

Online Registration Workgroup

Final Report

Submitted in Fulfillment of the requirements contained in Section 1 of CS/HB 7121.

February 2010

Executive Summary

Charge: The 2009 Legislature established the Florida Distance Learning Consortium and provided it with a series of responsibilities and specific study assignments. Among those was a specific assignment to continue the work of the Florida Distance Learning Task Force in the development of a plan for an online registration process for students utilizing the Florida Higher Education Online Catalog. The charge is as follows:

Develop in consultation with the Florida College System and the State University System, a plan to be submitted to the Board of Governors, the State Board of Education, the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives no later than March 1, 2010. The plan must address the implementation of a streamlined, online registration process for undergraduate students who have been admitted to a public postsecondary educational institution and who wish to enroll in a course listed in the Florida Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog, including courses offered by an institution that is not the student's degree-granting or home institution. The plan must describe how such a registration process can be implemented as an alternative to the standard registration process of each institution. The plan must also address:

- 1. Fiscal and substantive policy changes needed to address administrative, academic and programmatic policies and procedures.*
- 2. A method for the expedited transfer of the distance learning course credit awarded by the institution offering a distance learning course to a student's degree-granting or home institution upon the student's successful completion of the distance learning course.*
- 3. Compliance with applicable technology security standards and guidelines to ensure the secure transmission of student information.*

To assist in the completion of the assignment, the Consortium with the assistance of the Board of Governors and Division of Florida Colleges assembled a 13 member workgroup consisting of college and university staff members with expertise in academic affairs, admissions and registration, student services and distance learning. In addition, the workgroup received support from the Florida Center for Academic Advising and Services (FCAAS) that oversees the operation of the Florida Advising and Counseling Tracking System (FACTS). The workgroup had 5 meetings via web-conference and one face to face meeting in Tallahassee to review the work of the Florida Distance Learning Task Force, the development of similar systems in other states, the existing technical infrastructure for transient student admissions/registration and the identified policy issues involved in the development of an automated, streamlined registration process.

In the development of this plan for a streamlined, automated registration process for distance learning students, the Online Registration Workgroup is recommending an approach based upon the transient student admissions system available through FACTS. The proposed plan is designed to take advantage of and improve upon existing technical and policy infrastructure. The solution presented is significant initial step in the development an automated, streamlined process with opportunities to expand and improve with testing and feedback from participating institutions and students. While some funding support will be essential to adapt and modernize the Florida Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog, the process described is based upon existing systems and policy agreements and therefore extensive development should not be necessary to begin a pilot implementation.

In the course of the development of the proposed plan, the Workgroup identified a range of policy and infrastructure “gap” issues. Where possible, the Workgroup has provided recommended strategies or solutions for consideration. However, some of the issues and concepts discussed are complex and they will require further study and discussion among institutional representatives and governing authorities before an appropriate strategy can be recommended. In some cases, depending upon the nature of the issue, state or federal legislation may be involved as a part of the solution. As a result, those complex areas have been identified for further exploration as the proposed plan is implemented. Overall, most of the items identified for further study can be viewed within the broad need for an overarching, policy-based framework to provide guidance when multiple institutions are involved in the instruction of a student within a given period.

The Workgroup’s final report and plan for a streamlined, automated online registration process from the Florida Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog is based upon the existing transient student admissions process within FACTS coupled with the following recommendations.

Recommendation 1: The Workgroup supports the funding request to modernize and adapt the Florida Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog consistent with the required functions described in statute and this plan. The projected cost is \$89,500.

Recommendation 2: The Workgroup recommends that the Board of Governors and the Division of Florida Colleges work with their respective institutions toward the renewal of institutional commitments to accept the transient form as a substitute for additional formal admission documents for “qualified students” already enrolled in a Florida public postsecondary institution.

Recommendation 3: The Workgroup recommends that the FACTS transient student automated form be re-titled as an admissions process form and further modified to include any additional information required by institutions to make admissions decisions.

Recommendation 4: The Workgroup recommends that the Board of Governors and the Division of Florida Colleges work with their respective institutions to review the nature of the application/admissions fees charged to students during the transient admissions process and develop substantive policy to guide their use. At a minimum, the Workgroup believes that a student should pay an application/admissions fee only once to the “home” institution and only once to any college or university to which they apply as a transient student. Where additional application/admissions fees are required, they should be clearly listed within the Florida Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog for student consideration.

Recommendation 5: The Workgroup recommends that transient admissions form utilization and the possible impact of increased institution workload on student request processing time should be monitored by the Florida Distance Learning Consortium and FACTS as the plan is implemented. Should the processing time for student transient admissions requests increase significantly, FACTS and the Florida Distance Learning Consortium can provide additional information to participating students on processing time periods.

Recommendation 6: The technical specifications for the integration of the transient admissions form with existing campus based systems should be reviewed by the institution representatives for additional input as to the feasibility and pilot testing of the planned process and should include the logistics of local system integration.

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Introduction

The academic integrity of any postsecondary institution depends upon its ability to certify the awarding of academic credentials to students who have completed the required courses and or programs. The first step in that process begins with admission to the institution and it is continued every semester as the student registers for classes and continues progress towards a degree or credential. Each semester over a million college and university students are enrolled for classes offered by Florida public postsecondary institutions. Of that number during the Fall term, approximately 30 percent are new students that have applied for admission, been accepted, and then enroll for classes. The process can be very labor intensive on the part of both the student and institution in completing forms, submitting certified copies of credentials, verifying such things as immunization history and residency status, and authorizing financial aid. Admission and registration processes are also submerged in a climate of state and federal regulation that includes privacy issues, evidence of good academic standing for financial aid purposes, and a range of tuition and fee requirements.

Although complex, the admissions and registration process has been simplified to some degree in recent years. More of the required forms have been made available electronically, admissions and registration processes have become more automated and web-based, and the transmission and processing time for most documents has been greatly improved. Most of these efficiency improvements are credited to institutional registrars who have made effective use of technological advances wherever possible. However, progress has not been simple. The same advances in technology that provide for the ability to widely share information and simplify what have been paper driven processes can also provide risks to the security of sensitive records and the integrity of credentialing processes. As a result, educational institutions have cautiously moved forward with web-based admissions and registration procedures.

