



**REVIEW OF ACCELERATED
BACCALAUREATE DEGREE OPTIONS**

**Report and Recommendations by the
Florida Postsecondary Education Planning Commission**

December 1998

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION PLANNING COMMISSION

**Review of Accelerated Baccalaureate
Degree Options**

Prepared in Response to Specific Appropriation 57
of the 1998 General Appropriations Act
Chapter 98-422, Laws of Florida

December 1998

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 1997 Legislature directed the Postsecondary Education Planning Commission to examine the feasibility of providing state funding to support the liberal arts program at Nova University. The Commission, in the course of its study, was to examine the program in light of its consistency with the Master Plan for Postsecondary Education. During the course of the 1997 review, Nova Southeastern University began to investigate modifications to its state-supported liberal studies program that built upon the lessons learned from the earlier accelerated program and suggested a useful model for an accelerated competency-based baccalaureate degree. The Commission encouraged the institution to continue to develop the reconfigured accelerated baccalaureate degree program. The program was funded for 1998-99 for \$615,788 (Specific Appropriation 93).

The 1998 Legislature directed the Commission to determine if any such similar programs exist in the public sector with particular reference to Florida International and Florida Atlantic Universities. Although the review last year noted the ground-breaking nature of the Nova Southeastern program, a review of similar accelerated baccalaureate degree options, where they exist, would be valuable.

Few exceptions could be found where public or private institutions would not accept most forms of advanced placement or credit earned through examination. Such credit is particularly prevalent in the lower division or general education concentration of coursework and less prevalent in the major. The program under development at Nova Southeastern University goes beyond those currently available in the public sector. Like Florida Atlantic University and Florida International University, NSU will accept credits earned while dual enrolled in high school, credit earned through examination or International Baccalaureate credit, however the program under development at NSU also will provide a larger variety of assessment for credit measures. Students will be able to earn credit for a broader range of courses, course sequences and competencies. Based upon an evaluation of each student's prior knowledge and competencies, a learning program would be designed which would allow the student to focus on only those learning outcomes, knowledge, and skills needed. The design of the program is consistent with many published policy discussions focussing on ways to decrease student time to degree to four years or less. The institution has received a \$200,000 grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education to support the development and implementation of the accelerated baccalaureate degree program that suggests its importance as a model. As a result, the program under development at Nova Southeastern University is unique in Florida and it should be watched as a potential model for further consideration.

The Commission also noted the importance of academic advising to accelerated degree programs. With the development of the statewide stu-

dent advising system, otherwise known as the Florida Academic Counseling and Tracking for Students (FACTS), some attention needs to be directed to the considerable variance that exists in the quality of the student online academic advising experience among the institutions. The FACTS system may level the advising playing field somewhat, but given the poor implementation within some institutional web sites, room for improvement exists. Currently, no provision exists for regular meetings of advising personnel in the state to discuss current advising issues or the impact of technology on advising practices.

Recommendations

The Nova Southeastern University should continue the development and implementation of the outcome-based accelerated baccalaureate degree program. A formal program review should be conducted by the Department of Education three years from the date (anticipated Fall 1999) the first class of students is enrolled. The review should examine the effectiveness of the accelerated degree program in meeting its stated goals, the assessment measures utilized, student performance and satisfaction measures and the usefulness of the model as developed for application in other programs and institutions.

The Postsecondary Education Planning Commission in cooperation with the State University System and the State Board of Community Colleges should convene an advising conference. The meeting should be designed to provide advising personnel with an opportunity to discuss the impact of state policies and technology initiatives on student advising. The conference sponsors should produce a report summarizing the proceedings and discussing current issues and recommendations for improving current practices in student advising.

Proviso language accompanying Specific Appropriation 57 in the 1998 General Appropriations Act (HB 4201) directs the Postsecondary Education Planning Commission to:

Evaluate whether or not Florida Atlantic University or Florida International University has a liberal arts program similar to the program at Nova University funded in Specific Appropriation 93.

The 1997 Legislature directed the Postsecondary Education Planning Commission to examine the feasibility of providing state funding to support the liberal arts program at Nova University. The Commission, in the course of its study, was to examine the program in light of its consistency with the Master Plan for Postsecondary Education. Originally conceived as an accelerated baccalaureate degree program with a heavy emphasis on an interdisciplinary approach to the liberal arts, the liberal arts component continues to be reviewed and improved but the focus in recent years had been towards service learning and the program had been lengthened to include a fourth year. Although the SCORE program was a well executed service learning program, the program was found to be different from other state funded programs in that it did not directly result in the production of students with credentials in a profession or field in which the state is experiencing a critical shortage or need. The Commission noted that the availability of similar opportunities in the public sector, coupled with the fact that the SCORE program does not result in a graduate with a unique profession that would meet the critical state need test, suggested that continued funding of the program in its current form was not in the best interest of the State.

