

A Leader in Education



FILE PHOTO

South Florida State College employs many strategies to overcome underrepresentation of students such as the Minority Male Initiative.

SFSC on a path to improve diversity

By MARC VALERO

STAFF WRITER

Editor's note: For decades, local residents have referred to South Florida State College as "Harvard on the Highway." Today the Highlands News-Sun kicks off a series of articles that takes a deeper look at what makes this higher education institution one of the nation's best.

AVON PARK — In June, South Florida State College introduced its new marketing campaign "Your Path, Your Way" that focuses on meeting students where they are and navigating their path to success.

While this is SFSC's latest way to share its available opportunities for potential students, the college has had a long-time ongoing effort to connect with students from a variety of backgrounds.

The college utilizes strategies to overcome underrepresentation of students.

Many of these strategies are noted in the SFSC's annual Equity Update.

The equity report notes that female students comprise a larger percentage of the college's FTIC (first time in college) and overall student enrollments.

The Minority Male Initiative is an annual program that brings Black and Hispanic high school students to campus. This initiative began in 2016 with more than 100 students from all five high schools in the college's three-district service area (Highlands, DeSoto and Hardee counties).

SFSC

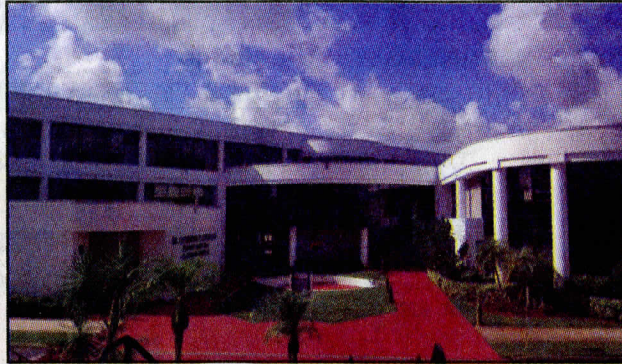
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The program provides high school students with the opportunities to hear and interact with current minority college students and recent alumni. In addition, guest lecturers provide informational and motivational speeches. During the pandemic, this event went virtual.

Each year, one minority student from each of the five high schools in the SFSC district who attends the event receives a first-year scholarship.

College recruiting efforts to reach minority students has increased with the addition of recruiters from the HSI-STEM grant.

The Education Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) STEM grant was awarded to improve access to and success in degrees and career fields in science, technology, engineering



MARC VALERO/STAFF

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and math for Latino students in the Heartland Region.

This program is increasing the number of Hispanic and low-income students, the SFSC equity report states.

“SFSC has been an HSI college for almost a decade and is the only rural HSI institution in the Florida College System,” said Dr. Christopher van der Kaay, executive director of institutional

effectiveness, planning and technology at SFSC. “HSI or Hispanic Serving Institution is a federal designation by the U.S. Department of Education encompassing accredited public or private higher education institutions with an undergraduate enrollment of 25% Hispanic students or more.”

Each year, SFSC sponsors a College-For-A-Day event to recruit students

by showcasing the wide variety of curricular and co-curricular programs available at the college. Students from all five high schools attend.

Minority students make up a sizeable percentage of the attendees, according to the equity report.

The Panther Youth Program provides youth with services that develop and strengthen employability skills.

SFSC’s Farmworker Career Development Program helps migrant and seasonal farmworkers and their dependents overcome educational and employment acquisition barriers. The program has continuously been recognized for exceeding performance measures set for by the U.S. Department of Labor.

In 2022, SFSC is strategizing a new format for minority enrollment initiatives.

This will include more

purposeful outreach by inviting current targeted college staff to directly interact at the high school level by visiting schools to help identify students who may be interested to learn more about college, but who may not have otherwise had the opportunity to be identified by the high school.

Students will be invited to the college for a series of workshops focusing on exploring career choices, researching post-secondary institutes, how to apply to college and more.

