

# Affordability in the Florida College System

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## Introduction

The Florida College System is the primary access point to undergraduate education for Floridians, including recent high school graduates and returning adult students. The 28 member colleges respond quickly and efficiently to meet the demands of employers by aligning certificate and degree programs with regional workforce needs. With an array of educational programs and services, the FCS serves individuals, communities and the state with low-cost, high-quality education opportunities. College access and affordability have been and remain priorities for all 28 colleges.

During the 2016 legislative session, the Florida Legislature tasked the State Board of Education with conducting a study to identify strategies and initiatives promoting college affordability by: evaluating the impact of tuition and fees on students; examining federal, state and institutional financial aid on the actual cost of attendance for students and their families; and exploring the costs of textbooks and instructional materials.

Pursuant to section (s.) 1004.084, Florida Statutes (F.S.), this Florida College System Affordability Report has been prepared for the governor, the president of the Senate and the speaker of the House of Representatives.

## Who the Florida College System Serves

Data from the Florida Department of Education's Bureau of PK-20 Education Reporting and Accessibility reflect the 28 colleges of the Florida College System served more than 730,000 students in 2017-18. Sixty-three percent (63%) of Florida's high school graduates who pursue higher education enroll in a Florida College System institution, and nearly half of the juniors and seniors enrolled in the State University System are graduates of the Florida College System. More than half of students enrolled in the FCS are low income and are the first in their families to attend college.

Ninety-nine percent (99%) of FCS students are from Florida and the average age of the student body is 25. Sixty-five percent of students are enrolled part-time, allowing them to balance college and life responsibilities. Nine out of ten Florida College System graduates are employed in Florida or continue their education.

Florida College System institutions are recognized as being among the nation's best colleges. Whether it is through innovations in teaching, advising, transfer or partnerships with business

and industry, the FCS keeps college affordable. This report provides an overview of the strategies FCS institutions employ to maintain and increase college affordability.

### **Stabilizing Tuition and Fees**

Florida College System institutions keep college affordable for students by maintaining low tuition and fees. Tuition at Florida College System institutions has remained flat for five years while colleges have implemented strategies that focus on enrollment growth, efficiency and affordability.

#### **Strategy: Stabilizing Tuition and Fees**

Florida College System institutions are the most affordably priced option for higher education in Florida. For 2017-18 full-time enrollment in lower division programs, in-state tuition and fees were \$3,205 per year compared to \$5,943 at a state university.

*Reducing/Holding Tuition.* Florida College System institutions did not increase tuition in 2017-18. Daytona State College approved a two percent reduction in tuition effective spring 2016 that is now the standard tuition cost for 2017-18.

FCS institutions provide students with options to pay their tuition without taking on debt. These options may include payment plans, college work-study, grants, scholarships, waivers and tuition reimbursement plans. Florida Keys Community College increased the number of payment plan options to assist student's ability to pay their tuition and avoid high-interest loans. The timing of these plans have been adjusted to allow more students to take advantage of these options.

*Reducing Fees.* FCS institutions regularly review each course fee as required in s. 1009.23, F.S. The purpose of these reviews is to ensure the fees charged do not exceed the cost of providing the course. Such evaluations may result in the reduction or elimination of student fees. The College of Central Florida recently eliminated 35 student course fees with students saving from \$5 to \$285 dollars per course, saving 416 students over \$78,000. Florida SouthWestern State College (FSW) reduced course fees in 61 courses and eliminated 81 course fees, saving students approximately \$610,000. Additionally, FSW reduced the online access fee by \$5 per credit hour saving students \$377,510. Tallahassee Community College reduced course fees in 31% of courses.

## Cost Savings

In addition to investments from the state and students, FCS institutions are able to provide an affordable college education by operating efficiently. Strategies FCS institutions employ to keep college affordable fit within the following areas: 1) offering 2+2 articulation agreements and targeted pathways; 2) reducing time to graduation; 3) enhancing operational efficiency; and 4) evaluating academic offerings. An additional set of actions regarding textbook affordability are detailed in the annual *Florida College System Textbook and Instructional Materials Affordability Report*. The 2017-18 report highlights all FCS institutions:

- Have an adoption process that considers the cost of textbooks and instructional materials.
- Undertook efforts to meet posting requirements for lists of required and recommended textbooks and instructional materials.
- Employed at least one initiative designed to reduce the cost of textbooks and instructional materials (e.g., open educational resources, textbook rentals and programs with no textbook or instructional materials costs).
- Conducted a cost-benefit analysis to select textbooks and materials focused on affordability and high-quality resources that met the learning outcomes of courses.

