

**MISSOURI SOUTHERN STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**Board of Governors Minutes**  
**September 8, 2023**  
**Billingsly Student Center**  
**Room 310**

The September 8, 2023, meeting of the Missouri Southern State University Board of Governors was called to order by Chairwoman Anita Oplotnik. Governors in attendance were T. Mark Elliott, Bill Gipson, Carlos Haley, Anita Oplotnik, Dr. Benjamin Rosenberg, Mariann Morgan, and Alison Hershewe.

Others in attendance were Dr. Jean Coltharp, Peter Edwards, Alicia Hughes, Rob Mallory, Dr. Brad Hodson, Dr. Lisa Toms, Dr. Dean Van Galen, Dr. Shellie Hewitt, Linda Eis, Marcel John, and Jeanie Nice.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Chairwoman Oplotnik called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. and welcomed everyone. Governor Oplotnik introduced the Board's new attorney, Peter Edwards. Governor Oplotnik asked if there were any other announcements. None were mentioned.

**MINUTES**

Chairwoman Oplotnik asked if there were any additions or corrections to the minutes of the June 8, 2023 Board meeting; none were noted.

*A motion was made by T. Mark Elliott and seconded by Bill Gipson to approve minutes of the June 8, 2023 Board meeting as submitted. Motion passed unanimously. (Minutes are archived in the permanent record book).*

**Resolution of Appreciation**

Before beginning the meeting, Governor Oplotnik presented a Resolution of Appreciation for Governor Ron Richard to his wife Patty and their daughter-in-law Amy. The resolution stated:

Whereas Governor Ronald "Ron" Francis Richard was appointed to serve on the Missouri Southern State University Board of Governors on Nov. 6, 2019; and faithfully served until his passing on June 9, 2023; and

Whereas Governor Richard was a proud graduate of Missouri Southern State University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in history and political science, and was ultimately honored as the Outstanding Alumnus of Missouri Southern and with the Richard Webster Medallion for legislative service; and

Whereas Governor Richard was an exemplary elected official, serving four terms in the Missouri House of Representatives and two terms in the Missouri Senate, and becoming the first Missourian in history to serve in the highest position in both chambers; and

Whereas Governor Richard loved his community and utilized his leadership abilities to serve on the Joplin City Council and as the Mayor of Joplin, and was rightfully recognized with the Joplin Outstanding Citizen Award; and

Whereas Governor Richard was widely recognized and sought out for his expertise and skills, serving in many leadership positions including the Joplin Public Schools R8 Foundation, as Chair of the Southern Legislative Conference, on the Joplin Redevelopment Corporation, and on the Board of Directors of Connect2Culture in Joplin, along with many others; and

Whereas Governor Richard often stated his greatest honor was serving the people of Joplin, the State of Missouri, and the students of Missouri Southern;

Now be it therefore resolved that the Board of Governors of Missouri Southern State University honors the life, passions, and accomplishments of Governor Richard, remembers his service and kindness, and proudly recognizes a life well lived by our friend and colleague.

Presented this eighth day of September 2023 and attested to by Anita Y. Oplotnik, Chair of the MSSU Board of Governors and Dean Van Galen, Ph.D., President, Missouri Southern State University.

*A motion was made by Dr. Benjamin Rosenberg and seconded by T. Mark Elliott to approve the Resolution of Appreciation for Ron Richard. Motion passed unanimously.*

Governor Oplotnik then opened the floor to the other Board members who added comments and stories about Ron. A framed resolution was presented to Patty Richard and Amy Greer by Governor Oplotnik and Dr. Dean Van Galen.

**President (Dr. Dean Van Galen):**

*Note: Highlights of Dr. Van Galen’s report are as follows. Additional information can be found in a handout distributed to the Board that is attached to the minutes in the permanent record book.*

Before my formal university update, I also want to acknowledge the tremendous impact that Senator Ron Richard had on our region, the State of Missouri, and especially on Missouri Southern—as one of our most distinguished graduates and an exemplary member of the Board of Governors. I will miss his keen insights, his straightforward communication, and his relentless pursuit of how to make this university even better.

**New Member of President’s Cabinet**

As a lead-in to my report, I want to acknowledge a new member of the university’s leadership team and President’s Cabinet: Mark Scott. Mark began his new role as our university’s Director of Communications and External Relations on July 31<sup>st</sup>. He is a University of Arkansas graduate. Mark brings a diverse set of past experiences to our university including Director of Public Communications for the State of Arkansas’ Governor’s Office, Senior Communications Manager for Walmart, and Director of Media Relations at Hendrix College in Conway, Arkansas.

