Report of the

Task Force on Elimination of the Age Requirement for Online Programs

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Committee Members

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Task Force Charge

The Task Force was formed at the June, 2009 President’s Retreat and was asked to examine the potential impact of removing the 22-year old age requirement for students to take online courses at Florida Tech. The Task Force was requested to also make recommendations regarding this opportunity.

History of Age Requirement for Online Courses

Florida Tech has had distance-based education since the Virtual Campus was created in 1998 to allow students in the ten off-campus graduate sites (now called the Extended Studies Division) an opportunity to complete their degree programs if they were relocated. Specific past and current issues related to the age restriction and undergraduate online courses are reflected in the following:

1. The University Alliance partnership created between Florida Tech and Bisk Education in January of 2006 indicated that the online programs were for adult learners, limiting enrollments to 22 years or older except for military personnel. The agreement did allow for exceptions. Appendix A provides the pertinent section of the agreement.

2. An Amendment to the University Alliance contract in January, 2009 allowed engineering co-op students the opportunity to take up to six 3-credit hour courses online and other traditional on-ground students to take no more than four 3-credit hour courses online during their program. Appendix A contains the contract wording for this amendment. Engineering co-op students will begin taking online courses in Summer, 2011 during their work semesters.

3. For the 2009 Summer I term, campus undergraduate students were permitted to take two (2) online courses if they received the permission of their academic dean. This alternative was announced late in the spring semester and 35 students took advantage of the opportunity (49 class seats).

4. The age restriction for online undergraduate programs without an equivalent campus program (i.e., associate degrees, criminal justice, CIS, applied psychology) has been eliminated. Consequently, these University Alliance undergraduate programs can now enroll students in these specific programs without having the age restriction limitation. Currently, the university has 84 students under the age of 22 in our online courses. Of those students four indicated they were in the military; additionally, 57 are classified as full-time and 27 as part-time.
**Estimate of Enrollment Impact on University Programs**

Bisk Education has estimated a 14% enrollment expansion based on the growth the University of Phoenix achieved upon removal of their age restriction. A more conservative estimate would mean a potential 10% increase in online enrollments.

Modification of the admissions criteria slightly will allow flexibility for campus and online distinctiveness in admissions criteria. See Appendix B. The changes suggested are in italics and underlined.

**Research on Age Aspects and Online Education**

- Examples of other online programs regarding age restrictions is provided in Appendix C
- Studies on age, maturity for online learning – Very little research is available on the impact of age, particularly at the younger ages of entering university freshmen. A May, 2009 study by the Department of Education (*Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning*) found that students in K-12 online courses performed essentially the same as students in face-to-face (for university and other older age groups, the online students performed better than the face-to-face students). However, the number of studies in this meta-analysis for the K-12 population was small (7) and caution was provided for generalizing the results.

**Positives/Negatives of Eliminating the Age Requirement**

**Potential Positive Factors**

1. Helps the university be more competitive technologically.
2. Serves a new population of students (greater access to Florida Tech).
3. Produces more university revenue.
4. Increases continuity of quality (vs. Community College).
5. Provides greater geographic reach.

See Appendix D for a discussion of the potential positive factors.

**Potential Negative Factors**

1. Changes the expectations of the faculty regarding the online programs.
2. Potentially transforms the university’s cultural and creates accreditation issues.
3. Creates a substantial change to the online academic model.
4. Produces dual standards between campus and online programs.
5. Generates cross over issues.
6. Provides challenges for implementing QEP in the online environment.
7. Creates financial aid implications.

See Appendix E for a discussion of the potential negative factors.
Recommendation

The Task Force is recommending that the age restriction be eliminated for Florida Tech’s online undergraduate programs.

This recommendation is based on the following:

- We recognize that online delivery will continue to be accepted as a viable delivery mode for academic courses, even for our campus student population.
- The College of Business, which will be most affected by this change, does not perceive a negative impact on their campus student enrollments.
- Consideration should be given regarding both online course development and instruction in the evaluation of our faculty, specifically including such efforts in performance evaluations and promotion considerations.
- This change will require a greater need for student services for an increased transfer student population
- This change may require a new focus on the less prepared and more financially disadvantaged student population group.

