

**South Puget Sound Community College  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
REGULAR MEETING: STUDY SESSION  
Tuesday, January 13, 2026  
Building 25-Boardroom  
South Puget Sound Community College  
2011 Mottman Road, S.W.  
Olympia, WA 98512-6292**

**CALL TO ORDER**

Board Chair Judy Hartmann called the meeting to order at 2:32 p.m.

**ROLL CALL**

Trustee Judy Hartmann, Trustee Steven Drew, Trustee Rozanne Garman, Trustee Mark Brown, and Trustee Doug Mah were present. Justin Kjolseth, Assistant Attorney General (AAG), was present.

**APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA**

It was moved by Trustee Drew, seconded by Trustee Brown, and carried **THAT THE FOLLOWING CONSENT AGENDA BE APPROVED. THE MOTION CARRIES.**

**A. ADOPTION OF MINUTES**

- December 9, 2025 regular board meeting

**B. MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES**

- ACCT National Legislative Summit, February 8-11, 2026, Washington, DC
- ACT Trustee Tuesday, March 10, 2026, Virtual

**C. ANNOUNCEMENTS****D. DATE OF THE NEXT BOARD MEETING**

Regular Meeting  
February 3, 2026  
2:30-4:30 p.m.

South Puget Sound Community College  
2011 Mottman Road, S.W.  
Olympia, WA 98512-6292

**E. 2027-2028 COLLEGE INSTRUCTIONAL CALENDAR**

With the approval of the Consent Agenda, the Board also adopted:

- The 2027-2028 Instructional Calendar as presented in TAB 1A.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Chair Hartmann announced, "Board Policy 105 (*Meetings*) allows for oral comments or questions by members of the public on any matter relevant to its responsibilities and duties in the operations of the college. Consistent with this policy, comments may be limited to three minutes per person. The board is here to listen and typically does not respond and/or engage in public comments. We will now hear from individuals who wish to comment."

There were no comments.

## BOARD SPECIAL COMMITTEE LIAISON REPORTS

- ACT Legislative Action Committee (LAC): Trustee Doug Mah--primary; Trustee Steven Drew--secondary
  - Trustee Mah reported:
    - The Legislative Advocacy Committee met via Zoom on December 11, though he was unable to attend and was uncertain if other trustees were able to participate.
    - Reports were prepared before the governor's budget announcement, assuming all proposed cuts would proceed. According to OFM materials, there is an initial \$19.3M reduction to the State Board budget, in addition to the current \$2.4B biennial budget.
    - Although there are some budget increases, primarily for compensation, the net outcome is about a \$1M reduction to the State Board's budget, impacting allocations. The added funds are restricted in their use, whereas the cuts affect more flexible funds, creating operational challenges.
    - Colleges are encouraged to meet with legislators ("visit the hill") and include presidents, trustees, faculty, staff, and students, to explain campus challenges.
    - The next Trustee Tuesday is scheduled for January 20, focusing on legislative updates ahead of the ACCT National Legislative Summit in Washington, D.C. on February 8.
    - Dr. Stokes added:
      - The federal government has finished rulemaking on the Workforce Bill and others; community colleges were largely exempted from additional IPEDS (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System) reporting requirements.
      - Recent activity at the state capitol is picking up as the legislative session begins, with preparation and initial meetings underway.
- Board Finance Committee: Trustee Steven Drew--primary; Trustee Mark Brown--secondary
  - Trustee Drew reported:
    - There was no Board Finance Committee meeting.
- Foundation Board: Trustee Rozanne Garman--primary; Trustee Judy Hartman--secondary
  - Trustee Garman reported:
    - There has not been a Foundation board meeting recently, but there was a social event held for both the Foundation board and trustees, with positive feedback and good attendance. She expressed appreciation for holding more joint events between trustees and the Foundation board, which supports relationship building.

- Foundation board retreat is on January 26, with topics to include world-class fundraising, review of the strategic plan, and student presentations.
- The annual MLK event is on January 16, featuring a guest lecturer, and everyone is encouraged to attend.

