



New MBA

Once again, the USB's MBA has been audited and approved by two international accreditation agencies. But nothing remains static. AMANDA MATTHEE finds out how the USB has updated its MBA for 2009.

“We are always looking at what the market is expecting from MBA graduates and at what we are delivering to our students,” says Professor Wim Gevers, associate director: Academic at the USB. “We do this despite

the fact that our MBA is accredited by the European Foundation for Management Development and the Association of MBAs.”

Each year, the Academic Planning Committee of the University of Stellenbosch Business School (USB) takes a fresh look at the MBA, as well as other leading MBAs in the world, to ensure alignment.

“Even though the content of our MBA is in line with the MBAs of top schools around the world, we have decided to make some changes in the way we'll package and present our 2009 MBA,” he says.

“Content-wise, leadership development will remain a central theme of our MBA next year. Each student follows a leadership development track aimed at developing leaders who will make a real difference to the company in which they work. In addition, the MBA will continue to equip participants with theory as well as real-world management and leadership competencies that can be applied in any industry and in any country.

“However, in the new MBA we'll focus more strongly on integrated thinking, instead of on a silo approach to business problems. Business decisions are highly complex; that is why we need to get away from thinking in isolated units of knowledge.

“The new MBA will also use off-campus learning for the mastering of theory, while on-campus time will be used for facilitation and the

application of theory in practice. We plan to place more emphasis on the written and verbal communication abilities of students throughout the MBA,” explained Gevers.

“Our aim is to deliver marketable graduates with employable knowledge, who are sought after in the global market.”

Learning across subject boundaries

Martin Butler, senior lecturer in Information Systems at the USB and a member of the MBA

Restructuring Committee, says the aim of the USB MBA is to develop a core of functional knowledge and skills based on an integrated approach, in order to apply knowledge across subject boundaries.

“In the real world, managers often have to find a solution to a problem which involves, say, IT, HR as well as the marketing department of a company. To assist our MBA students to think more holistically, we will

make extensive use of case studies presented by a team of lecturers, all present in the same class. This holds enormous benefits for the students as they will at once be exposed to the different angles from which they need to distil a solution.

“Team teaching will require more cooperation among faculty, but the outcome for students is integrated thinking,” says Butler.

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Revamped 2009 USB MBA

Learning management fundamentals

Modules: Orientation; Management Concepts; Leadership; Personal Skills Development (Information Literacy, Presentation Skills and Writing Skills); Economics for Managers; Research Methodology; Decision Analysis; Management Accounting.

Placing management in context

Modules: Business Finance; Operations and Information Management; Business Environment; Marketing Management; Strategic Management and Innovation; Leadership (which includes subjects like Individual Ethical Decision-making, Corporate Governance, People Management and Employment Relations).

Adding management enhancements

Modules and/or field work: Electives (e.g. USB electives, USB-ED programmes and the international study tour) and/or field work (e.g. consultation, internships and action learning projects).

Doing research

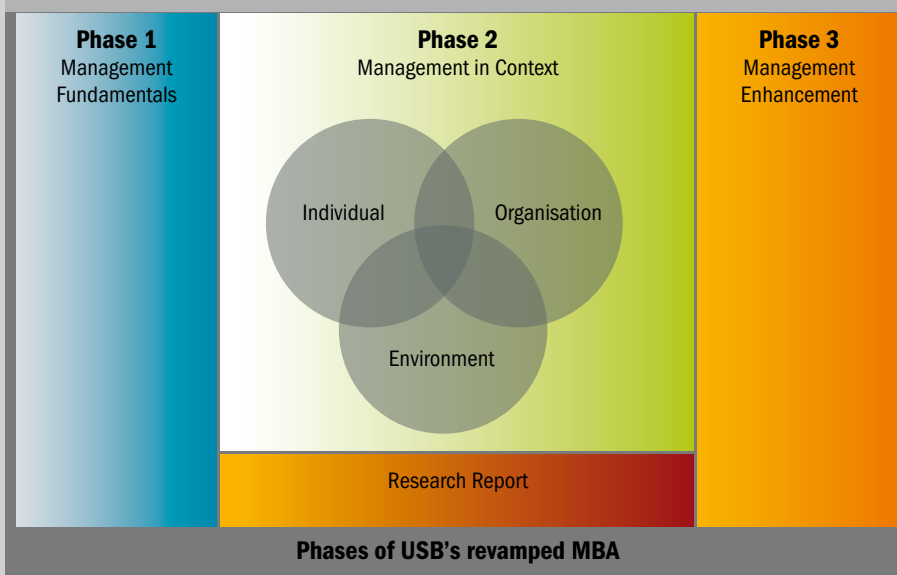
A research report on a real business problem is a requirement of all top providers of MBAs around the world. It is also one of the requirements of international EQUIS accreditation. Doing research allows students to apply the knowledge and competencies they have acquired on the MBA programme in one focused project.

■ **The actual report:** The report must focus on a business or management-related problem: it can be a problem at the student's place of work, or in a specific industry. The USB invites the business industry to submit research topics for MBA students – which offer students ways to apply their know-how in the real world. The actual writing of the research report will run parallel to the second and third phases of the MBA. Students should therefore be able to hand in their reports soon after they have completed their class programme. Students also have to

present their findings to a panel of the USB community.

