



## **FIU Embrace-External Advisory Council Meeting Minutes**

### **Tuesday, January 23<sup>rd</sup> 2018**

#### **External Advisory Council Members**

Albert Lopez, Southeast Assurance Regional Managing Partner, BDO USA, LLP  
Andres Gil, VP of Research and Dean of the University Graduate School, FIU  
Andrew Sagona, Founder, Disability Rights Law Association  
Anthony Gonzalez, Chief of Surgery, Baptist Hospital of Miami  
Brenda Lampon, Area Director, Vocational Rehabilitation  
Cuong Do, Executive VP and Head of Global Strategy, Samsung Electronics America  
Kenneth Furton, Provost and Executive Vice President, FIU  
Luis Navas, Senior Partner, Global Governance Advisors  
Mary Partin, CEO, Dan Marino Foundation  
Milton Vescovacci, Shareholder, Gray Robinson, P.A.  
Ora Prilleltensky, Clinical Assistant Professor (Retired), University of Miami  
Yogi Hernandez Suarez (Chair), FIU and CMO, Care Delivery Organization of Humana

#### **Attendees**

Alberto Fernandez, Principal, SPED Outreach, Miami-Dade County Public Schools  
Alexandra Lejarza, Program Manager, FIU Embrace  
Angel Rodriguez, Parent  
Arlene McDermott, Assistant Director of Education, FIU Embrace  
Christopher Chin, Parent  
Daniel O Perez, Program Assistant, FIU Embrace  
Deborah Dietz, Executive Director, Disability Independence Group  
Eddie Maldonado, PLUS Student, FIU Embrace

Edgardo Morales, Business Relations Representative, Vocational Rehabilitation  
Elizabeth Alvite, Administrative, FIU Embrace  
Ernie Martinez, Independent Living Advocate  
Deborah Dietz, Disability Independence Group  
Hayed Kure, Congressman Curbelo's Office  
Janet McDaniel, Adjunct Lecturer, FIU  
John Ortuzar, President, Access for Autism  
Karlyn Emile, Special Olympics Florida  
Katerina Bryant, Community Relations Manager, Governmental Relations, FIU  
Kelli Hunter-Sheppard, District Director, Miami-Dade County Public Schools  
Lester Roviroso, Manager of Administrative Services, FIU Embrace  
Maggie Marrero-Neville, Transition Specialist, MDCPS  
Marina Marchena, Access Consultant, FIU Embrace  
Marlaina Maddux, Research Assistant, School of Social Work, FIU  
Mavara Mirza-Agrawal, Medical Director, FIU Embrace  
Michelle D. Mason, Senior Associate Dean for Clinical Education, Experimental Learning & Engagement, Florida International University  
Nicole Attong, Director, FIU Embrace  
Ondina Rodriguez, Program Coordinator Project Panther LIFE, MDCPS  
Patricia Ramirez, Program Specialist, SPED Outreach, MDCPS  
Rumi Agarwal, Doctorate Student, FIU  
Shanna Burke, Assistant Professor, FIU  
Vivian Nunez, Instructional Supervisor, MDCPS  
Vivian Puig, Parent

### **Call to Order**

The Chair Yogi Hernandez Suarez convened the meeting of the FIU Embrace External Advisory Council at 10:00 a.m. on Tuesday, January 23, 2018 at Modesto Maidique Campus, MARC Pavilion in Miami Florida, and invited the Council and members of the audience to introduce themselves.

## **Review & Acceptance of Minutes**

Mr. Cuong Do put forth a motion to approve the October 16, 2017 minutes as presented. Milton Vescovacci seconded the motion. The minutes was unanimously approved, and accepted as presented.

## **Legislative Update**

Ms. Attong informed the Council that the Vice President of Governmental Relations Michelle Palacio, is unable to attend the meeting and the following update provided.

The legislative session is ongoing and there are no concerns to report. We do not anticipate that there will be any substantive changes during this legislative session. However, we will provide the Council with an update at the next meeting. In addition, Elected Official Danny Perez, has expressed an interest in learning more about FIU Embrace. Therefore, after the legislative session, he will be visiting FIU to learn more about our work. Finally, Provost Kenneth Furton added that FIUnique is a top priority for the University and we are cautiously optimistic that the legislative process will end in the University's favor.

Mr. Andrew Sagona asked if a representative from FIU would be attending Developmental Disability Day on February 14, 2018 in Tallahassee to discuss FIU Embrace.

Ms. Attong explained that the Univeristy has not found the Developmental Disability Day as the best way to bring FIU Embrace's agenda forward. Instead, the FIU Embrace works closely with the Univeristy's Governmental Relations Office to bring the initiative's agenda to the forefront of the legislature by initiating one-on-one discussions.

Mr. Cuong Do asked what FIU Embrace needs to start doing from a programmatic and planning standpoint in the event the legislative session ends with negative outcomes.

