

# DELTA STATE UNIVERSITY

## PRESIDENT'S CABINET

### *Minutes*

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**Meeting date: June 8, 2020**

**Members in attendance:** President William LaForge (via Zoom), Dr. Vernell Bennett-Fairs (via Zoom), Chief Jeffrey Johns (via Zoom), Mr. Mike Kinnison (via Zoom), Dr. Charles McAdams (via Zoom), Mr. Rick Munroe (via Zoom), Dr. Michelle Roberts (via Zoom), Mr. Jamie Rutledge (via Zoom), Mr. Jeff Slagell (via Zoom), Dr. Jonathan Westfall (via Zoom), and Mr. Richard Word (via Zoom) (recorder – Ms. Claire Cole)

**Members not in attendance:** None

**Guests:** None

**Call to Order:** A regular meeting of the President's Cabinet was held via Zoom conference call on June 8, 2020. The meeting convened at 1:30 p.m. with President LaForge presiding.

#### **APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES**

On motion by Dr. Westfall and seconded by Mr. Rutledge, all Cabinet Members present and participating voted unanimously to approve the Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting held on May 11, 2020.

#### **GENERAL OVERVIEW**

- President LaForge acknowledged the great remarks made by Mr. Word during this morning's virtual New Student Orientation.
- President LaForge gave an overview of the activities and events from the last few weeks. He participated in the Cleveland Music Foundation Board meeting, and the members were told that GRAMMY Museum® Mississippi remains closed at this time, but hopes to open in July. President LaForge participated in the virtual Athletics Department Senior Day Recognition video, and he commended Mr. Kinnison and his staff on a top-notch job on creating the video. The GSC Board of Directors meeting took place via Zoom at the end of May. The Institutional Executive Officers (IEO) and Board of Trustees met via Zoom three weeks ago. President LaForge shared topics discussed during the IEO meeting: the Mississippi Association of Colleges and Universities annual conference to be held at the University of Mississippi this fall has been postponed; a widespread discussion on needed policies regarding academic hours and minutes for the fall semester, and a university's requirement to its accrediting agencies to meet certain benchmarks for hours and minutes; additional discussions about administrative leave and universities having the authority and flexibility when granting it; the University Press's budget request for "flat-funding" was rejected, and the IEOs requested draft budgets showing 3%, 5%, and 10% cuts in funding; and, the first considerations of the Senate Appropriations Bill calls for a 6.5% decrease in appropriations for the IHL system. President LaForge participated in a call with consultants to the Cleveland-Bolivar County Chamber of Commerce, and they are helping the

Board of Directors review their current practices. President LaForge assisted NCAA Chief Operating Officer Don Remy with tips on lobbying the United States Senate on the Name, Image, and Likeness bills in the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation. The Gulf South Conference Annual Board of Directors meeting was held via Zoom on May 29, and the conference discussed rules and guidelines for the fall semester. The Cleveland-Bolivar County Chamber of Commerce Board met last week.

