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GLOBAL AVIATION EDUCATION IN AN ONLINE ENVIRONMENT: THE DANIEL WEBSTER COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

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Summary

The Master's in Business Administration for Aviation Professionals degree offered by Daniel Webster College blends current industry realities with traditional foundations for successful management utilizing a fully online delivery model. This model of delivery enhances the program's accessibility and flexibility. It also allows for an ongoing intellectual collaboration of aviation professionals worldwide that can incorporate and immediately apply the educational outcomes directly to real world problems. Finally, it substantially increases the portability of the educational model across national boundaries. The MBA-AP degree is structured in a manner that promotes a holistic understanding of organizations and the business and industry environment, while remaining cognizant of the distinctive features of the aviation field in which the professionals in this program operate. Our approach is to offer versatility by developing critical thinking, intellectual flexibility, analytical and applied research skills, creativity, and high standards for professional integrity and ethics. It starts with courses that provide strong foundations in each of the major areas of business. These are followed by course in which these concepts are applied while developing higher level analytical skills and insight into the aviation industry. A capstone project brings together all of the concepts in the program.

Introduction

Today's organizations demand versatile, technologically literate professionals who can actively contribute and thrive in a team/project management environment. The dynamic and global nature of the aviation industry places particular demands on professionals who aspire to move into leadership roles in aviation related organizations. The Daniel Webster College MBA-AP (Master's in Business Administration for Aviation Professionals) blends these

current realities with traditional foundations for successful management utilizing a fully online delivery model. This model of delivery enhances the program's accessibility and flexibility. It also allows for an ongoing intellectual collaboration of aviation professionals worldwide that can incorporate and immediately apply the educational outcomes directly to real world problems. Finally, it substantially increases the portability of the educational model across national boundaries. The MBA-AP degree is structured in a manner that promotes a holistic understanding of organizations and the business and industry environment, while remaining cognizant of the distinctive features of the aviation field in which the professionals in this program operate.

The approach used in this program is to offer versatility by developing critical thinking, intellectual flexibility, analytical and applied research skills, creativity, and high standards for professional integrity and ethics. It starts with courses that provide strong foundations in each of the major areas of business. These are followed by course in which these concepts are applied while developing higher level analytical skills and insight into the aviation industry. A capstone project brings together all of the concepts in the program.

The MBA-AP program uses a cohort model. Students enter the program sequence as a cohort – a group of professionals that move through the program's course sequence as a team. We know from experience that this promotes long term bonds between students, generates valuable opportunities for academic and interpersonal exchange between professionals from a wide range of aviation fields, and helps maintain student focus by introducing one topic at a time. This is particularly important given that nearly all students remain active in their careers while pursing the MBA-AP. It also divorces the program from the traditional constraints of a semester-based system, thereby leveraging the online delivery format.

Our degree fosters an integrated approach to management through course sequencing and the use of real world classical and contemporary case studies which are frequently focused on the aviation industry. Throughout the program, we base our teaching on the following principle: For learning to be meaningful and useful it is essential to develop the skill of applying material from disciplines taught earlier in the curriculum to increasingly complex situations. Because of its online nature, there is the added advantage of the tight integration of information technology in each course, including the delivery of content materials, problem analysis, and communication.

Our program emphasizes three of the most fundamental aspects of management: leadership, communication, and effective decision-making based on quantitative and qualitative data. A peer evaluation process provides students with the opportunity to hone their evaluation techniques, including the ability to provide constructive feedback to subordinates and peers. In addition, teamwork, an essential component of project management and organizational life, is stressed through team projects and helps students develop online skills which are becoming increasingly important in modern business environments. Every course offers opportunities to develop decision making skills in practical situations. The program is based on the principle that people are social and that learning is enhanced when students are commonly engaged in the pursuit of knowledge.

In this paper we outline the key design features of this industry-specific applied MBA online program. These features include design philosophy and focus, pedagogical outcomes, academic foundations, delivery format, oversight features, and design structure. We also list the program courses. Finally, we spend some time describing features (such as that of a cohort coach) that make our program innovative and aid us in the implementation of our core effectiveness characteristics (similar to all online programs), namely communication and student support.

Main Body

1. Key Features of the MBA-AP Program at DWC

a. Program focus
We have striven to combine the strength of a traditional MBA program, understanding of business theory, with the ability to apply it to the practical problems of the business world as they exist in the air transportation industry. We believe that busy professionals find the exclusive online educational environment engaging and appropriate.

b. Program outcomes
We have designed seven outcomes that all students must meet to accomplish the program in a successful manner:

b1. Knowledge of the Field
Be able to demonstrate a working knowledge of the key information and concepts in each of the functional areas of business.

b2. Leadership and teamwork
Develop leadership and team-management skills that facilitate success in a diverse and changing workplace.

b3. Decision making
Given a complex business situation, be able to identify where change is needed, collect relevant information, evaluate opportunities and demonstrate appropriate decision making skills.

b4. Integrated analysis
Demonstrate problem analysis capabilities that integrate the functional areas of business knowledge.

b5. Global perspective
Effectively identify the domestic and global dimensions of an issue and their implications for management of an organization.

b6. Written and oral communication skills
Employ written and oral communication skills that convey effective analysis of situations and justification of recommendations, as well as demonstrate the ability to be receptive to information presented from other points of view.

b7. Information technology skills
Be able to apply appropriate technology to the collection, analysis, and transmission of information.

c. Foundation – Based on the DWC classroom MBA
The foundational knowledge of our program is comprised of nine courses that are equivalent to the classroom courses offered in our traditional MBA. However, the MBA-AP version of these courses uses a different mix of business cases and changes the format of many assignments. In addition there are four courses with specific aviation focus that highlight relevant and specialized aviation knowledge that is critical to the air transportation industry. A fundamental element of the transition from our classroom environment to an online delivery method was to maintain an

equivalent level of rigor, depth of content, and faithfulness to academic outcomes throughout the development of all online courses. No compromise is made in porting the MBA curriculum from the classroom environment to the online delivery format.

d. Oversight of course presentation

There is a core faculty for the program that has assigned responsibilities that go beyond those of regular faculty. These responsibilities include:

- Briefing faculty on structure and delivery guidelines.
- Collaboration in the hiring of adjunct faculty and the admission of students.
- Developing presentations that provide an overview of the course and an introduction to each unit.
- Monitoring course offerings and writing faculty reviews.

