

*Providing distance learning leadership for Florida's educational institutions*

## **FLORIDA DISTANCE LEARNING CONSORTIUM**

### ***FY 2006-07 STATUS REPORT***

DRAFT

# The Florida Distance Learning Consortium

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## Technology in Education

Technology has changed how we work, play, and learn. According to a 2007 survey by EDUCAUSE Center for Applied Research <sup>1</sup>, technology is becoming infused throughout institutions of higher education, where students expect to have access to information and technology:

- Almost all respondents to the survey owned a computer (98 percent). Laptops are gaining ground as the platform of choice.
- The 1.6 percent of students that did not own a computer reported the same patterns of computing use as those who owned one (e.g., basic activities such as email, writing documents for class, and accessing library web sites).
- The use of wikis and digital games is increasing in instruction, which correlates with student interest in using these technologies in their courses. Wikis have taken off with 41.7 percent of students accessing them at least weekly.
- Eighty-two percent of students have used a computer management system, which is a significant increase over the prior year.
- Students that indicated their instructors use IT effectively were more likely to report that technology had a positive impact on their academic experience.

As depicted in Exhibit 1, Florida's growth in distance learning enrollment continues along a strong upward trend. As a result, colleges and universities easily fill all sections of distance learning courses and have faced continued challenges as they try to meet strong student demand. The Southern Regional Education Board reports that Florida's universities lead the region with the highest percentage (12.6%) of instruction through e-learning for 2006-07. In addition, Florida's Community College system has seen e-learning enrollment growth of 21% over the same period.

## The Florida Distance Learning Consortium

Since its creation in 1996, the Florida Distance Learning Consortium (FDLC) has provided leadership in distance learning education for Florida's institutions of higher education. The FDLC achieves this goal through broad-based collaboration that capitalizes on the strengths of its 65 voluntary public and private community college and university members. Thus, the FDLC is able to lead short- and long-term strategies to promote the effective use of technology- and distance-based instruction in Florida. Key trends that illustrate the results of this collaborative approach include:

*The FDLC offers a single web access point that lists more than 13,380 distance learning courses available to students.*

- The number of e-learning course offerings on the FDLC web site has increased to 12,800, with over 60,000 hits per week.

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<sup>1</sup> Caruso, Judith and Gail Salaway, *The ECAR Study of Undergraduate Students and Information Technology 2007*, September 2007.

- The mix of distance learning courses offered in Florida has changed in favor of web-based instruction. Florida’s community colleges report a 28 percent increase in web-based courses over the last four years.
- Some community colleges have reported that over 34 percent of all enrolled students are taking web-based courses.
- There were nearly 55,000 more K-20 students enrolled in distance learning in FY 2005-06 than the prior year, as illustrated in Exhibit 1.
- The catalog of online degree programs currently lists 124 available programs at the masters and doctoral level.

