



Academic Affairs Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: Thursday, June 11, 2026
Time: 2:00PM
Location: Boyd Conference Room, Conley Hall

Members Present: Mr. Brent Benjamin, Ms. Cathy Deeb, Mr. Mike Hastings, Mr. Randy Price, Dr. Sarita Rhonemus, Mr. Ed Toman (Virtual)

Call to Order:

Mr. Ed Toman called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

1. HLC Update

An update was provided on the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) accreditation process. The peer review team has finalized its report and submitted it to the Institutional Actions Council. The HLC Commission is scheduled to meet June 22–23, with an action letter expected in mid-July.

The committee was informed that Bluefield State is no longer on probation and that the institution is expected to meet all accreditation criteria. Reviewers were particularly impressed with the Board of Governors' engagement and progress made since the previous review cycle. The next comprehensive review is anticipated in 2032.

2. Fall 2026 Registration Numbers

Current enrollment figures show the University is ahead of the same point last year, with headcount enrollment up by seven students and full-time enrollment up approximately 5.5 percent.

Discussion focused on student payment status and accountability. Committee members emphasized the importance of identifying students who have registered but have not completed payment arrangements. Suggestions included:

- Tracking students who are paid, unpaid, or on payment plans.
- Providing earlier intervention and financial counseling.
- Identifying responsible offices for monitoring payment completion and student financial readiness.

Administration reported ongoing efforts to improve early communication regarding balances, financial aid, and payment plans to reduce enrollment attrition.

3. Organizational Chart Change

The committee reviewed proposed organizational structure changes effective July 1, 2026.

Key changes include:

- Renaming the College of Arts, Education and Social Sciences to the **College of Arts, Education and Science**.
- Returning science disciplines to the College of Arts, Education and Science, with the exception of Physics and Computer Science, which will remain aligned with STEM.
- Moving Applied Science back to the Basic Science Building where laboratories and faculty offices are located.
- Aligning reporting structures more closely with instructional locations and student expectations.

Committee members agreed the changes create a more logical and efficient academic structure.

4. Curriculum Changes

Several curriculum updates were presented, including:

- Allowing Biology 101 to serve as both a prerequisite and co-requisite where appropriate.
- Updating pre-medical program requirements.
- Replacing a Visual Basic course with **Python for Engineers** to modernize instruction and better align with industry standards.

The committee noted that these revisions support curriculum modernization and student success.

5. Job Postings and New Hires

An overview of recent hiring activity was provided. Administration noted that faculty overloads were identified as a concern during the HLC review and that efforts are underway to reduce excessive teaching loads through strategic hiring.

Recent hiring and recruitment efforts include:

- Pending offer for Electrical Engineering.
- New First-Year Experience instructor position.
- Searches underway in Education, Engineering Technology, and Mechanical Engineering.
- New hires in Computer Science, English, Accounting, Criminal Justice, Psychology, Engineering, STEM Research, and Nursing.

Most positions represent replacements for vacant roles. The committee discussed the importance of monitoring course enrollment, instructional efficiency, and faculty workload while maintaining academic quality and student support.

6. Master of Science in Engineering Technology

The proposed Master of Science in Engineering Technology was reported to be in its final approval stage before the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission.

Administration indicated:

- The proposal was scheduled for consideration on June 12.
- No concerns were anticipated regarding approval.
- Once approved, the University will have two years to fully implement the program.

The committee also discussed future graduate program development opportunities, including potential programs in Computer Science and Nursing.

7. International Students

An update was provided regarding international student recruitment.

Current status:

- 151 applications have been received.
- Nine students are currently registered.
- Forty-seven students are participating in Optional Practical Training (OPT).
- Several graduates are pursuing additional training or transferring to graduate programs.

Administration noted that international recruitment remains a lengthy and complex process and that current geopolitical conditions may affect enrollment from some regions. Staff continue to work closely with applicants throughout the process.

Program Review Recommendations

The committee reviewed the following academic programs:

Business Administration

- Applications increased by more than 100%.
- Student competition results and national recognition were highlighted.
- Retention and graduate placement tracking remain areas for improvement.

Recommendation: Continue and invest in the program while focusing on retention initiatives.

Elementary Education

- Program received an A+ rating in Science of Reading preparation.
- Graduate placement rates remain strong.
- Teacher shortages continue to support workforce demand.

Recommendation: Continue and expand the program to address workforce needs.

Master of Business Administration (MBA)

- Applications increased approximately 42%.
- Enrollment growth continues.
- Assessment and graduate outcome tracking remain areas for improvement.

Recommendation: Continue and grow the program.

International Studies

- Strong alignment with the University's mission and international partnerships.
- Enrollment remains small and outcomes data are limited due to the program's age.
- Opportunities exist for growth through study-abroad initiatives and targeted marketing.

Recommendation: Continue the program while establishing enrollment benchmarks and increasing recruitment efforts.

Following discussion, a motion was made and supported to recommend continuation of the reviewed programs in accordance with the administration's recommendations for consideration by the Board of Governors.

Additional Discussion

Administration agreed to follow up on reporting mechanisms related to student payment status and accountability, an issue raised during enrollment discussions. Committee members expressed support for obtaining more detailed information to assist future planning and oversight.

Adjournment

With no further business to come before the committee, a motion was made by Mr. Mike Hastings to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at 2:53 PM.

