



**Utah Board of Higher Education
Virtual Meeting
Friday, January 9, 2026**

**COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
MINUTES**

Board Members Present

Amanda Covington, Chair
Jon Cox, Vice Chair
Javier Chavez Jr. (joined at 8:30)
Jeremy Hafen (left at 9:30)
Jodi Hart
Danny Ipson
Garrett Largent
Steve Neeleman
Aaron Skonnard
Cydni Tetro

Board Members Absent

Office of the Commissioner

Geoffrey Landward, Commissioner
Alison Adams, General Counsel and Board Secretary
Taylor Adams, Associate Commissioner of Student Affairs
TJ Bliss, Associate Commissioner for Academic Affairs
Kris Coles, Senior Assistant Commissioner of Access and College in High School
Cassidy Dragunat, Assistant Commissioner of Financial Aid
Trisha Dugovic, Director of Communication
Kevin Enright, Director of Finance and Facilities
Brynn Fronk, Executive Assistant to the Utah Board of Higher Education
Vic Hockett, Associate Commissioner of Talent Ready Utah
Carrie Mayne, Chief Economist
Katie Mazzie, Associate Commissioner of Strategic Initiatives, Community and Government Relations
Hilary Renshaw, Associate General Counsel
Brian Shuppy, Senior Assistant Commissioner for Budget & Finance
Angie Stallings, Deputy Commissioner and COO
Nate Talley, Deputy Commissioner and CFO
Melissa Van Hien, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner and Office Manager
Jessie Winitzky-Stephens, Assistant Commissioner for Technical Education
Jacob Wright, Senior Assistant Commissioner of Facilities and Finance
Kim Ziebarth, Associate Commissioner of Technical Education

Institutional Presidents Present

Mindy Benson, Southern Utah University
Darin Brush, Davis Technical College
Chad Campbell, Bridgerland Technical College
Clay Christensen, Mountainland Technical College
Leslie Durham, Weber State University (interim)
Stacey McIff, Snow College
Brad Mortensen, Utah State University
Taylor Randall, University of Utah

Jordan Rushton, Dixie Technical College
Shane Smeed, Utah Tech University
Jim Taggart, Ogden Weber Technical College
Kent Thygerson, Tooele Technical College (interim)
Astrid Tuminez, Utah Valley University
Aaron Weight, Uintah Basin Technical College
Brennan Wood, Southwest Technical College

Others

Matthew Boyer, DFCM Deputy Director, Division of Facilities Construction and Management
Troy D'Ambrosio, Chief of Staff and Vice President for Innovation, University of Utah
Rachel Divine Lewis, Associate Provost, Academic Systems, Salt Lake Community College
Steve Hess, Chief Information Officer, University of Utah
Teresa Kehl, Deputy Chief of Staff and Special Assistant to the First Lady, University of Utah
Andy Marr, DFCM Director, Division of Facilities Construction and Management
Val Peterson, Vice President for Administration and Strategic Relations, Utah Valley University

Chair Covington called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m.

Committee of the Whole

Utah Legislative Preview

Commissioner Landward, Katie Mazzie, and Nate Talley previewed the upcoming legislative session, including budget considerations and key legislation to watch. The Board members inquired about the work of the Campus Safety Task Force and the impact of fraudulent applications. The Commissioner's office will provide the Board with institutional data detailing the overall impact of fraudulent financial aid that may have been distributed. The Board members discussed alignment between K-12 and higher education. Board member Neeleman raised concerns about post-secondary enrollment numbers, which Angie Stallings addressed. Chair Covington requested to have an update on this at a future Board meeting. This was an information item only; no action was taken.

Federal Update

Katie Mazzie shared an update on federal student loan borrowing limits, outlining recent changes and highlighting two federal bills currently focused on college athletics. Concerns were raised about the accuracy of Pell program data, which Carrie Mayne addressed. This was an information item only; no action was taken.

System Redesign

Commissioner Landward outlined the system redesign centered on vertical and horizontal integration and requested Board approval to pursue it legislatively. Board members expressed strong support, with Chair Covington emphasizing the need for full institutional and legislative buy-in and noting its significance as core Board work. Board member Ipson asked whether to include a rural region alongside a southern region. Commissioner Landward explained the reasons for configuration and outlined that the plan is to seek legislative support, but the Board's determination on membership in those regions will come later.

Board member Largent moved to authorize the Commissioner to pursue legislation to establish higher education regional centers, but maintain the Board's discretion to determine membership within those centers and then begin building vertical integration, horizontal integration, and shared administrative services as subsequent steps. Board member Neeleman seconded the motion, and the Board members in attendance voted unanimously in favor. The motion passed.

