Higher Education Workgroup

Meeting Minutes

January 29, 2025
1pm-2pm

Virtual Meeting

Attendees: Dr. Andrea Cantora, Ainsley Moench, Amanda Owens, Dr. Charles Adams, Danielle Cox , Emily Hainze, Dr. Frances Tracy-Mumford, Gordon Pack, Initia Lettau , Jamel Freeman, John Feaster III , John Griffin, Dr. Judith Lichtenberg, Karen Jones, Kelly Gilliss, Meredith Conde, Rose Dailey, Ramieka Robinson, Dr. Stephen Steurer

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I. Call to Order

Dr. Andrea Cantora called the meeting to order at 1pm.

II. Introductions

The group introduced themselves.

III. Overview of Purpose

Dr. Andrea Cantora went over the purpose of the Prison Education Delivery Reform Commission as well as the role of the Higher Education Workgroup. The Commission will recommend a better delivery model of prison education and career and workforce training. The Higher Education Workgroup will focus on higher education issues, including expanding access, and report their recommendations to the Commission.

IV. Data Discussion

Dr. Andrea Cantora asked if there was data on how many incarcerated individuals had a GED and thus would be eligible to take college classes. Dr. Judith Lichtenberg asked what it meant for a GED score to indicate a test taker is “college ready.” Danielle Cox that if a test taker scores a certain number on the GED, they may be eligible to earn college credit. Any incarcerated individual with a high school diploma or GED can go to college programs. Meredith Conde added that, at Goucher College, incarcerated individuals can take college preparatory classes. Danielle Cox said she would be able to get the data on those with a high school diploma or GED.

Dr. Andrea Cantora shared that there are five colleges currently in Maryland prisons serving 300 students. Wor-Wic Community College will cease operations in prisons at the end of the semester due to a lack of funding. Towson University is starting up a new program, and the Workgroup should look into some of the challenges of operating and growing college prison programs.

Dr. Stephen Steurer mentioned that incarcerated individuals may have to choose between vocational training, college, and employment with Maryland Correctional Enterprises, which pays more than the other options.

Dr. Judith Lichtenberg asked if there was information about how many incarcerated individuals are interested in college programming. Dr. Andrea Cantora replied that there is a waiting list for the Second Chance College Program, but that waiting list does not represent all students who are interested in attending college. Dr. Stephen Steurer asked if there was a way to survey the incarcerated population to see who may be interested. Danielle Cox responded that it may be possible.

Gordon Pack mentioned that there is a diverse population who may be interested in different types of programming, and some incarcerated individuals may need an incentive to attend college. Maryland Correctional Enterprises pays incarcerated individuals at the highest rate. Emily Hainze replied that Georgetown students are paid $2 per day to attend college.

Andrea Cantora talked about how it is difficult to obtain space for programming. Some students may earn diminution credits upon completing an associate's or bachelor's degree, but it is limited by certain offenses. The group should look into the exact amount of credits given in Maryland. Dr. Stephen Steurer said that a variety of states offer large amounts of time off of a sentence for completing programs, and Maryland is on the lower end. Gordon Pack added that only for lifers or suspended life sentences does completion of programming affect a parole decision, but for everyone else, it affects the mandatory release date.

John Griffin said that there are a lot of incarcerated individuals who are interested in participating in college, but they may not have the self-confidence to do so. If they were given more information about what goes into being a college student, they may be more inclined to apply.

Dr. Stephen Steurer gave some context about historic practices. Until 1994, Pell Grants were available and there were 1,000 students. Off-campus programs were available. Over time, programs lost space, staffing decreased, and funding decreased. Most states that are successful at providing college programming have state funds dedicated to that programming.

Dr. Judith Lichtenberg asked if the group should advocate for providing state funds to college programming. Dr. Andrea Cantora replied that Pell Grants do not cover the full cost of a program. They do not cover the full cost of tuition for most state and private four year schools, and schools must provide staffing, supplies, and technology. Goucher and Georgetown rely on external private funding to cover the cost of running programs. The second biggest issue is unavailability of space, as programs cannot grow or be sustained if there is not enough funding or space.

Meredith Conde talked about Goucher's solution to space issues. Goucher College is planning to go full-time within the next five years, so they are installing two trailers to hold classes at the women's facility, funded by federal grants. Andrea Cantora mentioned that she would like to investigate different spaces that programming can be held at during prison visits. Meredith Conde added that, because trailers cannot be installed at the men's prison due to environmental issues, they are using classrooms in the Chapel. More space may be able to be found if prisons get creative about using spaces. Dr. Andrea Cantora added that in 2017 at JCI, Anne Arundel Community College and the University of Baltimore were able to do programming in a housing unit, which allowed for uninterrupted programming. However, they were not able to continue due to pretrial detention being moved to JCI.

Dr. Stephen Steurer said that he and Ainsley Moench have been doing research into other state models. The availability of programming is not always influenced by state politics.

Karen Jones said that her dream for college programming would be to better incentivize students with pay and sentence reduction. Many incarcerated individuals have financial obligations. Meredith Conde agreed and said that part of Goucher's plan to provide full-time programming involves providing competitive payment and the ability to get a degree within two years instead of four or five. Dr. Andrea Cantora added that lots of students are working in the day and doing evening classes as full time students. The workgroup should look at different state models around incentives, space, and different ways of serving students outside of the traditional classroom setting. A survey should be conducted to gauge interest in programming.

Dr. Judith Lichtenberg asked if there could be information about colleges put on tablets. Andrea Cantora replied that Bowie State has done so.

Ainsley Moench said that the workgroup will meet on the last Thursday of the month from 1-2pm.

Dr. Frances Tracy-Mumford asked if Dr. Andrea Cantora could put together something that describes the funding issues that colleges face coming into the prisons.

Dr. Andrea Cantora ended the meeting by saying that the areas the Higher Education Workgroup would focus on are state funding, space, and incentives.

The meeting ended at 2:01pm.