

Board of Governors is Focused on Quality in Education

**By Mark B. Rosenberg
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Throughout the nation, state governments are grappling with strategies to improve the quality of public university education. In Ohio, the major institution just hired a dynamic new president who is an accomplished fund-raiser and coalition builder. In North Carolina, the Legislature has accepted a multi-year business plan to raise the quality of their well-regarded public university system. In California, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has created the “California compact” as a means to enhance the competitiveness of the top-ranked university system in his mega-trend state.

In Florida, the Board of Governors, mindful of the competitive playing field nationally and the changing landscape of competitiveness globally, is aggressively embracing the will of the voters in the 2002 Constitutional Amendment to create and to fully manage the State University System.

In part, the Board of Governors is being driven by concerns over quality. Despite significant efforts by the governor and the Legislature in recent years, the state now finds itself with the worst student-faculty ratio in the country – not counting post-Katrina Louisiana. With the recently announced statewide budget cuts – including cuts to the state universities of at least \$100 million but possibly as deep as \$188 million – essential student services and needed courses are at risk.

Florida’s hope to raise the quality of its State University System is fading as demands for additional access for qualified students fall on the harsh reality of university crowding, increasing class sizes and overburdened staff and advisers. No wonder that graduation rates are now stagnant. Community colleges can expect more student demand – surely good news, given the flat enrollments there over the past few years.

The Board of Governors has decided to join the Graham-Frey lawsuit over tuition authority and other issues as a means to determine once and for all how the public universities are to be financed. While recognizing the seminal role of the Legislature in any public university system, the Board of Governors points out that a majority of universities throughout the United States determine their own tuition charges, normally as a compliment to state funding.

Florida’s low tuition could be a blessing, but in a context where state support per student has rapidly declined, the low tuition guarantees diminished quality.

Without quality, Florida’s students will not graduate in a timely fashion and the education they receive will not be competitive at a global standard. Without quality, Florida’s universities will not be able to retain the best faculty and staff and will not be

able to hire the rising academic stars who will teach generations of students to come and who will carry out research that could generate new and better jobs for our state's economy.

Since Florida must compete globally, mediocre education will result in the state's declining global competitiveness. Floridians deserve a bright future – only achievable with graduates who have received a world class university education. The Board of Governors will accept nothing less.

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