

MINUTES
STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF FLORIDA
BOARD OF GOVERNORS
SELECT COMMITTEE ON FLORIDA POLYTECHNIC
UNIVERSITY OF WEST FLORIDA
PENSACOLA, FLORIDA
MARCH 17, 2016

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1. Call to Order

Governor Wendy Link called the meeting to order at 8:50 a.m. on March 17, 2016, with the following members present: Daniel Doyle, Jr. (by telephone), and Fernando Valverde (by telephone). A quorum was established. Other Board members in attendance were Richard Beard III, Dean Colson, Patricia Frost, Tonnette Graham, H. Wayne Huizenga, Jr., Thomas Kuntz, Ned Lautenbach, Alan Levine, Katherine Robinson, Pam Stewart (by telephone), and Norman Tripp.

2. Meeting Minutes

Governor Link asked for a motion to approve minutes of the Committee's November 4, 2015 meeting. A motion was made by Governor Doyle, seconded by Governor Valverde, and the motion passed unanimously.

3. Florida Polytechnic University Implementation Update

Governor Link said that the Committee's next agenda item was to receive a status report from Florida Polytechnic University with respect to the six implementation requirements specified in statute. Chair Link said that, at the update provided for the meeting today, the institution's "red light/green light dashboard" indicated that three of the six statutory requirements have been completed; namely, that STEM academic programs have been implemented, that administrative capability has been achieved, and that immediate facilities needs have been met. Chair Link noted that the Committee has continually received updates on the University's efforts to achieve regional accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), a process that has been ongoing since December 2013. She said that at the Committee's meeting today she particularly wanted to focus on the issue of regional accreditation.

She noted that accreditation is a critical statutory requirement, and that the University's several previous updates, as well as its most recent update, have included a timeline for keeping the process on-track. Governor Link said that it was very important that the Board of Governors have as complete an understanding as possible with regard to where the University currently is in the accreditation process.

Chair Link said that the Committee had been advised in November 2015 that a SACS Candidacy Committee site visit was scheduled for March 7-10, 2016 and that, on March 14th she, Chancellor Criser, and Vice Chancellor Ignash met with President Avent as well as Florida Polytechnic University's Board of Trustees chair and other University representatives in order to more specifically understand where Florida Polytechnic was in the accreditation process. She thanked President Avent for taking the time to have that discussion. She then called on Vice Chancellor Ignash to provide an overview of the March 14th meeting.

Dr. Ignash said that the reasons why the University was unable to meet the statutory deadline of December, 2016 were discussed. Also discussed was when the University became aware that it was unable to meet the deadline and why the University might have gotten off-track. She reminded the Committee that the master timeline was originally approved by the Board of Governors in March 2014 and that the original date for candidacy was listed as June 2015 with the intention of receiving full accreditation in June 2016. She said it was noted at the meeting that this was a very ambitious timeline but that it was the timeline approved by the Board of Governors and that the timeline was deemed to be possible if there were no unforeseen delays. She said that, at the meeting, participants discussed what might have changed since the University's last update to the Committee. She said that another topic of the meeting was the number of students who intended to graduate this May and what information the University was providing to those students now that it appears as if accreditation will be delayed from the original master timeline. Dr. Ignash said that participants at the March 14 meeting also discussed what plans had been made to assist those students graduating this May relative to employment or applications for further study. She said that the extent to which any students would be negatively impacted as a result of the accreditation delay was discussed, as well as what students were being told about graduating from an unaccredited institution and whether that information has changed over time. She said, finally, that whether accreditation was achievable by June 2017 was also discussed.

Chair Link thanked Dr. Ignash and then said that there were points that she particularly wanted President Avent to cover in his update to the Committee. She said, first, that the Committee would be most interested to receive an update with regard to the March 7-10 site visit. She said that the Committee had the expectation of receiving any future documentation or other feedback provided by SACS with regard to the site visit. Secondly, she said that the Committee was interested in understanding the plans and actions that have been taken regarding students who may be graduating from Florida

Polytechnic University prior to its receiving accreditation by SACS. Third, Chair Link said that the Committee needed to be made aware of any revised estimate as to when Florida Polytechnic University could realistically expect to receive accreditation if the December 2016 timeline was no longer viable. She then called on President Avent to make his presentation.

President Avent began by saying that the “green light/red light dashboard” never had green marked on it with respect to accreditation. He said, rather, that the dashboard had yellow on it, which was a sign that the University was making good progress. Dr. Avent said that the University had only one year of enrollment data. He said that persistence rates were at 93% and that retention last year was 76%. He said that the University has admitted 40% more students this year than last year despite the fact that applications were slightly lower this year than last year. With regard to the quality of these admits, President Avent said that they have the same grade point average and ACT scores, and slightly lower SAT scores than the year before. He said that deposits were up approximately 15% over last year and that, accordingly, the University’s admissions office was projecting that approximately 600 students would enroll this year. President Avent then turned to the subject of accreditation.

