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STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF FLORIDA

STEERING COMMITTEE

Innovation and Online Education

March 3, 2022

SUBJECT: Approval of Minutes

MINUTES
STEERING COMMITTEE FOR INNOVATION AND ONLINE EDUCATION
VIRTUAL MEETING
FEBRUARY 9, 2022

Chair Bret Danilowicz convened the meeting at 2:03 p.m. on February 9, 2022, with the following members present: Provosts George Ellenberg, Ken Furton, Joe Glover, Mark Rieger and Ralph Wilcox and Associate Vice Chancellor Nancy McKee (non-voting).

The following invited guest and Implementation Committee members were in attendance: Marshall Criser (Chancellor); Michelle Horton (UWF); David Jaeger (FGCU); Deb Miller (UNF); Andy McCollough (UF); Cindy DeLuca (USF); Julie Golden-Botti (FAU); Evangelia Prevolis (FIU); Franzetta Fitz (FAMU); Tom Dvorske (Poly); Robby Fuselier (FSU); Tom Cavanagh (UCF); and Mariam Manzur-Leiva (NCF).

Ronald Henry (FAMU) was also in attendance.

Provost Wilcox moved approval of the minutes of the Steering Committee meeting held on December 1,

Creation of New Knowledge and Its Application

#1 in long-term recommendations (interdisciplinary research): Move to short-term.

Engagement with Our Communities

Leave as-is.

Operating an Efficient Enterprise

#1 in short-term recommendations: Recognize market forces, as well as department needs and demand.

Planning for Additional Post-Pandemic Analyses

Include in the short-term: Bring useful data back to the Committee to discuss. Invite a couple of data administrators to our next meeting.

Regarding student health insurance, Provost Wilcox suggested that recommendations be developed for both institutional leadership and Board of Governors leadership. Provost Glover suggested that the vice presidents of student affairs document the cost to students if the recommendation is adopted, and Chair Danilowicz suggested they also determine the cost of not implementing the recommendation.

Chair Danilowicz said that groups would be asked to flesh out implementation plans for their respective recommendations, with timelines developed. Provost Glover said that the plans should be ready by the June Board of Governors meeting.

Chair Danilowicz said the next Steering Committee meeting will focus on data. He adjourned the meeting at 2:51 p.m.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted activities across the State University System. To provide a continuity of service, the operational practices of every university division were significantly altered, and remote work modalities were embraced where possible. This report summarizes pandemic-

audiences accessing continuing education and cooperative extension. Recommendations to improve work with external communities include: expanding remote interviews and professional seminars to promote access and quality; engaging continuing education and cooperative extension offices with chambers of commerce for regional workforce development; and establishing Florida workforce microcredentials to enhance university alignment with industry.

For the effective operation of our universities, challenges were encountered with remote work policies, reduction in on-campus and off-campus employment opportunities for students, and ensuring equitable access to IT resources necessary for remote operations. Mental health and disability offices saw changes in the types of students using their services, international admissions were severely disrupted, and existing challenges facing university police forces were further exacerbated. New ways to support access and equity for SUS students were created using food pantries, clothing exchanges, and laptop/hotspot loaner programs. Recommendations to improve campus operations include: updating remote work policies; disseminating best practices for IT access and use and the associated professional development of employees; leveraging volume contracts for purchasing, including software; easing restrictions on carryforward reserves to accelerate resiliency response; and creating guidelines for the deployment of emergency student aid in the future.

As this report was a synthesis of observations primarily by administrators, staff, and faculty and student leaders during the pandemic, its recommendations to the SUS were developed prior to the conclusion of the worldwide pandemic. Consequently, limited performance-based data is available to suggest more permanent changes which will stem from student and employee outcomes and expectations post-

A planning workgroup was created in February 2021 by the Board of Governors Innovation and

digital divide to maintain equitable support for all students. A recap of the presentations associated with the student experience highlighted the following common and related themes:

