



West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission

Higher Education
News Clippings

Week of January 4, 2009



January 08, 2009

HEPC OKs rules for president searches

Chancellor may serve on several committees

BY CASSIE SHANE, The Dominion Post

After six months of discussion and revision, the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (HEPC) unanimously approved new guidelines for presidential searches statewide at a special meeting on Wednesday.

The commission voted in November to table the guidelines, which were required by a 2008 change in state code, after concerns were raised about a provision that requires the HEPC chancellor to serve as an ex-officio, nonvoting member of presidential search committees at 10 state institutions.

Commissioners had indicated that problems could occur if the chancellor was being considered for a job or if several searches were being conducted at once, but Brian Noland, the current HEPC chancellor, said the commission decided to approve the rules on Wednesday without making any changes.

“While I don’t like the rule, I’ll withhold my objection at this time,” HEPC vice chairman David Hendrickson said.

There was no further discussion of the guidelines during Wednesday’s meeting. Though no additional changes were made, Noland said the new rules for presidential searches were an improvement.

“It’s a much more inclusive system,” Noland said. “I think it’s a better process than what’s historically been used by the state over the past 20 years.”

The rules require the commission to approve all search procedures, allow the commission to conduct its own finalist interviews and instruct college governing boards to consult peer institutions and other appropriate sources in determining presidential salaries.

The guidelines were first discussed at a meeting held last August and approved as an emergency rule in September, pending a 30-day comment period that ended Oct. 10. The commission received comments from three people — including WVU Faculty Senate Chairwoman Virginia Kleist — during the comment period.

The rule was altered based on the public comments to require a school’s governing board to seek input on presidential characteristics from various constituencies and to consider feedback from campus communities in making a final presidential selection.

After Wednesday’s meeting, Noland said the rules will be presented to the Legislative Oversight Commission on Education Accountability for final approval on Sunday.

Noland has previously said that the presidential searches under way at WVU and Fairmont State University adhere to the emergency rule approved in September.

Raise for Marshall president

Also during Wednesday's meeting, the commission approved a \$42,220 pay raise and a \$50,000 annual bonus — depending on the availability of funds — for Marshall University President Stephen Kopp. His annual salary will increase by about 18 percent, from \$232,780 to \$275,000.

C. Peter Magrath, WVU's interim president, earns \$300,000 annually.

Commissioners Bob Brown and John Estep voted against the proposal, which was submitted by Marshall's Board of Governors. Brown said he objected because Marshall had not fully funded a salary schedule for classified staff.

"I cannot in good conscience today vote for this compensation package, notwithstanding the fact that I do believe Dr. Kopp is worth it," Brown said.

The commission did not approve a deferred compensation package for Kopp included in the Marshall proposal. Noland said the package was "broad-reaching," and a term sheet provided to the HEPC provided only a "rough sketch" of the plan.

The commission "felt the deferred compensation was a little bit more than they could handle at this time," Noland said, after Wednesday's meeting.



January 7, 2009

WVU wins lawsuit filed by paper in Pittsburgh Mon County judge rules Bresch-case FOIA request fulfilled

Staff, wire reports

A Monongalia county judge has ruled against a Pittsburgh newspaper in a suit it filed against WVU under the Freedom of Information Act.

Circuit Court Judge Robert Stone said WVU gave the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette all the information that was required last year in response to three records requests involving a degree awarded to Heather Bresch, Gov. Joe Manchin's daughter.

The newspaper claimed WVU failed to fully answer the three FOIA requests, refusing to produce documents that included then-President Mike Garrison's phone records.

The requests were filed after the newspaper published stories that questioned whether Bresch, a Mylan Inc. executive, actually earned an executive master's of business administration degree from WVU. An investigative panel's report released in April found that Bresch had not earned the degree.

Stone granted WVU's motion for summary judgment Dec. 29.

Stone said an index provided under court order shows 43 documents were legitimately withheld for privacy reasons, but he awarded the newspaper attorneys' fees because the newspaper had to sue for that list.

