



**External Relations Committee**  
**November 20, 2025**  
**FIU, Modesto A. Maidique Campus, Graham Center Ballrooms**

**MINUTES**

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**1. Call to Order and Chair's Remarks**

The Florida International University Board of Trustees' External Relations Committee meeting was called to order by Committee Chair Yaffa Popack at 11:57 AM on Thursday, November 20, 2025.

General Counsel Carlos B. Castillo conducted roll call of the External Relations Committee members and verified a quorum. Present were Yaffa Popack, *Committee Chair*; Chanel T. Rowe, *Committee Vice Chair*; Francesca Casanova; Alexander M. Peraza; and Alberto R. Taño.

The following Board members were also in attendance: Board Chair Carlos A. Duart and Trustees Noël C. Barengo, Dean C. Colson, Alan Gonzalez, George Heisel, Jesus Lebeña, and Marc D. Sarnoff.

Committee Chair Popack welcomed all Trustees and members of the University administration. She also welcomed the University community and general public. She congratulated Senior Vice President for Marketing and Strategic Communications Michelle L. Palacio on her appointment as FIU's inaugural Chief Marketing and Communication Officer and welcomed Vice President for Government and Community Relations and Deputy Chief of Staff to the President, Christina Castillo.

**2. Approval of Minutes**

Committee Chair Popack asked if there were any additions or corrections to the minutes of the External Relations Committee meeting held on November 21, 2024. Hearing none, a motion was made and unanimously passed to approve the minutes of the External Relations Committee meeting held on November 21, 2024.

**3. Information and Discussion Items: No Action Required**

**3.1 Marketing and Strategic Communications Update**

Senior Vice President for Marketing and Strategic Communications and Chief Marketing and Communication Officer, Michelle L. Palacio presented an update on marketing and strategic communications. She mentioned FIU's continued momentum, the welcoming of University President Jeanette M. Nuñez, and the launch of the 2030 Experience Impact Strategic Plan. She presented a video showcasing major achievements over the past year. She commented that FIU's reputation is on an upward trajectory, powered by academic strength, student success, innovation, economic mobility, and community impact. She explained that marketing strategies are focused on elevating FIU's visibility locally, nationally, and internationally, attracting exceptional students, faculty, and staff,

engaging alumni and donors, strengthening industry and educational partnerships, and advancing the priorities of the 2030 strategic plan.

She mentioned a focus on six (6) strategic initiatives, including a new brand campaign in 2026, transitioning to an integrated hybrid communications model, restructuring the central team, and aligning resources. She noted the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to inform decision-making and increase productivity while maintaining brand standards. She remarked on collaborations with the Office of University Admissions to support recruitment efforts and integration of marketing and communications efforts with the University's Advancement office for unified messaging. Sr. VP Palacio highlighted an example of a unified approach through a collaboration to elevate Aquarius. She presented a video showcasing the Medina Aquarius Program's Aquarius Reef Base and future plans for Aquarius 2.

Sr. VP Palacio commented on the operationalization of the "MarCom" strategy through university leadership's investment in the digital communications team and improvement of the digital infrastructure. She stated that college websites are being transitioned to unified FIU branded templates for improved digital infrastructure and to support the recruitment of exceptional students, faculty, and staff. She emphasized the partnership with the Office of University Admissions and shared that over 100,000 pieces of printed materials were distributed, and more than 500,000 print pieces were mailed to prospective students. She provided an overview of the digital and print materials that admitted students will receive to facilitate a seamless transition to FIU and focus on the student experience.

Sr. VP Palacio presented strategic investments in advertising, including airport placements and digital outreach in major markets. She explained that this campaign highlights FIU's academic excellence, research strength, and growing national footprint - including the work of the Adam Smith Center for Economic Freedom and other signature initiatives. She mentioned that targeted campaigns at academic and professional conferences including ResearchGate, QS Latin America and Asia Summits, and National Security and Transportation focused conferences in Washington, D.C. strengthen FIU's visibility and position the University as a thought leader. Sr. VP Palacio emphasized the publication and use of *The FIU Research Magazine* to showcase faculty breakthroughs and real-world impact. She shared an example of content creation in remote environments, such as the Amazon, to document and showcase faculty excellence and high-impact science. Sr. VP Palacio explained that campaigns, structural alignment, and reputational initiatives are all anchored in the goals of the Experience Impact 2030 Strategic Plan. She explained that adherence to FIU's brand guidelines and enforcement of branding standards across all units will strengthen recognition of the University. She reemphasized the transition from a decentralized to a hybrid communications structure for greater consistency and impact across the University.

