



More State Direction Could Increase the Utilization of Higher Education Classrooms

at a glance

Higher education institutions display different classroom utilization trends, but in general, there continues to be underutilization of postsecondary classrooms. Overall, university classrooms were in use approximately half of the time they were available during the week, and state and community college classroom utilization was less than 50%. Since the publication of our 2006 reports, postsecondary institutions have implemented several strategies to increase classroom utilization with mixed results. Some administrators believe that underutilization may be due to the success of distance learning initiatives, and their efforts to use facilities more efficiently and lower operating costs.

As recommended in our prior reports, the Board of Governors has taken steps to make efficient use of existing facilities a factor in prioritizing university construction projects. However, the Department of Education does not yet consider utilization of existing facilities when setting construction priorities. Both state entities have made limited progress updating planning formulas for determining future facility needs, thereby potentially inaccurately portraying the need for additional space.

Postsecondary institutions continue to construct classrooms within national construction cost norms and have taken steps to contain construction and energy costs.

Scope

In accordance with state law, this progress report informs the Legislature of actions taken by the Department of Education and the Board of Governors in response to OPPAGA's March 2006 reports on facility planning, construction, and utilization.^{1, 2}

Background

In Florida, responsibility for public postsecondary facilities planning, construction, and utilization is decentralized and rests with the individual universities and the state and community colleges. Postsecondary institutions are responsible for the condition of their facilities and for identifying the need for maintenance, remodeling, acquisition, or new construction to meet current needs and expected institutional growth. The institutions report this information through capital improvement plans that are submitted to their respective state-level divisions (the Board of Governors for the 11 state universities and the Division of Community Colleges for the 28 state and community colleges). This data is used to develop statewide funding requests that are included in the Board of Governors' and the Department of Education's K-20 Legislative Capital Outlay Budget Requests.

¹ Section 11.51(6), *F.S.*

² *State Higher Education Facility Planning Process Is Designed Reasonably Well; Current Formulas May Inaccurately Portray Projected Needs*, [OPPAGA Report No. 06-30](#), March 2006; *Higher Education Facility Construction Costs are Reasonable; Some Improvements Could Maximize Use of Campus Classroom Space*, [OPPAGA Report No. 06-31](#), March 2006.

Our 2006 reports found that the state higher education facility planning process is designed reasonably well and higher education facility construction costs were within industry standards. However, utilization of many classroom facilities was low. We made specific recommendations to

- improve classroom utilization among postsecondary institutions;
- improve information in the postsecondary institutions' educational plant surveys;
- revise and update formulas used to project facility needs; and
- contain higher education construction costs.

Current Status

Classroom utilization among Florida's state postsecondary institutions generally is unchanged since our 2006 report and remains low during certain time periods. Although the Board of Governors and several postsecondary institutions have taken steps to increase utilization, more steps are needed to improve classroom use. In addition, the state continues to use outdated space standards to determine postsecondary institutions' future construction needs that likely do not accurately portray these needs in some areas. Construction costs for postsecondary facilities that are built, however, are within the national norms for higher education construction.

Higher education classroom utilization remains relatively low during some time periods despite the efforts of some postsecondary institutions

Classroom utilization for both the university system and the state and community college system continue to be underutilized during certain times. Overall, university classrooms were in use approximately half of the time that they were available during the week and use of state and community college classrooms was even lower. The Board of Governors and several postsecondary institutions have taken steps to increase utilization, but more action is needed to make better use of classrooms.

Florida postsecondary classroom use continues to vary by system, by institution, and time of day. Classroom utilization has changed little in recent years. Overall, classroom utilization among state universities during the spring semester 2008 was

56.1% from 8 AM to 8 PM, Monday through Friday (see Exhibit 1).^{3, 4} During the same period, utilization among state and community colleges was 39.7%.

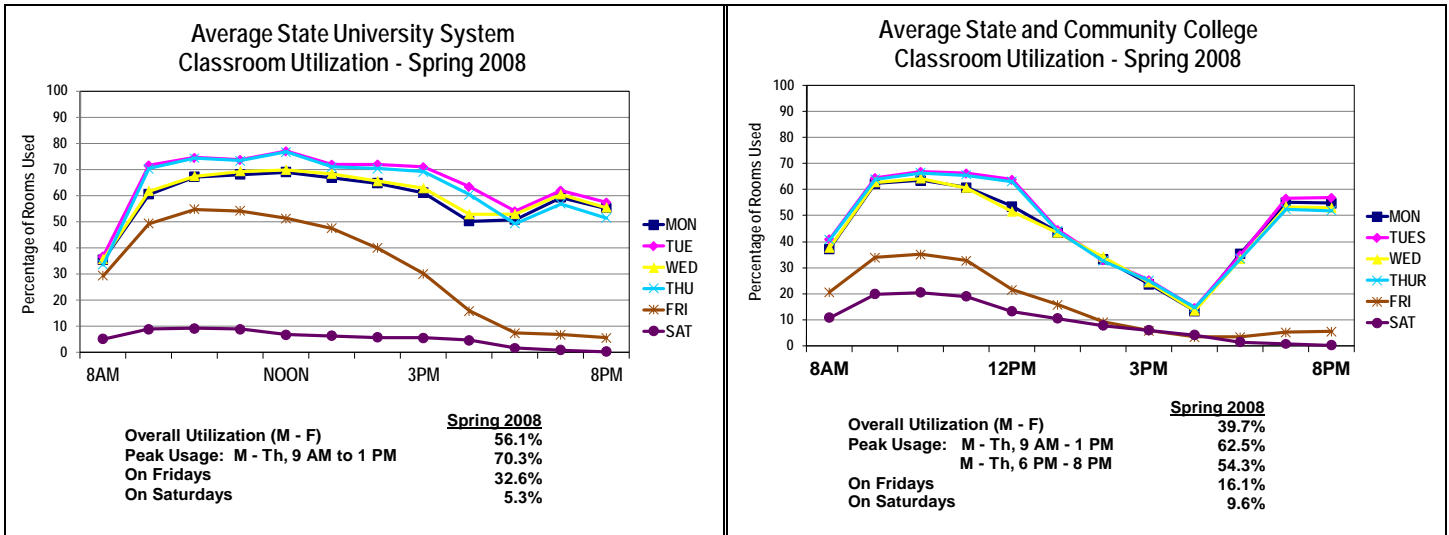
Classroom use varied widely between the two systems and by institution. Overall classroom utilization at most state universities exceeded 50%. Florida Gulf Coast University and the University of North Florida had the highest classroom utilization rates among state universities at approximately 70% each. In contrast, no state or community college exceeded 50% classroom utilization. Appendix A shows utilization rates by system and institution.

Classroom utilization rates also varied greatly by the time of day and the day of the week. The highest utilization rate for state universities (70.3%) occurred between Monday and Thursday from 9 AM to 1 PM. State and community colleges experienced two peak utilization time periods between Monday and Thursday—from 9 AM to 1 PM (62.5%) and from 6 PM to 8 PM (54.3%). State and community college administrators attribute these utilization pattern differences to differences between students who attend universities and students who attend state and community colleges. They indicate that students attending state and community colleges are more likely than university students to work full-time and that the state and community college system's steep dip in utilization at 4 PM is during a time when students are commuting and transitioning to or from work. Both systems experienced significant declines in classroom utilization on Fridays, when on average only 16% of state and community college classrooms and 32.6% of university classrooms were in use.

³ Section 1013.03(2), *F.S.*, provides that classrooms are to be used a minimum of 40 hours per week and that 60% of student stations are to be occupied. Our previous report found that while Florida's 40/60 standard for classroom utilization is comparable to standards used by other states, it does not reflect how institutions currently use their space. Therefore, we based overall classroom utilization rates on whether the institution scheduled the classroom for use between Monday and Friday from 8 AM to 8 PM (i.e., beginning at 8 AM and ending at 8 PM). We did not include Saturday usage in overall utilization rates. Data from the New College of Florida was not included in this analysis due to the institution's unique academic structure.

⁴ To ensure consistency, our analysis compared spring 2008 utilization with spring 2005 rates. To determine if there was a wide enough discrepancy in utilization rates between the fall and spring semesters to warrant a fall to fall comparison, we also compared utilization rates for fall 2007 and spring 2008 and found that overall utilization varied by less than two percentage points (from 41.8% to 40.1%) for the state and community college system and less than three percentage points (from 56.1% to 58.9%) for the university system.

Exhibit 1
Classroom Utilization Rates Vary by the Time of Day and the Day of the Week



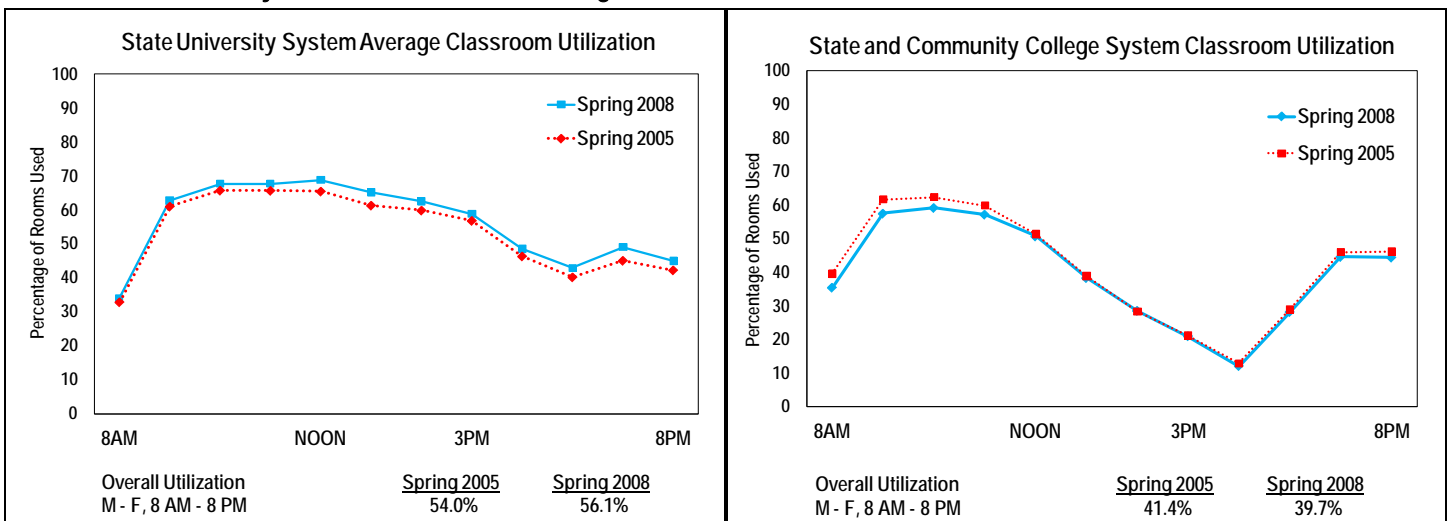
Source: OPPAGA analysis.

Overall classroom utilization has changed little since our 2006 reports. As shown in Exhibit 2, between spring semester 2005 and spring semester 2008, overall classroom utilization among state universities increased by 2.1 percentage points (from 54.0% to 56.1%), but overall classroom utilization in state and community colleges decreased by 1.7 percentage points (from 41.4% to 39.7%). Although the university rates improved slightly during the period, both systems continue to underutilize classrooms on Fridays and in the evenings.

In addition, classroom utilization at branch campuses is particularly low. Classroom utilization at university branch campuses was 35.4% in the spring 2008, well under the university system's overall classroom utilization rate of 56.1%. Underutilization of branch campuses and similar sites with classrooms was also a problem for state and community colleges, which had branch campus utilization as low as 14%.⁵

⁵ Utilization rates were often much lower for sites with fewer than 15 classrooms.

Exhibit 2
Florida Postsecondary Classroom Use Has Changed Little



Source: OPPAGA analysis.

Postsecondary institutions have taken steps to improve utilization with mixed results. Twenty-two of the 38 postsecondary institutions we reviewed increased classroom utilization between spring semester 2005 and spring semester 2008, with utilization gains of up to 19.3 percentage points (Pasco-Hernando Community College). However, 16 institutions experienced decreases in classroom utilization during the period.⁶ Lake City Community College experienced the largest decline, with classroom utilization falling by 17 percentage points.

