



Meeting Minutes
December 5, 2024
9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
University Center, Western Colorado University

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chair Pribyl at 9:08am.

II. Attendance

Trustees: Chair Pribyl, Vice Chair Buckley, Trustee Blessman, Trustee Gutierrez, Trustee Hamner (via zoom), Faculty Trustee Mason, Trustee Szczurek, Student Trustee Tanner, Trustee Vasquez (via zoom), Trustee Wiens.
Excused: Trustee Todd.

Non-Trustees: Matt Aronson (Faculty Senate Chair), Brad Baca (President), Kelsey Bennett (AVP Academic Affairs), Ashley Carlson (AVP Academic Affairs), Simon Driver (Associate Director, Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning- zoom), Laurel Fisher (Administrative Leadership Council Representative), Paul Giberson (Administrative Leadership Council Chair), Ginny Hayes (Director of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning- zoom), Ian Higgins (VP Finance & Administration), Kelli Kelty (Politicalworks-zoom), Mike LaPlante (VP Advancement), McKenzie Mathewson (Associate Director of Community Wellness), Lauren Peach (First Assistant Attorney General- zoom), Gary Pierson (Dean of Students), Natalie Powell (Senior Assistant AG), Caitlin Rovner (EA to the President- zoom), Alex Sturde (AV Technician), Leslie Taylor (VP Marketing & Enrollment Management), Miles VanHee (Athletic Director), Marita Whalen (Equal Opportunity Officer), James Young (Campus Audio-Visual Manager), Jess Young (Provost).

III. Approval of the Agenda

A motion to approve an amended agenda, removing Action Item B. *2024 Affirmative Action Plan and Progress Report on 2023-2025 Progress for Affirmative Action Strategies* was made by Trustee Szczurek and seconded by Trustee Buckley. The motion carried.

IV. Approval of Minutes for the September 19, 2024 Board of Trustees Meetings

A motion to approve the minutes as presented for the Board of Trustees Meeting of September 19, 2024, was made by Trustee Szczurek and seconded by Trustee Gutierrez. The motion carried

V. Review of Action Items from BOT Meeting of September 19, 2024

President Baca provided updates to the presented action items.

VI. Oral Reports

A. President

President Baca reported on the end of the semester. The Economic Impact Study has been completed, and a communication plan is being developed to share report findings with stakeholders, including state and local officials. He provided updates on positions being filled: the Business Dean search is ongoing, with candidates being brought to campus in January. The Director of the Energy Management Program has been filled, as has a full-time faculty member in this program. The Dean of Equity and Inclusion search has been launched with the support of a search firm.

B. Board Chair

Chair Pribyl did not present a formal report.

C. Student Trustee

Student Trustee Tanner provided updates from the first semester of SGA including the potential establishment of a fraternity on campus and the creation of a campus-wide infrastructure request form that uses SGA reserves in order to fund projects such as the acquisition of a new industrial freezer and fridge for the Mountaineer Marketplace. A group of SGA members met with Alma, the Dean of Equity and Inclusivity search firm, to provide student feedback on the search process. The main takeaway from this meeting was that students would like a Dean who knows not only the job requirements but also the campus and valley culture.

D. Faculty Trustee

Faculty Trustee Mason reported that faculty have been busy meeting prospective students at the “Basecamp” and “Ascend” Western events. The admissions team has been working very closely with faculty, with better emails, better communication, better information, more efficient scheduling, etc. Faculty are feeling pretty good about this semester, there’s been good student engagement in the classroom right for the start and Faculty Trustee Mason has heard feedback that this good start has persisted throughout the semester. Faculty time in these last weeks is spent meeting one-on-one making individualized plans to catch up, making exceptions to due dates, getting make-up exams scheduled, etc. for ten or so students per faculty member.

E. Faculty Senate Chair

Faculty Senate Chair Aronson worked with other faculty senate chairs from nearly all CO universities to create a letter (shared with Trustees via email on December 4, 2024) which was sent to the Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE) and Dr. Angie Paccione. This was meant to convey a message, from a united group of faculty senators, voicing opposition to calling reduced-credit (90-credit) credentials "bachelor's" or baccalaureate degrees. CCHE and the Higher Learning Commission will be deciding on this issue in the future, and this group will continue being a voice in those discussions. He also reported on the important and fulfilling opportunities that faculty members get in their encounters with prospective (admitted/committed) students during the Ascend Western events. This is also true of conversations with current students during "advising season," where the time is taken to know our students’ interests, life goals, concerns, and strengths, in addition to helping them wisely decide on their coursework. He also reported that the new GE/Watershed proposal is

currently in review at Curriculum Committee (one of the Senate's committees), and that he anticipates a formal vote on that in the near future. He will provide more detail during the Board's February meeting.

