

NCCC board outlines reopening for fall semester, sports

BY MICHAEL DEPIETRO

Interim Tribune Editor

This week, Niagara Community College's Board of Trustees discussed fall reopening plans, including its decision to offer fall-season intercollegiate athletics. The board summarized its official reopening procedures that were submitted to, and ultimately approved by, SUNY on Thursday morning.

During the president's report, NCCC President William J. Murabito said that, in the coming weeks, the college will begin its reopening procedures by bringing in 25% of staff, emphasizing "density reductions" within offices.

NCCC Vice President Wayne Lynch explained, "We're really placing safety at the front of all of this. The reason we're bringing back some people staggered ... is we need to test the system. ... We feel it's really important to work our bugs out now during the summer session months."

Per a New York state mandate, staff will also have to self-report via a questionnaire on the BannerWeb online application. When arriving on campus, staff will have to stop at a checkpoint to swipe their name badges and have their temperatures taken. A timestamp will be recorded for contact tracing purposes in the event a positive case is later confirmed.

Lynch also outlined a number of safety changes aimed to protect students. Plexiglas barriers have been installed in the school's labs to help maintain social distancing, while signage will begin to be posted around the campus with important safety information. Additionally, supplies are expected to begin coming in next week, including 80 hand-sanitizing stations as well as 11,000 reusable masks for student use. Elsewhere, Murabito explained that the masks would be made of three layers of cotton, and are re-washable for upward of 20 to 30 times. Students will each receive three masks.

In terms of testing protocol, Lynch said NCCC does not have the ability to conduct COVID PCR tests. Murabito later clarified the costs required to do in-house testing were prohibitive and that the county will perform any necessary testing.

Lynch said the college was faced with three possible overall testing methods. The first option was simply to test those who show symptoms. Lynch said this was the most common method college campuses are using and indicated this would be NCCC's choice as well. The second would've involved random batch testing, which Lynch discounted saying "You would (test) I think 40 out of a hundred, so you're trying to find a needle in the haystack." The third option was simply to test everyone once every two weeks but the cost of this was \$100,000 per 1,000 individuals.

Questions arose as to how the school will find out about positive cases as well as how they would handle those cases. Lynch said cases would either have to be self-reported, detected through entrance screening, or the school would be notified by the county. A student exposure would be handled by the wellness office to maintain medical privacy, while employee exposures will be han-

dled by the human resources department.

From there, the school said that, per Niagara County Health Director Daniel J. Stapleton, the school itself is not to inform anyone about potential exposures. School officials would contact the Niagara County Health department, which would then handle contact tracing and notification.

NCCC to Offer Fall Sports

The board also briefly discussed its plans to allow fall sports to take place this year. Per a press release sent out earlier this week, the college said:

"Niagara County Community College, in accordance with the National Junior College Athletic Association's Path for 2020-21 Sports, plans to offer intercollegiate athletics during the 2020-21 academic year. Fall championship sports may begin practice on Aug. 1.

"We are looking forward to a return to play that offers a competitive and positive experience for our student-athletes," Director of Athletics Amanda Haseley said. "The health and safety of our student-athletes will always be our top priority, so we will continue to follow all national, state and local guidelines in regards to the ongoing COVID-19 situation."

"NCCC offers the following intercollegiate sports: baseball, co-ed golf, men's basketball, men's soccer, softball, women's basketball, women's soccer, women's volleyball and wrestling. Men's ice hockey is a club offering on campus."

During his report on Tuesday, Murabito elaborated on the decision to allow fall sports to take place noting a lack of contact among the fall sports offerings. He also said he would be prepared to terminate the season if cases began to arise.

"I felt that's important because there's so many students who are engaged in sports and they come here for sports and some Fall sports are really not contact. I have a hard time telling our students, they can't play volleyball, but the students at UB can play football. It doesn't make much sense to me. (We've) spent hours and hours working on this in terms of how we can offer sports in a safe environment and where are athletes being housed, how they're being transported, everything. ... We will have a very safe program and if it appears there are triggers or are problems, we will cut the season," Murabito said.

For more information on NCCC athletics, visit www.ncccathletics.com.

Outgoing Chairman, Board Elections

While Tuesday's meeting marked the last meeting of the academic year, it was also William Ross' last meeting as board chairman. Ross was appointed to

NCCC STUDENTS RECEIVE DIPLOMAS IN UNIQUE WAY



NCCC graduate, Maritza Rivera poses with her family during diploma pick-up on Thursday, June 25.

The board also briefly recapped the unique diploma delivery service the college offered last week. A press release explained the event:

"While the global pandemic has altered many aspects of the spring semester for students at Niagara County Community College, the administration wanted to ensure graduates still received a proper acknowledgment of their accomplishments. For many students, receiving a diploma is the ultimate symbol of years of hard work and dedication to their studies, and the staff at NCCC wanted to make the process as fun as possible under the circumstances.

"After a bit of brainstorming, members of the commencement committee at the college decided that repurposing the campus shuttle for delivering diplomas was a unique way to bring a special moment to deserving graduates. The Class of 2020 was excited to share the special moment with their families and some even dressed in their caps and gowns to receive their diplomas at their homes while NCCC staff cheered them on and took pho-

tos to commemorate the occasion.

"Graduates also had the option to participate in a diploma pick-up on campus at the Niagara Falls Culinary Institute or on the Sanborn campus of NCCC. At each location, graduates had an opportunity to get pictures with their families and some graduates were even able to pose for photos with NCCC President William Murabito as they normally would at commencement. "One of the advantages of being at a community college is that the staff and administration are very invested in the students, and they pushed to create these meaningful experiences for graduates despite the inability to have a traditional commencement ceremony," said President Murabito.

At the board meeting, Murabito said plans for some type of formal ceremony are still being discussed.

"We're still looking at the possibility, though it may be unlikely, of having a fall face-to-face ceremony. If not, those individuals will be asked to come next spring," Murabito said.

the NCCC board by the Niagara County Legislature in 2005. He has served as board chairman since 2017.

Murabito offered words of praise for the Ross, noting the help and assistance he provided when Murabito took over as interim president in 2017.

"I personally want to thank Bill for working closely with me through the last three years, Murabito said. "I think I've learned a lot from you. I mean, he knows everybody in the county (laughs). And every contact I made I think it was based on you. I think you've been an excellent chairman and thank you for your service."

Ross will continue to serve on the NCCC. At the end of the board meeting, the following slate of officers were approved, effective July 1:

- ✓ Gina Virtuoso – Chairperson
- ✓ Ross – Vice Chairperson
- ✓ Bonnie Sloma – Secretary
- ✓ Jason Cafarella – Financial Secretary

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