

Board of Trustees of Northeastern Illinois University  
**Academic/Student Affairs, Enrollment, and Technology Committee Meeting Minutes**  
October 23, 2025

A meeting of the Academic/Student Affairs, Enrollment, and Technology Committee of the Board of Trustees of Northeastern Illinois University was convened on Thursday, October 23, 2025 in the Student Union Golden Eagles Room located at 5500 N. St. Louis Avenue, Chicago, IL 60625. Trustee Ann Kalayil, Chair of the Committee, called the meeting to order at 1:13 p.m.

**Roll was called and the following Trustee committee members were present:** Carlos Garcia; Ann Kalayil; and Daniela Navarrete

**The following Trustee committee members were not present:** Betty Fleurimond and Michelle Morales

**Also present:** Katrina Bell-Jordan, President; Karl Voigt, Assistant Secretary to the Board; vice presidents; students; faculty; staff; and University community members both in person and viewing via video

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

Trustee Kalayil announced the opportunity for public comment. There were no registrations placed in advance and no presentations made.

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**Chair's and President's Remarks**

President Bell-Jordan reported that in light of what's going on in and around the city with aggressive federal enforcement efforts, the University is actively supporting students and families affected by a crisis through various resources and services, coordinating efforts across different offices and with agencies outside of the University. She thanked everyone involved in supporting NEIU students and for being aware of ways to help. On September 29 the University presented at the IBHE's big picture meeting to present institutional information that informs IBHE's budget recommendations to the governor and General Assembly. The meeting focused on student trend data, operational budget and financial forecasts, tuition affordability, and curricular innovations. The University also advocated for adequate funding and increased investment in MAP funding. Overall, the IBHE provided positive feedback on the University's efforts and presentations. The Faculty Senate will host the annual State of the University address on Tuesday, October 28 at 3:05 p.m. Zoom access information will be shared the morning of the address via email.

Trustee Kalayil thanked the President and the University for their efforts. For today's meeting, the Committee will not address its charter and will take up its review at a later meeting.

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**ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

**Academic Affairs**

Academic Affairs Updates

Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Shayne Cofer, introduced Dr. Christian Bello-Escobar as the new Director of El Centro effective November 3. Dr. Bello-Escobar is an accomplished higher education leader with 15 years of experience advancing student success, community engagement and equity initiatives across diverse academic settings. Dr. Bello-Escobar earned his Ed.D. in Leadership from Valdosta State University and comes to NEIU from the University of North Georgia where he served as the Director of Academic and Community Engagement in the College of Education.

Dr. Sandra Beyda-Lorie, Executive Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning, provided an update on the University's work within the Illinois State Equity Plan and Student Success Equity Intensive. The past year was focused on establishing baseline metrics and five-year goals for the 11 strategies of the Illinois State Equity Plan. A significant accomplishment was centralizing and updating all internal scholarships into the Academic Works platform, making them more visible and accessible to students.

Under the Open Educational Resources program, 34 courses were redesigned impacting 877 students and saving over \$105,000 in textbook costs. Additionally, development of a D2L widget and tutorials helped track and support faculty in expanding their use of open educational resources. A required financial literacy module was implemented within the redesigned First Year Experience (FYE) to improve student financial literacy and help reduce student debt. Most FYE changes were implemented through five pilot courses this semester, with further implementation and assessment ongoing.

College equity teams guided the examination of Drop/Fail/Withdraw (DFW) rates across 10 courses, providing recommended changes planned for implementation by Fall 2026. A data system was developed to track students' progress in different math pathways based on their placement test scores. Preliminary data shows that the co-requisite model, where students take a college-level math course with a support course, is successful in reducing the time to complete the college-level math requirement. The English department has replaced the ALEKS placement test with the NEIU placement test and increased the number of test readers to decrease overall test rating time. This effort has reduced enrollment and registration time to two-to-three days, with advisors able to place students in the appropriate English class within two weeks. The University has participated in IBHE's success program, which included webinars and best practices sharing, to enhance advising efforts. Additionally, the University has implemented equity and faculty hiring training for all search and screen committees.

