Sen. Carlton files proposed education overhaul - BLOG
2/26/07 Tampa Bay.com

As expected, Sen. Lisa Carlton today filed the joint resolution for a proposed constitutional amendment to reinstating an elected education commissioner to the Florida Cabinet and to strip the Board of Governors of many powers.

The amendment would change the Constitution to say simply that the Board of Governors "shall administer the state university system as provided by law." Currently, the Board is given power to "operate, regulate, control, and be fully responsible for the management of the whole university system," including defining the colleges' missions.

The amendment would change the Board from 14 members to 5, serving four years instead of seven. And they would no longer appoint members to individual university boards of trustees.

Click the above link to the page to see the blog comments.

Student fee suggested for mental-health counselors
02/27/2008 © Orlando Sentinel

Students may be asked to shoulder a new fee to pay for more mental-health counselors on campus as Florida's public universities search for ways to prevent tragedies like those at Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University.

All but one of Florida's 11 state schools -- New College in Sarasota -- reported student-to-counselor ratios worse than international averages, according to a special report on campus mental-health issues. To reach the international average
of one counselor for every 1,500 students, the state would have to spend $5 million a year to hire 83 more counselors, said Dottie Minear, a university system vice chancellor. The University of Central Florida would have to hire 16 counselors to achieve that ratio, according to the report.

The goal is to boost the number of counselors on campus so there's a better chance for troubled students to get help "before they get to crisis level," Minear said during a meeting of university leaders.

Tuesday's meeting, held through a telephone conference, did not detail the amount of the fee or when it would take effect. University officials said they would calculate possible amounts for the board to consider, along with other recommendations, at its meeting March 26 and 27 in Tallahassee.

The report also recommends that the universities push for changes in state and federal privacy laws that prevent schools from sharing information about students.

Colleges and universities across the state and the country began studying ways to improve campus security and mental-health services after the massacre of 32 students at Virginia Tech in April by a mentally disturbed student who later shot himself. Five shooting deaths at Northern Illinois University earlier this month by yet another disturbed student who also shot himself has kept the issue at the forefront.

Creating a new fee to hire more counselors would require approval from the state Legislature but probably would be easier politically than trying to increase existing health fees that pay for campus medical clinics, university officials said.

"It's a great idea," said Mary Coburn, vice president for student affairs at Florida State University. Having a fee devoted to a specific cause "capitalizes on public support of improving mental-health services."

Office of the Chancellor

No Articles Today

Florida A&M University

No Articles Today

Florida Atlantic University

Back to school: Teachers get visas
FORT PIERCE — Visas arrived Tuesday for the 16 Indian teachers working in six St. Lucie County schools through a cultural exchange arranged by Florida Atlantic University.

With the documents' long-awaited arrival, the teachers can legally return to work and be paid, and they were expected back in the classroom today.

The news, coming late in the day after weeks of waiting, was greeted with applause and cheers when it was announced by Superintendent Michael Lannon during the St. Lucie County School Board meeting Tuesday night.

"It's official. The teachers have their visas," he said, reading the news from an e-mail.

Dr. Sudhir Nayer, of the Atlantic India Association in St. Lucie County, said he's glad they can put this behind them.

"I'm so glad it's all over now and they can go back to their classrooms," Nayer said.

School and university officials celebrated along with Florida lawmakers a week ago when the State Department agreed to extend the teachers' visas, but then waited for days for the visas to actually arrive.

Kristine McGrath, a spokeswoman for the university, confirmed their arrival Tuesday.

The teachers, who were put on unpaid leave Feb. 9, have missed more than two weeks of classes. Their absence, in the middle of the school year and in the midst of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, has put a strain on the schools, which have had to hire substitute teachers to cover the classrooms. The district has paid $70 per teacher per day for the subs.

The situation has been most difficult for the teachers, who have been living on very little - about $5,000 each for the first half of the school year - and do not have cars.

Many, interviewed last week, said they spent the time preparing daily lesson plans for their substitute teachers and waiting for news about the visas. Most expressed concern only for their students.
The teachers were recruited by the university to fill much-needed positions in math, science and special education. They earned intern-style wages until January when, if they passed their probationary period, their salaries increased commensurate with their education and experience levels.

The university applied for the wrong type of visa when it brought the teachers here from India.

**Boca Raton: FAU student reports she was raped in dorm room**
02/27/2008 © Ft. Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel

A student at Florida Atlantic University was raped early Tuesday in her dorm room, university police said.

The woman reported the rape about 5 a.m., said Deputy Police Chief Keith Totten. She had invited the man, described as a casual acquaintance, to her dorm room Monday night.

The man's identity was not available, though the victim said he is not an FAU student.

FAU officials alerted students of the rape via e-mail at 4:25 p.m. Tuesday.

University police ask anyone with information to call the police department at 561-297-3500 or an anonymous tip line at 561-297-4636 or use the university's "Silent Witness" Web site at police.fau.edu/witness.asp.

**Florida Gulf Coast University**

**Wild art: Exhibit benefit FGCU gallery, wildlife clinic on Sanibel**
02/27/2008 © Ft. Myers News-Press

When a monstrous eastern indigo snake stopped traffic to cross the road by Florida Gulf Coast University a few years ago, faculty members took it as a sign.

Urban development is encroaching on Southwest Florida's natural habitat.
The largest non-venomous snake in North America is already listed as a threatened creature by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The slithering creature had nowhere to go.

The sign of a shrinking natural habitat prompted Scott Snyder, director of FGCU's The Art Gallery, to conjure up a new kind of exhibition.

"Where the Wild Things (Still) Are" showcases the works of local, regional, national and international artists - past and present - to benefit the gallery and the Clinic for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife (CROW) in Sanibel.

CROW provides medical care for more than 3,400 wild animals annually, representing nearly 160 species.

"It's not just about having nice art at your home," Snyder says. "It's about how each of us impact the world around us."

More than 50 artworks traveled to the exhibition, which starts Thursday with a party and ends March 28 with another party.

