



External Relations Committee
June 18, 2026
FIU, Biscayne Bay Campus, Wolfe University Center Ballrooms

MINUTES

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 George Heisel on Thursday, June 18, 2026, at 3:02 PM.

Acting General Counsel Ryan Kelley conducted roll call of the External Relations Committee members and verified a quorum. Present were George Heisel, *Committee Chair*; Nestor Plana, *Committee Vice Chair*; and Alyssa Mederos.

Trustee Fred Voccola was excused.

The following Trustees were also in attendance: Carlos A. Duarte, *Board Chair*; Alan Gonzalez, *Board Vice Chair*; Noël C. Barengo, Dean C. Colson, Alan Gonzalez, Jesus Lebeña, Patrick McDowell, Alexander M. Peraza, and Yaffa Popack.

2. Approval of Minutes

Committee Chair Heisel asked if there were any additions or corrections to the minutes of the External Relations Committee meeting held on November 20, 2025. Hearing none, a motion was made and unanimously passed to approve the minutes of the External Relations Committee meeting held on November 20, 2025.

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 shared a video capturing University achievements and events, admissions decision day, and media highlights. She outlined priorities, including strengthening the University's performance and reputation, supporting student recruitment, leveraging artificial intelligence (AI), and developing a cohesive university brand. She noted that Marketing and Strategic Communications exceeded internal goals related to earned media, social audience growth, and reach, and highlighted strong growth on the FIU News page.

Sr. VP Palacio emphasized efforts to grow FIU's academic reputation nationally and internationally in support of the University's goal to reach the top 30 by 2030 and advance preeminence metrics. She noted that FIU is ranked among the top 50 public U.S. universities by major ranking agencies and is targeting academic peers through digital, print, social, and sponsored-content campaigns in leading higher education publications. She described FIU's participation in academic conferences and announced that FIU will host the Building University Reputation Conference in partnership with the University of Navarra. She reported that FIU has made strategic investments to broaden its domestic and international presence. She shared highlights including representation at the Smart Cities, Tech Connect conference in Washington, D.C.; the World Academic Summit in Cape Town; the Innovation and Impact Summit in Seoul; the QS Africa Conference in Ethiopia; and the Times Higher Education Latin America Summit in Colombia. She stated that these engagements support the University's reputation, partnerships, recruitment opportunities, and long-term ranking advancement.

Sr. VP Palacio discussed recruitment and enrollment marketing efforts noting close collaboration with campus partners. She highlighted that first-time-in-college applications doubled in two (2) years and described branded admissions materials, orientation items, and student engagement initiatives as examples of a more unified FIU brand. She highlighted the relaunch of the FIU Admissions social media account and increased engagement tied to fully branded, student-focused admissions campaigns. She stated that the division is strengthening partnerships with colleges.

Sr. VP Palacio noted the recent hiring of a Director of Marketing and Analytics in a shared role with the College of Business. She underscored the importance of communicating with brand clarity while highlighting FIU alumni, research, and breakthroughs. She cited examples such as the FAHLO bracelet partnership supporting conservation work, marketing and advertising for the Adam Smith Center's new master's degree program, and airport advertising that expanded the University's visibility. She discussed FIU's research magazine, which showcases faculty and student success and supports outreach through stakeholder distribution, social media, sponsored content, digital ads, and college-specific efforts. She explained that FIU is using AI to support social listening, social media management, brand compliance, data-informed advertising, and operational efficiencies. She noted that the division is also moving colleges and schools onto a common digital platform.

Sr. VP Palacio addressed the division's broader goal of changing perceptions of FIU by consistently telling the University's story as a leader in economic mobility, social mobility, and student success. She announced the upcoming rollout of a unified FIU brand platform, developed with Republica Havas under University President Jeanette M. Nuñez's leadership, and emphasized the role of alumni leaders, Miami pride, and passion for FIU in the future campaign. She summarized that the division will continue focusing on brand consistency, recruitment strategies, digital campaign assets, integrated technology, AI, and strategic investments.

3.2 Government, Corporate, and Community Relations Update

Vice President for Government, Corporate, and Community Relations and Deputy Chief of Staff to the President Christina Castillo provided an update on the office of Government, Corporate, and Community Relations. She commented that the office will continue its federal, state, and local government relations and community outreach work while developing a coordinated, university-wide strategy to deepen corporate engagement and partnerships supporting sponsored research, commercialization, philanthropy, internships, workforce pipelines, and other University priorities. VP Castillo announced two (2) new team members: Adriana Reyes, Senior Associate Vice President of Corporate Relations, and Francisco Blanco, Director of Local Government.

VP Castillo highlighted recent local government efforts, including the cybercrime memorandum of understanding signing with the Miami-Dade Sheriff's Office and FIU College of Engineering and Computing; President Nuñez's participation in a press conference on combating antisemitism; and President Nuñez's induction into the Miami-Dade County Women's Hall of Fame.

