

SPONSORED SUPPLEMENT: EXECUTIVE DOCTORATE IN BUSINESS

Research that has an impact

CityU DBA programme students celebrate their success in achieving a top recognised qualification and producing research that has helped introduce change in many fields and improved the quality of life for many

Meeting challenges and change

For any business school, success and reputation ultimately depend on four essentials: the quality of the programmes and students plus the relevance of courses to academia and the real world.

“In addition, though, there must be a commitment to constant improvement to meet new challenges and fulfil changing societal needs,” says professor Yan Houmin, dean of the College of Business at City University of Hong Kong (CityU). “With the DBA (doctor of business administration) programme, we do this by promoting theme-based research which asks students to tackle interesting problems from different angles, and in ways which, we hope, will benefit society.”

The subjects explored by this year’s nine DBA graduates have done just that. Each makes a clear contribution to important aspects of business principle or practice, with the potential applications extending well beyond the immediate Hong Kong environment.

With that in mind, Yan notes the college is now paying particular attention to developments in areas which are more than likely to be the focus of future DBA theses. One is China’s “One Belt, One Road” (OBOR) policy, which is looking to strengthen economic ties with countries in Central and Southeast Asia. Another is the evolving role of public-private partnerships (PPP) as a model for large-scale investment. And a third is the sphere of transportation and logistics, which covers everything from the impact of the construction of roads, bridges and high-speed rail networks, to the explosive growth of e-commerce and shifts in international trade.

Already, this initiative has involved building closer links with mainland

government departments and UN agencies with a view to training officials in best practices and how to collaborate effectively with private companies.

“Research-wise, for our DBA and PhD programmes, the focus is on achieving world-class standards and publishing our scholars’ output in the leading journals,” says Yan, pointing to a recent second-place ranking in the Asia-Pacific region. “So far, we are doing that quite well.”

More broadly, he adds, there is a renewed emphasis on boosting international links, so that students can be placed in top North American research schools. Along with that goes a plan to increase the EMBA intake and develop more joint degrees with overseas partners, such as the current four-year undergraduate programme with Columbia University in New York.

“The students are finding jobs on Wall Street, joining top finance and trading firms,” Yan says. “With such joint programmes, the aim is to give a Hong Kong education and a taste of world-class courses in the United States. Besides that, regular exchange programmes with other universities mean that around

50 per cent of our undergraduates can have at least one semester abroad.”

In many classes, discussion of business ethics is now a standard component. The intention, though, is to put more focus on issues like social and environmental responsibility, and to review curricula and course content as necessary to incorporate the advances spurred by digitisation and the migration to mobile devices.

“We are a young school so, in mobilising efforts to build our reputation, we have to think about the entire educational process,” Yan says. “We are fully aware of our mission and want society to have high expectations of the College of Business and the university.”



Practical solutions to problems

The ceremony to confer DBA (doctor of business administration) degrees on this year’s nine deserving recipients is a cause for celebration, marking as it does the end of a testing but ultimately highly rewarding journey.

Each of the individuals being honoured by CityU’s College of Business has successfully completed a thesis based on in-depth research of a topic chosen for its direct practical relevance to their organisation or industry. And, in doing so, they have not only earned their academic credentials, but also put forward ideas and proposed solutions with the potential to improve, reform or recast various paradigms of business.

“When students enter the programme, they are already highly successful executives in their respective sectors,” says DBA programme director professor Muammer Ozer. “They come to us because they want to do research which leads to practical solutions for real-life problems and we give them the skills, guidance and support to achieve that.”

To illustrate, the topics studied by this year’s graduates include the delivery of financial consultation services to premier customers via interactive e-channels; the survival of Hong Kong manufacturing firms in a changing competitive environment; and the influence of industry clustering on technological innovation among SMEs in Hong Kong’s Science Park.

Showing the breadth and diversity of subjects, others chose to focus on key determinants of the debt decisions of equity REITs; the innovativeness and performance of new products from mainland China; and the impact of cultural factors on the implementation of Six Sigma methodology in southern China.

“This year’s graduates have tackled some very important topics,” Ozer says. “Their studies have wide implications and the potential to have a substantial impact on society.”

Looking back to the start of the process, he notes that DBA candidates are generally asked to write a one-page research statement outlining what they want to study and why. Some begin with an extremely specific idea, perhaps with real relevance only for their own company. Others initially take too much of a big picture approach.

Therefore, Ozer and his fellow supervisors help define and refine areas of research to ensure they will be challenging, pertinent, and ultimately manageable.

The DBA is primarily research-based, rather than a taught programme, but as things progress each student can take advantage of classes in research methodology, workshops on academic writing, sharing sessions to discuss progress, and statistical help from a dedicated consultant on hand to offer advice on data collection and analysis.

Along the way, there are also regular forums with well known business leaders. These provide the added value of being able to network with senior figures across a range of industries and the chance to share knowledge with trade associations. Subsequently, this can lead on to the publication of key findings and conclusions in business and academic journals, which is always another feather in the cap.

“For the College of Business, the DBA is a high-end flagship programme, which provides another way for us to connect with society, disseminate knowledge and keep closely in touch with the latest trends in business,” Ozer says. “The

students are at the cutting edge of their industries and among the most motivated people I have ever met, so this is a ‘dream class’ for me and being involved has undoubtedly helped my teaching in other courses.”



Muammer Ozer,
director of DBA
programme, CityU
College of Business.