



FLORIDA SOUTHWESTERN STATE COLLEGE

WORKFORCE EDUCATION

AY 25-26, Spring Term Issue 1



FSW begins 2026 with strong enrollment growth—an 8% spring increase with double-digit gains at the Charlotte Campus and in the School of Nursing—reflecting the community's trust in our mission. Through collaborative industry partnerships, hands-on learning experiences, and curriculum aligned to workforce needs, FSW continues empowering students to meet the demands of Southwest Florida's evolving economy.

Discover how FSW is preparing Southwest Florida's workforce through the following programs and partnerships:

- Experienced Healthcare Leader Takes Helm of FSW's School of Allied Health
- FSW Firefighter Program Named State Training Provider of the Year
- FSW Engages Industry Leaders to Strengthen Career Connection Pathways
- From Woolly Mammoth Teeth to Digital Museums: FSW Students Catalog and Showcase Geological Treasures
- FSW Students Gain Real-World Experience Through Meaningful Internships
- Building Futures: 1,200 Charlotte County Students Explore FSW Opportunities at District Career Exploration Event
- LaBelle Middle Schoolers Explore Career Possibilities with FSW Workforce Education
- Regional Education Leaders Discuss Collaboration and Innovation at Chamber Luncheon
- Workforce Education Excellence: FSW Team Members Earn State Leadership Role and National Credentials



Experienced Healthcare Leader Takes Helm of FSW's School of Allied Health



**Dr. Mary Catherine Faust
Dean, School of Allied Health**

Dr. Mary Catherine Faust, Dean for the School of Allied Health, brings over 25 years of experience in higher education and healthcare leadership to the role with extensive expertise in program development, accreditation, with a focus on student-centered educational practices.

Her experience spans both academic leadership and clinical practice, having specialized in hospital-based cardiac rehabilitation programs whilst serving as Vice President of Clinical Operations for Heart Alert, a telemedicine company.

Dr. Faust's academic credentials include degrees in Education from Eastern Kentucky University and a Ph.D. in Exercise Physiology from Texas Woman's University. She has been actively involved with the HOSA organization at both state and national levels and has contributed to healthcare innovation, including research that led to FDA submission for personal cardiac monitoring devices.

"Across Allied Health, excellence remains consistent. Nearly all programs maintain a 95 percent or higher pass rate on licensure and certification exams," Dr. Faust notes, highlighting the school's strong track record of student success.

With an eye to the future, Dr. Faust is focused on two key priorities: maintaining an unwavering commitment to student success and expanding community partnerships. "From curriculum updates and new facilities to community outreach and scholarship opportunities, every initiative is designed with student success at its core," she explains. "Strengthening partnerships across the region will ensure students have access to high-quality clinical experiences, employment opportunities, and support systems that directly impact the local labor force. The School of Allied Health remains committed to excellence, access, and service, preparing students to meet workforce needs while making a meaningful difference in the lives of those they serve."

As she begins this new chapter at FSW, the School of Allied Health is positioned to continue developing successful healthcare practitioners who will serve the Southwest Florida community and beyond.



"Dr. Faust's combination of clinical expertise and academic leadership makes her an exceptional addition to FSW. Her proven track record in launching successful academic programs and building strong community partnerships aligns perfectly with our mission to expand educational access and prepare the next generation of healthcare professionals for Southwest Florida."

Dr. Judith Bilsky, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs



FSW Firefighter Program Named State Training Provider of the Year

Florida SouthWestern State College's North Collier Fire Training Center's Firefighter Program has been recognized as the 2025 Florida Fire Service Training and Education Provider of the Year! This prestigious honor marks the third time the program has received this recognition, following behind awards granted in 2015 and 2018. In 2025 alone, the program graduated 71 firefighter students ready to serve and protect their communities across Southwest Florida.

"Earning this recognition for the third time reflects our unwavering commitment to training firefighters who are ready to protect and serve Southwest Florida communities," said Cassie Billian, Director, Emergency Services. "Our 71 graduates this year represent the caliber of professionals our region needs, and this award validates the hard work of our entire team in preparing them for this critical calling."

