Board of Trustees of Northeastern Illinois University
Regular Board Meeting Minutes
September 24, 2026

A Regular Board Meeting of the Board of Trustees of Northeastern Illinois University was convened on Thursday, September 24, 2026 in the Student Union – Alumni Hall North located at 5500 N. St. Louis Avenue in Chicago. Trustee 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 Gariti; Jorge Leon; Anna Meresidis; Brecel Limon; J. Todd Phillps; and Paula Wolff

Trustees not present: Ann Kalayil

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

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Administration of Past Meeting Minutes and Records

Trustee Wolff, seconded by Trustee Fleurimond, moved to approve the written open and closed past meeting minutes and to keep the closed minutes closed of the following meetings pursuant to Sections 2.06(b) and 2.06(c)(2) of the Illinois Open Meetings Act:

- Open and closed minutes from the June 11, 2026 Regular Board meeting
- Open and closed minutes from the August 28, 2026 Executive Committee meeting

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

Trustee Wolff, seconded by Trustee Fleurimond, moved that the approved confidential written minutes of the closed session portions of the following meetings require confidential treatment and will remain confidential pursuant to Section 2.06(d) of the Illinois Open Meetings Act:

- June 5, 2025 Regular Board meeting
- September 11, 2025 Audit Committee meeting
- September 18, 2025 Finance, Buildings and Grounds Committee meeting
- September 18, 2025 Regular Board meeting

Discussion: there was no discussion. The motion carried by unanimous acclamation. Trustee Kalayil joined the meeting at 1:04 p.m.

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

Chair Phillips announced the opportunity for public comment. There were 9 registrations placed in advance and 9 presentations made.

1. **Brandon Bisbey,** NEIU University Professionals of Illinois (UPI), Local 4100
   Topic: Synopsis of CBA bargaining progress and need to reach agreement on key points
2. **Courtney Francis,** NEIU UPI
   Topic: to address the topic of campus safety
3. **Kristen Over,** NEIU UPI
   Topic: concerns about AI and the lack of institutional protections against AI surveillance and the threat AI poses to mission-driven integrity
4. **Ashley Elrod,** NEIU Faculty
   Topic: emergency funds for students

5. **Nik Hoel,** NEIU UPI
   Topic: current state of instructors and the importance of a fair and equitable contract for them
6. **Olivia Cronk,** NEIU UPI
   Topic: to speak in support of current contract negotiations between NEIU and UPI
7. **Christopher Merchant,** NEIU UPI
   Topic: the importance of valuing our instruction professionals
8. **Emily Erblich,** NEIU AFSCME
   Topic: speaking in support of a fair contract for UPI members
9. **Jonathan Gronli,** Civil Service Counsel, NEIU AFSCME, and students
   Topic: speaking in solidarity with UPI to support a fair and equitable contract

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Chair's and President's Remarks

President Bell-Jordan welcomed everyone back to the Fall 2026 semester. Highlights of Fall 2026 are students are enrolled in 55,345 credit hours (96.8% of goal) which is a slight decrease over Fall 2025 by 632 credit hours. African American/Black student enrollment increased by 10%, Asian Asian/American student enrollment increased by 11%, White student enrollment increased by 5%, and Latino student enrollment decreased by 10% compared to the same time last year. Fall 2025 to Fall 2026 student retention is 65% (beating the goal of 62%) compared to 60% same time last year. The Executive Committee of the Board met on August 28, 2026 to amend the University's tuition model from in-state/out-of-state and international rates to domestic and international rates effective in the Fall 2026 semester. This change will give the University greater recruitment opportunities and make tuition more affordable. The One Stop student center ribbon cutting will take place on November 17th with its official opening for students on November 18th. Several leadership vacancies have been filled over the summer: Dr. Kiantra Loza has been appointed as the Vice President for Enrollment Management, Dr. Eric Pegués has been appointed as the Executive Director of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, and Pamela Pirtle has been appointed as the University's Ombuds. On October 9, the leadership team will meet with the IBHE to make its initial funding request for FY2028. The State of the University address will take place on Tuesday, October 27.

