

ONLINE VIRGINIA NETWORK AUTHORITY

BOARD MEETING

Monday, December 18, 2017

MINUTES

The Online Virginia Network Authority Board met on Monday, December 18, 2017 at 2:30 p.m. in the Pocahontas building in Richmond.

Present from the Board were:

Peter Blake
Speaker Kirk Cox
James Hazel
Delegate Nick Rush
Ron Ripley
Senator Bill Stanley
Dr. Michelle Marks
Dr. Ellen Neufeldt

Absent:

Delegate Lashrecse Aird
Senator Rosalyn Dance
Delegate Tag Greason
Senator Steve Newman

Also present were:

Marc Austin
David Burnet
Andy Casiello
Eboni Cotton
Beverly Covington
Jane Dane
Kelly Gee
Lisa Ghidotti
Heather Huling
David Kozoyed
Tony Maggio
Janette Muir

Steve Nodine
Robin Parker
Brian Payne
Caitlin Shear
Tom Shifflett
Ahmad Taheri
Darren Trevton
Rusty Waterfield
Chris Whyte

WELCOME & OPENING REMARKS

Chairman Cox thanked the board for all of their great efforts. He remarked on the need to examine pertinent questions that will help shape the future of higher education. How can we make online education cost effective? Is there a way for online students to share instructional materials instead of paying hundreds of dollars for one semester's use of text books? Can classes be structured so popular teachers can reach more students? And ultimately, we must be able to think innovatively and expand our offerings in a collaborative effort.

APPROVAL OF July 14, 2017 Meeting Minutes

Chairman Cox asked if there was a motion to approve the previous board meeting minutes. A motion was made by Delegate Rush and seconded by Mr. Hazel, the minutes were approved by all members present and voting.

OVN PRESENTATION

Dr. Marks and Dr. Neufeldt presented on the OVN overview. Dr. Neufeldt remarked on the goal of building a network across Virginia universities to support adult degree completion. Dr. Marks highlighted our previous efforts including the web portal, the network launch as well as our continued work on building out future policy and marketing facets.

Jane Dane and David Burge presented on the OVN student, an update on course search as well as enrollment management, and the OVN project scope. Mr. Burge remarked that we are on pace to meet the first year enrollment numbers. We are nearing the end of our pilot phase thinking critically about how to move forward in the coming years. The national data shows that 38% of today's college students are over 25. Two-thirds of that group work and one in four are raising children.

Ms. Dane remarked that most of the potential OVN students reside in the metropolitan areas. Individuals with a bachelor's degree have 40% higher earnings than those without. Virginia has about a 9.3% projected growth by 2024 and that's outpacing the nation which is going to be growing at 6.5%.

Mr. Burge noted that data was analyzed over the 1.1 million student records. It indicated that 74% only earned community college credit, 12% in the mixed category of community college and four year work and 14% have four year work. By far the majority of the potential students had 1-29 credit hours.

Ms. Dane remarked that the teams created the first coordinated network for online course searches of four year public institutions in Virginia. The individual can search by subject, school, as well as view prior offerings so they can anticipate future offerings. Course details include course descriptions and instructors. If the students are interested and they want to pursue enrollment at either institution there are launch points for both Old Dominion and Mason.

Chairman Cox asked if there was any student feedback in regards to the course search usability aspect. Mr. Burge responded that the course source feature was new to the website. Some feedback has been received regarding the student's desire for more information on finances and return on investment. He also noted that further information would be provided at a future meeting.

Mr. Blake asked if there are common course numbers. Are you offering the same courses or are they separate? If a student goes to either of your two institutions and seeks to enroll do they have access to the other institutions online courses or is this the only place to do it? Ms. Dane responded that each institution has unique course numbering but students could compare subjects and course titles. If a student wants to enroll in a course regardless of where they attend, we will make sure it fulfills their degree plan and meets the program requirements. Mr. Burge noted that we are working to streamline processes so students with minimal effort will be able to enroll.

Mr. Burge remarked that as we are half way through year one, we are at 81% for our first year goal of 225 total students between both institutions. That is 181 out of 225 students. We have a spring and a summer entry point so we are well on our way to achieving our goal. These enrollment targets were constructed around the budget.

The total gross cost is nearly seven million dollars and when we subtract out what the Commonwealth contributed over the two year period, three million dollars, that shows we have four million dollars in kind that has been supported between George Mason and Old Dominion University. Old Dominion is in the scalability moment, hiring faculty and making sure we can accommodate the demand that's out there in terms of our target programs we are looking to hit. Mason on the other hand is focusing on the infrastructure and making sure the service and students are being supported. Ms. Dane noted that the four million dollars were for the first two years. In order to continue to grow and reach enrollment targets, the additional four million is important to scale to the next stage.

Mr. Hazel stated that as previously noted we had the 818,000 potential audience for the first year and we have the 74%. We had the 225 goal. How do they know to find us? What's being done to help those people find this program? Mr. Burge responded that the digital marketing strategy has been to focus on finding and buying impressions that we can serve up to these students based off of what they're looking at on the internet. We obtain around 2-3 million impressions every week.

