



Board of Trustees

Governance and Nomination Committee

8:00 a.m.

June 11, 2025

Conference Rooms A & B, University Hall

Committee Members: Chair Melissa Alvarado, Vice Chair Theresa Jasmin, Secretary Tessa Lucey, Chris Montemayor, Michael O'Rourke and William Reichelt

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

- | | |
|---|------------------|
| 1. Call to Order | Trustee Alvarado |
| 2. Approval of Minutes | Trustee Alvarado |
| a) April 22, 2025, Meeting | |
| 3. Items for Discussion | Trustee Alvarado |
| a) Welcome Student Trustee Barney Garcia | |
| b) 2025-2026 Officer Nomination Results | |
| c) Board Retreat Reminder- August 8, 2025 | |
| d) Board Self-Evaluation Summary | |
| 4. Adjournment | |

Attachment(s):

- a) Draft Minutes of April 22, 2025



Board of Trustees

Governance and Nomination Committee

April 22, 2025

9:00 AM

Minutes

President's Boardroom, Horace Mann Center

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

MEMBERS PRESENT: Committee Chair Melissa Alvarado, Vice Chair Theresa Jasmin, Secretary Tessa Lucey, and Trustees Chris Montemayor, Michael O'Rourke, and Board Chair Ali Salehi, ex-officio member.

MEMBERS PARTICIPATING REMOTELY: Trustee William Reichelt

Also present and participating were Westfield State University President, Dr. Linda Thompson, and Special Assistant to the President on University Strategies and Chief of Staff, Dr. Michael Freeman.

Committee Chair Alvarado called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM and a roll call was taken of the committee members participating as listed above. It was announced that the meeting was being livestreamed and recorded.

MOTION made by Trustee Jasmin, seconded by Trustee O'Rourke, to approve the minutes of the December 9, 2024 meeting. There being no discussion, and a roll call vote, **motion passed.**

Trustee Training

- Trustees are up-to-date with required training.
- Reminder of required training:
 - Full online training through the Department of Higher Education (DHE) within six months of appointment and every four years thereafter.
 - Curriculum of eight modules done online through Blackboard: Governance, State Finance, Conflicts of Interest, Public Records, Open Meeting Law, Procurement, Fraud Prevention, and Fiduciary Responsibilities.
 - KnowB4 trainings emailed to trustee emails throughout the year: FERPA, Waste Fraud and Abuse Ethics, Conflicts of Interest, and Security Awareness.
 - Annual Title IX training (November/December).
 - Annual Conflict of Interest Law training (due in February).

Upcoming Campus Wide Events

- Commencement is on Friday, May 16, 2025.
 - Undergraduate commencement is from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.
 - Graduate commencement is from 4:30 p.m. to 6 p.m.
 - Food will be provided in between.
 - The event is at the MassMutual Center in downtown Springfield.
 - Board Chair Ali Salehi encourages everyone to attend, emphasizing that "this day is all about the students."
- Board retreat scheduled for Friday, August 8, 2025.
 - All day event and the agenda will be released closer to the date.
 - The Assistant to the Board of Trustees has sent out preliminary information.
- CURCA Spring celebration next Friday May 2, 2025 from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., Dower Center.
- Student Leadership Awards: Monday, May 5 from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. in Scanlan Hall.
 - A good opportunity to see students who represent leadership skills.
- Nursing Pinning Ceremony: Wednesday, May 7, 2025 at 5:00 p.m. in Scanlon Hall.
 - A "heartwarming ceremony" where nurses get their pins.
- Next Board meeting is on June 11, 2025.

Association Governing Board (AGB) Conference Debrief

- AGB is a valuable resource for the board, offering resources, answering questions, and providing guidance on board operations.
- Board Chair Ali Salehi and Trustee Chris Montemayor attended the annual conference in Chicago, Illinois, a couple weeks ago.

Conference Debrief

- Focus on students, including secondary students, graduate salary, and graduation rates.
- Discussed student retention systems and innovations, focusing on enrollment strategies and faculty-to-student ratios.
- Universities are facing similar challenges, offering opportunities for different approaches.

Conferences and Networking

- It was encouraged for board members to attend conferences for networking and learning best practices.

Discussions and Concerns

- Discussions revolved around uncertain times and funding.
- A key topic was "institution of neutrality," and avoiding taking positions.
- The board aims to protect its mission, values, students, and faculty.

