

Affordability in the Florida College System 2019

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Introduction

The Florida College System (FCS) is the primary access point to undergraduate education for Floridians, including recent high school graduates and returning adult students. The 28 member colleges respond quickly and efficiently to meet the demands 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.

The 28 colleges that comprise the Florida College System served nearly 730,000 students in 2018-19. Sixty-two percent of Florida's public high school graduates who pursue higher education in Florida enroll in a Florida College System institution. Just under half of the juniors and seniors enrolled in the State University System are graduates of the Florida College System.

Among students seeking a degree or certificate, the majority of FCS students (65 percent) are enrolled part-time, allowing them to balance college and life responsibilities. The average age of part-time students is 26 years old (compared to 19 years old for full-time students). Additionally, 60 percent of students are minority and 60 percent are female.

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 maintains a focus on keeping college affordable. This report provides an overview of the strategies employed by FCS institutions to maintain and increase college affordability, as required by section (s.) 1004.084, Florida Statutes (F.S.).

Stabilizing Tuition and Fees and Operating Efficiently

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 our colleges have been recognized nationally as some of the most affordable. In addition, FCS institutions are able to provide an affordable college education by operating efficiently. 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 needs.

Strategy 1: Stabilizing Tuition and Fees

Florida College System institutions are the most affordably priced option for higher education in Florida. For 2018-19, in-state tuition and fees were \$3,205 per year compared to \$5,943 at a state university.

Reducing/Holding Tuition. Florida College System institutions did not increase tuition in 2018-19. Most of the colleges have held tuition rates flat since 2012-13. In calculating estimated student savings, colleges identified the difference between the 2018-19 tuition rate that was held flat compared to rates of tuition that would have accounted for increases in tuition or fees due to factors like cost of living adjustments. These cost savings estimates varied around the state depending on the percentage of the estimated increase used in the calculation, as noted in the following examples. The College of the Florida Keys estimates its 1,200 students saved approximately \$180,000 in tuition in 2018-19 based on an estimated 7 percent increase, while State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota, estimates its 12,917 students saved approximately \$500,000 in tuition based on an estimated 3 percent increase. St. Johns River State College estimates its 7,133 students saved \$466,000 based on an estimated 5 percent increase, while Valencia College estimates its 70,000 students saved \$11,000,000, based on an estimated 2 percent increase.

Reducing/Eliminating Fees. FCS institutions are committed to affordability, and regularly review course fees as required in s. 1009.23, F.S. Such evaluations may result in the reduction or elimination of student fees. Several colleges reduced fees in 2018-19 and a few colleges eliminated certain fees. Broward College reduced 19 lab fees, saving 854 students \$22,684. Broward College eliminated 16 lab fees, saving 424 students \$9,992. Daytona State College reduced its access fee by \$3.58 per credit hour, saving 24,963 students \$1,000,000. Florida State College at Jacksonville eliminated six class fees, saving 226 students \$11,586. The College of the Florida Keys reduced lab fees in 46 courses, saving 607 students \$151,900. These are just a few examples of fee reductions and eliminations reported for the 2018-19 fiscal year.

Strategy 2: Enhancing Operational Efficiency

Reducing Administrative Costs. FCS institutions regularly review administrative staffing to ensure operational efficiencies. Indian River State College (IRSC) evaluates positions when employees resign or retire. If the decision is made to keep the position, it is reinstated at entry-level pay. The position would only remain at the higher level of compensation due to competitiveness for the required skillset. In 2018-19, 57 positions at IRSC were downgraded to entry level, with savings estimated at \$690,000. IRSC also used attrition and reorganization to eliminate eight (8) positions, for an estimated savings of \$591,000. In another example, St. Petersburg College eliminated multiple vacant positions for an estimated savings of \$585,312, and completed a structural reorganization covering multiple

departments, which resulted in a consolidation of positions and responsibilities, netting additional savings of \$317,408 for 2018-19.

