

## FSU PRES OFFERS ANSWER TO TEXAS HIGHER ED REFORMS

By LILLY ROCKWELL  
THE NEWS SERVICE OF FLORIDA

Posting or forwarding this material without permission is prohibited. Contact  
<<mailto:news@newsserviceflorida.com>>  
[news@newsserviceflorida.com](mailto:news@newsserviceflorida.com)<<mailto:news@newsserviceflorida.com>>.

THE CAPITAL, TALLAHASSEE, September 8, 2011.....In response to Gov. Rick Scott's interest in the controversial Texas higher education overhaul that emphasizes accountability, Florida State University President Eric Barron offered up his own proposal Thursday that he plans to take to the governor.

Barron's plan embraces many of the ideas behind the Texas proposal, known as the "Seven Breakthrough Solutions," that emphasizes teaching over research and more accountability over performance.

"It's a colossal mistake to try and hide from accountability," Barron told FSU's Board of Trustees.

Barron's ideas, laid out in a 23-page paper titled "Florida Can Do Better Than Texas," offers an in-depth analysis of the seven solutions and responds with eight "Florida solutions." Barron's suggestions are designed to be more palatable to university faculty, while still embracing the concept of more accountability.

For instance, the Texas plan suggests monitoring how effective professors are by the number of classes taught, student satisfaction surveys and the number of A and B grades awarded.

But Barron believes this type of emphasis on effectiveness will result in larger classes, less emphasis on smaller science and engineering classes and turn teaching into a popularity contest.

"You cannot teach chemistry in a lab of 60 people without it being dangerous," Barron explained. Instead, Barron suggests judging how effective professors are at teaching by examining the freshmen retention and graduation rates, offering student evaluations at the beginning and end of a course, looking at the cost per student for each credit hour, and giving post-graduation surveys to students on their university experience.

Those same factors would be used in awarding tenure and faculty bonuses of up to \$10,000.

Scott began pushing for colleges and universities to look into the Texas higher education proposals last spring. He has sent letters to university and college presidents soliciting their thoughts on the plan and has given a copy of the Texas proposal to every person he has appointed to a university or college governing board.

The changes to higher education were first proposed by a conservative-leaning Texas think tank in 2008. Texas Gov. Rick Perry, now a presidential candidate, heavily promoted the plan, which

gives students more power over teacher pay and tenure and ties state funding to university performance.

But Perry encountered stiff resistance from universities and very few of the proposals were embraced. Texas A&M University, Perry's alma mater, went the furthest and created a publicly available spreadsheet documenting faculty productivity. But it became so controversial it was taken down.

Barron urged the board to look at Scott's interest in higher education accountability as a "remarkable gift."

"If you use it to improve what your programs are like, it adds a level of efficiency," Barron said.

Some members of FSU's board of trustees indicated their support for the plan, especially those appointed to the board by Scott. "I commend you on the effort," said trustee Joseph Gruters, the head of the Republican Party of Sarasota County and a Scott appointee. "You are taking a step in the right direction."

But others fretted over the response from faculty. "This is a draconian move if you don't have the faculty with you," warned Joseph Camps, a Tallahassee physician and board trustee.

The lone faculty representative on the board, Sandra Lewis, who is president of the Faculty Senate and a professor of education, said she was pleased with Barron's suggestions and felt the Texas plan was "too simplistic."

"Accountability is important," Lewis said. "It's part of the environment today, so we have to be willing to provide evidence that we are being effective, however that effectiveness is measured."

But under the Texas plan, professors would be driven to get high student satisfaction scores by "bringing pizza on the last day of class and showing a movie and giving everybody A's," she said.

Ed Mitchell, the head of the United Faculty of Florida, which represents Florida's college and university professors, said there is a lot of worry over how faculty will fare in the new push for accountability.

He speculated that Scott's interest in the Texas plan is driven by a desire to provide less government funding for higher education. Changes to faculty pay and tenure brings down salaries, he said.

"It will be lower salaries," Mitchell said. "We are going to the factory model. Unfortunately, they keep saying they want to run it like a business and what they want is to run it like a Chinese factory, where you pay people the lowest amount to do the work...trying to quantify everything doesn't work."

Universities and colleges may feel pressure to embrace some of these reforms, Mitchell said, because they still need Scott and the Legislature's approval for much-needed classroom construction projects in the state budget.

"They feel they don't have a choice," Mitchell said.

Barron said his next step is to discuss his plan with Florida State University faculty and the Board of Governors, which governs the entire state university system, before discussing it with the governor.

Though other university presidents have been engaged by Scott to respond to ideas sketched out in the Texas plan, Barron is likely the first to offer an exhaustive alternative.

Some trustees warned him that there was a political risk to being the first.

"Whoever is there first will get the most press and the most scrutiny," said Peggy Rolando, a trustee and Miami-based real estate attorney. But she said the university will also show it is open to change and challenges.