

MIAMI TODAY

WEEK OF THURSDAY, JANUARY 22, 2004

\$1 WWW.MIAMITODAYNEWS.COM



29 historic schools in line for major restoration jobs, pg. 13

EDUCATION TRENDS

At 2 universities, early bird can get the business degree, pg. 14

14 MIAMI TODAY

EDUCATION TRENDS

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At Barry and FIU, the early bird gets the business degree

BY SAMANTHA JOSEPH

Two South Florida universities are working earlier in steps they hope will make them more competitive and appealing to busy, non-traditional students.

Barry University and Florida International University have created programs to bring students to the classrooms as early as 6:30 a.m. and have them out before the start of a traditional workday.

Both schools plan highly structured curricula that cater to small groups of students who follow identical courses of studies at the same rate. Both include in-class and online lectures and target older students with jobs and families who prefer morning classes to ones held evenings or weekends.

"The No. 1 reason that people choose a [master's in business administration] program is convenience," said Jose Poza, marketing director of Barry University's Andreas School of Business. "We wanted to give them the morning MBA and give the full flexibility we could offer."

Barry's Breakfast MBA, scheduled to start in January 2005, will be a 23-month, 36-credit hour program offered between 6:30-8:30 a.m. on Tuesdays and Thurs-

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Jose Poza

days.

"It's obviously geared toward the working professional who wants to get up early," Mr. Poza said. "There are people who get up early and this is another way for them to pursue an educational endeavor."

The average Barry MBA student is 29 years old and usually has family and professional responsibilities that require attention on evenings and weekends.

"It's just a question of the time factor," Mr. Poza said, explaining that the Breakfast MBA will closely resemble the university's other master's programs in terms of class size and tuition expenses. Classes are expected to hold 15-20 students.

The fundamental difference, though, is that aside from their pre-advised or fixed eight core courses, students in the Break-

fast MBA program will vote on the four electives that will complete the credit requirements for the entire group.

"That's the one aspect that students surveyed have liked the most about this program," Mr. Poza said.

The chosen electives could determine whether participants finish with general MBAs or with specialties.

FIU students are only days into the university's pilot program, the Early Bird BBA, introduced Jan. 5. Unlike Barry's MBA, the Early Bird targets older students seeking a bachelor's degree.

Also different from Barry's program, which will cost the same as its evening or weekend counterparts, FIU's pilot will cost students \$475 extra per course, said Clifford Perry, associate dean of academic affairs and undergraduate programs at the College of Business Administration. The money will pay for technical support, software, administrative staff and other expenses associated with the special early morning classes and their online components.

Despite additional tuition, 12 students have enrolled in the program that was designed to accommodate 15, and administrators expect a class of 30 in the fall.

The structured program shaves six months off the program, allowing participants to earn degrees in 18 months rather than two years.

The college offers the program at its Pembroke Pines center from 7:30-8:45 a.m. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

"To do it any earlier wouldn't appeal to them," Dr. Perry said of the participants, who are mostly about 20 years old. "If there is more demand than that, I'd actually be surprised."

Neither Dr. Perry nor Mr. Poza expected the structured early morning classes to become a trend in higher education.

Dr. Perry, who has lectured in a 6:40 a.m. class outside of the Early Bird program, said, "I have to tell you that not a lot of students are lining up to take it."

The difference, though, he added, is that Early Bird students are likely to be highly motivated and disciplined. He said they also stand to benefit from more personalized attention in their smaller classes.

"We're like a family doctor rather than an HMO," he said. "The learning experience is different. Whether it's better or not, we'll find out. We're trying to get some creativity in the education of our students."