Ms. Attong explained that the department have initiated some strategic planning for budgetary cuts and have begun exploring opportunities for maintaining programs during a period of funding reduction. Additionally, FIU Embrace has begun working towards making every component of the initiative self-sustaining. Additionally, there are different philanthropic steps underfoot that will assist FIU Embrace in its goal to becoming self-sustaining, and hopefully a complete update can be provided in the following Council meeting. Finally, Provost Furton indicated that the university is very committed to finding alternative sources of funding for any program affected by the legislative session.

Chair Yogi Hernandez Suarez asked Ms. Attong to give a summary of the new activities that have developed since the last External Advisory Council Meeting. Ms. Attong explained that several changes have occurred since the last meeting, particularly around the FIU Embrace LIFE and PLUS programs as well as, the Employment

Conference. Additionally, this has also been a time of infrastructure development, strengthening of public-private partnerships, rebuilding of relationships with the University of Central Florida consortium. Finally, FIU Embrace is focused on our mission and research, all while trying to integrate both the LIFE and PLUS programs.

### **Website Update**

Mr. Headley unveiled the changes made on the FIU Embrace website, explaining that through the use of analytics, a goal was set out to increase marketing and communication on the web platform.

FIU Embrace can now be found under the main FIU website, under the support services tab. Moreover, a unique FIU Embrace theme has been created to identify FIU Embrace as well as, efforts have been put in place to make the site more user friendly and accessible through different social media outlets. The development of infographics, videos, stories, and posting of research articles have been implemented to inform the public of what FIU Embrace does and to encourage people to grow beyond any limitation. Mr. Headley further added that FIU Embrace's presence in online media and the web is evolving and open to suggestions.

Ms. Attong explained that once the website is complete, the next task would be to make it accessible. Chair Yogi Hernandez Suarez stated that in any new business branding it is important to its success.

### **Employment Conference**

Milton Vescovacci, Chair of the Employment Committee provided the Council and audience members with a draft agenda of the conference and a flyer. The following update was also shared: The purpose of the Conference is to raise awareness of the need of employment for individuals with intellectual and other developmental disabilities, to share with other organizations how to initiate the process of hiring individuals with developmental disabilities, and sharing strategies for expanding their current initiative.

Speakers at the conference will share their stories of the challenges and successes faced when hiring these individuals, in hopes of encouraging other employers to hire this demographic. The conference is free for those who wish to attend and we have a capacity of 300 attendees.

Ms. Partin indicated that FIU Embrace will only be as successful as long as it includes all communities. Therefore, its important that the intative is connected to everyone. There is a group of about thirty people/organizations in Broward County who recently met and are not connected to FIU Embrace. This group has indicated that they have tried to connect to the program. It's important that all the Council members know who to connect to about regarding this employment conference so that we really do maximize exposure throughout the community specifically reaching organizations and

employers within Broward County who would like to be connected with the employment conference. Ms. Partin asked if Mr. Vescovacci is the point person for the conference on this issue, and he indicated that he is. Ms. Partin indicated that The Dan Marino Foundation has reached out to connect potential conference participants with FIU Embrace. Ms. Partin also stated that it is important for all council members to help promote the conference. Ms. Attong referred all persons interested in attending the conference to the event landing page. Additionally, Ms. Partin indicated that these organizations have reached out several times via phone to FIU Embrace and have not received a response to date. Ms. Attong stated that after the meeting she will connect with Ms. Partin on this issue.

Dr. Anthony Gonzalez asked to have a list of the organizations who have already been contacted and asked that the flyer for the conference be sent to the Council members in order to maximize efforts of increasing attendance by reaching out to different organizations that Council members have a relationship with.

The Chair thanked Mr. Vescovacci for his tireless efforts, his commitment, and his pragmatic views connected to the success of FIU Embrace, the employment conference, and that of the overall university.

Mrs. Dorcas Gonzalez asked if students attending the LIFE and PLUS programs would be paired with employers, and if there would be a support system put in place to help guide them.

Ms. Attong explained the purpose of the conference was to raise awareness about employment and not to pair students to particular employment opportunities. However, graduating LIFE and PLUS students have been invited to attend the event. Mr. Vescovacci also explained that within the advisory council there are three committees. Of which he is the Chair of the employment committee, one task developed by this committee, is the conference. There will be other initiatives facilitated by this committee aimed at increasing employment opportunities for students.

The Chair Hernandez Suarez also added that within our community there are not a lot of ready-made partners who are willing to hire individuals with disabilities; a lot of the relationships, tools, and awareness will have to be developed. Additionally, Ms. Partin shared that a valuable component of this employment conference is that all persons who attend will be able to receive the contact information of all of the presenters and have a rich network of resources to connect to when hiring individuals with disabilities.

