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Unique ELI program enhances classroom learning, creates business connections

While researching graduate schools, Abishake Subramanian was looking for a program that would complement his technical background with business credentials. He chose OU's SBA Master of Science in Information Technology Management (**MSITM**) program, and then earned a coveted spot in its **Experiential Learning and Innovation (ELI) program**, where he is spending a semester at Physician Healthcare Network gaining real-world experience.

A unique component of the SBA graduate educational experience, the ELI program pairs top SBA graduate students with partner organizations to help them solve complex business problems. The competitive program enhances the SBA's already strong graduate programs by giving the students priceless on-the-job experience and allows them to put their education into practice immediately.

"For students, this is a great opportunity to signal their expertise to a potential employer, gain valuable work experience and network with professionals who may open doors to new opportunities in the future," says Balaji Rajagopalan, associate professor of MIS and interim faculty director, SBA graduate business programs.

"It is also one way the SBA graduate school strengthens its learning platform by offering experiential learning opportunities at all levels of management which allows our students to apply the knowledge and skills they acquire in the classroom in a real business environment," he adds.

At Physician Healthcare Network, Subramanian is expanding his skills by performing business analysis and creating cost volume profit reports.

"This experience is helping me gain domain-based skills and experience, and will put me in a better position to prepare me for full-time opportunities when I graduate from OU," says Subramanian. "I am able to apply what I have learned in class, learn more and contribute at the same time."

Fellow MSITM student and ELI participant Dean Pryzmusinski is drawing on the knowledge he gained in his systems analysis and systems design courses to develop a Web-based application to track physician gifts at St. Joseph Mercy, working closely with its Medical Administration and the Compliance departments.

"My OU graduate classes gave me skills necessary for conducting effective requirements gathering with stakeholders and for carrying out development of the Web-based application," he says.

The ELI program also helps displaced professionals in these difficult economic times, says Rajagopalan. "Full-time students who participate in the ELI program may find it difficult to find job opportunities in this tight economy and hence, this serves as a great transition opportunity."

The program can also give a much-needed boost to companies facing financial challenges. This was the case at Oakland Family Services, which turned to SBA's ELI when its president saw an opportunity to consolidate functions with other family services organizations around southeastern Michigan, yet didn't have the staff or budget to implement it.

The partnership was an overwhelming success, says Michael Earl, president and CEO, Oakland Family Services, during a recent panel discussion during SBAs 2009 International Business Conference.

"We didn't have the resources to turn our vision into reality until we turned to OU's ELI program," says Earl.

"ELI projects have given me an invaluable opportunity to actively apply skills I learned through the course of my MSITM program," says Pryzmusinski. "Not only will I leave OU with a remarkable career-oriented graduate degree, but I'll also enjoy the benefit having applied the skills I developed through the MSITM program to improve real-world business processes."

*SBA students in the EMBA, MBA, MAcc and **MSITM** programs can apply to the ELI program. Students work for one semester, with the option to extend to two semesters on a partner site. Businesses can learn more about sponsoring/partnering by visiting the **ELI Web site** or by contacting Balaji Rajagopalan at rajagopa@oakland.edu.*



ELI students Dean Pryzmusinski and Abishke Subramanian

SUMMARY

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