Board of Trustees of Northeastern Illinois University
Academic/Student Affairs, Enrollment, and Technology Committee Meeting Minutes
October 15, 2026

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 15, 2025 in the Student Union – Golden Eagles Room located at 5500 N. St. Louis Avenue in Chicago. Trustee Ann Kalayil, Chair of the committee called the meeting to order at 1:12 p.m.

Roll was called and the following Trustee committee members were present: Carlos Garcia; Ann Kalayil; and Brecel Limon (via video).

The following Trustee committee members were not present: Betty Fleurimond

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

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

Trustee Kalayil announced the opportunity for public comment. There was one registration placed in advance and one presentation made.

1. **Mohammed Musba**, representing the Muslim Student Alliance
   Topic: allocation of funds

Chair's and President's Remarks

Trustee Kalayil welcomed everyone to the meeting and expressed gratitude for the collective efforts of the trustees, staff, faculty, and President Bell-Jordan in supporting Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) students and the broader community. Trustee Kalayil pointed out that the day's agenda reflects the University's core commitment to its student body and mission as an anchor institution, featuring critical updates spanning Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Enrollment, Equity planning, Technology, and the role of artificial intelligence (AI). Trustee Kalayil further emphasized that these collaborative efforts directly shape accessible learning environments and institutional systems that empower students to find belonging at the NEIU.

President Bell-Jordan welcomed everyone to the meeting, noting that the fall semester classes are progressing well, student programming is active, and first-quarter financials for fiscal year 2027 remain on track. The University is actively moving forward with its Year 1 strategic plan initiatives, major infrastructure projects, and monitoring potential budget impacts from the upcoming state legislative veto session. In preparation for fiscal year 2028, the leadership team is scheduled to meet with the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) on October 28 to advocate for NEIU's plans; this "big picture" meeting will address student trend data, contributions to the state's *A Thriving Illinois* strategic plan (focusing on equity, a three-year budget projection for sustainability, and growth/attainment), and new academic programs including a Bachelor of Science in Artificial Intelligence, the Ed.D. in Leadership, Equity and Inquiry, and the Master of Science in Nursing. President Bell-Jordan announced that the annual State of the University Address will take place on October 27 via an in-person and webinar format, and is hosted by the Faculty Senate.

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

<u>Academic Affairs</u>

Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Shayne Cofer, provided updates on the University's accreditation and program approval processes. A successful Higher Learning Commission (HLC) peer review visit took place on October 5–6 for the new Master of Science in Nursing program, during which reviewers toured the main campus and El Centro facilities, and lauded the University's

thorough application and modern laboratory. Upon receiving and reviewing the forthcoming HLC Letter-of-Fact, the application will proceed to the Institutional Action Council for final approval, allowing the program to begin marketing ahead of its scheduled launch Fall 2027. Provost Cofer reminded the committee of the upcoming 10-year HLC comprehensive review for reaccreditation in Spring 2028. A 25-member campus committee led by Associate Provosts Sudha Srinivas and Effie Kritikos has been formed to begin drafting the required self-study.

Dr. Eric Pegués, Executive Director of the Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, provided an update on the University's equity plan, announcing that the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) gave the University a strong, positive review for its FY2026 equity summary submitted on May 31, 2026. IBHE commended NEIU for successfully transitioning from the planning stage to active implementation, labeling the report as comprehensive and data-rich. Specific initiatives lauded in the review included the First-Year Experience (FYE) redesign, ICARE advising, affordable course materials, and co-requisite gateway course reform. These efforts have yielded tangible improvements in student success, including enhanced fall-to-spring retention, higher success rates in introductory courses, reduced student debt, and significant textbook cost savings. IBHE highlighted the University's strong infrastructure, specifically noting the effectiveness of its equity plan dashboards, disaggregated data usage, and the active engagement of the University Diversity Council and various equity working groups.

