



BOARD OF GOVERNORS
Approved Minutes of the Meeting (Open Session) held on
Tuesday, October 20, 2020, 3:00 p.m.
Via Videoconference

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Candace Thomas (Chair), Paul Beesley, Fatima Beydoun, Scott Brison, Level Chan, Cassandra Dorrington, Angeline Gillis, Cheryl Fraser, Ahsan Habib, Robert (Bob) Hanf, Kevin Hewitt, Kristan Hines, Joyce Hoeven, Laurie Jennings, Brian Johnston, Jay MacIsaac, Merle MacIsaac, Carolan McLarney, Sherry Porter, Robert Richardson, Deep Saini (President), Devarsh Sood, Madeleine Stinson

NON-MEMBERS PRESENT:

Alice Aiken (Vice President Research & Innovation), Peter Fardy (Vice President Advancement), Frank Harvey (Provost and Vice President Academic - Acting), Matt Hebb (Vice President Government and Global Relations), Susan Robertson (Vice President Finance & Administration - Acting), Susan Brousseau (University Secretary), Cheryl MacDonald (Board Governance Assistant), Judith Ng'ethe (Associate Secretary of Senate), Sarah Elliott (Student Minute Taker)

GUESTS:

Theresa Rajack-Talley (Vice-Provost Equity and Inclusion), Jasmine Walsh (Assistant Vice-President Human Resources), David Westwood (DFA Observer)

REGRETS:

Michele Williams

1. Approval of Agenda

The agenda was adopted as presented.

2. Consent Agenda

All items were adopted by consent.

2.1 Minutes of Meeting June 23, 2020 and July 14, 2020

THAT the Board of Governors approve the minutes of the meetings of June 23, 2020 and July 24, 2020 as presented.

Approved by CONSENT

3. Business Arising from the Minutes

There was no business noted.

4. Chair's Report

C. Thomas presented her report noting the virtual fall convocation ceremony that took place the previous week and congratulating graduating students on their tremendous achievements.

C. Thomas referred Board members to the report of the Executive Committee which records the motions approved on behalf of the Board on September 16, 2020 and October 8, 2020, respectively. She thanked B. Hanf for chairing these meetings in her absence. The approved motions are as follows:

THAT the Board Executive Committee, on behalf of the Board of Governors, and on the recommendation of the Governance and Human Resources Committee, approve the appointment of Sherry Porter as the Board representative on the search committee for the Provost and Vice-President Academic, effective as of the date of Board approval. [Approved September 16, 2020]

THAT the Board Executive Committee, on behalf of the Board of Governors, and on the recommendation of the Board Finance, Audit, Investment and Risk Committee, approve the signing of the Amended and Restated Contribution Agreement with the Province of Nova Scotia to fund a program designed to assist anchor tourism operators who have been impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. [Approved September 16, 2020]

THAT the Board Executive Committee, on behalf of the Board of Governors, and on the recommendation of the Board Finance, Audit, Investment and Risk Committee, approve the execution of Standby Letters of Credit to be issued to eligible financial institutions in accordance with the Tourism Sector Financing Assistance Program without further approvals required under Document Execution/Contract Signing Authority Policy. [Approved October 8, 2020]

C. Thomas reported on the joint meeting of the Board and Senate officers and the president held on September 24th. The discussions were interesting and productive, focusing on encouraging interdisciplinarity and working across boundaries to achieve collaboration, and on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) at Dalhousie. The EDI conversation will continue at a follow-up meeting to be scheduled. C. Thomas also noted that the Board committee chairs met recently, as is the practice each semester, to engage with the President in roundtable discussion related to items currently before the various committees.

C. Thomas thanked the new and returning members of the Board who participated in the Board orientation sessions, noting that feedback is welcome, and that going forward the online format may be considered for future orientation sessions. She also noted that the Board Retreat, scheduled for November 25th, will be a two-hour “mini” online session with details to follow.

At the conclusion of the report, K. Hewitt echoed C. Thomas’s remarks related to the value of the joint Board and Senate officers meeting, noting some outcomes that are moving forward, including the Black and African Diaspora Studies major where proposers are taking a transdisciplinary approach.

5. President’s Report

D. Saini began his report by congratulating the 2020 fall graduates, commending them on their hard work and achievements. He also extended his congratulations to recent award winners and grant recipients. D. Saini offered his heartfelt thanks to S. Robertson for ably stepping into the role of Vice-President Finance and Administration (acting) for the three-month period before Gitta Kulczycki takes up the role on November 1.