A member of the public asked whether FIU Embrace had reached out to organizations such as the Beacon Council in order to promote the employment conference. Mr. Vescovacci indicated that FIU Embrace had reached out to organizations such as the Beacon Council and the Chambers of Commerce in various counties, and those outreach efforts will continue. Ms. Attong also mentioned that FIU's Governmental Relations is reaching out to elected officials regarding the conference.

## **LIFE and PLUS Update**

Ms. Attong provided an overview of the changes to the LIFE and PLUS programs.

As part of the new branding efforts of FIU Embrace, the programs are now referred to as FIU Embrace LIFE and FIU Embrace PLUS. In keeping with feedback from the Council, two informational sessions were held where families and students from both programs and the groups were provided with a program update.

Additionally, all students have been enrolled in classes that are closely aligned with the program of study and had their courses funded by Vocational Rehabilitation. FIU Embrace has also begun working on the building of the residential component for the PLUS program. We have established a tentative date for the curriculum of March 15, 2018 and a rollout during the Fall 2018 semester. There are a number of trainings and activities that must be conducted between these two dates, and we are working aggressively to meet this timeline. Additionally, we are also reviewing the seminars provided in the PLUS program and will be exploring opportunities to create additional experiential learning.

## **LIFE & PLUS Evaluation**

Dr. Burke indicated that FIU's LIFE and PLUS programs received approval from the Instructional Review Board (IRB) to collect data, and the information was used to inform improvements made by the program.

One survey conducted was the student satisfaction survey, where 96% of the students felt they were provided with the program support and university resources needed to complete assignments, and they felt comfortable asking for assistance as needed from their course instructors. They also felt that meeting with academic mentors and student support specialists were very helpful to them. The results indicated over 90% satisfaction in areas such as time management, assistance with specific home work assignment, study skills, and it also help them engage better with their peers.

One area of program improvement, would be to add peer coaches, so that students would have access to peer social support. Therefore, students will have assigned academic mentors, that will allow students to develop a more comfortable individual relationship within which to seek academic guidance and support, and then have peer coaches to whom students can seek social support. Additionally, the program will be working on improving technology and financial literacy workshops with a goal of strengthening content and increasing frequency.

Additionally, the ten academic mentors provided weekly feedback totaling 114 different submissions. Overall, they felt the students were very engaged and they were helpful to students. They reported spending a lot of time on organization, they attended social events, had lunch with students on campus, almost 80% did discuss interpersonal and personal issues, and over 90% of the time students arrived on time for the meetings.

Finally, it is believed that the peering of mentors to specific students will help to increase overall program satisfaction.

There were two student support specialists and 25 different surveys, and again the results were similar. They felt that students were engaged, attentive, communicating effectively, courteous and punctual. Therefore, the data is reflecting from various angles that the students are demonstrating the skills we want to see for independent living and college life.

There are however, several goals, we would like to see. These are, an increase in student's utilization in university's resources beyond the program. There will be more time spent developing resume, letter writing and independent living skills. We anticipate that the launch of the residential component of the program will also assist in the further refinement of these skills.

Also all 39 Parents were offered a three week period during which they could provide their feedback on the program. Questions and themes were prepared for this end of the semester debriefing. However, individuals could discuss any topic of their choice. The "look back" period was for the fall semester. Parents indicated that their adult students were more confident, independent, demonstrated ability to communicate their needs and preferences, increased willingness to leave their comfort zone, a better understanding of their own goals and direction in life, and an increased taking of responsibility and willingness to take initiative.

The parents that participated in the debrief indicated that they would like graphic designs, hands on technology, computer animation and creative based courses to be added to the program of study. Parents also made the following suggestions: increase communications between the program and the parents to understand the process of the students, increase structure and guidance to reduce boredom among the students, increase course options, increase awareness in the inclusiveness of course options on campus, bilingual communications for all correspondence, and a delineation of the PLUS program from the LIFE program through course structure, and rigor as well as other changes.

Dr. Burke indicated that some of these changes, such as the use of translated materials, and translators at the meetings were already put into place, and course options are also being explored. Therefore, it is good to see that program staff and parents are aligned on these topics.

Finally, Dr. Burke indicated that all the students enrolled in the program predate the current administration, and the way the programs were explained to the families and students were different than the demonstration grant which is a focus on independent living skills, employment and experience in a college setting. Therefore, the realignment of the programs will be crafted to demonstrate that it is a college setting and not an extension of high school.

Ms. Attong explained that there have been challenges in accomplishing all the goals set from last semester, particularly with the students requiring additional support to become ready for independent living.

Additionally, we are in the process of hiring additional academic and social mentors, as there are not sufficient support for both programs. We understand that the PLUS students are not utilizing university resources, and that they feel more comfortable receiving academic support from the FIU Embrace academic mentors. Additionally, we are working with Best Buddies International to finalize internships for the students both on and off campus.

