Era of Experimentation
Programs explore hybrid and blended options as they leverage technology to both survive and thrive

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Era of EXPERIMENTATION

PROGRAMS EXPLORE HYBRID AND BLENDED OPTIONS AS THEY LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY TO BOTH SURVIVE AND THRIVE

It already started before the pandemic: The growth of hybrid programs. Then the pandemic hit, and hybrid became the now and perhaps the future of EMBA Programs. What do hybrid EMBA Programs really look like? How do programs balance the in person with the online? How do they incorporate networking? Executive Connections turned to programs worldwide to learn more about their experiences and perspectives.

Veterans of the Hybrid Scene

EMORY UNIVERSITY

Almost 20 years ago, Emory University’s Goizueta Business School recognized the merits of the online world, launching a modular program with virtual components. And just before the pandemic hit, the school planned a move to replace the modular program with a new hybrid option, integrating the hybrid format with the popular on-campus format.

The work and investment in online and hybrid not only helped the school offer more flexibility to EMBA students but also made the sudden transition to online at the pandemic’s start less traumatic.

With technology in place and faculty who knew the online world, Goizueta was ready to respond. Then, as planned, in August 2020, it debuted its new hybrid program option. In its on-campus EMBA Program option, students meet on campus on alternating weekends. Students in the hybrid format come to campus three weekends each semester, and for the remaining online sessions, they participate in a mix of asynchronous and synchronous learning.

In the previous online modular program, students came to campus every eight weeks and completed the rest of the
Robots? Hybrid Solutions Pioneer

**BI NORWEGIAN BUSINESS SCHOOL**

During the pandemic journey, EMBA students at the BI Norwegian Business School found themselves in the company of small and somewhat adorable robots. For group work, they gently transported their mechanical companion to designated breakout space. Designed for children who are sick and cannot attend school, the robots act as avatars through which—in this case remote EMBA—students can see, hear, raise their avatars’ hand, and speak. Simple to use, the robots were placed near the virtual EMBA student’s classroom seat and also travelled for group work. The robots represented only one innovation along the way for the BI program. They helped the program fill a gap in reaching its aim: “It was important to me that the remote students could listen and participate in real time,” says Idoia Olazar, program manager, international executive programs for BI.

BI has worked through many solutions to make its hybrid environment work for students. In many ways, the timing couldn’t have been worse for its EMBA Program, which started in 2020 on March 16. On March 12, Norway and the school shut down. “So that gave me three days to do something.”

Olazar and her team had monitored the spread of the pandemic well before March, but now came the decision point: cancel, postpone, or move online fast. They decided to go online the Friday before Monday classes, bringing technical support to faculty at home.

While initially students were upset with the switch to online, they came to appreciate the opportunity. “They were happy because they created this connection that happens when you are struggling together,” she says, adding that all students remained in the program.

By the end of May, BI received special permission from the Minister of Education to pioneer a hybrid solution where students could participate live in the classroom or live remotely. It took many adjustments in sound and video, but by fall, upgraded classrooms with two cameras allowed all students to see who was talking, eliminating the need for the robots.

“Cute and practical: As one innovative solution,” says Kang, assistant director, international affairs for NUCB Business School. “For example, the teachers acted as robots and taught the EMBA students using the robots. It was the first time students participated in online classes using this technology.”

**NUCB BUSINESS SCHOOL**

In 2018, NUCB Business School in Japan invested in technology to develop a virtual program that was designed specifically for women on maternity leave from their workplaces.

“We established a beautiful, high-quality studio facility in an open floor on our campus,” says John Kang, assistant director, international affairs for NUCB Business School. The large facility makes use of studio cameras, a soundboard, many television screens, and professional video production equipment.

In early February as COVID began to hit, the school decided to go 100 percent virtual with the large studio serving as a template for 10 miniature set-ups in other rooms. The spring 2020 semester began as scheduled in April without any delays. The efforts proved so successful that Ministry of Education officials visited and wrote a white paper on how NUCB Business School pioneered a distance learning solution that could serve as a model for the rest of Japan.

As the situation continued to be challenging, the school began in-person instruction in May. The decision to go back to some in-person classes was driven by the need to help students feel more connected and engaged.

“While Olazar sees benefits in hybrid, particularly for programs with students who live in many different countries, hybrid is also very demanding, especially for faculty. “For the future, of course, we will have hybrid courses in the school. What we do in EMBA, we don’t know yet.” Since all programs moved in the same direction at the same time globally, they know the advantages technology can offer, such as bringing experts into the classroom from anywhere. Olazar sees the potential for growth in blended learning, but she isn’t as certain about hybrid. “Will it be a better experience for everyone? I can argue yes, but I also can argue no.”

