APPROVED

Fitchburg State University

Minutes

Board of Trustees

Fitchburg State University Board of Trustees Meeting

Date and Time
Thursday April 17, 2025 at 1:00 PM

Location
Hammond Hall, Main Lounge

This meeting will be live streamed and recorded.

Notice of a meeting of the Fitchburg State University Board of Trustees on Thursday, April 17, 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. Tiernan (remote), E. Gregoire, J. Flanagan, K. Spinelli, L. Barrieau, M. Fiorentino, Jr., M. Gill, M. Morris, S. Rodriguez

Trustees Absent
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 Thursday Apr 17, 2025 at 1:05 PM.

C. Public Comment

II. Board Chair's Report

A. Approval of Minutes, February 18, 2025 VOTE (15.2024-2025)

C. Stimpson made a motion to approve the minutes from Fitchburg State University Board of Trustees on 02-18-25.
L. Barrieau seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

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

B. Approval of Minutes, March 28, 2025 VOTE (16.2024-2025)

E. Gregoire made a motion to approve the minutes from Board of Trustees Meeting on 03-28-25.
J. Flanagan seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

M. Gill	Aye
J. Flanagan	Aye
L. Barrieau	Aye
E. Gregoire	Aye

Roll Call

K. Spinelli	Aye
S. King-Goodwin	Absent
M. Morris	Aye
C. Stimpson	Aye
D. Tiernan	Aye
M. Fiorentino, Jr.	Aye

III. President's Report

A. From the President

- President Hodge Highlighted April 17th as our Student Research Day and Spring Awards Ceremony
- She also highlighted convocation which will now be in the fall semester and honor our new students. This will also include the State of the University address. Also highlighted was Visions Showcase, commencement and various other campus events.
- **Investiture and Gala:** The investiture of President Hodge will be April 25 with a formal fundraising gala on the 26th.
- **Partnership with MWCC:** President Hodge highlighted a new partnership with Mount Wachusett Community College, where MWCC students will be able to live on Fitchburg State's campus and be part of our community while attending the Mount.
- **Board of Trustees Retreat:** Officially scheduled for August 12th, from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM at the Fitchburg Art Museum. A reception with cabinet colleagues will follow from 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM. This day will focus on listening and learning about significant topics. More information will be shared by the Chair in the coming weeks.
- **Board of Trustees Meeting (May 12th):** The last scheduled meeting is proposed to be held virtually for two hours, from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM, given that it will be a budget meeting and only the Finance Committee will convene beforehand. An email follow-up from Kelli will provide confirmation.
- **Governor's Visit:** The Governor will be visiting Fitchburg next Tuesday. The university leadership will meet with her and her team, an invitation extended by Senator Cronin. Discussions will focus on downtown development projects, including the theater block.

B. Provost and EVP Update

- **Progress on Academic Affairs Priorities (AY 24-25):** Significant progress has been made on priorities established at the summer 2024 retreat. These include:
- Launching the Massachusetts Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative.
- Implementing Explorance, the new student evaluation instrument.
- Revising the academic integrity policy (further details to follow).

- Examining the academic portfolio in partnership with Eduventures, with results to be presented to the board in the fall.
- **Three Areas of Emphasis:**

1. **Better Integrating Day and SGOCE Operations (School of Graduate, Online, and Continuing Education):**
2. Promoting the concept of "one university" to move beyond separate contractual and
3. Financial models for undergraduate day and SGOCE operations.

