

MINUTES  
STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF FLORIDA  
BOARD OF GOVERNORS  
STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE  
June 27, 2024

*Video or audio archives of the meetings of the Board of Governors and its committees  
are accessible at*

<https://thefloridachannel.org/videos/6-27-24-florida-board-of-governors-meeting/>

1. Call to Order and Opening Remarks

Chair Jones convened the meeting at 9:04 a.m. with the following Governors present: Governors Jones, Oliva, Brinkman, Frost, Good, and Phalin. A quorum was established.

2. Minutes of Strategic Planning Committee Meeting

Chair Jones requested a motion to approve the Strategic Planning Committee meeting minutes from May 8, 2024. Governor Phalin moved to approve, Governor Frost seconded the motion, and the motion passed.

3. Accreditation Update

Chair Jones stated that section 1008.47, Florida Statutes, requires universities to provide quarterly progress updates on accreditation to the Board of Governors.

Chair Jones recognized Dr. Moez Limayem, President of the University of North Florida (UNF), to provide an update. President Limayem reported that on June 14, 2024, UNF submitted its application to the United States Department of Education. Additionally, they are working on drafts for the Higher Learning Commission's initial application, preliminary peer review, and comprehensive evaluation for initial accreditation. President Limayem also mentioned that the UNF's Southern Association of Colleges and Schools fifth-year interim report is due on March 1, 2025, and noted that significant progress is being made.

Chair Jones recognized Dr. Alexander Cartwright, President of the University of Central Florida, to provide an update. President Cartwright reported that they have submitted a request to the Higher Learning Commission for an accelerated review, which has been approved. The accreditation team is putting together the preliminary peer review. This report will be submitted in early fall, and they are on schedule to meet the 18-36 month accelerated process. Due to the initial review time, they will also need to submit a compliance certification for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools in September 2025.

#### 4. Programs of Strategic Emphasis Tuition and Fee Waiver: Update

Chair Jones recognized Ms. Emily Sikes, Interim Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs, to provide an overview of the proposed program for the Programs of Strategic Emphasis Tuition and Fee Waiver.

Ms. Sikes presented that in November 2023, the Board approved a new methodology and Programs of Strategic Emphasis list, resulting in Physics no longer meeting the criteria due to not being tied to an occupation that met the minimum gap and starting wage thresholds. Ms. Sikes stated that any student who has previously received the waiver in Physics will continue to benefit from it until they graduate, exceed 110% of the required credit hours, or withdraw from the program. She reported that the Board needs to select a replacement program for Physics for the upcoming 2024-25 academic year. The replacement must be a Program of Strategic Emphasis at the bachelor's level, reflect state priorities, be offered at seven or more institutions, and be designated as a STEM program. Ms. Sikes concluded that Environmental Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, and Biology met all requirements, and staff recommended Mechanical Engineering to replace Physics.

Chair Jones requested a motion to approve the Mechanical Engineering program for the Programs of Strategic Emphasis Tuition and Fee Waiver, effective fall 2024. Governor Frost moved, Governor Oliva seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

#### 5. 2024 University Accountability Plans

Chair Jones noted that Sections 1001.706 and 1008.46, Florida Statutes, and Board Regulation 2.002, require universities to develop an accountability plan that outlines strategic direction and top priorities, outcomes on institutional and System-wide goals, and future performance and enrollment goals.

Chair Jones recognized Ms. Sikes to present highlights of the 2024 university accountability plans. Ms. Sikes expressed her privilege in sharing the System's remarkable progress, attributing it to the hard work and a student-centric focus on accountability. She highlighted that the university accountability plans underpin the System's number one ranking and its efforts to redefine excellence in higher education. The System's commitment to student success has led to a 62% four-year graduation rate.

Ms. Sikes noted that the median salaries of bachelor's graduates reached \$50,000 this year, with wages increasing by more than 9% at ten institutions. Despite the lowest tuition, graduates are highly recognized in the workplace. She also emphasized the significant focus on research, with most funds coming from federal grants or competitive awards from institutions like the National Institutes of Health, National Science Foundation, and Department of Defense. The majority of research

is in science and engineering fields, with \$650 million in medicine. She mentioned that System research created an estimated 3,000 new jobs and provided an economic impact of \$5.5 billion.

Board Vice Chair Levine commented that the average national graduation rate for universities across the country was roughly 62% in 2023. This indicates that the four-year graduation rate in the State University System of Florida is comparable to the six-year graduation rate across the country. Governor Levine commented that this was a great accomplishment.