F. Administrative Leadership Council (ALC) Chair

ALC Chair Giberson passed along his thanks to Trustee Wiens for attending one of the ALC meetings. This fall, professional development was limited, primarily taking place during regular meeting times. Looking ahead to spring, the ALC plans to focus on a lunch-and-learn series with recommendations tailored for ALC members. Key discussions and training this fall addressed FLSA, CORA, and FERPA compliance for professional staff, including their implications and navigation strategies. The Employee Enhancement Experience (E3) successfully hosted a networking hour at 5B's, continues to release a monthly newsletter, and has launched a highly effective new employee mentoring program. They remain committed to enhancing employee well-being, in alignment with the strategic plan. Additionally, the ALC would like to thank President Baca for designating professional development days in December. The Staff Senate Working Group is making progress, and the ALC is actively working on a resolution of support.

G. Attorney General/Legal Report

Senior Assistant AG Powell informed the Board that, due to the upcoming change in the administration at the Department of Education, some regulatory changes can be expected. The AG's Office will be monitoring for those changes and will report back to the Board on any significant changes.

H. Athletic Director

Athletic Director Van Hee reported that Western Colorado University Athletics had an exceptional fall season. The football team achieved an historic 11-2 record, marking the most wins in program history and securing its first NCAA D2 playoff victory since transitioning to NCAA D2 in 1992. Coach Jas Bains was honored as RMAC Coach of the Year. Volleyball reached the RMAC Tournament for the first time since 2021, while Cross Country excelled at the NCAA D2 National Championships, finishing 9th in the Women's division and 12th in the Men's division. Women's Soccer had a strong season, narrowly missing the RMAC Tournament. Western also garnered national attention with its game against Colorado School of Mines featured on ESPN College GameDay, earning over 16,000 Instagram impressions. Additionally, a Hail-Mary play in the CSU Pueblo game was ESPN College Football Final's #3 play of the week.

I. Legislative Report

Kelli Kelty provided an update on the 2024 General Election as well as a 2025 Legislative preview. She also gave an overview of the Governor's 2025-26 budget proposal with a focus on higher education funding and its impact on Western.

VII. Action Items

A. Personnel Action and Information Items

A motion to approve the personnel items as presented was made by Trustee Buckley and seconded by Trustee Wiens. The motion carried.

VIII. Discussion Topics

A. 2023-2028 Strategic Plan Update

The following Strategic Plan updates were provided.

Goal One: Enrich the Western Experience and Improve Well-Being for Students, Faculty, and Staff

Dean Pierson reported that Western's Division of Justice and Inclusion conducted a Diversity and Equity Campus Climate Survey in spring 2024 with support from the Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium (HEDS). The survey assessed perceptions of inclusion, diversity, and equity at Western, alongside experiences with discrimination. A Campus Climate Metric of 3.49 (on a 5.0 scale) was calculated, reflecting overall satisfaction with the campus environment and sense of belonging. In spring 2024, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) gathered insights from first-year and senior students about academic and social experiences, with a 19% response rate. Additionally, the Student Well-being Institutional Support Survey (SWISS) captured residential student perspectives on well-being support, achieving a 21.8% response rate, with analysis ongoing.

Western's co-curricular curriculum emphasizes fostering a supportive and inclusive campus community that promotes belonging, leadership, and well-being. On the employee front, a comprehensive compensation study began in April, involving focus groups and market analysis conducted by Evergreen Solutions LLC. Preliminary results, including salary structure recommendations, are expected soon.

To address housing needs, the University provides short-term staff accommodations at the Lazy K development and is advancing plans for a long-term housing project on campus-owned land. Fading West Construction has been selected for the project, and state approvals for bond issuance are underway. Final project costs and timelines will inform future approvals, with the ultimate goal of Board of Trustees authorization.

Goal Two: Improve Student Affordability and Access

VP LaPlante reported that Western Colorado University has made significant progress in improving student affordability and access under its Strategic Plan Goal 2. Efforts to reduce costs have focused on expanding the use of open educational resources (OER), lowering textbook expenses. The Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) conducted a faculty survey to better track low- and no-cost courses, with plans to make this information searchable for students. Supported by a grant from the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE), an OER infrastructure involving TLC, library staff, and faculty champions has been established, with ongoing efforts to secure additional funding.

To enhance scholarship resources, the WCU Foundation increased private scholarship funding by over \$400,000 (over a 30% increase) in 2023/24, awarding a total of \$1,678,417. New initiatives include the Reisher Scholars program for continuing and transfer Colorado residents and the Geiman Scholars program for first-generation Gunnison Valley residents. The Mountaineer Promise program was also launched, offering free tuition and mandatory fees to Colorado residents with incomes under \$70,000.

