



The fourth week of session was, once again, all about the money, but also a week of few gains. Both the House and Senate began releasing Appropriations Bills. In week six, the amendatory process starts, and members have one last chance to include their special projects or issues before conferencing occurs. The best way to enter conference is when both houses have included equal funding of college programs in their respective appropriations bills, making final passage very likely. If a budget item is only in one chamber's bill, the challenge is then to get the other side to agree to match the budget item during conference. Obviously, budget items that are not contained in either appropriations bill have little chance of being added after conference.

Similarly, the budget levels for appropriations, such as the Community College Program Fund (the primary funding source for college operations,) tend to result in a compromise between the two chambers. Individuals with the FACC legislative team spent most of week four meeting with several of the appropriations leaders and staff members. The main objective of the meetings was to point out the differences between the House and Senate budgets as they relate to community colleges and to communicate our position.

Depending on the leadership, the amendatory process in week six can be very controlled where the outcome on each amendment is known in advance, or sometimes very open, where real debate drives the result. This year, the process it is expected to be controlled, yet members from both parties were able to have amendments pass. Party affiliation continues to influence outcomes, but isn't the sole reason for success or failure.

Much of week four was spent on a priority issue for **House Speaker Rubio**, Senate **President Pruitt** and **Governor Crist – Property Tax Reform**. However, the only action this issue saw was through the media. **Senator Geller** held a press conference and presented the Minority (Democratic) plan for property tax reform. Almost immediately, supporters from both sides were heard, setting the stage for a cooperative effort to resolve tax problems over the next few weeks. It should be noted that there does not seem to be a consensus on this issue and it will be a challenge to adopt substantive changes to property taxes with the time remaining in this session.



Rep. Anthony Traviesa, R-Brandon

Other leadership priority bills were considered in the **House** including two property insurance reform bills. Both were expected to be passed, but only one of them, Representative Trey Traviesa's mitigation bill (**HB 7057**) made it out of the **House**. In other action, the **House** passed **HB 211**, the now yearly sales tax holiday for hurricane equipment and supplies.

Both the **House** and **Senate** will be taking time off in week five to observe Passover and Good Friday, so process on much of the legislative activity will be held to a minimum.

Budget

On Wednesday, March 28, the **Senate** began the stage of hearing amendments in the applicable appropriations committees. The Committee reports were consolidated into a single **Senate Appropriations Act**, which was released on Friday, March 30, as **SB 2800**, along with the implementing bill, **SB 2802**. The **Senate** will now accept amendments for floor discussion through mid day Monday, April 9. Amendments to those amendments will be allowed the next day. The **Senate** will hear the amendments, and then release their appropriations bills on Wednesday, April 11.

On Friday, March 30, 2007, the **House** starting hearing amendments in the **Policy and Budget Committee** and will release its consolidated bills on Monday, April 2, 2007. Their amendments are then due on Thursday, April 5, with a Monday deadline for amendments to amendments. The **House** plans final passage of its bills on Thursday, April 12.

The stage will then be set for conference committees to begin immediately, probably starting over the weekend of the 13. The final budget usually is not known until week eight of Session.

The detailed analysis of the community college budget presented in week three can be found on the FACC web site at the following address: <http://www.facc.org/legisact.htm>

Substantive issues of interest that had action this week are as follows:

Textbook Sales Tax Exemption—Cost of textbooks

Several bills have been filed to address the SGA generated sales tax exemption for college textbooks. [SB 254](#) (Wise) and [SB 2492](#) (Haridopolos), as well as [HB 289](#) (Flores) all support the exemption.

On Tuesday, March 27, [HB 289](#), passed out of the **Schools and Learning Council**, but with a major change. The bill no longer includes the sales tax exemption. It still requires a study regarding textbook prices, and to identify polices and practices that might help reduce the costs. The bill also restricts postsecondary employees from benefiting from textbook selection. [HB 289](#) will be heard next in the **Policy and Budget Council**.

To hear more about the Textbook Sales Tax Exemption at the Schools and Learning Council video archives page at MyFloridaHouse.com. Click on this link for more details:

[March 27 Schools and Learning Council](#)



Sen. Stephen R. Wise,
R-Jacksonville

Cosmetology

[HB 117](#) (Carroll) and [SB 920](#) (Wise), as reported in earlier editions of *Perception*, amends the licensure requirements related to cosmetology, so that licensure is available for specialties, including hair technician, esthetician and nail technician. Colleges with cosmetology programs have supported this legislation which will allow students to be trained in specific, shorter programs and enter the workforce quickly.

