BACK TO SCHOOL

Local colleges and universities offer MBA programs tailored to time-starved professionals who need flexibility, Page 24
FAU GRAD: Getting an MBA while working was hard work, ‘but it was also very empowering,’ says Laura Cullen, owner of Clarke’s bar in Miami Beach.

Business professionals find MBAs give them competitive advantages

The only thing multiplying faster than MBA programs seems to be the reasons to get them. As schools offer increasingly flexible schedules and more narrowly focused programs, South Floridians are hitting the books in an effort to leap some rungs on the corporate ladder, gain the tools to build their own business, or simply feed the brain.

Jesus Rodriguez was hoping an MBA would shoot him up through the ranks of the public relations agency he was working for in Miami and then on to something bigger. "The goal was to be vice president of Coca-Cola in Latin America or something like that," said Rodriguez, 32.

But midway through an MBA for professionals at Barry University, he got caught in the claws of corporate downsizing—losing two jobs in rapid succession.

Rather than pound the pavement to hunt for a new boss, he decided to use what he was learning to become his own. In 2004, while he was still taking classes, he launched Page One Communications, a Miami public relations and corporate communications firm.

"The fact that I was going to school and was going to have an MBA gave me the confidence that I was going to succeed on my own," he said.

Barr’s small class sizes and intimate feel (the dean personally gave Rodriguez the second extension he needed to complete his degree in 2005) were the reasons he enrolled in and stayed at Barry, he said.

Laura Cullen also wasn’t thinking about starting a new busi-
Cliff Shapiro was in the midst of launching a fast-growing business called Today Gene Forever in Pompano Beach when he was told that he needed to go back to school to get his MBA. A business degree had always "intrigued" the 29-year-old retail chain proprietor, and when he found a program close to home that would still leave him time for his new venture, he decided to head back to school. "It was a tremendous amount of work," admits Shapiro, who opted for an executive MBA from Florida Atlantic University in April. "But the location and the schedule were very convenient. It was a perfect fit."

Aiming for time-starved students like Shapiro, South Florida schools are spinning out an array of MBA options. There are night-time MBA programs, weekend MBA programs, MBA programs that meet one night a week. Students can log on anywhere from any where.

"Most of the students have full-time jobs," says Detrick Crewther, director of advertising and communications at Nova Southeastern University's Huizenga College of Business and Entrepreneurship. "Getting back to school isn't really an option for them."

For Nova that means offering most of its master's programs online.

The University of Miami has an MBA for health professionals that only meets one weekend a month to accommodate the schedules of busy physicians. Florida Memorial University hopes to enroll in students offering a weekend MBA that can be completed in one year. And Florida International University recently opened a downtown location to attract time-starved professionals with schedules who would prefer to have happy hour near to the halls.

Business schools are packaging what they preach in terms of looking at the market and addressing the needs they see," said Bob Lucas, director of communications at the Graduate Management Admission Council, a nonprofit research organization. And it seems to be working. After years of declining MBA enrollment rates, the graduates of all universities in the United States saw increased applications, according to GMAC. In 2007 just 21 percent saw increased demand.

"While business as business schools may be booming, it's still a very competitive environment," says Harold Berkman, vice dean of the business programs at the University of Miami.

The school regularly recruits across the country and is planning to visit Taiwan and China in coming weeks to promote its MBA program.

Another important element in UM's class of 2009 includes the marketing role in its accreditation. While the majority of South Florida's business schools are accredited by one reputable association or another, the University of Miami is just one of four universities that have the seal of approval of the American Association of Colleges of Business — considered among the most stringent business-school accrediting organizations.

"We put a lot of credit in our accreditation," said Berkman. "One of the most important aspects of our program is that it's recognized all over the world."

Florida International University, Florida Atlantic University and Barry University also have the AACSB stamp of approval.

While it may give them a leg up on local competition, it hasn't kept other AACSB-approved programs at those schools from vying in on rare turf.

The University of Miami, for example, has a weekend executive MBA program in Miami and Northwester University's Kellogg School of Management — which is regularly ranked among the nation's top programs — is kicking off its second fifth season in the area.

Because many employees and MBA students are blue-collar, the index of high-end programs such as Kellogg's could mean a lot for competition for executive MBA candidates, GMAC research has found.

However, local university recruiters say they haven't seen an impact on their programs yet.

Still the idea of outsiders poaching MBA candidates bothers Berkman. While UM pumps more than $8 million into the local economy, and has more than 9,000 workers, programs like Kellogg's do little for the local economy, he said.

"Northeastern brings nothing to the table. They rent a few rooms, rent a few tables, their faculty flies in and then their tenants fly out," he said. "Would I rather not see them here the answer is yes. The answer is yes. The answer is no. The answer is nothing to the community."

But high-stakes competition may be key to keeping out the schools on their back, said Lis Casas, the director of marketing and recruiting for FIU's college of Business.

