Alternative MBA programs grow in South Florida

BY ED DUGGAN

The master of business administration degree — the MBA — has long been a golden key to corporate opportunity and promotion. Until recent years, because of availability, cost and inconvenience, it has also been a golden bar to some working men, women and minorities. That has changed.

In South Florida, at least 11 local accredited universities now offer MBA programs on evenings, weekends or online. Of the 11, four offer online MBA degrees and four others offer partial instruction online.

The University of Miami offers a weekend executive MBA program, as does Florida Atlantic University, Florida International University, Barry University and Nova Southeastern University.

H. Christian Skoglund, 24, a native of Goteborg, Sweden, started an accelerated 12-month Lynn University MBA program in September 2002 and is on track to finish in August.

"It’s a hectic pace two nights per week, but I enjoy the interaction with the other MBA candidates," Skoglund said.

Although he has a perfect 4.0 grade point average, Skoglund said the MBA course work is both challenging and satisfying.

He also likes the international character of the student body at Lynn and says a U.S. MBA is highly prized throughout the international business community.

"To me, the MBA program is much more than an instructional and educational opportunity — it’s also an important networking base for future career moves," Skoglund said. "I already represent some companies from Turkey and China in Sweden, so the international contacts at Lynn are very important to me now and will be in the future."

American International University

American International University, a for-profit holding of Career Education Corp. (Nasdaq: CEC), a Delaware corporation based in Hoffman Estates, Ill., has 51 campuses, including one in Fort Lauderdale, although it seems to place great emphasis on online instruction.

At the end of April, there were 1,100 students in the online division of the university, with an estimated 500 in the MBA program. The cost is a flat $26,000 plus credit hour.

Carlos Abizu University

With campuses in the Coral area of Miami-Dade and San Juan, Puerto Rico, Carlos Abizu University is still virtually unknown to most South Floridians. It offers an accelerated MBA program, requiring 36 credit hours and can be completed in a year by attending its once-a-week, 6 p.m. to 10 p.m., class.

Jose O. Mederos, the university’s director, said the program has 184 students, an average of 59 students per class, and currently has 29 students enrolled in its accelerated MBA program.

Florida International University

Miami-Florida International University offers four MBA programs, some of which were designed for working students.

The Monday through Thursday MBA program requires 55 credit hours and costs approximately $12,000 for Florida residents and $26,000 for nonresidents.

The average age is 25 and 14 percent are international students representing 36 countries.

South Florida State College

South Florida State College offers an MBA program that requires 56 credit hours and costs $14,880 for Florida residents and $30,420 for nonresidents.

Lynn University

Lynn is located in suburban Boca Raton, where the MBA program is offered two evenings a week as well as online, said Ralph Norico, dean of the College of Business and Management.

"There has been more demand for the program than we expected," Norico said. "We already have close to 100 students on campus.

He cites the fierce competition for jobs where a high school diploma or bachelor’s degree is just not enough for today’s major career paths.

"We offer the MBA in six eight-week terms per year where students can take one or two courses a term," Norico said. "It has also been offered for the last three terms completely online."

Tuition is billed at $460 a credit hour, or $1,380 for a three-credit course. Full MBA tuition at Lynn is currently $16,560.

Nova Southeastern University

Nova Southeastern University, a private school, is becoming an MBA powerhouse with its School of Business & Entrepreneurship where approximately 2,000 are enrolled in various MBA programs.

"We offer traditional MBA programs during the day, as well as Friday night/Saturday programs, and complete online MBAs as well," said Patricia Jones, associate dean at the business school.

It takes 43 credit hours to earn the degree.
LOCAL OFFERINGS

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Source: The School.

More than 25 percent of PBAC students are foreign

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MBA at NSU. The cost for the daily or weekend program is $475 per credit hour, or $20,025 for the degree. Online candidates are charged $525 per credit hour, or $22,975 for the Internet based MBA.

MBA specialties abound: entrepreneurship, leadership, health services, finance, and marketing are the concentrations. "It's the largest area MBA program for a reason," Jones said. "All the professors are PhDs—and have years of actual industry experience."

Palm Beach Atlantic College

More than 25 percent of the student population at Palm Beach Atlantic College is made up of international students, said Richey Andrew, admissions counselor for the MBA program. "An American MBA gives students more prestige and better opportunities in their own countries."

Maurocito Escudero, a student from Mexico City in his third year of MBA study, agrees. "The MBA gives me more opportunity to recognize and absorb job learning skills," he said. "It's not only a different kind of a business relationship in the U.S., but a different language and cultural environment."

Palm Beach Atlantic offers an evening MBA program at its West Palm Beach campus, and many classes are online. "It's moving in that direction," Andrew said. "Over 100 are enrolled in the program and, by the rate it's growing, we look to have a record fall enrollment."

Classes are offered from 6:45 p.m. to 9:15 p.m. one night a week for a 16-week semester, with others offered from 5:20 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. two nights a week. It takes 36 to 48 credits for the MBA degree, depending on whether or not four required courses were taken as an undergraduate. Tuition cost ranges from $11,520 to $15,360.

St. Thomas University

St. Thomas University offers a number of MBA programs, including a combination three-year MBA/law degree.

"We offer either a Master of Business Administration or a Master of International Business degree for working students," said Joseph Iannone, dean of the graduate school.

The MBA is offered in four 11-week night terms each year. "A course load is typically two classes per week, each from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m.," he said.

"There are currently 115 students enrolled in the MBA program, up from 85 in the last year. We offer it at the main Miami campus, and in addition at our Coral Gables and Kendall facilities," Iannone said.

