



# TECHNOLOGY AND BUSINESS

## Working Hand-in-Hand

»Jonathan Calens talks to Dr Arthur Keiser

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### Getting to Know Keiser University

**Since the inception of your first school in 1977, you have come a very long way. You now have approximately 11,000 students and close to 2000 staff. To what do you attribute this success?** In fact, Keiser University now has approximately 15,200 students and close to 2700 staff. There are 16 campuses throughout the state of Florida. I believe that our success is based on our extreme dedication to the students: our primary goal is to serve the student. We provide our students with a quality education and in fulfilling this mandate, we sometimes operate somewhat differently and a little bit more innovatively to ensure that all of their needs are being met.

**Your global message is that of a leader and innovator in career education. Therefore, post MBA; do you consider yourself to be a support unit for alumni throughout their careers?** Keiser University (KU) supports its alumni (including international alumni) by transferring its superior student service expertise and implementing the KU student service system to Keiser's international operations/campuses, combined with our market-research based, career oriented curriculum.

Our global status as Innovator and Leader in Career Education is recognized in countries and regions around the world.

The China Education Association for International Exchange recently invited us to a conference on the issue of growing unemployment amongst university graduates. This allowed us to meet several university presidents from some of the top Chinese universities.

We have received similar recognition in Europe, mainly Eastern Europe, and in Latin America.

In addition to our decade long efforts in establishing relationships with Chinese educational governing bodies and universities, we recently created a division headed by Vice Chancellor of International Studies, Mr. Zhanjun Yang.

We consider ourselves to be a student-focused institution. As such, we believe very strongly that it is our responsibility to not only educate the student and help him learn, but as far as possible, ensure success in his career, and future. Over the years, we have strived to maintain contact, no matter the level at which the students graduate. Our superior student system also provides assistance in placement and additional learning which might assist them to explore new avenues.

Keiser's multiple campuses throughout the state of Florida allow us to extend our reach and commitment to each community in which we operate. This commitment carries over to our international operations and is a logical extension of our global reach.

**You have been doing a great deal of work in order to establish a presence in Asia, are you at liberty to discuss this in more detail?**

We have been working in Asia for the past 10 years. We started a program designed to bring students from China into the US for part of the program and then back to China for the end of the program.

In the last two years we have been re-examining the concept. The Chinese students are extremely well prepared and we want to ensure that we can deliver a program that will at some point be valuable to them from a career standpoint and also be stimulating intellectually. Over the last 6 months we have signed agreements with a school based in Singapore, which has operations in Beijing and Chengdu. We also have an agreement with a different institution that is primarily focused on business education in Shanghai and Hong Kong.

The basis of our agreements is on three levels, viz; 1. with Government and its various organizations – in community relations development, 2. with universities, in curriculum development and student services areas and 3. with joint curricula programs in which we directly transfer out know how to local universities for the ultimate benefit of the students.

It is noteworthy that we have been offering our Bachelors of Business Administration in the Republic of Moldova.





## Program Overview

**Kindly define Keiser University's MBA value proposition?** Keiser University's entire curriculum and all of the faculty are driven by a hands on, real world approach to the environment, rather than just merely inhabiting a theoretical space. Accordingly, our MBA is designed to imbue our students with a sense of the real world, more so than the standard MBA technical program taught by a tenured faculty without industry experience. The faculty we employ are selected from people who,

whilst possessing pristine credentials, have tremendous real world experience and knowledge behind them.

**Some schools prefer to use senior faculty members when teaching courses. Is this something that you advocate at Keiser University?** We do not use the term senior faculty. We hire a fulltime faculty and most of the people teaching the MBA are full time employees who not only have a strong academic background, but equally important, a really strong business background. Our faculty is evaluated

based upon on their teaching skills, class preparation and ability to motivate students to learn and develop rather than the number of journal articles or books they have written.

