



BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING

December 9, 2021
Murdock Hall, Room 208
Audio/Video Conference

The following Trustees were present:

Mohan Boodram
John Barrett III*
Brenda Burdick
JD Chesloff

Frederick Keator*
Karen Kowalczyk*
Denise Marshall

Robert Reilly
Franklyn Reynolds*
Kathleen Therrien*

Trustees Absent:

Edgar Perez

MCLA Staff in attendance:

James F. Birge, President
Lisa Lescarbeau, Clerk

*Denotes remote participation

As allowed by executive order of the Governor of Massachusetts, in compliance with the provisions of Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 30 and 15A, Section 9, and with a quorum present in-person and via audio/video-conference, the Board of Trustees of Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts met on December 9, 2021 with Board Chair Boodram presiding.

Chair Boodram called the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m. and welcomed newly appointed trustee, Franklyn Reynolds. Trustee Reynolds is president and CEO of UIL Holdings Corporation, the AVANGRID subsidiary that oversees its natural gas and electric companies in Connecticut and Massachusetts, including Berkshire Gas Company. Prior to his appointment with UIL, Trustee Reynolds served as the President of Berkshire Gas.

Trustee Reynolds holds a Master's in Business Administration from the University of New Haven and a bachelor's degree in industrial technology from Central Connecticut State University. In addition to his service with the Army National Guard, from which he retired as a Major after 20 years, Reynolds previously served in both board and advisory capacities with the Urban League of Rochester, N.Y., and on the Advisory Board of Roberts Wesleyan College, also in Rochester.

Executive Committee Chair Report on the Meeting of December 9, 2021

Chair Boodram presented the report of the Executive Committee of the Board meeting of December 9. The Committee reviewed the President's performance goals for FY22 and stewardship of each goal was assigned to committee chairs.

- Continue to build student enrollment recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic by increasing the fall 2022 student enrollment from 995 to 1,094, including undergrad and DGCE enrollment. Assigned to Trustee Reilly.
- In order to improve the Board of Trustees awareness of institutional benchmarks of performance, craft a dashboard of performance indicators that provide information about MCLA's advancement and our progress toward achieving them. Assigned to Chair Boodram.
- Coordinate efforts with the Vice President of Institutional Advancement and the MCLA Foundation Board to prepare for the next comprehensive campaign by establishing staffing infrastructure and volunteer Campaign leadership. Assigned to Trustee Kowalczyk.
- Identify and contact major donors for the Comprehensive Campaign and secure early gifts totaling between \$3 million and \$5 million. Assigned to Trustee Kowalczyk.
- Expand MCLA's focus on equity by eliminating the first-year retention rate and the six-year graduation rate gaps between students of color and their entering cohort, and creating a more diverse academic community by attracting students and faculty/staff from under-represented communities so that 30% (vs 26% in fall 21) of the student population and 15% (vs. 12% in fall 21) of faculty/staff is diverse in fall 2022. Assigned to Trustee Chesloff.
- Hire a nursing program administrator to research the need for a nursing program in the region and launch a nursing major, if indicated. Assigned to Trustee Burdick.
- Work with the Vice President of Student Affairs and the Chief Diversity Officer to determine practices and strategies to enhance safe social and academic spaces for students. Assigned to Trustee Chesloff.

Enrollment Management Committee Chair Report on the Meeting of December 2, 2021

Trustee Keator presented the report of the Enrollment Management Committee meeting of December 2, 2021.

The Committee heard an update on the College's marketing and communications efforts. Simpson Scarborough has been contracted to assist with the paid digital advertising campaign being undertaken. Key takeaways for their early work include click through conversion, increased engagements, and requests for information. The budget for the College's digital campaign is approximately \$100k, and is the bulk of the marketing budget.

Simpson Scarborough is conducting an enrollment communications flow audit including emails, text, print and PURLs (personal URLs). The results of this work will be reported and include recommendations for improving communications.

Advertising work continues with a focus on sharing the U.S. News and World Report rankings. Billboards, campus signage and print/digital media all are avenues being used to market this information.

