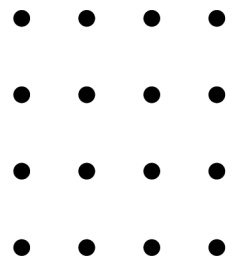


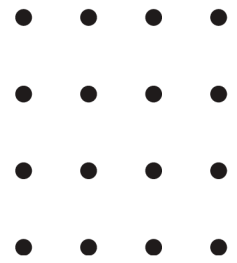
**2023-24 Florida Center for
Students with Unique Abilities**



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



2023-24 Executive Summary Overview



The Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities (FCSUA, the Center) serves as the state coordinating center to establish and support inclusive postsecondary education programs in collaboration with universities, state, and technical colleges. The overall goal is to increase independent living and competitive integrated employment for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Located in the College of Community Innovation and Education at the University of Central Florida in Orlando, FL, the Center was established following the passing of the Florida Postsecondary Comprehensive Transition Program Act (the Act; F1004.6495), effective July 1, 2016. The Act charged the Center and its director with implementation of the Act, and meeting the accountability requirements specified therein, including submission of an annual report by October 1 each year.

This executive summary (ES) provides highlights of the Center's work and impact during the new reporting year, from July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024. This decision to change the reporting year was to align data collection with the fiscal and academic year. There were 30 approved Florida Postsecondary Comprehensive Transition Programs (FPCTPs) during this reporting year. Most (20) were required to submit annual reports to the Center, reflecting student and program information from the 2023-24 academic year (AY). Reported student data was derived from the 20 FPCTPs with student enrollment. Stories from FPCTP alumni and program leaders are featured to further highlight the impact of the Center's work during the 2023-24 AY.

Program Growth

25

The number of approved programs by Oct. 1, 2023.

30

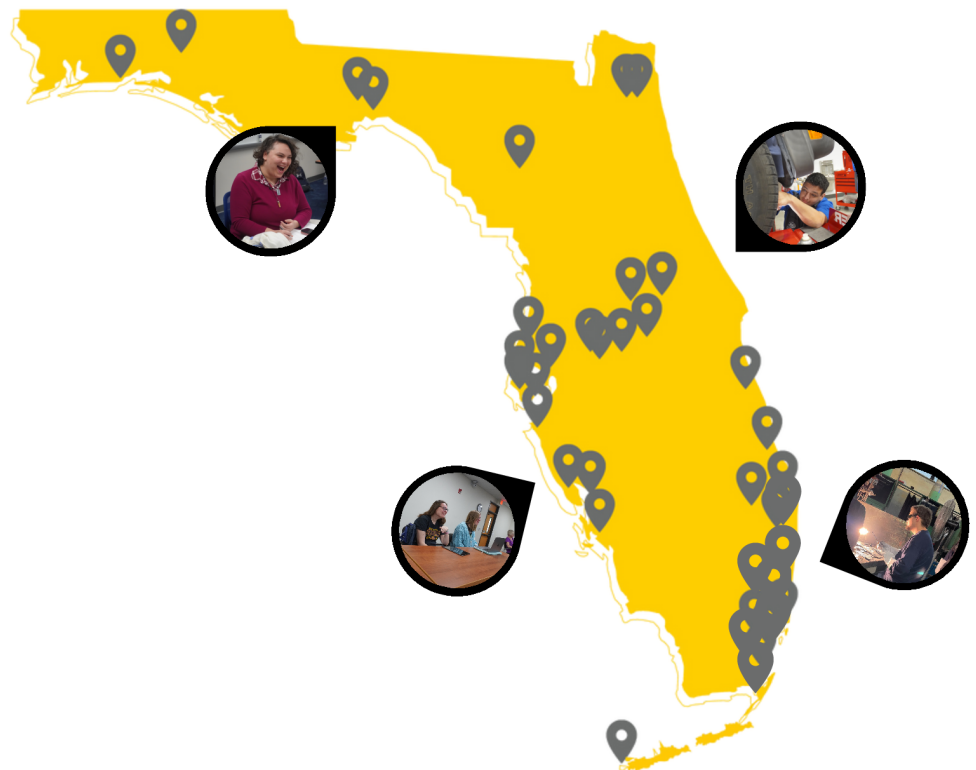
The number of approved programs by June 30, 2024.



