Northwest Missouri State University Board of Regents
Date of Meeting: October 30, 2026

Agenda Item: Guaranteed In-State Tuition Rates

Leads: President Tatum, Vice President Carrick and Provost and Vice President Ward

Open or Closed Agenda Item? OPEN

Issue description and proposal (as approved by the president):

Effective Fall 2027, Northwest proposes to guarantee in-state tuition rates for undergraduate students from Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas. This initiative simplifies our value proposition, aligns with market expectations, and positions Northwest more competitively in our primary recruitment territory.

Why This Matters Now

The higher education marketplace is increasingly competitive, and many regional public universities have already adopted broad in-state tuition, reciprocity, or tuition-guarantee models. Peer institutions including Northern Iowa, Central Missouri, Missouri Western, Fort Hays State, and others offer simplified pricing structures that reduce barriers for out-of-state students.

Northwest must strengthen its position within its core recruitment region by offering a clear, compelling, and easily understood tuition structure. Delaying action increases the risk of losing prospective students to institutions offering more accessible and transparent pricing.

Enrollment Trends and the Importance of the Four-State Region

Northwest's first-time freshman enrollment remains heavily concentrated in Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas:

Fall 2026 first-time freshman enrollment:

- Missouri: 562 students (64.2%)
- Iowa: 109 students (12.4%)
- Nebraska: 114 students (13.0%)
- Kansas: 58 students (6.6%)

Total from the four-state region: 843 of 876 students (96.2%).

Across the last four entering classes, the four-state region consistently represented approximately 94% to 96% of all first-time freshmen, demonstrating that Northwest's enrollment future is tied directly to our strength in these markets.

Protecting and Growing Key Markets

These neighboring states are also the markets most aggressively targeted by competing institutions offering resident-rate tuition, broad tuition waivers, or one-rate models.

Providing guaranteed in-state tuition rates will help Northwest protect existing enrollment while creating opportunities for growth in these important border states.

Financial Impact, Student Retention, and Enrollment Growth

The proposed tuition guarantee represents a strategic investment in both student retention and new student enrollment. The University's current out-of-state tuition differential is $300 per credit hour, or $9,000 annually for a student enrolled in 30 credit hours. While extending in-state tuition rates reduces the tuition collected from certain out-of-state students, the financial impact must also consider the potential to retain students who might otherwise leave Northwest and attract new students who may not otherwise enroll.

Current enrolled students from Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas who do not receive in-state tuition rates who would become eligible under the proposed guarantee would provide these students with consistent access to in-state rates which could improve affordability, strengthen retention, and protect future tuition revenue.

From a financial perspective, the University must evaluate not only the reduction in tuition rates for eligible students but also the tuition revenue that can be preserved through improved retention and generated through additional enrollment. Retaining an existing student preserves an established tuition revenue stream, while recruiting a new student creates additional revenues opportunities.

Marketing Opportunity

The institutional benefit extends beyond affordability. The proposal creates a simple and highly marketable message: "Students from Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas pay in-state tuition at Northwest."

Enrollment research notes that prospective students actively search for "in-state rates," making this language more aligned with how families make college affordability decisions.

The simplified message removes confusion around current waiver and scholarship structures and provides a clear competitive advantage during recruitment conversations.

Need for Early Promotion

The proposed guarantee would begin with the Fall 2027 term. Timely approval is essential to allow the University to incorporate this commitment into its current recruitment cycle. Northwest needs to begin promoting the change as soon as possible, as nearly 80% of applications for the fall 2027 class are received *before* January 1, 2027.

Early communication will:

- Increase awareness among prospective students and families.
- Strengthen recruitment efforts during the current admission cycle.
- Allow Northwest to capitalize on a distinctive market position before competitors further expand their reciprocity programs.
- Reinforce Northwest's reputation as an affordable, student-focused regional university.

Evidence From the Market

The University of Northern Iowa moved to a Midwest reciprocity model for Fall 2026 and reported a 10.3% increase in first-time freshman enrollment, its highest total since Fall 2017. While outcomes will vary, the example demonstrates growing student demand for *simple, transparent* tuition pricing across regional markets.

Key Takeaways

More than 96% of Northwest's Fall 2026 first-time freshmen came from Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas making these states the foundation of the University's enrollment strategy.

Guaranteeing in-state rates beginning Fall 2027 is a strategic enrollment investment that helps Northwest:

- Protect core markets.
- Improve competitiveness.
- Simplify tuition pricing and strengthen the affordability message.
- Expand recruitment opportunities.
- Position the University for sustainable enrollment growth throughout the region.
- Protect existing enrollment by reducing tuition-related barriers that may contribute to student attrition.
- Improve retention among current students who might otherwise lose eligibility for in-state tuition rates.
- Preserve existing tuition revenue while creating opportunities for additional enrollment growth revenue.
- Support long-term financial sustainability by stabilizing and strengthening the University's enrollment.

Proposed Resolution:

I move to approve offering guaranteed in-state tuition rates for undergraduate students from Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas effective Fall 2027.