



**Minutes of the Meeting of the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES ACADEMIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**December 8, 2020**

**MS Teams Audio/Video**

**Committee members in attendance:**

Brenda Burdick, Committee Chair  
Robert Reilly  
Susan Gold  
Mohan Boodram, Board Chair

**Others present:**

James F. Birge, President  
Adrienne Wootters, Interim VP of Academic Affairs  
Lisa Lescarbeau, Clerk  
Ely Janis  
Theresa O'Bryant

Trustee Burdick called the meeting to order at 8:32 a.m.

**Sabbatical Applications**

VP Wootters commented briefly on the sabbatical applications that faculty had submitted, and which were provided to the Trustees in advance of this meeting.

Trustee Reilly motioned to waive the reading of the specific sabbatical requests as the materials presented to this Committee clearly defined each faculty member's request and the work they planned to do during their sabbatical. As well, trustees had time to read this material in advance of the meeting.

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

**VOTED:** to waive the reading of the individual sabbatical applications presented to the Committee.

Trustees discussed the diversity of the pool of sabbatical applicants, specifically related to race identity. Faculty members currently eligible for sabbatical are largely white. As the diversity of faculty at the College progresses, the diversity of applicants for sabbatical will change.

The timing and number of sabbaticals approved was discussed. There are plans in place to cover the necessary courses. In cases where it is a hardship on the department for a member to take sabbatical, they may be asked to defer their sabbatical until another time. This was not the case this year.

With regard to the faculty member anticipating being the recipient of a Fulbright award, VP Wootters stated that if the Fulbright scholar designation was not awarded, the faculty member would take a single semester sabbatical and work on the curriculum projects as outlined in their request.

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

**VOTED:** to accept the sabbatical applications, as presented, for advancement to the Board of Trustees.

### **Academic Affairs Update**

Dean Janis provided an update on the Academic Affairs department beginning with a review of the revised core curriculum. The new core will be implemented in Fall 2021. Core Capstone workshops were conducted for faculty in preparation of changes. Additional training for faculty will be conducted in the Spring.

As part of the core changes, the first-year student experience will be adjusted with the introduction of a first-year seminar. This seminar will be integrated with first year orientation, academies and the first eight-weeks program.

With regard to timing of the core curriculum roll-out, a waiver has been approved by College governance allowing for an additional year to approve existing courses with core designation. This delay was allowed in light of challenges faced during the current pandemic.

The Marketing and Communications division will be engaged to introduce the revised core to the community both internal and external.

Dean Janis noted that his current focus is on the review of reappointment, promotion and tenure portfolios for faculty. The Committees on Tenure and Promotion have been convened as part of this review process. He stated his gratitude for the high-quality work of his colleagues.

A three-year action plan is being developed for the Division of Graduate and Continuing Education (DGCE). The focus is on developing a cohort program and new initiatives, including changes to online programming, and working with community partners and employees to develop certificate

program. The DGCE certificate program process is currently being considered through College governance.

A call has been placed for summer courses, which will be conducted fully on-line in summer '21. Efforts will focus on tailoring the schedule to meet the needs of students and expanding the offerings to allow community members outside the college to take advantage of the summer course offerings. In addition, now that we have the State Authorization Reciprocity Act (SARA) designation, all online summer courses may be offered throughout the state and across the nation.

The securing of a dual-enrollment grant allows the College to offer seats in existing courses to high school students.

With funds from Title III, two-credit recovery courses will be held in the summer for students who have fallen behind allowing them to stay on track to complete their degree work and graduate in four years.

The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) and Academic Technologies (AT) staff have done an outstanding job with remote teaching. The majority of faculty have completed online class training, leaving about 20 faculty members who have yet to complete the four-week session.

The winter Tech Fest will be held on December 17. Faculty will have the opportunity to discuss what they have had success with, and what improvements they would like to see for hybrid and online classroom instruction.

A professional development session was hosted by CTL. The challenges and opportunities of teaching and learning during the pandemic were discussed.

Staffing of the Academic Technologies division was discussed. The hiring of an assistant in the division was highlighted as a significant contribution to the success the division has seen.

At the next meeting of this Committee, Professor Stroud will be invited to present and discuss the DESE accreditation.

Dean O'Bryant provided an update on the work of the Center for Student Success and Engagement (CSSE). She discussed the challenges posed by the pandemic and remote learning noting the impact on student mental health. The increase in numbers of college-going students with learning differences was discussed. Year over year, MCLA has seen a 50% increase in this area; currently 15% of the student body, which is up from 10% in Fall 2019.

CSSE staff continues to work closely with colleagues to combat the impacts of the pandemic and address the growing needs of the College's student body. Programs for incoming students have been expanded, and the first eight weeks program offers over 100 different programs for first year students.

Success coaching with students has proven effective, leading to the hiring of a staff member to specifically do success coaching.

Efforts are focused on expanding opportunities around college readiness with the development of specific programs preparing students for college life and careers.

CSSE worked with faculty to address student absences from classes and academic concerns. Daily outreach is conducted with students. Work with Academic Technology has also expanded to work with students to develop their technical skill.

Michael Obasohan continues his work with the Men of Color Initiative, and Dean O'Bryant and her colleagues their work with the Women of Color Initiative.

With regard to financial aid for students of color, Dean O'Bryant highlighted the work being done by Student Financial Services as they work closely with students to connect them with the funds that may be available to assist with need.

President Birge provided an update on the impact and operations during the pandemic. Students and faculty have pivoted to full remote learning for the remainder of the semester. The decision, in hindsight, to not return to campus post-Thanksgiving break has proven to be propitious as COVID-19 cases begin to spike in Berkshire County.

Faculty and staff have moved to remote work until January 4, 2021. Staff are working in offices on a rotating basis with the goal of only one person being in an office at any given time.

There is some concern about winter and what might occur as the state sees the positive rate across the commonwealth continue to increase. While indications are that the Governor is not anticipated to enforce additional restrictions, there are questions as to whether he will mandate that colleges are fully remote for the spring semester.

President Birge commented on the potential for a supplemental stimulus package out of Congress that will help universities and colleges. The state institution presidents are advocating with Congressman Neal to provide direct payment to the universities and colleges as opposed to through the state. These supplemental funds would be used to help students with financial aid.

President Birge commented on the availability of a vaccine. With the vaccine schedule being extended or slowed, and administration anticipated through spring, it is hoped that fall potentially looks more normal.

Secretary Peyser gave a rare public accolade highlighting that public higher education institutions have outperformed state rates for COVID-19 positive cases. Higher education has done their part contributing to the control and spread of the virus. It is unfortunate that this has come at great cost not only in dollars, but in anxiety and stress for our community. Faculty and staff have come

forward and done the additional work that was needed of them to give our students the education they deserve.

The college continues to plan for a return to campus for the spring semester, and anticipate it will look like the fall semester with blended learning across the curriculum.

Trustees expressed their gratitude to administration, faculty and staff for their efforts to not only manage through a pandemic, but for doing it very well and providing students the best possible experience.

President Birge expressed concern for the strain that employees and students are facing as a result of the pandemic. While the efforts of all are good during the pandemic, there is much work that remains to be done. This places additional strain on our community. And while the focus is on fiscal responsibility and efficiency with limited resources, decisions are made to incur the costs that allow for what is right and necessary.

### **Adjournment**

There being no further business to come before the Committee the meeting was adjourned at 9:46 a.m.