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 STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF FLORIDA
 BOARD OF GOVERNORS
 TALLAHASSEE, FL
 August 26, 2022

*Video or audio archives of the meetings of the Board of Governors
 and its Committees are accessible at <http://www.flbog.edu/>.*

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1. Call to Order and Opening Remarks

Board Chair Lamb convened the meeting on August 26, 2022, at 9:30 a.m. with the following members present: Governors Cerio, Corcoran, Diaz, Edge, Frost, Gabadage, Jones, Jordan, Levine, Lydecker, Mateer, Michael, Scott, and Stermon.

Board Chair Lamb commented that Board staff worked hard on the accreditation report provided to the Board and thanked university presidents, provosts, and other university staff who participated in this effort. He noted the universities' participation in the accreditation research demonstrates why Florida is the top university system in the country.

Chair Lamb also welcomed the new Faculty Senate Chair, Dr. Deanna Michael, to the Board. He stated Dr. Michael is an Associate Professor of Higher Education and Policy, and teaches undergraduate courses on diversity and the social foundation of education at USF. Dr. Michael thanked Chair Lamb for the welcome saying she was happy to serve as the Board's representative for the faculty members.

2. Public Comment

There were no requests for public comment

3. Intellectual Freedom and Viewpoint Diversity 2022 Survey

Chancellor Criser presented the results of the Intellectual Freedom and Viewpoint Diversity Survey for 2022. He explained that section 1001.706 (13)(b), Florida Statutes, requires an annual assessment of the intellectual freedom, viewpoint, and diversity of students, faculty, and staff at each institution and for the Board to compile and publish those assessments each year by September 1. Chancellor Criser reported the employee and student surveys were developed and administered in collaboration with the Florida College System. He noted the student survey was delivered to more than 368,000 students, and 8,835 (2.4%) students responded. He reported that student response rates varied from .6% to 12.1% by institution. Chancellor Criser reported the employee survey was delivered to 98,000 employees, and 9,238 (9.4%) employees responded. He explained that employee response rates varied from 6% to 21.6% by institution. Chancellor Criser indicated this was

the first attempt to survey all students and employees. He thanked staff from the Board and the universities for their work on the survey.

Governor Michael thanked all who worked on the survey and commented that the faculty is interested in student experiences and the campus atmosphere. She noted that faculty expressed concern about the security of the survey and would like to see each institutional review board's process followed.

Board Chair Lamb stated this survey was an essential first step.

Chancellor Criser noted that the report would be available on the Board's resources webpage by September 1.

4. Postsecondary Education Institution Accreditation

Chair Lamb introduced postsecondary education institution accreditation as the next item on the agenda and noted the extensive information on accreditation in the meeting materials. He thanked Governor Levine for leading the charge in many conversations on accreditation and asked that he lead this discussion on accreditation.

Governor Levine thanked the Board staff and acknowledged the enormous work done over the past few months. Governor Levine began by explaining that, while the standards for accreditation are essential, the goal of Florida institutions has always been to go beyond the standards. He mentioned that this focus on excelling above the standards brought the University of Florida into the top five universities, Florida State University into the top 20 universities, and recognition of the University of Central Florida as the fastest-rising university.

Governor Levine noted that in 2010 when Rick Scott was elected the Florida Governor, the institutions had had a 15% tuition increase over the previous three years. He observed that tuition increases contributed to students leaving college with high levels of debt and some without a degree. Governor Levine stated that universities had planned to increase tuition annually until 2019 for Florida to match the national average. He explained the Board's policy took a different direction and focused on reducing student debt, faster graduation, and employment after graduation. Governor Levine reported that prepaid tuition went from \$14,600 in 2006 to almost \$50,000 in 2011. He also explained the top award for the Bright Futures Scholarship decreased from \$3,700 to \$3,000 and that scholarships were changed in 2009 to a fixed amount. Governor Levine said the Board started to use performance funding, stopped increasing tuition, and looked at student outcomes. He explained that as a result, in 2014, \$200 million in prepaid tuition was refunded to 18,000 families, and the cost of prepaid tuition was reduced for 22,000 additional families. Governor Levine reported the average student debt decreased to \$2,100, and 75% of students do not require loans. He observed that with financial aid, the total cost of a degree in Florida is \$3,020, down from almost \$15,000 in 2015.

Governor Levine said state universities in Florida and accreditation bodies are looking for options. He explained the federal government rule change in 2020 allowed universities and accreditors to have options. Governor Levine noted the Florida system has some of the highest ranking and fastest rising universities and, therefore, is attractive to accreditors. He emphasized that the choice of accreditor is up to the universities, and the Board wants to support their choices. Governor Levine recognized Dr. Christy England, Vice Chancellor of Academic and Student Affairs, to present the report.

