



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Academic Enterprise, Research, and Student Success Committee **DRAFT** Meeting Minutes

September 18, 2025
8:30 – 10:00 A

Florida Polytechnic University
Virtual via Microsoft Teams

I. Call to Order

Committee Chair Sidney Theis called the Academic and Student Affairs Committee meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

II. Roll Call

Kristen Wharton called the roll: Committee Chair Sidney Theis, Vice Chair Patrick Hagen, Trustee Sumanth Neelam, Trustee Colby Manrodt, and Trustee Edwar Romero-Ramirez were present (Quorum)

Committee members not present: N/A

Other Trustees Present: Board Chair Beth Kigel

Staff Present: President Devin Stephenson, Provost Brad Thiessen, Dr. Tanner McKnight, Bryan Brooks, David Blanton, Cole Allen, Kelli Stargel, Melaine Schmiz, Dr. Tom Dvorske, Dr. Jon Pawlecki, Kevin Calkins, and Kristen Wharton

III. Public Comment

There were no requests received for public comment.

IV. Approval of May 28, 2025, Meeting Minutes

Trustee Patrick Hagen motioned to approve the Academic and Student Affairs Committee meeting minutes of May 28, 2025. Trustee Sumanth Neelam seconded the motion; a vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

V. Approval of the Revised Academic Enterprise, Research, and Student Success Committee Charter

Committee Chair Theis reviewed the charter changes, which include a revised committee name and the addition of regular reports and discussions on academic research.

Trustee Patrick Hagen motioned to approve the revised Academic Enterprise, Research, and Student Success Committee Charter. Trustee Colby Manrodt seconded the motion; a vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

VI. Approval of the Revised 2024-2026 Academic Enterprise, Research, and Student Success Committee Work Plan

Committee Chair Theis reviewed the work plan changes, which include the revised committee name and the addition of regular reports and discussions on academic research.

Trustee Sumanth Neelam motioned to approve the revised 2024-2026 Academic Enterprise, Research, and Student Success Committee Work Plan. Trustee Colby Manrodt seconded the motion; a vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

VII. Academic Enterprise Report

Vice President and Provost Brad Thiessen provided a detailed review of the University's standing in the Performance-Based Funding (PBF) metrics, outlining strategies to address areas needing improvement—specifically academic progress and four-year graduation rates. Planned initiatives include enhanced academic support, faculty development, curriculum improvements, and enrollment management adjustments.

Thiessen reported that twenty-five new faculty members joined the University this fall, and twenty-six existing faculty were promoted or reappointed. Faculty attrition, which averaged 12% annually from 2021 to 2024, dropped to just 3% in 2025.

Academic program enrollment also shifted, with increases in civil engineering and cybersecurity. For fall 2025, mechanical engineering and computer science together account for 61% of total enrollment, and graduate program enrollment grew by over 100%. Planning is underway for new programs in aerospace and space engineering, as well as biomedical science. Thiessen also shared updates on both ABET and institutional accreditation efforts.

A. Annual Textbook and Instructional Materials Affordability Report for FY25

Thiessen reviewed the requirement for all universities to submit an annual report on textbook and instructional materials affordability to the Board of Governors. Florida Poly met this requirement for 98.6% of course sections in both Fall 2024 and Spring 2025. Additionally, 56% of all course sections offered required or recommended textbooks and instructional materials at no cost or at low cost (defined as \$20 or less per credit hour).

Trustee Patrick Hagen motioned to recommend approval of the Annual Textbook and Instruction Materials Affordability Report for FY25. Trustee Sumanth Neelam seconded the motion; a vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

Trustees revisited key points from the provost's earlier report. Trustee Shapiro asked about the root causes of Florida Poly's low retention score. Provost Thiessen explained that a significant number of students are now being placed directly into Calculus rather than Pre-Calculus, suggesting that the incoming class is better prepared for rigorous math coursework. He also noted discrepancies in grading scales across the State University System (SUS); for example, a 45% may be considered a "C" at one institution, while Florida Poly requires a 70% for the same grade. Thiessen emphasized that he does not intend to lower Florida Poly's grading standards and will continue to review the curriculum in comparison with peer institutions.