Ms. Sikes presented employment outcomes for bachelor's graduates, noting the Board's goal of 80% and the System's current performance of 74%. This metric measures the percentage of graduates employed and earning at least \$40,000 or continuing their education. She highlighted that 11 universities saw improvements last year, with Florida Polytechnic University surpassing the Board's 80% goal and achieving the largest year-over-year growth.

Ms. Sikes presented the Academic Progress Rate, identifying significant strides by most institutions this year. The Board's goal is 90%, measuring students retained with a 2.0 or higher GPA. Four institutions, the University of Florida (UF), Florida State University (FSU), the University of Central Florida (UCF), and Florida International University (FIU) exceeded this goal. Additionally, eight institutions improved their academic progress rate last year, attributed to innovative student success initiatives.

Ms. Sikes highlighted the System's progress on the four-year graduation rate metric. When the current strategic plan started, the four-year graduation rate was 39%, with the Board's goal at 50%. It took six years to surpass this, prompting an increase to 65%. Currently, the four-year graduation rate is 62%. In 2019, six institutions were below 40%. Now, 11 exceed 40%, and seven exceed 50%. Ms. Sikes credited this progress to Performance-Based Funding and expressed optimism for continued improvements.

Governor Levine inquired about the student success plan at Florida Gulf Coast University and their plans to increase four-year graduation rates. Dr. Aysegul Timur, President of Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU), noted that their real-time dashboard indicated that FGCU's graduation rate would increase by at least 3% over the next reporting cycle. President Timur also emphasized that they have taken a data-driven approach that utilizes predictive analytics to flag students who need additional support. Florida Gulf Coast University also utilizes admissions pathways, an early alert system, tracking student progress through a new academic appointment scheduling software system, reducing average class size, and mandating upper-level advising. President Timur stated that these initiatives will help to improve the four-year graduation rate.

Governor Jones inquired about plans to improve the four-year graduation rates at the University of North Florida (UNF), considering the plans to add 5,000 more undergraduates in the next four years. President Limayem indicated that UNF was using a new platform to help students understand the courses that they need to graduate. Advisors are being provided a dashboard to receive alerts on students who are in danger of not progressing toward graduation. Faculty also have a new website that they can use to raise red flags on students in need of additional support.

Mr. Mori Hosseini, Chair of the University of Florida's Board of Trustees, mentioned that students who take time to pursue experiential learning opportunities, especially in the field of engineering, may have difficulty in completing their degree in four years. Chair Hosseini suggested that the Board look into ways to account for degree programs that normally take more than four years to complete in the overall graduation metrics. Chair Jones agreed that there should be some way to ensure efficiency in student progress toward graduation while also accounting for degrees that may take a little longer to complete. Governor Levine suggested examining the lower division courses of the general education requirements in light of specialized courses that are added to degree programs such as engineering, which make them take longer to complete.

Ms. Sikes presented the four-year graduation rate for Pell students, noting that despite challenges in enrolling more Pell students, both UF and FSU performed exceptionally well in graduating Pell students within four years. She highlighted FIU for its impressive achievements. Florida International University's undergraduate population consists of 50% Pell recipients, and their four-year graduation rate for Pell students has increased by 25% points over the last five years. Remarkably, FIU has a slightly better four-year graduation rate for Pell students (66%) compared to non-Pell students (65%). This demonstrates FIU's effectiveness in serving a large number of Pell students and promoting on-time, successful graduation. Ms. Sikes noted significant improvements in this metric across the System over the last five years and an increase in the number of Pell students graduating within four years.

Dr. Kenneth Jessell, President of Florida International University, attributed their increased graduation rates to their emphasis on student success. The ability to provide emergency funds has been especially important for Pell student graduation rates.

Ms. Sikes then moved on to discuss areas needing improvement. She reported a decline in the three-year graduation rates for Associate in Arts (AA) transfer students at most institutions. Last year, nine universities saw a decrease in this metric. The three-year graduation rate is comprehensive as it includes both part-time and full-time transfer students. However, Ms. Sikes recognized UF, the University of South Florida (USF), and UNF for showing improvements in this metric and exceeding the Board's goal.

Ms. Sikes explained that part of the downward trend in the AA transfer graduation rate could be attributed to students affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, who started in 2020 but could not continue at a university. She noted that enhancement agreements with Florida Colleges would help improve this metric. Additionally, the new specialized AA transfer degree established by the Florida Legislature in HB 1285, which was signed by the Governor, may help. This pathway allows students additional time at the college to finish prerequisites and better prepare to enter a university. A pathway program is currently being developed between UCF and Valencia College.

