

PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES, OCTOBER 17, 2024

Summary: This report outlines presidential activities and engagements from July 1, 2024, to October 11, 2024.

The first 100 days of President Hodge's tenure were a crucial period in the transition, presenting an opportunity to introduce Dr. Hodge to the community while reintroducing the university as a high-quality educational and cultural resource for the region and beyond, as well as a collaborative civic partner.

This period included significant transitions in university leadership, including the departure of two vice presidents and reorganization of the President's Cabinet. The wider community was welcomed to campus for the State of the University address on Sept. 4, and morale-boosting efforts like \$5 meals in the dining hall were announced for all campus employees.

To further establish a community atmosphere, President Hodge and Dustin Hodge opened their home for a variety of campus events, including seven formal functions in the first three months of the administration.

A renewed push for enrollment was announced, and manifested in a series of "one stop" recruitment events dubbed Falcon Express. These programs created celebratory opportunities for current and prospective students to address barriers to enrollment, at the same time they fostered a team atmosphere wherein employees collaborated across divisional barriers to focus on shared goals.

High-level attention was also paid to the importance of athletics in the life of the university. This included heightened presidential attendance at Falcons games and the creation of a President's Pavilion at Elliot Field to support opportunities to engage with students, alumni, and fans from the community.

This community focus will continue with the approaching Homecoming weekend, during which the annual carnival will, for the first time, be open to the public.

Opportunities to elevate students have also been embraced. The president's office invited students to apply for newly-designed Presidential Ambassador positions. These students will work as valued advisors to the president while advocating for major institutional objectives. Several applicants comprised the university guest table when we sponsored the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce's Congressional Luncheon in October, enabling face-to-face interaction with the local delegation. The president also invited two students to the GlobalMindEd at the United Nations in New York City.

Another effort launched to promote community and communication was the establishment of Presidential Fellows from the ranks of university faculty. There was widespread interest in these advisory positions, indicating an appetite to engage in efforts that will support the university, its mission, and its students. The president has also begun meeting with all academic departments for candid dialogue with faculty colleagues. These sessions have been productive and illuminating.

Community partnerships are also being celebrated and formalized. Informal “handshake” alliances are being codified in writing, with mutual expectations and benefits enumerated for all parties. These discussions, involving major institutional partners including the Fitchburg Public Schools and Fitchburg Access Television, have been positive and productive, with a renewed sense of optimism about the possibilities that will be realized through collaboration.

July 2024 Highlights:

- July 1: Began tenure with a dinner with board member and community leader; participation in Fitchburg’s 4th of July Parade, emphasizing university-community involvement.
- July 5: Conducted interviews with the *Worcester Business Journal* and toured key locations, establishing media presence and industry connections.
- July 9-15: Initiated key partnerships and advisory meetings, including regular discussions with the chair of the Board of Trustees and launching weekly Cabinet meetings.
- July 16-18: Hosted a series of alumni events on Cape Cod, reinforcing alumni relations through receptions, gatherings, and tours.
- July 23-26: Attended the AASCU New President Academy in California, focusing on professional development.
- July 31: Engaged with the Fitchburg Art Museum and participated in the Academic Affairs Retreat, strengthening ties with cultural and academic entities.

August 2024 Highlights:

- August 1-3: Fostered engagement within athletics and student life, including hosting coaches and attending readiness events.
- August 6: Met with community leaders, including Gardner’s mayor and representatives from the Fitchburg Art Museum, promoting local partnerships.
- August 7-31: Conducted various university and community meetings, attended retreats, hosted a maintainer breakfast and dinner (two shifts), attended AFSCME luncheon, and welcomed new international students. The Cabinet retreat at the Colonial Hotel marked a significant step in strategic planning.

September 2024 Highlights:

- September 2-5: Marked the start of the academic year with student and faculty welcome events, including a campus-wide “State of the Union” event, and a Cabinet-led donut “squad” event on the first day of classes.

- September 10-14: Attended various events, including a Devens tour with local legislators, Rock the Block, Center for Italian Culture (CIC) Board Meeting, 7th ROC Police Academy Graduation, and the Hispanic Heritage Month BBQ, showcasing diversity and inclusion efforts.
- September 16-20: Engaged in leadership and team meetings, covering student success, academic teams, and athletic events.
- September 21: Hosted Gold Key Breakfast (Class of 1974)
- September 23-30: Represented Fitchburg State University at events such as the New England Council Annual Dinner in Boston, downtown meeting the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, the MOHAWKS' (former student social club) 100th Anniversary Celebration, Industrial Tech Reunion and dedication of cabinet in honor of the legacy of former professor, Walter Harrod. Events and engagement served to enhance the university's regional profile.

October 2024 Highlights:

- October 1: Celebration of National LGBTQ+ History Month.
- October 1-8: Continued community outreach with North Central Chamber of Commerce engagements and local media appearances.
- October 8: Hosted a Cabinet-led luncheon for McKay educators and staff during a professional development afternoon.
- October 10-11: Attended the GlobalMindED Conference at the United Nations, traveling with students to promote global perspectives and opportunities.

Concluding Remarks: Dr. Hodge's schedule reflects a comprehensive approach to leadership, combining internal university events, alumni outreach, and community partnerships. These efforts align with Fitchburg State University's strategic priorities, enhancing visibility and fostering community ties.

The summary reports, below, represent a selection of Cabinet-level activities since May 2024:

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

Academic Affairs has launched five new BHE-approved programs since 2023, including two new interdisciplinary B.A. degrees in Creative Arts Enterprise and Creative Arts Therapies. We have also launched our new fully online master's degree in Construction Management. Progress on our NECHE Projections, Strategic Plan, and Strategic Plan Goals is ongoing, and updates have been posted on the website.

