Journal of Executive Education

Volume 1 | Issue 1 Article 4

November 2013

An Integrated EMBA for an Integrated World

Douglas R. Moodie
Kennesaw State University, dmoodie@kennesaw.edu

Deborah M. Roebuck
Kennesaw State University, droebuck@kennesaw.edu

An Integrated EMBA for an Integrated World

Douglas R. Moodie and Deborah M. Roebuck

Internal and external stakeholders to the academic community have expressed concern about the MBA and have urged systemic transformation in curriculum content and course delivery. Corporations want business leaders who can provide creative solutions for problems that cut across business functions. Organizations want business graduates who have been taught how to think about business not as a series of functional smokestacks but as an integrated whole.

Elliot and Goodwin (1994) state that faculty have difficulty integrating across academic boundaries because they lack appropriate business experience. They suggest that as businesses are de-emphasizing functional specialties and departmental isolation, academe should follow suit. Milton Blood, director of accreditation at AACSB International, believes improvements in faculty breadth and integration are needed (Blood, 2001).

Organ (1997) reports that the trendy word in business schools is "integration." However, he states that academic divisions are still there with members who even have different meanings for the same words. Hancock (1998) believes that integration across functions is a critical area where business schools need improvement.

Douglas Moodie, Ph.D. is associate professor of management at Kennesaw State University.

Deborah Roebuck, Ph.D. is Chair of the Leadership and Professional Development Department and is professor of management at Kennesaw State University.

It appears few business schools blend knowledge, integration, and application. Most business colleges deliver courses associated with function areas: accounting, finance, marketing, information systems, operations, and management. Changing economic forces and research show the need to abandon the vertical, functional organizational structure characteristic of traditional organizations in favor of a more horizontal, cross-functional structure (Closs & Stank, 1999). Just as organizations are seeking to reengineer their business processes, in part, to move away from functional disintegration, management education has also begun to question its functional orientation (Becerra-Fernandez, Murphy, & Simon, 2000).

The business world needs a MBA program that treats business as an integrated whole, teaches students how to work in teams, is applicable to real life problems, ensures that individuals learn necessary foundation skills, but loses none of the rigor of traditional programs. This paper presents a model of an integrated EBMA program, which we believe meets these needs. In addition, we will identify the challenges we faced in implementing this model as well as the benefits that we perceive outweigh these challenges.

Objectives of the Integrated Model

The principal objective is targeted to educate executives to assume leadership positions. Five primary educational enablers: integration, technology, adult learning, teaming,

and professional development, help us achieve this goal.

Integration

We recognize that business is practiced as an integrated whole not as a set of unconnected silos. Therefore, our curriculum is not silo-based, but instead is designed around frameworks and modules. The program flows so that later modules are related to earlier ones to provide interconnectedness that crosses normal academic boundaries. Even in modules designated for a particular skill, concepts from previous modules are integrated into that module. Therefore, students can perceive the entire curriculum to be an integrated whole.

Technology

Given that technology has become a fundamental component of the business world, we believe students should consider technology a standard of their work and study day. Technology allows us to reach out nation-wide to bring in individuals that are assuming leadership positions in their areas and assists in program integration. Technology allows our busy students to be connected to their faculty and classmates at any time in any place.

Adult Learning

The principles of adult learning are followed as explicitly as possibly in curriculum design and delivery. Learning design is modular with target learning objectives developed for each module. Students give feedback on each module regarding how well they perceived the objectives were achieved. The educational content is designed for both theoretical significance and immediate applicability. It is designed on the belief that adults learn as much from each other as from faculty. Therefore, each module is created with collaboration as a primary means of knowledge acquisition both while in class and from a distance. Grading is based on as real-life applications of skills and knowledge instead of paper and pencil testing.