There are 30 approved Florida Postsecondary Comprehensive Transition Programs located at 32 institutions on 38 campuses. Several institutions have approved programs on multiple campuses: **Indian River State College, Florida Atlantic University, Lee County Technical Colleges, and The College of the Florida Keys.**

Institutions with recently approved FPCTPs

1. Erwin Technical College
2. Fred K. Marchman Technical College
3. Miami Dade College
4. Ridge Technical College
5. Travis Technical College



New Programs' Perspectives

The Center saw growth in the number of institutions approved to start Florida Postsecondary Comprehensive Transition Programs (FPCTP), with five (5) new programs approved and several others in the approval process during the 2023-24 AY.

Program leaders shared why they believed it is important to start an FPCTP at their institution.



"While Polk County provides a robust range of services to students with disabilities, we have never had a program that enables these students to attend our postsecondary institutions with the necessary supports to help them be successful. Our goal is to welcome STEEL students to our technical campuses and provide them with the opportunity to pursue meaningful credentials, work-based learning experiences, and employment."

- **Laura Webster, Assistant Director, Career, Technical & Adult Education,**

"Miami Dade College (MDC) believes that having an FPCTP will aid in fulfilling our mission of changing lives through education. Recognizing the need for inclusive postsecondary options, MDC launched the Student Transition and Resource (STAR) Academy to empower students with intellectual disabilities. The program aims to increase students' academic and occupational skills, leading to industry-recognized certifications and meaningful employment. MDC seeks to enhance the lives of students with intellectual disabilities, ensuring they have the tools and support necessary to succeed in both education and the workforce."



- **Ericka S., Program Director**



"As a pillar of community and inclusion in northeast Florida, the University of North Florida is excited to pioneer USoar, an inclusive program that targets to support an unique population with growing needs in our Jacksonville community. Postsecondary years are often overlooked and undervalued as an important stage of life for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, yet it is during these years that adult relationships and careers are bolstered into success and stability. USoar aims to reignite the conversation surrounding fulfilling and well-rounded independence across all domains of a postsecondary student's life. We are excited to bring Northeast Florida and our local communities this option for students."

- **Dr. Marlena Jenkins, Director**
- **Dr. Debbie Reed, Principal Investigator**

Grants

The Center provides **initial and continuing grants** to institutions of higher education to support the creation and implementation of approved Florida Postsecondary Comprehensive Transition Programs. Initial and continuing grants provide necessary funding for FPCTPs for staffing, equipment/technology curriculum development and other necessary purchases to successfully implement their approved programs.



\$19 Million

Grant Awards for Program Implementation

Scholarships

The Center also provides **scholarship funds** for eligible students enrolled in an Florida Postsecondary Comprehensive Transition Program who meets **Satisfactory Academic Progress**. Scholarship funds are used to fund expenses occurred during a student's postsecondary education experience, including, but not limited to: tuition & academic fees, textbooks, uniforms, supplies, transportation/bus fees, industry certification exams, technology and more.

\$2.94 Million

Amount of Student Scholarship issued



Inclusive Education Services

University of Central Florida, Orlando, Florida



“The multidisciplinary collaboration used in IES ... ensures that students receive holistic support...”

Occupational justice, as a branch of social justice, emphasizes the fundamental right of every individual to participate inclusively in society, regardless of their differences. It advocates for equal access to meaningful occupations and activities that provide purpose and fulfillment. For many adults, pursuing higher education is a crucial step toward achieving occupational justice. Historically, students with intellectual disabilities have been excluded from the opportunity to pursue higher education. Societal changes in line with social justice have been inspiring growth in higher education, leading to 343 postsecondary programs for students with intellectual disability nationwide. Inclusive Education Services (IES) at the University of Central Florida believes in equality and justice for every individual and the foundation of our program is built upon social justice.

