In the summer of 2008, some of the most accomplished and prestigious professors left Florida’s financially-strapped universities for more attractive job opportunities in other states. Charles Figley, professor of social work and founder of the nationally renowned Traumatology Institute at FSU, left for Tulane University; David Figlio, professor of economics and an internationally acclaimed expert in education and public finance at the University of Florida, took a job at Northwestern University; Richard Heller, professor of molecular medicine and founder of the Center of Excellence for Biotechnology Research at USF, accepted a position at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia. The “brain drain” deprived the State University System (SUS) of some of its best, and the quality of Florida’s system of public higher education suffered as a result.1

Unfortunately, our institutions of higher education are likely to undergo budget cuts again in the 2009 legislative session. Nevertheless, the Board of Governors (BOG) is developing an SUS enrollment plan that will allow universities to increase enrollments after the fall 2010 semester, when the three-year freeze on freshmen enrollment will be lifted. At least one member of the BOG recommended lifting the freeze now. While lifting the freeze and allowing for modest enrollment increases will alleviate some of the mounting pressure for access to higher education, lifting the cap on freshmen enrollment will do little to improve the quality of our institutions. Chancellor Mark Rosenberg reminded the board that the freshmen enrollment freeze reflected its “commitment to quality,” a priority identified by then-chair Carolyn Roberts in February 2008.2

With enrollments at SUS branch campuses and community colleges increasing dramatically as students scramble to find an opening in higher education, ENLACE FLORIDA must once again express deep concern on behalf of the thousands of college-ready students who have been

and will be denied access to our state universities. At the same time, we do not simply promote access to higher education regardless of quality. Our students deserve—and our state needs—access to affordable, high quality education.

The BOG is well aware that Florida must increase the production of bachelors’ degrees significantly to serve the economic development of the state. In the ten most productive states of the union, 33% of the workforce aged 25 to 64 has at least a college degree. In Florida, only 27% of the people in that age group have a bachelor’s degree. In order to raise the percentage to 33% and thereby move to where the top ten most educated (and prosperous) states currently are today, Florida will have to produce 4.5 million more baccalaureate degrees by 2030. At current rates, Florida will produce only 3.2 million more degrees by 2030.  

Expanding access to and the capacity of the SUS only increases the supply of students within the system. To increase degree production our universities must also do a better job of retaining and graduating students. We can do this by hiring and retaining more prestigious researchers and teachers; supporting innovative academic programs; and providing students with effective support services. Chronic underfunding threatens to turn our university system into degree factories. ENLACE FLORIDA hopes to encourage debate on the quality of our higher education system as well as access to it. The reputation and quality of our university system will suffer if our elected officials do not come up with real solutions soon. The Miami Herald editors warn: “If Florida's leaders continue to ignore the needs of higher education, you can forget about a quality public university system in Florida for a very long time.”

I. State University System Enrollment Plans, 2009-10 to 2013-14

The draft enrollment plans presented and discussed at the BOG meeting on September 25, 2008, were based on the following assumptions:

♦ The freshman enrollment freeze would remain in effect through fall 2010
♦ Funding for 2009-10 would remain flat (adjusted for inflation)
♦ Funding in subsequent years would be increased 2% (in excess of inflation)
♦ Prior years’ budget cuts would not be restored
♦ Undergraduate tuition would increase 6% annually

Based on these assumptions, each university developed an enrollment plan for 2009-2014. These draft plans, subject to revision at the BOG meeting in November 2008, project:  

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1 Presentation by Nate Johnson, Executive Director, Planning and Analysis, to Board of Governors, Strategic Planning and Academic and System Oversight Committee, September 25, 2008.
Given that 2008-09 full time equivalent (FTE) SUS enrollment apparently declined, from 194,335 in 2007-08 to 192,378 in 2008-09, the projected growth rates would be reduced to a more modest 1.2% if 2007-08 were used as the benchmark for the enrollment plans. In any case, the modest growth rate of 1.95% is contingent on funding, and it is significantly lower than the 4% average annual growth rate that the SUS registered from 1997 to 2007.

