

Higher Education Workgroup

Meeting Minutes

September 25, 2025

1-2pm

Virtual Meeting

Attendees: Dr. Andrea Cantora, John Feaster III, Ainsley Moench, Del. Elizabeth Embry, Meredith Conde, Dr. Judith Lichtenberg, Dr. Stephen Steurer, Gordon Pack, Karen Esterque, Zakiya Lee, Christian Gant

I. Call to order

The meeting was called to order at 1 pm.

II. Approval of August meeting minutes

The August meeting minutes were approved.

III. Discussion and vote on workgroup recommendations

Dr. Andrea Cantora introduced the four recommendations the workgroup would be discussing for the annual Commission report.

Dr. Stephen Steurer reported that Delegates Elizabeth Embry, Karen Simpson, and Cheryl Pasteur are interested in introducing legislation based on these recommendations, specifically focusing on the recommendations surrounding incarcerated individual access to state aid and the creation of a tuition waiver, with Delegate Embry sponsoring the legislation. Delegate Elizabeth Embry confirmed that the legislative drafting process would begin soon to be ready for the session, emphasizing collaboration with the Commission.

Dr. Andrea Cantora discussed the recommendation on space, noting that the Commission could continue to study space opportunities within facilities within the coming months.

Christian Gant asked what the format of the recommendations would look like. Ainsley Moench stated that the current meeting was to approve the recommendation statements, and the next meeting would be discussing and approving a more comprehensive write up of each recommendation. Dr. Stephen Steurer suggested the report should describe ongoing activities and include success metrics to demonstrate progress and garner support, emphasizing a positive tone for the report. Dr. Andrea Cantora agreed, noting the Goucher trailer project as a positive.

Ainsley Moench started sharing the outlines of each recommendation write-up. Dr. Stephen Steurer suggested distributing the outlines to the workgroup to avoid duplication of writing.

Dr. Judith Lichtenberg asked why there was no recommendation regarding technology. Dr. Andrea Cantora explained that since DPSCS is actively funding and implementing a common technology system, a recommendation was deemed unnecessary for now. Dr. Stephen Steurer suggested that the report should still update on the progress of technology across all sectors, including virtual classrooms and incentives being implemented by DPSCS.

John Feaster III pointed out that DPSCS was not on the call, and they should be given an opportunity to comment on the recommendations as well. Dr. Andrea Cantora responded that Danielle Cox was on vacation, but the recommendations would be shared with her and she would be given the opportunity to give feedback.

Dr. Stephen Steurer expressed his gratitude for the legislators and the Commission for their commitment to prison education.

Gordon Pack emphasized the clarity and conciseness of the recommendations, noting their potential to gain support. He expressed how he would like to look into other motivators for prison education for those inside.

Dr. Judith Lichtenberg asked if there were information sessions inside for individuals to learn about the education programs offered. Dr. Andrea Cantora replied that information sessions were given on an individual college basis, however some colleges did not have sessions due to the already existing waitlist. Meredith Conde offered that every admission cycle, Goucher College offers three information sessions and alumni panels to anyone interested. Those who are interested take placement exams and are interviewed, and are admitted if there is space.

Dr. Stephen Steurer added that the report should indicate how many college students are in each program.

Gordon Pack thanked Dr. Andrea Cantora for having Robert Pitman in JCI as a mentor and inspiration to the students.

Dr. Stephen Steurer asked Del. Elizabeth Embry how the Commission could best support the items of legislation that come out of the annual report. Del. Elizabeth Embry replied that each piece of legislation would have to be assigned to a committee, and individual organizations and people could express their support and attend hearings. Dr. Judith Lichtenberg asked if other workgroups had legislative recommendations. Dr. Stephen Steurer said that there is legislation regarding the number of mandatory education days there are, expanding the GED requirement to high school credits, empowering the Commission to create a school board, and creating a line item to fund the Certified Peer Recovery Specialist Program. Ainsley Moench clarified that the recommendations had not been approved by the Commission yet.

Dr. Andrea Cantora announced that there would be a graduation ceremony at JCI for University of Baltimore students.

IV. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 1:46pm.