



Stop-Out Student Degree Completion Initiative

February 2023

FutureMakers Coalition is delighted to partner with the Elsa and Peter Soderberg Charitable Foundation (Foundation) and the Lee County Industrial Development Authority (IDA) to increase the number of skilled workers and change lives in Southwest Florida. This report reflects the impact of the phase 1 investment of \$200,000 from the Foundation and a one-time, three-year investment of \$500,000 from the IDA from June 2022-January 2023.

Together, we have expanded opportunities for students throughout Southwest Florida by removing financial barriers for degree seekers at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) and Florida

SouthWestern State College (FSW). Policies and practices to improve student support have been developed. FSW developed the GED Pathway program. FutureMakers Coalition's Graduate! SWFL Navigator program expanded to recruit and remove barriers for reconnectors (adults who need to return to education and training programs to get into a well-paying job). These collective advancements foster collaboration, articulation, peer learning, and results.

Impact Since June 2022

- 366 additional adults (276% increase) have a FutureMakers Coalition Navigator to walk alongside them as they reconnect to education and training programs to get into a well-paying career
- 288 stop-outs (561 total since pilot project) have re-enrolled at FGCU and 14 degrees awarded (174 total since pilot project)
- FSW has supported the return of more than 150 (upwards of 1,300 total since pilot) formerly stopped out student through the Second Look Initiative.
- Second Look students have earned over 5,000 credit hours (more than 11,500 college credit hours since pilot) since returning to higher education at FSW and produced over a hundred graduates.
- 28 students, who would have otherwise been dropped for nonpayment, have received financial support at Florida SouthWestern State College with Last Mile & Gap funding who would have otherwise been dropped for nonpayment
- 10 students have received support to enter the new GED Pathway program (14 total enrolled)

- 1/3 plan to earn a certificate
- 2/3 plan to earn an associate degree
- 1 already completed their EMT certificate

Major Program Developments

Florida Gulf Coast University

- Streamlined readmission process for Return to the Nest students
- Created student navigation to provide a single point of contact
- Implemented FGCU-funded Return to the Nest Scholarship Award
- Provided FGCU-funded Return to the Nest Debt Forgiveness Award
- Improved data access through dashboards and reports
- Renewed focus upon “non-traditional” students
- Revised Academic Amnesty Policy for returning students
- Launched Credit for Prior Learning Experience

Florida SouthWestern State College

- Entered into partnership agreements with each of the public-school districts that offer GED courses
- Developed GED Pathway webpage
- Hosted partnership events

FutureMakers Coalition Graduate! SWFL Program

- 4.5 Navigators hired
- Partnership with Hendry County District Schools established to support funding a Hendry County-focused Navigator
- Expansion of data collection for Graduate! SWFL program for sustainability

Included here are detailed reports of results and findings from this work presented by both FGCU and FSW. The challenge grant resulted in more than \$1 million in investment supporting students who face barriers to earning the credentials needed to fill in-demand jobs in our region. Many of these students have completed some college but have yet to earn their degree. The impact of the Foundation's challenge grant has again exceeded our initial expectations. Not only do adults in Southwest Florida have greater opportunity to earn a degree and transform their

lives, but we are learning from them to develop policies and practices to remove barriers to degree completion and reduce the number of stop-outs in the future.

FGCU in partnership with FutureMakers Coalition at Collaboratory leveraged our pilot project to help secure \$22.9 million dollars from the Department of Commerce to implement the Southwest Florida Equitable Jobs Pipeline as part of the Economic Development Administration's Good Jobs Challenge Grant. This was the largest grant in FGCU's history and a testament to what your investment in our collective work is doing for our region.

Furthermore, this three-year investment and the work from our pilot project positioned us to respond to the challenges presented by Hurricane Ian. Our work together and the multi-year investment provides a foundation for the work that must be done to help those impacted by this 500-year storm event. FutureMakers Coalition, including our partners at FGCU and FSW, have experience working together, ensuring flexibility, and addressing the needs of those who face significant barriers to earning credentials thanks in part to the year of work we did together because of the initial \$100,000 investment from the Foundation and IDA.

We are extremely grateful for this investment from the Foundation and IDA. Moreover, lives are being changed in a time of great need in Southwest Florida. We are incredibly proud of what this

FutureMakers Coalition

partnership accomplished and remain committed to acting on the actionable data identified through this grant to continue to identify, contact, and support stop-out students.

Overview and History

We have a workforce problem:

- 2 out of 3 jobs in Florida will require a credential beyond high school by 2025
- 70 of Florida's fastest growing occupations need a postsecondary credential
- The top 10 fastest growing jobs in Florida require credentials beyond high school
- 2.4 M skilled workers will age-out of the workforce in the next 6 years
- Nearly 50% of total US jobs at risk of automation in the next several decades
- Nearly 58% of Southwest Florida's working-age adults do not have a credential beyond high school

FutureMakers Coalition has a goal to transform Southwest Florida's workforce by increasing the number of skilled workers (those with the credentials needed to fill in-demand jobs) to 55% by 2025. Southwest Florida started out behind the nation and the state in the percentage of skilled workforce because only 42% of working age adults (25-64 y/o) in the region hold a credential beyond a high school diploma. About 20% of those individuals who do not have a credential started a degree but never finished. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the need for our

FutureMakers Coalition

education and workforce systems to change to meet the needs of all students so we can have a more sustainable economy and improve quality of life for everyone in our region. The good news is, for the first time since FutureMakers Coalition was launched, the region's attainment among working-age adults grew at a faster rate than population growth thanks to partners like the Foundation and IDA.

The partnership between FutureMakers Coalition, the Foundation, and the Industrial Development Authority leveraged the Southwest Florida Talent Hub designation project designed to accelerate efforts to increase the number of skilled workers in our region by removing financial barriers to completing a degree in 2020 and 2021. This partnership took the form of debt-forgiveness at FGCU and a fund to remove financial barriers to returning at FSW. The funds were valuable tools in supporting those returning to complete a degree and better understanding and eventually ending the stop-out problem through policy and practice changes.

Helpful Dates

- January 2020 – Earned Talent Hub designation and began acceleration project to identify and bring back students who stopped out before completing a degree at FGCU and FSW.
- September 2020 - FutureMakers Coalition accepted the Elsa and Peter Soderberg Charitable Foundation’s challenge to match a \$50,000 contribution to accelerate efforts to re-admit and support degree attainment among students who stopped out before completing a degree at FGCU and FSW. FGCU committed \$50,000 to support students with repayment of a balance owed to FGCU (\$25,000) or to support first semester tuition and fee payment (\$25,000).
- November 2020 – FutureMakers partners worked together and pitched the challenge grant opportunity to the Lee County Industrial Development Authority (IDA) and received unanimous approval for the \$50,000 match.
- January 2021 – FSW adds \$25,000 to match fund to remove financial barriers. Spring semesters begin.
- February 2021 – FutureMakers received \$50,000 match from the IDA. Remaining funds received from Soderberg. Grant agreement with FGCU executed and \$45,000 distributed.
- March 2021 – Grant agreement with FSW executed and \$45,000 distributed.
- May 2021 – FGCU task force created to focus on the non-traditional student experience from admissions through graduation.
- December 2021 – Pilot project completed; 240 degrees awarded.
- Submitted proposal for 3-year partnership with the Elsa and Peter Soderberg Charitable Foundation

- January 2022 – Submitted request for \$500,000 in debt-forgiveness and opportunity cost removal funds as match for a 3-year partnership with the Elsa and Peter Soderberg Charitable Foundation
- March 2022 – Received unanimous approval for \$500,000 match from the Lee County Industrial Development Authority
- July 2022 - \$225,000 distributed to FGCU and \$225,000 distributed to FSW

Revised Three Year Partnership						
Program	Partner Institution Contribution*	Lee County IDA Match	EPSCF Year 1	EPSCF Year 2	EPSCF Year 3	Total
Florida Gulf Coast University	125,000	175,000	50,000	50,000	25,000	425,000
Florida SouthWestern State College	287,000	175,000	50,000	50,000	25,000	587,000
FutureMakers Backbone Support	235,000	150,000	100,000	75,000	75,000	635,000
Total	\$647,000	\$500,000	\$200,000	\$175,000	\$125,000	\$1,647,000

*This includes both in-kind and financial/grant contributions

What's next?

Florida Gulf Coast University

- Continue to identify barriers to re-enrollment with a focus on students who began or completed the readmission process, but have not reenrolled
- Establish baseline datasets for students sent to collections vs. not sent to collections
- Improve timely identification and award of students to remove balances owed prior to the end of the term/beginning of the subsequent term
- Implement financial supports for students in pursuit of credit for prior learning

Florida SouthWestern State College

- Development strategic pathways into workforce programs
- Establish a mentorship/ambassador program to guide and plan student success events for program participants

FutureMakers Coalition Graduate! SWFL Navigators Program

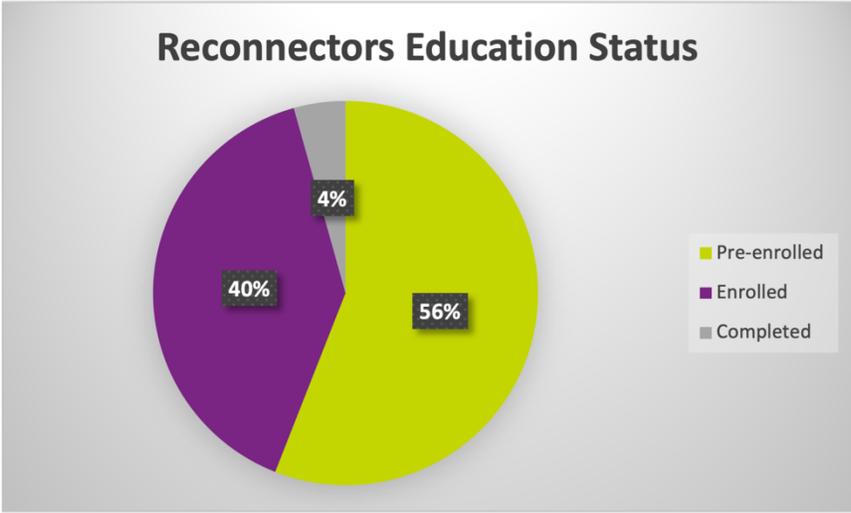
- Formalize hiring agreements with employers
- Hire a Hendry County-focused Navigator to address the nearly 1400 jobs anticipated from the development of AirGlades International Airport
- Continue to recruit reconnectors and train ambassadors to make referrals to Navigators
- Grow capacity to add 4 more Navigators that specialize in specific sectors to ensure folks are getting jobs and grow relationships with employers to create robust talent pipelines

FutureMakers Coalition Navigators >

FutureMakers Coalition Graduate! SWFL Program

Since June 2022, we have grown the FutureMakers Coalition Graduate! SWFL program by 366 (up 276% from 132 prior to investment) reconnectors who now have Navigators to walk alongside them to earn a credential to start or advance in a career. The Navigators work across our region with partners to help reconnectors (e.g., adult learners who need a GED or to learn English, adult learners pursuing credentials for the first time, or an adult learner who has some college-level training but no degree or credential) identify resources and help them overcome barriers and reach their goals. They have shared the program at more than 60 regional events since September 2022.

