

**New Jersey City University**

**Board of Trustees**

**December 9, 2024**

- ATTENDING:**
- Mr. Luke Visconti, Chair *(In Person)*
  - Mr. Ralph Salerno, Vice Chair *(In Person)*
  - Ms. Natalie Brathwaite *(In Person)*
  - Mr. Carlos Lejnieks *(In Person)*
  - Ms. Jenny Davis Toth *(via Telephone)*
  - Ms. Irene Trowell-Harris *(via Zoom)*
  - Dr. Edward Whittaker *(via Zoom)*
  - Mr. Andrés Acebo, Interim President, Ex Officio *(In Person)*
  - Dr. Venessa Garcia, Faculty Representative, Ex- Officio *(In Person)*
  - Mr. Dominic Yarson, Student Trustee, voting *(In Person)*
  - Ms. Branda Logan, Student Trustee, non-voting *(In Person)*
  - Mr. Henry Amoroso, State Monitor, non-voting *(In Person)*
  - Ms. Monica de los Rios, University Counsel & Chief Ethics Officer, non-voting *(In Person)*
  - Mr. Joe Baumann, Outside Counsel, non-voting *(In Person)*
- ABSENT:**
- Ms. Helen Dao, Alumni Representative, Ex- Officio
  - Mr. Peter Hernandez, Foundation Representative, Ex Officio

The meeting was called to order at 5:25 p.m. in Hepburn Hall, Gothic Lounge, Room 202, by Mr. Visconti.

**ROLL CALL**

The roll call was taken by Ms. Lee, Board Secretary and noted there was a quorum. Trustees/Ex Officios Dao, and Hernandez were not in attendance.

## **MINUTES**

Vice Chair Salerno made a motion on behalf of the Executive Committee to approve the minutes from the September 23, 2024, Public Session. The motion was seconded by Mr. Lejnieks. The motion was passed with two abstentions (Dao, and Hernandez).

## **CHAIR'S REPORT**

Mr. Visconti acknowledged Mr. Dominic Yarson, the new student voting trustee member who was sworn in by University Counsel Ms. de los Rios prior to the December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024, Public Session. He will replace Mr. David Valica. Mr. Visconti thanked Mr. Valica for his contribution, and referenced the importance of student trustee Logan, and trustee Yarson to the Board for their input and their ideas.

Mr. Visconti turned the floor over to outside counsel Mr. Baumann who brought forth out of the Executive Session the resolution passed by the Board to ratify an extension of Interim President Acebo's contract for an 18-month term with a one-year renewal to the floor. The motion was unanimously passed with two abstentions (Dao and Hernandez). Mr. Baumann yielded the floor back to Mr. Visconti.

Mr. Visconti reported on the significant progress made in 2024, including financial stability, infrastructure improvements, and academic and community engagement to stabilize and advance NJCU's core objectives. In collaboration with the State Monitor. The Chair thanked President Acebo for his contribution and efforts for the success NJCU has had in the last year.

Mr. Visconti yielded the floor to Trustee Brathwaite, chair of the Finance and Audit Committee for her report.

Ms. Brathwaite reported on the financial review of Fitch Ratings upgrading NJCU's outlook to "Stable," marking the university's first positive revision in more than a decade. The preliminary unaudited FY24 financial statements show an approximate \$7million improvement in net position compared to the previous fiscal year.

Trustee Brathwaite continued to report that the committee has adopted the Internal Audit Charter, establishing the purpose, authority, and responsibilities of NJCU's internal audit function, with Baker Tilly conducting a comprehensive risk assessment to guide the institution's FY25-FY27 audit plan. She provided updates on property monetization transactions that are nearing completion that will significantly enhance NJCU's cash reserves and debt reduction efforts, and that the committee continues to focus on proactive budget planning and oversight for continued stabilization funding to reflect the ongoing commitment to fiscal responsibility and strategic growth. The committee remains dedicated to NJCU's long-term mission-driven success.

There were no questions. Ms. Brathwaite yielded the floor back to Mr. Visconti.

Mr. Visconti yielded the floor to Trustee and Vice Chair Salerno, chair of the Real Estate, Infrastructure, and Capital Committee for his report.

Trustee Salerno reported considerable progress on NJCU's property monetization efforts as called for in OSHE's transition plan which will yield substantial financial benefits for the university, allowing to reinvest in critical infrastructure needs and capital improvements. He provided examples of those transactions and key highlights of the committee's ongoing efforts which were provided in the Board Book.

Dr. Garcia questioned about the Ft. Monmouth Transaction plan. Vice Chair Salerno deferred to President Acebo, who answered that the plan is to expedite the use of the sub-lease. And subject to third-party regulatory approvals, that the leasing will yield positive benefits for NJCU. Dr. Garcia had a follow-up question about whether NJCU's nursing equipment would stay at that location and President Acebo responded that it would.

There were no further questions, and Mr. Visconti yielded the floor to Trustee Davis Toth, chair of the Academic Affairs and Student Success Committee. As Trustee Toth was unable to present as she said she was driving and unable, she deferred to President Acebo to present on her behalf. President Acebo provided the update.

