



"I believe education is the best way to give back to society. I could be working somewhere else and making more money, but that wouldn't give me the chance to do what I want to do."

— Pedro Marquez,
Royal Roads University

GREGS ELLIOT



"Community colleges have an incredibly important role to play. Anyone who believes we're second-best is absolutely, outright wrong, based on the quality of professionalism that's coming out of our college today."

— Joan Yates, Camosun College

THE DEAN TEAM

Getting to know the leaders of Greater Victoria's business schools and their educational philosophies

by Brian Hartz

The deans of Greater Victoria's three post-secondary business schools couldn't be more different, but spend just an hour or so with them and similar themes begin to emerge.

Words like "global," "collective," "collaborative," and "community" feature prominently in their discourse on what modern business education should look like. The next generation of business leaders, they say, won't have to be taught concepts like

the triple bottom line (profits, people, and planet) — they'll be conscious of it almost instinctively.

"Students today, unlike a decade ago, even in a business context see their world as bigger than themselves," says Joan Yates, dean of the Camosun College School of Business.

"Of course, a student has to graduate from business school with strong business skills, but that's not enough," says her Royal Roads University counterpart, Pedro Marquez. "They need to be able to make decisions, work with

others, communicate, and problem-solve in the context of a global setting."

Ali Dastmalchian, dean of the University of Victoria's Peter B. Gustavson School of Business and the longest tenured of the three deans, has seen even more massive shifts in the way business is taught.

"When we started [the UVic business school] over 20 years ago, not a single business school in this country had international business as a core class," he recalls. "It was not considered important."

“My earliest inspirations were soccer players. The idea of competing and collaborating at the same time has always been very important to me.”

— Ali Dastmalchian,
University of Victoria

When School is Out

Douglas asked each dean why a business should hire one of their graduates.

YATES “They could come right out and start doing the job. They would have ambition and good networks in the community that they would keep and maintain. They would have some exposure [to business] already. They would have incredible energy; they would know how to do a report, to present incredibly well, how to be a member of a team. They would be engaged, interested in issues, and would want to make a difference.”

DASTMALCHIAN “Last year the average GPA of students getting into our program was 93.6 per cent — that’s higher than med school at UBC; it’s unbelievable. So in terms of academic qualifications, they are outstanding. But that’s just the entry point. These are students who are adventurous. They know that up to four times during the two years they’re with us, we will send them away — to co-op and an overseas location where the first language is not English. We are attracting students who have a better idea of who they are, who want to do things differently, go places they haven’t been before. One of my colleagues used the term ‘world-ready’ to describe our graduates. They are. They’re ready. They get to know themselves much better, and when you know yourself better, you can do a lot more than people who don’t know who they are.”

MARQUEZ “Doing business is not just about buying and selling, it’s about understanding your role in society. People don’t come here because they want to make more money; they want to be better managers, better people. I’m very proud that they are finding that here.”

Instantaneous communication via e-mail, texting, and social networking was also unheard of back then, as was the 24/7 news cycle that keeps executives on the clock nearly all day, every day, with smartphones at the ready. Underlying these momentous changes in the way business is done is the ever-quickening pace of technological innovation we’ve seen over the past two decades. It’s easier and faster than ever before to bring a product or service to market, yet the sheer volume of communication in our digital economy can drown out human voices and personalities — and leave behind those who don’t get onboard.

“My daughter is 14,” says Marquez, “and today’s technology is as natural for her as anything else. I didn’t have an e-mail account until I was doing my master’s degree. The world is changing very fast, it’s becoming global, and thanks to technology the way people relate to each other is changing.”

Dastmalchian agrees, to a point.

“Despite social media and the electronic connectedness of the world, you still need to be able to look into someone’s eyes and negotiate with them,” he says. “We have to look at each other and make a deal. It’s that human side of business we’re very keen on at this school.”

Amid overwhelming change, Greater Victoria’s business schools continue to produce outstanding graduates who will guide and shape the economies of tomorrow. They attract different types of students thanks to their complementary strengths, which are well known. The stories and views of the people who lead these institutions, however, may not be.

Promoting a Global Mindset

Dastmalchian, 56, was one of the first faculty members hired by UVic’s business school, coming aboard in 1991 as director of MBA

programs. He left for about five years when offered the dean’s position at the University of Lethbridge’s business school, but returned to UVic in 2002. Prior to his academic career, he worked for many years in Europe and the Middle East as a salesman and manager.

