

Florida Public Higher Education: Governance Structure

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The State of Florida created a new system of governance in 2001 in an attempt to consolidate governance of Pre-K through higher education under the State Board of Education. The portion that governs higher education is made up of five different, but interdependent agencies: The State University System Board of Governors, the Higher Education Coordinating Council, 28 locally autonomous Boards of Trustees at each state college, The Division of Florida Colleges, and the Florida Board of Education. Each agency is responsible for a certain portion of the state's higher education system, and each plays a vital role in its governance. This cooperation increases the accountability of the institutions and governing boards, and state government. This consolidated governing system is less than twenty years old, and is the successor of two previous systems. Additionally, Florida has seen a greater growth of population, as well as a more diverse demographic shift than many other states. This has greatly affected higher education in the state, as is demonstrated through the history, demographic information, and projected future of governance in Florida.

History of Florida's Higher Education

Florida was colonized by the Spanish, and remained in their possession well beyond the Revolutionary War. Florida did not become an American colony until much later than its eastern seaboard counterparts did. Due to this delay, their higher education history is shorter than many eastern states. It is also very different from the traditional, English education seen in many of the Northeastern states, because private institutions do not play as big of a role. However, this short history is full of governance shifts, consolidations, openings of new schools, and the restructuring of existing institutions.

The Beginning of Higher Education in Florida

The State of Florida signed their first bill supporting public higher education in 1853 (The University of Florida, 2014). Immediately following the opening of the East Florida Seminary in Ocala, FL, the Civil War caused the school to close. However, after the Civil War, this same institution reopened its doors in Gainesville, FL in 1866 (The University of Florida, 2014). The state also funded the opening of five other public colleges throughout the state, which at the time spanned from the Panhandle to the East Coast, but was inhabited no further south than Gainesville (Bureau of Economic and Business Research, n.d.).

With funding from the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862, the state of Florida established the Agricultural and Mining College, which enrolled students beginning in 1887 (Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, 2015). By 1905, the Florida Legislature, convinced that they were spending too much money on higher education, passed the Buckman Act of 1905 that effectively consolidated the six colleges into four institutions: one for white men, one for white women, one for black students, and a fourth for the deaf and blind (Mabley, 2008). The University of Florida, in Gainesville, was designated as the all-male, white institution. The Florida State College for Women, now known as Florida State University, was designated as the all-female, white institution. Lastly, the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College for Negroes, now Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, was designated as the college for colored students.

Not only did the Buckman Act create three of the leading public institutions in the State of Florida, it also created the first governing board in the state of Florida. The Buckman Act created the Florida Board of Control, which governed these state institutions as part of Florida's

Board of Education until 1963. These three institutions remained the only public universities in Florida until the 1960's (Mabley, 2008).

New Populations

Due to the location restraints of public higher education, many private institutions were created to serve local populations. Stetson was the first to open, in 1883 to serve the Central Florida population near Orlando (Stetson University, n.d.). The University of Miami opened in 1926 to serve the small, but growing population of South Florida (University of Miami, 2015).

Many of these private institutions started as two-year colleges. Some institutions, like Jacksonville Junior College, became a private four-year institution now known as Jacksonville University (Jacksonville University, 2014). Most others, however, were adopted into the State's Community College system, which was established by legislation in 1947. Each was operated by the local Board of Instruction and was publically funded (Wattenberger & Albertson, 2012). In 1949, the administrators at each junior college organized to create the Florida Association of Public Junior Colleges, which served as the governance of two-year institutions until 1955, when the Community College Council was formed (Wattenberger & Albertson, 2012). Two years later, the Florida legislature created the Division of Community Colleges, which separated the post-secondary institutions from K-12 public education, establishing the locally autonomous boards that govern each community college today (Wattenberger & Albertson, 2012).

Due to the favorable climate, the population of Florida grew exponentially after World War II. The Board of Control quickly became outdated and unequipped to govern the population growth in higher education. As a result, the Florida Legislature replaced the Board of Control with the Board in Regents in 1963 (Mabley, 2008). This Board, with more authority and separation from the State Board of Education, saw the development of six new institutions in the

next 34 years. Many of these institutions were located in parts of the State that had previously been served only by the local community colleges including the Southern Gulf Coast, Miami, and Orlando (Mabley, 2008).

Board of Governors

In response to the lack of power the Board of Control had, the legislature created the Board of Regents. In 2001, this powerful organization came to an impasse with Governor Jeb Bush (Howard, 2006). The legislature voted to dissolve the Board of Regents. Later, through a constitutional amendment, they created the Board of Governors that governs the State's Higher Education today. In an attempt to consolidate the K-12 Public School System with the Higher Education System, the Board of Governors consists mostly of governor-appointed members, along with the Commissioner of Education, The Chair of the Advisory Council of Faculty Senates, and the President of the Florida Student Association (Florida Const. art. IX, § 7). The Constitutional Amendment also positioned the Division of Florida Colleges as a part of the Board of Education rather than a separate entity, like the Board of Governors.