With regard to advertising in the New York market, the areas of interest were noted as being mainly in the Albany capital region, and eastern NY through New York City. Efforts to break into the Boston market are underway with a meeting scheduled with an expert in that market.

The Committee heard an update from the Office of Admission. Counselors have visited over 350 high schools and 30 community colleges in New England and New York. Inquiries have seen an increase of 1,500. Attendance at Fall events have increased from 190 in 2019 to 223 in 2021. Two open houses have been held, as well as four Saturday tours, daily tours and virtual open houses.

Early action numbers show inquiries for first year students at 6,877, an increase of 22%, and applications at 472, an increase of 28%. The GPA in the applicant pool has increased from 3.37 to 3.54. Interest from Suffolk and Berkshire Counties has seen a decrease, while overall MA, NY, CT and VT are on the rise.

In response to a question regarding tuition for NY state residents and the Empire Promise, it was noted that efforts have been made to increase communications in the NY region with a focus on the tuition reduction program offered at MCLA.

The Committee was provided a review of Spring yield events including dates for recruiting events and continued one-on-one meetings with high school counselors.

FASFA filings for 2022/23 are trending equal to the same time last year. National trends still estimate that FASFA filings will be down for 2022/23. Aid awards to current and new students will follow the same matrix as last year based on high school GPA and need.

There are currently 66 undergraduate students who have not completed registration for Spring 2022, vs. 230 in spring 2021. More proactive steps are being taken to continue to lessen this number.

The most recent round of federal aid of \$943K was dispersed to 991 students through a newly implemented system allowing for direct deposit into student accounts as opposed to paper checks. Awards are based on financial need assessed from the FASFA on file and students are able to use this money as they wish, with many choosing to pay down current student debt or toward future college expenses.

There are currently five students with categorical waivers in the elderly category and 19 enrolled Veterans with tuition waivers. While the tuition for Veterans is waived, the College does still receive payment of fees from the VA.

Academic Affairs Committee Chair Report on the Meeting of December 3, 2021

Trustee Burdick presented the report of the Academic Affairs Committee meeting of December 3, 2021.

The Committee heard from Assistant Professor Travis Beaver, of the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work regarding his application for tenure. Dr. Beaver provided an overview of his educational background, teaching, scholarly work including publications and major presentations, and service.

The board expressed their gratitude to Dr. Beaver for his work. The Committee looks forward to hearing in a future meeting from one additional faculty member who has applied for tenure.

Two programs with proposed changes were presented to the Committee. Due to recent changes made by the New England Commission of Higher Education, both of these proposals require board review and approval for submission to NECHE. This process is new and these types of substantive changes have not been reviewed by Trustees in the past.

The first substantive change asks for formal permission to develop fully online versions of five current programs:

- Certificate in Network Security
- Certificate in Principles of Accounting
- BA completion in Interdisciplinary Studies
- Master of Business Administration
- Master of Education.

In each case, the Division of Graduate and Continuing Education (DGCE) has already run online versions of these courses in response to the pandemic, and the application to NECHE builds on this experience to serve more fully the needs of our adult students.

The second substantive change creates a partnership with Greenfield Community College (GCC) to offer MCLA's degree completion program on GCC's campus. Although this is a well-established program, NECHE requires that institutions seek approval when offering credit at another site. DGCE currently offers degree completion in a hybrid format for bachelor degrees in Business Administration and Interdisciplinary Studies. Student support services for these programs is provided on campus and remotely.

The Committee voted to recommend approval of the College offering its Interdisciplinary Studies Degree Completion Program at Greenfield Community College as College as recommended by

the Academic Affairs Committee. It was stated that there is no additional operating cost to the college as a result of this substantive change.

Upon motion duly made and seconded, following a roll call vote, it was unanimously:

VOTED: to approve the College offering its Interdisciplinary Studies Degree Completion Program at Greenfield Community College.

The Committee also voted to recommend approval of the College developing fully online versions of five current programs:

- Certificate in Network Security
- Certificate in Principles of Accounting
- BA completion in Interdisciplinary Studies
- Master of Business Administration
- Master of Education.