To identify reasons for changes in classroom utilization rates, we contacted administrators at five institutions that achieved large utilization increases and five institutions with large utilization decreases between spring 2005 and spring 2008. We determined that several institutions had implemented strategies to increase classroom utilization with mixed results.

The two universities with the largest increases in classroom utilization—Florida International University (15.6 percentage point increase) and Florida Gulf Coast University (10.5 percentage point increase)—indicated that they implemented block scheduling for their courses to utilize as much of the scheduling grid as possible.⁷ Administrators at these universities indicated that block scheduling provided them greater control over course scheduling decisions by restricting student choice of courses to particular blocks of time during the week. These strategies also helped the universities control traffic congestion and reduce the pressure on parking lots by providing greater centralized control over when students are on campus. Florida International University also set specific annual outcome-oriented goals to increase classroom utilization, and changed class schedules from four days (Monday through Thursday) to five days (Monday through Friday) each week.

In addition, the university standardized class periods to 50 minutes, adopted uniform campus-wide scheduling policies, centralized classroom scheduling, and placed one individual in charge of capturing classroom utilization data and providing feedback to administrators.

Pasco-Hernando Community College also significantly improved its classroom utilization rate since our 2006 report, increasing overall classroom utilization by 19.3 percentage points. The college attributed this increase to more efficient course scheduling and offering more courses during non-peak times such as during afternoons and on Fridays; it also cited student enrollment growth and the correction of room inventory coding errors as factors leading to increased utilization rate.

Several other institutions reported that they had adopted more efficient course scheduling practices. However, these steps had not increased their classroom utilization. For example, Hillsborough Community College uses classroom scheduling software and data analysis to help maximize classroom use. This software enables the college to examine the percentage of available seats filled in existing classrooms before scheduling additional sections of the same courses. The college reported that it closely monitors classroom utilization and produces reports for faculty at the close of each semester to provide feedback on the college's efforts to improve utilization. Similarly, Seminole Community College reported implementing strategies to fill larger classes to capacity whenever possible.

However, both community colleges experienced drops in classroom utilization (6.8 and 4.8 percentage points decreases, respectively) between spring 2005 and spring 2008. Administrators at the colleges indicated that they believed these decreases would be temporary and were a reflection of their successful efforts to increase class sizes and schedule fewer classrooms. In addition, Hillsborough Community College indicated that its expanded use of non-traditional instructional methods, such as distance learning that allow students to attend classes off-campus, also could account for decreases in utilization. Hillsborough Community College has a goal to increase distance learning classes by 20% to 25% over the next several years.

⁶ The classroom utilization rates of five universities and 17 state and community colleges increased, while the rates of five universities and 11 state and community colleges decreased between spring semester 2005 and spring semester 2008.

⁷ Florida Gulf Coast University uses block scheduling for all course offerings while Florida International University allocates specific blocks of time to each of the colleges which must be filled. As mentioned in our 2006 reports, the University of Central Florida, which has one of the highest classroom utilization rates among the state universities (61.2%), also uses block scheduling for general education courses.

Administrators at some institutions reported that physical barriers prevented their schools from increasing their classroom utilization rates. Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University, Polk Community College, and Seminole Community College reported that many of their classrooms are older and can accommodate a maximum of 35 students. These institutions have used various means to make more cost-effective use of their facilities. For example, Polk Community College is offering more hybrid classes which allows students to take part of a course online and part of the course in the classroom. Seminole Community College is employing smart room set-ups and updating classrooms so that the rooms can be used for both lectures and labs. Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University has moved to larger class sizes and is using space not coded as classrooms on the inventory to teach larger groups of students. The schools indicated that they planned to renovate and combine some of their smaller classrooms to better match their needs for classroom space.

More state-level action is needed to improve classroom utilization and the facilities planning processes

While the Board of Governors has taken steps to improve classroom utilization, the Department of Education has made limited progress in this area. Neither entity has made utilization of existing facilities part of their formal evaluative process when setting state funding priorities for higher education facility construction. As a result, there is little incentive for institutions to improve their classroom utilization in order to receive project funding. The classroom space needs formulas used by the board and the department consider both student station size and utilization, but these formulas are outdated and may make it appear that state universities and colleges need to construct more classrooms than they actually need.⁸

The Board of Governors has taken steps to improve classroom utilization and its facilities planning process. The Board of Governors has taken actions to address our recommendations to improve classroom utilization rates among the state's public universities. In May 2006, the board established a facilities task force to make recommendations on several facility issues, including the efficient use of facilities. The task force issued its reports in September and November 2006, which included recommendations to improve classroom utilization rates and the facilities planning process.

The board adopted several of the task force recommendations, including a requirement that universities demonstrate that they are effectively using existing space before the board approves new space requests. The board's capital improvement plan guidelines for 2010-11 will require each university to incorporate utilization data as a factor in prioritizing funding requests. Those institutions with classroom utilization below the board standards will not be eligible to make requests for additional classrooms in their capital improvement plans. Board staff indicates that the board will provide postsecondary institutions with technical instructions on the new guidelines in April 2009.

In addition, the board recommended that universities adopt best practices to improve how they use classrooms, teaching laboratories, and office space. The board suggested that improving instructional space use might be achieved through expanded evening and weekend programs, more intense use of existing facilities during the summer, or scheduling more classes during the early morning or late afternoon. The board also implemented task force recommendations to streamline the educational plant survey process by automating the survey submission process, making updating faster and easier for universities, and consolidating plan updates into a package for board of trustee approval.

While the board's task force made several recommendations for updating the formulas used in the planning process to determine need for additional classrooms and other types of instructional and non-instructional space, the board has not yet done so.

⁸ Sections 1013.31 and 1013.40, *F.S.*, require each public postsecondary institution to conduct an educational plant survey every five years to assess the condition of current facilities and project facility needs for the next five years.

Our 2006 reports recommended that the Legislature consider increasing the classroom utilization standard established in the *Florida Statutes* that universities and the board use to determine the need for additional classroom space from the current metric of 40 hours per week at 60% occupancy to 50 hours per week at 70% occupancy.⁹ Using the current lower standard can make it appear that a university needs to construct more classrooms than it actually needs. While board staff acknowledged that formulas for determining university facility needs for all categories of space need to be reviewed and possibly updated, the board has held off revising the space needs formulas in light of recent student enrollment changes and budget cuts.

The Department of Education has made limited progress in revising space standards and automating the facility planning process for state and community colleges. The Department of Education continues to evaluate the need for new space based on the relative need among state and community colleges, determined primarily by student growth and the impact of the project, without regard to current utilization rates.¹⁰ Department staff indicates that each state and community college is responsible for ensuring the efficient use of classroom and other facilities. However, the department reports that it plans to use utilization of existing space as a factor in approving new space requests in the future.

The department is in the process of automating the educational plant survey submission process for state and community colleges. This should help to reduce errors and decrease the length of time it takes to approve state and community college facility plans. According to department facilities staff, the educational plant survey submission process should be fully automated by July 1, 2009.

The department has made limited progress in implementing our recommendation to revise the space standards that are used to determine postsecondary institutions' future construction needs. After publication of our 2006 reports, the

department established a committee consisting of both department personnel and postsecondary institution facility planners/directors to study space standards and utilization issues raised in our reports. However, the committee made no formal recommendations to improve classroom utilization or to revise the space standards.

State entities have not implemented our recommendations related to shared use arrangements and branch campuses. Neither the Board of Governors nor the Department of Education has implemented other recommendations in our 2006 reports that would improve utilization data. For instance, neither system includes data on shared use of classrooms with other higher education institutions, school districts and other entities in their utilization reports; failure to consider this data can make classroom utilization data less comprehensive.¹¹ Furthermore, neither system has developed criteria for evaluating the facility needs or performance of branch campuses, centers, satellites, and similar sites with classrooms. We continue to recommend that both the Board of Governors and the Department of Education develop systems to evaluate utilization at these sites to determine, in collaboration with postsecondary institutions, whether they are meeting their potential for enrollment and whether steps are necessary to address underutilization at these sites.

Postsecondary institutions' construction costs continue to be within national benchmarks

Despite rising construction costs, Florida's public university and college construction costs continue to be within national benchmarks. In addition, both the Board of Governors and postsecondary institutions have implemented several of our recommendations for controlling construction and energy costs.

The average per-square-foot cost of a Florida postsecondary classroom has increased 50% over the last 10 years. Our 2006 report noted that the average cost of a Florida postsecondary academic classroom building was below the national average, at \$148.73 per square foot compared the national

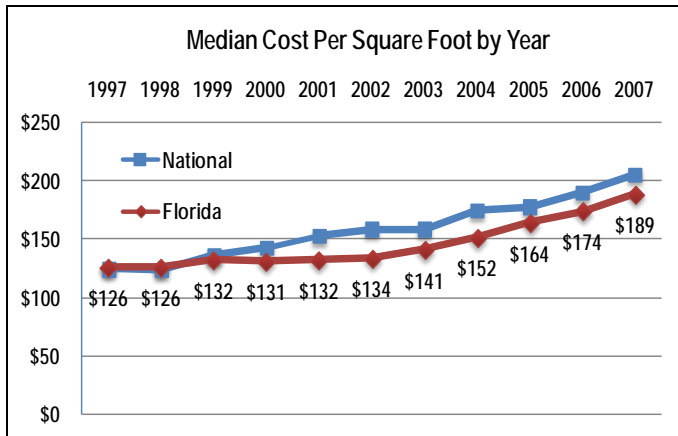
⁹ A bill was introduced during the 2006 legislative session changing the utilization standard but failed to pass.

¹⁰ Projects impacting 1,000 or more students are given priority.

¹¹ Shared use refers to arrangements in which an existing room or space is shared by a host institution and a visitor institution or entity, that is, the space is assigned to one institution but used by both. In contrast, a joint use facility is funded and built for cooperative use. In general, community colleges have more joint use of facilities than universities.

median cost of \$172.82.¹² In 2007, Florida’s average cost had risen considerably to \$189.19, but remained below the national average cost of \$206 per square foot.¹³ Exhibit 3 shows the average per square foot classroom construction costs from 1997 to 2007 for Florida compared to the national average.

**Exhibit 3
The Average Per-Square-Foot Cost of a Florida Postsecondary Classroom Building Increased 50% Over 10 Years But Remains Below National Average**



Source: Florida Department of Education, Office of Educational Facilities and “2007 Construction Report”, *College Planning and Management*, February 2007.

However, classroom construction costs have recently begun to moderate due to changing market conditions. Institutions report that competition for construction bids has increased and labor costs have declined due to the residential housing market slump and recent quiet hurricane seasons. These benefits have been somewhat offset by greater foreign competition for raw materials and higher transportation costs.

State entities and postsecondary institutions have adopted several strategies to help control construction costs. The Board of Governors has given universities more flexibility in the selection of construction methods, and it has amended its regulations to allow universities more flexibility to negotiate contracts for construction management

and design–build services.¹⁴ In addition, both the board and the Department of Education adopted green building initiatives to help postsecondary institutions control facility operating costs. Green buildings, also known as sustainable buildings, are designed to use resources such as energy, water, materials, and land more efficiently. For example, building orientation, placement of windows, and selection of lighting can have a significant impact on lowering energy consumption. The 2008 Florida Legislature also mandated new energy standards for construction of new state university and state and community college buildings.¹⁵

Postsecondary institutions also have adopted strategies to control construction and energy costs. For example, several university and college administrators reported using value engineering methods to cut construction costs. This process allows managers to identify potential cost savings by evaluating what else might accomplish the same purpose at a lower cost. Other strategies included increasing communication among architects, construction management teams, and stakeholders to improve facility designs and reduce the need for costly change orders. Some postsecondary institutions also reported constructing larger classrooms that serve multiple uses; standardizing finishes such as furniture, carpet and tile; and making use of the sales tax exemption on materials. To decrease energy costs, some postsecondary institutions reported installing solar systems and computerized systems that automatically shut off computers, lights, and air conditioning systems when classrooms are not in use.

