

# Faculty Assembly Meeting Minutes, June 4, 2026

## Lee College Faculty Assembly

June 4, 2026, 2 p.m., Tucker Hall

### I. Call to Order at 2pm.

Dr. Georgeann Ward announced this called meeting of the Faculty Assembly with invited guests from the Board of Regents, Staff Assembly, and Administrative Assembly. Recognized the members of the board in attendance: Regent Gilbert Santana, Regent Gina Guillory, Regent Mark Himself, and Regent Mark Hall.

### II. Statement of Purpose: Discussion of Lone Finalist of Presidential Search

*Dr. Georgeann Ward:* Today's meeting is a discussion of the lone finalist of the presidential search. For context, on May 26th, the Lee College Board of Regents voted seven to two to name our interim president, Jacob Atkin, lone finalist. We are now in a 21-day waiting period according to the Texas government code, during which people can provide opinions or give feedback before the candidate is confirmed.

Dr. Ward summarized the process used in the past to name a lone finalist, noting that the current process looks different. Faculty expressed questions and concerns about the process; the purpose of this meeting is to address those.

Presented three questions to address:

1. What was the board's process and rationale in making this decision?
2. Why did the board decide not to use the process we've used in the past, including a national search and a committee of various stakeholders?
3. What are Jacob Atkin's strengths that make him an appropriate candidate for president?

Introduced and welcomed Regent Gilbert Santana.

### III. Comments by Gilbert Santana, Chair of the Lee College Board of Regents

*Regent Gilbert Santana:* I want to first talk about the past presidents and how they were selected. And the most recent one, and hopefully I answer questions one, two, and three on the agenda.

Summary of Regent Santana's discussion of the time allowed for past presidential searches (average of 7-8 months) beginning with most recent:

- 2019 / Dr. Villanueva hired January of 2020: ideal scenario for a search committee due to several factors: the board had over seven months to find a new president, there were no internal candidates and no interim needed. Reviewed the process of selection by search committee based on the "presidential profile," or Lee College criteria related to the specific needs of Lee College and the surrounding communities. The public part of the committee included faculty, staff, Baytown community stakeholders, and student government representatives. Breakdown of the timeline of the process from June to December of 2019.
- 2011 / Dr. Brown hired February of 2012 / process over 7 months.
- 2008 / Dr. Murphy hired January of 2009 / process over 8 months.

- Dr. Ellis hired in August of 2002 / process over 8 months.

Factors in the current scenario:

- Dr. Villanueva's resignation was sudden; no advance notice or transition period.
- When Jacob [Atkin] was appointed as interim, the board decided to wait six months before deciding which process to take.
- Consultant informed the board that if Jacob [Atkin] was included as an internal candidate in a national search, the college wouldn't get the quality of applicants because to have a robust and completely honest search process, would need to disqualify Jacob [Atkin] as an applicant.
- Jacob [Atkin] has acted and planned like a permanent president since being appointed interim February 26th. Reviewed a list of Atkin's accomplishments as interim president regarding dealing with personnel issues, managing the budget, executing contracts, dealing with legal issues, and enforcing board policy in all areas of operation. Provided a comparison of Atkin to the hiring process and career track of Dr. Brenda Hellyer, Chancellor of San Jacinto College.
- Jacob [Atkin] has had a board facing role since March 2025 and is the one high-level administrator other than the president who spends the most time with the board, giving the board time to evaluate his knowledge and experience.
- Upcoming retirements next year will require filling those roles. The president should be involved in filling those positions. The sooner there is a permanent president, the sooner positions can be filled.
- Jacob [Atkin] has been performing two high-level roles since February. Would need to hire a temporary CFO if not naming a new president soon. If new president is named, then could hire a permanent CFO.

\*Regent Santana stated that personnel matters are discussed during closed sessions, noting there can be the appearance of not being transparent but that was not the intention.