**Investment in Technology**

“Will it be a better experience for everyone? I can argue yes, but I also can argue no.”
“Students themselves have learned over time how to best interact digitally, and there is a lot of learning between them, sharing best practices from their own organizations.”

KARIN WISTRÖM, STOCKHOLM SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

Currently, the school offers its executive education courses virtually for students and non-degree participants who can’t take campus classes or prefer virtual classes. The application of technology during the pandemic also has changed many efforts for the better—from improved workflow to hybrid events, such as case writing, project presentations, and competitions, to career services, alumni gatherings, and virtual tours, and even to an online package of Japanese stand-up comedy, he says. It pays to reach out to other schools, participate in conferences, learn more about what is happening in the industry, and be willing to experiment in the right context, says Kang. “I think a lot of business schools have risen to the challenge. It is inspiring to see.”

Hybrid = Flexibility 
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

Before the pandemic, hybrid already hit the radar at the University of Colorado Boulder Leeds School of Business. “Our market research revealed that students in Colorado and outside of our state wanted more flexibility,” says Lori Seward, teaching professor and faculty director of the MBA Program at the school. The school began piloting hybrid courses in 2019 in its Evening MBA Program. Those efforts, plus student and faculty feedback, led to the design of its new hybrid EMBA Program, which launched its first class in August. The 21-month hybrid program includes about equal parts asynchronous and in-person delivery. The program begins with an in-person orientation. Students then complete six weeks of asynchronous course work, followed by a seven-day in-person residency on campus, and repeat that schedule—sans the orientation—two additional times in the first year. They also participate in a synchronous Zoom class three weeks before each in-person residency to help supplement the connections that take place during the in-person residencies. At the start of the second year, students meet again in-person, with a final residency planned for an international location. The design helps maximize relationship-building among students.

“Our experience with the traditional model showed that much of the cohort bonding actually takes place outside of the classroom when students are working together on cases and projects,” says Seward. “Students will still engage with their classmates and professors during the pre-residency period with their weekly activities. But during the residency, students will have time throughout days and evenings to create the relationships that are important for EMBA students. The seven-day residency is where students work together without the distractions of work and family, thus creating the unique networking experience the students want.”

With Canvas as the online platform, faculty worked with an instructional design partner to convert their teaching materials, emphasizing active engagement and collaboration among students and between students and faculty during the asynchronous part of the course. Faculty also created high-quality video content that ties directly to class activities such as reading assignments, homework quizzes, and group projects. Market response has been strong, and the school continues to invest in hybrid. Leeds recently introduced a hybrid version of its Evening MBA Program and delivers two successful master’s programs online.

Seward sees many upsides and few downsides to this before the pandemic and now that folks couldn’t access it because of corporate restrictions. Tools, such as Airmeet but found that some students couldn’t access it because of corporate restrictions. Familiarity with a tool also helps—the tools that all students know tend to work best, she says. All the work to design digital activities and find the most applicable technology makes a difference, says Wiström.

“We have found that during the pandemic, as people have been able to meet in person, it is crucial to offer other ways to meet and interact, having check-ins and various get-togethers. Also, during class, it is very important to allow student interaction through a lot of breakout groups.” Students also find their own ways to connect virtually. “Students themselves have learned over time how to best interact digitally, and there is a lot of learning between them, learning best practices from their own organizations.”

SSE went back to hybrid education in June, and plans to continue this in the fall, hoping that students will be able to come to campus. If the situation demands, the program is prepared to move fully online again. It also plans to integrate digital components even further in its new curriculum that starts in the fall.

“At SSE, we truly believe in the power of meeting in person to really get to know one another, so we will continue with in-class sessions,” says Wiström. “However, virtual engagement and networking is a great complement to meeting in person. I think in the future we will see a combination of both.”

Finding the balance will require continuously asking questions and thinking in new ways, she says. “How can we do this digitally? What are the things that are important to do in person? And why?”

“What works better to do in a digital format? How do we really make the learning stick?”
IN A WORLD OF CHANGE, EMBA PROGRAMS LOOK TO STAY AHEAD IN THE MARKETPLACE

EMBA Programs are hoping to keep their edge and find new opportunities as the landscapes of work and education continue to shift. Executive Connections shares some ways that programs are looking to stand out in the changing and sometimes confusing graduate business marketplace.