The modern internet is a vast collection of information databases and commercial computer-based interfaces that allow the average person to conduct the majority of their personal and business interactions from almost any location on their own schedule. As the Internet has grown in its capability, the reach of web-based services has penetrated general society such that most people cannot imagine life without the convenience it offers. Similarly, educational institutions both in terms of instruction and the delivery of support services, have embraced the Internet as another pathway to serve former, current, and potential students. Generally student interactions with educational institutions have become increasingly web-based. Distance learning instruction in Florida's public postsecondary institutions now accounts for approximately 25% of all instruction. While students have become more mobile in seeking courses and programs, approximately 80 percent of distance learning students are also enrolled in regular classroom based courses. Technology-based instructional delivery has provided local and remote students with courses and programs that more readily adapt to their complicated schedules.

As instructional activity has changed to include more technological delivery, so have support services. Today students can access a range of services and information over the Internet from library resources, information about financial aid, tutoring sessions and remote testing from almost any location. Students register for classes over the Internet each semester through processes that have been in place at most institutions for many years. Some of the first activities in this area involved telephone registration systems that gradually moved to the web as the Internet spread and access to broadband services became more ubiquitous.

For most students, accessing courses, support services and institution information systems has become a basic expectation. While web-based transactions with students are not uncommon, managing such academic and business transactions with students enrolled in multiple institutions are of a distinct and complex nature. Once a student enrolled at one institution (home institution) seeks to enroll in a class at another (offering institution), all of the information including academic history, residency, financial aid status, immunization, etc. must be verified by the offering institution before any decisions about admission and registration can be made. The barriers placed around such activities were created to ensure the integrity of the academic credentialing process and compliance with federal and state law. In approaching this assigned task, the workgroup first sought to define the policy and technical environment in which such a streamlined, automated process would have to function.

I. Concept Overview

In fulfilling the Legislative assignment, the workgroup adopted some basic assumptions that guided the development of the recommended process. The assumptions are based upon the knowledge of the workgroup members, success or failure of similar systems/initiatives, and knowledge of Florida's higher education system and governance structure. Any system that links the resources of multiple institutions must accommodate the necessity for individual institutional control of enrollment, curricula, and degree programs. Such control is required for compliance with regional and professional accreditation standards (from agencies such as the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools [SACS]), federal financial aid guidelines, and Florida statutory authorization. In addition, the necessary controls must exist to ensure that participating institutions will be able to fully comply with the requirements imposed by state and federal law on student records and procedures. The following basic assumptions were adopted by the workgroup:

- The process will be designed to facilitate the transient student admissions process.
- Academic policies and admissions/enrollment decisions of the student's home institution and those of the offering institution will be respected.
- The transient admissions process is an alternative to the traditional admissions process that is intended to simplify some aspects and provide better communication and information for the student and the institution.
- The process will be primarily designed in its initial phase for currently enrolled, qualified students.
- Students wishing to register for a course listed in the Florida Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog will complete an automated transient student form and "request a seat in the course". Actual approval and enrollment will depend upon:
 - The student completing the necessary process.
 - Approval by the student's home or degree-granting institution.
 - Assurance that the student has or can meet the requirements for enrollment in the course in terms of prerequisites, grade-point average, etc.
 - The selected course or courses will apply to the student's degree program
 - Availability of space in the course.
 - Payment of the required tuition and fees.
- Any process created for distance learning transient students should not provide any unnecessary advantage over regular students in the course registration process.
- Although a course is listed in the Florida Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog, space for transient students may not be available. Public postsecondary education institutions must list all distance learning courses for which a distance learning fee is charged in the Florida Higher Education

Distance Learning Catalog as is required by s. 1004.09 F.S. As has been previously noted, demand for distance learning course sections is high and in many cases that demand outpaces student requests. Space in distance learning courses is treated much the same as other course enrollments that are in high demand. Course registration priorities for the available seats have been created for resident students, students accepted to certain degree programs or students with high need such as graduating seniors. As a result, although Florida postsecondary institutions have complied and listed all distance learning course sections for which a distance learning fee is charged, actual space for transient students is not available in all course sections listed in the catalog.

- The Florida Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog does not currently have the capability to identify or project student demand for specific distance learning courses. Analysis of the statistics and traffic patterns currently collected by the website may offer useful information in the future.

The workgroup explored a range of approaches that could be used to create the online registration system described in the assignment including those under development in other states. During the course of evaluating the options, the workgroup also discussed the capabilities of campus based information systems, the existing policy environment and the processes used to admit and register students at Florida colleges and universities.

Transient Students

Students who are enrolled and pursuing the majority of their educational program at an institution and want to take a course, face-to-face or via distance learning, at another institution are called transient students. The typical transient student in Florida is a university student that seeks to enroll in a course at a Florida college while home for the summer. Addressing the on-line registration of distance learning students is a two-part process involving first the evaluation of a student's credentials for admission to an institution and then the advising and registration of that student for a course or courses in pursuit of a degree. To enroll in a course as a transient, the student would go through the standard admissions process, take the course, then present the transcript to their regular institution for inclusion of the credit. In the past, the transient student would be faced with a difficult and time-consuming admissions process. In addition, many students would not clear a targeted course with their advisor at their degree-granting institution so that sometimes credit might not be recognized for their particular degree program.

Prior to 2003, the transient process was handled through a paper form. With the advent of FACTS.org in 2000, the college and university registrars requested that an electronic transient system be created that provided for an administrative flow on the front end to facilitate approval at the home institution and a process that would allow the information to pass electronically to the offering institution's system. Such a system would include the necessary checks and balances so that adequate

advising of students could take place and, at the same time, the paperwork burden on both the student and the institutions would be reduced.