President Acebo highlighted the University's revitalized commitment to student success, community engagement, and strategic partnerships, and through this committee, provided key examples including partnerships with the Jersey City Board of Education to enhance mental health services in Jersey City Public Schools; an agreement with Jersey City Public Schools to support the Jersey City Arts High School Program on NJCU's campus; the release of NJCU's Student Development and Community Engagement Strategic Plan; a Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program by the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE); new academic programs, the creation of a new Master's of Social Work degree from a Federal Grant; among other successes.

Upon no further questions, President Acebo yielded the floor to the State Monitor for his update.

#### **STATE MONITOR'S UPDATE**

Mr. Amoroso thanked the full Board of Trustees for the collaborative work this past year, and the opportunity to continue working together to ensure the success in meeting the goals laid out in the previously published report. Amoroso noted the staff, the President, the Board and the NJCU community have met all benchmarks, and met all deadlines, and are well along toward debt reductions. Great strides have been taken, and commended President Acebo for his work and yielded the floor back to Acebo.

## **INTERIM PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

Interim President Acebo yielded the floor to the following for their presentations, which the materials were included in the board e-book and posted on the NJCU website, to the room: Erin McCann, VP for Student Development and Community Engagement, "Student Development and Community Engagement Strategic Plan Update."

Dr. Rachél Fester, VP of Institutional Effectiveness gave an oral report updating the community on the self-study report for Middle States. She reported that they are ahead of schedule and overall, in excellent shape.

Dr. Fester ceded the floor back to Interim President Acebo, who highlighted examples on the progress over the past year, including a photo slideshow PowerPoint presentation during his speech, which reflected the positive NJCU events and milestones in the community.

### **Academic Affairs**

#### **A. Strategic Initiatives**

1. **Textbook Inclusion Program:** NJCU became the only university in New Jersey to include textbooks as part of tuition, significantly reducing financial barriers for students.
2. **Bridge Program:** A support initiative for students entering with lower GPAs, providing targeted assistance throughout their critical first year.
3. **Center for Community Engaged Learning:** Directed by a faculty member, this new center expands community-based learning opportunities.
4. **Grading Policy Reform:** Updated policies allow for WU or WA grades for students who drop out without official withdrawal, reducing the adverse impact on GPAs and financial aid eligibility.

#### **B. Academic Programming**

1. The College of Education has developed a new K-12 program, pending state approval.
2. A new undergraduate certificate in Behavior Management and Applied Behavior Analysis will be initiated in Spring 2025.

#### **C. Strategic Hires**

1. Dr. J.D. Jayaraman and Dr. Esther Nir have been respectively appointed Interim Dean of the School of Business and the College of Professional Studies.
2. Full-time graduate advisors were added to the College of Professional Studies and the College of Education.
3. A full-time transfer advisor was hired through grant funding.

## **Enrollment Management**

### **A. Enrollment Metrics**

1. Undergraduate Enrollment: Applications increased by 8.25%, admit offers by 9.60%, and total enrollment by 11.25%.
2. Graduate Enrollment: Applications decreased by 5.48%, but admit offers increased by 9.83%, and enrollment rose by 11.28%.

### **B. Strategic Hires**

1. Key additions include:
  - a. Director of New Student Programs
  - b. Assistant Director of Enrollment Communications
  - c. Graduate Admissions Counselor
  - d. Transfer Success Coach
  - e. Multiple Admissions Recruiters

### **C. Strategic Initiatives**

1. Expanded recruitment efforts in key markets and strengthened transfer pipelines.
2. Optimized CRM systems for personalized outreach and improved communication strategies.
3. Revamped onboarding and yield programs for prospective students.
4. Launched readmit campaigns to re-engage former students.

## **Student Development and Community Engagement**

### **A. Student Experiences**

1. Athletics: The Men's and Women's Soccer teams achieved their best start in nearly two decades.
2. Residence Life: Processed 321 applications, welcoming 167 returning and 154 new students.
3. Disability Services: 270 students registered for support in Fall 2024.
4. Counseling Center: Provided 181 appointments since the start of the semester.
5. Food Pantry: Assisted 225 individuals in September, a 20% increase from the previous year.

### **Community Engagement and Events**

- A. Key events hosted this year include:
  1. Fireside Chat with U.S. Senator Andy Kim and U.S. Representative LaMonica McIver.
  2. Open House events for prospective students and families.
  3. Ribbon-cutting ceremonies for the A. Harry Moore LIFT Program and the Center for Student Persistence.

## **Strategic Initiatives**

1. Office of Student Persistence: Established in November to provide targeted support services and individualized persistence plans for students.
2. Care and Concern Committee: Revamped to address student mental health and food insecurity.
3. First-Generation Center: Launched to mentor first-generation students navigating college.
4. Enhanced Student Engagement: Over 100 student organizations actively participated in Welcome Month programming.

