



**BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING**  
June 6, 2024  
Murdock Hall, Room 208  
375 Church Street, North Adams, MA  
Microsoft Teams Audio/Video Conference

**Trustees in attendance:**

Brenda Burdick, Chair  
Mohan Boodram  
John Barrett III\*  
Frederick Keator\*  
Karen Kowalczyk  
Denise Marshall  
Jean Clarke-Mitchell\*

**Trustees Absent:**

Franklyn Reynolds  
Robert Reilly  
Paige Dufur  
Kathleen Therrien

**MCLA Staff in attendance:**

James F. Birge, President  
Lisa Lescarbeau, Clerk  
Gina Puc, Chief of Staff  
Barbara Chaput, Executive Director of Human Resources  
Joseph DaSilva, Vice President for Administration and Finance  
Richard Glejzer, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs  
Robert Ziomek, Vice President for Institutional Advancement  
Jeannette Smith, Vice President for Student Affairs

\*Denotes remote participation

For recording purposes only, the Trustees met for a Board Professional Development session prior to this Board of Trustees meeting. Trustees heard a presentation on the faculty post tenure review process from Dean of Academic Affairs, Dr. Carolyn Dehner

Attending the development session in person were Brenda Burdick, Mohan Boodram, and Denise Marshall. Attending remote were Trustees Barrett, and Clarke-Mitchell, Kowalczyk. Absent from this session were Trustees Dufur, Kowalczk, Reilly, and Reynolds.

As allowed by executive order of the Governor of Massachusetts, in compliance with the provisions of Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 30 and 15A, Section 9, and with a quorum present in-person and via audio/video conference, the Board of Trustees of Massachusetts College

of Liberal Arts met on June 6, 2024, with Chair Burdick presiding. Chair Burdick called the meeting to order at 5:33 p.m. and began with a remembrance and moment of silence for Trustee Robert Reilly who passed on xx, 2024.

Chair Burdick reviewed the items in the consent agenda as presented, and asked if there were items in the meeting materials that members wish to be removed and discussed individually.

Hearing none, Chair Burdick then asked for corrections to the minutes as provided from the prior meetings listed on the agenda as item 2a, and other reports listed as item 2b. Hearing no corrections, upon motion duly made and seconded, following a roll-call vote, it was unanimously:

**VOTED:** to approve the consent agenda as presented.

## **Committee Actions**

### *Fiscal Year 2025 Budget*

The Fiscal Affairs committee was presented the College's FY25 proposed budget at their May 21, 2024, meeting. Minutes of the meeting included with the material issued to the board in advance of this session provide greater detail of the proposal and discussion.

The budget for FY25 is balanced using the following:

- State appropriation assumption uses the Senate version which is slightly higher than the house version
- 2% funding formula
- 3% student fee increase
- \$50 per student tech fee increase
- No reserve use for operations

The committee was provided comparisons for prior years fees, a fact sheet that detailed MCLA fee increases compared to other state institutions, and a list of what the campus support fees are used for.

The Committee carefully considered all aspects of the budget including enrollment projections, student retention, grant funding, additional support from the Foundation, interest income and its use, open positions and payroll expenses, and DCAMM funding of capital projects and the 20% match requirement.

Upon motion duly made and seconded, with no discussion, following a roll call vote, it was:

**VOTED:** to approve the fiscal year 2025 budget with a 3% fee increase and \$50 technology fee increase, as recommended by the Fiscal Affairs Committee

*One Time Use of Reserve Funds - \$420,000*

President Birge presented a request for the one-time use of up to \$420,000 in College reserve funds as discussed at the May 21, 2024, meeting of the Fiscal Affairs Committee. The Funds would be used for the following:

- \$250k | Purchase three vans, including one that will be handicap accessible, for use of athletics, student life, and academic purposes.
- \$150k | Funds to implement initiatives that arise from the FY25 strategic plan process
- \$20k | Engage a student financial aid consultant to conduct a review and analysis of the College's aid awarding process to use institutional funds more efficiently

These funds would be derived from the College's investment funds as follows:

- \$330k three-month treasury funds. As the funds mature, \$200k in principal will be reinvested into treasuries and the growth will fund the cash account until it reaches \$330k
- \$90k cash from investments. The current investment policy calls for retention of 1% of investments in cash. This fund is currently at 3% (\$350k), and \$90k would be accessed for these one-time expenses.

