

University Senate Opening Day

August 29, 2025 | 4 P.M. | SBUS 140

- Meeting Minutes: S. Sangregorio

Voting Members in Attendance:

A. Rzepka, A. Spadaccini, A. Talamo, B. Garlick, C. Baird, C. Challenger, C. Dilkes, C. Rodriguez-Unalt, D. Falloon-Blake, D. Peterka-Benton, D. Trubatch, E. Jacobson, F. Lauby, I. Ren, J. Alexandre, K. Handeli, L. Carr, L. LeFever, M. Chaifetz, N. Kurzynowski, N. Panorkou, P. Haggerty, P. La Fountain, R. Kunstadter, S. Baglieri, S. Bellum, S. Collins, S. Ghoshal, S. McCarthy, S. Nowak, S. Sangregorio, T. Gorman, W. Colucci, W. Sullivan, Y. Luo, Z. Aidala

Voting Members Missing:

A. Toro-Carnevali, C. Gunhouse, C. Reinisch, D. Chong, L. Simeon, M. Kamenetskiy, M. Smith, O. Gharehgozli, R. Misra, S. Mamonov, S. Nicholas, Y. Bai

Meeting Minutes

1. Call to Order

- **Call to Order:** 4:08 PM
- **Shannon Bellum** called the meeting to order.

2. Call for Quorum

- **Shannon Bellum** asked to confirm the quorum.
- **Sarah Sangregorio** confirmed that there was a quorum.

3. Land Acknowledgement Statement/Introduction of President Koppell

- **Shannon Bellum** read the land acknowledgement statement.
- **Shannon Bellum** introduced **President Koppell**.

4. Speaker: President Koppell

- **Welcome and Reflections on Student Event**
 - **President Koppell** opened by reflecting on a recent event for first-year students. He reflected on a successful welcome event for first-year students, emphasizing the importance of building traditions and fostering a sense of belonging.
 - **Koppell:** "We had this great event in the stadium for the first year students... There was a lot of positive energy among

our first year students. And one of the cool things was it reminded me of like a little league game where the parents make the little tunnel. I had flashbacks to that, but it was, I think, a really great thing. I hope we can make that into a tradition where we had staff and faculty welcoming students.”

- **President Koppell** emphasized the importance of building traditions and fostering a sense of belonging.
- **University Mission and Student Empowerment**
 - **President Koppell** discussed the university’s mission to empower students to shape their own futures and contribute positively to society, both personally and collectively.
 - **President Koppell** discussed the university’s mission, linking it to the University motto “carpe diem”:
 - **Koppell:** “What I make the point of is, what is ‘seize the day’? What does seize the day mean?... because we don’t know what tomorrow brings.”
 - **President Koppell** challenged students to think about their future and the world they want to create:
 - **Koppell:** “We have the opportunity to make tomorrow, that’s what seizing the day is about, and to challenge the students to think about what they want tomorrow to look like, what they want the world to be, and the role that they want to play in creating that future... Our job is to put students in a position to realize that vision of the future... their own personal future... and also in a broader sense, what kind of community, state, nation, world do they want to inhabit, and what role do they want to play in creating that?”
- **Inclusion and Challenging Perspectives**
 - **President Koppell** highlighted the importance of creating an inclusive environment that encourages students to step outside their comfort zones and engage with differing perspectives.
 - **President Koppell** highlighted the importance of inclusion as a foundation for intellectual challenge:
 - **Koppell:** “Part of the goal of the university is to put people in a position to be challenged, and you do that by creating a comfortable environment where everybody feels secure in their place in this community. And that seems like a contradiction, but to me that is the purpose of university, to create that feeling of inclusion, such that people can be

challenged and confronted with things that they're not used to."