## REPORT FROM THE COLLEGE PRESIDENT

- There were no reports from Student Senate, Faculty Union, and Faculty Senate as it was a Study Session board meeting.
- He called on Dr. Tysha Tolefree, Vice President for Finance and Operations, who reported that in December, there was discussion about possibly pausing the student housing project or continue planning at a slower pace. Gradually advancing the next phase of work on the housing development would allow the college to make a fully informed, low-risk decision aligned with the upcoming biennium. She outlined the phased approach and potential timeline: Pre-solicitation (RFQ); Developer solicitation and selection; Feasibility, pre-development, design and agreements; Bond financing process; Construction and delivery; and Lease-up and Operations. Beginning with a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) in the near term would allow the college to maintain strategic momentum while aligning key milestones with the start of the next biennium. Proceeding with phased work would enable the board to evaluate the project based on clear data, vetted assumptions, and a transparent sequence of next steps while preserving flexibility and minimizing financial exposure at this early stage.
- He called on Kelly Green, Vice President for Advancement, who provided an update to the board's request for a list of resources for students. The Public Relations team compiled a one-pager that categorized resources and supports for students and aligns closely with what can be found online or through AI tools. The resource sheet serves as a helpful tool for responding to common student and community inquiries about available supports. There was a suggestion to include an introductory statement emphasizing the institution's commitment to identifying and removing barriers and meeting every student where they are. The document is intended for internal board, but could also be useful for other groups such as the Foundation board.
- Dr. Stokes reported:
  - The college is beginning its budget planning process, facing both opportunities and challenges. Enrollment remains strong compared to other institutions, likely due to effective marketing, community engagement, and the rising cost of four-year colleges. However, operational costs—especially utilities—are increasing, and state funding is expected to decrease by 1.5% in the next biennium. Cash flow issues have emerged from state reimbursement methods and new payment plans. The college is preparing for two budget scenarios, considering 5% and 8% reductions, primarily affecting staffing and benefits. There is

concern about a long-term enrollment decline due to fewer high school graduates, but strategic outreach to working adults has helped mitigate this for now. Decisions about cuts need to be made by March, with program eliminations requiring one to two years to phase out. The leadership recognizes the need for very difficult but necessary adjustments to ensure financial stability.

- Dr. Stokes, Dr. Pelkey, and Dr. Andreas met with Western Washington University's President Sabah Randhawa, Vice Provost for Outreach & Continuing Education Robert Squires, and Chief of Staff Becca Kenna-Schenk to discuss shared priorities related to enrollment and student success. The group agreed on a framework for a transfer agreement that includes assured admission into Western programs, with some students directly admitted into their major. Shared advising and data exchange are integral parts of the agreement, and a detailed list of these elements was provided by Western. The agreement also incorporates non-repetition course language to address concerns about students repeating equivalent courses. Both institutions use the same student success software, which presents opportunities for seamless student record transfers and the possibility of automatically moving students in the assured admission program between systems to ease their transition. A draft of the agreement has been shared and received prompt, positive feedback, with the goal of implementing it by March for students transitioning in the spring. Additionally, there are plans to add Western advisors to students' personal support systems once they have completed 45 credit hours and declared their intent to transfer. Western responded favorably to proposals supporting degree planning and minimizing course repetition for transfer students.
- A highly successful meeting was held with Dr. Bish Paul from the Gates Foundation to discuss advancing AI innovation in Community and Technical Colleges (CTC), specifically leveraging technology to promote equitable student success. The team discussed an advising system developed over the past decade, which is efficient in managing students and degree plans, which generated strong enthusiasm for AI-driven advising solutions. The Gates Foundation expressed significant interest in investing, with possibilities ranging from a system-wide initiative involving all 34 colleges to a pilot "data league" of five colleges to prepare for broader AI integration. The need for AI was underscored by the large student body of 8,668 last year and the limited number of advisors. Existing advising platforms like EAB Navigate will support this transition, and the Gates Foundation is considering funding either the full setup, requesting \$26M, or the pilot project at \$3.5M. Dr. Dave Pelkey projected that within two to three years, 75% of students could use AI to build degree plans. Excitement builds for the upcoming Higher Education Roundtable on March 13, where, for the first time, a community college will present. Dr. Stokes reminded stakeholders of the extensive groundwork required, noting that building the system could take about

three years. Both the Gates Foundation and the State Board highlighted the importance of communicating this background work to ensure stakeholder understanding and support for the project.

