



Many Options Implemented for Baccalaureate Degrees at Florida's Community Colleges

at a glance

The Legislature, Board of Education, and Board of Governors have implemented several options presented in OPPAGA's 2005 report on community college baccalaureate degree programs. These options included strengthening the review process for community college proposals to offer baccalaureate degree programs, providing incentives to encourage universities to offer degrees on community college campuses, defining the types of baccalaureate degrees community colleges may offer, and developing a common definition of Bachelor of Applied Science programs.

There is ongoing discussion on proposals to create additional four-year baccalaureate degree institutions. The recent Board of Governors consultant report recommended that Florida create a system of four-year colleges by providing incentives for universities to focus on undergraduate education, transforming some university branch campuses into separate four-year institutions, inviting some private institutions to become public, and transforming some community college baccalaureate degree programs into stand-alone colleges.

Scope

In accordance with state law, this progress report informs the Legislature of the actions taken that relate to a 2005 OPPAGA report regarding the authority of community colleges to provide baccalaureate degrees.¹

Background

In contrast with other states, Florida has concentrated its public baccalaureate degree programs 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. This creates several challenges, including restricted geographical access to baccalaureate degrees; limited ability to address local workforce needs; and restricted student options for attending small public baccalaureate degree-granting institutions.

One means for increasing access to baccalaureate degree programs is to offer these programs on community college campuses, which were designed to be within commuting distance of 90% of Florida's population. Florida has two primary options for increasing the provision of baccalaureate degrees on community college campuses. First, community colleges may enter into partnerships with State University System institutions and private institutions.

¹ *Authorizing Community Colleges to Award Baccalaureate Degrees Is One of Several Options to Expand Access to Higher Education*, [OPPAGA Report No. 05-20](#): April 2005 .

Second, community colleges may create their own baccalaureate degree programs. These options are not mutually exclusive, and some community colleges have established partnerships with other institutions as well as developing their own baccalaureate programs.

Our 2005 report identified several problems in the current system. The process the State Board of Education used to review community college proposals to offer baccalaureate degree programs did not ensure that such programs would be cost-effective. Some public and private universities were reluctant to offer baccalaureate degree programs on community college campuses because of the higher administrative cost of providing these programs off of their main campuses. Finally, both universities and community colleges were creating Bachelor of Applied Science programs with little coordination among them. Without this coordination, different institutions could have widely varying degree requirements that would make it difficult for students to transfer credit between institutions offering the same degrees.

Our 2005 report identified several options for addressing these problems and improving access to baccalaureate degree programs. Specifically, we noted that the state could

- strengthen the process for reviewing and approving community college degree programs by requiring them to consider cost-effective alternatives, requiring them to develop financial plans for the new degree programs, and tying the approval process to strategic planning processes;
- provide incentives for public and private universities to partner with community college to offer baccalaureate degree programs on community college campuses;
- limit community colleges' ability to offer baccalaureate degree programs;
- establish a process to coordinate degree requirements for Bachelor of Applied Science programs; and
- slowly transform some community colleges into four-year colleges that focus on teaching.

Current Status

Since our 2005 report, the Legislature and Department of Education have taken steps to implement most of these options. Specifically, the department has strengthened the program review process, and the Legislature has provided financial incentives for public and private universities to offer baccalaureate degree programs on community college campuses. In addition, the Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Education and Board of Governors entered into an agreement to limit the types of baccalaureate degrees community colleges may offer and have developed a common definition for Bachelor of Applied Science degree programs. A recent consultant report to the Board of Governors has recommended creating a system of four-year colleges that focus on teaching.

Program review process strengthened

The Department of Education has strengthened the process for reviewing community college proposals to create baccalaureate degree programs. It now requires the community colleges to

- describe their planning process and implementation time lines;
- analyze the workforce need for the program, demand for graduates, and impact on other institutions;
- describe how the proposed program aligns with K-20 goals and strategies;
- describe the proposed program's academic content and curriculum;
- assess the current and anticipated resources available to deliver the program;
- describe the budget for the program, including information on planned enrollment and completers, for a five-year period; and
- describe a plan for closing the program if necessary.

To assist them in this effort, the department has developed guidelines for community colleges to use to analyze workforce needs for baccalaureate degree programs. These new guidelines require more detailed information and analysis than was previously used to evaluate degree proposals.

Community colleges must submit their proposals in accordance with a time line for the approval process. These proposals are reviewed by a cross-functional team comprising representatives from several units within the department and the Board of Governors. The review team may recommend revisions to the proposals and makes recommendations for approval or disapproval to the Board of Education, which makes the final decisions.