Students enrolled in IES earn a professional services credential in either hospitality, social services, or early childhood education. Within these tracks students learn valuable employability skills, enabling them to find sustainable and meaningful employment. Students are also enrolled in classes with degree-seeking peers in their specific track. Living on campus provide students an environment that fosters independence and life skills through daily routines and peer interactions, while encouraging social integration by allowing students to build meaningful relationships and a sense of community. Additionally, the proximity to academic and support services ensures they receive the necessary assistance to thrive both academically and personally.

The multidisciplinary collaboration used in IES with on- and off-campus partners ensures that students receive holistic support, addressing their diverse needs. Our partnerships promote equity by providing tailored resources and employment opportunities that empower these students to fully participate in campus life. Our collaborations advance social justice, fostering an inclusive environment where all students can thrive and reach maximum independence upon graduation.

Written by Jaime Best, Ph.D., Program Director & Kiera Anderson, OTR/L, Ph.D., Research Associate

Eagle Connections

Tallahassee State College, Tallahassee, Florida



“Eagle Connections increases opportunities for students who might otherwise face significant barriers to higher education and the workforce.”

The Eagle Connections program at Tallahassee State College (TSC) contributes significantly to the overall success and reputation of the college. By demonstrating a commitment to accessibility and inclusion, TSC maintains its appeal to prospective students and their families. The program highlights the college's dedication to educational equity, which allows for the college to strengthen its community ties. In addition, Eagle Connections increases opportunities for students who might otherwise face significant barriers to higher education and the workforce.

Eagle Connections reflects positively on Tallahassee State College as a whole. The program enhances the college's reputation as a leader in accessibility and educational equity, attracting a diverse range of students and their families. Through the practical training and support provided, the program is able to prepare students for the workforce through internships, job coaching, and career planning resources, all of which are tailored to the individual needs and strengths of each student. By providing these opportunities, the program significantly enhances students' employment prospects and fosters greater independence.

Graduates of Eagle Connections program not only earn an Employment Credential but also demonstrate increased self-confidence, improved job prospects, and enhanced quality of life. These outcomes not only reflect the success of the program but also contribute to the broader goal of creating a more inclusive society.

The support provided by the Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities further amplifies these positive impacts, ensuring that programs like Eagle Connections continue to thrive and make a meaningful difference. By supporting students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, the program not only changes individual lives but also enriches the entire college community.

Written by Abi Mustapha, Program Coordinator

Build Your Future

Sheridan Technical College, Hollywood, Florida



“...students enrolled in the Build Your Future program increase their levels of independence, self-determination...and employability skills...”

Florida Postsecondary Comprehensive Transition Programs (FPCTPs) provides individuals with an intellectual disability the opportunity to further their education at institutions of higher education and prepare them for the workforce by earning a meaningful credential in a wide variety of career fields.

The Build Your Future program at Sheridan Technical College is an approved FPCTP that helps students become certified in a Career Technical Education (CTE) credential. Prospective students begin in a pre-requisite course, and after showing Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP), transition inclusively into a CTE program.

The following programs are available to students: Automotive Maintenance & Light Repair, Computer Systems & Information Technology, Cosmetology, Early Childhood Education, Heating, Ventilation, Air-Conditioning/Refrigeration (HVAC/R), Professional Culinary Arts & Hospitality. Each program prepares students for careers in their respective field through hands-on education and experiences. Students not only graduate from the program but can earn one or more post-secondary certifications.

Program directors Christi Dingman and Eileen Santiago work together alongside staff and faculty members to ensure students enrolled in the Build Your Future program increase their levels of independence, self-determination, academic, technical, life-readiness, and employability skills during their time at Sheridan. A multitude of support services are available for students in order to ensure success. Students are part of support groups to assist with reviewing lessons and material, preparing for exams and completing projects. The team also provides students with academic advising, career development, and social experiences. Upon program completions, students are prepared to enter the workforce.

