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ISC immersion course like no other classroom experience

MBA students will have opportunity to 'soak up' supply chain expertise from IBM

Twenty-eight MBA students from Penn State and Howard Universities will shortly begin a course in supply chain management at IBM unlike any experience available on campus.

The students have been selected to participate in IBM's second Integrated Supply Chain Immersion Course where they will meet with eight IBM supply chain vice presidents and another dozen content experts over three intensive days of learning.

"Rarely do we get an opportunity in a class room to study one particular company in depth, and it's not usually with the very top executives and experts," says David Fitzpatrick, Director of the SCM Program at Howard University. "The IBM immersion course offers students the opportunity to study a major corporation's supply chain from beginning to the end, and is vastly superior to what we normally accomplish on campus with charts and guest lecturers."

Supply chain simulation exercise

The course at IBM East Fishkill, NY, between February 28 and March 2, will expose students to everything from supply chain strategy development, new business growth initiatives, and supply chain information management, through sourcing, manufacturing and customer fulfillment, as well as a tour of the 300 MM plant in Fishkill. Both universities worked with IBM to develop the agenda, which will also include an interactive supply chain exercise that involves the students applying supply chain concepts in a simulated environment.

Dr. Terry Harrison, Supply Chain Professor at Penn State's Smeal College of Business says the immersion course gives students the chance to review the supply chain big picture. What's missing in the classroom is the opportunity to interact with the people who are working in the supply chain day in and day out, and to learn directly from those kinds of experts. The students will benefit from real life experience, real decision making, and real results from a state-of-the-art supply chain driving a best in class company with a long track record, he says

Surprising and overwhelming experience

Only students from the Smeal College at Penn State participated in the first immersion course held last year, and Dr Harrison described the experience as surprising and impressive. The students were surprised at how frank and transparent the IBM executives were, impressed by the level of management they were talking to and the depth and breadth of the discussions.

Ellen Carter, IBM ISC University Relations, says the immersion course benefits both students and IBM. She says the 28 students are the industry's future supply chain leaders, and that the immersion course gives IBM valuable exposure to two leading universities with programs specializing in supply chain management.

"The students come away with greater insight into the workings of the supply chain, and IBM benefits from a frank interchange of questions and ideas from the students who often have a different perspective of the supply chain to stimulate entirely fresh thinking.

Where the action is

Dr Harrison uses an analogy to best describe what the Penn State class hopes to gain from the IBM course. The students are close to graduation, and we're spending a considerable amount of time in the class room trying to help them understand the various aspects of supply chain management, and the components that make up the supply chain. But on campus it's like looking through a set of binoculars. The IBM immersion course brings all the various components of the supply chain into sharp focus so that students can both see and understand how all the pieces and components fit and work together."

David Fitzpatrick says the Howard University MBA students are committed and dedicated to a supply chain career. "While none would turn down an opportunity to become a CEO, they do believe the supply chain is where the action is. We have a saying -- without good finance you have a business with potential cash flow problems, but without an efficient and effective supply chain, you don't have a business.

