

Business program a good sell

■ **BUSINESS:** Restructured master's program takes students from the classroom to the Board Room

By Ben Kwasney
Higher Education Reporter

First-year students in the newly restructured Master of Business Administration program are using classroom learning and applying it to real-life business problems.

The program, which began in fall, teams small groups of students with Oregon business firms to work on emerging opportunities.

Emerging business opportunities include new products, new market segments and geographic expansion, said Jerry Blakely, who coordinated the teams and helped recruit the 19 businesses.

"Companies are constantly being exposed to new business opportunities, but most of the time they find themselves so busy doing what they do on an everyday basis," Blakely said. "They don't have the time to adequately research and plan for these opportunities."

The master's program at the University is unique, said Wendy Mitchell, assistant dean of the program.

"There's no other M.B.A. program where students work with a firm throughout the entire year and apply knowledge that they learned," Mitchell said.

The groups of students are known as Opportunity Planning Teams. Students learn about the business and operating environment of the firm they work with, Blakely said. During winter term students will evaluate business problems and their ability to solve them. In spring students focus on the plans for making the solutions

successful.

"We call it a planning partnership because the companies feel like this is real valuable assistance they can get, and it's a great opportunity for the students," Blakely said.

Blakely contacted 125 companies in Oregon based on a list of about 14 key industries in the state. Thirty businesses applied. Then students chose their industry preference and were placed with a business.

Many students said the OPT program has been a beneficial component of the master's program.

"We can actually start using things we learn in class for a real-life business case," said Ana Walraven, who graduated in 1989 with an international studies degree and a minor in economics from Oglethorpe University in Atlanta.

The University's program attracted Walraven because of the strong background in international and Asian studies.

"I liked the program and was impressed with the curriculum," she said.

She spent the last year working with trade associations in international business and would like to work in international business after graduation.

"I want to be able to travel and work with people of other cultures," she said.

Thirty-five percent of the students in the program are international, and experiences working with students of different backgrounds appealed to Walraven, she said.

She said the program is useful, but sometimes difficult to give her full attention with the heavy workload.

"I think a lot of us are overwhelmed," she said.

Dale Morse, curriculum coordinator for the program's first year, agreed.

"I think they're a little overwhelmed," he said of the expectations to complete class work and a business plan.

Students are given a heavy workload early, said Dan Poston, director of admissions for the program. "You have to learn a great deal very quickly," he said.

Poston, who owned his own business before graduating from the University with a master's last year, said the new program is what keeps him around.

"I'm really doing this right now because I'm so excited about what's going on here," he said.

But he said in the future he plans to manage his own business again.

What attracted Chris McKee, a management graduate from the University of Montana, was the format and diversity of the program.

McKee previously was working in management for AT&T in Seattle. He left when the company offered packages for employees to walk away as part of cuts the company was making. One incentive was a \$10,000 tuition assistance, so McKee began applying to graduate programs.

He said the OPT part of the program has been valuable.

"It's great exposure into the local market," he said. "Our business liaison has been very willing to meet with us."

Applications for the master's program were up 50 percent this year with about 330 applicants, Mitchell said. One hundred students were admitted.

Professors put heads, classes together for degree

■ **CLASSES:** Educators combine curriculum for one 12-credit graduate business course

By Ben Kwasney
Higher Education Reporter

Faculty have noticed favorable reactions to curriculum changes in the first-year of the new-look Master's of Business Administration program.

The curriculum has been modified to integrate various topics together.

"I think it's a big improvement," said Jennifer Van Heeckeren, who teaches economics and strategy.

It also has been a lot more work, but there's a payoff for students because the course work fits together better, she said.

"I get a lot more participation in class," she said. "The students seem more interested and engaged in economics."

The faculty have had meetings to analyze the content of the assignments and how they relate to assignments in other subject areas, Van Heeckeren said.

"For my class, I've had lots of excellent reviews," decision sciences professor Sergio Koreisha said.

The new format allows faculty of particular expertise to come into the classroom to

teach when it applies to what is happening with the Opportunity Planning Teams program, he said.

"We're trying to deliver the best information at the right time," Koreisha said.

Previously, students took separate courses in marketing, ethics, law, accounting, organization management and technology. Students now take one, 12-credit course taught by professors who are experts in those subjects.

"We're trying to integrate all these topics together, so instead of having the students take three or four courses, they're taking one 12-credit course," said Dale Morse, curriculum coordinator for the program.

The class meets three hours, Monday through Thursday, and sometimes Friday. Students meet outside the class to work on the OPT project.

"The classes are integrated to help them achieve the skills and knowledge they need to perform the OPT project," he said.

Only curriculum built around essential skills of a manager are included, said Wendy Mitchell, assistant dean of the master's program. She said 70 to 80 percent of the same material is being taught, but it's delivered differently.

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