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**A dose of common sense**  
State wisely bends the rules for MCC nursing program

Published: Friday, December 26, 2008 at 1:00 a.m.  
Last Modified: Wednesday, December 24, 2008 at 3:10 p.m.

Even when Florida's budget isn't stained with red ink, the state needs an orderly, analytical method for evaluating new programs at public colleges and universities.

But as a recent turn of events involving Manatee Community College demonstrated, the state also needs to employ flexibility and common sense in its assessment of those proposals.

Fortunately, the Department of Education agreed this week to be reasonable and flexible with MCC's request for approval of a new, four-year nursing program.

The community college focuses on two-year associate's degrees and shorter-term employment training. State law allows community colleges to create four-year programs that confer bachelor's degrees -- under certain conditions and with approval of the department and Board of Education.

Board rules require colleges to apply for such approval in June.

MCC didn't apply until September -- in part because the new president, Lars Hafner, didn't take over until July 1. Hafner said that, between the time he signed a contract in April and assumed his post, he was overwhelmed by community- and business-based calls for a four-year nursing program at MCC.

State legislators who serve the college's two-county area united and joined Hafner in an appeal to the state board to modify its rules due to the unusual conditions involving the transition of administrations at MCC, the need for nurses in local health-care facilities and the value of creating good-paying jobs during a recession.

On Tuesday, the state education commissioner -- citing "strong local support" -- agreed to waive the deadline requirement and let MCC's proposal proceed.

Smart move.

This story appeared in print on page A16


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