

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

September 11, 2023

- MEMBERS PRESENT:** President DR. MARK WURZEL; Treasurer MR. BOB NEWSOME; and Trustees MR. JOHN HOUSEL, MS. TARA KUIPERS, MS. DENISE LAURSEN, and MR. DUSTY SPOMER.
- MEMBERS ABSENT:** Trustee DR. LARRY TODD
- OTHERS PRESENT:** MS. LISA WATSON, President; MR. DAVE ERICKSON, Interim Vice President for Academic Affairs; MR. DEE HAVIG, Interim Vice President for Student Services; MS. JILL ANDERSON; MS. AMY BURTON; MS. JENNIFER CANNIZZARO; MR. AUSTIN CONKLIN; MS. JONEEN COSTIGAN; MR. DUSTIN DICKS; MS. AMANDA ENRIQUEZ; MS. KIM FLETCHER; MS. TRACY GASAWAY; MR. MARK GRANT; MR. STEVEN HAGGARD; MR. ERIC HAGMANN; MS. JO ANN HEIMER; MR. JEREMIAH HOWE; MS. STACY KUENN; MS. JEN LITTERER-TREVIÑO; MR. JACK MCGRATH; MS. BROOKE MERKEL; MS. CAREY MILLER; MS. REBECCA MONCUR; MR. DENNIS QUILLEN; MS. JOAN SIMPKINS; MS. LISA SMITH; MR. MARTIN STENSING; MR. OSCAR TREVIÑO; MR. JEFF TROXEL; MR. ANDY WARD; MR. RONNIE WOLFE; MR. ZAC TAYLOR, *Powell Tribune*; and MS. KELI BORDERS, Executive Secretary to the President and Board of Trustees.

CALL TO ORDER: President Dr. Mark Wurzel called the regular meeting of the Northwest College Board of Trustees to order on Monday, September 11, 2023, at 4:03 p.m. in the Yellowstone Building Conference Center.

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

MISSION MOMENT:

New Employee Introductions

President Watson welcomed new employees, as well as those employees whose positions had changed. She introduced those who were in attendance to Trustees: **Amy Burton**, Interim TRIO Career and Transfer Associate; **Austin Conklin**, Assistant Professor of Anatomy and Physiology; **Joneen Costigan**, Fixed Term Instructor of Nursing; **Mark Grant**, Finance Director; **Steven Haggard**, Fixed Term Instructor of Emergency Medical Services; **Eric Haggmann**, Fixed Term Instructor of Vocal Music; **Stacy Kuenn**, Instructor of Business; **Jack McGrath**, Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice; **Joan Simpkins**, Interim Senior Office Assistant for Human Resources; **Jeff Troxel**, Fixed Term Instructor of Music; and **Ronnie Wolf**, Interim Multimedia Production Specialist.

New and reassigned employees who were unable to attend include **Joshua Buhmann**, Interim Campus Security Coordinator; **Christopher Christen**, Temporary Campus Security Assistant; **Faith Johnson**, Library Coordinator; **Jessica Kasinger**, Interim Admissions Representative; **Lori McKearney**, Interim Adult Education Instructor; **Calli Nissen**, Fixed Term Instructor of Art; **Denise Schuler**, Fixed Term Instructor of Nursing; **Ana Vazquez Madera**, Visiting Fulbright Scholar for Spanish; **Haley Harrison**, Facilities Assistant – Custodial; **Mandy Joy**, Facilities Supervisor – Custodial; **Nydia Jurado**, Interim Business Office Assistant; **Rebecca Voss**, Library Director.

- A CONSENT AGENDA:** **A motion was made by Trustee Newsome and seconded by Trustee Kuipers to approve the consent agenda.**

Trustee Housel stated he is pleased to see the Temporary Dining facility's operations are running smoothly.

President Watson stated that much planning went into the facility's building

and operation. She commended the many individuals who worked hard to ensure its opening went smoothly. The pizza meal exchange in the Trap has been well received, and extra seating in the Conference Center has been made available. Students eat in thirty-minute increments in the Temp Dining building, and a shuttle service is available for transportation from various areas on campus. President Watson has ridden the shuttle bus, spent time in the Temp Dining and the Trap during lunch, and feels that everything is operating well. She expects the shuttle to be utilized more during colder weather, and a second shuttle or van could be used if necessary.

Trustee Housel thanked President Watson for hosting the Men's and Women's Soccer and Volleyball teams for dinner.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that the seventy-five employment packets referred to in the Administrative Services report are for student employees.

Trustee Housel stated that he is pleased to see that interest rates are being compared at local financial institutions and that a long-term strategic plan is being developed for cash management.

