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Message from Complete Florida

Greetings!

Collaboration plays an important role in efforts to meet degree attainment goals and ultimately enhance workforce development across the state. Why re-invent the wheel if a proven strategy exists? Sharing successes and pooling resources helps all of us support adults who return to college. By learning from each other, we can refine and improve various aspects of our work. We recently had an opportunity for such collaboration during a webinar hosted by Complete College America. It's called "A Better Deal for Returning Adults," and Complete Florida joined directors from You Can Go Back in Indiana and Finish Line at the University of Memphis to discuss statewide and institutional approaches to increase degree attainment for returning students. You can listen to a recording of the webinar by clicking [here](#). To offer feedback or ideas, send an email to Michelle@completeflorida.org.

Dr. Michelle Horton
Complete Florida Director



Getting to Graduation: Finish Line

One key strategy to improving attainment rates is designing a specific road map to completion for students. At the University of Memphis, it's called Finish Line. Tracy Robinson runs the program in addition to performing her other duties as director of innovative academic initiatives.

Since the fall of 2013, 493 students have returned to school and graduated through Finish Line.

"We provide students with a complete map," Robinson said. "We look at their existing credit and use our degree audit system to generate information about several possible options. We say, if you choose to complete this major, here are the courses you need. This is when the courses are offered. This is how much the courses will cost, and this is how long it will take you."

Once the route is designed, students continue to work with an advisor to ensure they achieve their goal.

"At Finish Line, we like to call them concierge coaches," Robinson said. "There are three of them, and they are with the students every step of the way from reaching out to recruit them back all the way through to graduation."

To be eligible for the program, students must have earned 90 or more credit hours, have a stop-out period of at least one semester, have an overall University of Memphis grade point average of at least 2.0, and have a maximum of 30 credit hours remaining to finish a degree.

All Finish Line students must fill out the FAFSA and discuss any employee benefit programs they can use to offset tuition costs. About a third of Finish Line students receive scholarships. These recipients have usually exhausted all available federal grants and loans.

The average age of Finish Line students is 36, and Robinson said a typical graduation path consists of 11 credit hours, which requires about two semesters. There are 16 fully online undergraduate degree programs at the University of Memphis, and the majority of Finish Line students do online classes although some take hybrid courses, and others choose to attend on campus. The path to completion at University of Memphis often includes credit for prior learning and other options that reduce costs for students.

Robinson adds to Finish Line's success by forging relationships across campus that benefit returning adults. For example, she worked with administration and faculty to develop five fully online credit-by-exam classes. They are offered exclusively to Finish Line students through the continuing education office at a deeply discounted price, which is about a third of the regular tuition rate.

Finish Line students have earned degrees across a range of majors including philosophy, biology, earth sciences, child development, management and interdisciplinary studies.

The program is a work in progress and continuously evolving. Robinson said, "Each academic year, we look for ways to expand."

If your institution or organization is interested in developing a completion program for students with 90 or more credits, Complete Florida would like to help. Send an email to Dr. Michelle Horton.



Student Spotlight

Anthony, 32, recently started working on a bachelor's degree in supervision and management at Miami Dade College.

He enjoys the classes and says they complement his 10 years of professional experience at the managed health care company where he works near his home in Miami. He does regulatory analysis and compliance.

"I work full time while supporting a family ... without the assistance of Complete Florida scholarships, I would not be able to pay for my classes," Anthony said.

Anthony made the decision to return to school and complete his degree when he heard rumors of an acquisition at his workplace.

"I knew that whoever took over would be trimming the fat, and I didn't want to be the fat," he said.

Anthony said when he finished his associate degree in general studies, also at Miami Dade College, he knew he wanted to continue his education. His company's administration is extremely supportive of his goals.

Though he does not begin work until 8 a.m. each morning, he arrives at the office at 6:15 to do schoolwork.

"It is a quiet atmosphere, and I am able to be very productive," Anthony said. "Sure, I am sacrificing a couple of hours of free time to get things done, but that is only temporary for a few years. I have to keep the endgame in mind."

Due to his professional experience and stellar work ethic, Anthony's supervisors let him know that he could be considered for a promotion into a management position soon after he completed his associate degree.

He decided to go ahead and pursue a four-year degree and did a cost-benefit analysis of staying at Miami Dade for a bachelor's or transferring to a university.

"The difference on paper was a savings of about \$20,000 so I decided to stay," he said. "I am getting a solid education at Miami Dade," Anthony said. "I can apply theories I learn in class to different aspects of my job. Going to school has changed my way of thinking; I see things from different angles now. It's truly validating."

What We're Reading

- [Adult Students - Whatever You Call Them - Are Key to Our Talent Needs](#)
- [Statewide Skills Gap and Job Vacancy Survey by CareerSource Florida](#)



Who Are We?

Complete Florida is a high-tech, low-hassle, online program for busy adults to finish their college degree and land their dream job. We provide free concierge coaching services for students returning to college.

CompleteFlorida.org.

By the Numbers

14 Partner schools

130+ Degree programs available

6,100+ Students working with a Complete Florida Coach

\$630,000+

Amount awarded in scholarships from Complete Florida

758 Graduates



College is Good for Business

Companies that offer employees education benefits see an 87% increase in employee morale.

~The Conference Board

What Students are Saying

"It's nice to have a coach with a positive attitude who also knows the ins and outs of how everything works."

~Lawrence

"Working with Complete Florida makes me feel that I am not alone on the journey of accomplishing my educational goals."

~Courtney

"I have always wanted to return to school, but I was unsure about what to do. My coach, Bridget, makes navigating choices about education incredibly easy."

~Vera

"A Complete Florida scholarship greatly helps me in my endeavors as I strive to balance work, life, fatherhood, and education."

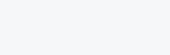
~Christian

"I can see now that going back to school and earning the credentials that employers are craving is my only option to become competitive in the job market."

~Armando

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