



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. Draft Presidential Evaluation for 2024-2025 Academic Year

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.

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.

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