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EDUCATION TRENDS

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New international real estate master's program at FIU popular

By CHARLOTTE LIBOV

A mix of people – traditional graduate students, Realtors and investors who want to dive into South Florida's booming international real estate market – are enrolling in Florida International University's new master of science program in international real estate, a program official said.

"I haven't looked at the data, but it appears that we have students who want to work in real estate in the future, people who are already working in real estate and a lot of people who are looking at it for their own investing because if you're in South Florida, you know that most of the wealthy people are in real estate," said John Zdanowicz, director of the Jerome

Bain Real Estate Institute at FIU.

According to him, 22 students signed up for the first class, which began Jan. 9. "We only did a month of marketing," he said, adding that he expects the enrollment to double for the fall semester. The program is expected to have five instructors when running at full 45-student capacity.

"It's phenomenal for a school to have an international real estate program take off and become established so fast," said Guy Trusty, chairman of the Bain Institute's advisory board. "I remember when we sat down in the beginning six years ago and formulated the timeline we would need." The program was formulated with members of the Realtor Association of Greater Miami and the

Beaches, he added.

Last summer, FIU trustees approved the 12-month, \$20,000 curriculum, which offers 10 courses taught at FIU's Downtown Center, at Macy's on Flagler Street.

Each class that enters together stays together for the entire program, Mr. Zdanowicz said.

"This will be a lockstep process. You're in a group, and you continue with them, so you can set up group projects. Then you form friendships, and it develops into a good networking opportunity," he said, noting that FIU's executive MBA program is run the same way.

Focusing on international real estate is unusual for a university, but it takes advantage of South Florida's unique multicultural market, he noted.

"There are some real good real estate programs nationwide, but they tend to focus on 'plain vanilla' real estate," he said. "We twist that and look at the international investments because it's a lot more complicated and risky when you cross a border. Then, issues like foreign exchange rates, risk, legal constraints and also cultural issues come into play. Selling a condo to somebody in New Jersey is different than selling to someone in Bogotá, Colombia."

Last year, according to estimates by David Dabby, a consultant who works on the Bain Institute board, \$1.5 billion in South Florida commercial real estate and land – 15% to 20% of all sales – went to foreign buyers, and \$3 billion in South Florida residential real estate was sold abroad.