



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

September 8, 2023

Minutes

Via Zoom

In accordance with Massachusetts Executive Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, § 20 dated March 12, 2020.

A live stream of the meeting for public viewing also took place on YouTube.

MEMBERS PARTICIPATING REMOTELY: Chair Ali Salehi, Vice Chair Melissa Alvarado, Secretary Dr. Gloria Williams, and Trustees Paul Boudreau, Daniel Currier, George Gilmer, Theresa Jasmin, Madeline Landrauⁱ, Dr. Robert Martin, Chris Montemayor, and William Reichelt

Also participating remotely was Westfield State University President Dr. Linda Thompson.

The meeting was called to order at 2:50 PM by Chair Salehi. It was announced that the meeting was being livestreamed and recorded and a roll call was taken of the Trustees participating as listed above.

MOTION made by Trustee Jasmin, seconded by Trustee Montemayor, to approve the minutes of the June 13, 2023, meeting.

Trustee Gilmer abstained from voting and there being no discussion, ROLL CALL VOTE passed motion unanimously with Trustees voting in the affirmative: Alvarado, Boudreau, Currier, Jasmin, Martin, Montemayor, Reichelt, Williams, and Salehi.

MOTION made by Trustee Jasmin, seconded by Trustee Williams, to approve the minutes of the July 21, 2023, meeting.

There being no discussion, ROLL CALL VOTE passed motion unanimously with Trustees voting in the affirmative: Alvarado, Boudreau, Currier, Gilmer, Jasmin, Martin, Montemayor, Reichelt, Williams, and Salehi.

Presidential Evaluation for 2022-2023 Academic Year. The executive committee discussed and approved the presidential evaluation for 2022-2023 to be brought to the full Board. The evaluation includes President Thompson's self-evaluation and a compilation of anonymous trustee comments responding to seven prompts to assess the president's performance over the last year. Trustees Martin and Salehi spoke with campus constituents last fall and those findings were also incorporated into the evaluation.

The Board applauds President Thompson for her awareness and ability to articulate the current challenges in higher ed with vision. She has demonstrated a stellar performance on building bridges with external partnerships to help enrollment and programmatic development. Recognizing that the University will not be able to cut its way to fiscal health, she is willing to invest in innovation and new programs. Going forward, the challenge for both the president and the University will be to take the vision and general strategy and develop

actionable plans that identify specific programs and actions by whom and in how much time. It is the Board's responsibility to hold the president and staff accountable for those changes. Another challenge will be to mobilize a critical mass of the University to move it forward, which will require frequent communication with campus constituents. Opportunities for progress are more in-depth communication, accountability, and nurturing with executives.

President Thompson shared that upcoming strategic planning visioning sessions will include the campus community and key stakeholders to help create the next Strategic Plan. Innovation, diversity, and engagement are advancing the University with students at the center of everything that is done. That work is continuing this year by integrating innovation into the redesigned Parenzo building. She will work to expand communications.

MOTION made by Trustee Alvarado, seconded by Trustee Currier, to approve the presidential evaluation for the 2022-2023 academic year as presented by the Executive Committee on today's date, September 8, 2023, and the submission of said evaluation to the Commissioner of the Department of Higher Education.

Discussion: It was questioned how the president's compensation was determined. The local Board has no decision in determining compensation, which is established by the Department of Higher Education.

There being no further discussion, ROLL CALL VOTE passed motion unanimously with Trustees voting in the affirmative: Alvarado, Boudreau, Currier, Gilmer, Jasmin, Landrau, Martin, Montemayor, Reichelt, Williams, and Salehi.

Recommendation for Compensation Adjustment. Chair Salehi brought forward the following motion.

MOTION made by Trustee Currier, and seconded by Trustee Jasmin, as follows: Based on the requirements of the *Massachusetts Board of Higher Education Compensation and Evaluation Guidelines and Procedures for State University and Community College Presidents* and the Board of Trustees' evaluation of President Linda Thompson for the 2022-2023 academic year, the Board recommends that President Thompson receive the maximum compensation increase that can be awarded.

There being no discussion, ROLL CALL VOTE passed motion unanimously with Trustees voting in the affirmative: Alvarado, Boudreau, Currier, Gilmer, Jasmin, Landrau, Martin, Montemayor, Reichelt, Williams, and Salehi.

Chair Salehi shared that when he met with campus constituents last fall, the students knew exactly what was happening on campus, and they were most vocal in support of Dr. Thompson. She is the right person at the right place at the right time and he appreciates her vision and determination to keep going among challenges.

Governor Healey's Emergency Declaration for Migrant Housing. The Board has received news and facility reports and Chair Salehi has spoken with local politicians. This is a humanitarian crisis but currently there are not enough facts available to make a decision.

