Not so bright

When Chancellor Mark Rosenberg and Florida Board of Governors chairwoman Carolyn Roberts announced last week that the BOG would indefinitely delay a discussion on the future of the Bright Futures scholarship program, they were in essence saying that it's pointless to tilt at windmills.

Few would argue with their strategy. Bright Futures is wildly popular among Florida families. It funds the college educations of about 150,000 students at a cost of $347 million.

It's also a political sacred cow. Several powerful lawmakers, particularly Senate President Ken Pruitt, R-Port St. Lucie, have erected a virtual fence around the program and topped it with barbed wire.

Florida is in the midst of perhaps its most serious financial crisis in decades. The state university system is struggling, as spokesman Bill Edmonds described, to just "keep the lights on during this economic downturn."

In that environment, BOG officials would be foolhardy to seek significant reform of Bright Futures — which, for all its popularity, has grown into a middle-class subsidy that is steadily devouring lottery funding for education.

They've done what savvy analysts who operate within a political environment must do: not fail so that they might revive the discussion down the road. At some point, circumstances may be more favorable — or at least not quite so unfavorable.
For Florida high-school students who qualify, Bright Futures pays 75 percent or 100 percent of their total tuition cost at Florida universities. It's a terrific deal for their families, but it's a huge drain on the state.

Universities aren't collecting much tuition from in-state students as a result of the program. According to an Associated Press report, 89 percent of Florida State University's in-state freshmen last year were Bright Futures recipients.

Meanwhile, the growth of the program is so rapidly outpacing increases in the lottery education money that funds it that other areas of education will invariably suffer.

A Tampa Tribune analysis of Bright Futures conducted in February showed that Bright Futures payments grew by almost 165 percent over the past seven years. Lottery funding for education, which includes the K-12 system, grew by less than a fourth of that rate, the newspaper investigation found.

Jade Moore, a member of the Florida Taxation and Budget Reform Commission, told the Tribune that the program's rate of growth was unsustainable.

"Left alone," he said, "we project that the total lottery revenue will be consumed by Bright Futures within seven years."

Mr. Rosenberg has correctly pointed out in the past that needy students who don't qualify for Bright Futures but could still succeed in college aren't receiving enough help, while students from more affluent families are getting plenty.

That's a problem. It's in the public interest to help disadvantaged students earn postsecondary degrees and qualify for higher-paying jobs than they otherwise would qualify for.

With the 2008 Legislature about to convene, it is obvious that now is not the time to take on Bright Futures. But ignoring the obvious, while politically convenient for the time being, eventually will have even more serious consequences.

What issues legislators will tackle before adjourning May 2
03/03/2008 © Ft. Myers News-Press

Money, as always, will dominate the session. In this election year there will be less to go around. Here are summaries of some of the issues lawmakers will tackle before adjourning May 2.
TAXES

The Legislature agreed last year to a $15 billion rollback of local property taxes and then launched two contentious special sessions that eventually produced Amendment 1. At Gov. Charlie Crist’s urging, voters in January approved the plan, which will provide another $9.3 billion in relief over the next five years and give the average homeowner a $240 windfall.

Crist wants more cuts and House Speaker Marco Rubio wants a 1.35 percent flat tax plan that would slash $9 billion in the first year. But look only for incremental changes this session. Senate President Ken Pruitt is in no mood for more big cuts. House leaders are pushing changes left out of the Amendment 1 compromise, including a break for first-time homebuyers that could bolster Amendment 1’s chances of surviving a legal challenge, and another provision to help “working waterfronts,” or hotel and marina owners.

— Jim Ash

HIGHER EDUCATION

Florida’s colleges and universities look to solve financial straits this session or, their leaders say, there could be severe cuts, including faculty and fewer students being admitted.

The Board of Governors voted to recently raise full-time student tuition by 8 percent. The courts have yet to decide whether the Legislature or the board can make that call.

University administrators already cut their budgets in the fall in a $65 million reduction to the state’s 11 public colleges and universities.

Further cuts — diminished a bit from projections earlier in the year — await as lawmakers will take an ax to this year’s budget once again in the first weeks of session.

Gov. Charlie Crist is against raising tuition.

— Stephen D. Price

INSURANCE

After passing changes to property insurance last year that vastly increased Floridians’ risk of having to pay off huge hurricane losses long into the future,
there’s movement to step back a bit this year on the scary parts and press forward on common-sense elements. The House seeks to reduce the amount of cut-rate backup insurance the state-run Hurricane Catastrophic Fund offers to insurance companies, and therefore the amount of charges people possibly face to pay off debt for years to come.

Continuing to push home-strengthening programs will still be a focus as the long-term solution — there’s a proposal to start a zero-interest loan program to harden homes against hurricane winds. Lawmakers also are sure to make plenty of noise about the failure of insurance companies to respond with lower rates to the legislation passed in 2007. The governor, regulators and lawmakers are pushing various legal, regulatory and legislative responses to still high, still-rising rates.

— Paul Flemming

ENVIRONMENT

Florida’s conservation land-buying program expires in 2010, and there will be a push this year by Sen. Burt Sanders, R-Naples, who’s an environmental committee chairman, to renew it. Environmental groups want the $300 million annual spending increased now, but Saunders says there’s no money. He’s looking ahead to the expiration of Florida Forever bonds in 2013 to provide money under Florida’s debt ceiling. Also, Saunders has introduced a bill establishing a pilot program for limited springs protection. Environmentalists hope it will lead to greater protections for springs statewide, but developers are opposed. The governor’s budget request includes $200 million for South Florida environmental restoration, including $50 million for water storage projects and treatment marshes to protect the estuaries of the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie rivers.

— Bruce Ritchie

ENERGY

Energy is a key issue after Gov. Charlie Crist last July signed executive orders addressing climate change. The Florida Energy Commission, created by the Legislature in 2006, issued 85 recommendations in December.

The governor directed utilities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and for the Public Service Commission to demand more renewable energy from investor-owned utilities. In his legislative package, Crist proposes creating rules for a program that could set limits on emissions but allow utilities to sell or trade
credits for emissions reductions. Crist also proposes requiring at least 20 percent annual energy growth be achieved by utilities through efficiency and conservation.

The Florida Energy Commission directed regulators to review its cost-benefit test, which environmentalists say weighs against conservation and renewable energy. The Florida Chamber of Commerce says it wants to make it easier to build new nuclear power plants to provide power for future growth.

— Bruce Ritchie

GROWTH MANAGEMENT

A proposed constitutional amendment to require voters to approve local land-use changes may have stalled, but it will influence legislation. Florida Department of Community Affairs Secretary Tom Pelham says the Florida Hometown Democracy proposal reflects dissatisfaction among some residents with state and local planning. He has proposed a “Citizens Planning Bill of Rights” that would limit votes on land-use changes to once yearly instead of twice. His proposal also seeks to restrict the numerous exemptions from state review lawmakers have approved over the years.

Pelham’s proposal has raised concerns among some builders and developers, but the Florida Home Builders Association says it hasn’t taken a position. DCA also proposes requiring local governments within the Lake Okeechobee, Caloosahatchee River and St. Lucie River watersheds to adopt growth policies consistent with Everglades restoration. Homebuilders also want tighter restrictions on new development fees to pay for schools.

— Bruce Ritchie

HEALTH CARE

At a time when lawmakers are looking at another $500 million in budget cuts for the current fiscal year and $2 billion for the next, Gov. Charlie Crist wants to help the 3.9 million Floridians who have no health insurance, especially the 548,000 children. He wants regulated insurance companies to cover the children of existing policyholders longer, up to age 30 and to dramatically expand KidCare, the program for blue collar Floridians who can’t qualify for Medicaid.

He would do that by lifting income caps and making all children in Florida eligible. Parents would still have to pay based on income and some doubt whether the coverage would be affordable.
Crist recently ordered a three-year, $63.9 million experiment to beef up county health departments and target low-income neighborhoods with mobile health vans. Crist also wants to eliminate “certificate of need” regulations that for 30 years have tied hospital and health facility expansion to market demand.

— Jim Ash

PRISONS

It could become a felony to smuggle a cellular phone to a Florida prison inmate, if the Department of Corrections has its way.

The agency’s agenda for the 2008 legislative session projects a growth from 98,000 to almost 104,000 in prison population, so Gov. Charlie Crist has put $343 million for prison construction in his budget. The Department of Corrections also has drawn up short-term plans for the current fiscal year, converting unused vocational classrooms at five prisons to house 900 prisoners and putting another 1,000 in 21-man tents at some institutions.

The cell-phone change is a security measure, adding all forms of portable communication devices to the existing ban on contraband within the secure perimeter of a prison.

— Bill Cotterell

COURTS

The state’s judicial system will be seeking 19 new circuit judgeships and 42 more county judges in the 2008 legislative session.

But first, the courts have to work out $17 million in impending budget cuts for the current fiscal year. That will be brutal, with employees furloughed for three to 10 weeks in some areas and trials postponed.

“I am pleading for the life of a branch of government,” Chief Justice Fred Lewis recently told a Senate budget committee.

Because of the state’s revenue shortfall, all agencies have been told to trim 4 percent from this year’s spending — before state lawmakers even get to pared-down planning for the fiscal year starting July 1.
“If the money is not there, we can’t spend it,” said Sen. Victor Crist, R-Tampa, who chairs the Senate justice-appropriations committee.

— Bill Cotterell

JUSTICE

The exonerated and wrongfully incarcerated could have an easier path to receiving compensation from the state but they better have a clean past.

A bill (SB 756) proposed by State Sen. Arthenia Joyner, D-Tampa, would give the exonerated $100,000 for each year he or she was wrongfully incarcerated. That person would be able to apply for the money directly with the Florida Chief Financial Officer. But one caveat to the bill says no compensation will be paid if he or she has been designated as a violent offender.

— Stephen D. Price

Tight budget year limits bold reforms
03/03/2008 © Bradenton Herald

No "major" insurance reforms or tax-cut plans. Big budget cuts. Money for the wrongfully incarcerated. More legislative control of state universities.

Don't expect a whole lot more out of the Florida Senate and, therefore, the Legislature during the 60-day lawmaking session that begins Tuesday.

The modest agenda, outlined by Senate President Ken Pruitt, are the most doable in these tough financial times and point to a cold political reality in the Capitol: The big and bold ideas of the Florida House and its West Miami leader, Marco Rubio, won't drive the agenda during this year's session.

What a difference a year's worth of Republican Party infighting makes.

Just 12 months ago, Pruitt couldn't praise Rubio enough as a "star" and chief "architect" of ideas that the "master builders" in the Senate would refine.

This year in his presession chat with reporters, Pruitt skipped any mention at all of Rubio, whose hardball politics in pushing for steep and politically unfeasible property-tax cuts estranged senators from both parties last year and during three tense special lawmaking sessions.
Pruitt now wants to see the effects of two tax-cut measures - one approved by voters, the other by the Legislature and Gov. Charlie Crist - before doing anything more significant.

"I'll be clear with you: There will be no concerted effort from the leadership of the Florida Senate to do anything more," said Pruitt, a Port St. Lucie Republican. "I'm not going to stop anybody from filing a bill. But if we shared with them that there would be no leadership assistance, hopefully they'll know there's no appetite over here."

Pruitt's change of tone is marked from a year ago, when he repeatedly refused to "pre-judge" almost any issue, saying everything deserved a fair hearing without the presiding officer weighing in. Pruitt did weigh in last year to block compensation for Alan Crotzer, who spent 24 years in prison for two rapes he didn't commit.

Now, Pruitt has made Crotzer's compensation a top concern. Rounding out his agenda: proposals to protect senior citizens, spend billions more on roads, reauthorize an environmental land-buying program and invest in alternative-energy production.

Pruitt is hesitant to do much more because the state's finances are in such shambles. Legislators will need to cut this year's and next year's budgets during this session, and focusing on divisive issues could sidetrack them. Pruitt says the budget cuts won't be "slash and burn" but said some public employees should brace for furloughs.

"I'd rather have them do that and keep their job and know that next year it's going to get better," he said. "But there's also public service. People that work for government better have a public-service mentality."

Because it's an election year, partisanship will color what relatively few policies get passed this year. That's especially true in the bipartisan Senate now that Republican Sen. Jeff Atwater of North Palm Beach, selected as next year's Senate president, faces a potentially tough election in November against former Democratic Tamarac Sen. Skip Campbell. Polls from both parties suggest the race is a toss-up.

Atwater is leading a Senate committee that's investigating whether hurricane insurers complied with the intent of a reform law passed last year that undid big portions of an insurance-friendly bill he sponsored in 2006.
Pruitt said he expects Atwater's committee will "refine" and improve the insurance reform of last year, "but I don't see us doing anything major."

Atwater's likely successor for Senate president, Sen. Mike Haridopolos, also faces some political trouble over a $75,000-a-year lecturing job he won at the University of Florida. Some UF staffers have questioned the political motives of the hire . . . especially as the university's spending is reduced.

But Haridopolos' UF job will be a sideshow to the real higher-education policy battle: Pruitt's proposed constitutional amendment asking voters to clearly give the Legislature the authority over university tuition rates.

The amendment would largely undo a 2002 constitutional amendment, pushed by former U.S. Sen. Bob Graham, that created the Board of Governors over the 11 state universities. Graham and the board have sued the Legislature to stay out of the university tuition business. The board's just-aborted decision to tinker with the Bright Futures scholarship program further inflamed the bad relations with the Legislature.

The amendment would also would make the board smaller and make the education commissioner a statewide elected position, which it was before 2002.

Despite . . . or perhaps because of . . . the fact that he never went to college, Pruitt has made affordable higher education a legacy issue. And he has helped steer hundreds of millions to top-notch research firms in an effort to help "transform" Florida's "service-based economy" to a "knowledge-based" one.

In that regard, Pruitt said the troubles with the economy are really growing pains.

"The days of coming to Florida with $500 in your pocket and living in a mobile home and living a life in paradise are over," he said. "And that's probably not a bad thing for Florida."

**Issues Piled High on Legislators' Plates**
03/02/2008 © Lakeland Ledger

Ledger Tallahassee Bureau
Here are some of the major issues Florida lawmakers will face as they begin their annual session on Tuesday:
THE BUDGET

Facing the worst budget crisis in decades, lawmakers will begin their session by cutting $543 million from the current budget. With a new state revenue estimate, which is expected to bring more grim financial news on March 11, lawmakers will have to craft a 2008-09 budget while facing a budget shortfall in the range of $2 billion.

EDUCATION

Among the key school proposals is Senate President Ken Pruitt's move to return to an elected education commissioner. Gov. Charlie Crist is backing an initiative to require that school districts spend at least 65 percent of their money on classroom instruction.

HEALTH CARE

Gov. Crist wants to expand low-cost, no-frills health care coverage to many of the state's uninsured. He is also backing a measure that would deregulate hospital construction.

TUITION

The Board of Governors has backed a 5 percent tuition increase, while legislative leaders assert only they have the power to raise tuition. Lawmakers will consider a constitutional amendment that they say will better delineate that power.

ENERGY

Following the governor's lead to move Florida into the forefront of the clean energy movement, lawmakers will look at a wide array of energy issues, ranging from efforts to make new homes more energy efficient to setting up a carbon cap and trade system.

IMMIGRATION

Lawmakers may consider more than a dozen bills calling for stronger immigration enforcement, although the bills are not likely to advance too far given opposition from immigrant advocacy groups and businesses that rely on undocumented workers.

INSURANCE
Chief Financial Officer Alex Sink is advancing a plan to limit Florida's liability in the event of a major hurricane. Senate leaders continue to pursue possible legislation that would tighten the state's ability to make sure insurance companies are passing on savings to consumers.

Our view: Legislature 2008
03/02/2008 © Florida Today

No one expects bold action from Florida lawmakers heading to Tallahassee for their annual session this week.

The reasons are obvious:

A stagnant economy will force them to cut spending by $3 billion -- $500 million from this year's budget and $2.5 billion from next year's.

That being the case they must find the fairest ways to distribute the pain evenly while protecting priorities from crippling slashes.