Increasing Efficiencies in Utility Costs. All colleges continue to look for ways to reduce utility costs. As resources allow, colleges reduce electrical use by improving energy control systems, modifying energy use schedules, and renovating/replacing systems with more efficient equipment. This includes new chillers, replacing lighting with light emitting diode (LED) fixtures and bulbs, adding motion sensors to indoor lighting, and implementing heating, ventilating and air conditioning (HVAC) controls that allow for more precise scheduling, temperature control and humidity mitigation. In 2018-19, Pensacola State College upgraded exterior road and parking lot lighting to LED for \$75,000 in utilities savings. At St. Johns River State College, ongoing upgrades to LED lighting and HVAC equipment resulted in \$18,000 saved. Palm Beach State College has lowered its use of electricity for eight (8) of the past nine (9) fiscal years, with \$849,615 saved in 2018-19.

Ten colleges are currently using solar energy to some degree. Indian River State College has three solar arrays, six powered parking lot and pedestrian scale lights, and one solar power monument sign at the Ft. Pierce campus. In total, these generate up to 45 kW of power and provided \$1,300 in annual savings in 2018-19. Miami Dade College has several solar applications at various campuses, saving it approximately \$8,000 annually. Palm Beach State College also has three solar arrays, producing and saving more than \$13,400 in electrical energy each year. Santa Fe College continues to have the largest (Florida) college solar power system and generated 80,454 kWh in 2018-19 for an annual savings of \$25,582.

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.

Some colleges reported renovating buildings in place of new construction. When feasible, existing buildings are refurbished to house new or expanded programs. The elimination of programs allows for repurposing of existing facilities to expand high-demand programs without investment in new facilities. In 2018-19, South Florida State College renovated portions of two Highlands center buildings to establish the new mechatronics program. The cost of a new building to meet this need would have exceeded \$3 million.

Many colleges also employ other tactics to monitor and improve space utilization. Miami Dade College's space optimization practices include centralized scheduling of academic space, uniform college- and campus-wide scheduling policies, establishing common start and stop times, scheduling of credit courses at non-peak times, and using scheduling software to maximize space occupancy. In 2018-19, Miami Dade College eliminated approximately 500 course sections while maintaining its current class size levels, equating to \$1.2 million in savings.

Outsourcing Services. FCS institutions have found instances where outsourcing services have resulted in cost savings. In fact, most colleges outsource multiple services and have for many years. For example, Chipola College outsources bookstore operations and security services, which is estimated to save \$50,000 annually. The College of the Florida Keys estimates savings of \$115,000 annually using private vendors for bookstore operations, custodial and security services. Gulf Coast State College outsources

security, the information technology help desk call center, and motor coach services, with estimated savings of \$220,000 annually. Almost all colleges outsource bookstore management services.

Improving Bidding and Procurement Practices. In the case of projects requiring a bid, colleges solicit multiple bids and competitively bid projects. Multi-year contracts are reviewed annually and rebid or renegotiated wherever possible and feasible. In addition, colleges continue to utilize various and multiple purchasing cooperative agreements 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. Broward College's procurement office logged in commodities purchases savings of \$1.2 million using state and other governmental cooperative contracts in 2018-19. Colleges also achieve significant savings by using various procurement strategies unrelated to formal procurement, such as asking for educational discounts or requesting additional quotes even when not required.

FCS district boards of trustees established the Florida College System Risk Management Consortium (FCSRMC) in 1980 as a risk sharing pool formed under a mutual agreement. The purpose of the FCSRMC is to manage insurance programs in accordance with Florida Statutes and as approved by the FCS Council of Presidents. In 2018-19 27 of the 28 colleges participated in the FCSRMC property and casualty program, which has options for participating in additional programs such as builder's risk, equipment breakdown, and network security and privacy liability. In 2018-19, 22 of the 28 colleges participated in the FCSRMC health program, which allows each college the flexibility to select the health plans that best suit its employees' needs, while taking advantage of their collective purchasing power.

