

**Massachusetts Board of Higher Education  
ACADEMIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

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December 10, 2019  
10:00 a.m.

One Ashburton Place, 21<sup>st</sup> Floor  
Conference Room Two  
Boston, Massachusetts

**Meeting Minutes**

Committee Members Present: Board Chair Chris Gabrieli; Commissioner Carlos Santiago (non-voting, ex-officio member); Secretary James A. Peyser; Abby Velozo (voting Student Member); and Anna Grady (non-voting, Student Advisor)

Committee Members Absent: none

Department Staff Present: Robert Awkward; Stacy Bougie; Ignacio Chaparro; Keith Connors; Winifred Hagan; Alexander Nally; Constantia Papanikolaou; Elena Quiroz-Livanis; Thomas Simard; Ashley Wisneski

Special Guests: New Board Members Patricia Eppinger; Ann Christensen; Judy Pagliuca

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Board Chair Chris Gabrieli called the meeting to order at 10:07 a.m.

**II. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES**

On a motion duly made and seconded, the minutes from the October 15, 2019 meeting of the Academic Affairs Committee were unanimously approved.

**III. REMARKS**

List of documents used:

*AAC Meeting PowerPoint, December 10, 2019*

Board Chair Chris Gabrieli welcomed the three new board members (Patty Eppinger, Ann Christensen, and Judy Pagliuca) and the new student representatives and asked them to formally introduce themselves. He briefly described the Board of Higher Education's (BHE's) upcoming work, noting his optimism for a productive year because of the talents and experiences the new members brought to the Board. Chair Gabrieli concluded his remarks by inviting remarks from Commissioner Santiago.

Commissioner Santiago thanked Chair Gabrieli, welcomed everyone, and added a special welcome to the new board members. He shared how he looked forward to the opportunity to meet with the new members and inform them of the Department's (DHE) current initiatives. He also mentioned the absence of Deputy Commissioner of Academic Affairs and Student Success, Dr. Patricia Marshall, who regularly attends the meeting, but unfortunately had experienced a death in her family. In her place, Assistant Commissioner of Academic Affairs and Student Success, Elena Quiroz-Livanis, also Chief of Staff, would be presenting a refresher on the Committee's major projects for FY20. The Commissioner said he looked forward to a productive conversation and that he would withhold further comments until next week's full board meeting.

Assistant Commissioner Quiroz-Livanis began by welcoming students from the Harvard Graduate School of Education who were asked to attend one of the Committee meetings as part of their requirements for a class taught Dr. Francesca Purcell, a former DHE colleague. Assistant Commissioner Quiroz-Livanis then presented PowerPoint slides highlighting current DHE work. The presentation covered these key agency initiatives:

- A. Equity Agenda
- B. New Program Review Process
- C. Common Assessment Policy
- D. Police Career Incentive Pay Program
- E. Open Educational Resources

Regarding the Equity Agenda, Assistant Commissioner Quiroz-Livanis noted that the initial phase of the equity agenda work will be an agency-wide policy and program audit resulting in recommendations that create a culture of equity.

Assistant Commissioner Quiroz-Livanis summarized the new program review process, noting that AAC Committee Members and DHE staff adjusted the new program review process to involve the Board earlier in the review through a letter of intent. This process and the intended outcomes will benefit by the BHE's earlier involvement at this stage, because it will allow the BHE to ensure that new campus programs align with campus strategic plans and regional needs, which are wide-view considerations needing approval ahead of academic program details. Board Chair Gabrieli and Secretary Peyser spoke approvingly of the changes.

Assistant Commissioner Quiroz-Livanis provided an overview of the Common Assessment Policy, describing the use of GPA as a new measure of academic ability under the new policy. This prompted comment by the new board members. Board Member Pagliuca stated that she believed the use of grade point average (GPA) as a better predictor than standardized tests was counterintuitive, based on her knowledge of these tests-- especially where the tests are known to be weighted and GPA is not. She expressed concern about the reliability of using GPA since grades are subjective and grade inflation is known to exist. Board Member Pagliuca was interested in learning the context for the common assessment policy change, particularly the research and data on which the Board based this change.