- **Federal Policy Impacts**

- **President Koppell** reviewed federal policy impacts, including:
 - Disruptions in international student enrollment due to policy and State Department issues.
 - Interruptions and uncertainties in federal grant funding, especially in the humanities.
 - Changes to graduate student loan programs and their potential effects.
 - Evolving interpretations of the Civil Rights Act and their implications for university operations.
- **President Koppell** addressed current federal and political issues affecting the university:
 - **Koppell:** "There are many things in motion at the federal level, from a policy point of view, that are, first of all unprecedented, and second of all, highly disruptive."

- **On international students**

- **Koppell:** "The number of international students starting the year with us, physically is down 60%... the interruption is people just can't get [here]... Is that a policy decision? Is that because we've eviscerated the State Department, a little bit of both from what I understand."

- **On grant funding**

- **Koppell:** "We have had several grants interrupted, and we are pending decisions on acceptance of grants because of conditions that are being attached to new grants... The tricky part is the way that the grants are written, they're now saying we reserve the right to stop the flow of money grant based on any perceived shortcoming relative to any policy that we've enacted. And... get the money back that we gave you."

- **On student loans**

- **Koppell:** "A lot of the loans and other programs to support graduate students were capped... That's probably not going to be most of our programs... It's a little soon to tell whether our graduate students will be interrupted by that."

- **Support for Marginalized Students**

- **President Koppell** addressed ongoing challenges affecting marginalized groups, including trans and undocumented students,

and reaffirmed the university's commitment to supporting all students.

- **Koppell:** "I alluded to the ongoing attacks and dehumanization of trans people, which continues. I think it's shocking what's been done to people in the military, whose careers, distinguished careers have been not only ended, but insulted and dismissed. I think it's a disgrace. I think what's happening to undocumented folks and frankly, citizens who look like undocumented folks... has a massive traumatic impact on communities that are heavily represented on our campus, and it's very disturbing."
- Reaffirmed the university's commitment.
 - **Koppell:** We have to go straight lines to ensure our students that they are welcome and supported here, but at the same time, and I've said this before, not create a false sense of security for students who are impacted."
- **Balancing Free Expression and Safety**
 - The need to balance free expression with campus safety was reiterated.
 - **Koppell:** "We will continue to do what we have tried to do over the last year and a half, where this has been a big issue, which is to balance our obligation to create an environment that honors the First Amendment and people's opportunity to express themselves, but also ensure that we have a safe environment where students are able to study and pursue their work, without being interrupted."
- **Federal Policy and Campus Initiatives**
 - **President Koppell** discussed the university's engagement with federal policy and the importance of educating the campus community on American democracy, especially in light of the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.
 - **Koppell:** "I do want to, I think, fulfill our obligation by talking about these issues by educating our students and our own campus community about the premises of American democracy."
 - **President Koppell** announced a series of lectures/discussions on democracy, with involvement from various departments.
 - Noted cross-departmental interest, including Chemistry and Biology

- Emphasized making this a campus-wide initiative, and highlighted Montclair's leadership in this area.
 - **Koppell:** "When I tell colleagues at other universities that we're planning to really lean into the 250th anniversary to create programming, they are like, 'tell us what you're doing so we can emulate it.'"
- **Strategic Framework and Senate Engagement**
 - **President Koppell** provided a brief update on the strategic framework, noting that Provost Gonzalez will present more details at the next meeting.
 - Summarized the process: "Instead of another exercise to say, these are our goals... it was actually to focus on the competencies required to achieve those objectives... better communication, team building, inculcating a strategic mindset, building cultural competence, adaptability, innovation."
 - **Koppell:** "There's been a lot of participation, a lot of surveys... As I said this morning, what the direction I went guided by the participants was, instead of another exercise, to say, these are our goals, and these are objectives, which we have articulated in many ways. It was actually to focus on the competencies required to achieve those objectives, and that that whole process was intensely collaborative... A lot of different things that came out of that the themes had to do with better communication and better team building, inculcating a strategic mindset, building cultural competence, getting people to have skills and abilities to have to incorporate foresight regarding the future, strategic planning around expected changes, including, but not limited to artificial intelligence and other technological changes. How to build a growth mindset. These were all things that came out of the group. How to break silos, increase adaptability and innovation... As I said, interesting things."
 - Focused on developing competencies such as communication, team building, cultural competence, adaptability, and innovation.
 - Mentioned participation in an ASU program funded by the Gates Foundation, with external consultants provided at no cost
- **Provost Departure and Interim Leadership**

