



**FIU Embrace**  
**External Advisory Council Meeting Minutes**  
**Tuesday, April 17<sup>th</sup> 2018**

**External Advisory Council Members**

Cuong Do, Executive VP and Head of Global Strategy, Samsung Electronics America

Kenneth Furton, Provost and Executive Vice President, FIU

Andres Gil, VP of Research and Dean of the University Graduate School, FIU

Anthony Gonzalez, Chief of Surgery, Baptist Hospital of Miami

Yogi Hernandez Suarez (Chair), CMO, Care Delivery Organization of Humana

Brenda Lampon, Area Director, Vocational Rehabilitation

Albert Lopez, CEO of the Americas, BDO USA, LLP

Mary Partin, CEO, Dan Marino Foundation

Andrew Sagona, Founder, Disability Rights Law Association

Milton Vescovacci, Shareholder, Gray Robinson, P.A.

**Telephonic Attendees**

Luis Navas, Senior Partner, Global Governance Advisors

Ora Prilleltensky, Clinical Assistant Professor (Retired), University of Miami

**Attendees**

Nicole Attong, Director, FIU Embrace

Lilia Bourzac, Administrative Specialist, FIU Embrace

Christopher Chin, Parent

Nicholas Chin, PLUS Student, FIU Embrace

Wendy Chin, Parent

Janelle Espinosa, Parent

Nicholas Espinosa, PLUS Student, FIU Embrace

Alberto Fernandez, Principal, SPED Outreach, Miami-Dade County Public Schools

Angie Laird, Center for Imaging Science, FIU

Eddy Maldonado, PLUS Student, FIU Embrace

Maggie Marren-Neville, Transition Specialist, MDCPS

Ernie Martinez, Independent Living Advocate

Arlene McDermott, Assistant Director of Education, FIU Embrace

Mavara Mirza-Agrawal, Medical Director, FIU Embrace

Rosario Pintos, Center for Imaging Science, FIU

Lester Roviroso, Manager of Administrative Services, FIU Embrace

### **Call to Order**

The Chair Hernandez Suarez convened the meeting of the FIU Embrace External Advisory Council at 2:10 p.m. on Tuesday, April 17, 2018 at the Modesto Maidique Campus. She invited the Council and members of the audience to introduce themselves.

### **Review & Acceptance of Minutes**

Chair Hernandez Suarez requested a motion to approve the January 23, 2018 minutes. Mr. Do put forth a motion to approve the the January 23, 2018 minutes as presented. Mr. Lopez seconded the motion. The minutes were unanimously approved as presented.

### **Legislative Update**

Dr. Gil indicated that FIUnique retained its funding at the same level for next year. Dr. Gil explained that since the budget for FIUnique was separated from the University's base budget, the legislature requested a Return on Investment (ROI) report. The University provided that information, and no additional information was requested.

Ms. Partin requested information regarding the breakdown of the funding. Dr. Gil indicate that FIUnique's total funding of \$3.8 million is divided across FIU Embrace, the LIFE and PLUS Postsecondary programs, the Center for Children and Families, and Fostering Panther Pride. Mr. Lopez asked if this funding is approved annually. Dr. Gil stated that every year FIUnique will likely face the threat of a veto, although there is no indication of such a threat in the coming year.

Chair Hernandez Suarez thanked Dr. Gil, and Mrs. Palacio for the phenomenal job done to secure FIUnique's funding with great optimism for the continuation of FIU Embrace's work.

Dr. Gil agreed to provide an update at the next council meeting, as to whether the funding was once again a part of the University's base budget.

Ms. Partin asked if the funding was an appropriation, since it appears to be funded on a year to year basis. Dr. Gil responded some of the University's funding are appropriations. However, this is not one of them. He also shared with the Council that in previous years, other University's budgets have been vetoed, such as StartUP FIU, but in those years FIUnique's budget was not vetoed. Ms. Partin shared with the Council that Mrs. Palacio is very well respected by the state Legislature. Chair Hernandez Suarez thanked the staff who helped provide the ROI report for the Legislature.

### **Website Update**

Ms. Attong provided an update on behalf of Mr. Headley. In order to make the website more engaging for users, the next iteration will include pictures of our students, data, infographics, and a resource list added. Faculty advisors and students will also have a secure landing page where they can retrieve student information. All of the updates to the website will be unveiled at the August External Advisory Council meeting.

### **Employment Conference**

Chair Hernandez Suarez thanked Mr. Vescovacci for an extraordinary day, with great content and the enthusiasm that came out of a very successful conference that ended with urging employers to take action.

Mr. Vescovacci provided a brief update and thanked everyone involved in making the conference possible. He informed the Council that 200 individuals registered for the conference and 145 attended.

