



FLORIDA ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES PERCEPTION A WEEKLY LEGISLATIVE UPDATE FOR FACC MEMBERS

Please refer to the legislative issue of *Current* or to the FACC website at www.facc.org for an explanation of issues discussed in this report and for other legislative information.

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Week Three of the 2008 Florida Legislature Session was, perhaps, the ‘calm before the storm’ as the impending budget cuts for the 2008-09 fiscal year is about to become the major issue. In addition, Week Three provided more focus on community colleges, providing details of proposals to address Governance as well as the types of colleges that could develop.

Of interest in Week Four is a **statewide rally in support of community colleges on March 27th, at the Capitol**. The Florida Junior and Community College Student Government Association (FJCCSGA) will be in the front of the capitol at 8:00 a.m. asking for support for their issues.



BUDGET ISSUES

Once the budget cuts were finished in Week Two, appropriations staff went to work crafting the 2008-09 budgets. While no budget hearings occurred in Week Three, members of the community college legislative team were busy lobbying to have the college system ‘held harmless’ from the expected cuts. The colleges want to remind legislators, especially leadership, that enrollment at the community colleges has already increased by 54,000 students as the economy declined, that additional growth is anticipated as the universities limit freshman admissions, and that the colleges are statutorily required to keep an open door. As mentioned last week, the revenue estimates for the 08-09 fiscal year are well below anticipated, and **every Appropriations Committee is expected to start the appropriations process by cutting budgets.**

In addition to cuts to operating budgets, colleges were disappointed to hear in Week Two that **PECO (Public Education Capital Outlay) funds will be less this year than anticipated.** The Division of Community Colleges has submitted plans to reduce funding for projects on the list of those recommended for funding. At a time when construction projects also help build the economy, reduced funding for construction is a double whammy.

Budget hearings will start on March 25, when the Senate Higher Education Appropriations discusses community college budgets, along with the other higher education budgets.

Governance and a New Florida College System

As discussed last week, **CS SJR 2308** is the Senate’s version of a governance bill. This is a Joint Resolution, which is the framework for putting a constitutional amendment on the November ballot for approval by the citizens of Florida. **SJR 2308**, if the constitutional amendment is approved by voters, would re-establish an elected Commissioner of Education with a cabinet level State Board of Education (instead of the current Board appointed by the Governor), and university trustees all appointed by the Governor (instead of half appointed by the State Board.)

The Bill also includes a State Board of Colleges, for the 2 and 4 year colleges that have no graduate degrees. While the bills do not provide details of the new Board, it will “oversee and coordinate” the system. The Board would be made up

of six members, appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate, plus the Commissioner of Education. The **Senate Bill is scheduled to be voted on the Senate Floor on March 26th, on the ‘special order’ calendar.** The **House Schools and Learning Council**, chaired by **Representative Joe Pickens**, approved their proposed committee bill; which will also be a Joint Resolution, [HB 7025](#).

In addition to the bills that will allow voters to approve changes to the Constitution that impact community colleges, **legislation that creates a new “College System” has now emerged. CS/SB 1716 passed out of the Senate Higher Education Committee on March 19.** This bill creates a new type of college, in addition to the existing 2 year community colleges and community colleges that have been approved for limited baccalaureate degrees. The new “state colleges” would offer baccalaureate degrees that address regional and statewide workforce needs, versus the local needs that are used to document the need for the limited baccalaureate degrees that some colleges offer now. This bill also creates a Task Force made up of 8 community college presidents and the Commissioner of Education to develop a process for approving these state colleges and developing a funding model.

[SB 1716](#) also provides for a “pilot program” where Indian River College, St. Petersburg College and Okaloosa Walton College would become State Colleges. The Bill also allows for community colleges to change their name to “college” if approved to offer a baccalaureate degree.

If the State College system sounds familiar, that may be because the State University System released a study over a year ago, called the “Pappas Report,” which suggested that a system of ‘state colleges’ was needed in order to provide more baccalaureate programs in the state. It remains unclear how the State University System will react to **SB 1716**, or if they are impacted at all.