Written by Christi Dingman and Eileen Santiago, Program Coordinators

Course Enrollment

One of the main purposes of Florida Postsecondary Comprehensive Transition Programs is to provide an inclusive educational experience for students with intellectual disabilities. This purpose is achieved through enrollment of students in **inclusive courses** available on campus.



Inclusive courses are defined as courses that students with intellectual disabilities attend with classmates without intellectual disabilities.

From 2022-23

1518

Number of courses students were enrolled in 2022-23.

954

Number of **inclusive** courses students were enrolled in 2022-23.

To 2023-24

1695

Number of courses students were enrolled in 2023-24.

1111

Number of **inclusive** courses students were enrolled in 2023-24.

Student Demographics

Florida Postsecondary Comprehensive Transition Programs are an inclusive environment, reflective of the institution community. Students of every race, gender, ethnicity, etc., enter the programs and are educated alongside their peers while also engaged in the greater college/university community.

Sex

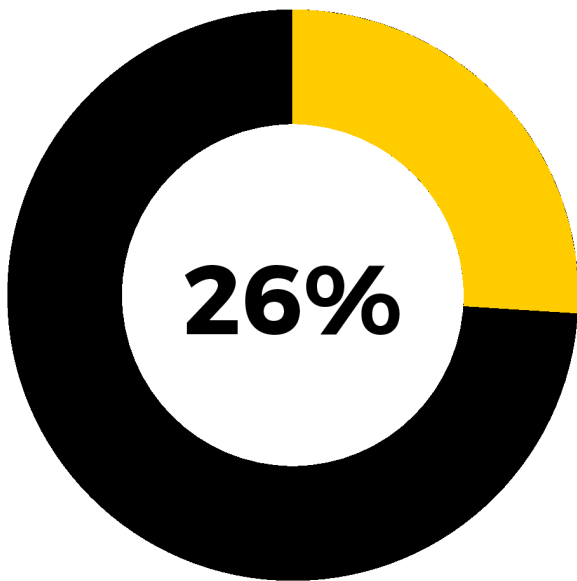


57% male students

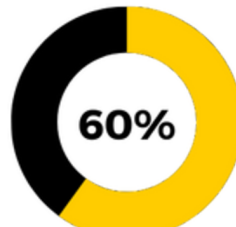


43% female students

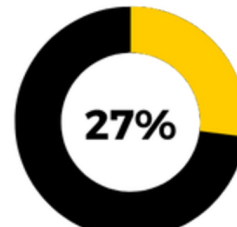
Hispanic Students



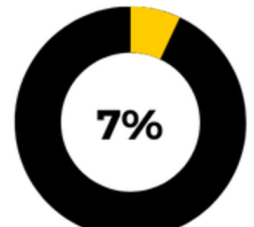
Race



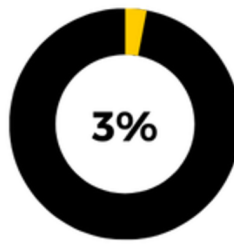
White



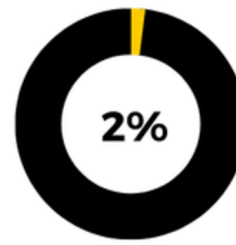
Black



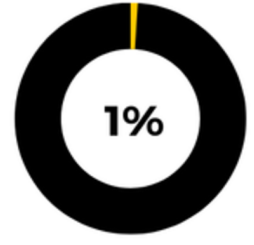
Other/Unknown



No Response



Asian

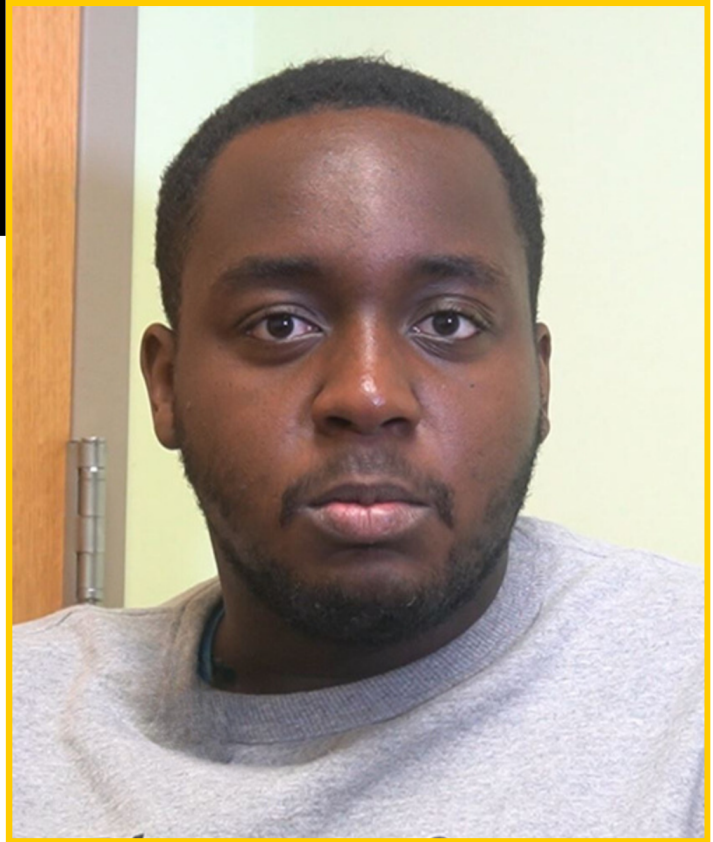


Pacific Islander/
Native American

Florida Postsecondary Comprehensive Transition Programs are a reflection of the institutions that they serve; a diverse community of individuals striving to achieve their dreams and goals, to improve and contribute to the advancement of their local communities.

“He wants to be a light to those he meets...”

Marleyh Pierre
FGCU RISE
Florida Gulf Coast University