The major caveat with this recommendation is the need for significant faculty input as we proceed with this change and as other potential changes may be considered (e.g., greater migration of campus courses to online courses).
Appendix A
University Alliance Partnership Agreement

Original Contract:

The University Alliance partnership agreement was signed in January 2006 and the following statement is provided in Article 1, Section 1.2 Student Selection Criteria:

(d) Age Requirement – Students must be twenty-two (22) years of age or older at the time of enrollment. This age limitation shall not apply to students who are actively serving in the armed forces or their spouses. Florida Tech pursuant to University policies may make exceptions to this rule based upon special circumstances

Amendment 4:

Amendment 4 to the contract was signed on January 28, 2009. In Section 1.2 (d) Student Selection Criteria, the agreement is amended by the addition of the following:

- Florida Tech undergraduate students who are under the age of 22 and who have been admitted and enrolled by Florida Tech in a Florida Tech ground-based degree program (“Traditional Student”), may from time to time be permitted by Florida Tech to take online Program courses to fulfill their degree requirements. Traditional students in the engineering program shall not take more than a total of six 3-credit program courses online, while all other Traditional students shall not take more than a total of four 3-credit program courses online. Pursuant to Section 4.3 of the Agreement, Traditional students who are permitted to take any online course while at Florida Tech must take all online courses through the Program, unless an online course is not offered through the Program.
Appendix B
Admissions Criteria

Current 2009-2010 Melbourne Catalog (page 25-26)

Undergraduate Student Information
Requirements for First-Year Admission

The Office of Undergraduate Admission carefully reviews all candidates for admission, using evaluation criteria to determine a student’s ability to complete several years of rigorous study. Applications are reviewed with reference to specific degree programs or for admission to first-year programs in general engineering, general science or general studies. The evaluation criteria considered include, but are not limited to:
- Strong high school curriculum.
- Achievement in college preparatory classes.
- Counselor and/or teacher recommendations.
- SAT or ACT results (if the student is a high school graduate for less than 2 years)
- Essay

Participation in special classes, clubs or teams that involve research projects/opportunities and advanced problem-solving techniques

Although an admission interview is not required, campus visits and interviews with admission counselors are highly recommended. An interview, mid-year grades or additional testing may be requested at the discretion of the admission committee.

[Revised Addition: Provisional admission may be made if the prospective student does not meet the usual requirements but, in the opinion of the Admission Director, has the qualifications needed for academic success in a particular program. Provisionally admitted students will be evaluated after the completion of 12 credit hours of undergraduate, non-remedial courses at Florida Institute of Technology. If the student has maintained a cumulative GPA of at least a 2.0 (GPA), that student will meet the conditions for continued enrollment in the University.]

Admission Guidelines

Applicants must demonstrate readiness to succeed in a challenging academic curriculum. The transcript from a regionally accredited high school is the most important element of the application. While no minimum grade point average, class rank or standardized test score is specified, these measures must indicate a readiness for college studies in a chosen academic program. An applicant who is a U.S. citizen must have earned a high school diploma from a regionally accredited high school or a high school equivalency diploma by the date of first enrollment.

Science and engineering applicants should complete four years of mathematics, the minimum level including trigonometry, mathematics analysis, analytical geometry or precalculus. Science and engineering applicants are also expected to have taken four years of science, to include physics and chemistry. The committee recommends students take the most rigorous mathematics and science curriculum offered by the high school.

Applicants for all non-science and non-engineering majors must complete at least three years of mathematics. A fourth year of mathematics is highly recommended. Applicants for these majors must also complete at least three years of science, with a fourth year recommended.

