



# THE INTERNATIONAL MBA

» Dr. Muscia talks to Jonathan Calens

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## Program Overview

**Kindly define Arcadia's MBA value proposition?** The value proposition for the MBA is very consistent with the school's own value proposition, reflecting the three pillars on which our school stands.

The first one is a global perspective, which permeates all of our courses, with every

course in our program being taught from that perspective. We also become involved with international speakers and work on international cases within each of the courses.

The second pillar is integrative learning: and that concept enables us to integrate basic theory with practical application. For example, as part of the experiential learning program, we take our students in the MBA program on two, one-week travel experiences: one week is

spent in a developed economy and another in a developing economy so there is an integration of global and actual experiential-type learning; further integration ensures that all our courses dovetail, and are not merely independent silos of learning.

The third pillar of our program is personal attention. To facilitate this aspect, we maintain relatively small class sizes, with our faculty being highly interactive and accessible to our students. Additionally, because our students are working in a cohort based model and travel and attend class together for the duration of the 22 month program, they tend to bond, become close and work together during the program.

“ In other words, if they’re not already using a concept they’ve learned in class on Monday, they’ll be using it in a week or two. What they learn is that relevant to today’s world. ”

**Part-time MBA program can be completed in person or online in 22 months. Which of the aforementioned options is more popular?** First, we are relatively new in the online arena; the online program went live in the fall semester, therefore, it goes without saying that the ground program is a lot more popular at this point.

There is a great deal of competition for the online student. A different type of marketing is required, and we are addressing that currently. I would remark that online programs seem to be much more popular on the West Coast than here in the East, where there is more of a traditional focus on education. I think that a number of the big schools have been slow to adopt online programs.

**Arcadia is considered to be a technology intensive institution. To what extent does this benefit your students?** I think that technology in general is changing the landscape of education. It is, of course, part and parcel of the online programs; but in so far as it concerns our ground-based classes we also use it for support and additional input.

In my opinion, technology permits more self-directed and more problem-based learning; there is more feedback for students on an individual basis. Although discussion in the classroom tends to be wider, not everyone gets the opportunity to participate on a regular basis. However, the use of technology facilitates greater instructor and class interaction.

It also affords us an opportunity to do more simulations and enhances our ability to set up real world situations for students so they can experience and make decisions and then see the outcome of these decisions.

Allied to the foregoing, it can be seen that technology is requiring new ways of teaching, new ways of thinking, especially on the part

of faculty; with all the available resources out there, faculty are becoming more facilitators of learning, employing more of the Socratic method of leading students to find their own answers, as opposed to being merely presenters of content.

**I understand that you try to keep classes quite small. Typically, how many students are there in a class?** Our ground students are kept to a maximum level of 25. Cohorts begin three times a year (fall, spring and summer) and, here again, the maximum is 25 students.

The online classes are kept to a maximum of 18 students. As mentioned earlier, the online is lower but we expect increases moving forward.

**Some schools prefer to use senior faculty members when teaching courses. Is this something that you advocate at Arcadia? The quality and background of the professors charged with teaching and motivating Arcadia’s students is clearly very important. However, what sets Arcadia’s faculty apart from other schools?** My preference is to employ faculty that are practitioners. The word senior faculty means a lot of different things to a lot of different people. In a traditional university, using senior faculty to teach may mean they are far removed from the real work world. They may have been in education, teaching for the past 30 years, but if they are not staying current in their discipline, if they are not out there consulting and working in the field, they tend to become very academic and lose the ability to relate to what is happening in the work environment.

In looking at faculty, I always check their academic credentials. However, I place greater emphasis on their practitioner and professional qualifications.

**Given the current economic climate, do you foresee there being an upswing in the**

**number of self-funded MBA students?**

As I read and look at what is happening in the industry there seems to be an increase in the number of people coming back to school, a recession tends to cause that to happen. However, my MBA program has remained relatively flat and we have not seen an upswing in the numbers yet. I believe this is due to the type of student we get in our program. These are, by and large, students who are on tuition reimbursement programs from their companies. Many companies are cutting back, so we are seeing a lot more people seeking financial aid in order to enter the program. However I anticipate that we will see an increase, as in times of economic decline, investment in self often proves to be the best investment.

Leadership

**In this ever-changing economy, what role does leadership play and to what extent is it addressed throughout the program? How do you test the leadership qualities of your students and, ultimately, prepare them for the real world business challenges that lay ahead?** I think it is part of the assessment process. In talking about the measurement of learning we pay careful attention to the development of assessment plans, so that when we lay out our programs and course objectives, we put specific tools in place to measure progress in those areas. Again, there are a variety of assessment tools and techniques that instructors use within their own courses.