The Office of the Vice President for Legal Affairs and General Counsel at WVU referred The Dominion Post to Becky Lofstead, assistant vice president for communications at WVU, for comment.

"WVU complied fully with the request, as well as the spirit of the West Virginia Freedom of Information Act," Lofstead said.

Lofstead said WVU had received Stone's ruling, and the exact amount of the court costs had not been determined Tuesday.

John Polak, a Charleston-based attorney representing the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, said the newspaper is considering its next step.

"We're still reviewing the judge's order and evaluating our options," Polak said.

Kopp pay raise approved

By BILL ROSENBERGER

CHARLESTON – The Higher Education Policy Commission approved a new compensation package for Marshall University President Stephen Kopp by a 7-2 vote on Wednesday afternoon in Charleston.

The new five-year package includes a salary increase from \$232,780 to \$275,000 and gives the Marshall University Foundation permission to award Kopp up to \$50,000 in annual bonuses. It also includes a deferred compensation plan, but Marshall's Board of Governors must bring details of the plan back to the commission, which only approved it in a conceptual phase.

"I don't have a problem with \$275,000; I don't have a problem with the \$50,000, but I do have a serious problem with the deferred compensation," said commissioner David Hendrickson, who offered a resolution that stipulates any deferred compensation plan be brought to the commission before it goes into effect.

Kopp, in a prepared statement, said he is honored to be thought of so highly.

"We are making great strides at Marshall University and Jane and I are honored to serve Marshall University," Kopp said. "The potential I see for our beloved university and the great state of West Virginia is extraordinary. I thank the members of the Higher Education Policy Commission and the Marshall University Board of Governors for their confidence in me and I relish the opportunity to continue advancing our commitment to fulfilling the promise of a better future for the countless constituents we serve both locally and globally.

Kopp is anticipated to sign the new contract, which would go into effect the next pay period.

Members of Marshall's Board of Governors, not present at the meeting, offered statements as well, saying that Kopp's leadership and the direction he has taken Marshall since joining in 2005 warranted the raise.

"Dr. Kopp, since arriving at Marshall University, has aggressively addressed the major challenges facing Marshall and its future, including declining enrollment, financial pressures and redefining Marshall's critical role for it and its students in an ever-changing world," said A. Michael Perry, a member of MU's Board of Governors and chair of its finance committee.

"Although problems persist, the board is very supportive of his vision, leadership and the progress he has made, and is committed to keeping him here at Marshall at a time when the higher education market is very competitive. Accordingly, recognizing the quality job he has done and also in an effort to make certain the salary of the president of Marshall University is more competitive with its peers, the board recently recommended a substantial raise to the HEPC for its consideration and we are delighted to learn that our recommendations were accepted.

The deferred compensation, said Marshall's senior vice president of communications Bill Bissett, will be a retirement package that is intended to keep the 57-year-old Kopp at Marshall for the foreseeable future.

Not every commissioner felt the raise was a good idea. John Estep and Robert Brown voted no. But neither said it had to do with the job Kopp is doing.

Brown said he received many phone calls from Marshall faculty and staff, upset that their salaries aren't in line with peer institutions and are low within the state of West Virginia.

"I don't have any doubt that Kopp is worth the money," Brown said. "I have watched him at in the Legislature and I'm quite impressed, but I cannot support this."

But Hendrickson said it's a matter of the chicken or the egg. Will rewarding Kopp now mean greater things are ahead for faculty and staff?

"When you try to compete for talented individuals such as Dr. Kopp, you have to find a way to fund these salaries," he said, adding that he believes Kopp's vision will foster increased compensation for the university's 2,000 employees.

January 08, 2009

State approves \$42,000 increase in MU president's pay With bonus, income could hit \$325,000

By Alison Knezevich, Staff writer

CHARLESTON, W.Va. - Marshall University President Stephen Kopp will get a \$42,220 raise under a contract approved Wednesday by the state's Higher Education Policy Commission, a boost two commissioners say is unfair in light of staff salaries there.