Chair Jones noted that UCF has one of the largest populations of transfer students entering their university but one of the lowest graduation rates across the System. He inquired about strategies at UCF to increase those rates.

Dr. Alexander Cartwright, President of the University of Central Florida, emphasized that the Direct Connect program guarantees admission to students from partner colleges in the Florida College System who have earned an AA Degree. House Bill 1285 will provide support for these students to take the classes that they will need to be degree-ready for the specialized programs at UCF. President Cartwright believes this will contribute to an increased graduation rate among transfer students.

Ms. Sikes reported that the access rate, or Pell student enrollment, remained flat. The purpose of including the metric is to recognize and maintain the System's commitment to providing access to low-income students. The System's goal is for all institutions to be at 30% or above. Ms. Sikes mentioned that the U.S. Department of Education is implementing changes to the Pell Grant program in terms of eligibility starting this fall, which is expected to increase the number of eligible students. Additionally, increased AA transfers from the Florida College System may help improve this metric.

Governor Cerio emphasized the importance of a dialogue about what is attainable for the access rate metric in light of future actions from the federal government on Pell Grant eligibility. He noted that it is crucial to be realistic about what can be achieved after understanding the federal government's actions.

Ms. Sikes highlighted key licensure pass rates, recognizing four universities with a 100% pass rate in one exam last year. She commended institutions with ambitious 100% goals, reflecting their dedication to preparing students for high-demand healthcare careers. Ms. Sikes pointed out that most institutions met or exceeded licensure exam benchmarks.

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Chair Jones commended the universities that achieved a 100% pass rate on their licensure exams. He then inquired about the strategies for increasing passage rates for other exams, especially in law. Chair Jones suggested that the lower pass rates could be due to the need to make instruction more relevant to the exam, inadequate test preparation of students for the exam, or the possibility that admissions standards need to be raised.

Dr. Stacy Volnick, Interim President of Florida Atlantic University, attributed improvements in the nursing exam metrics to changes in leadership in the College of Nursing. She explained that more rigorous admissions standards, enhanced simulation spaces, a redesigned curriculum, and increased exam preparation also contributed to these improvements.

Chair Jones expressed concern that the universities were not collaborating as much as they could to improve student exam pass rates. He suggested internal conversations about what is working and encouraged Board staff and university leadership to identify best practices at universities with excellent exam pass rates.

Governor Levine inquired whether raising admissions standards might be necessary to meet key metrics. He noted that this strategy had worked at Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University (FAMU) to improve overall graduation rates and questioned whether a similar approach could improve exam pass rates for law and nursing. Governor Levine noted that for the State University System to continue providing a high level of education to students across all programs, students need to be able to pass their exams.

President Robinson reported that FAMU has submitted four comprehensive improvement plans and is fully implementing them. They are seeing increases in all exams but not yet at the level to meet the previous goals. He mentioned that FAMU recently had a meeting with law school deans from around the state to discuss best practices. The other deans recommended updating the curriculum to better reflect the exam and making bar test preparation mandatory for at-risk students.

Ms. Sikes reported that the State University System has shown continued success in nursing licensure exam pass rates this year. The System average for 2023 increased from 83% last year to 92%, a gain of 9% points. All universities improved their passage rates, with seven institutions above the national average benchmark and FGCU achieving a 100% pass rate. Ms. Sikes highlighted that FAMU's nursing licensure pass rates improved by 14% points to 82%, moving them off probation. Florida Atlantic University's nursing pass rates improved by 14% points for the Davie Campus and 2% points for the Boca Raton Campus.

Ms. Sikes reported on the Preeminent Research University metrics, noting that this year, the Legislature appropriated \$100 million for this initiative. Florida State University, the University of Florida, and the University of South Florida met all 13 preeminence metrics. Florida International University (FIU), which met only eight benchmarks in 2019, met 12 of the 13 this past year. Over the past five years, FIU significantly improved its endowment, growing 47% from \$209 million to \$307 million, and its four-year graduation rate increased from 39% to 65%. Additionally, FIU's research expenditures exceeded \$300 million.

Ms. Sikes then presented highlights and opportunities for improvement on each of the university accountability plans.

Ms. Sikes reported that contrary to national news about declining higher education enrollment, Florida saw a 1% increase in new First-Time-in-College enrollment and a 3% increase in returning students last year, indicating strong university efforts to retain students. However, there was a decline in Florida College System AA transfers due to reduced college enrollment. Ms. Sikes is optimistic that increased Florida College enrollment this year will boost Florida College System transfers, which is vital for increasing access and increasing the number of students with Pell grants at the state universities. She also discussed projected university growth, noting that New College of Florida (NCF) shared its enrollment growth plans last fall, and UNF presented its plans in January. A summary table of growth plans for each university was provided.