Access, Technology, Communication: The increased reliance on off-campus technology usage during the pandemic brought a greater awareness of the digital divide among diverse student populations. Access to high-speed internet, Wi-Fi, unlimited data, and laptops was not readily available to all students as institutions shifted to remote instruction. There were also unique challenges experienced with instructional labs, performing arts, and faculty/institutional responses. IT units faced an increase in demand for classroom technology support as faculty, students, and staff returned to campus with multi-modal course options with some students online and some simultaneously in the classroom. The global pivot to remote work presented additional challenges of retaining IT staff due to private sector job opportunities. Fatigue from the usage of video platforms and information overload were evident as the pandemic extended into multiple semesters. The lack of real and tangible social interactions was noted as an issue by many students, faculty, and staff. Students struggled with keeping up with communication and the changing landscape associated with the pandemic.

Pedagogy, Course Modality, Faculty Training: The rapid transition to remote instruction resulted in substantial institutional investments in faculty training, along with support resources for instructional design and student engagement. The training required development of specialized instructional design and educational technology resources and support. Testing and evaluation presented unique challenges for faculty as new proctoring solutions were quickly on boarded, often requiring modification to assessment strategies. Creating meaningful student engagement with peers, instructors, and the curriculum was also a challenge in a fully digital environment. The use of new educational technologies along with multi-modal instruction practices necessitated a much greater investment of personnel time and vigilance to address student engagement.

Student Health, Housing, Financial Challenges: Mental health and substance abuse conditions and demand for financial aid services increased among students during the pandemic. Students seeking counseling were reported to have more severe emotional and behavioral problems and were seeking counseling more frequently. Many students and their families experienced immediate financial trauma due to job loss. Homelessness and food insecurity,the

reported that access to technology and equipment to support virtual hiring practices was a challenge for many, contributing to the equity gap. The Student Government Association reported that students received emergency financial assistance, which will potentially become a student expectation beyond the federal- funding period. Support associated with addressing equity and diversity among the campus community will be

technology was suggested as a way to create efficiencies across the institutions. The Housing Directors also noted shared resources and the importance of aligning policies and sharing successful practices.

Staff and technology support: The Advisory Council of Faculty Senates indicated that there is now an opportunity to develop a new taxonomy for course delivery in light of the changing mindsets regarding educational technology. From the perspective of the Innovation and Online Education Implementation Committee, increased interest from faculty for technology support and training allows for professional development across modalities to strengthen pedagogical practices in their on-campus and off-campus

Financial Stewardship: The Chief Information Officers discussed the power of aggregating demand across the entire system, combining the collective buying power of the entire SUS to ensure the best possible prices for procured goods and services. This is reflected in several sections of the report and will be addressed specifically in the ăŜŎűƛ2ƴƳάhLJŜNJI·űƛƴƎ I·ƴ9ŦŦƛŎƛŜƴű 9ƴűŜNJLJNJƛăŜέ fI·űŜNJ ƛƴűKƛă NJŜLJ2NJűφ ¢KŜ CƛƴƖI·ƴŎƛI·f !ƛŘ Directors shared how certain non-core functions have been successfully outsourced, allowing efficiencies and the ability to redeploy critical internal resources for key activities.

Access: The Deans of Students shared how loans can assist students with housing and food insecurity, as well as the cost of tuition and materials. Both the Council on Equal

Develop strategies, standards, and training associated with best practices in multi-modal (i.e. Flex) instruction and student resources to support faculty, staff, and student success.

Innovation and Online Education Implementation Committee:

Develop, maintain, and disseminate shareable resources for faculty and staff related to best practices in multi-modal (i.e. Flex) instruction;

Distance Learning Research Consortium:

Explore student learning, grades, and progression into future courses and disseminate findings to the Implementation Committee and SUS Provosts.

Address sustainability of financial support associated with federal relief funding, which was necessary to 1) increase the extent of IT resources and software in classrooms and teaching laboratories, although it does not cover the cost of a refreshment cycle, and 2) provide loaner laptops, hotspots, webcams, and other IT support to students without access to the necessary infrastructure for off-campus learning.

Provosts and Vice Presidents of Administration:

Identify sources of funding that can be used to support refreshment of the IT infrastructure in expanded classrooms and teaching laboratories.