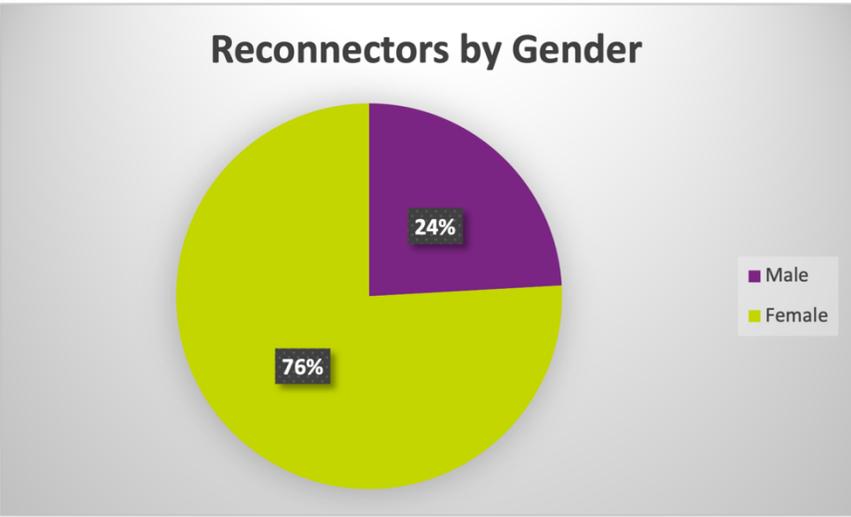
The following graphs provide information about the reconnectors being served.

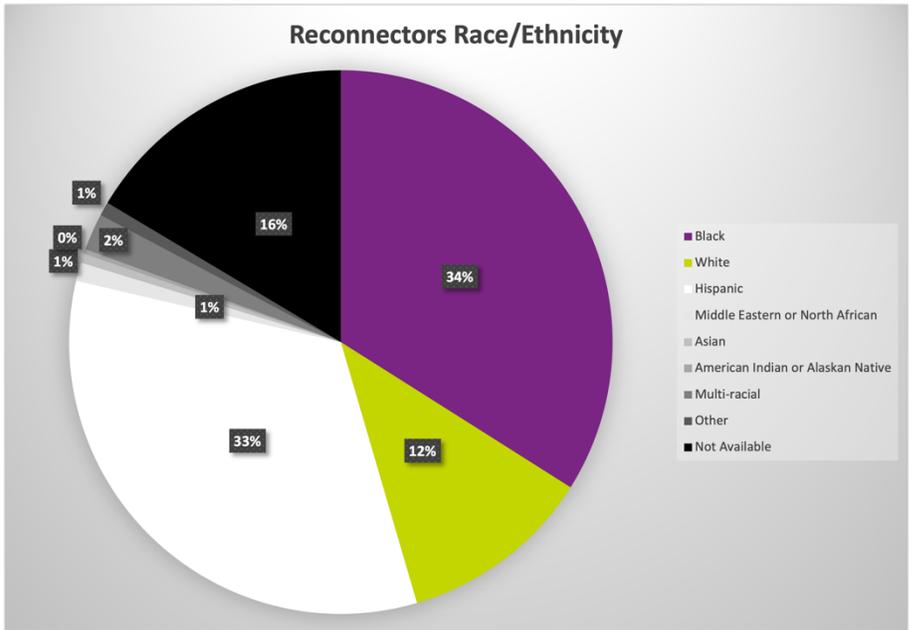


Of the 366 reconnectors added since June 2022, 155 (56%) are pre-enrolled, meaning that they are working through barriers and considering their education/training options and potential career pathways with the support

of a Navigator. Since Hurricane Ian, this pre-enrollment process has become far more complex as individuals face a variety of additional challenges, including homelessness and needing to transfer skills to an entirely new sector. 110 (40%) are currently enrolled in an education/training program, and 12 (4%) have completed. Of those who have completed, eight are working and four are working in their field. Those who are not working or employed in their field, are looking for employment with the support of their Navigator.

Most reconnectors, 278, or 76%, of the reconnectors are female. 88, or 24% are male.

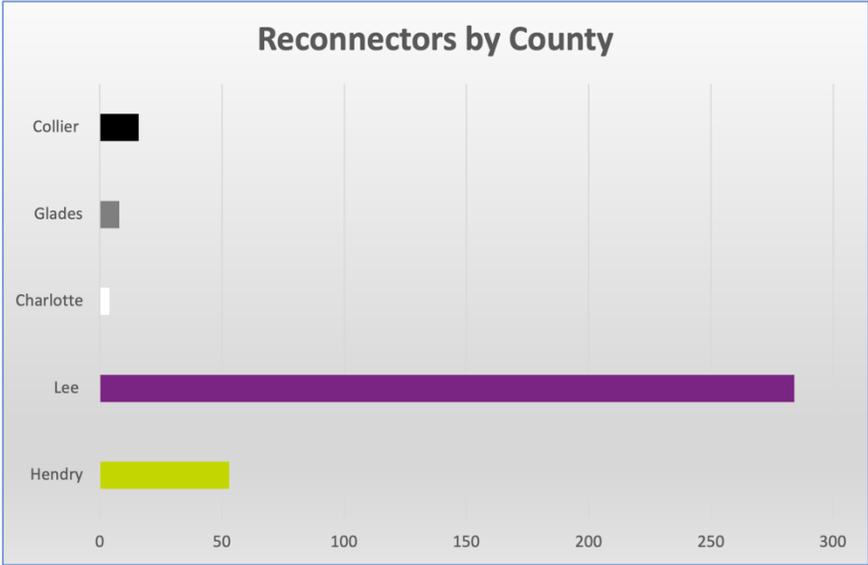




Thirty-four percent, or 124, of the reconnectors are black. Thirty-three percent, or 121, are Hispanic or Latino, and 42, or 12% are white. Four identify as Middle Eastern, 2 as Asian, 1 as American Indian or Alaskan Native, 8 as

multi-racial, 3 as other, and 60 chose not to specify.

284 reconnectors reside in Lee County. 53 call rural Hendry County home. While 16, 8, and 4 reside in Collier, Glades, and Charlotte counties, respectively.



The number of reconnectors is growing by the day thanks to our now 4.5 Navigators who are working to get the word out and train FutureMakers partner organizations to be ambassadors of the program. 4 of the navigators are bilingual (3 speak Spanish and 1 speaks Creole). The team is

honing our data collection system to better understand who we are helping, trends, and impact for program sustainability. Our goal is to hire 4 additional Navigators that will specialize in sectors to create a more dynamic talent pipeline.

As a proud partner of FutureMakers Coalition, Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) responded to the call for action to join the collective impact initiative with the goal to transform the regional workforce of Southwest Florida. FGCU plays a primary role in increasing the number of working age adults with post-secondary degrees, certificates, and other high-quality credentials.

The following annual report contains comprehensive data and analysis from the conclusion of phase 1 efforts outlined in the February 10, 2021 award letter and the beginning of phase 2 efforts outlined in the June 14, 2022 award letter. The included Workplan also highlights intended use of year two funding.

In 2021-22 this work made it possible for FGCU to identify barriers and historical trends to improve the student experience for returning and future FGCU students. Below, please find a summary of systematic changes implemented in 2021-22:

- Streamlined readmission process for Return to the Nest students
- Created student navigation to provide a single point of contact
- Implemented FGCU-funded Return to the Nest Scholarship Award
- Provided FGCU-funded Return to the Nest Debt Forgiveness Award
- Improved data access through dashboards and reports
- Renewed focus upon “non-traditional” students
- Revised Academic Amnesty Policy for returning students
- Launched Credit for Prior Learning Experience



561
Re-enrollment
Stop-out Students



174
Total Graduates



2.5
Years

Phase 1 efforts focused primarily on FGCU’s Return to the Nest initiative. This initiative was designed to help former FGCU students, who stopped-out for more than three consecutive semesters and did not earn a degree, re-enroll with fewer barriers and complete their Bachelor’s Degree. To date, Navigators (through Return to the Nest) supported the re-enrollment of 561 stop-out students, producing 170 graduates in 2.5 years.

Readmission and Completion Data

Figure 1: Number of Readmitted & Enrolled Students by Term

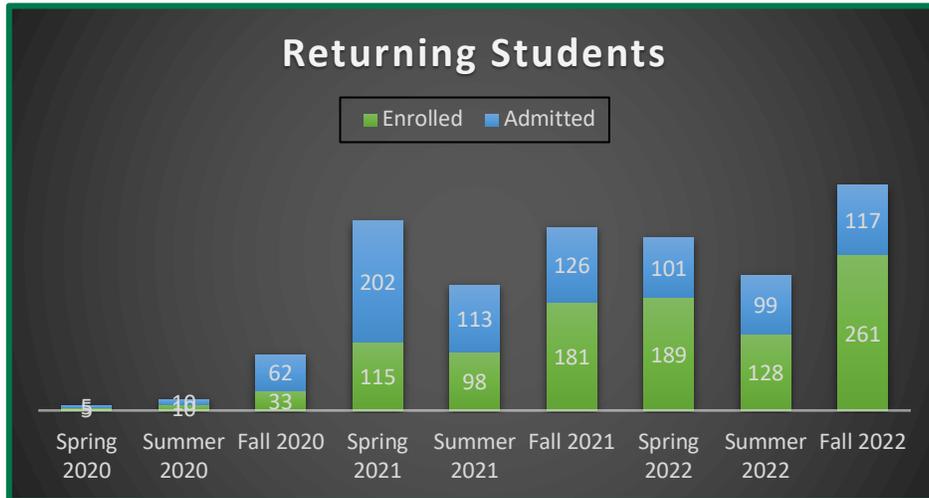
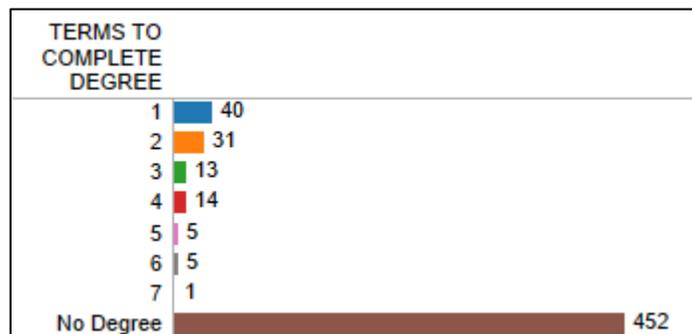


Figure 2: Total Earned Bachelor Degrees



A total of 60 students have earned a degree without a need to enroll in another course.