Notably, for general education core courses, 93 percent of FCS institutions used open educational resources, which gives students access to textbooks and instructional materials for these required courses at no or very little cost

### **Strategy 1: Offering 2+2 Articulation Agreements and Targeted Pathways**

When other systems partner with the FCS, students can realize further savings. Most notably is the vaunted 2+2 articulation agreement in Florida, which guarantees that credits will transfer and be applied at the state university. Over 50,000 students who have already earned an associate in arts degree from a Florida College System institution are enrolled at State University System (SUS) institutions to continue their education. For these students, the average savings is over \$5,000 in tuition and fee payments due to lower tuition charges at an FCS institution. The FCS continues to enhance 2+2 programs with targeted pathways, such as UCF DirectConnect, that ensure students have a seamless pathway to completing their degrees at the one of the state universities. In these programs, students who earn their associate in arts degree at certain FCS institutions are guaranteed admission to a specific state university and/or a specific program of study. All 28 FCS institutions have developed at least one targeted pathway with SUS partners.

## **Strategy 2: Reducing Time to Graduation**

Strategies to decrease students' time to completion provide benefits to students and the state. One such benefit is beginning to earn higher wages earlier while reducing the amount of time paying for living expenses as a student. To this end, FCS institutions are implementing practices to reduce the time to completion by placing students on guided pathways.

*Placing Students on Pathways.* The Florida Student Success Center joined as the 15th state in the national Student Success Center Network, supporting Florida's 28 colleges' efforts to develop student-centered pathways. The center works collaboratively with colleges to create a coherent, statewide strategy so colleges can integrate their varied student success efforts, share best practices with one another and maximize resources. The guided pathways model is an integrated, institution-wide approach to student success. The model includes four dimensions: 1) clarify paths to student end goals, 2) help students choose and enter a pathway, 3) help students stay on the path and 4) ensure that students are learning. The model is designed to simplify students' choices with maps that are clear, include progress milestones and are aligned with the student's education and employment field, including transfer pathways.

This pathway work also results in colleges structuring their institutions to maximize student success. For example, St. Johns River State College's Student Success initiative includes proactive advising with integration of faculty mentoring, an early alert system, one-stop student services, scheduling, onboarding and online orientation.

Broward College has led national efforts in implementing guided pathways that help students take only the courses required for completion and/or transfer in a selected career area, which reduces time and costs to students. Broward College also provides students with information on job tools and salaries. At Miami Dade College, students have begun using a software tool to help make informed career and major decisions by helping develop clear academic plans, understand time to degree completion requirements and communicate with advisors.

Tallahassee Community College has installed career coaching kiosks throughout the campus. Career Coach is also available via the college website as well as in the career center. The software is a free online tool that allows students to explore careers as well as live job postings. The real-time information includes detailed wage estimates and up-to-date job postings associated with any career.

*Implementing Developmental Education Reform.* FCS institutions utilize nationally recognized, high-impact practices that enhance student success as well as address the statutorily mandated

changes to the populations enrolled in developmental education. For the 2017-18, course enrollments in developmental education decreased 26 percent from the previous year. Student success rates— the percent of students who earned a grade of “C” and above— remained stable with success rates of 75 percent in reading and 73 percent in writing. In mathematics, 60 percent of students earned a grade of “C” and above. With decreases in course enrollments, students moved into gateway courses, saving time and money on tuition and books.

*Expanding Online Offerings.* Online offerings at FCS institutions continue to grow in high-demand areas. In total, FCS institutions offer more than 42,000 online courses, providing options that allow students to accommodate work and family responsibilities while progressing towards an academic credential. For example, at Valencia College, online course offerings have increased from four percent to 27.8 percent over the last 13 years, representing nearly 12,000 students. Eastern Florida State College has developed fully online college certificate programs to address current workforce needs, including Office Support/Management and Medical Office Management. Florida SouthWestern State College has continued to expand online courses over the last five years, increasing from 19.1% in 2014 to 22.3% in 2017 and 23.8% in fall 2018. This increase translates to a change in FTE from 853 to 1,200 over the five-year span.