Personnel Transitions

A number of new colleagues have joined the Division, including Dr. Mojdeh Bayat, Dean of Education, and Dr. Jannette McMenemy, Interim Dean in the School of Business and Technology and the School of Health and Natural Sciences. We have also welcomed four new tenure-track and five visiting (full-time) assistant professors. Our School of Graduate, Online,

and Continuing Education (SGOCE) is now operating with a full staff, including three new replacement hires.

We also continue to honor the memory of two faculty members. Dr. Jeffrey Godin (Exercise and Sports Science) passed away in June after a courageous battle with cancer. Dr. John Crawley (Business Administration) passed away in May. Memories of Dr. Crawley have been compiled in a [special podcast episode](#) of *Perseverantia* to capture his impact on the campus community.

School of Arts and Sciences (A&S)

In September, our seventh Police Academy cohort graduated, with all of the graduates hired prior to the conclusion of their academy. We also have the largest incoming class of police students since Fall 2020. Based on her stellar work with the cadets and on recruitment, we were pleased to appoint Ola Wysocki as our permanent Academy Director.

A&S has already supported many community and campus arts and education events this fall, including an exhibit in the Hammond Hall Art Gallery by Keith Morris Washington (“*Within Our Gates: Site and Memory in the American Landscape*”) and an exhibit (“*Second Nature*”) in the Sanders Gallery by alumnus Atom Moore ‘05.

School of Business & Technology (B&T)

Faculty from Engineering Technology (ENGT), Human Services, and other STEM departments are collaborating on a \$1 million S-STEM grant to provide scholarships, mentorship, and career development for talented STEM students with demonstrated financial need. The first cohort of STEM Scholars will enter Fitchburg State in Fall 2025. Through a \$300,000 award from the Massachusetts Capital Skills Grant Program, ENGT faculty are working to enhance our robotics and advanced manufacturing training.

School of Education (SOE)

This fall the SOE welcomed the first cohort of paraprofessionals, who are supported by a three-year, \$30,000 grant from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). In addition, the SOE hosted a regional superintendents’ breakfast, a regular event to strengthen our partnership with the K-12 community.

The SOE is also taking the lead on the implementation of our campus Massachusetts Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative program (MAICEI). The MAICEI program creates opportunities for individuals between the ages of 18 and 21 with intellectual disabilities. This fall we welcomed four MAICEI students to campus. These students are eligible for services through their home school district in partnership with Fitchburg State through signed MOUs.

Dr. Nancy Murray is currently working on establishing a campus Reading Clinic. The clinic will provide personalized and accessible reading support to individuals and will also provide a venue for undergraduate and graduate students to observe evidence-based instruction.

School of Health & Natural Sciences (HNS)

HNS faculty finalized a \$50,000 subcontract on an EPA grant with the Nashua River Watershed Association and NewVue Communities. This project includes undergraduate student interns working to mitigate the impacts of climate change. The Nursing Department received a \$50,000 grant from the Fairlawn Foundation Fund to purchase life-like manikins for practicing geriatric and end-of-life care. An articulation agreement has been finalized with Mount Wachusett Community College for transfer from their Environmental Conservation program to our degree in Environmental and Earth Science.

School of Graduate Online and Continuing Education (SGOCE)

Admissions and enrollment numbers are strong and expected to be on-track in AY24-25. This summer, applicants submitting “Intent to Enroll” confirmations dipped 5% across all programs; however, removing Risepoint and international students from the total, “Intent to Enroll” numbers grew by 13% between summer 2023 and summer 2024. We expect to see an overall increase in the “Intent to Enrolls” moving forward.

The SGOCE team has worked with Student Billing to make an important update to the student billing process for non-Risepoint students. The new process (effective Fall 2025) will create a billing due-date rather than requiring payment within 24 hours of registration. These changes were made based on research of student perceptions of billing, a review of student drops for non-payment, student retention, and best practices at other institutions. This project has received national recognition, prompting research on the link between student billing and student retention through a partnership with Touchnet Billing Services.

Through the Center for Professional Studies (CPS), the university received Wilson Language Training Accredited Partner status, a distinction that opens the university’s reading specialist and dyslexia graduate programs to increased national visibility.

Library

As part of the library’s important role in supporting the curriculum, more than 100 research classes will be taught by librarians this fall. In addition, the librarians conducted library orientation tours for all 28 First Year Experience sections this fall. Study hall for the football team also continues this year.

The library has hosted two Banned Book Week programs open to the university and the community. In collaboration with faculty from numerous departments, the library is currently co-

hosting a series on “Engaging Students in the Voting Process: Voter Education & Drive.” Programs include a presidential debate watch party, panel and lightning talks about the power of the vote, voter registration drives and Rock the Vote, an event with live music that promotes the importance of voting.

Over the summer, the library website was successfully migrated to Fitchburg State’s main university website and a new interlibrary loan system was implemented.

Student Success

In AY24, Career Services and Advising (CSA) assisted 1,398 students and alumni, and 5,132 students received support through the Academic Coaching and Tutoring (ACT) center. CSA is also coordinating \$150,000 anonymously donated internship funding, creating opportunities for students to gain experience in their field of study. Additionally, through CSA’s promotion of the First Destination Survey, 85% of alumni reported working or continuing their education, with a 66% response rate. Over the summer, ACT again facilitated our annual Summer Bridge program, a free 5-week academic program for conditionally-admitted students.

As part of a renewed focus on the role of Academic Affairs in orientation, Student Success partnered with the Registrar’s Office and department chairs to redesign the scheduling practice for incoming first-year students. Previously, the Registrar pre-registered all incoming students prior to summer orientation. This year, students used our course-scheduling software (College Scheduler) to register themselves, in consultation with department chairs, CSA, and the Registrar. This redesigned process improved student engagement by providing more advising time and increasing student agency.

Office of International Education

Academic Affairs has advanced conversations with department chairs about teaching and research abroad, welcomed 194 new international graduate and undergraduate students to our campus, sent 57 students overseas to study in our spring/summer 2024 programs (Croatia, Verona, Greece), and 5 students to semester- and full-year abroad programs with other agencies.