D. Saini highlighted several items in his report, including the recent conciliation process with the Dalhousie Faculty Association. President Saini acknowledged the outstanding work of faculty and staff over the past seven months in responding to the pandemic, highlighting several examples including online teaching webinars offered by the Centre for Learning and Teaching that has attracted more than 4,000 registrants; the launch of the On Track-Online program by Student Affairs designed to assist students in preparation for their semester online; and an online portal created by Human Resources to provide support services to employees working remotely. He also noted that the Dalhousie community, both internally and externally through donors, has supported a range of emergency funding for students who are facing financial challenges as a result of the pandemic. All of this hard work and additional support for students has resulted in enrolment numbers which far exceed earlier projections, though long-term effects of the pandemic as they relate to future enrolment are as yet unknown.

D. Saini reported on the recent senior leadership team virtual retreat which focussed on issues related to the pandemic, including the current institutional impact, lessons learned, and strategic opportunities. Multiple themes arising from these discussions will be further distilled at an executive council meeting to a list of actionable items. These discussions will help inform the development of the new strategic plan.

D. Saini acknowledged the stress on faculty and employees caused by the sustained pandemic and its impact, noting that with no end in sight it is important to continue to work together in order to better navigate the challenging situation in which we currently find ourselves.

C. Thomas echoed D. Saini's sentiment regarding the importance of teamwork during this difficult time.

5.1 University Strategic Planning Process - Update

D. Saini spoke to the strategic planning process, the development of which was paused last spring as a result of the pandemic in order to allow faculty and staff to focus on the transition to online learning and to assess how dealing with the pandemic might inform the strategic plan going forward. D. Saini noted that the planning process has now resumed under F. Harvey, Provost and Vice-President Academic (Acting), and called on Dr. Harvey to speak to the current phase.

F. Harvey provided an overview of the recent history of the strategic planning process, noting that phase one was launched in January 2019 by former provost Teri Balsler, with the objective to engage in a bottom-up comprehensive consultation process to identify priorities for the next five-year cycle, which included surveys and meetings with faculty, staff, and students. Phase two included a retreat in May 2019 with participants from across the University and the development of informal learning circles, with Senate engaged to further generate information from these discussions. Phase three in September 2019 included a fall planning retreat, culminating in the request for the development of eight strategic theme-based self-studies. It was during this work that the planning process was temporarily halted.

Two months ago, the work was resumed in conjunction with members from the planning and analytics team. A second draft of an interim report is being produced and will provide a summary of the consultations, identify issues and recommendations related to emerging strategic themes, and provide details on how to bridge knowledge gained in previous phases and lessons learned from the pandemic into the next five-year plan. F. Harvey highlighted several of the general themes, noting that embedded within these are a variety of strategic priorities to be clarified in the interim plan. He stressed the value of identifying lessons learned from the pandemic and how they will inform the development of the new strategic plan, including the importance of developing a comprehensive digital strategy. A steering committee, co-chaired by Josh Leon, CIO, and Donna Bourne-Tyson, Dean of Libraries, is developing the core components of the digital strategy that will be an enabling foundation for the new strategic plan.

Following the report, discussion included note of Senate's role and participation in the development of the academic priorities as related to the development of the strategic plan as well as Senate's role in providing input into the annual operating budget process. F. Harvey noted that the Budget Advisory Committee's updated report with final recommendations will be circulated shortly, before it is presented to the Board's Finance, Audit, Investment and Risk Committee. He also noted the connectivity between Senate and the digital strategy steering committee with several senators serving as members. The interim report will be shared with Senate once the second draft has been completed.

6. Dalhousie Student Union President's Report

M. Stinson referred members to her written report provided within the meeting materials, highlighting growing student concerns related to the possibility of a faculty strike. Also noted were student concerns around Dalhousie's governance, including the increased reliance of the operating budget on student tuition and fees, with a perceived shift away from academic areas to other areas that do not as directly impact the student experience. She also spoke to the health and wellness crisis that the COVID-19 pandemic has created for many students and the additional stress that a potential strike has created.

Following the report, M. Stinson responded to questions related to the role of students in the strategic planning discussions, noting that while students have been given opportunities to contribute in the process, they largely feel disconnected and that their comments generally go unheard.

Further discussion surrounded the students' perception that the budget has shifted away from academic priorities with M. Stinson agreeing to prepare a more detailed report outlining examples of this to share with President Saini. D. Saini and F. Harvey proposed further conversations with student leadership to share relevant data and arrive at a common understanding of academic and administrative expenditures, noting that some items categorised as "administrative" are actually in support of student experience and success.

