Florida’s demographics include some ethnic and religious groups you may not know are here.
REAL LIFE

Businesses are bringing more than money to Florida colleges and universities.

By Barbara Miracle

Students who sign up for Robert Brechner’s Principles of Marketing class at Miami-Dade Community College learn by doing. Brechner’s class transforms itself into an advertising agency with a real client: Duhaney Buick Pontiac GMC of Miami Lakes. Students perform market analysis and handle public relations, advertising and other marketing tasks. There’s real money involved, too. The dealership gives the class $2,500 and donates $500 to the business school.

Is Brechner’s class a sellout to commercialism or a win-win situation for the dealership and the school?

“What I really like is that it gives the students a chance to sink their teeth into a real-life project,” says Brechner, who has been a marketing professor for 37 years at MDCC. “It isn’t a little group project that we do for a week or two.”

Most Florida colleges and universities seem to agree with Brechner’s perspective. Seventeen Florida public and private colleges, community colleges and universities — including the University of Florida, Florida State University and Stetson University — participate in programs organized by California-based EdVenture Partners, the company that matched the dealership with MDCC’s north campus.

“We have really only seen growth in the willingness of faculty to take on our programs,” says Tony Sgro, founder and CEO of 12-year-old Ed...
LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Robert Brechner’s marketing class created an ad campaign for Duhaney Buick Pontiac GMC and helped raise money for charity through a marketing event, which included a raffle. Beside Brechner (front left) is Duhaney general manager Harold Bardin.

Venture. As for interest in his corporate-university match-making program in Florida, Sgro says, “It has been an epicenter of activity for us and growing.”

When approaching a new school, Sgro typically contacts the dean of the business school or the chair of the marketing department. His pitch is that he will give students real-life experience — and valuable future contacts — with national companies such as General Motors, Lockheed Martin, Citicorp, Honda and others. Sgro says that only one school — not in Florida — rejected his program as being too commercial.

Businesses love EdVenture’s partnerships with colleges and universities, too. Who wouldn’t love to have up to 30 people put together a detailed marketing plan for a mere $2,500?

In another auto dealership-university partnership, Tallahassee’s Champion Chevrolet has worked with John Brennan’s marketing class at Florida State University. Barbie Jordan, sales manager at the dealership, enthuses about the marketing campaign for the Chevrolet Avalanche pickup truck-SUV that students put together last year. The project, called “An Avalanche Hits Tallahassee,” included displaying the Avalanche along with a rock-climbing wall at the Downtown Get Down celebration during FSU’s Homecoming weekend.

Jordan says that the dozen students in the class visited the dealership several times to go over their plans. When the students made their final presentation to the dealership, they dressed in business attire, just as advertising agency professionals would do.

“Every year, at least two of them ask me for a reference,” says Jordan, adding, “and I’ve tried to hire some of them.”

Other partnerships with higher education institutions in Florida:

CEOs in the Classroom

Florida International University’s College of Business Administration is teaming up with Guarded Networks, a fast-growing Fort Lauderdale-based network security company, to help train IT professionals in computer security. The two will share expenses and revenue.

FIU is helping to design the curriculum and is providing the marketing while Guarded Networks Vice Chairman and President Richard Dobrow, an FIU alumnus, and his employees will teach. Students — working professionals and FIU students — will get a certificate of completion and can take a computer security professional’s exam but will not get college credit.

Says Business School Dean Joyce Elam, “I see our major responsibility as a business school to prepare our students for successful careers.”

Sun, Surf and Learning

At Johnson & Wales University, internships and co-op programs aren’t just available, they are required of all students.

“We have them built into our curriculum,” says Larry Rice, dean of academic affairs at the Florida campus in North Miami. The university, which has about 2,100 students at its 11-year-old Florida campus — the university’s home is in Providence, R.I. — focuses on hands-on learning as part of its associate’s, bachelor’s and master’s degrees in business, hospitality, culinary arts, computer technology and other career-oriented programs. “It is where theory meets practice,” says Rice.

Unlike at most schools, students begin taking classes in their major during their first year and complete at least one internship, typically in their sophomore year.

In the school’s hospitality program, partners include the Alexander Hotel in Miami Beach, the Westin Diplomat Resort & Spa in Hollywood, Turnberry Isle Resort & Club, Marriott Hotels and Carnival Cruise Lines. The school also owns the Bay Harbor Inn & Suites, a 45-room inn near Miami Beach.

Rice says the job placement rate has been 100% in the past two years at the Florida campus.

Campus and Community

A coalition of state college and university presidents is promoting “service learning” through Florida Campus Compact, part of the 18-year-old National Campus Compact organization.

The idea is that students can apply the skills they are learning in class to a real-life task by volunteering in a civic or community organization. Engineering and architecture students, for example, might work with a local government to design an affordable housing complex.

Florida Campus Compact awarded $210,000 in impact grants to nine Florida colleges and universities in 2002-03. All together, 33 Florida higher education institutions, both public and private, are members of the program, paying from just under $500 to $3,600 in annual dues.

Nursing Solution

Florida’s nursing shortage and the state’s budget crunch have put pressure on community colleges to find new ways to fund nursing education. To that end, Polk Community College has formed a partnership with Lakeland Regional Medical Center, four smaller hospitals and a major clinic.

The hospitals will donate $1.3 million to PCC over three years. The money will be used to create a nursing recruiter position, hire nursing faculty and fund scholarships.

Community colleges turn out 67% of the state’s registered nurses, according to PCC.