

Maryland Higher Education Commission
Meeting Minutes

December 6, 2023
10:00 a.m.

The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) met on Wednesday, December 6, 2023 via video teleconference (Google Meet).

Commission members present:

Catherine J. “Cassie” Motz, Chair	Rebecca Taber Staehelin
Chike Aguh, Vice Chair	Sheila D. Thompson, Ph.D.
Mickey L. Burnim, Ph.D.	Craig A. Williams, Ph.D.
Charlene Mickens Dukes, Ed.D.	Janet E. Wormack, Ed.D.
Barbara Kerr Howe	Cierra M. Robinson, Student Commissioner
Ray Serrano, Ph.D.	

Staff members present:

Sanjay Rai, Ph.D.	Emily A. A. Dow, Ph.D.
Geoffrey Newman	Soma Kedia
Lyndsay Silva, D.P.A.	Kimberly Smith Ward
Derrick Coley	Rhonda Wardlaw
Allie Edelstein	Barbara Schmertz, Ph.D.
Al Dorsett	Bryson Barksdale
Eliza Kritz	Rose Robinson
Frances Turner	Samuel Durai Pandian
Yuxin Lin, Ph.D.	Victoria Johnson
Glenda Abney	Trish Gordon McCown

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by **Chair Motz** at approximately 10:02 a.m. A meeting quorum was established with all eleven (11) members present.

Chair’s Remarks

Chair Motz asked for a motion to amend the agenda, adding recommendations from the Student Advisory Council who met and voted on them the day after our agenda was posted. **Vice Chair Aguh** motioned to add this item, and **Commissioner Taber Staehelin** seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Chair Motz thanked the institutions for their work during this busy time of year. She also thanked the staff of the Commission for their efforts, and noted that MHEC had two very

successful events recently, a virtual financial aid open house in November and a campus safety summit.

Acting Secretary's Remarks

Acting Secretary Rai thanked the faculty and staff of all postsecondary institutions for their work with students. MHEC partnered with USM (University System of Maryland) early this week to host a campus safety summit in Baltimore City. On the following day, a team from MHEC, along with Vice Chair Aguh, participated in a Peer Learning Opportunity in DC, sponsored by the Lumina Foundation, during which participants learned best practices from other states. Additionally, our Office of Student Financial Assistance has been rather active, in anticipation of changes to the FAFSA. Lastly, **Acting Secretary Rai** gave an overview of the agenda items.

Public Comments

There were no public comments.

Commission Minutes Approval

There was a motion by **Commissioner Burnim** and a second by **Commissioner Howe** for the approval of the August 9, 2023 meeting minutes. The motion was approved unanimously.

There was a motion by **Commissioner Howe** and a second by **Vice Chair Aguh** for the approval of the September 7, 2023 meeting minutes. The motion was approved unanimously.

Student Advisory Council – Recommendations Regarding 2024 Elections and Student Participation

Chair Motz recognized Dr. Emily Dow, Assistant Secretary for Academic Affairs, who asked the Chair of the Student Advisory Council, Ms. Alexis Faison, to present this item. In light of the upcoming 2024 elections, the Student Advisory Council recommends that Maryland institutions make a sustained effort to empower students to be active participants in the civic process of elections, including removing barriers that obstruct students from voting, such as:

- Reducing barriers, such as attendance requirements for the 2024-25 academic year and lack of guidance in the voting process;
- Providing resources and supports to students to participate as election judges;
- Providing accommodations and resources to out-of-state students; and,
- Generally encourage students to participate in our democratic process.

The Student Advisory Council shared some specific, actionable items for campuses to implement to support the initiatives above on a chronological timeline. These included holding voter pledge drives, increasing resources on voter education, and supporting out-of-state students in their ability to vote, among others.

In providing these actionable items and recommendations, the Council encourages institutions to create a campus culture that embraces democratic civic engagement, while acknowledging the different organizational structures and scheduling processes on campuses around Maryland. The Council would also like to see these opportunities be extended to faculty and staff, as they will be supporting the facilitation.

The Commissioners asked questions about the presentation. In summary, the Commissioners appreciate the work and the intent of the Student Advisory Council, but they do not wish to burden the institutions with additional requests, nor do they wish to duplicate the existing outreach efforts of various groups. The Commissioners request that the Student Advisory Council conduct research on the work that these other groups are already doing, whether governmental or non-profit, and attempt to collaborate and align efforts with them. The Student Advisory Council should return and present their findings at a future meeting.

Department of Finance and Administration – Office of Student Financial Assistance – FAFSA Changes: Overview and Discussion

Chair Motz recognized Mr. Geoffrey Newman, Assistant Secretary for Finance and Administration, who asked Mr. Al Dorsett, Director of the Office of Student Financial Assistance, to present this item. Mr. Dorsett shared a PowerPoint presentation, giving an overview of the FAFSA's (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) history, efforts to simplify the FAFSA, and what the new changes are. Consequently, the improved FAFSA form will be available to students and parents by December 31, 2023, much later than usual. He also gave a preview of the new online application. The Commissioners asked questions about the presentation. They also asked the agency to share a communications plan regarding these new changes.

Vice Chair Aguh made a motion to extend the Maryland deadline for the FAFSA from March 1, 2024 to June 1, 2024 and to give the agency the discretion to extend it beyond June 1, if they deem it to be appropriate. **Commissioner Burnim** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Department of Academic Affairs – Office of Research and Policy Analysis – Opening Fall Enrollment Dashboard

Chair Motz recognized Dr. Dow who asked Dr. Barbara Schmertz, Director of the Office of Research and Policy Analysis, to present this item. Dr. Schmertz gave an overview of the dashboards on our website, their features, how to find them, and their functions. The Opening Fall Enrollment Dashboard shows a recent overall increase in enrollment. Public, 4-year institutions and community colleges have seen growth. State-aided, private, independent institutions have experienced a slight decrease, however. Dr. Schmertz also shared a new dashboard that features data on students completing workforce training. The Commissioners asked questions about the presentation. **Vice Chair Aguh** expressed interest in setting up a special meeting early next year to learn about the work of the research unit.

Department of External Relations – Report on Campus Safety Summit

Chair Motz recognized Mr. Derrick Coley, Executive Director of External Relations, to present this item. Mr. Coley shared that the Campus Safety Summit, held on Monday, December 4, was a joint effort with USM (University System of Maryland). There were about 125 attendees and 34 institutions represented. Topics included best practices, the application of data and intelligence to campus safety, and student mental health, among others. The Commissioners asked questions about the Summit.

Adjournment

Vice Chair Aguh made a motion to adjourn the meeting and **Commissioner Taber Staehelin** seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at approximately 12:10 PM.

Approved by the Commission:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Catherine J. Motz', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Catherine J. "Cassie" Motz, Chair