

University at Buffalo Council

Meeting minutes

December 14, 2020, 8:00 a.m.

Meeting held via video conference

Members present:

Jeremy M. Jacobs, Chairman

Jon Dandes

Michael Cropp

Scott Friedman

June W. Hoeflich

Brenda McDuffie

Mike Montoro

Other participants:

Satish K. Tripathi, President

A. Scott Weber, Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

Rod Grabowski, Vice President for University Advancement

Opening business

Call to order

Chairman Jacobs called the meeting to order at 8:01 a.m.

Approval of minutes

Chairman Jacobs called for a motion to approve the minutes of the September 30, 2020 meeting. A motion was made by Ms. Hoeflich, seconded by Mr. Dandes and approved unanimously by Mr. Montoro, Mr. Friedman, Ms. McDuffie, Ms. Hoeflich, Mr. Dandes, Dr. Cropp and Chairman Jacobs. None voted to oppose.

Topics for discussion or action

Report of the Chairman

Chairman Jacobs asked Vice President Rod Grabowski to present some details to the Council about a proposed naming resolution to be voted on by the Council. A draft of the resolution can be found on the [UB Council website](#).

The resolution calls for the Council's approval to name the Sunstar Robert J. Genco Endowed Chair in Oral Biology in the School of Dental Medicine. A motion was made to approve the resolution by Mr. Dandes, seconded by Ms. Hoeflich and approved unanimously by Mr. Montoro, Mr. Friedman, Mr. Dandes, Ms. McDuffie, Ms. Hoeflich, Dr. Cropp and Chairman Jacobs. None voted to oppose.

Upon approval by the Council, the resolution will be forwarded to the State University of New York System Administration for final review and approval by the SUNY Chancellor and the SUNY Board of Trustees.

University Briefings: Report of the President

President Tripathi began his report by updating the Council on UB's fall semester. President Tripathi praised the extensive planning UB undertook to make the fall semester a success as the university was able to complete in-person instruction without disruption. COVID-19 has put an extreme strain on UB's finances. SUNY is projecting a 25 percent reduction that equates to approximately \$37.5 million dollars. This reduction in direct state tax support is compounded by a 46.7 million dollar revenue loss (from state tax support, auxiliary services, fees) due to COVID in 2019-2020. UB did receive \$12 million dollars in CARES Act funds for institutional use, however, these funds only partially off-set the 2019-2020 revenue loss. UB employed several strategies to manage this serious financial situation including: reducing expenditures by over 18 percent from April 1 to November 30 as compared to the previous year; decanal and divisional units assessed a one-time, 10 percent reduction to state operating budgets for the 2020-2021 fiscal year; and instituted a hiring pause across all funding sources. UB also lost revenue in the areas of housing and tuition—particularly from international student enrollment. Dr. Tripathi added that the university was on sound financial footing when the pandemic began—and will be on sound financial footing when the pandemic is over.

Dr. Tripathi also updated the Council on the progress of the President's Advisory Council on Race. Over the past six months, the advisory council members identified and reviewed best practices in four focus areas: the recruitment, hiring and retention of faculty and staff; the recruitment, admissions, retention and graduation of students; curriculum and teaching; and community engagement. Among the council's recommendations include: build on UB's recent success in improving the recruitment, retention and graduation rates of underrepresented minority students through holistic admissions, enhanced mentoring and academic support programs, and increased student diversity programs; increase the number of underrepresented minority faculty, staff and university leadership — with an institutional goal that meets

or exceeds the level of top peers in the Association of American Universities — and improve retention through enhanced faculty support and mentoring; re-examine UB’s curriculum through the lens of inclusive pedagogy and anti-racism; develop a university-wide mentorship program for student researchers of color; and deepen UB’s service to the community by developing new initiatives that address social injustice and racial inequity, and enhancing existing programs. Next semester, UB will host a series of Zoom meetings about these recommendations with the broader university community. Following these conversations, UB will initiate a plan for implementing them.

President Tripathi updated the Council on the continued success of UB’s research enterprise. Recent major awards include: \$8.1 million dollars from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to expand UB’s role in the Women’s Health Initiative; a \$3.7 million-dollar partnership grant to lead a team of researchers from across the country in advancing MRI technology; and \$8.5 million dollars from the Department of Energy to study hybrid rockets—technology that could provide a safer, less expensive way to explore outer space than conventional rockets. Overall, UB sponsored research expenditures for fiscal year 2020 were \$178 million dollars.

UB also continues to provide a transformative student experience while also meeting the needs of students despite the challenges of a pandemic. These efforts include: UB Counseling Services has moved all appointments, consultations and outreach programs to a virtual platform; UB Career Services staff offered a full array of career services in a virtual format—from individual appointments to internship fairs to employer-hosted events; virtual orientation for new and transfer students; online tutoring sessions that included more than 4,000 appointments; the Center for Excellence in Creative Writing held more than 2,000 appointments during the fall semester; and the Experiential Learning Network continued to provide students with a wide array of transformative learning experiences in the fall semester—from mentored research opportunities to virtual study abroad programs.

President Tripathi concluded his report with an update on the UB Football program’s record setting season. The team is 5-0, is ranked 23rd in the Associated Press national poll, and won the MAC East Division and will play in the Mid-American Conference Championship game against Ball State on December 18. UB running back Jaret Patterson rushed for 409 yards against Kent St.—a MAC record and second most in NCAA history, and also scored 8 rushing touchdowns in the game—also a MAC record and tied for most in one game in NCAA history.

