



Authorizing Community Colleges to Award Baccalaureate Degrees Is One of Several Options to Expand Access to Higher Education

at a glance

The Legislature has authorized community colleges to offer baccalaureate degrees in fields that meet local workforce needs. As of February 2005, four community colleges offer baccalaureate degrees and two are applying to do so. In addition, nearly all community colleges partner with public and private colleges to provide access to baccalaureate degrees on their campuses.

Authorizing community colleges to offer baccalaureate degrees improves the state's ability to meet workforce needs and gives students more choice. However, if not carefully implemented, this step could produce unanticipated consequences including higher expenditures per student and weaker community college dedication to their traditional students. To limit these problems, the Legislature should consider several options:

- strengthening the process for reviewing proposals for new community college degree programs;
- empowering community colleges to provide baccalaureate degrees that meet workforce needs on their campuses by the most efficient means, which could include providing incentives for partnerships with public and private institutions;
- limiting community colleges' ability to offer baccalaureate degree programs;
- slowly transforming some community colleges into four-year colleges that focus on teaching rather than research; and
- establishing a process to coordinate degree requirements for Bachelor of Applied Science programs.

Scope

In response to a legislative request, this report provides information on alternative methods of increasing access to baccalaureate programs for place-bound and non-traditional students, including authorizing community colleges to grant baccalaureate degrees. The report examines

- the need to increase access to baccalaureate degrees;
- the advantages and disadvantages of alternative methods of delivering baccalaureate degrees at community college campuses; and
- options for strengthening the process for providing baccalaureate degrees on community college campuses.

The Need to Improve Access to Baccalaureate Degrees

In contrast with other states, Florida has concentrated baccalaureate degree-granting authority in relatively few large public universities. Florida is the fourth most populous state with the seventh highest enrollment in public baccalaureate degree-granting institutions, but ranks 20th in the number of those institutions.

As shown in Exhibit 1, other states with smaller populations have more baccalaureate degree-granting institutions than Florida.

**Exhibit 1
Florida Has Fewer Public Baccalaureate Degree-Granting Institutions Per Capita Than Other States**

State	Population (2003)	Student Population (2004)	Number of Public Baccalaureate Granting Institutions
Florida ¹	17 million	272,591	11
Alabama	4.5 million	136,184	16
California	35.5 million	584,126	31 ²
Georgia ³	8.6 million	196,515	21
North Carolina	8.4 million	183,347 ⁴	16
Ohio ⁵	11.4 million	251,367	15
Pennsylvania ⁶	12.3 million	257,279	18
Texas ⁷	22.1 million	455,719 ⁴	35

¹ Florida universities have a total of 11 branch campuses. In addition, four community colleges offer limited baccalaureate degrees.

² Does not include the University of California San Francisco, which is a graduate university, or the University of California Merced, which is scheduled to open in 2005.

³ Includes two state colleges with limited baccalaureate degree offerings.

⁴ These numbers represent the fall 2003 student population for North Carolina and the fall 2002 student population for Texas.

⁵ Ohio universities have a total of 10 branch campuses with limited baccalaureate degree offerings.

⁶ Pennsylvania universities have 31 branch campuses, including Penn State’s College of Medicine and Dickinson School of Law.

⁷ Includes four public two-year, upper-division universities.

Source: OPPAGA.

Florida’s relatively low number of baccalaureate degree-granting institutions creates several problems, including

- limited geographical access to baccalaureate degrees;
- limited ability to address local workforce needs; and
- limited student options for attending small public baccalaureate degree-granting institutions.

Limited geographical access. Some people, especially those who are older and cannot leave their families or jobs, lack geographical access to public institutions that grant

baccalaureate degrees. In 1972, Florida had nine public universities and a population of approximately 6.8 million people. Since then Florida’s population has grown to 17 million. In addition, a higher percentage of students seeking to attend higher education institutions are now non-traditional students who are more likely to be place-bound. Nevertheless, over the past 30 years the state has added only two public baccalaureate degree-granting institutions, Florida Gulf Coast University and New College of Florida. ¹

As a result, access to Florida’s public baccalaureate institutions has become more limited over time. Some areas of the state, such as the Treasure Coast region, have grown to have large populations but are distant from any state university. In highly urbanized areas that contain universities, traffic congestion and limited public transportation systems restricts some non-traditional students’ access to those universities.

