

SUBJECT: Student Services: Securing Resources for Technology

Tactic: Access 2.1.4 - Secure student support resources to ensure students have access to technology required for online education.

Background:

Three factors contribute to the digital divide (a) access to broadband, (b) socioeconomic status, and (3) primary language other than English.

- a) Broadband services are a gateway to a highly connected world. Although Florida ranked as the ninth most connected state, three counties have no access to internet. According to BroadBandNow, 1.2 million Floridians are without access to a wired connection capable of 25 Mbps download speeds.
- b) Individuals with low socioeconomic status do not have the resources to own a computer or to pay for broadband to access the full range of educational resources. Across Florida in the 2013-2014 academic year, 188,590 undergraduate students received some form of grant aid. Of that number, 102,288 received grant aid from Pell, and another 111,115 were awarded a federal student loan to apply to the cost of their education. Not counted in these statistics are those who attempted and did not finish the admission process or did not try to attend a post-secondary institution.
- c) Individuals whose primary language is not English often place owning the technology as a low priority. In Fall 2014, 77,633 Hispanic students enrolled in Florida's public universities, which is 24% of the total student population.

Lack of Broadband Access Impact on Higher Education

- a) Prospective students, who lack access to broadband, struggle with the pre-enrollment processes with 15% to 40% not enrolling in college after acceptance or enrolling in a college that does not match their ability or interest.
- b) Prospective students overestimate the cost of attending college because they do not have the digital literacy skills to research options to reduce the cost of attendance resulting in not enrolling at the university.
- c) Students, once in college, are not as proficient in communication skills due to lack of practice using technology or unable to participate in online discussions because of the lack of adequate technology to be active participants in online courses.
- d) Students using online mobile devices miss critical aspects of the courses because of the lack of access to a full range of tools to participate in online courses or to conduct research.
- e) Economically disadvantaged students spend financial aid money on meeting basic needs not on technology.
- f) Students require 10 to 15 hours a week per online class access to technology which is not always available through public libraries or computer labs.

Recommendation:

This issue is broader than the State University System. Therefore, the recommendation is to forward the lack of broadband access whitepaper to the Higher Education Coordinating Council for review and consideration.

Supporting Documentation Included: None

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