APPROVED

Fitchburg State University

Minutes

Board of Trustees Joint Meeting (Foundation/Supporting Org)

Board of Trustees

Date and Time
Thursday October 30, 2025 at 1:00 PM

Location
This meeting will be held at Fitchburg State University Main Lounge and will also be livestreamed

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

Trustees Present
C. Stimpson, D. Tiernan, E. Gregoire, J. Flanagan (remote), K. Spinelli, L. Barrieau, M. Fiorentino, Jr., M. Gill, M. Morris, S. Rodriguez

Trustees Absent
S. King-Goodwin

Ex Officio Members Present
D. Hodge

Guests Present
Barbara Mahoney, John Garten (remote), K. Lundgren, Karina Calvo, M. Bruun, Marc Dohan (remote), Mary Beth Jokela, Michael Mahan (remote), Nathan Robichaud, Rick Healey (remote), Stacey Luster, Stefan Dodd, Tony Mercadante (remote)

I. Opening Items

A. Call the Meeting to Order

M. Fiorentino, Jr. called a meeting of the board of trustees of Fitchburg State University to order on Thursday Oct 30, 2025 at 1:01 PM.

B. Record Attendance - Board of Trustees

C. Call the Meeting to Order

The Meeting of the Foundation Board was called to order by Dr. Donna Hodge at 1:03pm

D. Record Attendance - Foundation Board

In attendance for the Foundation Board was:
Dr. Donna Hodge - in person
Dr. Patricia Marshall - In person
Eric Gregoire - In person
Tony Mercadante - Remote
John Garten - Remote
Mary Beth Jokela - In person
Marc Dohan - Remote
Barbara Mahoney - In person

In attendance from the Supporting Org:
Michael Mahan - Remote
Rick Healey - Remote

E. Public Comments

Matt Bruun, Chief of Staff reported there were no public comments.

F. Approve Minutes - 5/19/2025

L. Barrieau made a motion to Approve the minutes of the May 19, 2025 meeting.
E. Gregoire seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

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

Roll Call

D. Tiernan	Aye
M. Gill	Aye

L. Barrieau made a motion to approve the minutes from Board of Trustees on 05-19-25.
E. Gregoire seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

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

G. Approve Minutes - August 12, 2025

K. Spinelli made a motion to approve the minutes from Special Board of Trustees Meeting on 08-12-25.
L. Barrieau seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

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

II. Finance Committee Update

A. Presented by Karen Spinelli

Trustee Karen Spinelli reported the Finance Committee met on October 17th to preview the audit.

- **Jim Johnston, Audit Partner at Bollus Lynch**, presented the audit for FSU, the FSU Foundation, and the FSU Supporting Org.
    - All three entities received **clean, unmodified opinions**.
    - No findings were reported for the audit of the university's federal funding (student financial aid).

B. Audit Report (joined virtually by Foundation Board)

Jim Johnston, Audit Partner at Bollus Lynch, presented the audit for FSU, the FSU Foundation, and the FSU Supporting Org.

- All three entities received **clean, unmodified opinions**.
- No findings were reported for the audit of the university's federal funding (student financial aid).
- **Consolidated University Financials:**
    - Net position decreased by approximately **$2.4 million**.
    - Total assets: $290 million (decrease attributed mostly to **depreciation**).
    - Operating revenues were down about $2 million, attributed to a decline in **enrollment**.
    - Operating expenses increased by about $3.5 million to $128 million (mostly **payroll related**).
    - State appropriations increased by about $3.3 million.
- **Foundation Financials:** Investment portfolio was up about **$2.6 million**. Noted an increase in **scholarships and awards** provided to the university.

C. Audit Context, FY25 Final Budget & Working FY26 Budget

Bob Labonte (Acting CFO) provided financial context and translation, explaining the $2.434 million net deficit:

- The core **Unrestricted Budgeted Funds** for FY25 ended with a **$545,000 surplus**.
- The deficit number is a result of **Fund Accounting**, primarily driven by **$13.6 million in depreciation expense** and large state-mandated accrual adjustments (e.g., pension liability).
- **FY25 Actuals:** The University did not pull from reserves for FY25 operations and ended with a net positive operational result.
- **Revised FY26 Budget:** The budget has been fine-tuned to align with state standards and now projects using **$2 million of reserves**, down from the preliminary estimate of $3.5 million.
- **Q1 FY26 Trend:** The first quarter statement shows the budget is on track, with expenses generally at or below 25%.

D.