Limited ability to address local workforce needs. The limited access to public baccalaureate institutions also affects businesses, non-profit organizations, and public organizations that wish to improve the knowledge and skills of their existing and potential employees. While the state’s 28 community colleges can offer courses to meet some of these workforce needs, they cannot readily meet other needs such as providing upper division coursework and baccalaureate degree programs. The importance of such training to local economies is growing as the state and nation move from manufacturing-based to knowledge- and technology-based industries.

Limited student choice. Florida’s limited number of public baccalaureate degree institutions restricts student choice, particularly for those students who prefer going to small higher education institutions. Some students wish to attend smaller institutions because they believe they will be more supportive and student-friendly than large universities.

¹ New College of Florida started out as a private college in 1960 and then became affiliated with the University of South Florida in 1975 before becoming an independent institution in 2001.

Research shows that students who attend small higher education institutions are more likely to graduate than students who attend large institutions. This may be because small colleges tend to have more of a teaching than a research mission.

However, most of Florida’s public universities have large student populations. Only three of Florida’s state universities (Florida Gulf Coast University, University of West Florida, and New College of Florida) have fewer than 10,000 enrolled students. In contrast, as shown in Exhibit 2, Georgia has 14 baccalaureate degree-granting institutions that enroll fewer than 10,000 students (including 2 state colleges offering a limited number of baccalaureate degrees), Alabama has 12, and North Carolina has 8. Although Florida students who are seeking to attend smaller higher education institutions can go to private schools, they may not view these schools as affordable.

**Exhibit 2
Florida Has Fewer Small Baccalaureate Degree-Granting Institutions Than Other States**

State	Institutions With Fewer than 10,000 Students	Institutions With 10,001 to 20,000 Students	Institutions With More than 20,000 Students
Florida	3	2	6
Alabama	12	2	2
California	8	9	14
Georgia	14	5	2
North Carolina	8	5	3
Ohio	4	6	5
Pennsylvania	13	2	3
Texas	21	6	8

Source: OPPAGA.

Delivering degrees at community colleges can address these problems. These issues can be resolved in part by delivering baccalaureate degrees on community college campuses, either in partnership with a public or private four-year institution or by the community college itself offering a baccalaureate degree. The Florida Community College System was planned to be within commuting distance of 90% of Florida’s population. Providing

baccalaureate degree programs on community college campuses increases geographical access to these programs, improves the state’s ability to meet local workforce needs, and allows students to obtain their degrees in small school settings. Although Florida community colleges in highly urbanized areas are quite large, they tend to have a number of smaller branch campuses.

Ways of Expanding Access

Florida has two primary options for increasing the provision of baccalaureate degrees on community college campuses:

- community colleges may enter into partnerships with State University System (SUS) institutions and private institutions, or
- community colleges may create their own baccalaureate degree programs.

These methods are not mutually exclusive. For example, St. Petersburg College has partnered with both public and private institutions and also has created several of its own baccalaureate degree programs.

Each delivery model has benefits and challenges. Some models may work better for some community colleges than for others due to factors such as geographic location, relationships with SUS institutions and independent colleges and universities in the region, and community needs and demands.

Partnerships with SUS and private universities

Most of Florida’s community colleges have partnered with public and/or private higher education institutions to deliver upper division coursework leading to a baccalaureate degree to students on their community college campuses. Section 1004.03, *Florida Statutes*, encourages cooperative programs, especially between institutions within the same regions of the state.

Currently, 22 of the 28 Florida community colleges partner with at least one state university to offer approximately 90 baccalaureate degrees. The number of

students served by these degree programs is unknown because some universities do not keep separate data on the students they serve at different locations.

Some of these partnerships have existed for decades, such as one between Brevard Community College and the University of Central Florida. Other partnerships have been formed only recently, such as the partnership between St. Petersburg College and Florida Gulf Coast University.

In addition, 12 private universities have partnered with community colleges to deliver upper division coursework leading to approximately 20 baccalaureate degrees at 18 community colleges. Barry University, Saint Leo University, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, and International College have been the most active in partnering with community colleges and currently serve 16 community colleges. The Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida estimates that, in 2004, their member institutions were serving approximately 3,000 students who were working toward baccalaureate degrees on community colleges campuses.

Together, public and private universities offer baccalaureate degree programs at all but one community college. The exception is Florida Community College at Jacksonville, which has a strong two plus two relationship with the University of North Florida, under which the community college educates most of the lower division students who eventually graduate from the university.