During the course of the 1997 review, Nova Southeastern University began to investigate modifications to its state-supported liberal studies program, which built upon the lessons, learned from the earlier accelerated program and suggested a useful model for an accelerated competency-based baccalaureate degree. Considerable development work and investment by the institution will have to be made to implement the program. Some policy issues concerning funding in a new curricular paradigm are being explored, however, the model, as developed, addresses time-to-degree concerns and educational productivity in promising ways consistent with both the Master Plan and suggested postsecondary curricular reform literature. The Commission encouraged the institution to continue to develop the reconfigured accelerated baccalaureate degree program. The program was funded for 1998-99 for \$615,788 (Specific Appropriation 93).

The 1998 Legislature directed the Commission to determine if any such similar programs exist in the public sector with particular reference to Florida International and Florida Atlantic Universities. Although the review last year noted the groundbreaking nature of the Nova Southeastern program, a review of similar accelerated baccalaureate degree options, where they exist, would be valuable.

INTRODUCTION

Legislative Charge

Background

Commission Activities

To direct this study, the Commission Chairperson appointed a Program Committee with Ms. Inez Bailey serving as Chair and membership including Dr. Robert Bryan, Mr. Ivie Burch, Mr. Ed Tolle, and Mr. Clyde Hobby. The Committee held five public meetings between June 1998 and December 1998.

For this study, the Commission received updates on the progress of Nova Southeastern University in the development of its accelerated baccalaureate degree program which was the subject of a Legislatively directed review by the Commission last year. Commission staff surveyed SHEEO agencies in other states to ascertain what other accelerated degree option might be in use outside of Florida. And finally, Commission staff collected and reviewed past studies and descriptive information concerning other accelerated degree programs in Florida, with particular attention to those at Florida Atlantic and Florida International University.

**ACCELERATED
DEGREE METHODS**

A number of methods have been available to students for decreasing the time it takes to earn a degree. The primary method involves earning college level credit prior to enrollment. Both formally through an organized program or informally through the acceptance of certain recognized credit by examination programs, students have been able to decrease the amount of credit needed for a degree for some time. Such programs or processes appear to fall into these categories:

- Programs which allow the student to complete a baccalaureate degree more quickly by compressing the normal time through heavier course loads and/or summer attendance.
- Programs that promote the use of credit gained through CLEP, advanced placement and dual enrolled credit from high school courses to reduce the postsecondary time to degree.
- Programs that in addition to promoting the use of credit gained through CLEP, advanced placement and dual enrolled credit from high school courses also award credit for demonstrated skill in competency-based undergraduate courses and programs of study. Credit is awarded based upon some type of assessment process at the institutional level.
- Some combination of the three.

A survey conducted of SHEEO agencies in other states suggests that few formally organized programs exist. The majority of institutions responding indicated that they have no formally organized programs at the state level. Almost all institutions and any accelerated degree programs do however allow for the acceptance of credit earned either while in high school or credit earned through examination. The accumulation of credit prior to entering postsecondary education is the foundation of accelerated degree programs.

Florida Atlantic University has recently begun offering approximately 26 programs that can be completed in a three-year track. While the University accepts all of the traditional student credit earned through examination and credit earned through dual enrollment or International Baccalaureate programs, this new initiative offers any student the option of completing the baccalaureate degree in three years without such earned credit. Essentially, the offering department guarantees to the student that the necessary courses and course sequences will be offered when needed. The time to degree is compressed into three years through students completing at least 15 to 16 credit hours per semester and at least 9 to 10 semester hours in summer. (An example of one of the programs is contained in Appendix A.) As a result the student can complete the 40 credits per year or 120 credits total in three years. Students who enter this program track with earned high school dual enrollment credit or credit by examination would have less to complete over the three year time period.

Florida Atlantic University

Florida International University currently offers no specialized accelerated degree program track however; the institution accepts and promotes all of the traditional methods used by students to earn credit through examination, early high school dual enrollment or International Baccalaureate Programs. In addition, students may enter the institution with advanced knowledge in a particular subject area such that they may wish to petition the department offering the appropriate course for an option to test out of certain required courses. The institution currently encourages students to carry a full load of courses and they must complete at least 9 credit hours during a summer while at the FIU. The institution has a large summer attendance and most of the required courses are offered during the summer term. Florida International University also works with several magnet high schools in their area to offer dual enrollment courses. Further, the institution also offers programatic dual enrollment courses that can transfer for credit in such programs as Architecture and Hospitality Management.