**The quality and background of the professors charged with teaching and motivating Keiser University's students is clearly very important. However, what sets Keiser University's faculty apart from other schools?** As I mentioned earlier, our faculty is student-focused. We expect them to be fully focused on their curriculum, teaching and delivering it with



competence. To this end we perform pre and post tests for every student and every course, so our assessment teams are constantly measuring whether students are learning.

Some institutions feel that the students are responsible for the learning, but in our case, we feel that our faculty have a significant responsibility to measure and evaluate the efficacy of the course. Just last year alone, we carried out over 300,000 pre and post tests: these are evaluated and measured so that we can assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of the students at the end of the program. It is also noteworthy that we want the faculty to be engaged in a process of consistent self-improvement, which in turn helps them to improve the quality of learning in their classes year after year.

However, what really sets our faculty apart is their commitment and involvement in their students' success.

Here is an example: Two days ago, an MBA student taking her second accounting class called the dean to tell her of the anxiety she was feeling about accounting. The student

had hit a wall. The dean spent about 30 minutes on the phone with the student, listening and counseling. Before the end of the conversation the dean asked the student if she would like some telephone tutoring from one of the accounting professors. The student readily agreed. The next day the professor spent more than an hour on the phone with the student, helping her to understand the concepts in accounting. This is not an isolated episode.

We believe this approach to be significantly different. Therefore, our measurement of faculty performance is not based on research and consequent publications but on performance in the classroom. We see this as paramount.

**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 offering?** I would say that we define it with those things in mind. Again, our MBA is relatively young and it is designed around the modern workplace rather than the work-

place of the 70s, or even that of 10-12 years ago. As the workplace is constantly changing, so too are our programs, to factor in the elements of the changing market. If we talk about marketing as an example, just 10 years ago it was media: today it's the Internet. Our program reflects the issues that are facing globally competitive businesses today.

## Investment

**Does the online MBA represent better value for money when compared to the full-time or Executive MBA?** I'll give a controversial answer. The student who completes the program obtains the best value. Many students don't. So the difference between online and on-campus is in many cases a matter of convenience. Both are difficult; both require sedulous study, focus and concentration.

To obtain best value, the student should seek the best designed program that will enable them to complete and hopefully become successful. Most of our students are adults who are already in business and may have to travel a great deal. If they are in planes, it is virtually impossible to attend a standard MBA course.



Even an EMBA, which tends to be done on weekends, is still in a fixed location. So the only choice for some students may be the online option. However, in our case, we offer online, on-campus and the hybrid environments.

**In terms of financial support, would it be fair to say that employers are more likely to support online study, which can be built around one's working life, rather than traditional classroom learning, which will inevitably take the employee away from the office from time to time?**

The online option is a great way for an employer to invest in an employee wishing to improve himself, because it does not interfere with his work - it's a 24/7, 7 days a week a program - the motivated can work in their own time, whereas a fixed program would take them outside of standard office hours. Many corporations tend to look to the elite institutions, but these are not necessarily best for the adult learner or employer-based student. Most of the traditional institutions focus on the student coming out of undergrad work and then moving on to graduate school, and that's most appropriate for those

low us to be present with the student whilst they are practicing. Online delivery systems provide students with far greater flexibility.

I often get a number of students who say that 'there is no way they could have done their program on-campus'. That's where technology delivers anyplace anytime. You can be anywhere in the world and still meet your study requirements. Similarly, the lecturer is able to teach classes from a distance.

Notwithstanding, I would emphasize that the key to successful online education is not the technology; it is the faculty member interacting with the student in order to ensure constant dialogue between student and teacher, and student and student. For without significant faculty intervention in the learning process, online is nothing more than a computer sitting on a table. If you don't turn it on it doesn't do anything.

