

Partnering Internationally to Deliver a Hybrid MBA Program

Debra Petrizzo
Franklin University

Wendell Seaborne
Franklin University

When our new global expansion team went out and visited with institutions, we found that a 100% online education was not approved in many parts of the world, so we had to build a new, hybrid format for our course offerings. Our MBA program consists of ten courses, four-credit-hours each. And, these courses are taught by both Franklin University professors and qualified partner university professors; specific courses depend on the location and the agreement between our two institutions. Global distance learning is facilitated by the fact that many countries teach English in addition to their own native languages, making English a de facto standard in the global distance education marketplace. International students not only become part of the fabric of university and classroom life, but the curriculum incorporates global learning themes across disciplines (Rovai, 2009).

Franklin University in Columbus, Ohio brought on its fourth president, Dr. David R. Decker in August, 2007. Dr. Decker was a visionary leader that wanted to know where our student body was then and where it will be in the future. Although that was a good question to ask, not many in the education community had thought to ask at that point in time. What he found changed the way Franklin thought about its business model, although we were never the university with traditional students that many are. He found the trend to be one of older students, already engaged in their chosen profession, with a need for a degree to compete in the marketplace. No big surprise there. What he also found was the growth of the for-profit education sector and they had targeted the same students as Franklin. Layer on top of that, the lower population growth and it was soon obvious that there will not be enough students for the growing education system to remain amply supplied as we had historically. But, Franklin had an advantage in Dr. Decker and his having been with institutions that had students around the globe. He was not tied to the vision that students of an English-speaking, American university must be native English speakers, or Americans. The Association of International Educators predicts that by 2020, from a year 2000 base, global higher education demand for seats will double to 200 million, suggesting a growth market in international higher education (Redden, 2009). Much of this growth will be in distance education.

So, one of his early steps was to recruit two former colleagues experienced in the recruitment of partner universities in other countries, Drs. Klaus Heberlich and Godfrey Mendes. Their new role was to find prospective partners in areas of the world where we could gain a steady supply of new, qualified students and each partner could gain from the collaboration. The first partners they found were in Poland, Slovakia, China, Viet Nam, Oman and Macedonia. Some of these partners—and their governing structures politically and educationally—were easier to work with and we found our MBA program

offered in some sooner than others. The School of Banking in Wroclaw, Poland was our first—and to date most successful—partner. (WHY were they first?? Talk about EU support) To date, we have had two cohorts, totaling 52 students, to complete the MBA program and graduate with a third cohort of 23 students scheduled to finish in June 2013. There is also a fourth cohort of 18 students that are about one-quarter of the way through the program. In addition to these students, we work with the School of Banking in an advisory role for their own polish-language MBA and our professors also have taught undergraduate courses while in Poland.

Our additional partners include University of Economics in Bratislava (EUBA), and their Bratislava Business School, where we have graduated a cohort of seven students with a second cohort of ten scheduled to finish in July. They are recruiting for a third cohort now, with plans to start in late spring 2013. Also among our partners in the Modern College of Business and Science in Muscat, Oman, where the first cohort of 14 students just finished their final class, a second cohort of 16 students is about one-third finished and a third cohort began in February, 2013. Our final active partner is University St. Kliment Ohridski in Prilep, Macedonia where the first cohort of eleven students will finish in August, 2013. Our additional partners with recruitment of student efforts going on now are Megatrend University in Belgrade, Serbia and Vienna, Austria, and the National Mining University in Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine. Each of these partners has a goal of launching cohorts in 2013 as well. Our relationships mentioned earlier in China and Viet Nam proved too difficult to arrange governmental approvals and those have lapsed, even though we had Higher Learning Commission approvals in place.