VOTE: Approve FY25 Audit (Foundation Board)

On a motion made by Michael Mahan and seconded by Eric Gregoire, it was voted to approve the FY25 audit as presented.
Donna Hodge - Aye
Patricia Marshall - Aye
Eric Gregoire - Aye
Tony Mercadante - Aye
John Garten - Aye
Mary Beth Jokela - Aye
Marc Dohan - Aye
Barbara Mahoney - Aye
Michael Mahan - Aye
Rick Healey - Aye

E. Adjourn Foundation Board Meeting

With no further business to discuss, the Foundation Board meeting was adjourned at 1:34pm.
Donna Hodge - Aye
Patricia Marshall - Aye
Eric Gregoire - Aye
Tony Mercadante - Aye
John Garten - Aye
Mary Beth Jokela - Aye
March Dohan - Aye
Barbara Mahoney - Aye
Michael Mahan - Aye
Rick Healey - Aye

F. VOTE: Approve FY25 Audit (Board of Trustees)

K. Spinelli made a motion to Approve the FY25 Audit.
L. Barrieau seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

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

Roll Call

S. Rodriguez Aye

III. Academic Affairs Committee

A. Academic Affairs Committee Update

Trustee Flanagan reported on the Academic Affairs Subcommittee meeting held on October 15th.

Key information presented by Provost Pat Marshall included:

- Updates on the work of Academic Affairs, covering staffing changes, curricular reforms, and innovative efforts being discussed at the state level.
- Information on the programmatic assessment currently being conducted by EduVentures.

Provost Marshall was then invited to provide an overview of her report to the full body.

B. Provost and Executive Vice President, Dr. Patricia Marshall

Staffing and Personnel Updates

- **New Dean of Business and Technology:** Welcomed **Dr. Mahmoud Al-Odeh** in July. Dr. Al-Odeh previously served as Chair of the School of Technology at Eastern Illinois University and is recognized for his commitment to industry engagement and innovation.
- **Faculty Hires:** Welcomed **10 new full-time faculty** members and **8 visiting assistant professors/instructors** (one-year temporary positions). All are replacement positions due to retirements or resignations.
- **Ongoing Searches:** Currently conducting **five approved searches** for full-time faculty to start in Fall 2026, and reposting **two failed tenure track searches** and one failed one-year temporary position.
- **Resource Management:** All vacant faculty lines return to Academic Affairs for recommendation (eliminate, fill, or reallocate) based on **enrollment numbers** and curricular needs, supporting **cost containment**. Strategies include:
    - Hiring one-year temporary and adjunct faculty.
    - Replacing two faculty departures with **one line**.
    - Restructuring staffing for efficiencies.
- **Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (OSP) Restructure:** Due to the shift of Institutional Research, retirement of the Director of Assessment, and a resignation, OSP was restructured:

    - **Drew Goodwin** was elevated to **Executive Director of Accreditation, Grants, and Sponsored Programs** (and congratulated on recently defending his dissertation).
    - The new structure includes an Associate Director of Grants (currently posted), the Director of Early College, and a newly created **Director of Accreditation and Assessment** (currently posted).
    - The Director of Accreditation and Assessment will also serve as the **Accreditation Liaison Officer**.
- **Dean of the Library Retirement: Jackie Kremer** announced her retirement after seven or eight years of service.
    - The search for her replacement is progressing well, attracting a **robust pool of 33 applicants**.
    - The goal is to have a new Library Dean in place before the start of the **Spring semester**.

Divisional Priorities and Curricular Reform

- The Academic Affairs leadership team held its annual retreat in July to develop and refine divisional priorities, which were shared with chairs and faculty to ensure the division is "rowing in the same direction."
- **Key Curricular Reform Needs:**
    1. **Reduce the size and complexity of the General Education (Gen Ed) program:** It is currently at **51 credits**. Typically, Gen Ed programs are approximately one-third of a student's total credits.
    2. **Reduce the size of majors:** FSU's majors are very large, which prevents students from pursuing **minors or double majors** (e.g., Nursing and Spanish, Business and Spanish) that would better prepare them for the job market.
    3. **Revamp the First Year Experience (FYE) program:** The goal is to transform the five-year-old FYE into an **extended orientation experience** that embeds elements of college success.
- **FYE Discussion:** The Provost met with FYE directors to plan a transformation, noting that the program is a crucial **retention tool** on campus. CSI data indicates that about **20%** of students enter FSU intending to transfer out.
- Faculty (who drive curriculum) have been charged with discussing the future of FYE, including whether it should remain embedded in the Gen Ed program or become an introduction to a major.

Innovative State-Level Initiatives

- Faculty Development Day focused on two Department of Higher Education (DHE) initiatives driven by the national conversation about **Return on Investment (ROI)** and student success:
    1. New DHE **innovation regulations** related to the **three-year degree movement**.

2. The statewide **Co-op initiative**.

- **Discussion on 3-Year Degrees:**
- Massachusetts currently lacks a clear statutory path for institutions to offer three-year baccalaureate degrees.
- The DHE is working on regulations, which are out for public comment, with a **formal vote anticipated soon (likely December)**.
- Both the Provost and President agreed that the three-year degree model is complex, controversial (especially regarding the role of community colleges), but **imminent**.
- FSU is proactively engaged in discussions to ensure the institution is **ahead of the curve** and helps the state create necessary **guard rails** to maintain the **integrity of the bachelor's degree**.

