

December 21, 2022

Dr. Robin Capehart
President
Bluefield State University
219 Rock Street
Bluefield, West Virginia 24701

Dear President Capehart:

Thank you for sending Bluefield State University's intents to plan for the following new degrees: Master of Science in Engineering Technology; Bachelor of Science in Respiratory Therapy; Associate of Science in Surgical Technology with Bachelor of Science (+2 Option) for Allied Health Education; Associate of Applied Science and Certificate in Cybersecurity and Information Assurance; Certificate in Cardiovascular Sonography Imaging; and Certificate in Patient Advocacy.

APPROVAL TO MOVE FORWARD WITH BACCALAUREATE AND GRADUATE PROGRAMS

Following receipt of Bluefield State's intents to plan, the Commission initiated a comment period with state higher education institutions that concluded December 5, 2022. The Commission received no remarks from universities or feedback regarding the baccalaureate and graduate level programs submitted by Bluefield State. Therefore, Bluefield State University may continue development of those programs.

COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGE CONCERNS WITH CERTIFICATE AND ASSOCIATE DEGREE PROPOSALS

During the comment period, community and technical colleges identified substantive concerns with Bluefield State University's request to offer the certificate and associate degree programs noted above, including:

- General concern about a state university offering new certificate and associate degrees;
- The duplication of programs already offered at New River Community and Technical College, Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College, and Mountwest Community and Technical College, including the certificate and Associate of Applied Science in Cybersecurity and surgical technology degrees;
- If additional certificate and associate degree programs or 2+2 programs are needed, Bluefield State University should collaborate with community and technical colleges for their development and implementation; and
- Permitting universities to deliver programs provided by community and technical colleges erodes the role, scope, and mission of the state's public postsecondary system as determined by the Legislature.

Community and technical colleges were established by the West Virginia Legislature to offer certificate and associate degree programs. The delivery of such credentials is under the purview of community and technical colleges, just as baccalaureate and graduate/professional programs are provided by the state's universities. When the community and technical colleges were separated from their previous host baccalaureate institutions, some four-year institutions were allowed to retain a limited number of specific associate degree programs. Those programs are identified in West Virginia Code and overseen by the West Virginia Council for Community and Technical College Education.

The Council for Community and Technical College Education has on occasion granted permission for a baccalaureate institution to deliver an associate degree program when the institution could show that a workforce need is evident, and the local community college is unable to provide that instruction.

Previously, Bluefield State University sought to offer the Associate of Science in Surgical Technology degree. After New River Community and Technical College objected to this offering, Bluefield State was informed it could appeal New River's objection to the Council for Community and Technical College Education for its consideration. Bluefield has never appealed to the Council to offer that associate degree. As of this date, New River has not implemented a surgical technology program. Provided Bluefield State University can present evidence of a workforce need that would not be oversupplied by multiple surgical technology programs delivered in the same service area, the Council may support such degree expansion. Vice Chancellor Randall Brumfield can help steer Bluefield State University through that process, should the institution choose to move forward.

At this time, multiple community and technical colleges offer associate degrees in cybersecurity; however, West Virginia lacks adequate 2+2 programs in cybersecurity. Rather than creating duplicative associate degree programs in cybersecurity, the Commission instead encourages you to reach out to your colleagues at the community colleges about establishing 2+2 degree pathways with Bluefield State University.

ABILITY TO OFFER NON-DEGREE CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS

The proposal submitted by Bluefield State University did not include sufficient information for the Commission to determine whether the proposed certificates would be stand-alone degrees or specialized curriculum as outlined in the Commission's Rule entitled *Standards and Processes for Approval of New Academic Programs*, W. Va. Code R. § 133-11-3.2. If the certificates adhere to the definition of "certificate programs" as outlined in the rule, Bluefield State University does not require Commission approval to offer those certificates. Please let the Commission's Division of Academic Affairs know whether you are proposing certificate programs as defined in the rule.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Commission urges Bluefield State University to thoroughly review and consider the financial and human resources necessary to effectively support student success and sustain quality delivery of the proposed programs. These additional programs require significant new and ongoing financial investment by Bluefield State at a time when the University's most recent audit indicates a period of financial downturn.

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Bluefield State should work closely with the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) to ensure HLC will approve the additional graduate degree program.

If you have questions or need assistance with these items, please contact Dr. Randall Brumfield, Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sarah Armstrong Tucker'.

Sarah Armstrong Tucker, Ph.D.
Chancellor

Enclosures

cc: Dr. Ted Lewis, Provost, Bluefield State University
Dr. Sarita Rhonemus, Academic Affairs Administrator, Bluefield State University
Dr. Randall Brumfield, Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs