



## SUNspots

### Student's Best Investment in

### Volatile Economy:

### Education

*Story by SUN Newsletter Staff*

It's nearly impossible these days to turn on the television or open a newspaper without seeing yet another story about Americans scrambling to find safe places to invest in a struggling economy. And while most of us usually think about banks and retirement funds, when it comes to investments, we often forget that one of the safest - and most profitable - places to invest is in our own education. Helping students start their "self-investment plan" is what the Success UNlimited initiative - or Colorado SUN - does best.

Through a vibrant, state-wide joint venture between the Colorado Community College System and the Colorado Department of Education, several community colleges are partnering with local adult education centers in Denver, Fort Collins, Sterling, Fort Morgan, Lamar, and Durango to help expand availability of the SUN college prep program and fill a critical unfunded gap in Colorado's post-secondary education process.

Within the Colorado SUN intensive program, GED completers and under-prepared high school graduates engage in intensive skill enhancement classes designed to reduce the time spent in remedial math, reading, and writing. Complemented by career exploration, job-related goal-setting, and study skills, the SUN program helps students better understand the college and employment process, set realistic, achievable college and career goals, and succeed quickly in attaining certificates and degrees.

Last summer, the Community College of Denver (CCD) offered the SUN program, called College Connection, for GED completers from several local adult education centers. Each received instruction in developmental math, reading, writing, and study skills. And with the support of the "Navigator," students were guided individually through career exploration and how to use campus resources to their advantage. Navigators nurture the student transition process by providing advice and sometimes even personal support by serving as tutor, mentor, and case manager.

Of the twelve students who participated in the eight-week CCD College Connection program, 58 percent needing skill development passed one or more remedial math courses, 73 percent passed one or more remedial courses in reading, and 90 percent passed one or more remedial classes in writing. Sixty-seven percent advanced to college-level coursework in at least one subject area. Of the completers, 59 percent enrolled in community college the following semester, and 86 percent of those are still enrolled for a second semester.

#### Survey Says....

"I didn't know how to get started for my career and lacked initiative, but now I have it all planned out."

"I am committed to finishing college and pursuing my chosen career."

— 2008 exit survey of  
new SUN Students

Additionally, students surveyed indicated that the navigator was influential in helping them learn to address challenges in their lives and to make a commitment to finish college and pursue a chosen career. "Moving from GED to a college class would have really been tough to get the hang of," explains CCD College Connection student Jonathan Spalding. "The College Connection program helped with financial aid and getting used to an ordinary day at college. If it wasn't for it [College Connection], I would have had a hard time getting everything done on my own."

Aside from the academic element, the SUN initiative's College Connection program strives to build confident learners capable of synthesizing available resources for themselves. Students indicate one of the biggest barriers to transitioning to college is the complex matrix of paperwork and learning to balance work, school and home life effectively.

While the economy may have seen better days, experts say the downturn is an excellent time to consider learning new skills, and to invest in yourself. The opportunities for self-investment are out there. And as College Connection student, Andy Barraza, advises, "...learn it and get it down. What you put into it is what you get out of it."

For more information on the SUN Initiative or the College Connection Program, contact Kristin Corash, SUN Project Director at 303-595-1560 or Kendra Rodriguez at 303-858-2787, or visit the SUN Initiative Web site at <http://www.cccs.edu/foundation/SUN.html>.