



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

University Success Committee

Minutes

February 19, 2026 11:00 a.m.

Loughman Living Room, Scanlon Hall

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 William Reichelt
- Vice Chair Tessa Lucey
- Secretary Dr. Gloria Williams
- Trustee Barney Garcia
- Trustee Jay Queenin

MEMBERS ABSENT:

- Trustee Melissa Alvarado
- Trustee Geroge Gilmer

Also present and participating were;

- Westfield State University President, Dr. Linda Thompson
- Vice President of Enrollment Management, Marketing and Student Affairs, Dr. Kevin Hearn
- Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, Dr. William Salka
- Director of Residential Life, Chris McKenzie Willenbrock

Committee Chair William Reichelt called the meeting to order at 11:01 a.m. A roll call was taken of the Trustees participating as listed above and it was announced that the meeting was being livestreamed and recorded.

MOTION made by Trustee Garcia and seconded by Trustee Williams, to approve the Enrollment Management & Student Affairs Committee minutes of the December 18, 2025 meeting. There being no discussion, a roll call was conducted, **and motion passed.**

Review of Committee ‘Discussion Points’ Committee

- Dr. Hearn discussed the overlap between University Success and Student Success and Learning Committees.
- Dr. Hearn is the administrative liaison to the University Success Committee, but other cabinet members will lead discussions in their areas.
 - Enrollment management functions will be contributed to by Dr. Hearn.
 - Retention will be addressed by the Provost.

- Faculty success and professional development will be addressed also by the Provost.
- The Provost is the administrative liaison to Student Success and Learning, which includes areas reporting to enrollment management, student affairs, and marketing.
- Cabinet members will liaise with each other to support the Board's restructuring.

Board Expectations and Strategic Alignment

- The Board should focus on addressing issues and challenges facing the University, regardless of reporting lines. Emphasis should be placed on KPIs and the strategic plan in every meeting.
- Aligning with strategic plans and KPIs leads to higher success and education for Boards.

Update on Student Retention

- The meeting transitions to an update on retention, led by The Provost, Dr. Salka.
 - The focus of the Huron contract has been on student success data.
 - The second phase of the contract involves finalizing and testing a dashboard with drillable data.
 - The dashboard is planned to be presented to the cabinet in early March, and potentially to the Board as well.
 - The University has been lacking historical data.
- Retention numbers shared today have an asterisk to indicate "as of now" for the last year and this year.

Trends in Higher Education

- The big trend is declining enrollment.
- Westfield State went from a peak of about 5,600 undergraduate students in 2015 to leveling off at around 3,800 in the fall of 2024.
- External factors contributing to enrollment declines include declining demographics, particularly in New England and the northern states.
- Internal factors include high school students taking tours and seeing that the campus is behind the times.
 - Students are sitting in classrooms with chalkboards and outdated technology.
 - Low-tech, outdated classrooms in rundown buildings negatively impact recruiting efforts. There is a master plan in place to address this.

Responses to Declining Enrollment

- Two responses to declining enrollment that Westfield State has engaged in:
 - The Provost stated that there was a lowering of admissions requirements to admit more students.
 - Increasing focus on retention.
- Retention is not just a financial issue but also a student success issue.

Conflicting Responses

- Lower admission standards and focusing on retention can be at odds with each other.
- Retention data is being looked at from a new perspective.
- Admissions data by high school GPA is available.

Admission Data Analysis

- Dr. Salka is analyzing student admission data from Westfield State University from 2015 to 2024, comparing it to state universities and UMass Amherst, focusing on high school GPA bands.
- UMass Amherst primarily admits students from the top two GPA bands (3.0 and above).
- Westfield State has increased the percentage of admitted students at both the top and bottom academic bands.
- There has been a significant shift in 2022 in the number of students who enroll at Westfield State, with a notable jump from 11% in the lowest GPA band.

Student Support and Retention

- As Westfield State admits students from lower GPA bands, there's a need to provide adequate support for their success. Data suggests that the current support system may not be sufficient, as retention rates are not ideal.

Retention Rates

- Overall retention rates at Westfield State are too low, ideally, the institution should aim for the high 70s or low 80s
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- Students in the top GPA band have higher retention rates compared to the average.
- There is concern about the second GPA band (3.5) and suggests investigating the reasons for their retention rates.

Fall vs. Spring Retention

- Fall retention is a key metric measured by the federal government.
- The lowest GPA band (2.5) shows a concerning trend, with a significant percentage (42%) not returning the following fall.
- If a student persists to their junior year, they are more likely to graduate.
- 55% of students who started in the first year leave the institution without a degree.
- Only 35% of the initial first-year students remain by the third year.
- Reducing students' workload by encouraging summer and January term courses could allow them to complete a two-year program instead of one.
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- The University is already admitting students with a 2.0 GPA who need a safety net.
- The University is using success money to implement mechanisms to support struggling students.
- A three-credit math course could become a four or five-credit course to allow faculty more time with students.
- The goal is to find ways to retain and enrich students for their success, which is the university's responsibility.
- The State has committed to helping at-risk students, and the university needs to use the money effectively and assess program effectiveness.

Student Support Systems

- The University has support systems, but the students who need the most support are the least likely to ask for it and the most difficult to connect with.
- The University is putting things in place, including a stipend to incentivize students to participate in enrichment programs, particularly with success coaches.
- The stipend acts as an incentive for students to participate, and they will lose it if they don't participate.

Software Platforms

- The University uses a texting platform to reach out to students who haven't registered, especially if they have a hold.
- WSU360 is a platform available to faculty and staff to raise a flag on a student who's struggling.
 - Raising a flag informs the student's advisor and the course achievement center.
 - This triggers outreach to the student to try to get intervention in time.
- The University is encouraging faculty to raise flags for struggling students so they can receive support.

