



May 2010

Report No. 10-43

## University Implementation and State Oversight of Common Program Prerequisites Have Improved

### *at a glance*

Since our 2008 report, the Board of Governors and Department of Education have reviewed and revised the common program prerequisites and universities are more consistently complying with the revised prerequisites. The Department of Education has taken steps to improve oversight of the common prerequisites policy by monitoring college student transfer problems and has worked with the Florida colleges to help ensure that students complete prerequisites before transferring to universities. The Board of Governors also has taken steps to improve its communication with state universities about the common prerequisites and has strengthened its oversight of the policy. These changes should help facilitate the transfer of Florida college students to upper division programs at universities.

### Scope

In accordance with state law, this progress report informs the Legislature of actions taken in response to a 2008 OPPAGA report on common program prerequisites for university academic programs.<sup>1,2</sup> This report presents

our assessment of the extent to which the Department of Education, the Board of Governors, and the Legislature have addressed the findings and recommendations included in our report.

### Background

Florida's postsecondary education system includes a 2+2 articulation process through which students may pursue a baccalaureate degree by first receiving an associate in arts degree from one of the 28 colleges in the Florida College System and then transferring to a state university to complete their remaining two years of coursework. More than 16,000 students with associate in arts degrees transfer to a state university each year.<sup>3</sup>

The state has established a common prerequisites policy to facilitate articulation for students transferring from Florida colleges to universities. This policy establishes common courses needed for admission to upper division programs at any of the state's universities. The Board of Governors and the State Board of Education are responsible for ensuring that state universities and colleges correctly implement common prerequisites.<sup>4</sup> The two boards have established

<sup>1</sup> Section 11.51(6), *F.S.*

<sup>2</sup> *Inconsistent Implementation of Common Prerequisites Creates Barriers to Effective 2+2 Articulation*, [OPPAGA Report No. 08-11](#), March 2008.

<sup>3</sup> From 2004-05 through 2008-09, between 16,000 and 20,000 associate in arts students transferred to state universities each year.

<sup>4</sup> Sections 1001.705(1)(b) and 1001.02, *F.S.*

rules and policies that require postsecondary institutions to use the approved common prerequisites as the requirements students must complete for admission to upper division programs; identify these prerequisite courses in their catalogs; and accept all allowable substitute courses that satisfy these prerequisites.<sup>5</sup>

Our 2008 report found that state universities were inconsistently implementing the common program prerequisites, and the Board of Governors and Department of Education were insufficiently monitoring implementation of the policy. As a result, transfer students could be denied admission to universities' upper division programs or be required to complete additional courses, increasing both state and student costs.

## Current Status

State universities, the Board of Governors, and the Department of Education have taken steps to implement the recommendations made in our 2008 report. The Board of Governors has revised the common program prerequisites, universities are more consistently implementing these policies, the Board of Governors and Department of Education have improved their oversight of the prerequisites, and Florida colleges are offering more advising options to help ensure that students complete the prerequisites before transferring.

### *The common prerequisites have been revised*

The Board of Governors has worked through the Articulation Coordinating Committee to review and revise the common program prerequisites for all baccalaureate degree programs.<sup>6</sup> This review

<sup>5</sup> Rule 6A-10.024(11), F.A.C.

<sup>6</sup> The State Board of Education and Board of Governors established the Articulation Coordinating Committee to serve as an advisory body for developing and implementing statewide articulation policies.

was intended to ensure that all state universities were in agreement with the courses included as common prerequisites, and consistently implemented these requirements. Faculty and staff from Florida colleges and state universities participated in this process. The Articulation Coordinating Committee reviewed and approved changes for all programs, with some revisions effective in the 2009-10 academic year while others become effective in the 2010-11 academic year.

