

**NORTHWEST COLLEGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING**

October 13, 2025

MEMBERS PRESENT: President Ms. DENISE LAURSEN; Vice President/Secretary MR. R.J. KOST; and Trustees MR. JOHN HOUSEL, MS. TARA KUIPERS, MR. SHANE OGDEN, and DR. MARK WURZEL.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Treasurer MR. BOB NEWSOME

OTHERS PRESENT: MS. LISA WATSON, President; MR. DAVE ERICKSON, Vice President for Academic Affairs; MR. TOM HAVRON, Vice President for Student Services; MR. BURT REYNOLDS, Vice President for Administrative Services and Finance; MS. BOSSAN ABDYYEVA, MS. SAMI ASHCRAFT, MS. OGULBIBI BATYROVA, MS. JACQUE COBOURN, MS. ELAINE DEBUHR; MR. DUSTIN DICKS, MS. AMANDA ENRIQUEZ, MS. TRACY GASAWAY, MR. MARK GRANT, MR. TAYLOR LEE, MS. CAREY MILLER, MR. DENNIS QUILLEN, DR. ROBERT RUMBOLZ, MS. KARA RYF, DR. GREG SMITH, MS. LISA SMITH, MS. LINDA SPOMER, MR. OSCAR TREVIÑO, MS. SHELBY WETZEL, MR. CHRIS WINEMAN, MR. ZAC TAYLOR, *Powell Tribune*; and MS. KELI BORDERS, Executive Secretary to the President and Board of Trustees.

CALL TO ORDER: President Denise Laursen called the regular meeting of the Northwest College Board of Trustees to order on Monday, October 13, 2025, at 4:00 p.m. in the Yellowstone Building Conference Center.

A APPROVE THE AGENDA: **A motion was made by Trustee Kost and seconded by Trustee Kuipers to approve the agenda. Motion carried.**

MISSION MOMENT Amanda Enriquez, International Student & Scholar Services (ISSS) Manager, explained that in Turkmenistan culture, offering special bread is a heartfelt gesture of hospitality and respect, practiced when welcoming important guests. She introduced Turkmenistan student Ogulbibi Batyrova and former student and current employee Bossan Obdyeva, who offered the bread to the Trustees and guests.

The ISSS's department goal for years has been to bring the world to Wyoming, and its daily work is rooted in the College's Mission. Amanda introduced her team: Kara Ryf, ISSS Coordinator (Immigration and Advising); Sami Ashcraft, ISSS Specialist (campus and community events and activities); and Bossan Abdyeva, Interim Admissions Representative – Recruitment Outreach – Intl and National. Among the four, they handle everything related to international students, including recruitment, admissions, immigration processes, airport transport, check-in to housing, orientation, advising, and efforts to engage students on campus and in the community.

Amanda stated that between 2016 and 2019, the number of international students attending Northwest College averaged about 60. During the COVID years, it dropped to the low 40s. Last year, there was a record number of international students at 104. Despite the uncertainty around increased scrutiny of entry into the United States, the College has 100 international students this fall, representing 24 countries.

Beginning in the 1970s, approximately 10 to 14 international students enrolled at Northwest College, mainly from Japan, Nepal, and Australia. In the 1990s, Harriet Bloom-Wilson served as International Student Advisor and taught courses such as Cross-Cultural Studies and Intro to American Culture. Harriet's vision was to build the international program and put Northwest College on the

map. In 2001, Harriet took her first recruitment trip to Vietnam, where Northwest College was one of only two community colleges selected to participate. The College continued to form partnerships and increased recruitment efforts in Vietnam, China, Europe, and Central America.

Harriet believed that Northwest College had something special to offer: a small institution in a small town near Yellowstone National Park with a one-on-one program. Harriet continued to travel to various countries, attending fairs and spreading the word about why students should choose Wyoming and Northwest College.

With advances in technology, recruitment efforts have shifted to virtual fairs. New tools and platforms include webinars, social media, and online marketing. The College can now provide personalized follow-up with agents, students, and parents.

