
Case-Study: FGCU's Legal Studies Bachelor of Science Online Program

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This year Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) in Fort Myers unveiled a new baccalaureate program in Legal Studies ready to take on as many new and transfer as possible. In part it can thank the Florida Legislature, which has made four-year institutional attendance easier by traditional as well as distance education means.

The Problem

Many states have geographical areas that do not have four-year schools, or whose two-year colleges do not offer particular majors of interest. In Florida the State Legislature has attempted to solve these problems by allowing two-year institutions to offer four-year degrees under certain circumstances. Community colleges have to undergo a formal state approval process showing need for a program if they wish to offer a baccalaureate option. Institutions such as Miami-Dade Community College, Daytona Beach Community College and others have proposed programs of study in nursing, public administration, computer science and culinary arts. Saint Petersburg College, formerly SPCC (same name but with the word "Community" therein) is now offering four-year curricula under its new moniker. However, no two-year Florida school has in existence or ever proposed a four-year degree in Legal Studies (LS).

The Solution

The Statewide Articulation Agreement between the Florida State University System (SUS) and the Division of Community Colleges governs the transfer of students who have earned an associate degree. State laws now provide the means for associate degree holders to transfer within the state without fancy agreements or red tape.

The Articulation Agreement guarantees, within certain limitations, priority for graduates of a Florida community college and facilitates the transfer of students from the associate level to baccalaureate degree programs such as Legal Studies at FGCU. FGCU's Legal Studies Program is listed on page 20 in the revised January 2002 *Florida Statewide Articulation Manual*. FGCU is the only Florida university attempting to introduce a statewide articulation agreement to serve as a capstone to Associate of Science degrees in Legal Assisting/Paralegal Studies. FGCU will serve the following community colleges that related legal programs, as stated below, in 2001:

Table 1. FGCU Student Enrollment in Legal Programs in 2001

Florida State Community Colleges	Student Enrollment in Legal Programs
Hillsborough Community College	80
St. Petersburg Junior College	320
Manatee Community College	84
Florida Community College	88
Miami Dade Community College	500
Indian River Community College	75
Daytona Beach Community College	203

Seminole Community College	100
Pasco Hernando Community College	70
Pensacola Junior College	150
Brevard Community College	60
Edison Community College	175
Tallahassee Community College	225
Palm Beach Community College	150
Santa Fe Community College	46
Valencia Community College	400
Broward Community College	300

FGCU's Approach

FGCU is one of eleven universities in the State University System (SUS) of Florida. Distance learning possibilities abound. Options include:

All of the upper division courses required to complete a:

- Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice
- Bachelor of Science in Health Sciences

All of the courses necessary to complete a(an):

- MBA (Master's in Business Administration)
- MPA (Master's in Public Administration)
- Master's in Health Science
- Master's in Curriculum and Instruction: Educational Technology
- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Endorsement for K-12 teachers

Several courses from the College of Arts and Sciences are available, such as:

- ASH 3000 - The Chinese
- HUM 2510 - Understanding Visual & Performing Arts
- PSY 3044 - Experimental Psychology
- ANT 3410 - Cultural Anthropology
- SOP 4714 - Environmental Psychology
- HIS 3930 - History of Modern East Asia
- IDS 3305 - Issues in Media, Literature and Art
- IDS 3301 - Issues in Culture and Society

As stated in the FGCU *Institutional Purpose*, "The university seeks to employ innovative ideas and technologies in the development and delivery of programs and services. The university also pursues regional and community-based public service activities and projects." See <<http://www.fgcu.edu/info/Vision.asp>>. The FGCU College of Arts and Sciences at FGCU received \$200,000 to redesign the HUM 2510 distance course, *Understanding Visual and Performing Arts* course. The monies came from the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute Center for Academic Transformation through the Pew Learning

and Technology Program. Additional information may be found at FGCU's web site for Distance Learning, at <http://www.fgcu.edu/DL/index.html>.

The Legal Studies Program is designed to provide an in-depth understanding of the legal system as it relates to the laws, the courts, clients and lawyers. The curriculum encompasses both generalist and specialist courses as recommended for those seeking approval by the American Bar Association.

The state general education requirements consist of thirty-six (36) credit hours, as follows:

Communication 6 hours

Mathematics 6 hours

Humanities 9 hours

Social Sciences 6 to 9 hours

Natural Sciences 6 to 9 hours

In addition, in order to graduate with an associate of arts degree from a Florida community college or university, students must have twelve (12) hours of English and six (6) hours of Mathematics. A grade of C or better is required for this course work. *See* State Board of Education Rule 6A-10.030, *The Gordon Rule*.

