

Date XX, 2004

POLICY DIRECTIVE

TO: Members, State University Presidents Association

FROM: Debra Austin, Chancellor

SUBJECT: *Academic Learning Compacts*

AUTHORITY:

- Article IX, Section 7, of the Constitution of the State of Florida
- Florida Board of Governors Resolutions, October 22, 2003; April 22, 2004
- Florida Board of Governors Action, July 22, 2004
- Florida Administrative Code 6C-3.001 - Systemwide Uniform Procedures, as adopted by the Florida Board of Governors on January 7, 2003

POLICY: All universities, through their Boards of Trustees, shall adopt *Academic Learning Compacts* for their baccalaureate degree programs.

Introduction

“Explicit identification of learning expectations facilitates the department's coherence about its goals. Sharing those expectations explicitly with students can provide an effective learning scaffold on which students can build their experiences and render effective performance.”

American Psychological Association (March, 2002).

http://www.apa.org/ed/best_practices.html

In recent years, there has been increased emphasis on the identification and assessment of core student learning outcomes in higher education. The Florida Board of Governors has articulated the importance of student achievement in its strategic planning and accountability process. Simultaneously, the Board has placed more emphasis on the devolution of authority to the universities, campus-level decision making, and institutional accountability.

Accordingly, the Board has determined that universities will develop “*Academic Learning Compacts*” and related processes to ensure student achievement in baccalaureate degree programs in the State University System. These *Compacts* will be made readily available to prospective and enrolled students.

University students are served best when students and faculty fully engage in a teaching-learning partnership, and this partnership is all the more meaningful if it is made as clear as possible to students what it is they will learn and how program personnel will assess that learning. By establishing *Academic Learning Compacts* and associated processes, State universities shall

certify that each baccalaureate graduate has completed a program with clearly articulated core student learning expectations and corresponding robust and effective assessment mechanisms.

[OR]

determine by any method they wish that each baccalaureate graduate is certified in clearly articulated core student learning outcomes in content/discipline knowledge and skills, communication skills, and critical thinking skills.

The Development of *Academic Learning Compacts* and Related Processes

Each university shall construct clearly defined policies and procedures for developing, implementing, and reviewing *Academic Learning Compacts* and associated activities. A current copy of each university’s policies and procedures regarding *Academic Learning Compacts* shall remain on file in the Division of Colleges and Universities. These policies and procedures shall be aligned with System policies and will include, but not be restricted to, the following elements:

- (I) For each baccalaureate program on (or that an institution intends to place on) the State University System Academic Degree Inventory, university personnel will develop *Academic Learning Compacts* that:
 - (A) Identify, at a minimum, the expected core student learning outcomes for program graduates in the areas of
 - (1) content/discipline knowledge and skills;
 - (2) communication skills*;
 - (3) critical thinking skills*;and
 - (B) Identify corresponding assessments used to determine how well student learning matches those articulated expectations.

[* It will be a university decision as to whether there will be institutional-level definitions and/or required outcomes in the areas of communication and critical thinking skills. Some institutions may decide instead that definitions and/or required outcomes will be established (or supplemented) at the program level.]

- (II) University personnel will develop the evaluation systems (including external validations) necessary to corroborate that the assessments referenced above truly measure student achievement against the expected core learning outcomes. Such evaluations will serve to validate the confidence levels associated with assessment mechanisms used in the program, and results will be used to improve student achievement and program effectiveness.

During the initial phase of implementing this Policy Directive, university personnel shall develop an action plan that will be approved by their university's board of trustees and submitted to the Division of Colleges and Universities. The plan shall include the following:

- A proposed timeline for developing policies and implementing procedures to capture each element outlined above, as well as in making *Academic Learning Compacts* readily available to students.
- A description of how university personnel will

certify that each baccalaureate graduate has completed a program with clearly articulated core student learning expectations and corresponding robust and effective assessment mechanisms.

[OR]

ensure that each baccalaureate graduate is certified in clearly articulated core student learning outcomes in content/discipline knowledge and skills, communication skills, and critical thinking skills.

In addition to submitting the action plan, university personnel shall submit a status report that includes an analysis of the progress being made in each baccalaureate program toward the development and implementation of the elements outlined above, as well as in making *Academic Learning Compacts* readily available to students. Updated status reports may be requested periodically until the *Academic Learning Compacts* and associated processes are fully developed and implemented.

The Implementation of *Academic Learning Compacts* and Related Processes

University personnel will provide students and prospective students with *Academic Learning Compacts*, which include concise statements of what active and successful participants in the joint teaching-learning process will know and be able to do, expressed in terms of the core student learning outcomes embodied in the requirements for each baccalaureate degree. The *Compacts* also will list the types of assessments used in the program. *Compacts* provided to students must be written in a user-friendly, jargon-free format.

University policies and procedures shall delineate how and where *Academic Learning Compacts* will be made readily available to students. However, the *Academic Learning*

Compacts must be made available to students beginning no later than the fall semester of 2005.

The Review of *Academic Learning Compacts* and Related Processes

As part of the mandated review and continuous improvement process for State University System degree programs (refer to the Policy Directive on Academic Program Review issued by the Chancellor on August 11, 2004), university personnel must submit an electronic copy (or a hyperlink to a copy) of the ***Academic Learning Compact*** for each baccalaureate degree program under review. University personnel are expected to demonstrate how information from the periodic review of student learning outcomes, as well as from the evaluation of corresponding assessment mechanisms, has been used to improve student achievement and program effectiveness.

Contact: Office of Academic and Student Affairs
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DA/casa

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