Artists range from Andy Warhol, Pablo Picasso, Troy Abbott, Romero Britto, Marilyn Manson, Geoffrey Baris and Carl Schwartz.

"I'm not kidding when I say there's something for everyone," Snyder says. "It's like a three-ring circus here."

Each piece in some way reflects an aspect of nature.

Digital media artist Troy Abbott's interactive art series involves almost 200 self-constructed bird cages with digital videos of live birds he owned, bought or borrowed.

The Miami Beach artist's work has appeared in Miami's internationally acclaimed Art Basel.

The series has several layers of environmental meaning, Abbott says.

It symbolizes the extinction of wildlife. The only way to see many animals in the future will be through digital images.

But, if people enjoy animals digitally now, it gives the viewer the ability to enjoy a bird guilt-free.
"Do we need the cage anymore if the bird is on the screen?" Abbott asks.

The social implications of the cage change from the cage as a symbol of imprisonment to an object of decoration, he adds.

A former international fashion photographer, Geoffrey Baris' eerie abstract nature photography highlights the mysterious beauty of nature.

The Los Angeles artist captures in his photography the belief that waterways mirror the mood of the community surrounding it.

Viewers often don't know what they're looking at when he photographs the natural world.

"They're more like paintings," Baris says.

Although the piece Baris submitted to FGCU is more realistic-looking than most of his work, it couldn't be more local.

"Heads-Or-Tails" captures in two side-by-side photographs the head and tail of an alligator he spotted in the Everglades.

**A sober life lesson for FGCU students**

02/27/2008 © Naples Daily News

Time for an education in alcohol.

More than an institution of higher learning, universities teach students valuable life lessons in first experience outside the home.

While many teenagers drink before graduating high school, there’s no place like a university campus to turn young people into seasoned and educated drinkers; a place where binge drinking is a regular weekend activity, and where students will turn 21 years old and become acquainted with the bar scene.

At Florida Gulf Coast University this year, the lessons in alcohol have come hard: One student died in a drunk driving accident at the start of the fall semester, another died from alcohol poisoning in the dorms several weeks after and three students were seriously injured in a drunk driving wreck off campus just last week.
The lessons came a little easier this week as the FGCU student government and the university Prevention & Wellness Services put on the Eagles Rise for Sober Rides event. It offered a more lighthearted way to teach people the perils of irresponsible alcohol use.

Students put on beer goggles from Lee Memorial Health System and tried to pedal a cart around an obstacle course. They tried to walk in a straight line wearing the goggles where extended arms and concentrated steps weren’t enough to keep them on the course.

“Presenting it in a laughing, joking manner is good for college students,” said Jarrett Simpson, a sophomore business marketing major. “It’s not dry and boring; it is fun to do.”

More than 100 students came out for the event Monday. Participation dropped slightly on Tuesday but was still steady as word-of-mouth spread about T-shirt give-aways and other freebies. Wednesday is the last day.

Navigating the obstacle course took incredible concentration, and even then, it was hard to keep from crashing the pedal cart, said Lo Furlow, a senior communications major.

“Everything was double. You didn’t know what to see,” Furlow said. “It was like an illusion.”

Nearly every student would have taken a blood-alcohol test in a real-life situation, as walking in a straight line — a common sobriety test — was virtually impossible while wearing the beer goggles.

“I still kind of feel uneasy about it,” said AshLee Ellis, a freshman sociology major. “I feel like I got off a roller coaster.”

Despite the light-hearted atmosphere surrounding the event, participants were mindful of the seriousness of irresponsible alcohol use.

“I couldn’t drive a vehicle if I had vision like that,” said Jenna Blair, a junior liberal studies major. “The campus should do more of this type of stuff for students to see what drinking is really like.”

Eagles Rise for Sober Rides hit home for Katie McCann, a freshman criminal forensics studies major. McCann was in the second car on the scene during last week’s accident where three students were seriously injured.
“I was just so affected by it,” said McCann, who volunteered for the event. “I wanted to help out with this because it is a good cause.”

Monday’s announcement of FGCU’s Sober Driver Program was popular with the students because seven area restaurants offer free appetizers and drinks to anyone who is the sober driver for friends.

“Everybody loves that program,” said Angela Rosado, the student director for Eagles Rise for Sober Rides.

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**Florida International University**

**No Articles Today**

**Florida State University**

**Rhodes Scholar says FSU’s cheating was no secret**

02/27/2008 © Orlando Sentinel

What you are about to read are the most cutting comments yet concerning the ongoing academic scandal at Florida State.

They are comments filled with frustration and tinged with condemnation. They blame the academic quagmire not so much on the students caught cheating but on a university bureaucracy and NCAA administrators who continue to perpetuate the academic shell game that pervades college athletics.

And here's the most damning part of all: These comments didn't come from some mudslinging sports columnist or some hoity-toity Harvard professor. And they weren't pulled off a University of Florida fan message board.

These comments are so cutting not because they came from some perceived enemy, but because they came from within. They came from Garrett Johnson, arguably the most decorated scholar-athlete in FSU history -- a young man who truly loves his university and feels a "debt of gratitude" for the opportunity FSU provided him.

"This [academic misconduct] is concerning not because of the negative attention it has brought on Florida State, but because it wasn't a secret," says Johnson, an FSU Rhodes Scholar who is currently in grad school at Oxford University in England. "People knew what was going on. For people in the institution to take the position that they were unaware of the situation is untrue."
"I can't list specific allegations. I can't say who knew what. I'm just saying it was no secret. It's sort of like the Mitchell Report in baseball where the players are the ones being accused of taking steroids when everybody involved in baseball knew it was happening."

These comments are both refreshingly unfiltered and disquietingly unsettling. You see, Garrett Johnson is not just some disgruntled jock popping off about something he knows nothing about. If we listen to anybody about the plight of the "athlete-student" then it should be a true "student-athlete." Who better to judge what's wrong with the system than an athlete who did right by the system?

