



# NEWS

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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Pilot Program Helps College Students Stay the Course**

*Heart of Florida United Way and Seminole State College of Florida Launch Destination Graduation*

**ORLANDO, Fla. (Oct. 19, 2015)** – Heart of Florida United Way and Seminole State College of Florida are teaming up on a pilot program to help at-risk students access resources they need to stay in school. Destination Graduation – the initiative recently launched and funded through a grant by the nonprofit Lumina Foundation – targets low-income students and student veterans. Both student groups show an increased risk of dropping out for non-academic reasons.

“Sometimes life gets in the way of getting a college degree – but that’s where we can help,” said Robert H. (Bob) Brown, president and CEO of Heart of Florida United Way. “Destination Graduation is designed for students who might be experiencing things like a financial crisis, child care issues, transportation barriers or lack of familial support and guidance. We want to provide a safety net that allows them to continue their education.”

Leveraging United Way’s 2-1-1 Information & Assistance Helpline and support staff at Seminole State, Destination Graduation identifies eligible students, matches them with the most effective campus or community resources and monitors their progress. It also establishes two persistence funds (one for low-income students and the other for veterans) to provide an extra layer of financial assistance. All the student needs to do is dial 2-1-1 and mention that they are a Seminole State College student.

“Destination Graduation allows us to strengthen our commitment to increase educational opportunities for a large segment of the population,” said Dr. E. Ann McGee, president of Seminole State College and Heart of Florida United Way board chair. “This innovative program holds tremendous promise, and it will not only change the lives of our students but also their families and our community here in Central Florida.”

Consistent with national averages, low-income students and veteran students at Seminole State have graduation rates about 2-4 percent below the overall average. Destination Graduation funds will fill the gap, helping more than 1,000 students to continue their studies and earn postsecondary credentials.

“Research shows that by 2020 more than two-thirds of all jobs will require a post-secondary degree or high-quality credential,” added McGee. “The difference in earning power between having a degree and not is more than \$1 million over a career. As a community, we need to support those with the motivation to overcome obstacles to achieving this goal.”

The program is being administered through the Central Florida College Access Network, a partnership between United Way and community organizations that aims to reduce barriers to post-secondary education.

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#### **About Heart of Florida United Way**

*Heart of Florida United Way (HFUW) is Central Florida’s most comprehensive health and human services charity and the largest provider of funds to the region’s most critical health and human service programs. Last year, it raised and*

managed \$26.6 million throughout Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties. HFUW is working to advance the common good by focusing on education, income, health and basic needs. It operates United Way's 2-1-1 Information & Assistance Helpline; Volunteer Resource Center; Gifts In Kind Center; Emergency Homelessness Services; and the Ryan White Part B program, which administers more than \$2 million to provide HIV/AIDS services and referrals. HFUW impacts more than 400,000 individuals annually through its direct service and funded programs. United Way partners with local businesses, government, other charities to increase awareness of local health and human service issues and to inspire hope, provide options and create possibilities for people in need. Visit [www.HFUW.org](http://www.HFUW.org) for more information, or call (407) 835-0900.

**About Seminole State College of Florida**

Seminole State College of Florida is celebrating 50 years of changing lives. The College opened as the first public college in the area in a former citrus grove. Today, Seminole State serves more than 30,000 students with campuses in Altamonte Springs, Heathrow, Oviedo and Sanford/Lake Mary. For more about the college, visit [www.seminolestate.edu](http://www.seminolestate.edu), like us on Facebook: [facebook.com/seminolestate](https://facebook.com/seminolestate), and follow us on Twitter: [@seminolestate](https://twitter.com/seminolestate).

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