

## **New Mexico Highlands University**

Board of Regents Workshop/Retreat

October 30-31, 2025 (2-day)

The New Mexico Highlands University Board of Regents held a special meeting on October 30 and 31, 2025. The meeting was livestreamed via Zoom Platform. Notice of the meeting was posted in the Rogers Administration Building, posted on the NMHU Board of Regents website, and sent to local media as required. The university made every effort to accommodate members of the public as stated in the meeting announcement. Members of the public were able to access the livestream through the following Zoom link: <https://nmhu.zoom.us/j/99373471046>.

### **DAY 1 – October 30, 2025**

#### **Call to Order**

Chairman Frank Sanchez called the meeting to order at 9:30 AM.

#### **Roll Call**

Board Members present: Dr. Frank Sanchez, Mr. Robert Lucero, Ms. Elaine Luna, and Mr. Gary Tripp

#### **Administrative Personnel Present**

Dr. Neil Woolf, President; Dr. Dann Brown, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs; Stephanie Gonzales, CPA/Vice President for Finance and Administration; Dr. Kimberly Blea, Vice President for Student Affairs; Paul Grindstaff, Vice President for Student & Donor Engagement; Dave Lepre, Vice President for University Relations; Mr. Scott Noble, Athletic Director

#### **Others Present**

Jennifer Lindline, Faculty Senate Chair; Kathy Jenkins, Faculty Senate Vice Chair; Dr. Veena Parboteeah, Dean of the School of Business, Media, and Technology; Amalinda Arguello, Executive Administrative Assistant to the Board of Regents; Clint Weckerly, Center for Teaching Excellence Program Coordinator. Faculty, staff, students, and community members also attended the 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 October 30 - 31, 2025, meeting were posted in a timely fashion and in compliance with the NMHU Board of Regents Open Meetings Act.

#### **Finance and Strategic Planning Session – Led by Regent Lucero and VP Gonzales**

- Top Revenue Sources:  
State appropriations (\$44.5M), federal grants/contracts (\$17M), restricted funds, scholarships, sales & services.
- Federal Cuts Impact:  
Loss of indirects (\$215k), cancellation of key grants (CAMINO, Title V, NSF)

- Tuition/Fees:  
FY25 projection \$15.3M; commitment to remain lowest-tuition NM institution; upcoming tuition review.
- Top Expenditures:  
Salaries, supplies/operations, restricted miscellaneous, fringe, faculty labor.
- Oversight Requirements:  
HED, GASB, federal compliance, procurement code, 24-hour deposit rule.

**Strategic Planning Session** – Led by Dr. Ian Williamson

- Strategic Plan “Vision 2035” nearing completion; to be presented in December.
- Draft plan includes goals with KPIs under refinement.
- Focus on making the plan a living document tied to evaluation, budgeting, and continuous improvement.
- Discussion on increasing high school outreach, expanding P-20 efforts, and strengthening visibility of institutional achievements.

**Faculty Senate Goals Session** – Led by Dr. Jennifer Lindline and Dr. Kathy Jenkins

- Faculty Senate goals: strengthen shared governance, governance handbook review, grievance/conciliation support, transparency with Board, HLC engagement.
- Board and faculty discussed improving communication, earlier faculty involvement in initiatives, and committee participation.
- Noted need for improved recognition of faculty achievements and institutional history.

**Lunch Break** – The Board of Regents hosted lunch with members of Faculty Senate. No public business was discussed, and no actions were taken.

**Academic Affairs Session** – Led by Dr. Dann Brown

- Reviewed student orientation, involvement opportunities, communication channels.
- Emphasized linking academic interests with engagement to improve retention.
- Need for modernized marketing materials and updated program visibility.
- Strengthening Relationships with K-12 Leaders to grow the university through deeper community and school engagement.
- Focus areas:
  - Joint legislative advocacy.
  - Strengthening statewide higher education strategy.
  - Advancing a P-20 vision (Pre-K through doctoral pipeline).

- Need for better communication between K-12 and higher education to improve student readiness, retention, and long-term outcomes.
- Superintendent Engagement
- Plan to bring the developed agenda forward to the regents' subcommittee for alignment.
- Statewide Center opportunities:
  - NMHU has untapped potential at statewide centers.
  - Challenges include limited outreach and difficulty maintaining presence in distant regions.
  - Leadership working to strengthen statewide relationships, improve communication, and increase responsiveness to local educational needs.
  - Emphasis that stronger relationships lead to better feedback.

**Athletics Session** – Led by Scott Noble

- Facilities study completed; renderings and priorities shared.
- Strong performance improvements in volleyball, women's basketball, cross-country, wrestling, and softball.
- Proposal to add sports such as men's/women's track and women's wrestling; considerations for Title IX compliance and funding readiness.
- Facilities modernization viewed as central to recruitment and retention.

