

# **Florida Distance Learning Task Force**

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## **Final Report**

**Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements contained in Section 1 of CS/HB 7105.**

**February 26, 2009**

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## Executive Summary

The Florida Distance Learning Task Force was created through HB 7105 by the 2008 Legislature. The nine-member Task Force was appointed by the Chancellors of the State University System and the Florida College System with specific legislative assignments (**Appendix A**). These assignments reflected several policy goals which provided a foundation for the work of the Task Force. These goals included: 1) facilitating maximum affordable access for students to complete degrees and transfer credits; 2) achieving increased cost-effectiveness in the development and delivery of undergraduate distance learning courses and degree programs; 3) improving instructional and faculty effectiveness; 4) advancing technology innovations; and 5) providing accountability for funding and tasks assigned to the Florida Distance Learning Consortium.

To assist in the completion of the assignments, the Task Force empanelled six workgroups made up of college and university staff members with expertise in the specific assigned areas of study. Each workgroup was chaired by a member of the Task Force. The six workgroups were:

- Administrative Services
- Faculty and Instruction
- Fiscal Policy and Access
- Learning Object Repository
- Online Registration
- Strategic Statewide Goals

The workgroups conducted reviews of existing policies and documents, held interviews with key resource people, and met through conference calls and other technological means during the course of their work. Final reports from the workgroups with draft recommendations were forwarded to the Task Force for consideration in the final report.

In the course of the study, the Task Force reviewed the activities of the Florida Distance Learning Consortium, general distance learning course and degree statistics, distance learning structures in other states and examples of best practice approaches to the delivery and support of distance learning at the state and local institutional levels. In addition, online registration systems in Georgia, North Carolina and through the SREB Electronic Campus were reviewed, as well as the status of learning resource repositories in various states.

The Task Force recommendations reflect the essential components of a student-centered, cost-effective, statewide strategy for the development and delivery of distance learning courses and degrees through the state's colleges and universities. They are intended to build upon existing strengths while focusing on the need for action in specific areas. The recommendations include: the formal establishment of a central coordinating entity, the Florida Distance Learning Consortium; the hosting of a state-level learning resource repository; the development of an online registration process; and the promotion of the Florida Higher Education Online Catalog.

These policy and funding recommendations can serve as the basis for an effective state-level policy structure to address future challenges presented by advances in technology and the changing nature of the instructional process. Action is critical if distance learning is to be an effective tool in the achievement of system and state goals. The Task Force urges the Legislature to consider the recommendations contained in its report as a critical step in managing the unprecedented rapid and changing role of technology in our education system.

The following are the final recommendations regarding the use of technology and distance learning in Florida's education system and address organizational concerns, academic and student support, infrastructure development and funding.

## **Critical State Policy Recommendations**

### Definition of Distance Learning

**Recommendation 1:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends the adoption of a definition of distance learning where at least 80 percent of the direct instruction of the course is delivered utilizing some form of technology when the student and faculty member are separated by time, space or both. The Task Force further recommends that distance learning fees as authorized in state law apply only to courses meeting this definition.

**Recommendation 2:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends the adoption of a definition of hybrid/blended courses where at least 50 percent and not more than 79 percent of the direct instruction of the course is delivered utilizing some form of technology when the student and faculty member are separated by time, space or both.

### Florida Distance Learning Consortium

**Recommendation 3:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that the Legislature consider officially establishing the Florida Distance Learning Consortium as a statewide higher education collaborative with a mission to lead and support Florida's state-level distance learning initiatives in partnership with its member institutions to include:

1. Ongoing management, operation and promotion of the Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog as required by state law. (Recommendations #4, #14 and #15)
2. Identification, execution and dissemination of collaborative contracts for desired distance learning related products and services on behalf of Florida's schools, colleges and universities. (Recommendations #7, #16, and #17)

3. **Facilitation of a streamlined, online course registration process and other web-based services that support or enhance distance learning.** (Recommendation #8)
4. **Development and implementation of a regular process for identifying and evaluating new technologies and instructional methods that can be used for improving instruction, student learning and the overall quality of distance learning courses and programs.** (Recommendations #19, #20, and #21)
5. **Support educational programs for the professional development of faculty and staff and provide information and materials for use in the development, evaluation and enhancement of distance learning courses and programs.** (Recommendations #22 and #23)
6. **Development and operation of a central repository of instructional resources, including seeking partnerships wherever possible with similar state, regional and national repositories.** (Recommendation #5)
7. **Identification of opportunities for collaboration beyond the existing membership and the development of partnerships among educational institutions, businesses and communities for the mutual benefit of participants in the expansion of activities related to distance learning courses and programs.** (Recommendation #18)
8. **Production of an annual accountability report on the state of distance learning. The report should contain the following components:**
  - **An overview of distance learning activities within the sectors.**
  - **The status of Consortium operations and activities.**
  - **An updated set of policy and procedures recommendations for consideration by the appropriate governing boards that can increase student access, improve learning or increase cost effectiveness in the development and delivery of distance learning courses and degree programs.**
  - **A review of the role of distance learning activities in support of strategic educational goals.**

Access and the Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog

**Recommendation 4:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that s. 1004.09 F.S., be amended to specify that a description and link to the Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog be placed, at a minimum, within advising and distance learning sections of each institution’s website and that the requirements for placing a link be implemented utilizing a consistent graphic and description.

Open Access Textbook Opportunities Utilizing the Repository

**Recommendation 5:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that the Legislature consider the establishment and support of a statewide digital instructional resource repository for Florida educators with its management and operation assigned to the Florida Distance Learning Consortium.

**Recommendation 6:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that the Legislature consider policies regarding the placement of instructional resources and/or open textbooks created with state funds in a legislatively-established statewide digital repository.

#### State-level Collaborative Contracting

**Recommendation 7:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that clear authority be provided to the Florida Distance Learning Consortium to negotiate preferred pricing and collaborative contracts for desired distance learning related products and services on behalf of Florida's schools, colleges and universities.

#### Online Registration

**Recommendation 8:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that the Legislature consider providing authority to the Florida Distance Learning Consortium to convene a workgroup to complete the planning document for the online registration process as required in CS/HB 7105. It is further recommended that the planning document be completed and submitted to the Legislature, Board of Governor and State Board of Education by March 1, 2010.

#### Fiscal Policy

**Recommendation 9:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force supports a 20 percent increase in the Florida Distance Learning Consortium's operating budget (\$135,000 in recurring funds).

**Recommendation 10:** The Distance Learning Task Force supports additional funding (\$15,000 in recurring funds) if it becomes necessary for the Florida Distance Learning Consortium to secure and pay for its own Internet connectivity in support of the distance learning catalog, the learning object repository and its general operations.

**Recommendation 11:** The Task Force supports dedicated funding for the promotion and enhancement of the Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog's administrative and search interface functions in order to completely address the requirements contained in s. 1004.09, F.S. and more effectively meet student needs (\$100,000 non-recurring and \$75,000 in recurring funds).

**Recommendation 12:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends dedicated funding to provide a sustainable infrastructure for ongoing operations to enable the establishment and continuation of a statewide digital instructional resource repository. (\$680,000 non-recurring and \$300,000 in recurring funding)

## **Essential Support Activities**

### Definition of Distance Learning

**Recommendation 13:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that the classification scheme described in Appendix C be considered by the Board of Governors, Florida College System and State Board of Education in revisions to state level data collection and reporting requirements for learning.

### Online Catalog Promotion

**Recommendation 14:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that standard graphics and promotional materials be created and provided to each institution for use in web-based and/or print-based materials to further increase student awareness of the opportunities offered.

**Recommendation 15:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that in addition to the use of public service announcements and other traditional methods for increasing student awareness of the Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog, the Florida Distance Learning Consortium place a strong focus on the utilization of search-engine, site-targeted advertising and other web-based alternatives.

### Collaborative Contracting

**Recommendation 16:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that in addition to campus distance learning contacts, the Florida Distance Learning Consortium establish and maintain regular communication with institutional procurement officers so that up-to-date information on favorable terms, conditions or pricing within existing contracts or agreements within Florida's education system can be collected and shared through the most effective means possible.

