

Board of Trustees of Northeastern Illinois University
Regular Board Meeting Minutes
June 5, 2025

A regular meeting of the Board of Trustees of Northeastern Illinois University was convened on Thursday, June 5, 2025 in the Student Union Alumni Hall North located at 5500 N. St. Louis Avenue, Chicago, IL 60625. J. Todd Phillips, Chair of the Board, called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

Roll was called and the following Trustees were present: Betty Fleurimond; Carlos Garcia; Ann Kalayil; Jorge Leon; Itzel Linares; J. Todd Phillips; and Paula Wolff

Also present: Katrina Bell-Jordan, President; Nicki Bazer, Interim General Counsel; Karl Voigt, Assistant Secretary to the Board; vice presidents, students, staff, and University community members both in person and viewing online.

Motion to Permit Remote Participation by Trustees

Trustee Fleurimond, seconded by Trustee Linares, moved to permit remote participation by Trustee Anna Meresidis pursuant to Section 7(a) of the Illinois Open Meetings Act.

Discussion: Trustee Meresidis contacted the Assistant Secretary in advance of the meeting. The request meets one of the conditions outlined within the Act pertaining to employment purposes.

Roll was called and the vote was as follows:

Fleurimond: Yes Kalayil: Yes Linares: Yes Wolff: Yes

Garcia: Yes Leon: Yes Phillips: Yes

The motion carried. Trustee Michelle Morales joined the meeting at 1:09 p.m.

Administration of Past Meeting Minutes and Records

Trustee Fleurimond, seconded by Trustee Kalayil, moved to approve the following written open and closed meeting minutes and to keep the closed minutes closed:

- Open and closed minutes from the April 17, 2025 Regular Board meeting
- Open and closed minutes from the May 15, 2025 Audit Committee and Finance, Buildings and Grounds Committee joint meeting
- Open minutes from the May 15, 2025 Academic/Student Affairs, Enrollment, and Technology Committee meeting

Discussion: there was no discussion. The motion carried by unanimous acclamation.

Trustee Wolff, seconded by Trustee Linares, moved that the confidential written minutes of the closed session portions of the May 14, 2024 Finance, Buildings and Grounds Committee meeting and the May 28, 2024 Regular Board meeting require confidential treatment and will remain confidential.

Discussion: there was no discussion. The motion carried by unanimous acclamation.

Opportunity for Public Comment in Accordance with P. A. 91-0715

Chair Phillips announced the opportunity for public comment. There were 5 registrations placed in advance and 4 presentations made.

1. **Rebekah Fitchett**, representing AFSCME Local 1989
Topic: contract negotiation progress
2. **Emily Erblich**, representing AFSCME Local 1989
Topic: the necessity for fair wages and fair contracts for civil service employees at NEIU
3. **Tim Libretti**, representing himself
Topic: University values
4. **Mary Kroeck**, representing the Civil Service Council
Topic: FY25 recap

Chair's and President's Remarks

President Bell-Jordan invited Interim Vice President for Enrollment Management, Claudia Mercado, to introduce the new One Stop Center Director, Paula Hanley. Ms. Hanley started on June 2, 2025. President Bell-Jordan invited Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Shayne Cofer, to introduce several newly appointed employees. Jeremy Babcock has been named Director of the First Year Experience program. Dr. Marcelo Sztainberg has been named Dean of the College of Graduate Studies and Research and Dr. Timothy Libretti has been named Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Dr. Bell-Jordan reported the academic year concluded with the graduation of over 600 students. The next big celebration will be the groundbreaking ceremony on August 18th for the new education building. The MSNEP program received a \$1.28 million award in capital funding for the simulation lab due to the sponsorship from Congresswoman Delia Ramirez, and the program will be formally presented for approval by the Board of Higher Education on June 25th.

Blanca Jara, Interim Executive Director for Government Relations, reported on the University's engagement efforts with stakeholders throughout the General Assembly's 104th session, reinforcing relationships and building new partnerships. On May 31, the Illinois General Assembly approved a \$55.2 billion state budget for FY26, including a 3% increase in state appropriations for public universities. NEIU received \$170.3 million in total appropriations, including \$130 million for capital projects. The General Assembly approved a base FY26 appropriation for NEIU of \$41.1 million in operating support, representing a 1% increase in appropriations over the prior year. \$815,000 in supplemental funding, representing the remaining 2% increase in NEIU appropriations, was approved but is subject to the Governor's discretion as to which funding source this amount will be paid.

