

# SENATE STAFF ANALYSIS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

BILL: SB 1636  
 SPONSOR: Senator Pruitt  
 SUBJECT: Community Colleges & Branch Campuses  
 DATE: March 29, 2001      REVISED: 04/03/01 \_\_\_\_\_

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	<u>White</u>	<u>O'Farrell</u>	<u>ED</u>	<u>Fav/3 amendments</u>
2.	_____	_____	<u>AED</u>	_____
3.	_____	_____	<u>AP</u>	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____	_____
6.	_____	_____	_____	_____

**I. Summary:**

This bill authorizes procedures by which:

- A community college may obtain the authority to offer a limited number of selected baccalaureate-degree level programs.
- A university branch campus may request and be granted authority to become a freestanding college.

This bill amends the following section of the Florida Statutes: 240.3836

**II. Present Situation:**

**Role of Community Colleges in Florida**

Florida's postsecondary education system consists of 10 state universities, 28 community colleges, and 41 technical career centers operated by public school districts or by a charter agreement. The community colleges have an "open-door" admissions policy, and a statewide articulation agreement guarantees university admission to any student who earns an Associate in Arts degree from a community college.

This two-plus-two structure is central to the design of Florida's system; Florida relies on community colleges for the lower division work of most students. This articulation design is unique in the nation. A 2000 Senate Education Committee Interim Project recommended that the state policy should "maintain and increase the role of public community colleges as an open door to every Florida resident who wishes to pursue a baccalaureate degree."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Florida Senate Education Committee, *Postsecondary Education Issues*, Interim Project Report 2001-012, p. 8.

### **Role of Branch Campuses**

Most of the state universities operate branch campuses, and the Legislature has appropriated over \$11 million directly to branch campuses in the past 5 years. However, enrollment at branch campuses has increased little, and branch campuses have had little effect on the number of baccalaureate degrees granted.<sup>2</sup>

The programs at branch campuses are designed to meet the needs of populous areas without 4-year public colleges, but recent discussions have questioned whether they are adequately meeting community needs. The branch campuses tend to serve a different clientele from the main campus, enrolling predominantly older students who attend part-time while also fulfilling the obligations of employment and family management. The programs needed by these students, who are likely to have difficulty traveling to the main campus, may differ from the programs offered at traditional universities. A university graduate may relocate to pursue an employment opportunity, but many “nontraditional” students need degrees that will help them advance in occupations where they are. A 2000 Interim Project by the Senate Education Committee suggested that branch campuses “may benefit from teaming up with community colleges, or emulating them, by studying local economies and targeting programs that will improve them.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Analysis of Baccalaureate Degree Access in Florida**

The Postsecondary Education Planning Commission projects an increase of 150,000 new undergraduate students between now and 2010. The number of occupations that require 4-year degrees is increasing so much that the number needed will increase by 31 percent by 2005. This statistic means that the state should add to its current graduation rate an additional 240,000 people with baccalaureate degrees.

Yet, Florida lags behind the rest of the nation in percent of the population with baccalaureate degrees, ranking 38<sup>th</sup> among all states and eighth among the ten largest states.<sup>4</sup> Its universities are among the largest in the nation -- on average, over twice as large as those in the other 49 states. Five of our universities have over 30,000 students each.<sup>5</sup>

Compared to other states, Florida has a lower rate of students enrolling in baccalaureate-level colleges right out of high school (43<sup>rd</sup> in the nation), a lower rate of students who continue after the first 2 years of college, and a lower capacity in universities at the upper division.<sup>6</sup> Seventy-five percent of students who earn the Associate in Arts degree enroll in a state university, but only 20 percent of students who enroll in an Associate in Arts program complete it within 5 years. This is a lower completion rate than is typical of students who start out in 4-year colleges.

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<sup>2</sup>Counting all branch campuses, the total enrollment growth that can be attributed to them in the past 5 years is only 2,294 FTE.

<sup>3</sup> Florida Senate Education Committee, Postsecondary Education Issues (Interim Project 2001-012, October 2000), page 2.

<sup>4</sup> Postsecondary Education Planning Commission, *Study of the Need for Baccalaureate Degree Opportunities in Five Florida Counties*, January 2001.

<sup>5</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, *A Brief Analysis of Baccalaureate Degree Production in Florida* (December 1999).

