APPROVED

Fitchburg State University

Minutes

Board of Trustees Meeting

Date and Time
Tuesday January 11, 2022 at 8:15 AM

Location
This meeting will be held remotely.

Notice of a meeting of the Fitchburg State University Board of Trustees on Tuesday, January 11, 2022 at 8:15 a.m.

For public comments dial (when announced in the meeting): 978.665.3698

Public streaming:
Live stream
stream.meet.google.com/stream/34f10486-83ab-4ef1-a85e-e52a5c3ba8af

Trustees Present
D. Irving (remote), D. Phillips (remote), D. Tiernan (remote), F. O'Donnell (remote), J. Cautela III (remote), K. Spinelli (remote), L. Barrieau (remote), M. Fiorentino, Jr. (remote), M. Nicholson (remote)

Trustees Absent
C. Stimpson

Ex Officio Members Present
R. Lapidus (remote)

Guests Present
C. Canney (remote), F. Barricelli (remote), G. Doiron (remote), J. Bry (remote), J. Murdoch (remote), J. Wolfman (remote), L. Bayless (remote), P. McCafferty (remote), R. Toomey (remote), S. Swartz (remote)

I. Opening Items

A. Record Attendance and Guests

B. Call the Meeting to Order

D. Phillips called a meeting of the board of trustees of Fitchburg State University to order on Tuesday Jan 11, 2022 at 8:16 AM.

C. Public Comments

D. Approve Minutes from the November 9, 2021 meeting - VOTE (12-21/22)

D. Irving made a motion to approve the minutes from Board of Trustees Meeting on 11-09-21.
M. Nicholson seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

M. Nicholson	Aye
C. Stimpson	Absent
M. Fiorentino, Jr.	Aye
F. O'Donnell	Aye
K. Spinelli	Aye
D. Irving	Aye
L. Barrieau	Aye
J. Cautela III	Aye
D. Phillips	Aye
D. Tiernan	Aye

II. Enrollment Presentation

A. Presentation/Discussion on Enrollment

The president stated that this presentation was provided to the campus community a couple of times last semester. It was based on a number of common themed questions he had been asked while traveling around campus. He provided background on how the presentation came together and that his goal was to more holistically explain how aspects within the university operate. The presentation was modified very slightly from what had been previously presented, mostly for the purposes of easier readability.

He discussed enrollment trends at a high level within various segments in the Mass Public Higher Education system, including Community Colleges and UMASS. He mentioned the impact of students going straight to work as opposed to higher education. He noted that the downward trend in transfers from community colleges is impacting our enrollment significantly. He also stated that the UMASS system has been impacted by challenges with international travel. He indicated that UMASS has a robust waitlist and that as they go deeper into their list, they could be skimming students considering Fitchburg State. He highlighted that UMASS Amherst has made significant expenditure on online learning. We are starting to see the private schools looking a little more like the publics by offering deeper price discounts and moving closer to our price point. All of these issues are increasing competitiveness.

He next discussed the universities in our system. Our segment is at a 20-year enrollment low. He presented the three major areas that compose Fitchburg State enrollment: undergraduate day, School of Graduate, Online and Continuing Education Non-AP credit hours and AP credit hours. The university's accelerated online programs are growing. He indicated that some of the shift away from in-person undergraduate programs and traditional graduate programs is due to a shift to fully online.

M. Fiorentino asked about projections for the next 5-years from the data that has recently been published regarding undergraduate students. The president responded that the data reflects a continued downward trend for high school graduates and a similar decline for transfers. He noted that the trend data will need to be adjusted as the impact of the pandemic is better understood.

There was a discussion regarding online courses, accelerated online programs and why more courses are not being transitioned to an online format more permanently. The president noted that not all programs are conducive to online learning and that not all students perform well in the format.

D. Irving mentioned that enrollment decline is not expected to slow until 2035. He asked if there were conversations in Boston about school closures. The president responded that there have been conversations regarding regionalization of publics and, in some cases, consolidation of privates as opposed to shutting down. There are smaller privates experiencing significant financial challenges. He noted that we spend a great deal of time with Mount Wachusett Community College and work together to increase enrollment and student success. There was a discussion.

M. Nicholson asked about online learning at the undergraduate level and what that might look like in the future. The president responded that it would depend on student needs. We find here that many students need extra support to be successful. When we move to online classes, students are asked to do more independent learning. Many students perform better in the classroom and like the element of face-to-face socialization. There is a market, however, for online programs and we are working to further identify students that perform well using that pedagogy. There was a discussion.

The president presented sample questions that he had shared during the open campus forums. These questions were designed to prompt campus discussion.

- What makes Fitchburg State distinctive?

    - What is the campus known for?
    - What should it be known for?
    - Should the campus strive to be comprehensive or do fewer things even better?
- How do we continue to build diversity and inclusiveness?
    - How do we demonstrate it?
    - How do we communicate it?
    - Alternative strategies for recruiting students and faculty/librarians, and staff?
- Are there services that are absolutely necessary and others that are not?
- What should our mix of pedagogical delivery methods look like?
    - How can technology be better leveraged?
- How do we remain an affordable option for students?
- How do we best demonstrate value?