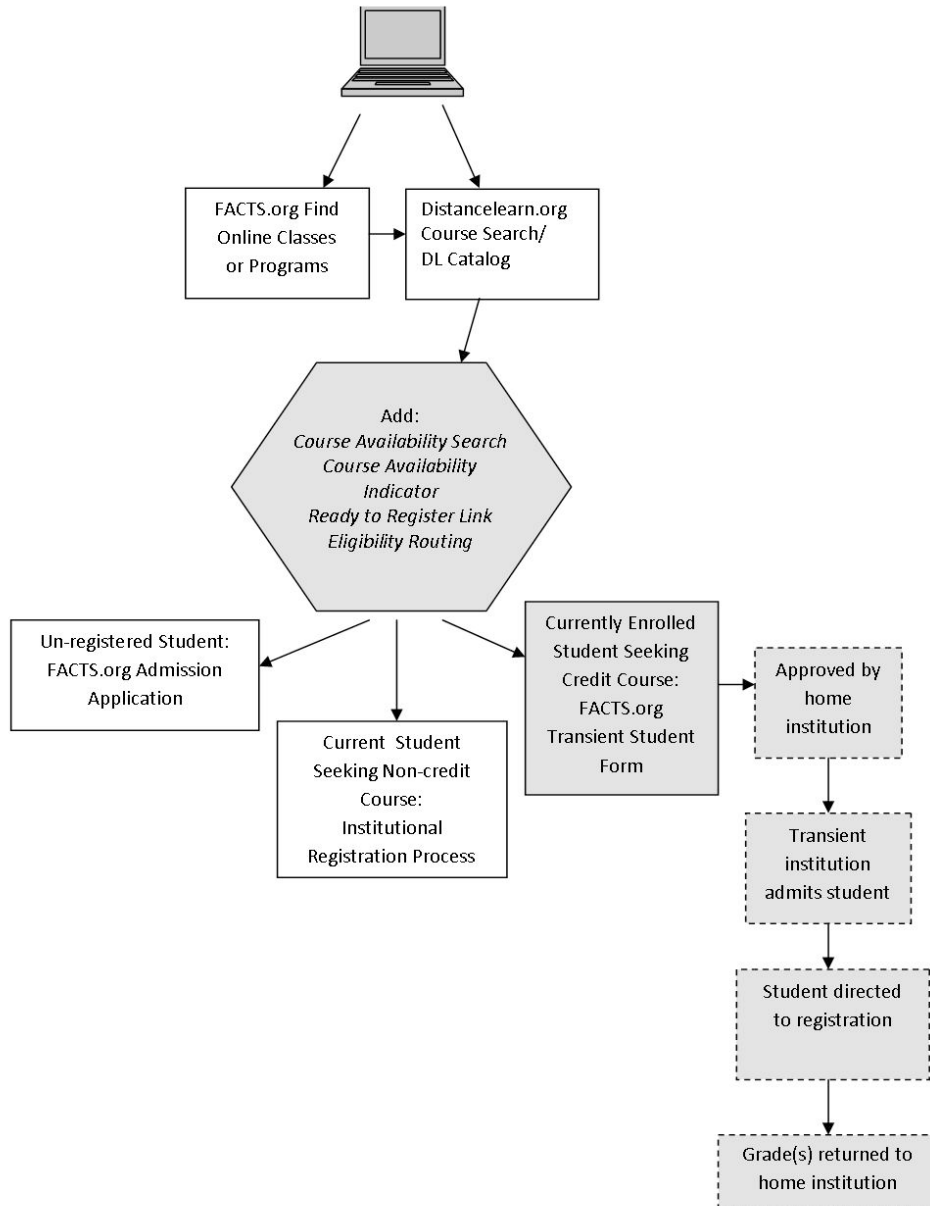
Working with the institutional registrars, FACTS implemented an automated transient form in 2003. As a part of this two-way system, colleges and universities could send transient forms on behalf of their students and receive forms from other institutions whose students were requesting enrollment. While the institutions could elect to send forms on behalf of their students to other institutions, all institutions were required to receive and process them. By 2005, nearly 100% of the institutions were “receiving” the form. Today, only three institutions of the 39 public institutions do not “send” the transient form and of those three only one does not send or receive the form. (New College is not included in this report.) Since its implementation in 2003, the number of transient forms sent through the system has grown 92% from 3,393 to 43,122 in 08-09. In 2008-2009, the Florida College System “sent” 10,266 transient forms and “received” 39,076. During the same period, Florida universities sent 32,856 transient forms and received 4,046, confirming that the bulk of the transient students are still typically public university students seeking to enroll in a course at a Florida college.

After consideration of the options for the development of a streamlined, automated registration process, the workgroup elected to base its plan upon the transient student admissions process available through the FACTS system. There were several key reasons for this approach.

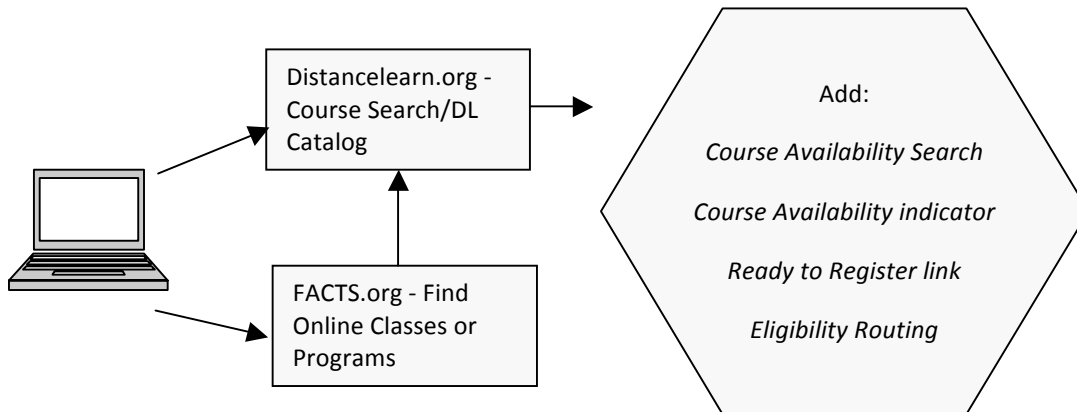
1. Inter-institutional policies have already been established. The transient form process is based upon established and accepted policy protocols.
2. Major system components are already in place. The transient system already exists and would only need minor adaptation to serve the needs of distance learning students.
3. Creation of a “new” process to link all existing campus-based systems would involve considerable cost and time to link the wide variety of institution registration systems and establish the policies and workflows necessary.
4. The existing infrastructure is secure. The transient registration process was created within a “trusted network” infrastructure and adheres to established enterprise information security protocols.
5. The existing process is not overly complex for students if the steps are properly followed. The transient student admissions process is based upon a short automated form that is processed through existing institutional workflows.
6. Frameworks exist to address the complex processing issues involved. All critical admissions and registration policy issues can be controlled and addressed within the existing framework using academic advisors and registrar’s office personnel as needed.
7. The FCAAS staff that operates FACTS has assured the Workgroup that further adaptations to the transient form and process can be made with the assistance of the institutions involved.