### Fiscal Efficiency

**Recommendation 17:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends the Florida Distance Learning Consortium research and identify statewide support services (such as test proctoring, tutoring or help-desk functions) which can be utilized by all member institutions and provide cost savings to individual institutions who choose to participate.

**Recommendation 18:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends the Florida Distance Learning Consortium seek grant opportunities that provide funding of collaborative efforts in course development and the sharing of resources among institutions. It should also develop recognition/award programs to encourage faculty and staff to work together cooperatively, share resources, and ultimately save tax dollars.

## Emerging Technology

**Recommendation 19:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that the Florida Distance Learning Consortium be charged with implementing a regular process for identifying and evaluating new technologies that can be used for improving instruction and student learning. The process should include communication of institutional, regional and national utilization of emerging technologies, results of campus-based pilot programs and regular communication through newsletters, webinars and meeting presentations on viable new technologies, instructional strategies and any policy implications of their use.

**Recommendation 20:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that the Florida Distance Learning Consortium coordinate or provide regularly scheduled events to showcase emerging technologies, including information about their effective implementation in instruction. Information about the technology events will be communicated via the Florida Distance Learning Consortium website, newsletters, podcasts, and other forms of technology.

**Recommendation 21:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that the Florida Distance Learning Consortium be tasked with identifying grant opportunities requiring cooperative or collaborative arrangements with other educational institutions and/or with business and industry regarding emerging technologies.

## Faculty Professional Development

**Recommendation 22:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that the Florida Distance Learning Consortium use a “best practices approach” to collect and distribute professional development resources for faculty and staff through a statewide repository such as the Orange Grove.

**Recommendation 23:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that the Florida Distance Learning Consortium coordinate and support e-Learning faculty development opportunities across the state by creating a web-based schedule of faculty development opportunities offered within the education community.

## **Strategic Goals of the State**

### Analysis and Recommendations

**Recommendation 24:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that college and university boards of trustees encourage the expansion of distance learning course offerings so that more opportunities will exist for students to fully complete associate and baccalaureate degrees through distance learning.

**Recommendation 25:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that the Legislature provide incentive funding for developing and implementing cooperative degree programs that address specific educational and economic needs of Florida identified in the strategic plans of the State Board of Education and the Florida Board of Governors.

**Recommendation 26:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that the Legislature provide incentive funding for collaborative statewide effort to create fast-track degree completion opportunities for adult learners that can be completed in large part through distance learning.

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## Introduction

Distance learning and classroom instruction continue to dramatically change as technology evolves and revolutionizes how, when, and where instruction is delivered. Students growing demand for technology-based instruction has been reflected by Florida's growth in post-secondary distance learning headcounts since 1998. Community colleges and state universities have seen a significant increase in distance learning enrollments since 1996. As a percentage of system level instructional activity, community college student participation in distance learning courses has grown from 4% of all students taking at least one distance learning course in 1997-98 to 25% in 2007-08. Similarly, the state universities have also seen participation increase from 16% to 51% of all students taking at least one distance learning course over the same 10-year period. In the last three years, distance learning degree programs, as listed in Florida's Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog, have increased from approximately 20 to over 430 offerings that range from certificate through graduate level. Recent national and regional reports and interviews with campus representatives suggest that growth in distance learning will continue into the foreseeable future.

While the increased demand for distance learning delivery and the significant impact of educational and consumer technology upon all levels of education cannot be ignored, these factors alone do not constitute the most critical reason for the state to consider changes in policy. Without a doubt, demand will continue to be strong; however, the disruptive effects of rapid technological change on the nature of instruction will challenge the ability of our institutions to address critical state needs and priorities. Similarly, a lack of a coordinated approach based upon sound state level policy, organizational structure, effective applications of technology and targeted investment is a recipe for failure.

A solution is needed that provides coordination and support to institutional activities which support critical state goals without compromising the philosophy of local control that has allowed each institution to determine how best to serve the community in which it resides. The following issues and recommendations are intended to, as a group, provide a basis upon which the state and its colleges and universities can expand access for students, increase cost efficiencies, reduce unnecessary duplication and build upon existing strengths of distance learning delivery in Florida.

The report is organized into three sections. The first section focuses on critical state policy issues that form the foundation for the overall distance learning strategy outlined by the Task Force. These recommendations will require action by the Legislature for implementation. The second section contains recommendations for activities and programs that the Task Force believes are essential to an effective overall program but do not require specific legislative action; these can be implemented by the Florida Distance Learning Consortium if resources are available. The final section provides strategy recommendations for addressing state goals and guidance on the determination of distance learning costs at the campus level.

# I. Critical State Policy Recommendations

## Definition of Distance Learning

Current practice concerning a definition of “distance learning” typically considers two factors: an instructional event in which the student and instructor are separated from one another by (a) time and/or (b) space. In addition, the amount and types of technology used to deliver the instruction are usually considered.

Distance learning is most often described as an instructional process during which the student and faculty member are separated by space, time or both for some portion of the course or program. Most agree that distance learning is a departure from traditional face-to-face instruction with faculty and students in the same room. The question is at what point does a class move from traditional face-to-face instruction to some form of distance learning? While some take an all-or-nothing approach, many definitions employ some percentage measure of faculty-student separation by time and/or space as the determinant factor. Another consideration is the amount of technology used in the delivery of instruction. A course that employs a significant amount of technology during the instructional process, however, is not necessarily a distance learning course. Technology may be used to deliver instruction remotely or as an instructional aide or enhancement to classroom-based instruction. Using technology as part of the definition for distance learning, therefore, is less precise.

Rapid and continued growth in the use of technology both in the classroom and at a distance has resulted in a dynamic learning environment difficult to define. Descriptions and definitions used by other states, professional associations, regional agencies, and in federal legislation have been reviewed. While a variety of approaches have been identified, some common themes have emerged:

- **Definitions and descriptors for distance learning are under review at the federal, state and regional levels.**
- **Hybrid or blended courses are not included in many of the existing classification schemes.**
- **The “continuum approach” to defining distance learning is an emerging trend.**
- **Students assume that courses listed as distance learning require few or no scheduled campus visits. Percentage definitions for distance learning activity are moving to higher thresholds.**
- **The use of percentage measures to determine a threshold for distance learning activity does not produce reliable data.**

The approach to defining distance learning used in the Alfred P. Sloan Consortium’s annual survey of online learning in postsecondary education and the revisions to community college and state university system distance learning data elements proposed by the Florida Distance Learning Consortium are very similar in structure and design. The classification categories are nearly identical and while thresholds for distance learning activities vary somewhat, the approach taken by both groups is largely the same. Given the trend toward a higher threshold of technology utilization in distance learning courses and programs, the Task Force recommends the following definition and classification scheme for distance learning courses in Florida.

**Recommendation 1: The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends the adoption of a definition of distance learning where at least 80 percent of the direct instruction of the course is delivered utilizing some form of technology when the student and faculty member are separated by time, space or both. The Task Force further recommends that distance learning fees as authorized in state law apply only to courses meeting this definition.**

Significant growth in face-to-face classes that employ technology for some instruction has accompanied the surge in distance learning activity. These “hybrid” or “blended” courses are recognized as effective instructional frameworks for providing students with scheduling flexibility while maintaining the familiar structure of face-to-face classroom sessions. The increased use of technology to supplant classroom-based instruction has also benefitted colleges and universities struggling to accommodate increased numbers of students while experiencing space limitations. Given the need to consider the role of hybrid/blended instruction in the overall classification scheme as the hybrid/blended model matures, the Task Force recommends the following definition and classification scheme for hybrid/blended courses in Florida.

