

## **Executive MS Degree in Computer Science—Software Engineering**

UWF's Department of Computer Science (Drs. Laura White and Leo ter Haar) in partnership with the School of Allied Health (Drs. Melanie Sutton and George Stewart) recently received a grant of \$302,727 from Florida's Great Northwest Inc. (FGNW) to implement an innovative Executive Masters degree in Software Engineering (SE). The FGNW program, funded by the US Department of Labor, was designed to respond to the ever-growing regional demand for high-skilled, high-waged positions in technology related fields.

The Executive Software Engineering (SE) program is an innovative, fully online, executive program which will allow students to complete all degree requirements within one calendar year. In recognition of the importance of information technology, the UWF Medical Informatics Certificate Program was integrated as an elective track within the program. Students will choose one of two elective options, either general software engineering courses or medical informatics courses. The students who successfully complete the medical informatics electives will also earn a Certificate in Medical Informatics and will be prepared specifically for IT professions in healthcare. UWF intends to integrate additional target industries into this program in a similar manner with each successive offering of the executive SE program so as to better serve Florida's workforce needs.

The first cohort of 25 students has been selected and started the program on February 19<sup>th</sup>. The students will receive tuition scholarships as part of the UWF match. This program began with a two-day orientation, unique for online programs at UWF, during which students met their faculty and support staff and received laptops (on loan) preloaded with all software required for their courses and textbooks. This orientation was also designed to develop a strong sense of community among students which will contribute significantly toward greater peer learning. Throughout the remainder of 2009, students will take two courses during five 8-week terms including a project/internship during the last term. A two-day pre-project/internship orientation will be conducted between the fourth and fifth terms. A special commencement ceremony will be conducted at the completion of the program. Subsequent cohorts will start in January of each year. The executive format places a full-time educational load on students during each 8-week term. So, even though all courses are online, it is expected that employers will provide 20 hours per week of work release time so that students can focus on their studies, interact with faculty and classmates, and complete assignments. Students who are self-employed are required to make the same commitment to work part-time while in this program.

The award also provides funds to sponsor a series of workshops for high school guidance counselors and IT directors to focus on early recruitment of students to the field of informational technology.