BHE Urges CCs to Hold Face-to-Face Classes

At its March 23 meeting the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education took up the issue of increasing the number of in-person classes at the 15 community colleges.

Prior to the meeting, rumors were circulating that Secretary of Education James Peyser was adamant about community colleges returning to largely in-person classes in September. There was a sense that pressure was being applied to the college presidents.

Nationally first-year community college enrollments are down 19 percent. Massachusetts community colleges have averaged an overall nine percent drop, but last fall, first-year Black and Latino students were down about 30 percent.

Many four-year colleges, including Boston University, Northeastern, Harvard and the U Mass system, have announced that they will be having most students fully on campus with all the traditional activities in the fall.

Given that Massachusetts community colleges enroll nearly half of all public college students, and that they serve a large percentage of minority and low-income students, there is concern about equity. The Board was concerned that our students may have more difficulty with remote learning and have a greater need for face-to-face instruction.

President James Mabry from Middlesex Community College spoke for the college presidents telling the Board that the community colleges are planning to offer a variety of modalities including face-to-face, virtual classes, and hybrid options. He said that the colleges had surveyed their students and many do want options.

Mabry used the example of some campuses that are setting up first-year orientations in August where students will spend some time on campus to meet their peers under tents.

College leaders voiced the need for more detailed guidelines from the state about such issues as how much distance students should keep apart. Peyser said that they have been waiting to see the progress on vaccinations and new variants of the virus. “It’s still a moving target, so we have to do a little bit of wait-and-see.”

“We weren’t advocating 100 percent in-person,” Board member Patty Epinger was quoted in the Boston Globe. “We didn’t want to lose sight of the need and value of in-person education.”

In the end, the Board passed a resolution guiding the fall reopening that said, “all students who want or need an in-person learning experience, either full-time or part-time, will have a robust set of affordable and accessible options across all degree programs at all community colleges, especially first-year students.”

In the public comments period of the Board of Higher Education meeting, MCCC Vice President and SAC Coordinator spoke supporting the $7 million that was included in the budget for a new SUCCESS Fund (Supporting Urgent Community College Equity through Student Services) created specifically for community college students. She explained the importance of the wraparound support SUCCESS provides students like scholarships, food assistance, child care housing, etc.

Our students, who are generally older, face many more impediments than traditional students and this kind of support is vital.
Know Your Rights

In Solidarity

MTA Bargaining Support

The establishment of a Bargaining Support team one of the changes in MTA’s restructuring that will be assisting local associations (like the MCCC) as they engage in contract negotiations.

In a brief presentation to the MCCC Board at its March meeting, MTA staff member Courtney Derwinski, explained what the group will be offering as support for bargaining and campaigns.

She was a familiar face to the MCCC having formerly been our field representative. Similar divisions can be found at other NEA state affiliates such as in Wisconsin and Minnesota where she had previously worked.

A perfect example of what this new MTA group can do, she said, was the MCCC salary grid negotiations that brought us a fair, predictable salary system. Because of experience gained in those other states, we had a much greater evidence to support our case to management.

The new group will be able to do research in support of various initiatives for all MTA locals. ■

Juneteenth Holiday Added

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has established a new state holiday designated for June 19 of each year known a Juneteenth Independence Day, the traditional celebration of the end of slavery in the United States. The holiday was established after collective bargaining agreements had been ratified, so the union will bargain over adding the day to the list of holidays on page 25 of the MCCC Day contract. For 2021, June 19 is a Saturday, and according to the contract employees would have the previous Friday as the day off.

RCC Recognized

The college ranking site AcademicInfluence.com has named Roxbury Community College the second most influential community college in the country. The ranking highlights significant contributions that RCC personnel have made in the fields of mathematics, criminal justice, education, nursing, biology, and computer science.

The rankings came from analysis of 839 fully-accredited community colleges with over 1000 students. And the final ranking is based on the overall impact of the faculty, alumni, and administrators associated with RCC. According to AcademicInfluence.com: “The people affiliated with a school are ultimately what make it great.”

Massachusetts community colleges were well represented in the top 20 with Springfield Tech (# 4), Northern Essex (#14), MassBay (# 16), Bunker Hill (# 18), and Holyoke (#20). Ann Arundel Community College in Maryland came in first.

