



Fitchburg State University

Minutes

Fitchburg State University Board of Trustees

Board of Trustees Meeting

Date and Time

Tuesday February 18, 2025 at 1:00 PM

Location

Hammond Hall, Main Lounge. The meeting will also be livestreamed.

Notice of a meeting of the Fitchburg State University Board of Trustees on Tuesday, February 18, 2025 at 1:00 p.m.

The meeting will take place in the Main Lounge, Hammond Hall, Fitchburg, MA 01420

Public Live Stream:

<https://www.fitchburgstate.edu/live>

Trustees Present

C. Stimpson, D. Phillips (remote), D. Tiernan, E. Gregoire, J. Flanagan, K. Spinelli, L. Barrieau, M. Fiorentino, Jr., M. Gill

Trustees Absent

M. Morris, S. King-Goodwin

Guests Present

K. Lundgren

I. Opening Items

A. Record Attendance and Guests

B. Call the Meeting to Order

M. Fiorentino, Jr. called a meeting of the board of trustees of Fitchburg State University to order on Tuesday Feb 18, 2025 at 1:09 PM.

C. Public Comment

There are no public Comments

II. Board Chair's Report

A. Approval of Minutes, December 12, 2024 VOTE (10.2024-2025)

C. Stimpson made a motion to approve the minutes from Board of Trustees on 12-12-24.

J. Flanagan seconded the motion.

The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

S. King-Goodwin	Absent
L. Barrieau	Aye
D. Phillips	Aye
C. Stimpson	Aye
D. Tiernan	Aye
J. Flanagan	Aye
K. Spinelli	Aye
M. Fiorentino, Jr.	Aye
E. Gregoire	Aye
M. Morris	Absent
M. Gill	Aye

III. President's Report

A. From the President

President's Report (President Hodge):

- President Hodge announced that her written report would stand as submitted.
- She prioritized three presentations:
 - Academic Affairs Report (Dr. Patricia Marshall)
 - Enrollment Report (Rich Toomey)
 - Housing, Contracts and Real Estate Report (Matt Lechter)

B. Provost and EVP Update

Academic Affairs Report (Dr. Patricia Marshall):

• Academic Portfolio Analysis:

- A contract was signed with Eduventures to conduct an academic portfolio analysis.
- Eduventures was selected for its clear assessment methodology and detailed metrics.
- The analysis will use data from various sources (IPEDS, BLS, Lightcast) to inform strategic planning.
- Both external (market demand, competition) and internal metrics (enrollment, retention) will be analyzed.
- Eduventures will provide a summary document and a program strengths assessment scorecard.
- The goal is to strengthen existing programs, not eliminate them.
- The analysis aligns with the 2021-2022 academic plan and the 2020-2025 strategic plan, focusing on differentiation and program resonance.
- The first scoping call with Eduventures is scheduled for February 21st.
- Results are expected in fall 2025.

• New Finance Major:

- A new cross-disciplinary finance major is being developed between economics and business administration.
- An EAB feasibility study indicated strong student demand and career opportunities.
- The program will be submitted to governance for consideration this spring.
- If approved, a letter of intent will be submitted to the Board of Higher Education (BHE).
- The BHE will determine if the program receives fast-track or standard approval.
- The goal is to launch the program in fall 2026.
- One new faculty member will be required.
- Discussion of the market demand for finance graduates.
- Discussion of the ability to add a minor in finance.

• Cyber Security Concentration:

- The computer science department will add a cyber security concentration to the MS in computer science program in fall 2025.
- This concentration does not require BHE approval.
- It will be a four-course concentration available online and face-to-face.
- No additional costs are anticipated beyond course development expenses.

• Personnel Updates:

- A new fiscal coordinator was hired in the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs.
- The search for a Dean of Business and Technology closed with 38 applicants.
- Campus visits for dean candidates are expected in March and April.

- Provost Marshall thanked Dean Jannette McMenemy for her service as dean of two schools.
- President Hodge thanked Provost Marshall and Dean McMenemy for their work.

• **Q&A and Discussion:**

- Clarification on the new finance major curriculum.
- Discussion about the resources needed for the new finance major.
- Discussion about the timeline for the dean of business and technology search.
- Discussion regarding the applicant pool for the dean of business and technology position.

