

Villanova's business boot camp gets a diversity makeover

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by [Tim Hyland](#)

For nine weeks this summer, about 70 students will gather at Villanova University for a daily grind of three-hour-long classes, group-project work sessions and, probably, no small amount of homework.

Not exactly summer fun.

But Villanova School of Business administrators say students who complete the summer program walk away with almost as much business knowledge as they could have collected in four full years of college.

"There are very few programs like this in the entire country," said Ron Hill, senior associate dean of intellectual strategy at Villanova. "It's a hybrid between the basic foundation you would get in an academic environment along with the advanced skills you would get in an executive education program."

Under Hill's guidance, and with some help from accounting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers, the program is shifting its focus, getting diverse and aiming high.

New course offerings reflect the demands of modern business, and students entering the program today, Hill said, can expect to spend as much time working on leadership skills and entrepreneurship as they do accounting or management.

"It's evolved," Hill said of the program. "We still teach the basic principles -- accounting, management, finance. But we also believe that students can absorb those skills rather quickly, so we're also going to do higher-order skills."

Students will be exposed to personal and business ethics, global strategy and entrepreneurial thinking.

"Half the program is now a basic primer on business, and the second half is really built around making sure they know what leadership skills are necessary for the 21st century," Hill said.

Tuition for the Summer Business Institute runs \$8,175 for nine weeks of classes. The cost includes textbooks, transportation and some meals. Students also get the use of a laptop.

Given the amount of work they'll face during the summer, Hill said, it's a laptop they'll likely put to good use.

"It's very intensive," Hill said. "They will have at least two full sessions a day. They have a lot of group work and projects and homework. My guess, it will take students about nine hours a day to get done what they need to get done, maybe even 10 hours."

Among the main reasons for the changes to the Institute, Hill said, was Villanova's desire to attract more students of color.

It's a nice coincidence, then, that the changes are implemented just as the university finalizes a new diversity partnership with PricewaterhouseCoopers, which recruits heavily from the program and aims to improve diversity in its own firm.

"I said to them, 'It's never going to change if we don't produce a pipeline of those students -- your success is going to be determined by our pipeline,'" Hill said. "But we couldn't do that until we brought a critical mass of minority students into places like Villanova and trained them. So PWC said, 'Maybe we ought to find a way to get them there.'"

Working with Villanova, PWC will do just that.

The firm will provide annual scholarships for an as-yet-undetermined number of minority students at the institute.

In return, says PWC campus recruiter Megan Charlton, the firm hopes to increase its own access to diverse talent.

"Villanova has been a great source of students for us, so we wanted to partner together and hopefully lead more minority students to get interested in business," Charlton said.

Villanova helps PWC identify possible candidates for the program. Then PWC interviews the interested candidates before picking a few who seem talented enough, and interested enough, to pursue a career in accounting.

Down the road, those students could then one day land at PWC, Charlton said.

"We're looking for intelligent, hardworking students who have an interest in business," she said. "Our main goal is that they have to be interested in business, and maybe would want to pursue a master's in accounting for a further degree. That's kind of the end goal."

Already, Hill said, changes made to the Summer Business Institute seem to be paying off.

After attracting about 50 students per session in its first 10 years, the incoming 2007 class should reach 70. Among the new applicants, said Hill, is a physician looking to make the jump from clinical practice to administration who sees the institute as a way to pull it off -- just the kind of student Villanova is seeking.

One of this year's scholarship winners, Villanova freshman Amir Jones of Philadelphia, said he had an interest in both business and engineering, and had trouble deciding which field to major in. Knowing he could get a business minor through the institute in just one summer, while spending the rest of his college career finishing the engineering degree, helped sell him on Villanova.

"I figure that everyone should have some kind of business background, no matter what field you're in," Jones said.

"We have a record number of people applying, so we actually have to find a way to either cut down or expand the program," Hill said. "We feel very good about this program. It seems to be selling itself."