¹⁴ Amended November 2008, Board of Governors Regulation 14.0055, Certification and Competitive Selection for Construction Management Services and Design Build Services.

¹⁵ Chapter 2008-227, *Laws of Florida*, requires all state agencies to adopt green building rating systems and standards. The law also created the Florida Energy Systems Consortium. Headed by the University of Florida in collaboration with four other universities, the group is charged with promoting collaboration among experts in the SUS for the purposes of sharing energy-related expertise and assisting in the development and implementation of an efficient energy strategic plan for the state.

¹² Florida Department of Education 2004 postsecondary construction costs report.

¹³ Source: “2007 Construction Report,” *College Planning and Management*, February 2007 and OPPAGA analysis of Board of Governors and Division of Community Colleges data.

Agency Response ---

In accordance with the provisions of s. 11.51(5), *Florida Statutes*, a draft of our report was submitted to the Commissioner of Education and the Florida Board of Governors to review and respond. Both written responses are reproduced herein in Appendix B. OPPAGA's comments follow these responses.

OPPAGA supports the Florida Legislature by providing evaluative research and objective analyses to promote government accountability and the efficient and effective use of public resources. This project was conducted in accordance with applicable evaluation standards. Copies of this report in print or alternate accessible format may be obtained by telephone (850/488-0021), by FAX (850/487-3804), in person, or by mail (OPPAGA Report Production, Claude Pepper Building, Room 312, 111 W. Madison St., Tallahassee, FL 32399-1475). Cover photo by Mark Foley.

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Appendix A

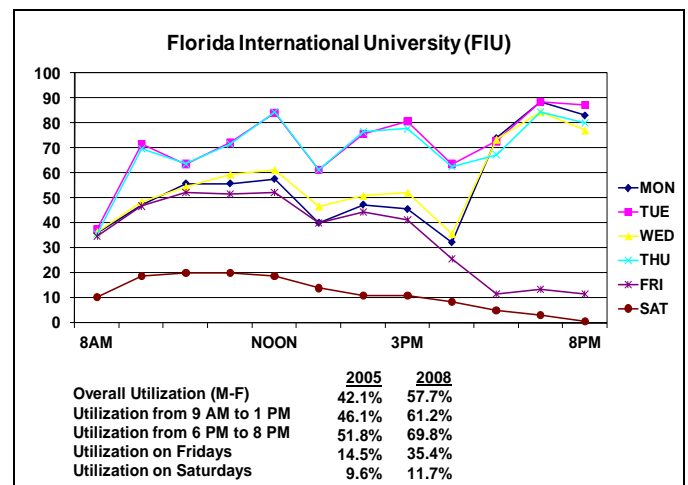
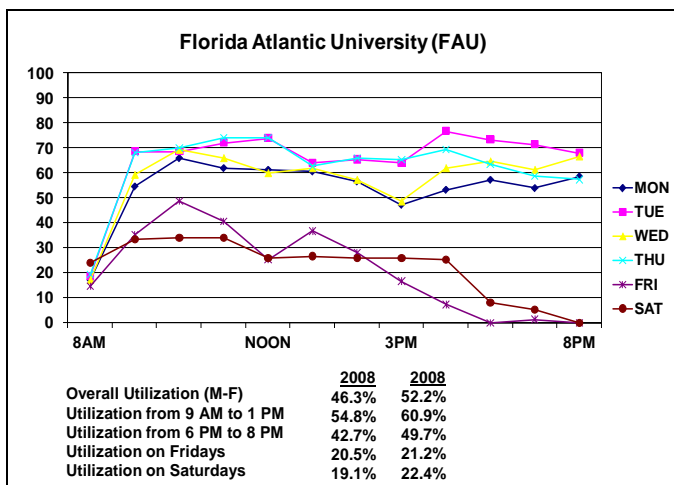
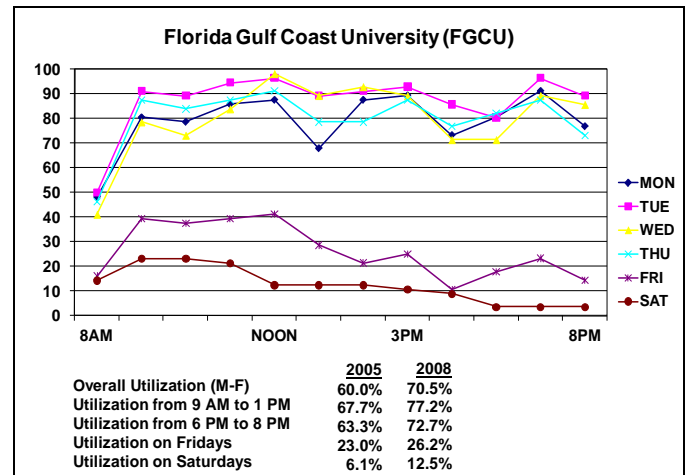
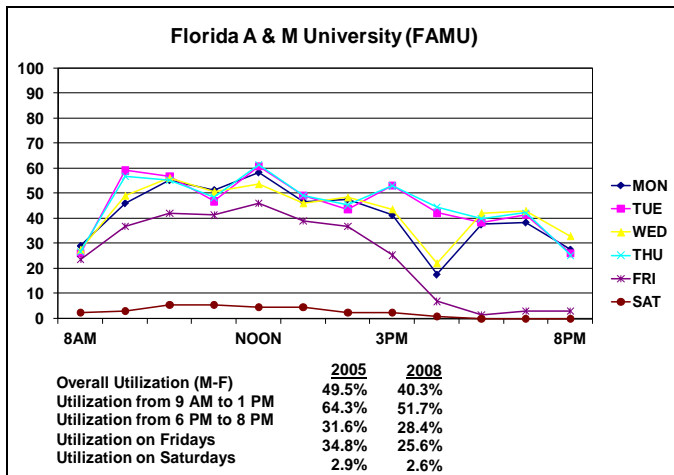
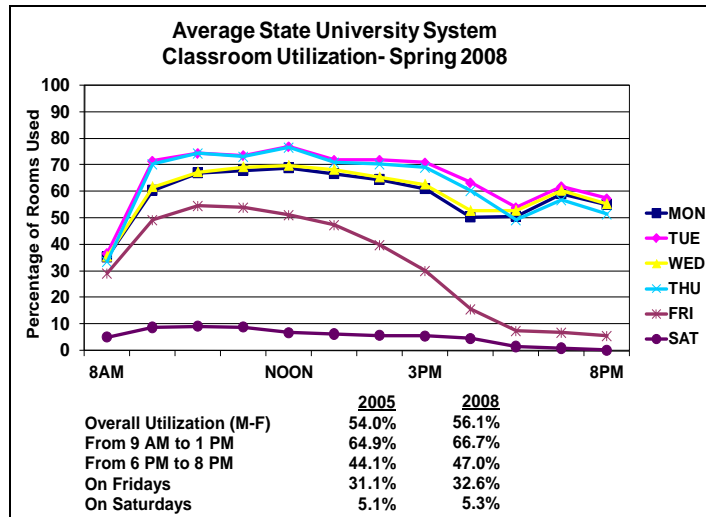
Classroom Utilization by System and Postsecondary Institution

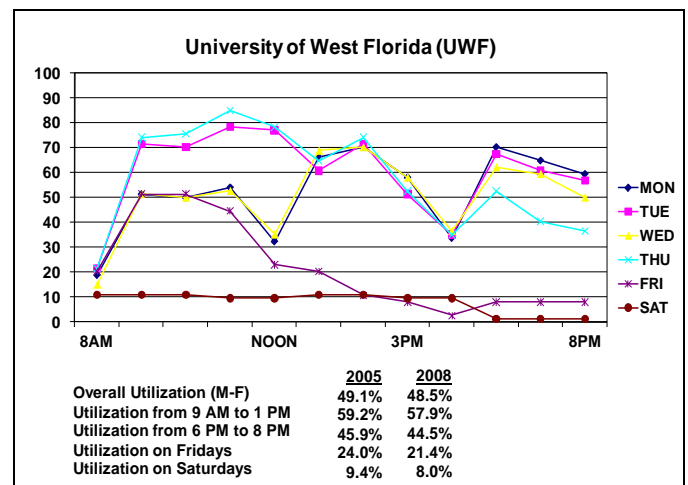
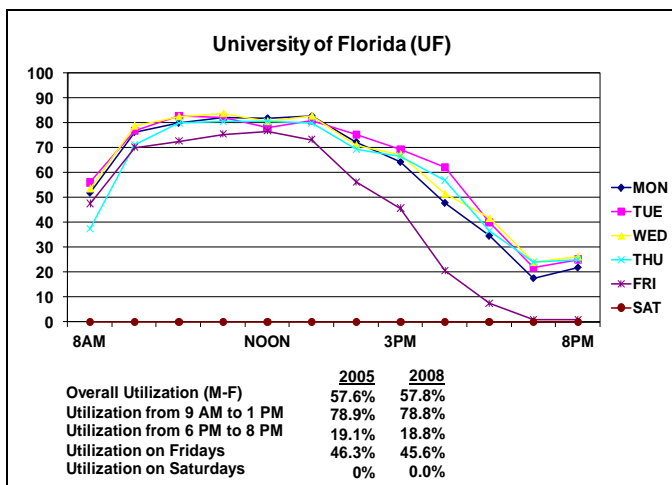
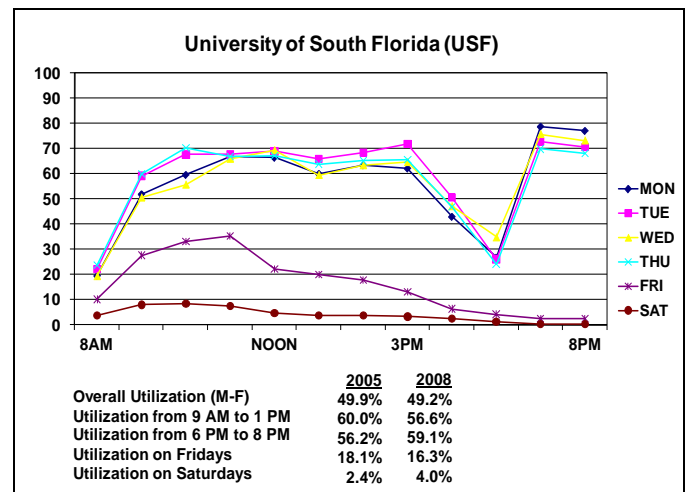
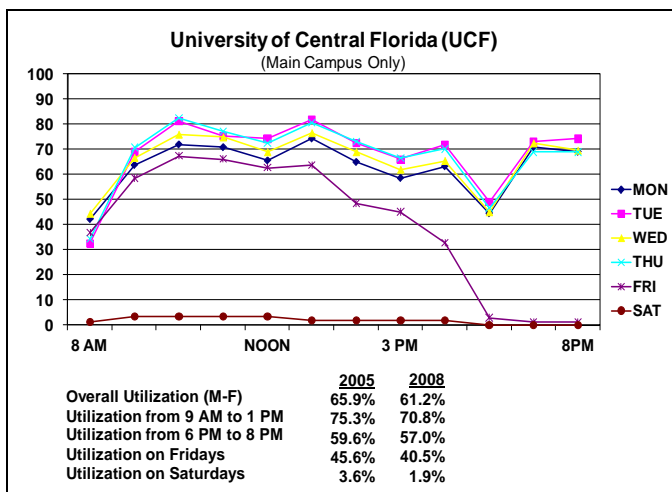
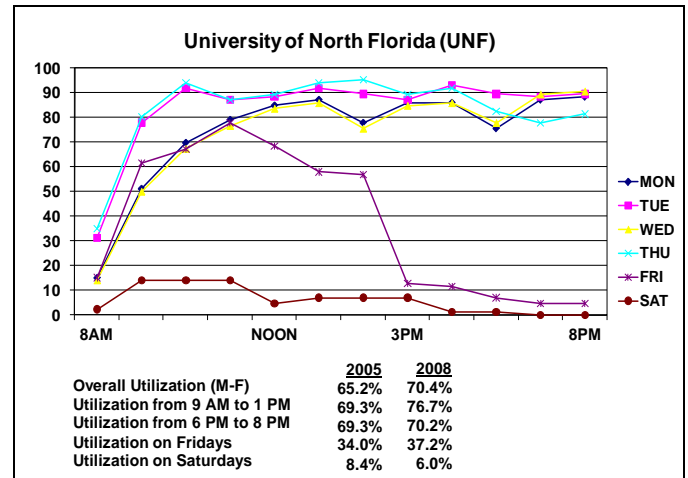
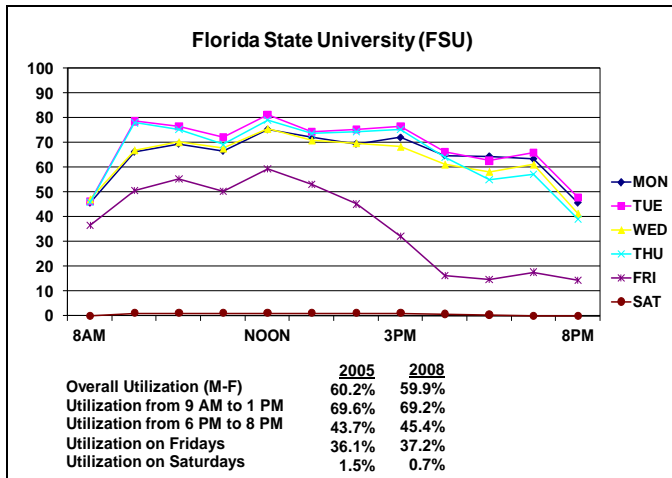
Classroom utilization has changed little in recent years and varies by the time of day and the day of the week. As shown in Table A-1, classroom utilization among state universities during the spring semester 2008 was 56.1% from 8 AM to 8 PM, Monday through Friday.¹⁶ During this same period, utilization among state and community colleges was 39.7%. Classroom utilization rates varied greatly by institution, the time of day, and the day of the week. The highest utilization rate for state universities (70.3%) occurred between Monday and Thursday from 9 AM to 1 PM. State and community colleges experienced two peak utilization time periods between Monday and Thursday—from 9 AM to 1 PM (62.5%) and from 6 PM to 8 PM (54.3%). Both systems experienced significant declines in classroom utilization on Fridays, when on average only 32.6% of university classrooms and 16% of state and community college classrooms were in use. Between spring semester 2005 and spring semester 2008, overall classroom utilization among state universities increased by 2.1 percentage points (from 54.0% to 56.1%), while overall classroom utilization in state colleges and community colleges decreased by 1.7 percentage points (from 41.4% to 39.7%).

