

Minutes

Lowcountry Graduate Center Supervisory Council Meeting

**Friday, January 8, 2021
ZOOM Web Conference**

10:00 – 11:30 a.m.

Supervisory Council Members Present via Web Conference:

Suzanne Austin – Provost, College of Charleston

Lisa Saladin – Provost, Medical University of South Carolina

Sally Selden – Provost, The Citadel

LGC Staff Present:

Nancy Muller – Director, Lowcountry Graduate Center (LGC); Visiting Associate Professor of Public Health, College of Charleston

Jonathan Solomon – Administrative Assistant, Lowcountry Graduate Center

Call to Order

The scheduled meeting of the Lowcountry Graduate Center (LGC) Supervisory Council was called to order by Supervisory Council Chair Saladin shortly after 10:00 a.m. Noting the meeting was publicized in accordance with South Carolina's FOIA, Saladin commented that attendance by anyone from the media generally represents the *Charleston Business Journal*. No one from the media was present at the January 8th meeting.

Minutes

Selden made a motion the minutes of the August 7, 2020 meeting, as distributed previously, be approved. Austin seconded the motion, and minutes were unanimously approved. Muller pointed out she had copied verbatim from Saladin's email into the body of the minutes before distributing the document those decisions taken in the Executive Session unfolding after she exited the August 7th meeting. Saladin commented that at some future time the Supervisory Council should discuss what is appropriate to include from an Executive Session in published minutes.

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Program Offerings

Muller said UofSC has maintained all of its MSW classes traditionally taught as F2F classes at Trident Technical College (TTC), making the location a virtual teaching hub for the state using its Blackboard learning management and communications software. Additionally, The Citadel has maintained its Principal Service Center with monthly F2F meetings at TTC. The Citadel moved its MS in Project Management (PMGT) to its main campus, while opening more sections and classes to be taught online rather than traditionally as F2F classes. The Citadel's new Ed.S cohort of Dorchester County teachers, originally scheduled to meet F2F at TTC, elected to meet virtually via ZOOM when the pandemic continued and a second spike in the Fall was feared. There are no Spring 2021 Charleston students enrolled in UofSC's MS in Engineering Management; meanwhile, SCSU moved all graduate programs temporarily online to allow social distancing space for undergraduate students on its main campus in Orangeburg. When asked about Charleston student enrollments in the MBA Healthcare Management concentration, Muller said that the pandemic had set back efforts by the new program director to cultivate applicants, as she had escorted him for introductions to numerous area employers a year earlier and he was always warmly received by their HR staff. Still, the university lacks funds to market the program vigorously especially to make known the hybrid concentration to Charleston area residents. It is considered one of the most successful graduate programs at SCSU and continues to be so, regardless.

Enrollments

Introducing the spreadsheet with enrollment data by term as well as by academic year, Muller commented that enrollment in The Citadel's PMGT program fell 38% from 258 to 160 between 2019 and 2020, with only 26 enrolled F2F at present on its main campus in three classes. The previous year, enrollments tumbled 32% pre-pandemic from 378 to 258. UofSC's enrollments in its MSW program fell 26% from 298 to 221, in large part because no summer classes were held as usual due to the pandemic. It has since regained nearly half that ground lost in absolute number of students (52 at present), with stronger new enrollments by first year students versus re-enrollments by second year students. These represent the LGC's two longstanding anchor programs. There are currently no programs being offered by the College of Charleston through the LGC's portal, as its Executive MPA program launched in January 2020 has been suspended.

Requests for LGC Opportunity Funds

Saladin asked that all requests be presented by Muller before individual decisions were reached on funding. In the order as appearing on the agenda, Muller presented:

1. MUSC's MPH Program (\$25,000 requested): Going for accreditation in 2021, the program needs to demonstrate inclusion of a local, diverse workforce among enrolled students and is proposing to spend \$25,000 for social media, radio, and TV marketing and advertising to a local audience. MUSC is matching this with the hiring of a program coordinator. She pointed out that it falls outside of LGC Guidelines for Opportunity

Funds because the program is more than three years old, having been launched five years ago. However, she encouraged the application because it is one of MUSC's newer graduate programs and a targeted workforce sector of the LGC. Its proposed campaign is targeted to local workforce development. Moreover, MUSC has never requested Opportunity Funds – over \$600,000 under her predecessor - from the LGC in the past. Additionally, the proposal received very positive letters of support from program directors at Emory University and the University of Miami.