Looking forward, the University's primary focus will shift toward sustained implementation, tighter cross-campus coordination, and closer alignment with NEIU's overarching strategic plan. To support this growth, Dr. Pegués announced that NEIU has been selected to participate in IBHE's "Supporting Universities and Colleges in Creating an Equitable Student Success" (SUCCESS) program for the 2026–2027 academic year. This targeted technical assistance opportunity grants NEIU a dedicated Equity Champion, 40 hours of customized campus consultation, $40,000 in grant funding, and access to a statewide community of practice. The three strategic takeaways: celebrating the external validation of NEIU's active equity work, leveraging data and accountability structures to strengthen campus infrastructure, and intentionally utilizing the newly acquired SUCCESS resources to accelerate institutional goals and eliminate remaining equity gaps. Dr. Pegués acknowledged Dr. Sandra Beyda-Lorie's work in assembling the various components that made up the May 31 summary submission.

Director of the El Centro location, Dr. Christian Bello-Escobar, reported on the quantitative successes of El Centro since the beginning of the Fall 2026 semester. There are 588 core course enrollments this term in a total of 62 course sections with an average class size of 12 students. The El Centro Scholars program has achieved its highest enrollment ever this term with 42 full-time students. The cohort reported its fall-to-fall retention of 74%, one of the highest rates at the University. Bookings and building use are seeing increases with 1,384 building entries since August 24. The most used space in the building is the 3rd floor lounge, with the 1st floor lobby coming in second, and the library as third. The center has logged 362 event bookings for the Fall semester; 214 events having already occurred with another 148 to take place. Other highlights include: the Spring semester course offerings will include drawing and art classes; a continuation of the first-year student mentoring system through the grant-funded *Crear Futuros* program, which aims to improve student retention; an upcoming Trunk or Treat event and the roll out of a new *Mercadito* event for local entrepreneurs; and the use of El Centro as an early voting site starting next week. Partnerships with local civic organizations will continue with the long-term goal of increasing student enrollment alongside dedicated high school recruitment initiatives; and a continued partnership with Chicago Public Schools (CPS) as a place for professional development activities for teachers, and to serve as a CPS test proctoring site with 76 proctoring events scheduled through next Summer. The El Centro team is in the process of developing a strategic plan for the center with a draft expected to be presented to the Provost by the end of the Fall term.

Akua Cason, Interim Director of the Carruthers Center, reported on several exciting events and initiatives taking place this academic year. The signature event will be the Center's 60th-anniversary milestone celebrating six decades of culture, community, and scholarship alongside faculty, staff, students, and elected officials at a community-university reception scheduled for Thursday, February 25, from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. Other initiatives include a Women's History Month panel on March 25 to honor the women leaders who have sustained the Center, the return of the Black Music and Black Cinema series running from November to June, and a special AACM music festival. To honor the Center's deep roots in Chicago's Black Arts Movement and its legacy as a civic engagement hub, a screening of the film *Punch 9* will take place to encourage participation in upcoming midterm elections.

On academic and community outreach, a new partnership with City Colleges of Chicago was announced, specifically a "2+2+1" pilot program with Kennedy-King College enabling Social Work students to seamlessly complete their bachelor's and master's degrees. The Center is actively expanding its course offerings in Social Work, with plans to build comprehensive degree completion paths in Justice Studies and African American Studies. To strengthen enrollment pipelines, the Center will host an open house on October 20, a Counselor Brunch on November 6 for CPS and charter school staff, and Saturday cultural workshops with the Chicago Urban League. Finally, to promote cross-campus collaboration, a "Get on the Bus" initiative launching November 20 will provide free transportation for staff, alumni, and students from other University sites to visit the historic South Side location.

