WESTERN
COLORADO UNIVERSITY

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Meeting Minutes
Board Business Session

June 25, 2026
11:00am – 4:00pm
Crested Butte Center for the Arts
King Community Room

I. Call to Order

Chair Buckley called the meeting to order at 11:00am.

II. Attendance: Oath of Trusteeship—Trustee Ehrlich

Trustees: Chair Buckley, Vice Chair Wiens, Trustee Blessman, Trustee Ehrlich, Trustee Hamner, Trustee Henry, Trustee Nordini, Trustee Pribyl, Faculty Trustee Mason

Excused: Trustee Carver, Student Trustee Brown

Non-Trustees: Brad Baca (President), Kelsey Bennett (Associate Provost), Amber Burdge (Director of Athletics), Ashley Carlson (Associate Provost via zoom), Pavel Cenkl (Provost), Andrew Flebbe (Audio-Visual Manager), Ian Higgins (VP Finance & Administration), Mandi Leigh (Assistant Professor of Teacher Education via zoom), Joni Matzinger (EA to the President), Sara Morgan (Notary, Crested Butte Mobile Notary), Gary Pierson (Dean of Students), Natalie Powell (Senior Assistant AG), Caitlin Rovner (Business Operations and Event Manager via zoom), Leslie Taylor (VP for Marketing & Enrollment), Shelley Thompson (VP of Advancement, Executive Director of WCU Foundation), Katie Walters (EA to the VP of Academic Affairs via zoom), Marita Whalen (Equal Opportunity Officer), Lance Wright (VP for Student Affairs-Consultant), Jess Young (Provost).

Sara Morgan administered the oath of public office to newly appointed trustee Scott Ehrlich.

III. Approval of the Agenda

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

IV. Approval of Minutes for the Board of Trustees meeting of May 8, 2026

A motion to approve the minutes for the Board of Trustees meeting of May 8, 2026, was made by Trustee Nordini and seconded by Trustee Henry. The motion carried.

V. Review of Action Items from BOT Meeting of May 8, 2026

President Baca reported that most action items had been completed, with the housing project remaining in progress. He shared that construction was expected to begin soon pending utility approvals and noted that, despite delays, Fading West continued to project occupancy by December. He added that once construction began, progress was expected to move quickly.

VI. Oral Reports

A. President

President Baca shared updates on several outreach and partnership efforts since the last meeting. He highlighted the successful completion of the university's capital campaign, recognition received at a fundraising event that generated positive exposure for Western, and ongoing media relations efforts to promote the university's programs and 125th anniversary. He also provided an update on the state's higher education and workforce transition initiative, noting that while he was not appointed to the advisory committee, Western intended to remain engaged in the process. Finally, he discussed strengthening relationships with local partners, including the Tourism and Prosperity Partnership (TAPP), to identify future opportunities to support Western and the Gunnison Valley.

B. Board Chair

Chair Buckley outlined the agenda for the Board's retreat, which focused on two key topics identified by trustees: Colorado's state budget and the effectiveness of board operations. She highlighted an upcoming presentation from budget expert Henry Sobanet on Colorado's fiscal landscape, TABOR, and higher education funding. She also plans to lead a discussion on board governance, including meeting structure, committee models, and leadership succession, encouraging trustees to consider whether changes could improve engagement and effectiveness.

C. Faculty Trustee

Faculty Trustee Mason reported that faculty remained actively engaged during the summer through online course instruction, student advising, research mentorship, and support for students seeking employment and transfers. He also highlighted several graduate program activities, including the Summer Teacher Institute, upcoming residency and immersion experiences, and in-person components of hybrid graduate programs, emphasizing their value in fostering student engagement and learning.

D. Faculty Senate Chair

Faculty Trustee Mason shared a Faculty Senate update on behalf of Dr. Aronson, highlighting ongoing implementation of the new Western Watershed general education program and the development of assessment processes to support future accreditation efforts. He also reported that the Senate had begun establishing university-wide AI policies, elected its leadership team for the coming year, and was reviewing revisions to the faculty evaluation process in response to changes in student course evaluation services. President Baca commended faculty for their significant work on the general education program, noting that it had received positive recognition at the state level.

E. Administrative Leadership Council Chair

ALC Representative Marita Whalen reported that the ALC's annual professional development day was a success, with more than 70 faculty and staff participating in sessions focused on change management and professional growth. She shared that ALC leadership elections were underway and highlighted the council's ongoing priorities of information sharing, cross-campus collaboration, and support for mid-level managers. She also noted plans to explore AI best practices in partnership with the Teaching and Learning Center and thanked the Board for its continued support.

