

**Highland Community College**  
*Board Retreat*  
*September 9, 2020*  
*Highland Community College Student/Conference Center*  
*Robert J. Rimington Board Room*  
*Freeport, Illinois*

**CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL**

Mr. Jim Endress, Board Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 1:02 p.m.

***Members Physically Present:*** Mr. David Shockey (departed 2:10 p.m.; returned 3:26 p.m.), Mr. Doug Block, Mr. Jim Endress, Mr. Blake Musser, and Mr. Shawn Boldt

***Members Virtually Present:*** Dr. Steve Jennings, and Ms. Pennie Groezinger

***Also Physically Present:*** Ms. Chris Kuberski, President; Mr. Pete Fink, Director of IT (departed 4:17 p.m.; returned 5:05 p.m.); Dr. Brendan Dutmer, Associate Dean, Natural Science & Mathematics (arrived 2:02 p.m.; departed 3:56 p.m.); and, Ms. Terri Grimes, Board Secretary

***Also Virtually Present:*** Ms. Liz Gerber, Vice President, Student Development & Support Services; Ms. Jill Janssen, Vice President, Administrative Services; Mr. Scott Anderson, Vice President, Business, Technology and Community Programs; Dr. Chelsea Martinez, Faculty (departed 3:13 p.m.); Mr. Dan Dick, HCC Foundation Major Gifts Officer (departed 4:13 p.m.); Mr. Dave Barton, President, HCC Foundation Board (departed 1:35 p.m.); Mr. Jim Yeager, Faculty (departed 4:16 p.m.; returned 5:05 p.m.); Mr. Jeff Reinke, Executive Director, HCC Foundation (departed 1:36 p.m.); Ms. Karen Brown, Director of Human Resources (arrived 1:02 p.m.; departed 1:30 p.m.; returned 2:01 p.m.; departed 4:16 p.m.; returned 5:05 p.m.); Ms. Leslie Schmidt, Director, Marketing & Community Relations (departed 4:16 p.m.); and, Mr. Steve Mihina, Faculty (departed 1:44 p.m.)

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

There were no public comments.

**OPENING REMARKS**

Ms. Kuberski reported that the College is currently in week four of the semester and things have gone smoothly with only a few hiccups. There was discussion earlier today in the Emergency Operations Team (EOT) meeting regarding places for students, faculty, and staff to eat on campus. Frontline staff especially need a place to have lunch, and we will continue to explore options. Enrollment numbers indicate that it appears we are retaining students. We have a maximum of approximately 500 students

on campus on any one day but that number may be elevated due to hybrid classes. The majority of staff are on campus, and probably less than half of faculty are on campus. Mr. Endress stated that he was happy to hear that the school year got off to a good start. Trustees are more comfortable with the room setup in the Board room and, although this is not the preferred methodology, we are dealing with it. Mr. Endress expressed a "huge thanks" to Mr. Pete Fink for helping with the technology for the Board meetings.

## FOUNDATION REPORT

Mr. Jeff Reinke, Executive Director of the HCC Foundation, discussed the fundraising campaign, which has been discussed for a couple years. At this point, \$1.5 million in restricted gifts has been raised in the campaign, and many items on the list of needs have been funded through those gifts. He reviewed the reasons for a campaign, which included intensive fundraising for specific priorities; laying a foundation for a stronger Annual Fund after the campaign; an increase in the involvement of volunteers; a heightened public awareness of the College; and developing stronger Major and Planned Gift programs. Mr. Reinke explained that calendar years 2019 and 2020 were the exploratory phase of the campaign, while years 2020 through 2022 are the quiet phase. The public phase will begin in 2022 and continue through 2023. He outlined the five things that the Foundation asks of the College, including developing a larger "transformational vision"; marketing resources committed to the campaign and a Marketing Plan created that uses the Stamats study and is integrated into the campaign; a transition plan crafted and implemented related to the campaign and change in institutional leadership, which is an opportunity to "reintroduce" the College to the external community, major gift donors and prospects; an institution-wide effort with the College and Foundation working together to engage trustees, faculty, and staff regarding campaign education, readiness, and implementation; and, collaboration between the Athletic department and Foundation through outreach and fundraising opportunities to secure major gifts for the Campaign and the Corporate Partnership Program. Related to athletics, Dr. Jennings suggested having a "basketball night" where taxpayers would receive two free tickets to the game if they show their tax receipt, and the Foundation could welcome everyone, and Mr. Reinke suggested it be all-inclusive, with anyone able to attend. Currently with COVID there are restrictions, but Mr. Reinke has suggested that donors and partners come in to see the gymnasium renovations and meet with Mr. Pete Norman, Athletic Director, as well as Ms. Kuberski and Mr. Reinke.

