

November 10, 2006

DOW JONES REPRINTS

Career & Executive Education

Business Schools Set Course For Chartered Waters

Floating Universities

Let Seafaring Scholars

Broaden Horizons

By RHEA WESSEL

SPECIAL TO THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

November 10, 2006

C.Y. Tung, a Chinese shipping magnate, was fond of saying that ships can transport ideas as well as cargo.

As a teenager, the young man from Shanghai worked as a shipping clerk; some 40 years later, in 1970, Mr. Tung was one of the world's leading independent ship owners and the founder of the Seawise Foundation Ltd., a nonprofit corporation. Over the decades, Mr. Tung's foundation has helped thousands of students from around the world experience just what he meant about ships and ideas.

Mr. Tung was one of the founding fathers of shipboard education -- the practice of turning vessels into floating universities that carry students from one port to the next, from one experience to the next.

Shipboard education -- and with it business education -- will receive another boost next September when a new program for undergraduate and graduate students launches on its maiden voyage. The program, called the Scholar Ship, is backed by Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines and six universities from around the world, including the University of California, Berkeley, and Macquarie University in Australia. The schools will issue academic credit to students to be transferred back to their home institutions. A multinational faculty will teach international business, international communications and international relations onboard the program's ship.

Like Mr. Tung, the founders of the Scholar Ship envision people from diverse cultural backgrounds living, learning and playing together at sea.

"We have a strong focus on intercultural communication skills because we find this very

important for the future work force," says René Lenssen, the program's regional director for Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

Some 160 students have applied for the program and about half are interested in the undergraduate and graduate business programs, Mr. Lenssen says.

As the Scholar Ship continues to develop its program before the first ship sets sail, other programs are racking up more experience as floating universities. And one of the trends is the increasing popularity of business classes.

Old Dominion University in Virginia offers three graduate-level business classes to U.S. Navy sailors and pilots serving at sea. Capt. Dick Whalen, USN (Ret.), the director of military activities for the school, says Old Dominion began offering business courses from the outset in 1996, based on strong demand. The classes -- organizational management, marketing management and accounting for managers -- are part of a degree program that is accredited by the AACSB, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business.

Navy personnel listen to lectures in a below-deck classroom outfitted with two-way audio and video. Some 30 ships in the Navy have the technology to offer the satellite broadcasts to students.

"In 10 years of doing this, we have been able to provide these courses without major drops in communications," says Capt. Whalen. Occasionally, however, some students have had to excuse themselves from class to fly a mission over the Persian Gulf or attend to other matters.

Semester at Sea is by far the program with the most experience operating a floating university -- one with real-life professors rather than virtual ones. Backed by the Seawise Foundation, Semester at Sea and its predecessor programs -- the University of the Seven Seas and World Campus Afloat -- have been sending students around the world for more than 40 years. At present, the program caters to undergraduates and accepts seniors into its lifelong learning program, but Semester at Sea has offered a summer law program and is considering graduate programs since its recent move to the University of Virginia.

Two decades ago on Semester at Sea, business courses were few and far between. Now business is the program's No. 1 major, says Les McCabe, the president of the Institute for Shipboard Education, which operates Semester at Sea. "There's an increasing sense that undergraduates need an international experience before they go into graduate school," he says.

The beauty of shipboard education is twofold: Theoretical course work can be brought to life with in-port experiences and via shipboard living. Anyone who has spent time onboard a ship will tell you that the closed-circuit environment of a ship heightens the need for intercultural communication skills and opens up numerous opportunities for informal learning.

Robert E. Kelley is a professor at the Tepper School of Business at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh who sailed on Semester at Sea in spring 2000 and spring 2003. Prof. Kelley says he spent more time than usual counseling his students on their career and

education paths because he frequently saw them in informal settings -- at meals, in the lounge or on deck watching the sunset.

"The voyage was having a life-altering impact," says Prof. Kelley. "A student was going to be an accountant and now he wants to go into the Peace Corps." He adds: "Students and faculty don't really have a place to hide from each other."

He also says the onboard-teaching experience was the most demanding he has experienced as a professor -- and it wasn't because he had to chase his chalkboard as it rolled back and forth when the ship pitched in choppy seas. Prof. Kelley and other teachers keep a demanding schedule because class is held each day the ship is at sea regardless of whether it is a weekend. In port, Prof. Kelley was leading excursions, teaching or trying to take in the sights with his wife and two children who traveled with him.

"It was morning-to-night nonstop teaching," he says. Prof. Kelley's wife, a law professor, taught on both voyages as well.

In port, Prof. Kelley led field programs that tied into his class work and found lots of topics for discussion. After students haggled over the price of soap-stone sculptures in Kenya, Prof. Kelley led a discussion about the fluidity of prices. "You could come back and talk about what strategies work in reducing and increasing prices," he says.

When the ship docked in Japan, students had to experience a day in the life of a Japanese salaryman. They had to get up at 6 a.m. and commute into town, shoving themselves onto overfilled public transportation.

"Many of the students who come on Semester at Sea haven't traveled widely," he says. "There's a gradual awakening. They experience the world outside their realm and it changes their perspective."

Rick Rickertsen, now in his mid-40s, sailed on Semester at Sea as a 21-year-old engineering student at California's Stanford University and one who didn't know what he was going to do after college. Mr. Rickertsen says sailing around the world and stopping in more than 10 ports gave him a global perspective that he relies on today as a managing partner of Pine Creek Partners, a private-equity firm.

After graduation, Mr. Rickertsen accepted a job offer from Morgan Stanley; two years later he went to Harvard University for an M.B.A.

"I was always tilted toward business when I came out of Stanford, partly because of Semester at Sea," he says. "I wanted to broaden my horizons as much as possible."

More than two decades later, the shipboard experience remains vivid for Mr. Rickertsen. "When I sit in a meeting with an Indian entrepreneur, I think I have a different understanding" than colleagues, he says, adding, "The experience permeates every part of my life."

URL for this article:

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB116310840505519009.html>