

New Mexico Highlands University
Board of Regents Meeting
April 3, 2025

The New Mexico Highlands University Board of Regents met on April 3, 2025. The meeting was held at 9:30 a.m. in the Board Room-107 of the Rodgers Administration Building at 803 National Avenue, Las Vegas, NM 87701. The university made every effort to accommodate members of the public as stated in the March 24, 2024, meeting announcement. The meeting was livestreamed and accessed via Zoom through the following link:

<https://nmhu.zoom.us/j/99373471046>

Call to Order – Chairman Sanchez called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

Roll Call – Board Members present: Robert Lucero, Elaine Luna, Dr. Frank Sanchez, and Gary Tripp

Administrative Personnel Present: Dr. Neil Woolf, President, Dr. Brandon Kempner, Acting Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs; Stephanie Gonzales, CPA/Vice President for Finance & Administration; Dr. Kimberly Blea, Vice President for Student Affairs; David Lepre, Vice President for Marketing, Communications & Government Relations; and Dr. Paul Grindstaff, Interim Vice President for Advancement

Others Present: Dr. Jennifer Lindline, Faculty Senate Chair; Kayl Rainer, ASNMHU President; April Kent, HLC Liaison Officer; Patricia Ives, NMHU Legal Counsel; Carlos Padilla, NMHU Legal Counsel; and Carolina Martínez, Sr. Executive Administrative Assistant. Faculty, staff, students, and community members participated in the livestreamed meeting.

Compliance with Meeting Notice Requirements

Chairman Sanchez stated that, in accordance with the Open Meetings Act, the notice and agenda with the meeting date, time, and place for the April 3, 2025, meeting were posted timely and in compliance with the NMHU Board of Regents Open Meetings Act Resolution.

Approval of the April 3, 2025, Meeting Agenda

Chairman Sanchez recommended removing item #7, as it was addressed on March 19, 2025, and updating item #17 to note the campus tour and absence of the Legislative Fellows today.

Regent Tripp moved to approve the revised agenda, seconded by Regent Lucero. The motion passed unanimously.

Approval of the Minutes from March 19, 2025

Regent Tripp moved to approve the **March 19, 2025 Meeting Minutes** as presented. Regent Lucero seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment

Chairman Sanchez invited public comment; no one came forward.

Consent Calendar – Action Items

- A. Quarterly Report and Certification (FY25/Q3) – Stephanie Gonzales, CPA
- B. Open Meetings Act Resolution
- C. Minor in Digital Marketing for Non-Business Majors – Dr. Brandon Kempner
- D. BBA Concentration-Digital Marketing – Dr. Brandon Kempner
- E. MBA Concentration-Digital Marketing – Dr. Brandon Kempner
- F. Vice President for Finance & Administration Report – Stephanie Gonzales, CPA
- G. Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs Report – Dr. Brandon Kempner
- H. Vice President for Student Affairs Report – Dr. Kimberly Blea
- I. Vice President for Marketing, Communications & Gov. Relations – David Lepre
- J. Associate Vice President for Strategic Enrollment Mgmt. Report – Benito Pacheco
- K. Associate Vice President of Facilities Management Report – Sylvia Baca
- L. Athletics Report – Shanna Halalilo
- M. NMHU Advancement and Foundation Reports – Dr. Paul Grindstaff

Regent Lucero moved to approve the **Consent Calendar (Attachment A-H and J-M)** Regent Tripp seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

The Board of Regents discussed plans for the upcoming summer retreat.

President’s Report – Dr. Neil Woolf

2025 NMHED Annual Capital Outlay Submittal – Action Item

Regent Lucero moved to approve the **2025 NMHED Annual Capital Outlay Submittal (Attachment N)** as provided. Regent Tripp seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Tuition & Fees Increases – Action Item

No increases for tuition, housing, and meal plans are being proposed. The Budget Committee recommended an 8% fee increase, resulting in a \$7.35 per credit hour rise for students.

ASNMHU supported a 5% fee increase, expressing concern about how the additional funds will be used but acknowledging that students will benefit from the increase.