Jeremy Babcock, Director of the First Year Experience Program, reported on recent developments in the FYE initiative. The FYE program aims to welcome and retain students through intentional programming and relationship building. 19 FYE core sections are currently running, serving 304 first-time freshmen with plans to reach more students through spring sections and through other success programs. The FYE peer mentor program, consisting of 10 mentors, facilitates student connections through weekly meetings, training sessions, and events like the Freshman Meetup. The program is being enhanced through a partnership between peer mentors and faculty, focusing on building relationships and creating a sense of belonging for students. A two-day FYE faculty institute is offered in May and January to help faculty implement changes and ensure everyone is on the same page regarding FYE courses. A curriculum writing team is also updating FYE learning objectives. The program is being assessed through student and instructor surveys, and best practices are being researched to improve retention and engagement. Students in the FYE program learn their path to graduation, navigate challenges and identify resources, connect with each other and the community, and have fun throughout the process.

## **Enrollment Management**

### Enrollment and Retention Updates

Claudia Mercado, Interim Vice President for Enrollment Management, reported the One Stop Center is nearing the design completion stage. The center aims to transform student services by focusing on accuracy, people, technology, and processes. This student-centered model will feature cross-trained generalists and specialists to provide efficient, accurate, and empathetic support to new incoming students. The open and welcoming space, along with tools like Callendly, will facilitate collaboration and student interactions.

A new system is being implemented to streamline student advising appointments and improve accessibility. This system will centralize services, provide data analytics, and offer multiple communication channels, including live agents and a chatbot to provide 24/7 support. The University is shifting away from measuring success by compliance and processing speed to focusing on student satisfaction, engagement, and retention. This shift is an important step in reducing complaints and helping students meet deadlines, such as timely registration and FAFSA completion. An added benefit of the shift is improving service delivery by helping students with multiple needs in a single visit. The goal is to create a more student-centered approach while considering the needs of diverse student populations, including returning adult students. The University will measure service quality through surveys, scans, and QR codes at points of

contact with students to assess efficiency and effectiveness. Utilizing real-time analytics to inform decision-making will quickly identify areas for improvement, and enhance employee training and accountability.

Ryan Trout, Director of Undergraduate Admissions, reported on two new state initiatives that are being implemented through IBHE: One Click College Admit, and a partnership with ReUp to re-engage inactive students. One Click College Admit, which is optional this year and will be required next year, allows students to be automatically admitted to NEIU through the Common App. This new initiative automatically admits students who have a minimum GPA of 2.5 to participating state universities. While the initiative may increase overall applications, its direct impact on enrollment is not yet known and will be monitored over a two-year period.

The ReUp/IBHE partnership aims to re-enroll students who have been inactive for six months or longer, with a particular focus on those who have been out for 24 months or more. Targeted communications to this student population will begin in early November for spring, summer, and fall 2026 terms. The goal is to improve student retention and degree completion, and to make the re-admission process less onerous by engaging with inactive students and guiding them through the admission and enrollment processes.

Interim Associate Provost for Student Success and Retention, Irma Ortiz, reported that the early accounts receivable (A/R) hold pilot program, initially targeting first-year students with outstanding balances, has been expanded to include all undergraduate students with fewer than 45 credit hours and a balance owed of \$500 or more (excluding Chicago HOPE scholars). This expansion has increased the number of impacted students to 627 and the total owed to \$2.97 million. The early alert hold pilot successfully reduced student debt by 60% in Fall 2024 and 62% in Spring 2025, but a specific goal for the current expanded pilot has not yet been established. The Office of Institutional Research and Assessment provides updated lists to advising teams weekly showing which students on their caseloads are impacted by advising holds including financial.

Faculty completion rates for NEIUStar progress surveys are lower than desired; 55.8% so far, which is 10% fewer than last year. This impacts advisors' ability to effectively intervene with students. Work with Deans and Department Chairs is ongoing to encourage timely faculty survey completion. Concurrently, bi-weekly meetings with advising directors are being used to monitor metrics with the goal of improving performance. For example, the percentage of first-year students meeting with advisors within the first eight weeks, and establishing goals for the percentage of students to be met with within each advising group.

## **Student Affairs**

### **Student Affairs Updates**

Terry Mena, Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students, reported on the Nest transition planning. Following the acquisition of the Nest in early September, the University signed a nine-month contract with American Campus Communities (ACC) to continue management of the facility through May 31, 2026. The transition plan for self-management of the Nest is progressing, with a new Director of Residence Life to be hired in January 2026 and the implementation of a new housing management system. Auditing of current technology and security access points at the Nest is underway to aid in the transition.

