



# WESTERN

COLORADO UNIVERSITY

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

**Meeting Minutes**  
**February 5, 2026**  
**10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.**  
**The Sonesta Downtown, Denver**

## **I. Call to Order**

Chair Buckley called the meeting to order at 10:01 am.

## **II. Attendance: Oath of Trusteeship—Trustee Henry, Trustee Nordini**

Trustees: Chair Buckley, Vice Chair Wiens, Trustee Blessman, Trustee Carver, Trustee Hamner (zoom), Trustee Henry, Trustee Nordini, Trustee Pribyl, Faculty Trustee Mason, Student Trustee Rosenow.

Non-Trustees: Matt Aronson (Faculty Senate Chair), Brad Baca (President), Townes Bakke (Student), Kelsey Bennett (Associate Provost), Ashley Carlson (Associate Provost), Andrew Flebbe (Audio-Visual Manager), Paul Giberson (Director of Student Retention and Completion via zoom), John Hausdoerffer (Professor of Environmental Studies and Philosophy via zoom), Jess Hickey (Student), Ian Higgins (VP Finance & Administration), Jim Hinkle (Hinkle & Company), Kelli Kelty (Kelty Public Affairs LLC), Brian Kerrigan (Student), Race Lessar (Student), Cole Magrid (Student), Joni Matzinger (EA to the President), Hayley Maxfield (Student), William Niemi (Professor of Politics and Government), Gary Pierson (Dean of Students), Natalie Powell (Senior Assistant AG), Caitlin Rovner (Business Operations and Event Manager via zoom), Micah Russell (Associate Professor of Environment and Sustainability via zoom), Xan Serocki (Paralegal-AG's Office), Andrew Shopneck (Student), Jestyn Smith (Student), Leslie Taylor (VP for Marketing & Enrollment), Shelley Thompson (VP of Advancement, Executive Director of WCU Foundation), Chase Watts (Director of Admissions), Elly Weber (Student), Marita Whalen (Equal Opportunity Officer via zoom), Tiffanie Wick (Director of Library Services via zoom), Lance Wright (Interim Director of Residence Life via zoom), Jess Young (Provost via zoom).

Xan Serocki administered the oath of public office to newly appointed trustees Danielle Henry and Kelly Nordini.

## **III. Approval of the Agenda**

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

## **IV. Approval of Minutes for the December 11, 2025 Board of Trustees Meeting and the January 7, 2026 Special Meeting**

A motion to approve the minutes of the December 11, 2025 Board of Trustees Meeting and the January 7, 2026 Special Meeting was made by Vice Chair Wiens and seconded by Trustee Pribyl. The motion carried.

## **V. Review of Action Items from BOT Meeting of December 11, 2025**

President Baca reported that the board had completed its December action items and that a few items from October were still in progress while he prepared a campus communication on immigration enforcement policies. He noted that the university was working to better understand off-campus resources supporting vulnerable populations and expected to have the remaining items completed by the March meeting.

## **VI. Oral Reports**

### **A. President**

President Baca recognized the students who attended the prior evening's event and welcomed the additional students arriving later in the day. He reported that both the provost and athletic director searches were progressing well, with strong candidate pools and plans to bring finalists to campus in late March or early April. He also highlighted the recent \$2 million federal appropriation supporting the new rural nursing program, noted successful retention of Coach Jas Bains, and informed trustees about signing cards for departing board members.

### **B. Board Chair**

Chair Buckley ceded her report time and welcomed Trustee Nordini and Trustee Henry as they described their personal connections to Western, their professional experience, and the deep impact the university and community had on their families. She concluded by expressing appreciation for their enthusiasm and noting how excited the board was to have them join as colleagues.

### **C. Student Trustee**

Student Trustee Rosenow reported that the student government was preparing for leadership turnover next year. She noted the restructuring of Spring Fest into a two-day festival, shared students' enthusiasm for the new School of the Arts, and highlighted SGA's recent letter supporting geothermal and sustainable energy efforts on campus. She also celebrated that two students in attendance were Geiman Fellows and would travel to Spain for academic study. She announced her own acceptance into Cornell University's graduate program in Environment and Sustainability Policy.

