



STATE
UNIVERSITY
SYSTEM
of FLORIDA
Board of Governors

**Board of Governors
Innovation and Online Committee**

Work Plan for Developing the *Strategic Plan for Online Education*

Background

The Board of Governors established the Innovation and Online Committee in January 2014 to investigate policies and best practices for transformative and innovative approaches to the delivery of higher education. The charge to the Committee included exploring initiatives that will result in systemwide cost efficiencies and effectiveness for university programs and services and that will meet workforce needs through online education.

To meet this charge, the Committee will provide global direction for the system regarding online education through recommendation to the Strategic Planning Committee of a goal and associated measurement for inclusion in the Board's *2012-2025 Strategic Plan*.

The Committee will also develop the *Strategic Plan for Online Education* that will articulate additional goals for the system and identify strategies for reaching those goals. The *Strategic Plan for Online Education* will guide the development and implementation of system policies and legislative budget requests related to online education and will be reviewed periodically to ensure its goals and strategies continue to support the Board's *Strategic Plan*.

Problem Statement

In its 2012 report for the Board of Governors, the Parthenon Group identified four primary objectives for online education within the state of Florida:

- **Expanding Access:** Allows students who cannot take face-to-face courses to continue their education.
- **Reducing System and Student Costs:** Allows for a lower cost of delivery, through lower physical infrastructure costs, better utilization of resources, reduced time-and cost-to-completion and increased effective capacity of institutions.
- **Strengthening the Link between the Labor Market and Postsecondary Education:** Enables a broader scaling of labor force-demanded degree programs through coordination with the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) and “Labor Councils” and program dissemination beyond the local catchment area.
- **Enhancing the Student Experience:** Allows digital delivery, in its many forms, to enhance the quality of existing core programs and to expand the flexibility offered to students through a portfolio of online learning models.

In addition to commissioning the Parthenon Report, the Board created the *Task Force for Postsecondary Online Education in Florida*, which presented its report to the Innovation and Online Committee in January 2014. The report contained several recommendations to accomplish the following goals set by the Task Force to guide its work:

- Bring expanded online educational offerings of high quality to Florida citizens
- Set measures and goals to greatly increase access to educational opportunities that will lead to employment and support Florida’s economy
- Develop common solutions and unduplicated services
- Provide students with more flexible tools to find and enroll in courses they may need across the state.

Also, after numerous discussions, the Committee approved at its June 2014 meeting five priority issues to explore over the upcoming year: Learning Management Systems, Faculty Training, Strategic Planning, Quality Metrics, and Program and Course Offerings.

The above reports, other reports produced nationally, programs created by the Legislature (UF Online, Complete Florida, and the Complete Florida Plus Program), and priorities established by the Committee need to be synthesized to help provide a clear strategic direction for online education. A review of these initiatives and activities identified five key recurring themes, which are explained below: Access, Student and Faculty Support, Academic Programs, and Performance.

Current Status

Access: SUS students are increasingly taking distance learning or hybrid classes. In 2012-13, 21% of state-funded student FTEs were in distance learning or hybrid classes, up from 17% in 2010-11. In their work plans, universities are projecting FTEs to increase to 24% in 2016-17.

Current and projected FTEs in distance learning and hybrid classes vary greatly by institution. One institution in the SUS, for example, is projecting to grow from 0% graduate FTE in state-funded distance learning and hybrid classes in 2012-13 to 12% in 2016-17, while another is planning to grow from 21% state-funded undergraduate distance learning and hybrid FTE in 2012-13 to 37% in 2016-17.

While the data above reflect growth in instructional effort (student FTEs are calculated from the amount of credit hours taken), the proportion of students taking classes online is greater in Florida than in the nation. The Parthenon Group reported that 40% of students in the SUS and Florida College System took at least one online course in 2010-11, which compared well against the 31% of students who took at least one online course nationally.

Student and Faculty Support: Nationally, there has been concern regarding students' successful completion of online courses. The success rates of SUS students in online courses should be compared to the success rates of hybrid courses and face-to-face courses. Strategies could be developed to address any discernible differences.