Trustee Kuipers appreciates everyone involved in Paint the Town Red planning and activities. She feels it was an incredible night with a sense of community that Northwest College should be proud of.

President Watson highlighted a couple of items in the Reserve Overview Report and stated that she feels that the College is doing a good job of managing its revenue and matching expenditures to those revenues while also planning fiscally for projects.

The Wyoming Community College Commission and state statutes dictate that the Operating Fund Reserve remains under the 15% reserve limitation. This reserve fund is necessary to ensure payroll and other expenses can be covered if there is no cash flow. Due to planned conservative spending, it has been possible to utilize the surplus to fund the Student Center and other projects.

President Watson reminded Trustees that a few years ago when faced with the issues at Cody Hall, \$3 million of the One Mill (Fund 11) was designated for capital project use. Therefore, this fund reserve has intentionally trended down as it is used for the Student Center.

The auxiliary reserves are increasing due to increased occupancy at Trapper Village West and revenue from student auxiliary facility fees and laundry fees. President Watson reminded Trustees that there were increased costs from consumables and transition costs associated with feeding students while the Student Center is built. There is expected to be a loss again this year.

President Watson stated that Major Maintenance money is constantly being spent on various projects, and we cannot build reserves in that area. The year-to-year reserve balance fluctuates based on the size of projects and paying on a project over time.

The Emergency Contingency (WCCC) reserve is old coal board lease money given to the community colleges and the University for emergency project use. It must be reported to the Commission as it is utilized. The money decreased in this account primarily due to replacing the failed boilers in Colter Hall.

Coal money is no longer received from the State; therefore, the College shall utilize the funds while replacing it simultaneously to always have an unencumbered emergency account of approximately \$1 million. Currently,

funds remain in the WCCC account and are being put into the new internal emergency account to replace the monies spent from the former.

The College aims to maintain Fund 10 at the operational level, retain at least \$1 million in emergency plant reserves, and ensure that auxiliaries have some reserves to handle more minor emergencies.

President Watson directed the Trustees' attention to a spreadsheet in the Reserves Overview report that illustrates the year-to-date funding for the Student Center project. At the end of FY2023, the College still owes \$6.8 million, which does not include the Foundation's campaign of \$3.5 million. President Watson feels that with another year of conservative spending and flexibility built into the plan to keep costs as expected, the College is on track financially with the project.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that she created the Transformational Reserve account from HEERF money to help fund transformational change initiatives. This year, \$150,000 was added to support the academic program review project as outlined in the Strategic Plan. The remaining funds will be utilized for program development, marketing, and enrollment initiatives.

President Watson explained that while looking at the reserve accounts is not a full accounting of all cash holdings, it is close. The College considered what the cash flow needs would be for the next fiscal year and worked with the bank to receive higher interest rates. CDs have been purchased to maintain flexibility for the Student Center funding and other project needs. As they mature, needs will be reevaluated, and the money can be reinvested or utilized as needed. President Watson reminded Trustees that area financial institutions must express their interest and capacity to work with the College each year because they must pledge asset collateral for funds the College holds with them.

Motion carried, and the consent agenda, including the minutes of the August 14, 2023, regular meeting, was approved.

DISCUSSION/ INFORMATIONAL ITEMS:

CCSSE Report

Lisa Smith reported that the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) is a survey the College conducts every other year. The Wyoming Community College Commission pays for all community colleges in the state to participate in the survey. Many two-year institutions across the country participate, and this year, there were over 200,000 students who took the survey and are included in the CCSSE 2023 cohort.

In the spring of 2023, 243 Northwest College post-high school students completed the survey, with a response rate of 27%. This is a lower response rate than in the past when the survey was conducted in classes. Since COVID, the survey has been conducted online. Dual and concurrent students are not surveyed.

Lisa shared the benchmark scores, which compare Northwest College's results with those of the other Wyoming community colleges, the national cohort, and the top 10% of institutions in the cohort. All the CCSSE benchmark scores are normalized around 50, meaning if the score is above 50, the score is above average, with most institutions falling between 40 and 60. Questions on the survey either fall into one of the benchmark categories or are standard, stand-alone questions.

Northwest College scored above average (53.0) in active and collaborative learning questions, slightly below average (46.7) in student effort questions, right at average (49.5) for academic challenge questions, above average (51.7) for student-faculty interaction questions, and slightly below average (49.0) for support for learners. Lisa noted that all the College's benchmark scores were higher in 2023 than in 2021.