Regent Tripp moved to approve the proposed tuition and fee increases (**Attachment O**), with Regent Luna seconding. The motion passed unanimously.

President’s Report (Attachment P)

President Woolf presented a PowerPoint summarizing his goals, sub-goals, and progress. He highlighted new partnerships being cultivated by himself and the university to boost enrollment and enhance campus culture.

Vice President for Finance & Administration –Stephanie Gonzales, CPA

Acceptance of the 2024 Financial Audits – Action Item

Regent Lucero moved to accept the **2024 University Financial Audit, the Stable Isotopes Audit and the Foundation Audit (Attachment Q, R, and S)** as discussed. Regent Tripp seconded. Motion unanimously passed.

IRS Penalty Update

VPFA Gonzales informed the Board that in July 2023, the university received notice from the IRS of a \$348,000 penalty for failing to file 1095-C informational forms for calendar years 2020 and 2021. An additional \$347,000 penalty was later assessed, bringing the total to over \$700,000.

The university resolved the non-filing issue and, with support from the HR Office, submitted the required forms to the IRS. Despite this, the penalties were not abated, and interest continued to accrue due to nonpayment. VP Lepre has since engaged with federal legislators to pursue abatement through federal channels. As of February 13th, an update on the outcome was still pending.

VPFA Gonzales further explained that the university was seeking assistance to address the IRS penalties. She noted that the most recent payment penalties payment was approximately \$488,000. The university is seeking abatement for the original penalties, totaling over \$700,000 including accrued interest.

Under the President’s leadership, new policies have been implemented. One key measure is the adoption of Paycom as the university’s payroll provider. Paycom now handles the filing of all federal compliance forms related to payroll, including year-end processing, helping to ensure timely and accurate submissions moving forward.

EFOP, CAP Matrix and Unaudited Financial Statements – Action Items

VPFA Gonzales informed the Board that as part of the university's Enhanced Fiscal Oversight Program under the New Mexico Higher Education Department (NMHED), the university is required to update the Corrective Action Plan (CAP) matrix quarterly. This includes addressing audit findings, updating unaudited financial statements, and obtaining Board approval prior to submission to NMHED. The updated CAP matrix, included in the board packet, reflects Fiscal Year 2024 audit findings, with all entries indicating that corrective actions are currently in progress.

Regent Lucero moved to approve the EFOP, CAP Matrix and Unaudited Financial Statements (**Attachments T and U**) as provided. Regent Luna seconded. Voting in favor: Regent Lucero, Regent Luna, Regent Tripp, and Chairman Sanchez. Motion carried.

HR/Payroll Ticketing System Update (Attachment V)

VPFA Gonzales reported that tickets are decreasing monthly. The Human Resources Department has been undergoing a significant rebuilding process, including the implementation of Paycom

for payroll processing. Considerable efforts have been made to address and resolve longstanding issues within HR and payroll operations.

The HR Task Force includes a broad representation from across the university, including faculty, staff, vice presidents, and union members. They are developing an electronic faculty contract process, to streamline workflow and address the variety of contract types.

Working Lunch – Legislative Delegation Introductions

New Mexico Senator Pete Campos and New Mexico State Representative Anita Gonzales were introduced. They provided a synopsis of the work they are doing and continue to do for NM Highlands University, Las Vegas, San Miguel County, and surrounding communities.

The board and the administration thanked Senator Campos and Representative Gonzales for all of their work and support.

Regent Tripp motioned to recess at 12:53 p.m., Regent Lucero seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Faculty Senate Report – Dr. Jennifer Lindline

Dr. Lindline read her written report (**Attachment W**) which was included in boardbook.

ASNMHU Report – Mr. Kayl Rainer

Mr. Rainer reported the following:

- The Associated Students of New Mexico Highlands University (ASNMHU) visited the State Roundhouse during the recent legislative session.
- ASNMHU is actively building partnerships with student senates across the state.
- Elections are currently underway, with voting scheduled to conclude on Friday. A candidate debate was held as part of the election process.
- He noted a positive trend of increased student presence and engagement on campus.

