

**Full Board Meeting
January 8, 2026
Minutes**

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Board Meeting**9:03 a.m.**

The public was provided with information on the UWF Board of Trustees website to attend this public meeting in person or virtually through Zoom Webinar.

I. Call to Order

The meeting of the UWF Board of Trustees was called to order at 9:03 a.m. by Chair Rebecca Matthews.

II. Roll Call

Chair Matthews asked Kristie Johnson to conduct roll call. Trustees Paul Bailey, Trista Bennett, Ed Fleming, Janice Gilley, Adam Kissel, Rebecca Matthews, Kishane Patel, Heather Riddell, Ashley Ross, Zack Smith and Chris Young attended in person and Trustee Rachel Moya attended virtually.

Others in attendance included:

Jaromy Kuhl, Senior Vice President and Provost; Clifford Humphrey, Chief of Staff and Vice President of Strategic Initiatives; Tori Bennett, Interim Vice President of University Advancement; Dan Lucas, Vice President of Finance and Administration; Mary Anderson, Interim Vice President and Dean of Students for Academic Engagement and Student Affairs; Julie Sheppard, Interim General Counsel; Alex Smith, Director of External Affairs; Dallas Snider, Vice Provost; Anna Lochas, Director of Events; and Kristie Johnson, Board of Trustees Liaison.

III. Greeting

Chair Matthews welcomed everyone to the meeting and recognized new Trustees Patel and Gilley.

IV. Public Comment

Chair Matthews opened the floor for public comment. Dr. Amy Cook commented on BOT-1, Approval of Presidential Appointment for Confirmation by the Florida Board of Governors. Trustees also were provided copies of comments received via form or email.

V. Interview Candidate for UWF President

Presidential Search Committee Chair Zack Smith welcomed candidate, Interim President Manny Diaz, Jr. and began the interview. Trustees asked Mr. Diaz questions including:

Questions asked (summarized - please refer to the meeting recording to view the full interview, including responses to the questions listed below):

1. Please share your vision for UWF if we approve you as president.

2. How do you think we should best work to solve the need for more beds for students as we grow?
3. What do you see as success in implementing your vision after 5 years?
4. What would your approach be for the different types of fundraising including annual gifts, operations, major gifts/endowments, corporate opportunities, capital campaigns, planned giving, athletic fundraising, and research support?
5. How will you protect faculty research interests, support intellectual diversity and freedom of speech on campus?
6. What is your strategy for allocating funds for hiring faculty which includes increasing tenure track lines so we can continue to compete within the state system?
7. Discuss your past experiences and how you will respond to the different constituencies you will have to serve.
8. What is the process generally for the charter school and where are we in the process?
9. Would the charter possibilities take student teaching opportunities from the public school system?
10. You have extraordinary contacts in legislature and at the federal level, can you tell how you will leverage those contacts for the financial lifeline of the university?
11. A key priority is elevating student success. Do you have plans to leverage community partnerships to increase job opportunities and internship opportunities for current students and students who are about to graduate?
12. Do you have ideas or plans for growth in Ft. Walton Beach, especially with service to the military there?
13. What are you looking for in the (staff) candidates you are bringing to the University?

VI. New Business

A. Action Items

1. BOT-1: Approval of Presidential Appointment for Confirmation by the Florida Board of Governors

Presidential Search Committee Chair Zack Smith presented BOT-1 and made a motion to appoint Mr. Manny Diaz, Jr. as the new President of the University of West Florida to be presented to the Florida Board of Governors for confirmation.

Seconded by: Trustee Ross

Trustees discussed the motion. Trustee Riddell read a statement from the faculty.

Motion passed 11-1 with Trustee Riddell casting the dissenting vote.

2. BOT-2: Approval of Substantive Presidential Contract Terms and Compensation Range

General Counsel, Julie Sheppard, presented BOT-2. She reviewed highlights of the contract and commented that comparison was made with former UWF presidents and recently appointed SUS member presidents. She answered questions regarding a performance bonus and vote to terminate.

Trustee Fleming made a motion to approve the key terms of the employment agreement for President-elect Manny Diaz, Jr. and to authorize Chair Rebecca Matthews as the Chair of the University of West Florida Board of Trustees to execute, on behalf of the board, a contract document consistent with the terms of the draft contract presented.

Seconded by: Trustee Young

Trustees Riddell, Matthews, Smith, and Fleming engaged in discussion.

Motion carried unanimously.

Chair Matthews presented President-elect Manny Diaz, Jr., congratulated him, and offered the opportunity for him to comment which he accepted and made remarks.

VII. Good of the Order

Chair Matthews identified that all agenda items had been discussed and offered several dates to the Trustees including: 1/28-29/26 – BOG meeting where President-elect Diaz will be presented, 2/12/26 – Committee meetings via Zoom, and 2/11/26 – Stadium groundbreaking. She also commented that trustees would be reassigned to committees; she was creating a new Presidential Review ad-hoc committee, and all were invited to participate in the new Strategic Planning ad-hoc committee.

VIII. Adjournment

With no other business to discuss, Chair Matthews adjourned the meeting at 11:18 a.m.