



## Campus News



## New Options... A Pathway to a Better Life

Many adults recognize the need to return to college later in life. Some stop working for many years to raise a family. Others face life changing situations such as divorce or the death of a spouse. Still others find their current skills obsolete in a fast paced and ever-changing job market.

Often these individuals think about beginning college or re-entering college for quite some time. Although they know education is the path to a better standard of living and opportunities for the future, many students don't know where to begin. Busy lives provide many excuses not to begin college, but the real obstacles are anxiety, doubt, and fear.

Jefferson State began a program called New Options in the early 1980's that proactively addressed the need to help these students. The program was originally funded by a federal grant to help displaced homemakers and under employed/under educated women get updated job skills to advance in the workforce. Jefferson State utilized federal grants to offer a series of free seminars to participants who met specific federal guidelines. Seminars addressed issues such as admissions, financial aid, major selection and scholarships.

"Adults sometimes don't understand that it doesn't matter what kind of student they were at 17 years old," said New Options Administrator Ann Fulmer. "They are a different person now with a

new perspective on life. Many students realize they can do the work and actually thrive in college classes.”

The program was a success from the beginning. Many of the women who participated were able to update job skills by taking a few classes, complete two year degrees and transfer to four year colleges and universities. After a few years, when federal programs were no longer available, community members provided funding during a transition period. Jefferson State currently funds the program which is supplemented by grants and donations used for textbooks and scholarships.

Today, the New Options program is offered on Jefferson State’s Jefferson and Shelby-Hoover Campuses as well as the Clanton and Pell City locations. It is also open to both men and women. In addition to the seminars, the program also provides a textbook lending service to participants allowing costly textbooks to be borrowed each semester.

The success of New Options is obvious by the success of participants, both academically and personally. Participants have received the confidence needed for college and completed associate degrees in numerous fields such as nursing, hospitality management, and office administration.

“I was very unsure of myself,” said New Options Participant Martha Ahern. “They encouraged me and gave me the confidence I needed to go forward with my dream of graduating from college. After enrolling in college, my husband and I divorced. My husband provided our only source of income. College became so much more than my dream . . . it became necessary for my survival.”

Martha needed financial assistance to continue college. Once again, the New Options program was there to provide guidance and support. "They found grants, loans and scholarships, and encouraged me all the way," said Ahern.

There are many students like Martha in our communities. She is representative of many adults who do not qualify for academic scholarships designed for traditional college students who are just out of high school. Often, returning students graduated from high school many years ago or did not complete high school and never considered college an option. New Options helps these students realize that earning a degree is an attainable goal and walks them through every step of the way.

New Options has helped change the lives of countless Jefferson State students by giving additional support needed for returning to college. "I am leaving Jefferson State a new woman," said Ahern. "I will soon be a nurse and am now confident I can care for and make a difference in the lives of my patients and their families. My job skills empower me to fully support myself financially for the first time in my life."