C. Enrollment Management Update

Enrollment Management Report (Rich Toomey):

• **Forecasting and Growth:**

- The focus is on forecasting and projecting future enrollment, moving beyond post-COVID recovery.
- The goal is to set a positive and ambitious path for growth, focusing on both recruitment and retention.
- Enrollment management requires extensive campus partnerships and collaboration.
- New initiatives include:
 - Direct admission programs with targeted regional schools.
 - Enhanced financial aid programs (Falcon Promise, Fitchburg Promise, sibling grants).
 - Targeted outreach to adult learners, veteran students, and niche populations.

• **Undergraduate Day Enrollment Goals:**

- A 2% enrollment increase is targeted for fall 2025 (45 additional students).
- An additional 2% increase is targeted for fall 2026.
- A 5% growth in first-time, full-time (FTFT) freshmen is targeted for fall 2025.
- Transfer student population will be stabilized due to community college initiatives.
- The university has met budgeted enrollment targets, but stretch goals are now being set.

• **President Hodge's Comments:**

- Emphasized the shift from trend data to aspirational goals.
- Highlighted the need to invest in academics.
- Acknowledged the importance of adult learners and upskilling students.
- Discussed the impact of free community college programs and the need to engage with those students early.
- Discussed creative ways to partner with community colleges, such as offering on-campus housing.

- Discussed the need to message the value of a full college experience.
- Discussed the importance of direct admission programs.
- Discussed the need to have a single enrollment plan for all of campus.
- Discussed the need to pull retention efforts into enrollment management.

Q&A and Discussion:

- **Community College Partnerships:**

- Discussion on engaging with community college students and offering transfer pathways.
- Discussion of creative partnerships with community colleges.

- **SGOCE and Graduate Programs:**

- Discussion on goals and expectations for continuing education and graduate programs.
- Discussion on the need for a single enrollment plan for all of campus.

- **Enrollment Landscape:**

- Discussion on the challenges and opportunities in the enrollment landscape over the next five years.
- Discussion on the need for managed growth and collaboration with state and federal partners.

- **Market Share:**

- Discussion on whether the growth potential is from reclaiming market share or expanding into new markets.
- Discussion on the importance of serving the local region and rebuilding partnerships.
- Discussion on the growth potential in adult learners and military/veteran students.
- Discussion on the need to invest in programs and support systems that attract those student populations.

- **Retention:**

- Discussion on the increased effort needed to retain students in today's environment.
- Discussion on the impact of food and housing insecurity on student retention.

- **Marketing:**

- Discussion on the shift towards a marketing focus in enrollment management.

- **General Comments:**

- Jen Flanagan thanked Provost Marshall and the campus for being nimble enough to reach out to people where they are.
- President Hodge and Rich Toomey discussed the importance of collaborative efforts and setting ambitious goals.
- Discussion on the need to evaluate and improve the supports and resources available to students.

- Discussion on the need to communicate the value of Fitchburg State University.

D. Housing, Contracts and Real Estate

Housing, Contract and Real Estate Report (Matt Lechter)

- Lechter is serving as Special Assistant to the President for special projects.
- The focus is on clarifying housing possibilities, addressing misinformation, and preparing for discussions on real estate holdings.
- **Herlihy Hall Update:**
 - 64 applications were received for 13 beds.
 - The announcement and tour were successful, with positive feedback.
 - The second side of the first floor opened in January, with ongoing work.
 - Eight commuter students were brought onto campus, some living in Herlihy Hall, others in other residence halls.
 - Strategic planning for student needs and revenue generation is ongoing.
- **Spring Occupancy:**
 - Spring occupancy is at 927 students, matching last spring's numbers, despite starting with 31 fewer students in the fall.
 - This indicates a significant retention boost.
 - Efforts continue to attract commuter students to on-campus living.
- **Graduate Student Housing:**
 - Graduate student occupancy at North Street increased from 4 to 9 students.
 - These students do not count towards state occupancy reports.
 - International student website now advertises graduate student housing.
- **Year-Round Housing:**
 - Year-round housing is available, with over 50 students living on campus last summer.
 - Apartment-style housing with kitchens is needed for year-round residents.
- **Financial Considerations:**
 - Fitchburg State has the lowest housing costs within the MSCBA portfolio.
 - Rising insurance costs, utilities, personnel, and deferred maintenance require balancing revenue generation with affordability.
- **Property Portfolio:**
 - The university owns a variety of properties, including residential, commercial, and vacant buildings.
 - A comprehensive review of the portfolio is underway.
 - Heide Messing from CPM is providing valuable assistance in understanding the properties.
- **MSCBA Funding:**
 - \$700K to \$1 million in MSCBA funding has been secured for townhouse renovations, boiler and lighting updates, and heating systems.
 - This is the first time in 5-6 years that such projects have been funded.
- **Mount Wachusett Partnership:**

