

MINUTES
STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF FLORIDA
BOARD OF GOVERNORS
INNOVATION AND ONLINE COMMITTEE
January 24, 2024

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1. Call to Order and Opening Remarks

Chair Ed Haddock convened the meeting at 11:00 a.m. on January 24, 2024, with the following committee members present: Manny Diaz, Aubrey Edge, Jack Hitchcock, Charles Lydecker, Craig Mateer, and Amanda Phalin. A quorum was established.

2. Approval of Committee Meeting Minutes

Governor Hitchcock moved that the Committee approve the minutes of the meeting held on November 9, 2023. Governor Diaz seconded the motion, and the members concurred.

3. AMAZON Career Choice Program: An Employer/Education Partnership

Chair Haddock began the session by calling on Ms. Cristal Cole, the Southeast Regional Policy Lead for Amazon.com, Inc. to introduce the Career Choice program and guide the presentation. Ms. Cole highlighted the Florida participation in the Amazon Career Choice program that includes nine state universities and focused on the unique inter-sector partnerships in Tallahassee involving Florida A & M University, Florida State University, and Tallahassee Community College. She recognized FAMU Provost Allyson Watson, FSU Provost Jim Clark, and TCC Provost Calandra Stringer and thanked them for their support. Ms. Cole stated that Amazon's Career Choice program is designed to enable its employees to pursue and meet their individual education and career goals. She introduced Mr. Colin Newman, Director of Workforce and Economic Development at Amazon.

Mr. Newman began by showing a brief video that demonstrated from an Amazon employee's perspective the critical role that employers can play to assist their employees in pursuit of their education and career dreams. He reported that Amazon has over 100 fulfillment centers with 50,000 employees in Florida and the company has steadily increased employee compensation and benefits in recent years. Educational opportunities and support are critical priorities of Amazon as the company believes that it has a critical responsibility to be a national leader in workforce development and a source for workforce talent. Mr. Newman stated that Amazon has committed \$1.2 billion to upscale 300,000 employees by the year 2025.

Currently, Amazon has 175,000 employees participating in its Career Choice program that includes all education levels: G.E.D. programs, high school equivalencies, English as a 2nd language, industry certifications, and postsecondary credentials and degree

programs. Career Choice is a pre-paid tuition program that emphasizes accessibility as all employees are eligible after 90 days employment. The program has no life-time learning limit. Thus far, 11,000 employees in Florida have participated in Career Choice through an investment of \$34 million with 45 % in degree-earning programs.

Mr. Newman said that the Amazon Career Choice program emphasizes local partnerships, like the FAMU, FSU, TCC partnerships, that make the pursuit of educational programs convenient for its employees. Amazon pays close attention to program quality, curriculum nimbleness, and program completion rates, recognizing that employment demand and job growth continue to change and evolve.

Board Chair Lamb commended Amazon and asked that the leadership continue to push the state universities forward toward greater collaboration. Governor Jones encouraged the direct engagement of university presidents in the development of such partnerships. Responding to a question from Chair Haddock, Mr. Newman said that the value of local partnerships is that employees often have the option of taking courses on campus or online based on their work and family schedule.

Chair Haddock thanked the Amazon leaders for their critical support of state university Career Choice partnerships.

4. Outstanding Online Student

Chair Haddock introduced this agenda item by offering a brief video to introduce Ms. Jasmine George, a student in the FSU Master of Science in Information program. Ms. George told the committee that her passion for information and library work began at an early age, through volunteering and focused study. She described her background and the challenges of providing health care to her mother during recent years while attending FSU. Jasmine was facing the need to stop her educational pursuits when she was encouraged to consider an online graduate degree program, which turned out to be a perfect fit for her. The FSU faculty and staff were open, welcoming, and supportive throughout her degree program.

Jasmine discussed the graduate online program that focuses on high-quality educational content while providing opportunities to engage with her fellow online students. Jasmine will be graduating this Spring with a Master's Degree in Information.

Chair Haddock thanked Jasmine and congratulated her for her academic achievements. Following concluding remarks, Chair Haddock adjourned the meeting at 11:32 a.m.

Edward Haddock, Chair

Jon Rogers, Ph.D.
Assistant Vice Chancellor