

FLORIDA **A&M** UNIVERSITY

Board of Trustees

Meeting Minutes April 24, 2025

I. Call to Order and Welcome

Chair Kristin Harper called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m. A quorum was established with the presence of Trustees Brown, Crossman, Ellison, Figgers, Gainey, Gibbons, Harper, Lawson, May, Perry, and Reed. Trustee White joined the meeting later.

II. Public Comments

The following individuals addressed the Board concerning the presidential search process:

- Montre Bennett
- Chekesha Kidd
- Erinn Tucker-Oluwole
- Carolyn Collins

III. President's Report

Dr. Timothy Beard, Interim President

Dr. Beard provided highlights from the spring semester:

- \$125,000 gift from Indelible Solutions presented by Chairman Jerome Byers and Trustee Michael White during the School of Business and Industry forum.
- Women's History Month event, *Unbreakable: A Celebration of Strength*, hosted by First Lady Wendy Beard.
- 1887 Strikes Day of Giving: Boots on the Ground held April 3–4, 2025.
- FAMU Day at the Capitol held April 9, 2025.
- School of Nursing achieved a 93% passage rate on the NCLEX-RN, an 11-point increase from the previous year and above the national benchmark.

He reviewed progress toward institutional goals aligned with the *One SUS 30* and *Boldly Striking Strategic Plans*, emphasizing community engagement, fundraising, alumni and student achievements, and academic excellence.

The university achieved a historic high score of 83 on the 2025 Performance-Based Funding (PBF) metrics, an 11-point increase from the previous year.

Dr. Beard informed the Board of an inquiry from SACSCOC regarding Standards 4.2.B and 4.2.D. The university is required to submit related documentation by May 19, 2025.

IV. Student Government Association Report

Trustee Loryn May, SGA President

Trustee May delivered her final report and reflected on her term. She outlined the year-end SGA programming:

- Rally in Tally
- FSA Day at the Capitol
- FAMU Day at the Capitol Series
- Be Out Day
- Scholars and Sweets
- SGA End of the Year Awards
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She also submitted two key memoranda addressing the Presidential Search and Campus Safety, in response to recent events.

Trustee May introduced the incoming SGA President, Zayla Bryant, and expressed gratitude for the opportunity to serve.

Action Items and Reports

V. 2025–2030 Educational Plant Survey

VP Rebecca Brown presented the results and recommendations for capital outlay needs. The survey assessed future space requirements across multiple categories and institutions.

VI. Repeal of BOT Policy 2005-22 (Tuition Reimbursement)

VP Brown recommended the repeal of the policy for fiscal efficiency. Trustees requested a cost-benefit analysis to be presented in June 2025.

VII. 2025 Accountability Plan

Provost Allyson Watson summarized key updates:

- Increases in 4-year graduation, academic progress, and post-graduate median wages.
- Improved licensure passage rates, particularly in Nursing (93%).
- Rise program implementation across licensure fields.
- Updates on enrollment, research, and academic quality.

VIII. Sabbatical and Professional Development Leave

The Committee recommended nine faculty members for 2025–2026 sabbaticals:

- Clement Allen
- Victor Eno
- Bobby Granville
- John Luque
- Nzinga Metzger
- Marcia Owens

- Keerthisinghe Senevirathne
- Anedra Small
- Anandhi Aavudai Swamy

IX. Men's Basketball Coach Contract

Attorney David Self presented the employment contract for Coach Charlie Ward. VP/AD Suggs began her presentation by expressing appreciation to Coach Crarey for his dedication and passion during his tenure as the head men's basketball coach. Afterwards, she recommended approval of the five-year contract agreement for Coach Charlie Ward, Jr. to become Florida A&M University's next men's head basketball coach while providing an overview of his athletic and coaching career.

Trustees White, Lawson, Harper, Gibbons, and Crossman discussed the contract details including financial responsibility and risk as well as the multi-year term and unanimously supported the hire, pending review and final approval by:

- Office of General Counsel
- University President
- FAMU Foundation (for additional compensation coverage)

X. University Naming – Band Rehearsal Hall

VP Anthony Neal proposed approval of naming the Band Rehearsal Hall in honor of Dr. Bernard and Shirley Kinsey.

XI. Strategic Plan Implementation & PBF Metrics Update

VP Roddrick Jones reported improvements in 7 of 11 metrics and presented updates on implementation timelines, college-level dashboards, and strategic tracking.