The following sections detail a streamlined, automated registration process based upon the existing transient admissions process within the FACTS system. Minor revisions have been made to ensure the process will work with distance learning students and several policy issues that were also discovered during the plans creation are illuminated and addressed. The following sections describe the actual process that is outlined completely in Diagram 1.

Diagram 1
Proposed Online Admissions/ Registration Process



II. Proposed Plan for a Streamlined Admissions and Registration Process



A. Catalog Search and Registration Process Activation

Students will visit the Florida Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog site and search for courses and degree programs using its various search parameters and filters. Students may access the catalog by going directly to the site or through links that exist within institutions and state agency sites including FACTS.org. Several critical modifications will be necessary for the catalog search functions to enable the planned registration process. All involve providing the student with simplified search capabilities and more in-depth information about course offerings and their availability to transient students. The following specific modifications and functions are envisioned.

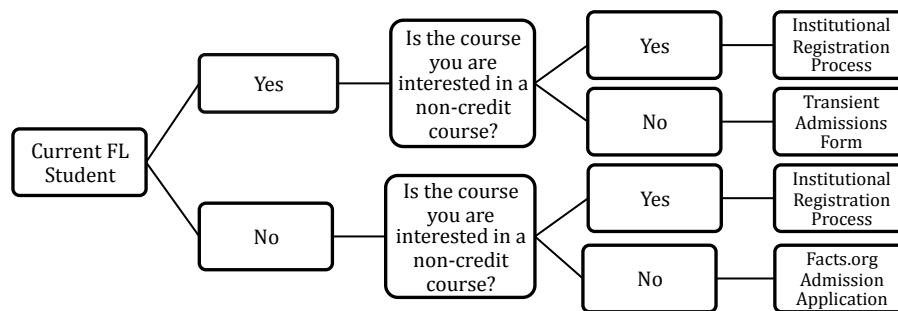
1. Search functions will be further enhanced to allow students to limit search results to only those courses where seats have identified as potentially available to transient students.
2. There will be a need for a course availability status indicator and a “Register” button for each course listing returned as a result of student searches. Each course listing would include information on any restrictions on availability of seats and any additional campus registration procedures including a timeline:
 - a. **Restricted Availability** – Course enrollment restricted to students enrolled at the offering institution,
 - b. **Limited Availability** – Limited seats available for students meeting certain criteria such as those accepted to a specific degree program, or
 - c. **Open Availability** - Open to all students (including transient students) until class size limits are reached.
3. Although the online registration process has been designed, at least initially, to serve currently enrolled, qualified students, the workgroup is aware that there will be a high level of interest in the process by all types of students and prospective students. As a result, the distance learning catalog will need

additional capability to route students to the proper admissions/enrollment path depending upon their specific status.

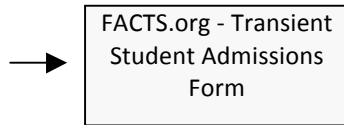
4. Once a student has decided upon a course section and elected to begin the registration process by clicking the “Register” button, the distance learning catalog will prompt the student with a series of questions to determine the correct admissions/enrollment path. The workgroup recommends that the following prompt be used to determine an enrollment path for each student.
 - a. Are you a current Florida student who wants to take a course form another college or university for the purposes of earning a degree?
 - i. If the answer were **yes**, the student would be directed to the transient admissions form online process.
 - ii. If the answer is **no**, the student would need to apply for admission via the facts.org common admissions application.
 - b. For non-credit courses listed in the distance learning catalog, students would be directed to a specific registration process provided by the offering institution.

Additional information links with each prompt will provide examples scenarios and further clarification for students attempting to navigate the system. The following diagram illustrates how such a decision tree might work to route students for enrollment processing from the online catalog.

Diagram 2
Proposed Student Admissions/ Enrollment Path
Florida Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog



The classification scheme depicted above is a high level approach to what can be a very complicated process. An expansive list of categories might apply given a students particular situation, however the length and complexity of such a list precludes attempting to apply such a function at the catalog level. The eligible to enroll/not enroll prompt provides for the effective initial routing of students that is appropriate for the catalog. Additional information links will be offered that explain the prompt and offer advice to the student to pursue further clarification from the home or offering institution if they are in question about their individual response to the prompt.

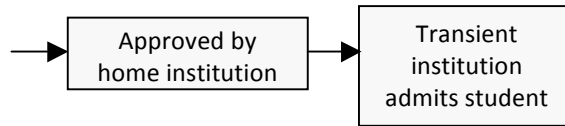


B. Transient Student Admissions Form Submission (Degree-seeking student)

For those currently enrolled or eligible to enroll (qualified students), the established transient admissions process can be utilized to facilitate admission to the offering institution and subsequent registration in a course section listed in the Florida Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog. Upon review, the Workgroup believes that the existing transient process provides the necessary safeguards to both the student and the institution without being unnecessarily burdensome. The approval of the home or degree granting institution is a critical step for two substantive reasons. Most importantly, the pre-approval of the student's degree granting institution assures that the student is selecting a course or courses that will contribute toward a degree, reduces the likelihood of earning excess credit hours, and it protects the student and the institution by documenting the terms of the agreement to proceed. Secondly, the home institution registrar provides critical certifications necessary for the smooth acceptance and processing at the offering institution. This pre-approval sequence is the key component of the transient admissions process.

The transient admissions process involves the following basic steps.

1. Students seeking to enroll will activate a link at the course level within the distance learning catalog that passes them over to the transient student admissions form housed within the FACTS system. The processing of the students request for enrollment in courses listed within the online catalog would take place within the existing FACTS transient system.
2. Because a students eligibility for enrollment can be determined by a wide range of factors each semester such as residency, academic standing or financial aid status, students would need to complete a new transient admissions form each time they wish to take a course from a remote institution in order to maintain the integrity of the process and insure students are eligible at the time the enrollment request is made. While this may seem burdensome, the form is very short and simple to complete and the workgroup believes that this approach is the most feasible route to a cost effective and secure process.

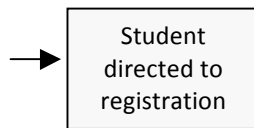


C. Home Institution Approval/Offering Institution Approval

Institutions determine the workflow for the transient admissions form and how many levels or “agents” are required to sign off on the form before final approval at each institution can be given. The process is not standard across the institutions but the workgroups’ review of the established institutional workflows suggests that despite the existence of some variations, the existing processes are relatively efficient and they exist within established admissions frameworks within each institution. A recent survey conducted by FACTS indicates that the average processing time for a transient form is 6.85 days, with the median being 4.61 days.

