

April 17, 2012 | By Melinda Battenberg

Rady School of Management Receives \$1.7 Million GMAC Grant

Grant will fund virtual learning project

The Rady School of Management at UC San Diego has been awarded a \$1.7 million Ideas to Innovation Challenge grant from the Graduate Management Admission Council (GMAC), a nonprofit education organization of leading graduate business schools and owner of the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT®) exam. The grant will fund the creation of a “virtual world” that will foster global learning and collaboration among MBA students. The initiative is a joint venture between the Rady School and Rembisz & Associates, an international management-consulting firm.

The project will create an immersive, virtual world where students can design a lifelike avatar and interact in real time, much like the popular online game platform Second Life. In this unique virtual environment, students will collaborate in global teams, socialize and network, receive coaching and attend seminars.

“This visionary project could drastically, and positively, alter the MBA experience in terms of how students gain information, how they interact with each other and how they develop skills,” said Rady School Dean Robert S. Sullivan.

Ron Rembisz, who developed the concept for the project with Alex Howland, said that the project will launch with a business competition, providing students the opportunity to collaborate with their peers across the globe.

“In the classroom, we often talk about diversity, inclusion and globalization, yet we talk to the same 20 people in our cohort for the duration of our schooling,” Howland said. “When students leave universities and enter into the job market, they will work in teams where their colleagues might be in India or scattered through Europe. By creating a virtual environment where students can collaborate internationally, we can make a connection between theoretical knowledge and real-world experience.”

Rembisz noted that there is vast potential for this virtual learning environment, which the project developers will continue to explore as the project progresses.

“We can build a lot of real-time learning,” Rembisz said. “We could have someone from China conduct a seminar on what it’s like to live and work in China. Through this virtual world, students can develop a real understanding of the similarities and differences in cultures as they relate to business.”

The project will be housed in the Rady School’s Center for Executive Development, under the direction of Rady School Assistant Dean Clark Jordan. Jordan noted that the project could also be used as a research vehicle.

“We will have the capability to observe groups of people, in real time, facing challenges together,” Jordan said. “There is a tremendous research potential in that rare opportunity.”

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