F. Athletic Director

Athletic Director Amber Burdge provided updates on staffing, fundraising, camps, and emerging NCAA legislation. She reported plans to hire assistant coaches for women's basketball and women's soccer, launched a new monthly athletics newsletter, and highlighted the success of the Bill Noxon Memorial Golf Classic and summer camp programs, which generated significant revenue and brought thousands of visitors to Gunnison. She also announced that Drew Nash had been selected as the RMAC Man of the Year and discussed upcoming NCAA eligibility changes that will allow student-athletes five years of competition, noting both opportunities and potential enrollment impacts for Western.

G. Attorney General/Legal Report

AAG Natalie Powell did not provide an update due to her facilitation of the Trustee training session.

Trustee Ehrlich introduced himself and shared his background as a Colorado business owner and community leader. He described his connection to Western through his late wife, a Western alumna, and expressed his enthusiasm for serving on the Board, learning more about higher education, and contributing his business and nonprofit governance experience to support the university.

VII. Discussion Topics

A. Attorney General's Office Training (hand carry)

AAG Natalie Powell provided the Board's annual governance training, reviewing trustees' fiduciary duties, conflict-of-interest requirements, statutory protections, and Colorado's Open Meetings and Open Records laws. She emphasized the importance of transparency, avoiding conflicts of interest, complying with public meeting requirements, and safeguarding public trust while carrying out board responsibilities.

Lunch

VIII. Discussion topics

A. 2023-2028 Strategic Plan Update

Senior Cabinet members provided a comprehensive update on progress toward the university's Strategic Plan, highlighting significant achievements across all four goal areas. Updates included improvements to student wellness, housing, retention, and campus belonging; expanded scholarship support, affordability initiatives, and financial aid access; implementation of the new Western Watershed general education program, growth of the Teaching and Learning Center, and enhanced career-connected learning opportunities; and continued progress in enrollment growth, marketing, budget management, and financial sustainability. Cabinet members emphasized that strong campus collaboration and data-informed decision-making were driving measurable progress toward the plan's long-term goals.

B. Undergraduate Enrollment Report

VP Taylor reported exceptionally strong enrollment results, with new student deposits reaching their highest levels since 2019 and tracking ahead of institutional goals. She attributed the success to earlier financial aid packaging, enhanced student communications, improved enrollment technology, stronger engagement from academic departments, targeted marketing efforts, and peer-to-peer outreach programs. Taylor also noted increases in continuing student enrollment and expressed confidence that Western would return to approximately 1,500 on-campus, undergraduate degree seeking students, strengthening both enrollment and the university's long-term financial outlook.

C. Elevate Western Campaign and Advancement Update

VP Thompson reported that Western's seven-year capital campaign surpassed its original $80 million goal, exceeding $110 million raised and significantly increasing the university's endowment from approximately $32 million to nearly $55 million. She highlighted record donor participation, growth in scholarship support, and the successful securing of a final seven-figure gift to close the campaign. Looking ahead, Thompson outlined post-campaign priorities focused on advancing key institutional initiatives, strengthening donor and alumni engagement, growing planned giving, and building the foundation's capacity to sustain long-term fundraising success.

VIII. Action Items

A. Personnel Action and Information Items

President Baca presented personnel appointments for Board approval as part of the upcoming academic and fiscal year transitions. The appointments included new faculty members, athletic staff, and leadership positions. During the discussion, Athletic Director Amber Burdge highlighted the hiring of new Head Women's Basketball Coach KC Bassett, noting her successful coaching background and early impact, including significantly increasing participation in the team's summer camp program.

A motion to approve the Personnel Action and Information Items was made by Trustee Pribyl and seconded by Trustee Hamner. The motion carried.

B. FY2026-27 Current Fund Budgets

VP Higgins presented the FY 2026–27 budget, highlighting a balanced financial plan built on conservative assumptions, including flat enrollment projections and a 2.1% tuition increase. He reported a projected surplus in both the Education & General and auxiliary budgets, driven by improved budget forecasting, cost controls, and significant savings in areas such as insurance and utilities. Higgins emphasized that any additional enrollment growth would generate substantial new revenue, with a primary focus on using those funds to advance the university's comprehensive compensation plan for faculty and staff.

A motion to approve the FY2026-27 Current Fund Budgets was made by Trustee Ehrlich and seconded by Trustee Wiens. The motion carried.

IX. Public Comment

No public comments were made.

X. Set Next Meeting's Agenda: September 24, 2026 *(Homecoming)*

President Baca reviewed the proposed agenda for the Board's September meeting, which will coincide with Homecoming and Family Weekend activities. He noted that the agenda includes a new discussion session focused on artificial intelligence, allowing time over the summer to develop content and prepare for the rapidly evolving topic. He also encouraged trustees to participate in Homecoming events, connect with Foundation Board members, and attend classes and other campus activities throughout the weekend as part of ongoing engagement with the university community.