1. Specifically, the next steps in the transient admissions process involve an automated series of transactions between the student, the student’s home institution and the course offering institution to determine if:
 - a. The requested course will be accepted by the student’s degree program
 - b. The student possesses all of the necessary prerequisites to enroll for the requested course, and
 - c. The student meets all of the general requirements such as residency, immunization and good academic standing for enrollment at the offering institution.
2. A review of the current transient form workflows established by colleges and universities through FACTS suggests that processing at the home institution requires from 2-3 agents. Once the student’s home institution has approved the request, processing/approval at the offering institution typically requires only the involvement of the Registrar’s office. The typical wait time from start to finish for a final approval for registration is reasonable and students can follow the progress of their requests at any point in the process. (The transient admissions form institutional workflows are depicted in Appendix A.)
3. Students may discuss the transient admissions process and request with their program advisor and in such cases the student will be apprised of any concerns or restrictions upon their choices from the degree granting department’s perspective. Other advising related issues such as prerequisites or minimum grade point average criteria may also be discussed. Due to limited availability of some courses and modes of delivery, the student and advisor may discuss approvals for more than one course as an optional selection should space be unavailable in a targeted course during the registration process.

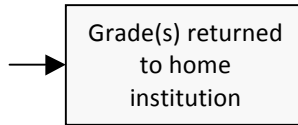
4. If after review of the student's transient admissions form submission and/or other records a determination is made that the enrollment request should be denied, the student would receive an email notification of the status of the request and a reason for the denial. A transient admissions form might be denied because the student's eligibility for enrollment is in question, the requested course did not meet the requirements of the degree-granting institution or the offering institution did not accept the student's request for the course. The student would be free to follow-up as appropriate to further pursue their eligibility, the applicability of the course or select another institution or course from the listings in the distance learning catalog.
5. Once students are approved to take a course at a remote institution, they are allowed to participate in the remote institutions' registration system with all applicable policies applied. While some institutions may require submission of additional forms or information, in most cases, the student is approved for registration.



D. Student Registration

Given the many issues that surround the registration procedures within colleges and universities in Florida, the workgroup proposes that at a minimum, transient students that have been approved for registration should receive clear and timely information concerning the final steps in the registration process and their specific responsibilities in its completion. The following procedure is proposed.

1. The approval of the transient admissions form and request for a seat in a course comes in the form of an email notification with specific instructions for participation in the offering institutions registration process. At a minimum, once the transient admissions request has been approved, the student should receive timely notification of the approval and clear instructions through email as to:
 - a. The approval status of the request, including the course and section information
 - b. Any additional documents or completed forms required with a deadline for their submission
 - c. The process necessary to complete the registration for the course including dates and times for any restrictions
 - d. The amount and nature of tuition and fees required
 - e. Contact information for further information or questions.



E. Returning Grades to the Home Institution

The Florida Automated System for Transferring Educational Records (FASTER) is used to transfer student grade information for transient and regular students among Florida institutions. While the network and capability exist, the automatic electronic transfer of transient student grades back to the home institution varies in actual practice. Some institutions transfer the grades at the conclusion of a semester, while others wait for a request either from the student or the home institution to act. In some cases, students will make the transfer request either electronically or for certified documentation in the form of a transcript for which a fee is usually charged. Section 1009.23 (12)(a) and Section 1009.24 (13)(r) F.S. authorize the colleges and universities respectively to charge a fee for providing certified copies of a transcript or diploma. Some institutions do not have procedures in place to track transient students as a group once they have been approved and authorized for registration and as a result cannot easily automatically return grades at the end of a semester to the home institution. The capabilities of information systems at the campus level for the automatic return of grades to the home institution appear to be unevenly distributed among postsecondary institutions as well. As a result, a request by either the student or the home institution for a report is often required for the completion of the process.

The FASTER data network has existed since 1989 and all postsecondary institutions readily use it. Further, the electronic return of student grades using the system should not necessitate the payment of an additional fee whether the report is automatic or the result of an event such as a request by the home institution as a follow up on a transient student. The Workgroup, recognizing the variability of the systems involved, suggests the following approach.

1. Transient student transfer credit hours and grades should be returned to the home institution electronically using the FASTER network. Reports can be delivered, depending upon the infrastructure and policies of the institutions involved, as the result of:
 - a. A request from the students home institution for a report of the credit hours and grade earned
 - b. A request from the student to transmit the report
2. Should the student request a certified copy of the report, an additional fee could apply for such a service and is allowed by statute.

Student grades for transient students could be automatically returned to the home institution through prior request and authorization included as a part of the initial transient admissions form request. FACTS is reviewing the process to determine if

adjustments to the form will aid in further automating the return of grades to the home institution.

F. Pilot Testing

The proposed plan is designed to take advantage of and improve upon existing technical and policy infrastructure. The solution presented is an initial step in the development of an automated, streamlined registration process with opportunities to expand and improve with testing and feedback from participating institutions and students. Since the process described is based upon existing systems and policy agreements already in use, extensive development should not be necessary to begin testing the process. Initial implementation of a pilot test with a selected range of courses and institutions can be done within the next year; assuming modifications to the systems described in previous sections of this report can be made. Three areas of work would be required.

- Modernization and adjustments to the distance learning catalog to include refreshing the catalog code base, adding fields for course section availability indicators as described and providing for a “registration” link with directed paths depending upon student eligibility.
- Re-programming of the FACTS transient admissions form to include any needed data elements for admissions, grade return or campus systems integration.
- Coordination and consultation with participating institutions to develop the course sections, availability indicators, and links to critical institution web pages and additional advice and assistance in the future development of the process.

Continued exploration and development of the policy and infrastructure issues outlined will be required as the test of the initial process is implemented. Because of the lack of substantive policy in several key areas, the variability in campus based policy and infrastructure and the variety of student issues that cannot reasonably be predicted, the Workgroup recommends an incremental and structured approach to implementation.

The following timeline represents a reasonable approach to the implementation of pilot testing of the process.

- **April/May 2010** – Workgroup continues discussions on policy and procedure issues for pilot testing. Coordination of discussion groups with Board of Governors and Division of Florida Colleges activities. Pilot institutions identified.

