



State Council of Higher Education for Virginia **UPDATE**

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A Time for Reform, Innovation, and Investment

By Alan Edwards

The creation of state-level commissions and task forces is a rather common phenomenon, including such bodies focused on higher education. The Commonwealth has seen a number of higher education commissions over time, as have most other states. In just the past two years, no fewer than eight states have convened review and reform panels for higher education.

Such activities are worthwhile exercises for states and their systems of higher education. New ideas are brought into the conversation; new perspectives and strategies are shared and tried; and the status quo is challenged and forced to justify itself or change.

Governor McDonnell's Commission on Higher Education Reform, Innovation and Investment is the latest iteration in Virginia. Not unlike previous efforts here and elsewhere, it is focused on improving outcomes – for students and families, for colleges and universities, and for all citizens and taxpayers – using innovative, fiscally prudent means.

What distinguishes Virginia's commission, and those currently underway (or recently concluded) in other states, from previous efforts are the unprecedented contexts and realities of American higher education: public colleges and universities are experiencing unprecedented budget reductions; students are experiencing unprecedented tuition increases; and higher education in general is facing unprecedented expectations for it to spur – if not lead – state, regional, national, and even international economic growth and development.



Given this context, Governor McDonnell assembled a commission of leaders from public and private higher education, the business community, and the legislature and charged this august panel with three primary goals:

- (1) increasing Virginia's levels of degree attainment and workforce training, and the financial aid available to support both;
- (2) implementing innovation and cost containment on institutions' academic and administrative sides, as well as sustainability in the state's funding model; and
- (3) creating regional strategies and partnerships for research and economic development.

Cross-cutting these goals is the overarching objective of "ensuring that all Virginians have affordable access to appropriate post-secondary education, training, and re-training."

The commission's 44 members were divided into three committees, corresponding to the goals above, with each committee meeting multiple times over the summer to address the sub-goals associated with each. The full commission, which kicked-off in mid-July, will reconvene on October 12. While it is authorized to work through 2011, the commission will issue an interim report on its activities by the end of November.

As a staff person to one of the committees, I can attest firsthand to commission members' commitment to their task and to the future of Virginia higher education and the Commonwealth itself.

The work of the Governor's Commission is only beginning. The challenges are great; the stakes, high. But what better time than now to reform, innovate, and invest in higher education for the Virginia of tomorrow? ♦

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On Campus: Virginia State University

VSU Business School Embraces Open Source Textbooks To Improve Affordability and Access for Students

By Kathleen Kincheloe

When Dr. Mirta Martin accepted the position of Dean and Professor of Management at Virginia State University's Reginald F. Lewis School of Business one year ago, she was immediately concerned about the number of bright, motivated students who were failing or dropping out of courses halfway through the semester. As she looked more closely at the situation, she discovered that 93% of the Business School's 1,450 majors were receiving financial aid and many felt overwhelmed by the cost of their required textbooks.

Breaking the Cycle

The average cost of college textbooks is \$700 a year, according to the US Government Accountability Office. Faced with the financial challenges of paying other college costs, such as tuition and room & board, many VSU Business students felt they could not afford to purchase the textbooks for all of their courses, a decision which left them at a disadvantage in the classroom.

"For our accounting books senior year, there was nothing under \$250," according to Dr. Martin. "We needed to break the cycle. We needed to create a model of access and affordability."

After investigating a number of options to lower textbook costs, while still providing students with access to relevant and up-to-date multimedia content, Dr. Martin learned about Flat World Knowledge, an open source textbook publisher founded in 2007. Unlike e-books, which can usually only be downloaded once, open source textbooks can be altered, copied, or saved in a number of formats.

"It is critical to our learning models that students retain access to information from their courses during their studies," Dr. Martin explains. "If a student is taught about a forecasting model in their freshman year, we want them to have access to the information four years later when they are taking the Strategic Management Capstone course."

