Florida Continues as Leader Among SREB States

The 2008-09 Highlights of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) State Data Exchange report showed that colleges in The Florida College System (FCS) continue to perform at the highest levels in many areas, especially when compared to the other SREB member states. This report examines Florida’s performance on an array of topics such as degree productivity and persistence, headcounts, funding, and faculty, providing comparisons to previous years\(^1\) when possible.

**SREB Background**

SREB is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that works with 16 member states (Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia) to improve public pre-K-12 and higher education. Founded by the region's governors and legislators in 1948, SREB was America’s first interstate compact for education.\(^2\)

The SREB State Data Exchange is a cooperative effort of SREB and the statewide higher education governing and coordinating boards in the South. Founded in 1969-1970, it is one of the nation's oldest, most comprehensive sources of comparative data on public higher education. The Data Exchange annually collects, compiles, and publishes the most up-to-date statistics on postsecondary education in the 16-state SREB region, including information by institutional category.\(^3\)

---

2. Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), [http://www.sreb.org/page/1068/who_we_are.html](http://www.sreb.org/page/1068/who_we_are.html)
Persistence in Florida Colleges

Exhibit 1 shows the first-year persistence rate of the fall 2007 cohort entering Florida colleges second only to Alabama. Persistence is defined as a student returning to a college after the first year of enrollment transferring for the second year. Seventy-three percent (73%) of students who enrolled at a Florida college in 2007 returned the following year. Florida’s persistence rate surpassed the SREB average (65.1%) by 8 percentage points and increased 1.5 percentage points over the prior cohort.

**EXHIBIT 1: FLORIDA RANKS SECOND IN FIRST-YEAR PERSISTENCE RATES***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>First-Year Persistence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama (2.2)</td>
<td>73.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida (1.5)</td>
<td>73.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland (-5.2)</td>
<td>67.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia (3.0)</td>
<td>66.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky (0.5)</td>
<td>66.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SREB Avg. (6.3)</td>
<td>65.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia (-6.4)</td>
<td>64.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas (0.1)</td>
<td>63.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi** (-)</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma (5.0)</td>
<td>61.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina (2.0)</td>
<td>60.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana (3.1)</td>
<td>60.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware** (-)</td>
<td>60.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee (0.5)</td>
<td>59.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina** (0.1)</td>
<td>57.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia (-5.0)</td>
<td>57.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas (1.7)</td>
<td>54.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Numbers in parentheses next to state names represent change from prior year

“—” indicates not available

* “Persistence” refers to students re-enrolling or transferring for the second year

** Do not report students transferring out

SOURCE: SREB DATA EXCHANGE, 2009

Florida’s three-year persistence rate was 68% and “tied” with Alabama, who had the same persistence rate for students first enrolling in 2005 (Exhibit 2). The SREB average was 59%. The Florida College System maintains an open-door policy, providing higher education opportunities to many students, including those who are non-traditional or underprepared. These students typically require more time than the conventional two-year timeframe to earn their degrees or certificates. Florida’s persistence rate illustrates that a large percentage of students are consistently re-enrolling from term to term and making progress towards completion.
EXHIBIT 2: FLORIDA RANKS FIRST IN THREE-YEAR PERSISTENCE RATES

Three-Year Persistence for Students Enrolling 2005

- Florida: 68%
- Alabama: 64%
- Maryland: 62%
- Kentucky: 61%
- West Virginia: 61%
- Georgia: 61%
- Virginia: 60%
- Oklahoma: 59%
- SREB Avg.: 59%
- South Carolina: 59%
- Louisiana: 57%
- Tennessee: 57%
- Texas: 57%
- North Carolina: 50%
- Arkansas: 50%

SOURCE: DIVISION OF FLORIDA COLLEGES ANALYSIS OF SREB DATA

EXHIBIT 3: FLORIDA HAS THE HIGHEST GRADUATION RATE AMONG SREB STATES

Graduation Rates of Full-Time Students, 2005 Cohort

- Florida: 31%
- Mississippi: 23%
- Arkansas: 21%
- North Carolina: 20%
- Alabama: 19%
- Kentucky: 19%
- SREB Avg.: 17%
- Oklahoma: 17%
- West Virginia: 16%
- Virginia: 15%
- Maryland: 14%
- Georgia: 12%
- Texas: 11%
- Tennessee: 11%
- South Carolina: 11%
- Louisiana: 6%
- Delaware: 6%

SOURCE: DIVISION OF FLORIDA COLLEGES ANALYSIS OF SREB DATA
Exhibit 3 shows the percentage of full-time students in the 2005 cohort who completed their degree or program within 150% of the normal time (i.e., three years). Florida’s graduation rate for this cohort was 31%—significantly higher (+8%) than any other member state and 14 percentage points higher than the SREB average.

