Happy New Year!

Next Tuesday, January 10 is the first day of the Florida Legislature’s 2012 Regular Session. The 60 day session is scheduled to end on Friday, March 9. As noted in previous Legislative Reports, this year’s Session is early to accommodate the legal schedule for adopting new districts for Congress, State Senate and State Representatives before the late spring candidate filing deadlines.

State Budget Proposals
Governor Rick Scott unveiled his budget proposal for FY2012-13 on December 6 and, despite economic forecasts of up to a $2 billion shortfall in revenues, it held good news for the Florida College System (FCS) institutions. The Community College Program Fund (CCPF), the bulk of FCS state funding, was maintained at the same level as the current funding, $890.1 million. The Governor’s budget also recommends continuing a nearly $3 million infusion into the 2 + 2 partnerships with public universities, with an emphasis on funding programs in STEM fields. On the less encouraging side, the Governor would not allow any tuition increase, and the only allocation of PECO funds for construction and maintenance are earmarked for charter schools.

Governor Scott’s budget for education, both K-12 and higher education, is funded at the expense of Medicaid and other safety net programs, which he cut severely. The legislative budget committees are expected to have a different outlook on the whole budget picture, and House budget leaders have told the higher education community to expect severe cuts when their budget is unveiled.

House Speaker Dean Cannon and Senate President Mike Haridopolos have differing takes on the need to dive right into the budget process as the Session starts. Haridopolos has said that because of the early start, revenue and budget projections may be less reliable, and that a later special session on the state budget may be advisable. Speaker Cannon, however, sees no reason to delay and House appropriations committees have aggressive budget sessions scheduled for the first week of the Session.

The state’s Revenue Estimating Conference will hold a January 12 general revenue estimating conference to determine the revenue outlook for the coming fiscal year.

Higher Education Coordinating Committee Report
The HECC has completed its report to the Legislature which was due at the end of December. The 71 page report is available in its entirety at: http://floridahighereducation.org/_doc/HECC-FINAL-REPORT-12-14-11.pdf

The HECC was charged by the Legislature with making recommendations regarding:

- The primary core mission of public and nonpublic postsecondary education institutions in the context of access demands and economic development goals
- Performance outputs and outcomes designed to meet annual and long term goals relating to access, preparedness, retention, transfer and completion
- Articulation policies and practices to ensure that cost benefits are maximized
• Aligning school system and FCS workforce programs to achieve maximum cost efficiency.

Recommendations that the HECC highlighted in its summary include:
• All educational sectors should be charged with setting goals for increased degree completion, with a particular emphasis on STEM degree production. Incentives should be provided to encourage STEM education.
• The Legislature should align financial aid and grant programs to encourage and accelerate access, graduation, and time-to-degree. The grants should be available for summer sessions.
• A new funding formula for the State University System and the Florida College System needs to be examined based on performance-based accountability.

The report recommendations are aimed at the SUS, the Board of Education, or the Florida Legislature, depending which has authority to implement each recommendation. Legislative leaders have not yet reacted to the report, but some of the recommendations are expected to be included in legislative proposals focused on higher education that are in the drafting stage.

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All issues of the HCC Legislative Report will be posted to this page. And links are provided to web sites for Florida’s Governor, Senate and House where much useful and interesting information is available about state government.

If you have questions about these or other legislative issues, please call or email Sally Everett, Director of Community and Government Relations, at 813-253-7560 or severett8@hccfl.edu. Please visit the Government Relations web page at: http://hccfl.edu/departments/government-affairs.aspx