Chair Hernandez Suarez also explained that the employment conference was able to showcase the efforts of national companies such as Walgreens, who have implemented a cutting edge program to hire individuals with disabilities. A member of the senior leadership team at Autism Speaks shared their national agenda in the employment arena. Leadership from Baptist Health of South Florida, and the Greater Miami Society for Human Resource Management (GMSHRM) were in attendance, and many organizations shared their experience and expertise regarding their hiring practices, workplace accommodations and sustainability of programs aimed at employing individuals with developmental disabilities. Moreover, the conference allowed corporate senior leaders and employers to continue to engage their efforts of shifting hiring practices within this demographic.

Ms. Partin provided information that organizations like GMSHRM were very impressed with the FIU Embrace Employment Conference, and as a result invited the Dan Marino Foundation to speak at their national conference in November.

Mr. Lopez stated that the employment conference was a great way to cultivate relationships with both local and national employers, and to continue to raise awareness regarding the hiring of individuals with disabilities, and it would be a shame to see these efforts diminished due to budgetary issues. Chair Hernandez Suarez agreed that it also helps create an opportunity for sponsorship that was not available before as the work and quality of the programs available to individuals with disabilities, are not known by the community. She also stated the work being done on a local and national level will bring about other partnerships.

Ms. Partin asked if a financial report related to the employment conference could be shared with the Council at the next meeting in order to assess gaps, and see how funds were allocated to different areas in order to organize sponsorship campaigns to host future employment conferences.

Chair Hernandez Suarez explained the purview of the External Advisory Council does not include fiduciary responsibilities, as is the case for any board of any state institution. However, within the confines of the Florida Sunshine laws, the information is public record. Ms. Attong informed the Council that the total cost of the conference was under budget because Mr. Vescovacci raised \$5,000 in sponsorship.

Dr. Gil explained that FIUnique has different budgets that are funded at different levels, and assured the Council that FIU's Office of Research and Economic Development has grants and budgets which are not related to the budget authorized by the state Legislature which also helps fund and support some of the work done. Additionally, Chair Hernandez Suarez explained that the Council should have a governance education briefing related to the Sunshine Law and the purview of the Council so that all members clearly understand their responsibilities and liabilities as Council members.

Mr. Sagona asked if there are plans to host future employment conferences, and what outreach would be conducted. Chair Hernandez Suarez responded by stating that the proposed outreach at other employment type conferences was a different strategy. Hosting this employment conference on a national level is a good idea to share with the Council. Ms. Attong agreed that it was a good idea to consider conducting another employment conference at a national level.

Ms. Attong provided the summary of the survey results from the conference, on behalf of Dr. Burke, who could not attend the Council meeting. These results indicated that the attendees are interested in attending another employment conference hosted at a national level. The results indicated that overall attendees were happy with the venue. The majority of attendees were not employers, but rather those who work directly with individuals with developmental disabilities, such as educators, supported employment

agencies, the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) and Vocational Rehabilitation. This was a different type of audience than what was originally planned.

Some employers who did attend left by lunch time and provided feedback that future event(s) should be a half day comprising of small seminar type discussions, and a quick how-to resource guide, as opposed to a full day event. Ms. Attong explained that follow-up discussions with employers and organizations have led to additional planning on how to engage potential employers to attend future employment conferences.

Other feedback included:

- (a) The need to focus on all developmental disabilities and not just Autism
- (b) Increase the voice of the affected individual
- (c) Increase the number of topics to include the employment of individuals of all levels of impact
- (d) Develop a directory of resources to be placed on FIU Embrace's website

Dr. Gonzalez asked whether anyone commented on creating an evening program? Ms. Attong indicated that that idea was not raised. However, one suggestion brought forward was to engage and connect small business and entrepreneurs to programs like FIU Embrace LIFE and PLUS. Ms. Partin indicated that one approach that has been effective for the Dan Marino Foundation is hosting Night Time Socials, where 15-20 different companies are invited to attend and alumni have a chance to network.

Ms. Attong explained that at the employment conference the audience commented that FIU Embrace should be the convenor and facilitator of future employment conferences, inviting organizations that help serve the community, and allowing them to lead the discussions with the community. Ms. Partin also noted it is important to mention and include in these discussions all organizations within the community that want to work together, and who offer certification programs such as the Dan Marino Foundation.

Mr. Do explained that the Council is the place to bring the entire community forward, not just one particular organization. It is more effective to help another organization, even if it means latching ourselves on to another conference or event, to create a single must attend event. Dr. Gil questioned how we as FIU can promote our own event without explicitly advertising this is an FIU-only event, but also involve other organizations when we cannot speak for other programs or events. Ms. Partin explained that, community members identify FIU Embrace as a postsecondary program, but it is equally as important to also identify the Dan Marino Foundation as a partner in this effort, and by that token, increase the presence in the community.