Lisa shared highlights from the standard questions: 93% would recommend NWC to a friend or family member; 89% rated their overall educational experience at NWC as good or excellent; 86% of friends and 85% of immediate family members are quite a bit or extremely supportive of students attending NWC; 82% believe NWC emphasizes providing the support students need to help them succeed; 79% noted their NWC experience contributed to their ability to think critically and analytically; and 79% believe their NWC experience contributed to their ability to learn effectively on their own.

Lisa stated there were also special focus questions related to student mental health and well-being, with highlights as follows: 79% feel that students' mental health and emotional well-being is a priority at NWC; 58% would know where to seek professional help for their mental or emotional health; 53% felt that emotional or mental difficulties hurt their academic performance in the four weeks before taking the survey; 47% have been bothered by feeling down, depressed, or hopeless for at least several days over the two weeks before taking the survey; and 25% noted that it is somewhat to very likely that mental health or emotional well-being would cause them to withdraw from classes or from NWC. Lisa feels these results indicate the necessity of services to help these students.

Lisa explained that the full results are available to employees on the portal. The results will be shared with various leadership and campus groups to help inform relevant departmental planning. She has shared the mental health and well-being results with the Student Success Center Counselors, who will use them to address student needs.

President Wurzel expressed concern that over half of the students who participated in the survey stated that their emotional or mental well-being hurts their academic performance.

Lisa Smith reported that the numbers are comparable to statewide and national survey results.

Upon invitation from President Watson, Counselor Kim Fletcher stated that during her tenure at Northwest College, she had noticed a decline in the mental health of both American and international students. She feels it can partly be attributed to COVID-19, isolation, and social media.

Kim stated that she is working to develop a support group for students called "Better Together." The survey indicates that students are more likely to talk to a friend than to seek help from a mental health professional. The group is meant to be about students helping students, and there will be workshops that teach coping and life skills. Kim will present her proposal to the Student Senate at their meeting later in the week. She is envisioning this as becoming a mental health movement and is seeking a grant to provide financial support.

Trustee Spomer stated the survey results are concerning, and he appreciates the creativity of the idea of students helping students. He is concerned, however, that young students might not be developmentally equipped to deal with another student who may be in serious mental trouble.

President Watson stated that besides existing counseling services, the student support group would not be the only resource for students who are struggling. There would be training for students to understand the difference between when they can help and when professional help is needed.

Kim stated that her vision includes educating students on the various resources available on and off campus. She recognizes that students always helping other students can be a problem as well; therefore, she wants to provide the skills necessary for them to identify when additional help is needed.

President Watson stated that Northwest College utilizes a HELP alert system where employees and faculty members can initiate an alert for a student they have concerns about academically or otherwise. The alert is sent to the appropriate department, which then reaches out to the student to offer services.

President Wurzel noted that he feels mental health issues are beginning before students arrive at college and questioned whether Northwest College should be working with K-12 superintendents to address the problem.

Kim stated that many students seeking counseling in her office have already worked with professionals and know what they're dealing with. When students reach college age, many no longer have parental support. She feels the support group would help students get out of their rooms and connect with others.

In response to a question from Trustee Laursen related to the timing of the survey and if it might have impacted the results, Lisa stated the survey was administered mid-February through mid-March. Students may be feeling homesick, stressed about classes and grades, etc. She noted that in the standard CCSSE questions, 82% of students who responded to the survey indicated that NWC emphasizes providing the support students need to help them succeed.

President Watson also noted that 79% feel that students' mental health and emotional well-being is a priority at Northwest College. She thinks it reflects the services and support they likely received at the College.

Trustee Spomer expressed concern that many classes have moved to online or hybrid versions. There is a loss of student-to-student and student-to-instructor interaction.

President Watson stated that nationwide, the percentage of online coursework has increased. When surveyed, students request more online learning options, which institutions provide. Northwest College offers live instruction, online classes, and hybrid options, which consist of the opportunity to attend in person or online.

Trustee Housel noted an increasing number of nationwide studies that indicate the harmful effects of social media. Legislators have begun an attempt to restrict the use of social media among the younger age groups.

President Watson stated that most NWC students are legal adults. The College approaches the problem by providing opportunities for engagement through clubs, activities, etc., and various support services.

President Wurzel stated that the statistics are alarming, and the Board would be interested in a follow-up report on Kim's proposal and other mental health-related initiatives.

Trustee Kuipers expressed her appreciation to the Trustees for engaging in the discussion, as it's an issue that affects every facet of the institution, and she feels the conversation is critical.

President's Operational Plan 2023

President Watson presented the 2023 President's Operational Plan for review. She stated that it's a good reminder of the efforts and successes of the College the prior year, all while inspiring and educating students.

