

Florida Board of Governors Task Force for Strategic Planning for Online Education

Affordability Workgroup

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Affordability Subcommittee Report

In Florida, most state universities have a strategy for the implementation and ongoing operation of online learning. While some institutions make significant investments and are studying new ways to support students online, whether it is collapsing fees, freeing up valuable classroom space by blending the face to face and online format, using instructional coaching to go to scale or attempting alternative models such as competency-based education, the underlying issues of achieving positive learning outcomes for students while reducing learning costs has not been achieved. Current empirical research is limited in this area, but excellent in-progress examples exist in higher education systems around the country for consideration. Technological interventions coupled with business process redesign at the system level are going to be needed to support meaningful change that will provide an impact on overall cost. From the limited work done, it appears that there are four goals for affordability, to include:

1. **Share services to support development and implementation costs.**
2. **Discover new sources of educational content for student use.**
3. **Adopt innovative instructional models to create instructional efficiencies.**

are the areas that should be considered deeply when trying to impact affordability in Florida.

Although the impact of studying campus-based distance learning fees will be marginal, it is recommended that as a system we

4. **Better understand the real costs of distance learning campus-by-campus.**

to facilitate a more meaningful conversation around additional services to share, the impact on innovative models to the existing funding formula and the impacts of other sources of educational content to be used by students.

Goal 1: Share Services to Support Development and Implementation Costs

When considering affordability through the lens of cost containment, the sustainability of creating redundant course materials and courses, purchasing similar or the same resources at each institution and using different, but similar measures of quality is limiting. Through sharing digital technologies, digital content and measures of quality, individual institutions can plug into services while independently maintaining high quality curricula and programs at each academic institution. *Overall, the purpose of shared services would be to lower institutions overall costs to maintain affordable, high quality online programs in Florida.* Academic libraries in Florida have already benefitted from this model through sharing academic electronic resources across the system, having a common integrated library system and other common tools for search and storage of digital archives. In addition to what is shared, academic libraries maintain what is specific to institutional need, whether it is a focus on research collections, STEM collections or some other area of specialty.

The Georgia Board of Regents led the development effort for “eCore” and “eMajor” with a central point of master course development and for implementation, a central point for operations. From there, opt-in institutions participate in the delivery and award of a degree from this initiative, reducing the costs of independent development, increasing access across more institutions, reducing costs to students and creating a new revenue model for campuses. This endeavor is financially self-sustaining and provides LMS hosting, course design consultation, master courses and additional shared services to support students. With revenues split among participating campuses, it is estimated that per-student instructional savings will be approximately 50% with additional reduced fees. Notable is that the savings are realized on campuses and cost of tuition is reduced for students. Other systems have been studying how to innovate and share from a system perspective, such as Open SUNY, UMass Online, Wisconsin, Colorado, California and many initiatives out of the state of Texas. Institutionally, there are many notables, specifically Arizona State University and their work to increase student success through 360 tutoring for online students and a revolutionary mission to maintain the New American University recognizing that they serve the demographic of their state and are inclusive rather than exclusive. The inclusivity required radical redesigns across the campus and outcomes have been significant to increase enrollments, project growth in online learning and take advantage of predictive analytics to fill gaps and support student success.

In Florida, initiatives are occurring with the Metropolitan Universities Project, the Unizen Initiative and institution-by-institution efforts to excel in online learning making Florida a national and international leader. Many institutions have been recognized for their excellence in faculty development, use of data across the system to impact significant improvements and recognitions of high quality courses. Initiatives have been underway to developing one-stop shop

student portals at FAU, student-to-student tutorials deployed through the LMS at UCF, library integration models at USF, FIU and UCF, adaptive learning tests at UCF, competency-based learning at UWF, deployment of off-cycle courses and admissions at USF, new entry points for online learning through UF Online, new podcasts “TopCAST” by UCF to share ideas in online learning, Proctor-Hub at UCF to potentially change the proctoring model, evaluation kits at FGCU, student authentication and markers of excellence at UF Online, analytics testing and implementation of tools such as Starfish at FIU, and a common application platform rollout and concierge-based coaching with Complete Florida to name a few.

