

Affordability in the Florida College System 2016

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Contents

Introduction	1
Who the Florida College System Serves	1
Achieving Affordability through Stabilizing Tuition and Fees	2
Strategy: Stabilizing Tuition and Fees	2
Reducing/Holding Tuition	2
Reducing Fees	2
Increasing Affordability through Cost Savings	2
Strategy 1: Reducing Time to Graduation	3
Structuring the Student Experience	3
Implementing Developmental Education Reform	3
Expanding Online Offerings	3
Offering Acceleration Mechanisms	4
Strategy 2: Enhancing Operational Efficiency	4
Reducing Administrative Costs	4
Increasing Efficiencies in Utility Costs	4
Optimizing Space Utilization	5
Outsourcing Services	5
Improving Bidding and Procurement Practices	5
Strategy 3: Evaluating Academic Offerings	5
Aligning Course Demand and Offerings	5
Terminating Programs	6
Expanding \$10,000 Bachelor’s Degrees	6
Strategy 4: Implementing Textbook and Instructional Materials Affordability	6
Selecting Materials	6
Using Open Educational Resources	7
Student Financial Support	7
Strategy: Providing Institutional Student Financial Aid	7
Targeted Aid	7
Emergency Aid	7
Identifying Student Aid	7
Partnerships to Support Students	8
Conclusion	8

Introduction

This report responds to 1004.84, Florida Statutes, requiring the Florida College System (FCS) to annually report strategies to promote college affordability, including reducing the cost of textbooks and providing students and their families information on the cost of attending a Florida College System institution.

The Florida College System is the primary access point to undergraduate education for Floridians, including recent high school graduates and returning adult students. The 28 member colleges of the Florida College System respond quickly and efficiently to meet the demand of employers by aligning certificate and degree programs with regional workforce needs. With an array of programs and services, the FCS serves individuals, communities and the state with low-cost, high-quality education opportunities. College access and affordability have been and remain priorities for all 28 colleges.

During the 2016 legislative session, the State Board of Education was tasked with conducting a study that identified strategies and initiatives to promote college affordability by evaluating the impact of tuition and fees on students; examined federal, state, and institutional financial aid on the actual cost of attendance for students and their families; and explored the costs of textbooks and instructional materials.

This Florida College System Affordability Report has been prepared for the Governor, the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives as statutorily required.

Who the Florida College System Serves

The 28 colleges that comprise the Florida College System served nearly 800,000 students in 2015-16. Sixty-five percent (65%) of Florida's high school graduates pursue their college education at one of the Florida College System institutions, and nearly half of the juniors and seniors enrolled in the State University System are graduates of the Florida College System. More than half of students enrolled in the FCS qualify for Pell Grants and are the first in their families to attend college.

Ninety-nine percent (99%) of FCS students are from Florida and the average age of the student body is 25. Many FCS students, 65 percent, are enrolled part-time, allowing them to balance college and life responsibilities. Nine out of ten Florida College System graduates are employed in Florida.

The Florida College System institutions are recognized as being among the nation's best colleges. Whether it is through innovations in teaching, advising, transfer or partnering with business and industry the FCS keeps a focus on keeping college affordable. This report provides an overview of the strategies employed by FCS institutions to maintain and increase college affordability.

Achieving Affordability through Stabilizing Tuition and Fees

Florida College System institutions keep college affordable for students by maintaining low tuition and fees. Tuition at Florida College System institutions has remained flat as colleges implement strategies that focus on growth, efficiency and affordability.

Additionally, when other systems partner with the FCS, further savings to students can be realized. Most notably is the vaunted 2+2 articulation agreement in Florida. The impact of this agreement on affordability is notable. For example, in the fall of 2014, the State University System of Florida (SUS) enrolled 75,235 students who had previously earned an Associate in Arts degree. For those students, the average savings was \$5,463.60 in tuition and fee payments. In total, those students saved \$411,053,946 because of Florida's 2+2 articulation policies. These savings are realized year after year as FCS students earn their Associate in Arts degrees and transfer into SUS institutions. The FCS continues to develop strategies, enhancing 2+2 programs such as Direct Connect and most recently, the FUSE program that ensure students have a seamless pathway to completing their degrees at the one of the state universities.

