

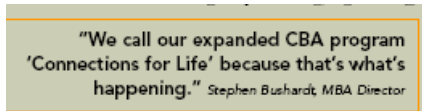
Let Them Eat Chocolate Cake

Did Bushardt Improve the CoB's MBA Program?

Stephen Bushardt's (Professor of Management) tenure as Director of Graduate Programs in the College of Business at USM has been a heretofore overlooked subject. We have seen reports on how he used some of the CoB's budget, but the details of that use were missing from those reports.

This independent report fills in those gaps, and provides a snapshot into an administration that might have decimated the CoB's MBA program had it continued for a longer period. The Spring 2002 issue of *Joint Venture* provided a well-documented look into the direction the MBA program began under Bushardt, as the screen at the end of this report points out. As the feature indicates, when Bushardt took over as Director of Graduate Programs his "... first step was to have students do a market analysis of what other top business schools were doing ..." Out of that analysis came the new REACH program, an acronym for "Realistic Experiences and Challenging Horizons," a program used by Pine Grove Recovery Center in Hattiesburg.

According to the article, the program at Pine Grove includes outdoor obstacle courses such as tightrope walking, log walking, climbing brick walls, and swinging from a trapeze. These activities are said to "... build teamwork, communication skills, and trust."



As the feature states, "REACH was a hit with MBA students." In post-REACH discussions students talked about what they did to solve problems and what they learned doing the exercises.

But, Bushardt's innovations didn't end there. He next asked the MBA students what they wanted out of the program. Their response: training in social skills. The article points out that, as a result of their suggestion, the MBA Program adopted six hours of training from a "certified etiquette teacher" in basic business and social situations.

Bushardt's response to the students' suggestion went further. The Graduate Programs in the CoB instituted a wine tasting element which included, as the article indicates, "... a wine tasting session held off campus and conducted by wine aficionados."

If the picture below is any indication, the "wine aficionados" were George Carter (now Professor of Economics and Chair of Economics, Finance, and International Business), Barry Babin (now Professor of Marketing and Chair of Management, Marketing and Fashion Merchandising), and Bushardt.



It's interesting that all three of these wine aficionados are products of Agricultural and Mechanical institutions (Texas A&M, LSU, and Mississippi State, respectively). As such, this seems to be a case of "Agriculture vs. Culture." Where were the CoB's Ole Miss faculty? Hotty Toddy! In its defense, at least the feature article never said these three were "certified" wine experts.

As for the benefits of the program, Bushardt noted that as "different as they all are . . . our students are bonding with each other and gaining an understanding and appreciation of the differences and strengths of us all."

We can't help but think of the famous Bill Cosby skit about feeding his children chocolate cake for breakfast. He asks them what they want, and they say "chocolate cake." He rationalizes giving them cake by recalling its ingredients: eggs, milk, and flour. It sounds like a breakfast, put in those terms. That's essentially what Stephen Bushardt did when he took over the position of Director of Graduate Programs. He asked the students: "What do you want?" They said: "Chocolate Cake."

Is/was the biggest difference between Chicago/Stanford and USM (in terms of MBA Programs) had been the lack of a ropes course exercise and wine tasting? If so, then Bushardt stepped into the breach and changed all that with "Connections for Life."

MBA Connections for Life

When Stephen Bushardt was named director of the MBA program last year, his goal was to turn out students who are not only steeped in business and financial skills, but who are also fully developed as individuals, equipped to conquer the obstacles and meet the challenges to become successful business leaders.

His first step was to have students do a market analysis of what other top business schools were doing and what additional skills leading businesses wanted in employees.

The second step was to implement changes, beginning with the requirement for all MBA students to participate in REACH, an acronym for Realistic Experiences and Challenging Horizons offered by Pine Grove Recovery Center in Hattiesburg. REACH is based on similar programs around the country utilized by Fortune 500 companies for their employees. The program at Pine Grove includes outdoor obstacle courses such as tightrope walking, log walking, climbing brick walls and

swinging from a trapeze – all designed to build teamwork, communication skills, and trust.

REACH was

"We call our expanded CBA program 'Connections for Life' because that's what's happening." Stephen Bushardt, MBA Director

a hit with MBA students. Bushardt said in the discussion sessions afterwards, students talked about what they did to solve problems and what they learned from the exercises. Kevin Stephen, a recent MBA graduate from Trinidad, said the program helps new students get to know each other. "It really teaches us teamwork...to trust each other, to extend ourselves, and to be creative in solving life's challenges."

Bushardt then turned to the MBA students and asked what else they wanted from the MBA program. A culturally diverse student body, students requested additional training in social skills. As a result, students now receive six hours training from a certified etiquette teacher in basic business and social situations and a wine tasting session held off campus and conducted by wine aficionados.

The financial support for these additions to the MBA program come from outside resources, mainly the BAC, the College's Business Advisory Council. "We depend on our BAC not only for financial support but also for guidance," said Dean William Gunther. "One of our BAC's most recent recommendations was that we ask MBA students to go into local high schools and talk to young people about budgeting and fiscal responsibility," said Gunther.

"They're more than willing. We've got the best students in the world," said Bushardt. "They're always ready to step up and help out. It's a part of the work ethic and values we try to instill in them that they're a part of the greater community, that it's their responsibility to make an investment in their futures and the future of our country and our global community. We call our expanded CBA program 'Connections for Life' because that's what's happening. As different as they all are (more than 25 percent are from ethnic minority backgrounds) our students are bonding with each other and gaining an understanding and appreciation of the differences and strengths of us all."



New Stennis MBA Program a Win-Win Situation

Among the number of specially designed programs at the USM College of Business Administration aimed at moving the college to the next level of excellence is the new MBA offered at the Stennis Space Center in Hancock County. With an initial registration of 18 students this past fall, enrollment is expected to double by next fall.

"We aim to be in the top 25 percent of accredited MBA programs in the country," said Dean William Gunther. "Part of our strategy is to build partnerships with organizations that will bring even greater credibility to our programs. The partnership with Stennis Space Center does that."

Keith Long, academic affairs director for the Center for Higher Learning at Stennis, said the need for an MBA was the result of a survey of employees to see what degree programs they wanted. The master's of business administration was the most requested program, Long said.

"USM has a long history here at Stennis," he said. "They have quite a number of students here in other programs, and they have quite a number of research projects here as well." It was only natural, he said, that Stennis would turn to USM for the MBA program.

The evening classes taught by regular USM business faculty are a boon for students like Annette Hawkins, an education information specialist. "It's been a great opportunity for me as an adult student and a working mom to get my MBA" she said. "I walk out of my office and cross the hall to my classroom. It's a wonderful program and I've learned more than I expected."

For information on the MBA program at The University of Southern Mississippi, call (601) 266-4653, E-mail mba@usm.edu, or visit us at www.usmma.usm.edu.