

POLICY BRIEF

A
Statewide Network
Promoting College
Readiness,
Access and
Success



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TUITION, ACCESS, AND AFFORDABILITY IN FLORIDA

By Paul Dosal

On October 26, 2007, Governor Charlie Crist approved a 5% increase in tuition for all community college and university students beginning in January 2008. The governor had vetoed similar legislation last May, citing the financial burdens imposed on families by soaring insurance rates and property taxes as justification for keeping tuition rates the lowest in the country. Governor Crist approved the tuition increases with the expectation that the universities would direct at least 30% of the tuition increase to students who need additional financial aid to cover the tuition increase. The governor's conditional approval of this tuition offers some hope that the state of Florida and its universities recognize the value of providing more need-based financial aid to its college students.

The fact that tuition at Florida's universities is the lowest in the country does not mean that Florida's students can afford the cost of attendance. Access to a university is not guaranteed simply by keeping tuition low. Access to higher education can, and should, be measured by the ability of a student and his or her family to pay the TOTAL costs of attendance. In this area, The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education gave the state of Florida a grade of "F" for affordability in its 2006 state report card. According to the *Measuring Up 2006 Report* "net college costs for low- and middle-income students to attend public two- and four-year colleges represent about 40% of their annual family income, even after accounting for Bright Futures scholarships and other financial aid." (<http://measuringup.highereducation.org>)

For many limited-income students, the total cost of attending a state university is beyond their financial means, even if they earn a Bright Futures Scholarship. These merit-based scholarships provide 75% to 100% of tuition and fees (which vary by institution), plus \$300 for college expenses. As shown in the following table, a student who receives the Academic Scholars Award (the highest Bright Futures Award) would find that the award covers less than 23% of the total cost of attending FAU, FIU, UCF, or USF.

The Value of Bright Futures Scholarships, 2007-08 Year

	USF		UCF		FIU		FAU	
Tuition	\$2,321.70		\$2,321.70		\$2,321.70		\$2,321.70	
Fees	\$1,110.00		\$1,097.10		\$707.10		\$902.40	
Total	\$3,431.70		\$3,418.80		\$3,028.80		\$3,224.10	
Other Expenses	\$12,990.00		\$13,300.00		\$15,800.00		\$12,637.00	
Bright Futures Contribution		\$3,731.70		\$3,718.80		\$3,328.80		\$3,524.10
Total Cost of Attendance	\$16,421.70		\$16,718.80		\$18,828.80		\$15,861.10	
Bright Futures Contribution as Percent of Total Cost of Attendance		22.72%		22.24%		17.68%		22.22%

Sources: <http://www.flbog.org/TuitionandFees/Excel/2007-08Fees.xls> and university web sites

The state of Florida invests little money in need-based financial aid. The Bright Futures Scholarship program, representing over \$400 million in the state budget, accounts for about 80% of total financial aid, with only about 20% of financial aid allocated on the basis of need. This means that students without demonstrable financial need receive state funding. In an informal study conducted at the University of Florida, researchers found that 23% of Bright Futures recipients attending the University of Florida reported family incomes of more than \$150,000.

Florida can do a better job of investing its scarce financial resources. Under the current circumstances, a student who has qualified for admission to a state university and earned a Bright Futures Scholarship may not be able to afford to attend that university. Without an increase in need-based aid, Florida's limited-income students will soon find that the institutions of higher education are closed to them, despite Governor Crist's laudable efforts to maintain access by keeping tuition rates low.