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Florida College System Examined in New LeRoy Collins Institute Report

~Tough Choices Report Highlights the Past and Future of Florida's College System~

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. – The LeRoy Collins Institute today released the *Meeting the Needs of Florida: The Florida College System Past and Future* report which examines the historical role of the Florida College System (FCS) and identifies ways the FCS can prioritize the available resources to better prepare students for long term success in Florida's competitive marketplace. Overall, the FCS remains a reliable and strong choice for students, but the Collins Institute identified several key areas of improvement that could further strengthen the FCS including:

- Prioritizing the needs of Florida's financially disadvantaged students;
- Addressing financial considerations, particularly the performance funding model;
- Increasing accessibility for the enrollment of underserved populations most likely to attend FCS institutions; and
- Studying the long-term impacts of recent changes to state education policy.

"The Florida College System is an essential part of Florida's higher education landscape and has been doing an exemplary job," said Dr. Carol Weissert, Florida State University (FSU) political science professor and LCI director. "However, there are challenges for the FCS that should be acknowledged. Our hope is that this report will help lead to a more robust education system with opportunities for all students who seek a degree or certificate."

The report finds that:

- Financial resources similar to the Bright Futures Scholarship program for high-achieving students are needed to encourage the enrollment of underserved populations most likely to attend an FCS institution.
- The current system is not meeting the needs of the state's poorest students as evidenced by the fact that disadvantaged students are not completing credentials at the same rate as students who are not disadvantaged.

- State colleges are often caught in the middle between local and statewide priorities.
- Florida’s appropriations per FTE in state colleges is considerably lower than the national average.
- Florida’s current performance funding system did not reward colleges that serve high percentages of low-income students, which may affect the enrollment of these students (recent changes have been made to the system to address this issue)

“National attention is now focused on community colleges and their pivotal role in access to higher education,” said Lester Abberger, chair of the LeRoy Collins Institute board. “Florida should be part of that broader discussion.”

Since this report was written, the state board of education adopted rules for implementation of state college performance measures that added a Pell-multiplier to the completion metric to incentivize colleges to better support low-income students. Also, the legislature required the State Board of Education to adopt a rule with specific thresholds for colleges that would lose funding (HR 7092) and created new responsibilities and requirements on boards of trustees and institutions to adopt policies to decrease the costs to students for textbooks and instructional materials (HR 7019).

This report was written by Professor Toby Park from the Florida State University College of Education and Professor David Tandberg formerly at the Florida State University College of Education and now at the State Higher Education Executive Officers organization in Boulder, Colorado.

For more than 20 years, LCI has studied and promoted creative solutions to key private and public issues. Beginning in 2005, the Institute published several reports in a series called, Tough Choices: Shaping Florida’s Future. These publications provided an in-depth analysis of Florida tax and spending policy. Recent research produced another series, Tough Choices Facing Florida’s Governments, which focused on retirement benefits, including pension plans, health benefits and other post-retirement benefits, as well as ethics policy. This latest report – part of the Tough Choices Facing Florida’s Governments series – is the second that focuses on higher education. Future reports from the Collins Institute will address other issues facing higher education in Florida.

To access a complete version of *Meeting the Needs of Florida: The Florida College System Past and Future*, please visit <http://fla.st/2c8fOjh>.

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About the LeRoy Collins Institute: *Established in 1988, the LeRoy Collins Institute is a nonpartisan, statewide policy organization which studies and promotes creative solutions to key private and public issues facing the people of Florida and the nation. The Institute, located in Tallahassee at Florida State University, is affiliated and works in collaboration with the State University System of Florida. Named in honor of former Florida Governor LeRoy Collins, the Institute is governed by a distinguished board of*

directors, chaired by Lester Abberger. Other board members include executives, local elected officials, and other professionals from throughout the state.