



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

**Meeting Minutes**  
**May 8, 2026**  
**9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.**  
**University Center, Western Colorado University**

**I. Call to Order**

Chair Buckley called the meeting to order at 9:00am.

**II. Attendance**

Trustees: Chair Buckley, Vice Chair Wiens, Trustee Carver, Trustee Hamner, Trustee Henry, Trustee Nordini, Faculty Trustee Mason, Student Trustee Rosenow

Excused: Trustee Blessman, Trustee Ehrlich, Trustee Pribyl

Non-Trustees: Matt Aronson (Faculty Senate Chair), Brad Baca (President), Kelsey Bennett (Associate Provost), Hannah Brown (Incoming Student Trustee), Amber Burdge (Incoming Director of Athletics via zoom), Ashley Carlson (Associate Provost), Pavel Cenkl (Incoming Provost via zoom), Ella Fahrlander (Assistant VP of Development via zoom), Andrew Flebbe (Audio-Visual Manager), Paul Giberson (Director of Student Retention and Completion), Ian Higgins (VP Finance & Administration), Hanna Justis (Human Resources Specialist via zoom), Kelli Kelty (Kelty Public Affairs LLC via zoom), Joni Matzinger (EA to the President), Gary Pierson (Dean of Students), Natalie Powell (Senior Assistant AG via zoom), Manzil Rayamajhi (IT Service Manager), Chad Robinson (Associate VP and Chief Information Officer), Caitlin Rovner (Business Operations and Event Manager via zoom), Kaylee Summers (Associate Athletics Director of Business Operations, Interim Director of Athletics), Leslie Taylor (VP for Marketing & Enrollment), Shelley Thompson (VP of Advancement, Executive Director of WCU Foundation), Chase Watts (Director of Admissions), Marita Whalen (Equal Opportunity Officer), Jess Young (Provost).

**III. Approval of the Agenda**

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

**IV. Approval of Minutes for the Board of Trustees meeting of March 26, 2026**

A motion to approve the minutes for the Board of Trustees meeting of March 26, 2026 was made by Trustee Nordini and seconded by Trustee Carver. The motion carried.

**V. Review of Action Items from the Board of Trustees meeting of March 26, 2026**

President Baca shared that planning for the June retreat was ongoing and that a survey would be sent to gather Board input on discussion topics for the Friday seminar session (June 26). He noted the time

would allow for a few topics to be explored in depth, including potential items such as ballot initiatives and artificial intelligence, and emphasized that the session was intended to reflect Board priorities. He also explained that the retreat would include a regular business meeting on Thursday, June 25.

## **VI. Oral Reports**

### **A. President**

President Baca shared that the Colorado Senate had adopted a resolution recognizing Western's 125th anniversary, noting it was a meaningful moment that reflected strong support for the university. He also reported on recent outreach in Denver, including donor visits and media engagement, which generated interest in potential coverage of Western, including the nursing program and women's wrestling. President Baca highlighted ongoing efforts to elevate Western's profile and introduced new hires, Athletic Director Amber Burdge and Provost Pavel Cenkl, expressing enthusiasm for their arrival.

### **B. Board Chair**

Chair Buckley expressed appreciation for the Legacy of Excellence event, highlighting it as an inspiring recognition of faculty and staff. She emphasized Western's strong academic programming, including cross-disciplinary collaboration, experiential learning, and career pathways, with recent examples from nursing, engineering, and teacher education. She also commended the Student Government Association for its engagement and leadership, specifically recognizing Student Trustee Ainsley Rosenow for her effective leadership and contributions to the university.

### **C. Student Trustee**

Student Trustee Rosenow reported on SGA activities, including two funding streams for student initiatives and campus infrastructure. She noted that SGA distributed funding to multiple student requests, supported campus improvements such as irrigation upgrades, and continued annual support for SafeRide. She also highlighted key accomplishments, including the approval of new student clubs and the successful implementation of menstrual product access in academic buildings. Rosenow concluded by introducing incoming SGA President and future Student Trustee Hannah Brown.

### **D. Faculty Trustee**

Faculty Trustee Mason reported that faculty were in a busy period wrapping up the academic year, with grading underway and final grades due soon. He noted that faculty activity continues through the summer, including a strong demand for online courses alongside field-based and graduate program offerings that keep campus active. He also highlighted that summer provides important time for research and professional development, allowing faculty to prepare projects for student engagement in the fall. Mason added that faculty support student career pathways primarily through advising, with additional integration in coursework and programs where applicable.

