Duke's international brand highlighted by Global Business Outlook survey

By Neclesh Moorthy on May 18, 2015

A Fuqua professor is working to improve Duke’s international reputation in an increasingly global market.

John Graham, D. Richard Mead Jr. Family professor of finance at the Fuqua School of Business, directs the Global Business Outlook survey. Since 1996, the survey has conducted quarterly polls of chief financial officers from around the world, analyzing the results in order to predict future economic trends. The survey has mainly received recognition for bridging the gap between academia and those practicing business, but Graham also envisions the survey as helping legitimize Duke’s claim to be a global university.

“We don’t just sit here and read textbooks about international stuff,” Graham said of Duke. “We’re actually doing research in and providing educational experiences from these countries.”

The GBO is especially significant because it facilitates and strengthens Fuqua’s international outreach programs, such as its Global Academic Travel Experience and Global Executive MBA programs, he explained.

“Because of this survey we have major connections and contacts in Latin America or wherever, so that when Fuqua creates new programs these countries know that we’re paying proper attention to them,” Graham said. “Getting students to enroll and getting these programs started would be much more difficult if we didn’t have frequent research connections to these regions.”

Despite its role in improving Fuqua’s international brand, the GBO is not unique in providing a global perspective, Graham noted. Fuqua has long embraced the philosophy of international education, in large part due to the increasing number of international students who stand to benefit from learning about the United States in a global, non-isolated context.
"If you’re going to be a top university, you need to be fully integrated into what’s happening around the globe—it needs to be embedded in everything you do,” Graham said.

One thing that sets the survey apart from others is that less than 50 percent of responding CFOs are from companies in the United States, said Campbell Harvey, J. Paul Sticht professor of finance and the survey’s co-founder.

The GBO has gained footholds in numerous countries at a relatively quick pace—the survey started in the U.S. in 1996, then expanded to Europe and Asia in 2000, Latin America in 2012 and Africa in 2013, Graham said.

Graham noted that the large gap between the inclusion of European and Asian companies and the inclusion of Latin American and African companies is explained in part by personnel constraints—the survey lacks a permanent staff. Besides Graham, the survey relies on media specialists, Ph.D. or MBA students and employees at the survey’s partner organization CFO Magazine to work on the project part-time.

“I’m personally dealing and meeting one-on-one with major players from all of these countries and there are significant time constraints in creating and maintaining these relationships,” Graham said.

Both Graham and Harvey acknowledged that increased funding might go a long way in helping the GBO become more efficient, with Graham adding that most of what has been done so far has relied on his and others’ “sweat equity.”

Despite current limitations, Graham said he remains optimistic that the survey will continue to contribute to Fuqua’s international reputation moving forward.

“The GBO’s growth will probably be slower in the future, but we still hope to keep growing,” he said.
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