To ensure that equitable access to the SUS is maintained, identify sources of funding that can be used to allow for ongoing support of students in need of additional IT essential to their use of remote modalities.

Create links to external resources for students to access financial support from employer education benefits and internships, state-funded workforce development resources, and other community services.

Encourage institutions to consider requiring students to have health insurance in order to ensure every student has the opportunity to receive the physical and mental health support they need to be successful as a student.

Vice Presidents for Student Affairs:

Document the benefits to students from institutions that currently require student health insurance, their lessons learned, and best practices that have emerged as a potential model for SUS institutions.

As supported by the documentation, formulate a recommendation for consideration by institutional leadership.

The mission of the State University System of Florida is to provide undergraduate, graduate, and professional education, research, and public service of the highest quality through a coordinated system of institutions of higher learning, each with its own mission and collectively dedicated to serving the needs of a diverse state and global society.

The *State University System's 2025 Strategic Plan* further underscores a commitment to "transform and revitalize Florida's economy and society through research, creativity, discovery, and innovation." Essential to the pursuit of truth, creation of new knowledge, and solutions to Florida's most critical and complex challenges, the SUS maintained its focus on research, scholarship, and innovation throughout the global pandemic. Universities continued to be guided by three related goals to:

Strengthen the Quality and Reputation of Scholarship, Research, and Innovation,
Increase Research Activity and Attract More External Funding, and
Increase Research Commercialization Activities.

Throughout, institutional progress has been gauged using the following key performance indicators: Faculty Membership in National Academies; Faculty Awards; Percent of Undergraduate Seniors Assisting in Faculty Research, or Percent of Undergraduates Engaged in Research; Total R&D Expenditures; Total Annual R&D Expenditures in Non-Health Sciences; University Centers and Institute Expenditures; Percent of R&D Expenditures funded from External Sources; National Ranking in Research Expenditures (by STEM discipline); Number of Patents Awarded Annually; Number of Licenses and Options Executed Annually; Number of Start-Up Companies Created; and Postdoctoral Appointees.

In addressing the global pandemic's impact on research, the creation of new knowledge, and its application across the SUS, three major themes emerged:

The recognition and readiness on the part of Florida's universities to adapt to change, especially as it pertains to research, scholarly and creative activity and building toward a new, smarter, more inclusive, collaborative and stronger future;
A focus on building an environment to support collaboration, efficiency, equity, excellence, innovation, redundancy, resiliency, and safety across the SUS' academic research enterprise; and
A commitment to reimagining and leveraging a post-pandemic "new normal" through increasing statewide partnerships and interdisciplinary, team-based research.

The SUS Innovation and Online Education Steering Committee sought input from institutional vice presidents for research and chief information officers, along with medical school and public health deans. In addition, valuable testimony from others (including the Advisory Council of Faculty Senates, Council of Student Affairs, the Council on Equal Opportunity and Diversity, the

Council of State University Libraries, and the Council of Administrative and Financial Affairs, in particular) helped inform the Committee's work, especially with regard to the specific impact on early career scholars and scientists, along with the experience of undergraduate and graduate student researchers.

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the academic research enterprises across the SUS. Many traditional research activities were suspended in the spring and into the summer of 2020. The Committee's discussions with stakeholders identified key areas of impact, including lack of access to physical space, technology, and supplies.

> *Physical Infrastructure:* Due to pandemic protocols instituted at each university, laboratory facilities were often closed, sometimes reducing access to faculty and student researchers below what was necessary to meet research outcomes. As well, field-based researchers (including those engaged in international research) and those in the performing arts found their research, scholarly and creative opportunities significantly curtailed.
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> *Technology:* The switch to remote or virtual work revealed inequities in researchers' access to technology and digital literacy (i.e., the digital divide) in responding to research needs. These limitations also uncovered a paucity of existing remote or virtual platforms and services to support research (e.g., including telehealth for clinical research).
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> *Supply chain:*

While the pandemic created many challenges to academic research, positive outcomes were also identified. The presenters highlighted the following phenomena that present opportunities for research moving forward.