New Interdisciplinary Finance Major

- A new interdisciplinary **Finance major** (between Economics and Business Administration) was approved by campus governance in the spring.
- A feasibility study by **EAB** indicated **strong demand** and many career opportunities for students.
- Academic Affairs is finalizing the **Letter of Intent** for submission to the Board of Higher Education (BHE) staff.
- The Provost expects to share the LOI with President Hodge for consideration before the end of the semester.
- Pending Presidential approval, the program will be brought before the **Board of Trustees for a formal vote in the spring**.
- Target launch date for offering the program is **Fall 2026**.

Programmatic Assessment with Eduventures

- The **combined report** from **Eduventures** assessing **53 bachelor's programs** was received earlier this month.
- **Contextualizing the Report:** The Provost emphasized that the Programmatic Assessment (PSA) is **only one tool** in a multi-pronged approach used to assess and strengthen the academic portfolio. Decision-making for programs and faculty hires must be grounded in:
    - Mission.
    - Periodic program reviews and action plans.
    - Accreditation (e.g., ABET for Computer Science, CCNE for Nursing).
    - Academic Department Trend Data (**number of majors**).
    - Admissions data (from Slate).
    - Market analysis and alignment with regional workforce needs.
    - Enrollment in departments that support the **School of Graduate and Continuing Education (SGOCE)**, as FSU has the **largest graduate program** in the state university segment.

- **Four Quadrants for Programs:**

1. **Maintain:** Above average in both external and internal performance (e.g., Police, Game Design). Needs continued support.
2. **Monitor:** Above average in internal performance but in a challenging regional environment. Needs monitoring of regional trends.
3. **Invest/Focus:** Above average in external health but underperforming in internal success metrics. Needs cross-divisional, collaborative effort to boost **retention efforts**.
4. **Evaluate:** Below average in both external and internal health metrics. Typically programs critical to mission that can benefit from attention to internal metrics (e.g., retention).

Program Assessment Timeline and Strategy

- **Next Steps:** The Provost shared the combined report with Deans this week and charged them with identifying points of **alignment and divergence** between the report and current/recent departmental efforts.
- **Goal:** To have an analysis and list of these items by the **end of the semester** for review in the spring. This will ensure **Eduventures** data is used in conjunction with other key metrics, notably **SGOCE enrollments**.

IV. President's Report

A. Presented by Dr. Donna Hodge, President

President Hodge allowed the **30-page written report** in the packet to stand as presented, using her time to highlight key themes and activities.
Theme and Purpose

- **Theme: "Building Momentum."**
- **Goal:** To stabilize, heal, and transform Fitchburg State University into a growing and stable campus that knows its mission and is not trying to be "all things to all people."
- **Clarity of Purpose:** The President affirmed the commitment to ensuring FSU stands as the **premier state university** and a leader in North Central Massachusetts.

Engagements and Leadership Updates

- **Board Retreat (August 12th):** Held at the **Fitchburg Art Museum**, embedding the Board in the cultural life of the community. A full **bylaws revision** is launching this year, led by Stacy Luster.
- **Cabinet Retreat:** Held at **Mass Maritime Academy**, touring the training ship *Patriot State*. The focus was on **alignment, accountability**, and the **six presidential priorities** (Enrollment, Financial Sustainability, Campus Culture, Partnerships, Housing, Strategic Vision, all wrapped in Academic Mission).
- **New Chief Financial Officer (CFO):** After a national search, **Dr. Travis Chambers** was hired, starting **December 1st**. His expertise is in higher education finance and strengthening sustainability.
- **Advancement Oversight:** Vice President Jeffrey Wolfman retired on October 7th. Chief of Staff **Matt Bruun** is overseeing Advancement in the interim while a full assessment of fundraising operations is conducted.
- **Civic Visibility:** The President joined local leaders for a walking tour of downtown Fitchburg (focusing on investments like the **Theater Block**), keynoted a **Chronicle of Higher Education webinar** (1,000+ participants), and testified at the State House in support of a **Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) designation** for Massachusetts.
- **Leadership Pipeline (Special Assistants):**
  - **Dr. Josh Spero:** Returned part-time as Special Assistant to the President to advance discussions on **international recruitment**.
  - **Dr. Christine Dee:** Stepped into a Special Assistant role, leading the successful **Presidential Ambassadors Program**.
  - **Dr. David Weiss:** Stepped into a Special Assistant role, leading the **Presidential Fellows Program** (supporting faculty and librarians in broader institutional contributions).
- **State Funding:** The University received a special **$100,000 earmark** specifically for **recruitment to its Police Academy**.