VP Castillo provided a state legislative update; noting that the legislative session extended beyond the constitutional 60 days and included three (3) additional special sessions. She mentioned that during the second special session, the Florida Legislature passed the state budget; however, the information presented remained subject to Governor Ron DeSantis' pending review and approval of the budget. She shared that the Legislature allocated \$15.5M in operational support to FIU (\$12.9M in recurring funds and \$2.6M in nonrecurring funds). She reported that the Legislature allocated the remaining \$53.6M requested for the Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine Academic Health Sciences Clinical Facility, noting that, if approved, total state investment in the academic medical center would exceed \$211M. She acknowledged the Florida Legislature, Miami-Dade Delegation, recognized Board Chair Carlos A. Duart for his long-standing support, and congratulated Dean Juan C. Cendan and the College of Medicine on the recent groundbreaking.

VP Castillo highlighted additional legislative allocations, including \$15M to upgrade the Wall of Wind to simulate Category 6 hurricane-force winds of approximately 195 to 200 miles per hour; \$5M for upgrades to the FIU Aquarius Reef Base; and \$2M to support Dr. Diana Azzam's research on pediatric and adult cancers at the Robert Stempel College of Public Health and Social Work, along with a recent \$1.5M Florida Department of Health award through the Casey DeSantis Florida Cancer Innovation Fund. VP Castillo commented that FIU also received three (3) appropriation projects related to healthcare, transportation, and business. She stated that the University will continue working with its partners to advance those projects, pending the Governor's approval. She reported that the Legislature approved policy language establishing FIU as the University designated for a Center of Excellence for Disaster Preparedness, Response, Recovery, and Training. She described policy revisions that allowed FIU to revert and reappropriate \$11M from the Honors College to Innovation II and to access carryforward or reserve funds to complete Innovation II. VP Castillo then summarized FIU's state budget results, noting that the University

secured a combined \$82M in appropriation projects, \$15.5M in operational support, and \$73.7M in Public Education Capital Outlay funds. She stated that the funding would support the University broadly and benefit five (5) colleges or schools and university units, pending the Governor's approval.

VP Castillo reported on federal relations, noting that FIU secured seven (7) earmarks totaling \$18.2M and highlighted that FIU leads the State University System in earmarks included in House markups. She stated that the earmarks span transportation, healthcare, technology, national security, and the environment. She mentioned a \$5M earmark for ultra-high-performance concrete research in the College of Engineering and Computing to support equipment for bridge engineering and accelerated bridge construction research, and a \$4.9M earmark to advance research of congenital heart defects, supporting the work of Dr. David Kalfa.

VP Castillo noted that President Nuñez and Congresswoman Frederica Wilson unveiled the Marine Robotics and Autonomous Systems Lab and the Coastal Conservation and Restoration Lab at the Biscayne Bay Campus, made possible by \$11.5M in federal funding secured with Congresswoman Wilson's leadership. She stated that FIU secured 18 programmatic proposals and summarized federal results, including \$64M requested in earmarks, seven (7) earmarks secured totaling \$18.2M, and proposals benefiting seven (7) colleges. VP Castillo also reported that approximately 300 students participated in 30 FIU in Washington, D.C. experiences, nearly 90 students received Washington, D.C. internships, and 26 students received congressional internships. She also highlighted the President's Council mentorship program and the FIU Government Fellows Program, which supports local and Tallahassee government internships, including a local pilot with nearly 10 students.

VP Castillo stated that the President's Council will award \$40,000 in scholarships in the fall to students in the Fostering Panther Pride program. She also noted that the President's Council completed its review of applications for the Outstanding Faculty Award, and the recipient will be announced during Faculty Convocation. She added that the President's Council continues to support several University initiatives.

VP Castillo highlighted recent FIU visits by Florida Attorney General James Uthmeier and U.S. Attorney Jason Reding Quiñones for a press conference on combating World Cup-related human trafficking; U.S. Department of Transportation Assistant Secretary Dr. Robert Hampshire, who toured engineering and transportation initiatives; Administration for Community Living Administrator and Assistant Secretary for Aging Mary Lazare, and Florida Department of Elder Affairs Secretary Michelle Branham and Deputy Secretary Kari A. Berridge, who visited research and nursing programs; and Miami-Dade County Commissioner Roberto Gonzalez, who met with aerospace-focused students.

Trustee Plana commended VP Castillo and the team for their work and acknowledged the significant support received from the Miami-Dade delegation. President Nuñez echoed Trustee Plana's remarks.

4. New Business

No new business was raised.

5. Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

With no other business, Committee Chair George Heisel adjourned the meeting of the Florida International University Board of Trustees External Relations Committee on Thursday, June 18, 2026, at 3:47 PM.

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