

# VALENCIA COLLEGE

## SESSION UPDATE: 2014

FEBRUARY 26, 2014

### ▶ PECO Funding/Poinciana Campus

**Legislative Priority:** Valencia College requires funding for the acquisition of property, master site planning, and first phase construction of a 60,000 square foot building with related parking. The total cost of planning and construction of the first phase is \$22 million, with anticipated planning costs of \$2.3 million. Valencia respectfully requests funding at the highest level possible for this urgent community need.

**Update:** The College is currently seeking Poinciana property through an RFP process. Sen. Soto has issued a letter of support to key community leaders. Also, a proposal has emerged from Adam Putnam, Agricultural & Consumer Services Commissioner, which would cut in half the 7 percent sales tax that commercial entities pay for the use/consumption of electricity. The remaining 3.5 percent would become a dedicated revenue source for PECO. This would be phased-in over a three year period. Bills have been filed in furtherance of this energy tax proposal - SB 1076, by Flores and HB 899, by Hill, M.

### ▶ Fee Exemption/Fee Waivers/ Residency for In-State Tuition

**Legislative Priority:** In order to make college more affordable and accessible for all students, Valencia strongly supports legislation that would provide authority to establish fee waivers or fee exemptions for out of state fees, and/or provide for appropriate changes in state residency laws to benefit veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces (including reserves) who were honorably discharged and physically reside in Florida while enrolled in classes, students lawfully present in Florida under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) program, and students who are otherwise eligible to be enrolled and have attended a Florida high school.

**Update:** While several bills have been filed in the House and the Senate addressing in state tuition for veterans and immigrants, CS/HB 851, by Nunez, has been voted favorably out of its first committee of reference and addresses many issues that simplify the residency process without creating new categories of residency. The bill clarifies that certain students, while not considered to be residents for tuition purposes, may be reported for purposes of state funding and are not required to pay out-of-state fees, including veterans and any student who

attends a Florida high school for 3 consecutive years, and then enrolls at a college within 24 months of graduation. This single section would reduce the workload of college admissions staff significantly. The bill addresses the recent Ruiz ruling as well, stating that dependent children who are US citizens may not be denied classification as a resident for tuition purposes based solely upon the immigration status of his or her parent.

▶ **Textbook Affordability**

**Update:** Legislative discussions continue on the issue of textbook affordability. Two bills have been filed, HB 355, Porter and SB 530, Flores, which would require colleges to adopt policies and procedures include in their policies the selection and pricing of “other” instructional materials; would change the required posting date for adopting textbooks, their costs, and other instructional materials from the current 30 days before the first day of class to 14 days before the first day of student registration; and calls for additional required annual reports on the average costs of textbooks.

▶ **Florida College System Budget Request**

**Legislative Priority:** Valencia College fully supports the continued use of the Florida First Plan as its top priority for the 2014 Legislative Session. *It is especially important that the distribution of the funding to the colleges effectively addresses historical funding equity issues, and that any performance funding distributions be made on the basis of legitimate performance measures.* The Florida First Plan (Year Two) requested amount for the Florida College System is \$150 million, apportioned as follows:

Student Achievement and Success .....	\$40 million
Performance Capacity/Compression .....	\$20 million
Performance Capacity/Funding Model .....	\$43 million
Performance Outcomes .....	\$20 million
Workforce Grants .....	\$25 million
Operating Costs of New Facilities .....	\$ 2 million

**Update:** 1/29/14: Governor’s budget released, providing for an \$80 million pool of funds to be distributed on both performance above specified thresholds on identified metrics and improvement over prior year performance based on those same metrics – The \$80 million will include \$40 million of new money and \$40 million taken from college base budgets; Performance funding discussions now are occurring in both the House and Senate.





By [Sophie Quinton](#), February 10, 2014

## Why Central Florida Kids Choose Community College

A partnership between UCF and local two-year programs is helping keep a university degree within the reach of low-income, minority students.