Significant innovation in online learning is occurring in Florida, to further the story, two system-level areas of shared services exist to support the service-oriented needs of the entire system, **The Florida Virtual Campus and Complete Florida**.

The Florida Virtual Campus (FLVC). FLVC is a legislatively developed entity, housed through the University of West Florida as the hub for building efficiencies across the system of 40 state colleges and universities. FLVC maintains many distance learning services including the distance learning course catalog, the Florida Orange Grove repository, statewide licensing agreement negotiation authority, career readiness tools, the ‘old’ FACTS.org streamlined admissions and transient processing and the Florida Academic Libraries. Since a legislatively funded hub is already established to share many services, it is recommended that we build on services already shared to gain economies of scale for Florida’s State University System.

Complete Florida. Complete Florida is an example of institutional sharing with eleven partner institutions across the state university system (and new partners coming on board), state college system and private institutions coming together for a single purpose, to recruit and retain adult learners who have some college and no degree and to connect them to jobs in Florida. Through Complete Florida, innovative models have been tested, such as a single entry point, concierge based consulting and advising, career readiness assessments, competency-based education, accelerated online programs and overall collegial partnerships and relationships across the SUS, FCS and ICF systems.

Sharing of infrastructure, programs and services exists, however, there are more opportunities to provide consistent, high quality, accessible and affordable services to students taking online courses and programs in Florida. Similar to industry, educational systems and individual institutions, there is a move from local IT service provision to more hosted or cloud-based services. Florida should model 21st century IT service provision in this fashion to support affordability. Table 1 provides a listing of current and aspirant shared services in Florida.

Table 1: Shared Services in Florida

Type of Service	Currently Shared	Proposed to Share
Shared Infrastructure	Online Course Catalog Florida Orange Grove (repository for shared content) Library Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integrated Library System - Digital Archives - Discovery Tool Statewide licensing for Florida-based tools and services	-Cloud-based and hosted Learning Management System - Single Sign on Opportunities - Integration across various SIS systems in Florida (predominantly Banner and Peoplesoft integrations) - Cross system integration - Real time analytics capability to assess and monitor learning - Predictive analytics to identify risks that impact time to degree, completion and overall success.
Shared Services for Students & Faculty	Shared eResources Career Readiness and Assessment Tool Transient Application 2+2 Articulation Help Desk	Tutoring Network Proctoring Network eTextbooks Quality-Based Tool to support consistency in sharing the definition of ‘quality courses’

	Common Application (for Complete Florida)	
Shared Programs		Develop shared program(s) based on real need in Florida
Partnerships to defray costs	Complete Florida - Cost of Concierge Based Advising & Support - Program Marketing - Career Connections	

Objective 1: Enhance shared support services for online students.

The “online marketplace” was one of the recommendations of the Online Postsecondary Education Task Force and was intended to serve as a central location for institutions to share and for students to use as a ‘front porch’ to online education in Florida. The Florida Virtual Campus was assigned the project.

- a) **Expand the online marketplace to enhance current shared services using statewide buying power and building economy-of-scale drivers.**

The Florida Virtual Campus is launching “Florida SHINES” (Student Hub for Innovative Educational Services) on August 1 to serve as a single location for students to:

- o Go to College
- o Succeed in School
- o Find a Career

Florida SHINES will be the first point of contact for students at all levels (First Time in College, Transfer, Transient, Non-Traditional and Graduate) to gain access to vital services to support financial aid information, scholarships, library resources, locating a course or degree program online and participating in an array of career related tutorials, inventories and support.

Figure 1: Online Marketplace for Students



In addition to work already being completed by the Florida Virtual Campus, it is recommended that additional items for potential sharing be included to further expand the quality of the student online learning experience while reducing costs through efficiency. Future committees working on shared services through Florida SHINES may make recommendations on additional services such as a

Proctoring Network, Tutoring Network, expansion of the Florida Orange Grove to support reusability of content and shared marketing to name a few.