Johnson is certainly that. He was the NCAA shot put champion and the team captain who led the Seminoles to their first men's track and field title in 2006. He also happens to be only the second Rhodes Scholar in FSU history. He graduated magna cum laude in just three years with a double major in political science and English. For two years, he served as president of the FSU Student-Athlete Advisory Council.

"I have greatly benefited from my relationships and mentorships at Florida State," Johnson says. "I have nothing but deep respect for those who have helped me along the way, but there are problems. And to brush those problems under the rug is to perpetuate them.

"My purpose in providing criticism of the academic/athletic balance at the NCAA and Florida State is because I want to look out for student-athletes and protect their best interest... I don't want to see student-athletes take the fall for this. This is all systemic and part of the culture of the NCAA, and it doesn't just happen at Florida State. It happens at almost every major Division I-A school. It's sad, but that's the reality of the beast."

Johnson is right. The entire system is rife with rhetoric. You want to know what the real scandal is at Florida State? It's not tutors who gave athletes the answers to an exam in an online music course. No, the scandal is that tutors were actually needed in such an easy class.

Let's get real here. Isn't the dirtiest little untold story in college sports about how universities spend millions of dollars on "academic support" to keep woefully under-performing students eligible for competition? Why else would a school like Florida State need to employ nine full-time staff members and dozens and dozens of tutors?

Many schools will tell you their academic support staffs report to university deans, but in reality they are bankrolled by the athletic department. Now ask
yourself: Are academic counselors and tutors really going to bite the hand that funds them?

It's a never-ending circle. The academic-support staff is subsidized by the athletic department, which is funded by the football program, which is populated with star players who desperately need academic-support to stay eligible.

Then, of course, there's the ultimate hypocrisy: That these marginal students, who badly need to concentrate on their studies, instead spend most of their time concentrating on their sport. Which is why they end up in cupcake online music courses in the first place.

Johnson, for one, doesn't seem to think the NCAA or his own university will change much even in the wake of the ongoing academic scandal.

"I believe it is in the interest of self-preservation to perpetuate the status quo, despite the current rhetorical position taken by FSU and the NCAA," Johnson wrote in an e-mail "If academics REALLY take priority, I suggest athletic administrators and coaches demonstrate this by reducing their salaries to create parity with the tenured professors that work to prepare their athletes for long-term success. This would REALLY send a message."

It's no secret that the entire academic/athletic structure at big-time college football and basketball programs is inherently fraudulent.

You don't have to be a Rhodes Scholar to know that.

But the message is much more meaningful if you happen to be one.

New College of Florida
No Articles Today

University of Central Florida
No Articles Today

University of Florida

UF: Legislation ups Florida consumer confidence
02/27/2008 © Orlando Business Journal

The passage of the national economic stimulus package and state property tax amendment helped boost Florida's consumer confidence by four points to 74 in
February, following a decline to its lowest point in 16 years, a University of Florida study showed.

However, researchers expect the increase to be brief.

Four of the five components of the index rose, with the perceptions of national economic conditions over the next year showing the largest increase -- 11 points - - to reach 66. The only component to fall was perceptions of whether it is a good time to buy big-ticket items, which dropped three points to 71, its lowest point since December 1991.

"We certainly did not expect this increase," says Chris McCarty, director of UF's Survey Research Center at the Bureau of Economic and Business Research, in a news release. "We think the overall rise this month is a reaction to the passage of the stimulus package that will result in payments to a majority of Florida households, as well as the passage of the property tax amendment, which was supported by 64 percent of the voters. Both of these are, at least temporarily, bright spots for Florida consumers."

UF said data over the past two months shows that confidence fell steadily through January, rose during the first week of February and increased dramatically in the second week. By the third week of February, confidence had fallen to January levels.

McCarty said he expects confidence to decline again in March.

"By lowering interest rates, which may help loosen credit for borrowers, the Federal Reserve has further weakened the dollar against other currencies," he said. "This has contributed to the rise in the price of oil and other commodities, as can be seen in the recent rise in the price of a gallon of gas, which has increased more than 7 cents in the past week."

He added that though the stimulus package offers a welcome rebate check, those borrowed funds add to the deficit, and that the property tax amendment will likely offer fewer local services, and may have long-term downside effects on the state economy as homeowners take their tax exemptions with them when moving within the state.

In a nationwide study, New York-based Conference Board reported that its Consumer Confidence Index declined in February to 75 from a revised 87.3 in January, the lowest since the index registered 64.8 in February 2003.
Despite severe thunderstorm warnings and torrential downpours on Tuesday, University of Florida students flocked to the polls for the first day of voting in this semester's Student Government election.

More than 4,100 UF students braved the weather and made it to various polling locations around campus, according to elections officials.

"I was totally surprised," SG Supervisor of Elections Sarah Krantz said of the turnout. "It was much higher than we expected, especially with the weather."

Despite the weather, Krantz said it was the highest first-day turnout she has seen in the three years she has been involved in SG.

During last spring's election, around 3,500 students showed up to cast their ballot on the first day of voting, even in rain-free conditions. The total turnout ended up being 7,692.

At this semester's current rate, the total will easily eclipse 8,000 voters, Krantz said.

Aside from a couple of minor complaints, which will be dealt with by the Elections Commission after the election, Krantz said the first day went very smoothly.

Student voters are choosing between a slate of candidates from the incumbent Gator Party and the opposition Orange and Blue Party. Voting locations on campus will be open again today from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Election results are expected to be announced tonight around midnight.
WASHINGTON ? It's a toxic economic mix the nation hasn't seen in three decades: Prices are speeding upward at the fastest pace in a quarter century, even as the economy loses steam.

Economists call the disease "stagflation," and they're worried it might be coming back.

Already, paychecks aren't stretching as far, and jobs are harder to find, threatening to set off a vicious cycle that could make things even worse.