¹⁶ Although Table A-1 provides Saturday utilization for each postsecondary institution, we based overall classroom utilization rates on whether the institution scheduled the classroom for use between Monday and Friday from 8 AM to 8 PM. Data from the New College of Florida was not included in this analysis due to the institution's unique academic structure. To ensure consistency, our analysis compared spring 2008 utilization with spring 2005 rates. To determine if there was a wide enough discrepancy in utilization rates between the fall and spring semesters to warrant a fall to fall comparison, we also compared utilization rates for Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 and found that overall utilization varied by less than two percentage points for the state and community college system and less than three percentage points for the university system.

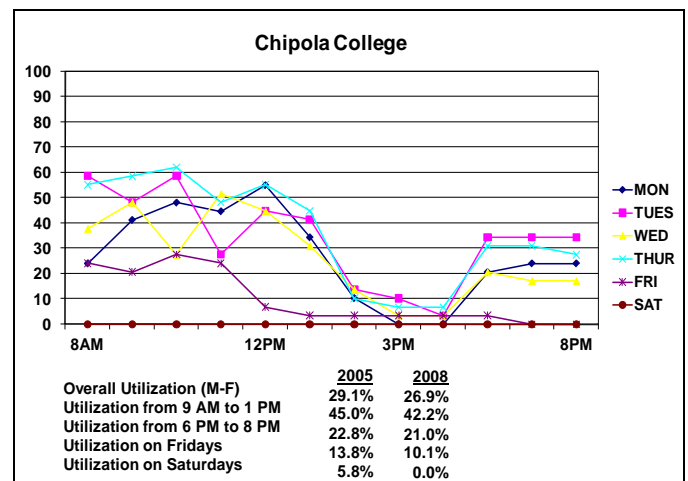
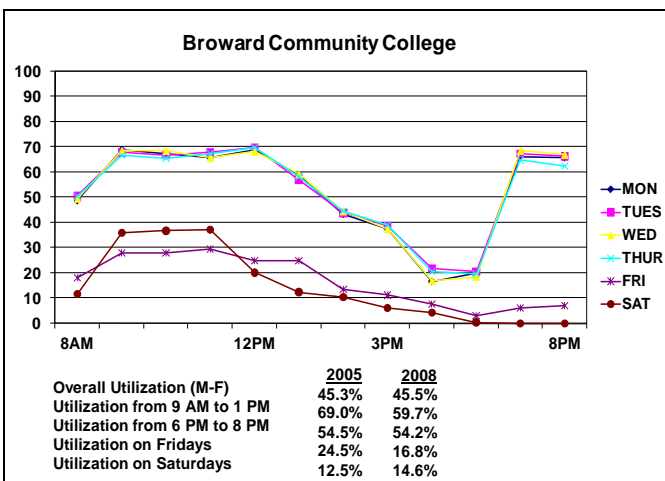
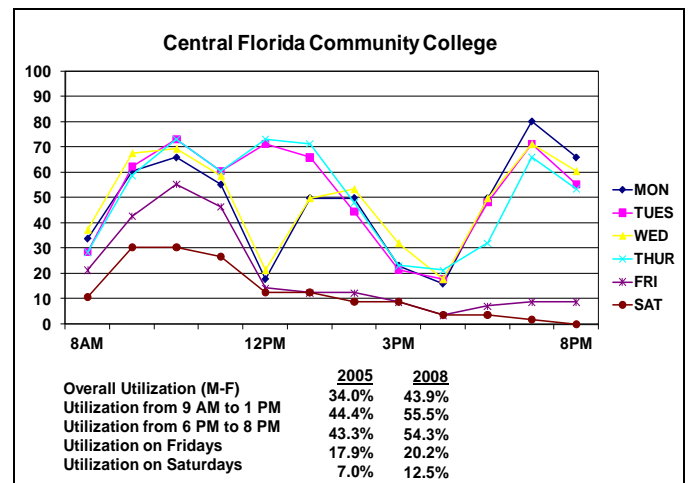
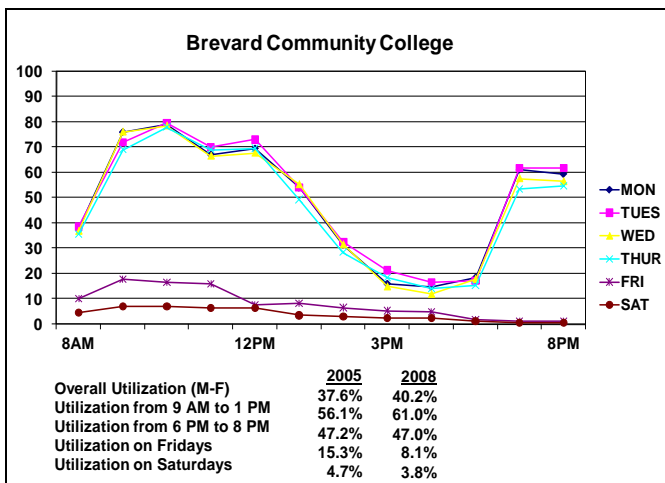
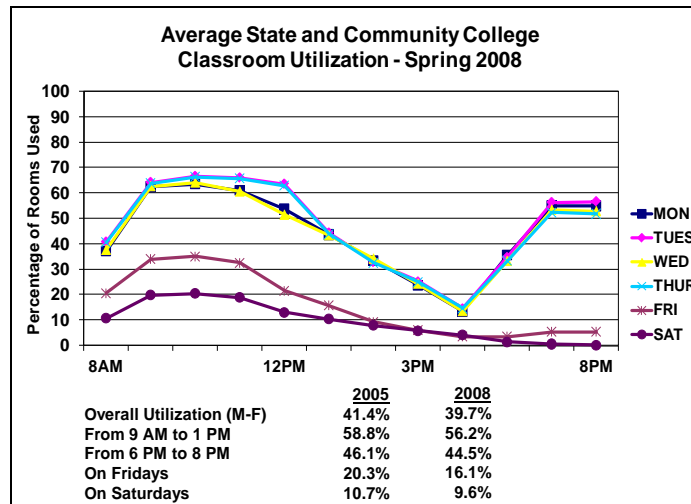
Table A-1
Disaggregated Classroom Utilization by Postsecondary Institution From 8 AM to 8 PM, Monday Through Saturday

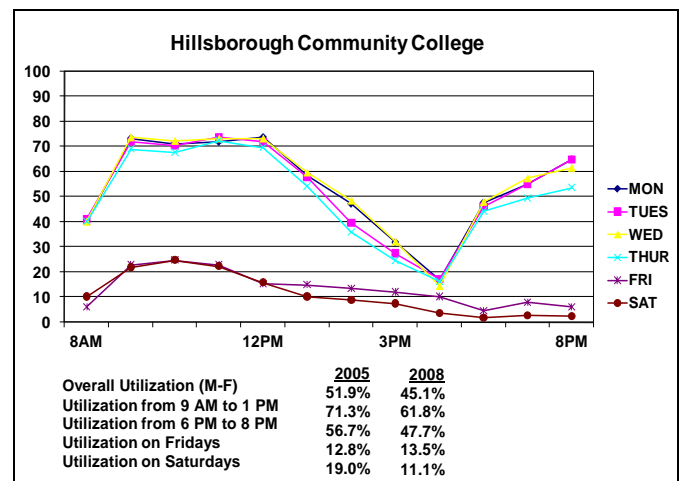
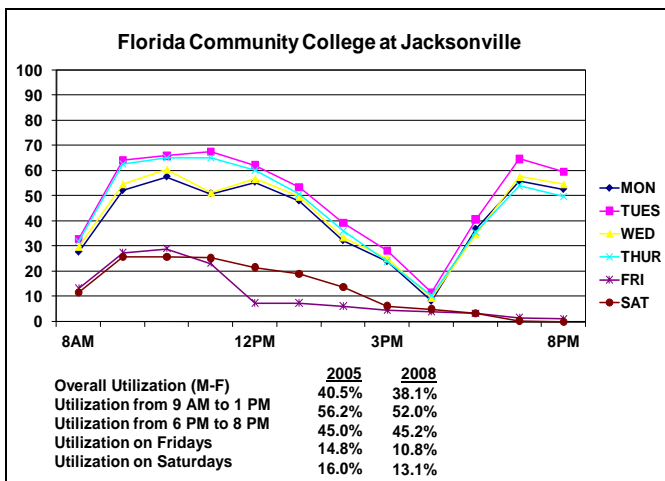
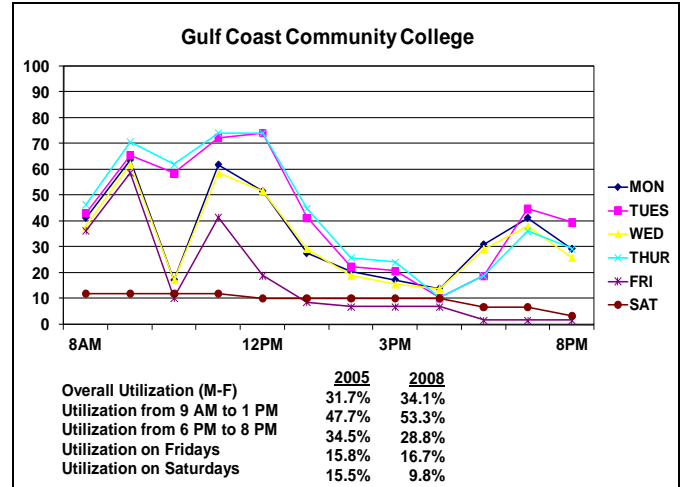
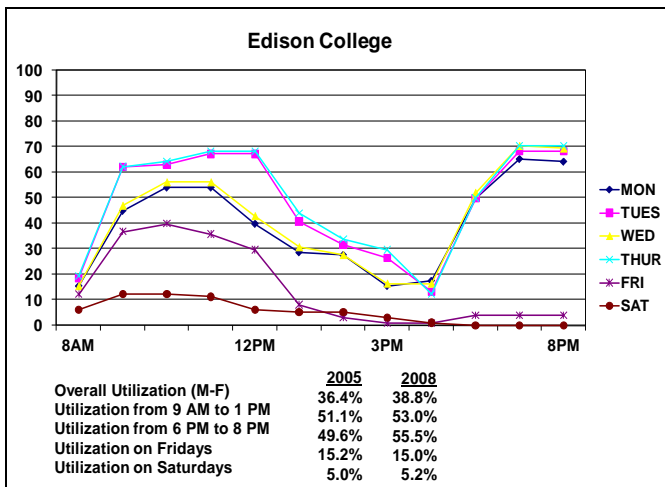
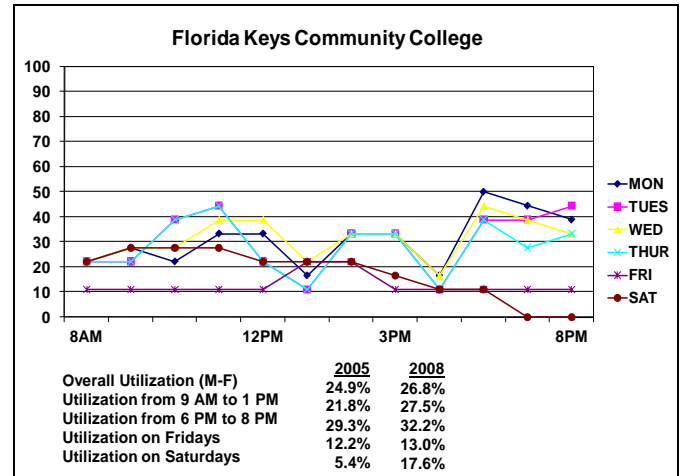
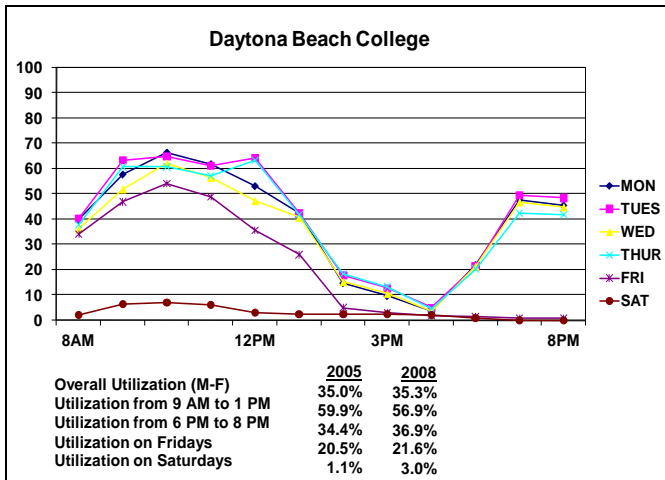
Universities