Mr. Reinke stated that this is an opportunity for the institution's leadership to say they are "in" and what they want to do. He noted that it is also important that the trustees be "all in." The trustee's role in the campaign would be to support the College and the campaign financially; actively participate in development activities; give of their time and talent; and serve as an ambassador for the College. He listed several specific opportunities for trustees to be involved, including providing prospects for major gifts; a "door-opener" letter to prospects; inviting prospects to join them at events or on-campus tours; and meetings with prospects and Ms. Kuberski. Mr. Reinke also requested that the Board identify one trustee to serve on the Campaign Committee. Mr. Block asked what determines when the campaign goes into or out of the quiet phase, and Mr. Reinke reported that the \$1.5 million raised was from prior gifts for nursing and ag. When the campaign goes public, 80 percent of the funds should have already been raised. Five-figure gifts will be gone after during the quiet phase. Mr. Reinke reiterated that it will be important for everyone to be involved, have an awareness of the campaign, and speak about it with those with whom they come in contact. Trustees each discussed their comfortableness and

willingness to assist with the campaign. Mr. Endress will let Mr. Reinke know which trustee would like to volunteer for the Campaign Committee. Mr. Reinke closed his presentation by reminding trustees of the Leadership Golf Outing on September 11. Trustees were invited to come out between 9:00 and 10:00 a.m. to thank the corporate partners.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE UPDATES**

### *Higher Learning Commission Assurance Argument as Connected to Recent Presidential Search and Shared Governance*

Ms. Kuberski introduced Dr. Chelsea Martinez, Psychology Instructor and Higher Learning Commission (HLC) peer reviewer. Dr. Martinez is coordinating the writing of the Assurance Argument and will be the key person to review it. Ms. Kuberski noted that, in April, she and Dr. Martinez had discussed Dr. Martinez's concerns about the presidential search process.

Dr. Martinez introduced faculty members Mr. Sam Fiorenza and Mr. Steve Mihina. Dr. Martinez read a letter to the trustees (see attached) and explained that the initial conversation started when concerns were raised at a Board meeting at the end of April regarding the presidential search process.

Mr. Sam Fiorenza thanked trustees and Ms. Kuberski for the opportunity to share thoughts with the Board. He pointed out that faculty are sharing their thoughts and criticisms of the process because they care about the institution. They also want to participate in the business of the College. Mr. Fiorenza shared his belief that how things were done recently with the presidential search process was not transparent, and faculty want an opportunity to participate in College search committees, especially for the President. His hope is that the Board will agree that shared governance includes all stakeholders of the College and that trustees would invite faculty back to a Board meeting to further discuss this. Mr. Endress stated that he read the concerns about the true definition of shared governance, and personally, he would like to have a way to have shared governance implemented so that all who would like to be involved feel they are involved. Dr. Martinez stated that there has been a shared governance work group in place for a couple of years, but there is a concern that it is "spinning its wheels." The motivation is not equally acknowledged or welcomed. She would want to make sure that it is not a structure in place for "checking a box" but that it functions. Mr. Fiorenza noted that the shared governance process will probably be messy, and he is not sure what it will look like, but he would like it to move forward. Ms. Kate Perkins expressed her frustration to Mr. Fiorenza and Dr. Martinez that the group has not been able to agree on a definition. Dr. Martinez hopes to get some assurances to finalize the definition, and she believes shared governance needs to be part of the culture. Mr. Musser expressed his support for what had been said today and challenged the group to get a definition in place and "find a way to legitimize." He stated that he loves that we are talking about it now and that they owe it to the Board to start succession planning.

Ms. Kuberski stated that this was no surprise, and that what was presented today was what Dr. Martinez had talked with her about and what she anticipated would be discussed with trustees. An ad hoc group met a couple times and then the pandemic hit. Ms. Perkins had been organizing the group, and if she would still like to do that, a start would be to reconvene the group. With differing viewpoints, we can get to common knowledge and a common definition of shared governance.