Figure 3: Bachelor Degrees Complete by Number of Terms



As shown above, 40 returning students were able to graduate after returning for one term with 31 additional students graduating after two terms of enrollment.

Experience and Outcomes for Non-traditional Students

To emphasize the importance of the non-traditional student experience at FGCU, FGCU's President formed a task force in early 2022 charged with addressing this question:

How can we work together to ensure the student experience and outcomes for learners who do not fit the so-called traditional mold meet workforce demands, foster economic development, promote life-long learning, and develop FGCU's reputation as a trusted and supportive regional resource among Southwest Florida's residents and employers?

The task force began the process by defining who is considered a non-traditional student and what obstacles are faced at FGCU. This work was followed by expanding how these obstacles hinder non-traditional students' attraction, retention, degree completion at the university, and what changes could be implemented to enhance their student experience. The task force worked together to implement the following outcomes:

- Expanded flexible course offerings and modes of delivery
- Implemented Micro-credentials through Innovative Education and Partnerships
- Provided flexible orientation offerings
- Created a Non-traditional Student Team in Undergraduate Admissions
- Developed and implement non-traditional recruitment efforts
- Expanded role of "FGCU Complete" Navigators
- Converted Return to the Nest to a program (initially launched as a single initiative)
- Revised the Academic Amnesty Policy
- Revised the Undergraduate Admissions Regulation
- Increased Transferability of Credit and Credit for Prior Learning opportunities
- Removed Financial Barriers through linkage to Career Source and FutureMakers Coalition funding and wrap-around service support

The task force ended their efforts with seven recommendations for the future to continue enhancing the experience and outcomes for non-traditional students. These recommendations have helped shape the Phase 2 Workplan. A copy of the draft from the Non-Traditional Student Task Force White Paper is included as Appendix A.

Trends Observed

As FGCU continues to admit stop-out students, current data shows that 35% of the readmitted population do not enroll. In the coming year, efforts will shift to focus outreach and initiatives to support these students in degree completion or determine and resolve barriers for their enrollment.

Debt Forgiveness for Stop-Out Students

As Phase 1 efforts formally concluded on December 31, 2022, during fall 2022 FGCU identified and conducted outreach to stop-out students with a debt owed, that had 90 or more credit hours and enrolled in courses during the last academic year. This intervention communicated the possibility of debt forgiveness on the remaining balance and encouraged students to re-enroll at FGCU, improving retention.

This outreach jumpstarted FGCU’s attention to improvements to the pre-collect process for students who owe a balance. Through the generous philanthropy in 2021-22 of the Elsa and Peter Soderberg Charitable Foundation (\$25,000), the IDA (\$25,000), and institutional support (\$25,000), 119 students received a total of \$171,935 in funds to repay debt in order to return or remain at FGCU. The breakdown of amount, by fund, is displayed on Figure 4. Seven students supported by these funds were able to pay off a balance in order to receive their earned degree, with no need for additional enrollment. Another eight of the awardees graduated within one academic year following the investment in their removal of debt.

119
Students

\$171,935
Total Funds Debt Forgiveness

Figure 4: Total Recipients and Distribution of Amount by Fund

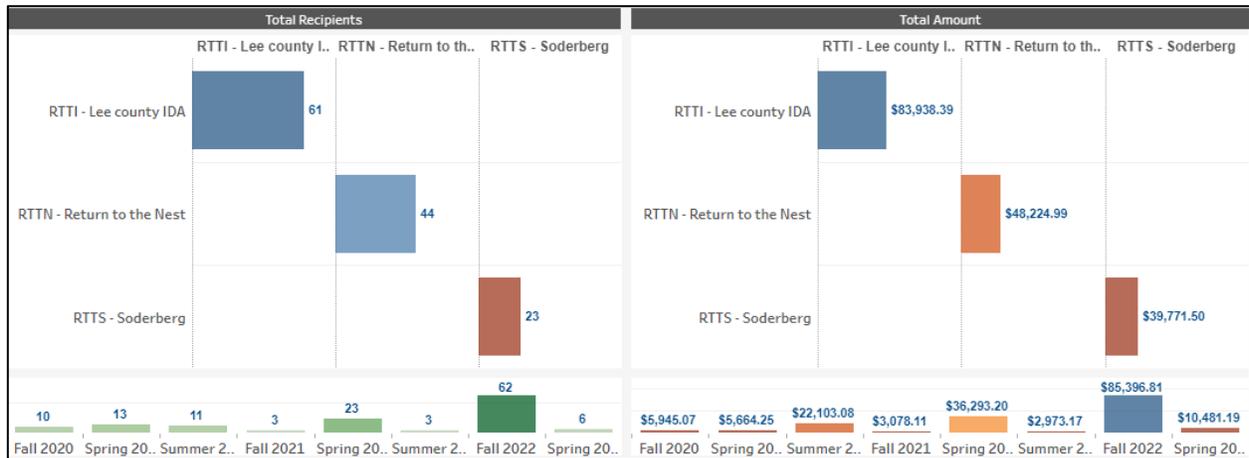
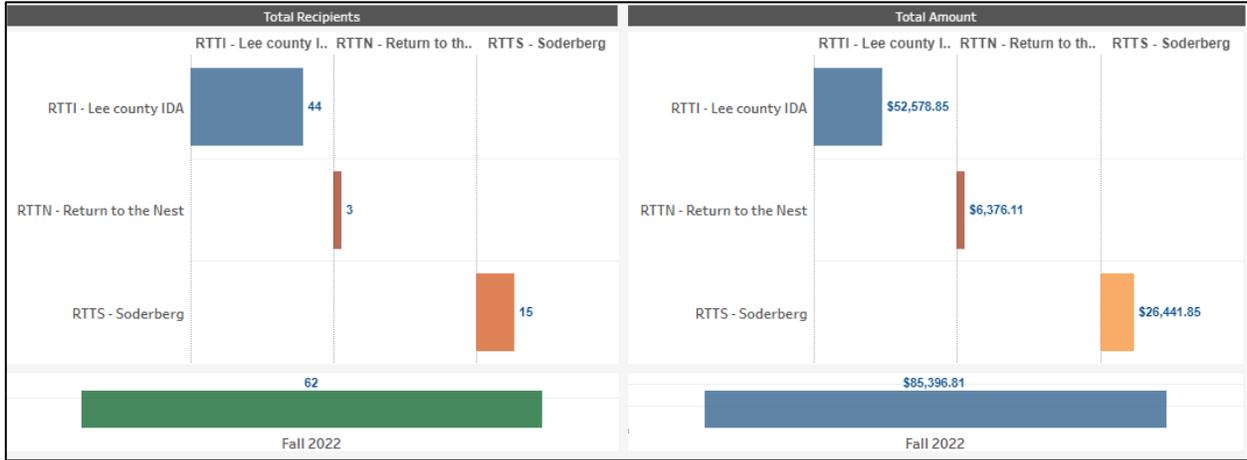


Figure 5: Snapshot of the Fall 2022 awards as of December 31, 2022



A breakdown of gender, age, race, and ethnicity of students supported through all three funds, as well as location is shown in Table 1 and Figures 6-7 below. FGCU funds were primarily used to support students outside the FGCU region.

Table 1: All Funds Demographics

All funds	119 students
Gender	39% male, 61% female
Average Age	30
Average Amount	\$1146.00

Figure 6: All Funds by Race/Ethnicity

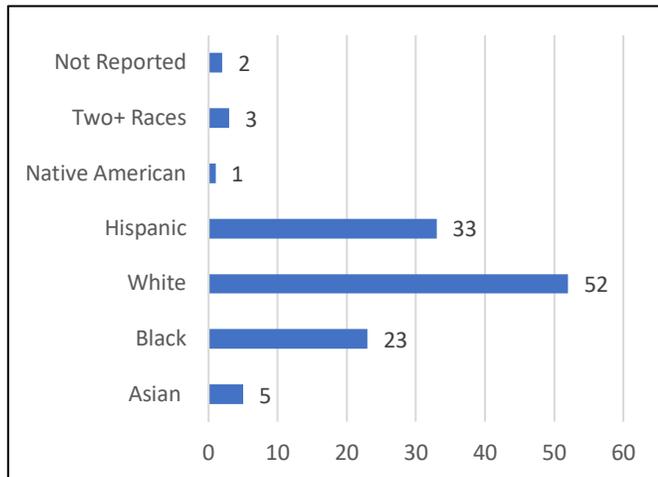
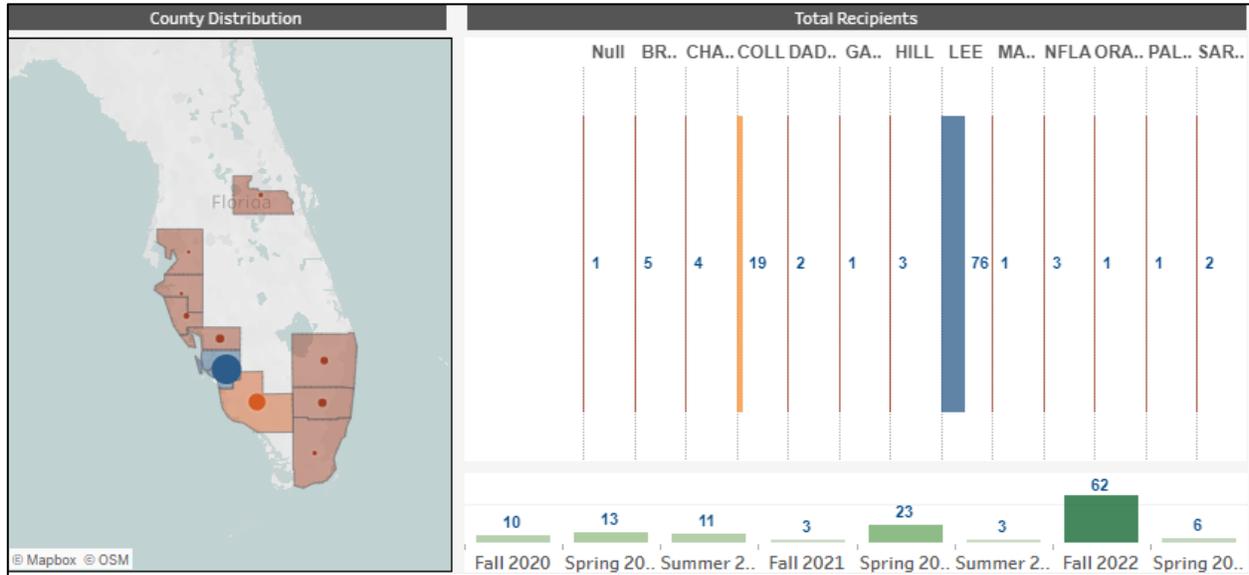


Figure 7: Debt Forgiveness of all funds by County



Trends Observed

FGCU created a survey for students who were supported through these funding sources, to proactively identify remaining and new barriers students anticipate upon return to the university. Not surprisingly, the majority of students stopped out because they did not feel financially prepared and have sufficient financial support to continue their education and 30% stated that in order to remain and graduate from FGCU receiving financial aid is critical. A copy of the survey is included as Appendix B.

Student Engagement in Pre-Collection Process

To begin the implementation of Phase 2 in July of 2022 FGCU expanded their focus on support for students so that if they must take a break from higher education, they do so without owing a balance in order to return. The first step was reviewing policies related to debt collection and fees for outstanding balances and late payments.

The pre-collection process includes various billing statements. The last step of the pre-collect process includes a letter from the University providing students 30 days to pay their account in full or make payment arrangements. An analysis of this process during the 2021 fiscal year showed that 702 students or 3% went through the pre-collect process and ultimately only 1.5% or 334 students were placed in collections. It is important to note that outstanding balances were due not only to tuition and fees but included other university fees such as housing fees, library and parking fines, etc.

FGCU will continue to enhance and implement preventative ways to ensure students remain enrolled or return successfully without accumulating financial liabilities. The following table supports FGCU’s efforts.

Table 2: Term Comparison for Number of Students placed in Collections

Collections Term	Number of students	Notes
Fall 21	219	81% decrease*
Fall 22	42	
Spring 21	446	56% decrease
Spring 22	194	

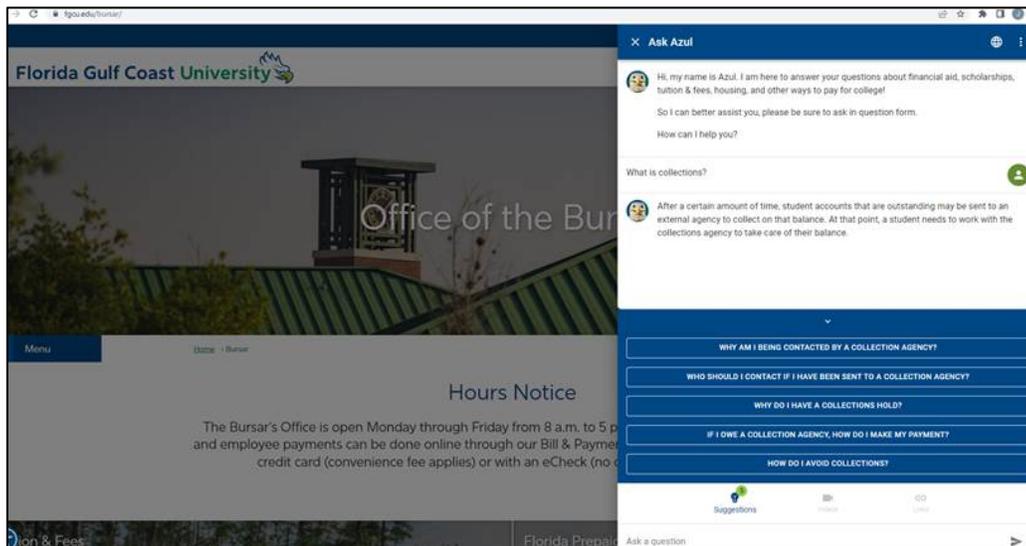
* As a way to help our students, FGCU did not place students in collections during Fall 2022.

Education & AI Experience

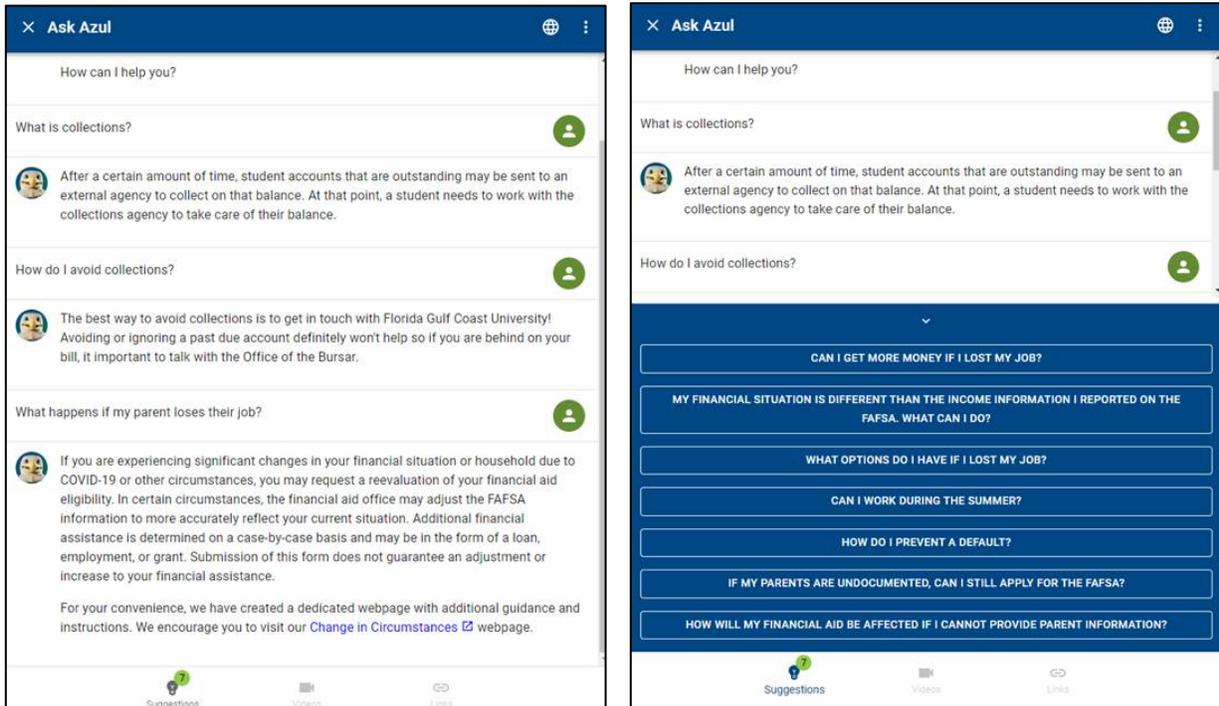
FGCU currently offers comprehensive Financial Literacy information via Chatbot and website materials. Many student inquiries occur after hours. This information is available to students 24/7 so they are able to ask questions on variety of topics where answers are provided via Q&A, videos, and links where applicable.

In fall 2022, we implemented the ChatBot rollout to include the Bursars/Cashiers office. As such, we provide 24/7 assistance and answers to our students via AI. The Bursar Chatbot includes specific information about tuition and fees, payments, billing, charges, collections, etc. Overall, the ChatBot has answered 2,241 Bursar/Cashiers related question to-date. Below are a few snapshots of how the ChatBot assists –

The example below shows the answer to a simple question such as *What is collections?* The Bot answers the question and it provides additional topics related to the question.



The following example is a continuation of the conversation with the Bot and you can see how the Bot will provide related and applicable answers.



Successful changes implemented through January 2023

- Expansion of student navigation team to provide a single point of contact:** The FGCU Navigators for the Complete Program have expanded their reach to include all non-traditional students. This supports the “fast lane,” approach for these students rather than follow the steps typical for a first-time at FGCU student.
- Collaboration with Non-traditional Student Team in Undergraduate Admissions:** The team is responsible for wrap-around services for Non-Traditional students including enrollment marketing and communications, pre-admissions counseling, specialized recruitment, application assistance, post admissions transition counseling, coordination of next steps, discussion of financial aid and scholarships, and ensuring these students are registered for classes. In order to serve adult students well, they should have the option to connect to support staff who are well-trained in helping non-traditional students access the services they need on campus seamlessly.
- Refined data access through dashboard and reports:** The Office of Planning and Institutional Performance enhanced analysis tools to include dashboards and reports that segregate data specific

to these funds. This provides cross-departmental staff the opportunity to see this information in live time and align programs that may immediately improve or remove financial barriers for students.

- **Growth of Credit for Prior Learning Experience:** FGCU developed a policy, approved in December 2020, to provide returning, experienced learners with an opportunity to pursue undergraduate academic credit for learning that has taken place outside of a traditional academic environment. This initiative provides faculty and students with an opportunity to review learning experiences and determine alignment with course and program level outcomes, to reduce repetition of learning and advance degree attainment. Four students have successfully earned credit through this process and 5 students are working towards earning credit for prior learning.

To date, FGCU has not assessed students any fees as the university launched this program. In future semesters, modest fees will need to be paid by the student to contribute to compensation for faculty who assess learning within this program. Currently students are ineligible to use Federal financial aid for this program. As this initiative continues to grow at FGCU we plan to seek ways to change current policy that will allow students to utilize financial aid for this program. This change in policy may allow more returning, experienced learners to pursue credit for prior learning. A small portion of the overall funds from the Elsa & Peter Soderberg Foundation and the Lee County IDA will support students during this time.

- **Renewed partnership with Career Source of Southwest Florida:** FGCU has revived its partnership with CareerSource Southwest Florida to offer eligible students the opportunity to receive the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) grant. This grant is suitable for students in their last year and half of degree completion that are Pell eligible, pursuing a major for an in-demand career. This partnership provides students an additional funding opportunity to reduce their financial burden and support degree attainment.

Accountability Measures 2022-2023

In May 2022, FGCU established the following measures for the coming year. As we implemented Phase II of this work, FGCU:

2022-2023 Measure	2022 Progress	Alignment to 2023 Workplan
Continues outreach to stop-out students with a balance owed to FGCU to bring back 2% of these students (estimated 40 students).	In the Fall 2022 term (the only term that has concluded since development of this measure), FGCU readmitted 77 stop-out students. 6 students graduated with a Bachelor Degree and 2 earned the Associate in Arts Degree.	Intentional focus on students who began or completed the readmission process, but have not reenrolled.
Reduce the number of students sent to collections by 10%.	Between Spring 2021 and Spring 2022, the number of students sent to collections was reduced by 56%.	Continue to reduce the number of students sent to collections by at least 10%. Compare data, year-to-year, to set intentional goals.
Empower appropriate departments to use funds to support the student prior to moving into collections or stopping-out with a balance owed.	FGCU Navigators have been empowered to identify students in need and request removal of debt/fees owed. This has significantly improved support for students, as they are not required to complete institutional application processes and engage with staff from multiple departments to resolve their balances owed.	Improve timely identification of students to remove balances owed prior to the end of the term/beginning of the subsequent term.

2023 Workplan

The 2023 Workplan replaces the 2022-2023 Accountability Measures included in the Phase II proposal, dated May 2022.