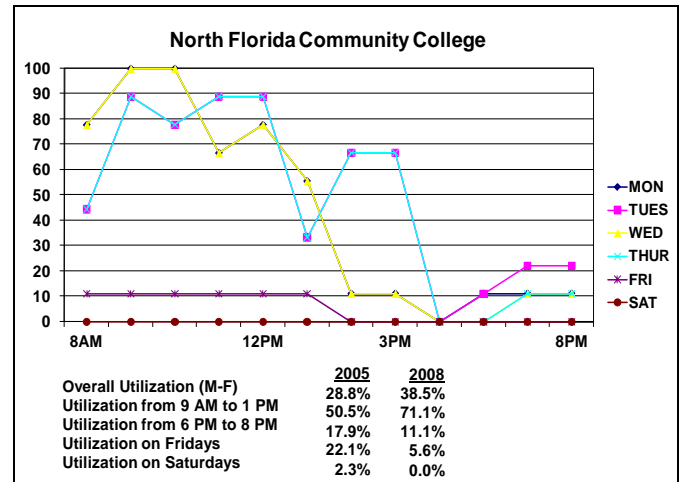
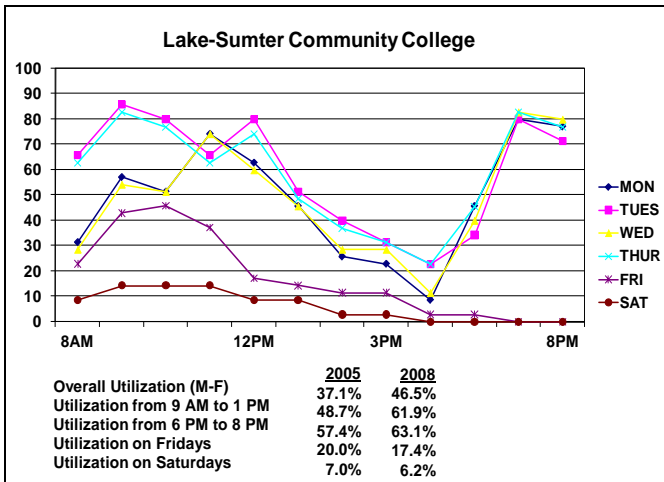
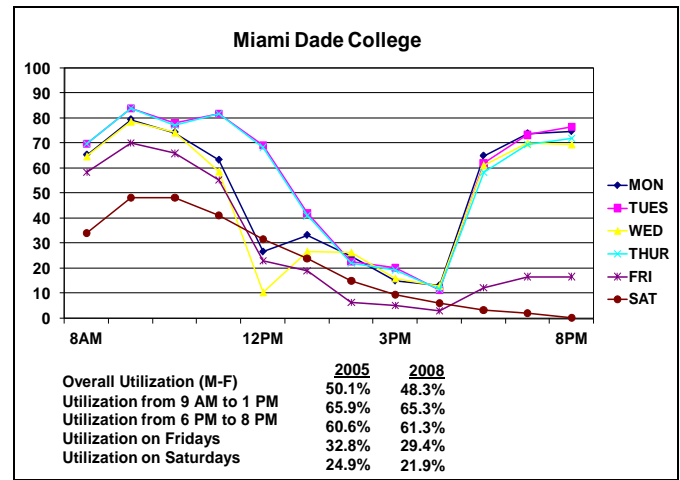
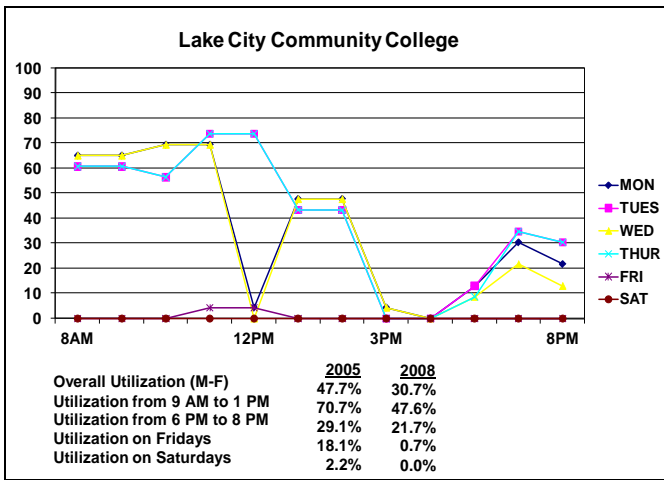
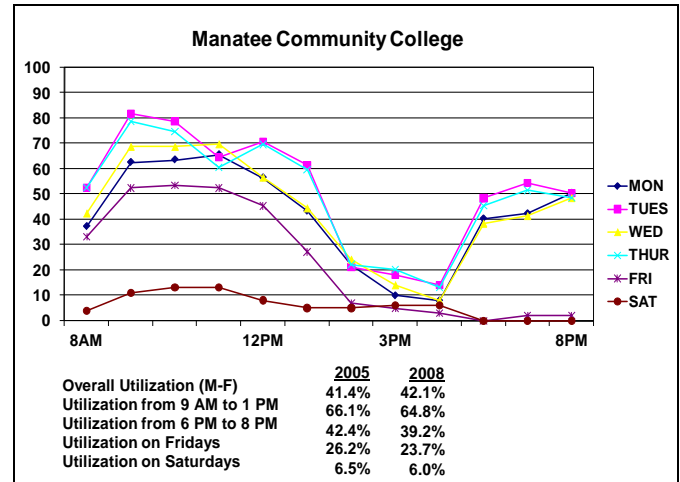
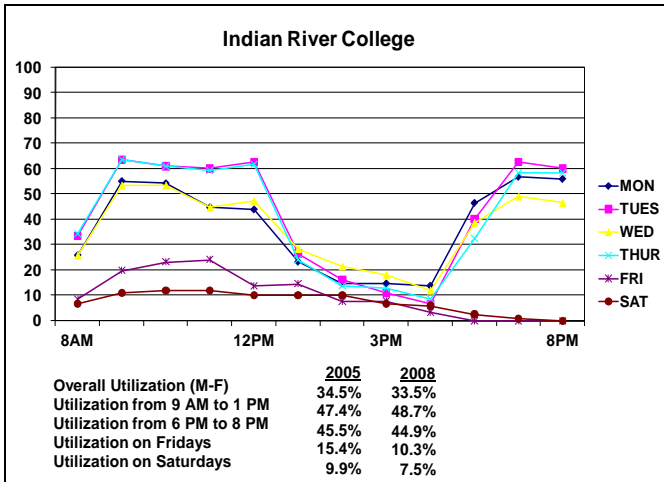


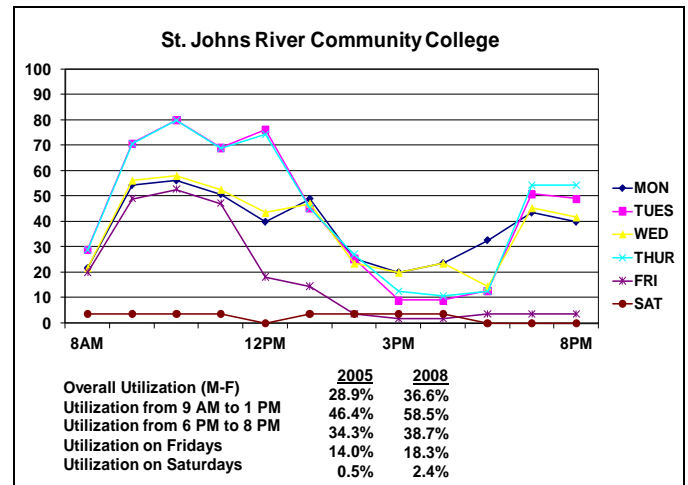
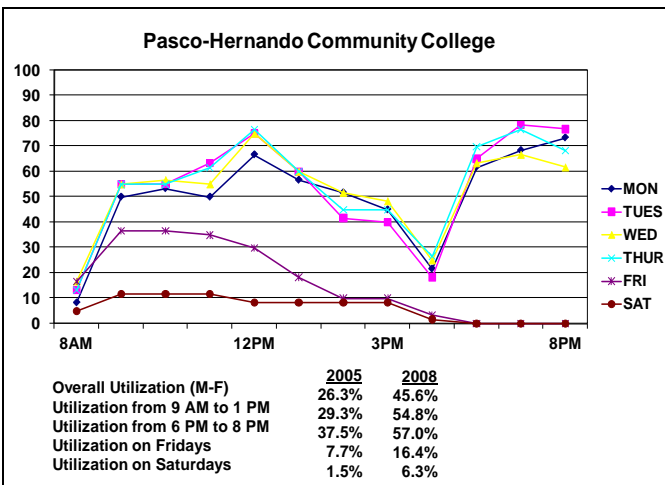
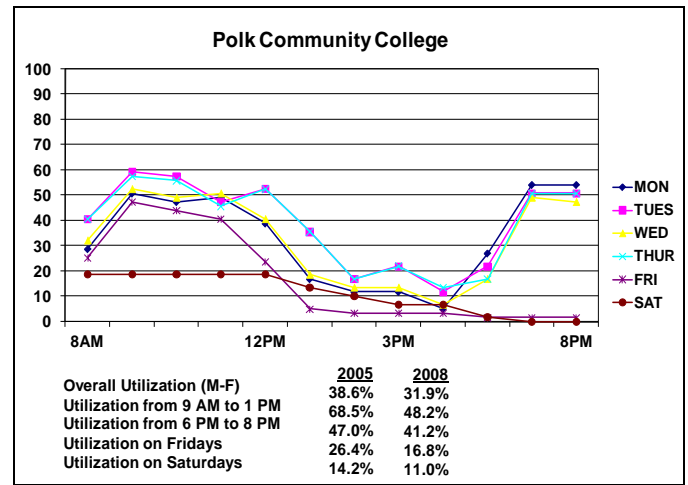
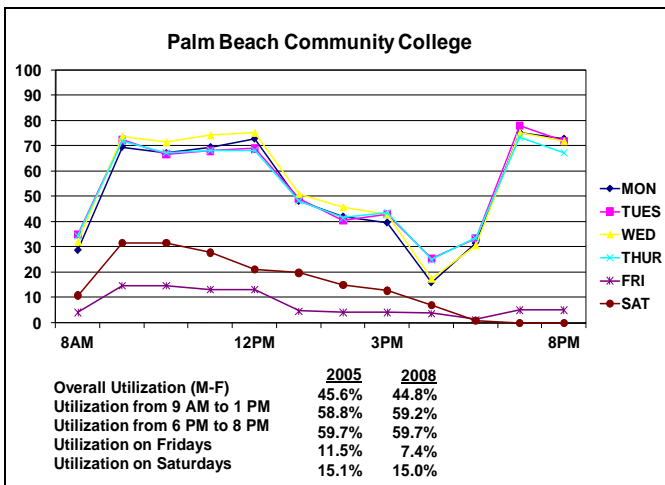
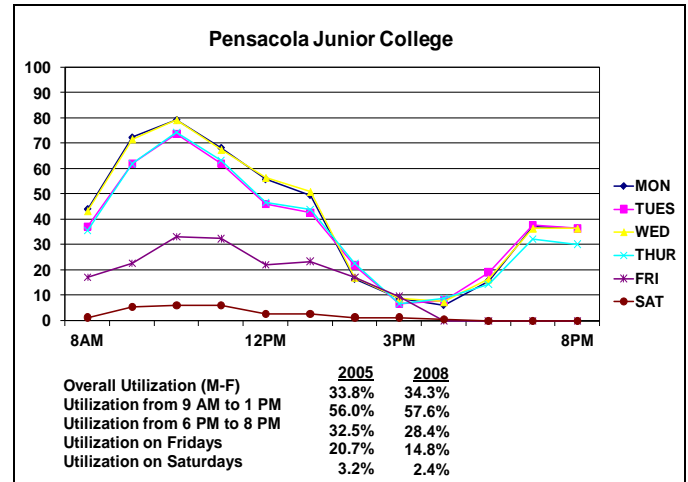
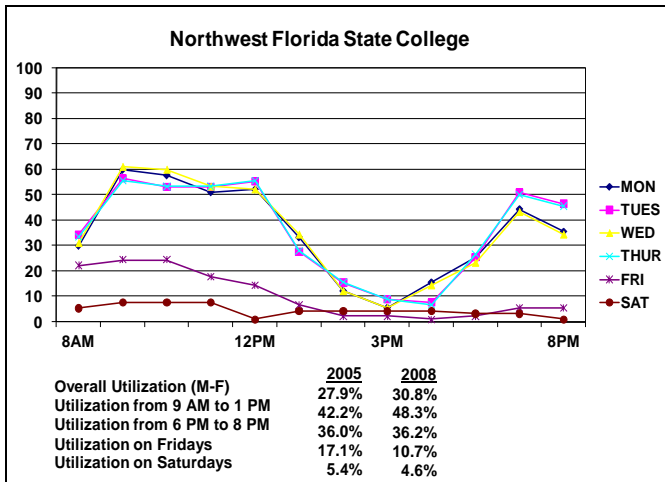


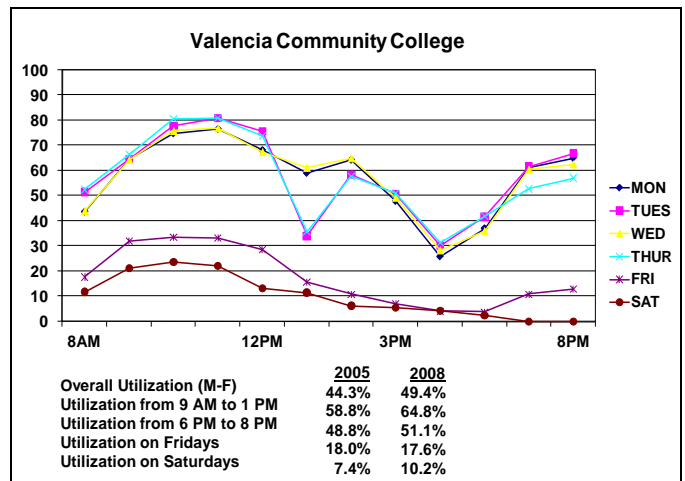
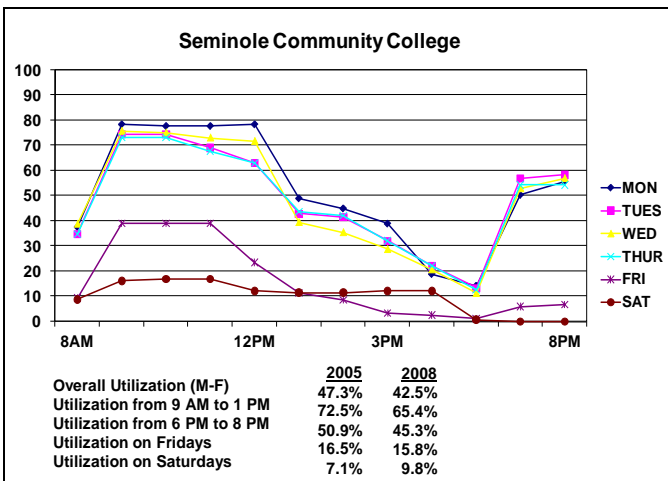
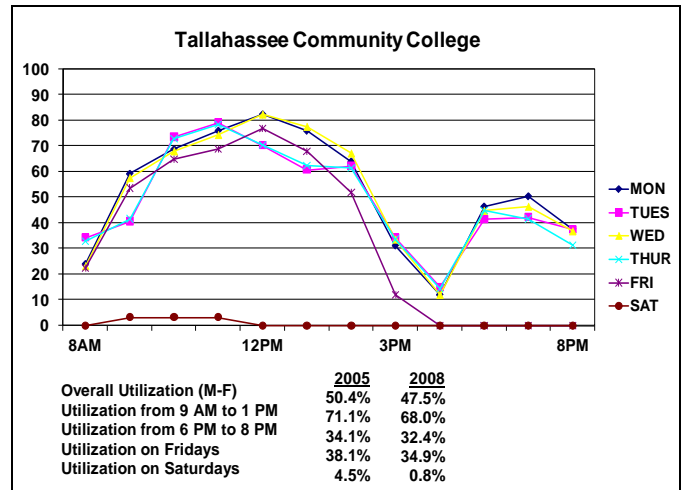
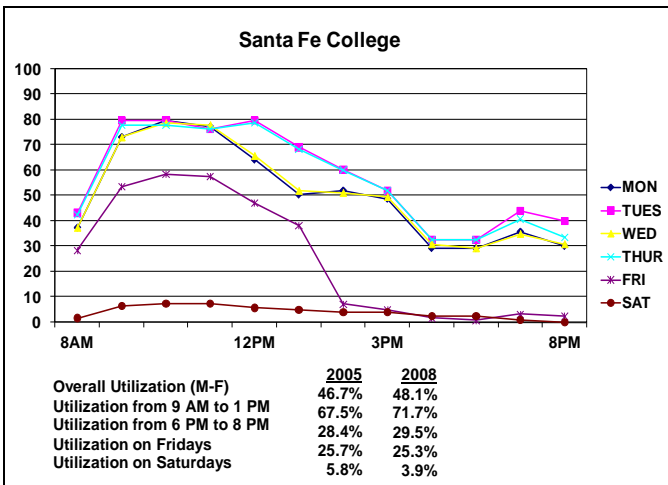
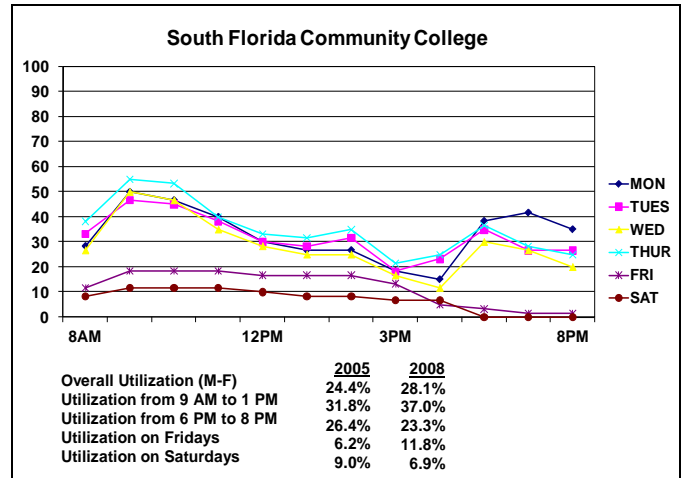
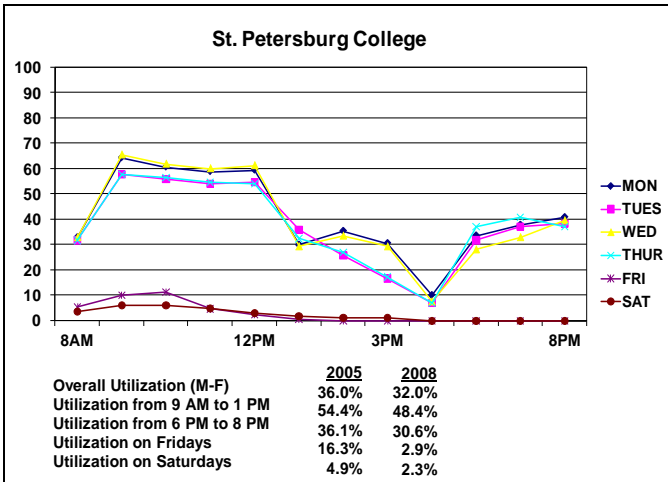
State and Community Colleges











Appendix B

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Dr. Eric J. Smith
Commissioner of Education

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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April 3, 2009



Gary R. VanLandingham, Ph.D.
Director
Office of Program Policy Analysis
and Government Accountability
111 West Madison Street, Suite 312
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1475

Dear Dr. VanLandingham:

Re: Draft Report *More State Direction Could Increase Use of Higher Education Classrooms*

This response is being sent on behalf of the Florida College System (FCS), in consultation with the Office of Educational Facilities (OEF), and the Community College and Technical Center Management Information Systems (CCTCMIS) Section. We appreciate the opportunity to respond to the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) draft report entitled: "More State Direction Could Increase Use of Higher Education Classrooms." We recognize this is a progress report on two March 2006, OPPAGA reports on facility planning, construction, and utilization. We are also very appreciative of the results of the meeting with OPPAGA staff held Friday, March 13, 2009, which resulted in several changes to the original draft report. We will address each section of the revised draft report on current status.

Higher Education classroom utilization remains relatively low during some time periods despite the efforts of some postsecondary institutions.

Florida postsecondary classroom use continues to vary by system, by institution, and time of day.