Finally, with respect to the program redesign, Ms. Attong explained that with the help of Dr. Burke, it is anticipated that the PLUS program will have a completed program design by the fall semester.

The Chair asked what the University is doing to learn about the more impacted individuals who are marginalized by the community.

Ms. Attong responded that FIU Embrace is working with an organization in the community that is involved with the moderately and severely impacted group of individuals for over 25 years to open a small Day Program. The goal will be to develop an innovative model of care, which also has a research component attached to it. This will be a model of care that is both portable and sustainable with a component of work attached to it.

Dr. Gil added that this initiative requires a multipronged approach, one of which is to place internal seed funding to begin the program. Another approach is the actual recruitment of faculty that the university goes through by partnering with an area of the university whose research interests aligns with this area. Provost also noted that the Center for Children and Families has a self-sustaining program model. One being, the summer treatment program, where the university provides scholarships for the families that do not have the means for the program. This is a model that FIU Embrace can explore and implement as one of its efforts to become self-sustaining.

Dr. Agrawal noted FIU Embrace medical has implemented a series of trainings for individuals working with this demographic to provide infrastructure to build awareness within the community.

Mr. Do also noted that when it comes to this community, the first priority is to provide medical care for adults within the community. The second priority is the creation of day programs and that the best way to accelerate these priorities is by talking to parents. Once this is complete, then the research can be conducted to improve this process. Mr. Vescovacci added that it is important to identify success stories where both structure and independent living components have been implemented.



## **Law Update:**

Dean Michelle Mason gave an update on the FIU Embrace Law partnership, which began in August 2016, and has since provided services to sixty clients. FIU Law has kept thirty-three of those cases and referred some of these clients out because of different circumstances. The services provided include but are not limited to family law services, guardianship services, and immigration law services. FIU Embrace LAW will also be working to conduct a series of Know Your Rights Workshops to inform the community on certain areas of interest, as well as working with the FIU Embrace Medical program to help identify families that need legal services provided, or identify potential legal issues that come up. The Chair asked Dean Mason if there is energy and commitment from the student body to help those in the community. Dean Mason explained that as the person responsible for developing the FIU LAW clinical program, she is always looking to add pedagogical value for FIU LAW students, primarily for students to learn from their clients, and from other professionals regarding common issues that are faced in practice. Dean Mason indicated that they have learned to strike a careful balance, and recognize the agency of both parents and students.

## **Medical Update:**

Dr. Gil explained FIU Embrace is finalizing the expansion of medical services to be more inclusive and sustainable. Final details will be provided during the upcoming Council meeting, including details of the long-term sustainability plan for the medical services program.

Dr. Agrawal also gave an update on the medical program noting the developments of their family counseling and bringing in new patients to the primary care services, most of which are seriously impacted individuals. The program also welcomes undergraduate volunteers to their clinical community setting to build their residency program, and learning to service the population. FIU Embrace Medical is focused on doing things that are different than what is done in the typical community setting, such as vision screening process, working with specialists within the community, and reaching out to the community through a series of medical workshops.

Dr. Gil asked from a capacity standpoint what is being done to expand the medical services program. Dr. Agrawal responded that in the clinical setting there was a lot going on, however, FIU Embrace Medical does realize there is a need to expand the services. Even though there are limited days that services that are available overall. However, the families are satisfied with the services received. Dr. Gil added that at this point, FIU Embrace is exploring a new partnership to expand FIU Embrace Medical.

Ms. Gilda, asked if at the moment any students of the program were part of the foster care system. Ms. Attong explained that the PLUS and LIFE programs does not have any students from the foster care system. However, under FIUnique, there is a program

called Fostering Panther Pride that provides services for students who are from the child welfare system. Dr. Gil added that the program is under the office of student success and access, and is part of the overall funding provided for FIU Embrace PLUS and LIFE, but is managed by a different office. However, FIU Embrace is familiar with what they do because the progress of these programs are summarized and in one report to the state.

### **Questions and Comments:**

Parents in the audience asked how information is gathered and open lines of communication encouraged.

The Chair suggested that perhaps the program could utilize social media tools as a way of sharing stories and increasing communication between parents and the program. Mr. Headley explained that through the new focus of media there are hopes of showcasing stories of success both on and off campus. Dr. Prilleltensky suggested that students and parents can be encouraged to tell their own strength-based narratives. Furthermore, they can be asked to provide feedback that can be used to improve the program. What has worked well for them, and how can we make it better for the next cohort? The Chair Hernandez Suarez added that it is important we are the ones seeking the information from students and parents.

Finally, the Chair requested all council members complete the 2018 conflict of interest forms.

### **Adjournment**

The Chair requested a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was unanimously approved and the meeting adjourned at 11:55 a.m.