- **April/May 2010** – Coordination with FACTS to determine need for modifications to the existing transient policies, procedures and infrastructure.
- **June 2010** – Final call for participation for pilot testing streamlined transient admissions process.
- **June/July 2010** – Catalog revisions modifications/improvements identified.
- **July 2010** – Distance Learning Catalog revisions and modernization begin.
- **July/August 2010** – Catalog course listing specifications developed for pilot sections with participating institutions
- **October/November 2010** – Catalog Course Load and Testing
- **December 2010** – Soft launch testing of 5 course sections
- **January/February 2011** – Evaluation of initial testing.
- **March/April 2011** – Implementation of larger scale pilot testing with adjustments based upon initial testing.
- **May-August 2011** – Evaluation and adjustments
- **Fall 2011** – Phase II implementation – Expanded course selection and institution involvement.

III. Enabling Recommendations

In the development of this plan for a streamlined, automated registration process for distance learning students, the Online Registration Workgroup is recommending an approach based upon the transient student admissions process available through FACTS. In the course of its study the Workgroup identified policy and infrastructure “gap” issues. Where possible the Workgroup has provided recommended strategies or solutions for consideration. However, some of the issues and concepts discussed will require further study and discussion among institutional representatives and governing authorities before an appropriate strategy can be recommended. In some cases, depending upon the nature of the issue, state or federal legislation may be involved as a part of the solution. As a result, those areas have been identified for further exploration as the proposed plan is implemented.

Distance Learning Catalog Modernization

The Florida Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog, formally established in statute by the 2008 Legislature and operated by the Florida Distance Learning Consortium since 1997, is in need of modernization. Since its formal establishment, the Florida Higher Education Catalog has been under strain. Institutional course listings have increased by 38 percent in one year and new data reporting responsibilities have been assigned. The catalog application is in need of code revision and additional features for administration, data reporting and bulk uploading and testing for course listings are required. Further, the proposed registration process described in this report will also require additional modifications to the application. As a result, revisions to the catalog application are essential for overall stability and to meet the additional demands placed upon it by both legislative reporting requirements and the modifications described in this proposed plan.

Recommendation 1: The Workgroup supports the funding request to modernize and adapt the Florida Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog consistent with the required functions described in statute and this plan. The projected cost is \$89,500.

Admissions Policy, Procedures and Fees

Variations in practice among Florida colleges and universities concerning both admissions policy and procedures were identified and they received considerable discussion and review by the workgroup. The following significant policy and process issues and recommendations were identified.

The workgroup was provided with survey information from the Division of Florida Colleges and the Board of Governors that indicated some institutions require transient students to complete additional admission forms as a part of the approval process. A recent survey found that of the 10 Universities reporting, three require an additional application besides the transient form and 2 charge an additional fee.

Of the 28 colleges, 22 require an additional application and 19 of the 28 charge an admissions fee. (A summary of the survey responses is contained in Appendix B.) As a result, additional processing time may be required at those institutions for registration approval. Despite previous efforts to obtain a consistent approach, the increased processing time required due to the reported variations in procedures were a concern for the Workgroup. Through further discussion, the Workgroup was able to determine the primary reasons for the additional requirement.

- There is additional information that the institution needs for its student records that is not contained within the current transient admissions form.
- The local institution's admissions procedures and documents are a part of the established process all students follow and they provide necessary triggers for institutional action on behalf of the student. The transient admissions form has not been integrated with the local system.
- The campus admissions form provides substantive documentation for the assessment of an application/admissions fee.

In the development of the transient admission form, FACTS coordinated efforts to identify and include the essential student information necessary for admissions decisions in the original form. In 2007, the FACTS transient form was modified to include three additional data elements that would further negate the need for an additional admissions application. Upon review of the current transient admissions form, the workgroup believes that any additional necessary data elements not present can be incorporated in the current form without any significant disruption to the system. The FCAAS staff that operates FACTS has assured the Workgroup that further adaptations can be made with the assistance of the institutions involved to ensure any missing data elements are added as required.

Recommendation 2: The Workgroup recommends that the Board of Governors and the Division of Florida Colleges work with their respective institutions toward the renewal of institutional commitments to accept the transient form as a substitute for additional formal admission documents for “qualified students” already enrolled in a Florida public postsecondary institution.

Survey information from the Division of Florida Colleges and the Board of Governors also indicated some institutions require transient students to pay an additional admission or application fee as a part of the approval process. Section 1009.23(12)(a) F.S. and Section 1009.24(13)(a) F.S. authorize Florida colleges and universities respectively to assess fees for applications for admission. Institutions that may assess a fee for transient student applications for admissions to enroll in a course may require the local institutions application form as documentation for the assessment of such fees. The FACTS transient student form is not currently referred to as an “admissions” form. The workgroup believes that restating and emphasizing the transient process and form as a “transient admissions process” and “transient admissions form” will clarify the nature of the process and further alleviate any

need for additional documentation required for the assessments of fees as authorized in statute thus easing the additional paperwork and processing burden on institutions and students.

Recommendation 3: The Workgroup recommends that the FACTS transient student automated form be re-titled as an admissions process form and further modified to include any additional information required by institutions to make admissions decisions.

Florida Statutes provide authority for public postsecondary colleges and universities, respectively, to charge a fee for the processing of admissions forms. The workgroup is aware that in instances where such fees are charged they are an authorized and critical part of the funding for the Office of the Registrar and may directly support staff positions dedicated to the processing of transient student admissions. In some instances such additional fees may be problematic for students. Students filing more than one transient form during a semester might pay multiple admissions fees. Similarly, students returning to an institution for another course as a transient student at some later date would be “known” or they would have established student records and an additional admissions fee would seem illogical. At present, there is no standard substantive policy in such instances to guide the logical assessment of such fees within the transient admissions process. In light of these issues, the workgroup believes the following options should be considered.

Recommendation 4: The Workgroup recommends that the Board of Governors and the Division of Florida Colleges work with their respective institutions to review the nature of the application/admissions fees charged to students during the transient admissions process and develop substantive policy to guide their use. At a minimum, the Workgroup believes that a student should pay an application/admissions fee only once to the “home” institution and only once to any college or university to which they apply as a transient student. Where additional application/admissions fees are required, they should be clearly listed within the Florida Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog for student consideration.