The powers allotted to the Board of Governors include appointing members to the Boards of Trustees at each of the 12 public universities, regulating university administration, overseeing the Boards of Trustees, monitoring the academic programs, confirming Board of Trustee nominations for university presidents, approving institutional budgets, approving property acquisitions and contracts, and other extraneous responsibilities (Board of Governors Regulations, 2010). This new system also gave each institution a Board of Trustees, which maintains the daily operations of the institution (Florida Const. art. IX, § 7).

Demographics

Florida's population has changed drastically over the last two centuries, growing to over 500 times its population in 1830, twenty years before higher education had a foothold in the state (Bureau of Economic and Business Research, n.d.). By 1905, when the institutions of higher education were consolidated, the northern part of the state was where most of the population was concentrated. Anything south of Ocala, in Central Florida, was considered wilderness, which is why higher education was concentrated in the northern part of the State. However, this trend changed drastically in the 1930's and 1940's, when South Florida became an exotic oasis to where thousands flocked to make their new home (Bureau of Economic and Business Research, n.d.).

Higher Education in South Florida

The first institution of higher education in South Florida, the University of Miami, enrolled its first class in 1926. As the Board of control had yet to extend south of Gainesville, the University of Miami began as, and remains, a private institution. In more recent history, South Florida's population has grown to be one of the most diverse in the nation. They boast a greater percent of Hispanic, Black, urban, and foreign-born citizens than the national average (Smith, 2005).

Because there is such a large amount of first-generation citizens and first-generation college students in Southeast Florida, the community colleges here are among the largest in the state. Between the three community colleges in Southeast Florida's "tri-county" area (Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach), over 275,000 students are enrolled in a community college (Broward College, 2014; Miami Dade College, n.d.; Palm Beach State College, 2015).

Responding to Diversity

Community colleges throughout the State of Florida serve drastically different populations. Miami-Dade College in Southeast Florida serves a large number of Hispanic, first-generation college students in an urban setting while Florida Gateway College serves a smaller population of rural students. In response to the diversity, locally autonomous Boards of Trustees serve each the Community Colleges. These boards work in conjunction with The Florida Board of Education and the Division of Florida Colleges, but do not report directly to them.

Additionally, the state created a Higher Education Coordinating Council to merge the interests of the state universities, community colleges, private institutions, and representatives of the workforce. This council submits an annual report to the Governor and state legislature regarding the state of higher education, and any suggestions the board may have (K-20 Education Code, 2013).

Accreditation

The growing trend of first-generation college students enrolling in higher education is commendable; however, it has a daunting consequence. Florida is home to over 80 different for-profit institutions (College Simply, 2015). The locations of these institutions mirror the population trends of first-generation college students. These institutions are accredited by any one of a number of accrediting agencies, and many do not tout their lack of regional accreditation to prospective students. Regional accreditation is the accreditation typically required to transfer credits, and is the accreditation that all public institutions in the state of Florida have. Many of these for-profit institutions have state approval to operate. However, “approval to operate does not require accreditation” and does not necessarily signify any level of academic quality (Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 2015, para. 7).

The Future of Florida

More recently, the state of Florida has been struggling with their diverse population and the location of the state governance systems. South Floridian representatives claim that the government, located in North Florida, does not take their concerns seriously. Over the years, few have proposed that the state split into two different states: North Florida and South Florida. The most recent proposal came from the City of South Miami (2014). This split would directly affect the governance of higher education in each of the two states. The population shift would be drastic, with more than two-thirds of the population residing in what would be South Florida, and North Florida becoming much less diverse. The new South Florida would be home of seven of the existing 12 public universities and 16 of the existing 28 community colleges (City of South Miami, 2014). How would the governance of each state be handled? How would this effect students who want to attend an institution in the “other half” of Florida? This would cut the opportunities for students in half.

Conclusion

Though the population of Florida is growing quickly and more diverse, the governance system is creating new methods to maintain the best interest of their students. The current system is new, less than 20 years old, and maintains accountability for the institutions, as well as their governing bodies. Each institution has a Board of Trustees that makes routine decisions, while decisions that cover a larger scope must be approved by the Board of Governors or representatives in the Board of Education. Lastly, all in higher education must work with the Coordinating Council, which ensures that all parties are fairly represented. Through the history of their higher education, as well as the growing diversity in student population, Florida has responded to the needs of their students effectively through their evolving governance structure.

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