Objective 2: Develop a common toolset for distance learning course design and delivery that enhances existing toolsets to minimize the cost of distance learning without reducing quality of instructional experience.

- a) **Invest in state level licensing agreements for “Quality Matters” or some other methodology to measure course quality and coordinate internal and external coordinators for the system.**

Most institutions in the State University System use some form of metric to measure quality in online courses. The Online Postsecondary Education Task Force made a recommendation to study academic quality in online courses across the system. To do this, using the same quality metric would enable opportunities to identify best in class courses, programs, faculty, etc. for incentives and recognitions. Based on the quality metric selected, identifying the model to measure including the selection of statewide review team would reduce costs of quality measures such as Quality Matters.

- b) **Develop shared master courses in specific high demand areas.**

The Florida Virtual Campus maintains a repository, The Florida Orange Grove, could be refined for master course availability throughout the state. This repository is fully federated and funded. With additional standards around the best-case use of a master course, the Florida Orange Grove could be a shared resource for all institutions to use content in Florida.

- c) **Review data analytic tools and methods to predict student success in online courses.**

When sharing a technological infrastructure as significant as a common Learning Management System platform, many additional things are possible. To yield the full power of shared system infrastructure, it is recommended that connecting various components enabling data analytics to be captured at the moment of application through the completion of a degree to monitor how students are doing and what interventions can be put in place to create student success. With accessible high end analytics in place, limited dollars can be focused around areas of real need that directly support success.

Goal 2: Discover new sources of educational content for student use.

For many years, Florida has been testing models to share educational content. The Florida Orange Grove, funded several years ago to support sharing of instructional objects was one of the first. The Orange Grove is a fully federated repository that pulls educational learning content objects from federated repositories all over the world. Additionally it has storage capabilities to support campuses in creating and reusing instructional content. The Florida Orange Grove has several general studies books that are available for download that have been provided through other states. The University of Florida also tested open educational textbooks with the Provost funding faculty to develop open educational content and it is being used in courses in Florida. At the same time, the FLVC has been tasked by the Florida legislature with uncovering a solution to the issues of affordability through the use of eTextbooks and other open educational resources to reduce costs. At the same time, Florida Academic Libraries are using shared eResources to support the needs of students through library materials and several Florida institutions have developed widgets or building blocks in Learning Management Systems for students to directly access accessible library materials. Other large institutions outside of Florida, such as Indiana University and University of Minnesota have saved significantly through joint agreements with textbook publishers. As a system, it is time to come together and solve this issue for students in Florida to develop, purchase, or reuse high quality content that is available for students across platforms that enables consistent usage for students. Current eTextbooks do not take advantage of the digital environment to offer students full motion video, documentaries, and interactive simulations as well as developed written content. As well, current eTextbooks do not have embedded cognitive strategies that are sufficient for today’s learners (ability to take notes, highlight, share, save, etc.).

Objective 1: Develop a statewide model for the use of eTextbooks and other open educational resources to support reduced costs for students in Florida.

- a) **In response to statutory requirements, The Florida Virtual Campus has convened a group Open Access Textbook and Educational Resources Task Force (OATER) comprised of state college and university library and distance learning experts.**

Recommendations from this group may be presented to the Florida Board of Governors selected subcommittee for action. The charge for the task force comes directly from [statute](#): *“Promote and provide recommendations concerning the use and distribution of open-access textbooks and education resources as a method for reducing costs and work with public postsecondary education institutions in developing a standardized process for the review and approval of open-access textbooks and education resources.”*

Objective 2: Build a model to support realized cost savings to students in Florida through the use of eTextbooks.

Highlight pilot programs underway through the OATER Task Force to determine a best case for Florida’s State University System to consider whether it becomes negotiated services through vendors or some other entity to support reduced costs for students. A senior committee of educational leaders in Florida should be selected to learn from the OATER Task Force and make recommendations to the Chancellor on best next steps for Florida.