Looking at the courses that I teach personally: there are two experiential travel courses, where students do an industry analysis of each of the countries they visit from the perspective of the industry they are working in or have an interest in.

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We are also examining a partnership with one of our chambers of commerce whereby the students that are in our leadership and entrepreneurship concentrations will work with the community itself, thus obtaining actual hands-on experience in the real world. It will be somewhat akin to an internship program but with more of a consultative approach.

#### Accreditation

**Do you feel accreditation is an indicator of quality and do employers use it as a benchmark?** Accrediting organizations are important to ensure quality and consistency in business programs throughout the world. It is refreshing that business schools are being held accountable for assessment of learning and for students to be able to demonstrate competencies they have gained in their programs of study.

Arcadia University is accredited by the Middle States Commission of Higher Education, and our undergraduate business program is accredited by the Association of Collegiate Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP). We are in the process of completing the ACBSP documentation for our new MBA program.

My concern with business school accreditation is the overall emphasis on research and publishing, and the requirement for academically, rather than professionally qualified professors. Our emphasis is on practical application and so we are more interested in working professionals who can “talk the walk” in the classroom. Arcadia professors are highly experienced business professionals with strong work backgrounds in the areas in which they teach.

**Does accreditation increase the value of one’s MBA in the commercial**

**world?** It is difficult to answer this question because my personal experience has been that only the top tier schools seem to make a difference in hiring in the business world. I think the reality is that name recognition of the school is actually more important than accreditation. Recognized schools open more doors, but the reality is that in the commercial world it boils down to how one uses the learning he or she has acquired.

#### Program Selection

**When is the best time to enroll in an MBA program?** The old adage that ‘the best time is the best available time’ is never truer. Experience has taught that an investment in education provides the best ROI of any of the investments out there. It is always better to invest in your self than it is to take the money and invest it in something else. What I tell my students is that the decision to further one’s career is part of what we teach in terms of having an organization that interacts and adapts moving forward. The principle is enhanced by offering an academic program that enables the student to think critically and develop communication skills and problem solving ability, thus putting himself on a path for continuous improvement.

**The general MBA is typically shorter in duration when compared to the specialized MBA. However, some say that the specialized MBA can make the graduate more marketable. Do you concur with this?** I find that in the international arena it is almost a given that the student chooses a specialized MBA; especially in Asia where they are mostly looking at specialized MBA programs.

We consider our program to be specialized because of the international element. Therefore, within our basic program we consider that we

already have a focus or specialization. However, within the last year, effective this spring, we have decided to add MBA concentrations and certificate programs in five different areas to increase marketability.

#### International Business

**Given the competitive demands placed upon corporations today, and increasing globalization – both of which require tomorrow’s business leaders to be flexible and manage workforces and internal structures that cross cultural and political lines – have you redefined your MBA program?** Given that we try to recruit practitioners who develop their lesson plans from events in the real world, I think you can safely say that our program is constantly changing.

Clearly, the finance arena is changing. I think there is more emphasis today on social responsibility and ethics, sustainable development and the environment, and we weave those factors into the course work.

**Students have the opportunity to experience both developed and developing economies firsthand through the Arcadia M.B.A. with an International Perspective, which is somewhat refreshing. What prompted you to incorporate this feature?** Our advantage lies in the fact that our MBA program is relatively new; we are just now moving into our fourth year. So we had a golden opportunity to look at the competitive landscape, see what was on offer, what would make us unique, and design the program accordingly.

We are a small university in a highly competitive market place, so we search for things that will give us competitive advantage in the market place. As mentioned



previously, one of our major pillars is that we are an international school and as such have been rated number one in the nation for international experience.

In keeping with that reputation, and maintaining our emphasis on internationalism, we adhere to the principle that we should not merely examine developed economies, but emerging ones as well.

**Looking Ahead**

**What can new and existing students expect from Arcadia, in terms of program**

**innovations, over the next 12 to 18 months?** I think of the future as an evolving process. I do not foresee any major changes within the program itself, but rather major changes within the courses. We will continue to do the two international trips; still do the basic format, but the major change overall will be increased integration of technology, and blended learning.

Another ongoing challenge is maintaining the search for the 'right faculty'. I look at faculty in two ways, one as a presenter of content; the content expert who is going to lecture, and then I look at the other extreme, the person who is more of a Socratic method instructor whose

mission is to lead discussion and facilitate learning development in others. ■

**Biography**

Dr. Tony Muscia is the Executive Director of Arcadia's MBA with an International Perspective. He earned his doctorate from Nova Southeastern University, his MBA from Western International University, and both his M.A. in Psychology and B.A. in Journalism/Advertising from Duquesne University. Dr. Muscia has more than 30 years of corporate experience in senior management positions, and he has owned and operated several small business ventures.