Strategy: Stabilizing Tuition and Fees

Florida College System institutions are the most affordably priced option for higher education in Florida. For 2015, in-state tuition and fees were \$3,156 per year compared to \$5,934 at a state university and \$20,053 at a private university in Florida.

Reducing/Holding Tuition. Florida College System institutions did not increase tuition in 2015-16. Daytona State College approved a two percent reduction in tuition effective spring 2016 that is now the standard tuition cost for FY 2016-17.

FCS institutions provide students with options to pay their tuition without taking on debt. Florida Keys Community College increased the number of payment plan options to assist student's ability to pay their tuition and avoid high-interest loans. The timing of these plans was adjusted to allow more students to take advantage of these options.

Reducing Fees. FCS institutions are committed to affordability and regularly reviews course fees as required in s. 1009.23, F.S. Such evaluations may result in the reduction or elimination of student fees. Florida SouthWestern State College (FSW) evaluated overall fees for 2016-17 and reduced course fees in 61 courses and eliminated 81 course fees. The savings impact for students at FSW will be approximately \$610,000. Additionally, FSW reduced the online access fee by \$5 per credit hour, saving students \$377,510. Polk State College reduced fees for 21 courses in 2015-2016 and 17 courses in 2016-2017 due to reductions in the cost of materials or the required materials.

Increasing Affordability through Cost Savings

In addition to investments from the state and students, FCS institutions are able to provide an affordable college education by operating efficiently. Actions taken by the FCS to keep college

affordable fit within the following areas: 1) reducing time to graduation; 2) enhancing operational efficiency 3) evaluating academic offerings; and 4) implementing textbook and materials affordability.

Strategy 1: Reducing Time to Graduation

While the majority of students enrolled in the FCS are part-time, decreasing their time to graduation provides benefits to the students and the state. One such benefit is the reduced cost borne by students. To this end, FCS institutions are implementing practices to reduce the time to graduation by restructuring the students experience and expanding dual enrollment.

Structuring the Student Experience. The FCS is actively analyzing data, engaging in convenings related to best practices and innovation to structure the students' academic paths into a format that increases completion. These best practices have been implemented by the colleges and include mandatory orientation, intrusive academic advisement and career pathways that map students to a college credential.

This pathways work is also resulting in colleges' structuring their institutions to increase student success. For example, St. Johns River State College's Student Success initiative includes pro-active advising with integration of faculty mentoring, early alert system, one-stop student services, scheduling, onboarding and online orientation.

Broward College has led the national efforts in implementing guided pathways that help students take only the courses required for graduation and/or transfer in a selected career area. This reduces time and costs to students by ensuring that they follow their academic plan. Broward College also provides students with information on job tools and salaries. At Miami Dade College, students can access additional information on the employment options associated with their degree choice through EMSI Career Coach.

Implementing Developmental Education Reform. Over the past three years, FCS institutions reformed developmental education by developing implementation plans for new education strategies, changing the way students are advised, utilizing a multiple measures approach to guide student choice, and delivering these new education strategies in the classroom. In addition to changes in structure, colleges have focused on pedagogical enhancements and content realignment all in an effort to help a larger number of students succeed in college, graduate and enter the workforce. Students are positively impacted by these changes which have resulted in reduced costs and improved student success in developmental education courses.

Expanding Online Offerings. Online offerings at the FCS institutions continue to grow in high-demand areas. For example, at Valencia College online courses have increased from four percent to 24.6 percent over the last 12 years. Eastern Florida State College has developed fully online college certificate programs to address current workforce needs. The colleges have developed a model for quality online and hybrid teaching and learning that includes enhanced student services and learning to support student success. In total, FCS institutions offered 42,235 online courses in 2015 providing options that allow students to accommodate work and family responsibilities while progressing towards an academic credential.

