

Higher Education Study Committee Enrollment Advisory Group Recommendations

*** FINAL DRAFT SUMMARY***

Committee Members:

Layton McCurdy, M.D.
Mr. Robert W. Marlowe
Mr. Jim McNab
Mr. Daniel Ravenel

The Advisory Group believes that the potential group with the greatest likelihood of yielding additional students for higher education is the traditional aged, but previously considered under-prepared. Therefore, the Advisory Group believes that the state should implement policies and systems to encourage and facilitate those students who have not traditionally participated into a post-secondary educational experience. In an effort to encourage that direction, the following observations and recommendations are provided for consideration by the full Higher Education Study Committee.

Observations:

- 1) Encourage articulation and transferability of coursework
- 2) Provide college preparation information throughout high school career
- 3) Encourage consistent advising

Recommendations:

- 4) Create financial assistance for students transferring from two-year institutions to four-year institutions
- 5) Increase need-based financial assistance
- 6) Provide increased funding to two-year sector
- 7) Create a tax credit incentive program for non-residents
- 8) Create surcharge for excessive coursework

Higher Education Study Committee Enrollment Advisory Group Recommendations

*** FINAL DRAFT FULL REPORT ***

Committee Members:

Layton McCurdy, M.D.
Mr. Robert W. Marlowe
Mr. Jim McNab
Mr. Daniel Ravenel

The Enrollment Advisory Group sees that there are two potential sources of additional students for higher education in South Carolina: 1) adult non-traditional and 2) traditional aged, but previously considered under-prepared. Each prospective group would require exceptional efforts on the behalf of institutions because these markets have not been tapped previously. The adult market would require new marketing programs and increased efforts to make the college experience perceived to be an “achievable goal”. This group of students is also being served by a growing community of proprietary institutions and increased emphasis by the technical colleges. The students who have previously been considered under-prepared will require additional support both in terms of remediation as well as academic advising. The natural tendency is to steer these students to the two-year sector due to cost considerations and also because that is where all remediation work is done (per state policy). However, some of these students could also be guided to the four-year sector provided that proper support is provided. Lessons for these types of efforts could be gleaned from the independent institutions that have experience with under-prepared students.

The Advisory Group believes that the potential group with the greatest likelihood of yielding additional students for higher education is the traditional aged, but previously considered under-prepared. Therefore, the Advisory Group believes that the state should implement policies and systems to encourage and facilitate those students who have not traditionally participated into a post-secondary educational experience. In an effort to encourage that direction, the following observations and recommendations are provided for consideration by the full Higher Education Study Committee. The noted observations are comments on issues where work is already underway, but the Advisory Group wanted to provide supporting emphasis for those efforts. The noted recommendations are ideas that are either new, or may have been discussed before but have not yet been implemented.

Observations:

- 9) Encourage articulation and transferability of coursework - One of the evolving characteristics of current students is their increased mobility. Today's students are far more likely to relocate during their collegiate career, thereby needing the ability for transferability of coursework. The Advisory Group would like to encourage the continuation of efforts currently underway as a result of the recently passed Education and Economic Development Act (EEDA) relating to the articulation agreements among higher education institutions and between the various educational sectors. Also of note are the bridge programs that have been developed between several four-year institutions and the Technical College System. These programs will greatly improve students' likelihood and ability to transfer from two-year to four-year institutions.

- 10) Provide college preparation information throughout high school career - One of the most significant challenges faced by non-traditional students is their lack of information on preparing for college. A frequent explanation for this fact is that potential first generation students do not know where to go, or do not have adults available to provide such information. There are some programs in existence that are working to provide this information to students. Notable programs include the Emerging Scholars Program at Clemson University, the GEAR-UP program at the Commission on Higher Education, and Trio (Federal), Upward Bound, and Talent Search programs that exist at several institutions. In addition, other schools have middle school mentoring programs in place. These programs represent a few of the best practices that are available for working with high school students in order to prepare them for college. The Advisory Group believes that there should be a coordinated statewide effort to encourage these or other best practices so that the higher education community can embrace the opportunity to work within the k-12 community for the purposes of providing guidance and information to high school students in order to better prepare them for college.

- 11) Encourage consistent advising - An observation noted by the Advisory Group is that students who have the benefit of a consistent advisor during their high school experience have a stronger likelihood of being successful in completing their high school degree. These advisors may be academic (eg: guidance counselor), non-academic (eg: athletic coach), or not be school affiliated (eg: church youth group advisor). Of these options, the logical role for the state to fill is that of an academic advisor. Therefore, every effort should be made to provide increased opportunities for students to work with their academic advisors throughout their high school career. It should be noted that the EEDA legislations does provide for increasing the numbers of personnel in the guidance departments thereby increasing the quality of those services offered to students.