Enrollment Reports – Benito Pacheco and Dr. Barbara Wharton

Associate Vice President for Strategic Enrollment Management, Benito Pacheco and Dr. Barbara Wharton, Director of Institutional Research, summarized their PowerPoint presentation (**Attachment X**).

Strategic Planning Update – Dr. Ian Williamson

VP Grindstaff stated that the Foundation Board is working to aligning the Foundation and Alumni Board's priorities with those of the University to ensure everyone is working together to support and advance the institution's mission.

He informed that with President Woolf, Highlands is building a culture of giving as part of its \$10 million capital campaign. We've currently raised \$6.2 million, with additional gifts in progress expected to bring us over \$7 million.

Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs/Graduate Dean, Dr. Ian Williamson, reported that the Strategic Planning Committee meets regularly and is working to develop the foundation of the University's new strategic plan. Using a multi-pronged approach, the committee reviewed strategic plans from across New Mexico and neighboring states to inform its process. The group has identified five broad focus areas, with the first being delivering a great education—a priority that involves significant consideration and detailed objectives.

The Strategic Planning Committee is defining what “a great education” means at Highlands beyond classroom instruction which includes: workforce alignment, informed academic decision-making, holistic student success, community engagement, and applied expertise.

Additional focus areas will be shared as the planning continues to evolve.

HLC Update – April Kent

Ms. Kent informed the Board that an HLC update **Attachment Y** was included in the Board packet prior to the meeting and stood for any questions.

Executive Session: (a) discussion of limited Personnel Matters related to President Neil Woolf's performance evaluation pursuant to NMSA 1978, § 10-15-1(H)(2); (b) discussion of limited personnel matters related to the hiring, promotion, dismissal, assignment, resignation, and/or investigation or consideration of complaints or charges against any individual or public employee, pursuant to NMSA 1978, § 10-15-1(H)(2); (c) deliberation upon competitive sealed proposals (RFP 25-003) for a Dining Services Management vendor, pursuant to NMSA 1978, § 10-15-1(H)(6) (d) discussion of matters subject to the attorney-client privilege pertaining to threatened or pending litigation in which the university is or may become a participant, pursuant to NMSA 1978, § 10-15-1(H)(7); and (e) discussion of the purchase, acquisition or disposal of real property of the university, pursuant to NMSA 1978, § 10-15-1(H)(8). Regent Lucero moved to enter into executive session for the sole purpose of discussing the items listed. Regent Tripp seconded. Voting in favor were: Regent Lucero, Regent Luna, Regent Tripp, and Chairman Sanchez. Motion carried and the Board entered into executive session at 2:47 p.m.

Reconvene in Open Session - Regent Lucero moved to return to open session and stated, for the record, that only those items specified in the executive session motion were discussed, and no action was taken. The Regents present confirmed this statement. Regent Tripp seconded the motion. Voting in favor of returning to open session were: Regent Lucero, Regent Luna, Regent Tripp, and Chairman Sanchez. The Board reconvened in open session at 4:36 p.m.

Action on Items Discussed in Executive Session – Action Item

No action was taken.

Regent Tripp moved to amend the agenda by moving Item #22 to be heard before Item #21. Regent Lucero seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Emeritus Status Designation – Action Item (Attachment Z)

Acting Provost Kempner stated that the library faculty and the administration was excited to support the Emeritus Status Designation proposal being presented to the Board. He recognized the distinguished service of Mr. Ruben Aragon, Director of the Donnelly Library.

Highlands University recognizes the Donnelly Library as a true gem of the campus—serving as a stable, accessible, and vital resource for students, faculty, and the broader Las Vegas community. The library has long stood as a central hub for academic support and engagement, and this is a direct reflection of Mr. Aragon’s tireless dedication and exemplary leadership as Library Director. Throughout his tenure, Mr. Aragon has been an unwavering advocate for the library, both on campus and across the state. He has worked diligently to secure funding and critical resources, collaborating closely with the New Mexico Legislature and through the General Obligation (GO) Bond process to ensure that Highlands University maintains a strong and influential voice in statewide library development initiatives. Mr. Aragon’s deep involvement with various library associations and his steadfast commitment to the library community across New Mexico have had a profound and lasting impact. His contributions are deeply appreciated, and his legacy will continue to benefit the institution and the community for years to come.