The economy nearly stalled in the final three months of last year and probably is barely growing or even shrinking now. That's the "stagnation" part of the ailment. Typically, that slowdown should slow inflation as well ? the second part of the diagnosis ? but prices are still marching higher.

The latest worrisome news came Tuesday: a government report showing wholesale prices climbed 7.4 percent in the past year. That was the biggest annual leap since 1981.

"I hear a lot of people accuse the media these days of being too negative about the economy," said Al Muller, president and co-owner of Pensacola-based Metro Market Trends. "I think that's preposterous. Consumers don't need the media to tell them what's going on in the economy.

"They know gas is $3 a gallon; that milk is $4.50 a gallon," he continued. "They know what their property taxes or homeowners insurance was three years ago. They know the consumer is being squeezed."

Consumer confidence among Floridians is especially low, and for good reason, said University of West Florida economist Rick Harper.

"The situation for Florida consumers is more difficult than for the rest of the nation," said Harper, director of UWF's Haas Center for Business Research and Economic Development. "They've seen hits to their disposable incomes because of casualty insurance and property tax rate hikes, and Florida has seen bigger declines in retail sales."

Once the twin evils of stagflation take hold, it can be hard to break the grip. People cut back on their spending as they are stung by rising prices and
shriveling wages. Businesses, also socked by rising costs and declining demand from customers, clamp down on their hiring and capital investment.

That would be a nightmare scenario for Wall Street investors, businesses, politicians and most everyone else.

To brace the teetering economy, the Federal Reserve since September has been ratcheting down its key interest rate. Another cut is expected in March. However, to combat inflation, the Fed would be expected to boost rates instead.

"The Fed has its hands full. It is preoccupied with the economic slowdown at the front door, but inflation looks to be sneaking in the back door," said Greg McBride, senior financial analyst at Bankrate.com. "If that trend continues, the Fed would need to show the economy some tough love, meaning higher interest rates to keep inflation from getting out of hand."

Some numbers underscore the concerns:

n Prices paid by consumers were up 4.1 percent last year, the biggest increase in 17 years. Those higher prices? especially for heating homes and filling up gas tanks? are taking an ever-bigger bite out of paychecks. Workers' weekly earnings are down 1.4 percent from January a year ago when adjusted for inflation.

n Oil prices galloped past $100 a barrel to close at a record $100.88 on Tuesday. Those lofty energy prices are a double-edged sword: They can spread inflation through the economy by boosting the prices of lots of other goods and services, and they can leave people with less money to spend on other things, thus slowing overall economic activity. There are signs high energy prices are causing some damage on both of those fronts.

People are hunkering down. Earlier this month, nervous shoppers handed the nation's retailers their worst January in almost four decades. High gas and food prices, the toll of the housing bust, the credit crunch and a tougher job market all were to blame.

Wary employers eliminated jobs in January, the first nationwide loss of jobs in more than four years.

Can a serious bout of stagflation be avoided? Many economists believe the Fed's aggressive rate cuts along with tax rebates for people and tax breaks for businesses will lift the economy in the second half of the year.
Until then, analysts warn that it could feel like the country is suffering through a mild case of stagflation—even if technically that is not the case. "It could feel like a bad flu," said Brian Bethune, economist at Global Insight.

News Journal staff writer Carlton Proctor contributed to this report.

**State Higher Education Issues**

**Schools to take another hit**  
*02/27/2008 © Miami Herald*

TALLAHASSEE -- State lawmakers are poised to slash more than $350 million from schools—forcing layoffs in some districts before the end of the school year in June—in an effort to balance the current year's budget, shrunken by withering sales-tax collections.

Schools, community colleges and universities will take the brunt of the $542 million in proposed cuts lawmakers want to make for the budget year that ends June 30. Other areas hit hard include state attorneys and public defenders, county and circuit courts, county health departments and juvenile justice programs.

Broward and Miami-Dade officials say they will manage without layoffs. But at other school districts, staff cuts will be inevitable, said Mark Pudlow, spokesman for the Florida Education Association, the teachers' union.

"We expected the Legislature would probably do something like this," he said. "It's unfortunate there wasn't a way to prevent it."

Gov. Charlie Crist called the House and Senate proposals "unfortunate" and repeated his recommendations to lawmakers to dip into reserve accounts and use one-time cash from the state's rainy-day fund to avoid making cuts. For the budget year that begins July 1, the governor has proposed a budget that adds $1 billion to schools by relying on higher property tax revenues and new state lottery games.

"This is just the beginning of the process," Crist said. "Everything that we can do in a responsible way to utilize rainy-day funds and get us to a bridge to a brighter future for Florida is the way to go."
House and Senate leaders agreed to the cuts this week and will take up the actual reduction bills on Monday, the eve of the 2008 regular session, and pass them by the second week of March.

Schools account for 66 percent of the latest budget cut because it's late in the fiscal year and school budgets depend heavily on sales-tax revenue, which has been sinking below expectations for months. Nearly half of the $28 billion the state collects from general revenue -- primarily sales taxes -- goes to schools.

Legislators have already cut $1.1 billion from the 2007-08 spending plan, but the declining revenues and sluggish economy have forced them to take another whack when they meet next week.

Once those cuts are done, they must next embark on an even harder task: shaving more than $2.5 billion from the next state budget to balance the 2008-09 spending plan.

**HOW BAD IS IT?**

"However bad you think it is, it's worse than that," said Rep. Joe Pickens, a Palatka Republican and chairman of the House Schools and Learning Council.

While the budget cuts are not unexpected, they are not sitting well.

"This borders on insanity," said Broward Schools Superintendent Jim Notter. "You've done all your hiring. You've done all your budgeting. And you've spent down your money."

Broward County schools must cut $21.7 million during the remaining months of the school year, and officials expect to offset some of that because they froze hiring, left 180 jobs unfilled and cut back on purchases after the first round of budget cuts in fall 2007.

While it won't be impossible to make the new numbers work, Notter said, it won't be easy, either.

