



Massachusetts Department of Higher Education

Board of Higher Education Priorities for Academic Year 2014–15

October 21, 2014

Background

At the beginning of each academic year, the Board of Higher Education (BHE) establishes priorities to guide its own work and that of the Department of Higher Education. The adopted priorities reflect recommendations from the Commissioner, input that the Commissioner has received from campus presidents, the Executive Office of Education and the Department of Higher Education (DHE) staff, as well as the deliberations of the BHE itself. The priorities summarized below were discussed and affirmed at the BHE Retreat on September 16, 2014.

Priority One: Further Development of the Vision Project

A major emphasis must be placed on those aspects of Vision Project work that will increase overall production of graduates. This priority reflects the BHE's concern that system-wide enrollment declines projected for the decade ahead create the prospect that public higher education will produce declining numbers of graduates at a time when the state's economy will have a growing need for college-educated workers. Specifically, the DHE should give special attention to efforts to improve graduation rates and reduce achievement gaps with respect to both college participation and college completion. The DHE, working with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, must find ways to enhance the pipeline from high school into and through postsecondary, particularly for low income and underrepresented students. The DHE should also explore the possibility of enrolling more students from groups within the state's population who are not currently taking full advantage of opportunities at our public campuses. Such groups include older citizens with some college credits but no degree.

Within the framework outlined above, the wide range of Vision Project activities that have been launched since the inception of this policy in 2010 should continue along established lines. This includes continued work in the areas of learning outcomes assessment, workforce alignment, college readiness and teacher education. In addition, the Department should begin implementing the new policy on Civic Learning adopted by the BHE in May 2014.

Priority Two: Management of Fiscal Resources

Several matters related to the fiscal responsibilities of the BHE require special attention in the year ahead. These are:

- (1) DHE should continue its work with the Partnership to Advance Collaboration and Efficiencies (PACE) in order to make sure that the campuses are taking every opportunity to achieve economies with respect to the use of state resources; special efforts must be made to build the capacity to document and report these savings;
- (2) In collaboration with the college presidents, the DHE should further refine the Community College Funding Formula and work toward the development of a funding formula for the state universities;

- (3) The BHE's Fiscal Affairs and Administrative Policy Committee should review the BHE's statutory responsibilities for fiscal oversight in light of last year's events at Westfield State University and make sure that the BHE is doing everything it can do to ensure prudent management of state funds;
- (4) The Office of Trustee Relations (OTR) should develop a program of professional development in the area of fiscal oversight for college and university trustees; and
- (5) DHE should explore with the presidents the desirability of proposing legislation that would allow tuition retention by the campuses, as recommended by the Higher Education Finance Commission.

Priority Three: Improved Use of Performance Metrics and Data

The BHE is eager to build on the work accomplished last year with the development of campus-specific data dashboards for use by colleges' and universities' boards, presidents, and the BHE and DHE. DHE is charged to find ways to make these dashboards the basis for more focused interactions between the BHE/DHE and individual campuses with respect to work on various aspects of the Vision Project. To this end, the DHE should look for ways to include additional information on the dashboards that would be helpful to campus boards, such as their comparative standing in relation to peer institutions with respect to various metrics or identification of top-performing campuses in specific outcome areas. At the same time, the OTR should mount a program of professional development for campus board members regarding the use of the dashboards as a resource in setting institutional priorities. The BHE also calls for a discussion involving the DHE and campus representatives directed toward expanding the dashboards to include data currently reported through the Performance Measurement System or used for the Community College Funding Formula, the goal being a single, comprehensive dashboard that is sufficiently concise and clear to be helpful to campus boards.

Consistent with the recommendations of the Higher Education Finance Commission, the Department should conduct research on the distribution of the state appropriation among the three segments to determine whether or not current patterns of distribution in Massachusetts are in line with those of other states. As recommended by the Commission, the Commissioner should work with the Secretary of Education and the President of the University of Massachusetts in exploring this topic.

Priority Four: Further Development of Interactions between BHE and Campuses

The BHE continues to seek ways to interact constructively with the colleges and universities with a view toward advancing statewide priorities more effectively and also supporting the campuses as fully as possible. In this context, special attention will be placed in the coming year on three matters:

- (1) **Strategic Planning:** The BHE wishes to begin implementing its stated intention to work with the campuses as they develop their strategic plans, consistent with its statutory responsibility to review such plans and make recommendations regarding them to the Secretary. In this initial year the BHE views this activity as a learning exercise for it as well as for the campuses. As the basis for this dialogue, it has charged the DHE to organize interactions with campuses that are at an appropriate stage of strategic planning, the point of which will be to help the BHE determine how it can most effectively and constructively exercise its statutory responsibilities in this area. In parallel with this BHE-campus dialogue the DHE, in consultation with the BHE, the presidents, and the campus trustees, should develop a template or rubric that makes clear the BHE's expectations regarding information to be included in campus plans; this template should be finalized no later than the spring of 2015. The BHE is creating a special, ad hoc committee to lead

its work in this area. The intent is to fully implement the BHE's responsibilities with respect to reviewing campus plans during 2015–16.

- (2) **Sexual Assault:** The BHE is mindful that concerns about incidents of sexual assault and campus responses to them have become a major national issue. The BHE very much shares these concerns. In that context the BHE wishes to engage in a dialogue with the campuses to learn more about current and proposed practices in this arena and ultimately, in collaboration with the campuses, to develop and endorse a statement of policies and procedures to govern campus responses.
- (3) **Program Review:** Last spring the BHE approved new procedures for program review for private institutions designed to streamline interactions between DHE and the campuses in this arena. It is vital that these new procedures be implemented effectively during the current year. The BHE is also open to extending these new procedures to public campuses and awaits communication from the presidents with respect to the desirability of doing so. Finally, the BHE calls upon the DHE to continue its efforts to establish an effective system to review and approve new program proposals from out-of-state, online providers.