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New internship program seeks to retain local talent

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Miami Dade College's Wolfson Campus. ROBERTO KOLTUN / EL NUEVO HERALD

In an effort to counter “brain drain,” academic and business leaders announced a new pilot program Wednesday that will create 200 paid internships in Miami-Dade County for local students over the next two years.

“We want to ensure that local talent is staying here,” said Larry Williams, president of the Beacon Council, the county’s economic development arm. “For us to really achieve that vision, we all have to come together.”

The program, called the Talent Development Network, was created by the Academic Leaders Council – a collaboration of seven local academic institutions – with the help the Beacon Council’s One Community One Goal initiative to identify ways to improve economic development

in Miami Dade.



Fourteen companies – including American Airlines, Baptist Health South Florida, Perry Ellis International and TD Bank – will offer the internships, which will pay at least minimum wage, starting this summer and continuing throughout the school year. Hours, rate of pay and duration of each internship have not been determined and will vary by employer.

High school, college and university students will be eligible to apply. Participating academic institutions are: Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Miami Dade College, Barry University, Florida International University, Florida Memorial University, St. Thomas University and University of Miami.

The purpose of the program is to connect gifted students with South Florida businesses and train them for the local economy – with the ultimate goal of convincing students to stay in the area after graduation.

“We can only go so far in terms of the education that our students get. We know they need great practical hands-on opportunities. We can’t do this alone, we need local employers to step up,” said Mark B. Rosenberg, Florida International University president and chair of the Academic

Leaders Council. “We see it as a shared responsibility.”

Local business leaders have long complained that they see talented young people leaving Miami after college to enter the workforce in bigger cities such as New York, Boston and San Francisco.

That’s created a talent gap locally, meaning companies can struggle to find workers with the right skills for their industry.

Historical Census data back up their worries.

Although South Florida ranks seventh in the nation in terms of college student per capita, the Miami metro area has a low percentage of young people with bachelor’s degrees – just 29.7 percent of residents aged 25 to 34 in 2013. That puts Miami in the bottom quarter of the nation’s 50 largest metro areas, according to Census data.

The new program is a way to fight brain drain, said Donna Abood, managing director of the Beacon Council.

“Internships provide students with the skills and connections they need to be hired,” Abood said.

The One Community One Goal initiative identified seven growing industries in South Florida: aviation, banking and finance, creative design, hospitality and tourism, information technology, life sciences and health care, and trade and logistics. The program will target these industries to entice students in these fields to stay in the community and promote economic growth.

Throughout the program, each academic institution will keep track of the students who earn internships and see how many students are hired locally.

“There’s no better way to keeping our talent local than giving them an internship,” said Nelson Lazo, CEO of Doctors Hospital and co-chair of One Community One Goal. “The key is to get as many companies signed up.”

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