

**The Florida Senate**  
**BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

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

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Military Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security Committee

BILL: SB 894  
 INTRODUCER: Senator Bennett  
 SUBJECT: Postsecondary education of military veterans  
 DATE: March 16, 2011      REVISED: \_\_\_\_\_

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Fleming	Carter	MS	<b>Pre-meeting</b>
2.	_____	_____	HE	_____
3.	_____	_____	BC	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____	_____
6.	_____	_____	_____	_____

**I. Summary:**

This bill provides that any veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces who was a resident of Florida 4 years before entering military service and who holds an associate degree or has earned at least 60 college credit hours from a Florida College System institution shall be admitted to any Florida College System institution or state university of the veteran's choice.

This bill creates an as yet unnumbered section of the Florida Statutes.

This bill provides an effective date of July 1, 2011.

**II. Present Situation:**

**The Florida College System<sup>1</sup>**

The Florida College System is comprised of 28 public postsecondary educational institutions that grant two- and four-year degrees. Some of these institutions have more than one campus, resulting in 182 sites throughout the state.

Florida College System institutions have an open door admissions policy allowing any person with a Florida high school diploma or GED to enroll at the associate degree level. However, Florida College System institution baccalaureate programs have admission criteria. Florida College System serves a large number of non-traditional students; that is, students other than

<sup>1</sup> Information retrieved from the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability. Government Program Summaries (GPS). *Board of Governors, State University System of Florida*. Available at: <http://www.oppaga.state.fl.us/profiles/2101/>. Site last visited March 15, 2011.

those who have just graduated from high school and a high proportion of students commute to college. In addition, many are classified as part-time students and also have full-time or part-time jobs.

#### *Articulation Agreement between Community Colleges and Universities*<sup>2</sup>

Florida's higher education system is designed to allow students to successfully pursue a bachelor's degree by first attending a community college and then transferring to a 4-year institution. This approach to earning a 4-year degree is commonly referred to as the 2+2 System. The state of Florida guarantees that students who complete an Associate of Arts degree at a community college have the opportunity to enroll in and earn a bachelor's degree at a state university.<sup>3</sup> Admission to the student's preferred public postsecondary institution or program is not guaranteed.

#### *Associate in Arts Degree*

The associate in arts (AA) degree program was established to prepare students for transfer from two-year institutions to four-year colleges and universities. The Florida 2 + 2 system guarantees students with a Florida College System AA degree admission to a state university.<sup>4</sup> The AA degree program requires 36 hours of general education credits (liberal arts) and 24 credit hours in the program area in which the student intends to complete a bachelor's degree. In 2009-10, there were 333,272 students enrolled in an AA degree program within the Florida College System.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Associate in Science Degree*

The associate in science degree is a two-year degree intended to prepare students for entry into the workforce. Selected programs provide for articulation from an associate in science to a baccalaureate degree. The associate of science degree is awarded to those students who complete all of the required courses for the vocational program in addition to selected general education classes (i.e., liberal arts and sciences). This degree is organized into 26 nationally recognized career clusters, such as Architecture and Construction, Hospitality and Tourism, Manufacturing, Information Technology, Government and Public Administration, and Finance. In 2009-10, there were 103,741 students enrolled in an associate in science degree program within the Florida College System.<sup>6</sup>

#### **The State University System of Florida**<sup>7</sup>

The Board of Governors<sup>8</sup> is the governing body of the State University System. The State University System consists of 11 public universities<sup>9</sup> that provide undergraduate and graduate

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<sup>2</sup> 6A-10.024(4), F.A.C.

<sup>3</sup> 2+2 *Pathways to Success Brochure*. Available at: [http://www.fldoe.org/articulation/pdf/Pathways\\_to\\_Success.pdf](http://www.fldoe.org/articulation/pdf/Pathways_to_Success.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Admission into an institution does not qualify for automatic admission to a degree program within the institution. Also, students are not necessarily guaranteed admission to the institution of their choice.