Marleyh Pierre is a 2024 program completer of the FGCU R.I.S.E. (Real Independence, Sustainable Employment) program at Florida Gulf Coast University. Marleyh earned a credential in community employment and is continuing his education with hopes of earning his associate degree. Marleyh is currently employed as a server at a living facility, while actively interviewing for available positions with Lee Health. He credits the FGCU R.I.S.E. Program for helping him gain the tools necessary to be successful in the workforce.

Marleyh has career aspirations of working in the healthcare field. He completed his two internships at a pediatric cardiologist office with Lee Health. Marleyh had a substantial impact on the staff, with an energy level and enthusiasm that was unmatched. This experience allowed Marleyh to determine if healthcare was the best fit for his long-term career goals. Upon completing his internships, Marleyh decided that his ultimate goal is to work for Lee Health. He has said that he wants to be a light to those he meets.

Marleyh’s experience and desire to work in the healthcare industry has also had an impact on the FGCU R.I.S.E. program staff to make curricular changes to include new pathways for students. Thanks to his feedback, the program offers four pathways for incoming R.I.S.E. students: Education, Healthcare, Business/Entrepreneurship, and Resort, Hospitality, & Retail. These pathways will allow for community partnerships and more targeted training to help all FGUC R.I.S.E. completers find a career that matches their life aspirations.

“He hopes to share his gift with ... the world.”

Andrew Diaz
Project ACCESS
The College of the Florida Keys

Andrew Diaz joined the Project ACCESS program in fall 2022. He was guided to the program at The College of the Florida Keys through by his family who were looking for opportunities for Andrew to learn new skills, and find employment.

Andrew, who has a passion for Japanese culture, and who enjoyed cooking for family and friends at home for years, didn't realize that he could combine his interests into a pathway to becoming a cook. Through experiencing Culinary classes at The College of the Florida Keys, Andrew began to learn more about preparing Japanese foods.