Key Takeaways

- Focus on the bigger picture and strategic plan success.
- Universities must prioritize student success.
- Balanced budgets should be achieved through living within means, not relying on reserves.

Board Self Evaluation

- The Board will do its own internal self-evaluation, using the same questionnaire as last year.
 - The Board's assistant will send out the questionnaire.

- Topics include board operations, board president relations, advocating for the University, institutional performance standards for university operations, community relations, and policy direction.
- The questionnaire is fillable online and should take about 10 minutes.
- The goal is to have the results by June 1, 2025 and be presented at the next board meeting.
- Upcoming officer elections and committee assignments are also on the agenda.
 - There will be an annual evaluation to ensure satisfaction with the current setup.
 - Trustees can express their preferences for committee chairs or members.
 - Candid feedback is encouraged on committee preferences.

There being no further business,

MOTION made by Trustee O'Rourke, seconded by Trustee Montemayor, to adjourn.

ROLL CALL VOTE passed motion unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 9:22 a.m.

Attachments presented at this meeting:

- a. Draft Minutes of December 9, 2024, Meeting

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 Governance and Nomination Committee meeting held on April 22, 2025.

Tessa Lucey, Secretary

Date

2024-2025 Board of Trustees Self-Assessment

Overall, Trustees “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with a majority of the statements. Below are the “Don’t Know” and “Disagree” statements. Any statements in **bold*** were found on multiple assessments.

Don’t know statements:

- Board members adhere to protocols for responding to community members and the media.
- Once a decision is made, board members cease debate and uphold the decision of the board.
- The board adequately studies issues prior to board action.
- **The Board self-evaluation process provides useful information on board performance.***
- **The Board has clear protocols for communicating with staff that include the President.***
- Board members keep the president informed of community contacts.
- The board policy manual is current, relevant, and useful.
- The board is aware of the campus governance model and the means through which policy recommendations are vetted through the campus community.
- The board is committed to equal opportunity.
- The board, through its diverse composition, fairly represents the community it serves.

Disagree Statements:

- **The board clearly delegates the administration of the university to the President.***
- The board demonstrates a concern for the success of all students by monitoring broad student learning outcomes.
- The board monitors performance related to safety and security.
- The board monitors performance related to its policies on employment.
- The board understands the budget documents and the fiscal condition of the university
- **The Board spends sufficient time discussing the future direction of the University.***
- The board is knowledgeable about the university’s educational programs and services.
- The board periodically reviews and evaluates its policies.
- The board focuses on policy and strategy in board discussions, not on administrative matters.

2024-2025 Board of Trustees Self-Assessment

- The policy-making process is clear, public and inclusive.
- The board is aware of the campus governance model and the means through which policy recommendations are vetted through the campus community.
- The board ensures the university regularly evaluates program effectiveness.

Major Accomplishments:

- Continued support of the President as she continued to build her cabinet; growth of the board through onboarding of new trustees; enhanced relationships with external stakeholders
- Identified some archaic policies during meetings that should be rescinded or substantially revised.
- Ensured that the FY25 Budget was realistic.
- Approval of 2025-2030 Strategic Plan's four goals.
- The board members are engaged, informed, collaborative, and respectful. They regularly attend meetings and other events at the University and in support of the University.
- Beginning to use consent agenda.
- The Board positively represents the University on campus, in government, and in the community.
- The Board has contributed to the development of a new strategic plan.
- The Board continues to be supportive of creative and innovative ideas.
- The Board has taken a stronger stance on the financial management of the University and the use of reserves to balance the budget.
- Began using data in presentations more regularly. Filled in some of the open positions and now have a full board that seems to be very engaged. Members attended the national conference and brought knowledge and some best practices for possible future improvement actions back to the full board.
- Financial Oversight: The Board has shown strong financial stewardship by approving operating budgets, reviewing student fees, and overseeing critical construction and renovation projects. These actions have contributed to the university's financial stability and long-term sustainability.
- Academic Programs and Policies: The board approved the new two-college organizational structure, comprising of the College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Professional Studies, reflects the Board's commitment to enhancing academic excellence and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration. Additionally, the board's endorsement of strategic initiatives, such as diversity and inclusion efforts, underscores their dedication to creating a vibrant and inclusive academic environment.

