

# Universities Form Florida Consortium of Metropolitan Research Universities to Accelerate Innovation toward Student Success



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## ABOUT HELIOS EDUCATION FOUNDATION

We believe education can break down barriers, move communities forward, and gives everyone the opportunity realize their fullest potential. Because we believe so passionately in the transformative power of education, Helios Education Foundation invests in partnerships from cradle to career so that more students – particularly first-generation, minority, and underrepresented students – connect talent to opportunity by completing a postsecondary degree.

Through our Florida Regional Student Success framework, Helios collaborates with partners to invest in initiatives that transform opportunity for students in Tampa Bay, Orlando, and Miami. In Arizona, where Latino students comprise the largest percentage of the K-12 public school population, the foundation is implementing its Arizona Latino Student Success initiative focused on preparing all students – especially student in high-poverty, under-served Latino communities – for success.

Dear Colleague,

Connecting student potential to limitless possibilities through the completion of a postsecondary degree is more than an aspirational goal for Helios Education Foundation. The assertion that education changes lives and strengthens communities is fundamental to our work, to our partnerships, and to the impact we strive to achieve.

Ensuring all students, particularly first-generation, minority, and underrepresented students are not only inspired, but aspire to unleash their potential motivates us to seek partners that challenge convention in favor of innovation – partners such as the Florida Consortium of Metropolitan Research Universities (Florida Consortium). Fostering collaboration among three metropolitan-based research 1 universities, Florida Consortium members, the University of South Florida, the University of Central Florida, and Florida International University are challenging the notion of competition in favor of collaboration, and having significant impact on student success. While collaboration is commonplace in education, the depth of synergy and integration among Florida Consortium members clearly illustrates the potential of collaboration to supersede competition. Inspired by the early successes of the Florida Consortium, we hope this brief serves to challenge more institutions, all along the education continuum, to embrace a synergistic approach to serving students.

Helios Education Foundation is inspired by the early successes of the Florida Consortium, the impact it fostered in Florida, and the potential that deep-seated collaboration has to elevate achievement among first-generation, minority, and underrepresented students in Florida.

Sincerely,



Vince Roig  
Founding Chairman

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vince Roig".



Paul J. Luna  
President & CEO

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul J. Luna".

## INTRODUCTION

Higher education is rich with tradition: from century-old institutions to the youngest of campuses, our nation's colleges and universities shape not only the minds, but also the futures of countless students. While the goal of higher education has always been to graduate mature, intellectual contributors to society, the profile of a “traditional” student has evolved.

The notion that a college student immediately enrolls in a four-year university upon high school graduation and has no commitments other than on-campus, academic success not only is dated, but also could not be further from today's reality. An increasing proportion of postsecondary students—particularly students enrolled in urban universities, many of whom are minority, first-generation, and underrepresented in higher education, balance education with career and family obligations, often requiring support services beyond those of a “traditional” student.

This brief explores how three public metropolitan research I<sup>1</sup> universities in Florida abandoned norms to form an unprecedented alliance—the Florida Consortium of Metropolitan Research Universities (Florida Consortium) to accelerate innovation aimed at increasing student success and, ultimately, ensure an increasing number of Floridians complete a postsecondary degree.

This brief is divided into three sections. In Part I, we explore the origins and evolutions of the University of South Florida (USF), University of Central Florida (UCF), and Florida International University (FIU), paying particular attention to the demographic composition of their respective student populations. In Part II, we provide an overview of postsecondary degree attainment both in the U.S. and in Florida. Based on workforce projections, both national and statewide leaders acknowledge the need to focus on postsecondary degree attainment. In Florida, this momentum was exemplified in the state's adoption of the SAIL to 60 initiative (SAIL stands for “Strengthening Alignment Between Industry and Learning”), which calls for 60% of Floridians to hold a high-value postsecondary degree, certificate, or training experience by the year 2030. Building on each institution's history and capitalizing on the state's momentum, in Part III, we explore formation, successes, and challenges of the Florida Consortium—early lessons upon which the Consortium is building its strategic framework, intent on elevating student success for more first-generation, minority, and underrepresented students.

<sup>1</sup> Research I university is a category that the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education uses to indicate universities in the United States that engage in the highest levels of research activity

**PART 1: METROPOLITAN REGIONS SUPPORTED BY PUBLIC RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES**

**HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA, THE UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA, AND FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY**

Florida has been widely recognized as a leader in postsecondary education. Affirming this stance atop other states in the nation, *U.S. News & World Report* named Florida first in the nation for higher education in 2018 based on the number of citizens who hold a college degree, the time it takes students to complete both two- and four-year college programs, the cost of in-state tuition and fees, and the burden of debt that college graduates carry.

