Building HIGH-IMPACT Partnerships
By Mark B. Rosenberg

Beset with multiple challenges, our urban public universities are continuously in search of new approaches to address market and community needs. Repeated concerns relate to the preparation of students and the universities' apparent indifference toward its community.

We continually hear of dissatisfied employers who want more relevant hard-skills preparation for the graduates that they are hiring. No doubt we can do better at how we prepare our students for the constantly changing marketplace. It is clear to us, however, that the responsibility to prepare and train more market-ready students represents a shared opportunity. This opportunity derives from the core marketplace need that pivots around talent: talent that will maintain and enhance core company business operations; talent that will add value to the bottom line; talent that will have the ability to respond to market conditions and help companies adjust day by day to new opportunities.

Universities are talent magnets. Faculty bring cutting edge knowledge that gets transferred to peers, to students, to staff, and often to external company partners. Much of this effort is necessarily channeled through classroom pedagogy and some hands-on practical application. The formal educational experience can serve as a baseline qualification for a student's degree and validate that the student is workplace-ready. Yet employers often believe that deeper work experiences or more specialized training is necessary, because of actual workplace complications and specificities that are usually intensely particular to that company and/or niche in the global marketplace.

Urban universities in metropolitan areas, as anchor institutions in their communities, have unique opportunities to impact those communities beyond the traditional "outreach" logic of the nineteenth-century land-grant institution. Because universities attract talent at all levels, this talent has unprecedented opportunity to address local issues that may
require the thoughtful assessment and option development that universities are mandated to provide.

The dynamic nature of Florida’s population growth and Miami’s role as a global city provide significant opportunities for Florida International University (FIU) that can uniquely define the FIU experience and provide additional value in the community. On one hand, the university understands that it has a sacred responsibility to prepare students to take good jobs and/or create good jobs. On the other, the university has accepted that it can take responsibility for bringing solutions to the table to help address major and minor community challenges.

As a consequence, we have made an intensified commitment to developing a win-win-win partnership logic with local companies and organizations. This logic aligns our institution with community challenges and in the process gives students, faculty, and professional staff additional opportunities to enhance community improvement and well-being.

To clarify and accelerate our partnership development, we created an Office of Engagement led by a newly appointed vice president. This office takes the lead in identifying and developing partnerships with key stakeholders in our community. It serves as a one-stop shop for interested community members who may neither have the time nor inclination to figure out the maze of colleges, schools, centers, and institutes that populate our large ecosystem. Most importantly, it is results-oriented and intensely focused on marrying partner needs with FIU capabilities. Below, we describe instances of how this has worked.

**Talent Development Network**

The Office of Engagement is spearheading the Talent Development Network (TDN), a collaboration with six other local academic institutions that have banded together to help create an internship culture in Miami. The TDN sprung from the Beacon Council’s One Community One Goal initiative, intended to foster job creation and talent retention in Miami in seven key sectors of the economy. It has benefited from local company support and major investment from the Helios Education Foundation.

Now at the mid-point of a multi-year pilot, more than 158 employers have registered at the online portal, TDNmiami.com, including most recently the Biltmore Hotel, Miami Marlins, and the law firm of Becker & Poliakoff. Across TDN’s partner institutions, more than 700 students have registered on the site. More than 1,200 applications have been processed, and more than 180 internship positions have been filled.

Recently, TDN partnered with *The New Tropic* and the Arts and Entertainment District to host the Job Flea, a job and internship fair for students and young professionals across Miami-Dade County.

With more than 1,000 responses, the event was an enormous success in attracting Miami’s young talent and connecting applicants with jobs and internship opportunities with employers as diverse as the Miami Heat, the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts of Miami-Dade County, Uber, and more. The event culminated in an hour-long, lightning-round speaker series on talent in Miami featuring the Knight Foundation’s Matt Haggman, FIU’s Vice President for Engagement Saif Y. Ishaof, and EcoTech Visions’ Pandwe Gibson.

The event directly led to:

- 20 new internships being posted on TDNmiami.com
- 25 new employer registrations
- 53 new registered students
- 115 applications processed
Ultimate Software

When Ultimate Software invested $1 million to help build FIU’s new 8,000-square-foot College of Engineering and Computing facility called Tech Station, the gift was the culmination of a longtime friendship and years of collaboration.