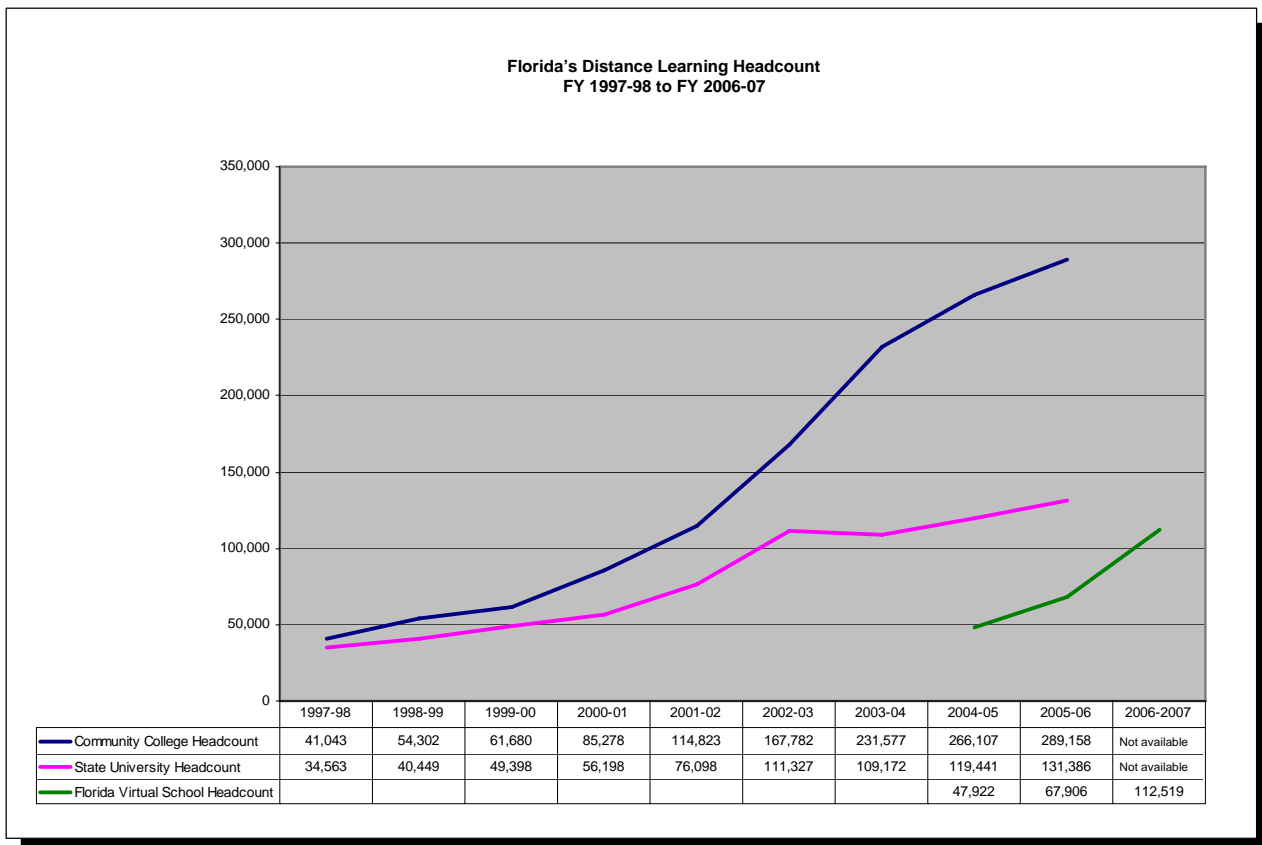


Exhibit 1 – Florida’s Distance Learning Headcount, FY 1997-98 to FY 2005-06.

# FY 2006-07 FDLC Strategic Activities

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2006-07, the FDLC and its member institutions continued and expanded six key initiatives to ensure Florida's postsecondary students are provided access to quality technology and distance learning courses.

## 1. Statewide Leadership

Innovation is often the result of the synergy between individuals with a common purpose. To promote and support distance learning innovation in Florida, the FDLC conducts quarterly consortium meetings with its 65 public and private member institutions. These sessions allow locally based distance learning leaders to share institutional-level successes and lessons learned. National and international leaders and state-level stakeholders are invited to attend the meetings in order to present new ideas, share information, and facilitate change. In addition to information sharing, the quarterly meetings often result in the identification of statewide obstacles and roadblocks that are preventing technology-based change from occurring in Florida. When obstacles are identified, FDLC helps drive reform by communicating the challenges and possible solutions to state and local stakeholders.

*FDLC spearheads synergy and innovation among Florida's distance learning stakeholders through quarterly meetings and the infusion of new ideas and products.*

## 2. Online Access to Distance Learning Course Offerings

Through the FDLC web site ([www.distancelearn.org](http://www.distancelearn.org)), postsecondary students can locate distance learning courses offered in Florida which support their course curriculum or enhance lifelong learning. In addition, students in the Southeast can find the same course information through the Southern Regional Education Board's (SREB) Electronic Campus web site (<http://www.electroniccampus.org>). Prior to each semester, this information is updated by the institutions to ensure information accuracy. Once a student locates a course of interest, the web site directs the student to the appropriate postsecondary institution for enrollment and registration. The number of courses listed on this web site has increased to more than 12,800 courses in FY 2006-07 (13,380 in FY 2007-08), with approximately 60,000 hits per week. In FY 2006-07, the FDLC converted its online course database to a searchable database, thereby allowing users to easily find courses by institution, degree level, title, and other search terms. The Degree Options Database currently includes 294 listed programs offered through distance delivery.