He grew up in the region of Iran associated with the Silk Road, the historical international trade route network, in a family of importers and exporters.

“Going across borders into different countries was a pretty natural thing for our family,” he says, recalling his first job: working in his grandfather’s factory, which produced raw materials for the carpet industry.

So it’s no surprise that “international” is one of the four pillars of the UVic business school’s mission statement (the others are “integrative,” “innovative,” and “socially responsible/sustainable”). To that end, the school offers a master’s degree in global business, and in addition to mandatory co-op

Rachel Cuthbert, CMA
Business Intelligence Analyst,
Aritzia LP

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TURN DATA
INTO
LITTLE
BLACK
DRESSES.**

What attracted Rachel Cuthbert to the Certified Management Accountant program was the opportunity it gave her to work in any industry. Fashion being one of her passions, it's no surprise Rachel landed at Aritzia, a North American fashion boutique. She credits her CMA with giving her the tools to understand the business side of fashion. It's a career choice that fits her perfectly. Find out more about the CMA Program and its focus on strategy, management and accounting at cmabc.com.

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placements, many students participate in international exchange programs in countries where English is not the primary language.

“Whether you’re opening a 7-Eleven or starting a boutique shop downtown, you cannot get away from international business,” Dastmalchian says. “As a business leader, young or not young, you need more now than ever in the past to be able to work with people who are not like you.”

Yates, 53, a transplant from Saskatchewan, joined Camosun in 1991, but like Dastmalchian, she left briefly to pursue another opportunity. That was in 1999. She returned in 2003 and became dean of the business school in autumn 2009. She believes businesspeople can learn a lot not only from other countries, but also from other forms of civilization. Thus, Camosun offers a diploma in business administration with an Indigenous business leadership option.

The program, she says, “Looks at a business model that’s quite antithetical to North American competitive models. You look at a collective — how does this serve the community? You look at how it benefits everybody; you look at profit as a way to return funds to a community. That kind of influence permeates this school in terms of the bigger picture, and I think it is an incredibly important lesson for right now.”

Marquez, meanwhile, is a walking, talking testament to globalization’s potential for good. The 42-year-old was born in the city of Campeche, in Mexico’s Yucatan Peninsula, but grew up in Mexico City, and says he aspired to a career that would improve the reputation of his country’s expatriates. He and his wife, Cecilia, a marketing and communications professional, pledged to raise their children as true global citizens.

Marquez cites two influential Latino writers — Mexico’s Octavio Paz and Chile’s Pablo Neruda, who in their later years served as ambassadors to India and France, respectively — as inspiration for his desire to succeed abroad.

“By reading their words, I became particularly sensitive to and completely engaged in this issue of the multicultural world,” he says. “I was able to move away from ethnocentrism, which is us believing we are the centre of the universe, to geo-centrism, which means no one is really right or wrong, it’s just that we’re different, and we need to understand those differences, and value and appreciate them.”

Marquez is blunt in his assessment of his homeland’s role on the world stage. He says Mexico has played the global game well in that it has negotiated many free-trade agreements with other countries, yet it has not produced very many leaders in international business.

“Mexicans haven’t done a good job in becoming expatriates,” he says. “I’m part of the generation that wants to change that. When you think of Mexicans working abroad, you think of them picking fruit in California. Not many universities here would have a dean who’s Mexican, who grew up in Mexico. I’m very proud of that.”

It comes as no surprise, then, that Marquez loves Mexico and cherishes its culture; he and Cecilia speak Spanish at home and strive to instil in their children the strong family values with which they themselves were raised. He says his daughter, 14, and eldest son, 13 — both born in Canada while he was a graduate student at the University of Calgary — are, ironically, much more interested in Mexican culture than their youngest son, 7, who was born in Mexico.

“I think my family illustrates the new global world,” he says with pride. “The boundaries we grew up with are disappearing. The notion of nationality is changing. My little one is the most Canadian of them all [while] my Canadians are the ones who don’t want to speak English at home.”

A New Style of Leadership

Running a business school can be a lot like running a business, the deans say, except that you answer to a dizzying number and variety of stakeholders. Take UVic, for example. In 2008-09 it had 760 students enrolled in BComm or MBA programs. The year before, it worked with 316 employers on co-op placements for 666 students. Every year, more than 150 students participate in international exchange programs at more than 55 partner institutions in some 30 countries. On top of that, it maintains a roster of 200 executive mentors and a 60-member board of advisers. And as of 2007-08, it could count more than 4,000 alumni around the world.

