

**STATE COUNCIL OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR VIRGINIA**  
**COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING**  
**March 16, 2026**

**DRAFT MINUTES**

General Jumper called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m. in Room 300 in the Student Center of Norfolk State University in Norfolk, Virginia.

Council members present: Walter Curt, William Harvey, Delceno Miles, Charlie King, Jason El Koubi, Lindsay Fryer, John Jumper, Cheryl Oldham, Douglas Straley and Steven Taylor.

Council members participating virtually: Lindsay Fryer and John Olsen.

Council members absent: William Harvey.

Staff members present: Lee Andes, Melissa Benavidez, Taylor Clark, Sarahbeth Dreis, Grace Covello Khattar, Alan Edwards, Scott Fleming, Alexis Gravely, Anne Lowe, Jennifer Mayton, Tod Massa, Todd McDonald, Jessica Minnis-McCann, Laura Osberger, Monica Osei, Kirstin Pantazis, Paula Robinson, Emily Salmon, Juanita Sherman, Barry Simmons, Paul Smith, Bob Spieldenner, Kristin Whelan and Yan Zheng.

**ACTION ON REMOTE PARTICIPATION OF COUNCIL MEMBER**

General Jumper read a resolution allowing remote participation by Council members Lindsay Fryer and John Olsen. On motion by Mr. Straley and seconded by Ms. Miles, a resolution to allow remote participation of Lindsay Fryer and John Olsen was approved unanimously (7-0). The motion passed unanimously.

**ACTION ON PROPOSALS FOR NEW DEGREE PROGRAMS AT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS**

Dr. Edwards introduced the four proposals for new degree programs. He noted that the first proposal was the final one submitted under Council's prior approval policy, while the other three followed Council's current approval policy. Dr. Edwards yielded the floor to Dr. Taylor, as chair of Council's Academic Affairs Committee.

Old Dominion University proposed a new Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Cybersecurity (CIP: 11.1003) to initiate in fall 2026. Dr. Edwards noted that the external reviewers recommended data collection to ensure the degree program maintains alignment with workforce needs. Gen. Jumper requested that staff amend the approval resolution to produce a conditional-approval resolution, with the aforementioned tracking added as a stipulated condition for the Council's approval. Dr. Edwards noted that this degree program will be the first doctoral program in cybersecurity at a Virginia public university.

On motion by Dr. Taylor and seconded by Mr. El Koubi, the Committee of the Whole unanimously (8-0) approved the ODU proposal on condition and directed staff to develop a formal conditional-approval resolution for action by the full Council on the next day.

The College of William and Mary in Virginia (William and Mary) proposed a new Master of Science (MS) in Data Science (CIP: 30.7001) to initiate in fall 2026. Dr. Edwards noted that

the summary information in the materials included substantive quotes and quantitative data extracted directly from William and Mary's proposal, in accord with the Council's current approval policy. In response to Dr. Taylor's concerns, Gen. Jumper agreed to defer the proposal for future action.

The College of William and Mary in Virginia also proposed a new Master of Science (MS) in Computational Operations Research (CIP: 27.0304) to initiate in fall 2026. In response to a query from Dr. Taylor, Dr. Kincaid, Chancellor Professor of Mathematics and Program Director of Computational Operations Research at William and Mary, stated that a new degree program is necessary to align internal oversight of the existing concentration within a different university organizational unit. In response to a query by Gen. Jumper, Dr. Taylor requested that the approval resolution be amended to produce a conditional-approval resolution, with the addition of a requirement that W&M continue to work with staff on better aligning the program name, purpose, Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) code, and evidence of student and labor market demand.

On motion by Mr. El Koubi and seconded by Ms. Miles, the Committee of the Whole unanimously approved (8-0) the William and Mary proposal on condition and directed staff to develop a formal conditional-approval resolution for action by the full Council on the next day.

