



# SPOTLIGHT

## Business Schools & Doctoral Education

### Featured School:

Georgia State University

J. Mack Robinson College of Business

Atlanta, Georgia, United States

[www.robinson.gsu.edu](http://www.robinson.gsu.edu)

June 2011  
AACSB International

## Executive Doctorate in Business Program

Executive education programs are nothing new in the world of management education. Senior executives desirous of furthering their education with an MBA, without leaving their current professional positions, have had EMBA programs available to them for decades. Until recently however, and particularly within the United States, options for executive education beyond the master's degree level have been virtually non-existent.

Maury Kalnitz, director of the Executive Doctorate in Business (EDB) at Georgia State University's J. Mack Robinson College of Business, says that when he directed the college's EMBA program back in 1993-98, each cohort would have at least one student who expressed a desire to go on to the next level. Given the dearth of options at the time, Kalnitz approached several faculty members at the Robinson College about designing an executive-format doctoral program, similar to the one he had heard Case Western Reserve University began two or three years prior.

However, it was not until gaining the support of the Robinson College's dean, H. Fenwick Huss, in 2007 that the idea began to take tangible shape, according to Kalnitz. Dean Huss got the board of regents to approve the idea the following year, and asked Kalnitz to be director of the program. Kalnitz agreed, as long as another faculty member was selected to be academic director, as he says that his personal experience, primarily in industry,<sup>1</sup> made it appropriate to have an experienced research professor in a co-equal position to manage the academic aspects of the program, an administrative structure that he notes is similar to the aforementioned program at Case Western.<sup>2</sup> The dean tapped Dr. Lars Mathiassen for the job of academic director, and in 2009 the new EDB program welcomed its first cohort.

Mathiassen says that running such a program is a very demanding endeavor, requiring such a wide range of competencies that it really takes a comprehensive team to do it well. He and Kalnitz, and Assistant Program Director Heather Jacobs, have to do all the standard managerial tasks executive education involves, such as recruiting students, marketing, and positioning the program, in addition to academic tasks like recruiting faculty, monitoring student progress, and making the execution of research and scholarly activity a part of their students' everyday experience. Kalnitz and Mathiassen agree that it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for a single individual to perform all these tasks, and thus the division of labor in the program's administrative structure is both practical and beneficial. Kalnitz quips that he "gets them in, and Lars gets them out."

### A Unique Program Structure

Candidates selected for the EDB program are required to have an MBA or Master of Science degree in a relevant field, as well as at least 10 years of managerial experience in business. They are also expected to maintain their professional position and duties throughout the duration of the program. In some cases, the employer pays a portion or even all of the tuition costs. Kalnitz says it is rare for a firm to pay all a

student's expenses, and that approximately 20-30% of EDB students shoulder the entire cost themselves. Mathiassen adds that, regardless of the tuition arrangements, a social contract between each EDB student and their employer is insisted upon. This is important, he says, due to the commitment of time and effort involved in gaining the degree on the students' part, as well as the changes in expectations on the part of the employers concerning the students' responsibilities at work, both concurrent and subsequent to their enrollment in the program.

The EDB is a part-time, three-year lockstep program, with cohorts of up to 21 students. Students meet for a three-day (Thursday-Saturday) residency period at the Robinson College once per month, four times per semester, for all six semesters of the program.<sup>3</sup> The EDB curriculum includes a total of 18 courses, six each of what Kalnitz and Mathiassen describe as "content" courses, "research methods" courses, and "research labs." Students take three courses per semester, always of at least two of these three types.<sup>4</sup>

Since EDB students are expected to have substantial grounding and experience in business, there is no need to spend time retreading the basics, say Kalnitz and Mathiassen. As a result, the six content courses focus on very broad, general topics related to emerging and contemporary issues for executives, such as leadership and decision-making styles, ethics in organizations, global finance, emerging markets, etc. The research methods courses go over quantitative and qualitative research techniques, reading and writing research papers, and data analysis.

The six research lab courses allow EDB students to practice using the skills they learn by performing complete research cycles under professorial supervision. This is done in groups during the first two of the research labs, which encompass the second and third semesters of the program. Students address real business problems germane to their experience, which are negotiated between the students and their faculty instructors. The final four research labs then allow EDB students to complete a supervised research cycle individually, as part of their dissertation process.

### **Contrasting the EDB Program with Standard PhDs**

Kalnitz and Mathiassen are quick to point out the important differences between the EDB and a standard PhD program. While both are terminal, research-based degrees, the target population for the EDB program consists of experienced businesspeople, embedded in a professional environment, who want to learn to apply research methodology to problems facing that environment. As a result, training received by EDB students is necessarily much more interdisciplinary than a PhD program would be, as PhD students typically focus their research topics within a single discipline. While Mathiassen acknowledges that some of their EDB graduates may very well enter into relationships with academia at some point in their careers, he states in no uncertain terms that the objective of the EDB program is not to create academic scholars who will go on to teach. Rather, it is based on the concept he and Kalnitz call "engaged scholarship."

