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**METROPOLITAN STATE UNIVERSITY of DENVER  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING  
Friday, March 19, 2021  
MINUTES  
Executive Session: 7:30 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.  
Public/Full Board Meeting: 8:45 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.  
Zoom Meetings**

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**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Chairwoman Barb Grogan read the Trustees into Executive Session at 7:30 a.m., and asked for a motion. The motion was made and seconded, and unanimously approved.

**II. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

The Board of Trustees business meeting was called to order at approximately 7:30 a.m. by Chairwoman Grogan. Vice Chairman Russell Noles, Trustee Albus Brooks, Trustee Mario Carrera, Trustee Emily Renwick Garnett, Trustee Kristin Hultquist, Trustee Mike Johnston, Trustee Marissa Molina, Faculty Trustee Bethany Fleck, Faculty Senate President Katia Campbell, Student Trustee Alaura Ward, Alumni Association Trustee Joe Rice, and Student Government Assembly President Braeden Weart were also in attendance, along with President Janine Davidson, Board Secretary David Fine, Vice President/Chief Operating Officer Larry Sampler, Treasurer/CEO George Middlemist, Assistant Secretary Melinda Olivarez, various faculty, administrators, and staff.

**III. CHAIR'S WELCOME & REPORT**

Chair Grogan opened the meeting thanked faculty and staff for the outstanding work they have done during these challenging times. She asked for approval of the Consent Agenda.

**IV. CONSENT AGENDA**

A. Approval of January 29, 2021 Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes

B. Office of Human Resources report of personnel actions for the Board's approval, which have occurred since the last Board Meeting on Friday, January 29, 2021

C. Approval of 2022-2023 Board of Trustees Meeting Schedule. Chair Grogan noted that the Board Retreat will be held on campus this year. Attendance is important as many critical issues will be discussed. The first day of the retreat will be for the Board of Trustees; the second day will be for both the Board of Trustees and the Foundation board; the third day will be for the Foundation board.

Trustee Carrera **moved for approval** of the Consent Agenda, with a **second** by Trustee Brooks. The motion was **unanimously approved**.

**V. REPORTS and ACTION ITEMS**

**A. President's Report – President Janine Davidson**

President Davidson thanked all who participated in MSU Denver's Day of Giving.

President Davidson outlined the talking points used to familiarize legislators with the facts surrounding funding higher education generally, and MSU Denver's funding in particular. Colorado ranks 48<sup>th</sup> in the country in higher education funding. Its large racial attainment gap holds the state back from reaching its goal of at least 66% of its adult population having a college degree by 2025. The Colorado Department of Higher Education's Talent Pipeline report showed that in Colorado, White adults with a college degree comprise nearly 65% of the population; Blacks, 44%; Latinos, 32%; and Native Americans, 28%. MSU Denver is poised to address this racial attainment gap as these are the populations it serves.

The JBC initially approved a restoration of higher education funding to pre-pandemic levels in figure-setting last week. Instead of signing onto the consensus letter with other institutions of higher education, MSU Denver went out on its own with the JBC and asked for more equitable funding. In doing so, it has made a strong impression and is influencing additional proposals related to funding for underrepresented students as well as first-generation and Pell-eligible students.

The JBC is also considering a proposal whereby the state would buy down tuition for students at MSU Denver, Mesa, and the community colleges, keeping tuition flat for students at those institutions. In the past, the legislature gave MSU Denver permission to raise tuition, which is in direct opposition to the institution's intentions for its students. Its outreach efforts have driven that point home, President Davidson said. MSU Denver is still the most affordable institution of higher education on the Front Range.

President Davidson expressed her gratitude to the Board, Kaycee Gerhart, and Christine Staberg and her team for using their influence to leverage the University's equitable funding message, and asked that their efforts continue over the coming months.

One year ago on St. Patrick's Day, the campus closed due to the pandemic. Faculty and staff pivoted to providing online courses for the long haul. The University's plans for Fall were considered conservative. While other institutions advertised that they would operate in person in the Fall, MSU Denver determined that 90% of its courses would be offered online. Students were informed upfront what they were signing up for, although this might have negatively affected enrollment.

