

## Three Concepts for Envisioning “Programs of Distinction”

May 10, 2018

Goal: Achieving world-class, nationally recognized university programs of distinction within and among the SUS

Issue: Two aspects to the goal: 1) maintain the quality of programs that are already preeminent or “programs of distinction and 2) moving programs that are on the cusp of preeminence of distinction. It is possible to include both aspects in the overall goal.

Issue #2: The programs of distinction are to be developed so that the SUS regional-comprehensive and the state’s liberal arts institutions are able to participate.

Issue #3: To identify “programs of distinction,” institutions may need to use both objective and subjective elements. “Objective elements would include those used to measure a program’s quality (e.g., data) and subjective elements would include those used to determine a program’s prominence (e.g., reputations). It is worth noting here, however, that subjective information is involved in the assessment of program quality (which data are used, for example) and that measures of programmatic prominence may contain objective, data-driven elements.”<sup>1</sup>

Working toward a draft *definition* of “programs of distinction:”

From earlier work conducted by the SUS/SBE in 2004, the following definition of “preeminent” might well serve as well as the definition for “programs of distinction:”

For the purposes of this project, an academic program is said to be “preeminent” when it has (1) documented high quality; (2) documented external recognition of its high quality; and (3) documented national or international prominence. To be considered preeminent, a program must meet all three of these criteria.

**Concept A:** A Collaborative in which university excellence addresses problems Florida needs to solve

One of the ways in which to promote programs of distinction is to develop expertise in a program among several institutions within the SUS, along the lines of the Rhode Island Model ([INBRE](#)) which follows a regional-type of collaborative. Here, a research focus area of excellence is identified. Collaborations are fostered between institutions that are research intensive (faculty have significant release time to lead research projects) and institutions with a stronger education emphasis where release time may be limited to summer or parts of a semester. There would be continuity in research programs achieved through collaborations between institutions. Pilot project grants could support collaborations, engage faculty for summer research, support undergraduate research opportunities and create a pipeline of future graduate students and faculty for the systems R&D mission. The goal would be to develop the academic program and research capacity and reputation of the participating institutions; increase the number of star faculty within the SUS in the program area; and increase the number of junior investigators who would then pursue academic and research careers in the

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<sup>1</sup> Programs of Preeminence. *Criteria/Indicators and State University System of Florida Programs, as Identified by SUS Institutional Personnel*

program area within the SUS; provide access to facilities, labs and instrumentation for faculty and students conducting cutting-edge research; or to develop a centralized research core facility in which all could participate.

As an example of how this would work, INBRE grants in the Rhode Island Model are funded at about \$1M per proposal. The state could fund 5 or 6 of these whereby partnerships would be created with a research-intensive university in the lead and education-intensive colleges collaborating as a way to expand their research capacity.

*Indicators of Success:* To judge the success of the Collaborative, the following are just a few of the indicators that might be considered:

- a) Total R&D Expenditures in the program area
- b) Number of grants/contracts between 2 or more institutions
- c) High placement rates in professional positions for student graduates
- d) National academic members
- e) Measureable improvement in area of need

Examples of a collaborative that focuses on a programmatic theme in which more established measures of quality exist could include the following:

- 1) Improving the health of Floridians
- 2) Growing technology and development
- 3) Addressing Florida's Environmental Needs

An example of a collaborative that focuses on a programmatic theme in which measures of quality are known, but more subjective, might be "Improving the human social experience," (such as a collaborative that includes multiple institutions demonstrating excellence in programs in the arts, tourism/hospitality and entertainment)

### **Concept B: Unique Programs of Distinction**

Another way to promote programs of distinction is to focus on discipline-specific programs, such as dance or cybersecurity. These programs of distinction would arguably be more narrowly defined and may be likely to have more agreed-upon indicators of quality throughout the Academy.

#### *Indicators of Success*

Indicators of the program's distinction could include national rankings in college guides, program reputation rankings, per capita number of publications and/or creative works, high percentage of passing scores on certification or licensure exams, student success in competitions and performances, and so on.

#### *Examples of Unique Programs*

- 1) Dance
- 2) Marine Biology
- 3) Neuroscience
- 4) Dietetics

## 5) Cybersecurity

### **Concept C:** Research, Scholarly, and/or Creative Areas of Excellence

This concept might be thought of as a hybrid of Concepts A and B, essentially using both concepts but in a hierarchy – like a “decision tree.” Concept C builds upon “big ideas” that require large investments to transform Florida, the nation and the world, such as improving human health, enabling environmental sustainability, harnessing big data, advances in surgery and medicine, assessing and treating disabilities and mental health disorders, advancing translational research, strengthening business practices, and enhancing the human experience.