### **3.2 Government and Community Relations Update**

Vice President for Government and Community Relations and Deputy Chief of Staff to the President, Christina Castillo provided an update on the Office of Government and Community Relations. She explained that the Office of Government and Community relations was strategically realigned to strengthen FIU's position as a trusted partner and respected institution at state and national levels. She mentioned a focus on team onboarding, implementing new processes and

strategies, and prioritizing meeting with each Dean and visiting the colleges. She commented on meetings with University leadership, elected officials, community leaders and the FIU President's Council to align shared goals.

VP Castillo mentioned preparations for the 2026 legislative session (January 13 – March 13), including filing legislative budget request priorities: Operational Excellence, Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine Health Sciences Clinical Facility, Pediatric Cancer, the Wall of Wind, Aquarius, and the FIU Global Jewish Studies Program. She highlighted that President Nuñez hosted a round table on the future of Aquarius with local and state officials, reinforcing FIU's leadership in marine science. She mentioned that President Nuñez and the Office of Government and Community Relations team have been in Tallahassee working on university priorities, with President Nuñez also having participated in the designation ceremonies for Senate President Designate Jim Boyd and House Speaker Designate Sam Garrison. VP Castillo announced that FIU Day in Tallahassee is scheduled for February 3, 2026.

VP Castillo noted recent visits by government officials – a priority set by the Office of Government and Community Relations - including Governor Ron DeSantis, First Lady Casey DeSantis, and Chief Financial Officer Blaise Ingoglia, as well as other local, state, and federal leaders. She mentioned the execution of two (2) existing agreements with the State of Florida: (1) the Florida University Space Research Consortium and (2) the Florida Alliance for Quantum Technology. VP Castillo mentioned that a focus will be to expand state and federal grant awards and mentioned working with the Office of Research and Economic Development to increase the number and competitiveness of FIU' awards. She highlighted a visit from Florida Department of Elder Affairs Secretary Michelle Branham.

VP Castillo stated that pending final action by Congress, the fiscal year 2026 draft bills include \$9M in direct earmarks for FIU supporting pediatric cancer research, health innovation, and Everglades monitoring. She added that the draft bills include \$14M in “programmatic plus-ups” and directive language supporting FIU researchers in additive manufacturing, defense technologies, water quality monitoring, marine robotics, pediatric cancer, security research, and Everglades restoration.

VP Castillo commented on FIU in Washington, D.C. and federal engagement initiatives. She provided an example through FIU hosting the Director of the White House Environmental Advisory Taskforce to explore a stronger relationship and role in the administration's water quality initiatives. She provided a fall 2025 update, noting that there were nearly 30 interns across various offices with a record of 11 interns on Capitol Hill; 10 experiential fly-in programs; and collaboration with federal agencies and hosting 20 national workshops or events, including those focused on space, aerospace innovation, and AI for chronic diseases. She mentioned the expansion of internship programs for students at the local, state, and federal levels. She noted that a Board of Trustees Retreat would be hosted in Washington D.C. in late March 2026.

VP Castillo remarked on the active community engagement of the University, with participation in over 75 events in 2.5 months and recognition as Educational Institution of the Year by the Latin Builders Association. She mentioned the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Government Relations Homecoming BBQ reception, thanking the Steven J. Green School of International and Public Affairs and Dean Shlomi

Dinar for their partnership on the event which featured a local alumni-owned business “Apocalypse BBQ” and students from the FIU Chaplin School of Hospitality and Tourism Management with the FIU Coffee Guild. She thanked Trustees George Heisel, Noël C. Barengo, Jesus Lebeña, and Francesca Casanova for attending the reception.

#### **4. New Business**

No new business was raised.

#### **5. Concluding Remarks and Adjournment**

With no other business, Committee Chair Yaffa Popack adjourned the meeting of the Florida International University Board of Trustees External Relations Committee on Thursday, November 20, 2025, at 12:35 PM.