Ms. Kuberski reported that what was formerly called “Core Cabinet” has now been renamed “Cabinet”. The group is reassessing what Cabinet focuses on and what the former “Full Cabinet” focuses on. There may be too much crossover between the groups, and Ms. Kuberski’s hope is that Full Cabinet would have a different name but be representative of the shared governance committee and not a duplication of effort. The first meeting invitation for Full Cabinet has gone out, and it could be another avenue to get to shared governance and an opportunity to get the process clear and have an understanding. Ms. Kuberski expressed her belief that it will be “messy,” as Mr. Fiorenza said. Full Cabinet previously included the Vice Presidents and Deans, and now there will be a representative of the Vice Presidents, a representative of the Deans, a representative from the Director level and a representative of Core Cabinet. Recommendations from Full Cabinet will go to Cabinet, the President, or the Board. The hope is to reduce the number of people on Full Cabinet from around 30, since the size was a detriment to discussion and people did not talk.

Dr. Martinez asked trustees to keep in mind the work that has happened and perspectives, and make sure the perspectives go over to the new group. She believes this news is a surprise that it will be shifted to the new group. The shared governance group was put together to try to finalize a definition and make a recommendation on how to move forward. The Full Cabinet group was thought to be a place for shared governance to play out but open to discussion. Dr. Martinez stated that she does not believe the work group thought the definition had been finalized. Ms. Kuberski stated that it could be a whole different group and Full Cabinet not exist as it did in the past. The conversation will begin at the first Full Cabinet meeting. Mr. Fiorenza stated that he envisions shared governance being like assessment – something from the top down, part of the culture, and a core practice that is incorporated throughout the College. Mr. Musser stated that it is important that trustees get involved in the conversations early on in the process. Mr. Block stated that many schools in the nation are using shared governance and we do not need to recreate the wheel and overlook some good examples that are out there. Ms. Kuberski noted that the work group had looked at some shared governance examples. Mr. Endress thanked the faculty members for their time, noting that it is valuable input and the process started is a good one. He encouraged Dr. Martinez, Mr. Fiorenza, and Mr. Mihina to feel free to continue to work with Ms. Kuberski and keep trustees in the loop.

#### *10<sup>th</sup> Day Enrollment Numbers*

Ms. Kuberski reported that the Vice Presidents and Deans have been aware of the decline in enrollment over the last couple years, and today’s discussion would provide a high-level overview of some efforts to address the declining enrollment. Ms. Janssen reported that the Resource Allocation and Management Plan (RAMP) document has been done on an annual basis. The document looks forward three years and is usually completed in March. The report this year did not address COVID, so the upcoming report will need to be adjusted. The FY21 budget is balanced but relies on full State funding and a reliance on other funds in order to balance the budget. Ms. Janssen would like to include more specific plans in the RAMP document, including a capital plan which will tie to strategic planning and the Foundation Case for Support list. A personnel plan would include a review of vacant positions, including looking at benchmarking data and determining whether areas are staffed correctly. This was also done with faculty when Mr. Evan Talbert and Mr. Todd Vacek were reassigned to other programs.

A Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) plan has been developed and includes Fall-to-Fall retention targets for full- and part-time students, persistence, completion, student engagement, alternative

delivery, and recruitment. Stamats performed a program gap analysis, and met with two trustees and faculty to review the information. New program opportunities include sonography, advanced CNA, welding, and cybersecurity, which Mr. Jeremy Monigold and Ms. Jennifer Roser are currently pursuing. New program development is key to addressing enrollment issues. The SEM committee has been expanded to include faculty, Ms. Janssen, and Ms. Kathy Bangasser. Two presentations were given at Opening Days to gather input from faculty and staff.

Mr. Anderson reported that dual credit is also key to recruitment. The Linking Talent with Opportunity grant is currently in its third year, and the College will apply for the next grant. The grant supports continuation of programs for pathways. Ms. Gerber reported that the Remind text messaging tool has been implemented as a way to communicate with students, and the College has also invested in a customer relationship management (CRM) system, which will be implemented by the end of the semester. Mr. Block asked how the College is addressing changes in areas that we will never go back to, and Ms. Gerber reported that conversations are ongoing in instruction and student services that the “normal” will now have elements of online and virtual classes. Some people have expressed the need to continue to work virtually due to family, and the College is trying to navigate what that might look like.