## 3. Web-Based Repository of Digital Resources ("The Orange Grove")

The Orange Grove is a repository of digital learning resources capable of serving Florida's K-20 educational system, which supports nearly 230,000 educators. The purpose of the repository is to provide an easy-to-use access point where educators can quickly locate instructional materials to enhance student learning and to teach diverse learning styles. Despite very limited state funding, the FDLC has grown the Orange Grove to a repository containing more than 1,500 learning resources. The number of learning resources will continue to increase daily as items are contributed by member institutions or developed by the FDLC. Additional Legislative funding in

2007-2008 has allowed the Consortium to expand participation in the repository to all Florida educators and students. Through resource sharing with other repositories, The Orange Grove provides access to an additional 30,000+ resources. Resource sharing was established by the FDLC in FY 2006-07 with the Library of Congress, PALMM (Publication of Archival, Library, and Museum Materials, Discover (Australian Repository), the University System of Georgia, the College Center for Library Automation, and Florida on Florida. Further efforts are underway with private publishers to add grade-level specific resources. These partnerships will help expand the number of items accessible through Florida's Web-Based Repository.

In FY 2006-07, the FDLC's Orange Grove project received national recognition from the U.S. Department of Education in October 2006 through the award of a prestigious \$473,364 grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE). This grant recognized that Florida was spearheading innovation in the creation of a statewide learning repository, which other states are seeking to emulate. This three-year grant enables the FDLC to develop a national blueprint for other states to follow in creating statewide repositories, as well as to create implementation strategies to facilitate statewide deployment.

#### **4. Leveraged Purchases for Cost Savings**

One of the most important roles of the FDLC is leveraged buying and coordinated purchasing of common distance learning products and tools. Each year, the FDLC surveys its members for common products of interest and negotiates with vendors for cost savings. The following products and services were identified for coordinated purchasing in FY 2007-08 by the consortium members:

- Learning Management Systems: Angel, Blackboard, Desire2Learn
- Academic Student Support Services: Smarthinking
- E-learning Software Tools: Plato Learning
- Publisher Partnerships: National Repository of Online Content (NROC), Intelcom, Dallas, Annenburg

*The FDLC saved the State of Florida taxpayers \$1,037,000 in FY 2006-07 through leveraged purchases of distance- and technology-based tools and courses.*

As illustrated in Exhibit 2, the FDLC saved State of Florida taxpayers an estimated \$1,037,000 in FY 2006-07 through leveraged purchases of distance- and technology-based tools and courses.

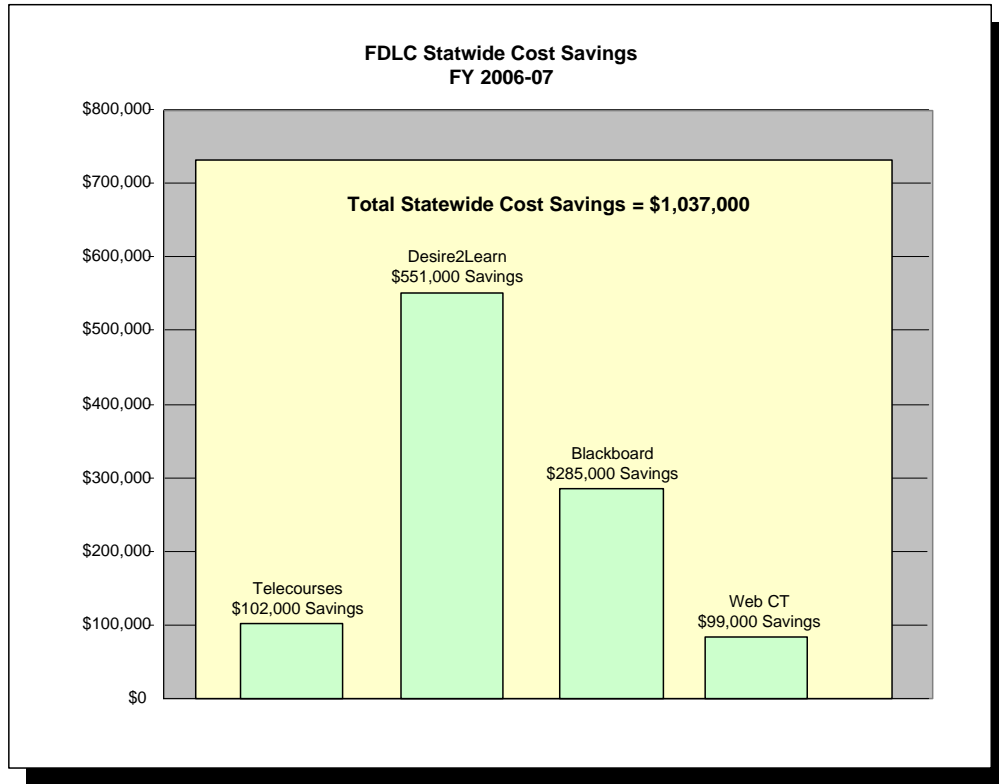


Exhibit 2 - Florida's Distance Learning Leverage Purchase Cost Savings, FY 2006-07

