1 Introduction

Electronic commerce courses and Media MBA programs have been offered in a variety of departments at universities. Frequently these programs reflect the perspective of the discipline that is hosting the course, for example, marketing, communications, or computer science. The approach described here attempts to overcome the limitations of a single perspective by teaching new media and communications as an interdisciplinary and holistic course program for future managers in the digital economy.

This article describes the rationale for developing the MBA program, the design and development, and the implementation of this MBA. Lessons learned from this offering and suggestions for a similar program are discussed in the final part of the report.

Background and rationale of the MBA

New Media and Communication is more than just a new channel for information. It restructures and even replaces entire business processes. It is important for the managers of tomorrow to understand, control, and develop this new, media-based industrialisation (Glotz, 2001a). This has led the University of St. Gallen and the =mcm institute, in co-operation with the Bertelsmann Foundation and the Heinz-Nixdorf Foundation, to create the Executive MBA in New Media and Communication, which we believe prepares our students for a successful career in the management of new media in the digital age. The program includes an academic Master’s degree by the University of St. Gallen and is accredited by EQUIS (European Quality Improvement System). The University of St. Gallen is the first public university in the German-speaking region of Europe to be accredited by the European Foundation for Management Development. This award demonstrates St. Gallen’s leading position in quality management education when compared with other Swiss, foreign and private Universities. The program is called “Executive MBA” because the students must have practical working experience of at least 3 years. The students have a broad range of career opportunities based on this degree:

- Transforming companies of the “Old Economy” into the “New Economy”, e.g. project leaders for E-Business projects, corporate communication managers (relevant for companies in every branch),
- Managing companies in the Media Converging Industries: Telecommunications, IT, “Traditional” Media Industries,
- Embarking on a new venture, a start-up company in the Internet Business.

On February 5, 2001, the MBA team welcomed the first participants of the Executive MBA Program in New Media and Communication developed at the...
The 46 students came to the University of St. Gallen (HSG) in order to receive training in general management techniques and gain insight into the realm of possibilities opened up by the advent of networked digital media. The curriculum is composed of the blocks General Management, Managing New Media and Communication and Managing the Converging Industries. Furthermore, the students will be studying abroad at UC Berkeley and the Centre Universitaire in Luxembourg, where they will become acquainted with the specialities of Silicon Valley the media politics of the European Union, respectively. During the program, the participants will work on designing their own new media business models which they will then realise in the Media Venture block. Throughout the course, the students will be provided with knowledge and techniques in conflict mediation and organisational psychology. A distinct feature of the MBA program is the compact teaching units which allow for only 11 months of overall study duration, as well as the focus on the specific characteristics of the European and American media markets.

Planning for the program began in Spring 2000. The goal set by the directors of the mcm institute was to implement a MBA program that would spearhead the University of St. Gallen’s efforts towards becoming one of Europe’s top ten business schools as stressed by Prof. Peter Gomez, the university’s dean and co-director of the mcm institute. The MBA team, consisting of Prof. Glotz, Dr. Sabine Seufert and Dr. Johannes Hummel (Project managers), Julia Gerhard, Peter Mayr and Günter Hack (Assistants) and Jennifer Bruegger-Battista (Backoffice), had to plan the whole program from scratch, devising everything from the application procedure to the whole curriculum.

Program Staff and Faculty

Throughout the program courses are held by regular professors and lecturers of the University of St. Gallen as well as by external experts and practitioners from the respective fields of interest. About two-thirds of the external experts come from the academic community connected to the mcm institute, one-third of them hail from mcm institute competence centre project partners. Apart from those regular lecturers, many prominent practitioners from all fields of the media industry will host special events and discussions throughout the program.

Student Background

Since this program has an international focus, we aim for a highly diverse student body and therefore encourage students with various backgrounds and nationalities to apply. Students should have the extraordinary opportunity to learn from each other.