Here are our recommendations in four areas of importance to Space Coast citizens:

Taxes

Impacts from property tax reforms approved by voters in January are expected to cost localities $9.3 billion over five years, on top of spending cuts lawmakers will impose to deal with the budget shortfall.

Some in Tallahassee will be pushing for even greater reforms, regardless of their consequences.

The Legislature should begin examining ideas that might have merit and could be put in place when better economic times return.

That includes a proposal to eliminate local school taxes -- which would cut property taxes sharply -- and replace them with a 1-cent sales tax hike.

But this is not the year to jump off the cliff with more hasty tax cuts schemes that suck money from vital services.
Reasonable smaller reforms to make the system more equitable can be pursued, such as giving citizens more power to challenge unfair property appraisals and eliminating special sales tax exemptions or exclusions.

**Education**

Lawmakers have promised to hold education harmless from the estimated $1.5 billion Amendment 1 will divert from schools over five years.

That means plugging the hole with money from other sources, scarce to nonexistent this year.

Gov. Charlie Crist wants to expand gambling revenues and draw on trust funds to shore up K-12.

We think it's shortsighted to drain reserves for recurring costs, as do many legislators. And receipts from new gambling ventures have been slacker than expected.

But schools are likely to see budgets reduced 3 percent to 5 percent this year because of the slumping economy and there's no doubt education will suffer if Amendment 1 cuts get piled on top.

That's why lawmakers must keep their word, find the money, and do it with a better plan than Crist's.

And then there are Florida's universities.

The state's future hinges on having a competitive 21st century workforce to help Florida move beyond a tourism- and agriculture-based economy. A strong university system is critical to making that happen.

But Florida's universities are sinking into mediocrity from too little funding. Dead last in the nation on student-faculty ratio, they're preparing to shut out thousands of deserving students over the next four years because of the crisis.

They should be spared draconian cuts this year. Lawmakers also should work with the Board of Governors to stabilize the system and ensure funding increases when the budget situation improves to keep the door to a quality higher education in Florida open.

**Insurance**
The Legislature enacted some 80 reforms last year meant to bring down unaffordable hurricane insurance rates, and some are starting to bear fruit.

But most homeowners have yet to see the 24 percent reductions promised, and policyholders continue to be dropped. That's why lawmakers should keep the heat on for lower rates.

That includes better tracking by the state to make sure those who hurricane harden their houses get the reductions they're due.

And keeping the pressure on Gov. Charlie Crist and Attorney General Bill McCollum to hold companies who shirk the law to rack up profits liable in court.

Space

NASA's space shuttle fleet retires in two years, taking an estimated 3,500 jobs at Kennedy Space Center with it.

That makes it imperative lawmakers use non-recurring funds to invest in Florida's high technology future, including seed money to help build a commercial launch complex to send astronauts and supplies to the International Space Station.

They should also strongly support a proposal to use Florida Tech and four other universities to turn the spaceport into a hub for alternative energy research through partnerships with Siemens Power Generation and Florida Turbine Technologies.

Such moves would create new jobs and industries and improve Florida's chance of becoming a major player in the 21st century global economy.

Our position: Backing down on change to state's scholarship program delays a needed fix

03/02/2008 © Orlando Sentinel

It's easy to understand why college students and their parents would oppose changing Florida's Bright Futures Scholarship.

After all, the scholarship provides the best students with at least 75 percent of their tuition, even if they can afford college. It's a great deal if you're satisfied with mediocrity.
As long as Florida's tuition rate is tied to Bright Futures, and the Legislature refuses to increase spending, the quality of the state's universities will continue to erode.

Lawmakers know this, but they see Bright Futures as a middle-class entitlement. Indeed, House Speaker Marco Rubio says the scholarship is "the only benefit" middle-class families get. The problem is that Florida's lowest-in-the-country tuition can't sustain a quality university system. When tuition goes up, the cost of Bright Futures goes up, so there is a built-in incentive for lawmakers to oppose tuition hikes. That would be fine if lawmakers would spend the extra money needed to enroll the growing number of students who want to go to college.

University System Chancellor Mark Rosenberg proposed capping Bright Futures and using part of it for students who can't afford college and part of it to give 100 percent tuition for students entering science, technology, engineering or math, disciplines the state desperately needs. He's withdrawn that idea now because, in this tough budget year, he decided this battle could not be won.

But that doesn't mean the problems with Bright Futures have gone away. Lawmakers need to face facts eventually.

Office of the Chancellor

A new chapter in the GOP story
03/02/2008 © Tallahassee Democrat

Our Gov. Charlie Crist and California's Arnold Schwarzenegger have a couple of things in common beyond their alliance in setting stringent standards for greenhouse-gas emissions.

One is that they're both optimists, almost Ronald Reagan-like in their apparent lack of anger. This month's Esquire, staging an extravagant spread on Schwarzenegger, describes the actor who once played Conan the Barbarian as a man who is not just joyful, but who has "figured out that optimism, confidence and joy are what people need from him." And he's incorporated these traits "so deeply into the performance of his job that it doesn't matter if he is performing or not; they're who he is ..."

Surely, this is one thing that Floridians have come to know about Crist in his first 14 months as governor: He is always rooting for things to work out, even in the face of obstacles that would cause Conan to furrow his brow. Crist is upbeat and
unassuming; people say he is a pleasure to be around even if they are privately furious at what isn't happening, what isn't being said or solved.

The other thing Crist and Schwarzenegger have in common is that neither has been fully embraced as a real Republican. Republicans, except for the really real ones, are coming around to his populist ways because Crist is, after all, the governor, with all the power and authority vested therein.

Crist does get credit for almost single-handedly re-imagining his party's place in Florida history, which is a fascinating one. Amazing, really, given how it came from the swamps of nowhere up through World War II to become the dominant force it is today, with a secure hold on politics that it appears it will have for years to come.

This is the speculation of, perhaps among others, David Colburn, author of "From Yellow Dog Democrats to Red State Republicans: Florida and its Politics Since 1940." Colburn, provost emeritus and professor of history at the University of Florida, directs the Askew Institute in Gainesville.

He's also senior adviser to State University System Chancellor Mark Rosenberg, who invited Colburn to provide some verbal CliffsNotes on his book Thursday night for a group of folks who, above all, remain fascinated by politics even as politics can make us dizzy with frustration, skepticism and pessimism.

Colburn, who likes to quote a colleague who said that with the Democratic Party these days "it's every man for himself," says that conversely the GOP has kept a steady eye on the prize. This single-mindedness has altered our state from being a "sleepy, impoverished Southern outpost" in the 1940s — when there were no Republicans in the Legislature — to a state that "represents the political and demographic future of the nation."

The GOP emerged step by step in Florida, said Colburn. The first was when the old, utterly loyal yellow-dog Democrats began to feel "choked until they were blue in the face" by FDR programs that conservative Democrats found too all-encompassing and expensive.

Their disenchantment was an opportunity in waiting for a fledgling GOP that was inching forward by the migration of Midwesterners who had been moderate Taft Republicans back home.

This demographic shift was coupled with the gathering strength of the Cold War, when McCarthyism seemed a reasonable way to fight communism. Soon,
those conservative newcomers were joined by the influx of Cubans who found the GOP stronger on the Cold War than the Democrats.

The senior retirees really started drifting toward the GOP in the 1970s, during the 18-percent "stagflation" of the Carter era. It caused them concern about their fixed incomes and a dread of almost any new taxes.

GOP values

Before long, Colburn said, working-class people who came to Florida for better jobs than they could find in the North found themselves in search of the neighborhoods they were used to. "All they found in Florida were people moving in and moving out," Colburn said. "The new conservative mega-churches became very appealing with their family values, women-in-the-home and anti-abortion positions" — values the GOP shrewdly worked into its political platforms.

"The last piece came with the 1992 redistricting, which ensured Republican victories," Colburn said. State's legislative districts were drawn by strict party lines, with a few bones thrown to minorities who got their own "black blocs," which gave them representation in the Legislature, yet not enough numbers to have any real voice.

Now, the ball is in the hands of a governor who follows the state's most powerful governor ever, Jeb Bush. The office itself simply got a bump in authority when our elected Cabinet system was downsized by constitutional amendment.

Bush governed during good times economically and had his own clear vision, uninterrupted by populism. The fact that a substantial number of voters often disagreed with him and the now GOP-dominant Legislature had an unintended consequence: We're now a state governed by constitutional amendments — with no end in sight — making things harder for those who follow.

Crist comes into office in a withering economy, with a demographic that Colburn calculates is 30 percent native Floridians, 18 percent from a foreign country, and the rest from other states — many of them retirees who aren't exactly engaged in what Florida's future holds. Crist has been lucky so far: no hurricanes to render our state bankrupt. Yet history shows that he is going to need a powerful gift of leadership to wrangle a harmonic convergence out of our testy political and shaky economic climate.

To wrest agreement on some critical issues that, just now, seem stubbornly resistant to solution will take vision, intelligence, an attention to detail and an
openness to the possibility that bipartisanship can sometimes keep both sides from looking inept.

Optimism? It can't hurt.

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**Florida A&M University**

FAMU president to hold "town-hall" meetings
03/03/2008 © Tallahassee Democrat

Florida A&M University President James Ammons will host four forums or "town-hall" type meetings today for faculty, staff and students in Lee Hall.

The meetings are scheduled from: 9 a.m.-9:45 a.m. for staff; 10 a.m.-10:45 a.m. for managers; 11 a.m.-11:45 a.m. for faculty and 4 p.m. to 4:45 p.m. for students.

Return to tallahassee.com for more details.

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Report praises FAMU's strides
03/01/2008 © St. Petersburg Times

Florida A&M University is removing the biggest stain on its reputation.

The state task force formed to oversee the embattled university's finances all but finalized a report Friday that says FAMU has made big strides in shoring up its financial and operational controls.

On the fiscal front, the new report is the latest in a series of increasingly positive signs for FAMU, which was put on probation last year by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, in part because of concerns about its financial stability.

"In those areas, their progress has been significant (and) appears to be sustainable," said Lynn Pappas, a Jacksonville lawyer who chairs the task force. "I think those are very important steps to restoring the credibility in their financial and operational control areas."

The report echoes glowing comments from state auditors and regional accreditors in December. And it offers even more hope that FAMU's probation will soon end.
"I think it's important that when the report is read, people understand the university is not where it was when the task force began," said FAMU president James Ammons.

The report will be tweaked over the weekend and delivered to Gov. Charlie Crist and key lawmakers Monday.

The Florida Board of Governors formed the task force in the spring, after FAMU received another scathing state audit despite assurances from top officials that it had turned a corner. That audit listed 35 findings, including $2.7-million worth of missing items, $1.8-million worth of missing ticket receipts and off-balance ledgers for activity, health and athletic fees.

After becoming president in July, Ammons and his administrative team put together an action plan to address fiscal concerns. And by year's end, oversight bodies were giving FAMU credit.

In December, the latest state audit - FAMU's best in years - concluded the university had made "significant improvement" in financial management. And while the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools decided that month to keep FAMU on probation, its officials publicly declared during a site visit that FAMU had made "remarkable progress."

The Board of Governors task force came to the same conclusion, as did Accretive Solutions Inc., the company it hired to evaluate FAMU's plan.

Among other changes, the task force found FAMU had installed a "robust" internal auditing system so it can better watchdog itself, said Pappas, a board member. "That is something that appears to be running certainly at a much, much higher plane that it has in the past," she said. "That is a very important finding."

The task force still has areas to review in coming months, including contracts and grants and information technology.

The group will disband in June, the same month the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools will decide whether to keep FAMU on probation.

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**Florida Atlantic University**

FAU cuts back on expenses for Tallahassee trip
Supporters of Florida Atlantic University will make their annual trek to Tallahassee this week for a scaled back, but some say crucial, lobbying effort called FAU Legislative Days.

For years, universities throughout the state have sent contingents to the Capitol to try to persuade the Legislature to support pet projects and increase funding. But it's a bleak year for the state budget, with a potential $2 billion in cuts this year. Florida State University and the University of Florida are canceling legislative lobbying days because of costs and sour moods.

FAU officials say they're cutting back on the event, planned for Tuesday and Wednesday. They are sending fewer people and asking some to pay their own way. But they think the event, which coincides with a similar lobbying effort from the county's elected officials called Palm Beach County Days, is too important to miss altogether.

"We've got to go up there and tell them how concerned we are about the budget cuts and show them the good work we're doing," said Norman Tripp, chairman of the FAU board of trustees.

FAU officials want to be sure they get $3.3 million to continue a joint medical program with the University of Miami. The largest request is $83 million for student advising and other efforts to improve the school's low graduation rate.

The lobbying event costs about $1,000 per person, spokeswoman Kristine McGrath said. The university is sending fewer people this year, but is paying for President Frank Brogan and three staff members to attend.

The FAU Foundation is sending two alumni relations staff members, student government is using its budget to send President Tony Teixiera and Vice President Abe Cohen. And some trustees and alumni are going at their own expense.

FAU has traditionally used revenues from vending machines to pay for trustees' travel and food. But the university is using much of the concessions budget to pay a $578,000 severance package to a former administrator.

"We weren't going to go unless we paid our own way. At the end of the day the dollars are that tight," Tripp said.

He said most of the 13 trustees plan to make the trip.
Even though FSU is a few blocks away from the state Capitol, officials at that school said the event typically costs them $8,000 to $9,000. They paid for food, a bus to transport the marching band, balloons, draped tables, posters, invitations and even a circus act.

"This session, the first week off the bat, [the Legislature is] cutting out of our budgets for this current year," said Kathleen Daly, FSU’s assistant vice president for governmental relations. "To juxtapose that with bands playing, balloons flying and a circus act just didn't feel appropriate."

At UF, the annual Gator Days cost $10,000 to $20,000, spokesman Steve Orlando said.

"It's a nice thing to do, but when you're looking to cut expenses, that seemed like something we can live without this year," he said.

But state Sen. Jeremy Ring, D-Parkland, said he thinks FAU is making the right decision to attend.

"The lobbying effort is more important now than ever," said Ring, vice chairman of the Senate Higher Education Committee. "They've got to be in front of their legislators. Every story is an important story to tell."

**Demand will increase for 'cybersecurity' professionals:** TCPalm.com
03/01/2008 © Jupiter Courier

The terrorist attacks in 2001, an increasing business reliance on the Internet, the high-profile thefts of laptops and customer data and the cyber-attacks on the Department of Defense and Estonia last year have put a new emphasis on the extensive and high-level risks that will face us in the future.

Those risks, in turn, are putting a new emphasis on the role of security in our society.

In addition to law enforcement and security guards to protect physical property, governments and companies must have people to secure the data they produce and collect.
These are the cybersecurity guards of the information age. As the profession is being defined and refined, people in the cybersecurity field not only rise through the information technology (IT) ranks. They are people with IT backgrounds who come from law enforcement, contract security, military, engineering and other fields.

And colleges and universities are starting to offer classes to fill jobs in the growing cybersecurity field. Many of these students have years of training ahead. But those who succeed will be able to reach for the highest levels of responsibility as companies adapt to the information age.

**Cyber Security Institute at Indian River Community College**

Indian River Community College just started a group, or cohort, of students in the Cyber Security Institute this fall. Graduates of the new program will receive an associate's degree in computer information technology but their electives are geared to computer security.

The students attend regular hours in the Institute so they can work and attend school and graduate on time.

Because they all move through the program together as a cohort, they develop professional relationships, he said. And they can work on in-depth projects that span two or three semesters, something they could not do taking classes semester at a time.

When they graduate with associate's degrees, some will go to work in an information technology job. Others will go on to study cybersecurity at the university level, said Randy Gibson, director of the Cyber Security Institute.

"A lot of people in cybersecurity jobs right now come in sideways," said Gibson, who came into the field as an engineer. They may come from law enforcement or mathematics or engineering.

"But there's a very strong push in the state right now for computer security professionals," he said. Especially in areas with a high concentration of IT and security companies.

