



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, June 25, 2024
Teleconference Call
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
Ms. April Baur as Proxy for Dr. Anita Gustafson, Presbyterian College
Dr. Chad Stutz as Proxy for Dr. William Barker, Southern Wesleyan University
Ms. Julie Sturgill as Proxy for Dr. Nayef Samhat, Wofford College
Dr. Maurice Scherrens, Newberry College
Mr. Keith Faulkner, Charleston Southern University

Commission Members Absent:

Dr. Gregory Little, SC Commission on Higher Education, Ex-officio

Non-Commission Member College Presidents Participating:

Dr. Nathan Copeland, Limestone University

Dr. Boone Hopkins, Commission Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:32 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 participating. Ms. Harrison confirmed all participating Commission Members in attendance. A quorum was established. Ms. Harrison recognized and welcomed the non-Commission members in attendance.

Dr. Hopkins called for a motion to approve the March 12, 2024, Commission Meeting and April 16, 2024, Special Commission Meeting Minutes. Dr. Lester McCorn, Commission Secretary, moved to approve the Minutes and Dr. Gene Fant, Commission Vice Chair, seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Dr. Hopkins called on Ms. Harrison to report on the Agency Updates. Ms. Harrison reported the Agency staff continues to participate in state, regional, and national trainings, and professional development opportunities to ensure our agency has updated and relative knowledge and skills required to successfully administer the Program. Ms. Harrison announced that Mrs. Kira Demery, Commission Program Coordinator, has been accepted by the South Carolina Department of Administration into the LeadSC Program, a year-long training program for emerging leaders in state government that will begin in September.

Ms. Harrison noted Ms. Gena Miles, Commission Financial Officer, has continued to research and implement efficiencies in the financial aspects of Tuition Grants disbursements and other financial transactions. The latest process improvement Ms. Miles has pioneered is the ability for institutions to submit Tuition Grant refunds,

when required, back to the agency electronically; eliminating the need for a paper check to be generated and sent in the mail.

Ms. Harrison stated Mr. Zachary Christian, Commission Deputy Director, is wrapping up his term as President of the South Carolina Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (SCASFAA) at the end of June 2024 and has had a very successful year. Ms. Harrison revealed Mr. Christian presided over his final Executive Board Meeting on June 11, 2024, and the Association is hosting a Virtual Training Summit under his leadership during the final week in June 2024. Ms. Harrison indicated that many of the training and professional development events held during Mr. Christian's year as President have broken recent attendance records. Mr. Christian is planning to prepare for the Financial Aid Administrator Certification (FAAC) designation through the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) later this year.

Ms. Harrison announced she is serving as Conference Co-Chair for the National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs (NASSGAP) and has been busy planning for the Association's annual conference in October 2024. Ms. Harrison announced she has secured session presenters from numerous state aid agencies in addition to notable organizations such as SHEEO, NCAN, and the Hope Center at Temple University. Ms. Harrison declared she continues to serve as part of the leadership planning team for the combined NASSGAP and SHEEO collaboration project to assist state agencies with their Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) Simplification efforts.

Ms. Harrison detailed the Agency's progress with the new Student Information System, myTG, stating that additional updates and enhancements are continuing to be made as the awarding cycle moves forward. Ms. Harrison reported the Agency began sending eligibility notification emails beginning May 8, 2024. The notification emails direct students to create and login to a myTG Student Portal Account to view their tentative eligibility status and award amount, if applicable. Ms. Harrison explained that the myTG Student Portal and myTG Financial Aid Administrators Portal both enable direct messaging with Agency Staff. If needed, a secure upload mailbox for documentation for appeal requests is available to Financial Aid Administrators and students in their Portals, rather than emailing those documents to the Commission, further strengthening the Agency's data privacy and information security posture. Ms. Harrison noted Mr. Christian and Mrs. Demery continue to meet with the Agency's representatives at Nelnet weekly to review projects nearing completion and request new functionality and features as needed.

Ms. Harrison reported upon the status of the House Legislative Oversight Committee's formal review as an ongoing effort among Agency staff, with all initial requests completed in March 2023. The Committee is currently holding its hearing with the Commission on Higher Education and is planning to begin their full review of the Tuition Grants Commission during next year's legislative cycle.