For instance, last year, the Strategic Plan was finalized, the College successfully made compensation gains, and progress was made on marketing and strategic enrollment work. The Wyoming Innovative Partnership (WIP) work continued, and the College received grant funding for the following year in addition to the continuation of the original funds for the Outdoor Recreation academic space. Project and fiscal planning for the Student Center and the Temporary Dining Facility building continued throughout the year.

President's Operational Plan 2024

President Watson stated that the President's Staff worked to develop the 2024 President's Operational Plan and ensure it aligned with the Strategic Plan. The operational document itself was redesigned to include the four pillars and the associated work that would be focused on and accomplished this year:

Pillar 1: Innovate Academic Programming

Identify and implement academic programs that support economic development and workforce needs.

President Watson stated that the Governor and legislators have clarified that this is their priority. The College has and will continue to participate in WIP and participate in grants that make sense for Northwest College. As the College works through academic program demand analysis and programmatic review, it will utilize WIP to move programmatic needs.

Create new grant department and processes.

President Watson stated that she has reviewed financial reports showing some small institutions receiving up to 30% of their revenue from grants. The College stepped away from grant writing with budget cuts and staffing losses, and she feels it needs to return to this work.

Ellucian, the company that provides Colleague to the College, has a specialty group that assists colleges in setting up and running successful grant programs. They will work with a team on campus to develop policies and procedures, help research opportunities, and offer professional development for grant writing and grant accounting. They will also help the College write at least three grants every year for up to three years and provide technical assistance. President Watson favored this company because their goal is to help you get started, operational, and succeed. She seeks to hire a grant writer to support building a future revenue stream and programmatic support for the College. This work will begin in October.

Examine and redesign academic program review process.

President Watson stated that an academic program demand analysis will be conducted, and the formal academic program review will be reinvigorated. These efforts will lead the College in its future programmatic focuses.

Pillar 2: Attract New Students and Quality Employees

Enhance the NWC brand through new investment in marketing and communication to improve recruitment, institutional reputation, and alumni across the state and region.

President Watson stated that it's essential to educate the campus community on the brand's value and clearly define it when working on the marketing plan.

President Watson stated the College plans to contract with a marketing consultant to evaluate its current work with target audiences. The academic demand analysis will help to inform who the target audiences are. Current messaging and delivery will then be assessed to ensure they meet potential students' interests.

The College has chosen the vendor Modern Campus to work with on the website redesign. They work primarily with clients in higher education, including several in Wyoming. Modern Campus can provide the content management system, content, website design, platform, search engine optimization, and ADA compliance. It is the only vendor that replied to the RFP that can do it all. The existing website will stay up and running while the new website is being built.

There is federal pressure for institutions to provide information to students regarding the economic outcome of their chosen area of study. Modern Campus offers a module called Pathways. Each academic program will have a webpage that describes the program, necessary courses, etc. On the side of each is a pathway that pulls data from places like the Bureau of Labor Statistics that will describe the median earnings and how many jobs are available in the student's region. This would be available for all programs, including career and technical.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated the vendor anticipates a three-to-five-month timeline to complete the project. A committee will be formed to review the current content and provide feedback and input on the design. She expects to roll out the new website in mid-spring.

Elevate Strategic Enrollment Efforts.

President Watson stated that there will be an assessment this fall on the current recruitment and retention processes with an enrollment consultant. A Strategic Enrollment Plan (SEM) will be developed with the consultant's assistance to help guide the Enrollment Services department. There will be informational sessions on the SEM to help employees understand their role in recruitment and retention efforts.

Attract and Hire Highly Qualified Faculty and Staff.

President Watson will continue to advocate with legislators for compensation at market levels. The community colleges are focusing on a sustainable inflationary cost adjustment for the next legislative session, ensuring they can keep up with increased costs such as utilities, insurance, and compensation.

Pillar 3: Champion Student and Employee Retention and Success

Develop and Retain a Highly Qualified Faculty and Staff.

President Watson stated that professional development funding was a casualty of the past budget cuts. The College has flexible funds received through rent and bookstore commissions. Investing those funds through the Foundation would create an endowment to provide a consistent income stream for faculty and staff to apply for and participate in professional development opportunities.

President Watson reiterated that employee compensation and benefits will remain a priority.

Research Higher Education Best Practices in Flexible Work Arrangement Models.

President Watson stated the College would explore the feasibility of a flexible work arrangement in an institution designed around service. While students are inquiring about their options for instructional delivery, employees are also wondering about options for flexible work arrangements.

Pillar 4: Revitalize Campus

Build, Enhance, and Support Campus Infrastructure to Compete with Regional Institutions.