Throughout the draft report, comparisons are made between the university system and the state and community college system, with the Florida College System statistics usually

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showing lesser results. The draft report points out on page two, "Classroom utilization of most state universities exceeded 50%.... In contrast, no state or community college exceeded 50% classroom utilization." While we recognize the logic behind such a comparison, we would like to remind the reader that we have different missions and we serve two very different student populations. Here are a few of the major differences between the two postsecondary systems (statistics from existing Fact Book data from the FCS and Board of Governors (BOG) Websites) that might account for the differences in utilization:

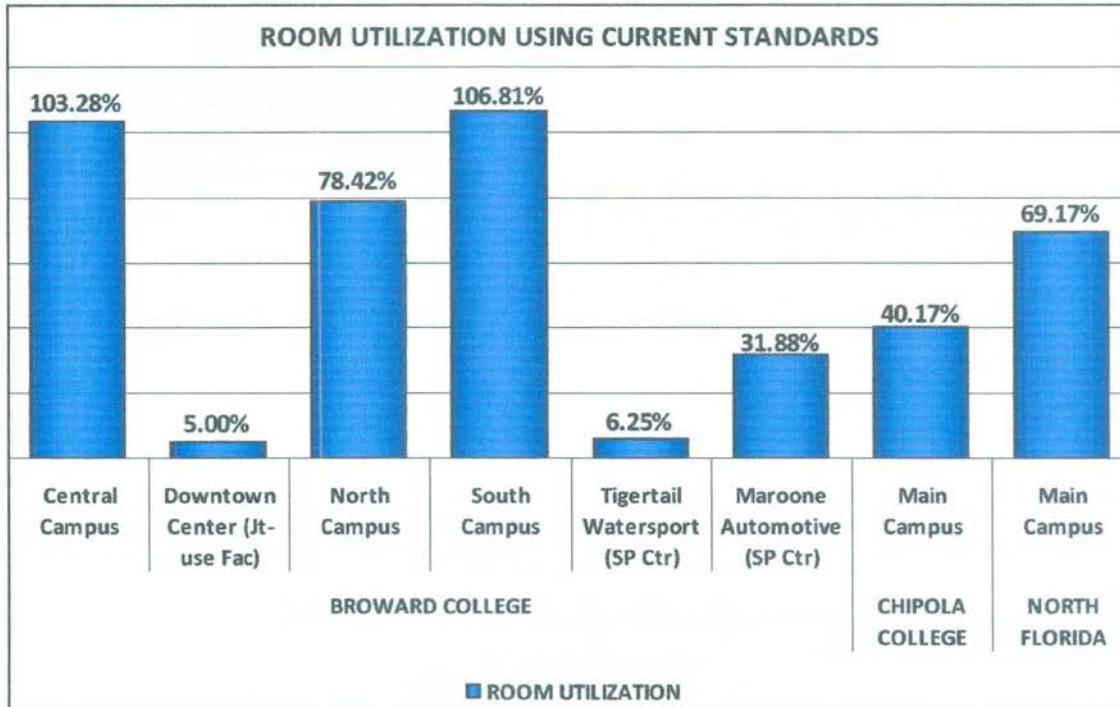
- The FCS consists of 28 community and state colleges, which were located to serve all communities in Florida so that no citizen would have to travel more than 50 miles to have access. Our students are commuter students.
- The FCS student profile is approximately 38% full-time and 62% part-time. The majority of FCS students are employed. The State University System (SUS) student profile is approximately 71% full-time and 29% part-time.
- The biggest difference, of course, is in program content. The SUS programs all lead to bachelor and graduate degrees, while FCS programs include adult basic and secondary education, vocational and college certificate programs, associate degrees, and a limited number of bachelor degree programs.

As noted in the draft report, state and community colleges generally show two peak utilization time periods between Monday and Thursday – from 9 AM to 1 PM and from 6 PM to 8 PM. Also as noted in the draft report, these two peaks, and the steep dip in utilization at 4 PM can probably be attributed to the fact that FCS college students are more likely to be working full-time while attending school, and that 4 PM is during the time when students are commuting and transitioning to or from work.

In response to OPPAGA's reported room utilization for the FCS, the CCTCMIS has identified some data reporting issues that have an adverse affect on the utilization rates reported by OPPAGA. The data used to produce the utilization rates in the OPPAGA report comes from a CCTCMIS Day-by-Hour report developed for data validation purposes. This report was not developed to calculate room or space utilization as it is outlined in statute and rule. CCTCMIS runs room utilization reports by college, by site, by facility, and by room, based on current standards (40 hours per week for classrooms). These reports allow a college to drill down and identify rooms with low usage so that corrections can be addressed.

In the interest of time and space, the following chart depicts the room utilization rate, based on current standards, for three colleges, Broward, Chipola, and North Florida, for Spring term of 2007-08. Broward being a large college in an urban area, with multiple campuses and Chipola and North Florida being two of the smallest colleges, located in rural areas.

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Broward College's Central and South campuses have room utilization greater than 100% - meaning rooms were used more than 40 hours per week, on those two sites. They show low utilization at the Downtown Center (which is a joint-use center with FAU), and at the Tigertail Watersport Center, which is a special-purpose center. Chipola College shows somewhat low utilization, while North Florida's is a little higher. What doesn't show on this particular chart is the number of classrooms at each site. Broward's Central Campus has 116 classrooms; the Downtown Center has four (4), North Campus has 92, South Campus has 36, Tigertail has two (2), and Maroone Automotive has eight (8). Chipola's main campus has 29 classrooms and North Florida's has nine (9). If we average Broward's utilization based on the number of sites and the info shown on this chart, Broward has 59.95% room utilization. If we take Broward's 59.95% and average it in with Chipola and North Florida, we would have 56.43% room utilization for these three schools together. If we base it on the number of rooms by site by college, we get different numbers again. Regardless, based on the actual CCTCMIS room utilization report by site, Broward's Central Campus is more than meeting the current room utilization standards.

The original 2006 OPPAGA report contemplated a change in the utilization standards from 40 hours per week to 50 hours per week. OPPAGA used the CCTCMIS Day-by-Hour report, and an 8 AM to 8 PM, 60-hour time period to generate their data. In OPPAGA's report, Broward College's overall utilization for Monday-Friday in Spring 2008 drops to 45.5%; Chipola's is 26.9% and North Florida's is 38.5%.

The Day-by-Hour report is an overview of the regularly scheduled course/sections at each institution. This report does not capture data under the following circumstances:

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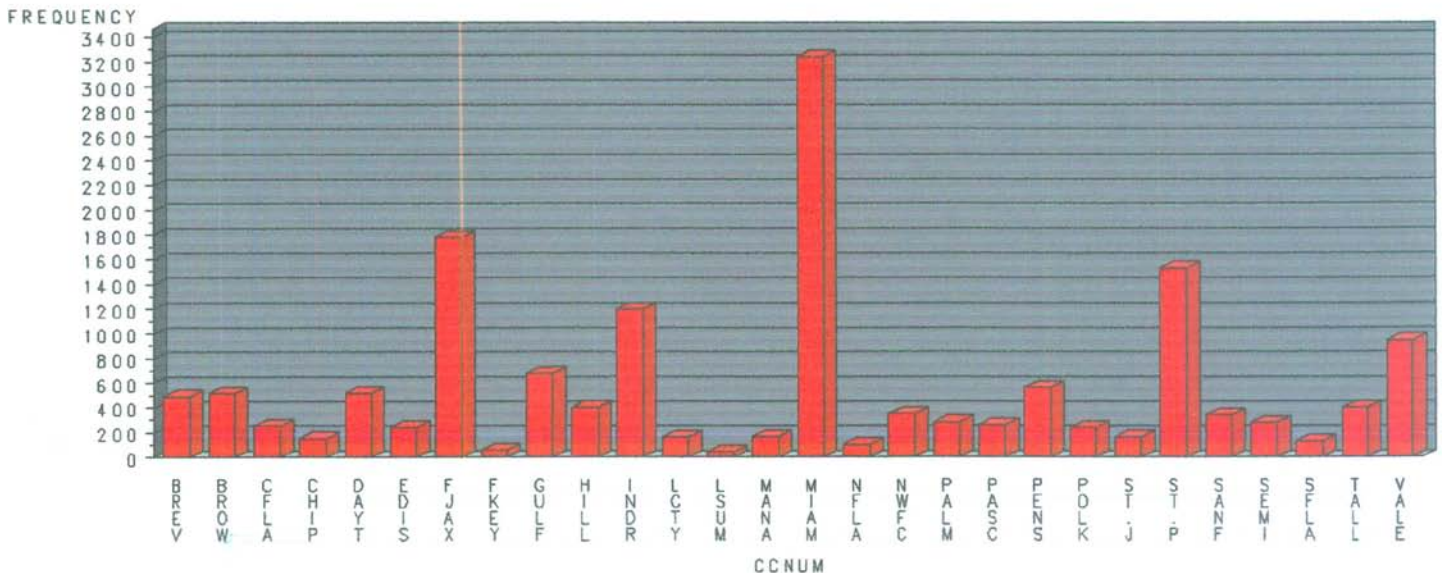
- Non-regularly scheduled course/sections
- Non-captured spaces
 - Rooms marked for renovation
 - Course/sections in spaces not designated as "classrooms" in the college's inventory
 - Course/sections that cross terms

Non-regularly Scheduled Courses

Of the 76,226 unduplicated course/sections in Winter/Spring 2008, 15,507 (20.3%) were non-regularly scheduled courses. Non-regularly scheduled courses have no consistent pattern of usage that allows them to be plotted in the "Day-by-Hour" format used in OPPAGA's classroom usage report. According to the CCTCMIS 2008 Winter/Spring course schedule data, 43% of these non-regularly scheduled course/sections are distance learning courses that periodically meet on campus. The remaining 57% are course/sections that do not have standard meeting schedules.

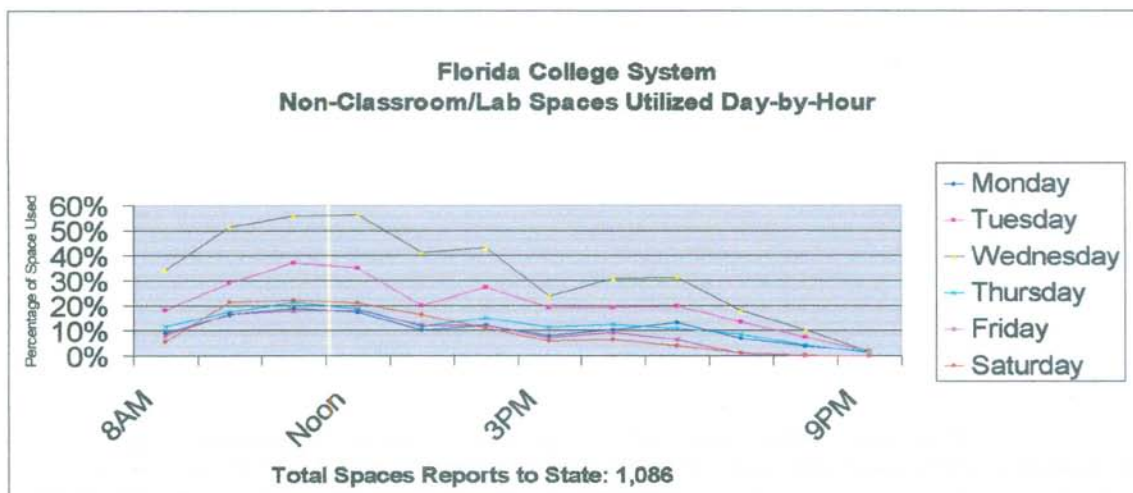
Florida College System

Course/Sections NOT included in Day-by-Hour Data
 Non-Regularly Scheduled Course/Sections by College Winter/Spring 2008
 System Total = 15,507



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Non-Captured Spaces



The criteria applied for room/space utilization calculations are restrictive. For example, if a room is marked as being “remodeled” in a college’s Facility inventory, it is removed from the pool that the room/space calculations are performed upon. This does not prevent an institution from using the space prior to remodeling for a course/section that meets for less than the full length of the term. Spaces not categorized in a college’s inventory as “classrooms” or “laboratories” are not included in the production of the reports used in this study. These spaces include related classrooms (used for some vocational programs), teaching auditoria, and meeting rooms. CCTCMIS has identified 1,086 “other” spaces used for instruction that are not included in any of our room/space calculations. System wide these spaces house 6,912 course/sections during the term.

