



## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

# Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes

September 26, 2025  
9:30 A – 12:00 P

Florida Polytechnic University  
Barnett Applied Research Center (BARC)  
and Virtual via Microsoft Teams

### I. Call to Order

Chair Beth Kigel called the Board of Trustees meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

### II. Roll Call

Kristen Wharton called the roll: Chair Beth Kigel, Trustee Ilya Shapiro, Trustee Patrick Hagen, Trustee Sam Neelam, Trustee Eliot Peace, Trustee Sidney Theis, Trustee Colby Manrodt, and Trustee Edwar Romero-Ramirez were present (Quorum).

Board Trustees not present: Vice Chair Jesse Panuccio

Staff Present: President Devin Stephenson, Provost Brad Thiessen, Dr. Tanner McKnight, David Fugett, Bryan Brooks, Cole Allen, David Blanton, Dr. Tom Dvorske, Dr. Andy Oguntola, Melaine Schmiz, and Kristen Wharton

### III. Public Comment

There were no requests received for public comment.

### IV. 2025-2026 Board of Trustees Work Plan

Chair Kigel reviewed the revised Board of Trustees Annual Work Plan. There were no comments or questions.

**A motion was made by Trustee Sidney Theis to approve the 2025-2026 Board of Trustees Work Plan. Trustee Colby Manrodt seconded the motion; a vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.**

### V. Chair's Remarks

Chair Beth Kigel reaffirmed that the University's Strategic Plan remains the Board's guiding framework. She noted updates to the committee structure, including an elevated focus on research and the creation of the Strategic Initiatives and External Relations Committee. Chair Kigel also

recognized strong campus momentum, with record enrollment and improved U.S. News & World Report rankings, and commended President Stephenson and his team for their leadership.

VI. President's Remarks

President Devin Stephenson provided an update on the Legislative Budget Request, Fixed Capital Outlay (FCO), and deferred maintenance. He also reported on local and community engagement efforts, including meetings with state legislators, the signing of an MOU with Fulbright Hungary, the partnership with OCOM, and other strategic engagements aimed at strengthening Florida Poly's ties with industry and government. Additionally, he highlighted the growing recognition of Florida Poly's reputation at the local, national, and global levels.

VII. Annual Review and Endorsement of Statement of Free Expression

Chair Kigel reminded trustees of the Board of Governors' recommendation that university boards of trustees annually review and endorse the Statement of Free Expression and commit to the principles of civil discourse. This Statement was provided in the Board's materials for their review.

**A motion was made by Colby Manrodt to endorse the Board of Governors' Statement of Free Expression. Trustee Sumanth Neelam seconded the motion; a vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.**

VIII. Faculty Senate President's Report

Trustee Edwar Romero shared the faculty's appreciation for the new administration, citing renewed energy, visible leadership, and positive changes. He noted improvements in the faculty contract renewal process, with greater transparency and timeliness. Faculty are balancing teaching, research, and service, while also addressing DFW rates and working to streamline the curriculum. Romero acknowledged resource challenges but expressed optimism that the Strategic Plan will help close these gaps and strengthen research. He also emphasized the significant service contributions faculty make beyond the classroom and praised the collaborative efforts shaping Florida Poly's future.

Chair Kigel expressed her gratitude for Trustee Romero's leadership among the faculty.

IX. SGA President's Report

Trustee Colby Manrodt, SGA President, reported record-high student engagement in campus activities and Registered Student Organizations. Florida Poly has volunteered to host a future Florida Student Association (FSA) meeting, hopefully paving the way for a future Florida Poly SGA president to serve on the Board of Governors. Last week, SGA hosted its first-ever Spirit Week, with strong participation from students, faculty, and staff, and plans to make it an annual tradition. Interest in student government remains high, with a growing list of students eager to get involved.

SGA is finalizing the launch of its *From the Nest* podcast. They are also collaborating with Alumni Services to develop a homecoming-style event. Plans are also underway for SGA to fund new outdoor community spaces.

In response to Trustee Shapiro’s question about how Florida Poly is viewed by other SGAs in the SUS, Trustee Manrodt shared that peers view Florida Poly students as “geniuses,” and noted strong collaboration and mutual learning across institutions.

X. Global Strategy Elements

Senior Global Affairs Officer Mustapha Achoubane thanked President Stephenson for the Strategic Plan, calling it a vital compass guiding Florida Poly’s future. He reviewed peer data on study abroad programs and noted that, due to minimal student interest and limited benefit, Florida Poly does not participate in traditional study abroad. Instead, the University is prioritizing prestigious opportunities like the Fulbright Program, where Florida Poly is projected to become the second-strongest inbound STEM Fulbright institution in the State University System (SUS). The Killam Fellowship will continue to meet undergraduate interest in global academic experiences.