A home schooled applicant must submit a transcript of academic work including an assessment of the level attained in mathematics and the sciences, and the texts that were used; a self-descriptive, one-page essay that includes academic, community and athletic accomplishments, career goals and work experience; and SAT or ACT scores. It is recommended that a high school equivalency diploma be obtained prior to matriculation. Although SAT II (Subject Exam) scores are not required, it is strongly suggested that SAT II results in Mathematics Level II and English Composition be submitted.

Florida Tech operates on a rolling admission basis and will accept applications throughout the school year. It is recommended that applicants for the fall semester submit all application materials as soon as possible after starting their senior year in school and completing the SAT or ACT. For full academic scholarship consideration, applicants for
the fall semester should submit all application materials by January 15. Each applicant will be notified of an admission decision as soon as possible after the applicant’s file is complete and evaluated.

Florida Tech subscribes to the College Board candidates’ reply date of May 1. A $300 nonrefundable tuition deposit is required as a means of confirming your intention to attend Florida Tech. Payment is due by May 1. If you are admitted after May 1, or for the spring or summer terms, submit payment within 30 days of the date on the acceptance letter. The deposit guarantees a place in the entering class in the indicated major/program and is applied to the student’s account.

Entering first-year students can qualify for advanced standing by earning academic credit through any of the following programs:

- Advanced Placement Exams (AP) administered each May by the College Entrance Examinations Board
- International Baccalaureate (IB)
- Cambridge Advanced-Level Examinations (A-levels).

Official results of these examinations must come directly to Florida Tech from the examination board. The actual credit awarded for each examination can be found through the navigation menu at www.fit.edu/ugrad/adminfo/freshmanreq.htm.

**Admission Requirements for Transfer Students**

Applicants to Florida Tech must demonstrate readiness to succeed in a challenging academic curriculum. Transcripts are the most important element of the application. While no minimum grade point average is specified, the student’s GPA must indicate a readiness for college studies in a chosen academic program.

Transfer applicants must provide official transcripts from any and all colleges and universities attended. Students who have earned less than 24 semester credit hours will be evaluated as a first year candidate (see above criteria). Admission will be granted to those applicants who have completed appropriate course work that indicates progress toward their chosen field of study.

**Admission Requirements for International Students**

Florida Tech provides a certificate of eligibility (I-20) to all admitted international students. The form is used to apply for the F-1 student visa. It also verifies to U.S. immigration officials the students is academically qualified to attend Florida Tech and has sufficient funds to cover the first year of study and that subsequent funds will be available for the future. Students must demonstrate proof of financial support at the time of application. Florida Tech policy states that students are required to attend for one full semester when entering the United States on a Florida Tech-provided I-20 form. Florida Tech will not release a student to another educational institution until the student completes one semester at Florida Tech.

**Demonstrating English Proficiency**

English language proficiency is not required for admission, but enrollment in academic courses will be limited for all whose home language is not English until proficiency can be demonstrated. More information on English proficiency can be found under “Languages and Linguistics” in the Nondegree Programs section of this catalog, along with references to the Florida Tech courses available to help establish proficiency.

Current University Alliance Catalog 2009-2010 (page 11 – 13)

**ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS**

**All Students**

**Flow Charts / Program Plans**

Students will receive a degree program plan/flow chart showing the most commonly accepted sequence of courses for their degree program as soon as admission is complete. Students should contact the University Alliance enrollment representative if they have not received a degree program plan/flow chart.
Registration Prior to Admission

Registering prior to admission allows students to begin classes while gathering all application components. Students are required to complete the online application and submit the required documents. Students may register for up to two consecutive eight-week terms before being fully admitted. Registering prior to admission and pending formal acceptance requires a determination of a high probability of eventual acceptance into the program applied for and that registration prior to admission is in the best interest of both the academic unit and the student.

Students who register prior to admission are not eligible to receive federal student financial aid until fully admitted to the university. Such registration requires a preliminary review of written documentation from the degree-granting institution (not necessarily official) showing previous academic courses taken, grades received and degrees awarded. In the event that applicants are denied admission while enrolled in graduate courses, they will be given the option of either withdrawing with full tuition refund or completing the courses underway. If the applicant completes one or more graduate courses prior to being denied admission or completes a course for any other reason, he or she will not be given the option of withdrawing or receiving a tuition refund after completing the course.