Due to the changing role of education, the traditional model of semester-length courses has also been changing throughout the college system. Currently, student course information is only reported during the term they are initially enrolled. Any course/section that crosses the Fall and Winter/Spring boundary are only reported during the Fall semester. The matching process used in the Day-by-Hour report only includes data that are matched and meet the other criteria for room/space calculations. Approximately 3% of the course/sections system-wide cross a semester boundary.

Taking these non-regularly scheduled courses and non-captured spaces into account may paint a more realistic picture of the numbers of students and courses that are being accommodated by the Florida College System in existing facilities. We offer this additional information only to add to the overall room utilization picture for the FCS.

Postsecondary institutions have taken steps to improve utilization with mixed results.

The FCS concurs with this finding and will ensure that ongoing discussions and plans for improvement continue.

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More state-level action is needed to improve classroom utilization and the facilities planning process.

The OPPAGA draft report notes that the Department of Education (DOE) as an agency has made limited progress in promoting and/or taking steps to improve the Florida College System's classroom utilization and the facilities planning process.

The Florida College System will ensure the OPPAGA report is distributed to the colleges upon its release. The FCS will review the issue of classroom utilization at upcoming workshops being planned to address the processes for facilities planning and construction. We will also reorganize a facilities committee, including college participants, FCS, OEF, and CCTCMIS staff, to address and make recommendations on these and other facilities issues, as the BOG has already done. As noted in our meeting with OPPAGA staff on March 13, 2009, implementation of recommendations must be accomplished at the local level, dictated by each college's board of trustees.

The Department of Education has made limited progress in revising space standards and automating the facility planning process for state and community colleges.

This statement is true. However, the reason, in these budget-challenging times, is that DOE has limited staff to address these issues. Up until recently, the Division of Community Colleges/FCS had one staff person dedicated to facilities planning and budgeting. Now there are two staff employees dedicated to facilities. The Office of Educational Facilities (OEF) has one staff person dedicated to community college facilities. The CCTCMIS bureau has one staff person dedicated to community college facilities. All total, DOE has four people to address the Florida College System facilities issues.

For the upcoming Capital Improvement Plan process, FCS will be implementing revised worksheets that include college information concerning the utilization of existing space as a factor in a new space request.

OEF is in the final stages of automating the educational plant survey submission process for colleges, which should be operational by July 1, 2009.

As previously noted, we will reorganize a facilities committee, and revising space standards will be addressed as an issue. Revising the space standards is a large-scale project and will involve research at the national level. We will also work with and share information with the BOG on any revised space standards.

State entities have not implemented our recommendations related to joint use arrangements and branch campuses.

The FCS does analyze and report data on joint-use space. Joint-use is an official designation given to a facility/rooms used in partnership by two public educational entities, such as the school district and a college, or a college and a state university. Joint-use projects are developed through a separate process and are specifically designated by the legislature. Generally, a joint-use facility will be "owned" by one of the educational entities, but the facility and specific rooms will be assigned and recognized in their individual inventories as joint-use. It is the "shared space" that is problematic. Shared space cannot be officially designated as joint-

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use. This happens in the cases of FCS colleges that have agreements with other colleges and/or universities to offer programs and/or courses in their facilities as a service to their community. For example, Chipola College has agreements with Florida State University, University of West Florida, and Troy University and allows these schools to offer graduate degree coursework on their campus. However, they do not have an official, joint-use facility; therefore, any classroom space(s) used by the other institutions will show either low or no utilization, because the usage by the other entities is currently impossible to track. Those students are not Chipola's students. They are providing that space as a service to the citizens in their community.

Although these shared spaces were originally identified as a utilization issue, when further information was pursued through a survey of the colleges, the numbers of actual shared spaces identified was very low (less than 50 throughout the system). It was determined that the investment to devise a program for reporting the utilization would not justify the effort given the limited resources.

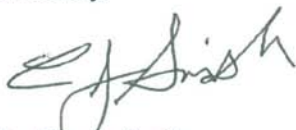
The FCS does not have "branch campuses." We have campus, center, and special purpose center site designations. All FCS designated sites are included in the utilization reports. While most campuses and centers have general classroom space, special purpose centers are designated to provide space for a more specific (usually vocational) program, as is the case for the Maroone Automotive Center at Broward College, and will have limited classroom space with low utilization.

Postsecondary institutions' construction costs continue to be within national benchmarks.

We are in agreement with all statements made in this section of the draft report.

In closing, this memo has been written with input from FCS, OEF and CCTCMIS staff. We commend OPPAGA staff on their work and appreciate the opportunity to respond. We will work together to continue to address these issues, improve our FCS facilities planning, construction, and reporting processes, increase our classroom utilization and decrease our construction costs.

Sincerely,



Dr. Eric J. Smith
Commissioner

EJS/LC/br

c: Will Holcombe, Chancellor, Division of Community Colleges
Linda Champion, Deputy Commissioner, Finance and Operations
Lisa Cook, Director, Florida College System, Facilities Planning and Budgeting



FLORIDA BOARD OF GOVERNORS

325 West Gaines Street – Suite 1614 – Tallahassee, Florida – 32399-0400
(850) 245-0466 – www.flbog.edu

March 26, 2009

Gary R. VanLandingham, Ph.D., Director
Office of Program Policy Analysis
And Government Accountability (OPPAGA)
Claude Pepper Building, Room 312
111 West Madison Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Dear Dr. VanLandingham:

Thank you for the opportunity to review the draft report *More State Direction Could Increase Use of Higher Education Classrooms*. We agree with many of the findings in the report, such as:

- 1. The Board of Governors has taken steps to improve classroom utilization and the facilities planning process.** These steps include:
 - Establishing a facilities task force to make recommendations on a variety of facilities issues, including the efficient use of facilities.
 - Adopting several of the task force recommendations, including requiring universities to demonstrate that they are effectively using existing space before the Board approves new space requests.
 - Including in its guidelines for capital improvement plans for 2010-11 a requirement for each university to incorporate utilization data as a factor in prioritizing funding requests. Institutions with utilization rates below legislative standards will not be eligible to make requests for additional classrooms in their capital improvement plans.
 - Encouraging universities to adopt best practices to improve how they use classrooms, teaching laboratories, and office space.

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- Streamlining the educational plant survey process by automating the survey submission process, making updating faster and easier for universities, and consolidating plan updates into a package for university board of trustee approval.
2. **Postsecondary institutions have taken steps to improve utilization with mixed results.**
 - Strategies have included implementing block scheduling, standardizing class periods, adopting uniform campus-wide scheduling policies, providing feedback on utilization data to administrators, and implementing centralized classroom scheduling.
 - Efforts to increase utilization have had mixed results.
 3. **The average per-square-foot costs of a Florida postsecondary classroom building remains below national average.**
 4. **The state and institutions have adopted several strategies to help control construction costs.**
 - The Board of Governors has given universities more flexibility in the selection of construction methods, and it has amended its regulations to allow universities more flexibility to negotiate contracts for construction management and design-build services.
 - The Board has adopted green building initiatives to help universities control facility operating costs.
 - Universities have also adopted strategies to control construction and energy costs.

We do, however, have concerns about several statements made in the report.

The report correctly reflects that section 1013.03(2), F.S., provides that classrooms are to be used a minimum of 40 hours per week. It is imperative we point out that this legislative standard is one of the most stringent in the country, and that our university system utilization exceeds the Legislature's 40-hour/60% occupancy standard. The report mentions several times that classrooms are "underutilized" and that classroom utilization "remains low," clearly evaluative statements made in response to university performance being compared to a derived utilization rate, rather than to a utilization

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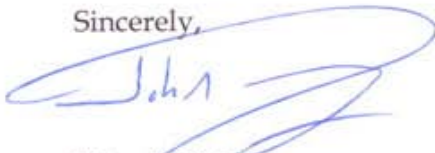
standard reflected in Florida Statutes, Board regulation, state or national guidelines, accepted Best Practices, or national norms. We believe the standard established by the Legislature provides a consistent and reasonable method of ensuring efficient usage and is the appropriate point of comparison.

Also, please remember that our utilization data reflect usage for *scheduled classes*. Most universities do not capture usage of classrooms for *non-scheduled* activities, such as student group discussions and faculty meetings (it was determined through deliberations with university staff involved in the Facilities Task Force effort that even if the data could be captured, the costs of doing so would not be inconsequential). We have no data to affirm that utilization for non-scheduled activities has declined.

The report also indicates that there was a significant decline in classroom utilization on Fridays. As mentioned in your 2006 report on utilization, "Underutilization of classrooms on Fridays is not unique to Florida but rather a nationwide phenomenon in higher education." It should be recognized that class scheduling is not independent of student demand for the course. In other words, students may register for a particular course if it is offered during a peak, high-demand period, but may not register for it if it is offered during an "off-peak" period, such as on Friday afternoons.

Again, we thank you for the opportunity to review these reports.

Sincerely,



John A. Delaney
President in Residence

JAD/smm

OPPAGA's Comments to the Agency Responses

Regarding the methodology we used to evaluate classroom utilization, OPPAGA provides clarification below to the Department of Education's response on pages 18-19 and the Board of Governors' response on pages 25-26.

To assess the need for additional classroom space at the state's colleges and universities, our review examined classroom utilization during the days and times that postsecondary institutions can, and do, serve students—from 8 AM to 8 PM, Monday through Friday. We believe that this methodology provides the most accurate portrayal of classroom utilization in Florida's postsecondary institutions.

Section 1013.03(2), *Florida Statutes*, provides that classrooms are to be used a minimum of 40 hours per week and that 60% of student stations are to be occupied. While useful, this standard does not represent how the state's colleges and universities currently use their classrooms. In practice the 40/60 standard indicates that a classroom is at 100% utilization if it is used 40 hours per week at 60% occupancy. Institutions with classroom utilization that approaches 100% using the 40/60 standard would thus be considered to need additional classrooms although their classrooms may only be used 40 hours a week and have 40% of the student stations unutilized.

However, while Florida's 40/60 minimum standard for classroom utilization is comparable to standards used by other states, it does not reflect how institutions currently use their space. The state's colleges and universities routinely offer classes during the evenings and weekends outside of the 40-hour period considered by the standard. The current standard too narrowly defines the number of hours during the week a classroom is available for use and may indicate a public college and/or university is at maximum capacity even though the institution has the potential to increase utilization of its existing classrooms. We believe that a more appropriate methodology examines classroom utilization during the days and times that postsecondary institutions can, and do, serve students—from 8 AM to 8 PM, Monday through Friday. In addition, we recommend the Legislature consider increasing the statutory minimum standard to bring it in line with the number of hours during the week that postsecondary classrooms are available for use.

Regarding the Department of Education's role in ensuring that classroom space is used efficiently, OPPAGA provides clarification below to the department's response on page 22.

Given the increasing demand for limited state funds available to construct K-12 and higher education facilities, postsecondary institutions have a responsibility to demonstrate that they are using existing facilities as efficiently as possible. Thus, we believe that each public college and university should be required to demonstrate it has implemented comprehensive strategies to maximize use of existing classrooms before receiving funding for additional classroom space. This additional information will enable the Department of Education and the Board of Governors to be more informed when making funding recommendations to the Legislature and will provide an additional layer of public accountability. This additional information also will provide the basis for institutions with legitimate reasons for not approaching 100% utilization to explain their need for additional classrooms.

Although some factors affecting utilization may be outside the control of the state's colleges and universities, our report details several steps that postsecondary institutions are taking to improve classroom management. These steps may help the institutions increase classroom utilization and may delay the need to build additional classrooms. The Department of Education and Board of Governors can play an important role in promoting effective classroom management practices among their respective institutions.

Regarding our use of the term "joint use" when capturing and reporting data on shared use of classrooms, OPPAGA provides clarification below to the department's response on pages 22-23.

We concur with the department's statement that classroom utilization data does not include shared use arrangements in which a public college or university allows another entity, such as a postsecondary institution or a school district, to schedule courses or other instructional activities in classrooms. Our final report focuses on shared use rather than joint use agreements.