thrive in a very challenging national environment. Her success continues to depend on energizing and collaborating with others and converting her vision and ideas into tangible plans and actions. The University Board of Trustees is fully supportive of President Thompson's efforts and looks forward to working with her and the University community in moving the University forward, especially as we rollout the strategic plan for the next five years.

II. Description of the Evaluation Process

This evaluation of President Linda Thompson follows the Compensation and Evaluation Guidelines and Procedures for State University and Community College Presidents (June 2013) and DHE Commissioner Ortega's memorandum of April 25, 2025. In evaluating President Thompson, the Board considered President Thompson's accomplishments against her identified priorities and goals as endorsed by the Board at the beginning of the year. The Board focused on President Thompson's performance during the past academic year.

Materials considered in this evaluation include the self-evaluation which President Thompson submitted (and is an appendix to this document) as well as written comments by individual Board member that were solicited specifically as a part of this evaluation. Trustees were asked to share their written observations by responding to

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the following suggested prompts: 1) the tone and climate that the president has set for the campus; 2) The President's plan and KPI's on reporting "Student Success and Economic Mobility" progress for all students and underserved and first-generation college students; 3) The President's communication with the campus and with the Board; 4) The President's effectiveness as a leader and ability to develop a productive and cohesive team; 5) The President's articulation of an agenda and set of priorities (consistent with the University's Strategic Plan, values, and mission) and the development of clear, identifiable strategies to achieve these. Items such as innovation funds, developing innovative programs and weeding out/plan to weed out low performing/attending programs; 6) The President's effectiveness as a representative of the University to the broader community; 7) The President's effectiveness in addressing new and challenging issues seldomly faced by the higher education institutions in the past, such as mental health of students, faculty, and staff; 8) The President's effectiveness and benchmarking KPI's in general; 9) The President's handling of the unfamiliar environment created in D.C.; 10) The President's handling of the budget and financial matters; 11) The President's handling of challenges presented to the University; and 12) any other observations that a trustee wished to make. The responses of all trustees who responded to the prompts are also included as an appendix to this evaluation.

The Board also considered a variety of metrics related to institutional and system-level priorities. Data from the DHE performance measurement reporting system (PMRS) and the University's Office of Institutional Research were used to assess the University's progress in addressing issues of affordability and access, student success and efforts to close achievement gaps, educational cost, overall financial health, and fundraising.

Based upon these materials, this evaluation of President Thompson was initially drafted by the chair and vice chair of the Board who worked closely with the president throughout the year, generally holding individual meetings with her every two weeks. The evaluation was then reviewed by the Board executive committee and presented to the full Board for its formal approval and to President Thompson with opportunity to discuss its findings.

III. Institutional Goals and Objectives

President Thompson's leadership during the 2024-2025 academic year has been marked by a clear and strategic understanding of the evolving higher education landscape. Her vision for Westfield State University is both forward-thinking and grounded in the realities of today's student demographics and institutional challenges. In her communications with the Board and the broader University community, President Thompson has consistently articulated a compelling case for expanding the University's reach emphasizing the importance of engaging new populations of learners beyond the traditional college-age cohort. She has championed the development of innovative academic offerings, including non-degree programs and alternative delivery models, to meet the needs of these emerging audiences.

Her commitment to innovation reflects a deep understanding of sustainable institutional growth. Rather than relying on budget cuts, she has advocated strategic investments and creative solutions to drive enrollment and financial health. This approach has gradually gained traction across the University, as more stakeholders recognize the value and urgency of embracing change.

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Change within academic institutions is often met with resistance, and Westfield State is no exception, yet President Thompson has embraced her role as a change agent with clarity, resilience, and purpose. Her leadership continues to inspire a culture of adaptability and progress at Westfield State.

Several initiatives and accomplishments are particularly noteworthy from the Board's perspective. These include the continued support of an innovation fund (supported from investment earnings) to seed innovative ideas that have the potential to yield new students and/or income. Recent accepted proposals include the installation of a meadow on campus to be used as an environmental learning lab, nutrition and metabolism testing equipment, and repurposing library space for innovative uses as referenced in her self-evaluation. In addition, there's been a strong emphasis on Belonging, Inclusion and Learning (BIL), with the hiring of a new position to lead this work across the campus to develop an institute centered on exploring innovative leadership models in education, inclusive practices, multi-level community engagement, dialogue on equity in education, and creative uses of technology. New programmatic efforts continue to be built out, particularly in areas of health (a major theme of President Thompson's presidency), mental and behavioral health, data science, criminal justice, and business. One of her greatest strengths is her ability to foster meaningful collaboration and cultivate strong relationships across both internal and external constituencies. Through these efforts, she has significantly enhanced the university's visibility, expanded strategic partnerships, and contributed to the development of valuable resources that support the institution's mission and long-term success. Continued focus on these relationships will be critical for the coming academic year as the campus gears up for future fundraising efforts.

