

# SUPPORTING ENTREPRENEURSHIP

By Richard Westlund

**With small businesses driving the** creation of new jobs in South Florida, Miami-Dade County's colleges and universities are increasingly getting into the business of teaching entrepreneurship.

"That's where the jobs are today — not in mid-level management," says Alan L. Carsrud, executive director of the Eugenio Pino and Family Global Entrepreneurship Center at Florida International University in Miami. "At the same time, students [are] tired of being cogs in the wheels of a big organization and are looking for more entrepreneurial opportunities."

The statistics bear him out: According to the US Census Bureau, there were 240,000 small businesses in Miami-Dade in 1997. That number had risen to an estimated 330,000 by July 2005, according to a report by the FIU Entrepreneurship Center.

Statistics from the US Small Business Administration also show a steady increase in SBA-guaranteed loans to small businesses in Miami-Dade: \$78.1 million in fiscal year 2003, \$99.3 million in 2004 and \$114.5 million in 2005.

Those numbers are driven in part by Miami-Dade's immigration patterns, says H. Leigh Toney, executive director of Miami Dade College's Carrie P. Meek Entrepreneurial Education Center in Liberty City. "Miami ... has a long history of attracting immigrants who start their own businesses," she says.

The FIU report notes, too, that "There are some unique features of the start-up and new firms in South Florida, including a greater connection to international markets."

The FIU study also found that blacks and Hispanics in Miami-Dade are about 50 percent more likely than whites to become involved in the start-up process for new businesses. In fact, blacks and Hispanics make up a larger proportion of the entrepreneurial community in Miami-Dade than in North Florida or the rest of the United States.

"Entrepreneurs are the

bedrock of American society, and particularly important to African-Americans and Haitians," says H. Leigh Toney, executive director of Miami Dade College's Carrie P. Meek Entrepreneurial Education Center in Miami-Dade County's Liberty City area. Toney adds that entrepreneurship education — with actual experience starting a



business — is particularly important in the community around Liberty City, where few families own businesses. "It's not something that is discussed at their dinner tables," she says.

So Toney, who also serves as an advisory board member of the National Association of Community College Entrepreneurship, is reaching out to students as early as high school. MDC's outreach program takes 50 students through entrepreneurship training, a business plan competition and market research, and then helps them start businesses they can run over the summer. Toney says students in the program start 25 new businesses each year, and many of them continue with their companies long after the summer is over.

Julene Fleurmond is one such entrepreneur. As an 11th grader at Miami Northwestern Senior High School, she learned the basics of entrepreneurship at MDC. Now a 20-year-old sophomore at the University of Miami, she still runs her Web design company, Envibrance Design Studios.

FIU's Carsrud notes that some national studies show entrepreneurship programs improve the odds of keeping at-risk teens

in school. "They see the importance of learning about business compared with other academic subjects," he says.

While Carsrud adds that there is little research on the overall impact of entrepreneurial programs on their communities, more two- and four-year schools are adding courses to help students find success in the world of small business.

In South Florida, many academic institutions now offer courses relating to entrepreneurship, such as sales and marketing techniques, writing business plans and securing financing. Barry University's School of Adult and Continuing Education, for instance, offers a Web-assisted seminar series on improving business effectiveness, and UM offers similar courses through its business school.


"We understand the importance of entrepreneurship in our community," says Paul Sugrue, dean of the University of Miami's School of Business Administration. "We want to encourage that entrepreneurial spirit and get our students thinking creatively."

As FIU's Carsrud sees it, to succeed, university entrepreneurship programs need to involve students in many disciplines, including the arts, law and medicine. He believes effective programs must be action-

oriented, rather than focused on case studies. "Students need to write a business plan, raise money and start making sales," he says. "It's important to teach, but it's the application of those skills that matter."

Miami-Dade has plenty of successful entrepreneurs eager to see others follow in their footsteps, and a number have founded entrepreneurship competitions at local universities.

The University of Miami, for instance, holds a business plan competition that will offer \$30,000 in prize money to students this semester. Its sponsor is UM alumnus Leigh M. Rothschild, chairman of Plantation-based technology and intellectual property company Connected Media Technologies Inc. At FIU, Howard J. Leonhardt, CEO of Weston-based biotech Bioheart Inc., funded the school's \$15,000 New Venture Challenge, and homebuilder Sergio Pino, CEO of Miami-based Century Homebuilders LLC, also played a leading role in funding the university's entrepreneurship center.

The bottom line: "Without successful business leaders putting their hard-earned time and money into these programs, you can't get anywhere. Involvement is critical for success," Carsrud says. 

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