Dr. Hopkins recognized Ms. Harrison and Mr. Christian for reaching State service milestones during the 2024 calendar year. Mr. Christian is celebrating ten years as an employee of the State of South Carolina, and Ms. Harrison is celebrating twenty years as an employee of the State of South Carolina. Ms. Harrison presented the framed certificate she and Mr. Christian received from the Agency, and described the service pins they each received as a gift from the State of South Carolina.

Dr. Hopkins called on Mr. Christian to report on the 2023-2024 Award Year and provide an update on the 2024-2025 Award Year. Mr. Christian reported the Agency is seeing consistent upward trends in the number of total South Carolina Tuition Grants disbursed, and student commitments made between the 2022-2023 and the 2023-2024 Award Years. Mr. Christian disclosed the number of applications received as of the date of the meeting for the 2024-2025 academic year was 17 percent below the number of applications received at the same time in 2023 for the 2023-2024 academic year. Mr. Christian detailed possible reasons for the decrease in applications received, including the delay in the FAFSA form being released to students. Mr. Christian described the efforts the Agency is undertaking to attempt to communicate with students regarding the importance of completing an application, including expanding the Agency's social media efforts.

Dr. Hopkins called upon Ms. Harrison to review the Federal Methodology calculation for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and South Carolina Tuition Grant Eligibility. Ms. Harrison explained the Commission began utilizing the FAFSA as its application for the Tuition Grants Program in 1994, for the 1994-1995 Academic Year, which alleviated the burden on the Agency staff's need to complete manual calculations of a separate application. In using the FAFSA, Ms. Harrison explained the grant's definition of financial need is based on the federal methodology and the calculation of the information given on the form. Ms. Harrison noted the U.S. Department of Education changed the formula for the federal methodology calculation effective with the 2024-2025 award year, which also had unintended consequences for the Tuition Grants Program. Ms. Harrison announced as of June 5, 2024, 239 students were newly eligible for the Tuition Grant using the new methodology for the 2024-2025 award year, while 327 students who were previously eligible will now be ineligible using the new formula. Ms. Harrison reminded the financial aid office staff members in attendance that the Agency is continuing to work directly with their offices to make sure completed professional judgments will continue to be accepted to grant students eligibility for the Tuition Grants Program.

Dr. Hopkins called upon Mr. Christian to present the proposed changes to the Annual Eligibility Deadline Policy. Mr. Christian detailed the importance of the November 15 Eligibility Deadline Policy, which was established effective with the 1998-1999 Award Year as a safety net to prevent future reduction in student awards in the spring semester. He stressed that an eligibility deadline is necessary, however moving the deadline to January 15 would further expand access to students. Mr. Christian explained moving the eligibility deadline to January 15 would allow the colleges offering online degree programs through the Commission's Non-Traditional Program Calendar Policy additional time to ensure fall-semester eligibility for those students, as their certification deadlines often fall after the November 15 eligibility deadline. Dr. Hopkins opened the floor for discussion, and upon hearing none called for a motion to adopt the proposed change of moving the eligibility deadline from November 15 to January 15. Dr. McCorn moved to adopt the proposed changes, and Mr. Keith Faulkner, Charleston Southern University seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Dr. Hopkins called upon Mr. Christian to present the proposed recommendation from the staff for additional allowance for Spring-Only Grant Appeal Requests. Mr. Christian presented the eligibility requirement for students of enrolling at an eligible independent institution full-time during the fall semester to be eligible for the Tuition Grant for the spring semester. Mr. Christian explained the Spring-Only Grant Appeal process has historically been reserved for students who have extenuating circumstances beyond their control, which are preventing them from enrolling in an eligible independent institution in the fall semester. In an effort to continue expanding the reach of the Program to more students, Mr. Christian stated the Agency staff recommend discussing the availability of allowing additional spring-only appeals to be accepted from the financial aid office on a student's behalf through February 15, for specific cases only. Mr. Christian detailed the recommendation to add the following verbiage to the existing Spring-only Appeal policy:

A student who is beginning their initial enrollment at the college effective with the Spring semester, either as a first-time freshman or as a transfer student from a non-participating college or university, may have the college submit an appeal on their behalf, for consideration of a Spring-only grant no later than February 15. The college must provide the appropriate documentation showing that the student was not enrolled during the fall semester at an eligible participating college or university, as these students would either have the ability to potentially qualify as a mid-year transfer or, in the case of not receiving Tuition Grants during the fall, have the opportunity to submit a Spring-only Appeal Request by the Eligibility Deadline. The college must ensure all eligibility requirements are satisfied (e.g., Signed Affidavit on-file, Verification completed, etc.) prior to submitting this type of request to the Commission.