Jeremy Babcock, Director of First Year Experience (FYE), reported on the new FYE graduation requirement for Northeastern Illinois University students entering with fewer than 30 credit hours. He emphasized the necessity of enrolling students in an FYE class during the Fall semester to introduce campus resources early. Notably, Fall FYE enrollment surged from 58% in the previous Fall to 97% current enrollment, significantly improving the integration of incoming students. This initiative utilizes engaging faculty and peer mentors who meet with students twice a semester to foster a strong sense of belonging and improve retention. Peer mentors have taken the lead on monthly freshman meetups, which saw a massive attendance increase from 71 freshmen in August 2025 to 160 freshmen in August 2026.

Additionally, the University recognized two students, Cage Rivera and Diana Perez, with the Dr. Lawrence Frank FYE Scholarship, awarding each $1,250 during the Golden Eagle Welcome Day. To better support instructors, the two-day FYE Faculty Institute was moved from August to May to allow for better course implementation, though faculty still return in August for a luncheon with their assigned peer mentors. The program also utilizes a D2L master course shell as a centralized clearinghouse for resources, important dates, and the core college success PDF textbook. To ensure these learning objectives are consistently met, student and faculty surveys will be administered soon to evaluate engagement and refine the program's direction.

<u>Enrollment Management</u>

Vice President for Enrollment Management, Kiantra Loza, provided an update on the comprehensive redesign of NEIU's enrollment communications, targeting prospective students and lead generation. In active partnership with Baker Consulting, the initiative addresses existing fragmented communication pieces by optimizing six distinct communication flows based on historical Slate data: first-time college freshmen, transfer students, international students, graduate students, parents, and summer-only students. Each workflow will consist of 10 to 15 communications systematically structured to first introduce institutional value propositions, detail specific academic pathways, and ultimately facilitate onboarding by pairing students with a dedicated staff contact. Executive Director of Marketing Christopher Childers is recognized for his continuous collaboration in reviewing these materials to ensure alignment with University brand standards.

The Division of Enrollment Management has launched several collaborative enrollment focus groups that have seen high cross-departmental engagement from faculty, staff, and students. These discussions are organized around four core stages of the enrollment lifecycle. The first stage, lead generation and prospecting, leverages marketing and requests for information (RFI) website forms to share the institution's story. The second stage, admissions and acceptance, focuses on application completion and features a revamped, vibrant acceptance package containing letters from President Bell-Jordan and V. P. Loza. The final two stages, which received the most focus due to their reliance on seamless departmental collaboration, cover new student onboarding (guiding students from acceptance through census day via placement testing, FAFSA, advising, and housing) and continuous enrollment through graduation to ensure long-term student retention.

Student Affairs

Terry Mena, Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students, provided a historical overview of NEIU's Living Learning Communities (LLCs). The LLC initiative began as a Fall 2020 social justice leadership pilot tied to the George Floyd Scholarship before formally expanding in Fall 2021 into a multi-divisional, high-impact practice co-led by Veronica Rodriguez and the now-retired Dr. Vicki Byard. Backed by collaborations across Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Finance Administration, and Enrollment Management, the formal model launched in Fall 2021 with three communities (Social Justice Leadership, Discover Yourself, and Future Teachers) and steadily expanded to include the Honors Program and STEM tracks in 2022, an aligned peer mentor model inspired by Dr. Frank Gaytan's FYE groundwork, and the College of Business and Technology in 2023. Currently executive co-led by V. P. Mena and Provost Shayne Cofer, with Dr. Pamela Geddes joining Veronica as program co-lead, the LLC leadership team meets bi-weekly throughout the academic year to manage, execute, and sustain these comprehensive, cross-divisional student success programs.

