Specialty IB programs: A tailored approach

Pinning the curriculum to fit student, industry needs

Emerging educational needs, as communicated to school administrators by local businesses and/or students, were the genesis of three specialty programs developed separately at University of California, Los Angeles; University of Colorado Denver, and San Diego State University. Robert Spich, Manuel Serapio and John Francis shared the success of their respective school’s program with educators at the CIBER conference.

Global Access Program (GAP) University of California, LA

“GAP began as an entrepreneurial effort by UCLA Anderson Price Center faculty to give students both entrepreneurship and international business experience in a single course,” said Robert Spich, faculty director of the UCLA Anderson School of Management CIBER.

“Faculty picked up on student interest in international and created a field experience requirement for all our part time MBA students. CIBER played a role of providing start-up support and financial assistance to the GAP program for student field research, partner development and faculty travel.”

GAP is a six-month, 10-credit course that runs in the final year of the 33-month Fully Employed MBA (MBA (FEMBA) program.

GAP teaches the principles of developing effective growth strategies for early stage, high-tech companies located in a foreign country. A field study project is the cornerstone of the program in which students go abroad to work hand-in-hand with executives of an assigned company to impact the short- and long-term growth of the business.

Finding the right companies to partner with the program is vital to the success of GAP. “We work with key high-technology agencies internationally to identify entrepreneurial companies that are best positioned to benefit from our MBA students’ input,” said Spich. Companies may enter the program by invitation only.

“Each company is assigned a team of student consultants made up of a cross section of business functions.” Their tasks include business plan development, market assessment, competitive analysis, product development, finance, human relations, operations, sales and marketing strategies and the art and science of raising venture capital.

“CIBER supports the field research and students get direct exposure to challenging problems related to business development in international markets,” said Spich.

“Thirty-six companies participated in this year’s GAP which we just completed,” Spich said. “Next year GAP will be expanded to over 50 companies. It’s a very complex educational endeavor better suited to big schools than small ones,” he said, noting that it’s the students’ continued interest and enthusiasm, highly committed faculty and a tightly managed program that continue to drive the success of GAP.

As a former Peace Corps volunteer, Spich is impressed by what he sees as a “growing movement among students in social entrepreneurship to develop projects that can be profit-oriented but do social good. These include sustainable and green related businesses and microfinance ventures to fund pro-social projects in developing countries, all of which CIBER supports,” said Spich.

“Students talked to the dean about these interests and we now teach a social entrepreneurship course with an outside lecturer. It fills a classroom of 50-60 students once or twice a year.

“This movement points to new ways of thinking about how we should be running our business schools,” said Spich. •

In UCD’s IB Program, business leaders do more than serve as guest speakers, they teach and help analyze the courses.
Specialty IB programs: A tailored approach

Pinning the curriculum to fit student, industry needs

International Entrepreneurship
University of Colorado Denver

Deal-making skills and “the nuts and bolts of international business” are emphasized in this UCD course, the result of feedback from Denver-area employers with whom the university enjoys a close working relationship, said Manuel Serapio, faculty director of the UC Denver CIBER.

“We like the graduates from your program,” employers told Serapio. “They can talk about globalization in elegant ways but we’d like them to have more in-depth knowledge about how to put deals together.”

Said Serapio, “Employers weren’t talking about letters of credit, exporting-importing and the Why and What that are a part of every international program. They were talking about serious deal-making skills that can make the difference between a profitable enterprise and a struggling one.”

As the UCD Business School together with the Bard Center for Entrepreneurship started developing a program to meet employer and student needs, Serapio recognized the major focus had to be on the How of international entrepreneurship.

• How do you scan the environment for international business opportunities and deals?
• How do you identify and select from alternative international business deals (product/service selection, country/market options)?
• How do you take an international business idea from a concept to an actual business?
• How do you structure an international business deal? What key business, legal, financial and cultural considerations impact an international business deal? How do these considerations drive the structuring of deals?
• How can you best structure your mode of entry (e.g., export / import / international franchising, international alliances, offshoring) in international markets?

Cases, company examples and research materials are included in the program. “We look at the large international corporation but we look at it from an entrepreneurial perspective,” said Serapio.

“For example, students like to look at decisions from the perspective of the company as a whole. But in fact decisions are made division by division or product segment by product segment.”

International Entrepreneurship is an elective that satisfies IB requirements for MBA and MS students. “It has become a very popular program,” said Serapio.

Sports MBA
San Diego State University

For fans, sports is entertainment, a rousing good time at the stadium or in front of the TV. For team owners, it is a serious business in which winning depends not only on the players’ ability but on the specialists who can bring “tried and true business methods to managing the team and generating revenues,” said John Francis, assistant professor of management at San Diego State University. He holds a PhD in business administration from the University of Memphis, an MBA from Samford University and a BA in business administration from the University of Montevallo.

“Our program got started in response to those needs,” said Francis, referring to the Sports MBA offered at San Diego State University (SDSU).

“The owner of the Padres came to San Diego State about five years ago and talked with the dean of the business school about his organization’s need for people who
Specialty IB programs: A tailored approach

Pinning the curriculum to fit student, industry needs

had a business background in sports as opposed to something of a general nature. Furthermore, he indicated that knowledge of the international scene was also needed as teams export their products to markets all over the world.”

Out of that conversation came the Sports MBA, which developed over the next couple of years. SDSU pioneered this degree. “There are a lot of sports management programs but in business schools there are very few,” said Francis. “It’s a specialty niche that the community asked for and that students love.” The niche is largely unfilled across the country, he added.

“My class in international sports is so new that there’s no established curriculum and no textbook to serve as a guide.”

The SDSU CIBER boasts the oldest IB program in the country, according to Francis. In developing the Sports MBA, “we didn’t just want to start a new program; we wanted to start one that fit what we were already doing,” he said. “So it made sense to take our program and emphasize something we were good at and simply tweak it a little bit. That’s where the international part comes in. We don’t teach a business policy and strategy class at San Diego State. We teach an international business policy and strategy class. Now we’re trying to get at the intersection of sports and international sports.”

Yet it’s not international sports that draw students to this degree, said Francis. “They come in wanting to work for a US team or the athletic department of a university. So it’s a great opportunity for us to help internationalize them.”

The program actively recruits students from around the world and this year has a diverse group that includes students from Korea, Japan, Germany and Mexico. •