Ms. Krista Newkirk, Commission Chair, called the meeting to order at 11:35 AM. Ms. Newkirk welcomed all in attendance and requested a roll call of the Commission Members participating via conference call. Ms. Katie Harrison, Commission Executive Director, confirmed all participating Commission Members and Non-Commission Member College Presidents in attendance. A quorum was established.

Ms. Newkirk called on Ms. Harrison to report on the Commission Staff Update on Processes and Guidance Concerning COVID-19. Ms. Harrison reported that the Commission Staff has continued agency operations while working 90% remotely for the past four weeks. During that time, Mr. Earl
Mayo, Commission Deputy Director retired, Mr. Zachary Christian, Commission Financial Aid Counselor/IT Director was promoted to Deputy Director, and Ms. Monique Lemmon was onboarded to the staff as the Commission’s Program Coordinator. The agency has adapted functions and processes to continue working without interruption in our services for students and colleges. Ms. Harrison gave thanks to the Commission Staff for their flexibility and endurance during this time. Ms. Harrison reported that while it has been a challenge, it is one they have faced extremely well.

Ms. Harrison reported that COVID-19 related guidance has been provided to the college financial aid offices concerning flexibilities with Satisfactory Academic Progress requirements, refund timelines, and the expected increase in volume of professional judgments due to income reductions. For colleges who have implemented a pass/fail or a credit/no credit option, the Commission will accept all “pass” or “credit” options as hours earned as the Commission does not have returning GPA requirements. The Commission will work with students who receive extensions for “incompletes” to ensure they maintain grant eligibility. Timing of refunds have been adjusted to account for 30-day refund requirement. As any additional issues come up, Commission Staff will do their best to accommodate students and financial aid staff. Ms. Newkirk called for any questions, there being none, the meeting continued.

Ms. Newkirk called on Ms. Harrison to discuss the Approval of Updated 2020-2021 Maximum Tuition Grant Amount. Ms. Harrison reported that with the Legislative Session being cut short, the Commission is uncertain that the $1,130,000 in new funding for the Tuition Grants Program that had previously been approved by the House Ways and Means Committee, will be available for FY21. The Board of Economic Advisors met on April 9, 2020 and reported that the State’s existing revenue surplus will cushion much of the economic impact of COVID-19, but they revised their projections for New Recurring Funds down from $886,000,000 to $244,000,000. The Board of Economic Advisors does not anticipate revenues to decline to a point that would require any cuts to the FY20 base budgets.

Based on these projections, Commission Staff recommended that the Commission proceed with a Maximum Tuition Grant Amount less than the previously determined amount of $3,750 for the 2020-2021 academic year. Ms. Harrison presented the Commission with two voting options: Option 1) Maximum Tuition Grant Amount of $3,650, which would cost around $43,000,000 or Option 2) Maximum Tuition Grant Amount of $3,600, which would cost around $42,500,000. Ms. Harrison reminded the Commission that both options are an increase from the 2019-2020 Maximum Tuition Grant amount of $3,500. At this time, the Commission would begin FY21 with a total of $43,300,000 available funds, with no fund increases taken into consideration. These figures are based on current projections of .5% increase in eligible students for 2020-2021 over 2019-2020 enrollment numbers.

Ms. Newkirk asked for the value in carrying over $1,000,000 in carry forward funds. Ms. Harrison explained that the Commission has spent down carry forward funds, which currently has an amount of less than $500,000. Ms. Harrison reported that if the Commission voted for the $3,600 Maximum Tuition Grant Amount, the Commission may be able to provide students with a Spring 2021 supplement as previously executed for Spring 2020 semester, depending on the number of eligible students enrolled for 2020-2021. Dr. Todd Voss, Dr. Dwaun Warmack and Ms. Diana O’Bryan, a Financial Aid Counselor at Bob Jones University, made suggestions for the Commission to consider Option 2 with a Maximum Grant of $3,600, as it would be a better situation for the students and the financial aid office staff.
Ms. Newkirk called for a motion to approve the Maximum Tuition Grant Amount for the 2020-2021 Award Year as $3,600. Mr. Pettit moved to approve the 2020-2021 Maximum Grant of $3,600; Dr. Evans Whitaker seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Ms. Newkirk called for any other Old or New Business. Ms. Harrison reminded the Commission Members and College Presidents that they can expect the Agency Head Performance Surveys to go out within the next month. Ms. Newkirk reminded everyone that the next Commission Meeting is scheduled for June 16, 2020 at 10:30AM.

Ms. Newkirk adjourned the meeting at 11:59 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Ms. Monique Lemmon
Acting Secretary for
Dr. Roslyn Clark Artis, Secretary
South Carolina Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission