

## Consultant: S.C. State must enroll more high achievers

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Interim President Leonard McIntyre

ORANGEBURG — South Carolina State University must enroll fewer students who lack the basic skills to succeed in college if it wants to offer a higher-quality education and boost its graduation rate, according to a consultant hired by the school's interim president.

Leonard McIntyre, interim president since the university's Board of Trustees voted not to renew former President Andrew Hugine's contract last year, told board members Thursday that he formed a university committee and commissioned consultant Gary Fretwell of the Noel-Levitz firm to look at how the school has been managing enrollment and where it has been falling short. Committee members and Fretwell presented the board with what they have found so far.

McIntyre, previously a dean at the university, said he and other S.C. State staffers were concerned when last fall, more students than expected showed up at the beginning of this school year and the university didn't have enough campus housing.

McIntyre said the housing crunch was only the most visible of problems related to enrollment.

There weren't enough faculty members to teach entry-level courses, he said, so some freshmen were enrolling in upper-level courses they weren't academically prepared to take. The school also had problems with classes that were too large and complications with many students' financial aid, he said.

When he took over as interim president, McIntyre said, he charged a committee of faculty and staff members to take a deeper look at better ways to manage enrollment.

"We're going to do what we need to do so students can have a smooth entry into our university in the fall," he said.

One of the points Fretwell emphasized was that S.C. State needs to better monitor how students are doing once they enroll. He said university officials shouldn't be enrolling low-achieving students if they can't offer the support they need to graduate.

Freshman enrollment increased from 960 in the fall of 2004 to 1,318 in fall of 2007, Fretwell said.

But, he said, freshmen that enrolled in 2007 had weaker academic backgrounds. The average incoming freshman's SAT score was just 823, he said.

At some of the state's most competitive colleges and universities, average freshman SAT scores hover around 1,200.

Fretwell said that before 2003, the school was about dead center on a 1 to 5 scale of "student selectivity." A higher level of selectivity means the school brings in students with stronger academic backgrounds.

After that year, it dropped to the lowest level of selectivity. He said the average academic background of today's S.C. State freshmen was no higher than that of schools with no admission criteria.

It's important to enroll more middle- and high-achieving students, he said, because the school doesn't have the resources to give such a high percentage of students whose academic credentials are lacking all the support they need to succeed.

"You have to bring in students with whom you can be successful," he said.

Board Chairman Maurice Washington praised McIntyre for the comprehensive initial report. The board has been waiting a long time to get this kind of information from the school's administration, he said. Although some of the results are disappointing, he said, "to make good policy decisions, we need frank and transparent information."

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