The Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, does one thing and does it very well: educate people to be masters in their businesses.

Edward Jewett Tucker, then Dartmouth’s president, established the school in 1900 with financing provided by his former college roommate, Edward Tuck. Tuck was a wealthy banker and philanthropist of a type that characterized the Gilded Age. The school is named not after Edward, but his father, Amos Tuck, who was also a graduate of Dartmouth. The mission of this new school? To provide the tools students would need to succeed in the newly emerging economy driven by advances in industrialization at the turn of the century.

Now, the Tuck School has the largest minority executive education program in the world. It has seen more than 10,000 students seek out knowledge and intensive, immersive learning experiences dedicated to serving the needs of a diverse, thriving business community. Just being a part of the network has its benefits, says Keith Tillage, owner of Tillage Construction, LLC. Tuck provided the fundamentals needed to run his business, and exposure to “a network of successful businessmen and women—not only in my classes, but the entire Tuck alumni community,” he says. “That has proven to be invaluable.”

So, how did Tuck transform from an Ivy League institution meant to provide large corporations with skilled professionals and executives into a developer of minority and women entrepreneurs?

Business culture and perspective were changing in the late 1970s. Major corporations were beginning to do a lot of outsourcing, and it became clear that corporate supply chains and the American economy would be stronger if they included minorities as significant contributors. The trustees at Tuck had the vision to create a program to meet the then-unmet needs of minority entrepreneurs with limited business education resources. Partnering with the Small Business Administration (SBA), and subsequently with the Minority Business Development Agency and the National Minority Supplier Development Council, the Tuck School began to provide intensive education tailored to the needs of minority businesses.

What they knew then and know now is that, typically, minority business owners know more about the processes involved in manufacturing and service delivery than they do about the actual ins and outs of running a business. The challenges faced by minority business owners are not related to doing the things that go into delivering a product, but rather, knowing how to establish a strategic focus,
create sustainable cashflows, attune sales and operations to
customer needs in a competitive marketplace, and manage
people. Tuck identified these challenges and adjusted its
curriculum to meet them.

“The Tuck program helped me by offering a comprehen-
sive presentation on the required segmentation of customer
types,” says Eric Bailey, president of EMED Medical Com-
pany. “It helped me understand better the relevance of each
customer by defining them by criteria other than size or
sales volume.” He adds, “Due to the profit-margin analysis
provided by the Tuck program, I was empowered to increase
my sales prices with confidence on certain customers, and
to increase my profit margins by 5 percent.”

Marjorie Perry, president and CEO of MZM Con-
struction & Management, credits attending one of Tuck's
programs with revealing how much more she could learn
about business, and giving her the tools and knowledge to
expand. “The executive program showed me how much I
did not know about business and finance,” she says. “Upon
my return from the program, I was able to work my financial modeling
for a major contract while under-
standing of all the profit-and-loss
factors. After attending the Grow-
ing the Minority Business to Scale
program, I went back and applied
for my 8(a) certification, which
allowed me to add three new
components to my clients' supply
chains. I loved that program—[it]
kept you fresh and open to what's coming next for small,
minority businesses.”

Tuck “forced me to more thoroughly understand finan-
cial statements and evaluate how the business is positioned
in the industry value chain,” says Carla Walker-Miller,
also opened my mind, challenging business assumptions
I made in starting the business, some of which were based
on my corporate experience and traditional operating
methods.”

Tuck's model helped Linda Parks, CEO of Lixit, an animal-care products company, overcome significant challenges
almost immediately after she graduated from the program.
“Upon my return from a lovely week on the Dartmouth
campus, our bank went under,” she says. “I had to start from
scratch to find new financing in the middle of an acquisition.
Tuck helped me [learn how to] procure financing with great
terms and [in] completing the acquisition. [It also] helped
me better understand my own financials.”

Concentrated Learning

Tuck knows that entrepreneurs are busy people—they
don't have much time to be away from the business, so some
of its programs are designed to provide the most important
learning in a focused, week-long experience. The programs
differ from other executive education programs; coached
by highly experienced faculty acting as teachers as well as
consultants, they resemble strategic retreats more than tra-
ditional classrooms. Still, part of what attracts people to Tuck is the pres-
tige associated with Dartmouth, an Ivy League college. “I understood
my deficiencies, so I researched
every potential vehicle that could
help me be a better business owner,” Tillage says. “Tuck consis-
tently came back as the best op-
tion.”

The program's recognition leads to strong recom-
endations through professional networks, too. Walker-
Miller heard about the program through DTE Energy.
Parks was referred to Tuck by the supplier diversity man-
ger of a major buyer. Bailey credits his attendance
to the positive reviews given to him by a previous attendee,
and Perry heard about Tuck from a conference she at-
tended.

Three factors make the Tuck program unique. First, the
design is based on more than a decade of research into what
causes diverse businesses to succeed, what causes them to
plateau, and what causes them to fail. This base of knowledge
drives the curriculum of Tuck's various programs. Second,
the case study for the week is the participant's own busi-
ness, and the "deliverable" is an updated business plan with
a to-do list that the participant is expected to implement.
Third, the same faculty team that has been working on these
programs for decades is in charge of instruction—only top-
level professors are entrusted to interact with entrepreneurs.
In this way, the Tuck program ensures that the people who
show up receive the best experience and information from
instructors who have earned Tuck's top rankings.

Together, what is happening at Tuck represents the cutting edge
of what is happening in entrepreneurial education. Its commitment
to excellence is what leads graduates like Perry to endorse it whole-
heartedly. “Make a commitment to yourself and your organization
to gain the knowledge necessary to continue to work on your
business, not in it,” she says. “You cannot find a better home than
Tuck.”

Amy Elizabeth Goudy is CEO of
CRH Enterprises, Ltd., a diversity
consulting firm specializing in business
development for suppliers and program
development for corporations. She has
worked in the supplier diversity field for
almost a decade and is a strong advocate for
creating supply-chain opportunities.

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