

# VIEWS

## Tell us what you think

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# A progress report

## What the Talent Hub designation means



**Your Turn**  
Tessa LeSage and Whitney Rhyne  
Guest columnists

When the FutureMakers Coalition announced Southwest Florida was designated a Talent Hub by Lumina and Kresge foundations in January 2020, we couldn't have predicted how important our work to accelerate efforts to improve our regional workforce would become.

When the thought of a global pandemic dramatically altering our lives would have seemed far-fetched, we were most excited about being a national exemplar community in our efforts to work together to transform our workforce, alongside places like Nashville, Detroit, Los Angeles, Denver and Boston. After five years of hard work and three significant efforts to compete with communities across the country, we did it.

FutureMakers Coalition to leverage the designation to scale our work to create systems that better support today's students and

See **TALENT HUB**, Page 43A

## Strengthening partnership between FSW and FGCU



**Your Turn**  
Keith Martin and Marisa Ouvreun  
Guest columnists

The Florida 2+2 Program has enjoyed a long history of supporting Floridians in fulfilling the dream of completing a bachelor's degree in a timely, convenient, and cost-effective manner. Established in 1971 as one of the first major transfer agreement programs in the country, Florida was an early pioneer in the field of higher education to develop a comprehensive 2+2 program that ensures students can seamlessly transition from a Florida State College to a Florida State University following completion of the Associate in Arts Degree (AA).

Utilizing this system, students have the opportunity to complete the first two years of college at one of the 28 Florida State Colleges and later transfer to a State University to finish the last two years and earn a bachelor's degree. With several state policies supporting it, the 2+2 program provides a number of benefits and

See **PARTNERSHIP**, Page 43A

## Finishing the degree you started is within your reach



**Your Turn**  
Kristen Venselow and Aysegul Timur  
Guest columnists

Lumina Foundation reports about half of Americans aged 25-64 hold a credential beyond a high school diploma or G.E.D. This data suggests the other half of Americans do not hold a credential. Within our Southwest Florida region, more than 200,000 adults fit into this category.

Through its collective impact initiative, The FutureMakers Coalition aims to transform Southwest Florida's workforce by increasing our regional credential attainment by bringing more than 300 individuals together who represent businesses, education, government, non-profit organizations, residents, students, and philanthropic citizens. The overarching goal is to guide adults toward completion of college degrees, certificates, industry certifications, and other high-quality credentials beyond a high school education. The collective goal is for 55% of SWFL adults to achieve

See **DEGREE**, Page 44A

## You may have earned a college degree and not even realize it



**Your Turn**  
Dr. Christy Giffert and Dr. Lisa Johnson  
Guest columnists

You may already have earned a college degree and not even realize it. This is the title of a recent communication sent to students attending Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) who transferred from Florida SouthWestern State College (FSW) without first earning their Associate in Arts (AA) degrees. The goal of this communication was to let students know that through a process called Reverse Transfer they may be eligible to earn their AA degrees while continuing to work towards their bachelor's degree.

Through the FutureMakers Coalition's efforts to ensure more residents get an education beyond high school, Southwest Florida (SWFL) has been designated as a Talent Hub by the Lumina and Kresge Foundations — joining 25 other communities around the country. Through this significant badge of honor for our community, Florida SouthWestern State College (FSW) and Florida Gulf

See **EARNED**, Page 45A

## Talent Hub

Continued from Page 39A

accelerate efforts to identify students who stopped short of earning a degree at Florida SouthWestern State College or Florida Gulf Coast University and bring them back to complete.— inching us closer to our goal of 55% of Southwest Floridians holding a credential beyond a high school diploma.

Fast-forward and the need for our efforts have multiplied. According to the Florida College Access Network Talent Strong Florida initiative:

- Over half of Floridians have lost their job, had a pay cut, or saw a reduction of hours because of COVID-19;
- Those with the lowest education levels are hurting most;
- Nearly 50% of total U.S. jobs are at risk of automation in the next several decades, and COVID-19 is accelerating that in some industries; and
- The top 10 fastest growing jobs in Florida all require degrees and certificates beyond high school.

In these conditions, FutureMakers is poised to demonstrate what being a Talent Hub is really all about — collaborating to improve the human condition and develop a more resilient and sustainable economy. One way we are doing that is by re-writing policies and practices to better support returning adult learners.



**Mike Martin, president of FGCU, leads a discussion on income inequality during a recent FutureMakers Coalition event at the Collaboratory in Fort Myers.**

KINFAY MOROTI/THE NEWS-PRESS USA TODAY NETWORK-FLORIDA

We know nearly 60% of our workforce in Southwest Florida currently do not have a credential beyond high school. According to the 2017 American Community Survey, 20% percent of those workers started a credential or degree program but never finished.