Readmission Policy

A student who has been away from the university for two or more consecutive years or who has attended another institution during an absence from the university must apply for readmission. If readmission is approved, the degree requirements in place at the time of readmission, or later with academic approval, must be met. A student is not considered absent from the university during a period of study at another institution if a Request to Study at Another Institution form was submitted and approved before enrollment for the other institution’s courses. A student who has been away from the campus for less than two years and who has not attended any other college or university may register for class without filing an application for readmission.

Enrollment Verification

Florida Tech has authorized the National Student Clearinghouse to act as the agent for all verifications of student enrollment and degrees for lenders, or anyone requesting verification. Students can contact the Clearinghouse at service@studentclearinghouse.org, by phone at (703) 742-4200 or fax to (703) 742-4239. A direct link to the Clearinghouse for free enrollment verification is available from the PAWS student records menu.

Last Date of Attendance

The learning management system (LMS) tracks student attendance electronically. In order to participate in class or access class materials students are required to log into the system with a unique username and password. This allows Florida Tech to track the last day of attendance with complete accuracy and detail.
Undergraduate Student Admission

General admission requirements for students applying for an associate of art or a bachelor of art or science degree are as follows.

Any student with an accredited high school diploma or a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) is eligible to enroll.

[Add: Applicants must complete at least three years of high school mathematics and at least three years of science.]

[Delete: Students must be 22 years of age or in active U.S. military service.]

[Add: Submit SAT or ACT results (if the student is a high school graduate for less than 2 years).]

[Revised Addition: Provisional admission may be made if the prospective student does not meet the usual requirements but, in the opinion of the Admission Director, has the qualifications needed for academic success in a particular program. Provisionally admitted students will be evaluated after the completion of 12 credit hours of undergraduate, non-remedial courses at Florida Institute of Technology. If the student has maintained a cumulative GPA of at least a 2.0 (GPA), that student will meet the conditions for continued enrollment in the University.]

Students are required to take a minimum of the last 25 percent of credit hours while enrolled through FloridaTech in order to receive an associate’s or bachelor’s degree.
Appendix C
Other Online Programs

Traditional universities offering online degrees for students 18 and older:

- Penn State Online (www.worldcampus.psu.edu)
  - 100% distance
  - SAT or ACT required
  - $445/credit hour

- University of Oklahoma (www.ou.edu/cls)
  - 100% distance
  - SAT or ACT required
  - $550/credit hour

- University of Alabama (www.bamabydistance.ua.edu)
  - 100% distance
  - SAT or ACT required
  - $296/credit hour

- Texas Tech University (www.depts.ttu.edu/distancelearning)
  - 100% distance
  - SAT or ACT required
  - $660-770/credit hour
Appendix D
Discussion of Positive Aspects

1. Helps the university be more competitive technologically
   Young, residential students will begin to expect availability of online courses since other colleges will offer them. They may have taken an online course in high school, especially if it was an advanced course (these would be the top students that we recruit).

   Equipment and staff required for offering new online courses can also be used for hybrid courses (combination of online and in-class teaching) or to augment in-class courses. This benefits all students, even those not taking online courses.

2. Serves a new population of students (greater access to Florida Tech)
   Young students enrolled at other schools can take our online courses and transfer the credit to their home institution. Young students from around the world can take online Florida Tech courses.

3. Produces more university revenue
   Lowering the minimum age for 8-week online courses to 18 years old would increase revenue. According to Mary Bonhomme, “if we assume conservatively that we’d increase enrollment by 10% (some estimates are 15% while others are as high as 50%) in the online programs that are not offered on campus, e.g. criminal justice, CIS, the annual increase in revenue would be $719,550. (15% would be $1,079,325 and 50% would be $3,597,750).” Although there are staff and infrastructure costs associated with teaching online, non-residential students, there would be no costs due to dorms or additional classroom space. This may enhance the revenue even more.

