

**Board of Governors Meeting Minutes**  
**Boyd Conference Room**  
**Thursday, April 23, 2026, 4:00 PM**

**Members Present:** Ms. Cathy Deeb, Mr. Mike Hastings, M. Tim McKenzie, Mr. Randy Price, Mr. Luke Roberts, Mr. Shannon Remines (Phone), Mr. Jack Sheffler, Mr. Ed Toman, Mr. Anthony Tolley.

**Members Absent:** Mr. Bill, Cole, Mr. Charlie Cole

**Guests:** Mr. Ryan Bailey, Dr. William Bennett, Mr. Brent Benjamin, Dr. Deirdre Guyton, Mrs. Cynthia Higgins-Atwell, Dr. Ted Lewis, Mr. Keith Olson, Ms. Julie Orr, Mr. Ansel Ponder, Dr. Sarita Rhonemus, Ms. Christina Sammarco, Mr. Brodderick Tucker

**1. Call to Order and Chair Remarks**

Ms. Cathy Deeb called the meeting of the Bluefield State University Board of Governors to order at 4:00 PM. Ms. Deeb stated that the Board of Governors of Bluefield State University wishes to recognize Dr. Sarita Rhonemus for her exceptional leadership throughout the HLC accreditation and also extended recognition to the entire HLC Board. She also expressed appreciation to Mr. Luke Roberts, Student Representative for his accomplishments, while representing Bluefield State University as the student representative and noted that this is his last year the university.

**2. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes**

The minutes from the previous meeting were reviewed and approved. Mr. Anthony Tolley made the motion to approve the minutes and Mr. Ed Toman seconded the motion. No changes or comments were noted. The minutes were approved as presented.

**3. President's Report – Dr. Darrin Martin**

- **General Remarks**

President Martin complemented the entire University for the efforts that have gone into planning and executing Mercer County Public School Days. He complemented faculty for the time and effort they put into planning hands-on activities for prospective students.

The Food Bank is now open thanks to the efforts of Student Activities leadership and SGA. The Food Bank is open to all and food is provided courtesy of Food Lion. President Martin remarked that this was a great endeavor and he appreciates everyone involved.

He thanked the entire campus community for their contribution to the most recent HLC site visit. He and Provost Rhonemus anticipate official results and recommendations from the visit in July.

Ed Toman, Board Member, asked about open hours for the dining hall in the Student Union. The open hours were confirmed to be 11-2 Monday-Friday. Mr. Toman said he would share with staff at MCPS in case they would be interested in eating in the Student Union.

- **Enrollment Growth**

Enrollment growth increased by 9.5% and is projected to grow by up to an additional 7% this year. Mr. Ed Toman, Superintendent of Mercer County Schools, has been collaborating with Bluefield State University to bring students to campus for events associated with Mercer County Days. Hands-on learning activities for Mercer County Days are scheduled to begin next week.

Building I is being renovated to serve as a First-Year Experience residence hall. Efforts are underway to secure donations to support the renovation project. The Registrar's Office, Financial Aid and other campus offices will also be available in the building periodically to provide assistance as needed.

- **Library Renovation**

The library renovation will focus on reducing traditional book stacks to create a more open and inviting layout. The redesigned space will include dedicated study rooms, a conference room, and a faculty lounge or additional meeting space. The overall design will reflect the institution's identity through the use of blue and gold colors, along with the incorporation of the academic seal for branding.

Dr. Martin reported that dining services have returned to campus, expanding from one day per week to now operating five days a week. Alumni and members of the community are also invited to participate.

Dr. Martin, in collaboration with Mr. Randy Price and Mr. Ed Toman, is partnering with Burke & Herbert Bank and Mercer County Schools to develop a recognition program for K-12 students who achieve A-B honor roll status. As part of this initiative, the bank has agreed to support both younger and older students by providing small incentives, such as a \$5 deposit into a student bank account.

The program is intended to recognize and reward high-achieving students while also encouraging continued academic success. In addition, it is designed to positively support student engagement and contribute to strengthening literacy outcomes within local schools.

## **Standing Reports**

- 1. Alumni Report – No Report**
- 2. Academic Update – Dr. Sarita Rhonemus**

Dr. Sarita Rhonemus provided a follow-up report on the HLC site visits. The exit interview was conducted with herself and Dr. Darrin Martin. The Chair commended Bluefield State University and recognized the Board of Governors for their clear understanding of their role. Participation in institutional forums was also highlighted positively. It was noted that continued attention will be needed to strengthen institutional processes and procedures. Dr. Rhonemus also informed Luke Roberts (Student Government President) that the team expressed interest in viewing the Student Government Association's food pantry initiative.

