

Public Comments
Forward by Design Initiatives on Future of the State University System

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Education

On behalf of Florida Association of Post Secondary Schools

I am Nancy Bradley, the president of Central Florida College and Career Training and member of the Commission for Independent Education, appointed by Governor Bush in 2006.

On behalf of the Florida Association of Postsecondary Schools and Colleges, I am here today representing the 768 career schools and colleges and our 235,000 students. We thank the Board of Governors Strategic Planning and Academic Programs Committee for inviting us to participate in today's public input session.

I will be providing the career schools and colleges' views and comments relating to the Pappas Consulting Group's report and also commenting on how we, as a sector, can work together to provide greater student access and academic programs that directly respond to our state's workforce needs.

Although universities and community colleges are a large part of our state's higher education system, they are not the only part. Before I discuss the Pappas report, I would like to give a quick overview of Florida's career school and college sector.

- For over 100 years, we have provided a critical source of industry-based education that upgrades and refines work skills for Florida's front line workers. Our students look to us to teach them relevant and needed skills necessary to adapt and succeed in Florida's every changing market place.
- As of 2006, there are 768 licensed career schools and colleges operating in Florida.
- We educate nearly 235,000 students in over X occupational fields throughout the state. If you take our 235,000 students and enrolled them in our public university system, it would cost the state an additional \$1 billion per year.
- During the 2005-2006 academic year, we graduated over 80,000 students.
- Our schools offer programs which provide students certificates, two-year AA degrees, baccalaureate degrees, master degrees and PHDs.
- All career schools and colleges are licensed through and overseen by the Commission of Independent Education, a 7 member gubernatorial appointed board, which serves as the state regulatory agency. We have a strict oversight process and if our colleges or schools do not adhere to these state standards –then they loose their license.

- The school's accrediting agencies, federal government and state agency, CIE, all have investigative authority of our sector to protect students.
- All nationally and regionally accredited career schools and colleges must meet federal accrediting standards.
- Average student age is 24 and their main objective is to upgrade their skills to secure a better job.

Some of our schools in Central Florida include – Full Sail, Central Florida College, Keiser University, DeVry University, Florida Metropolitan University and University of Phoenix.

We are grateful to the Board of Governors for soliciting a study conducted by the Pappas Consulting Group that assesses and makes recommendations on how to improve our state's higher education system. The Pappas report findings are bold.

While we mostly agree with many of the issues raised in the report such as – improving school access, increasing bachelors' degree programs, encouraging academic programs that respond to state's needs and including independent colleges and universities in certain initiatives – we were disappointed that our 735 schools and 235,000 non-traditional students' contributions and value to Florida's every growing workforce were omitted.

Since I raised the question, let's explore how our sector can work with you in developing a coherent strategy and road map to accomplish our state's higher education goals.

First - the Pappas report emphasized the need for greater student access. We have some recommendations we would like to share about how to increase student access without tapping into tax payers funds:

- #1. Increasing capacity by joint use of facilities
 - Yes, distance and online learning works for some students. However, many students need that human contact and one-on-one dialogue with their professors and other students. We agree that expanding online learning is one way to increase student access, but it is *not* the only way.
 - The state university system and community colleges are limited by their facilities. It is costly to expand and build new buildings at tax payers' expense. Career schools and colleges offer to start a dialogue about how the state can use our facilities to reach more students. This way, non-traditional students who want to attend UCF or Florida State, but work full time and can not afford to relocate, can reach out and teach some of their freshman and sophomore classes at our schools. It will save the taxpayers money while increasing student access.
- #2. Exploring how we can fairly transfer credits and increase portability of financial aid between all higher education institutions, including career schools and colleges.
 - We, as a higher education sector, should sit down and determine the criteria instead of leaving it solely up to the accrediting agencies. Who knows better about the needs of our students, than us?
 - Today's student population has an increased share of older and more experienced individuals. Many of them started at one school, went to work for a few years, and now are seeking additional skills and a degree. We need to make sure that we are not establishing artificial barriers – such as denying them portability and credit transfers based on monetary grounds - as we attempt to provide greater access. Higher education needs to provide an open door of opportunity for all students, not a confined crawl space that only benefits one group or institution.

Second, the Pappas report spoke to the need of encouraging academic programs that respond to the state's needs. This is a topic that career schools and colleges are suited for and offer to share best practices.

An important difference between career schools and colleges than the state run institutions is that we seek excellence through a healthy and vibrant entrepreneurial spirit. This spirit ensures that our schools are engaged in the necessary, cutting-edge training that provides the best quality as measured by the market place, our students. If our schools fail in this mission, then the students go elsewhere.

We recommend that when developing a road map for our state's higher education system, it is important that we include all the major arteries – state universities, community colleges, private universities and career schools and colleges.

As we all move forward in this dialogue, career schools and colleges recommend:

- All institutions are treated fairly.
- The needs of the students are placed ahead of the needs of the schools.
- Emphasize a workforce and career curriculum that measures quality, accountability, student achievement and student outcomes
- Finally, increase access by removing barriers for non-traditional students. This includes:
 - Student-centered not institutional-centered financial aid. Giving those eligible state financial aid students the choice in deciding which school or college best meets their career objectives. Financial aid should follow the student, not the school
 - Enact and enforce credit transfer policies that give students the ability to continue their education without suffering additional financial penalties and losing precious time retaking the same classes they studied at another accredited school. It is in the state's economic interest to prepare, graduate and place students into jobs – sooner rather than later.

Every Floridian who wants to obtain higher education should have the opportunity – whether it is at a career school or college, community college or university.

We all recognize every student is unique. And, not every student fits the public college or university mold. It is in everyone's best interest to ensure our higher education system provides the best educational value and is accessible to every student.

I want to underscore our sincere commitment to being a resource for the state's higher education system and the board of governors. We look forward to working together in developing a coherent strategy to accomplish our goals.

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