



# **MINUTES**

## **Regents Universities Study Committee**

**Friday, November 12, 2021**

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### **MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Chris Cournoyer, Co-chairperson  
Senator Eric Giddens  
Senator Tim Kraayenbrink  
Senator Amy Sinclair  
Senator Zach Wahls

Representative Gary M. Mohr, Co-chairperson  
Representative Dustin D. Hite  
Representative David Kerr  
Representative Dave Williams  
Representative Cindy Winckler

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### I. Procedural Business

**Call to Order and Adjournment.** The meeting of the Regents Universities Study Committee was called to order by temporary Co-chairperson Mohr at 10:02 a.m., Friday, November 12, 2021, in Room 103 of the State Capitol, Des Moines. The meeting was adjourned at 1:04 p.m.

**Election of Permanent Co-chairpersons.** Members of the committee unanimously elected temporary Co-chairpersons Representative Mohr and Senator Cournoyer as permanent co-chairpersons.

**Adoption of Rules.** Members of the committee unanimously adopted the proposed rules.

**Opening Remarks.** Co-chairperson Mohr made brief introductory comments.

#### **Panel Members.**

- Dr. Wendy Wintersteen, President of the Iowa State University of Science and Technology (ISU).
- Dr. Mark A. Nook, President of the University of Northern Iowa (UNI).
- Dr. Barbara J. Wilson, President of the State University of Iowa (UI).

### II. Charge

The committee is required to examine the administrative costs, staffing levels, and allocation of staff at the institutions of higher learning governed by the State Board of Regents (BOR), as well as the graduation and student retention rates for each academic program at each such institution.

### III. Student Recruitment and Enrollment

The committee asked the panel to describe how enrollment projections were developed and how the 2025 enrollment cliff that ISU projects may affect the BOR institutions. President Nook stated that the enrollment cliff is related to the projected decline in the number of high school graduates in neighboring states. President Nook added that he expects enrollment at UNI to remain fairly steady because it does not draw in a large number of students from those states whose high school graduation numbers are expected to decline. President Nook mentioned that UNI is changing the ways it reaches out to students and is focusing more attention on nontraditional students and transfers from community colleges in an effort to maintain enrollment figures.

The committee asked whether the BOR universities have calculated a breakeven point in terms of the number of students required to be enrolled as a way to mitigate the risks associated with volatile enrollment. President Wintersteen stated ISU's current enrollment is a good enrollment number from a financial perspective. President Wintersteen also described the focus ISU has placed on recruiting out-of-state students in an effort to maintain enrollment figures. President Wilson indicated that UI determines enrollment by examining, among other things, market demand and job trends. President Wilson also stated that bringing in out-of-state students and international students are important aspects of maintaining enrollment.

The committee asked the panel whether the BOR universities account for the General Assembly's funding model when developing their enrollment projections. President Nook addressed the link between budget modeling and enrollment projections. President Nook indicated UNI uses the Consumer Price Index for purposes of its budget modeling process. President Wintersteen stated that ISU runs each of its colleges like a business. Each college must look at things like the demand for a particular major and work with industry advisory councils on what is needed for employees to determine where to increase and decrease investments. President Wintersteen noted these decisions drive enrollment, which affects the budget.



The committee inquired about the return on investment for education. President Wintersteen stated that the BOR recently put together a study addressing the return on investment the universities provide to the state. President Wintersteen also addressed the number of people the university research parks in the state employ. President Wilson addressed UI's return on investment in terms of health care by stating that 80 percent of dentists practicing in the state were trained at UI; 50 percent of the pharmacists in the state were trained at UI; and 50 percent of the physicians in the state were trained at UI. President Nook stated that the state invests roughly \$100 million in UNI annually and the annual economic impact of UNI to the state is in excess of \$1.2 billion. President Nook also addressed the return on investments students realize through obtaining degrees from the state universities.

Responding to a question from the committee, President Nook stated UNI is in a good position to navigate the projected enrollment cliff. President Nook stressed the importance of aligning academic programs with job needs of students and with what students are looking for. President Wilson stated UI was reasonably confident in its enrollment numbers and projections, and will follow up on those numbers periodically. President Wintersteen stated she felt very confident about student enrollment for the upcoming academic year.