“Rethinking, especially around the role of it’s about creating a learning environment,” says Akitt. “It’s not about teaching anymore. Teaching executives or helping them learn,” “Experiential learning has to be the way of one where walls don’t necessarily play a role. At Switzerland’s IMD, the path forward is longer relies on a bricks-and-mortar model. Developing business leaders of the future no
mdb
The pandemic has resulted in much confusing graduate business marketplace.

“The global diversity of the program also offers another point of differentiation. A class of 50 or 60 students may include representation from 35 different nationalities, and the program emphasizes global business, including three global discovery expeditions.

To their credit, EMBA Programs worldwide have remained flexible, with an ability to adapt to changing circumstances, which helps differentiate them from other offerings, she says.

Participants, though, continue to change, and competition is increasing from consulting companies and other private organizations that are upping their offerings for leaders. “We need to stay ahead as much as possible.” Part of that requires moving pedagogy from teaching to learning, knowing what your participants want and need, understanding your mission, and adjusting the curriculum to keep it relevant, she says.

EMBA is much more than a part-time MBA for executives, Akitt says. “It’s about developing learning opportunities for senior leaders who will move our organizations forward in a complex world that is fast outpacing many of us.”

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IMD
The pandemic has demonstrated that developing business leaders of the future no longer relies on a bricks-and-mortar model. Moreover, for Terry Akitt, EMBA director at Switzerland’s IMD, the path forward is one where walls don’t necessarily play a role. “Experiential learning has to be the way of a learning environment,” she says. Akitt. “It’s not about teaching anymore. It’s about creating a learning environment.”

The pandemic has resulted in much rethinking, especially around the role of technology. Like schools worldwide, IMD has invested in technology and been able to adapt its sessions to work for students. “There’s no question the digital aspect is going to have an impact. The question for me will be in what way because the value of being together face-to-face is, of course, irreplaceable.”

EMBA Programs can leverage their new facilities and greater expertise to deliver hybrid and online experiences in the future, with the challenge of determining when they best support executive learning, she says. IMD differentiates its program on three fronts, including one that builds on the importance of experiential learning.

"Our dean often says we'll teach you less so you will learn more. It's not about cramming the brain with different theories and frameworks. It's about being selective about which frameworks are helpful to them in their day-to-day life."

One major point of differentiation involves the leadership journey. "That I believe is truly what sets us apart." In that journey, IMD focuses on helping students understand their behavior and its impact on others. For example, students write a paper comparing their different roles, behaviors, and impact in different teams. They work with leadership coaches one-on-one and coach one another in peer teams. “This is where it becomes a transformational journey.”

The global diversity of the program also offers another point of differentiation. A class of 50 or 60 students may include representation from 35 different nationalities, and the program emphasizes global business, including three global discovery expeditions.

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Reflection & Differentiation
SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY

Marcia Armstrong keeps lists of the many ways EMBA Programs might change in the future because of the pandemic. The lists help in posing key questions to consider in moving forward and helping ensure program relevance in the ever-shifting marketplace. It is, as Armstrong puts it, a time of reassessment, as opposed to the mad scramble to survive early in the pandemic.

“I think it’s really important that schools re-evaluate right now because so much is happening now,” says Armstrong, Brierley Endowed Professor and director of the Brierley Institute for Customer Engagement at Southern Methodist University (SMU). “There are question marks right now. We are not through it yet.”

Global immersion trips, for example, are such an integral part of EMBA Programs, with many programs offering virtual global options because of travel restrictions. “It’s just not clear what the future is for global immersions.” There are other examples that made the lists as well.

• Virtual and hybrid. Lockdown orders forced programs to explore online technology more than they ever had before. SMU is returning to face-to-face in the classroom this fall, but has the prospective student base changed? “They see the advantages in being synchronous, being remote,” she says. “They now don’t have to fight traffic for an hour to get to classes.”

• Tuition. Are EMBA Programs going to continue to be able to charge the same level for EMBA tuition? “This is where differentiation comes in as you talk about how EMBA is substantially different and worth that added tuition.”

• Recruiting and admissions: Virtual recruiting events opened new possibilities for recruiting. SMU will likely keep such events, as well as face-to-face options, especially after admissions and between class starts to help cement student commitment.

• Social media. The pandemic accelerated the trend toward social media and digitalization. SMU EMBA started using its YouTube Channel to enhance its digital footprint. “It is absolutely here to stay,” says Armstrong.

In a fluid market, such as the current one, it pays to really understand how you are different from your competitors, both internal and external competitors.