State Budget and Policy Update

The President detailed several key provisions in the Senate's fiscal year 2025 closeout supplemental budget that significantly benefit higher education and noted the progress of the BRIGHT Act.

- **Mass Grant Funding: $18.3 million** was included to ensure Fiscal Year 2026 allocations are **level** with the past year, with increases for Mass Grant and Pell recipients. It also includes the restoration of a **$1,200 allowance for books and supplies** for low-income community college students—a move that supports the pathway from community colleges to state universities like FSU.
- **Deficiency Reserve Fund:** A new **$100 million** fund was established to cover unanticipated financial obligations, such as aid shortfalls.
- **Student Support Fund:** A new **Public Higher Education Student Support Fund**, seated with over **$100 million** in sales tax revenue, was created to prevent year-over-year reductions in financial aid or allocations.

- **Student Opportunity Act Investment: $200 million** was transferred to the Student Opportunity Act investment funds, viewed as a legislative response to the Governor's DRIVE Act proposal.
- **BRIGHT Act Bond Bill:** The Joint Committee on Higher Education is advancing the **BRIGHT Act bond bill**, which is anticipated to pass near Thanksgiving.
    - The committee increased the bond authorization to **$3 billion**, a very significant investment that includes sections specifically helpful to campuses like Fitchburg State.
    - The bill is expected to be reported favorably soon, moving next to the Joint Committee on Bonding.
- **Overall Signal:** These moves signal a **strong priority for higher education** in the Commonwealth and provide FSU with a degree of stability amidst demographic and fiscal pressures.

Semester Engagement and Upcoming Events
The semester has been marked by rich community engagement and visibility efforts:

- **Fitchburg Resident Guarantee:** Launched a program guaranteeing **direct, tuition- and fee-free admission** to Fitchburg residents who graduate from one of the five local high schools. This strategy acknowledges that most of these students already qualify for significant federal and state aid (PEL eligibility).
- **Academic and Programmatic Success:** The Early College program welcomed its **largest class** (including the first bilingual course). **Computer Science and Nursing** both completed rigorous accreditation reviews.
- **Campus Events:** Homecoming, the community's Latino festival, the Diwali celebration, and the P20 education forum have increased campus energy and visibility.
- **Athletics and Student Engagement:** Athletics introduced **mandatory study halls** for student-athletes and increased community engagement. The **Presidential Ambassadors** program has ensured student presence at various community events.

Upcoming November Events

- Hockey Home Opener & Ring Ceremony for MASCAC Champion hockey players.
- Bolton PD Visit - Chief Cloutier and President Hodge will spend time with the Bolton Police Department to offer support following the loss of their Chief.
- Field Hockey Playoffs - FSU hosts first-round playoffs
- Library Dean Search
- Zoom interviews begin for the **Library Dean search**.
- First Gen Day - Upward Bound hosts; Dustin Hodge (an Upward Bound graduate) will be a speaker.
- Guidance Counselors Breakfast & Congressional Luncheon
- Enrollment Management/Student Success event; FSU is a premier sponsor at the Congressional Luncheon.

- **Nov 10 (1:00 PM) -** Veterans Day Observance
- **Nov 12 - Nov 22 -** *Stop Kiss* Theater Production - Fall production in McKay Auditorium.
- **Nov 13 -** Lighting of Campus - The annual campus tradition begins.
- AASCU Meeting - President travels to the Presidents and Chancellors meeting to give two presentations.
- New Art Exhibit Opening - Featuring local artist Ricardo Barros on the first floor of the library.
- **Nov 21 - Nov 22 -** Moot Court Tournament - Eastern Regional Tournament and group reunion held on campus.

B. Associate Vice President of Capital Planning and Maintenance

Matt Lechter, AVP of Capital Planning and Maintenance, presented updates on summer projects, deferred maintenance strategy, and housing.
Summer Achievements and Recognition

- **Scope:** The CPM team completed **50–60 projects** over the summer, including roof repairs, steam line upgrades, painting, and gym floor replacements.
- **Civic Center:** Completed much-needed exterior maintenance and improvements, including painting and signage, and hosted the Bruins Fanfest.
- **McKay Theater:** Completed a **small but meaningful project** improving the dressing rooms for the theater program. This was done **completely in-house** by CPM personnel.
- **Presidential Thanks:** President Hodge recognized Matt Lechter and the CPM team for taking on the interim role and successfully managing approximately **50 projects** that were significantly behind schedule, specifically citing the complex, state-funded **Conlon Hall project**, restoring confidence in the operation.

