



Global careers in academia: following the ideas

Although Wall Street may be feeling battered and bruised from the financial crisis, if you want a career in teaching business, you should still consider heading for the US at some point. That was the consensus view among INSEAD PhD programme graduates taking part in the school's 20th reunion celebration at its Europe campus.

“Get a job at a top school in the US,” says Miklos Sarvary, the incoming Dean of Executive Education and a Professor of Marketing at INSEAD, who was previously a faculty member at Harvard Business School and Stanford University’s Graduate Business School. “Don’t waste your time on a second-tier US school.”

Bart Bronnenberg (PhD 1994), Professor of Marketing and Research Fellow at Tilburg University in the Netherlands, agrees. “Go to the US as the first step in your career if at all possible,” he says. “It’s very interesting to be exposed to the US model business school. After all, it all started there. Lots of people and ideas flow through top US schools; you can get spillover from other schools, too – visiting professors and students. You need this critical mass of people around you to network, develop friendships, co-authorships.”

Bronnenberg himself taught at UCLA for several years before returning to his native country. He says being able to adjust is key to being a global teacher today. “Students are interested in the American business model and they are interested in US company case studies, but you can’t teach only American business strategies or situations in European schools. You need to adapt to your

location.”

Johanna Mair (PhD 2000) entered the world of academia after spending several years as an investment banker on Wall Street. Today she is an Associate Professor in the Strategic Management Department at IESE business school in Barcelona, researching, among other things, how institutions both stifle and support social and economic progress. Mair says she did not jump at the chance to return to the US to teach: “I received an offer to teach in Barcelona, and it was a good fit. Careerwise, it’s not always about location; it’s really about what kind of teacher you want to be.” But what about being exposed to more people and ideas in the US? “We have planes and the internet,” she replies.

Wu Yaozhong (PhD 2006) bypassed the US altogether and went straight from Fontainebleau to Singapore, where today he is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Decision Sciences at NUS Business School. “I did hesitate over a US offer,” he says.

“But the demand for business education is increasingly higher in the Asian markets. It’s probably the greatest in the world.”

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Bronnenberg agrees: “Growth in that region of the world would support more top-flight business schools than there are today,” he says. “The business education market in Asia should grow by leaps and bounds.”

But today there is no one Asian business model – Japan, Korea, China and Singapore being very different entities, yet all studying the US model.

“You need both American professionals and models, and European ones to maintain contact with reality,” says Luc Wathieu (PhD 1994), Associate Dean of Faculty at the European School of Management and Technology (ESMT) in Berlin. Wathieu spent a decade as a faculty member at Harvard Business School before being lured to Germany in September 2007 to head the new ESMT institution which was founded and funded by the country’s 25 major industrial giants to provide a steady stream of well-educated managers.

Wathieu points to being published as having had a major impact on his career. “I wanted to return to University of California-San Diego (where he’d also studied) to teach after getting my PhD, but ended up in Hong Kong. I got back to the US via my publications. That’s what caught the attention of Harvard – my byline.” Sounds as though the idea of ‘publish or perish’ works for him. “Publish or perish forces people to be better than they normally would be,” he says. “This is part of attracting intellectuals to teach at schools. And it helps you find collaborators for your research.”

Wathieu says his current research – consumer behaviour in the US and Asia - allows him to tap his background and that writing papers during the process is an added benefit, a way of shaping things along the way to the finish line. “The more papers and research, the richer the project gets,” he says.

Global careers, global research and global collaborators: eventually the academic has to make a choice about where she wants to be and how she wants to direct her experience, and - as Mair has already said - what kind teacher she wants to be.

For Bronnenberg, it was making the decision to leave Los Angeles to return to a small Dutch town, where he and his wife were born, to raise their children. “I found it useful to have taught in the US,” he says about the mechanics of making the change. “And I wouldn’t have wanted to miss it.”

For Wathieu, the career shift was leaving Harvard to return to Europe and the challenge of creating a new business school in the heart of Berlin. “The school was started in 2002 and we began operations in 2006,” he says. “So far, we have 20 nations represented and there are 27 MBA candidates. The

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Executive MBA programme is growing and will become the real strength of the school.”

He believes this is just the beginning of a whole new system. “Business schools themselves are evolving,” says Wathieu. “And they’re doing it right in front of us.”

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