Both public and private universities have expressed interest in expanding their offerings on community college campuses. Four public universities report that they plan to offer more baccalaureate programs on community college campuses. The Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida has reported that 13 of their member institutions have interest in offering new baccalaureate degree programs at community colleges.

Benefits. Partnerships between community colleges and public and private universities offer a number of benefits. State universities

and private colleges entering into these partnerships are accredited and do not need to undergo a separate accreditation process for the programs they offer outside of their main campuses. Consequently, the state's start-up costs for these programs are generally low. Although some capital funds may be needed for buildings and renovations, the only continuing funding the Legislature needs to provide is paying for the additional FTE generated by students attending these programs.

These partnerships also may encourage the community colleges and public or private institutions to share resources such as computers, lab equipment, and library materials and thereby save costs. Public and private universities may make investments at the community college campus, which can then benefit students in the community colleges' two-year programs as well.

Finally, providing state and private university baccalaureate degree programs on community college campuses offers differing benefits. State university programs benefit students, who can stay in their community but still pay the low tuition rates charged to all state university system students. Private colleges benefit both students and local employers because they often are more flexible than state universities and can more quickly adjust course offerings in response to changing workforce needs or student demands.

Challenges. Partnerships between community colleges and state and private universities also pose some challenges. Establishing and maintaining these partnerships require good communication and a strong relationship between the institutions. Communication breakdowns, personality conflicts, and a lack of commitment to the sharing arrangement can prevent or destroy these partnerships.

In addition to these problems, both universities and community colleges may be unwilling to partner for a number of reasons. For example, some state universities, particularly those aspiring to be highly rated research institutions, can be uninterested in establishing

these partnerships because they are focused on investing in programs on their established campuses. While nine of the state’s universities indicated that they wanted to increase the size of their programs on existing campuses, only four indicated that they wanted to establish programs in new locations.

Community colleges may be reluctant to partner with private universities due to their higher tuition costs. Even after Florida Resident Access Grants (FRAG) subsidies are considered, private colleges that are members of the Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida charge tuition and fees that range from \$51 to \$173 per credit hour, with a median of about \$96 per hour. In comparison, for upper division courses, community colleges charge about \$61 to \$73 per credit hour, with a median of \$70.

Community colleges also may be reluctant to partner with either public or private universities if they are more interested in offering their own baccalaureate degree programs. These institutions may view offering their own programs and becoming colleges as more academically prestigious than remaining community colleges.

Exhibit 3 summarizes the benefits and challenges of community colleges partnering with public and private baccalaureate degree-granting institutions to offer baccalaureate degree programs on community college campuses.

**Exhibit 3
Community College Partnership with Public and Private Universities Pose Both Benefits and Challenges**

Benefits	Challenges
<p>Both Public and Private</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Low cost to the state ▪ Already accredited ▪ Can include resource-sharing agreements <p>Public</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Low in-state tuition <p>Private</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Flexibility to meet workforce and student needs 	<p>Both Public and Private</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Institutions that are unwilling to partner <p>Public</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of flexibility to respond to local workforce needs <p>Private</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High tuition

Source: OPPAGA analysis.

Community college baccalaureate degrees

Community colleges are authorized to offer baccalaureate degrees by two Florida statutes. In 2000, the Legislature created s.1004.73, *Florida Statutes*, authorizing St. Petersburg College to offer baccalaureate degrees in applied science, nursing, and education. The college also has the authority to offer additional baccalaureate degree programs four years after first being accredited to offer baccalaureate degrees. The decision to add new programs must be approved by local stakeholders and based on community needs and economic opportunities. St. Petersburg College is now past the four-year mark and, starting in spring semester 2005, is offering Bachelor’s of Applied Science degrees in two new majors, veterinary technology and public safety administration.

In 2001, the Legislature created s.1007.33, *Florida Statutes*, authorizing all community colleges to provide upper division coursework and award baccalaureate degrees. To receive this authorization, a community college must submit a proposal to the Council for Education Policy Research and Improvement and obtain approval from the State Board of Education. Approval is contingent upon documented demand for the program, unmet need in the area, and the community college having the necessary infrastructure to deliver the program. The primary mission and responsibility of community colleges must be to remain responsive to community needs for lower division undergraduate instruction, such as awarding associate degrees, and providing remedial and workforce education.

As of fall 2004, Chipola College, Miami-Dade College, and Okaloosa-Walton College successfully completed the application and approval process and offer baccalaureate degrees under their own authority. In addition, Daytona Beach and Edison Community Colleges have applied for authority to offer baccalaureate degree programs. Exhibit 4 shows the baccalaureate degree programs these community colleges currently offer. All but one of the baccalaureate degree programs are in education or applied sciences.