This core of faculty meets periodically in order to align standardized elements, review progress, and discuss future development. The faculty members are also active in educational outreach, by presenting the MBA-AP model for feedback at educational conferences and other forums for academic exchange.

e. Use of cohort coaches

We have instituted and evolved the concept of a Cohort Coach who is present throughout the entire program and whose fundamental role is to maintain consistency. More specifically, the cohort coach is an academic professional who works as a liaison with faculty and students to ensure that course outcomes are delivered in a consistent manner from class to class. The coach moves with each cohort through the entire sequence and performs a variety of roles over the duration of the program. The Cohort Coach serves a critical role in providing a constant and substantive presence, helping to personalize the program through student interactions in each and every course and by facilitating the transitions between courses.

Coaches are in charge of the cohort orientation activities and provide help with organizational tasks in the course, such as setting up teams and assuring each student gets experience in the leadership role. Due to their continuous involvement from beginning to end, Cohort Coaches can play a vital role in recognizing individual team member strengths and weaknesses and facilitating student engagement in a way that allows each student to realize his or her leadership potential.

Another important function of cohort coaches is to serve as an academic interface for the faculty member teaching the course. The coaches monitor activity of each and every course of their cohorts and address both professor and student needs, thereby helping to ensure that the educational objectives and outcomes of each course are met. Coaches work closely with the Program Director, Program Officer, and Academic Advisor to ensure that all activities run smoothly and that possible problems are addressed in a proactive and timely fashion.

f. Program integrity – how do we know who is doing the work?

We rely less on objective tests and place more emphasis on emphasis on, individual written work, team projects that include peer evaluations and discussion board participation, using both synchronous and asynchronous communications. An example of the latter is the use of VoIP-based teleconferencing as well as VoIP-based one-one-one interaction with faculty. In general, we attempt to capitalize both on synchronous and asynchronous communications, to give students maximum time

flexibility, while also providing an opportunity for developing deeper connections between individual students and faculty members.

g. Instructional design

Our curriculum is developed with a consistent format for ease of use. We use technology and active strategies to optimize student engagement by providing a multi-faceted approach to learning. We also provide on-going training for faculty on best practices in online education.

h. Modular design

The sequence of course has been designed to be modular. The courses within each module are given in the order specified, but the modules can be offered in any order. This provides flexibility in cohort scheduling, reorganizing cohorts (if necessary), and developing derivative certificate programs to meet industry training needs.

Courses

The MBA for Aviation Professionals consists of 13 classes, each seven weeks long. The courses are:

- Leadership in Times of Change
- Management Accounting
- Marketing Management
- Finance for Managers
- The Air Transportation System
- Organizational Behavior
- Operations Management
- Research Methods
- Economics of Air Transportation
- Aviation Safety and Security
- Global Aviation Management and Law
- Strategic Management
- Aviation Project Seminar

The curriculum combines a sound preparation in the fundamentals of business management with an understanding of the unique features inherent in the aviation industry. In the business courses aviation application and cases are used to highlight theoretical concepts. In the aviation courses the direction of pedagogy is almost the opposite one: As students have developed a business theory foundational knowledge, they are immersed in important tenets of the air transportation industry in a way that expands previously learned theoretical concepts.

Conclusion

In our program we use an exclusively online platform to educate professionals interested in the fundamentals of business management and their aviation applications. We focus on services that highlight student-professor and student-student interaction as the cornerstone of success. We achieve this in part by providing the necessary support systems to make this a reality. More specifically, these include:

faculty interaction with students

Our experience shows us that here is nothing that students both value (and need) more in an online program than the feeling of belonging to a learning community. This includes the expectation that faculty are there for them to answer questions and give advice. The creation of a learning community is accomplished by the way we design courses, the types of learning activities we use, and by the customer care provided through other institutional resources like the Cohort Coach, Educational Technology Specialist, and Program Administrator.

student to student interaction

One enduring feature of the aviation industry is the global nature of the enterprise that, somewhat paradoxically, reaches worldwide while still maintaining its colloquial feel. Student to student interaction enhances the development of working relationships with other aviation professionals around the world in a way that is priceless.

recognition of the dual role of the student as aviation colleague

One feature of a program for working aviation professionals is the acknowledgement of the dual role of the student. The students are already engaged daily in aviation industry operations. Many of the students bring to the program a variety of accomplishments and experiences that can then be utilized to enhance the educational outcomes for all. Faculty play an important role in maintaining academic integrity while also recognizing the nature of the student as a potential colleague in the work place.

Our pedagogical approach is to offer versatility by developing critical thinking, intellectual flexibility, analytical and applied research skills, creativity, and high standards for professional integrity and ethics and combine strong business foundations with aviation specialized knowledge in providing aviation professionals with a high value specialized degree.