# Higher Education Workgroup

# Meeting Minutes

**April 24, 2025**
**1pm-2pm**

**Virtual Meeting**

**Attendees:** Amanda Owens, Dr. Andrea Cantora, Ainsley Moench, Anita Wiest, Dr. Charles Adams, Danielle Cox, Dr. Elyshia Aseltine, Gordon Pack, Jamel Freeman, John Feaster III, John Griffin, Dr. Judith Lichtenberg, Karen Esterque, Meredith Conde, Richard Gibson, Rose Dailey, Ruschelle Reuben, Dr. Stephen Steurer.

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## I. Welcome

The meeting was called to order at 1pm.
The April 3, 2025 meeting minutes were approved.
Workgroup members introduced themselves.

## II. HB 877 Updates

Ainsley Moench gave an update on HB 877. The bill extends the commission's sunset date to 2029. An interim report and a final report will still be completed this year. Dr. Steurer, workgroup chairs, and Ainsley Moench are developing a long-term strategic plan with concrete milestones for the Commission.

## III. Site Visit Updates

The scheduled site visits for April and May are being rescheduled to July to allow Secretary Scruggs or an assistant secretary, along with legislators, to join. New dates are being coordinated.

## IV. Report back from Bowie State Inaugural HBCU Prison Education Summit and National Alliance for Higher Education in Prison

Dr. Charles Adams gave an update on the first Bowie State Inaugural HBCU Prison Education Summit. The Summit was held from April 4-6th and had 220 registrants and 130 attendees. Around 20 HBCUs attended the conference and indicated interest in creating higher education in prison (HEP) programs. Bowie State is providing technical assistance to a cohort of five HBCUs

to create HEP programs. They will begin meeting in September and report back on their progress at the next annual conference. Planning for the 2026 conference is underway.

Anita Wiest asked if the University of Maryland Eastern Shore attended the conference, as they are interested in creating a HEP program for Eastern Correctional Institution. Dr. Charles Adams replied that they were in attendance. Danielle Cox mentioned that she has previously spoken with UMES representatives about the approval process but has not received any follow-up. The HEP approval process can take up to a year and a half. Dr. Charles Adams clarified that UMES is not part of the five HBCUs in the cohort, and that the cohort includes colleges and universities from other states. Dr. Andrea Cantora added that the approval process has to be completed by the college, and it is a long process.

Anita Wiest stressed the importance of having a HEP program at ECI. Dr. Stephen Steurer added that Wor-Wic Community College is pulling out of having a HEP program due to a lack of resources.

## V. University System of Maryland statewide collaboration

Dr. Andrea Cantora discussed the University System of Maryland's (USM) efforts in the HEP space. UMES is part of the USM, which is working to create a statewide support system for HEP programs that involves startup funding. USM created a report on HEP programs in Maryland that highlights current efforts and goals for the future; however, the goals rely on funding. Danielle Cox mentioned that USM has created an umbrella Memorandum of Understanding, which is required for the HEP approval process. Any college or university in USM can use the umbrella MOU and add an addendum specific to their college or university, which speeds up the approval process.

Dr. Elyshia Aseltine added that the Department of Education, which has to approve all HEP programs, is facing staff cuts and shortages, which may affect the timeline for approval. Danielle Cox and Dr. Andrea Cantora said that programs are getting approved, it's just a matter of getting the paperwork done on time.

## VI. Report back from National Conference for Higher Education in Prison

Dr. Andrea Cantora gave an update on the National Conference for Higher Education in Prison, which occurred on April 10-12th and had a thousand attendees. Sessions included the approval process for HEP programs, technology, reentry, and statewide efforts.

Danielle Cox gave an update on technology efforts. She and Ainsley Moench spoke with Unlocked Labs regarding funding for implementing internet access in correctional facilities.

Unlocked Labs is selecting five states for funding and Maryland is a candidate. Unfortunately, the application for a $12 million Digital Equity Act grant to upgrade facility technology was unsuccessful. Danielle Cox is also in talks with Ascendium for funding the $12 million that would be required to get internet access to all schools, not just HEPs. Eventually, she would like to get internet access in housing units as well; however, addressing the internet in housing units is a more complex issue due to existing contracts with tablet providers and exceeding the $12 million estimate.

Danielle Cox went over the technology pilot program for MCI-W and the Origin systems. A pilot program for increased technology access at MCI-W is being coordinated with the Department of Labor and the Department of Information Technology.

The Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services has a million dollar grant over three years through the Department of Justice for education specialists (working inside and outside facilities, with offices at Enoch Pratt libraries) and licenses for the Origin Learning Management System platform. Bowie State is piloting the Origin platform. Origin was chosen for its secure platform, 24/7 maintenance, and ability to import/export from various LMS systems such as Blackboard, Canvas, and Moodle. It also offers workforce development, reentry, cognitive behavioral, and career/financial aid advising resources. Other colleges are in discussion to adopt the Origin platform, covered for two years by a DOJ grant.

$12 million in funding would create a separate, segmented, and secure education network, maintained by three computer network specialists.

## VII. Goucher College trailer project update

Meredith Conde gave an update on the Goucher College trailer project.Goucher received a federal earmark of $355,000 for a project estimated to cost over $700,000, covering two trailers. The trailers are being installed at MCIW to provide classroom space for daytime classes, as existing GED classrooms are only available in the afternoons/evenings and other programming makes space difficult to find. The trailers will create a Goucher-specific space with technology, replicating a college classroom environment.

Danielle Cox added that the trailer solution would not be possible at MCI-J, as the land is too swampy. Instead, a partnership with the chaplain allows for the use of chapel classrooms during the day, emphasizing creative use of existing space.

## VIII. Interim report discussion

The next meeting will contain a discussion of the interim report, which will highlight key issues from each workgroup. Each issue will have a couple of sentences describing the issue.

## IX. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 2pm.