



HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS COMMITTEE

Thursday, August 21, 2025

Ballroom, Student Center, Dickinson State University, Dickinson, North Dakota

Friday, August 22, 2025

Workforce Training Center, TrainND Northwest, 415 22nd Avenue NE, Williston, North Dakota

Senator Jonathan Sickler, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. Mountain Daylight Time at Dickinson State University (DSU).

Members present: Senators Jonathan Sickler, Josh Boschee, Robert Erbele, Scott Meyer*, Mike Wobbema; Representatives Landon Bahl, LaurieBeth Hager, Bob Martinson*, Mark Sanford; Citizen Members Kevin Black**, Ann Ellefson**, Maxwell Eriksrud, Gigi Goven*, Sarah Hall Lovas, Brent Lohnes, Terri Zimmerman*

Member absent: Citizen member Brent Sanford

Others present: Representative Mike Lefor, Dickinson, and Senator Brad Bekkedahl, Williston, members of the Legislative Management

Representatives Patrick R. Hatlestad, Dennis Nehring, and David Richter, Williston; Senators Todd Beard, Williston, and Dean Rummel, Dickinson

Chloe Gunderson, Holly Gruhlke, Elizabeth Freedman Fowler, Melissa Wagner, Amy Grinsteinner, Md Ochiuddin Miah, and Kayla Noah, Dickinson State University; Marcus Lewton, Dickinson Public Schools; Guy Moos, Baker Boy; Chris Johnson, TMI Systems Corporation; Brenda Zastoupil, North Dakota University System; Scott Snyder, University of North Dakota; Heidi Grunwald, North Dakota State University; Anna Nelson, Williston Economic Development; Daniel Stenberg, McKenzie County; Hunter Berg, Williston State College Foundation; Zahi Atallah, Williston State College

See [Appendix A](#) for additional persons present.

*Attended remotely both days

**Attended remotely on Friday, August 22, 2025

Mr. Casey Orvedal, Counsel, Legislative Council, presented the [Supplementary Rules of Operation and Procedure of the North Dakota Legislative Management](#).

Mr. Alex Cronquist, Senior Fiscal Analyst, Legislative Council, presented memorandums entitled [Higher Education Institutions Study](#) and [Duties of the Higher Education Institutions Committee - Background Memorandum](#). He noted Dakota College at Bottineau is an affiliate institution of Minot State University and operates under the administration of the Minot State University president. He noted Dakota College at Bottineau previously was a branch campus of North Dakota State University, and Williston State College (WSC) and Lake Region State College previously were branch campuses of the University of North Dakota.

Mr. Scott Molander, President, Dickinson State University, presented an overview ([Appendix B](#)) of the institution. He noted Dickinson State University (DSU) is a dual-mission university providing graduate, baccalaureate, and associate degrees and certificate programs. He noted the number of high school graduates in the state and the neighboring states of Montana, Wyoming, and South Dakota is projected to increase over the next 4 years.

Ms. Chloe Gunderson, student, Dickinson State University, commented regarding her experience at DSU.

Dr. Marcus Lewton, Superintendent, Dickinson Public Schools, commented regarding collaboration between DSU and Dickinson Public Schools.

Representative Mike Lefor, Dickinson, commented regarding the work of the Legislative Assembly to improve education in the state, including the expansion of career and technical education programming.

Mr. Guy Moos, President, Baker Boy, commented regarding DSU's relationship with the business community in Dickinson.

Mr. Chris Johnson, Senior Vice President of Finance and Administration, TMI Systems Corporation, commented regarding DSU's relationship with the business community in Dickinson.

Dr. Holly Gruhlke, Vice President of Academic Affairs and Provost, Dickinson State University, presented information ([Appendix C](#)) regarding academic initiatives to address workforce readiness, emerging trends, and changing demographics.

Dr. Elizabeth Freedman Fowler, Dean, School of Applied Sciences, Dickinson State University, presented information ([Appendix D](#)) regarding applied sciences programs at the institution.

Ms. Melissa Wagner, Assistant Professor, Nursing, Dickinson State University, presented information ([Appendix E](#)) regarding the nursing program at the institution.

Ms. Amy Grinsteiner, Assistant Dean, School of Education, Dickinson State University, presented information ([Appendix F](#)) regarding the teacher education program at the institution.