- Dr. McAdams announced that Summer Session I began on June 1. As of today, 992 students are enrolled (508 graduate students, 484 undergraduate students). This is an increase of 15% from the number of students who enrolled last summer. Revenue increased 37% from Summer Session I last year. The purge occurs today, so the number will likely decrease. A clearer picture of enrollment figures and tuition revenue will be seen next week.
- Mr. Kinnison gave an update on Athletics. The Athletics Department staff are back in office and preparing for student-athletes to return in phases. The Gulf South Conference Athletic Directors continue to have weekly conference calls to discuss the effects of COVID-19 on their respective campuses and their plans for the fall semester. Each school in the conference cleaned up their fall sports schedules, and additional changes may be made due to NCAA regulations. The Athletic Directors are now delving deeper into the screening process for game officials and game-day staff in the fall.
- Mr. Rutledge gave an update on Facilities Management projects. The Bureau of Buildings has faced several personnel changes over the last several weeks, and the agency is left with a skeleton crew to operate and maintain their projects. Delta State continues to speak with the Bureau of Buildings to keep our projects in the forefront. The Mayers Aquatics Center HVAC project Notice to Proceed was issued last week. The Bureau of Buildings gave Delta State three professionals to choose from for the campus-wide elevator project. A selection will be made in the next several days, and a start date soon after. Facilities Management has been working in the residence halls to make sure they are ready for students to return in August. Construction on the President's home nears completion, and appliances and furniture are being ordered. The house should be ready in August. The Golf Course project has stalled due to COVID-19 issues, but Mr. Rutledge remains hopeful it will begin again once the COVID-19 issues are resolved.
- President LaForge shared with Cabinet members some of the meetings and events planned for this week. The first virtual New Student Orientation occurred today. Dr. Bennett informed Cabinet members 252 students registered for the event, and her staff will work toward increasing the number of registered students for the next session. The New Student Orientation is not mandatory, but Dr. Bennett encourages deans and their faculty to reinforce a student's need to participate due to the fact that an abundance of information is shared to prepare them for the fall semester, including new COVID-19 protocols.

## **CABINET TOPIC**

### **Campus Response to COVID-19..... President LaForge**

President LaForge shared with Cabinet members recent updates to Delta State's COVID-19 Action Plan. He informed Cabinet members this is an ever-changing document, and it will be updated as new information is released by IHL and the State. All eight public universities are trying to be consistent with their action plans, but each university has the authority to respond to unique requests and concerns. The Governor's Safer at Home order ended on June 1.

Distribution of the CARES Act grant funds will be distributed in three phases. The university has awarded \$214,375 in individual grants to 307 students, as part of Phase I CARES Act grant fund distribution. Applications for the funds are still being received and reviewed. Funds are available until April 2021. The

second phase of funds will go to the universities to help reimburse themselves for refunds given to students for housing, meals, and parking fees. Delta State received \$1,289,000 in CARES Act grant funds and \$124,800 in CARES Act Minority Service funds for a total of \$1.4 million. Delta State reimbursed students \$630,922 for room refunds, \$230,749 for meal plan refunds, and \$20,500 for parking permit refunds for a total of \$882,000 in refunds. The university has \$531,627 remaining to help with other expenses incurred during the COVID-19 crisis. The final phase of CARES Act grant funds will be distributed by the State. Mr. Rutledge was informed by IHL staff that the universities are set to receive CARES Act funds from the State, but it is not known how much or what it can be used for.

The university opened on June 1. Prior to opening, President LaForge disseminated Delta State's Guide for Returning to the Workplace that outlined protocols the university will execute to keep employees safe including: single entrance into every building; checking temperatures at entrances; and, providing four cloth masks to each employee. Mr. Rutledge stated some glitches occurred the first week, as expected, but the process is running smoothly now. Also, Human Resources will create a procedure for screeners to follow for anyone with a temperature 100° or above. The screener will contact an administrator to inform the employee to return home. Dr. Westfall informed Cabinet members an adjustment for faculty members was wearing masks, and a concern raised by faculty members stems from social distancing protocol. Some faculty offices and secretary areas are very small, and it is hard to adhere to proper social distancing protocols and maintain a six feet distance from others. Reconfiguration of some office areas or the use of dividers may need to occur before school starts in the fall. Mr. Slagell voiced the concern over the need to sign in each morning and using a communal pen to do so. Mr. Rutledge shared with Mr. Slagell and the other Cabinet members the intent on signing in was to have documentation. Mr. Rutledge will work with Human Resources to see if the process can be adjusted.

The Wyatt Gym will not open until August as it relies on student workers to keep it open. The Mayers Aquatics Center is open to student-athletes by appointment only, and they must be supervised by their coach at all times. Appointments will be disrupted when the HVAC project begins.