Integration of the transient admission form into existing institutional systems is a more difficult issue since local systems vary in their internal procedures and technical infrastructure. As a consequence, some institutions have elected to have transient students complete a local, additional admissions application, so that the necessary information could be easily processed by their existing student information systems. Currently the processing of approved transient admissions forms for registration is not fully automated. Additionally, on many campuses the information systems used for admissions and registration are completely separate technical environments. Each approved transient admissions form must be processed by a staff member for registration authorization to occur. The student's

information and authorization for registration must be entered into the institutions' information system and specific instructions must be provided to the student. The Workgroup considered centralized approaches to further automating this process but the current technical variations in institutional systems and workflows would make the scale of such a project prohibitive in terms of time and cost. The integration or optimization of campus-based admissions and registrations systems is an area best left to local institutions. However, the Workgroup is concerned that utilization of the FACTS transient admissions process will significantly increase once links for "registration" are placed within the distance learning catalog. In some cases, institutions may see dramatic increases in student transient form requests and thereby experience an increased workload. As a result, the processing period of student transient admissions requests may be lengthened. While technical documentation in support of the integration of campus-based information systems with the transient admissions process has been developed by FACTS, further attention to the standardization and automation of the transient admissions process with campus-based systems should receive additional discussion in preparation for scaling the system consistent with student demand and the potential impact on institutional workload.

Recommendation 5: The Workgroup recommends that transient admissions form utilization and the possible impact of increased institution workload on student request processing time should be monitored by the Florida Distance Learning Consortium and FACTS as the plan is implemented. Should the processing time for student transient admissions requests increase significantly, FACTS and the Florida Distance Learning Consortium can provide additional information to participating students on processing time periods.

Recommendation 6: The technical specifications for the integration of the transient admissions form with existing campus based systems should be reviewed by the institution representatives for additional input as to the feasibility and pilot testing of the planned process and should include the logistics of local system integration.

IV. Areas for Further Development

During the course of developing the plan for a streamlined registration process, the workgroup identified areas for further study and development. There were two distinct categories for further exploration. The first involves broad admissions, graduation and financial aid policy issues that require further study and discussion among institutional representatives, and governing authorities before a solution can be recommended. In some cases, depending upon the nature of the issue, state or federal legislation may be involved as a part of the solution. The second category involves considerations for enhancements to the proposed process that will provide additional access and benefits to students or improve the overall functioning.

The following list of issues is not exhaustive but it is indicative of some of the more important areas and concerns that the workgroup identified as critical in the further development of the proposed process. In addition, many of these issues affect distance learning and regular students seeking to enroll for a course through the transient admissions process.

Admissions, Graduation and Student Aid Policy Issues

Student Financial Aid: When students attend more than one postsecondary institution during a semester, the problems associated with eligibility, disbursement and reporting requirements for the oversight of student financial aid are considerable. For the most part, student financial aid policies and other requirements are structured around the assumption that students attend a single institution during a standard semester. Distance learning students who take courses of different durations and may take a full load of courses distributed among more than one institution create a host of exceptions to the expected model. As a result, many distance learning students find the utilization of financial aid support either extremely difficult or impossible when their behavior goes outside traditional instructional activity. Most of the problems concern tracking student activities and the lack of synchronized calendars across institutions for aid related critical events. Some of the issues identified involve:

- Determining eligibility for and disbursement of financial aid when more than one institution is involved.
- Calculation of the cost of attendance with more than one school and different rates for tuition and fees.
- Varied calendars for educational terms, payment deadlines and reporting requirements.
- Unclear policies concerning the use of institutional aid at another school.
- Tracking student drops from courses for the purposes of Title IV regulations and Bright Futures repayments.

Admissions, Transfer of Credit, and Graduation: A second policy area for further exploration concerns issues involving admission/readmission, transfer of credit and

graduation. The workgroup identified a number of broad issues that warrant a review of institutional and state policy concerning the following situations.

- **Admissions:** Policies concerning student readmission after some number of terms of non-enrollment at the home institution while taking transient hours at another institution.
- **Transfer of Credit:** Policies related to institutional limits on the number of transfer hours that may be accepted toward a degree (which may be the result of accreditation policies outside the purview of the institution).
- **Graduation:** Policies concerning a transient student's ability to complete a sufficient number of credit hours for a degree without being admitted as a regular student.

Process Issues

Registration Prioritization: Distance learning classes are popular and often fill quickly. As a result, transient distance learning students may have a low probability of actually securing a seat in distance learning course sections at some institutions or within some course sections. The workgroup considered the obvious equity issue involved in streamlining enrollment for distance learning transient students and not for other students regardless of mode of delivery. However, the transient distance learning student also faces additional disadvantages. Should a requested course section be unavailable during registration, transient distance learning students may be unable to easily seek out additional options or make schedule adjustments easily since they are not physically on a campus during the registration process or due to the complexity of involving more than one institution in the process. The workgroup also identified some options that, although limited, provide some possible solutions to the registration procedures for transient distance learning students that can be further explored.

- Some institutions, primarily Florida colleges, offer distance learning sections to all students, including transient students, with no additional wait time on enrollment. Where such course sections and policies exist, they can be clearly identified within the course description of the distance learning catalog for the student's consideration in making an informed choice.
- Registration priority overrides could be utilized for transient distance learning students with a critical need for a course. Such students might include graduating seniors or students in degree programs where course sequencing is critical for time to degree. For such students a registration priority override could be requested of the offering institution with the agreement of the students degree-granting institution/department. The processing of such a request could be included as a part of the transient admissions form and authorization/approval process with an additional check box and comment field.

Flexibility and Access: As has been noted, the Workgroup devoted significant effort in this planned approach to the development and addition of course availability indicators and comment fields to course listings within the distance learning catalog to better inform students of the availability of space in courses and the criteria for its allocation. Although the transient admissions process as described will provide students with additional options and access to courses, there is a limiting factor within the process that concerns the Workgroup.

Students who search the catalog for specific courses are presented with a range of options. They can pursue a search by institution, delivery method and evaluate a variety of factors including tuition and fee amounts, testing policies and campus attendance requirements. The student is offered a broad range of flexible options from a variety of institutions. A transient student might be approved for registration and find because of their low registration priority that the course section is unavailable and that all sections of a course of interest are filled. Logically, if all of the spaces in course sections of interest are filled at one institution, students could consider appropriate sections of another course or move on and evaluate those offered by another institution. Unfortunately, students do not submit transient admissions forms to more than one institution for the same course or courses at the same time. To consider additional options, the student would have to complete another transient form and begin the process again. So, the current transient admissions process, while offering options to students, also forces them to narrow their options once the process is activated.

