

HB 7121 Establishing the Florida Distance Learning Consortium

HB 7121 establishes the Florida Distance Learning Consortium (the “Consortium” or FDLC) in statute with some specific definitions, duties, and two processes to research and report upon within the year.

The Board of Governors (BOG) and the State Board of Education, Division of Florida Colleges (DFC) will exercise joint oversight of the Consortium.

The Consortium is established in Section 1004.091, FS to:

- Facilitate collaboration among public postsecondary institutions in the use of distance learning,
- Increase student access to associate and baccalaureate courses and degree programs,
- Support institutions in their use of educational technology, and
- Help build partnerships among institutions, businesses, and communities.

Two studies are included in HB 7121 and due March 1, 2010:

Online registration - In conjunction with the BOG and DCF, the Consortium shall develop a plan to implement a streamlined online registration process for undergraduate students who have been admitted to a public postsecondary institution and who wish to enroll in a course listed in the Florida Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog. This will help all students manage their time to degree because courses not available on campus may be obtained from another institution via online learning. This mechanism is also very supportive of adult learner degree completion and the Forward by Design goal to increase baccalaureate production.

Open access textbooks - In conjunction with the BOG and DCF, the Consortium shall convene a working group (Orange Grove staff, BOG staff, and DFC staff) to develop a plan to promote and increase use of open access textbooks. This requirement dovetails with the ongoing efforts of the Orange Grove Digital Repository (OG) and the University Press of Florida (UPF) to partner in the production of Orange Grove Textbooks. The Orange Grove Repository currently has an inventory of 53 textbooks and is expanding this inventory as quickly as possible. A business plan developed by the OG and the UPF clearly indicates the potential savings to students in the millions of dollars in public postsecondary education in Florida alone.

Follow up from the March 2009 Committee meeting:

The report of the Florida Distance Learning Task Force (FDLTF) was presented to the Strategic Planning and Academic and System Oversight Committee in March 2009. At that time Governor Parker made the following requests for clarifications and updates on issues related to the Taskforce recommendations and pending 2009 legislation. These are addressed below:

- 1 *Definition of distance learning* - For reporting and fee purposes is now defined in s. 1009.24 FS as courses that are 80% accessible to students via technology without requiring physical presence at a particular location and/or meeting time with the instructor. Any course for which a university charges a distance learning fee is now statutorily required to meet the 80% threshold and be included in the Florida Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog.
- 2 *State University System data elements* - The data elements for tracking distance learning courses will be aligned with the new definition in statute and with other recommendations in the FDLTF report for the tracking of hybrid/blended courses. Although there will be some disruption to longitudinal tracking data as elements are revised, the data is expected to more accurately reflect the use of instructional technology going forward. The new data elements will be finalized at the June 18, 2009 SUS Data Workshop.
- 3 *Collaborative contracts and shared services* - The Consortium provides a long standing service of identifying electronic tools and products that can be licensed at significant savings when multiple institutions participate. A major function of the Consortium is providing education on new instructional technologies and coordination of licensing activity. Now that the Consortium has been established in statute, Governor Duncan's Shared Services Team can work with the Consortium leadership to determine action and guidance that may be needed to assist the Consortium in these efforts.
- 4 *Incentive funding for collaborative and cooperative degree programs* - It was recommended by the FDLTF that incentive funding be sought to promote greater collaboration in the use of distance learning. This funding could be requested by LBR and/or external funding sources to support collaborative program development among institutions. It would support two related Forward by Design projects that have been placed on hold pending the actions of the 2009 Legislature in adopting FDLTF recommendations. The two projects are Collaborative Baccalaureate Models and Collaborative Distance Learning. Staff has been actively tracking efforts in other states to create statewide, multi-institution collaborations designed to increase degree production through targeted marketing, adult-friendly student support, and accelerated credit-earning mechanisms. These are outlined below and can inform the work of task groups assigned to these two projects.
 - a **Kentucky** - "Double the Numbers" is the tagline for Kentucky's concerted effort to increase retention and degree production at every sector level. The program places an emphasis on identifying and supporting adults with some college credit through to degree completion through multiple means.
 - b **Louisiana** - "CALL" or Center for Adult Learning in Louisiana focuses specifically on the route to a bachelor's degree and the multiple areas where

students get off track. Six postsecondary institutions are collaborating to ensure that appropriate adults are identified, informed of opportunities, provided experiential credit where appropriate, and offered fast track degree completion.

- c **Oklahoma** - "Reach Higher" is the motto of the program developed especially to serve persons 21 years of age and older who have been out of college for at least a year and who have at least 72 hours of college credit to build upon. Eight postsecondary institutions are collaborating on curriculum development and accelerated delivery of courses leading to the BS in Organizational Leadership.
- 5 *Open access textbooks* - HB7121 requires a collaborative study and plan to provide open access textbooks. However the Orange Grove Digital Repository and the University Press of Florida are continuing their collaborative effort to establish *Orange Grove Textbooks*. Once implemented, this project will provide access to online or print on demand textbooks that will initially target high enrollment general education courses. An updated business plan is under development and will be provided to SUS and Florida College System leadership over the summer for their input and recommendations. It is expected that this business plan will become the report required in HB 7121.