*Students who graduate from one of the four regional Direct Connect community colleges are guaranteed admission to the University of Central Florida. (Sophie Quinton)*

ORLANDO, Fla.—At Daniel Salas's central Florida high school, students had a lot of reasons for not going to college. "I don't have the money now. I need to work more. I don't have the time. It's not on my priority list," the 20-year-old recalls, listing a few. Some local teens dismiss nearby Valencia College, a former community college, as "the 13th grade"—just another year of high school. Others worry they won't be able to get in to Valencia, even though Valencia has an open-admissions policy.

In Osceola County, only about 40 percent of students pursue higher education right after high school. The biggest private-sector employers here are Wal-Mart and Walt Disney World, and, despite the suburban sprawl, it's not unusual to pass a cow pasture. The area has a fast-growing Hispanic and immigrant population, and many parents don't have college degrees themselves. Four years of full-time, in-state university tuition, low by national standards at about \$24,000, would be an unimaginable expense for many families.



*Daniel Salas, 20, raised in the Dominican Republic, sees Valencia as the first, surest step in his goal to become a surgeon. (Sophie Quinton)*

Salas, an aspiring surgeon who grew up in the Dominican Republic, turned down offers from three state universities so he could start his path to medical school at Valencia. He's saving money because he can commute from home, and his tuition—about \$3,000 per year for full-time students—is offset by scholarship money.

Through his associate's degree program, Salas is taking classes aligned with first- and second-year course work at a state university. And he's guaranteed admission to the University of Central Florida when he completes the two-year degree. "That was one of my conditions to coming to Valencia. One day I would want to go on to UCF," Salas says. He doesn't need to start out at UCF to earn a UCF bachelor's degree.

DirectConnect, a regional agreement between UCF and four former community colleges (now Florida College System institutions), amplifies Florida's already strong system of transfer from associate's degree programs to state universities. DirectConnect students get the security of guaranteed admission to a specific institution, additional advising, and can even earn UCF bachelor's degrees without leaving their local Florida College campus.

The agreement preserves access to UCF, an institution of some 60,000 students that has become as selective in freshman admissions as the state flagship. For now, UCF and its partner colleges are well matched. But as the university increases its efforts to recruit the state's strongest students, the transfer guarantee could come under strain.

## **THE TROUBLE WITH TRANSFER**

Nationwide, 45 percent of first-time college freshmen start out at a community college, according to the American Association of Community Colleges. Two-year programs serve disproportionate numbers of low-income, first-generation, and minority students, many of whom hope to gather lower-cost credits that they can put toward a bachelor's somewhere else.

Not many succeed. Of first-time students who started out in an associate's degree program in the 2003-04 academic year, 11.3 percent had attained a bachelor's degree six years later, according to recent data from the [National Center for Education Statistics](#). Only 17.9 percent completed an associate's in that time. Bachelor's degrees are all but essential for professional jobs, and any kind of postsecondary attainment boost labor market prospects.

The White House wants to strengthen links between two-year and four-year colleges to improve social mobility. State lawmakers also want to strengthen those links to make their higher-education systems more efficient and to meet college completion goals without spending billions of dollars on new university campuses.

In Florida, a lot of the structural policy issues with transfer have already been resolved. Under what's known as the 2+2 system, students who earn an associate's degree are guaranteed a place as juniors at a state university—although not necessarily the institution or degree program of their choice. Associate in arts degrees incorporate the general education courses universities require freshmen and sophomores to take, and state law mandates that all credits will transfer across institutions.

Transfer has become more important to Floridians as the college-going population grows, and as state universities fail to expand freshman seats fast enough to meet demand. The acceptance rate across the system has dropped from 67 percent to 52 percent in a decade. Today, almost two-thirds of high school graduates who pursue further education enroll at an open-access Florida College. The colleges serve 82 percent of all freshmen and sophomore minority students in the state higher-education system.

But 2+2 isn't perfect. Only about half of associate's degree graduates go on to enroll in a state university, and 8 percent pursue workforce-focused bachelor's degrees offered by Florida Colleges. The most popular two-year degree—associate in arts—has little value other than as a link to a bachelor's degree.