This process should improve community college assessments of the demand for and cost-effectiveness of proposed degree programs. In addition, the 2007 Legislature is considering a proposal to require community colleges to notify local accredited public and private colleges of their intent to offer a baccalaureate degree; the institutions would then have 90 days to propose alternative means to meet the identified local workforce need.²

Incentives provided for universities to offer degrees on community college campuses

The 2006 Legislature provided \$3,045,000 for 2+2 Partnership Baccalaureate Incentives in the Fiscal Year 2006-07 General Appropriations Act.³

This funding is available to be split between community colleges and public or private colleges or universities that partner to provide baccalaureate degrees on community college campuses. Community colleges that offer their own baccalaureate programs are not eligible to receive this partnership funding.

Universities and community colleges had to submit applications for 2+2 Partnership Baccalaureate Incentive grants to the Department of Education by March 15, 2007, and 36 partnerships involving both public and private universities applied for these grants. The department anticipates distributing this grant funding before the end of the fiscal year. The department requested the 2007 Legislature to appropriate \$4,170,000 to continue this grant program.

² This proposal was included in Senate Bill 244. Under the two plus two system, students complete their first two years toward their baccalaureate degree at a community college and the last two years at a university.

³ Specific appropriations 17, 20, and 76A.

Agreement reached governing community college baccalaureate degree programs

The State Board of Education and the Board of Governors entered into an agreement authorizing any community college to offer baccalaureate degrees in teaching, nursing, or workforce-related (Bachelor of Applied Science) degree programs.⁴ The two parties pledged to continue to support Florida's two plus two system as the primary route of higher education access for baccalaureate degrees, but agreed that community colleges could play a role in meeting workforce needs by providing baccalaureate degrees in workforce-oriented and teaching and nursing baccalaureate degrees. The two parties also agreed that Florida's universities will continue to meet the access needs for more traditional students. The 2007 Legislature is considering a proposal to codify this agreement into law.⁵

Degree requirements coordinated for Bachelor of Applied Science programs

The Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Education initiated a task force to examine existing Bachelor of Applied Science degree programs and to develop a common definition for these programs. The task force consisted of representatives from the Board of Governors, State University System, the Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Education, various community colleges, and the Florida Department of Education. The task force developed the following definition of a Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS) degree program:

The Bachelor of Applied Science is the designated degree for flexible baccalaureate programs that are designed to accommodate the unique demands for entry and advancement within specific workforce sectors. BAS programs provide degree completion opportunities for students from a variety of educational backgrounds, but primarily those with Associate in Science degrees or the equivalent. BAS degree programs conform to all articulation conventions (including common course prerequisites,

⁴ This would not affect their ability to become educator preparation institutes.

⁵ House Bill PCB SLC 07-05.

common course numbering, and faculty credentialing in accordance with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools). BAS degree programs typically include capstone experiences that provide opportunities for students to demonstrate the application of acquired knowledge, skills, and competencies.

The task force also identified four structures for delivering these programs.

- Inverted Baccalaureate. An upper-division focus on general education, electives, and an appropriate area of concentration.
- General Management. An upper-division focus on general business and management courses.
- Advanced Discipline and Management. An upper-division focus on advanced content in the discipline of the Associate in Science degree and management courses.
- Discipline Saturation. An upper-division focus on advanced content in the discipline of the Associate in Science degree.

The final report of the task force was presented to the Board of Education in June 2006. The Bachelor of Applied Science degree definition and associated degree structures should assist institutions of higher education as they develop these new degree programs.

Proposals under discussion for creating additional four-year institutions that focus on teaching

One of our prior report's options for increasing access to baccalaureate degrees was to create a system of baccalaureate-degree higher education

institutions by transforming some community colleges into four-year colleges. The Division of Community Colleges has indicated that it wishes to maintain the current community college mission and it has proposed legislation that would direct community colleges that offer baccalaureate degrees to retain their primary mission of providing lower level undergraduate instruction and preparing students for careers requiring less than baccalaureate degrees.

A recent consultant study conducted for the Board of Governors examined Florida's system of higher education and recommended that the state create additional access points to baccalaureate degrees. The consultant study recommended that the state establish additional stand-alone institutions focused on baccalaureate-degree-seeking students.⁶ The report recommended that the state provide incentives to existing state universities to focus on undergraduate education, make branch campuses of existing universities into separate institutions, transform some community college baccalaureate degree programs into separate institutions, and invite some independent colleges to become state institutions. This consultant report is likely to generate further discussion on the future of Florida's public higher education system.

⁶ Pappas Consulting Group, *Proposing a Blueprint for Higher Education in Florida: Outlining the Way to a Long-term Master Plan for Higher Education*, January 2007.

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