

A Decade of EMBA Excellence

Alexandra Skinner speaks to Professor Andrea Schenker-Wicki »

The University of Zurich– The Journey Continues

Q The Zurich Institute of Higher Education was renamed the University of Zurich (UZH) over 170 years ago. What would you say has been UZH's contribution to the domestic and international business community over this period?

The university was founded in 1833 and is over 178 years old. I think that the greatest contribution has been the education of students from Switzerland and around the world. Combined with our neighbour the technical university, ETH, we are the largest educational campus in Switzerland.

The UZH EMBA celebrated its 10th anniversary at the end of last year.

Q (a) How did you mark the occasion?
We held a big celebration including a dinner with keynote speakers and podium discussions, and we invited all of our alumni, students and faculty members, as well as people from our corporate network and the media

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– almost 500 guests from politics, business, science and society. The keynote speaker was Switzerland's first and only astronaut, Claude Nicollier, who spoke to us about his exciting experience in space. The podium discussion that followed focused on business and new frontiers, featuring Urs Rohner, President of the Board of Credit Suisse, Samih Sawiris, Egyptian businessman and billionaire, and Christine Beerli, Vice-President of the ICRC. The entire event was a huge success!

Q (b) How has the UZH EMBA evolved over the last decade?

We have put a clear emphasis on intercultural management and are developing it further

to focus on this even more. The UZH EMBA offers study trips to other countries: to Yale University in the United States, Fudan University in Shanghai, China, and (optionally) to the Indian School of Business in Hyderabad, India. The trips also include various site visits and networking events. In addition, we plan to launch study trips to South Africa, Latin America and Russia. The last three locations will be optional and are open to our alumni network.

The UZH EMBA Difference

Q What sets the UZH EMBA apart from its competition?

I think that it is our clear focus on intercultural management that sets us apart. In addition, we have the advantage of being university-based in contrast to a lot of stand-alone business schools. This means that we have access to interdisciplinary resources and we can easily call on faculty from other schools to become involved in the programme.

Q Please can you tell our readers about the UZH EMBA student profile, in terms of experience, age, industry background and ambition?

The average age of our EMBA students is 38. However, there is a certain variation and we may have students who are in their early 30s if they have outstanding qualifications and, of course, we have students who are much older too. On average, students have around 10 years of business experience and they typically come from Switzerland, Germany and Austria. An Executive MBA programme means people are living, working and studying in parallel, and so they cannot always move easily.

We have a huge variety of industries represented in our classes, and we are very lucky in that respect. Even though Zurich is a financial hub, we don't just have professionals from banking and finance – our students come from all services and industries, even the arts and from the public sector. It's always a very exciting mixture, and our students greatly enjoy that diversity.



THE UNIVERSITY OF ZÜRICH
(MAIN BUILDING)



MORNING LIGHT IN LIMMAT RIVER, ZURICH

Q The nature of an EMBA means that those enrolled are busy professionals balancing studying with both work and a private life. How has UZH structured the program to support students in getting this balance?

The students come to the university once a fortnight for three days, with breaks in the summer and winter, and they have access to the professors, tutors, the library and all of the university resources outside of these times. This setting allows our students to combine their day-to-day business with their executive education, saving the costs of paying for cover and allowing some spare time for family and friends.

Q Last time we met you spoke about the possibility of looking to emerging countries for future study trips. Has this plan progressed?

We are soon going to open South Africa, as I mentioned before, with traditional site visits and lectures but I would also like to introduce aspects of corporate volunteering. I have a senior researcher from South Africa who is currently working on this.

Q UZH prides itself on taking a 'holistic approach' in its teaching methods. Please can you expand on this and explain how this is put into practice in the classroom?

For executive education you need a holistic approach. You cannot just focus on a very traditional course where you have a professor in front of the class with the students listening. The watchword here is co-operative learning: everyone learns from each other which is a

great asset. Of course we also have blended learning, combining e-learning modules with traditional learning, group work, case studies and last but not least a research project at the end of the study, the master's thesis.

Q Many schools talk about internationalisation in terms of both student and faculty profiles. What does 'internationalisation' mean at UZH?