For years, EMBA fit into a unique spot, says Armstrong, offering value through format, delivery, and content. Now, change is impacting students, and has the prospective student base changed? “They see the advantages in being synchronous, being remote,” she says. “They now don’t have to fight traffic for an hour to get to classes.”

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programs need to make sure they offer what students want. “It helps to look at all areas of differentiation and what areas are still viable and what needs to change.” That process involves multiple stakeholders and careful consideration of what customers want. It means asking tough questions: What is our target market? Did it change? What do we understand and not understand about our target market? What makes us different? “It is a time to step back and reflect,” she says, to help make the best decisions for your program as it begins to settle from the whirlwind of the last year-and-a-half.

Armstrong believes demand remains for what EMBA does. “There are still plenty of people who need us. What might change is how we deliver and what we deliver.”

**New Land of Opportunity**
**YORK UNIVERSITY**

In this period of uncertainty, Su-Lan Tenn sees new opportunity for EMBA Programs.

Tenn points to an IBM Institute for Business Value (IBV) study conducted in 2019 of more than 5,000 executives in 48 countries. According to the study, “as many as 120 million workers in the world’s 12 largest economies may need to be retrained or reskilled as a result of AI and intelligent automation.”

The study recommended elements that already exist in most EMBA programs, such as educational journeys, experiential learning, and peer-to-peer learning through customized case studies with different skill sets. It also endorsed blending the traditional classroom with online learning.

“The real opportunity for EMBA Programs lies in responding to this market for retraining or reskilling with particular focus on what the IBV study indicated as top skills, such as ‘behavioural skills’ like the ‘willingness to be flexible, agile, and adaptable to change,’” says Tenn, assistant dean, EMBA Programs, Schulich School of Business, York University.

Like professionals, EMBA Programs also are continuing to adapt. “I think the effects of the pandemic and recent societal movements are changing the EMBA marketplace,” says Tenn. “For instance, to the extent that employees are seeking a flexible schedule at work, they are also looking to EMBA Programs to provide a flexible program schedule.

Students in organizations with an emphasis on successful diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives also will look for programs with the same level of commitment, she says. In addition, they want to see greater clarity on a program’s value proposition.

And, no doubt, programs will continue to explore the innovative use of technology, including maintaining some degree of hybrid teaching because students will come to expect this flexibility. “Professor Mohanbir Sawhney from the Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University, coins the term ‘hybridization.”’

Hybrid learning will blend both asynchronous and synchronous instruction to create learning experiences that are better than all-in-person learning, he says. He points out that “like commerce and work, higher education learning will become location agnostic.”

One significant challenge for EMBA Programs comes from what Tenn terms a convergence that causes blurring lines between EMBA Programs and other graduate business programs. “It is becoming more and more critical for EMBA Programs to not only clearly articulate what differentiates their offering compared to similar programs in their marketplace but also to ensure that these differentiators continue to respond to the needs of their market.”

Keeping in touch with the market is essential, she says. “It is important to ensure that the ‘DNA of one program is in alignment with what the market values. It’s key to stay on top of trends that can impact the higher education space in general and executive education in particular.”

**Big Leadership Leap**

**FDC**

From the Brazilian perspective, interest in MBA Programs remains strong, in large part fueled by a challenging business environment that demands more and more of leaders.

“People are aware that they have to change,” says Marcelle Gama, MBA Program director who is also responsible for the Alumni Network at Fundação Dom Cabral (FDC). “They have to upskill or reskill. They want to go out of this crisis better then when they came into it, and they see that MBA Programs can help.”

FDC emphasizes a leadership model with four key pillars, corresponding to the abilities and competencies it wants to develop in executives—the purposeful leader in the society pillar, the visionary leader in the global business environment pillar, the leader with a focus on results in the organization pillar, and the inspirational leader in the individual pillar.

And the FDC EMBA Program is taking this point of differentiation even further.

The program hears from students all the time about how their experiences in the program transform them and result in breakthroughs for their careers. “We wanted to go deeper and understand what the transformation is about, and that’s why we started this project or process of measuring the transformation,” says Gama.

The program uses a methodology—known as the Portfolio of Achievements—where students take the lead in their learning process by writing reports about what they learn, reflecting on the program’s content and how it connects with their development goals and professional practice.

Now, artificial intelligence is helping the program take a big leap. From a broad group of stakeholders, FDC gathered the names of leaders that people consider highly skilled in each of its pillars. The platform SPECK, which taps the personality insights resource of IBM Watson, analyzed the writings of each selected highly skilled leader to generate characteristics for each leadership pillar profile. SPECK then takes student reports and compares the characteristics of those texts with the characteristics of the leadership pillar profiles from the highly skilled leader group.