Offering Acceleration Mechanisms. Students at Florida College System institutions complete college faster when earning dual enrollment credits. Dual enrollment was developed, in part, to provide high school students the opportunity to earn college credits prior to enrolling in college with the intent to both challenge students academically while also decreasing their time to an associate degree. For students who enter with credits earned through the dual enrollment acceleration avenue, their time to degree is nearly half of that for students who enter without dual enrollment credits.

Increasingly, these experiences are leading to high school students earning Associate in Arts degrees while in high school. State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota launched an accelerated dual enrollment program on their Venice campus, allowing eligible juniors the opportunity to earn their AA degree while simultaneously finishing their last two years of high school (saving students just over \$6,000 in tuition costs).

The FCS is innovating in other ways to reduce the time to graduation. These innovations extend beyond the practice of awarding credit for advanced placement, international baccalaureate and Cambridge AICE courses to include converting high school career and technical education courses into college level courses, converting industry certifications into college credit, and converting work experience in the military and other work environments into college credit.

Strategy 2: Enhancing Operational Efficiency

There are a number of elements that provide savings and efficiency to colleges, it begins with the budget process for both the operational and capital need.

Reducing Administrative Costs. FCS institutions regularly review administrative staffing to ensure operational efficiencies. As a result of this practice a college may downgrade or eliminate positions and consolidate the responsibilities under another administrator as occurred at Florida Gateway College and North Florida Community College. In another example, Florida State College at Jacksonville reorganized its Student Services to better focus on utilization of resources.

Increasing Efficiencies in Utility Costs. Advancements in building technology and monitoring have resulted in increased savings in college utilities. All colleges reported energy saving strategies including Hillsborough Community College, which reduced electrical use via two phases of facility improvements in partnership with Tampa Bay Trane. Santa Fe College (SF) conserves energy and generates solar power through state-of-the-art mechanisms and has reduced its energy consumption, while adding nearly 100,000 square feet of building space. Solar arrays installed on SF's library provide the college with a rebate of approximately \$35,000 each year. Analysis of building usage, scheduling and building energy management systems as resulted in reduced utility consumption at St. Petersburg College and State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota.

Many of the colleges participate in the Florida College System Risk Management Consortium (FCSRMC), a number of local/regional/state buying cooperatives and other state authorized consortiums, as well as working with local governmental entities and state university partners to share costs, combine purchase orders, offer joint programs and activities, and implement other cost saving strategies. Multi-year contracts are reviewed annually and rebid or renegotiated wherever possible and feasible. Palm Beach State College reduced health insurance costs by participating in a college consortium, saving nearly

\$300,000 a year over market costs. Additionally, by participating through FCSRMC to conduct audits, rather than paying for an outside auditing firm, Palm Beach State College saved \$25,000 per year.

Optimizing Space Utilization. Space utilization analysis is a key component of the FCS institutions' capital needs evaluation. Each college reported that capital planning is conducted each year to ensure that the institutions are utilizing existing space in the most cost-efficient manner.

Several colleges reported renovation of their buildings in place of new construction. When feasible, existing buildings are refurbished to house new or expanded programs. The elimination of programs allowed for existing facilities be repurposed to expand high-demand programs without investment in new facilities. Broward College is presently renovating 150,000 square feet in the campus system in lieu of new construction. Last year, Broward College renovated approximately 60,000 square feet of space. These renovations include tech labs and classrooms. Additionally, the college is examining overhead space to determine if there are non-traditional ways of handling how offices are appropriated so additional classrooms may be created.

Outsourcing Services. FCS institutions have found instances where outsourcing services have resulted in cost savings. For example, the College of Central Florida implemented a number of administrative control and management strategies to enhance college affordability including but not limited to outsourcing bookstore management services, after-hours and weekend security services, custodial services, and motor coach services to private vendors. Polk State College outsources the call center as a cost savings measure, which also allows them to expand services to more students.