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

Faculty Senate Chair Dr. Aronson highlighted several ways Western prepares students for career readiness beyond the classroom, including expanded Career Services support, internship opportunities with academic credit, and regular engagement with industry professionals through guest speakers and applied learning experiences. He emphasized the broader role of higher education in shaping students' critical thinking and community impact, sharing a graduate student

example that reflected the value of Western's interdisciplinary approach. He also noted the wide range of faculty work during the summer, including research, community engagement, and new course development across diverse subject areas. Dr. Aronson concluded by inviting trustees to visit classes and highlighted ongoing efforts to strengthen the general education curriculum through the Western Watershed program.

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

ALC Chair Giberson highlighted the extensive campus activity associated with the end of the academic year, noting faculty and staff efforts to support commencement preparations, student move-out, advising, registration, and system operations. He provided an overview of ALC priorities, including improving communication and collaboration across campus, and shared updates on initiatives such as compensation implementation, student space planning, accessibility efforts, and the student affairs reorganization. He also recognized recent employee awards and professional development efforts, including an upcoming campus-wide professional development day. Giberson reported that retention trends were currently strong, particularly for first-year to second-year students, and emphasized the importance of belonging, engagement, and connection in supporting student success.

#### **G. Athletic Director**

Interim Athletic Director Summers reported on recent athletics updates, expressing appreciation for the new Athletic Director Amber Burdge and highlighting ongoing collaboration. She shared several personnel updates, including the hiring of new coaches in women's basketball, women's swimming, and wrestling, as well as academic and athletic honors earned by student-athletes across multiple sports.

She noted strong recruiting efforts, including significant growth in the women's wrestling program, and reported that over 140 student-athletes have committed for the upcoming year. Summers also provided updates on team performances, facility usage, and the successful hosting of events, including the return of an outdoor track meet.

Finally, she highlighted summer programming, including youth camps and outreach events, reflecting both community engagement and opportunities for athletic program growth.

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

AAG Natalie Powell provided updates on recent multi-state legal actions involving federal agencies that may impact higher education. She noted that Colorado joined a lawsuit challenging a new Department of Education reporting requirement related to race and admissions, which is currently on hold pending litigation. She also shared that Colorado joined a lawsuit regarding new USDA grant conditions related to gender ideology and immigration, with a hearing scheduled in early June. Additionally, she reported that a previously challenged Department of Education guidance on diversity, equity, and inclusion remains unenforceable after the federal government dismissed its appeal.

#### **I. Legislative Report**

Kelli Kelty provided a legislative update noting that the Colorado General Assembly was nearing the end of its session, with significant activity and major bills still under consideration. She reported that the state faced a challenging budget year for higher education, and while additional cuts were avoided, funding largely remained flat, effectively restoring prior reductions rather than providing new investment. Kelty emphasized that this outcome reflected strong advocacy and legislative support, particularly from rural champions, but noted ongoing concerns about

insufficient funding for higher education. She also highlighted several active policy issues, including legislation related to artificial intelligence, healthcare, and a workforce realignment bill, which is expected to move forward and include a task force to guide future implementation.

## **VII. Executive Session**

A motion to convene an executive session to consider details of specialized security arrangements or investigation under Colorado Revised Statute 24-6-402(3)(a)(IV) and to receive legal advice, as necessary, under Colorado Revised Statute section 24-6-402(3)(a)(II) concerning the following topic, a recent cybersecurity assessment completed by the university, was made by Trustee Hamner and seconded by Trustee Carver. The motion carried.

As part of the motion, the Board invited its counsel, voting trustees, President Baca, CIO Chad Robinson, CFO Ian Higgins, and Provost Young to join the executive session.

The Board returned to public session at 11:26am.

During the executive session, the Board reviewed a recent university cybersecurity assessment and received an update on the Canvas incident, noting that the cybersecurity team was actively addressing the issue and would continue to provide updates and resources to the campus community.

## **VII. Action Items**

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

President Baca presented personnel action items for Board approval, noting that all proposed appointments were for budgeted positions with no unexpected expenses. He also informed the Board that the provost appointment would be included in a future packet due to timing, and highlighted faculty promotions and tenure-related rank advancements as informational items.

