Students demonstrate top-tier business savvy

Four from Drexel's MBA program take part in international competition

There is nothing easy about assuming leadership in a company that has no clear direction, is failing to meet customer demands, and is experiencing financial difficulties.

Yet that was the theoretical challenge facing four first-year MBA students in Drexel University's Center for Graduate Studies in Sacramento—and their handling of the challenge won them a third-place finish among 185 teams from around the world.

The team of Samuel Applebaum, Robert Dodge, Scott Freeman and Steven Pon earned the recognition in the Capsim Foundation Challenge, an international competition for business students.

The Sacramento-based students had the highest score among Drexel's 15 teams, 14 of which were from Drexel's campus in Philadelphia. A University of Iowa team finished first with 756 points, followed by Baylor University (738) and Drexel (713).

"MBA students are typically competitive, so just being the No. 1 team from Drexel was a great achievement," said Freeman, a budget/forecasting consultant with ConnecPoint Search Group. "How our team, which had four people with four different perspectives, made its decisions was pretty interesting. We really worked well together.

"The diverse skills of Applebaum, a doctor with Sutter Roseville, Dodge (information technology director), Freeman (accountant) and Pon (IT project manager) were melded into one, helping the group reach the six-team finals.

"Each of us brought different things to the table and we had different perspectives," said Pon, an IT project manager for PASCO Scientific in Roseville. "We didn't always agree during our strategy discussions, but we worked together as a team, which enabled us to perform really well overall."

The popular game, established by Capsim Management Simulations Inc., is held twice annually and provides students a way to experience success and failure in a risk-free business environment. The overall competition included teams from Dartmouth, Oregon, Texas Christian and Brigham Young universities, and countries as diverse as Taiwan, Canada, Poland, Australia and Austria.

The Capsim Challenge requires students to compete against both a computer and other teams by winning the most market share with a computer-simulated business. During the first round, the teams competed against a computer. In the finals, the surviving teams competed against each other.

During the qualifying round, the Drexel team met eight others over a two-week period to make decisions concerning their mythical $80 million electronic sensor company, which has one product but can develop a portfolio of up to five additional ones. At the end of the round, Drexel was in second place.

"It was absolutely a great experience for any MBA student," Applebaum said. "If you did something like overproduce a product, thinking you could sell more, and you didn't, you would be penalized and have to take out an emergency loan the following year to make up for that mistake."

- Staff report