



STATE
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Workgroup on the Alignment and Enhancement of Online Postsecondary Academic and Student Support Web Services



Final Report
December 22, 2011

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

The State University System (SUS) and the Florida College System (FCS) created the Workgroup on the Alignment and Enhancement of Online Postsecondary Academic and Student Support Web Services in October 2011. This Workgroup was chartered to review the mission, services, and underlying technology infrastructure of two key state-supported online student service organizations. The two organizations to be included in the review were the Florida Distance Learning Consortium (FDLC) and the Florida Center for Advising and Academic Support (FCAAS). Both organizations are state-funded, cross-sector, student online outreach and support initiatives that provide complementary services to Florida students and educational administrators, primarily at the postsecondary education level. In addition, both organizations support statewide and national legislative policy, coordination, and institutional advocacy.

The Workgroup was charged with reviewing these two organizations, identifying changes, and developing a plan to include:

- Recommendations regarding mission, scope of services, technology support, potential enhancements, and institutional engagement
- Opportunities for operational efficiencies and effectiveness
- The current services-based budget for both organizations
- A strategy for an enhanced web services environment that addresses critical state needs for distance learning and student support web services, building on the strengths of both organizations

Recommendations

- Create a new organization, built upon existing statewide policy and needs, to help current and potential students connect to Florida's postsecondary educational opportunities through a central clearinghouse
- Eliminate services no longer needed by the institutions to obtain cost savings and operational efficiencies
- Reduce time to degree, increase number of degrees awarded, and support returning students
- Further examine the long-term fit of the new organization with the new postsecondary library organization to leverage resources

Recommendations

After reviewing the services, missions, structures, and budgets of the two organizations, the Workgroup puts forth the following recommendations.

Vision for a New Organization

Rather than merging the two existing organizations, the Workgroup recommends creating a new organization, built upon existing staff, statewide policy, and needs. Because access to higher education means access to improved employment opportunities and income, the focus of this organization should be on helping students and potential students connect to Florida's educational opportunities through a central clearinghouse.

Through innovative one-stop access to programs, resources, and services, this new organization will help Florida solve its current challenges of high unemployment and low fiscal

revenues. The new organization will provide the expertise to communicate in an electronic medium with a single voice as well as a professional, contemporary look and feel. The future of higher education in Florida is dependent on how well the state is able to meet the needs of digitally savvy students while also attending to the needs of mature, working adults attempting to reenter higher education to complete degrees started years ago.

For more details, please see the section titled Vision, on page 28.

Service Recommendations

With the focus on becoming the primary online web clearinghouse of information on the offerings of the postsecondary institutions in Florida, the new organization should offer services that will enable Florida's colleges and universities to:

- Reduce time to degree
- Increase number of degrees awarded
- Support returning students

In addition, metrics must be collected to measure the organization's performance against these objectives listed above. The new organization must have clear accountability to the institutions and students it services to ensure its effectiveness and value.

Services to be offered by the new organization include:

- Providing information on all degree and certificate programs and courses, including traditional, online, and blended
- Assisting students in transferring between institutions, including transcript audits
- Easing the process for students enrolling in courses at multiple institutions (transient students)
- Providing information to students who have "stopped out" to finish their degree

- Providing linkages to institutional information such as admissions applications

For more details, please see the section titled Services by Target Group, on page 31.

The Workgroup recommends the elimination of the following services:

- Provide hosting services for LMS hosting (Desire to Learn)
- Provide a place for postsecondary students to create and store career portfolios
- Conduct various statewide campaigns to promote postsecondary education
- Help students determine if they are ready for distance learning
- Listing faculty interested in teaching distance learning courses

In addition, the Workgroup recommends the following two services be reexamined:

- The Orange Grove learning object repository
- The Orange Grove Text Plus initiative

Governance Recommendations

The new organization should have a governance structure that strengthens the linkage of services provided to those desired by the institutions it serves. Therefore, the institutions should have a key role in the new organization. This involvement will help to prevent duplication of services, as well as ensure the organization retains its focus.

In addition, the new organization should be accountable to the Chancellors of the State University and Florida College systems. There should be clear lines of authority, communication, and reporting to ensure the organization stays focused on those initiatives with critical statewide importance.

The new vision should initially be led by an Interim Director and be subsequently led by a single Executive Director. A long-term, statewide

strategy could include moving the new organization as part of the new unified library organization being created from the merger of the College Center for Library Automation and the Florida Center for Library Automation. A single structure with multiple units would allow for the leveraging of technological and personnel resources, as well as ensure all services are provided by the entity best equipped and suited for it.

For more details, please see the section titled Governance, on page 42.

Funding Recommendations

To allow the organization time to phase out services and leverage resources, the new organization should be initially funded by the Legislature at the current levels of FDLC and FCAAS. As the existing organizations and services are combined, cost savings through operational efficiencies should be directed to the overall new vision. A one-time allocation of state funding may be required to accelerate the development of this vision. The exact allocation of funding will require more in-depth analysis of

the new vision and clearinghouse by the Executive Director and the institutions supported. This investment must contribute to the State's goal of awarding 800,000 Baccalaureate degrees by 2020.

The Workgroup recommends discussions among the Chancellors, the Legislature, and the Commissioner of Education to determine the future of the K-12 services and to provide a sufficient funding stream to continue these services, if they are deemed to be of value. Efforts should also be made to include the Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida (ICUF) in all efforts possible.

For more details, please see the section titled Funding Strategies, on page 46.

Transitional Timeline

The following depicts a high-level timeline for the transition into the new organization. For more details, please see the section titled Transitional Timeline, on page 47.

Phase 0: January 1 - June 30, 2012	Phase 1: July 1, 2012 - June 30, 2013	Phase 2: July 1, 2013 - June 30, 2014 (Year 2)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain necessary approvals on plan • Appoint Interim Executive Director • Initiate consolidation of staff and services of current organizations • Initiate elimination of services no longer needed • Initiate researching new services to offer via the web clearinghouse • Initiate hiring of Executive Director 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New organization officially begins on July 1, 2012 • Alignment of staff, structure, and services occurs • Operational efficiencies are obtained • New clearinghouse is implemented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliminate any existing services or technologies from the original organizations • Expand scope of new clearinghouse services