C. Thomas noted that student well-being and success remains a significant priority and concern of the Board. She noted recent presentations that highlighted investments in student supports, including increase financial support; at the same time, the university likely does not do as good a job as it could of telling these stories. F. Harvey echoed this sentiment, noting that support provided to students, including bursaries to assist during the pandemic, could be better highlighted to the wider University community; at the same time, he acknowledged the importance of talking about how students are feeling in the current circumstances.

Board members commended M. Stinson on her thoughtful comments and perspective.

7. Items for Decision

7.1 2020-21 Fiscal Update

S. Robertson provided a review of the budget development process that occurred over last fall and winter, and the suspension of that process in March in the wake of COVID-19 and the uncertain financial impacts at that time. She noted the decision of the Board last June to receive an interim fiscal update and to approve an interim spending authority to allow the continued operation of the University until such time as a 2020-21 operating budget was presented and approved. The budget process was to be revisited this fall once student enrolment numbers were confirmed, with an expectation that a proposed budget would be presented at the November 2020 meeting. S. Robertson reported that fall enrolment numbers are higher than originally anticipated, showing a 4.8% increase overall with tuition revenue up by 1.5% of February estimates. S. Robertson reported that revenue stream losses, particularly related to ancillary revenues, are greater than previously estimated due in part to the fact that these revenue losses will continue beyond the fall term. The Budget Advisory Committee (BAC) has reviewed the updated revenue forecasts as well as feedback received last February, and will be releasing an updated report with recommendations in the near future. This report and the proposed operating budget will be reviewed by the Finance, Audit, Investment and Risk Committee before being presented to the Board at the November Board meeting.

7.2 Diversity and Inclusiveness – Overview of Current Initiatives and Planning

T. Rajack-Talley presented on the current initiatives and planning related to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) at Dalhousie, beginning by acknowledging past work of members of the University community completed prior to her appointment as the Vice-Provost Equity and Diversity in 2019.

T. Rajack-Talley noted the importance of building an infrastructure to address issues, working across silos and developing consistent and digitized communications and reporting. She reviewed the proposed organizational chart of the Office of the Vice-Provost Equity and Inclusion, highlighting the recent hires for the newly created positions of the Director for Indigenous Community Engagement and the Director for African Nova Scotian Community Outreach. She also noted University-wide committees created as part of recommendations from previously completed reports to address issues of note; these committees will help develop action plans and metrics for accountability. Recommendations from previously completed reports and surveys are currently being analyzed and organized into actionable items, and diversity trends are being reviewed across a number of categories.

T. Rajack-Talley noted that another focus of the office is to raise Dalhousie's profile on EDI at national, regional and local levels through forums and conferences, as well as community events including the Speak

Truth to Power forum series. Work is also underway in the areas of curriculum, research and training, including transitioning the Black and African Diaspora Studies minor to a major by March 2021, the development of additional supports for Black, Indigenous, and other People of Colour (BIPOC) students, and the development of an EDI institutional policy on research and innovation in conjunction with the Office of the Vice-President Research and Innovation. Also of note is the increased demand for workshops and training on systemic racism and related themes across the University, and community engagement efforts via the newly created community outreach and engagement roles.

Following the report, questions and discussion focussed on a variety of issues including key strategic goals going forward; EDI consideration within health services for students; available EDI educational and training opportunities; and the development of EDI committees in both non-academic and academic units. T. Rajack-Talley noted that enrolment of racially visible and students may increase with the advent of the Major in Black and African Diaspora Studies and that active recruitment is also necessary. In relation to this, D. Saini highlighted the importance of ensuring appropriate benchmarks are set. He also noted that T. Rajack-Talley's work on distilling the many reports completed previously has provided data that identifies clear gaps and addressing these gaps will be the immediate focus going forward. He particularly noted the need to focus on African Nova Scotian, indigenous (particularly Mi'kmaq) and African Canadian communities more broadly.

Further comments applauded the hard work on EDI at Dalhousie and proposed the possibility of applying the same systematic, systemic approach to ensuring academic excellence and tackling the knowledge gap that COVID-19 has in some senses exposed. Applying a similar structure and focus could assist in addressing these issues; this is something that the Board, Senate, students and Administration should perhaps consider.

7.3 Board Standing Committee Reports

C. Thomas referred members to the reports of the standing committees included in the meeting materials. There were no questions on the reports.

8. In Camera Session

The Board moved to the *in camera* session.

9. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 6:00 p.m.