Our courses are either 4 or 8 weeks long, and students are on a very structured time-line. Every week there is a new course, the teachers are required to communicate with the student on a daily basis; therefore, for most teachers, on-

fully operational during the summer months even though there are fewer students on campus. Throughout Keiser University, more than 35% of our students are online. This approximates to 5000 students. If one student drives 10 miles less per day, that's 50,000 miles a day. Just think of the resources saved and the carbon omissions reduced.

## Online vs. Classroom Learning

**Classroom-based teaching facilitates interaction with classmates and professors, a big selling point when considering a full-time or Executive MBA program. As an online MBA provider, how do you tackle this?** My feeling is that a good faculty member should be accessible to provide for discussion as opposed to merely lecturing. Of course, the lecture method is good for certain courses but not necessarily for graduate level courses. Using the course I'm teaching now as an example, all of it is discussion. This challenges the student to understand the material by making him think and step out of his comfort

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kinds of students. I do believe however, based on experience, that employers benefit greatly from the flexibility of the online environment. There is still a school of thought that questions the integrity of the online system, but those who have taken online programs know that it's not a concern.

## Technology

**Keiser University is considered to be a technology intensive institution. To what extent has this benefited your students?**

Like everything else, technology has its pros and cons. Certain programs lend themselves more to technological devices whilst others require more of a hands-on approach. For example, a nursing program requiring heavy investment in simulators and training tools that enables the nurse to practice without having the fear of hurting the patient will al-

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## Going Green

**Socially responsible programs and green campuses are just two of the hot-button issues affecting the MBA space. What steps has Keiser University taken in order to embrace the aforementioned challenges and opportunities?** Keiser is already going green. Standardized syllabi (unlike most programs that will allow a professor to develop his or her own syllabus for a particular course) enable us to incorporate these socially responsible values into teaching.

Of course online epitomizes the green movement. We offer one class at a time, 12 months a year, unlike traditional campuses that remain

zone. That's the good part of graduate education versus undergraduate education. The former is much more Socratic in the way it is taught, while the latter is much more 'opening the doors' for students to understand that there is no right or wrong method, just different viewpoints.

**A common misconception is that online programs are easier than campus-based programs. How do you address this?** Yes. This is a common misconception. But let us look at the facts.

The reading in online and campus-based programs is comparable. The writing is much heavier in an online program: even classroom discussions are written. Plus, you can't hide behind someone else in an online class. Every student is required to participate. It is pretty obvious if someone

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is trying to be invisible in the online classroom. Discussions are scholarly and cited. That doesn't happen at the same level in a campus-based program.

**Would it be fair to say that an online MBA is a great education option, providing you are a self-starter?** I think that being a self-starter is a requisite, but its worth can be somewhat overstated. If one works to a disciplined time structure - this is basically no different to going to class on a campus - a well constructed online program forces you to follow a number of steps in order to be successful. The only difference is that it's done through a computer terminal and there's a lot less listening in terms of lectures. But apart from that, the communication level, the amount expected from you, and the structures that require you to self-start do not differ in a classroom environment.

### The Next Chapter

**Moving forward, what can new and existing students expect from Keiser University over the next twelve to eighteen months, in terms of program innovation?** By the autumn, we will have our first PhD program. It's in education leadership and we anticipate that it will take us to a new level. We have been working towards this for the last 30 years and I am proud to say that we have received recognition from the regional accrediting agency.

Secondly, we shall be placing even greater emphasis on hybrid. The hybrid is the model that we are developing which will really take off; it will allow students to take their theoretical material online, and enjoy even more hands-on practical campus time with truly outstanding business leaders. To this end, we plan to invite

the top business leaders in the community to come in and immerse the student in real-world business practices.

I see the technology improving very radically, enhancing our ability to deliver materials in multimedia and three dimensions. This will enable us to operate the online program more efficiently and effectively.

There will of course be increased competition, but our dynamic and innovative faculty does not merely welcome change; they demand it and lead the way to consistent improvements. ■

#### Biography

Dr Arthur Keiser is the Chancellor of Keiser University.

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