Mr. Kinnison and his staff have been working on a resocialization plan to bring student-athletes back to campus. The NCAA created a model for colleges and universities to follow, and the university will adhere to portions of their model; however, some federal, state, and CDC guidelines supersede the NCAA model. Mr. Kinnison has consulted with the team physician to get guidance to make sure their plan is sufficient. Student-athletes will return to campus in three phases. Phase I began today, and it allows student-athletes in Cleveland to use the athletic facilities under supervision and by appointment only. Student-Athletes login to the ARMS system to make an appointment, and upon arrival at their appointed time the student-athlete will enter through a specified area and be screened. Student-athletes are not using dressing rooms, are wearing masks when needed, and maintaining social distance from others in the area. The weight room, football facility, indoor practice facility, Walter Sillers Coliseum, and the Mayers Aquatics Center are open to the student-athletes. Mr. Kinnison is hopeful Phase II of resocialization of student-athletes will coincide with Summer Session II, and he believes the number of student-athletes on campus at that time will be around 100. Phase III will coincide with the beginning of classes in August and the return to competition. Mr. Kinnison doesn't know what fall sports will look like as the NCAA has asked each division and the subsequent conferences to decrease the amount of competition during a season. He has asked his coaching staff to keep student-athletes ready to proceed towards the earliest possible competition date, and adjustments will be made from there, as needed. During this time, the Athletics Department has begun to formulate a plan to use when a staff member, a coach, or a student-athlete tests positive for COVID-19. This plan will answer all possible scenarios.

The BPAC will host a non-residential, day camp in late July. The Athletics Department coaching staff are planning non-residential, day camps. Mr. Kinnison requested input from Cabinet members on allowing the coaching staff for the baseball and softball teams to host summer tournaments on campus in July. The summer tournaments are a big portion of the baseball and softball recruitment efforts. Cabinet members shared their input and gave Mr. Kinnison their consent on hosting summer tournaments in July. Mr. Rutledge asked Mr. Kinnison to develop a liability waiver for all teams to sign and to get the waiver approved by IHL staff.

Cabinet members discussed the need to address international students returning to campus and what would be required of them with regards to self-isolation or quarantining. Also, Mr. Rutledge plans to look into the guidelines of international students receiving any funding from the CARES Act grants as they were not eligible for Phase I of the grant. Faculty members have raised concerns over some exit doors in several campus buildings not closing automatically and/or correctly. Along with Facilities Management, Mr. Rutledge will look into the exit doors to ensure faculty and staff are able to stagger their exits to maintain social distancing. Lastly, Cabinet members discussed faculty and staff being able to work from home, and it being encouraged by the university, should they exhibit any COVID-19 symptoms.

**Cabinet Advance 2020 ..... Dr. Roberts**

Dr. Roberts informed Cabinet members the Cabinet Advance will take place on Tuesday, June 23 and Wednesday, June 24 in the Multipurpose Room in the Young-Mauldin Cafeteria. The topic for the Cabinet Advance will be the COVID-19 Action Plan for Fall 2020, and the discussion will be broken down into seven areas: academic continuity, campus life, athletics, campus events, health and safety, finance and business operations, and communication. This topic affects every aspect of the university and input from all Cabinet members will be needed to ensure the plan is inclusive and complete. Dr. Roberts urged Cabinet members, especially our constituency group representatives, to take time prior to the Cabinet Advance to be proactive and discuss with their constituencies' concerns, questions, and ideas. The Cabinet Advance will be two full days of decision making based on information brought by each member. The final plan needs to provide assurance to faculty, staff, students, and parents that Delta State will open the university safely and address all concerns and fears. A plan needs to be in place by July 1 with the notion that it could change, dependent upon state and federal guidelines.

