

**DELTA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**PRESIDENT'S CABINET**  
*Minutes*

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**Meeting date: August 3, 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:** Ms. Robin Douglas, COVID-19 Response Coordinator

**Call to Order:** A regular meeting of the President's Cabinet was held via Zoom conference call on August 3, 2020. The meeting convened at 1:30 p.m. with President LaForge presiding.

**APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES**

On motion by Mr. Rutledge and seconded by Dr. Westfall, all Cabinet Members present and participating voted unanimously to approve the Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting held on July 29, 2020.

**GENERAL OVERVIEW**

- Mr. Kinnison gave an update on Athletics. Student-athletes continue their voluntary, supervised workouts, in groups of 17 or less, with the strength and conditioning coaches. Mr. Kinnison stated a few more student athletes arrived over the weekend, and a few more will arrive today. International student-athletes are arriving, and they are quarantining for the required 14 days before joining their teammates for practices. Mr. Kinnison and other Athletic Directors in the Gulf South Conference continue to have weekly conference calls with GSC Commissioner Matt Wilson to discuss all aspects of sports for the Fall semester, and our Athletics Department continues to prepare for the start of the Fall semester.
- Mr. Rutledge gave an update on Facilities Management projects. Repairs on the Mayers Aquatics Center HVAC system have begun, and the old Dectron units will be removed next week. Yazoo Street, on the south side of the Mayers Aquatics Center, will be closed to through traffic during the duration of this project. The compressor for Lawler-Harkins Hall will be installed tomorrow by end of day.
- President LaForge shared with Cabinet members some of the meetings and events planned for this week. The Spring 2020 Virtual Commencement ceremony airs today. President LaForge and Mr. Munroe have a stewardship Zoom conference call with a new donor on Tuesday. As a reminder, the summer work schedule concludes on Thursday and regular office hours begin on Monday, August 10.

**CABINET TOPIC**

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

President LaForge led Cabinet members in a discussion of the university’s response to COVID-19, and the plans and protocols for Fall 2020. Dr. Roberts announced the position for COVID-19 Coordinator was offered and accepted by Ms. Robin Douglas. Ms. Douglas comes from Northwest Mississippi Community College where she served as the Associate Dean of Career Technical Education and also managed several COVID-19 related issues. Ms. Douglas began work this morning, and looks forward to working at Delta State to help combat COVID-19 on campus. The Healthcare Specialist position still has zero applications; however, Ms. Douglas plans to work with Bolivar Medical Center and the Robert E. Smith School of Nursing to look for the right person.

The IHL Safe Start Task Force met this morning with Dr. Thomas Dobbs. Dr. Roberts provided an overview of the call. Dr. Dobbs urged members of the IHL Safe Start Task Force to be more aggressive about prevention and to restrict all activity for three weeks to help deter the spread of the virus. A downfall for institutions will be the intermingling of students upon their return to campuses. Dr. Dobbs urged members of the task force to create, along with their institution, a threshold of positive COVID-19 tests by which each institution would move all aspects of the university system to online/remote for a 14-day period. He suggested isolating entire groups, as well, that have three or more positive cases within a 14-day period such as student organizations or athletic teams. It was suggested to look into rapid COVID-19 tests to have faster results for organizations with several positive cases. Residence halls can become a microcosm of problems for the institution, and Dr. Dobbs recommended private rooms, where possible. If the residence hall setup is a suite, the entire suite must isolate for a 14-day period if one person in the suite tests positive for COVID-19. Dr. Dobbs recommended creating boundaries for students that don’t allow them to make poor decisions with regards to protecting others and their self from COVID-19. For the classroom, he suggested utilizing assigned seats to help with contact tracing; and, he stated a student wearing a mask and sitting six feet apart from all other students would not be considered close contact. The State’s healthcare system is inundated with COVID-19 cases, and Intensive Care Units are full. Dr. Dobbs recommends abiding by the 14-day quarantine period instead of the CDC’s new recommendation of a 10-day quarantine.