Providing access to higher education from the Panhandle to the Palm Coast, the state’s public universities expand

knowledge and prepare students for careers in industries related to Florida’s leading economic drivers, including tourism, agriculture, and international trade. The State University System of Florida serves over 300,000 students via its network of 12 public universities. See Figure 1: State University System of Florida Institutions by Year Established

Meeting the education and workforce-readiness needs of Florida’s largest metropolitan regions are USF in Tampa Bay which boasts 3.1 million residents in the metropolitan statistical area (MSA); UCF located in Orlando with an MSA population of over 2.5 million residents; and FIU in Miami-Dade County, with an MSA regional population of over 6.1 million Floridians. Collectively 11.7 million Floridians reside in these regions, accounting for over 41% of the state’s population. Student demographics at all three universities are as ethnically and racially diverse as their respective regions.

**FIGURE 1** State University System of Florida Institutions by Year Established



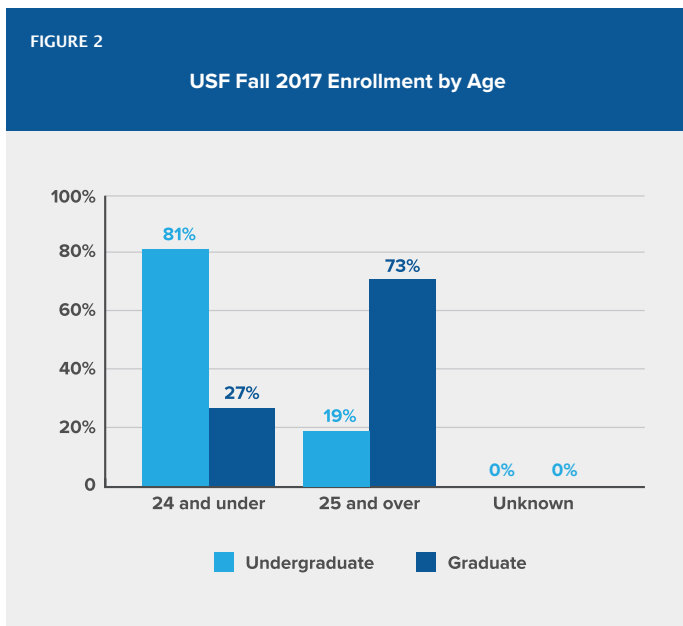
## UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

In 1956, USF became the fourth university established in the state and the first major state university planned, built and opened in the 20th century, as well as Florida’s first university located in a major metropolitan area.

The Florida Cabinet approved the name “University of South Florida” in 1957, partly because it was the southernmost university in the state at the time. Groundbreaking ceremonies took place on the Tampa campus in 1958. Expanding to meet Tampa Bay’s growing population, USF added campus locations in St. Petersburg in 1965 and in Sarasota in 1974.

Given the university’s network of three campuses, total USF enrollment as of Fall 2017 exceeded 51,000, comprised of students who represent diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds. Adding to the diversity on campus and challenging the “traditional” student profile are undergraduate students aged 25 or older, which comprised 19% of the university’s Fall 2017 enrollment, as shown in Figure 2.

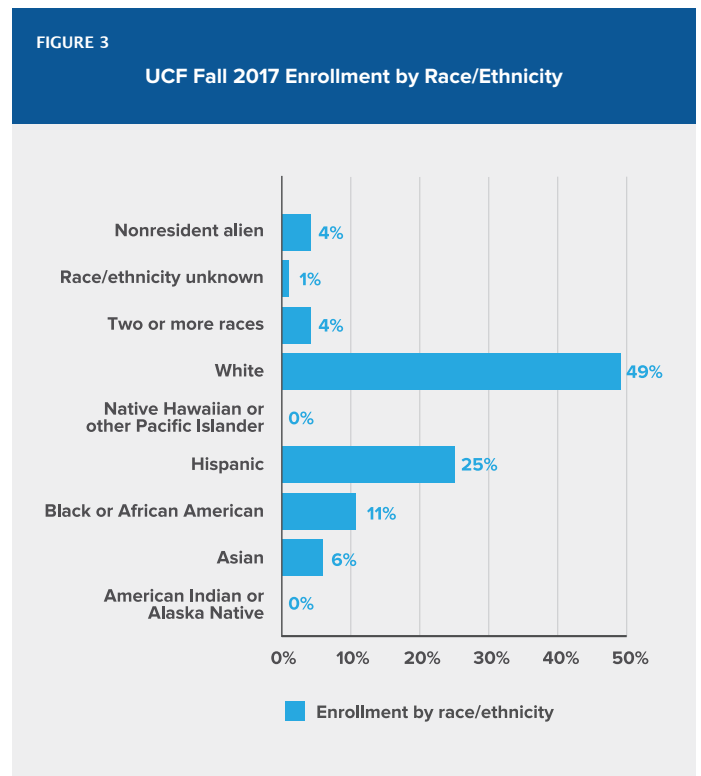
Strengthening the Tampa Bay region’s expansion into technology and health sciences, and serving as an incubator for global research, USF was designated the state’s first Emerging Preeminent State Research University in 2016 and formally designated a Preeminent State Research University in 2018.



## UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

Located in the center of Florida, UCF was founded in 1963 and opened in 1968 as Florida Technological University focused on supporting the expanding needs of the Kennedy Space Center. The expanding Orlando metropolitan region necessitated an increase for degreed individuals outside the fields of engineering, thus, in 1978, the school was renamed the University of Central Florida, acknowledging its expanded academic scope.