Broader areas of RSC excellence (Concept A), which are nationally relevant and of strategic importance to Florida, are then anchored in sub-areas within departments and research centers (Concept B). The sub-areas can involve faculty, postdocs and student researchers from a variety of departments and research centers.

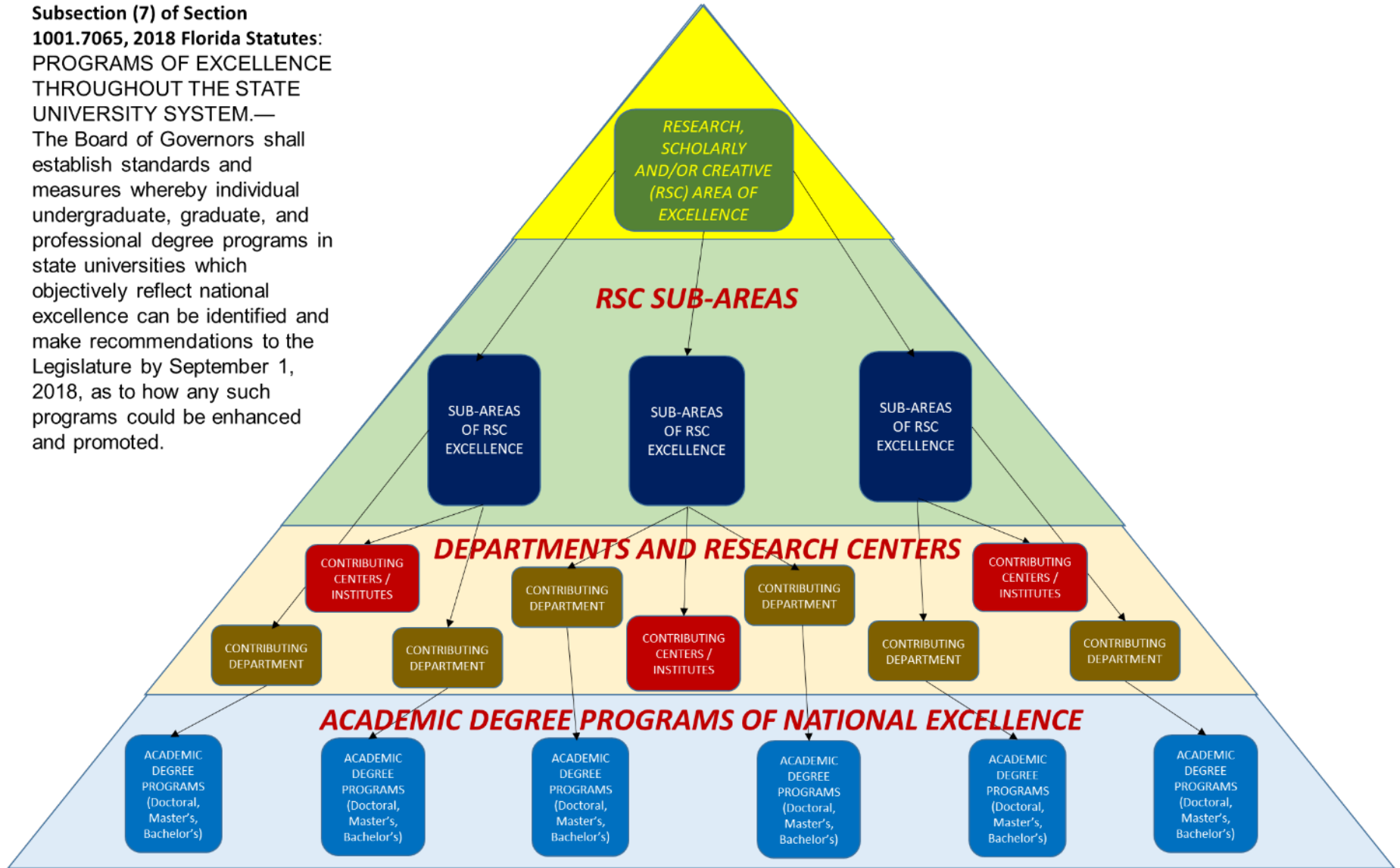
The hierarchical connection is represented in Figure 1 below. Two examples – one from the broad area of “Improving Human Health” (Figure 2) and another from the broad area of “Enabling Environmental Sustainability” (Figure 3) are provided on the following pages to illustrate Concept C.

An area of excellence may include current national distinction or emerging national prominence as indicated by a rapid trajectory of recent advancement coupled with nearly-distinctive status.

Potential Indicators of National Excellence for Departments / Degree Programs may include rankings from the NRC; *U.S. News & World Report*; *Academic Analytics*; Blue Ridge Institute for Medical Research, which includes rankings by specific medical fields.

**RESEARCH, SCHOLARLY AND/OR CREATIVE (RSC) AREA OF EXCELLENCE  
& ACADEMIC DEGREE PROGRAMS OF NATIONAL EXCELLENCE**

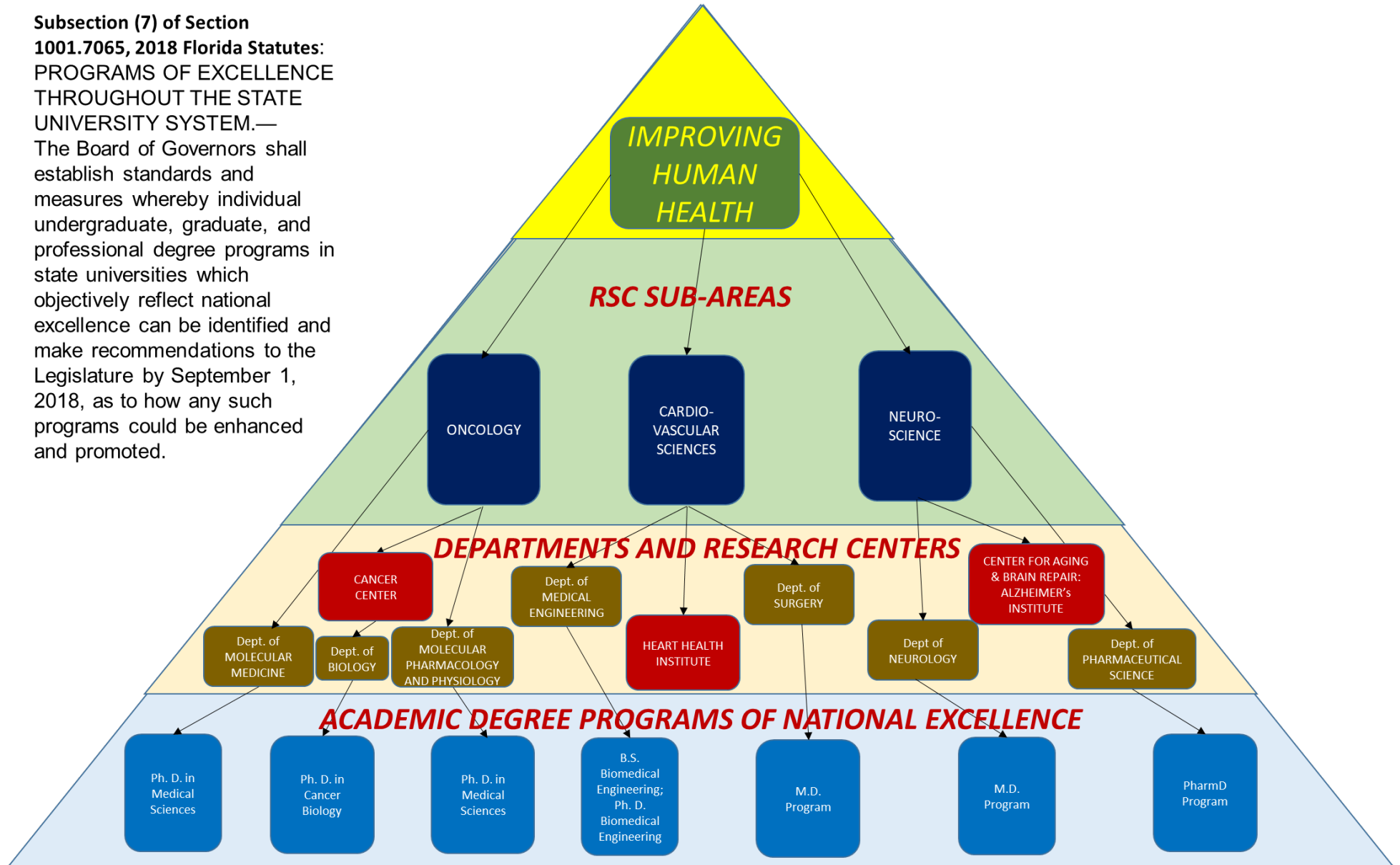
**Subsection (7) of Section 1001.7065, 2018 Florida Statutes:**  
**PROGRAMS OF EXCELLENCE THROUGHOUT THE STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM.—**  
 The Board of Governors shall establish standards and measures whereby individual undergraduate, graduate, and professional degree programs in state universities which objectively reflect national excellence can be identified and make recommendations to the Legislature by September 1, 2018, as to how any such programs could be enhanced and promoted.



## IMPROVING HUMAN HEALTH (an example)

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## ENABLING ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY (an example)

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