

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Chancellor Debra Austin  
Division of Colleges and Universities  
Florida Department of Education

FROM: Frank T. Brogan  
University President

DATE: March 1, 2004

SUBJECT: Governor's Policy Recommendations

This memo responds to your request for comments on several policies that were proposed by Governor Bush and endorsed by the Board of Governors. Our comments on the proposed policies follow.

### Targeted Incentive Program

Florida Atlantic University strongly supports the concept of creating incentives to universities for increasing enrollment and degrees conferred in areas critical to the state's future job growth needs. Nonetheless, we wish to express several conceptual and practical concerns. First, it is important to ensure that these incentives provide stable, long-term support for the disciplines targeted to increases in enrollment and degree production. The term-by-term approach described in the first part of the recommended policy focuses exclusively on short-term enrollment gains thus addressing credit output without tying those credit increases to the formal awarding of degrees. A better investment of these short-term funds would be to provide seed money to universities that are launching specific initiatives aimed at increasing degree production. Since the goal is to increase the supply of individuals qualified for particular fields, basing the incentive on actual degree output would make for a tighter tie between the incentive and the outcome, as is recommended for the long-term approach. The seed money approach would create a tighter tie between the short- and long-term efforts.

Our second concern pertains to the need for a more expansive definition of each of the fields of study. FAU seeks to increase the supply of teachers through several mechanisms that go beyond the mere production of credit hours and degrees awarded. For example, FAU has developed an extensive program to prepare teachers for alternative certification and for mentoring individual teachers and school supervisory personnel who are pursuing alternative certification directly through their school districts. In another effort to increase the supply of secondary teachers, FAU has initiatives to channel prospective teachers into programs in science and mathematics to address those shortage areas. Enrollments in these disciplines ought to be recognized for students enrolled in these tracks.

A third concern relates to the need for some precision in defining the linked occupations and educational programs that prepare individuals to engage in those occupations. For example, the fields included under Engineering and Information Technology should be well-defined, but broad enough to recognize that students majoring in certain fields within business, the sciences, and even the liberal arts may prepare students for these careers.

Our final concern relates to our first, which emphasizes stability and continuity of effort in supporting programs. There will always be a considerable lag between the identification of forecasted demand and the fulfillment of that demand by students enrolling in educational programs. Any incentive program must recognize this lag time and structure the reward schedule accordingly. To be effective, the time frame needs to be sufficiently long in order to produce positive results. The program should recognize also that economic forecasts are not infallible and understand that once funds are invested in selected academic programs they cannot be removed precipitously without causing grave personnel dislocations.

### Block Tuition

Florida Atlantic University supports the development of a Block tuition program that will serve as an incentive to students who are capable and desirous of accelerating their progress toward degree. In developing this program, the FAU Board of Trustees would carefully examine the cut-off hours eligible for block tuition and would take into account students' characteristics, preferences, and course schedule development opportunities. Given the nature of our students and their enrollment patterns, it is expected that such a program would have little positive impact on most students, and indeed could have negative consequences for a number of FAU undergraduates who would avail themselves of the program. Currently, only about twenty-nine percent of all FAU undergraduates enroll for more than twelve credit hours per term. Our primary concern is that under block tuition these students will enroll for 1-2 additional courses, which will render those courses unavailable to other students because course seats are a scarce commodity. The university simply does not have the financial or staff resources to add seats to be filled due to the additional demand created by block tuition. Second, students may be encouraged by this policy to enroll for more courses than they can handle and many of those students will wind up either withdrawing from these extra classes or barely muddling through with deleterious effects on their performance and retention. In the former instance, withdrawing students will have occupied a scarce place that could have gone to another student, thus denying that second student's educational opportunity. In the latter instance, no valid educational objective is served by weaker student performance caused by taking excessively high course-loads. As an aside, there would need to be policies dealing with changes to the Florida Prepaid Program (a student registering for 18 hours and paying for 15 would be eligible for a tuition refund) and to excess hours charges the final semester.

### Excess Credit Hours

Florida Atlantic University recommends leaving the threshold for calculating excess credit hours at the current level of 115%. At FAU, very few students deliberately take more credits than necessary to satisfy degree requirements. For native students, over 61 percent of excess

hours generated are the result of repeated, withdrawn, and failed courses. Additionally, for transfer students, over 50 percent of the excess hours are the result of excess hours transferred into the university. Many others have pointed out the educational value to the student of being able to pursue a course of study without the non-intellectual constraint posed by an excessive financial penalty. This policy could work at cross purposes with the policy of increasing degree production in targeted fields. Students might not respond to the call for teachers or engineers, for example, if that response would require additional course work above the ten percent limit. Nonetheless, any policy adopted should maintain legitimate exceptions for programs such as ROTC, second majors, foreign languages, and state-imposed certifications such as ESOL.

Florida Atlantic University sees an even greater threat to the pursuit of the university mission in the extension of this concept of full cost payment to non-degree students. A significant portion of FAU's student body, and that of sister metropolitan universities, is comprised of students who are classified as non-degree students but who are every bit as legitimate as their degree-seeking peers. At Florida Atlantic University, more than 85% of these students are adults over the age of 25 years and close to half of them are taking courses in Education, primarily to maintain their required certification. At FAU, 25% of the graduate credit hours produced in Education are earned by non-degree seekers. Many other non-degree students are enrolled under that category because their applications for admission to a degree program were not completed in time for admission to a particular term. These students are encouraged to enroll for a term as a non-degree seeker in order to make progress toward their eventual degree. Penalizing these legitimate enrollees with a punitive tuition policy would run counter to the educational mission and purpose of the metropolitan university and would greatly restrict access.

Another large group of non-degree students at FAU are dually-enrolled high school and community college students who are encouraged to enroll in such programs through state-sponsored acceleration and articulation policies and students enrolled in certificate programs. The proposed policy would work at cross-purposes to these state-supported goals.

### University Billing Statements

At Florida Atlantic University two initiatives mitigate against fulfilling the provisions of this policy in a truly substantive way. First, the university has recently installed a new financial software system for billing, which is still in the trial and testing stage. Modifying the system at this time to include real account information and systematic calculation of educational costs would be problematic at best, especially since financial aid is not always set and included at the point of preparing initial bills. These educational costs and subsidies could be stated in a general way, that is, noting in an approved statement that the student's payment represents, on average, only a small percent of the overall costs. A second and more meaningful initiative is moving university billing to a virtually paperless, web-based environment. In this environment, the printing and mailing of billing statements will cease and the intended impact of this provision may be diluted by the medium. In any event, it is unclear from the directive on this subject whether the cost and subsidy information required to be on the bill is specific

to each student's account or based on university averages. Additional direction will be needed for compliance.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments to the Board of Governors on these proposed initiatives. We would be happy to provide additional detail at your request.