As of Fall 2017, enrollment stands at over 66,000 mostly undergraduate students. Reflective of the diversity in Central Florida, over half of UCF’s student population identifies with some ethnic or racial minority. For example, as noted in Figure 3, 25% of students self-report as Hispanic, while 11% are Black or African-American (Source: National Center for Education Statistics).



## FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Multilingual, multicultural, multifaceted: Not only do those words describe South Florida, they describe Miami's top-tier research institution, FIU, which ranks among the 10 largest universities in the nation.

Catering to a non-traditional student population has been part of FIU's mission since its inception. In 1972, FIU's inaugural class was comprised of 5,600 students, 43% of whom were married, with the typical student working full-time. Today, FIU serves the needs of over 54,000 students pursuing undergraduate, master, or doctoral degrees, many of whom are first in their families to pursue a postsecondary education, as illustrated in Figure 4.

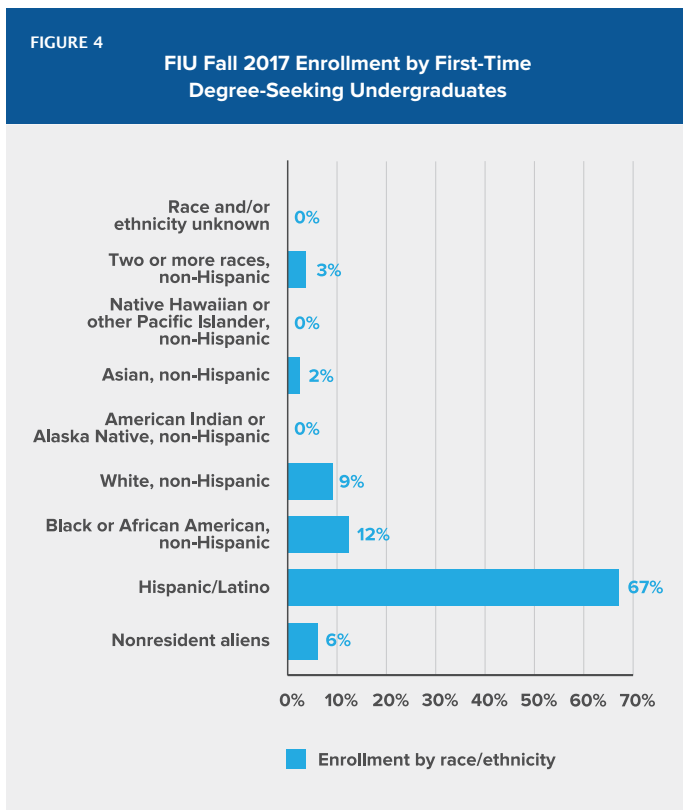
The diversity among FIU's students is also reflected among its faculty and staff as the university's leadership challenges both current and future FIU alumni to meet South Florida's workforce needs.

## COLLABORATION FORMED THE CONSORTIUM

In higher education, alliances prevail. Often, the synergistic nature of state colleges and universities facilitate student success by ensuring familiarity among educators, complementary curricula, and transferability of credits.

What is not as prevalent, and what uniquely positions the Florida Consortium, is the seeding of this same synergistic nature among three metropolitan-based research universities located within hours of each other.

Collectively, USF, UCF, and FIU form the Florida Consortium of Metropolitan Research Universities, an unprecedented coalition among public research institutions in the same state. Each university is interlinked with its region, catering to the evolving needs of its growing first-generation, minority, and underrepresented student population, and committing itself to developing practices that propel student success.



Source: Florida International University, Common Data Set 2017-2018



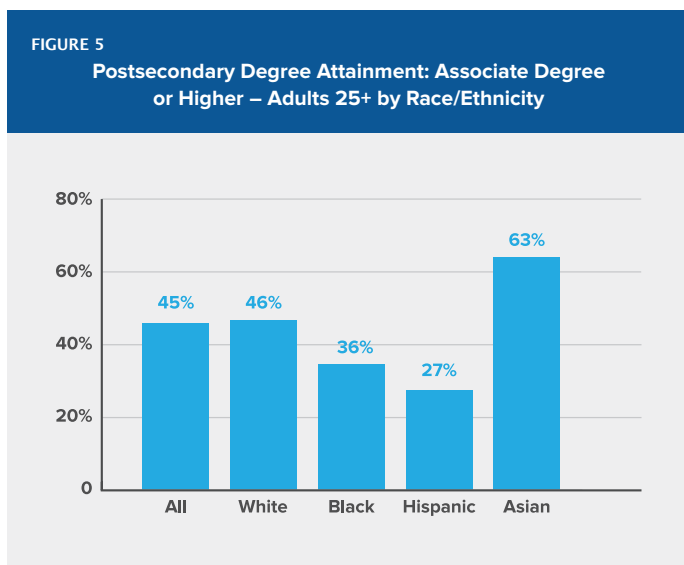
## PART II: POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION TRENDS IN THE U.S. AND FLORIDA

### POSTSECONDARY TRENDS IN THE U.S.

To fully appreciate this unprecedented alliance, it is important to first appreciate how trends in postsecondary education, both nationally and in Florida, have impacted postsecondary completion, particularly for minority, first-generation, and underrepresented students. Too often these students' obligations—the need to balance work and family obligations while completing their education—are not addressed by a traditional degree-completion path.