When our new global expansion team went out and visited with institutions, we found that a 100% online education was not approved in many parts of the world, so we had to build a new, hybrid format for our course offerings. In each of the four partners already mentioned, we have used this hybrid structure. Our MBA program consists of ten courses, four-credit-hours each. And, these courses are taught by both Franklin University professors and qualified partner university professors; specific courses depend on the location and the agreement between our two institutions. In Poland, we teach eight courses and the local faculty teaches two, while in both Slovakia and Macedonia, we teach seven and the local faculty teaches three and in Oman we each teach five courses. These arrangements have all met the approval of the Higher Learning Commission here in the USA and the various ministries of education in our partner countries, as well as the IACBE, our accrediting body. Our initial format was five weeks in an online environment followed by two weeks in a face-to-face environment and a final week in the online environment for each class, with a new class starting immediately upon completion of the former one. There have been a few exceptions in the earlier cohorts to accommodate varying national and religious holidays. However, the second cohort in Oman wanted to change the structure to accomplish each class in a six-week total length, so we revised our format to four weeks total in the online environment and maintained the two weeks in the face-to-face environment. This made a slightly heavier work load for the students and professors during each week of each class, but the students also have a one-week break between the end of one class and the beginning of the next. This seems to work very well for them and they have maintained this format for the new third cohort.

Global distance learning is facilitated by the fact that many countries teach English in addition to their own native languages, making English a de facto standard in the global distance education marketplace. International students not only become part of the fabric of university and classroom life, but the curriculum incorporates global learning themes across disciplines (Rovai, 2009). In order to meet the needs of the students in this hybrid format, we had to be careful in selecting the professors assigned to these classes. Those professors had to show proficiency in both the online and face-to-face environments as well as a mastery of the materials covered. We need to explain our teaching faculty; we have two full time lead faculty members assigned to the MBA program with three courses each, an additional three full-time Franklin faculty members assigned to one of the courses each and the Management & Marketing Department Chair/MBA Program Chair assigned to one as well. Our lead faculty members have responsibility to oversee their assigned courses for content and materials. They each work with a dedicated, doctoral-qualified course designer faculty member—also assigned to the MBA program—to develop the courses in their various formats. We deliver the same content to our students in each of our

formats: domestic face-to-face, domestic online and global hybrid. Beyond these responsibilities, each lead faculty member oversees a body of adjunct faculty members that comprise our teaching faculty. So, while our assigned fulltime faculty members do travel and teach these courses, as well as other full time faculty members without specific responsibilities for the MBA program, we also assign some of our adjunct teaching faculty to these global courses. One of our full-time MBA faculty members has the responsibility to train those faculty members that are traveling and teaching how to be successful in this effort. And, one of our operational staff members holds cultural training with each faculty member before going. Our future goal is to assign our teaching faculty into undergraduate, domestic graduate and global graduate based on abilities and training.

This two-week face-to-face assignment adds a degree of complexity to our offerings. We fly the faculty member to the partner country through one of our internal departments and a travel agency. When the faculty member arrives in the country, the partner institution has arranged transportation from the airport, hotel accommodations, transportation to and from the school for classes, and return trip to the airport. All personal activities while visiting in the country are at the faculty members' discretion, although if requested the partner will help arrange sightseeing trips during the faculty members' free time. Many persons have thought the faculty members were "going on vacation" but those traveling retain responsibility for their other duties while away. We each stay connected through e-mail and often by phone to be certain that everything stays running smoothly in our other areas of responsibility. For the adjuncts traveling, this part varies depending on their personal arrangements.

Our future goal is to have established credibility for the Franklin MBA program and gain acceptance of online education in other parts of the world, and be able to move to a more online environment. We know this will increase our scalability to offer our program in more places and to more students. In fact, we are able to start this move to a future state with new agreements we are just launching in Guatemala and Nepal. We have identified partner universities in these two countries where we will launch a 100% online MBA later this spring. Hopefully, we will be back to report on that program's success in the future.

REFERENCES

- Redden, E. (2009). In global recession, global ed still growing. *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved May 29, 2009 from <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2009/05/29/International>
- Rovai, A. P. (2009). *The Internet and higher education: Achieving global reach*. Oxford, UK: Chandos Publishing.