- This integration aims to improve academic quality, provide a seamless experience for "double falcon" students and faculty, and meet NECHE accreditation standards, which apply to the entire institution.
- Recognizing the shift in student demographics and the need to cater to diverse student needs and program choices. SGOCE students currently constitute the majority of the student population.
- Actively including SGOCE representation on student service committees to inform decision-making.
- Centering academic quality within academic departments, ensuring departments fully own their programs at all levels (e.g., MBA within the Business Administration Department). Program review and assessment processes for graduate programs are now aligned with NECHE expectations.
- Revising Institutional Learning Priorities (ILPs) to provide a framework guiding learning at all levels and elevating the importance of graduate programs.
- Implementing a new due date billing model in SGOCE, extending the payment deadline to approximately three weeks before the start of classes for non-accelerated online programs, expected to positively impact enrollment and student success.
- **Elevating Collaborations for Intentional Onboarding:**
- Strategic decision in summer 2024 to alter the first-year student registration process, moving away from registrar-generated schedules to a model leveraging registration software and promoting student agency and faculty interaction during summer orientation.
- Formation of a cross-divisional Orientation Practices Assessment Group in AY24-25 to overhaul orientation practices for inclusivity across all student identities and populations.
- Recognizing that traditional orientation programs have historically prioritized undergraduate day students.
- A phased approach to revisions is underway, with partial implementation for summer 2025 including:
    - Elimination of a mandatory overnight component.
    - Expanding family engagement.
    - Piloting a "choose your own adventure" model.

- This aligns with the medium-term priority of evaluating pre-registration, orientation, and the first-year experience.
- Commitment to evaluating the efficacy of the current first-year experience program, which plays a crucial role in onboarding and retention. Seminars can reduce early attrition. Data and feedback on the current model (five years in, piloted one year prior to the 2021 Gen Ed launch) will be evaluated.
- **Finalizing the New Academic Integrity Policy:**
- A three-year effort driven by the need to align with current higher education practices and address the use of artificial intelligence.
- Overarching goal: ensure the revised policy and procedures are student-centered, equitable, and fair.
- Process included the formation of an Academic Integrity Working Group, partnership with the International Center for Academic Integrity, and extensive stakeholder engagement.
- Recommendations for change across policy and procedures, AI, and culture were developed.
- AY23-24 work included a literature review, interviews, exploration of central reporting models, and analysis of educational sanctions.
- A draft definition, policy, and procedures document has been widely shared and is intended to go to governance in the fall.
- **Search for New Dean of Business and Technology:** The interview process has concluded, and the university is in conversations with the top candidate.
- **Questions from Trustees:**
- Trustees were invited to ask questions regarding the information presented by the Provost and the President. There were no questions.

C. Enrollment Management Update

- **Successful Spring Enrollment Cycle:** A record number of students attended campus events, including Saturday information sessions, daily tours, and shadow opportunities.
- **Future Falcon Days:** Two springtime events hosted admitted students, including a successful honors breakfast with a 100% show rate. Solid overall attendance at these events.
- **Positive Enrollment Indicators:** The university is anticipating new freshmen on campus in the fall.
- **New Convocation:** Collaborative work with the President's office is underway to develop a new convocation to ensure a smooth transition for incoming students.
- **Residential New Student Numbers:** Year-to-date linkages indicate higher residential new student numbers compared to previous years.
- **Financial Aid Success:** The Financial Aid Office achieved a significant milestone with 72% of currently admitted students having financial aid packages in hand, an all-time high compared to 49% at the same time last year.

- **Upcoming High School Vacation Week:** Record numbers of prospective students and families are planning visits during the upcoming Massachusetts high school vacation week. Personalized visits are a key focus.
- **Final Saturday Information Session:** The last session for this cycle will be on the 26th, coinciding with investiture activities, with over 90 students registered.
- **Direct Admission Program:** Working with the local Fitchburg community on a new direct admission program, initially focusing on Fitchburg High School with plans for a university satellite office within the school. This initiative is expanding to other local schools (St. Bernard's, Sizer, Monty Tech).
- Direct admission offers a promise of admission to 11th and 12th graders who meet specific guidelines, aiming for a smoother transition to higher education.
- The "Fitchburg Promise" will offer a $1,500 housing incentive for students entering through the direct admission program who reside on campus.
- **Importance of Early Financial Aid Packages:**
- Intentional changes to awarding practices include offering many scholarships at the time of admission.
- Moving the admission date earlier (October 1st) allows for earlier communication of financial aid information.
- Providing this information early helps students make informed decisions before the May 1st Candidate Reply Deadline (CRD).
- Early financial aid packages address cost concerns and enhance the university's yield of admitted students.

