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## Education

### **FOSTERING THE CREATIVE SIDE OF BUSINESS STUDENTS**

**Shari Rudavsky, Globe Correspondent**

Since starting business school at Babson College last fall, Ben Anderson has been taking a new tack toward reading The New Yorker. No, he's not scanning the magazine for pieces on economics or corporate takeovers. He's reading the poetry. Anderson, 31, chalks up his newfound interest in verse to the poetry module he took in his early weeks of business school. Babson students start their graduate professional education with a class that aims to spark their creative spirits, such as poetry, art, nontraditional music, or rhythmic dance.

"What we're after is having students embrace ambiguity and take risks, try something that they haven't tried before," said Mary Pinard, an associate professor of English at Babson, who teaches the poetry section.

Babson is not alone in weaving such unorthodox lessons into its business school curriculum. **At Emory University's Goizueta Business School, students can enroll in a one-week "creativity boot camp" offered during the January break.**

**Business schools such as these want their students to graduate with skills that go beyond management or accounting. Arts courses do more than instill a sense of creativity in students, proponents say. They also help hone students' leadership skills.**

About 10 years ago, when Babson designed its so-called Creativity Stream - including poetry, puppetry, music, dance and movement, painting, improvisation, and fiction - students could choose which creativity process they would study.

Too many students, however, gravitated to areas in which they felt comfortable. Now, students are randomly placed in sections.

The overall class meets with the teachers a few times during the five-week session. Students also meet outside of class in smaller groups to plan presentations. At the end of the session, each group presents its work in front of the first-year class.

For Anderson and his cohorts, the presentation entailed reading poems written by peers. Subjects ranged from the Sept. 11 attacks to descriptions of a natural landscape. Some wrote about the difficulty they had writing poetry and one even talked about accounting.

Not only did the experience teach Anderson about the importance of team building, he said, it also introduced him to some key tenets of leadership.

"The bigger picture is we're preparing to be future leaders of companies and this has the element of introducing some risk to students early in the program and getting them to go out on a limb and try something new," he said.

**Students at Emory's business school in Atlanta may not pen verse, but the weeklong creativity class offers an opportunity to tap into little-used skills. Limited to 30 students, the course introduces students to creative arts, such as space design and improvisational theater.**

**"Business schools prepare the students' left brain. We really kick into gear the right brain," said Harry Vardis, who organized the class. These courses also teach students how to think on their feet in unfamiliar environments, said Vardis, the founder of Creative Focus Inc., an Atlanta qualitative and creative research company. "School prepares them for the usual and we take them to the unusual," he said. Not every business school squeezes the arts into its graduate programs.**

Bentley College places a strong emphasis on liberal arts for its undergraduate business majors with half of its course offerings in the arts and sciences. At the graduate level, however, the school concentrates on providing its students with a curriculum geared toward teaching career skills.

"One hopes the graduates have already had this in their undergraduate experience," said Maureen Goldman, an English professor and director of five-year and interdisciplinary programs. "What they have to learn in graduate school is fairly specific. There's limited time and this doesn't seem like it's the first thing they need to do."

Increasingly the world of business, however, welcomes input from the world of poetry. David Whyte, a poet and author of "The Heart Aroused: Poetry and the Preservation of Soul in Corporate America," brings poetry –

his own and works of others - to the corporate world to help inspire creativity.

"I'd say there's a tremendous thirst in the business world and in business schools to have another language, literally, and poetry has always been the grantor of the next generation of language," said Whyte, who is based in Langley, Wash.

First-year Babson student Sam Thompson doesn't spend his free time thinking about the purpose of poetry, but he says that when he graduates, the lessons he learned in the poetry class will stick.

Critiquing colleagues' work emphasized the need to be sensitive, said Thompson, 28, who wrote a poem about the beach and another about the death of a friend. In addition, the presentation required his group to focus on teamwork.

"Everything we did there could be applied to the work environment 100 percent," he said.

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