### **Recommendations**

In a January 2001 conference on Access to Baccalaureate Education, the Postsecondary Education Planning Commission provided the following recommendations:

- Increase enrollment at existing universities
- Increase state subsidy for private institutions
- Increase use of distance learning technology
- Increase number of joint-use facilities at community colleges and state universities
- Authorize selected community colleges to award a limited number of baccalaureate degrees

Policy analysts agree that Florida is continuing to pursue the first four of these recommendations. The state's rapid growth and the shortage of essential services – especially for teachers, health care professionals, and qualified managers – raises the potential of expanding the offerings of some community colleges to include a limited number of baccalaureate programs. Another question is whether giving more independence to branch campuses would enable them to respond better to community needs.

### **III. Effect of Proposed Changes:**

The legislation under consideration will authorize two separate avenues by which existing postsecondary education institutions may change their classification to that of a college – either from community college to a college, or from branch campus of a university to a college.

#### **Baccalaureate Programs at Community Colleges**

The State Board of Education may authorize a community college to offer a limited number of baccalaureate degrees designed to meet local workforce needs in one of two ways:

1. A community college may enter into a formal agreement with the state university in its service area for the community college to deliver specified baccalaureate degree programs. The college's proposal must include the following information:
  - Identification of the demand for the baccalaureate degree program by the workforce development board, local businesses and industry, local chambers of commerce, and potential students.
  - Substantiation of the unmet need for graduates of the proposed degree program.
  - Verification that the community college has the facilities and academic resources to deliver the program.

The agreement must be submitted to the Postsecondary Education Planning Commission for review and comment and to the State Board of Education for approval. Upon approval of the State Board of Education, the college will pursue regional accreditation by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

2. A community college may develop a proposal to deliver specified baccalaureate degree programs in its district. The college's proposal must include the following information:
  - Identification of the demand for the baccalaureate degree program by the workforce development board, local businesses and industry, local chambers of commerce, and potential students.
  - Substantiation of the unmet need for graduates of the proposed degree program.

- Verification that the community college has the facilities and academic resources to deliver the program.

The proposal must be submitted to the Postsecondary Education Planning Commission for review and comment and to the State Board of Education for approval. Upon approval of the State Board of Education, the college shall pursue regional accreditation by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

*Note: An amendment by the Education Committee clarifies that a community college that converts to a baccalaureate-degree level college retains its primary mission of providing associate degrees and may not terminate its associate degree programs. By inference, students at such a college may continue to use their AA degrees as a way to enroll in the upper division of a university.*

### **Freestanding Branch Campuses**

When the interests of the state, region, and students would be better served by doing so, a branch campus of a state university may submit a proposal, based upon a resolution of its local advisory committee, to the State Board of Education for the branch to become a free-standing, 4-year public college. The proposal must include at least one of the following components:

- The mission and purpose of the branch campus is unique from that of the main university campus.
- The branch campus offers a full array of undergraduate degree programs and support courses, and the branch could be accredited as a separate institution.
- The new designation will enable the institution to more effectively address unmet demand for baccalaureate education.

The proposal must be forwarded to the Postsecondary Education Planning Commission for review and comment. Upon approval of the State Board of Education, the branch will pursue separate accreditation by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and will maintain its accreditation status as a branch campus until separate accreditation is achieved.

## **IV. Constitutional Issues:**

### **A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:**

None.

### **B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:**

None.

### **C. Trust Funds Restrictions:**

None.

**V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:****A. Tax/Fee Issues:**

None.

**B. Private Sector Impact:**

If community colleges and branch campuses pursue the options presented in this bill, and begin to offer baccalaureate degree programs, residents in their service area may save on the cost of travel to one of the 10 university main campuses to pursue an undergraduate degree.

**C. Government Sector Impact:**

Contingent upon whether branch campuses and community colleges successfully pursue the options created in the bill, the cost to the state may be affected. New programs may be created, and they will require state funding. However, there are known costs associated with increasing access at research universities and independent colleges and universities, and the programs authorized in the bill will likely be less costly. There are also unknown costs associated with having such limited access to baccalaureate education as Florida currently faces.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

**VII. Related Issues:**

As of this date, March 29, 2001, three bills have been introduced in the Florida Senate that allow a community college to offer selected baccalaureate degrees or increase independence for a branch campus. Senate Bills 986, 1190, and 1596 are the result of a process similar to the requirements of this bill.

**VIII. Amendments:****#1 by Education:**

Clarifies that the college must request a specific program, and any other program must receive separate approval.

**#2 by Education:**

Requires a separate approval process for any new programs to be started.

**#3 by Education:**

Clarifies that a community college that converts to a baccalaureate-degree level college retains its primary mission to provide associate degrees and access to a university.