Introduction

Florida International University (FIU) is celebrating its 40th year in 2012. What do you feel has been FIU’s biggest contribution to the domestic and international business community during this period?

Since its founding, FIU has had a mandate to serve Miami, a rapidly developing international business city. Not only has the school graduated more Hispanics than any other university in the U.S., but it has also risen as a central source of intellectual capital for Latin America’s business community. As a result, the business community – locally, nationally, and internationally – looks to FIU for a global perspective that stands out among its peers. Through cross-cultural research projects, our promotion of global entrepreneurship, and a large and growing network of international partner universities, we have made significant contributions to the study and practice of business throughout the world.

All of your graduate programmes share three core values; international perspective, hemispheric focus and technological inspiration.

Q (a) Please can you give a brief overview of each?

Our international perspective is our guiding principle. It’s in our name, and it’s infused into the majority of our coursework, research and student activity. Much of that global perspective has its roots in our hemispheric focus on Latin America. Many of our students retain close ties to Latin America and, with that, an inherent interest in doing business throughout the region. We are unique in our extensive, organic ties to that part of the world. Students and businesses come to us to understand Latin America, and Latin America comes to us to understand the rest of the world. We have

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Alexandra Skinner speaks to Joyce Elam »
While our technology comes into play in the tools faculty can employ in the classroom, it's also central to our growing array of online programmes, where state-of-the-art communication tools are so essential. We are constantly re-evaluating our efforts to deliver the full curriculum experience, and enable interaction between students and faculty, so that we can fully convey the rich material of our programmes to online students, wherever they live.

Please can you give our readers and prospective students an overview of what it is like to live and study in Florida, and the types of activities that they can enjoy outside of their studies? The allure of Miami and the beaches is legendary. For decades, the city has been an international draw for global vacationers at every stage of their lives. Our students can enjoy our magnificent beaches, the quiet beauty of the Everglades, the world-renowned snorkelling offered in the Florida Keys, and dozens of other leisure activities. More recently, the establishment and growth of Art Basel, the worldwide visual art movement with a tremendous global following, has added an enormous boost to Miami’s status as a meeting place for artists, curators, and investors.

Our new performing arts centre features a range of offerings from classical to avant-garde, and a flourishing new arts district extends new possibilities for cultural immersion. Miami’s culture is cosmopolitan and diverse, and reflected in every aspect of daily living; not only work, but food, music, dance, and sport. Living in Miami is truly an immersive experience as a world citizen.

Q: The FIU MBA Offering

Please can you outline your MBA value proposition, in terms of student profile and course overview, for the following?

• The International MBA (IMBA)

The IMBA programme is a full-time, immersive programme on our Miami campus for those who plan to leverage their knowledge and experience to pursue opportunities in international business. It is consistently one of the highest ranked one-year international business MBAs and graduate business degree programmes in the United States. Coursework gives students a full perspective of graduate business with an emphasis on conducting business in an international environment. This programme carries with it an extraordinary degree of internationalism, with students representing nations from throughout the world. They bring these diverse contacts and perspectives with them as they graduate and engage on a global scale.

• The Corporate MBA (CMBA)

The CMBA allows students to participate in an online MBA programme. Students in the programme are time-pressed professionals, who want to supplement their experience with the coursework that’s necessary to take the next step in their careers. The CMBA uses a sophisticated virtual learning management system and draws upon the expertise of full-time business school faculty members. Academic coaches help ensure that students feel a dynamic learning environment with their professors and classmates. The 18-month programme operates on an eight-week term with multiple start dates.

• The Executive MBA (EMBA)

The part-time, 18-month EMBA curriculum was recently redesigned to respond to the needs of business leaders. The curriculum is a radical departure from traditional business programmes, in which subjects are taught individually. The EMBA recognises that business decisions have multiple implications, and presents coursework in four interdisciplinary modules. Each is designed to sharpen personal leadership skills and develop a creative approach to innovation, all within a real-world business context.

• The Professional MBA (PMBA)

The PMBA is designed to meet the needs of ambitious individuals in middle management who are beginning to establish themselves in their careers, and seek opportunities to engage and advance in their careers. This programme offers both an evening-only option, and one that combines evening and online work. Evening classes are offered in two locations; in a downtown location that’s convenient for working professionals in the central business district, and in adjacent Broward County, making it convenient to students who live further north.

Q: The PMBA is delivered through a mix of campus-based and online teaching methods. How is this balanced?

We offer two PMBA tracks. One is offered entirely on campus, in the evenings. The other, which we call the PMBA Flex, allows students to take part of their coursework on campus, and the rest online. The ‘blended learning’ format gives students the flexibility of online delivery combined with the benefits of in-person classroom engagement. Classes meet once a week for a part-time schedule, with the option to accelerate. We have found that this programme offers the best of both worlds for many of our students.