**Student Affairs Session** – Led by Dr. Kimberly Blea

- National Trends:
  - Highlighted NASPA 2025 top issues: technology/cybersecurity threats, political/legislative pressures, use of data dashboards, and increasing focus on health, safety, and basic needs.
  - Emphasized alignment with national concerns while noting New Mexico's more supportive legislative climate.
- Student Success & Advising Initiatives:
  - Complete College America Accelerator Project gaining momentum; co-led by Provost Brown to drive campus-wide systemic change.
  - Participation in New Mexico Advising Day and development of academic pathways to simplify degree progression, especially for first-generation and low-income students.
- Engagement, Belonging & Basic Needs Support:
  - Focus on basic needs security, recognizing personal and financial challenges as primary reasons students stop out.
  - Major events (Casino Night, Operation Glow, Outdoor Rec trips) showing strong participation and renewed post-pandemic engagement.
  - Division-wide event tracking system and Purple Passport Program implemented to incentivize involvement and increase campus vibrancy.

- Residential Life & Student Demographics:
  - 521 residents on campus; majority student-athletes (75–80%), with a demographic skew toward male students due to athletic program growth.
  - Working to balance residential experience and better support all identity groups, including trans and non-binary students.
- Food Security & Emergency Aid:
  - Food pantry provided 900+ meals over three months; new general store space expected to increase access.
  - NMHU students show higher-than-statewide basic needs insecurity, underscoring continued urgency.
- Mental Health & Counseling Services:
  - HU Cares serving primarily traditional-age students with both in-person and virtual care.
- Accessibility & Accommodations:
  - Accessibility Services moved under Student Affairs (as of July 1).
  - Serving 224 students with accommodations this semester; demand continues to increase.
- Retention, Completion & Technology Opportunities:
  - Strong push to use data to link service utilization, event participation, and housing with retention outcomes.
  - Exploring AI/chatbot systems to proactively engage students, provide just-in-time support, and strengthen early-alert communication.
- Housing Expansion & Facilities:
  - Significant deferred maintenance (\$84M) acknowledged; exploring partnerships and HED approvals to add 70 new beds by Fall 2026.
  - Long-term goal: 1,000 on-campus beds to support university growth.
- Financial Literacy & Student Preparedness:
  - Emphasis on financial literacy programming, especially for student-athletes receiving NIL funds, to support responsible money management.
- Culture of Care & Strategic Alignment:
  - Student Affairs framed as fostering NMHU’s “culture of care”, positioning the division as the heart of student experience.
  - Commitment to ensuring all students feel seen, heard, supported, and valued.

## **DAY 2 – October 31, 2025**

### **Call to Order/Reconvene**

Chairman Frank Sanchez called the meeting back into order at 10:46 AM.

### **Roll Call**

Board Members present: Dr. Frank Sanchez, Mr. Robert Lucero, Ms. Elaine Luna, and Mr. Gary Tripp

### **Administrative Personnel Present**

Dr. Neil Woolf, President; Dr. Dann Brown, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs; Stephanie Gonzales, CPA/Vice President for Finance and Administration; Dr. Kimberly Blea, Vice President for Student Affairs; Paul Grindstaff, Vice President for Student & Donor Engagement; Dave Lepre, Vice President for University Relations; Mr. Scott Noble, Athletic Director

### **Others Present**

Doajo Hicks, NMHU Legal Counsel; Amalinda Arguello, Executive Administrative Assistant to the Board of Regents; Faculty, staff, students, and community members also attended the meeting.

### **Executive Session: (a) discussion of limited Personnel Matters related to President Neil Woolf's contract and annual performance goals pursuant to NMSA 1978, § 10-15-1(H)(2)**

### **President's Session**

- Emphasized team excellence, collaboration, and the “Destination Highlands” initiative.
- Effort underway to streamline messaging around five institutional pillars.
- Retention improving (+7.9%), expected to drive higher graduation rates, better funding, and stronger marketing outcomes.
- Major needs across academic, housing, and athletic spaces. Student housing identified as urgent; NMHU has the oldest halls in the state.
- Regional centers being rebranded and improved to strengthen statewide outreach.
- Program expansion must align with New Mexico workforce needs (e.g., anesthesiology assistant program). Deans will be required to justify new program proposals through labor-market data.
- Partnership with statewide online-learning consortium led by experts (including former SNHU leadership).
- Noted positive momentum recognized by state leadership.

**Lunch Break** – The Board of Regents hosted lunch with members of Student Senate. No public business was discussed, and no actions were taken.