Improving Bidding and Procurement Practices. In the case of projects requiring a bid, colleges solicit multiple bids and competitively bid projects. Reducing the time period of the bid has also resulted in savings. Pensacola State College (PSC) recently began using SmartProcure, a purchasing tool, to gather important pricing information obtained by other public entities to leverage negotiation opportunities with current and new vendors. Savings within four months has totaled \$16,697. This tool also allows for research in traditionally sole or single source markets. In addition, PSC utilized various purchasing cooperative agreements in order to save money on all commodities. By using various procurement strategies unrelated to formal procurement such as asking for educational discounts or requesting additional quotes although not required, PSC's purchasing department has tracked \$479,520 in savings since June 2012.

Modernization of Telecommunications Systems. St. Petersburg College reduced costs by converting from a legacy phone system to a new unified communications system. This resulted in significant direct cost savings and also saved effort and travel costs for students, faculty and staff.

Strategy 3: Evaluating Academic Offerings

Aligning Course Demand and Offerings. Offering the courses students need not only reduces their time to graduation, but also saves the college money. At Hillsborough Community College, analyzing enrollment patterns and surveying students has resulted in higher course fill rates and the elimination of courses. Gulf Coast State College has a robust program review process in place that evaluates programs for currency, effectiveness and need. Florida State College at Jacksonville added 13 workforce-oriented degrees over the past ten years; none of which required new buildings or large-scale capital investments. FCS institutions have been able to respond to high-demand workforce needs by leveraging

existing faculty, facilities, equipment and hybrid course scheduling in a very cost-effective and efficient manner.

Terminating Programs. Florida College System institutions have processes in place for reviewing program viability. Programs are terminated for multiple reasons including workforce needs, low enrollments, outdated curriculum or changes in statute or policy.

In the past five years, Florida College System institutions terminated 743 programs. During this timeframe, the average number of terminated programs per institution was 28, with a range of zero to 78. Of the programs terminated, three-quarters came from one of the following three areas: College Credit Certificates (234), Associate in Applied Science (193) and Associate in Science (140). Associate in Applied Science degrees were primarily terminated because industry need typically required an Associate in Science not an Associate in Applied Science. Similarly, Associate in Science programs were also terminated in cases where the Associate in Applied Science was the workforce standard.

Of the 193 terminated Associate in Applied Science degrees, the majority were in Business Management, Marketing and Related Services (52) followed by Engineering and Technologies and Engineering-Related Fields (31) and Computer and Information Sciences and Support Services (31).

Expanding \$10,000 Bachelor's Degrees. Florida College System institutions are currently offering 76 \$10,000 degree programs. Most recently Miami Dade College started a \$10,000 program in Data Analytics, Tallahassee Community College and North Florida Community College in Nursing and Broward College in Aero Science. Forty-two programs are in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

Strategy 4: Implementing Textbook and Instructional Materials Affordability

During the 2016 legislative session the College Access and Affordability bill passed requiring the FCS institutions to annually report current practices for the selection of textbooks and cost-saving innovations. As a result of this legislation, and pursuant to s. 1004.085(8), F.S., FCS institutions were asked to provide information on the policies and strategies implemented by the colleges to reduce the cost of textbook and instructional materials. Information collected included four items specified in statute: 1) materials selection process for general education courses with a wide cost variance identified and high-enrollment courses; 2) specific initiatives of the institution designed to reduce the costs of textbooks and instructional materials; 3) policies implemented; and 4) the number of courses and course sections that were not able to meet the textbook and instructional materials posting deadline. From these reports, the Division of Florida Colleges produced *The Florida College System Textbook and Instructional Materials Report*.

The report found that all FCS institutions were focused on college affordability through the development of policies and procedures for textbook adoption and the implementation of initiatives to reduce the cost of textbook and instructional materials for students. Additionally, all FCS institutions employ initiatives designed to reduce the cost of textbooks and instructional materials. Some of these efforts are provided below; the full copy of the report details these efforts and looks at best practices across the state.