Ms. Gerber provided comparison Fall 10<sup>th</sup> day data, noting that 26 Illinois community colleges saw a decrease in enrollment of from 10 to 19.99 percent. She will look at which colleges had increases in enrollment and why they had positive numbers. Ms. Gerber reviewed several graphs including head count and credit hours by fiscal year and week, the percent change in enrollment status for Fall 2020 compared to previous semesters, percent of full- and part-time registered students, and online credit hours by fiscal year and week. She noted that there are over 450 courses on the course listing that have enrollment in them, excluding labs. Thirty-one (31) percent of courses on the course listing are internet courses, while 13 percent are hybrid, and 17 percent are completely virtual via Zoom. Fifty-eight (58) percent of students registered for at least one internet-based course. Mr. Musser asked how many students transferred from four-year institutions, and Ms. Gerber will find the information and report back. She noted that there has been a 19 percent decrease in dual credit, but not all dual credit students have been entered yet. There has been a six percent increase in dual enrollment, likely due to an increase in the CollegeNOW agreements. She reviewed a chart that compared the county population between April 2010 and July 2019, noting that there have been increases in residents 65 years of age and over in Carroll, Jo Daviess, and Ogle Counties. The Regional Office of Education (ROE) that serves Stephenson, Jo Daviess, and Carroll Counties has seen a significant drop in head count since the 1997 – 1998 academic year, and the 2020 – 2021 academic year has seen decreasing class size in K-12 in the region. Strategic Enrollment Management continues to talk about and focus on adult, nontraditional, and part-time students. Mr. Musser asked how hard it would be to get the numbers for the parochial schools, and Mr. Endress noted that those schools do not feed into the ROE numbers.

#### *Emergency Operations Team Update*

Ms. Janssen reported that the Emergency Operations Team (EOT) continues to meet twice per week. In addition to the main team, there are four other subgroups working on specific areas, including Faculty Resource Team, Student Services, Community Services, and Administrative Services. Ms. Janssen acknowledged all the work that has been done trying to keep everyone as safe as possible, noting that everyone is being cooperative and compliant. Hopefully the College’s efforts will continue to pay off. Mr. Craig Beintema of the Stephenson County Health Department attended one of the EOT

meetings that included some tabletop exercises and from that, more employee training will be developed. A small group is also working on logistics if the College would have the opportunity to offer COVID testing. The institution portion of the CARES Act funds have been earmarked, which is approximately \$450,000, and there are some remaining funds from the student portion, which will be distributed later this month. Mr. Anderson reported that two external people have been hired to clean touch surfaces throughout the day, the normal cleaning schedule has been adapted, and an effort is being made to keep people informed.

*Discussion of Potential Salary Increases for Administrative, Professional, and Classified Nonunion Staff*

Ms. Kuberski reminded the trustees that several salary increase scenarios had been discussed previously, including the pros and cons of each. A one percent or two percent increase would fit the compensation study better, while a \$1,000 could cause compression issues from the minimum wage increase. The positive about approving the increase at this meeting is that the insurance shift in share will take effect this month. Staff who have family coverage will have their insurance increase \$750 per year due to the change in the percentage paid by the employee and College. A percentage salary increase helps the higher paid staff more than the lower paid staff, and, as mentioned earlier, a \$1,000 increase may cause compression issues. Ms. Janssen has included a two percent increase in the permanent budget. Both a one percent increase and a flat \$1,000 increase equate to approximately \$32,000. Mr. Endress also expressed his belief that the College is not paying the Student Advisors very much, and he noted that we recently lost Mr. Thedford Jackson to Freeport High School. Ms. Janssen reported that there are 46 administrative and professional staff, and 44 classified and hourly staff, with 22 in funds other than the Operating Fund. The salary for 18 of the 22 is not paid entirely from the Operating Fund. The annual classified salary is \$37,000, so a two percent increase would be \$600 and a three percent increase would be \$1,000. For professional staff, the average salary is \$44,000 and a two percent increase would equate to \$1,000. Mr. Endress expressed his belief that a flat dollar amount would help with the insurance increase and the increase with the minimum wage, however, he would not recommend continuing this practice in future years. Mr. Musser also noted that this would be two times in a row that a flat amount has been approved and not to expect that every time. Ms. Janssen stated that this year a new health insurance option was available for staff, and people will know more about it for next year.

At 3:11 p.m., the Chairperson declared a recess; the meeting resumed at 3:24 p.m.