MCCC Deemed “Best of Worcester”

The Worcester Awards Program recognizes various businesses in the city for excellence, and this year the Massachusetts Community College Council topped the category of 2021 Best of Worcester Awards — Labor Unions. President Margaret Wong, who lives in the city, said that these awards are a big deal in Worcester.

NSCC Selects New President from NECC

The North Shore Community College Board of Trustees has selected William Heineman, currently Provost at Northern Essex Community College, to be the fourth president of NSCC. He will take office July 1, after the expected approval by the Board of Higher Education. Heineman was the preferred candidate by the faculty and staff. With the departure of NSCC’s Academic Vice President and two other senior vacancies he will be making significant changes immediately.

Massasoit Announces New President

Ray DiPasquale has been selected as the next president of Massasoit Community College, succeeding Charles Wall. He has served most recently as President of Clinton Community College and before that at the Community College of Rhode Island. Earlier experience in the Massachusetts Community College system first at Middlesex and later at Springfield Tech.

Part-time/Adjunct MCCC Directors Appointed

Because of the COVID restrictions, candidates for the two At-large, Part-time/Adjunct Directors were unable to gather the required nomination form signatures to appear on the election ballot, there were no candidates. As per the MCCC Bylaws, the Board of Directors solicited nominees for the positions and at the April meeting two people were selected; Mark Linde from Massasoit and Laura Schlager from Holyoke.

WoSox Tickets

The MCCC Office, being located in Worcester, has been promoting the city and its attractions. Among those is the newly settled Worcester Red Sox minor league baseball team. If you’re interested in attending a game, contact Paul Johansen by email at jguanaphoto@gmail.com for WooSox Tickets.

Correction – In the last issue Roxbury Community College President Valerie Robertson was incorrectly identified as being at Bunker Hill Community College.
MCCC News

MCCC Employees Cited Among Qualifiers In Proposed COVID Early Retirement Bill

A bill has been filed in the state legislature called the “COVID-19 Essential Employee Retirement Credit Bonus” that would add three years of either age or years of service towards the calculation of retirement for people who worked in a workplace during the state of emergency declared by the Governor.

The bill co-sponsored by Rep. Jonathan D. Zlotnik (D Worcester) and Sen. John C. Velis (D Westfield), number 1794 in the House and 1686 in the Senate, has the endorsement of 71 legislators as of March 19, 2021.

It specifically mentions community college employees among the segments that would qualify, and it calls for the secretary of administration to work with employers of employees who fit the requirements to identify those who fit the criteria of working on site during the shutdown. They would provide lists of eligible employees with contact information to the appropriate retirement boards who would then notify qualifying employees.

An interesting feature of the provision is that the 3-year credit can be used at any time after the effective date of the legislation. So, if retirement is still a few years down the road, employees can plan on the additional benefit in their future retirement planning.

As with any proposed legislation, there will be modifications as it wends its way through the process. The current wording calls for the implementation commencing June 30, 2021, but that is likely to change. You can find the bill’s text on malegislature.gov. And you can also find your legislators’ contact information there if you want to express your support for the bill.

There is another, similar bill that focuses on K-12 personnel which does not include higher ed. employees. So be sure to specify the bill numbers above if you contact your legislators.

MTA Higher Ed. Legislation Explained

MTA Director of Government Relations Director Eric Nakajima gave a presentation at the MCCC Board of Directors’ April meeting to explain the legislation they have sponsored for this legislative session. As the budget process wraps up in July typically, this is the time for member action to show support.

He pointed out that information is available on the MTA website (Massteacher.org) under the Legislative Action in Current Initiatives. There is a separate section for higher education. The Cherish Act for increasing higher education funding that MTA has been pushing for a couple of years as part of the Fund Our Future campaign was the first initiative discussed. The Act would add an additional $136 million in funding for the state’s colleges and universities. Fund Our Future had success for K-12, and Nakajima said this is still being pursued with the argument for fairness and a just distribution of funds.

Making college affordable is another initiative being supported. There are two thrusts to this. One is the MASSGrant Plus program that provides $26 million to provide financial support for a wide range of the needs that challenge low income students’ ability to succeed. Another program under The Student Opportunity Act would provide $6 million in student debt relief for graduates of Massachusetts public colleges and universities who go to work in the state’s public schools.

Fair higher ed. workplaces was another topic. Adjunct faculty inequities were addressed with a call for $13 million for part-time health insurance and another $7 million for increasing equity with full-time faculty.

