APPROVED

Fitchburg State University

Minutes

Board of Trustees Student Life Committee

Fitchburg State University Board of Trustees Meeting

Date and Time
Friday January 24, 2025 at 12:00 PM

Location
Public Live Stream:
https://www.fitchburgstate.edu/live

Notice of a meeting of the Fitchburg State University Board of Trustees Student Life Committee on Friday, January 24, 2025 at 12:00pm via Google Meet.

Committee Members Present
C. Stimpson (remote), D. Tiernan (remote), M. Gill (remote), S. King-Goodwin (remote)

Committee Members Absent
None

Guests Present
K. Lundgren (remote), L. Barrieau (remote), M. Fiorentino, Jr. (remote), Matt Lechter (remote), Nathan Robichaud (remote), Stefan Dodd (remote), Tim St. john (remote), mburke@fitchburgstate.edu (remote)

I. Opening Items

A. **Record Attendance**

B. Call the Meeting to Order

S. King-Goodwin called a meeting of the Student Life Committee of Fitchburg State University to order on Friday Jan 24, 2025 at 12:01 PM.

C. Approve Minutes from the January 23, 2024 meeting - VOTE (07-2024-2025)

II. Student Life

A. Athletics and Recreation Presentation Preview

Athletics and Recreation Update - Matthew Burke, Athletic Director

- Matthew Burke thanked the board members for gathering.
- He noted the absence of Laura Bayless, Vice President of Student Affairs, due to leave. Tim St. John (Dean of Students) and Matt Lechter (Executive Director for Housing and Residential Services) were included in the meeting to cover areas of interest in Laura Bayless' absence, as they are cabinet members and play a major role in student life.
- Self-Introduction: Matthew Burke has served as Athletic Director at Fitchburg State for 6.5 years. He has 14 years of director experience and 25 years in college athletics. He leads 17 varsity sports and supervises recreation services (recreation center, intramural sports, group exercise, fitness center). His focus is on providing the best student-athlete experience, fostering academic success, and promoting gender and ethnic diversity.
- He highlighted Matt Gill (student-athlete) and Michael Burns (SGA President) as examples of involved student-athletes.
- Upcoming Board Meeting (February 18th): Matthew Burke will present information about the athletic department. Today's discussion served as a preview and Q&A session.
- NCAA Division III Overview: Division III is fully integrated into the campus community, treating student-athletes like all other students regarding admissions, financial aid, and academic requirements. It prioritizes academic goals and life skills over athletic achievement, with reasonable practice/competition expectations and regional travel.
- Impact on Enrollment:
- Currently, there are 360+ student-athletes across 17 sports.
- Student-athletes hail from 28 states, with some international students from Canada and France.
- Surveys indicate that 98% of student-athletes chose Fitchburg State due to athletics (either as the most important or a very significant reason).
- Retention Rate: First-year to second-year retention for student-athletes is approximately 75%, compared to 71% for the general student body.

- GPA: Student-athletes consistently maintain a GPA of 3.0 or higher. As of Spring 2024, their GPA was slightly below the overall student population but still above 3.0.
- Future Opportunities: Discussion around potentially expanding sport offerings to further assist with institution enrollment.
- Campus Impact: Home games foster school pride and a sense of connection among students, faculty, staff, and the community.

Questions and Discussion (Athletics and Recreation)

- Michael Fiorentino: Inquired about changes in the number of student-athletes over recent years.
    - Numbers are increasing recently.
    - Football program: Two seasons ago, it was at 55 members; this past fall, it reached the upper 70s and is expected to continue building.
    - Women's and Men's Track numbers have seen a slight decline.
    - Most other sports have been consistent.
- Sheila King-Goodwin: Asked about recruitment strategies for athletic staff.
    - Weekly reports from admissions on students expressing interest in sports.
    - Coaches travel extensively to showcases, high school games, and club events to identify athletically prepared students who are also a good fit for Fitchburg State academically.
    - Recruitment typically begins in the junior year of high school, involving extensive contact and campus visits.
    - For example, recruiting 40 new football student-athletes requires contact with over 1,000 potential recruits.
- Lynn Barrieau: Asked about faculty support for student-athletes.
    - Overall, faculty are very supportive and willing to work with student-athletes regarding missed class time. Athletes are encouraged to communicate with faculty in advance.
    - The biggest challenge arises in the spring for baseball and softball due to weather-related postponements and the need for daylight games, leading to more missed academic time.
- Michael Fiorentino: Asked about the two or three biggest challenges in maintaining the athletic program.
- Funding: Ensuring adequate equipment, transportation, and food for student-athletes as athletic programs are not revenue-producing in Division III.
- NCAA Legal Landscape: While most legal challenges (e.g., pay-for-play, athletes as employees) are focused on Division I, there are concerns about potential trickle-down effects to Division III.
- Sheila King-Goodwin: Inquired about the graduation rate of student-athletes.

- The exact percentage was not immediately available but would be provided before the end of the meeting. He stated that the graduation rate for student-athletes is currently right at the same number as the rest of the institution at Fitchburg State.

Student Tours and Athletics Integration

Sheila King-Goodwin initiated a discussion about incorporating information regarding Fitchburg State's 17 sports programs into student tours. She questioned if the variety of athletic options influences a student's decision to enroll, especially since over 90% of athletes choose Fitchburg State due to its athletic program.

Matthew Burke confirmed that the athletic program is always introduced during tours. He further highlighted the availability of club sports (student-run organizations) like cheer, men's lacrosse, women's ice hockey, and men's volleyball, which offer additional participation opportunities beyond varsity level. He also mentioned intramural sports. He stated that the sports offered align well with the conference and available facilities, while other opportunities exist for students outside of varsity sports.

