

**Niagara County Community College  
Board of Trustees**

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**A Special meeting of the Board of Trustees was held  
on April 2, 2020 at noon  
via teleconference call**

**Board Members Present on Call**

Mr. William Ross, Chairperson  
Ms. Gina Virtuoso, Financial Secretary  
Mr. Kevin Clark  
Mr. Jerald Wolfgang  
Mr. Eric Lipps, Student Trustee

**Board Members Absent**

Ms. Katherine Alexander  
Mr. Jason Cafarella, Vice Chairperson  
Ms. Bonnie Sloma, Secretary  
Ms. Sheila Smith

**Administration Present on Call**

William J. Murabito, Ph.D., President  
Ms. Deborah Brewer Director of Foundation  
Ms. Catherine Brown, Assistant Vice President of Human Resources  
Ms. Barbara DeSimone, Director of Public Relations  
Mr. John Eichner, Director, Business Services  
Ms. Patrice Elnicki, Interim Vice President of Finance and Information Technology  
Mr. Wayne Lynch, Vice President of Operations  
Mr. Dennis Michaels, Chief Information Officer  
Mr. Robert McKeown, Assistant Vice President of Enrollment Management  
Ms. Julia Pitman, Vice President of Student Services  
Ms. Lydia Ulatowski, Interim Vice President of Academic Affairs

Chairperson Ross called the meeting to order at 12:04 p.m.

Board Meeting Minutes March 10, 2020. A motion will be done at the next Board Meeting on April 21.

Special Board Meeting Minutes of March 26, 2020. A motion will be done at the next Board Meeting on April 21.

**COMMENCEMENT**

The Board of Trustees reviewed the paragraph below that was presented by Barbara DeSimone, Director of Public Relations and provided to ECC regarding Commencement:

College (NCCC) has decided to postpone the May 2020 Commencement ceremonies until fall. At a date yet to be determined, we plan to have a ceremony for all graduates who can attend. We will also have the ceremony streamed live so that others who are unable to come to campus can still view the event. The commencement webpage will include updates as the plans come together.

There were no questions in regards to the paragraph.

Dr. Murabito said NCCC made a system announcement yesterday and that tomorrow there will be a published message in all the newspapers coupling all the WNY community colleges and how they are each postponing ceremonies with a blurb about each one.

Chairperson Ross mentioned the memo from Barb Walck and asked that everyone to be sure to review the important memo so they are brought up to date.

## **ENROLLMENT ACTIVITY**

Robert McKeown, Assistant Vice President of Enrollment Management gave an update on enrollment activity. He said all student services are operating remotely. They have been reaching out to students via phone, emails, and texts. The withdrawal deadline date has been moved to May 15 to allow students more time to adjust to the new methodologies of their classes. The college is reaching out to every student requesting to withdraw and giving them a 72-hour period to rescind. Applications are up 228 from this time last year. Open House has been postponed. Zoom meetings and phone meetings are being held between program coordinators and prospective students. An individual appointment will be set up with every student that has signed up for Open House. The faculty has been very engaged in this process. Advanced registration began on Monday. So far 369 students have registered for the fall semester, up 12 students from this time last year. There are 201 students registered for summer, up 164 from last summer. Currently 863 students are ready to go and ready to register. Trustee Clark wanted to know that if the college is anticipating an increase in enrollment since past economic downturns brought a rise in enrollment. Bob McKeown said that has been true in the past, but there are too many unknowns at this point. They plan on offering enough programs both online and in classroom. Like last year, they are projecting a 4% overall decline, but could go either way boom or bust. Dr. Murabito said that as we return to normalcy, it will take a bit for the unemployment rate to be adjusted. There will be people who will be seeing college as an option. We will have to maximize our messaging and hopefully the government will create programs that allow these students to attend with incentives. We will be promoting that wherever possible.

Trustee Lipps wanted to know if NCCC recognizes or uses an experience program. Bob McKeown said there is Credit for Prior Learning that students can apply for and then it goes through the campus coordinators where students can potentially get credit for prior learning. Trustee Lipps said the college should be a little more flexible and maybe focus on getting that out to the public because with the declining economy older adults may worry about their current job and if they can use their experience to get a few credit hours that may entice them to come to the NCCC. Lydia said that is a good point. It is not enough to say they had experiences; it is what they learned through their experiences. Dr. Murabito said we need to build a campaign around that and build partnerships with Empire State. He also said Buffalo State has a teacher vocational technical program where they give significant credits for people who want to go on to teach. Students could take lower level courses with us. We should look at every option. Lydia said it also very important to work with Workforce Development and encourage students to go on to a degree from there.

## **BUDGET – RECRUITMENT – HIRING FREEZE**

Ms. Patrice Elnicki, Interim Vice President of Finance and Information Technology, has gone through a lot of the expenditures and came up with where the budget should be. Expenses will need to be reduced for the 2020-2021 Budget. The budget requests including salaries, fringe, contractual expenditures and equipment purchases for the upcoming year came up to \$52 million. That is about \$4 million in excess of the \$47.8 million current year budget. Staffing levels and current positions being recruited, grant positions as well as other replacement of faculty/staff that have retired will need to be looked at and prioritized to see what needs to be in the budget. Hard decisions in terms of not being able to bring staff will

have to be made. The college will have to look at smart ideas to use active employees to fill current roles to create situations where we can do without hiring. The college also might have to look at hiring adjuncts rather than full-time positions. Another option might be a hiring freeze for a period of time. We will have to wait to see how enrollment turns out.

Patrice said on the revenue side, the state budget was announced and it does not bode well for community colleges. There will not be an increase in the FTE state rate. It will remain constant year to year. Historically we received \$100 increase per year. Also, last year the state instituted a floor. If enrollment drops from your state funding, your state aid will not drop because they instituted a floor and it could not go below the 98% floor. This floor has been removed from the budget.

The Executive Council will work together to reduce staffing and contractual expenses and come up with creative ideas to save money so the budget works for next year.

Trustee Clark asked if the college had experienced the floor being reduced in the past. Patrice said the floor was brand new last year. The purpose of the floor was to try to level out the state funding so that as enrollment decreased you wouldn't see the same decrease with state aid to keep up with the cost due to inflationary increase.

Trustee Wolfgang wanted to know about the upcoming budget with the anticipated revenue and expenses and if the budget changed dramatically with the new facts. Dr. Murabito said the college is still in the midst of the budget process. Every year at this time we get requests from each division. The end game has changed because the college is anticipating less revenue they will be very selective of the requests. Last year during the budget process we had to make cuts. This year we will have to cut back deeper.

Trustee Wolfgang asked if the college is going to raise tuition rates to balance the budget. He said the college borrowed money for last several years from the fund balance and cut a little back for next year, but now it does not look good without going back to fund balance or raising tuition. Dr. Murabito said that last year we were discussing a modest 4% tuition increase so that is on the table as is a request to the County, but Niagara County is not in a position to increase its contribution.

Trustee Wolfgang wanted to know the timeframe. Dr. Murabito said there will be an update in April, with a final vote in May and then it will be presented to the County. It is the same timeframe as in the past.

Trustee Lipps wanted to know the overall deficit. Patrice said this year's budget had a \$2 million deficit with a goal to bring the deficit down to zero over a three-year period. However, with the turn of events, that goal will not be met. We are now looking at least bringing it to the \$2 million that we budgeted this year with an attempt to reduce it even lower by looking at every avenue to either increase revenue or decrease expenditures.

Trustee Lipps wanted to know if the college was looking at ideas such as turning off utilities to lower costs. Patrice said that she has spoken to Wayne Lynch and he is working through those strategies already. Dr. Murabito said that for the last few years, the college has been trying to keep expenditures low, but it can only be done so long and now it will be doubly challenging.

## **CREDIT/REFUND POLICY**

John Eichner, Director, Business Services, reviewed the Credit/Refund Policy resolution. SUNY guidelines were relied on to develop the policy. It was then vetted through the Executive Council. The policy impacts not only the college, but also the College Association.

and Student Housing Village Corporation. Financially the college is the least impacted while SHVC will be impacted the most. Students will be reimbursed for services they did not receive. Graduating students will be receiving refunds. Students continuing at NCCC will receive a credit applied to their fall 2020-2021 charges. Dr. Murabito said each fee supports a different level of activity and some activities are continuing and are now being done virtually requiring staffing. All those anticipated services will be debited for the ongoing activities to come down to the amount of money not spent and that will be the pooled dollar to be either refunded or credited. Most revenue is in the form of tuition. The college is using the normal refund policy on tuition. Because instruction is continuing, most of the tuition revenue will not be refunded. The resolution will be voted on at the upcoming April 21 Board of Trustees meeting.

