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## The Florida Times-Union

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# HIGHER EDUCATION: System is growing on every level

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American humorist Evan Escar once said that statistics is “the only science that enables different experts using the same figures to draw different conclusions.” So it is with the statistics published recently by Governing magazine to rank all 50 states in a wide variety of categories. Florida newspapers have reported recently that the Governing statistics show that Florida ranks “dead last in higher education spending.” What Florida ranked 50th in was higher education spending per capita. Using U.S. Census Bureau figures from 2004, the magazine reported that higher education spending in Florida amounts to \$389 per person. Per capita spending is a misleading measure in high-growth states like Florida. With the state’s population growing by 1,000 new residents every day, Florida colleges and universities are under constant pressure to ensure that the demand does not overwhelm the supply. They are developing branch and off-campus locations, forming collaborative partnerships and offering transfer programs located on site at Florida’s community colleges to provide access to an ever- increasing population of first-time-in-college and returning students. Here’s a telling statistic: Florida ranks No. 1 in the country in the number of students who come here from other states to earn their college degrees. Students who flock here from other states are not coming for the sunshine and beaches. They’re coming for a quality education, and Florida’s 11 state universities and 28 independent colleges and universities are giving them what they want. Students who come here from places like New Jersey are likely to stay here after they graduate, using their skills to drive a strong economy to new heights. Regardless of what the statistics seem to indicate, Florida legislators have demonstrated their commitment to a quality higher education system. Lawmakers increased the 2006-07 higher education budget by 8.5 percent, an amount that leaders in most other states can only envy. Lawmakers increased funding for the popular Bright Futures Scholarships, one of the best higher education bargains in the country, by 11 percent. The Legislature increased the Florida Resident Access Grant, a tuition assistance program for Florida students who attend in-state independent colleges and universities, to \$3,000. Could Florida spend more on higher education? Of course it can, and we will continue to advocate it do so. Our higher education system is growing and improving at every level, producing results that will lead to a brighter future for all Floridians. ED H. MOORE, executive director, Independent Colleges & Universities of Florida, Tallahassee

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