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Letter to Editor

For-profit career colleges play key role in workforce

The June 16 Herald story "Students, lawmakers question value of for-profit colleges" begs for a balanced example of the tens of thousands of Florida career college graduates who are moving ahead in full-time occupations, whether in the booming health care and technology fields or the entertainment, media and arts industry.

Career colleges have an important role in education and continue to be appealing choices for many students. In Florida, more than 370,000 students attend 900 licensed schools because they offer flexible schedules and real-world applied learning.

In the health care field alone, more than 60 percent of the state's credentialed graduates in 2009 -- nurses, technicians, medical assistants -- came from career colleges.

Career college two-year degree programs successfully graduate 59 percent of their students compared to the 23 percent graduation rate at community college degree programs.

Higher education is costly, and when student debt is analyzed based on income level, default rates are substantially the same across all institutions -- whether public or private, nonprofit or for-profit.

The higher percentage of defaults at career colleges is due to the population of students served: working adults with minimal family support seeking to improve their lives. It may cost less to attend taxpayer-supported public schools, but career colleges do not receive taxpayer subsidies.

Students who choose to enroll in career colleges do so because they want to be trained and job-ready when they graduate.

Our career-focused programs play a vital role in Florida's postsecondary education system and are the chosen path to independence and advancement for hundreds of thousands of Floridians every day.

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<http://www.bradenton.com/2011/06/25/3300798/letters-625.html>