Recommendations:

- 12) Create financial assistance for students transferring from two-year institutions to four-year institutions - For those students (both traditional and non-traditional) that choose to begin their college experience by enrolling in the two-year sector, but would like to continue their education by transferring into a four-year institution, the Advisory Group believes there should be some financial assistance to encourage that pursuit of the bachelor's degree. While assistance is available for students who qualify for a LIFE scholarship, there are other academically deserving students than do not meet the LIFE requirements. Therefore, the Advisory Group would recommend the creation of a program similar to the HOPE scholarship program whereby students who are transferring from a two-year institution to a four-year institution would be eligible for financial assistance, presuming some academic requirements are met. This approach would also serve to encourage students to attend two-year institutions where education can be provided at a lower cost to the state while at the same time facilitating the ability of those students to continue their education at a four-year institution.
- 13) Increase need-based financial assistance - While it is not in the direct purview of the Enrollment Advisory Group, the members would like to note the importance of available need-based financial assistance for those students that have not traditionally attended post-secondary institutions. These students are often the most in need of financial aid, and least likely to benefit from merit based programs. It is also important to note that overall enrollment levels are likely negatively impacted by increases in tuition levels. The recent trend of reductions, or limited increases, in state provided E&G funds has necessitated institutions to increase tuition levels and thereby place additional financial burdens on those students who can often least afford those costs. Also, when enrollment levels rise as a result of previously under-prepared students attending college, additional need-based funds will be needed to provide support for these students.
- 14) Provide increased funding to two-year sector - Given that the primary potential for increases in enrollment lies in those students who are considered non-traditional, and thereby are most likely to begin their college experience at the two-year level, it is likely that any initial increases in enrollment levels will materialize within the two-year sector. Therefore, as the state considers where to allocate increases in institutional funding, the two-year institutions will warrant consideration with respect to required additional resources.

As examples, consider the following relevant issues:

- Enrollment increases will impact the availability of Lottery Tuition Assistance funds. As more students attend two-year institutions, the impact of these funds will be diluted.
- While technical colleges are open enrollment institutions, significant increases in numbers of students will inevitably impact instructional quality without increases in faculty and related support.
- Significant enrollment increases will result in the need for additional facilities.

As one additional point, while much of the discussion here relates to the goal of increasing the number of Bachelors degrees held in South Carolina, the original role of the Technical College System should not be ignored. There will continue to be a high demand for technical programs and enrollment increases should be expected for those programs as well as the more traditional academic transfer-type programs.

- 15) Create a tax credit incentive program for non-residents – The Advisory Group believes that the state should consider the implementation of a tax credit policy whereby non-resident undergraduate and master’s level students who complete a degree at a South Carolina public institution can take a tax credit over a period of years for the out-of-state portion of their required tuition and fees (ie: out-of-state differential). The tax credit could be available for each year that the student remains in state until they have taken credits equal to the amount of differential paid by the students over the life of their college career. The Strom Thurmond Institute at Clemson University is currently developing a firm proposal of this concept. This issue is based on the reality that a majority of non-resident students leave the state after graduation. If those students could be encouraged to stay in South Carolina, it would have a direct effect on our number of citizens with a bachelor’s degree or higher. Also, this approach would allow South Carolina to benefit from the substantial educational investment that has already been accumulated by those students. The reason that this credit is not proposed for in-state students is that currently approximately 80% of residents already stay in state after graduation. Also note that the proposed credit is based only on the out-of-state differential paid by the student (ie: the amount not paid by resident students).

- 16) Create surcharge for excessive coursework – One of the perennial concerns of taxpayers is that resources are misapplied. On a college campus, an area where this can occur is providing more educational opportunities than a student might need. The example here is the “professional” student who has remained in school for several years taking courses, but never accumulating enough credits in a given discipline to obtain a degree. In most cases, students who accumulate extra credits have very appropriate reasons such as a change in major. However, for those students who seem to continue their education on an undetermined path, the state must realize that its resources are being used to support that student as opposed to supporting another student who is more inclined to obtain a degree. A possible approach to address this issue is to create a fiscal disincentive to taking unnecessary coursework. For example, the State of North Carolina has a statute that calls for a 25% surcharge for all coursework over 140 degree credit hours. Also included in the law are appropriate exceptions for conditions where this number of credit hours would be an inappropriate limitation. Therefore, the Advisory Group proposes that a 25% surcharge be applied to all coursework taken above 140 hours or 110% of the credit hours required for a particular degree. The details of this proposal will need to be further developed by appropriate parties.