### **3. Finance and Budget – Mrs. Cynthia Higgins-Atwell**

Ms. Higgins reported that she is currently working on financial draws. She commended the Athletic Department for successfully encouraging students to make payments. She also noted plans to reach out to non-athlete students to promote attendance at the "One Stop Shop."

Mrs. Higgins-Atwell briefly reviewed the cash report and deferred maintenance project updates and referenced the documentation shared in the Budget Committee Minutes from April 2026.

Mrs. Higgins-Atwell asked to save comments regarding the 2026-2027 Budget for the New Business time in the meeting agenda.

### **4. Safety and Security – Mr. Brent Benjamin**

Mr. Benjamin shared that biweekly meetings are held with the President and Chief of Staff in attendance. Keith Olson has updated the campus safety plan, noting that first responders now have access to campus buildings. Fire drills are currently being conducted, with an emphasis on improving education and compliance regarding proper evacuation procedures during drills.

Mr. Benjamin shared that the Safety and Security Committee consists of 12 members including both faculty and staff. Eight members of the Safety and Security Committee attended the Campus Safety and Emergency Response Symposium on April 22, 2026 at the Charleston Convention Center, which was sponsored by HEPC. He commented that the training was very helpful for the committee.

The Board was informed that West Virginia House Bill 4592 establishes new requirements for colleges and universities to develop standardized campus safety maps that integrate with local emergency response systems. Bluefield State University's safety and security team is aware of the legislation and has begun planning to ensure compliance, including coordination with local law enforcement and first responders. Updates will be provided to the Board as implementation progresses.

The Board was informed that the University has initiated a series of fire drills across campus as part of its ongoing commitment to safety and emergency preparedness. A recent drill identified several areas for improvement, including response time, communication, and adherence to established procedures. The safety and security team is actively addressing these

deficiencies and will incorporate lessons learned into future drills to strengthen overall campus readiness.

#### **5. Enrollment Update – Mr. Josh Grubb**

Mr. Josh Grubb provided an enrollment update, noting that projections are currently between 546 and 600 new students, including both in-state and out-of-state enrollments.

#### **6. Student Affairs Update – Dr. Ted Lewis**

Dr. Ted Lewis delivered a presentation on Student Affairs, during which he noted that four students were in attendance. The presentation materials are attached.

#### **Faculty Representative Updates – Mr. Jack Sheffler**

Mr. Jack Sheffler reported that the Agora Celebration of Local Arts was held on April 15. He also noted that the Earth Day celebration took place on April 22, with ongoing efforts focused on campus beautification.

#### **Staff Representative Updates – Mr. Tim McKenzie**

No updates reported.

#### **Student Representative Update – Mr. Luke Roberts**

Mr. Luke Roberts provided updates on several campus initiatives, including the clock tower project, university class rings, the food pantry, and the career closet. He also reported that the second annual Earth Day celebration was held on April 22, with participation from 17 clubs and athletic teams. Multiple areas across campus were improved through beautification efforts. In addition, he noted ongoing collaboration with the maintenance department to complete work at the MEC.

#### **Foundation Report – Dr. Deirdre Guyton**

Dr. Deirdre Guyton provided comments on the Development Committee Report, noting that it is included in the Board packet. She also announced that the second Giving Day is scheduled for April 29. In addition, a Phone-a-thon will be held from April 27 through May 1 in Hatter Hall.

#### **New Business**

The Board approved the University's 2026–2027 operating budget as recommended by the Budget Committee. The budget was presented as a “flat” budget, reflecting a conservative approach to revenues and expenditures, with only modest adjustments to account for anticipated increases associated with the recent compensation announcement by Gov. Patrick Morrisey for state employees.

The Board approved the distribution of state-supported compensation adjustments for university employees in alignment with the Fiscal Year 2027 state budget, which included funding for employee pay increases as announced by Gov. Patrick Morrisey. The University received an increase in state appropriation to assist with these adjustments, and the Board authorized a distribution approach consistent with institutional priorities and available funding.

The adopted budget aligns with the institution's focus on financial stability while maintaining support for core operations and strategic priorities.

A motion was made by Mr. Anthony Tolley to approve the 2026–2027 budget, which was seconded by Mr. Randy Price. The motion carried.

### **Comments**

Ms. Cathy Deeb announced that Mr. Sam Berry, Bluefield State University's Golf Coach, has been named Coach of the Year in the CIAA.

Mr. Josh Grubb announced that commencement will be held on May 16, beginning at 10:00 a.m. He asked Board members to stop by the President's Office to ensure they have their academic regalia. He also provided an update on Board training requirements, reminding members to keep their training current and to report their progress.

Mr. Grubb noted a change to this year's graduation program, where the five valedictorians will each give a five-minute address. Parking passes will be provided for Board members attending the ceremony.

### **Adjournment**

Mr. Randy Price made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 4:52 p.m. Mr. Ed Toman seconded the motion.