



State Council of  
Higher Education for Virginia

# SAC MINUTES

## Student Advisory Committee Minutes December 3, 2009 Meeting Richard Bland College

**Members Present:** Fajir Amin (VCU), Brittany Anderson (Virginia Tech), Candace Avalos (JMU), Ginger G. Birkner (Richard Bland), Catherine Bowman (NVCC), Elliott J. Clark (ODU), Jason Clemons (NRCC), Holly Hankley (MedSpa Careers Inst.), Victor Horton (substitute for VSU), Kelly Knox (W&M), Gerry Martin (Longwood), Nelson Morgan (DSLCC), Randi-Lyn Randall (Radford), and Kristin Twiford (UVA).

**SCHEV Staff Present:** Kathleen Kincheloe and Kirsten Nelson.

- Kathleen Kincheloe (SCHEV) welcomed SAC representatives to Richard Bland's campus and introduce Dr. James B. McNeer, President of RBC. Dr. Vernon R. Lindquist, Provost and Dean of the Faculty at RBC, was also in attendance to welcome SAC.
- Dr. McNeer gave brief opening remarks, stating his belief that higher education leads to economic development. He stressed that all of higher education has suffered a loss of funding over the past years, adding that class size and building maintenance are issues he is struggling with.
- Kirsten Nelson (SCHEV) thanked the SAC reps in attendance for completing SCHEV's recent student survey, and shared the results of that sampling with them.
- Kirsten gave members a legislative summary outlining SCHEV's proposal to share de-identified data about individual students among the Virginia Dept. of Education, SCHEV, and the Virginia Employment Commission in order to more effectively analyze how Virginia's system of higher education is meeting workforce needs.
- She also shared proposed bills about threat assessment teams and graduate student financial aid, as well as possible studies on cost efficiency at state colleges & universities and ways in which the Commonwealth may work more closely with private, nonprofit colleges to meet state higher education needs.
- Kirsten expects that more higher education-related legislation will be introduced in the coming weeks. Interested students can track these bills on the SCHEV website via the Hot List (<http://www.schev.edu/policy/hotlist.asp>) and Long List (<http://www.schev.edu/policy/longlist.asp>).
- Kathleen and Kirsten then opened the floor for students to discuss possible topics for the SAC legislative visit planned for January.
- Fajir Amin (VCU), who participated in the legislative visit last year, reiterated how lobbying helps put a human face on the issues legislators are already hearing about in higher education.
- Gerry Martin (Longwood) brought up the issue of institutional spending on athletics versus academics. Kirsten Nelson explained that those types of budget decisions are made by the board of visitors at each institution. Several SAC members suggested addressing that issue through Longwood's student representative to the BOV.
- Ginger Birkner (Richard Bland) echoed President McNeer's remarks by expressing concern that capital outlay projects do not include operational costs, such as maintenance and

custodial costs, saying it is disheartening to see a brand new building go up without funds for basic cleaning services.

- Catherine Bowman (NVCC) said that in addition to being an issue of morale, it is also a health issue, while Kelly Knox (W&M) emphasized that deferred maintenance costs can explode and end up being more expensive than preventive care.
- Many students shared personal stories about how the recent reductions in general funding are affecting their progress to a degree and the quality of their instruction.
- Kristin Twiford (UVA) expressed concern that the University of Virginia had done away with its Spanish minor due to lack of faculty and resources, leaving some students stranded with credits that can no longer be applied to a minor.
- Candace Avalos (JMU) shared that there had been a similar problem with the psychology minor at James Madison.
- Several students commented that they are seeing increasing numbers of cancelled class sections, as well as larger class sizes.
- Elliott Clark (ODU) said that he was personally affected by the offering of only one lab session that didn't fit his current schedule. He expressed concern that not being able to take the lab in a timely manner could prolong his education by a semester or more.
- Nelson Morgan (DSLCC) pointed out that it can be costly to return to take even a single class, as many students covered by their parents' health insurance are required to be full-time students.
- Gerry Martin (Longwood) mentioned that one of the reasons for reductions in course offerings at Longwood was that professors are giving new consideration to jobs offered elsewhere.
- Elliott Clark (ODU) agreed that faculty retention is extremely important for quality instruction, while Kelly Knox (W&M) mentioned that she views quality of advising as being equally important.
- Jason Clemons (NRCC) agreed that having trained advisors and professors who are aware of course requirements and can effectively counsel students about class and career goals is imperative.
- Brittany Anderson (Virginia Tech) said this is of special importance to students who are planning to transfer. She asked whether reduced course offerings might impact the transfer process, as well.
- Students also discussed concerns about reduced facility operations, including labs, libraries, and even campus bookstores.
- Before the close of the meeting, elections were held for two SAC leadership positions. Brittany Anderson of Virginia Tech was elected Chair, and Ginger Birkner of Richard Bland College was elected Vice Chair. Brittany and Ginger will be in touch with SAC members in the coming weeks to develop the messages that interested students will deliver to legislators in January.