

EDITORIALS MAY 17, 2016 1:36 PM

Home-grown success as Manatee-Sarasota colleges graduate mostly local students

HIGHLIGHTS

Of the 3,000 spring graduates from four schools, 2,100 hail from this region

Colleges expanding collaboration to boost enrollment, serve employers

Spring commencement season marks several milestones



Southwest Florida’s diverse, collaborative and blossoming institutions of higher learning share a hitherto little known virtue: Most graduates hail from this region. This commencement season, State College of Florida, the University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee, New College of Florida and the Ringling

College of Art and Design – the big four – will confer diplomas on 3,000 students. Of those, 2,100 local residents will be awarded certificates of achievement.

Those four institutions -- which are pooling their resources under the banner of the Consortium of Colleges on the Creative Coast, C4 for short -- offer a multitude of educational opportunities to propel students on strong career paths. The Ringling/Florida State University and Eckerd College in St. Petersburg are also members of the consortium, sharing their assets with the other schools. The group is also exploring additional opportunities for cooperation with top college leaders meeting Tuesday morning to advance the C4 mission.

The 2-year-old C4 partnership already enjoys a seamless cross-enrollment process as well as joint projects. Additional opportunities on the table involve student housing, transportation and security but more exciting are possible shared research between faculty, shared activities for students, faculty and staff, and seeking grant and foundation funding for special projects.

As we opined last week in a salute to this flourishing synergy, the colleges are intent on serving local communities by graduating students poised to enter relevant and vital careers — aimed at bolstering the area economy. These college collaborations also serve as a business recruitment tool since relocating companies examine the quality and quantity of local college graduates. A strong talent pool is vital to economic development.

The dozens and dozens of academic programs at these institutions of higher learning cover an astonishingly wide range of endeavors, from computer animation and film production to museum and cultural heritage studies to marine science and international relations — confirming this is indeed the Creative Coast. Plus, many programs offer overseas studies, internships with local employers and various other opportunities.

The colleges also aspire to brand the region as a “college town,” which shouldn’t be difficult given the region’s glorious natural environment and the thriving cultural scene. “Each year, we read about our local college graduations and it’s always impressive, but when you put them together, you understand that yes, we are a college town,” Dr. Laurey Stryker, C4 initiative manager, remarked in a statement. The former president of USF Sarasota-Manatee is working with the college presidents, deans, faculty and registrars to take the initiatives from ideas to reality.

This commencement season marks a significant milestone at USFSM — the early graduation of six members of the school’s inaugural freshman class from 2013. “This achievement represents our commitment to keep local students in our community while they earn their degrees so they can join the workforce in this region,” said Dr. Sandra Stone, the university’s regional chancellor.

State College of Florida reveled in staging its largest graduation ceremony in school history. The spring commencement featured 602 Associate in Arts degree graduates, 205 Associate in Science recipients, 79 baccalaureate graduates and 40 certificate recipients, reflecting the college’s broad array of programs designed to serve the workforce needs of the community. That graduation day also saw 98 students from SCF’s acclaimed Collegiate School earning both their high school diplomas and Associates in Arts degree.

This community is well served by the visionary leaders of these dynamic institutions.

SPOTLIGHT ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Beginning June 5, the Herald will debut a monthly column written by the leaders of the C4 institutions. The columns will focus on individual schools, the collaborative projects among multiple schools and other higher education topics.



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