2024-2025 Board of Trustees Self-Assessment

- Personnel Management: The Board approved faculty promotions and tenure decisions, recognizing outstanding contributions and reinforcing its commitment to attracting and retaining top talent. These decisions support the professional growth of faculty and staff and contribute to the university's academic mission.
- Enrollment Support: The Board's efforts in creating and revising policies, approving strategies, and prioritizing financial budgets to support robust enrollment numbers demonstrate their proactive approach to ensuring the continued growth and success of the Westfield State University. By investing in initiatives that attract and retain students, they contribute to the fulfillment of the university's missions in teaching, research, creative endeavor, and service to the public.
- Proactive and creative in recruiting new students.
- Supporting DEI and The Mission of Westfield State University.
- Thinking outside the box to avoid the "cliff."
- Discussing new majors for new opportunities.
- Insisting on a budget process that the collective cabinet provides a balanced budget that will not require the use of reserves to cover shortcomings. We are nearly home on that project of living within our means.
- Pursuing and asking for data, regarding retention, major and course offering to encourage the university to eliminate non-producing offerings and look at course offerings that the region, the industry and the community as a whole need graduates from.
- Working in collaboration with the president to have KPI's that are measurable and accountable for the entire team.
- Facilitated a transparent and conducive environment for the president to build a team, that is strong, collaborative, data driven and not resistant to change.
- Work on behalf of the University and the president with the legislators and the Governor's office on deferred maintenance projects.
- Financial stability has been a major accomplishment.
- In my view, our most significant accomplishment this past year has been supporting the President in hiring new executive-level staff to strengthen her leadership team and better support the university. This has had a noticeable and positive impact on both our meetings and the overall campus atmosphere.
- In 2024 the Board supported the President and Cabinet through continued sensitive employee issues that required time, proactive attention and coordination between the Board, President Thompson and internal and external legal.
- The board supported the President in funding strategic initiatives designed to improve enrollment and address areas that required attention on the campus.
- Numerous senior level staffing changes occurred in the cabinet in 2024 assisting the President to ensure a seamless process and transition in filling these roles was also a great accomplishment.

2024-2025 Board of Trustees Self-Assessment

Areas of improvement:

- Broader participation in campus activities; more efficient/structured use of board meetings (i.e., not all-day meetings; more data-driven decision making.).
- Committee Structure.
- Budget Understanding.
- Use of meeting time.
- Continue to shift focus to more strategic vs. administrative issues. A change in the Board's structure (fewer committees, for example) could help facilitate this.
- As part of being more strategic, continue to ensure that we are asking difficult questions, such as related to the allocation of resources. Our stronger position on balancing budgets without the use of reserves will likely prompt discussions about the allocation of resources and encourage the University to allocate dollars to the units, areas, programs, etc. that are contributing to our growth. Adoption of this new approach requires the University to share common goals and a common understanding of the challenges (e.g., demographic cliff) that are facing the University.
- I am a proponent of reducing the number of committees and having some of the topics discussed as agenda items rather than as separate committees. Example is JEDI. I think that this is a very important conversation and that we, as a board, need to keep this as a topic that the board discusses regularly and routinely. However, I don't think that it needs a separate committee, and I don't think we need to get as granular at the board level.
- Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives: While the Board has endorsed diversity and inclusion efforts, there is room for further commitment and action in implementing initiatives that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion at all levels of the university.
- Financial Management: Continuously refining financial oversight practices and ensuring responsible budgeting and resource allocation can help in maximizing the effectiveness of financial resources and mitigating risks.
- Continued Evaluation and Improvement: Regularly assessing the effectiveness of policies, strategies, initiatives and soliciting feedback from stakeholders can help identify areas for improvement and ensure that the Board remains responsive to the evolving needs of the university community.
- Committee Structure Alignment: The Board could evaluate its committee structure to ensure it aligns with the strategic priorities of the university. This involves reviewing the composition, functions, and responsibilities of each committee to optimize efficiency and effectiveness.
- Evaluation and Performance Metrics: Implementing mechanisms to evaluate the performance of board committees and setting measurable metrics can help assess their effectiveness in achieving their objectives. Regular reviews and assessments can identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement.