Major Projects and Infrastructure

- **Conlon Hall and Fine Arts:** Phase 1 (window replacement, IT suite, faculty/staff break room) is ongoing, with window delays. **Demolition work is paused until after commencement in May** to minimize academic disruption. The third-floor ADA restroom renovation is expected to finish in late November.
- **Housing Portfolio / Herlihy Hall:** The **reimagining of Herlihy Hall** (completing the second and third floors this summer) added **74 new studio premium units**, which are now **sold out**. Currently, **78 students** reside in Herlihy Hall, proving that local, targeted investments can transform spaces with "strong bones" that were previously "mothballed."
- **MSCBA Projects:** $850,000 in capital projects were completed this summer (e.g., LED lighting in Aubuchon, lounge refresh in Townhouse 5). **$1.2 million** is planned

for Summer 2026, including **boiler replacements** in Townhouses 3 and 7 and Phase II lighting upgrades in Aubuchon student rooms (sustainability focus).

Sustainability and Campus Access

- **EV Chargers:** Four new EV chargers are being installed on Highland Avenue and two at **Conlon Hall**, increasing the campus total from two to eight.
  - **Conlon Hall** will be **closed access** (primarily for FSU community members).
  - **Highland Avenue** will be **open to the community** and critical for campus visitors/Admissions. Any EV is authorized to park and charge in the designated spots.
- **Parking Discussion:** In response to a student question, the AVP confirmed that the team is reviewing the **entire parking portfolio** to address concerns about staff lots that were once student lots (pre-Herlihy closure). He emphasized that the campus still has **enough overall parking**.
- **Mt. Wachusett Partnership:** The successful Herlihy Hall renovation enabled **10 Mount Wachusett student partners** to live on campus this year, furthering the community college pipeline.

BRIGHT Act and Deferred Maintenance Strategy

- **Priorities:** FSU was asked to submit its priority projects for the potential **$3 billion BRIGHT Act** bond bill, identifying **Conlon Hall** and **McKay Auditorium** due to infrastructure issues combined with growing program needs.
- **Edgerly Hall:** An RFI was submitted for a study of **Edgerly Hall** (with a potential **$5 million investment** contingent on the BRIGHT Act) to focus on applied learning, workforce development space upgrades, and deferred maintenance. The study will begin in the spring.
- **Deferred Maintenance Roadmap:** The University is working with NESCO and DCAMM on a **decarbonization study** that is generating a **200-page building-by-building roadmap** to accurately prioritize deferred maintenance needs. This roadmap will guide future investment decisions, ensuring capital is spent on critical infrastructure (like elevators) rather than just transformative cosmetic upgrades.

C. VP of Enrollment Management & Student Success

Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Success, **Pam McCaffrey**, presented a detailed analysis of FSU's five-year enrollment trends compared to state university peers, focusing on opportunities to reverse undergraduate decline.

Five-Year Enrollment Overview (Ending Last Year)

Overall Trends

Total Headcount: FSU's **8% decline** was better than the **13% decline** seen across peer institutions.
Total Credits: FSU saw a **14% decline** (over 125,000 credits), but this decline was **less severe** than the implied worse decline experienced by peers.

Graduate vs. Undergraduate Enrollment

VP McCaffrey specifically praised Dean Becky Copper-Glenn and the SGOCE team for maintaining a strong and stable graduate enrollment, which differentiates FSU.
Graduate Enrollment: Remained **Flat/Stable** at approximately **5,700 students**, contrasting sharply with the **18% reduction** peers experienced. Graduate students represent **61% of total students** and **40% of all graduate enrollment** in the state system.
Undergraduate Enrollment: This is the primary source of decline. **Undergraduate Headcount** saw an **18% reduction**, a larger decline than the **12% reduction** peers experienced.
Undergraduate Credits: Also declined by **18%**, but FSU had a smaller decline in credits than peers, suggesting **undergraduate students are taking more credits** on average.

Day vs. Evening/Online (SGO) Enrollment

Day Students: This population (73% of students/80% of credits) saw a **20% decline** in both headcount and registered credits over five years.
Evening/Online (SGO): This adult and online population saw a less severe decline: **12% decline in headcount** and only a **3% decline in credits**.

Undergraduate Day Admissions Data (5-Year Trend)

Application numbers are up, but yield is down, presenting the main opportunity for improvement.
First-Year Applications: Up 53% (largely due to Common Application adoption); **Enrollments are Down 20%**.
Transfer Applications: Up 26% (strong performance); **Enrollments are Up 13%** (very strong performance).
Yield Rate Focus: The **First-Year Yield Rate of 14.1%** was 2.4 percentage points lower than the peer average of 16%. VP McCaffrey noted that matching the peer yield rate could have reduced the 5-year decline from 20% to only 5%, and stated that **focusing on yield rate is the significant opportunity to reverse the undergraduate decline.**

Current Year Snapshot: Fall 2025 Enrollment

Returning Students: The population behaved as expected, with a slight positive variance, validating projection methods.

