

A Response to the *Pappas Report*
University of West Florida
March, 2007

The *Pappas Report* was commissioned as a way to stimulate thoughtful discussion about the future of higher education in Florida. To date, it has done that, and more. The University of West Florida (UWF) believes it is important to respond to the *Report's* major recommendations as they impinge on UWF's mission of serving the educational needs of citizens in the Panhandle and beyond.

In general, we find the *Pappas Report* provides much useful information that will be valuable in UWF's planning. Our response is limited to those recommendations in the *Report* that may affect UWF directly or indirectly; therefore, we will not comment on those recommendations that pertain only to the system level (e.g., recommendations about specific functions of the Board of Governors). Our response is divided into the observations and recommendations corresponding in general to the major issues raised in the original report.

Demand for Access

One of the key findings in the *Pappas Report* pertains to the changing nature of the students in the K-12 sector in Florida over the next decade, which will change from majority white to majority minority. As it will for the entire State University System (and community college sector as well), this change will have major implications for UWF. It is clear that the programs and partnerships with the K-12 sector currently in place will need to be reviewed for relevancy, with new ones being created and implemented in order to address glaring differences in college going rates across ethnic and racial groups. UWF stands ready to assist school districts in understanding the reasons students do not complete high school and in creating and implementing programs to address these reasons.

UWF has already begun such efforts. Three years ago, UWF began partnering with Pensacola Junior College (PJC) in outreach and recruiting efforts with the African American community in Pensacola. These efforts extend beyond traditional partnership programs with the school district to include college nights, block party recruitment fairs, and other similar activities. The UWF-PJC joint effort focuses on the ways that students can access and afford a college education, a specific issue noted in the Spellings Commission Report. In addition the joint effort identifies ways for opportunities to enhance the community college-university articulation agreement. Additionally, UWF has partnered with Pensacola High School, the only Title I high school in Escambia County, to create the Argo Scholars Program, aimed at providing mentoring to high school students from financially challenged families and that will provide

full tuition, fees, room and board, and a study abroad experience fully paid at UWF. Such efforts exemplify ways that the overall college going of underrepresented students can be addressed through partnerships throughout the K-12, community college, and university sectors, approaches that could be duplicated across the state.

UWF also strongly supports the call for a working group at the State University System level, in partnership with the community colleges, to create a realistic projection model for future enrollment. Such a model is clearly needed in order for appropriate planning for growth to be accomplished. We would further strongly encourage the Board of Governors to act with all deliberate speed to examine the degree to which high school graduates are academically prepared to succeed in the state's universities and to take, in partnership with the K-12 and community college sectors, any appropriate steps to improve students' preparation.

General Education Curriculum Relevance

The *Pappas Report* calls for "a working group, consisting of a majority of State University System faculty/academic administration but also including representation from the business community and the community colleges, to examine the general education programs in State University System to insure their currency for preparing students for a global society" (p. 6). UWF supports such curriculum reviews, and has already established several advisory groups connected to the colleges and specific programs with membership in line with the recommendation. Such advisory groups are also in line with the SACS principles and standards.

Over the past five years, several undergraduate and graduate programs and courses have been implemented as a direct result of input from these groups. For example, the genesis of the allied health programs over the past several years (e.g., MPH) is a direct outcome of this process. Additionally, the advisory groups provide valuable input and commentary on the skills our graduates should have. Discussion about a full review of the Basic Studies coursework at UWF has also begun.

We applaud the action of the Board of Governors to create the academic learning compacts. UWF is proud to be a statewide leader in the assessment of student learning outcomes. Such assessment not only documents what students have learned, but, through the use of benchmarks, also documents how well we do compared to others. For example, students in our College of Business scored overall in the 80th percentile on a national test of business knowledge. We believe that the Board of Governors should advocate not only academic learning compacts, but also the use of normative data to provide better contextual information for the use of these data.

Higher Education in Florida

No issue regarding the structure of higher education in Florida will have a bigger impact on UWF than baccalaureate degrees being offered by community colleges. Currently, two of the four community colleges in the Panhandle offer baccalaureate degrees: Chipola College and Okaloosa-Walton College. Our view of these programs is well known, and can be summarized as follows. UWF firmly believes in a strong 2+2 articulation model because it represents the best stewardship of scarce public resources, and takes advantage of faculty collaboration. Although we recognize both the statutory authority of the State Board of Education in approving such degrees, and the signed agreement between the Board of Governors and the State Board of Education concerning the types of degrees that can be offered (i.e., nursing, teacher education, and BAS), we nevertheless believe that routine authorization of baccalaureate degrees at community colleges will inevitably create needless duplication of state-funded programs.

