

# DELTA STATE UNIVERSITY

## PRESIDENT'S CABINET

### *Minutes*

---

**Meeting date: August 24, 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

**Guest:** Ms. Robin Douglas, COVID-19 Response Coordinator  
Mr. Adam King, President's Art Award Winner  
Mr. Cetin Oguz, Chair, Art Department

**Call to Order:** A regular meeting of the President's Cabinet was held via Zoom conference call on August 24, 2020. The meeting convened at 1:30 p.m. with President LaForge presiding.

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

On motion by Mr. Word and seconded by Dr. McAdams, all Cabinet Members present and participating voted unanimously to approve the Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting held on August 17, 2020.

#### **GENERAL OVERVIEW**

- President LaForge introduced Mr. Cetin Oguz, Chair of the Art Department. Mr. Oguz introduced Mr. Adam King, the President's Art Award winner. Mr. King, a painting major, introduced his piece "Mississippi Gobbler." Mr. Oguz also recognized the winner of the Cabinet Art Award, Mr. John Cassibry, for his sculpture "Fish II."
- President LaForge gave an overview of the activities and events from the last week. Delta State had its first week of classes last week. Dr. McAdams stated classes ran smoothly, and he announced 39% of the student body is taking their courses online this Fall. This percentage includes students who are taking online classes only and those who requested to take their course online due to COVID-19. The reduced number of students on campus helps to decrease congestion in the classroom and on campus overall. During the first week of classes, the Office of Student Life hosted Welcome Week activities for students. Dr. Bennett-Fairs stated the week went very well, and the students complied with all safety protocols, and must continue to do so in order to have more programming this semester. The Office of Human Resources held open enrollment sessions for faculty and staff to be able to make changes to their benefits. Mr. Rutledge stated that less than 20% of employees made changes to their benefits. The IHL Board of Trustees met last week. During the meeting, they approved two new academic programs for Delta State: Bachelor of Applied Decision Science in Commercial Aviation and Bachelor of

Applied Decision Science in Business. These two degrees allow for transfer students with Applied Associate degrees to finish their college career at Delta State. Also, the Board of Trustees approved the formal deletion of Delta State’s Bachelor of Science in Social Science and the Master of Science in Community Development. These two programs were eliminated during a formal review this past Spring, and the deletions will be effective August 2021. President LaForge participated in a conference call with Governor Tate Reeves, State Health Officer Dr. Thomas Dobbs, Commissioner Al Rankins, the other Institutional Executive Officers, and mayors from the local communities that host the eight public universities. The call will be discussed later in the meeting.

- Mr. Kinnison gave an update on Athletics. Each team is allowed to have supervised weight lifting and running right now, and student-athletes are allowed to work out on their own voluntarily. The GSC Athletic Directors continue to have their weekly update conference calls to discuss ongoing issues and planning with regards to COVID-19.
- Mr. Rutledge gave an update on Facilities Management projects. Repairs on the HVAC units in the Mayers Aquatics center continue. The contractor will replace only one unit of the HVAC system at a time. Mr. Rutledge needs to consult with Mr. Kinnison on how best to proceed with a leak in the Mayers Aquatics Center pool. The storm damage repairs throughout campus are complete. Mr. Rutledge contacted the architect and contractor for the Sillers Coliseum project to discuss the condensation on the floor, and they will work on a solution for us. The Bureau of Buildings met with Mr. Rutledge this morning to discuss the elevator project, and the project should go out for bid next week with a possible start date in November. Facilities Management has completed 17 of the units at Hill Apartments. Six of the apartments need new fire alarms, and those will be replaced next Monday.
- President LaForge shared with Cabinet members some of the meetings and events planned for this week. President LaForge participated in the weekly COVID-19 update conference call with Commissioner Al Rankins and the other Institutional Executive Officers this morning. The GSC Board of Directors meets tomorrow via Zoom. Also, the Greater Jackson Alumni Chapter will host a virtual chapter meeting on Thursday evening.

**CABINET TOPIC**

**COVID-19 Plans for Fall 2020 ..... President LaForge**

President LaForge led Cabinet members in a discussion of the university’s COVID-19 plans for Fall 2020. As mentioned earlier, President LaForge participated in a conference call with Commissioner Al Rankins and all Institutional Executive Officers this morning to discuss COVID-19 related issues. Commissioner Rankins had several conversations with the Board of Trustees since the last conference call about items related to COVID-19 and the eight universities. The Board of Trustees will not impose a set of protocols for each university to follow with regards to the need to close or provide a threshold number as to when an university must move to online instruction and working remotely. The Board of Trustees supports each university in making their own decisions. President LaForge gave an overview of the conference call with Governor Tate Reeves and State Health Officer Dr. Thomas Dobbs. Dr. Dobbs shared his extreme concern for the State with regard to the current rate of positive COVID-19 cases, and he stated universities may be faced with hard choices in the coming weeks. Dr. Dobbs’ concerns aren’t on the actions taking place on each respective campus; rather, it is the need to curtail unsafe and unrestrained social behavior off campus. A few presidents requested advice on threshold numbers, but no advice was given during the call. Governor Reeves and Dr. Dobbs will continue to consult with one another, and they will set up a time for another conference call to provide additional information. Ms. Douglas provided Cabinet members with an update on several items related to her efforts as the COVID-19 Response Coordinator. She shared the current number of positive cases among faculty, staff, and students, and she reported on the number of students in quarantine and isolation. We have a total number of 43 screeners, and each building now has a