Dr. England started by highlighting the activities and efforts to produce the accreditation report provided in the meeting materials. She noted the ongoing collaboration with the universities, the Florida College System, and staff from the various accreditors. Dr. England reported that throughout this process, Board staff met regularly with the accreditation liaisons from the 12 state universities and colleagues at the Florida College System. She also explained the accreditation liaisons spent considerable time outside the regular meetings collecting and analyzing much of the information provided in the report. Dr. England recognized the outstanding contributions of staff from all the accreditors. She noted each made themselves readily available for meetings, emails, and phone calls and expressed her gratitude to them for their assistance. Dr. England also acknowledged the outstanding effort of the Board staff who contributed to this effort.

Dr. England then introduced the types of accreditors that were previously referred to as regional and national. She explained that national accreditors focus on institutions with particular missions, such as vocational or technical schools, faith-based institutions, or fully online institutions. She then explained that regional accreditors focus more on comprehensive institutions like those that comprise the State University System. Dr. England noted in July 2020, federal law changed to allow regional accreditors to accredit institutions outside their traditional regions or boundaries. As a result of the change in law, Dr. England reported the U. S. Department of Education now refers to all recognized accreditors as "institutional accreditors." She noted, however, that she would use the term "regional" throughout the presentation because it helps to focus on the accreditors most appropriate for consideration by the state universities.

The regional accreditors Dr. England reviewed were the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), the Middle States Commission of Higher Education (MSCHE), the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE), the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC). Dr. England reported the three largest regional accreditors are the HLC, SACSCOC, and MSCHE. She reported from staff conversations with the regional accreditors that all are interested in growth and expansion beyond their traditional regions in light of the 2020 federal rule change. However, Dr. England stated that they were not all planning to grow at the same pace and that their respective governing boards direct growth. She explained that HLC, MSCHE, and WSCUC are

planning for substantive growth with support and direction from their respective boards. Dr. England reported that NECHE and NWCCU plan to expand their membership at a more moderate pace based on their current size and staffing resources.

Dr. England reported that with Florida ranked number one in the country for higher education and with several of the Florida universities nationally ranked, combined with the Board's emphasis on excellence, it was essential to identify where other nationally recognized institutions were accredited. She reported that HLC, SACSCOC, and MSCHE accredited most of the public universities in the top 100 of the U.S. News and World Report rankings and that most of the public universities in the Association of American Universities were accredited by HLC and WSCUC.

Next, Dr. England explained the university liaisons compared the SACSCOC standards to the accreditation standards of the other regional accreditors. She noted the standards used by all accreditors recognized by the U.S. Department of Education must meet specific minimum requirements. Dr. England further clarified that every accreditor's standards emphasize student success and quality and that any given university, especially those nationally recognized, achieves higher levels of excellence and quality by exceeding the requirements of the accreditor's standards. Dr. England clarified that accreditors review every aspect of a university, including governance, administration, faculty, curriculum, resources, and student support services. Dr. England reported there might be differences or nuances in how standards are articulated or evaluated during a review, but that the standards across all regional accreditors were generally comparable. She noted the universities would work closely with prospective accreditors and consultants to understand the standards and demonstrate how they would be met.

Dr. England indicated that Board staff worked closely with the university accreditation liaisons to estimate the cost of being accredited. Based on the information provided by each university, Board staff estimated the 12 state universities spend an average of \$11 to \$13 million annually. Dr. England explained that most of those expenditures were for university personnel, meeting reporting requirements, hosting review teams for site visits, and other expenses depending upon where the university was in the accreditation cycle. She reported that in terms of the dollars provided directly to SACSCOC, the state universities pay an average of \$220,000 to \$250,000 annually, primarily for annual dues.

Dr. England noted that as universities transition to a new accreditor, university expenses would increase while universities maintain their current accreditation with SACSCOC and apply for membership with another accreditor.

Dr. England also reported Board staff worked closely with staff from the regional accreditors to estimate how a change in accreditors would likely impact the cost to

the universities. She explained that the total amount paid to any one accreditor for a complete accreditation cycle ranged from approximately \$2 million to \$6.5 million, with most of the dollars paid for the annual dues. Dr. England noted the variation in dues results from different calculations used by each accreditor, which is outlined in more detail in the report.

Dr. England clarified that though there are differences in the estimated fees for a complete accreditation cycle, the amount paid to any given accreditor represented only about one to two percent of the total accreditation-related expenditures.

Dr. England next described that in terms of the total overall cost to the universities, the Board staff does not anticipate any significant increase in expenses system-wide after the transitions have been completed.