Published in 2013, the Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce's report, *RECOVERY: Job Growth and Education Requirements Through 2020*, predicted that 65% of jobs nationally will require postsecondary education and training beyond high school. U.S. degree production, however, is not keeping pace with this predicted need. In fact, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, while the number of individuals with an associate degree or higher increased from 45.7% in 2015 to 46.1% in 2016, that figure remained flat in 2017. Figure 5 outlines 2018 data noting associate's degree attainment by adults 25+ by race/ethnicity.

Compounding the complexity of degree attainment are the perpetual gaps between minority students and non-minority students. Recognized as the key to social and economic mobility, postsecondary education, or the lack thereof, has ramifications that influence quality of life, including the number of times an individual experiences unemployment, opportunity for home ownership, and an individual's commitment to civic engagement.



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 2018

## POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION TRENDS IN FLORIDA

According to the Florida Chamber Foundation, by 2030, Florida will have added six million residents and need to have created a net gain of two million new jobs. Over the coming decade, the state's expanding technology sector is anticipated to augment Florida's current workforce, which has historically been anchored in agriculture, tourism, and construction.

Anticipating future workforce needs has led educators, business leaders, and legislators to examine the status of postsecondary-degree attainment in Florida, adopt a state attainment initiative SAIL to 60, and strengthen coalitions that support both traditional and non-traditional students on their way to postsecondary degree attainment.

According to The Lumina Foundation's 2017 report, *A Stronger Nation*, 49.3% of Floridians aged 25 to 64 years old hold a two-year postsecondary degree or higher, ranking the state above the national average of 47.6%, yet falling short of projected workforce needs. Figure 6 illustrates Florida resident education levels, ages 25–64.

Aiming to improve degree attainment in Florida is the state's SAIL to 60 initiative, which calls for 60% of Floridians to hold a high-value postsecondary degree, certificate, or training experience by the year 2030.

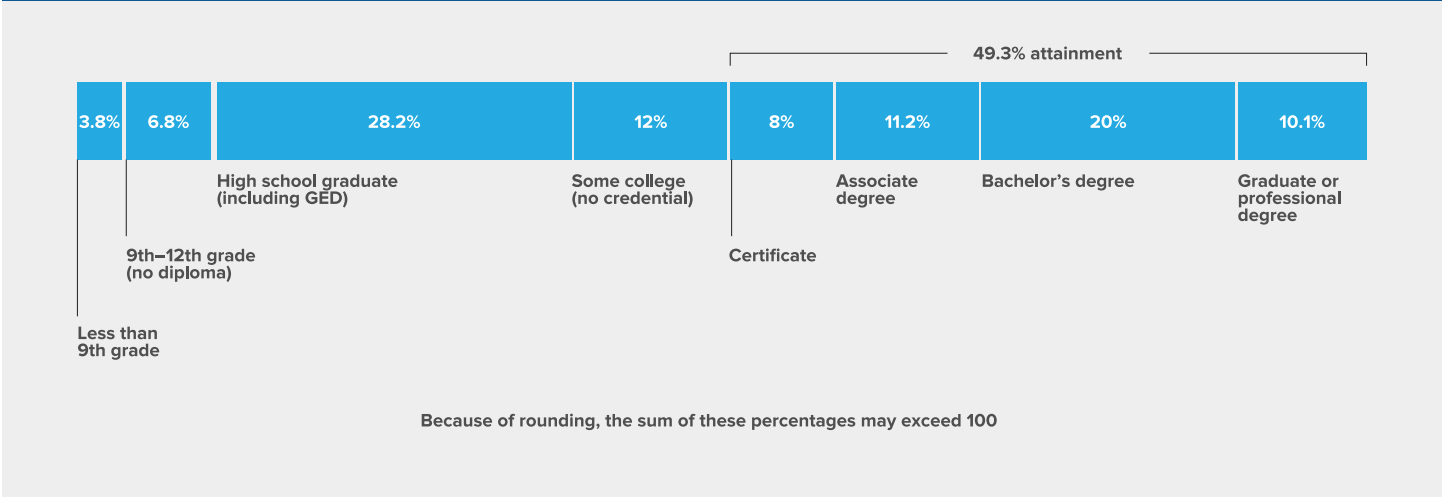
Achievement of this ambitious goal will require alignment among institutions, innovative student reenrollment programs, and expansion of successful student support programs such as Florida Shines, the state's 2+2 articulation program, the Florida FAFSA Challenge, and individual institutional efforts supporting students from enrollment through degree completion.