Strategic Initiatives

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion

Academic Affairs provided engaging and interactive programming at our [September 2024 Development Day](#) with guest facilitator Dr. Liya Escalera, Harvard School of Education. Dr. Escalera provided an asset-based approach to teaching and advising that reflects the backgrounds and experiences of underrepresented students in higher education.

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP)

With no additional financial resources, the ORSP was formed in August to oversee state, federal, and research-based grants. The office creates a strategic infrastructure that will support faculty research, prepare the campus for its eventual federal designation as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), and coordinate resources related to research and sponsored projects.

Open Educational Resources (OER)

The library continues to lead the university's efforts to expand OER. Fitchburg State is one of six Massachusetts institutions participating in the Remixing Open Textbooks through an Equity Lens (ROTEL) grant, which provides stipends for faculty to remix and/or develop accessible, intentionally inclusive open textbooks and other OER that reflect students' local and lived experiences. To date, Fitchburg State authors have published [seven OER textbooks](#).

Critical AI Literacy

Building on the **Development Day** program in [January 2024](#), when Dr. Carie Cardamone of Tufts University provided a workshop on "Generative AI in Higher Education," the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) has offered multiple workshops and Summer Institutes to explore generative AI and its impact on pedagogy, academic integrity, and academic innovation. In addition to a resource page on the CTL website, one outcome of the Summer Institute was the creation of an [AI libguide](#).

ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

For the purpose of this update, EM includes the Office of Admissions, the Office of Student Financial Aid Services, the Office of Marketing and Integrated Communications, and Print Services.

Office of Admissions

Staffing

- The Office of Admissions has encountered a serious setback with the unanticipated, and prolonged, medical leave for a senior administrator. This role, as lead of office operations and lead to our CRM platform, has proven problematic. Additional resources (staff positions) will be sought to ensure our ability to both ensure proper support to ongoing efforts, but also not be restricted from completing new and scheduled projects.

- The office also had one retirement, two resignations (one to another role on campus, and a second leaving the institution). Subsequent internal moves have left the team of 12 with three vacancies at a critical time as we launch fall recruitment efforts. Much effort has been made to ‘cover’ and therefore some efforts have been delayed.

Data

Comparative data for fall 23 vs fall 24 (*reflective of enrollment deposit process*)

- Freshman; 610 (f23) vs 541 (f24) = -12% or -69 students
- Transfer; 163 (f23) vs 201 (f24) = 19% or +38 students
- Returning; 1542 (f23) vs 1513 = -3% or -29 students
- Overall; 2327 (f23) vs 2229 (f24) = -4% or -98 students

Events

- *College Search Kick-off & BBQ*; Friday, Aug. 2; 105 guests (52 students)
- Three (3) successful *Falcon Express* events; Aug. 3, 6, 14; 64 total attendees
- *First Look Friday*; Friday, Aug. 9; 156 student reservations (80% attendance rate!)
- Saturday Information Session (SIS); Saturday, Sept. 21; 37 student reservations
- Fall travel is planned for approximately 425 individual events (school visits, college nights & fairs, transfer visits at community colleges, etc.)
- Upcoming events
 - Oct. 5 & 26; Fall Open House Events (new partnership with Hollis Hills Orchard)
 - Twilight Tours (campus visits offered after 5 p.m. weekdays)

Office of Student Financial Aid Services

***Announced by DOE, FAFSA will be released for student applicants to access by Dec. 1 Several months earlier than last cycle, but still two months later than previous years. Professional associations still predict significant implementation issues as seen last cycle with the new simplified FAFSA. ***

Staffing

- Submitted proposals for additional staff resources with the plan to eventually assumed roles for SAP appeals process (currently led by Student Affairs) and scholarships (currently led by Advancement)
- In addition, current MAFSA data indicates that for a student population our size and the number of resources that are administered by this office, appropriate staffing levels would be 7-8 professional staff; we currently operate with 4

Data

- The U.S. Department of Education (DOE) has received a submission of the Fiscal Operations Report for 2023-2024 and Application to Participate for 2025-2026 (FISAP) for the Campus-Based programs.

- Dollars that flow through Financial Aid; \$43 million annually or approximately 80% of inbound university dollars. (87% of undergraduate revenue)
- Release of Mass Grant and Mass Grant Plus funds allocations, yet all institutions are questioning guideline changes yet to be announced prior to planned institutional disbursement
- Shift in program application of NERP (New England Regional Program); previously was individual program based (i.e., Game Design for students from New Hampshire), but our new implementation would make all New England residents eligible for any program.

Office of Marketing & Integrated Communications

Staffing

- Four (4) full time staff; added the two (2) graphic design staff from Print Services
- Proposed the expansion of an additional staff line to assist with the coordination of both UG marketing efforts as well as provide support to the social/new media efforts (currently managing 15+ different accounts)

Data

- [Social Media Analytics](#)
- SmugMug Gallery with over 30k images; retired and archived old server of galleries
- Assisted with launch of new/updated library web presence

Events

- Conducted two (2) in-person meetings with university colleagues for Social Media Advisory Board
- Planned upcoming Marketing & Branding seminars for campus community in October; opportunity to reinforce branding guidelines with institutional colleagues

Print Services

Staffing

- Four (4) staff; plus, two (2) graphic designers realigned with Marketing
- Two (2) staff have had extended medical leave instances during the summer and fall of 2024; this caused some delays in operations.

Data

- Purchase of new large volume printer (Konica/Minolta); essential for ongoing services

Veterans Services

New priority on serving this population. Collaboration between FSUPD and EM to review, evaluate, and make proposals regarding staffing, services offered and programmatic offerings.

FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

Most prominent update to finance and administrative operations since May was the departure of the VPFA and AVP (VPFA effective August 5 and AVP, September 13). Interim CFO Helen Ouellette (contracted by The Registry) assumed leadership of the Finance and Administration Aug. 15, 2024. Carin Bullis, Senior Director of University Budgets, assumed an interim role as Acting Senior Director of University Finance and Budgeting; Associate Vice President of Capital Planning and Maintenance JD Head, assumed an interim role as Associate Vice President of Capital Planning and Maintenance and University Operations. University finance teams support both the Foundation and the Supporting Organization fiscal management and investment operations.

Cash balances are on par compared to this time last year, but this is a very fluid time of year, with tuition and housing revenue for fall term still coming in. Our short-term investment account is running \$700K ahead of this time last year. Total investments are up \$4.3M over same time last year, and \$2M since June 2024. Because we invest funds that belong to the public, Fitchburg State is a cautious investor. Our portfolio is between risk averse and risk cautious, so that although it does fluctuate with markets, the swings are not as drastic as a personal or corporate portfolio might be.

The FY24 university preliminary audit began in late June, with the full audit beginning Sept. 9; auditors were on campus the weeks of Sept. 9 and 16, and did not report finding any irregularities. The Foundation and Supporting Org audits began in August and are also ongoing.

Fall enrollment has surpassed budget by 57 FFTE, producing about \$314,000 additional revenue. Since the last Board meeting, Student Accounts has processed \$820,000 in additional MA state funding disbursements, providing refunds as required. The additional funds included MA in Demand Scholarships, MA Grants Plus, and MA Grants Plus Expansion.

Our current year budget remains incomplete, with the State Comptroller still negotiating the fringe benefit rates the universities will pay—you will note that the Board financial report does not include fringe costs at this time.

In collaboration with the State Universities Council of Presidents, Fitchburg State is developing an RFP for bookstore management. We have selected a hybrid model, with online course materials and an on-the-ground campus store.

Across the street our facilities units had their usual busy summer. The CPM team completed annual maintenance and cleaning, while the trades workers handled special projects and summer work orders. The building at 185 North St. was remodeled for graduate student housing, Mara 6

and 7 were reopened as single occupancy suites, and a significant steam line leak behind the Dupont building was addressed. In addition, the team remodeled the President's House and readied it for the new president, and they closed out the Sanders lower-level office addition and the Holmes roof capital projects.

STUDENT AFFAIRS

The Division of Student Affairs has been focused on:

- Ensuring that the transition of new and returning students positions them for success and creates a sense of belonging.
- Readying robust services and opportunities.
- Refining some of our processes and approaches that support our most vulnerable students.

Student Affairs departments use a high touch method that has boosted retention in the residence halls, encouraged participation in both summer and fall orientation, and helped students work through barriers to be able to remain and progress at Fitchburg State in and out of the classroom. The numbers of students engaging with student affairs departments already this semester is strong, in many cases surpassing previous years' engagement.

Some specific examples of these efforts include, but are not limited to:

Refining processes that support our most vulnerable students.

- Just finished year 2 of a 4-year process in which we collaborate with the JED Foundation to review our approach to student mental health and empower us with a framework and customized support to enhance student well-being and prevent substance use issues and suicide. We have learned that generally, our approaches and practices are on target, and there are a few areas we are exploring further. Accomplishments, thus far, of our JED subcommittees include:
 - A strengthened Leave of Absence Policy and clearer language about the policy in the Student Handbook, as well as updated practices regarding students' return from a leave.
 - A campus-wide environmental scan to identify and address potential areas of safety risk to students.
 - Tabletop exercises (i.e., suicide attempt, death of a student) to evaluate our capacity and identify gaps. These exercises were conducted with numerous stakeholders, including University Police, university administrators, and external evaluators.
 - A web page built and ready for launch that discusses the work of the JED Task Force and provides "real time" updates of progress made.

- The CARE Team engaged in a partnership with the National Association of Behavioral Intervention and Threat Assessment (NABITA). Significant progress has been made towards operationalizing the recommendations including:
 - Trained membership on NABITA's standards, conducting a violence risk assessment interview (SIVRA-35), and use of the objective Risk Rubric tool.
 - Created both a CARE Team Manual and Case Management Process Manual.
 - Revised the membership of the CARE Team.
 - Implemented operational changes within the system Maxient for better recordkeeping of the work of CARE Team on an individual case basis.
 - Strategically marketed the work of the work of the team with the goal of increasing referrals.

Students are engaging significantly with our opportunities and services.

- Our CARE Team and student conduct activity are up for the academic year:
 - 20% increase in CARE referrals compared to September 2023, and our current CARE case number (64) represents 22% of the total for Academic Year 2023-24
 - 13% increase in student conduct cases compared to September 2023
- 85 first year students have registered with Disability Services; no comparison is available because of a change in tracking and documentation and change in departmental leadership
- 124 students have submitted onboarding forms for care in Counseling Services, on par with September 2023.
- Student organizations have been active, including more than 71 events/meetings hosted by student organizations, 92 club leaders attending club training day, and the largest Rock the Block in history
- An increase in commuter attendance in Fall Orientation
- We held our second annual First Look Friday, which gives new students the opportunity to see their actual room in Russell Towers and connect with staff to answer questions and create a sense of belonging. It was a success in terms of participation as well as feedback - 156 registered to attend in 2024, compared to 147 in 2023.
- Switching the bedrooms in Mara Village to premium singles with a full size bed has proved popular with students, increasing occupancy in that living area by 40.4% compared to Fall 2023. Overall occupancy is at 59.9% of the design occupancy (82% Fitchburg State occupancy). We continue to strengthen the number of returning students who live in the residence halls. We added graduate student housing for the first time in Fall 2024.
- The identity-based student organizations are busy planning and implementing identity months that launch at the beginning of the academic year, as well as providing a sense of belonging and targeted support for underrepresented students.