After learning that Flat World Knowledge was interested in partnering with VSU, Dr. Martin approached VSU administrators and Business School faculty about giving open source textbooks a try in eight core business courses. "The consensus was, if partnering with Flat World could get textbooks into



Students at VSU's Reginald F. Lewis School of Business activate their Flat World accounts to download new open source textbooks. Photo courtesy of Virginia State University.

the hands of more students, it was worth trying," she says. "So we contacted Flat World to discuss how our vision dovetailed with their business model. They jumped on our vision, and the dream became a reality."

"The Perfect Storm"

Flat World Knowledge offered the Business School a bulk rate of \$20 per student per course that allows users to download digital copies of the textbook, as well as study guides, available audio versions, and iPad editions, a bundle that would typically cost about \$100.

Students enrolled in the eight participating courses, including Introduction to Business, Principles of Management, Personal Finance, and Introduction to Economics, received a unique registration code that unlocks individual Flat World Knowledge accounts loaded with their digital content. In some classes, professors selected only one title for students to access, while students in other classes received digital formats for multiple titles or customized content their professor chose from different Flat World texts.

VSU is currently covering the \$20 fee for the approximately 850 student seat licenses in circulation this semester, so the open source textbook content is completely free for students.

"We must seek innovative ways to ensure the success of our

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students, especially during these times of severe budget cuts and economic uncertainty," VSU President Keith T. Miller told *Publishers Weekly* in an August interview. "The licensing agreement with Flat World Knowledge meets the needs of our business students and faculty for high-quality, affordable textbooks."

Dr. Martin adds that students and faculty alike are pleased at how the open source model allows content to be distributed through multiple channels, providing students more flexible access to course material. For example, students can download course content to Kindle devices, iPads, and computers. Additionally, some textbooks have audio files for each chapter that can be downloaded on iTunes so students can listen to them on their iPod or iPhone. Alternatively, course material can be accessed online at the Flat World website or from specific links created by VSU faculty.

Although the early feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, Dr. Martin says the Business School will review a number of metrics before declaring this experiment a success. "One of the main factors we will be looking at is classroom retention, and eventually graduation rates," she explains. "We will also be looking at same-course student performance before and after open source textbooks were introduced."

If the data backs up the anecdotal evidence, Dr. Martin hopes that within the next 18 months all of the Business School's 30 courses will be delivered digitally. But that's not to say this initiative was easy, cautions Dr. Martin. The faculty and administration put in a lot of time and effort to make this happen so quickly.

"Basically the faculty spent the summer writing course content," she says. "We had a faculty champion, Dr. Andrew Feldstein, who did an incredible job bringing the digital aspects of the curriculum together with the content and delivery piece. We accomplished three years' worth of work in three months developing our new curriculum and getting it approved by all of the committees of the University. It certainly helped that our leaders, President Miller and Provost Weldon Hill, embraced the initiative and removed obstacles."

Dr. Martin proudly adds, "I believe at Virginia State University we had the perfect storm: an incredibly supportive administration, an enthusiastic faculty, a persuasive champion, students who were ready for change, and a revamped curriculum we could all believe in." ♦



Provost W. Weldon Hill of Virginia State University (left) and President Keith T. Miller (right) pose with Mirta M. Martin, Dean and Professor of Management at the Reginald F. Lewis School of Business.

In Pictures: Dr. Andrew Fogarty's Visit to the Southern Virginia Higher Education Center



▲ Dr. Andrew Fogarty with Dr. Betty H. Adams, Southern Virginia Higher Education Center Executive Director (left), and Patty Nelson, SVHEC Chief Financial & Operating Officer (right).

SCHEV's Interim Director returned from a visit to the Southern Virginia Higher Education Center (SVHEC) in South Boston, VA. In this photo, Bob Mitchell shows Dr. Andrew Fogarty the SVHEC's nearly completed Innovation Center. They are standing in what will be the work space for the Center's Digital Art & Design students.



SCHEV Uses Federal Grant Funding For “I am the One” Campaign To Help Virginia Students Plan for Education After High School

“I am hearing great things from my colleagues at Arcadia High School about SCHEV’s ‘I am the One’ campaign. How can I order free materials for my students at Northampton High School?”

