

FLORIDA: A STATE POLICY PROFILE FOR COMPLETION BY DESIGN

DIVISION OF FLORIDA COLLEGES: THE COMPLETION BY DESIGN STATE POLICY LEAD ORGANIZATION FOR FLORIDA

The Division of Florida Colleges provides leadership and advocacy to promote education, innovation, and continuous improvement within the Florida College System. The Florida College System encompasses all 28 community colleges, colleges, and state colleges in the state, which together serve more than 900,000 students at 173 sites.¹ The Division of Florida Colleges is charged with eight goals ranging from ensuring open-door access to expanding the use of technology and aligning college funding with performance.

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FLORIDA'S ENGAGEMENT IN THE COMPLETION AGENDA

The state of Florida has long been a national leader in creating innovative ways to improve college completion. The Florida College System's forward-thinking policies have positioned it well for pursuing the completion agenda, including a common course-numbering system, strong transfer and articulation policies, and a student data system that is cited regularly as one of the nation's best. In response to growth and community needs, the Florida College System adopted a new strategic plan in 2010 that lays out five goals for the next five years. Significantly, the second of the five goals is "increase completion rates." The other four are: educate for job creation and economic development; expand and maintain access; improve performance accountability; and optimize use of learning technologies.

Florida is also active in a number of national initiatives focused on improving student success. In 2004, Florida belonged to the first cohort of states to join Achieving the Dream, a national nonprofit dedicated to helping more community college students, particularly low-income students and students of color, stay in school and earn a college certificate or degree. Based upon Florida's laudable work in Achieving the Dream, the state was selected to join the Developmental Education Initiative in 2009, which aims to expand groundbreaking remedial education programs that experts say are key to dramatically boosting the college completion rates of low-income students and students of color. As a member of Complete College America's Alliance of States, Florida also has committed to setting campus- and state-level goals for degree attainment, developing publicly reported performance measures, and creating an action plan for graduating more students. Florida has pledged to double the number of graduates by the year 2020.

RECENT POLICY CHANGES RELEVANT TO THE COMPLETION AGENDA

Under the auspices of the Developmental Education Initiative, the Division of Florida Colleges developed a new assessment that is simultaneously a placement tool for colleges and a college-readiness indicator for high schools and their students. The state's robust data system revealed misalignment between high-school exit assessments and college readiness among new entrants to the community college system. That research contributed to the state Department of Education's decision to design a new customized assessment, called the Postsecondary Education Readiness Test (P.E.R.T.), that is fully aligned with K-12, state college, and university standards including the new Common Core State Standards. A diagnostic component for the P.E.R.T. has also been implemented so that colleges can pinpoint students' academic needs.

Students with P.E.R.T. scores showing they are not college ready will be able to take college preparation courses before graduating from high school. Due to Florida Senate Bill 1908, enacted in 2008, Florida's DOE is in the third year of implementation of its early assessment program and the second year of its early remediation program for high school students. During the 2009-10 school year, more than 23,000 eleventh-grade students were tested. While this year's data are currently being reviewed, it appears the number of students tested has risen dramatically. For 2009-10, pass rates were 30 percent for math, 35 percent for reading, and 49 percent for writing. Since then, college and high-school faculty have worked together to develop and improve remedial courses at professional development workshops held in summer and fall 2010. The goal is to drastically reduce the proportion of recent high school graduates needing remedial courses in college.

The Florida Division of Colleges offered mini-grants to colleges that demonstrated interest in trying new methods of delivering developmental education courses, especially a modularized instruction system. The Division identified six colleges of varying demographics to implement pilot programs using a modularized format.

The Division of Florida Colleges rolled out a student success dashboard in summer 2011. By putting student outcomes data in the hands of those working closely with students and institutions, the dashboard will enable data-informed decision making. The student success dashboard effort recognizes the greatest challenge in our information-rich world: presenting data in formats and at times that focus the attention of people who can make a difference, so that data can lead to action.

The Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program provides funding for high school seniors to attend postsecondary education in Florida. The program is lottery-funded. For the 2009-10 academic year, \$69,588,210 in Bright Futures funds was awarded to students in the Florida College System: 44,176 students received an award, and the average award was \$1,574.

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

Republican Governor Rick Scott has demonstrated an interest in higher education. He is particularly concerned with Florida's economic growth and higher education's contribution to the workforce in the STEM fields. Governor Scott has also expressed an interest in Governor Rick Perry's plan for higher education in Texas.

In addition, 2012 will usher in a new Speaker of the House, Will Weatherford (R), and Senate President, Don Gaetz (R), both of whom have talked of applying accountability and transparency principles of recent K-12 reform to the higher education sector.

The Florida College System ranks first in degree production among the 16 southern states, according to the Southern Regional Education Board. In the past five years, the Florida College System has grown tremendously in both size and complexity. Between 2006-07 and 2010-11, Florida's colleges added more than 96,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) students, an increase of 34 percent. State funding dropped 25 percent per FTE during that same period.

In 2010, the Florida legislature created the Higher Education Coordinating Council and charged the Council with identifying the state's unmet postsecondary needs and resolving any conflicts as colleges and universities created new programs and campuses. In 2011, the Council's scope was expanded to include making recommendations to the legislature about the missions of postsecondary institutions, performance and accountability measures, transfer and articulation, and education that supports workforce development.

The Council is comprised of the following seven members: Education Commissioner, State University System Chancellor, Florida College System Chancellor, President of Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida, Executive Director of the Commission for Independent Education, and two business representatives (one appointed by the House Speaker and the other appointed by the Senate President). The Council's first recommendations were submitted in December 2011.

GOVERNANCE

Florida's 28 public colleges are coordinated by the State Board of Education and are locally governed by boards of trustees. The Board of Education has limited policy and budgetary regulatory authority. The Chancellor of the Florida College System reports to the Commissioner of Education, the chief executive officer of the K-20 System.

ENDNOTES

¹ Beginning in 2001, several two-year institutions in Florida were given permission to offer four-year degrees in high-demand fields such as teacher education and nursing. The name of the "Florida Community College System" was later changed to the "Florida College System," and several colleges dropped the word "community" from their name, but their missions continue to reflect a "commitment to be responsive to local educational needs and challenges" and a focus on lower-level undergraduate instruction and Associate degrees.

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