- Discussions are ongoing to create a housing program for Mount Wachusett students.
- This could serve as a recruitment tool for Fitchburg State.
- **International Student Housing:**
 - Efforts are being made to increase international student housing opportunities.
- **24/7 Support:**
 - Housing requires 24/7 support, including maintenance and resident director staff.
- **Future Executive Session:**
 - A future executive session is planned to discuss property details in greater detail.

President Hodge's Comments:

- Emphasized the importance of asking for MSCBA funding.
- Highlighted the collaborative approach with MSCBA, DCAMM, finance, housing, and capital planning and maintenance.
- Discussed the challenges of managing the university's property portfolio.
- Emphasized the importance of employee engagement and feeling part of solutions.
- Reiterated the university's commitment to not purchasing additional property without board approval.
- Emphasized the need to review existing properties and their potential uses.

Q&A and Discussion:

- **MSCBA and DCAMM Requirements:**
 - Discussion on the complexities of state regulations and reporting.
 - Discussion on the need for creative solutions and collaboration with state agencies.
- **Family Housing:**
 - Discussion on the possibility of offering family housing and the associated challenges.
- **Property Inventory and Condition:**
 - Discussion on the need for a complete inventory of properties and their conditions.
 - Discussion on the current occupancy rates and the impact of various factors.
- **Summer Housing and Revenue Generation:**
 - Discussion on the need to streamline processes for summer housing, camps, and clinics.
 - Discussion on the need to move towards a "yes" mentality.
- **Property Assessment and Management Plan:**

- Discussion on the need for a full assessment of properties and a management plan.

IV. Student Trustee Report

A. Student Trustee Report

- **Elevating the Student Trustee Role:**

- Matt announced his efforts to elevate the role of the student trustee by establishing connections with various campus offices and departments.
- He collaborated with Michael Kennedy, Director of the Office of Student Development, to identify key offices for outreach.
- Initial meetings were conducted with Veteran Affairs, International Education, and the School of Graduate, Online, and Continuing Education (SGOCE).
- The primary goal was to understand how the student trustee and the Student Government Association (SGA) could support these offices and their student populations.

- **Veteran Affairs:**

- Met with the Fitchburg State University Chief of Police, who oversees Veteran Affairs.
- Discussed the university's efforts to hire a Director of Veteran Affairs to strengthen support for the approximately 139 veteran students.
- Announced an alumni and student veterans' event on March 29, 2025, featuring social activities and a guest speaker.
- Explored the possibility of creating an official veterans club or organization on campus.

- **International Education:**

- Met with Nelly Wadsworth, Director of International Education.
- Discussed the international student experience, focusing on opportunities for improvement.
- Identified challenges in accessibility for international graduate students and planned to collaborate on solutions.
- Collaborating with Michael Kennedy and the Office of Student Development to enhance programming for international students.

- **School of Graduate, Online, and Continuing Education (SGOCE):**

- Met with Peter August, Assistant Dean of Enrollment from SGOCE.
- Discussed the need to provide on-campus experiences for online and continuing education students who are locally based.
- Explored ideas to address challenges and create a better experience for all SGOCE students.

- **Undergraduate Day Student Experience:**

- Highlighted successful spring semester events, including "Rock the Lounge" and a "Bingo Blowout."

- Reported high usage of the Commuter Lounge, with consistent swipe numbers.