The selected class of the first mcm Executive MBA Program – the pioneer class – consists of 13 people from Switzerland, 19 from the rest of Europe, 3 each from Asia, Africa, India and the United States and 2 from the Middle East. Women comprise 31% of the participants, the average age is 32, the average full-time job experience is 5.6 years. For many participants, it was the excellent reputation of the HSG as well as the diversity of themes covered within the program that provided the basis for their decision in favour of the mcm institute’s MBA. Another important aspect turned out to be that the program could be finished in only 11 months. Due to the generosity of co-operating firms, the MBA team was able to offer 18 scholarships to interested applicants.
imparted additively, i.e., in broad contexts without any attempt being made to interlink to actual daily business practice (Astin, 1985). Such knowledge remains in many cases knowledge which has not been truly understood and assimilated, because it has been merely learnt by rote and cannot therefore be consciously disposed of, or summoned up to help its possessor to deal with concrete situations. A suggestion frequently made is that the quantity of material to be learnt should be reduced to a minimum, so that the lesson-time gained may be devoted to the cultivation of such qualities as problem-solving, decision-making, creativity, etc. Such an approach is defended with the claim that a high percentage of the knowledge acquired will in any case soon become obsolete, and it is therefore useless to accumulate much of it. Research in the field of cognitive psychology shows such statements to be false (Dubs, 1996). Knowledge is essential to thought. Those who know nothing cannot recognise problems, cannot perceive connections between different spheres of knowledge, and seldom succeed in finding innovative and creative answers and solutions. The availability of knowledge is essential to all learning. What is decisive, however, is that knowledge should be striven for, that is to say, the thought-processes associated with knowledge acquisition should be laid bare in realistic situations. In this context, there is no need to place all information at the learner’s disposal. What is necessary is “formative”, “opening-up” knowledge which enables the learner to apply knowledge creatively to problem-solving, and, also gives her/him the opportunity to create new knowledge. This structured fundamental knowledge must also be wide enough, because the interlinkage with other branches of knowledge requires a certain breadth.

On the evidence of the demands described above, new approaches and models in management education would appear to be required. In the following, we present a contribution towards this:

- Building an MBA community of MBA students, faculty, alumni, staff members, experts, and corporate partners helps to create settings where learning from experiences among peers can take place (Gabelnick et. al., 1990). The focus lays on team-based learning with group work in multicultural and interdisciplinary teams. Furthermore, communities have long-term goals, for example to provide a network for the alumni (Harasim, et. al. 1995). An online community platform is necessary to support our MBA community.

- Collaborative Learning or Groupwork enhances communication skills and students’ ability to manage group dynamics. Groupwork is interesting and motivating for students because they become actively involved in the work and are held accountable for their actions by group members. For these reasons groupwork can enhance student achievement (Jonassen, 1992). Groupwork helps develop learning communities in which students feel comfortable developing new ideas and raising questions about the material.

- Problem- and project-based learning describe classroom activities that shift away from the classroom practices of short, isolated, teacher-centered lessons and instead emphasise learning activities that are long-term, interdisciplinary, student-centered, and integrated with real world issues and practices (Bridges, Hallinger, 1990). One immediate benefit of practising project-based learning is the unique way that it can motivate students by engaging them in their own learning. It provides opportunities for students to pursue their own interests and questions and make decisions about how they will find answers and solve problems. Applying the project method supports the transfer “from theory to practice. The MBA includes the “Media Venture” project as well as “community projects” which are organised to support and foster the MBA community.

- At the beginning of a course the emphasis lays on instructor-centered lectures to lay the foundations in lessons. At a more advanced learning level, the transition can be made to a less frontal-approach method of teaching (indirect leadership). The instructor functions as a coach who makes suggestions and encourages the metacognitive development of the learners by reflecting the learning- and dynamic group-processes. The changing function of the teacher from direct instruction to indirect instruction and, finally, to learning consultation in group work reflects, after all, the various learning theory paradigms: From cognitive behaviorism towards the adoption of various features of constructivism (Dubs, 1996).