**Welcome Back Lions**

As noted on page two of the Board Report, the new academic year is off to a great start, with many campus and community activities designed to help new students with their transition to Missouri Southern. We continue to build student engagement and the vibrancy of our campus.

## **President (continued):**

It is important that we hear from our students, and during the first week of classes our Student Success staff surveyed our first-year students to hear their perceptions of their early Missouri Southern experience. These five student comments are representative of the over 200 students who responded:

- *“So far, I really enjoy my classes. The teachers seem to really engage with students and care about that they are teaching. I enjoy the passion behind what they do.”*
- *“I like how everyone is super nice and treats you like a family even though we all just got here.”*
- *“I love everything about MSSU. I love the people, the campus, I enjoy meeting new people and making friends, everyone here so far has been kind and respectful. I think the campus is amazing and I already feel at home.”*
- *“The campus is pretty, and it is a lot warmer here than it is in Minnesota.”*
- *“I appreciate the amazing faculty and staff, that is so hard to find anywhere else.”*

Those comments, and there were many others with the same sentiments, say a lot about a great start to the semester and the great work of our faculty and staff.

## **Celebrating Faculty Achievement**

In my Board report you will find photographs from the August 24<sup>th</sup> event at the University Mansion, where we recognized the eight outstanding faculty members which the Board approved for tenure or promotion at its June meeting. These educators will continue to positively impact thousands of Missouri Southern students. I want to thank Board Chair Oplotnik for speaking at the event, and Academic Affairs Committee chair Governor Rosenberg and Academic Affairs Committee member Hershewe for their participation in the recognition ceremony.

## **Health Science Innovation Center**

In my written report, you will find a brief update on the planning of our new *Health Science Innovation Center*. Governor Parson and the legislature included an additional \$7.5 million dedicated specifically to that project in the state’s fiscal year 2024 budget. Also noted is the \$1 million gift from the Steadley Trust to support the project announced at our campus Welcome Back meeting earlier this semester. CornerGreer continues to be a great partner in the planning process, and the project steering committee will be reviewing updated floor plans and an exterior concept in the next week. Groundbreaking will be in early 2024 with completion anticipated in 2026.

## **Looking Forward to a Great 2023-2024 Academic Year**

On page four, you will find ten images and captions—reasons for excitement and optimism—that I shared at the faculty and staff welcome back meeting on August 18<sup>th</sup>. I will highlight two of the ten.

### **Ireland Themed Semester**

Ireland will be the focus of this fall’s themed semester. The Board has been provided with an Ireland themed semester brochure that lists the exciting line-up of about 40 opportunities to learn about Irish history, arts, literature, culture, food, and business. As always, special thanks to Dr. Chad Stebbins for leading the development of themed semester activities. A recent addition not found in the brochure...on Friday, September 22<sup>nd</sup> there will be a presentation on *Oral Health in*

## **President (continued):**

*Ireland* by Dr. Brian O’Connell. Dr. O’Connell is the Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences and Professor of Restorative Dentistry in the School of Dental Science in Dublin Ireland. Dr. O’Connell’s presentation was arranged in collaboration with the Kansas City University College of Dental Medicine and is another great example of our partnership with KCU.

## **Support and Celebrate Great People**

Finally, I highlight the photo and caption: “Support and Celebrate People.” The progress of our university that you’ll hear about today is truly the result of the great work of people. As an example, pictured in my report above the “Support and Celebrate Great People” caption is one of the recipients of the most recent Service Champ Award, sponsored by Staff Senate. Tyler Meyer from Financial Aid was recognized along with Toni Nicoletti from Facilities Services, and IT Support Specialist Scott Westwood (who is always behind the scenes making this work). I am grateful to these honorees, and many others on our campus who demonstrate excellence and commitment to our educational mission, every day.

## **Executive Vice President (Dr. Brad Hodson):**

*Note: Highlights of Dr. Hodson’s report are as follows. Additional information can be found in a handout distributed to the Board that is attached to the minutes in the permanent record book.*

## **New Facility Services Director**

I would like to introduce Jeff Boman, the new Director of Facility Services. Jeff started Tuesday of this week and will oversee custodial, mechanical maintenance, grounds, trades, transportation, key control, and capital construction. He comes to us as a Physical Plant Director at NEO College in Miami, OK. Prior to that he spent 19 years in Facility Management at Leggett & Platt and 15 years at Ozark Christian College.

