

The 279th meeting of the Board of Trustees  
Mount Wachusett Community College  
Thursday, February 20, 2025  
Murphy Room  
Meeting Minutes

A. **CALL TO ORDER** – Chairperson Freda called the meeting to order at 8:31 AM.

B. **ROLL CALL:**

Present: Claire Freda, Irene Hernandez, Tricia Pistone, Lawrence NFOR, Rick Walton, Patti Bergstrom, Sharmese Gunn, and Oren Cohen

Present via Zoom: Doug Petersen

Unable to attend: Denise Gosselin

Also, present from the College: President Vander Hooven, many members of the Leadership Team, students, and Executive Assistant Laurie Snoonian

Many others joined via live stream on Vimeo.

C. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES** – December 12, 2024 and February 4, 2025

-Chairperson Freda asked for a motion to approve the minutes of December 12, 2024. Mr. Cohen made a motion to approve, and Ms. Hernandez seconded the motion. All approved. Motion passed.

-Chairperson Freda asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the special meeting of February 4, 2025. Mr. Cohen made a motion to approve, and Mr. Walton seconded the motion. All approved. Motion passed.

D. **CHAIRPERSON’S REPORT** – Claire Freda

- a. Chairperson Freda provided an update on pending legal matters, mentioning that the board is still waiting for an opinion from the Attorney General’s Office regarding certain institutional policies and concerns.
- b. Claire noted the importance of board participation in fundraising and grant applications.
- c. Many grants now require full board participation in financial contributions, regardless of the amount given.
- d. A suggestion was made to schedule a joint meeting between the Board of Trustees and the Foundation Board.
- e. President Vander Hooven and board members expressed support for this joint meeting and its potential to strengthen institutional fundraising and strategic alignment.

E. **PRESIDENT’S REPORT** – President Vander Hooven

- a. Jim provided a summary of the ACCT legislative summit in Washington, D.C. He expressed his appreciation to Oren Cohen and Tricia Pistone for attending.
- b. They met with congressional representatives to discuss funding for community colleges. There was strong bipartisan interest in maintaining funding for Pell Grants, TRIO programs, and other student aid initiatives.
- c. The president assured the board that the college remains committed to serving all students with dignity and respect.
- d. Some federal grants have been affected due to staffing cuts at the Department of Education, leaving some grants in limbo.
- e. There is more concern for new grants than ongoing grants.
- f. The spring semester has increased to 23.4% compared to the previous year.

- g. The persistence rate (students continuing from fall to spring semester) increased from 45% to 76.4%, which is a major achievement for student retention. Staff and faculty are working hard to help and retain our students.
- h. Trustee Pistone spoke about the legislative summit and her appreciation for going.
- i. A request was made to provide disaggregated data on enrollment and persistence rates, focusing on marginalized student populations.
- j. ACCT has also offered a free retreat to the board. This will likely take place after the onboarding of two new members in March.

**F. REPORTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE LEADERSHIP TEAM – None**

**G. MISSION/STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE –**

- a. The next meeting will include a presentation by Heather Layton on strategic planning progress.
- b. The board wants to ensure institutional growth aligns with equity and inclusion goals.
- c. The board requested a breakdown of hiring demographics to assess progress toward affirmative action goals.
- d. A draft of the Affirmative Action Plan for review will be provided for review at a future meeting.
- e. The leadership team is working on a new budgeting model to ensure resources are allocated based on strategic initiatives. The next budget proposal will include a dedicated line item for strategic initiatives.

**H. ADMINISTRATIVE ORDERS OF THE DAY**

- a. **AD 1321 – Fourth Quarter Trust Report FY24** – Chairperson Freda asked for a motion to approve the Fourth Quarter Trust Report FY24. Mr. Cohen made a motion to approve and seconded by Ms. Hernandez. All approved. Motion carried.
- b. **AD 1324 – First Quarter Trust Report FY25** – Chairperson Freda asked for a motion to approve the First Quarter Trust Report FY25. Mr. Cohen made a motion to approve and seconded by Ms. Hernandez. All approved. Motion carried.
- c. **AD 1325 – Second Quarter Trust Report FY25** – Chairperson Freda asked for a motion to table the Second Quarter Trust Report FY25. Ms. Pistone made a motion to table and seconded by Mr. Cohen.
- d. **AD 1323 – Presidential Evaluation** – Claire spoke about this being her first presidential evaluation as a chair. She stated her frustration with confusing and conflicting information provided by the Board of Higher Education. Jim did submit a self-evaluation, but the BHE has indicated a preference for broader evaluations with trustee and staff input. Claire agreed that going forward there will be a more formal evaluation process that will include a subcommittee. Jim spoke briefly about some of the highlights of his self-evaluation. He also emphasized the need for clear expectations from the board regarding performance metrics, goal setting and communication and welcomes feedback from the college. The only item Claire mentioned that she would like to see some change is getting more staff back on campus and less remote work. Chairperson Freda asked for a motion to approve the Presidential evaluation with the compensation recommended by the BOHE. Mr. Cohen made a motion to approve and seconded by Ms. Hernandez. All approved. Motion carried.

I. **ADJOURNMENT** – Chair Freda asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. A motion was made by Ms. Hernandez and seconded by Mr. Cohen. All approved. Meeting adjourned at 9:51AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Laurie Snoonian