*FDLC pre-qualified 21 technology-based courses and tools to meet the needs of local institutions and support Florida's educational mission.*

**5. Infusion of Innovative Products**

Because of its statewide mission, FDLC serves as a conduit for vendors to present innovative instructional tools to a broad range of institutions. In FY 2006-07, the FDLC screened more than 21 products for their instructional value and appropriateness, thereby leveraging statewide efforts for product reviews. Vendors whose products are deemed to be of potential value are endorsed by the FDLC. If a significant number of institutions are interested in the product, the vendor is invited to a FDLC quarterly meeting to demonstrate their product and coordinated statewide procurement can occur if there is sufficient interest.

**6. National Leadership**

FDLC staff members recognize their responsibility to represent Florida in the national arena. The FDLC is actively involved in groups such as EDUCAUSE, the Southern Regional Education Board

(SREB) and the Instructional Technology Council. Involvement in national organizations brings new ideas to Florida and facilitates change.

## 7. Other Initiatives

In FY 2006-07, the FDLC supported a number of other distance learning initiatives, such as:

- **Web Site Hosting** – The FDLC supported a number of web sites, including Florida Girls Get IT!, Florida’s Alternative Teacher Certification Program, Department of Children and Families Education Initiative, and the Florida Professional Development Alternatives for Exceptional Student Educators Program.
- **SREB SCORE Project** – The FDLC staff participate in the SCORE project, which is a multi-state partnership to link state-level learning repositories and establish best practices.
- **Desire 2 Learn Hosting** – The FDLC hosts the Desire 2 Learn electronic repository for seven community colleges, two school districts and for the Alternative Certification Program.
- **EdPass**- The FDLC, in cooperation with the SREB and voluntary institutions, began efforts to pilot a streamlined, electronic admissions and course enrollment process. The initial pilot project will support state-level registration for Florida’s teachers interested in distance learning courses for professional development. This pilot project will allow teachers to seamlessly find, register, and take a distance learning course located via the SREB or FDLC course catalog web sites – regardless of the institution offering the course.
- **Policy Task Group** – The FDLC is leading an effort to remove policies and barriers that inhibit e-learning activities. In FY 2006-07, the FDLC chartered a Policy Task Group that will identify, review, and recommend modifications to existing statutes, rules, and related policies. Issues to be examined include, but are not limited to, state funding formulae, state and federal financial aid policies, faculty workload, contact hour rules, e-learning data elements, facilities funding (i.e., PECO), and compensation.
- **Ask a Tutor** - The FDLC created an initiative to develop a state-level process and system to provide remote tutoring and support for students in crucial academic areas. In FY 2006-07, the FDLC released a Request for Information to identify the possible features of online/ virtual tutoring systems. While avenues for support and implementation continue to be explored, fiscal constraints have limited progress.
- **Workforce Education** – The FDLC continues to collaborate with the Division for Workforce Education to increase e-learning instructional delivery in the areas of GED, ESOL, and Core Health curricular programs.
- **Degree Completion** – Recent studies in Oklahoma and Louisiana revealed that there were more than 150,000 people who are within a semester or two of completing a degree. Similar analyses in Florida suggest a substantial population of adult learners who have left the education system that are within a year of completing a degree. The FDLC is developing an effort to link several existing and pilot programs to focus on identifying these individuals in Florida and providing them the resources needed to obtain their degree with a heavy reliance on the opportunities provided through technology delivered instruction.

- ***State-Wide Communication*** - The FDLC employs a number of strategies to facilitate state-wide communication and sharing, such as:
  - ***Database*** - The development of a database of distance learning contacts, organizations, and events.
  - ***Newsletter*** - The development and distribution of a monthly newsletter that is emailed to FDLC members.
  - ***BLOG*** - The development of the Florida Distance Learning Connections blog to encourage state-wide communications.
  - ***Quarterly Meetings*** - The coordination of quarterly meetings for communication and sharing.
  - ***ListServe*** - The purchase of ListServe software to assist with project communications.
  - ***Webinars*** - The coordination of professional development webinars for faculty with speakers and subjects identified by the Faculty Development Committee.