

Maryland Higher Education Commission
Meeting Minutes

March 20, 2024
10:00 a.m.

The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) met on Wednesday, March 20, 2024 in the 7th floor boardroom in the Nancy S. Grasmick State Education Building (200 West Baltimore Street, Baltimore, MD 21201). The meeting was also livestreamed (and recorded), and some Commissioners joined virtually.

Commission members present:

Catherine J. “Cassie” Motz, Chair	Barbara Kerr Howe
Chike Aguh, Vice Chair	Rebecca Taber Staehelin
Mickey L. Burnim, Ph.D.	Sheila D. Thompson, Ph.D.
Charlene Mickens Dukes, Ed.D.	Craig A. Williams, Ph.D.

Commissioners absent:

Ray Serrano, Ph.D.	Cierra M. Robinson, Student Commissioner
Janet E. Wormack, Ed.D.	

Staff members present:

Sanjay Rai, Ph.D.	Emily A. A. Dow, Ph.D.
Anthony Reiner	Soma Kedia
Geoffrey Newman	Kimberly Smith Ward
Derrick Coley	Rhonda Wardlaw
Yuxin Lin, Ph.D.	Barbara Schmertz, Ph.D.
Al Dorsett	Deborah Ing
Trish Gordon McCown	

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by **Chair Motz** at approximately 10:00 a.m. A meeting quorum was established with six (6) out of eleven (11) members present. Two other members joined later in the meeting.

Chair’s Remarks

Chair Motz welcomed and thanked everyone for attending today’s meeting. She congratulated Dr. Sanjay Rai upon his official confirmation by the Maryland Senate as the Secretary of Higher Education. She acknowledged that it had been a challenging time all around, both in Annapolis and at the office, and she thanked everyone for their efforts and their work.

Secretary's Remarks

Secretary Rai congratulated Commissioner Burnim upon the publication of his new book on the topic of leadership. MHEC has been especially busy during this legislative session, attending budget hearings and tracking legislation that will impact the agency.

Public Comments

There were no public comments.

Commission Minutes Approval

There was a motion by **Commissioner Howe** and a second by **Vice Chair Aguh** for the approval of the December 6, 2023 meeting minutes. The motion was approved unanimously.

Department of Finance and Administration – Office of Student Financial Assistance – Financial Aid Update – Information Item

Chair Motz recognized Mr. Al Dorsett, Director of the Office of Student Financial Assistance, who reported on the challenges experienced by the agency due to the recent FAFSA changes. The U. S. Department of Education has begun transmitting small batches of FAFSA information to schools and state agencies. They hope to ramp up delivery in the coming weeks. MHEC aims to process awards as quickly as possible for students who have been timely in submitting their FAFSAs in an effort to provide a clear financial aid award picture for families to make decisions. MHEC's proposed timelines are dependent on the U. S. Department of Education's timelines, so they are subject to change. The Commissioners asked questions about Mr. Dorsett's presentation.

Department of Academic Affairs – Faith Theological Seminary of Catonsville, Approval of Stage One Application – Information Item

Chair Motz recognized Ms. Trish Gordon McCown, Director of Academic Affairs, to present this item. The Maryland Higher Education Commission has reviewed a Stage One initial application for a Certificate of Approval as an in-state, degree-granting institution submitted by Faith Theological Seminary of Catonsville ("FTSC"). The application includes a proposal to offer several degree programs.

FTSC serves adults in the greater Baltimore-Washington community and teaches the Protestant theology. The programs offered at FTSC would address the needs of providing diversity in religious education that is affordable with flexible course options for students (both in-person and online).

Pastor Jerry Harmon, President, was informed on January 3, 2024, that FTSC is approved to proceed to Stage Two of the application process. This decision was based on an analysis of the application in conjunction with the Maryland Higher Education Commission's Minimum

Requirements for In-State, Degree-Granting Institutions, the Maryland State Plan for Postsecondary Education, and a 30-day review by the Maryland higher education community. No comments or objections were received during the 30-day circulation period.