Kalnitz and Mathiassen describe engaged scholarship as research in which the researchers engage themselves in the context of real business problems, and apply rigorous research methods to try to bring the situation to a solution. As previously mentioned, whether individually or as part of their group work, EDB students use this process to attempt to solve real business problems as part of their research training. As a result, all research projects completed during the program come out of business problems that students see as important and contemporary. Mathiassen says that three of the four EDB student dissertations he is currently overseeing either relate directly or are relevant to the firms for which the students work.

Being quality-conscious is just as important on the faculty end of the program as the student end, according to Mathiassen. He says that it is impossible to make high-quality doctoral practitioners in three years on a part-time executive model without having highly skilled professors. All faculty chosen as supervisors to EDB students are active academic researchers, many of whom also mentor or have mentored students in standard PhD programs, and who simultaneously maintain an active interest in engaged scholarship.

Mathiassen acknowledges that working as a mentor with EDB students is both “the same, and different” from the mentoring experience with PhD students. He points out that it is important to set the bar for quality doctoral training just as high for EDB students as for their PhD counterparts. However, because of the limited amount of time the cohort-based EDB students have to interact directly with their professors, faculty do not have the luxury of working closely with them on an individual basis to provide detailed day-to-day guidance, as they would with PhD students.

Additionally, EDB students tend to bring with them practical knowledge and experience that a standard PhD student does not have, which Mathiassen says often results in a much more two-way learning experience between faculty mentors and EDB students than would be the case with a traditional PhD student. All professors involved in the delivery of the EDB program therefore have to adjust the way in which they supervise, so as to learn quickly how to work together, build skills and rapport, avoid frustration over details that are relatively unimportant to an EDB student’s research, and efficiently provide any necessary guidance.

## **Establishing Links with Academia and Industry**

Kalnitz believes an inflection point in the growth of executive doctoral programs in business is being reached, and that they are beginning to gain traction, especially in the U.S. Recognizing the rising importance of these kinds of programs and the increasing number of schools worldwide that offer them, in August 2010 Kalnitz and Mathiassen helped set in motion the creation of a new organization, the Executive Doctorate in Business Administration Council (EDBAC),<sup>5</sup> along the lines of the existing EMBA Council. Beginning with the first EDBAC Conference at Case Western Reserve University this June, they

and their partners from business schools around the world seek to make EDBAC a forum for business schools to help start and grow executive doctoral business programs, exchange information and knowledge, as well as allow students and alumni of executive doctoral business programs to present research and network with one another.

According to Mathiassen, business schools and universities are challenged to transform themselves from serving the needs of a 20<sup>th</sup> century industrial society to those of the 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge-based, globalized society. He says that business and other professional schools are increasingly coming to understand that academia needs to become more engaged and active in practice. This is not to say that research should necessarily become less theoretical, but rather increase its relevance to practitioners. Networks of high level businesspeople with whom the Robinson College can interact, who understand the potential and the importance of academic research, are vital to this endeavor.

The ability to forge such links between the Robinson College and the firms that employ its students, then, is an extremely beneficial outcome that Kalnitz and Mathiassen anticipate for the EDB program in this regard. They say that the college is in the process of implementing a 10-year strategic plan, one of whose primary thrusts is the development of “embedded relationships” with industry, for which an active EDB alumni network will become particularly important. Kalnitz and Mathiassen are optimistic that EDB graduates will continue to do research and perhaps publish (as indeed, they are encouraged to do), as well as form research alliances based on engaged scholarship with future Robinson College students, both EDB and PhD.

---

*Acknowledgements: AACSB International is grateful for the assistance of Maury Kalnitz, Director of the EDB Program, and Lars Mathiassen, Academic Director of the EDB Program and Professor at the J. Mack Robinson College of Business.*

## End Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> Georgia State University, J. Mack Robinson College of Business. (2011) Executive Doctorate in Business, Director web page. Electronic document, <http://robinson.gsu.edu/execdoctorate/director.html>, accessed May 13, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Case Western Reserve University, Weatherhead School of Management. (2011) Doctor of Management Program, Contacts web page. Electronic document, <http://weatherhead.case.edu/degrees/doctor-management/contact>, accessed May 13, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Georgia State University, J. Mack Robinson College of Business. (2011) Executive Doctorate in Business Schedule of Residencies web page. Electronic document, <http://robinson.gsu.edu/execdoctorate/residencies.html>, accessed May 6, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Georgia State University, J. Mack Robinson College of Business. (2011) Executive Doctorate in Business Curriculum Overview web page. Electronic document, <http://robinson.gsu.edu/execdoctorate/curriculum.html>, accessed May 6, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Bradshaw, Della. (2010) "Push to have DBA recognized as practitioner degree," *Financial Times.com*, December 16, 2010. Electronic document, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/2510e0fe-0941-11e0-ada6-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1LsqfXurN>, accessed May 9, 2011.