

Colleagues,

I write today to update you on our ongoing efforts to redefine the undergraduate residential experience at Mary Baldwin.

Three weeks ago, I shared an update on the work of [the Academic Portfolio creative team and the Engaged Student Experience creative team](#) as well as actions that the Board of Trustees will consider when they meet in October, including program closures, faculty handbook changes, and teach-out plans.

After receiving my email to students last month, Mary Baldwin senior and studio art major Charlotte Bradley replied, saying she thought we needed to do a better job integrating the liberal arts with skills that prepare students for post-graduation success in the workforce: "Integrating technology into our learning and understanding how to use it is important, and it would be very beneficial for students about to enter the workforce."

Since January many on campus have been working toward Charlotte's goal by thinking about ways to evolve academic programs, meet student needs, and adapt to the changing world of work.

Last week, leaders of both creative teams presented updates on their latest work to the Board of Trustees in preparation for its October meeting. The Board took no votes at the session, held via Zoom on Aug. 31. Earlier today, academic leaders met again with the Faculty Council to report on that meeting and next steps.

Academic Portfolio

As you recall, Paul Menzer, dean of the university faculty and vice president and dean of the Gold College of Arts and Sciences, is leading the work of the Academic Portfolio creative team. This summer, the team reconceptualized the MBU general education curriculum and has now introduced a new approach to aligning majors within "meta majors."

The meta majors, or academic pathways, contain a mix of current, new, and reconceptualized majors that lead to career opportunities while leveraging the liberal arts and current strengths. These academic pathways offer students the ability to: 1) select a general area of study before deciding on a specific major, 2) switch majors seamlessly within their chosen meta major (to minimize time spent earning a degree), and 3) be assigned to a first-year residential college or living learning community affiliated with their meta major.

Please see the attached summary of Dr. Menzer's report to the Board, which provides more detailed information; some of the data points the team considered in its recommendation; and a proposed list of discontinued majors, continuing majors, consolidated/reconceptualized majors, and new majors.

Next Steps

The work ahead will involve intricate steps that will likely affect students, faculty, staff, university planning, budgets, and employee contracts. I want to reiterate that we will work to find creative and compassionate solutions for employees impacted by program closures. We are committed to providing tenured faculty with 12 months notice or severance regarding program closures and meeting the deadlines for non-renewable faculty, as outlined in the Faculty Handbook. We are also hopeful that this work will include transition assistance and the development of internal positions for which existing tenured faculty may apply.

Teach-out planning for potentially discontinued majors will begin immediately, and, as required by SACSCOC, will involve faculty members in the related departments. Potential reductions in staffing will be considered after teach-out planning is completed. We will also contemplate the level of instructional support needed for the suite of new and persisting majors. The Board will not vote on these changes until their October meeting.

Each student who is affected will receive an individualized teach-out plan from the university. Again, we are committed to ensuring that students have the information and support they need and that, regardless of program decisions, they will complete a degree at MBU in their chosen major.

The Academic Portfolio creative team will also begin the work to sequence the new gen ed curriculum, and we will undertake further market research in addition to the team's analysis of internal trends and external market research.

Engaged Student Experience

Will Webb, chief academic officer and executive vice president and dean of the Palmer College of Professional Studies, also presented to the Board the work of the Engaged Student Experience creative team, which he has led. The team is now divided into three subcommittees focused on expanding the MBU learning experience beyond campus, creating engaged learning pathways and professional development, and developing cohort-based living and learning communities. Composed of faculty, staff, and administrators, the subcommittees will work through September to prepare materials for the Board of Trustees to consider next month.

Working Together

I want to reiterate my commitment to being transparent and to listen carefully while we work through these changes. I know that this community of educators is committed to designing a liberal arts education combined with career preparation that readies our students for lives of purpose and professional success. Even in the face of difficult work, I see your efforts and dedication to our community and students – work which is a testament to MBU's resilience and will pave the way to a bright future.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to reach out by emailing reimagine@marybaldwin.edu or to me directly at president@marybaldwin.edu. Our next Town Hall meeting is scheduled for 12:15 p.m on Sept. 14 in Francis Auditorium, where we'll have an opportunity to discuss this work and other issues. There will be a Zoom option for those who cannot be on campus.

All in for Mary Baldwin,

Dr. Jeff Stein
President