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (VA Tech) proposed a new Master of Science (MS) in Water Resources (CIP 40.0605) to initiate in fall 2026. In response to a query by Mr. Curt, Dr. McGuire, Director of the Virginia Water Resources Research Center and Professor of the Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation at VA Tech, noted that the degree program would combine hydrology with managing water resources and would include the use of artificial intelligence in data science analysis of water resources.

On motion by Dr. Taylor and seconded by Ms. Miles, the following resolution was approved unanimously (8-0) for transmittal to the full Council:

***BE IT RESOLVED that the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia grants approval to Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University to initiate a Master of Science (MS) degree program in Water Resources (CIP code: 40.0605), effective fall 2026.***

### **ACTION ON DEGREE-PROGRAM PRODUCTIVITY POLICY**

Dr. Edwards presented for review and action a new policy for Council's assessment of the productivity of degree programs at public institutions, replacing the existing policy, which has been in place since 2019. He reminded the Committee of the Whole of discussions by the Academic Affairs Committee on this topic since July 2025 and summarized how the proposed policy differed from the existing policy, including at Council's direction, the addition of a return-on-investment (ROI) measure. He deferred to Mr. Massa to respond to members' questions about the ROI measure.

In response to queries by Mr. Curt and Gen. Jumper, Mr. Massa said he would provide the ROI model's underlying formulas, which he concluded would allow staff to monitor degree-program productivity reasonably and efficiently, given the limitations of currently available data.

On motion by Dr. Taylor and seconded by Mr. El Koubi, the following resolution was approved unanimously (8-0) for transmittal to the full Council:

***BE IT RESOLVED that the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia approves its revised “Degree-Program Productivity and Viability at Public Institutions: Policy and Procedures,” as agreed to on March 17, 2026, and effective on that date; and***

***BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Council delegates authority to the Executive Director to modify and update the policy’s procedures (processes and forms) as future circumstances necessitate, as long as such updates do not materially alter the effect of the policy itself.***

### **UPDATE ON THE 2026 LEGISLATIVE SESSION**

Mr. Andes and Dr. Khattar provided the Council with an update on the 2026 General Assembly Legislative Session. The presentation was organized into three segments.

Mr. Andes reported that the General Assembly completed most of its work during the session that ended on March 14. The conference budget, however, was not finalized. The General Assembly will reconvene on April 22, and he anticipates that the budget will be considered then.

Dr. Khattar noted that more than 100 bills related to higher education were introduced during the session, with fewer than 60 remaining at the end and now awaiting gubernatorial action. In response to General Jumper’s question regarding legislation with significant implications for SCHEV, Dr. Khattar highlighted the BOV governance bills concerning board membership composition and term lengths. She then presented a list of bills that, if enacted, would assign new responsibilities to SCHEV. These include convening workgroups for the Enslaved Ancestors Scholarship Program, collecting self-reported data from student parents, collecting Workforce Pell data, supporting IEP development, participating in a VMI workgroup, and implementing financial aid simplification requirements.

Dr. Taylor asked about SCHEV’s capacity to manage these new responsibilities. Mr. Fleming stated that the list of duties had been streamlined and that the agency hopes for additional support from the General Assembly. However, without an approved budget, determining capacity remains difficult. Dr. Khattar added that the Governor may veto or amend some bills, which could decrease SCHEV’s workload.

Dr. Khattar also explained that the legislature will reconvene on April 22 to consider vetoes and amendments from Governor Spanberger. Approved legislation becomes law upon the Governor’s signature—or after seven days without signature following adjournment of the Reconvened Session. The biennial budget and new statutes will take effect July 1 unless otherwise specified.

Mr. Andes provided a timeline for the 2026–2028 biennium budget process. The General Assembly reviewed the budget introduced by Governor Youngkin on December 17, 2025. Committee budget amendments were released on February 22, 2026, followed by the appointment of budget conferees. A unified conference report was expected by the end of the session on March 14; however, the General Assembly adjourned without adopting a

budget. Although the legislature will reconvene on April 22, it remains unclear when the conference budget will be completed.