President Corcoran emphasized that this was NCF's highest enrollment in 63 years, along with improved SAT and ACT scores. He mentioned that improvements in the graduation rate will not be evident until 2027 to reflect the enrollees from this year. Additionally, enrollment numbers were boosted by increased financial support, the addition of athletics, improvements to student life and infrastructure, and the hiring of 43 new faculty members.

Chair Jones inquired about university plans to ensure student success with the increased growth goals.

President Robinson indicated that FAMU plans to increase enrollment by accepting additional Florida College System transfer students and increasing retention rates.

President Avent mentioned that Florida Polytechnic University seeks to improve its admissions process by giving students a more realistic picture of what is involved in earning a degree in STEM. They have also implemented a common core to ensure key skills are taught across the curriculum. Additionally, a new dorm will help the university become a more residential campus.

Ms. Sikes presented data on non-resident enrollment. She explained that there is a regulation limiting non-resident enrollment to 10% for the System, which has been in place since the early 1990s. The data team reviewed historical numbers to track changes in undergraduate enrollment since 2014. In 2014, NCF, FAMU, and UWF exceeded the 10% threshold. In 2024, nine of the twelve universities exceed this threshold, with the System rate at 12%. By 2028, UCF is projected to be the only university below the 10% rate.

Chair Jones suggested that Board staff consider items such as grandparent waivers and fully online students when calculating historical data on non-resident enrollment, noting that these students should likely be removed from the data.

Ms. Sikes mentioned that the Board staff had data on grandparent waivers and online enrollments. However, a study comparing enrollment to peer institutions would take additional time and collaboration with the universities.

Chair Hosseini encouraged the Board to allow individual goals for each institution based on their unique needs. He noted that many of UF's peer institutions have much higher non-resident enrollments.

Mr. Peter Collins, Chair of the Florida State University Board of Trustees, stated that non-resident tuition rates were much lower in Florida compared to peer institutions. He mentioned that increasing out-of-state tuition rates would not lead to a drastic drop in applications while keeping in-state tuition low to ensure access.

Chair Jones requested a motion to approve the 2024 university accountability plans, excluding those sections of the plans that require any additional regulatory or procedural review or approval pursuant to law or Board regulations and excluding the out-year portion of the non-resident undergraduate enrollment rate. Governor Frost moved, Governor Good seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Chair Jones requested a motion to approve the 2024 Preeminent State Research University Annual Status Updates for the following institutions: FSU, UF, and USF. Governor Phalin moved, Governor Frost seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Chair Jones requested a motion that FIU be designated as a Preeminent State



Research University. Governor Frost moved, Governor Oliva seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

## 6. Strategic Plan Update

Chair Jones mentioned that during the May conference call, the committee discussed the mission and vision, and since then, he has been working with the Chancellor and Ms. Sikes on the next steps. They have formed a Steering Committee of 14 individuals, including a trustee, university presidents, System group chairs, university government relations staff, a student and faculty representative, and a representative from the Florida Chamber. The committee had its first meeting at UCF, discussing 2030.

Chair Jones emphasized that the goal was to have engagement from the presidents in this planning process. Governor Phalin suggested that the new strategic plan should allow for flexibility in differentiating goals among the universities in the System. She emphasized that benchmarking should be done against national peers rather than other universities within the System.

Governor Jones emphasized that the System could be improved through collaboration. He advocated for taking the best practices from each university and using them to inform practices at other universities in the System.

Ms. Rhea Law, President of the University of South Florida, stated that the 2030 strategic plan should emphasize the importance of lifelong learning and provide support for it. Ms. Law highlighted the need to build connections to businesses, ensuring students are integrated into the business community and have job opportunities upon graduation. She stressed the importance of allowing graduates to return to universities for additional training, embracing collaboration with the Florida College System, and encouraging growth in research.

President Corcoran stated that, in addition to helping students gain careers, the System should also focus on creating great citizens and thinkers. He emphasized the importance of teaching soft skills.

Chair Levine noted that future funding from the legislature should be considered. He suggested creating an investment thesis to secure increased funding by demonstrating a return on investment for higher education in Florida.

Dr. Ben Sasse, President of the University of Florida, applauded the use of performance metrics. He re-emphasized the importance of syncing with industry and the importance of lifelong education.

President Robinson encouraged the Board not to lose sight of the importance of serving first-generation college students and Pell recipients in their 2030 plan.