**DIVISION FOCUS – NATURAL SCIENCE AND MATHEMATICS**

Dr. Brendan Dutmer, Associate Dean of Natural Science and Mathematics, presented the division focus. He noted that the division includes 14 full-time faculty and staff, as well as 15 part-time. The division also works closely with Ms. Carolyn Petsche, Director of Learning and Transitional Education Services, with the Math Achievement Center. Students who take classes in the division are primarily pursuing an associate of science or an associate of engineering science. Dr. Dutmer reviewed the courses taught by faculty in the department, as well as the programs under Engineering Science. He also noted that Highland has the first physics course taught entirely online with a lab, which was done pre-COVID. Dr. Dutmer thanked Ms. Rhonda Perry, Executive Assistant to the Vice President of Administrative Services/CAO, and former Student Advisor Mr. Thedford Jackson for the incredible amount of work

they did with the Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI) and Form 13s that were needed through the program review. He reviewed future plans for the department, including evaluating the lab space for Earth Science, incorporating Transitional Math into the program, utilizing assessment for continued improvement, and working with high schools on dual credit options in math and science. Mr. Block stated the College needs to keep curriculum available for high school students. It is exciting to see students have moved on and been successful, and exciting to see where they have moved on to. There is a pride that we have quality programs. Ms. Kuberski stated that much work has been done that is reflective of Dr. Dutmer's leadership. The IAI codes was a monumental task and critical for transfer. In addition, Mr. David Esch, Physics Instructor, has basically redone the program, and it would not be possible without the support of Dr. Dutmer.

### **MAIN MOTIONS**

**A. First Reading – New Policy 3.28: Prohibition of Sex-Based Misconduct**

Mr. Musser moved and Mr. Boldt seconded the motion to approve for first reading new policy 3.28, Prohibition of Sex-based Misconduct, as presented. The policy is recommended for inclusion in Chapter III, Student, and complies with the Title IX regulations published in May 2020. The roll call on the motion was as follows:

AYES: Block, Endress, Jennings, Musser, Groezinger, Boldt, Shockey  
NAYS: None

Whereupon the Chairperson declared the motion carried.

**B. Approval of Salary Increases for Administrative, Professional, and Classified Nonunion Staff**

Dr. Jennings moved and Ms. Groezinger seconded the motion to approve an FY21 salary increase for eligible administrative, professional, and classified non-union staff in an amount of \$1,000 (48 cents per hour) retroactive to the start of FY21 (July 1, 2020). The roll call on the motion was as follows:

AYES: Endress, Jennings, Musser, Groezinger, Boldt, Shockey, Block  
NAYS: None

Whereupon the Chairperson declared the motion carried.

### **BOARD UPDATES**

*Review of ICCB Salary Schedules*

Dr. Jennings referred to the salary tables from the ICCB FY19 Salary Report, noting that for years, people have believed that Freeport has a lower cost of living than other areas. Illinois categorizes all community college towns on a cost of living of 100, which is also the US average. Twenty-seven (27) of the Illinois community college towns have a higher cost of living than Freeport, with around five at the same or lower, including Ina, Galesburg, Danville, and Decatur. Dr. Jennings stated that he was "shocked" at the lack of disparity, and he expected Freeport to have a substantially lower cost of living, but he found that Freeport is at 72, Canton at 73, Centralia at 74, and Rockford, Springfield, and

Rock Island at 75. Dr. Jennings stated that the faculty salaries the College is paying are a little high but he had thought they would be higher yet. He also noted that, in the report, South Suburban lists a full-time faculty member as making \$19,992. Mr. Endress noted that, if the Chicago and suburban community colleges are excluded, the only community college with higher faculty salaries than Highland is Lincoln Land at Springfield. It was also noted that Highland's MA+0 salary at \$50,000 is higher than a lot of other community colleges. Dr. Jennings offered to talk with trustees if they would like to discuss this further.

### **CLOSED SESSION**

Mr. Musser moved and Dr. Jennings seconded the motion to move into Closed Session for the purposes of discussing the appointment, employment, compensation, discipline, performance, or dismissal of specific employees, specific individuals who serve as independent contractors in an educational setting, or specific volunteers of the public body or legal counsel for the public body, including hearing testimony on a complaint lodged against an employee, a specific individual who serves as an independent contractor in an educational setting, or a volunteer of the public body, or against legal counsel for the public body to determine its validity; and, collective negotiating matters between the public body and its employees or their representatives, or deliberations concerning salary schedules for one or more classes of employees, pursuant to the Open Meetings Act, and to return to Open Session for possible action. The roll call on the motion was as follows:

AYES: Jennings, Musser, Groezinger, Boldt, Shockey, Block, Endress  
NAYS: None

Whereupon the Chairperson declared the motion carried.