Notably, St. Johns River State College has reduced the distance learning fee from \$15 to \$13 per credit hour due to the growth in online education. This reduction in costs for students applies to over 235 courses per term.

*Offering Acceleration Mechanisms.* Dual enrollment was developed, in part, to provide high school students the opportunity to earn college credits prior to enrolling in college with the intent to both challenge students academically while also decrease their time to an associate degree. For students who enter with credits earned through the dual enrollment acceleration avenue, their time to degree is nearly half of that for students who enter without dual enrollment credits. Seminole State College of Florida, North Florida Community College, Valencia College, Santa Fe College and Lake-Sumter State College report large increases in the number of dual enrollment students recently. Northwest Florida State College estimates nearly \$50,000 in tuition and fee costs are saved annually by students in the dual enrollment program. Over 70,000 students took advantage of dual enrollment at Florida College System institutions in 2017-18.

Increasingly, these experiences are leading to high school students earning associate in arts degrees while in high school. State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota launched an accelerated dual enrollment program on its Venice campus, allowing eligible juniors the



opportunity to earn an associate in arts degree while simultaneously completing the last two years of high school (saving students just over \$6,000 in tuition and fee costs).

The FCS is innovating in many ways to reduce the time to completion. These innovations extend beyond the practice of awarding college credit for prior learning to include: converting high school career and technical education courses into college level courses, mapping industry certifications into college credit and awarding college credit for work experience in the military and other work environments.

### **Strategy 3: Enhancing Operational Efficiency**

There are a number of elements that provide savings and efficiency to colleges; it begins with the budget planning process for both operational and capital needs.

*Reducing Administrative Costs.* FCS institutions regularly review administrative expenses to ensure operational efficiencies. As a result of this practice, a college may downgrade or eliminate positions and consolidate the responsibilities under another administrator. This practice occurred recently at Florida SouthWestern State College, Lake-Sumter State College, Florida Gateway College, Daytona State College and North Florida Community College. St. Petersburg College implemented efficiencies in the operating budget last year saving \$2.8 million. South Florida State College reorganized several positions and departments to better focus on utilization of resources. Eastern Florida State College is realizing savings over \$1.5 million annually through reduced expenditures for travel, advertising, custodial services and television broadcasting.

*Increasing Efficiencies in Utility Costs.* Advancements in building technology and monitoring have resulted in increased savings in college utilities. Chipola College has connected more facilities to the centralized chiller plant and has consolidated night course locations to reduce the number of buildings in operational mode. Hillsborough Community College reduces electrical use through facility improvements in partnership with Tampa Bay Trane, for a three-year return on investment of \$3.3 million in savings. Santa Fe College conserves energy and generates solar power through state-of-the-art mechanisms and has reduced its energy consumption, saving \$432,000 last year. Florida State College at Jacksonville implemented an Energy Conservation Program in 2013 to better monitor and modify time-of-day schedules, which results in approximately \$1 million in savings annually. State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota upgraded the chiller plant on the Venice Campus including the installation of a 300 ton high efficiency chiller and controls with anticipated annual cost savings of \$10,000.

*Optimizing Space Utilization.* Space utilization analysis is a key component of the FCS institutions' capital needs evaluation. Each college reported that capital planning is conducted each year to ensure it is utilizing existing space in the most cost-efficient manner.

Several colleges reported renovation of their buildings in place of new construction. When feasible, existing buildings are refurbished to house new or expanded programs. The elimination of programs allowed for repurposing of existing facilities to expand high-demand programs without investment in new facilities. Polk State College has consolidated a number of office spaces and terminated leases for off-campus space. Broward College is presently renovating 150,000 square feet in the in lieu of new construction. These renovations include tech labs and classrooms. Additionally, the college is examining design space to determine if there are non-traditional ways of handling how offices are appropriated so additional classrooms may be created. Broward College is working with partner institutions to eliminate the need for deferred maintenance expenditures along with annual overhead and maintenance costs.

