



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

**BOT Approved on 05/22/2026**

# Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes

**February 13, 2026  
10:00 A – 1:00 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 10:10 a.m.

The Chair welcomed four new trustees—Dr. Christie Bassett, Jeff Beelaert, Rob Kincart, and Jack Harrell, III—each of whom briefly introduced themselves, sharing highlights of their background, family, and career.

II. Roll Call

Kristen Wharton called the roll: Chair Beth Kigel, Vice Chair Jesse Panuccio, Trustee Patrick Hagen, Trustee Jack Harrell, III, Trustee Eliot Peace, Trustee Sumanth Neelam, Trustee Colby Manrodt, Trustee Edwar Romero, Trustee Ilya Shapiro, Trustee Rob Kincart and Trustee Sid Theis were present (Quorum).

Trustees not present: N/A

Staff Present: President Devin Stephenson, Provost Brad Thiessen, Bryan Brooks, Dr. Tanner McKnight, Kelli Stargel, Joshua Millikin, Kristen Wharton, and David Blanton

III. Public Comment

There were no requests received for public comment.

IV. 2024-2026 Board of Trustees Work Plan

Chair Kigel reviewed the Board's Work Plan. There were no questions about the Work Plan.

V. Chair's Remarks

Chair Beth Kigel delivered her remarks, highlighting the ribbon cutting of the new Esports arena in the Barnett Applied Research Center and its expected impact on student life. She emphasized the 25|30 Strategic Plan as the University's guiding framework, encouraged trustees to review it, and requested that staff align all Board presentations with the Plan. Chair Kigel also announced that trustees will receive quarterly updates on the Plan via email prior to committee meetings. Additionally, she thanked those participating in Florida Poly Day at the Capitol next week.

## VI. President's Remarks

President Devin Stephenson recapped his activities since the November Board meeting.

In December, the University signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Skyway Organization, an advanced materials and aerospace technology leader that will be locating operations in Polk County. The partnership was facilitated by Alex Kelly and supports the University's role in advancing high-demand, technology-driven industries in the region.

President Stephenson also highlighted Counselor's Day, which brought 170 high school advising counselors from across Florida to campus for an immersive experience—the largest event of its kind hosted by the University. As influencers in students' college decisions, these counselors play a key role in guiding prospective students to the institution.

In early December, President Stephenson met with James Hartzell, Executive Director of the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs. Discussions focused on aligning the University's academic programs to better serve military-connected veterans and their dependents, as well as exploring opportunities through expanded online offerings and career-readiness initiatives.

In January, President Stephenson visited Florida Trend, which expressed interest in the University's impact on workforce development across the state. The publication continues to be a dedicated supporter of the University.

Additionally, the President reported on his visit to the National Robotics Engineering Center (NREC) at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. NREC is exploring the establishment of several satellite locations nationwide and has invited the University to become an affiliate, with the potential to bring NREC operations to Lakeland. A white paper with further details will be provided to the Board for review.

President Devin Stephenson also reported on his meeting with Mark Wilson, President of the Florida Chamber of Commerce, to discuss issues impacting the state's business climate and workforce needs.

In addition, President Stephenson traveled to Washington, D.C. with Bryan Brooks, Vice President for Student Affairs, Enrollment Management, and Strategic Communications, where they met with members of the University's congressional delegation to discuss federal priorities including artificial intelligence, and advocate for institutional initiatives.

## VII. Campus Safety and Security

University Chief of Police Aaron Murray reported that the Police Department will be fully staffed by the end of March, and reaccreditation is on schedule for April. External assessors are scheduled to visit campus, and he expressed confidence in a successful outcome.

Chief Murray outlined plans to align departmental initiatives with the University's Strategic Plan, emphasizing innovation. He announced the launch of the University's first drone unit, noting support from local law enforcement partners and strong student interest, including engagement with the Rotaract Club. Drone operators will obtain Federal Aviation Administration Part 107 certification, and the department plans to coordinate airspace management with SunTrax.

In anticipation of institutional growth, Chief Murray also proposed establishing the University's first canine unit to enhance safety and community engagement. He emphasized building a service-oriented, team-focused culture within the department, with the goal of setting a high standard for public safety in higher education.

