



Florida International University

Office of the President

February 27, 2004

Ms. Debra Austin, Ed. D.
Chancellor
Division of Colleges and Universities
Florida Board of Education
325 West Gaines Street, Suite 1514
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1950

Dear Dr. Austin:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the sections of the Governor's recommended proviso regarding targeted incentive programs, university billing statements, block tuition, excess hours, and hours accumulated for non-degree students. I am encouraged by the Board's willingness to work closely with the Universities on these important issues.

Florida International University (FIU) is enthusiastic about the Governor's proposal to provide incentives for educational programs serving critical state needs. We expect to contribute and participate strongly in providing programs needed for Florida's economic development and social well being. In addition, we believe that it is important to students to recognize the contributions of the State of Florida to the true costs of their education and will support the change to university billing statements.

Two of the Governor's provisos could have a negative impact on the ability of our students to pursue or complete their education in a timely way.

Excess Hours

The requirement for students with hours in excess of 110% of those required for the degree to be charged nonresident tuition could be a tremendous burden for our students and discourage many from continuing their education. Most of our students must balance work, family and educational obligations, resulting in many discontinuities such as course withdrawals, course repeats, and transfers. Many of FIU's students are transfers and, through no fault of their own, may lack prerequisites for specific majors requiring them to take additional courses before entering the major. The students affected by this proviso would be close to graduation, and the extra financial burden is likely to slow their completion of a degree. This is an unintended consequence of the proviso that runs directly counter to the larger state goal of increasing baccalaureate production.

We recommend that the percentage criterion be increased to 125% to reduce the burden on working adult students and to promote quicker graduation of these students. Further, we recommend consideration of a small surcharge rather than the proposed charge of nonresident tuition as a penalty for excess hours. FIU is already actively advising and working with students to promote more timely graduation.

Non-degree seeking Tuition

Charging nonresident tuition rates for non-degree students will have a negative impact on FIU students and on the surrounding community. FIU's local non-degree students are often seeking to enhance their employability through courses, certificates, and specific training experiences. We firmly believe that our Board of Trustees should have the option of carefully evaluating the consequences of implementing any such policy.

FIU supports the concept of block tuition **as an option** for universities to consider. We understand and agree with the Governor's philosophy of encouraging students to graduate in four years. However, it is important to realize that each university serves a very distinct population. Any block tuition policy must give the local Board of Trustees the flexibility of formulating a policy tailored to their students' needs.

We believe that students who are enrolled full time on residential campuses will be better able to take advantage of block tuition as proposed than those who are part time with other work and family obligations. We do not expect many FIU students to be able to take advantage of this option. However, we support other universities in this effort to promote more timely graduation of students by charging the equivalent tuition for 15 student credit hours to any student who registers for 15 or more hours. We would oppose charging all full-time students a flat rate equivalent to 15 hours as we agree with our student leadership that such a policy would be counter productive. We are pleased that this policy has been proposed as an option as opposed to a mandate.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to comment on these important issues.

Sincerely,

Mitch Maidique
President
Florida International University

c: Adolfo Henriques, Chairman FIU Board of Trustees
Tim Jones, Division of College and Universities