"Competition is healthy for the market," he said. "We welcome it, especially when it's coming from good schools."

And as any freshmen business major can tell you, competition is also good for consumers. In the following pages, you'll find a sampling of some of the graduate business programs that local colleges and universities have put together to compete for MBA candidates.

Florida International University, top, is trying to tap local crowds. Nova Southeastern University, above, offers 12 master's programs.

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MBAs for working professionals

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI
Coral Gables

THE GOODS: MBA programs with seven specializations. Executive and professional MBA programs can be completed at night and on weekends in 23 months. 

COST: $1,280 per credit hour.

CLASS SIZE: 28 to 48.

THE PITCH: Ranked top MBA program in Florida in a Wall Street Journal survey of corporate recruiters in 2004 and 2005, the University of Miami offers a variety of weekend and evening programs for working professionals.

Classes are organized in cohorts so students march through their courses with the same group of peers, building long-lasting connections.

Its MBA in health administration and policy meets Friday, Saturday, and Sunday once a month and is one of the few such programs in the United States that has dual accreditation both on the business and health side.

Another UM standout is its master's in professional management taught in Spanish. The program is arranged in two-week modules held five times a year and can be expanded into an MBA. The program has been bringing in students from Latin America for almost a decade.

Also new this year is a full-time MBA that can be completed in a single year.

UM holds claim to running the oldest continuously-operating executive MBA program in the Southeast. And that counts for something, said Harold Berkman, the university's vice dean of graduate business programs.

"If you have been doing something long enough and you're able to last, you get pretty good at it," he said.

NO GMAT OR GRE REQUIRED: Carlos Albizu University's business program in Doral is aimed at working adults who may be shy of admission tests.

COURTESY OF CARLOS ALBUZU UNIVERSITY

FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY
Broward, Palm Beach and St. Lucie campuses

THE GOODS: Ten graduate-level business programs including MBA programs with 11 specializations — many of which can be completed online. The school also offers a 20-month weekend executive MBA program and a 16-month weekend MBA program.

COST: $244 per credit hour.

CLASS SIZE: 20-40.

THE PITCH: With a newly built replica of a Wall Street trading room and a newly minted specialization in computer forensics, FAU says it's trying to stay abreast of what the business community needs from MBAs.

Among its offerings are specialties in electronic commerce, global entrepreneurship and sports management.

For those who can't make it to any of FAU's seven campuses, the school offers a virtual MBA, where students can log on from anywhere at any time.

Despite its online offerings, FAU requires its MBAs to have real world experience. Most students have at least a few years on the job and those in the Executive MBA program are required to have five years of "high level" work experience, said Marilyn Wiley, the senior associate dean of the business college.

"We don't want to be an option for those who didn't succeed," she said.

BARRY UNIVERSITY
(Andress School of Business) Miami Shores

THE GOODS: Offers a 36-credit MBA with eight specializations that can be completed during evenings and weekends, usually in about two years.

COST: $725 per credit hour.

CLASS SIZE: 14.

THE PITCH: Barry's business teachers are just that — teachers. Unlike some universities where assistants do much of the heavy lifting, or former executives are tapped to lead classes, all Barry MBA programs are taught by 22 full-time staff members. And all but one of them have PhDs, said Dean Jack Scarborough.

The emphasis on academics, combined with the smallest class size of any local AACSB-accredited school, creates an intimate, personal feel.

"We are very much the opposite of a large public university," he said.

Another Barry hallmark is encouraging students to follow a single publicly traded company throughout the entire course. As they use the company as a model in their marketing, accounting and strategy classes, the students develop a comprehensive case study that they can present to prospective employers. The process creates an integrated approach to business rather than leaving students with an "unrelated set of cookbook courses," said Scarborough.

"We teach them not to get bogged down in the minutiae and the details but to think like a top manager," he said.

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY
(H. Wayne Huizenga School of Business and Entrepreneurship) Fort Lauderdale, Davie

THE GOODS: Offers 12 master's degree programs with more than a dozen specializations — most available in the evenings, on weekends and online.

COST: $554 per credit for weekend programs; $944 per credit for online programs.

*TURNS OF SCHOOLS, 27

FIU has a strong entrepreneurial streak

completed in 20 months, an evening MBA that can be completed in two to three years, and an 18-month downtown MBA that hopes to pull in urban professionals with after-hours classes and catered dinners.

FIU recently started a similar program at its Pembroke Pines campus targeting Broward's professional crowd.

Home to the Eugenio Pino Global Entrepreneurship Center, the campus has a strong entrepreneurial streak — 20 percent of its 30,000 alumni have started their own businesses.

One of FIU's most rigorous programs is the executive MBA. The 20-month course includes a trip abroad and strict admission standards: Students must have at least eight years of working experience, including five in a top managerial position.