The \$420k requested for use will not reduce the principal investment funds.

Trustee Barrett requested each request be presented for vote individually.

Trustee Keator cautioned Trustees on use of revenue as the goal for these investments should be for long term growth and endowment purposes.

Upon motion duly made and seconded, with no discussion heard, following a roll call vote, it was unanimously:

**VOTED:** to approve the use of up to \$250,000 from the College's revenue from investments for the purchase of three vans, as presented.

Upon motion duly made and seconded, with no discussion heard, following a roll call vote, it was:

**VOTED:** to approve the use of up to \$150k from the College's revenue from investments for implementation of initiatives resulting from the FY25 Strategic Plan.

Upon motion duly made and seconded for the use of \$20k from the College's revenue from investments to engage a financial aid consultant, discussion followed regarding this expense being included in the operating budget or being considered a one-time expense.

With no further discussion, following a roll call vote, it was unanimously:

**VOTED:** to approve the use of up to \$20k from the College's revenue from investments to engage a student financial aid consultant to review the College's student aid awarding process to ensure efficient use of the College's institutional aid.

### **Fiscal Reporting**

Trustee Mashall provided a fiscal report based on the Fiscal Affairs Committee meeting of May 21, 2024. Details of the meeting are available in the minutes of that session provided with the material for this meeting.

Regarding the FY24 budget, the state revenue variance, attributable to timing as the college operates on a cash basis, will reduce to zero by the end of the fiscal year. Tuition and fee revenues were up slightly as a result of an increase in enrollment. As well, the state increased the Mass Grant Plus funds by \$253k. Overall revenue for the period reflects a positive variance of \$400k.

Expenses are trending under budget as administrators and staff manage costs. The employee salary line increase is a result of the 4+4 salary increases all employees received and is offset in the state revenue line. There is a savings of \$622k resulting from less need for adjunct faculty and the lack of students interested in employment. The overage in the construction line is a result of having to conduct asbestos abatement on a project, which delayed the work being done on Venable Hall. Overall expenses are trending positive with a \$500k variance.

The FY24 full year forecast repeats the trends seen in the 3rd quarter report above. The use of reserve is forecast to be around \$700k, which is a decrease from the \$2.5m requested in the FY24 budget.

Committee members discussed at length trust funds and fund balances. It was recommended that a session be held to help trustees understand designated funds and their use. There was also a brief discussion of the use of separate operational and capital budgets which is not uncommon at other institutions.

Student accounts receivables balances were reviewed. These accounts are written off the College's books and remain in the state's intercept system for collection.

Investment reports were provided to the Committee and to this board with the materials sent in advance of this meeting.

Trustees discussed student employment and possible reasons students are not seeking jobs with the College. With additional financial aid funding available from the state, students are able to manage their educational costs without employment.

While the absence of student works does leave gaps, these positions are paid through federal funds, and it is beneficial to the College and the student to continue to provide these opportunities. As the distance grows away from the pandemic, it is anticipated that students will begin to seek employment with the College.

### **President's Report**

President Birge provided an update on enrollment in the wake of the late roll-out of FAFSA and issuing of ISIRs that is impacting colleges nationally. MCLA first year student deposits are down by 85 year-over-year, with a narrowing of the gap being seen. As students receive their financial aid packages from all the institutions they applied to, we expect to see some impact on enrollment numbers.

MCLA, Berkshire Community College, and Williams College are collaborating with Adams Community Bank to host three FAFSA sessions around Berkshire County. The intent is to provide training and assistance for students and their families to complete and submit the FAFSA to the federal government.

Admissions staff continue to work to attract students from within the county and share that student aid funds are available at MCLA for AY25.

Retention as of this meeting is at 82.5%. While this rate is expected to decline during the summer months, the expected mid-70s rate will still be the highest since the fall of 2017. Retention can be attributed to the work done to improve onboarding and orientation for new students helping them acclimate to college. While administration remains cautiously optimistic of reaching the budgeted enrollment number, should retention continue at the current rate, any reduction in new first year students could be made up in retention.