Mr. Hazel inquired as to how much of the current funding goes toward OVN and Commonwealth related expenses. Mr. Burge noted that we've contracted with a PR firm who manages our digital marketing strategy with a line item of \$415,000. They're not branding ODU or Mason, they're branding the OVN network and they're driving people to the network.

Mr. Ripley acknowledged the standing cost and this year's cost. He inquired about the following years cost. Do we have a figured idea, notwithstanding state support of what those costs would look like? Ms. Dane responded that we do have the expectation in order to go from where we are now as a pilot that we want to make the infrastructure more robust and be able to market more heavily and serve students at a higher rate, so an additional 4 million dollars is our midpoint of recommendation.

Mr. Ripley asked if it was before tuition. Before state support? Ms. Dane responded that it would be in addition. The initial concept was based upon 7.4 million dollars and it was actually funded at 2 million dollars and that was a great way to get started. We know that the 8 million dollars is probably a stretch so the additional 4 million is right where we need to be in order to continue to scale and broaden the service.

Mr. Ripley remarked that it would be a cost to the universities more or less, unless you receive more funding? Mr. Burge responded that it would allow them to invest in one of these three areas and make a tactical decision at the board's direction as to where we would make those investments. The \$415,000 digital advertising budget is insufficient to grow at scale. The other piece of that would have to do with the piping question and our ability to serve the students at all participating institutions to make that more seamlessly connect which is a striking difference between the 2 million dollar versions we're in versus the \$7.4 million that was originally budgeted.

Ms. Dane noted that there was a focus on establishing the brand of the Online Virginia Network the first two years as well as product development and services. The service area covers aspects like the call center which offers immediate response to students inquiring, offers the ability to be responsive and agile to their needs, to assist their financial aid concerns, and bring together staff to be able to support that.

Chairman Cox asked how it is currently being done. Is that through their current advisor? Since the concept is sort of a one stop shop. Ms. Dane responded that we do appreciate the one stop shop method, but at this point a student explores the portal and if they have interest they are directed directly to Mason or ODU for more information. Mr. Burge noted that it is also a good example of how institutions have utilized the funds that have gone to them directly. So in the case of Mason we have staffed up to try to accommodate that onboarding process. We were in a different place than ODU and so some of those resources have gone there.

Dr. Marks remarked when you're programming a larger percentage of the operating budget, it goes to marketing and outreach in order to reach the students and get them enrolled. As we think about growing this project down the road that's an area we will need to pay attention to.

Mr. Blake asked if we would prioritize the students on the right side of the table. Those who have 30-59 credits you might be more inclined to get another 12 to get an associate degree. If you have 90 you might be more inclined to pick up a bachelor's degree. If I were to prioritize, if we are limiting the resources I would focus toward those with more credits. Do you share that point of view or do you believe that it ought to be everybody equally? Mr. Burge responded that there are more students with fewer credit hours.

Mr. Blake asked if there is a way to follow up, or if we knew where these people are. Mr. Burge responded that while we do not have the information to send them a letter directly, we can draw conclusions about them from the heatmaps and other visualizations of the data.

Mr. Blake inquired as to whether the marketing differs for those from 1-29 to 90. Mr. Burge responded that while it's difficult to do that in mass without knowing who you're going after, we can generally do so. We place our effort in convincing students of the modality, support and the

return on investment. There is a slightly different message on the return on investment for those with fewer credits as we would need to have a more personal, relationship management aspect. Dr. Neufeldt also noted the significance of ensuring we look across the board. We want to make sure that it is open to all students, regardless of whether they have any credit.

Chairman Cox inquired as to whether there is a way to track students and their hour categories. Dave responded that we do not have that information at this meeting.

Mr. Blake inquired as to whether there is a flag in the data system that tells us these 225 are part of OVN. Mr. Burge responded that we can tell which students are new and fully online coming to ODU and GMU. However, we do not have a tag or ability to flag those who stopped by the OVN network and inquired.

Mr. Blake asked how the 225 are captured. Ms. Dane responded that we look at the total enrollment of fully online undergraduate students for fall 17 and compared that to fall 16, so we had an increase of the 181 students so far. Mr. Burge noted that while general conversion metrics can be obtained, we do not have a way of accounting for students who did not engage with our website but still arrived at the institution. Dr. Neufeldt noted that we can see how many credits they came in with and track student progression.

Ms. Dane noted that we are looking at offering courses with flexible schedules such as 8 week sessions. We also are focusing on the ability to connect technology to be able to support a student in a seamless manner, and work with consortiums for students to be able to use financial aid at more than one institution at a time and transfer credit.

Chairman Cox inquired as to more information about the 8 week course development. Ms. Dane responded that the course is effective for students who want to be able to take it during the summer and particularly for those when they are not deployed. Dr. Neufeldt noted that it helps with the year round school and the idea that you can enter when and where ever you are.