"You may have one professor, but you have many teachers," said Luis Casas, the director of marketing and recruiting for the College of Business. "You're learning from your classmates."
Local schools offer variety of MBAs

**SCHOOLS, FROM 26**

**CLASS SIZE:** 20.

**THE PITCH:** Nova Stakes claim to being the only business school in Florida with "entrepreneurship" in its name and prides itself on having a small campus atmosphere. "Unless you've lived through it, it's hard to tell young people how it all works," the school's other claim to fame is that it was among the first to pioneer online education.

Currently most of its 12 master's programs can be completed online.

Despite being the nation's seventh-largest private university, the school has managed to keep class sizes relatively small.

"You get the big campus feel and a small campus atmosphere," said Debora Crowther, manager of advertising and communications.

The school is accredited by the International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education.

**FLORIDA MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY**

**THE GOODS:** Offers a weekend MBA program that can be completed in one year.

**COST:** Approximately $600 per credit.

**CLASS SIZE:** Around 30.

**THE PITCH:** After recently receiving accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, FMU is launching its MBA program this January. The program will be offered Friday night and Saturday and is designed to be completed in 12 months — one of the few weekend programs that offers such a speed.

Just over two years ago, the university only offered bachelor's degrees. The MBA program will be FMU's fourth master's offering.

But just because the program is new doesn't mean it's green, said Program Director and Associate Professor of Marketing Robert Pellegrino.

"All of the faculty is doctorally qualified and all have graduate classroom teaching experience," he said.

**CARLOS ALBIZU UNIVERSITY**

**Doral.**

**THE GOODS:** Offers a night MBA program that can be completed in 15 months with specialization in entrepreneurship, organizational management and nonprofit management.

**THE COST:** $935 per graduate credit.

**CLASS SIZE:** 15-20.

**THE PITCH:** A satellite campus of the Puerto Rican school of the same name, Carlos Albizu's business program started in 2002 and is aimed at working adults who may be shy of admission tests. CAU does not require GMAT or GRE tests, but generally requires a 3.0 GPA to get into the program.

The program also gives credits based on previous work experience.

"We understand that there are a lot of people out there that are not good test takers," said Luis Rivera, the director of the business program. "We look for the students who have been focusing on their careers."

And the size — about 156 business students between the BA and MA business programs — keeps the feel intimate. "We cater to individuals that don't feel like they get that one-on-one customer service from other universities," he said.

CAU degrees are accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

**ST. THOMAS UNIVERSITY**

**Miami Gardens.**

**THE GOODS:** Offers a 42-credit MBA with six specializations and a 29-credit general MBA. The programs are offered in the evenings and on weekends and can usually be completed in 21 months.

**COST:** $625 per credit.

**CLASS SIZE:** 14-20.

**THE PITCH:** Founded as Biscayne College, this Catholic university has been operating in Miami since 1956. With small class sizes — the school has 740 graduate students — St. Thomas aims to provide students an intimate environment at its Miami Gardens campus.

The MBA program offers specializations in accounting, international business and sports management, among others. Health management specialization courses are offered on-site locations, such as Memorial Regional Hospital and Baptist Hospital.

Business professionals, foreign execs pursue MBAs in local schools

"PROFESSIONALS, FROM 246"

neness when she signed up for a weekend executive MBA program at Florida Atlantic University.

She was perfectly happy with her 10-year career as a liquor and wine wholesaler.

"I had a dream job; my bosses were incredible, and I was making good money," she said. "But I hit a spot in my life that I wanted to exercise my brain a bit and meet some different people."

But halfway through the "exercises," Cullen decided what she really wanted to do was pursue her childhood ambition of opening her own bar and restaurant. "I'm not going to lie to you and tell you I'm making any money yet," said Cullen, who opened Clarke's on 840 First St. in Miami Beach 11 months ago. "But it has been exhilarating and the greatest experience of my life."

Now 36, Cullen said she probably wouldn't have had the confidence or inspiration to launch Clarke's without an MBA.

"Working full-time and getting an executive MBA is a tremendous amount of work," she said. "But it was also very empowering."

As senior vice president of sales and marketing at Mexico's Grupo Bimbo — one of Latin America's largest food producers with more than 4,500 products in 16 countries — Gabino Gómez Carbalaj didn't seem like someone who needed a leg up.

But even at the top of his game, Gómez said he felt like he needed to keep studying in order to keep pace with all the young MBA graduates who are joining the company.

"I hadn't been to school in 25 years and things do change," he said. "I have another 14 to 16 years of productive life at the corporation, and if I want to stay relevant, I need to keep looking after my education."

Gómez is finishing up a master's in professional management at the University of Miami. The class meets five times a year, two weeks at a time, and is taught in Spanish. UM carries a certain cachet in Latin America, Carbalaj said, and the innovative schedule doesn't keep him away from the office too long.

As for Rodriguez, while the MBA was key to helping him start the business, he's found it's also been good for pulling in new customers. "When clients see MBA on my business card — and I have put it on my card — they seem to take me more seriously," he said.

"It has brought me a lot of credibility."