Chair Phillips recognized outgoing Student Trustee, Itzel Linares, and recited the following Board Resolution honoring her:

WHEREAS, Itzel Linares was elected by the student body to serve as the Student Trustee on the Northeastern Illinois University Board of Trustees from July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025; and

WHEREAS, Itzel Linares is an alumna of Northeastern Illinois University and is currently a graduate student in the ENLACE Leadership Institute at Northeastern Illinois University working toward a Master's in Higher Education Leadership; and

WHEREAS, Itzel Linares, in addition to her impressive academic work, has tirelessly promoted Northeastern Illinois University and the success of its students through her diligent involvement in Student Government, serving as its Vice President; and

WHEREAS, Itzel Linares serves as a Graduate Associate Program Fellow through NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education having presented at its 2025 national conference; and

WHEREAS, Itzel Linares has worked as a Graduate Assistant in the Student Leadership Development Office helping students navigate university life through creative programming, and by removing barriers to access for students to engage more meaningfully with the university; and

WHEREAS, Itzel Linares has earnestly pursued equity among the entire student body, and has admirably represented her fellow students as a member of the Board of Trustees, as well as being a respected ambassador of Northeastern Illinois University.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Trustees of Northeastern Illinois University honors Itzel Linares and expresses its sincere gratitude for her exemplary service.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees of Northeastern Illinois University June 5, 2025, J. Todd Phillips, Chair of the Board of Trustees and Katrina E. Bell-Jordan, Ph.D., President of the University

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Academic/Student Affairs, Enrollment, and Technology Committee

Trustee Kalayil reported that the Academic/Student Affairs, Enrollment, and Technology Committee met Thursday, May 15, 2025 on the main campus. The Committee has no recommendations to present today, but received informational briefings on various initiatives, including the pending approval status of the Ed.D. program, the pending approval of the MSN program, and fiscal year 2026 enrollment goals. The committee also heard about the development of the One-Stop Center, success of the recently minted accounts receivable academic holds initiative, results from the Nest resident student satisfaction survey, the library's laptop lending program, and AI strategy discussions from within the Goodwin College of Education. Additionally, Trustee Kalayil highlighted the success of its Afghan students as ambassadors of NEIU to the Illinois Legislature this past session. Trustee Kalayil expressed gratitude to the Legislature for securing funding for the Afghan student program in FY26.

Audit Committee

Trustee Meresidis reported that the Audit Committee met on May 15, 2025 in a joint meeting with the Finance, Buildings and Grounds Committee. The Committees received briefings on the material findings from the FY2024 external audit in both open and closed sessions.

Action Item I. A. Board Action on Committee Recommendation to Accept and File the FY24 External Audit Reports

Trustee Meresidis, seconded by Trustee Wolff, moved to adopt the Audit Committee's and Finance, Buildings and Grounds Committee's joint recommendation to accept and file the FY2024 external audit reports as presented.

Discussion: there was no discussion. The motion carried by unanimous acclamation.

Finance, Buildings and Grounds Committee

The Finance, Buildings and Grounds Committee met on May 15, 2025 in a joint meeting with the Audit Committee. In addition to the briefings on the material findings from the FY2024 external audit reports, and how the audit cycle affects the University's ability to timely respond to those findings, there are three recommendations to present for Board approval.

Information Item II. A. FY25 3rd Quarter Budget to Actual Report

Beni Ortiz, Vice President for Finance and Administration, presented an overview of the University's 3rd quarter budget to actual report and presented a year-end forecast. The University expects to have a small surplus of \$200,000.

Information Item II. B. Purchases of at Least \$100,000 but Less Than \$250,000

This item is presented at each regular Board meeting pursuant to Board Regulations Section V. Administrative Affairs, Subsection B. Purchases, 2. Reports.

Action Item I. B. Board Action on Committee Recommendation to Approve the FY2026 Preliminary Operating Budget

Chair Phillips, seconded by Trustee Wolff, moved to adopt the Audit Committee's and Finance, Buildings and Grounds Committee's joint recommendation to approve the FY2026 Preliminary Operating Budget reflecting a 3% increase in state appropriations. *

Discussion: Trustees engaged in a lengthy discussion to better understand the Legislature's peculiar appropriations decision for FY2026. The University's appropriations amount approved in Senate Bill 2510, amendment 3, represents a 1% increase over the prior year. A supplemental appropriation of \$815,000 was approved, but will come from a funding source at the discretion of the Governor. At this time, the University does not know where to voucher for the supplemental funds, however, it plans to voucher that full amount in July. Once that supplemental funding is received, the University will be able to recognize its entire 3% increase for FY26 in the final operating budget.