## **Strategic Partnerships and Agreements**

- A. **Hudson County Latin American Chamber of Commerce (HCLACC)**. A groundbreaking partnership fostering international connections and boosting the local economy through initiatives like the International Business Expo and student internships with Latino entrepreneurs.
- B. **Statewide Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of NJ (SHCCNJ)**. This collaboration established the Hispanic Business Hub on campus, providing workforce development, internships, and entrepreneurial mentorship for students.
- C. **Mercer County Community College (MCCC)**. A transfer agreement facilitating seamless credit transfer, joint admissions, and transfer scholarships.
- D. Launch of the **Hudson Connect Program**, a collaborative initiative to bridge educational and economic opportunities in the region.
- E. Partnership with the **Jersey City Police Officers Union** and the **Boys and Girls Club of Hudson County**, strengthening our ties to local youth and law enforcement communities.
- F. Collaboration with **Essex County Community College** to establish clear pathways for student transfer and success.

## **Significant Grants and Awards**

1. **\$3 Million Federal Grant for Hispanic Students**
  - a. This grant supports “The Professional Pathways Project,” which:
    - a. Introduces a new Master of Social Work program.
    - b. Develops a micro credential in Multicultural/Multilingual Services.
    - c. Enhances curriculum in the Educational Technology Leadership Ed.D. and Civil Security Leadership doctoral programs.

## 2. \$150,000 OSHE Grant

Awarded for the “Some College, No Degree” initiative, helping adults return to complete their degrees through debt relief and individualized resources.

## 3. \$222,000 NJ Department of Education Grant

Funds teacher development programs focused on literacy and English Language Arts (ELA).

### Institutional Stability and Future Positioning

- a. Ranking #1 in New Jersey and #10 nationally for improving students' upward economic mobility.
- b. Active exploration of a strategic partnership with a like-minded four-year public institution to ensure financial and institutional stability.

2024 marked a pivotal year for NJCU's financial health, with **Moody's** and **Fitch Ratings** upgrading the university's financial outlook for the first time in over a decade. These upgrades reflect our successful efforts to stabilize operations and secure NJCU's future.

Key advancements include:

- Implementation of shared governance practices to foster collaboration and accountability.
- Completion of a mission and vision refresh to align with NJCU's strategic priorities.
- Adoption of the **Academic Master Plan** and **Strategic Enrollment Plan** to guide academic and recruitment efforts.
- Development of the **Student Development and Community Engagement Plan**, enhancing support services and student life.

There were no questions, and the floor was opened for Public Comment.

### PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Visconti asked Ms. Lee if there were any public comments. Ms. Lee called up Dr. William Calathes, acknowledging his time limit of three minutes.

Dr. Calathes read his prepared statement as the Union Representative for NJCU and shared his experience as a member of AFT Local 1839. He commended Mr. Acebo for his stabilization efforts at the University, and thanked the State Monitor, the Board of Trustees, and the NJCU staff and Faculty for their hard work and valued the way the information was articulated and presented. As the Labor Representative for NJCU, he voiced the grievances from his constituents regarding the budget for the fiscal year. Mr. Calathes offered to have the union collaborate with the Board of Trustees, based on the impressive work already completed through the State Monitor's guidance, and work together to ensure all voices are heard, thus fostering a positive relationship and unite to continue to build a stronger Institution.

Mr. Visconti thanked Mr. Calathes.

Dr. Rachél Fester, VP Institutional Effectiveness, NJCU, spoke as an individual attendee. She praised President Acebo's work during this past year, and how he has provided the leadership and expertise needed at such a pivotal time in NJCU's history. Fester also placed on the record how she felt that Acebo has been the right person put in the role at the right time during the financial crisis who has brought the University out of a situation that could have been detrimental to the students, the community, and to the state.

Student Sofa Mostafa spoke about the hardships faced by many students who are on financial assistance and are searching for answers to find work yet are struggling to pay their bills and may be locked out student loans due to lack of guidance. Chair Visconti acknowledged the student's plight and said the board would investigate the situation.

Alumni Student Tesha Mateo was called to the forum by the Board Secretary. After a second calling, and no answer, with no more questions, the Board Secretary yielded the floor back to Chair Visconti for the Consent Agenda portion.

### **CONSENT AGENDA RESOLUTIONS**

President Acebo introduced a friendly amendment of inclusion of Dr. Esther Nir, Acting Dean, College of Education to the Personnel Actions Resolution due to the timing of the Board meeting and the receiving of the information. The item was passed. Vice Chair Salerno made a motion to approve all the items on the agenda and was seconded by Trustee Brathwaite. The resolutions were unanimously passed with two abstentions (Dao and Hernandez).

### **NEXT MEETING**

The Board Secretary announced that the next Board meeting will be held on February 24, 2025. Mr. Visconti requested a motion for the board to move into executive session prior to the public session to discuss confidential personnel matters and contractual matters. The minutes of the executive session will become available to the public when there is no longer a need for confidentiality regarding these matters and was seconded by Ms. Brathwaite. The motion passed with two abstentions (Dao and Hernandez).

### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Board, Mr. Visconti requested a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was moved by Mr. Salerno and seconded by Mr. Lejnieks. The motion passed with two abstentions (Dao and Hernandez). The meeting was adjourned at 6:08p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta Lee  
Board of Trustees Secretary