

## **DRAFT MINUTES**

### **WEST VIRGINIA HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY COMMISSION**

**September 18, 2020**

#### **I. Call to Order**

Chairman Michael J. Farrell convened a meeting of the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission on September 18, 2020, at 9:00 a.m., by Zoom videoconference and conference call. The following Commission members participated: Robert L. Brown, Ex-Officio; Clayton Burch, Ex-Officio; James W. Dailey; Michael J. Farrell; Diane Lewis Jackson; Dale Lowther; and Andrew A. Payne. Absent was Commissioner Donna Schulte. Other participants included state college and university representatives, Chancellor Sarah Armstrong Tucker, and Commission staff.

Chairman Farrell secured a quorum and welcomed all participants to the meeting.

#### **II. Chairman's Report**

Chairman Farrell spoke of the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. He commended the presidents on their efforts to keep their campuses safe stating that we are stronger by their response and their sincere participation with each other and with our chancellor in trying to navigate through the pandemic. He added that the presidents have shown true concern for their campuses and not just how the pandemic has impacted their student enrollment. Chairman Farrell thanked the Governor's Office for making resources available to higher education as it manages this health crisis.

#### **III. Chancellor's Report**

Chancellor Sarah Armstrong Tucker began her report by introducing and welcoming Dr. Nicole Pride as the new president of West Virginia State University.

Chancellor Tucker provided an update on the efforts throughout the system to adapt to the impact of the COVID-19 virus as the fall semester is starting. She stated that Governor Justice provided \$2.5 million to higher education to support testing of students, faculty, and staff. She said that because of the high number of positive cases, West Virginia University leaders are working hard to contain the virus and protect their students, staff, and community members. Outside of WVU, less than one percent of students at all other institutions have tested positive. The institutions are being encouraged to keep students with COVID-19 on their campus, following the advice of national and state health experts as the best way to contain further spread. Dr. Tucker stated that of great concern is student mental health and that the Commission's Health Sciences staff is in close contact with the campus counseling centers providing resources, guidance, and related social media content. She further stated that another

key effort in which the Commission is involved is the expansion of the state's broadband technology as online education is being utilized in all institutions.

Regarding the work of the Commission staff, Chancellor Tucker provided highlights regarding their outreach efforts, particularly through virtual platforms. The Division of Academic Affairs coordinated 12 professional development training sessions for faculty regarding online instruction; the Division of Financial Aid launched a series of 20 webinars to be held through April 2021; and the Division of Student Affairs has been actively campaigning for the national #WhyApply Day, held on September 18, to inspire high school seniors to apply to college. Additionally, Dr. Tucker praised staff in the Human Resources and Legal Divisions who have been dealing with procedural questions from all constituencies in response to changes caused by the pandemic; and the Division of Science and Research which has been working on publishing a special edition of the *Neuron*, the Commission's STEM magazine, featuring an interview with Dr. Clay Marsh, West Virginia's COVID-19 Czar. Chancellor Tucker further reported that through HERA funds, the agency was able to award \$85,000 to 17 institutions to support their diversity initiatives, and \$45,000 in grants to support student mental health through nine institutional statewide projects.

To end, Chancellor Tucker introduced and welcomed Mr. Matt Ballard as the new Executive Director and CEO of the West Virginia Regional Technology Park.

#### **IV. Updates from Constituent Groups**

##### **A. Advisory Council of Classified Employees**

Ms. Jenna Derrico, Chair of the Advisory Council of Employees and employee at West Virginia Northern Community and Technical College, reported on behalf of classified employees. Ms. Derrico explained how the pandemic has affected employees. Additionally, she reported on several issues affecting employees such as losing voice at the institutions and with the Legislature; exclusion from shared governance; Council elections not being held at all institutions; employment of non-classified staff has expanded while safeguards for classified staff are being removed; lack of support to find a permanent solution to PEIA funding; classification compensation is not always being implemented; and the Classification and Compensation Committee and the Job Classification Committee not meeting as they should. Ms. Derrico emphasized that the Commission plays an invaluable role by ensuring accountability, transparency, and unbiased oversight throughout the system.

Chairman Farrell asked Ms. Derrico to arrange a meeting with Chancellor Tucker to share the Council's concerns and try to find adequate solutions to the problems. He added that the Commission is here to help.

## **B. Advisory Council of Faculty**

Dr. Joseph Allen, Chair of the Advisory Council of Faculty and professor at Concord University, reported on behalf of faculty. Dr. Allen commented on the resilience of faculty in trying to accommodate the challenges presented by the pandemic. He reported that the Council is working to develop next year's legislative agenda; and it is actively supporting enrollment growth by proposing to increase the state's post-secondary presence globally to encourage international students to study at West Virginia institutions. Responding to a question from Chairman Farrell regarding specifics on how the Commission can improve the academic experience, Dr. Allen stated that the technology training workshops arranged by the Commission have been a lifeline for faculty.

Chairman Farrell asked Dr. Allen how the learning experience is at Concord University. He responded that a lot of students are very stressed but that some have adapted very well to the mixed virtual and face-to-face learning, especially commuting students. Chairman Farrell encouraged the Council to reach out to Chancellor Tucker and identify the faculty's concerns, stressing that the Commission members cannot help if they do not know that a problem exists.