"The Treasure Coast is an up-and-coming technology area," said Gibson. "But we are not to the level of Orlando or Miami or even Palm Beach yet."
That will change over the next five to 10 years, he noted. That is when his current crop of students will be graduating with bachelor's or master's degrees in computer security fields.

To reach the upper levels of the cybersecurity profession, students will need higher-level degrees, said Gibson. "Most of our students will go on in school."

They need professional-level understanding of the things they will be responsible for. "For example, they may have to be able to read medical security regulations and understand it from a legal perspective," he said. "What we do is to give them a good foundation and send them on for more education. They will be continuing their education the rest of their lives."

Maybe they will continue their education at Florida Atlantic University (FAU).

Center for Cryptology and Information Security (CCIS) at Florida Atlantic University

In the Department of Mathematics at FAU's Boca Raton campus is the four-year-old Center for Cryptology and Information Security (CCIS).

Much of the cybersecurity field is a fusing of computer science and mathematics, said Rainer Steinwandt, associate director and co-editor of Journal of Mathematical Cryptology.

Data encryption and security is a huge and growing field, said Steinwandt.

New companies pop up daily that need to have data encrypted, said Steinwandt. They do that with software and "keys" developed by cryptologists using mathematics.

"You use the Internet daily and you assume everything is safe," he said. "You can send your credit card number over the Internet and you see the little lock at the bottom of the browser. That means your information is encrypted."

If you look at the issue of encryption, you have two components, he said. "You have the stuff you read about in the press like viruses and data theft."

"And then you have a big mathematical component," said Steinwandt.

Information security professionals use math to tackle other digital data issues, he said.
"A typical issue is authentication," he said. "When you are doing online banking, you want to be sure that the entity you are online with is really your bank." You need tools to authenticate that you are online with your bank.

"Every country wants a passport that cannot be forged so terrorists cannot come into the country on a fraudulent passport," said Steinwandt. "So some are adding a digital signature that is created mathematically. It is something that can be verified."

Yet another concern of these cybersecurity mathematicians is confidentiality, he said. People want to be able to store medical records for a lifetime with only the medical professionals who need them getting access to their medical data.

They want digital access control, he said. Cryptologists use math to control access to data with digital "keys."

Cryptology is not the same as during the 1940's. To work in cryptology today, you will probably need at least a master's degree, said Steinwandt. You must have a mature and stable understanding of the principles of mathematics which comes from years of experience in the field, he noted.

Some of Steinwandt's students will go on to receive doctorate's. Some will stay in academia to continue their research and teach the coming generations of cybersecurity professionals.

And, Steinwandt said, others will go on to the government or corporate worlds.

Maybe as a Chief Security Officer.

Chief Security Officer

A new job description in the last few years, especially in large, public corporations, is a new C-level job, the Chief Security Officer or CSO, said Bill Hill, president of Consulting and Investigations at Wackenhut G4S in Palm Beach Gardens. Like the Chief Financial Officer before it, the CSO is being added near the top of the organizational chart.

"That person is responsible for not only physical security but also for information security," he said. Any security-related issue in the corporation comes

"These people are coming from many different areas," said Hill. For example, someone with a law enforcement or government background who is also experienced in information security could find their to a top position like this.
"It's very new and it shows to what level security has risen as an integral part of the corporation," Hill said.

There is a new emphasis on the role of security in the last few years. And the security field has expanded greatly with the need to secure critical infrastructure, ports, transportation and food and water supplies, he said.

Corporations, governments and schools are now focusing on security in the information age. And they are creating new professionals who can secure not only our facilities but our information, too.

Florida Gulf Coast University

Editorial: Give journalism program a chance
03/03/2008 © Ft. Myers News-Press

Florida Gulf Coast University should do everything it can to start its new journalism program.

The bachelor’s degree in journalism, along with a master’s in math and environmental sciences, were put on hold because of budget constraints.

None had been approved yet by the FGCU board of trustees or the state Board of Governors. They are just in their beginning stages.

We passionately advocate for this program not only out of self-interest but out of a national interest in having well-trained, responsible social communicators telling our communities’ stories and holding government accountable.

Our Founding Fathers wisely sought in the First Amendment to incorporate a commercial interest — the press — because it could be the eyes and ears of the people in keeping them informed and keeping public officials honest.

Much has changed since the late 18th century, and many of the stories we read in the press about journalism are troubling — buyouts, mergers, the end of long-standing companies, and concerns over quality in the digital age, among others.

Yet these are also times of opportunity for prospective journalists who wish to use new tools, such as, video and audio, to tell stories in multiple platforms (i.e., online, newspapers, radio, television).
There are many changes in the look and feel of media outlets, yet there is still great passion over such things as First Amendment journalism, consumer advocacy, beat reporting, and feature stories about you or your neighbors. Numerous examples exist locally, included The News-Press and news-press.com.

The average citizen, more than ever, can tell stories, too, through the Web, through blogs and posting photos and video.

We are in a state of flux, yet never before has there ever been such a demand for information.

The need for people who can report and analyze in ethical and fair ways is greater than ever.

Journalism 101 professors often tell students that the only thing they have is their credibility. And that’s still important.

May FGCU reconsider its decision and allow the journalism program to start and flourish.

**FGCU provost search narrowed to 5**
03/03/2008 © Ft. Myers News-Press

Five administrators from five states were named Sunday as finalists for FGCU provost, a job that’s being expanded from top academic to second-in-command.

A Florida Gulf Coast University committee spent the weekend interviewing a dozen semifinalists, ultimately choosing candidates from New Jersey, Rhode Island, Colorado, Illinois and Pennsylvania for full interviews later this month.

FGCU’s past provosts have led the university’s academic division. On his second day on the job in November, though, President Wilson Bradshaw asked Provost Bonnie Yegidis to step down so he could hire someone with expertise in all facets of campus operations, essentially acting as president when he is out of town.

Sunday’s committee deliberations ended swiftly when 11 members made almost identical choices on their top five picks, leaving little room for debate.

“If you know what you are looking for, the decision can be clear-cut,” said committee chairwoman Donna Price Henry, dean of the college of arts and sciences.
Despite their geographic spread, four of the five finalists share a common thread with careers in the fields of math and science.

The five finalists are:

- Jeremy Haefner: Associate vice chancellor for research and innovation at University of Colorado at Colorado Springs.

Haefner also serves as dean of the College of Engineering and Applied Science, as well as principal investigator with the Partnership in Innovative Preparation for Educators and Students.

Haefner earned a bachelor’s in mathematics from the University of Iowa, and master’s and doctorate degrees in mathematics from the University of Wisconsin.

- Inessa Levi: Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Western Illinois University.

Levi previously was associate dean for research and graduate studies, and acting chairwoman of the mathematics department, at University of Louisville.

Levi holds master’s and doctoral degrees in mathematics from University of Canterbury in New Zealand.

- Robert Prezant: Dean of the College of Science and Mathematics at Montclair State University in New Jersey.

Prezant also is a professor of biology, and previously was dean of mathematics and natural sciences at City University of New York.

Prezant earned a bachelor’s in biology from Adelphi University, a master’s in biology from Northeastern University and a doctorate in marine studies from University of Delaware.

- Ronald Toll: Vice president for academic affairs and dean of faculty at Lebanon Valley College in Pennsylvania.

Toll, who also maintains his position as biology professor, previously was dean of natural sciences and mathematics at University of Central Arkansas.

Toll earned an associate’s in biology from Union College, bachelor’s in zoology from Rutgers University and a doctorate from the University of Miami.
• V.K. Unni: Vice president for academic affairs at Bryant University in Rhode Island.

Unni previously worked as dean of the College of Business and Public Administration at California State University at Bakersfield.

Unni has a master’s of business administration from Atlanta University and a doctorate in business administration from Louisiana Tech University.

Next, the committee will conduct more interviews with these candidates and narrow the list to three. Their names will be forwarded to Bradshaw who will select one.
The new provost is expected to begin work July 1.

Spring break not all about partying for many FGCU students

03/02/2008 © Naples Daily News

Spring Break kicks off this week at Florida Gulf Coast University, but it won’t be all wet T-shirts and drinking contests.

While partying and spring break seem to go hand-in-hand, especially in Southwest Florida, many students use the time to catch up on sleep, do some homework, make some money and even help out those in need.

FGCU students are launching or continuing several spring break alternative events that include working with the underprivileged in Haiti or helping with tornado recovery in Tennessee.

“There are a lot of little service projects going on,” said senior biology major Bridget Regan, who is organizing her own alternative spring break.

Regan, along with a half dozen others, is volunteering at the Guadalupe Center of Immokalee for the spring break week. The students will be helping out in the soup kitchen and the education center.

“We wanted to start a tradition for student government going an alternative spring break,” Regan said. “We wanted to start small this year and grow in the following years.”
Unfortunately, one of FGCU’s alternative spring break traditions won’t happen this year because of an injury to a teacher.

For the past seven years, Arts & Sciences associate professor Ingrid Martinez-Rico took students to the Dominican Republic for a service project to help children working in the streets.

Martinez-Rico was in a car accident near the interchange of Interstate 75 and Alico Road that put her in a coma. Because of the unfortunate event, the trip to the Dominican Republic has been postponed to the end of April.

“Still going this year helps continue the FGCU relationship over there,” said Richard Coughlin, an associate professor with the College of Arts & Sciences who is planning on participating in this year’s trip.

Even with many travel opportunities, Spring Break can be just some time off from school.

Junior public relations major Ashlyn Gibbs will do her class readings and apply for internships.

“A pretty laid back spring break,” Gibbs said. “I’ll pretty much be catching up on sleep and working.”

Freshman forensic science major Philip Daugherty is retreating to his hometown of Vero Beach, Fla. for a little rest and relaxation.

“We’re just going to the beach and stuff like that,” Daugherty said.

Editorial: Use FGCU inaugural for needy
03/01/2008 © Ft. Myers News-Press

Good for Florida Gulf Coast University President Wilson Bradshaw for putting the money that would have been spent on party favors at his formal inauguration this month into a scholarship fund instead.

But why stop there? As reported in The News-Press, some other colleges have decided to cancel presidential inaugurations altogether and divert the money saved elsewhere.
In the FGCU case, that would save $75,000, or five times as much as the party favors cost. Each $15,000 could cover in-state tuition for a needy student. That's five students right there.

We would love to see the resulting fund named for Bradshaw, as was done with the president of the University of Albany in New York in 2005, where the donation kicked off a highly successful scholarship drive.

Lee County is a great place to raise money for good causes, as witnessed by the perennial success of United Way and of FGCU itself in fundraising. People would love to jump on a bandwagon propelled by such an offer.

Are we being killjoys? After all, the inauguration of a new university president, like the inauguration of a president of the United States, is a chance for the new leader to inspire his campus and his community by setting goals for an institution that should be central to our identity. As ritual, inaugurals are valuable celebrations; we all feed off pomp and ceremony.

But these are trying times. The real estate bust and the impending budget crunches for universities and other public institutions - as well as tuition hikes - require a new kind of inspiration. Austerity can be inspiring, too, when times are tight. Bradshaw, who relied on need-based financial aid and jobs at the post office and at a shoe store to get through college, obviously has a keen interest in seeing other kids receive such assistance.

The inaugural set for March 28 will last for two hours. A scholarship fund could last forever.
Among Florida's 28 community colleges, Tallahassee Community College remains the largest feeder institution for neighboring Florida State University.

A recent report showed that TCC accounted for more than half of the state's 1,753 students who transferred to FSU in 2007. With 834 transfers, TCC led the way for the sixth consecutive year. According to FSU, the number includes summer transfers who remained at the university into the fall semester.

“The TCC-FSU partners program works because FSU puts their best energies into it,” said Bill Law, president of Tallahassee Community College, “From Dr. Wetherell to the frontline staff everyone is devoted to the success of the student.”

TCC's 834 transfers is also a 3.7 percent increase over the 2006 total of 803. This past year also marked the fourth consecutive year that TCC's number of transfers to FSU increased.

New College of Florida
No Articles Today
University of Central Florida

A bridge across cultures: One man's journey from India to America inspires a generous effort to promote understanding.
03/02/2008 © Orlando Sentinel

It took years for Anil Deshpande to feel comfortable in the United States, which he now calls home. But in today's world of business, corporations don't have years to wait around for employees from other countries to acculturate. And many American companies are hiring Indians as the trend toward outsourcing jobs to cut costs continues.

Deshpande, who went on to become co-founder of Park Square Homes, an Orlando building firm, wants to help ease this transition period for Indians and Americans alike.

So he and his wife, Chitra Deshpande, have given an initial donation of $100,000 to the University of Central Florida to start the India Program, a series of seminars and workshops meant mostly for Americans -- individuals and
corporations -- who are interested in learning about Indian culture, as well as Indians who want to reconnect with their roots.

The program will focus on Indian culture and include religion, business, politics, science and philosophy. It will also encourage scholarship and research, and work with partners worldwide to bring prominent speakers to UCF.

Deshpande hopes the program can eventually grow into a minor in India studies at UCF. India, with some 100 dialects and many religions, "is a complicated country even for Indians," says Deshpande.

His wife, Chitra, says the program "will give a true perception of India."

They both know outsourcing is not a popular topic among Americans -- especially with the U.S. economy entering a recession. He hopes the program will help ease tensions by building a better understanding of these workers abroad.

"Today, we live in a global world," says Anil Deshpande. "We cannot arbitrarily stop those forces. India cannot be ignored. What we can do is educate ourselves so we can better understand each other."

For example, he says, in America it is customary to go out for a meal after a business deal. In India, "it would be quite natural and normal for the executive to invite everyone to his house."

In America, an employee calls his boss by his or her first name. In India, it is customary to use Mr. or Mrs.

"It is not about being right or wrong," says Deshpande. "It is about understanding custom -- on both sides."

The program will be part of the Department of Political Science in the College of Sciences.

Roger Handberg, department chair, says the new program provides an important expansion of the department.

"There can be no serious global discussion without considering India," he says.

Deshpande, one of four siblings, grew up in Mumbai. His father worked on the shipping docks. The family lived in a two-room tenant house, each room measuring 10-by-10. This was middle class by Indian standards of the time.
In India, Deshpande studied engineering "to get a good job," he says.

His only preparation for American culture was a one-week course given in Mumbai -- then called Bombay -- at the U.S. Consulate office.

He had learned English in India from textbooks, but was unfamiliar with certain American phrases. He was puzzled when a UF professor asked him if he was "pulling his leg."

"People had a hard time understanding me, and I had a hard time understanding them," he says.

Deshpande, who sold Park Square Homes a few years ago to his partners, now runs Deshpande Incorporated, an investment company. He is a former board member of the Hindu temple in Casselberry and current chairman of the Asian Cultural Association. He helped start the Orlando chapter of The Indus Entrepreneurs, a Silicon Valley initiative.

Sharad Mehta, who owns an apparel-printing company in Orlando, has known Deshpande and his wife for decades.

"They always have been there for the community," Mehta says.

In India, Deshpande helped finance the construction of a school in a rural area, and purchased ambulances for a low-income housing unit that is near where he grew up.

Locally, for the past three years he has donated $10,000 annually to UCF’s Global Perspectives summer scholarship to the London School of Economics and Political Science.

**Developer experimenting with green roof**
03/01/2008 © Ft. Myers News-Press

The Bonita Bay Group is known for its lush gardens and expert landscaping. But at Shadow Wood Preserve, its garden is going to new heights. And that height is about 18 feet off the ground.

A garden planted on the rooftop of a metal maintenance shed there in March is now thriving. It’s a much greener picture than the one they planted there in 2003.
That earlier experiment taught them it won't work during our dry winter climate without some irrigation. So this time a watering system was put in place. Large cisterns capture water when it rains. That water is then pumped to the roof where it gently spews from purple piping up there, on a timed watering system.

"It looks better and better all the time," said Tim Denison, environmental scientist with Johnson Engineering, who checked up on the rooftop plants this week.

The rooftop garden is an experiment that Bonita Bay is doing for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. The DEP wanted to find out how effective green roofs are and what plants, watering system, filtration, and soil do the best job.