### **Foundation Session**

- Highlands Elevated Campaign:
  - Public phase launched Sept. 4; nearing original \$10M goal; internal goal now \$20M+.
  - Major gifts secured for Business School, Education, and Forestry/Sciences.
- Annual Giving:

- “Project Purple” campaign expanding faculty/staff participation.
- Growing athletics excellence funds and Friends of the Galleries.
- Endowment Growth:
  - 109 existing endowments; target 125.
  - Scholarship awards increased from \$160k to \$250k.
- Community & Alumni Engagement:
  - Regionally targeted events (NM, TX, MT).
  - Student recruitment and outreach integrated with foundation initiatives.
- Financial Stewardship:
  - Improved investment strategies expected to raise total endowment value to \$53M.
  - Cost to raise \$1 reduced significantly, improved audit results.
- Future Needs:
  - Expanded staff, enhanced donor relations, Board fundraising training.

### **Legislative Session**

- Student Fellows Program & Leadership Development:
  - Commitment to continuing structured development for student fellows, including public-speaking, idea-sharing, and leadership exercises.
  - Fellows represent diverse backgrounds across centers and main campus, including non-athletes and older adult learners.
  - Program refined to be more focused, with guided topic selection rather than unstructured “campfire” discussions.
- International Student Engagement:
  - Desire to more fully integrate international students into institutional discussions.
  - Interest in making NMHU a top-choice destination for international students.
- Government Relations & Legislative Strategy:
  - Notes that several supportive legislators have strong ties to NMHU and could be strategic allies.
  - Emphasizes coordinating with the President to strengthen political engagement and advocacy.
- Board Communication & Strategic Requests:
  - Request for strategic evaluation before contacting certain high-profile individuals.
  - Desire for a clear plan outlining who to contact, when, and for what purpose.
- Campus Initiatives & Student Leadership Projects:
  - Student government and fellows collaborating on projects with deadlines tied to congressional or state opportunities.
  - Students proud of opportunities to engage civically and represent NMHU at national events.

- Diversity, Inclusion & Connection Across Campuses:
  - Fellows come from different countries, regions, and NMHU locations, reflecting broad campus diversity.
  - Engagement across centers and main campus seen as beneficial for understanding varied student experiences.

### **Land Development Session**

- NMHU Development Corporation has been incorporated as a nonprofit and filed for tax ID and status.
- Legal guidance emphasized the importance of proper governance structures to mitigate risk.
- The Master Developer intends to move quickly and has expressed interest in taking a vested stake in the project. Developer experience includes hotel projects, which could accelerate progress if incorporated into the contract.
- The project is aligned with the Research Park Act, enabling development flexibility and new partnerships.
- Operates as a mechanism for NMHU to engage in activities that are easier for a corporation than a university to execute directly.
- NMHU's partnership with UNM provides access to architects and support for future facilities.
- Board members emphasize the importance of breaking ground soon to create visible momentum and signal progress to the public.
- Graphics/renderings exist and help illustrate placement and usage patterns.
- Two proposals were reviewed through the RFP process, with one firm nearly unanimously favored. Committee currently working through final details to finalize developer selection.
- Working in an open-market model, negotiating scope and pricing directly rather than from fixed proposals.

### **Governance Refresher & Closing**

- Regents have core fiduciary duties: care, loyalty, obedience, and acting collectively as one board voice. Duties include ensuring compliance, safeguarding institutional integrity, and acting in the university's best interest.
- Emphasis on understanding state and federal laws affecting Regents, including:
  - Open Meetings Act
  - Public Records Act
  - Anti-Donation Clause
  - Whistleblower Act

- Court of Claims Act
- Ethics Commission requirements
- Regents must ensure actions comply with university policies and state regulations to avoid legal risk.
- University is strengthening compliance structures, including updated HR policies, oversight mechanisms, and new procedures. All new policies will be publicly posted online as searchable PDFs for transparency and shared governance.
- New conflict-of-interest forms and processes are being implemented to ensure proper documentation and legal protection.
- Board vs. Administration Roles:
  - Board: Sets mission, strategy, policy, evaluation of the president, compensation, and oversight.
  - President/Administrators: Handle daily operations, personnel, financial management, and implementation of board policies.
- Regents will receive additional training, including conflict-of-interest policy review and legal risk briefings.
- Counsel provides ongoing guidance and resources for understanding governance responsibilities and preventing litigation.
- SWOT Analysis & Institutional Profile:
  - Strengths: strong community engagement, collaborative board culture.
  - Weaknesses: gaps in compliance policies and procedures.
  - Opportunities: new partnerships alternative funding sources.
  - Threats: ongoing legal and regulatory issues, including IRS and Environmental Department matters.

Workshop concluded with commitment to advancing Vision 2035, enhancing student outcomes, and improving facilities and engagement.

**Adjournment**

There being no further business, Chairman Sanchez moved to adjourn the meeting.

Motion: Regent Tripp

Second: Regent Lucero

Vote: Unanimous approval (4-0) – Motion carried

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 4:38 PM.

  
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 Chairman  
 NMHU Board of Regents

  
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 Secretary/Treasurer  
 NMHU Board of Regents