President Watson stated the College will complete the Facilities Master Plan document. Also, there is a focus on completing the Student Center project, which includes the Temporary Dining Facility and monitoring student satisfaction, management of the construction of the Student Center, and the Foundation's campaign for funding.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that she would prefer not to bring in a consultant for the Master Plan. The College contracted with Point Architects a few years ago to renew the Facilities Master Plan, and the academic program analysis will aid in aligning the College's interests. She feels open input sessions for the campus and the community would suffice. A less costly approach would be to contract with someone to help the College pull it all together. She is hopeful it could be accomplished by the end of the fiscal year, which would please the State.

In response to a question from Trustee Spomer related to the potential impact of the academic program analysis on facilities, President Watson stated that the Armory provides flexibility for career and technical program growth that we didn't have before. She is unsure what the study will indicate regarding whether we have space to offer the type of programs where the College may have gaps. It will depend on whether the programs need classroom space or extensive career and technical space.

Trustee Spomer prefers that the work on the Facilities Master Plan be strategic instead of just making the state happy, even if it takes longer. He feels facilities and infrastructure are one of the College's greatest assets. He would like a strategic vehicle that helps guide decisions.

President Watson agreed with Trustee Spomer and stated that the academic program plan would help guide the work on the Facilities Master Plan. She expects the academic program review to be concluded by early spring. The College must be very thoughtful when prioritizing projects because of its limited resources. However, she would like the College to be more engaged in opportunities when they arise, which is why she is working to develop the grant writing position.

Trustee Spomer stated that in his experience, when there is a well-developed Master Plan, it creates a capital improvement plan. It remains consistent with updates and tweaks along the way, but it continues moving forward. He is in favor of the completion of the Plan being in the Operational Plan; however, he is concerned that the timeline for completion will take longer than anticipated.

President Watson agreed and stated she would move the completion date forward, if necessary, to ensure a well-developed Facilities Master Plan. It will be essential to build a plan that the College believes in, and that can be accomplished.

Retain the Focus on Operational Efficiencies.

President Watson stated that while this is a broad topic, one of the main goals is to implement and foster engagement in the Strategic Plan. The tactics will be refined and prioritized, then operationalized so people understand their role. Key Performance Indicators will be developed, tracked, and reported to the campus community.

President Watson reminded Trustees of the HLC's requirement for the College to identify and implement a quality initiative project. The College has many projects on the Strategic Plan and does not have to create a new idea; it can choose an idea or initiative that already exists to present to the HLC for approval. HLC is less concerned about whether the initiative succeeds or fails than whether the College is always looking to improve.

President Watson stated that the last item on the 2024 President's Operational Plan is to create a policy review cycle. While the process for policy approval was rewritten, there is no process in place that ensures that existing policy is being reviewed for relevancy. Existing policies will be assigned to the respective Vice Presidents to review for accuracy, best practices, etc. This will ensure a proactive approach to policy work in the future.

President Watson stated that while the Operational Plan is ambitious, the President's Staff and key leadership at the College are tasked with ensuring that work is moving forward. Great employees in different areas are already working on various initiatives. The Operational Plan has been presented to employees so everyone knows what the College will spend its time and effort on this year.

Trustee Spomer said he is extremely pleased with the Plan and thinks it is well thought out. While it's a big load, he feels there is a lot of momentum and a great group of people doing the work. He feels that good headway is already being made.

Board Self-Assessment

President Watson stated that Trustees will receive an electronic self-assessment document this fall. The self-assessment is completed annually.

President's Evaluation

President Watson stated that Trustees will also receive the President's evaluation document electronically.

The self-assessment and the President's evaluation will need to be completed in order to be discussed during the Board's winter retreat.

CITIZENS' OPEN FORUM

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

A UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

There were no unfinished business items on the agenda.

A NEW BUSINESS:

Course/Lab Fee Proposal

A motion was made by Trustee Spomer and seconded by Trustee Kuipers to approve the proposed course fees. Motion carried.

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

October 16, 2023, upcoming:

- Strategic Plan Update
- Longitudinal Enrollment Report
- Marketing Report
- Academic Program Development Update
- Facilities Master Plan Update
- Schedule Winter Board Retreat
- Other TBD

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

President's BBQ & Student Club Fair, September 13, 2023, Campus Mall
WCCC Commission Meeting October 5-6, 2023, 8:30 a.m., Sheridan College
ACCT Leadership Congress, October 9-12, 2023, Las Vegas, NV
Next Board meeting, October 16, 2023, 4:00 p.m., Yellowstone Bldg.

A ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting adjourned at 6:41 p.m.

TARA KUIPERS, Vice President/Secretary

Date