Leveraging technology to assist students for efficiency and visibility.

- Disability Services launched a new software program, Accommodate, to facilitate communication between students and faculty members as well as between students and the office staff; already 388 students have engaged with the platform and the response has been quite positive
- All student club finances have been moved to Falconnect (our student engagement platform), allowing student leaders to view/request funds and submit purchase requests in one location
- We have also added residence hall areas to Falconnect to make it easier to promote events, as well as track and assess them

Federally funded programs management.

- Our three TRIO programs are admitting their final students to their caseloads and planning robust and engaging curricula and opportunities for the year. Note that 100% of Upward Bound Math and Science Class of 2024 students (who are high schoolers) applied and were accepted to Fitchburg State University.

HUMAN RESOURCES

The Human Resources and Payroll Services team has worked diligently to prepare for the fall semester since the last board meeting in May. The Vice President of Human Resources & Payroll Services worked with senior staff to welcome our new President, Dr. Donna Hodge.

The Human Resources/Payroll Services team reviewed current processes, planned development for Professional Development and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging programming, recruitment activities, onboarding/offboarding staff and faculty as well as a myriad of additional tasks to support our campus partners.

The Director of Payroll Services worked with Financial Services/Budgeting to close out FY 24; she addressed the final adjustments to labor expenses at the end of the FY to ensure that the state appropriations and grants are expended for the fiscal year close. The Payroll Services team is also responsible for inputting the labor rules for each FY to support Budgeting. Payroll also worked with Financial Aid to make sure that all federal work study expenses were spent to meet the federal regulations.

Payroll has supported the hiring of all student employees, non-benefited part time employees and benefited hires this fall in collaboration with hiring managers and the HR team. The team has hired/onboarded approximately 73 part time day adjunct faculty, 168 graduate adjuncts, 194 non-benefited part time employees, 384 Trust Fund Students and 149 Federal Work Study Students.

The Human Resources and Payroll Services team is responsible for addressing all immigration sponsorship matters for employees who are seeking permanent residency. This includes getting H1B status for new faculty and staff joining the university, seeking permanent residency as a sponsoring employer which requires the university to assess the current employment market per legal requirements of USCIS (Immigration Services) and Department of Labor. As of September 30, the university has eight faculty and staff that are in the process for Visas and or green cards.

Title IX

The Director of Title IX and EO has been working on the new regulations related to Title IX and the implementation of these new regulations. On April 19, the U.S. Department of Education released its Title IX Final Rule specifying how recipients of federal financial assistance must stop, prevent, and remedy sex discrimination and sex-based harassment in all education and employment activities. These regulations have clarified the protected class to include sexual orientation, gender identity and expression. Currently 26 states are facing injunctions blocking the new regulations from taking effect. Massachusetts is not one of these states and therefore, the regulations have been effective since Aug. 1. Fitchburg State University was an integral part of a team of practitioners from the state universities that worked to redesign the shared non-discrimination policy and procedures, now contained within the Equal Opportunity, Non-Discrimination, and Title IX Plan ([EO Plan](#)). This Plan is designed and implemented in alignment with the requirements of state and federal laws, inclusive of Title IX and additional civil rights acts.

In July, the Office of Civil Rights provided guidance and reminded institutions across the country about our obligations under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Title VI provides that no person may be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or otherwise be subjected to discrimination on the ground of race, color, or national origin under any program or activity that receives federal financial assistance. Expectations have been emphasized regarding a campus' response to allegations of harassment, specifically reports of antisemitism and anti-Palestinian conduct. In light of these and recent high-profile events, we are paying close attention to the campus climate and are prepared to take prompt and effective steps to address concerns of bias, harassment, or hostile environment. We have improved the level of transparency about how to make a report and have broadly shared the key provisions and information about prohibited conduct and the related grievance procedures.

Prevention and response efforts related to sex-based misconduct included increased options for confidential reporting and resources, including an interpersonal violence specialist/advocate and appointed campus-based Confidential Resource Provider. All employees and students have received notice of their obligations and a link with access to mandatory training. Additionally, the Director of Title IX and Equal Opportunity has conducted 13 in-person presentations for the campus community since August. The list of identified Campus Security Authorities (CSAs) has

increased to over 400 (from 143). CSAs have the duty to report crimes, including sex offenses, to University Police. In October, CSAs will be informed of their responsibilities, including training, and this designation will be noted in their job descriptions.

Payroll

The Director of Payroll, Stephanie LeBlanc, is a member of the Commonwealth BEST Project sponsored by Matthew Gorzkowicz, Secretary for the Executive Office for Administration and Finance; Jason Snyder, Secretary for the Executive Office of Technology Services and Security; and William McNamara, Comptroller of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The BEST (Business Enterprise Systems Transformation) program is a multi-year initiative that will replace the Massachusetts Management Accounting & Reporting System (MMARS) and the Human Resources/Compensation Management System (HR/CMS). The Commonwealth signed an agreement with CGI - Advantage 4.0, a cloud-based application to replace MMARS and LCM.

LeBlanc is currently a subject matter expert assigned to the Labor Cost Distribution and Payroll Accounting Track, working on replacing the LCM portion of MMARS. We are using Agile project methodology that includes sprint workshops and user stories. Its approach involves dividing the project into increments (or sprints) and emphasizes continuous improvement of system functionality. Here are the sprints that she is actively involved in:

Sprint 0: User stories

Sprint 1: LCD profiles, LCD Employee, position

Sprint 2: Payroll Expense Allocation

Sprint 3: Payroll Expense Allocation / Financial Transactions

Sprint 4: Financial Transactions / Postings

Sprint 5: Postings and Error Corrections / Corrections and Adjustments

Sprint 6: Corrections and Adjustments / Reconciliation

Later this year, the Commonwealth will be choosing a new service provider to replace HR/CMS and it would be very beneficial for her to have the opportunity again to be a subject matter expert so the voice of higher education is heard throughout the implementation process.