Data on Applicant Funnel:

- FR reflects freshman transfer.
- The top row indicates different categories within the applicant funnel: applications started, incomplete applications, etc.
- Separate campaigns target students, families, and high schools to gather necessary information.
- Data is available to analyze residential vs. commuter students and by individual academic department.

Drop in Total Applicants:

- A significant drop in total applicants (around 1000) from Fall 24 to Fall 25 is observed at the top of the funnel.
- This is attributed to the university's recent adoption of the Common Application, which initially inflated application numbers with incomplete applications ("ghosts").
- Admittance and yield rates have been stronger despite this drop.
- Focus is on enhancing yield through scholarships, financial aid, campus visits, faculty connections, and student support resources.
- **Focus on Deposits:** The current focus is on actual deposits, with positive indicators showing that students who visit campus are more likely to deposit.

Efforts are being made to increase faculty interaction with prospective students to strengthen connections and encourage deposits.

Questions from Trustees:

- Trustees sought clarification on the definitions of data lines in the enrollment metrics provided.
- Concerns were raised regarding the drop in the total number of applicants at the top of the funnel.
- **Focus on Deposits:** Discussions are centered on prioritizing efforts that lead to student deposits. While the number of applications may be down, the number of deposits has increased since the board packet was compiled. This positive trend is being closely monitored to inform future goal setting.

D. Housing and Contract Updates

- **Returner Student Housing:** As of this morning, 660 current students are in the housing process, up from 577 two weeks prior. This number is changing daily and is weeks ahead of last year's pace, indicating satisfaction with campus life and amenities.
- **Incoming Class Housing:** Completed applications from new students and transfers are also trending about two weeks ahead of last year. 98 new students/transfers have completed applications out of 180 eligible as of this morning. Access to the housing application is granted upon deposit payment.
- **Mount Wachusett Community College (MWCC) Partnership:** Continued growth and vibrancy in housing are anticipated through this partnership, benefiting current Fitchburg students with increased campus activity and supporting Student Affairs programming.
- **Ongoing Efforts:** Individual outreach to students is underway to understand why they haven't applied for housing and to educate them on the comprehensive costs of off-campus living compared to on-campus housing. Approximately 18 commuter students have decided to move on campus recently, primarily sophomores and juniors.
- **Summer Housing Projects:** Partnerships with MSCBA for summer projects are on track, commencing the Monday after commencement. Townhouse 5 will undergo a complete refresh of the common area, laundry room, exterior (water leakage), and water boilers. Future summers will address other townhouses.
- **MWCC Visit:** A visit from MWCC's SGA president and student leaders is planned for April 30th (time not yet confirmed). Showcase Herlihy and tours of Herlihy and Russell Towers will be provided. Materials and signage will be delivered to MWCC next week.
- **Campus Contracts:** Increased emphasis on managing campus contracts with Chartwells, the bookstore, FMC, and others has yielded positive results.

Chartwells Dining Services:

- A Request for Information (RFI) will be issued to explore potential dining vendors and gather information about the marketplace, vendor services, and new dining trends.
- Increased communication and oversight of Chartwells have resulted in positive feedback from students, faculty, staff, and librarians.
- The employee meal perk, initiated by President Hodge, has seen significant uptake, with over 2,600 meals used this semester (since January), enhancing vibrancy in the dining hall (Holmes). This is a significant increase compared to previous years when faculty and staff largely did not utilize the dining hall.
- Increased programming and engagement opportunities in Holmes, such as "food fights" and faculty/staff-created recipes, are well-attended and encourage greater utilization of the dining hall.
- **Bookstore Transition:** An agreement has been signed with eCampus and University Gear Shop (UGS) as the new bookstore vendor, effective July 1st, in partnership with 15 other state universities and community colleges leveraging collective buying power.
- This will be a hybrid model with eCampus managing the book aspect and UGS handling retail.
- Books are expected to be more affordable and will be housed in eCampus's warehouse, with a three-day delivery window to the campus bookstore for student pickup.
- Students will have temporary (10-day) access to electronic versions of their books upon purchase.
- The physical bookstore space will be adapted to offer more campus-related products and potentially extended hours for campus events.
- Communication regarding the transition will be shared with the campus community.
- **Contract Management:** Efforts are underway to compile listings of future contracts and ensure they serve the students' needs effectively.
- **Recognition:** Dr. Becky Copper Glenz was thanked for her representation on the bookstore group. The collective bargaining power of the 15 institutions was highlighted as significant in securing the new vendor. The changing and challenging nature of the textbook and bookstore retail market was noted. The transition from Follett will be managed, and communication will be key.