The committee requested that the panel provide the committee with a breakeven number for enrollment for each BOR university.

The committee asked the panel what gave them the confidence that growth in enrollment was sustainable and how funding should be handled given the volatility of enrollment. President Wintersteen described the variety of new tools ISU uses to attract more students. President Wintersteen stated ISU expects to see increased enrollment from first-generation college students. President Wintersteen also stressed the importance of returning to prepandemic levels of international student enrollment. President Nook stated 50 percent of UNI's enrollment decline this year is due to the decrease in international student enrollment. President Nook also stated it is important to focus more on bringing in first-generation college students.

The committee inquired about the decrease in applications from male students. President Nook indicated this trend has been happening for years. President Nook noted this decrease could be a function of the economy and low unemployment rate. President Wilson stated UI was concerned about this decrease in applications. President Wilson addressed the importance of helping families to appreciate the value of higher education. President Wintersteen indicated it is important to consider how to get more women into engineering.

The committee asked where the universities stand in terms of in-state enrollment. President Nook indicated UNI would like to attract more in-state students. President Nook also addressed the importance of bringing in out-of-state students to help fill jobs that are needed in the state. President Nook pointed out that, as a result of the regent admission index, the universities do not turn away in-state students to take students from out of state.

The committee addressed getting information that would show the number of out-of-state students who graduated from a BOR university and stayed in Iowa. The committee requested that the panel provide the committee with information related to why graduates from BOR universities might leave the state. President Wilson informed the committee that the BOR recently entered into a partnership with the United States Census Bureau to better track graduates of BOR universities over time. President Wilson estimated the data generated by this partnership will be available in six to eight months. President Wilson also addressed the importance of attracting high-quality faculty to the BOR universities because those faculty members bring in grants and out-of-state students. President Wintersteen added that it was important to grow business opportunities in the state to keep more graduates in the state.



The committee asked the panel about dropout rates during the first two years of education at BOR universities. President Nook indicated UNI's retention rates are very steady at roughly 83 percent to 85 percent. President Nook stated UNI's three-year graduation rate has increased as a direct result of concurrent enrollment. President Nook acknowledged it is less costly to deliver the first two years of a college curriculum.

The committee inquired about what the BOR universities do to counsel their students on student loan debt. President Wintersteen stated that roughly 35 percent to 40 percent of graduates of the universities have no student loan debt upon graduation. President Wintersteen indicated that the universities' student loan debt counseling provided to families and students addresses both financial literacy and future earnings. President Nook indicated UNI's student loan debt counseling program "Live Like a Student" has led to a decrease in the number of students who take out student loans and a decrease in the amount of student loans the students take out compared to what they thought they needed.

The committee asked the panel whether first-generation college students are more likely to take on student loan debt. The committee also inquired about the connection between the tuition charged by BOR universities and appropriations to such universities over the past 20 to 30 years. President Nook stated first-generation college students are more likely to take on student loan debt. President Nook indicated the students he is most concerned with from a financial perspective are those who are not eligible for Pell grants but are just above the cutoff for Pell grant eligibility. President Nook acknowledged the connection between the tuition charged by BOR universities and appropriations to BOR universities. President Nook noted the issue is finding the appropriate balance. President Wintersteen indicated raising money for scholarships was an important part of this consideration. President Wilson described a new wraparound initiative at UI "First Gen Hawks," that has increased the retention rate of first-generation college students. President Wintersteen described the importance of grants to financially support students, especially those who are close to completing their college careers.

The committee requested that the panel provide the committee with data related to the student debt of in-state graduates, out-of-state graduates, and international graduates.

The committee asked whether students mention the comparatively low tuition rates charged by the BOR universities during the recruiting or admissions process. President Wilson acknowledged students do mention the comparatively low tuition rates charged by the BOR universities during the recruiting or admissions process, but added that it stresses the institutions to keep tuition so low.

The committee discussed the possibility of funding the All Iowa Opportunity Scholarship Program at a higher level. President Wilson described a successful grant program in place in Illinois to help keep students in the state. President Wilson indicated improvements could be made in terms of funding scholarships for Iowa students.