## **C. Advisory Council of Students**

Ms. Anna Williams, Chair of the Advisory Council of Students and Student Body President at Marshall University, reported on behalf of the students. She stated that Internet access continues to be an issue for a lot of students, particularly those who make their homes in the southern part of the state. She mentioned the several ways in which her institution is assisting with broadband access. Ms. Williams added that lack of social interaction is beginning to take its toll on the students; stating that anxiety and depression are rising with uncertain circumstances or being in an adverse home situation. A major concern is food insecurity due to an increase in family unemployment and among students who finance their own education. Chair Williams addressed other issues of interest to the Council such as promotion of intercultural relations on campus, improving the academic experience for minority students, and encouraging students to vote in elections.

Chairman Farrell thanked Ms. Williams for her thorough report and commented that he is impressed with the involvement of the student government organizations as they continue to be a voice for the students. He added that it is difficult to be a student in these uncertain times.

## **V. Update from Council of Presidents**

Dr. Mirta Martin, President of Fairmont State University and Chair of the Advisory Council of Presidents, reported on behalf of the presidents. She stated that all presidents across the system have worked well together in addressing the pandemic; they are resolute in their efforts to educate students as they face an unprecedented

enemy. As the semester gets underway, the campuses are strongly recommending the use of masks and social distancing, arrangements have been made for COVID-19 testing of students, and quarantine services are implemented. President Martin mentioned that it was a joy welcoming home all students, faculty, and staff. She stated that the Council continues their weekly dialogue with Chancellor Tucker and thanked the Chancellor and Commission for serving as strong advocates for their institutions before the Governor, and for being instrumental in securing the assistance of the West Virginia National Guard to disinfect their facilities.

#### **VI. Approval of Minutes**

Commissioner Dailey moved to approve the minutes of the Higher Education Policy Commission meetings held on June 26, July 23, and August 7, 2020. Commissioner Lewis Jackson seconded the motion. Motion passed.

#### **VII. Presentation of Champions of College Access and Success**

Ms. Elizabeth Manuel, Senior Director of Student Services, presented a report on the Champions of College Access and Success initiative. She stated that principals, counselors, and staff from 18 high schools across West Virginia are being recognized for their schools' efforts to make students aware of higher education opportunities after they graduate. The Champion of College Access and Success awards are presented to select schools that go the extra mile to help students and their families plan for college. Ms. Manuel listed the schools being recognized.

#### **VIII. Approval of Fiscal Year 2021 Higher Education Policy Commission Division Operating Budgets and Higher Education Resource Assessment Projects**

Dr. Edward Magee, Vice Chancellor of Finance, provided an overview of the proposed Fiscal Year 2021 Higher Education Policy Commission division operating budgets and Higher Education Resource Assessment projects.

Commissioner Lewis Jackson moved approval of the following resolution:

*Resolved*, that the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission approves the Fiscal Year 2021 Division Operating Budgets and Higher Education Resource Assessment projects.

Commissioner Dailey seconded the motion. Motion passed.

#### **IX. Review of Institutional Operating and Capital Budgets and Approval of Institutional Capital Budgets**

Vice Chancellor Magee provided an overview of the institutional operating and capital budgets.

Commissioner Payne moved approval of the following resolution:

*Resolved*, That the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission approves the Fiscal Year 2021 institutional capital budgets.

Commissioner Lowther seconded the motion. Motion passed.

**X. Approval of Fiscal Year 2021 WVNET Budget**

Dr. Carl Powell, Director of West Virginia Network for Telecomputing (WVNET), provided an overview of the proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2021.

Commissioner Burch moved approval of the following resolution:

*Resolved*, That the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission approves the Fiscal Year 2021 budget for the West Virginia Network for Educational Telecomputing.

Commissioner Lowther seconded the motion. Motion passed.

**XI. Approval of Fiscal Year 2020 Research Challenge Fund Annual Report**

Dr. Juliana Serafin, Senior Director of Science and Research, provided an overview of the Fiscal Year 2020 Research Challenge Fund Annual Report.

Commissioner Payne moved approval of the following resolution:

*Resolved*, That the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission approves the Fiscal Year 2020 Research Challenge Fund Annual Report and recommends submission to the Governor and the Legislature.

Commissioner Dailey seconded the motion. Motion passed.

**XII. Report on Master's Degree Programs**

Ms. Sheree Bryant, Director of Academic Programming, reported on the status of the master's degree programs at Concord University, Fairmont State University, Shepherd University, West Liberty University, and West Virginia State University. The first master's level programs at the former baccalaureate-only institutions were approved by the Commission for initial offering in the 2003-2004 academic year. In the past academic year, the number of graduate programs implemented across the five institutions increased by seven to 33.

**XIII. Update on Kids Connect Initiative**

Dr. Powell provided an update on the Kids Connect Initiative. While this program's primary focus is for K-12 students, West Virginia higher education students also can

access the network at any of the sites. After the initial rollout of nearly 1,000 sites, the Kids Connect partners expect to add dozens of additional locations. The project was first conceived in late July. It is a partnership with the Department of Education, the Office of Technology, WVNET, all state colleges and universities, and three West Virginia-based technology providers. WVNET is providing help desk and technical support for this project.

Chairman Farrell asked that the Kids Connect Initiative be made available to the media for broadcasting. Commissioner Lewis Jackson asked that pertinent information be forwarded to the Legislature.

#### **XIV. Additional Board Action and Comments**

There were no additional board action items or comments.

#### **XV. Adjournment**

There being no further business, Commissioner Payne moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Dailey seconded the motion. Motion passed.

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Michael J. Farrell, Chairman

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Diana Lewis Jackson, Secretary