

New College is striving for state dollars

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SARASOTA - After Florida's university system withheld 5 percent of New College's funding and tasked it with creating a performance improvement plan in 2014, the school decided to focus on two goals: connect undergraduates to work opportunities and increase student retention and graduation.

Facts

CLARIFICATION

This story was modified, at the request of the college, to clarify state funding requests that have been made for the Center for Engagement and Opportunity

Performance rankings:

Here are the 2015 school rankings based on Florida's performance-based funding metrics:

1. University of Florida: 44 points
2. University of South Florida: 42 points
3. University of Central Florida: 39 points (tie)
3. Florida International University: 39 points (tie)
4. Florida Gulf Coast University: 38 points
5. Florida Atlantic University: 37 points (tie)
5. University of West Florida: 37 points (tie)
6. University of North Florida: 36 points (tie)
6. Florida State University: 36 points (tie)
7. New College of Florida: 35 points
8. Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University: 26 points

New College created the Center for Engagement and Opportunity and hired a director of career services and an internship coordinator. It launched an initiative to better equip first-year students with information and resources.

After a year, the number of students enrolled in internships increased by 140 percent compared with the spring of 2014. About 80 percent of first-year students participated in a career workshop. The median average full-time wage of recent graduates rose from \$21,220 to \$26,300.

New College improved enough in the eyes of the university system's Board of Governors to earn back the 5 percent — or \$1.08 million — originally withheld.

But it was not enough to earn the carrot at the end of the stick — a portion of \$150 million in bonus money set aside by the state for universities that do well on performance-based metrics first used in 2014.

Although New College's score was the second-most improved in the state, it still scored the second-lowest of Florida's 11 public universities on performance-funding metrics. Because it ranked among the bottom three lowest-scoring schools, it lost out on a portion of the performance-based bonus money.

The school was within one point of getting those extra dollars, said John Martin, New College's vice president of finance and administration.

"Even though we had 35 points, we were one point behind" Florida State University and the University of North Florida, Martin said. "So, doggone it, if we had one more point we would have been in the money."

But the school's score this year allowed New College to keep all of its base funding. Schools that score less than 25 points on the state metrics lose that funding but have the chance to earn it back through performance improvement plans. If New College had scored 25 points or lower, as it did last year, it could have lost about \$2.5 million, or nearly 10 percent of its state allocated and tuition funding, this year.

The CEO

Among the biggest changes New College made was to establish the Center for Engagement and Opportunity, or the CEO.

State legislators gave the school \$500,000 to establish the program and another \$500,000 this year to keep it going. New College administrators expect that money to dry up next year, but plan to request that the Legislature make the funding recurring.

The center is designed to create relationships with local businesses and nonprofits and get students to begin thinking about life after college earlier.

New College provost Stephen Miles said his school has gotten more of a response from first- and second-year students than upperclassmen, many of whom are working on their mandatory thesis.

"They're not coming here focused on a career. They're coming because they want to be able to explore areas of academic interest; many come with strong social motivations," Miles said. "What we want is to help each one of them find their path and do it intentionally."

The school also launched an initiative called Navigating New College, aimed at better guiding students through their first year at the college. Administrators created 23 steps to promote first-year success, such as hosting an academic concentration fair, increasing the flow of information to students and sending out more reminders for deadlines. Many of those changes are small, but they add up, Miles

said.

The efforts appear to be paying off: The number of first year students who stayed through their first year rose from 84 percent during the 2013-14 school year to 92 percent during the 2014-15 school year. The number of students who graduated within six years rose from 66 percent to 69 percent. The rate of students who were employed or in graduate school one year after graduation rose from 44 percent to 51 percent.

New College is not done making changes. Administrators hope to transform a wing of one of their letter-named residence halls into a career-focused learning and living environment. Thirty rising second-year students were recruited to mentor incoming first-year students.

Martin said by continuing to work toward improvement, New College will likely earn some performance dollars next year.

"We're going to be in the money next year; we are working hard," Martin said. "I can't guarantee it, but boy, I think with the kind of things we've been doing with the CEO — things are going really well."

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