

ARKANSAS HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING BOARD
Special Meeting
April 24, 2008

Minutes of Meeting

The Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board held a special meeting on Thursday, April 24, 2008 at the Forrest City Civic Center. The purpose of the meeting was to give Coordinating Board members and Presidents/Chancellors an opportunity to discuss possible changes to the academic program review policy and processes. The meeting convened at 4:00 p.m. with a quorum present.

Coordinating Board present:

Dick Trammel, Chair
David Leech, Vice Chair
Dr. Lynda Johnson, Secretary
Dr. Charles Allen
Dr. Joe Bennett
Phil Ford
Dr. Dan Grant
Steve Luelf

Coordinating Board absent:

Bob Burns
Jodie Carter
Kaneaster Hodges
Dr. Anne Trussell

Department staff present:

Dr. Jim Purcell, Director
Dr. Steve Floyd, Deputy Director
Dr. Karen Wheeler, Associate Director for Academic Programs
Cynthia Moten, Coordinator of Academic Programs
Dale Ellis, Communications Officer
Nichole Abernathy, Administrative Support

Chairman Trammel thanked Coordinating Board members for participating in the meeting. With no formal agenda, Chairman Trammel stated that no action would be taken at the informal meeting.

After reviewing the history of existing academic program reviews, the board considered the current levels of productivity that have been established as standards for the state.

Dr. Karen Wheeler reviewed the history of the review process, and explained how that review process works. Arkansas Code Annotated 6-61-214 directs the board to establish standards for program production and to periodically review programs with the goal of program improvement. Although initially those reviews were conducted by ADHE for reporting to the board, Dr. Wheeler said that budget and staffing changes that occurred in 1997 required that those reviews be conducted internally by the institutions and reported to ADHE.

Dr. Jim Purcell said that the need exists to strengthen AHECB oversight of academic programs to encourage degree productivity, assure quality, and encourage time to degree. “When I first heard about the 3-2-1 threshold, I thought that is odd,” Dr. Purcell said. “How can you assure a sufficient level of productivity with the threshold set so low?” (The 3-2-1 threshold is the current level of productivity that requires an average of three degrees annually over a five-year period at the associate and bachelor’s degree level, an average two degrees annually at the master’s degree level, and an average one degree at the doctorate level for each new program approved.)

Dr. Purcell suggested that the current threshold is far too low to encourage true degree productivity and needs to be reconsidered with an eye toward setting those thresholds to a level more conducive to enhanced degree production. “If you look at the five year average for each program, you get a good picture of how productive each program is,” he said. “We can determine from this if some of these programs truly serve the needs of the students and of the state.” Dr. Purcell said that, just because certain programs may not be meeting productivity levels – that doesn’t mean the programs aren’t needed. “We don’t want to take an engineering program or physics program that produces a badly needed skill set for the state,” he said, “but we do want to examine those programs and come up with ways to make them more productive. “What I’d like to propose is that we get a group of people together to examine the academic program review process and to determine areas in which there is agreement on improving criteria and processes,” he said.

Dr. Lynda Johnson called for a dialogue with the institution officials. “This is something I’d like to hear from you,” she said. “What do you think? What works for you?”

Dr. Becky Paneitz, President of Northwest Arkansas Community College, said a lot of thought goes into program offerings. “We look at the programs and try to determine if there’s a need in our community, if there’s an interest among our citizens, and a need in our local industry. Then we work to develop these programs.” But that process, she said, doesn’t always work. “We have begun programs to find out that the interest isn’t there. One of the problems we have is we don’t have money for new program start-ups. So we go out into the community, talk to businesses, to find out what the needs are and to try and meet those needs.” Dr. Paneitz said those programs must be constantly reviewed to ensure that they remain relevant to the needs they were created to meet. Often times, Dr. Paneitz said, needed programs are under-funded and it becomes difficult to find sufficient funding for those programs, even though research indicates the programs are needed. That lack of funding often makes it difficult to make changes in programs to make them more attractive to students and more relevant to the area of business or industry the programs are designed to address.

Dr. Jeff Olson, President of North Arkansas College, said measures of success at the community college level are often difficult to quantify. “We have a lot of

welding programs that are always full,” he said. “I got a call from a student recently who is making \$3,000 a week working on a pipeline, which is a pretty good wage by any standards. The only problem is that he didn’t graduate the program because he got the job he wanted. Is he a success? I suppose that depends on what standard you use to define success.” Dr. Olson noted that, especially at the community college level, considering the mission those institutions fill, a one size fits all solution may not be the most advantageous solution to pursue.

Dr. Larry Williams, Chancellor of ASU-Newport, said programs in higher education are constantly under federal review for quality standards, and asked that the board consider using the processes and procedures that are currently in place, and require the institutions to report periodically to the board. “I don’t think anyone minds adjusting the level,” he said. “But I would ask that you allow us to adjust those levels internally to account for the differences in each institution. Every institution is different and serves a different mission.” Dr. Williams said any close examination of the programs offered in the state would demonstrate that Arkansas is getting a tremendous amount of service for the money that is spent on higher education.

Dr. Wheeler stated that there’s a great deal of activity out there as the institutions work to ensure the programs they offer are effective. The question is, are we getting what we need? The biggest question is, what are we getting from it at this point?

David Leech suggested that the internal reviews still be conducted but the board might consider setting the timetable for them. The matter will be considered by the full board at its meeting tomorrow in Marianna, but is likely to be considered in greater depth at the July meeting.

“This was a good conversation,” said Dr. Purcell, as the meeting wrapped up. “Knowing is half the battle and through these conversations, we’ll know more about what we’re facing, where we want to go, and how to get there.”

With no further comments, the meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

Nichole Abernathy

APPROVED:

Dr. Lynda Johnson, Secretary