Collective Bargaining Negotiations

The APA and AFSCME negotiations have been ongoing. Director of Human Resources Kim Page served as a member of the AFSCME negotiating team and also serves on the statewide AFSCME state labor relation committee. As of September, APA negotiations continue; AFSCME negotiations have concluded.

INSTITUTIONAL ADVANCEMENT

Advancement office holds a critical role in supplementing traditional funding sources through private philanthropy. By targeted, diverse, and thoughtful fundraising, financial support is raised from a built-in constituency of grateful alumni, community businesses, corporate sponsors, government and private foundation grants, and a myriad of other sources.

During the presidential search and transition, we worked to keep our constituents engaged, confident and optimistic in the future of their alma mater. Once the new president began her service, we assisted with the on-boarding process of making key donor introductions.

Fitchburg State University's Division of Institutional Advancement includes three distinct but complementary units:

- The **Alumni and Family Relations** unit focuses on alumni and family engagement, special events, communications, and brand identity;
- The **Annual Fund and Donor Engagement** unit focuses on the donor continuum of prospective donor research, identification, cultivation, solicitation, stewardship, gift acknowledgement, and donor database integrity;
- The **Corporate, Foundations and Government Grant Relations unit (the Grant Center)**, which recently switched over to Academic Affairs, focuses on identifying funding opportunities, aligning academic and program subject matter experts to develop proposals that impact strategic priorities;

Overseen by the Vice President for Institutional Advancement, the team of six employees accomplishes critical work that supports every aspect of Fitchburg State's mission.

The division concentrates its efforts on increasing private and public resources to the university through the Fitchburg State University Foundation and promoting the Fitchburg State brand of academic excellence through consistent communications, marketing, special events, private and public grant partnerships, and public relations. Philanthropy gives our alumni, as well as friends of the university, a way to deepen their engagement and financial commitments for the mission and future of Fitchburg State. Our office is pleased to share that we welcomed 455 new Falcon donors into our philanthropic family in FY24.

The Commonwealth Endowment Incentive Match program was renewed by the Massachusetts Legislature and the Fitchburg State Foundation leveraged over \$500,000 before the end of the fiscal year. The program incentivizes private donations to public universities and colleges by matching \$1 for every \$2 raised through private fundraising.

New Funds Endowed in Fiscal Year 2024: [4] Men's Soccer, Marieb Endowment, Robert S. Stowe Jr., Lapidus Scholarship.

Pending New Endowments: [2] Football, Alumni Harrod Scholarship.

The Incentive Match program is pending allocation for this current year with the same goals as previous year.

Alumni events highlight:

The Alumni Office hosted or supported 21 alumni touch points, which resulted in over 825 individual alumni personal contacts. These ranged from individual meetings, to athletic reunions, class reunions, Homecoming events, regional meet-ups, alumni board and committee meetings.

Event highlights from April to September below:

- **April Communications Media** - nearly 170 alumni came back to campus for a reunion held in the department
- **May Commencements** - 35 alumni attended to take part in graduation ceremonies.
- **Golf Tournaments** - 68 alumni participated in various golf tournaments to support our athletic teams.
- **Falcons on Cape Cod** event brought almost 90 alumni and their guests together in celebration of Falcon pride and excitement over meeting the new president.
- **Retired Educators Luncheon** - 86 alumni gathered at a luncheon that had not happened in five years.
- **Alumni Athletic Reunions** - 74 alumni came back to campus this summer to play against the current teams' roster.
- **Gold Key Breakfast:** 60 alumni came together to celebrate the newly initiated class of 1974 into the Gold Key Society.
- **50th reunion:** 30 alumni caught up during a lunch for the class of 1974.
- **MOHAWK reunion:** 92 alumni registered to attend the 100th anniversary of the MOHAWK club.
- **Harrod Antique Tools:** alumni gathering to see the new display for Harrod tools in the old industrial arts building that is now the Anthony building.

ATHLETICS AND RECREATIONAL SERVICES

Athletics continues to make a positive impact on the overall enrollment of the university. Our student-athlete count for the Fall 2024 semester is 50 students higher than the Fall 2023 (377 compared to 327). The largest roster increases were seen in football, women's cross country and baseball but all of our sports contributed to the increase.

The academic performance of our student-athletes continues to be a great source of pride for the department as athletes finished the 2023-2024 academic year with a GPA of 3.04. The academic commitment was recognized by the MASCAC as 168 student-athletes earned all-academic standing for achieving at least a GPA of 3.20 or higher.

While there is not a lot of athletic activity in between the spring and fall semesters, one student-athlete excelled for the green and gold during this time. Liam Bourassa, a junior track and field student-athlete from Shirley, earned NCAA Division III All-American honors at the national championships in late May. Bourassa, who competes in javelin, finished 10th in the country at the national meet which resulted in his second straight season of all-American status. Bourassa entered the national championship as the 2nd ranked javelin thrower in the country.

The fall athletic seasons are underway with excellent team and individual accomplishments. Football secured a victory in their first game of the season with a 12-0 win over Dean College. Men's soccer has three wins in the early going with victories over Elms, Dean and Curry College. Women's Soccer and Field Hockey both opened their MASCAC conference seasons with victories over Salem State and Framingham State, respectively.

Improving our student-athlete's health and well-being continues to be a major focus of the department. Our athletic training staff implemented a new tool this preseason to assist in the monitoring of concussions. All student-athletes were given tests using a new concussion platform which uses technology to better assess the baseline balance of an athlete which can be compared to future tests when a head injury is suspected. This tool, when combined with other monitoring practices, provides our athletic trainers with additional knowledge to ensure athletes are diagnosed and properly assessed before returning to practice and competition.