With the CARES Act money it received, MSU Denver invested in its faculty and technology, positioning it in a post-pandemic world to provide even better online offerings for its students who will need it more than ever. They realize that the option of taking courses online provides flexibility. Students' lives are being disrupted by the pandemic, and even more students will be working while also attending classes.

President Davidson said that she and her colleagues on the Auraria Campus feel that if enough faculty, staff, and students can be vaccinated, students will be able to return to campus safely in Fall 2021. The Governor's office was petitioned by all the presidents and chancellors across Colorado to move higher education up on the list of populations prioritized for vaccination. The Governor's office listened, and today all faculty and staff and anyone aged 50 and over are eligible to be vaccinated. With the assistance of Trustee Johnston, the Auraria campus partnered with COVID-Check Colorado and Denver Health to create a vaccination site. Approximately 800 people were vaccinated the first week. In this effort MSU Denver played an important role as an anchor institution and drew on its past work with the census when it reached out to hard-to-reach residents.

Returning to a fully operational physical campus allows MSU Denver to offer the best of both worlds to students, with ample classes for those who prefer in-person classrooms. Operationally, faculty has the opportunity to lead inside their own departments. Human Resources is working on an alternative work arrangement for the post-COVID new normal, looking at best practices in higher education and in industry, to put in place a strong policy that provides employees flexibility in the post-pandemic workplace.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected communities of color, but there has not been an exodus of students of color from MSU Denver. With a 6% decline in enrollment overall between Fall 2019 to Fall 2020, there was only a 1.6% decline in the number of students of color. The percentage of students of color increased in the Fall to 48.4%, while the percentage of White students was 49%; the remainder are international students or students of unknown race/ethnicity.

There are searches under way for deans in the College of Health and Applied Sciences and in the College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences. President Davidson and Chair Grogan thanked interim provost Dr. Bill Henry who stepped in when Dr. Vicki Golich retired and led at a time when the University was faced with one of the biggest crises in history.

**B. Government Affairs & State Legislative Update – Kaycee Gerhart, Director of Government Affairs and Christine Staberg, Founding Partner of The Capstone Group**

Ms. Gerhart stated that the state legislature is in session and in the middle of budget season. Some crucial collective work has been done over the last several months and the Board has played an important role in it.

Ms. Staberg said that the JBC voted to restore funding to 2019-'20 levels, equal to a \$451 million restoration. Ms. Staberg's team was able to help draw out the conversation with committee members regarding underrepresented minority students and a tuition buydown at Colorado Mesa University, the Community Colleges System, and MSU Denver.

\$300,000 a year for the University's Cybersecurity program, which is being viewed as ongoing funding for the next few years, was approved. Ms. Staberg and her team, along with President Davidson, lobbied the Joint Business Committee on that funding. A \$1 million appropriation for Open Educational Resources was also approved. MSU Denver is seen as a leader in the OER field.

Two important supplemental bills were signed into law by the Governor on Friday. SB109 provides \$2.75 million in state money to AHEC toward its bond payment; and SB52 included the AES supplemental, which is essentially a forgiveness of \$2.1 million that MSU Denver would otherwise have had to repay to the state.

Both of MSU Denver's IT requests are in the budget currently. The JBC voted Friday to fund \$1.25 million for network infrastructure, and \$1.3 million for student/faculty interfacing. The Joint Technology Committee (JTC) said a number of higher education institutions were looking at funds for the student/faculty interface and upgrade, an ERP system, and the JTC expressed interest in having the institutions work together to negotiate a better deal. With the help of Ms. Gerhart and the IT team at MSU Denver, MSU Denver steered the entire process, drafted a letter of intent which was signed by all the institutions, and presented it to the JBC and JTC prior to figure-setting on Friday. MSU Denver played an important leadership role, and the University received kudos from the JTC for taking the initiative in doing that.

