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Finalists Named for 2004 Florida College Student of the Year Award

GAINESVILLE, Fla. (3/04) — After a yearlong search for Florida's best students, *Florida Leader* magazine has chosen 20 outstanding campus leaders to represent the state in the 17th annual **Florida College Student of the Year Award**. Seven finalists now will vie for the title, with one overall winner to be announced on April 16, 2004 at a press conference in Tallahassee. The event later will be televised statewide on The Sunshine Network. The prestigious awards program recognizes students who support themselves financially through college, excel academically, and are involved in community service and political activism.

Top students from universities, private colleges, and community colleges throughout Florida compete in the statewide scholarship program sponsored by *Florida Leader*, SunTrust, Office Depot, and other companies that support the recognition of excellence in Florida higher education. More than 5,000 students inquired about how to apply for the 2004 Award, and nearly 90 submitted applications.

The 2004 finalists are: Minal Ahson of the **University of Miami**, Leslie Brown of **Seminole Community College**, Matthew Collier of **Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University**, Jason Guercio of the **University of Miami**, Janet Levic of **Saint Leo University**, Anup Patel of the **University of Florida**, and Cathalain Tobin of **Florida Southern College**.

Thirteen other students also will receive recognition as honorable mention winners: John Allen, Jr. of the **University of North Florida**, Craig Altemose of **Eckerd College**, Ayanna Beckles of **Seminole Community College**, Bijal Chhadva of the **University of South Florida**, Steven Cohen of the **University of Florida**, April Gillespie of the **University of Tampa**, Brianna Holmes of the **University of Tampa**, Marianne Howe of

the **University of Central Florida**, Joshua Pila of the **University of Florida**, Wendy Reed of **Manatee Community College**, Kimberly Rogers of **Chipola College**, Kimberly Ruhge of the **University of Central Florida**, and Clevin Weekes of **Florida Memorial College**.

The 2004 winners will share nearly \$55,000 in scholarships and prizes from **SunTrust**, **Office Depot**, **Gulfstream International Airlines**, **Florida Monthly Magazine**, **Eastpak**, **Jiffy Lube**, **Checker's Drive-In Restaurants**, **The Anthony Grandio Company**, and other sponsors. All 20 students also will be featured in the "Student of the Year" issue of *Florida Leader* magazine.

"The diverse group of students recognized this year is a testament to the wonderful variety of students we have at colleges across Florida," says **W.H. "Butch" Oxendine, Jr.**, publisher of *Florida Leader* magazine. "The outstanding quality of this year's applicants signals a resurgence of student activism, as students across the country are taking greater responsibility for improving the world around them. This year's winners are self-reliant student leaders who understand the importance of community and political activism."

The 2004 applicants were reviewed by a panel of distinguished judges, including respected educators, business leaders, and journalists statewide.

Florida Leader, the founding sponsor, is a newsmagazine read by students at 86 colleges and 550 public and private high schools throughout the state of Florida. Now in its 21th year of publishing, *Florida Leader* has won first prize nationally for editorial excellence among college magazines. Oxendine Publishing, Inc. also produces the national leadership magazine *Student Leader*.

For more details on the Friday, April 16 press conference when the overall 2004 winner will be announced, contact W.H. "Butch" Oxendine, Jr. at (352) 373-6907. The seven finalists and 13 honorable mention winners and their families, judges, sponsors, and Commissioner of Education Jim Horne will be in attendance at the 1:30 p.m. press conference and awards reception on the 22nd floor of The Capitol Building in Tallahassee. Copies of the "Student of the Year" issue of Florida Leader will be available featuring the winners and their achievements. A television show based on the event will be aired statewide on The Sunshine Network.