Teaming

Contemporary organizations must have individuals who can function on teams both in face-to-face environments as well as virtually. Our program places a premium on the acquisition of team skills; and thus students are placed on intact teams throughout the lockstep program. All instruction is through interdisciplinary faculty teams who model desired skills. Students receive continuous team-based assignments and are given developmental feedback on their team's performance. In addition, coaching is provided on how to improve the team's functioning. To ensure a successful launch of the student teams, each class starts with three days of teaming instruction and practice.

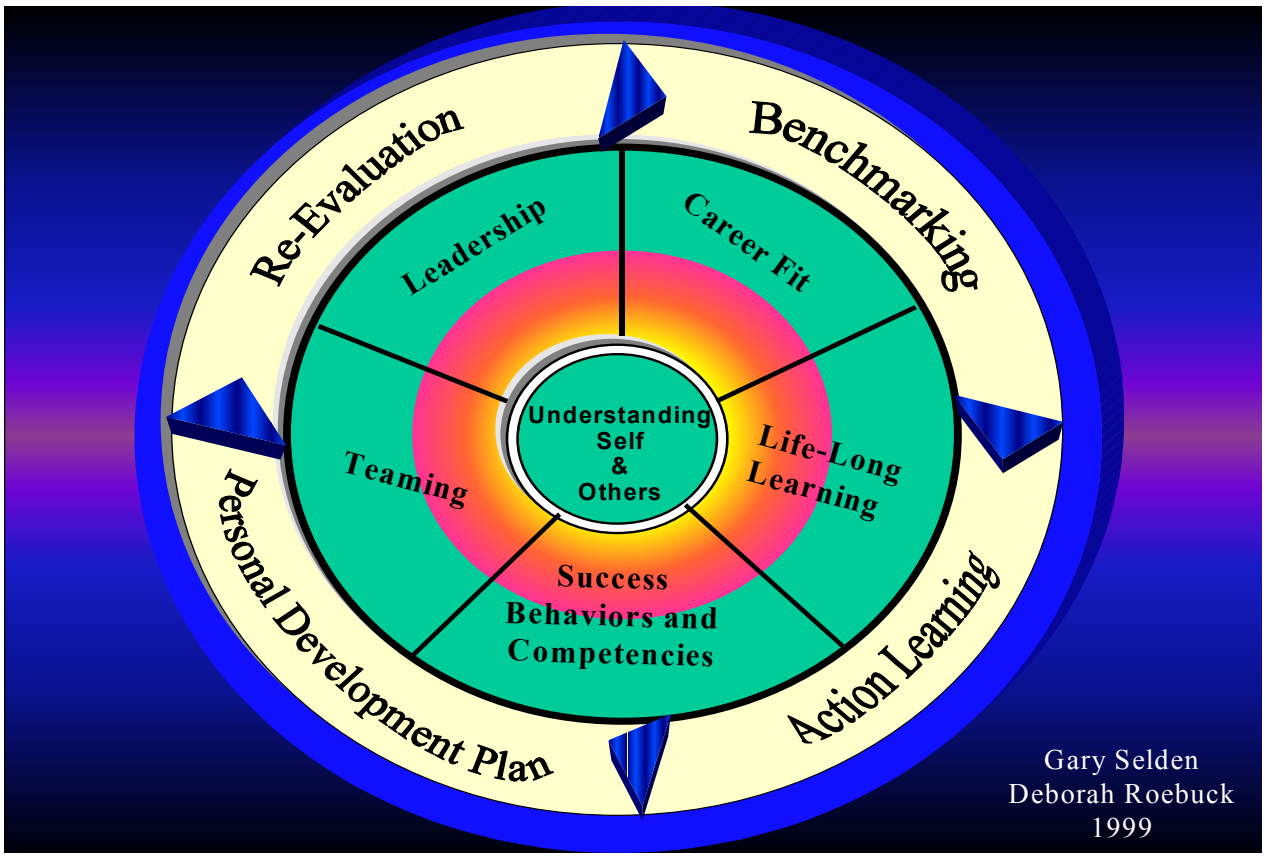
Executive Coaching and Professional Development

An executive coaching and professional development thread is common across all semesters and perceived to be a program differentiator. Approximately 20 to 25 percent of any semester is devoted to this thread. Students begin building their leadership portfolios before arriving for the first class. Students take many different individual assessment instruments, complete team and individual exercises, and prepare a personal development career action plan that is continuously updated (See Figure 1).