Assistant Commissioner Quiroz-Livanis noted that research demonstrated a high percent of students were misplaced in developmental courses based on the results of high stakes exams, as the exams are not a reliable indicator of student ability or potential. In contrast, research from the UMass Donahue Institute has provided evidence that GPA is a reliable predictor of student success, which is aligned with the national research on the subject. The failure to act on

this knowledge results in many students who will fail to progress to college-level work because of placement in developmental courses. On average, the Department knows that only 24% of Massachusetts students in developmental mathematics go on to complete credit-bearing courses in the same subject. In examining states like Alaska, North Carolina, and California for their implementation of high school GPA as an academic predictor of student success, there have been positive outcomes and results. California is also looking at additional measures like motivation and time spent studying.

Commissioner Santiago added that the committee has been working to improve assessment since 2013. He said the committee needs to understand it's not easy to get institutions to change to new assessment policies when the current assessment policy has been in effect since 1998. It will be up the Board and DHE to convince the campuses that cumulative GPA produces better results. Change to the new assessment policy has been slow but, when campuses review their own student data, they will see the situation differently and be more willing to change.

Secretary Peyser added that the AAC Committee and DHE curated and developed data on GPA as part of the initial work in validating the effectiveness of using GPA as just one predictor of success along with standardized tests and other measures. Assistant Commissioner Quiroz-Livanis added to the Secretary's statement by sharing how the committee first piloted the use of GPA across all three segments of Massachusetts public higher education institutions. The work included the hiring of independent evaluators; using UMass Donahue Institute in collaboration with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). DESE approved mathematics curricular alignment between K-12 and higher education with the key question, "what does assessment look like in high school?"

Assistant Commissioner Quiroz-Livanis moved on to the Police Career Incentive Pay Program (PCIPP) initiative, and for that she asked Ignacio Chaparro, Project Specialist, to provide an overview. Mr. Chaparro's overview included a listing of the ad-hoc committee recommendations and accomplishments including: 1) the minimum requirements for an associate's degree, 2) acceptance of PLA, 3) revision of the BHE guidelines to include PLA, 4) crosswalk between police academy and higher education, 5) the establishment of an allowable maximum number of credits for PLA and, 6) revision of PCIPP annual report template. The overview was followed by a brief question and answer period.

Next, DHE Director of Learning Outcome Assessments, Dr. Robert Awkward, summarized the work of the Open Educational Resources (OER) group. He made substantial reference to the report he and the working group had previously prepared for the Board with the group's recommendations. The new board members expressed pleasure with the overall initiative and the work of the team on OER. These general expressions of support were followed by comments from Student Trustee Abby Velozo, who spoke about her efforts and the efforts of the student government, for moving the initiative forward. Anna Grady, non-voting state university segmental advisor, spoke in favor of the OER initiative noting the learning loss for students who can't afford books. Board Member Pagliuca thanked Dr. Awkward for his work. In thinking about the resource repository, she asked if certain materials would be excluded because of cost. Dr. Awkward replied saying the initiative includes both no-cost and low-cost materials available in the public domain under an open-license. The OER group welcomes low-cost resources in the repository. Trustee Velozo spoke about the visible and positive change she and the other students already see on campus since the beginning of the OER initiative. She noted how the use of OER by some professors is positively influencing the interest and use of OER materials by other professors.

Assistant Commissioner Quiroz-Livanis mentioned the MassGrant Plus program as a program that provides students with book stipends to help in the purchase of books for courses in which OER is not used.

#### **IV. MOTIONS**

List of documents used:

*AAC Motions 19-09 through 19-10*

*SARA PowerPoint, December 10, 2019*

**A. AAC 20-08 Approval of Letter of Intent and Authorization for Fast Track Review of Bachelor of Science in Veterinary Technology at the University of Massachusetts Amherst**

The University of Massachusetts Amherst found significant need for the proposed Bachelor of Science in Veterinary Technology program during the closing of the Mount Ida College program. UMass Amherst is proposing full degree granting authority with this Letter of Intent application, and it expects that graduates of the program will have a set of skills that range from hands-on management of production animals at UMass farms, knowledge of compliance and management of laboratory animals at UMA research facilities, to general education and basic-science knowledge; and that graduates will fill positions at veterinary practices, universities and biotech firms. Several stakeholders agree with the need for certified Vet Techs and urged UMass to offer an American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) accredited veterinary technology program beyond the teach-out period.