Chair Phillips welcomed everyone to the first regular meeting of the Board in the new academic year. Chair Phillips welcomed new Student Trustee, Brecel Limon, to her first full meeting and thanked her for her participation in other committee meetings prior to today. Chair Phillips acknowledged that the enrollment dip this Fall is part of a larger state-wide and national trend. He is, however, bullish on the future and looks forward to the excellent work of the University leadership and enrollment management team. Chair Phillips announced that Trustee Michelle Morales has stepped off the Board. He praised her dedication to NEIU and how she deeply cared for NEIU students. The Governor's Office has provided a proclamation in appreciation of Trustee Morales to be read into the minutes.

Board Secretary, Trustee Anna Meresidis, recited the following proclamation:

Proclamation Presented this 24th Day of September 2026

WHEREAS, Michelle Morales' experience growing up in a Puerto Rican immigrant family in Chicago has profoundly shaped her lifelong commitment to social justice and community empowerment; and,

WHEREAS, working as a community organizer in Chicago's Puerto Rican community for sixteen years, Michelle has advocated for many issues, including educational and economic justice, police brutality, neighborhood gentrification, and public health access; and,

WHEREAS, she has earned a Bachelor of Arts in Latin American/Latino Studies from DePaul University, a Master of Education in Special Education from the University of Illinois at Chicago, and a Master of Education in Educational Leadership from Northeastern Illinois University; and,

WHEREAS, Michelle initially began her career in education as a teacher at Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School, an alternative high school in Humboldt Park dedicated to empowering students as critical thinkers and community leaders; and,

WHEREAS, she then went on to serve the Alternative Schools Network for over twelve years, first as Program Manager and later as Associate Director, which included time as the Director of the Re-Enrolled Student Project, a collaboration engaging students across twenty community-based alternative high schools in Chicago; and,

WHEREAS, serving as the Executive Director of the Illinois Chapter and later as CEO of Mikva Challenge, Michelle became the organization 's first female and Latina Executive Director and advanced its mission of developing informed, empowered youth leaders; and,

WHEREAS, Michelle has served as President of Woods Fund Chicago since November 2019, becoming the foundation's first Latina president and restructuring its work to center racial justice and adopt a trust-based philanthropy framework, under which the foundation increased its payout to 11 percent in 2023; and,

WHEREAS, Michelle Morales was appointed to the Northeastern Illinois University Board of Trustees on March 16, 2023, which was confirmed by the Illinois State Senate on April 11, 2024; and,

WHEREAS, she was then elected Vice Chair of the Northeastern Illinois University Board of Trustees by its membership on May 28, 2024, and has served on the Board's Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Enrollment and Technology Committee since September 21, 2023, demonstrating leadership, strategic vision, and a steadfast commitment to the University's students, faculty, and staff; and,

WHEREAS, Michelle has served in numerous additional roles of civic leadership and public service, including as a member of the Chicago Board of Education, Co-Chair of Mayor Brandon Johnson's transition team, Secretary of the City Bureau Board of Directors, and a member of the Crossroads Fund Board, Thrive Chicago Leadership Council, and other civic and educational bodies; and,

WHEREAS, she was honored in 2024 with the Professional Grantor Award from the Association of Fundraising Professionals Chicago, recognizing her leadership in philanthropy, and was selected for the inaugural cohort of Cultivate, a leadership-development initiative for women of color in Chicago's social impact sector; and,

WHEREAS, Michelle Morales has, through decades of service in education, philanthropy, and civic life, left a lasting and positive impact on the communities and institutions of the State of Illinois;

THEREFORE, I, JB Pritzker, Governor of the State of Illinois, do hereby recognize and honor Michelle Morales for her enduring commitment to social justice, education, and community leadership in service to the residents of the State of Illinois.