Curiously, the *Pappas Report* both endorses baccalaureate degrees by community colleges and warns against the loss of the traditional community college mission at those institutions that have them. We believe that what could be read into this seeming contradiction is that the decision to authorize such degrees should be based on objective evidence of the inability or unwillingness of a university to offer the degrees, not on politically expedient decisions that are contrary to the evidence of true need. For example, when there is clear evidence of excess capacity in a 2+2 program offered on a joint campus, objective evaluators should conclude that there is no need for *an additional baccalaureate degree in the same field at the same location*. Although the Board of Governors has ceded its review authority in this regard, it should nevertheless continue to advocate for statutory clarification of both the intent of the BAS degree (i.e., it should not be marketed as equivalent to a BS degree in the same field) as well as the review process that proposals should undergo. Failure to address these issues will, in our opinion, result in further needless duplication of programs and diminution of available public funding.

The *Pappas Report* was also silent on the issue of national accreditation for the baccalaureate degrees covered by the Board of Governors-State Board of Education agreement. For example, UWF is held to a standard of national accreditation for its teacher education programs through NCATE; community colleges are not. This accreditation difference means that UWF and community colleges are held to different quality accountability standards. In the long run, students in the educational programs held to a lower quality accountability standard will be disadvantaged, as will the long term interests of the State by not requiring the highest quality standards for all students.

Institutional Tuition Flexibility

The *Pappas Report* recommends that individual institutions have greater flexibility in setting tuition. We agree. Given UWF's geographic location, we have benefited from the flexibility we have been granted regarding Alabama residents. However, given that we are also a state leader in developing and offering fully online programs, our inability to price all of these programs according to prevailing market rates within the credit-generating funding rules is a distinct disadvantage. Increased institutional flexibility, particularly for online programs, is essential to UWF's future growth. Our ability to provide high quality academic programs to everyone's home rests critically on being able to compete in the marketplace.

Creation of a Voluntary State College Sector

No recommendation in the *Pappas Report* has sparked more controversy than the call for the creation of an opt-in state college system. Because of the use of a single metric to target existing universities for this sector, and because no alternatives were really explored in the *Report*, we remain opposed to this recommendation and we currently do not see a scenario in which UWF would voluntarily participate in a system that would require the dismantling of its Board of Trustees and severely limit its ability to meet the graduate educational needs of the citizens in the region.

A Better Alternative. The *Pappas Report* and the remarks made by Dr. Portch in presenting the *Report* to the Board of Governors pointed to several highly regarded systems across the country that have a single sector. These systems are successful precisely because they require their members to have clearly articulated and differentiated missions. We believe that this is the much better alternative for Florida.

Clearly articulated and differentiated missions provide the best way for Florida universities to respond to local, regional, and state needs in view of their location, student population, and economic conditions that are unique to the institution. This approach would recognize, for example, that UWF is the only public university in the Panhandle, and is a major driver of economic development in the region, so therefore UWF must continue to offer a mix of graduate programs to address these dynamic and changing needs. Additionally, the ability for master's programs to be added as appropriate and with approval at the local level by the Board of Trustees is essential to responding quickly to emerging educational needs in the region.

Additionally, although UWF is not classified as a "research intensive or extensive university," it conducts a great deal of applied research that directly benefits the region. All of UWF's research centers are focused on regional issues, and provide much needed expertise in providing solutions, for example, to environmental challenges and economic forecasting.

Access Through Distance (Online) Education

The *Pappas Report* recommends increased use of distance (essentially online) education as one way of addressing the need for increased access. In this arena UWF is a state leader. Through the efforts of our Academic Technology Center and numerous faculty, we have developed a wide array of online programs that address critical needs (e.g., teacher education). Additionally, we have forged partnerships with other institutions, such as Florida Community College in Jacksonville, that provide 2+2 opportunities. These developments have created opportunities for UWF to become a national leader in online and distance education to the military, and to create innovative technologies that will open additional opportunities, as well as create intellectual property that could provide new sources of revenue.

UWF stands ready to consult with the State University System and our K-12 and community college colleagues on ways of creating interinstitutional partnerships in order to better leverage resources (both financial and human) to deliver current high quality programs and to create new learning opportunities for students.

Conclusion

The *Pappas Report* raises many important issues and poses many important questions for consideration. UWF believes that there is much to be gained by a focused discussion of possible action steps based on a thoughtful analysis of the recommendations. We are fully prepared to enter into those discussions as a full partner, and firmly believe that by working together for the common goal, our students, UWF and the State University System can create a better future.

John C. Cavanaugh, Ph.D.
President

Endorsed by the UWF Board of Trustees, March 20, 2007