

# PHILADELPHIA BUSINESS JOURNAL

## A STRATEGICALLY DESIGNED MBA

# Where failing 'early and often' is ideal

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When the academic leaders at Philadelphia University were looking to create a new MBA program, they asked a variety of company executives about their ideal employee. The takeaway was that companies were looking to include creative thinkers into their culture.

"Many schools are trying to think outside of the box," said Andrew Leckey, president of the Reynolds Center for Business Journalism in Phoenix.

The MBA is an attractive degree, and business schools are connecting subjects of interest with traditional business school principles, Leckey said.

The Strategic Design MBA at Philadelphia University is an example of a new type of MBA, which aims to merge business thinking with creativity.

"It's a boutique MBA that's creatively disrupting the space," said Natalie Nixon, director of Philadelphia University's Strategic Design MBA program.

The program, which includes course offerings such as "innovation leadership" and "design research for business," revolves around design thinking principles, a problem-solving process borrowed by designers, Nixon said.

Students are encouraged to emphasize with their potential



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Philadelphia University's Strategic MBA classes are held in an open-space studio. This is one of the ways the program differentiates itself from many traditional MBA programs, which usually hold classes in lecture halls.

customers and to ask questions such as, "what problem am I solving for my user?"

Another concept is "related world" thinking, in which students "connect the dots between seemingly unrelated realms in order to innovate," Nixon said.

An example of related world thinking is in a 2012 New Yorker article, in which a doctor compared the operations of the Cheesecake Factory with the operations of an emergency room. Nixon said this type of thinking keeps students agile.

The third design principle is a continuous development of prototypes, which, according

to Nixon, teaches students to embrace failure.

"We want them to fail early and often," she said.

The Strategic Design program, which welcomed its first class of students in January, is a 22-month, executive-style MBA program designed for working adults. Classes meet every other Friday and Saturday.

The program attracts people who already have real world experience, which leads to a dynamic class environment, Nixon said of the program, which has about 35 students enrolled.

"It's a nice diverse mix," she said.