



**Chancellor Mark Rosenberg**

**To Complete, Florida must speak Globally**

### **Newspaper Commentary - Opinion**

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When U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings announced that she was commissioning a comprehensive study of higher education in America, she sent shock waves throughout the nation's universities. Another federal study? More Washington intrusion? What would be the focus? What changes would the study recommend?

The worries were unjustified. The recommendations of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education were released Sept. 26, and they are good. They address needed reforms and, in the case of Florida's public universities, they align with changes already under way.

The findings deal with a number of key areas - affordability, for example, and assessment of student achievement, access and accountability. All are important to the continued success of Florida's state university system.

The commission also weighed in on international education - which is of special concern to the citizens of this state. Florida is an international state - we conduct billions of dollars in trade beyond our borders every year. This makes international studies - encouraging graduate students from other nations to come to Florida to study, and making it easier for Florida students to study abroad - a priority.

Thomas Friedman's *The World is Flat* made it clear that most policymakers underestimate the rapid rate of globalization of the American economy. The marketplace has already gone worldwide and is pulling each of us along with it.

Perhaps some of us - those of us near to retirement, or those of us in jobs that cannot be commodified in a global sense - can continue as we have. If you mow lawns or paint houses, your job is secure. If you deal with trade or information or many other services - design, accounting or engineering, for example - you are being globalized, whether you know it or not.

Globalization brings with it tremendous opportunities, especially for Florida, which is comfortable doing business with various peoples, languages and cultures. Florida is already a financial center for Latin America. It can become a trade center for the entire East Coast - if it prepares for that future.

This means our higher education system needs to change, as the Commission on the Future of Higher Education suggests. We need to change dramatically. We need to transform our state universities into the training grounds for global engagement. We must prepare students today for the cultural, ethical and economic challenges of a truly international marketplace.

Our plan would focus on two strategies: Improving our contact with other nations, through expansion of international education and study abroad, and improving our ability to communicate, through establishment of foreign-language programs that take advantage of new technologies.

To compete in the new economy - an economy not just of global trade but of global exchange of ideas and innovations - we must build our comfort level and understanding of the world's cultures and their economies. This understanding starts with language.

Our universities have, for years, taught languages - French, German, and, of course, Spanish. These languages, however, don't open up the opportunities they did in the past. China is a rising power - we need to speak the languages of China, yet they are not offered at every university. Brazil is Florida's largest trade partner - but not every university offers courses in Portuguese. Moreover, studies in Arabic, Farsi, Korean and even Japanese can be hard to find.

This must change. To engage the world, we have to speak the languages of the world. This is why I am proposing the establishment of a Virtual Language Institute to facilitate the study of critical languages.

The Virtual Language Institute would be a cooperative effort of all 11 public universities in Florida. Using distance learning techniques and technology, students from any university can study and earn credit for languages taught elsewhere.

In addition, the Virtual Language Institute will explore tapping into the language expertise in universities throughout the South - and even abroad. I want to give Florida's students maximum exposure to the greatest variety of languages - be it Kurdish, Korean or Kazakh.

The state university system would offer the institute's expertise as a service to Florida's business community. If a Florida company secured a foothold in China, then the Virtual Language Institute could offer a condensed course in the appropriate language, the culture and the economy. This could be an asset for Florida companies establishing international operations.

Language is the key to the gate of global opportunities. But there is more to understanding a nation and a culture than speaking the language. Our students must immerse themselves in these cultures to be fully conversant. This means bringing students from abroad into our campuses, and sending our students over there.

I have asked our experts in international study to examine this issue and help me draft a strategy for expanding these opportunities. In keeping with recommendations of the Spellings

commission, I want to increase the enrollment of foreign students in our 11 state universities, and I want to expand the number of students studying abroad.

The hands-on knowledge such cultural contact provides is invaluable. It is vital to our security and to our success.

We live in a global environment - that is undeniable. But will we thrive? Yes, if we prepare now for the changes that are rushing to meet us. I believe this plan - more robust opportunities for language study and greater exposure to other nations and their peoples - is how Florida's universities can best prepare our citizens for that future.