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The China Track is designed to equip students with the rare combination of a U.S. business education and a background in Chinese language and culture. It consists of three terms of introductory (Mandarin) Chinese. During the IMBA coursework, followed by a summer study-abroad experience at Qingdao University in China. The summer programme offers two months of immersion-style Chinese language instruction coupled with university-level business classes in English. In the process of touring world-renowned landmarks, gaining first-hand knowledge of Chinese businesses and immersing in Chinese history and culture, students emerge with an insight into China that is extraordinarily valuable in today's global business environment.

Q: With your EMBA, you have established the EMBA Consortium on Business Innovation in a Global Context in order to enrich students’ educational experience. Please can you further expand on the activities of the consortium?

The EMBA Consortium is an innovative solution to a study-abroad problem many graduate schools face; the time-consuming
process of arranging for travel and study in another country, school and culture. Consortium members offer one-week programmes within their universities to fellow members, making all arrangements for travel and study for incoming students. Members provide a week of high-quality education to participants from each other’s programmes on an annual basis. In addition to FIU, participants from Italy, Brazil and Russia are already on board, with schools from China, India and the United Kingdom expected to join this year. A total of 78 students and alumni participated in the first year, and we expect this number to grow significantly.

Q Your CMBA is delivered online. How does the course content differ, if at all, from the campus-based courses, and how easy is it for CMBA students to gain access to professors and other MBA staff?

The course content of the CMBA is identical to that of the PMBA. Faculty is available online, and a trained staff of coaches is available to give students additional assistance as necessary. What enables this to be a standout programme is FIU’s extensive experience as a pioneer in online education, and its commitment to providing the highest possible level of technical support and faculty accessibility. The Financial Times listed the college among the 48 top business schools offering an online programme.

Q You offer a dual degree option. What does this entail and what benefits are students able to accrue?

In our dual degree programme, students from all over the world receive an MBA from their home institutions, and a Master of International Business from FIU’s Chapman Graduate School of Business, in a unique eight-month programme. As a world leader in international business education, FIU has helped create a network of partner schools that offer graduate students the opportunity to earn complementary business degrees in two different countries. Guidance in selecting complementary coursework in the two-degree programmes helps maximize the value and effectiveness of the overall educational experience. The Dual Degree network also fosters academic exchanges, collaborative research projects, joint career service activities, case competitions and executive education. Students experience a deeper exposure to international business by living and studying in a different culture and business environment for at least eight to nine months. By earning two complementary degrees in two different locales, students also gain access to two networks of business contacts and colleagues along with exposure to two sets of potential employers.

Students at FIU have the option to undertake a joint degree by combining an MBA with one of four Masters qualifications.

Q a) What was your thinking behind this proposition and the options that are on offer?

While the MBA is universally recognised as the essential degree in today’s business environment, many students seeking to specialise in a field wanted additional education to support that specialisation. To that end, the Chapman Graduate School of Business offers nine different joint degree programmes that build on the MBA and other business degrees. Four of the programmes include degrees in business specialties, including Master of Finance, Master of Science in Information Technology, Master of Science in International Real Estate, and Master of Science in Human Resources Administration. Other joint degree programmes combine the MBA with other specialties at the university, such as the joint programmes in Law and Latin American and Caribbean Studies.

Q b) Do you feel that a joint degree adds more value to a student’s academic profile than a standalone MBA?

In a world that’s growing more complex and specialised, students seek the need for an education that addresses several different areas of specialised expertise. That specialisation can be a key differentiation when it comes to ultimate advancement in a particular field. While an MBA is considered the gold standard in most of the business community, certain fields may require more extensive, specialised training. For example in securities law, a joint MBA is often the background of choice.

Looking Ahead

Q Over the next 12 to 18 months what can new and existing students expect, in terms of programme innovations, from Florida International University?

We are looking at an extraordinary period of programme growth and opportunity for our students worldwide. Our EMBA will give a select group of leaders the opportunity to learn in a new way, in a modular-style setting that takes a 360 degree approach to global business challenges. We will begin a new Master of Science in Health Information and Management Systems, training students for one of the fastest growing job categories in the U.S. We will also deepen our commitment to offering our courses online by developing a wider array of degree programmes. Our Masters of International Business will be offered online, and we are developing more online versions of our very successful specialised programmes. These are excellent courses for those who want to engage in business on a global level. You will also see our college deepening our engagement with our international partners.

We have grown at a rapid rate in the last five years to meet the demands of students and businesses. We see the next five years as a period where we harness that growth, continue to hone our programmes, and continue to build on our excellence.

BIOGRAPHY

Joyce Elam is Executive Dean of the College of Business Administration at Florida International University.