Upon motion duly made and seconded, following a roll call vote, it was unanimously:

VOTED: to approve the College developing fully online versions of five current programs as presented.

Sabbatical applications for AY 2022-2023 submitted by faculty members who have completed six years of full-time service to the College were reviewed:

- Dr. Anna Jaysane-Darr, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Fall 2022
- Dr. Ingrid Castro, Professor of Sociology, Academic Year 2022-2023
- Dr. Eric Doucette, Associate Professor of Biology, Spring 2023
- Ms. Melanie Mowinski, Professor of Art, Academic Year 2022-2023
- Dr. Chali Nondo, Professor of Economics, Spring 2023
- Dr. Samantha Pettey, Associate Professor of Political Science, Spring 2023
- Dr. Ruby Vega, Associate Professor of Psychology. Spring, 2023
- Mr. Jeremy Winchester, Associate Professor of Theatre, Spring 2023

Trustees discussed documenting and reporting outcomes of a sabbatical, and whether there are consequences for not fulfilling the sabbatical goals. The College provides assistance to faculty where possible to ensure the sabbatical is successful. It is important to understand that one of the possible outcomes of research is that the results expected are not actualized, and in these instances, faculty are encouraged to continue their work and provide additional information on why the research project may have ended the way it did.

Should a faculty member not return to the College post-sabbatical, reimbursement of the pay received during that sabbatical is owed to the College.

The committee voted to recommend approval of the AY 2022/2023 faculty sabbatical applications as recommended by the Academic Affairs Committee.

Upon motion duly made and seconded, following a roll call vote, it was unanimously:

VOTED: to approval of the AY 2022/2023 faculty sabbatical applications as presented.

Dr. Elizabeth Fiscella has been hired to fill the role of Associate Dean of Nursing with an official start date of February 1. Dr. Fiscella brings substantial teaching and administrative experience to MCLA, currently directing the RN to BSN Nursing program at Elms College after having served for many years as Nursing faculty and in administration at Berkshire Community College. As a long-time Berkshire County resident, she has a deep connection to our community and to health providers in the region.

Four tenure-track faculty searches were recently approved, bringing the total number of tenure-track searches this year to five:

- Business Administration – Economics
- Computer Science – Electrical Engineering
- Fine and Performing Arts – Art History and Museum Studies
- Psychology – Counseling (approved in June, offer pending)
- Psychology – Specialty Open

All five position descriptions explicitly focus on bringing greater diversity to our curricular offerings and teaching strategies, with each position framed around racial/ethnic equity and culturally responsive pedagogy.

Fiscal Affairs Committee Chair Report on the Meeting of December 7, 2021

Trustee Kowalczyk presented the report of the Fiscal Affairs Committee meeting of December 7, 2021.

For the first quarter FY 22, revenue overall is under budget by \$452K. Tuition and fees revenues are under budget by \$663K as a result of enrollment decreases. Scholarship funds are over budget by \$175K, but this is due to timing and should be in line with budget for the full FY. The MSCBA issued the College a \$1M bond.

Expenses overall are under budget by \$722K. This is a result of open positions and delaying hirings, unfilled student worker positions, and timing issue related variances on a cash basis. The nature of legal expenses, which include retainers, bargaining and union related items, and personnel issues, were discussed. Debt service increased as a result of the pay down of a loan with Berkshire Bank.

Overall, the College's budget to actual variance remains positive at \$269K.

The FY22 forecast represents four months actual and eight months projected financials. Overall revenue is under budget by \$227K with additional state revenue of \$400K resulting from formula funding, and tuition and fees revenue under budget by \$638K. Overall expenses are under budget by \$337K and include:

- full-time employee staffing projected to be under budget by \$73K as a result of open positions and delayed hiring;
- special employee staffing projected to be under budget by \$134K (consisting of adjunct staffing increases of \$175K, part-time student staffing decreases of \$250K and part-time employee staffing decreases of \$60K); and
- equipment purchases projected to be over budget by \$80K as a result of the purchase of two passenger vans and three utility vans, and the lease-to-own of two 25-person shuttle buses.