Modernization of Telecommunications Systems. Voice over internet protocol (VoIP) telephone systems are the current modern standard. In 2018-19, the College of the Florida Keys, Hillsborough Community College, State College of Florida Manatee-Sarasota, and Tallahassee Community College all purchased new VoIP systems. These systems also allow multifunction devices to handle copying and scanning, saving colleges money by not having multiple pieces of equipment to procure, maintain, dispose, and replace. Upgrading to the VoIP system allowed State College of Florida to bring the outsourced student services call center back in house for a savings of \$60,000. Miami Dade College modernized its telecommunications equipment that resulted in lower AT&T network and telecommunications maintenance savings of \$200,000 in 2018-19. St. Johns River State College and South Florida State College both upgraded key network infrastructure devices that allowed them to increase their bandwidth, providing better service for employees and students. This results in significant direct cost savings while improving timeliness of information and saving effort and travel costs for students, faculty, and staff.

Streamlining Student Pathways

Strategy 1: Strengthening Articulation and Transfer Mechanisms

2+2 Transfer Guarantee. Students can realize cost savings by taking advantage of Florida's 2+2 articulation agreement. Established in 1971, Florida's Statewide 2+2 Articulation Agreement provides the foundation for the associate in arts degree as the most direct means of transferring from a Florida college to one of the 12 state universities to earn a baccalaureate degree. Articulation ensures that students receive credit for comparable coursework without unnecessary repetition when transferring from one institution to another. Florida's 2+2 statewide articulation programs continue to be an affordable academic option, giving Florida families the most economical path to a baccalaureate degree.

2+2 Targeted Pathways. In 2019, the Florida Legislature passed Senate Bill (SB) 190, which amended s. 1007.23, F.S., *Statewide Articulation Agreement*, to enhance Florida's "2+2" system of articulation by requiring each FCS institution to execute at least one 2+2 targeted pathway articulation agreement with at least one SUS institution by 2019-2020. The agreements must provide students who meet specified requirements guaranteed access to the state university and a degree program at that university. SB 190 requires that the agreements outline the specific criteria that FCS institution students must meet in order to participate in the 2+2 targeted pathway programs as well as requirements for SUS institutions regarding on-time graduation plans, advisement, and access to information and services. These direct pathways guarantee that students take the courses needed at the college that will count toward their baccalaureate program. They also reduce the overall cost to students considering the lower tuition for courses taken at the FCS institution.

Reverse Transfer. In 2019, the Florida Legislature also passed House Bill (HB) 7071, which amended s. 1007.23, F.S., *Statewide Articulation Agreement*, by adding reverse transfer as a required component in the statewide articulation agreement. Reverse transfer is "the process of retroactively granting associate degrees to students who have not completed the requirements of an associate degree before they transferred from a two- to a four-year institution" (Hannenmann & Hazenbush, 2014). The National Student Clearinghouse touts the many benefits of students who earn their associate degree through reverse transfer, citing increased potential for obtaining a job and for earning a raise as well as increased likelihood of completing a bachelor's degree.

HB 7071 allows for reverse transfer when students with at least 30 credit hours from an FCS institution transfer to a SUS institution before earning the AA degree. It also requires state universities to identify students who complete the AA degree and, with students' consent, transfer credits back to the FCS institution. Reverse transfer provisions make it easier for people to receive degrees that they have already paid for, worked towards, and earned.

Strategy 2: Reducing Time to Graduation

Decreasing 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 implementing clear pathways, placing students directly into credit-bearing courses, and expanding acceleration mechanisms.

Guided Pathways Implementation. The Community College Research Center (2015) notes, “the idea behind guided pathways is straightforward. College students are more likely to complete a degree in a timely fashion if they choose a program and develop an academic plan early on, have a clear road map of the courses they need to take to complete a credential, and receive guidance and support to help them stay on plan.” The FCS is actively analyzing data and engaging in convenings related to best practices to structure the students’ academic paths so students do not accumulate courses that do not count toward their program.