Our athletic conference, the MASCAC, launched a new initiative that provides free access to ZAMA Health for all student-athletes across the league including Fitchburg State. The app is designed specifically for college athletes and offers self-guided modules to maximize performance goals and improve mental health. The app also provides athletes with direct contact information to the offices and services on the Fitchburg State campus that can assist them with any challenges they are facing while balancing being both a student and an athlete.

The athletic department welcomed three new staff members to begin the fall seasons. Hope Tula has joined the staff as an assistant athletic trainer. Tula joins the Falcons staff after a two-year stint at Clark University. There are a number of challenges with staffing athletic trainers across all levels of collegiate athletics and we were excited to have someone with Tula's experience joining the team.

Joe Galvin has been named the new head baseball coach. Galvin has been a member of the Fitchburg State baseball coaching staff for the previous three seasons in which he has played an instrumental role in recruiting. In addition to his time at Fitchburg State, Galvin previously served as an assistant coach with the Shrewsbury American Legion and as an instructor for 3Step Sports baseball. Galvin played collegiately at UMass Dartmouth.

Jim Ray takes over as Head Women's Volleyball Coach after serving as assistant coach for the previous three seasons. Ray's past experience includes serving as the head men's and women's volleyball coach at Lesley University. Volleyball is the most recent addition to our varsity sport offerings and continues to develop as a program and will benefit from Ray's previous coaching experience as we move forward.

Recreation Services continues to provide a plethora of fitness opportunities for our student population. This academic year there is a focus on increasing in-person group exercise classes with yoga, Zumba and spin all being offered. The Recreation Center over the last academic year (September 2023 to May 2024) saw 32,479 total users. This data does not include student participation in varsity athletics or academic class attendance and reflects an increase of 49% over the previous year (21,745 users).

CAMPUS SAFETY/UNIVERSITY POLICE DEPARTMENT

The University Police Department consists of twenty-six (26) full-time employees and one (1) part-time employee. We have twenty-two (22) sworn police officers, who are certified through the Massachusetts Police Officer Standards and Training Commission (POST). In addition, we employ five (5) full-time civilian employees; four (4) communications personnel and one (1) administrative assistant.

We recently had three officers graduate from Municipal Police Training Committee (MPTC) academies (in May and July), and hired two new front-line supervisors (sergeants) in May. As a result, we are happy to report that all of our UPD positions are currently filled.

We are fortunate to be in this position, as many agencies are still struggling to fill their vacancies as we have observed an increase in retirements and fewer people who are interested in careers in law enforcement.

As part of a concerted effort, we worked with Human Resources and senior leadership to implement recruitment and retention strategies that we forecasted to be impactful. We were the first in the state system to review the compensation structure for our officers and also the first to implement a non-traditional schedule, with the primary focus on employee wellness.

On-going Efforts & Accomplishments

Clery Compliance / Annual Security Report: the University Police Department worked collaboratively with the Director of Title IX, and other campus stakeholders, to draft and publish the university's Annual Security Report (ASR). This report also reflects the new Title IX

regulations that took effect on Aug. 14. The 2024 ASR was shared with the university community on Friday, Sept. 27.

Emergency Management Team

The Emergency Management Team (EMT) has convened twice since the end of the spring semester. We have focused our work on the following areas in recent months:

We have initiated a review of our existing Emergency Support Functions (ESFs) and identified additional ESFs that we may wish to create.

The team has completed two exercises; a full system test of our mass notification system, RAVE Alert, on Sept. 12 and 19.

With regards to fire safety, we collaborated with other internal and external stakeholders to offer “After the Fire” during new and transfer student orientation. “After the Fire” is an educational/awareness program based on a Jan. 19, 2000, incident at Seton Hall University when a fire set by arsonists raced through a freshman dorm, killing three students and injuring 58 others.

We also completed our emergency evacuation drills from all campus buildings, on Oct. 9.

The Emergency Management Team has identified several goals for the 2024-25 academic year:

1. Execute an MOU between the university and the City of Fitchburg Emergency Management Agency.
2. Review and update our Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP), which was last revised in April of 2019.
3. Review and update our Emergency Support Functions (ESFs).
4. Draft an institutional Continuity of Operation Plan (COOP).

Community Engagement & Personal Safety Course Offerings

Since May, our department has engaged in several efforts meant to develop relationships with students and campus partners.

During the summer months, we met with our orientation leaders in an informal setting. This type of environment created the ability for open discussion, to learn about one another's roles on campus, and created the space for students to ask questions about our role on campus. The intent

was to share information that may help them to answer questions that may arise during orientation.

We offered and delivered several iterations of our “Campus Safety Overview” presentation. Over the course of seven sessions, we reached approximately 510 people (to include new/transfer students during orientation).

Additionally, our community CPR/AED/First Aid offerings continued through the summer. We provided training for 49 people. We have two more classes scheduled for later this fall.

Our de-escalation training was provided to 30 students/staff from Housing and Residential Services and our Civilian Response to Active Shooter Events (CRASE) training was also delivered to 45 people.

Representatives from the University Police Department also participated in the annual 4th of July Parade with our city partners.

Sergeant Sumner participated in the Upward Bound Math and Science career night, which presented an opportunity for the students to ask questions about a career in law enforcement.

Other events we participated in include; Rock the Block event and our annual Housing Open House at the station.

The chief and each of the lieutenants participated in the One Stop Falcon (“Falcon Express”) events this year. New for the institution, these events were designed to provide a forum where students could meet with university representatives to help resolve issues that may be a barrier to a successful academic year.

Our departmental liaison officers have had conversations with the Gay Straight Alliance (GSA), the Veterans Outreach Center, and Housing and Residential Services regarding how we can work together for future events.

We have more events planned in the coming days and months. One of which is an event where we partner with the Vanessa Marcotte Foundation and the District Attorney’s office to provide self-defense training. We also participated in the national “Coffee with a Cop Day” on Wednesday, October 2nd.

