

Research by Day, MBA at Night: The Business of Marine Biotechnology

Daniel Baden, director of the Center for Marine Science (CMS) at UNC Wilmington, is offering exceptional Ph.D. scientists in marine biotechnology a new opportunity: earn an MBA from Cameron School of Business (CSB) at night. To research skills of analysis, experimentation and presentation of findings, Baden wants these “post-docs” to add business acumen and entrepreneurial thinking – to strategize, plan and develop potential products from marine biotechnology research in a lock-step program that combines research with an executive MBA. The program’s first three Business of Marine Biotechnology MBAs graduate this spring. Already, more than 100 scientists – from around the world – have applied for the three positions open for fall.

The Business of Marine Biotechnology program at UNCW, funded by the MARBIONC program (Marine Biotechnology in North Carolina), is one part of a three-fold initiative promoting marine biotechnology and aquaculture in the region and state. MARBIONC is collaborating with East Carolina University, NC State University, UNC-CH Institute of Marine Science, community colleges in the region, and other focused research initiatives. The research targets bioassay technique development, finfish mariculture, aquaculture technology, nutrition and commercial demonstration, marine pharmaceuticals and nutraceuticals derived from cultured organisms, bioengineered natural products, novel enzymes and biosynthetic.

The Business of Marine Biotechnology program is difficult. It requires candidates who have completed a biotechnology-related Ph.D. to conduct research in marine science by day while pursuing the advanced business degree at night and on weekends. Researchers complete the program in the standard 24 months, taking the same classes as regular MBA students and participating in all required applied-learning projects.

Applied-learning projects provide an integration of practical and theoretical knowledge that explains the wide appeal of the MBA degree to people with managerial or administrative responsibilities – an integration that Baden wants to offer researchers. Real business experiences with regional companies involved in marine biotechnology provide accelerated applied research experience.

Regional corporate collaborations extend opportunities and benefit. Product ideas are being assessed for marketability in the earliest stages of their development. Patent potentials can be evaluated by aaiPharma and other companies that network with the MARBIONC-MBAs to support patent processes and, if realized, eventual licensing. Finally, “The researchers themselves are a value-added product of the program,” Baden says. “The intellectual property these researchers generate will have far-reaching impacts on economic growth and development in the region and beyond. Their skills become a regional asset as well.”

Graduates of the MARBIONC-MBA collaboration, trained in the marketing and development of biotechnology products, offer North Carolina a pool of professional talent that will assure its quality of life by providing clean, well-paying jobs from products that will protect the environment as they grow the economy.

Vince Howe, associate professor of marketing and director of the MBA program, is enthusiastic. “UNC Wilmington and the Cameron School of Business are offering these ‘post-docs’ the chance to take their research and test its commercial feasibility. We will graduate scientists savvy in the business of marketing and development. The majority of our most socially conscious students -- those who desire to work with non-profits as well as those who enjoy for-profit management -- believe that service-delivery complements the profit incentive. Both for-profit and non-profit enterprises have the similar objective of bringing beneficial products and services to the widest number of users.”