For example, St. Petersburg 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 practice reduces time and costs to students by ensuring that they follow their academic plan. To help students connect their educational journeys with their intended career outcomes and success, St. Petersburg College has developed Career and Academic Communities made up of all associate, baccalaureate, certificate, and non-credit degree programs within a similar career field.

To support guided pathways work throughout the FCS, the Florida Student Success Center, housed within the Division of Florida Colleges, launched the Florida Pathways Institute (FPI) in the fall of 2019 to help colleges advance in-depth work on the design and implementation of structured guided pathways. Modeled on the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) Pathways Project, FPI aims to scale pathways to dramatically boost completion and improve the social and economic mobility of graduates. Twelve FCS institutions joined the first FPI cohort, indicating significant dedication to guided pathways work. The cohort will span a period of two years and include a variety of activities, all of which are designed to get students on a pathway toward a career in as little time as possible, thus reducing the time and money spent in college.

Implementing Developmental Education Reform. Since the passage of Senate Bill 1720, FCS institutions have reformed developmental education by creating implementation plans for new academic delivery strategies and changing the way advisors assist students through a multiple-measures approach and pathways advising to better guide student course selection. In addition to these changes and in response to integrating more prescribed academic and career pathways, colleges have focused on high-impact practices including curriculum redesign and alignment in order to help larger numbers of students succeed in courses, complete on time, and enter the workforce.

For 2018-19, FCS institutions implemented nationally recognized, high-impact practices that enhanced student success for improving communication and computation skills. Colleges used technology to increase academic supports through open online courses to offer free online courses as well as various online tutoring services through HippoCampus, Smarthinking, MyLabs (Writing and Reading), MyMathLab, ALEKS, InQuizitive, Virtual Skills Lab, NROC, EdReady, Smarthinking (math tutoring in Spanish), and electronic paper drop review technology. In some cases, students completed modular coursework online with adaptive learning technologies in academic support centers. These technology solutions present opportunities for cost savings for students.

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 both to 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. For example, South Florida State College has increased the number of dual enrollment students by nearly 30 percent since 2016, with dual enrollment students now comprising approximately 20 percent of the college's overall student population. Miami Dade College estimates \$5.4 million in tuition costs are saved annually by students in the dual enrollment program.

Increasingly, these experiences are leading to high school students earning associate in arts degrees while in high school. Florida SouthWestern State College operates a Collegiate Institute where college faculty members provide full instruction on a local high school campus traditionally without access to dual enrollment opportunities. Through this school-within-a-school model, students can earn an AA degree by high school graduation at no cost to them. The Collegiate Institute allows for students who rely on traditional school transportation to attend college courses during their regularly scheduled school day with built-in academic support, office hours, and other college-readiness programming in a supervised, supported learning environment.

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 3: Evaluating Academic Offerings

Auditing Programs for Quality. Governor Ron DeSantis made clear his commitment to education with the issuance of Executive Order 19-31, (19-31) "Charting a Course for Florida to Become Number 1 in the Nation for Workforce Education by 2030." Through 19-31, Gov. DeSantis reinforced the fact that Florida needs to prepare now for our economy's future needs and gave the Florida Commissioner of Education a series of directives, including bold policy and funding goals for the 2019 Legislative Session. Gov. DeSantis directed the Commissioner of Education to develop a methodology for an annual review of CTE programs. The department developed a methodology for the annual CTE audit that, first and foremost, measures program quality to ensure alignment between the state's CTE programs with our established economic and workforce priorities. Given the constant changes within Florida's economy, the annual review of programs will reaffirm existing CTE programs and identify new programs that should be offered based on the needs of tomorrow. The Department of Education makes recommendations to the Governor on an annual basis to eliminate course offerings that are not aligned to market demands, to create new offerings that are aligned to market demands and to strengthen existing programs as needed.

