Local universities bring MBA courses to work

Going to school has turned into 'school coming to you' for some businesses that help employees earn MBAs, other degrees or certificates.
Florida Atlantic University and Florida International University are among the schools that are part of this emerging trend known as on-site education. FAU's College of Business has offered an on-site MBA program and several non-credit certificate programs at South Florida businesses and government agencies since the late 1990s.

FIU's College of Business Administration has offered a non-degree Master's Certificate in Project Management at employers' sites since the late 1990s, and it plans to launch several other on-site, non-degree business programs.

The program, sponsored by the not-for-profit Project Management Institute, consists of seven courses in which participants study concepts of leadership, management, team facilitation, conflict resolution and negotiation strategies. "It is for managers in all ranges and covers all aspects of project integration," said Vince Daniels, director of business development at FIU's Department of Professional Education.

FIU offers the Project Management program in open enrollment sessions at its campuses and offices of businesses and local government agencies that sponsor their employees.

On-site programs give employers a chance to build camaraderie among employees, while also letting them avoid a second commute on school nights, said Marilyn Wiley, associate dean for graduate programs and research at FAU's College of Business.

On the other hand, Wiley pointed out that "many employers are less willing to sponsor and pay for all these programs amid this decade's slow economy than they were during the late 1990s. Far more frequently, employers will sponsor, and reimburse all tuition – or portions of it – for groups of employees who take MBA courses at university campuses.

Numerous South Florida employers send groups of students to FIU campuses, primarily in evenings, for MBA programs, Daniels said. FIU has no immediate plans to offer MBA programs at employers' offices, Daniels said.
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Marilyn Wiley  
Associate dean, FAU College of Business

For several years, FAU has held MBA classes at the Boca Raton office of ACTS Retirement-Life Communities.

"We are talking with them about offering some non-credit business programs for some of their supervisory people, which we would hold at their site," said Carl Riegel, chairman of the Department of Industry Studies at FAU's College of Business.

This year, FAU completed its first MBA program at the South Florida offices of BellSouth.

FAU is talking with Fort Lauderdale-based Arby's about the prospect of holding MBA courses at offices of that company.

FAU's MBA program consists of 14 courses and 40 hours of coursework, including its on-site programs.

For students who work full time, the program usually takes two to two and a half years of night and weekend courses, Wiley said. Tuition and fees are about $8,000 per student.

"If a business comes to us, we will talk about an on-site program," Wiley said.

But FAU is putting more focus on recruiting businesses to sign up groups of students for its on-campus MBA programs.

Partly because of the state's tight budget for education, Wiley said FAU does not want to "overextend itself" by having faculty members spend time teaching away from campuses.

A link to Toronto

But by early next year, FAU might be actively marketing some new on-site programs through a venture with Canada's York University of Toronto, Ontario.

York's Schulich School of Business has been offering what it calls "in-company customized programs" for 25 years.

In late June, FAU and Schulich were holding discussions about setting up an on-site program in South Florida that would include faculty of both universities.

"Schulich is the expert in offering continuous learning for companies' executives and managers," Riegel said. "If we do this with them, we will actively solicit businesses."

A partnership between FAU and Schulich would include an MBA program and several non-degree programs and courses.

Non-degree programs probably would include management courses for engineers, finance courses for managers in non-financial departments with some understanding of that topic and leadership programs, Riegel said.

Companies involved with FIU's on-site Project Management program include United Airlines and Carrier Corp.

Many local companies, including architectural firms and construction companies, have also hired FIU to offer the program on-site.

"We offer these programs continuously for the Miami-Dade government," Daniels said.

The Project Management Institute, based in Newtown Square, Pa., offers its program in 125 countries. FIU is among universities that are registered to have faculty members teach the nine courses in the Project Management program.

The program consists of 20 classes, taught at weekly and bi-weekly intervals for six months.

Daniels said FIU is considering its own on-site, non-degree programs in international bank management and accounting and finance for non-financial managers.

FIU has an early 2004 target date for launching the programs.

FIU also is seeking certification from the Board of Certified Financial Planners to offer that group's Certified Financial Planner program.

The university would offer that program at its campuses and to businesses at their sites, Daniels said.

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