President Birge commented on the College's ability to provide additional faculty incentive awards due to the generosity of donors Julie Englund and Brian Fitzgerald. Faculty who received awards were listed in the Campus Update provided with the material for this meeting, and President Birge provided highlights of awards given to Dr. Sharon Claffey, Dr. Hannah Haynes, and Dr. Jerome Socolof.

Trustee Barrett departed the meeting at 6:04 p.m.

President Birge announced that Ms. Gina Puc, President's Chief of Staff, had tendered her resignation with her final day being June 28, 2024. Ms. Puc will join Williams College in the

Office of the President. A small gathering is planned for June 28 from 12 – 2 p.m. in the President’s Offices at 87 Blackinton Street. President Birge anticipates filling the Chief of Staff position in the coming weeks and will share an announcement with the Trustees.

To thank Ms. Puc for her service to the College, and more specifically, as an important member of his executive team, President Birge presented Ms. Puc with a Bow Tie Pin. Trustees offered their best wishes and congratulations to Ms. Puc.

President Birge discussed the NECHE accreditation determination letter, a copy of which was provided to trustees with the material for this meeting. NECHE granted a continuation of the College’s accreditation with the following requirements:

- Submission of a report focused on strategic plan, enrollment, and multi-year financial plan due by January 15, 2026.
- Submission of an interim (fifth-year) report focused on strategic plan, enrollment, multi-year financial plan, DEI efforts, and faculty and staff recruitment and retention by August 15, 2028.
- Next comprehensive evaluation to be scheduled for fall 2033.

The determination letter and the visiting team’s report will be publicly posted on the Colleges website in the near future.

## **Chair’s Report**

### *Board of Trustees Self-Evaluation*

Chair Burdick presented the results of the board of trustees’ self-evaluation survey for which eight surveys were submitted. Weighted results were provided for questions answered with the Likert scale and themes were provided for written response questions. Overall, individual and performance as a whole were rated (on a scale of 1 to 4, 1 being strongly disagree, 4 being strongly agree) 3.8 and 3.3, respectively, indicating the Board is doing good and important work. The suggestions for future board developments sessions will be used in planning sessions for FY25.

President Birge noted that in the survey questions particular attention should be paid where there are outlying scores below the agree rating. These areas provide opportunities for improvement in the board’s operations and possible development topics.

### *Nominating Committee of the Board of Trustees*

Chair Burdick announced the formation of the Nominating Committee. Members will include Chair Burdick, and Trustees Clarke-Mitchell and Marshall. The committee is charged with recommending a slate of officers for consideration at the full board meeting on June 27.

*Presidential Evaluation Committee*

The Presidential Evaluation Committee is scheduled to meet on June 10, 17 and 24 to complete the President's Evaluation. This year's review is limited in scope, with the comprehensive evaluation due in 2025. The committee will review the President's self-evaluation, compare it to his goals for FY24, and compile summary statements on his performance. The final evaluation will be presented to the Board at the June 27 meeting for consideration and submission to the Commissioner by June 30.

The President's goals for FY24 were provided with the material for this meeting. Trustees were offered an opportunity to provide feedback for the President's evaluation. No discussion followed.

*Presidential Summer Authority*

In past years, this board has granted Presidential Authority to Presidents for the summer months when the board of trustees is in recess.

Upon motion duly made and seconded, with no further discussion, following a roll call vote, it was unanimously:

**VOTED:** to grant Presidential Authority to make such appointments and decisions that are necessary for the normal operation of the College during the summer when the board does not conduct regularly scheduled meetings.

*Board of Trustees Appointments*

The Board of Higher Education has notified MCLA that two new trustees have been appointed to the College's Board of Trustees and will take their oath later this month. Darlene Rodowicz, President of Berkshire Healthcare Systems, will take the seat vacated by Trustee Kowalczyk who has decided not to accept a reappointment. Yvonne Spicer, Executive Director of Life Science Cares Boston, will take the seat vacated with the passing of Trustee Reilly.

**Adjournment**

With no other business being brought before the meeting, upon a motion duly made and seconded, it was unanimously:

**VOTED:** to adjourn the meeting at 6:31 p.m.