**Recommendation 2: The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends the adoption of a definition of hybrid/blended courses where at least 50 percent and not more than 79 percent of the direct instruction of the course is delivered utilizing some form of technology when the student and faculty member are separated by time, space or both.**

### **Florida Distance Learning Consortium**

The Florida Distance Learning Consortium has evolved since 1996 when it was first established in rule by the State Board of Community Colleges to advise on policy and fiscal issues relating to distance learning and technology. In 2003, the Florida Virtual Campus (representing state universities) and the Florida Community College Distance Learning Consortium were consolidated into a single entity to serve both systems; among other items, the restructured Consortium was responsible for building and managing the online distance learning catalog. With the creation of the K-20 system and the Florida School Code re-write, the rule that established the Consortium was repealed. Since that time, the Consortium has continued to operate informally under the Florida Department of Education and the Board of Governors. However, given the significant and growing demands for distance learning courses and programs, the Distance Learning Task Force strongly recommends that the Florida Distance Learning Consortium be formally established as a higher education collaborative to assist institutions in the implementation of distance learning policy as defined by the Legislature, Board of Governors and State Board of Education. The Task Force has carefully reviewed the current work of the Florida Distance Learning Consortium and identified policy functions that are needed in order to: 1) facilitate maximum affordable access for undergraduate students to complete degrees and transfer credits, 2) achieve cost-effectiveness in the development and delivery of undergraduate distance learning course and degree programs, 3) improve instructional and faculty effectiveness, 4) advance technology innovations, and 5) provide fiscal and substantive accountability for funding and tasks assigned.

**Recommendation 3:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that the Legislature consider officially establishing the Florida Distance Learning Consortium as a statewide higher education collaborative with a mission to lead and support Florida’s state-level distance learning initiatives in partnership with its member institutions to include:

9. **Ongoing management, operation and promotion of the Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog as required by state law.** (Recommendations #4, #14 and #15)
10. **Identification, execution and dissemination of collaborative contracts for desired distance learning related products and services on behalf of Florida’s schools, colleges and universities.** (Recommendations #7, #16, and #17)
11. **Facilitation of a streamlined, online course registration process and other web-based services that support or enhance distance learning.** (Recommendation #8)
12. **Development and implementation of a regular process for identifying and evaluating new technologies and instructional methods that can be used for improving instruction, student learning and the overall quality of distance learning courses and programs.** (Recommendations #19, #20, and #21)
13. **Support educational programs for the professional development of faculty and staff and provide information and materials for use in the development, evaluation and enhancement of distance learning courses and programs.** (Recommendations #22 and #23)
14. **Development and operation of a central repository of instructional resources, including seeking partnerships wherever possible with similar state, regional and national repositories.** (Recommendation #5)
15. **Identification of opportunities for collaboration beyond the existing membership and the development of partnerships among educational institutions, businesses and communities for the mutual benefit of participants in the expansion of activities related to distance learning courses and programs.** (Recommendation #18)
16. **Production of an annual accountability report on the state of distance learning. The report should contain the following components:**
  - **An overview of distance learning activities within the sectors.**
  - **The status of Consortium operations and activities.**
  - **An updated set of policy and procedures recommendations for consideration by the appropriate governing boards that can increase student access, improve learning or increase cost effectiveness in the development and delivery of distance learning courses and degree programs.**
  - **A review of the role of distance learning activities in support of strategic educational goals.**

### **Access and the Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog**

The distance learning catalog operated by the Florida Distance Learning Consortium was created as a convenient and efficient way for students to identify available distance learning courses and to increase student access to education. Since the emergence of an early version of the catalog in 1997,

the distance learning listings have grown significantly from under 100 courses and fewer than 10 distance learning degree programs to over 16,000 course listings and 431 distance learning degree programs for the fall 2008 and spring 2009 semesters. Today, the Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog includes information on most distance learning courses and programs available from community colleges, universities, and participating Florida private educational institutions, as well as the Florida Virtual School. With the passage of HB 7105 in 2008, the Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog was established in statute as “an interactive, Internet-based central point of access to distance learning courses, degree programs, and resources offered by public postsecondary education institutions and is intended to assist in the coordination and collaboration of articulation and access.” The legislation assigns the Florida Distance Learning Consortium with the ongoing management of the catalog and requires it to establish operational guidelines and procedures.

In addition to establishing the Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog in statute, CS/HB 7105 also requires that the catalog be able to collect data reflecting frequency of access and the nature and types of requests received. While some of the information can be collected and reported using capabilities already resident within the catalog structure, some of the information can only be collected through additional modifications or in conjunction with external data sources. Interviews with campus distance learning staff members, focus group discussions with students, and a review of distance learning catalogs in other states suggest the need for additional search and usability enhancements to keep pace with technological changes and new course offerings. The following catalog enhancements are suggested:

- Revise search criteria to include options for flexible start and end dates within a given term.
- Revise the course listing information page to more clearly display and include tuition and fees data.
- Provide geographic search options for institutions offering requested courses and programs.
- Provide for increased course upload capability.
- Provide for better data reports and clear, consistent transition page information.
- Provide information on any on-campus or face-to-face meetings that might be required.

The primary goal of a promotion campaign for the Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog is to make students aware of the options or alternatives available to them through distance learning courses and programs. Distance learning programs can fulfill a variety of needs for students and offer additional opportunities when geography, scheduling or personal circumstances do not allow regular campus attendance. In addition, students may find that certain prerequisites or courses in a critical program sequence may not be offered at their local institution. As a result, enrolling in one or more distance learning courses offered by another institution can make a significant difference in a student’s continued progress and reduced time to degree. Finally, the Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog can be and has been an important source of information for adults who are seeking to either return to complete a degree or for those seeking continued professional development. Distance learning courses and programs, because they are designed to deliver instruction and support services directly to students, are uniquely suited to serve adult student populations with the challenges of family obligations and full-time employment.

After evaluating previous marketing and promotion activities for the distance learning catalog and those used for similar sites around the country, the best overall approach appears to be one which focuses on ensuring that the catalog is promoted through the use of prominent links on high traffic sites and within relevant sections of institutional websites. Sections 1009.23(16) and 1009.24(17), F.S. require institutions to prominently display a link to the catalog on the institution's website; however, since each institution's website is structured differently, "prominently displayed" might not be consistently interpreted. The placement of information about the catalog would be most effective in areas where students are actively engaged in searching for information about distance learning course options; such areas would logically be located within advising and distance learning functional areas. In addition, providing consistent, high quality promotional materials and focusing additional marketing campaign activities and resources on site-based targeted advertising services would strongly complement the required site links.

**Recommendation 4: The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that s. 1004.09 F.S., be amended to specify that a description and link to the Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog be placed, at a minimum, within advising and distance learning sections of each institution's website and that the requirements for placing a link be implemented utilizing a consistent graphic and description.**

#### **Learning Object Repository**

A repository is a storehouse for digital resources that range from documents to multi-media learning objects with animations and video clips. While repositories may hold many forms of digital content, they also include descriptive information or "meta tags" which allow easy identification, classification and access through search capabilities. Many repositories store materials produced by a single educational or research institution including faculty and institutional research materials or instructional resources. Other stored digital repository content may be administrative reports, scholarly collections, digitized records, or exhibitions and performances. However, within the infrastructure made available, there is generally no limit as to the type of digital content that repositories can archive. In addition to the single institution model, shared multi-institution repositories also exist in which faculty and staff members at different institutions can "deposit and withdraw" content as defined by a cooperative agreement. Significant savings in the development costs for an individual lesson plan or course can be realized from the utilization of a statewide educational repository in which instructional resources are shared. A statewide repository also avoids silos of content created when institutions develop homegrown systems that may not be standards based.

Repositories seek to accomplish a number of goals which include:

- Providing free or reduced cost to access high quality instructional resources.
- Providing a dissemination vehicle for products produced by federal and state grants.
- Creating a venue for faculty publishing and research collaboration.
- Serving as an archive to document an institution's research and creative efforts.

- Creating a persistent, stable location for digital material to make it possible to find and retrieve deposited items far into the future.

The Florida Distance Learning Consortium is in the early development stage of what could be a very robust repository. The Orange Grove Digital Repository currently houses instructional resources funded by the State of Florida, content from other standards-based repositories, content from websites across the U.S., and multimedia content licensed from the National Repository of Online Courses and Kentucky Educational TV (GED). Because The Orange Grove can communicate with other collections and repositories, repository users can currently locate from 60,000 to 80,000 additional instructional resources from just a handful of other state, national, and international repository sites. The potential for capturing and sharing more resources developed in Florida and the harvesting of other repositories offer significant and ongoing growth opportunities.