Updated Dixie Technical College Trades and Technology Building Request

Nate Talley outlined the background of the updated Dixie Technical College Trades and Technology Building request before turning the presentation over to Jacob Wright for a detailed overview. DFCM Director Andy Marr joined the discussion and addressed questions from Board members.

Board member Ipson moved that the Board approve the updated Construction Budget Estimate and 2026 General Legislative Session budget request for the Dixie Technical College Trades & Technology Building. Vice Chair Cox seconded the motion, and the Board members in attendance voted unanimously in favor. The motion passed.

Southern Utah University – Acquisition of Real Property

Kevin Enright presented Southern Utah University's request for the acquisition of real property, followed by brief remarks from President Benson. Board member Ipson asked whether the acquisition included equipment inside the building, and President Benson clarified that it would consist solely of the building itself.

Board member Neeleman moved to approve Southern Utah University's request to purchase the USDA Hangar building and underlying property as presented. Board member Hart seconded the motion, and the Board members in attendance voted unanimously in favor. The motion passed.

UVU Request for Long-Term Ground Lease

Jacob Wright provided a brief overview of UVU's request for a long-term ground lease, followed by comments from President Tuminez. Board member Ipson asked why a long-term lease was being pursued rather than a sale, and President Tuminez and Vice Chair Cox explained the rationale for the approach.

Board member Ipson moved to approve Utah Valley University's request to enter into a non-traditional long-term ground lease as presented. Board member Tetro seconded the motion, and the Board members in attendance voted unanimously in favor. The motion passed.

Utah First Credential Program Update

Commissioner Landward gave brief remarks on his role as co-chair of the First Credential Committee, followed by an update from Taylor Adams. Board member Ipson asked about the impact of tech and career high schools and the extent of collaboration with them, and Commissioner Landward responded. Board member Largent shared that students would like more career advising in high school if credentials are pushed. This was an information item only; no action was taken.

Update on Review of Existing Academic Centers and Institutes

TJ Bliss shared an update on academic centers and institutes, prompting questions about potential cost savings at USU. President Mortensen explained that while some centers were eliminated, savings were minimal and resources were redeployed. Commissioner Landward noted that approval of academic centers and institutes will be brought to the Board for action once there are final recommendations. This was an information item only; no action was taken.

College Athletics Challenges and Solutions

Commissioner Landward introduced the item and outlined challenges in college athletics. President Randall discussed the difficult landscape, the options considered by the University of Utah, and the rationale behind their chosen approach. Board members expressed support for President Randall's leadership and innovative approach. Board members asked President Randall how to approach the issue from a systemwide perspective. President Randall offered his view, and several presidents added insights on how their institutions are addressing the matter. Commissioner Landward noted that there are potential policy solutions and emphasized developing system-level solutions that can be proposed to lawmakers without placing the burden on students. This was an information item only; no action was taken.

Technical Education Concurrent Enrollment

Kim Ziebarth explained that technical education will be integrated into the Concurrent Enrollment framework beginning this fall. She noted that students will benefit from improved credit alignment, while institutions work to ensure system barriers are removed. Board members discussed scale, marketing, and the impact on career high schools, with President Rushton and President McIff emphasizing that the change strengthens existing partnerships and is already working well in many service areas at Dixie Technical College and Snow College. This was an information item only; no action was taken.

Consent Calendar

Board member Ipson asked why the Technical Education Alignment Audit showed automotive programs only 50% aligned, and Kim Ziebarth explained the factors limiting full alignment. Chair Covington then confirmed that upcoming policy revisions on program approval and trustee delegation align with the broader framework the Board is pursuing, which Commissioner Landward affirmed.

Vice Chair Cox moved to approve the Consent Calendar. Chair Covington seconded the motion, and the Board members in attendance voted unanimously in favor. The motion passed.

Board member Ipson moved to go into closed session for the purpose of discussing the character, professional competence, or physical or mental health of an individual; impending litigation; or the sale of real property. Board member Largent seconded the motion, and the Board members in attendance voted unanimously in favor. The motion passed.

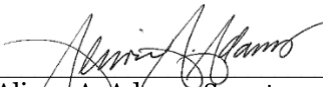
CLOSED SESSION

Vice Chair Cox moved to end closed session. Chair Covington seconded the motion, and the Board members in attendance voted unanimously in favor. The motion passed.

Vice Chair Cox moved to adjourn. Board member Skonnard seconded the motion, and the Board members in attendance voted unanimously in favor. The motion passed.

The meeting adjourned at 12:05 p.m.

Board Meeting Minutes
Friday, January 9, 2026
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Alison A. Adams, Secretary

Date Approved: March 26, 2026