Other Issues of interest to FACC

Bond Finance

Representative Heller has filed [HB 235](#) and **Senator Oelrich** has filed [SB 696](#), both of which will provide clarity to the Bond Finance laws for community colleges. Both bills were heard in Week Three, with the **House Bill passing the House Postsecondary Education Committee on March 18, and scheduled for another hearing by the Schools and Learning Council on March 25.** The Senate Bill was then passed by the Higher Education Appropriations Committee on March 19, and is scheduled to be heard by the full Senate on the Special Order Calendar on March 26th.



Rep. Heller

Ready to Work Certification

Representative Nelson’s [HB 985](#) would require career academy students to pass a “ready to work” certification as part of their graduation requirements. In addition, students planning on using a ‘Gold Seal’ Bright Futures Scholarship would have to pass the certification as well. **This bill passed the 21st Century Competitiveness Committee on March 18, and is scheduled to be heard in the Schools and Learning Council on March 26.** Two companion bills, [SB 2460](#) (Lynn) and [SB 2818](#) (Wise) have not been heard in a committee, making final passage a long shot.

Financial Aid

A bill that amends tuition assistance programs for private and proprietary postsecondary schools, **SB 2210**, is a **Senate Higher Education Committee** Bill. Committee Bills are usually considered to be priorities of the leadership. This bill amends the Florida Resident Access Grant Program (FRAG) and the Access to Better Learning and Education Grant Program (ABLE) to make these programs *financial aid* programs rather than tuition assistance. The bill would require student recipients to maintain a certain GPA and number of hours and to complete financial aid applications. **SB 2210** passed out of the Senate Higher Education committee on March 12, and will be heard in the Senate Commerce Committee next.

Textbook Affordability

HB 603, (Flores) and SB 2350, (Atwater) are identical bills seeking to find methods to contain the high cost of textbooks. The bills **prohibit college or university employees from receiving anything of value in exchange for textbook selection, with exceptions** for sample copies, royalties, honoraria, compensation for reviewing, and training. The bill also requires posting of required books at least 30 days before the first day of class. The State Board of Education and Board of Governors are to adopt policies, procedures and guidelines to help minimize the cost of textbooks. The House bill **passed the Schools and Learning Council on March 18th, and will be heard in the Policy and Budget Council on March 25**. Senator Atwater's bill will be heard on March 26 in the Higher Education Committee of the Senate.

Firefighting and Inspections

HB 1041 (Garcia) and SB 2388 (Saunders) not only amend the statutes relating the work of college fire inspectors, they create a new 'apprenticeship' program that can be offered in high schools. Colleges are concerned that the apprenticeship concept will have significant liability issues related to students under the age of 18. **The House bill passed the Committee on Financial Institutions on March 20**, but the Senate Bill has not had a hearing.

Excess Hours

The Excess Hours bill has resurfaced as anticipated. **Senator Constantine's bill, SB 2614**, was filed. Senator Constantine has worked with the community colleges to develop a plan that is less punitive, while still addressing his concerns. In Week Three, **Senator Constantine amended the language of SB 2614 into SB 320, which dealt with university fees**. The bill will be heard next in the Higher Education Appropriations Committee. No House bill has dealt with this issue, to date.



Rep. Garcia

Cosmetology

HB 415 (Carroll) and SB 996 (Wise) amend the licensure requirements related to cosmetology. Colleges with cosmetology programs have supported this legislation which will allow students to be trained in specific, shorter programs and enter the workforce quickly. **SB 996 passed the Regulated Industries Committee on March 4, and is on the agenda in the Higher Education Committee on March 26.** The House bill has been waiting to be heard in the House Policy and Budget Council since it passed its first committee of reference on March 6.

Radiology

HB 1233 (Garcia) and SB 2642 (Peaden) would amend the statutes regulating schools of radiology. These bills, opposed by the national certification association, would allow a school accredited by an alternative association to offer training. Neither bill has been heard by of committee yet.



Rep. Carroll