State University System Addressing multiple dimensions of the State's challenges due to the pandemic demanded creative problem solving, often at the intersection of disciplines. The rapid emergence of system-wide networks of research expertise in response to challenges associated with the pandemic (e.g., biomedical, global health, mental health, communication, business, economics, and cybersecurity) provided a talented and diverse research community to assist in the communication and exchange of knowledge. The competitive strength of epidemiological and disease modeling researcher teams across the SUS contributed to the timely, safe, and productive response to the pandemic.

Research productivity: Researchers in some fields found that remote work supported higher levels of productivity primarily due to their work efficiency and work-life balance.

disruptions while continuing to drive innovation, there is a need to further invest in research and development across the SUS. The presenters indicated that determining optimal long-term investments (i.e., the need for seed funding, the development of research infrastructure and mechanisms, the creation of flexible, adaptable, and available research space, and the ongoing investment in digitization) are critical to mitigate future disruptions to our universities' financial stability and their research effort.

A number of best practices emerged from the overall discussions with university leaders from across the SUS. For researchers, this included:

Professional development: Academic continuity throughout the pandemic required faculty and researchers to be skilled in a variety of modalities. Online professional development and credentialing (e.g., grant-writing), especially for early-career faculty and graduate students, was critical in maintaining academic continuity. To navigate a future disruption successfully, continuous professional development must become an integral part of the academic career path.

Interdisciplinary research: The global pandemic required interdisciplinary research to provide solutions to complex problems. Researchers across disciplines, internally and externally, have created new ways to disseminate information and collectively solve pressing issues. The effectiveness of this synergistic approach to a worldwide problem has provided a firm foundation for the continuation of interdisciplinary collaboration post-pandemic.

Digital operations: The rapid response necessary during COVID enabled the SUS institutions to find technological solutions utilizing existing infrastructure, connectivity, and digital platforms. The opportunity to continue research virtually provided much-needed flexibility and accommodations to researchers. In many ways, these best practices assisted universities in becoming more equitable and more accessible to a broad range of faculty researchers. The introduction and continuation of digital resources and technology-enhanced delivery will enable faculty to maintain their work during future disruptions.

Identify opportunities, then build and support statewide, interdisciplinary research communities, networks, and clusters with a focus on grand challenges and global problems affecting Florida. The SUS ExpertNet should be updated accordingly (https://expertnet.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.home).

Vice Presidents of Research:

- Identify opportunities for grand challenges and global problems affecting Florida;
- Build and support statewide, interdisciplinary research communities, networks, and clusters to create an experts list for critical and/or time-sensitive topics.
- Organize disease and modelling groups composed of experts existing within the SUS, so if requested, they are prepared to inform statewide response and policy.

: Identify investment needs in a system-wide shared technology, research tools, and instrumentation (including remote access to core facilities) to expand SUS research competitiveness (e.g., high-performance computing), productivity, and data protection (i.e., cybersecurity,). This will also support the resiliency of research operations to future disruptive events.

Vice Presidents of Research and Chief Information Officers:

- Jointly identify investment needs in system-wide shared technology, research tools, and instrumentation
- Prioritize the repurposing of vacated "back office" space (due to remote work) to expand research facilities

Council of Administrative and Financial Affairs

extension programs, and increased opportunities to meet workforce needs through continuing education and certificate programs. In addition, in the new post-pandemic world, increased use of technology will prompt changes in addressing many dimensions of community engagement.

Assisting the Workforce:

learning for both internal and external audiences and is investing in hybrid face-to-face/virtual extension teaching space in counties modeled after HyFlex classrooms on the UF campus. Both IFAS and FAMU Extension intend to permanently transition a portion of extension teaching and learning to the virtual world. However, face-to-face programming will be kept in their portfolios to retain traditional audiences.

FAMU Cooperative Extension also provides research-based educational programs and direct technical assistance to Florida citizens, with particular emphasis on underserved and limited resource audiences. The pandemic saw increased and innovative use of

example is the way in which UF began engaging educational communities in the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), such as:

anticipated. When that learning curve was coupled with the adversities many people faced during the crisis, there was a disruption in scholarly output among some faculty groups. Some universities have allowed faculty to request a one-year delay in the tenure decision process. Despite it all, most faculty have proven resilient and resourceful during the pandemic and seized opportunities for collaboration between faculty, administrators, and staff to develop and implement innovative learning solutions.