2024-2025 Board of Trustees Self-Assessment

- By addressing these areas for improvement, the Board can further enhance its impact and contribute to the overall success and advancement of the university.
- Consolidating Committees when possible.
- Shorter meetings.
- Evaluating program effectiveness.
- Improving safety and security, and cyber security.
- Be more strategic about measuring our student success based on data.
- Be more strategic about the direction of the University and the future.
- Be more involved with the Strategic planning for the next 5 years.
- Better job of self-evaluation. Are we as effective as we should be. Are we spending too much time on details?
- The board must demonstrate a stronger commitment to diversity of thought as well as diversity in staffing, especially in upper leadership.
- I believe the main area where the Board can improve is in the structure and utilization of our Committees. While each committee does meaningful work, I feel we have too many, which spreads our efforts thin and limits opportunities for broader participation and long-term strategic discussions among all Board members.
- We have improved in the area of board committee consolidation to ensure we are as efficient as possible with the time of Board members, President, Cabinet and other staff. When we have the opportunity to bring these groups together continue to ensure we are focused on strategic issues that will drive the campus forward.

I recommend the following goals for board improvement for the coming year:

- Scheduled rotation for participation in key campus activities; reorganization of committee structure.
- Refine committees to the following: (1) Combined Audit/Governance Committee, (2) Learning & Leadership Committee, (3) Student Recruitment, Retention & Engagement Committee, (4) Fundraising & Impact Committee, and (5) Resource Stewardship Committee.
- Ensure that all policies are reviewed and that a cycle of review is adhered to.
- Devote Full Board meeting to strategic discussions rather than a review of previous committee meetings.
- Support the launch of the new strategic plan.
- As part of strategic planning, ensure that all stakeholders have a solid and common understanding of the challenges facing higher education in general and the University in particular.
- Continue to shift focus to more strategic vs. administrative issues.
- Continue to drive toward more dashboard-like reporting of KPIs to get a pulse on the University.

2024-2025 Board of Trustees Self-Assessment

- While we have seen more data being presented, I am not sure that there is a unified understanding of KPI's - what they measure, what they do, why we are asking for them. Data, while helpful, is not always indicative of performance. I think if we were able to provide, perhaps, an educational opportunity for both trustees and university leaders to put us all on the same page. I understand that this, may just be something that I'm needing more information about. If that's not the case and if we all need a session to center us on what we need when we ask for key performance indicators, this could be an improvement area that we could all benefit from.
- Development of a Strategic Plan for the Next 3 Years: Initiating the development of a comprehensive strategic plan that outlines clear objectives, priorities, and strategies for the university's growth and development over the next three years. This plan should involve input from key stakeholders and align with the university's mission and vision.
- Continued Evaluation of Board Policies and Procedures: Continuing to evaluate and refine board policies and procedures to ensure they remain relevant, effective, and aligned with best practices in governance. This includes reviewing existing policies, identifying areas for improvement, and implementing updates as necessary to enhance transparency, accountability, and decision-making processes.
- Sustained Financial Oversight and Capital Improvements: Continuing to exercise diligent financial oversight and prioritizing capital improvements to support the institution's long-term financial health and sustainability. This involves monitoring budgetary performance, identifying cost-saving opportunities, and strategically investing in capital projects that enhance the academic and physical infrastructure of the university.
- By focusing on these goals, the board can strengthen its governance practices, enhance strategic planning processes, and contribute to the continued success and advancement of the institution.
- A clearer format to evaluate the President and a more uniform measure for the Board.
- Encouraging Board Members to attend Trustee Seminars.
- Demand revamping of course offerings for majors with low numbers of participants and right size the offerings.
- Introduce data driven, offerings in Math, Science, Health care, Business, Finance, accounting, Forensic and others that are in demand of today and next 20-50 years.
- Better job of fundraising efforts to support the University to grow its reserves and rainy-day funds.
- Strongly support the Capital campaign initiative.
- Measure student success and the University success in a meaningful manner.
- Strongly support the cabinet and the president in their efforts to face financial, enrollment and political challenges.
- The board can fine-tune its meeting structure, as well as the delivery of sub-committee reports.

2024-2025 Board of Trustees Self-Assessment

- Reorganization of the Committees to our strategic objectives.

Additional Comments:

- Work with the administration on a dashboard of key metrics that can be reviewed at each meeting for ease of understanding and comparison.
- I feel honored to be a part of it. Especially in a time when there is so much chaos and anxiety around the future of higher education and where there are efforts to dismantle work that has benefited the University, the state, country and world, it is good to be part of a group that recognizes the importance of the work we are doing.
- This is a great group of people who clearly care about the direction of the University.
- As a new member of the Board, I found the onboarding process very thorough.
- This Board is very active and filled with people that are dedicated to the University and what it stands for. I personally appreciate the efforts, the time spent on meetings, functions and events. This board donates time and resources that are greatly appreciated.