"It's like a hunger-strike diet -- you either die or you come back," he said. "I'm not ready to die."

Miami-Dade County schools officials expect the cuts will take between $23 million and $28 million from their $3 billion budget, but the district is taking steps to "minimize the impact on the workforce," Associate Superintendent Alberto Carvalho said.
The district has already cut the administrative budget, eliminated travel expenses and imposed an "absolute moratorium" on nonessential purchases, he said.

**NEED FLEXIBILITY**

Carvalho said that the school system will ask lawmakers to give the districts flexibility so they can better manage their financial woes. For example, officials want authority to use property-tax revenues that are now dedicated for construction to pay the district's property insurance bill.

Miami-Dade also wants to suspend its teacher merit-pay program, get permission to use money now set aside for transportation and textbooks, and delay the last round of class-size requirements until 2010, Carvalho said.

The budget-cutting plans for both chambers also include a $17 million cut to courts, leading judges across the state to warn it will prompt hundreds of furloughs of judicial assistants in circuit and county courts.

"I'm not sure the people in Tallahassee were quite aware of the role of the judicial assistants," said Sam Slom, chief administrative judge for Miami-Dade's county criminal division. If judicial assistants have to be furloughed for 58 working days, as projected, "that would be devastating" and "would have a very traumatic effect on the public. Our courts would shut down," he said.

Negotiations between House and Senate staff and judicial administrators have persuaded lawmakers to allow the court to cut programs, rather than staff, to avoid massive court shutdowns.

"They understand the significance of the furlough issue and have asked for what else might be done," said Lisa Goodner, state courts administrator.

Miami Herald staff writers Nirvi Shah, Breanne Gilpatrick and Susannah A. Nesmith contributed to this report.

**Colleges decry grant cut**
02/27/2008 © St. Petersburg Times

ST. PETERSBURG - The governor's proposal to halt a $3,000-per-student grant program for private colleges and universities in Florida would deny thousands of students access to a higher education, at a time when public universities are cutting seats.
Moreover, a dramatic cut in the program could be devastating to financially needy students debating whether to take on the expense of college, say leaders of the 28 private institutions.

"It shuts off options for people that are critical to this state's success," Ed Moore, president of the organization that represents the private colleges, told the St. Petersburg Times editorial board Tuesday.

"We take a little bit of money from the state and make it go a long way," he said. "We reach out to people who might not otherwise have a chance."

Private universities produce a third of the degrees granted each year in Florida, and 41 percent of all teaching degrees. Nearly half of the 34,000 students enrolled in a college like Eckerd or Rollins are the first in their families to attend college.

Forty-four percent of them are minorities, compared with 35 percent in the public universities. And one in three private college students is poor enough to qualify for federal Pell Grants, compared to one in five students at a state university.


Any students who would have been eligible to get the $3,000 annual grant for the first time in fall 2008 would not get it, with the exception of students attending a historically private black college like Bethune-Cookman.

Legislators are icy to the governor’s drastic cut, but the reality is that all state agencies and programs will see their funding reduced next year, thanks to the more than $2-billion budget deficit that already resulted in tens of millions in reductions for public and private higher education.

Moore said the private institutions are ready for a cut of some sort, but he warned that too dramatic a drop in the these grants will shut out students whose education is vital to the state's economic future.

"You’ll see a lot of institutions drop their state enrollment," he said. "Students who might have depended on the FRAG money to give them that financial edge will no longer see college as an option."
FRAG is not a need-based grant, but it serves a significant percentage of poor students. Many of the students who get the grants also get, on average, $7,000 in additional aid from the institution they attend because they are financially needy.

A third of the FRAG recipients at Eckerd College and St. Leo University, for example, are eligible for federal Pell Grants.

"The privates are taking on the job the public land-grant universities were set up to do," said Eckerd president Donald Eastman III. "They are taking in the minorities, the first-generation students, the low-income students."

He and other private university presidents say they understand elected officials are trying to save money.

But given the FRAG grants represent less than 1.5 percent of the state's higher education spending, they question the wisdom of cutting a program that has helped produce so many degrees in high-demand fields like teaching and engineering.

The state subsidizes public university students to the tune of roughly $12,000 a year, Moore said. FRAG is a bargain in comparison, he said.

"If I were the decider here, I would be looking to see, how can we use fewer dollars to serve more students? That's what FRAG does."

**National Higher Education Issues**

**Latest Attack on a California Scientist Who Uses Animals in Research Signals Shift in Tactics - Chronicle.com**

02/27/2008 © The Chronicle of Higher Education

Wearing bandanas around their faces, several assailants believed to be students from the University of California at Santa Cruz on Sunday attacked the home of a researcher who uses mice to study breast cancer.

While the researcher and her children cowered in the back of their house just after noon, the assailants assaulted her husband and then fled in a car. The incident reflects an escalation of violence by animal-rights extremists in the United States, who until now have not physically attacked academics.
Because the assault took place during the day, the husband, who did not suffer major injuries, was able to take down the license plate of the car, and city police officers later raided a house where several Santa Cruz students live.

No arrests have yet been made. But Lt. Rudy Escalante, the detective in charge of the investigation, said several Santa Cruz students and people who are not students were involved in the crime.

Shift in Tactics

"I am flabbergasted that this happened," said the biology professor who was the victim of the attack. (She and university officials requested that her name not be disclosed to protect her from further violence.)

"Free discussion is fine—that's what universities are all about," she said. "I'm just upset that they came onto my property and attacked my house."

Like recent assaults on private residences in Los Angeles and Salt Lake City, the events in Santa Cruz reflect a shift in tactics for animal-rights extremists, who formerly focused on facilities where animal research is conducted. And the incident provides a warning to other universities that have not yet attracted the attention of violent opponents to animal research.

"We're facing a national movement," said George Blumenthal, chancellor of the Santa Cruz campus. Other universities, he said, are going to have to face "individuals who are prepared to use potentially violent tactics that have a terrorizing effect on researchers."