Selecting Materials. Florida College System institutions examined and submitted details for the selection process for textbook and instructional materials with a wide cost variance to general education courses

and high enrollment courses. Some college policies require that all sections of the same course must adopt the same textbook and other course materials unless the instructor opts for open educational resources (OER) or to not use course materials. As a result of these processes focused on keeping college affordable, minimal textbook cost deviation exists among sections of the same course.

Using Open Educational Resources. OER is one of the most common initiatives to reduce textbook and instructional material costs. Using OER resources provides quality and affordable textbook solutions. Colleges have also established committees and/or task forces charged with monitoring textbook cost and ensuring awareness of quality and affordable textbook options available to faculty and students.

Some FCS institutions reported specific cost savings for individual textbook formats ranging from \$20 to \$300. One example of these saved students \$2.8 million over a three-year period by using OpenStax, an online resource for free open textbooks, which are available in both printed and digital formats

Student Financial Support

In addition to federal and state aid programs, colleges provide scholarships to students to help offset remaining, eligible costs. Examples of institutional aid include Daytona State College's need-based grant and scholarship programs that awards over \$800,000 in scholarships annually, The Santa Fe College Foundation annually awarding \$1 million in aid to students and an additional \$1.4 million in scholarships, and the Miami Dade Honors College where all students receive a full tuition scholarship at the in-state rate along with a \$500 book stipend and \$600 for education-related expenses.

The FCS institutions continue to focus on providing scholarships to students to reduce the direct cost to students and decreasing debt.

Strategy: Providing Institutional Student Financial Aid

Targeted Aid. Grants and scholarships are often targeted to particular populations on campus. For example, the Santa Fe College Foundation pledged \$30,000 to assist SF in recruiting those students who were within nine credit hours of finishing as part of the college's "Finish at the Top" campaign. St. Petersburg College (SPC) implemented an institutional student incentive grant that is offered to students with need, but who are not otherwise eligible for Pell Grants. Other need-based aid is distributed among eligible students. In 2016, SPC Foundation awarded \$1.6 million in scholarships.

Emergency Aid. For FCS students, a few hundred dollars can mean the difference between completing college or not. Some FCS institutions have implemented emergency aid programs to reduce this barrier to completion. For example, The College of Central Florida Foundation has an emergency student aid fund for students in emergency financial situations such as a vehicle break down or other unplanned costs that impact a student's ability to attend and complete their educational goals. More than 90 percent of students helped are retained at the college.

Identifying Student Aid. Students are often overwhelmed or lack the understanding of student aid available to them. To alleviate this problem, colleges are encouraging students to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Additionally, colleges like Pensacola State College, are

investing in “NextGen Scholarship Management” which provides a single online scholarship application for all institutional scholarships, including need-based grants and foundation scholarships to make sure 100 percent of the funds available for scholarships are being awarded. This implementation has enabled Pensacola State College to award 43 percent more scholarship funds in fall 2016 compared to the previous year, and establish 16 new annual and endowed scholarships during the 2015-16 fiscal year. These awards represent more than \$600,000 in new scholarships to support students.

Partnerships to Support Students. In every college service area there are community-based organizations (CBO) vested in the prosperity of their community. Partnerships with CBO’s also make college affordable. For example, Seminole State College established a community partnership with the United Way to help keep students in school by providing emergency aid for housing, food, transportation expenses, and paying for past financial obligations in order to get students back in college so they can complete their program.

Conclusion

The 21st Century workforce demands the best education to meet the needs of a diversified state economy. The Florida College System continues to meet those needs in the most affordable manner for students.

The Florida College System and the 28 colleges will continue to innovate and implement strategies that result in cost saving measures. Ensuring that our colleges remain the primary access point to higher education for all students will always be the top priority for our colleges. Every hard-working student deserves a real opportunity to earn an affordable, high-quality degree or credential that offers a clear path to civic engagement, economic security, and success.

The Florida College System, working with the Governor and the Legislature, will work to meet the challenges of college affordability through innovation and sharing of best practices.