## **STUDENT HOUSING VILLAGE CORPORATION ASSISTANCE – DEBT SERVICE**

John Eichner reviewed the Student Housing Village Corporation Assistance resolution. He said there is a May 16, 2020 call option. We want to work with Citizen's Bank to have them waive that option by enhancing the credit with the college guaranteeing principle and interest. We need to reach out to Niagara County and talk with them to get their approval as they are our local sponsor. This resolution looks for us to start this process and go through an extensive list of due diligence and bring it back to the Board with our findings and recommendations so the Board can act at that point on the guarantee. This guarantee would be for a 2-year period. The maximum exposure for the college if SHVC could not make the payments is \$1.3 million. There is \$1.3 million in a debt service reserve fund that Housing has on their balance sheet that can service one year's worth of debt. Gina wanted to know if the County signed up on this and if the County backs this, if we might be able to get a lower rate. Gina said they would not want the County to pay it, just to back it. Dr. Murabito said the outside \$1.3 million would be if we do not have any revenue, but revenues from the rents would reduce that amount greatly. John said we will approach the County with this resolution. We are not asking for the County to help refinance. It is an option worth exploring, but not sure if the County can issue debt for not-for-profit. That is why initially we went through the IDA in order to get the tax exempt bonds. Trustee Wolfgang wanted to know if we are asking the County to firmly be part of this resolution with Citizen's Bank or just to approve our resolution. John said we are not asking Niagara County to guarantee this debt at all, but for them to allow us to explore the college taking second position on this debt. Trustee Wolfgang wanted to know if the County was to assist us would they take the third position or the second position. Dr. Murabito said the County would not take any position. All they are doing is authorizing the campus through the budget process because they approve our budget. Trustee Wolfgang said before we vote on the final agreement with Citizen's Bank, we need that information as to not only where the County stands, but what is the college's formal obligation. Dr. Murabito said we will work with our lawyers then the County lawyers and that SUNY said we need to have the County sign off. NCCC is looking at all options. We may even look at taking the College Association out of the equation since they are in no position to be a guarantor. Trustee Wolfgang said he hopes we are exploring the IDA that holds the bonds as well. Dr. Murabito said they have been talking to all concerned groups and have brought in a specialist to look at refinancing. Trustee Wolfgang is requesting that before there is a final vote he wants to have some type of communication back from the IDA approving what they are asking us to do. Dr. Murabito said okay. Chairperson Ross said he is certain we can work our way through that. The resolution will be voted on at the upcoming April 21 Board of Trustees meeting.

## **ONLINE INSTRUCTION**

Lydia Ulatowski, Interim Vice President of Academic Affairs, gave an update on online instruction. She said that they had two weeks of very busy preparation. Classes resumed on March 30 with 100% of classes online. It has been quieter than thought. Lydia believes

because such an amazing job in training the faculty. They have even received emails of gratitude from faculty and students. There are a few challenging programs such as Nursing and Allied Health. Diane Roth found software with simulations of clinicals and it seems to be going well. Lydia continues to check on instructors with unique programs that might have difficulty with online migration. Lydia is working with Welding and Animal Management right now. Students can't go anywhere to weld. They have been seeing what other colleges are doing. Instructors are giving different assignments. Students need a certain number of hours for TIG/MIG. Welding will probably have to extend that into summer. Students in Animal Management cannot go to the Zoo or Aquarium now, but Aaron Cobaugh, Animal Management Program Coordinator, is looking into other options and having them do research and different kinds of projects. One of the positive effects of this situation is that we are really more competitive now that faculty has become experienced in online instruction. Dr. Murabito asked Lydia to explain the difference between approval for an online program vs. the waiving by state education of the percentage of a current program. No more than 50% of a current program could be online. Lydia said they have been working very well with them and they did waive the 50% restriction. Lydia said it will now be easier to flip classes online after this is over. Changing the policy and procedures like Bob said in regards to the W Grade is important. Lydia is working on a document regarding the S/U Grade to give to the Executive Council. The college needs to be more lenient with the new way of learning for the students.

## **TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT**

Mr. Dennis Michaels, Chief Information Officer, Dennis said the IT expenditure on this campus is very expensive as is it across all 64 SUNY campuses. He has always tried to have a very frugal strategy to be able to meet the needs of the campus community. One of the things IT adopted was to limit laptops on campus due to the high cost threshold they have. Very few staff was prepared to work at home because of that strategy. IT had to work very quickly to have 100% faculty and staff work at home. They currently have over 100 laptops deployed to faculty so they can work at home on a very secure manner. They also are making sure faculty has the tools to work at home so they can work at home by purchasing hardware, software, licenses, webcams, etc. It was a very successful push, but they are still getting faculty requests for hardware. They are in the process of meeting the requests of the students that do not have the right technology at home. IT is essential personnel so some staff has been coming to work in a safe manner to assist and make hardware available. Some staff is working remotely.

Dr. Murabito said Patrice is collecting unusual expenses related to the shut down and virus. There is a hope SUNY will find funding to reimburse us on that.

## **COVID-19 UPDATE**

Dr. Murabito said everyone has stepped up and we should be very proud of everyone on campus. There were very few push backs.

## **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **ACADEMIC/STUDENT LIFE – FISCAL COMMITTEE**

The Committee Meeting Minutes of March 10, 2020. A motion will be done at the next Board Meeting on April 21.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

There was no old business.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

Trustee Wolfgang said they did not receive the cyber security information that was requested at the March 10 meeting. Dr. Murabito said he will need to talk with Dennis and a report will be mailed.

Chairperson Ross asked that the Credit/Refund Policy resolution and the Student Housing Village Corporation – Debt Service resolution be sent by out so they have them in hand.

## **GOOD & WELFARE**

There was no good and welfare.

The next meeting will be the scheduled Board meeting on April 21 at noon.

The meeting ended at 1:15 p.m.

Ms. Pamela M. Nimetz  
Typist