Additionally, the implementation of the Blackbaud Award Management (BAM) platform streamlined the scholarship application and awarding process, leading to a significant increase in applications—from 350 in FY23 to 537 in FY25. These initiatives collectively enhance affordability and broaden access to higher education for students at Western.

Goal Three: Enhance the Quality and Value of a Western Degree

Provost Young provided a written update on Goal Three. The faculty continue to work on creating an improved general education program for implementation in 2026, and the newly established teaching and learning center has created seminars and workshops to aid in their course and curriculum improvement efforts. Career Services initiatives include the creation of a Career Champions Network, implementation of a successful fall career fair, and partnerships with CDHE toward having Western designated as a Career-Connected Campus program. The IMPACT metric baseline has been established and initial results reviewed. Results are already aiding in development of a spring 2025 faculty workshop specifically targeted at improving career advising for students with special attention toward categories of students with the largest gaps associated with high impact practices such as participation in student research, internships, and receiving career advice.

Goal Four: Ensure Financial Strength and Support Enrollment Growth

VP Higgins reported that the University's composite financial index score improved significantly from 2.62 in FY23 to 4.44 in FY24, indicating strong financial health. The finance team has enhanced budgetary transparency by rolling out detailed, user-friendly reports in Workday (WD), coupled with training resources for budget managers. A key improvement in FY25 was ensuring operation budgets were fully loaded into WD, addressing prior transparency issues during the transition from Banner. Looking ahead, the team aims to refine processes, improve benefit cost projections for FY26, and enhance the portrayal of vacancy savings to provide better insights into personal services budgets.

VP Taylor detailed how the challenges created by the FAFSA and WD implementation delays narrowed attention to setting timelines and priorities focused on recovering undergraduate enrollment. Goal-setting exercises have involved campus leadership, admissions, financial aid, and academic programs. For fall 2025, the goal is 575 new students and raising retention/persistence by one percentage point (both fall and spring). The key to accomplishing this goal is establishing and socializing baseline practices and expectations in admissions, student financial services, academic affairs, co-curricular and support units, and other campus partners. Starting with admissions, initiatives are underway in focused lead generation; accurate, timely, and appropriate communications; high-quality, unique campus visit experiences; and collaborative, focused, and intentional investments with pre-collegiate and funding partners, digital platforms, and the Western campus community. Additionally, marketing and communications has launched the updated brand campaign to campus. A new Brand Policy and Brand Guidelines were developed, along with Brand Central, in an online resource for the campus community.

Lunch with WCU Drum Line

B. Board of Trustees Job Description and Individual Action Plan Updates

President Baca requested that this item be moved to the February Board Agenda, with agreement from the Board.

A motion to add the Trustee Job Description as presented to the Trustee Policy Manual (TPM) was made by Trustee Szczurek and seconded by Trustee Buckley. A motion to remove the final paragraph (starting with *Board members are also strongly encouraged to*) was made by Trustee Gutierrez and seconded by Chair Pribyl. Discussion followed. A roll-call vote on this second motion was taken as follows:

Yeas: Chair Pribyl, Trustees Buckley, Gutierrez, Hamner, Vasquez, Wiens; Nays: Trustees Blessman, Szczurek.

The motion to remove this paragraph from the job description carried.

The motion to add the amended job description to the TPM carried.

C. Draft 2025-2026 Board of Trustee Meeting Schedule and Administrative Calendar

President Baca requested that individuals provide any feedback on the proposed schedule to the President's Office. The formal calendar will be presented at the February meeting for approval.

D. Housing Update

VP Higgins reported that progress continues on the University's long-term housing project, which involves four key components: land acquisition, issuing a Request for Proposal (RFP), obtaining state approval, and issuing bonds. For land acquisition, Western is working with the foundation to determine the most suitable parcel. The recent extension of College Avenue toward Gunnison Rising will result in the subdivision of one of the foundation's parcels, and it is anticipated that the northern portion, located east of the Aspinall Wilson building, will be used for the project once the subdivision is confirmed. Regarding the RFP, four firms were interviewed following the last board meeting, and on October 9th, Fading West Construction, a modular building company, was selected. Since then, several meetings have been held to discuss initial designs and layouts, and cost estimates and a payment schedule are expected this month. The University's cash fund spending authority request received Capital Development Committee (CDC) approval; however, a total cost estimate is needed to seek inclusion in the state intercept program. Once the estimate is available, the University will return to the CDC and subsequently seek approval from the Joint Budget Committee (JBC). The final step, bond issuance, is planned for as late as possible to reduce capitalized interest. This process requires the cost estimate and payment schedule from Fading West, and a meeting with Western's capital advisors is scheduled for next week. The University is also actively exploring alternative funding opportunities to minimize the debt load.

