



Florida House of Representatives

Will Weatherford

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Dean Colson, Chairman
Florida Board of Governors
State University System
325 West Gaines Street, Suite 1614
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0400

Dear Chairman Colson:

Congratulations on becoming the new Chair of the Board of Governors. I have enjoyed working with you over the years, and look forward to continued partnerships. I write today with a request that has the potential of meeting multiple higher education objectives shared by the Board of Governors and the Florida Legislature. I ask the Board of Governors, under your leadership, to consider embracing technology as a way to take Florida to new heights. I believe it is time for the Board of Governors to undertake a cost-benefit analysis of establishing a high quality, accredited, online university in Florida.

There is no question the future of our state will be determined by our ability to compete and excel in the dynamic global marketplace. The innovation our students need and our state requires is born in our education system and brought to maturity in our universities. Over the last decade, higher education reform has been a recurring topic of discussion and debate, with a particular intensity in the past few months. I commend the Board of Governors for taking a proactive role to require more accountability from our universities and to recognize market demand for degrees.

With the prolonged downturn in the economy and the demographic characteristics of Florida, more students of all ages are seeking advanced degrees. As a result, we can expect to have continued challenges in meeting our capacity needs and paying for our growth. Consider the Florida Chamber of Commerce's study which determined that in the next ten years we will need to provide 1.52 million advanced degrees in order to remain competitive not only nationally, but also internationally. The need for capacity, the desire for innovation, and the demands of the global marketplace can be viewed as burdens to weigh us down or as a launch pad for better approaches.

We are living in the middle of a technological revolution. The Internet is the information Autobahn. At this moment, you can log onto Apple's i-Tunes and download lectures given at Yale, Stanford or MIT. You can watch on YouTube a multivariable calculus class taught by a professor at UC Berkley. Through technology that is available now, we have the power to deliver a high quality education to students anywhere in Florida.

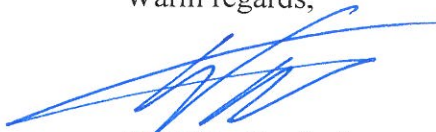
Technology has also brought with it "disruptive innovations" for higher education and we should embrace it with open arms. The next university created in our state could be an online university; one that has no student capacity limits, no walls, no marble statutes, no football team, and no parking garages. Yet, what it lacks in traditions, it more than makes up with innovation, a student-centered approach, limitless knowledge resources, and lower costs.

There is no doubt that such a delivery model is the wave of the future. The question is will Florida lead or will it lag in the race? Florida has led the nation in K-12 education reforms. We have record high graduation rates, more choice, better accountability, and quality means to measure learning gains. We are home to the first online K-12 school, Florida Virtual School, with over 122,000 students who are currently receiving a high quality education at a fraction of the cost. It's time to bring the same principles and technology, the way students are learning today, to our university system.

While I believe this idea has merit, I want to be clear that I am asking you to undertake this effort if you deem it worthy. If it makes sense for Florida, we should aggressively move forward. If the objective research produces a more viable solution, we should consider the best option. The goal is to expand higher education opportunities by harnessing the power of technology. I want to begin a conversation that will hopefully lead to better outcomes and superior access.

Charles Kettering once said, "There exist limitless opportunities in every industry. Where there is an open mind, there will always be a frontier." I believe there is a frontier before us in online learning. The Board of Governors, if willing, could help usher in the beginning of a "New Florida" to the benefit of our students and our state. Please know I am available at anytime to discuss this idea further with you.

Warm regards,



Will Weatherford
Speaker-Designate
Florida House of Representatives