



MONTCLAIR STATE
UNIVERSITY

University Senate

President Jacobson's Fall 2020 Board of Trustees Statement

Since this is the first time I am speaking to you, I wanted to quickly introduce myself. My name is Erik Jacobson. My pronouns are he and him (though I'm not bothered by other pronouns being used to describe me). I'm the son of Joyce and Robert. The brother of Jennifer. The husband of Shirley and the father of Aki and Teo. I'm a professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning, where I teach courses on literacy.

In addition to being the current University Senate President, I am also on the Land Acknowledgement Committee. My hope is that sometime during my tenure as Senate President we will have a formal recognition of the fact that the university sits on unceded Indigenous territory. The process of drafting this statement is taking some time because members of the committee are working closely with local Indigenous communities to ensure it meets their expectations. For any Land Acknowledgement Statement to be effective, it cannot be unilateral or simply a token gesture. We are working with these Indigenous communities to identify concrete ways the university can support them and their efforts.

From my vantage point, I believe the semester went just about as well as it could. Nobody believes remote learning and instruction is the best fit for all students or programs, but given the circumstances, there is no way around the necessity of utilizing this modality. Students and instructors were flexible and committed to making a go of it. I believe we have learned a lot about how to offer education in various formats, and that the delayed start of the spring semester can be used as a time to engage with students to reduce their anxiety and to prepare them for another semester in less than optimal conditions. I also want to note that professional staff around the university were similarly committed and responsive, and the campus would not have been able to function without their vital contributions. This includes responding to huge volumes of student emails and phone calls about shifting schedules and modalities and getting technology in the hands of students who need it, something that the university should continue to make a priority.

In addition to teaching courses, faculty and others remain engaged in the broader educational work of a university – holding symposia, offering outside of class learning opportunities and pursuing their research. In the midst of the pandemic, the various Senate Councils are also quite active. The Academic Affairs Council, the Administrative Affairs Council and the Student Affairs Council are all working on efforts to improve students' experience. This includes efforts to re-imagine the nature of core courses, establishing shared teaching principles and responding to student concerns about on-campus life. Starting in September, I have made it a priority in

University Senate meetings to hear from various caucuses around campus, and I can report that they continue to be active, as well. For example, both the African American Caucus and the Latinx/a/o Caucus offered multiple events over the fall. In addition, the Disability Caucus was created as a forum for discussing issues related to disability justice and rights. This type of inventive work continues in many venues, demonstrating a commitment to the core mission of the university.

Of course, these efforts did not always run smoothly, but this is to be expected given the fact that people come from different backgrounds and disciplines and serve different roles in the university. However, I sincerely believe that in the end we are all pulling towards the same goal of providing students with a great education. Some misconnections or miscommunications are temporary, often a result of struggling to find a shared language in a novel situation. Some are not so temporary, and are a result of fundamental differences in pedagogical philosophies. Examples of this include the nature of assessment and expectations around deadlines for students to complete work. The Senate's position is that some of this ongoing struggle to get on the same page would be more productive with a robust embrace of shared governance. This is something that I know was emphasized by the former University Senate President, and presumably the one before him. It is a long-standing structural issue that the pandemic has only made more obvious.

We have a full agenda for the spring – making sure students can maximize their learning, providing academic and other support as the pandemic continues, and engaging in research and the other activities that make Montclair State University a vibrant campus. Ensuring that this is done in keeping with the university's commitment to social justice and equity means that students, instructors, professional staff, librarians and others have a role in governance and decision-making.

I thank you for your time. Stay safe.