Andrew Diaz completed Project ACCESS, and Certificates in Chef's Apprentice, and Culinary Arts Management. Andrew is continuing with CFK in the fall 2024 semester to pursue an additional certificate in Culinary Arts.

Andrew's favorite cuisine is Japanese. Andrew participated in the College's annual Mud Pi fund raising event serving up Karaage Chicken. He is so passionate about the Japanese culture that he spent time in Japan during the 2023-2024 academic year, and is returning again in October.

After completing Culinary Arts this year, Andrew has aspirations to open his own food truck. He hopes to share his gift and passion with his community and the world.

“She ... is very content doing what she loves.”

Diana Dorwart
Okaloosa UP
Okaloosa Technical College

Growing up in Fort Walton Beach, Diana faced her share of challenges, but her determination has always been her greatest asset.

Diagnosed with an intellectual disability at a young age, she attended local public schools, where she received a strong educational foundation. Despite this, after high school, Diana encountered a significant barrier: finding a job. She was told she would need supported employment as her only option to work.

However, she firmly believed she was capable of more and refused to let this define her future. She remained actively involved in her community through volunteer work at her former school, being part of a local Irish Dance Team and a local cheerleading group. However, she still longed for greater independence and opportunities.

The opportunity came when she learned about Okaloosa UP. Excited by the chance to further her education, Diana eagerly applied and was accepted into the two-year program. The inclusive setting broadened her academic horizons and empowered her emotional and socially. She grew more confident and developed a strong sense of independence. Diana gained valuable experience as an intern in the laundry department of a hotel resort. She graduated with a certificate in Specialized Career Instruction as well as an industry certificate, the SafeStaff Food Handler Certificate, the State of Florida’s contracted food handler training certificate. She was offered a job at the same hotel where she interned after graduation and was thrilled to continue the work she enjoyed in the laundry department. She takes pride in her job, the financial benefits it provides and is very content doing what she loves.





From Enrollment...

310

Students enrolled
in FPCTPs

89%

Students who maintained
satisfactory academic progress

88%

Retention Rate

57%

Students who gained work experience in
competitive, supported, unpaid and
other settings

104

Completers



...to Graduation!



Class of 2024




CLASS OF **2024**

RMEC
TECHNICAL COLLEGE

PIRATE PRIDE

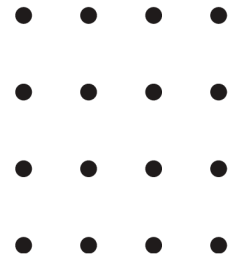
Congratulations Graduates!






Class of 2024





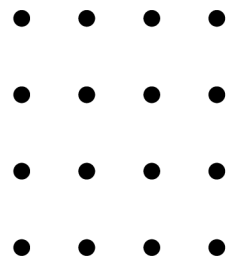
CONCLUSION

During this reporting year, FCSUA continued to implement major elements of the Act. The Center continued to provide technical support to existing and newly developed FPCTPs to improve and expand opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities. Throughout the year, the Center maintained an active agenda of working with key partners to disseminate information to institutions of higher education (IHEs) and other constituents about the Act, the FPCTPs, and available support and resources from FCSUA.

The FPCTPs maintained a steady course of providing high-quality programs to students. They implemented innovative recruitment and support strategies that yielded an increase in student enrollment and program completion. IHEs continue to express interest in becoming an FPCTP, with five becoming approved programs, increasing the number of FPCTPs to 30.

Students are receiving more of their postsecondary education in all campus environments with their peers without disabilities and earning credentials that are industry-recognized. They are being prepared to exit programs and enter competitive integrated employment in career clusters of their choice. Increased student enrollment, program completion with earned credentials, and secure employment are anticipated for the next reporting year. Additionally, based on IHE responses to the Center's professional development and outreach efforts, another increase in the number of approved programs across the state are anticipated for the 2024-25 AY.