While first-generation, minority, and underrepresented students necessitate targeted supports, the fact that many of these students are vested in their communities by virtue of employment and family status also presents a significant opportunity. According to the State University System Board of Governor's *2018 Accountability Report*, 76% of students attending USF, UCF, and FIU remained in Florida upon graduation and earned a median starting salary of \$38,000, contributing to the state's economic growth.





**FIGURE 6** Florida Resident Education Levels, Ages 25-64



Charting a new course to augment degree completion in Florida requires challenging preconceived notions of collaboration among universities and intentionally building a synergistic relationship that leverages the assets of each member institution. Visionary leaders Dr. Judy Genshaft, former President of USF; Dr. John Hitt, former President of UCF, and Dr. Mark Rosenberg, President of FIU, did this by committing to abandon a proprietary mindset in favor of unyielding collaboration.

## PART III: FORMATION AND SUCCESSES OF THE FLORIDA CONSORTIUM OF METROPOLITAN RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES

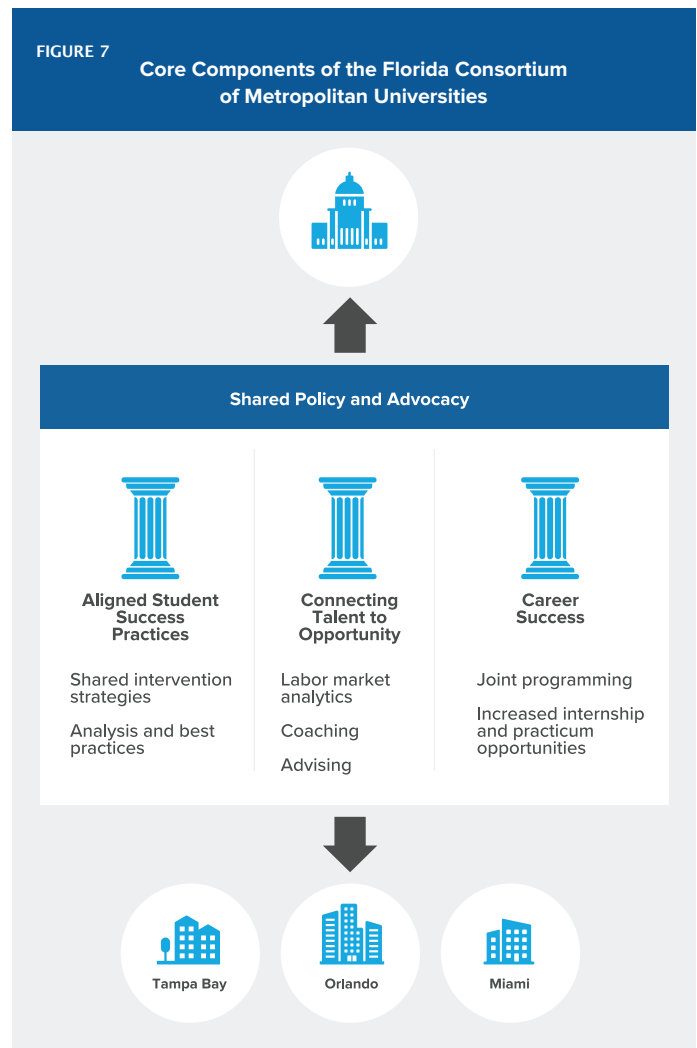
### WHY WAS THE FLORIDA CONSORTIUM FORMED?

Public metropolitan research universities have taken on an important role in the U.S. Serving growing populations of low-income, first-generation, and minority students; universities such as USF, UCF, and FIU not only are charged with providing a high-quality postsecondary education, but also have taken on the responsibility of increasing equity in their larger communities.

This sense of community obligation is what led Drs. Genshaft, Hitt, and Rosenberg to establish the Florida Consortium of Metropolitan Research Universities. Joining in the mission to share best practices and scale solutions, these leaders sought to accelerate the rate at which student support innovations are identified and adopted, ultimately leading to an expansion of economic opportunities for those living in the metropolitan regions of Tampa Bay, Orlando, and Miami.

At the same time, the university presidents believed in the Consortium's potential to help them be successful within Florida's performance-funding model. Under state law, the amount of funding distributed to each university is tied directly to their performance on specific measures, including retention rates, completion rates, job-placement/continuing-education rates, and entry-level wages for graduates. Knowing that a growing proportion of their student populations were more vulnerable to not persisting in college, each of the leaders across the three universities believed they could be more successful if they shared and co-developed best practices to retain students. In many ways, this practice is counter-intuitive, as the organization and structure of most university systems is competitive in nature, often working against collaboration.