Valencia College President Sandy Shugart and University of Central Florida President John Hitt designed DirectConnect in 2006 to plug the leaks in the 2+2 system. Guaranteed admission to a specific institution helps students focus their academic plan, and UCF advisers on partner college campuses provide additional guidance. UCF, which already had regional campuses aside from its main campus near Orlando, also committed to bringing junior and senior level courses to partner college campuses.

At Valencia's Osceola Campus, some students commute two and a half hours by bus to get to class. UCF's main campus is another hour's drive away by car, on a toll road. "It's just so out of the realm of possibility for so many of our students to drive to UCF's main campus," says Osceola Campus President Kathleen Plinske. Many students can't afford, or don't want, to leave home and find housing on or close to UCF.

When, in 2012, Plinske announced at a local chamber of commerce meeting that UCF would be bringing a dozen bachelor's degree programs to the Osceola campus. "There were folks there almost in tears," she says. Longtime residents of the community continue to be moved to think that university degrees are within students' geographic reach. UCF and Valencia split the cost of a new building, where today Valencia faculty teach lower-division courses, and UCF faculty teach upper-division courses.

Associate's degree transfers now make up 48 percent of bachelor's degrees awarded by UCF, the highest share of any Florida university. Without any grade or test score requirements, DirectConnect students graduate at a slightly higher rate than native UCF students with only slightly lower GPAs overall, Shugart says. The transfer agreement hasn't hindered UCF's efforts to improve its academic reputation, and it has helped partner colleges like Valencia recruit and graduate associate's degree students.

The agreement has also added diversity to UCF's graduating class. In 2012-13, 31 percent of some 4,800 bachelor's degrees granted to native UCF students went to minority students. Forty percent of the more than 7,200 bachelor's degrees awarded to Florida College transfers went to minority students. "If you want to increase access to the professions for people of color, there's only really one way to do it—and that's to draw a direct line from transfer to the professions," Shugart says.

## **SEPARATE BUT EQUAL PATHS?**

Higher education is often idealized as a four-year, residential experience. But that's not really the UCF experience. The main campus only has on-campus housing for about 16 percent of undergraduates. Many students live at home and commute to school, and many work part time, as their counterparts at Florida Colleges usually do.

DirectConnect students say they don't feel like they're missing much. "They're literally in the exact same classes that I'm taking, paying twice as much," says Valencia student Gonzalo Sauri, 20, of his high school friends who went straight to UCF. Valencia students also find it easier to get to know their professors. Most classes have about 30 students, as opposed to the 300-person lectures common to first- and second-year classes at big universities.

Both UCF and its partner colleges are enrolling growing numbers of minority students, a shift that reflects Florida's changing demographics. Both have strong academic programs. And thanks to the shared facilities on partner college campuses, there's a certain amount of churn, with students based on UCF's main campus sometimes traveling to a partner college to take a class and vice versa.

Student life is a little different: UCF offers fraternities, sororities, and hundreds of student clubs, while Valencia's Osceola Campus has about a dozen active clubs. But Valencia students keep busy. Salas participates in student government, volunteers at a hospital, and has a job at a GNC nutrition store. Sauri is a peer mentor, a member of a student engineering society, and an employee of both a local supermarket and a woman's club.

In the years to come, however, there is a danger of divergence between the two types of institution. In freshman admissions, UCF has made a big push to recruit National Merit Scholars and, last year, it began automatically admitting Florida high school seniors in the top 10 percent of their class. UCF is investing in amenities, as selective institutions do when competing for talented students: a wellness center, a rock climbing wall, dorms with single bedrooms, more career and health services. Valencia's campuses look like big high schools. UCF looks like a small city.

"I think a big challenge for us is that as UCF becomes more and more selective—and so the academic backgrounds of their native students are going to be so much more enriched than the students we serve—that performance differences will begin to emerge, particularly in their first semester, that transfer shock semester," Shugart says.

With a lot of communication between institutions, and constant focus on improving the structure of academic experiences, Shugart is confident that Valencia students will be able to hold their own. But if increasing selectivity at the university level is combined with widening inequality in K-12 preparation, the two-year and four-year programs involved in DirectConnect may cease to be so closely matched.