

Massachusetts Commission on Digital Innovation & Lifelong Learning

Meeting Minutes | May 22, 2018

The following Commission members were present and constituted a quorum of the Commission: J.D. LaRock (Chair), Rosalin Acosta, David Cedrone (designee for Commissioner Carlos Santiago), Susan Cicco, Joanna Dowling, Joe Fuller, Chris Gabrieli, Michael Horn, Don Kilburn, Laurie Leshin, Michael London, Patricia Meservey, Reinier Moquete, Marjorie Ringrose, Mary Sarris, Michelle Weise, Gina McLaughlin (designee for Secretary Jay Ash), James McGaugh (designee for Linda Boff)

The following Commission members were absent: Jennifer Davis-Carey, Jean Eddy, Oswald Mondejar, James Peyser, Christina Royal, Sanjay Sarma

Call to Order – A regular meeting of the Commission on Digital Innovation & Lifelong Learning was held on Monday, May 22, 2018, at 1 Ashburton Place, Boston, Massachusetts, in Conference Room Three on the 21st Floor.

Action Item – Approval of the Minutes. Commission members were provided with draft minutes of the April 23, 2018 meeting. Laurie Leshin moved to approve the minutes, and Michael Horn seconded the motion. By a voice vote, all members voted aye.

Action Item – Remote participation at Commission meetings. The Commission, as a statewide public body, is required to comply with the Massachusetts Open Meetings Law (OML), G.L. c. 30A, §§ 18 – 25. The law seeks to safeguard transparency in the deliberations on which public policy is based – ensuring the public has knowledge about considerations underlying governmental action by being able to witness deliberations of public officials. The Attorney General has issued regulations to implement OML. Pursuant to 940 CMR § 29.10, a state public body may, by majority vote, adopt remote participation by members in meetings of the public body and its committees.

Following discussion, Chris Gabrieli moved to approve the adoption of remote participation in meetings of the Commission and its committees by using teleconferencing or video conferencing via the Internet as the approved participation technologies, a measure consistent with all requirements of the Open Meetings Law and the regulations of the Attorney General that establish procedures for remote participation in public bodies. Michelle Weise seconded the motion. By a voice vote, all members voted aye.

Information Item – Certification of Receipt of Open Meetings Materials. J.D. LaRock reminded Commission members that they are required by the Massachusetts Open Meetings Law (OML), G.L. c. 30A, §§ 18 – 25, to sign a certification attesting to receipt of certain briefing materials about the OML. A form is included at the back of the agenda book to be used for certification.

J.D. LaRock provided a brief review of the first commission meeting, on April 23, 2018:

This Commission builds on the Governor's convening in November of 2017 at which a number of innovative learning strategies were spotlighted. Our charge is to build on that foundation. The Commission is also informed by Executive Order 581.

We want to look at how Massachusetts can dramatically expand learning and training opportunities that are (a) affordable; (b) high quality; and (c) employer aligned. At a macro-level, we need to be sensitive to changes in the world of work and changes to the economy, especially those brought about by the impact of automation and technology.

In our last meeting, several categories of learners were described. Which learners are we particularly interested in? (a) Learners who must work; (b) people who have not prospered or can't access existing education and training programs; (c) diverse learners, especially English language learners; (d) people with some college but no degree; and (e) opportunity youth – those who are not currently working or involved in education.

The core list of strategies we are looking at include: (a) efforts that are co-designed, tightly coupled with employers; (b) credit for prior learning; (c) competency-based learning and credentialing; (d) micro credentials or stackable credentials; (e) student support; (f) experiential and job-embedded learning; and (f) soft skills development.

The major themes expressed at the first Commission meeting: (a) broad interest in proposed strategies; (b) systems to inform young people about careers and jobs; (c) general understanding that work is changing dramatically; (d) interest in solutions like on-line learning and micro-credentialing; and (e) agreement that there are limits to on-line learning, which goes back to the need to think about student support structures.

