Featured School:
University of California, San Diego
Rady School of Management
San Diego, California, United States

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AACSB International
Rady School of Management

The mission of the Rady School of Management, which welcomed its first students in 2005, is “to educate ethical leaders for innovation-driven organizations.” Complemented by a set of values that includes “innovation, impact, collaboration, integrity and risk taking”, this mission defines a clear direction that the school is well-positioned to support, particularly through the delivery of its innovation-focused MBA programs.

Located in San Diego, the Rady School draws upon the nearby presence of business “clusters” in the technology and life sciences industries. Robert S. Sullivan, Founding Dean of the Rady School of Management, has noted that there are more than 600 biotech firms within a five-mile radius of UCSD. In 2009, more than 50% of full-time MBA graduates joined careers in the high-tech/telecommunications and healthcare/biotech/pharmaceutical industry categories.

The profile of the school’s MBA students (including those in the Full-Time MBA program and evening/weekend FlexMBA programs) reflects the school’s connection to these industries. 65 percent of Rady students have science, technology or engineering backgrounds. One in three already holds an advanced degree in another field, and 12% already hold PhDs.

The school offers both a Full-time MBA and a FlexMBA (the latter in weekend and evening formats) – both of which have curricula designed to enhance students’ effectiveness in supporting business innovation, as well as their ability to bring ideas to market. In addition to including a series of core MBA courses, the programs offer a range of electives focused on different industries and on different aspects of innovation and a mandatory Lab to Market (L2M) sequence.

Lab to Market is a three course sequence aimed at educating people who will be effective in transforming innovations into viable projects, ventures, and products. JoAnne Starr, Assistant Dean for MBA Programs, stresses that the course is not intended to serve as an incubator. Rather, she says, the course sequence is more about how to prepare students to be innovative, opportunity-driven, entrepreneurially minded managers.

The L2M sequence begins with a quarter-long conceptual course that provides a theoretical, analytical, and intellectual framework for making business decisions about innovation. In the course, students examine the various channels through which new ideas often emerge, and draw upon readings, cases, and discussions to learn about opportunity analysis, business model analysis, scenario planning, and other stages in the cycle of idea development.
During an interim period that follows this initial course, students form teams and settle on an idea to develop further in the next two stages of the L2M sequence. This process is aided by elective courses and other activities intended to expose the students to new ideas and to suggestions from experts in the business community. Elective courses such as “Biotechnology Industry Strategy and Structure” and “Technology and Innovation Strategy” are designed to provide opportunities for students to gain a deep understanding of a particular industry sector; others such as “Research for Marketing Decisions” or “New Venture Finance” enable a deeper understanding of a particular aspect of the innovation process.

Students also have many opportunities to interact with individuals from the local business community through a “Professional Seminar Series” – a one credit pass/fail course in which members of the business community speak to students about their experiences in topics such as technology transfer, innovation within a large enterprise, and many others. Many also make themselves available as coaches or advisors to students.

L2M culminates with two-quarter long workshop sequence offered over 20 weeks. In the first workshop, students conduct market research for a new idea and write a market validation paper, then write and present a “business case” at the end of the term. In the second workshop, students construct and present a fully developed “business plan.” Starr notes that, although students are focused on a particular idea, the workshops emphasize the process of making a business case and developing a business plan, rather than emphasizing the actual launch of a new product or process. Throughout both workshops, students benefit from opportunities to seek advice from members of the business community as well as faculty members directly involved in the workshops (a faculty team that includes practitioners). Many also choose to seek informal feedback on specific aspects of their plan from faculty members teaching the program’s core, fundamental courses, such as marketing, finance, etc.

According to Starr, in a few cases projects pursued through the L2M course sequence have gone on to implementation, though she notes that these have primarily involved students from the FlexMBA programs who have more professional work experience, on average, than full-time MBAs and some of whom pursue projects for their employing companies. Many students, however, finish the program with the realization that they wish to pursue additional industry experience prior to pursuing any one particular new venture.

Complementing the L2M sequence for interested students is an optional course sequence focused on a new student-assisted venture fund. The sequence is designed to enable students to look at a new venture from the perspective of an investor and determine whether or not it is worth funding. Students begin the sequence with a “New Venture Finance” course, and then may apply for a slot in a subsequent workshop series, “Venture Capital Management I and II.” Students in the workshops provide the
screening, investment recommendations, and monitoring required to manage the venture fund, which exists through donations to the UC San Diego Foundation.

According to Starr, the Rady School continues to revisit its courses and program content with an aim toward ensuring a robust learning experience that continually evolves to meet the needs of the school’s stakeholders. Among other things, the school is considering another optional course sequence in which students would learn how to manage the growth and scale of a company, and then serve in a consulting capacity for emerging companies. Such a course would build on existing work by some students (often through independent study) to provide business strategy consulting with area businesses.

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End Notes