Achoubane highlighted Florida Poly’s growing global presence, including ten established international partnerships and several more in development. He also noted Florida Poly’s recognition by the U.S. Department of State as a top producer of STEM Fulbright scholars. He concluded by emphasizing the University’s rising global reputation.

XI. AlbertX Team: NASA’s Micro-g NEXT Challenge

Three Florida Poly students presented their winning project from NASA’s Micro-G NEXT Challenge. The team designed and built a tool to solve a challenge faced during space missions—attaching two overlapping materials while accessing only one side. Their device was tested by astronauts at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, TX. Through multiple prototype iterations, the team developed a final tool and consumables that earned top honors in the competition. The experience provided hands-on engineering practice, leadership development, project management skills, and valuable connections with NASA professionals.

XII. Enrollment and Marketing Update

Dr. Andy Oguntola, AVP of Enrollment Management, presented trustees with a comprehensive update on admissions strategies and improvements. He outlined goals for the admissions team, enhanced communication with prospective students and internal departments, and the introduction of consistent branding across recruiter attire and event displays. He also highlighted the launch of a new AI recruiter and shared dashboards used to track progress and meet recruitment targets, with a strong focus on Polk County and the I-4 corridor.

Nick Estee, Director of Admissions, discussed admissions counselor goals, accountability measures, territory management, and travel. Carrie Mann, Director of Financial Aid, provided an overview of financial aid, while Samantha Lane, Director of Marketing, Branding, and Creative Services, demonstrated how the marketing team addressed inconsistent branding and messaging for prospective students.

XIII. Consent Agenda

**Chair Kigel brought forward the consent agenda for trustee approval.**

- A. Academic Enterprise, Research, and Student Success Committee**
  - 1. Approve the Revised Academic Enterprise, Research, and Student Success Committee Charter**
  - 2. Approve the Annual Textbook and Instructional Materials Affordability Report FY25**
- B. Governance, Audit, and Compliance Committee**
  - 1. Approve the Revised Governance, Audit, and Compliance Committee Charter**
  - 2. Approve the University Audit Risk Assessment and Audit Plan for FYE26**
  - 3. Approve the University Compliance & Ethics Program Plan for FY26**
  - 4. Approve the Performance Based Funding Data Integrity Audit Scope and Objectives to be performed by University Audit**
  - 5. Approve of the evaluation instrument titled “President’s Annual Review” to be used in the Trustees’ evaluation of the president’s performance for fiscal year 2025**
- C. Finance and Facilities Committee**
  - 1. Approve the Revised Finance and Facilities Committee Charter**
  - 2. Approve the FY26 University Carryforward Spending Plan and Fixed Capital Outlay Budget**
  - 3. Approve of and authorize the President to sign instruments, documents, and contracts as necessary to effectuate the Public Safety and Campus Operations Center to design, construct, and furnish within the total budget, not to exceed \$5,400,000 - increasing the project budget by \$400,000.**
  - 4. Approve the appointment of Dr. Tanner McKnight as the Board of Trustees’ designee to fulfill its obligations in Board of Governors Regulation 14.008 Competitive Selection and Negotiation, effective September 26, 2024.**
  - 5. Approve the Foundation’s Request for planned uses of university personnel and property for the fiscal year 2025-26 for \$430,000.**
- D. Strategic Initiatives and External Relations Committee**
  - 1. Approve the Strategic Initiatives and External Relations Committee Charter**
- E. Board of Trustees**
  - 1. Approve Board of Trustees Meeting minutes from June 3, 2025**
  - 2. Approve Board of Trustees Meeting minutes from June 30, 2025**

**As each of the consent agenda items comes before the Board with unanimous approval from the respective Committees, there is no need for a second. A vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.**

**XIV. Committee Reports**

**A. Academic Enterprise, Research, and Student Success (AERSS) Committee**

Committee Chair Sid Theis reported that Vice President and Provost, Dr. Brad Thiessen, provided an Academic Enterprise report on student and faculty success, academic programs, and compliance in the areas of institutional and ABET accreditation. Thiessen also provided a report on Research, which articulated a vision and next steps to propel Florida Poly’s research output.

Bryan Brooks, Vice President for Student Affairs, Enrollment Management, and Strategic Communications, provided an updated enrollment report for Fall 2025 as well as a report on the

current housing situation at Florida Poly, including a brief discussion about the possibilities for additional housing until Phase IV can be completed. Additionally, the committee heard updates on the new Tutoring Center, personnel updates in Student Success and Career Services, a fresh look at Florida Poly's new website, and discussion regarding Florida Poly's entrance into the NAIA beginning in Fall 2027.

Committee Chair Theis stated the Committee reviewed, approved, and recommended Board approval for the following items which are on today's consent agenda: the Academic Enterprise, Research, and Student Success Committee Charter; and Florida Poly's Annual Textbook and Instructional Materials Affordability Report for FY25, which demonstrates Florida Poly's compliance with state requirements.