Moreover, growth rates will vary significantly, as shown in Table 1. The University of Florida, our flagship university, will grow only 0.9%, while our newest institution, Florida Gulf Coast, will grow, 7.91%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: SUS ENROLLMENT PLANS, BY FTE, 2007-08 to 2013-14</th>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>FAMU</td>
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<td>FAU</td>
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<td>FGCU</td>
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<tr>
<td>FIU</td>
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<td>FSU</td>
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<td>UNF</td>
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<tr>
<td>USF</td>
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<tr>
<td>UWF</td>
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<td>TOTAL SUS</td>
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</table>

Of the four Florida universities classified by the Carnegie Foundation as Doctoral/Research Universities—Extensive (FIU, FSU, UF, and USF) only FIU projected a significant growth rate over the five-year period. If the legislature provides any funding for growth, the SUS may be able to accommodate increasing student demand by holding enrollment at current levels.
in the Doctoral/Research Universities while increasing enrollment at branch campuses and comprehensive universities (FGCU, UNF, UWF). The projected growth will still be far less than the 4% average annual growth rate that the SUS experienced from 1997 to 2007, leaving us to wonder what has happened to the thousands of students who would have entered the SUS. Where, if anywhere, are they going for their postsecondary education? We fear that too many of them are postponing or abandoning their college dreams. If, as evidence indicates, they are enrolling at a community college, do those institutions have the capacity to meet student demand? Will those colleges receive the funding required to hire more faculty and offer more high-demand baccalaureate degrees?

II. Community College Preliminary Enrollment Figures

In June 2008, the Tampa Tribune reported that “classroom seats are filling fast at Hillsborough Community College (HCC), a result of a tight economy that has sent workers back to school and forced several state universities to cut back their admissions.” Even though the college scheduled more courses to meet the anticipated increase in demand, Carlos Soto, president of the HCC-Brandon campus, was surprised at the number of fall 2008 sections he had to close due to capacity in the early summer. Although final enrollment figures are not yet in, it was apparent at HCC and other community colleges around the state that fall registrations were up significantly, the result of a crisis in the SUS and a poor economy. 6

Florida’s Community College System, with 28 campuses around the state, serves more limited income and minority students than the SUS. With Florida’s nationally acclaimed 2+2 articulation system, by which community college graduates are guaranteed admission into a state university, students find the community colleges an attractive point of entry into higher education. It is even more attractive for high school graduates with sub-par academic records who need remedial coursework. Given that the mission of the community college system is to serve workforce development needs by maintaining an open admissions policy, it remains an integral and vital component of Florida’s system of higher education.

After the BOG imposed a three-year freeze on freshmen enrollment, many observers naturally expected to see a spike in community college enrollment. HCC in Tampa was one of many institutions that anticipated this trend and prepared for it, even though the state funds community colleges, not on the basis of projected growth, but on average enrollments over the previous three years. As USF trimmed its budget, raised admissions standards, and increased class sizes, students denied admission to or wait-listed at USF looked to HCC, other community colleges, and smaller branch campuses for their postsecondary education.

The common wisdom is that community college enrollments increase when the job market is poor and the economy is down, two factors that characterize Florida today. Compounding that trend, increased competition and higher admission standards in the SUS may have shut out over 4,000 students this year alone. Preliminary fall 2008 enrollment figures for a few commu-

6 Adam Emerson, “HCC Shuts Courses as Students Cram In,” Tampa Tribune, June 22, 2008.
The common wisdom is that community college enrollments increase when the job market is poor and the economy is down, two factors that characterize Florida today. Compounding that trend, increased competition and higher admission standards in the SUS may have shut out over 4,000 students this year alone. Preliminary fall 2008 enrollment figures for a few community colleges suggest that common wisdom is holding true; our community colleges are experiencing a surge in student demand.

- At Broward College, which served 34,335 students in the fall of 2007, enrollment is up 11%.
- At Palm Beach Community College, which enrolled 24,109 students last fall, enrollment increased 13 to 17%.
- At Miami Dade College, which enrolled 79,122 students in the fall of 2007 (making it the largest community college in the country) enrollment is expected to increase by 5,000 students
- At Valencia Community College, enrollment is expected to increase 7%
- At Seminole Community College, preliminary estimates show an increase of 32%, from 12,745 in Fall 2007 to 16,883 in Fall 2008.  