This recent call from Faye Wilfong, a Career Coach based at Eastern Shore Community College, is exactly the kind of reaction SCHEV was hoping for when it launched the “I am the One” marketing campaign last fall as part of a federally funded effort to increase the number of under-represented students who enter and remain in postsecondary education.

SCHEV first considered creating a marketing campaign targeted at Virginia students when the agency was selected by former Governor Kaine to administer funds from the U.S. Department of Education’s College Access Challenge Grant Program (CACGP), which was created as part of the federal College Cost Reduction and Access Act (CCRA) of 2007.

Since the grant’s inception, SCHEV has used the funding to focus on such diverse initiatives as partnerships with established community access providers, workshops for school counselors, cable access television programs, parent information sessions, in-school advising, and internet-based web portals. SCHEV also used a portion of the funding to launch the “I am the One” marketing campaign, designed to help Virginia students and their parents demystify college, understand financial aid procedures, and learn more about various educational options after high school.

A Pilot Campaign

The “I am the One” campaign began in fall 2009 when SCHEV invited several rural and urban school districts across the Commonwealth to participate in a pilot program where high school counselors were offered free informational and incentive materials in exchange for feedback on how well these items helped students consider, plan for, and succeed in college or vocational programs.

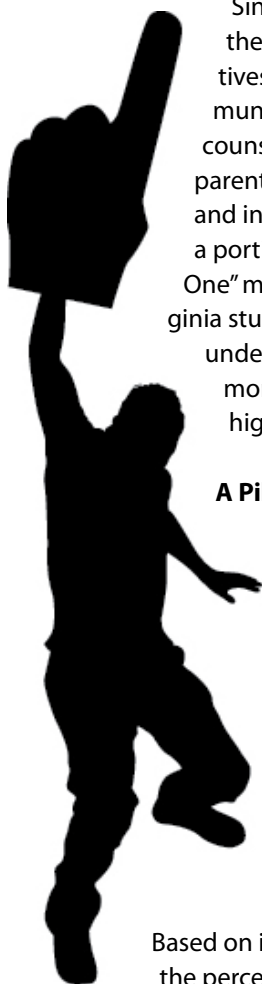
Based on interest from superintendents, as well as the percentage of students in the district who were

eligible for the National School Lunch Program’s Free and Reduced Price, SCHEV entered into agreements with six school districts across the state, including four high schools in Accomack County, high schools in Brunswick and Cumberland counties, Franklin High School in Franklin City, five high schools in Norfolk, and six high schools in the City of Richmond through the GReat Aspirations Scholarship Program (GRASP). All told, the pilot program extended to 18 Virginia high schools and reached well over 13,000 students.

Knowing that the ultimate goal was to demystify college and encourage students from all walks of life to consider pursuing some type of education after high school, SCHEV and its marketing team began the process of conducting interviews and focus groups with students and school counselors at the pilot schools. Student focus groups revealed that most Virginia high school students have a desire to attend college, but have no understanding of the commitment it takes to get there, academically, financially, or practically.

For example, student athletes mentioned wanting to attend big-name colleges with stellar sports teams, but didn’t know what the academic requirements were to get in to those schools. Students also expressed concerns about what they viewed as challenges to their success after high school, including low grades, being the first in their family to attend college, the inability to adjust to college life, and the financial requirements of furthering their education.

Counselors in the pilot program told focus group moderators that many students want to go to college, but have unrealistic expectations and don’t know where to start with financial aid and admissions application processes. Specifically, they have a general idea of the college they would like to attend with a less concrete awareness of acceptance rates, cost, or academic requirements, such as GPA or test scores. They added that some students seem to expect that financial aid will just materialize or that it is the counselor’s job to find the money for them.



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When asked how a marketing campaign and related materials could help them, counselors indicated that they needed information and fun incentives that reinforce their message to students and parents that it takes effort and planning to get into and succeed in college. So SCHEV worked with the marketing team to come up with several graphic logos and taglines to be part of a campaign that met the needs expressed by both students and counselors.

When several possible ideas were shared with students at the pilot schools, they selected the “I am the One” theme and graphics, indicating that this message resonated with them on several different levels. First, that they deserve and are worthy of the opportunity to continue their education beyond high school. Second, that it is their responsibility to make their dream happen with the support and encouragement of their counselors, friends, and families.