point-of-entry screener. The Mississippi Department of Economic Services employs 30 of the positions, and Delta State employs the remaining 13. The Student Health Center is open, and Ms. Douglas has arranged for three nurse practitioners to rotate as the Healthcare Specialist. The Student Health Center will be open six days a week from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. except on Saturday when it will close at 12:00 p.m. Ms. Douglas will schedule a meeting with Dr. Steven Clark and the nurse practitioners to establish scope of practice. Ms. Douglas stated there is an issue with students contacting only their faculty members to report symptoms or a positive case, and they are failing to contact the Office of Student Life, as well. Ms. Douglas has encouraged faculty members to follow up with their students to ask them to report to the Office of Student Life. Ms. Douglas spoke with Dr. Stephen Clark about the difference between wearing a face mask and a face shield, and she asked his opinion on what the protocol should be for Delta State. Dr. Clark stated a face shield and face mask are not interchangeable. All must wear a mask, and can wear a face shield additionally, if they desire. Faculty members may take a mask off when teaching to help students better understand during the lecture; however, they must wear a face shield during this time. Due to the limited space on campus, the university has secured additional quarantine space at a local hotel. Mr. Rutledge has been working with the hotel on the amount of rooms available for the university's use, as well as the payment. Ms. Douglas hopes the COVID-19 database created by OIT will be able to provide live data by the end of the week so that more accurate reports will be available. Dr. Bennett-Fairs informed Cabinet members 17 of the Hill Apartment units are complete, and all, but one, are currently filled. An additional six units will be complete a week from today. Dr. Westfall and Chief Johns shared with Cabinet members a proposal to use \$20,000 of State CARES Act funds for faculty and staff professional development, resources, and professional cost reimbursement. With the move to online instruction in the spring, the call to prepare courses for hybrid delivery in the fall and the need to change practices in offices to promote remote work or social distancing, many faculty and staff have answered the call using every resource available. Given Delta State's financial situation in 2019-2020, it is even more likely that many faculty and staff took it upon themselves to purchase supplies or resources since they felt requests to their supervisors would likely be denied. At the same time, faculty and staff have been asked to broaden their scope of knowledge related to remote work, distance education, PPE, and several other topics. Professional development resources exist remotely, in the forms of books and webinars; however, these often have a cost associated with them. As an institution, we should be supportive of the initiative taken by our faculty and staff to ensure they have the tools necessary to do their jobs at the highest possible level, leveraging both professional resources as well as filling the gaps with personal resources. The proposal allows for 260 faculty and staff members to apply for a micro grant, up to \$75. To apply, faculty and staff will submit a PDF copy of the original receipt for the goods or services—dated March 15, 2020 through September 30, 2020—plus a short, written justification of the purchase, which includes the intended use of the items for their professional development. The application and documentation will be sent to the Faculty Senate leadership or Administrative Staff Council leadership, as appropriate, for recommendation. They will then forward their recommendation to Mr. Rutledge for final approval. Mr. Rutledge stated this type of expenditure of the State CARES Act funds will be allowed by the State Auditor's Office as long as the appropriate receipts are provided and copies are retained in the Finance and Administration Department.

## **BUSINESS**

### **Action**

**State CARES Act funds request..... President LaForge**  
Dr. Westfall and Chief Johns presented to Cabinet members a proposal to use \$20,000 of State CARES Act funds for faculty and staff professional development, resources, and professional cost reimbursement. The

leadership of the Faculty Senate and the leadership of the Administrative Staff Council will make the final recommendations to the Vice President for Finance and Administration Department for final approval and reimbursement.

**Motion:** Moved by Dr. Westfall to approve the use of State CARES Act funds for faculty and staff professional development, resources, and professional cost reimbursement and seconded by Chief Johns. The motion was approved.

**Discussion**

**Hearin Scholarship.....Dr. McAdams**

Dr. McAdams announced the Robert M. Hearin Foundation gifted Delta State with \$23,000 in scholarship support. The Executive Committee decided the scholarship funds will be given to the Office of Student Financial Assistance for distribution. Director of Student Financial Assistance, Dr. Megan Smith, will use the funds at her discretion to help those students who are purged from their classes and needs funds to remain in school. The Hearin Foundation also gifted Delta State with \$49,000 for the funding of scholarships and/or COVID-19 related expenditures. The decision was made to hold off on the use of the funds until more information is available regarding COVID-19 needs.

**Enrollment Update ..... Dr. Bennett-Fairs/Dr. McAdams**

Dr. Bennett-Fairs provided Cabinet members with an update on enrollment. Currently, 520 new students are registered for their Fall courses, and 27 prospective students need to be enrolled in their Fall courses. Dr. McAdams reported that the current graduate student enrollment stands at 723. Delta State has 106 international students enrolled for Fall 2020. Of the 106 enrolled, 15 are completing their coursework online in their home countries.

**FY21 Budget Update ..... Mr. Rutledge**

Delta State’s FY21 Annual Operating Budget and budget assumptions were approved by the IHL Board of Trustees last week. President LaForge and Mr. Rutledge had a separate conversation with the Board of Trustees during their Executive Session, and the Chair of the Finance Committee questioned the increase in our salaries for FY21. Mr. Rutledge explained the increase comes from State CARES Act funds being used to pay our point-of-entry screeners, COVID-19 Response Coordinator, and Healthcare Specialist. No employee salaries were increased for FY21, per IHL policy.

**ADDITIONAL ITEMS:**

- Mr. Munroe announced the Director of Media Relations position was posted, and he has already received some applications.

**INFORMATIONAL/CALENDAR ITEMS:**

- Greater Jackson Area Alumni Virtual Chapter meeting, August 27, 7:00 p.m.
- Labor Day holiday, September 7

**NEXT MEETING:**

- Next Cabinet Meeting – Monday, August 31 at 1:30 p.m.
- Next Cabinet Meeting Topic – TBD

**Adjournment:** The meeting adjourned at 2:58 p.m.