Summary of closed sessions leading to decision:

- April 16: Met to discuss a potential path forward. Concern over the option of not having a search committee expressed by more than two regents. No decisions made so nothing to communicate.
- May 20: The board had more clarity on a possible path forward with remaining concerns regarding a national search or at least a modified search process.
- May 26: Decision to name Jacob Atkin the sole finalist, understanding the criticism the board would receive. The board believes it made the right decision for the circumstances, timing, and internal candidate. There was no intent to eliminate or keep the college community or the overall community out of the process.

Dr. Ward presented a fourth question based on faculty concerns:

As we move forward, how can we as a campus community improve communication between the board and college employees?

Regent Santana reviewed the process of formal communication made as a board in contrast to the nine different opinions of each regent before a majority decision is made, questioning how to constructively communicate personal opinions without undermining what the board decides. Regents are given the opportunity to express disagreement in board meetings, but the role of a regent is to support the board's decision, thus regents

usually do not have individual conversations about individual opinions because the board works as a collective. Possible opportunities for scheduled discussion between the board can be decided by the assemblies and the president.

*Regent Santana:* We just have to make sure we're either communicating as a board or we're communicating as an individual. I know we're willing to work on how we can better communicate with the college community.

*Dr. Ward:* If members of the college community have questions, concerns that are not answered today, is it appropriate for them to email you or others on the board?

*Regent Santana:* You can communicate with each one of us. Our emails are public.

#### **IV. Questions for Regent Santana**

*Audience Member 1:* Expressed concern about the process of filling major positions, such as provost, in the future. What are the board's plans for filling other important roles?

*Regent Santana's Answer:* The board only have one employee and only fills one position, the president. We don't fill the provost role or the CFO role or any other role beyond the president, so the normal process of filling the provost role would be used.

*Audience Member 2:* As a faculty member, it was concerning to learn about the decision that Atkin was the lone finalist from the Baytown Sun. How did that post in the *Baytown Sun* come about, where I believe you were quoted about interviewing a candidate for a year? If you can explain why that came out first.

*Answer:* Due to various timing issues, such as postponing the regular board meeting to May 26<sup>th</sup> due to high school graduations, then finding out the board could also meet on May 20<sup>th</sup>, the required agenda posting had to be on Tuesday the 19<sup>th</sup>. The agenda for May 26<sup>th</sup> was already posted, but was not very specific, whereas the agenda for the May 20<sup>th</sup> meeting specified talking about the presidential position. Spoke with President Atkin to ensure that the agenda for May 26<sup>th</sup> was changed to be more specific and allow the opportunity to discuss the presidential position. After the agenda was posted, I was interviewed by the Baytown Sun, but I didn't say we were going to be appointing Jacob [Atkin] at that next meeting. The headline correctly said may consider; the first sentence said we will appoint, and that was not accurate. I provided a lot of background information during my interview, so when I made reference to the one year, it was the fact that the board had an opportunity to know Jacob [Atkin] is, in the sense that this wasn't just an interview process with a candidate that applied, but seeing who he is, how he handles things, how he handles conversations, how he handles challenges; not meant to imply we've been interviewing him for a year to be the president. Did I answer your question?

*Audience Member 2:* Yes and no. It's still, for lack of a better word, hurtful, to find out from the *Baytown Sun* before the board itself, and the timeline is still confusing. I understand board agendas have to be sent out at a certain time, but I want there to be trust between the board and the employees of this college, and I feel like that was rough business to find out that way.

*Answer:* It is understandable that trust may be damaged, and it is a sensitive issue both ways. It was a difficult decision, and the board also knows that the quickest way to get trust back is to have these conversations.

*Audience Member 3:* At the board meeting, this decision was made by a majority, but not all board members agreed.

