

Chapter 7

An International Collaborative Masters Degree in Integrated Marketing Communications: A US–EU Program in the Mediterranean

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A transnational partnership between the University of Malta in Malta and San Diego State University in the United States resulted in an agreement to commence a Masters degree in Integrated Marketing Communications. The degree is fully delivered in Malta, a Mediterranean island state and a full member of the European Union. In Malta, the program is held not at the main campus of the University but at the historical campus of the University of Malta in Valetta that dates back to 1592. Classes are in English and are taught by faculty from both universities. Students earn a degree from each of the two participating schools thus providing recognition in both the US and the EU. This chapter charts the challenges faced and the hurdles encountered to develop the curriculum, launch the degree, recruit the students, undertake teaching, and ultimately, graduate the first cohort.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

This case presents a program which is the result of a transnational partnership between the University

of Malta (UM) and San Diego State University (SDSU) in the United States. It is a comprehensive post-graduate program in Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC). The effort is part of a series of post-graduate degree programs offered by

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the University of Malta in partnership with various US partner universities under its International Masters Programmes (IMP) portfolio. In the case of the IMP IMC program, students earn a Master of Science in Business Administration (MSBA), Marketing from San Diego State University and a Master of Arts (MA) in Integrated Marketing Communications from the University of Malta as they study in Malta for one year, taking courses from both UM and SDSU faculty. This case describes how the partnership was established, the development process, program details, the program's launch and its first year of operations. The benefits and challenges of developing and implementing such a program are highlighted throughout the case and insight into how such a transnational partnership can occur is provided.

SETTING THE STAGE

Partnership Establishment

Integrated Marketing Communications seeks to send a single, consistent message to a company's or organization's various publics. This approach has grown in importance in the realm of corporate communications and marketing in recent years as its value over piecemeal approaches to corporate communications has been recognized. Because the concept is relatively new, established corporate practitioners rarely have been educated in either the theory or practice of integrated marketing communications. Hence as demand for expertise in IMC has grown in companies and organizations there has been a concurrent need for educational offerings in the field. The discipline of integrated marketing communications in universities worldwide is a relatively new phenomenon but it is growing. IMC studies are sometimes housed in business schools, as an offshoot of marketing and advertising. Alternatively they are sometimes found in departments or schools of communications.

These two different approaches to the housing of IMC studies were found in the early 2000s on the campuses of San Diego State University, a public university located in San Diego, California, USA and at the University of Malta. At San Diego State University (SDSU) faculty interest and expertise within the Marketing Department of the College of Business Administration had resulted in the development of a Centre for Integrated Marketing Communications. At the time it was established in 2003 the Centre for IMC was the only such center in the US located in a business school. The Centre was developed to support research amongst faculty in IMC and education in IMC at the undergraduate, graduate, and executive levels. An undergraduate emphasis in integrated marketing communications within the marketing major had been offered for the first time two years prior to the establishment of the IMC Centre and was growing rapidly. In 2009 almost 50% of all marketing majors at SDSU chose the IMC emphasis. Under the centre's watchful eye, growth in IMC at SDSU continued. This growth included the development and offering of executive short courses. A strong community advisory board was established as part of the centre's development. The board was and remains instrumental in providing a connection between the academic programs that are under the auspices of the centre and the practice of IMC in the community.

At the University of Malta, the Centre for Communication Technology was established in 1991 and initially focused primarily on building its undergraduate program in communications. In the late 1990s when the Centre began contemplation of which post-graduate degrees to offer, considerations relating to expertise possessed and market opportunities identified IMC as an area worth pursuing. A masters program in Integrated Marketing Communications was first offered in 2002. Students in the program came from a variety of undergraduate academic backgrounds although communication studies and business were the two most frequently represented fields.

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