Students receive a development report, which shows their percentage of compatibility with each leadership profile and the characteristics that need more development. It gives students a more complete view of their development potential and the characteristics to continue nurturing.

“This is a work in progress,” says Gama, but is helping give students more tangible results and allowing the program to measure the transformation and demonstrate its ability to deliver for students and society.

“The skills and abilities acquired by graduate management students during their business school experience makes them a valuable asset for organizational recovery and resilience, and that’s what I see in our students here,” she says. “They need to be stronger than they were before.”

**Critical Trends and Responses**

**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE BUSINESS SCHOOL**

Technology as a driver. Flexibility. Digital transformations: The importance of brand. Return on investment.

The game-changer of a pandemic makes all those trends even more critical for EMBA Programs to address, says Nicole Tee, director of graduate studies at the National University of Singapore (NUS) Business School.

“There is no turning back,” she says. Students now expect programs to incorporate technology, as well as flexibility in delivery. “We are looking at how we can improve the student experience through the lens of technology.”

While the NUS EMBA Program maintained face-to-face delivery, except for six weeks of lockdown, it also includes an online option for students who can’t come to class. With technology playing a key role, the program continues to enhance the hardware and software infrastructure and enhance capabilities.

On the curriculum side, the program intends to increase its active learning components, and offer students a deeper dive into the digital transformation and its impact on business.

The NUS EMBA team also embraced technology and automated processes to improve productivity. “Over the last year-and-a-half our team launched about 20 projects,” she says, turning time-consuming tasks into routine ones.

The pandemic helped reinforce NUS’ conviction in its positioning as a provider of unmatched Asia-based insights, says Tee. NUS looks to attract people from outside of Asia who want to come and learn more about Asia and plans to add exchange partners.

“These days you can’t do global business without Asia. I think people will more and need insights on the ground in Asia.”

Reinforcing branding will only help programs as they move forward, she says. As premium programs in business schools, EMBA Programs must deliver because students enter the program with high expectations.

“The brand is going to be increasingly important. Students have so many options right now either free or much, much cheaper options. If your brand is not credible, there is no reason for them to pay a premium. I think we need to really protect our brand and our reputation.

Ensuring that students quickly experience return on investment also remains a staple for EMBA Programs. “Most students are self-funded. They want to see fast ROI, and programs that enable them to do that will see those students go further,” says Tee.

Now and in the future, EMBA Programs as a whole will endure, she says, especially those that can deliver the quality and maintain a good reputation.

“The purpose of the program actually is more relevant now than ever before. People need these skills to be able to help them navigate the future. Our programs just need to make adjustments in how we achieve those goals.”

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NICOLE TEE, NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE
Value in Action

EMBA Alumni Make Their Mark in a Worldwide Crisis

Whether serving on the front lines, navigating the supply chain, or finding creative ways to support the ongoing health of their businesses, EMBA alumni are contributing to the economy, society, and their communities as part of a COVID-19 response—and tapping their EMBA experience like never before.

Alumni—a Positive Force for Society

To increase awareness about the positive contributions of alumni, in late May EMBAC launched a new initiative: EMBASSADORS.

“We know that much amazing work is being done by alumni,” says Michael Desiderio, EMBAC executive director. “Broadening the exposure of the work and its impact is good for the EMBA industry, and perhaps more importantly, helps amplify alumni voices to create more positive change.”

As a start, EMBAC is asking members to nominate alumni whose work is positively impacting society in ways that go beyond just growing profit for profit’s sake. Contributions may impact a wide range of areas, such as health and well-being, education, environment, energy, economic growth and job creation, infrastructure innovation, sustainability in all forms, and peace and justice initiatives.

EMBAC will contact alumni to confirm their participation and then begin to highlight their efforts on social media (#EMBassaDors), including links to the initiatives of alumni.

“The contribution of alumni is being used across the country to help counter a major pandemic challenge,” says Erickson. “As physicians we spend a lot of time in training and by the time we start practicing, we have a tendency to think our lives are mapped out for us,” she says. “I like thinking outside of the box. Before I was less aware of innovative opportunities, like this collaboration with engineers.”

Her time in the program was transforming and has prepared her for opportunities, like this collaboration with engineers.

“EMBAC application in action. Duke EMBA alumni Melissa Erickson, MD collaborated with Duke University engineers and Duke's Innovation Co-Lab to develop another PPE resource, helping counter a major pandemic challenge.”