Cabinet members discussed and edited the external COVID-19 Action Plan for Fall 2020. This action plan will be released to the public for reference on all actions taken by the university in preparing for students return for the Fall semester. As plans change, the document will be edited to reflect those changes. (*\*see document*)

Cabinet members discussed and edited the COVID-19 Protocols Guide for Employees. Dr. Roberts focused on three new items added to the document: 1) “Employee Acknowledgment of the Fall 2020 Return to Campus Requirements and Risks related to COVID-19” attestation form; 2) positive COVID-19 case announcement email; and, 3) new leave options related to COVID-19. All employees are required to complete by August 14 the “Delta State University Employee Acknowledgement of the Fall 2020 Return to Campus Requirements and Risks related to COVID-19” attestation form affirming their understanding of the responsibility to adhere to current university-established protocols and procedures. Dr. Roberts will work with Human Resources and OIT to have the attestation form in an electronic format. The positive COVID-19 case announcement email alerts employees someone in the campus community has tested positive. The name of the employee will not be identified. Any areas in which the infected person had been on campus will be closed for cleaning; those areas with their closed dates will be announced in the email. Also, the email provides a reminder to employees on how to be proactive in preventing the spread of the COVID-19 virus. There are two new categories of leave available under the Families First

Coronavirus Response Act (“FFCRA”) until December 31, 2020. Emergency Paid Sick Leave (EPSL) allows employees who are unable to telework and cannot report to their on-campus workplace due to a COVID-19 related reason may be eligible for up to two weeks (80 hours) of Emergency Paid Sick Leave. Qualifying reasons for EPSL are: 1) subject to a federal, state, or local quarantine or isolation order related to COVID-19; 2) has been advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine related to COVID-19; 3) experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and is seeking a medical diagnosis; 4) caring for an individual subject to an order described in #1 above, or self-quarantine as described in #2 above; 5) is caring for the employee’s child whose school or place of care is closed, or child care provider is unavailable, due to COVID-19 related reasons, or 6) experiencing any other substantially-similar condition specified by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. EPSL taken for reasons #4-6 above is paid at 2/3 an employee’s regular rate of pay. An employee may elect to use accrued personal leave (for reason #5) or major medical leave (for reason #4 or #6), to receive an additional one-third of the employee’s regular rate of pay. Expanded Family and Medical Leave (EFML) allows employees who are unable to work (or unable to telework) due to caring for a child whose school is closed, or whose child care provider is unavailable due to COVID-19 related reasons, may be eligible for up to 10 weeks of Expanded Family and Medical Leave. EFML is paid at 2/3 an employee’s regular rate of pay. An employee may elect to use accrued personal leave or compensatory time, if applicable, to receive an additional one-third of the employee’s regular rate of pay. (\* see document)

Cabinet members discussed and edited the COVID-19 Protocols Guide for Students. Dr. Bennett-Fairs focused on areas that were different from the protocols created for employees. Dr. Bennett-Fairs referenced one major change throughout the protocols for students is the point of contact. For students, the Student Life office is their point of contact. Students are to be advised that roommates and suitemates of residents and roommates of commuters who have been exposed to, or tested positive for COVID-19 must quarantine and undergo the COVID-19 protocols as well. A section was added to the student protocols guide that outlines expectations of students in the classroom setting, as well as, protocols for various areas of Student Affairs such as Campus Counseling, Career Services, campus programming, etc. (\*see document)

Cabinet members discussed the Athletics’ Department Return to Game Day protocols. The Gulf South Conference delayed the start of Fall competition to the end of September or the first of October. Upon the start of competition, Mr. Kinnison and his staff have created protocols on how best to handle all aspects of game days including visiting teams, game day officials, fans in the stadium/bleachers, ticketing, concessions, security, parking, etc. Mr. Kinnison informed Cabinet members competition dates could change, as well as the protocols created. He requested face shields for game day staff who will come in contact with a larger group of people during games. (\*see document)

Mr. Munroe and the staff of Communications and Marketing created a communications plan for COVID-19, and it is currently in place. Communications and Marketing has released pieces of our protocols across social media for the last few weeks. Mr. Munroe stated their plan needs additional videos, and he asked President LaForge, Dr. McAdams, and Mr. Word to be in these videos. Mr. Munroe will work with Communications and Marketing to create and schedule the videos.