Regent Luna moved to award **Emeritus Status Designation to Mr. Ruben Aragon**, in recognition of his outstanding service and lasting contributions as Director of the Donnelly Library at Highlands University. Regent Tripp seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Ruben Aragon respectfully asked not to speak publicly. He expresses his sincere appreciation for the honor being bestowed upon him. He asked April Kent, Interim Library Director, to deliver these remarks on his behalf.

“Thank you so much for this incredible honor. I feel immensely grateful, humbled, and deeply inspired. First and foremost, I want to thank the members of the Board for this recognition. It truly means the world to me to be acknowledged in this way. This accomplishment is not something I have done alone. There are many others who deserve to share in this recognition. I would like to thank Dr. Roxanne Gonzales, who initiated the Emeritus process and served as my immediate supervisor during her tenure. I would also like to thank Ms. Kent, who I affectionately call my ‘left hand’, as we are both left-handed, along with a surprising number of our library staff. Working with such a dedicated and talented team has been one of the greatest privileges of my career. And of course, I extend my deepest gratitude to the entire staff of the Thomas C. Donnelly Library. Your unwavering commitment to our students and academic community has always inspired me.

Through his 48 years as a librarian and administrator, with 8 years at the National Agricultural Library and 40 years here at NMHU. He has had so many colleagues that have given him the confidence and support throughout the years to his colleagues and everyone involved in the journey. This award is as much theirs as it is his. He thankful for their dedication, hard work, and creativity that have been essential to everything he has accomplished. Working aside, such passionate individuals, has been one of the most rewarding aspects of his career.

He thanked his late wife Janie, their children, Stephen, Mindy, Wesley, Craig, Christina, and the many friends for their love and support throughout his career. Last, but not all, least, a special thanks to all of you, individuals and organizations that have had faith in me. He hopes that recognition of his work can serve as inspiration to others his field.”

Everyone expressed their heartfelt thanks to Mr. Ruben Aragon for his hard work, dedication, and lasting contributions to the University, the Las Vegas community, and throughout the state of New Mexico.

Dining Services Management Vendor Selection (RFP 25-003) – Action Item:

Vice President Blea stated that the Administration is requesting that the Board act to accept the recommendation of the Committee Evaluation Committee and grant the Purchasing Department and the Administration the authority to negotiate and finalize the contract for dining services management under RFP 25-003.

Regent Lucero moved to approve the request. Regent Luna seconded the motion. Voting in favor were: Regent Lucero, Regent Luna, Regent Tripp, and Chairman Sanchez.

Incorporation of and Memorandum of Agreement with Highlands Land Development Corporation – Action Item

President Woolf stated that next step is drafting the Articles of Incorporation for a land development entity that will report to the Board of Regents under the authority granted by the Higher Education Research Park Act. A draft is in process and is being developed in consultation with legal counsel.

Regent Lucero moved to the Incorporation of and Memorandum of Agreement with Highlands Land Development Corporation. Regent Tripp seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Regent Comments

Chairman Sanchez reported that the Gene Torres Golf Course Committee met last week to develop a budget. They discussed sustaining the course through collaboration with the City and County, both agreed to contribute \$60K each. The vendor will focus on boosting community involvement, increasing memberships, and improving advertising efforts.

Chairman Sanchez announced that commencement ceremonies are scheduled as follows: Rio Rancho Center on May 8, 2025; Main Campus on May 10, 2025, at 2 p.m.; and Farmington Center on May 17, 2025. He encouraged everyone to attend.

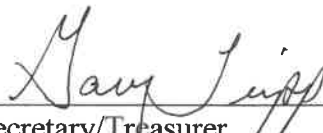
Adjournment

Regent Tripp moved to adjourn, seconded by Regent Lucero. The meeting adjourned at 5:05 p.m.



Chairman

NMHU Board of Regents



Secretary/Treasurer

NMHU Board of Regents