

EAB Board Meeting of February 10, 1999

Ray Boland, Chair of the Educational Approval Board, called the meeting to order at 9:12 A.M.

Members Present:

Ray Boland, Georgiana Geise, Delora Newton, Leroy Conner, Tracy Bredeson for Jon Litscher, Gene Kussart. Absent: Rick Berg.

Others Present: Karen Pedersen (Upper Iowa University), Lee McConaghy (Keller Graduate School of Management), Mary Meyer (Bryant & Stratton College), David Dies (Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges & Universities), Patti Epstein (Inacom Information Systems), Rick Demoya (Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs), Linda Heidtman, Maurice Spencer, Joan Fitzgerald, Pat Sweeney, Yvonne Hagen, Nina Tallard, Joe Davis (EAB staff).

Mr. Boland referred the members to the minutes. There were no comments. Ms. Newton moved and Ms. Geise seconded a motion to approve. The motion carried.

History Paper

Mr. Boland referred to the paper outlining the history of the EAB. He thought it very informative. Ms. Newton liked the paper and thought it very helpful to see the development of the agency's roles, over time, and its shifting location in state government. She said she was especially pleased with the snapshots of the changing major categories of schools under EAB's oversight and the listing of outcomes by school.

Mr. Davis noted that the EAB Directory did include school enrollments and outcomes by program.

Mr. Boland reported that he had recently done some interviews responding to the recommendations of the Congressional Commission on Servicemembers and Veterans Transition Assistance [the Principi Commission] proposing some major changes in the GI Bill. He noted that the report, though, still focused too much on baccalaureate education and not enough on quicker more job-related training which can readily help veterans transition to civilian life and the labor market. He specifically referred to the job-focused education in the context of the role of proprietary schools in helping veterans make the transition to the labor market.

New Policy Papers

Distance Education:

Mr. Boland referred the members to the new policy papers. Mr. Davis said that the two papers, on Distance Education and Outcomes, related very well to the previous comments by Ms. Newton and Mr. Boland. He said that the Distance Education paper was intended to describe the approach the EAB has been taking; trying to maintain a level playing field and be especially vigilant for 'scams.' He noted that the intent is to be neither too loose nor too restrictive. He also noted that the Principi Commission made special reference to State Approving Agencies paying more attention to Distance Education.

Mr. Davis referred to an article in the 2/12/99 *Chronicle of Higher Education* reporting on a conference of accreditors dealing with Distance Education. One of the attendees stated that accreditation had to begin looking at whether students mastered the material in their courses. She also said, "states had not adequately confronted fraud in distance-learning programs." Mr. Davis also showed the members a new Web site which gave consumers access to a wide array of Distance Education providers.

Mr. Boland said that he appreciated the effort that EAB has put into the area. He noted that Wisconsin did not want to be asleep on the switch and thought it important to stay in front of developments.

Ms. Geise agreed with Mr. Boland. She said she did not, at her level of involvement with education, have the time necessary to pay attention to all the developments and liked the fact that the EAB was being the state's eyes and ears.

Mr. Conner asked if Ohio's standard defining Distance Education programs as those with more than 50% of instruction so delivered was common.

Mr. Davis said that the Ohio approach seemed pretty much in tune with what responsible states were doing in this area and how they defined Distance Education programs.

Ms. Newton noted that the legislature was also struggling with all the complex issues arising out of the Internet. She said that the terrain was constantly evolving and changing.

Mr. Boland asked if any Y2K issues relevant to the Distance Education were an issue. Mr. Davis said that there did not seem to be any impact on that or on EAB's ability to do its oversight work with the schools. He noted that the **EAB** is still heavily 'personal' with staff interacting with schools.

Ms. Newton asked if Y2K issues might have an impact on student records.

Mr. Davis stated EAB receives records from closed schools and after a period of time ships them to the State Records Center. There, again, seemed to be no apparent problem.

Outcomes:

Mr. Davis said that the Outcomes paper outlined an approach in which staff would work with individual schools to customize and individualize their outcome goals. This, he said, fit the agency's 'case management' approach and made the outcomes more relevant to each school than a rigid 'one-size-fits-all' standard.

Mr. Conner said that he liked the idea of improvement plans by school.