Student Hardships: The pandemic caused collegiate plans to be altered in ways no one could have anticipated. Given increased job loss, homelessness, food insecurity, and other adversities, many students found it hard to commit to degree programs. Many SUS institutions were able to support students by varying degrees with increased financial aid, CARES funding, and flexibility in academic policies. Naturally, financial directors across SUS institutions saw a higher demand for financial aid services during the pandemic.

Technology: The increased use of technology during the pandemic did alert deans to the digital divide existing in the communities our institutions serve. These include wide gaps in access to high-speed internet, wi-fi, or unlimited data. As broader delivery options for student learning are all but inevitable, it is imperative that SUS institutions bridge the technological divide as much as possible. To do so is to seize an opportunity for targeted research and community outreach, which SUS institutions are especially equipped to do.

Mental health counseling offers an especially insightful lens into student impact. Fewer students sought out counseling services in Fall 2020 than in Fall 2019, but the students who did seek out counseling had more significant emotional and behavioral problems and sought out services with more frequency. Counselors agree that the gravity of student needs, in addition to new remote options, reveals an opportunity to balance tele-therapy with in-person counseling, and thereby make accessing services more convenient while enriching treatment for students.

Disability services across the SUS present a similar picture. The pandemic resulted in a greater need to continue offering course and service delivery options to students while maintaining success strategies to help them no matter the modality. While mass virtual learning minimized the use of physical accommodations in on-campus disability service centers, there have been improvements in digital accessibility. Captioning, for instance, is now the norm in digital content delivery. Today, disability services leaders across the SUS have worked together with the aim of continuing to push for digital innovations and normalize universal accommodations while also communicating that other services are still available to students on campus.

Admissions: The biggest story in admissions is how pandemic-imposed travel limitations and rapidly changing international migration policies impacted international student

admissions and enrollments. International admission leaders have addressed these challenges by

Remote Work: Despite obstacles, university employees have expressed greater demand for remote work and flexible schedules. Some campuses find that a significant percentage of their own staff can continue to work remotely quite effectively given appropriate human resources policies and guidance. In addition, many SUS institutions established remote and cost-effective mechanisms for employee recruitment, selection, and professional development. To accommodate a reality in which remote work is here to stay, SUS human resources leaders took the opportunity to work on new guidelines and policies that promote employee satisfaction, savings, and productivity in virtual settings.

Student Recreation: As is well known, moderate physical activity has been tied to decreases in mild stress, mild anxiety, and mild depression, and significantly improves cognition. The kind of recreational programming that took to a remote setting most naturally was virtual fitness programming. These included live and recorded group fitness classes, personal training sessions, and virtual 5K races. At the same time, SUS institutions saw a surging interest in outdoor recreational programming like walking, hiking, outdoor yoga, l·yŘ ˥l·èl·˥ɅyƎ¢ a l·yê ŎI·YLJdžăŜă ŎNŜI·úŜŘ ØɅŘŜ2 άK2ø-ű2ɛ ƎdzɅŘŜă Ŧ2N various activities and for proximate outdoor landmarks.

[I·úŜNΣ I·ă I· Y2NŜ KèōNɅŘ Y2ŘŜf ōŜŎI·YŜ úKŜ y2NYΣ YI·yê ăűdzŘŜyúă ű22˥ άŜÈLJf2NŜ f2ŎI·fɛ trips within driving or biking distance from campus. TKŜăŜ úNɅLJă ăŜNØŜŘ I·ă άYŜŜű dzLJɛ locations where recreational staff members would serve as guides. The trips have proven so successful that many campuses are shifting resources to offer the program more often. As with nearly all student services, SUS recreation directors believe virtual programs will continue as a supplementςςbut not a replacementςςfor in-person experiences.

Equal Opportunity and Diversity: The social unrest in 2020 led many SUS diversity and inclusion officers to ask what more the SUS could do to ensure equitable opportunities for disadvantaged groups. In response, diversity officers across the SUS initiated numerous online outreach programs addressing diversity and inclusion. An opportunity for ever-closer collaboration among state institutions, these offices worked especially hard to share their respective programs with sister universities.

