New LeRoy Collins Institute Report Makes the Case for Improved Higher Education Planning in Florida

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. – The LeRoy Collins Institute (LCI) today released its latest report, The State of Higher Education Planning in Florida – And How We Got There, reviews current and past higher education governing bodies’ and associations’ strategic planning efforts. Through this historical analysis, the LCI concludes that past plans have been fragmented and subject to politics. The need for more coordinated and forward-thinking planning exists.

“Florida’s higher education system is clearly important to the state’s economic well-being, but surprisingly there is little systematic, comprehensive planning regarding how it can best meet the needs of the state’s citizens and its economy,” said Carol Weissert, Florida State University (FSU) political science professor and LCI director. “This report walks through the history of Florida’s higher education planning and underscores the need to energize and refocus our planning efforts.”

According to the report, Florida has produced numerous higher education plans in the last 35 years. Most of them have been erratically implemented or ignored. Many expansions – new medical and law schools are a particular example – have been initiated piecemeal by legislators rather than as part of any plan.

Florida now has four separate strategic education plans roughly aligned around related goals and specific performance measures. These are more focused on the present than the future and may only address a single sector, such as state universities or the college system. Coordination among institutional groups is largely lacking. Florida has had no independent higher education planning agency since 2005.

The report suggests:

- Higher education boards tend to react to major policies and initiatives rather than initiate them.
- Current higher education plans focus less on increasing the number of residents with bachelor’s degrees than they did in the past.
Meeting performance measures, which are not the same as strategic goals, has taken precedence for Florida higher education institutions.

Bold recommendations for achieving excellence in higher education have not been well-received.

Additionally, the report points to examples of model higher education planning in other states, including Pennsylvania, Virginia and Texas. Also cited as a model is the Lumina Foundation’s 10-year horizon on aiming for higher attainment.

“The time is right for consideration of ways to improve higher education planning in Florida,” said Lester Abberger, chair of the LeRoy Collins Institute board. “The Collins Institute hopes this report will help provide the impetus for a discussion of ways to do this over the coming months and years.”

This report was written by Rick Edmonds and Dr. James Mau. Edmonds is a faculty member and media business analyst at The Poynter Institute in St. Petersburg. Dr. Mau is a former Professor of Sociology, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Florida International University.

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 first to focus on trends in higher education planning.

To access a complete version of The State of Higher Education Planning in Florida – And How We Got There, please visit http://fla.st/293obHL

###

**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.