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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Polk State College receives national Hispanic-Serving Institution designation

Monday, July 12, 2021 — The Hispanic Association of Colleges & Universities (HACU) recently designated Polk State College as a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) as the College's Hispanic student population has reached 26 percent and continues to grow.

Additionally, Polk State is now eligible for Title V and HSI STEM federal grant funds that support institutions that enroll large proportions of minority and financially disadvantaged students. The College will apply for these funds through the U.S Department of Education to further support its services to students.

"Polk State's Hispanic-Serving Institution designation has been one of my top priorities since assuming the presidential role in 2017, when the College's Hispanic student population was 19 percent," Polk State President Angela Garcia Falconetti said. "This designation will support the continuing enhancement of services for all students."

HACU designates colleges and universities with student populations that are at least 25 percent Hispanic with HSI status. Similarly, the U.S. Department of Education uses this threshold for Title V and HSI STEM grant fund eligibility.

"Thanks to our dedicated and diverse faculty, staff, and District Board of Trustees who facilitate effective community outreach and strong student support services, Polk State continues to successfully fulfill its mission of providing access to quality higher education and workforce training to all populations of Polk County" Falconetti said.

Polk County's Hispanic population growth mirrors that of the College's, with this demographic increasing from 17.6 percent in 2010 to 24.6 percent in 2019, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Polk State District Board of Trustees member Teresa Martinez has played an instrumental role in the College's HSI initiative. Martinez, a Polk State Distinguished Alumnus who exiled from Cuba as a child, is driven to provide students with the life-transforming opportunity of a Polk State education that she experienced firsthand.

"This designation reaffirms Polk State's commitment to serving our diverse Polk County community," Martinez said. "The College ensures that its employees reflect the diversity of our students, that services are available in Spanish, and that Polk State remains visible in the Hispanic community. Polk State remains dedicated to its role as an open-door institution, and I could not be more proud of our College for achieving this prestigious designation."

Among many outreach efforts and support services, the College has hosted "Community Connections" events in Northeast Polk County where the Hispanic population continues to grow. The events not only informed residents of the opportunities available to them at Polk State, but also provided the staff and technology to assist prospective students with applying to the College and for financial aid. Similarly, the "Parents Advocating for Student Success Program"

has served as an introduction for Hispanic students and their families to the College, and Polk State has traditionally hosted a variety of diverse student clubs and cultural activities.

President Garcia Falconetti also serves as a strong advocate for Spanish students and the community, participating in Spanish radio, television, social media, and print media. Additionally, she serves as a member of Excelencia in Education's Presidents for Latino Student Success, comprised of approximately 115 college and university presidents and chancellors who are committed to ensuring their institutions foster learning environments where Latino students thrive.

While the pandemic has prevented in-person events over the last year, the College most recently held virtual "Open House" events with both live and recorded sessions in Spanish. Additionally, members of the College's leadership team are actively engaged with HACU and Excelencia in Education, a national organization that accelerates Latino student success in higher education.

Equity and a presence in underserved communities with targeted outreach efforts and bilingual resources are included in the College's 2021-2024 Strategic Enrollment Management Plan.

"The Polk State team continues to be innovative and engaging in our approach to not only recruiting, but also retaining and supporting all students," Falconetti said. "Polk State's Hispanic-Serving Institution designation and application for federal grant funds to further enhance academic and student services for all students is a significant accomplishment for our College and I remain dedicated to continuing to foster a College-wide culture focused on equity, diversity, and inclusion."

About Polk State College

Located in Winter Haven, Florida, and established in 1964, Polk State College is a multi-campus institution serving more than 15,000 students with Bachelor of Applied Science, Bachelor of Science, Associate in Arts, and Associate in Science degrees, as well as 9,000 individuals in a wide range of certificate and workforce training programs. 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.