International students have a significant economic impact. In 2023-2024, 1.1 million international students studying in the United States contributed \$42.8 billion to the economy and supported 378,175 jobs. In Wyoming, 839 students contributed \$21.6 million to the state economy and supported 142 jobs. At Northwest College, 101 students contributed \$2.5 million to the state economy and supported nine jobs. The top three institutions in Wyoming for international students are UW, Northwest College, and Casper College.

For Northwest College, the impact extends far beyond the economic realm. Global awareness is fostered through community engagement, connections established by various ISSS programs and activities, and in the classroom.

In addition to serving international students, ISSS is building partnerships across the state and the region. In 2020, Northwest College and Montana State University Billings (MSUB) were awarded a three-year UISFL grant to develop and implement programs that strengthen undergraduate instruction in international studies and foreign languages.

In 2023, Northwest College and MSUB were awarded a second three-year grant with similar goals and objectives, with the added purpose of creating and operationalizing the Yellowstone Consortium. Other institutions were included, such as Miles Community College and Dawson Community College. The main objectives are to provide language instruction in Japanese, Mandarin, Chinese, and Korean; increase study abroad opportunities; develop collaborative online international learning activities and courses; and develop faculty expertise in International Studies.

Over the past five years, ten Northwest College faculty members have received a UISFL Course Development Faculty Travel Grant. Each received \$6k to travel abroad, conduct research within their field of study, and then internationalize the curriculum by incorporating it into their courses. It's another way in which ISSS can bring global perspectives to campus.

Looking ahead, ISSS will continue to expand strategic recruitment and strengthen agent partnerships for targeted recruitment. It will learn from the UISFL grant to continue opportunities and leverage faculty research beyond the grant's end. Additionally, ISSS will strengthen community ties and reinforce regional and national collaborations to showcase Northwest College, promote Wyoming, and highlight the value of community colleges.

A CONSENT AGENDA:

A motion was made by Trustee Wurzel and seconded by Trustee Ogden to approve the consent agenda.

President Laursen expressed her appreciation to the Faculty Senate for establishing a committee to develop AI policy at Northwest College.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that the Surgical Tech program is offered at both the Cody Center and in Powell, depending on student interest. Paramedic and EMT programming take place at the Cody Center as well. There has been a lack of interest in live for-credit classes in Cody, so the College has transitioned into more online offerings. The hybrid Nursing courses have moved to Powell. The coursework is online, and lab work is done on the weekends. Interest in the program grew to the point that Powell's larger lab space is needed to accommodate the increased number of students.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that the Turkmenistan Educational Department is visiting the United States to tour Wyoming and Montana, with a scheduled stop at Northwest College on October 20. They will meet with academic departments and host a presentation in the evening. They plan to visit the University of Montana, Montana State University-Bozeman, and the University of Wyoming. Northwest College is the only community college on its tour.

President Watson stated that Turkmenistan recognizes community colleges on an educational level, but their banking system is quite different from that in the United States, with a specific list of approved institutions, making it easier to transfer money. Northwest College hopes to discuss opportunities for engagement and, eventually, to be included on the list of approved institutions. No Community Colleges are currently on that list.

Trustee Housel stated he was pleased to see the Outdoor Photography Seminar group travel to Yellowstone and Teton National Parks and stay overnight at the Whiskey Mountain Conservation Camp.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that the climbing wall has been very popular with students, community members, homeschool groups, and various high schools.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, VP Erickson stated that the Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (drone) Technician Certification program will consist of three 3-credit courses: a beginning, an intermediate, and an advanced class. By keeping the course load low, the program can appeal to students across various disciplines, including agriculture, anthropology, biology, criminal justice, and more.

The grant award enables the College to develop its curriculum, fund faculty professional development, and purchase necessary equipment. After the three-year grant ends, the College expects sufficient student interest to sustain enrollment. Student Fixed fees help fund replacement of instructional equipment; therefore, the drone equipment would fall into the same replacement cycle as existing instructional equipment.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that the Annual Security Report is related to the Clery Act. The College is required to report crimes, thefts, or illegal activities on campus or anywhere College individuals' travel.

