

September 4, 2003

MEMORANDUM

To: Mr. Dalton B. Floyd, Jr., Chairman, and Members, Commission on Higher Education

From: Dr. Vermelle J. Johnson, Chair, and Members, Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing

Consideration of Annual Report on Compliance with the English Fluency Act in Higher Education FY 2002-2003

Background

In 1991 the General Assembly passed the English Fluency in Higher Education Act. This Act required each public higher education institution to submit an annual report to the Commission, based upon a compliance plan that each institution had been required to develop. Under the law, the Commission was given the responsibility of developing and implementing policies and procedures consistent with the General Assembly's intent to ensure that faculty members at the public institutions in the State can communicate effectively even when English is not their first language.

In the language of the Act in Section (C)(2) each institution was required to submit as part of its compliance plan an assurance that an adequate procedure exists for students to report grievances concerning the inability of instructors to be understood in their spoken or written English. In Section (D)(2), the Act further requires that each institution must report annually the number of grievances filed by students under the provisions of (C)(2) and the disposition of those grievances.

On November 3, 1994, the Commission on Higher Education required that each institution of public higher education in South Carolina publish a clear, complete summary of the institution's policy on English Fluency in Higher Education *either* in both the catalog and student handbook *or* in the Academic Section and the Student Affairs Section (for institutions with a unified publication) of the unified publication on campus policies.

At its meeting on November 2, 1995, the Commission further required that all institutions must demonstrate for the current reporting year (i.e., in this case, the period beginning July 1, 2001, and ending with the conclusion of the Spring Semester 2002) that they are fully in compliance with the requirements regarding publication of the law's provisions in the Catalog and Student Handbook.

Discussion

All institutions of public higher education had submitted their reports to the Commission on Higher Education by July 23, 2003, for the recently completed academic year of 2002-2003. The data submitted in those reports show that all of the State's 33 public institutions are fully in compliance with the publication of the required student information under the law and Commission policy.

Since the passage of the English Fluency Act in Higher Education by the General Assembly in 1991, the Commission has issued twelve annual reports (including the current one) to the chairmen of the committees in the House and Senate with jurisdiction in educational matters. In all the previous eleven reports a total of six student complaints had been received. In the current year's reports from the institutions no student grievance was reported at any of the thirty-three public institutions, although one parental complaint was received, investigated, and answered at Clemson University.

The minimal use of the grievance policy by students throughout the state suggests that public institutions of higher education have been highly accountable in the hiring and retention of faculty who are capable of communicating well in the English language for purposes of teaching and advising students. In summary, students appear to be highly satisfied in all public institutions with the level of communication they are receiving from instructors whose first language is not English. For the past academic year, faculty members whose first language is not English are apparently meeting the expectations of the General Assembly for their ability to communicate effectively with students.

Recommendations

The staff suggests that the Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing recommend to the Commission that this report be approved and transmitted to the appropriate chairpersons of the education committees of the General Assembly.

The Committee will make its recommendation to the Commission on September 4.