There was a discussion on outreach to local communities, marketing, web content and social media.
The president discussed changes to enrollment and admissions operations.
M. Fiorentino asked about a multi-year plan moving forward. The president responded that the Academic Affairs division has been working on their plan, Student Affairs and Enrollment Management are also working on their plans. M. Fiorentino requested that the board receive updates as planning progresses.
There was a discussion about business leaders, workforce development and industry standards.
The president discussed the student recruitment enhancements taking place and the new University Welcome Center. There are increased recruitment efforts with campus partners. The communications to parents have increased and work toward expanding Spanish language materials. He next discussed longer-term activities to be concluded by fall 2025.
There was a discussion on OER materials. The first-year experience was explained and discussed.
The president provided updates on activities in the School of Graduate, Online and Continuing Education and the areas that are growing. He talked about housing occupancy. The budget actions previously taken by the board were presented.
He noted challenges in the marketplace as it relates to personnel. The university is experiencing what is being reported in general regarding personnel leaving for various reasons. At departure, all positions are being evaluated. Some positions have been replaced, some have been modified and others have not been replaced.
The president discussed the university's financial health and again noted that the institution is fiscally sound.
He provided the Ernest & Young (EY Parthenon) findings:

- The university is fiscally sound
- Reserves are adequate to carry the university for 6 months
- Investments are performing well

• FSU ranks in the upper middle of our university segment for fiscal health

The recent independent FY21 audit findings yielded similar conclusions regarding fiscal health.
The president noted the fund balances and financial reserves and explained the slides in detail. He discussed our current fiscal reality and what needs to happen moving forward.
There was a discussion on recruitment and admissions.
D. Phillips expressed her appreciation of allotting an hour for this discussion.

III. Notifications

A. Personnel Actions (N05-21/22)

The personnel actions were submitted for informational purposes. M. Fiorentino stated that he supported sabbaticals and noted the importance of them for the faculty and the institution as a whole. He asked if they had to be backfilled, the president responded yes, but not in all cases.

IV. Student Trustee Report

A. Joseph Cautela will provide the Student Trustee report.

J. Cautela addressed the persistent issue of COVID. He said in the last week of the prior semester there were a large number of positive cases. He expressed his support to the president in the decision to hold classes remotely for the first week of school and to mandate testing. The unknown of student behavior over break and the asymptomatic nature of COVID will put people at extra risk. The SGA plans to work with Dr. Bayless moving forward on this issue.
The president asked for suggestions that the school could do other than testing, and he asked what the student conversation might be. There was a discussion on testing, also de-densifying some spaces such as the Dining Hall and the Library. Dr. Bayless and others on campus are willing to discuss COVID policies openly with students.

V. Chair's Report

A. Debbie Phillips will provide the Chair's report.

C. Phillips thanked the president and his team for putting together the presentation. She noted that at the last board meeting, the local MSCA Chapter President, during public comments, read a prepared resolution regarding enrollment and the fiscal health of the institution. She indicated that the communication was timely given that the last meeting included the audit. She stated she was personally satisfied that the audit and financial statements presented confirmed that the school is fiscally sound. With respect to enrollment, she acknowledges that the campus will need to continue to focus attention on enrollment. She stated that the board understands what is happening demographically across the region and that we know we will need to be creative. There will not be a one

size fits all in regards to managing the complexities of a four-year public higher education institution. Today's presentation summed up the facts as we know them today. She discussed the changes going forward with students attending classes in person and remotely.
C. Phillips felt satisfied with the presentation that was presented and its proposed direction. She invited board members to submit agenda items to her for discussion at future board meetings.

VI. President's Report

A. Commencement

The president reported on the successful Winter Commencement. The event was executed effectively. The university implemented a ticketing system as a way of reducing attendance numbers, and attendees signed attestation forms. The event was shortened due to COVID. The greatest number of students in attendance were graduate students that earned their degrees fully online. The president stated he felt that spoke highly about how they perceived the quality of their programs. Campus administration held vigorous discussions on whether or not to have graduation remote or in person. He noted that a large number of students thanked him as they walked across the stage and others had written to him to let him know how important it was to have the ceremony in person. He next provided information on the Falcon Walk for those not comfortable attending the in-person graduation.

B. Spring Semester Opening

The president reiterated the opening of school policies.

C. COVID

The president indicated the topic had been addressed and discussed.

D. NECHE

The president stated that NECHE would be the predominate subject of conversation at the February 15, 2022 meeting. The Trustees will be getting the draft report prior to the meeting. There will also be a short presentation on a new academic program that the university would like to present to the Board of Higher Education in the near future.
F. O'Donnell mentioned former Trustee Beverly Farias' passing. The president stated that Ms. Farias was affiliated with Fitchburg State for 71 years, and was active until just recently. The university recognized Ms. Farias at an alumni event at homecoming and presented her family with an inaugural award at the Winter Commencement. Ms. Farias was a wonderful lady who always spoke her mind.

E. News Articles

The new articles were presented for informational purposes.

Trustee O’Donnell’s term was discussed. His term expires on March 1, 2022.

VII. Closing Items

A. Adjourn Meeting

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 10:12 AM.

Respectfully Submitted,
D. Tiernan