Our Model of An Integrated Program

Our model starts by addressing all vital issues at the organizational or institutional level, and then moves down to the business unit level followed by a focus on the product/service level. All student teams present a major project at the end of each term focusing on one publicly held organization.

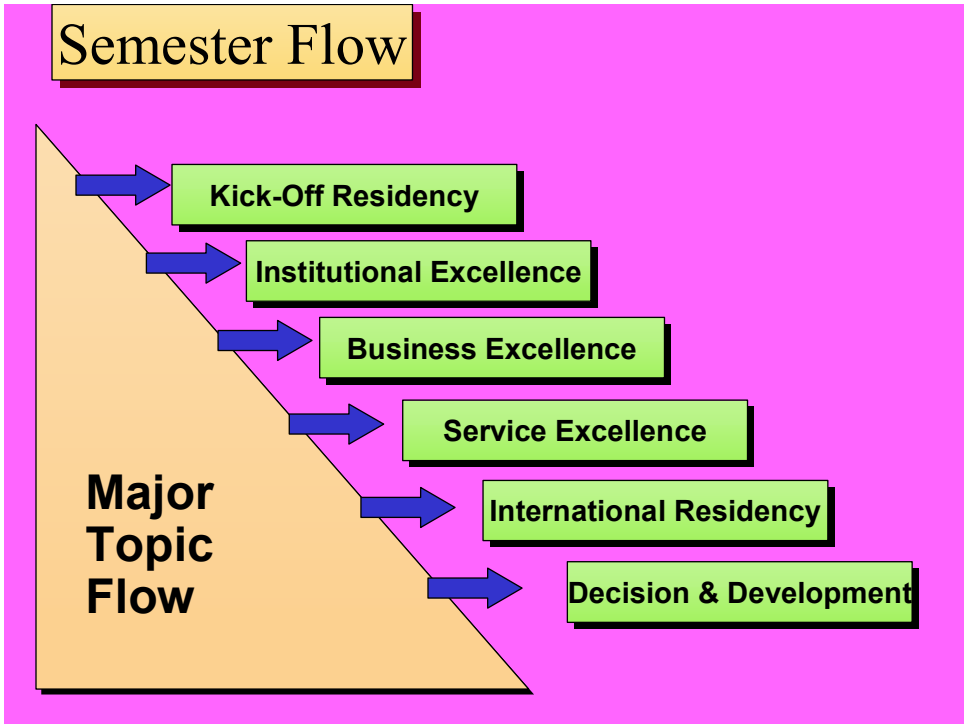
Figure 1 – A Diagram of Executive Coaching and Professional Development



We have organized the general program into two residencies and four full semesters. Figure 2 below shows the flow for th The last semester, "Decisions and Development," integrates decision-making, individual development, international finance, and e general program.

The "Kick-Off Residency" focuses on learning the technology platform, becoming acquainted with some basic accounting foundations, becoming familiar with the leadership and professional development thread, and establishing the teams. The first semester entitled, "Institutional Excellence," encompasses macroeconomics, finance, financial accounting, institutional strategy, and organizational design. his semester examines the firm and its environment at the corporate level. The second semester, "Business Excellence," is weighted towards business strategy, operations, management accounting, quality, management of information systems, statistics, negotiation, and business level marketing. This semester examines firms and organizations at the business level. The third semester, "Service and Product Excellence," focuses on product marketing,

