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0 COMMENTS

## Twelve university presidents are signatories to new Bluegrass Higher Education Consortium

LEXINGTON, Ky. (Feb. 29, 2012) — Twelve universities in the Bluegrass Region have agreed to collaborate to improve educational attainment and economic opportunity for central Kentuckians as the new Bluegrass Higher Education Consortium was formalized by the signing of a charter agreement at Bluegrass Tomorrow's annual breakfast meeting at Keeneland today.



The announcement was made by President Doug Whitlock of Eastern Kentucky University and President Augusta Julian of Bluegrass Community & Technical College, both Bluegrass Tomorrow board members and co-chairs of the new consortium.

The 12 schools that have agreed to collaborate to advance the regional educationally and economically are: Asbury University, Berea College, Bluegrass Community and Technical College, Centre College, Eastern Kentucky University, Georgetown College, Midway College, Morehead State University, Kentucky State University, and the University of Kentucky. All 12 schools are regionally accredited, four-year institutions, an important criteria for membership agreed to by the presidents.

"We're all very excited about the opportunities that will come from this consortium," said Whitlock. "The presidents have been talking about this kind of collaboration for a long time. It's a testimony to Bluegrass Tomorrow that the organization has exercised the leadership necessary to make this a reality."

The consortium concept evolved out of strategic planning and work sessions that resulted from Bluegrass Tomorrow's Innovision 2018 study released in 2008, which compared Lexington and the Bluegrass to 22 other similar regions with a flagship university at their core.

"What we learned was we ranked poorly in six-year graduation rates, college readiness and high school graduation rates," said Whitlock. "We knew we had to do something to begin to move the needle on those statistics."

In addition, "We discussed that the college presidents rarely communicated with each other about how we could improve the region academically and economically," recalled Julian, "and that most of the time when presidents were talking, it was about legislation or funding we needed from the General Assembly or Congress. We also discussed that there was not enough communication and collaboration with business leaders and superintendents."

Initial goals and objectives for BCHE were laid out last year during roundtable meetings of the presidents and key academic officers, and through research and surveying conducted in cooperation with Bluegrass Tomorrow and the Bluegrass Area Development District. The Bluegrass ADD and the Council for Postsecondary Education have been collaborating closely with Bluegrass Tomorrow as meetings and discussions have evolved.

"What we found was student success and attainment was first and foremost, and professional development for department chairs ranked highly," Whitlock said. "Also, ways to share arts and cultural activities and programs through outstanding performing arts facilities at ECU, Centre College and U.K. and others, was important."

Perhaps the most significant long-range goal is to develop a university-center sharing model, similar to Oxford University, to include faculty exchange, academic program course sharing, transfer of credits, library sharing and more, a concept introduced at the group's first roundtable meeting by President Bill Crouch of Georgetown College.

Other goals include the formation of an academic chairs academy, teacher training at the secondary level to credential more educators to teach college level courses, collaborative discussion with superintendents, business leaders and economic development professionals, research and asset mapping of academic programs and resources available, collaboration on student professional readiness and development, and collaboration on international study abroad opportunities.

Initially, BHEC will operate as a standing committee of non-profit Bluegrass Tomorrow as the consortium is in development. A Board of Directors will be appointed by respective university presidents, with the presidents acting as the executive committee of the board. The BHEC will also seek to establish partnerships with other organizations, including ancillary membership opportunities for organizations and educational institutions that do not meet the criteria of charter membership.

"This is certainly one of the most important milestones of Bluegrass Tomorrow in its 24-year history," says Ron Tritschler of The Webb Companies serves as chairman of Bluegrass Tomorrow. "However, now the important thing is have some success achieving the goals of this new consortium. I believe the outcome will be an exceptional partnership that will lead to the development of an extraordinary Bluegrass Region."