Degree Productivity
Florida led the SREB states in the number of degrees and certificates awarded with a total of 70,533 (49,242 degrees and 21,291 certificates) in 2007-08 (Exhibit 4). Texas came in second behind Florida with a total 59,003 awards (a difference of 11,530). Florida’s associate degree productivity represented 26% of all associate degrees awarded by SREB states and 21% of all certificates in the SREB states. Florida continues to be a frontrunner in supporting and retaining students to completion of their degrees and certificates.

Exhibit 4: Florida Produces the Most Degrees and Certificates Among SREB States

Source: Division of Florida Colleges Analysis of SREB Data
EXHIBIT 5: THIRTEEN INDIVIDUAL FLORIDA COLLEGES PRODUCED MORE DEGREES THAN ALL COMMUNITY COLLEGES COMBINED IN AT LEAST ONE SREB STATE

**Associate Degrees and Certificates Awarded, 2007-08**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>Florida</th>
<th>SREB State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FL State College at Jacksonville</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broward College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palm Beach State College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Petersburg College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Fe College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillsborough Community College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brevard Community College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian River State College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daytona State College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tallahassee Community College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminole State College of Florida</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Division of Florida Colleges Analysis of SREB Data

**Exhibit 5** shows the number of degrees and certificates awarded by SREB states and selected colleges within The Florida College System. Two Florida colleges, Miami Dade College and Valencia Community College, were top producers of associate degrees and certificates among colleges nationwide. Miami Dade College awarded a total of 9,164 degrees and certificates—more than the total number of awards in six SREB member states for the same year. Valencia Community College produced a total of 6,926 awards, putting it ahead of four SREB states.

**Tuition and Funding**

As with 2007-08, Florida ranked below the SREB average in tuition and funding for 2008-09 (**Exhibit 6**). Georgia moved ahead of Florida in tuition and required fees. Kentucky and North Carolina continue to hold positions as having the overall highest ($3,630) and lowest ($1,424) tuition rates, respectively. Florida’s tuition increased from $2,035 in 2007-08 to $2,265 in 2008-09—this was $1,365 below Kentucky and $841 above North Carolina’s annual tuition.
For 2008-09, Florida fell below the SREB average to $3,169 in state funding (Exhibit 7). The SREB average has dropped from $3,650 in 2007-08 to $3,263 in 2008-09. The same states (Delaware, Alabama, Louisiana,
Arkansas, and Georgia) take the top five positions in state funding in 2008-09 as in 2007-08, while four states and the SREB average were at the bottom of state funding: Florida, Maryland, Texas, and South Carolina.

**Exhibit 8: Florida’s Total Funding is Last Among SREB States**

For 2008-09, Florida was last in total state funding per FTE behind all 15 other SREB states. As shown in Exhibit 8, the SREB average dropped from $7,170 in 2007-08 to $6,847 in 2008-09. Florida’s funding per FTE decreased to $4,945 in 2008-09—approximately $1,900 below the SREB average and $6,393 below Maryland’s total FTE funding.
EXHIBIT 9: PART-TIME FACULTY

Faculty
Exhibit 9 compares the use of part-time faculty and teaching/research assistants as a percent of total instructional faculty. The average for the SREB states was 67% in 2007-08 compared to Florida’s 77% for the same year. Mississippi had the lowest percentage at 35% for 2007-08. There was much variation in how much a SREB state increased or decreased its reliance on part-time faculty members or teaching/research assistants from 2005-06 to 2007-08. It should be noted that although part-time faculty and teaching/research assistants comprise the majority of instructional staff, full-time faculty members teach more classes and also have campus committee assignments or participate in student activities.4

Conclusion
Institutions in The Florida College System continue to lead the Southern region in student persistence and completion as evidenced in data presented above on persistence, progression, and graduation rates. The sheer number of associate degrees and certificates awarded by Florida colleges speaks volumes about the great success of these institutions and their students. Low tuition rates make college more affordable and accessible for many people served by the FCS. Increasingly, enrollment caps due to the lack of funding have forced state universities to turn students away. As a result, more students are seeking educational

opportunities through Florida’s colleges. While the affordability of Florida colleges helps individuals access higher education, an increase in student enrollments without concomitant funding places additional strain on already limited resources. While tuition at Florida’s colleges remains below the SREB average, low funding has consigned the state to the bottom quartile of the lowest-funded among SREB states. As other institutions (e.g., state universities) are forced to cap enrollments due to funding issues and as more individuals seek re-training in this economic recession, the FCS continues to absorb more students without additional financial support. These and other factors contribute to Florida’s increasing reliance on part-time faculty members. However, despite the financial difficulties experienced by higher education in Florida (as with other states), our colleges maintain their national and regional reputations as top performers in associate degree and certificate producers.

For more information please contact:
Dr. John Hughes, Associate Vice Chancellor for Evaluation
John.Hughes@fldoe.org
(850) 245-9482

Dr. Kathyrine Scheuch, Research Analyst
Kathyrine.Scheuch@fldoe.org
(850) 245-9456