President LaForge asked Dr. McAdams and Mr. Rutledge to share some early preparations they have made within their respective areas and throughout campus. Mr. Rutledge and Dr. McAdams have worked closely with Facilities Management and OIT to assess needed changes to different buildings on campus in order to transform areas into temporary instructional spaces. Dr. McAdams, OIT, and Facilities Management compiled a list of equipment and supplies needed for the temporary instructional spaces for Mr. Rutledge to purchase with some of the university's CARES Act grant funds. Mr. Rutledge hopes to get our orders in early enough to allow plenty of time to transform the spaces prior to classes starting in August. Mr. Rutledge shared with Cabinet members the university will provide face masks to students as they did for faculty and staff, and faculty members will be provided with disposable masks to give to those students who forgot to wear one. Hand sanitizer dispensers will be placed between classrooms for two classrooms to share. Mr. Rutledge has been talking to vendors about securing dispensers for sanitizing wipes to allow students to wipe down their desk prior to use. Dr. McAdams formed the Academic Readiness Task Force to help implement the necessary changes in instruction for the fall. The task force has begun measuring classrooms to ensure students are spaced 48 square feet apart from another student. Due to the amount of space a student needs to be socially distant from others, the number of students able to be in a classroom is greatly reduced. Delta State's largest classroom, located in Caylor-White Hall, seats 203 students; however, only 30 students can be safely, socially distanced in this classroom. Dr McAdams and

the task force will continue to delve into the weeds in order to provide an update to Cabinet members at Cabinet Advance.

President LaForge shared with Cabinet members information Dr. Steven Clark provided to Executive Committee members to consider when creating the action plan for the fall: requiring all faculty, staff, and students to wear masks; if students are unable to wear masks, they should enroll in online courses; using hand sanitizers; sanitizing common areas before and after use; reasonable spacing in classrooms; provide helpful guidelines for students to utilize at social gatherings; elevators should only be used by physically challenged individuals; faculty and staff should sanitize common areas and items frequently; developing a plan for a positive COVID-19 test of a faculty or staff member or a student; providing basic health insurance for students to help with COVID-19 treatments, if needed; and, keeping students socially distant in the residence halls. Dr. Clark will work with the Athletics Department separately to ensure they have a plan in place.

During discussions, Cabinet members decided to conduct the Cabinet Advance virtually, instead of in-person. By having a virtual Cabinet Advance, Cabinet members will be modeling the university's recommendation to meet remotely, when possible.

## **BUSINESS**

### **Action**

#### **Revised Academic Calendar for 2020-21.....Dr. McAdams**

Due to the Board of Trustees declaring that each public university under its governance should conclude in-person classes for the Fall 2020 semester before the Thanksgiving holiday, Academic Council revised the Academic Calendar for 2020-21 for Cabinet approval. Dr. McAdams shared with Cabinet members the major changes made to the Academic Calendar for 2020-21: all morning and night classes will begin on Monday, August 17; Fall Break was removed; the last day to withdraw from a course was moved to November 18; Fall Exams are November 19 through November 21 and November 23; Fall Commencement occurs on Tuesday, November 24; and, all grades are due on December 1.

**Motion:** Moved by Dr. McAdams to approve the revised Academic Calendar for 2020-21 and seconded by Chief Johns. The motion was approved.

#### **Class Attendance policy (revised – first reading).....Dr. McAdams**

On the recommendation and approval of the Academic Council, Dr. McAdams brought the revised Class Attendance policy for a first reading. The revised policy includes the university's response to the COVID-19 pandemic during the 2020-21 academic year. It is essential to the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff that we adhere to the CDC recommendations to "stay home if you are sick." Students who cannot attend a face-to-face class because they are ill shall notify their instructor of their absence and engage in the course content using the course's Canvas shell. All students are allowed to make up assignments, quizzes, tests, major presentations, or other graded course activities missed due to illness. Proof of illness from a medical professional is not required. Students missing class due to illness will not have the absence count against the 25% of absences allowed during the semester.

Another change to the policy was the deletion of the graduate section, since it mirrored the undergraduate section. Undergraduate and graduate class attendance information was combined under one section.

**Motion:** Moved by Dr. McAdams to approve the revised Class Attendance policy for a first reading and seconded by Mr. Word. The motion was approved.