Ms. Staberg stated that the top capital priority was getting funding for the necessary upgrades for buildings on the Auraria campus of which MSU Denver is the majority user, and the committee voted Friday to dedicate \$20.4 million in state funds for the project. For the time being, they voted only on Tier 1 projects, which is where the AHEC project sits. The Health Institute project for MSU Denver is in Tier 2 and could be considered this week. It is the eighth project down the list; the state would need \$62 million in additional funds in order to fund the project, which is a \$7.1 million request.

MSU Denver has supported legislation, including SB67, Strengthening Civics Education; and SB77, Removing Lawful-Presence Verification. Powerful testimony supported of the bill, with bipartisan support. This bill's passage means that an applicant for professional credentialing through a state agency is no longer required to provide proof of lawful presence, an extremely significant change for MSU Denver students.

Ms. Gerhart thanked the Trustees for their one-on-one interactions with elected officials and key decisionmakers, sharing the message of the University in continuing meaningful dialogue. These connections have elevated the narrative around budget and capital requests and are having broad and deep reach. With the support of the senior leadership team, the Board of Trustees, the Foundation board, and alumni, leaders have internalized the message of the University, Ms. Gerhart said. In recent visits to the Capitol, legislators were overheard repeating talking points outlined by senior leadership of the University. Ms. Gerhart stated that this is a powerful illustration of the efficacy of this work, the efforts of the Board, and the progress being made in changing and building the understanding that drives increasing support of these initiatives.

Formal advocacy is the formal testimony that is provided by students, faculty, and staff to increase MSU Denver's presence at the capital and ensure that the University's perspectives are infusing the dialogue tied to bills, and to generate dialogue regarding the budget, informing decisions being made around capital dollar allocations and other special funding available to MSU Denver. Students, faculty, and staff have participated in these forums. Powerful testimony was provided by a staff member, a student and the student's parent on HB1067, the test-optional bill. This reinforces the presence of MSU Denver and elevates its perspectives in the way legislators view the issues coming across their desks. Roadrunners can influence how policy is made, and students are able to take action tied to advocacy efforts in a way that serves the University as a whole.

Ms. Gerhart noted that Cathy Lucas and her team are helping immensely in terms of media placement and the stories being generated, budget messages, and capital requests in bills that matter most to the MSU Denver community and getting the message out to the state as a whole.

Federal and local efforts will ramp up in the summer, Ms. Gerhart said, but the groundwork is being laid now. Meetings with the federal delegation and local officials will be held to launch conversations, strengthen relationships, focus on issues in areas they are well positioned to influence which include federal funding for cyber programs, aerospace and other credential pathways, as well as how MSU Denver can increase its reach in Denver and adjacent communities. Trustee Grogan stated that the Board is happy to help with those meetings.

Ms. Gerhart said that the higher education institutions are positioning themselves to try to retain federal stimulus money. Colorado Mesa University put together a proposal called Stimulus With A Purpose ("SWAP"). There is concern that the state will use some of the funds which were allocated toward higher education to balance the state budget instead.

Trustee Copp offered to provide Ms. Gerhart with briefing materials used by Colorado Concern last year which laid out an infrastructure plan with an emphasis on higher education.

Trustee Grogan asked when the decision will be made regarding moving the Health Institute funding up above the line. Ms. Staberg responded that legislators are waiting to receive the revenue forecast. She and her team are advocating to get the first phase funded. She stated that OSPB is rounding up its forecast by approximately \$400,000 with the warning that it is one-time only and that there is a structural deficit moving forward. The next opportunity comes from the federal money coming to the state dedicated to the capital list. CDC members and others are advocating on behalf of MSU Denver.

Trustee Noles inquired as to how the state is portrayed to companies considering moving to Colorado given the fact that Colorado is 48<sup>th</sup> in the nation in funding education. President Davidson said that legislators need to hear from constituents outside the area of education, including business leaders. Ms. Staberg noted that Colorado's constitution contains significant revenue restrictions that other states do not face.

### **C. Finance Committee Report – *Trustee Russell Noles***

Vice Chairman Noles reported that Spring enrollment is down 9% from last Spring, which is better than many other institutions are experiencing. Indigenous and international student populations are relatively small in number, but as a percentage they represent large, double-digit decreases in enrollment. There was also a meaningful decline in the population of White students.