- September: 448 swipes
- October: 474 swipes
- November: 419 swipes
- December: 297 swipes

- **Student Government Association (SGA) Updates:**

- Held a spring retreat on January 19, 2025, focusing on long-term change, advocacy, leadership, and goal setting.
- Featured guest speaker Adam Keyes, a former Fitchburg State SGA e-board member.
- Announced an SGA reunion on March 1st from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

President Hodge's Comments:

- Commended Matt and the SGA for their efforts to address the diverse needs of the student population.
- Highlighted the importance of creating inclusive experiences for all students.
- Noted the positive impact of the employee incentive program on graduate student inclusion in the dining hall.
- Acknowledged the approval of the first graduate student organization by the SGA.
- Thanked Matt and the SGA leadership for their dedication.
- Thanked Michael Burns, SGA president, for his work.

V. Athletics Update

A. Athletics Update

Athletics Update

- Matt Burke, Executive Director of Athletics and Recreation, presented a high-level overview of the athletics program.
- He discussed student-athlete accomplishments and future growth opportunities.
- He oversees 17 varsity athletic programs and the recreational sports program.

- **Student-Athlete Snapshots:**

- Highlighted the dedication and passion of student-athletes, showcasing their competitive spirit.
- Emphasized the "17 sports, one team" philosophy, promoting unity and support across all programs.
- Stressed the importance of university-wide support for successful athletic programs.

Athletics Mission and NCAA Division III:

- **Mission Statement:**

- Extends education beyond the classroom, fostering valuable life skills.
- Promotes an inclusive environment for student-athletes to excel.

- **NCAA Division III Overview:**

- Integrates student-athletes into the overall college experience, balancing academics and athletics.
- Focuses on developing well-rounded individuals for professional success beyond sports.
- Emphasized that Fitchburg State does not offer athletic scholarships.
- Encourages student-athletes to participate in clubs, organizations, and leadership roles.

- **Division III Facts and Figures:**

- 429 member institutions, the largest NCAA division.
- 80% private, 20% public institutions.
- Average of 18 athletic programs per institution.

MASCAC Conference:

- Highlighted the MASCAC as the oldest Division III men's and women's playing conference.
- Emphasized the conference's regional focus, minimizing travel time for student-athletes.
- Noted the strong sense of community and shared experiences among MASCAC institutions.

Student-Athlete Demographics:

- Approximately 360 student-athletes (223 male, 137 female).
- High number of student-athletes participate in multiple sports.
- 194 student-athletes reside on campus.
- Student-athletes represent 28 states and several international countries.
- Highlighted the diversity of student-athlete majors, with Business Administration and Exercise and Sports Science being the most popular.
- Noted the trend of multiple siblings participating in Fitchburg State athletics.

Coaching and Recruitment:

- Emphasized the crucial role of coaches in recruiting and retaining student-athletes.
- Highlighted the extensive recruitment process, including showcases, tournaments, and campus tours.
- Reported that 57% of first-year student-athletes chose Fitchburg State primarily for the opportunity to participate in athletics.
- Highlighted Kayla Quinn, MASCAC Field Hockey Coach of the Year.

Academic Performance and Retention:

- Student-athletes maintain a GPA above 3.0.
- Student-athlete retention rate is slightly higher than the general student population.
- Reported that senior student-athletes identify leadership, time management, communication, teamwork, and accountability as key skills developed through athletics.

Athletic Successes:

- Highlighted team and individual accomplishments from the past year, including:
 - Field hockey: MASCAC regular season champions.
 - Men's and women's soccer: Conference semi-finalists.
 - Individual All-American honors.
 - Discussed ongoing seasons for ice hockey and basketball, and preparations for spring sports.

Future Opportunities and Growth:

- Emphasized the role of athletics in supporting institutional enrollment goals.
- Identified opportunities to grow enrollment within existing athletic programs.
- Highlighted the need to expand female athletic opportunities to ensure Title IX compliance.
- Proposed exploring the creation of a varsity women's ice hockey program due to:
 - Existing facility (Wallace Civic Center).
 - Growing popularity of women's ice hockey.
 - MASCAC sponsorship of ice hockey.
 - Contribution to gender equity.
 - Potential to balance costs with the men's ice hockey program.

