



Meeting Minutes

December 11, 2025
9:30 a.m. – 1:15 p.m.

Aspinall-Wilson Center, Western Colorado University

I. Call to Order

Chair Buckley called the meeting to order at 9:35am.

II. Attendance

Trustees: Chair Buckley, Vice Chair Wiens, Trustee Blessman (zoom), Trustee Carver (zoom), Trustee Gutierrez (zoom), Trustee Pribyl, Trustee Todd (zoom), Trustee Vasquez (zoom), Faculty Trustee Mason, Student Trustee Rosenow.

Excused: Trustee Hamner

Non-Trustees: Matt Aronson (Faculty Senate Chair), Brad Baca (President), Thomas Bishop (Audio-Visual Technician), Ashley Carlson (Associate Provost), Andrew Flebbe (Audio-Visual Manager), Paul Giberson (Director of Student Retention and Completion), Ian Higgins (VP Finance & Administration), Katheryne Hinze (Director of Career Services via zoom), Kelli Kelty (Politicalworks via zoom), Joni Matzinger (EA to the President), Karen McLean (Director of Marketing), Gary Pierson (Dean of Students), Natalie Powell (Senior Assistant AG via zoom), Sally Romero (Director for Unity & Belonging), Leslie Taylor (VP for Marketing & Enrollment), Shelley Thompson (VP of Advancement, Executive Director of WCU Foundation), Chase Watts (Director of Admissions), Marita Whalen (ALC Representative), Jess Young (Provost).

III. Approval of the Agenda

A motion to approve the agenda as presented was made by Trustee Pribyl and seconded by Trustee Wiens. The motion carried.

IV. Approval of Minutes for the Board of Trustees Meeting of October 9, 2025

A motion to approve the minutes of October 9, 2025 was made by Trustee Wiens and seconded by Trustee Pribyl. The motion carried.

V. Review of Action Items from Prior Meetings

President Baca emphasized the importance of securing funding for the Leslie J. Savage Library remodel, noting its decade-long pursuit and its role in student success initiatives. He highlighted upcoming legislative efforts.

VI. Oral Reports

A. President

President Baca announced the adoption of a resolution designating Western as a bird-friendly campus, an initiative led by students and faculty to promote environmental stewardship. He also provided updates on board appointments, upcoming searches for the provost and athletic director positions, and highlighted a successful rural health session that engaged major healthcare leaders and advanced plans for a Center for Rural Mountain Health.

B. Board Chair

Chair Buckley reported on a busy fall marked by strong community engagement during homecoming events, the ribbon-cutting for Western's rural nursing simulation lab, and advocacy efforts at statewide gatherings, including a meeting with the governor's team. Buckley also highlighted progress on the comprehensive presidential evaluation, noting its value in gathering stakeholder feedback and improving communication about board processes. She clarified components of President Baca's new contract.

C. Student Trustee

Student Trustee Rosenow reported that SGA allocated \$10,000 to SafeRide and \$2,500 to Model UN, which attended a conference in Banff and earned an honorable mention. Rosenow also highlighted the approval of several new clubs, including art-focused groups and Turning Point USA, noting strong student participation and discussion during the SGA hearing.

D. Faculty Trustee

Faculty Trustee Mason affirmed concerns about the timing of the comprehensive presidential evaluation and the desire for clearer communication on contract renewals. Mason also highlighted an initiative to advance tenure-track hiring timelines, noting early on-campus interviews for anthropology and history, and shared that faculty are focused on supporting students through finals and preparing spring courses.

E. Faculty Senate Chair

Faculty Senate Chair, Dr. Aronson updated the board on progress with the Western Watershed General Education initiative, noting faculty engagement in interdisciplinary curriculum development and recent learning community discussions. He also highlighted vibrant student-faculty collaborations in music and theater, expressed enthusiasm for the Center for Rural Mountain Health, and supported ideas for future panel discussions to advance the initiative.

F. Administrative Leadership Council Chair

ALC Chair Giberson thanked Trustee Wiens for attending a meeting and reported on key discussions, including efforts to improve communication around the compensation plan through learning sessions with HR and leadership. Giberson also highlighted staff participation in the presidential review, an upcoming Professional Development Day, the launch of weekly wellness walks to foster community, and plans for the Distinguished Mountaineer Awards on April 16, 2026.

