

**STATE COUNCIL OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR VIRGINIA
COUNCIL MEETING
APRIL 23, 2020
MINUTES**

Mr. Fralin called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. **This was a remote meeting via Zoom webinar due to the Governor's stay-at home-orders related to COVID-19.** Council members present: Ken Ampy, Rosa Atkins, Marge Connelly, Heywood Fralin, Victoria Harker, Thaddeus Holloman, Henry Light, Stephen Moret, William Murray, Marianne Radcliff, Carlyle Ramsey, Tom Slater and Katharine Webb.

Council members absent: None.

Staff members present: Tom Allison, Peter Blake, Joseph DeFilippo, Alan Edwards, Jodi Fidler, Wendy Kang, Tod Massa, Paula Robinson, Lee Ann Rung and Kristin Whelan.

Mr. Blake noted that Dr. Ramsey, Dr. Murray, Ms. Harker and Mr. Slater were participating by phone. He also recognized that Deputy Secretary of Education, Fran Bradford, and Deb Love from the Office of the Attorney General were present.

WELCOME

Mr. Fralin welcomed attendees and thanked them for joining remotely. He noted that the Council canceled its March Council meetings due to the pandemic. Therefore, the action items from the March meeting will carry forward to May. Staff is working on arrangements to hold the May meeting remotely.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF DECLARATION OF STATE OF EMERGENCY

Mr. Blake took a roll call to indicate members in attendance. He noted that over 150 others signed up to listen to the webinar.

Mr. Blake explained that currently, FOIA allows exemptions to the requirement for a quorum to assemble in one location when holding a meeting remotely only when it is due to a state of emergency, and if it is unsafe to assemble in person. He explained that this meeting was being held in accordance with 2.2-3708.2 of the Code of Virginia and the Governor's Executive Order 51 to discuss the declared emergency and its effect on higher education. He also assured members that staff consulted with Deb Love, the agency's representative from the Office of the Attorney General to be sure this meeting was in compliance.

Mr. Blake explained the ground rules and noted that the PowerPoint presentation would outline the items on the agenda. He also stated that staff was muting all attendees during the webinar, with the exception of Council members and presenters.

CONSIDERATION OF COVID-19 ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Mr. Blake introduced Dr. Daniel Carey, Secretary of Health & Human Resources for the Commonwealth of Virginia. Dr. Carey said he is proud to be serving and noted that in this great time of uncertainty, the Governor's office is remaining data driven, even though the data is not clear. Social distancing is making a difference and for the most part, Virginians are adhering to the stay-at-home orders. He discussed the fact that different models show risk in how to reopen after a pandemic and he stressed the need to be careful and thoughtful in doing this. Dr. Carey thanked the higher education community for making a difference in the area of research and in the community.

Dr. Carey provided statistics to date about new cases but noted that they change daily. He reported that Virginia has not yet reached the 14-day lowering period that is required before the stay-at-home order is lifted, but he noted that metrics put Virginia near peak with deaths and new cases.

Dr. Carey said the Commonwealth needs to increase the capacity of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and testing capacity as it tries to minimize the number of patients in the hospital with suspected or confirmed cases. He noted that turnaround time on testing has improved dramatically.

He ended by thanking everyone involved in providing instruction while practicing social distancing and noted his appreciation to SCHEV for its leadership in the Commonwealth. He answered questions from Council members.

COUNCIL OF PRESIDENTS (COP)

Mr. Blake introduced Dr. Donna Price Henry, Chancellor, University of Virginia's College at Wise (UVA-W). Dr. Henry provided an update from the Council of Presidents about ways in which the institutions are collaborating on issues common to the campus community during the pandemic.

Dr. Henry noted that the Council of Presidents began meeting to discuss the pandemic early on, with the first meeting on March 10. The COP has met biweekly for several weeks to stay current and remain in line with the health needs that align with the Commonwealth.

After those meetings, the presidents generated three joint letters. The first was to the Governor and the Virginia legislature to help summarize the impacts the virus has had on campuses and budgets, including unexpected expenditures. During that time all institutions moved to online learning, incurring additional costs in order to make this change quickly. Ensuring that students and faculty have access to online learning creates additional expenses. Speaking about UVA-W, she said students moved out of residence halls and refunds offered on a prorated basis. The CFOs at the institutions are working to determine ways to handle refunds and manage costs at each institution.

