



## **BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

**September 19, 2023**

**Minutes**

The Starting Gate at GreatHorse  
128 Wilbraham Road, Hampden, Massachusetts

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**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chair Ali Salehi, Vice Chair Melissa Alvarado, Secretary Dr. Gloria Williams, and Trustees Paul Boudreau, Daniel Currier, George Gilmer, Dr. Robert Martin, and William Reichelt

**MEMBERS EXCUSED:** Trustees Theresa Jasmin, Madeline Landrau, Chris Montemayor

Also present and participating were Westfield State University President Dr. Linda Thompson, Chief of Staff Dr. Michael Freeman, Anthony Taylor and Jen Scumaci of SME Strategy Consulting, and special guests former Board Chairs Steven Marcus, Kevin Queenin, and Elizabeth Scheibel, and Lisa Andoscia of Rosewood Consulting, Inc.<sup>1</sup>

The meeting was called to order at 3:03 PM by Chair Salehi who stated it is time to focus on strategic planning, which must be flexible and interactive for all to use.

President Thompson thanked the Board for helping to develop strategy and identifying where the campus needs to go as we move into future. The University cannot keep doing things that worked yesterday and needs to develop leaders to make hard decisions. The NECHE study recommendations need to be incorporated into the strategic visioning process.

Dr. Freeman introduced Anthony Taylor and Jen Scumaci of SME Strategy Consulting, the firm that was selected to assist with strategic planning. SME had a model that worked with our model instead of Westfield State needing to fit into their model.

Mr. Taylor explained the strategic planning process for Westfield State and Trustees provided the following hopes for the outcomes of all the visioning sessions.

- Listen, participate
- Options/alternatives
- Share concerns/issues
- Reverse declining enrollment
- Hear collective thoughts/ideas
- Discuss where we want to be in 2029
- Address innovative goals (how will SME help?)
- Identify opportunities for next 5-10 years (within context of Higher Education landscape)
- Better institution
- Kick off strategic planning process for a significant output
- Determine how we stay relevant and affordable

- Short- and long-term strategies to support the president's big, bold vision

If there is no end point, everyone is going in different directions with a multiple destination trap, and nothing is accomplished. It is a waste of money and time. The purpose of the "one destination model" is to align on where we want to go and how to get everyone there. Start with where we are now by identifying strengths and weaknesses and trends in the future. Then collectively create goals and actions, priorities, values, mission, and vision. Trustees provided the following input to the below questions.

What is Westfield State University doing well?

- Educating students to be good global citizens
- New Gen Ed program will increase activity/engagement/interaction (faculty developed)
- Rich 185-year tradition of education, in a variety of ways/majors
- Beginning to focus on new opportunities and challenges for job creations in appropriate fields
- Willing to adapt (Student Affairs and Enrollment Management merger)
- Much better/stronger relationships with business and government communities
- Recognizing need for change
- Good leader who really cares about the University
- Providing students with quality education
- Experienced faculty
- Social media presence
- Amassed reserves for future investment
- Extracurricular student involvement (i.e., Washington Center internship)
- Committed alumni
- Affordability (relatively)
- Budgeting

What is Westfield State University doing not well/less well?

- Enrollment decreased significantly on fac/staff/student ratio demand
- Need more recruitment in other places
- Retention – keeping those we have to graduation
- Better alumni engagement/involvement
- Fundraising
- Branding and marketing
- Trying to get everyone on the same page about where we are now and direction
- Respect (climate culture and atmosphere). Everyone to respect each other and atmosphere to get to where we need to be to develop strategic plan (with 900 staff and 4,000 students – today's meeting could easily begin the impact on generations, the state, future companies, families, and students).
- Long-range financial planning
- Engaging with community about the value and importance of higher education
- Years of failed leadership
- Do not toot our horn long or loud enough
- Making sure our graduates can find work in changing work environment
- Managing the cost of education to students/not enough financial aid
- Not looking forward instead of looking back
- Not enough innovative programs instead of traditional courses/graduate and online courses
- Not meeting capacity expectations of 6,000 learners
- Recruiting and retaining diverse students
- Do not change well

- Tenure of the president
- We do not right size majors according to interested students

There is not enough time, money, or effort to fix all of these at the same time. Strategic planning is identifying what to say no to so that we can say yes (focus on) the most important items.