At a brief meeting by conference call, commissioners voted 7-2 to approve the compensation package, which will bring Kopp's base salary to \$275,000.

His five-year contract also will allow for up to a \$50,000 annual bonus from the Marshall University Foundation, if funds are available.

Commissioners Bob Brown and John Estep voted against the contract. Marshall has not fully funded a salary schedule implemented in 2001 for classified employees, Brown said.

"I don't have any doubt that Kopp is worth the money," Brown, who works for the West Virginia School Service Personnel Association, said after the meeting. "The issue is equity."

Marshall's Board of Governors approved a version of the contract in November. The HEPC discussed the compensation package in a closed executive session that month, but took no action.

Marshall BOG member A. Michael Perry said in a statement that since Kopp became president in 2005, he has aggressively addressed major challenges, including declining enrollment and financial pressures. The contract will help Marshall retain him in a highly competitive market, Perry said.

The average salary of a president at Marshall's peer public institutions is \$261,195, according to information provided by the HEPC. The average total compensation is \$345,382.

In the university's statement, Kopp thanked the Marshall board and the HEPC for their confidence in him and said he looked forward to continuing to lead the school.

At their meeting in November, HEPC members had questions about whether the annual bonus would come from public or private funds, officials said.

"It wasn't clear who would be paying what," higher education Chancellor Brian Noland said Wednesday.

Last month, then-commissioner Nelson Robinson called the proposed raise for Kopp excessive in light of the nation's economic crisis. He also said the public is often not aware of the perks university presidents enjoy.

Kopp's contract includes monthly stipends totaling \$1,850 for automobiles and other expenses. His monthly dues at Guyan Golf & Country Club also will be paid.

The timing [of the raise] is obviously not optimal," Noland said, referring to the economic struggles many people are facing. "The timing in many respects could not have been worse."

But he said that if Kopp left, they'd likely have to pay more for his successor due to the competitive marketplace for university presidents.

Noland said faculty, staff and presidents' salaries in West Virginia all are "below market," and said he hopes Kopp will address faculty and staff salaries at Marshall in the coming years.

The HEPC didn't approve a deferred compensation plan for Kopp, saying the Marshall Board of Governors hadn't provided enough information about it. Under the resolution passed Wednesday, commissioners still can approve a deferred compensation plan in the future when they get a detailed final document on it.

"This one piece to me is troubling," commissioner David Hendrickson said before the vote. "I don't have a problem with the \$275,000. I don't have a problem with the \$50,000. I do have a serious problem with the deferred compensation piece."

The Marshall board is still working on the deferred compensation piece to ensure it meets legal standards, BOG chairman Robert Shell said when reached after the meeting.

"The plans nowadays are relatively sophisticated and have to be done absolutely correctly," he said.

Shell said the board is "always concerned" about faculty and staff salaries, but that aspects of the issue are out of their control.

"The truth of the matter is, our ability to bring their wages and pay up to a higher scale is directly related to enrollment," Shell said. "It simply can't be done without that increase in enrollment, because that's where the money comes from."

Wednesday was Brown's first meeting as a commissioner. He replaces Robinson as an ex-officio member representing the state's Council for Community and Technical College Education.

Charleston Daily Mail

DAILYMAIL.COM

January 7, 2009

If it works, state officials shouldn't fix it **The Promise scholarships are working just fine**

By Don Surber

The annual attack on Promise scholarships puzzles me. The Promise program works, and it's funded by Lottery money, not money extracted from taxpayers.

So a few West Virginians want to change it. Why?

A new panel recommended capping the Promise scholarships and using the savings to boost needs-based grants. Savings in government never are refunded to the taxpayers.

Students earn Promise scholarships by getting good grades in high school and showing they are college material on the college exams.

Needs-based grants are based on family income and don't necessarily reflect the ability to do college work.

Most colleges probably prefer needs-based grants because most of those students won't graduate. Freshman classes are cash cows for colleges, which can herd large groups of first-year students into classes that in general are taught by junior instructors, who cost less than tenured professors.