- There will be a future capital funding request involving healthcare expansion. The expansion of Allied Health programs is urgently needed, with local hospitals and clinicians requesting more programs. A \$750,000 capital request was added to the Shared Legislative agenda. The board can request capital funding from the legislature, and an email summarizing the details will be sent and shared with key stakeholders. The request will support a new location close to campus to enable five to six new programs. The capital budget process is starting, and advocacy in other districts (35<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>) may help the request gain traction. The delegation from the 22<sup>nd</sup> district is facing many competing requests, so getting this request to the top of their list is important. Stakeholders and trustee support and advocacy will be needed. Everyone is encouraged to advocate for the project during interactions with local legislators, especially at upcoming social events. A formal member request is still pending on both the House and Senate sides.
- He noted the President's Outreach/Professional Development/Advocacy Activities List in TAB 2.

**INFORMATIVE REPORT** No Report.

**POLICY** No Report.

**BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS** No Report.

**BUDGET AND FINANCE** No Report.

**DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION** No Report.

## **STUDY SESSION**

### SPSCC's Work with Tribes

Our collaboration with Tribal partners encompasses a comprehensive range of initiatives. Dr. Michelle Andreas, Vice President for Instruction, (presented on behalf of Dr. Jason Selwitz, Dean of Applied Technology) and Noel Rubadue, Dean of Corporate and Continuing Education, reviewed initiatives that reflect our ongoing commitment to meaningful and impactful partnership with tribes.

#### High School+ Completion Program:

Noel Rubadue reviewed tribal contracts for High School+ Completion Program. The program operates under the Transitional Studies department, specifically as a self-support initiative funded through contracts with tribal partners. While it is part of the college's broader completion efforts, its self-support model means it is managed on a

contract basis via the Center for Continuing Education (CCE). This structure allows for financial flexibility and responsiveness to tribal needs.

The program currently partners with four tribes: Chehalis (the newest, with a year and a half of collaboration), Nisqually, Skokomish, and Squaxin. Each partnership is formalized through annual contracts that fund the program and facilitate on-site coordination and course delivery. This approach enables personalized support and program continuity, with a single director--Director of Tribal Programming, Dr. Shanon Millman Rodriguez, managing operations across four tribal sites.

The program targets adults (18+), though younger students may be admitted under special circumstances. Student recruitment is managed by tribal educational departments, which refer candidates based on their needs and eligibility. The program does not conduct direct outreach; instead, it serves as an option among several (including GED), for students who have left traditional high school paths.

It uses a competency-based approach, allowing students to align course completion with their interests and life circumstances. The program is delivered directly on the reservation in local education centers and tailored to tribal calendars rather than following a standard academic year. This flexibility supports students who may stop and start due to life interruptions. Completion rates are difficult to interpret in isolation due to the varied duration of student engagement, with some completing quickly and others persisting for many years. However, tribal partners report that completion rates through this program exceed those of traditional high school programs for their communities.

The program's success is attributed to its flexibility, alignment with tribal priorities, the personalized support provided, and the strong relationships developed with tribal communities. The model has attracted interest from other tribes, such as Puyallup and potentially Quinault.

#### Climate Solutions:

Dr. Andreas reviewed the Climate Solutions program funded by the State Board to integrate climate science across the college curriculum. It has been active for several years, though funding levels have fluctuated. Dr. Selwitz has overseen our program, which supports innovative interdisciplinary projects and direct partnerships with local environmental and tribal organizations. Many faculty members have integrated climate science into their courses beyond initial funded-projects. The program increases ongoing student and faculty engagement in environmental stewardship and emphasizes strong and respectful tribal relations. At the end of each year, a summit showcases faculty and student work, and highlight progress and future plans.

A few of the projects include:

- English: English Professor Kathleen Bird, in collaboration with the Nisqually Land Trust and local poets, leads students in creating "habitat poetry" that connects cultural and environmental themes, including contributions to a local anthology and engagement with tribal elders and guest lecturers.
- Biology: Biology Professors Stephanie Malmgren and Leslie Chao have students participate in hands-on fieldwork, collecting and documenting ecological data that supports the Nisqually tribe's restoration efforts. This has enabled the tribe

to gather long-term data critical for habitat monitoring and restoration, including successful increases in salmon populations.