**Curriculum Format**

The mcm MBA in New Media and Communications is a full-time program running for eleven months. It is subdivided into six blocks which are, in turn, composed of different courses that are administrated by experts in the respective fields of interest. As electronic media foster internationalization, two exchange programs have been integrated into the curriculum. The first has been designed in co-operation with the Ministry of Culture, Education and Research of the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg and takes place at the Centre Universitaire in Luxembourg-City, one of the most important hubs of the European Union. In Luxembourg, the program will include lectures by renowned European experts on media law and communication science as well as presentations and discussions with high ranking practitioners like the heads of both leading German pub-
lic and private TV channels. This part of the program has been designed to introduce the students to the subtleties of doing media business in the complex multi-cultural environment of the EU. In order to obtain up-to-date information about the latest technologies and to get input from top US economists like Hal Varian, the MBA class will embark for a three weeks trip to UC Berkeley and Silicon Valley. Throughout the entire program, the students will be engaged in Student Community Projects (ScoPs) and the realisation of their own business idea, the Media Venture Project (see fig. 2 and closer description below).

The lectures in the first block of the program will provide the students with a sound foundation of knowledge in the fields of business administration and economy, based on the system theory oriented St. Gallen model of business administration. The lectures are held and co-ordinated by the regular academic personnel of the University of St. Gallen, supported by presentations from external practitioners. During the second block, the staff of the mcm institute will show the students how digital technologies are transforming business and how to make use of current ideas and technologies online as well as within the enterprise. In the third block, a closer look is taken on how the digitisation affects the different areas of traditional media like television, print, radio or the music industry. Throughout this block, many leading managers from media firms like BMG or Napster will pass on first hand information about how business methods evolve in their respective areas and which problems continue to arise from technological progress. The students will then apply the generated knowledge in their own Media Venture groups in order to design viable digital products.

In addition to the business-oriented curriculum, the students will be treated to evening speeches by internationally acclaimed experts in the field of politics, philosophy and social sciences. So far, Joseph Weizenbaum, former professor with the M.I.T. and legendary socially conscious computer wizard, Prof. Vittorio Hösle, well-known philosopher, and Prof. Mohamed Rabie, expert for conflict mediation and politics in the Middle East, have held speeches and led discussions in the MBA program. Furthermore, Prof. Dr. Ernst Pöppel, one of Europe’s leading brain researchers, Chair of the Board of Directors at the Center for Human Sciences, and Director of the Institute for Medical Psychology, at the University of Munich, will host an evening on the subject of knowledge representation in the human brain. The approach is to offer the students a studium fundamentale, a comprehensive view of important aspects of science and society as to prevent entrenchment in only one discipline. Leadership and communication skills will also be trained and reinforced systematically throughout the program in units on mediation, communication and complexity management.

Teaching Methods

For the design of a study program (see table 1) the new HSG teaching approach distinguishes between three different types of studies (Euler, Wilbers, 2001):

- **Contact Studies:**
  At the beginning of a study program, i.e. in a community with little common knowledge, organisation
Table 1: Overview of the Teaching Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDY CATEGORIES</th>
<th>Appropriate for:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Social Form</td>
<td>Contact Studies</td>
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<th>Teaching/Learning Method</th>
<th>Activity Form</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Class Events</td>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>Homework in Groups (e.g. Readings), Group Presentations: What’s new, Tech Talk, Lessons Learned</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(New Theories and Concepts)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Guest Lecture</td>
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<td>Symposium, Dinner Speech, “Ask Expert” Session</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lecture: Instructor-led Preparation and Wrap up Class Discussion, “Open Space Discussion”</td>
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<td>II. Group Work</td>
<td>Tutorial: Instructor-led, Computer Lab Session: Instructor-led</td>
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<td>Group-led, Computer Lab Session: Group-led</td>
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<tr>
<td>III. Individual Work</td>
<td>Tutorial: self-paced (e.g. computer-based, interactive tutorial), Computer Lab Session: Student-led</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Homework (e.g. Readings), Presentation: What’s new, Tech Talk, Lessons Learned</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lecture: Presentation of Cases, Guest Lecture: Presentation/Demonstration of Business Cases</td>
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<td>“Classic” Case Study (discussed in Class, organized groups), Self-Study Case (Homework, self-organized groups)</td>
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<td>Integration Seminar, Project Seminar, Task Forces/Expert Groups</td>
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<td>Student Project, Experiment, Field Study</td>
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<td>Group Reports, Group Thesis</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Reports, Thesis</td>
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Online Tutor
and language to base learning on, the focus is on guided learning processes and socialising processes. Face-to-face contacts play an important role. The instructor assumes a very active role, directly conducting and controlling the learning processes. The methods of choice are mostly instructor-centered, such as lectures, and question-and-answer sessions, or group discussions in the class (Seufert et. al., 2001).

