CS/CS/SB 1696 — Higher Education Funding

by Policy and Steering Committee on Ways and Means; Higher Education Appropriations
Committee; and Senator Lynn

This bill revises higher education funding statutes to conform them to the General
Appropriations Act (GAA). The bill:

- Modifies the Bright Futures Scholarship Program to: (1) require a refund for courses
  withdrawn or dropped by students after the end of the drop and add period; (2) require
  that full-time students complete at least 24 semester hours, or the equivalent, per
  academic year for renewal of the scholarship; (3) remove college-related expense awards
  for Academic Scholars; (4) prohibit conversion of Gold Seal Awards to Medallion
  Awards; and (5) provide authorization to establish award levels in the General
  Appropriations Act.

- Establishes a new Prepaid College Plan payment methodology to state universities on
  behalf of beneficiaries of Prepaid College Plan contracts purchased prior to July 1, 2009.
  The payment methodology specifies the level that the Prepaid College Board will pay for
  tuition increases, tuition differential increases, dormitory, and local fee increases each
  year, within a reasonable range based on fund reserve. An advance payment contract may
  also be offered that covers registration fees, tuition differential fees, and local fees under
  one contract, rather than under separate contracts as presently offered, as well as a new
  plan with incremental credit hour increases.

- Authorizes the Board of Governors, or the board's designee, to increase tuition and out-
  of-state fees for university graduate programs by up to 15 percent each year, instead of by
  10 percent as currently authorized; requires a 50 percent tuition surcharge after
  120 percent of required credit hours for resident students; and modifies standards for
  converting to resident status for tuition purposes.

- Provides flexibility to state and community colleges by deleting an expenditure
  restriction on tuition revenue; makes a technical revision to the reporting date for the
  community college distance learning fee revenue; and, modifies community college
  baccalaureate program statutory language relating to state support and tuition to be "as
  provided in the General Appropriations Act."

- Limits severance payouts for employees of community colleges, the state university
  system, and the Board of Governors to one year's salary from state funds.

- Requires notice of state match delay for Community College and State University
  Facilities and Operating Challenge Grant donations, and allows Community Colleges and
  Universities to begin construction of facilities projects using existing donations.

- Revises provisions relating to several state student financial assistance programs to
  clarify eligibility criteria, remittance of unpaid balances and to clarify that award amounts
  may be prorated based on legislative appropriations; deletes the Ethics in Business

Scholarship Program for state universities and community colleges; and requires annual reporting from all institutions that participate in state-funded student financial assistance programs.

- Provides for consistent reporting requirements for private colleges and universities that receive state appropriations; provides a student fee cap exemption, for 2009-2010 only, to allow Florida State University to increase the student health fee for the purpose of constructing a health service center; and for next year, prohibits state universities from establishing a new requirement for student health insurance coverage.

- Authorizes the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to review all available service options and to make decisions based on cost effectiveness and the best interests of the client when providing vehicle modifications to eligible persons.

- Places the Johnnie B. Byrd, Sr., Alzheimer's Center and Research Institute as a unit of the University of South Florida.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect upon becoming law.
Vote: Senate 32-7; House 82-36