VII. Action Items

A. Personnel Action and Information Items

President Baca presented personnel action items for board approval. He also shared that he is working to renew Head Football Coach Jas Bains's contract following another successful season and emphasized the coach's positive impact on team and campus culture.

A motion to approve the personnel action items was made by Trustee Vasquez and seconded by Trustee Pribyl. The motion carried.

B. FY2025-26 Compensation Budget Amendments

VP Higgins presented the FY2025–26 compensation budget amendment, noting a 2.5% salary increase, effective January 1st, for non-classified faculty and staff, updated enrollment projections, and a 9.8% rise in health plan premiums largely absorbed by the university. Higgins emphasized the long-term goal of moving all employees to the midpoint of their salary ranges and reiterated that enrollment growth remains critical to funding future compensation improvements.

A motion to approve the FY2025-26 Compensation Budget Amendments was made by Trustee Carver and seconded by Trustee Pribyl. The motion carried.

C. Updates to the *Handbook for Professional Personnel* related to compensation, part-time faculty workload, and leaves of absence

VP Higgins presented updates to the *Handbook for Professional Personnel*, including revisions to compensation policies to align with Evergreen Solutions recommendations on the newly developed compensation plan, clarification of part-time faculty workload calculations, and best-practice changes to leave policies requiring presidential approval for extended vacation beyond an employee's last workday. He noted these updates reflect current practices and improve policy consistency.

A motion to approve the updates to the *Handbook for Professional Personnel* related to compensation, part-time faculty workload, and leaves of absence was made by Trustee Blessman and seconded by Trustee Wiens. The motion carried.

VIII. Discussion Topics (Continued)

A. Draft 2026-2027 Board of Trustee Meeting Schedule and Administrative Calendar

President Baca presented the draft Board of Trustees meeting schedule for 2026–27. He requested trustee feedback on proposed summer dates and potential locations, noting the importance of aligning meetings with key campus events such as homecoming and graduation.

B. Undergraduate Enrollment Report

VP Taylor reported that Western achieved its third-highest overall enrollment, highlighted a 20% increase in Colorado first-year students, and emphasized efforts to boost new student numbers for next year. Karen McLean outlined marketing strategies focused on authentic storytelling, targeted campaigns, and website enhancements, while Chase Watts detailed admissions initiatives including personalized outreach, improved yield communications, expanded campus visit

programs, and a new direct-admit pilot program—all contributing to early gains in applications and deposits for fall 2026.

C. Legislative Agenda

Kelli Kelty provided an overview of Western’s legislative priorities for the upcoming session, emphasizing advocacy for sustained higher education funding, support for workforce development initiatives, and securing capital construction funding for the Leslie J. Savage Library remodel. Kelty also noted the challenging state budget outlook, leadership changes on the Joint Budget Committee, and reaffirmed her continued role as Western’s lead lobbyist through her new firm.

IX. Written reports

A. Department of Higher Education Budget Request

VP Higgins reported that the governor’s November 1 request included a supplemental to formalize prior higher education cuts and a \$13.5 million increase in state funding, which would provide Western about \$764,485. He noted that while helpful, this amount falls short of covering rising costs, prompting governing boards to pursue a collective ask of \$62 million to meet core minimum needs. Higgins emphasized that tuition increases and cost pressures make additional funding critical for sustaining operations.

B. Campus Updates

Dean Pierson recognized Sally Romero, who will retire on January 5, 2026, after more than 30 years of service at Western. He highlighted her leadership as Director of the Multicultural Center and Westerners in Transition program, as well as her extensive contributions to diversity initiatives and community engagement. Pierson noted that Katie Crawford will serve as interim director and expressed confidence in continued student support while honoring Sally’s lasting impact.

XII. Set Next Meeting Agenda: February 5, 2026

XIII. Other Business

The board expressed appreciation for outgoing trustees Rich Todd and Cecil Gutierrez, recognizing their 8 and 4 years of dedicated service to Western, respectively. Plans were made to honor them formally at the February 5 meeting. Both were commended for their leadership, commitment to Western, and contributions to the broader community.

XIV. Public Comment

No public comments were made.

XV. Adjournment

Chair Buckley adjourned the meeting at 1:02pm.