*Audience Member 4:* The issue with just appointing the interim as president is that it appears there is an incongruity with this search process, or appointment, versus what happens at the lower levels. Seemingly, some upper-level administrative positions were added in a similar way, while there are current qualified faculty and staff who seemed like they were passed up several times for those same positions. It appears lower-level faculty-facing and student-facing positions don't get the consideration of being interviewed for a promotion through on-the-job experiences and accomplishments while employed with the college; they have been here and done the work, and the college has gotten to know them. It seems like some on the lower levels are being passed up for certain positions and promotions, but the board can just put in an interim because they've known him for a year. I don't know if you can speak to that or not.

*Answer:* Great comment. Those concerns are for the president level down. The board has one employee, the president, and at least two ways to hire, and both are acceptable methods. The search process is not a legal mandate; it's a tool. Not sure what the rules, processes, or policies are on filling administrative positions, but the board does not fill those positions. The college didn't have a lot of administrative positions open; they were a result of a reorganization with few people changing. The board doesn't get into those details; just the results.

*Audience Member 4:* The board does approve every single position, correct? Even though the board may not have a say in the hiring, the board must approve new hires?

*Answer:* The board approves the contracts of all employees. As far as promotions are concerned, those are handled internally. The board also approves reorganizations; if new positions are created, the board does not approve the person in the position, just the creation.

*Summary of Regent Santana's Comments:* Based on nationwide research of college presidential searches, when developing search criteria, institutions must consider specific needs, such as struggling financially or broadening the service area, and hire a president with specific skill sets. Each time a president is selected (approximately every 5 years), there will be a unique situation an institution needs to address and adjust criteria. Santana then discusses the college's unique situation and specific needs under Dr. Lynda Villanueva versus the current situation and needs under Jacob Atkin, where the college needs and has a leader who can run the business of the college; someone capable of taking this institution, the business of the institution, and moving the college forward.

*Audience Member 5:* My issues are the lack of opportunity to ask the candidates questions (perhaps Mr. Atkin will meet with faculty to address questions and concerns) and the lack of information. Being informed throughout the current process would have prevented undue stress for faculty who were left with no information, only to question and assume the status of the presidential search. The solution could have been just a few sentences, little bits of information along the way as the board made decisions about the six-month hold, or hiring and heeding the advice of a consulting company. That's all I wanted to say. Thank you.

*Answer:* I completely agree. Thank you for your suggestion. That's very helpful. I hope that faculty don't think they have to wait for a presidential search to express their concerns. Please express those concerns directly to the president who's here today.

*Audience Member 6:* Although outside my purview, based on your comments, President Atkin has my confidence in the business side of the college. The president must also understand what goes on inside the classroom, the specific teaching and learning needs across disciplines. As an academic who does not see teaching as a business, but as cultivating relationships with students according to their unique situations, their specific needs and learning styles, my questions concern the focus on teaching and learning when academics are thought of or approached as a business. What are you going to do about the academic side? What kind of innovative pedagogical practices are you bringing to faculty? Who are you consulting to get a better understanding of what it is to teach?

*Answer:* The provost, not the president, is the chief academic officer of the institution, and everyone below the provost has the responsibility of academics. The role of the president on the academic side is important; he is not in the classroom; he needs to understand what it takes to deliver the service and to be an organization that's geared to serve every student. Though he has no classroom experience, Jacob [Atkin] spent his career in community college settings, equipping him with an understanding of the business and academic side; he understands Lee College as an institution and its unique challenges. The president's role requires a balance between an internal component, focusing on the needs of instructors in the classroom and individual students, and an external component, focusing on our industry partnerships and the various needs of our broad service area. Not all about finance, the business is providing higher education to all students in our service area and beyond.

Regent Santana thanked the audience for the opportunity and acknowledged the lack of communication, encouraging moving forward and rebuilding any lost trust.

If there are any other questions or concerns, feel free to reach out to Regent Santana ([gsantana@lee.edu](mailto:gsantana@lee.edu)) or the other regents email addresses are available on the web page.

**V. Adjournment:** Adjourned at 3:01

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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