

A class act for professionals

The Fletcher School is branching out and offering executive courses after demand from corporate clients, says Rebecca Knight

It may not have been on purpose, but the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy – the oldest graduate school of international relations in the US – has suddenly found itself in the executive education business.

Last year, Microsoft and Raytheon, as well as a non-profit group, approached the school, at Tufts University in Massachusetts, to develop customised programmes for their mid- to upper-level professionals.

The programmes, which involved courses on international political and economic affairs, were a big hit. This year, Fletcher has three repeat customers on its hands and is “quietly and cautiously” working to attract others, according to school officials.

Executive education programmes – which have in the past been the domain of business schools – are typically marketed to companies as a way to hone their workers’ skills with courses in finance, marketing, and sales. But, according to Stephen Bosworth, the dean of Fletcher, companies nowadays are in search of more than management refresher courses. Rather, they are looking for ways to boost their executives’ knowledge of international politics, culture and business.

Fletcher’s programmes are ideal for those companies seeking to “upgrade the globalisation skills” of key employees, says Mr Bosworth. “The rationale for all of this is the perceived need for a greater understanding of the political, economic, and cultural context within which these companies are operating,” he says.

The programmes, which are conducted by Fletcher and Tufts faculty, are individually tailored, depending on their varying needs and specifications of the companies.

For instance, Microsoft

asked for a distillation of the school’s overall international curriculum, while Raytheon, the military contractor, requested a programme on political, economic and cultural issues for operating in the Middle East.

Deborah Nutter, senior associate dean and professor at Fletcher, says the school’s strength in diplomatic training is what gives it the edge in the executive education realm.

“From the beginning, we have educated global leaders in all sectors,” she says.

This is not the first time the school has dipped into MBA territory. In 2000, Fletcher introduced a year-long global Master of Arts programme – GMAP – that aimed to “plug a gap that the MBA does not fill”.

The programme combines three, two-week residencies – two on the Fletcher campus and the third at an international site – with the rest of the year devoted to online learning. It covers topics such as negotiation, trade, economics and politics from a global perspective.

Prof Nutter says that GMAP’s success inspired the school to consider branching out to new areas, but the move to executive education was “serendipitous”. Indeed, she says, Fletcher’s executive education programmes are not necessarily in competition with programmes at business schools.

“What we’re doing is complementary [to executive education at business schools],” she says. “If a company wanted to do better at running their core operations, then they can go to a business school for that, but they can’t get this understanding of the political and economic environment.”

She says the companies that have approached the school so far are ones that “need to understand the world for their clients”.

For example, Microsoft’s programme, which is geared

towards 100 public sector directors and technology officers, is spread out over two years. The programme kicked off in Beijing and is still ongoing. It focuses on international negotiation, international finance and

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international trade, economics and investment.

Raytheon’s programme was a three-day course at Fletcher, just outside Boston, on Middle Eastern culture, politics and business. The course comprised lectures on language, customs and the culture of the region, Middle Eastern economics and Islamic finance, and integrated security and defence in the Middle East.

Paul Mongillo, director of regional operations east at Raytheon, says it was a way to “prepare [the company’s] people to do business internationally”. “In a business school setting, you’ll get a good idea of how to do business in a region, but you may not get an understanding of how to be aware of the culture. It’s those softer skills that enable you to do business smartly,” he says.

The school also designed a programme for the Institute for the Advanced Study of Nonviolent Conflict. The programme, which took place last summer, included discussions on why certain civilian-led struggles succeed while others fail, the roles that the media played in struggles, as well as debates

on recent successful civilian-led uprisings in Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine.

Last year the school received \$750,000 from the three programmes, but Mr Bosworth says he is taking a cautious approach to these new funds. International affairs will remain the backbone of the school, he says. “We’ve been quite conservative about this. We don’t want to deviate or drain resources away from our core focus.”

The dean says that while he is “reluctant to wire the [money] into the school’s hard budget”, he plans to invest it in “strategic, new initiatives” such as the opening of Fletcher’s new Center for Emerging Market Enterprises, which will look at the study and application of best practices in emerging market enterprises, with conferences, reports, sponsored research and visits from senior business executives.

Prof Nutter says that, in addition to the repeat programmes for Microsoft, Raytheon and the Institute for the Advanced Study of Nonviolent Conflict planned for this year, the school has slowly begun to sound out other prospective corporate clients.

“We’ve put off marketing so far, because we’re not planning a massive programme,” she says. “The school did three programmes this year. We plan to double that amount next year and perhaps double again the year after that.”

Prof Nutter says she is confident that companies will see value in what Fletcher has to offer. “We’ve been preparing the world’s leaders for a long time,” she says. “They cannot get this from a traditional business school, but they need it. They’re not going to have successful international strategies without it. It’s a complicated, bumpy world out there.”



Broad curriculum: Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy covers such areas as Islamic finance and civilised uprisings in Ukraine Jon Chomitz