"This is having a terribly chilling effect on the research community, which is exactly what the activists want," said Frankie L. Trull, president of the Foundation for Biomedical Research, in Washington, which has tracked attacks by animal-rights extremists. "It seems like everything has been stepped up in terms of aggression," she said.

Earlier this month, the Animal Liberation Front set off an incendiary device near the front door of a house owned by Edythe D. London, a professor of psychiatry and of molecular and medical pharmacology at the University of California at Los Angeles (The Chronicle, February 6). It was the third firebombing aimed at a UCLA researcher in two years, and the second attack against Ms. London, whose home was flooded last fall. Researchers at several institutions have also received letters booby-trapped with razor blades.
While the level of violence has increased over the past few years, Sunday’s attack potentially marks a turning point. In previous attacks in the United States, extremists have not physically assaulted researchers or their family members, said Ms. Trull.

'Murderer, Torturer'

The attack in Santa Cruz was the second time that protesters had converged at the home of the breast-cancer researcher. Several weeks earlier, activists had scrawled the words "murderer" and "torturer" in chalk on the sidewalk in front of her house and leading up to her front porch. They wrote graffiti at the home of one of the postdoctoral research fellows in her laboratory, and they appeared at the homes of two other university employees, smearing garbage and yelling at them.

The university reacted quickly, taking several steps to reassure and calm the faculty, said Martha C. Zuniga, a professor in the same department who was not the subject of an attack.

The university offered to hire security guards for the people whose homes had been attacked, and it stepped up patrols around the animal-research facility and offices. It worked with the local police and also established a point person that faculty members could contact at any time, said Ms. Zuniga. "The university has really tried to step up to the plate," she said. "They’re taking this situation quite seriously."

Mr. Blumenthal and the chair of the Academic Senate at Santa Cruz issued a statement on February 12 condemning the harassment.

The victim of the recent attack said that a security guard had been stationed outside her house the night before the attack, but had left in the morning, when it was thought that the risk of an attack was low. Now she has full-time security.

She praised the university’s response, saying "it’s just been great."

Lieutenant Escalante, of the police department, said six people had participated in the attack on Sunday. Four investigators are at work on the case, and the FBI is also involved in the investigation. When the police raided the house where several students live, they carried away hundreds of pieces of evidence, including computers, handwriting samples, and bandanas, from which DNA might be extracted.
Questions for Universities

Mr. Blumenthal said that if students were involved, presumably there would be criminal charges filed, and "we will be looking at the appropriateness of any action that might be taken."

To prevent further violence, he said, "we need to be proactive in making sure that students understand what is the kind of research that is taking place." Having that discussion, he said, "will have some effect in decreasing the perceived needs of individuals to take direct action."

Ms. Trull of the Foundation for Biomedical Research said that the recent home attacks "pose a whole new series of problems for academic institutions: What kind of security does a university provide for a biomedical researcher or other faculty? What are the cost implications to an educational research facility? It can be daunting."

The violence is also driving people out of research, she said. One professor who conducts experimental surgery told her that he couldn't fill six postdoctoral research fellowships for which he had funds.

But Mark S. Blumberg, a psychology professor at the University of Iowa, has personally seen the opposite effect. In 2004 extremists broke into a research facility where he works and destroyed experiments and equipment. After that, he said, "I didn't have a single student who ever said, 'Oh my god, what am I doing in this business?' In fact, it was the opposite. It emboldened them."

Educators Exchange Strategies for Creating the Global Community College - Chronicle.com
02/27/2008 © The Chronicle of Higher Education

Many community-college leaders are thinking pretty far outside their local communities these days to swap strategies for recruiting students overseas, improving study-abroad options, and making faculties and curricula more international. Those were hot topics at the 32nd annual meeting of Community Colleges for International Development, which wrapped up here on Tuesday.

The educators attending the meeting said two-year institutions needed to position themselves to produce graduates whose skills let them prosper in a swiftly changing and increasingly international economy. The conference drew participants from U.S. and foreign community colleges focused on international development and education.
"Many skilled workers are coming out of our colleges trained for jobs that don't exist any more," said Paul A. Elsner, chancellor emeritus of the Maricopa County Community College District, in Arizona, in a speech. "We have lots of skilled workers, but do they have the right kinds of skills?"

Mr. Elsner, who presented the results of an American Association of Community Colleges study examining community and technical colleges in two dozen countries, said institutions in some developing nations were particularly nimble in adapting new technologies and meeting changing needs of employers and employees.

The challenge for American community colleges, he said, is to deliver the skills critical to the new economy—such as analytical thinking and the ability to work across cultural and international boundaries—to the widest range of workers. Two-year colleges can play a "democratizing" role, Mr. Elsner said. "We have to figure out how everybody gets access to those skills."

Many of the sessions during the three-day conference illustrated how different institutions are responding to that challenge. For example, Mesa Community College, which is part of the Maricopa community-college district, now offers a certificate in global citizenship and is working to incorporate, and measure, global perspectives and international skills across the curriculum.

Shereen Lerner, chair of the college's department of cultural science, said the creation of the certificate program was, in part, faculty members' response to students who seemed to think that "the United States was the only important place in the world." As part of the program, students take five courses in one of four tracks, then complete a research project or study overseas. One of the tracks focuses on the political and economic interdependence of the world; another looks at science, technology, and the world.

One stumbling block, Ms. Lerner said, was that students spend only a limited number of credit hours on the Mesa campus before earning a degree or transferring to a four-year institution and don't want to "waste time" taking courses that do not count toward those requirements. So all courses in the certificate program, which is optional, earn transfer credits.

At other institutions, international educators said they had to win over skeptics among faculty members or administrators. Elizabeth A. Molloy, assistant vice president for international education, libraries, and faculty services at Georgia Perimeter College, in metropolitan Atlanta, described one administrator who questioned efforts to make internationalization part of the college's strategic plan.
He said, "Why are you bothering? Our students aren't going to work overseas," Ms. Molloy recalls. "I told him that's not the point."