- Self-Studies:
  At a more advanced learning level, less frontal-approach methods of teaching (indirect leadership) can be applied. Here, all activities come under the heading of self-studies or self-directing learning and are controlled by the learners themselves. They guide, plan and supervise their own activities and learning processes, thus fostering meta-cognitive development. Learner-centered methods are integrated, such as learning with self-study materials, learning with webquests, case studies, and field studies with problems to be solved: each of them allow learners to work independently (Seufer et. al., 2001).

- Context-Studies:
  At the highest achievement-level, the emphasis can be laid even more strongly on the learners’ own creation of knowledge, in consultation with the instructor (Shapiro, Levine, 1999). Work in groups leads to critical reflection and can thus contribute to the building-up and maintenance of values. Examples of such team-centered methods are role-playing, or virtual seminars using different, conducted discussion-forms. The individual members take a very active part, although the group-interaction is of chief importance. The learning situations are extremely problem-oriented corresponding to “real world projects” focusing on multidisciplinary aspects. Additionally, context-orientated subject matters from other disciplines are integrated in this kind of studies.

Project-based Learning: MediaVenture and SCoPs

Project-based learning plays an important role as a teaching method to guarantee the transfer of learned theories to practice and to apply it to the students’ own business project. We think that acquiring knowledge is not an end in itself. We believe students learn best by building on their own experience and putting their new skills and understanding into practice immediately. Therefore, the students should experience the special challenges of entrepreneurship within the MediaVenture project in the MBA program. With the term “MediaVenture” we define a project related to the digital economy in which the students have to undertake during the course of the MBA program. The MediaVenture should prepare students to launch their own business in the field of new media and communication – as a start-up company or as a new business field of an existing company in the converging industries. The challenges of the MediaVenture are:

- Experimental Learning: Some of the students already have a business idea. The MediaVenture is the ideal environment to try out one’s own ideas. Students have a practically risk-free opportunity to develop a business idea into a solid concept with the support of experts, successful entrepreneurs, and peers.

  - Focus on Media-related Ventures: Students focus their efforts on creating a comprehensive business plan for a venture designed to satisfy a need, realize an opportunity, or solve a problem within the media converging industries.

  - Active Learning: “From theory to practice”. The transfer from theories and lessons learned to the concrete MediaVenture project helps students to acquire deep knowledge and problem-solving skills.

  - Networking: The MediaVenture can provide the students with a wealth of contacts, events, and experts, establishing a powerful network for their future career.

  - Team and communication skills: The MBA students have the privilege of learning from each other in multicultural and multidisciplinary teams.

  - Working interdisciplinary (project and problem driven): The MediaVenture follows an holistic approach: it demands more than writing a business plan, for example, practical-oriented tasks such as the web design or aspects of “communication issues”. It reflects a challenge from different disciplines.

![Figure 3: The Tasks of the MediaVenture](image-url)
Working scientifically: Since the MBA is an academic title, the scientific work in form of a thesis is included in the MediaVenture project as well. Students have to write a master thesis individually or in small groups.

Due to the objectives and challenges of the MediaVenture, students are required to complete the following task list (see fig. 3):

1. Team Building: If students already have a business idea, they can apply for initiating a team. The MBA team is responsible for organising the teams. The overall goal of the team-setting is to form as diversified teams as possible so that students in a team can learn the most from each other.

