



STATE
UNIVERSITY
SYSTEM
of FLORIDA
Board of Governors

ADULT DEGREE COMPLETION INITIATIVE

Currently, 17.4% of Floridians hold a baccalaureate degree. About 2 million Florida adults (23% of the work force) have earned some college credit; many, though in good standing academically, were forced to discontinue their pursuit of a college degree for various reasons—financial, family, health, and more.

This demographic element of Florida’s workforce cannot be ignored if the State is to achieve its goals for baccalaureate degree production and movement towards a knowledge economy. Bachelor’s degree holders have lower unemployment rates and more annual earning power. Increasing the number of Floridians holding a baccalaureate degree, especially one that allows entry to a fast-growing occupation, will build a stronger workforce and improve economic conditions in our state.

The proposed Degree Completion Initiative is designed to provide an opportunity for qualified Florida residents with at least 60 hours of earned college credit to complete a baccalaureate degree within a reasonable and flexible timeframe. Other states have successfully launched similar initiatives to bring these former students back to college and into degree programs designed to incorporate both traditional credit previously earned and credit for prior learning through assessment.

SUS institutions will participate in the Degree Completion Initiative through a Cooperative Program Agreement. A single statewide web portal, which could be accessed through FACTS.org, will be developed for adult learners interested in degree completion. The portal will include information about degree options and institutional contacts, access to the Florida Distance Learning Consortium’s online course catalog, and links to Florida job information, and will serve as a single source to help students navigate seamlessly among the various institutional degree and concentration options.

A set of support services designed exclusively for the adult learner is an important component of the proposed Degree Completion Initiative. Adults who have been away from higher education for some time may need an orientation course that includes information about study strategies, online courses, learning resources, etc. Adult students need options such as accelerated courses, flexible course schedules, and academic and student support services. Grant funding, scholarships and financial aid will also be needed. With the use of a ‘concierge’ approach to student support, students will select a home institution based on the degree program of choice. The home institution will provide academic advising, career counseling, and ultimately award a degree. A designated contact person trained in advising and counseling students in the degree completion program will assist the students in enrolling and moving through the program, obtaining financial aid, accessing support services etc.

SUS institutions may participate in the Degree Completion Initiative in two ways (1) offer concentrations within another institution’s degree program; and/or (2) develop a degree program that accommodates the concentrations available at other cooperating institutions. It is also anticipated that most course offerings would be available online in order to maximize the opportunities available to adult learners anywhere in Florida.

Oversight of the Degree Completion Initiative is proposed by a Statewide Coordinating Council to include all participating institutions, BOG, FDLC, and representatives from workforce agencies and organizations.

The Degree Completion Initiative will be implemented in two phases: a pilot program involving USF and UWF; and a full program involving all interested SUS institutions.

Pilot Program:

- A. **Lead institution:** University of South Florida
- B. **Cooperating institution:** University of West Florida
- C. **Model:** The USF Bachelor of General Studies (BGS) will be offered statewide through a Cooperative Program Agreement between UWF and USF. Currently available **online** concentrations include:

- 1. Hospitality
- 2. Information Technology
- 3. Information Technology Support
- 4. Public Administration
- 5. Public Health
- 6. Women's Studies

Other concentrations available to students in the Tampa Bay Region include:

- 1. Aging Studies
- 2. Behavioral Healthcare Services
- 3. Business
- 4. Environmental Policy & Management
- 5. Urban Studies

D. Proposed administrative procedures for statewide BGS pilot program:

- 1. Admissions through USF as the degree granting institution
- 2. Advising through USF plus designated contact at UWF
- 3. Concentrations available from authorized list
- 4. SCH accrue to the institution offering the course
- 5. Degree administration and reporting through USF, including monitoring of residency requirements and compliance with accreditation standards.

E. Issues for consideration

- 1. Funding source(s)
- 2. Pilot implementation date
- 3. Marketing
- 4. Technical support/help desk services for online students
- 5. Revenue sharing/cost recovery
- 6. Financial aid enrollment thresholds for adult, part-time students
- 7. Credit for prior learning