Mr. Endress explained that the public attendees through Zoom would remain in the meeting, with the video and audio muted, while the Board was in Closed Session. Mr. Pete Fink would update the public attendees from the Zoom chat during the Closed Session, as needed, and the video stream and meeting would resume following Closed Session.

At 4:16 p.m., the Chairperson declared the meeting in Closed Session.

Mr. Boldt moved and Mr. Shockey seconded the motion to end the Closed Session. The roll call on the motion was as follows:

AYES: Musser, Groezinger, Boldt, Shockey, Block, Endress, Jennings  
NAYS: None

At 5:05 p.m., the Chairperson declared the motion carried and the Closed Session ended.



**ACTION, IF NECESSARY**

- A. Appointment, Employment, Compensation, Discipline, Performance, or Dismissal of Specific Employees of the Public Body or Legal Counsel for the Public Body, Including Hearing Testimony on a Complaint Lodged Against an Employee of the Public Body or Against Legal Counsel for the Public Body to Determine its Validity

No action was necessary.

- B. Collective Negotiating Matters Between the Public Body and its Employees or Their Representatives, or Deliberations Concerning Salary Schedules for One or More Classes of Employees

1. Memorandum of Understanding Between Highland Community College (Board of Trustees) and Highland Community College Faculty Senate, Affiliated with AFT/IFT Local 1957, for Lab Courses SPTP 161, SPTP 163, and SPTP 267 in the Cosmetology Lab, due to the COVID-19 National Pandemic

Ms. Groezinger moved and Mr. Musser seconded the motion to approve the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), as presented, with the Highland Community College Faculty Senate, Affiliated with AFT/IFT Local 1957, due to the COVID-19 national pandemic, which establishes terms and conditions under which certain lab courses SPTP 161, SPTP 163, and SPTP 267 in the Cosmetology lab will be completed and how the instructor will receive additional compensation for extra hours needed to comply with restrictions related to COVID-19. The roll call on the motion was as follows:

AYES: Groezinger, Boldt, Shockey, Block, Endress, Jennings, Musser  
NAYS: None

Whereupon the Chairperson declared the motion carried.

2. Custodial/Maintenance Contract  
Mr. Musser moved and Mr. Block seconded the motion to ratify the contract with the Highland Community College Custodial/Maintenance Union Local 1957 for Fiscal Year 2020 and Fiscal Year 2021. The roll call on the motion was as follows:

AYES: Boldt, Shockey, Block, Endress, Jennings, Musser, Groezinger  
NAYS: None

Whereupon the Chairperson declared the motion carried.

**OLD BUSINESS**

There was no old business.

**NEW BUSINESS**

There was no new business.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Mr. Musser moved and Ms. Groezinger seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting. At 5:10 p.m., there being no further business, the Chairperson declared the motion carried and the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,



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Terri A. Grimes, Board Secretary  
Illinois Community College District No. 519

September 9, 2020

Dear Members of the Highland Community College Board of Trustees,

I am a member of the Highland faculty and also a member of the Assurance Team that is working to prepare the Assurance Filing for our upcoming Year 4 comprehensive evaluation on the Higher Learning Commission's Standard Pathway. A team of HLC Peer Reviewers is scheduled to visit our campus October 25 – 26, 2021, and our Assurance Filing must be completed and uploaded to HLC's Assurance System at least 4 weeks prior to that visit for their review. The Assurance Filing comprises a written Assurance Argument that demonstrates how the institution meets the 5 Criteria for Accreditation, as well as an Evidence File that contains the institutional artifacts that support the written argument.

In addition to my role as a member of the Criterion 4 workgroup, I am also working with each of the other criterion groups and the full assurance team to help review and edit our Assurance Filing. When President Kuberski first asked me to take on this added responsibility, she emphasized that my role would involve "thinking as a peer reviewer." She and I both completed Peer Reviewer training with HLC in October 2017.