XII. Legislative Session Funding Update

VP Jamal Sowell and Assistant Director Milan Thompson reported on:

- Advocacy efforts during the 2025 session.
- Governor's budget recommendations.
- FY2025–2026 budget status (as of March 28, 2025).

The legislative session may be extended.

XIII. Consent Agenda

- February 13, 2025 Board Minutes
- 2025–2030 Educational Plant Survey
- Repeal of BOT Policy 2005-22
- 2025 Accountability Plan
- Sabbatical and Professional Development Leave Applications
- Men's Basketball Coach Contract

Motion: Trustee Gibbons

Second: Trustee Lawson

Approved Unanimously. Motion passes.

Separately Approved Item:

- Naming of Band Rehearsal Hall

Motion: Trustee Lawson

Second: Trustee Perry

Approved Unanimously. Motion passes.

XIV. Presidential Search Update

Chair Harper called the meeting to order and acknowledged the significance of the presidential search process. She emphasized the profound impact of the committee's decision, which will shape the future direction, reputation, and ability of Florida A&M University to fulfill its mission and vision. Chair Harper extended her gratitude to all participants, including committee members, the search firm, and the candidates, recognizing their dedication and hard work.

Trustee Perry raised concerns regarding alleged improprieties in the search process. He highlighted various rumors circulating in the media and stressed the importance of determining their validity to safeguard the integrity of the search. Specific concerns raised included:

- Allegations that negotiations regarding salary took place with a candidate before the formal committee vote.
- Potential political influences affecting the selection process.
- The unexpected addition of a fourth candidate after the committee had finalized its selection of three.
- Private discussions among search committee members outside of the designated public forums.
- Possible violations of the non-disclosure agreement.
- Allegations of external pressure on the Board Chair to appoint specific individuals to the search committee.
- The search firm's role in contacting committee members and its overall influence on the process.

Trustee Perry emphasized that resolving these concerns was essential before proceeding, ensuring that the selected candidate is widely accepted and not hindered by lingering doubts about the legitimacy of the process.

Search Committee Chair Deveron Gibbons responded to the concerns, categorically denying any improper conduct. He reassured the Board that the process was conducted in a transparent and orderly manner in full compliance with State and Board of Governors (BOG) regulations. Trustee Gibbons emphasized:

- He had no contact with any candidates throughout the process.
- The University's General Counsel was present at all meetings.
- All meetings were recorded for documentation and accountability.
- Any formal complaints should be directed toward an official investigation.
- The meeting recordings had already been submitted to the General Counsel's Office and the Board of Governors for review to determine if any rules were violated.

In light of the previous discussion and all the new information received by the Board, Trustee Ellison moved to suspend the ongoing presidential search and engage an independent consultant for an investigation. Trustee Perry seconded the motion.

Attorney Shira Thomas advised that the appropriate body to investigate the search process would be the Board of Governors. She noted that regulations within Board of Governors Regulation 1.002—specifically subsection 11—outline procedures for addressing concerns regarding improprieties.

Chair Harper asked Atty. Thomas to specify where in the regulation the process for reporting concerns was detailed. Atty. Thomas confirmed that if any improprieties were suspected, they should be reported to the Board of Governors' general counsel for review.

However, Chair Harper clarified that the regulation in question applies to the search committee, not the Board of Trustees. Therefore, the motion to suspend the search and conduct an independent investigation would not fall within this regulation.

Trustee Perry cited previous investigations, including one concerning a major gift, to highlight the necessity of a parallel inquiry. He asserted that the Board of Trustees holds a fiduciary responsibility to ensure transparency and credibility. He argued that the Board should conduct its own investigation rather than relying solely on the Board of Governors.

Chair Harper acknowledged the Board's authority in this matter and voiced her support for an independent investigation parallel to the Board of Governors' inquiry.

Trustee Lawson cautioned the Board against allowing public speculation to disrupt the search process. He highlighted the composition of the search committee, which included representatives from the Board of Governors, legal counsel, and an experienced search firm.

Trustee White expressed concerns regarding the ongoing legislative session and the university's financial requests. He stressed that the Board must proceed carefully to maintain credibility. He supported continuing the search process while ensuring the Board of Governors received the necessary information for their investigation.

Trustee Brown sought clarification from Atty. Thomas regarding whether the Board of Governors had already initiated an inquiry. Atty. Thomas confirmed that they had. Trustee Brown suggested waiting for the Board of Governors' findings before proceeding with an independent investigation.

