



**Marine Environmental Sciences Consortium  
Executive Committee Annual Meeting  
Minutes**

Wednesday, August 11, 2021 at 1:00 p.m.

**Attendees:**

Dr. John Stewart, University of Montevallo  
Dr. Jack Hawkins, Troy University  
Dr. Stuart Bell, University of Alabama  
Dr. John Smith, University of South Alabama  
Dr. John Valentine, Marine Environmental Sciences Consortium  
David England, Marine Environmental Sciences Consortium  
Shelley Stephens, Marine Environmental Sciences Consortium

**Absent:**

Dr. Jay Gogue, Auburn University

- Meeting called to order by Dr. Smith, Acting Chair of the Marine Environmental Sciences Consortium (MESC) Executive Committee.
- Roll call of conference call attendees.
- Dr. Smith called to approve minutes from the 2020 MESC Executive Committee conference call. Motion made by Dr. John Stuart to approve the minutes; motion seconded by Dr. Jack Hawkins. Motion to approve minutes carried by unanimous vote.

- **Fiscal Year 2022 Budget (Document A) –**

- Anticipated revenues, based on historical patterns and in-hand grants, contracts and tuition, come to \$26,294,549.
- Current staffing is 109 employees.
- DISL State Appropriation included a modest increase of \$250,000
  - We received an additional \$2 Million supplement to the appropriation that is targeted for repair and renovation of facilities due to Hurricane Sally damages.
- We request approval for a 3% cost of living raise for employees effective October 1, the advertising of a new faculty line and startup, contingency, and debt service.

***Motion to accept the proposed FY2022 MESC budget made by Dr. Jack Hawkins; seconded by Dr. Stuart Bell, followed by a unanimous vote to accept.***

- **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement**
  - Currently a topic of much discussion in the field of marine sciences; diversity in this profession remains low.
  - DISL, like many other institutions, have had a number of internal discussions, resulting in a public statement that can be found on our website. DISL also feels there is more we can do on this topic.
  
- **Bylaws (Document B)**
  - MESC, to some degree, has been out of compliance with our bylaws, specifically Section 3, paragraph 1.
    - Participating institutional representatives who are nominated by the Executive Committee are limited to three, three-year terms by way of reelection. In speaking with Dr. Stewart (Montevallo) on the DEI matter, he has agreed to step off of the Executive Committee to nominate, with the Executive Committee's approval, a President from one of the HBCU members.
    - Due diligence led Dr. Valentine to nominate Dr. Cynthia Warrick of Stillman College to serve on the MESC Executive Committee. Dr. Warrick has visited the Sea Lab twice and brought her leadership team here for a retreat.
      - Dr. Warrick has verbally agreed to serve if you agree with the suggested nomination.
  - Dr. Jack Hawkins put forward a motion that Troy University will rotate off the Executive Committee first and that Dr. Stewart of Montevallo should remain in place for an additional year.

***Motion to rotate Troy University off the Executive Committee and accept the nomination of Dr. Cynthia Warrick of Stillman College onto the Executive Committee, seconded by Dr. Stuart Bell; unanimous vote to accept.***

- **State Audit Report**
  - The 2020 audit has been completed and we had hoped to include the completed report in your call package; but it has not yet been published.
  - That said, there were no findings or concerns raised during the exit interview.
  - Copies will be forwarded once the report is published.
  
- **Summer School Performance Metrics**
  - ***Document C*** shows the proportional institutional distribution of undergraduate credit hours among Consortium institutions for 2021 summer school program.
    - USA saw an increase in enrollment.
    - Auburn and UA were slightly lower than past years.
    - Remaining 12 institutions contributed 36% of the credits taken.
  - ***Document D*** shows the distribution of graduate credit hours
    - UAB has the largest enrollment this summer due to their neurobiology course.
  - ***Document E*** represents the cumulative sum of hours for summer 2021 from both graduate and undergraduate credit hours.

