

Career Series Articles

Start with the basics

By Michael Corby
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There was good news from the Florida Department of Education in early December: Duval County improved its high-school graduation rate for the 2006-2007 school year.

"The good news about the increased graduation rate is encouraging, and hopefully the beginning of a trend," said Edythe Abdullah, president of Florida Community College's Downtown Campus. "But students who dropped out in earlier years need to hear this message: It's not too late for them!"

Adult Education courses which lead to a high-school or GED diploma are available at FCCJ, at no cost to the students. Anyone in Duval County without a high-school diploma or GED equivalent, for whatever reason and for however long, has some choices to make. The unemployment rate for high-school dropouts is 30 percent higher than that of graduates, according to a recent study by the Education Trust. The security of a job with a living wage and a steady income, health care benefits and chances for career advancement will most likely be out of reach. Unless, that is, you plan to move ahead, as Professor Hope Clayton's FCCJ students are doing.

"Doors open," said Jonathan Presley, when asked about his motivation for enrolling in FCCJ's Adult Education program. Presley left A. Philip Randolph Academies of Technology in 2005 with a certificate of completion, but no diploma because of a shortfall in his GPA. Talented in IT, he had already gained Microsoft and other certifications in eight different areas, including Oracle database management system and QBasic. Although he found employment, he was passed up for a much better job opportunity because he lacks his diploma. When he finishes the courses he needs to bring up his GPA and get his diploma, he's continuing on to get an associate degree to make himself still more marketable.

Doug Stark, 29, dropped out soon after arriving in Jacksonville from Chicago in the early 1990s. Unchallenged by schoolwork, he became bored and dropped out to work as a carpenter - with virtually no high-school credits. After a variety of life experiences and years of false starts, he decided last September to commit. He scored high on his Test of Adult Basic Education (a required placement exam) and as a result is taking classes that gain him both high-school and college credit, through a program known as Dual Enrollment. His counselors suggested it would take him two years to complete his high school requirements, but he's targeting September 2008 as his completion date.

"I have students who work all night and still come in for classes during the day," Clayton said. "Self-paced learning, small classes, personal attention, variety of location and schedules help to reassure students that even if they had difficulty in school, they will find an individualized program geared to their abilities."

Clayton is one of more than 12 full-time Adult Education professors and numerous part-time teachers. They include Professor Roberta Thomas, herself a dropout at age 15 who eventually got her GED, bachelor's and master's degrees. She has dedicated her professional career to Adult Education at FCCJ.

Those who complete their diploma requirements or pass their GED exams find increased chances and choices for employment and earnings. Many gain the knowledge and confidence to enroll in college courses. At that point their successes benefit not only themselves, but add to the economic value of the community by increasing the pool of qualified workers. That allows existing businesses to grow and attracts new employers into the area. That's good for you and your community. For more information call 904.646.2300 or visit the [Florida Community College at Jacksonville](#) Web site.

Some people who left school and later returned to get their diploma or equivalency:

- Orlando Bloom, actor
- Grover Cleveland, US president
- Bill Cosby, actor, producer, comedian
- Walt Disney, film, TV producer, visionary
- Albert Einstein, physicist, Nobel Prize winner
- Mohandas Mahatma Gandhi, Indian political and spiritual leader

- Zora Neale Hurston, author
- Peter Jennings, TV journalist, author
- Angelina Jolie, actress, goodwill ambassador
- Ruth Ann Minner, governor of Delaware since 2001
- Valentina Tereshkova, Russian cosmonaut, first woman in space
- Roberta Thomas, FCCJ professor, adult education
- Damon Wayans, actor, writer, producer, comedian

*Tuition and fees are subject to change by action of the College's District Board of Trustees. Current tuition and fees will be posted at the time of registration.

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