President Jessell emphasized that the strategic plan should ensure students remain state-of-the-art and up-to-date with recent technology, responding to the increased rate of technological change. He stressed the need to keep graduates up to date on changes in technology and integrate the unique strengths of each university into the strategic plan.

President Limayem stated that a four-year degree with a rigid curriculum will not create the necessary skills for students. He suggested that a four-year degree should be complemented with badges and certifications to better prepare students for the workforce.

Ms. Suzanne Lewis, Chair of the Board of Trustees at the University of West Florida, highlighted that the 2030 plan should include a focus on emotional intelligence. She added that students should be prepared to be change agents in their homes and communities.

Chair Jones stated that the total available market of the System includes learners from around the world and suggested that the 2030 Strategic Plan consider new methods of content delivery to address this global market.

Dr. Richard McCullough, President of Florida State University, stated that Florida could outcompete many other states due to the organization and collaboration possible within the System. He noted that the 2030 Strategic Plan should encourage collaboration over competition between institutions in the System.

Dr. Aysegul Timur, President of Florida Gulf Coast University, noted that by further integrating with industry partners, the System can meet the skill demands of a rapidly evolving job market. She highlighted that FGCU is achieving this through its skills-based micro-credentialing program.

President Cartwright highlighted the importance of administrative efficiency across the System. He suggested that shared systems could enhance efficiency, reduce costs, and facilitate easier training.

Mr. Peter Collins, Chair of the Florida State University Board of Trustees, noted the positive impact of having students live on campus. He stated that in-person communication on a college campus contributes to the System's goal of producing good citizens.

Mr. John Brinkman, Chair of the Florida Student Association, stated that an important factor for students when choosing a college is the sense of belonging and community created by a campus environment.

Governor Bell Barnett indicated that she would like to see an increased emphasis on micro-credentialing and digital badging in the 2030 strategic plan. Ms. Bell Barnett suggested that endorsements for these credentials from major employers in Florida could help students meet the expectations of area businesses. She also stressed the importance of examining data on how students use their degrees and meet the workforce needs of the state.

Governor Good noted that he hoped the strategic plan would enable the System to train not just good employees but future good employers. He emphasized that skills such as critical thinking, innovation, and entrepreneurship are essential for students today.

Chair Lamb provided a list of eight strategic priorities to guide the Steering Committee for the 2030 strategic plan. He emphasized the importance of fostering productive conflict during discussions on the new strategic plan. He advised that a good discussion should lead to healthy disagreement among Board members, as this kind of debate is crucial for a robust planning process.

Chair Lamb urged the Board to have a candid discussion about areas where the System is not currently number one. He emphasized that it is vital to identify these gaps and seek ways to improve, possibly by learning from universities that excel in these areas.

Chair Lamb highlighted the importance of the System being viewed as highly digital, tech-enabled, and adept at using data to stay informed, a concept he referred to as the "information advantage." He explained that having this advantage would allow the System to be more agile and flexible in adapting to future challenges, ensuring it remains competitive and forward-thinking.

Chair Lamb emphasized the importance of building a strong reputation for producing workforce-ready graduates. He stressed that in defining workforce-ready, the Board must listen to the needs of leading companies, particularly Fortune 500 corporations. These companies are already planning for the skills they will need in the coming years, and the System must align its definition with their expectations. By doing so, the System can ensure that it prepares students to meet the demands of the industries they will enter.

Chair Lamb emphasized the importance of maintaining operational excellence. He pointed out the fiduciary responsibility to manage taxpayer dollars wisely and to be prepared for potential economic downturns, ensuring that the System remains resilient in tough times.

Prioritization was another key point Chair Lamb addressed, noting that one of the biggest challenges in the strategic planning process will be deciding where to focus efforts. He recognized that there are many opportunities for growth and improvement but emphasized the need to concentrate on the key areas that are big enough to make a significant impact.

Chair Lamb also encouraged, as part of the strategic plan process, to identify and showcase the unique strengths, or superpowers, of each university within the System. He suggested that the strategic plan should highlight these areas where each institution can excel on a global scale.

Chair Lamb stressed that the System must be globally competitive. He pointed out that both students and companies are thinking globally, and the strategic plan should reflect this reality by preparing the System to compete in the global economy.

Chair Lamb concluded by underscoring the importance of building and promoting the brand of the State University System. He expressed a desire for the System to no longer be the best-kept secret in higher education but rather to be recognized as one of the best places in the world to obtain an education.

## 7. Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

Having no further business, Chair Jones adjourned the meeting at 11:46 a.m.

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Ken Jones, Chair

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Kyle Roark  
Director, Academic and Student Affairs