FutureMakers Coalition partners at FSW and FGCU have identified more than 40,000 students who stopped out,

some of whom may have already earned an associate degree or are just a few credits short of a degree. We are reaching out to them because we want them to finish. Donors, like the Elsa & Peter Soderberg Charitable Foundation, are removing financial barriers and challenging others to join them. Local chambers of commerce and employers are stepping up to help identify who among

the workforce might benefit from opportunities to continue or finish a credential and the resources needed by distributing a survey. A cross-sector team is supporting efforts to identify opportunities to change policies and practices that may be unintentionally preventing some students from completing and deterring adults from returning to finish a program.

If you have college credits or are interested in getting started, explore your options to earn a degree at FSW by visiting

[www.fsw.edu/admissions/readmit](http://www.fsw.edu/admissions/readmit) or calling 239-489-9377. For FGCU, visit [fgcu.edu/return](http://fgcu.edu/return) or call (239) 745-4700.

Consider distributing this survey in your organization: [www.futuremakerscoalition.com/survey/](http://www.futuremakerscoalition.com/survey/)

Consider making a contribution to support this work by making a contribution. The success of our region's families and economy depends on all of us. We want to reach our shared goal of transforming SWFL's workforce by increasing the number of skilled workers to 55% by 2025. We cannot do it without you.

*Tessa LeSage is Director of FutureMakers Coalition at Collaboratory, Southwest Florida Community Foundation and a Future Maker.*

*Whitney Rhyne, MBA, is Director of Strategic Initiatives at Florida SouthWestern State College and a FutureMaker.*

## Partnership

Continued from Page 39A

guarantees to students including the following:

- Acceptance of at least 60 hours of academic credit towards the completion of a bachelor's degree
- Lower tuition rates for the first two years of schooling for the AA degree
- The guarantee that all General Education requirements taken to fulfill the AA degree will be honored at the state university the student is transferring to
- The acceptance of common prerequisite coursework for similar programs/majors across the state
- Guaranteed admission to at least one of the twelve State Universities
- Guaranteed acceptance of equivalent coursework via the Statewide

### Course Numbering System

The guarantees associated with the 2+2 program are critical to improving access to education, decreasing excess credit hours and student debt and ensuring timely graduation. All of these are factors which allow students to enter the workforce sooner and to contribute to the economic growth of Southwest Florida. According to Florida Access Network, on average, Floridians with bachelor's degrees earn more than double those with only a high school diploma each year.

Through the Future Maker's Coalition efforts, SWFL was recently designated as a Talent Hub by the Lumina and Kresge Foundations. Along with 25 other communities around the country, SWFL is working to increase the number of working age adults with college degrees.

As close partners in this effort, Florida SouthWestern State College and Florida

Gulf Coast University are refocusing on their relationship to think intentionally about the 2+2 program and to continuously improve its guarantees for students. With more than 40% of FGCU transfer students coming from FSW each year, we recognize that a strong 2+2 program is essential in helping students achieve their ultimate goal of earning a 4-year degree.

After recently branding the FSW/FGCU 2+2 program as Destination FGCU, the two institutions are working hard together to develop clear academic pathways that students can follow to effectively plan for completion of their degree from the point of admission at FSW to the point of graduation at FGCU.

The pathways provide a "road map" for students to follow from year one to year four while taking the guesswork and stress out of the transfer process. The initial group of 4-year pathways de-

veloped this year include Management, Social Work, Communication, Integrated Studies, and Interdisciplinary Entrepreneurship. These pathways reflect programs that students most frequently select for transfer and programs with available capacity to meet the enrollment needs of upper level transfer students.

For more information on Destination FGCU please visit: <https://www.fsw.edu/destinationfgcu> or <https://www.fgcu.edu/admission-sand-aid/undergraduateadmissions/transfer-agreements#destinationfgcu>

*Keith Martin is the Director, Academic Advising at Florida SouthWestern State College and a FutureMaker.*

*Marisa Ouwerson is the Assistant Vice President, University Advising Services at Florida Gulf Coast University and a FutureMaker.*



44A | SUNDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2020 | THE NEWS-PRESS

## Degree

Continued from Page 39A

an additional credential.

The FutureMakers Coalition's efforts have been recognized by Lumina Foundation through a Talent Hub designation for Southwest Florida. FGCU is a proud partner in this effort and committed to expanding accelerated degree completion and implementing new ways to assess prior learning experiences.

For the past 23 years, FGCU has subscribed to common methods of evaluating prior learning through standardized exams, military credit recommendations, and review of training. Now, there are new opportunities to take this to the next level and FGCU reaffirms our commitment to assess the "prior learning" of our experienced adult learners.

