International business still lures grad students

BY SHERRI C. RANTA

Students in full-time international business graduate programs are increasing in numbers, despite a year of uncertainty marked by terrorism and economic and political instability.

More US and foreign students are enrolled in Florida International University's International Masters of Business Administration program this year than last, but the percentage of domestic students rose, said John LaRochelle, marketing coordinator, International MBA program.

"Normally, the program averages about 70% international and 30% US, but this year we're looking at 60% international and 40% US," he said. "The number of US students increased at a greater rate."

Total enrollment, Mr. LaRochelle said, will grow from 57 to about 80 this fall. The international MBA program is a daytime one-year program open to students who do not necessarily have a business background.

The uncertain economy, he said, may be one reason for the increase in US students. Some, facing a frozen job market and layoffs, may be looking to switch careers or enhance their credentials, he said.

"Another factor," he said, "is FIU's reputation. We're becoming more well-known. Miami is an attractive place to students in other areas of the US and to students in other countries."

This year's class will represent 31 nations, he said. Heavy marketing in Europe, including Moscow, and Latin America drove those numbers, Mr. LaRochelle said. FIU officials plan to continue marketing efforts.

Foreign applicants to the school's Masters of International Business program are on the increase as well, said Lea Pacheco, associate director of the program. It differs from the International MBA curriculum in that it is a 30-credit program that requires a business background or appropriate undergraduate degree.

About 90 students are enrolled for the fall, she said. About 50% are international, followed by about 20% from Latin America and another 30% from the US.

International students, she said, are not afraid to come to Miami.

"They probably feel it is a safe city, not a major city like New York that could be a target. They feel safe here," she said.

Even after the events of 9/11 last year, Ms. Pacheco said, who was in Brazil recruiting at the time, enthusiasm for the program did not diminish.