## **Facility Improvement Plan**

In my report you have a summary of the eight projects that were selected for year one of the three-year plan. That is due to the funding this board allocated in the FY24 budget. On page six you will see the four categories of projects: instructional spaces, infrastructure, safety and security, and wayfinding. We will begin to determine the scope of those projects and get some preliminary pricing and put it out for bid. Our goal is to be shovel ready for the instructional space projects by December 31st, so they are only off-line one semester for actual construction. The others are larger projects that may take the better part of the fiscal year. The monumental new signage was being installed today.

## **New Foundation Board Members**

On page seven you will see the biographies and photographs of the five new foundation board members that were welcomed at the August meeting.

**Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs (Dr. Lisa Toms):**

*Note: Highlights of Dr. Toms report are as follows. Additional information can be found in a handout distributed to the Board that is attached to the minutes in the permanent record book.*

**Faculty with New Roles**

I would like to begin by introducing two individuals who are no strangers to Missouri Southern, but who assumed new titles on July 1. First, Dr. Elke Howe has been a faculty member here for a number of years and most recently served as chair of the Department of Technology. She is the new Dean of the College of Business, Communication and Technology. We are excited to have her in that role and look forward to great things from and for the College.

Ms. Betsy Woods has been at Missouri Southern for 17 Years. She began working in the Registrar's Office, then transitioned to IT. In January, I asked her to become the Interim Director of Institutional Effectiveness, a position that had been vacant for over two years. She jumped in and started providing expertise in our mandated reporting, in data, and has been instrumental in helping provide data for a number of initiatives, most recently for our HLC Assurance Argument. Beginning July 1st, the "interim" was removed from her title. We are thrilled to have her.

**Assurance Review**

On Tuesday of this week, Missouri Southern received a letter from HLC related to the Assurance Review four-year update. I quote "This letter serves to inform you that Missouri Southern State University has successfully completed its Open Pathway Assurance Review with no recommended monitoring." We are obviously thrilled with this outcome, as it means we demonstrated that we sufficiently met all criteria of accreditation and will not be required to provide any other actions or reports except our Quality Initiative proposal, which will be submitted next year. I would like to thank Dr. Wendy McGrane for her diligent work and long hours preparing the 35,000-word assurance argument that provided over 2000 pieces of evidence.

**Pass Rate**

We are thrilled to share that Missouri Southern has once again attained a high pass rate on several of the licensure exams that our graduating students take to conclude their programs. In the health sciences, 100% of May graduates in Nursing, Dental Hygiene, Radiology Tech, and Paramedicine passed their licensure exams. Seventy-three percent of Respiratory Therapy students passed their licensure exam. In teacher education, 100% of graduates passed their teacher education licensure exam. The Law Enforcement Academy graduates also had a 100% pass rate on their POST exam. This data confirms what we already know, Missouri Southern provides excellent educational opportunities for students of southwest Missouri and surrounding regions. We look forward to those programs growing and adding others.

**Nursing Program Approval**

On August 14, Nursing Department Chair Dr. Lisa Beals received the official letter from the State Board of Nursing that our Baccalaureate Degree Nursing Program received full program approval, with the next routine site survey due in 2028. Dr. Beals and her faculty have worked diligently to ensure that our nursing program is one of consistent excellence.

## **Chief Financial Officer/Treasurer (Ms. Linda Eis):**

### **Audit FY2023**

We are still in the throes of closing out FY2023. The auditors have done on-site fieldwork. We continue to work through the GASB96 standards along with a lot of year-end audit entries that need to be done. We are very much on track to present at the November 2023 Board meeting.

### **Insurance committee**

As previously reported, the insurance committee has done a lot of work to put together recommendations for employees for the calendar year 2024. That information has gone out to employees to give them time to prepare for open enrollment which will be October 18th through October 31st.

We want to remind employees there is still time to work on their wellness plan. If you obtain 400 wellness points you receive a \$25 monthly wellness incentive towards your insurance costs.

### **Supporting and Celebrating our Employees**

We have great employees on campus. We provide opportunities for training and engagement and one of the best engagement opportunities is welcoming students back with the spirit tunnel. As Dr. Van Galen often states “they are the reason why” and it’s good to see employees supporting our students.

### **Presentation of the financial statements for the period ending August 31, 2023**

#### **Cash Graph:**

Ms. Eis noted the balance at the end of August 31, 2023, is \$19.6M.