III. Capacity and Quality of Higher Education

In 1997, the Business/Higher Education Partnership of Florida warned that Florida’s system of public higher education was already straining under increasing student demand. To meet the anticipated growth in student demand, the partnership openly asked if Florida would need to build a new postsecondary institution to meet that demand. “As the baby boom-echo generation moves on to college,” Chairman Charles A. Cobb, Jr. explained, “we see a system ‘Bursting at the Seams’ in its ability to deliver higher education to Florida citizens and soon strained in its physical capacity as well.”  

When the Florida Council of 100 released “Bursting at the Seams,” in the fall of 1997, one new public 4-year institution, Florida Gulf Coast University, had just opened its doors. Since that time, enrollment in Florida’s SUS has grown an average of 4% a year, but Florida has not opened a single new four-year institution. The capacity of the SUS expanded by increasing enrollment at existing institutions, creating a university system distinguished not for its academics, but for having three of the ten largest institutions in the country (UF, UCF, and USF).

In 1997, the average size of a four-year public institution in Florida (measured by total headcount, not FTE) was 18,357. By 2007, the average size of a four-year public institution in Florida had grown to 27,376. The average size of a four-year public institution in the United States in 2005 was only 9,290. As shown in Figure 2, 75% of Florida’s university students attended a university with a total headcount enrollment larger than 30,000. In 2005, only 27% of university students in the United States attended a university with an enrollment larger than 30,000.  

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7 Scott Travis, “Enrollment in Community Colleges Surges; Expects Crowded Campuses,” South Florida Sun-Sentinel, August 17, 2008. Valencia Community College, VCC IR; Seminole Community College, SCC IR.
Students are being herded into larger and larger class sections, which mean that they have less interaction with and receive less individual attention from professors. This can have a negative effect on student satisfaction and educational attainment. Research suggests that student-faculty interaction affects students’ educational efforts. ¹⁰ As shown in Figure 2, the highest rates of growth have occurred in sections with over 100 students.

The number of students per faculty, a statistic of great importance to accreditation agencies and ranking systems, has been moving in the wrong direction since 1996, as shown in Figure 3.

Source: Florida Board of Governors Meeting, Sept. 25, 2008
Florida is now the fourth most populous state in the country, but it does not have a public higher education system that is comparable to its peers. In California, students can choose from 10 campuses in the University of California System, 23 campuses in the California State System, and 110 Community Colleges. While California is nearly twice the size of Florida, when one compares the number of higher education institutions to the population aged 15 to 34, Florida residents have less access to public postsecondary institutions than people in California, Texas, or New York. As shown in Figure 5, in Florida there are 117,580 persons aged 15 to 34 per higher education institution, compared to 63,812 in New York. 

Figure 5: 4-State Comparison of Higher Education Institutions Per Capita

Florida California Texas New York

Florida’s public higher education system is not comparable to its peers in terms of quality either. Only one of Florida’s eleven public universities, the University of Florida, is ranked in the top 100 on the U.S. News & World Report ratings of national universities. California boasts 8 of its 10 universities ranked in the top 100, as shown in Table 2. At least two regional peers, Georgia and North Carolina, with smaller populations, placed two institutions in the top 100.

Table 2: U.S. News & World Report Top 100 Rankings for Selected States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>California</th>
<th>Texas</th>
<th>New York</th>
<th>Florida</th>
<th>Georgia</th>
<th>North</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UC-Berkeley (21)</td>
<td>UT-Austin (47)</td>
<td>SUNY-Binghamton (77)</td>
<td>University of Florida (49)</td>
<td>Georgia Institute of Technology</td>
<td>UNC-Chapel Hill (30)</td>
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<tr>
<td>UCLA (25)</td>
<td>Texas A&amp;M (64)</td>
<td>SUNY College of Environmental</td>
<td></td>
<td>University of Georgia (58)</td>
<td>NC State—Raleigh (83)</td>
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<td>UC-San Diego (35)</td>
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<td>UC-Davis (44)</td>
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<td>UC-Irvine (44)</td>
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<td>UC-Santa Barbara</td>
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<td>UC-Riverside (89)</td>
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<td>UC-Santa Cruz (96)</td>
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</table>

While critics and skeptics will question the validity of the ranking system itself, the U.S. News & World Report ranking system is a popular guide for students and families. Moreover, the seven indicators used to evaluate the universities include criteria such as peer assessment, retention, class size, faculty salary, student-faculty ratio, acceptance rate of applicants, and average spending per student. Additional cuts in state spending on facilities, faculty salaries, and educational resources will further erode the quality and reputation of all institutions in the SUS. Access to higher education, and access to quality higher education, are at risk for Florida students.