- **President Koppell** addressed the Provost's departure, stating that interim leadership plans and a search for a permanent replacement are in progress. Updates will be provided soon.
 - **Koppell:** "The short answer is... I'm working on it. Give me a little bit of time, and we'll announce the interim plan, and then the search."
 - Stressed transparency: "People always are like, there's a secret... This is the secret plan. I don't have a secret plan. Junius wasn't planning on this."
- **Academic Calendar and Scheduling**
 - **President Koppell** recommended establishing a joint working committee to review and improve the recent calendar change.
 - **Koppell:** "A recommendation was made to establish a working committee... to look at improvements to the calendar change... I never viewed that as carved in granite. It was a first step."
 - Goals include making the calendar more student-friendly, offering classes in more formats and times, and improving space utilization.
 - Emphasized the need for flexibility: "How do you make the scheduling and how do you do it to make the process work better? ... You can't fix anything just by changing the calendar, if you still have all of the pathologies in how we actually schedule the courses."
 - Noted the need for better scheduling to maximize use of campus facilities.
 - Noted the importance of adaptability in the new Workday system: "My biggest concern about that project is that too much of what you build is unchangeable... part of the desirability of that product is that it gives you the ability to make changes as you move forward."
 - **Shannon Bellum** asked about the President's priorities for the calendar and scheduling.
 - **President Koppell** responded that the main objectives are adapting the calendar for student needs and making better use of campus space, including offering classes at more varied times and formats and improving space utilization for both academic and extracurricular activities.
 - **Koppell:** "My main objective with the calendar is... we are adapting the calendar to make it more friendly to students..."

offering classes at more times in more formats...
accommodate the different needs and preferences of
learners.”

- Cited issues with current scheduling: “We have these instances where you have, you know, 35 sections of a course, but 30 of them are at the same time. That's really not helpful.”
- Stressed better use of space: “We have space. What we don't have is utilization of the space because we're concentrating all the activities at the same time... I want to get rid of that. That's really frustrating to our students.”
- **Koppell:** My main objective with the calendar is, I guess I would put it in two buckets. One is that we are adapting the calendar to make it more friendly to students. I won't repeat everything I just said, but that we are offering classes at more times in more formats, so that we accommodate the different needs and preferences of learners. We have these instances where you have, you know, 35 sections of a course, but 30 of them are at the same time. That's really not helpful... That was literally one of the challenges... Part of what you get by having seven weeks and 14 weeks and three terms is you create a system that is adaptable to students who have different needs... We are not just putting that on paper, but actually, actually doing it right. Part of the objective was to make better use of Fridays . And in fact, we had fewer classes on Friday.”
- **Koppell:** “The second is that we make better use of our space. I made this point in many meetings where people bring up that we have no space - and that's not actually true. We have space. What we don't have is utilization of the space because we're concentrating all the activities at the same time. The calendar change was supposed to help with that, and it didn't, because we didn't change how we used the space. I'm not just talking about classes. I'm also talking about extracurricular activities. I'm talking about meetings and so and so what I want to do is rebuild

not just the academic calendar, but scheduling, so that we take better advantage of the space and don't waste this valuable resource, which is very expensive to increase the supply. We're not building a lot of new buildings. It's very pricey, and I'm certainly not doing it. When I walk around... you go at the right time, you could throw a ball through big rooms and you won't hit a single person. And the space study, which I imagine a lot of you have looked at, maybe not, every granular detail the space study shows something that wouldn't be surprising to any certain times when rooms are scarce, and then there are a lot of other times when it's not a problem. Interestingly, even at those times, if you looked at the schedule, it would say the rooms are booked. I want to get rid of that. That's really frustrating. It's really frustrating to our students. It's really frustrating for people who want to hold a meeting, and it's like, 'Nope, there's not a room to be had.'"