### ***Open Access Textbook Opportunities Utilizing the Repository***

The Orange Grove is a potential tool for the storage, customization, and dissemination of open textbook components. These components can be custom-assembled as desired by faculty and published through an external or an on-demand basis. Open textbooks are a new approach to publishing and are freely available with nonrestrictive licenses that enable faculty to customize textbooks for their courses and students to download or print them at no cost or, to order a cost effective bound textbook. Open textbooks are a potential viable solution to:

- Solve the problem of the high cost of textbooks.
- Reduce the length of time needed to produce traditional texts, which often results in content that is out-of-date at the time of publication.
- Provide consistent and persistent access to texts to better meet local teaching and learning needs.

There has been significant interest in developing an Open Access Textbook initiative in Florida. Faculty are exploring using the freely available resources in Wiki Books, Google Books or the textbook rental services such as Chegg ([www.chegg.com](http://www.chegg.com)) to address the high cost of student textbooks. In addition to coordinating and housing Florida's instructional content investment and assisting institutions in reducing development costs for high quality distance learning courses and programs, a statewide repository is a critical component for coordinating activities that can result in lowering the costs and distribution of open textbooks.

Because digital instructional materials are expensive to create, institutions and faculty can reap the benefits of sharing resources with other educators well beyond their own institutions. Sharing the resources created with state dollars leverages an investment by the State of Florida to the maximum potential. Further, the Open textbook concept offers an entirely new approach to publishing. Open textbooks are freely available with nonrestrictive licenses that enable faculty to customize textbooks for their courses and allow students to download or print them at no cost, or order a low cost bound textbook. Open textbooks are a potential solution to the problems of the high cost of textbooks and the length of time needed to produce traditional texts (which often results in content that is out-of-

date at the time of publication). The open source solution also provides consistent and persistent access to textbooks online to better meet local teaching and learning needs.

**Recommendation 5: The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that the Legislature consider the establishment and support of a statewide digital instructional resource repository for Florida educators with its management and operation assigned to the Florida Distance Learning Consortium.**

Ongoing development of shared access to Florida’s content through the repository could reduce the cost of course development, enhance the instructional experiences of distance learning and face-to-face courses, and provide remediation for our students. The state of Florida has evolved to be extremely active in distance education with well over 15,000 postsecondary courses listed in the statewide distance learning catalog in 2007-08. Distance learning courses often fill to capacity before on-campus courses. At many institutions, there are not enough sections to meet student demand. These courses represent an enormous investment in the development of digital instructional materials.

**Recommendation 6: The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that the Legislature consider policies regarding the placement of instructional resources and/or open textbooks created with state funds in a legislatively-established statewide digital repository.**

### **State-level Collaborative Contracting**

Statewide purchasing agreements and volume-based negotiations are well-accepted methods for establishing favorable agreements for products and services. Agreements for all types of products negotiated by the Florida Distance Learning Consortium have saved Florida educational institutions at least \$1 million a year for the last seven years. Given the expanding nature of distance learning activities and the utilization of technology products and services across the educational landscape, negotiating cooperative contracts for products and services is a critical strategy for managing costs. The findings listed below resulted from the Task Force review of collaborative contracting activities.

Using its fiscal agent, the Florida Distance Learning Consortium has obtained favorable pricing arrangements for a limited range of distance learning software products and services; however, without clear authority to negotiate preferred pricing and execute agreements, the process can be cumbersome and confusing to vendors. The businesses seeking to create large scale pricing agreements for community colleges and state universities find it difficult to approach Florida’s educational community due to its varied educational governance structure. Although the primary beneficiaries of these statewide licensing arrangements have been the public community colleges and universities, there are numerous opportunities for additional statewide licensing arrangements that would benefit all PreK–20, public and private institutions. Modest support and clear authority for the Florida Distance Learning Consortium to pursue such agreements would allow Florida educational institutions to capitalize on some of the opportunities that exist in this area. A clear process for the creation of statewide agreements should include the steps to be followed when identifying and

reviewing proposals and products, making recommendations, negotiating agreements, and enrolling participants.

**Recommendation 7: The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that clear authority be provided to the Florida Distance Learning Consortium to negotiate preferred pricing and collaborative contracts for desired distance learning related products and services on behalf of Florida's schools, colleges and universities.**

### **Online Registration**

Although web-based transaction systems have been prevalent over the last five to eight years through Internet retail sites, their presence and use in education has been limited. In order to understand the challenges in developing and implementing such a system, the Online Registration Work Group consulted with colleagues in other states regarding their approach to the implementation of online registration systems. The following individuals were interviewed during conference calls with the workgroup:

- Bruce Chaloux, Southern Regional Education Board
- Steven Hopper, UNC Online
- Kris Biessinger, GeorgiaOnMyLine

Any system that links the resources of multiple institutions must accommodate the necessity for individual institutional control of admissions, enrollment, prerequisites, 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]) and federal financial aid guidelines). In the course of its work, the Task Force and its associate working group identified significant policy and technical infrastructure challenges that will require additional clarification and analysis. Florida has strong data systems and some significant policy and technical initiatives that can serve as a starting point for the desired system. However, considerable variations in the local student information systems and academic policies and governance across the sectors create a level of complexity not present in the other state systems reviewed by the task force. Additional discussions and analysis will be required to develop a thorough planning document for consideration by the Legislature.

**Recommendation 8: The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that the Legislature consider providing authority to the Florida Distance Learning Consortium to convene a workgroup to complete the planning document for the online registration process as required in CS/HB 7105. It is further recommended that the planning document be completed and submitted to the Legislature, Board of Governors and State Board of Education by March 1, 2010.**

## **Fiscal Policy**

The total cost of distance learning is a combination of costs for faculty, technology, content, and support services. Factors affecting the total cost of distance learning are many, including the number of learners enrolled, the extent of the curriculum, the number of years over which individual courses are offered without change, the containment of course development costs, the sharing of course development costs, technology choice, the level of student support, content and teaching practices, staffing practices, and structural organization. (UNESCO, 2004) Institutions choose to balance, emphasize or scale distance learning services consistent with their operational philosophies, resulting in cost variation between institutions. The variation can be attributed to many factors, including organizational structure, technology choice, program volume, quality, and cost allocation methodology.

Organizational structure, whether centralized or decentralized, will present differing cost benefits and challenges. Likewise, organizational structure will present differing instructional flexibility, responsiveness and program autonomy. Best practice research suggests that organizational structure can favorably impact program costs. The rapid and substantial growth of distance learning opportunities provided by Florida institutions has naturally generated efficiencies as institutions have adapted to manage growth and maintain quality in a very challenging economic environment. The utilization of the following best practices can minimize the costs of the development and delivery of distance learning courses and degree programs:

- Centralization of the major elements of distance learning development and delivery.
- Collaboration with academic partners.
- Collaboration with educational support partners – media/publishers.
- Leveraged purchasing.
- Contracting/licensing strategies – annual review, long term agreements.
- Creation of master course shells and the use of on-line repositories.
- Utilization of distance learning technologies in delivering instruction to multiple locations with small classes to maximize affordability and accessibility.

**Technology Fee:** Standard tuition and traditional funding methods provide support for education in a pre-technology, chalk and talk environment. Today's students demand a technology rich environment because that is what they are accustomed to and expect; it is also how they learn. Technology, as a tool, provides value across institutions for both faculty and students as it enriches the academic experience and encourage heightened levels of engagement and access. However, the effective development and use of technology in support of teaching and learning is costly. In recognition of these facts, the Legislature authorized a technology fee for state universities and community colleges effective for fall term 2009. These new revenues will help fund system wide infrastructure for the institutions.

**The Distance Learning Fee:** The differences between the development and funding costs for new classroom-based courses and the adaptations necessary for online courses can be significant. The Legislature authorized a distance learning fee in 2008 for state universities and community colleges. At that time, most institutions were already assessing a distance learning fee as a lab fee to cover these costs. However, the range of fees and what they were called varied widely which led to the statutory requirements now in place through CS/HB 1705. Now institutions may only charge the distance learning fee if a course is listed in the Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog; lab fees for these courses are prohibited. Further, the Legislature requires the distance learning fee to reflect the

“extraordinary costs” associated with offering the online course. These costs which justify the fees are subject to audit and may only be assessed to students taking on-line courses at the institution. This cost-recovery method insures two things: 1) that students are paying for the convenience and flexibility of this mode of instruction, and 2) that the institutions have a method of recovering extraordinary costs in the development, delivery and support for these courses.