That is a very good question, and it doesn't just mean using English as the classroom language. Internationalisation, for us, means to really confront students with global changes, with global data and cases, with global surveys and with the different attitudes and institutions of diverse nations. To make our faculty really international, we invite professors to join us from the countries and regions we focus on in our programme. This is something that we are very strict about. We believe that if we want to teach intercultural management, for instance, with respect to Russia or China, we should engage Russian or Chinese professors, or professors who have lived in those regions for at least 10 years, rather than Swiss nationals. This means that the teaching isn't second-hand, but that it really comes from first-hand experience.

UZH EMBA Application

Q Can you talk me through the EMBA UZH application process?

We have a very selective application process. Firstly, we have telephone screening, as many interested applicants will contact us this way. Then we also offer one-to-one counselling, information events, open days and we visit several MBA fairs in Europe to get in touch with future candidates. Finally, they hand in their application (C.V., qualifications, letters of recommendation etc.). We have a close look at each dossier, and invite those who meet our requirements for an interview and assessment. I meet all of the people that we accept into the EMBA. I would say that we have four to five applicants for each place, and we accept 40 students per cohort.



AN EMBA LECTURE



CALATRAVA LIBRARY

“For us, internationalisation means to really confront students with global changes.”



EMBA STUDENTS

BIOGRAPHY

★ **Andrea Schenker-Wicki** is Professor of Business Administration in the Faculty of Economics, Business Administration and IT at the University of Zurich, and Dean of the Executive MBA program. With effect from August 2012, she will also take office as Vice President of the University of Zurich.

Q What are the key criteria that professionals should consider when looking at which EMBA to apply for?

The most important criteria when considering an EMBA application should be whether you like the curriculum. Potential students should also consider how interested they are in studying, and whether it will fit into their personal and professional life, as well as whether they can afford the time that it takes.

Career Support

Students at the UZH EMBA have access to Career Coaching.

Q (a) How important do you think it is for universities and business schools to provide students with career services in today's economic climate?

Career coaching and services are very important in executive education. People don't always feel safe in their jobs, or they may want to consider different paths. We offer these individuals career services and career coaching. The latter, for instance, focuses on whether you are really on the right career track for you. Our students like this, and they take advantage of it. In addition, they benefit from a pre-selected network of coaches, headhunters and executive search specialists that they can get in touch with. And last but not least, they have access to our wide alumni network.

Students outside of executive education don't need these services as much. We are very fortunate to have a very low unemployment rate in Switzerland, and normally students find jobs before they have finished their master's or bachelor's thesis.

Q (b) Does the inclusion of such services make companies wary of their employees undertaking an EMBA?

I think that companies are always worried if they have EMBA students, as they know that they often change job afterwards. On the other hand, the same companies also benefit from well-educated employees and EMBA graduates that have just left other companies seeking new challenges.

Q (c) How do you maintain and develop your relationships with local and national companies, and how important is their feedback?

Our relationship with the business world is very important. We have an advisory board, which is made up of members from the business and scientific world. They give us valuable input and help with evaluations. We always ask them, the alumni, and the students for their thoughts on the programme, whether they are happy with it, or if there is something missing. Hence, we are continuously developing our curriculum.

Although we don't have explicit contracts with companies, we have noticed that certain companies frequently send people to us. That is a good sign as it shows that they are pleased with the education that their employees receive.

The Next Step

Q What can we expect from the University of Zurich in terms of program innovations over the next twelve to eighteen months?

One thing will be the inclusion of the new study trips, particularly in emerging markets.

Another major change that we plan in the near future is to stop handing out loads of paper to our students. To date, we have been copying over 4000 pages during an EMBA for each student, – environmentally, this is anything but sustainable. In view of the new technologies now available (tablets, apps etc.), we will switch to completely paperless course preparation. All the lecture notes will be handed out electronically and the students can read, comment and annotate them on the tablets they will be given at the beginning of their studies – no matter where they are. Combined with a specific app for our programme, this will be a cornerstone on the path towards a more interactive, flexible and sustainable learning environment in our EMBA programme. □