

Universities of Distinction

The Legislature identified the importance of recognizing and investing in universities that can attain national excellence in a core competency. Universities of Distinction is a path towards excellence that will produce high-quality talent to diversify Florida's economy, stimulate innovation, and provide a return on investment to the state.

Key Goals:

- ✓ Focus on a core competency unique to the State University System and one that achieves excellence at the national or state level
- ✓ Meet state workforce needs now and into the future, including needs that may further diversify Florida's economy
- ✓ Foster an innovation economy that focuses on areas such as health, security, and STEM

Universities of Distinction is designed to support the nine non-preeminent institutions in the State University System. Institutions will participate in Universities of Distinction by submitting a proposal to the Board of Governors identifying the program that is a core competence capable of reaching national or state excellence. This may include multiple degree programs that support an area like health, or institutions can be very specific, such as increasing the number of registered nursing graduates to produce a stronger qualified workforce for the state of Florida and/or a particular region of the state. Proposals should demonstrate a unique focus for the institution. Stronger proposals would be ones that comprehensively address each of the three key goals of Universities of Distinction. This initiative should be flexible to allow for the distinctive array of strengths across the system.

As part of the proposal, each institution would be required to identify metrics for measuring success. At least one metric would need to demonstrate a year-one accomplishment or success, at least two metrics that demonstrate a return on investment to the state, and metrics that demonstrate how the program has improved over time as a result of the funding. Since institutions elect to elevate existing programs to excellent ones, they must identify appropriate metrics and/or rankings to demonstrate this ascension. Upon review of these proposals, the Board of Governors may recommend additional metrics to measure success and progress.

Institutions could use funds for faculty recruitment and/or hiring, lab equipment, technology, staff hiring, financial aid, stipends, and other expenses as permitted. Institutions may also use funds to support innovative ideas and partnerships, with Florida College System institutions and the business community. For this program to ignite success, funding should be recurring.

By January 1st of each calendar year, the Board will recommend to the Governor and Legislature any programs that should be considered for funding in the next fiscal budget.

Leverage academic program strengths

The Universities of Distinction initiative will shine a light on the unique strength of a university and ascend them towards excellence. As a part of the proposal, the institution would have to demonstrate how it plans to take an existing core academic program and leverage it towards excellence. If an institution was wanting to increase its health programs, it could focus a proposal on an array of academic degrees such as registered nurses, physical therapy, and occupational therapy. Programs could also be very specific. For example, a State University System institution with a strong cybersecurity program could use an infusion of funds from this initiative to ignite it towards excellence.

Meet current and future state workforce needs

A critical component of Universities of Distinction is to improve the quality of Florida's talent pipeline. Universities of Distinction will address the recommendation from the Florida Council of 100's Project Sunrise Report and the Chamber of Commerce 2030 report to increase the output of high-caliber talent from the State University System and to make Florida a place where talent thrives. Increasing the quality of Florida's talent pipeline will, in turn, encourage economic development and further diversification of Florida's economy. Any proposal coming forward under Universities of Distinction must demonstrate how it addresses current or future workforce needs, with a focus on producing high-quality talent.