IV. Student Trustee Report

A. Student Trustee Report

Commuter Affairs: Discussions with Shane Franzen are focused on better supporting commuter students and increasing their engagement. Considerations include adjusting club programming times and hosting events in commuter parking lots to gather feedback on their needs.

Falcon Bazaar (University Food Pantry):

- The Falcon Bazaar has been separated from the clothing closet and now has its own room in the Hammond Building.
- No personal information is collected from students; only their One Card is swiped for tracking purposes.
- Usage has significantly increased, with 834 One Card swipes through March this year, compared to 428 for the entire last academic year.
- Funding for the Falcon Bazaar comes from a state grant and support from OSD. A care referral process exists for students with frequent visits.

Clothing Closet: The clothing closet continues to successfully aid students with professional clothing needs. A career fair event in March saw 250 pieces of clothing given away, highlighting the importance of this service. Donations from faculty, staff, and students sustain the closet.

Alumni Office: Met with Karina Calvo (Alumni) to discuss the Spring Awards Ceremony. 274 students will receive awards totaling over $250,000. The Alumni Office is partnering with SGA to encourage scholarship recipients to write thank you letters.

Student Government Association (SGA): Elections for the new executive board have concluded. Congratulations to Michael Burns (President), Christian Dedier (Vice President), Elliot Olynciw-olkuski (Treasurer), Adriana Padilla Salgado (Secretary), and Matthew Gill (Student Trustee). This was the first contested SGA election in several years.

Undergraduate Research Conference: Met with Dr. Zachary Miner, who highlighted the growth of the conference, including the new "lightning talks" format, which were well-received.

Student-Professor Engagement: Addressing the disconnect between students and professors is a goal. Encouraging students to voice concerns and fostering more communication is planned. The $5 meal plan for faculty and staff is seen as a positive step in creating informal connections. Further efforts will be made.

Normalizing Support Services: It's crucial to normalize the use of resources like the Career Closet and the Falcon Bazaar, emphasizing that they are available to all Fitchburg State students regardless of need. The goal is to encourage students to confidently access these services for professional and personal well-being.

- **Sustainability of Resources:** The Career Closet and Falcon Bazaar rely on donations from the campus community.
- **Communication of Resources:** Information about these resources is disseminated through the Office of Student Development and Shane Franzen. Word-of-mouth among students is also a significant factor. Opportunities for increased promotion will be explored.

- **Donations:** Donations to the Career Closet are welcome, including all types of clothing. Spring cleaning is a good time to consider donating.
- **Congratulations:** The Board of Trustees congratulated all students elected to leadership positions for the coming year.

V. Academic Affairs Committee Update

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

Meeting Date: April 10th.

Enrollment Management Overview (Rich Toomey):

- A 2% increase in incoming first-time, full-time freshman deposits.
- A 10% increase in residential deposits compared to the previous year, following adjustments after federal financial aid process issues.
- Successful Future Falcon Days with high attendance, including a 100% show rate for honors events.
- Introduction of a direct admission initiative targeting local high schools to ease the transition to Fitchburg State, including potential residential incentives.