Many colleges employ their own program review processes to determine program viability. For example, at Broward College, each career and technical education (CTE) program must complete a program viability review. In addition to determining the overall health of a program, the review provides a set of measurable goals for continuous program improvement. Twice per year, each program meets with their advisory committee members to review data. The advisory committee makes recommendations for continuous improvement as well as provides input on skills needed to be hired locally. Advisory committee recommendations are taken into consideration when updating curriculum to better meet the needs of the local labor market.

Terminating Programs. Offering the courses and programs students need not only reduces students' time to graduation, but also saves the college money. The Florida Department of Education is responsible for facilitating the development and updating of educational programs that prepare individuals for skilled occupations important to Florida's economic development. Each CTE program is aligned to a career cluster and is detailed in a curriculum framework that is adopted by the State Board of Education. With partners from education, business and industry, and trade associations, the curriculum frameworks are a list of program standards that are both academically integrated and responsive to business and industry. Each program is updated every three years to reflect current business and industry needs specific to the occupation for which it prepares.

There are few major ways in which a program is identified as "daggered" for deletion and goes into the process of teach-out. Historically, the most common criteria for deletion has been enrollment. Low enrollment is most often a reflection of low market demand for that occupation. Another way is when the review committee, facilitated by the department, determines the need for such substantial revisions that it justifies creating a new program. Regulatory changes can also initiate need for substantial revisions; this is due to a change in a rule or law that governs the occupation, such as the training or hours required. If the hours change, a new program is created. In the last five years, more than 350 secondary and postsecondary CTE programs were deleted from the inventory.

Decisions to terminate programs also happen at an institutional level. For example, Miami Dade College has a responsive academic program improvement and development (RAPID) process that considers the life cycle of an academic program. When enrollment is consistently low or null, the college terminates the program to allow for freeing of resources.

Stackable Credentials. The U.S. Department of Labor defines stackable credentials as part of a sequence of credentials that can be accumulated over time to build up an individual's qualifications and help them move along a career pathway or up a career ladder to different and potentially higher-paying jobs. The goal and intent behind stackable credentials are to provide a learner with multiple on and off ramps. Intentionally designing educational and career pathways so they can be built upon, or stacked, better equips students with the ability to enter into high-skill, high-wage employment, and helps to ensure that previously earned credentials do not become obsolete. Stackable credentials are also exemplified in the 2+2 articulation agreements. All Bachelor of Science (BS), Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS), and AS/AAS programs are built on stackable credentials.

Providing Student Financial Support

Strategy: Connecting Students with Financial Resources

Identifying Sources of Financial Aid. Grants and scholarships are often targeted to specific populations on campus that could benefit from additional financial resources. Florida Gateway College offers scholarships to students who are not Pell-eligible through the Foundation for Florida Gateway College. Similarly, Broward College has aligned foundation and institutional scholarships to exclude Pell Grant eligibility and allow students with high needs based on the institutional cost of attendance to receive a scholarship to help with educational costs. The average by term award is \$1,200, and Broward College has awarded 1,919 students for a total of \$2,303,603.

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. College direct support organizations supported students with emergency aid, providing students with food bags, transportation, gas cards, and other emergency financial assistance. Additionally, students are connected to community resources through referrals. In every college service area, there are community-based organizations (CBO's) vested in the prosperity of their community. Partnerships with CBO's also make college affordable—many institutions receive funding for scholarships directly from community-based businesses and individual donors.

Last Mile College Completion Program. The Last Mile College Completion Program helps students who left college with 12 or fewer credit hours remaining to complete their first associate or baccalaureate degree. As of fall 2019, all 28 Florida colleges support the Last Mile College Completion Program, and are voluntarily providing scholarships to eligible students using existing resources before receiving funding from the legislature. The Last Mile Completion Program creates a pathway for many returning students to earn their degree. As Florida's workforce engine, the Florida College System knows that continuing to develop Florida's talent pipeline for workforce needs is a top priority for business owners in Florida, and the Last Mile College Completion Program is part of the solution.

Conclusion

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 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 is saving students hundreds of thousands of dollars as a system each year and all 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 a top priority.