Chair Hernandez Suarez explained that FIU Embrace needed to have a specific value proposition to bring back to the state, there are specific goals and obligations that must be fulfilled by FIU Embrace PLUS and LIFE. Now that FIU Embrace has a greater

presence in the community, the conversation has to include others and co-branding can also benefit everyone. Dr. Agrawal mentioned to the Council that all FIU Embrace Medical flyers include information about the Dan Marino Foundation and continuously refers members of the community to all available resources provided. She explained that FIU Embrace Medical is all about bringing the community together, and in doing so the goal is to help students and their families. They provide patients who are looking for programs, all of the options available to make better decisions.

Mr. Do explained that it all comes down to being able to answer “What are we here to do?” which is to get these students to the next stage of post-graduation. The way to do this is to connect them with the community, and employers who create opportunities for them, etc. Ms. Partin hoped that when The Dan Marino Foundation partnered with the FIU Embrace program, it would form a continuum, possibly even joining programs under one, as they blend so well together.

### **FIU Embrace Medical Update:**

Dr. Gil explained that progress has been made in terms of expanding FIU Embrace Medical services, and working with external partners to identify a location close to campus to set up clinical space that is both responsive to the population and allows for expansion.

Chair Hernandez Suarez provided context on the matter, explaining that this stems from the challenge FIU Embrace has to sustain and scale the medical model. Under Dr. Agrawal’s leadership, the medical care model functions but has not grown due to the constraints of only serving a commercial population, where most families are funded through Medicaid. The more challenging question then becomes where do we take our funds to create a sustainable model that gives full time service and grows on a national scale because it is reproducible. Dr. Gil explained that the proposal and the original idea on the clinical component was that the program would be expansive in dealing with behavioral needs as well as health needs. However, with the current configuration, due to different constraints within the University, the growth was too slow and we needed an external partner already working with the FIU College of Medicine (COM), that has more experience, expertise, and capabilities. Given that we have the funding, with this partnership, we would have access to additional resources that would help with any future expansion we may face.

Ms. Attong explained that space was found across the street from the University’s main campus. This would allow the clinical arm of the program the opportunity to stay connected to the faculty, students, administrative, and the research team.

Mr. Vescovacci asked if the service delivery model would be expanded beyond what is currently offered now? Ms. Attong indicated that the service delivery model would initially stay the same, with the intention of adding specialty services such as care

coordination and neurology. Also the existing budget would allow the clinic to expand to full time.

Mr. Vescovacci asked how this expansion of Medical would be branded now that there is an external partner? Ms. Attong explained that it would stay the same and continue to be FIU Embrace Medical. An update on the medical transition will be provided at the next Council meeting.

### **FIU Embrace LIFE and PLUS Update**

Ms. Attong provided an overview of the work that has occurred in the LIFE and PLUS programs. The areas of work include compliance, program redesign and expansion of the program.

With regards to compliance, FIU Embrace has worked to ensure that both programs are in compliance with State and University policies, and to embed all processes within existing university infrastructure. This will ensure the sustainability of both programs.

The program redesign was initiated by the research team. A review of existing programs and the literature revealed three career paths that appear to be of interest and demonstrate success for students. These include hospitality, health and wellness, and technology. By pairing these with existing areas of strength at the university, FIU Embrace will be able to issue badges. We are also working on developing internships that map onto these areas of study. Additionally, the employment conference was instrumental in connecting program staff to potential internship sites.

With regards to additional program development activities, Ms. Attong indicated that the students are in the process of launching an FIU club. The purpose will be to raise awareness on campus and provide opportunities for social integration.

The residential curriculum for the PLUS program was finalized and is ready to be launched. This is a comprehensive curriculum focusing on independent living that is projected to be delivered 5 days a week for 24 weeks. There is an evaluation component. Therefore, Dr. Burke is seeking IRB approval and pre and post surveys are included.

As part of the TPSID grant with the University of Central Florida (UCF), students from both programs attended the Hartwick Conference in Orlando. Dr. Burke has also submitted a presentation to the American Public Health Association.

Under Dr. Burke's leadership, we have also been awarded a mini grant for a new faculty mentor certification program. As a result, we will be providing trainings to our faculty and students aimed at strengthening the quality of academic support provided by faculty and guiding students to be better prepared to gain from the time spent with faculty.