FTSC is expected to submit a Stage 2 Application in the coming months. If the Secretary is satisfied with the documentation submitted by FTSC, an Evaluation Team will conduct an on-site visit to ensure that the institution complies with regulatory standards. The Evaluation Team will include at least 1 member affiliated with an out-of-state institution.

If, based on the Evaluation Team report and other available information, the Secretary is satisfied that FTSC is in compliance with COMAR and the minimum requirements are met, the Secretary shall grant approval to operate, which may include specific conditions. If the Secretary is not satisfied that a prospective in-state institution is in compliance with this chapter, the Secretary shall issue a notice of deficiencies and deny approval. If approved, a 2nd Evaluation Team will conduct an on-site visit at the end of FTSC's first instructional year to ensure that the institution is in compliance with COMAR and any other conditions for FTSC's approval to operate.

Currently, Faith Theological Seminary-Catonsville is authorized to operate under a religious exemption. The designation allows the entity to grant religious discipline degrees without a certificate of approval from the Commission. Additionally, Faith Theological Seminary-Catonsville is a separate entity from Faith Theological Seminary (FTS). FTS ceased operations in 2020 due to the loss of accreditation from Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools (TRACS); MHEC withdrew FTS's authority to operate in Maryland on May 21, 2020. There was interest from Grace Bible Baptist Church to continue the FTS educational offerings. FTSC applied for and was granted authority to operate under a religious exemption in July 2021. Per the regulatory process, FTSC is now seeking to operate as a degree-granting institution. The Commissioners asked questions of Ms. Gordon McCown.

Department of Academic Affairs – Office of Research and Policy Analysis – Background for 2024 Performance Accountability Report – Information Item

Chair Motz recognized Dr. Barbara Schmertz, Director of the Office of Research and Policy Analysis, who provided background information regarding the reporting requirements for the Performance Accountability Report (PAR). Institutions must submit a narrative report of 6-7 pages. Narrative reports accompany benchmarks, indicators, and measures. Commissioners may also request responses to 1-3 questions tied to their interests. They may choose one of three options:

- Option 1 – MHEC staff proceed with no tailored prompts for this reporting year.
- Option 2 – Commissioners hold an open discussion and suggest prompts.
- Option 3 – Commissioners discuss with Secretary Rai and defer to Secretary Rai on preparing the prompts.

There will be a follow-up discussion at the April Commission meeting to determine the reporting prompts for the PAR guidelines.

Commissioner Howe motioned to adopt Option 3 where the Commissioners discuss with Secretary Rai and defer to Secretary Rai on preparing the prompts. **Commissioner Burnim** seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

SHEEO Non-Credit Academy and Steering Committee – Information Item

Chair Motz recognized Dr. Emily Dow, Assistant Secretary for Academic Affairs, to present this item. Dr. Dow reported that Maryland was one of five states chosen by SHEEO (State Higher Education Executive Officers Association) to participate in a 2-year Non-Credit Academy. This initiative will help advance our existing work in non-credit workforce data collection. MHEC is looking for a Commissioner to participate in the Steering Committee. The Commissioner who volunteers will be leading the agency and state in this initiative, participating in a series of meetings. **Commissioner Aguh** volunteered to participate in the Steering Committee.

MDRC-Supported Advising Initiative with Community Colleges – Information Item

Secretary Rai reported that MDRC approached MHEC about a potential opportunity to expand existing, evidence-based, advising models that will eliminate inequities in college completion. Three community colleges will be chosen to participate in this initiative.

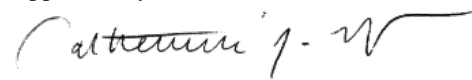
Planning for Statewide Success Summit – Fall 2024 – Information Item

Chair Motz reported that she and Commissioner Wormack attended USM's recent student success summit at Bowie State University. She would like MHEC to plan a similar summit sometime this fall. **Chair Motz** asked the Commissioners to volunteer to assist. **Commissioners Dukes and Thompson** expressed interest in helping out.

Adjournment

Commissioner Howe made a motion to adjourn the meeting, and **Vice Chair Aguh** seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at approximately 11:38 AM.

Approved by the Commission:



Catherine J. "Cassie" Motz, Chair