Veronica Rodriguez, Director of the Office of Student Leadership Development and LLC Co-Director, continued noting this is the program's seventh year, emphasizing the highly successful symbiotic partnership between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs that bridges classroom learning with resident support. A recent success has been connecting the freshman-focused "Discover Yourself" track to a credit-bearing First-Year Experience (FYE) class for the first time, which significantly advanced student retention. The introduction of peer mentors living alongside residents provided essential leadership development and accessible community support. Survey data assessing student experiences in the Nest residence hall revealed that 85% of respondents felt an increased sense of institutional belonging. 87% reported positive impacts on their academic performance, conceptually framed under the "SPARKS" framework (Social Support, Personal Growth, Academic/Professional Growth, Removal of Barriers, Knowledge of Resources, and Student Success/Retention). The program's positive impact was further enhanced after adding a 50% housing scholarship for LLC participants and specialized scholarships for peer mentors. This resulted in an exceptional overall retention rate of 93% across all tracks, including a perfect 100% retention rate for the College of Business and Technology (CBT), Discover Yourself, and Honors tracks. The program currently accommodates up to 112 students.

Associate Dean of Students and Program Lead, Paola Vargas, provided a comprehensive update on the Afghan Refugee Transition Program (ARTP), aligning the initiative's goals with the conclusion of Latino Heritage Month to celebrate NEIU's diverse and inclusive community values. The ARTP operates on a holistic, person-centered approach, ensuring that participating students receive compassionate, multi-touch support to successfully navigate language barriers, educational shifts, and societal adjustments. The program's current enrollment is 17 active students; 10 undergraduate students, 3 graduate students, and 4 individuals enrolled in the University's language proficiency program. To date, the ARTP has celebrated 13 total graduates, with an additional 3 students on track to graduate at the end of the current academic year. These graduates represent diverse academic fields such as accounting, computer science, marketing, and political science.

The exceptional resilience and academic successes of the program's participants are that students maintain an average 3.7 cumulative GPA despite juggling external responsibilities, employment, and acting as primary pillars of support for their families. The data shows steady degree-attainment progression, with participants averaging an 83% completion rate toward their academic requirements, while 74% have nearly completed all foundational benchmarks. This sustained excellence is backed by approximately $1.02 million in financial investments in FY27 channeled directly into the program through a combination of appropriations and re-appropriations. These funds are systematically distributed across a comprehensive support matrix focusing simultaneously on academic planning, student stability, emotional well-being, campus engagement, and long-term career placement beyond NEIU to transform these structural resources into life-changing opportunities.

Technology

Eliot Rodriguez, Chief Information Officer, provided an update regarding University Technology Service's (UTS) ongoing strategic priorities. These priorities encompass protecting data, modernizing technology, driving digital service automation, and enabling technology to sustain University operations across the teaching, learning, and research spectrums. To that end, UTS is currently overseeing more than 36 major University-wide initiatives.

To support this expanding portfolio, UTS is establishing a formalized Project Management Office (PMO) to introduce standardized processes, capture risks, ensure strategic alignment, and maximize the utility of limited funding and resources. While project management is already occurring, the new formalized framework will bring universal standardization across all IT initiatives by the PMO's target completion date of January 2027. Department staff are currently undergoing continuous training and have already begun migrating project information into the new PMO system.

Xiwei Wang, Special Assistant to the President on AI Governance and Strategy, provided an update on campus AI initiatives, announcing that a charter for the AI Governance Council has been drafted and recruitment is underway for voting members, standing advisors, and shared governance liaisons. Broad community interest has been generated following an announcement inviting faculty and students to participate, and leadership has begun consulting shared governance groups, including recent visits to the Faculty Senate and upcoming meetings with the University Planning and Budget Committee (UPBC) and University Advisory Council (UAC). The Council's immediate priority is drafting interim AI policies and usage guidelines to act as working guardrails for responsible AI use, with the goal of establishing formalized, official policies by the end of the academic year. Additionally, involvement from the student body is being solicited to have a student voting representative, and the Council has asked for a dedicated liaison from the Student Government Association (SGA).

New Business

Trustee Kalayil asked if there was any new business to discuss. Hearing none, there was no further business of the committee.

Motion to Adjourn

At 3:23 p.m. Trustee Garcia, 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 November 19, 2026