Promise scholars tend to graduate. They also prefer Marshall and West Virginia University, which draw 70 percent of the Promise scholars.

January 12, 2009

Fewer poor students attending college since Promise began

By Alison Knezevich, Staff writer

CHARLESTON, W.Va. - Poor West Virginia students are attending college less frequently than they did before the state's Promise scholarship started almost seven years ago, according to a committee that studied the merit-aid program.

Low-income students' college-going rate has dropped from about 21 percent in 2001 - the year before the program started - to about 19 percent in 2007, according to the committee's report, which will be presented Tuesday to legislators. The national average is about 24 percent.

"Even though we noted that it was a national trend, it seemed to be more of a problem in West Virginia," said former Concord University president Jerry Beasley, who chaired the Promise Scholarship Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee.

For all income levels, the state's college-going rate has increased modestly, from 56.4 percent to 57.5 percent.

Last year, Gov. Joe Manchin requested a review of Promise after a variety of changes were proposed in the Legislature. The advisory group studied how the program has met its original goals, which include increasing high school and college achievement, increasing access to college and preventing a "brain drain."

Among other recommendations, the committee says the scholarship should be capped at \$4,500 a year to control costs of the \$42 million program. The scholarship now covers all tuition and fees at public institutions.

West Virginia is one of 16 states that offer merit aid, which can become "exponentially expensive" due to its popularity and rising tuition rates, said state Higher Education Policy Commission Chancellor Brian Noland. Almost 9,000 students now receive the Promise scholarship.

Among the 16 states that offer merit aid, six guarantee full tuition and fees. The others give students a set amount of money.

"The problem with guaranteeing full tuition without a cap is that when tuition goes up, basically it can break the bank," said Gale Gaines, vice president for state services at the Southern Regional Education Board.

As high school ACT score requirements have risen, to control costs of West Virginia's program, poor students have lost out. Promise scholars are increasingly from higher-income families, according to the report.

Noland said the state is committed to helping students from all income levels attend college. In the past few years, the state has nearly doubled its investments in need-based aid, he said.

Raising eligibility criteria also is confusing to students and parents, Beasley and Noland said. Requirements have changed three times in the past five years.

"We did talk with high school counselors and others who told us that the continually changing standards really were exasperating for students and families," Beasley said.

According to the report, the state has made progress in both high school and college achievement since Promise began. More high schoolers are taking the ACT, and their test scores have risen.

Compared to similar students before Promise started, scholarship recipients earn higher GPAs in college, are more likely to take 30 credits a year, and have higher college graduation rates.

"That I think is an unsung strength of the program," Noland said.

Since the program started, more West Virginians are staying in state for college. But the committee found no evidence showing Promise scholars are more likely to stay after graduation.

"What most of the evidence that we looked at suggests is that the labor market often trumps public policy in the location decisions of college graduates," Beasley said.

State-provided merit aid started in Georgia in 1993. Such programs have become politically popular, but have also garnered criticism about who benefits from them.

Research has shown that much of the money goes to students who would have gone to college anyway, without public assistance - as much as 90 percent in the case of the Georgia Hope scholarship, said Donald Heller, an education professor and director of the Center for the Study of Higher Education at the Pennsylvania State University.

"So if a state's goal is to increase the overall college-going rate, as is the case in West Virginia and many other states, merit scholarships are an inefficient way to do that," Heller said in an e-mail to the Gazette.

It is true that West Virginia has maintained a stronger commitment to need-based aid than other states with merit-based programs, Heller said.

But many merit programs are funded by sources such as lottery proceeds, so they're more immune to politics and the state's fiscal situation, he said. State need-based programs are entirely in the discretionary part of state budgets and are more likely to be cut when times are bad.

Many issues in the Promise report might spark controversy, Noland said.

"I know that there's going to be a lot of debate about this - and there should be," he said. "It's going to be, I think, a great debate for the state to have about post-secondary education."

January 4, 2009

For-profit college opens in Teays Valley

Higher ed officials: State must compete with growing industry

By Alison Knezevich, Staff writer

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Even as for-profit schools like the University of Phoenix have thrived in other parts of the country, the industry hasn't built a big presence in West Virginia.