**Exhibit 4
Four Community Colleges Offer Baccalaureate Degrees in Education or Applied Sciences**

Institution	Degree
St. Petersburg College	Bachelor of Science
	▪ Elementary Education
	▪ Exceptional Education
	▪ Secondary Mathematics Education
	▪ Secondary Biology Education
	▪ Nursing
	Bachelor of Applied Science
	▪ Technology Management
	▪ Dental Hygiene
	▪ Veterinary Technology (Spring 2005)
▪ Public Safety Administration (Spring 2005)	
▪ Orthotics & Prosthetics Technology (Fall 2005)	
Miami Dade College	Bachelor of Science
	▪ Exceptional Student Education
	▪ Secondary Mathematics Education
▪ Secondary Science Education	
Okaloosa-Walton College	Bachelor of Applied Science
▪ Project and Acquisitions Management	
Chipola College	Bachelor of Science
	▪ Secondary Mathematics Education
	▪ Secondary Science Education

Source: OPPAGA analysis.

As shown in Exhibit 5, in Fiscal Year 2003-04, the programs currently serve about 1,250 students; however, since many of them go to school part-time, the number of full-time equivalent students was 614. The enrollment in the programs has grown in the two fiscal years and is expected to grow again this year. During the same time, Legislative appropriations for these programs have increased. The Legislature appropriated over \$7 million to the community colleges for these programs in Fiscal Year 2004-05.

**Exhibit 5
Community College Baccalaureate Programs (Upper Division) Are Growing**

Institution	2002-03 (Actual)	2003-04 (Actual)	2004-05 (Operating)
Chipola College	\$ 341,000	\$ 333,000	\$ 662,440
<i>Student Headcount</i>	--	14	30
<i>Student FTE</i>	--	8	30
Miami-Dade College	\$1,728,400	\$333,334	\$1,302,600
<i>Student Headcount</i>	--	365	450
<i>Student FTE</i>	--	63	180
St. Petersburg College	\$3,000,000	\$4,808,293	\$4,902,166
<i>Student Headcount</i>	507	870	1,516
<i>Student FTE</i>	339	543	827
Community College Total	\$5,069,400	\$5,474,627	\$6,867,206
<i>Student Headcount</i>	507	1,249	1,996
<i>Student FTE</i>	339	614	1,037

Note: Does not include Okaloosa-Walton College's baccalaureate program which began in 2004 or Edison College's joint program with Florida Gulf Coast University. The Legislature appropriated \$607,531 for these programs in 2003-04 and \$399,954 in 2004-05.

Source: Department of Education.

Benefits. Community colleges that offer their own baccalaureate degrees can provide benefits to students, local businesses, and the state. These include low tuition, ability to meet workforce needs, and a potential for improved retention and graduation rates.

Students who attend community college baccalaureate programs pay lower tuition than students in the state university system. In 2004, the Legislature capped tuition for community college baccalaureate degree programs at 85% of the tuition charged by state universities. This difference was intended to reflect the fact that universities receive funding to support their research missions, which community colleges do not share. In 2004-05, this difference amounts to \$10.22 per credit hour, or a \$306.60 savings for a student taking 30 credit hours during the academic year. In addition to tuition savings, students who stay at their community colleges to complete their baccalaureate degrees avoid the cost of relocating to a new institution.

Local business and other employers benefit from community college baccalaureate programs because these programs are designed to meet the unique workforce needs of the area. Community colleges have routinely developed, amended, or terminated Associate of Applied Science (AAS) or Associate of Science (AS) programs based on community needs. Thus they have experience in working with local businesses to identify needs and design educational programs to meet those needs. In addition, because of differences in their governing structure, community colleges have greater flexibility than universities and often can respond more quickly to workforce needs.

Finally, the programs can benefit students and help the state increase production of college graduates. Research indicates that students are more likely to complete baccalaureate degrees if they do not transfer between schools. In addition, community college students are more likely to be older, work full-time, and have dependents than university students. Community colleges have adapted well to the specific needs of these students and may be better able to meet those needs than large universities. However, because Florida's community college baccalaureate programs are still relatively new, there is insufficient data to determine to what extent they have improved degree completion rates or increased the number of non-traditional students who obtain baccalaureate degrees.