Strategy	Plans for Implementation	2023 Accountability Measure
<p>Continue to identify barriers to re-enrollment with a focus on students who began or completed the readmission process, but have not reenrolled.</p>	<p>Review data to identify the 35% of readmitted students who have not reenrolled.</p> <p>Navigator outreach to each student to proactively remove barriers to reenrollment.</p>	<p>By December 2023, enroll 10% of readmitted students who completed the process to return, but are not currently enrolled (approximately 20 students).</p> <p>By December 2023, enroll 5% of students who began the readmission process, but have not completed the process in order to return (approximately 30 students).</p>
<p>Establish baseline datasets for students sent to collections vs. not sent to collections.</p>	<p>Compare repayment of debt timeframe for students sent to collections vs. students not sent to collections (institution manages the collection rather than using an external agency).</p> <p>Compare year-to-year data of students sent to collections who return (with a focus on success of the collections agency to obtain repayment).</p> <p>Compare reenrollment status and timeframes of students sent to collections vs. owe a balance and are not sent to collections.</p>	<p>Datasets established and reviewed by June 2023.</p> <p>Goals set to reduce student collection percentage aligned with the data findings by July 2023.</p> <p>Provide progress on goals in December 2023 annual report.</p>

<p>Improve timely identification and award of students to remove balances owed prior to the end of the term/beginning of the subsequent term.</p>	<p>Refine process to identify students.</p> <p>Add appropriate fields to data dashboards to empower FGCU navigators to proactively identify students in need.</p>	<p>Identify additional prospective spring 2023 award recipients by April 1, 2023. Funds will apply to spring 2023 balances or previous balances (for students just returning). Award funds by June 1, 2023.</p> <p>Identify prospective summer 2023 award recipients by August 1, 2023. Funds will apply to summer 2023 balances or previous balances (for students just returning). Award funds by August 15, 2023.</p> <p>Identify prospective fall 2023 award recipients by December 1, 2023. Funds will apply to fall 2023 balances or previous balances (for students just returning). Award funds by December 15, 2023.</p>
<p>Implement financial supports for students in pursuit of credit for prior learning.</p>	<p>FGCU Navigators will identify students in need of financial support for portfolio development and/or challenges exams at FGCU or through other approved accelerated mechanisms.</p>	<p>Support 10 students with financial support to accelerate degree completion by December 31, 2023.</p>

Appendix A: Draft Non-Traditional Student Task Force White Paper

Florida Gulf Coast University Non-Traditional Student Task Force White Paper 1st DRAFT 1/21/23

Executive Summary

The awareness to understand more about the complex needs of non-traditional students became apparent through Florida Gulf Coast University's (FGCU) work with FutureMakers Coalition, a collective impact in Southwest Florida. This Coalition is a network of more than 300 partner organizations working to add 17,000 additional credentialed workers per year to Southwest Florida's workforce. FGCU's Non-Traditional Student Task Force was formed at the direction of President Mike Martin in July 2021 to help solve the region's labor shortage by identifying and removing multiple barriers faced by adult learners who join FGCU.

Background

According to FutureMakers' website, "more than 60% of the jobs in Florida will require a credential beyond a high school diploma by the year 2025." Currently only 41% of the region's workforce has a college or post-secondary degree. FutureMakers's goal is to bring that percentage to 55% by 2025. There are "tens of thousands first-generation students, underemployed adults, and people who never pursued or completed programs" in Southwest Florida according to FutureMakers. FGCU has tremendous potential to help reskill or upskill non-traditional students to help fill in-demand jobs in the region.

The Chronicle of Higher Education highlighted the need to address adult learners differently than graduating high schoolers in May 2022. These students have different needs, full lives, and require flexibility ([Donaldson, 2022](#)).¹ In addition to the adult learners with no previous college credits, there is a much larger number who have some college, but no credential. In a May 10, 2022 Annual Progress Report, The National Student Clearinghouse said that "the Some College, No Credential (SCNC) population had reached 39 million" nationwide.²

¹ Donaldson, S. (2022, April 4). Colleges are trying to re-enroll adult learners who dropped out. Here's how it's going. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. https://www.chronicle.com/article/colleges-are-trying-to-re-enroll-adult-learners-who-dropped-out-heres-how-its-going?utm_source=Iterable&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=campaign_4013163_nl_Academe-Today_date_20220405&cid=at&source=&sourceid&cid2=gen_login_refresh

² National Student Clearinghouse. (2022, May 10). Some college, no credential student outcomes annual progress report – academic year 2020/21. <https://nscresearchcenter.org/some-college-no-credential/>

In January 2020, FutureMakers Coalition Southwest Florida earned one of 26 prestigious Talent Hub designations from Lumina Foundation³ in partnership with The Kresge Foundation and received a \$125,000 award to support local efforts to increase educational attainment. The Talent Hub designation came with a challenge to increase the number of adults with a credential beyond a high school diploma throughout Southwest Florida. FutureMakers partnered with Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) and Florida Southwestern State College (FSW) to identify and target adults who had started a degree at one of the institutions, but never finished.

The partners, as well as the Non-Traditional Student Task Force, discovered many barriers non-traditional students face. This has created opportunities to revise policies and practices that are currently holding adult learners back from meeting education and career goals.

FGCU Task Force

FGCU’s President formed a diverse, cross-department Non-Traditional Student Task Force that met for a half-day planning retreat in July 2021 and had met biweekly thereafter. Together, the task force determined the work would focus on identifying barriers and changing systems to better serve today’s adult learners. Learner experiences in specific parts of the system were analyzed and a guiding question was established.

Task Force’s Guiding Question:

How can we work together to ensure the student experience and outcomes for learners who do not fit the so-called traditional mold meet workforce demands, foster economic development, promote life-long learning, and develop FGCU’s reputation as a trusted and supportive regional resource among Southwest Florida’s residents and employers?

Non-Traditional Student Task Force Members

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³ Lumina Foundation. [Talent Hubs: Cities that help educate residents for better work opportunities \(luminafoundation.org\)](https://luminafoundation.org)

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How Does FCGU Define a Non-Traditional Student?

FGCU expanded the Coalition's target of adult learners, ages 25-64, with Some College, No Credential (SCNC). FCGU includes brand new students who want to earn a degree who share some of the characteristics below:

- Work full-time while enrolled
- Attend college part-time
- Have any type of dependents, including children or elderly relatives
- Have established financial independence from parents
- Served time in the military
- Seek to attend courses outside of regular business hours

By FCGU's definition, a non-traditional student can also be 18-24 years old or older. This can include a female who had a baby while in high school and earned a GED or a 40-year old woman returning to the workforce after raising children. This can also include a student who started FCGU, but stopped for any reason including a low GPA. FCGU calls these students "stop-outs." Other names for these students include returning students or readmits.

Nearly 75% of U.S. college students can be considered non-traditional according to *Forbes* in its article "Reimagining The American College Student."⁴ For example, transfer students are often

⁴ Cloud, R. (2019, June 6). Reimagining the American college student. *Forbes*.
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/civiconation/2019/06/06/reimagining-the-american-college-student/>

non-traditional students. Approximately, 40% of FGCU graduates are transfer students based on 2021-22 FGCU Institutional Research data.

According to a report released by the National Student Clearinghouse in May 2022, the state of Florida has 1.6 Million adults with Some College No Credential (SCNC) out of the 39 million students with SCNC nationwide. 51.3% of Florida’s SCNC population are ages 35-64. 39.5% of these non-traditional students are under 35.⁵ FGCU is actively recruiting students from these adult populations.

Obstacles Faced by Non-Traditional Students

The Non-Traditional Student Task Force identified obstacles to success in attracting, retaining, and graduating adult learners. These include:

1. Time constraints due to the need to juggle multiple roles (employee, parent, caregiver, spouse, etc.)
2. Need for academic flexibility (course availability, course times, modes of delivery, etc.)
3. Policies and business practices designed for traditional age students (recruitment strategies, admissions standards, onboarding practices, transferability of academic credit, etc.)
4. Non-standardized, complicated rules surrounding transfer credit and credit for prior learning
5. Support services designed for traditional students with offices that operate 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. (university housing, enrollment services center, new student orientation, student programming/ affinity groups, etc.)
6. Need for affordable child care
7. Financial Burden (admissions scholarships for adults, debt forgiveness, etc.)

The Non-Traditional Student Task Force went to work tackling some of these barriers.

Highlights of Task Force’s Accomplishments:

- Flexible Course Offerings and Modes of Delivery
- Micro-credentials - Innovative Education and Partnerships
- Flexible Orientation Offerings

⁵ National Student Clearinghouse. (2022, May 10). Some college, no credential student outcomes annual progress report – academic year 2020/21. <https://nscresearchcenter.org/some-college-no-credential/>

- Created a Non-traditional Student Team in Undergraduate Admissions
- Development and Implementation of Non-Traditional Recruitment Efforts
- Expansion of “FGCU Complete”
- Return to the Nest Program (initially launched as a single initiative)
- Academic Amnesty Policy Revision
- Revised Undergraduate Admissions Regulation
- Transferability of Credit and Credit for Prior Learning
- Removing Financial Barriers

Flexible Course Offerings and Modes of Delivery

- Non-Traditional Students desire flexibility in the mode of delivery for courses. FGCU only offers a limited number of courses in 8-week sessions, 15-week semesters, and accelerated 7-week sessions.
- There are six entry term options to support non-traditional students to start learning when it is convenient for them without having to wait for the traditional fall, spring or summer semester.
- Classes are offered **in-person**, **on-line**, and in **hybrid** modes of delivery. Thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic, FGCU made many advances in providing online, remote and distance learning which benefit the adult learner.
- Lutgert College of Business is developing a new **completely on-line bachelor’s degree - Bachelor’s in Business Administration (BBA)** with concentrations.
- In support of adult learners, multiple academic departments added 8-week, online course options, particularly in the B terms (second half of the traditional academic terms).

Micro-credentials - Innovative Education and Partnerships

Within the Academic Affairs organizational structure, FGCU positioned programs and services designed for adult learners within the Innovative Education and Partnerships Unit. The programs supported in this area connect students to flexible learning options to include non-credit and credit-based opportunities.

FGCU’s Innovative Education model also provides adult learners with access to micro-credentials designed to align knowledge, skills and abilities with career-readiness skills and pathways to professional opportunities. FGCU recognizes that not all adult learners will follow a single pathway to align their previously acquired education and experience with future career

goals (Bragg, 2019).⁶ Students may simply access short-term, micro-credentials aligned with regional workforce opportunities or enroll in a degree-seeking program, and may pursue additional credentials designed to:

- 1) Help them showcase transferable skills acquired through their experiences at FGCU;
- 2) Pursue knowledge, skills, and abilities identified by regional employers that provide preference in the hiring process; and,
- 3) Upskill and reskill in key academic content areas important to the FGCU region.

Flexible Orientation Offerings

The Non-Traditional Student Task Force worked with the Senior Director of the First Year Experience to provide non-traditional students with on-boarding orientation options. This provides adult learners with the flexibility and service they need. Now, non-traditional students can select from the following orientation modes of delivery:

1. FGCU Complete Orientation
2. One Day in-person Orientation
3. One-Day virtual Orientation
4. Two-Day In-Person Orientation (one-night in Residence Hall)
5. Two-Day In-Person Orientation (commuter no overnight on-campus)

Created a Non-traditional Student Team in Undergraduate Admissions

In April 2022, Undergraduate Admissions repurposed two positions that had become vacant to create a new Non-Traditional Student Team. The team is responsible for ***wrap-around services*** for Non-Traditional students including enrollment marketing and communications, pre-admissions counseling, specialized recruitment, application assistance, post admissions transition counseling, coordination of next steps, discussion of financial aid and scholarships, and ensuring these students are registered for classes.

Wrap-around services are well-documented within higher education as a model for supporting adult learners. In order to serve adult students well, they should have the option to connect to support staff who are well-trained in helping non-traditional students access the services they need on campus seamlessly. Messaging, beginning with recruitment of learners back to higher education, must be critically reviewed and revised as part of wrap-

⁶ Bragg, D., Endel, B., Anderson, N., Soricone, I., Acevedo, E. (2019 July). What works for adult learners: Lessons from career pathway evaluations. Lumina Foundation. <https://www.luminafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/what-works-for-adult-learners.pdf>

around services. ([Selak, 2021](#)).⁷

Once non-traditional students are admitted through Undergraduate Admissions, they are handed off to support staff in FGCU Complete who are called FGCU Navigators. Navigators is a term FutureMakers also adopted.

Development and Implementation of Non-Traditional Recruitment Efforts

The new Non-Traditional Student Team in Undergraduate Admissions went to work developing new recruitment strategies to reach this adult audience.

Examples of Recruitment Venues established for Non-Traditional Students:

- Art Fairs/Festivals
- Community Gathering/Festivals
- Health and Wellness Fairs
- Recreation Centers
- Community Job Fairs
- Food Expos/Fairs
- Shopping Centers

Examples of Recruitment Strategies established for Veteran Recruitment:

- Show military veterans that FGCU appreciates their service including statements to express our appreciation in our Veteran admissions literature and new communications.
- Customize the admissions process for military veterans. Established the new Non-Traditional Admissions team with wrap-around personalized services and pre-application military credit review). Now get students connected to VA School Certifying Official at the appropriate and necessary time in the admissions process.
- Review military credit prior to application by the Non-Traditional Admissions team.
- Highlight class flexibility with night or evening classes, 8-week mini terms and work closely with FGCU Complete.
- Provide assistance with CLEP testing-providing students with guidance on how to register for these exams and where to find these resources. Most Veterans the department has worked with thus far have leaned towards taking courses rather

⁷ Sedlak, W. (2021, May 12). How to reach adult students? For starters, talk to them like adults. Lumina Foundation. <https://www.luminafoundation.org/news-and-views/insightful-study-shows-how-to-engage-and-enroll-adult-learners/>

than testing out as they did not feel prepared to pass a CLEP or other related exam.

- Established a Veterans' page on FGCU's website plus a Non-Traditional Admissions Webpage to guide students to the resources we offer.

In addition, Undergraduate Admissions will continue to offer services in Spanish since a large percentage of Southwest Florida's population are Latinx. Continue to advertise in Spanish, offer Admissions campus tours in Spanish and FAFSA completion in Spanish. They will leverage the efforts of the Community Engagement and Outreach to include reaching non-traditional students.

Currently, none of the student-facing offices on campus are open after 5 p.m. making it difficult for a non-traditional student who works full-time or needs to work around a daycare schedule to ask questions and solve issues after hours or on weekends. If a non-traditional student needs an ID card, has a billing or financial aid question, they need to email the appropriate offices and wait for a response.

Flexibility, in meeting dates, timing, and modes of communication (email, phone, chat, and in-person) is essential when recruiting Non-Traditional students.

Expansion of "FGCU Complete"

In the Spring of 2019, FGCU launched FGCU Complete. FGCU repackaged course offerings in select baccalaureate degree programs to promote degree completion. FGCU Complete, designed to streamline processes, remove barriers to enrollment, and accelerate degree completion has served over 300 FGCU students and graduated over 100 within two years. Currently, six bachelor degree programs offer courses in the 8-week format, with increased options to complete courses online and off-campus.

FGCU Complete originally served admitted adult transfer students. It will expand its services to non-traditional students. Students work with FGCU Navigators to connect with appropriate individuals and departments to streamline enrollment. Students are served through a "fast lane," rather than following the steps typical for a first-time at FGCU student.

FGCU Complete continuously researches best practices to serve adult students and has executed a number of strategies that align to [best practices](#).⁸ These include, but are not limited to, providing resources and expertise focused on adult learners, centralized information to

⁸ Person, A., Bruch, J., and Ashley Hong. (2021, July). How states and institutions can work together to serve adult learners: lessons from adult promise. Mathematica.org.
<https://www.luminafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/adult-promise-states-and-institutions-work-together.pdf>

improve efficiency, alignment and standardization with partnering institutions, reducing barriers to access, and encouraging innovation in support services and academic programming.

Return to the Nest

FGCU piloted reengagement of former FGCU students (“stop outs”) through a Return to the Nest initiative, beginning in 2020 (aligned with the FutureMakers Coalition and Southwest Florida Talent Hub designation from Lumina Foundation). In an effort to remove obstacles for these returning students, FGCU focused on streamlining the admissions process and removing financial barriers. Enrollment Management established a quick admit process in Records & Registration for students who left in good standing and had not attended another college or university. The second focus placed on removal of financial barriers aligned with national efforts ([Taylor, 2018](#)).⁹ FGCU Financial Aid Counselors support returning students with removal of debt and access to funding to aid in retention and success.

As of January 19, 2023, 156 Bachelor’s Degrees have been conferred through Return to the Nest. 98 of these students required enrollment of for at least one course in order to earn a degree. 38 of them graduated after returning for only on term.

Moving forward, it is recommended that FGCU seek to better serve adult students who have been readmitted beginning with an intake process to create a customized support system for each student. Although all students have access to traditional student and academic support resources across the campus, adult learners receive personal navigation. FGCU Complete Navigators represent former academic advisors, student success coaches, career counselors, orientation leaders, and retention specialists cross-trained to deliver these services without a need for students to seek support beyond their single-point-of-contact. Select navigators specialize in career counseling specific to students with significant employment experience who are now adding traditional academic credentials to their portfolio.

Academic Amnesty Policy Revision

The Return to the Nest initiative positioned FGCU to welcome back a large number of former students. Approximately 6,500 students who stopped-out from FGCU left with a GPA below 2.0. However, there was no pathway back for these students as FGCU remained in compliance with the Undergraduate Admissions Regulation 2.001 that required students to have a 2.0 or better GPA to be readmitted.

A thorough review of academic amnesty at FGCU, compared to the FGCU Undergraduate Admissions Regulation, identified inconsistencies in language. The existing academic amnesty

⁹ Taylor, T. (2018, September 18). College finances: Going back to school complicated for some adults. Lumina Foundation. <https://www.luminafoundation.org/news-and-views/college-finances-going-back-to-school-complicated-for-some-adults/>

criteria provided students, once readmitted, to pursue a full “fresh start” at FGCU. Students who stopped-out for more than five years could petition to remove all previous credit hours and grades earned at FGCU from the cumulative GPA. Based on the previous existing admissions regulation language, students were ineligible for readmission with below a GPA of 2.0.

A task force (Academic Progress Committee) further reviewed State University System academic processes, guidelines, and Board of Governors and Board of Trustees regulations. The task force shared recommended changes with the Academic Affairs Leadership Team, leaders within Student Success and Enrollment Management, the Council of Chairs, and the Undergraduate Curriculum Team of the Faculty Senate. Effective January 2022, FGCU implemented a revised process for students to include these key changes:

- 1) Adjusted the process to take place prior to readmission (which provides an opportunity for students to comply with the required 2.0 GPA);
- 2) Reduced the years away from FGCU to three (from five);
- 3) Provides two pathways for consideration
 - a) Full fresh start (complete removal of previous credit hours earned and grades received); or
 - b) Removal of select credit hours and grades earned at below a grade of C (2.0 average).

The formal language is updated within the official Academic Catalog effective for the 2022-2023 academic year. Records and Registration staff has implemented this process and supported work of the Academic Standards Committee. New forms, website content, and guidelines continue to be refined to support this change.

Revised Undergraduate Admissions Regulation

Related to the changes to the Academic Amnesty Policy, enrollment management leaders led a thorough review of the admissions regulation, policies, and business practices along with academic affairs leaders. Formal FGCU Regulations are first approved internally through a shared-governance process, then approved by the FGCU Board of Trustees, and ultimately approved by the Florida Board of Governors prior to implementation. This lengthy process ensures alignment to Florida Board of Governors’ Regulations and the State University System institutions throughout Florida.

FGCU’s Undergraduate Admissions Regulation describes, in great detail, requirements for First Time in College (FTIC) students; transfer students at the lower, middle, and upper levels; and transfer students from Florida College System institutions with and without an Associate in Arts transfer degree. Each of these populations must meet minimum criterion established within Florida Board of Governors’ Regulations.

Beyond these populations, additional requirements relating to non-degree seeking students and readmission of former students are outlined within the FGCU Undergraduate Admissions

Regulation. The Non-Traditional Student Task Force members thoroughly reviewed institutional-level decisions related to these populations, thoroughly reviewed practices in place throughout the State University System, and identified language and processes prohibitive to non-traditional admission, enrollment and graduation. Specific changes were made to the regulation and are summarized below:

1. Former students who stop-out for three or more consecutive semesters may apply for readmission, regardless of institutional GPA. Previously, students were ineligible for readmissions consideration if they left FGCU in poor academic standing (institutional GPA below a 2.0).
2. Non-degree seeking students may begin taking courses at FGCU even if the projected transfer GPA is unknown. Non-degree seeking students may also take up to 30 credit hours and have their academic credit hours earned at FGCU, and grades earned at FGCU, considered if/when they pursue degree-seeking admission.

These adjustments provide less-traditional students with the opportunity to demonstrate the ability to succeed in academic coursework at FGCU where previously, non-degree seeking students were required to meet all degree-seeking admission criteria to enroll in a single course. Additionally, this provides non-traditional transfer students with enrollment pathways if and when they need additional time to locate and request official academic records from previously attended high schools or institutions of higher learning. This is key for adult learners who may decide, late in a traditional admissions and enrollment process, to seek opportunities to begin. These business practices, along with the six entry term options, support adult learners who otherwise might be delayed at returning to complete a degree by several months otherwise.

