

Executive Director's Report
Commission on Higher Education
6 March 2014

A. Opening Remarks/General Update

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

This has been a particularly busy week in my new home town.

Tuesday was fat, Wednesday was ashen, and today already feels like Maundy Thursday.

After our meeting this morning we'll gather for my last supper, one will betray me before the Gamecock crows, and legislative crucifixion will end my suffering. So it is written.

Alternatively, I'll survive until lucky St. Patrick has his day, and leprechauns will share pots of gold with each of our institutions under rainbows of harmony and light.

Just hedging my bets, my Lenten resolution is to give up all further contact with legislators and government officials until the General Assembly passes and the Governor signs the FY15 budget bill.

Yesterday's schedule included:

- a session with the House Committee on Education and Public Works, where I presented an overview of the Commission's responsibilities and discussed some the policy issues looming on the horizon;
- presentation of CHE's budget request to the Senate Finance Committee's Higher Education Subcommittee (chaired by Senate President *pro tem* John Courson); and
- the first full convening during my tenure of the statutorily constituted Council of Presidents of Public Institutions of Higher Learning.

The day before, I sat in my ex-officio role as a member of the board of the Tuition Grants Commission. I later shared a session on higher education with newly designated Tech System head Jimmie Williamson, Winthrop President Jamie Comstock, and York Tech President Greg Rutherford at York County Day at the Columbia Convention Center.

In preceding weeks I had substantive conversations in my first meetings with the new president of Clemson, Jim Clements, and with one of the General Assembly's most experienced and perceptive thinkers about higher education, Sen. Nikki Setzler.

In the past month we also hosted the quarterly meetings of the SC Higher Education Foundation and the SmartState Review Board, participated in a conference call to discuss the Commission's role in approving A.A.S. degrees, and convened campus stakeholders to prepare implementation steps for year-round scholarship eligibility.

Once again we lost several work days to snow and ice, which I didn't realize are apparently the norm for South Carolina in February. Throw in the Presidents' Day holiday, and it's surprising that we got anything done.

But as always, the excellent staff that serves this Commission did their best under challenging circumstances.

In accordance with authorities established by the Commission's policies on academic programs, I have recently approved Francis Marion University's proposal to offer its existing RN-to-BSN program at a new site location in Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina.

In complying with this policy, FMU submitted the required program modification documents, complied with our requests for substantiating information, and received rigorous staff review by our academic affairs division.

Once they were vetted and forwarded to me, I concurred that both the need and demand for this baccalaureate degree-completion program justified a robust expansion of this option in the LowCountry.

Given the dynamics in the nursing profession in a rapidly changing healthcare environment, we will have a hard time meeting the capacity needs for baccalaureate education in this critical field.

Non-public institutions have already recognized this void and have moved aggressively to fill it. Public universities should not be restrained from doing the same.

Our state-supported institutions bring an important value-added benefit to the table. We can build collaborations with our sister colleges and universities that others can't match.

Although the details have not yet been fully resolved, we expect that this new degree opportunity in the LowCountry will lead to new partnerships between FMU, Trident Technical College's RN program, and the College of Charleston's strong complementary offerings.

Some of these connections will likely occur not just in Mt. Pleasant, but in North Charleston and other neighborhoods.

This is an important expansion of public higher education that we will monitor closely to gauge its success as we consider other similar expansions.

This is, however, only the approval of a single existing academic program to a new location. It is not an authorization to create a new four-year campus, nor *a priori* approval of other targeted programs that may or may not be forthcoming.

President Carter has asked to appear before CHE's Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing at its next meeting to discuss his university's expectations for very targeted program development in the greater Charleston metropolitan area.

B. CSOL Update

Speaking of Charleston...

Despite the snow and ice that disrupted our best laid plans, we plowed forward (literally) with the external review site visit at the Charleston School of Law.

One of consultants was unfortunately unable to participate due to flight cancellations, but the other two arrived ahead of the storm and were able to proceed.

We are expecting the consultants' reports to arrive soon. In the meantime we continue to search, assess, and analyze relevant information contained in the hundreds of pages of letters and documents we received during our announced period for submission of information.

We have now determined that, given the volume of information to process, staff will not be prepared to bring InfiLaw's application for licensure to CAAL until its next regularly scheduled meeting in May, with Commission action expected to follow in June.

C. Strategic Agenda

There have been several important developments this past month in fulfilling the action items of your strategic agenda.

On Priority One (Strengthening Academic Planning), Dr. Janosik has this week appointed a task force of five representatives from the Advisory Committee on Academic Affairs (ACAP) to develop recommendations to tighten our academic review process.

Their recommendations are due for the next ACAP meeting.

Priority Two (Develop New Higher Education Funding Models) was the core of the agenda and discussions at yesterday's Presidents Council.

There is still support among the university presidents for the concept of Accountability-Based Funding (ABF), but there is some question whether the model they endorsed two years ago is still in play.

There was general agreement that we need clarification of the key parameters of performance indicators, how they will be applied to a funding model, and how operational flexibility as well as funding resources will be distributed to those who meet performance standards.

On your third priority to Improve P-20 Collaboration, five of the six P-20 education agency heads have enthusiastically endorsed our proposal for a voluntary Council. I simply haven't been able to find a mutually convenient time to meet with DEW's executive director to review this plan.

Due to the snowstorm, Chairman Finan and Vice Chairwoman Horne were unable to attend the February meeting of the State Board of Education, but they will try again next Wednesday as we continue to build reciprocal engagement of the two bodies.

Also, tomorrow and Monday we will be interviewing finalists for CHE's new staff position in our Office of P-20 Initiatives

Priority Four got a new jolt when the Department of Commerce asked us to find expedited procedures to license new educational entities that don't operate along traditional instructional frameworks.

This particular case involved computer coding bootcamps. Julie, John, and I met with Sec. Hitt to discuss the issues, and we all agreed on the need for speed and flexibility while maintaining proper scrutiny.

Finally I had hoped to bring to you this morning a matrix that organizes much of the agency's on-going work around your four priorities.

Although you gave us specific action steps to execute, there are many other elements of our efforts that support your strategic agenda.

I just didn't get this piece completed, but will send it out to you soon. As I said, it's been a busy week.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That concludes my report.