Goal 3: Adopt innovative instructional models to create instructional efficiencies.

Many industries have been “disrupted” as radically different business models were developed to increase access and reduce costs while meeting the ‘user’ at a place convenient for the way the user works. The music industry, disrupted through the iTunes store; the publishing industry still trying to figure out their role in the new economy, and Blockbuster disrupted by the on-demand services of Netflix. In the education space, radically new ways of thinking have emerged, but typically outside of the confines of the academic institution. The Khan Academy has changed the tutoring model, Coursera and other MOOC providers, although still in search of a business model have changed how we think about open courses, adaptive learning has the potential to personalize instruction to the level that creates significant, guided learning outcomes for the student and competency-based education is making great strides in areas around the country, Northern Arizona’s Personalized Model, Southern New Hampshire University’s College for America Program and the system-level initiative, the Wisconsin Flexible Option.

For over 15 years the National Center for Academic Transformation (NCAT) has been studying how to reduce costs and increase quality across high demand general studies courses. Although the emphasis was not online learning, the model predicts that cost savings came largely from reduced demand for faculty and increased use of peer tutoring, laboratory technology, electronic tutoring and teaching assistants, reserving the faculty expertise for the design and oversight of high quality instruction. Several institutions in Florida participated in NCAT and achieved similar results. Most notable of the NCAT work would be the Math Emporium at Virginia Tech where student success was increased, course completions increased and cost reduced. This model has been replicated across the US with similar results.

Keeping in mind that most students in US have taken at least one online course and in Florida every high school graduate is required to take an online course prior to graduation, new students entering our higher education system are more savvy and have higher expectations than possibly in the past for personalized, on-demand, high quality courses that recognized their existing knowledge, are relevant and challenge them to think at higher levels of critical thinking. Additionally, with the largest growing segment of the population being adults over 25, it is imperative that we recognize the distinction between our primary populations of students and provide innovative opportunities for learning that matches the audience while dealing with the significant cost variables that prevent increased efficiencies.

Goal 3: Lead in the development of innovative programs to support reduced cost to distance learning students in Florida.

To truly reduce costs to the students, it is critical to consider the overall costs to the institution when offering ‘innovative’ programs. This report has shared ways to share and to more fully contemplate fees collected. Educational innovation should advance understanding of teaching and learning, while also contemplating things like

process workflow, student experience and faculty responsibility. To re-imagine a teaching and learning environment requires opportunities to pilot ideas, get waivers for work processes and in some cases, as with competency-based learning, it may require approval from the Federal Department of Education and SACSCOC.

Objective 1: Develop shared programs in areas of high demand while maintaining quality and increasing efficiencies through an innovative, shared model.

Each SUS institution was asked to submit the complete listing of fully online programs to the Board of Governors. It is recommended that this list be updated annually and will be compared to the Florida Virtual Campus Degree and Course Catalog to ensure consistency. Based on the annual review, possibly CAVP should consider areas where programs and courses could be shared across the system. Programs with high demand that cannot be quickly fulfilled by a single institution could be candidate. In Georgia, sharing of courses (eCore) has been a longstanding practice. Sharing of degree programs (eMajor) is a newer initiative, but quite successful to date.

Georgia eCore. Georgia has been operating a core set of general studies courses for 15 years and has refined the process to the point that it is a significant cost savings for the student at a rate of \$169 per credit hour. Student's select general studies online courses among a set of 14 affiliate institutions. eCore <https://ecore.usg.edu/prospective/> is led by the Georgia Board of Regents and engages its affiliate institutions for development, maintenance and instructional delivery of the courses. The cost savings come through non-duplication, shared efforts among faculty to build high quality courses and instructional delivery by faculty from affiliate institutions usually on an overload basis. It is a different business model that does not require full institutional infrastructure and costs to support the program. Revenue from courses is shared among affiliate institutions and the institution that was selected to lead the affiliate program. Revenue earned is used to pay the lead institution costs, faculty costs, additional course development costs, marketing and ongoing maintenance. It is operated on a cost recovery basis. It should be noted this is an opt-in model for institutions to become affiliates and participate in eCore. It is not a requirement of the full system.

