

**Massachusetts Board of Higher Education  
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

---

March 20, 2023  
2:30 p.m.- 4:00 p.m.

The March 20, 2023 meeting of the Executive Committee of the Board of Higher Education (“BHE” or “the Board”) was held virtually on the web-conference platform Zoom.

**Meeting Minutes**

Committee Members Present:	BHE Chair Chris Gabrieli; Bill Walczak; Patty Eppinger; Veronica Conforme; and Commissioner Noe Ortega (non-voting, ex officio).
Committee Members Absent:	Vice-Chair (vacant seat).
Others BHE Members Present:	Paul Mattera; Secretary Patrick Tutwiler.
Department Staff Present:	Constantia Papanikolaou; Elena Quiroz-Livanis.

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Board Chair Chris Gabrieli called the meeting to order at 2:35 p.m. Roll call attendance was taken (see above for attendance roster). Chair Gabrieli noted that Committee member Conforme would join the meeting soon.

**II. DISCUSSION**

List of Material's Used

*BHE Motions 23-31 through 23-38;*

*MSCBA Spring Semester 2023 Residence Hall Occupancy by University Building Report*

Chair Gabrieli began the meeting by proposing a motion to approve minutes. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the motion to approve the Executive Committee minutes for February 6, 2023 was approved unanimously by all members present, by roll call vote.

Chair Gabrieli introduced *BHE Motion 23-31 Approval of Letter of Intent of the University of Massachusetts Amherst to Award the Bachelor of Arts in Computational Linguistics and Authorization for Fast Track Review*. Committee member Walczak asked where the students are

coming from, as this the background statement in the document indicates that this is the only Computational Linguistics undergraduate program in the country. University of Massachusetts Amherst's (UMass Amherst) Associate Professor, Kristin Yu, informed the committee members that the institution already has enrolled students who follow the curriculum for computational linguistics major, and there is tremendous amount of interest and excitement for the program. UMass Amherst's Professor and Chair of the Linguistics Department, Joe Pater, added that there are two courses in the program that have been well subscribed since their inception. Committee member Walczak asked if the major will be fully developed in the next couple of years. Joe Pater responded that the program is built from existing courses, the only thing that needs to be done is to recruit students into the major. Chair Gabrieli spoke about computational linguistics being performed in artificial intelligence and believes that is the reason for the interest in computational linguistics.

At this moment, Chair Gabrieli welcomed Committee member Conforme and Secretary Tutwiler to the meeting. After hearing no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a motion to approve BHE 23-31. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the motion was approved unanimously by all members present, by roll call vote.

Chair Gabrieli moved on to introduce *BHE Motion 23-32 Approval of MSCBA Project- Bridgewater State University Shea Durgin Bathroom Renovations*. Chief of Staff Quiroz-Livanis thanked MSCBA's Deputy Director, Jennifer Gonzalez, for the PowerPoint and materials submitted prior to the meeting. Hearing no discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a motion to approve BHE 23-32. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the BHE Motion 23-32 was approved unanimously by all members present, by roll call vote.

Chair Gabrieli introduced *BHE Motion 23-33 Approval of MSCBA Project- Framingham State University Main Lobby Addition*. Chair Gabrieli asked how MSCBA projects are prioritized. Jennifer Gonzalez responded that the authority works with the campuses to perform studies that review the needs of campuses in different aspects and the revenue sources. The authority does not receive any state aid appropriations; the funding to pay the debt service on any bonds that they issued are funded by the revenues for the projects. She added that MSCBA's statute is limited, and they are unable to renovate academic buildings unless there is special legislation or if it is in the 2008 Higher Education Bond Bill. She also noted that the Shea Durgin project is funded by room rents. Deputy Director Gonzalez informed the committee members that MSCBA works with project managers to review all potential capital projects, and then itemize and prioritize them in a multi-year capital plan. Deputy Director Gonzalez added that the MSCBA looks to see if the study indicates if it is feasible and if there is sufficient revenue projected to afford the project.

Board member Mattera stated that he and Committee member Walczak were newly recommended by the Commissioner to serve on the MSCBA. He commented that this is new to them, and Deputy Director Gonzalez's descriptions were helpful. Commissioner Ortega thanked Board member Mattera and Walczak for agreeing to join the MSCBA. Chair Gabrieli spoke about board members needing to understand capital budgets to understand the comprehensive

financing discussions. Hearing no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a motion to approve BHE 23-33. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the BHE Motion 23-33 was approved unanimously by all members present, by roll call vote.

Chair Gabrieli introduced *BHE Motion 23-34 Approval of MSCBA Project- Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts Soccer Field Renovations*. Hearing no discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a motion to approve BHE 23-34. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, BHE Motion 23-34 was approved unanimously by all members present, by roll call vote.

Chair Gabrieli introduced *BHE Motion 23-35 Approval of Board of Higher Education Motions 23-31 through 23-33 on a Consent Agenda*. Hearing no discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a motion to approve BHE 23-35. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, BHE Motion 23-35 was approved unanimously by all members present, by roll call vote.

Chair Gabrieli moved on to introduce *BHE Motion 23-36 Approval of FY2024 MSCBA Rent Certificate*. Committee member Walczak commented that he and Board member Mattera discovered in the MSCBA meeting that rent certificates are done every year. Hearing no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a motion to approve BHE 23-36. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the BHE Motion 23-36 was approved unanimously by all members present, by roll call vote.