Challenges. Authorizing community colleges to offer their own baccalaureate degrees presents challenges as well as benefits. These challenges primarily relate to the potential costs of becoming accredited and the possibility of mission creep.

Community colleges can incur large start-up costs to offer baccalaureate degree programs. Community colleges offering their own baccalaureate degrees must fulfill the accreditation requirements of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). To meet these requirements, a community college may need to expand its library holdings, upgrade its facilities, and increase the number

of faculty with Ph.D.s to teach the proposed programs. For example, Miami-Dade College needed to upgrade its science laboratories to offer a baccalaureate degree in secondary science education. Further, if the community college does not have enough resources to meet accreditation requirements on an ongoing basis, it puts at risk not only accreditation for its baccalaureate degree program but also for its associate degree programs. This is currently an issue at Chipola College.

Due to high start-up costs and low initial enrollment, community college expenditures per credit hour are currently higher than those of state universities (see Exhibit 6). This is particularly true in community college baccalaureate degree program with low enrollments. For example, in 2002-03, the average expenditure per credit hour in Chipola College was \$2,706, 11 times more than the average cost of a credit hour in the state university system.

**Exhibit 6
Community College Expenditures Per Upper
Division Credit Hour Exceed State the University
Average**

Baccalaureate Degree Granting Institution	Expenditures Per Upper Division Credit Hour		
	2002-03 (Actual)	2003-04 (Actual)	2004-05 (Estimated)
State University Average	\$244	\$243	\$259
Community College Baccalaureate Program Average	339	373	290
St. Petersburg College	\$339	\$ 345	\$286
Chipola College	--	2,706	805
Miami-Dade College	--	317	219

Source: OPPAGA analysis of DOE expenditure data.

Community college expenditures per credit hour are expected to decrease as enrollments increase. For example, the Chipola College costs are projected to fall to \$805 in 2004-05, although this still will be substantially higher than the average university system per-credit-hour cost. However, to avoid creating programs that carry high long-term costs, it is important that community colleges carefully

plan their degree programs to ensure that they will attract enough students over time to bring their expenditures down to the state university system credit hour average.

Community colleges with baccalaureate programs could also be at risk for “mission creep.” This could occur if community colleges view creating baccalaureate programs as a means of enhancing their academic prestige. Within the higher education community, institutions that offer four-year degrees are often held in higher esteem than institutions that offer two-year degrees. Local leaders also can encourage their community colleges to take this step because they believe that having a local four-year college boosts community prestige and aids economic development. However, focusing on four-year degree programs can weaken the community colleges’ statutorily mandated focus on associate and certificate degree and adult education programs.

Mission creep does not appear to be a major problem with the current community college programs. However, as the number of community college baccalaureate programs and student enrollment in them increases, the possibility of mission creep may become more likely.

Exhibit 7 summarizes the advantages and challenges of granting community colleges authority to offer baccalaureate degree programs.

**Exhibit 7
Community College Baccalaureate Degrees Pose Both Benefits and Challenges**

Benefits	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Low cost to the student ▪ Seamless transition from lower to upper division coursework ▪ Flexibility and responsiveness to community needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High cost to state, particularly in areas with low populations ▪ Need to gain accreditation ▪ Potential for mission creep

Source: OPPAGA analysis.

Options to Strengthen the Process for Providing Baccalaureate Degrees on Community College Campuses

The state’s system for offering baccalaureate degree programs at community colleges has helped to improve access to degree programs and meet local workforce needs. However, the current system for establishing these partnerships and new degree programs has some limitations:

- the state provides little financial incentive for public and private universities and community colleges to establish partnerships;
- the current review process does not ensure that community college degree programs will be cost-effective in the long-term; and
- there is inadequate coordination of degree requirements of community college BAS programs.

Options for addressing these limitations include

- strengthening the process for reviewing and approving community college degree programs;
- empowering community colleges to provide baccalaureate degrees that meet workforce needs on their campuses by the most efficient means, which could include providing incentives for creating partnerships with public and private universities;
- limiting community colleges’ ability to offer baccalaureate degree programs;
- slowly transforming some community colleges into four-year colleges that focus on teaching; and/or
- establishing a process to coordinate degree requirements for Bachelor of Applied Science programs.

Strengthening the process for reviewing proposals for new community college degree programs

The current process for authorizing community colleges to develop new baccalaureate programs involves both the community colleges and the State Board of Education. As provided in law, community colleges seeking to offer baccalaureate degrees must meet three criteria. Local business, workforce boards, or chambers of commerce must identify a need for the program, students must express interest in attending the program, and the community college must have the facilities and resources to deliver the program.