The COP continued to meet to better understand how the federal stimulus dollars could be used in higher education. The COP drafted a joint letter to the Virginia congressional delegation to summarize what institutions have been doing. As requested by a Council member, staff will make a copy of the letter available to all members. All institutions in Virginia decided to move summer programs online. For fall planning, the Council is

jointly deciding how to move forward, and initiated a self-imposed deadline for deciding on a course of action by early June. The reason for this date is that many institutions extended the typical May date for students to make a deposit to June 1. Institutions realize the importance for families to know what to expect for the fall session.

Dr. Henry said when students return to campus, institutions need to have plans in place for them to remain healthy and to keep the spread from returning.

COP has three representatives on the COVID Task Force. COP also convened a group of public health instructors to help work through the issues. She noted that the COP is looking forward to working with the Commonwealth to help get everyone back to work.

Dr. Henry said one benefit from this experience is that it caused all faculty to look at best practices and consider ways to conduct online learning across a broader spectrum. This may be helpful as institutions consider how they offer other programs. While she noted nervousness about full deployment of working remotely, she noted that all faculty and staff have stepped up and are working hard.

She answered questions from members, including questions about enrollment. Dr. Henry said all admissions officers have been meeting and sharing best practices in enrollment while continuing to engage both online students and those who are interested in returning to campus. She noted that the message from all campuses is that staff and faculty are excited to welcome students back to campus, but institutions are bracing for decreases in fall enrollment, particularly as many families have experienced unemployment. She is hopeful that the federal stimulus funds for financial aid will help.

Dr. Henry explained ways in which rural areas have worked collaboratively with cell phone providers to extend broadband access to students who live in residences where that service was not available, and to provide free hot spots in other areas. She said the presidents were pleased with how companies responded.

She said all presidents indicated that institutions will need to be flexible when looking at transcripts next year. Dr. Henry said the COP is keeping this topic on its agenda and will send guidance out to K-12 counselors.

Mr. Moret reported that as part of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership's (VEDP) work they reached out to nearly all institutions to discuss the economic impact from the pandemic. He noted somewhat of a divide, particularly by presidents whose institutions have a large underserved population. Presidents noted that several thousand food service staff have been laid off, and the universities with affiliated health systems are experiencing dramatic losses due to cancellation of elective surgeries.

Mr. Fralin stressed the importance for each institution to have access to testing when students return to campus so they can be isolated quickly if they test positively. He asked that the COP discuss this and request appropriate testing. Ms. Radcliff also said institutions should be prepared to address space for quarantined students.

VIRGINIA COUNCIL OF INDEPENDENT COLLEGES IN VIRGINIA (CICV)

Mr. Blake introduced Mr. Robert Lambeth, President of the Council of Independent Colleges in Virginia. Mr. Lambeth provided information from the private colleges about effects of the pandemic on these institutions.

Mr. Lambeth thanked SCHEV staff, including Peter Blake, Lee Andes, Beverly Rebar, Laura Osberger, Wendy Kang and others for their efforts in maintaining good communications with the private colleges during the pandemic. He also recognized the CICV staff Sabena Moretz, Jan Smyth, Deb Thomas and Tim Klopfenstein. Mr. Lambeth said he has never seen better cooperation and a sense of friendship over his 40 years in higher education.

He stressed the unprecedented impact that COVID-19 has had on all institutions, especially private non-profits. He discussed the unique situations that apply to the private sector. First, private colleges pride themselves on providing high quality and personal education that is primarily residential and at close distance. Now with no notice those institutions have had to transition to teaching at a considerable distance. It has required much creativity and flexibility, but he said the institutions have stepped up to do a good job in difficult circumstances. Second, is the private colleges have an unusually low income and diverse population of students. The student population at these institutions is approximately 50% Pell-eligible, meaning that many of these institutions have been hit in a disproportionate way. Third, is that the private colleges are independent. While they value working collaboratively with state and federal governments, they do not receive general appropriations or have the ability to apply for loans, leaving each college on its own in financial situations. He reminded members that all institutions in Virginia would struggle, but keep in mind that admission issues create a four-year impact, not just one year.