**Search and Hire approvals ..... Cabinet Members**

In response to the Cabinet’s decision that all requests to search for and fill vacant positions will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Cabinet, Dr. McAdams and Mr. Rutledge brought to Cabinet positions for consideration. The positions presented do not impact the salary savings identified previously to address the budget shortfall for this fiscal year.

**Academic Affairs**

Dr. McAdams presented to Cabinet members the request to search for and hire a Studio Production Manager for the Delta Music Institute, a Graduate Recruiter for Graduate and Continuing Studies, two teachers for the Child Development Center, and the Acquisitions and Accounting Coordinator for the Roberts-LaForge Library.

**Motion:** Moved by Dr. McAdams to approve the searching and hiring of a Studio Production Manager, a Graduate Recruiter, two teachers for the Child Development Center, and an Acquisitions and Accounting Coordinator and seconded by Mr. Rutledge. The motion was approved.

**Finance and Administration**

Mr. Rutledge presented to Cabinet members the request to hire the Interim Comptroller as the Comptroller.

**Motion:** Moved by Mr. Rutledge to approve the request to hire the Interim Comptroller as the Comptroller and seconded by Dr. McAdams. The motion was approved.

Mr. Rutledge presented to Cabinet members the request to search for and hire a Chief Information Officer. The Mississippi Department of Information Technology Services, the regulatory agency over IT services, highly recommends the university have the Chief Information Officer (CIO) as an in-house employee. Currently, Delta State’s CIO is an outsourced employee. Mr. Rutledge will not ask for an increase in his budget for this position. The funding for this position will be from a requested reduction in our Ellucian contract. Mr. Rutledge plans to ask for a reduction in the amount of salaries and benefits of the current administrator of their contract. The remaining funds for the position will come from price negotiations of maintenance contracts resulting in approximately \$100,000. Delta State is the only university in the IHL system not to have an in-house CIO. One main reason Delta State wants to move in this direction now is to bring services back in-house to save money in the future as contract prices increase approximately 5% every five years. By having an in-house CIO, Delta State can work on securing in-house services prior to signing a new IT contract next year.

**Motion:** Moved by Mr. Rutledge to approve the searching and hiring of a Chief Information Officer and seconded by Dr. Westfall. The motion was approved.

**Motion:** Moved by Dr. Roberts to ratify and affirm the following action taken via e-mail by the Executive Committee members, on behalf of the Cabinet, since the last Cabinet meeting on May 11, 2020 and seconded by Dr. McAdams. The motion was approved.

- May 14, 2020 – Request from Dr. Bennett-Fairs for approval to search for and hire a Director of Student Development for the Office of Student Life
- May 27, 2020 – Request from Dr. Bennett-Fairs for approval to search for and hire an Assistant

Director of Career Services for the Office of Career Services

- May 27, 2020 – Request from Dr. McAdams for approval to search for and hire a Secretary for the Division of Family and Consumer Sciences, an Administrative Assistant for the Registrar’s Office, and a Director for the Child Development Center.

**Discussion**

**Organizational Chart 2020-21 ..... Dr. Roberts**

Dr. Roberts shared with Cabinet Members the draft FY20 organizational chart. She asked Cabinet Members to review the organizational chart and to send changes—including new hires, new positions, new titles, or any reorganization in the upcoming fiscal year—to Ms. Cole by Monday, June 15. The updated organizational chart will be presented to Cabinet one final time before being made final on July 1.

**Holiday Schedule 2020-21..... Mr. Rutledge**

Mr. Rutledge presented to Cabinet Members the 2020-2021 Holiday Schedule produced by Human Resources. IHL policy allows for 15 paid holidays, and Delta State’s schedule complies with their policy. The holidays include: Independence Day, Labor Day, two days for Thanksgiving, eight days for winter holidays, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, a spring holiday, and Memorial Day.