This theme was used to develop a number of materials distributed for free to the pilot participants, including a parent mailer with tips for encouraging students; “I am the One” T-shirts, banners and floor decals for school hallways; and stadium cups for use at sporting events or class celebrations.

The most informative piece of marketing collateral was the 12-page “I am the One” student planner that contains a full-color, two-page map with the name, location, and web address for every public 2- and 4-year institution, as well as private colleges and universities participating in the VTAG program. The planner also includes financial aid definitions, information about college entrance exams, and checklists for each grade level from freshmen to senior.

All of these items lead students and parents to www.i-am-the-one.com, a website that provides links to trusted sources of information about preparing financially and academically for college, such as fafsa.gov, the SCHEV website, and the VCCS Wizard portal. In addition to linking to resources for students and parents, the site provides an area for counselors to access electronic versions of all of the “I am the One” marketing components, as well as PowerPoint and signage templates with “I am the One” graphics.

Success at the Schools

Personnel at the pilot schools embraced the campaign, using the free materials in a number of creative ways that worked for their specific student bodies. For example, Cumberland High School based their Homecoming festivities around the “I am the One” theme, while Lake Taylor High School distributed items to 8th block classes so the students could take them out on the field during a planned Homecoming pep rally. Franklin High School distributed some of their “I am the One” items at Parent Night, and Granby High School in Norfolk used the “I am the One” cups at the concession stand during home basketball games. Other pilot schools offered “I am the One” materials as rewards to seniors who applied to college or received scholarship offers.

Elizabeth Lambert, counselor at Brunswick High School, described how the “I am the One” items were used to motivate students to complete tasks on a checklist she provided to them. “There were a few students who really wanted ‘I am the One’ T-shirts and they would beg for them everyday. I would

(continued I Am The One page 7)



Students at Lake Taylor High School in Norfolk wave “I am the One” foam fingers during a 2009 pep rally. Photo courtesy of April Harmon.

Staff Spotlight: *Ellie Boyd*

The 'E' in Ellie stands for efficient.

Interviewing Budget and Finance Director Ellie Boyd took exactly 20 minutes and yielded the optimal amount of information for a Staff Spotlight. No more, no less. It should come as no surprise, then, that SCHEV has received a “meets” or “exceeds” rating on all agency performance measures for which Ellie is responsible. But there is a much different side to Ellie. While she runs a tight ship here at SCHEV, her volunteer work reaches out to those who don’t have the ability to adhere to a set schedule.

Ellie was raised in the Detroit suburbs surrounded by family who worked in the auto industry. While she respected their work ethic, she wanted a different future. “I thought, I’m not doing that hard labor, I’m going to use my head,” she explains. While still in high school she took a part-time job at a credit union. “I knew then it was my thing,” says Ellie. After receiving her associate degree from Schoolcraft Community College, Ellie got a job at Ferris University as an Account Clerk and worked closely with the dean. During her 15 years at Ferris, Ellie earned a bachelor’s degree in accounting and a master’s degree in information systems.

When Ellie accepted the job at SCHEV in 2004, it was both a career move and a major relocation. She had never lived outside of Michigan, but welcomed the chance to work at the state level. Ellie’s first order of business at SCHEV was establishing controls such as pre-approval processes. “They called me the new sheriff in town for awhile,” says Boyd, who adds that after six years she still loves her job and is still learning.

Her husband Rick joined Ellie at SCHEV in 2007 as an Assistant to Agency Operations. Ellie’s 18-year-old niece has recently moved into the Boyd home so the couple can provide a supportive atmosphere while the young woman works and attends college. “I want to give her this opportunity,” says Ellie. But it’s not all work. Along with their firm belief in higher education, the Boyds are also sharing their love of NASCAR with their niece.

