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Deanne Butchey, Assistant Dean, Florida International University

Deanne Butchey, Assistant Dean at Florida International University, joins us today to discuss distance education.

Tell us about the distance learning programs offered at Florida International University.

Florida International University offers a number of degree programs for which a student can receive an entire degree online. FIU Online offers online courses, certificates, undergraduate degrees, graduate degrees, and continuing education in varying fields for all your learning needs, including the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for success in any chosen profession.

At the Undergraduate level the University offers a Bachelor of Business Administration in Finance, a Bachelor of Business Administration in International Business, a Bachelor of Business Administration in Human Resource Management, a Bachelor of Business Administration in Management, a Bachelor of Public Administration, a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice, and a Bachelor program for Registered Nurses to complete a Bachelor's in Nursing (RN to BSN). At the Graduate level the University offers a Corporate MBA, a Master of Public Health, a Master of Science in Construction Management, a Master of Science in Criminal Justice, and a Post Professional Master of Science in Occupational Therapy.

Furthermore, there are several Certificate programs that the University offers online. These online certificate programs include a Certificate in Banking, a Certificate in International Bank Management, a FIBA-FIU Certified Associate in AML (AML/CA), an Entrepreneurship Undergraduate Certificate, an Undergraduate Certificate in African and African Diaspora, a Post-Master's Certificate in Nursing Education, and a Graduate Certificate in Nursing Education, an Undergraduate Women's Studies Certificate, and a Certificate in Writing for Business Online. FIU Online also offers Continuing Education programs, such as a Test Preparation Math Workshop, as well as online Paralegal courses and an online Paralegal Certificate.

FIU Online has grown exponentially in the last 10 years and now has 44,000 instances of enrollment in on-line courses, up from 662 in 2000-2001 when our on-line programming began. Enrollees are mainly undergraduates. A good proportion of these students supplement their traditional face-to-face instruction with online offerings since many of the same world class Faculty teach using both media.

What is the typical duration of each of your programs?

Florida International University is Miami-Dade County's first public, four-year University, one of South Florida's anchor institutions, and is ranked by the Carnegie as a Doctoral / Research University-Extensive. The student body is now roughly 40,000 students studying in over 800 programs, many of which offer courses either fully online or in web-assisted mode. Master's programs typically 2 years, Undergraduate degree programs 4 years and certificate programs roughly one year.

What would you say makes Florida International University programs different and better than other comparable online programs?

At FIU we make no difference in expectation of the performance of our students regardless of whether they take courses in situ or through distance education. We assess their performance throughout and at the end of each program and we find that there is no statistically significant difference in Student Learning Outcomes and satisfaction ratings of our programs among students who take 0-25% of their courses online, 25-50% online, 50-75% online and students who take in excess of 75% of their courses.

How important would you say accreditation is when choosing an online college?

Accreditation is vital, since it provides a mechanism for the University to display transparency and be accountable to all stakeholders: our students who we aim to prepare to succeed in a technology driven world, our community—to whose economic development we contribute by providing a talented, diverse, and highly qualified pool of graduates and leaders along with educational programs, applied research, and collaborate projects; and the academic community—to whom we bring new knowledge by creating an environment that nurtures high-quality, discipline-based research and the development of future scholars. While having said that Accreditation is important, we must recognize that not all accrediting bodies are alike, and even the same ones accredit different classifications of schools with different missions using different standards. So when reviewing a University of College's Accreditation report, evaluate the level of detail undertaken for various schools and the type of Accreditation procured. Also as of September 2009, only 570 member institutions around the world hold AACSB business accreditation, THE preeminent accreditation body of Business and Accounting Schools around the world of which even a smaller number, 171 have additional specialized accreditation for their accounting programs (like FIU's College of Business).

There is some debate as to whether or not online degrees are as worthwhile as traditional degrees. What steps does Florida International University take to ensure that online students are receiving the same education that they'd receive in a classroom?

We treat the collection of assessment data as vital tools to inform the improvement of our programs and do not exclude the Online students from the rigorous assessment undertaken by all our students.

What would you say are some of the benefits of earning a degree online rather than in a traditional classroom?

We are truly delighted to be able to meet students' need for more convenient and accessible education with a program that is not only flexible in today's economic environment where human capital needs to have the flexibility and freedom to follow global job opportunities and also to ensure anytime, anywhere lifelong learning.

If a student enrolled in one of your programs was interested in finding an internship in their field in their area, do you have any means of assisting them in acquiring an internship position?

The College of Business, through a combined effort between departments and Career Services has a well defined mechanism for placing all students regardless of what platform (online versus in situ) they undertake their courses, both in internship and eventual jobs.

Does Florida International University offer any job placement services to your students and graduates?

Yes a well funded and professionally run Career Services department offers professional development seminars, career fairs as well as individualized services like resume writing, and other important activities.

Is financial aid available to students in your programs?

Yes, the University places no distinction in awarding aid to online versus students who primarily take face to face classes.

Do you have any advice for students enrolling in online classes for the first time?

Do your due diligence. Speak to employers and employees in your field. Very quickly you will learn on a cost-benefit analysis the State University System in Florida performs much better than the private schools, with the added distinction of being held accountable to a wider group of constituents including the general public through our legislatures. Review ranking organizations like US News & World, Business Week, Financial Times and numerous others who rank FIU's College of Business highly in diverse fields such as Operations Management and International Business.

What do you enjoy most about your position at Florida International University?

Being given the mandate to significantly improve the quality of our education of our students and poised to take the College to the next level of excellence.