

Florida A&M University's Response to the Governor's Proposed Policies

SECTION 2 – EDUCATION (ALL OTHER FUNDS)

“The tuition per credit hour for the 2004-2005 fiscal year is increased by 7.5 percent for resident, undergraduate students and 12.5 percent for all other students.”

The adoption of this increase in tuition would have a catastrophic effect upon Florida A&M University (FAMU) with reference to access by new students and retention of students currently enrolled. Approximately 93 percent of FAMU's student population is comprised of African Americans who are underrepresented not only in the targeted critical career areas of Teaching, Nursing, Engineering and Information Technology, but in all other career areas as well. Statistical evidence shows that FAMU students come from households with an annual average income of only \$31,500. Because the percentage decrease in enrollment and credits that may result from the tuition increase is likely to exceed the percentage increase in tuition (due to an elastic tuition demand), total tuition revenues for FAMU may decrease, although tuition revenues for the other universities may increase.

Historically, FAMU has been the state institution that has provided access to minority students. More than 80 percent of FAMU's current student population receives some kind of need-based financial aid; however, increases in state and federal financial aid have not been commensurate with the student's minimum needs to remain in the university. Instead of an increase in tuition, consideration should be given to need-based support to poor and minority students who seek access to the University and especially those who pursue studies in targeted critical career areas. Further, FAMU may be better served if it were given the opportunity to determine the amount of an increase. Harvard University has recently recognized the need to make tuition adjustments to accommodate lower income students. Florida may need to consider a similar policy to ensure that we do not exclude lower income students from higher education.

Attention should be called to the fact that the vast majority of FAMU's out-of-state students are high-achievers who contribute immensely to the academic climate of the university and potentially to the future economic development of the State. The average SAT score of out-of-state students at FAMU was 1048 compared to an average SAT score of 982 for in-state students admitted and enrolled at the university in Fall 2003. The significant number of out-of-state students at FAMU reflects the historical milieu in which the University was founded and the important national role it continues to play in higher education for minorities. Currently, 19.1 percent of FAMU's student population is out-of-state and includes the vast majority of our National Achievement Finalists (NAF). Further, because of their presence, many other high-achieving students who are not NAFs are inspired to attend FAMU. Students tend to remain in the state from which they graduate. Therefore, Florida A&M University serves as a conduit to attract talented minority students from out-of-state to Florida. Many of them remain in the state upon graduation and contribute to the educated workforce, helping to fill the great need for qualified minorities in many fields essential for economic development.

Graduate education, which is a strong contributing force for economic development, would also be negatively impacted by the proposed increase of 12.5 percent in tuition. Increased graduate education, particularly for underrepresented minorities, is essential to transform

Florida's economy from relatively low wage to high wage. Graduate education fuels the growth in the science and technology fields necessary for a high-tech economy.

“From the funds in Specific Appropriation 157, University boards of trustees shall establish policies which require students who are in excess of the number of hours needed to graduate by more than ten percent or who are not enrolled as degree-seeking to pay the out-of-state fee per credit hour.”

Florida A&M University's student body, which currently is comprised of 93 percent African Americans, is distinctly different from all other universities in the State University System. Because of an unfortunate historical past, a disproportionate number of FAMU's students find difficulty in gaining admission and graduating in a timely manner. Nevertheless, FAMU undertakes the challenge of admitting a high proportion of academically under-prepared students and enabling many of them to succeed in obtaining a college degree. However, this requires extra effort on the part of both the university and the students. When one combines the effects of lack of adequate scholastic preparation, low socio-economic status, and being the first generation in college, it becomes clear that negotiating a college education is an arduous enterprise. While the University fully intends to institute policies, procedures and supports to assist students in identifying majors early and progressing towards their degree, it cannot fully compensate for the lack of previous academic preparation and other socio-economic factors contributing to excess hours.

For many highly conscientious students, their scholastic under-preparedness may mean having to repeat college courses to master the content. Furthermore, the hours required for a particular degree are predicated on students being able to begin the curriculum at a certain level. College courses that students may need to take in preparation for those listed in the curriculum as the degree requirements are counted as excess hours. For example, a student planning to major in engineering, which is one of the targeted disciplines, may need to take algebra and trigonometry in preparation for calculus, but these courses would count as excess hours. The proposed cost associated with these courses would discourage our students from entering some of the very disciplines that are targeted in the recommended budget and which have a critical need for more minorities.