The Distance Learning Task Force spent much time discussing various schemes to try to give more structure to the parameters for documenting costs associated with the distance learning fee. Cost factors and overall cost effectiveness in using distance learning technologies and how the delivery of online instruction can be more cost effective in Florida was considered. The Task Force developed a framework that may be useful for describing how distance learning fees and costs could be allocated, recognizing that the complexities of programs and institutional organizations make reliance on any single model problematic (Appendix D).

Distance learning courses and programs have already provided additional access to students and enabled colleges and universities to expand capacity by reducing some of the need for additional physical classroom space. This has been a key component for maintaining access and stretching capacity for both systems as their enrollments have climbed. The Florida Distance Learning Consortium will continue to work with the universities and colleges to identify, refine, and promote models that increase collaboration, reduce costs, improve access for degree completion and improve the quality of the student experience. The Task Force believes that the strategies described in this report will bring further efficiencies and opportunities to refine existing campus-based distance learning instructional models.

The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends the following specific legislative budget requests in support of the Florida Distance Learning Consortium, the Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog and the statewide learning object repository as critical components in the development of an overall strategy for the cost effective development and delivery of distance learning education.

The Florida Distance Learning Consortium budget has experienced four budget reductions as a part of overall state revenue shortfalls since 2000-2001. Current total appropriations of \$679,417 are \$57,032 below 2000-2001 levels. Costs for staff benefits, facilities and office operations have increased on the average of at least 3% annually. Over that same period, the Florida Distance Learning Consortium has increased services to the institutions in collaborative licensing, professional development opportunities and hosted services. The Consortium cannot continue to provide services at the same level nor can it expand its activities consistent with the recommendations of the Task Force and the requirements in 1004.09 F.S., without additional funding.

**Recommendation 9: The Florida Distance Learning Task Force supports a 20 percent increase in the Florida Distance Learning Consortium’s operating budget (\$135,000 in recurring funds).**

The Florida Distance Learning Consortium is dependent upon the Florida Information Resource Network (FIRN) for its Internet connectivity. If the Legislature elects to change the approach to funding the FIRN, the Task Force further supports increasing the funds appropriated to the Consortium to allow it to secure and pay for its own broadband technology.

**Recommendation 10: The Distance Learning Task Force supports additional funding (\$15,000 in recurring funds) if it becomes necessary for the Florida Distance Learning Consortium to secure and pay for its own Internet connectivity in support of the distance learning catalog, the learning object repository and its general operations.**

The Florida Distance Learning Consortium has been able to increase the number of listed courses and programs and improve the level of services provided to users since the catalog's inception in 1997. With no significant funding increase over the last eight years, the additional requirements of s. 1004.09, F.S., and the needed interface improvements now necessitate additional funding if the goals of the Legislature are to be fully realized. Administrative enhancements identified by institutional representatives and usability enhancements suggested by users would require minimal additional funding support while greatly improving overall effectiveness. The estimated costs for these improvements are \$100,000 with an additional \$75,000 for maintenance and staff support.

**Recommendation 11: The Task Force supports dedicated funding for the promotion and enhancement of the Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog's administrative and search interface functions in order to completely address the requirements contained in s. 1004.09, F.S. and more effectively meet student needs (\$100,000 non-recurring and \$75,000 in recurring funds).**

To insure the long-term success of a learning objects repository serving Florida education, there is a clear need to develop sustainable infrastructure and funding. With a relatively small investment, Florida has an opportunity to provide educators with one-stop access to a world of digital resources. Ongoing development of shared access to Florida's content through the repository could reduce the cost of course development, reduce the cost of textbooks, enhance the instructional experiences of distance learning and face-to-face courses, and provide remediation for our students. Ongoing funding should support disaster recovery and continuity of operations infrastructure for critical services. Funding requests for support of the statewide digital repository have been submitted for consideration by the 2009 Legislature. Total costs for the initial year amount to \$980,000. Recurring funding to support continued operations once the initial software platform buyout is complete is \$300,000.

**Recommendation 12: The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends dedicated funding to provide a sustainable infrastructure for ongoing operations to enable the establishment and continuation of a statewide digital instructional resource repository. (\$680,000 non-recurring and \$300,000 in recurring funding)**

**Budget Recommendation Summary:**

	<b>Recurring</b>	<b>Non-recurring</b>	<b>Total</b>
Consortium Operations	\$135,000		
Internet Connectivity (FIRN)	15,000		
Catalog Upgrades	75,000	\$100,000	
<b>Critical Operations</b>	<b>\$225,000</b>	<b>\$100,000</b>	<b>\$325,000</b>
<b>Digital Repository – Orange Grove</b>			
Licensing and operations	\$300,000	\$680,000	\$980,000

## II. Essential Support Activities

In the course of its work, the Task Force identified a range of essential activities necessary for the development of a systemic strategy. While the activities identified in the following recommendations will not necessarily require specific action by the Legislature, they do involve coordinated approaches to important functions that are necessary in an efficient and policy-based approach to distance learning. Further, the activities and their implementation are linked to the policy recommendations identified in the previous section of this report.

### **Definition of Distance Learning**

Most distance learning data definitions include criteria to identify the various types of technology or modes of delivery being utilized within a course. While there is some variation from state to state in the technology categories, the primary challenge is in constructing a stable classification scheme for something that is constantly changing and evolving. In 2007, the Florida Distance Learning Consortium reviewed various technology indicators used in Florida and other states and suggested a revised classification scheme that addresses this issue. Due to the changing nature of instructional technology, the table of technology indicators described below will require regular review.

**Recommendation 13: The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that the classification scheme described in Appendix C be considered by the Board of Governors, Florida College System and State Board of Education in revisions to state level data collection and reporting requirements for learning.**

### **Online Catalog Promotion**

Standard promotional materials would provide a consistent message and take the burden off of the local institutions for their creation. In addition, any funding provided could be utilized more efficiently through a branded approach in the Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog's promotion.

**Recommendation 14: The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that standard graphics and promotional materials be created and provided to each institution for use in web-based and/or print-based materials to further increase student awareness of the opportunities offered.**

Although the use of printed materials is still a popular and useful method of promotion, most students already use Internet search engines to locate information. In particular, those students and adults interested in distance learning courses and programs are far more likely to frequently use the Internet. As a result, targeted promotion through Internet search engines is an effective strategy in addition to other more common approaches.

**Recommendation 15: The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that in addition to the use of public service announcements and other traditional methods for increasing student awareness of the Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog, the Florida Distance Learning Consortium place a strong focus on the utilization of search-engine, site-targeted advertising and other web-based alternatives.**

### **Collaborative Contracting**

Each year Florida's schools, colleges and universities negotiate and enter into agreements for products and services. In some cases, the agreements can be extended to purchases by other institutions or they can be used as reference models. The lack of general information about the existence of such agreements is a considerable barrier to effective procurement of common products and services. The use of a common website and regularly established communications using webinars, announcements and a newsletter would greatly assist Florida's schools, colleges and universities in making informed procurement decisions. To enhance the contracting process, a website to support the procurement process should be established. This website's primary purpose will be to provide an easy mechanism for the distribution of the information regarding the various cooperative contracting opportunities and timelines. Existing web services such as MyFlorida Marketplace should be explored as a vehicle for posting the availability of this type of educational products. Assistance can also be provided to institutions in promoting and marketing their own products and services related to distance learning. Specific product information can be included on the website, in addition to being shared in other ways. Promotion of institutional products and services can provide savings over commercial products and provide revenue and feedback for continued development of promising technologies throughout Florida.