It was with that mindset that I shared comments with the board at the April 30 special meeting, and it is with that mindset that I return to speak with you again today. I shared these concerns with President Kuberski earlier this spring and she encouraged me to bring them to you this fall. The Board's actions with respect to the selection of a new president—in particular the lack of transparency during the process—will have a negative impact on our effort to maintain our accreditation. The Board's approach failed to include its stakeholders in the process, and its approach is symptomatic of a larger systemic issue at Highland: our lack of a common understanding and definition of shared governance. The Board's actions put the institution at risk of being in noncompliance with specific HLC criteria unless we take immediate steps to address this area for improvement.

Peer Reviewers are not expected to evaluate *how* an institution meets HLC's 5 Criteria for Accreditation. Instead, they are explicitly encouraged to "clarify and verify" *whether* an institution has submitted sufficient and appropriate evidence that demonstrates they meet the criteria. I've included HLC's "Evaluative Framework for the HLC Criteria," where you can read more about the process that peer reviewers engage in during their review.

In February, multiple faculty members encouraged the Board to conduct a national search, and the Faculty Senate voiced our preference that the process be collaborative, transparent, and inclusive. Trustee Boldt shared information with the Board from multiple ACCT conferences that emphasized the value of a transparent process tied to the institution's strategic plan. Trustee Musser echoed Trustee Boldt's views and encouraged the development of a transition plan that allowed adequate time to include the larger campus community. At some point between February and April, the Board decided on a process for presidential succession, but that decision-making process was not available to or shared with its constituencies. The Board's

actions in determining the next HCC President lacked transparency and undermined recent and continued efforts to establish a working model of shared governance at the college. The Board's lack of transparency will make it difficult for the Assurance Team to demonstrate *how* Highland is fulfilling certain criteria. I've included the full set of Criteria for Accreditation for your review but will draw your attention to specific areas of concern:

- Core Component 2A: "The institution establishes and follows policies and processes to ensure fair and ethical behavior on the part of its governing board, administration, faculty, and staff."
- Core Component 2C.3: "The governing board reviews the reasonable and relevant interests of the institution's internal and external constituencies during its decision-making deliberations."
- Core Component 5A.1: "Shared governance at the institution engages its internal constituencies—including its governing board, administration, faculty, staff and students—through planning, policies, and procedures."

The Assurance Team cannot provide evidence that we don't have access to. What we *can* do, though, is clearly address recognized areas for improvement within the Criteria for Accreditation. The Higher Learning Commission does not expect perfection from any institution. In fact, if an institution is aware that they do *not* have evidence in place that demonstrates their fulfilment of a criterion, they are explicitly encouraged by the Higher Learning Commission to detail their plans for improvement within the Assurance Argument. I am here today to reiterate information that has already been shared with the Board, by faculty, the public, and individual members of the board: we have the opportunity to clearly and transparently work toward improving the College, and we need to take advantage of that opportunity immediately.

The work that is already being done by the Shared Governance Work Group to develop and implement an accepted definition of and structure for shared governance at the institution needs to be valued at the highest priority. This means that we cannot continue to claim we have shared governance structures in place when we can't collectively articulate what those structures are. We also need a transparent plan in place for leadership transitions. To address leadership transitions, an ad hoc work group including 2 Board members, 2 administrators, President Kuberski, 2 Faculty, and 2 staff members should work together to determine a sound policy for selecting new leadership. Their recommendation would be reviewed by the policy committee and approved by the Board of Trustees. We need to work on these plans now and address them openly and honestly in our 2021 Assurance Argument as "Areas for Improvement."

As you all know, HCC was put "on notice" after our last HLC review. Loss of accreditation would have meant the end of this institution. Faced with that reality, the campus community worked diligently to improve. The result, frankly, was extremely impressive—the work we did now serves as a model for how other at-risk institutions can improve. The Board's actions during the presidential transition undermine what we worked to achieve while we were "on notice." That's true regardless of the hiring decision— HLC requires not just that institutions come up

with solutions for the issues they face, but that they “show their work.” That’s what governance is about—not getting easy answers right, but having a process in place that serves the college even when the answers are difficult to find. It’s obviously too late to change how the process happened. What we must do now is ensure that we explicitly acknowledge that the process must be revised and then revise it. Failure to do so would again endanger Highland’s accreditation.

Respectfully,

*Chelsea Martinez*

Dr. Chelsea Martinez