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

### **B. FY2027-28 Capital and Controlled Maintenance Requests**

VP Higgins provided an overview of the state capital construction and maintenance funding process, emphasizing the multi-step approval and ranking system and the Board's role in prioritizing projects. He presented Western's proposed priorities, including the top-ranked Leslie J. Savage Library renovation project (approximately \$48.4 million), which would modernize infrastructure, improve student services, and create a centralized student support hub.

He also outlined additional requests for campus lighting upgrades, roadway repairs, electrical infrastructure, access control and security systems, and elevator modernization. Higgins noted that none of Western's projects were funded in the current cycle but highlighted significant improvement in project rankings and expressed optimism that these efforts position the university more competitively for future funding.

A motion to approve the FY2027-28 Capital and Controlled Maintenance Requests as presented was made by Trustee Carver and seconded by Trustee Hamner. The motion carried.

### **C. Election of Officers for 2026-27: Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer**

President Baca provided information on the process of officer elections.

A motion to elect Trustee Buckley as Chair, Trustee Wiens as Vice Chair, President Baca as Secretary and VP Higgins as Treasurer was made by Trustee Hamner and seconded by Trustee Nordini. No other nominations were put forward. The motion carried.

#### **D. Updates to the *Handbook for Professional Personnel*, Section 2.08: Emeritus Status**

Provost Young presented proposed updates to the *Handbook for Professional Personnel* regarding emeritus status, noting the changes were approved through faculty governance processes. She highlighted updates to streamline procedures, align eligibility timelines with peer institutions, and expand eligibility to include long-serving lecturers, while also allowing all faculty in a department to participate in the voting process.

A motion to approve the Updates to the *Handbook for Professional Personnel*, Section 2.08: Emeritus Status as presented was made by Trustee Henry and seconded by Trustee Wiens. The motion carried.

*Lunch with newly tenured and emeritus faculty/staff*

### **VIII. Discussion Topics**

#### **A. Undergraduate Enrollment Report**

VP Taylor and Director Chase Watts reported strong enrollment progress, noting that deposits were significantly ahead of prior years and tracking toward an ambitious incoming class target of approximately 575 students. They highlighted improved retention trends and overall enrollment growth, attributing this success to consistent admissions staff, earlier and more personalized outreach, stronger financial aid coordination, and expanded engagement strategies beginning earlier in the recruitment cycle.

They also noted the positive impact of new programs and initiatives, including growth in athletic programs and the Gunnison Valley Promise, and emphasized that continued coordination across admissions, student success, and academic areas would support both recruitment and retention moving forward.

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

VP Thompson reported that the Elevate Western Campaign was nearing completion, with more than \$105 million raised—well exceeding the original \$80 million goal—and achieving a record number of donors. She highlighted significant growth in the university's endowment and emphasized the importance of donor stewardship moving forward to sustain engagement.

She also underscored the growing focus on planned giving as a key strategy for long-term financial sustainability, illustrating its impact through a recent major estate gift and outlining plans to strengthen proactive outreach and stewardship efforts in the post-campaign phase.

### **IX. Written reports**

#### **A. Campus Updates**

Dean Pierson highlighted the value of the campus report as a comprehensive reflection of student, faculty, and staff accomplishments, noting in particular the growth and impact of the Mountain Sports program. He shared that the program has demonstrated steady progress and plays an important role in Western's identity, recruitment, and student experience, while also acknowledging opportunities to strengthen funding partnerships and leadership stability.

He concluded by announcing his transition to a reduced role as part of a phased retirement, with a continued focus on student health, wellness, and success, and expressed optimism about the future of Student Affairs under new leadership.

#### **XI. Public Comment**

No public comments were made.

#### **XII. Set Next Meeting's Agenda: June 25-26, 2026**

President Baca reviewed the proposed agenda for the upcoming Board meeting, noting that the first day would include the business meeting and a deferred budget approval to allow additional time for review and enrollment assessment. He emphasized the importance of including a strategic plan update and indicated that a survey would be distributed to gather Board input on discussion topics for the retreat session. There was also a discussion about adjusting the Board meeting start time for June 25.

#### **XIII. Other Business**

President Baca provided brief updates on commencement event logistics for board members. VP Higgins then shared updates on the housing project and State Land Board agreement, noting progress with approvals, utility coordination, and negotiations that secured favorable terms, including the university's right of first refusal on a portion of future housing units.

#### **XIV. Adjournment**

Chair Buckley adjourned the meeting at 2:28pm.