Now, a for-profit called Strayer University plans to open its first West Virginia location in Teays Valley - and some state higher education officials say public schools must compete with the proprietary sector by more aggressively courting working adults and others looking for convenient education choices.

Strayer will be the state's third for-profit school that offers four-year programs. The others are American Public University, an online school based in Charles Town; and Salem International University in Harrison County.

Strayer officials are mum on the details of the Putnam County location. The company hasn't officially announced the opening or finalized a timeline, said spokeswoman Sonya Udler.

But the Arlington, Va.-based company has recently posted job ads in local newspapers for a number of positions, including admissions officers, a business office manager and a student account representative.

According to materials Strayer gave the state's Higher Education Policy Commission, the school plans to open its offices this month and start offering bachelor's and master's degree programs in the spring.

"There is obviously a place for for-profit schools," said David Tyson, chairman of the HEPC, which in May gave Strayer approval to operate in the state. "It's apparent that Strayer and others are meeting a niche."

But some say state schools aren't catering to a certain niche: Adults who need flexible class schedules and young people who have grown up in the digital age. Strayer offers both online and on-campus classes. Its programs include information technology, accounting, business, health services administration and education administration.

Nelson Robinson, a member of the state's Council for Community and Technical College Education and former HEPC member, has often criticized the state's public four-year institutions for what he calls a lack of online courses. He also says the enrollment process and ability to transfer online credits is burdensome for students.

"They're not very customer-friendly," he said. "And I think these private institutions are very customer-oriented."

The state needs to provide more online classes to compete with for-profit offerings, Robinson and Tyson contend. More than 70 percent of Strayer students take at least one class online, according to the company's materials.

"I don't think we have expanded the online opportunities like we should have," Robinson said, adding that his son at West Virginia University would take most of his classes online if he could.

It's not just online offerings, but the overall "convenience factor" of many for-profits that attract some students, said state higher education chancellor Brian Noland. They usually provide short programs tailored to a specific career and evening and weekend classes for working adults with families.

He and others say they don't think Strayer- which has more than 50 campuses in 12 states and Washington, D.C.- will threaten enrollment at public schools.

But "I think that some of their markets ... are markets that our institutions need to be a little bit more aggressive in," Noland said.

Undergraduate students who attend four-year for-profit schools accumulate more debt than others. According to findaid.org, 87 percent borrow, compared to 62 percent at a four-year public. Their average debt is about \$28,000, versus about \$17,000 at a four-year public.

"These institutions spend a lot more on marketing than our institutions do," Noland said.

Still, he and others predict the sector will continue to grow here and elsewhere. Over the past 27 years, enrollment at for-profit postsecondary institutions has grown an average of 11 percent a year, according to a recent analysis by brokerage and investment banking firm Stifel Nicolaus.

The bad economy could actually help them. Stifel Nicolaus says that in the past nine annual periods of economic downturn, for-profits have grown by 17 percent. That's compared to eight percent growth during the past 18 annual periods of positive economic conditions.

Once the HEPC approves a for-profit school, the institution isn't subject to the same statutes that govern public institutions.

Tyson said company officials were "a little bit vague in terms of graduation rates and things of that nature," but that they met academic standards needed for approval. Strayer is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

Dan Rosenfield, a member of the National Association for College Admission Counseling, said for-profit schools are a good fit for some students, but that people should be cautious.

"Prospective students and regulatory agencies need to be very careful about some of the for-profits because their goal is to please their stockholders," said Rosenfield, a retired dean of enrollment management at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. "On the other hand, all colleges and universities have got serious bottom-line concerns."

Rosenfield has worked at both public and private non-profit schools, and also for the for-profit Argosy University.

Some for-profits deserve criticism, he said, like ones that admit people with such low academic credentials they are unlikely to ever graduate. Others employ instructors who care about students and take education seriously, he said.

"I think they serve a market that needs to be served," he said. "That's something a lot of people don't understand."