

SPONSORED SUPPLEMENT: CITYU - DBA PROGRAMME, COLLEGE OF BUSINESS



Professor Muammer Ozer

Photo: Steward Chan

City University is top of the class for Asian DBAs as students put their research to good use to create real change in industry

Amongst universities offering a DBA programme, City University of Hong Kong (CityU) is now number one in Asia, according to the latest University of Texas-Dallas business school rankings, which are based on the objective metric of research output.

What's more, the type of research topics pursued on the CityU DBA programme result in studies that do not just gather dust on a shelf but can have a real impact on specific industries, and on wider society. The value of these completed theses comes from the way the

programme brings academic rigour to bear on the practical knowledge and experience students have amassed while reaching the top in their field.

"A large majority of our students are senior executives: CEOs, presidents and vice-presidents of major companies," explains professor Muammer Ozer, director of the DBA programme at CityU's College of Business. "They are eager to study a topic in depth and solve an important research problem, or tackle an important practical business question."

Ozer identifies the different types of high-flyers who apply

for a place on the CityU programme.

"One will be people who will remain in their industry on graduation. The second type will be someone who is in mid-career and wants to switch jobs and maybe become a consultant. A PhD would be too academic for these people, but our DBA programme can give them the legitimacy they may need to become a respected consultant.

"The third type may be someone of retirement age who has a burning desire to study a topic in more depth but has been too busy with their careers

and their family life, and didn't have the time until now."

The thesis topics the CityU DBA students research come from right across the economy.

One participant, who works in the pharmaceutical industry, is studying the question of trust between doctors and patients, particularly in China. This relationship can be fractious, especially when it comes to the evaluation of the quality of treatment. "His thesis is potentially beneficial to his firm, the academic world, and to society," notes Ozer.

Another student, from the banking industry, is looking at

ways of maximising investment returns from real estate investment trusts, or REITs.

"We also have a couple of students studying Big Data – a particular focus of ours – and how to utilise it. And we've just had a graduate whose thesis was on innovation management – how to improve the innovativeness of Chinese firms," Ozer explains.

The latter student is planning to switch careers and become an innovation consultant advising SMEs in the mainland.

The honing and refining of these research topics begins from the first conversations would-be applicants have with Ozer.

With a small class size, the selection process is personal and detailed, and it strives to ensure that the applicants accepted are right for the demanding programme, and that the programme is right for them.

On their very first day, enrolled students are each assigned a dedicated supervisor who is a specialist in the relevant field. This one-on-one supervision is a characteristic that marks out the CityU DBA from the programmes at other institutes.

But Ozer highlights the quality of the students his course attracts as its chief distinguishing feature. The most important thing is our students. I don't think other programmes have students with the same diversity or seniority," he says.

"Plus we are really proud of our professors. A majority of our faculty members are world-renowned professors with PhD degrees from world-famous universities and we have experts in almost every discipline."

Students on the DBA programme meet frequently as a group, as well as with their supervisors, in order to get feedback and improve their research.

"Plus this provides great networking opportunities. They may know people within their own industry but, for example, bankers will be meeting people from the pharmaceutical industry, the high-tech sector and from real estate," Ozer says.

Intensive learning yields top results

Through the coursework they undertake during their first 18 months to two years on the CityU DBA programme, students learn how to conduct and review research.

But this doesn't mean that they're not also, at the same time, developing their thesis.

"From day one we start to work on the research topic," says professor Muammer Ozer, director of the DBA programme at CityU's College of Business.

Working under the guidance of their dedicated supervisor, students immediately begin the process of defining and refining the question they joined the programme to answer.

"If a student just wanted to research their company's supply chain that would be too narrow for us," explains Ozer.

"We would tell them to think about it in a broader way, to think about the wider industry and how other companies could benefit from the research.

"Alternatively, someone might come in wanting to solve everything. For example, their topic might be supply chain management. Then we would ask them to focus on one aspect: say, risk, responsiveness, or supply chain management in a particular industry."

The DBA students are given

the tools they require to successfully complete their thesis through courses covering research design, data collection and analysis, the application of various research methods, the management of research projects, and research presentation.

The programme also offers a range of electives for students who need a grounding in business management, as well as specialised courses for those that may have already completed MBA or EMBA programmes.

At the end of their first two years, and if their thesis proposal is judged to be in a good enough shape, they will defend it in the face of questioning from a panel.

But this will be far from the last time they will receive feedback or guidance as they conduct their research and write their thesis.

The CityU DBA programme uses a spiral learning model, in which continuous feedback leads to ongoing revisions of their research and thesis.

With the DBA students typically having demanding jobs which could involve long hours as well as international travel, the scheduling of meetings, and the means by which feedback is delivered, are designed to be flexible.

