

News and Updates From Our Recent Board of Trustees Meeting



Chair of the Board of Trustees

9:57 AM

BENNINGTON COLLEGE

Dear Bennington Community,

We hope that the beginning of the Spring semester finds everyone in good spirits and energized for the term ahead! The Board of Trustees gathered in New York City for its quarterly meeting on Friday, March 1. Below are highlights from this meeting.

Chair Nick Stephens '77 called the meeting to order. Stephens stated that this meeting was designed to build on the momentum of the Board's previous discussions, focusing on the College's strategic direction and the collective efforts to enhance the College's thriving and sustainable future.

Faculty Appointments

The Faculty Appointments were also approved as submitted by President Walker:

Faculty Resignation effective 6/30/24:

Anthropology: Noah Coburn

Psychology: Özge Savaş

Recommended Visiting Faculty Appointments: Spring 2024

CAPA: Kelie Bowman, Kathy Bullock, and Vahidin Omanovic

President's Report

President Laura Walker began her report by introducing Allison Gomes as the incoming Interim Vice President for Institutional Advancement. Gomes shared her fundraising background with trustees and her excitement about the work ahead. President Walker also spoke about the work emanating from the Strategic Planning process, centering around energizing the core of the College's academic programs and considering ways in which the college may attract and reach new audiences. Walker concluded by highlighting grants and grant proposals focusing on academic programs such as the Winston Foundation's support of the Ben Belitt Distinguished Visiting Writer, Colloquium on Arts and Literary Culture, and Prize for Undergraduate Writers; the Milford Graves exhibit; Beyond Plastics; the first-year experience; and mental health initiatives.

Enrollment & Marketing Update

President Walker recognized Tony Cabasco, the departing Vice President for Enrollment Management, for his service to the College. In his discussion on Enrollment, Cabasco reported on the successful doubling of application numbers over recent years and noted an increase in international student applications, which suggests a resurgence in interest in U.S. education post-Covid. He outlined plans for upcoming yield events in various locations to boost enrollment and mentioned the success of ZeeMee, a mobile chat platform, to foster student engagement. Cabasco thanked the Board and his colleagues and assured that the College has a strong foundation in enrollment management going forward.

Vice President for Communications and Marketing Jeffrey Perkins gave an update on his team's work in recent months and his priorities for the Spring term. Perkins highlighted the collaboration with Admissions on the yield campaign and digital outreach as well some of the results of a website audit and the much-anticipated return of the *Bennington Magazine* for alumni and friends of the College.

President Walker then invited Alfredo Medina Jr., Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and College Diversity Officer, to discuss initiatives aimed at fostering campus community and the continuation of efforts by the Long-Term Working Group on Freedom of Expression, which includes representatives from all constituents, including students, staff, faculty, and board members. Medina also discussed a range of activities aimed at strengthening community, including the extension of operating hours at Roz's Cafe in response to student feedback for better food access during late hours and weekends. He also mentioned ongoing discussions for further improvements in community life this Spring.

The Importance of Democracy: the November Elections and a Bennington Education

Provost Maurice Hall facilitated a conversation with Susan Sgorbati, Director of CAPA, with contributions by Elio Jahaj, Director of Special Projects. Sgorbati spoke about the importance of engaging students and the community in conversation, learning, and action around the state of our democracy, the upcoming November elections, and the role a Bennington education plays in safeguarding our democratic principles. Sgorbati detailed planned campus events for the 2024 election year, including a spring pop-up class on dialogue, a possible summer online class, and fall activities like a voter registration drive, a student-directed Public Policy Forum, and a class on the November elections from an international perspective by Mansour Farhang. These initiatives aim to educate students and community members on civic engagement and the importance of education. More updates will be forthcoming as plans are confirmed. Board members were enthusiastic about this work and shared ideas about how the alumni community can contribute to and learn from this important project about the future of our democracy.

Committee Meetings

Committee chairs shared reports on their recent meetings including Budget & Finance, Investment, Education & Community Life, Audit & Risk, Campus Planning, Campaign Design, and Nomination & Governance. The Education & Community Life Committee, led by Dan Rowland and Kate Stimpson, engaged with Ali Tartaglia, Associate Dean of Student Life and Director of Integrative Wellness, who gave a presentation on the new model of integrative wellness on campus. The committee also engaged in a discussion led by Jude Higdon, Associate Vice President for IT and CIO, focusing on AI and its impact on higher education. Co-chairs of the Campus Planning Committee reported that the committee focused on the immediate needs of the campus, including critical infrastructure improvements that are needed in several areas like VAPA and Jennings, and the continual efforts that are underway to address challenges concerning faculty and student housing.

Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee Michael Hecht reported that the committee's last meeting was focused on an assessment of risk areas for the College. A detailed inventory developed by senior staff was reviewed, and appropriate plans for control and mitigation are under development. Hecht underscored that risk management is a continual process and reported that, at the next meeting, the committee will review mitigation efforts to reduce risk. He thanked the staff members who have led this work. Investment Committee chair Ellen Safir '66 reported that the College's investment grew favorably in 2023, which was attributed to the increased value of equities, and discussed the ongoing collaboration with Glenmede Trust Co., the College's endowment manager.

Alan Kornberg '74 and Priscilla Alexander '58, Co-Chairs of the Nomination & Governance Committee, reported the committee met and reviewed ongoing efforts to identify and recruit new trustees. Bobby Deane '51 and Bill Derrough, co-chairs of the Campaign Design Committee, expressed the critical role the campaign will play in solidifying the College's future, enthusiasm for the upcoming fundraising work ahead, and their optimism that the College can accomplish ambitious fundraising goals with the leadership of board members and other donors. Lastly, the Chair of the Budget and Finance Committee Jim Simon spoke about the College's fundraising goals and budgetary needs for this fiscal year and the year ahead. Simon expressed confidence that the College can meet its goals and stated that it will take the committed collaboration of faculty, staff, and students together to ensure that.

The Board of Trustees also met in executive session.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, we wish you a successful Spring term! Our next Board meeting will be on May 31, and we look forward to continuing to update you on our work.

Warmly,

Nicholas A. Stephens '77
Chair of the Board of Trustees

Laura R. Walker
President