Trustee Gibbons voiced frustration over suspending the search process based on unverified rumors.

Trustee Lawson proposed a friendly amendment, recommending that the Board Chair consult with the Chancellor and the Board of Governors' general counsel to evaluate concerns based on their engagement in the search process.

Trustee Ellison hesitated to accept the amendment, citing concerns about public perception and yielding to Chair Harper's recommendation. Chair Harper advised against accepting the friendly amendment.

Trustee Washington apologized for her late arrival and sought clarity on the situation. She asked whether the Board of Governors had requested the search suspension or if the Board of Trustees was acting preemptively.

Chair Harper confirmed that the Board of Governors had not issued a directive to suspend the search and had only confirmed approval of the finalists.

Trustee Washington supported continuing the search process, recognizing the extensive work already invested. She also noted that the Board of Governors would inform the Board of Trustees if they uncovered improprieties.

Trustee Reed commended the Board for engaging in robust discussions to ensure the best outcomes for Florida A&M University. He raised two key questions concerning Trustee Perry's motion:

1. If no action were taken, what would be the next step?
2. If the search were suspended, what would be the implications?

Seeking legal insight, Trustee Reed asked general counsel, Attorney Thomas, for clarification regarding the Board of Governors' review. Atty. Thomas stated that the Board of Governors was currently examining certain aspects of the search process, but had not formally requested that it be halted. If suspended, the process would come to a standstill, though there was no directive requiring such action at the time.

Chair Harper informed Trustee Reed that his first question—regarding next steps if the motion failed—would be addressed once the discussion and voting concluded. Essentially, the Board would continue moving forward. She also noted that the Board of Governors' ongoing review was new information that had just come to light for everyone present.

Chair Harper asked Atty. Thomas how this new information would affect the scheduled on-campus finalist visits set for May 12–16, 2025. Atty. Thomas responded that while the Board of Governors was reviewing certain information, the process would proceed unless they found reason to warrant its suspension.

Trustee Lawson cautioned the Board against slowing or halting the process prematurely based on speculation. He argued that if the Board of Governors had reasonable cause to intervene, the Board Chair and interim general counsel would have already been contacted.

Trustee Perry stressed that the pursuit of truth must remain open. He acknowledged that the Board of Governors was investigating something, but the specific scope remained unknown. He underscored the Board of Trustees' fiduciary duty to ensure fairness, stating that if stakeholders perceived the process as flawed, it would not be widely accepted.

Using an analogy, Trustee Perry warned against relegating the Board's responsibilities to external authorities, likening inaction to becoming a "potted plant." He reiterated that if there was no wrongdoing, then investigations would confirm this. However, if the Board failed to address public concern, the rumors would persist unchecked.

- **Trustee May** supported continuing the process, emphasizing its importance for students and the University's future.

- **Trustee White** inquired about the timeline implications if the search were paused. Chair Harper clarified that an independent firm would be needed to provide an accurate estimate. Trustee White also asked if any substantive evidence had emerged to justify halting the process. Atty. Thomas stated that the precise scope of the Board of Governors' review remained unknown. Trustee White urged caution in positioning the Board of Trustees ahead of the Board of Governors in the decision-making process, particularly in light of funding considerations.
- **Trustee Brown** endorsed continuing the process, noting significant faculty involvement. He thanked the committee for accommodating additional faculty engagement during candidate sessions. He also expressed concern for candidates who had rearranged their schedules to participate, as well as faculty members facing uncertainty. Trustee Brown stated that, if the Board of Governors uncovered any issues, the Board of Trustees could reconvene to take appropriate action.

Trustee Lawson suggested that Attorney Thomas contact the Board of Governors during the meeting to obtain their perspective. He emphasized that multiple highly knowledgeable individuals had been involved in the search process, yet no concerns had previously been raised at this level. He warned against "overcorrecting" by taking unnecessary action before formal evidence of impropriety emerged.

Chair Harper stressed the responsibility of the Board of Trustees to safeguard the integrity of Florida A&M University while acknowledging that the Board of Governors has a fiduciary duty to oversee the entire university system. She asserted that both entities could coexist in their responsibilities and reiterated that the Board of Trustees has an obligation to address concerns raised by the public, media, or Board members. Failing to do so, she cautioned, could undermine confidence in both the search process and the Board's credibility.

Chair Harper raised concerns about the premature release of finalist names in the *Tallahassee Democrat* before interviews had taken place and before the University's official media release. She questioned how confidential information, protected by non-disclosure agreements, had been leaked and called for an explanation. She emphasized the unfairness of publicizing candidate names in a process meant to maintain integrity and confidentiality.