Regarding the cohort of learners who have some college but no degree, this group would seem to represent a priority population that could benefit the state's economy, and many current higher education institutions are targeting this cohort. However, survey data show a very high percentage of this particular group has no desire to return to the classroom – so we need to recognize this as a potential barrier.

Employer Insights: (a) skills trump credentials; (b) strong interest in experiential learning; (c) credentialing and degree inflation must be addressed; (d) employers and educators need a shared language; (e) hiring managers and human resource managers need to shift their mindsets.

Ensure that we are focusing on learners who are working but must continue to learn in order to stay current. This group – working learners – is a critical cohort for our focus. We are not talking about people who are taking classes at a university who also hold a job outside of college. We are talking about professionals for whom learning is a part of their development at work.

What do we mean when we say 'lifelong learning'? It will be important to this Commission to have a clear consensus definition.

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Agreement that we are interested in the working learner but, in addition, we need to recognize those who may currently be at work but are looking for a completely different job / career and are looking to have a different learning experience and earn a different credential in order to make that desired shift. To go back to an earlier point, this might include English Language Learners who might have a laborer job but are looking for a complete shift in their career. Those are also people who are currently working, but their motivations and goals are very different.

Argument that the Commission should not narrowly define what counts in terms of learning. We should take the broader view of the population of learners to avoid divisions and addressing too narrow a focus.

Argument that we should look at smaller groups of learners amongst whom we could gain the most amount of traction in the shortest period of time. Urge Commission to prioritize a smaller number of selected populations – use to design new initiatives and trust that they will spill over into larger population of learners.

Lifelong learning is a systems view. None of the sub-systems in our architecture of learning is flexible enough or seamless enough to work together as a system of lifelong learning. Even our most innovative new models are still pretty much based on credit hours or time in seat. They are not flexible enough to function as a new form of on-the-job training.

Could focus on key industry sectors in order to develop achievable recommendations. Manufacturing sector is emphasizing apprenticeships, which bypass the higher education and credit model. It allows more input for employers, since they own the standard as well as the delivery. It is a successful model that helps both the business sector and the employee.

One big issue is the lack of awareness by learners about resources, career information, and pathway choices. This is especially difficult for learners or workers who have had limited experience and awareness about the labor market. Most workers simply don't have the experience that is necessary to know about pathways or to weigh which options make the most sense to pursue.

Commission charged with delivering a specific outcome and also working at scale. Suggest that we select key industry sectors to support a 'deep dive'. We should design immediately for scale – avoid running pilots, as they are harder to scale up. If we can work at systems level, we can think about scale immediately.

The Commission was intentionally designed to include insurance / IT, manufacturing, health care. Which of these sectors would the Commission desire to focus on? We need to build on work that is currently taking place related to economic and workforce development – as in the seven regional economic blueprints that are currently in development. EOLWD will make these blueprints available to the Commission.

- **Manufacturing**, because several career pathways already exist, but they are a bit of a mystery to many people. The manufacturing sector is somewhat less organized, but it is a stable sector in terms of employment and has a statewide presence. One concern is the aging manufacturing workforce, which places that much more pressure on the public sector to come up with workforce solutions that can happen quickly.

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- **Health care** has both a statewide presence and a statewide need, and is a priority industry across all sub-state regions.
- **Information Technology** is statewide – very large sector that cuts across many other sectors and is essential to the carrying out of commercial services.

Recommend that we look at how ‘digital innovation’ enhances lifelong learning and avoid debate over the scope of lifelong learning. What are the things the state can do to accelerate the adoption of practices within the digital innovation space? Currently, many of the innovations that we are aware of are moving at a pace that feels slow with respect to the scale of the need or opportunity, even though they are exciting with regard to their potential.

Recommend that we tap into innovation . . . incentivize, expand, accelerate the use of these innovations on behalf of both learners and employers. The pace of job change belies the core belief that an education / credential is static. We need to provide much more information to people / learners about job change, skill demands, and training investments. We recognize that the flow of information between buyers and sellers in this [learning] market is terrible and yet this is a very manageable issue at the state level to connect learning, credentialing and economic opportunity.

