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MEMORANDUM

To: Chairman John L. Finan and Members, S.C. Commission on Higher Education

From: Dr. Bettie Rose Horne, Chair, and Members, Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing

Consideration of More Robust Metrics to Monitor Academic Degree Programs Offered by Public Institutions

Background and Introduction
At its November 6, 2014- CHE meeting, Commissioners asked the Academic Affairs staff to prepare information that would assist the Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing (CAAL) members in determining future recommendations to the Commission regarding the development of more robust metrics for program monitoring. At the CAAL meeting in January 2015, CHE staff presented current practices for program evaluation and demonstrated how modifying some of the current criteria, specifically, changing enrollment and completion benchmarks, might affect the outcome of biennial program productivity review. Since the January CAAL meeting, Academic Affairs staff then consulted with higher education agency counterparts in at least seven other states, met with the Advisory Committee on Academic Programs (ACAP) to discuss possible review options (February 2015), and met with CHE's data management staff. These discussions have helped confirm the variety of data collected already; the criteria and means most helpful for reporting program productivity; and the benefits both other states and in-state institutions have reaped as a result of such reporting.

As a result of these findings, Academic Affairs staff suggested several revisions to improve its monitoring of program productivity for public institutions at the CAAL meeting on April 8, 2015. Based on discussions at the April 8th CAAL meeting, Academic Affairs staff presented the following recommendations at the June 11, 2015 ACAP meeting:

1. improvements to the biennial productivity review criteria, including the following:
    a. An increase to the "satisfactory" threshold for program completers for degree programs from five (5) to eight (8).
    b. A change of the criterion for satisfactory program productivity from meeting ***either*** enrollment ***or*** completion thresholds to the new standard of meeting ***both*** enrollment ***and*** completion benchmarks.
    c. The addition of monitoring licensure and/or certification pass rates for applicable programs (e.g., nursing, education, engineering, etc.).
2. implementation of a new program-specific review beginning with programs approved in Fall 2015 to assess programs three years after implementation for master's degree programs and five years after implementation for all other programs, with final specific review criteria to be agreed upon prior to the first reviews to be conducted in Fall 2018.

ACAP Consideration
ACAP members and Academic Affairs staff discussed the recommendations, which resulted in an amended motion that refined the recommendations for the biennial productivity review and a postponement to vote to adopt the new program-specific review so that its criteria could continue to be reviewed over ensuing months. The refinements members suggested for the biennial productivity review include the following:

1. applying the increase for satisfactory thresholds to baccalaureate programs only, and not master's, first professional, specialist, or doctoral degree programs.
2. allowing exemptions to the productivity standards (i.e., enrollment and completion thresholds) on a program by program basis for those programs considered essential to the basic mission of the American university (i.e., the arts and sciences) or deemed so unique in their subject matter and value to the higher education community in South Carolina as to make them essential.
3. encouraging Commission consideration of specialized accreditation status for those programs that may not satisfy the enrollment and completion thresholds in determining whether the programs are granted an exemption, placed on probation, or recommended for termination.

In addition, ACAP members expressed concern about the number of programs that may be affected by the revised criteria. Academic Affairs staff agreed to continue to collaborate with ACAP to determine exemptions to the biennial review. In addition, staff confirmed that revisions will be required to the CHE *Policies and Procedures for Academic Degree Program Productivity* once the Commission has approved the improvements to the biennial productivity review.

For the proposed program-specific review, in addition to review of criteria over the next several months, ACAP members confirmed the difficulty of collecting graduate placement rates; strongly encouraged CHE to pursue the means to connect postsecondary education and workforce data to better track college graduates; and suggested that the first reviews be conducted later than Fall 2018 as proposed to allow for better data collection. In summary, ACAP members subsequently approved an amended motion that revises the biennial productivity review as noted, and defers implementation of the program-specific review until the final review criteria can be considered in coming months at a future ACAP meeting.

Recommendation
The Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing recommends the Commission approve the following improvements to the biennial productivity review:

1. Increase the "satisfactory" threshold for program completers for baccalaureate degree programs from five to eight (the threshold remains unchanged for master's, first professional, specialist, and doctoral degree programs).
2. Change the criterion for satisfactory program productivity from meeting ***either*** enrollment ***or*** completion thresholds to the new standard of meeting ***both*** enrollment ***and*** completion benchmarks for all programs.
3. Consider specialized accreditation status of applicable programs that do not meet the enrollment or completion thresholds when determining whether the programs are granted an exemption, placed on probation, or recommended for termination.
4. Add the monitoring of licensure and/or certification pass rates for applicable programs (e.g., nursing, education, engineering, etc.).

Next Steps
Upon approval of the suggested improvements to the biennial productivity review, Academic Affairs staff will revise the *Policies and Procedures for Academic Degree Program Productivity*. Academic Affairs staff will seek input from ACAP and CAAL members to:

1. Refine the list of licensure examinations to be considered in the biennial productivity report.
2. Determine benchmarks for licensure and/or certification pass rates for applicable programs.
3. Determine the feasibility of providing a comparison of peer programs in the biennial productivity review.

Then, Academic Affairs staff will present the revised *Policies and Procedures for Academic Degree Program Productivity* at the subsequent CAAL meeting. Academic Affairs will also continue to discuss the implementation of a program-specific review with ACAP members to refine the list of viable benchmarks and the means for data collection in order to present a recommendation to CAAL in the near future. Academic Affairs staff will also continue to explore ways to connect higher education productivity with workforce data.