Chair Harper agreed to engage in discussions with the Chancellor but asserted that all trustees should be privy to reports and conversations since she represents the Board, not just herself. She emphasized that the confirmed leak of finalist names warranted an independent investigation.

Chair Harper revealed new information—that the Board of Governors was investigating—though its scope and timing remained uncertain. She proposed a friendly amendment to Trustee Ellison's motion, suggesting that the search process be paused rather than suspended. Trustee Ellison accepted the amendment, clarifying that the Board would hire an independent consultant to investigate the search process before determining next steps.

Trustee White asked legal counsel to clarify the distinction between "pause" and "suspend" and how it would affect the motion. Atty. Thomas explained that the difference was minimal and deferred to Chair Harper for her intended interpretation.

Chair Harper clarified her stance:

- *Suspend* suggests a final stop to the process.
- *Pause* allows for a temporary break while new information is gathered before proceeding.

Trustee White then inquired about a timeline for the pause. Chair Harper responded that the Board did not yet have a timeline, but an independent firm would be expected to provide one upon hiring. She assured the Board that her priority was transparency, not delaying the process.

- **Trustee White** expressed concern that the pause might deter candidates from continuing in the process.
- **Trustee Washington** questioned whether an investigation could realistically be completed within two weeks. Chair Harper responded that the Board would follow up as soon as a firm was hired.
- **Trustee Washington** also reiterated concerns about redundancy, as the Board of Governors was conducting a separate investigation. She struggled with the duplication of effort and the potential impact on timeliness.

Chair Harper emphasized the necessity of balancing thoroughness with fiduciary duty. She thanked members for their contributions and reiterated that the Board would follow up on the timeline once an independent consultant was secured. \

Trustee Lawson requested clear language regarding the Board of Governors' role in the matter. He asked if they were investigating, simply raising questions, or responding to public comments. He emphasized the need for full clarity before the Board of Trustees proceeded with any action.

Attorney Thomas responded that the Board of Governors had requested information for review, but she had not received details regarding the scope of their inquiries or what specific concerns they were investigating. She confirmed that the requested information had already been provided.

Trustee Lawson expressed his understanding that the allegations primarily revolved around conversations and discussions, meaning there might not be physical evidence to submit in response to the request. Attorney Thomas offered to retrieve the letter from the Board of Governors for review, which Trustee Lawson agreed to.

Trustee Lawson clarified that he was not opposing the motion but wanted to ensure that the Board fully understood what the Board of Governors was or was not doing before acting.

Chair Harper responded that the motion originated from Trustee Ellison, though she had amended it. Trustee Lawson reiterated that her amendment made it her motion procedurally. He insisted that the Board should be certain of the Board of Governors' intent before deciding.

Chair Harper noted that there was no clarity regarding the scope of the Board of Governors' review and acknowledged that the Board of Trustees would likely be unable to resolve that uncertainty during the meeting. However, she maintained that the Board of Trustees' action was still necessary.

Trustee Lawson disagreed, reiterating the importance of knowing exactly what the Board of Governors had asked for.

Attorney Thomas clarified that the Board of Governors had requested confidential information regarding the presidential search process, including records of confidential meetings, which had been provided by the University's General Counsel. Trustee Lawson then pointed out that this information did not directly address the allegations raised earlier. He asked whether the Board of Governors' request was tied to specific actions taken in each search committee meeting. Attorney Thomas confirmed that it primarily related to confidentiality concerns.

Trustee Gibbons expressed concern that the Board was setting an unusual precedent by launching an investigation despite no formal complaints or evidence of wrongdoing. He argued that the motion was based solely on speculation and questioned whether it was appropriate to suspend the search process without verifiable evidence. He also pointed out that the search had involved representatives from the University's General Counsel, the Board of Governors, faculty, students, alumni, and other stakeholders.

Chair Harper reaffirmed her support for an independent investigation if approved. She emphasized that any inquiry should be thorough, timely, and conducted with clear objectives. She asserted that such an investigation would strengthen confidence in the process both within the Board and among the public, reinforcing trust in the ultimate presidential selection.

A roll call vote was conducted with the following results:

- **No Votes (8):** Trustee Brown, Trustee Crossman, Trustee Gainey, Trustee Gibbons, Trustee Lawson, Trustee May, Trustee Washington, Trustee White
- **Yes Votes (5):** Trustee Ellison, Trustee Figgers, Trustee Harper, Trustee Perry, Trustee Reid

The motion failed with a vote of 8 against and 5 in favor.