"The DEP is partnering with Bonita Bay to test out techniques," said Kim Fikoski, senior environmental affairs manager for Bonita Bay Properties. "They need in the field testing to measure the effectiveness."

The 2,400-square foot roof at Shadow Wood Preserve has hardy plants on top including: common aloe, crown of thorns, beach sunflower, beach purslane, muhly grass, rain lilies, purple lovegrass, blue flag iris, and dwarf spartina (cordgrass).

The study includes looking at the nutrients that run off the roof and comparing it to nutrients that run off a normal roof. It will also look at the temperature differences both over and under the plants.

The outcome of the experiment could lead to more green roofs in the future.

"The Bonita Bay Group is exploring the opportunity to use this on future projects," Fikoski said. "We think a better application is big box stores like Wal-Mart."

Eric Livingston, chief of bureau of watershed management for Florida's Department of Environmental Protection, said the roof at Shadow Wood Preserve was the first test roof in the state.

"This is new to Florida, but has been used in Germany for 50 years," Livingston said.

He said previous green roofs had been in more temperate climates and the DEP needed to learn how to design one for Florida's climate.
The project here is giving them lots of needed information.

"This was an experimental green roof," Livingston said. "We learned, number one, in Florida a green roof must have irrigation, and number two we know what plants to use here in Florida."

There is now a second green roof on the student union building at the University of Central Florida in Orlando. Livingston said the knowledge learned will help the state as it revises its stormwater management plan. He said in the future developers could receive stormwater credit for adding a green roof to a project.

"Green roofs are an important stormwater management practice that will help reduce stormwater flooding and water quality problems," Livingston said. "It is also a way to save energy. This was our first in Florida to help us learn how to design and build them."

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**University of Florida**

**500 UF students makeover school**
03/03/2008 © Gainesville Sun

With a few strokes of a paintbrush, the gray classroom walls of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Elementary School transformed into colorful canvases.

Through an initiative and collaboration of about 500 University of Florida students and members of the Gainesville community, the vision behind the inaugural launch of Project Makeover: Rawlings Edition became a reality in just three days.

Project leaders from UF joined forces with the Alachua County School Board's Volunteer Program and Rawlings Elementary principal Emery Bishop to organize the renovation project that enhanced the school's learning environment and created a positive atmosphere for its largely low-income student body.

Joshua Jackson, a 21-year-old political science major at UF and director of Project Makeover, said members of Greek sororities and fraternities, various campus organizations and individual volunteers from UF and the community participated in the project, which lasted from Friday afternoon to Sunday evening. They painted hallways and classrooms, planted a butterfly garden and landscaped areas at Rawlings, located on the east side of Gainesville.
The purpose of Project Makeover is to equalize the disparity in public education today, which often depends on the area of the school, Jackson said.

"A lot of (UF) students haven't been out past Main Street," he said. "They have never been to Rawlings, so they don't know the issues in the community they are in. This has helped them open their eyes and see what's going on in Gainesville, and not just on Archer and 34th."

In addition to the renovation aspect of Project Makeover, the group will present more than 1,000 books, donated by Scholastic and Books-a-Go-Go, to the school's media center, classrooms and students, he said. It also will present a check for more than $1,000 to the school's music program.

Dream Team, a committee in charge of collecting funds for the donation, will present both the check and the books today while unveiling the makeover at a pep rally for students, which will take place at 7:15 a.m.

Lorie Settltn, art director of Project Makeover, said she was excited for today's revelation, which will be a surprise for Rawlings students. She said she could not wait to see the looks on the children's faces as they see the transformation.

Settltn, a 22-year old fine arts major and education minor at UF, was in charge of coordinating the design of murals painted on hallway and classroom walls.

"There is definitely a bright pallet," she said, "and it will definitely wake up the kids in the morning.

Kelley Kostamo, partnership coordinator for the School Board, said the makeover is a significant collaboration between UF students and the Alachua County schools. Kostamo said this project is different from most volunteer projects she usually sets up for the university because of the number of students and organizations involved.

"We have had several adult volunteers who have come by," she said. "and that's one of the things that they all talked about - how amazing these college kids are for donating their time and how their energy level is."

Russell Mercer, a 19-year-old UF student and member of the Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity, was one of the volunteers who helped paint the fourth-grade mural, the theme of which was Florida history.
Kerry Cerwin, 20, who represented the Delta Zeta sorority as well as the Florida Leadership Academy, also painted the fourth-grade mural. She said painting the walls was a fun way to express herself while giving back to the community.

Bishop, who has served as principal at Rawlings for more than two years and worked as an administrator for 11 years, said although he has been involved in similar undertakings throughout his administrative career, Project Makeover has been the most successful.

He said while students contributed their time and physical efforts, local business also donated materials to realize the project.

"When the two directors talked about having 500 students, in the back of my mind I'm thinking 100 over the course of a weekend," Bishop said.

"We had almost 100 in the first four hours, and so it's a real testament to the university volunteer group and anybody who is out here helping."

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**Pulitzer winner to speak at UF**

03/03/2008 © Gainesville Sun

Best known as a Pulitzer Prize-winning historian, David McCullough is also a bit of a resurrectionist. At 74, McCullough has spent the better part of his career breathing new life into dead men and women.

John Adams, George Washington and Harry Truman are just a few of the historical figures who've been given the Lazarus treatment at the hands of McCullough, who will speak Tuesday night at the University of Florida.

McCullough is heralded as one of the masters of a seemingly simple craft: Making the most influential figures of American history seem interesting.

"We don't have to try to humanize them," McCullough said of historical subjects in a recent phone interview with The Sun. "They were human. All you have to do is make them as interesting and as human as they really were. You don't have to conjure up little tricks and devices, and I think it requires people who want to write to be read, who want to teach to inspire, not just to get through a lesson plan."

McCullough has won the Pulitzer Prize twice, once for his book "Truman" (1993) and again for "John Adams" (2002).
For the last four years, McCullough has been working on a massive project to bring "Adams" to life in an ambitious television series. The HBO version of his book will begin airing in seven parts on March 16.

"Those who see the film are going to see the 18th century in a way they've never seen it before," said McCullough, who helped edit the scripts and has seen the series in its entirety. "They're going to see people with dirty fingernails and bad teeth. They're going to see what being tarred and feathered was really like. It wasn't a high school prank; it was torture, and people died from it. They're going to see what it was to have a child stricken with smallpox or to be inoculated for smallpox. And a lot of it's hard to watch because it's gruesome."

The Adams series, co-produced by Tom Hanks, seems a logical extension of McCullough's approach to history. Its emphasis on realism of the founding era, in all of its bloodiness and dirtiness, continues a fight against what McCullough describes as the ongoing sanitization of American history. The droves of oil paintings that line museum walls, depicting the founders in their satin britches and ruffled shirts, have left the impression that the founders were, to put it bluntly, sissies, McCullough said. In his conversations with Paul Giamatti and Laura Linney, who play John and Abigail Adams respectively, McCullough stressed that the founders weren't wimps.

"They were very tough people, very strong, resilient and with phenomenal fortitude and by no means were they softies or fops or characters in a costume pageant," McCullough said.

McCullough has carried his message about the importance of accurate historical knowledge to dozens of colleges and universities. His appearance at UF is, however, no coincidence. He's speaking at the opening of the Graham Center for Public Service, a new center on UF's campus named for former Sen. Bob Graham. McCullough and Graham are family, sharing three grandchildren. McCullough's son, Bill McCullough, and Graham's daughter, Cissy Graham, have been married nearly 20 years.

Apart from the family connections, McCullough has a keen interest in the founding mission of the Graham Center. The center is designed to prepare UF students and young Floridians for lives in public service, emphasizing civics education as an integral part of college and grade school curriculums. To that end, the center is undertaking programs that aim to improve the way teachers approach these subjects in classrooms.
"We've been raising for about 25-30 years generations of young Americans who are by and large historically illiterate," McCullough said. "I've lectured at well over 100 colleges and universities in the last 10 years, and I know what I'm talking about; I know these young people. It's not that they're stupid or that they're not appealing as human beings. They just don't know anything because they haven't learned anything about who they are, how we came to be the way we are, why we are the way we are and what those before us did to make it possible. They don't know, and they're pitifully ignorant about geography. You can't understand history if you don't know geography."

The prevailing importance of history, McCullough says, is that we will all be judged by it some day.

"History isn't just knowing what happened before you came on the scene. It's that to a very major degree, to be sure. But a sense of history also gives one the realization that we too are part of history and that we too are going to be judged by history in time to come," McCullough said. "And how are we going to measure up? And that's a motivation that people ought to have instilled in them from an early age. Not just how do you look today or what's in the newspaper about you tomorrow, but how is your role, your offering to society or to your ideals or to your family? How's that going to look 100 years from now."

Learning to serve, lead
03/03/2008 © St. Petersburg Times

Five Florida governors, two U.S. senators and a Pulitzer Prize-winning historian will gather this week at a new University of Florida center that is designed to teach students a rare skill: How to serve the public.

The Bob Graham Center for Public Service was created in part by a $1.5-million gift from its namesake, who is a former U.S. senator and governor, and from family members. Students already are taking courses and working toward a "certificate in public service."

"This is the educational training ground for a great number of people who are going to be in leadership in the state," said interim center director Walter Rosenbaum, referring to the University of Florida.

The new center is designed to teach those students about the ethics, communications skills and historical background they will need if they choose careers in elected office or other public service. Through teaching and research,
the center will focus on leadership, North American and Latin American affairs, and homeland security.

Beginning today and continuing through Wednesday, the grand opening will feature two-time Pulitzer winner David McCullough, author of Truman and John Adams; Harvard University professor Joseph S. Nye; former governors Graham, Claude Kirk, Reuben Askew, Buddy McKay and Wayne Mixson; and U.S. Sens. Chuck Hagel, R-Neb. and Jay Rockefeller, D-West Va.

Rosenbaum said the center has developed undergraduate and master's degree programs in public policy and hopes to obtain funding to offer them soon.

It also has worked with other departments to fashion courses teaching such topics as the ethics of public life and how to prepare a briefing on an important issue for a member of Congress.

"We want to make a difference in the quality of life in Florida," said Rosenbaum, who also is professor emeritus of political science.

Would a Young Republican be welcomed at this center named after a loyal Democrat?

Absolutely, said Rosenbaum. If the center became partisan, "our credibility would very quickly disappear."

"That's a little different from saying we shouldn't be controversial," he added.

Graham, 71, was governor from 1979 to 1986, a U.S. senator from 1986 through 2005, and he ran for president in 2004.

Go to www.graham.centers.ufl.edu/ for a schedule of the events this week at the University of Florida.

Bob's back at UF
03/02/2008 © Gainesville Sun

When he was still a columnist for the Miami Herald, Al Burt once wrote about a "cherubic freshman" who ran for the Honor Court at the University of Florida.

Continue to 2nd paragraph "He handed out cards," Burt recalled. "On one side he listed his name and candidacy. On the other he declared, 'I hate politics.' " Later,
when the young man ran for chancellor of the Honor Court, Burt said, he put up campaign posters depicting, not his own "fresh-faced" image, but rather that of "a bearded old man: Abraham Lincoln."

Well, Bob Graham always did love a good gimmick. By some accounts, his now famous "workdays" ranks among the most effective gimmicks in modern American politics. It certainly helped convinced skeptical Florida voters that this millionaire from Miami was one indeed of them.

And, clearly, whatever may have been the root of his self-professed loathing of politics in 1955, Graham got over it. He lost his race for Honor Court, but subsequent elections would take him to the Florida Legislature, governor's mansion and U.S. Senate. Only the White House proved too high a hurdle.

Graham graduated from UF in 1959 with a degree in history. And after nearly half a century in politics he's come home, as all good Gators must come home.

This week is the grand opening of the Graham Center for Public Service. The center's ambitious mission, as Graham puts it, is nothing less than to "reinvigorate citizenship." To "save democracy from the apathy and indifference that would kill it."

It is no longer only cherubic freshmen who hate politics. Fear and loathing of the democratic process is these days widespread and deeply ingrained.

Graham's new center is housed in the brand new Pugh Hall, which, appropriately, is located right next door to Dauer Hall. Manning Dauer was the legendary UF political science professor who gave Florida its first reality-based reapportionment plan, which broke the back of the rural Pork Chop Gang and made it possible for urban upstarts like Bob Graham to change the political ethic in Tallahassee.

Of course, Graham never really left the university. Throughout his career he would return, again and again. To pursue his passion for Florida history with his mentor, Sam Proctor. To grin and bear lampooning by irreverent law students at the annual Homecoming skits. And, naturally, to cheer on the Gators.

I recall watching him descend the stands in Florida Field one afternoon to enthusiastic cheers that would make Charlie Crist envious. Taking the homage in stride with a grin and a wave.

Of course, Jimmy Buffett was walking with him, but I'm pretty sure the crowd appreciated Gov. Graham's presence as well.
And it is entirely appropriate that Graham would return to UF in an educator's role. I don't recall ever hearing Graham referred to as "the people's governor," although he has registered Cristlike popularity ratings in his career. But Al Burt once dubbed him "the teacher-politician." He's been tagged "pedantic," "professorial," "eggheadish," "dweebish" and that most feared of all (for politicians at least) superlative, "intellectual."

As a reporter I used to dread the challenge of capturing the essence of an actual Graham quote. Because he was a chief executive who was loath to complete a thought in six words if he could cram in 60.

If Ralph Turlington specialized in incomplete, very nearly incoherent utterances, run-on (and on and on and on) sentences were Bob Graham's oratorical weapons of choice. And he always spoke slowly and carefully, as though each word were being meticulously weighed and measured for merit.

And so perhaps his White House run was doomed from the outset. If ever a candidate was utterly unsuited for "sound bite" national campaigning it was Bob Graham.

The Graham Center seeks to reinvigorate the democratic process by promoting civics education in the schools, honing the leadership skills of UF students and stimulating public dialogue through an ongoing series of lectures and public forums.

In an era of unyielding partisan warfare and made-for-TV politicians who think governing is all about tax cuts, focus groups and wedge issues, a little honest dialogue and a back-to-the-basics approach to citizenship surely can't hurt.

In a way, Bob Graham began to lay the foundation for his center in Tallahassee on a painfully frigid January day in 1979. On the occasion of his first inaugural speech, he recalled those who forged a modern state out of the swampy wilderness, and then called for a renewal of the "Florida dream."

"The barriers we face are equally challenging," he said. "For they are not barriers of nature, they are barriers of the soul.

"Ignorance, isolation, loneliness, selfishness, fear, desperation, distrust, an absence of commitment, a feeling of helplessness in controlling our own destinies. They are the most imposing, the most bewildering barriers..."
If that sounds uncomfortably like a description of the modern American political wasteland, then surely a recommitment to citizenship and civics is long past due.

**UF Could Cut 3,000 Undergrads**  
03/02/2008 © Central Florida News 13

GAINESVILLE -- The battle over a budget shortfall has forced the University of Florida to consider cutting students.

The university's Board of Trustees was thinking about shaving off 3,000 undergraduate students from the campus over the next four years.

Cutting enrollment of about 35,000 students would lower the student faculty ratio, which would move them up in the national rankings without the cost of adding faculty members.

The Gainesville Sun reported the university was worried that cutting students might also bring down revenues.

The school was already facing a $50 million state budget shortfall this coming fall.

**Gators adopt a legislator**  
03/02/2008 © Daytona Beach News-Journal

These are hard times for Florida's public universities and community colleges. They are choice targets for budget cuts in a hard budget cycle. The Legislature's leadership has been beating up on the college presidents and criticizing the schools' priorities, management and teaching.

No wonder, then, that the University of Florida has started an adopt-a-legislator program.

Florida universities already have a long and distinguished record of hiring politicians. Former Lt. Gov. Frank Brogan heads Florida Atlantic University. Former House Speaker T.K. Wetherell heads Florida State University. Former Jacksonville Mayor John Delaney heads the University of North Florida.
But former politicians aren't always the people who can help you out at budget time. Sadly, there are few occupations more former than that of former legislator. Because of term limits, a lot of members don't even know what these people used to do.