Beni Ortiz, Vice President for Finance and Administration, provided a report on the FY26 Nest housing budget. This is a transition year budget which will recognize 100% of the Nest income alongside general operations. The current budget is projecting a deficit of approximately \$600,000. While the operating revenues will not fully cover costs this year, the University anticipates breaking even within two to three years by integrating services and leveraging economies of scale.

The Nest facility will be overseen by Facilities Management, with operations responsibilities handled through Student Affairs with assistance from University Police. Going forward, the Nest financials will be

presented in a for-profit statement format. Much of the budget discussion revolved around accurately representing grant funding and actual student payments in the provided financial report. A revised version will be presented at the January meeting.

Paola Vargas, Associate Dean of Students, reported on the Afghan Refugee Transition Program (ARTP). The University established the ARTP in 2021 in response to the multitude of refugees who were granted U.S. asylum following the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. Many of the refugees were located in Illinois, particularly in Chicago and the greater-Chicago area. NEIU created an asylum/education program to help individuals earn their degrees and to find safe harbor. The program started with a cohort of 15 students. There are currently 4 students remaining in this original cohort (3 undergraduate and 1 graduate). A second cohort currently has 10 students (9 undergraduate and 1 graduate). NEIU has received public and private support to assist the students in these cohorts for several years. In FY25, the University received a one-time appropriation of \$500,000 and an additional grant from the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS). In FY26, the Legislature approved a re-appropriation of \$366,343 of unspent FY25 funds and the IDHS approved \$102,000 of the unspent de-obligated FY25 grant in FY26. These funds have been used to provide housing, case management, and other personal services in support of the educational journey for each individual similar to those services and programs available to all NEIU students. A \$3,500 grant was provided by the Afghan American Foundation to an ARTP participant for general support.

## **University Technology Services**

### Technology Updates

Chief Information Officer, Eliot Rodriguez, introduced Steve Saba, the University's new Director of Information Technology. Steve brings more than 20 years of IT experience and comes to NEIU from City Colleges of Chicago. University Technology Services (UTS) is currently focusing on three major initiatives: implementing artificial intelligence tools with a policy and governance framework, implementing Workday Finance by July 1, 2026, and moving legacy phone systems to a cloud-based system to reduce costs and improve accessibility. UTS continues classroom technology upgrades, improvements to student printing services, and a regular refresh of faculty and staff computer equipment. The demand for AI tools is high and in light of this the University is establishing institution-wide and college-specific policies for the responsible use of AI technologies, including a governance framework for updates and compliance. The University aims to empower the community with AI tools for research, learning, and business processes by January, but will do so on a measured basis. Awareness trainings will be provided to the University community to educate on safe information sharing practices and to empower responsible use of algorithms.

UTS continues to focus on enhancing network security and cybersecurity, strengthening account access, and ensuring secure payment processing. UTS is streamlining access to various platforms impacting students, such as Mediat, Watermark, ActiveNet, Clockworks, and EVision, to optimize technology integrations and provide robust technical assistance. The University's telephone system modernization project, new telephone app and services, is slated to be completed by January. This move is projected to save the University around \$720,000 over the next five years.

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## **Motion to Convene in Closed Session**

At 4:08 p.m. Trustee Garcia, seconded by Trustee Navarrete, moved to convene in Closed Session pursuant to Section 2(c)8 of the Illinois Open Meetings Act.

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

Fleurimond:                      Garcia: Yes                      Kalayil: Yes                      Morales:                      Navarrete: Yes

The motion carried.

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### **Motion to Reconvene in Open Session**

At 4:35 p.m. Trustee Navarrete, seconded by Trustee Kalayil, moved to reconvene in Open Session. The motion carried by unanimous acclamation.

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### **Open Session**

New Business: next committee meeting will be held on Thursday, January 15, 2026

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### **Adjourn**

At 4:40 p.m. Trustee Navarrete, seconded by Trustee Kalayil, moved to adjourn. The motion carried by unanimous acclamation.

Respectfully submitted,

Ann Kalayil, Chair of the Committee  
Karl Voigt, Assistant Secretary to the Board  
Approved December 11, 2025