2. A business idea: After team-building, students develop the business idea of a start-up company or of a new business field of an existing company in the media converging industries (“traditional” media, IT, and Telecommunications Industries) in outline form (3-5 pages), including perspectives on the market and competitive analysis.

3. Business plan: As a next task, students further develop a complete business plan of a start-up company or a new business field of an existing company in the media converging industries.

4. Web design: Students develop the web design concept and implement a prototype for the company’s web presence.

5. Communication concept: To introduce their MediaVenture results to the panel of judges, students create a communication concept (mainly a PowerPoint presentation) presenting the business plan and the web concept/prototype.

6. Scientific work: Finally, students work scientifically within the MediaVenture project as well and write a master thesis with the focus on a specific research question which came up during the MediaVenture.

One overall goal of the MBA program is to build a strong MBA community – a community of learners, professionals, and experts in various fields (Gabelnick et. al., 1990). The idea of SCoPs – Student Community Projects – was created to give MBA participants an opportunity to put their collective imagination together in self-selected groups of 7-8 people to support community-building. They have to organise a project that they would like to carry through to future MBA classes. In SCoPs they have to take initiative, to use their imagination and to be responsible as a member of the MBA community. The MBA year will be a year to remember, an experience of lifetime, especially because the class of 2001 represents our pioneer class and has a lot of chances to invent its own traditions and ideas.

Furthermore, the students are organized in student teams to plan, develop and evaluate a project which are not directly connected to the curriculum and not graded but their outcomes are of high value for current and future MBA classes. The outcome of the projects should be a benefit and an added-value for the community. Furthermore, the project work implies that the students have to deal with media and communications management by developing one concrete product/project. Mainly, the aim of the student community projects is that students should be engaged in developing a learning community and, as a member of it, they contribute important outcomes to the community. Hopefully, students will not only achieve a valuable result for the community, but will surprise themselves – not least of all because the whole thing has to be done during a very busy year. The pressure can be intense but students will learn how motivating good teamwork can be. Students work in small teams of 7 to 8 members on one project. The several projects are connected with each other. Therefore, a cooperative approach and a continuous exchange among the groups is highly recommended.

Whereas the MediaVenture projects represent a competition between the different groups, the community projects have a strong co-operative character with the ultimate and bonding goal to build and maintain the community of the MBA class 2001. The students may choose between 6 community projects (see fig. 4).
3 Program Implementation

The primary goal of the MBA program is to educate students about the knowledge and the skills a manager needs to command to be successful in the age of the digital economy. This section of the paper describes how the program was implemented, including the necessary cooperation, the course schedule of a typical week and the MBA community platform as the main online medium for the MBA.

Cooperation Partners

Among the program’s main strategic partners is the Haas School of Business at the UC Berkeley, where the students will have the opportunity to attend lectures by Hal Varian and other experts and make a tour of important IT and media corporations in the area. The cooperation with the government and Centre Universitaire of the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg, however, goes deeper. The Luxembourg commitment includes the financing of a joint professorship for the year 2002, a five week course block at the Centre Universitaire in Luxembourg-City and corporations with local media corporations like the SES (Société Européenne des Satellites) or the RTL group, which will provide professional media training for the students at the RTL studios.

Course schedule and in-class time, that means the time spent in class involved lectures, demonstrations, case studies, and class discussions. A class starts with a preparation and introduction slot in order to communicate the learning objectives, expectations and overview of the course program. In analogy, each class ends with a wrap-up lesson where the key takeaways are emphasized and sample questions for the exam are discussed. A typical day includes a lecture in the morning, small group discussion, and class discussion. In the afternoon and evening the focus lays on self-directed learning, the use of multidisciplinary resources, working on their MediaVenture projects and ScoPs tasks. The MediaVenture served as a thread that connected various topics throughout the courses. Students provide input based on the introduced theories and concepts as well as on their personal experiences. The time plan of the MediaVenture is shown in the next figure including dates of major student assignments such as the business plan and the communication concept (presentation, web design).