The Board of Governors 2015-16 Legislative Budget Request includes several initiatives to support students taking online courses and faculty teaching them, including improving online academic advising and other student support services, increasing the availability of library e-resources and e-textbooks, and enhancing faculty development programs for faculty teaching online courses. The Committee should continually assess

the performance of these initiatives and identify other resources and initiatives that would increase the success of students enrolled in online courses and programs throughout the system.

Academic Programs: Universities are making programs available completely online. According to a survey conducted by the Florida Distance Learning Consortium in the Fall of 2011, SUS institutions were offering through distance education 127 baccalaureate programs, 172 Master's programs, 16 doctoral programs, and 337 post-baccalaureate certificate programs. The gaps in programs available online that could assist the system in meeting workforce demands is unknown, and opportunities have not been identified for collaboration among institutions to develop and deliver online courses or programs.

Performance: Most universities in the SUS are members of the Online Learning Consortium, which produces the Quality Scorecard that can be used, according to its Website, to assist member institutions in assessing "the quality of their online programs in nine areas: institutional support, technology support, course development/instructional design, course structure, teaching and learning, social and student engagement, faculty support, student support, and evaluation and assessment. The scorecard focuses on the administration of online programs so institutions can identify areas of strength and areas that need improvement." It is not known whether universities are using either the Quality Scorecard or a similarly rigorous process to assess their programs and improve areas that need to be strengthened.

One of the recommendations of the *Task Force on Postsecondary Online Education in Florida* was to enhance data collection for online education "to update and refine distance learning modality definitions and to refine and enhance statewide data collection for online learning." The *Task Force* suggested that a common vocabulary be developed, with a common data dictionary to define terms; performance metrics be identified to assess access, cost, and quality dimensions; academic analytics used to define predictive pathways of student success; and employment data used to measure differences (if any) between students taking fully online programs and those taking courses on-campus. A *Workgroup on Performance Metrics* has been created and will begin crafting metrics and determining data needed to support those metrics on October 16, 2014. After vetting the proposed metrics with all institutions, they will be presented to the Innovation and Online Committee to assist in its determination of key metrics to include in its *Strategic Plan for Online Education*, as well as a key metric to recommend to the Strategic Planning Committee for inclusion in the Board's 2012-2025 *Strategic Plan*.

The 2012 Legislature created the Complete Florida Program for adults who have accumulated credit hours, but never completed their postsecondary education, and in 2014 the Legislature transferred the Florida Virtual Campus to the University of West

Florida, where it was assumed under Complete Florida as the Complete Florida Plus Program. The 2012 Legislature also created UF Online, which provides additional opportunities for students seeking a bachelor's degree online. These and other online initiatives of lead institutions should be assessed to determine their success and to identify effective practices that may be of use to other institutions in the system.

Study Questions

To provide direction for the system in online education, responses to certain questions should be presented to the Innovation and Online Committee for discussion and consideration for addressing in the *Strategic Plan for Online Education*:

Access:

1. What proportion of the system's instructional effort (student FTEs) is currently in online education and what proportion should be expected in 2025?
2. What proportion of the current student body has taken at least one online course and what proportion should be expected to take at least one online course in 2025?

Student and Faculty Support:

3. How do current completion rates of students in online courses compare to those of students in face-to-face and hybrid courses in the system?
 - What strategies are needed to ensure the success of students in online courses and programs?
4. In what ways can the Board ensure that faculty receive the support services they need to successfully develop and teach high quality online courses?

Academic Programs:

5. What programs are provided completely online?
6. Are there gaps in academic online offerings that should be filled in the system to meet workforce needs?
 - What strategies are needed to ensure these gaps, if any, are filled?
 - Are there opportunities for collaboration?

Performance:

7. How do institutions assess the quality of their course offerings?
8. What key metrics should be used to assess institutional and system performance in online education?

9. How is performance assessed for the Complete Florida, Complete Florida Plus, and UF Online programs?

Advisory Groups

Members of the Council of Presidents will serve as an online education leadership group chaired by President John Hitt to provide expertise and recommendations during the development of the Strategic Plan for Online Education. The Committee and staff may also seek assistance from the Committee's Advisory Group, which consists of representatives from institutions in the State University System and Florida College System, the Southern Regional Education Board, and the Western Cooperative on Educational Technology.