

Maryland Higher Education Commission
Meeting Minutes

March 24, 2021
1:00 p.m.

The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) met on Wednesday, March 24, 2021 via video teleconference (GoToMeeting).

Commission members present:

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| Andrew R. Smarick, Chair | Vera R. Jackson, Ph.D. |
| Donna M. Mitchell, Vice Chair | Charles McDaniels, Jr. |
| Senchal D. Barrolle, Esq. | Sydney Miller, Student Commissioner |
| Vivian S. Boyd, Ph.D. | James B. Sellinger, Sr. |
| Lewis R. Brown, Ed.D. | Mary Pat Seurkamp, Ph.D. |
| James E. Coleman | John W. Yaeger, Ed.D. |

Staff members present:

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| James D. Fielder, Ph.D. | Emily A. A. Dow, Ph.D. |
| Geoffrey Newman | Jennifer Katz |
| Soma Kedia | Trish Gordon McCown |
| Lee Towers | Tavon Vinson |
| Karen King-Sheridan | Jacqueline Cade |
| Bryson Barksdale | Donna Thomas |

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by **Chair Smarick** at approximately 1:01 p.m. A meeting quorum was established with twelve (12) members present.

Chair's Remarks

Chair Smarick thanked the Commissioners for attending today's meeting and welcomed all guests. He expressed the hope that everyone was in good health and good spirits.

Secretary's Remarks

Secretary Fielder reported that House Bill 1/Senate Bill 1 Historically Black Colleges and Universities – Funding was to be signed by the Governor today. He also shared that Commissioner Miller had suggested the formation of a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee, which would function as a sub-committee of the Commission. **Chair Smarick** agreed with the suggestion, as did the Commissioners, and tasked Secretary Fielder to form the committee.

Public Comments

Chair Smarick recognized the team from Strayer University. Dr. Andrea Backman, Acting University President, introduced her colleagues, which included Ms. Megan Jackson, General Counsel, Ms. Lisa Sincere, Associate General Counsel, and Mr. Andrew Burmeister, Director of Government Affairs. She requested a postponement of the discussion and decision by the Commission regarding their request for a waiver from the definition of full-time faculty. Dr. Backman explained that Strayer's mission was to serve the working adult by providing flexibility and accessibility in its online programs. Ms. Sincere and Ms. Jackson both requested the additional time to further consider Strayer's request, as they believe that their institution has a unique role, mission and scope, which would warrant granting the waiver.

Commission Minutes Approval

Commissioner Jackson motioned to approve the February 24, 2021 meeting minutes, and **Vice Chair Mitchell** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Commissioner Committee Updates

Education Policy Committee: Commissioner Yaeger reported that there were no other topics of discussion recently, only the subject of Strayer University's request.

Outreach, Grants, and Financial Assistance Committee: Commissioner Jackson shared that Commissioner Miller will be joining the committee.

Finance and Operations Committee: Vice Chair Mitchell reported that she is still trying to recruit members to serve on the committee.

Department of Finance and Administration – Office of Student Financial Assistance – Final Adoption of Amendments to COMAR Financial Aid Regulations – Richard W. Collins III Leadership with Honor Scholarship Program – Action Item

Chair Smarick recognized Mr. Geoffrey Newman, Assistant Secretary for Finance and Administration, who asked Ms. Donna Thomas, Director of the Office of Student Financial Assistance, to present this item. Ms. Thomas stated that on November 18, 2020, the Commission approved for publication in the Maryland Register proposed amendments to the regulations for the Richard W. Collins III Leadership with Honor Scholarship Program. The purpose of these amendments is to clarify the definition of part-time enrollment and alter application deadline dates. The proposed amendments were published in the Maryland Register on January 15, 2021. The public comment period for the regulations ended on February 15, 2021, and no public comments were received. The proposed amendments to the regulations are ready for the Commission's final adoption. The amendments will become effective 10 days after notice of the final adoption is published in the Maryland Register.

Ms. Thomas recommended that the Commission approves for final adoption the proposed amendments to the regulations for the Richard W. Collins III Leadership with Honor Scholarship

Program. **Commissioner Coleman** made a motion to approve, and **Commissioner Sellinger** seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Education Policy Committee – Strayer University’s Request for Waiver of Full-Time Faculty Definition – Action Item

Chair Smarick recognized Commissioner Yaeger who serves as Chair of the Education Policy Committee. **Commissioner Yaeger** remarked that the Committee wants to make an informed decision and should fully consider the information that was presented earlier by Strayer University. The mission statement presented by President Backman differed slightly from the one with which they were originally provided.

Chair Smarick recognized Dr. Emily Dow, Assistant Secretary for Academic Affairs, to provide additional commentary on this topic. Dr. Dow explained the request by Strayer University to waive the definition of full-time faculty. In reviewing Strayer’s renewal application to continue operations in Maryland, MHEC staff discovered that the University was out of compliance in meeting the 1/3 full-time faculty standard (by not meeting the COMAR definition of full-time faculty). This request for a waiver must be considered by the Education Policy Committee before being moved forward to the Commission for a final decision. Although no new information was received, the Committee can take additional time to ensure that the information presented was accurate.

Chair Smarick remarked that he appreciates the efforts of the staff, but he would also like to respect Strayer’s request for a postponement of a discussion/decision by the Commission. After further discussion, **Chair Smarick** asked the Committee to review the information that was presented to them today in an effort to ensure a sound evaluation. The issue will be discussed, and a vote taken, at the next Commission meeting.

Adjournment

Commissioner Seurkamp made a motion to adjourn and **Commissioner Coleman** seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at approximately 1:33 p.m.