Trustee Kuipers expressed appreciation for the various ways in which the College supports its students, as described in the reports contained in the Board packet. She is very appreciative of how the various programs connect with and meet students' needs.

Motion carried, and the consent agenda, including the minutes of September 8, 2025, regular meeting, was approved.

**DISCUSSION/
INFORMATIONAL ITEMS:**

Visual & Performing Arts
Level II report

President Watson introduced Taylor Lee of Plan One Architects and Chris Wineman of Semple Brown Designs, who the College contracted to assist with the Level II report for the Visual and Performing Arts building.

Taylor Lee explained that a full range of consultants worked on this project, many of whom are local. All were tasked with visiting the site and learning about the building's existing conditions. Each discipline was involved, including structural, mechanical, civil, and landscape. Cost Plus was used to provide an in-depth view of the project's costs.

The building was constructed in 1965, with several additions over the years. The most recent addition is the Music Studio. Many studies have taken place regarding the space, beginning in 2008, when the Master Plan called for a new arts center. Since then, an accreditation report cited ventilation concerns; an updated Master Plan reiterates the need for a new or renovated building; the Level I study recommends renovation/expansion; and the most recent accreditation report for Music reiterates acoustical and accessibility concerns.

Level II found three potential areas of significant cost savings: maintaining the existing recording studio, renovating the auditorium, and renovating the current Music space for Visual Art.

Chris Wineman explained that Level II work calls for improving quality rather than quantity, right-sizing the rooms, and sharing spaces where appropriate. The square footage remains the same as called for in the Level I study.

Chris shared schematics representing different options such as: renovating the auditorium with Music remaining on the east side of the building next to the auditorium and building a Visual Arts space to the east; building a new auditorium to the west along with Music and renovating the existing space to the east for Visual Art; renovating the existing auditorium, building new Music space around it to the west and phasing the project so that Music and Art could both stay in their existing spaces until each phase is complete.

Suggestions for improving the auditorium include allowing entry from two sides of the hall rather than the rear, sloping the seating more dramatically to significantly improve sight lines, and creating a cross-aisle to provide a circulation path and ADA seating.

It could be cost-efficient to build new square footage with new foundations all at once and then do an interior renovation in the second phase. A new mechanical room would have to be built, as the old system cannot be tied into it until renovations are complete. Therefore, the existing mechanical room must remain operational throughout the phases.

Chris shared renderings to help visualize the completed project. There is a planned student gathering space on the east side of the building, a gallery off the lobby to invite foot traffic, improved auditorium sight lines and acoustics,

as well as proposed improvements to the outside of the building to update the appearance and make it more cohesive with the rest of the campus buildings.

Chris explained that the project's cost ranges from \$56.8 million to \$75.5 million, depending on the options. The estimates include general construction, contingencies, escalation to 2028, professional fees, and soft costs. Cost Plus is experienced in visual and performing arts projects worldwide and is adept at estimating project costs using diagrams. Their experience helps to ensure there are no future surprises.

In conclusion, Chris stated that the Nelson Performing Arts Building could expand its services to the College and the community as a combined performing and visual arts center. The exterior and interior can be refreshed, the long-standing accreditation, safety, and accessibility issues can be resolved, and space in Cabre Gym can be freed up for athletics. The phased approach allows the building to remain operational, which is ideal from an instructional standpoint and is more cost-effective.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, Chris stated that the number of seats in the new auditorium would decrease to 450 from 483 due to the proposed cross aisle for accessibility and the installation of wider seats.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, Chris stated that the recording studio's body is impressive. However, the feedback he received indicates that the faculty would like to see changes, such as a larger instructional space.

With improvements to the other spaces, such as the large music ensemble studio and auditorium, the signals could be run back to the recording studio. The design does not call for a significant change to the recording studio's structure, but it does call for changes to the equipment and control room space.

Level I work determined it is best to keep the Visual and Performing Arts space at the same site in the Academic Corridor. The design accommodates current enrollment in the programs, but it would limit future growth.