Transferability of Credit and Credit for Prior Learning

The undergraduate admissions staff, enrollment management and academic affairs leaders reviewed business practices, revised academic policies and standardized transferability of credit, including granting credit for prior experience. Both national and state trends were considered.¹⁰

Credit for Prior Learning

FGCU developed a policy, approved in December 2020, to provide returning, experienced learners with an opportunity to pursue academic credit for learning that has taken place outside of a traditional, academic environment. This initiative provides faculty and students with an opportunity to review learning experiences and determine

¹⁰ Hittepole, C. (2015). Nontraditional students: supporting changing student populations: A guide for Chief Academic Officers & Chief Student Affairs Officers. University of Denver.

https://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/main/Hittepole_NASPA_Memo.pdf

alignment with course and program level outcomes, to reduce repetition of learning and advance degree attainment. Students may pursue credit, through additional accelerated mechanisms, to include departmental challenge exams, portfolio review, and through interviews and demonstration of knowledge, skills and abilities.

Initially, students have not incurred any costs associated with the review and award of credit through these newly adopted mechanisms. Minimal costs will go into effect in the 2022-2023 academic year to cover the cost to provide this review by FGCU faculty.

Initial interest from adult learners shows great potential and, moving forward, FGCU is developing materials to notify prospective and current students of these opportunities.

American Council on Education (ACE) Credit Recommendations

From its first programs for returning World War I Veterans, ACE has led the national movement to recognize and promote adult learner programs in higher education. “ACE was founded in 1918 with the primary goal of coordinating the resources of higher education to meet the nation’s immediate needs during World War I.” This included intensive training for officers and other key personnel, and ensuring that faculty research programs were deemed essential to exploring wartime inventions and innovations (ACE, [Higher Education Today](#), 2018).¹¹

Florida Statutes 1004.07 and Florida Board of Governors Regulation 6.013, Military Veterans and Active Duty, mandate the award of credit to military veteran and active duty students. These practices extend to all ACE recommended, college-level courses where previous practices at the university and throughout the state limited the award of ACE credit to those listed on the military Joint Services Transcript.

ACE publishes a National Guide designed to provide recommendations to colleges and universities as non-traditional learning is validated as equivalent to traditional course completion. In 2017, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) and ACE issued a [joint statement on the transfer and award of credit](#), encouraging all accredited colleges and universities to examine transfer credit practices and honor the recommendations of ACE. The endorsement of both CHEA, the national voice of accreditation, and AACRAO, the body who recommends national standards for transfer of credit, supports this practice without reservation. Further, ACE is the organization that has provided the credit recommendations for Advanced Placement (AP) and the College Level Examination Program (CLEP). These accelerated mechanisms have been

¹¹ Higher Education Today. (2018) ACE at 100: Serving those who serve through the GI Bill. <https://www.higheredtoday.org/2018/05/09/ace-100-serving-serve-gi-bill/>

recognized by the Articulation Coordinating Committee of the Florida Department of Education, and codified in [Florida Statute](#), since 2002.

FGCU enrollment management and academic affairs leaders proposed, in 2021-2022, the adoption of this nationally recognized transfer evaluation and award-of-credit practice for all students. This proposal was developed and vetted within the Academic Affairs Leadership Team and the Student Success and Enrollment Management Leadership Team. Additional presentations to the FGCU General Education Council and the Council of Chairs took place in early 2022. Language related to the acceptance of credit hours recommended through the ACE formal evaluation process is now included in FGCU Undergraduate Admissions Regulation 2.001.

FGCU navigators proactively advise adult learners to review academic resources for success on college-level examinations to pursue additional opportunities for accelerated degree completion. These same resources also serve as a reentry preparation for adult learners who have spent many years away from an academic environment and share concerns about writing and computational skill readiness.

Removing Financial Barriers

Through our work with the Talent Hub, FGCU secured \$145,000 from Elsa & Peter Soderberg Foundation and \$200,000 from Lee County Industrial Development Authority to provide financial assistance to returning adults. As of January 19, 2023, \$117,146 was distributed to Return to the Nest students.

In addition, FGCU partners with numerous employers who provide tuition benefits for eligible employees. In the fall of 2022, FGCU became an Amazon educational partner for SWFL employees.

FGCU navigators have also revitalized approaches to connect students to community-based financial support through referrals to Career Source of SW Florida and FutureMakers Coalition. More than 20 bachelor degree programs offered at FGCU appear on the list of funding-eligible programs and students have not been informed of these opportunities proactively. FGCU has tripled the number of students receiving funding in two semesters and continue to connect Return to the Nest and FGCU Complete students to these resources. FGCU Navigators also connect students with FutureMakers Coalition Navigators in need of wrap-around services and community support.

By not increasing tuition in 9 years while increasing scholarships and financial aid, FGCU is keeping the cost of a quality education down. Awareness that FGCU is one of the best values in U.S. higher education needs to be increased among non-traditional students.

Recommendations – More Work to be done!

1. Develop more flexible program offerings at the Bachelor's Degree level. Offer evening, weekend, and online courses. Offering more classes in an asynchronous online learning format would allow non-traditional students to view instructional materials each week at any time they choose from wherever they choose. Develop more bachelor degree programs completely online and expand hybrid options as these fully-online options are being developed.
2. Offer affordable, flexible "drop-in" childcare. Consider evening (after 4:30 pm) and Saturday childcare options. Seek grant funding.
3. Early Intervention/retention strategies supported by faculty & staff who understand this student audience and the complexities they must cope with.
4. Provide additional student support services in online, remote, evening, and weekend timeframes to meet the needs of adult learners when they have time to devote to their educational goals. The majority of these students are unable to access campus-based services, in-person, during a typical 8a-5p schedule.
5. Route all adult learners through FGCU Navigators to provide a single point-of-contact for entry, progression, retention and support.
6. Additional Strategies Proposed for Veteran Recruitment:
 - a. Establish contact with the Transition Assistance Program at MacDill Air Force Base (AFB)
 - i. Potentially Eglin AFB as well and Homestead Air Reserve Base
 - b. Create a recruitment social media strategy to reach out to veterans
 - i. Utilize free opportunities like LinkedIn
 - ii. Paid lead generation, advertising, and sponsorship
 - c. Could produce a Veteran recruitment video on our website and/or highlight military stories of current students
 - i. Highlight Financial aid related to Yellow Ribbon and other tuition benefit programs
 - d. Survey current student veterans
 - i. Find out what led them to FGCU
 - ii. Determine what FGCU is doing right in attracting veterans and where there is room for improvement
 - e. Develop a minor or certification program in veteran studies
 - i. Might be of interest to veterans and civilians alike
7. Raise Awareness of FGCU Apartment Style Student Housing
 - a. On-campus housing at FGCU is a convenient and affordable option for single, non-traditional students without dependents. The university offers apartment-style housing with either a year-round or a traditional academic year housing agreement. Our annual rates are up to \$3000 less than off-campus student

housing, and students are not charged additional fees for utilities, internet, cable, or trash removal. We recognize that students come to FGCU with a variety of financial circumstances, so housing fees are automatically billed to students' accounts in four equal installments each semester. This allows students the option to pay over the course of the term if needed.

- b. Enrollment in one credit hour is the only requirement to live on campus, whether the student is degree seeking or non-degree seeking. Whenever possible, our assignments housing team works to assign students of similar age groups together within an apartment.
- c. Consider offering housing to single parents.

Conclusion

FGCU's Non-Traditional Student Task Force has been instrumental in removing barriers for adult learners. The task force members continue to stay abreast of best practices to serve non-traditional students and will continue to implement strategies that will help FGCU be a major partner in solving this region's labor shortage.

Appendix B: Student Survey

Name

First Name

Last Name

FGCU UIN

optional

Degree Progression/Attainment

Have you graduated from FGCU? *

Yes

No

Take a moment to reflect on your previous college experiences. At some point in time, you decided to take a break. What main factors caused you to stop-out (select all that apply or provide your own written response)? *

- I did not feel financially prepared/did not have sufficient financial support
- I didn't have an interest in being in college
- I was not ready to be a responsible student
- I did not feel socially prepared
- I decided to focus on my career/job opportunity
- I decided to focus on my family/relationships
- I needed to focus upon my physical or mental health
- I relocated to another town/state
- I did not feel academically prepared
- I did not feel connected at FGCU
- I had a poor experience while enrolled at FGCU (please specify below in the "Other" response)
- Other:

Select all that apply

As you considered your return to FGCU, did/do any of these items represent barriers or challenges? *

- Financial support
- No strong interest in being in college
- Continued/new need to focus on my career/job opportunity
- Continued/new need to focus on my family/relationships
- Proximity to FGCU is a concern/need support from a distance
- I will need to enroll in online courses
- I do not feel academically prepared to return
- I did not feel socially prepared to return
- Other:

As you continue your education, what are your main reasons/benefits of your choice? *

- Professional development
- Current career advancement
- Change in career
- Pathway to a graduate program
- Earning potential
- Marketability
- Opportunity to be a role model for others
- Change in loan repayment status
- Improvement of current lifestyle

Select all that apply

What do you need from FGCU to remain and graduate? *

- I am all set and either enrolled or ready to enroll!
- I have already graduated! Congratulations from FGCU!
- Support with repayment of debt
- Financial Aid (grants or scholarships)
- Advising to help determine my pathway forward
- Increased academic support
- Courses available online
- Face-to-face courses in the evening
- Face-to-face courses located off-campus, in the FGCU area
- Technology resources
- Social/emotional support
- Career services/Job placement
- Nothing comes to mind
- Other:

Select all that apply

Employment

How would you describe your type of employment? *

- Self-employed
- Salaried with benefits
- Hourly with benefits
- Hourly without benefits
- Administrative/Managerial Position
- Support Personnel
- Service Professional
- Independent Contractor (consultant or temporary employee)
- Other:

Please select the choice below that aligns with your employment status *

- Work full-time (40 hours or more per week)
- Work part-time (20-39 hours per week)
- Work part-time (less than 20 hours per week)
- Not currently working

Thank You Message

Please take a moment to write a thank you message to the donors and share how this financial support has/will help you earn a degree from FGCU? *

FGCU Support and Experiences

Are there areas in which you think the University could better support your needs?

Is there a memorable moment related to your experiences at FGCU that you would like to share?



Transforming SWFL 2025 Grant Report
January 31, 2023

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Florida SouthWestern State College is proud to work with the FutureMakers Coalition, the Elsa and Peter Soderberg Charitable Foundation, and the Lee County Industrial Development Authority, to transform southwest Florida through higher education. This report was prepared for January 31, 2023, by FSW’s Office of Workforce Education to fulfill the reporting criteria outlined in the FutureMakers Coalition Grant agreement.

The report includes student comments to show the tremendous impact your support provides to the students who receive these funds and the SWFL community at large.

As a nursing student and an aspiring educator, I value the continuation of education along with doing the absolute best I possibly can with everything I do under any circumstance. I currently work at Lee Health as a nursing assistant and always am applying the valuable information received through my college education to the workplace.