Georgia eMajor. Georgia also manages an eMajor program <https://emajor.usg.edu>. Affiliate institutions work collaboratively to develop full bachelors and masters degree programs by co-development and sharing faculty across the affiliates. The eMajor program also provides an avenue to offer Prior Learning Assessment to students to assist in reducing the time to degree. Currently, undergraduate eMajor programs include Bachelors in Office Administration and Technology, Organizational Leadership and Legal Assistant Studies with four affiliate institutional partners. At graduate, there are eMajor programs as well.

As a way to leverage state dollars, develop and expand distance education program offerings, foster collaboration between SUS institutions and ultimately reduce the cost to students, shared programs should be considered. These shared programs will provide cost savings to both the student and the institution as well as help create opportunities for shared resources and enhanced relationships among the SUS institutions. Considerations for sharing courses/programs would be reducing time and cost to degree and ultimately career placement. This collaboration would achieve a more sustainable distance education infrastructure for the State.

In order to initiate discussions on shared programs, it would be recommended that a statewide market research incubator be created to assist in identifying programs that could be delivered across or developed by SUS institutions. Conducting this research will help institutions make data driven decisions about meeting the needs of the state or region. For instance, the shared programming concept could be a way to meet the various student, economic and workforce needs across the state.

Various levels of shared programs could be designed and implemented. These collaborations could be in the form of shared marketing, shared use of courses or dual programs. The ultimate goal is to provide access to affordable quality online programs.

Objective 2: Develop competency-based and adaptive learning programs in appropriate areas of high demand primarily around adults and workforce needs while maintaining quality and increasing efficiencies through an innovative, shared model.

A promising model will be to take next steps toward flat fixed rates for competency-based education. Competency-based programs require a unique set of cost components as the role of the instructor and support staff is very different. It is recommended that a fixed cost be set for competency-based programs in line with other states and programs (Northern Arizona and College for America). Existing authority for block tuition could be modified to create a Competency Rate for part-time students that allow students to take as many courses as possible for the fixed amount. Northern Arizona assesses \$2500 per six month, flat rate. This strategy has the potential to reduce costs for

students selecting this option. The cost option should be the choice of the student so that the student can decide to (a) pay regular tuition and fees by term or (b) use the subscription model for students to take as many competency-based modules and courses as possible during a six month period.

Currently, the Lumina Foundation is working with the Florida Board of Governors, Florida College System Office and the Florida Virtual Campus (through the Complete Florida Initiative) to determine policy barriers to competency-based education. To date, two SUS institutions are piloting Competency-Based Learning along with state colleges and private institutions in Florida through Complete Florida.

Objective 3: Implement a model to assess competence through Prior Learning Assessment for the award of academic credit and expertise.

“Prior Learning Assessment” (PLA) is the term used to describe a variety of ways that college students can get credit toward their degree for what they already know, without having to enroll in a course. When used appropriately—for students who have both the ability and the desire to use prior experience to bypass certain course requirements—PLA can be a core policy tool for institutions and states to increase their capacity and serve students more efficiently and effectively (Johnson & Reidy, 2014, p 1).

Objective 4: Develop a series of experimental incubation pilot projects to support new and emerging distance learning trends through institutional partnerships, lead institution, or other method to support collaboration with the purpose of building affordable, innovative approaches and models that work.

Given the expertise of institutions in Florida, additional funds to support and pilot system level tests of new ideas, business process redesign efforts that have the potential to fundamentally shift the cost equation in Florida should be developed. This may be through an LBR request, a system level foundation agreement or through some other collaborative approach. Using the National Center for Academic Transformation as a model to define the process so that impact and sustainability can be realized would be the suggested approach rather than single award pilot projects that may not capture specific outcomes for sharing, reuse and system level adoption.