Trustee Sumanth Neelam inquired about the qualifications of Florida Poly's success coaches. Vice President Bryan Brooks responded that the University seeks personable individuals who have demonstrated academic success themselves. To reduce the student-to-coach ratio and improve support, Florida Poly plans to hire six additional success coaches.

Committee Chair Sid Theis asked whether the University conducts exit surveys for students who leave and whether that data could help improve retention. Provost Thiessen confirmed that an exit process exists but noted that students often do not disclose their true reasons for leaving. Instead, he is focusing efforts on strengthening the early alert system to identify at-risk students earlier in the semester and provide timely support.

B. Foreign Influence Annual Report FY25

Florida Board of Governors Regulation 9.012(9) (Foreign Influence) requires each university board of trustees to submit a *Foreign Country of Concern* report to the Board of Governors for approval. Florida Polytechnic University had no grant programs, agreements, partnerships, or contracts with colleges or universities based in a foreign country of concern during 2024–25 and does not currently have any.

C. Sponsored Research Certification Report

Florida Board of Governors Regulation 10.002 (Sponsored Research) requires each university to certify annually that it has appropriate policies and monitoring systems in place for managing sponsored research activities. This includes policies on contract negotiation, grant acceptance, use of research funds, and compliance with laws and institutional goals. Jay Smith, Director of Grants Administration, has signed the certification form for Florida Poly.

VIII. Research Report

Provost Thiessen provided a framework to integrate research more fully into the University's mission. His presentation focused on five key areas essential to advancing the University's research enterprise:

- Defining a clear vision and strategic research focus
- Building infrastructure to support research (space, equipment, HPC, and administrative support)
- Securing sustainable external funding
- Aligning faculty workload and incentives to support research activity
- Expanding student research opportunities, including the launch of a doctoral program

Thiessen outlined several next steps to advance the University's research efforts. These include issuing a call for seed funding proposals to support collaborative faculty research teams and conducting a comprehensive inventory of existing equipment and lab space. The University will also begin faculty searches focused on cluster hires in key research areas and increase efforts to pursue federal grant opportunities. To strengthen graduate-level research, graduate assistantship offers will be made more competitive, and the University is exploring the development of a Doctor of Engineering program.

IX. Student Affairs, Enrollment Management, and Strategic Communications Report

Vice President Bryan Brooks provided an update on activities and initiatives that reflect Florida Poly's strategic priorities for student affairs, enrollment management, and strategic communications. Items discussed included the new location of the Tutoring Center, staff updates in the Departments of Student Success and Career Services, the launch of the redesigned university website, updates from Move-In Weekend and housing operations, and Florida Poly's pursuit of an NAIA athletics program.

With on-campus housing at 93.14% occupancy for Fall 2025, Brooks shared the potential option of utilizing a residence hall at Southeastern University, located 15–18 minutes from Florida Poly's main campus. Committee Chair Theis noted that this approach provides the University with valuable flexibility to address immediate housing needs.

Brooks also reported that the Tutoring Center has been relocated to the IST Commons, where it now occupies triple the previous space and places it in closer proximity to student success coaches and other support services. With planned staffing additions, the student-to-success coach ratio is expected to improve significantly from 450:1 to 200:1. Additionally, two academic program managers will be hired to serve as liaisons between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs.

In athletics, the University's official membership in the NAIA is expected to be activated by July 2027. Florida Poly will partner with the Lake Myrtle Sports Complex for use of its athletic fields.

X. Closing Remarks and Adjournment

With no further business to discuss the meeting adjourned at 9:53 a.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Kristen J. Wharton
Corporate Secretary