Once a community college determines that it has met these criteria, it submits an application to the Council for Education Policy Research and Improvement (CEPRI), which reviews the application and makes a recommendation to the State Board of Education. The board has approved some of the applications made to date, generally after directing that the community college first explore the option of partnering with a state or private university to provide the degree program.

While this process has been reasonably successful to date, it does not ensure that resulting programs are coordinated with the strategic planning goals of the Board of Governors of the State University System. While the State Board of Education has developed some strategic goals, it has not developed a strategic plan for the state's higher education system. Instead, the state university and community college systems have implemented separate strategic planning initiatives. Currently, the university strategic plan does not consider the potential impact of community college baccalaureate degrees. This creates the long-term potential for university and community college baccalaureate programs to have excess capacity.

The Legislature could strengthen this process to help ensure that future baccalaureate degree programs at community colleges meet workforce needs and are cost-effective. To do

so, the Legislature could consider the actions discussed below.

- Statutorily require community colleges to consider cost-effective alternatives such as distance learning or entering into a partnership with a public or private university before they seek authorization to offer their own baccalaureate degrees. The college's application for authority to create a baccalaureate degree could be required to include documentation of its pursuit of these alternatives and justification for not pursuing them.
- Statutorily require community college proposals to create baccalaureate degree programs to include a detailed five-year financial plan. The plan should detail steps to ensure that the per-credit costs of the programs will be no greater than the costs of similar state university programs at the end of the five-year period. The State Board of Education should ensure that the plans are based on realistic enrollment and cost assumptions before approving the proposal.
- Statutorily create a sunset process that would review community college baccalaureate degree programs every five years. These reviews should determine the cost-effectiveness of the programs, their effectiveness in meeting local workforce needs, and their impact on the college's primary mission of providing associate degrees. Baccalaureate degree programs that have excessive per-credit-hour costs, no longer meet local workforce needs, or hinder the community colleges' primary mission would be discontinued.
- Statutorily require the State Board of Education to coordinate the strategic plans of the state university and community college systems.

Empowering community colleges to provide baccalaureate degrees on their campuses by the most efficient means that meet workforce needs, which could include providing financial incentives for creating partnerships with public and private universities

Another way to strengthen the current process for establishing baccalaureate degree programs on community college campuses would be to require the community colleges to conduct a “make or buy” analysis to determine the most cost-effective approach to providing the degree. This process would strengthen local control by allowing community colleges to identify local workforce needs and specify the type of program that could meet these needs. Community colleges could then bid out the programs, and thereby avoid the start-up costs of developing their own programs if other institutions were able to provide the programs more economically. To ensure the integrity of this process, the State Board of Education should oversee it and have final approval over the entity chosen to offer the program.

However, to ensure that the bidding process is effective in ensuring the most cost-effective way of providing baccalaureate degrees on community college campuses, the state may need to provide financial assistance to encourage partnerships. According to university officials we interviewed, a significant barrier to establishing these partnerships is that the institutions often need to establish student support services such as counseling and financial aid at the community college campus. Although the funding per FTE universities receive from the state is the same for all students, university administrators indicated that per FTE administrative and support service costs are often higher at branch or community college campuses due in part to smaller economies of scale. Similarly, community colleges are sometimes reluctant to form partnerships with private colleges because of their higher tuition. As a result, community colleges may be unwilling or unable to establish partnerships with public or private universities, even though state’s cost of a partnership may be lower than the cost of

establishing a new degree program administered by the community college.

Options for addressing this problem could include providing financial incentives to encourage public and private institutions to offer degree programs that meet workforce needs on community college campuses. For public universities, this could be done through providing funding to cover the additional costs of offering baccalaureate degree programs through partnerships. The Legislature could also encourage community colleges to partner with private universities by increasing the Florida Resident Assistance Grant (FRAG) for students enrolled in private university programs that are taught on community college campuses. Since many place-bound students must take classes part-time, the Legislature could also consider allowing part-time students pursuing baccalaureate degrees at a community college to be eligible for FRAG grants, and basing the amount of these payments on credit hours instead of semesters or quarters.