Deputy Chief Michael Jimenez, North Collier Fire Control and Rescue District/FSW Fire Academy Supervisor, is pictured accepting the award. Deputy Chief Jimenez has been coordinating and managing the academy through its successes for over 16 years, providing the leadership that has made this program a state leader in firefighter training.

Congratulations to the dedicated instructors, staff, and students whose commitment to excellence continues to set the standard for firefighter training in Florida.





FSW Engages Industry Leaders to Strengthen Career Connection Pathways

The Division of Workforce Education launched 2026 by convening four Career Connection Advisory Board meetings across its five-county service region, bringing together 25 leading employers from Lee, Collier, Charlotte, and Hendry/Glades counties. These strategic sessions provided invaluable insights into regional workforce needs, emerging industry trends, and opportunities to strengthen alignment between FSW programming and employer expectations.

FSW extends its gratitude to all participating business and industry partners whose expertise and collaboration are instrumental in creating exceptional opportunities that prepare students for meaningful careers while strengthening the regional economy:

Allegiant, Arthrex, Big Cypress Preserve, Charlotte County Airport Authority, Charlotte County Economic Development, Charlotte County Government, Charlotte County Public Schools, Charlotte County Utilities Department, City of Cape Coral, City of LaBelle, Collier County Public Schools, Hendry County Economic Development, Hendry County Government, Hendry County Sheriff's Office, HERTZ Corporation, Lee County Economic Development, Lee County Government, Lee County Port Authority, Lee County School District, Lee Health, Moorings Park, NEO Genomics, and Suncoast Credit Union.



From Woolly Mammoth Teeth to Digital Museums: FSW Students Catalog and Showcase Geological Treasures



FSW students are actively engaged in a geology program unlike any other in the nation. According to Dr. Michael Sauer, Professor of Natural Science in the School of Pure and Applied Sciences, “There isn’t really anyone in Florida or the U.S. that has taken this approach to geology education.”



The innovative program provides students with unprecedented hands-on experience through FSW's extensive collection of approximately 7,000 to 8,000 rocks, minerals, fossils, and shells including a woolly mammoth tooth. Designed to encourage students to take ownership of their education, the program invites Honors Scholars students to examine the collection, assist in classifying specimens, to then select items to study in depth.



After choosing a specimen, students conduct extensive research and then contribute to a digital database that makes the collection accessible worldwide. The process includes photographing specimens from multiple angles and uploading 3D images to Sketchfab.com, creating a virtual museum experience that extends far beyond the physical campus.



Student creativity shines in the exhibit design phase, where learners develop displays featuring their specimens with informative and imaginative posters. Projects often draw inspiration from popular culture—one exhibit explored the geology of Minecraft's stone-based world, while another student with artistic interests ground minerals into pigments to recreate paint similar to that used in Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*.

“This approach transforms students from passive learners into active contributors to scientific knowledge,” Dr. Sauer notes. “They’re not just studying geology—they’re curating, researching, and sharing discoveries with a global audience.”

These student-led exhibits are on display on FSW' Lee Campus on the second floor of Leonhardt Hall, Building H, showcasing the intersection of science, creativity, and hands-on learning that defines FSW's approach to education.

FSW Students Gain Real-World Experience Through Meaningful Internships

FSW students are transforming their academic knowledge into practical experience through internships that connect classroom learning to career success. Today we feature three students who are gaining invaluable hands-on experience in their fields of interest, demonstrating how internships provide essential preparation for future careers.



Clayton Moffitt, a cybersecurity operations student, interned with Lee County Government in their IT – Innovation and Technology department. His internship provides practical experience in cybersecurity protocols, network management, and public sector technology solutions, preparing him for a career protecting critical digital infrastructure. Clayton has stayed on and continued working with Lee County –IT even after the completion of his internship experience. He got to learn from the best and is pictured to the left with Chief Information Officer, Ashley Mason.



Adriana Farrugia, who is pursuing her Associate in Arts degree with aspirations in architecture, is interning at Walt Disney World on the Rise of the Resistance attraction within Hollywood Studios. The experience provides her with insights into design, guest experience, and operational excellence in one of the world's most innovative entertainment environments.