New Student Enrollment (Day): Ended **20% down** from the previous year across the entire funnel (freshmen and transfers). Unofficial feedback suggests **FSU's decline is greater than its sister institutions**, suggesting FSU has an opportunity to rebound relative to its peers.
Summer Enrollment (SGOCE): Graduate enrollment remained level (very positive) and **Undergraduate online enrollment went up 8%** (very positive).
International Students: Declining due to post-pandemic visa issuance issues; FSU is working to diversify international markets.

Key Initiatives and Student Success

Retention Rate: Increased significantly to **73.8%**, representing a gain of 23 students and a financial impact of nearly a quarter of a million dollars. The VP stressed that **retention is as important as recruitment**.
Grant Funding: FSU is slated to receive **$1.3 million** in state grant funds, earmarked for a **case management model for student retention**.
Admissions Initiatives: Current efforts focus on yield and local partnerships, including **Direct Admissions** (guaranteed, tuition-free admission for local high school students), placement of an **Assistant Director in Fitchburg High School**, and intensive marketing of the **New England Regional Program** tuition discount.
Technology & Data: Faculty participation in **Attendance Reporting** increased from 64% to **80%**, and **Deficient Midterm Grades reporting** increased from 55% to **64%**. The **SSC Navigate** advising and communication platform will be relaunched in January to connect students to resources and provide embedded analytics.

Strategic Priorities and Commitments

Key goals moving forward include:
Stabilizing enrollments and establishing a holistic approach to the student life cycle.
Reviewing **financial aid, scholarships, and tuition discounting**.
Refining the **Direct Admissions** program and expanding the **New England Regional** tuition discount.
Advancing a framework for a possible **Student Success Center**.
Working to **differentiate FSU** to become the number one school of choice in the region and beyond.

The President thanked the VP, emphasizing that enrollment and student success is an **ecosystem** where every member of the campus community contributes.

V. Student Trustee Report

A.

Presented by M. Gill

Student Trustee, Matthew Gill opened his report by noting it was his last year as Student Trustee, as he is graduating a year early and planning to enroll in a master's program.
Campus Engagement and Visibility

- **Rock the Block & Homecoming:** Thanked Trustees Shane Rodriguez and Lynn Barrieau for attending **Rock the Block**, which led to students asking **"Who are the board of trustees?"** and increased awareness of the Board's role. Homecoming featured a large turnout for events including a pep rally, casino night, semi-formal dance, sporting events, a tailgate, and a carnival.
- **Student Trustee Goals:** One of the main goals for the year is to **increase student awareness** of the Board's activities.

International Education and Engagement
The Student Trustee met with Nelly Wadsworth from International Education to discuss the purpose and services of the office:

- **Workforce Competitiveness:** Discussed how **study abroad experiences** (such as the Trustee's recent trip to Rome for education studies) make students more competitive and how to teach students to leverage these experiences in interviews.
- **Peer Pal Program:** Exploring a program to connect students who cannot study abroad with students currently studying or living internationally to share experiences and teach about **global perspectives**.
- **Recruiting Agents:** Discussed potentially using recruiting agents to **expand FSU's brand** in other countries.
- **Immigration/Visa Issues:** Discussed the need to combat **misinformation and fear** spreading among students both locally and abroad regarding studying in the U.S. and abroad, with plans to host informational events.
- **Faculty Course Design:** Encouraging faculty to design courses that incorporate **study abroad aspects** where currently none exist.

Student Government Association (SGA) Updates

- **Graduate Student Representation:** Met with Peter August, Assistant Dean of Enrollment (SGO), regarding creating **representative roles for graduate students** within the SGA Senate, which is currently undergoing a constitution review.
- **UPD Training:** University Police Department is offering **CRASE training** (Civilian Response to Active Shooter Events) to the SGA to gauge interest in safety programs and eventually highlight them for broader student participation.
- **Full Senate Achieved:** The SGA, which initially had only four senators after the election cycle, now has a **full Senate of 26 senators** thanks to the focused efforts of Michael Burns.

- **New Public Relations Officer:** Created a new Executive Board position for a **Public Relations Officer** (Lily Hallahan elected) to manage social media and **better connect SGA's purpose and activities** with the student body.
- **Streamlined Print Services:** The PR role is essential in a **new streamlined process** for clubs requesting print services, which previously required the Student Trustee to **individually sign every piece of paper**.

Student Success and Resources

- **Office of Student Engagement (OSE):** The office name was recently changed from 'Student Development' to better reflect its purpose. The OSE supported **over 100 events** held by 55 clubs so far this year (a 23% increase).
- **Falcon Bazaar (Food Pantry) and Clothing Closet:**
  - **Falcon Bazaar Visits:** 232 visits in September; 155 visits in October (still active).
  - **Clothing Closet Checkouts:** 20 visits in September; 6 checkouts in October.
  - The Student Trustee took a First Year Experience class to the Clothing Closet for reorganization, completing "a month's work in an hour."
  - **Donation Need Clarification:** The Trustee clarified that while the initial focus was **professional clothing** (for interviews), the clothing closet has a need for **regular clothing** as well.