**FY20 Budget Update ..... Mr. Rutledge**

Mr. Rutledge gave Cabinet members an update on the FY20 budget. All revenue and expenditure targets were met through April, and our expenditure targets continue to be met as we can control what money is spent. In March, the COVID-19 virus reached Mississippi, and some of its effects on the State were seen by the end of April. The effects of COVID-19 greatly reduced our revenue in May. Delta State was not able to host many, revenue-producing events due to the virus, including: the TFA Delta Institute, BPAC events, and summer camps. Scheduled payments for tuition have been slow coming in, and some payments have been reduced. Financial assistance funds are slow arriving due to federal and state financial aid offices only requiring essential employees in their offices. Delta State expects some revenue to come in this month including: Foundation funds, an insurance check for storm damage, and reimbursement checks from the Bureau of Buildings and IHL. The university will continue to do everything possible to ensure our overall cash balance goal is met on June 30.

During the FY21 budget planning process, Cabinet prepared and approved a budget that included a 5% expected decrease in State appropriations. Last week, Mr. Rutledge began to hear the reduction in state appropriations could be 6.5% to 15%. After speaking with IHL’s CFO, Mr. John Pearce, Mr. Rutledge learned the 6.5% decrease includes R&R funds. When planning the FY21 budget, the R&R funds were not included in the calculations. If R&R funds are taken out of the 6.5%, it leaves Delta State with a 5.1% reduction in State appropriations, or an additional \$88,000 in budget reductions. IHL has advised the universities not to make any additional budget cuts right now as the State budget won’t be complete until July or August, but Mr. Rutledge wants Cabinet to be aware that additional budget cuts up to \$100,000 could occur down the line.

**Legislative Update ..... Mr. Munroe**

Mr. Munroe gave an update on legislative activity. Last week was the deadline for original floor action on appropriation and revenue bills. The initial IHL appropriation bills have been approved by the Senate and are now pending action by the House of Representatives Appropriations Committee. These bills will go to conference for final negotiation. Bond bills have been adopted in both chambers and include the IHL bond request. The Senate reduced the amount of funds in the IHL bond request, but Delta State did not see a reduction. Mr. Munroe announced HB 1343, which would provide that the procurement of aircraft

equipment by IHL for degree programs in aviation would be exempt from the public purchase law requirements, was passed in the Universities and Colleges Committee. It moves on to the Senate Accountability Committee next. Mr. Munroe reached out to Delta State's representatives on the Alumni Advocacy Group to request they connect with their contacts in the Mississippi Legislature to garner support for IHL in our appropriations. The legislative session is slated to end on June 24.

#### **Additional information**

- President LaForge informed Cabinet members that a recent social media posting with racist comments overlaying Delta State's name and image was made. The social media post was staged to include the image of an African-American female, with a red "x" across her face, surrounded by Delta State swag, and with a text box that contained very disrespectful and racist comments targeting African-American students. This post, along with other related suspicious posts, were immediately turned over to the university police department for investigation. Dr. Bennett-Fairs and Chief Johns have been investigating this matter since the post first appeared, and it has been deemed that the post was a fraud. The university will release later today a statement regarding the social media post and other suspicious posts.
- President LaForge encouraged Cabinet members to review Appendix I and Appendix II, and try to finish any outstanding items prior to the start of the new fiscal year.
- President LaForge announced Cabinet meetings for the foreseeable future will continue via Zoom.
- Mr. Rutledge asked Cabinet members their opinion on allowing student workers to work during the summer, as several departments have requested their student workers return. He stated it had been discussed and decided not to allow students to return at this time. Dr. Bennett-Fairs reaffirmed that decision.

#### **INFORMATIONAL/CALENDAR ITEMS:**

- Virtual New Student Orientation I, June 8
- Virtual New Student Orientation II, June 22
- Virtual New Student Orientation III, June 29

#### **NEXT MEETING:**

- Next Cabinet Meeting – Tuesday, June 15 at 1:30 p.m.
- Next Cabinet Meeting Topic – TBD

**Adjournment:** The meeting adjourned at 3:50 p.m.