Florida International University

Nova Southeastern University also accepts credit earned through examination and credit earned through dual enrollment and the International Baccalaureate programs. Under the terms of their accelerated degree proposal, the institution would graduate a student with a baccalaureate degree in three years by awarding credit for competencies and knowledge the student already possesses. That characteristic separates it from most any other accelerated degree program. The program would have faculty becoming facilitators of learning and plans call for it to tailor the educational system to the learner's style and prior learning. Further, the program would support the learner through the curriculum with clearly articulated learning outcomes. Educational resources would be used more efficiently since students would only enroll in and consume only those courses or educational units that they need. The actual length of the program for each student would vary depending upon the student's prior

Nova Southeastern University

knowledge and skills upon entrance and how diligently the student works to demonstrate progress while at the university.

The undergraduate curriculum is composed of a general education component and the major field of study. The pilot program would begin with the general education learning outcomes and expand in later years to include the courses that compose the major as well. Beginning with a small incoming group of students, the project will focus on the mastery of clearly articulated general education outcomes through a variety of aptives are listed in Appendix B.) Students would be offered a variety of opportunities to demonstrate their prior knowledge and skills using Advanced Placement credit, previous college coursework, CLEP and other testing out procedures, and performance measures designed by NSU faculty members. Based upon an evaluation of each student's prior knowledge and competencies, a learning program would be designed which would allow the student to focus on only those learning outcomes, knowledge, and skills needed. The institution plans to offer a variety of instructional formats including regular courses, units within courses which cover a single or range of competencies, instructional technologies, independent learning experiences, service learning and experiential activities as individuals and in small groups. The focus of the program will be on the mastery of knowledge, concepts, and skills rather than the consumption of courses and credits. (A structural diagram of the proposed program is attached as Appendix C.)

ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Accelerated Baccalaureate Degrees

While there have traditionally been a number of ways for students to complete a baccalaureate degree in less than four years, they are not for all students. Students who enter postsecondary education with advanced credit earned through examination, dual enrollments or some other form of advanced placement tend to be those who are better prepared academically and who are self directed learners. For the most part, such student still require academic advising and counseling/mentoring through what can be a challenging curriculum. Few exceptions could be found where public or private institutions would not accept most forms of advanced placement or credit earned through examination. Such credit is particularly prevalent in the lower division or general education concentration of coursework and less prevalent in the major. The program under development at Nova Southeastern University goes beyond those currently available in the public sector. Like Florida Atlantic University and Florida International University, NSU will accept credits earned while dual enrolled in high school, credit earned through examination or International Baccalaureate credit, however the program under development at NSU also will provide a larger variety of assessment for credit measures. Students will be able to earn credit for a broader range of courses, course sequences and competencies. Based upon an evaluation of each student's prior knowledge and competencies, a learning program would

be designed which would allow the student to focus on only those learning outcomes, knowledge, and skills needed.

Most students take longer than four years to complete a baccalaureate degree. The design of the program is consistent with many published policy discussions focussing on ways to decrease student time to degree to four years or less. The institution has received a \$200,000 grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education to support the development and implementation of the accelerated baccalaureate degree program, which suggests its importance as a model. As a result, the program under development at Nova Southeastern University is unique in Florida and it should be watched as a potential model for further consideration.

Recommendation:

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During the completion of this study, a number of public and private postsecondary web sites were reviewed. Specifically, information was sought concerning student accelerated degree options, academic advising opportunities, academic advising information, degree program planning, and policies for the awarding of credit through course challenging or departmental examination. In three-fourths of those sites reviewed such information was non-existent or buried so deep within the site that most students would most likely have given up any hope of locating the information. In the worst of cases, selecting a link which vaguely suggested some help in academic planning or advising lead to a listing of course titles and numbers only. With the development of the statewide student advising system, otherwise known as the Florida Academic Counseling and Tracking for Students (FACTS), some attention needs to be directed to the considerable variance that exists in the quality of the student online academic advising experience among the institutions. The FACTS system may level the advising playing field somewhat, but given the poor implementation within some institutional web sites, room for improvement exists. Currently, no provision exists for regular meetings of advising personnel in the state to discuss current advising issues or the impact of technology on advising practices.

Student Advising

Recommendation:

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