Ms. Newton also expressed support for the approach in the paper, but questioned the plan to use the state's Wage Reporting System. She thought that this ran counter to the rest of the paper's individualized approach and wondered what use could be made of the possible data resulting from the proposed query.

Mr. Davis said that this was simply an exploratory idea trying to figure out a way to use the Wage Reporting System. He agreed with Ms. Newton's point.

Mr. Conner agreed with Ms. Newton and did not like using the Wage Reporting System as suggested in the paper. He especially liked comparing schools against themselves using their own historical performance. He thought that doing some analysis using the Wage Reporting System might raise more concerns than product benefits.

Ms. Newton offered that schools might find useful for planning an analysis that identified emerging and growing occupations. She also thought that something like this might already be done by a state agency. She added that she liked the recommendation to have schools put their outcomes on their Web pages. She thought that if they could also describe the sorts of individuals with whom they worked (e.g., W2 recipients) and could explain objectively 'poor' results within a larger contextual framework – i.e., that serving hard-to-serve individuals affected performance.

Mr. Davis took the opportunity to announce that the EAB had a presence on the Internet: a Web page at <http://www.eab.state.wi.us>. He said that now when consumers do a search for 'education' on the Internet they will come upon the EAB and be able to access some solid information about schools.

Mr. Sweeney added that EAB staff works with clusters of schools (e.g., computer training) and can, therefore, look at individual school outcomes related to historical performance and to the performance of schools with the same cluster. This can ensure that schools stay within tolerable operating and performance limits.

Mr. Boland said, in the context of outcomes, that he had recently met with a veteran and noted that the ability of government, per se, to systemically deal with transitioning veterans to civilian life is no better

than it was 50 years ago. There is nothing, he said, tying all the relevant systems and programs together.

Continuing Discussion:

Mr. Boland referred the members to further discussion on previous policy papers *Degree Standards* and *Computer Policy*.

Mr. Davis referred to the Degree Standards paper which, he said was intended to establish some yardstick so that the EAB could legitimately vet 'state' school programs and programs for the GI Bill given the absence in Wisconsin of a higher education authority. He then noted the proposed language in Ohio's administrative rules defining various sorts of terminal degrees and asked whether this sort of approach made sense for the EAB.

Mr. Boland asked whether this subject should really be in the domain of HEAB, the Higher Educational Aids Board.

Mr. Davis noted that HEAB is not empowered to do school or program oversight; that it is simply an agency coordinating the provision of student financial aid.

Mr. Boland said that the current subject really did touch on higher education policy and he said he was thinking about where the issue would or should fit in state government. He thought that this subject of standards could be part of a future reconstituted HEAB authority.

Ms. Fitzgerald pointed out that EAB staff was confronting these program standards issues daily; that a number of proprietary schools were considering expanding to baccalaureate programs.

Ms. Newton said that the original paper showed a wide variance among schools. She thought that this suggested the need for overarching standards. She supported the need for standards, though withholding an opinion on which body ought to implement the standards and deal with the issue.

Mr. Boland thought that the Ohio language seemed reasonable and said that the EAB ought to keep wrestling with the issue.

Ms. Newton stated that if, indeed, EAB is the logical place to set such standards, that it would take an entire meeting devoted to that subject alone. Mr. Davis stated that the EAB would continue to look for more information.

Mr. Conner asked if any other entity in Wisconsin dealt with this issue.

Mr. Davis said that for the schools it oversees there was no other entity looking at the issue of standards.

Ms. Newton thought that it might be helpful to look to the UW and Technical College Systems to see if there were any usable models.

Ms. Fitzgerald pointed out that often EAB approves programs at proprietary schools that have already been through oversight by an accrediting body; state approval is needed to secure access to federal grant and loan programs.

Mr. Sweeney pointed out that the EAB authority encompasses all aspects of the activities of the schools it oversees and, therefore, it needs some overarching standards to follow.

Mr. Spencer stated that the demand for quicker and quicker education and training and the pressure of credentials seemed to be driving a lowering of standards for what constitutes a degree at all levels. He pointed out that there is great variance in what constituted an associate or baccalaureate degree from school to school and this makes the work of the EAB very difficult. He also pointed out that Wisconsin is one of only four states without some sort of overall higher education authority.

Mr. Kussart commented on the latter statement – noting that Wisconsin did not have a higher education authority.