University Initiatives

Interim Executive Director of Government Relations, Blanca Jara, reported that NEIU received $42.4 million in operating support from the General Assembly for FY27, representing a 3% increase over the prior year. Although legislation for the adequate and equitable funding model did not pass in the Spring session, it remains a priority for NEIU and other Illinois publics. Following the General Assembly’s adjournment, the focus has shifted to implementing secured resources, tracking outstanding appropriations, and pursuing additional funding opportunities to support University priorities. NEIU officially kicks off its FY27 advocacy on October 9 during a meeting with the IBHE. University leadership will present

on enrollment trends and budget priorities to support the IBHE's upcoming funding recommendations to the Governor. The Government Relations Office is currently developing priorities for the Fall veto session and the 2027 legislative session focusing on capital needs, student success, and University financial strength.

President Bell-Jordan reported that the University has shifted into year one of its strategic plan with the current phase focusing on translating high-level goals into visible action and measurable goals. Starting in October the University will launch a regular progress cycle and public dashboard to provide transparency into accomplishments, highlight emerging challenges, and identify opportunities for cross-divisional collaboration. Dr. Bell-Jordan announced that she appointed Dr. Claudia Mercado to a temporary role in year one of the strategic plan implementation, to support the University's organizational structures, leadership practices, and institutional capacity building to ensure sustainable impact.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Academic/Student Affairs, Enrollment, and Technology Committee

Trustee Kalayil invited Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Shayne Cofer, to introduce the newest tenure-track faculty members and recite their biographies:

Dr. Ankit Agrawal, Computer Science

Dr. Agrawal is an Assistant Professor of Computer Science at Northeastern Illinois University. His research lies at the intersection of software engineering, artificial intelligence, and cyber-physical systems, with a particular focus on developing and testing safe autonomous aerial systems. His current research is funded by NASA. He earned his Ph.D. in Computer Science from the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, and enjoys teaching software engineering, artificial intelligence, and emerging computing technologies.

Dr. William Balco, Anthropology

Dr. Balco earned his Ph.D. in Anthropology from University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. His research investigates social contact, interaction, entanglement, and transformation via evidence of settlement, households, exchange, feasting, and human-environment engagements among complex societies in North America and the Mediterranean. Dr. Balco engages students in the process of archaeology, focusing on the ethical implications of our discipline and employing scientifically grounded approaches to study past cultures in a meaningful and respectful manner that contributes to our knowledge of the past. He brings more than 22 years of experience conducting and directing compliance and academic-based archaeological projects domestically and internationally, seeing those projects through from concept to completion and publication. At NEIU, he teaches archaeology courses in the anthropology department and looks forward to developing a public archaeology program that engages both students and community members.

Dr. Laura Domagala, Nursing

Dr. Domagala earned her Doctor of Nursing Practice from DePaul University, her Master of Science in Nursing Administration from North Park University and her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Elmhurst College. She brings 25 years of clinical nursing experience and extensive experience in academic settings, specializing in clinical education and nursing theory. At NEIU, Dr. Domagala looks forward to focusing on productive student outcome results through student mentoring and evidence-based teaching methods.

Dr. Kathy Donofrio, Nursing

Dr. Donofrio earned her Doctor of Nursing Practice from Rush University, her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Aurora University, and her Master of Science in Exercise Science, Master of Business Administration, and undergraduate degree in Secondary Education from Northeastern Illinois University. Her career spans more than three decades with extensive experience in nursing practice and leadership.

She has significant teaching experience in graduate exercise science and nursing, including more than two decades as an Adjunct Instructor at NEIU. At NEIU, Dr. Donofrio looks forward to preparing future nurses through a focus on critical thinking, clinical judgment, evidence-based practice, and the evolving role of technology and artificial intelligence in nursing.

Dr. Madelaine Romito, Counselor Education

Dr. Romito earned her Ph.D. in Counselor Education and Supervision from Northern Illinois University and her master's degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from Northeastern Illinois University. Her research explores eating disorders and body image in diverse populations, sizeism in counselor education, and play therapy interventions for eating disorders. Methodologically, Dr. Romito specializes in arts-based and qualitative research. In the classroom, Dr. Romito is passionate about student-centered, culturally-responsive pedagogy that fosters personal growth and professional training. She also informs her teaching with real-world clinical experience, as she practices counseling with those experiencing eating, anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive disorders and their families.

Dr. Jesse Self, Justice Studies

Dr. Self earned his Ph.D.in Social Work from the University of Chicago's Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice. Before joining NEIU, he worked as a Visiting Assistant Professor of Criminology at North Central College. Dr. Self is also an alum of NEIU's social work program. His current research focuses on hidden forms of punishment within the carceral and immigration systems. At NEIU, he teaches criminal justice courses, encouraging students to explore how shared experiences of criminalization and punishment reveal broader patterns of power, inequality, and social control.

Dr. Aishwarya Vijayan, Computer Science

Dr. Vijayan earned her Ph.D. in Computer Science from the University of Illinois Chicago, where her research focused on brain connectivity and complex networks using computational and data-driven methods. Her interests include computational neuroscience and artificial intelligence, and she is passionate about teaching and helping students develop strong problem-solving skills.

Dr. Nicholas Witt, Secondary Teacher Education

Dr. Witt earned his Ph.D. in Mathematics Education and M.A. in Mathematics from Western Michigan University. He also holds a Bachelor's Degree in Secondary Mathematics Education from Illinois State University. Dr. Witt is a former high school mathematics teacher in Chicago Public Schools and Kalamazoo Public Schools. Prior to joining NEIU, Dr. Witt was an NSF-funded postdoctoral research associate at the University of Arizona and a Visiting Assistant Professor at Towson University. His research interests are at the intersection of critical and technologically-enhanced mathematics curriculum and teacher knowledge.

Dr. Yingshihan Zhu, Philosophy

Dr. Yingshihan Zhu is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Northeastern Illinois University. She received her Ph.D. in Philosophy from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, where she also earned a graduate certificate in Interactive Technology and Pedagogy. She works at the intersection of social/political philosophy, feminist philosophy, ethics, and applied ethics (including bioethics, tech ethics, and AI ethics) and teaches in those areas. Her research explores the moral, epistemic, and sociopolitical implications of power dynamics within and between differently situated social groups.

Trustee Kalayil continued with her report. The Academic/Student Affairs, Enrollment, and Technology Committee met on September 17, 2026. The Committee has no items to recommend for Board action today.

The Committee received informational briefings from the administration on the following matters:

Academic Affairs – Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Shayne Cofer, notified the committee of the 9 new tenure-track faculty members. Provost Cofer also celebrated the most recent Emeriti Faculty announced this past summer. This includes Lidia Filus, Mathematics; John Kasmer, Biology; Mark Melton, Special Education; and Dan Milsky, Philosophy. The Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) in Leadership, Equity and Inquiry launched this Fall with a cohort of 23 students.

Gretchen LaCivita shared an update on the M.S. in Nursing – Entry into Practice program. The team of faculty and leaders is expanding. Assistant Professors Dr. Kathy Donofrio and Dr. Laura Domagala recently joined NEIU. The program recently completed searches for and hired a new Director of Simulation, Alex Rodriguez and a Simulation Specialist, Colin Winkelmann. 2 additional positions are next to be filled: Clinical Experience Coordinator and a Program Assistant.

As for the program accreditation, NEIU was on the June agenda for the Illinois Board of Nursing (IBON). The Higher Learning Commission is scheduled to visit the nursing lab facilities next month. The University hoped the HLC visit would complete the final program reviews, however the IBON was unable to achieve quorum at its June meeting, so their next meeting is in November and a site visit will occur thereafter. Gretchen provided photos of the new space and informed Trustees a tour of the facilities is in the works for the November Regular Board meeting at El Centro.