UMass plans to leverage the proposed program to increase diversity in STEM disciplines, including on-ramps from community colleges with Vet Tech programs. Year-round advising, an academic alert system, supplemental classroom instruction and summer courses are expected to ensure retention and completion. The regional blueprints project an 18.61% statewide growth in veterinary technologist and technician positions in Massachusetts by 2026.

The first of three strategic goals in the current UMass Amherst strategic plan include attracting students that are academically accomplished, socially responsible education seekers that will succeed. The Department of Veterinary and Animal Sciences has a tradition of attracting students interested in careers in veterinary medicine and biomedical research. Full authority to continue offering the proposed program beyond the teach out period is expected to enhance this profile, and to continue to prepare students to be Certified Veterinary Technologists.

The proposed program is expected to accept 50 students per year, yielding a steady-state enrollment of 200 students after the first four years. It is planned that students coming into the program as first-year students spend the first two years in Amherst and the second two years at the Newton campus. In order to meet disciplinary accreditation standards, the proposed program includes funding for a Program Director. Funds are also expected to provide for an office manager and animal care staff for the Newton campus. The business and departments offices are planned as adequate to meet the demands of the program and all laboratories, equipment, and library resources used for the veterinary technology program are in place on the Newton campus.

Staff validate that the UMass Amherst Letter of Intent for the BS in Veterinary Technology includes all data required by the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education. Staff recommend a Fast Track review of the program.

Board Chair Gabrieli opened the floor for comments. Board Member Pagliuca asked for clarification on whether the committee was voting for program approval or for fast track review. Assistant Commissioner Quiroz-Livanis replied that the committee was considering fast track review, adding that approved programs would go to the full Board next week. Board Chair Gabrieli added that now was the time for member to ask questions and raise concerns about the program because the program won't come back to their committee for approval once it goes to the BHE for ratification. Board Member Pagliuca asked about the required quorum. Chief Legal Counsel Dena Papanikolaou answered saying a quorum was a simple majority of the committee members present.

Regarding the proposal, Board Chair Gabrieli stated he liked the linkage to community college and the collaborative work involved. Board Member Eppinger referenced her former role on the Board of Trustees for the Tufts Cummings Veterinary School and from that perspective she stated that she was aware of a huge need for this program, one which she found well vetted. She was excited to see the program move forward. Board Member Pagliuca expressed her concern of not having a strong or deep background in veterinary medicine and questioned if she should vote on the motion or abstain. She expressed her strong sense of holding herself accountable. Board Chair Gabrieli told her not to worry because the committee had enough history to confidently vote and move the motion forward but told her she and any board member is always welcome to abstain. Secretary Peyser spoke to the value of UMA having a strong, well thought out program in a specialized field like veterinary technology because when the unexpected happens, such as the sudden closure of a small private school like Mt. Ida, it is in the Commonwealth's interest to have an institution like UMA offer alternative programming and address a very problematic situation for students. Board Chair Gabrieli concurred with the Secretary's thinking by recounting how our public higher education system saved a unique Mt. Ida program – funeral services – with the program being picked up by Cape Cod Community College and Bridgewater State University.

Board Chair Gabrieli moved for a motion to approve. The motion was seconded by Secretary Peyser. The motion passed unanimously with one abstention by Board Member Pagliuca.

**AAC 20-08 APPROVAL OF LETTER OF INTENT AND AUTHORIZATION FOR FAST TRACK REVIEW OF BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN VETERINARY TECHNOLOGY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST**

**VOTED:** The Board of Higher Education hereby approves the letter of intent and authorization for fast track review of **Bachelor of Science in Veterinary Technology** at the **University of Massachusetts Amherst**.

