SPOTLIGHT

Business Schools and Innovation

Featured School:
University of California, Berkeley
Haas School of Business
Berkeley, California, United States

www.haas.berkeley.edu

April 2010
AACSB International
Haas School of Business

This year, the Haas School of Business at the University of California, Berkeley, has released a new strategic plan, which places the archetype of the “Innovative Leader” at the center of the school's definition of its graduates. In many ways, the new strategic plan is an extension of the “Leading Through Innovation” initiative that has been at the heart of the Haas School’s culture for the past four years, according to Richard Lyons, Dean of the Haas School. Lyons points out, however, that it offers a framework to bring the school’s comprehensive array of activities, including admissions, the curriculum, experiential learning, extracurricular opportunities, and even alumni relations into focus through the lens of the Innovative Leader. Noting that most of the great firms in the world are held together by a carefully managed institutional culture, he believes the Haas School has an opportunity to manage an institutional culture around the norms and values related to Innovative Leadership.

Central to this shift has been an analysis of the curriculum at the level of individual courses, and at the level of the integrated whole. First, in seeking to redefine the Haas School graduate, Lyons and others on his faculty team reached out to various firms and asked what kind of person they looked for to come out of business school, as well as what the firms' own internal personnel development programs sought to teach. This led to development of a capability model with five categories of underlying skills: (1) Thinking critically and flexibly (individual cognition); (2) Promoting active inquiry (group cognition); (3) Recognizing and fostering breakthrough ideas (environment setting); (4) Influencing and inspiring others (particularly influence beyond authority); and (5) Leading to achieve results (change leadership).

Lyons worked with Michael Katz, Director of the school’s Institute for Business Innovation, to review each course with individual faculty members, to determine how best to connect it with those underlying principles. The aim was to engage individual faculty members teaching each course in a “bottom-up” approach to reframe and refocus everything through the lens of the Innovative Leader. As a result, two MBA core courses were completely redesigned (an Organizational Behavior course, for example, was redesigned as “Leading People” and moved to the beginning of the curriculum), and many others were “refreshed.”

Complementing changes in the core curriculum were efforts to create and more fully integrate experiential learning opportunities for students and to renew elective programs, such as the Management of Technology program, in line with the core curriculum and guiding principles. Whereas Lyons notes that previously a majority of full-time MBA students were engaging in experiential learning opportunities voluntarily, they will now be a requirement. The launch of the new Berkeley Innovative Leader Development (BILD) program represents the connecting theme across the new curriculum, including the core and elective courses, and the formerly disparate experiential learning opportunities (several of which are described below).
Another key initiative in the new strategic plan is to integrate and expand the numerous innovation-related programs and research centers within a new umbrella institution at the Haas School. According to Lyons, the Institute for Business Innovation (IBI)², formerly known as the Institute of Management, Innovation, and Organization, will be an important “vehicle for creating coherence” among various initiatives and activities. The mission of the IBI is to “[promote] interdisciplinary research, instruction, and corporate outreach on matters of innovation, entrepreneurship and technology³.” The Institute does this by housing and supporting several research centers and programs that undertake activities in these areas.

One of these programs is an applied innovation program, known as Haas@Work, which offers companies the opportunity to partner with Haas School MBA students to address a significant business challenge. The program has two phases, a recommendation phase and an execution phase. During the first phase, which is voluntary and not-for-credit, 45 MBA students work together with a sponsoring company, using the Haas@Work methodology to develop recommendations to address a competitive challenge that company is facing. Phase II involves coursework and credit in the form of a seminar: MBA 296: Seminar in Applied Innovation. During this phase, smaller teams of 4-5 students execute one or more of the Phase I recommendations over a 100 day period.

Another program supported by the IBI is the previously mentioned Management of Technology (MOT) Program⁴, which was originally established in 1989 and is jointly sponsored by the College of Engineering (COE) and the Haas School. MOT is the most popular interdisciplinary program at UC Berkeley, and is available to Masters and PhD students from a variety of disciplines. The program draws heavily on corporate connections in the San Francisco Bay Area and thus focuses heavily on three particular industries of importance in the region – electronics, software, and biotechnology. MOT classes are a mixture of lecture-based and project-based courses, and students also have opportunities for research fellowships, internships, and overseas study.

Under the aegis of the IBI, the Lester Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation serves as the focal place at UC Berkeley for entrepreneurial development. The mission of the Center reads: “Working with entrepreneurs, venture capitalists, business leaders, policy makers, scholars and students, the Lester Center focuses the resources of UC Berkeley to stimulate the formation, management and growth of new enterprises; to encourage innovation in new and established companies; and to teach the process of successful entrepreneurship and business innovation⁵.”

The Lester Center is described by Lyons as being very “student-facing”, offering courses for undergraduate and graduate students in the areas of entrepreneurship and innovation, including an MBA Certificate in Entrepreneurship⁶ available to all Haas MBA students. The Center hosts monthly Berkeley
Entrepreneurs Forums, where students get the chance to listen to and interact with entrepreneurs from various fields of business. The Lester Center also manages several summer internship and fellowship programs, and runs a series of business plan competitions including a Global Social Venture Competition that is run by the Haas School in partnership with several other business schools worldwide.

The Center for Open Innovation (COI), another center at UC Berkeley under the IBI umbrella, was created to conduct scholarly research and engage corporate stakeholders in the areas of open innovation, open business models, and services science, management, and engineering. Dean Lyons describes it as a more faculty-oriented, “research-facing” center than the Lester Center. Among other things, the COI hosts the Berkeley Innovation Forum, a membership organization designed to be a community of innovation leaders who meet to exchange ideas, issues, and practices, and who fund the study of innovation management problems and other topics of interest to members. The Forum, a weekly Open Innovation Speaker Series, and other initiatives offered by the COI are intended to develop a stronger feedback loop between innovation theory and innovation practice.

Acknowledgements: AACSB International is grateful for the assistance of Richard Lyons, Dean of the Haas School of Business.
End Notes