Food Insecurity Concern and Partnership

- **Bagels with the Board:** Proposed reviving the **"Bagels with the Board"** event, suggested by past Student Trustee Stephanie Infante, to facilitate casual communication between students and Trustees. A **TikTok** collaboration with the Board was also recalled and noted.
- **Fitchburg High School Food Insecurity:** The Student Trustee raised a critical, unscripted issue: **food insecurity rates at Fitchburg High School have significantly increased**. One teacher is currently paying out of pocket for a meal program. The Trustee plans to engage SGA and the Student Educators Association for support (food drives, etc.).
- **President's Response:** The President acknowledged the concern, noting she is in regular contact with Fitchburg Public Schools Superintendent Jon Thompson. She highlighted the ongoing work on a **joint Welcome Center** (Fitchburg Public Schools and FSU, located downtown through a Workers Credit Union partnership). This new center is envisioned as a space to coordinate support, including cycling items from the FSU Career Closet and addressing food insecurity needs using resources like the **Falcon Bazaar**.

VI. Enrollment Management

A. Enrollment Management and Student Success Committee Update

Enrollment Management Committee (Eric Gregoire)

- **Meeting Date:** October 21st.
- **Summary:** The committee reviewed the same **historic enrollment trends and recent strategic initiatives** presented by VP McCaffrey today.
- **Key Initiatives Highlighted:** Direct Admissions, Fitchburg High School Admissions Center (FASFA support), better marketing of the New England tuition discount, positive open house responses, and the upcoming Guidance Counselors Breakfast.
- **Overall Goal:** Stabilize enrollment and establish a holistic student experience, collaborating across all departments.

VII. Operations and Safety

A. Operations and Safety Committee Update

Operations and Safety Committee (Lynn Barrieau)

- **Meeting Date:** October 14th.
- **Bookstore Transition:** The transition is largely successful, with a **near-perfect 98% faculty adoption rate** for fall textbook information, which is well ahead of industry standards.
- **Technology:** Improved **cabling infrastructure** (upgraded wiring system in residential areas) and enhanced **cyber security** (encryption of the student information system). Technology is also working hard to achieve **ADA compliance with digital accessibility**.
- **Police Chief Cloutier:** Unable to attend; the report on **Clery Act compliance** and the **2025 Annual Security Report** will be heard at a later meeting.

VIII. Student Experience

A. Student Experience Committee Update

Student Experience Committee (Lynn Barrieau)

- **Meeting Date:** October 20th.
- **Key Updates:** Discussed divisional restructuring under CSO/Dean of Students Tim St. John.
- **Housing:** Herlihy Hall is near **90% occupancy** (or full); the Mount Wachusett Community College collaboration has **10 students** living on campus. Active discussions with MSCBA are ongoing to optimize housing for all student needs, including graduate and international populations.
- **Care and Case Management:** The reconfigured office is managing a **significant increase in referrals** year-over-year, indicating greater awareness of support systems.

- **Student Clubs:** The 55 clubs have held **over 100 events** (a 23% increase) this year, with OSE promoting collaboration to enhance the student experience.
- **Athletics:** Athletics continues to create **vibrancy and excitement** on campus.

IX. Special Presentation: Women's Ice Hockey

A. Presented by Matt Burke, Pam McCafferty and Tim St. John

The Trustees moved to a special presentation and proposal led by Matt Burke, Pam McCaffrey, and Tim St. John.

- **Matt Burke, Executive Director of Athletics and Recreation:** Presented an opportunity to add **Women's Ice Hockey as FSU's 18th varsity sport**.
- **Pam McCaffrey, VP of EMSS:** Requested support, noting the proposal is an **amazing opportunity** that checks all the boxes by recruiting new populations of students who will live in residence halls, eat on campus, and be active alumni, while also **differentiating FSU** in a competitive market.
- **Tim St. John, Chief Student Affairs Officer and Dean of Students:** Advocated for the proposal as a way to ensure a vibrant student experience built through connection. He stated that winning strengthens campus pride and community. The program will not only advance **equity and opportunity** but also **further energize** campus culture.

The presentation concluded with the introduction of the proposal for the Trustees' consideration.

The Opportunity: Growth, Competition, and Recruitment

Matt Burke framed the opportunity by highlighting the historical context and the current explosive growth of the sport:

- **Historical Context:** Prior to FSU's choice of Women's Volleyball in 2017, Women's Ice Hockey was one of two sports seriously considered for addition.
- **Collegiate Growth:** Women's Ice Hockey has grown **39%** over the last 10 years, with almost **3,000 students** participating nationally at the collegiate level (78 Division III institutions sponsor the sport).
- **MASCAC Competition:** FSU's direct competitors in the MASCAC—Salem, Worcester, Framingham, and MCLA—are **already sponsoring the sport**, providing a conference with plenty of ready rivals.
- **High School Growth:** Massachusetts has seen significant growth, adding **86 girls' hockey teams** in 10 years (now over 200 teams). This is a strong indicator of **immediate recruiting success**, as Women's Ice Hockey players are almost always **direct high school to college athletes** (unlike the Men's program, where athletes often play junior hockey first).
- **Youth Participation:** Girls playing youth hockey is up **21% in Massachusetts** and **15% in New England** over the last 10 years, creating a healthy recruitment funnel.