Goal 4: Better understand the real costs of distance learning campus-by campus.

As the number of students participating in online learning in Florida continues to grow, the Florida legislature is posing the question, how much does distance learning cost, to gain a better understanding of the ‘applicable cost components’ that are involved in the development and delivery of distance learning in Florida. As most institutions in the state have implemented a distance learning fee to support the costs of development and delivery, there is a realization that quality online education does have costs that are different from the face-to-face environment where policymakers and institutional leaders have a better overall understanding of the system.

Definition of Distance Learning

Distance learning courses are defined in Florida as *a course in which at least 80 percent of the direct instruction of the course is delivered using some form of technology when the student and instructor is separated by time or space, or both.* This method of delivery typically means that instruction is happening in a Learning Management System online. Public institutions wishing to assess a distance learning fee must include every section of every course in the state’s distance learning catalog (<https://courses.flvc.org/Degrees>) following legislation enacted relative to the **distance learning fee** (FS 1009.23(16)(a). *‘The amount of the distance learning course fee may not exceed the additional costs of the services provided which are attributable to the development and delivery of the distance learning course.’* The Florida Distance Learning Task Force Final Report (Feb 26, 2009) developed a set of recommendations for use of the fee that aligned to the legislation and took into account the needs institutions may have in developing and delivering distance learning on their campuses. There were four levels recommended as follows: (1) Level 1: Basic IT Infrastructure (b) Level 2: Centralized Distance Learning Costs (c) Level 3: Degree Related Distance Learning Costs, and (d) Level 4: Course Related Distance Learning Costs.

Florida Statute 1009.24(17) (b) permits the university to charge a Distance Learning Fee for all online courses that generate fundable student credit hours. (b) The amount of the distance learning course fee may not exceed the additional costs of the services provided which are attributable to the development and delivery of the distance

learning course. If a state university assesses the distance learning course fee, the institution may not assess duplicative fees to cover the additional costs.

The landscape of online education is very complex and ever changing. The needs of online learners as well as the technologies to support those needs have changed. In an effort to keep up with the pace of this rapid change, the current administratively defined protocols for the distance learning fees must be reexamined. The State University System (SUS) institutions, under the direction of the BOG, should clearly define goals and align investments that support today's online learners consistent with the missions of the SUS as well as the individual institutional visions, and to the extent appropriate, provide greater flexibility and authority to disperse allocated funding according to individual institutional needs.

In a broader study of distance learning fee utilization, institutions in Florida would fall into one or more of the levels in their decisions of how to best spend the dollars in support of distance learning. Complete Florida institutions overall have tied their distance learning fees to Level 1 Basic IT Infrastructure and Level 2 Centralized Distance Learning Costs.

Objective 1: Define a *fully online program* based on the work of the Metrics in Online Education Workgroup.

In response to a recommendation of The Task Force on Postsecondary Online Education in Florida, the Florida Board of Governors created a *workgroup on Metrics for Online Education*. This group is working to establish common definitions for reporting fully (100 percent) and primarily distance (80/20) online programs. These common definitions will provide consistency within and across state policy as we collect and analyze data to evaluate, inform, improve and develop online programs and student outcomes.

Objective 2: Identify all fully online programs in Florida's SUS for purposes of studying the complete portfolio.

The identification and statewide repository of all fully online programs will provide institutional and BOG leaders a better understanding of offerings. This information will allow them to think critically about how to expand statewide access cost effectively and better serve today's learners (millennials).

- a) **Review portfolio of online programs on an annual basis and compare with the FLVC Course and Program Catalog to ensure consistency.**

Per HB 5201, Florida Virtual Campus services includes the development and management of a statewide Internet-based catalog of distance learning courses, degree programs, and resources offered by public postsecondary education institutions which is intended to assist in the coordination and collaboration of articulation and access. In 2014, the FLVC launched a Distance Learning and Course and Degree Program Catalog in an effort to improve student access and success as well as enhance collection and analysis of statistical data. Using this portal, an annual review will be conducted to ensure consistency and maintain a statewide repository of online programs to provide students centralized and expanded access to quality online learning.