SGOCE Strategic Enrollment Plan (Becky Copper Glenz & Peter August):

- SGOCE serves over 7,400 students annually, with a majority of courses online.
- The plan involves researching best practices, analyzing enrollment data, setting program-specific goals with input from program chairs, and aligning with university-wide strategic and academic plans.
- Key focus areas include growing overall enrollment, increasing international student enrollment (on-campus and online), and maximizing graduate program offerings.
- Graduate and online enrollment now surpasses traditional undergraduate programs, making it vital for the university's financial health.
- Recruitment and marketing strategies are tailored to specific programs (e.g., online BBA, Master's in Criminal Justice, Master's in Computer Science), considering their unique modalities and target audiences.
- Peter August detailed challenging yet achievable enrollment goals for specific programs, set annually with input from recruiters and faculty. Business Administration exceeded goals, while Criminal Justice and Computer Science require further analysis.
- Recruitment and outreach strategies are program-specific, aligning recruiter and marketing efforts (e.g., community events for business, police partnerships for criminal justice, international agent collaborations for computer science).
- Strategies for search engine optimization, communication with inactive students, retention efforts, and financial strategies focused on affordable tuition and student-friendly payment processes were discussed.

- The goal of continuous improvement with measurable outcomes informing short- and long-term goal planning was emphasized.

VI. Personnel Committee Update

A. Update from Lynn Barrieau, Chair of the Personnel Committee

Meeting Date: April 7th.

Presidential Evaluation Process (President Hodge):

- Stacy Luster (General Counsel) explained the board's responsibility regarding financial stability and leadership.
- President Hodge has provided detailed reports and engaged in collaborative goal setting with board leadership.
- Former Commissioner's guidelines suggest presidential evaluations are not typically expected in the first year.
- **Motion of Support for President Hodge:** The committee approved a motion for Chair Fiorentino to send a letter of support for President Hodge to the Commissioner, including support for available compensation adjustments.
- **Future Comprehensive Evaluations:** Discussions on future comprehensive evaluations, potentially including campus and community stakeholders, will continue at the upcoming retreat.
- **Action Item:** Chair Fiorentino to send a letter of support for President Hodge to the Commissioner.

VII. Student Life Committee Update

A. Update from Sheila King-Goodwin, Chair of the Student Life Committee

Meeting Date: April 11th.

Student Life Overview (Tim St. John):

- Over 600 events hosted by 50 clubs.
- Praised student leadership, including the success of the new Grand Royal Square cultural event.
- Future focus on intentional inclusion of graduate, adult, international, and veteran students, with new clubs formed to support these groups.

Housing Update (Matt Lechter):

- 919 students currently living on campus.
- Returning and new student applications ahead of last year.
- On-campus housing projects progressing.

- New agreement with MWCC to allow their students to reside at Fitchburg State, enhancing campus vibrancy.
- **Dining Services RFI:** An RFI for dining services will be explored before a formal RFP to assess the market and current vendor performance.
- **Bookstore Contract:** Ongoing efforts to provide textbook affordability and accessibility under the new contract.
- **Fall Welcome Events (President Hodge):** In addition to the traditional Rock the Block event in September, there will be a formal matriculation ceremony for new students and a community picnic to start the academic year.

Athletics Update (Matt Burke):

- Recounted the men's ice hockey championship.
- Growing interest in club sports and on-campus recreation.
- Club sports will transition under Athletics and Recreation for better support (waivers, equipment, scheduling, athletic trainers for safety).
- New and growing club sports include women's hockey and men's volleyball.
- Funding for club sports is under review.
- **Men's Ice Hockey Team Recognition:** The men's ice hockey team will be sent to the Capitol on May 2nd to be celebrated, thanks to an invitation from Senator Cronin. Meetings with Senator Cronin, Representative Kushmerek, and potentially the Governor are planned.

VIII. Finance Committee Update

A. Update from Lynn Barrieau, Finance Committee

FY26 Budget Planning: Initial planning for Fiscal Year 2026.

