



MASSACHUSETTS COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS
BOARD OF TRUSTEES ACADEMIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
Audio/Video MS Teams

MINUTES
October 20, 2026

Members in Attendance via Teams

Dian Rogers-Adkinson, President
Josh Mendel
Richard Glejzer
Lynette Bond
Jerome Socolof
Emily Alling
Buffy Lord
Yina Moore
David Halbert
Yvonne Spicer
Omotaro Adeeko
Andrew Best
Benjamin Downing
Jami Pytko

Richard G began with introductions of members on the call.

Faculty Promotion with Tenure Bio's

Omotaro Adeeko, Assistant Professor of Economics

Dr. Omotara Adeeko is an Assistant Professor of Economics in the Department of Business Administration and Economics at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA). She earned her Ph.D. in Economics from Southern Illinois University Carbondale and holds an M.A. and B.S. in Economics. Her research interests include development economics, applied macroeconomics, and applied microeconomics, with scholarly work examining productivity, economic development, inequality, and public policy. Her work has appeared in peer-reviewed publications, including Defence and Peace Economics, and she has contributed to interdisciplinary research on economic discrimination and employment in African countries. Dr. Adeeko teaches courses across economics, statistics, and business and is committed to

experiential learning, data-driven instruction, and connecting economic theory to real-world decision-making.

Teaching Philosophy

Dr. Adeeko described her teaching approach as emphasizing practical learning and connecting academic principles to real-world experiences in the classroom.

Discussion and Questions for Dr. Omotara Adeeko

Questions and Responses

1. What is the greatest challenge in your research or instructional work?

Dr. Adeeko identified teaching a 300-level course as a significant instructional challenge, particularly when students do not have the foundational knowledge needed for advanced coursework. To address this, she implemented a review period to reinforce foundational concepts and familiarized students with available academic support resources, including the Math Drop-In Center.

2. What is the most rewarding aspect of teaching?

Dr. Adeeko stated that one of the most rewarding aspects of teaching is seeing students recognize how the principles taught in class apply to everyday experiences. She also finds it rewarding when students who have struggled in a previous course return and make another attempt to succeed.

3. How do current events affect your classes?

Dr. Adeeko explained that she distinguishes economics instruction from political science and emphasizes the use of data to examine current events and apply economic principles. She encourages students to evaluate issues objectively, regardless of their political beliefs.

4. Based on your advising experience, where do you see students finding employment after graduation?

Dr. Adeeko identified Amazon, Enterprise, and accounting firms as examples of employers where students may find opportunities after graduation. She encourages students to pursue professional certificates to distinguish themselves from other candidates and demonstrate initiative to potential employers. She also noted that some students continue their education by pursuing MBA programs.

Andrew Best, Assistant Professor Biology

I earned my Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Massachusetts in 2021. Formerly a high school biology teacher, I pursued my doctorate with the explicit intent to teach at the college level, where I could engage in research while teaching the topics I'm most interested in. I was hired at MCLA in 2021 as the Biology Department's human physiologist, teaching anatomy and physiology, developing other human-biology-focused upper-level courses, and designing a course for the Core. In my five years here I have also produced five peer-reviewed journal articles (four as first author) spanning two research projects involving undergraduate research assistants; coordinated the construction of a heat physiology laboratory space; and engaged with the media in print, web, television, video and podcast mediums, discussing my MCLA research.

Andrew's Slide Deck Summary:

1. Teaching

Dr. Andrew W. Best's teaching contributions include courses within the Biology Department, including Human Physiologist, Anatomy and Physiology, Exercise Physiology, Biomechanics, Journal Article Discussion, First Year Seminar, and the Core course, Science of Human Wellness.

His teaching philosophy emphasizes science as a tool for inquiry and understanding rather than simply a collection of facts. He also highlights the importance of evolutionary theory in understanding biological systems, reflecting the principle that "Nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of evolution."

2. Continuing Scholarship

Since joining Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA), Dr. Best has maintained an active program of scholarly work. His accomplishments during the review period include:

- Development of three research projects involving three undergraduate researchers.
- Publication of five peer-reviewed journal articles, four of which list him as lead author, across three research areas.
- Participation in conference presentations and session chairing.
- Completion of 11 peer reviews, contributing to the scholarly review process in his field.

These activities demonstrate continued engagement in research, scholarly publication, undergraduate research mentorship, and professional academic service.

