

STATE BOARD OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Recommendations

Request: The System Advisory Council requests that the State Board endorse recommendations developed through the DEI initiative established in July 2020. The DEI Taskforce reviewed State Board Code and sample college policies for elements that could negatively impact students of color. The System Advisory Council recommendations address the findings of this review.

Strategic Plan Reference:

THEME: Student Interest and Access

Goal: Increase the percentage of North Carolinians, particularly within underserved populations, pursuing and easily accessing education or training through North Carolina community colleges.

Objective 1.3. Identify and reduce access barriers for all prospective students, particularly among underserved populations.

Background:

On July 16, 2020, Peter Hans, then President of the North Carolina Community College System appointed Dr. Don Tomas (Southwestern Community College) and Dr. Thomas Walker (Wayne Community College) to lead the System Advisory Council's effort on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. The directive from President Hans asked that the initiative focus on:

- a. Identifying institutional or policy- related inequities limiting opportunities for students, faculty, and staff and make recommendations to address them. Specifically reviewing the State Board Code and sample college policies that may negatively impact students of color.
- b. Developing guidelines for colleges to use to examine their own policies.

Members of the DEI Taskforce included:

- Co-chair Dr. Thomas Walker (Wayne Community College)
- Co-chair: Dr. Don Tomas (Southwestern Community College)
- Dr. Mark Kinlaw (Rockingham Community College)
- Dr. David Johnson (Johnston Community College)
- Dr. Maria Pharr (South Piedmont Community College)
- Dr. Pamela Senegal (Piedmont Community College)
- Dr. Janet Spriggs (Forsyth Technical Community College)

To assist the taskforce, an RFP was issued to solicit vendors with the expertise to support this work. JFF Associates was selected.

With his appointment as President of the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS), Thomas Stith III, reiterated his commitment to this effort.

On September 9, 2021, after a year of intensive work, the DEI Taskforce presented 3 recommendations to the System Advisory Council.

The DEI Taskforce recommendations:

1. **Eliminate the RDS requirement for the NCCCS**

Rationale: This system, which is based on a timetable for students who will be applying to one of the four – year UNC system universities, puts community college students, and in particular students of color, at a distinct disadvantage. The results have been a barrier to access for many students of color.

2. **Absence of language specific to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the current code of the State Board of Community Colleges**

Rationale: Without clear and definitive language in the State Board Code, goals and strategies cannot be implemented.

3. **Develop guidance for the 58 community colleges for strategies to eliminate student debt that is related to small fee- related charges.**

Rationale: The year- long work uncovered through interviews that many students found a small debt, often fee-related and not tuition-related, to be a major harbinger to completion or readmission.

The System Advisory Council includes the following members:

State Board:

Mr. Hari Nath
Mr. William Holder
Mr. Jerry Vaughan
Ms. Sarah West

NC Association of Community College Trustees:

Gene Rees (Surry Community College)
Grayson Whitt (Rockingham Community College)
Ed Emory (James Sprunt Community College)
Mayor Gloristine Brown (Pitt Community College)

NC Association of Community College Presidents:

Amanda Lee (Bladen Community College)
Mark Poarch (Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute)
Lawrence Rouse (Pitt Community College)
Kandi Deitemeyer (Central Piedmont Community College)

After consideration of the DEI taskforce recommendations,

The System Advisory Council recommends to the State Board the following:

1. RDS (Residency Determination Service)

Recommendation to examine the RDS process to determine what barriers may exist and seek ways to mitigate those impacts.

Recommendation to share the request from the DEI Taskforce for the elimination of RDS with the President's Association legislative committee for consideration within the legislative agenda development process.

2. State Board of Community Colleges Code

Recommendation for the System Office and the Policy and Governance Committee of the SBCC to propose updates to State Board code based on recommendations cited in the report provided by JFF.

3. Student debt related to small fee – related charges.

Recommendation for a working group to include both college and system office staff to provide guidance for colleges and suggest best practices for handling student small fee related debt.