Changes to General Education and College Performance

House Education Committee Chairman Bill Proctor (R-St. Augustine) introduced legislation late last week that will shake up the teaching of General Education at both Florida’s community colleges and public universities.

The bill (HB 7135) reduces general education requirements from 36 credits to 30, and calls for a committee of college and university faculty to develop a core of 5 courses that all students must take within the 30 credits. Proctor’s rationale for the reduction in gen ed credits is that SACS requires only 30. It also calls for the 2 year foreign language requirement to be fulfilled within the 2-year Associates degree program. These provisions would become effective with the 2014-15 academic year.

The bill also sets performance metrics for colleges; defines STEM programs and occupations; gives the State Board of Education some oversight on college presidential evaluations; and calls for a FCS strategic Plan that incorporates the specific missions of each college.

Other sections of the legislation clarify the charge of the Higher Education Coordinating Council; eliminates the flexibility of colleges offering baccalaureate degrees to establish new 4-year programs without SBE approval.

Proctor, long involved in higher education leadership, is leaving the House after 8 years because of term limits, and this legislation is expected to pass easily in deference to him.

The bill is one of two introduced by the House Education Committee following the opening day remarks of Speaker Dean Cannon to delve into improving instruction and management of the state’s public higher education institutions. He said, “We have a higher education system with no clear mission, universities pursuing overlapping agendas despite limited public resources, and our community colleges rapidly transforming themselves into four-year degree institutions."

Proctor’s other legislative proposal (HB 7129) designates universities of academic and research excellence – with standards that both Florida State University and the University of Florida meet.

Se. Don Gaetz, the incoming Senate President, introduced legislation (SB 1366), with intent similar to Proctor’s regarding performance metrics and STEM. That legislation has been amended to mirror the Proctor bill.

The Florida College System Council of Presidents and lobbyists provided a list of concerns and questions to Rep. Proctor, and some changes were made in the revised version of the bill to address those. We continue to review the revised draft and will continue to communicate issues we see with the proposal. However, it is expected to easily pass both chambers.
Text of the both proposals can be seen on the HCC Community and Government Relations web page.

**Budget Negotiations Begin**

House and Senate budget conferees began to meet yesterday to iron out differences between the House’s $69.2 billion budget and the Senate’s $70.8 billion version.

The amount of funds dedicated to the Higher Education section of the budget was one of the sticking points that delayed the start of negotiations. The agreed upon amount - $2.933 billion – will be shared by the university and college systems.

An agreement must be reached by next Tuesday in order for the Legislature to adjourn the session on schedule on Friday, March 9.

**In-State Tuition Proposals**

A bill that would have let certain illegal immigrants pay in-state tuition at Florida colleges and universities has been defeated. The Senate Judiciary Committee voted it down last week largely along party lines.

The bill (SB 106) would have affected students who graduate from a Florida high school they've attended for at least three years regardless of immigration status.

Another bill that (SB 1018) would have allowed in-state tuition for U.S.-born children of illegal immigrants was defeated in another Senate committee earlier in the session.

**Community and Government Relations Web Page**

Please visit and bookmark this new web page, http://hccfl.edu/departments/government-affairs.aspx . It is an evolving one-stop source for info related to local, state and federal governments.

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