Jocelyn Rodriguez, a digital arts student, is gaining professional experience through an internship with FSW's Division of Workforce Education, where she's applying her creative skills to create visual content for marketing materials, design graphics for program promotion, and develop digital assets. The experience provides her with practical skills in professional design workflows, client collaboration, and project management while building her professional portfolio.



Building Futures: 1,200 Charlotte County Students Explore FSW Opportunities at District Career Exploration Event

In a powerful demonstration of regional collaboration, FSW team members engaged with 1,200 Charlotte County Public Schools students to explore higher education and career pathways.

The initiative brought together expertise from across FSW, including the Office of Accelerated Pathways, Office of Admissions, Career Connection Center, Charlotte Collegiate High School, Division of Workforce Education, Radiology Technology Program, School of Allied Health, School of Education, and Social and Human Services Program. This unified approach provided students with comprehensive information about college programs, career exploration, dual enrollment advantages, and the steps to higher education.

The outreach reflects FSW's mission to expand educational access throughout its service region and strengthen vital partnerships with K-12 systems preparing students for college and career success.





LaBelle Middle Schoolers Explore Career Possibilities with FSW Workforce Education

FSW's Division of Workforce Education connected with 800 LaBelle middle school students to help young students envision their future career paths and understand the educational opportunities available to them in SWFL.

The outreach introduced students to a wide range of career fields and academic programs, helping them connect their current interests to potential future professions. By engaging students at this critical stage of their education, FSW's team aims to spark curiosity about career possibilities while demonstrating the accessible pathways to achieving their career goals.



"It's incredibly rewarding to see middle school students light up when they discover a career path that excites them," said Natasha Teegardin, Career Coordinator. "At this age, students are beginning to think about their futures, and our goal is to show them that FSW offers practical, affordable pathways to careers in fields they're passionate about."

The initiative reflects FSW's commitment to building strong K-12 partnerships throughout its service region and ensuring that students in Hendry County and beyond have exposure to the educational and career opportunities that can shape their futures.



Regional Education Leaders Discuss Collaboration and Innovation at SWFL Chamber Luncheon



Dr. Judith Bilsky, FSW Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, Denise Carlin, Superintendent of Lee County School District, and Dr. Aysegul Timur, FGCU President, joined for a panel discussion on the state of education at a Southwest Florida Chamber luncheon. The panel explored critical educational topics affecting the region, including workforce development, student pathways from K-12 through higher education, and the collaborative partnerships essential to preparing Southwest Florida's future workforce.

Workforce Education Excellence: FSW Team Members Earn State Leadership Role and National Credentials

FSW's Workforce Education team continues to expand its expertise through state leadership roles and nationally recognized professional credentials.



Whitney Rhyne, Assistant Vice President of Workforce Education, has been nominated and selected to serve on the steering committee for the Florida College System, Council on Workforce Education, where she will help shape statewide workforce development policy and best practices.



Katy Madden, Sr. Career Coordinator for Lee Campus, earned her Board Certified Coach (BCC) credential, demonstrating her expertise in professional coaching methodologies that support student and staff development.



Natasha Teegardin, Career Coordinator for Charlotte and Hendry/Glades, earned her Certified Career Services Provider (CCSP) credential, enhancing her ability to guide students through career exploration, planning, and successful transitions into the workforce.



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Connect with us for more information about upcoming event and opportunities.

Student Events

[Campus-to-Career Day with the Office of the State Attorney](#)

February 6

[Internship Showcase](#)

February 10

[STEM Careers Week](#)

February 24-26

[Career Fair Week](#)

March 2-5

[Lee Health Day](#)

March 31

Community Events

Free Webinar

[Hazmat Trainer Stories](#)

February 4

Free [Hazmat Conference](#)

February 12-13

[Business and Community Partners](#)

Luncheon

February 19

Free Webinar

[What are Hazardous Materials Anyways?](#)

March 4

[SAT Prep Class](#)

March 8 – April 26

www.fsw.edu/careers

www.fsw.edu/ce

**Career Connection
Center**

Careers@fsw.edu
Internships@fsw.edu

**Office of Corporate &
Community Education**

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**Workforce Education
Scholarships**

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**Division of
Workforce Education**

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