The Workgroup believes further exploration of a transient admissions process that allows a student to take full advantage of the opportunities provided by the wealth of course sections offered by Florida postsecondary institutions through the distance learning catalog is warranted. Theoretically, a student might select the same course and delivery mode from multiple institutions that have availability. By considering the course offerings of more than one institution, transient students would have a higher probability for successful registration. There are a number of complex policy and infrastructure problems involved with such an approach; some of which have been detailed previously. However, the benefits to students in terms of the realization of the flexibility offered by distance learning and access to and effective utilization of available space beyond the limits of a single institutions schedule of classes warrant further investigation once the plans basic policy and infrastructure issues are addressed.

Conclusion

The Online Registration Workgroup has developed a plan that capitalizes on existing policies, procedures and infrastructure to begin the implementation of an online registration process. Florida's statewide articulation agreement, Statewide Course Numbering System, investment in the development of FACTS and the collaborative policies developed around the transient admissions process provide for a cost effective approach to the initial development of the process. The Workgroup also indentified a range of short and long term policy and infrastructure issues that need to be addressed. Where possible, recommendations and potential solutions have been offered for further consideration. Overall, most of the items identified for further study can be viewed within the greater need for a framework that provides a policy-based structure to provide guidance when multiple institutions are involved in the instruction of a student within a given period.

The continued increase in distance learning activity and web-based instructional activity coupled with research and other national reports of increased student mobility among education institutions strongly suggests that the "transient student" of today will be a larger share of the overall postsecondary population in the near future. Much like the policy environment that was mutually created by the institutions to govern the transient process, similar discussions and collaborative agreements can form the basis for the cooperative monitoring of students and the enforcement of appropriate academic, state and federal policy as it relates to admission, student aid, transfer of credit and graduation.

The issues described in the previous section of the report all relate to gaps in a shared substantive policy and procedures when multiple institutions are contributing credit hours toward a students ultimate degree. The issues involved, although central to and identified within this planning effort, transcend the original charge to the workgroup. And, while the Florida Distance Learning Consortium and the Workgroup are prepared to continue further discussions in this area, additional expertise in student financial aid issues and the further involvement of the institutions, Articulation Coordinating Committee, Board of Governors, Division of Florida Colleges, and the State Board of Education is advised going forward.

Appendix A – Transient Admissions Form Institutional Workflows

Colleges	Home ----->	-----> Transient----->
Brevard CC	Registrar	Registrar
Broward	Campus Advisor	Registrar
Central Florida CC	Program Advisor	Admissions
Chipola	Registrar	Registrar
Daytona State	Registrar	Admissions
Edison State	Advisor	Registrar
FCC Jacksonville	Registrar	Registrar
Florida Keys CC	Advisor	Registrar
Gulf Coast CC	Transcript Evaluator	Registrar
Hillsborough CC	Campus Advisor	Admissions
Indian River State	Advisor	Advisor
Lake City CC	Academic Dean	Admissions
Lake-Sumter CC	Registrar	Admissions
Manatee CC	Registrar	Advisor
Miami-Dade	Campus Advisor	Registrar
North Florida CC	Advisor	Registrar
NW Florida State	Admissions	Registrar
Palm Beach CC	Advisor	Academic Dean
Pasco-Hernando CC	Campus Advisor	Sponsoring College Dean
Pensacola CC	Advisor	Registrar
Polk CC	Advisor	Registrar
Santa Fe	Advisor	Registrar
Seminole CC	Campus Advisor	Campus Program Advisor
South Florida CC	Program Advisor	Registrar
St. John's River CC	Advisor	Registrar
St. Petersburg	Campus Registrar	Campus Registrar
Tallahassee CC	Admissions	Advisor
Valencia CC	Campus Advisor	Campus Admissions

Transient Admissions Form Institutional Workflows

Universities	Home ----->	----->	----->	----->
Florida A&M	College Advisor	College Dean	Transcript Evaluator	Registrar
Florida Atlantic	Program Advisor	Registrar	Registrar	Registrar
Florida Gulf Coast	College Advisor	Registrar	Registrar	Registrar
Florida International	College Advisor	Registrar	Registrar	Registrar
Florida State	Program Advisor	College Dean	Registrar	Admissions
New College				
U of Central Florida	Program Advisor	Advisor	Registrar	Registrar
U of Florida	Department Advisor	Registrar		Registrar
U of North Florida	College Advisor	Registrar		Prep Advisor
U of South Florida				Admissions
U of West Florida				Registrar
				Trans Eval

Appendix B Transient Admission Form and Fees Survey Results

Florida's Post-Secondary Institutional Transient and Fee Data
Survey Responses- October 2009

Institution	Require Transient App	Require both Transient App & Admissions App	Charge Transient App Fee	Charge Admissions Fee	If Admissions is required, fee is waived for Transient Students
COLLEGES					
Broward College	No	Yes	No	Yes: \$35	No
Central Florida CC	No	Yes	No	Yes: \$20	No
Chipola College	Yes	No	No	No	No
Edison College	No	Yes	No	Yes: \$20	No
Florida Keys CC	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Florida SC at Jacksonville	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Gulf Coast CC	No	Yes	No	Yes: \$20	No
Hillsborough CC	No	Yes	No	Yes: \$20	No
Lake City CC	No	Yes	No	Yes: \$15	No
Lake-Sumter CC	No	Yes	No	Yes: \$30	No
Miami Dade College	No	Yes	No	Yes: \$20	No
North Florida CC	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Palm Beach CC	for readmit students	for new students	No	Yes for new students	No
Pensacola Junior College	No	Yes	No	Yes: \$30	No
Polk State College	No	No	No	Yes	No
Santa Fe College	No	Yes	No	No	No
SC of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota	No	Yes	No	\$75 for International Students	No
St. Johns River CC	No	Yes	No	Yes: \$30	No
St. Petersburg College	No	Yes	No	Yes: \$40	No
Tallahassee CC	No	Yes	No	No	No
Valencia CC	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
UNIVERSITIES					
FAMU	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
FIU	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
FGCU	Yes	No if SUS student	No	\$30 for out-of-state, private or FL Doc students	Yes, for SUS students
FSU	Yes	No	No	No	No
NGF	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
UCF	Yes	No	No	No	No
UF	No	No	No	No	No
UNF	Yes	Yes for out-of-state	No	No	No
USF	Yes	No	No	No	No
UWF	Yes	No	No	No	No

Appendix C

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