## WHAT APPROACH IS THE FLORIDA CONSORTIUM TAKING?



Typically, universities operate in a very competitive environment. They compete for students, they compete for federal grants and research dollars, and they compete for state funding. In many ways, the institutional processes governing universities inhibit collaboration. Rather than taking this approach, USF, UCF, and FIU have turned that notion on its head. Pursuing the axiom that “rising tides float all boats,” the universities work to improve student and community outcomes by harnessing insights from all three university campuses, not just their own. This approach is encapsulated in the goals of the Florida Consortium, which include:

- Accelerating student achievement;
- Increasing career success in the three metro areas of Tampa Bay, Orlando, and Miami;
- Identifying promising practices and scaling them up to increase impact; and quantifying and promoting the state impact of the metropolitan research universities

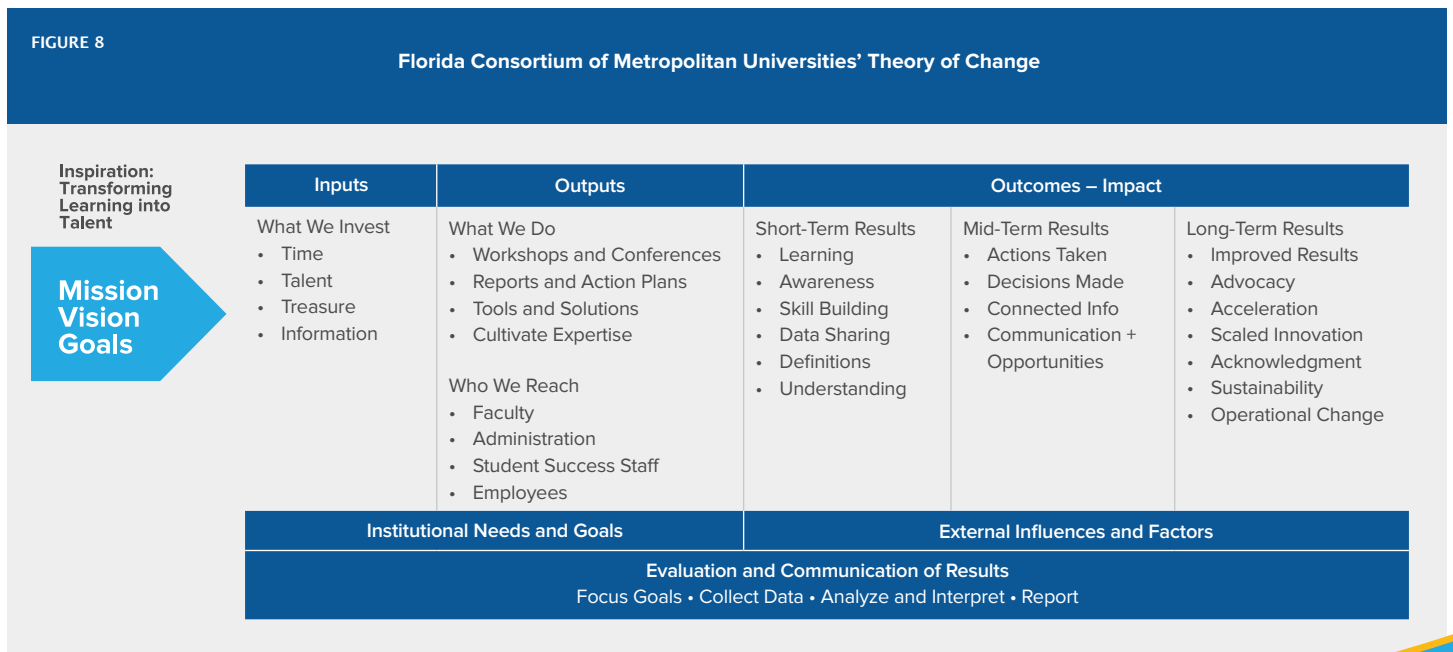
To create the change needed to support these goals, Florida Consortium leadership identified four components to guide systemic reform. As Figure 7 shows, the first component highlights the importance of aligned student success practices. This includes shared intervention strategies, analysis and best practices that support student learning and development. The second component represents connecting talent to opportunity. This means utilizing labor market analytics while providing students with the types of coaching, mentoring, and advising resources that will promote success both in school and in the job market. Following this is the third component, career success. This includes joint programming and strategies aimed at providing students with increased internship and practicum opportunities. Surrounding these three goals is the last component: shared policy and advocacy. According to this component, the three universities unify their efforts to champion statewide policies and practices that foster growth and impact in their three regional communities which translates to overall impact for Florida.

### WHAT IS THE FLORIDA CONSORTIUM'S THEORY OF CHANGE?

While the Florida Consortium's approach seems straightforward, the scale and complexity of issues it intends to address are far from simple. Endeavoring to achieve systemic change, each university leader recognized the

value of collaboration within the shared state governance and accountability structure, thus engaging in a collective approach to improve student, community, and university outcomes. Florida Consortium member's pursuit to meet their individual goals can be accelerated through the work of the Florida Consortium by way of a common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and organizational support. The result has been the development of a four-year strategic plan that aligns the work of the Florida Consortium with its identified aims.

Figure 8 highlights the critical steps in the Florida Consortium's Theory of Change. On the far left, the box with the arrow represents the Florida Consortium's mission, vision and goals, the focus of which is improving learner achievement and career success for Tampa Bay, Orlando, and Miami. To achieve this, USF, UCF, and FIU are investing leadership and staff time, bringing in talent to improve their universities, and using financial resources to leverage the desired change. To date, this has resulted in several outputs. These include issue-focused workshops and conferences, reports and action plans, and tools and co-created solutions for faculty and staff to adopt and implement to drive student success. On the far right of Figure 8 is the outcomes and desired impact. If the inputs and outputs are successful, the Florida Consortium should be able to observe short-, mid-, and long-term outcomes related to the goals.