Above Dastmalchian’s desk, tacked to a bulletin board, is a poster of a Dalmatian (get it?) whose spots are a rainbow of colours instead of the usual black. The poster is emblazoned with the slogan “Think Differently.” It’s a mindset the dean has to adopt every day as he manages the various interests and expectations of the school’s stakeholders.

“The philosophy of the program is different, the approach to education is different, the kind of leaders we want to produce are different,” he says. “Business schools have done a very good job of separating people: ‘Oh, I’m a marketing guy, I don’t need to know anything about accounting or finance’; or, ‘I’m an HR guy, it’s not my problem.’ And they stereotype all these people. What we are doing here is breaking these stereotypes, breaking the old approach to business education.”

UVic, he explains, challenges students with total business problems instead of just, say, an investment or accounting problem. The aim is an integrated, holistic approach to business leadership.

“Our students are always faced with complexities,” he says. “Understanding the language of different expertise within the field of business is so important. Because even though most of our grads end up being specialists in marketing, or CAs, or financial analysts, and so on, we think the education we have provided them gives them a better understanding of connectivity in business issues. It makes them a better specialist.”

“The time of putting only the Western stamp on people’s forehead for management is over,” says Ali Dastmalchian. “We’ve tried to teach the same management theories around the world. But because the world is flatter, because of the ease of business travel, our theories, our ideas, our concepts are changing.”

Yates’ outlook on business education was influenced by Saskatchewan writer and actor Jean Freeman, under whom she studied in university. “She was a coach before coaching was fashionable,” she says. Freeman, who had roles in *Corner Gas* and *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, taught Yates that know-it-all, top-down business leadership is a thing of the past.

“Her lesson to me was ‘always ask.’ Always ask what you don’t know. Don’t be apprehensive about not knowing it. That’s really critical.”

This philosophy is evident at Camosun, with its continuing education programs and flexible course schedules, where nontraditional students can pursue a degree while they work. Some might be poised to take the next step toward leadership, but need a particular course or qualification to round out their resume.

“We put a lot of emphasis on applied nature — on cases, on interacting with industry and business, on working,” says Yates. “The average [Camosun] student works 28 hours per week outside of their schoolwork, on the job. So it had better count when they come to school. We make sure they’re hitting the ground running and that we’re doing what we can to accommodate that.”

Yates, a marketing and communications management professional before her transition to academia, worked on the City of Victoria’s successful 2002 campaign to borrow, via public referendum, \$30 million to build the Save-on-Foods Memorial Centre. She compares her successes in stakeholder relations with those she has achieved in the classroom.

“When you’re able to get other people to feel the passion that you do, it’s an amazing opportunity and an incredible privilege.”

At Camosun, business faculty maintain close ties with professional associations such as the Canadian Public Relations Society. Also, business leaders are frequently invited to campus to share their experiences with students and serve as mentors.

“Mentorship is critical,” says Yates. “Young folks just need to ask. Many people today at the senior level are only too happy to give young people that hand up.”

Faculty and staff also benefit from links with businesspeople, she says, adding that curriculum changes have been made based on feedback from the business community.

“It’s not from a textbook, it’s not from a highly theoretical context, it’s from talking and asking ‘are we meeting your needs?’”

At Royal Roads, which has produced some 3,500 MBAs since it was founded in 1995, the typical business student may already be a leader, but is looking to reach the

next level. That’s why the university’s School of Management shuns the traditional university learning model in favour of one that is applied, experiential, and uses students’ own experiences as part of the learning process.

“We don’t lecture,” says Marquez. “The average age of our students is 41 years old. A 41-year-old individual with over 15 years of work experience is not interested in a textbook discussion, or having a professor speak for two hours non-stop.”

Thus, Marquez seeks a distinct breed of faculty member to serve students in the School of Management.

“I look for professional, real-life experience enriched by academic credentials,” he says. “Yes, my faculty have doctorate-level degrees. And they have important research agendas. But most importantly, they’ve been out there; they’ve done it, they’ve seen it. They can share their experiences and successes.”

It’s a different pedagogical model than UVic or Camosun, he says, but each institution’s unique approach to business education is what makes them successful — and ultimately more beneficial to the careers of their students as well as the economy of Greater Victoria.

“We support each other and we complement each other,” Marquez says.

“I feel an enormous sense of collegiality with Ali and Pedro. There’s a place for all three programs in meeting the needs of the community,” adds Yates.

Dastmalchian agrees: “We are very good partners — it’s really a very comfortable arrangement. ■

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