

Annual Reunion and Luncheon  
June 25, 2013

On Tuesday, June 25 2013, current and former participants of FIU's *Educational Leadership Enhancement Program*, now entering its 20th year, gathered at the Kovens Conference Center in FIU's Biscayne Bay Campus for the 12th *Annual Reunion and Luncheon*. The event brought together over 70 participants for a half-day of networking, sharing accomplishments, and hearing from distinguished leaders in higher education.

The reunion began with a coffee time, giving everyone an opportunity to catch up with friends and colleagues and meet some of the more recent program participants. The fact that it is always hard, in Miami, to get people to meetings on time and here, most of us were there early in order not to miss this networking session is a statement highlighting how precious this reunion is for all involved.

Following this session, Barbara Bader offered a brief history of the program, making notable mention of key individuals who have contributed to the program's endurance and success throughout the years. She for instance thanked the FIU administration for valuing the program enough not to cut its budget when several other Floridian institutions did.

Barbara then announced that this year, the program raised \$1,860.00 for FIU's First-Generation Scholarships, an amount that will be doubled by the State's matching funds and \$1,810.00 for the University's Hardship Fund.

Each participant then introduced her-/himself and said a few words. Most focused on professional achievements, personal milestones, humorous anecdotes or special memories about the program, or simply about how transformative and empowering this program, its leadership and mentorship have been. Barbara noted the presence of several FIU executives in the rooms – some alumni of the programs, some mentors for the program, and some simply there to show support to the program. Barbara also recognized and thanked Dr. Marie McDemmond who has played an instrumental role in the development and success of this program – both through her regular participation as a guest speaker and her financial support over the years.

Program participants, Desi Rodriguez, Korrin Anderson and Patricia Price introduced the panel presenters:

- Sandy Gonzalez-Levy, Senior Vice President for External Relations
- Kenneth Jessell, Senior Vice President for Finance and Administration and Chief Financial Officer
- Douglas Wartzok, Provost and Executive Vice President

Barbara began by asking each panelist specific questions. She asked Provost Wartzok to provide an overview of his major responsibilities and explain how he succeeded in transitioning from an

active researcher to a demanding administrative job. She then turned to Dr. Jessell and asked why and what he considered prior to leaving FAU after 26 years to join FIU. Barbara also took the opportunity to ask what most of us would want to ask but cannot: answers about the budget and what it will take for FIU to offer competitive salaries. Barbara asked Vice President Gonzalez-Levy why she decided to leave the private sector to take a position at FIU six years ago. VP Gonzalez-Levy was very definite about the fact that the bottom line was the opportunity to make a difference. VP Gonzalez-Levy was also asked about specific advice for women who wish to climb the executive ladder, within or outside of higher education. She insisted on the importance of working together, as a team, and that she has no problem voicing her opinions to male executives or working with them towards a common goal.

Between answers, Barbara, took the opportunity to remind the audience that when considering a job, the salary should never be the top priority. The supervisor and the job description are more important.

After the individual questions, the three panelists were asked about what they look for and ask when hiring someone, what methods they use to obtain feedback about themselves, what best career advice they ever received and would give to the audience, what one thing they know now and wish they had known earlier in their career, and how they receive feedback. It was interesting to hear that the three panelists have such collaborative leadership styles and that most of their team members have apparently no problem providing direct feedback!

The event concluded with a wonderful lunch prepared and served by FIU's School of Hospitality and Tourism Management students. Participants, for this lunch, were able to select a table and get to know or know better a selected senior administrator. Table hosts were Michele Ciccazzo, Elizabeth Bejar, Delia Garcia, Jaffus Hardrick, Douglas Wartzok, Sandy Gonzalez-Levy, Kenneth Jessell, and Barbara.

After that, we all know it is going to be difficult to wait a whole year for such another amazing event and program!

Written by: Cecile Houry, PhD

Program Alumna

Class of 2011-12