Enrollment Management – Dr. Kiantra Loza provided an update on the Fall 2026 final enrollment headcount: 5,674; a 2% decrease from Fall 2025. The University's recent change from an in-state and out-of-state tuition model to a domestic student and international student tuition model is expected to help promote the University and expand recruitment efforts across the country. Several strategic campuswide canvassing sessions on the University's current enrollment processes through structured focus groups. This will be a cross-divisional effort aimed at identifying things that are working well and things that need some attention. This work will take place over the next four to six months. The One Stop Center is almost ready to open to the public. Enrollment and Financial Aid teams will begin phased moving starting October 5 and completed by October 30. The One Stop Center's ribbon cutting will be on November 17 and the Center will be open for students on November 18.

Student Retention and Success – Interim Assistant Provost for Student Success and Retention, Irma Ortiz, presented the Fall 2025 retention figure of 65% - a full 3 percentage points above the budgeted goal and five year high. This represents a year-over-year increase of 4.8 percentage points from Fall 2024 retention of 60.25%. African American student retention jumped by 9.8 percentage points, yet remains just below goal. African American students and Other/Unknown Male Students are currently the lowest retained groups. Male student retention, overall, is sitting just below goal at 61.6%. Work continues applying the successful efforts from prior campaigns with African American students and Latino student gains to the Other/Unknown Male Students in the coming year.

Student Affairs – Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students, Terry Mena, introduced the new Director of Student Disability Services, Elissa Caropresso. An attorney, Ms. Caropresso has a vast background and knowledge of student disability services and delivery. Elissa joined NEIU in July 2026.

Dr. Brandon Johnson, Director of Housing and Residence Life. Dr. Johnson reported the Fall 2026 NEST occupancy figures: 93.1% (394 of 423 rentable beds), compared to a total occupancy rate of 91.9% in Fall 2025. Dr. Johnson reviewed the University's progress with its recent bond refinance and the University's management transition to full operational control of the NEST as of May 29, 2026. A new resident life software system has been implemented and two additional staff have been hired. The University had some success with providing housing for summer camp participants and looks forward to coordinating more of this going forward. Dr. Johnson reviewed the NEST budget and answered Trustees' questions.

Veronica Rodriguez introduced the new student groups app, branded especially for NEIU students, NEIU Connects. The new system replaces a less functional predecessor with dynamic ways for students to engage in University life, social events and many other activities.

Technology – Eliot Rodriguez reported that the committee received a briefing on the University's latest technology initiatives happening at the University.

Audit Committee

Trustee Meresidis reported that the Audit Committee met this morning and has 3 items to present for Board action today.

Action Item I. A. Board Action on Committee Recommendations to Accept and File the Internal Audit Charter, the 2027-2028 Internal Audit Plan, and the Statement of Auditor Independence

Trustee Meresidis, seconded by Trustee Wolff, moved to adopt the Audit Committee's recommendation to accept and file the Internal Audit Charter, the 2027-2028 Internal Audit Plan, and the Statement of Auditor Independence as presented.

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

Finance, Buildings and Grounds Committee

Chair Phillips reported that the Finance, Buildings and Grounds Committee met this morning and has two items to present for Board action today. The Committee received briefings on two information items:

Information Item II. A. FY26 Final Budget to Actual Report

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

Action Item I. B. Board Action on Committee Recommendation to Approve the University's FY27 Final Operating Budget

Chair Phillips, seconded by Trustee Wolff, moved that the Board adopt the Finance, Buildings and Grounds Committee's Recommendation to approve the University's Final FY27 Operating Budget

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

Fleurimond: Yes	Gariti: Yes	Leon: Yes	Meresidis: Yes	Wolff: Yes
Garcia: Yes	Kalayil: Yes	Limon: Yes	Phillips: Yes	

The motion carried.

Action Item I. C. Board Action on Committee Recommendation to Approve the University's FY28 Preliminary Operating and Capital Budgets Request

Trustee Wolff, seconded by Trustee Kalayil, moved that the Board adopt the Finance, Buildings and Grounds Committee's Recommendation to approve the University's Preliminary FY28 Operating and Capital Budgets Request as presented.

