



Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts
BOARD OF TRUSTEES ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
Minutes of the Meeting of December 3, 2020
Audio/Video Conference

Members in Attendance

Robert Reilly, Chair
Kathleen Therrien
Mohan Boodram, Chair of the Board of Trustees

Members Absent

Frederick Keator

Others in Attendance

James F. Birge, President
Gina Puc, Vice President of Strategic Initiatives
Lisa Lescarbeau, Clerk
Jana Boyer, Director of Enrollment Operations
Kayla Hollins, Director of Admission

Upon establishing a quorum of the Enrollment Management Committee Members present, Chair Reilly called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. and began with introductions of Trustees and staff in attendance.

Ms. Boyer began the presentation with an overview of the admissions acceptance packet that is sent electronically and in print to students.

Ms. Hollins reviewed the early action status. Student prospects are up, year over year, as are inquiries. Applications are down approximately 3% and acceptances are even, year over year. Majors that are experiencing a decrease in interest include biology, English, history, and sociology. Majors that are seeing an increase in student interest include business administration, health, performing arts and undeclared. Applications are down for Berkshire and Suffolk counties, which is consistent past trends. Boston area students typically apply to MCLA later, and the population of graduating seniors in Berkshire county continues to decline.

Ms. Hollins provided a comprehensive overview of the College's recent change to a test blind application process. The elimination of standardized tests as basis for college acceptance allows admissions counselors to learn more about students academically and personally. The decision to eliminate test scores on applications was done through research and historical comparison. The result is a more equitable acceptance process.

VP Puc discussed the equity review of the financial aid awarding process conducted by the enrollment management division.

The conversion to test-blind applications was approved by the Department of Higher Education. Admissions Counselors were trained on the new process and attended a webinar on DEI and anti-racist policies in the admission process.

With regard to applications, Ms. Hollins noted that the College stated early in the Black Lives Matter protesting, that a student's college application would not be impacted by high school records that were negatively impacted by protest participation.

Ms. Hollins presented Fall 2021 trend data that was provided during the webinar attended by counselors. This survey data shows that students are expressing anxiety and fear around attending college. There are also concerns with finances, and questions about the scholarship process and need based aid.

The location of testing centers was discussed. The closest location for Berkshire County residents is in the Springfield area, however there are indications that testing centers will not be open.

VP Puc presented an update on Student Financial Services (SFS) beginning with the aid package information that is provided to students. Ms. Boyer discussed the details contained in the aid package which includes a cost comparison of MCLA and three other schools. This allows readers to see the final bottom line cost when all financial aid and scholarships are accounted for, revealing that MCLA is typically the lower cost option.

VP Puc provided a review of the fall and spring semester timeline. All staff have moved to remote work through January 4, 2021. Staff rotates office coverage to process applications and other duties that can not be performed from home. New student file reviews have begun and award notifications are scheduled to be issued in December. Spring semester billing is underway, and work has begun developing a text campaign through Chatbot and social media to prepare students for the spring semester.

FASFA filings are trending down 16% nationwide as families are focused on more pressing concerns including food, housing and technology challenges related to remote education. Filings for MCLA are typically in the high 40s and are currently at 43%.

The SFS division initiatives in place of in-person events include webinars provided to high schools to share with students and their families; virtual workshops for current students; and social media campaigns to alert students that staff are available to help and to encourage student to complete their financial aid filings. A large increase in professional judgment and special circumstance appeals are anticipated.

Efforts are focused on how to provide incentives to residential students. Funds are available from an MSCBA housing grant that will be used to award micro grants to residential students to drive retention.

Block grants were again awarded from the CARES Act funds to assist students as was done in March.

VP Puc next reviewed the MCLA Commitment Scholarship awarding process. During the equity review conducted over the summer, 3-5 years of awarding history data was evaluated. The College's merit-based awards were predicated on recalculated high school GPAs as mandated by DHE, and included honors and AP courses that awards additional points in a student's GPA. This process revealed inequities, and showed that 70% of aid that was granted was based on DHE mandated calculations. MCLA's goal is to reach a 50/50 split in merit and MCLA aid awards, and will begin with the fall '21 awarding cycle.

Ms. Hollins discussed the new GPA review and subsequent financial aid awarding process. Students with a GPA of 2.00-2.99 all receive a \$1,000 commitment scholarship which renews as long as the student has 30 credits per year and maintain academic progress.

Students with a GPA of 3.00 and above are awarded based on status as a commuter, or residential student from out of state, or from within MA, NY and New England. Commuter students are awarded a \$2,000 commitment scholarship, MA, NY and New England receive \$3,000, and out-of-state students receive \$4,000. These students must maintain at least a 3.0 GPA and have 30 credits per academic year.

Ms. Boyer reviewed what the College is doing to support this model. Resources available to students include support from CSSE, degree audit software, advisors, small classes, low student to faculty ratios, and rankings by US News and World Report and for social mobility.

VP Puc stated that this commitment scholarship model was reversed to test impact and the model held. There were regional inconsistencies in key markets. As MA supported the charter school concept, it caused problems in the admission review process as charter schools do not have weighted curriculum, and do not offer AP or honors courses.

In response to questions regarding students who may have extenuating circumstance, it was stated that there is a process to make accommodations for life situations when considering required credits and GPA in awarding.

VP Puc discussed the pass/no pass initiative being presented through College governance by the Student Government Association. This is a pared down version of the pass/no pass grading that was in place in spring '20.

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the committee, the meeting was adjourned at 9:30 a.m.