Ms. Dane remarked that there is also winter session that begins in about a week and a half and will be over in early January. Dr. Marks noted that this is really directed at adult learners. It's the fastest growing higher education market in America and in Virginia, but I think the higher education systems for the most part isn't built for this group and we've got over a million now so were bringing education to them. Dr. Neufeldt remarked that at the federal level, financial aid does is not designed to work with the 8 week course. A student taking three hours is not PELL eligible. A lot of times the financial aid models work for a more traditional schedule and more traditional students. It also goes with the conversation with the consortium since only one institution can own a student for financial aid.

Senator Stanley remarked that he did not know that. If I am in the two plus two program, I get the money goes to the community college, but if I have a student getting the plus two engineering degree let's say from JMU and we want to use the online courses to fill some of the gaps you're talking about then the money doesn't follow the student to the online network if its outside JMU? Mr. Burge responded that it can, the consortium enables that to happen. The DOE will only distribute federal aid to a primary institution, but it can get to the student through one

of these consortium agreements. Ms. Dane remarked that one school is a host school and the other is a home school and whoever is in charge of that student has to verify with the other institution that they are still enrolled throughout the other term so they can qualify for that aid.

Ms. Dane remarked that the partnership discussion we had is focused on how other schools may be able to share resources or what the responsibility might be in those relationships. Are there other programs that we might be able to attract to the network? Mr. Burge noted that we have learned a lot over the last two and a half years about what it means and the investment that is required of membership.

Chairman Cox inquired about more information regarding funding to support additional partners and how do you all see that and where is that? Mr. Burge responded that the Commonwealth and all institutional partners would have to be willing to continue to maintain and shoulder that cost on the previous slide. For a partner I think it would be prudent for us to ask for that type of financial plan from them to help answer that question in a very specific way. Dr. Neufeldt noted that while the 8 week course seems simplistic, there is a whole infrastructure side with a lot of dedication of time, bringing in expertise and reengineering the curriculum with the department. That is an example of a cost that a partner would incur in the process. If a partner has never been online they would need help building a landing page, infrastructure, etc.

Mr. Ripley noted that institutions can be used to maintaining certain academic and procedural policies and may face a cultural change to actually participate in such an environment. He inquired about any potential thoughts. Mr. Burge responded that it is a serious matter and it's difficult to put order around culture change. I think of Mason's effort to renovate its academic calendar and the person hours that go along with that and the technology elements that go along with that. Dr. Marks remarked on the importance of flexibility and how the two institutions have been working to improve the policy of transferring credits. Dr. Neufeldt commented that for the course search to work the policies have to change or it depends on the institution to change. I think we could also look at institutions that could offer courses, but might prefer not to offer degrees due to the policies they would need to change.

Senator Stanley remarked that it appears there is no compulsion outside of ODU and Mason to accept these credits. I'm at Ferrum or I'm at JMU, I take some online course I expect them to be accepted by those institutions, there's no guarantee. Ms. Dane responded that these are accredited courses at our institutions, so it should be no different than a traditional course that would be taken versus an online course.

Mr. Blake asked if the credit would transfer the same way classroom courses would transfer. Senator Stanley commented that this is as equal as what would be in a classroom. Ms. Dane responded that absolutely, as a matter of fact you wouldn't know the difference if you looked at a transcript.

Senator Stanley inquired if this is not treated separately? Mr. Burge responded that it is correct. Dr. Marks remarked that a recent report noted a national problem of community credit not transferring to a 4 year career. We need to work together to figure out how to enable students to bring more credits across institutions towards degree completion.

Mr. Blake commented that it appears if you brought in another institution there's a lot of complications associated and those institutions would need to know what they're signing up for.

Chairman Cox commented that there is sort of a fine line because you want them to come in but they have to agree to the flexibility piece or it's not going to work. By the same token you all have figured out the 8 week courses so the incoming institution would not need to figure it out. Mr. Burge noted that over the past two and a half years the institutions have learned a great deal from one another.

Mr. Ripley commented about how a new institution coming in needs to agree they're playing in that market or those courses, that they are interchangeable. Those are the policies that I think are big policies. Dr. Marks remarked that we want to be market smart as we look around and figure out what the commonwealth needs and what we have now and how we can bring the right programs in as fast as possible.

Mr. Blake asked as to whether the 225 students are all undergraduates? Ms. Dane remarked that they were.

Delegate Rush commented that he would like to see the demographics of the new students, where they fit in the chart of credit hours, and age, so we can make sure we are hitting the target of what we're looking for. Where are they? Are they traditional students? Mr. Burge responded that the information would be provided.

Mr. Blake remarked that these two institutions alone enroll 38,000 graduates which is about 28% of all undergraduate enrollment at a four year university, so if they can work out some of these problems, it's going to serve a lot of Virginia students, and not even just on the online part of it but some of these other kinds of arrangements as they work on the policy side.

Chairman Cox thanked everyone for a great meeting and noted the need to work on budget issues, portability, and guidelines on bringing in other institutions for future.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:35 p.m.