**VSCS Forward Task Force Public Summary 6/30 and 7/2**

The webpage for VSCS Forward Task Force’s summaries and an input collection tool is here: https://www.vsc.edu/board-of-trustees/vscsforward/

**Task Force Discussion of VSCS existing footprint and possible changes:**

The percentage of total VSCS operating costs related to physical footprint are roughly 10%. Still, many on the Task Force see the footprint (physical location of schools) as an important part of their considerations as an area for reducing expenses. The Task Force discussed principles for consideration when making recommendations for cost savings in area of physical footprint. These principles include:

* Understand what's working well for the system/students and make recommendations that are cost-effective, consistent with strengths and values, and based on imagining a resilient future.
* Understand the features and functions offered by the VSCS campuses.
* Determine the right size of the system (all schools) proportional to the number of students and programs.
* Increase the online access (building on the circumstances VSCS was forced into with COVID-19). CCV staff provided an example of when CCV-Springfield offered services remotely, stopped offering in-person classes there, and enrollments went up.
* For in person experiences, where possible look for locations with public transportation and provide high-speed access on campus (some students don’t have this at home).
* Recognize the points of different between CCV/non-traditional learners and residential campus learners. Consider demand for diversity in learning and experiences.
* Consider additional co-location of CCV with other VSCS institutions. Finding that this doesn’t bring much savings. Co-locating CCV on a residential campus may have negative impact on CCV enrollment.  Non-traditional students often intimidated by traditional residential setting – this may be a deterrent for some.
* Consider the possibility of bringing other groups onto residential campuses to fully utilize space and generate synergy.
* Band together as a system for innovation and create more opportunity for students to access all VSC classes from any location.
* Match the programs with the specific communities that demand the program.

**Role of Office of the Chancellor:**

Executive committee of the BOT was asked to conduct a review of the OC - included interviews with presidents, senior leadership, and a review of finances. Task Force will review Exec Committee report (once report is finalized) and consider making a recommendation about the role of the Chancellor’s office.

**Outreach and stakeholder input**

The Task Force sees feedback as critical. Any input the TF takes in is information that will influence their recommendations. The TF also recognizes that they don’t have the resources or time for scientific polling. They plan to create ways to connect with stakeholders including students, faculty (assemblies), staff/administrators, business owners, and VT high school guidance counselors.

**Learning Session for Task Force with UMaine System Leaders**

The Task Force had a call with UMaine systems leaders Jim Thelen, General Counsel and two academic affairs leaders, Robert Placido and Kay Kimball. The discussion focused on UMaine’s work to bring all UMaine institutions under one accreditation.

Maine statute requires system to maintain institutions in communities where they are.  State law would have to change to make a change to this. However, law doesn't define what a university is or does. Unified accreditation allows the board the flexibility to say which programs an individual institution can maintain on its own.

Task Force Learning From UMaine Team:

Maine system is like VSCS with single board and policies that define overall responsibilities for governance and leadership at the system level.

Unified accreditation does not solve budget problems, doesn't address question of which programs should be collaborating. That is next step for UMaine in study committee.

The critical requirement of accreditation is that the institution have shared internal governance, outcomes, and standards.

Programs that are unique to a single campus if they are managed there sustainably. But other programs are not sustainable if separate at each school. UMaine decided to maintain a single program in some areas and faculty share students across all campuses. This made the program viable.

UMaine Accreditation Committee spent time with the community talking about what they can create together. They honored collaboration and distinctive and unique strengths.

They were clear with what they don’t know but made communication a priority.

The process built strong relationships among faculty and a foundation for working together on curriculum.

There was lots of behind-the-scenes work in cultivating relationships with legislators, state agencies, and governor.

Timeline: Although work on a “One University” concept had been underway for several years previously, work on potential unified accreditation started as recommendation to the board in September (2019). November (2019) committee created a report describing expected process and asked for a recommendation to pursue unified accreditation by board in January 2020. Maine submitted a request in June 2020 to the New England Council on Higher Education (NECHE). It was approved effective July 1. There is now a two-year period to develop self-study and comprehensive evaluation visit with site visits to all institutions to evaluate. NECHE expectation is to see evidence of multi-institution programs around the state and that students from individual institution have access to programs beyond their residential institutions. It may be that tuition and cost sharing becomes part of the solution. This is where the financial implications come in.

**Conclusions on accreditation based on UMaine Conversation:**

TF appreciates Maine's approach/recognition that different students have different needs/program structures. Task Force determined it is within reach for VSCS to do the unified accreditation or some form of it. The Task Force decided that unified accreditation would not address the financial challenges they are focused on. They thought it may be better to start with the interventions around program duplication that will make VSCS sustainable since this is the acute issue, get to accreditation later.

**Task Force committed to focus on functional area duplication and criteria, not focus on accreditation. The Task Force will have a conversation about functional area duplication with student-focus.**