Mr. Andes then summarized major committee-approved changes relative to the introductory budget. Both chambers increased funding for affordable access above the introduced level of 27.5 million over the biennium, with the House recommending 82.5 million and the Senate 72.5 million. Need-based financial aid, funded at 15 million in the introductory budget, received a Senate recommendation of 50 million. The introductory budget included a 2% salary increase for state employees, which the House supported; the Senate recommended a 3% increase.

Mr. Andes reported on other budget recommendations including the Tuition Assistance Grant (TAG) program did not receive new funding in the introductory budget. The House proposed 6 million in new funding, along with technical adjustments that would increase total funding by 17 million. Funding for the TAG bonus program for Hispanic-serving institutions was also proposed for continuation. A unique House proposal would provide funding for student grants at Virginia University of Lynchburg, which is ineligible for TAG under program restrictions.

Funding for the New Economy Workforce Credential Program includes \$13.5 million GF in the first year and \$13.5 million NGF in the second year. The House proposes an additional \$18.9 million, and the Senate proposes \$12 million.

The Transfer Grant program will continue under revised language recommended by the Council Chair and members. No new funding was added; funds are reappropriated. The VMDSEP waiver program was funded in the introduced budget at \$85 million GF with an additional \$75 million NGF. Neither chamber recommended continuing the NGF component.

Dr. Khattar provided an update on SB378, which would exempt all employees at public institutions of higher education from collective bargaining except for service employees. The bill includes two enactment clauses: one requiring each institution's BOV to assess impacts on tuition and fees through the SYP process, and one requiring the Secretary of Education, in collaboration with other Secretariats, to evaluate options for administering collective bargaining.

Council will receive an updated report at the May meeting. Director Fleming will notify members of any significant developments in the interim.

### **UPDATE ON WORKFORCE CREDENTIAL GRANT**

Ms. Thompson presented an update on the New Economy Workforce Credential Grant (WCG). She explained that WCG operates as a pay-for-performance model offered through community colleges, the Southern Virginia Higher Education Center, and New College Institute. Students pay one-third of program costs—up to 2,000—upon completion of training. Institutions are reimbursed for up to two-thirds of the cost upon student completion and credential attainment. Only public two-year institutions and higher education centers are eligible.

According to Ms. Thompson, program funding and enrollment have grown significantly since the program's launch in 2016. After several years of surplus, enrollment expanded rapidly beginning in 2022, increasing 150%. Ms. Thompson reported that 94% of students complete training; however, some students are hired before completing credential requirements. Because credential attainment is self-reported, institutions do not receive full reimbursement unless students report earning the credential. Enrollment growth is notable among students aged 18–24. Males enroll at higher rates, particularly in construction, while females are more heavily represented in nursing and health-related programs. Many students also use the program for mid-career reskilling.

Ms. Thompson described continued challenges with wage-match data due to participants working as independent contractors, self-employed workers, out-of-state employees, or in federal/military systems not captured in VEC and VDLS.

In response to Mr. Curt's request, she will provide data on ages associated with pre- and post-wages.

Ms. Thompson reported that the median wages of credential earners increased by \$11,936, or 49%. Wage gains occurred across all industries. The average student cost is \$997, with financial aid available. She emphasized the importance of maintaining low program costs and noted VCCS's efforts to remain competitive.

Ms. Thompson discussed Workforce Pell, which becomes effective July 1, 2026. Because most WCG programs are not eligible due to time-based requirements, there will be little overlap. Workforce Pell will expand federal aid eligibility and may establish pathways from WCG to Workforce Pell programs and ultimately to degree programs. Workforce Pell cannot be combined with state grants. The first year of Workforce Pell implementation is expected to identify key challenges. The full WCG report, including disaggregated data, is posted on the SCHEV website.

### **MOTION TO ADJOURN**

The meeting adjourned at 2:36 p.m.

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