2. MUSC's MPH Program (\$24,454, revised upwards from \$19,409) seeks funding for half of one day's time per week for Professor Jeffrey Korte to develop a new course in Pandemic Preparedness to be taught beginning in the Academic Year 2022. The other half of one day's time will be compensation covered by MUSC. She pointed out it also falls outside of LGC Guidelines for Opportunity Funds because the MPH program is more than three years old, having been launched five years ago. However, she encouraged the application because of the national importance in public health to pandemic preparedness for our nation's health and economic vitality. It, too, received very positive letters of support from program directors at Emory University and the University of Miami.
3. The Citadel's Zucker School of Education seeks \$25,000 to cover 75% of the tuition of nine Beaufort County teachers to take two graduate courses tailored to teaching English Language Learners (ELL). The courses will count toward Literacy credit requirements under the State's "Read to Succeed" mandate. Beaufort County has the fastest growing rate of ELLs in the state, having exploded from 19% to 28% of all students over the last two decades. The monies will be matched 1:1 by The Citadel with a 25% tuition abatement plus coverage of 1) out-of-pocket mileage expense to Beaufort and 2) allocated time for content customization. Muller pointed out that tuition is not explicitly mentioned as an "allowable" expense in the LGC Guidelines for Opportunity Grants, although K-12 Teacher Education is a priority sector of the LGC and this effort is entirely directed to benefit the local workforce and students in the Lowcountry, so she encouraged submission of the request. It is accompanied by strong letters of support from the Superintendent of Beaufort County Schools and its ESOL Program Coordinator. Still, The Citadel's Literacy program is more than three years old and thus technically outside of parameters of the Guidelines.
4. The College of Charleston's School of Education and Health & Human Performance seeks \$10,000 to market entirely in the Lowcountry its accelerated M.A.T. program in Elementary Teacher Education. The "Fast Track" overhaul represents a substantive revision of the M.A.T. program and is only in its second year. It represents a priority sector of the LGC and is focused on local workforce development at a time when teacher shortages are acute especially in rapidly growing Berkeley County. Strong letters of support were shared from the VP of HR for Charleston County School District and from Meeting Street Schools in Charleston.
5. The College of Charleston's School of Mathematics and Science requests \$24,750 for digital marketing of a new graduate program in its second year and only F2F computer

science-based MS in data science and analytics in the state. It will be matched 1:1 with direct spending for a total of \$49,500 in total marketing expense. It is accompanied by strong letters of support from Charleston County Economic Development and a local start-up, SpursTech, that builds and co-develops scalable business intelligence and data management tools for small businesses, as well as letters from the CEOs of the Charleston Regional Development Alliance and the Charleston Digital Corridor. It also represents a priority sector for the LGC. Muller pointed out that Charleston Metro Area is ranked 19th among 201 metro areas nationwide tracked for its growth rates in high tech employment.

Both College of Charleston submissions fully meet the Guidelines of the LGC's Opportunity Funds as approved by the Supervisory Council several years earlier.

Selden questioned if a program could receive more than one grant in a given year. Muller responded that the current Guidelines as approved by the LGC Supervisory Council several years earlier only allow one grant every five years and three years of reporting for accountability. Saladin said that because of its focus on local workforce development and increasing student diversity, she favored the marketing expense request over the course development request. The others agreed and the former was approved.

Selden said she did not think it was a good idea to use the funds for tuition. This could open the door to challenges. Muller said that other public institutions, especially SC State University, already involved with the LGC, may seek such state-appropriated funds as well. Selden suggested the requested \$25,000 by The Citadel be allocated instead towards allowable expenses under the Guidelines. Muller pointed out it can readily go for professional compensation allocated to course customization and instruction. The group agreed for Muller to communicate this recommended change to Lee Westberry for resubmission at the April meeting.

There was unanimous support without objection to approve the requested funds for both programs at the College of Charleston.

Selden questioned the Guidelines requiring that if a program is not new, it must meet the SACSCOC definition of being "substantively" changed to qualify for Opportunity Funds. She felt that was too rigid. Muller said she would doublecheck minutes of the earlier meeting at which Guidelines were approved to be sure they are in sync with this language. Selden added that she thought the Guidelines needed to be more flexible than being released only for either new (within three years old) or "substantively" changed programs, as circumstances change. Muller added support for her argument, as new technology may emerge or other trends in the area could alter the marketplace. Selden agreed, citing the possible announcement of a major, new or expanding employer deserving workforce development. Muller offered to consider modified language for the Guidelines and present a revised draft for the Supervisory Council's approval at its next meeting.