Another critical area of focus going forward will be enrollment and ensuring there's a clear direction and set of strategies that will hopefully reverse the downward trend that we and other similar institutions are experiencing, exacerbated by a demographic decline and the pandemic. The implementation of key performance indicators will enhance the ability to monitor progress more regularly. The University is making significant strides in enrollment, retention and supporting underserved and first-generation college students. KPI's are improving but still have an opportunity for improvement which the cabinet and President Thompson are focused on.

IV. System-level Goals and Activities

President Thompson is hyper-focused on helping to advance the state's priorities and make Westfield State University even more learner-ready and equity-minded, specifically in the areas of affordability (addressing college costs and implementing financial aid initiatives; access (expanding admissions opportunities, early college programs, or similar efforts) and student success (scaling access and support services, including wraparound supports).

In addition to the examples outlined in the prior section, she has also initiated several signature events to raise visibility around these areas. Most notably being Westfield State University's Blue Diamond Ball last October to celebrate 185 years, which was themed around "Infinite Possibilities" and carried the theme of access to education and empowerment of students throughout. This event raised approximately \$300,000, of which \$100,000 was earmarked for initiatives around student success and access.

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Another extremely successful event was the Keeper of the Dream event that took place last February and focused on the teachings and influence of Dr. Martin Luther King and his dream of nurturing leaders with equity of opportunity in mind. The University has historically had very successful programs that have been targeted to underserved populations, notably the Urban Education program, TRIO, and learning disabilities support. These programs have often had retention and graduation rates on par or exceeding the general student population. President Thompson is working to grow these programs and to extend these support services to larger numbers of students. The University's ability to serve these groups successfully, defined by reducing the achievement gaps between these populations, will depend on growing and strengthening these programs.

The BHE's Equity Agenda establishes the higher education system's commitment to maintaining high levels of accessibility and attainment across all segments of the adult population, including those from traditionally underserved backgrounds. President Thompson was hired in part because of her strong commitment to the principle of equity and inclusion. Her behavior as president has continued to underscore and elevate this commitment as an important part of the University's values. In addition, President Thompson continues to collaborate with local community colleges, most especially Holyoke and Springfield Technical, to establish pathways and articulation agreements that facilitate the movement of their students in high-demand programs to Westfield.

President Thompson's leadership within state-wide organizations has significantly amplified, not only the University's strategic priorities, but also the state's priorities, beyond campus. Her active engagement and influence in these forums have positioned her not only as a champion of institutional advancement but also as a thought leader across Massachusetts. Her role as Chair of the State Universities Council of Presidents exemplifies this impact, and the consistently positive feedback from her presidential peers underscores the respect and confidence she has earned through her collaborative and forward-thinking leadership.

I. Conclusion

President Thompson has demonstrated visionary leadership and a strong capacity to initiate meaningful change at the University. Her clear articulation of a forward-looking vision has successfully set a new strategic direction, inspiring confidence across the institution. She leads with courage and conviction, embracing innovation and calculated risk-taking, and has effectively motivated her administrative team to do the same. She has created a powerful framework for engaging stakeholders across the University, including the Board of Trustees, senior leadership, faculty, staff, librarians, and the broader community. This vision has helped unify diverse constituencies around a shared purpose and direction.

While the University continues to navigate significant challenges, notably declining enrollment and financial pressures, President Thompson has approached these issues with optimism and creativity. She continues to champion innovation and new thinking throughout the institution. Initiatives such as the Innovation Fund and new market demand-based program offerings, exemplify her commitment to fostering a culture of experimentation and forward momentum. President Thompson has also made notable strides in strengthening internal and external collaboration. Her bridge-building efforts have enhanced the University's reputation and relationships with community partners, alumni, and other external stakeholders. Her inclusive leadership style has contributed to a

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welcoming and supportive campus climate, reinforcing a sense of belonging and shared purpose among students, faculty, and staff.

The Board believes President Thompson possesses the vision, energy, and strategic insight necessary for the University to thrive in a rapidly evolving higher education landscape. Building on her strong leadership, President Thompson is well-positioned to further elevate the University by continuing to engage and empower others around her vision. By consistently translating strategic ideas into clear, actionable plans and fostering open, inclusive communication, she can deepen collaboration and drive continued progress across the institution. The Board of Trustees remains fully supportive of President Thompson's leadership and is excited about continuing to work in close partnership with her and the University community to advance the institution's mission. As the University embarks on its five-year strategic plan, the Board looks forward to collaborating on the implementation of this vision and ensuring its success through shared commitment and accountability.

Based on this evaluation, it is the recommendation of the board of trustees of Westfield State University to grant Dr. Linda Thompson, the maximum allowable increase and all other relative (equity and longevity) adjustments that she is eligible for.

Ali R. Salehi, Chair

Date



Board of Trustees

October 10, 2025

MOTION

To approve the presidential evaluation for the 2024-2025 academic year as presented, and the submission of said evaluation to the Commissioner of the Department of Higher Education along with the submission for the maximum possible compensation.

Ali R. Salehi, Chair

Date