

**Executive Director's Report  
Commission on Higher Education  
3 April 2014**

**A. Opening Remarks/General Update**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is both a privilege and a pleasure to hold our session today on the campus of Aiken Technical College.

I am glad that the Commission has chosen to hold two of its nine scheduled meetings this year at places where some of our 240,000 students are actually educated. It reminds us of our purpose and enables us to engage with the constituents we serve.

I would also like to extend my thanks to President Winsor & ATC's faculty, staff, and students for hosting our meeting today.

It probably wasn't fair for Beth to claim that we were the advance scouting party for Adam Scott's defense of his Master's title at Augusta National next week, but we sure got a nice reception at the restaurant last night.

Some of you may recall that today marks the one-year anniversary of your star-crossed decision to invite me to become the executive director of this commission. I continue to be honored and humbled by your selection.

I fear that one day you will wake up and come to your senses. But until that happens, I'm doing everything I can to fulfill your trust in my leadership.

Next month's meeting will mark the first annual benchmark of my actual work here. I have reflected lately on what I intended to do when I began, how much of that agenda still stands incomplete, and how challenging the journey remains.

This month or next might provide an appropriate occasion for me to deliver my first State-of-the-Commission address. That one will be a real stem-winder, so I'm recommending that such an annual event should occur in October, following our annual strategic planning retreat, the launch of a new academic year, and the submission of our budget request,

In the meantime, we have reorganized the CHE website, so that you can find all of my public statements in one place.

This is primarily intended to ensure that I don't use the same jokes twice, but it also gives you a convenient way to track my monthly summaries and hold me accountable for the issues of the moment, what I said we would do about them, and whether we have achieved our commitments.

Much of what I've dealt with in the past year, however, is tied to the broad theme of South Carolina's structure of higher education and where we're headed as a state amid the unprecedented turbulence in the global landscape of our academic enterprise.

We are in uncharted waters. The direction of the tides, the velocity of the winds, and the fate of our fleet—ships both large and small—are not certain. We must navigate our path forward with bold vision and sharp eyes.

As you know, I testified last week before the House Ad Hoc Committee on the Charleston University Act (H.4632).

Yesterday that committee threw another wrinkle into the discussion by passing an amended version of the bill. Julie will update you on this late-breaking development in a few minutes.

A primary factor that has always struck me as a tremendous asset of South Carolina's approach to higher education is that CHE unites the state's technical colleges, our other two-year schools, our four-year institutions, and our research universities under one umbrella.

Other states in which I have worked have divorced two-year technical colleges from their baccalaureate colleagues, creating a separation that is both inefficient and unfair to the students we all serve.

If I were an eighteen-year-old high school senior, or a returning veteran, a working mom, or an unemployed MBA, I would not understand the distinctions and barriers that separate the various parts of the academic enterprise.

I would simply say: Your turf wars are not my concern. I pay taxes to invest in a system of educational opportunity that should be accessible to me and my children without having to fight through your bureaucratic divisions.

Our challenge is to determine how best to rationalize our state's system of higher education, so that we don't find ourselves rationing its benefits among a declining array of institutions and consumers.

The Commission on Higher Education plays a vital and critical role in that process. We need to continue to exercise our responsibility as the state's honest broker of fair-minded solutions that consider the needs of all South Carolinians.

Indeed, our authorizing statutes call on us "to be a global leader in providing a coordinated, comprehensive system of excellence in education."

As we all know, that's much easier said than done.

This morning we are pleased and honored to welcome the new head of the Technical College System, Dr. Jimmie Williamson.

Dr. Williamson and I have already made several joint appearances in championing the importance of post-secondary education in South Carolina. On this we both sing from the same hymnal.

Dr. Williamson has inherited a host of issues that will drive many of our future conversations. It's too early in his three-week tenure for him to respond to those challenges today, but they include items that are central to the concerns and priorities of this commission. They include:

- Collaboration between two-year and four-year institutions in creating or expanding bridge programs and other cooperative efforts to help students earn post-secondary degrees more efficiently and at less personal expense.
- Improved systems of course transfer and articulation that provide students with reliable frameworks for moving seamlessly between two-year and four-year institutions;
- CHE's role in program review and approval that provides meaningful value, statewide coordination, and qualitative accountability;
- New and innovative degree schemes that help students progress on paths of lifelong learning and not finding themselves short-circuited into educational cul-de-sacs.

These topics presage larger issues looming about whether we move toward greater collaboration and integration among sectors or sharpen the dividing lines among institutions.

I met yesterday with the chairman of the House Education and Public Works Committee, Representative Phil Owens, to discuss these and other concerns. Chairman Owens recently announced that he would not seek re-election this fall, after a dozen years of service in the General Assembly.