A company based just 20 miles north of our main campus, Ultimate had been an established collaborator with FIU since 2007, when it began an internship program that has led to more than 100 FIU engineers being hired full-time.

The partnership is a triple win. It provides Ultimate Software with a much-needed talent source; helps our FIU students get invaluable experience and ultimately jobs; and—most importantly—is helping to develop a new local technology ecosystem encouraging our brightest students to stay here in South Florida.

Royal Caribbean Cruises

We combined our expertise and talents with Royal Caribbean Cruises, Ltd. (RCCL), a renowned global cruise company that reaches nearly 500 destinations on all seven continents, and formed a unique public-private partnership that bridges industry with academia to promote talent development, research, and economic vitality.

By joining forces, we are enhancing preparation and training for Royal Caribbean’s shipboard performers along with opportunities for our FIU students, particularly those in our College of Communication, Architecture + The Arts and the Chaplin School for Hospitality & Tourism Management.

Since our partnership began in 2013, we have:

- Unveiled the Royal@FIU World Stage Collaborative, a 130,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art training facility at FIU’s Biscayne Bay Campus. The building features classrooms, three-story studios, a 300-seat theater, and a 20,000-square-foot costume-making facility, where students will have the chance to take classes, earn paid internships, and train alongside hospitality and entertainment professionals.
- Developed a new plan to intensify internship opportunities.
- Created the opportunity for students to participate in behind-the-scenes shipboard tours, to establish relationships with management teams in entertainment and operations, and to learn from entertainment professionals working on the front lines.
- Submitted research proposals from FIU faculty to RCCL on topics ranging from fuel efficiency to food innovation. Teams from both RCCL and FIU are developing plans to work on joint projects.

This is the future of tourism and hospitality—a vital industry in our community. This is the future of the arts for South Florida and beyond.

City of Miami Beach

Several departments across the university have also collaborated with the city of Miami Beach to forge a dynamic partnership leveraging our unique assets—geography, history, demographics, and intellectual capital—to address the city’s most pressing challenges. The partnership is driven by workgroups focused on arts, culture, and history; Florida coastal resilience and adaptation; youth and education development; and transportation.

Currently, we are working on expanding dual enrollment at Miami Beach Senior High School and the city’s paid internship program by adding paid research assistantships for graduate and PhD-level students.

Life Sciences South Florida

Life Sciences South Florida (LSF), whose members include leaders of the top educational, economic development, and research institutions in the region, seeks to establish an industry cluster in South Florida focused on life sciences, biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, diagnostics, and information technology. Launched in 2010, LSSF is overseen by FIU’s Office of Engagement.

This year, the initiative has continued to focus its programming and activities on supporting the growth of life sciences in the region, with the goal of increasing student opportunities in this arena.

This past spring, we held the fourth annual Life Sciences South Florida STEM Undergraduate Research Symposium at Broward College (FL), and more than 80 LSSF member students presented their original research in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. Oral and poster presentations were critiqued by
volunteer judges from South Florida universities, colleges, and research institutions.

Our Lifees Awards, aimed at recognizing those companies that are helping to transform South Florida into a life sciences epicenter, were held on April 18 at eMerge Americas, a technology conference. Over 200 guests joined LSSF for a luncheon to honor life sciences companies and hear from keynote speaker Daniel Cane, CEO and co-founder of Modernizing Medicine, and a panel of STEM and innovation experts.

Better Together

FIU is committed to creating innovative new partnerships that help us better prepare our students and make a positive impact on our community.

We are not afraid to break new ground and try new ways of getting things done. We are making important strides in bridging the gap between industry and academia, and building confidence about the benefits of deep collaboration. We believe that the lines between higher education and industry/government must be blurred wherever possible, as long as mission interests are not sacrificed and unit integrity is maintained.

The way to do that is to step out of the classroom—to partner with local and global companies and nonprofits to create market-relevant learning experiences, and to tie instructional and creative initiatives to real-world community needs and priorities. Partnerships and collaboration allow for a shared commitment to the success of our students and the strength of our local economy.

In the words of Helen Keller: “Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

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