APPROVED

Fitchburg State University

Minutes

Student Experience Committee

Board of Trustees Student Experience

Date and Time
Friday January 9, 2026 at 9:00 AM

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

https://www.fitchburgstate.edu/live

Committee Members Present
D. Tiernan (remote), M. Fiorentino, Jr. (remote), S. Rodriguez (remote)

Committee Members Absent
L. Barrieau, M. Gill

Ex Officio Members Present
D. Hodge (remote)

Guests Present
David Niemi (remote), Donna (remote), K. Lundgren (remote), M. Bruun (remote), Matt Burke (remote), Stacey Luster (remote), Tim St. John (remote)

I. Opening Items

A. **Record Attendance**

B. **Call the Meeting to Order**

S. Rodriguez called a meeting of the Student Experience Committee of Fitchburg State University to order on Friday Jan 9, 2026 at 9:03 AM.

C. Approve Minutes

M. Fiorentino, Jr. made a motion to approve the minutes from Student Experience Committee on 10-20-25.
D. Tiernan seconded the motion.
The committee **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call	
D. Tiernan	Aye
S. Rodriguez	Aye
L. Barrieau	Absent
M. Fiorentino, Jr.	Aye
M. Gill	Absent

II. Student Experience

A. Student Affairs Report

A report was presented on the significant changes made to the academic standing policy and process, emphasizing the positive impact on enrollment, student success, and student support. The changes are the result of cross-divisional collaboration and a commitment to serving student needs.

Discussion of Former Policy Challenges

The previous academic standing process had several key problems:

- A high number of academic separations, with over 100 students separated in January 2024.
- The policy was overly complicated, making it difficult for students, faculty, and staff to navigate, which hindered advising.
- It disproportionately impacted first-year students and offered little grace for a bad first semester.
- The system did not allow students who showed significant progress (e.g., a strong second semester) but hadn't yet reached the 2.0 cumulative GPA threshold.
- The process only ran after the fall and spring semesters, preventing students from using winter or summer courses to immediately regain good academic standing, which severely impacted NCAA eligibility for student-athletes.
- The dismissal period for students who returned from suspension and failed their Dean’s Probation contract was a long five years.

New Policy and Interventions

The new policy and interventions were implemented to address these challenges:

- Simplified Policy: The new policy is easier to understand and navigate.
- Mid-Term Review for Winter/Summer Courses: Students who take winter or summer courses can now request a review of their academic standing with the registrar's office, allowing them to regain academic eligibility for the NCAA sooner if they reach good standing.
- Deferred Suspension: A new status was added for second-semester probationary students who are enrolled full-time and making notable GPA improvements, granting them an additional semester to achieve a 2.0.
- Reduced Dismissal Period: The dismissal period for students who return from suspension and do not regain good academic standing has been reduced from five years to two years.
- Increased Support and Outreach: Investments in Care and Case Management, counseling, and student success have led to earlier and more effective intervention, demonstrated by a 34% increase in care referrals this fall, with more referrals occurring on the front end of the semester.
- Personalized Student Communication: The appeals committee now personally calls students whose appeals are denied to explain the reasons and coach them on a pathway back, such as which community college courses to take to regain financial aid eligibility. Outreach was also started to former "stop out" students who left years ago to encourage readmission.

Immediate Results (Data from January 2026)

The early results suggest a significant positive impact:

- Academic Suspension/Dismissal Notices: Only 28 notices were sent this January, a remarkably low number compared to 103 last year. The number of students ultimately separated is expected to be even lower after appeals.
- Academic Separation Rate: The rate has dropped from an average of 4% of the undergraduate day population in the last two falls to 1.2% this fall.
- Students Not in Good Academic Standing: The overall number of students not in good standing dropped from 254 in Fall 2024 to 165 this fall (9.8% down to 6.8% of the population).
- Residential Attrition Financial Impact: The difference in residential attrition due to academic standing between January 2024 and today translates to a positive financial impact.

Student Eligibility Requirements

Key academic eligibility standards were reviewed:

- Athletics (NCAA): Minimum of 12 credits per semester is required to be academically eligible to play a sport.
- Dean's Probation Contract: Requires a term GPA of 2.0 and no failed singular courses.
- Student Organizations: A 2.0 GPA is required for general participation, and a 2.5 GPA is required to hold a leadership position (e.g., executive board member).

B. Athletics Report

Matthew Burke provided updates on the strategic shift toward student-athlete academic support:

- Organizational Shift: Approximately one year ago, the university identified a lack of centralized leadership for student-athlete academics monitoring. Laura Pierce (former Women’s Basketball Coach) was transitioned into a dedicated Academic Coach role for athletes.
- Study Hall Program: A mandatory study hall for all first-year student-athletes was launched in the Fall. While deemed a success, adjustments regarding location, timing, and staffing are being implemented for the Spring semester.
- Engagement Metrics: Coach Pierce conducted 123 individual meetings with student-athletes flagged via care reports or academic alerts.
- Retention Results: The intervention has shown significant early results. The number of student-athletes entering the Spring semester academically ineligible was reduced by over 50% (from 43 students last year to 21 this year).
- Philosophy: The committee emphasized that 16% of the student population are athletes. The goal is not just maintaining eligibility but pushing high-achieving (3.0+) students toward even greater success and shoring up retention through consistent personnel rather than relying on part-time coaches.

Women’s Ice Hockey Launch

- Recruitment & Interest: Despite not yet having a head coach, the announcement has already generated significant interest. Eleven applicants for Fall 2026 have expressed interest. One transfer student from another institution has already enrolled for the Spring to join the club program in anticipation of the varsity launch.
- Personnel Search: The search for the Head Women’s Ice Hockey Coach was officially posted yesterday. Hiring is expected to conclude within the next 45–60 days to build the program for a Fall 2027 start.

Community Outreach & Facilities

- Youth Engagement: The department hosted students from the Sizer School and St. Bernard’s for tours and basketball games to increase local visibility and promote the "Fitchburg Promise."
- Facility Partnerships: * Hosted a high school girls' basketball doubleheader (Ayer Shirley vs. North Middlesex).
    - Partnered with Fitchburg High School to allow the university track program to use their fieldhouse for indoor throwing training during January and February.
- Fundraising: The annual fundraising game for local student Jake Thibeault is scheduled for January 31st at the Wallace Civic Center. It will feature a quadruple-header, including three high school games and the Falcon Ice Hockey game at 5:00 PM.

Student Welfare & Operations

- Winter Session Dining: In collaboration with Chartwells, the dining hall was opened during the January winter session to feed athletes (hockey, track, basketball) and non-athlete residents.
- Food Insecurity: For the first time, state grant funds were used to provide meal swipes for housing- and food-insecure students remaining on campus during the break.
- National Representation: Matthew Burke and staff will attend the NCAA Convention in Washington D.C. next week to represent the university on a national level.

III. 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 10:07 AM.

Respectfully Submitted,
S. Rodriguez