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NCI BOARD APPROVES PLANS FOR FUTURE DIRECTION

MARTINSVILLE, Va. – Progress and new programming were the themes of the New College Institute (NCI) Board of Directors meeting on Monday.

During the meeting, NCI Chair Senator Bill Stanley presented a proposal for the future direction of the institution, which was unanimously approved by the Board. NCI adopted a conceptual framework that focuses on four core academic areas: engineering and advanced manufacturing; technology and cybersecurity; healthcare; and education and community leadership.

NCI’s newly adopted plan represents a “focused approach to academic areas that are responsive to current and future industry needs,” according to Stanley. The institute will accomplish this goal through new programs that fit the needs of the community as well as the growth of existing programs currently offered through Longwood University.

A defining feature of NCI’s future direction will be accessibility to programs that include both online and face-to-face courses. Additionally, the plan calls for NCI to continue to operate with a “2+2 model.” This model allows students to complete the first two years of their bachelor’s degree at the community college level and then complete the last two years of their degree at NCI.

Experiential learning will be a key element embedded within the academic programs at NCI. This will allow students to develop necessary hands-on experience and professional connections that will produce jobs for students. “Experiential learning will be especially key for the cybersecurity programs. Cybersecurity jobs, in particular, represent an interesting opportunity where students here in Martinsville can work from a distance for employers throughout the state,” said Stanley.

In order to meet the needs of regional employers, NCI will embed industry credentials into academic programs where appropriate.

The proposal presented by Senator Stanley offers a framework that will “allow NCI to identify the best programs and best partners,” added Dr. Leanna Blevins, NCI’s Executive Director.

Now that this plan has been approved, NCI will be making new efforts in outreach and recruiting. The new recruitment efforts will extend into North Carolina, every community college in Virginia, regional middle and high school students, and veterans. “We have to expand our net,” said Stanley.

In addition to strategies for academic programming and recruitment, Stanley cited new efforts for increasing and diversifying funding as well as building upon existing relationships with funding streams. “We are dedicated to strengthening relationships with New College Foundation because their vitality is dependent on ours. Their purpose is to serve our students, this institute, and the betterment of NCI,” said Stanley.

“We are at a crossroads, and I assure you that the Commonwealth of Virginia stands with NCI and supports the future of the institute and of the Southside region,” Stanley shared with those in attendance.

The adopted framework outlines key focus areas and a pathway for the future of NCI. The goal is to have a plan that is ready to execute by fall of 2017, according to Stanley.

Presentations by Current and Prospective Partners of NCI

During the meeting, the Board heard from representatives of Longwood, Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), Virginia Manufacturing Skills Institute (MSI), and the Wendell Scott Foundation.

During her remarks, Dr. Joan Neff, Longwood Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, highlighted the historical success of the partnership between Longwood and NCI and outlined three potential programs that could be added: RN to BSN, Bachelor’s in Criminal Justice, and a Bachelor’s in Business Administration. The Bachelor’s in Business Administration program incorporates an opportunity for students to concentrate in areas such as accounting, economics, and information systems and cybersecurity.

While there have not been any agreements made yet, “we are willing to work with NCI and assist them with the creation of these and other programs,” added Neff.

Dr. Gregory Triplett, VCU Associate Dean of Graduate Studies, shared a presentation on engineering and cybersecurity programs. “Experiential learning is key in VCU’s engineering program, which separates VCU from other programs in the state. We would look forward to working with NCI to expand experiential learning efforts in Southside Virginia,” said Triplett.

Potential academic programs to bring to NCI from VCU include areas of engineering and cybersecurity. “We believe there is a lot of untapped potential in the Southside, which is good for the Commonwealth,” said Triplett.

The Board learned about employment needs within engineering from Brett Vassey, President and CEO of MSI. “The Virginia Manufacturers Association (VMA) recognized eight years ago that Virginia was on the cusp of a retirement boom in engineering and began preparing solutions to address future interest and skills gaps. The goal is to create flexible, nimble solutions that are responsive to changes within industry needs,” said Vassey.

The VMA will attempt to meet these needs through stackable, customizable credentials and certifications.

Dr. Victor Gray, Executive Director of MSI Workforce Solutions, offered that his organization could assist NCI through degree “braiding” of MT1 certification for verified credit with university partners and by connecting opportunities across state lines into North Carolina.

Warrick Scott, CEO of the Wendell Scott Foundation, was the final guest to present to NCI’s Board of Directors and presented information about their K-12 outreach programs that encourage students to explore careers in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math). Scott also offered suggested areas of growth for NCI that coincide with the goals of his foundation.

Dr. Leanna Blevins spoke to the various aspects of the approved plan, which includes efforts for staff and faculty to reengage regional roundtable advisory groups that align with growth. Blevins will also be working with university and statewide partners on measures to deliver the most affordable model available for prospective students.

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About New College Institute:

NCI is a state-funded educational entity that provides access to bachelor's and master's degrees; teacher endorsement and recertification programs; industry certifications; dual enrollment courses; and more through partnerships with state universities. NCI strives to increase access to education through counseling, community outreach, and experiential learning programs. NCI staff, faculty, and board members are all committed to making NCI a premier educational facility for students, businesses, and the community at large.