University Briefings: Report from the Provost

Provost Weber began his report stating UB ended most in-person learning for the Fall Semester following Thanksgiving break to minimize student travel and spread of COVID-19. UB tested all students who were living on-campus, taking an in-person class, or participating in any on campus activity for COVID-19 within 10 days of their leaving for Thanksgiving break. For UB’s pre-Thanksgiving exit testing, UB conducted 16,425 COVID tests. Since the beginning of the Fall semester, UB has conducted over 35,000 tests with an overall positivity rate was just below 0.5%, significantly lower than the surrounding community. Random surveillance testing continues for any student, faculty and staff who live, learn or work on campus post-Thanksgiving. UB will be holding fully remote Winter Session courses and will be welcoming students back to campus for the Spring semester, which will start on February 1st for most students – with the exception of some professional students who will arrive in early January for in-person clinical courses. Following UB’s approach to the fall semester, in the spring we will be: safely offering in-person, remote and hybrid instruction; requiring students to be tested just prior to returning to campus or within 5 days of returning to campus; requiring all returning students to complete a seven-day precautionary quarantine prior to their arrival on campus; cancelling spring break to minimize student travel and COVID spread. UB will release full details soon about the implementation of plans for the spring semester and provide regular updates about UB’s plans as they develop. UB’s spring plan will align with guidance provided by SUNY, NYS Department of Health, Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention, and UB's own faculty experts. UB's top priorities remain preserving its mission as a place-based, public research institution, and providing the best possible educational experience for students while protecting the health and safety of the campus community.

Much of UB's research and clinical work has pivoted to focus on COVID-19, for example: the Department of Biomedical Engineering researchers have discovered a technique that could increase the effectiveness of a coronavirus vaccine; in the Jacobs of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, a cross-disciplinary team is conducting a clinical trial to determine whether melatonin could treat patients with mild and moderate COVID-19; in the School of Architecture and Planning, faculty have partnered with local industry to engineer a do-it-yourself fabric mask that is not only a high-performing alternative to an N-95 mask, but also affordable and scalable; and researchers in UB's Community Health Equity Research Institute have been actively exploring COVID's disparate impact on underrepresented minority communities.

Finally, Provost Weber announced that James O'Donnell is stepping down as Dean of the School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences and Nancy Smyth is stepping down as Dean of the School of Social Work. UB launched search committees in December for both dean positions and plans to have new leadership determined by the end of Spring 2021 semester. The search for the next Vice Provost for International Education has attracted a strong and diverse pool of candidates. The search committee is actively reviewing applications now and finalists will be invited to interview in January.

Dr. Cropp commended UB's Community Health Equity Research Institute for its work related to COVID and investigating the disproportionate number of people in the Black community who have been impacted by the coronavirus.

Ms. Hoeflich commended President Tripathi and Provost Weber for UB's response to COVID-19 and asked if the university anticipates additional federal funding to support higher education. Dr. Tripathi affirmed that higher education institutions anticipate some funding, but are unsure about the details thus far.

Mr. Montoro inquired if UB is considering waiving fees for graduate students, similar to a decision by Stony Brook University. Provost Weber stated UB is evaluating what Stony Brook did and what UB could possibly do and a decision could be made in March.

Report of the Student Representative

Mr. Montoro also commended UB's planning in response to COVID-19, particularly regarding safety protocols for students and added that the hybrid academic model implemented by UB has been a success. Mr. Montoro also expressed pride in the success of the UB Football team and its clear commitment to safety regarding COVID-19.

Mr. Montoro also discussed climate change and the roll and voice UB plays globally. UB is a clear leader in climate change, with continued building of solar panels, attracting faculty experts and promoting sustainability in its operations. UB was recognized as a top university by Times Higher Education for its climate action and is added his optimism for the success of UB's '10 in 10' plan. Mr. Montoro stated neither SUNY nor the University at Buffalo Foundation (UBF) has committed publicly to divestment of fossil fuels, but also acknowledged that divestment is complicated. Mr. Montoro stated there are two main questions related to divestment from fossil fuels: Does fossil fuel divestment work against the fossil fuel industry? And, does divestment work against the investor and its portfolio? Mr. Montoro stated a growing number of universities have divested including Cornell University, Johns Hopkins University and the University of California system. Mr. Montoro stated this divestment has had little impact on the fossil fuel industry and also little impact on university endowments thus far. Mr. Montoro called for UB to align

its financial interests with its intellectual mission. Mr. Montoro acknowledged that it is not the Council's responsibility to legislate this action, but as concerned global citizen, doing so will further UB's leadership in climate change.

Adjournment

Chairman Jacobs called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. A motion was made by Ms. Hoeflich, seconded by Ms. McDuffie and approved unanimously by Dr. Cropp, Mr. Montoro, Chairman Jacobs, Ms. McDuffie, Mr. Dandes, Mr. Friedman and Ms. Hoeflich. None voted to oppose. The meeting was adjourned at 8:43a.m.

Minutes approved at the March 8, 2021 meeting of the UB Council.

An [archived video](#) of this meeting can be found on the UB Council website.