

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES ACADEMIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE  
January 30, 2024  
87 Blackinton St, North Adams  
MS Teams Audio/Video**

**Committee members in attendance:**

Jean Clarke-Mitchell, Committee Chair\*  
Buffy Lord (BL)  
William Garrity (WG)

**Others present:**

James Birge, President (PJB)  
Jeannette Smith, Vice President Student Affairs (JS)  
Sajaira Hudson, Student (SH)  
Joshua Mendel, Chief of Staff

\*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 Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees of January 30, 2025, with Committee Chair Clarke-Mitchell presiding was called to order at 8:30 a.m.

Chair Clarke-Mitchell called the committee meeting to order at 8:30am

JS- Brought to the attention of the committee the handout package called the Blue and Gold Collective, specifically pointing out the identified need to define who/what first-generation is (Firstgen).

CHAIR CLARKE-MITCHELL- Noted that she really enjoyed how broad the understanding of what first-generation is considered.

JS- Defining Firstgen is important so students can understand success. Definitions from Higher Education Act, Common App and internal language are confusing. So, creating an actual working definition for student success at MCLA is important.

PJB- It was interesting to learn that a parent with a four-year degree, but not active in a student's life, the student is considered Firstgen. Also interesting about parents with a four-year degree from outside the country.

BL- Shared her life experience of degrees skipping a generation.

SH- Explained the importance of creating a community understanding of Firstgen students, because it helps to take away the tabu or stigma that is attached with the tag.

BL- Finding a name for the Firstgen affinity group will be a good step in creating a positive experience for the students.

SH- Firstgen students are an example of bravery. It is bravery for a student to be first in their family to pursue a degree.

PJB- Firstgen students are challenged by the complicated language of college and the terms that are used are very confusing. The college process is also very complicated to navigate, both before and while in college.

JS- Indicated that she would like to see faculty and staff, who are Firstgen, as part of the committee. This will help students to better relate as well as have role models.

SH began her presentation Firstgen Voices: Stories of Trailblazers

Sajaira has been working with the Firstgen Committee to help the students find a voice and an identity. She crafted key questions and conducted interviews throughout the fall semester to begin to identify First gen student stories.

Sajaira found that the two groups of students that participated in the surveys were First Year and Senior Students. The questions asked to students were:

- Can you share what motivated you to pursue higher education as a first generation student?
- How do you balance your academic responsibilities with other aspects of your life, such as family commitments or part-time work?
- When did you first encounter the term first-generation? How did you come to know this phrase applied to you?
- What roles have mentors or advisors played in your college experience, and how did you find them?

The more impactful quotes that were taken from the interviews were:

“Other first-gen students have been a great help to aid in my schooling here. from the professors to staff, it was refreshing to see people in high-end jobs being a first gen. That means I can do it too. ”

“In 6th grade, I first started to prep for college. Then I went to college prep for middle and high school. They taught me to apply for many colleges and to always have a safe school. ”

“ ...I rely on my major professor's help for any questions I have. It's nice to have someone obligated to listen to you. Even helping me with finding a job. ”

“ ...Being told that I made the Dean’s List. I have previously struggled with academics so seeing the process and effort meant a lot to me. ”

SH- Explained that the next steps with the data she collected is to work for IRB certification, to present at the Undergraduate Research Conference and to help the First gen committee have data to guide work in the future.

PJB- I believe that the College has a role to play in helping students understand and talk about college at an early age.

BL- Said that she chose to enter the Navy because she did not understand the college planning process. A mentor group would have worked for her.

JS- Spoke about the importance of defining First gen so all students understand who they are.

BL- Students should be proud of being First gen and own the opportunity. Look to change the narrative so it is positive.

CHAIR CLARKE-MITCHELL- The definition that was created is broad and helpful to students and the community.

SH- It is easy in MCLA to talk to people that have roles who can help make change and listen to the students concerns and opportunities.

BL- Being a First gen comes with a lot of responsibility. You reach your goal of a degree and do well because your family is counting on you. They saw you take a risk and expect you are going to help raise them up as well.

JS- Power Point Presentation for Title IX and EO Updates

Key points:

2024 Title IX regulations were recently struck down. 2020 regulations now immediately apply. Think of a situation like an annulment and not a divorce.

Staffing changes:

1. Title IX Coordinator Intake (same person)
  2. Investigator
  3. Advocate #1 (Complainant)
  4. Advocate #2 (Respondent)
  5. Decision Maker
  6. Appellate
- Waiting for guidance to confirm direction.
  - There are four mechanisms that offer space for reports, investigations, education, referrals, sanctions, and support. (Law Enforcement, Community Standards, State EO Plan, 2020 Title IX sexual harassment)

#### Currently Updating

- Webpages
- Training Presentations
- EO plan
- 2020 regs
- Policies, Practices, & Procedures
- Training Modules

#### Training

Confirming current certifications

- VP Smith and Dean Morrill
- HR Director, Brenda Stokes
- Identify staff capacity
- Residence Life Staff
- Athletics
- Any new/vacant positions

#### Next Steps

Position re-posted January 21, 2025

- Updated the JD
- Purchased a posting upgrade
- Posted to ATIXA
  - Continue with Grand River Solutions
    - Camie Pratt
    - Dr. Liz Frost
      - Laura Harlow

BL- Is there an ability to share positions with other schools? JS- Yes, there is an opportunity to share.

WG- The requirement for cross evaluation may be very hard for students to accept/understand.

CHAIR CLARKE-MITCHELL - Thanks, VP Smith for the update and transitioned the meeting to Trustee Garrity for an update from Student Government.

WG – Shared his notes with the Committee

He highlighted:

The Student Government Association held their fall elections this past October, resulting in the election of 4 senators and a student trustee. This means that we now have a full Student Government Association to be able to meet and act on matters of concern for students.

During our first semester, the Student Government Association passed the following proposals:

- Sullivan Lounge Proposal – To allow student clubs and organizations to use Sullivan Lounge through a booking system that runs through SGA.
- Senate Chair Proposal – To allow the Senate Chair to receive compensation for their work on the SGA Executive Board.
- Food Committee Proposal – To form a Food Committee that reports to SGA to bring about a more collaborative process, involving students, administration, and dining hall staff, to bring about improvements to dining services on campus.

The Student Government Association held their retreat on Tuesday, January 21st. At this meeting we heard from all the executive board members on topics such as leadership skills, parliamentary procedure, goal setting, and our strengths as a group. Members found the retreat informative and to bring us on strong footing to start this semester.

BL- With the good work being done, vacant seats will create some competition for positions.

CHAIR CLARKE-MITCHELL- I am always impressed with the outstanding work being done by the students at MCLA. Any other business?. Hearing none.

With no further business the meeting was adjourned at 9:28am

Respectfully Submitted  
Joshua Mendel  
Chief of Staff