**Recommendation 16: The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that in addition to campus distance learning contacts, the Florida Distance Learning Consortium establish and maintain regular communication with institutional procurement officers so that up-to-date information on favorable terms, conditions or pricing within existing contracts or agreements within Florida's education system can be collected and shared through the most effective means possible.**

### **Fiscal Efficiency**

Approximately 10 years ago, Ask-a-Librarian was formed as a collaborative effort to offer extended library services statewide. By the 2007-2008 academic year, the participating membership had expanded to 101 libraries. This is one example of a collaborative service that meets student needs and shares the financial burden of extended services. The Ask-a-Librarian model can help the Florida Distance Learning Consortium identify other possible state level services and move toward cost-effective delivery. Collaborative licensing and procurement of critical products and services has been a proven success and should be expanded and continued. In addition, multi-institutional collaboration

on services such as test proctoring for distance learning students, professional development programs for faculty and staff, or help-desk support for students and faculty should be explored.

**Recommendation 17: The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends the Florida Distance Learning Consortium research and identify statewide support services (such as test proctoring, tutoring or help-desk functions) which can be utilized by all member institutions and provide cost savings to individual institutions who choose to participate.**

While many of the colleges and universities produce high quality courses and apply technological innovations to instructional practices, most of these new developments remain within the institution. Courses developed in one part of the state may be duplicated in another. Currently, institutions do not have much history of collaboration in course development. The Florida Distance Learning Consortium should facilitate developing opportunities among institutions to contract with one another or groups to contract with a specific institution(s) for courses.

**Recommendation 18: The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends the Florida Distance Learning Consortium seek grant opportunities that provide funding of collaborative efforts in course development and the sharing of resources among institutions. It should also develop recognition/award programs to encourage faculty and staff to work together cooperatively, share resources, and ultimately save tax dollars.**

### **Emerging Technology**

Today, most students have computers, mobile phones or other personal devices with computing capabilities far beyond the desktop machines of a few years ago. The trend of rapid technological change shows little evidence of slowing down. In addition to the advances in technology, new capabilities for operating system software, web-based services and new communications capabilities have only served to make this environment even more complex. Just as these changes have impacted the nature of business, industry and society as a whole, the instructional processes within our colleges and universities have also been influenced. While new technology-based products and services have allowed faculty to greatly enrich the educational process for students, deciding which technologies to evaluate and include as a part of the teaching and learning environment can be costly, risky and technologically challenging.

The Task Force believes that the Florida Distance Learning Consortium is uniquely situated to be a catalyst for change and could provide the regular information on emerging technologies and new instructional strategies through its established communication network within the educational community.

**Recommendation 19:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that the Florida Distance Learning Consortium be charged with implementing a regular process for identifying and evaluating new technologies that can be used for improving instruction and student learning. The process should include communication of institutional, regional and national utilization of emerging technologies, results of campus-based pilot programs and regular communication through newsletters, webinars and meeting presentations on viable new technologies, instructional strategies and any policy implications of their use.

**Recommendation 20:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that the Florida Distance Learning Consortium coordinate or provide regularly scheduled events to showcase emerging technologies, including information about their effective implementation in instruction. Information about the technology events will be communicated via the Florida Distance Learning Consortium website, newsletters, podcasts, and other forms of technology.

**Recommendation 21:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that the Florida Distance Learning Consortium be tasked with identifying grant opportunities requiring cooperative or collaborative arrangements with other educational institutions and/or with business and industry regarding emerging technologies.

### **Faculty Professional Development**

Over the last ten years, faculties across the state have used different avenues to migrate courses from the traditional face-to-face instructional method to web-based asynchronous delivery of courses. While all institutions view faculty training as an essential element of quality e-Learning instruction, not all devote the same level of resources to this area. There is a lack of reciprocal exchange of e-Learning teaching methods and content across the state. The Florida Distance Learning Consortium is uniquely positioned to coordinate efforts to support faculty and course development on a statewide scale.

Professional development programs for faculty in preparation for teaching in distance learning courses and programs usually cover topics in the following areas:

- Effective design and development of distance learning courses.
- Facilitation of online communication and student engagement.
- Appropriate use of emerging and new technologies in an online course.
- Development and use of effective assessment and evaluation techniques in a distance learning environment.

Most, if not all of these topic areas currently exist among Florida's postsecondary community as a part of local efforts to prepare faculty in the transition to distance learning instruction. Through its membership the Florida Distance Learning Consortium has the ability to collectively evaluate needs, identify existing resources and subsequently facilitate access to training modules based on best practices submissions already in use by consortium members. Further, through the distribution

capabilities that exists within the statewide digital repository, a single source for e-Learning best practices can be created which would serve to encourage the exchange of ideas and resources in better preparing faculty for the development and delivery of distance education.

The creation and use of such a collection of existing faculty development resources within a statewide repository will help to raise the profile of innovative teaching practices while promoting collaboration between and among faculty from different institutions. The end result would be an increase in the range of instructional strategies and technologies employed by Florida faculty through an easily accessible cost effective format.

**Recommendation 22: The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that the Florida Distance Learning Consortium use a “best practices approach” to collect and distribute professional development resources for faculty and staff through a statewide repository such as the Orange Grove.**

The Florida Distance Learning Consortium, through regular communication with its member institutions, can collect and make available a calendar or schedule of faculty and staff development opportunities offered throughout the state. By taking advantage of existing training opportunities, institutions can eliminate duplicate activities, assure that valuable programs have adequate participation, and facilitate the sharing of ideas and collaboration among faculty statewide.

**Recommendation 23:The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that the Florida Distance Learning Consortium coordinate and support e-Learning faculty development opportunities across the state by creating a web-based schedule of faculty development opportunities offered within the education community.**

### III. Strategic Goals of the State

The strategic plan adopted by the State Board of Education in October 2008 included areas of focus for strengthening foundation skills, improving college and career readiness, expanding opportunities for postsecondary degrees and certificates, improving the quality of teaching, improving K-12 educational choices, and aligning resources to strategic goals. The Board of Governors State University System of Florida Strategic Plan for 2005-2013 established goals related to student access, production of degrees, meeting statewide professional and workforce needs, and building world-class academic programs and research capacity. In both plans the components that are most relevant to the work of the Florida Distance Learning Task Force are those directly related to degree production. In addition to increasing degree production, improving Florida's distance learning infrastructure will support the goals of both boards by promoting student access, supporting workforce and economic competitiveness needs, fostering quality academic programs, and meeting the needs of local communities.

The recently approved State Board of Education (SBOE) strategic plan includes the following four objectives under the focus area of expanding opportunities for postsecondary degrees and certificates:

- Increase postsecondary enrollment rates.
- Increase both diversity and number of high school graduates who enroll in postsecondary education.
- Increase diversity, number, and percentage of high school graduates who earn a certificate or a degree at a community college or career center.
- Increase diversity, number, and percentage of community college or state university system students who enroll in and complete a baccalaureate program of study.

The Florida Board of Governors (BOG) is currently in the process of reviewing the underlying assumptions used to formulate its 2005-2013 strategic plan. In an effort to better align state university system degree production with the economic and workforce needs of the state, the Board updated the plan's areas of programmatic strategic emphasis which provide the broad categories for identifying degree programs that support alignment of degree offerings with the economic/workforce needs of Florida.

The Board of Governors' Areas of Programmatic Strategic Emphasis are:

- Critical Needs: Education
- Critical Needs: Health Professions
- Critical Needs: Security and Emergency Services
- Economic Development: Globalization
- Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM)
- Economic Development: Regional Workforce Needs

As part of its ongoing strategic planning, the Board of Governors also adopted in December 2007 a plan entitled *Forward by Design* that includes a series of initiatives and projects related to degree

production. Included as part of an initiative to increase baccalaureate degree production, two current projects are either directly or tangentially related to distance learning.

- Project C seeks to create new models for baccalaureate degree production through collaborative efforts with the Division of Community Colleges of the State Board of Education and the not-for-profit Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida.
- Project E seeks to increase the number of distance education degrees with special emphasis on high state needs in cooperation with community colleges and not-for-profit independent colleges and universities.

The Areas of Programmatic Strategic Emphasis will play a major role in determining degree programs that meet high state needs and are therefore good candidates for targeted development and delivery through distance learning. Within certain critical need areas opportunities exist for establishing cooperative degree programs that can tap into faculty expertise across educational sectors including the university system, public colleges, and independent institutions. Any collaborative efforts for baccalaureate degree production will also address existing SUS goals related to access and meeting statewide professional and workforce needs.

