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Florida International University Student Named Runner-Up for the 2005 Florida College Student of the Year Award

Gainesville, Fla. (04-08) – George Alton Austin, a senior in psychology at Florida International University with a 3.5 GPA, is first runner-up for the 2005 Florida College Student of the Year Award.

Austin and 19 other students from colleges and universities across Florida will share \$50,000 in scholarships and prizes. The ceremony was at the Capitol Building in Tallahassee.

Austin was selected from 78 applicants in the annual scholarship program sponsored by *Florida Leader* magazine, SunTrust Education Loans, and Office Depot. The Florida College Student of the Year Award celebrates 18 years of recognizing outstanding Florida college students for their campus leadership, academic excellence, and financial self-reliance.

In August 2001, somebody moved Alton Austin's cheese. You'd never know that he'd faced that mouse-in-the-maze feeling if you met him today, but everything about Austin's

character has been tested, tried, and tempered by the choices he's made since he discovered his future wasn't what he thought it would be.

Austin, 36, was working for IBM, packing a \$100K salary and feeling pretty good about the future. Marriage, three kids, a good job—if life was a maze, Austin had a copy of the map. Suddenly, the maze changed. “My manager called in July 2001 and told me I had been selected for layoff, along with 400 others,” Austin says. For a short while, Austin and his family scrambled to adapt. Armed with VA benefits and financial aid, Austin enrolled as a freshman at Seminole Community College.

From setback to comeback, Austin has never stopped helping others around him realize their potential. After getting fired at IBM, he could've reasonably forgotten about leadership. Instead, he took that disappointment and turned it into a drive to lead and learn. He joined the Leadership Challenge Team, Phi Theta Kappa, and the All-Florida Academic Team within 18 months.

At FIU, he volunteered at the Center for Leadership and Service and served as the advisor for the LEAD team, which facilitates leadership programs on campus. "If I can teach students and influence them to do the same for others, then the process will continue indefinitely," Austin says.

This summer, check the Florida Leader homepage at www.floridaleader.com for scheduling and stations for the broadcast of the Florida College Student of the Year program.