Thus, the adopt-a-legislator program. The University of Florida hired Sen. Mike Haridopolos, R-Indialantic, to teach part-time for $75,000 a year.

Yes, it's usual at UF for lecturers to have a doctorate and Haridopolos only has a master's degree. And yes, the average lecturer makes something closer to $40,000. But Haridopolos has special skills. Skills like being a likely Senate president and chairing the Finance and Tax Committee.

Previously, under Brevard Community College's adopt-a-legislator program, Haridopolos was paid $40,000 a year to write a book on the history of the Florida Legislature rather than teach.

It's unclear just yet what courses he'll be teaching at UF, but for a man of Haridopolos' experiences, it shouldn't be hard to come up with topics. Let's see:

Ethics 200 -- The Art and Science of Distinction Drawing. Course will cover the difference between unethical paying for influence and the ethical and legal practice of giving jobs to legislators with the expectation that they'll look out for the interests of their employers. Highlights the distinctions between old-fashioned graft and forging modern, creative public-private partnerships. Between lobbying and being a citizen-legislator committed to the businesses and institutions he or she understands first-hand.

Florida History 201 -- History of the Florida Legislature. Because of term limits, this course will not need to get into matters occurring before the 2000 elections. Topics will include: "The myth of 'conflicts of interest,'" "Jeb Bush: Prophet or Divine Being?" and "The press: Menace or nuisance?"

Education 402 -- The Political History of Florida Higher Education. This will explore the long history of conflict between Florida universities and the Legislature. Topics include why the FSU-UF football game is as politically important as any dumb ol' committee hearing. Also, the development of Florida's "stack 'em deep and teach 'em cheap" philosophy of education and why it benefits all educational institutions -- except UF.

Microeconomics 301 -- The Economics of Part-Time, No-Show and Touch-Base-With-Us-When-You Find-Time Employment. Topics on this understudied but large sector of the Florida economy will include consulting, finding places for
relatives, adopt-a-legislator programs and so-called "mystery workers." The state pension system is explored in-depth.

I'm sure there are other possibilities out there, but, then, I'm not a professor. And I have no plans to run for the post.

**Area services at risk**
03/02/2008 © Gainesville Sun

As state legislators prepare to slash the state's budget to make ends meet, entities throughout Alachua County are preparing to take a hit.

From the University of Florida's College of Medicine to Alachua County government, local officials say they're worried that actions to correct the state budget shortfall could adversely impact existing programs and hamper the creation of new ones.

Officials with UF's College of Medicine have already met with a number of state lawmakers to discuss their concerns about the funding shortfall.

As Dean Bruce Kone explains it, class size in the medical school has gone up 25 percent to 540 students in the past five years, while the state's contribution to the cost of a medical education from general revenue has dropped 40 percent.

With two new public medical schools coming on line at the University of Central Florida and Florida International University, keeping its share of the pie is a top priority for UF.

For Shands at the University of Florida and Shands AGH, further cuts in Medicaid reimbursement coupled with an estimated $2 billion shortfall in the state budget for the next fiscal year could prove a drastic blow.

Legislators cut Medicaid rates by 3 percent in October, with rates for hospitals with trauma centers such as Shands UF cut by 1 percent.

Shands UF and Shands AGH are so-called "safety-net hospitals," with a substantial amount of care going to Medicaid and charity patients.

Another item in Gov. Charlie Crist's proposed budget would end the certificate-of-need process that requires hospitals to prove the need for additional patient beds before they expand.
Newcomers who want to set up competing hospitals have to prove the same need before they build.

Established hospitals fear that opening up the field will spawn a variety of limited-service competitors that will "cherry-pick" patients with private insurance and offer only the most profitable services.

With the state already suffering from a shortage of medical specialists and a chronic shortage of nurses, that's a bad idea, administrators say. It's a view backed by the Florida Hospital Association.

Alachua County officials have expressed concern about any moves by the Legislature to force local government to make additional tax cuts.

The passage of Amendment 1 by voters in January will cost the county about $10 million, though much of that will be covered by new growth. The amendment follows on tax cuts mandated by the Legislature last year that ended up reducing county revenue by about $2.5 million.

Dan Boyd, superintendent of Alachua County Public Schools, said he hoped Amendment 1, which increased the homestead property tax exemption by $25,000 on non-school taxes for properties with assessed values of over $50,000, would have the effect Gov. Crist promised.

"Just days before the vote on Amendment 1, Governor Crist offered a budget that would make up for reductions in education spending and said approval of the amendment 'doesn't have to make a difference in funding for our students,' " Boyd wrote in his e-mail. "We hope he was right about that."

Beyond merely fighting to soften the blow from a statewide budget shortfall, one of UF's key issues will be a request for $5 million to create a venture capital fund to help move UF inventions to the marketplace.

The fund would be used to create a pot of money for UF's proposed "innovation center." UF has partnered with Alexandria Real Estate Equities Inc., a California-based company that will put an additional $2.5 million in venture capital behind the faculty inventions developed at the center. The fund would reach $25 million with the help of the state, Alexandria and other investors, UF officials say.

The center will be housed in two 75,000-square-foot buildings - a footprint nearly the size of three football fields - that will be paid for by Alexandria, according to UF officials.
UF also will be pushing for $9 million in new funding for its medical school, and $77 million in state matching money for donations made to UF's Foundation.

Santa Fe Community College is looking for funding for each of its 16,600 students and matching funds for a building project, scholarships and equipment.

SFCC President Jackson Sasser, who is also chairman of the Florida Community College Council of Presidents, said he and the 27 other community college presidents want lawmakers to continue funding community colleges with an existing formula that's based on the number of full-time equivalent students enrolled.

Sasser's assistant, Larry Keen, said that without adequate funding from the state, "we simply cannot offer all the classes that students want."

Officials with the city of Gainesville said they'll be lobbying for funding for some vital city projects, including $3.2 million they hope to acquire for various waste and stormwater treatment projects.

"Where we'll spend some substantial resources will be on, most notably, the Paynes Prairie project," Mayor Pegeen Hanrahan said.

The project is aimed at treating the city's wastewater and stormwater that currently flow into the wetlands.

"The water is nutrient-enriched compared to what you would like it to be going into the natural habitat," Hanrahan said.

The Sweetwater Branch/Paynes Prairie Sheetflow Restoration project is expected to cost $23 million. The city is asking for $2 million in state funding.

The remaining $1.2 million requested will go toward treating water before it enters Newnan's Lake and the Alachua Sink.

Behind those items on the city's legislative agenda is auiring $75,000 for the Reichert House after-school program for at-risk African-American teens.

City Commissioner Scherwin Henry said he'd like funding for vocational training for the age group between 17 and 24.
"They are either no-skilled or under-skilled, and that is the age group that, really, this day and time has the first encounter with the criminal justice center," Henry said.

At least one subset of Alachua County's population stands to benefit from the budget-slashing session.

Since the Republican-led leadership's proposed path out of the doldrums is to stimulate the economy, business interests could actually come out ahead, according to some county business leaders.

Plans include an agenda to reduce the burden on consumers and businesses through further property tax and property insurance reform, issues local real estate professionals have said hold up some home buyers.

Local business leaders said they'll also be keeping an eye on the role higher education and research play in an agenda to diversify the state economy with high-tech innovations. State economic development organizations are pushing for research grants and incentives to spur the kind of technology commercialization that spins out of university research.

Alachua County environmental officials said the Legislature could address three key environmental issues significant to the county.

The first is the future of the Florida Forever program. The state land-conservation program Florida Forever expires at the end of next year unless lawmakers agree to extend it or put a measure before voters allowing them to decide whether to do so.

Alachua County Environmental Protection Director Chris Bird said the county's own land-conservation program, Alachua County Forever, relies on funds from the state program to leverage its buying power.

"The success of Alachua County Forever, to a large extent, has depended on the partnership with Florida Forever," he said.

Climate change is another issue important to Alachua County, where concerns over carbon dioxide emissions played a role in the city of Gainesville's decision not to build a coal-fired power plant.

Bird said he'll be looking to see whether Gov. Charlie Crist can get lawmakers to go along with limits on the greenhouse gases believed to cause global warming.
"To really put some teeth in it, it is going to take some legislative action," he said.

Finally, Bird said, the county will be waiting to see whether the Legislature passes a law that prevents local municipalities from regulating fertilizer use.

After Sarasota County moved last year to restrict fertilizer use to protect water quality, lawmakers considered a uniform state regulation on its use.

Bird said the county is considering regulations on fertilizer as a way to protect water quality in springs and waterways. He worries the Legislature this session could enact regulations that are less restrictive than those needed to be effective here.

"It's a concern about being stuck with a one-size-fits-all approach," he said.

UF salaries face thinning budgets  
03/01/2008 © Gainesville Sun

YULEE - Bernie Machen is hearing it just about everywhere these days.

Continue to 2nd paragraph Working in his yard recently, the University of Florida president was approached by a faculty member who asked him this blunt question: Is it a bad career move to stay at UF?

The question is one Machen is fielding with increased frequency from faculty who went without raises last year and fear the state's economic downturn will mean several more years of increasingly scarce resources.

"The real danger is sort of a general demoralization that leads good people to say, 'not Florida,' " Machen told trustees assembled at a meeting here Thursday and Friday.

UF faces an estimated $50 million budget shortfall for fall 2008, but Machen says he's still committed to faculty and staff raises. The challenges, however, are significant. Providing a pool of money for merit raises of just 1 percent would require $5 million, Machen says.

Machen wouldn't specify how significant a raise he would seek but added, "It has to be something you can find in your paycheck."
Given a projected statewide budget shortfall of at least $1.5 billion, there's little confidence the kind of raises Machen has in mind would be covered by state support. As such, Machen is eyeing tuition revenues as a possible source.

Last year, lawmakers approved a so-called "tuition differential" plan that allows UF to raise tuition by as much as 15 percent a year. If the state approved an 8 percent tuition increase for all universities for the 2008-2009 school year - as the Board of Governors has recommended - then UF would be permitted to raise its tuition an additional 7 percent.

State statutes place restrictions on how UF can use the money from the differential program. While UF could use its base tuition money however officials choose, the differential funds have to go toward hiring additional faculty and advisers. As such, Machen still has a powerful incentive to lobby for a base tuition hike that's as high as possible.

Gov. Charlie Crist, who fought tuition increases last session but ultimately conceded, has not included any tuition increase in his budget plan.

"All the legislators I talk with say there's going to be a tuition increase," Machen said Friday.

Absent raises this year, Machen and trustees say they truly fear faculty flight from the university.

"Right now we're facing the possibility of a brain drain of faculty because we can't pay their salaries," said Joelen Merkel, a UF trustee.

**One question for God**
03/01/2008 © Gainesville Sun

Amid a sea of orange and blue T-shirts, campaign signs, fliers and Student Government candidates at Turlington Plaza on the University of Florida campus this week, there stood two 8-foot-tall white signs that boldly asked, "What is the one question you would ask God?"

Continue to 2nd paragraph "It really makes you stop and think," said Ryan Arens, a UF freshman and journalism major. "It's a really unique way to look at faith."
Scribbled all over the signs in black Sharpie were questions like, "Why give us free will?" and "When will the end come?" and even "What happened to the dinosaurs?"

Arens decided on a whim to go to the "One Question" event held this week in the Rion ballroom at the Reitz Union.

Sponsored by Campus Crusade for Christ, the event featured theologian and author William Lane Craig, who lives in Atlanta but teaches at Talbot School of Theology in La Mirada, Calif.

Craig attempted to answer what are considered the most popular questions for God, as determined by hundreds of informal campus surveys.

Among those questions: "Why is there suffering in the world?" and "What is the purpose of life?" He used a PowerPoint presentation to help organize his sometimes lengthy responses and logic.

"God is not something we can be moderately interested in," Craig said, quoting C.S. Lewis, author of "Mere Christianity."

"If there is no God, then everything we do is meaningless," Craig said. "It's like shifting deck chairs on the Titanic. If life ends at the grave, it makes no difference if you live as a Joseph Stalin or a Mother Theresa."

As for world suffering, Craig said that if God desires to create a world of free creatures, then he can't have a world of all good.

As for the purpose of life, Craig said there is a misconception that the purpose of the human life is happiness. This view is not biblical, he said. Craig believes God did not merely create the world to be a comfortable living environment.

Craig discussed scientific topics, like the Big Bang theory, and how they fit with the Christian belief of creationism.

"Things don't just pop into being without cause," he said of the Big Bang theory, in which a universe comes into being out of virtually nothing.

"The origin of the universe is linked to a transcendent causal mind," he said. "There must be a creator."

After Craig's speech came a Q&A session with audience members.
When Craig explained the Christian belief that accepting Jesus Christ as a personal savior is the only way into heaven, Alex Woods, a UF sophomore, asked what happens to people who never hear the gospel of Christ.

Craig said that he believes all people are responsible for acknowledging the existence of a creator and the existence of morals, but he also believes that God extends grace to those who have never heard of Jesus.

Woods, a philosophy major, said he came to the event interested in hearing Craig speak about how to handle the faith debate in an intellectual way.

As he looked around the room, which held about 400 students, faculty and community members, Woods said he hoped the audience was a mix of Christians, atheists and members of other faiths.

"I'm hoping he's not preaching to the choir," Woods said.

Rob Foss, a sophomore member of Campus Crusade for Christ, said he learned a lot of practical knowledge from the event.

"I heard a lot of theological evidence and proof for God that I can use when sharing my faith with others," he said.

Jimmy Trent, the UF campus director of Campus Crusade, said staff members asked Craig to speak at UF because he gives a reasonable, plausible and intellectual argument for Christianity.

And "we really just wanted to know what the students are asking about God," Trent said.

Campus Crusade for Christ at UF meets on Thursday nights at 8:30 p.m. in the Medical Science Building at Shands at UF. For more information, or to listen to a recording of Craig's speech, go online to www.ufcampuscrusade.com
LAKELAND | When legislators obtain money for projects back home, it is often referred to as "bringing home the bacon," but this year residents of Polk and Florida's other 66 counties may have to content themselves with dry toast and egg substitute.

Sales tax revenues are down, and documentary stamps, the source of tax money collected when a home sale is recorded, are also dramatically lower because housing sales have slumped.

In addition, cities and counties are concerned that their revenues will take a dive and they will have to cut services because of the tax reform amendment passed Jan. 29.

"We are all having to tighten our belts, not just local, but the state as well," said Rep. Marty Bowen, R-Haines City, the speaker pro tem of the House. "The people of Florida approved the amendment; personally, I don't think it went far enough.

"In this climate, everyone needs to readjust accordingly."

The Legislature's adjustment is that there will be few of the little goodies for the home folks, often referred to as "member projects" or as "pork" by others.

Sen. Paula Dockery and Rep. Seth McKeel, both R-Lakeland, are again filing for one little slice of bacon, money for Florida Southern College's nursing school.

"There is a shortage of nurses and nursing schools. We're funding 100 percent of nursing school at state-supported colleges and universities, and this is asking for only 30 percent," McKeel said. "I know it is a bleak year, but this was vetoed last year, and we are trying again."

MONITORING USF SITE

The entire delegation, with Dockery, McKeel and Sen. J.D. Alexander, R-Lake Wales, in particular, will be carefully monitoring the promised $15 million in the state budget to begin construction on the new University of South Florida campus proposed near the eastern intersection of Interstate 4 and the Polk Parkway.

The appropriation has been approved by the USF Board of Trustees and by the universities' Board of Governors, but all are mindful that the money was vetoed last year even though it went through all the necessary processes.
Most bills that benefit Polk County actually don't contain money.

Alexander has filed a bill (Senate Bill 186) that says it is "requiring the President of the University of South Florida to consult with the (USF Lakeland) Campus Board before hiring or terminating the Campus Executive Officer."

It further provides that students enrolled at the USF branch campus "have the same rights as other students; requiring the University of South Florida to provide for a system of student registration that meets certain conditions."

