Course concept

In the current trends of globalization, with ongoing expansion of multinationals into novel markets, along with the rapid technological advancements characterizing the past decades, managers responsible for organizational success find themselves facing markets of increasing diversity and business environments of escalating complexity. As a consequence, many institutions have increased practical and active learning elements in their programs. Active learning means learning by doing: it is about solving real management problems for real corporations, participating in challenging projects provided by company project owners.

Purdue University’s EMBA and the IMM Global EMBA programs integrated Active Learning Projects into the curriculum in 2012. The EMBA program has students from 15 U.S. states and four countries. The IMM Global EMBA has students from 10 countries. Purdue is reaching out to managers who need input on how to solve specific problems like entering new markets, launching new services, initiating organizational change, making important investment decisions, restructuring functions or processes or other challenges.

Assistance will be provided by a team of Executive MBA students who come from around the world and have, on average, 14 years of work experience. Students work in teams as company consultants: they get the initial needs from the company. They work with the company to define the terms of the project and then generate valuable ideas and recommendations that can be implemented in practice.

Course design, timing, milestones

Course participants get background readings and videos for individual preparation before the projects begin. These readings are focused on problem solving and project management. The projects are launched when students are at Purdue. The teams get a short description of the problem with the contact details of the project owner and have to contact the project owners as soon as possible. Detailed needs assessment is an integral part of the job. Teams must build a working contact with the project owner, they must organize their communication lines, must manage their activities, etc. Teams
take full responsibility for their projects but their work is supervised by a faculty advisor.

There are three important milestones in the project: (1) submission of problem definitions, problem structure, scope descriptions and project plans; (2) submission of progress reports; (3) submission of final reports and delivery of the final presentations. Timing of these milestones is generally fixed but otherwise teamwork is flexible; the groups must manage their time together with their company project owners. It is certainly great if the client can come to Purdue campus to meet with the project team at the start of the project, but that is by no means a requirement. Due to exam schedules, there will be some breaks in the times that the teams spend implementing the projects.

**Program timing**

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<tr>
<th>Global EMBA Dates</th>
<th>EMBA Dates</th>
<th>Content</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 15, 2015</td>
<td>June 30, 2015</td>
<td>Finalize project descriptions from client</td>
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<td>May and June 2015</td>
<td>June and July 2015</td>
<td>Individual methodological preparation by recommended background readings</td>
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| June 16 – 29, 2015 Purdue Residency | July 28 – Aug 2, 2015 Purdue Residency | Distribution of project leads
Discussion of requirements and milestones
Allocation of faculty advisors
Flexible team preparation, building contact with the project owners |
| July 31, 2015     | Sept 15, 2015    | MILESTONE 1. Deadline for the electronic submission of problem definition and scope (approx 1 text page), problem structure (graph, 1 page), project plan (e.g. Gantt chart), each approved by the project owner |
| Sept 15, 2015     | Oct 20-25, 2015  | MILESTONE 2. Deadline for the electronic submission of the progress reports (preferred format: consulting PPT): where are we in the project plan, achievements, problems to be solved, agenda for the rest of the time etc.) |
| October 13-25, 2015 Beijing residency | November 30, 2015 (will gain in-class peer feedback in late October) | MILESTONE 3. Plenary classroom presentations of findings and recommendations
Feedback from professors and students
One hour for each team (40 minutes for presentations, 20 for feedback and discussion) |
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<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>October 26 –</td>
<td>Final discussion of lessons learned</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 20, 2015</td>
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<td>January 1, 2016</td>
<td>Submission of final reports to project owners</td>
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<td>Feedback from project owners</td>
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<td>Nov 20 – 30, 2015</td>
<td>Final written evaluation from faculty advisors</td>
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**Active Learning Projects**

The project looks like a typical *consulting assignment* for the company: a problem is raised at the beginning, which must be solved at the end. Student teams work as *company consultants*: they receive the task from the company and must do their best to generate valuable ideas and recommendations that can be implemented in practice.

Here are some examples of projects completed in the last few years:

- Helping a pharmaceutical firm expand in emerging markets
- Developing a risk-assessment plan for an aerospace company
- Creating an implementation strategy for a business plan
- Preparing self-sufficiency options for a homeless shelter
- Evaluating design centers for a global firm to improve effectiveness
- Preparing a business plan for an NGO to start operations in Central Asia
- Working with a consulting company on market analysis & opportunity identification

Teams receive the problem definition and initial scope, expected deliverables, contact information of the partner company’s project owner, and company information. Preparing a detailed needs analysis is an integral part of the team’s job.

**What does an ideal project look like?**

- It is important for the company
- It has the support of high-level management
- It is challenging for a top-level EMBA team of 5-6 members
- It will benefit from MBA knowledge
- Individual workload is in harmony with that of an EMBA course
- Feasible within the time framework above, with the team (in total) allocating approximately 30-35 hours per week
- Language of communication is English
- Project work doesn’t require physical presence of team members
What kind of partner organizations are we looking for?

- Organizations can be of any size from start-ups to industry leaders
- Organizations from any industry, including not-for-profit firms
- Organizations from any country, including emerging markets
- Organizations with ambitious strategic plans (growth, innovation, diversification, international expansion) or challenging problems
- Organizations ready to work with an Executive MBA group (discussing needs, sharing info, providing feedback, participate in performance evaluation)
- Organizations where different channels of online communication are accepted and preferred
- Organizations ready to support education and experiment with new methods of learning

What do we expect from partner companies?

- A challenging and current problem facing the firm
- A project owner (a higher-level manager who may benefit from the solution) and managerial attention
- A contact person for regular communication and commitment to being responsive
- Relevant info about the company, the project, and competitors including financial information if that is relevant to the project
- Regular communication, working contact with the team, and feedback at the milestones
- Demanding but supportive attitude
- Participation in final performance evaluation and feedback on the team’s performance as a grade is assigned to the team
- $1,000 financial commitment for coverage of potential direct costs such as travel or obtaining a database. Any additional costs would be approved in writing by the client prior to the expense being incurred.

What can partner companies expect from us?

- Extra capacities for solving an important business problem
- Business insight, Executive MBA knowledge and personal experience
- Professional problem analysis
- Recommendations with ideas on implementation summarized in a final presentation (report)
- Regular communication with the partner company
- Network building through an international top-level Executive MBA group
• Long-term cooperation and strategic partnership with Purdue University

**More info**
For more information and to discuss Active Learning Projects, please contact:

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