■ **Preparation:** To prepare students for the research and writing of these reports, they will follow a Research Methodology module right at the start of the MBA. This module covers the scientific principles underlying business and management research. It also show students how to formulate their research question and explains the logic of the research process, the different forms of reasoning and various ways to analyse data.

■ **Research approaches:** Students may use various research approaches such as case studies, feasibility studies, business plans, marketing plans, strategic plans, econometric research, exploratory studies and studies based on surveys or interviews.



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Making the most of contact sessions

From 2009 onwards, the USB will increasingly use the e-learning platform, Blackboard, to help students become proficient in theory. Blackboard will also be used for interactive assessments off campus. This will free up on-campus time so that contact sessions can focus on facilitation and application.

“Time on campus is precious. So, contact time won’t be used for absorption, knowledge transfer or assessments, but for doing and applying,” says Butler.

“The lecturer becomes the facilitator that leads discussions among students to elicit the knowledge residing in each student. That is one of the reasons why those applying for an MBA should have at least three years of hands-on work experience – this will enable them to contribute more meaningfully to these discussions.”

Butler says visiting faculty often mention that they enjoy lecturing at the USB because of the high standard of the group discussions.

Enhancing the MBA

The USB’s MBA follows a generalist approach with management enhancement options at the end of the class programme.

“In the past, specialisation opportunities were provided mainly through electives and a research report. These specialisation opportunities – now called management enhancements – have been expanded to include fieldwork, internships and other programmes and projects. International exchange opportunities and the annual MBA international study tour will be promoted as part of management enhancement on the new MBA,” says Butler.

Interacting competently

According to Professor Gevers, managers and leaders have to be able to interact effectively with stakeholder groups in today’s competitive business world.

“An MBA graduate should be able to

articulate professionally when presenting a new strategy or writing a report. We will help students to acquire these skills throughout the MBA. We’ll start off by teaching them the relevant skills during the first phase of the MBA and then we’ll monitor the application of these skills in everything they do – from the way they write their assignments to the way they do presentations. In the past, the best speaker in a group assignment team put forward the findings. This will now change: everyone will get the opportunity to present and at the same time practise presentation skills,” says Gevers.

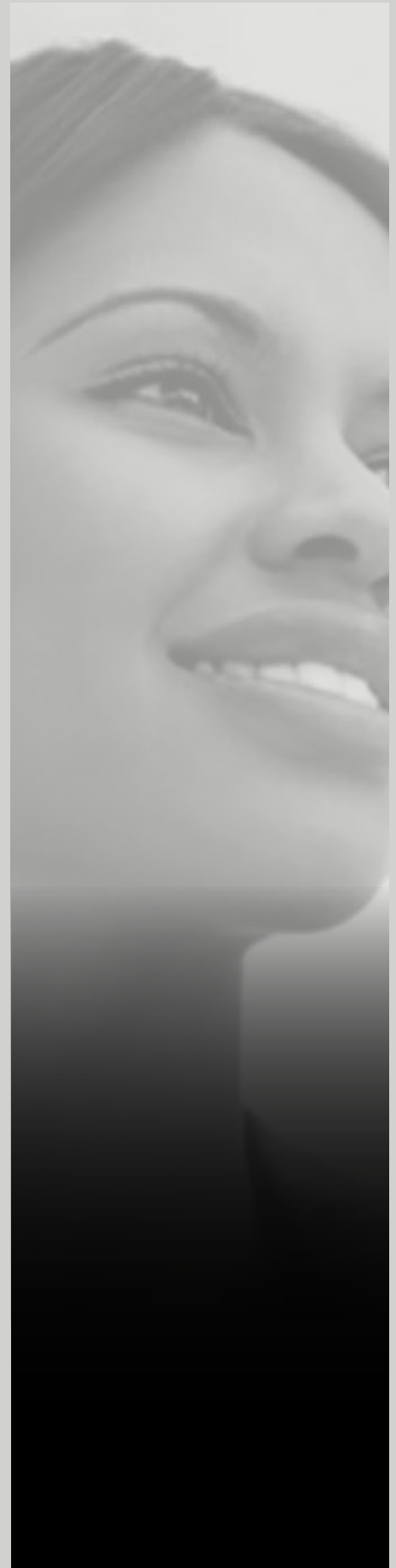
Supporting the global agenda

Dr Babita Mathur-Helm, senior lecturer in Diversity Management and a member of the Sustainable Leadership Development Group that drives leadership development on the MBA programme, says the USB occupies a responsible position in both the local and the international business school industry.

“We need to be proactive and look ahead to make sure our MBA fits the global business agenda. We need to go beyond current expectations and develop MBA graduates that are a better resource for the business environment of tomorrow. Doing an MBA is about much more than earning a top salary. It’s about acquiring the competencies to act as a change agent,” she pointed out.

The Leadership Development module in particular will prepare students for their roles as change agents, says Mathur-Helm. The module focuses on personal, group and organisational leadership, and covers areas like ethical decision-making, multi-cultural sensitivity, valuing and leading diversity, leadership and teaming, organisational change, corporate governance, people management, employment relations, and negotiation.

Electives on applied change leadership, environmental finance, spiritual leadership, and facilitation and coaching will also help students to grow as leaders, she says. □



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