<sup>5</sup> Florida Department of Education. *College Facts at a Glance*. Available at: [http://www.fldoe.org/cc/facts\\_glance.asp](http://www.fldoe.org/cc/facts_glance.asp). Site last visited March 15, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> Information retrieved from the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability. Government Program Summaries (GPS). *Department of Education Florida College System*. Available at: <http://www.oppaga.state.fl.us/profiles/2100/>. Site last visited March 15, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> The Board of Governors has 17 members, 14 appointed by the Governor with the consent of the Senate plus the Commissioner of Education, the chair of the Advisory Council of Faculty Senates, and the president of the Florida Student Association.

level instruction leading to baccalaureate, master's, doctoral, and professional degrees. Additionally, the State University System conducts research that extends the boundaries of knowledge and engages in service to the public. Section 1001.705(2)(i), F.S., recognizes the Board of Governor's constitutional duty to govern admission into state universities.

### **Veterans in Florida**

Florida has the third largest population of veterans in the nation with more than 1.6 million. Only California and Texas have larger populations of veterans.<sup>10</sup> Section 1.01(14), F.S., defines the term "veteran" as a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service and who was discharged or released therefrom under honorable conditions only or who later received an upgraded discharge under honorable conditions, notwithstanding any action by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs on individuals discharged or released with other than honorable discharges. The Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs estimates that there are roughly 200,000 Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation New Dawn service members and veterans who claim Florida as their home of record. The proportion of veterans and active duty service members that constitute the 200,000 estimate cannot be determined.

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

This bill provides that any veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces who was a resident of this state 4 years before entering military service and who holds an associate degree or has earned at least 60 college credit hours from a Florida College System institution shall be admitted to any Florida College System institution or state university of the veteran's choice.

This bill would allow veterans to gain admission to their choice of institution. As previously stated, the current articulation agreement for AA degree recipients guarantees admission into an upper division program, but the choice of institution is not guaranteed.

### **Other Potential Implications:**

According to the Florida College System, this bill could impact the admissions process for baccalaureate degree programs, requiring institutions to implement a process for verifying Florida residency 4 years prior to a veteran's military service. Additionally, documenting and verifying residency 4 years prior to military service might be difficult depending on how long the veteran has been removed from service.

According to the State University System, this bill conflicts the Board of Governor's authority to set university admission policies.

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<sup>9</sup> State University System institutions include: Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University; Florida Atlantic University; Florida Gulf Coast University; Florida International University; Florida State University; New College of Florida; University of Central Florida; University of Florida; University of North Florida; University of South Florida; University of West Florida.

<sup>10</sup> Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs. *2009-10 Annual Report*. Available at: [http://www.floridavets.org/pdf/ann\\_rprt\\_10.pdf](http://www.floridavets.org/pdf/ann_rprt_10.pdf)

**IV. Constitutional Issues:**

## A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

## B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

## C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

**V. Fiscal Impact Statement:**

## A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

## B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

## C. Government Sector Impact:

According to the State University System:

The fiscal impact on public universities and colleges is indeterminate at this time, as the data is not available to determine how many veterans would migrate to the State University System (or the Florida College System) for their educational needs. However, some universities would most likely experience a stronger surge in student enrollment and tuition revenues than other universities based primarily on factors such as a university's unique brand, cost of attendance, and university location. Further, the additional in-state credit hours would be state fundable at the upper division level, requiring additional state support by the Legislature.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

It is unclear whether the intent is specific to veterans seeking baccalaureate degrees. Under this provision, it may be possible for a veteran to qualify and then seek admission to a university for graduate study.

It is also unclear as to whether or not a veteran must have resided a full four years in Florida before entering military service to be eligible for the benefit.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Additional Information:**

- A. **Committee Substitute – Statement of Substantial Changes:**  
(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

- B. **Amendments:**

None.

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This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.

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