

# College of Business & Public Administration

## NOT JUST ANOTHER JOB

**Our Promise: The College of Business and Public Administration prepares our learners to succeed as leaders and global citizens by bringing the world into the classroom and the classroom into the world.**

John Spinks, ED'98, loves working with kids and has a long-term goal—to return to his home state of Florida. But he doesn't plan to spend his time sitting on the beach. "Like many southern states," says Spinks, "Florida knows how to incarcerate delinquents, but not how to help troubled youngsters stay out of the juvenile justice system. That's what I want to do ... help at-risk kids in Florida find another path."

The College of Business and Public Administration (CBPA) is playing a key role in helping Spinks realize his goal. Despite 20 years working with at-risk youth in Des Moines, Spinks had little understanding of the financial, legal, and administrative requirements for setting up and managing a nonprofit that could actually make a difference for troubled kids.

And then in 2004, he signed up for a CBPA certificate program designed for future leaders of nonprofit agencies. The program changed his life. He discovered what so many other CBPA students have found: By bringing the world into the classroom and the classroom into the world, the CBPA certificate programs offer a powerful tool for potential leaders who want to bring academic standards and best practices to the everyday workplace.

Spinks began to believe he could actually run such an agency. Now enrolled in the degree program for a Master's in Public Administration, Spinks is several steps closer to making his dream come true.

## WHY THE CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS?

Participants in the CBPA's certificate programs are typically individuals with considerable work experience and demonstrated leadership potential. While the CBPA offers a variety of standardized certificate programs as well as custom programs targeted to different groups (e.g., private sector, public sector, health care, etc.), they all provide graduate-level education in the three key areas of competency for business, nonprofit, and government leaders: technical skills, leadership, and administration.

Each of the certificate programs consists of a cohort of adults who study together on a regular basis over a period that can range from a couple of weeks to 18 months. While the certificate programs all utilize traditional classroom techniques like lectures and case studies, they emphasize experience-based learning. For example, participants work in small teams to complete an in-depth project related to an



Students in Drake's Business Leadership Certificate Program gain expertise in strategic decision making, human capital, finance and accounting, marketing, the legal and regulatory environment, risk management, and more.

issue they confront in their everyday working world. They also use scenarios and role-playing to highlight the different perspectives that class participants bring to the group.

"Role-playing is not just a teaching tool," says Matthew Mitchell, assistant professor of international business and strategy. "It's a management technique that can have powerful benefits in the workplace." A prime example, according to Mitchell, is the use of role-playing to deal with cultural conflict. Certificate participants are asked to act out defined roles based on simple but very specific rules of behavior. "This kind of role-playing offers an easy and relatively unthreatening way for participants to observe how their own unconscious values influence behavior." Mitchell sees role-playing as a valuable tool for dealing with all kinds of diversity—ethnic, socioeconomic, or even the diversity that stems from working in different areas of a single corporation or community.

## LEARNING IN REAL TIME

According to Spinks, the process of self-evaluation and reflection that comes out of the role-playing technique is a major benefit of the certificate program. "I needed to build my technical skills, to understand how things like finance, human resource administration, and fundraising come together in running a successful nonprofit," he says. "But it was the interaction with my classmates—comparing my management style with theirs—that was so valuable to me from a leadership perspective."

Tom Root, associate professor of finance, concurs. "Our technical curriculum is terrific, but the certificate programs also use textbook topics as launching pads for wide-ranging discussion of students' varying perspectives on the work-a-day world."



More than 300 professionals have graduated from Drake's Certified Public Manager (R) Program in recent years, many going on to earn their Master of Public Administration degree.

One key lesson Spinks says he learned from the role-playing was how to delegate. "Before the certificate program, I just had to do everything myself ... it was the only way I knew to be sure things were done right."

Through classroom exercises and discussion, he discovered how much more he could accomplish if he empowered his staff, let them contribute, encouraged them to express their opinions, and allowed them to make a few mistakes along the way. "I don't have to be the sharpest knife in the drawer," Spinks says with a laugh, "as long as I surround myself with really good people."

Spinks also learned to apply the role-playing technique in his working world. For years, he had been dissatisfied with his track record in hiring staff to work with troubled youth. "I always knew that getting the right people isn't just about getting the right technical skills. But I didn't know how to assess someone's ability to build relationships and contribute to the team as a whole."

Watching the class use scenarios and role-playing to experiment with different approaches gave Spinks the courage to take off his "boss's hat" and toss out his prepared interview questions. Instead, he began to set up scenarios based on situations from his workplace—perhaps a volatile student in a classroom environment or a kid who refuses to follow

directions—and invite the interviewee to help him brainstorm a solution. By observing the individual's approach to problem solving on the fly, he was better able to judge who would fit in with and be effective on his team.

#### **AN UNEXPLOITED RESOURCE**

The Drake certificate programs are one of Des Moines' most unexploited resources, both from the standpoint of the University and the community, says Mitchell.

"The CBPA can design a new certificate program or modify an existing one to meet the specific needs of an individual corporation, nonprofit, or government agency," he says. "We want to take advantage of the tremendous opportunity for synergy between Drake and the Des Moines business, nonprofit, and government sectors."

Larry Zimpleman, chairman, president, and chief executive officer of Principal Financial Group, as well as chair of the Drake University Board of Trustees, concurs.

"I see the CPBA certificate programming as a great way for central Iowa businesses to continue to upgrade the skills of their key employees," says Zimpleman. "And it is a great demonstration of the close relationship that is needed between Drake and the central Iowa business community for the mutual benefit of both groups."



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