- **CFO Search Assistance:** Introduction of Heidi Swift (former budget director assisting with the search) and Bob Labonte (consultant and former VP of Finance).
- **CFO Search:** The search has been launched with significant interest.
- **FY25 Updates:** Showed stability with minor adjustments and a rise in student numbers.
- **Collective Bargaining Agreements:** Agreements reached with APA and DGCE, with salary increases expected in May (retroactive to January). MSCA negotiations are ongoing.
- **FY26 Budget Planning Focus:** Critical review of operational needs and a shift towards realistic budgeting. Initial reviews of departmental requests are underway.
- **Cash Flow:** Identified as an initial concern, but a clearer understanding is emerging due to the efforts of Heidi and Bob.
- **Service Contracts:** Emphasis on reviewing service contracts, particularly for dining and the bookstore.

- **Cash Flow Management:** Discussion focused on understanding cash flow patterns to assist in financial planning and foster transparency.
- **Investment Portfolio:** Highlighted the importance of monitoring the university's investment portfolio, which has recently seen a downturn.
- **Gratitude:** Heidi and Bob were thanked for their work and transparency.
- **Action Item:** No specific action item was noted; more detailed budget review in the May meeting.

IX. Budget Report/Updates

A. Presented by Dr. Hodge/Heidi Swift

- Extended thanks to administrative staff and trustees for their engagement in committee meetings.
- **Cabinet Involvement:** Noted the valuable depth and breadth added to committee meetings by the attendance of cabinet members.
- Introduced Bob Labonte, former CFO at MWCC, assisting with FY25 and FY26 budget planning.
- **FY25 Updates:**
- Fall enrollment exceeded the budgeted target by 57 students.
- Spring enrollment exceeded the target, resulting in a $600,000 positive impact on the budget.
- Second quarter FY25 remained roughly at the same overall level as FY24 actuals.
- Utility expenses are approximately 4% higher (as budgeted).
- Capital expenses are approximately $1 million lower.
- Graduate, Online, and Continuing Education accelerated program expenses are trending slightly higher (in line with enrollment growth).
- Movement on union collective bargaining agreements:
- AFSCME increases effective January 12th ($170,000 FY25 impact).
- APA agreement ratified and awaiting Governor's approval ($160,000 impact).
- Total collective bargaining costs estimated at $390,000 (MSCA negotiations ongoing).
- University cash balance as of February 2025 was approximately $540,000 less than the same time last year (related to reserve drawdowns).
- University cash in the bank and held by the state treasury saw a net increase of approximately $1 million.
- Total investment amounts as of February 2025 were approximately $38.3 million (noting potential recent changes).
- **Finance Team Relocation:** The finance team has been successfully moved back to Sanders Hall following renovations to the lower level. Chief Cloutier and his team, JD Head, and Matt Lechter were thanked for their work on this project.
- **FY26 Budget Planning (Bob Labonte):**
- Goal is to develop a thoroughly vetted and realistic budget.

- Budget presentation to the board will be simplified ("budget at a glance," ideally one page).
- Emphasis on presenting financial information in plain English, understandable to all stakeholders.
- Quarterly reporting will align with the approved budget to track progress.
- **External Factors:**
- The Council of Presidents is actively discussing the potential House budget, which may include student success funding (good news for current initiatives).
- Deferred maintenance remains a significant concern with potentially high costs.
- State funding often comes with associated costs.
- The Governor's budget and legislative process are crucial.
- **Federal Funding:** TRIO is the largest federally funded program. While Fitchburg State has not been directly impacted by recent federal changes, potential cuts to Title IV funding (financial aid) would be dire. Risk factors for federal funding are difficult to build into FY26 planning.
- **Enrollment Goals vs. Budgeting:** While ambitious enrollment goals are essential for the university's mission and future, the current financial landscape necessitates a judicious and pragmatic approach to budgeting in the short term. The goal is to balance aspirational enrollment targets with fiscal responsibility.
- **Grant Funding:** Fitchburg State does not have the same level of research grant funding as some other state public institutions. The board will be updated if any significant changes occur.

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 3:31 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
M. Fiorentino, Jr.