Figure 2 –Flow of Semesters and Residencies



forecasting, analysis and decision-making, activity based costing, product legal issues, and new product management. Also included in this semester is a business simulation, Capstone, which concentrates on the tactical product decisions. The "International Residency" spans across the third and fourth semesters. We form virtual teams with other executive students in Finland and Singapore enrolled in the Helsinki School of Economics program. A common opening weekend focusing on virtual teaming and cross-cultural communication is shared with all three groups before beginning any virtual interaction. Then all students meet in Singapore for a nine-day residency. Our students conclude this residency with a final debriefing day. The last semester, "Decisions and Development," integrates decision-making, individual development, international finance, and legal issues. The simulation game, Capstone, continues during this semester, but concentrates on strategic decisions.

Commonalities Across All Semesters

All students receive identical laptops with IBM's LearningSpace, our Lotus Notes distance-learning platform to help integrate their classroom experience. All communications with students or faculty is done directly though LearningSpace or e-mail. Students and faculty can replicate the courses to their laptops and then work offline.

All Harvard Business cases and articles, class PowerPoint slides, assignment instructions, and learning objectives are electronically loaded into Learning Space, and the only paper items involved in the program are textbooks that are common throughout each program. Thus, before any class session, students can read all their readings, prepare cases, and examine PowerPoint slides. All these items remain in their

laptops, so that students can easily review previous units at any time. Students give feedback through electronic surveys on every unit. In addition, students submit all assignments electronically and faculty grade and return these assignments electronically as well.

At the end of each semester, all student teams present a major project focusing on one publicly held organization. At the end of the first semester, they present a full analysis of an institution. At the end of the second semester, they focus their analysis on the business unit level, and then in the third semester, they study the organization at the product level. In the final semester, they present a complete analysis and business plan of the Capstone, simulation game.

The four semesters consist of four or five monthly weekends, which occur one weekend a month with classes starting Friday at 12:00 p.m. and finishing at 6 p.m., allowing two three-hour modules. Classes start at 8 a.m. and finish at 5:00 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday, allowing four four-hour modules. Breakfast and lunch is provided, which allows team and faculty interactions. This once-a-month format fits the life style of today's busy student who must juggle the busy demands of work, family, and school.

Detailed Program

Table 1 presents the hours allocated to the different academic disciplines for each semester. Tables 2 to 5 show typical detailed schedules for each of the semesters.

Roles and Responsibilities of Faculty

To integrate the curriculum, faculty teams plan, prepare and deliver modules together. To create the modules, faculty members must meet several times before a term begins to define module-learning objectives, choose cases, readings, and textbooks, establish course flow, and discuss how assignments will be graded. Once a semester begins, faculty teams are expected to attend and participate in all sessions.

A Course Manager, a member of the faculty teaching team, manages both the faculty teaching team and the course. This individual chairs the initial design of the course, helps chose faculty to present given modules, schedules assignments, manages his or her fellow faculty, leads in the detailed design of the course, coordinates with other Course Managers, ensures that classroom is ready to teach, monitors students in their on- and off-line modes, awards final grades to students, and provides feedback to all faculty involved in that course. Course managers are usually present in the classroom even if they are not teaching. All Course Managers are from a department, whose faculty teaches only in EMBA courses.

The department chair is responsible for appointing her faculty as Course Managers and to teaching teams. She is also responsible for ensuring courses integrate with each other to form a smooth overall program. Course Managers are usually part of teaching teams for other courses. Therefore, faculty members can be a Course Manager of one course, a member of the team for another, help teach only one unit for another.

Challenges

Challenges to integrated programs include: historical faculty lines, entrenched courses and programs, limited availability of integrated teaching material, and traditional performance measures related to credit hours taught. Typically, faculty is allotted from administration based on credit hours taught. Discussions about joint teaching and course content often become battles between administrators who are trying to keep existing positions or justify new ones.

