

## **Stanford to opt for personal approach**

*Della Bradshaw*

The Stanford Graduate School of Business is to revamp its MBA programme completely to give a more personalised education to each of the 380 students who graduate from the school every year. The new style programme will include a series of tutorials and a menu of new programmes to ensure that the most accomplished students are stretched further than in the current "one size fits all" system.

The decision to introduce the new way of learning at the Californian school was taken at the end of May and the programme will be introduced in the autumn of 2007. Garth Saloner, who is professor of electronic commerce, strategic management and economics and led the MBA redesign task force, says the group went right back to basics. "We said, if we were to develop an MBA curriculum from scratch, what would it look like?"

The result is a move away from the standard lectures on finance, marketing and accounting. Instead, all students will choose from a menu of courses for each topic. A basic-level course will be available for those new to the subject with two or three other options available to those with different levels of knowledge or those who want a different focus.

Today, a student with an undergraduate degree in management who has worked on Wall Street has to take the same finance core courses as someone with an arts degree who has worked in the charity sector or the military, for example. That will all change.

The new system will not only mean that novices get a more thorough grounding in the subject, but the more accomplished students are stretched, says Robert Joss, dean. "Graduates have told us 'You could have pushed us harder.' That's a lost opportunity."

Prof Joss hopes the move will help Stanford in its aim to increase the diversity of experience in the MBA student body, in particular pulling in more matriculants from the operations side of businesses.

The menu system will enable students to tailor the programme to both their abilities and their career needs. Each will be mentored by a faculty member and the first few months of the programme will be dedicated to exploring general business issues. This will involve students working in tutorial groups of between 12 and 20 participants, with one faculty member.

Together with the mentoring this tutorial system, similar to that employed at UK universities, will help faculty get to know individual students and explore with them appropriate courses and careers.

The new curriculum will be time-consuming for professors and Prof Joss acknowledges that the school will have to expand its faculty by 5 to 10 per cent in order to implement the scheme. However, the relatively small size of the programme rivals Wharton and Harvard enrol 800 and 900 MBAs respectively each year means the school is agile enough to introduce the scheme, whereas its opposition probably cannot.

Prof Saloner believes that he has full commitment from enough faculty already. He will need about 13 of them to run the tutorials if the scheme is to work.

One perhaps surprising convert to the new curriculum is Jeffrey Pfeffer, a Stanford professor and a frequent critic of management education in general and the MBA degree in particular. Under the current system, students are "way, way too passive", he complains. In the new MBA they "can't hide at the back of a tiered classroom reading the Financial Times".

His biggest criticism of the traditional lecture method is that it goes against everything educationalists know about how adults learn. The personalised tutorial approach, he believes, means students "will develop habits of thinking and learning that they take to their jobs...The theory is, this programme will get them into a different way of thinking", he says.

To top it all, the business school is planning to construct a new building on the Stanford campus that will be designed from the outset to promote this new style of learning.

**Fonte: Financial Times, USA, june 12 2006. Business Life – Business Education, p. 10.**