

REPORT ON MBA SCHOOLS

***Business with the jet set*****Maxime Crener, Dean of the Monaco Business School, talks about building a business school in the land of luxury and high finance**

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Maxime Crener isn't betting against history.

Like the ancient fortress upon which his school's tiny principality was built, the dean of the **Monaco Business School** at the International University of Monaco plans to survive by continuing to attract the luxury and financial crowds, even as hard times hit the global economy.

Except in his case, instead of throngs of casino gamblers, billionaires and their bankers that fill the world's second smallest nation, Mr. Crener has set his sights on international students interested in pursuing degrees such as Master of Business Administration in Luxury Management, or Master's in Finance, Financial Engineering.

So far, it's working. Applications are up 27 per cent from a year ago at the English-language school on the Côte D'Azur, Mr. Crener says.



Maxime Crener, dean of the Monaco Business School at the International University of Monaco: 'Change is coming very, very soon, and we need a new type of a young manager.'

"To compete, you need a niche in the market. I can't compete against London Business School," said Mr. Crener, a Canadian who holds degrees from Aix-Marseilles, Lille, Laval, Nice and Harvard Universities.

"I thought about the dream here. When you mention I'm living in Monaco, people think 'Oh, wow — glamour, looks, international finance.' I thought, how can I compete in this area, how do I implement this strategy in finance, luxury and international business?"

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The school opened in 1986. Mr. Crener came to the school in 2001, soon changing its name from the University of Southern Europe. In 2003, it ranked 94th in the Economist Intelligence Unit's annual ranking of the top 100 MBA programs. Today, it ranks 37th, and its EMBA is listed in BusinessWeek's rankings of top non-U.S. executive MBA programs. The school has 385 students, plus another 122 in locations in China and Taiwan.

Having a tight focus has served the entire principality well. It's been 800 years since people from the nearby Italian region of Genoa built a fortress where today's Principality of Monaco now stands, contained in a little under two square kilometers. The first casino opened more than a century ago, and today Monaco houses more than 30,000 inhabitants. In addition to being a resort for the world's super-wealthy, it has a bustling financial sector, encouraged by low business taxes and zero income taxes.

Just as a Canadian business school curriculum must reflect the issues and industries faced by Canada's companies on the national and international stage, Monaco's equivalent must mirror its own unique economy, said Mr. Crener. Given its tiny size and residents from around the globe, Monaco's business activity (and business education) in the luxury and finance industries is by definition international, Mr. Crener said. Most of the students speak at least three languages.

"We have no national market — here we move immediately to the international market and learn quickly," he said. "When you move in these areas, you have to be at the top."

Learning in the land of the wealthy is more likely within your grasp if you are already comfortably-off. Students are paying up to €25,000 (about \$41,000) for a one academic year's tuition in MBA programs, plus €17,000 (about \$28,000) for living costs.

Mr. Crener holds Canadian citizenship, though he was born in Madrid and raised in South America.

He is now a shareholder in the Monaco school, which is run "like a business" without subsidies for the students. He is no stranger to developing educational facilities, and cut his teeth starting up the University of Quebec in his late 20s as a professor and director of the first business administration module.

"It gives you impetus to continue to develop," he said. "That we created it from nothing — that's what I like."

Prior, he studied and worked in Europe, then earned an MBA at **Laval University** in 1969. After the University of Quebec, he taught at the **University of Ottawa** for four years in the 1970s. He moved back to Europe a few years later, working as a consultant for international corporations, and later returned to Ottawa, founding a consultancy that was later acquired by SNC Lavalin. At 48, he became the dean of the Marseille Business school in France, then director general and dean at CERAM Nice Sophia-Antipolis, and later a consultant as well as a professor at University Marseille III.

Around the time he joined the Monaco school, he had discussions with Albert Grimaldi, now Prince Albert II of Monaco. "He was very interested to have a business school in Monaco — every time when people spoke about Monaco, they thought of rich people and luxury, but you have a financial industry too. It was important to him to have a very good school," Mr. Crener said. "The opportunity was there."

He is optimistic for his graduating students, though he knows they face a challenging environment in the near-term.

"Change is coming very, very soon, and we need a new type of a young manager. They need to have people who understand finance, who can manage these corporations, not in the way it's been done in the last 15 years," he said.

To help achieve this, the school is hiring a new professor of corporate finance. And for those interested in money, the pay is not as high as you might get at, say, AIG, and you must publish at least one paper a year, he says.

But there is that glorious Monaco sunshine.

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