- **CHSS Restructuring**

- **President Koppell** discussed the restructuring process, emphasizing feedback and shared governance, and addressed concerns about efficiency, administrative structure, and the use of metrics in decision-making.
 - **Koppell:** "There was a lot of feedback. There's a committee with a lot of different members from the college... So people may not like what was suggested by the committee... but there was participation and input, and that was pretty well documented."
 - **Koppell:** "There are places where the enrollment in the humanities is not in decline... those places are places that have been introspective... it's about how you present the opportunity for students to find meaning and value in the work."
 - **Koppell:** "I am not, I am not even remotely anti-humanities. I actually think the emphasis that we're placing on creativity... You look at the emphasis of the Honors College, which I hope will infuse the entire university, the emphasis on creativity, the need for empathy in the world, and understanding of different perspectives, and the ability to

synthesize information, which I consider to be core to the humanities, I think those are more important skills than ever. And one of the interesting things about AI as a transformative technology is that I actually think those attributes, or those skills or those human features are more valuable now than ever.”

- **Dean Milli** expressed appreciation for the level of engagement and candidness among college members, noting a desire for input and a strong appreciation for the humanities and social sciences, especially in a technology-driven world. She has observed a lot of positives in how the college is really engaged with the conversation. The conversation can be polarizing.
 - **Milli:** “Through the two months that I have been here, I have really been very pleased by the level of engagement, the level of interest and the level of candidness of everybody in the college... there is definitely a desire to have a say in it.”
 - **Milli:** “And as far as the appreciation for the humanities... Some of the conversations that we have been having is the importance of having a strong humanity and social sciences these days, in the face of a world that is driven by technology that there is always a considerable human factor. This is the time for humanity and social sciences space in the university to serve all the students, as well as students who are in the college.”
- **Koppell:** “Valuing the humanities means structuring your organization around disciplines... part of the idea of bringing multiple disciplines together is that you have different perspectives... that doesn't mean that you don't think the disciplines have value.”
- **Adam Rzepka** raised concerns about shared governance, efficiency, and the addition of administrative layers, emphasizing the need for feedback to result in substantive changes.
 - **Rzepka:** “Shared governance can't be constituted by the solicitation of feedback alone... if feedback is solicited, provided and read, but nothing changes, it's only token... there have to be two sides to it.”

- **Rzepka:** “There's some skepticism that adding more and more expensive layers of administration... potentially decreases efficiency.”
- **Dean Milli** responded that efficiency is important, but no decision has been made to add more administrators, and stressed the participatory nature of the process and the importance of input, even if not all suggestions are implemented.
 - **Milli:** “Efficiency is important. It's certainly our students serving the students that we serve. And nobody said that we will have more administrators. Definitely. That's definitely, that's not the direction that we will – Well, that's one of the models proposed. It doesn't mean that that's the direction that we will go. And I think we have, as I mentioned, over the last two months, we have been working collaboratively at shaping the branding of the college, and it has been fully participatory, and everything that I have observed that happened before I came and white line here shows these lots of input, solicitation and consideration of that input. It doesn't mean that whatever input you provide will be followed, you will be heard. It doesn't mean that what you said will be done. That's two different things.”
- **President Koppell:** “The question as to whether there was shared governance or participation is not did I get what I want? It's whether this was an actual substantive engagement where ideas were heard and considered and given appropriate weight.”
- **David Trubatch** asked about the metrics used to assess efficiency and the clarity of the process for CHSS restructuring.
 - **Trubatch:** “When you're talking about efficiency, what are the metrics that are being used? ... the report actually has, for example, very few metrics in it... It's not clear... what the next step was going to be in terms of not the decision, but what the process was.”
- **Dean Milli** explained that both metrics and the institution's mission are considered in decision-making, and that increasing enrollment in CHSS would improve efficiency and fulfill the university's mission.
 - **Milli:** “My understanding and what I have seen so far is that the process has been spelled out. The report distributed is a survey that's distributed to everybody to get their feedback and and we said that you will do the branding effort at the