I was disappointed to hear that news, because I have enjoyed working with Chairman Owens. He understands the state's necessary role in higher education, he has always been willing to listen and talk through issues, and he plays a pretty mean guitar. We have invited him to share some parting thoughts about the state of education in South Carolina at a future meeting.

I also met with the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, Senator John Courson on Tuesday, to discuss similar issues. As always, he offered his sage advice and assessments about the realities of South Carolina's political process.

The preceding week I had a conversation with Dr. Belle Wheelan, who heads the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). SACS accreditation determines the eligibility of our institutions for federal student aid, research grants, and other sources of funding.

As you know, South Carolina has gained some national attention lately for some legislative reactions to reading material required of entering freshman at a couple of our 33 institutions.

The opportunity to engage in unrestricted examination, review, discussion, and debate of knowledge, theories, and perspectives in the arts, sciences, humanities, and professional fields is a fundamental precept of American higher education.

This is a defining characteristic that differentiates higher education in the United States from that of many other nations.

The opportunity not to engage in such examinations is also a fundamental precept of our educational structure. Our system encourages choice and offers many alternatives for students to pursue.

To help sort through the many layers and levels of divergent opinion that surround these issues, I have asked our director of academic affairs, Dr. MaryAnn Janosik, to convene a task force of chief academic officers from our institutions to develop a statement on academic discourse that considers the rights and responsibilities of all members of our college and university communities—including students, faculty, administrators, and trustees.

This is not a new controversy, but it deserves to be revisited periodically to ensure that it is current and relevant to the times and technologies in which we live. I have asked that the task force submit its recommended statement for consideration at the August meeting of CHE's Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing.

Last week the senior staff provided an intensive orientation for our newest Commissioner, Dianne Kuhl. In just a few hours we succeeded in making her totally confused about what the Commission does!

Tuesday was April Fool's Day. Gary Glenn showed that he was nobody's fool by announcing that he will be stepping down from his position as the Commission's director of finance, facilities, and management information systems, upon the naming of his replacement.

We will, at some future time, celebrate Gary's forty-plus years of service to South Carolina, his exemplary contributions to education and to this agency. But not too soon.

Gary has graciously agreed to continue his service to the Commission in a supporting role until he has completed training of the new director.

This includes the intricate ways in which he manages CHE's complex budget, the inscrutable elements of the Mission Resource Requirement, and the secret password to our Cayman Islands accounts. It won't be a simple orientation.

We will soon launch a search for Gary's successor, and we hope to conclude that process by the end of the summer.

As I did with the search for a new academic affairs director, this search will again be led by representatives from each sector of our 33 public institutions. I am very pleased to announce that Steve Osborne, the widely respected chief financial officer at the College of Charleston, has agreed to chair this important search committee.

The heavy lifting of the commission's work today was accomplished earlier this morning, when the Finance and Facilities Committee dispatched 46 capital projects on the Comprehensive Project Improvement Plans (CPIPs) at 13 institutions totaling \$734 million.

This was my first opportunity to observe this annual process, and I found it both affirming and disturbing. Staff—and by that I mean two people, Gary and Courtney, on top of their other duties—review the institutional submissions, ask questions, get responses, and make recommendations.

They do not, however, actually visit the institutions, inspect the building sites, verify the severity of need for renovations, or otherwise engage in what I would consider to be a full and robust investigation that satisfies a reasonable person's definition of due diligence.

In this and other areas of our agency, I believe it is important to strengthen CHE's responsibility for due investigation in ways that add value to the processes we manage. We will be working to improve these functions and dedicate greater resources to them in the coming months.

## **B. Update on the Charleston School of Law**

As you will recall, a team of external consultants was enlisted to assist us with our review of InfiLaw's application for initial license to operate the Charleston School of Law. They conducted their site visit on February 12-14. We received their report on March 24.

In follow-up to certain items in the report, we requested additional information from InfiLaw on March 27. We are expecting a detailed response from them by the end of this week.

The report also revealed that the consultants were not able to connect during the site visit with many of the parties suggested by CHE, so we will continue to conduct our due investigation in accordance with applicable statutes and regulations.

Despite these delays, we remain hopeful that we will be in a position to place this item on the May agenda of the Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing.

## **C. Strategic Agenda**

We have been making steady progress on your strategic agenda, but there have not been any dramatic developments these past few weeks. Staff will provide a six-month assessment at our May meeting.

I've touched a lot of bases in my remarks today. It seems only appropriate that I do so, because Monday marked the start of major league baseball. There are designated days to mark the official start of the four seasons, but to me spring doesn't officially begin until the first pitch is thrown.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That concludes my report. I will be happy to respond to your questions or comments.