



SC Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission

Providing Opportunity. Promoting Choice.

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Katherine H. Harrison
Executive Director

MINUTES

South Carolina Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission Meeting
Tuesday, March 12, 2024
Virtual Meeting
Columbia, South Carolina

Commission Members Participating:

Dr. Boone Hopkins, Converse University, Chair
Dr. Gene Fant, North Greenville University, Vice Chair
Dr. Lester McCorn, Clinton College, Secretary
Mr. Keith Faulkner, Charleston Southern University
Dr. Maurice Scherrens, Newberry College
Dr. Anita Gustafson, Presbyterian College
Dr. Chad Stutz as Proxy for Dr. William Barker, Southern Wesleyan University
Dr. Nayef Samhat, Wofford College
Dr. Gregory Little, SC Commission on Higher Education, Ex-officio

Non-Commission Member College Presidents Participating:

Dr. John Dozier, Columbia College
Mr. Jeremy Whitaker, Limestone University
Mr. Scott Cochran, Spartanburg Methodist College
Dr. Ronnie Hopkins, Voorhees University

Dr. Boone Hopkins, Commission Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:30 AM. Ms. Katie Harrison, Commission Executive Director, informed participants the meeting is being transcribed and is being held in compliance with the Freedom of Information Act, welcomed all in attendance and conducted a roll call of the Commission Members. Ms. Harrison confirmed all participating Commission Members in attendance and noted that Dr. Chad Stutz is serving as proxy for Dr. William Barker, Southern Wesleyan University. A quorum was established. Ms. Harrison recognized and welcomed the non-Commission members in attendance.

Dr. Hopkins called for a motion to approve the June 20, 2023, and July 31, 2023, Commission Minutes. Dr. Lester McCorn, Commission Secretary, moved to approve the Minutes and Dr. Nayef Samhat, Wofford College, seconded the motion. There was no discussion. Dr. Hopkins put the motion to a vote which passed unanimously.

Dr. Hopkins called upon Ms. Harrison to report on 2022-2023 Program Reviews. Ms. Harrison reported on the twenty-two colleges who underwent Program Reviews for the 2022-2023 year, stating all reviews were submitted by the deadline, with two deadline extensions granted, and all have been closed. Ms. Harrison reported there were five colleges with findings program-wide with most of the findings pertaining to the requirement of returning funds to the Commission within 30 working days of the institution being notified of student ineligibility. A singular finding at an institution regarding internal reconciliation discrepancies was rectified after the program review process. Ms. Harrison thanked all participants for their work during the Programs Reviews this year.

Dr. Hopkins called on Mr. Zachary Christian, Commission Deputy Director, to report on the 2023-2024 Award Year. Mr. Christian reported that the Agency has seen an increase in the total number of applications received, total commitments made, and total grants realized in the 2022-2023 Award Year over the previous year, with a more than six percent increase in grants realized. Mr. Christian noted that for the current award year, 2023-2024, the Agency has realized grants for 12,517 students as of March 1, a four-percent increase so far over the previous year, with several Non-Traditional program certifications still pending. Mr. Christian attributes the implementation of the Agency's new student information system, *myTG*, as streamlining the certification process and enabling the Agency to send funds to students much earlier than with the prior process.

Dr. Hopkins called on Ms. Harrison to report on Agency Updates and Initiative. Ms. Harrison noted Ms. Kira Demery, Commission Program Coordinator, the Agency's newest staff member, has taken the initiative to participate in many trainings and professional development opportunities. These opportunities include attending the annual conference of the Southern Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (SASFAA) in February, where she obtained a professional certification credential through the National Association of Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA). Ms. Demery is also scheduled to attend the South Carolina Association of Financial Aid Administrators (SCASFAA) New Aid Officers Workshop in April and has applied to participate in a year-long training program for emerging leaders in state government, LeadSC, through the South Carolina Department of Administration.

Ms. Harrison reported that Ms. Gena Miles, Commission Financial Officer, has been researching and implementing more efficient ways of processing and requesting grant disbursements as part of the implementation of *myTG*. Ms. Miles has discovered ways to ensure eligible students receive their grants funding as quickly as possible after certification is complete.

