

Distance Learning

CS/HB 7105

Subsequent to the adoption of the BOG's strategic initiatives, the 2008 Legislature approved CS/HB 7105 related to distance learning. The bill created the Florida Distance Learning Task Force consisting of four representatives from the community college system, four from the university system, and the Executive Director of the Distance Learning Consortium. The task force has met twice so far and is being co-chaired by President Steve Wallace, FCCJ, and President John Hitt, UCF.

The task force is required to submit a report to the President of the Senate, Speaker of the House, State Board of Education, BOG, and university and community college boards of trustees by March 1, 2009. The task force decided to accelerate that schedule and complete its work in December.

The report must include, but is not limited to, recommendations regarding:

- (a) Management and promotion of the Florida Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog, which is created in the bill;
- (b) Creation of a central content repository for faculty;
- (c) Potential use of distance learning as a means to address the state's critical educational needs;
- (d) Evaluation and promotion of new and proven instructional methods, emerging technologies, and quality distance learning courses and degree programs;
- (e) Coordination and support of training opportunities for faculty and staff;
- (f) Process for negotiating statewide licensing and pricing agreements for distance learning resources;
- (g) Opportunities for building partnerships among educational institutions, business, and communities;
- (h) Methods that will improve student access to and completion of distance learning courses and degree programs;
- (i) Policies to increase access and cost-effectiveness in the development and delivery of undergraduate distance learning courses and degree programs;
- (j) An accountability mechanism to assess service provided by the Florida Distance Learning Consortium;
- (k) Future role of the Consortium;
- (l) Process for reporting data collected by the Distance Learning Catalog;
- (m) Definition of distance learning course;
- (n) A plan for developing and implementing an online system that streamlines and automates the registration process for students who have been admitted to a public postsecondary educational institution and who wish to enroll in a course listed in the Distance Learning Catalog. The system must:
 - 1. Allow a qualified student to register for any undergraduate course listed in the catalog, including courses offered by an institution that is not the student's degree-granting or home institution.
 - 2. Allow for the expedited transfer of the distance learning credit
 - 3. Be accessible from the catalog.

4. Comply with technology security standards

The bill also creates the Florida Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog which will be the central point of access to distance learning courses, degree programs, and resources. It is to include a tool that allows for the collection and analysis of data, including:

- (a) The number and type of students who use the catalog
- (b) The number and type of requests for information of distance learning courses and degree programs not listed in the catalog
- (c) The comparison of distance learning course and degree program cost data
- (d) An evaluation of course completion, graduation, and retention rates of students enrolled in distance learning courses.
- (e) The summary of specific requests by course type or course number, delivery method, offering institution, and semester.

In addition, the bill allows community college and state universities to charge a distance learning fee that may not exceed the additional costs of the services provided which are attributable to the development and delivery of the distance learning course. The institution may not assess duplicative fees to cover the additional costs.