### *State universities are more consistently implementing the common prerequisites; some minor inconsistencies still exist*

Our prior report found widespread inconsistent implementation of the common prerequisites by state universities. To address this issue, we recommended that universities better align their requirements with the common prerequisites, and they have taken steps to address this problem. As shown in Exhibit 1, the six university programs that had the greatest inconsistencies at the time of our prior report are now generally in compliance with the common program prerequisites.<sup>7</sup> The universities' 2009-10 catalogs list prerequisites that are generally consistent with the common prerequisites.

However, a few minor inconsistencies still exist. Some universities did not identify all allowable prerequisite courses in their catalogs, one university required different courses than the common prerequisites for a degree program, and some universities required fewer prerequisites than the common prerequisites. Only one of these inconsistencies, requiring a different course than the common prerequisites, could potentially create an articulation barrier for students who follow the common prerequisites.

<sup>7</sup> We reviewed implementation of the common prerequisites for the following programs: Accounting, Biology, Business Administration, English, Finance, and Marketing.

**Exhibit 1  
Universities Have Addressed Inconsistencies with the Common Prerequisites for the Degree Programs Reviewed**

Degree Program	Florida A&M University	Florida Atlantic University	Florida Gulf Coast University	Florida International University	Florida State University	University of Central Florida	University of Florida	University of North Florida	University of South Florida	University of West Florida	Problem Rate by Program <sup>3</sup>
Accounting	☑ <sup>1</sup>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0%
Biology	☑ <sup>1</sup>	☑ <sup>2</sup>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0%
Business Administration	☑ <sup>1</sup>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0%
English	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0%
Finance	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0%
Marketing	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0%
Problem Rate by University <sup>3</sup>	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

✓ - University prerequisites did not create articulation barriers for students.

☑ - University reported that the issue will be addressed in its 2010-11 catalog.

<sup>1</sup> Florida A&M University did not identify the common prerequisites in its 2009-10 catalog, but reported that the prerequisites will be clearly identified in its 2010-11 catalog.

<sup>2</sup> Florida Atlantic University has corrected this issue in its 2010-11 catalog.

<sup>3</sup> In our 2008 report, we defined the problem rate as the number of inconsistencies that could create articulation barriers for students following the common prerequisites divided by the total programs offered by each university (problem rate by university) or the total number of universities offering the program (problem rate by program). Since universities reported addressing all inconsistencies we identified in this review, the problem rates for each university and program are 0%.

Source: OPPAGA analysis of university prerequisites and common prerequisites.

Generally, the remaining inconsistencies exist due to the timing of the Common Prerequisite Manual revisions. The Board of Governors and State Board of Education finalized all prerequisites in October of 2009, after the universities' 2009-10 catalogs had been published. Therefore, some of the programs in the universities' 2009-10 catalogs and other published materials did not reflect the newly revised common prerequisites.

All universities reported that they were in the process of updating their catalogs and other published materials to ensure compliance with the revised common prerequisites for the 2010-11 academic year. The universities also reported that their 2010-11 catalogs would include references and a hyperlink to the Common Prerequisite Manual.

***The Board of Governors and Department of Education improved oversight of the common prerequisites***

The Board of Governors has taken several steps to ensure that universities comply with common prerequisite policy, and it has improved

communication with universities. The Department of Education has taken steps to monitor student and institution complaints about the common prerequisites.

The Board of Governors has strengthened oversight. Our prior report noted that the Board of Governors and Department of Education had not systematically reviewed or monitored how the common prerequisites were implemented since the policy was established in 1996. Consistent with our recommendations, the board created an annual review process for the common prerequisites, examining several program areas each year. This process will begin in 2010-11, after all revisions have been implemented.

The board has improved communication with state universities regarding the common prerequisites. Consistent with our recommendations, the Board of Governors has strengthened its communication with state universities about the common prerequisites. Specifically, the board conducted training conference calls with university faculty and staff,

held articulation workshops at three universities, and provided updates to the Council of Academic Vice Presidents and university academic program representatives. The board also reminded universities that common prerequisites apply to limited access programs.<sup>8</sup> The board is now in the process of developing a memorandum concerning common prerequisite expectations for university and college staff and faculty members. Additionally, the board and department are considering developing a multimedia video tutorial on common prerequisite policy to be posted online and shared with institutions.