Any student enrolled in a Florida community college or junior college who has obtained an AA or AS degree in Legal Assisting, Paralegal Studies, or the equivalent, and who has completed the general education requirements contained in the Articulation Agreement, is eligible to enroll at FGCU with upper level status as a junior. This means that students are allowed to take upper level courses, numbered in the 3000's and 4000's. The Division of Justice Studies at Florida Gulf Coast University will accept up to sixty-four (64) credit hours from an associate degree for the LS degree. Depending upon how many additional credits may be required in the areas of general education and foreign language, the total number of credits will vary but should not exceed one hundred and thirty-three (133) credits.

In a memorandum dated September 20, 1999 regarding AS to BS capstone programs, James A Mau, Vice Chancellor of Academic and Student Affairs, State University System of Florida, stated:

[T]he universities should attempt to provide their portion of the degree within 60 semester hours, including upper division coursework and any remaining general education hours necessary to complete the 36 total hours of general education required. Within the general education category, only transferable courses in the AS degree will be recognized for the bachelors degree. It may be necessary to exceed the 60 hours at the university in some cases.

In keeping with this directive, and to maximize the transferability of general education credit into the university setting, FGCU closely reviewed each of the twenty (20) programs statewide which would be affected by the proposed degree program. Numerous commonalities are present in these programs, which allowed us to create three (3) basic models representative of the programs, and develop typical transfer protocols, allowing the greatest flexibility for transfer. The models involve either a 15-credit, an 18-credit, or a 21 credit hour requirement for general education at the AS degree level. Each of the community college programs which may benefit from this capstone degree program incorporate from 15 to 21 hours of general education credit within a 64 credit hour degree program.

The models are as follows:

15 General Education Credit Transfer Model

COMMUNITY COLLEGE AS DEGREE PROGRAM

GENERAL EDUCATION COURSES (15 hours)

Communication 6 cr. hrs. (includes Speech*)

Mathematics 3 cr. hrs.

Humanities 3 cr. hrs.

Social Sciences 3 cr. hrs.

PROGRAM CORE AND ELECTIVES

Varied requirements 49 cr. hrs.

TOTAL # OF TRANSFER CREDITS 64 cr. hrs.

FLORIDA GULF COAST UNIVERSITY REQUIREMENTS

GENERAL EDUCATION COURSES (21 hours)

required to fulfill FGCU distribution

Communication 3 cr. hrs.

Mathematics 3 cr. hrs. (Statistics)

Humanities 3 cr. hrs. (HUM 2510)

Social Sciences 6 cr. hrs.

Natural Sciences 6 cr. hrs.

*Speech is applied to the Humanities component of FGCU general education distribution

UNIVERSITY REQUIREMENTS (upper division requirements)

Colloquium and Sr. Seminar 6 cr. hrs.

Curriculum Core and Electives 42 cr. hrs.

TOTAL # OF FGCU CREDITS 69 credit hours

TOTAL CREDITS AS/BS 133 cr. hrs.

18 General Education Credit Transfer Model

COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROGRAM

GENERAL EDUCATION COURSES (18 hours)

Communication 6 cr. hrs. (includes Speech*)

Mathematics 3 cr. hrs.

Humanities 3 cr. hrs.

Social Sciences 6 cr. hrs.

PROGRAM CORE AND ELECTIVES

Varied requirements 46 cr. hrs.

TOTAL # OF TRANSFER CREDITS 64 cr. hrs.

FLORIDA GULF COAST UNIVERSITY REQUIREMENTS

GENERAL EDUCATION COURSES (18 hours)

Communication 3 cr. hrs.

Mathematics 3 cr. hrs. (Statistics)

Humanities 3 cr. hrs. (HUM 2510)

Social Sciences 3 cr. hrs.

Natural Sciences 6 cr. hrs.

*Speech is applied to the Humanities component of FGCU general education distribution

UNIVERSITY REQUIREMENTS (upper division requirements)

Colloquium and Sr. Seminar 6 cr. hrs.

Curriculum Core and Electives 42 cr. hrs.

TOTAL # OF FGCU CREDITS 66 credit hours

TOTAL CREDITS AS/BS 130 cr. hrs.

21 General Education Credit Transfer Model

COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROGRAM

GENERAL EDUCATION COURSES (21 hours)

Communication 9 cr. hrs. (includes Speech*)

Mathematics 3 cr. hrs.

Humanities 3 cr. hrs.

Social Sciences 6 cr. hrs.

PROGRAM CORE AND ELECTIVES

Varied requirements 43 cr. hrs.

TOTAL # OF TRANSFER CREDITS 64 cr. hrs.

FLORIDA GULF COAST UNIVERSITY REQUIREMENTS

GENERAL EDUCATION COURSES (15 hours)

Mathematics 3 cr. hrs. (Statistics)

Humanities 3 cr. hrs. (HUM 2510)

Social Sciences 3 cr. hrs.

Natural Sciences 6 cr. hrs.

*Speech is applied to the Humanities component of FGCU general education distribution

UNIVERSITY REQUIREMENTS (upper division requirements)

Colloquium and Sr. Seminar 6 cr. hrs.

Curriculum Core and Electives 42 cr. hrs.