Mr. Davis said that the EAB's desire and goal is to set some standards against which programs offered by EAB-approved schools could be assessed. He added that this is also the key challenge.

Computer Policy:

Mr. Davis noted that at its previous meeting the board asked for more information about the state of computer education and training and the status of oversight in other states.

Ms. Fitzgerald presented a report on the status of computer education in the state. She summarized existing policy (revised in 1994) and noted that the key issue remained the exemption of 'business-to-business' training. As a result of this policy the EAB looked to 'private' students in its oversight of computer vendors. She then reviewed currently approved schools and explained that they all offered various sorts of 'systems engineer' training; leading to certification of a set of competencies. She said that such vendors reported 382 students in the most recent reporting year.

Ms. Fitzgerald reported on some trends in the field. Schools were now seeing the need for entry-level training and some have taken pieces from larger certificate programs and created smaller more intensive programs geared to basic jobs. Wisconsin seems to be on the leading edge in this regard. Illinois seems to have the most comprehensive overall law and rules governing computer training and has tried to grapple with the 'here-today/gone-tomorrow' aspect of the field.

Ms. Fitzgerald reported two new developments. There are new loan programs to finance training by individuals in various certificate programs. EAB has already alerted the Department of Financial Institutions and has informed schools and vendors to check with that agency.

Mr. Boland asked how a veteran, for instance, would learn about such computer training.

Ms. Epstein noted that Microsoft does an excellent job in marketing and making individuals aware of the training opportunities.

Mr. Davis added, though, that from a systemic standpoint, there was really no clear path for a veteran to follow to learn of such training and then to take advantage of it.

Ms. Epstein added that there is a huge skill shortage in the IT area.

Mr. Boland and Mr. Conner agreed that the system for securing access for veterans to such high-demand training is non-existent, or hit-or-miss.

Ms. Fitzgerald then noted that some computer vendors were making connections to out-of-state colleges in order that college credit might be granted for their training; otherwise employers seem reluctant, now, to reimburse employees. This, she said, raised a whole host of questions concerning the approvability of those out-of-state colleges; the validity of the credits, etc. The fact is that the consumer may be getting bogus, or useless, college credits.

Ms. Epstein reported that she had inquired whether the UW System would accept such credits and was told no. She, therefore, did not see it as a viable option for her operation.

Ms. Fitzgerald added that the tendency is for students for first get into trouble and then contact the EAB for help – i.e., being attracted to the idea of receiving college credits for training and then asking the EAB for help if things did not work out.

Administrative Law Judge Ruling

Mr. Davis reported that a school of massage had protested EAB's oversight. The case was taken to an independent Administrative Law Judge and the finding favored the EAB. The school in question has since

modified its program after the ruling so as to remain avocational. However, the significant fact, for the EAB, was clarification (by an independent entity) of the scope of the avocational exception in statute which could be applied to other issues.

Advisory Group

Mr. Davis noted that the Advisory Group had met twice since the board's last meeting. He highlighted some of the items cored at the meetings: that the members wanted to present information to the board about their schools and the private sector; that responsibility for advancing the reputation of for-profit schools really lay with the schools; that the new Workforce Investment Act, for the first time, recognizes the role private education can play in public workforce development.

Mr. Boland thought that it would be a good idea for the Department of Veterans Affairs to also make a presentation to the board.

Executive Secretary's Report

Mr. Davis handed out Activity Reports that summarized staff work since September for both 'state;' oversight and the GI Bill. He especially highlighted the number of field contacts staff makes with schools and school officials. He then handed out information on EAB's GI Bill Pilot effort, including unsolicited positive reactions from schools on the EAB's new way of doing things. He also referred to the Principi recommendations and said that the EAB's Pilot was completely in tune with the direction they set.

Mr. Davis then handed out an inquiry from a 'school' official inquiring whether or not the state had any oversight legislation; the school in question (under the cover of a religious exemption) clearly had the appearance of a diploma mill. When states do not have solid oversight operations such as this can take root and this is has not been the case in Wisconsin.

After some discussion it was agreed to have the next board meeting in the first week of June.

Mr. Boland called for a motion to adjourn; Ms. Newton moved and Mr. Conner seconded. The meeting adjourned at 10:45 A.M.