The overall SFSC student enrollment percentages for 2020-21 were:

- Black — 11%
- Hispanic — 38.6%
- Other minorities — 4.6%
- White — 45.7%
- Female — 64.9%
- Male — 35.1%

The enrollment figures for the 2021-22 academic year (i.e., the last full academic year) for the

Avon Park campus are:

- White — 41.5%
- Black — 9.5%
- Hispanic — 39.0%
- Asian — 3.5%
- Other — 2.5%
- American Indian — .2%
- Hawaiian — .2%
- Unknown race — 3.7%
- Male — 36.9%
- Female — 61.9%
- Unknown gender — 1.2%

SFSC maintains a comprehensive equity plan that documents the college’s continual efforts to increase diversity among students and employees.

The annual process used to prepare SFSC’s Annual Equity Update entails data collection, analysis and input from several key college faculty, staff and administrators.

The SFSC District Board of Trustees approved the 2021-22 Annual Equity Report on April 20.

SFSC awarded \$2,000 grant to boost undergraduate research

Special to the Highlands News-Sun

PROVIDED BY SFSC

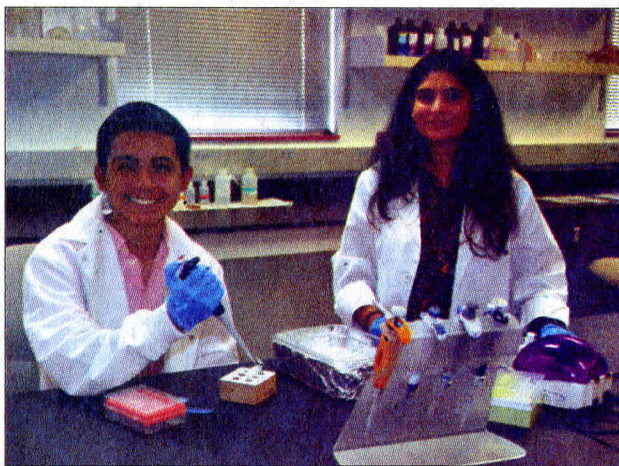
AVON PARK — South Florida State College (SFSC) was recently awarded a \$2,000 grant from the Florida Academy of Sciences (FAS) through its Grants-in-Aid of Undergraduate Research program.

Funds through the Grants-in-Aid of Undergraduate Research program are made available in support of undergraduate science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) students at colleges and universities in Florida that have been officially designated as Minority-Serving Institutions and Primarily Undergraduate Institutions. The funds are earmarked for student equipment, supplies, or

research travel during the 2022-23 academic year.

According to the FAS, the organization is the Florida affiliate of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. It sponsors the Florida Junior Academy of Science to encourage young scientists, publishes a quarterly journal, and sponsors an annual meeting to give members an opportunity to present papers, honor peers, and participate in multi-disciplinary scientific exchanges.

“At SFSC, the grant money is to be shared by four faculty conducting cell and molecular biology research with students,” said Dr. James Hawker, Jr., dean of arts and sciences at SFSC. “The four faculty are Dr. Mintoo Patel, Dr. Daniel Sanches, Amy Bohan, and



COURTESY PHOTO/SFSC

From left: South Florida State College student researcher Alejandro Torres with his mentor, Dr. Mintoo Patel, biology instructor.

myself. Though we have different projects, we use similar reagents and supplies in our work with students. So, the purpose will be to be to pay for reagents and supplies that our students use for cell

biology research in the coming year.

“I am a councilor-at-large for the Florida Academy of Sciences,” Hawker said. “The Academy set aside funds for minority-serving

institutions in Florida to promote undergraduate research in science at both universities and colleges, as those institutions often have little money to do science research with students. At SFSC, we don’t have much money for UGR in science, so we applied for this grant. In addition to SFSC, two other postsecondary institutions received this award. They are Bethune-Cookman University and Florida SouthWestern State College. “

By participating in undergraduate research at SFSC, students gain a deeper understanding of subject matter beyond regular courses, as they develop critical thinking and analytical skills. Undergraduate research prepares students for success in rigorous research after transferring

to universities or to the workforce.

SFSC offers undergraduate research opportunities for students in the natural sciences, humanities, and art. Research may be part of a regular class or honors class, or as a separate special topics course. Students develop and implement research ideas guided by a faculty mentor in their particular discipline. Many SFSC students gain further experience by presenting their research results and making professional connections at state and national conferences, as well as during monthly undergraduate research forums at SFSC.

