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Burdines-Macy's offers downtown Miami store to FIU for classes

By Tom Harlan

Burdines-Macy's is offering space at its landmark downtown Miami store to Florida International University.

FIU and Burdines-Macy's are working on a deal that would allow the university to start classes in a portion of the Flagler Street store in May, a university spokesman said, after space is reconstructed to accommodate the students.

FIU is in talks to open a small center for its MBA program at the company's store at 22 E Flagler St.

Company spokespeople say Nirmal K. "Trip" Tripathy, president and chief operating officer of Federated Department Stores in Miami, suggested that the store unite with the university.

Under the plan, College of Business Administration Dean Jose de la Torre and Assistant Dean Tomislav Mandakovic would manage the center and FIU business management professors would teach a variety of courses.

The university offers three MBA degrees: an executive MBA, an evening MBA and an international MBA that U.S. News and World Report ranks as a top 25 program.

The proposed campus would feature non-degree and degree programs for working professionals interested in taking business classes near their work instead of competing in rush-hour traffic.

Burdines was founded in downtown Miami in 1912 and the Flagler store was its flagship until a second location opened in Miami Beach in the 1920s, followed by four others in Florida over the next 30 years.

Burdines became part of Federated Department Stores in 1956 and entered into 56 locations throughout Florida. Federated changed the name of Burdines to Burdines-Macy's in 2004.

The business administration school was partly interested in opening an MBA program downtown to reach students who were favoring the weekend MBA programs due to rush-hour concerns, Executive Dean Joyce Elam said in a Jan. 25 interview.

More than 180 prospects attended a recent information session about the possible programs, university officials said, adding that enrollment is expected to grow with downtown Miami's population.

FIU's MBA program would be the second college program to set up operations in a former retail landmark. In 2002, Education Management Corp. leased 100,000 square feet in the Omni, a former retail mall at Biscayne Boulevard and 15th Street.

Company school Miami International University of Art & Design opened a 60,000-square-foot campus on the building's ground floor.

And Brown Mackie College-Miami, one of 19 locations in a nationwide system of business-related schools run by Education Management Corp., began sharing space with Miami International University of Art and Design on the second floor in November 2004.

But FIU and Burdines-Macy's have not signed an agreement, said Luis Casas, marketing director for FIU's College of Business Administration, adding that talks are progressing but it's too early to say the university would hold classes at the store.

"We are planning a downtown facility at Macy's," he said. "At this point we don't have a definite agreement signed. Therefore, we don't feel it's prudent to say anything beyond that."

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