#### **Statement of Net Position:**

**Total Assets:** \$199M The semi-annual bond payment will be processed next week.

**Total Liabilities :** \$135M

**Net Position :** \$64M

#### **Comparative Statement of Revenues, Expenses, and Changes in Net Position (difference column):**

- **Total Operating Revenues:** Reflects an increase of \$942k. This is made up from an increase in tuition which is due to some of our rate changes. We were also able to use the bond proceeds to update some of our residence halls, which allows us to have additional occupancy creating an increase in auxiliary revenue.
- **Total Operating Expenses:** Reflects an increase of \$615k. A portion of that is timing on our property insurance. We paid early, plus there was a \$200k increase in property insurance. We are seeing savings from changing our carrier for our health insurance.
- **Non-Operating Revenues:** Reflects an increase of \$437k. State appropriations we received from the state were a little over \$300k. Investment incomes also contributed to the increase.
- **Other Revenues:** Reflects an increase of \$924k. This is primarily from capital gifts for the new Health Science Innovation Center.
- **Income Before Other Revenues:**  
Current Year: \$13.6M  
Prior Year: \$12.9M  
This results in an increase from Prior Year: \$764k.

*A motion was made by Carlos Haley and seconded by Bill Gipson to approve the August 2023 financial statements as presented. Motion passed unanimously. (A copy of the financial statements for August 2023 is attached to the minutes in the permanent record book).*

### **Dean of Admissions (Dr. Shellie Hewitt)**

*Note: Highlights of Dr. Hewitt's report are as follows. Additional information can be found in a handout distributed to the Board that is attached to the minutes in the permanent record book.*

#### **Fall 2023 New Student Enrollment**

We all are looking forward to Census Day next Friday. We anticipate an increase in new graduate student enrollment and new transfer student enrollment. We are hopeful that overall new student enrollment will be up for a second year in a row.

#### **Fall 2023 International Student Enrollment**

This fall, international student enrollment soared, and I want to especially thank Stephanie Goad and Heather Ali for their tremendous efforts processing the applications. The goal for fall 2023 was a 10% increase in new international students and we exceeded that goal. The exciting news is that we have 33% more degree-seeking international students this year. That means freshmen and transfer students are going to be here for more than one to two semesters. Efforts that contributed to this increase were establishing a new scholarship model and partnerships across the globe.

#### **Fall Enrollment Highlights**

Overall Graduate enrollment is trending up. An enrollment breakdown of those programs was provided to you in my report. We are excited to see our new graduate programs, specifically Healthcare Admin and Data Analytics, are off to a good start. As a side note, 89% of our graduate students are in-state or Lion Pride students.

New transfer enrollment is on the rise, as well. The top transfer majors have been provided to you in my report. Our top feeder transfer schools are Crowder College (55%), Ozark Technical Community College, Coffeyville Community College, Missouri State University, and NWACC. For first time freshman, our top three programs include: Nursing, Criminal Justice Admin, and Business. Our five local feeder schools and international schools lead the way for new student enrollment. Initiatives this year included Missouri Southern taking enrollment teams to many of these schools and enrolling students early. Eight of the 11 schools are on the list provided.

#### **New Website Redesign is LIVE!**

On August 24<sup>th</sup> the university launched the new website. This website was designed to be an additional recruitment tool and enhance the overall user experience. We've had a lot of positive feedback thus far. URM is scheduling meetings with the individual departments to customize their content.

### **Director of Athletics (Mr. Rob Mallory):**

*Note: Highlights of Ryan's report are as follows. Additional information can be found in a handout distributed to the Board that is attached to the minutes in the permanent record book.*

#### **SOUTHERNFEST SUCCESS**

Southernfest 2023 was a major success! It is the athletic department's largest fundraising event of the year and brought in approximately \$115,000 to support MSSU student-athletes. We had 160 golfers who braved the July rain at the Rod Smith Golf Classic. We had 375 attendees at the Green & Gold Gala which was held at Downstream Casino & Resort on July 22nd. Dates for Southernfest 2024 will be July 11-13, once again hosted at Eagle Creek Golf Club and Downstream Casino & Resort.

## **Director of Athletics (continued):**

### **MIAA Membership Update**

As previously reported, it was announced that Lincoln University would leave the MIAA effective Fall of 2024. In June, upon unanimous approval by the CEO Council, the MIAA welcomed the University of Arkansas – Fort Smith (UAFS) as a full member beginning Fall of 2024.

UAFS joins the MIAA from the Lone Star Conference and becomes the conference's first full-time member in the state of Arkansas. Scheduling impacts and new conference schedules will be considered and reviewed throughout the fall for approval in November.

The MIAA continues to monitor the membership landscape with a desire to grow further in the future.