Authority: Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, §9(b).

Contact: Winifred M. Hagan, Ed.D. Associate Commissioner for Academic Affairs & Student Success.

**B. AAC 20-09 Approval of Amendments to 610 CMR 12.00: Operation of Massachusetts Degree-Granting Institutions Under the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA)**

Ashley Wisneski, Deputy General Counsel, and Alex Nally, SARA Coordinator, introduced the next agenda item which included both an update on the SARA initiative, and a presentation on proposed amendments to the SARA regulations. Mr. Nally introduced himself and explained that as the DHE SARA Coordinator he manages day-to-day receipt of SARA applications; facilities refinements; engages in communications with institutions, NEBHE, and NC-SARA; and provides technical assistance to institutions and the public; and is responsible for overall SARA policy implementation.

Mr. Nally delivered a presentation on SARA, which is a national agreement that allows institutions to apply to their home state for authorization to offer online programs in all other SARA member states. Institutions apply to their home State Portal Entity (SPE) initially and annually to renew participation in SARA. Federal law requires institutions to be authorized to grant degrees in each state in which they operate, but if an institution joins SARA, it only needs to be authorized in one state in order to operate online in all other SARA states and territories. Massachusetts became the 49th SARA state in June 2018. Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands are also members in SARA. California is the only remaining non-SARA state, and territories American Samoa and Guam also are not in SARA. The DHE is the SPE for Massachusetts and enforces the policies and procedures of SARA.

Mr. Nally provided some statistics on the number of Massachusetts institutions that have joined SARA (46) and the average processing time for initial and renewal applications, as well as the breakdown of public institutions (by sector) versus private institutions that have joined SARA.

Ms. Wisneski then summarized the motion before the Committee, which is to approve minor changes to the regulations governing SARA (610 CMR 12.00) to be put out for public comment. The proposed changes would align the SARA regulations with policy changes implemented by NC-SARA since the regulations were first enacted in 2018. The proposed changes included:

- amending the definition of the SARA Manual;
- enabling the Department to retain an independent auditor to calculate an institution's financial responsibility composite score (FRCS);
- changing licensure disclosure requirements so that students are informed based on their location during enrollment instead of residency; and
- allowing the Department to keep an institution on provisional status for more than one year.

Board Chair Gabrieli asked if institutions are required to apply for SARA membership every year. Mr. Nally stated that they are. Commissioner Santiago expressed surprise by the low number of approved institutions, given the push made by private higher education institutions for Massachusetts to join SARA, and asked why the numbers were so low. Mr. Nally replied that, in his opinion, the low numbers are mostly due to institutions underestimating the preparation necessary for participation in SARA and that the number of member institutions would likely continue to increase. Board Chair Gabrieli asked about the speed of the application reviews. Mr. Nally responded that reviews go relatively quickly, especially because the Department is not assessing the quality of the programs because participation in SARA builds upon an institution's existing degree granting authority extended from the Board or the Massachusetts legislature.

Chief General Counsel Papanikolaou noted the increased complexity for processing SARA applications among the “pre-1943” higher education institutions that do not fall under the purview of the BHE. Board Member Pagliuca inquired whether the inclusion of initial and renewal applications together in the figures for application processing time were appropriate. Mr. Nally replied that although the steps involved in an initial versus a renewal application review are slightly different, ongoing changes to institutional characteristics, and changes in federal law and NC-SARA policy, have still required a substantive review at the renewal stage similar in depth and complexity to that of an initial review.

Secretary Peyser asked how many online programs are offered. Mr. Nally stated that that information is not available because the Department does not track data at the programmatic level on an annual basis. Secretary Peyser then asked why some institutions do not include or identify all their online programs under their participation in SARA. Ms. Wisneski replied that in some cases the programs likely needed NECHE approval prior to being offered fully online, and in other cases, the institutions simply do not intend to offer the programs online or outside of Massachusetts. The question of whether other states charge a membership fee was asked. Mr. Nally answered that about half do. Commissioner Santiago then asked if Massachusetts was collecting enrollment data on SARA programs. Mr. Nally responded that NC-SARA collects annual enrollment numbers from institutions directly, so the onus is not on the Department to do so.

