

## Bridging the Business Faculty Gap

### Business schools hope that converting teachers from other academic disciplines will resolve an ongoing shortage of professors

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The future business-school classroom could be a bleak place in the next decade, with lecture rooms filled with eager students but nary a professor in sight. It's a vision that has sent business-school leaders scrambling in recent years to find innovative ways to address a projected shortage of business PhDs.

By next year, however, some of those spots could be filled by academics who, while they are experienced teachers, haven't stood in front of a B-school class before. To prepare, the professors will participate in a so-called bridge program to be launched at five business-school campuses next year.

John Fernandes, president of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), the accrediting agency that came up with the program, says that the professional situation in business-school classrooms is at a tipping point. "Without any intervention, the student-to-faculty ratio will get really disturbing in the future," he says.

#### Accreditation at Stake

Business-school leaders have reason for concern. In the past five years, the overall production of business PhDs declined while enrollments in undergraduate and masters level business programs have grown. Exacerbating the problem, an entire generation of business-school professors who received their PhDs in the late 1960s and early 1970s are expected to retire within the next few years, leaving a vacuum in the B-school classroom that needs to be filled—and fast.

The situation is so dire that some business schools could eventually be in danger of losing their AACSB accreditation because of the faculty shortage, says Richard Sorensen, the chair of AACSB's faculty shortage workgroup. "Some schools don't have the financial resources or reputation and are having difficulty

recruiting any new faculty," says Sorensen, who is also the dean of Virginia Tech's Pamplin College of Business, which is participating in the bridge program. "They can't meet the classroom needs for a growing number of students."

## **Show 'Em the Money**

With a decreasing array of options, the B-school world is looking to the larger academic world for help, hoping to convince a psychology professor, for example, to take a job as a marketing professor. Organizers said they believe the program will appeal to professors in the social sciences, who could easily double their salaries by moving into a faculty position at a business school. The average salary of a new assistant professor of psychology is about \$50,406 and peaks at around \$76,949, according to the College & University Professional Association for Human Resources. Contrast that with the average salary of a business-school marketing professor, which is \$125,000, according to a 2006 AACSB salary survey.

It's a striking imbalance that the AACSB hopes to use to recruit new PhDs, promising them higher salaries and more career opportunities if they move into the B-school world. The accreditation group has taken a multipronged approach to the faculty shortage problem, devising strategies revolving around their accreditation standards—which requires member schools to have at least 50% of their classes taught by academically qualified (PhD) faculty, with 40% allowed for "professionally qualified" (non-PhD) teachers, and 10% of faculty that might not qualify as either.

## **A Stronger Bridge?**

The AACSB first tackled the issue last year by rolling out the first part of its bridge program—known as PQ Bridge (for professionally qualified)—one that trained business-world professionals to be classroom teachers. The program has had mixed results so far, with only 15 of the initial 75 graduates finding teaching positions as of this September.

AACSB officials are hoping that their new AQ—for academically qualified—Bridge program will make more of a dent in the faculty shortage problem. Their goal for the first year? Convert 200 PhDs from other disciplines into business professors. People who sign up for the program won't receive a new PhD, but they will receive an AACSB-endorsed certificate that will enable them to teach in one of association's 551 accredited business schools.

In the program's first year, five schools will help the PhDs learn the skills necessary to teach business students: the University of Florida's Warrington College of Business, Grenoble Ecole de Management, University of Toledo's College of

Business Administration, Tulane University's Freeman School of Business, and Virginia Tech's Pamplin.

Each school has designed its own program, ranging in duration from two months to two years. Classes will be a mix of distance learning classes, on-site weekend seminars, and research projects. The cost of tuition ranges from \$14,000 to \$40,000, which will be paid for either by the participant or the participant's sponsoring school.

## **Making the Transition**

By targeting professors who already have their PhDs in related social science fields, schools such as Tulane say they will be able to turn out business PhDs who are just as qualified as their other graduates. Tulane has designed its program as a residential PhD program, where the faculty-students will be required to participate in five seminars that will get them up to speed on how to teach business education.

The schools offering the classes are ones that have, in many instances, already had experience helping bring PhDs from outside the business-school world into their programs. For example, 10% to 15% of the faculty at the University of Florida's business school has nonbusiness PhDs, according to Warrington Dean John Kraft. In the past, Warrington has hired psychologists, economists, engineers, and sociologists, people whose dissertation research was on topics that had significance for the business world, Kraft says. "We think that it is a model that can work if people understand how business schools operate and can learn something about team teaching and how to teach case studies," Kraft says.

Schools hope they can attract people like Kim Weaver, a marketing professor at Virginia Tech who has a nonbusiness doctorate in social psychology. Her doctoral research at Princeton focused on decision-making and she later realized—while pursuing postdoctoral work at the University of Michigan—that it had implications for the business world. Rather than taking a job in a liberal arts college or university, she decided to become a business-school professor. At the time she did this, the AACSB's bridge program did not exist. To prepare for her new role, she audited business classes, studied business marketing textbooks, and talked to academics about how to make the transition. "There's a lot of work involved in the transition, but I think it's doable for sure," Weaver says.

## **Early Interest. Future Success?**

Organizers say they are encouraged by an early surge of interest in the program since it was announced last month. Anand Kunnathur, the senior associate

dean at the University of Toledo, says he has already gotten calls from academics with PhDs in philosophy, mathematics, and psychology who are interested in the program, including one professor from an Ivy League school. His school's program will focus on preparing PhDs to teach courses in supply chain, technology, and operations management.

Those who are accepted to the program will need to work hard to make the transition to a B-school professor and must be open-minded, Kunnathur says. "At a minimum, they will be knocked out of their comfort zone," Kunnathur says. "In a relatively short period of time, they will need to pick up a lot of information, digest it, and apply it very, very quickly."

By 2009, the AACSB hopes to have 200 graduates from the bridge program, a number that will supplement the 800 to 900 business PhDs currently being produced each year by AACSB-accredited schools. At the very least, the extra 200 PhDs will be a "good shot in the arm," says the AACSB's Fernandes. Until then, business education leaders will be sitting nervously on the sidelines, waiting to see whether the program can cure one of business education's most pressing problems.

"This is going to be a big help, but only if it works," Fernandes says. "It's a way off until we can tell if these programs are successful, if these people can go into B-schools and be accepted."