*The motion is further conditioned on the understanding that the University will work from a preliminary operating budget that reflects the 1% increase in FY26 appropriations scenario, and create an appropriate operating plan in the event the remaining 2% does not materialize. The final FY26 operating budget will be presented at the September regular Board meeting.

Roll was called and the vote was as follows:

Fleurimond: Yes	Kalayil: Yes	Linares: Yes	Morales: Yes	Wolff: Yes
Garcia: Yes	Leon: Yes	Meresidis: Yes	Phillips: Yes	

The motion carried.

Action Item I. C. Board Action on Committee Recommendation to Refinance the University's Debt

Chair Phillips, seconded by Trustee Fleurimond, moved to approve the refinancing of the University's debt as recommended by the Audit Committee and Finance, Buildings and Grounds Committee and as presented by the team here today.

Discussion: The opportunity to consolidate debt right now is favorable and such action would provide flexibility for the University to buy out the Nest student housing complex, refinance the parking garage debt, and address deferred maintenance issues across the University. The refinancing would result in a decrease in annual debt service payments and provide more flexibility in using the auxiliary space within the parking garage. A portion of the refinancing funds will be used over a three-year period to address deferred maintenance projects like roof repairs, elevator repairs/replacement, and the swimming pool restoration, which is important to students as well as being a community revenue source. The University is proposing issuing a 2025 Certificate of Participation (COP) in an amount not to exceed \$65 million. Trustees expressed their appreciation to the many people who have presented this opportunity to improve University operations and the enhance the student experience.

Roll was called and the vote was as follows:

Fleurimond: Yes	Kalayil: Yes	Linares: Yes	Morales: Yes	Wolff: Yes
Garcia: Yes	Leon: Yes	Meresidis: Yes	Phillips: Yes	

The motion carried.

Action Item I. D. Board Action on Legal Services Contract

Chair Phillips, seconded by Trustee Morales, moved to approve the contract with Davis & Campbell, LLC for expenses up to \$300,000 for legal services in connection with litigation, labor negotiations, and general employment matters.

Discussion: the request is for expenses incurred within FY25

Roll was called and the vote was as follows:

Fleurimond: Yes	Kalayil: Yes	Linares: Yes	Morales: Yes	Wolff: Yes
Garcia: Yes	Leon: Yes	Meresidis: Yes	Phillips: Yes	

Motion to Convene in Closed Session

At 2:29 p.m. Trustee Leon, seconded by Trustee Fleurimond, moved to convene in Closed Session pursuant to Sections 2(c)1, 2(c)2, and 2(c)11 of the Illinois Open Meetings Act.

Discussion: there was no discussion. Roll was called and the vote was as follows:

Fleurimond: Yes	Kalayil: Yes	Linares: Yes	Morales: Yes	Wolff: Yes
Garcia: Yes	Leon: Yes	Meresidis: Yes	Phillips: Yes	

Motion to Reconvene in Open Session

At 4:58 p.m. Trustee Garcia, seconded by Trustee Wolff, moved to reconvene in Open Session. The motion carried by unanimous acclamation.

Old / New Business

Chair Phillips asked if there was any old or new business to discuss.

New Business:

- Save-the-date: Chuck Kane Scholarship Golf Outing July 28
 - Education Building Groundbreaking Ceremony on August 18
 - Next Board Committee meetings at the main campus
 - Academic/Student Affairs, Enrollment, and Technology Committee meeting at 1:00 p.m. Thursday, September 11
 - Finance, Buildings and Grounds Committee meeting at 9:30 a.m. Thursday, September 18
 - Next Regular Board Meeting: September 18, 2025 at the main campus
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Motion to Adjourn

At 5:02 p.m. Trustee Linares, seconded by Trustee Garcia, moved to adjourn. The motion carried by unanimous acclamation.

Respectfully submitted,

J. Todd Phillips, Chair of the Board
Karl Voigt, Assistant Secretary to the Board
Approved September 18, 2025