

**R. Wes Hayes, Jr.**  
Chairman

**Dr. Gregory D. Little**  
Acting President and Executive Director



June 21, 2024

The Honorable Timothy A. "Tim" McGinnis  
Subcommittee Chair, Education and Cultural Affairs Subcommittee  
South Carolina House  
530D Blatt Building  
Columbia, SC 29201

Dear Chairman McGinnis:

The SC Commission on Higher Education is providing information in response to a few questions sent in the fall from the Education and Cultural Affairs Subcommittee. In September 2023, the Subcommittee sent the CHE a list of questions to answer. A few of those questions needed the input of the Commission members. At the November 2023 full Commission meeting, the Commissioners discussed responses to the Subcommittee's questions. Originally, the CHE planned to present this information to the Subcommittee in early winter 2024 and then in Spring 2024 at one of its meetings. However, the topics of that presentation changed per request of the Subcommittee. Instead, the Commission is providing the information in writing.

The Subcommittee asked the following question:

*The statute governing membership on the CHE board does not provide for student representation. Would the CHE be amenable to adding a student member?*

- *If no, please explain the drawbacks of student representation.*
- *If yes, please explain the benefits of student representation.*

In their November 2, 2023, meeting, the members decided having a single student representative on the Commission would not be the best way to involve the student perspective. Many members explained that Boards of Trustees at institutions have a student representative who provides insight to the student perspective at that institution. For example, the University of South Carolina has the Student Body President as their student representative. For a coordinating board of 33 two-year and four-year institutions, one student could not provide a statewide perspective as student perspectives are too varied throughout the state. The Commission expressed interest in having more student feedback though either through re-activating the Student Advisory Group or having a student provide their perspective on a regular basis at a Commission meeting.

The Subcommittee also asked the following question:

*According to an AP article published on September 15, 2023, West Virginia University (WVU) President E. Gordon Gee, told faculty earlier this year that higher education nationwide has become arrogant and isolated, warning that without change, schools face "a very bleak future."<sup>1</sup> The university has since decided to cut 28 majors and 143 faculty positions after completing a formal review of programs and departments.*



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- *The American Association of University Professors defines financial exigency as an “imminent financial crisis which threatens the survival of a college or university as a whole.”<sup>2</sup>*
- *Appendix A provides process and outcomes documents related to WVU’s review of programs and departments [See Pg. 15]. Review the university’s evaluation process and provide feedback regarding the feasibility of South Carolina’s higher education institutions implementing a similar review strategy.<sup>3</sup>*
- *Does the CHE have the resources to develop a programs and departments review process template for the state’s higher education institutions to consider for implementation?*
  - *If so, is there any reason why the CHE could not lead the development and promotion of this tool?*


The Commissioners discussed the concept of the West Virginia University program review at both its Committee on Strategic Initiatives and Engagement meeting on November 1, 2023 and at its full meeting on November 2, 2023. Commissioners agreed that program evaluation is critical and that institutions should review programs regularly. They discussed the contextual differences in regards to the CHE being a state coordinating body and West Virginia University being an individual institution. They also discussed the differences in the two states in regards to higher education and economic development, stating specifically the strong position South Carolina has economically. Even though no consensus was reached, a few Commissioners argued for the CHE to have more authority over academic programs, including termination authority. Commissioners referenced the biennial report the CHE completes regarding program productivity but recognized that the CHE has a limited role in this analysis.

In the fall, the Subcommittee also asked the CHE to:

- *Discuss how the state’s higher education system will reckon with the exponential changes occurring in higher education absent an immediate shift from the current paradigm;*

Commissioners discussed the topic at its November 2, 2023 meeting. The Commissioners reiterated that institutional Boards of Trustees are responsible for their institutions’ financial solvency and are diligent in financial monitoring. In discussing possible enrollment changes in South Carolina, the Commissioners agreed that the state has the opportunity to plan for any future changes due to the state’s strong economic position and its workforce focus. The Commissioners also referred to the higher education study proposed by the Governor and supported by the House of Representatives proposed budget which will address the higher education paradigm in the state. The Commissioners also discussed potential actions it could take in planning for enrollment changes in SC. They discussed monitoring key financial indicators for each institution and developing potential red flags to prompt further analysis. They also discussed prioritizing program productivity analysis and monitoring productivity on an annual or twice annual basis.

Sincerely,



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Acting President and Executive Director