- Art: Art Professor Liza Brenner works with students and tribal ecologists to document declining fish species, culminating in large murals displayed in the college library.

#### Tribal Stewards Program:

The college has received support from the State Board for a Tribal Stewards Program, aimed at strengthening connections between colleges and tribal communities, particularly for institutions that previously lacked close relationships. This initiative is part of a broader effort to integrate tribal perspectives and culture into college life and learning, reflecting a shift toward deeper engagement with indigenous communities. Over time, the influence of tribal culture has grown within the college. Faculty, some with personal or professional ties to indigenous communities, have helped bring tribal perspectives into the curriculum—not just in content, but also in teaching methods. This integration occurs in various ways, including faculty communities of practice, in-service training, and collaborative cohort experiences.

There is awareness of developments in the surrounding tribal communities, such as a convention center and casino expansion. The college aims to continually strengthen its relationship with tribal communities and seeks to be responsive not only to employment sector needs, but also to cultural and community needs.

#### Applied Business Degree:

The college has paused its Bachelor of Science in Brewing and Distilling program, re-focusing efforts based on input from Jason Robertson (President of JRO + CO) and regional needs. There is consensus that a business degree tailored to local demands would better serve both student interests and address the regional skills gap identified by employers. Multiple tribes—including Chehalis, Squaxin Island, and Skokomish—have expressed strong interest in business, gaming, and retail management education. They report a pressing need for bachelor's-level graduates who possess practical skills in management, accounting, and marketing, which current programs do not adequately provide. Tribes have also shown interest in bachelor's degrees related to computer science and short-term technical certifications, indicating a need for both short- and long-term training solutions. The timeline for these projects remains uncertain, largely dependent on the tribes' hiring schedules and ongoing large-scale initiatives.

The college seeks a unique program niche that distinguishes their offering from existing applied bachelor's degrees at Centralia (Management) and South Seattle (Hospitality). The goal is to find an approach that aligns with both tribal and employer needs, filling gaps not addressed by other colleges, such as Evergreen and Northwest Indian College, whose programs are seen as insufficient for local workforce demands. The college is mindful of regional exclusivity agreements and competition among community colleges. However, geographic concerns may be less important than institutional relationships and customer preferences.

Moving forward, the plan includes organizing “vision events” to gather detailed input on desired knowledge, skills, and abilities from tribal and employer partners. These sessions will inform curriculum development and program tracks.

Bachelor of Science in Computer Science:

The B.S. in Computer Science program now has 32 students enrolled. This June marks a major milestone, as the program will graduate its first cohort of bachelor's degree recipients. The majority of these students have backgrounds in CIS, networking, and computer science. Notably, four students from Grays Harbor College—a partner institution with typically low enrollment—are part of this group. This reflects the success and impact of the ongoing partnership efforts. The board will be informed as plans develop for consideration of additional areas for expanding bachelor's degree offerings.

### **COMMENTS FROM INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

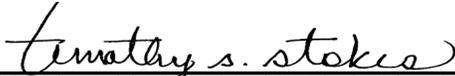
Trustee Brown shared that he has been actively engaged with the ACT six-month onboarding tutorial and finding the process highly educational but also raising many questions for future discussion. In reading our Aspen application, he noted the abundance of unfamiliar acronyms which contributed to both increased knowledge and additional questions. He expressed gratitude to Dr. Tolefree for a detailed session on community college financing; Marriya Wright for a tour of the Dr. Angela Bowen Center and the state-of-the-art allied health facility and overview of the nursing program; and Kelly Green and Foundation staff for a better understanding of the Foundation's role and its collaborative partnership with the college. He expressed appreciation for the creativity and commitment evident in the college's efforts and thanked everyone involved for building a strong foundation of support.

**EXECUTIVE SESSION** None.

**ACTION ITEM FROM EXECUTIVE SESSION** None.

**ADJOURNMENT** 4:22 P.M.

  
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JUDY HARTMANN, BOARD CHAIR  
SOUTH PUGET SOUND COMMUNITY COLLEGE

  
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TIMOTHY STOKES, SECRETARY  
SOUTH PUGET SOUND COMMUNITY COLLEGE