- **Document F** presents the historical growth of enrollment of the summer program. The blue bar represents undergraduate, red bar for graduate.
  - While we had a few problems initially due to COVID, we implemented sentinel and PCR testing for student and faculty safety with the assistance of UAB.
  - Enrollment has almost recovered to the record high of 2019 enrollment.
- **Document G** represents graduate hours taken on the DISL campus during the academic year. This skew towards USA represents their full-time resident graduate student population present on the DISL campus.
- **Discovery Hall Programs (K-12) Metrics**
  - **Document H** Discovery Hall Programs (K-12) continued to be impacted by COVID concerns while the numbers are respectable, they are lower than seen in the past. The red bars indicate capacity, while blue bars indicate summer 2021 enrollments.
- **USCG Property**
  - We continue what has become a five-year effort to acquire via public conveyance. We have finally made some progress on this. GSA threw us a new curve yesterday which essentially limits the acquisition of federal funds for either construction or for flood insurance. We are working on a concept now for the property.
- **Campus renovation status -**
  - On September 17, 2020, Hurricane Sally struck lower Alabama. Damage was widespread in Baldwin and Mobile counties. Winds reached 120 mph for five hours at the DISL campus. A number of roofs, hurricane shutters and windows were damaged.
    - We took on required steps to secure damaged buildings. We are almost a year later and are just completing the insurance and FEMA processes. The combination of insurance (\$3.5 M) and miniscule FEMA support, plus a \$2 M supplement from the Alabama Legislature will allow us to make many, but not all, of the needed repairs.
    - One challenge to be addressed will be rebuilding the graduate dorm to current codes.
    - There is the additional challenge of getting competitive bids in the post-COVID world; in the first iteration we received two bids that were 300% above our architect's estimate.
    - We now have an Attorney General opinion and have been informed we can select contractors from quotes without a bid process. With that said, we are now moving to get back on schedule and should have lower costs using this approach.
  - We will be breaking ground on a new pool and outdoor classroom in late October. This is our first capital campaign and an outcome of the formation of our Development Office three years ago.
  - Before moving on I would like to thank Jack Hawkins who aided in this effort.
- **Facilities Master Plan**
  - In order to rearrange some of the planned renovations, we needed to identify the location of sewer, power, and water lines. This was critical since most of this early warning Air Force Base was constructed in the late 1950's and early 1960's. This plan is now in place and is also being used as we develop concepts for the USCG property.

- **MESC Programmatic Goals**

- With the impacts of COVID limiting office visits last, communication with board members has been limited to monthly phone calls with then President Waldrop who served as Chair of the Executive Committee, and now President Smith.
- Campus visits from Presidents Philip Way and Cynthia Warrick have occurred this year.
- We have started planning for visits to member school campuses in north Alabama this fall to meet multiple new presidents, and already made one campus visit this fall.
- We have done feature interviews both on Alabama Public Radio and one of our own local TV channels in the past two months.
- I will speak at the Downtown Birmingham Rotary next month. If possible, we will meet with member schools in the area.
- Earlier this month, I paid a visit to Auburn and met with President Gogue, Auburn's Provost and Marine Sciences coordinator.
- Lastly, this month we hosted several Alabama Legislators on a red snapper research fishing trip; chief among them was Senator Arthur Orr.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

- **Center for Excellence**

- We have just completed a lengthy Sea Grant Panel Review process on scientific merits and methods. Panelist and reviewers were selected from outside the state to ensure impartiality. Forty proposals were submitted and 10 have been provisionally selected. Award announcements will go out soon.

- **ESCO**

- We have completed upgrades to our power usage via installation of LED lights campuswide, increased power generation from the installation of more solar panels and new HVAC units.
- Funding for this effort is coming from guaranteed reductions in energy bills.
- In the brief time they have been online, we have saved some \$37k on our bills. The savings goal for year 1 is \$108,000.

- Dr. John Smith called for any additional comments or questions.
- Dr. John Smith called for a motion to adjourn the call; a motion was made by Dr. Jack Hawkins and seconded by Dr. Stuart Bell.
- The call was adjourned.