Each three-credit course is billed at $540 per credit, so that the degree will cost $19,440 to $22,680 over the 18 months or two years it takes a student to finish. The degree requires between 36 and 42 credits, depending on whether or not some key undergraduate courses were taken.

The MBA course can be completed in 18 months, but most students take two years, Iannone said. Some classes are also available online, but not the entire program.

"We are moving toward online offerings," he said. "Typical student financing is via no-interest Stafford loans for a maximum of $8,500 a year, conventional student loans of $10,000 a year and/or corporate re-imbursement."

"Our mission as a university is to serve the student, especially from traditionally un-represented groups," Iannone said. "Our class size ranges from one to 15 and we also want to use and adapt the best technology. We like the mix of small classes and cutting-edge technology," he said.

There are 115 students in the MBA program. "It's attractive in that it can be taken while still employed," he said. "I see the program continuing to expand for both the MBA and the Master of International Business degrees."

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UM offers off-campus classes throughout the state

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University of Miami

The University of Miami in Coral Gables, a private, independent university, is a pioneer in alternative MBA degrees and offers name recognition that few can equal. There are evening MBA classes and Saturday executive MBA classes, with a number of different specialties or concentrations.

It also offers off-campus classes in Delray Beach, Orlando, Tampa, and the Bahamas. Its Saturday MBA program has the distinction of being the oldest continuously operating off-campus MBA program in the south.

It takes 51 credit hours for the 45 Saturday classes a year, with costs between $30,000 and $45,000 for the various MBA degree programs.

University of Phoenix

The University of Phoenix is a for-profit university with an aggressive marketing plan for undergraduate and graduate students.

Lynn Mulherin, VP for the Florida campuses, sees solid growth ahead for the MBA program.

“When the economy is good, employees go back to equip themselves for advancement,” she said. “When times are bad, they go back to improve skills and earn credentials to secure their jobs.”

There are two Bwad campus programs for

The University of Phoenix: Plantation and Fort Lauderdale Cypres Creek area.

“Almost all students in the MBA program take evening classes one night a week, or meet on Saturday,” Mulherin said. “There is also weekend workshops per week and participation in an outside learning team.”

There are collaborative projects with three to five student participants in each learning team looking at real-world business problems and devising real-world workplace solutions.

Currently, 225 Fort Lauderdale area candidates are enrolled in the University of Phoenix MBA programs. A number of MBA specialties are offered, including global management, health care management, HR management, marketing management and technology management.

The university also offers something called FlexNet, a combination of an campus and online instruction. It is an optional program designed for working students who need to attend in their jobs.

“During the six-week-long term, students attend the first and last workshops on campus, then take the other classes online,” Mulherin said.

The program takes two years, and at $348 per credit hour and 42 credits needed for the degree, tuition costs range from $12,000 to $14,280.

“We listen to the needs of both the students and the area employers,” she said. “Employer feedback prompted us to recently add both the HR and health care specialties.”

The university has initiated a new delivery system, Resource, to supply course materials and books via computer downloads at $60 a course.

“For every student who had to stand in line for book orders or wait weeks for an out of stock text, Resource is a real improvement,” Mulherin said.

Florida Atlantic University

Florida Atlantic University has two MBA programs an online virtual program and a weekend executive program.

The cost of the MBA program is $30,000 a credit hour and 35 courses are offered each semester. For online students, there is an additional service fee of $100 a course.

“The degree can be offered completely online,” said Dr. Peggy Golden, head of FAU’s virtual MBA program. “A student first needs to be accepted into the MBA program, then can choose whether to be an on-campus or online student.

The course requires 40 credit hours for those with a background in business and a previous business degree or 52 without that background, she said.

There are 350 to 400 online MBA students each semester. MBA specialties include finance, accounting, marketing, information technology, international business, and global entrepreneurship.

“A weekend schedule to earn a Bachelor of Business Administration requires 60 credit hours and can be completed in 18 months to two years,” Golden said.

“Another 15 months earns an MBA on a Friday night and Saturday schedule.”

Weekend offerings include concentrations in environmental management, crisis intervention management, economics, HR management, and health administration.

Debra Zambra, COO of Fort Lauderdale-based Gateway Insurance Agency did the first half of her degree on campus and the second half online, finishing in December.

“It’s hard to compare the two since they are two completely different programs,” Zambra said. “Online, you must be self-motivated to log on and get to work. I have a five-year old daughter and it was difficult to find and pay for a reliable babysitter so I could go to the campus. But I had my eye on the prize and the online option helped me when I needed it.”

Some things were the same.

“The richness of the curricula changed and I enjoyed talking classes with exchange students from Peru and Spain,” she said.

Some things were different.

“The face-to-face discussions and debates were easier in person then in a chat room. There is no emotion in an e-mail, so it’s sometimes difficult to gauge the emotion and understand the sender’s perception,” Zambra said.

Zambra holds an upper level position in an insurance agency that handles property, casualty, life insurance, financial services and employee benefits.

“Working on my MBA broadened my knowledge all along, keeping my mind fresh. I’ve been out six months and still recovering, but if I won the lottery I’d go back for a doctorate.”

Connecting with professors proved to be more difficult online.

“I felt a couple of times that some of the professors had abandoned us,” she said. “It was a new program and it takes a big adjustment to teach on the net versus live, on-campus classes. For professors, it calls for new skills. They must be computer literate and responsive with e-mails.”

“Overall, I think they were very good and we were actually harder on us as online students, really taking us up a load [of work],” she said.

Was it worth it?

“Oh, yes,” she laughed. “I’m a second-degree black belt in karate. Getting my MBA degree was like tying a new black belt around my mind.”

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