Future Requests for Opportunity Funds

In addition to the revised proposal from The Citadel as noted above, Muller shared three possible requests to be forthcoming, subject to their qualification under existing Guidelines:

1. College of Charleston's School of Business has a new graduate certificate in Business Analytics seeking \$25,000 for marketing and advertising support, professional stipends, course development, and special software licenses. It is making final curriculum changes before formally submitting the request in April. There was no discussion of this proposal, appearing to fall within all current LGC Guidelines.
2. The Citadel's School of Engineering seeks \$25,000 for faculty training in "Quality Matters," representing standards and rubrics to safeguard accessibility for online learning by students with disabilities, in order to move its MS-level programs online. Muller pointed out it is not program specific. Selden said there are three such evening engineering programs. Saladin stated she had no problem with a single grant proposal benefiting faculty of three different degree offerings. Austin commented favorably regarding the positive value of "Quality Matters" based on her experience at UAB, adding that she might like to submit a similar request from the College of Charleston. As such, Saladin told Muller to convey to Dean Welch to proceed in his preparation of a formal request of the LGC for consideration at the upcoming April meeting of the Supervisory Council.
3. The Citadel's School of Engineering seeks \$25,000 for need-based scholarships for its graduate students. Muller noted that graduate engineering students, the large majority of whom are working full-time, are more likely to have access to tuition dollars supplied by local area employers such as Boeing, Benefit Focus, and Cummins. As discussed earlier, the provosts did not support the use of the LGC's funds for scholarships or tuition abatements of any kind. Muller will communicate this decision to Dean Welch.

Saladin said that MUSC is preparing a proposal for funding support for a new master's degree in genetic counseling.

Reports from Past Grant Recipients

For information only, Muller presented the spreadsheet created to help keep track of annual reports from all grant recipients, sharing the survey conducted by Lee Westberry as her first year report demonstrating how well received The Citadel's new Principal Service Center (PSC) has been by enrollees. Reports are forthcoming in January 2021 from the College of Charleston's EMPA program, a second year report in June 2021 from the PSC, and in August 2021 from the College of Charleston's graduate certificate in Workplace Wellness.

LGC Financial Report: YTD Actual Expenses and Full Year Estimate vs. Approved FY 2021 Budget

Muller said personnel expenses were higher than Budget by nearly \$8,000, largely because of \$4,905 required for “payout” of accrued but untaken vacation by discontinued staff who had been shared with the College of Charleston’s School of Professional Studies. There were some modest timing differences in the actual re-start dates of part-time Barry Waldman and full-time Jonathan Solomon including higher than budgeted payroll taxes and health insurance.

To stay on budget, Muller deleted \$5,000 in market research expenses provided in the approved Budget and reduced spending for professional development because of the enduring Covid 19 pandemic restricting travel and for supplies because of the continued impact of the pandemic on F2F classes at TTC. The resulting estimate for the full FY 2020-2021 totaling \$660,128 is 0.4% below the approved Budget of \$662,937.

TTC MOU Review and Amendment

Muller presented an amended lease agreement submitted by TTC CFO Scott Poelker because TTC has eliminated classroom IT support from its Help Desk for the remainder of this current fiscal year. This is reasonable because: 1) the continuing Covid pandemic suppresses F2F instruction through the LGC portal at TTC, reducing demand for in-person IT support as initially provided in the agreement’s original language; 2) the LGC administrative assistant has increased his knowledge and familiarity with the TTC classroom technology used by programs still holding classes through the LGC – just as faculty have acquired greater familiarity; and 3) TTC IT Help Desk staff are being assigned during the Spring Term to other priority TTC projects where they are needed more urgently. When questioned if the LGC was owed any reimbursement from the annual payment made to TTC in August 2020, Muller explained it was not because the LGC was charged only for Fall 2020 classroom IT support because it was too difficult at the time to project how soon the pandemic would subside or how F2F classes would be affected. When pressed for greater clarity by Selden, Muller explained that there continues to be ongoing technology support such as for access to the network and high-speed internet. These charges have already been covered by the full year payment made in August. If future out of pocket expenses are incurred for classroom technology, such as new webcams on order, these will be invoiced directly to the LGC. Such expenses, she currently estimates, will be under \$2,000 and are provided for in the LGC’s approved Budget. The motion was made by Selden and seconded by Austin to approve the amended agreement. Muller said she will forward it promptly to the LGC’s fiscal agent, College of Charleston, for its CFO John Loonan’s signature.

