Businesses send employees back to school

By Eileen Cukier

The saying goes that one's learning never ends. And at South Florida colleges and universities, the opportunities for executive education are abundant.

The tri-county area's nearly two dozen community colleges and universities offer a variety of educational programs that range from half-day training sessions to two-year commitments.

Banks, general contractors, logistics companies and national retailers are some of the local industries that rely on South Florida institutions to train their workforces.

Florida International University in Miami offers a dozen open-enrollment courses in both Miami-Dade and Broward counties. From "Accounting and Finance for Non-Financial Managers" to "Training and Human Resource Development," the programs are anywhere from two full days to 31 evening sessions.

Tuition ranges from $795 to $1,995 a person, depending on the course. A discount is offered when three or more individuals from the same organization sign up.

Grisell Sotolongo, director of the Office of Professional Education at the FIU College of Business, said that if companies want to train a larger group, they can work with the college to create a custom, closed-enrollment program for employees.

"If there's something that's not already packaged, we will go to our business faculty so they can work with us and provide what the company needs," she said.

Some custom programs include a program for Miami-Dade principals, an accounting and finance course for Miami Children's Hospital, and a six-day introductory program for Miami-Dade County employees, she said.

"We're talking to HR managers in the business community" to expand the program, Sotolongo said.

The James W. McLamore Executive Education Center at the University of Miami School of Business also offers ongoing, on-demand corporate education programs, director David Green said.

"Typically, there will be one- or two-week programs, although sessions vary and they can be a few hours or a day," Green said. "We match the demand with our faculty."

Programs at the 6-year-old center may deal with business strategy, wealth management, and organizational and behavioral classes, he said.

Enrollment usually averages between 25 and 30 students, and open-ended for companies that want to design programs "because we don't have a wide selection of open-enrollment classes," Green said.

Also offering a variety of programs is the Hudson Institute of Entrepreneurship and Executive Education at the Wayne Huizenga Graduate School of Business and Entrepreneurship at Fort Lauderdale.

Nova Southeastern University.

The institute regularly offers open-enrollment seminars and workshops. Though the training sessions are offered to the general public, companies may also have them given on-site, with or without tailoring.

"We do custom programs, too," Hudson Institute Director Ed Gripe said. BankAtlantic, Office Depot and DHL Worldwide Express are some of the local companies that offered NSU programs for their employees.

The programs "usually are something involving leadership," Green said.

The companies are "training potential leaders or trying to make people better leaders," he said.

Companies will bring in people who are managing operations in other countries or locations who have some management experience, but need new skills to keep current.

"The companies want to integrate their own philosophies," Green said.

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