## WHAT DOES THE WORK OF THE FLORIDA CONSORTIUM LOOK LIKE?

Over the last five years, the Florida Consortium has taken steps to develop a set of inputs aimed at meeting its goals. Often, such work is complex, with many moving parts. To date, the Consortium's work has centered around (1) aligning student–success practices and (2) connecting talent to opportunity. According to the university presidents and Florida Consortium leadership, the areas of career success and advocacy and policy are in the development stages and key to success over the next four years. The following section briefly highlights work the Florida Consortium has matured over the last four years and how they see it connecting with student success practices and connecting talent to opportunity.

### ALIGNED STUDENT SUCCESS PRACTICES

#### Communicating Best–Practices Success to Institutional Staff

Beginning in 2014, one of the Florida Consortium's strategic focuses has been sharing best practices. Yet, not all best practices work in all environments. To that end, Consortium leadership began identifying best practices aligned with larger metropolitan universities. Over time, leadership from the three universities have then taken those strategies back to institutional staff. One example of this is working with predictive analytics. Together, the three universities have identified a set of common practices from predictive analytics that benefit their student populations.

#### Teaching and Learning Improvements

*Improving STEM learning.* With an investment from the Helmsley Charitable Trust which funded the Florida Metropolitan STEM Continuum: From College to Career program, the Florida Consortium brought together 100 faculty members from STEM courses at each of the universities to develop strategies to improve student success, especially for students from lower economic or minority backgrounds. Along with this work, the faculty explored opportunities such as networked improvement communities (NICs). With this work, the faculty focused on: (1) incorporating more active learning in the classroom; (2) improving the transfer pipeline; and (3) employability of students.

*Best practices.* Annually, the Florida Consortium has invested resources in the Sunshine Teaching and Learning Conference so that faculty from the three universities can participate in training to improve teaching practices. As part of this work, national experts also train faculty in methods that can help students from vulnerable populations. In addition, the Consortium has sent faculty and staff to the National Student Success Conference to improve their teaching practices.

*Active Learning.* Since the Florida Consortium member universities are larger, students will find themselves in larger classroom settings. To assist faculty with the challenge of scaling active learning techniques for large classroom settings, the Consortium created the Florida Consortium Active Learning Summit.

In addition to the endeavors outlined above, the Florida Consortium has sponsored events to increase the (1) skill–sets of learning assistants; (2) understanding of how to better serve first–generation students; and (3) use of digital learning methods.

#### Transfer Success

With funding from the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust, the Florida Consortium, along with Transfer and Transition Services at USF, UCF, and FIU, launched the Transfer Success Network in 2017. One year later, the network held its inaugural summit focused on three issues: (1) math transfer pathways; (2) cross–university advising models; and (3) increased interaction between university and community college faculty. With over 250 participants in attendance, the goal of this work is to improve transfer success rates of students moving from community college to the metropolitan universities.

#### Connecting Talent to Opportunity

*Adopting platforms that identify more job opportunities.* In 2016, the Florida Consortium convened a meeting of career service professionals from USF, UCF, and FIU to examine platforms from career vendors. From that meeting, they selected Handshake, a platform created by students for students to level the playing field for job opportunities. As a result, the platform has identified more opportunities for students. At the same time, the career service professionals met to highlight different ways to utilize and improve the system.

*Building relationships with the Florida Chamber of Commerce.* To strengthen relationships between the universities and employers, the Florida Consortium's executive director joined the Florida Chamber of Commerce Foundation board of directors. This has given the Consortium an opportunity to collaborate with workforce leaders to build stronger connections between the metropolitan universities and the evolving job market.

*Using workforce data to align the curriculum with workforce needs.* Providing students with the skills to succeed in 21st century jobs has been a priority for the Florida Consortium. One way the Consortium has approached this is through data analytics. Through training from Burning Glass Technologies, the universities ensure that the skills needed by employers are represented in their curriculum. At USF, for example, history majors now have an option for an internship. Currently, each of the universities is using Burning Glass Technologies to reexamine curriculum across their colleges.

### **HOW IS THE FLORIDA CONSORTIUM MEASURING IMPACT, AND WHAT ARE SOME OF ITS SUCCESS STORIES?**

From the outset, the Florida Consortium has taken a shared-measurement approach to examine its impact. Accordingly, each university follows a set of common benchmarks to measure system-level impact at each campus. This individual impact, when amplified on all three campuses, exemplifies Consortium impact as a whole. The four key measures are: number of baccalaureate degrees awarded; six-year graduation rate for minority students; percent of graduates employed full-time or continuing education; and median salary of employed graduates. Table 1 highlights these measures over time from the genesis of the Florida Consortium through the 2017-18 academic year.