*Outsourcing Services.* FCS institutions have found instances where outsourcing services such as custodial services or office equipment maintenance have resulted in cost savings. For example, the College of Central Florida implemented a number of administrative control and management strategies to enhance college affordability, including outsourcing bookstore management services, after-hours and weekend security services, custodial services and motor coach services to private vendors. Pasco-Hernando State College outsources security, custodial and grounds maintenance as a cost savings measure, which also allows expanding services to more students. Polk State College is achieving better pharmacy pricing and rebates for employee benefit programs and expects to save over \$500,000 annually. St. Johns River State College is saving approximately \$100,000 per year by outsourcing custodial services using pricing from the Florida Department of Management Services Custodial program.

*Improving Bidding and Procurement Practices.* In the case of expensive projects that require a bid, colleges solicit multiple bids and competitively bid projects. Reducing the time period of the bid has also resulted in savings. Pensacola State College (PSC) recently began using SmartProcure, a purchasing tool, to gather important pricing information obtained by other public entities to leverage negotiation opportunities with current and new vendors. This tool also allows for research in traditionally sole or single source markets, which resulted in \$54,787 savings last year.

In addition, nearly all colleges continue to utilize various purchasing cooperative agreements in order to save money on all commodities. Colleges also achieve significant savings by using various procurement strategies unrelated to formal procurement such as asking for educational discounts or requesting additional quotes.

All 28 colleges participate in the Florida College System Risk Management Consortium (FCSRMC), a number of local/regional/state buying cooperatives and other state authorized consortiums. Colleges also work with local governmental entities and state university partners to share costs, combine purchase orders, offer joint programs and activities, and implement other cost saving strategies. Multi-year contracts are reviewed annually and rebid or renegotiated wherever possible and feasible. Palm Beach State College reduced health insurance costs by participating in a college consortium, saving nearly \$300,000 a year over market costs. Additionally, by participating through FCSRMC to conduct audits, rather than paying for an outside auditing firm, Palm Beach State College saves \$25,000 per year.

*Modernization of Telecommunications Systems.* Indian River State College, St. Petersburg College and Santa Fe College have recently reduced costs by converting from legacy phone systems to new, unified communications systems. This conversion results in significant direct cost savings while improving timeliness of information and saving effort and travel costs for students, faculty and staff. South Florida State College has increased IT bandwidth across all campuses, which has allowed for more effective use of online instructional resources and computer labs.

#### **Strategy 4: Evaluating Academic Offerings**

*Aligning Course Demand and Offerings.* Offering the courses students need to complete their credentials not only reduces students' time to completion, but also saves the college money. Gulf Coast State College has a robust program review process in place that evaluates programs for currency, effectiveness and need to increase course fill rates while maintaining optimal instructor-student ratios. Florida State College at Jacksonville added 15 workforce-oriented degrees over the past twelve years; none of which required new buildings or large-scale capital investments. Santa Fe College implemented a new baccalaureate program in accounting. In response to many requests from local employers, Santa Fe College also expanded its range of allied health programs by adding a new certificate in central sterile supply as a crucial link in the supply chain for health care organizations.

The National Science Foundation awarded Florida Keys Community College (FKCC) a grant for a three year project entitled "Developing a 21st Century Training Program in the Florida Keys for

Renewable Alternative Energy Technology: Wind, Solar and Tidal Power.” Through the workforce program, FKCC developed an Associate in Science degree in Engineering Technology with a focus on training technicians in the emerging renewable energy field of wind, solar and tidal power; the Engineering Technology program launched in August 2017 with an initial cohort of eight students.

*Terminating Programs.* Florida College System institutions have processes in place for reviewing program viability. Programs are terminated for multiple reasons including workforce needs, low enrollments, outdated curriculum or changes in statute or policy.

In the past seven years, Florida College System institutions terminated over 740 programs. During this timeframe, the average number of terminated programs per institution was 28, with a range of zero to 78. Of the programs terminated, three-quarters came from one of the following award types: college credit certificates (234), associate in applied science (193) and associate in science (140). Colleges terminated associate in applied science degrees because industry need typically required an associate in science not an associate in applied science. Similarly, colleges terminated associate in science programs in cases where the associate in applied science was the workforce standard.

