

## Chapter 58

# Ernst & Young Leadership and Professional Development Center: Accounting Designed for Leaders

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This case highlights a unique program for students pursuing a graduate degree in accounting. The program's mission is to prepare students to be effective leaders and communicators in their careers. To accomplish this mission, the program has developed a Leadership and Professional Development Center (LPDC) that uses physical, virtual, and external space to support programmatic goals through cross-disciplinary collaboration. The LPDC houses trained consultants who provide services such as feedback on written documents, mock interviews, presentation assessment, and self-awareness development. The LPDC also hosts workshops on a variety of leadership and professional development topics. Furthermore, consultants partner with faculty and professionals to provide instruction and experiential learning inside and outside the classroom. The goal of this chapter is to highlight how cross-disciplinary partnerships promote learning in physical, virtual, and external spaces. Recommendations for navigating and utilizing cross-disciplinary collaborations are provided as well as suggestions for implementation in various learning spaces.*

## **ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND**

In partnership with the Accountancy Executive Advisory Council, the Department of Accountancy at Northern Illinois University developed the Leadership Master of Accounting Science (LMAS) program. The LMAS program consists of thirty semester hours that integrate a nationally recognized accounting curriculum with various leadership and professional development opportunities inside and outside the classroom. The goal is for students to exit the program and step into the accounting workforce prepared not only to contribute from a technical standpoint but also to possess the skills needed to be a trusted advisor and leader. This unique program emerged from a growing desire to prepare students to be more effective and help them launch successful accounting careers.

A substantial body of literature describes the importance of strong professional communication skills for entry-level accounting professionals. Supervisors of entry-level accountants reported dissatisfaction with the communication level of accountants and the desire for new hires to have stronger skills (Bunn, Barfit, Cooper, & Sandifer, 2005; Norvin & Pearson, 1994). In addition, accountants at varying levels of career progression indicated a desire for better communication skills to improve personal job performance (Stowers & White, 1999). Specifically, accounting professionals indicated that professional communication skills are critical for career success (Maturo, 2007; Smith, 2005; Stowers & White, 1999). Stowers and White (1999) summed up the value of professional communication skills, “No longer something to be acquired later, students will be hired at the prestigious firms because their schools had the foresight to include communications in their curricula” (p. 39).

Thus, in response to concerns from employers and alumni, the process of designing and developing the LMAS program began in 2006. In 2009,

the Department of Accountancy at Northern Illinois University officially revised their graduate program in accounting and created the LMAS program. Furthermore, they partnered with a corporate sponsor to design a space dedicated to helping students build leadership and professional skills.

## **SETTING THE STAGE**

### **Funding and Collaboration**

In 2010, the Department of Accountancy contacted Ernst & Young (E&Y) about providing support for an innovative space designated to assist LMAS students’ leadership and professional development. In exchange for naming rights, E&Y agreed to endow the space with an initial commitment of \$500,000 funded over a five-year period. The endowment generates an estimated income of \$20,000 per year and provides funds needed for technology, workshops, student activities, and self-assessment tools.

The LMAS program and the LPDC represent extensive collaboration efforts and cross-disciplinary coordination inside and outside the academy. Outside the academy, the corporate sponsor provides not only funding for the space, but also a needed external and employer perspective. E&Y partners and professionals serve on the Department of Accountancy’s executive advisory council and provide regular feedback to faculty about curriculum issues and perceptions of student technical and professional skills. Inside the academy, the LMAS program utilizes the management department housed in the business school to teach a required course examining managerial leadership. Individuals from a variety of disciplines inside the academy also have partnered to contribute leadership and programmatic direction for pedagogy within this space. Specifically, individuals from communication, English,

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