

Thursday, October 15, 2009

SBA's 2009 International Business Conference a great success

The lively discussions and networking heard in and around Elliott Hall were just an added bonus of Oakland University's School of Business Administration's 2009 International Business Conference, which featured content-rich panel discussions among top business leaders and engaging question and answer sessions. The two-day leadership program concluded Friday Oct. 9, and commemorated the school's 40th anniversary.

The first day focused on "Nursing as a Business," while the second day of sessions, "The Future of Business Leadership," featured a diverse set of topics including ethics, health care reform, education and global leadership.

SBA Dean Mohan Tanniru was encouraged by the engaging discussions that took place throughout the conference. "The sessions were successful at bringing some very important issues to the forefront, but more importantly, the event gave the SBA an opportunity to interact as a community, with our faculty, students, alumni, business partners and other associates all coming together to share insights and knowledge."

Despite the widely diverse perspectives and backgrounds of the panelists on "Ethics and Social Responsibility," the presenters found solid common ground in that the conscience must lead the way in the workplace. Ken Janke (SBA '85) senior vice president, Investor Relations, Aflac Inc., emphasized the need for transparent disclosure and strong risk management. As a corporate lawyer, Betsy Bayha, (SBA '72) senior vice president, general counsel and secretary for Blue Coat, sees the importance of leaders to establish "a tone at the top" and an open door policy. For employees, she suggests "raising your hand, and question something if it doesn't feel right."

In order to lead in a global environment, companies need to think globally, said Richard Corson, director of the Pontiac U.S. Export Assistance Center of the U.S. Commerce Service. "The universe does not revolve around the U.S. Companies that recognize this become more successful. If you aren't geocentric, it can be a deal breaker," he continued.

Greg Garrett, (SECS '97) chief strategy officer, VW of America, emphasized the opportunity within the global marketplace. "In the next 20 years, 80 percent of the world population growth will occur in areas that are the least capable of supporting this growth," Garrett said. "Diversify, focus on new markets, use the global tools that exist and apply them to your unique market."

Several afternoon sessions explored new approaches to enhance leadership and global opportunities for students. Xiadong Deng, associate professor, MIS, SBA, described the SBA's three models of global engagement. Through a Chrysler grant, the SBA brought OU students and faculty together with students and faculty from partner business schools in China to work on business projects from companies such as Ford Motor Company. "We used a partnership strategy to educate, provide internship opportunity, develop research and become engaged in outreach projects," Deng said.

Another speaker, Cathy Cheal, assistant vice president of OU's e-Learning and Instructional Support, believes interactive Web-based learning is key to student success. "When people think about e-learning, they think about automated content. In reality, Web 2.0 tools, such as IM, Wikis, RSS feeds, blogs, video and virtual world environments are highly interactive, and enhance reading and writing skills. All these tools are available at OU."

Conference participant Ursula Scroggs, president, Derderian, Kann, Seyferth & Salucci, was impressed with the educational presentations. "As an employer of SBA's students and graduates, I'm pleased to see professors placing increasing emphasis on critical thinking, technology and international business. These skill sets are imperative to the students' success, but also for our firm and the clients we serve," she said.

Two afternoon sessions covered health care reform. Posing the question, "Can Information Technology (IT) save the health care crisis?" four panelists debated the benefits and complexities of converting the nation's medical records systems from paper to electronic form. Paul Peabody, recently retired vice president & CIO of William Beaumont Hospital, was adamant that the health care industry cannot eliminate waste and fraud without good IT systems in place.

Still, he recognizes many challenges. "The American Recovery and Reinvestment ACT (ARRA) will have \$900 billion flowing to hospitals and physicians over the next 10 years to adopt electronic health records (EHRs)," he said. "Right now, only 17 percent of doctors and 10 percent of hospitals have basic EHR's. Since the ARRA money serves as an incentive, but does not cover the complete cost of startup, cost remains an issue. It also requires a process change. If you put a good system on top of a bad process, you get bad results faster, so change management is critical."

Michael Ubl, executive director of the Minnesota Health Information Exchange, agrees the IT solution is necessary to standardize health care practices. "Our biggest problem is that we are fragmented. The many stakeholders involved have little incentive to work together. It's not about whether technology will work or not. It does. It's about a new paradigm. It's about doing right by the patient. We need to have adequate information in the doctor's hands when the patient is in his office. We must agree we won't compete on the data itself."

For more information about Oakland's programs, visit the SBA Web site at sba.oakland.edu.

SUMMARY

The SBA's successful 2009 International Business Conference featured content-rich panel discussions among top business leaders and commemorated the school's 40th anniversary.

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