TOTAL # OF FGCU CREDITS 63 credit hours

TOTAL CREDITS AS/BS 127 cr. hrs.

FGCU's Legal Studies coursework consists of the following:

Required core courses (27 hours):

CCJ 4215 Constitutional Criminal Law (3)

PLA 3203 Courtroom Techniques (3)

PLA 3700 Ethics for Legal Assistants (3)

PLA 3763 Law Office Management (3)

PLA 3803 Family Law Issues (3)

PLA 4116 Research & Document Drafting (3)

PLA 4603 Florida Trusts, Estates & Probate (3)

PLA 4612 Commercial & Residential Real Estate Transactions (3)

(Plus 3 upper division hours in communication selected in consultation with advisor).

Electives, from the following (15 hours):

PLA 3236 Alternative Dispute Resolution (3)

PLA 3273 Negligence & Tort Litigation (3)

PLA 3433 Business Organizations (3)

PLA 3572 Travel Law (3)
PLA 3586 Condominium & Association Law (3)
PLA 3634 Land Use and Ownership (3)
PLA 3733 Legal Technology (3)
PLA 4530 Elder Law (3)
PLA 4556 Real Estate Litigation (3)
PLA 4565 Certified Legal Assistant Review (3)
PLA 4570 Globalization and the Rule of Law (3)
PLA 4604 Probate Litigation (3)
PLA 4913 Independent Research (1-3)
PLA 4933 Special Topics (3)
PLA 4940 Internship (1-6)

Other upper division electives approved in advance by the advisor in criminal justice, political science, law, business, or other fields.

Additional Requirements

PLA 4850 American Jurisprudence Seminar (3)
IDS 3920 University Colloquium (3)

At FGCU if a student does not have a legal background, say he or she has just started college or has an associate degree in another field, the Legal Studies Program is still available. The student could opt to obtain some of the basic legal coursework before taking the upper level Legal Studies offerings, even though no prerequisites are necessary for any of the FGCU LS courses. And, if a student starts as a freshman, there are a multitude of criminal justice, business law and other related courses via distance and traditional means to aid them toward the upper level and/or introduce them to the legal field in general. Thus, any student with an appropriate two-year degree can earn a baccalaureate degree in Legal Studies by taking courses via distance and traditional means. The program is primarily designed as a capstone curriculum to prepare graduates for advancement in careers in law-related professions.

The Future of "Distance Legal Education"

We are in a litigious society. But, on the sunnier side, paralegal and legal studies programs offer tremendous growth opportunity for an expanding job market. According to The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics' Office of Occupational Statistics and Employment Projections, the paralegal field is expected to grow over 33% through the year 2010. The Florida Department of

Labor and Employment Statistics indicates that the state can expect a 67% increase in the profession by 2008. And, according to the Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation, "paralegal" scored #7 in Fastest-Growing Occupations as well as within the top 100 in Occupations Gaining the Most New Jobs in Florida. Legally related fields will provide solid career paths for those with proper training and skills. Furthermore, individuals with a baccalaureate degree will fare especially well in the future. Job openings, due to employment increases and net replacements, grew from 17,801 in year 2000 to 21,807 in year 2001, representing a 22.5% increase. Careers in human resources, banking, government, secretarial, real estate, title examination, business, management, politics, insurance, and other fields abound with the right training.

Presently there are three other Florida institutions, The University of West Florida (UWF) in Pensacola, International College in Naples, and the University of Central Florida (UCF) in Orlando, that have bachelor programs in the sunshine state. However, the FGCU Legal Studies program is unique in that it provides more opportunities for ease of transfer for the upper-level student as well as for the freshman and sophomore student. In fact, FGCU's degree tries to solve two (2) common deficiencies within most Florida universities: (1) It is attempting to articulate any qualified AS degree graduate from a Florida state community college legal assisting or paralegal program; and (2) It offers the entire upper division program via distance so that the student will have access in their home area. Within the next two (2) years, the LS program will be totally web-based. But there is no waiting for the student who wants to start immediately. There is the option of taking distance learning courses in criminal justice and business law that can serve as electives, as well as many general education courses, if necessary, tailored to career plans.

Many institutions will be left behind if they do not meet the demand for providing quality legal education via non-traditional avenues. But, indeed the key word is "quality." Unfortunately many improper venues offer what is deemed "legal education," especially via the Internet. And, in the case of law school, many times a student may not discover the grave error until it is too late; he or she is now unable to sit for the state bar because the degree-conferring institution has not undergone the rigors of proper approval processes.

Conclusion

As times and needs change, so it seems that the way we look at articulation and distance learning will greatly affect the business of education. Thus, we need to consider those who cannot leave family, employment, and/or home for greater scholastic opportunities, but who would like to benefit from distance offerings. Many legal studies programs as well as law schools are beginning to identify these issues and undertake the challenge. All involved must carefully consider these new avenues in order to assure success down the road for students, programs, and places of higher learning on the whole.

Author's Note:

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