

Maryland Higher Education Commission
Meeting Minutes

September 13, 2021
1:00 p.m.

The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) met on Monday, September 13, 2021 at 1 p.m. via video teleconference (GoToMeeting).

Commission members present:

Mary Pat Seurkamp, Ph.D., Chair	Charles McDaniels, Jr.
Senchal D. Barrolle, Esq.	Ray Serrano, Ph.D.
Vivian S. Boyd, Ph.D.	Craig A. Williams, Ph.D.
James E. Coleman	Haleemat Y. Adekoya, Student Commissioner
Vera R. Jackson, Ph.D.	

Commission members not present:

Lewis R. Brown, Ed.D.	James B. Sellinger, Sr.
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Staff members present:

James D. Fielder, Jr., Ph.D.	Emily A. A. Dow, Ph.D.
Mae Mgbaja	Jennifer Katz
Karen King-Sheridan	Trish Gordon McCown
Yuxin Lin, Ph.D.	Soma Kedia
Jacqueline Cade	Bryson Barksdale

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by **Chair Seurkamp** at approximately 1:00 p.m. A meeting quorum was established with nine (9) of the eleven (11) members present at that time.

Chair's Remarks

Chair Seurkamp thanked the representatives of institutions present for their leadership and expressed hope that their academic year was off to a good start.

Secretary's Remarks

Secretary Fielder congratulated institutions who have made tremendous efforts to keep their campuses safe and healthy. He also praised them for remaining flexible during the pandemic.

Review Meeting Regarding a Proposal of Stevenson University to Implement a Doctor of Physical Therapy Program

Chair Seurkamp recognized Ms. Soma Kedia, MHEC's Assistant Attorney General, who will facilitate the review meeting. Ms. Kedia advised the Secretary that he will present first and be given 30 minutes, which will be divided between his initial presentation and any responsive remarks.

Chair Seurkamp recognized **Secretary Fielder** who explained that Stevenson University proposed a Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) program to which the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES), an HBI (Historically Black Institution), and the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) objected, and which he subsequently denied. The proposed program at Stevenson would unreasonably duplicate the existing doctoral programs at UMES and UMB and would cause demonstrable harm. First, he noted that he found no educational justification for the dual operation of Stevenson's proposed program that is broadly similar to UMES's unique and high-demand program. Second, he found compelling evidence regarding limited clinical placement sites in Maryland, particularly in the Baltimore-metro area. Third, national organizations suggest a saturation of the job market in physical therapy.

Additionally, Maryland has eight Physical Therapy Assistant programs, and there are 35 accredited DPT programs in the surrounding area (the four border states of WV, VA, PA and DE, plus DC). There are many similarities among the 3 programs, including the fact that each is delivered in-person. Furthermore, clinical education experiences, which are required for all DPT programs, are a challenge to secure. There is already significant competition and high demand for clinical rotation sites in Maryland. A second physical therapy program in the Baltimore area, and a third program in the state, would likely exacerbate the issues in securing clinical placement sites and impact student success and their ability to complete the program of study. Lastly, there is evidence suggesting a forthcoming national saturation of professional physical therapists, indicated a limited market need.

Chair Seurkamp recognized Stevenson University's President Elliot Hirshman who urged the Commission to consider reversing the Secretary's decision to deny their DPT program. Stevenson acknowledges the historical and current effects of discrimination that have had a negative impact on academic program development at Maryland's HBIs. Therefore, they recognize the importance of the program review process as a means to ensure equity of opportunity and prevent unreasonable program duplication. He believes that the program duplication and demonstrable harm criteria have been misapplied. Their presentation will demonstrate that their program is not unreasonable duplicative.

Dr. Meredith Durmowicz, Interim Dean of the School of Nursing and Health Professions, noted the differences between the programs at UMES and Stevenson:

- 1) Institutional mission – UMES is a public research university, while Stevenson is an independent institution focused on its student's career preparation.

- 2) Program objectives – UMES graduates “will be prepared to carry out the expanding responsibilities as autonomous healthcare providers” and Stevenson graduates “will function effectively as integral members of a multi-disciplinary health care team”.
- 3) Geographic locations – UMES and Stevenson are located approximately 145 miles from each other in distinct regions of the state.
- 4) Cohort size – Stevenson will be limiting their cohort size to 25 students, while the cohort sizes at both UMES and UMB are significantly larger.

As Stevenson’s cohort size is only 25, their program will not cause demonstrable harm to the other programs, since student demand is so great. Each year, there are about 200 academically-qualified Maryland residents who apply to DPT programs, but are not accepted into any DPT program. Additionally, Stevenson is pursuing clinical placements for its students that will not negatively impact clinical placements for UMES or UMB students. They have already identified 24 clinical entities that are willing to support clinical experiences for Stevenson students.

