

UO continues rebuilding executive MBA program

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Even as a new group of students begins the traditional Oregon Executive MBA program, University of Oregon faculty and administrators continue to construct the new version that will take root in 2013.

The revision process for the Portland-based program got a boost in June, when the UO brought on board Wes Balda as director of the Oregon Business Institute, which oversees the OEMBA.

Balda is working with OEMBA Executive Director Erika Foin to transform the program into one in which students obtain a series of graduate certificates leading to their MBA. Many students may simply limit themselves to earning one or two certificates. Likely certificate topics include quantitative skills, strategic thinking and leadership development.

No other schools incorporate graduate certificates into their executive MBA programs to the extent that OEMBA will, said Balda, who earlier in his career was the founding dean at the school of management at George Fox University in Newberg, where he developed the school's executive and professional MBA tracks.

Besides the certificates, OEMBA students will also need to take some core classes to obtain the MBA.

For 26 years the UO worked with Oregon State University and Portland State University to conduct the OEMBA, producing more than 900 graduates. Early this year, the three schools announced that OSU and PSU would end their affiliation with the program in 2013, and UO would reshape the OEMBA on its own.

The certificate approach offers several advantages, said Balda, who recently began reaching out to Portland-area business leaders to serve on an advisory board. This so-called building-block method provides students flexibility, including the ability to start earning one resume-enhancing certificate while deciding whether to pursue the full MBA.

Also, the courses and content of a certificate program can be combined and altered more quickly than a traditional MBA pro-



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Wes Balda says the new OEMBA will rely heavily on graduate certificate programs.

gram, allowing the program to stay on top of developing trends and hot topics.

The OEMBA program, located at 200 S.W. Market Street in downtown Portland, currently costs \$58,000. Balda said the revised program will cost more, but he intends to keep it less than the \$83,000 charged by the University of Washington for its executive MBA program — which Balda considers a rival for Northwest prestige.

Balda also anticipates a new scheduling approach. Currently, students attend classes on one day every weekend. That could change to two days a month, augmented by some online teaching. That will make it easier for faculty from Eugene to teach the Portland program. Moreover, it will make the program more attractive to professionals living in Seattle or the Bay Area.

As head of the Oregon Business Institute, Balda oversees another program: Oregon Executive Education. That program consists of short courses — perhaps an intense two-day workshop — often customized for a corporation that desires quick training for its executives on a narrow topic.

Balda intends to integrate those short, noncredit courses with the OEMBA, providing OEMBA participants one more learning avenue.