

BOSTON BUSINESS JOURNAL

August 23, 2019

Three academic experts weigh in on executive education

By [Hilary Burns](#) – Associate Editor, Boston Business Journal

The Boston Business Journal asked three leaders in executive education about their respective schools' growth strategies, the role of online learning and what sets their programs apart. Below are edited excerpts of the conversations.



Josh Brand is vice president for external relations, oversees executive education at Bentley University.

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Bentley University — Josh Brand, vice president for external relations, oversees executive education

How important is executive education to Bentley? We are a business-focused university with about 5,000 students and 500 faculty, and pretty much all students major in some form of business and all faculty focus on business or application of a discipline to business. If you are in natural sciences, you may be working on the business application of climate change, for example. It's an exciting place to be and in order for us to fulfill our mission, we have to have corporate engagement. The most direct way to do that is through executive education. We've been in the executive education business for a little over 10 years. We started with a lot of open enrollment programming and courses that executives needed to continue along their professional development. Individuals would enroll and now we are seeing many corporations have specific needs, unique challenges and change caused by rapidly changing technology in rapidly evolving industries. Companies have their own specific needs, so we work with a company to understand deeply what those needs are and who the population is that needs to be upskilled so they can manage for the business of tomorrow. Much of business coming from programming offerings is the biggest way executive education has been evolving at Bentley.

What are you noticing in the executive education space more broadly since you have worked for different schools? I see companies looking for more out of relationships with universities. Historically the burden has been on the company to find the right people in the right universities to do business with. They had to go to the executive education department, for example, or faculty research. We want to make it easy for corporations to work with us and to do business with us. We can bring you the full capability of resources to bear partnership with the university. If we do this well, we will be the trailblazers to set the path other universities will follow. This was really important for us. Companies want more customization and the ability to deliver in a lot of different formats. Open enrollment classroom style is still alive. We also do case studies about companies and follow up with projects, it's almost quasi-consulting.

How are you thinking about online education? It's something we are looking at, not just for executive education but across our graduate programs to provide as much flexibility as we can for students. We are in the evaluation phase of that right now.



Dr. David Roberts is dean for external education, oversees executive education at Harvard Medical School.

COURTESY PHOTO

Harvard Medical School — Dr. [David Roberts](#), dean for external education, oversees executive education

How do you define executive education? We don't find a lot of other medical schools doing exactly the kind of thing we are doing. The closest thing we have to executive education is for executives who work in or adjacent to health care. Unlike many business schools, which teach people about leadership and management, we are actually teaching more about how health care works. What are challenges from a physician perspective, patient perspective, social workers pharmacists, etc., and how does the ecosystem work? What are the opportunities that the healthcare ecosystem has that could be answered by companies in the biotech arena, health care IT or pharmaceuticals. A lot of companies are intersecting with health care today and many of those people don't necessarily have traditional health care or scientific training.

How have these executive education programs evolved? I've been in this role for five years and we didn't have executive education before. I went around and looked at all the Harvard schools and they all have excellent executive education

programs. What I didn't see a lot was an understanding of how the process of caring for patients and doing scientific discoveries was actually being shared with people. I don't think there are a lot of executive education programs, at least in our industry, where they show you what the challenges are and that's what we tried to do. The way this started initially was all custom meaning we would work with companies or groups to design an individual program. We spent a lot of time asking questions about what problems are you trying to solve? I've been thinking about education for 20 years, not thinking about executives, so I tried to apply a lot of those principles. We've run primarily for last four years custom programs and then tried to create an open enrollment version of this. For last couple of years we've offered programs like the two you mentioned for individuals rather than entire cohorts from companies. People can come, learn and be together in an interesting environment. We might have people from pharmaceutical companies sitting next to you, from insurance companies sitting next to you, people interested in the regulatory or policy side, and you end up with a very interesting networking and community aspect. That's less likely to happen when you have a cohort from one company.

Will the school add more programs over time? We offer one other program currently about functional genomics and drug development and that is now heading into its third year. We have a program coming in the spring with MIT that is the intersection of health care and real estate development for aging populations. It turns out there is this intersection between health care and where and how people live and get services so we built the program around that. We haven't announced it yet but there will be a program around innovation and health care and a few others coming that haven't been announced yet. Those will all be executive education. The ideal learner will be a professional working in health care (or a surrounding field) and is interested in understanding more about how drugs get developed, how aging populations need housing — that kind of thing.



Helen Muterperl is director of graduate and professional programs at Emmanuel College.

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Emmanuel College — [Helen Muterperl](#), director of graduate and professional programs

Why is Emmanuel launching an online MBA program? The new online MBA is an evolution of Emmanuel's Master of Science in Management program, which has provided a curriculum in leadership and management for many years. In response to today's business environment and market needs, we have launched the online Master of Business Administration to build on this foundation with course content in economics, finance, accounting, operations and strategy. Competent, experienced business leaders are needed in almost every industry. At an institution with 100 years of educational expertise, we launched the online MBA to transform the future business leaders to think holistically about their firm, industry and economy.

How do online programs and classes fit into Emmanuel's growth strategy? Online learning and the MBA program provide flexibility and convenience. Emmanuel's online graduate and professional programs were developed to extend the reach of Emmanuel's face-to-face programs beyond Boston and Eastern Massachusetts.

Professionals across the country can access course content and faculty through a fully online, instructor-led, asynchronous learning format.

Can you tell me more about the program and what it will look like? The online MBA provides management skill development. This 36-credit program is delivered in a format of seven-week courses and can be completed in two years with a curriculum focused on topics like marketing, data analysis, business law and strategy. The cost is \$525 per credit hour or \$1,575 per 3-credit course.