Any opportunity given is an opportunity learned. I pride myself on my ability to maintain an optimistic work, school, and life outlook; as many professors and peers can attest to. Not only do I wish to continue applying education to my work, but to use it to benefit and help out my community here in SWFL. I am a hard worker and an empathetic caretaker. With the help of the Transforming SWFL scholarship, I can pass the opportunities given to me onto others. Growth is a chance to give, and in giving we can transform the lives of the people we meet.

Alanood, FSW Nursing Student

Transforming SWFL 2025 Overview

With the generous support of the Elsa & Peter Soderberg Charitable Foundation and Lee County's Industrial Development Authority, FSW has provided financial support to 38 students via the Transforming SWFL 2025 grant.

The Transforming SWFL 2025 grant has financially supported 10 students in the GED Pathway program and 28 students with Last Mile & Gap funding.

Below, please find a few key statistics about the students who have received the Transforming SWFL 2025 Grant funds.

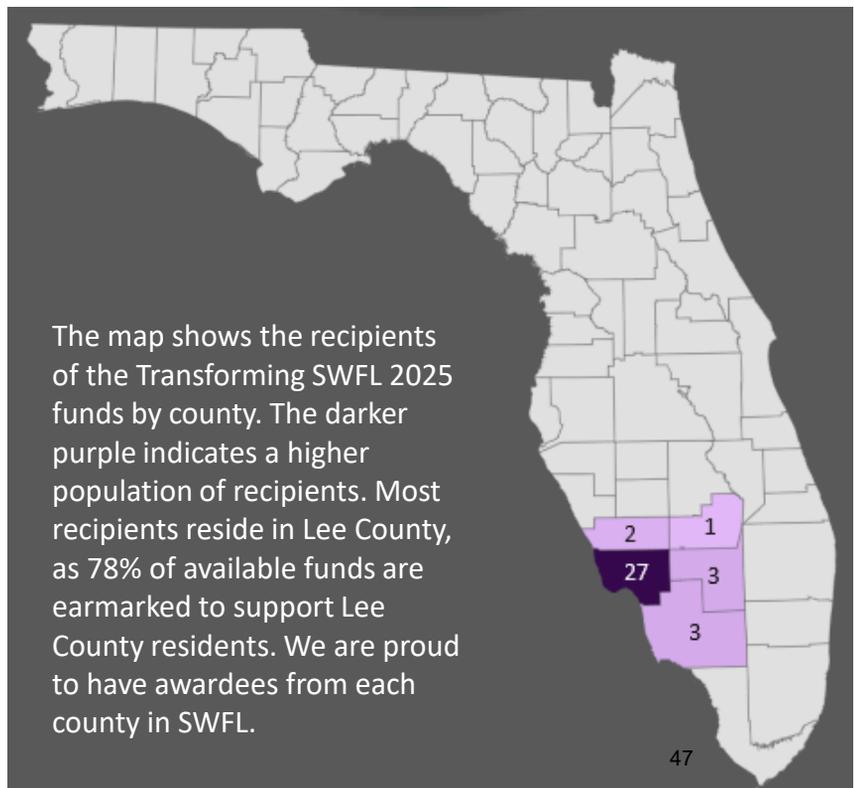
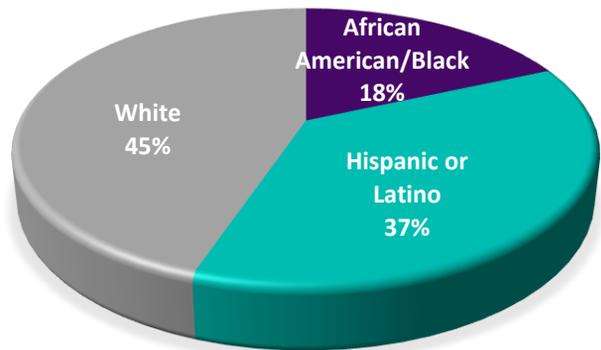
27 Average Age

52% Female

79% Employed

- The students who are employed work on average over 30 hours a week.

95% Reside in SWFL



Academic Programs of Study

The Transforming SWFL 2025 grant has funded 38 students in the following academic programs of study.



Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences
 Pure and Applied Sciences

Associate in Arts



Business and Technology

Accounting Management
 Business Administration and Management
 Computer Programming and Analysis
 Paralegal Studies
 Public Safety Administration



Education

Early Childhood Education



Health Professions

Emergency Medical Technician (EMT)
 Paramedic
 Nursing, ASN
 Nursing, BSN



Certificate



Associate Degree



Bachelor's Degree

Account Summary

The tables below summarize the utilization of funds for the Transforming SWFL 2025 Grant. The first table (aqua header) provides a summary of the entire project. The following tables provide an overview of each funding source.

The first scholarships awarded to students via this grant started in the fall semester (August) of 2022. To date, FSW has utilized 18% of the Elsa & Peter Soderberg Charitable Foundation Funds, 15% of the Lee County Industrial Development Authority funds, and 16% of the total available funds.

Transforming SWFL 2025 Account Summary	
Starting Balance	\$225,000.00
Scholarship Dollars Paid	\$17,300.00
Scholarship Dollars Authorized	\$18,000.00
Remaining Balance	\$189,700.00

Industrial Development Authority Lee County Contributed Funds	
Starting Balance	\$175,000.00
Scholarship Dollars Paid	\$15,300.00
Scholarship Dollars Authorized	\$11,200.00
Remaining Balance	\$148,500.00

The Elsa & Peter Soderberg Charitable Foundation Contributed Funds	
Starting Balance	\$ 50,000.00
Scholarship Dollars Paid	\$ 2,000.00
Scholarship Dollars Authorized	\$ 6,800.00
Remaining Balance	\$ 41,200.00

Funds noted as “Paid” were awarded during the fall semester of 2022, while funds labeled “Authorized” will be utilized during the spring semester of 2023. Due to the timing of this report, scholarship funds for the spring 2023 semester are still in the authorization process. Faculty must confirm students have attended classes and are participating in coursework (a process known as attendance verification) before authorized scholarship dollars are paid.

100%

of invested funds are being utilized as direct support to students.

GED Pathway Program



This financial gift has supported the development of FSW's GED Pathway Program. Within the last year, FSW has entered into partnership agreements with each public school system that offers GED courses in southwest Florida. These partnership agreements have allowed FSW to develop systems of sharing data to help GED graduates see FSW and higher education as a viable option and to enhance support to GED students as they transition to higher education at FSW.

Program Development

Below are a few program development successes.

4

Signed partnership agreements



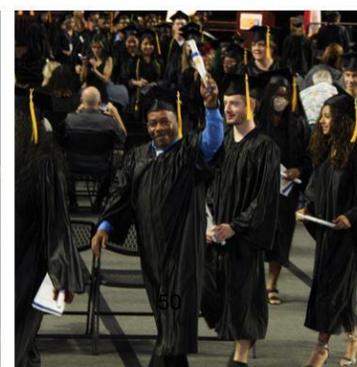
Program webpage with links to partner organizations



Congratulations letter to new graduates



Partnership events



GED Pathway Program



This is our initial year of the GED Pathway Program at FSW. We are proud of the partnerships and systems we have developed to support this population of students. FSW will continue to build and enhance this program. Our next steps include utilizing current GED Pathway students to help potential and new students via a mentorship/ambassador program. The ambassador will also serve as a guide and plan student success events for program participants.

At present, FSW has supported 14 GED Pathway students who successfully enrolled and have started their higher education journey. One-third of the pathway student plan to earn a certificate, and two-thirds intend to earn an associate degree at FSW. We are proud to celebrate that one pathway student has already completed their EMT certificate.

GED PATHWAY STUDENT PROFILE

32 Average age

33% Attend FSW as a full-time student



60% Are employed while attending school



I am a hard worker who can give all my dedication to something I truly want. I have had limited funding, which makes it hard to decide how many courses I can afford. I saw the opportunity to complete the EMT program as a way to start a career path that I will enjoy and could quickly reach a level of success that otherwise would've taken years and lots of funding. Finally, seeing a clear path that I am excited to start is inspiring and a great relief because I was lost not too long ago.

Josh, FSW EMT Student

Last Mile & Gap Funding



After the hurricane, my family has experienced financial hardship, and that is why I could not afford my classes this current semester.

Gabriela, FSW Student

Southwest Florida was hit hard by Hurricane Ian. Having this last mile and gap funding was critical to supporting many students in continuing their path in higher education. We know the residents of SWFL continue to recover from Hurricane Ian. This spring, we were able to offer students on the College's drop-for-non-payment list an opportunity to take advantage of the Transforming SWFL 2025 Last Mile and Gap funds. These funds supported 28 students to pay for classes and continue their academic journey. This funding helped these students remain enrolled at FSW and continue on their path toward earning a postsecondary credential.

86%

of students receiving the Last Mile & Gap funding are employed.

28 Students

saved from being dropped for non-payment.

Being enrolled in school full-time in such a demanding program while still balancing work as a clinical technician has made it difficult to work enough hours to help financially support my family. This scholarship will go a long way as any funds I don't have to pay out of pocket will allow my work hours to count towards our other bills, such as housing and food. All in all, my education will continue to be a top priority through these financially challenging times.

Jessica, FSW Nursing Student



A Look to the Future

Progress to Date

In FSW's continued efforts to support the residents and workforce needs of southwest Florida, we are proud to partner with you to support our community. With your financial support, we have developed and operationalized the GED Pathway Program; we will continue to grow and strengthen this program to ensure that GED graduates see a pathway to higher education. We have supported students through the Last Mile and Gap funding initiative; students supported through this program would have been dropped for non-payment. Instead, they received your financial support and could continue their educational pursuits at FSW. We have not yet operationalized the Family Affairs Initiative. Receiving this grant funding just prior to the start of the fall semester and then dealing with a category 4 hurricane delayed this initiative and the development marketing campaign to support Second Look students.

Future Plans

We know the landscape of higher education is changing, and many students want to learn skills that will help them get a high skill-high wage job. FSW offered 58 college credit workforce programs. FSW's workforce programs align with industry needs and jobs in southwest Florida. Our workforce programs have advisory boards comprised of professionals in industry to help ensure our programs and graduates are meeting the needs in our community. Many of our workforce programs lead to national or state licensures and industry certificates (i.e. Registered Nurse, American Registry of Radiologic Technologists, CompTIA A++, etc.).

Here in southwest Florida, we know there is a need for more healthcare professionals and teachers. We know that technology and cybersecurity are ever-expanding industries. In addition to continuing the work described in this report, we would like to utilize about a quarter of these funds to develop strategic pathways into several of FSW's workforce programs. To include a paraprofessional-to-classroom teacher initiative, leveraging demonstrated skills through the transcription of industry certifications to college credits in IT programs (Network Systems, Cybersecurity, etc.), and supporting health professional advance (Nursing, Radiologic Technology, etc.). We want to enhance recruitment efforts, and support for students in health, education, and technology workforce programs to meet the workforce needs in southwest Florida.

