

FLORIDA COLLEGES PLAN TO BUILD ON YEAR OF STEADY SUCCESSES

~ Mission remains to continue high quality and open access to meet growing demand ~

TALLAHASSEE – The Florida College System experienced a year of evolution and accolades, culminating with prestigious statewide and national recognitions for Miami Dade College President Eduardo J. Padrón who was selected as *Florida Trend* magazine's Floridian of the Year, and as one of *Time* magazine's top ten college presidents. Both Padrón and The Florida College System were credited in 2009 with bringing greater recognition to the vital role of community colleges in light of the nation's economic challenges.

Florida's colleges served more than 845,000 students in 2009, an increase of 9.6 percent from the previous year, and early enrollment indicators predict an overwhelming year for college campuses throughout the state in 2010.

"The doors to our colleges remain open as they continue to provide the necessary skills essential for today's workforce," said Dr. Willis N. Holcombe, Chancellor of The Florida College System. "Often times, entry into our system is the first opportunity for students to achieve higher education, and I'm proud of the work our institutions have done to provide a quality education to a diverse student body during tough economic times."

Despite budgetary challenges, The Florida College System led the southeast region last year in graduation and progression rates, and maintained top ranks nationally for leading America's more than 1,200 community colleges in an array of degree categories. For the seventh year in a row, Florida's community colleges were among the nation's top producers of associate degrees and the number of associate degrees awarded to minority students, health professions and related sciences degrees, according to Community College Week's annual Top 100 report conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics.

Florida's College System was also touted for leading the southeast region in three-year student progression rates. This measure tracks full-time freshmen enrolled in degree or certificate programs who graduated, were still enrolled, or who transferred to another college within three years. At 60.5 percent, the state's progression rate was the highest in the region, and 12 percentage points above the southern region's state average. This reflects a 15-point increase in student success rates since 1999.

The caliber of students within The Florida College System remained strong last year with 92 outstanding college students being honored as members of the 2009 Phi Theta Kappa All-Florida Academic Team. The team consisted of exemplary students representing all of Florida's 28 system colleges, one independent college and one independent university. The students were chosen based on their exceptional academic achievement, leadership and dedication to community service.

With the signing of a new GI Bill providing more than \$62 billion in assistance nationwide, Florida's colleges, alongside the Florida Board of Governors and the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs, unveiled a new Web site designed to help veterans meet their educational and career goals. Veterans with three years of active service are qualified to receive numerous

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benefits, including full tuition and fees, a monthly housing allowance, and \$1,000 a year for books and supplies. The new bill, combined with state efforts to communicate its benefits, resulted in a 76 percent increase in veteran enrollment in Florida colleges.

Last year brought about the creation of 16 new baccalaureate programs within seven of Florida's colleges to address the growing economic challenges of communities throughout the state. In addition, local workforce needs and unmet demand also brought about legislative changes to enable Florida colleges to submit proposals for baccalaureate programs at any time during the year. As a result of this change, nine colleges submitted proposals for a total of 19 additional programs. These proposals, in various stages of completion, will be considered by the State Board of Education early in 2010. Also, through legislation passed in 2009, Florida's Division of Community Colleges officially became the Division of Florida's Colleges.

Looking ahead, Florida's colleges will continue to serve as the primary point of access to higher education in Florida, with 58 percent of the state's high school graduates pursuing postsecondary education beginning at a community college and 81 percent of freshman and sophomore minority students in public higher education attending one of Florida's 28 community colleges.

For more information about Florida's Colleges, visit www.fldoe.org/cc.

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