Limiting community colleges’ ability to offer baccalaureate degree programs

In addition to providing financial assistance, the state could encourage community colleges to partner with state or private universities by limiting their ability to offer baccalaureate degree programs. This could be done by denying community colleges the authority to offer their own baccalaureate degrees and requiring them to partner with public or private universities. Alternatively, it could also be done by allowing them to offer only Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS) degree programs.²

BAS is a workforce-related baccalaureate degree specifically designed for students with an Associate in Science or Associate in Applied Science degree. The BAS degree allows individuals with associate degrees to obtain baccalaureate degrees without having to obtain an Associate of Arts degree.

²This would not affect their ability to become educator preparation institutes.

The BAS degree requires the same 36-hour general education requirement as a Bachelor of Arts or a Bachelor of Science degree, but approximately 18 credit hours of the general education requirements are “back loaded” into the final two years of coursework to accommodate Associate in Science and Associate in Applied Science degree holders. The remaining upper division course work generally comprises management and technology courses. Students seeking BAS degrees are usually already employed and seeking to move up into management positions.

Currently, the University of South Florida is the only state university offering a Bachelor of Science in Applied Science degree for Associate in Science degree graduates of all Florida community colleges. This program accepts all Florida community college-conferred Associate of Science degrees for entry into the program, and offers six concentrations (Behavioral Healthcare, Business Administration, Criminal Justice, Gerontology, Public Administration, and Urban Policy). The course of study for each of these concentrations is the same, with the exception that each requires a specific 18 to 21 credit hours within that concentration. The University of Central Florida is also proposing to offer a Bachelor of Science in Applied Science degree program and hopes to have a program by fall of 2005. However, other universities have shown little interest in developing these programs.

Community colleges view the BAS degree as well-tailored to the workforce needs of their students, allowing students to build on previously acquired coursework and complete a baccalaureate degree as they grow professionally in their chosen careers. St. Petersburg College and Okaloosa-Walton College currently offer BAS degrees, and Edison and Daytona Beach community colleges have requested authority to do so. It is likely that additional community colleges will request authorization to offer these degrees.

Due to the workforce orientation of BAS degrees, the provision of these degrees fits the mission of community colleges. Furthermore, most state universities do not offer these degrees, which could impede some community colleges from offering these degrees through partnerships. Therefore, the Legislature could consider allowing community colleges to offer BAS degree programs, but require them to partner with public or private universities for other baccalaureate degree programs.

Transforming some community colleges into four-year colleges that focus on teaching

While the current process for establishing baccalaureate degrees on community college campuses has expanded access to these degree programs, over the long term it may not fully address access issues. As noted earlier, some areas of the state have grown substantially since the current state universities were sited, and place-bound citizens in these areas have limited ability to commute to public universities that offer a full range of baccalaureate degree programs.

One option for addressing this issue would be to designate selected community colleges in these areas to develop into four-year colleges that focus on teaching rather than research. Under this option, the Legislature would direct the Board of Education to work with the Agency of Workforce Innovation to identify areas of the state that have a high need for access to baccalaureate degree programs. Community colleges serving these areas would be permitted to develop baccalaureate degree programs. At first, these colleges would continue to be charged with meeting local workforce needs and granting associate degrees. If, however, over time their interest in providing these workforce and associate degree programs lessens, responsibility for these programs could be transferred to technical and vocational schools. This would raise other policy issues, such as who would be responsible for governing those schools.

Criteria for selecting these community college candidates could include those that are located in densely populated urban centers whose geography and transportation issues make access to regional universities difficult and those located in rapidly growing parts of the state with an increasing demand for baccalaureate-level education. The goal would be to create an accessible system of relatively small colleges or branch campuses that can meet the needs of students who are not well suited to the environments of large research institutions.

Better coordinating degree requirements for Bachelor of Applied Science programs

No matter which option the Legislature chooses for increasing baccalaureate degree production on community college campuses, the state will need to better coordinate the provision of Bachelor of Applied Science degrees. While the state has created processes to ensure the comparability of most baccalaureate degrees and the transferability of most courses offered by community colleges and state universities, it has not yet done so for Bachelor of Applied Science degrees. These degrees constitute most of the new degree programs being established by community colleges.

Currently, there is no statewide guidance or coordination on what coursework should be included in a BAS degree. This creates the potential for schools to independently develop degree programs for numerous specialty areas, creating a proliferation of narrowly defined degree programs. It also creates the potential that students who need to transfer between institutions will have courses disallowed by their new institution, increasing costs and excess hours.

To address this issue, the Legislature could direct the Division of Community Colleges and State University System to establish a workgroup to coordinate Bachelor of Applied Science degree requirements and establish protocols for accepting credits earned by transfer students in these programs.

