



## **Florida Higher Education Classroom Utilization Study - DRAFT**

The State Board of Education and the Board of Governors, (the Boards), have made increasing Florida's degree production a goal of their strategic plan. In order to achieve this goal, Florida's colleges and universities will need to enroll more students, as well as increasing the percentage of students who complete their college education, also known as the student retention rate.

One key indicator of Florida's progress in meeting this challenge is the classroom utilization rate. Increases in utilization should be highly correlated with increased degree production. Utilization rates below system averages may indicate unrealized opportunities for the expansion of course offerings; whereas high rates signal that demand for courses may be exceeding available instructional resources such as faculty or classroom space, or the specialized teaching labs required by many disciplines.

This connection has long been recognized. Section 1013.03(2), Florida Statutes, provides that classrooms are to be used a minimum of 40 hours per week and that 60% of student stations are to be occupied. Both the Florida College System (FCS) and the State University System (SUS) are in compliance with these requirements, with the SUS having a system average rate of 115% and the FCS showing a rate of 105% for the fall 2010 term. (See Appendix for more detail)

What is the goal of examining the issue of space utilization? Clearly, the goal is to reduce future costs and increase efficiency. Easy solutions can improve utilization metrics, without achieving genuine cost savings. For instance, one large lecture section with 400 students in an auditorium could be divided into 10 smaller classes of 40 each. Such a division would increase utilization, because an auditorium is not a classroom - but is obviously not more efficient. Likewise, merely shifting classes from morning to evening or from Monday to Friday would do nothing to improve overall efficiency. The focus thus must be on measures that both improve utilization and increase the number of credit hours taught and successfully completed in a given term.

Looked at more broadly, one starting point is to examine how Florida's higher education compares to the K-12 delivery sector. As the fundamental building block of elementary and secondary education, both students and teachers spend the majority of each day in the classroom. Actual classroom occupancy is approximately 6 hours a day, once lunch, recess and various breaks are factored in.

On the basis of a K-12 30 hour week, the SUS rate of utilization would be 153%, and the FCS rate would be 170%. In terms of classroom operations, the most significant change has been the Class Size reduction initiative. While the amount of space per student for higher education remained fairly static over the past 10 years, the amount of classroom space available per student at the K-12 level increased by over 30%. The student station size standard has not increased; rather than making the existing classrooms physically smaller through renovations, and using the excess space to create more, but smaller, classrooms, the policy decision was made to have fewer students in each class.

**K-20 COMPARISON**  
**All Owned Net Assignable Square Feet of Classroom Space per FTE**

| Sector                  | 2001-02 | 2003-04 | 2005-06 | 2007-08 | 2009-10 | 2010-11 |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Florida College System  | 9.57    | 9.44    | 11.07   | 10.74   | 9.44    | 9.08    |
| State University System | 10.47   | 10.63   | 10.12   | 10.36   | 10.82   | 10.60   |
| K-12 System             | 27.81   | 29.89   | 33.14   | 35.99   | 37.30   | 37.41   |

The statutory language presumes a 40 hour week, based primarily on faculty schedules of the past. With the addition of distance learning, expansion of adjunct faculty, and other non-traditional approaches, which blend classroom and non-classroom instruction, the 40 hour paradigm may no longer be the most appropriate benchmark. However, before the benchmark is increased, practical questions should be addressed. For example, how much time should be allotted for cleaning, and changing of classes? What are the practical start and end times of the school day and should time be allotted for lunch or dinner? On many campuses, there is a transition between students who generally attend during the day, and the night shift, who begin to arrive around 6:00. Given that parking is a constraint at many campuses, additional time must be granted for these factors, otherwise queuing theory predicts resulting inefficiencies.

Nonetheless, staff has examined a range of possible new benchmarks, ranging from the current 40 hours per week, up to a maximum of 60 hours a week, as suggested by OPPAGA studies. Hypothetical utilization rates are included in the Appendix to this report. Likewise, actual usage data for evenings, Monday through Friday, 6 PM to 8 PM, as well as Saturdays (weekends) are included for reference purposes.

However, there are practical considerations as to whether the schools can afford to operate for more and longer hours. For example, university study space is already intensively used, with many university libraries operating almost around the clock and parking is already at a premium at many schools. Currently, the general rule is that campus support services, such as police, janitorial, academic and dining are scaled back on the weekend and at night. More

increased classroom utilization will increase the coverages and costs of these associated support services.

During the 2011 Session, the Florida Board of Governors adopted increased utilization as part of its Legislative agenda, and two items related to utilization were adopted during the 2011 Session. The first item was a statutory change allowing the University of Florida, on a pilot basis, to admit spring-summer cohorts of students, who will be restricted from attending classes during the Fall term. This will allow the University of Florida to increase utilization during the Spring and Summer semesters, which have historically had additional capacity. Furthermore, as a result of the repeal of FS 1007.27(10), all state universities may now require freshman and sophomore students to attend at least one summer term, regardless of how many credit hours the student earns prior to enrolling.

### **Recommendations**

Chapter 2011-69, Section 2, Laws of Florida requires that the Boards develop recommendations for a revised funding formula or potential policy changes to increase the evening and weekend utilization of higher education classroom facilities during future school terms no later than January 15, 2012.

The Boards should direct the system Chancellors to appoint a joint work group of appropriate college and university system personnel to establish uniform data-based equitable utilization standards and policies designed to encourage overall improvements to utilization leading to increased graduation and retention. Standards should be research-based, and might consider the following questions:

- How has technology changed national utilization norms?
- Is the need for study space increasing?
- What tools are other state's higher education entities using to capture utilization data?
- Is utilization data being reported and used to improve desired policy outcomes by other states?
- Have utilization standards reduced life-cycle costs associated with the operation of higher education classroom facilities?
- How can scheduling software be better utilized to improve classroom utilization, facilitate faculty and staff scheduling, and provide for enhanced statewide reporting of system metrics to better inform funding and potential policy changes?

Each student should be required to take at least one off-peak, night or weekend course and two on-line courses prior to graduation.