TABLE 1
Class Hours Allocated by Discipline and Course

Discipline	Residencies	First Semester	Second Semester	Third Semester	Fourth Semester	Total	Mean** EMBA
Executive Coaching & Personal Development ****	24	14	11	15	16	80	80
International*	64					64	47
Strategy & Planning		8	10	7	33	58	43
Written & Oral*** Communication		14	11	11	14	50	21
Finance		11	7		18	36	63
Accounting	8	7	11	12		38	56
Operations & Quality			24	8		32	33
Marketing			10	21		31	45
Economics		23				23	50
Legal & Negotiations			8	7	7	22	23
Quantitative Analysis			10	7		17	38
IT & MIS	8	3	4			15	30
Human Resources		4	4			8	
Ethics		4				4	17
Total	**104**	**88**	**110**	**88**	**88**	**478**	**525**

Note:
****Executive Coaching and Professional Development includes life-long learning, teaming, career development, and other Organizational Behavior topics.
*** Includes end of term team presentations
** Figures from Alsup et al. (2001) show reported mean in-class hours for EMBA programs. Mean subject hours are from Q6 and mean total hours from Q4, page 41. Total mean subject hours do not total mean total hours.
* International Residency and preparation weekend. Quality and Policy Residencies total 64 class hours.

TABLE 2
First Full Semester – Institutional Excellence

Day and Time	Weekend 1	Weekend 2	Weekend 3	Weekend 4
Friday Noon - 3 pm	Financial Statements	Leadership & Culture	Valuation	Long Term Finance
Friday 3 pm - 6 pm	Web Retrieval Systems	Written & Oral Communication	Institutional Leadership	Presentation Practice
Saturday 8 am - Noon	Financial Performance	Managing Mix & Growth	Fiscal Policy	Presentations
Saturday 1 pm - 5 pm	Macroeconomic Structure	Ethics & Defining the Organization	Goal Setting & Balanced Score Card	Presentations
Sunday 8 am - Noon	National Economics	Monetary Policy	Capital Structure	Assessment Experience
Sunday 1 pm - 5 pm	Strategic Framework	Financial Concepts	Human Resources	Assessment Experience

TABLE 3
Second Full Semester – Business Excellence

Day and Time	Weekend 1	Weekend 2	Weekend 3	Weekend 4	Weekend 5
Friday Noon - 3 pm	Strategic Framework	Managerial Accounting 1	Sales Support	Capital Investment Decisions	Queuing Theory
Friday 3 pm - 6 pm	Industry Forces	Quantitative Analysis	Deep Change	Negotiation Principles	Presentation Practice
Saturday 8 am - Noon	Business Strategy in Action	Teaming	Performance Management	Managerial Accounting 3	Technology Management
Saturday 1 pm - 5 pm	Market Analysis	Supply Chain Management	Information & Knowledge Management	Leadership That Gets Results	Negotiation Application
Sunday 8 am - Noon	Operations Strategy	Investment Decisions	Quality Excellence	Project Management	Presentations
Sunday 1 pm - 5 pm	Process Excellence	Product Positioning	Managerial Accounting 2	Statistics & Process Control	Presentations

TABLE 4
Third Full Semester – Product and Service Excellence

Day and Time	Weekend 1	Weekend 2	Weekend 3	Weekend 4
Friday Noon - 3 pm	Strategic Framework	Positioning	Channels & e-Commerce	Master Manager
Friday 3 pm - 6 pm	Analysis & Decisions 1	Patent Law & Trade marks	Branding	Presentation Practice
Saturday 8 am - Noon	Analysis & Decisions 2	Product Design & Development	Product Liability & Competition Law	Emotional Intelligence
Saturday 1 pm - 5 pm	Market Segmentation	New Product Introduction	Product Cost Analysis	Leadership
Sunday 8 am - Noon	Customer Profitability	Communications & Advertising	Budgeting	Presentations
Sunday 1 pm - 5 pm	Forecasting	Leadership & Personal Development	Going Soup to Nuts	Presentations