Mr. Md Ochiuddin Miah, Assistant Professor, Computer Science, Dickinson State University, presented information ([Appendix G](#)) regarding the computer science program at the institution.

Ms. Kayla Noah, Vice President of Student Affairs and Dean of Students, Dickinson State University, presented information ([Appendix H](#)) regarding student success, retention, and mental health initiatives at the institution.

Mr. Ty Orton, Executive Director, Dickinson State University Heritage Foundation, presented information ([Appendix I](#)) regarding fundraising at the institution, including fundraising for student scholarships and facilities.

Citizen member Black commented regarding the hiring process for the commissioner of higher education position pursuant to Section 48 of Senate Bill No. 2003 (2025). He noted the Constitution of North Dakota provides for a commissioner of higher education and is important to have the position filled in an efficient and effective manner. He also expressed support for the work and skills of interim Chancellor Brent Sanford.

Mr. D.J. Campbell, Vice Chair, State Board of Higher Education, presented information ([Appendix J](#)) regarding the workforce education innovation program. He noted funding was allocated to expand nursing education programs, establish a cybersecurity and artificial intelligence program at DSU, and establish an aviation maintenance technology program at the North Dakota State College of Science.

Mr. David Krebsbach, Vice Chancellor for Administrative Affairs and Chief Financial Officer, North Dakota University System, commented regarding State Board of Higher Education (SBHE) policies relating to communications between board members and board member access to current and historic board information, pursuant to North Dakota Century Code Section 15-10-66. He noted SBHE policy has been updated to ensure board member access to information.

Ms. Brenda Zastoupil, Director of Financial Aid, North Dakota University System, presented information ([Appendix K](#)) regarding federal funding impacts on student financial assistance.

Dr. Scott Snyder, Vice President for Research and Economic Development, University of North Dakota, presented information ([Appendix L](#)) regarding federal funding impacts at the institution.

Dr. Heidi Grunwald, interim Vice President for Research and Creative Activity, North Dakota State University, presented information ([Appendix M](#)) regarding federal funding impacts at the institution.

Citizen member Black commented regarding the SBHE's August 2025 retreat. He noted the board discussed credit-hour production because it affects the amount of state funding provided for the institutions. He noted the board wants to ensure the degrees delivered by North Dakota University System institutions are relevant and pertinent to the occupational demands in the state.

The committee recessed at 3:01 p.m. Mountain Daylight Time, and reconvened at 8:30 a.m. Central Daylight Time on Friday, August 22, 2025, at TrainND Northwest in Williston.

Ms. Susan Heegaard, President, Midwestern Higher Education Compact, presented information ([Appendix N](#)) regarding the Midwestern Higher Education Compact and national and regional trends in higher education, including enrollment and consolidations. She noted the population of traditional college-aged individuals is declining nationally and regionally, with high school graduates projected to decrease by 15 percent in the Midwest between 2022 and 2041; however, the number of high school graduates in North Dakota is anticipated to increase 4 percent over that timeframe. She noted multiple states have consolidated institutions, including:

- Minnesota which merged five individual colleges into the Minnesota North College in 2022;
- Wisconsin which merged its thirteen 2-year colleges with nearby 4-year institutions from 2017 to 2018; and
- Connecticut which merged 12 community colleges into a singly accredited multicampus institution with 22 sites in 2023.

Dr. Bernell Hirning, President, Williston State College, presented an overview ([Appendix O](#)) of the institution. He noted the college had record enrollment in the spring 2025 semester, with 811 FTE students, an increase of 163 FTE students from the spring 2024 semester.

Ms. Anna Nelson, Executive Director, Williston Economic Development, commented regarding the impact of WSC on the Williston community.

Mr. Daniel Stenberg, Economic Development Director, McKenzie County, commented regarding the impact of WSC on the region.

Mr. Hunter Berg, Executive Director, Williston State College Foundation, commented regarding the work of the foundation.

Dr. Zahi Atallah, Vice President of Academic Affairs, Williston State College, commented regarding new academic programs at the institution and other changes at WSC to improve the student experience.

No further business appearing, Chairman Sickler adjourned the meeting at 12:15 p.m.

Alex J. Cronquist
Senior Fiscal Analyst

Casey Orvedal
Counsel

ATTACH:15