Dr. Susan Gorman, Executive Vice President and Provost, presented evidence of future high demand for physical therapists. The Bureau of Labor Statistics project that the national demand for physical therapists will increase 18% from 2019-2029. Maryland’s projections show that the demand for physical therapists will increase 31% from 2018-2028. Furthermore, there are now many patients who have “Long COVID”, which requires the long-term care of a physical therapist.

Ms. Antionette Marbray, Vice President of Legal Affairs, State and Federal Relations, and Strategic Planning, remarked that denying Stevenson’s DPT program will produce demonstrable harm to Maryland’s communities with disparate impact on historically-underserved communities and will limit educational access. Many of their planned clinical sites are located in communities where large portions of people identify as African-American. Stevenson University has also garnered the support of many community organizations and elected officials who recognize the importance of their program to the community. Lastly, denying their program would also harm Maryland’s students with disparate impact on historically-underserved students, as 33% of their graduate students are African-American. Historically-underserved students are already underrepresented in Physical Therapy.

President Hirshman concluded the presentation by saying that if their program is recommended for implementation by the Commission, Stevenson University stands ready to work with UMES and UMB to advance Physical Therapy education and services in Maryland and ensure that there is no demonstrable harm to existing programs.

Chair Seurkamp recognized **Secretary Fielder** for responsive remarks. He complimented Stevenson University on their collaborative nature throughout the process. However, he noted Stevenson’s comment that their program was convenient for those who were “place-bound” (and not able to easily travel to UMES). UMB’s DPT program was an option for those not able to regularly commute to UMES.

Chair Seurkamp recognized President Hirshman of Stevenson University for responsive remarks. He replied that UMB accepts a small portion of qualified applicants each year. Those who are not accepted to UMB would have another option in Stevenson.

Chair Seurkamp recognized **Commissioner Boyd** who asked what the tuition was for Stevenson's program. Dean Durmowicz responded that tuition was \$17,500 per year, plus \$3,500 in annual student fees. **Commissioner Coleman** asked how Stevenson planned to work with the other institutions, if they were permitted to implement their program. President Hirshman responded that he was open to dialogue on the matter, but did not want to make any promises at this point. **Commissioner Serrano** asked what the tuition was for UMES. President Heidi Anderson (UMES) replied that tuition was \$15,000. Other clarifying questions were asked.

Chair Seurkamp recognized UMES's President Anderson who urged the Commissioners to uphold Secretary Fielder's decision to deny Stevenson's program. Creating a third DPT program would hurt UMES by placing additional demand on already limited clinical sites. Secondly, another program would dilute their current student applicant pool. Lastly, program duplication has already hurt them previously (as an HBI). Allowing such duplication now would surely continue the harmful practice.

Dr. Michael Rabel, Chair of the Department of Physical Therapy, remarked that Stevenson would be competing with them for a declining pool of applicants. He also noted the future saturation of the job market. In addition, there is the challenge of securing clinical sites that are already limited. Lastly, there is increasing difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified faculty.

Chair Seurkamp recognized **Commissioner McDaniels** who asked what the acceptance rate was at UMES and how many qualified applicants were not accepted. Dr. Rabel responded that admissions were declining at UMES. Recently, they received 184 qualified applicants, interviewed 104, and accepted 34 students. **Commissioner Adekoya** asked what UMES was doing to advertise its program. Dr. Rabel replied that they have two open houses per year, plus monthly virtual visits. Additionally, they cooperate with other institutions to promote their program. **Commissioner Serrano** asked if UMES worked with other institutions to increase their number of clinical sites. Dr. Rabel responded that they did and, in fact, have been working recently with UMB to ensure that their programs did not negatively impact the other.

Chair Seurkamp recognized Dr. Victoria Marchese, Chair of UMB's Department of Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation Science, who noted that there is already a shortage of qualified teaching faculty. Allowing Stevenson's DPT program to be implemented would exacerbate this problem. Additionally, there is a present shortage of clinical sites. Although a site may initially express willingness to accept students, those same sites may not actually be able to provide placements later when students need it. Dr. Marchese also remarked that both schools (UMB and Stevenson) would be drawing from the same geographical region for students, as their applicants are from all over the state. Lastly, recent graduates of the DPT program are not always able to find jobs right away, with some taking as long as 6 months to obtain employment. President Bruce Jarrell (UMB) expressed his support for the Secretary's decision and requested the Commission to uphold it.

Chair Seurkamp recognized **Commissioner Boyd** who asked what happens when a student cannot secure a clinical placement. Dr. Marchese answered that it is the institution's responsibility to find placements for their students, though the process to secure one can be challenging. Other clarifying questions were asked by the Commissioners.

Commissioner Boyd made a motion to enter into a closed session and **Commissioner Jackson** seconded the motion. Ms. Kedia called the roll:

Adekoya – YES
Barrolle – YES
Boyd – YES
Coleman – YES
Jackson – YES
McDaniels – YES
Serrano – YES
Seurkamp – YES
Williams – YES

The motion was approved unanimously.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at approximately 2:37 p.m.