**Entrepreneurial Faculty**

In another session, Kelley Brayton, director of international education at Portland Community College, in Oregon, talked about her success in pitching a "business plan" for international education that laid out priorities for internationalizing the campus and recruiting additional foreign students. As a result, administrators approved an overhaul to the financing structure for her office, allowing her to keep 50 percent of the money from international-student tuition.

Ms. Brayton said she has used the money over the past five years to more than double the number of international students at the college, to more than 400, and to support summer faculty-development seminars that help faculty members include international perspectives in their courses.

One faculty member, Marlene Eid, not only added an international component to her psychology class, but also applied for and received a federal grant to help internationalize the curriculum. She now is coordinating such efforts on the Portland campus.

Other sessions also highlighted faculty members. Jeffrey M. Armstrong, dean of the college at Muscatine Community College, in eastern Iowa, talked about how he used a grant from the U.S. State Department to set up a partnership with Stella Maris College, in India. The two institutions use an Internet video connection to hold joint sessions of a course on contemporary world issues. Students from the two colleges also communicate through an online forum and e-mail. Mr. Armstrong said he hoped to recruit additional colleges to participate in the program.

*In Rare Move, Professors at Michigan Technological U. Vote to Drop Their Union - Chronicle.com*
Faculty members and administrators at Michigan Technological University are dealing with years' worth of tension that flashed into public view last week when professors there voted out the union that had represented them for just over three years.

Both supporters and opponents of the union point to the closeness of the vote to decertify the American Association of University Professors as evidence of the rift. The final tally was 143 to 136, with 92 percent of the institution's 313 tenured and tenure-track faculty members casting votes. The results of the vote must be certified by the Michigan Employment Relations Commission before they are official.

"The most important thing for us to recognize is that there wasn't total unanimity" on letting the union go, says Shea McGrew, vice president for advancement at Michigan Tech and a spokesman for the administration. "We need to have more discussion about the role of faculty in governance and how to strengthen the University Senate. We believe that rather than having a union, having a strong University Senate is the answer."

Marilyn M. Cooper, a professor of humanities and president of the Michigan Tech AAUP chapter, disagrees. Although the group has been stripped of its role as a collective-bargaining agent, she says it plans to keep working on behalf of faculty members who "really want a stronger voice in what's going on at Michigan Tech."

"We are not disheartened by this setback," Ms. Cooper says.

The decertification of an AAUP chapter at the hands of its members is rare, says Michael Mauer, director of organizing and services for the association, which has nearly 80 collective bargaining units that represent full-time faculty members, adjunct professors, and graduate assistants. (Some chapters are jointly affiliated with other unions, including the American Federation of Teachers.)

The weeks prior to the vote were marked by online exchanges between the university's AAUP chapter and a small group of faculty members who run a Web site that urged professors to vote against the union.

These leading opponents of the union, who organized under the name Quality MTU, would not consent to an interview with The Chronicle. One of them, James R. Mihelcic, a professor of civil and environmental engineering, instead pointed a reporter to his group's Web site. Postings there indicated that opposition to the
union was centered around the question of union dues and a belief that the AAUP added "layers of bureaucracy" to professors' daily routines.

Opponents also argued that the university's affiliation with the union would not help Michigan Tech become the national research university it aspires to be, and that conflict over labor issues "has distracted us from our many responsibilities as faculty."

Close Votes

The initial vote to unionize at Michigan Tech in September 2004 was also close, with 152 in favor and 134 against. Contract negotiations between the union and the university, held on and off since early 2005, were thwarted in part by two decertification petitions, the most recent of which was filed in October 2007 and signed by at least 30 percent of Michigan Tech's faculty members. By Michigan law, labor negotiations must halt when such petitions are filed.

Ms. Cooper said that at the time of the latest filing, the two groups were close to agreeing on terms. One issue that kept surfacing as a sticking point was how pay raises for faculty members should be calculated.

"What it all adds up to is time is on the side of the employer," says Mr. Mauer, of the AAUP. The absence of a contract after so much time "is extremely hard to overcome," he said.

A clear majority of faculty members said their will was to have a union, Mr. Mauer says, and "this is an unfortunate example of the way in which a recalcitrant administration can thwart the will of the faculty."

On their Web site, opponents of the union argued that support for AAUP representation largely came from faculty members who were upset with policies created by the university's former president, Curtis J. Tompkins, who resigned in March 2004 after a no-confidence vote. The opponents urged their peers not to "cling to a union he helped elect."

Ms. Cooper, however, says the top-down culture of Michigan Tech has not changed, despite the university's new leadership. And although she is encouraged by some of the ideas she has heard from administrators recently about how to make the University Senate stronger, an improved governance body "doesn't obviate the need for a good union," she says. "We can be a good extra line of communication to the administration and also a good line of communication to the faculty."
After a year, the AAUP can try to get recertified. Ms. Cooper is hopeful that the union's status can be reversed, but she is aware of the challenges of such a task.

"There can be a very good relationship between the union and the university, and that's what we're trying to get," Ms. Cooper says. "We're going to have to build a very strong base of support so that we might win an election by a margin that the administration will find acceptable."


No one envied Roderick J. McDavis's uncomfortable position. Mr. McDavis, who is president of Ohio University, took the stage to describe how he and his university had responded to a series of network-security breaches that made headlines across the country in 2006.

"I know that the majority of you are saying, I'm glad it's him up there and not me," Mr. McDavis told the crowd at The Chronicle's Technology Forum here on Tuesday.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation contacted the university in late April 2006 to tell administrators that their networks had been hacked. The FBI found out about the breach, Mr. McDavis said, because undercover agents on chat rooms had seen hackers bragging about breaking into Ohio University's systems.

A series of breaches followed, which could have led to the exposure of private alumni data and other records.

Mr. McDavis said Ohio University had had a very decentralized information-technology organization and no permanent fire wall at the time. "We didn't take IT seriously," he said.