#### **IV. Academic Offerings**

The committee asked the panel how the BOR universities decide to create new programs or degrees and discontinue programs or degrees and asked who is involved in making such decisions. President Wintersteen indicated that, at ISU, these types of decisions are made at the college level and take into account student demand and input from the business community. President Nook stated student demand is a prominent concern when determining whether to discontinue a program or degree. President Nook added the economic impact the program has on the state is also a consideration.



The committee requested that the panel provide the committee with data related to student loan debt organized by graduates of the different degree programs and further broken down into groups of in-state graduates, out-of-state graduates, and international graduates.

The committee asked the panel when any of the BOR universities last discontinued a student degree program. President Nook indicated this took place at the last BOR meeting. President Nook discussed the coordination that takes place between the BOR universities related to decisions of this nature. He noted that a group composed of persons representing regents universities, private postsecondary institutions, and community colleges exists to review academic programs offered throughout the state.

The committee inquired about responsibilities the BOR universities have to students who are enrolled in programs that are discontinued. President Nook stated that student welfare is the primary consideration when determining whether and how to discontinue a student degree program. President Nook stated an adequate teach-out plan needs to be put in place as early as possible.

The committee asked the panel how they decide which courses will be offered online, in person, or using both methods, and the costs involved in those different methods. President Wintersteen stated online courses have been utilized for years, and noted the costs are essentially the same between in-person and online courses because the main cost is employing the professor who is teaching the course. President Wilson stated the main concern when making these decisions is what makes the most sense to further student learning. President Wilson noted that solely online courses for undergraduate students are utilized mostly during summer school and during classes held over winter session. President Wilson stated purely online degrees are targeted toward working professionals. President Wilson indicated there are different expenses associated with purely online courses, including course designer costs and technology costs. President Nook acknowledged the increased costs associated with technology for purely online courses.

The committee inquired about the accreditation process. President Nook indicated the accreditation process is an exhaustive process that takes place on a 10-year cycle. President Nook stated the accreditation process is even more intense for new programs offered by the universities.

The committee asked the panel whether the BOR universities discuss programs at each of their institutions when determining whether to create a new program or degree or discontinue a program or degree. Dr. Kevin Kregel, University of Iowa Executive Vice President and Provost, discussed how provosts coordinate on these issues using a layered process. President Wintersteen stated the universities do collaborate and use each other's ideas on this front. President Wilson acknowledged the high level of collaboration among the BOR universities in this area. President Nook discussed how accreditation factors into these decisions.

The committee asked the panel to discuss the value of tenure, how it is used at the universities, how people achieve tenure, and how tenure benefits the people of Iowa. President Wintersteen stated that tenure is very important and needed to attract faculty. President Wintersteen also explained the process for being offered tenure at ISU. President Wintersteen indicated the full impact of tenure is felt in the classroom preparing students for their careers. President Wilson emphasized that tenure is the norm in the marketplace — it is needed to attract prestigious faculty. President Wilson also elaborated on UI's tenure review process. President Nook stated tenure was needed to recruit effective faculty who can deliver a high-quality education. President Nook discussed how the cost of education would increase if tenure were no longer utilized.

The committee asked the panel to discuss the waiver process and a recent complaint filed with the Iowa Public Information Board. Ms. Aimee Claeys, BOR General Counsel, explained the waiver process.



Ms. Claeys stated that the general rule at BOR universities is that the faculty and staff positions are filled using an open, competitive process. However, Ms. Claeys indicated a waiver could be requested in exceptional circumstances. In terms of the status of the complaint, Ms. Claeys stated that the Iowa Public Information Board has received the complaint and started its investigation.

The committee inquired about the use of the waiver process to hire a trailing spouse or partner. President Wilson indicated the accompanying spouse or partner is often at least as qualified as the original hire. President Wilson stated the accompanying spouse or partner is still screened by the hiring school. President Wilson added there are no guarantees and no department is forced to hire an accompanying spouse or partner.

The committee asked the panel what hiring has been like since the General Assembly's recent discussion of tenure. President Wintersteen stated this discussion is certainly something faculty candidates are aware of. President Wintersteen added this discussion was a concern among current faculty as well. President Nook stated this discussion came up during UNI's search for an academic administrator.

