

Cross-Border Coffee Break

Designing a Sustainable Business Program

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Daniel Hicks, Lecturer Economics Department, Miami Herbert Business School
David L. Kelly, Professor of Economics, Co-chair of the Sustainable Business Research Cluster, Academic Director of the Masters of Science in Sustainable Business, Miami Herbert Business School

1. How does this course compare to an MBA? Are they comparable or complementary?

They are definitely complimentary. I would not describe them as very comparable. In a one-year Masters, you really have to focus on what they need to know with respect to sustainability. In our accounting class, for example, there's not a lot of time to teach them all the financial reporting in addition to the environmental and social reporting that they are learning. So, they get some financial reporting, and they understand the very basics, but really that's it. The rest of the time has to be focused, in a one-year program, on all the things they need to know with respect to sustainability. So, in that sense it is complimentary. We have students who have Masters in accounting or MBA students who are taking this on as a second degree.

2. Do you have any online offerings or courses dealing with sustainable business?

Not at present. My own preference as a professor is I really enjoy face to face interactions with the students. So, I have designed the program with respect to my own preferences. Now, I get a lot of requests for students and executives and so on for online versions. So that's something we may develop in the future.

3. Can you talk a little bit about your approach to get companies to participate in the capstone?

That's a good question because each company has their own internal culture, each company is facing their own market dynamics. As I mentioned with Office Depot, they are in a turnaround situation as opposed to other companies that may be in a growth phase, or even at start up. And then the size of a company, they range in terms of the biggest companies, publicly traded, like Office Depot, to smaller midsized companies that are unique to south Florida. But, when I approached them, and I've begun to cast a wider net because Dr. Kelly wants to have a menu of capstone courses to offer students going forward. We were fortunate that for the first year we had a client that was willing to take all of them and was big enough to handle them. But, in other companies the sustainability department might even be smaller, might be one person, or none at all and that's where I would step in and provide some consulting services which I'm giving to

one of our advisory board members to get their sustainability program off the ground, so they could do some actual reporting, produce disclosure for investors and potentially be in a position down the road to build a capstone project. So, there are ways of intervening along the way to encourage companies in a way that's all integrated with what we're doing through the program here at the school. But, my main point is I would say that I focused on the sustainability professional, or leader, or team at a given company and then decide where our students or a consulting project might help. So, there is a need that had to be identified and that comes out through conversations with the potential or perspective client regarding their sustainability program. But, also my market research as the case with Office Depot, where I knew they were locally based, so we could be physically connected, which is important, I think, to have the students be able to leave campus and go to work in a corporate setting. But, this company was facing some headwinds, so some extra assistance, some additional staff, some out of the box thinking, was welcome. So, it really is a mixed bag out there so I think it depends on the variety that exists where you live and where the school is based because you do have to be able to place the students in that working environment and actually engage in face to face meetings, I believe, to make it effective and also to build that placement component potentially. Where it's not just an experiential learning experience, but it's a potential job, a potential role because we intend to carve out at least one role with Office Depot at the end of this nine months. To answer your question, there is not one approach that fits all, you really have to survey the landscape, decide what the market dynamics are, determine the needs, identify sustainability within the potential target company and of course at the end of the day know who your students are because you have to get a sense, that was difficult the first year, get a sense of what you are able to offer the company and the level at which the students are able to operate because they do come in at various points in their early careers.