In response to a question from Trustee Kost, President Watson stated that the project is more complex than the Student Center project. Bringing Music and Art together with their respective mechanical and structural needs while providing future flexibility is challenging, especially when costs are considered. A phased approach may be necessary to advance the project in a manageable and sustainable way.

Trustee Kuipers stated that the academic needs of the students and the faculty's effectiveness must be foremost in mind when designing the space. Additionally, she appreciates the visuals that offer a glimpse into what the space could also be for bringing the community together.

President Watson expressed her appreciation to everyone who has worked on the project, and especially the faculty who spent time over the summer meeting to discuss program needs for the new space. She invites feedback from the Trustees and will also seek final input from the faculty on the design presented. She would like to complete the Level II report so that it can be used to inform Legislators and the community about the project. However, it is too soon to present the report at the upcoming budget session.

Lisa Smith stated that the report offers an examination of the College's enrollment over the past eleven years, with various breakdowns to understand how populations are changing.

Fall 2025 enrollment is down from the year before, but only slightly down from two years ago. Enrollment is expected to increase by the end of the term and possibly exceed numbers from two years ago once the second half-term classes are accounted for.

The top ten program areas that have the highest number of majors are: health science (non-nursing), general studies, nursing, biology, business, agriculture, education, criminal justice, aeronautics, and STEM (chemistry, engineering, math, physics). Some program areas offer multiple degrees or certificates.

As in the past few years, the majority of Northwest College students (56%) are part-time, while 44% are full-time. Approximately one-third (34%) are dual- or concurrently enrolled while in high school. Three-fourths of students come from the College's service area.

Within the past five years, an average of 21% of Big Horn Basin high school graduates have enrolled at Northwest College, with the largest percentages coming from Powell, Lovell, and Rocky Mountain high schools.

Last year, graduation rates were down due to the group of students who started at Northwest College during the COVID years. In 2024, graduation rates rebounded to 43% for first-time, full-time degree-seeking students who began in Fall 2021. Another 15% of this group transferred, bringing the total to 58% of those students who either graduated or transferred within three years. The unofficial retention rate of 65% of first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students who enrolled last fall and returned this fall is something to celebrate.

In response to a question from Trustee Kuipers, President Watson stated that it's difficult to determine why there was a shift from a majority of full-time students to part-time students. She feels there are several contributing factors, including the decline in traditional-aged students, the aggressive market, the cost of attendance, and enrollment declines nationwide. Most part-time students are dual- and concurrent-enrolled and are not completers, meaning they don't complete or transfer because they are in high school.

Lisa Smith stated that the decrease in the number of students taking large credit loads might be partly due to changes in tuition rates. Tuition was a flat rate until Fall 2019, when the rate cap changed from 15 to 20 credits. Students taking higher credits paid the same rate. Then, in Fall 2021, the rate cap was eliminated, and students pay for all credits. The timeline of the decrease in larger credit loads lines up with that timeframe.

VP Havron stated that the removal of the tuition cap explains why students are taking smaller loads, which ultimately affects the total credit hours. As part of the SEM Plan, there is a focus on increasing students' credit loads and converting some part-time students to full-time students. VP Havron and Lisa Smith meet weekly to review different data points. This report provides an opportunity to focus on areas that may need improvement.

In response to a question from Trustee Ogden, President Watson stated that while the report indicates that Music and Art programs do not have the highest number of majors, a new Visual and Performing Arts building would hopefully improve the overall experience for many Northwest College students who would be taking classes there. The reality is that the building is at the end of its life, and, from an accreditation perspective, real improvements are needed. The design work took a conservative approach that would meet the programs' needs and improve the overall student experience.

In response to a question from Trustee Kost, Lisa Smith stated that dual and concurrent students are classified by the number of credits taken at Northwest College. Therefore, most are classified as part-time, with a few who may be able to take twelve credits or more being classified as full-time.

NSF-ATE Grant

President Watson stated that she is excited to announce that Northwest College has been awarded a \$475,000 grant from the National Science Foundation's Advanced Technological Education (NSF ATE) program. It's a great example of how working with Ellucian paid off, and it's also a reflection of the quality of the faculty and staff who developed the ideas and plan to submit the grant application, which was then awarded at a time when federal grants are uncertain.