Improving Florida's distance learning infrastructure will support the goals of both boards by promoting student access, supporting workforce and economic competitiveness needs, fostering quality academic programs, and meeting the needs of local communities.

### **Analysis and Recommendations**

There is growing demand for distance learning courses among the age group that is traditionally associated with undergraduate education, particularly for online instruction. Adult learners who already have a large number of college credits but no degree are a largely untapped resource for increasing degree production. Targeting this group with a program that combines outreach, student support, and a fast-track degree program could positively impact the state's workforce by increasing the number of adults with a bachelor's degree or higher.

Development of graduate-level distance learning courses and programs has occurred primarily in response to market forces such as student demand and ability to pay. The same market approach has been less effective in developing baccalaureate programs that can be accessed entirely through distance learning. With targeted funding and increased collaboration, distance learning could become a strategy for the state to reach the national average in the number of bachelor degree graduates per capita in the 18-44 year old age group, especially in disciplines that are aligned with Florida's economic and workforce needs. The Areas of Programmatic Strategic Emphasis adopted by the Board of Governors will play a major role in determining university degree programs that are aligned with state needs, and a similar methodology would be effective for the Florida College System.

The following recommendations with regard to distance learning will help Florida meet statewide professional and workforce needs:

**Recommendation 24:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that college and university boards of trustees encourage the expansion of distance learning course offerings so that more opportunities will exist for students to fully complete associate and baccalaureate degrees through distance learning.

**Recommendation 25:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that the Legislature provide incentive funding for developing and implementing cooperative degree programs that address specific educational and economic needs of Florida identified in the strategic plans of the State Board of Education and the Florida Board of Governors.

**Recommendation 26:** The Florida Distance Learning Task Force recommends that the Legislature provide incentive funding for collaborative statewide effort to create fast-track degree completion opportunities for adult learners that can be completed in large part through distance learning.

## Conclusion

The recommendations contained within this report cover a range of issues including the establishment of a central coordinating entity, the Florida Distance Learning Consortium, through which the state can effectively enact policy related to distance learning activities in collaboration with the appropriate governing boards. Although Florida's colleges and universities have made significant progress in the development and implementation of distance learning courses and programs, stronger state-level advocacy, coordination and support are warranted. Other states have been able to provide coordination and support through centralized governance structures or state-level virtual institutions. Florida's varied governance structure and devotion to local control makes state-level coordination and support more complex. Further, state postsecondary virtual institutions have met with limited success. The voluntary coordination and support activities provided through the Florida Distance Learning Consortium coupled with the considerable course and degree offerings of Florida's colleges and universities make any consideration of a virtual institution unnecessarily costly and redundant. Although the Consortium's activities have provided valuable coordination and support across sectors, the organization must evolve to effectively address the policy, coordination and support needs of the state in a time of rapid expansion and instructional innovation.

The report also includes recommendations covering the need for a state-level learning resource repository, an online registration system and the promotion of the Florida Higher Education Online Catalog. The Task Force endorses all of these as essential components in an overall strategy in the development of a systemic approach to the development and delivery of distance learning courses and programs.

Finally, the Task Force, in submitting this report, believes that the recommendations provide the basis upon which a strong distance learning system can be built that will improve student access to courses and degree programs, increase cost effective delivery of distance learning, and reduce unnecessary duplication of effort through better coordination and collaboration among Florida's colleges and universities. Although progress thus far has been good, action is critical if distance learning is to be an effective tool in the achievement of system and state goals. The Task Force urges the Legislature to consider the recommendations contained in its report as a critical step in managing the unprecedented rapid and changing role of technology in our education system.

## Appendix A

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### Distance Learning Task Force Members

**Kathy Cobb**, Provost, Brevard Community College

**Joyce Elam**, Vice Provost FIU Online, Florida International University

**John Hitt**, President, University of Central Florida

**Richard Madaus**, Executive Director, College Center for Library Automation

**Kathleen Moore**, Asst. V. P. Academic and Student Affairs, University of South Florida

**John Opper**, Executive Director, Florida Distance Learning Consortium

**Carol Probstfeld**, V.P. Business and Administrative Affairs, Manatee Community College

**Richard Stevens**, Director of Academic and Student Affairs, Board of Governors

**Steve Wallace**, President, Florida Community College at Jacksonville

## Appendix B

<b>HB 7105 Assignments</b>
3. (a) The management and promotion of the Florida Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog pursuant to s. 1004.09, Florida Statutes, to help increase student access to undergraduate distance learning courses and degree programs and, in particular, students seeking accelerated access in order to complete their degrees.
3. (b) The creation of a central content repository for instructional resources which can be used by faculty in developing, evaluating, and enhancing distance learning course and degree programs.
3. (c) The potential use of distance learning as a means to address critical educational needs of the state.
3. (d) The evaluation and promotion of new and proven instructional methods, emerging technologies, and quality distance learning course and degree programs.
3. (e) The coordination and support of educational programs and other training opportunities for faculty and professional staff in developing, evaluating, and enhancing distance learning courses and degree programs.
3. (f) A process for negotiating statewide licensing and pricing agreements for distance learning resources and entering into agreements with distance learning resource providers when such negotiations and agreements result in cost savings for the participating institutions.
3. (g) Opportunities for building partnerships among educational institutions, businesses, and communities.
3. (h) Methods that will improve student access to and completion of distance learning courses and degree programs.
3. (i) Policies that address ways to increase access and cost-effectiveness in the development and delivery of undergraduate distance learning course and degree programs. Such recommended policies must address the cost variations that exist within the delivery system and identify the best practices that minimize cost of the development and delivery of distance learning course while enhancing the effectiveness of instruction.

3. (j) An accountability mechanism to assess the effectiveness of the services provided by the Florida Distance Learning Consortium.

3. (k) The future role of the Florida Distance Learning Consortium as a facilitator of the state's public undergraduate postsecondary distance learning.

3. (l) A process for reporting on the data collected by the Florida Higher Distance Learning Catalog.

3. (m) The definition of a distance learning course.

#### Distance Learning and Tech Fees

3. (n) A plan for developing and implementing an online system that streamlines and automates the registration process for 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. The task force shall identify and address the applicable administrative, programmatic, and technical issues and protocols necessary to ensure the implementation of such a system as an alternative to the standard registration process of each institution which complies with the academic policies and procedures of the institutions offering the course. At a minimum, the system must:

1. Allow a qualified student to register for any undergraduate course listed in the catalog, including courses offered by an institution that is not the student's degree-granting or home institution.

2. Allow for the expedited transfer of the distance learning course credit awarded by the institution offering the distance learning course to the student's degree-granting or home institution upon the student's successful completion of the distance learning course.

3. Be accessible from the catalog.

4. Comply with applicable technology security standards and guidelines established by the Agency for Enterprise Information Technology to ensure the secure transmission of student information.

## Appendix C

### Recommended Classification Scheme for Technology Delivered or Enhanced Courses

1. **Instructional Delivery Method:** All courses will be classified with an instructional delivery indicator.

<b>T</b>	<b>Traditional</b> – 100% face-to-face instruction with no technology used. (100% F2F)
<b>TE</b>	<b>Technology Enhanced</b> – Primarily face-to-face instruction utilizing some form of technology for delivery of supplemental course materials and no more than 49 % of direct instruction.
<b>H</b>	<b>Hybrid/Blended</b> – A combination of face-to-face and technology delivered instruction where from 50% to 79% of direct instruction is delivered utilizing some form of technology when the student and faculty member are separated by time, space or both.
<b>D</b>	<b>Distance Learning/Online Virtual</b> - Technology delivered instruction where 80% or more of the direct instruction is delivered utilizing some form of technology when the student and faculty member are separated by time, space or both.

2. **Technology Delivery Indicator:** The type of technology used by the instructor for course delivery will be indicated. A maximum of three indicators may be used for coding. The indicator should reflect the primary method of delivery. If technology is only a supplemental tool for a given course, the first occurrence of this element should be coded “N” (None) and subsequent occurrences should be used to indicate the technology used.