3. Service

Dr. Best's service contributions include stewardship of the Human Performance Lab, participation in committee work, and engagement in press and outreach activities. These efforts support departmental and institutional operations, promote the use and maintenance of research facilities, and contribute to broader community engagement.

Questions and Responses

1. Is there a specific type of student the Board could help you connect with, or other ways the Board could support student engagement?

Dr. Best explained that many of the students involved in his work already have an interest in or participate in athletics. These students are often physically active and curious about general biology concepts or pursuing majors in health sciences.

2. How might individuals who do not identify as athletes, but engage in moderate exercise, differ in your studies?

Dr. Best noted that there are many classifications of athletes and suggested that anyone who has a body and moves that body could be considered an athlete. He acknowledged that it would be interesting to examine outcomes among individuals who do not identify themselves as athletes. He also expressed interest in studying underrepresented groups, including women. He emphasized that the populations of interest depend on the specific study and research questions.

3. How have political views and changes in public discourse influenced course design and delivery? Have classroom conversations shifted as the world has changed?

Dr. Best stated that he believes the course has become increasingly important over the four years he has taught it. He explained that course topics evolve in response to changes in public conversation and current issues. Although the course is not explicitly political, some topics may have indirect political implications, such as nutrition and changes in federal policy.

Dr. Best also emphasized the importance of critical thinking, noting that students are accustomed to examining issues in other campus contexts and supporting their perspectives with facts and evidence.

2026 MCLA Summer Bridge Program

1. Program Background and Objectives

The 2026 Summer Bridge Program was developed as a pilot initiative to support incoming MCLA students in their transition to college. Historically, MCLA offered a four-week Individual Enrichment Program Summer Seminar through the federally funded TRIO Student Support Services (SSS) program as recently as 2015. Successful completion of that program provided an alternative pathway to college admission through the completion of 3–9 credits.

In May 2026, senior staff decided to allocate remaining SUCCESS funds to support a five-day Summer Bridge pilot program. Following consultation with the Executive Director of Student Persistence, TRIO SSS was designated to organize and deliver the program. The initiative also supports strategic recruitment efforts to help meet TRIO enrollment goals.

2. Eligibility and Program Components

Students were eligible to participate if they met at least one of the following criteria: first-generation college student, low-income status, or documented disability. These criteria align with TRIO SSS eligibility requirements. Unlike the earlier program, participants were admitted to MCLA through the traditional admissions process.

The program took place August 23–27, 2026, and included early move-in for residential students, meals, peer mentoring, community-building activities, wellness and academic success programming, faculty and staff mentorship, and connections to campus resources. Each participant received \$800 upon successful completion of the program.

3. Program Participation and Outcomes

The 2026 Summer Bridge Program welcomed 23 incoming students, of whom 14 are now TRIO scholars. At the time of reporting, 22 participants remained enrolled at MCLA.

Participant demographics and program characteristics included:

- 16 first-generation students.
- 9 students with documented disabilities.
- 6 ALANA students.
- 5 students enrolled in Summer 2026 MCLA coursework, with 2 earning credit.
- 4 Honors Program students.
- 4 transfer students.
- 3 commuter students.
- 11 peer ambassadors supporting program activities.

4. Participant Survey Results

Post-program survey results indicated positive outcomes in students' familiarity with campus resources and their sense of belonging.

- 100% reported knowing where campus buildings, classrooms, and services were located.
- 92% felt familiar with student services.
- 83% saw themselves as part of the MCLA community.
- 75% felt connected to faculty and staff.
- 67% felt connected to other students.
- 67% felt prepared or well prepared to begin college.
- 92% would recommend the program to others.

Open-ended feedback highlighted the value of hands-on learning and field research, opportunities to step outside comfort zones and build relationships, and stronger connections with MCLA faculty and peers. Participants also noted that the program helped them develop friendships and connections beyond what they might have experienced during traditional orientation.

5. Assessment and Future Planning

The college will continue evaluating the program's effectiveness and its contribution to student persistence and success. Planned assessment measures include:

- Comparing Summer Bridge survey results with overall first-year student survey results; this analysis is currently in progress.
- Monitoring participants' academic standing at the end of the semester and academic year.
- Reviewing fall-to-spring retention.
- Evaluating first-to-second-year retention.

Planning for the Summer 2027 Bridge Program is expected to begin soon.

There being no further business to come before the committee, the meeting was adjourned at 9:40 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Jami Pytko