

## **BOARD OF GOVERNORS OF ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY**

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APPROVED minutes of the open session of the 261<sup>st</sup> regular meeting of the Board of Governors of Athabasca University held virtually on Friday, January 20, 2023.

**Present:** Byron Nelson (Chair), Matthew Prineas (Acting President), Leo de Bever, Don Gnatiuk, Dan Leckelt, Terry Lovelace, Lori Van Rooijen, Wilfred Willier, Elena Gould, Jacqueline Hobal, Roger Morrill, Martha Cleveland-Innes, Richard Huntrods, Liam Connelly, Karen Fletcher, Chris Edwards and Dur-E-Najaf Syed

**Governance Staff:** Sara Kunto (Chief Governance Officer and General Counsel) Barbara Kowalchuk (Recording Secretary) and Laura Knoblock (Executive Assistant)

**Others Present:** Deborah Meyers, Jennifer Shaeffer, Kristine Williamson, Pauline Smeltz, Gilbert Perras and Nick Knight

**Absent with Regrets:** Larry Spagnolo and Mike Lovsin

### **Call to Order**

The Chair called the meeting to order at 10:46 a.m. having achieved quorum followed by the delivery of the AU land acknowledgement.

### **1.0 Approval of Agenda and Consent Agenda**

**261-01 MOVED** That the Board of Governors approves the open session agenda for meeting 261, and thereby approves the consent agenda including the open session minutes of meeting 260, held December 9, 2022, as presented.

**Gould/Fletcher**

**Carried**

### **2.0 Conflict of Interest Declaration**

Subject to the Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest Guidelines for the Board of Governors, members were asked to declare any conflict they may have with respect to particular agenda items contained within the meeting agenda.

No conflicts were declared.

### **3.0 Presentations/Information Sessions**

#### **3.1 Finance Information and Awareness Session**

The Vice President Finance & Performance Services & Chief Financial Officer provided a presentation for the members including an overview of the following:

- Key considerations relevant to Post-secondary Institution (PSI) Budgeting & Expenditure
- Revenues
- Operating Expenditures
- Net Assets (Liabilities)

- Financial Stability
- Capital Expenditures
- Financial Management Processes
- Financial Policy and Control

Further clarification was provided in respect of the percentage of AU students that are out of province/foreign students, the process that guides the amount of net assets apportioned to the different internally restricted funds when a surplus is realized, as well as the risk assessments and overall process, including policy, for the assessment and setting of the target balance for the Internal Risk Reserve.

#### **4.0 Action, Information / Discussion Items**

##### **4.1 Approve 2023-24 Tuition and Fees**

The Board Chair noted that in the absence of the Chair, Finance & Property Committee (FPC), he had assumed the Chair for the FPC meeting held earlier in the day and reported that FPC had defeated the motion to recommend approval of the 2023-24 tuition and fees. He further advised the Board that the lack of recommendation from FPC did not preclude the Board from moving forward and deliberating on the item.

**261-02 MOVED** That the Board of Governors approves the 2023-24 tuition and fees, effective September 1, 2023, subject to non-substantive edits.

##### **Cleveland Innes/de Bever**

The Acting President presented this item noting that the Integrated Resource Planning process is a long process that spans most of the fiscal year prior to the approval of the Integrated Resource Plan each year in March. He further provided an overview of the current environment, the process undertaken in the development of the proposal, consultations with students, and the rationale for the proposed 2023-24 tuition and fees.

The members discussed this proposal at length including:

- the impact of potentially not approving the increase
- what cuts would need to be made with an eye to minimizing impacts to students and staff where possible
- acknowledgement of the impact on students that the increase would have including affordability and cost of living crises
- other financial aids for students that could assist in mitigating the impact
- the potential that if the increase is approved and the situation changes, that the redistribution of surplus be directed to bursaries for students
- how the decision will impact the development of the Integrated Resource Plan
- price sensitivities in different market segments and the feasibility of raising tuition in a time of declining enrolments
- the rationale for the proposed reduction in out of province fees
- the need to remain competitive in the online learning field
- the need to lobby the government in terms of more equity in funding per FLE when compared to other Alberta PSIs

**Carried**

## **4.2 Approve Master of Science in Earth System Science**

**261-03 MOVED** That the Board of Governors approves the Master of Science in Earth System Science effective July 1, 2023, or thereafter at the discretion of the Provost and Vice President Academic, subject to the approval of Alberta Advanced Education.

### **Huntrods/Morrill**

The Board Chair reported that the Finance & Property Committee had recommended approval of the proposed Master of Science in Earth System Science at the meeting held earlier in the day.

The Acting President presented this item noting that the proposal had significant vetting over a number of years, and further that he believed it to be the first graduate program of its kind in Canada. He further noted that the proposed program was built on a strong cluster of researchers at Athabasca University associated with the Athabasca River Basin Research Institute (ARBRI) in a variety of interdisciplinary areas.

Support was expressed for the proposal noting that the program supports the Athabasca community in that work has been done through ARBRI which brought researchers to the area, and now this program will bring students. He further noted that there will be a demand for this kind of research and this degree as there will be employment opportunities and lifelong careers for graduates.

The members discussed the proposal and noted the importance of marketing the new degree when it is finally approved.

**Carried**

## **5.0 Business Arising from the Consent Agenda - None**

## **6.0 Adjourn**

The open session of Meeting 261 was adjourned at 1:06 p.m.