

# Community links helping more FIU students engage in jobs

BY RYAN KELLY

Through Florida International University's engagement department, the school is working with new businesses, schools and other community groups, earning it in January a spot among 100 universities recognized by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching for its high level of community outreach.

The university enlisted Divina Grossman a year and half ago as vice president for engagement, asking her to build from the ground up a department that focuses on engaging the community.

As a result, the number of students working within Miami-Dade's businesses, schools and economic development organizations like the Beacon Council continues to increase.

"I think [in] just about every major corporation in town we have students that are working as interns," Ms. Grossman said. "If you go to the banks or the businesses, you'll see a lot of FIU students."

At one point, her office helped Florida Power & Light Co. develop a call center that focuses on customer care. A total of 22 interns, chosen from a pool of 130 applicants, received internships at the center.

The interns trained for six weeks before starting and 12 of them eventually got jobs with Florida Power & Light.

Ms. Grossman said she recently met with the city managers of Pinecrest and Doral, both looking to add internship programs to their administrative offices.

Her team also met with hospitality vendors from the Miami Beach Chamber of Commerce to discuss intern programs in

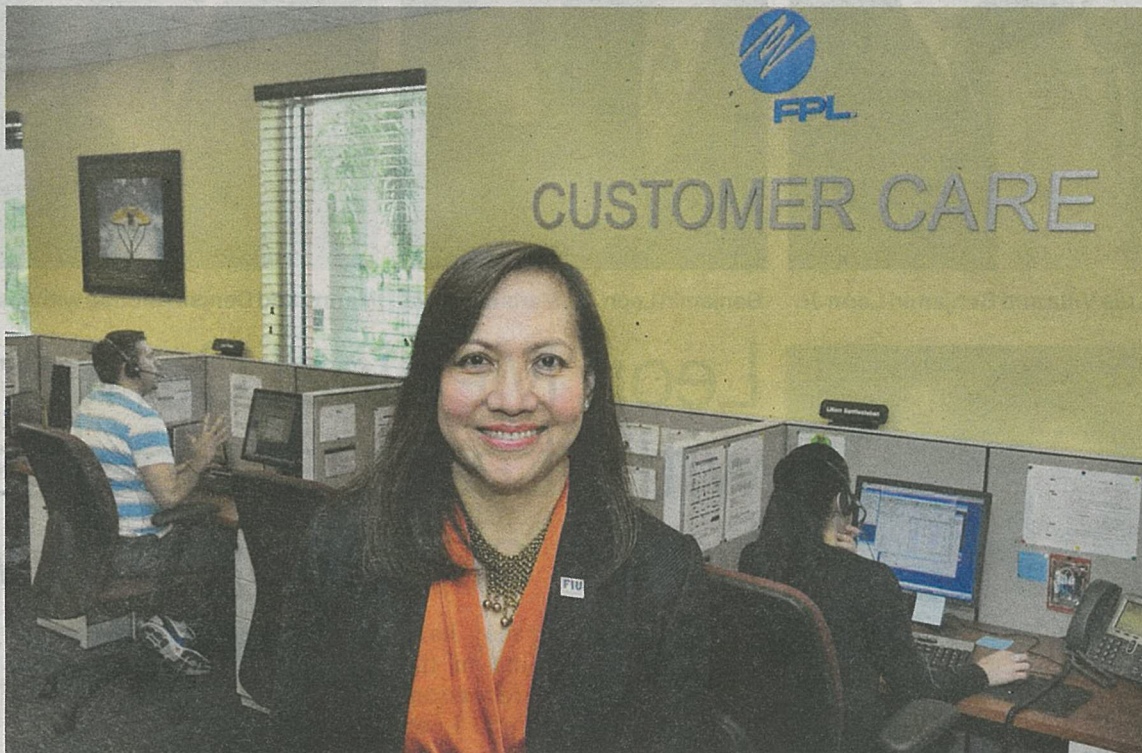


Photo by Maxine Usdan

Divina Grossman helped Florida Power & Light Co. develop a call center that focuses on customer care.

the hospitality industry.

It's especially important that students who graduate in a field like history or hospitality see first-hand what the professions are like within their majors, she said, adding that the students in programs like nursing already go through clinical internships or similar experiences as part of their programs.

"We want our students placed in those internships," she said, referring to any internship her department sets up, "because it helps lead to a career."

Engaging businesses and other organizations also means maintaining relationships with them, she said, similar to the relationship her department has with Florida Power & Light, to which Ms. Grossman's office is to send 12 new interns to replace the ones the company scooped up for jobs.

Maintaining relationships is important, she said, because once FIU and the organization are familiar with each other, the process is streamlined.

"We created this mechanism so it becomes systematic," she said.

FIU faculty will know what students fit best into the various organizations, she said, and will be able to identify them more quickly for the company.

For example, if the Coral Gables Chamber of Commerce, with which Ms. Grossman recently met, told her team it wanted an accounting intern, the team would know exactly where to look, shortening the chamber's wait.

Target, Wal-Mart and Bank of America are a few of the companies recruiting FIU students for internships.

"[We] want to make sure we're aligning the right students with

the right opportunities," she said.

Also on the group's agenda is the life sciences corridor, a project that intends to leverage education and bioscience research across the state to bolster the life science industry.

It's spearheaded by a group led by FIU's President Mark Rosenberg and Beacon Council Chairman and CEO Frank Nero that includes all the presidents of public and private universities in the area as well as representatives from all the community colleges and economic development councils.

The project's purpose is to cluster industries around the life sciences, Ms. Grossman said.

"[We] take research that is produced by our universities... spin off companies from the research and get them commercialized."

The program focuses on medi-

cal devices, drugs and other bio-science-related products.

FIU's engagement department is also spreading its wings to reach the county's public schools, where it is sending its students to work with grade school pupils.

In one case, FIU students studying speech pathology are helping the public schools recognize speech impediments in children.

"We have a group that works in schools with kids to recognize any learning impediments," Ms. Grossman said.

Psychology and social work majors are also working with grade school children who have psychological problems or who might be bullied by their peers.

About 30 to 40 college students, split among four teams, work at five to six schools, and Ms. Grossman's department is getting a request for another team.

The department is working with the school system to help open a community school in Liberty City with the aid of an \$89,000 grant from the JPMorgan Chase Foundation that is to focus on holistic teaching.

Basically, Ms. Grossman said, it's going to center on children with health, family or neighborhood issues, like children who witness of violence.

The engagement department also launched a program last year that boosted from 526 to 2,200 the number of Miami-Dade high school students who take classes at FIU to better prepare for college.

"The purpose of it is to be more intentional in the way we work together," she said, "so students at Miami-Dade public schools can transition in a better way."

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