

OPINION

CAREER COLLEGES MEET DEMAND

The Miami Herald
February 28, 2008

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Floridians are demanding that their tax burden be reduced and that government spend less money. Tax cuts, combined with a downturn in the economy, mean we have less money to spend. As a result, Florida's state colleges and universities are facing budget cuts, enrollment caps and higher tuition. Will these cuts result in fewer degreed, skilled employees entering Florida's workforce? The simple answer is No.

Florida has more than 750 licensed private career colleges and schools that provide practical education and workforce preparation for the 235,000 students attending our schools. They study fields demanded by Florida businesses such as nursing, teaching, medical assisting, radiation technology, criminal justice, information technology and business.

Our students earn degrees, enter the workforce and start contributing to Florida's economy much faster than their government-educated contemporaries. In 2005-2006, more than 80,000 students received certificates, two- and four-year degrees, masters' degrees and Ph.D.s from our schools.

These taxpaying colleges and schools do not burden taxpayers. In 2005-2006, only 3 percent (\$13,888,429) of all state financial aid followed our students; that same year we paid more than \$131 million in local, state and federal taxes and offered \$1.5 million of our own funds in scholarships to high-school seniors. We, not taxpayers, pay for our own buildings.

Our continued growth indicates there is strong demand for career-focused education, especially from working parents, minorities and first-generation college students. Our students look to us for the skills they need to succeed in Florida's workforce, and because of our low student-to-faculty ratio, they get those skills.

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