IV. Policy Implications

- We cannot continue to expand access to our SUS by increasing enrollment at UF, FSU, UCF, and USF.

The SUS is already at or near capacity. Any further increases will have a negative impact on the quality of instruction. Short-term increases in baccalaureate production might be realized by increasing enrollments in comprehensive universities (FGCU, UWF, UNF), branch campuses, and community colleges. In the long-term, however, there are few options more attractive and politically feasible than establishing a new system of mid-size state colleges.

12 http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/college/national
The newly created Florida State College System pilot project has the potential to expand college access for limited-income students, increase baccalaureate degree production, and satisfy growing student demand for higher education.

In 2008, Governor Crist approved Senate Bill 1716, creating the Florida State College System and creating two task forces to implement this system by transforming community colleges into State Colleges granting a limited number of baccalaureate degrees. Seven community colleges were approved for participation in the State College Pilot project beginning in the 2008-09 fiscal year: Chipola, Daytona Beach, Edison, Indian River, Miami Dade, Okaloosa-Walton, Polk, Santa Fe, and St. Petersburg College. The mission of the State College Pilot Project is to “provide the residents of the state affordable access to baccalaureate degree programs that are designed to meet regional and statewide employment needs.”

ENLACE FLORIDA offers conditional endorsement for a State College System that preserves open access and the 2+2 articulation agreements that have allowed students to transfer into the SUS. By statute, the State Colleges are required to maintain open-door admissions policies and provide remedial education, but there is widespread concern that the State Colleges will eventually move away from their original mission of providing open access.

Florida must prioritize carefully and invest its limited resources more wisely to preserve and enhance university faculty. The brain drain threatens to turn our once-growing universities into a training ground for other universities. If our elected officials and university leaders don’t find a way to boost faculty salaries, support their research, and match offers from competitive schools, we will continue to fall in the rankings and our reputation will suffer.

The state and universities can invest their limited resources more wisely in student success programs to increase graduation and retention rates.

Six-year graduation rates for our state universities can be improved significantly with wiser investments in academic support services. Graduation rates range from about 80% at the University of Florida to 37% at Florida Atlantic, and graduation rates for Hispanic and African American males are even lower. The Center for Academic Retention and Enhancement (CARE) at FSU has received national recognition for contributing to the highest graduation rates for African American students in the country. This center, as well as similar programs around the state, demonstrates that universities can raise graduation rates by offering support services such as tutoring and mentoring. With a relatively limited investment to hire counselors and support staff, these centers can make a real and immediate difference in SUS graduation rates.

The state with the 4th highest population has a well-deserved and superb reputation for its collegiate athletic programs, but we should work more intensively to develop a university system with a strong reputation for outstanding faculty and academic programs. Our universities and community colleges should not be regarded simply as worker training facilities for the private sector. They are also academic enterprises, think tanks, and research centers that promote economic development.

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13 Dr. Willis N. Holcombe, Chancellor, Division of Community Colleges, “Florida’s Baccalaureate Legislation; The Transformation of Florida’s Community College System,” Presentation to the Florida Board of Governors, September 25, 2008; http://www.flbog.org/pressroom/meeting_items.php?id=10&agenda=162
innovation, analytical skills, citizenship, civic engagement, public service, and an appreciation for the arts and humanities. Our state universities and State Colleges must become more than degree-producing factories that churn out graduates in mass quantities. Improving the quality of our higher education system not only requires a different mind-set, but also an investment of resources in faculty recruitment, retention, and research to develop academic programs of regional and national distinction. While ENLACE FLORIDA fully supports the expansion of college access for all students, we must also join the call for expanded access to high quality education.