Beacon ranked among state’s best values

Staff report

It would take the combined enrollment of about 260 Beacon Colleges to equal that of a major school in Florida like the University of Central Florida.

But Leesburg’s Beacon is casting a large shadow these days, having made a list of the top six best value colleges in the state, topped only by some big institutions (ranked one through five): the University of Florida, Florida State University, UCF, University of West Florida and Florida Atlantic University.

The list was compiled and released late last week by the ValuePenguin online database service and was based on two simple questions:

■ “How much does it cost in-state students to attend school every year?”
■ “Upon graduating, are students prepared for today’s workforce - in other words - can they get jobs that pay off their tuition investment?”

According to ValuePenguin, an expensive school that doesn’t adequately prepare its students for real-world jobs can be a huge cost burden.

To come up with its ranking, the company looked at annual tuition costs and student default rates for both Perkins and Stafford student loans at all Florida’s colleges.

Beacon is the nation’s only four-year college providing academic degree programs exclusively for students with learning disabilities like dyslexia or ADHD. The private school offers associate of arts and bachelor of arts degrees in human services, interdisciplinary studies, computer information systems, psychology, and business management.

Although it had the highest tuition cost of $42,065 among the top five colleges, it had the lowest default rate of zero on both Perkins and Stafford student loans. The top five have tuition costs of about $19,500 a year, on average, but their Stafford default rates ranged from a low of 5 percent at the University of Florida to a high of 16 percent at the University of West Florida.

“The best value colleges in Florida should focus on generating a good return on students’ investment by educating them well, and arming them with the skills and resources needed to pay off any student debt,” the survey stated.