Dr. Hopkins opened the floor for discussion, and upon hearing none called for a motion to adopt the proposed change to the verbiage of the Spring-Only Grant Appeal Policy. Dr. Maurice Scherrens, Newberry College, moved to adopt the proposed changes, and Dr. McCorn seconded the motion. Prior to the Commission voting

on the motion, Mr. Christian detailed the financial aid office's submission process with the proposed changes after questions arose. Dr. Hopkins then put the motion to a vote of the Commission, which was approved unanimously.

Dr. Hopkins called upon Ms. Harrison to report upon the 2024 Legislative Session. Ms. Harrison presented information regarding a request for a continuation of the \$10,000,000 increase in Tuition Grants funding provided through the Lottery, which was approved by the House Ways and Means Committee and recommended by the Senate Finance Higher Education Subcommittee in the full Senate's version of the Fiscal Year 2025 Budget. Ms. Harrison remarked the Conference Committee had concluded their deliberations and delivered a State Budget to the Governor at the time of the meeting.

Dr. Hopkins called on Ms. Harrison to present the 2025-2026 Budget Request to the State Budget Division for the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program. Ms. Harrison stated the Tuition Grants Commission is required to submit its Budget Request to the Executive Budget Office each fall for funding in the next fiscal year. Because the Commission will not meet again before this request is to be submitted, the Budget Request for funding for the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program for 2025-2026 must be approved by the Commission at the June 2024 meeting. Ms. Harrison presented the projection that the Program can sustain the maximum grant of \$4,800 while also potentially increasing eligibility to additional students. The current funding of \$10,000,000 in lottery allocation the Commission has received each year for several years, plus \$10,000,000 in additional lottery funds included with the FY25 budget request, on top of the current recurring amounts in general funds is sufficient to fund the Tuition Grants Program at this time. Ms. Harrison noted the increase in lottery funds is not guaranteed going forward and would like to maintain the momentum of increased funding for need-based programs in asking for these funds as part of the budget process.

There are two different approaches the Commission can take when asking the General Assembly to maintain the increase in funding for the Program:

- (1) Create a request for recurring general funds (State appropriations) in the requested amount. Using this approach, the Legislature will view the request as a monetary need to sustain the increased grant amount moving forward. If approved, this would create a more stable source of funding; however, if the amount is not available in recurring funds through general State appropriations, they could opt to provide the funding once again through Lottery allocations. This option has been utilized in the past, however the request was denied.

- (2) Create an annual request for non-recurring funds at the current amount as Lottery allocations.

Dr. Hopkins called for a motion to approve the 2025-2026 Budget Request to the State Budget Division with a request for \$10,000,000 in lottery funds to be converted to recurring general funds. Dr. McCorn moved to approve the Budget Request and Dr. Fant seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Dr. Hopkins called upon Mr. Christian to report upon the upcoming due date of the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program Reviews. Mr. Christian stated all the third-party auditors that have been confirmed by the colleges have been contacted and sent the current copy of the 2023-2024 Program Review Guide, as well as the 2023-2024 Policies and Procedures Manual. Mr. Christian reported an email with specific instructions on how to access the various reports in myTG for the auditors had been sent on May 22, 2024.

Dr. Hopkins announced the Rotation of the Tuition Grants Commission members for the 2024-2025 Commission. As scheduled, Mr. Keith Faulkner, Dr. Nayef Samhat, Wofford College, and Dr. Maurice Scherrens, are rotating off the Commission. Presidents rotating on to the Commission according to the Rotation Schedule are Dr. John Dozier, Columbia College, Dr. Ernest McNealey, Allen University, and Dr. Natalie Harder, Coker University. Due to the elected officers remaining on the Commission, there was not a change in leadership of the Commission.

Dr. Hopkins called upon Ms. Harrison to present an update on the State Ethics Commission Report filing. Ms. Harrison reminded all Commission members, as well as the Presidents rotating on to the Commission, the Statement of Economic Interest Report with the State Ethics Commission is required to be completed annually. Ms. Harrison noted that in the case of the incoming members of the Commission, the report must now be filed prior to the date on which they are appointed, which is July 1.

Dr. Hopkins asked if there was any new business, and upon hearing none, called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Dr. Scherrens moved to adjourn the meeting. Dr. McCorn seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. Dr. Hopkins adjourned the meeting at 11:33 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

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