Cabinet members discussed the possibility of postponing the start of face-to-face classes or postponing a students’ return to campus. Several great opinions were shared. Cabinet members decided to postpone the decision until the next Cabinet meeting on August 10 to give each constituency group the chance to discuss this possibility. Each constituency group leader will provide an overview of the opinion of their constituency at the next meeting.

## **BUSINESS**

### **Action**

#### **COVID-19 Action Plans (external) and COVID-19 Protocols (employees and students) for Fall 2020 President LaForge**

President LaForge presented the final draft of the external COVID-19 Action Plan for Fall 2020, COVID-19 Protocols Guide for Employees, and COVID-19 Protocols Guide for Students to Cabinet members for approval.

**Motion:** Moved by Dr. Westfall to approve the final drafts of the external COVID-19 Action Plan for Fall 2020, COVID-19 Protocols Guide for Employees, and COVID-19 Protocols Guide for Students and seconded by Mr. Rutledge. The motion was approved.

### **Discussion**

#### **Enrollment Update ..... Dr. Bennett-Fairs**

Dr. Bennett-Fairs provided Cabinet members with an update on enrollment. In Fall 2019, Delta State had 667 new students enroll. Currently, 378 students are registered for their Fall courses, and 293 students need to be enrolled in their Fall courses. With these two figures, Delta State's Fall potential enrollment for new students is 671. Dr. Bennett-Fairs stated it is not realistic to believe all 293 will enroll in Fall courses; however, she is hopeful at least 70% will enroll. In addition, Delta State received 106 new applications within the last 10 days. In her experience, students applying close to the beginning of the semester are more likely to enroll. Also, Delta State will have 111 re-admissions which will be additional tuition revenue for the university.

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

Cabinet members approved the FY21 Annual Operating Budget at last week's Cabinet meeting. It will be presented to the IHL Board of Trustees at their August meeting on August 20. IHL CFO, Mr. John Pearce, has requested each institution's CFO provide a list of assumptions the university made during their budget planning process (i.e. possibility of furloughs, no salary reductions, possibility of all classes being online). Mr. Pearce will present each institutions budget, along with their assumptions, to the Board of Trustees. Mr. Rutledge will discuss the assumptions with the Executive Committee this Thursday during their meeting prior to presenting them to Cabinet next week. As mentioned during last week's Cabinet meeting, CARES Act funds provided by the State must be spent by December 30. In order to extend some employment contracts funded by CARES, Mr. Rutledge rearranged some line items to allow them to be paid for by Federal CARES Act funds which can be spent through June 30, 2021. The university has approximately \$520,000 of CARES Act funds that has not yet been obligated.

### **Additional Information**

- Dr. Roberts shared with Cabinet members personnel changes within the President's Office.
- Mr. Word informed Cabinet members he began interviews for the SGA Appointed Positions today, and they have gone really well.

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

- Summer Work Schedule ends, August 6
- Virtual Spring 2020 Commencement, August 3, 1:00 p.m.
- Virtual Convocation, August 13, 3:00 p.m.

- Move In Day (Freshmen), August 14, 10:00 a.m.
- Move In Day (Juniors), August 15, 10:00 a.m.
- Move In Day (Sophomores, Seniors, and Graduates), August 16, 10:00 a.m.
- Day and night classes begin, August 17
- Welcome Week, August 17-21

**NEXT MEETING:**

- Next Cabinet Meeting – Monday, August 10 at 1:30 p.m.
- Next Cabinet Meeting Topic – Plans for Start of Fall Semester (Cabinet Members)

**Adjournment:** The meeting adjourned at 5:51 p.m.