APPROVED

Fitchburg State University

Minutes

Enrollment Management Committee Meeting

Board of Trustees Meeting

Date and Time
Tuesday October 21, 2025 at 12:00 PM

Location
This is a virtual only meeting and it will be livestreamed

https://www.fitchburgstate.edu/live

Committee Members Present
E. Gregoire (remote), J. Flanagan (remote), L. Barrieau (remote), M. Fiorentino, Jr. (remote), S. Rodriguez (remote)

Committee Members Absent
None

Committee Members who left before the meeting adjourned
J. Flanagan

Ex Officio Members Present
D. Hodge (remote)

Guests Present
K. Lundgren (remote), M. Bruun (remote), Nathan Robichaud (remote), Pam McCafferty (remote), Stacey Luster (remote), Stefan Dodd (remote)

I. Opening Items

A.

Record Attendance

B. Call the Meeting to Order

E. Gregoire called a meeting of the Enrollment Management and Student Success Committee of Fitchburg State University to order on Tuesday Oct 21, 2025 at 12:05 PM.

C. Committee Charge by BOT Chair and President

Chair Gregoire opened the first meeting of the year by referencing the committee charge, which had been previously shared. Chair Fiorentino noted that the new structure is designed to increase trustee engagement with the university's leadership and operations. Chair Gregoire emphasized that the formation of the committee highlights the critical importance of enrollment and student success to Fitchburg State's future, as it addresses the entire student lifecycle—recruitment, retention, and graduation—all of which directly impact the university's finances, academic quality, and student experience.
President Hodge added that the committee's formation is a milestone, as it unifies the essential functions of enrollment management and student success under one house, a goal long discussed by the board. This unification, led by Vice President Pam McCafferty, is aimed at making the university more cohesive and strategically efficient with its resources. President Hodge highlighted Pam McCafferty's institutional memory, expertise, and rapid action in leading this restructuring, especially in moving student-facing services back to in-person operations.

II. Enrollment Management and Student Success

A. Enrollment Management

Enrollment Management Update: Historical Trends
Vice President Pam McCafferty provided a data-rich overview of Fitchburg State's enrollment trends over the past five academic years (AY25 backward), comparing the university to its sister state institutions.
Overall Enrollment
While the university's overall unduplicated headcount decreased by 8% over five years, Fitchburg State fared better than its peer institutions, which saw an average decline of 13%. Similarly, the university's decline in generated credits (14%) was also better than the trend seen by peers.
Graduate and Online Strength
Fitchburg State's graduate enrollment has remained level over the five-year period, while sister institutions experienced a significant 16% drop. Notably, Fitchburg State represents nearly 40% of all graduate enrollments in the state university system, a fact McCafferty stressed as a key differentiator due to the university's long history as an early adopter of online education. Although the number of students held steady, graduate generated credits declined by 8%, indicating students are taking fewer classes. Graduate students make up 61% of the total student body across a year.
Undergraduate Decline and Opportunities

The undergraduate headcount saw an 18% decline, which was higher than the 12% average decline experienced by peers. However, the decline in undergraduate generated credits (18%) was slightly better than peer institutions' performance.

- The Undergraduate Day population, which accounts for the vast majority of students, declined by 20% in both headcount and credits.
- The Undergraduate Evening/Online (SGOCE) population fared better, with a 12% drop in headcount but only a 3% decline in credits.

Admissions Data and Yield Focus
The university saw a 53% increase in applications and a 50% increase in acceptances over five years, largely due to the adoption of the Common Application. Despite this, the number of enrolled new students declined by 20%. McCafferty identified the yield rate—the number of accepted students who enroll—as the critical area for focus.

- Fitchburg State's yield rate was 13.6%, compared to the 16% average of its sister institutions.
- This 2.4% differential represents nearly 100 students. Improving yield is seen as a key opportunity to significantly reduce the new student enrollment decline.

The New Transfer Student population is a bright spot, growing its enrollment by 13% over five years, a positive trend likely to continue as the state increases its focus on free community college.

B. Student Success

Fall Enrollment and Student Success Initiatives
McCafferty detailed several recent and ongoing initiatives designed to immediately impact enrollment and create foundational practices for the future:

1. Stop-Out Student Outreach: The team executed a personalized outreach campaign to students who had previously stopped attending. This project, a joint effort with Student Affairs, provided individualized counseling to get students back on track to complete their degrees. The university is also participating in a DHE initiative with ReUp to expand this outreach.
2. Falcon Assist Week: Launched the week before classes, this initiative encouraged students to complete essential business (registration, financial aid, parking) and drove traffic to the Anthony Student Service Center. The goal is to make the service center a recognized central resource for all enrollment-related needs.
3. Welcome Week and Campus Navigation: The team's efforts during Welcome Week, including the creation of campus navigational signs to help students and new faculty easily find classrooms, were highly praised. President Hodge noted this seemingly small intervention had a "huge impact," embodying the strategy of "being present" and anticipating student needs.

