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Florida Aims to Expand Pell Student Enrollment at State Universities

A new report examines enrollment trends and strategies to meet state goals of increased access for low-income students

TAMPA, FL — The Florida College Access Network (FCAN) has released a new policy brief titled [Florida Aims to Boost the Number of Pell Students Attending Our State Universities: What Can Be Done to Achieve This Goal?](#) The brief takes a data-informed look at enrollment and admissions trends, revealing challenges and opportunities to expand access at Florida's 12 public universities for Pell Grant recipients who qualify for need-based federal financial aid.

With the recent adoption of the [SUS-30 Strategic Plan](#), Florida's State University System set a bold goal to significantly increase both the enrollment and graduation rates of Pell-eligible students. To support this effort, FCAN's new brief provides an overview of Florida's Pell-eligible students and trends.

Key Findings:

- Decline in Pell Enrollment: The share of Pell students enrolled at Florida public universities dropped from 36% in 2014 to 28% in 2023, even as overall admission applications surged by more than 100% across several institutions.
- Admissions Pressures: As selectivity increased at universities like UF, FSU, and USF, Pell admissions rates dropped from 36% in 2014 to 28% in 2023.
- Regional Opportunity Gaps: Population growth and rising demand for university seats may be outpacing institutional capacity in key metro areas, which limits access for local Pell-eligible students.

"Florida's future prosperity depends, in part, on our ability to increase access to our state universities," said Braulio Colón, executive director at Florida College Access Network. "For students who are ready to succeed academically but who may lack the financial resources or support to navigate the admissions process, our universities should lead and strengthen how they deliver support."

According to the FCAN report, Florida's economy continues to outpace much of the nation, and the need for a highly educated workforce has never been more urgent. More than 64% of jobs in Florida will require education beyond high school by 2031¹, yet only 55.1% of working-age adults currently hold a postsecondary degree or credential².

Economic Impact: The report also cites a study suggesting a 10% increase in postsecondary enrollment could generate \$8.38 billion annually for Florida's economy³.

¹ Georgetown Center for Workforce and Education, March 2024 report.

² Lumina Foundation.

³ Helios Education Foundation.



One of the most promising solutions is to ensure more Pell-eligible students gain access to Florida's public university system.

The full FCAN brief is available now [here](#).

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About Florida College Access Network

Florida College Access Network (FCAN) is Florida's collaborative network committed to ensuring all Floridians have the opportunity to achieve an education beyond high school and a rewarding career. We envision a Florida working together where education is the pathway to economic mobility for all.

FCAN strives to expand knowledge of research, data, policies, and practices that impact postsecondary access and attainment in Florida. For more information, visit www.floridacollegeaccess.org.

FCAN is a statewide independent organization hosted by the University of South Florida (USF). The statements and positions presented are those of FCAN and are not made on behalf of the USF Board of Trustees or intended in any way to be representative of USF.