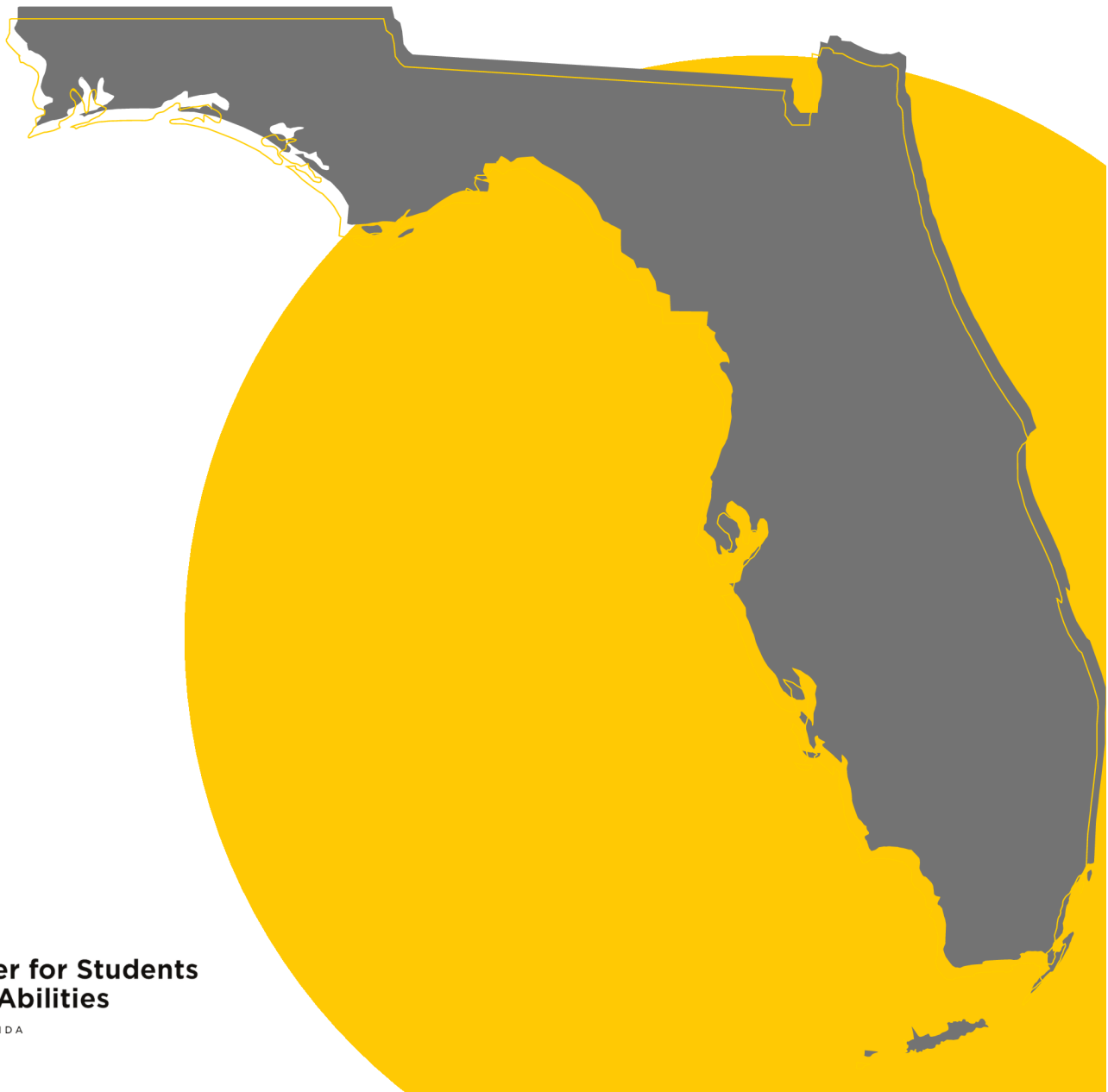
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Visit fcsua.org for more information



**Florida Center for Students
with Unique Abilities**

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA