

An Agile Approach to Business Education

Think about business in America. For most people, empathy doesn't spring to mind.

But since Alan Ritacco became dean of Becker College's School of Design & Technology three years ago, he's become convinced that knowing how to share and understand other people's feelings is among the most important skill that today's business students must acquire.

"You use empathy to understand what other people are interested in—your audience, customers, and marketing," he says.

Empathy is one of the key components of the Agile Mindset, a signature initiative at Becker that prepares students for the blindingly fast-changing world they'll encounter after they graduate. Tying empathy to marketing, management, and other courses has been central to Ritacco's reinvigoration of Becker's business program, which he says fits into his School's broader mission now, more than ever before.

"It's very important to understand why business is part of design and technology," Ritacco says. "Business really is the cornerstone of everything we enjoy in society in terms of technology and how it is delivered."

The new esports management major—a first-in-the-nation undergraduate degree launched Fall of 2018—is the best example of new innovations happening in Becker's business program. Esports involves the video game industry, but it also embraces nuts-and-bolts business training, like how to read a financial statement, differentiating capital and operating costs, and cultivating entrepreneurship.

The new major has attracted world-class professors like Kevin Mitchell, director of business development and strategic intelligence at National Amusements, the parent company of CBS and Viacom—media giants worth more than \$30 billion in total. "He is the real deal," says Ritacco, referring to Mitchell. "We're very fortunate."

Mitchell is also on the Esports Management Advisory Board, a new panel of highly regarded industry insiders and experts who are shepherding the growth of esports at Becker. They provide guidance to students on esports teams and, importantly, bolster the College's standing and offer contacts in the business world, which are valuable assets for students seeking jobs in the growing industry after they graduate.

The board is a who's who of tech business and esports luminaries. It includes Rob Curtin, executive director of Microsoft's higher education outreach in the U.S.; Christina Alejandre, a former



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vice president at Turner Sports; and esports coach and entrepreneur William Collis.

"Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but maybe 10 years from now, esports will be bigger than the NFL," says Ritacco, noting that esports already has a global audience of 580 million and is forecast to generate \$1.5 billion dollars annually by 2020.

Becker students are already benefitting from that forward-looking perspective, working on business and tech projects with local governments and major corporations. "What we are providing to our students is highly beneficial to the knowledge and skills they are developing," says Ritacco. "They are working on real-world applications, not case studies."

Ritacco thinks a new project called "Agile University" that he is developing might dovetail nicely with social business, which is a strong focus at Becker. Agile University would provide unemployed and underemployed people with opportunities to learn new skills online. It would also attract new students interested in addressing some of the social problems in the world and seeking innovative and sustainable change.

"There's a lot of runway here in terms of where we can go," says Ritacco. "I think it's pretty cool and, in the end, makes our graduates competitive in the job market."

Real-World Collaborations

Through the School of Design & Technology, Becker students and faculty are working with Fidelity Investments executives and researchers on a study of how Millennials (people born between 1981 and 1996) differ from Generation Xers (born between early 1960s and the late 1970s) in their approaches to managing their finances.

Cooperating with the Worcester Department of Public Health, the city's public schools, and other local stakeholders, students are developing a serious game for schoolchildren, on early prevention, that teaches them about the dangers of opioid abuse.