

## **Student Life & Enrollment Joint Committee Meeting**

**Date:** Thursday, August 21, 2025  
**Time:** 3:00 p.m.  
**Location:** Boyd Conference Room

**Members Present:** Anthony Tolley, Chair – Enrollment (Virtual); Cathy Deeb, Chair – Student Life; Christina Sammarco; Sudhakar Jamkhandi; Randall Price, Jack Sheffler; Luke Roberts; Ron Shidemantle

**Guests:** Melisa McGuire (University Retention Specialist), Richard Livingston (Director of Housing & Residence Life), Ansel Ponder, Darrell Malamisura; Charlie Cole, Josh Grubb, President Darrin Martin.

### **1. Welcome**

- Meeting called to order jointly by **Cathy Deeb** and **Anthony Tolly**.
  - New staff members introduced:
    - **Melisa McGuire**, University Retention Specialist (joined July 1).
    - **Richard Livingston**, Director of Housing & Residence Life (joined July 1).
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### **2. Retention Services – *Report by Melisa McGuire***

Melisa shared progress and plans aligned with the **strategic plan**:

- **Needs Assessment:** Using early risk data (Fall 2024 cohort) to identify at-risk students for early intervention; aligning with CARE (navigation support) teams.
- **Advising/Student Contact:** Working to improve student–advisor relationships; considering engagement opportunities outside traditional settings.
- **Student Success Month:** Scheduled for September, including meet-and-greet events for new students with division heads and deans.
- **One-Stop Shop:** Exploring streamlined transition services for students.
- **Student Athletes:** She will meet with athletes entering the transfer portal; will also explore identifying early warning signs.
- **Attendance Policy:** Collecting faculty and athletics feedback for ongoing review.
- **Programs & Initiatives:**
  - Successful orientation and matriculation events.
  - Peer Mentor program launched (3 hired, seeking 1 more).
  - Retention Committee to align strategies with University Strategic Plan.

**Discussion Points:**

- Board members encouraged early identification of transfer-risk athletes.
  - The board asked about orientation changes (fewer sessions, more engaging format, mixed faculty feedback).
    - VP Shidemantle explained that the University has come from approximately 8 orientations to 4 this year. This was designed to have a more concise orientation schedule and less burden on the faculty and staff involved. Mrs. Deeb asked if there is an orientation for those students who do not commit to the University until later in the enrollment cycle (August). VP Shidemantle confirmed that, yes, there is an orientation that is the “catch all” for late admitted students.
    - VP Shidemantle also explained that students are allowed to register even without attending an orientation. This was designed strategically to have a better measurement on which students will attend Bluefield State – registration confirmation is a key indicator of attendance. The University also incorporated an attendance verification measure within the LMS (Banner) that asks students to confirm their attendance each semester.
  - Orientation participation fell below 50% (previously ~90%). The committee discussed balancing mandatory requirements vs. accessibility and timing. VP Shidemantle shared that a comfortable participation rate is closer to 60-70% and that he and Ms. McGuire will assess the orientation program and discuss possible changes for next year as part of a plan to continuously improve the program to meet the needs of the students and the University.
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### **3. Housing & Residence Life – *Report by Richard Livingston***

- **Move-In Fall 2025:** Significantly smoother than 2024 due to experienced RA staff.
  - **Housing Numbers:**
    - MEC Housing: 124 men, 111 women (total 235).
    - Quality Inn: 63 (including temporary placement of cottage students).
    - Cottages: A & F nearly ready; B–D expected by late September.
    - **Total housed on campus: 294 students**, an all-time high (approx. 40% increase).
  - **Facilities:**
    - Dorm tours received very positive parent/student feedback.
    - Some doubles temporarily converted to triples by student request.
  - **Challenges:**
    - Student turnover occurs regularly; e.g., one student left during move-in week. This is not uncommon for universities with campus housing.
    - Quality Inn costs continue until cottages are complete.
  - **Next Steps:** Mr. McKenzie and President Martin have planned frequent walkthroughs of cottages to ensure contractors stay on schedule.
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#### **4. Current Enrollment Update – *Report by Ron Shidemantle***

