



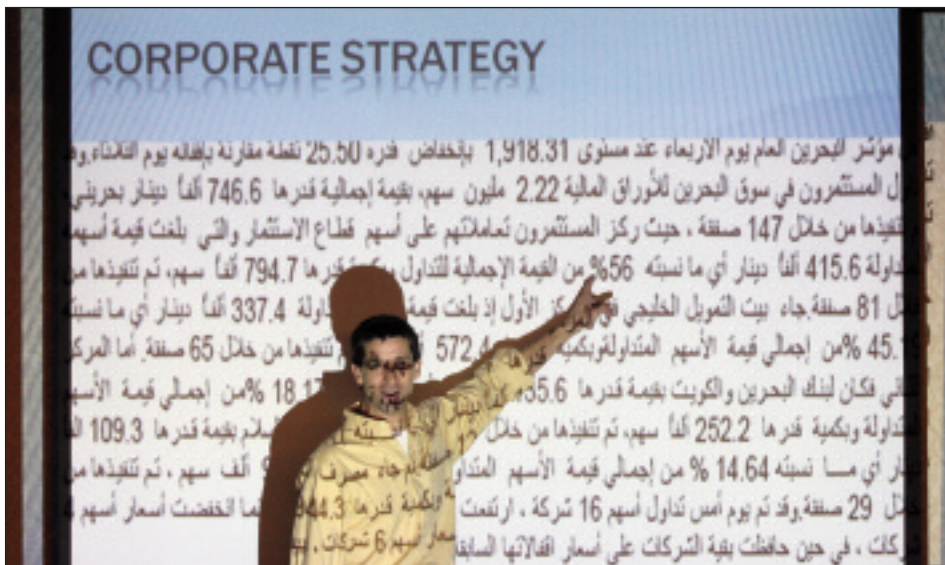
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Change is their business

UT's Professional MBA program adapting to suit needs in today's economy

By Brooke Everett



Chad Greene

Robert Zimbrich gives a presentation for his team Dec. 5 during the University of Tennessee Professional MBA program's final presentations at the Cumberland House Hotel.

In the decade since the University of Tennessee launched a master's of business administration program for professionals, times have changed. The dot-com bubble burst and so did the real estate one. The economic boom has been replaced with a thud, and UT business students are taking classes in the new Haslam building, not Glocker.

The Professional MBA program (Pro MBA) has had to change, too. Instead of an intense three-day study

weekend once a month on campus, busy executives now have the option that includes an online education.

The 52 professionals currently receiving their degrees make up the 10th class to graduate from UT's Pro MBA program. They'll be hooded today.

The program - a 16-month course for experienced, working professionals who are within driving distance to UT - now meets three

Saturdays a month and online.

"We've got 55-year-olds and we've got 25-year-olds in the program," said Michael McIntyre, director of the Pro MBA program. "I think a lot of people see the value."

The average student has 10-15 years of experience, is an expert in his or her field, and is interested in knowing more about the business side of his or her work.

Students come from virtually every industry, and many of the major companies in the area have had employees in the program.

"We've got a lot of resources that come along with being at UT," McIntyre said. "You get connected with the UT network."

In 10 years, that network has grown to 382 Pro MBA alumni.

Every year the program changes a little.

"Pro MBA looks so different than it did year one," said Carolyn Cuddy, executive director of UT's Center for Executive Education, who was director of the Pro MBA program before McIntyre.

Early on, the classes met Friday evenings, Saturdays, and Sunday afternoons. But that schedule proved too grueling for many students. Once the program added online distance access part of the time, enrollment doubled.

Pro MBA classes, which begin each August and have a waiting list, cost \$35,000. Most students' employers pay some of the program costs, and a return for that investment is a class consulting project that examines each student's employer.

The classes are project-based and teach theory before putting the theories into practice. The students' coursework often leads to business relationships.

McIntyre said the program isn't for lackadaisical students because requirements include 30-40 hours of coursework time per week on top of their full-time work schedules, with studying replacing sleep and home duties put on the back burner during the 16 months.

"They know what they're signing up for," McIntyre said. "That's the beauty of this group."

McIntyre said the Pro MBA faculty are training the students for their next jobs and promotions and that

students often change jobs during the program.

Stephanie Austin changed jobs three times during the 16 months she worked on her MBA at UT. Austin, who now is vice president of business development at Trinity Leadership Partners in Nashville, graduated from the program in 2007.

Austin said she learned time management, how to grow new leaders in a company, and to be a true professional.

"I needed a program that balanced life, while getting education," said Austin, who is the mother of a 5-year-old.

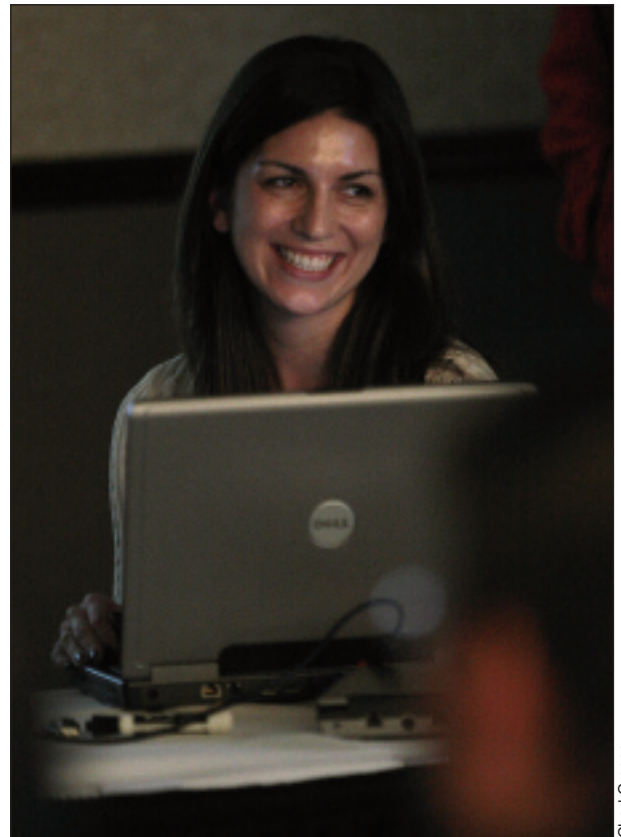
Paul Gubanc, a 2008 graduate and an operations manager at Oak Ridge National Laboratory, is one of the oldest in the class at 49. He said now is a great time to study business because real-world economics are moving at dynamic speeds, which makes it more interesting to study and see the curriculum in motion.

Gubanc said he already had a good understanding of business from his

work experience but that the program gave him a better understanding of supply chain management.

Gubanc said the biggest benefits he found in the program were the business connections he made.

"I have 52 new contacts, and some of those are people who are going to be millionaires," he said. "A lot of them are people I would recruit if I needed someone."



Letitia Basner presents her team's project during the UT Pro MBA program's final presentations Dec. 5.

Chad Greene