Some colleges may not be able to survive the crisis. Refunds for room and board amount to millions of dollars and were unanticipated, both for the public and private institutions.

Employee retention is a big issue for smaller and thinly staffed privates, and these colleges are doing everything possible to retain these staff. Private colleges also are mindful of the impact their institutions have in their communities; in many cases, they are a major employer in the area. The loss of the private colleges' robust summer programs will have a major financial impact, as these programs help to offset costs during the year. The fourth unique aspect of the private colleges is the anticipated expenses required to accommodate online learning quickly, both staffing and equipment. Though most campuses enjoy a robust on-campus IT support, many have not been overly involved in online education until now.

Enrollment is a major issue for the privates, as these institutions are very tuition-dependent. Of the Federal funding becoming available, one-half must go directly to students, with no restriction on how students spend the funds. In most cases, the other half that will be distributed to the institutions will not cover the refunds that institutions are issuing for room and board.

Mr. Lambeth asked that SCHEV work with the higher education community to allocate for an equitable distribution of funding between K-12 and higher education. He answered questions from members.

The Chairman called for a break at 11:20. The meeting resumed at 11:25.

STAFF REPORTS AND IMPACTS

Agency Operations

Mr. Blake reviewed the report that was included in the agenda materials. He updated the Council on staff's work and discussed ways in which staff is communicating remotely. He noted that regular advisory group meetings continue with college and university presidents, chief academic officers, finance officers, financial aid directors and others.

Dr. Edwards, SCHEV's primary liaison to the Governor's office on COVID-19-related activities, provided an explanation of Virginia's COVID-19 Task Force and Unified Command; Virginia Volunteer Health System; and the Economic Crisis Strike Force.

Mr. Blake reminded members that the location of the May 18-19 meetings was to be Virginia Wesleyan University. Now that the legislature approved language to allow meetings without the presence of a physical quorum in one location, this will be a remote meeting. Staff will work with the Chair to develop agendas that will include items from the cancelled March agenda and items that are typically due in May. Staff will work with CICV to build an agenda for a meeting with the Private College Advisory Board (PCAB) that is typically part of the May schedule. Staff will keep members informed as plans develop.

Mr. Blake noted that at the May meeting, the Council will address the short- and long-term effects of COVID-19 on The Virginia Plan for Higher Education.

Academic Affairs

Dr. DeFilippo explained the ways in which institutions have had to pivot from on-ground instructional activities to online remote learning. He noted the dilemmas facing institutions as they moved to this learning format, including the magnitude of orchestrating an abrupt pivot to distance education, navigating regulatory and quasi-regulatory requirements and policy and logistical implications of impacts on the educational pipeline.

Dr. DeFilippo addressed actions SCHEV staff is taking to confer state authorization to public institutions to offer all programs online without further approval, which will remain in effect until further notice.

He addressed other actions SCHEV has taken in its program productivity process review, student learning assessment policy and temporary processes for receiving submissions for approval. Dr. DeFilippo noted that Academic Affairs staff has adjusted its outreach and engagement with college and university officials, the office of the

Secretary of Education and the Virginia Department of Education, and provided examples.

Finally, he noted that the section's normal work is continuing, with all staff engaged in telework. Regular program review continues. As a result, there will be many program approvals on the May agenda. The Private Postsecondary Education (PPE) section is doing desk audits in lieu of in-person audits, and preparing for transition when Ms. Rosa-Casanova retires on June 1.

Dr. DeFilippo noted that work on the SCHEV post-college outcomes survey continues; but he said whether and how the pandemic may affect continuation of the survey is yet to be determined.

Financial Affairs

Ms. Kang said previous presenters covered the main items she planned to discuss. She echoed the statement that SCHEV has ongoing communication various stakeholders.

With regard to refunds for the spring semester, she noted that the methodology institutions are using for refunds varies from a fixed amount, a prorated amount or a combination of fixed and prorated per student.