With the help of consultants, the university hired a chief information officer, created a plan of action, and established a committee to oversee information-technology issues on the campus. The chief information officer became part of the president's cabinet.

Gartner, the consulting firm hired by the university after the breach, said the university needed $7-million to $10-million to make its information services stable and secure. The university has spent $2-million so far, and plans to spend
$8-million over the next few years. Mr. McDavis said the university had to delay a fund-raising campaign a year to focus on the crisis.

Technologists in the audience commended Mr. McDavis for having the courage to come forward and talk about the breaches. But many of them wondered whether it would take a crisis to get university leaders to listen to technologists and devote money to security and training. An article in The Chronicle in 2006 revealed that Ohio University had received several warnings from consultants and others about lax security and disorganized technology before the breaches. (Episodes of the podcast Tech Therapy — like this one and this one — have discussed college presidents' dangerous lack of interest in technology.)

"Technology is something everybody wants, but nobody wants to pay for it," an audience member said.

Mr. McDavis said he had learned to pay attention to technology — and stressed that other college presidents should learn to, as well. Ohio University is always vigilant now, he said. "We never want to get to a point again where we are comfortable."

Canada's Budget Includes Need-Based Grants, but No Increase for Student Aid - Chronicle.com
02/27/2008 © The Chronicle of Higher Education

Canadian students, at long last, will get a federal need-based grant program next year. A new $350-million program, announced on Tuesday in the Conservative minority government's latest budget, will replace Canada's Millennium Scholarships program, which ends in 2009.

On the whole, however, the budget left higher-education officials with mixed feelings. While it includes money for some new programs, existing problems — such as more core funds for universities and colleges — were ignored.

Although there had been speculation in recent weeks that the opposition would reject the budget and thus trigger a spring election, that's not going to happen. The opposition leader Stéphane Dion, although critical of the document, said his party would not vote against it.

Students Welcome New Grants

The new need-based grants "will reach an estimated 245,000 students," the finance minister, Jim Flaherty, said during his budget speech to the House of
Commons on Tuesday. "This is over 100,000 more students from low- and middle-income families than the current system."

The grant system was welcomed by student leaders, who said it was long overdue. "It's a step in the right direction, and it means that Canada is no longer one of the few countries without a national grant system," said Amanda Aziz, head of the Canadian Federation of Students.

The budget, however, did not increase federal support for student financial aid. Instead, it applied the same amount of money that had gone to Millennium Scholarships to the new program.

Nor did it deal with the issue of high interest rates on student loans. That omission earns the government a D grade, according to a statement from the Coalition for Student Loan Fairness, which is concerned about almost a million people with student loans.

The coalition says that Canadian students pay the highest interest rates in the G-8 countries and that it had hoped to see some action on loan interest in this budget.

The budget does contain $123-million for what is called modernization and streamlining the loan process.

**Doctoral Scholarships**

Mr. Flaherty, the finance minister, also announced that he was setting aside $100-million a year for five years to pay for a program of doctoral scholarships that will be open to both international and domestic students. The Vanier Scholarships, as the awards are called, are aimed at attracting up to 500 top doctoral students. Each scholarship will be worth $50,000 a year for a maximum of three years.

The government will also spend $21-million to set up 20 university research chairs that will focus on the environment, natural resources and energy, health, or information and communication technologies.

**Mixed News on Research**

The budget holds increases for Canada's three research granting councils, but despite the additional money, some higher-education officials are uneasy over the government's continued policy of so-called targeted research.
That means new funds for the council that distributes grants for natural-sciences and engineering research will go to university researchers who study the automotive, manufacturing, forestry, or fishing industries.

The health-research budget increase is focused on research involving social and environmental conditions, food and drug safety, and the health needs of communities in Canada's North.

James Turk, executive director of the Canadian Association of University Teachers, said the increase for research was "modest and welcome, but the government has undone the good by targeting."

The news for higher education was similarly mixed in other budget elements, Mr. Turk said. The new grant program is a good idea, he said, but the failure to provide additional funds for student aid means the government is simply consolidating existing money. And the government has shown that it doesn't understand the needs of doctoral candidates, he said, by setting up scholarships but restricting them to a maximum of three years when doctorates usually take at least five years.

"There is no additional money for universities," Mr. Turk said. "It's a budget with no vision of what's needed for higher education in this country."

*Art With a Purpose - Chronicle.com*
Seven years ago, a professor at Tufts University envisioned building a robot that could move without gears or a motor, and he was successful. Sort of.

"The prototype would twitch, but not much more," says Barry A. Trimmer, a biology professor. "We're building on that."

But while Mr. Trimmer continues his work — which could lead to advances in prosthetics — that early prototype of a "softbot" has made its way into New York's Museum of Modern Art.

Works from Tufts and several other colleges are included in "Design and the Elastic Mind," a new exhibit where science, technology, and design converge. The works, which will be on display this week through May 12, are more than just pretty pieces of art. Many have practical applications as well.

One piece, "DNA Origami," features pictures of actual DNA that are manipulated using a process called "algorithmic self-assembly." Basically, one long strand of viral DNA (the "paper") is folded using shorter DNA strands that are programmed by a computer to pull the long strand into a specific shape — in this case, a series of smiley faces.

"We want to learn how to program a molecule like we can program a computer," says Paul W.K. Rothemund, a senior research fellow at the California Institute of Technology and creator of the project.

Another work, "Computational Origami," was designed by a father-son team at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The three paper sculptures the pair contributed to the exhibit are a result of computer research exploring how to fold paper to achieve particular 3-D shapes. The shapes emerge differently depending on how the series of folds is designed.

"Our goal is to understand why that happens, and how to control it," says Erik D. Demaine, an assistant professor of computer science at MIT and son of the duo.

While the researchers have different backgrounds, all three agree on one point: They never expected their research to end up in an art museum.

Send ideas to short.subjects@chronicle.com