President Avent said that SACS accreditation is actually two processes, the first being candidacy. Once an institution is a candidate, it can submit a final application, known as compliance accreditation. He said that the two processes consist of four components: the collection of data, the submission of an application, a site visit and its report going to SACS, and then a decision by a SACS committee which meets twice yearly, in June and December, for that specific purpose.

President Avent said that the candidacy application requires two important data elements: one full year of student assessment data and three years of financial audits. He said that SACS allowed the University to submit a pre-application, and that the University did so on December 19, 2014.

He said that SACS reviewed that application and provided feedback to the University in June 2015. He said that, based on the feedback and the fact that the University had time in June to finish one full year of student assessment, the application was updated and transmitted to SACS. He said that in August SACS indicated that the application was sufficient and that it was now just waiting for the financial audits.

President Avent said that the University endeavored to have the financial audits completed in August so that the application could make the agenda of the SACS 2015 December meeting for a candidacy decision. However, the financial audits were not completed until January 2016. He said, however, that SACS determined in late October that the application was complete, trusting that the financial audits would be good. President Avent said that SACS then assigned Dr. Mary Kirk as the SACS

representative who would work with the University all the way through accreditation. He said that Dr. Kirk visited the University in February 2016 and that the University worked with her to schedule a site visit for March 7-10, 2016.

President Avent said that the site visit had been conducted, that the University would receive feedback from SACS, the University would waive its review time, and that the site visit report would go to SACS, hopefully on June 16, 2016. He said that when he received the site visit report he would share it with the Board of Governors. He said that the University's plan had been that, with a June 2016 candidacy decision, a class would have graduated in May and then a complete compliance certification application could go forward. This would hopefully allow for a site visit in September 2016 in time to be placed on the December 2016 SACS agenda.

Dr. Avent said that when the University met with Dr. Kirk in early February they were informed that SACS would not allow this timeline, because the SACS policy is that both a candidacy visit and an accreditation visit cannot happen in the same calendar year. He said that the primary reason for this is that an institution could receive accreditation which then back-accredited to the beginning of the calendar year, creating a situation whereby an institution was accredited prior to its candidacy. He also said that he had been informed that there are some Department of Education implications on financial assistance associated with the SACS policy. President Avent said that there is no official written SACS policy with regard to this. He said that, as Florida Polytechnic began to press the issue of dates with SACS, that SACS made a decision that it could not be done. President Avent said that, at that point, he alerted Chancellor Criser and some members of the Committee.

President Avent said that a memorandum was issued to students and that meetings were held with graduate students. He said that there are six graduate students who could graduate in May, one of whom is going to graduate school and whose Ph.D. program is not contingent on his getting a master's. He said that two graduate students already have jobs and so the delay will not impact them. He said that of the remaining three who are looking for jobs only one said that it would have an impact, because she was living on a graduate stipend. He said that the University was going to work with her to minimize that impact. President Avent also indicated that the University was calling incoming students to advise them of the accreditation status. He said that when the University opened its webpage there was an indication that the institution was unaccredited. He noted that all students had signed a form that they knew that this was a risk.

President Avent said that there were certainly costs associated with the delay. He said that there was potentially one undergraduate student who may have to wait on the accreditation decision. He said that if that student happens to seek employment, the University would provide an explanation to the potential employer. He said, finally,

that the accreditation delay could have a potential impact on enrollment. President Avent said that in terms of benefits associated with the delay, the University would have much more assessment data which would make its application stronger, thereby significantly reducing risk in the accreditation decision. Dr. Avent said that, with the delay, the University would have the full year of 2017 to get accreditation, thereby significantly reducing the risk to the student. He said that it would also allow the University more time to respond to any comments that SACS may have, and that it would allow the University more time to put more policies in place.

Following President Avent's presentation, Chair Link asked Committee members and other Board members if they had questions and observations.

Governor Doyle questioned whether the University had clarity on the accreditation impediments prior to February and whether the Board should have known that there was going to be a problem before that date. He said that his main concern was whether the University should be indicating that accreditation was achievable by December 2017 and, once again, setting an unachievable goal. President Avent responded that the University didn't find out about the impediment until February. He said that it was a combination of policies and also a federal agency other than SACS that caused the impediment. He said, further, that the University had never promised accreditation on any schedule.

Governor Valverde said that the University should consider, either financially or in-kind, how it would keep students financially whole who might be affected. President Avent said that there was only one student who would be impacted, and that the University was going to work with her. He said that there would be no financial impact on other students other than not getting income.

Governor Colson had questions regarding future enrollments. He noted that the long-term projections for the University was 5,000 students. He asked whether this enrollment was achievable in the next ten years. President Avent said that the very long-term goal was 5,000. He said that the University currently had facilities for only 1,600 or 1,700, and so the University would have to stay at that enrollment until three more buildings could be built, at which time the enrollment could begin increasing toward 5,000. Governor Colson asked whether the University would be able to attract students with the necessary SAT scores and grade point averages. President Avent said that the University was attempting to raise grade point averages as well as test scores. He said that the University was looking for a specific type of student, and that he didn't know whether the 5,000 figure was attainable. He said that the University would need to attract international and out-of-state students.