TABLE 5
Fourth Full Semester – Decisions and Development

Day and Time	Weekend 1	Weekend 2	Weekend 3	Weekend 4
Friday 12n - 3pm	Review of Financial Concepts	Capstone Planning & Decision Making	Capstone Review	Taking Teaming Back
Friday 3 pm - 6 pm	Assessment Center Experience	Review of Financial Concepts	Corporate Compliance	Cross-Cultural Interactions
Saturday 8 am - Noon	International Finance	International Finance	International Finance	CPI
Saturday 1 pm - 5 pm	Contract and Employment Law	CVS & LPI	Career Anchors	Presentation Practice
Sunday 8 am - Noon	Business Planning	Competitor Analysis	Pro Forma Planning Statements	Team Presentations
Sunday 1 pm - 5 pm	Capstone Planning & Decision Making	Capstone Planning & Decision Making	Capstone Planning & Presentation	Team Presentations

We have faced many of these challenges in implementing our program. Some of these we consider we have surmounted; some we continue to address. The major challenges we faced concerned the faculty, the students, the administration, and technology.

Faculty

Faculty present one of biggest challenges to implementing this type of program. Team teaching is expensive and can reduce the faculty available to teach other courses. Faculty must be comfortable with team teaching and flexible about variable teaching schedules, as every week they are on a different schedule.

Another faculty challenge is creating the materials because few educational resources or guidelines are available for integrating courses. In addition, developing integrated lesson plans requires considerable time and effort. Faculty must be willing to do the work, which may include learning more about other functional areas.

Then other faculty may perceive that an integrated curriculum is not as academically rigorous and produces "jack of all trades, and master of none". So often faculty who teach in an integrated program must justify their content to faculty in other more traditional departments. Furthermore, the pressures from within (tenure and promotion) and without (accreditation and hiring) are for academics to be specialists not generalists.

In our program, faculty must teach on weekends, with a different schedule every weekend. During the week, they are preparing and coordinating their teaching plans, conducting their online teaching, replying to students emails and chat room concerns, grading assignments, and carrying out their required research. Faculty often finds that they spend far more time on out of classroom teaching associated activities than they did in their silo teaching.

As we are an AASCB accredited institution, the faculty who teach in the integrated program have committed to a research requirement of two published articles every three years in a refereed journal. The schedule presents quality of life problems to faculty with school age children or working spouses.

Both classroom and online electronic teaching requires more preparation than traditional classroom teaching. Our program requires that all faculty use PowerPoint presentations, which must be available electronically to students at least three days before class. All other classroom material is loaded onto the laptops before the end of the previous course. The advantage of having all modules planned and distributed to students is that if a faculty member were unable to attend class, other faculty can step in and to teach that module. Another advantage of preparing modules in advance is that once all the material is set up for a program, it is relatively easy to run another program. One expectation that we have of our faculty is that they will respond within 24 hours to all questions in the chat room and emails.

Our faculty teaches in teams, where all syllabi and organizational matters are decided as a team. Teaching teams must integrate their teaching with other business disciplines. Faculty proposals for assignments and modules are discussed with the other faculty team members and the Course Manager. Teaching team members have other faculty sitting in and participating in their classes. Faculty receive constant feedback from their peers (and departmental chair) on their teaching, as well as from associates who file electronic feedback at the end of every module. Thus unlike traditional courses where the teacher makes all decisions relative to content and delivery, our faculty are expected to make adjustments based on feedback from all sources.

We have only just started on the concept of integrating education with work place learning. Conger and Xin (2000) consider this to be a key development in education for the 21st century. We believe that students should learn not only from faculty but also from each other. Therefore, we are constantly seeking ways to involve students rather than just lecturing to them. We also want to make the learning applied so that they can take what they are learning and use it immediately in their work environment. This desire to continually improve creates additional pressure on faculty.

