



## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

# Board of Trustees | Annual Retreat Meeting Minutes

**November 18, 2025**  
**12:30 P – 5:00 P**

The Terrace Hotel Conference Center  
329 Main Street, Lakeland, FL

### I. Call to Order

Chair Beth Kigel called the Board of Trustees Annual Retreat to order at 12:30 p.m.

### II. Roll Call

Kristen Wharton called the roll: Chair Beth Kigel, Vice Chair Jesse Panuccio, 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: N/A

Staff Present: President Devin Stephenson, Provost Brad Thiessen, Dr. Tanner McKnight, Bryan Brooks, Cole Allen, Kelli Stargel, David Blanton, Maggie Mariucci, Stephen Weingart, Hannah Morris, and Kristen Wharton

### III. Public Comment

There were no requests received for public comment.

### IV. Chair Remarks

Chair Beth Kigel delivered opening remarks, noting that this retreat serves as a continuation of the strategic planning process undertaken over the past year. She expressed appreciation to President Stephenson and the Strategy Circle for their commitment and the progress achieved to date. Chair Kigel encouraged trustees to actively participate in the discussion, emphasizing that the work completed today would further advance the Strategic Plan, streamline committee and Board efforts, and provide clear direction to the administration.

The strategic planning video was presented as a refresher for trustees prior to commencing their work. Following the video, Chair Kigel stated that the primary goal for the day was to conclude the meeting with alignment on program priorities among all trustees.

## V. President's Remarks

President Devin Stephenson delivered a brief presentation highlighting the origins of the University and Senator J.D. Alexander's founding vision for a 100% STEM institution—one designed to serve as a distinctive economic engine rather than simply another university. He reviewed the institution's mission and vision and encouraged trustees to consider opportunities for expanding the University's reach, particularly through STEM+M which adds "medical" to the traditional STEM. President Stephenson spoke about the University's potential entry into the medical sector and challenged trustees to be "possibility thinkers," poised to pursue future-forward initiatives.

## IV. Strategic Plan Priorities

### A. Comprehensive Institutional Growth

Dr. Brad Thiessen, Vice President and Provost, reviewed the University's current academic programs and the metrics used to assess their ongoing viability, followed by an overview of proposed programs aligned with the Strategic Plan. Dr. Thiessen asked trustees to consider where ideas for new programs should originate and how their viability should be evaluated, prompting engaged discussion. He then outlined the criteria he uses to identify the most promising program opportunities and revisited the list of programs the Board directed him to explore at the May 2025 meeting as part of the Legislative Budget Request. Dr. Thiessen shared the current academic planning timeline, including new programs anticipated for launch in Fall 2026, such as Biomedical Sciences, and highlighted areas of emerging importance, including Quantum Technology. He discussed potential growth areas such as STEM-focused B.A. degrees and Aerospace Engineering. Additional topics included reducing credit hour requirements, offering a three-year B.A. pathway with a 3+1 master's option, and pursuing private-sector partnerships due to declining federal funding.

Dr. Thiessen continued by addressing the broader question of Florida Poly's institutional identity and future direction, highlighting the value of doctoral programs designed in partnership with industry, ensuring impactful research rather than traditional dissertations with limited readership. Dr. Thiessen also discussed U.S. News & World Report rankings, recommending that the University transition from classification at the college level to the university level, which would require expanding its portfolio of master's programs.

Trustees engaged in discussion regarding potential industry partners who could support program development and the strategic recruitment of preeminent scholars capable of attracting external funding. Trustees individually identified one to three priority program areas, with Aerospace Engineering, Biomedical/Bioengineering, and Financial-related STEM fields emerging as the three strongest programs to pursue.

### B. Advancement Through Intentional Resource Development

Stephen Weingart, Chief Development Officer and CEO of the University Foundation, provided an overview of historical and projected gift income, emphasizing the need to build and retain a strong donor base to support the University's long-term priorities. Dr. Tanner McKnight, Vice President and CFO, outlined the University's current needs and noted that many of these cannot be supported through E&G funds. He highlighted housing constraints, including the University's inability to issue new bonds until 2028, making public-private

partnerships essential for near-future housing development. Dr. McKnight also discussed the potential benefits of NAIA athletics for student engagement, while noting that any athletic programs must be financially sustainable through revenue sources such as ticket sales.

Weingart then reviewed plans for a comprehensive fundraising campaign—distinct from a capital campaign—and stressed the importance of increasing unrestricted giving. He shared a list of campaign focus areas and presented trustees with several options for enhancing Board engagement in fundraising efforts.

#### C. Academic & Industry Collaborative Partnerships

Kelli Stargel, Vice President, Strategic Initiatives, Development, and External Relations, provided an overview of current academic and industry partnership initiatives, noting that while these partnerships are not yet monetized, today’s discussion will help her team refine their approach and identify priority partners. Maggie Mariucci, AVP External Relations, presented an update on land opportunities, focusing on two parcels contiguous to campus that may support future strategic development.

An ad hoc committee was established to advance this work, with Vice Chair Jesse Panuccio appointed as Chair. Committee members will be appointed by Chair Kigel.

#### V. Executive Leadership for Modern Learners

Joe Sallustio, Chief of Industry Engagement and Senior Vice President at Ellucian, delivered a dynamic presentation on the growing influence of artificial intelligence in higher education. He discussed current AI tools and demonstrated their practical applications for improving workplace efficiency. Sallustio encouraged trustees to cultivate an innovation-ready organization and to embrace the transformational opportunities driven by AI.

#### VI. Closing Remarks and Adjournment

With no further business to discuss the meeting adjourned at 5:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:  
Kristen Wharton  
Corporate Secretary