

# **State Board of Higher Education – North Dakota**

## Potential Discussion Areas for Board Improvement

Based on the State Board of Higher Education Self-Evaluation - For the Fiscal Year ended 6/30/17

### **Background**

In June 2016, North Dakota University System (NDUS) Audit Services completed an interview process with members of the State Board of Higher Education (SBHE). The questions/statements were from the SBHE Board Development Instrument (BDI) document created by the SBHE Governance committee and approved by the full SBHE on May 15, 2017.

The resulting report included summary observations as well as the detailed responses and was included on the June 26, 2017 annual SBHE retreat agenda. The SBHE Governance Committee was to discuss the report and determine next steps.

### **Potential Improvement Areas**

Six general categories were included as part of the BDI. Strengths and potential areas for improvement were noted in each category. The below highlights some of those areas and includes excerpts (*in blue italic quotes*) from “Public University Systems: A Checklist for Success” by Thomas C. Meredith, to aid in the SBHE Governance Committee discussion.

#### ▪ Policy

- Improve understanding of current board mission, values, authority and responsibility (located in the SBHE Policy 100 series), as well as committee roles (located in the SBHE Policy 300 series). What form could this take?
- Should there be a regular review of the bylaws and other SBHE policies?
- What is the role of the board regarding issues that have a greater degree of controversy (Music therapy, Faculty sick leave)? If a greater degree of involvement is recommended, how can this be achieved?
- Should the goals of the SBHE be reviewed and narrowed or refined, should metrics be included?

*“The system board should regularly evaluate its bylaws and policies to make sure they are still viable.”*

*“The board should ask for key data points and evidence of institutional and student success and effective use of resources, and be willing to share that information publicly.”*

#### ▪ Relationship with the Chancellor

- Transparency on the goals and priorities of the Chancellor as well as the review process. Do all members understand the current process, and has there been discussion of the continued acceptance of this process?
- Is there a way to make this process more data driven, and use metrics?

*“The board should annually assess the system head and make decisions regarding his or her contract and compensation.”*

*“The system should establish a uniform data collection and analysis system that enhances management decisions and accountability.”*

#### ▪ Meeting Process/Effectiveness

- The committee structure is supported, can it be improved? Do all members understand the responsibility and role of each committee, especially prior to appointment?
- Is there a clear path for the wide variety of issues that the system continues to face? For example, academic issues go to the ASA committee, financial issues go to the BFC committee, audit issues go to the AC, but what is the path for important IT or HR issues?

*“Every meeting should be a model for how intelligent and dedicated adults handle the business that impacts so many people.”*

■ Communication

- Board members want the Board Chair to be the voice of the board, should this be formalized?
- How does that effect what the other board members can say with regard to board business?

*“The system should provide a unified voice to the governor and the legislature on all matters.”*

*“The system board and the office should make transparency and communication it hallmarks.”*

■ Reflections on the Past Year

- Continue to build upon the improved relationship with the legislature, and foster a positive relationship with the new governor. How can this be achieved?
- Should the SBHE be more involved with potential new legislation that may be needed to preserve, protect or enhance the strategic goals of the NDUS?

*“A close working relationship with political leaders, economic development leaders...will forge new partnerships that will demonstrate the essential nature of higher education?”*

■ Final Comments

- Can the board do a better job of preparing new members?
- Should the board request that the current “new” members participate in an assessment?
- Are the member term lengths appropriate, especially concerning the staff and faculty roles, which are only one year?
- Should the board look at “incoming” or “elect” types of roles for one to learn prior to taking the position?