Debt service is projected to be over budget by \$214K due to loan payoffs with Berkshire Bank. An overall positive variance of \$110K is projected.

The Committee reviewed a timeline for the state's and MCLA's FY23 budgeting process, which begins in December 2021.

Mr. Daniel Seaman, newly hired Executive Director of Facilities Management, was introduced to the Committee.

The Committee reviewed the College's FY23 major capital submission which is referred to as the Pathways Project. DCAMM funds are being pursued for renovations to include several campus buildings including Mark Hopkins Hall, Freel Library and the Academic Quad. Estimated cost of the Pathways Project is \$35,373,157. President Birge informed the Committee that the goal is to raise \$2.4M through the Foundation's capital campaign, and request the amount of \$30M from the state. The Fiscal Affairs Committee voted to recommend to this board the commitment of up to \$1.5M from MCLA's surplus funds to support funding for the proposed Pathways Project.

Upon motion duly made and seconded, following a roll call vote, it was unanimously:

VOTED: to allocate up to \$1.5M from MCLA's reserve funds to support the Pathways Project.

The Committee reviewed the proposal to create an Investment Advisory Committee to consist of a Trustee to serve as chair and members of the community with experience in the financial and investing arenas. An RFP is being developed that will explore investing a portion of the College's available funds in equities, bonds, and other low risk ventures. The Committee will be charged with exploring investment strategies and selecting an investment firm to manage funds.

Student Affairs Committee Chair Report on the Meeting of December 9, 2021

Trustee Chesloff presented the report of the Student Affairs Committee meeting of December 9, 2021.

The Committee heard an update on ARAMARK dining services and the supply chain impacts on dining services. Dining services staffing and hours are being maintained; however, the satellite location in Bowman Hall is not operational. Supply chain shortages have resulted in a reduction in food selections and last-minute changes to menu options. While students have expressed dissatisfaction with options and the lack of a satellite location in Bowman, student nutritional needs are being met. As well, students placed in isolation due to COVID are being serviced by ARAMARK.

Patrick Connelly has been contracted as Interim Dean to fill this crucial role, while Dean Heather Quire is out on extended leave. Interim Dean Connelly brings a wealth of experience and knowledge in student affairs and Title 9.

The Committee heard an update on the College's food pantry and food insecurity among students. Forty percent of students attending public universities self-identify as hungry. These students, for a variety of reasons, will go to class hungry or miss meals. First generation students, students of color, and students who identify as LGBTQIA are impacted higher by food insecurity.

The pantry supply continues to be robust through the support of the campus community, and is open and accessible 24 hours a day. Between September 7 and December 8, there were 245 visits (not unique visitors) made to the pantry for 3,400 items. The only data collected from students is to ask if the visit is a first visit. Gift cards continue to be offered to students.

The College is part of a nationwide campaign called Swipe Out Hunger which Mr. Moser is looking to launch this spring. As part of this ARAMARK offered to create the ability to add swipes to student meal cards. Staff in the food pantry will determine how to share this equitably.

Trustee Chesloff acknowledged Frederick and Renee Keator for their generous match challenge which raised \$10,000 for the food pantry.

Students AJ Burton, Melanie Davis and Roman Robledo provided an overview of the projects they are working on that focus on building community on campus. Mr. Burton and Ms. Davis are developing an interactive student resources manual that encourages new students to build and personalize a guide based on their individual needs and experiences, and to share those guides with other students in their first-year seminar.

Mr. Robledo's project is focused on engaging community around the environment to create awareness of sustainability and become active with helping the local environment. His project goal is to create relevance around the topic of environment, then to share that relevance with the College community through activism.

MCLA Foundation

Trustee Marshall presented the report of MCLA's Foundation Board meeting of November 10, 2021 and welcomed new Director Chrystina Geagan Parks.

Based upon Committee recommendations, the Board voted:

- to temporarily increase the endowment administrative fee from 1% to 1.5% for fiscal years 2023, 2024 and 2025 to aid with the cost of fundraising; and
- to elect Corporator Judith Wilkinson of Stockbridge, MA to the Endowment and Trust Committee for fiscal year 2022.

The Board amended the Foundation's bylaws to raise the maximum number of Directors on the Board from 20 to 25, and to add the ability to recruit individuals who are not Corporators for the Corporate Relations Committee and the Donor Relations Committee.

President Birge provided a campus update and Foundation President Bob Ziomek gave the Institutional Advancement report. Current fundraising numbers are \$1.16M, the endowment value as of October 31, 2021, was \$17.90M and total Foundation assets were \$24.3M.

The Alumni Association Board of Directors met November 13, 2021. Planned activities for the remainder of the fall semester include a Psychology career panel, the December Academic Reception to welcome mid-year graduates, and a mid-year board leadership retreat. The process for '22-'23 board elections will begin on December 1.

Corporate Engagement and Strategic Partnerships include six new corporate connections and 10 strategic partnerships that have been established or strengthened.

Programs and initiatives include work with General Dynamics, SolaBlock, Mountain One, Adams Theater, and Pittsfield Community Television.

Approval of Minutes of Committee Meetings

Upon motion duly made and seconded, by roll call vote, it was unanimously:

VOTED: to approve the following meeting minutes and all actions contained therein:

- Board of Trustees of November 4, 2021
- Student Affairs Committee of November 4, 2021
- Enrollment Management Committee of December 3, 2021
- Academic Affairs Committee of December 3, 2021
- Fiscal Affairs Committee of December 7, 2021

Chairman's Report

Chair Boodram began his report to the Trustees with comments on board meetings. He expressed the importance of being Trustee and noted several very positive things underway such as the capital campaign, Pathways Project, nursing major, continued work on equity, and stabilizing enrollment.

President's Report

President Birge provided the President's Report to the Board and began by thanking Frederick and Renee Keator for their financial support and their challenge to engage others in supporting the food pantry.

During the semester there were nine positive COVID cases. The College's overall positivity rate is .44% with a seven-day positivity rate of .34%. For comparison, Massachusetts's seven-day rate is 4.4%, the city of North Adams' 14-day rate is 6.7%, and Pittsfield's 14-day rate is 5.6%.

The College continues following our established protocols including testing, tracing, masking, and vaccination. The rate of vaccinations for students is 97%; and for employees, 93%.

President Birge acknowledged and thanked VP Puc for her focus and work on the College's COVID response management.

Requiring COVID vaccination boosters for employees and students is on hold at this time as science around the booster, and possibly an omicron specific booster, are awaited. In addition, many of our colleagues in unions have not completed the six-month period since receiving the second vaccination shot.

The three units, MSCA, APA and AFSCME, contracts have been settled. The APA contract is with the Governor and the MSCA and AFSCME contracts are with the DHE. The latter are anticipated to be with the Governor before December 17.

Each contract, and in-turn the agreement with NUPS, calls for 2.5% increase retroactive to July 2020; a 2% increase retroactive to July 2021, and a 1.5% COVID supplemental bonus. As of this writing, the Governor has yet to request funding of these agreements. The Council of Presidents (COP) will meet with Secretary Peyser and ask that he encourages the Governor to request these funds as the state universities and colleges have a contractual obligation to pay these funds. Any payment before the holidays is highly unlikely.

Legislative action regarding ARPA funds is good news for higher education. This bill is on Governor's desk for consideration and he has until December 13, 2021 to take action. The bill includes \$5M for endowment match funds (the College portion is \$500K and our match has been met), \$5M for mental health services, \$30M for COVID recovery costs, \$15M for cybersecurity, and \$10M for recruiting teachers of color. The COP will decide division of these funds.

The Accrediting Council for Business Schools and Programs completed their review and accredited the College's business program. President Birge acknowledged the great effort of the department's faculty, in particular, Professor Chali Nondo who led the review.

With no other business being brought before the meeting, upon a motion duly made and seconded, it was unanimously:

VOTED: to adjourn the meeting at 6:26 p.m.