If we arrived at success in 2029, what would it look like? All input shared below:

- Minimum 3%-5% positive operating margin
- 25% increase in number of students – resulting in 1,000 extra students (5,000 students enrolled)
- President in place for 6-7 years
- Diverse student population of 5,000-6,000 in four or more health-related and other majors
- President Thompson announced her retirement
- Financial stability – revenue and expenses are in line
- 6,000 students, 3,000 on campus, with a retention rate of 80%
- Academic programs online and in Washington DC, Ireland, and Italy
- Alumni giving \$3M annually
- Doubled the number of graduate programs – from 10 to 20 – particularly in business (MBA) and STEM
- Top five programs with online, asynchronous options with an emphasis on adult learners
- Not using cash reserves for budget stability
- Known as destination for unique high quality undergraduate experience with high outcomes
- Has 10-15 programs uniquely connected to community partnerships
- Strong loyalty of faculty/staff to the institution with shared vision
- Financial stability with large endowment
- Truly authentic diverse community of learners, faculty, and staff
- Offer equitable educational opportunity for students wishing to attend WSU
- Graduating with marketable skills – career opportunities – how fast/how many quickly employed
- Has a \$1M endowment
- Enrollment of 6,000 students
- Ranked as one of the top 100 universities by US News & World Report
- Enrollment of 6,500 students
- New courses in health sciences/science and technology at full capacity
- Reserves of over \$120M with zero operational deficit
- 1,000 more students
- President Thompson still in her office at Horace Mann
- Ranked as a leading “Top 100” for state universities
- Enrollment at 100% capacity
- 100% acceptance of financial aid – increase endowment to make happen
- Majority of graduates finding employment
- Pre-covid enrollment over 5,000
- Campus size/staff aligned with enrollment (not excessively staffed)
- Significant advancement of, if not accomplished, strategic priorities
- Contributing to financial reserves
- Ranked as segment leader in US News & World Report for state universities
- Empty dorms filled with elders and adult learners
- Stability of administration
- Increased student retention
- Added programs within healthcare, teaching, criminal justice majors that turn into employment
- Graduate students in four years

- Increase in enrollment 40%
- Increase graduation rates
- Increase in diversity – students and employees
- Additional educational satellite locations Worcester to west of Holyoke in distressed areas
- President Thompson still in office
- Improved educational outcomes
- Financial stability
- Broader impact
- Higher rankings in the country
- Shared governance
- 75% aligned in success

If that is where we want to go, what are the next steps?

- Ensure employment post-graduate
- Recognize multiple paths to expand enrollment. Consider diverse populations and certificates.
- Adapt and change
- Reflect on how we serve diverse populations
- Offer appropriate courses/majors to drive employment
- Differentiate ourselves from other institutions in higher ed (people need to come here)
- Strategic Plan
- Realistic data – driven goals and objectives
- Branding and job market – establish programs for a career path based on needs of society
- Different delivery courses for programs
- Focus on retention

How do we get everyone on the same page? What are the best ways to get to biggest needs/challenges?

- Adapting and changing - adjust and be nimble
- Plan for enrollment and how to make it work
- Understand what we mean by “enrollment” and communicate urgency across campus. We do not agree on what enrollment is.
- Enrollment does not exist apart from academic programs
- Branding is connected to how students look at the University – everything is connected
- In addition to a good enrollment number in 2029, also include what it would look like
- Engage stakeholders/community in the “why”
- Benchmark our financial aid/cost/endowment against sister institutions and UMass. The flagships are getting the students we used to get

Takeaways from today?

- Good positive ideas
- Consolidate all information into 4-5 items
- Be specific on what we want to do
- Togetherness in generality
- Need to engage many stakeholders in the future of Westfield State University
- Opportunity to assess alignment thoughts in where we need to be
- Everyone fully engaged in this exercise
- Ability to talk about challenges and opportunities and willingness to tackle
- Imagining is difficult
- There is a lot of work left to do. Identified a number of areas of concern. Opportunity for everyone to

- have input is significant.
- There was more agreement than disagreement
- Group participation and excitement for sharing goals
- Good energy – people are committed and want to do the right thing for a rich history

The benefit of the future needs to be greater than the pain of change. The process needs to make it worthwhile and make sure everyone sees the benefit to share the vision to change successfully. There is a tendency to over resource the planning and under resource the implementation. Once the strategic plan is in place, pull people in to implement it.

Items to address later (parking lot):

- Add parents as stakeholders
- Latinx populations – recruit the parents
- Why don't we change well?

Mr. Taylor stated that all the stakeholder contributions in the visioning sessions will be compiled and shared in future communications to the University.

There being no further business, **MOTION** made by Trustee Alvarado, and seconded by Trustee Martin, to adjourn. There being no discussion, **Motion passed unanimously.**

Meeting adjourned at 4:58 PM.

Attachments presented at this meeting:

- a. None

**Secretary's Certificate**

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of the approved minutes of the Westfield State University Board of Trustees Special meeting held on September 19, 2023.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Gloria Williams, Secretary

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Date

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<sup>i</sup> Ms. Andoscia joined the meeting at 3:30 PM