MBA Community Platform

All internal processes and external communication efforts are supported by a custom-built online platform which is integrated into the mcm institute’s well-known research site, the NetAcademy (http://www.netacademy.org). The NetAcademy was founded in 1997 by Prof. Beat Schmid (mcm institute, University of St. Gallen) as a platform for knowledge exchange, publications, and discussions of researchers (Schmid, 1997). Currently, researchers of five research communities in the field of media and communications management exchange their knowledge on this platform. In autumn of 2000, the NetAcademy was made accessible to learning communities. Numerous services already offered by the NetAcademy (e.g., the digital libraries and the glossaries) are used by the MBA learning community as well. Additional
services, such as curriculum catalogues or teaching templates have been developed specifically for this community “type” on the NetAcademy platform. In the MBA environment, networking is very important; an overlap with the research communities on the NetAcademy connects MBA community members to and enlarges their network with interesting researchers. The MBA platform mirrors virtually all administrative aspects of the program into dataspace. Application and evaluation processes, for example, can be managed elegantly through tailor-made databases. Administration and planning of the curriculum are facilitated by the curriculum database which also serves as a timetable that can be accessed quickly through the World Wide Web. In the password-protected online library, the students can download digitized course materials and accompanying datasets. Furthermore, the online platform helps the student groups to organize their MediaVenture team work and their extracurricular activities. In Student Community Projects, which serve the purpose to build the foundation for the future community of MCM-MBA graduates, the students help building a career and alumni network, design a digital story about their experiences in St. Gallen and plan events together. The NetAcademy is designed as a “generic” platform, i.e. a new research or learning community can choose and combine existing services of the NetAcademy according to its needs and also add other required services.

4 Lessons Learned and Conclusion

The interdisciplinary approach is a useful way to educate students about managing new media and communication and to provide the knowledge and the skills a manager needs to command to be successful in the age of the digital economy (Glotz, 2001b). Despite the interdisciplinary approach, the main focus concentrates on management tools and techniques in order to form a new management discipline: how to manage a company in the digital age.

The pioneer class is an extremely heterogeneous class regarding their different cultural and educational backgrounds. Collaborative learning and team-oriented teaching methods allow students to benefit from the perspective and experience that comes from their peers and experts in different fields. Students’ feedback shows that teamwork is one of the key advantages of such an international and interdisciplinary MBA program. Furthermore, it provides a realistic and authentic situation as well because of the growing importance of diversified and multicultural teams in companies.

However, the heterogeneity has some shortcomings as well. Especially in the first part of the curriculum where courses such as finance were taught, students without a business administration or economic background felt frustrated that there was not enough class time being used to practice finance. We have had to cope with a similar situation regarding technically oriented courses. In such courses it is extremely hard and virtually impossible for the lecturer to successfully teach and address the expectations of an heterogeneous class ranging from pure novices to almost specialists in a certain field. Therefore, the students are provided with additional evening courses and assignments for beginners.

Concerning the MediaVenture students found that to manage their businesses, they had to apply what they were learning from their readings and classroom. This created an “authentic learning environment” where students can publicly exhibit their learning, have a practically risk-free opportunity to try out their own idea, and expect real life standards of quality. Currently, the business ideas of nine promising MediaVentures have been developed. The students have received their first feedback in order to further elaborate on their projects. In October, the final business plans and communication concepts will be presented to an outstanding jury of practitioners and experts. The different MediaVenture groups show a fair competition where the students exchange their ideas and feedback among the teams. The SCoPs groups are extremely engaged in developing a learning com-
munity. It demonstrates the intrinsic motivation of the students to contribute and be part of the MBA community because no credits or grades are awarded for ScoP projects.

The first Executive MBA Program continues until December 16, 2001. For more information on the Executive MBA in New Media and Communication, please visit our community platform: http://www.media-mba.unisg.ch.

References


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