The committee asked the panel to explain the history and purpose of tenure. The committee also asked the panel to explain, outside the context of hiring, why tenure is important. President Nook stated that other industries and companies — law firms and certain medical entities — have systems similar to tenure. President Nook indicated tenure was a way of making a commitment to a person who has made a commitment to the university.

The committee asked the panel if there were any financial incentives associated with being tenured. President Wilson stated that being tenured does come with a promotion, so there is a financial incentive. The committee asked the panel to explain what protection tenure provides. President Wilson explained that tenure protects faculty who conduct research that might be considered controversial. President Wilson added that there is a systematic review process for tenured faculty. President Wintersteen emphasized tenure is needed to hire the best faculty. President Nook explained that the political pressure often comes from within the department itself.

## **V. Degree Completion**

The committee asked President Wintersteen to explain the purpose of cooperative extension today. President Wintersteen explained the history of cooperative extension at ISU. Dr. John Lawrence, ISU Vice President for Extension and Outreach, explained how cooperative extension is funded. Dr. Lawrence indicated this program is embedded in Iowa's communities and works with faculty to interpret and disseminate research. Dr. Lawrence stated cooperative extension also helps people consider attending college.

The committee asked the panel how students who arrive on campus already having obtained college credit while in high school affect their enrollment and degree programs. President Nook stated this has increased UNI's three-year and four-year graduation rates. President Nook added UNI's retention rates have increased as a result of high school students arriving on campus with college credit.

The committee inquired about the graduation rates for students who have already obtained an associate degree. President Nook stated these graduation rates were the same or slightly higher than other students, depending on how those rates are measured. President Wilson stated these students do just as well as students who begin their studies at UI. President Wilson noted that, as a result of these students, students are graduating within four years more often now. President Wilson also indicated



getting college credits before attending a four-year university allows the student the flexibility to pursue things like internships and studying abroad.

The committee asked the panel whether a student's time spent earning credits in community college is included in the universities' three-year, four-year, or six-year graduation rates. President Nook explained that, so long as a student was not enrolled in a community college, that student is considered a first-time, full-time student when they arrive on the university's campus.

The committee asked the panel what steps they are taking to ensure more students graduate within four years. President Nook discussed multiple things UNI is doing on this front, including emphasizing to students the importance of taking 15 credits per semester instead of only 12.

The committee asked the panel if students who leave high school with enough credits for an associate degree are considered transfer students or first-time, full-time students. President Nook stated that so long as a student was not enrolled in the community college, that student is considered a first-time, full-time student.

The committee asked the panel if there is any data related to the four-year or six-year graduation rate for students who change majors. President Nook explained how complex this data is. President Nook acknowledged it is difficult to track graduation rates in these scenarios.

The committee asked the panel to explain how students who drop out and then reenroll are factored into the data. President Nook indicated it depends on how long the student has been out. President Nook stated UNI does track first-time, full-time students, but the national data is restricted in terms of the students to be included in this dataset. President Wintersteen acknowledged these students are not captured in the national data. President Wilson summarized the discussion by stating the six-year graduation rate is not a perfect measure but it is an important benchmark.

The committee asked the panel what happens to the students who do not graduate in six years. President Wintersteen stated ISU does stay in contact with these students. President Nook indicated most of the students who do not graduate from UNI within six years are simply students who transferred to another school to complete their degree.

The committee discussed the possibility of working with the United States Department of Education to develop a better and more comprehensive data system.

The committee requested that the panel provide the committee with data related to the completion of graduate programs.

## **VI. Committee Discussion**

The committee requested that the panel provide the committee three dates in December 2021 when they are available for a second meeting to discuss additional issues.

## **VII. Materials Filed with the Legislative Services Agency**

Materials were distributed at or in connection with the meeting and are filed with the Legislative Services Agency. The materials may be accessed from the "Committee Documents" link on the committee's Internet site accessible at the following address: [www.legis.iowa.gov/committees/committee?ga=89&session=1&groupID=36639](http://www.legis.iowa.gov/committees/committee?ga=89&session=1&groupID=36639)

- State Board of Regents Response to Request for Information.