[HB 117](#) passed its final committee of reference, the Jobs and Entrepreneurship Council in week four, on March 29. [SB 920](#) passed out of the **Regulated Industries Committee** on March 20. Confidence is high that this bill will pass this year, thanks to the special efforts of college lobbyist Susan Lehr, from Florida Community College at Jacksonville.

Excess Hours

Senator Lee Constantine sponsored the “excess hours” bill in 2005, when it passed the Legislature. FACC members were pleased that Governor Bush vetoed the bill. Unfortunately, the Senator has re-filed the legislation, [SB 2862](#). The bill would impose a 50% tuition tax for students who take more than 120% of credit hours required by their declared degree.

In week four, the **House** companion bill, [HB 1507](#) (Altman) was heard for the first time on March 27, in the **Postsecondary Education Committee** of the **House**. The **House** bill was actually more stringent than [SB 2862](#) requiring a 75% tuition tax, rather than 50%. The lobbyist teams had lobbied Representative Altman to remove community colleges from the bill altogether, but were not successful. The Committee did approve two amendments to [HB 1507](#). One amendment modifies the legislative intent and one reduces the penalty from 75% to 50% additional tuition for students. The FACC legislative team will continue to work with both sponsors in order to minimize the adverse consequences that this legislation would create.

Rep. Altman's presentation of the bill may be viewed at the following link at about 33 minutes into the video.

[House Postsecondary Education Committee March 27](#)

Financial Aid

One of the System's major financial aid bills received action in week four. [SB 918](#) (Wise) was heard on March 27, in the **Senate Higher Education Committee**. The bill amends the **College Work Experience Program** to allow Adult Vocational (PSAV) students and **Educator Preparation Institute** (EPI) participants to be included in the program and allows PSAV students to participate in the **Florida Student Access Grants** (FSAG). Next stop for this bill is the **Higher Education Appropriations Committee** in the **Senate**, and from there the bill will go to the **Senate** floor.

[HB 343](#) (Bean) is the companion bill to [SB 918](#) and is expected to be placed on the agenda in the **Schools & Learning Council** in week five.

[HB 1443](#) (Thompson) and [SB 2698](#) (Lawson) also addresses **FSAG**, addressing the issue of the expected family contribution for community college students, and also creates a new "working student" financial aid program, to address those students who can only qualify for student loans. Neither [HB 1443](#) nor [SB 2698](#) saw action yet, but the FACC legislative team is hopeful that action will be taken soon.



Sen. Alfred "Al" Lawson, D-Tallahassee

Board of Governors

Since the constitutional amendment creating a governing board for the universities passed, many sections of the Florida Statutes have required modifications to reflect the new Board's authority. Legislation has been filed to clarify the responsibilities of the **Board of Governors** versus the **State Board of Education**. [Senate Bill 1270](#) (Oerlich) was heard in **Higher Education** on March 27, and passed 5 – 0. This 259-page bill includes mostly technical changes to the law to reflect the BOG, but also touches on the Baccalaureate degree issues. College lobbyist are scouring this bill to insure that any impact on community colleges, especially those related to articulation and the community college baccalaureates, is addressed in a way the college support. College lobbyists who are also serve as college attorneys have been called on to review every page.

The **House Postsecondary Education Committee** reviewed a 256-page **companion proposal** on Tuesday, March 27. The Committee should release its companion bill next week, although it is unclear whether the committee itself will meet again to approve it, or if the **Schools and Learning Council** will hear the proposed bill.

For more information see: Page 58 of the packet at the following link:

[March 27 Committee Packet](#)

Workforce Development Boards

Bills that change the purpose of regional Workforce Development Boards and change the purpose of the Agency of Workforce Innovation (AWI) and the related Workforce Florida, Inc, (WFI) have been filed in both Houses. [SB 382](#) (Bennett) addresses the regional Board functions. For many years, the local Boards have been restricted from providing services to clients. This bill would allow the Boards to provide services directly to clients, *except for training*. College lobbyists had expressed concern if the Boards were allowed to offer training, and were pleased that **Senator Bennett** agreed to exclude that activity.



Rep. Bill Heller, D-St. Petersburg

[SB 382](#) was heard in the **Commerce Committee** on March 27, and passed 9 – 0.

The companion bill [HB 675 \(Heller\)](#) has not yet been heard.

An interesting battle is brewing on another workforce bill. A **proposed committee substitute** to [SB 870](#) (Diaz de la Portilla) dissolves the existing Workforce Florida, Inc, and instead, gives the Agency for Workforce Innovation the responsibilities of WFI. In lieu of WFI, the proposal would create a new Workforce Florida Board which will be an *advisory board* to AWI. [SB 870](#) was scheduled to be heard in the **Senate Commerce Committee** on March 20, but was postponed. This battle will be monitored with great interest, as community colleges have worked closely with both AWI and WFI.

