

Ed H. Moore : Presentation to SACS Committee

Orlando Gaylord Palms Hotel, December 11, 2006

I want to thank you for allowing me to present to you today, with special thanks to President Cavanaugh for extending the invitation. I think it is so important that the three major sectors in Florida higher education visit together often, especially to talk about looming policy issues.

And nothing ever seems to loom as much as the federal government. It seems we have been conditioned to pay attention to just about anything that emerges from DC. I recently received a report from the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education that cites four reasons for state policy makers and institutions to keep focused on what goes on in our nation's capital:

1. The federal role in student aid is so huge that it creates a de facto partnership with the states.
2. Federal funding for student aid and research & development that it has become a driver in these areas, which should raise both opportunities and concerns

3. Federal tax law is increasingly affecting state policies
4. And finally, the impact of federal level discussions regarding accountability, how this might impact state activities and in large part how this might affect the first three categories, Student Aid, Research & Development Funding, and Tax Changes.

But today I was asked to speak to how The Spellings Commission report might impact the Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida (ICUF) System in Florida higher education ... 28 private, non-profit, SACS accredited colleges and universities that have 120,000 students and award 1/3 of the state's bachelor, master, doctorate and 1st professional degrees.

At first, the instinct is to view this effort, like so many that have gone before, as just another study that in two years will be long forgotten, gathering dust on a shelf. But I think that might be giving short shrift to issues that may have a longer shelf life ... Access, Cost & Affordability, Financial Aid, Learning, Transparency & Accountability, and Innovation.

Accountability, for example, in various iterations, is likely to become “a rallying cry and change driver,” both at the state and federal level.

Knowing that it is in the DNA of government to want to regulate allows us to understand that when any bureaucracy gets hold of an idea it becomes like the kudzu on the roadside---very hard to stop growing, much less eradicate.

And there are key points of the Report that do have value in these efforts.

ICUF is capable of meeting the need to report data required for policy makers to consider funding our student grant programs. Taxpayers should expect accountability and ICUF has agreed with this concept for many years before I arrived. Each year we do an extensive accountability report that provides volumes of information about every school, who we serve, how they do, and how long it takes them to finish. Every year we report reams of data to the Florida Data Warehouse and reams of data to IPEDS. The concern arises though, what happens to all the reports being done and how is the data going to be used. This concern rises when the Spellings Commission doesn't seem to address much of the purposes for all this push for more and more data. It is not enough to say how difficult it was for the Secretary to figure out college information for her daughter, especially when

the DOE's own data system had all that information she had trouble finding available already.

In Florida, our FACT website would answer all her questions and our FETPIP system would track her daughter into the workforce.

It is in the DNA of bureaucracies to seek to regulate. They can't help themselves. But to what end is all this regulation and reporting?

I also wonder when the commonly phrased mantra of free markets and market driven decisions begins to come into play when engaged with a federal agency. As a state with a highly sophisticated data collection and utilization system, we should be concerned, really concerned, when the federal government begins to think it can create a better model and assumes that the Florida consumer is not intelligent enough or discriminating enough to access the information needed for college decisions on their own. But enough philosophizing.

I like studies like the Commission report. They play a valuable role in increasing discourse and stimulating discussion on major issues of concern. But they do not provide one-size-fits-all remedies that can be applied with

equal benefits in 50 states. I was pleased to hear the Secretary state that she felt this report was a starting point for dialog. A dialog is needed on issues of access, retention and graduation. However, those responsible for providing access, promoting retention and increasing graduation should develop, define and direct that dialogue. We should be seeking models to use, institutions that do well in each of these areas, programs that can be replicated and exported to other schools not doing as well. We should explore why it is that different demographic groups gain access more easily, why performance might vary and then seek remedies for these issues.

We should explore the impact of merit aid, need-based aid, or need-blind and such as is given in Florida through Bright Futures, the Florida Resident Access Grant and other programs, none of which tend to be credited in national studies that give Florida a low rank for need based aid. These studies completely ignore the huge value of the state subsidy to our SUS and community college systems, taxpayer support that flows through in the nation's lowest tuition rates....to me this is aid to students and families who might not be able to afford college if they had to pay the full costs. Perhaps a better examination of who it is that gets the aid, and what kinds of aid they

receive might be a more useful lens in determining how well we do in meeting the needs of all segments of society.

I am also concerned that the report scarcely mentions graduate and professional education, a significant segment of what we do.

I am concerned that there seems to be a push, one without real merit or detailed discussion on the basis of roles, functions or performance, on creating some form of national accreditation. Here again we see the drift towards thinking there is a one-size-fits-all, national is better mentality.

There is a movement towards thinking that government at a larger scale is wiser and all knowing more than systems crafted by those who truly understand the needs of the citizens of each state.

I am very comfortable that Florida can continue to improve without federal prodding or intervention. I think we are doing an increasingly better job at addressing the 6 main points of the Spellings Report: Access, Affordability, Costs, Financial Aid, the quality of teaching and learning, and increased accountability.

The market is influencing higher education. In Florida we see changes in demographics as to who attends and where. We see a rise in what we call satellite site or concurrent use sites, we see changes in traditional vs. non-traditional, we see the emergence of for profits, and lately we see changes in expected attendance numbers. We will be having many discussions about how best to meet perceived needs, or whether our estimates of need are even accurate or can be predicted. But we will be working towards the common goals of making Florida a brighter place.

My view is the Spellings Commission report will take a back seat in the coming year to the Higher Education Act Reauthorization. It previews debates on tuition controls, accreditation, and articulation.

It is incumbent upon us to stay engaged. But let us not lose sight of the reality.

- We know the needs of Florida better than they do.
- We know our capabilities better than they do.
- We know our markets better too.
- We know our limitations better as well.

It is incumbent upon us to continue to address our limitations and continue to work with all systems in addressing the six main points of the Spellings Report.

I know time is short but Dr. Cavanaugh also asked us to speak to the Florida election and to the coming session. I am optimistic that our new crop of leaders have a good handle on higher education and that our position in the policy discourse will rise, but only if we are willing to continue expanding our own self examinations and if we can find ways on our own to expand the six consideration points of the Commission Report.

I appreciate your invitation and hope I have added some to your perspectives. ICUF continues to seek engagement in policy issues affecting Florida and we continue to be passionate about being private institutions in the public service.