4. Falcon Support Ice Cream Social: This event, managed by Student Affairs, was held in Week 3 (suggesting Week 4 for next year) to connect students with support services after they had time to settle into the semester.
5. Undergraduate Day Enrollment: The returning student population performed as expected and was actually up by about 25 students, which is a positive indicator for predictability. However, new undergraduate day student enrollment was down 20% from the previous year, with this reduction seen across the entire admissions funnel (applications, acceptances, and enrolled students).

- Unofficial conversations with peer institutions suggest Fitchburg State had a larger decline than its peers.
- McCafferty viewed this as an opportunity to pivot and rebound in the coming year, emphasizing the need to closely examine and streamline business operations to remove unnecessary steps that complicate the student experience.

President Hodge reinforced that enrollment management and student success cannot be disconnected, stressing that retaining existing students is as critical as recruiting new ones. The focus must be on increasing total enrolled credit hours and ensuring the campus is present, streamlined, and uses incentives (like scholarships) to enroll students upfront, which then acts as a retention strategy.

Enrollment and Student Success by Population

SGOCE (School of Graduate and Continuing Education) Update

- Summer Enrollment: Graduate enrollments and credits were level, and undergraduate online was up by 8%, showing strong performance.
- Fall Outlook: Early indications for the fall show that undergraduate online remains strong, mirroring the summer success. Graduate enrollment may be slightly down, but it is still early to tell, as the second mini session doesn't start until late October.

International Student Recruitment

- Five-Year Trend: International student numbers had fully recovered from the pandemic and reached their strongest levels but are now declining again due to issues with F1 visas.
- Strategy: The team is focused on diversifying international students beyond F1 visa holders and planning for an eventual recovery. Josh Spero was invited to work part-time to help build new partnerships, assess program offerings, and explore hybrid options for both graduate and undergraduate students. President Hodge stressed that this population is crucial for the vibrancy of the campus and is a space the university cannot abandon.

Student Success and Retention

- Retention Rate: The most recent, unofficial retention rate for the Fall 2024 cohort returning this fall is 73.8%, a significant increase from 69.5%. This increase is credited to the work being done across campus and demonstrates a clear financial benefit (a quarter million dollars).
- State University Success Grant: The university submitted the formal application for a $1.3 million grant for its second year of funding. This money will be used to build a high-touch, holistic, case-load approach to retention modeled after the proven TRIO method. This high-touch system allows the university to intervene immediately when faculty identify a student concern.
- Faculty Engagement: The faculty census at the end of the drop/add period, where faculty report on students who have stopped attending, had an 80% participation rate, which is "incredible" and allows the administration to effectively address student issues.

McCafferty closed by outlining the path ahead: leveraging data, partnering with Academic Affairs on Gen Ed and First-Year Experience and new programs (like accelerated three-year programs or co-ops), and continually refining recruitment efforts. The overall goal is to stabilize enrollments, establish a holistic student experience from recruitment to post-graduation, and become the college of choice for the region.

C. Next Steps

Key Forward-Looking Initiatives

McCafferty outlined several strategic initiatives for the coming cycle:

- Direct Admissions: The program has strong momentum, generating great interest at events and in high schools, providing a chance to promote Fitchburg State's affordability.
- Fitchburg High School Admissions Center: Assistant Director Eli Rivera is physically present at Fitchburg High School, building relationships and providing direct help, especially with filling out the FAFSA, which is key to affordability and enrollment.
- New England Tuition Discount: New communications are being developed to better market the existing tuition discount offered to all students in New England states.
- EAB Contract: The university is actively assessing its three-year contract with EAB (which manages the prospect pipeline), holding the vendor accountable, and is considering bringing some of that work in-house to leverage the investment already made in its own CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system.
- Admissions Events: The first open house showed incredible energy. The final open house is scheduled for Saturday.
- Guidance Counselor Breakfast (November 7th): This event is intended to re-engage guidance counselors, who are the number one influencers in the college decision process, with many being Fitchburg State alumni.

- Military Recruitment: The university launched College Recon, an online platform to recruit military personnel, veterans, and their families.
- Transfer Recruitment: TES (Transfer Equivalency System) has been purchased and is being implemented by the Registrar's office to aid in transfer recruitment.
- Athletics: Efforts continue to fill team rosters and potentially add more teams. Coaches were given a "huge shout out" for their vital role in recruiting student-athletes, who are predictable enrollments and contribute significantly to campus vibrancy.

Closing Comments:
Chair Gregoire thanked McCafferty and President Hodge for providing a comprehensive "landscape survey" and setting a baseline for future discussions.
Shane Rodriguez thanked the team for the "very impactful report," noting the importance of the information for supporting the university. He offered his assistance and planned to attend the second open house.
President Hodge added a final thought, emphasizing the strategic importance of holding this enrollment conversation last, after the financial status had been reviewed. She stated that the university is proud of its financial position because it budgeted with an eye toward enrollment realities, ensuring financial stability while the large, long-term work of enrollment is underway. She concluded that the administration is focused on building an ecosystem centered on student success, making decisions today for the future of the campus.

III. Closing Items

A. Adjourn Meeting

J. Flanagan left at 12:08 PM.
There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 1:06 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
E. Gregoire