In response to trustee questions, Chief Murray confirmed that a threat assessment team is in place and that a comprehensive security audit will be conducted. He also noted plans to partner closely with IT on cybersecurity efforts. President Devin Stephenson added that a recent \$2.9 million federal award will expand the University's security operations center to strengthen cybersecurity protections.

#### VIII. Faculty Senate President's Report

Trustee Edwar Romero reported on faculty and administrative efforts to strengthen shared governance, streamline curricula, and improve academic performance metrics. Faculty are revising programs and standardizing reappointment, promotion, and annual evaluation processes. He noted that anticipated enrollment growth will increase faculty service demands, particularly in undergraduate advising, and emphasized the importance of expanding graduate enrollment to support research and innovation.

#### IX. Student Government Association President's Report

Trustee Colby Manrodt, SGA President, reported a strong close to the Fall semester, with Reading Days serving over eight hundred students, and a successful start to Spring with a Pizza Pop-Up. In January, SGA joined fellow state universities in Tallahassee to advocate for a \$50 million increase in the performance-based funding cap, deferred maintenance funding, and an FSA advisor stipend. Recent campus efforts also included community events, Spirit Week, expanded off-campus trips, and the upcoming launch of "Coffee and Conversations" to enhance student engagement and communication.

#### X. Principles of Board Governance

Michael Pierce, outside Counsel to the University, presented an overview of board governance principles. He reviewed the structure and function of the State University System of Florida and the role of the Florida Board of Governors.

Pierce outlined the best practices of governance, emphasizing the distinction between governance and management. He noted that the Board's most direct influence on university management is the hiring and evaluation of the President. He also stated that accrediting bodies typically require periodic board assessments to ensure appropriate separation between governance and operational responsibilities.

He summarized the Board's scope of responsibilities, including oversight, advocacy, and fiduciary duties. Trustees were reminded of their responsibility for stewardship of public funds. Pierce reviewed key requirements under BOG Regulation 1.001, including presidential selection and review; oversight of administration, academic programs, and student affairs; personnel matters; fiscal management; and property and purchasing.

Finally, Pierce addressed legal considerations, including liability and risk exposure. He reminded trustees that they are subject to Florida's Code of Ethics, as well as confidentiality obligations

under FERPA and other privacy laws. He reviewed the broad application of Florida's Sunshine Law, noting that meetings between two or more trustees constitute a public meeting and must be properly noticed, open to the public, and documented with published minutes. Board-related documents, emails and texts are public records and may be requested at any time. He encouraged trustees to practice prudent email and text message hygiene and advised against conducting Board business via text messaging.

XI. Student Scholarship Recipients

Presidential Ambassadors Erica Kozak, Aidan Flynn, and Jorgeandres Alvarez addressed the Board, sharing about their academic journeys and the meaningful impact their scholarships have had on their educational experience. Each student, a senior expected to graduate in May, spoke about their academic growth and the opportunities afforded them at Florida Poly. Trustees engaged the ambassadors with several questions and expressed admiration for their professionalism and poise.

XII. Florida Poly's New Brand Marketing

Bryan Brooks, Vice President for Student Affairs, Enrollment Management, and Strategic Communications, provided updates on Student Affairs, as well as fall 2026 enrollment and housing projections.

He presented a new reputational awareness campaign, distinct from the University's enrollment marketing efforts, aimed at increasing visibility and strengthening perception among key stakeholders, including industry leaders, state legislators, corporate partners, major donors, and members of the Florida Board of Governors. As a young institution, the University faces an awareness gap, and the campaign is intended to clearly position it as *the* solution to Florida's workforce and economic needs.

Titled "*Different by Design: The STEM University of the Future*," the campaign emphasizes the University's unique role in serving the state. Brooks also outlined planned media placements across print, digital, podcast, billboard, theater, and airport platforms.

Vice Chair Jesse Panuccio expressed support for the campaign, and Chair Kigel commented positively on its momentum and potential impact.