“"It wasn't just another degree. It's just changed my framework and mindset." — MELISSA ERICKSON, MD

Doctor and innovator both applies EMBA lessons in pandemic

Even as those with COVID-19 filled their beds during the pandemic, hospitals also needed to take care of other patients who required emergency care, while at the same time keeping the environment as safe as possible for all. Early in the pandemic, Melissa Erickson, MD, orthopedic spine surgeon at Duke Health, and her colleagues met weekly to discuss the many challenges the pandemic posed, including the problem of a huge personal protection equipment (PPE) shortage.

For hip and knee replacements, surgeons use a surgical hood and helmet to prevent the spread of airborne germs that could cause infections. She wondered whether the helmet might be used to help with the PPE problem. That thought ultimately turned into the design and development of another source of PPE—a powered air purifying respirator (PAPR) for use by health care organizations worldwide.

Along the way, Erickson applied some lessons from her time in the Weekend Executive MBA Program at Duke University’s Fuqua School of Business.

She decided to pursue her MBA to add and strengthen skills that would help her improve the complex world of health care. “An MBA teaches you ways to streamline and collaborate,” she says. “Health care still has areas to improve, and I want to do all I can to use the tools that I learned.”

The pandemic offered ample opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills she gained from the program. “It gave new meaning to the merits of real-time solutions.”

For example, a collaboration with Duke University engineers and Duke’s Innovation Co-Lab turned the idea into reality. As a result, the team tested numerous designs through 3D printing until they ended up with a final version, ready for the field. Along the way Erickson offered guidance and feedback on designs and modifications.

After testing by a HEPA certification company, Duke Health began using the PAPR. But it didn’t stop there.

“We didn’t want it just for our hospital,” says Erickson. “We wanted to make it widely available.” The design is available for others to 3D print, and it is being used throughout the country to varying degrees, says Erickson.

Her EMBA experience helped her with the PAPR project and helped widen her horizons in other ways.

“As physicians we spend a lot of time in training and by the time we start practicing, we have a tendency to think our lives are mapped out for us,” she says. “It’s just changed my framework and mindset. This isn’t just about your work as a doctor for my patients and local hospital. It’s about that bigger impact.”

EMBA application in action. Duke EMBA alumni Melissa Erickson, MD collaborated with Duke University engineers and Duke’s Innovation Co-Lab to develop another PPE resource, helping counter a major pandemic challenge.
Alumnus develops air measurement device that can detect the presence of COVID

Pre-pandemic Edward Sobek decided to tackle a gap in measuring indoor air quality and found a solution that now also helps organizations monitor the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Sobek developed the WhisperCare® unit to protect patients in critical care facilities who are vulnerable to health care acquired infections. Before WhisperCare®, practitioners took 10-minute grab samples.

“The problem is that airborne microbial composition changes drastically over a 24-hour period and short grab samples lacked the ability to detect those changes, leaving large gaps in data quality,” says Sobek, principal of Assured Bio Labs and alumnus of the Executive MBA–Healthcare Leadership Program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville’s Haslam College of Business.

The WhisperCare® unit includes patented M-TRAP® technology that allows for long-term continuous sampling to identify viruses, bacteria, and mold.

Since the product’s release, the technology found applications in other settings, such as commercial office space, sensitive manufacturing facilities, and other industrial buildings. It also proved a powerful tool in keeping people safe from COVID-19.

“During the height of the pandemic, the WhisperCare® technology was used extensively to monitor for the SARS-CoV-2 virus in hospitals, schools, and manufacturing facilities to protect occupants and workers from infection,” he says.

What began with a request from the city of Oak Ridge, Tennessee, to monitor fire houses and first responder vehicles for the virus turned into inquiries from hospitals and businesses in New York.

Sobek launched Assured Bio Labs in 2005. By 2016, the business had grown to 15 employees, and Sobek was looking for a way to gain the tools and knowledge to take the company to the next level. To achieve that aim, he enrolled in Haslam’s Executive MBA–Healthcare Leadership Program.

“It was one of the best ROI business decisions I have made, outside of the decision I made in 2005, to start Assured Bio Labs, LLC,” he says. “The money I spent on tuition was earned back in new business in less than six months after graduation.”

His time in the program helped him with WhisperCare® development. “The big lift that came from the EMBA Program was learning how to effectively design the financial and supply chain to successfully launch a product and ramp up production to meet customer demands.”

In February, Sobek stepped down as president of Assured Bio Labs to join Global Plasma Solutions, the largest non-compatible plasma supplier in the world.

“I continuously draw from, and build upon, what I learned in the program. It’s the knowledge foundation that I continuously draw from, and build upon, while executing the business of science.”

Edward Sobek

Developed by University of Tennessee, Knoxville. EMBA alumnus Edward Sobek, the WhisperCare® unit can detect the presence of the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

2021 EMBAC VIRTUAL CONFERENCE OFFERS COMPELLING PLENARIES, SESSIONS, NETWORKING... AND MORE

Set for Oct. 25-27, the 2021 EMBAC Virtual Conference includes a diverse and ever-so-relevant range of offerings—from a record number of plenary sessions to more than 30 concurrent and corporate member sessions to a 40th Anniversary Jam and much more.

Here’s a quick look at 2021 plenaries:

Influence: The Ultimate Power Tool
Robert Cialdini, PhD / bestselling author and thought leader in the fields of influence and persuasion

Searching for the HERO Inside: The Role of Psychological Capital on Mental Well-Being
Frank Macwewege, PhD / Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria

Dean’s Panel
• Francesca Cornelli / Dean, Donald P. Jacobs Chair of Finance, and Professor of Finance, Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University
• Sharon Hodgson / Dean, Ivey Business School, University of Western Ontario
• Christina Soh / Dean and CoH Tpei Kok Professor in Business, Nanyang Business School, Nanyang Technological University

Be the EMBA Pipeline of Corporate Diversity
• Lori Costew / Chief Diversity Officer and People Strategy, Ford Motor Company
• Ramona Hood / President and CEO of FedEx Custom Critical®
• Barbara Singer / CEO, Executive Core

What’s the Data Say: Looking Back While Looking Forward
Elmer Almacha / Senior Director, Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University

Discover Tomorrow: What Learners Want, What Employers Want, and What It All Means for Business Schools
Andrew Crisp / Co-Founder, CarringtonCrisp

EMBASSADORS: Alumni As a Positive Force in Society
• Siyad Abdullage / Vice President and Director of Medical Affairs, Pro-Health Care, Inc.
• Qadriah Abdur-Rahim / Chief Equity Officer, City of Atlanta
• Fabiana Bentes / CEO, Sou do Esporte.org
• Tim Gocher / Founder and CEO, Dolma Fund Management

And to increase access to all sessions, EMBAC is making its plenary and other sessions available to those who register each day on demand after 8 pm EST.

Register at embac.memberclicks.net/conference and join your friends and colleagues for the industry event of the year.
EMBAC celebrates 40 years of growth and progress

Yes, we know there are many, many more milestones than 40, but these below were carefully selected to highlight some of EMBAC’s firsts and other memorable moments in its 40 years of existence. Enjoy the look back!

1. 1981 Collaborations begin with AACSB International and GMAC to form EMBAC
3. 1987 First Bud Fackler Service Award winner: Bud Fackler
4. 1987 EMBAC launches its first non-United States based conference in Toronto, Canada
5. 1988 Executive MBA Council incorporates, with AACSB International continuing to offer organizational support and 16 schools become charter members of EMBAC
6. 1988 Tom Ference from Columbia University becomes the first chair of EMBAC’s Board of Trustees
7. 1987-88 First Survey of Executive MBA Programs tallies nearly 100 graduate business programs for managers and executives in the U.S., Canada, and Australia and some 2,500 EMBA students
8. 1987-88 Survey says: 70 percent of students received full funding and 20 percent partial funding
9. 1991 First issue of the member newsletter, Executive MBA Review, debuts
10. 1992 Big spurt of growth. EMBAC membership increases to more than 100 member schools
11. 1993 EMBAC members met the president of Mexico at the EMBAC Conference in Mexico City, Mexico, and a story about the visit appeared next day in the Mexican national media
12. 1995 Trade you: Schools start the first T-shirt exchange at the annual conference, a tradition that carried forward for many years
13. 1997 EMBAC establishes its presence on the web
14. 1997 EMBAC develops three membership categories: full member, associate member, and partner, known today as corporate member
15. 1997 Accent Travel Group becomes EMBAC’s first corporate member
16. 1997 Oh look, it’s us! EMBAC establishes its first visual identity
17. 1998 EMBAC research expands with the first Student Exit Satisfaction Survey
18. 1999 Throughout the world: First international regional meeting in Paris, first Asian and Latin American regional meetings
19. 2000 Leaving the AASCB International nest! EMBAC strikes out on its own as an independent organization
20. 2000 EMBCA hires its first Managing Director, Maury Kalnitz
21. 2001 & 2002 EMBAC designs two new offerings: Teaching Effectiveness for Faculty and posts on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn
23. 2005 Ole: First non-North American EMBAC membership takes place in Barcelona, Spain
24. 2005 EMBAC partners with AACSB International and UNICON on a series of research projects on management education
25. 2006 Party on: EMBAC celebrates 25 years and publishes its first edition of Executive Connections, EMBAC’s magazine for members
26. 2007 Welcome: EMBAC hosts its first full-time Executive Director, Michael Desiderio
27. 2007 EMBAC organizes first preconference offering for directors
28. 2008 Technology-enabled: The first EMBAC webinar explored “Marketing on a Shoestring Budget”
29. 2010 The EMBAC Board of Trustees names its first non-North American chair, Jordi Diaz from EADA
31. 2013 EMBAC joins AACSB International and UNICON on a series of research projects on management education
32. 2015 Asia-bound: EMBAC holds its first Asia-based conference in Singapore
33. 2016 & 2017 New looks: The current EMBAC logo makes its debut in 2015 and a revamped online newsletter for members, EMBAC Voice, follows in 2016
34. 2016 EMBAC launches its first of several hyperdrive research projects, which look at relevant industry issues in a shorter timeframe
35. 2016 EMBAC offers its first Virtual Discussion Forum (VDF), an experiment that reaps many benefits four years later during a worldwide pandemic
36. 2016-2021 Media investments: EMBAC enhances its social media presence through blogs and posts on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn
37. 2018 & 2020 Working Professional Task Force, which brings together stakeholders from various organizations that provide education to working professionals, forms in 2018, and EMBAC sponsors a task force research project on the changing world of work and learning in 2020
38. 2020, 2021 A time of many firsts: Thanks to a worldwide pandemic, EMBAC hosts its 2020 and 2021 conferences virtually; brings members together through VDFs on COVID-19 and EMBAC and special topics, as well as for regional meetings; establishes an Inclusion and Diversity Committee; launches two new virtual programs; and celebrates its 40th anniversary
The 2021 EMBAC Virtual Conference, set for Oct. 25-27, is almost here. And what a conference it has shaped up to be! If you have not yet registered, I strongly encourage you to do so...it’s never too late to decide to join the EMBA industry event of the year. This year we have included a record number of plenaries and structured new ways to connect in the virtual world. And you don’t want to miss another milestone that we will celebrate at the conference—EMBAC’s 40th anniversary.

And while the conference committee was hard at work building this year’s lineup, EMBAC was fortunate to have another group of dedicated volunteers—our professional development team—creating two new program offerings, the EMBAC Leadership Summit and the EMBAC Institute, which ran in late July.

The EMBAC Leadership Summit helps strengthen the skills of current leaders, and the EMBAC Institute helps future leaders address issues that relate to their day-to-day responsibilities. Both programs received high performance ratings from participants...an average rating of 4.6 out of 5 stars. What an amazing start for two brand new offerings!

The four instructors who designed, developed, and delivered these programs did it from a pure willingness to serve members during a time when everyone, including each of them, is already oversubscribed. Elmer Almachar, Kevin Davis, Louise Kapustka, and Barbara Millar truly deserve our thanks!

Although important, professional development offerings are not the only way EMBAC is bringing value to its members.

This year EMBAC continued its efforts to support inclusion and diversity (I&D) by formally kicking off its broader I&D Committee. The committee already has met several times this year, and the passion, energy, and level of commitment are incredible. With 30 members, it’s the largest committee in our history. We launched a members-only forum to post discussions and resources from committee members and encourage the same from members at large. We hosted three Virtual Discussion Forums (VDFs) focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), and fielded a survey on the topic, which helped us shape DEI questions to include in our Membership Program Survey.

In our quest to find new ways to shine a light on the impact of EMBA Programs, in late May EMBAC also launched the EMBASSADORS initiative (see page 12).

EMBAC designed the initiative as another way to showcase EMBA alumni who are acting as a positive force in society. EMBASSADORS began with a soft launch of two emails to members. The result? EMBAC has completed more than 20 conversations with alumni and more to be scheduled.

You’ll begin to hear more and more about this effort but don’t wait to participate. Just email me at michael@embac.org to nominate worthy candidates.

While there is always more to share, I’ll close by saying thank you to each of you, our board, all our committee volunteers, our contractors, and our staff. Each piece of the EMBAC ecosystem is critical to our ability to deliver to our membership. You each have my deep appreciation!

Michael Desiderio
Executive Director