4. Increases continuity of quality (vs. Community College)
   Florida Tech currently accepts transfer credit from schools that offer online courses. In some cases, the course number and name give no indication that it was an online course. As with classroom-based courses, their quality may be lower than the same courses potentially offered at Florida Tech. Since Florida Tech accepts transfer credit for lower quality courses, Florida Tech should offer those courses itself so that students have a high-quality option. This would allow a young person to take many introductory/lower level courses online as a Florida Tech student and then become a residential student in order to take advanced courses and finish a degree program.

5. Provides greater geographic reach
   As mentioned previously, online courses can serve students around the world. This is already taking place with the current online courses. Lowering the minimum enrollment age would increase the pool of interested students to include those who are “college age.”
1. Changes the expectations of the faculty regarding the online programs.
   a. While the financial benefits may not appear fully appreciated by the faculty at large, administration established expectation with the faculty when the online programs were established. We should consider their input and concerns in changing admission requirements.
   b. The faculty was assured at the onset of the University Alliance initiative that the programs were for adult learners.
      i. The UGCC already questioned the change in policy to allow campus students to take online courses. This is a substantial policy change directly contradicting expectations set by the administration to the faculty.
      ii. There have been implications to the change allowing campus students to take online classes that were unexpected.

2. Potentially transforms the university’s cultural and creates accreditation issues.
   a. Concerns exist that we could become known as an online school. With increases in online enrollment, that is an existing issue.
   b. Identity of the university is important to faculty, alumni, and the community.
   c. Are there any accreditation issues when the volume of adjuncts teaching exceeds the number of full-time faculty members?

3. Creates a substantial change to the online academic model
   a. Courses have been developed based on an adult learner model that capitalizes on the life experience of the adult learners. Adding fresh from high school students creates a bi-modal situation (new college students vs. adult learners) and has classroom impacts.
   b. Will we create a more difficult teaching environment to retain adjuncts?
   c. We assumed a program and schema (from St Leo) that was an adult learner model.
   d. Are there common academic characteristics that may exacerbate current trends, such as communication and math deficiencies?
   e. Are we sure we can compete with community colleges for solid academically sound students?
   f. Do we want students that we have a reasonable expectation to have lower retention rates than we have with the adult learners? With early retention at around 40 percent, there is a great chance that more students will not continue. How will this impact such things as SACS accreditation and national rankings, such as US News?
4. Produces dual standards between campus and online programs
   a. Tuition rates
      i. Campus students already took issue of the different rates in tuition.
      ii. How do we justify the different rates?
      iii. Programs that mirror in business and similar (with new applied psychology) are likely to impact perceptions of fairness and raise issues of equity.
   b. Admission standards.
      i. Justified open enrollment before because students are adult learners and offering educational opportunities.
      ii. How do we justify different admission criteria from campus students?
         1. If a student is poorly prepared and starts online, then wants to transfer to campus program, how do we justify not taking them?
         2. We already make age exceptions in the current system. They are reviewed and exceptions are made.

5. Generates cross over issues
   a. We argue that a Florida Tech course is a Florida Tech course. With the campus and online programs converging and more online courses offered with the same course number, what are the sound rationales for limiting residential students from taking online courses? If we do not limit students, then those discipline/programs that had agreed to participate in the development of online programs experiences will be the ones negatively impacted by the loss of face-to-face classes. This negatively impacts the people who have been most supportive of the online initiative.
   b. Do we risk losing traditional campus students to online?
   c. Question of commitment of the university to the full-time faculty. Who will be asked to teach the online courses if have migration from campus courses?

6. Provides challenges for implementing QEP in the online environment.
   a. Online QEP is a difficult mandate as it is. At least the adult learners have some life and/or work experience.

7. Creates financial aid implications
   a. Have we yet determined any default issues from online students and the subsequent impact on our financial aid rating? Given the retention rates of the adult learners, just the increased volume of students could be problematic.