



Students from the Lauder Institute strike a pose at a replica of the seat of Caiaphas in Israel.

The Cross-Cultural MBA

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Collaboration is the operating system that runs the Lauder Institute, a joint degree program that relies on relationships within the University of Pennsylvania as well as schools around the world. Now in its 26th year, the program combines a Wharton MBA with a master's degree in international studies. Up to 70 students are accepted annually into one of eight foreign-language tracks that revolve around Arabic, Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, French, Spanish, Portuguese, German, or Russian.

Lauder students begin classes in May, three months before Wharton classes start, then spend two summer months in an overseas immersion program located in a country that speaks the language they're studying. Classes are held on the campuses of partner schools that include the American University in Cairo, École des Hautes Études Commerciales Paris, the Beijing Foreign Studies University, the Universidad de San Andres in Argentina, and the Academy of National Economy in Russia. Upon returning to Philadelphia, Lauder students join the rest of the Wharton MBAs. They spend the next two years dividing study time between business and international studies in a closely choreographed and highly collaborative arrangement.

When someone asks me why the world needs a cross-disciplinary, cross-cultural program like ours, I have two answers.

First, I don't think the world is as flat as some people say. Take a look at the current economic crisis. Germany didn't have a real estate bubble like the U.S. did; it's suffering from the crisis because it exports a great deal, and trade has plummeted. What happened in the U.S. is only relevant to the German markets as background. If we want managers to be more effective in Germany, they need to understand the situation in that country.

Second, a joint business and international studies program allows us to educate better human beings. We don't teach students Russian or Portuguese because we expect them to work in Russia or Brazil for the rest of their lives. We teach them a second or third or fourth language to enrich them as individuals, to make them better thinkers and problem solvers. In the future, when they face difficult problems, they can say, "How would a Russian solve this?" and they will instantly have a new perspective.

We don't want students at the Lauder Institute simply to be fluent in a second language. We want them to have an in-depth understanding of another country, so we provide classes on the history, culture, and politics of the regions they're studying. Not only do Lauder students go overseas for the summer immersion, we encourage them to pursue "in-language" internships during their second summer of the program, which means taking positions in countries where their target languages are spoken. To make this more affordable, we offer a fellowship that will enable them to accept jobs in countries such as China or Brazil or Chile, where the pay might not be as good as it would be if they interned in the U.S.

While students take their MBA classes at Wharton, the Lauder Institute has its own faculty for language, history, culture, international economics, economic history, and summer immersion courses. Thus, successful collaboration across campus is critical.

I have learned that two structural decisions will help interdisciplinary programs like ours function smoothly. One is to have the program heads report to someone other than the school deans—in our case, that's the provost. The support of the deans is always essential, but reporting to a campuswide official ensures access to university resources.

The second important decision is to define early on which part of the program will serve as its foundation, and which part will differentiate it from similar programs. At the Lauder Institute, we build the program on the foundation of the Wharton MBA. We differentiate it with the master's degree in international studies, which does not exist separately.

For a joint degree program to run smoothly, it's absolutely critical for the director to establish relationships with all parts of the campus that will be involved in the effort. That's easier said than done. When I started as director two years ago, I had more linkages to Wharton than to the School of Arts and Sciences, but my job has been greatly facilitated as I've tapped into the connections I had at both schools. For instance, I have a secondary appointment in the department of sociology. Most crucially, the Institute has a co-director who is a faculty member from the School of Arts and Sciences, and our activities are overseen by a Graduate Group in International Studies which includes faculty from across campus.

Collaborating with institutions in different countries presents a different set of challenges. I think there are four ways to address these challenges and develop successful international partnerships. The first step is to define what you want to accomplish with the alliance; develop a clear set of goals before you begin.

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Second, partner with schools at your same level, so you don't dilute your reputation. We look for partners who have a solid reputation in the world of business, but who also can deliver language and cultural training that flows logically from our May classes into our fall classes. We also must consider logistical demands, such as the timing of their summer schedules and the geographic location of their campuses.

Third, structure the relationship so that it has specific limits. A partnership doesn't have to be like a marriage—it doesn't have to affect everything.

Finally, make sure you have an exit mechanism. Sign a partnership for a set number of years and then jointly evaluate to determine if it's working the way you want. And keep in mind that changes in the world itself might render these partnerships irrelevant, so always be prepared for new challenges.

Breaking Down Barriers

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Last January, the School of Business Administration brought together nine of the University of Miami's 12 schools for a two-day Global Business Forum that attracted 700 attendees. The School of Business Administration had begun planning the forum in 2007 to bring together global business leaders and academics to discuss global business. The conference also represented a manifestation of university president Donna Shalala's goal to promote cross-disciplinary cooperation.

Forum speakers included industry titans such as former GE CEO Jack Welch, McDonald's CEO Jim Skinner, and Coca-Cola CEO Muhtar Kent. But what really drew attendees was a series of 16 panel discussions organized by the various schools and stretching across a variety of industry sectors. The business school's panels focused on the economic crisis, Latin America and Asia, customer engagement strategies, healthcare financing, and entrepreneurship. Other schools developed panels on topics such as medical advances, alternative energy, commercial arbitration, sustainable urban building, water scarcity, commercializing music technology, culture and branding, and women and leadership. Together, the panels provided attendees with a broad, interdisciplinary look at key issues in the world today.



At the University of Miami's Global Business Forum, receptions and breaks between events give participants a chance to hold cross-disciplinary discussions across a variety of industries.