Put forward a construct for the work of the commission. The conversation at today’s meeting is about three key themes: (a) need to define lifelong learning; (b) need to define a range of digitally-enabled models / incentive structures; (c) need to agree upon priority sectors. Do we use these three questions as the structure of the subcommittees?

Maybe there is no such thing as an ‘aspiring worker’ because many learners ARE already working. Also, many adults are looking to change jobs. They are aspiring, but not just an emerging workforce. Also includes adults who already have a college degree but really lack the skills necessary to gain access to the workforce. For opportunity youth, we don’t have the structures in place to build an awareness of choices for learning pathways and accessing employment.

There are two key roles in this system – the roles of educator and employer. Learning and workforce preparation has two parts: a delivery mechanism and the content that represent the learning standards. Some of the innovation that we are looking at is simply the many new platforms for delivery that make the learning more accessible to more people by expanding the *form* of delivery. Part of our challenge is to develop new ways to accelerate the infusion of new standards into curriculum / learning / credentialing.

Suggest that we define the term ‘lifelong learning’ and then articulate a programmatic and institutional structure that gives life to that vision – to define the infrastructure and operational roles necessary to implement that system. There is a group of learners who know they need additional skills and commit to achieving them. There are other learners who don’t know they need skills and don’t know what is available or the expectations. There is a pervasive culture that thinks education is finite and nobody needs additional skills.

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Recommend that we address the issue of over-credentialing – focus on the skills that employers need, not just on helping more learners obtain a college degree, which is a barrier for many learners and not really what employers are looking for. Defining factor for the commission is to focus on skills, not credentials. Need to focus on low-skill and middle-skill jobs, where skills are more critical and learners in need of greater information. Many higher-skilled workers will take care of their own learning needs.

Competencies are at the core of the learning models that we are talking about, especially for low and middle-skilled workers. Strength of U.S. system of higher education is its diversity . . . many types of institutions offer different approaches to different learners. Conditions today suggest that we are not reinventing higher education, but we are developing a new approach to the range that already exists. With that said, we do not have a significant element of the system that is employer-focused.

Propose working group structure. Three groups: (a) conceptual definition of lifelong learning; (b) what does lifelong learning look like programmatically, starting with digitally-enabled; (c) look at the institutional arrangements that need to happen in order to support the emergence of such a system. Pay attention to the sequence of activities, since definition of lifelong learning triggers the others. We will produce a design for committee structure using this approach, and ask members to select a preference.

The Commission heard a presentation from Yaziris Lucerna, OBGYN Finance Coordinator, Brigham and Women’s Hospital. She is currently a learner who is participating in the Partners Health Care / College for America (SNHU) healthcare management certificate program.

Yari provided an introductory statement – she graduated high school and started college but found that it was a financial burden. Five years later, she is a single mother and is about to graduate from the Partners program. While working at PHC, she received direction and options that led to select a focus and begin on-line work. Later, after having a second child, she started CfA and became a lot more familiar with skill goals that had been established for the program.

The competency-based approach allowed Yari to be present at home, learning at her own pace and consistent with her availability. Competencies are much more relatable to what she is doing at work – especially compared to her early experience at college.

The key element to the program is that course competencies are directly related to what she was being asked to deliver at work.

Yari believes that the student support system is critical – there are coaches at CfA and coaches at the employer site, and both sets of coaches are in an advisory role to provide support and structure for learning. The PHC advisor helps manage the learning process and prioritizes each learner’s effort, making sure that the on-line experience has a context and relation to the learner’s expected on-the-job delivery. On-line learning needs never to create a situation where the learner feels like they are on their own.

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Yari has set a goal to complete her bachelor's degree by the time her oldest daughter graduates from high school.

PHC worked with CfA to articulate the competencies needed to earn the certificate; CfA already had organized the competencies that articulated into an A.A. and a B.A. This process took about one year.

Why aren't there more health care partners who are offering this sequence, and only offered by PHC? Other workers at PHC can't take advantage of this offering because they lack the language skills or the computer skills, barriers which reduce who can really benefit from on-line learning. Other health care providers could participate because the competencies are directly relevant to them.