Advising

- Every student has a faculty advisor as part of the faculty member's job.
- A dual advising model was implemented this past fall, where first and second-year students

have both a faculty advisor and a professional advisor in the advising office.

- Over 80% of first-year students attended their appointment with their professional advisor.

Additional Comments

- The data presented is the most information the Board has had in a long time, and the focus should now be on how to use it productively.
- The University needs to innovate and offer courses that attract both traditional and non-traditional students.
- Capital expenses for things like whiteboards and blackboards will be approved by the Board if they help retain and bring in more students.
- Changes in admission are not unique to Westfield State and are governed by the State.
- Retention is a complicated issue and should be discussed, and all conditions at the University need to change to support students in the classroom, counseling centers, and residence life.

Office of Residence Life Strategic Update

Chris McKenzie Willenbrock, Director of Residential Life reported the following:

- Three things to think about regarding the residential experience at Westfield State University:
 - Strategic position: Residential Life is a central structural element to student success, belonging, and retention.
 - Significance: The department supports students and connects with them, helping them "adult with a safety net."
 - Demonstrated ROI: Occupancy is up 7.6%, and there have been positive shifts in community engagement, such as two dedicated first-year communities.

Foundation

- Everything in residence life is built on a foundation of student development theory.
- This theory guides the work, including the shift to intentional first-year communities and staff training.

Framing

- Framing includes structural pieces like partnerships with the Honors Program.
- Programs are the scaffolding, addressing academic success, wellness, community building, and faculty engagement.
 - A satellite initiative brings campus partners into residence halls during the week.

Rooms

- Rooms provide general and specific support.
 - General support includes three layers of on-call presence: RAs, Hall Directors, and professional staff.
 - Specific support includes individualized support plans and cross-campus partnerships.

Utilities

- Utilities represent crisis response and behind-the-scenes support.
- There is 24/7 coverage with student and professional staff on call.
- They work with campus partners like Student Conduct, Counseling, Title IX, and University Police.

Windows – Survey Data

Residence Hall Occupancy and Melt

- Meltdue to several factors including academic and administrative withdrawals, graduation, transferring, moving off campus for commuting, or going abroad.

Skyfactor Survey

- Looks at satisfaction, learning, and overall program effectiveness (overall residential experience).

- Goal is 5.5 on a scale of 1 (least satisfied) and 7 (most satisfied).
- 23-24: Residential students fell just below the goal of 5.5 on all three factors.
- 24-25: Hit the goal and exceeded it in terms of satisfaction.
- This past year: Students met the goal and were increasing in all three factors: satisfaction, learning, and overall program effectiveness.

Overall Satisfaction

- Halls with asterisks (Davis Hall and Courtney Hall) are first-year communities with high satisfaction.
- Seymour Hall: Students were unable to select into the rooms as they were hoping and they ended up in Seymour, which may have had some impact in terms of lack of satisfaction.
- First-year communities are at the top, which shows that building intentional communities is really working.

General Areas of Satisfaction

- Overall safety and security being a top one.
- Interactions with student staff.
- Students feeling very informed about alcohol and drug use on campus, the community environment, etc.

Recommendations for Improvement

- Room assignment component is a top priority.
- Making adjustments this year for an easier process and better inventory for students.
- Significant increases in the overall satisfaction of residential students, learning, and program effectiveness since 2022.

Renovations

- Working on apartment buildings right now, making sure that there are plumbing repairs that are being taken care of.
- "When students come in and take a look at our residence halls, we want them to be impressed and we want them to see something that they want to live in."

Financial Stewardship

- Residential Life has often been connected to this idea of historical debt.
- The department has made strides in terms of revenue generation.
- Residential Life is the third highest revenue generator on campus.

Curb Appeal – Promotion and Future Direction

- Working with marketing to make sure that incoming students and prospective students like what they see in terms of residential communities.
- Building that community even as early as the first day they set foot on campus.
- Residential Life team refers to themselves as chaos coordinators, i.e. the people who manage the beautiful mess that is the residential experience.
- Student development theory, making sure people feel a sense of belonging and inclusion that is key to who they are and what they do.

Seymour Hall

- Seymour Hall is one of the apartment buildings. In years past, offered as four-person apartments but were designed for six people.
- Because other buildings have been taken offline, Seymour Hall was shifted to six person apartments.
- Students living in Seymour Hall were initially told that they would have to change and move into Conlin Hall mid-year.

Deferred Maintenance and Lammers Hall

- Deferred maintenance is an ongoing issue with inventory.
- Lammers Hall is currently offline, resulting in a \$1.7 million annual revenue loss due to

maintenance issues.

- There is a need to balance facilities maintenance with student housing needs, potentially taking buildings offline and increasing capacity elsewhere to house students, similar to what was done with Seymour Hall.

Survey Data and Academic Integration

- Survey data indicated a low impact factor in the academic satisfaction, specifically regarding integrating classroom knowledge into residence halls and interaction with faculty outside of the classroom.
- There is success in partnering with the Honors Program, with plans to explore partnerships with other departments like nursing and fine arts.
- The goal is to be more intentional in developing partnerships across campus to support students' in-class and residential experiences.

MOTION made by Trustee Lucey, and seconded by Trustee Queenin, to adjourn. There being no discussion, a roll call was conducted, **motion passed.**

Meeting adjourned at 12:09 p.m.

Attachments:

1. Minutes – 12.18.25
2. WSU Revised Board Committee Topics
3. Retention PPT
4. University Success PPT

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 University Success Committee meeting held on February 19, 2026.

Dr. Gloria Williams, Secretary

Date