



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Academic and Student Affairs Committee

October 13, 2020

Minutes

Meeting held virtually via Zoom

In accordance with Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker’s Executive Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, § 20 dated March 12, 2020.

A live stream of the meeting for public viewing also took place on YouTube.

MEMBERS PARTICIPATING REMOTELY: Committee Chair Martin, Vice Chair Williams, Secretary Neves, Trustees Landrau, Martinez-Alvarez, and Sullivan (entered at 10:31 AM)

TRUSTEE GUESTS PARTICIPATING REMOTELY: Trustees Alvarado, Boudreau, Magovern, and Queenin

Dr. Roy H. Saigo, Interim President of Westfield State University, was also participating remotely.

The meeting was called to order at 9:39 AM by Committee Chair Martin.

MOTION made by Trustee Martinez-Alvarez, seconded by Trustee Neves, to approve the minutes of the June 25, 2020 meeting.

There being no discussion, **ROLL CALL VOTE** taken:

Trustee Landrau	Yes	Trustee Neves	Yes
Trustee Martin	Yes	Trustee Sullivan	Not yet joined
Trustee Martinez-Alvarez	Yes	Trustee Williams	Yes

Motion passed unanimously.

Faculty Experience Preparing for Fall 2020. Dr. Robert Kersting, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, stated that he wanted to share the narrative of the last seven months through the experiences of the faculty, presented below. Challenges and opportunities for this year included diversity, inclusion, social justice, retention, and continued response to the pandemic, working jointly with Admissions on recruitment, managing financial resources, and preparing for the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) accreditation. We have been guided by the goal of offering the highest quality education to our students, both in and out of classroom, the heart of student success is their relationship with faculty and staff.

Dr. Jennifer DiGrazia of the English Department shared a compilation of faculty experiences in the transition to online learning and the mental impact on faculty.

- Courses needed to be reinvented to transition to online (2 to 4 classes per faculty member), creating a tremendous amount of work.

- While summer camps have been utilized by some, lack of daycare created challenges while teaching their own children and trying to host classes from home. Many faculty members had no days off this summer. It has had a huge impact on families and mental health.
- There has been incredible support for the faculty from all departments.
- Instructors are spending more time preparing for classes and professors are learning to utilize multiple new applications. There is a steep learning curve
- Some faculty needed the Google Suite in May but did not receive it until the day before classes started.
- One faculty member added that she attributed her engagement to anti-black sentiment in the country and that she wants to re-tool her classes and material with an anti-racist lens, with more of a focus on equity.

Dr. Beverly Army Williams of the English Department shared the experiences of contingent faculty.

- They are grateful for opening communication between the Board of Trustees and the MSCA union members.
- They value the workshops and training being offered and try to take advantage of every learning opportunity. They have received support from department chairs.
- Some teaching opportunities were diminished due to COVID-19. Many felt deep anxiety on whether they would have jobs this fall, with some anxiety related to their belief of the financial mismanagement of the previous president and board. The contingent faculty has done extraordinary work this summer with no guarantee their work would be used.
- Most have worked every day since spring to create 100 percent completely new materials while following up on students to make sure they can pass.
- Extensive workshops were held over the summer to prepare for this fall and to improve teaching to assist students during this traumatic time. They feel the extra labor undertaken has not been acknowledged by administration and the board in any way.
- They believe in the mission of Westfield State and need to bring their very best to their students and be role models. They care about our students and their courage and willingness to try in these circumstances. The students are the reason they work so hard.
- The faculty love this work but are exhausted. A great help to them would be to lessen the load of students in the classes. It makes it near impossible to support more students while teaching online. It may lose money in the short term but would pay off by keeping students in the seats.

Dr. Christopher Gullen of the Communication Department shared experiences from full-time faculty.

- Expressions of gratitude were given to the Center for Instructional Technology (CIT) and other faculty members assisting when needed. It is not an ideal scenario for students and faculty and that is difficult.
- On top of normal class preparation, they had three weeks to learn how to retool classes for a virtual environment. They want to give students the most current information and it takes a lot of preparation to do that.
- The semester was darkened by fiscal mismanagement and the board showing disdain and disregard for the faculty by supporting the president and creating a toxic environment.
- Students need more time than usual to learn this way.
- They are encouraged by Dr. Saigo tackling financial issues, closing gaps with groups, improving the University's negative profile, and sharing governance, which has been absent for the last five years.
- They have been dreading the start of the semester and are worried about failing in their jobs.

Dr. Kersting added there is a desire for growth and healing within the community. To do that, it is important to hear the reality of people's experiences. Faculty and staff had to make an on-the-spot shift to online

instruction and it is a Herculean effort to reconstruct an entire class for online teaching. Thirteen percent of students took advantage of the pass/fail policy and eighty percent of those completed their courses successfully. Ninety-three percent of students who stayed with traditional grading completed successfully. There was a ninety-two percent course completion rate and a four percent withdrawal rate, which means the efforts of the faculty and staff made a difference.