The Fall semester is difficult to predict because of the pandemic. The best-case scenario is that enrollment will be close to flat compared to last year, and the worst-case scenario is that enrollment will be down 8%. Ms. Saucedo and her team are recruiting through a series of marketing campaigns and working closely with education partners.

Mr. Middlemist explained auxiliaries to the committee. Auxiliaries are those functions that are endemic in the campus's activities, including the Health Center, Athletics, and the Hotel. These activities have their

own budgets, revenues and expenses, and their own fund balances. Although the pandemic has cut into these operations, their reserves have remained strong.

Mr. Middlemist also updated the committee on the state's budget options. The fact that the JBC is deliberating on a \$3 million tuition buydown is evidence that MSU Denver's message is resonating with legislators, that tuition must remain affordable and that raising tuition is not the right response to the University's funding issues.

Trustee Johnston said that the University's message to state legislators must now be amplified and that the expected additional federal funding must be used by the state to continue to invest in higher education.

The Hotel continues to battle the effects of the pandemic. The Hotel's occupancy rate was 40% compared to the budgeted rate of 32%. The Hotel had a small operating profit which was insufficient to support the Hotel's debt payment and this in turn put a strain on the University's finances. The Hotel is well positioned to come out of the pandemic, due in large part to the expert management of its general manager and the partnership with Sage.

The committee received an update on the University's audits. There was a significant deficiency in a recent audit. Mr. Middlemist assured the committee that adequate resources are in place to maintain the effectiveness of internal controls.

#### **D. Academic and Student Affairs (ASA) Committee Report – Trustee Marissa Molina**

##### **1. Approval of Faculty Emeritus Recommendations**

Trustee Molina asked for approval of the faculty emeritus recommendations given in committee.

Trustee Carrera **moved for approval** of the faculty emeritus recommendations, with a **second** by Vice Chairman Noles. The motion was **unanimously approved**.

##### **2. Approval of New Programs**

Trustee Molina stated that the committee is seeking approval of a new minor in Public Health. The University's programs are adapting as needed in the community and as students' needs evolve.

Vice Chair Noles **moved for approval** of the new minor in Public Health, with a **second** by Trustee Hultquist. The motion was **unanimously approved**.

#### **E. Sustained Racial Justice (SRJ) Committee Report – Trustee Mario Carrera**

Trustee Carrera stated that the committee's discussion focused on three areas. The Denver Institute for Racial Equity and Reconciliation is a work in progress. The Institute is becoming a resource in this community and statewide.

A Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Certificate is being explored which may become a program in the Hospitality School. Further work and investigation remains to be done, but there is significant interest.

MSU Denver has once again been designated as a Hispanic Serving Institution. The HSI initiatives involves several projects. TutorMe Virtual; the Association of Colleges and University Educators is a new initiative that was recently put in place; Learning Assistants has been shown to be very effective, especially for students in STEM programs; and the Teacher Assistant Program, a new initiative that complements a significant amount of undergraduate studies.

Development and implementation of the Campus Climate Survey was also discussed, as well as its analysis and interpretation and response rates from the administration, faculty, staff, and students.

The fourth pillar of the Strategic Plan was discussed. It addresses recruitment and retention and the success of faculty and staff, specific initiatives under review, and work by the Faculty Diversity Resolution Task Force specifically, which is charged with coming up with recommendations.

Chair Grogan stated that the SRJ Committee is a committee of the whole, and each Trustee cares deeply about the work it is undertaking. She thanked Dr. Michael Benitez and his team and colleagues.

**F. Student Trustee & Student Government Report – *Alaura Ward, Student Trustee and Braeden Weart, Student Government Assembly President***

Mr. Weart and Student Trustee Ward said that Student Government is working to increase student involvement and participation in SGA. It is amending its constitution and policies to lower GPA and credit-hour requirements to remove barriers to equitable involvement in SGA. SGA believes that students have an important voice that is central to moving the University forward.