E. Elevate Western Campaign and Advancement Update

VP LaPlante shared an update from the Elevate Western Campaign stating the campaign has reached \$86M with 19 months left in the "Final Push" to close out campaign. Remaining months will be focused on unmet needs such as the Engineering Colorado's Future pillar and securing start-up funding for the launch of the Biomedical and Aerospace Engineering programs and Foster Academic Excellence pillar by securing scholarship and operational funding for the new Nursing program. Securing the needed funding to launch the Gunnison Valley Promise will also be a high priority. VP LaPlante also mentioned recent visits with several front range Foundations and a trip to cultivate alumni in California and Nevada.

F. Enrollment Report

VP Taylor shared that the fall 2025 undergraduate application activity for Western Colorado University shows an 8% increase in applications and a 5% rise in admitted students compared to the previous year, reflecting renewed engagement with academic programs. Key initiatives include scheduling academic meetings for campus visitors, setting deposit goals by academic program, and strong collaboration with department chairs and leadership. Faculty Senate endorsement and enhanced Slate CRM expertise are driving these efforts. Additionally, new online tools were introduced, such as an improved Net Price Calculator, a Parent Portal, an interactive campus map, and data visualization via Power BI. Collaborations with student affairs resulted in the launch of Slate Student Success and other student-centered platforms, highlighting a holistic approach to improving enrollment and retention.

G. Financial and Capital Construction Report

VP Higgins reported that since the Board approved the budget in May, Western Colorado University's E&G tuition and fee revenues, including COF stipends, are projected to fall approximately \$500,000 below budget due to a decline in fall degree-seeking undergraduate residents. To address this shortfall, the University is prioritizing retention and transfer recruitment to stabilize spring revenues and identifying areas for expenditure reductions. Additionally, the reclassification of Graduate Studies is expected to reduce the E&G budget by \$177,738. Of the \$1.5 million E&G allocation for strategic initiatives, funds have been directed toward community wellness, advising, disability support, scholarships, and technology innovations aimed at enhancing enrollment and retention. In auxiliary funds, a revenue shortfall of \$700,000 is anticipated, offset by a \$500,000 reduction in expenditures, resulting in net revenue of \$33,938. For capital construction, the University has received \$4 million for Crawford Hall renovations and is preparing a \$43.6 million request for the Leslie J. Savage Library Renovation, alongside smaller requests for campus maintenance projects.

H. Legislative Agenda

President Baca, supported by VP Higgins and Ms. Kelty, provided information about the importance of ongoing rural funding from the state budget. VP Higgins outlined requests that would be taken to the JBC by the three rural institutions. Discussion followed.

IX. Written reports

A. Department of Higher Education Budget Request

B. Campus Updates

X. Executive Session

A motion to convene an executive session to receive legal advice under Colorado Revised Statute section 24-6-402(3)(a)(II) and to consider personnel matters under Colorado Revised Statute section 24-6-402(3)(b)(I) on the following topics:

- Western's firearms policies; and
- the President's annual performance evaluation

was made by Trustee Buckley and seconded by Trustee Szczurek. The motion carried.

As part of the motion, the Board invited its legal counsel and President Baca. Non-voting trustees and members of senior cabinet were also invited to join for the portion of the executive session on Western's firearms policies.

The Board returned to public session at 4:04pm.

XI. Action Item

A. Updates to the *Trustee Policy Manual*: Section 3.4 – Policy Prohibiting Violence and Weapons

A motion to approve the additional revisions to Section 3.4, Policy Prohibiting Violence and Weapons, as presented was made by Trustee Gutierrez and seconded by Trustee Buckley. Discussion followed, and it was stated that the Board had obtained clarification on weapon storage. The motion carried.

XII. Set Next Meeting Agenda: February 6, 2025

Trustees were asked to please hold this day on their calendars so they can also attend the Capitol event prior to the meeting.

XIII. Other Business

Trustee Szczurek raised a point of personal privilege and spoke of the potential end to her four-year term on the Board. She expressed how meaningful her time in this role has been. While it was acknowledged that no appointment decisions have been conveyed by the Governor's Office, Chair Pribyl thanked Trustee Szczurek for her service, attention to detail, and sharing of skills with the Board.

No other business was raised.

XIV. Public Comment

There were no public comments.

XV. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned by Chair Pribyl at 4:15pm.