XI. Other Business

A. Resolution of Appreciation—Dr. Jessica Young

President Baca presented a resolution honoring Dr. Jessica Young for her 31 years of service to Western Colorado University, including four years as Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs. The resolution recognized her exceptional leadership, mentorship, dedication to students and colleagues, and lasting contributions to the university. Trustees expressed appreciation for her compassion, professionalism, and steady leadership, and formally declared June 25, 2026, as Dr. Jessica Young Appreciation Day, recognizing her remarkable career and service to Western.

A motion to approve the Resolution of Appreciation for Dr. Jessica Young was made by Trustee Hamner and seconded by Trustee Blessman. The motion carried.

B. Logistics for Thursday evening, Friday and Saturday

President Baca reviewed logistics for the remainder of the Board retreat and related events, including the evening gathering at Public House, the Board retreat sessions scheduled for the following day, and a joint reception with Foundation Board members. He also highlighted Saturday's celebration event, noting its significance as part of the university's broader campaign festivities and ongoing engagement between trustees, donors, and university leadership.

XII. Adjournment

Chair Buckley adjourned the meeting at 4:13pm.

WESTERN
COLORADO UNIVERSITY
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Meeting Minutes
Board Seminar

June 26, 2026
9:00am – 1:00pm
Crested Butte Center for the Arts
King Community Room

I. Call to Order

Chair Buckley called the meeting to order at 8:59am.

II. Attendance

Trustees: Chair Buckley, Vice Chair Wiens, Trustee Blessman, Trustee Ehrlich, Trustee Hamner, Trustee Henry, Trustee Nordini, Trustee Pribyl, Faculty Trustee Mason

Excused: Trustee Carver, Student Trustee Brown

Non-Trustees: Brad Baca (President), Pavel Cenkl (Provost), Andrew Flebbe (Audio-Visual Manager), Ian Higgins (VP Finance & Administration), Joni Matzinger (EA to the President), Natalie Powell (Senior Assistant AG), Caitlin Rovner (Business Operations and Event Manager via zoom), Henry Sobanet (Treasurer and Senior Advisor to the Chancellor at CSU via zoom), Leslie Taylor (VP for Marketing & Enrollment), Marita Whalen (Equal Opportunity Officer), Lance Wright (VP for Student Affairs-Consultant).

III. Approval of the Agenda

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

IV. Seminar Topics

A. State Budget and Ballot Initiative Overview: Presented by Henry Sobanet

President Baca gave a brief introduction of Henry Sobanet. Sobanet provided an overview of Colorado's fiscal outlook, highlighting how TABOR, demographic shifts, Medicaid growth, and competing state priorities are affecting the budget and higher education funding. He noted that Colorado's economy remains resilient but faces challenges from slower population growth, rising healthcare costs, and limited state resources. Sobanet also discussed upcoming ballot measures and emphasized the importance of thoughtful policy decisions, collaboration, and public trust in addressing the state's long-term fiscal challenges.

Break

Board members viewed a 9News story highlighting Doug Hankins, a spring 2026 graduate of Western. The discussion recognized the efforts of Western's communications team in sharing the story and noted the positive media attention it generated for the university.

B. Board Operational Review/Assessment

The Board engaged in a discussion about meeting structure, governance practices, and leadership succession to improve Board effectiveness. Trustees and staff expressed interest in exploring a shift from six meetings per year to four longer, more strategic meetings, supplemented by special meetings as needed. Members noted that fewer meetings could reduce staff workload, allow for deeper discussions, and create more opportunities for campus engagement and strategic planning.

The Board also discussed relying more on advance materials, consent agendas, and key performance indicators to reduce time spent on routine reports and increase time for meaningful discussion of institutional priorities and future opportunities.

Regarding governance, trustees generally agreed that standing committees are not necessary and could create additional administrative burdens. Members favored continuing the use of ad hoc committees when specific issues arise that would benefit from focused trustee involvement.

The discussion also included Chair and Vice Chair leadership terms, with several trustees expressing support for exploring shorter leadership tenures to provide more opportunities for leadership development and participation. Potential changes included limiting total leadership service (Vice Chair and Chair combined) to no more than four years or limiting service to two one-year terms as Vice Chair and two one-year terms as Chair, while maintaining flexibility in the leadership succession process. No decisions were made, but Board leadership will further evaluate meeting structures, leadership roles, and governance practices and bring recommendations back for future consideration.

V. Working Lunch

VI. Other Business

No other business was discussed.

VII. Adjournment

Chair Buckley adjourned the meeting at 1:06pm.