

Updates following Board of Trustees Meeting

President Joanne Berger-Sweeney <President@trincoll.edu>

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To: President Joanne Berger-Sweeney <President@trincoll.edu>



October 22, 2020

Dear Trinity College Community Members,

As I do following every Board of Trustees meeting, I write to share a summary of our sessions from last week—our second official full board meeting held entirely remotely. While we couldn't gather in person as we normally would, the meeting was as full of positive energy and thoughtful discussion as ever.

The COVID-19 pandemic—specifically, Trinity's response to it—was a significant focus, of course. The board meeting, occurring mostly on Friday and Saturday of last week, came during a spike in active cases on campus, at a time when we had shifted classes temporarily to remote format. Trustees previously had learned about our plans for contact tracing and our isolation and quarantine protocols, and last week they saw those plans in action and were gratified to see, in real time, the number of cases drop significantly. We all are grateful for the tireless work of our staff and the dedication of our students, faculty, and staff who contributed to our bringing the caseload down such that we were able to return to in-person classes this week.

The board expressed its gratitude by approving commendations to [faculty](#) and to [staff and administration](#) in recognition of their outstanding service to Trinity throughout the pandemic. Trustees also approved a [resolution of appreciation](#) honoring Sue Aber on the occasion of her retirement as chief information officer and vice president of information systems. As I've communicated to the campus community, Fred Kass is serving as interim chief information officer, and we are set to begin a search for a permanent successor for this critical role. I'll share details about that process and the search committee shortly.

Among the outstanding work by our faculty in responding to a pandemic are the many ways they have creatively reimaged courses and pivoted to ensure a rigorous and enriching educational experience for students, whether in person or remote. Trustees enjoyed a forum on Friday in which several faculty members and students shared their experiences "inside the 'distanced' classroom." Truly a highlight of the board meeting, this forum showcased the ingenuity, resilience, and care with which our faculty members are teaching this semester and with which our students are engaging both inside and outside of the traditional classroom.

That Trinity pride moment was a reminder that even amid a global pandemic, Trinity is living up to its academic mission to the fullest extent. We also continue to make great progress in

pursuit of [Summit, our strategic plan](#), and its three overarching goals: to **position Trinity increasingly as a first-choice destination for students, faculty, and staff; connect Trinity more deeply to the Hartford region and the world beyond; and build on Trinity's historic past to ensure a vibrant, sustainable future.**

Toward the first goal and, specifically, fostering an inclusive campus, the trustees did not shy away from the challenges that were voiced through the BlackatTrin and TrinSurvivors social media accounts over the summer and in the work of the Umoja Coalition and others to move our community forward. We have significant progress to report on the many commitments that the board and I, on behalf of the college, made in July. You'll hear more about that progress in the coming weeks. Trustees discussed the importance of updating our policies and procedures to reflect our values and best practices. One piece of news I will share is that the board has created a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, chaired by [Trustee Michael Gary '86](#). The committee will engage with constituent groups and task forces on campus to assist in furthering our work to be a diverse, equitable, and inclusive community for students, faculty, staff, alumni, and the board.

As the trustees discussed challenges thoughtfully and with great dedication, they also received much good news at this meeting, including on the enrollment, retention, and financial fronts. Our fall student census is now complete, and it shows not only that we met our enrollment goals for the Class of 2024 but also that our first-year retention rate was 90 percent. These are extraordinary accomplishments by the entire community, and especially our enrollment and student success teams, amid a pandemic and other pressures that have contributed to a steep decline in student enrollment nationally this year. Congratulations, all, and thank you!

The good news about our fall enrollment will mean good news for our budget in Fiscal Year 2021, and you will hear more about that soon as well. We'll share that and the audited financial statements from FY20, which have been slightly delayed. We can share now that the FY20 budget closed with a loss of \$1.3 million, far less than initial projections. The sacrifices by individual community members, reductions in department budgets, and strong fundraising results made a huge difference in mitigating the pandemic's financial impact on the FY20 budget.

As we look to continue fundraising through the comprehensive campaign, we are grateful to [Trustee Kathryn George Tyree '86](#) for her continued leadership of the campaign and to [Trustee Peter Duncan '81, P'13, P'14](#), who has stepped up to co-chair the campaign with Kathryn.

Finally, as many of you know, the October board meeting brought a report of the President's Commission on Trinity's Future. The commission met weekly for months to assess the current and projected external pressures facing Trinity and to cultivate "blue sky" approaches to the future of the college post-pandemic. The commission, led by [Board Vice Chair and Chair-Elect Lisa Bisaccia '78](#), provided ideas, consistent with our strategic direction, along a continuum of change, starting a conversation about the future that the board and I look forward to continuing with all of you in the coming months. My hope is that we will begin in January with a community-wide webinar in which we can discuss the current environment for

higher education and for Trinity. A shared understanding of that context will help frame decisions we make for our future, together.

Sincerely,

Joanne Berger-Sweeney
President and Trinity College Professor of Neuroscience