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

Fleurimond: Yes	Gariti: Yes	Leon: Yes	Meresidis: Yes	Wolff: Yes
Garcia: Yes	Kalayil: Yes	Limon: Yes	Phillips: Yes	

The motion carried.

Motion to Convene in Closed Session

At 3:02 p.m. Trustee Wolff, seconded by Trustee Kalayil, 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	Gariti: Yes	Leon: Yes	Meresidis: Yes	Wolff: Yes
Garcia: Yes	Kalayil: Yes	Limon: Yes	Phillips: Yes	

The motion carried. The audience was asked to leave the room.

Motion to Reconvene in Open Session

At 4:48 p.m. Trustee Wolff, seconded by Trustee Garcia, moved to reconvene in Open Session. The motion carried by unanimous acclamation.

Board Action Items

Action Item I. D. Board Officer Elections

Chair Phillips, seconded by Trustee Kalayil, moved to approve the following slate of officers presented for the new two-year terms:

- J. Todd Phillips, Chair
- Jorge Leon, Vice Chair
- Betty Fleurimond, Secretary
- Paula Wolff, Officer *Pro Tem*

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

Fleurimond: Yes	Gariti: Yes	Leon: Yes	Meresidis: Yes	Wolff: Yes
Garcia: Yes	Kalayil: Yes	Limon: Yes	Phillips: Yes	

The motion carried.

Chair Phillips announced the following committee assignments:

Academic/Student Affairs, Enrollment, and Technology Committee

- Betty Fleurimond
- Carlos Garcia
- Ann Kalayil, Chair
- Brecel Limon

Audit Committee

- Carlos Garcia
- Jorge Leon
- Anna Meresidis, Chair

Executive Committee

- J. Todd Phillips, Board Chair
- Jorge Leon, Vice Chair
- Betty Fleurimond, Secretary
- Paula Wolff, Officer *Pro Tem*

Finance, Buildings and Grounds Committee

- Ann Gariti, Chair
- Anna Meresidis
- Paula Wolff

Old Business

Nicki Bazer reported to the Board that following their approval to update the Board Regulations concerning Parental Leave at its April 16, 2026 meeting, the language that the Board approved was modified to comport with language in the AFSCME contract. The revised Board Regulation reads as follows (underlined portions are new):

Employees who have completed one (1) year of employment shall be eligible for up to six (6) consecutive weeks of paid parental leave or up to thirty (30) consecutive workdays, provided that such leave shall start within thirty (30) days of the birth/adoption/fostering of the child and further provided that the child is co-resident with the employee. Requests for parental leave of more than 10 days shall be submitted to the President, or designee, 30 days in advance, except in cases of emergency. Non-emergency requests for parental leave of more than 10 days shall be subject to the consideration of maintaining efficiency of operations.

Parental leave shall be limited to one leave per year. Parental leave is automatically counted toward the 12-week family and medical leave entitlement for eligible employees. Additional time away from work for this leave under FMLA can be covered using sick, vacation or personal time. All applicable University policies and FMLA will be followed. Employee will provide documentation to the Office of Human Resources.

As outlined in FMLA regulations, eligible partners who work for the same employer, in this case NEIU, are limited to a combined leave of 12 work weeks of FMLA in a 12-month period.

New Business

Karl asked Trustees to review the latest draft of the 2027 Board meeting calendar. A final version will be presented at the November 19 Regular Board meeting.

Annual Ethics Training will kick off on October 15. Look for the kickoff announcement email soon. Trustees are required to complete the training.

Upcoming Board meetings:

- **October 15, 2026**
  - Finance, Buildings and Grounds Committee
  - Academic/Student Affairs, Enrollment, and Technology Committee
- **November 19, 2026**
  - Regular Board meeting at the El Centro location

Motion to Adjourn

At 4:54 p.m. Trustee Wolff, seconded by Trustee Limon, moved to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned by unanimous acclamation.

Respectfully submitted,

J. Todd Phillips, Chair of the Board
Karl Voigt, Assistant Secretary to the Board
Approved November 19, 2026