Students who have double majors should continue to be exempt from the excess hour calculations. Further, students who are not enrolled as degree-seeking students should be individually evaluated by the appropriate authorities before applying out-of-state tuition fees. Many of these students may be seeking courses to improve their skills and quality of service they are rendering to employers. It is important to note that many professions, such as the K-12 teaching profession, require that its members continue to take courses in order to maintain their certification. These individuals satisfy the requirements by enrolling as non-degree-seeking students. To impose out-of-state tuition on these students who serve a critical function would be detrimental to the State.

Any cursory overview of African American high school graduates in Florida would clearly reveal that there is an insufficient pool of African American students with the necessary academic preparation to progress through most college curricula without some degree of difficulty. The pool of African Americans from Florida high schools who make a score of 1010 on the SAT or 21 on the ACT is far too small to satisfy the fierce competition for these students

in the State University System and in the nation as a whole. According to a compilation for 2003 by the Florida Department of Education, a total of 23,169 African Americans received standard diplomas from high schools in the State of Florida. Of that number, only 9,686 African Americans took the SAT, with only 1,728 or 17.4 percent making 1010 or above. A total of 10,054 African Americans took the ACT, with only 1,582 or 15.7 percent making 21 or more. When we combine the total number of high school African American graduates who made the minimum admission score to a university in the State University System on both the SAT and ACT, we have a grand total of only 3,310. Since many of these students take both the SAT and ACT, it is safe to say that the number 3,310 decreases significantly. If we reduce the SAT scores to 900 and the ACT scores to 19, we will find that 63.2 percent of all African Americans Florida High School graduates fell below 900 on the SAT, and 70.9 percent fell below 19 on the ACT.

Since it is obvious that high schools in the State of Florida are not graduating enough high-achieving African Americans who are fully prepared to face the rigors of many college curricula, FAMU students should not face the burden of paying at the out-of-state rate for excess hours which exceed ten percent. A recent Hour-To-Degree Summary showed that fifty-four percent of the 1410 graduates from FAMU in 2002-03 had credit hours exceeding 110 percent of the degree requirements. It is more cost effective for the state to permit these students to take a few additional hours at regular in-state fees and go forth into the marketplace and contribute to the economic development of the State.

“From the funds in Specific Appropriation 157, individual university boards of trustees are authorized to establish block tuition and fee policies for full-time students based on a course load of 15 credit hours beginning with the 2004-2005 academic year. The Board of Governors shall review and approve such policies prior to their implementation. Such policies shall not increase costs to students or the state regarding state supported student financial aid programs or the Florida Prepaid College Tuition Program.”

More than any other university in the State University System, FAMU will show a large percentage of students with low economic backgrounds, for whom the proposed block tuition policy would pose a financial hardship. Requiring students who are currently taking twelve credit hours to pay for fifteen hours amounts to a tuition increase in addition to the proposed increase of 7.5 percent for in-state and 12.5 percent for out-of-state students. An analysis of Course Credit Hour Load for Degree-Seeking Undergraduate Students for the 2003 Fall Semester shows that 65 percent took 14 or fewer course credit hours. The same analysis showed that approximately 15 percent registered for 15 credit hours while only 20 percent took 16 or more credit hours.

In addition to recognizing the financial hardships, additional time is warranted to study the impact of the proposed policy on the academic performance of students. We recommend that the block tuition proposal be given careful consideration by the Council of Academic Vice Presidents, and that CEPRI be requested to conduct a system wide analysis of the impact of block tuition before such a policy is implemented.

Because of the nature of the Summer semester with its various sessions (13, 8 and 6 weeks) and intensive courses that must be offered, the block tuition and fee policies should not be applicable to the Summer.

In general, we support the incentive programs, provided that they are funded from recurring dollars. We have no comments on the University Billing Statements other than concern regarding the cost of implementation and having a reasonable implementation date.