- **New Students:** 314 (up from 221 in 2024, +42%).
  - **Transfers:** 175 (+19%).
  - **Graduate Students:** 22 (+37%).
  - **Total Enrollment (as of Aug. 21, 1:45 p.m.):** 1,400 students, a 6.8% increase from 2024.
  - **FTE:** 1,183 (exceeding budgeted 981).
  - **Highlights:**
    - First time in ~20 years enrollment has exceeded 1,400.
    - Continuing students down slightly (-1%).
    - Readmits down 22% (to be addressed with new outreach strategies).
  - **Contributing Factors to Growth:**
    - Athletic recruitment emphasis.
    - Renewed focus on local high schools.
    - Launch of new CRM system (automated communication, texts, emails).
    - Campus-wide call initiative – nearly 60 faculty and staff from the University reached out to 10-11 students for an additional admissions touchpoint. Admissions Director, Christina Sammarco, contributed this effort to some of the success her department had.
    - VP Shidemantle and Mrs. Sammarco complimented the efforts of Mr. Ansel Ponder and the marketing team for the high quality materials produced such as the Acceptance Packet and postcards used in mailing campaigns.
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#### **5. Recruitment Strategies 2025–2026 – *Ron, Christina, Ansel***

Outlined **10 strategies**:

1. **Local high school recruitment focus** – continued based on success from previous years.
2. **WV & VACRAO data analysis.** – The team will review success from last year's recruitment events and use that data to determine the best recruitment events to attend this year.
3. **HBCU, Mercer/Fair, transfer/community college partnerships & open house events.** – Many of these are already scheduled. The team will begin this work in September.
4. **CRM template refresh by Sept. 1.** – All active communication flows (automated emails and texts) are being refreshed with a new design which is modern and very competitive based on peer institutions. This work was completed in house by the marketing team and specifically by Charles Harris, Webmaster at BSU, who worked alongside Steven Jarvis in admissions to update the University's communication flows.
5. **CRM electronic applications for restricted programs (live by Sept. 1).** – Right now, the application for students in restricted admissions programs like nursing have a separate application that isn't tied into the University's Customer Relationship Management

software, which means they do not enter the automated communication flow. Starting September 1, they will be automatically entered into the CRM and will be receiving targeted, timely, and branded marketing messages.

6. **Common Application purchase to streamline applications.** – The Common App is an industry-standard way of inviting more students to apply. This is a centralized application where perspective students can apply to more than one college at a time. This will increase our application pool and give us more opportunities to recruit students.
7. **Encoura purchase & targeted postcard campaigns.** – The university will be purchasing the names, emails, and contact information for students within a certain radius of the University. These records will give the University the prospect's intended major among other datapoints. The marketing plan for 2025-2026 includes 2-3 targeted campaigns that will be sent to these prospects that will include variable messaging on the postcard and targeted digital ads in social media. These strategies are proven to boost engagement and increase the number of students who inquire or apply.
8. **University call initiatives.** – based on the success of the University call initiative mentioned earlier in the minutes, The University plans to continue involving more of the campus community to engage with students earlier on in the enrollment cycle.
9. **Enhanced admissions marketing.** – As mentioned in #7 above, the marketing team, led by Ansel Ponder, is creating a robust marketing plan to drive more students to BSU. In addition to the postcard campaigns, they are designing an updated BSU Viewbook which will highlight the University's academic programs, athletic programs, facilities, and services – these Viewbooks are typically shared with students who apply or visit the University. Additionally, the team is building "Travel Pieces" which are high-quality marketing tools that admissions counselors will take with them as they visit schools and college fairs. They are designed to give a brief snapshot of the University to the student and they include a mechanism for the perspective students to inquire or apply by filling out a card or scanning a QR code to do so online.
10. **CRM-focused communication for readmit students.**– The communication flow will continue to be built out to send targeted and timely messaging to multiple student groups such as readmit (adult) students, online students, and international students.

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## 6. Adjournment

- Meeting adjourned by **Cathy Deeb** and **Anthony Tolly**.
- Acknowledgment of team-wide effort leading to enrollment growth.