Matthew Gill inquired about specific sports being considered for future expansion.

Matthew Burke responded that any expansion would prioritize women's sports opportunities to improve compliance with Title IX gender equity. He explained that current sport makeup shows a lower percentile of female equivalent sports, particularly in football and men's ice hockey.

B. Housing & Residential Services

Matt Lechter, Executive Director of Housing and Residential Services and Special Assistant to the President, provided an update on Chartwells dining services. He began overseeing Chartwells in January to focus on increasing occupancy and revenue generation, recognizing the pivotal role housing and dining play in student retention and overall experience.

Key updates regarding Chartwells services:

- Extended Dinner Hours: Dinner service was shifted by 30 minutes to close at 8:00 PM (Monday-Thursday) and 7:00 PM (Fridays). This change was made to accommodate students' schedules, including work, meetings, classes, and athletic practices, leading to increased meal plan usage and satisfaction.
- Enhanced Offerings:
    - Omelets were reintroduced during breakfast.
    - A "menu entertainment" station was added, offering customized stir-fries and specialty dishes made to order.
    - A panini machine was added to the deli counter, increasing traffic.

    - Starbucks offerings in the cafe were expanded to include Frappuccino’s and cold foam.
    - A weekly rotating retail station was introduced to provide variety.
    - Monsoon Kitchen, an Indian concept, will be previewed in the spring semester based on student feedback.
    - A gaming shelf was added in the dining center to encourage social interaction and provide a hangout spot for residents and commuter students.
- Spring Semester Improvements:
    - A new front-of-house service manager has been hired to improve customer service.
    - A Latin bowl and different noodle options have been added based on feedback.
    - Bowls have been swapped for a more functional design.
    - An on-demand pancake machine has been installed.
    - Continued focus on expanding healthy and sustainable meal options.
- Student Satisfaction Survey: A fall survey showed an increase in overall satisfaction from last fall to this fall, with significant growth in food taste, variety, and hours.
- Matt Lechter also briefly mentioned the success of the Herlihy Hall project and the addition of a gaming lab as enhancements to the student experience.

Discussion on Chartwells Contract and Athletics Needs
Caroline Crowley Stimpson inquired about the Chartwells contract. Matt Lechter clarified that the current extension will continue until the next academic year (2026), at which point an RFP (Request for Proposal) bid process will be initiated for all food vendors, including Chartwells.

Sheila King-Goodwin asked Matt Lechter about the working relationship with Chartwells. He described the on-site team as "fantastic" and dedicated. He emphasized the importance of weekly meetings with the dining service manager and adapting to student feedback, noting that the extended hours led to a 16% increase in satisfaction on that specific question. He stressed that the relationship is pivotal due to its broad impact on students, faculty, staff, and guests.

Sheila King-Goodwin then asked if the extended dining hours better serve student-athletes.

Matthew Burke confirmed that accommodating student-athletes' practice schedules was a major motivator for the time shift, and there has been a positive impact. He acknowledged that more work is needed to open the dining hall during specific windows to provide meals to athletes, and this will be part of future bid process conversations.

Matthew Gill commented on the improved food quality based on his experience as a resident this year, contrasting it with previous complaints. He noted that the dining hall has been responsive to student concerns. He also raised a question about providing more scheduled mealtimes for winter preseason athletes due to past difficulties.

Matthew Burke confirmed that addressing the winter session meal needs is a top priority and will be included in the next fiscal cycle's requests.

Matt Lechter added that Chartwells' Jeff McVoy is looking to broaden the food committee to include students with diverse interests and to expand special events to foster more community engagement in dining.

C. Student Life Overview and Feedback

Tim St. John, Dean of Students, provided an overview of student life, marking his one-year anniversary at Fitchburg State. He emphasized his role as a chief student advocate, focusing on the "whole student experience" and supporting students with complex needs.

Key highlights from his update:

CARE Team: The CARE team, a collaborative support network across campus (athletics, student affairs, police, academics, financial aid), saw a 92% increase in referrals from last fall. This indicates both increased student needs and a culture that identifies and addresses those needs early. The most common presenting needs are academic concerns, medical concerns, mental health, basic needs (food insecurity, housing), and suicidal ideation. He also noted a pronounced increase in students experiencing grief and loss.

Falcon Bazaar (Food Pantry): The campus food pantry experienced a 265% increase in usage this fall. It is primarily funded through grants, with community donations supplementing items via an Amazon wish list. Discussions are ongoing to utilize grant funding for to-go containers to reduce food waste from events and to explore cooking classes for students using Falcon Bazaar items.
Student Involvement: There's a noticeable increase in student engagement on campus, leading to a 70% increase in total club events from last fall. Seven new clubs have started, including the first non-undergraduate exclusive club, the Indian Student Association, and the club ice hockey team. Efforts are being made to include graduate and international students in off-campus trips and cultural events.

Leadership Development: A key focus for the spring is leadership development, helping students build skills (e.g., effective communication) desired by employers. Sessions are being held for student leaders and employees to help them articulate their experiences for job searches and internships.

Caroline Crowley Stimpson asked for clarification on the Falcon Bazaar usage increase, which was defined as both the number of individual students using the resource and the frequency of their visits. She also inquired about the type of food provided, confirming it's primarily grab-and-go microwavable items, with future plans to explore providing full meals and cooking education.

III. Closing Items

A. Adjourn Meeting

C. Stimpson made a motion to Adjourn Meeting.
D. Tiernan seconded the motion.
The committee **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

C. Stimpson	Aye
S. King-Goodwin	Aye
D. Tiernan	Aye
M. Gill	Aye

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 12:40 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
S. King-Goodwin