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# Many choices face those seeking college training

## Do your homework before registering

By Scott Travis
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With a high unemployment rate and a tough job market, thousands of displaced workers are going back to school.

In South Florida, there are an overwhelming number of options, from public and private universities to community colleges and private career colleges.

The Broward County Public School System also offers three technical centers that offer job training for adults, including displaced workers: Atlantic Technical School in Coconut Creek, McFatter Technical School in Davie and Sheridan Technical School in Hollywood.

Each has advantages and drawbacks and experts warn students to do careful research before taking out thousands in loans, only to wind up with a useless degree.

"In today's market, it's more important than ever to have a profession from your degree, not just a degree," said Revi Goldwasser, author of the book, CD and workbook series, *Secrets from a Wall Street Recruiter*. "So think of this when deciding what you want to do, what to major in, and which school to pursue."

If you need vocational training, consider a job training agency, such as Work Force One in Broward County or Workforce Alliance in Palm Beach County.

"They're pushing out a lot of stimulus money, and they're identifying occupations in the community where there are actual jobs," said Kathy Mizereck, executive director of the Florida Association of Postsecondary Schools and Colleges, which represents for-profit schools in the state.

Counselors at training agencies will assess a worker's skills and see what jobs are available. Displaced full-time workers who lack marketable skills will get referrals for free vocational training at their choice of community colleges and approved for-profit career colleges.

This workforce money is geared toward specific training and certificates in high-demand areas, not for students seeking a general associate's degree or those hoping to transfer to a four-year university.

"Air conditioning, electricity, plumbing, waste management, education, nursing skills are all going to be needed one way or another regardless of whether the market goes upside down," said Jane Hardell, a work force training

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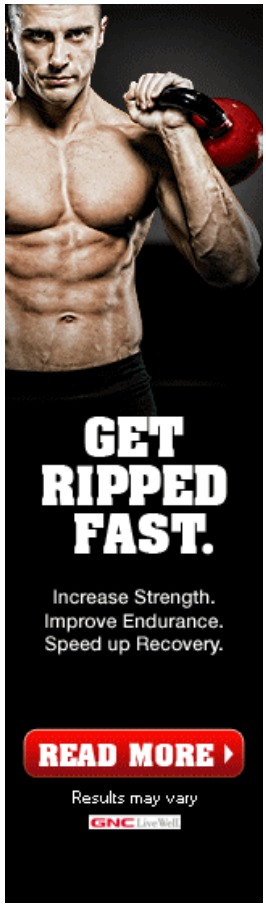

FORCE FACTOR

coordinator at Palm Beach Community College.

For those who have to cover their own costs, community colleges are the least expensive option. In Florida, students who take 15 hours a semester pay about $2,400 per year. State universities cost about $4,000 a year. Career colleges charge about $7,000 to $15,000 a year, while private non-profit universities charge $10,000 to $40,000 a year.

Andrew Harkness, 25, of Sunny Isles Beach, was recently laid off as a branch manager for a bank. He learned there would be a need for air traffic controllers in the coming years, so he's studying to become one at Broward College.

"There's a lot of job growth, the pay is high, and it interests me," he said.

But community colleges are getting crowded. Miami Dade College, for example, predicts 5,000 students will be shut out, while about 30,000 of its 86,0000 students might not get into at least one class they need. Broward College and Palm Beach Community College acknowledge that students who wait until the last minute may finding course offerings slim.

This has created a market for private universities, such as the non-profit Nova Southeastern University in Davie and the for-profit University of Phoenix and American IntercContinental University, as well as dozens of career and technical schools, such as Florida Career College, MedVance Institute and Florida Culinary Institute.

Advocates say these schools do a good job of getting students quickly educated and into the job market. "Their whole structure is built around the needs of people, who may need to go to school at night or on weekends. There are schools that run seven days a week, late into the evening and combine online and classroom," Mizereck said.

But some of the for-profits have suffered image problems and experts encourage students to thoroughly research them. Students should find out who accredits the schools and whether the accrediting association is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.

Students seeking to transfer later to other schools should be especially careful. Many state and private non-profit universities will only accept transfer credits from regionally accredited schools. Most career colleges are accredited by national associations.

"Regional accreditation is usually more stringent," said Barbara Pletcher, admissions director at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton.

If your concern is getting a job, not transferring to another school, look at the job placement rates and talk to employers, said David Hawkins, director of public policy for the National Association for College Admission Counseling.

"If you're interested in being a nurse, call a local hospital and find out where they get most of their employees," he said. "I think employers are generally willing to tell you whether they think a degree from a certain institution will help you get a job."

Sabrina Williams, 41, of Lauderhill, is pursuing a bachelor's of management degree from the University of Phoenix, a for-profit, regionally accredited school that offers degrees from associates to doctorate.

She was laid off from her job at a credit card company and now has a lower-paid position. She said the university offers a flexible schedule that allows her easily to work, go to school and raise her teenage son.

"I want a great job in a great corporation, and by pursing my degree, I'm going to be more marketable," she said. "I think the sky's the limit."

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What I think is sad is that adult students seeking marketable skills are being turned away from public vocational schools due to budget problems. These students require refresh classes in basic skills (GED, ABE and VPI) in order to receive their certificates for programs such as cosmetology, business, computers, automotives, nursing, and more. Our technical schools have reduced face-to-face time to a minimal of an 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. schedule. Working adults, including parents are being turned away. These students are forced to go to private schools spending 3 to 10 times more at than the public school system. That is for those who are determined to get ahead. No wonder folks abandon obligations of student loans. It's unrealistic like the housing market use to be.Broward schools should meet the needs of all within our community who seek an education. If not through Broward Schools then accredited community colleges should step forward and service these folks. If we want folks gainfully employed and independent, we should not stifle their potential. Private schools are wonderful for those who can truly afford it. We should all live within our means.For those of you trying to better yourselves, don't give up. We know you don't want a free hand out. Somehow, someway, our youth and those transitioning to other careers will find a way to achieve success.
*travelvan (07/26/2009, 12:33 AM )*

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