Professional Development and Training

The department prides itself on staying up to date on changes in the policing profession, and ensuring that members of the department receive the necessary tools and resources to serve the campus community. In the past five months, members of the department have participated in numerous trainings, both in person and virtually, as well as in collaboration with other campus departments. In addition, our dedicated certified instructors in particular content areas, had the opportunity to provide training from their areas of expertise (First Responder, CPR/AED/First Aid, Firearms and Active Shooter Response).

Each sworn member of the department completed mandatory in-service training, as prescribed by the Massachusetts Police Training Committee (MPTC). These blocks of training needed to be completed by June 30. Those topics included: Legal Updates, Reports and Testimony, Defensive Tactics, Officer Wellness, OUI (Operating Under the Influence), Rules of the Road, First Aid, CPR, and firearms training & qualification.

The department also provided officers additional training as part of our “in-house” in-service training, which included Active Shooter Response and Behavioral Observation Recognition Training (a sort of “See Something, Say Something” program that focuses on behaviors, not appearance).

In August, we held our first joint training with Housing and Residential Services, the Dean of Students Office and Counseling Services. The intent was to have HRS and UPD employees further develop their competencies when responding to students experiencing a mental health crisis.

These concepts were then furthered by reviewing the newly revamped CARE Team process. The new process included the implementation of industry best practices, in consultation with the National Association of Behavioral Intervention and Threat Assessment (NABITA).

The aforementioned training was reinforced at the department level with several members of the University Police Department attending the Department of Mental Health’s (DMH) law enforcement conference (which Fitchburg State Hosts), or Crisis Intervention Training provided by a state vendor (Open Sky Community Services).

This past May, we hired two new front-line supervisors (sergeants). As a result, we invested in their professional development and sent them to two separate supervisory training programs, including one hosted by the Massachusetts Police Training Committee and the other from Municipal Police Institute.

The two new sergeants also received Clery Act Training from the Clery Center, to increase their knowledge of the federal requirements placed on institutions of higher education and how they intersect with their role as supervisors.

Although much of this summer training focused on response to mental health, we continue to train on other crisis-related topics such as Civil Disorder and Political Protests, Active Assailant Integrated Response (AAIR), Use of Force, and De-escalation. Lastly, we were able to send two officers to Police Mountain Bike Training (PMBT), which allows us to increase our visibility and accessibility on campus.

COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

This has been a busy quarter in communications and public affairs with a great deal of internal and external interest surrounding the presidential transition. The new chapter in the institution's history has provided a valuable opportunity to reintroduce Fitchburg State to audiences near and far.

We disseminated press releases about the presidential search, from the arrival of finalists to campus and ultimately the selection of Dr. Hodge. The [news](#) about the appointment drew widespread media interest, as did the ultimate [confirmation](#) by the state Board of Higher Education.

Dr. Hodge's arrival on campus was also met with significant attention, including interviews with local and [regional](#) publications. This included the inaugural State of the University address on Sept. 4, which was [streamed](#) by FATV and highlighted in [regional media](#) outlets.

This office also coordinated media coverage for other events of local interest, including the graduation ceremony for the 7th Recruit Officer Course in September, which was also [streamed](#) online. Program elements including remarks were prepared for this event through this office.

Press releases created during this period are [posted](#) on the university website, including previews of major university events like [Hispanic Heritage Month](#), the university's observance of [Constitution Day](#), [LGBTQ+ History Month](#), the university's [rankings](#) in U.S. News and World Report, and programs organized for national [Banned Books Week](#).

This office also continues to curate the digital [Fitchburg State Magazine](#). In this period, articles were posted with an introduction to the [vision](#) of President Hodge, as well as a feature looking back at the tenure of [President Lapidus](#). The magazine also included a wrap-up of the first [State of the University](#) address that also included links for readers to see the program. There is also a feature on accomplished alumnus [Francis Legros](#) and additional articles are in development.

As a member of the president's cabinet, this office advises on a number of operational areas and assists in communicating updates to the Board of Trustees as well as campus constituencies.

Beyond those functions, this office is a key member of the university's emergency management team. Working with offices including University Police and Technology, the office supports the updating and testing of our emergency response plans and systems, including a comprehensive test this fall that revealed a glitch in our mass notification software. The issue has since been resolved.

As the university's records access officer, this office has processed more than 40 public records requests this calendar year, more than 20 of which were submitted since the board's last meeting. All of these involve coordinating the collection of documents from other campus offices, including detailed procurement data.

This office also coordinates the dissemination of campus messages from several official mailboxes, including the President's Office, Campus Communications, and Fitchburg State News. These accounts are employed to call attention to certain notices, from major campus events to updates on institutional reorganization.

In close collaboration with the Marketing and Integrated Communications team, this office has supported the development and deployment of social media and other content, including the president's expanded social media presence, including Presidential accounts on Facebook, Instagram, and Threads. President Hodge maintains an active professional LinkedIn account.

Media Links:

- Donna Hodge gets state OK as next president of Fitchburg State University, Worcester Telegram & Gazette, June 3, 2024:
<https://www.telegram.com/story/news/education/2024/06/03/donna-hodge-gets-state-ok-as-next-president-of-fitchburg-state-university/73962867007/>
- FSU welcomes 12th president; Donna Hodge reports for duty, Sentinel & Enterprise, July 7, 2024: <https://www.sentinelandenterprise.com/2024/07/07/fsu-welcomes-12th-president/>
- The new president: Under Donna Hodge, Fitchburg State looks to provide more pathways for non-traditional students, Worcester Business Journal, July 22, 2024:
<https://www.wbjournal.com/article/the-new-president-under-donna-hodge-fitchburg-state-looks-to-provide-more-pathways-for-non>
- State of the University Address, FATV, Sept. 4, 2024:
<https://videoplayer.telvue.com/player/yycCAZPb0NN3zj2o5qio->