same time. And all of this input then comes to the desk of the provost, the president, me. The decision, a collective decision, will be made based on all of these things, the matrix. It's I'm a number person, and metrics are important, but also the nature of the institution is important. The mission of the institution is important. So, I always get a little bit nervous when we say, "What the matter?" Yes, we make decisions based on the metrics, as well as sometimes we go against the numbers, because there is a mission issue. In this case, they go together hand in hand."

- **Milli:** "When we see the enrollment in CHSS go down at a time when we need the humanities... We need more students graduating for the Humanities, we realize that there is an effectiveness, there is a there is an efficiency issue, that we can grow the appeal of the programs that are offered by CHSS, by growing the number of students who are majoring in CHSS, You automatically increase its efficiency. You also increase your mission in the sense that, yes, we are serving more students, and we are upgrading and updating our curriculum to make them more up to date, to make them more future oriented, so that we serve the students better as prepared. So yes, there is a matrix, but there is also mentioned – there is a sense of purpose. What are we or are we doing it in the best possible way? Are we doing it for the largest number of students? And we have room for improvement? My colleagues at CHSS, they've been amazing, doing extraordinary work. But there is a way to do more of that by reorganizing, reorganizing and a number of other things we're doing, the reorganization, the branding and coming all together as a college to say, how do we prepare? How do we have more programs that are more responsive to what the students want?"
- **President Koppell** added that successful programs have been introspective and broadened their appeal, and that the restructuring is intended to give greater prominence to the humanities, not to marginalize them.
- **Financial Aid and State Support**
 - **Pascale LaFountain** asked about the FAFSA process and financial challenges for students: "Was it a year ago or so, there was a

whole crisis with FAFSA... are financial things at the front of our students' minds more than they have been historically right now?"

- **President Koppell** reported that the FAFSA process worked smoothly this year, with no major funding issues, but noted concerns about future funding for work-study and student support programs (e.g., TRIO, Year Up) and discussed the importance of state support and the upcoming governor's race.
 - **Koppell:** "The FAFSA process worked this year... the concern in terms of financial aid was that funding levels would be lowered... that didn't end up happening this year, but who knows what tomorrow brings."
 - Noted possible reduction in work-study funding: "One thing that's out there that's potentially significant is a reduction in dollars available for work study... that could have some effect, and so we are trying to figure out... how we might use more of our resources to do more work-study."
 - Discussed federal support programs: "Some of the funding for student support programs... there was an expectation that those things would be cut. They actually didn't get cut this year, I wouldn't make a bet on their long term sustainability."
- **David Trubatch** commented on the importance of state support for the university and the role of the governor's office: "It's really been key that the state has been on the side of the university and in New Jersey... the governor's race is very important... we need a state that will protect and defend the university against all of these things."
 - **President Koppell** noted that both gubernatorial candidates are aware of higher education issues and have a positive view of Montclair State University: "Both candidates are aware of higher education as a significant issue for the state. They're both aware. They're both aware that we are a net loser of talent, the number one exporter of college students in the country, and that that's a negative for the long term financial future of the state. And I will say, in a very particularistic assessment of the candidates, which you won't find on any political show, both candidates are really aware of the quality of Montclair State University."

5. Announcements

- Elections Committee
 - **Christina Dilkes** (Elections Committee) announced special elections for Fall 2025, with nominations opening next week and voting scheduled from September 22 to October 10.
- **Shannon Bellum** announced the next Senate meeting on September 17 in CELS 120, with future meetings returning to the usual building.

6. Meeting Adjournment

- **Call to Adjourn:** 5:27 PM
 - **Eric Jacobson**, Motion to Adjourn
 - **Tim Gorman**, Seconded
 - **Shannon Bellum**: Adjourned by Acclamation