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Polk State College receives prestigious Bellwether Award

Winter Haven, FL, Feb. 14, 2019 — Polk State College recently received the prestigious Bellwether Award during the 2019 Community College Futures Assembly for *Transforming Advanced Technical Education Through Innovative New Models: Engineering Technology – Advanced Manufacturing Associate in Science Program in a Rolling Enrollment Open-Entry Early-Exit (O3E) Model*.

The College is also celebrating Polk State Chain of Lakes Collegiate High School's *Growing the STEM: Implementing a Collegiate STEM Program*, which was one of 10 finalists for the Assembly's Legacy Award.

[The Bellwether College Consortium](#) is an elite group of colleges charged with addressing critical issues facing community colleges through applicable research and best practices regarding workforce development, instructional programs and services, and planning governance and finance. Through the Community College Futures Assembly, the Consortium recognizes best practices occurring at community colleges across the world by reviewing more than 1,000 programs and selecting 10 programs in each of the three areas to compete for the coveted Bellwether Award.

"Polk State is incredibly proud of both of its finalists, which are bright examples of the College's innovative programs that contribute to the success of our students," President Angela Garcia Falconetti said.

Polk State won in the category of Instructional Programs and Services for its use of the O3E model to serve the nontraditional student population in degree programs that [fill local manufacturing workforce demands](#), including the Associate in Science in [Engineering Technology](#) with concentrations in advanced manufacturing and mechanical design and fabrication. O3E courses allow students to progress at their own pace and exit and reenter the program as their schedules allow, breaking down traditional length courses into smaller units that are more manageable for students limited by time, transportation, and other obligations.

Vice President of Special Projects, Strategic Priorities & Growth Naomi Boyer and Engineering Technology Program Director Mori Toosi presented the model during the Assembly on Feb. 4 in San Antonio, Texas.

“In addition to growing workforce needs, the demands on students have also shifted, with the potential workforce to fill the gap comprised of nontraditional students who need flexible degree options that adapt to work schedules, family demands, financial limitations, and learning needs of older adults,” Boyer explained. “It is in this context, burgeoning industry dynamic, and student-centric framework that Polk State developed and continues to refine its rolling enrollment O3E model.”

Dean of Academic Affairs April Robinson, Polk State Chain of Lakes Collegiate High School Principal Bridget Fetter, and Professor of Anatomy & Physiology Suzanne Halverson presented *Growing the STEM: Implementing a Collegiate STEM Program. Nominated in 2014 for a Bellwether Award* and nominated this year for the Legacy Award, the program illustrates more than five years of successful implementation and replication.

The STEM Enhancement Program increases access to authentic STEM research, active-learning projects, and mentoring opportunities for dual-enrolled collegiate high school students with the goal to create pathways that lead to degrees and careers in STEM fields.

“This program enables students to visualize themselves pursuing STEM careers through increased awareness and exposure to STEM experiences in the community, from building submersible remotely-operated vehicles to investigate microplastics pollution in local lakes, to mentoring middle school students building working robotics,” Fetter explained. “We are honored to be nominated and recognized once again for our innovative approach to providing quality STEM experiences for our students.”

About Polk State College

Located in Winter Haven, Florida, and established in 1964, Polk State College is a multi-campus institution serving more than 16,000 students with Bachelor of Applied Science, Bachelor of Science, Associate in Arts and Associate in Science degrees, as well as a wide range of certificate and workforce training options. The College also operates three charter high schools.

Polk State’s advantages include small class sizes; hands-on learning; dedicated faculty; day and night classes; online options; affordable tuition; excellent financial aid; and a diverse community and vibrant student life, including fine arts opportunities, clubs, and intercollegiate athletics.