McKeel, who has filed the House companion bill, said the bill is not opposed by the University of South Florida administration in Tampa and is mainly putting USF Lakeland on an even par with the branch campuses in Sarasota and St. Petersburg.

"Once we get the new campus up and ready, we need to have the same posture as the other university branches," McKeel said. "Right now, we are more like a satellite than a regional campus."

PENSION CHANGES

McKeel and Dockery also have filed versions in their respective chambers of a local bill that would separate the City of Lakeland's Pension Board from its Civil Service Board, a measure the city has been trying to accomplish for three years.

Both legislators tried last year, but it failed because both police and fire unions had to approve.

"State law says that if we change the operations of our main pension, then we have to separate out those pensions of police and firefighters," Assistant City Manager Tony Delgado said.

Because of the danger of their jobs, both police and firefighters have supplemental pensions as well as their pensions within the main city pension fund.

When the pension and civil service board are separated, Delgado said, both police pensions, the main one and the supplemental one, will be melded together to form one, and the same will occur for firefighters.

"They would still be administered by the city if that is what they (the unions) want," Delgado said, "but they would then be separate from the main pension fund as required by state statute."
The police union has agreed to the change and negotiations are under way with firefighters, Delgado said.

other proposals

Rep. Dennis Ross, R-Lakeland, has filed two statewide bills that would aid Polk County.

He filed House Bill 203, at the request of Polk County Sheriff Grady Judd, that increases penalties for a person using electronic surveillance equipment to assist in the commission of a crime or for using the surveillance equipment to avoid arrest.

Another Ross proposal, House Bill 747, is a statewide bill to allow charter counties to levy a surtax for a Charter County Transit System upon approval by the voters.

The bill would also help Polk County, which already has approved a countywide bus system, get more money for it.

Although Polk voters approved a countywide transit and a board to run it, the system has not been able to find a local source of money for operating.

As Rep. Baxter Troutman, R-Winter Haven, said, it may be a rather mild session since there is little money to fight over, but he added it may also lead to a concentration on lawmaking this year.

Confucius Institute Opens At USF
03/03/2008 © Tampa Bay Online

TAMPA - Henry Kwoh has lived long enough to witness a chilling and thawing of relations between the United States and China.

Now, the 88-year-old Clearwater man, originally from Shanghai in eastern China, is hoping that the new Confucius Institute at the University of South Florida will promote greater understanding between the nations.

Kwoh and his wife, Gean, members of the Suncoast Association of Chinese Americans, were among the 100-plus guests Sunday night to welcome the creation of the institute, the only one in Florida.
Highly coveted by U.S. colleges, the institutes are cultural centers funded by the Chinese government to promote understanding globally of the Chinese culture and language.

"This [is] very meaningful. The institute is about building a bridge between China and the U.S.," said Kwoh, an engineer who left China for Taiwan before immigrating to the United States with his wife and two children in the 1950s. "Our world is getting smaller, and we should help each other and work with each other."

The banquet, at Traditions Hall on the USF campus, was festooned with red table cloths and Chinese paper lanterns. Traditional Chinese art was displayed. Among the guests was Qiao Hong, consulate general for China in Houston, and Jun Fang, first secretary for education at the Chinese Embassy in the United States.

Although the opening of the institute was celebrated Sunday, the task of teaching lessons in Mandarin and Chinese culture began in January. Three language classes by visiting professors from Nankai University in Tianjin are offered by the institute.

USF Provost Ralph Wilcox said the center eventually could provide Florida a competitive edge in international trade with China.

"China is the No. 2 market and is the world's fastest growing market," said Wilcox, who traveled to Beijing in December to sign an agreement to bring the institute here. "Beyond that, this institute will promote a cultural understanding of China … and offers great prestige to USF."

China is providing three professors from Nankai University and $100,000 a year for five years to support the institute. USF is matching that with $200,000 a year, another instructor and the center's director, Dajin Peng, who studied international affairs at Princeton University.

About 40 Confucius Institutes operate in the United States, with 240 operating in 64 countries.

**Spike Lee to join USF lecture series**
03/03/2008 © St. Petersburg Times

The University of South Florida continues its impressive 2008 University Lecture Series roster, presenting iconoclastic filmmaker Spike Lee Tuesday night.
Lee, whose last big project was the acclaimed HBO documentary miniseries about New Orleans, When the Levees Broke, will take a break from finishing his upcoming World War II film, Miracle at St. Anna, to speak at 7 p.m. at the USF Sun Dome Corral.

Governments in Osceola County to take defensive fiscal stand during legislative session
03/02/2008 © Orlando Sentinel

Many local governments will play defensively during the legislative session that starts Tuesday, keeping an eye on laws that could hurt the way they operate.

That's a switch from a normal year when cities, counties and school districts press hard for funding of local projects.

"We're pretty thin [on requests] this year because we were told there would not be a lot of money available from Tallahassee," School Board Chairman John McKay said. "It looks like that's going to be very true."

Although the school district may not get funding, School Board member Tom Greer hopes at least to get language approved for a program that will help recruit and retain teachers.

The state could create a $1 million pool of money so that districts could offer a one-time free relocation loan to teachers. The money would remain in an escrow account, and the interest would be used if needed to make good on any loans that went unpaid. Teachers would pay the $2,000 loan back through payroll deductions, Greer said.

But the veteran at lobbying lawmakers in Tallahassee doesn't hold out hope for much state funding to school districts. Lawmakers will be hard-pressed not to hurt education during the budgeting process, he said.

Guarding against unfunded mandates -- issues for which the state gives local governments responsibility without cash -- will be a priority, said Osceola County Property Appraiser Atlee Mercer.

More than 100 proposed pieces of legislation could affect the way taxes are assessed or collected, he said. And two key issues could affect the county more
than any previous tax cuts. Both would make it easier for big businesses to challenge assessments.

"They are approaching the problem from the wrong direction," Mercer said. "They are ugly, big business buyout systems."

While similar measures were turned back last year, Mercer said that this year "it appears they have traction."

Getting state funding for a library at the Osceola campus of Valencia Community College remains the top priority for a lobbying group representing four of the community's governments.

Polk County's top priority is to secure funding for a new University of South Florida campus in Lakeland. The issue is critical to the county's future, a Polk spokeswoman said.

Also crucial is the ability to levy a tax for countywide transit services.

Officials say that after the 2010 census, Polk will be over the population threshold for federal funding and will need another source for new and existing transit services.

Red-light-running legislation is a priority for Kissimmee city commissioners. In addition, the city also will seek funds for some airport projects.

But the city is not asking for a lot of big-ticket items this year.

"We're taking a little bit of a different angle," said City Manager Mark Durbin. "Instead of lobbying for things, we anticipate lobbying against things that might hurt local government."

**USF Strategy For Top-50 Status Takes Back Seat To Political Pull**
03/02/2008 © Tampa Tribune

When it comes to focus, the leadership of the University of South Florida has Marty Feldman eyes.

You know Feldman, the late comedic actor with eyes that skewed in different directions.
So it is with USF.

The university says it wants to be a top-50 research university, but its strategy runs all over West Central Florida, generating little confidence the university can achieve its target in a timely manner.

USF President Judy Genshaft's recent threat to build an on-campus football stadium is but the latest example of a university with scatter-shot priorities.

A couple of years back, former Gov. Jeb Bush made Genshaft choose between state funding for a research park near USF-Tampa or money for a student center on its new Sarasota campus. She chose Sarasota.

It's easy to see how a research park could create synergies that would help USF attain top-50 status. But growing a new campus in Sarasota, which already has a state university called New College? And remember this: New College used to be part of USF until hometown lawmakers sought and won its independence in 2001.

More recently, Genshaft announced plans to create a polytechnic university in Lakeland that will compete with the main campus for limited capital funds.

How will growing a new campus in Lakeland help USF become a top-50 research university? It won't. But USF has another strategy, too.

Genshaft wants to increase her pull in Tallahassee by getting USF in the hometowns of more lawmakers. She often boasts that USF campuses are represented by a quarter of the Florida Legislature.

What this means is that while the university says it wants to grow depth, it's focused on growing reach to build political pull.

So how's the strategy working?

USF-St. Petersburg, the university's first satellite campus, is now independently accredited and has little interest in helping USF-Tampa achieve its goal of joining the elite Association of American Universities, which attracts the big research dollars. Indeed, when Genshaft tried to cajole St. Pete librarians into meeting AAU standards, they turned her down.

Now the Sarasota and Lakeland campuses, even before they reach adolescence, want independent status, too. Independent accreditation will allow them to
largely set their own agenda, do their own hiring, set their own admissions standards and run their own fundraising.

How does growing satellite campuses help USF reach its goal of being a top-50 research university that attracts more top researchers, more seven-figure research grants, more spin-off companies and more top-flight students?

It doesn't.

If USF is serious about attaining its top-50 goal in any meaningful timeframe, Genshaft and the university's board of trustees should reconsider their decision to spend limited construction dollars on satellite campuses that seek independence. The strategy has shown little return, and siphons scarce funds away from the university's primary goal.

Instead, USF should aggressively refocus its eyes on the prize of becoming a top-50 research university - soon.

Anything less will shortchange this community.

Anonymous Donor Gives $5 Million To USF; State To Match It
03/01/2008 © Tampa Bay Online

TAMPA - The University of South Florida has received a $5 million gift from an anonymous donor mostly to back scholarship programs for low-income and minority students, university officials announced Friday.

The donation is the largest USF has ever received from an anonymous donor, and is eligible for a state match. With the match, the gift would be worth $10 million.

Under the donor's agreement, $8 million would bankroll scholarships in the USF Diversity Scholarship Initiative and benefit female and minority students.

The remaining $2 million would support academic programs that need the money the most.

"The most wonderful part of the gift is there's no restriction on it," said Jeffrey Robison, chief executive officer of the USF Foundation, which will administer the
gift. "The university is going to have the capacity to make full awards if it wants to. This is one of the highest forms of philanthropy I've ever been a part of."

Earlier in February, the university received a $2 million donation from the Helios Education Foundation to benefit low-income and minority students. That gift also goes on a list of projects to be matched by the state's Major Gift Challenge Grant Program.

Most of that award will benefit the USF Latino Scholarship program, which has given about $1.5 million to Hispanic students at USF in the past 17 years. The rest of the Helios gift will go to minority students from low-income families who want to study science, technology, engineering and math.

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**University of West Florida**

**OWC to offer nursing degree -- Courses will begin this fall just as a program with UWF expires**

03/01/2008 © Northwest Florida Daily News

After four years participating in a cooperative program, Okaloosa-Walton College will offer its own bachelor’s degree in nursing beginning this fall.

“It’s always easier to deal with one institution than two,” said Jill White, the school’s senior vice president.

The University of West Florida and OWC have shared a joint baccalaureate program since 2004. UWF has awarded the degrees.

“The program that we’ve run with UWF has been very successful, but geography made it difficult to manage,” White said.

The Florida State Board of Education last week approved OWC’s plan to expand its baccalaureate program to include a Bachelor of Science degree in nursing.

The approval coincides with the expiration of the colleges’ five-year agreement.

Now UWF will redirect its resources to develop a Master of Science in nursing. OWC previously received state approval for bachelor’s degrees in teaching and in project management. The transition should be smooth for students and faculty. All of the classes but one in the joint program were taught by OWC faculty who were contracted by UWF. The change will also be more affordable,
White said. A student completing the entire curriculum at OWC will save $1,398. Registration will also be easier; students will have to complete only one set of paperwork. Beth Norton, OWC’s director of nursing, said the program will be helpful to the college, but “it’s more about what it will do for the students and the community.”

State Higher Education Issues

Session set, but with less harmony
03/02/2008 © St. Petersburg Times

TALLAHASSEE - Senate President Ken Pruitt and House Speaker Marco Rubio stood united on the first day of the 2007 legislative session, pledging a new era of cooperation, a willingness to confront the difficult.

Reaching under the mahogany dais, Pruitt pulled out a sign: Rubio for President ’08 - a friendly dig from the older politician at the35-year-old's no-limits political ambition.

One year later, the Republicans will open another session on Tuesday. But this time, the story line is not as neat or naive.

Rubio continues to eye his role as an eventual springboard to future office and Pruitt remains his willing straight man. But different philosophies and a series of battles between the House and Senate have damaged the Pruitt-Rubio collaboration. And now the pair face their toughest challenge yet: cutting the state budget by $2-billion.

Adding to the stress, they must govern as their own power threatens to wane amid preparations for fall elections. All 120 House seats and half of the 40 Senate seats are on the ballot.

Both leaders say the tensions are not personal and they stress mutual respect. But no one is expecting the 2008 session to be easy, or nearly so cordial as was promised a year ago.

"Any election year is more contentious than a nonelection year, and this one might be exacerbated by the fact that we don't have the money to spend," said
Sen. Jim King, a former Senate president and veteran Republican from Jacksonville.

"This won't be an easy session," agreed the House Democratic leader, Rep. Dan Gelber of Miami Beach. "All the shortcomings are coming home to roost and you have less money to address them."

In hindsight, the two leaders, and their chambers, were never destined to dovetail.

Rubio, charismatic, quick-witted and a polished orator, takes his philosophical cues from former Gov. Jeb Bush, a fiscal and social conservative. They remain close.

Pruitt is a quieter leader with a businessman's sensibility. He's a longtime legislator with a similar history, who has seen his own conservatism ebb as he has risen in the more-moderate Senate, making him a natural partner for moderate Republican Gov. Charlie Crist.

And it was that partnership, Pruitt and Crist, that ended up mattering more in 2007 than did Pruitt and Rubio's:

- The Senate pushed the governor's plan to make it easier for all homeowners to buy insurance from the state-run company. House leadership fought the change but eventually gave in.

- After months of debate on property taxes, the Senate forced the House to accept Amendment 1, a last-minute ballot measure that Rubio decried as flaccid. House Republicans wanted deeper cuts and accused the Senate of bending to concerns from local governments and schools. Approved by voters Jan. 29, the measure cuts more than $9-billion from local budgets over the next five years.

This year is lining up to offer similar disagreements.

Rubio, undaunted by last year's loss, promises another run at property tax cuts. But Pruitt says the Senate is finished with the issue.

"There will be no concerted effort from the Florida Senate to do anything other than implement Amendment 1," Pruitt recently said.

"I understand if they don't want to hear it, it won't happen," Rubio said. "But I can't allow those pronouncements to be what sets our agenda."
Similarly, Rubio wants to shrink government. The $2-billion deficit is an opportunity, he says, to cut government to a more manageable size. He wants to eliminate some state agencies and has named his top priority as a cap on government spending and revenue.

"Even as fiscally responsible as we thought we were being, we allowed state government to grow faster than the ability of our economy to sustain it," Rubio said.

But Pruitt is decidedly less vocal about the need to cut government and names top goals such as building infrastructure, economic development and delivering the governor's alternative energy proposals. He also wants to pass a ballot measure asking voters to elect an education commissioner and designate the Legislature, not the Board of Governors, as the body that sets university tuition.

Rubio's other goals include scaling back the state's investment in the hurricane catastrophe fund by $3-billion, making private insurers take on more of the risk and expanding health care with fewer regulations.

This session will also feature a debate over another of Rubio's pet peeves: expanding gambling. Crist wants to expand the state's gambling offerings to help offset the deficit.

Meanwhile both Pruitt and Rubio are expected to face management challenges within their chambers, for different reasons.

Pruitt's presumed successor, Republican Sen. Jeff Atwater, faces a competitive re-election this fall against a Democratic challenger, former Sen. Skip Campbell. Campbell's candidacy breaks an unspoken rule that opponent parties don't challenge the next Senate president - and is expected to create tensions between Senate Democrats and Republicans. And Pruitt's own Republican caucus is divided over the race to eventually succeed Atwater.

In the House, Democrats are feeling bolder these days after picking up a net eight seats since 2006. Republicans still hold a substantial majority, but the minority party now has enough votes to thwart procedural moves and block constitutional amendment proposals from making the ballot.