XIII. University Foundation MOU and Bylaws

Stephen Weingard, Chief Development Officer and CEO, University Foundation, presented two items for review and consideration of approval.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Florida Polytechnic University and Florida Polytechnic University Foundation, Inc. defines their collaborative relationship in support of the University's mission, while maintaining separate governance and accountability. Originally revised on May 5, 2023, the MOU was updated and approved by the Foundation Board on January 23, 2026, reaffirming a shared commitment to this partnership. The MOU is required to be approved by the University Board.

**A motion was made by Trustee Jack Harrell, III, to approve the revised Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Florida Polytechnic University and its Direct Support**

**Organization (DSO), Florida Polytechnic University Foundation, Inc. Trustee Eliot Peace seconded the motion; a vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.**

Next, Weingard stated the Foundation Board completed its revisions of the existing Amended and Restated Foundation Bylaws. The revised Bylaws were approved by the Board of Directors on January 23, 2026, by way of resolution 2026-001.

**A motion was made by Trustee Jack Harrell, III, to approve the revised Florida Polytechnic University Foundation, Inc. Bylaws. Trustee Sid Theis seconded the motion; a vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.**

XIV. Consent Agenda

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

**A. Governance, Audit, and Compliance Committee**

- 1. Approve Performance Based Funding (PBF) Audit and Data Integrity Certification**
- 2. Approve FPU-1.003 Use of University Facilities and Property (Amended)**
- 3. Approve FPU-1.007 Campus Free Expression (Amended)**
- 4. Approve FPU-5.003 Textbook and Instructional Materials Selection and Affordability (Amended)**

**B. Board of Trustees**

- 1. Approve Board of Trustees Meeting minutes from November 6, 2024**
- 2. Approve Board of Trustees Meeting minutes from November 30, 2024**

**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.**

XV. Committee Reports

A. Academic Enterprise, Research, and Student Success Committee Report

Trustee Theis, Committee Chair, stated that Dr. Brad Thiessen, Provost, shared updates on student and faculty successes, academic programs, and compliance matters. Committee Chair Theis also reported on a Pittsburgh visit to the National Robotics Engineering Center with Devin Stephenson, Steve Scruggs (Lakeland Economic Development Council), and Vice Presidents McKnight, Allen, and Thiessen.

B. Finance and Facilities Committee Report

Committee Chair Jesse Panuccio shared the Committee heard financial reports from VP Tanner McKnight who reported a strong second quarter, with a 6.4% year-over-year increase in net position, \$8.4 million in net revenues over expenses, expenses under budget, and healthy liquidity and reserve benchmarks.

An update on housing noted plans to meet enrollment growth through a public-private partnership to develop Phases 4 and 5, adding five hundred beds. Additional capital project updates were also given.

Advancement and Foundation updates were provided by Stephen Weingart.

The Committee also recommended, and the Board approved on today's consent agenda, a 15% increase in out-of-state tuition and fees and a \$2.5 million budget amendment to the Gary C. Wendt Engineering Center project, funded by carryforward reserves.

C. Governance, Audit, and Compliance Committee Report

Committee Chair Ilya Shapiro stated that David Blanton provided an update on external and internal audit and compliance activities and presented the Performance Based Funding Data Integrity Audit and related PBF Certification. The audit contained no reportable findings. Both items were included on today's consent agenda for approval. David also presented the Foundation audit for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2025, which resulted in a clean opinion with no internal control deficiencies or instances of noncompliance.

Joshua Millikin, Chief of Staff, reported on University employment practices as required by State law.

The Committee also discussed the nomination process for Chair and Vice Chair. No vote was taken; however, members expressed strong support for retaining the current Chair and Vice Chair.

XVI. Board of Trustees Meeting Calendar

Chair Kigel reviewed the upcoming Board calendar and noted the need to schedule a virtual meeting soon to address two agenda items that could not be covered today. Kristen Wharton will reach out to trustees to coordinate a date and time that accommodates everyone.

XVII. Board of Governors Meeting Calendar

Chair Kigel shared that the next Board of Governors meeting will be held January 29-30, 2025, at the University of North Florida in Jacksonville.

XVIII. Closing Remarks and Adjournment

With no further business to discuss the meeting adjourned at 1:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:  
Kristen Wharton  
Corporate Secretary