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New Small Business Development Center expands rapidly

BY NINA LINCOFF

Florida International University's newly opened Small Business Development Center's (SBDC) regional director, Jacqueline Sousa, officially began her role Monday. The center's sister center, the Pino Global Entrepreneurship Center, which hosts seminars under the university's College of Business, is still without a director.

"They're working on it," Ms. Sousa said.

The SBDC however, is rapidly expanding after having just opened in January. With four full-time consultants, the center plans on doubling that team quickly and hiring an associate director. Consultants will be primarily based at FIU's Brickell location, but will be available around the county at

FIU campuses.

The SBDC is one of about 40 such centers around the state, and joins a center in Broward, Palm Beach and the Keys, Ms. Sousa said. This one will specifically serve Miami-Dade and help area small businesses and entrepreneurs to find a smooth path to open or maintain business. FIU's SBDC offers no-cost consulting to businesses and individuals in South Florida, she said.

"It is part of FIU's mission to grow the local economy," Ms. Sousa said. Eventually, the center will be able to facilitate a dialogue between the small business community in the county and the faculty and students at FIU's College of Business.

Already, the SBDC has paired a small business with a couple of faculty members who might choose to use the busi-

ness as a case study. Potentially, students will be able to intern or work with small businesses and FIU faculty will be able to use the SBDC network to pull local information and research. Because FIU is an applied research institution, the possibilities for future study are great, Ms. Sousa said.

SBDCs in the state are funded by the US Small Business Administration and the State of Florida. The SBDC at FIU, Ms. Sousa said, is uniquely positioned because of its association with the university within its College of Business and its relationship to the Pino Center.

"As we grow and develop, the College of Business will be lending a lot of its resources and expertise, especially with some of the things we do with the Pino Center," Ms. Sousa said.

"Economic development and entre-

preneurship is a core mission of FIU and at the university level our president [Mark Rosenberg] is very passionate about it. It's part of the DNA," she said.

Since opening, FIU's SBDC has already consulted with close to 100 entrepreneurs and small businesses, she said. Small businesses and entrepreneurs are either recommended to or found by the SBDC and are welcome at any stage during development, whether it's just with an idea or already with a young, established small business.

"We aren't industry specific. We help anybody who needs the help," Ms. Sousa said. "We are particularly interested in the growth stage of companies, also companies that are interested in expanding to the international marketplace."

Details: business.fiu.edu/sbdc/