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**Commission on Higher Education Access and Educational Attainment**

June 15, 2012

Over the past two years, the Board of Governors has developed a new 2025 Strategic Plan, has completely rewritten its Annual Accountability Report, and has created the Work Plan template for our universities to help align their future plans with the state’s Strategic Plan. The Board has also recently created a task force to address the funding challenges for new facilities and will soon launch a second task force to explore the possibility of an online university. Recently, the Governor announced a Blue Ribbon Task Force to address certain higher education issues, and the Board was invited to make appointments to that group.

Much work is being done to help Florida make informed, strategic choices on how best to increase the state’s educational attainment. A key piece of this strategic planning must focus on how Florida is currently addressing the very specific statewide need for future baccalaureate degree attainment. In the 2025 Strategic Plan, the Board embraced a vision to increase baccalaureate degrees awarded statewide from 53,000 per year to 90,000 per year—an increase of 37,000 graduates per year. To generate these additional graduates, we will need many times that number of new students in Florida’s institutions. That fact alone raises questions we currently cannot answer:

* Is the pipeline of college-age students going to be able to produce a sufficient number of college-ready students?
* Should all these new students attend our state universities, or is there a major role to be played by the State’s colleges?
* Is there going to be any need in the near future for additional universities or colleges to meet this demand?
* Will the increased demand be evenly distributed around the state or will there be some geographic areas disproportionately impacted?

To answer these questions and marshal our resources in the best way possible, Florida needs to be able to focus on the crucial issue of capacity in higher education. It is for this purpose that the Board of Governors’ Commission on Florida Higher Education Access and Degree Attainment was created by Chair Dean Colson on May 16, 2012.

This new Commission will operate on a timeline that will allow it build upon the work of the new groups that are each addressing particular issues affecting higher education, including

* the Task Force on Facilities Funding to develop recommendations on facilities funding models and options by November 7, 2012;
* the Governor’s Blue Ribbon Task Force on State Higher Education, which will deliver recommendations to the Governor on accountability, funding and governance by October 30, 2012;
* the new Board of Governors Task Force that will offer recommendations on the expansion of online degree programs and explore the potential role for an online university; and
* the Higher Education Coordinating Council, which was created in law a few years ago to provide an ongoing forum for the chief executives of Florida’s education delivery systems and business leaders appointed by the Legislature to regularly meet and discuss a wide range of cross-sector issues.

The Tasks

The Commission must focus on the issue of “capacity” and make recommendations regarding how to achieve optimal access and degree attainment for our State. In the course of doing its work, the Commission will rely upon data to inform its recommendations and consider factors such as:

1. the State’s projected population growth;
2. employers’ needs for workers with advanced levels of knowledge and skills;
3. citizens’ demands for higher education;
4. existing postsecondary capacity issues; and
5. regional or state-wide factors that could maximize, leverage, partner, or re-engineer existing resources.

Guiding Questions

Three critical questions must be addressed in the Commission’s final recommendations:

1. Can programs be strategically aligned to provide greater educational opportunities for access and degree completion?
2. Should new students attend our state universities, or is there a major role to be played by the State’s colleges?
3. Is there going to be any need in the near future for additional universities or colleges to meet demand?

To answer these questions regarding capacity, the Commission will likely rely upon the work of several state educational and workforce databases to answer the following sub-questions:

1. Where are baccalaureate and graduate degree programs currently offered at state colleges and four-year public and private universities?
2. Is there existing institutional capacity to expand program offerings? Where are students currently being served, including educational centers, regional and main campuses, and alternative delivery systems?
3. What is the workforce demand for new programs or expansion of existing programs, projected to the year 2025?
4. What is the potential pipeline of students to the year 2025—including high school graduates, transfer students and returning adult students? Will the increased demand be evenly distributed around the state or will there be some geographic areas disproportionately impacted?
5. Are there gaps in program delivery? If so, where are they?

To make this happen, the Commission will need to form two staff teams that will work together to help accomplish the Commission’s goals. The first team will be composed of researchers from higher education and workforce agencies. This means, we will need the commitment of the Board of Governors, the Department of Education and specifically the Florida College System, the Department of Economic Opportunity, the Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida, and the Commission on Independent Education to make available the necessary data and staff resources. Together, this team will tap into existing databases to conduct the actual “gap analysis” to determine how we can best meet the state’s workforce needs.

The second team of senior policy staff will review the research that the data team assembles to see where the system is already functioning optimally—and where progress still needs to be made. The Commission will work with senior policy staff to review the data and analyses and develop a plan address the gaps in the system.

Expected Outcomes

The Commission’s recommendations will ultimately be provided to the appropriate governing bodies, including the Legislature, to determine how best to consider and implement the recommendations that affect their areas. The recommendations are likely to provide strong direction for:

* a more focused delivery system for higher education that has identified where gaps exist in current program offerings and that is aligned with the state’s workforce needs.
* opportunities to optimize existing institutional capacity.
* identification of where new programs are needed or existing programs should be expanded, including eLearning and alternative delivery programs.
* a set of guiding principles for system expansion or optimization.
* recommendations to address gaps in both undergraduate and graduate degree production.
* possible recommendations for near-term as well as longer-term best options for expanding degree attainment.

Commission Members and Contributing Partners

The following persons will serve as members of the Commission:

* Board of Governors charter member and former Board Chair Ava L. Parker will serve as chair of this Commission.
* Dean Colson - Chair, Board of Governors
* Kathleen Shanahan of Tampa – Chair, State Board of Education
* Rep. William L. “Bill” Proctor of St. Augustine – Member, Florida House of Representatives
* Thomas G. Kuntz of Orlando – Member, Board of Governors, and Geographic Banking Executive, SunTrust Banks
* Marshall M. Criser, III of Miami – Co-Chair, Higher Education Coordinating Council; Vice Chair,
* University of Florida Board of Trustees; President, AT&T Florida
* Susan Pareigis of Tampa – President, Florida Council of 100

In addition to Commission members, the following agencies and offices will be asked toparticipate in the development of the recommendations by nominating a researcher and a senior level policy administrator to complete the necessary work on which to base the Commission’s recommendations:

* The Florida College System, Department of Education
* The Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida
* The Commission on Independent Education
* The Department of Economic Opportunity
* Other institutional research participants from colleges and universities, as needed.

To ensure that the work is informed by all stakeholders in higher education, advisory partners will be asked to review the work and to provide input at various points in the development of the Commission’s recommendations. These Advisory Partners include:

* The State University System Public University Chief Academic and Vice Presidents group
* The State University System Council of Student Affairs
* House and Senate higher education policy representatives
* The Governor’s education policy staff member

Suggested Timeline

The following timeline is proposed as a realistic timeframe within which to gather and analyze the data necessary to inform the Commission’s final recommendations:

* June 15: First organizational meeting
* By June 30: Commitment to participate from “kitchen cabinet” and researchers
* July – September: First meeting of researcher group, to continue every other week through September. After September, on an “as needed” basis only.
* Mid-September: 1st meeting of Commission (data presented on demographics, current and projected student participation and degree production, and program array)
* November: 2nd meeting of Commission (data presented on institutions and capacity and workforce demand)
* March: 3rd meeting of Commission (data presented identifying opportunities for growth and optimization; beginning development of recommendations)
* May: 4th meeting of Commission
* Draft recommendations to address statewide and regional gaps in higher education
* Vetting of draft recommendations with CAVP, CSA and other constituent groups
* June-July: Final adoption of recommendations.