Governor Kuntz said that he couldn't help but be disappointed. He said that he felt as if the Board was learning something now that it should have known a long time ago so

that it could be articulated that the state-mandated deadline couldn't be met. He said that the Board and the University's students had been hearing that the University was on-track to receive accreditation by the end of 2016 and that now it is clear that it is not. He said that the Board should have known of this long before. He said that, if he understood the President's explanation, then accreditation in 2016 was impossible for a number of reasons. He said that it was disappointing and that the Board should have been informed. President Avent said that the University was disappointed as well and that the cause was not due to a specific policy but to a combination of policies that also involved another federal agency. He said that he couldn't speculate as to why the University didn't know before the end of February. Governor Kuntz said that the University could have found out two years ago. President Avent said that this was true if the right person had been involved.

Governor Kuntz then turned to the subjects of enrollment and cost per degree. He noted that the original cost per degree was approximately \$70,000. President Avent said that, with increased enrollments, the cost per degree had gone down by 50% and that it would go down even further. Governor Kuntz requested that, for the Committee's next meeting, the University provide an assessment of cost per degree for the next few years. Governor Colson said that he was not wedded to 5,000 students. He said that if the most appropriate enrollment was 2,500 he would prefer to have that discussion now rather than to be told in year seven that the 5,000 was not achievable.

Governor Frost had a number of questions regarding international students, whether faculty were leaving due to lack of accreditation, student to faculty ratio, and fundraising goals. President Avent said he believed that the lack of accreditation had slowed down applications from international and out-of-state students. He indicated that faculty had not left due to accreditation issues, and that the student-to-faculty ratio was 18 : 1. He said that a fundraising goal was set on a yearly basis.

With respect to accreditation, Governor Tripp said that the Board didn't know that it was skating on thin ice. He said that the Board had been given the impression that the accreditation process was going just the way it should and that he was disappointed to now hear that it wasn't. He said that because this was such a large undertaking for Florida and for the students, the Board could not afford to not know exactly the status. He said that if the right questions had been asked, SACS would have provided answers. Governor Tripp said that he was disappointed. He suggested that President Avent reassess the University's staff responsible for accreditation so that the Board would not receive a similar report again.

Governor Robinson asked for clarification regarding faculty hires. President Avent said that the University currently had 39 full-time faculty and 24 adjuncts. He said that the University had a goal of hiring up to 70 faculty over the next two years. He said that the University had recently made six offers, and six have verbally accepted.

Governor Beard asked whether a large number of students would be affected if the University didn't get accredited in 2017. President Avent said that it would not affect a large number of students. Governor Link said that, in her opinion, the accreditation status was affecting students. She said that, when a timeline is disseminated and published, most people are going to think that, as a state university, the timeline is accurate.

Chancellor Criser said he would like his staff to meet with the University's staff. He said that the dashboard is important and that now is a good time to ensure that the dashboard is tracking the right issues. He said that he couldn't speak to when the University was going to get accredited, but that the Board needed to understand whether there are any roadblocks between the University's ability to ask SACS to consider accreditation. He said that he had seen the explanation for the delay provided by the University and that it appeared as if the SACS policy had always existed. He said that it was hard for him to understand why the University's consultant wouldn't have understood that this was an issue from the very beginning. He said that the issues related to the delay didn't appear to be new information; rather, that they appeared to be a new understanding of existing information.

Governor Link said it was her understanding that one other institution had achieved SACS accreditation on an accelerated timeline. President Avent said that there is one institution that received accreditation in two and a half years, but that it had already existed and was already operating. He said, therefore, Florida Polytechnic University was attempting to do in one and a half years what the other institution did in two and a half years. Governor Link said she was concerned that, because accreditation is Florida Polytechnic University's number one priority, the University should have immediately reached out to that institution to understand the process and how its accreditation had been achieved.

Governor Link said she was concerned that there was not a policy change by SACS. She said these policies were not new and that nothing had changed. She said that, accordingly, accreditation was never something that could be accomplished in the mandated timeframe. She said that this concerned her a great deal. She said that it bothered her that the University's attempt to achieve accreditation by December 2016 had been published and talked about since she has been on the Board. Chair Link said that this is what had been conveyed to students, to the University's Board of Trustees, and to the Board of Governors even though it had never been possible. Chair Link said that she wanted to know why the University's consultant did not have this information.

Governor Link then said that she was concerned about enrollments. She said that she believed the accreditation status would have an effect on enrollment. She said that she had been advised that there were a number of students who may be transferring

because they are uncomfortable with the accreditation status. President Avent said that he knew of only one such student.

Governor Kuntz recommended that the University, working with Board staff, revisit the dashboard so that it reflected where the University was, what could go wrong, and answered the questions posed by Board members.

4. Closing Remarks and Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the Committee, Governor Link adjourned the meeting at 9:48 a.m.

Wendy Link, Chair

R.E. LeMon,
Associate Vice Chancellor,
Academic and Student Affairs