About ten years ago the Boyds added a new member to the family named Jozi, a collie-shepherd mix. It was never Ellie’s intention to raise a service dog, but she recognized something special about this dog’s personality and began to research training opportunities. Service dogs must be desensitized to stimuli that might ordinarily frighten an animal. Examples include items that are common in hospitals like wheelchairs, crutches, walkers, and loud noises. Service dogs must also learn the concept of “leave it.” In one class a hot dog is placed



Ellie and Jozi Boyd, therapy dog.

on the floor and the dog must approach the food in ever-decreasing circles all the while being told to “leave it.” Ellie says that Jozi figured it out quickly and actually jumped over the hot dog to make sure she didn’t come in contact. Jozi is both certified and insured through Therapy Dogs International.

Ellie and Jozi volunteer at McGuire Veterans’ Hospital in the Poly Trauma Unit therapy program. Jozi plays fetch and tug of war with the patients, which works the muscles of the hand and arm in ways that are much more entertaining than traditional therapy. “But most importantly,” says Ellie, “she puts a smile on their faces.” Jozi obviously puts a smile on her owner’s face as well. “If I had \$100,000 I’d clone her,” says Ellie. ♦



We hope you enjoy this issue of SCHEV’s quarterly newsletter as much as we enjoy sharing with our constituents news and in-depth articles about successes in Virginia higher education. Do you have stories to share or topics you’d like us to cover?

As always, we invite you to give us your feedback or tell us what’s happening on your campus by writing to us at communications@schev.edu.

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tell them, 'You have to complete something on the list to get it.' Finally these students brought in the info they needed to get their shirts. While letting them pick a shirt, it gave us time to talk one-on-one about college preparation."

A GRASP pilot participant working at John Marshall High School in Richmond chose to give out the "I am the One" T-shirts to students who filled out a college application. She describes a particularly meaningful encounter by saying, "I met with a student to complete an application for J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College as a culinary arts student. To most of us, community college isn't necessarily a big deal. However, after completing his application he looked at me and asked, 'Do you mean I'm going to college? People told me I would never go to college.' I gave him his T-shirt and told him he could wear it and if anyone asked what it meant to tell them, 'I have a plan to make my life a success. Do you? If you don't, you need to meet with Mrs. Nelson.' This young man hugged me three times before he left because he was so excited that he would have the opportunity to go to college."



It was feedback such as this that indicated that the pilot schools easily found many ways to successfully use the free "I am the One" marketing materials to inform and motivate students and their families to consider educational opportunities beyond high school. So with a few tweaks and the introduction of some new items, SCHEV opted to take the campaign statewide and offer free "I am the One" materials to school counselors and access providers across Virginia.

SCHEV unveiled the statewide "I am the One" campaign and materials to a standing room-only crowd at the Virginia College Access Network (VCAN) conference in December 2009 and received an enormous amount of interest in the online ordering process. By the time the two-week online ordering period closed, SCHEV had received orders from personnel at 125 schools and community-based access organizations in 89 localities across Virginia.

A second two-week online ordering period took place in August 2010 to ensure that interested counselors and access providers would have enough "I am the One" materials to kick off the new school year. SCHEV sent emails and other notifications to district-level counselors in the Virginia public school system and encouraged interested individuals to spread the word to other eligible personnel at schools and non-profit organizations. SCHEV received more than 170 "I am the One" orders, which were shipped this month to new and returning participants throughout Virginia.

SCHEV hopes that those participating in this important campaign will agree with the GRASP Advisor at Huguenot High School who said, "I see the 'I am the One' campaign as being a message of hope for those students who desire a better life for themselves, as well as for those parents who desire more for their children, but lack the resources or knowledge to make their dream a reality." ♦



State Council of
Higher Education for Virginia

Agency Leadership

Andrew Fogarty
Thomas Daley
James Alessio
Joseph DeFilippo
Alan Edwards
Dan Hix
Tod Massa

Kirsten Nelson

Interim Executive Director
Deputy Director
Higher Education Restructuring Director
Academic Affairs and Planning Director
Policy Studies Director
Finance Policy Director
Policy Research and Data Warehousing
Director
Communications and Government
Relations Director

SCHEV
James Monroe Building
101 North Fourteenth Street, 9th Fl.
Richmond, VA 23219
PH: (804) 225-2600
FAX: (804) 225-2604
WEB: www.schev.edu
EMAIL: communications@schev.edu