Veteran legislative watchers said that despite past policy disagreements, the House and Senate are getting along far better than they have in the past, especially as compared to the years under House Speaker Johnnie Byrd.
"There are clear signs that there is some commonality on issues in the agenda," said lobbyist Ron Book of Miami, pointing out quick agreements on the first round of budget cuts.

Rubio contends his personal relationship with Pruitt is stronger than any of the presiding officers in the past decade. "There are issues that divide us, but that's just how it is," he said.

Also unclear, however, is how Rubio's future political ambitions, including a possible bid for governor, will shape the session's final debates. Term limits are forcing him out of Tallahassee at an awkward time because there is no open, higher office for him to seek until perhaps 2010.

By contrast, Pruitt, 51, will return to the Senate for two more years after he surrenders the title of president. He has said he has no further political ambitions and wants to spend more time with his family. Legislative leaders say Pruitt would be happy to leave a legacy of helping Florida's economy transition from tourism to technological industries, such as the Torrey Pines Institute for Molecular Studies, SRI International and Scripps Research Institute.

Rubio plans to practice law and return to his growing family in Miami. To keep a public profile, he already is working with a foundation modeled after his 100 Ideas for Florida's Future, an idea-gathering exercise he launched when he became speaker. He is also helping gather support for a citizens' petition to cap property taxes at 1.35 percent of taxable value.

Don't write his political history yet, he says. "Probably the most important chapter in that story is yet to be written."

**State eyeing cuts**
03/02/2008 © St. Augustine Record

The Florida Legislature trying to recover from the state's continuing financial meltdown begins its two-month 2008 session on Tuesday fixated on trimming $542 million from its $27.3 billion total budget.

But, while those cuts will be painful, they are nothing compared to the $2.5 billion in deeper cuts anticipated in 2009.
This year's budget trimming will impact schools, colleges, courts, public service and health care, plus a multitude of other state-supported agencies and programs. It follows a $1.2 billion cut in 2007.

Legislators believe cutting expenses and lowering taxes is the key to pulling out of a financial crisis that began in 2006 and deepened in 2007 due to declines in sales tax collections. Economic recovery stalled because of a moribund housing market, high gas prices that reduced tourism and flat spending by consumers worried about a possible recession.

The Legislature's long list of issues this session includes tackling state water policy, reforming the state's evolving tax system, finding education funding and seeking a more stable property insurance market, all while tinkering with the economy.

Along those lines, the Associated Press reported that House Speaker Marco Rubio, R-West Miami, supports several more measures to further cut property taxes. He believes that may stimulate consumer spending and restart the economy.

One of his proposals is to cap taxes at 1.35 percent of a property's value. But the first year's cost of that would be 8 billion, further deepening the state's financial crisis. His opponents, such as Rep. Steve Geller, D-Cooper City, say it's not possible for state and local governments to take more cuts without reducing services, the AP said.

In any case, a requirement to balance the budget will dominate the first few weeks of the session.

State Rep. William Proctor, R-St. Augustine, said the state's financial crisis probably won't go away soon.

"You can't say anything with absolute certainty now about what the cuts will be," Proctor said last week. "We'll get a better picture of how much money we're going to have (in a couple of weeks) at our revenue estimating conference."

School funding

Educators across Florida are bracing themselves with the news that $357 million will be cut from state school subsidies this year.
The St. Johns County School District with 27,514 students and a budget of $216 million is expected to be cut by $1.8 million, according to Chief Financial Officer Conley Weiss.

Since the first round of property tax measures, the district has already lost $5.2 million in state subsidies.

So far, no programs have been cut, he said.

"We anticipated this year's cut last fall," Weiss said. "We were told that more was coming. So we prepared."

But next year will be tougher.

"If this (level of cuts) carries over to next year, on top of Amendment 1, we'll go into the 2009 school year with $7 million less while serving more students and stricter class size requirements," Weiss said.

He said the decision of what to cut have not yet been made if that happens,

"There's just too many questions right now," he said.

State funding provides 34 percent of the district budget.

But the district has hit a "perfect storm" of expenses, one administrator said.

Just opening two new high schools and a middle school will cost $6 million, Weiss said. If the district gets 3 percent more students, that will cost $2.1 million. And strict limits on class size would cost $6.3 million more.

And he said there isn't fat to cut.

Weiss said most school districts spend 4 or 5 percent of their budgets on administration. "We're barely at three," he said.

Also locally, the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind will lose 4 percent of its budget, or $1.7 million.

FSDB's Interim President L. Daniel Hutto said he expects a "big impact on FSDB programs" due to those cuts.

"We're working on a contingency plan that will show us that impact," he said.
Changing tax systems

The 25-member Florida Taxation and Budget Committee able to put amendments on the ballot without legislative approval has proposed dozens of new measures, including one on how to handle financial crises in the future.

Essentially, it would permit the Legislature to raise revenues or impose taxes not otherwise allowed by the Florida Constitution if the governor certifies the existence of a crisis.

This could only be done with a three-fourths vote of both houses of the Legislature.

Another proposes a radical change to Florida's tax system, replacing all property taxes with sales taxes. That could raise $23.5 billion annually, and one-cent increase would add $3.9 billion.

The sales tax now is 6 percent.

Removing exemptions to it would bring in another $12.3 billion. And adding a sales tax on services would bring in another $23.4 billion.

The committee votes May 8.

Higher education

Colleges and universities are expecting cuts of $42 million this year.

Proctor said this isn't necessary. A 10 percent hike on a $3,000 tuition bill means that a student pays $300 more.

"Florida's 11 state universities collect less tuition per student than any other state college system in the country," he said. "We're 50th of 50."

He also challenged a state requirement that state tuition must be uniform throughout Florida, which tends to keep tuition artificially low.

"Why should tuitions at the University of Florida and the University of West Florida be the same?" Proctor said. "You've got the tail wagging the dog."

State universities might eventually be so squeezed financially that they will be forced to limit enrollment, he said.
Property insurance

Rep. Proctor says Florida is sitting on a financial "ticking time bomb" by ignoring the insurance problem.

National insurance companies are leery of covering Florida homes and businesses because of the state's high risk of hurricanes. But the state Department of Insurance is also preventing these companies from charging actuarily sound rates, he said.

The state Department of Insurance has said in the past that it wants to lower high insurance premiums to home and business owners and that they prevent insurance customers from being gouged.

But Proctor said Florida's policies have driven away private companies and that has put millions of property owners in Citizens Property Insurance, giving the state $500 billion of exposure.

If a major storm strikes and recovery costs exceed the state's reserves, insurance policy holders all over Florida will be assessed to pay those losses.

That worst-case scenario could place Florida property owners, drivers or other insured individuals in debt to the state for hundreds if not thousands of dollars, even if they don't live by the water.

"(The system) works until we have the first major storm," Proctor said. "This is the biggest problem in the state. Property taxes pale in comparison."

Overall, Florida's coastal value is about $2 trillion.

"No one is going to insure that," he said. "Politicians want low rates. But Florida isn't going to have low rates ever again."

Multiple storms could hit in the same year, or one could hit every year.

"All we're doing is playing defense," Proctor said.

Embry-Riddle senior top delegate at Model U.N.
03/02/2008 © Daytona Beach News-Journal

Count A.F. Orlov was powerful, ruthless, sadistic.
As head of the Third Section of His Majesty’s Chancellery, he carried out orders from Russian Czar Nicholas I to stop the eastward spread of revolutionary ideas in France. Fear was a common tactic. Enemies of the state were sent to Siberia, never to be heard from again.

This made him a key figure in a regime that looked upon education in the same way Fidel Castro views democratic principles.

Recently, it was Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University senior Freddy Elorza's job to think like Orlov, act like Orlov, to basically be Orlov. And he did it so well he was named Outstanding Delegate in the Joint Cabinet Crisis committee at the Harvard National Model United Nations.

Just being chosen for the committee is an honor.

Karl-Alexander Dubec, a Harvard junior who directed the committee (and thus portrayed Nicholas), said the competition for spots is fierce, with students from Ivy League schools and elite universities worldwide applying.

Although Elorza is from relatively unheralded Embry-Riddle, he is an alumnus of the same high school that produced the recently retired Cuban President Castro, the Belen Jesuit Preparatory School. In three months of preparation, he had such a handle on Orlov, Czarist politics and 19th-century Europe that he blew his Model UN coach away.

"This is even more remarkable when one considers (Elorza) is an aerospace engineering major competing against some of the strongest international relations, political science and history majors in the country," Embry-Riddle associate professor Glenn Dorn said.

Over the course of four days in February, Elorza's committee met and stayed in character, working through several fictional crises, a "chess match of sorts," he said.

Elorza's performance was "the most remarkable thing I have seen in more than 20 years of watching and training delegates for Model UN competitions," Dorn said.

While other competitors had taken several classes on European diplomacy or history covering the revolutions of 1848, Elorza had to conduct all his research on his own, Dorn said.
He might be ruthless in the library, but Elorza, the 21-year-old Miami-born son of Colombian parents, didn't exactly become a fan of the man he portrayed.

"(Orlov) hated education in all of its forms, unless it was to educate an army," Elorza said. "I understood he was a man of his time . . . I don't know that I admired him. I respected that he had a job and tried to carry it out as he did."

For Elorza, Model UN became an outlet of his love for debate and international relations, even while he focused mostly on math and engineering classes.

"(Model UN) expands the way students think," he said. "It shows them they can change the world, which I think is powerful."

Maybe even as powerful as Orlov.

**State tuition grant is good investment**
03/02/2008 © Daytona Beach News-Journal

Members of state Senate and House committees are making a well-placed effort to maintain the Access to Better Learning and Education tuition grant program for 2007-08, currently assisting the career-focused, adult students.

The ABLE program was passed by the Legislature in 2003 to assist Florida residents seeking bachelor degrees at one of 12 accredited, independent postsecondary institutions in Florida. The 12 colleges and universities are private, for-profit or private, not-for-profit institutions.

The committees, Senate Higher Education Appropriations and House Schools and Learning Council, have suggested a cut to ABLE in the current year of $287,000. That would leave ABLE funding at $4.1 million if the proposal passes through the Legislature during the coming session. While it is unfortunate that any student financial assistance programs must be cut, the committee showed great insight into value of the ABLE grants.

Most ABLE recipients are adult, career-focused learners who are eligible for no other state financial assistance. They typically work full or part time and have families; thus they need the flexible schedule, individual attention and career-focus provided by the 12 schools. A large percentage of the students are the first ones in their families to attend college.
Tremendous challenges face higher education and current economic conditions require the state budget to be reduced. However, ABLE is a valuable, cost-effective program that should be maintained at the highest level possible. The individual grants are modest but crucial to students paying their way through college with little financial aid. Students at private institutions deserve full access to postsecondary educations and should have the right to choose a college or university that best fulfills their individual needs.

Florida is well behind other states in producing baccalaureate degree graduates. And now public universities are capping enrollments and predicting budget shortfalls in the hundreds of millions of dollars. One recent study forecast 60,000 potential students being turned away by the state university system by 2012.

Financial needs are the number one barrier to higher education. The ABLE grant program broadens access to higher education without a capital investment by the state of Florida. Almost 300,000 students in Florida presently attend private postsecondary schools at little or no cost to the state's taxpayers. State tuition grants go directly to the students to spend at the school of their choice; private schools are not subsidized with state funding.

Students in these schools are prepared for careers in critical workforce shortage fields in Florida such as biotechnology, nursing, allied healthcare, elementary education, business, criminal justice, computer technology, computer animation and graphic design and culinary arts. Graduates typically stay in Florida after finishing and contribute to the state's workforce and economy.

Keiser is vice chancellor of community relations and student advancement at Keiser University. This article has been co-signed by John Peterson, president, South University (West Palm Beach); Donald G. McGregor, president, Johnson & Wales University (North Miami); Dan Coble, president, South University (Tampa) and Erika Fleming, president, Miami International University of Art and Design.

**Editorial: Dorms sound idea for Edison**

03/01/2008 © Ft. Myers News-Press

Eight community colleges in Florida offer on-campus housing.

There's no reason Edison College shouldn't become the ninth school on the list.
Edison commissioned a study on student housing and found that almost 88 percent of students believe on-campus lodging is crucial in attracting and retaining students.

Although roughly 74 percent of students said the lack of housing didn't discourage them from attending, Edison is likely losing out on some prospective students who prefer dorm life, can't afford rent, or can't live with nearby relatives.

The Scion Group estimates that Edison could fill 838 student beds on the Lee County campus and 286 in Collier County, with demand increasing to 981 and 335, respectively, in two years. The study found minimal interest from Charlotte County students.

As we strive to diversify our economy, the need for a well-educated work force has never been greater. Florida Gulf Coast University needn't fear competition from Edison or any of Southwest Florida's other options for college degrees.

Edison is considering building a dorm or buying a nearby apartment complex. We say go for it.

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**National Higher Education Issues**

**Code of Ethics for Study Abroad Is Offered to Colleges and Providers - Chronicle.com**

03/01/2008 © The Chronicle of Higher Education

A new code of ethics, to be released today by the Forum on Education Abroad, seeks to offer colleges, overseas-study providers, and foreign host institutions a "compass" to guide their management of study abroad.

The document lays out a set of broad ethical principles, calling for truthfulness and openness, for avoiding conflicts of interest, and for making students' health, safety, and academic needs top priorities. It poses four questions to steer ethical decision making in education abroad, including "Is it true, fair, and transparent?" and "Does it foster international understanding?"

Unlike a report released in January by Nafsa: Association of International Educators (The Chronicle, January 25), the code provides detailed guidance to colleges and program providers. It recommends, among other things, that institutions have specific procedures for reporting payments, like honoraria and
consulting fees, for work done on behalf of providers; that agreements and criteria for selecting study-abroad programs be disclosed fully; and that the goals and parameters for visits by campus officials to overseas-program sites be clearly established in advance of the trips.

In addition, the Forum on Education Abroad plans to provide its members with an online "toolbox" of resources, such as promotional materials for programs and sample itineraries for trips to evaluate overseas sites, and will offer workshops on setting up campus codes of ethics at its annual meeting, in April, said Brian J. Whalen, the group's president.

The forum is a consortium of American and overseas colleges and outside providers founded six years ago to create standards of good practices for colleges and companies. Its members represent about 80 percent of American students who study abroad.

The Cuomo Investigation

The code of ethics evolved out of the consortium's standards-setting work but was given additional "urgency" after Andrew M. Cuomo, the New York State attorney general, began an investigation last summer into some of the industry's business practices, Mr. Whalen said (The Chronicle, February 1).

Representatives of more than 40 colleges and provider organizations worked throughout the fall to draft the code, a process that included reviewing ethical guidelines developed by other professional associations. The forum then solicited feedback from other study-abroad directors, university lawyers, and "government officials," although Mr. Whalen declined to say whether a copy had been given to Mr. Cuomo's staff. A spokesman for the attorney general could not be reached for comment.

Mr. Whalen said the working group did give "thorough attention" to practices apparently being scrutinized by Mr. Cuomo, including free trips to study-abroad locations for university officials and discounted rates in return for exclusive access to students. The code recommends that college administrators not accept paid trips "unless substantive work, such as program assessment or program development, is required." It also calls on institutions to use any rebates or discounts to defray costs to students.
Forest and Trees

But Mr. Whalen and others involved in compiling the code say that it was not simply a response to Mr. Cuomo's inquiry but was also meant to offer more-expensive guidance on all aspects of education abroad.

"We had to back away and look at the issues that, broadly, are going to affect study abroad over the long term," said Adrian G. Beaulieu, dean of international studies at Providence College. "Otherwise, we would have been focusing on the trees and missing the forest."

Mr. Beaulieu said he hoped to use the code to "inform and guide" his institution's own review of its study-abroad practices. And Mr. Whalen said the document was not meant to proscribe specific practices but, rather, to offer colleges and companies direction in establishing their own policies.

"It's meant to be aspirational," he said.