Dr. England provided a high-level overview of the five regional accreditors. The accreditors vary in size and scale and all accreditors have standards designed to emphasize quality and student success. In terms of national competitiveness, she reported that HLC, MSCHE, and WSCUC have the highest concentrations of institutions in national leadership positions.

Dr. England reiterated that all accreditors are planning for growth and expansion beyond their traditional regions, with HLC, MSCHE, and WSCUC preparing to grow more quickly and substantively as compared to NECHE and NWCCU, which are smaller. She explained if the state universities are interested in seeking accreditation from the same accreditor, everyone must understand and acknowledge the plans and capabilities of the various accreditors. She said it was also essential to recognize that Florida's universities and colleges are not the only institutions seeking a change in accreditors. Dr. England explained the president and staff of each accreditor are working very closely with their respective governing boards and members to determine the extent to which they can grow and how quickly. She mentioned the universities need to take this into consideration.

Next, Dr. England explained that all the accreditors have, or will soon have, accelerated accreditation processes for currently accredited universities in good standing with their current accreditor. She explained that this was something that the university's accreditation liaisons identified early on as a critical component of the review.

In addition, Dr. England noted that if there is interest on the part of the universities in the State University System and the colleges in the Florida College System to have all of the public institutions in Florida accredited by the same accreditor, most of the colleges in the Florida College System would not be eligible for accreditation by WSCUC. She explained that WSCUC primarily accredits comprehensive institutions

that award bachelor's level degrees and higher. Dr. England mentioned a separate agency, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, accredits institutions that primarily award associate degrees. She stated it would not be possible to keep all institutions together if the leadership of the institutions in both systems believed that to be an essential goal.

Chair Lamb reiterated the importance of the full report and opened the discussion up to the university presidents and board chairs.

Presidents from Florida Atlantic University, Florida Gulf Coast University, Florida International University, Florida Polytechnic University, Florida State University, New College of Florida, the University of Central Florida, the University of North Florida, the University of Florida, and the University of South Florida stated that HLC would be a good option for their universities.

In addition, Chair Levine of the Florida Atlantic University Board of Trustees and Chair Lawson from the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University Board of Trustees noted they were also interested in HLC.

Governor Diaz asked if there was a ranking to the recognized accreditors from the U.S. Department of Education. Dr. England responded the Board staff had not identified evidence of a ranking of accreditors by the U.S. Department of Education. Governor Levine explained that when a university voluntarily chooses an accreditor, the Board assumes that all accreditors recognized by the U.S. Department of Education are high-quality.

Governor Silagy thanked the Board staff, the Chancellor, and Governor Levine for their work on the report. Governor Silagy noted the System has been ranked first in the country for over half a decade. He commented that the institution's accreditor should reflect a culture of continuous improvement and innovation and encouraged presidents and board chairs to converse with multiple accreditors.

Board Chair Lamb said it is prudent for organizations to look closely at prospective partners. He remarked on the importance of listening to university presidents and the responsibility of the Board to provide comprehensive, data-driven information.

Governor Levine moved to accept the presentation from Board staff along with the recommendation that the universities have a choice of accrediting bodies from which to choose, that we have vetted and offer them in accordance with the discussions that have been had leading up to today, and that we turn it back over to the universities for them to move forward. Governor Silagy seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously.

Dr. England provided information on the next steps. When a university is planning to change accreditors, the university must notify the U.S. Department of Education of the intent to change and outline the rationale for making a change. Next, the university must submit accreditation-related documents to the U.S. Department of Education. Once the U.S. Department of Education reviews the request and accreditation materials, the Department determines whether to approve the request and then informs the university of its decision. Dr. England noted if the Department approves the request, the university may apply to the new accreditor. If the new accreditor accepts the university, the acceptance letter must be forwarded to the U.S. Department of Education. If the U.S. Department of Education acknowledges receipt of the acceptance letter, the university may sever ties with its current accreditor. Dr. England explained this last step of the process with the U.S. Department of Education ensures that students do not lose access to federal financial aid funds during the transition.

Dr. England presented a timeline, noting the years of the next reaffirmation or fifth-year review for each state university. She explained that each university must initiate the change process in the year following the fifth-year review or reaffirmation and that the University of Central Florida and Florida Polytechnic University would be the first institutions to initiate the change. She noted that as the universities move through this process, Board staff will work closely with them and provide the Board with regular updates. Dr. England mentioned that as part of that process, Board staff will also continue to meet with the provosts and accreditation liaisons regularly.

5. Consent Agenda

Governor Silagy moved to approve the items on the consent agenda. Governor Jordan seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously.

6. Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

Chair Lamb announced that the next Board meeting is scheduled for September 13 and 14, 2022, at UWF. Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:38 a.m.

Brian Lamb, Chair

Vikki Shirley,
Corporate Secretary