Overall, the Florida Consortium has seen increases across all measures. Between 2014 and 2018, there was an increase of 3,650 baccalaureate degrees awarded, which translates to a 12% improvement. At the same time, the Consortium observed a 4% increase in the proportion of minority students graduating within six years. A smaller percentage increase (3%) of recent graduates were employed full-time or continuing their education. This measure is important, as it demonstrates the continued need for the Consortium to build upon its college-to-career strategies. Finally, the Consortium observed a 10% increase in median salary of employed graduates.

The data also show positive increases outside the Florida Consortium's primary measures. In particular, the Consortium observed an increase in overall enrollment, especially for low-income and minority students. Additionally, as it relates to baccalaureate degrees awarded, the Consortium achieved an 8.1% increase for first-generation students and an 8% increase for Pell Grant-eligible students.



TABLE 1

Key Shared Measures of Success for the Florida Consortium of Metropolitan Universities



*Systemic Accomplishments.* Across the member universities, among several early success stories, two primary accomplishments have emerged.

*Collaboration Across the Network:* Perhaps the Florida Consortium’s greatest achievement has been the development of a collaborative network across the three universities. In semi-structured interviews with both university and Florida Consortium leadership, respondents emphasized the importance of this collaboration, particularly how it has improved university curricula, care services, and instructional methods. Moreover, respondents also indicated that members of the network reached out to each other for support and guidance, opting not to try to reinvent the wheel in every instance.

*Improving Teaching and Learning:* Central to the Florida Consortium has been a focus on improving instructional practices at the member universities. To this end, the Consortium has created opportunities for faculty and staff to expand pedagogical knowledge with a focus on active learning. In addition, the Consortium has expanded opportunities for faculty and staff to improve teaching of, and learning strategies for, low-income, minority, and underrepresented students. This has resulted, university and Consortium leadership believe, in an increase in persistence and graduation among these vulnerable populations.

## WHAT HAVE BEEN THE CONSORTIUM'S BIGGEST CHALLENGES?

Despite its early successes, the Florida Consortium has identified several challenges to overcome.

*State legislators and the Board of Governors haven't fully bought in to the idea.* The Florida Consortium has not been fully accepted by legislators in Tallahassee or the State University's Board of Governors. According to the Consortium, there are some who see the three universities' collaboration as unfair or giving them a competitive advantage over other universities in the state. This has been challenging to the university presidents who believe that the Consortium should be celebrated as a model for improvement. As a result, they have begun taking steps to change the mindset of legislators and other educational leaders. They have recommitted to reeducating educational leaders about the goals and purpose of the Consortium, highlighting the evolution of strategy and, most importantly, the gains they have achieved so far.

*Balancing the sharing of all best practices with identifying which ones to scale up.* What works and how much of an impact a practice or intervention has are questions that challenge any improvement program or strategy. During the first iteration of the Consortium, the philosophy focused on providing as many opportunities for collaboration as possible with less attention given to how to measure which efforts were having the greatest impact. The Consortium has had considerable gains across many indicators. The challenge is now deciding which efforts should be scaled up and what additional best practices can be established to continue improvement. Moving forward, the Consortium is attempting to address those questions while adding new support structures to its collaborative process.

*Changes in leadership can impede progress or create uncertainty.* One challenge that can undermine any initiative is a change in leadership. During the brief existence of the Consortium, two of the three university presidents have left their respective universities. With a new regime comes uncertainty, and, in worst-case scenarios, it can mean the end of a specific program or initiative. Fortunately, the Consortium is well positioned to weather changes in leadership. Yet, changes in leadership have still meant that the work slowed or experienced interruptions as new leadership became more familiar with the work. Conquering this challenge is not an easy task, but is necessary if the Consortium intends to achieve its ambitious goals.

## CONCLUSION

A myriad of workforce projections clearly illustrates the need for an increase in postsecondary degree attainment. While this need is not new, concerted efforts to abandon individualistic or isolated approaches that inhibit achieving this increase are few and far between. The Florida Consortium was established to address this.

The Consortium sought initially to impact student success across a multitude of platforms. What the Consortium leadership quickly discovered was that seeding a cultural mindset of collaboration was not only crucial, but integral to their mission. Having laid a foundation for the exchange of best practices, professional development, and curriculum-related learning communities, the Consortium is well poised to serve as a model for postsecondary institutions serving a similar student population.

Leading with innovation and abandoning accepted norms is not easy, yet USF, UCF, and FIU—each an exceptional institution integral to their metropolitan areas—have chosen to collaborate and in doing so have achieved outstanding results.

The era of siloed learning, proprietary methodology, and introspective examination of best practices must be placed in the past. Ongoing, institutions seeking to ensure their students not only complete a degree, but also practice the necessary workforce skills of team integration, critical thinking, and individual incorporation of a team methodology can look to the Florida Consortium as an exemplary case study.

Augmenting this effective collaboration will take funding support that integrates cross-institutional personnel and continued focus on growing the strategic pillars that support students, no matter which of the member universities they attend. In addition to funding universities based on their individual performance, legislators may benefit from observing the Consortium's model and consider alternative ways of structuring funds to support collaboration over competition.



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