Agency Response—————

In accordance with the provisions of s. 11.51(6), *Florida Statutes*, a draft of our report was submitted to the Commissioner of Education to review and respond.

The Commissioner’s written response has been reproduced in Appendix A.

Appendix A



John L. Winn
Commissioner of Education



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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April 6, 2005

Mr. Gary VanLandingham
Interim Director
Office of Program Policy Analysis
And Government Accountability
111 West Madison Street, Suite 312
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1450

Dear Mr. VanLandingham:

OPPAGA's timely report, *Authorizing Community Colleges to Award Baccalaureate Degrees Is One of Several Options to Expand Access to Higher Education*, contains many useful observations and suggestions that address the state's need to increase its bachelor-degree granting capacity. All of the policy options recommended merit serious consideration by the Legislature, the State Board of Education and the Board of Governors.

It is with interest that we noted the emergence of several critical themes in this study: access (both geographic and financial), student success, cost-effectiveness, flexibility and responsiveness, articulation, and meeting local workforce demands. The report clearly details the success of the community college system in addressing these individual and community needs via certificates, associate degrees and, more recently, limited baccalaureate degrees.

In analyzing these options, the study gives particular attention to cost effectiveness, noting that, to date, baccalaureate programs offered through the community college system have exceeded the average cost per credit hour of offering baccalaureates through the State University System. It should be emphasized, as illustrated in the trend chart in the report, that:

1. the community college baccalaureates have, at most, been in existence for only three years; therefore, a comparison to the cost of operating an existing program versus a start-up program is based upon insufficient expenditure data;

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2. the trend data for the community college program clearly shows that the cost per credit hour declined between 2003-04 and 2004-05; and
3. the cost per credit hour within the State University System increased between 2003-04 and 2004-05.

As noted in the report, it is expected that the operating cost per credit hour for community college baccalaureate programs will continue to decrease as enrollments increase. This projection, combined with the lower tuition costs and program responsiveness found in community colleges, points to a cost-effective means by which the state can increase access to the baccalaureate while meeting individual and workforce needs.

It is also important to recognize the leadership role that the Board of Governors and the State University System are playing in addressing the challenge of providing access to four-year degrees, and to support their efforts to maximize the use of resources that are already in place. In particular, three areas stand out for comment:

1. **Graduation Rates** - The average graduation rate at Florida's public universities is among the highest in the country, especially for minority students, and has increased significantly over the last four years. This means that the money spent on credit hours translates directly into degrees. While it is often true that small institutions succeed in retaining and graduating students, some of our largest universities, such as the University of Florida and Florida State, are leading the nation in establishing and maintaining strong graduation rates.
2. **Strategic Planning** - In response to its constitutional mandate, the Board of Governors has engaged in a significant strategic planning effort and has set goals for the university system that are consistent with economic and educational strategic planning efforts that predate the Board's creation. One of the most important goals is to lead the state in reaching a national average ratio of bachelor degrees awarded to working-age population.
3. **Branch Campuses** - Medium-to-large branches exist in most of the major population centers not served by a main campus. Aside from their connection with community colleges, the potential of these branches to serve the education needs of the state, either in their current form or with increased autonomy (on the model of USF St. Petersburg and USF Sarasota), merits serious attention. Also, while geographic access is still an important consideration in degree program delivery, it is a 20th-century concept that does not carry the same weight in the technology-driven 21st century. The expanded use of instructional technology, evening and weekend courses, cohort group enrollments, and alternative program formats are just some of the tools that can be used to improve access. Enrollment in e-learning courses (both distance education and technology-enhanced courses) has expanded dramatically over the past seven years, with 109,172 unduplicated enrollments in distance education courses in 2003-2004.

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I would recommend that the community college system, working in concert with the SUS and the Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida (ICUF), continue to work via the Articulation Coordinating Committee and within established protocols to further develop avenues for increasing baccalaureate access in Florida.

Sincerely,

/s/
John L. Winn
Commissioner

JLW/jmf/br

c: Jeanine Blomberg
Debra Austin
J. David Armstrong

The Florida Legislature

Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability



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- [Best Financial Management Practices Reviews of Florida school districts](#). In accordance with the *Sharpening the Pencil Act*, OPPAGA and the Auditor General jointly conduct reviews to determine if a school district is using best financial management practices to help school districts meet the challenge of educating their students in a cost-efficient manner.

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