### **D. Faculty Trustee**

Faculty Trustee Mason reported that faculty were midway through a fast-moving semester, balancing teaching with progress reports, upcoming course scheduling, and implementation of the new Western Watershed General Education program. He highlighted faculty participation in upcoming recruitment events, such as the Ascend Western and Basecamp Western preview days. He also noted that faculty were completing their annual reviews and self-evaluations, emphasizing continual improvement in teaching and support for students.

### **E. Faculty Senate Chair**

Faculty Senate Chair Dr. Aronson reported on ongoing faculty engagement with artificial intelligence, highlighting a campus AI working group, preliminary survey findings, and collaboration with Academic Affairs and the Teaching and Learning Center. He noted that faculty governance bodies were beginning structured discussions that could lead to future academic policies, while emphasizing both the opportunities and challenges AI presents in higher education, particularly given limited institutional resources. He also pointed to upcoming celebrations of scholarship and new

curriculum proposals, including a proposed Master of Arts in Applied Ethics, as examples of Western's continued commitment to intellectual inquiry and student learning.

#### **F. Administrative Leadership Council Chair**

ALC Chair Giberson shared updates from the Administrative Leadership Council, noting a strong focus on relationship-building among mid-level leaders to break down silos and strengthen cross-campus collaboration. He reported ongoing conversations around student enrollment and retention, emphasizing that all staff play a role and that AI was being explored as a supportive tool without replacing the human connections central to Western's mission. He also highlighted employee engagement efforts through the E3 Committee, the upcoming Distinguished Mountaineer Awards tied to Western's 125th anniversary, and plans for campus-wide professional development and staff preparation around new academic programs.

#### **G. Attorney General/Legal Report**

AAG Natalie Powell provided updates on several multi-state lawsuits involving higher education that Colorado had joined. She explained that litigation was ongoing regarding the attempted dismantling of the U.S. Department of Education, that a lawsuit against the NIH had resulted in a settlement restoring regular grant review processes, and that a new lawsuit challenged a proposed \$100,000 H-1B visa fee. She noted that these cases were still developing and that the state was working with other attorneys general to monitor potential impacts on higher education institutions.

#### **H. Legislative Report**

Kelli Kelty provided a legislative update, noting that the session was underway amid a significant projected budget deficit and that higher education continued to face funding pressure. She explained that institutions were advocating collectively for core funding while closely monitoring a proposed higher-education and workforce realignment bill, emphasizing the need for a strong rural voice and clarity around governance and resources. She added that the election-year environment and anticipated policy shifts made this a particularly uncertain and consequential session for higher education.

### **VII. Action Items**

#### **A. Personnel Action and Information Items**

President Baca presented personnel action items for board approval. He noted that the February report included faculty sabbatical requests and turned the presentation over to the provost to explain their purpose and review the recommended proposals.

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

#### **B. 2026-2027 Board of Trustees Meeting Schedule and Administrative Calendar**

President Baca presented the proposed 2026–2027 Board of Trustees meeting schedule and administrative calendar as a follow-up to the December discussion. He explained the rationale for meeting locations and timing.

A motion to approve the 2026-2027 Board of Trustees Meeting Schedule and Administrative Calendar was made by Trustee Pribyl and seconded by Vice Chair Wiens. The motion carried.

### **C. Proposed Curriculum Changes for 2026-27**

Provost Young presented major curricular proposals, explaining that they reflected an extensive faculty-led review process and included undergraduate changes aligned with the new School of the Arts, stackable credentials, accelerated 3+2 pathways, and final refinements to the Western Watershed General Education program ahead of its fall launch. She also outlined significant graduate program updates, including a proposed Master of Arts in Applied Ethics and revisions to the Master of Environmental Management to improve affordability, flexibility, and workforce alignment.

Dean Micah Russell explained that changes to the Master of Environmental Management responded to market demand for shorter, more accessible programs, reducing total credits while embedding stackable certificates and preserving the program's experiential, applied-learning core.

Dr. John Hausdoerffer described the Master of Arts in Applied Ethics as a fully online, 15-month program centered on ethical leadership, community-based projects, and values-driven professional practice, supported by significant donor funding and a multi-campus fellowship pipeline. Together, they emphasized that these curricular updates positioned Western to better serve students, working professionals, and regional and global needs.