Commissioner Santiago asked for an update on the questions surrounding states’ ability to enforce their laws against institutions participating in SARA. Ms. Wisneski provided background regarding this issue and stated that the new state authorization regulations issued under the Trump Administration, scheduled to go into effect July 2020, would allow state authorization reciprocity agreements to prevent member states from enforcing laws of specific applicability, which includes the Attorney General’s for-profit institution consumer protection regulations.

Board Chair Gabrieli moved for a motion to approve. The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

**AAC 20-09      APPROVAL OF AMENDMENTS TO 610 CMR 12.00: OPERATION OF MASSACHUSETTS DEGREE-GRANTING INSTITUTIONS UNDER THE STATE AUTHORIZATION RECIPROCITY AGREEMENT (SARA)**

**VOTED:**            The Board of Higher Education hereby approves the amendments to 610 CMR 12.00: operation of Massachusetts degree-granting institutions under the state authorization reciprocity agreement (SARA)

Authority:          Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, §9(b).

Contact:            Winifred M. Hagan, Ed.D. Associate Commissioner for Academic Affairs & Student Success.

## V. PRESENTATIONS

### A. Common Transfer Principles

Assistant Commissioner of Academic Affairs and Student Success, Elena Quiroz-Livanis, also Chief of Staff, presented. She summarized the principles as follows:

- Ensure that credit accepted reflects appropriate levels of academic quality and is applicable to students' programs;
- Reduce unnecessary barriers to protect the colleges' academic quality and integrity; and
- Provide standards for the evaluation of alternative sources of credit.

In addition, she highlighted that the principles provide guidance on the following:

- General conditions;
- Minimum grades for credit transfer;
- Course residency requirements and maximum transfer credits allowed;
- Alternative sources of credit;
- Time limits; and
- Students appeals.

Board Chair Gabrieli began the questions following the presentation by asking what the adoption of the principles will mean – *i.e.*, what will be its net benefit? Assistant Commissioner Quiroz-Livanis answered by stating that it will put pressure on campuses to start changing internal transfer policies to be consistent with each another. Board Chair Gabrieli asked if this could occur because the campuses made the choice consciously or because the Board voted on the principles, and Assistant Commissioner Quiroz-Livanis responded that it was the latter.

Board Chair Pagliuca asked if all state higher education institutions would have to comply if the Board approves of the common transfer principles in February. Assistant Commissioner Quiroz-Livanis answered yes, and reminded the Committee that the campuses agreed to these principles in statewide convenings and are eager to comply. She added that the DHE tracks completion through pathways so the goal will be to see more transfer students complete and graduate with degrees. Board Member Pagliuca commented that the approval of the principles would become a question of campus speed of compliance. Assistant Commissioner Quiroz-Livanis said most campuses are already compliant due to two years of iterative conversations and versions of these documents. The campuses are now just waiting for us to act so they can implement on the local level.

Board Member Pagliuca asked if the changes have resulted in more transfers and if we had a way to track that data. Assistant Commissioner Quiroz-Livanis replied the Department is not only tracking transfer rates, but also how many credits a student earns at the time of completing the baccalaureate degree. One goal of the transfer work is to ensure students do not need to repeat courses and finish the baccalaureate with no more than 120 credits. Board Member Pagliuca said it would be a challenge to determine cause and effect for the increase in student transfers and completion, to which Associate Commissioner Quiroz-Livanis noted the additional challenge where high school students complete sufficient credits to earn an associate's degree and how the accepting institution will categorize the student – as a transfer or as a freshman?

Board Chair Gabrieli concluded the conversation by highlighting the importance of these policy questions, including how to consider Advanced Placement (AP) courses. To which Assistant Commissioner Quiroz-Livanis noted that policy could be amended once an AP policy exists.

**VI. OTHER BUSINESS:**

There was no other business.

**VII. ADJOURNMENT:**

On a motion duly made and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 12:08 p.m.