

Keiser University's auto retailing plan Management program to launch at ex-Northwood site in Florida

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NEW ORLEANS -- Keiser University plans to launch its auto dealership management program this spring on the former Northwood University campus in West Palm Beach, Fla. Students can sign up in May for summer classes; a regular academic year begins in the fall.

Some aspects of the program will resemble Northwood's four-year program in Midland, Mich., whose alumni are dealers principal and

dealership managers across the country. But Keiser intends to distinguish its program in several ways.

For example, it will take advantage of its South Florida location by adding executive education.

"We have in our area, in almost every brand, either the No. 1 in the nation or one of the top five" dealerships for that brand's new-vehicle sales, Timothy Gilbert, department chairman for Keiser University's automotive marketing program, told *Automotive News* last month during the National Automobile Dealers Association convention here.

Job placement

That opens the door for internships at dealerships nearby. Students will work at dealerships, between their first and second and then their third and fourth years.

Also, "We have the opportunity to give them all sorts of job opportunities when they graduate," Gilbert said.

The automotive retailing program is two-pronged: a four-year bachelor program resulting in a business degree, and the Keiser Executive Education program for ongoing education.

The executive-education programs will be designed to meet particular needs.

The first one, this spring, will be designed for general managers. That choice came from an *Automotive News* article, said Gilbert. The article described how private-equity investors who wanted to buy dealerships were having difficulty finding experienced managers, and how automakers were reluctant to grant franchises to management teams that lacked auto retailing experience. The date has not yet been confirmed.

4-year program

In the four-year program, courses focus on basic business practices, such as preparing and analyzing financial statements, and the specific profit centers of a dealership.

In addition, as part of Keiser's effort to distinguish itself, there will be courses on:

- Human resources, specifically recruitment and retention.
- Customer retention, including an examination of today's changing automotive customer.
- The integration of technology into all dealership activities.

The program has partnered with Auto/Mate, and will use its dealership management system.

"We might be talking about sales, for example," said Gilbert. "Let's go to the computer right here and find the sales, CRM tools, or inventory management [software], and do what we're talking about in class."

Keiser U

Keiser bought Northwood's West Palm Beach campus in 2015, a year after Northwood shut its residential campus near Dallas. Gilbert and Brian Bastin, a professor at Keiser, crafted an auto-retailing curriculum that the school approved.

Keiser University says it is the second-largest not-for-profit private university in Florida, offering 100 degree programs -- associate, bachelor's, master's and doctoral. It is especially known for its nursing, criminology and business programs. The automotive management program will be part of the business curriculum.

Keiser also intends to do independent research for dealerships.

"There are a lot of old adages about dealerships" that might be worth researching, Gilbert said. "For example, what's the average number of units that a salesman sells a month? Everybody knows the answer to that, but has anyone ever investigated to verify that?"

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