**G. Foundation Report – *Jamie Hurst, Assistant Vice President of Strategic Engagement, Katie Biscoe, Associate Vice President, University Advancement, and Emily Garnett, Trustee***

Ms. Hurst said that the 5<sup>th</sup> annual MSU Denver Day of Giving was held yesterday. In 2017, approximately \$8,000 was raised on the Day of Giving. Last year, despite the Day of Giving falling on the day after the campus shut down, \$155,000 was raised. This year, \$207,704 was raised from 866 donors in 24 hours. This made it possible to launch President Davidson's Internship in Public Service project with \$48,000, which will support five students going to Washington, D.C. for a hands-on learning experience; \$32,000 was raised for Roadrunners Athletics; \$23,000 for the Student Emergency Fund; and \$10,000 for the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Fund. Ms. Hurst thanked all the Social Media Ambassadors who participated, including Trustees, Hurst, Molina, and Rice. The event was streamed live on Facebook, and a seven-hour live telethon ran the entire day. Twenty-five campus programs were highlighted, and videos from Ms. Lucas's team were shown telling the MSU Denver story.

Ms. Biscoe said that at 70% of the way through this fiscal year, the University is already at 78% of the way toward meeting its fundraising goal of \$5 million. The Foundation is receiving continued support from corporations, foundations, friends, alumni, and nonprofits.

Ms. Hurst said that 91% of donors have been retained, with nearly 1,600 donors retained from last year. The Foundation office is making database improvements.

Fair market value of the University's current endowment is \$19,527,857; total net assets as of January 31, 2021 are \$34,416,300.

Ms. Biscoe said that over a ten-year period there has been a total return of 6.3% on the Foundation's investments.

An RFP was circulated for an investment advisor and the selection will be announced next week at the Foundation board meeting.

Trustee Garnett stated that scholarship dinners will be held virtually, with the goal of connecting donors with the students who receive the scholarships, creating a cycle of giving.

Trustee Garnett thanked Vice Chair Noles for his generous gift and for spearheading creation of the Foundation's Charitable Gift Annuity Program.

A gift from Cook Street Consulting will go towards creating paid internships and providing equity, in furtherance of the goals of the University's Strategic Plan.

**H. Auraria Higher Education Center (AHEC) Board Report – *Trustee Albus Brooks***

Trustee Brooks stated that SB21-109 was signed into law by Governor Polis. Representatives McCluskey and Herod, and Senators Hanson and Rankin sponsored the bill which provides for \$20.3

million in state funds and \$200,000 in institutional funds for replacement of the HVAC infrastructure on the Auraria Campus.

The CCD Boulder Creek Project Phase I was allocated \$6.2 million in state funds and \$1.1 million in institutional funds.

Five hundred COVID vaccinations were administered last week to faculty and staff of the three institutions at the Health Center of Auraria. The rollout and implementation of the vaccines will ensure a safe return to campus as quickly as possible.

Trustee Brooks serves as co-chair of the Urban Exploration Trip for the Downtown Denver Partnership. In prior years, the group would travel to another city with one to two hundred civic and business leaders. Because of the pandemic, this year's study was about Denver and the history of the Auraria campus and how the city incorporates the campus. MSU Denver and UC Denver are sponsors of the event.

Trustee Brooks noted that the heads of each of the three institutions on campus, and the executive director of AHEC, are all women. He stated that this is an exciting and historically significant moment and that these women will lead the vision of what the campus will become.

**I. Alumni Representative Report – *Jamie Hurst, Assistant Vice President of Strategic Engagement***

The Black Alumni Network was launched during Black History Month in February. Forty participants attended its first networking meeting.

"Finish Line" is an endowed scholarship of the Alumni Association. With assistance and support from Admissions, Financial Aid, and the C2Hub, students are identified who have stopped out for at least two semesters and are within 12 to 15 credit hours of graduating. Recipients of the scholarship are invited to return and the remainder of their program is paid by the scholarship.