Q&A and Discussion:

- **Student-Athlete Support:**
 - Discussed the need to enhance academic support for student-athletes, particularly first-year students.
 - Highlighted the importance of communication and collaboration with other campus departments, such as dining services.
 - Discussed the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) as a valuable forum for student-athlete feedback.
- **Balancing Academics and Athletics:**
 - Discussed results of the satisfaction survey.
 - Explained that the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee and conversations with student athletes are the primary ways that the athletic department receives feedback.

VI. Marketing Update

A.

Marketing Update

Marketing Update (Rich Toomey)

- Rich Toomey, Associate Vice President of Enrollment Management, presented an overview of the Marketing and Integrated Communications team's work.
- He emphasized the team's small size and nimbleness, highlighting their ability to produce high-quality content with limited resources.
- He encouraged attendees to explore the numerous links, videos, and resources provided in the presentation materials.
- He highlighted the "One-Minute Majors" video series and other digital content available on the university's website and social media platforms.

Team Overview:

- The Marketing and Integrated Communications team is responsible for social media, website content, visual elements (videography and photography), and overall university marketing.
- Toomey noted the significant difference between Fitchburg State's marketing budget and the industry standard of 10% of the operating budget.
- He emphasized the team's role in educating the campus community about brand guidelines and ensuring consistent messaging.
- He reiterated that everyone associated with Fitchburg State is a brand ambassador.

Social Media:

- The team manages 13 social media platforms, developing content and engaging with various audiences.
- Social media ambassadors and content creators, consisting of over 30 students, contribute to the team's efforts.
- The team collaborates with academic and administrative units through a social media advisory group.
- Data-driven decision-making is employed, with significant reach and engagement metrics reported.
- Various video content is produced for different platforms, including welcome videos, tour guides, and alumni outreach.

Major Advertising Campaigns (Kelly Norris):

- The team works with Mass Media for Google Ads (search, display, marketing) and Davis Advertising for broader campaigns.
- Google Ads are used to promote priority programs, open houses, and other initiatives.
- Audience matching campaigns, using lookalike audiences, have shown high click-through rates.

- Davis Advertising campaigns include connected TV, display ads, social media (Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook), Spotify, and Spanish radio.
- Geo-fencing is used to target specific high schools for recruitment purposes.
- Additional marketing efforts include journal advertisements, community newspapers, and banner ads.

Collateral Creation and Graphic Design:

- The team utilizes both external vendors and in-house graphic designers for collateral creation.
- In-house designers handle a high volume of projects, including publications, posters, and promotional materials.
- The team leverages student talent for real-time content creation.

Website Management:

- The team partners with Technology for website management, focusing on content development and user experience.
- The website receives over 1.3 million hits annually, with a 24-hour turnaround time for updates.
- The team prioritizes accessibility, consistently maintaining a high accessibility score.
- The team manages the Burg Blog, SmugMug, One-Minute Majors video series, and the online magazine.

Future Initiatives:

- The team is exploring new marketing strategies, including digital displays at community colleges and targeted international advertising.
- The team emphasizes the use of QR codes and digital content over traditional collateral.
- The "It's About You" campaign is being integrated into various marketing efforts.
- The team is partnering with Wachusett Mountain for promotional activities.
- The team plans to expand its resources and prioritize marketing efforts.
- The team is focused on representing brand integrity and ensuring consistent messaging.
- The team is adapting to the evolving landscape of digital and social media marketing.

Q&A and Discussion:

- **CASE Conference:**
 - President Hodge highlighted the importance of the upcoming CASE conference for professional development and industry best practices.
 - The conference will provide opportunities for team members to collaborate and learn from other institutions.

- **Budgetary Constraints:**

- President Hodge acknowledged the team's limited budget and the need for increased investment in marketing.
- She noted the successful marketing strategies employed by SGOCE and the need to replicate them for undergraduate programs.

- **Viral Video:** President Hodge highlighted a viral video created by the women's lacrosse team, showcasing the power of student-led social media. She commended the team, coach, and student-athletes for their authentic and positive representation of Fitchburg State.

VII. Academic Affairs Committee Update

A. Update from Jennifer Flanagan, Chair of the Academic Affairs Committee

Due to a cancellation, there was no Academic Affairs Committee Meeting.

Student Life Committee Update (Carolyn Crowley Stimpson):

- **Chartwells:**

- Matt Lechter worked with Chartwells' to extend dining hall hours for student-athletes.
- Chartwells is introducing Latin-inspired dinners and an on-demand pancake machine.
- Plans to issue an RFP for dining services in fall 2025, with a decision in 2026.