There is no companion bill in the **House**, but there are bills in both houses that also deal with the relationship between AWI and regional workforce boards. These bills [HB 1301](#) (Aubuchon) and [SB 1926 \(Commerce\)](#) delete the requirement that regional boards enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with AWI, consistent with new Federal laws. While these two bills are considered non-controversial, they are possible “vehicles” for the other changes above. [HB 1301](#) passed the **Economic Development Committee** on March 19, and is to be heard next in the **Economic Expansion and Infrastructure Council**. The SB passed out of **Senate Commerce** and is now in the **Children, Families and Elder Affairs Committee**.

BILLS SEEING NO ACTION

Property Tax

[HB 7001](#) (Attkisson) offers \$5.5 Billion property tax relief for Florida homeowners and small business owners. [HB 7001](#) was placed on the calendar in the House, signaling action will happen soon. Interesting activity came from the minority party, with Senator Geller’s announcement of a different plan. The issue will probably be at the top of the agenda for both houses to address with once the budgets have been passed.

Articulation

Articulation between sectors, from high school to college, and among postsecondary sectors, appears to be of interest, and several bills offer suggestions to enhance the process. [HB 965](#) (Kendrick) and its identical companion [SB 1232](#) (Gaetz). The Senate Bill has passed the Senate and is waiting to be heard in the house with a focus on career programs in high schools, establishing the requirement that school districts develop strategic plans to meet local workforce needs. All school

districts are required to establish career academies. The **State Board of Education** is then to establish a process to review new secondary career courses, and such courses are to lead to “industry certification.” The certification process is to be defined by the **Agency for Workforce Innovation**. Other filed bills include **SB 1190** (Lynn), which attempts to improve articulation between public and non-public institutions, and reduce excess hours as a result.

Retirement/FRS Benefits

SB 0008 (Lawson) and **HB 0087** (Allen) have both been filed to increase the health insurance subsidy to employees under the **Florida Retirement System**. Both bills have a long list of co-sponsors. However, given that there appears to be no staff analysis on either bill and the \$1 billion decrease in revenues, we do not expect that either bill will be heard in a committee of reference.

Three bills have been filed to increase the retirement multiplier of a regular class employee from 1.6 percent of the employee’s average final compensation. **HB 657** (Gelber) and **SB 2210** (Villalobos) proposes to raise the multiplier to 3.0 percent. **SB 568** (Jones) proposes to increase it to 1.8 percent.

As with the other retirement bills, revenue shortfalls make it unlikely that these bills will become law.

Half Cent Sales Tax for Miami Dade County

HB 185 (Garcia) and **SB 552** (Margolis) allow the Miami Dade County Commission to place a local referendum for Miami Dade College. If passed locally, a half penny sales tax increase for five years will support scholarships, program enhancements, student retention efforts, and capital outlay. Both bills have moved out of their first committees, but did not move again this week.



Sen. Gwen Margolis, D-Miami-Dade

Transportation Fee

HB 207 (Chestnut) and **SB 684** (Oelrich) would authorize a transportation user fee for community college students. **Santa Fe Community College** has a unique agreement for public transportation that would be well served by this legislation. Since the fee is not limited to SFeCC, other institutions could replicate the initiative. Both bills are still expected to receive more action, and probably pass.

Fulltime Faculty Ratios

HB 1279 (Fitzgerald) and **SB 2652** (Geller) propose to require that 75% of college faculty be full time employees. Both bills were filed on March 2, and both have each been referred to three committees. Neither has a completed staff analysis nor has either been put on an agenda.

Baccalaureate

SB 244 and **SB 1570** have both been filed by **Senator Lynn** to address the process for community colleges to obtain approval to offer baccalaureate degrees. A house bill was filed, although subsequently withdrawn. Lobbyists expect a house bill connected to the “100 ideas” to include similar language to Lynn’s. The College System wants to ensure that all

publicly funded community colleges continue to report to the **State Board of Education** (including those which offer baccalaureate degrees) and that the approval process is simple, yet accountable.

SB 244 and **SB 1570** have not yet had a hearing; however the Board of Governors bills mentioned earlier (no bill number yet) may well be the vehicle to make the needed changes.

Other Resources

The Division of Community Colleges has made available on their website a video copy of **Chancellor Armstrong's** recent interview on Face to Face that aired on the **Florida Channel** on February 28:

<http://www.fldoe.org/CC/meetings/2007/02-28.asp>

Also available online is a video copy of a presentation on the Pappas report to the **Senate Higher Education Appropriations Committee** on February 8:

<http://www.fldoe.org/CC/meetings/>

Florida Public Radio *Capitol Update* archives

http://wwwt.fsu.edu/~wfsu_fm/listen/index.htm