

The State University System Pursuit of Excellence

Charles B. Reed
Chancellor, State University System of Florida

Education is the key to our future. It is necessary to our economic vitality; it is the basis for social mobility; and it is crucial to the preservation of our democratic society. The students of today are our informed opinion-leaders of tomorrow. They will face critical challenges; and the technological, political, and social choices they will make will determine the quality of life in this state. For this reason, a great responsibility rests on the shoulders of our educational system to educate students who will preserve and enhance our standards of living.

Florida has taken this responsibility seriously. In 1983, the State Board of Education adopted a goal of achieving educational quality on par with the upper quartile of states as measured by such criteria as licensure examination results of our graduates, the number of National Merit Scholars enrolled at our institutions, and nationally ranked programs. The University System is well on its way to achieving that goal.

True educational excellence, however, is not defined simply by mastery of an academic subject. It is multi-faceted. Educational excellence produces students who are well-anchored in the fundamentals of learning — students who know how to think and how to communicate clearly, and who will possess the will and capacity to continue to learn for the rest of their lives.

This kind of well-rounded education is what we strive for. Florida is fortunate to have a state legislature that consistently places education at the top of its priority list. State leaders have, over the past several years, taken significant steps to increase our educational standards. Course distribution requirements at the secondary level — which are now among the most rigid in the country — were modified and upgraded, with greater emphasis on English, math, science, and social studies.

We have programs in place to help facilitate the transition from the high school to the postsecondary education level. The university system has a vested interest in what happens in our secondary schools. To a great extent, our ability to graduate top-notch students from our colleges depends on the preparedness of our entering freshmen. University faculty conduct inservice training and seminars for high school teachers on new developments in their disciplines.



Dr. Charles B. Reed only last year assumed executive responsibility for the State University System of Florida. He has already set a tone for greater excellence in the nine universities which are under the Board of Regents. His past work in the Governor's Office and with all levels of education provide an excellent base for the type of leadership needed in higher education.

To accomplish our goals, the university system has also upgraded its course requirements to concentrate on a broader base of learning at the lower level. Emphasis is placed on the basics — English, math, the sciences, and other subjects that teach communication and computation skills as well as critical and analytical thinking.

A fundamental part of the university experience is the student's opportunity to interact with faculty members. Florida has a unique program to help us attract scholars of national and international renown to our campuses. The Eminent Scholars Program, which is funded jointly by state and private dollars, establishes million dollar chairs in academic programs for eminent faculty. Currently, we have over 40 such chairs at the nine state universities.

Learning during the college years is not confined to the classroom. Consequently, the quality of the environment in which our students live and learn has a great deal to do with the quality of the education they will receive. There is a tendency, especially in larger institutions, to reduce students to numbers. The processes of advising and registration can often seem frustrating and dehumanizing.