FGCU recognizes education acquired outside of a traditional college classroom. Adults in SWFL and beyond have mastered skills, knowledge and abilities through life experiences. They have spent years in the workforce, started businesses, raised families, and spent time in the military or performing civic engagement. Informal learning has value, is relevant to workplace needs, and is transferable.

FGCU is proud to launch a "prior learning assessment" initiative to help students align their learning (outside of formal coursework) with courses offered within FGCU degree programs. According to the definition by the Council on Adult and Experiential Learning, prior learning assessment is one way that colleges and universities can evaluate a person's college-level extra-institutional learning for the purposes of awarding college credit or advanced standing. What it means is that, for the first time, proficient adults can formally connect with faculty to review learning experiences and determine if they can fulfill course requirements, meet learning outcomes, and accelerate completion of a degree at FGCU. Experience received through corporate or other training programs, certifications, licenses, apprenticeships and lessons learned from life may align with traditional college course content and learning outcomes.

FGCU Complete, launched in 2019, has supported more than 200 adults through accelerated, online, face-to-face, and hybrid courses leading to degrees in Child and Youth Studies, Entre-



**A presentation highlighting the work of FGCU's booming entrepreneur school featured musicians Lydia Coyner and Antonella Chiappo.** PAMELA MCCABE, PMCCABE@NEWS-PRESS.COM

preneurship, and Integrated Studies. In addition to the curriculum offered through these majors, students select accelerated courses in human development, management, sociology, legal studies, philosophy, anthropology, education, and an array of current issues courses focused on health, culture, technology, science, politics, economics, and pop culture.

By 2030, Florida is projected to be

home to 26 million residents and one of the most diverse populations in the world.

Florida's brand and reputation as a phenomenal place to live, work, raise a family, visit, learn, play, relocate, and compete attracts many new businesses and workforce opportunities to our region each day. While our population continues to grow, the level of importance we place on degree and credential

attainment must remain front and center. Helping our experienced adults achieve credentials, on an accelerated pathway, is crucial.

*Kristen Vanselow is Director of FGCU Complete at Florida Gulf Coast University and a FutureMaker.*

*Aysegul Timur, Ph.D., is Vice President and Vice Provost for Strategy and Program Innovation at Florida Gulf Coast University and a FutureMaker.*





Ed Long III cheers as he crosses the stage at his graduation from Florida Southwestern State College on May 3, 2019, in Fort Myers. AMANDA INSCORE/THE NEWS-PRESS USA  
TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

## Earned

Continued from Page 39A

Coast University (FGCU) are proud partners of the FutureMakers Coalition and the Talent Hub working closely together to help SWFL residents earn their degrees!

When most people think about transferring college credits, they think about vertical transfer. Vertical transfer is when a student transfers from a two-year institution to a four-year institution and carries forward earned credits from the two-year institution toward a degree at the four-year institution. Reverse Transfer, on the other hand, is a process for awarding an AA degree to a student who transfers prior to completing the AA degree requirements at the

two-year institution. Through Reverse Transfer, the student can combine the credits earned at the four-year institution with those previously earned to retroactively be awarded the AA degree.

The National Clearinghouse (a nonprofit and nongovernmental organization which provides educational reporting, data exchange, verification and research services) has identified 1.2 million individuals that have completed enough credit hours to earn an AA degree, but have not been awarded the degree. \* This is troubling as more jobs across the nation have shifted towards associate degree holders and away from workers with a high school diploma or less. In 2020, it is estimated that 65% of all jobs require postsecondary education or training, up from 28% in 1973. \*

To help prepare our students to meet the increasing demands of the work-

force, FSW and FGCU worked together this fall to create a Reverse Transfer pathway for our students. A communication was sent to students who earned 45 or more credits at FSW before transferring to FGCU, explaining Reverse Transfer and its benefits:

"Why should I consider Reverse Transfer? You will earn your AA degree while continuing your studies at FGCU, without any additional time or expense. An AA degree enhances your opportunities for employment, certifications, promotions and pay increases. In fact, studies show that completing an associate degree yields on average approximately \$4,600 to \$7,200 per year in extra earnings compared to entering college but not completing a degree."\*\*

Reverse Transfer gives a student the chance to earn a degree that is immediately valuable in the workforce and pro-

vides a permanent enhancement to the student's earning potential. Additionally, a student who earns an AA degree is statistically more likely to stay on track to earn his or her baccalaureate degree.

Reverse Transfer, is one more way that FSW and FGCU are collaborating together to increase the number of degrees and credentials in our region to at least 55% in our community by 2025.

Want to learn more about FSW? [www.fsw.edu/explore](http://www.fsw.edu/explore)

Want to learn more about FGCU? [www.fgcu.edu/thefgcueffect/](http://www.fgcu.edu/thefgcueffect/)

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