President Thompson stated that the migration of people leaving countries because of violence or climate change is a global crisis. The governor issued a declaration of emergency and every state institution in the commonwealth has been approached to help deal with this issue, including a potential plan to house migrants on campuses. Westfield State has been around for almost 185 years, and we are very giving, compassionate, and concerned with the wellbeing of people. This is not an issue of not wanting to welcome people. Lammers Hall is currently vacant but there are concerns about the infrastructure. There is no ADA compliance. The

building was designed in the 1970s with small rooms for two students, communal bathrooms and showers, and no bathtubs to bathe infants or toddlers. There is limited space for warming food or to congregate and play. Local elected officials are concerned about students in the k-12 system with language needs and the impact on local communities. There is no urgent care in Westfield and Noble Hospital's emergency room is one of the busiest in the commonwealth. Lammers Hall is in the center of campus with other students and there is no easy way to travel from campus to other places. She has heard from people having difficulty finding housing for homeless and the elderly in our communities because of waiting lists. We have received countless calls from parents and others concerned with safety. There have been comments about wanting refunds because students will be removed from campus as well as the fairness of those paying to live on campus versus free housing. She has no say in the decision, but welcomed the Board's perspective since they have authority on how space is used on campus. Trustees' comments follow.

- People in the community have expressed concerns. Families, toddlers, infants, and pregnant women would be considered for campus housing. There are issues of feeding, bathing, clothing, safety, lack of an elevator, traffic, and the location of the building at the top of a cliff. The roadway cannot be accessed without crossing campus. In West Springfield, children who need translators arrive at schools with no notification. Without more facts, a position cannot be taken.
- Being very sympathetic to the need and the current crisis, trustees have the fiduciary responsibility and duty of loyalty and care to the institution, above all else. All decisions must be guided in what the best interest of the University is. The situation is more complicated than available space and includes food, transportation, and city services. The phone calls have not yet affected enrollment, but parents say they will disenroll their child and request reimbursement if the campus houses migrants. It was questioned whether the University would be reimbursed for services and whether that would help to pay the bond debt service.
- Expressed opposition to this. Even if funding reimbursement was received (which is unlikely because funds are running out), once people are in the hall, it would be difficult to remove them. Placing migrants in a residence hall in the center of campus is not a good idea. The state should be looking at closed colleges in the east.
- This week Senator Velis asked a good question of what the impact would be on our students. The University has enough challenges going forward and doesn't need another challenge such as this. Do not support.
- Expressed opposition to the plan as do many students. The counseling center and mailroom are in Lammers. This would see a Covid-level enrollment decline if it goes through. This is a major issue for Westfield State and there are many concerns.ⁱ
- Renovations were previously planned for Lammers and this is an indefinite housing plan. In Massachusetts you cannot remove someone from housing. This is not a long-term solution. There would not be housing for students if enrollment rises.
- Letters threatening to remove students from the University have been seen. We are a right-to-shelter state and may not have the right to say no to this plan. The safety of students is understood. It was added that it is not believed the governor's office would force Westfield State to take the migrants against its will.
- Does not want the presidential evaluation momentum to be null and void based on what may happen if the governor forces the University to house migrants.
- Salem State is housing migrants, but they are in a building off campus. We do not want to create an adversarial situation and safety issues for both migrants and students. The University is working very hard to change the culture of campus and there would be a definite impact on enrollment. The general sentiment is that the Board is not looking favorably at the plan and is looking into available options. This discussion was added to the agenda so that the entire campus and the Board know what is going on.

There being no further business,

MOTION made by Trustee Currier, seconded by Trustee Reichelt, to adjourn.
ROLL CALL VOTE passed motion unanimously with Trustees voting in the affirmative:
Alvarado, Boudreauⁱⁱ, Currier, Gilmer, Martin, Montemayor, Reichelt, Williams, and Salehi.ⁱⁱⁱ

Meeting adjourned at 3:56 PM.

Attachments presented at this meeting:

- a. Draft Minutes of June 13, 2023
- b. Draft Minutes of July 21, 2023
- c. Draft Presidential Evaluation for 2022-2023 Academic Year
- d. Motion – Presidential Evaluation for 2022-2023 Academic Year
- e. Motion – Recommendation for Compensation Adjustment

Secretary's Certificate

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of the approved minutes of the Westfield State University Board of Trustees meeting held on September 8, 2023.

Dr. Gloria Williams, Secretary

Date

ⁱ Trustee Landrau joined the meeting at 3:04 AM and left the meeting at 3:44 PM.

ⁱⁱ Trustee Boudreau's vote on adjournment was not recorded during roll call due to technical difficulties, but he subsequently confirmed that he wished to record a "yes" vote.

ⁱⁱⁱ Trustee Jasmin left the meeting shortly before the vote to adjourn.