- **Herlihy Hall Renovations:**

- Updates on Herlihy Hall renovations were provided

- **Dean of Students Report:**

- Tim St. John, Dean of Students, highlighted the increased complexity of serving student needs.
- The revamped CARE program saw a 92% increase in utilization compared to the previous fall.
- Top student concerns include:
 - Academics
 - Medical issues
 - Mental health
 - Basic needs (food and housing)
 - Suicidal ideation
 - Grief and loss (anecdotal evidence)
- The Falcon Bazaar pantry experienced a 265% increase in visits.
- Student involvement is on the rise, with a 70% increase in student clubs and seven new clubs.
- Leadership development is a key focus this spring, with workshops on effective communication and skill-building for future careers.

- The Falcon Bazaar is exploring ways to provide prepared foods for student-athletes who return late at night.

VIII. Finance Committee Update

A. Update from Karen Spinelli, Chair of the Finance Committee

Finance Committee Update (Karen Spinelli):

• Fiscal Year 2025 and 2026 Budgets:

- The finance committee met to discuss the fiscal year 2025 budget and a preview of the fiscal year 2026 budget.
- President Hodge introduced Heidi Swift, Executive in Charge of Finance, and emphasized the importance of financial planning, including cash flow and investments.
- Heidi Swift shared observations about the university's financial status and the need for open communication.
- Tuition revenue was reported as stable.
- The university is closely monitoring the impact of federal executive orders on state aid.
- A fifth board meeting was proposed for May 12th to confirm the fiscal year 2026 budget.
- Enrollment numbers were discussed, with a goal to increase enrollment by 2% for fall 2025.
- The importance of online programs was emphasized.
- President Hodge stressed the need for strategic growth in maximizing assets and announced the elimination of extraordinary budget requests.
- The committee reviewed the budget document and discussed grant funding, which is currently stable.
- A collaboration between student accounts and academic affairs to improve billing practices and student retention was noted.
- Further details were said to be provided in Heidi Swifts report to the full board.

IX. Budget Report/Updates

A. Presented by Dr. Hodge/Heidi Swift

- President Hodge reported that the budget updates were proceeding as expected, indicating stability.
- The budget is included in the presentation packet, and the university will continue to reconcile approved budgets with actual expenditures.
- The goal for fiscal year 2026 is to work with individual units to develop accurate budgets based on actual expenses and operational needs, rather than historical allocations.

- Extraordinary budget requests will be eliminated, with operational needs addressed through cabinet-level leadership.
- Heidi Swift will work closely with cabinet-level leadership to develop the fiscal year 2026 budget plan.
- Campus was informed of a request to plan for a level-funded budget, meaning funding aligned with actual expenses.
- The university is aiming to operate agilely and intentionally, avoiding deficits.
- The “dear colleague” letter to university presidents regarding executive orders was acknowledged, and the university is working with state partners to navigate potential impacts.
- The university's financial standing is currently stable, with funds being drawn down as expected.

Q&A and Discussion:

• Personnel Expenditures:

- Discussion on managing personnel expenditures, vacancies, and attrition.
- President Hodge emphasized intentional backfilling, working with cabinet-level leadership and the finance team.
- Job descriptions are being reviewed and updated, and entry-level hiring is considered where appropriate.
- New roles require cabinet-level discussion and approval.
- Strategic investments in areas like admissions and academic programs were highlighted.
- The feedback from the financial sustainability task force was taken into account.
- The importance of collaborative and transparent personnel decisions was emphasized.

• Operational Needs:

- Discussion on identifying core operational needs, anticipated needs, and growth opportunities.
- The university is aiming to empower individuals and realign resources to maximize their potential.
- The provosts process for determining operational needs was highlighted as a good model.
- Fiscal year 2026 planning is a step toward achieving this goal by fiscal year 2027.
- The university is being transparent about its current financial situation and making careful adjustments.
- Trustees will be engaged in a thorough review of the FY2026 budget in the near future.

B. FY26 Budget Planning Process

X. Closing Items

A. Adjourn Meeting

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 4:09 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
M. Fiorentino, Jr.