Ms. Attong indicated that the program is in a redesign phase. In the subsequent year, Ms. Attong will provide the Council with a proof of concept and feasibility of what it

will take to sustain the programs. It is anticipated that by fiscal year 2021-2022 all components of the programs will be fully implemented and the University will apply for federal and state certification. This will allow students to receive scholarships from the state and the program will have greater access to additional funding.

Ms. Partin commented that there has been a failure to inform FIU Embrace partners on the programmatic changes. Chair Hernandez Suarez encouraged Ms. Partin to convene the educational subcommittee to give advice and provide guidance throughout the program redesign. Dr. Gil explained that Ms. Attong's presentation regarding programmatic changes involves two programs the University receives funding for and therefore has a duty to maintain the programs.

Mr. Lopez asked whether the certification is still an attendance or a competency type of certification? Ms. Attong indicated that the certification discussed earlier is issued at the state and federal level for the program. This certification establishes educational standards that the Center for Unique Abilities and the Department of Education have deemed crucial for these types of programs. Once the programs acquires both the federal and state certifications, families will have access to scholarships and grants.

With respect to the question of the program issuing a certification to students, FIU Embrace will continue to issue a certificate of attendance in addition to specific badges earned. Ms. Partin explained that all certifications are common towards helping students acquire employment. Ms. Lampon explained that the badges align with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), because under federal regulations, as a state agency, Vocational Rehabilitation has to report the skill acquisitions of their clients.

Provost Furton commented that the conversation of digital badging is university wide and the development of badges aimed at specific skill sets is being designed because this is driven by employers.

Mr. Vescovacci asked whether badging will help the program begin to take on additional students. Ms. Attong responded that the program needs to get to a stage where all issues of compliance are addressed, all areas of the program are rolled out, and a sustainable model is presented to the leadership before the program can consider expanding.

Dr. Gil also responded that aside from the resources needed to have more students, the more streamlined the program is by offering more courses and by being more purposeful, then the program will be ready to handle additional students. Ms. Partin commented that the idea of implementing badges can be reproduced at other schools. Chair Hernandez Suarez commented that the program redesign can be shared to the broader university population and bring in external organizations such as GMSHRM. Ms. Attong explained that there are other areas of specialization that would be added to the tracks being offered. The decision to start with hospitality was due to the fact that



badges are being rolled out throughout the FIU Chaplin School of Hospitality & Tourism Management.

Mr. Do commented that Ms. Attong and Dr. Burke both deserve accolades for all the work being done to improve the program. He believes that it would be beneficial to convene a meeting with interested parties to have one conversation in order to get a collective of ideas. Dr. Gil explained that once programmatic changes are launched, there will be lessons learned and it is the role of this Council and other advisory committees to help ensure the success of the program.

### **Questions and Comments:**

Chair Hernandez Suarez welcomed questions and comments from the audience.

Mrs. Espinosa commented that the programmatic changes sound very clinical from a parental perspective. She explained that from the inception of the program, both students and parents were given notice of program status and were open to additional students enrolled. Students in the program should be allowed to take coursework of their choosing and interests. She believes that students and families should be engaged to provide feedback and have influence on the progress of the student in both educational and homelife, and the program should have a less clinical approach. Mrs. Espinosa believes that the programmatic changes and redesign was moving very slowly, despite the legislature approving recurring funds for programs such as this and also to cover programmatic expansions.

Ms. Attong responded to the comments from the audience, explaining that the recurring funds allocated from the legislature was specifically for the University of Central Florida (UCF). Dr. Gil added that he wished all programs going through changes within the University would occur faster, and he would be happy to meet and inform parents of all changes occurring. Mrs. Espinosa explained that with the previous leadership, the students had a sense of real college life and that's what she wants them to continue to have. Provost Furton responded that the University wants the students to have a college life, and for the program to continue to expand, but at the same time the University has a duty to ensure it is based on a sustainable model, and the commitments to the program are meant to have a larger impact on the overall student population and reflect the goal which is for FIU to be the most diverse university.

M-DCPS principal Dr. Fernandez, also commented that as head of the SPED outreach program, he has conducted a programmatic review that showed students are graduating and finding employment. The program continues to provide students with the support they need from faculty mentors, peer coaches, and job shadowing opportunities. He also confirmed that all faculty and interns in the program must have level II background checks, and that the TPSID grant provides for the employment and

social skills students need. He also confirmed that he communicates with Ms. Attong regularly regarding the programmatic changes taking place.

Mr. Do commented that as the corporate representative of Samsung, he has noticed the programmatic changes within FIU Embrace have occurred at a substantially faster rate than anticipated. Mr. Lopez also suggested that the Council host an educational session to refresh governance, procedures, and roles and responsibility of the Council.

### **Adjournment**

The Chair requested a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was unanimously approved and the meeting adjourned at 4:08 p.m.