One common observation was that university communities were more likely to participate in programs that provided a space for sharing thoughts honestly and for hearing from others on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. This finding offers us an opportunity to tailor our programming on difficult topics in the most amenable ways possible.

Topical concerns over accessibility on campus have challenged compliance and equity officers to change how they conduct investigations, provide compliance education, provide accommodations, and extend resources. For example: The pandemic saw an increase in incident reports related to social media activity among students. Moving to more remote services was a welcome occurrence that helped adapt compliance offices to meet students where they are.

Other sustainable opportunities are:

Emergency relief funds for students, faculty, and staff
Laptop loan programs/Wi-Fi access support
Food pantries; and
Clothing exchanges.

Information Technology: The rapid move to remote and hybrid instruction required a rethinking of course construction and delivery and afforded faculty the opportunity to operate technology as both a means of course delivery and to professionalize students for the workplaces they now inhabit. This meant investing in substantial faculty training, instructional and student support, and in some cases, significant upgrades in both small and large-scale technology.

As each SUS institution can attest, the increased remote delivery only accelerated efforts already underway at most universities to implement new instructional technologies (especially considering plans set in motion by the SUS Strategic Plan for Online Education). The difference now is that faculty are more inclined than ever to expand their instructional methods into multi-modal delivery or else use technology in novel ways that augment classroom instruction. This has been a boon to instructional innovation and quality outcomes as academic programs across the system take numerous opportunities to add enhanced field experience, simulated labs, and cutting-edge pedagogy.

SUS institutions already have a successful channel for disseminating new instructional practices and faculty development statewide through the TOPkit and Innovation Summit initiatives, but campus-level resources are required to ensure successful implementation. Initial steps would be to identify and begin a dialogue about any system and/or institutional policy that may need to be revised and develop a financial model which supports the infrastructure of these new modalities.

Each university should update policies and practices to support in-person, fully remote, and/or hybrid work and instruction options based on department service needs and demand.

Human Resources Directors:

Update policies and practices to support all work modalities and instruction options

Ongoing assessment of the productivity of employees in order to remain agile and competitive as a workforce

Share best practices in strengthening IT infrastructure and training to maximize employee productivity.

Develop and disseminate shared-SUS remote-instruction resources, including optimized technology standards for remote and Flex instruction such as for STEM laboratory classes, faculty and staff development, and outcomes of course modalities involving remote learning.

Innovation and Online Implementation Committee:

Develop and disseminate shared-SUS remote-instruction resources, including optimized technology standards for remote and Flex instruction, through TOPKit, the Innovation Summit, the Distance

accelerated for each institution, but the SUS will also be more resilient to any potential disruption in the future.

(since July 1, 2021)
Provost and Vice President
for Academic Affairs
Florida Atlantic University

(Vice Chair through June 30, 2021)
Provost and Senior Vice President
University of West Florida

Provost and Executive Vice President
Florida State University

(Vice Chair since July 1, 2021)
Provost, Executive Vice President
and Chief Operating Officer
Florida International University

(Chair through June 30, 2021)
Provost and Executive Vice President
University of South Florida

Dr. Tom Dvorske (Polytechnic

Develop and deliver system-wide professional development programs for faculty, student researchers, and technical staff utilizing digital platforms to enhance their skills in grant writing, equipment use, and other skills transferrable across institutions. This should be an ongoing effort given the rapidly changing technology available to researchers.

Develop and deliver system-wide professional development programs utilizing digital platforms.

Identify opportunities, then build and support statewide,

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It would be prudent for the SUS to determine what additional data beyond that

Evaluate regulatory and statutory statewide restrictions on the use of carryforward fund reserves.
Propose recommendations to the Board of Governors.

Discuss with a few Data Administrators at the next Steering Committee meeting.
Identify additional data or metrics useful for tracking changes in the post-pandemic operations of the SUS.

Propose policies and procedures that would allow SUS staff to provide supplementary tele-counseling support at other SUS institutions.

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