

# FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



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Commissioner of Education



October 22, 2008

Dr. Eric J. Smith  
Commissioner  
Florida Department of Education  
325 West Gaines Street, Suite 1514  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0400

Dear Commissioner Smith:

The attached six-month follow-up report number 08-25, *Postsecondary Student Use of the Florida Academic Counseling and Tracking for Students is Low* issued by the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability is for your information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive that reads "Ed W. Jordan".

Ed W. Jordan  
Inspector General

EWJ/br/cwg

c: Jane Fletcher, OPPAGA  
Florida Joint Legislative Auditing Committee  
Sandy Cho, Chief Strategy Officer  
Dr. Willis N. Holcombe, Chancellor, Division of Community Colleges  
Dr. Mark B. Rosenberg, Chancellor, Board of Governors  
Dr. Judith Bilsky, Executive Vice Chancellor, Division of Community Colleges

Ed W. JORDAN, CIG, CFE, CIA  
INSPECTOR GENERAL

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ILAC  
Rec 10/27/08

Dr. Dottie Minear, Vice Chancellor, Board of Governors  
Dr. Heather Sherry, Director, Office of Articulation  
Dr. Connie Graunke, Executive Director, Florida Center for Advising and  
Academic Support

**Department of Education**  
**Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability**  
**Report 08-25, Postsecondary Student Use of the Florida Academic Counseling and**  
**Tracking for Students is Low**  
**Six-Month Follow-up 10/22/08**

I am happy to report that significant changes have been made to FACTS.org since the OPPAGA Report was released in April, 2008. Most noticeably, the FACTS.org site was re-tooled and rolled out July 1<sup>st</sup>. The re-tooling was done as part of a National Postsecondary Education Cooperative (NPEC) Consumer Web-site Pilot Project to provide better and more easily accessible information for prospective students and their families, particularly for adults and other underserved populations. During the course of the project, over 27 focus groups were held to identify the needs of different audience groups, including how and what information they expected to find, preferred terminology, and menu taxonomies. The findings resulted in a complete overhaul of the Web-site navigation, content, and College Search function as well as the consolidation of login IDs.

Additional research was conducted with community college and university representatives to gather input from users specifically on the 2+2 Transfer Evaluation, including identifying the kind of data that would be helpful in advising students, how to ensure the reliability of the data, and the format in which it needs to be presented. The recommendations from the focus groups resulted in the following actions:

- The FACTS.org 2+2 Transfer Evaluation was reformatted to include a Transfer Program Admission Information section that contains program admission information, foreign language admission requirements, and the common prerequisites.
- The FACTS.org system was modified to pull information for this section directly from the university audits ensuring accuracy of the data.
- The Transfer Program Admission Information section was also set up as an independent search tool, making the information easily accessible without an evaluation, and as a downloadable file for institutions to utilize and load directly into institutional systems.

The necessary programming changes have been completed by FACTS.org and the universities have begun modifying their audit systems to allow for the Transfer Program Admission Information to be pulled directly from their systems. The new Associate in Arts (AA) Degree Transfer Evaluation is scheduled to go into production on October 23, after a review by the FACTS.org Standing Committee and the Articulation Coordinating Committee.

These changes will address a number of issues raised in the OPPAGA report. The following addresses the recommendations for legislative options and agency recommendations.

### **Recommendations**

#### ***Legislative Options***

- *Require the Department of Education, Board of Governors, and the Florida Center for Advising and Academic Support to assess the current need for FACTS' postsecondary*
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*advising tools at all public institutions. The department should report the results of the needs assessment to the Legislature by December 31, 2008.*

- *Require the Department of Education and Florida Center for Advising and Academic Support to evaluate and report to the Legislature by December 31, 2008, the effectiveness and usefulness of the FACTS' tools for middle and high school students.*

A survey will be sent out late October to all public postsecondary institutions to assess the “extent to which their internal advising systems and/or processes have the same Web-enabled capabilities provided by FACTS’ college administrative and advising tools” and whether specific Web services can be “scaled back” on FACTS.org. In addition, the survey will include questions pertaining to institutional compliance with the Guidelines for Procedures for Student Advising and Tracking Progression adopted by the Council of Presidents on January 26, 2006.

FACTS.org has already begun hosting a series of Regional Articulation Workshops to be held at nine universities at which the AA Transfer Evaluation will be the centerpiece of the discussions. An Articulation Guide has also been produced which will be distributed directly to the counselors and advisors at the community colleges who work with students, explaining the evaluation and other services available to them through FACTS.org. Further plans to improve postsecondary student usage will be developed after results from the survey have been collected.

In May 2008, FACTS.org conducted a usage survey of middle and high school guidance counselors to assess how they use FACTS.org and if another advising system existed within their school district with the same advising capacity as the FACTS.org, electronic Personal Education Planner (ePEP), and High School Academic Evaluations. Over one thousand (1,015) responses were received representing 55 school districts. Nearly 85% of the respondents used FACTS.org with their students; almost 74% to help students create high school plans with the ePEP, and over 64% to search high school Major Areas of Interest and access Florida CHOICES. Sixty-nine percent of the high school respondents used FACTS.org to help students evaluate their progress toward graduation and Bright Futures awards, 66% to search for colleges and programs, and 34% to apply for admission to college and search for financial aid. Thirty percent of respondents, representing 15 school districts, stated that they have their own school or district advising system. However, when asked if their system had specific features (in three categories: student academic planning, progress monitoring, and accessibility), none of the systems had all of the features available on FACTS.org. For the most part, local systems were used for registering students, maintaining a record of grades and other day-to-day activities. The ePEP and the school systems complimented each other and did not have duplicative services.

#### ***Agency Recommendations***

- *Track unduplicated student use of FACTS' functionalities.*
- *Develop and disseminate student usage data that institutions can use to measure the extent to which individual students are accessing the various FACTS' functions.*

Monthly unduplicated student usage reports are available on the FACTS.org Web-site for the high school portion of the system; monthly unduplicated student usage reports for the postsecondary sections will be available shortly. On a quarterly basis, notification will be sent to the Presidents of the public postsecondary institutions, the Vice Presidents for Academic and

Student Affairs, the Admissions Officers and the FACTS institutional managers. The notification will include the status of their compliance with s. 1007.28, F.S. as outlined in the Standards for Compliance and their unduplicated headcount of usage rates.

All of these efforts are being done in collaboration with the Divisions of Community Colleges and Public Schools, the Board of Governors and the Florida Center for Advising and Academic Support. In accordance with OPPAGA's report, we will be submitting a final report to the Legislature by December 31, 2008. If you have any further questions, please contact Dr. Heather Sherry, Director of the Office of Articulation, or Dr. Willis Holcombe, Chancellor of the Division of Community Colleges.