

EXECUTIVE CONNECTIONS



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



“I absolutely think that hybrid is here to stay, and it’s going to grow. It’s the future. It’s now. It’s what they need.”

JACLYN CONNER, EMORY UNIVERSITY

course work online. “They were never here at the same time as students in the weekend program,” says Jaclyn Conner, associate dean of EMBA Programs at Goizueta. “We needed to have a format where they could all be together.”

The new hybrid option gives the on-campus EMBA Program and the hybrid participants the chance to better know each other. “They have much more opportunity to network, interact, and engage with each other,” she says.

Thanks to donors, the classroom comes equipped with the latest technology. When they are not physically present, hybrid students are seen by all on a large wall of monitors.

“We were very fortunate to have this new technology,” says Conner, who notes that students want more than Zoom school. The interactive wall that brings students visually into the classroom helps increase engagement and interaction among all students. “With this technology, you can intermingle groups.”

While technology offers one key to success in the hybrid world, great faculty and content also count, she says. “With quality teaching, proper technology, a well-equipped classroom, and strong curriculum, there’s a lot of advantages to this format.”

Recruitment for the first class of the new hybrid option went well, and Conner expects the program to continue to attract leaders who are looking for opportunities to learn that are not bound so much by space and time.

“The advantages of a hybrid program are that you can escape all geographic boundaries,” says Conner. “We have made a program where you can learn from anywhere and that allows much more flexibility.”

Because of its many advantages, hybrid’s popularity will continue, she says.

“I absolutely think that hybrid is here to stay, and it’s going to grow. It’s the future. It’s now. It’s what they need.”

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.

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

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.

“We were really proud of that because I think it was a testament to our ability to adapt quickly and lead the way,” says Kang.

EMBA faculty made the shift quickly during the COVID lockdown. In talking with faculty and gathering student feedback, the program learned the challenges of engagement through the online platform.

Based on their responses, the school developed a quick reference guide for faculty with recommendations about conducting a virtual course that included increasing the use of gesture systems, such as raising hands or physically



Cute and practical: As one innovative solution, robots helped remote EMBA students participate with peers and faculty in the physical classroom at the BI Norwegian Business School.



“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

indicating yes or no. They also experimented with virtual backgrounds to immerse students in a case.

“More seriously, our professors have increased their use of Harvard business simulations because for some of them, they have found it’s a very effective way to increase engagement.” They also incorporated group work in a virtual setting, expanded their use of platforms for activities, conducted quick polls, and organized random breakout rooms with activities.

“We’ve also seen a huge effort from our students in organizing their own activities,” says Kang. “I would say they’ve taken the ball and run with it.” Those student-led activities include club activities, competitions, webinars, and networking.

“This whole digital transformation that we’ve been forced to undergo has really yielded a lot of interesting innovations and useful initiatives that I think ultimately once we are in a post-COVID era will remain and will shape the way things are done at our institution.”

And while EMBA students returned to the physical classroom in fall 2020, with only 10 percent of EMBA courses taking place virtually, the fully online legacy of early pandemic days is shaping new directions.

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 new hybrid EMBA Program, in large part because of the attention to ensuring engagement among faculty, students, and the business community throughout the program.

“Demand for this type of program flexibility will grow,” says Seward. “The market was already asking for this before the pandemic and now that folks have experienced the flexibility of remote work, they will continue to expect these options.”

Engagement in the Digital Environment

STOCKHOLM SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

The pandemic may have forced the Stockholm School of Economics (SSE) EMBA Program online, but it did not stop the program from working overtime on new ways to engage students and ensure networking in a digital environment.

“We introduced much more digital get-togethers of various types and forms—guest speakers, guest lectures, and more to compensate for not being able to meet on campus,” says Karin Wiström, director of the SSE MBA. The program incorporated social activities, such as quizzes, games, and random digital lunches that encouraged those who wanted to meet, network, and work together.

“We also have had improvisation theatre and sometimes just social events that gave a reason to connect,” she says. “We have encouraged our students to reach out to one another and to use the digital tools provided.”

Students participated primarily through Zoom, and all groups have access to Teams and use Slack as a platform to interact. The program tried other tools, such as Airmeeet 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.

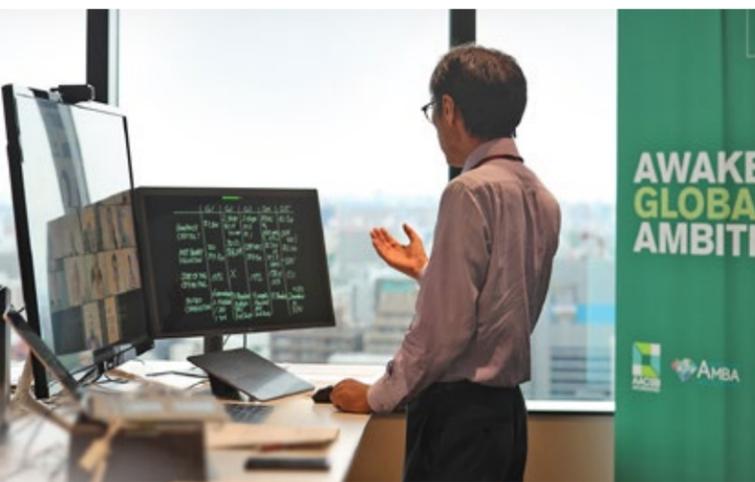
“We have found that during the pandemic, as people have not been able to meet in person, it is crucial to offer other ways to meet and interact, having check-ins and various get-togethers. Also, during class, it is very important to allow student interaction through a lot of breakout groups.”

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, sharing 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?”



A previous investment in technology allowed the NUCB Business School in Japan to make a quick shift online in the early days of the pandemic.

STAND OUT

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.



Emphasis on Strong Suits

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 teaching executives or helping them learn," 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.

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."

"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."

SU-LANTENN, YORK UNIVERSITY

Reflection & Differentiation

SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY

Marci 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 relevancy 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



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 the dust 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 agile teams 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 ‘behavioral 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’s program is in alignment with what the market values. It’s key to stay abreast 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 Marcele 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 than 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

“There is no turning back... We are looking at how we can improve the student experience through the lens of technology.”

NICOLE TEE, NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE

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 advancing quickly, work 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 more people will want 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 themselves doing well.”

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 more than ever. 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.”

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



EMBASSADORS
ALUMNI AS A POSITIVE FORCE IN 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.

“I want to thank the members who already have emailed me with alumni names and contact information,” says Desiderio. “I’ve had great conversations with these alumni, and they are all excited to participate. Indeed, they are all examples of the power and impact of the Executive MBA on society.”

In the long term, EMBAC is looking at options to broaden the reach of EMBASSADORS, possibly including a more significant media campaign, establishing a dedicated web presence, and offering a way for EMBASSADORS to connect with one another. “This important initiative is evolving thanks to inputs from alumni,” he says. “The more alumni we can involve as EMBASSADORS the bigger the impact!”



If you are interested in highlighting your alumni or have questions, please email Michael Desiderio at michael@embac.org.

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

“It wasn’t just another degree. It’s just changed my framework and mindset.” – MELISSA ERICKSON, MD



EMBA application in action: Duke EMBA alumnus Melissa Erickson, MD, collaborated with Duke University engineers and Duke’s Innovation Co-Lab to develop another PPE source, helping counter a major pandemic challenge.

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. “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 to make even larger contributions to improving health care.

“It wasn’t just another degree,” 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.”

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 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

“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.

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

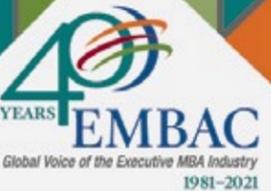
design the financial and supply chain to successfully launch a product and ramp up production to meet customer demands.”

In February, Sobek stepped down as president of Assured Bio Labs to join Global Plasma Solutions, the largest U.S. manufacturer of in-duct HVAC air purification technology, as chief science officer. It’s a new challenge he is enjoying, and he still applies what he learned in the program.

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

COMMUNITY OF INNOVATORS

EMBAC VIRTUAL CONFERENCE



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 MAGWEGWE, 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 Goh Tjoei 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 ALMACHAR / 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 ABDULLAHI** / Vice President and Director of Medical Affairs, Pro-Health Care, Inc.
- **QAADIRAH 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.

40 FORTY MILESTONES for YEARS

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

2 1981 & 1983

First Executive MBA Workshop, Houston, Texas, in 1981 and first EMBA Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1983

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 56 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 7,500 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 1992

Oh look, it's us! EMBAC establishes its first visual identity



12 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

13 1995

Trade you: Schools start the first T-shirt exchange at the annual conference, a tradition that carried forward for many years

14 1997

EMBAC establishes its presence on the web

15 1997

EMBAC develops three membership categories: full member, associate member, and partner, known today as corporate member

16 1997

Accent Travel Group becomes EMBAC's first corporate member

17 1997

Members organize the council's very first three regional meetings in the Midwest, Northeast, and Southeast

18 1998

EMBA research expands with the first Student Exit Satisfaction Survey

19 1999

Throughout the world: First international regional meeting in Paris, first Asian and Latin American regional meetings

20 2000

Leaving the AACSB International nest! EMBAC strikes out on its own as an independent organization

21 2000

EMBCA hires its first Managing Director, Maury Kalnitz



22 2001 & 2002

EMBAC designs two new offerings: Teaching Effectiveness for Faculty seminar in 2001 and Marketing & Admissions Program in 2002

23 2003, 2020

Go global: Non-North American EMBAC membership nears 25 percent and now stands at nearly one-third

24 2005

Ole: First non-North American based conference takes place in Barcelona, Spain



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 hires 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

30 2010 & 2011

Industry promoters: EMBAC launches a new website for prospective students in 2010 and releases its first ebook, *EMBA Up Close* in 2011



31 2013

EMBAC partners with AACSB International and UNICON on a series of research projects on management education

32 2014

Participation in the *Lights, Cameras, EMBA Action*, EMBAC Conference in Los Angeles reaches a record high for an in-person conference

33 2015

Asia-bound: EMBAC holds its first Asia-based conference in Singapore



34 2015

EMBAC's media efforts result in 64.4 million earned media impressions in 25 media outlets

35 2015 & 2016

New looks: The current EMBAC logo makes its debut in 2015 and a revamped online newsletter for members, *EMBAC Voice*, follows in 2016

36 2016

EMBAC launches its first of several hyperdrive research projects, which look at relevant industry issues in a shorter timeframe

37 2016

EMBAC offers its first Virtual Discussion Forum (VDF), an experiment that reaps many benefits four years later during a worldwide pandemic

38 2016-2021

Media investments: EMBAC enhances its social media presence through blogs and posts on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn

39 2018 & 2020

Working Professional Task Force, which brings together stakeholders from various organizations that provide education to working professionals, forms in 2018, and EMBA sponsors a task force research project on the changing world of work and learning in 2020

40 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 EMBA 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



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



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