



Belinda Keiser, guest columnist, Keiser University

Belinda Keiser: Career colleges and universities key to developing Florida's world class talent

BY Belinda Keiser

Thursday, June 17, 2010

Career colleges and universities continue to play an important role in the effort to create the framework for developing the world-class talent in Florida needed for the state to compete economically on a global basis.

Florida's Legislature faced innumerable challenges in 2010, almost all rooted in a poor economy and shortage of funding. In 2007, the Washington Economics Group estimated that an increase of \$8.1 billion in operating expenditures for the state's public colleges and universities would be needed through 2012, and that figure would be even higher without enrollment growth at Florida's private colleges and universities

A new report released by the Florida Council of 100 in partnership with the Florida Chamber of Commerce, "Closing the Talent Gap," calls for the state's educators and business leaders to work together to build "a seamless talent-development system," in Florida.

While leaders from the career college and university sector are participating in this effort, legislators and other decision makers should continue to build these crucial state resources into the talent-development framework, and to also support students' choices to attend them.

The vast majority of career colleges and universities are well-licensed and accredited: Keiser University, for example, is regionally accredited and meets the same standards as Florida's public universities. Students are prepared for careers in critical workforce shortage fields in Florida such as

biotechnology, nursing, allied health care, elementary education, criminal justice, information technology and culinary arts.

Private career colleges and universities are educating up to 25 percent of the state's postsecondary students. More than 265,000 students attended career colleges in Florida in 2007-2008, when those schools graduated more than 86,000 students. Included were 63 percent of the state's graduates in computer sciences and information technology, and 54 percent of the state's graduates in allied health and medical studies.

One cannot underestimate the priority of increasing baccalaureate degree production. Since 2003, Florida's legislators have wisely funded a key educational tool called the Access for Better Learning and Education grant, which provides financial assistance to an underserved student population, primarily comprising adult learners.

ABLE was enacted by the Florida Legislature to assist bachelor's degree-seeking college students, who are Florida residents, to attend one of 13 private, regionally accredited, postsecondary institutions in the state. Legislators this year voted to fund ABLE at about \$4 million for 2010-2011. It will provide \$945 per student, helping 4,289 projected students attend private schools for their bachelor's degrees instead of taxpayer supported public institutions.

The Florida Legislature would be well serving its constituents to continue their support of the ABLE grant and to provide other such opportunities to provide the best possible access to postsecondary education for all the state's residents. We must be inclusive and call on all of our educational resources to meet the state's global economic challenge in developing world-class talent.

Keiser is vice chancellor of community relations and student advancement at Keiser University, which has campuses in St. Lucie County. She also is chair of the Workforce Florida Inc., board of directors.