Ms. Kang reported that institutions are assessing the budget impacts of COVID-19 in short- and long-term budgets, including effects from a shortened spring semester and potential losses in summer income in the areas of Educational and General Programs and Auxiliary Enterprises. She cautioned that while most recent state revenue forecasts were higher than the prior year, it reflects pre-COVID-19 revenues. The Governor and the General Assembly are contemplating a special session later in the year to determine if any of the "unalotted" funds could be released and to address other budget adjustments. She noted that SCHEV staff is preparing potential best- and worst-case scenario budget impacts for the upcoming academic year.

Ms. Kang said although new spending is currently on hold, funding for tech talent and interest earnings to institutions remained in the budget. She cautioned that fall forecasts could affect even these items.

Many institutions have not yet held board meetings to address tuition, and some institutions are pushing tuition decisions to June. SCHEV is starting to look at models to inform conversations in this area.

Student Affairs

Ms. Robinson said SCHEV staff hosted a virtual meeting with the Student Advisory Committee to obtain student input on how COVID-19 has affected them. Eleven students volunteered to talk with SCHEV staff about their experiences. For the most part, students felt a sense of gratitude and recognized that campuses are doing the best they could on their behalf. Students shared some areas they are concerned about, including sadness and regret that their college experience was disrupted; feeling isolated from the campus community; reduction of loss of work hours and wages.

Seniors are experiencing lost job opportunities and internships. Overall, Ms. Robinson said students are resilient and seem to be taking advantage of the services offered on their campus.

Students also said the pandemic has heightened concerns over access to food and housing. Many institutions have established food pantries, which have remained open as dining facilities closed, offering “grab-and-go” options for delivery to the few students remaining in university housing.

Ms. Robinson noted that the Governor’s Summit on Equity in Higher Education scheduled for April 27 at the College of William & Mary has been postponed until further notice. In the meantime, SCHEV and the Governor’s office continue to seek ways to engage college and university presidents and other leaders on this subject.

Enrollment Impact

Mr. Massa said there are many challenges and unknowns in the current environment; as a result, no one can project with any sense of confidence the impact the pandemic will have on enrollments. He mentioned some of the unknown factors and noted that SCHEV staff is monitoring fall registrations to get an idea of what we can expect.

He said that nationally, Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completions are down; in Virginia, these applications are down 1.9%. Ethics and practices of the Association of Admissions Counseling have changed, and it now allows for open competition for students, even those already committed to an institution. This will likely increase and create more obstacles for institutions to attract and retain students.

Federal Assistance

Mr. Allison addressed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, and discussed the potential for additional federal funding. Virginia institutions should directly receive \$294,391,162 through the largest pool for CARES funds; half of the funds for each institution must go to direct student grant aid related to COVID-19 disruptions, including eligible expenses under the cost of attendance (e.g., food, housing, health care, etc.) In addition, Virginia will receive \$66 million under the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEERF) of the CARES Act. The Governor have discretion in distributing these funds between high education institutions, local education agencies and/or other educational entities.

Staff is updating the SCHEV website regularly, briefing advisory groups and discussing best practices from national trade and advocacy organizations.

SCHEV staff is also tracking developments for the next round of federal stimulus to help determine if funds to institutions of higher education will be included.

Mr. Fralin said because there are many unknowns at this time he thought it would be helpful for the Council to hold a work session/retreat in the fall and next spring. He would like the Council to address where the system stands and be prepared to discuss how changes would relate to the goals of The Virginia Plan for Higher Education.

Council members engaged in a question and answer session with staff and Deputy Secretary Bradford.

Dr. Murray thanked staff and said this meeting provided a timely set of speakers and useful information. Ms. Harker agreed and acknowledged the difficulty in making projections at this time but thanked staff for its work in keeping the Council up-to-date.

Heywood challenged all members to think about what the researchers are saying about the virus and its likelihood to return. He said the Commonwealth should be prepared for the possibility that a variety of new viruses and diseases will emerge on a more regular basis going forward. As the Council deliberates, it would be helpful to think about ways to address this in an effort to be better prepared for these issues in the future.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Fralin said there were no requests for public comment.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 12:20 p.m.

The date for the next meeting is May 18-19. Staff is arranging to conduct these meetings, including the Private College Advisory Board (PCAB), virtually rather than at Virginia Wesleyan University as originally planned.

Katharine Webb
Council Secretary

Lee Ann Rung
Director, Executive and Board Affairs