
Holyoke Community College Board of Trustees freezes student fees

HOLYOKE – Citing the financial hardships brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Holyoke Community College Board of Trustees voted Tuesday to freeze student fees for the upcoming academic year.

The vote was 8-0.

“This unanimous vote to freeze fees demonstrates our concern for the success of our students,” said board chair Robert Gilbert. “They depend on us, and freezing costs when they’re facing grave economic uncertainty is the right thing to do. We’re trying to do everything we can to make it easier for students to come here, stay here, and succeed here.”

The vote locks HCC’s Educational Service Fee at \$188 per credit and the Student Service Fee at \$145 per semester for fiscal year 2022, which begins July 1.

Over the past five years HCC has raised fees by about 5 percent annually. Tuition for all the community colleges in Massachusetts is set by the state. At HCC, tuition is \$24 per credit, a number that has not changed in more than 10 years.

“Holyoke Community College is fortunate to have a Board of Trustees that recognizes the financial hardships brought on by this pandemic, and understands that many of our students have been disproportionately impacted,” said HCC president Christina Royal. “The decision to freeze fees, as well as greater investments in student supports that address food insecurity, mental health, and digital equity, mean that students will have more resources and financial support to attend HCC now and in the

future.”

The Tuesday vote came at the recommendation of Narayan Sampath, vice president of Administration and Finance, and the college Audit and Finance committees.

“We solicited input from our Student Senate, the Budget Advisory Committee and the Comptroller’s office in making this recommendation,” Sampath told the board Tuesday. “The overwhelming feedback we got was that if we can afford it, it would be very helpful to our current and potential students if we do not raise fees.”

Despite the freeze, Sampath said he would still be able to present a balanced budget to the board in June.

“We have some indications of what state appropriations are going to look like, and it seems very positive, that we

might have level funding in FY ’22,” he said. “Our estimates are very conservative.”

Since the pandemic began, HCC has received more than \$3.7 million in higher education relief funds for direct student financial support. That has enabled HCC to provide \$550 block grants to every student enrolled for the fall 2020 and spring 2021 semesters. Those grants, and other incentives, are likely to be available again for the fall 2021 semesters.

In addition, HCC has received more than \$7 million in stimulus money to cover additional expenses incurred during the pandemic.

“We continue to watch our budget very closely, and state and federal stimulus money has certainly helped,” Sampath said.