



To: Higher Education Committee
From: John L. D'Agati *John L. D'Agati*
Subject: Update on the Regents Task Force on Distance Education
Date: April 21, 2014

Authorizations:

John B. TS Jr.
SUMMARY

Issue for Information

A panel will provide an update on the Regents Task Force on Distance Education – Co-Chaired by Chancellor Emeritus Bennett and Regent Bendit.

Background Information

Given the ubiquitous nature of digital technology in today's world, there is no longer a clear-cut distinction between pure distance or online education and its brick-and-mortar counterpart. In addition, the rise in competency-based education and an increase in collaboration between institutions of higher education (IHEs) and outside providers of technology and content require that we reexamine current methods and criteria for evaluating programs to ensure that they meet the highest quality standards.

To assure that approved programs meet or exceed standards established in Education Law and Regents Rules, the Regents Task Force is charged with reviewing current regulations as they pertain to, and are applied to, the evaluation of degree programs when provided in a distance education format, a competency-based, rather than credit-based, model or when they involve external partnerships in the development of the degree program. The Regents Task Force will make recommendations and provide guidance regarding the review of proposals for new degree and certificate programs offering any of the aforementioned options.

The Regents Task Force has been asked to consider the following:

- Should the Commissioner's Regulations, used to evaluate the quality of a proposed program, be amended, or policy and guidance be developed, to ensure that programs that include any of the aspects mentioned above meet or exceed the requirements established by the Board of Regents?
- What specific types of evidence, artifacts, data, faculty qualifications, institutional resources, admission standards and support services should the Department require as indicators of quality before approving a program in a distance education format or that changes the system for calculating and awarding credits, and/or creates partnerships that may impact the current governance system?
- How will the phenomenon of "MOOCs" (Massive Open Online Courses) and other similarly disruptive ventures be evaluated for quality?
- Given the evolving landscape of distance education, how can the Department ensure the quality of programs offered by New York State institutions while at the same time enabling them to remain competitive with their out-of-state counterparts?

Chancellor Emeritus Bennett and Regent Bendit participated in the first meeting of the Regents Task Force, which was held on November 12, 2013. Eighteen of the 27 Task Force members represent IHEs from the four sectors across the State and have been invited to participate based upon their expertise in distance education, competency-based learning and/or partnerships. The remaining six participants are from program offices in the Department. (See Appendix 1 for a complete list of members.) Chancellor Emeritus Bennett and Regent Bendit also participated in the most recent full Task Force meeting held on April 3, 2014. At this meeting the Task Force asked representatives from McGraw-Hill Education to provide an overview of the types of technology they are developing to promote student learning. Questions regarding remedial education and adaptive technology were discussed, as well as ways in which the Department can evaluate these new methods to ensure that quality standards are monitored.

State Authorization for Distance Education

One of the panelists will also discuss with the Board new federal regulations regarding State Authorization for Distance Education and how that will affect our system of review.

Panelists

A member from each of the distance education, partnerships, and competency-based education sub-groups will discuss their group's progress and address questions from the Board.

Meg Benke

Empire State College

Meg Benke, Ph.D., of Saratoga Springs, is a professor and mentor in Empire State College's graduate programs in adult learning and emerging technologies. Dr. Benke has had an extensive administrative career at Empire State College, serving as Dean of the Center for Distance Learning, vice provost, provost and as acting president.

Dr. Benke also serves as a commissioner for the Middle States Association for Higher Education, and participated as a commissioner for the National Commission on Interstate Regulation of Distance Education. She also serves as a member of New York State's Regents Advisory Council on Institutional Accreditation and is a member of the Board of Directors of Sloan-C, a national consortium focused on advancing quality e-Education learning into the mainstream of education through its community.

Dr. Benke's presentations and publications focus on adult learning, prior learning assessment and progressive education. She began her career at Ohio University and Antioch College, and her early work was dedicated to increasing access to higher education for adult learners through distance education. Dr. Benke was particularly interested in increasing the employability of graduates, and worked to ensure that the outcomes of an online education matched traditional education from a quality perspective.

Mary Beth Del Balzo

College of Westchester

Mary Beth Del Balzo, LCSW, Senior Executive Vice President and Chief Operations Officer at The College of Westchester (CW) in White Plains, most recently worked in Distance Education, spearheading and launching CW's distance education division, as well as overseeing and expanding its high school, corporate and community relations. Past responsibilities at CW include instruction, curriculum and program development and community outreach, student activities, advisement and counseling center development. Currently, Ms. Del Balzo oversees academic affairs, admissions, marketing, business development and other technology based opportunities, corporate and government relations.

Ms. Del Balzo serves on the boards of The College of Westchester, The Westchester County Association, The College of Westchester Charitable Foundation and the Westchester Putnam Rockland Counseling Association, and is a Psychotherapist in private practice. Most recently, she testified before the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Education and the Workforce with the Chancellor of Fayetteville State University System and the President of DePaul University, Chicago, IL, on sharing best practices at CW to retain and graduate low income and first generation students. Ms. Del Balzo received her BA in English Literature at Fairfield University and her MSW at

Fordham University. She also holds a certificate in Computer Programming and Systems Analysis at Control Data Institute of NY.

Robert Ubell

NYU-School of Engineering

Robert Ubell is Vice Dean, Online Learning, at NYU School of Engineering, where he heads the school's e-learning unit, which is ranked by US News & World Report in the nation's top dozen online learning engineering graduate programs, offering nearly twenty online graduate programs worldwide. Dr. Ubell also heads the school's executive education division, Enterprise Learning.

Dr. Ubell is recipient of the highest honor given for individual achievement in digital education, the A. Frank Mayadas Leadership Award. The school's online graduate program in Cyber Security was also awarded the Sloan-C prize as best online program. Formerly, as Dean of Online Learning at Stevens Institute of Technology, Dr. Ubell launched WebCampus, winner of numerous awards for quality online education. During his tenure, WebCampus enrolled more than 25,000 online students.

Dr. Ubell received his undergraduate degree at Brooklyn College, where he serves on the Advisory Council of the School of Natural and Behavioral Sciences. He has been a guest lecturer at MIT and Columbia's College of Physicians & Surgeons, and is a Fellow of the Sloan Consortium and a Member of the Council of the Chongqing (China) International Exchange Association.

Appendix I

Regents Task Force on Distance Education Task Force Members

Distance Education

- George Otte (co-leader)
- Eric Fredericksen (co-leader)
- Doreen Justinger
- Mary Beth Del Balzo
- Wendy Tang
- Robert Maruca
- John Brock (SED)
- Thomas Reimer (SED)
- Kathy Sheehy (SED)
- Ellen Zunon (OCUE)

Partnerships

- Curtis Kendrick (co-leader)
- Bob Ubell (co-leader)
- Ekaterina Sukhanova
- Neil Hair
- Mary Pat Lewis
- Tracy Mitrano
- Marilyn Caldwell (SED)
- Barbara Downs (OCUE)

Competency-Based Education

- Meg Benke (co-leader)
- Carey Hatch (co-leader)
- Matt Champagne
- Paul Shiffman
- Susan Deer
- Tina Grant
- Ann Frank (SED)
- William Murphy (SED)
- Maribeth Krupczak (OCUE)