Continued on page 4

Salem State Faculty Face Furloughs

Salem State University has unilaterally imposed two, one-week payless furloughs on the faculty and librarians in that chapter of the Massachusetts State College Association (MSCA) union.

The union had filed Unfair Labor Practice charges against SSU, charging the union had recently concluded a one-year collective bargaining agreement that had COVID-19 considerations and the University could have negotiated over furloughs then. But the Massachusetts Department of Labor Relations dismissed the charges citing the Union’s refusal to bargain over the furloughs.

The first furlough week was during the university’s Spring Break from March 15 to 21, and the second is intended for the week after commencement in May.

MSCA chapter members voted for a “work-to-rule” action and conducted a demonstration at a major intersection near the North Campus on Monday, March 22, the first week after the furloughs. Signs decried university President John Keenan as “Bully-in-Chief.”

Salem State has suffered among the most serious enrollment declines of the nine institutions in the State University system, but it is the only one contemplating furloughs. President Keenan claimed that a projected $20 million deficit over two years necessitated the reduction in pay for faculty and librarians to help stem the red ink.

But the union maintains that, based on the anticipated COVID-19 relief bill funds, the university could have as much as a $25 million surplus and claims that the furloughs are no longer needed. The university says that the budget surplus is at $14.5 million without counting future relief funds. It does count the $1.5 million saved by the MSCA furloughs and another $1.8 million from other personnel taking unpaid time off.

Furloughs were a tactic used in 1991 by then Gov. Bill Weld, who forced many state employees, including all in higher education to work without pay for a number of weeks. The amount lost was on a sliding scale depending on the employees’ earnings.

The unions sued Weld, and it was determined that the claimed fiscal crisis was a fiction. Ultimately, the courts awarded the furloughed workers full restitution with interest.

DCE Negotiating Team Chair DeAnna Putnam led an open discussion on progress in bargaining a new contract. Nearly 50 members participated to hear the status of negotiations and to voice their concerns over the DCE contract and issues they would like to be addressed.

Write Us

Letters to the Editor

Only submissions by MCCC unit members will be accepted. Letters should be no more than 200 words in length. The author must include name and chapter affiliation, which will be published with the letter. Authors must provide the editor with contact information in the form of either email address, mailing address or telephone number. Letters will be published on a space available basis and may be edited for length and appropriateness. Not all submissions can be published.

Guest Columns

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Know Your Day Contract

April 2021
April 15  Dean’s tenure recommendations due (p. 46).
April 15  Title changes announced (p. 68).
April 19  Patriots Day holiday (p. 25).
April 25  Professional Staff unused vacation days in excess of 480 hours (64 days) converted to sick leave at end of last pay period in April (p. 24).

May 2021
May 1  President’s tenure recommendations and sabbatical notification due (pp. 28–46).
May  Last Day of classes, Faculty submit college service and student advisement form (p. 60).
May 21  Tenure decisions due (p. 46).
May 30  Professional staff College service and student advisement forms (p. 61).
May 31  Memorial Day observed (p. 25).

N.B. Dates may vary depending on the first day of classes. Most of these dates are “last date” standards. In many instances the action can be accomplished before the date indicated. Cited page numbers are from the 2018–2021 Agreement.

MTA Higher Ed. Legislation . . .

Continued from page 3

time faculty in per-course pay. Nakajima said that in talking with legislators, the unfairness of adjunct treatment was an issue that got the greatest interest. Another aspect was removing the influence of the governor’s Administration and Finance people in setting contract parameters.

Nakajima wrapped up his presentation saying, “I’m concerned that they don’t put higher ed. as a priority.” The current budget calls for level-funding, which is actually a cut with inflation. That the legislature passed a $24 million student aid package last year says that they do recognize need.

His candid opinion is that the prospects are not good for these bills initially. But he is optimistic going forward because of the $4.5 billion federal aid that the state will receive from the COVID Recovery Act. It is not clear what restrictions if any come with this money. So the legislature is proceeding with the budget under the ordinary course of business which only counts on the normal sources of funding.

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MTA Director of Government Relations, Eric Nakajima (top) gave a detailed presentation of the higher education legislative agenda to the MCCC Board of Directors at its April meeting. Earlier he had joined MTA lobbyist Sean King (below) at a meeting with the MCCC Executive Committee at its March 5 meeting to discuss MCCC’s priorities for this legislative session.

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