VP Erickson stated that the curriculum is currently being developed by participating faculty and will then be submitted to the Curriculum Committee, followed by the Board of Trustees for approval. The statewide Vice Presidents, followed by the Presidents, will review, and the certificate program will then be presented to the Wyoming Community College Commission for final approval.

The award amount will allow the College to purchase American-made drone technology. Faculty professional development and training will also be part of the award. Dr. Greg Smith, with his background in anthropology and archaeology, will develop the beginning class. Dr. Astrid Northrup, with her background in engineering and private airplane license, will create the intermediate course. The appropriate curriculum for the advanced course is being explored.

VP Erickson stated that he is grateful for the strong support and partnerships received during the process. Choice Aviation is recognized as an official proctor for the permit and will provide testing for the beginning class. Area high schools, including Meeteetse, Powell, Cody, and Greybull, provided letters of support to strengthen partnerships and provide feeder programs for the new degree offering. Tom Rullman, who has years of experience developing drones and holds specialized certifications, has also signed on as a partner.

Area police Chiefs have expressed their excitement for the opportunity for officer training. The leading drone operator from the Sheriff's department expressed excitement and intends to share his perspective on developing curriculum regarding responsible and ethical drone flying.

The program will integrate RPAS technology across multiple academic areas, including agriculture, anthropology/archaeology, biology/wildlife, criminal justice, emergency response, entrepreneurship, and software development.

VP Erickson expressed his appreciation to the seven faculty members who spent the summer of 2024 researching and helping prepare the grant application to meet the October deadline. He stated that the goal is to get everything developed, passed through the Curriculum Committee, and receive the additional approvals needed for a Fall 2026 start date for students.

President Watson also extended her appreciation to all who worked on the grant and to Ellucian for their guidance and support. This type of grant is highly competitive, and most applicants are unsuccessful on their first attempt. She stated that it is a true testament to the individuals who worked to develop and write a quality grant application.

CITIZENS' OPEN FORUM

The Citizens' Open Forum convened at 5:00 p.m. No citizens requested to address the Board; therefore, the Citizens' Open Forum adjourned.

A UNFINISHED BUSINESS

There were no unfinished business items on the agenda.

A NEW BUSINESS:

There were no new business items on the agenda.

**FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS
FEEDBACK TO CITIZENS'
OPEN FORUM TOPICS:**

November 10, 2025, upcoming:

- Concurrent and Dual Enrollment Summary Report
- Academic program updates
- Big Horn Basin High School Report
- Facilities Master Plan
- Preliminary Audit report
- Statewide Legislative update
- Nomination Committee for Board Offices
- Holiday Party
- Other TBD

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Second Half-term classes, Oct 15, 2024

Volleyball vs. Casper, Oct 17, 2025, 6:00 p.m., Cabre Gym

Soccer Region IX Tournament Quarter Finals, Oct. 18, 2025, TBA

Volleyball vs. Gillette, Oct 18, 2025, 2:00 p.m., Cabre Gym

ACCT Leadership Congress, October 22-25, 2025, New Orleans, LA

Volleyball vs. LCCC, Oct. 24, 2025, 6:00 p.m., Cheyenne

Soccer Region IX Tournament Semi-Finals, Oct 25, 2025, TBA

Volleyball vs. Eastern, Oct 25, 2025, 2:00 p.m., Torrington

Volleyball vs. Central, Oct 29, 2025, 6:00 p.m., Riverton

Volleyball vs. Western, Oct 31, 2025, 6:00 p.m., Cabre Gym

Soccer Region IX Tournament Finals, Nov 1, 2025, TBA

Chorale, Wind, and Percussion Ens., Nov 3, 2025, 7:00 p.m., NPA

Advising Day and Early Registration for Spring 2026, Nov 4, 2025

Volleyball Region IX Tournament, Nov 5-8, 2025, Cheyenne

Next meeting, November 10, 2025, 4:00 p.m., Yellowstone Building

A ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting adjourned at 6:33 p.m.

R.J. KOST, Vice President/Secretary

Date