Chair Harper requested an update from Search Committee Chair Gibbons regarding the compensation analysis for presidential finalists. Trustee Gibbons reported that the search committee was actively working through the compensation analysis, and the results should be delivered to the Board by the following week.

Chair Harper sought confirmation that the compensation analysis was being conducted for each candidate. Trustee Gibbons affirmed that multiple factors related to each candidate's compensation package had been reviewed, with deliverables expected soon.

Chair Harper reminded Trustee Gibbons that the Board must approve the compensation range before proceeding with a vote and emphasized that the search firm was responsible for conducting the analysis. She asked for final confirmation that the information would be available by the following week, and Trustee Gibbons assured accuracy in the process and timeliness of delivery.

Trustee Ellison requested that the Board receive complete profiles and bios of the finalists. Trustee Gibbons assured the Board he would contact the search firm to ensure finalists' credentials and bios were provided.

Chair Harper reflected on the earlier conversation regarding concerns surrounding the presidential search process. She reiterated that the Board was informed during the meeting that the Board of

Governors was reviewing information related to the process but lacked clarity on the scope or timeline of the review.

She expressed concern that, if the review remained incomplete before campus meetings or before the Board convened to vote, it could impact the process. Chair Harper asked Attorney Thomas to ensure the Board received updates regarding the scope and anticipated timeline of the Board of Governors' review. Attorney Thomas concurred.

Trustee Washington sought clarification on whether the Board of Governors was investigating or simply reviewing information. Attorney Thomas confirmed that the Board of Governors had requested information for review but had not formally declared an investigation. Trustee Washington noted that while there was no investigation at present, the review process could potentially impact the timeline.

Chair Harper outlined the next steps in the search process, including campus visits scheduled for Monday through Friday, May 12–16, 2025. Each finalist would spend one full day on campus, engaging with various university stakeholders.

Campus Visit Schedule:

- **Monday, May 12:** Dr. Rondall Allen
- **Tuesday, May 13:** Mr. Gerald Hector
- **Wednesday, May 14:** Atty. Marva Johnson
- **Thursday, May 15:** Dr. Donald Palm
- **Friday, May 16:** Board of Trustees meeting to deliberate and vote

Daily Schedule for Campus Visits:

1. **Board of Trustees Interview**
2. **Meeting with Senior Leadership Team**
3. **Faculty and Staff Meeting**
4. **Lunch with Senior Leadership, Deans, and Students**
5. **Campus Tour**
6. **Meeting with FAMU Students**
7. **Community Meet-and-Greet Session**
8. **Dinner with Board Chair**

Each finalist would deliver a presentation at campus forums, outlining their vision for Florida A&M University over the next five years, addressing potential challenges, and explaining their qualifications to lead the institution.

Trustee Brown requested faculty and staff feedback from their respective sessions, citing concerns that many faculty members were in classes during the forums. He also requested a Zoom option for participation.

Chair Harper assured the Board that all meetings would be available in person and via Zoom, with exceptions for lunch, the campus tour, and dinner. Trustee Brown further requested early access to the dates, forms, and Zoom links.

Trustee Washington questioned why the schedule featured only one candidate per day instead of two. Chair Harper explained that the schedule was developed based on best practices recommended by the search firm. She reaffirmed that all interviews, including the Board of Trustees meetings, would be available both in person and online.

Trustee Gibbons requested permission to address Trustee Washington's inquiry, which Chair Harper granted. He explained that the scheduling allowed candidates to tour the campus without risk of crossing paths with each other, maintaining the integrity of the process. During the search committee interviews, breaks were scheduled between sessions to ensure candidates did not overlap, and candidates were placed in holding rooms before entering interview spaces.

Trustee Washington acknowledged Trustee Gibbons' explanation. Chair Harper noted that, when there were initially three candidates, she had considered consolidating the schedule, but with four finalists, the search firm advised maintaining a one-candidate-per-day schedule.

Trustee May asked whether the May 16 meeting would be conducted in person or via Zoom. Chair Harper confirmed that both options would be available.

XV. Closed Session – Collective Bargaining

Led by Attorney Kentayvia Coates

The Board ratified a tentative agreement with the faculty union providing contract extensions and salary increases for FAMU DRS faculty.

IX. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Minutes amended on June 5, 2025.