

SPONSORED SUPPLEMENT: EXECUTIVE DOCTORATE IN BUSINESS

HONOURING ACHIEVEMENT

Today's CityU Congregation will see newly qualified doctors ceremonially conferred with their degrees, writes John Brennan

Business leaders up to the challenge

The Congregation of the City University of Hong Kong (CityU) is an annual week-long occasion at which the university awards its degrees.

"This is a traditional event when everyone comes together," explains Professor Yan Houmin, dean of the College of Business at CityU. "All the students – doctors, masters, bachelors – who have graduated will have their names called out one by one."

There are three official graduation dates every year – normally in February, July and October – but today's annual congregation is when the newly qualified doctors get the chance to don their black gowns and bonnets and step up onto the stage to be ceremonially conferred their degree awards.

"On the one hand, this occasion is a celebration for the students and their family members and, on the other, it is an opportunity for reflection for the faculty and the students," says Yan, who will be speaking at the congregation ceremony.

"The university takes this opportunity to show its appreciation for all the help the students received

from their families and also to deliver a message on the education system."

Yan says that, this year, he took quite some time writing the address he will deliver to the congregation. In it, he will talk about books written by two authors. One tome looks at the last 500 years of Western civilisation and considers whether its influence on the world has now peaked. The other discusses the way in which the 19th century was viewed as "the British century" and the 20th century as "the American century", and ponders whether we are now entering "the Chinese century".

The history of the CityU College of Business does not stretch back quite as far, but since its founding in 1990, its progress has been rapid.

"The DBA programme was launched in 2006 and that's when you could say, programme-wise, we became mature – we had the full range of degrees," Yan explains. "We now have 170 full-time tenure track faculty members, which is quite a number."

"In addition to our programmes, we also do research. In the international university rankings, research-wise, we were in the top 100 four or five years ago. Last year, we were in the top 50 universities and, putting this in an Asia-Pacific perspective, we are second."

As well as working towards global excellence, the College of Business also tries to ensure it retains its local relevance. For example, Hong Kong's Centa-City Index for real estate was developed there.

"In our other programmes, such as the MBA, we are trying to train future business leaders, or, as in our PhD



programme, future academic research leaders – people who will pursue research positions, such as university professorships, when they graduate," Yan says.

"But the DBA programme is different. It is for successful businessmen and women, and managers, who are current business leaders. I am impressed by their desire to learn, as they do not have to do this [because] they are already successful. But they have a curiosity and the DBA programme allows them to look at contemporary issues from different angles."

Yan says that, despite its success, his faculty has no intention of resting on its laurels and is looking for new tools and methodologies that can be used on the DBA programme. It also seeks to devise some themes and grand challenges for research topics that those enrolling can choose to pursue.

Find the solution with a DBA

Experience tells Professor Muammer Ozer, the director of the DBA programme at City University's College of Business, that he will go through a range of emotions at today's session of the CityU Congregation as he watches the "learning partners" he has helped guide through their work collect their DBA degrees.

"First of all, I will feel a great deal of relief that they completed this challenge, as it's not easy," Ozer admits. "I will also feel extremely proud. An MBA or an EMBA is very structured – you attend the programme, take courses, follow the schedule, turn in assignments, and it is done. With a DBA programme, although we have some foundation courses, it is really not course-based. They have to do the research on their own and this is a very long and lonely process."

"Therefore, seeing these people finish it is really, really amazing, and makes me feel very humble. They are already established, highly successful business leaders and are very, very busy. I also feel proud to be part of their research that contributes to knowledge, business and society in many ways."

During the course of the CityU

DBA programme, the learning partners find answers to important practical questions they have about their company or industry.

Typically, Ozer says, they come up with either an extremely narrow research topic – maybe one that concerns only their own division – or they want to solve a huge, sprawling problem. The CityU faculty members then encourage them to refine their idea, so it not only has general implications for the economy – and possibly society in general – but is focused enough to be achievable.

The thesis written by one of this cohort of graduates, for example, looks at the future of Hong Kong's container port. "The container port plays an important role in the Hong Kong economy, so ideas on how to make it more efficient or responsive are very important to this society," Ozer says.

The College of Business recently moved into a brand new building on the CityU campus. But it is not only the facilities that have been upgraded.

"In the past we used to cover the history and philosophy of science," Ozer says. "Now the programme is very practical from day one. On the first day of application, we ask [learning partners] to submit a research proposal. In the first class, we ask them to justify the importance of their topic. In the second session, we talk about how to frame that topic in a proper way. And in the third we talk about methodology and what sort of data to consider to justify the research."

Ozer says that the level of support, through structured courses, specialist advice and networking opportunities, has also grown.

"For example, we have a dedicated statistical consultant to help [learning partners] with their statistical analysis."

There are formal requirements for entry to the DBA programme – a master's degree in a business-related field and a minimum of 10 years' work experience – but applicants also need to hold a senior position in a company.

CityU aims for diversity, Ozer adds. "We want a balanced mix, as another takeaway is the chance to network."



I feel proud to be part of research that contributes to society

PROF MUAMMER OZER (RIGHT), DIRECTOR, DBA PROGRAMME, CITYU COLLEGE OF BUSINESS



It is an opportunity for reflection for the faculty and the students

PROF YAN HOUMIN (ABOVE), DEAN, CITYU COLLEGE OF BUSINESS