Among more than 50 guidelines for ethical behavior, the Forum recommends that:

- Colleges and providers develop conflict-of-interest policies and procedures for dealing with such conflicts.
- Individuals not accept gifts, services, or other favors that could be construed as influencing their objectivity or their ability to do their jobs.
- Institutions, provider organizations, and their employees fully disclose service on advisory boards. Except in special circumstances, the costs of such work should be shared by the provider and the adviser's institution, the report states.
- Institutional and organizational policies regarding the award and transfer of student financial aid for study abroad be open, communicated clearly, and readily accessible to students and their families.
- Colleges that limit student participation to approved programs frequently reassess those programs, considering student input and evolving campus needs.
- Existing and proposed study-abroad agreements be reviewed by legal counsel and risk-management officials.
- Colleges and companies seek to offer reciprocal opportunities that benefit both the sending and receiving countries' educational institutions, students, and broader communities.
- Outside providers have a written policy outlining which student records, including electronic records, will be kept; who will have access to them; and how they will be discarded.
A Private College Builds on Its Confidence - Chronicle.com
03/01/2008 © The Chronicle of Higher Education

The campus of Quinnipiac University is surrounded by forested hillsides, but one cleared hilltop, crawling with earthmovers and construction cranes, stirs a sense of excitement here, as well as one inevitable question: What is this university thinking?

Quinnipiac is developing the mount, the site of its year-old hockey and basketball arena, into a new campus called York Hill, to eventually include residence halls for 2,000 students, a mammoth parking garage, and a $40-million student center. The university has also just acquired an office park a few miles away in North Haven that the space-crunched institution plans to convert into a locus for its graduate programs.

To pay for it all, Quinnipiac, an institution with about 7,400 students and an overall annual operating budget of $236-million that comes mostly from tuition and fees, last year quadrupled its debt load, to $488-million. That amount is the maximum it can borrow without damaging its credit rating.

With the pool of high-school graduates in the Northeast expected to decline and the national economy looking shaky, this would hardly seem the most opportune moment for a pricey, tuition-dependent New England private college to go heavily into debt to develop two new campuses, particularly with a financing plan that relies on finding even more students who can afford the tab. Undergraduate tuition, fees, room, and board at Quinnipiac run $39,920 this year.

Aside from the $25-million it raised for the new arena, Quinnipiac has had an unspectacular record of fund raising.

It seeks to expand both graduate and undergraduate enrollment by 20 percent in the next 10 to 12 years to help pay off the new debt.

"It is an ambitious growth plan at this time," says Karen Dulitz, an analyst from Moody's Investors Service who recently evaluated the colleges' finances when rating the $303-million in new debt.

Moody's is one of several organizations that has pointedly and publicly warned colleges about the coming demographic and financial challenges they face,
urging administrators and trustees to "plan conservatively for enrollment levels over the next decade."

Quinnipiac, however, sees the expansion as an opportunity it cannot afford to pass up, and believes it has the necessary management savvy and faculty buy-in, not to mention a few aces in its pocket, to pull it off.

"You have to be pretty confident," allows Patrick J. Healy, senior vice president for finance and administration, who has worked here for 37 years. The university, he says, is counting on its Plan A to work. "We're not planning to go to B."

Raising Its Profile

Among other strategies, Quinnipiac is counting on the publicity from its namesake public-opinion poll and from its deliberate moves to upgrade its sports program, putting its teams into conferences with prestigious Ivy League competitors, to help raise the institution's profile and, perhaps, the public's perception of its quality.

Quinnipiac leaders say they have good reasons for taking on the debt at this time. For one, it will allow the institution to offer four years of housing to all undergraduates. Now seniors live off the campus.

The university is also strapped for teaching space, with many classrooms on this compact, modern campus of low-slung red-brick buildings filled from eight in the morning to nine at night.

Most professors here do not even have their own offices; they share with colleagues. This leaves them few opportunities for private meetings with students and little quiet in which to pursue research, which is increasingly prized here.

York Hill will not relieve that space crunch, but university leaders think the North Haven campus, which it bought from an insurance company for $39.5-million, will provide some breathing room.

The complex of four austere glass-and-concrete structures and a parking garage is a far cry from the woodsy charm of Quinnipiac's stream-laced Hamden campus, to which it moved in 1966. But Mr. Healy says it is perfectly suitable for the graduate health-sciences and business programs to be offered there.

"The adult market is a different market and can be satisfied with a different presentation," he says, noting that these are the kind of buildings where
institutions like the for-profit University of Phoenix now offer courses nearby. Quinnipiac expects to spend $30-million to renovate the buildings. It estimates the university's overall budget will be 25 percent larger once all the new expansion comes on line in 10 years.

Mr. Healy says the university recognizes the risks of getting in over its head financially. "Bridgeport is right down the street," he notes, referring to the university that all but went under in the 1990s.

Recent successes, and its own unapologetically businesslike approach to managing the university, form the basis for Quinnipiac's optimism.

In the past 20 years, the university has tripled its enrollment, developed 14 new graduate programs (including a law school, which it picked up from Bridgeport), and become notably more selective and geographically diverse in its admissions. Several of its programs, including the law school and a physicians' assistant degree, have risen in national rankings.

The university has accomplished all this while continually banking surpluses. The surplus last year was $36-million, or about 20 percent of the university's operating revenue, five times greater than the average operating margin of its peers. Quinnipiac uses the surpluses to pay for capital projects and to build up the fund it calls its endowment, which stood at about $266-million as of June 30. The university only spends from a small portion of that, though — the $9.5-million that is legally restricted as endowed. It plans to eventually spend from the entire fund once it reaches $350-million.

View from the Top

The financial and academic advances coincide with the 21-year tenure of the institution's president, John L. Lahey, a figure who commands — and in some instances, demands — passionate loyalty from administrators, faculty, and students. (Mr. Lahey enforces a policy that all members of the university leadership, including student leaders, get clearance from the public-relations office before speaking to outsiders.)

Under Mr. Lahey, one of the longest-serving and highest-paid college presidents in the country (see article, Page A16), Quinnipiac in 2006 eliminated its faculty union, a move that by most accounts appears to have left few lasting scars. He declined to be interviewed for this story.

Faculty members credit Mr. Lahey for Quinnipiac's move up the academic pecking order.
"He runs the place with a very clear sense of where he wants it to go," says Robert Smart, a professor of English and vice-chair of the Faculty Senate.

His and others' admiration is not total. Like many professors here, Mr. Smart thinks the university depends too heavily on its 400-plus adjunct faculty members to save money. (They're known as "I-91 adjuncts," a reference to the interstate highway many drive between teaching gigs at Quinnipiac, the University of New Haven, and Southern Connecticut State University.)

The ratio of full-time students to full-time faculty members is 22 to 1 at Quinnipiac, versus 14 to 1 at Ithaca College, which it considers a competitor; Quinnipiac plans to increase its number of full-time faculty members from about 270 to 315 by 2010.

Some professors also say the university has let classes get too large, although administrators say there are few with more than 35 students.

But Mr. Smart, who worked previously at Bradford College, a Massachusetts institution that expanded programs and facilities in a last-gasp attempt to survive before going under in 2000, says he appreciates the management acumen of Mr. Lahey and his team of long-serving administrators.

"The thing that gives me some reassurance is their ability to trim and move," he says.

Quinnipiac leaders pride themselves on their ability to focus on "what's hot in the marketplace and what's not," much as for-profit colleges do, says Mr. Healy, the finance chief.

For instance, the university ended a degree program in medical and laboratory sciences and shifted many of its faculty members into the biology department when concern about blood-borne diseases arose. Likewise, about a decade ago, the university temporarily cut back its occupational-therapy program, when it appeared that a change in Medicare reimbursement policies would discourage students from entering that field.

Under Mr. Lahey, the university has also focused on 10 academic programs, including finance, journalism, and health law as having or having the potential for "academic excellence and national prominence," and committed to provide those with extra money for faculty hiring, travel money for conferences, and other support. The university is also encouraging professors to conduct more research in these areas.
Quinnipiac's approach to the law school, too, has also been unusual. Rather than taking revenue from the law school to cover costs in other places, as is the custom elsewhere, Quinnipiac cut law-school enrollment by more than half, to 390 — foregoing some $10-million annually in tuition — in a deliberate move to make it more selective.

The university applied the same approach to its push into Division I athletics, and it is no accident that it places particular emphasis on lacrosse and ice hockey.

Lacrosse has a following in the Middle Atlantic, a region from which the institution hopes to draw more applicants. Fewer colleges offer the sport, so Quinnipiac's men's and women's teams also have a better chance of getting into NCAA championships, which can generate publicity.

With hockey, which has an appeal across the upper Midwest as well as New England, acceptance in 2004 into a conference that pits the men's and women's programs against teams from Harvard, Yale, and Colgate, was also a coup.

"We are winning and losing against some of the best athletes and best institutions in the world," says Jack MacDonald, director of athletics and recreation.

The Quinnipiac Poll recently extended into Ohio and Florida, which are also recruiting hot spots for the college, and it plays a similar role.

The poll, which looks at national issues and political candidates, is a "public service," says Mr. Healy. "If we happen to end up in the newspapers with a headline, that's OK too."

**Advantage, Quinnipiac**

Joan Isaac Mohr, vice president and dean of admissions, says those strategies, along with others like working closely with independent college counselors, whose clients tend to be more likely to be able to afford Quinnipiac, are paying off. (About 9 percent of the students come from families needy enough to qualify them for Pell Grants; the university also provides about $42-million of its own money — mostly from tuition — for need-based aid, merit aid, and athletics scholarships.)

Applications are up 20 percent for the coming year.

Other colleges are seeing similar increases. Ms. Mohr, however, says Quinnipiac has several advantages, including several programs in which students can get their bachelor's and master's degrees in five years. The admissions office, which
conducted extensive surveys on admitted students and those who went elsewhere, says 30 percent of freshman choose Quinnipiac with the intention of staying on for their master's.

The admissions office also deploys a full-court press to get its admitted students to matriculate, paying for Web-based services that seek to create a community feeling — and affection for Quinnipiac — among accepted students and their parents. It also draws heavily on faculty volunteers to speak at campus open houses for high-school guidance counselors and admitted students.

Robert A. Sevier, an enrollment-management management consultant who does not work for Quinnipiac, says the university seems to be taking all the right steps.

"If you can get more students, raise the selectivity, and keep down the discount rate, then they're doing great," he says. Quinnipiac's overall "discount rate," the proportion of tuition revenue it uses for student aid, is 22 percent, lower than the 28-percent national average.

Still, he warns, it cannot count on clear sailing. "The big bugaboo is probably going to be that debt," says Mr. Sevier. And however well-managed an institution may be, "you can't predict what your competitors are going to do."

That does not scare administrators here. During the recession in the early 1990s, Quinnipiac was one of the few New England institutions to actually increase enrollment. And, as officials here are quick to note, its ability to thrive in the face of economic distress is a trait that dates to the institution's very founding 79 years ago, as the two-year Connecticut College of Commerce. The year was 1929, hardly the most auspicious of times to start a business college. What were those founders thinking?

**Colleges Expect Heroics From Professors, Without Fixing Themselves, a President Says - Chronicle.com**

03/01/2008 © The Chronicle of Higher Education

Educational reforms have failed time and again because colleges look to professors to rise above organizational dysfunction, the president of Valencia Community College in Orlando, Fla., told a crowd of college officials here on Sunday.

Colleges send faculty members off for training in the most up-to-date teaching methods, technological tools, and models for student success, and "they come
back to the same screwed-up organization," said Sanford C. Shugart, speaking at the annual conference of the League for Innovation in the Community College.

If colleges are going to change teaching—and the impact it has on student-learning outcomes—they must change their entire culture, he said. One of the key steps in accomplishing that, he said, is throwing out the notion that, at open-access institutions like community colleges, some students are simply going to be sifted out.

Rather, Mr. Shugart said, colleges must realize that anyone can learn anything, under the right conditions. And colleges should not expect faculty members alone to create those conditions.

That means colleges should send people out to make sure that classrooms aren't too cold or too hot for students to concentrate. It means colleges should think about how the layout of a campus affects learning. It means they should ask students about their impressions of their campuses and classrooms, and make necessary adjustments.

Administrators have to remember that students are people, and that they experience college campuses as people, not as data points, he said.

Still, Mr. Shugart said that he was long a secret skeptic about the ability of all students to learn: "I wondered even as recently as a year ago whether the sociological factors our students were wrestling with were so powerful that we couldn't move the needle."

But Valencia has started seeing results. Over the past three years, the college has focused in particular on improving student outcomes in six basic math and English courses. In five of those courses, achievement gaps between low-income and minority students, and their wealthier and white counterparts are now gone, he said. "I have hope like never before that the vision for equity can be achieved."

Grant Program Lets Students Take Charge of 'Service Learning' - Chronicle.com
03/01/2008 © The Chronicle of Higher Education

Emma Pickering wanted to use her love of painting to help children from low-income families express themselves through art. As a child, Ms. Pickering was able to paint because of an aunt who gave her free instruction and supplies. Now a junior at the University of Texas at Austin, Ms. Pickering hoped to offer similar
opportunities to others. But in order to do so, she was going to need some money.

Ms. Pickering turned to the Internet. She found some grant applications, but they were for a lot more money than she could use. Ms. Pickering wanted the middle- and high-school students she would work with to have access to free art supplies, but she couldn't imagine spending $135,000 on paper and paints.

Then she found a nonprofit organization that sponsored another grant program, one aimed at students. The group, Students Serve, gives service-learning grants — those that get students out of the classroom and helping communities — of more manageable amounts, about $2,000 each.

Ms. Pickering applied, got a grant, and is now starting her project, Drawn for Good, which will offer free art classes for 13- to 18-year-olds in the Austin area.

Angela C. Perkey, a student at the College of William and Mary, founded Students Serve after her freshman year, in the summer of 2006. Her goal is "to empower students to use their education to benefit communities," Ms. Perkey says. This, in turn, she hopes, will help form the next generation of lifelong civic leaders.

Amy B. Cohen, director of Learn and Serve America, a service-learning program of the Corporation of National & Community Service, says that while there are numerous programs that provide grants for service learning, the fledgling Students Serve program has found a new niche.

"The big difference is Angela is putting funds in the hands of students," Ms. Cohen says. "The value is not only understanding local problems, but putting students in the driver's seat along with community leaders."

The federal Learn and Serve America program, in contrast, provides money to officials at schools, colleges, and educational groups who then dole out service-learning grants.

Ms. Cohen has been following Students Serve's progress since Ms. Perkey e-mailed her asking for advice when starting the organization in 2006.

As a freshman, Ms. Perkey was part of William and Mary's Sharpe Community Scholars Program. The program allows 75 freshmen to live together and take seminars that relate their academic interests — health, in Ms. Perkey's case — to solving community problems.
The following summer, Ms. Perkey received a small grant from Sharpe to implement her plan of leveling sidewalks, improving lighting, and adding park benches in parts of her hometown, Nashville. The goal was to increase outdoor activity to help prevent obesity.

During the course of her project, Ms. Perkey found that many of her friends also had ideas for using their academic knowledge to help their communities. What they didn't have was money. By then hooked on service learning, Ms. Perkey decided to make money available to more students.

Ms. Perkey had no management experience. She learned the ins and outs of incorporating a nonprofit from a library book. But before long, she had a small, student-run organization committed to putting money in the hands of students who wanted to use their knowledge to meet local needs.

So far, Students Serve has given out two grants, one to Ms. Pickering and the other to Elizabeth A. Stuenkel, a senior at North Carolina State University whose plan involves refurbishing old wheelchairs and walkers and donating them to a clinic that provides free health care. Students Serve is reviewing its next round of applications and will select new grant recipients soon. The group plans to award 10 grants a year.

Ms. Perkey hopes to expand the program through local fund raising. She is working to form councils in several different cities — the first in the Washington area — made up of recent graduates of nearby colleges. The councils will raise money to support grants for students from their areas, though the recipients will still be chosen by the central organization.

Ms. Perkey will soon be a recent graduate herself. She plans to keep her role as executive director of Students Serve, but the organization will continue to be run by college students who want to support the work of their peers.

That is, after all, what sets Students Serve apart.