Ms. Harrison acknowledged Mr. Christian's role as current President of SCASFAA, presiding over the annual conference of the Association in October, which boasted one of the highest number of attendees in recent history. Mr. Christian continues to serve on the SASFAA Executive Board as a voting member, and recently presented at the annual conference for the National Association of the State Student Grant and Aid Programs (NASSGAP).

Ms. Harrison described recently concluding her term as Past President of NASSGAP in October and being immediately appointed to a two-year term as Conference Co-Chair. As Conference Co-Chair, Ms. Harrison will plan and execute the Association's 2024 and 2025 conferences. Ms. Harrison continues to serve as part of the leadership planning team for the combined NASSGAP and State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) collaboration project to assist state agencies with their FAFSA Simplification efforts.

The Agency has been recognized by the South Carolina Department of Administration for one hundred percent of staff successfully completing professional development courses on the LinkedIn Learning platform within a 90-day period.

Ms. Harrison noted the Agency, as well as every institution of higher education in the nation, has been following FAFSA Simplification developments closely and completed all necessary steps to receive the Institutional Student Information Records (ISIR) prior to the Department of Education sending the first file on March 11. Ms. Harrison announced that through the Agency's collaboration with their student information system vendor, Nelnet Diversified Services, the first real ISIR file of 2024-2025 has been successfully received.

Ms. Harrison reported that the Agency worked diligently under the leadership of Mr. Christian, with the development team at Nelnet Diversified Services to help design, build, test, and deploy *myTG* and have the system operational for the Fall 2023 semester. Ms. Harrison noted the Agency has begun receiving student inquiries through the student portal of *myTG* and will continue to work toward utilizing all student-facing aspects of the web-based application soon.

Ms. Harrison presented upon the status of the Agency's House Legislative Oversight Committee process as still in progress. Due to unexpected delays in their review of another state agency, the House Legislative Oversight Committee has not yet begun their review of the Agency, however they are expected to begin soon. Ms. Harrison assured the Commission that all initial requests have been completed at this time.

Dr. Hopkins called upon Ms. Harrison to report on the Review of the 2024-2025 State Budget Request for Funding of the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program. Ms. Harrison stated the budget process is underway, with the House scheduled to meet during the week of March 11, and the Finance Committee of the Senate scheduled to meet during the week of April 9, 2024 to discuss the budget. Ms. Harrison reported the Agency asked for continued funding of the \$10,000,000 increase from lottery appropriations for the Tuition Grants Program realized in the past three fiscal years and requested an additional \$10,000 in funding to support the Agency's obligation to pay employee benefits.

Dr. Hopkins called upon Dr. Jeffrey Perez, President and CEO of South Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities (SCICU), to report on the 2024 Legislative Outlook. Dr. Perez began by describing Ms. Harrison's presentation of the State Budget Request to the Higher Education Subcommittee of the House Ways and Means Committee in January as very well received. Dr. Perez reported the House is deliberating upon the budget currently, with \$80,000,000 being discussed for need-based grants, a percentage of which is allotted toward the Tuition Grants Program. The House is also discussing how to use the CHE scholarship surplus of \$152,000,000, with ideas to support higher education initiatives throughout the State.

Dr. Perez thanked the Agency for all the work that they have done to process the student geocoding information internally and called upon Mr. Christian to further explain the process which the Agency has undertaken to complete the legislative district match for each student. Mr. Christian explained the process the Agency is using to anonymize student data to upload to the United States Census Bureau's website to retrieve most of the student geocoding data, with 1,300 students, or 8 percent of the student dataset which remained to be manually coded by Ms. Demery after automated processing completed due to a data mismatch with student addresses. Dr. Perez stated there were over 7,000 student letters sent to legislators last year, which was recently noted by Representative Nathan Ballentine at a Higher Education Ways and Means Subcommittee meeting as being impactful across the legislature.

Dr. Perez announced Higher Education Day for 2024 at the State House will be on Tuesday, April 9. He stressed the importance of the collaboration between SCICU, the South Carolina Technical College System, and the CHE to continue to make this event possible.

