



Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts
BOARD OF TRUSTEES EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
Minutes of the Meeting of March 27, 2023
MCLA, 87 Blackinton St, North Adams, MA
Audio/Video Conference

Members in Attendance

Brenda Burdick, Chair*, Mohan Boodram*, Denise Marshall* Frederick Keator*

Members Absent

Franklyn Reynolds

Others in Attendance

James Birge, President , Lisa Lescarbeau, Clerk

*Denotes remote participation

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 Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees with Committee Chair Burdick presiding was called to order at 8:31 a.m.

President Birge led with a discussion of the selected commencement speaker, Dr. Patricia Okker, and requested that Dr. Okker be considered to receive an Honorary Doctorate of Letters at the May 2023 commencement. Dr. Okker is the former president of New College of Florida (NC) whose contract was terminated by a newly appointed board of trustees as a result of the Governor of Florida's redirection of state public higher education. Dr. Okker has been invited to speak on numerous TV and radio talk shows, but has declined to comment as her focus remains on education and not politics. Speaking at MCLA's commencement provides an opportunity for Dr. Okker to talk about liberal arts, academic freedom and the intersection of these with Democracy.

In response to a question relative to the ideological diversity at NC and the impact that may have on Dr. Okker's comments at commencement, President Birge noted that during conversation with Dr. Okker, her position with the NC board had been to work with the Trustees to move the College forward as they saw fit. She believes that a strong liberal arts education is found by viewing through multiple lenses, and it is unlikely she will go into conservative, liberal or other ideological language.

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

VOTED: to recommend that MCLA's Board of Trustees approve Dr. Patricia Okker as a recipient of an Honorary Doctorate of Letters at the College's commencement exercises in May 2023.

President Birge discussed the College's satellite location at 66 Allen Street in Pittsfield, MA. This location is reaching the end of its five-year lease agreement, and the recommendation is to not renew the lease at this location. Initially this site was planned to enhance the College's Division of Graduate and Continuing Education offerings. The pandemic's impact resulted in DGCE courses being taught fully on-line, and while undergraduate education has resumed on campus, DGCE continues to be taught in hybrid and remote modes. The College is able to offer the same continuing and graduate education opportunities without the lease expense of \$65,000 per year.

Non-renewal of the Allen Street lease has not been discussed with the City of Pittsfield's Mayor nor the CEO of 1Berkshire. These conversations are second to notifying the board of the proposed course of action, and President Birge will begin those conversations next.

Trustees expressed concern with maintaining a presence in Pittsfield though not necessarily in this location. The cost of this lease outweighs the benefit the College has seen as a result of operations there. Alternate space can be considered, but this should be the outcome of a larger strategic discussion as the DGCE office undergoes a reorganization.

Current programming on the College's main campus presents opportunities for students to have educational experiences in Pittsfield. For example, an environmental policies class recently visited the aquaponics facility at the Berkshire County House of Correction. As the health sciences offerings continue to expand there will be additional opportunities for the campus community with Berkshire Health Systems.

Chair Burdick announced the formation of the Nominating Committee of the board and thanked Trustees Boodram, Kowalczyk and Marshall for agreeing to serve on the committee.

Chair Burdick announced the beginning process of forming the Presidential Evaluation Committee. She anticipates this committee will operate as it did last academic year with the completed evaluation due to the Commissioner of Higher Education by June 30, 2023.

Trustee Marshall expressed concern with the number of committee members on the Evaluation Committee referring to the public meeting education session recently provided to Trustees. President Birge and Chair Burdick will review this concern as committee members are selected.

There being no further business to come before the committee, the meeting was adjourned at 9:15 a.m. by Chair Burdick.