A motion to approve the Proposed Curriculum Changes for 2026-27 was made by Trustee Carver and seconded by Trustee Blessman. The motion carried.

### **D. FY2026-27 Tuition, Fees, Room and Board Rates; Budget Overview and Initial Budget Scenarios**

VP Higgins presented proposed FY27 tuition, fee, room, and board rates, noting that the recommendations were based on anticipated state funding levels, inflationary cost increases, and a desire to remain affordable and competitive. He outlined modest undergraduate tuition increases for resident and non-resident students, increases in the differential tuition for computer science and engineering programs, and introduced a new differential tuition model for the nursing program designed to equitably support both traditional and accelerated pathways while covering program-specific costs. He also reviewed projected budget scenarios, emphasizing that enrollment growth and retention remained the primary drivers of future revenue needed to support compensation increases and institutional priorities.

A motion to approve the FY2026-27 Tuition, Fees, Room and Board Rates was made by Trustee Pribyl and seconded by Trustee Blessman. The motion carried.

### **E. Updates to *Trustee Policy Manual*, Section 3.10: Background Checks**

AAG Natalie Powell explained that updates to the background check policy were required due to FAFSA changes that give institutions direct access to federal tax information, triggering additional state-mandated security requirements. She noted the revisions also modernized the policy to reflect current practices and best standards.

A motion to approve the Updates to *Trustee Policy Manual*, Section 3.10: Background Checks was made by Vice Chair Wiens and seconded by Trustee Carver. The motion carried.

*President Baca introduced Professor Bill Niemi and students from his Politics and Government course.*

*Lunch*

## **VIII. Discussion Topics**

### **A. Elevate Western Campaign and Advancement Update**

VP Thompson reported that the Elevate Western Campaign had exceeded its original goal, raising approximately \$104 million and significantly growing scholarships and the university's endowment. She shared that her first months focused on listening, relationship-building, and assessing goals, while positioning Advancement to sustain momentum beyond the campaign through clear priorities, stewardship, and fundraising accountability. She highlighted upcoming efforts including a June campaign celebration and the Mountaineer Gives Day, emphasizing its role in building a broad culture of philanthropy and supporting key institutional priorities.

### **B. FY2024-25 Financial and Compliance Audit**

Jim Hinkle, from Hinkle and Company and Western's contract auditor, reported that the university received clean audit results for its FY2024-25 financial statements, internal controls, and the NCAA Division II agreed-upon procedures review. He noted that no material weaknesses, significant deficiencies, audit adjustments, or compliance findings were identified, including additional testing of federal financial aid conducted this year. He emphasized that all audits were completed on time, approved by the Legislative Audit Committee, and reflected strong financial controls and compliance across the institution.

### **C. Financial and Capital Construction Report**

VP Higgins reported that FY2025-26 revenues and expenditures were trending favorably across education and general, graduate, auxiliary, and restricted funds, with small surpluses projected and improved performance in graduate and auxiliary operations. He noted positive budget variances driven by higher-than-anticipated revenues, disciplined cost controls, and increased scholarship spending, while restricted funds remained balanced as expected. He also provided a capital construction update, highlighting the \$1.4 million primary electrical infrastructure upgrade and outlining upcoming state requests, including a major renovation of the Leslie J. Savage Library and additional controlled maintenance projects.

### **D. Enrollment Report**

VP Taylor and Director of Admissions Chase Watts reported that Western was in its third consecutive year of growth in applications, admits, and deposits, driven by earlier and more personalized student engagement strategies. They explained how the admissions team identified and addressed instances of fraudulent "ghost students," strengthening safeguards while maintaining strong enrollment momentum. Chase Watts highlighted positive trends in first-year and out-of-state recruitment, expanded use of direct-admit and faculty-led yield campaigns, and increased deposits ahead of schedule, positioning Western well for the upcoming fall class.

## **IX. Public Comment**

No public comments were made.

## **XI. Set Next Meeting Agenda: March 26, 2026**

## **XII. Other Business**

Trustee Hamner raised the question of whether a natural disaster preparedness plan is in place for the Western campus, and President Baca agreed to follow up.

### **XIII. Adjournment**

Chair Buckley adjourned the meeting at 2:44pm.