FIU Launches Program in Dominican Republic

Florida International University is living up to its name — by taking its business education programs overseas, into the Dominican Republic.

FIU's College of Business Administration launched its first graduate program for young, working executives in Santo Domingo this spring in a joint program with the Dominican University, Universidad Iberoamericana.

Professors from South Florida will travel to the Caribbean nation to offer different course modules in the 15-month international MBA program offered on weekends in English to an initial 15 students.

"We're looking to this as a platform to launch other programs in the Caribbean and Latin America," said José de la Torre, dean of FIU's graduate school of business, noting talks for similar executive education programs in the Netherlands Antilles and Puerto Rico. "Our goal is to become the business school of the Americas."

The venture comes as Florida and the Dominican Republic — already top trade partners with nearly $5 billion in two-way trade in goods last year — work to forge a "strategic alliance" that will help spur economic development, job growth, cultural exchange, research and other links.

FIU, through its Latin American and Caribbean Center, is part of a larger consortium of schools, government agencies and business groups mapping out an alliance plan with such Dominican counterparts as the Global Foundation for Democracy and Development, led by former Dominican Republic President Leonel Fernández.

Fernández said education is vital to the alliance, because his Caribbean nation of nearly 9 million residents is evolving into a service economy, with tourism already its largest source of foreign currency.

The Dominican Republic's industrial free zones also are moving from low-tech operations such as sewing clothes toward more high-tech tasks including data entry and call centers, the ex-president said at a recent forum in Miami to unveil the strategic plan.

Of course, training needs go far beyond MBA programs.

Basic education in the Dominican Republic now lags even behind most other Caribbean nations, except Haiti. The country today mandates schooling only through sixth grade, the ex-president said.

That's why the alliance partners are working to launch the first community college-type program in the Dominican Republic, with Daytona Beach Community College active in that venture. Talks also are under way to offer hospitality management training through "distance learning" over the Internet, said officials at Daytona Beach Community College.

Fernández sees cooperation in education and services also extending into the health care field longer term.

The ex-president envisions U.S.- and Florida-accredited programs that would train doctors and nurses in the Dominican Republic, who would then be able to work in Florida and beyond.

Plus, he foresees development of elder care villages in the lower-wage Dominican Republic, where U.S. retirees with chronic diseases could get quality health care assistance at a fraction of U.S. costs.

Efforts to boost cooperation in services, trade, investment, and other areas will be high on the agenda when Gov. Jeb Bush leads a Florida business mission to the Dominican Republic Sept. 15-18.

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