

Higher Education Study Committee Public Hearings Summary Report
(updated January 5, 2009)

During the week of November 17-21, 2008, and a December 10, 2008, a series of ten public hearings were held around the state to receive feedback on the Higher Education Study Committee's (HESC) Action Plan and draft Implementation Recommendations. The hearings were held at Anderson University, Winthrop University, Claflin University, Spartanburg Community College, Coastal Carolina University, Francis Marion University, Technical College of the Lowcountry, University of South Carolina Aiken, College of Charleston, and Midlands Technical College Airport Campus. Participation in the hearings ranged from approximately 12 to 75 and included college and university administrators and faculty, students, business and community leaders and representatives, elected officials, and press. One hearing was broadcast on a local access television channel. At least nine articles appeared relating to the hearings.

Hearings were led by a moderator who in most cases was a representative of the local Chamber of Commerce. After the moderator's opening remarks, a member of the Higher Education Study Committee welcomed the public, commented briefly on the Committee's work, and then called upon Dr. Garrison Walters, Executive Director of the Commission, to review the draft Implementation Plan recommendations. Following the review of the report, the moderator asked panel participants to comment before opening the discussion to the public. Panel participants included HESC members, CHE members, college and university presidents or administrators. The public was also informed that written comments could be made by emailing them to hesc@che.sc.gov.

Consistent across the hearings were many positive comments from panelists and the public about the comprehensive and ambitious nature of the report. Suggestions were made to encourage work to improve cultural attitudes relating to the value of higher education and its role in the state's future prosperity.

PASCAL, the state's higher education electronic library was mentioned as a positive collaboration that improves access to information in a cost-effective manner for all institutions. The importance of restoring lost state funding for PASCAL to ensure its viability in the upcoming year and future years was noted. Concerns were discussed about recommendation 3.10 relating to GED programs for those over 18 years of age, and it was indicated this recommendation would be amended in light of the feedback that had been received. A couple of comments were also made questioning the governance structure and in regard to the need to be mindful of the balance of jobs and educational levels.

Much of the commentary across the hearings focused on concerns relating to existing state funding levels for higher education, disparities across institutions in funding levels, and whether needed increases in funding would be available to enable the implementation of the many recommendations included in the report. The need for capital bond funding and increased institutional operating funding was noted, particularly in light of the call to increase capacity, as was the need for additional need-based student financial aid and financial aid for adults returning to higher education. Regulatory relief for colleges and universities and improving faculty pay were also mentioned.

Additionally, several expressed the value of increasing the education levels of the state and the merits of recommendations focusing on the adult pipeline, better preparation of students for higher education, research activities, and workforce development. Some commented on the importance of improving institutional collaborations with each other and with businesses, the involvement of families in supporting student's higher education aspirations, the value of employers providing incentives for education, and the importance of flexibility in program delivery methods for adults.