#### B. Finance and Facilities Committee

Committee Vice Chair Eliot Peace stated that the Committee received the University's fourth quarter financial update for the period ending June 30, 2025. The University closed FY25 with a 3% increase in net position. Additionally, the Committee reviewed the University's FY25 Employee Bonus Plan Certification, a list of vendor contracts exceeding \$1M, and a housing rate increase of 3% for fall 2026.

They also received updates on the five major campus construction projects currently underway, and Advancement and Foundation activities.

Lastly, the Committee recommended Board approval of the following items, which were approved on today's consent agenda:

- Revised Finance & Facilities Committee Charter
- FY26 Carryforward Spending Plan and Fixed Capital Outlay Budget
- Budget increase for the Public Safety & Operations Center
- Appointment of Vice President and CFO, Dr. Tanner McKnight, as Board designee to fulfill the obligations of BOG Regulation 14.008 "Competitive Selection and Negotiation" for the Student Achievement Center Project
- FY26 Planned Use of University Resources by the Foundation

#### C. Governance, Audit, and Compliance Committee

Committee Chair Ilya Shapiro listed the numerous updates shared by David Blanton, CAE and CCO, including the presentation of the Audit & Compliance Annual Report. He noted several items which were approved on the consent agenda, including the University Audit's Risk Assessment & Audit Plan for FY26, the Compliance & Ethics Program Plan for FY 26, and the Performance Based Funding Audit, Scope, and Objectives.

David Fugett, Vice President and General Counsel, presented the Trustee Evaluation Instrument, which will be used to evaluate President Stephenson's performance during fiscal year 2025. This item was approved on today's Consent Agenda.

Dr. Stephenson then presented the Employment Practices report, followed by his presentation detailing the president's accomplishments in alignment with his FY25 Administrative Action Plan.

XV. Board of Trustees Meeting Calendar

Chair Kigel reminded trustees that the next scheduled in-person meeting will be the annual Board Retreat held on Tuesday, November 18. It will be conducted off-site following the ribbon-cutting event for the Gary C. Wendt Engineering Center. The full Board will meet on Wednesday morning, November 19.

XVI. Board of Governors Meeting Calendar

Chair Kigel shared that the next Board of Governors meeting will include the biennial Trustee Summit. These meetings will occur at the University of South Florida in Tampa on November 4 and 5. Chair Kigel encouraged trustees to let Kristen Wharton know if you plan to attend.

XVII. 2025-2030 Strategic Plan Progress Report

Dr. Tom Dvorske, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, provided an update on the overall progress of the University's Strategic Plan. Of the thirty-seven initiatives outlined in the plan, all have been initiated; twenty-one are currently on schedule, and one has been completed. Dvorske also highlighted key achievements across each of the three strategic priorities, emphasizing areas where the University is making notable progress.

XVIII. Phoenix Racing Team: *The Road to the Electrek Formula Sun Grand Prix*

Two student members of the Phoenix Racing Team shared the history and ongoing development of the University's solar car. They outlined the design process and emphasized how continuous improvements have enhanced the vehicle each year. The team also discussed their participation in the Formula Sun Grand Prix, a closed-track endurance race, where they placed seventh nationally in 2024 and third in 2025. They also received the "Most Improved" award this year. President Stephenson attended part of the 2025 race.

The team recently received a donated trailer for transporting the car and has secured several sponsors. They plan to compete in the American Solar Challenge, a cross-country endurance race, using their current car with planned redesigns ahead of the event.

XIX. Collective Bargaining

David Fugett, Vice President and General Counsel, reported that collective bargaining began in February 2025. He acknowledged and thanked all individuals involved in the successful negotiation process.

Fugett shared outcomes on four negotiated articles:

- Article 6: Appointment and Promotion
- Article 7: Assignment of Responsibilities
- Article 8: Performance Evaluation
- Article 12: Salaries

**A motion was made by Colby Manrodt to approve the ratification of the proposed Amendments to the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) between Florida Polytechnic University and the United Faculty of Florida (UFF) for 2025-2026 academic year, contingent upon faculty approval**

**in the vote scheduled for completion on October 2, 2025; amended articles to become effective upon successful ratification by the faculty union.**

- 1. Article 6 – Appointment and Promotion**
- 2. Article 7 – Assignment of Responsibilities**
- 3. Article 8 – Performance Evaluation**
  - a. Appendix B – Faculty Activity Report**
- 4. Article 12 - Salaries**

**Trustee Sumanth Neelam seconded the motion; a vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.**

XX. Closing Remarks and Adjournment

With no further business to discuss the meeting adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Kristen Wharton  
Corporate Secretary