<b>M</b>	<b>Materials</b> – Primarily print-based materials for checkout or mail-out which may be packaged with other materials including CDs, DVDs, and videotapes or telecourses not broadcast. Correspondence courses fall into this category.
<b>B</b>	<b>Broadcast</b> – Course delivered by open-air broadcast (such as PBS), fed by satellite, or delivered by cable TV, EBS, microwave, or radio that is synchronous or live. Transmission is one-way, although telephone, web, or email access may be included for interactivity.
<b>C</b>	<b>Conferencing, Compressed Video, Audio, ITV</b> – Two-way, audio and video, synchronous delivery that is interactive between two or more locations.
<b>P</b>	<b>Mobile or Portable Devices</b> – Course delivery over PDAs, MP3 players, digital video players, handheld gaming units, or other “personal” or mobile devices.
<b>W</b>	<b>Web-based or Internet-based</b> – Course delivery via the Internet, via Web-TV, video streaming on the computer, or any other technology heretofore not yet developed or thought of.
<b>N</b>	<b>No technology employed.</b>

## Appendix D

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### Understanding and Calculating Distance Learning Fees

A distance learning fee was authorized under the following law:

FS 1009.23 (16)(a) “The amount of the distance learning course fee may not exceed the **additional costs** of the services provided which are attributable to the development and delivery of the distance learning course.”

A framework for describing the additional costs which are attributable to the development and delivery of distance learning courses has been developed. These recoverable costs are used to calculate the fee to be charged for distance learning courses. The framework, as shown below, consists of 4 levels<sup>1</sup>: A distance learning course is one in which at least 80% of the instruction is delivered with technology, the instruction occurs where professor and students are separated by location, and the course is listed in the Florida Higher Education Distance Learning Catalog.

Level 1: Basic IT Infrastructure

Level 2: Centralized Distance Learning Costs

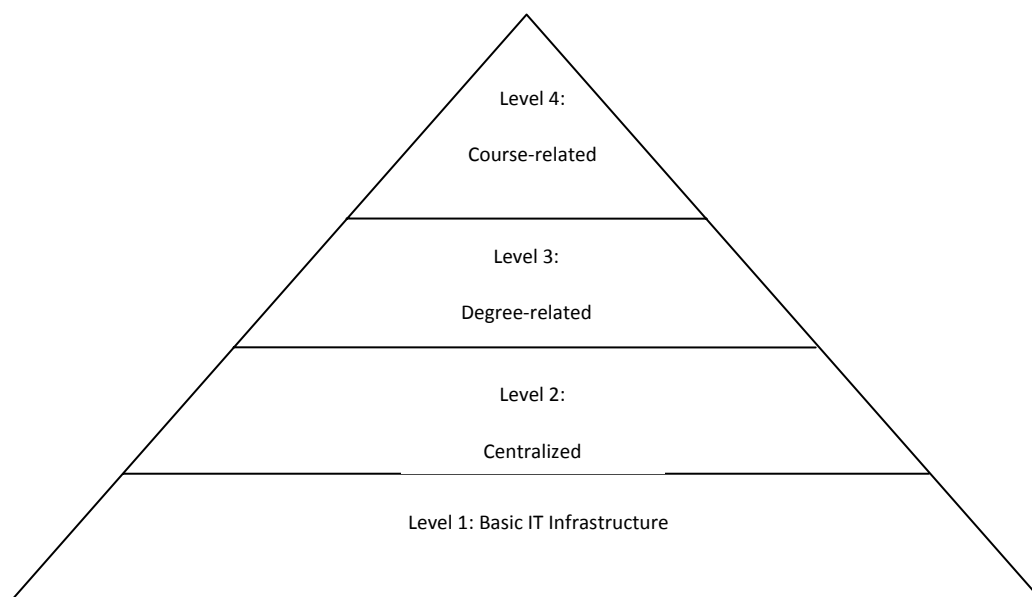
Level 3: Degree-related Distance Learning Costs

Level 4: Course-related Distance Learning Costs

We anticipate that most institutions will have recoverable distance learning costs at Level 2 and may have recoverable costs at Levels 3 and 4 depending on how the institution is organized to develop and deliver distance education courses.

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<sup>1</sup> The framework is based on one presented by Dr. Steven Wallace at the Florida Distance Learning Task Force meeting on September 22, 2008.



#### Level 1: Basic IT Infrastructure

Level 1 includes costs for basic IT infrastructure development and maintenance that supports instructional technology computing activities in the institution for all students regardless of method of instruction (e.g., online registration system, online access to library services, email system, computer labs). These costs are not specific to distance learning courses and will not be included in the calculation of the distance learning fee.

The additional costs specific to distance learning courses are Level 2, Level 3, and Level 4. The specific costs included within each level are described below.

#### Level 2: Centralized Distance Learning Costs

For this level, institutions may adopt one of two models. In the first model, distinct, centralized organizational unit(s) are established to develop and deliver distance education courses. We call this model the stand-alone model. In this case, it is straightforward to determine the total costs for distance learning at this level; they are just the total operating costs for this unit since all costs are directly related to the design and delivery of distance learning courses. These costs are identified in Appendix A. Any IT infrastructure shared between the centralized Online Unit(s) and other instructional technology computing units in the institution would be calculated on a pro-rata basis and added to the total cost for this unit. The distance learning fee per credit hour associated with this level would be the total cost attributable to distance learning course sections divided by the total SCHs enrollment in distance learning course sections.

In the second model, distance education is provided by the same organizational unit(s) that provides general instructional technology computing support and services for all students. We call this model

the integrated model. In this case, the distance learning course fee is based on a pro-rata share of the actual permissible costs.

Permissible costs related to developing and delivering distance learning courses for the integrated model are included in Table 1.

### Level 3: Degree-related Distance Learning Costs

There are two models for supporting distance learning at the degree level. One model is a centralized model where all costs for developing and delivering distance learning courses are aggregated across all degrees in the institution and divided by total enrollment in all distance learning courses. In that case, there would be no Level 3 costs included in the calculation of the distance learning fee.

Another model recognizes that some costs of developing distance learning degree programs vary across disciplines. Thus, rather than including these costs at Level 2, these costs for all distance learning course sections within a degree program are divided by SCH enrollment in these course sections to obtain a Level 3 fee per credit hour.

Permissible costs, by degree program, related to developing and delivering distance learning courses for institutions adopting this second model are given in Table 1.

### Level 4: Course-related Distance Learning Costs

There may also be costs that are specific to sections of a particular course within a degree program that are delivered via distance. These permissible costs could include those identified in Table 1.

The total of permissible course costs is divided by SCH enrollment across all distance learning sections of the course to arrive at a Level 4 credit hour fee.

### What cannot be charged?

- Instructional costs
- Any costs covered by other fees (health, activity, technology, etc.)
- Costs not associated with the development and delivery of eligible distance learning courses

### Summary

The additional costs and expenses associated with developing and delivering distance learning courses often require significant front end investments in course development and specialized technology. It would be unfair to students to charge all these front end costs to the first year of delivery of new courses, and it is recommended the costs be amortized over a three year period. This also supports the sound financial practice of periodic review of student fees, and fees would be adjusted accordingly (up, down, or same) in the next three-year projection cycle.

The distance learning fee for particular distance learning course sections will be re-calculated every three years<sup>2</sup> based on a three-year average of forecasted costs and enrollment in distance education courses as follows:

Distance Learning fee for a distance learning course section = Level 2 distance learning fee + Level 3 distance learning fee, if applicable, + Level 4 distance learning fee, if applicable.

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<sup>2</sup> Institutions should establish a distance learning fee based on a three-year average of forecasted costs and enrollment that will be implemented in academic year 2009-10. Thereafter, the fee would be reviewed every 3 years.

Table 1

Permissible expenses that represent the additional costs associated with developing and delivering distance learning courses for Levels 2, 3, and 4 may include:

- specialized technology and maintenance (e.g., hardware, software licenses; technology consulting; hosting and network services)
- development and/or acquisition (licensing) of instructional content for distance learning courses
- distance learning program development and accreditation
- distance learning program quality assessment and control
- faculty development and support for distance learning courses
- distance learning student support services
- testing facilities and support
- distance learning administrative & operating costs
- course management system server, database, and support staff
- instructional material