*Expanding \$10,000 Bachelor’s Degrees.* The Florida College System is dedicated to providing access to a high-quality, affordable education to all Floridians—\$10,000 workforce baccalaureate degree programs are one way the FCS accomplishes this goal. Florida College System institutions have 81 approved workforce baccalaureate degree programs for \$10,000. Each baccalaureate degree-granting institution offers at least one \$10,000 degree. Overall, baccalaureate degree students make up less than six percent of FCS enrollments, but they are a vital component of the FCS in our efforts to prepare Floridians for work in our dynamic state and local economies.

### **Student Financial Support**

In addition to federal and state aid programs, colleges provide scholarships to students to help offset remaining eligible expenses. Examples of institutional aid include Daytona State College’s need-based grant and scholarship programs that award over \$800,000 annually, the Santa Fe College Foundation that annually awards \$1 million in aid to students and Miami Dade College’s Honors program that awards students a full tuition scholarship along with a \$500 book stipend and \$600 for education-related expenses.

FCS institutions continue to focus on providing grants and scholarships to students to reduce the direct cost to students, decrease indebtedness and reduce student loan defaults. Average default rates for Florida College System institutions continue to drop as institutions provide alternative strategies for paying for college without taking out student loans.

### **Strategy: Providing Institutional Student Financial Aid**

*Targeted Financial Aid.* Grants and scholarships are often targeted to particular populations on campus. Palm Beach State College and Chipola College report awarding financial aid to students close to graduation but who needed additional resources to complete their education.

Similarly, the Santa Fe College Foundation has pledged \$30,000 to assist 99 students who were within 12 credit hours of finishing as part of the college's "Finish at the Top" campaign. Florida State College at Jacksonville (FSCJ) is participating in a national initiative to cover all expenses for two years for students in need. FSCJ Promise will pay the cost of tuition, fees and books for students for whom state and federal funding is not enough to cover those costs. Tallahassee Community College has implemented scholarships for dual enrollment students to complete their associate in arts degree upon high school graduation and provides STEM scholarships to students who are not eligible for Pell grants.

*Emergency Financial Aid.* Unexpected life events can often derail a student's completion goals. Over the past several years, schools around the country have started setting up emergency aid programs, according to the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation's "Making College Affordable" report. For FCS students, a few hundred dollars can mean the difference between completing college or not. Some FCS institutions have used emergency aid programs to reduce unforeseen barriers to completion. College direct support organizations like those at Indian River State College and Broward College have an emergency student aid fund for students in severe financial situations, such as a vehicle break down or other unplanned costs that impact a student's ability to attend classes and complete their educational goals.

*Identifying and Awarding Student Financial Aid.* Students are often overwhelmed or lack the understanding of student aid available to them. To alleviate this problem, colleges are engaging students to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) with workshops at area high schools, web-based financial aid support mechanisms like Financial Aid TV (FATV), the new FAFSA app for mobile devices, and robust outreach and marketing campaigns. Additionally, colleges have created programs like MY FUTURE at St. Petersburg College to make sure students understand how to qualify for the array of financial aid programs and the important financial implications of debt management.

*Partnerships to Support Students.* In every college service area, there are community-based organizations (CBO) vested in the community’s prosperity. Partnerships with CBO’s can also make college affordable. For example, Seminole State College of Florida established the Destination Graduation program with the United Way, helping to keep students in school by providing emergency aid for housing, food, transportation expenses and past financial obligations in order to get students back in college so they can complete their program.

Polk State College and United Way of Central Florida are piloting a Destination: Graduation program, to assist students on their path to graduation by connecting them to resources they need to stay in school—from financial and housing assistance to food and transportation. The program targets low-income students who show an increased risk of dropping out for non-academic reasons but have demonstrated positive academic progression and promise of graduating.

### **Conclusion**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce demands the best education to meet the needs of a diversified state economy. The Florida College System continues to meet those needs in the most affordable manner for students. The 28 colleges will continue to innovate and implement strategies that result in cost savings for students. Ensuring colleges remain a primary access point to higher education for all students is the top priority for the Florida College System.

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Division of Florida Colleges  
325 W. Gaines Street, Suite 1544  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0400

