



MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 16, 2000

TO: Presidents

FROM: Martin Lancaster

SUBJECT: Reporting Student Hours Consistent With Academic Term

It has come to my attention that one or two colleges may be manipulating their schedules in such a way as to enable them to report what are essentially summer term courses during the spring reporting period in order to maximize the budget FTE generated. By public policy, the General Assembly does not currently fund the summer term. Since current fiscal policy does not include summer term curriculum FTE in determining the college's budget, a college could gain a significant financial advantage through subtle scheduling manipulation whereby classes that otherwise would be considered summer term are reported in the spring reporting period.

The General Assembly has never established a fixed calendar for the community college system in order to give colleges flexibility to meet local needs. Current State Board policy 23 NCAC 2D.0323(a) gives colleges flexibility to offer courses and academic terms of varying lengths as long as certain academic and other criteria are maintained. NCAC 2D.0327(a)(1) lists the three reporting periods colleges are to follow. While colleges are given significant flexibility in determining academic term calendars and course schedules, the prescribed reporting periods are intended to provide uniformity in student hour reporting regardless of the individual differences among college calendars that would be expected to occur. With a few exceptions, most classes reported for a given reporting period are assumed to have been completed during that period. The reporting period for the spring semester ends May 15. However, it appears a few colleges are setting up academic terms that begin in late April or early May and reporting these classes, in addition to their regularly scheduled spring term classes, during the spring reporting period. Although the census date for classes in this term may fall just prior to the May 15 cut-off date, the classes do not end until well into the summer reporting period. Manipulating the academic calendar in such a manner violates the intent and spirit of the above noted policies and may jeopardize the credibility and integrity of the FTE data submitted to the legislature for use as the basis of our funding, and would further jeopardize our chances of getting summer school funding from the General Assembly.

The bottom line is that the legislature has trusted us with the flexibility to make appropriate educational decisions regarding academic calendars, course length, census dates, etc. The System cannot allow this flexibility to be jeopardized by one or two colleges seeking a financial edge by manipulating data. Therefore,

the Education Program Audit staff has been instructed to review instances where a college may have manipulated their schedules in the manner described above. Further, they have been instructed to take exception to this practice and to the student hours reported for budget FTE reimbursement as a result of this practice. They have also been directed to review not only the “letter” of the policy but also the “intent”. While there may be unique instances in which a few spring term classes may end after the May 15 deadline, scheduling what are essentially summer classes in the manner described above for the purpose of gaining a financial advantage is clearly inappropriate. This practice, even if engaged by only a few colleges, could jeopardize the entire System’s credibility with the General Assembly and our attempt to secure funding for the summer term for all colleges.

You have said many times that all colleges should not be punished with a restrictive policy because just a few are violating the spirit of existing policy. I agree, and feel this situation can be handled without a policy change. Colleges violating the intent of the existing policies will be cited. We cannot afford to have the credibility of our FTE data challenged, nor do we want to lose the flexibility in scheduling and reporting which we currently enjoy. This issue will be discussed with the Policy Committee at the upcoming State Board meeting. Please contact Steve Scott, Kennon Briggs, or me if you have questions.

HML/dw

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E-Mail