

Committee on Education

CS/SB 72 — Higher Education

by Appropriations Committee and Senator Stargel

The bill modifies a number of policies related to postsecondary education, including, scholarship and grant programs, state university preeminence and performance incentive programs, and state university and Florida College System (FCS) operational and capital funding.

Postsecondary Scholarship and Grant Programs

The bill modifies certain merit- and need-based programs. Specifically the bill:

- Modifies the Florida Student Assistance Grant (FSAG) programs to authorize a student who received an FSAG award in fall or spring term to receive an award during the summer term, prioritize the distribution of grant funds to students who are within one semester of completing a degree or certificate program, and modify the maximum expected family contribution.
- Modifies the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Florida Academic Scholars award to provide an annual stipend as specified in the General Appropriations Act, rather than specifying the amount at \$300.
- Modifies the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Florida Medallion Scholars award to specify that, beginning in the fall 2021 semester, a Florida Medallion Scholar who is enrolled in an associate degree program at an FCS institution is eligible for an award equal to the amount necessary to pay 100 percent of tuition and fees.
- Clarifies provisions related to the Benacquisto Scholarship Program to require a scholarship renewal student to be enrolled full-time, except for the last term before graduation, and specifies limitations for the duration of an award.

State University Performance

The bill modifies provisions relating to the preeminent state research universities program, effective upon becoming law, which:

- Specifies that preeminence excellence standards are as reported annually in the Board of Governors (BOG) Accountability Plan, rather than by specified third-party sources.
- Removes the emerging preeminent state research university funding provisions.
- Replaces the State University System Programs of Excellence with State Universities of Distinction, with reporting deadlines, but excludes preeminent state research universities.

The bill modifies the state university performance-based incentive program to:

- Modify the 4-year graduation rate metric into two metrics, including a 4-year graduation rate for first-time-in-college students, and beginning in the 2021-2022 fiscal year, a 2-year graduation rate for FCS institution associate in arts transfer students.
- Add a new metric for a 6-year graduation rate for students who are awarded a Pell Grant in their first year, beginning in the 2021-2022 fiscal year.

State University and Florida College System Funds

The bill modifies requirements for the carry forward of operational funds by state universities and FCS institutions to modify submission and approval dates of a carry forward spending plan, and authorize the spending plan to include a commitment of funds to a contingency reserve for expenses related to a declared emergency.

The bill modifies a criterion for the State Board of Education to include new construction, remodeling, or renovation projects on a specified public education capital outlay (PECO) prioritized list for FCS institutions, to align to a similar requirement for the BOG.

The bill also requires the BOG legislative budget request (LBR) to include information about administrative and faculty personnel and requires the BOG to define faculty and administrator classifications and report such definitions in the LBR.

Additional State University and Florida College System Provisions

The bill also:

- Creates the Florida Institute of Politics at FSU and the Adam Smith Center for the Study of Economic Freedom at Florida International University, with specified goals for each institute.
- Requires that employees of a state university or research entity engaged in the design, conduct, or reporting of outside research must disclose and receive a determination that any outside research does not affect the integrity of the state university or entity, with penalties for noncompliance.
- Authorizes FCS institution and state university board of trustees (BOT) innovative pricing techniques and payment options policies to include either an opt-in or opt-out provision for students.
- Authorizes a member of the Phosphate Research and Activities Board to serve beyond 180 days of the expiration of his or her term, effective upon becoming a law.
- Expands the authorization for a state agency to contract with a nonpublic college or university to include a nonpublic institution that is authorized to operate within this state, offers a professional degree, and is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2020, except as otherwise provided.

Vote: Senate 37-0; House 112-0