### **STAFF COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS**

Lastly, I'd like to highlight some MSSU employees who recently received appointments to serve on MIAA or NCAA leadership committees. President Dr. Dean Van Galen has been named Vice Chair of the MIAA CEO Council. Associate AD for Internal Operations Cori Reid has been named the chair of the MIAA Institutional Representatives Council (IRC) and will serve a two-year term in that role. Head Baseball Coach, Bryce Darnell, has been appointed to the NCAA Division II Baseball Committee for a four-year term. Director of Athletics, Rob Mallory, has been appointed to the NCAA Division II Membership Committee for a four-year term.

## **Faculty Senate President (Dr. Jean Coltharp):**

*Note: Highlights of Dr. Coltharp's report are as follows.*

Faculty Senate has not met since I last reported to the Board, however, the faculty has had many things to celebrate! We had a new faculty orientation in August where we welcomed 16 new faculty since January. At our back-to-school meeting we honored faculty who have reached milestone years of service to the university. We also awarded the outstanding teaching award to Kimberly Rogers (Dental Hygiene) and Lynell Gilbert-Saunders (Chemistry) and the outstanding advisor award to Zackary Rice (Teacher Education).

We had an exciting first few weeks with new parking regulations and the loss of air conditioning. Thankfully, Academic Affairs worked quickly to move classes around.

The ad hoc committee we created last semester to review the Promotion and Tenure requirements is making a lot of progress. They have the current plan out to department chairs asking for input and ideas – all feedback so far has been positive!

## **Staff Senate President (Ms. Alicia Hughes):**

*Note: Highlights of Ms. Hughes report are as follows:*

Our service champ award winners for the second quarter are Tyler Meyer, Tony Nicoletti and Scott Westwood. These winners exemplify respect for the campus community, positive attitude, pride in work, exemplary dependability and excellence in customer service.



**Staff Senate President (continued):**

Currently we are rolling out a digital billboard idea where employees post to a private Facebook group our engagement photos taken by employees of the Spirit Tunnel or other campus vibrancy events.

We are wanting to create a “Swag Shop” where we can take our Missouri Southern clothing that employees no longer want/need, and other employees can shop for the clothing. We’ve already had a conversation with the Lion Co-Op, who has the space.

Discussing other ideas to grow relationships across campus, improve campus culture and improve retention.

**Student Senate President (Mr. Marcel John):**

*Note: Highlights of Mr. John’s report are as follows:*

We will be having Student Senate’s first meeting on September 14<sup>th</sup> where we will be introducing 12 new members. Our first meeting will revolve around introductions and getting people to know each other. Our students tend to talk softly, and this will help us become more comfortable talking with and to other people.

**Board Committees:**

**Personnel/Compensation (T. Mark Elliott, Chair):**

The committee did not meet.

**Academic Affairs (Dr. Benjamin Rosenberg, Chair):**

We had several updates from Dr. Toms who shared most of that with you in this meeting. We also approved the update of the faculty handbook.

*A motion was made by Dr. Benjamin Rosenberg and seconded by Mariann Morgan to approve the Faculty Handbook updates. Motion passed unanimously.*

**Budget Audit Committee (Carlos Haley, Chair):**

We discussed the health insurance update coming for the 2024 year. We also talked about our Construction Manager at Risk contracting process. A brief update was given on our tuition workgroup and the work they are doing.

We do have one item that needs approval of the Board, which is the Policy on Policies. There were a few changes on the standardization of policies.

*A motion was made by Carlos Haley and seconded by T. Mark Elliott to approve the Policy on Policies document. Motion passed unanimously.*

**OLD BUSINESS** – N/A

**NEW BUSINESS** – N/A

**Future Meeting Date:**

The next meetings of the Board are as scheduled:

November 10, 2023

January 19, 2024

March 15, 2024

June 13, 2024

**Closed Executive Session:**

Chairwoman Oplotnik noted that the Board needed to go into closed Executive Session pertaining to the following state statutes:

**RSMo 610.021 (1)** Legal actions, causes of action or litigation involving a public governmental body and any confidential or privileged communications between a public governmental body or its representatives and its attorneys; and

**RSMo 610.021 (3)** Hiring, firing, disciplining, or promoting of particular employees by a public governmental body when personal information about the employee is discussed or recorded.

*A motion was made by Bill Gipson and seconded by Carlos Haley to move to executive closed session. A roll call was made by Secretary Jeanie Nice, with each attending Board member voting in favor of the closed Executive Session.*

*At the conclusion of the Executive Session, a motion was duly made and passed to adjourn the meeting.*

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Board Chair

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Board Secretary