Student Success and Academic Affairs Committee
Board of Trustees
Massachusetts Bay Community College
8:00 – 10:00 a.m.
Tuesday, June 21, 2022
WebEx Meeting

MINUTES

Trustees Present:  Lili Silva (Chair); Sandy Lish; Mikael Pyrtel; Diane Schmalansee; Wendy Vincent; Rodolpho Sanz

Staff Members Present:  David Podell, President; Lynne Davis, Dean of Health Sciences; Courtney Jackson, Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness and Strategic Initiatives; Lynn Hunter, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost; Christopher La Barbera, Assistant Provost; Nina Keery, Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences; Susan Maggioni, Dean of Business and Professional Studies; Jeremy Solomon, Interim Director of Marketing and Communications; Richard Williams, Associate Dean for Student Success; Elizabeth Blumberg, Vice President for Student Development and Dean of Students; David Protano, Dean of Automotive Technology; Sean Fortney, Assistant Director for Advising and Transfer Offices & Supervisor of our coaching model; Jeanie Tietjen, Professor, English Department, Division of Humanities and Director of the Institute for Trauma, Adversity, and Resilience in Higher Education; Peter Nassiff, Associate Professor in STEM; Carolyn Guttilla, Associate Professor and Chair of the Communication Department; Susan Hamilton, Assistant Director of the Academic Achievement Center, Math and Science Center; Sofia Vargas, Executive Assistant to Lynn Hunter

CALL TO ORDER, INTRODUCTIONS, AND MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Chair Silva declared a quorum was present and called the meeting to order. President Podell facilitated staff introductions. Trustee Silva motioned to approve the April 26, 2022, minutes, and was seconded by Trustees Schmalansee and Pyrtel.

The motion to approve and accept the minutes passed with the following roll call vote: Trustee Lish – YES; Trustee Pyrtel – YES; Trustee Sanz – ABSTAIN; Trustee Schmalansee – YES; Trustee Vincent – YES; Chair Silva – YES.

DISCUSSION ON FACULTY LEARNING COMMUNITY (FLC)

President Podell stated that the purpose of Faculty Learning Communities (FLC) is to provide an opportunity for faculty to reflect on their teaching practices with a community of their peers. He turned over the discussion to Dean Keery, who has been doing research on FLCs since prior to becoming a Dean. FLCs at
MassBay are a model of professional development that brings together small groups of 8-15 faculty across disciplines. Groups have been meeting since 2018 around different topics and pedagogies. The FLC presented at the June Student Success Committee focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), and was facilitated by Professor Carolyn Guttilla. The goal was for faculty to feel comfortable, build community, and to give faculty space and time needed to explore how to become more equity-minded in their teaching practices. The members of the DEI FLC revised their syllabi and reviewed disaggregated course completion data to create more inclusive classrooms. Dean Keery introduced Professor Guttilla who continued the discussion.

Professor Guttilla has co-facilitated or participated in four out of five FLCs including three for adjunct faculty, one on mindfulness, and the equity FLC in Spring 2021. The equity FLC is part of the College’s work to promote equity and inclusion, specifically in the classroom. Faculty were asked to think about ways to make their classrooms more equity-minded. There were 23 applicants and 19 faculty completing the equity FLC. There were six sessions – three with Dr. Estela Bensimon, one with Dr. Courtney Jackson, an introductory session, and a final debrief. In the sessions with Dr. Bensimon, faculty saw examples of equity-minded syllabi and the application of reviewing disaggregated data. Courtney Jackson provided participants with their own course-specific disaggregated data. Professor Guttilla introduced Professors Susan Hamilton and Peter Nassif to discuss their work as part of the FLC.

Professor Hamilton discussed how participating in the FLC helped her to build a more equitable classroom for students. One of the recommendations for an equity-minded classroom is using open educational resources (OER). OERs are free or low cost, which helps to remove a barrier to access but can be a large effort for faculty to incorporate into their teaching. OERs lack the built-in support other products offer, such as PowerPoint presentations, teacher manuals, online homework, etc. Many OERs have excellent content, but some lack diversity. Professor Hamilton described looking at every aspect of her course through the lens of cultural wealth, and then reevaluating and redesigning course materials.

Professor Peter Nassif then discussed how he developed a more equity-minded syllabus that reached all students. He decided to work on his syllabus because this is the first thing students see when they come to class. He added cartoons in different languages, a detailed biography, a video recording welcoming students to the class with subtitles and a transcript, put important text in blue bold font, added resources for online learning, his goals for the class, transparency about course exams and lab requirements, using older editions of textbooks which are less expensive, all with the goal of wanting to be friendly and accessible. It was suggested to record testimonies of prior students to help communicate with new students as peers.

DISCUSSION ON INSTITUTE FOR TRAUMA, ADVERSITY, AND RESILIENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

President Podell stated that what the two presentations have in common is that they are both examples of how MassBay is trying to become a student-ready college rather than asking students to be college-ready. President Podell then introduced Professor Jeanie Tietjen, who has developed her interest in trauma-informed education into an Institute.
Professor Tietjen began with a land acknowledgement. The focus of this discussion was on how the Institute started, its rationale, what it has accomplished, and where it is headed next. To illustrate why trauma matters in higher education and where it is seen, Professor Tietjen discussed the assignment of a standard English essay for students to share something about themselves. She found that many students would bring up their experiences with a large proportion electing to write about their traumas, often having experienced more than one. Students bring their lived experiences to everything that they do. She confirmed that combat veterans have been the main focus of discourse about trauma but also pointed out that there are many other traumas such as family violence, displacement due to political violence, medical problems, and institutional racism. All of these adverse childhood experiences impact education, especially post-secondary attainment.

MassBay has been a leader in the Trauma Informed Education movement in creating collective awareness and attentiveness to the lived experiences and needs of students. MassBay held the first ever conference on this subject in 2012 for both 2- and 4-year colleges and universities. Since then, the Institute has informed higher educational practices at MassBay, conducted research on trauma and post-secondary practices, and functioned as a community resource for higher education and specifically community colleges. The Institute will host a national conference in April 2023. With Title III funding coming to an end, the Institute will seek additional funding to continue and expand its work.

Trustee Schmalansee asked Professor Tietjen for some specific examples of best practices in the classrooms. Professor Tietjen replied how faculty teach students about how their brains work, that a “learning how to learn” discussion is shown at the beginning of a course to show students how to understand their learning brains, the neuroscience of learning, and how the brain fires a stress response mechanism, typically fight/flight/freeze, with freeze often being mistakenly associated with disassociation and problematic behavior instead of trauma-related responses. Students start to think about their responses as neurobiological processes they can control. She also shows a video on procrastination. The learning of this neurobiology of procrastination is freeing for students, as procrastination stimulates the same points in the brain as painful and unpleasant experiences, and it is not associated with being a bad student. It is seen as a natural thing to do, which brings relief and shock in students, as they can see themselves not as incompetent but shows them a toolbox that liberates them and regulates the stress responses of the brain.

Trustee Silva asked about the recruitment and targeting of adult learners, and Professor Tietjen said that the Institute is still working on focusing on that population. There is a trauma advisory group that advises the Institute on various projects that meets on a monthly basis.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Silva thanked Jeanie Tietjen for her presentation and proposed the motion to adjourn, seconded by Trustee Schmalansee. The motion was approved, and the meeting adjourned after the following roll call vote: Trustee Lish – YES; Trustee Sanz – YES; Trustee Schmalansee – YES; Trustee Vincent – YES; Chair Silva – YES; Trustee Pyrtel - ABSENT.

The next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, November 15, 2022.