To be successful in our integrated, team-taught, technology driven curriculum, faculty must manage their time, like working with other faculty, be flexible regarding scheduling, be comfortable with constant feedback, want to experiment with teaching methods, and embrace new technology. Traditional academic training and tradition does not prepare faculty well for such roles as team teaching, as it is based on individual effort. However, most business experience does prepare faculty for working as teams. Thus, we chose faculty with extensive business as well as academic experience.

We found that these challenges caused the need to create an inter-disciplinary department, called Leadership and Professional Development, to teach these programs. Faculty who join this department, understand the need for teach teaching and believe in an integrated program. At present, our department consists of faculty from the following disciplines: strategy, organizational behavior, marketing, accounting, economics and finance, family business, and operations. Nearly all the faculty in this program was hired directly into the program as we found few existing faculty that wished to teach in our environment. In addition, we use faculty from the other departments and outside consultants and managers to support particular modules.

Students

A significant concern for students in an integrated program is consistent grading across faculty, especially when multiple faculty members teach a single section. Often students only have one opportunity to have an assignment graded by a particular faculty member.

Another problem with integrated programs is the lack of flexibility for part time students. Typically, most integrated programs are lockstep with cohort groups. Students cannot miss a semester and continue with their program. Therefore, once a student chooses to enroll in this time of program, it is a commitment of several months.

Administration

As our actual teaching load is varies from weekend to weekend and is different for each faculty member, this creates administrative problems. As stated in the opening of this section, faculty lines are generated by credit teaching load. Even though, we may have 250 students enrolled in classes, the numbers must be allotted to all faculty members.

Another challenge has been with our registrar. As our courses do not follow the academic calendar, we often have to give all our students “Incompletes”, which lead to automatic warning letters going out from the registrar. In addition, we have to put our semesters and residencies into the University graduate catalogue as separate courses, with descriptions that are often out of date before they are printed. Luckily, we now have our own administrative staff that is working on these problems.

The university promotion and tenure system is based on courses taught by one professor and is administrated by faculty who have little experience of team based teaching. This can

create problems for our non-tenured faculty in our integrated, team taught program.

Technology

It is essential that we issue all course participants identical software and hardware and that we fully control the servers. In the beginning, we allowed students to provide their own computers. However, we ran into several problems, which created additional work for our technological support director. Therefore, we have moved to providing the laptops as part of the program.

Technology training is also essential before the main program starts. If technology training is not done well, then technology problems can soon interfere with the learning mission.

Benefits

We believe the benefits certainly outweigh the challenges. First, the integrated, team-taught curriculum increases faculty exposure to cross-functional disciplines and research. This faculty interaction between disciplines broadens the knowledge base, which can ultimately lead to co-authored articles across cross-discipline areas.

Second, graduates will have a broader understanding of how the functional areas truly work together, which will prepare them to take on more complex assignments. In addition, they will have a solid foundation of leadership development that will give them substantial flexibility in both initial and future job assignments.

Third, the business world has more skilled and knowledgeable employees who understand how all the pieces fit together. Further, this understanding creates an integrative mindset that is crucial for the 21st Century.

Conclusion

Institutions of higher learning must abandon the artificial functional silos that exist at present. However, these functional silos are influenced by a combination of departmental structure and performance measures, which in turn drive faculty lines. Academic institutions and faculty are slow to adapt. Arjay Miller, former dean of Stanford Business School has noted that getting faculty to change is "like trying to move a cemetery." Nevertheless, we believe faculty must stop operating independently where they often duplicate teaching, research, and service efforts and do not integrate the total teaching experience to their students.

Faculty may be the major obstacle to an integrated program, as they may perceive it is easier to teach a traditional stand-alone course where they have more control. In addition, because there are no performance rewards or incentives, faculty is not motivated to adapt to new processes.

We believe we are headed in the right direction with our integrated MBA program. Integrated programs are the future of business and lifelong learning for both graduate and undergraduate students.

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