Objective 3: Identify institution-by institution distance learning fees by institution to directly support the online student.

To understand best practices within the SUS, we must identify how each of our partner institutions invests their distance learning fees into the infrastructure of student support. A prior review of distance learning fees across Complete Florida institutions (date and report information) revealed that the majority of expenditures of dl fees are to: 1) Support technology and infrastructure specific to distance learning that may include a portion of the Learning Management System as well as many software applications, modules and add-ons to support specifically the distance learning student; 2) Enable staffing and expenses in distance learning design centers and institutes embedded on college campuses to be responsible for development and portions of delivery of online learning. These robust units serve the function of supporting faculty, designing courses, developing media for online courses, leading proctoring efforts, handling state authorization, ensuring ADA requirements are met, handling authentication of students, managing distance learning software and applications, conducting training and managing change on campus; and 3) Provide student support infrastructure that spans the campus to support an online learner in the same way a traditional student is managed (help desks, library services, financial aid, tutoring, advising, ADA support etc.). Most of this activity is not funded by the distance learning fee but is critical to the retention of online students

and required through SACSCOC to provide equivalent services to all students regardless of instructional delivery methodology. This study should be replicated and implemented across the SUS to identify the current use of the distance learning fee and other institutional resources to support distance learning as a major strategy for the state.

a) Develop a protocol to expressly define distance learning fee expenditures aligned to statutory language.

Working together to encompass individual campus needs as they relate to the distance learning fee expenditures, we need to develop a protocol that is aligned with and directly related to the BOG statute listing permissible fees. This protocol should include the development of a research methodology that involves data analysis to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to the design, development and delivery of distance education courses.

Distance Learning fees are regulated by Florida Statute(s) and University Policies and are closely audited. According to Florida Statutes 1009.23 (16) and 1009.24 (17), a state university may assess a student who enrolls in a distance learning course a per-credit-hour distance learning course fee. A distance learning course is defined as one in which at least 80 percent of the direct instruction of the course is delivered using some form of technology when the student and instructor are separated by time or space, or both. Distance learning fees cannot exceed the additional costs of services provided which are directly attributable to the development and delivery of the distance learning course. A framework for describing these additional costs, which are attributable to the development and delivery of distance learning courses, has been developed by the Florida Distance Learning Task Force and provides the basis for evaluating the acceptable use of distance learning fees.

b) Benchmark against national models for total cost of education.

National models for total cost of education compare fixed costs (design, development and technological infrastructure costs), variable costs (number of students per course, materials, student services, maintenance), revenue, and return on investment. Applicable cost components for online programs in Florida are similar to those across the U.S. An analysis of distance learning fee expenditures done for Complete Florida institutions revealed that the costs to deliver distance learning programs can be broken down into the categories of direct instruction, other direct salaries, other direct expenses, technology and infrastructure, support services, faculty development. Direct instruction, including the cost of the faculty member, is held constant for this report and is not considered in the cost study, although the faculty member is the keystone to establishing the overall teaching and learning environment. Although institutions distribute the costs differently, they consistently fund the support unit that assists the development and delivery of distance learning for each institution.

c) Based on a multi-year review, determine where there could be cost savings within and across the model.

Currently there is not a consistent evaluation model for cost savings within and across the state. Using national best practices and models, the SUS institutions should develop an assessment instrument for identifying cost efficiencies and cost effectiveness of our online programs and services. This tool could be used to assist institutions in continuing discussions regarding costs and making data driven decisions based on a strategic focus that incorporates both the BOG and individual institutional priorities.

This model should be developed with extensive participation from all stakeholders. It should incorporate the goals of student success; affordability, access and quality. Each institution, as well as the governing body, could use the model to assess and compare varying costs of development and delivery of quality courses and programs across the state.