Chair Gabrieli introduced *BHE Motion 23-37 Approval of MSCBA Refunding Revenue Bonds Community College Program*. After no discussion was made, Chair Gabrieli called for a motion to approve BHE 23-37. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, BHE Motion 23-37 was approved unanimously by all members present, by roll call vote.

Chair Gabrieli introduced the final MSCBA-related motion, *BHE Motion 23-38 Approval of MSCBA Refunding Revenue Bonds to Provide Fiscal Relief from FY24 through FY29*. Hearing no discussion, Chair Gabrieli called for a motion to approve BHE 23-38. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, BHE Motion 23-38 was approved unanimously by all members present, by roll call vote.

Chair Gabrieli moved on to Advisory Council updates and asked the Chair of Academic Affairs and Student Success (AA&SS) Advisory Council, Chair Eppinger, for an update on the March 14, 2023 meeting. Chair Eppinger informed the committee members that the AA&SS council received a presentation on the Massachusetts Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative (MAICEI) and the goal setting for the Strategic Plan for Racial Equity. Chair Eppinger advised that there are currently fourteen MAICEI programs and another five being proposed; there are approximately 220 students being served, the funding provided to the campuses was 2.4 million and 1.4 million was added. She added that because of services and programs for the students, it costs \$3000 per student Grant funding is capped at \$175,000 per campus; Bridgewater State University has the largest program.

Next, AA&SS Chair Eppinger reported on goal setting for the Strategic Plan for Racial Equity. She advised that the Board has received the Strategic Plan last June, and the Commissioner received directions to recommend statewide or sector-specific goals and targets by June 2023. She informed the committee members that since that time, work has been done to do: define operational goals, set targets for 2023, and convene working groups that have collaborated with the data organizations that already exist. She continued by noting that the three areas were enrollment, sense of belonging, and social and economic mobility. The groups working on this have defined and measured goals in the following six different areas: timely completion of gateway courses, on-time credit accumulation, persistence, transfer rates, degree completion after transfer, and degree or certificate completion.

Chair Gabrieli thanked asked how MAICEI fits in with the general higher education financing. Chief Legal Counsel Papanikolaou responded that the MAICEI students are not considered enrolled students—they are matriculated students who for the most part are auditing courses and are seeking the socialization and other benefits of a college experience while exploring their academic interests. The program is currently funded through a grant program and by sending school districts through each student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP). She said the current program is limited to students up to the age of 22, but the legislature is expanding the MAICEI program to students over the age of 22. The new legislation requires the BHE to promulgate regulations on how these students, who have aged out of the DESE/ school district IEP process, will be integrated into the program. She concluded by informing the committee member that the current program has been structured in a way where it should not cost institutions and legislature was very specific to make it clear that any additional students will be at no cost to the institution; students will need to come with a participation plan that should be funded by other state agencies—such as MassRehab or the Department of Developmental Services-- or through private funding.

Chair Gabrieli asked MSCBA's Deputy Director, Jennifer Gonzalez, about the provided chart that showed the occupancy level for dorms and inquired if the rate of occupancy will continue to decrease and the implications of decreasing occupancies. Deputy Director Gonzalez informed the committee members that MSCBA has seen continued improvement compared to the reduction of fall 2020. She advised that some campuses are experiencing lower occupancy rates; those campuses are exploring options for alternative uses of the residence halls. MSCBA's Director of Administration and Budget, Kristen Murphy, added that MSCBA has been acutely aware of the demographic cliff and enrollment trends, and they are cautiously optimistic that there will be a rebound, but they do not know where it will level off; they are being conservative around operational budgeting, and thinking critically about borrowing and what improvements mean for students. Board member Mattera added that residence halls have been reconfigured to single and double rooms, to appeal to students who would not return to campus. He added that the occupancy numbers show what was originally established; the original double room now counts for one.

Chair Gabrieli asked what the fall level occupancy relevancy to the 71%. Deputy Director Gonzalez presented *Spring Semester 2023 Residence Hall Occupancy by University Building*

*Report*, showing that the occupancy level went from 71.4% to 74.5% this year. Chair Gabrieli asked if there is an occupancy level where it becomes problematic financially. Deputy Director Gonzalez responded that in 2020 they issued 2020A Refunding Bonds, which reduced the debt surface by 50% in fiscal year 2021; this brought the assessments/expenditures down closer to where their revenue was. Campuses also applied federal aid and university contributions to the Residence Hall Trust Fund, and in fiscal year 2022, 25% of debt surface was reduced. She concluded by informing the committee members that as of right now, the occupancy level is low; they are seeing cost increases for projects but lower deposits to the reserves. Committee member Conforme suggested that this should be reviewed with the Financial and Administrative Policy Advisory Council in terms of overall budgets. Commissioner Ortega noted that this presents an opportunity to think about what this means across other efforts and initiatives, such as basic needs, and to work with sister agencies to figure out solutions to help the institutions.

After no further discussion, Chair Gabrieli concluded the meeting.

### **III. OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business.

### **IV. ADJOURNMENT:**

On a motion duly made and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 3:20 p.m.