The department has taken action to monitor transfer students' problems with the common prerequisites. Our prior report noted that the department has not systematically reviewed or monitored the implementation of the common prerequisites. To address this issue, the department worked with the Board of Governors in updating the common prerequisites and also communicated these updates with faculty and staff at the Florida colleges. In addition, the department has developed an online system that allows students and colleges to communicate problems they encounter related to common prerequisites, and also allows institutions to submit requests for new or revised common prerequisites.<sup>9</sup>

***Florida colleges offer more options to ensure that students complete prerequisites***

A key to effective articulation is that students take common prerequisite courses at Florida colleges while earning an associate degree. In addition, students need to be informed about which prerequisite courses they should complete if they intend to transfer into a bachelor degree program.

Our prior report found that 18 of 28 Florida colleges had degree pre-majors as an option or requirement for associate in arts students. Pre-majors identify courses that are aligned with the common prerequisites for bachelor degree programs and are

<sup>8</sup> Limited access programs are programs for which student demand exceeds available resources, thereby requiring that admission to the program is competitive. Programs requiring auditions or portfolios for admission (in the fine and performing arts) may also be designated as limited access.

<sup>9</sup> This system is available at <https://app1.fldoe.org/DFCPrerequisiteIssues>.

intended to help students identify which courses they should take to be admitted to university programs.<sup>10</sup>

Currently, 23 of the 28 colleges identify degree planning options that advise students to complete common prerequisites as part of their associate degree, with the options differing by college. For example, Florida State College at Jacksonville encourages its students to choose an 'intended transfer major' as early as possible and has assigned unique codes to each intended transfer major to assist students through the advising process. Miami Dade College has approximately 50 'university parallel programs' that include unique advising codes, required prerequisites, and other suggested courses for each program. These degree planning options help ensure that students complete prerequisites during their associate degree coursework before transferring to a state university.

<sup>10</sup> While our prior report recommended the department require Florida colleges to implement pre-majors, some colleges have raised concerns that this practice could affect their accreditation. Accrediting agencies require colleges to document separate program outcomes and assessments for each pre-major; doing so could be problematic due to the large number of possible pre-majors at each college. Accordingly, colleges have begun identifying 'transfer programs' rather than 'pre-majors' for advising students.

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Project supervised by Jane Fletcher (850/487-9255)  
 Project conducted by Emily Sikes and Erika Morse  
 Gary R. VanLandingham, Ph.D., OPPAGA Director



STATE  
UNIVERSITY  
SYSTEM  
of FLORIDA  
Board of Governors

Office of the Chancellor  
325 West Gaines Street, Suite 1614  
Tallahassee, FL 32399  
Phone 850.245.0466  
Fax 850.245.9685  
www.flbog.edu

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Dr. Gary R. VanLandingham, Director  
Office of Program Policy Analysis and  
Government Accountability  
Claude Pepper Building, Room 312  
111 West Madison Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1475

Dear Dr. VanLandingham:

Thank you for your May 18, 2010, letter and draft copy of the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) report entitled *University Implementation and State Oversight of Common Program Prerequisites Has Improved*. We appreciate the opportunity to review the document.

Our universities and Board of Governors staff have worked in partnership with the Department of Education Office of Articulation, Division of Florida Colleges, and Florida College System institutions to provide clear communication in regards to common prerequisites for admission to baccalaureate programs. As noted in the report, our state has just completed a review of all baccalaureate program requirements. This was the first step in addressing the need for more efficiency in this area.

We will be working with our institutions, education partners, and the Articulation Coordinating Committee as we continue our on-going review of disciplines to ensure the smooth transfer for students into baccalaureate upper-division coursework. Thank you again for the opportunity to review your draft report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Frank T. Brogan".

Frank T. Brogan  
Chancellor

FTB/lpl