Two years ago, businessman Istvan Megyari left behind his native Hungary and relocated his wife and children to Fort Lauderdale so he could complete an MBA program at Nova Southeastern University.

He says he chose to study in the United States because of the quality of the programs available here. He also wanted to expose his children, ages 5 and 8, to the American education system. Now, with his wife and kids settled, Megyari is preparing to graduate from NSU later this year with an MBA in Finance and Business Intelligence/Analytics.

It has not been an easy undertaking. Megyari, 40, has worked full time while studying for his MBA; he owns and manages Wyl Partners LLC, a consulting company that performs financial and information security projects for businesses. He also tutors other NSU students in finance and accounting.

Because he was not fluent in English when he arrived in South Florida, Megyari says he had to study much harder so he could get good grades. But his studies helped him to learn English quickly, and when his instructors saw how hard he was working, Megyari says many went out of their way to help him to advance in the program.

Megyari is enrolled in the state's largest MBA program, based on student numbers. This past fall semester, almost 1,700 students graduated from NSU's MBA program, according to Steve Harvey, assistant dean of graduate programs.

“Technology plays a role in almost all of our MBA programs, providing students with posting, communication, and testing capabilities,” Harvey says, so they do not necessarily have to be sitting in a classroom to learn.

“Within our courses, students learn how technology affects the work of professional managers,” Harvey says.

The MBA program at NSU emphasizes teamwork, because that's what graduates will be facing in the real world, says Regina Greenwood, chair of the university’s management department. She oversees graduate courses in Human Resources, International Business, and Leadership, among other areas of concentration.

Greenwood says NSU will add another area of concentration to its list of MBA programs in the fall. Called THE Real World MBA, it will provide students with real-world applications of a range of business topics, presented to students by industry experts.

“When we ask students why they came here, it’s because of the interaction we provide with the local business community,” Greenwood says.

Megyari is not alone as a foreign MBA student in South Florida’s melting pot of higher education. Silvia Rodriguez, originally from Caracas, Venezuela, says her mother brought her to the U.S. in 2008 so she could learn English and attend college. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in finance from a Tennessee college, and went on to a job as a financial planner.

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She returned to South Florida and says when she tried to find a job here, most of the companies where she applied were looking for candidates who had an MBA.

Rodriguez says she had read about Keiser University’s MBA program, and felt that its combination of online and on-campus courses would be a good fit for her. Attending classes on a full-time basis, she says she has been lucky to be able to devote all of her time to school and later this year should graduate with an MBA, with a focus in either marketing or international business.

“I’ve gotten very interested in globalization, how economics in different countries are affected by what is happening in the business world,” she says. “And I hope [the MBA] will help me find a job.”

The MBA definitely should help, says Ken Johnson, associate dean of graduate programs at FAU’s College of Business in Boca Raton. “An MBA is the tie-breaker,” he says, since job applicants who have an MBA typically will be chosen over those who do not, other requirements being equal.

The size of MBA programs at South Florida colleges and universities tends to be larger than those in other areas of the state because of the large population here. There are at least 30 different MBA programs available in Broward, Palm Beach and Miami-Dade counties, including online, on-campus, full- and part-time programs.

“We also have a wider range of types of MBA students here, and we are trying to create a segmentation of programs that meet the needs of all of them,” Johnson says. MBA programs serve the needs of recent undergraduates moving directly to graduate school, professionals looking to bolster their careers or widen their range of skills, and seniors who want to learn for more personal reasons.

For Braden Birch, 25, obtaining his MBA is a necessary step toward securing the type of job he wants. Originally from the Toronto area, Birch was drafted to play hockey with the Chicago Blackhawks at 18 but said he realized he didn’t have what it took to make it as a player. He went on to receive a bachelor’s degree in hotel administration from Cornell University in upstate New York.

When he learned about the Sport Management MBA program at FAU, he said he found a way he could still work in the sport he loves without having to play the game.

In his second semester in the program, Birch is taking classes at FAU’s Boca Raton campus, where he also is a graduate assistant in the Sport Management program. Also as part of program, he works full time in hockey operations for the Florida Panthers at the team’s headquarters in Sunrise.

“This program really gives you a great step into the sport industry,” Birch says. “I’m kind of killing two birds with one stone. I’m getting my MBA and also working full time for a sports team. I’m building relationships with other students and with sports professionals. To get a good position in sports, you basically have to start with an MBA.”