The Alumni Book Club is virtual and has grown to 350 members in a year and a half. Alumni volunteer to facilitate guided conversations about the books read by the club. The Association will be working with the University's "1 Book/1 Project/2 Transform" program to create a connection between alumni and students. Ideas are welcome.

The Colorado Rockies 50/50 Raffle sponsored by MSU Denver has raised approximately \$250,000 annually. The opening game is Thursday, April 1 against the Dodgers.

**J. Faculty Trustee Report – *Bethany Fleck, Faculty Trustee***

Faculty Trustee Fleck provided a brief report contained in the meeting packet, and she invited meeting participants to contact her to chat.

Chair Grogan asked Faculty Trustee Fleck to convey the Board's gratitude to faculty.

**K. Faculty Senate Report – *Katia Campbell, Faculty Senate President***

Faculty Senate President Campbell stated that the Diverse Faculty Resolution was passed by Faculty Senate, and an update will be provided at the next meeting of the Board.

Faculty Senate has a posthumous degree policy. To avoid misunderstanding as to who has the final word in awarding the degree, the policy was changed so that the person with the final word on awarding the degree is the Provost.

**VI. PRESENTATION**

**A. Educational Quality and Student Services Report – *Matthew Cream, Associate Director of Student Support and Retention, and Nahum Kistner, Executive Director of Student Support and Retention in the Classroom-to-Career Hub***

Mr. Kisner provided an overview of the Academic Re-Engagement Navigator Program and described the ways in which it aligns strategically with the University's priorities and strategic alignment and the Colorado Master Plan. The Colorado Master Plan has a mandate from the state to produce 73,500 additional degrees and certificates by 2025. The Reengagement Program and other programs at MSU Denver will assist the state in achieving that mandate.

A "re-engaged student" is a student who has stopped-out/discontinued their studies at MSU Denver for more than a year and has returned to the University.

In July 2008 MSU Denver partnered with the Denver Chamber of Commerce in a program focusing on youth previously enrolled at MSU Denver aged 18 to 24. From the first pilot program, 17 students re-enrolled, with an average 9.88 credit hours each, which increased each year. Out of approximately \$7,500 spent on hourly wages in the Fall of 2018, approximately \$52,076 of estimated tuition and fees were returned to the University. If full-time staff could be dedicated, the program could be scaled and retention and access could be increased. The program is out of the pilot stage.

Mr. Cream said that the program's two re-engagement navigators have helped develop the program structure that eventually leads to enrollment. This is a university-wide effort. Academic advisors, the Center for Individualized Learning where the students complete an individualized degree program, and Financial Aid. Re-engagement and retention grants in the amount of \$200 are sometimes available to take care of previous balances due, and the Bursar has worked to get the students out of collections. The Registrar's office offers change-of-major support. Admissions utilizes "Slate" which is technology that enables Admissions to reach out to students to track their admissions applications and determine where they are in the recruitment process.

The focus of the program is to improve retention. Eight students graduated in their first or second semester back.

Estimated tuition and fees collected in the 2019-'20 academic year were \$1.3 million. The total program budget is \$240,000.

Barriers to retention are having a balance due or being in collections, and the reliability or affordability of childcare.

Chair Grogan said that this work is profoundly important and basic to what MSU Denver does. She asked what the average amount is in collections. Mr. Simpkins stated that he will obtain that information and ensure that it is conveyed to the Board.

Mr. Simpkins pointed out that the program began with a \$15,000 contribution from the Chamber of Commerce's Denver Youth Opportunity Project to MSU Denver. That \$15,000 has turned into a \$1.3 million revenue generating program.

## **VII. INFORMATION ITEMS**

A. Human Resources report of personnel actions for the Board's information, which have occurred since the last Board meeting on Friday, January 29, 2021.

## **VIII. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Board Secretary David Fine introduced the student known as X who read a letter to the Board of Trustees from the Senate of the Student Government Assembly.

Trustee Grogan thanked X and asked him to relay to the students the Board's appreciation of their input and feedback.

## **IX. ADJOURNMENT**

The Board of Trustees meeting was duly adjourned at approximately 12:00 p.m.