Training for Faculty. Dr. Enrique Morales-Diaz, Dean of Faculty, stated there was \$200,000 earmarked for professional development and faculty training and there has been a request that professional development be offered through the January break. CIT is providing 1:1 support for faculty.

A course schedule was adopted over the summer that would meet the needs of the majority of students to include regular on-ground, hybrid, remote synchronous, and asynchronous classes (all online with no specific time). The deans planned for classroom usage with the facilities department, which was a huge effort. The registrar's office allowed an early add/drop period. Department chairs, deans, and faculty advisors stepped up to help students adjust schedules for the fall, which helped to keep enrollment stable, going from 3,771 in June to 3,781 at the end of September. Course offerings now are 18 percent of classes being hybrid, 11 percent in person, 29 percent asynchronous, and 29 percent synchronous online (remote). Spring classes will balance between remote, online, and hybrid.

Student Support Program Adaptations. All student support has gone virtual, with in-person meetings when needed. Urban Ed ran its first virtual summer program. The Banacos Center is offering in-person exams and developing a plan for space on campus for students to go for virtual classes. The TRiO Center received another three-year grant.

Resources: The seat utilization is six percent unused seats for this fall. Last fall was 11.7 percent non-used seats. Our classes are full, but the shift to online learning challenges the faculty more. We need to balance and talk about the cost of reducing course caps so faculty do not get burned out. CARES Act funding was used for academic course support and technology.

COVID-Related Preparation and Student Engagement and Support. Dr. Gloria Lopez, Vice President for Student Affairs, stated that the current budget impacts Student Affairs significantly. Establishing how to function through changes in student engagement has been critically impactful and significant. Student Affairs leaders took on additional roles in helping the University learn about health and safety measures while partnering with public health officials. For the past several months they have accomplished:

- Establishing protocols for students, faculty, and staff to mitigate risks;
- Sharing information with students and champions;
- Partnering with the facilities department; and
- Pivoting to socially-distanced and virtual student engagement and connection to students.
- Trustee Sullivan joined the meeting at 10:31 AM.
- Health, safety and mitigation strategies were shared:
 - The health, safety, and well-being of everyone is a top priority by strict adherence to public health practices.
 - There is continued focus on engaged and comprehensive learning experiences with a need to be flexible and transparent.
 - Strategies continue to be developed through:
 - Divisional working groups finding the best way to operate on campus for the health of students, faculty and staff.
 - Asymptomatic testing five times through the semester will be required for all students with an on-ground presence and the option for testing for all faculty and staff. Work continues with the Westfield Department of Health in contact tracing.

- The emergency response team is doing a great job on quarantine and isolation plans and practicing and planning for contingencies. There is a plan for each scenario that may arise.
- Examples of student support services were shared by all the programs under the umbrella of Student Affairs. Organic student engagement is taking place.
- A joint initiative with a shared calendar between Academic and Student Affairs has been developed with incentive programs to attend events.
- As the faculty mentioned earlier in the meeting, this is hard work. It is not only about each employee taking care of themselves, their families, their staff, and working 100 percent, but also being there to support our students.

Social Media. Dr. Lopez stated that social media has changed the landscape of conduct and campus engagement. Our code of conduct is overdue for periodic review to be inclusive of different types of situations and expectations. The development of a review committee is underway. Social media feedback inspired the reactivation of the safety committee to include students and make improvements where needed. The Counseling Center is establishing an advisory board with outreach to students with an SGA affinity group connection to think about access and inclusion on mental-health issues on campus to drive innovations for the future.

Trustees commented that the work being performed is phenomenal and that faculty and staff need to take care of themselves because the students need them and they are making a difference. It was requested to share at a future meeting the numbers showing how large the class sizes are.

There being no further business, **MOTION** made by Trustee Sullivan, seconded by Trustee Martinez-Alvarez, to adjourn.

There being no discussion, **ROLL CALL VOTE** taken:

Trustee Landrau	Yes	Trustee Neves	Yes
Trustee Martin	Yes	Trustee Sullivan	Yes
Trustee Martinez-Alvarez	Yes	Trustee Williams	Yes

Motion passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 11:04 AM.

Attachments presented at this meeting:

- a) Draft Minutes of June 25, 2020
- b) Course Offering Data/ Information: Instructional Modalities and Enrollments
- c) Professional Development Opportunities for Faculty Summer 2020/Fall 2020
- d) CARES Act 2 Funding
- e) Supporting Students During COVID presentation
- f) Student Support Services