- **Timing:** Burke stressed that the **time is now** to add the sport to avoid falling behind competitors and missing the time of significant growth.

Strategic and Compliance Advantages
The proposal outlined how the addition benefits the entire institution and region:

- **Facility Advantage:** The University already owns the **Wallace Civic Center**, providing a **ready and willing home ice advantage** when many competitors must rent ice time in neighboring towns.
- **Conference Advantage:** The MASCAC began sponsoring the sport in the 2025 season and is continuing to grow, with NCAA tournament **automatic bid status coming in the 2028 season**. FSU's addition would strengthen the conference's bid.
- **Campus Momentum:** The existing championship-level Men's Ice Hockey team brings **increased notoriety** to Fitchburg State Hockey.
- **Student Initiative:** A **club hockey program** was started last year by young women on campus with the goal of elevating the sport to varsity status.
- **Title IX Compliance:** Adding Women's Ice Hockey would significantly help address **Title IX gender equity compliance**, particularly by relying on **Prongs Two and Three** (showing a history of expanding opportunities for female students and meeting the needs of the underrepresented population).

Enrollment and Financial Impact
Pam McCaffrey (VP of EMSS) and **Tim St. John (CSO/Dean of Students)** detailed the positive impact on enrollment and student life:

- **Enrollment Driver:** FSU's overall full-time undergraduate population declined 20% over five years, but the **student-athlete population increased by 8%** and now represents **16%** of the full-time undergraduate enrollment (up from 11%).
- **High Performance:** Women athletes are retained at a higher rate (almost **82%** retention vs. 70% for non-women athletes) and have a **higher GPA** than non-women athletes. This is a population that persists, performs academically, and becomes engaged alumni.
- **Campus Pride and Engagement:** Men's Ice Hockey has the **highest and most consistent fan engagement**. Adding the women's team will enhance the student experience, increase campus pride, and provide additional marquee destination events.
- **Regional Impact:** The addition demonstrates that FSU is **"growing, being bold, and investing in our campus,"** giving young women in the region a chance to attend FSU and play the sport they love.

Logistics and Budget Projections

- **Launch Timeline:** A recommended **18-month runway** is needed, starting the launch process now to begin the search for a **full-time Head Coach** and start recruiting immediately. The target for full varsity launch would be **Fall 2027**.
- **Budget (FY27):** The proposal recommends phasing in expenses. The total estimated annual operating cost for a full varsity program is approximately **$200,000** (including coaching staff).
    - **FY27 expenses** would primarily cover increased coaching staff salary and additional ice time to elevate the current club program for the year prior to varsity launch.
- **Revenue Neutrality:** The projected revenue generated by 25 new students (at roughly **$10,000 per student**) is **$250,000**, meaning the sport is expected to be **cost-neutral** and potentially **revenue-positive** from the outset.
- **Residence Halls: 70% of freshman women athletes live in residence halls**, providing a significant financial impact and adding much-needed campus life.

Trustee Discussion and Capital Needs

- **MASCAC Automatic Bid Status:** Burke clarified that the MASCAC is strengthening its number of core members with the sport (along with affiliate member Rivier) to support achieving the **NCAA automatic bid status in 2028**.
- **Facilities and Ice Time:**
    - The primary challenge is managing the **one sheet of ice** at the Wallace Civic Center with multiple users.
    - The need for a **full-time coach** is critical to provide the flexibility required to work in practice time.
    - **Locker Room Space is the Biggest Need:** The current Civic Center footprint presents challenges. This is the **number one check mark on the Title IX list** for equity. The University will pursue temporary facilities initially while developing longer-term plans, acknowledging that **capital investment is needed** in the Civic Center.

President's Comment: The President noted that bringing the proposal to a vote allows the University to move forward with planning and **leverage fundraising opportunities** around the popular sport. She emphasized that intentional investment is needed in the Civic Center, which has seen too much deferred maintenance, and reaffirmed the need for a **full-time coach** to ensure the new sport is started correctly and safely.

B. Discussion

C. VOTE: Women's Ice Hockey

L. Barrieau made a motion to Vote to add women's ice hockey as the 18th varsity sport at Fitchburg State University.
C. Stimpson seconded the motion.

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

Roll Call

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

X. Closing Items

A. Chair Fiorentino and President Hodge

B. Adjourn Meeting

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 4:46 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
M. Fiorentino, Jr.