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## SPECIAL REPORT BUSINESS EDUCATION

# Wharton has abolished the phrase: 'We don't do that'

University of Pennsylvania's business school is not resting on its laurels, says Rebecca Knight



### PROFILE

In 1881, Joseph Wharton, one of the founders of the Bethlehem Steel Company, approached the University of Pennsylvania with a somewhat radical request: to create the world's first collegiate business school.

He had a notion to elevate the study of business from a trade into a rigorous profession, to start a school that would produce graduates who would become "pillars of the state, whether in private or in public life".

Wharton has come along way since then. Today, it is one of the most competitive business schools in the world and stands at the pinnacle of business education.

"The thing I like about Wharton and Penn is that it's not self-satisfied," says Patrick Harker, who has been dean of Wharton since 2000 and a long-time faculty member. "We're at the top of our game, but there is no sense here of people letting up. It's a culture and an attitude."

In addition to a standard MBA, Wharton offers an undergraduate programme as well as executive and doctoral programmes. With 215 full-time professors – and another 200 part-time professors – it boasts the largest faculty of any of the leading international business schools.

Like most other business schools, core classes in finance, marketing, management, and operations take up the first year of Wharton's MBA programme. In the second year, students have a choice of 18 majors including healthcare management, real estate and multi-national management.

Students are also required to take at least nine elective courses – ranging from urban fiscal policy to private equity in emerging markets to entrepreneurship and venture initiation.

Prof Harker says what differentiates Wharton's teaching

from other schools is that it is not tied to a single pedagogy. Professors use a variety of methods, including lectures, cases, simulations and action learning.

"We want to focus more on learning and less on teaching," he says. "Our focus is along the lines of: What are the most important things students need to learn and what is the most effective way for them to learn those things? It's freeing; you break out of old ways of doing things."

That said, Wharton's curriculum stresses quantitative reasoning, according to David Schmittlein, deputy dean: "At Wharton we are committed to a rigorous examination of real problems and a dedication and carefulness of getting the right answers."

He adds: "It can't just be the creative idea of the moment. It's a combination of critical and analytical thinking, coming up with an answer you can credibly defend based on logic and reasoning, not just based on your debating skills."

That emphasis on critical analysis is what attracted William Bundy, a 26-year-old Rhode Islander, to the

school. "I had been in the Navy, so I already knew how to make decisions under stressful situations.

"What I didn't know about was business. I didn't know how to calculate discounted cash flow or how to figure out the best marketing strategy for a particular product. Wharton is the best place to learn those fundamentals," he says.

Mr Bundy, who is currently an MBA candidate in Wharton's class of 2007, says that after graduation, he plans to go back into the Navy for three years and then try to get into investment banking. "This place is the best preparation for a practical setting," he says.

Like other top-tier universities, Wharton has pushed international studies to the forefront of its curriculum, partnering with business schools in Europe and Asia. It encourages students to study overseas in one of its exchange programmes with schools in 11 countries.

"We want students to be deeply engaged with [issues of globalisation]," says Prof Harker. "We need to continue to develop innovative overseas programmes and

partnerships with international schools. The demand for global perspective is insatiable."

Wharton also offers extensive executive education, including both customised and open enrolment programmes. "Our mission is impact through education," says Jon Spector, who has been the director of the executive programme for the past 18 months.

The open enrolment programmes offer courses in strategy, finance, leadership and marketing. "The topics are as varied as management," says Mr Spector, a former partner at McKinsey and a graduate of Harvard Business School.

The customised programmes, tailored to a particular company, represent the bulk – about 60 per cent – of the school's total executive education. Mr Spector says that Wharton's competitive advantages are the depth and breadth of its faculty as well as its razor-sharp focus on its clients. "We are very client-centered," he says. "We have abolished the phrase: We don't do that."

Mr Spector says that Wharton does in-depth needs assessment with the company prior to the customised programme, spending up to four months interviewing employee participants before they even set foot on campus.

He also recently instituted a post programme assessment – called observable outcomes – under which participants evaluate how they use what they learned in the programme. "What companies are buying is the impact that happens after the programme," he says.

Mr Spector says that Wharton is expanding its executive education programme, both in Philadelphia and overseas. The school has a presence in Japan and Korea.

"India and China are important priorities," he says, adding that the school recently opened a small office in Shanghai and launched its first open-enrolment programme for board directors in India. "We are slowly building a global presence," he says.



Jon M. Huntsman Hall at Wharton: the school is expanding overseas

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