For more information about undergraduate research at SFSC, contact Hawker at 863-784-7329 or hawkerj@southflorida.edu.



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Graduates from the South Florida State College radiography program include: (front row, from l): Jessica Eugenio-Hernandez, Susana Ramirez, Guadalupe Salgado, and Andre Nguyen; (back row, from l) Alex Paulino, Rebecca Nadaskay, Leroy Small III, Brittany Lockwood, and Ashlyn Smeal.

Radiologic Technologists Graduate from SFSC

Special To The Herald-Advocate

On Thursday, July 28, 2022, South Florida State College (SFSC) honored nine of its graduates in a traditional pinning ceremony on the College's Highlands Campus in Avon Park. The graduates have earned their Associate in Science (A.S.) in Radiography.

The graduates honored were: Jessica Eugenio-Hernandez, Brittany Lockwood, Rebecca Nadaskay, Andre Nguyen, Alex Paulino, Susana Ramirez, Guadalupe Salgado, Leroy Small III, and Ashlyn Smeal.

Graduates from Hardee County included: Ramirez, Nadaskay, and Paulino

The guest speaker was Maria Zapada, clinical in-

structor with HCA Highlands Hospital in Sebring, who addressed the students.

"I'm a graduate of the second Radiography class at SFSC. Being part of this program has been one of the most rewarding experiences for me," Zapada said. "As a clinical instructor, my duty is to teach and mentor students who have chosen Radiography as their career. Every student who has succeeded in their Radiography program worked hard and sacrificed a lot to be where they are today. I have seen the fear in their eyes when they performed their first x-ray unassisted. I have seen the pride in their eyes when they completed a textbook X-ray on a patient. From the very first clinical day as a new student

to the bittersweet last day of clinicals, you all have gone through an amazing journey together. Here's to a new beginning and to a new adventure."

Upon completing SFSC's two-year A.S. degree in Radiography, graduates can work as certified radiologic technologists by passing the American Registry of Radiologic Technologists (ARRT) national examination. Radiologic technologists work in hospitals and clinics performing diagnostic imaging examinations, such as X-rays.

For information about SFSC's Radiography program, contact Danielle Ochoa, Health Sciences advisor at 863-784-7027 or by email at healthsciences@southflorida.edu.

Heston appointed to Florida Center for Nursing Board of Directors

Special to the Highlands News-Sun Provided by South Florida State College

Aug 25, 2022

AVON PARK — Dr. Michele Heston, interim vice president for academic affairs and student services at South Florida State College (SFSC), was appointed by Gov. Ron DeSantis to the Florida Center for Nursing Board of Directors. She is one of 10 recent appointees from educational institutions that offer nursing programs and hospitals throughout Florida, including Tampa General Hospital and St. Petersburg College.

The Florida Center for Nursing is the definitive source of information, research, and strategies addressing nurse workforce needs in Florida. The center was established in 2001 by Florida statute to track nursing shortages and recommend possible solutions. By collecting, analyzing, and reporting on the nursing workforce, the center can help to ensure an adequate supply of providers for the health of Floridians. The center was closed in 2021 due to lack of funding; however, it was re-established recently to address the ongoing shortage of nurses as the result of burnout and stress from the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Dr. Heston’s experience as a seasoned leader in nursing education makes her an ideal choice for membership on the board,” said Dr. Thomas C. Leitzel, SFSC president. “SFSC’s first-time pass rates on the NCLEX rank among the state’s best, a tribute to Dr. Heston’s leadership together with the faculty in the Division of Health Sciences. Her commitment to the nursing profession and knowledge, both theoretical and practical, will be part of a relational framework she will bring to her service on this important board.”

“It is truly an honor to receive this appointment, as nursing has been my passion for more than 40 years,” Heston said. “I am grateful for the opportunity to help advance the supply of nurses and to provide a remedy for their critical shortage now and in the future.”

Heston was previously dean of Health Sciences at SFSC. She is a member of the American Nurses Association, the Florida Pathways Institute, and the Florida Council of Nursing Education Administrators. She earned her bachelor’s degree in nursing from the University of Florida, her master’s degree in nursing from Clarkson College, and her Ph.D. in educational leadership and higher education from Barry University.