Dr. Hopkins called upon Ms. Harrison to present the Staff Recommendation for an Office Furniture Purchase of a desk for the Deputy Director's office. Ms. Harrison explained State Statute requires a vote of the governing board of the Agency to approve purchases exceeding \$1,000 for office furniture to be used in the Agency's Executive Director's or Deputy Director's offices. Ms. Harrison described the current state of the Deputy Director's desk set as partially damaged and not able to be locked for data security, as some pieces were obtained in the 1980's. Dr. Maurice Scherrens, Newberry College, moved to approve the purchase of a desk for the Deputy Director's office; Dr. McCorn seconded the motion. There was no discussion. Dr. Hopkins put the motion to a vote which passed unanimously.

Dr. Hopkins called upon Ms. Harrison to present upon a Staff Recommendation for a change to the Agency's Program Review Requirements. The Commission's current Program Review Requirements include verbiage stating, "the auditor will review computations associated with either a 20 percent random sample of student awards, or the appropriate statistical random sample, either of which should be derived from the Payment Roster Report that is available at the college via the *myTG* student information system." Ms. Harrison explained throughout the years, the random sample student award percentage has varied substantially, ranging from 1.45 percent to 42.86 percent. Ms. Harrison proposed for the Commission to create a minimum threshold for the percentage auditors choose as the appropriate statistical random sample, if the suggested 20 percent is not utilized. Dr. Hopkins requested Ms. Harrison give a recommendation for a percentage which

would be discussed by the Commission. After discussion, it was determined additional information regarding the potential impact this change would have, and Ms. Harrison agreed to collect data to present to the Commission at the next meeting, so discussion may continue. Dr. Hopkins proposed the Commission table the discussion of the proposed changes to the Agency's Program Review Requirements until the next scheduled meeting, to which there were no objections.

Dr. Hopkins called upon Ms. Harrison to present upon a Staff Recommendation regarding Initial 2024-2025 South Carolina Tuition Grant award amount. Based on the support of the initial \$20,000,000 in Lottery Funding continuing for the 2024-2025 year, the agency recommended the Maximum Grant should remain at \$4,800 for the 2024-2025 Award Year. Dr. Hopkins called for a motion to carry the Maximum Grant for 2023-2024 Award Year of \$4,800 forward to the 2024-2025 Award Year. Dr. McCorn moved to set the initial Maximum Grant at \$4,800. Dr. Anita Gustafson, Presbyterian College, seconded the motion. There was no discussion. Dr. Hopkins put the motion to a vote which passed unanimously.

Dr. Hopkins called upon Mr. Christian to present upon the discussion topic of a South Carolina Tuition Grant application submission deadline extension. Mr. Christian explained the history of the June 30 deadline policy as being initiated in the fall of 1992 by the Commission. To begin the discussion among the Commission members, Mr. Christian presented data including the number of students who submitted their Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), which is used as the application for the Tuition Grants Program, after June 30, but before September, ranging between 1,300 and 1,550 over the last five years. Mr. Christian reported the estimated cost to extend the deadline from June 30 to August 1 would be between \$5,800,000 and \$7,500,000 annually. Mr. Christian presented three options for the Commission to discuss:

1. Maintain the June 30 deadline as has been in place since the application cycle for the 1993-1994 Award Year; or,
2. Extend the application deadline from June 30 to August 1 for the 2024-2025 Award Year only, returning to June 30 effective with the 2025-2026 Award Year; or,
3. Extend the application deadline from June 30 to August 1, effective with the 2024-2025 Award Year and beyond.

After discussion among Commission members, and comments from a number of the Financial Aid Directors in attendance, Dr. Hopkins called for a motion. Dr. Keith Faulkner, Charleston Southern University moved to approve option three: to extend the application deadline to August 1, effective with the 2024-2025 Award Year and beyond. Dr. McCorn seconded the motion. No other discussion was had. Dr. Hopkins put the motion to a vote which passed unanimously. Ms. Harrison thanked the Commission for all the work they have accomplished to enact changes over the last several years which have largely impacted students and their families.

Dr. Hopkins reminded all Commission members to complete their Ethics filing by the March 30, 2024, deadline.

Dr. Hopkins asked if there was any new business. There was none.

Dr. Hopkins reminded all participants that the next meeting is scheduled for April 16, 2024, at 10:30 AM.

Dr. Hopkins adjourned the meeting at 11:38 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Ms. Kira Demery
Acting Secretary for
Dr. Lester McCorn, Secretary
South Carolina Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission