

QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

While they value the fast-paced format, Rivier's first accelerated business graduates agree it's the quality of the program that really counts

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Students from Rivier's first EMBA cohort presented capstone projects and celebrated the completion of their program on October 24, 2006. The first cohort group is pictured above with Academic Dean Dr. Al DeCiccio, Vice President for Academic Outreach Dr. Joseph Allard, President William Farrell, and Assistant Professor of Business Dr. Kevin Wayne. (Photo by Jodie Andruskevich)

Over the last few years, the demand for accelerated programs has grown enormously. In January 2005, Rivier responded: the College introduced a bachelor's of science in business administration and an executive M.B.A. in organizational leadership. The first cohorts have reached their goals and provided insight into the benefits of Rivier's accelerated programs.

Katie McQuaid says she was intrigued by the accelerated format of the EMBA program. "As a working professional, attending graduate school full-time was not an option, and a traditional program would have taken me more than three years to complete," she says. The EMBA combines six- and eight-week courses and can be completed in 20 months.

"These are our first programs to use the hybrid format in a significant way," says Dr. Joseph Allard, Vice President for Academic Outreach. Both the bachelor's and EMBA programs combine face-to-face meetings with online coursework using the Blackboard® course management system. Courses are offered in a prescribed sequence and meet on the same night for the duration of the program.

Allard says that students have to be self-motivated to succeed in accelerated programs. "They have to come to the first class prepared to participate," he says. Dr. Kevin Wayne, Assistant Professor of Business, says that students must be independent, willing to do outside reading on their own. "Their intellect and input are crucial to making the program work," he says.

“I expected a very fast pace, because the courses are only five weeks,” says Brian Cooper. A CAD operator and field technician for a civil engineering consulting firm in Manchester, N.H., Cooper says that his undergraduate business classes helped him understand the project management process. “The courses also helped me understand legal issues relevant to a variety of industries, and to consider the ethical implications of decisions made in the business world,” he says.

Cooper took advantage of Rivier’s undergraduate degree completion option, transferring in credits from his associate degree. He finished the major requirements for his bachelor’s in just 18 months, and has moved on to the EMBA program.

Rivier faculty developed the accelerated business curriculum, with ethics embedded throughout. After each course, faculty submit revisions to help maintain quality. Wayne says that comments from students in the first cohorts were especially important in improving curriculum and course design.

This spring, Rivier enrolled the fifth cohorts in both the Bachelor’s and EMBA programs. “Experiencing Rivier’s EMBA program as a cohort, and learning with the same group of people throughout was one of the most enjoyable aspects of the program,” McQuaid says. “Interacting with other working professionals, we were able to learn how course concepts worked in industries across the spectrum.”

The cohort model has advantages for instructors as well. Wayne says, “It’s refreshing to have students refer to material from an earlier course and have all the students in class recall the shared experience.” Anne Formalarie, an adjunct professor, says the program is a microcosm of what the working world is like. “You can’t choose your coworkers or your cohort, but you find ways to work and learn together,” she says.

In addition to teaching, Formalarie works as a Benchmarking Program Manager at Cisco Systems, Inc. Many of Rivier’s adjunct business faculty hold full-time positions in business and industry, bringing real-world knowledge to the classroom. “They describe their experiences in the workplace and explain how our readings and assignments are applicable,” says Cooper.

Most classes incorporate projects that can be applied to students’ work; something both students and employers appreciate. EMBA students complete a capstone project that they present to their peers, faculty, and invited guests. “It’s a unique opportunity for family members to see students interact in a professional environment and see what they’ve learned,” says Wayne.

Capstone projects for the first cohort included a business plan for an executive transportation company, a workplace violence prevention plan for a hospital, and research on an aerial intelligence system. “We want this to be meaningful, realistic, and practical,” says Allard.

According to students, Rivier’s programs pass the test. ■

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