Trends in Graduates of Programs at the LGC

In presenting the table, including December 2020 graduates in Academic Year 2021, Muller pointed out that for the first time in its history, no graduates from any College of Charleston graduate program are being reported currently because no such programs remain, in part or in whole. MSW graduates are down 40%, more than enrollments, because it lost more 2nd year

students in 2020 than 1st year students. The Citadel's PMGT graduates are down 49% from 39 to 20 due in part to the pandemic. With a total number of 189 graduates reported for Academic Year 2019, positive results in the form of program completions at the LGC were showing sustainability prior to the onset of the Covid 19 pandemic .

Pursuit of New Program Offerings for the LGC's Future

Having been asked following the August 7, 2020 meeting of the Supervisory Council to add one new program at the LGC this year, Muller explained the process she has undertaken in pursuit of this new goal: 1) reminding graduate program directors and deans at all three member institutions of the resources of the LGC at its new TTC home facility; 2) reviewing all newly approved graduate programs – certificates and degrees – in Academic Year 2020 by the Commission on Higher Education in search for non-duplicative programs to pursue; and 3) analyzing all graduate programs, numbering 45, offered at University Center of Greenville by nine public and private institutions, based on its website to identify possible candidates for adding an additional satellite location at the LGC. Although she has no proposals in hand, the best current prospects based on correspondence to date include: 1) Graduate Certificate and MS (non-thesis) in Agricultural Economics and Statistics, from Clemson University, supported by a recently announced \$341 million Opportunity Funds agribusiness center in Hampton County generating 1,600 new jobs; 2) Graduate Certificate in Construction Science and Management, from Clemson University; 3) Graduate Certificate in Accounting, from Furman University; 4) Executive MBA, from the University of South Carolina; 5) Masters of Divinity, from Bob Jones University and 6) Master of Arts in Biblical Counseling, from Bob Jones University.

Selden said she would need to scrutinize Clemson's construction management offering to ensure there was no conflict. Muller responded that the Supervisory Council would not only receive proposals in writing from every institution wishing to work with the LGC's North Charleston TTC location but would have to have their approval for any such program to be added.

Due to a pressing matter arising at The Citadel, Selden excused herself from the meeting.

LGC Website Analytics and RFP Status

Referring to the Website Analytics report provided in the meeting packet, Muller pointed out that page views between the two calendar years ending December 31 are up 50%. This past year, 38% of website visitors clicked through from the LGC site to the program landing page at its respective host institution, including the "Apply Now" page. While social media activity was dormant during Summer 2020 because of furloughed staff and the LGC's relocation to TTC, we have rebounded completely in line with seasonal patterns, above prior year traffic volumes.

The College of Charleston's eProcure released in mid-December the RFP for a new contract for LGC website maintenance, cybersecurity, and digital marketing support with social media tools. Bids are due by February 18, 2021. Twelve vendors are said to be preparing proposals, with an additional seven anticipated. The selection team consists of Amy Heckle (TTC), Morgan

Spencer (The Citadel's webmaster), Laura Everett (College of Charleston's manager of graduate program marketing and recruiting), Andrew Bergstrom (College of Charleston IT director and member of the original selection team seven years ago), and Muller. The process is being managed by the College of Charleston's Office of Procurement, working closely with Muller.

Survey of LGC Advisory Boards

Accompanied by a document summarizing results of the survey that Muller was asked to distribute to the LGC's three advisory boards in targeted employment sectors of Metro Charleston, Muller said that the survey experienced a 45% response rate, fairly evenly distributed across sectors, despite the distraction of the pandemic and remote work sites for many. Eighty-seven percent self-reported they had attended some or most meetings. Star ratings ranged from 3.4 to 3.8 on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 stars highest) regarding the benefit members viewed to themselves and their organization and value of their input to the LGC.

Closing and Adjournment

Saladin shared with Muller that the LGC Supervisory Council is scheduled to meet privately, including several others, on February 8, 2021 to discuss strategic planning for the LGC.

With no further business and with all agenda items addressed, Saladin adjourned the meeting at approximately 11:30 a.m.

January 12, 2021