

Blue MBA's global reputation is reinforced with graduation of Class of 2019

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Members of Blue MBA Class of 2019 celebrate their graduation.

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Industry leaders and top academics hailed the status of the Blue MBA as an integral part of the shipping industry and as a beacon of global repute at the graduation ceremony in Copenhagen for the Class of 2019.

Family, friends and colleagues of the graduates gathered in the Danish capital, some travelling considerable distances, to congratulate the 30+ candidates, all of whom hold senior positions in their companies and organisations.

Irene Rosberg, programme director of the Executive MBA in Shipping and Logistics, as the Blue MBA is formally known, said the day — August 10, 2019 – was a celebration of much hard work, and the start of new adventures and new challenges.



A section of the academic procession.

Speakers at the ceremony concurred that the challenges loomed large but could be successfully tackled with the deep-rooted skillsets that the MBA course had nurtured.

Since 2001, the Blue MBA, which has accreditations from top educational bodies, has graduated 274 students from more than 45 countries. The MBA is under the aegis of Copenhagen Business School, the largest institution of its kind in northern Europe.



MBA director Poul Hedegaard.

Poul Hedegaard, director at CBS for the full-time, Blue and Executive MBA programmes, referred to “this great [Blue MBA] programme and its great reputation all round the world.”

It had been referred to as “probably the best shipping MBA in the world, and I believe that is true.” He understood that the industry story was of consolidation, cost-cutting, greater efficiency and shareholder pressure. “People in the shipping industry are very hard-working, and you in the MBA have proved just that,” he said. The graduates would help enhance the future strength of the industry.

Bent Petersen, associate dean of CBS, said that turbulence had “become, so to say, the normal for the sector.” He recalled speaking at the 2017 graduation ceremony of an emerging ‘perfect storm’ including trade wars and cyber-attacks. Thankfully, the storm had not broken but the threats remained, and the past two years had had their share of turmoil. He emphasised that digitalisation and sustainability could be seen as threats as well as opportunities, hence the philosophy of the Blue MBA programme “is to make you realise the opportunities where the others see the threats.



Bent Petersen, associate dean

“The ability to navigate your company through troubled waters is indeed in high demand. The market value of your MBA is high today, and will be even higher tomorrow,” continued Prof Petersen.

He underlined the dictum of Leonardo da Vinci: “He who loves practice without theory is like a sailor without rudder and compass, never knowing where to be cast.”

Prof Petersen told the graduates that they were now shifting roles from students to become ambassadors for the programme.

Gregor Halff, dean of education at CBS, said that the MBA was probably, after medical education, the most successful form of education in universities. The Blue MBA was part of CBS's global reputation. "I have spent the last 10 years of my life in Singapore [where he was professor and faculty area coordinator of corporate communication and deputy dean at Singapore Management University] and there are places where the Blue MBA and CBS is considered 'one thing.'"

Prof Halff said: "The Blue MBA is something that only the CBS can do to this quality, and about that I am particularly proud."



Gregor Halff, dean of education.

Martin Fruergaard, chief executive of Ultragas, which runs a fleet of 20 gas carriers, told the graduates: "Many of you will soon realise how privileged you have been for the last two years, and miss the time you have had at CBS.

"The maritime industry and oil and gas industry are again undergoing a challenging period. We need well-educated colleagues to see and capture and use the opportunities. Therefore, the Blue MBA is essential for the growth of the Danish shipping cluster."

Standing back from the specific topics, Mr Fruergaard identified four key themes involving "shaking the tree." One was leadership: "You cannot do it alone and therefore you need to get your colleagues on board... shake up the knowledge inside the organisation and use it for deciding the best way forward."



Ultragas chief Martin Fruergaard.

Second, pay close attention to the customers: “Shake that customer tree as well. You will get a very clear purpose if you know what the customers are looking for.”

Third point related to “your new network established in the last few years. Maybe you should shake the network tree a little bit. It is important to keep the learning experience alive.”

Fourth, safety. “Please take safety seriously.”

Mr Fruergaard has been at Ultragas since 2015 after 26 years with AP Møller-Maersk, latterly as chief commercial officer of Maersk Drilling. He is a board member of Danish Shipping and the Danish Maritime Fund.

To resounding applause, the candidates were presented with their diplomas, turning the tassels on their caps from right to left to signify they had graduated.



Peggy Høegh Grays: exemplary thesis.

On behalf of the examining panel, Herbert Kotzab of Bremen University announced that Peggy Høegh Grays had submitted the best master's thesis, known as the Integrated Strategy Project.

Danish-born Mrs Grays has been a ship operator with Stolt Tankers USA in Houston since 2016.

Her paper was called "Academy for shoreside training for chemical tanker specialist knowledge" with the focus on North America.

The ISP calls for theoretical and practical knowledge developed during the MBA course to be applied for the benefit of the candidate's business.

Prof Kotzab said that of the many fine works the examiners evaluated, they had selected Mrs Grays' ISP "which we consider to be of a tremendous quality."

This was not an easy task as so many good ISPs were submitted. "Honestly speaking, we really learned a lot on digitalisation and its consequences for company strategies in various segments, about corporate social responsibility programmes, how to approach new markets and how to expand a portfolio of services to ensure profitability in the companies."

The examiners were looking for originality, innovativeness and relevance.

The ISP process meant that ideas were independently worked out in a novel way which a company was unable to do. The research should be of value to the whole industry, said Prof Kotzab.



Graduates Mrs Grays and Gisle Kårbø Rong extoll the value of the Blue MBA.

He said that the project of Mrs Grays dealt with the most important element of shipping, which was not a ship or vessel, but the human element. It showed that educating people at work might cost something but could help to avoid many mistakes, which might be in some cases fatal.

The thesis written by Mrs Grays took the lack of structure in that area as a challenge, and developed a complete training programme for a company, "which can be immediately realised in the form of an academy. It consisted of internal and external training and displayed the financial impact that a little investment in training of people would have on the profit of a company," said Prof Kotzab.



A section of the enthusiastic audience.

This shoreside training would have a clear value within Stolt Tankers and for the whole maritime sector, even though in the current work she covered only the US sector.

Mrs Grays is the author of a soon-to-be published book, entitled *The Maritime Industry – an Ocean of Opportunities*. The book is written to inspire talented people to join the industry, and help entry-level employees gain a thorough knowledge of the basics, as well as offer tips and tricks on optimising vessel operation.

In a joint presentation on behalf of the graduating class, Gisle Kårbø Rong, managing director of Seatrans Ship Management, Norway, and Mrs Grays recalled the combination of intense study and lighter moments of the past two years. Mr Rong's firm provides shipmanagement for in-house partners and external clients in the European chemical parcel, offshore and project cargo trades.



The Gordon Pipes and Drums accompany the procession.

Mr Rong quoted the guiding spirit of educational inquiry: “I know one thing for sure: that I know nothing for sure.”

He advised maritime practitioners: “Make sure that everyone in your organisation knows they are important and makes a difference.” Do the extra necessary to support diversity and inclusion: “it is very powerful when one person empowers another, when a man empowers a woman, and woman a man, and when a privileged person empowers a minority.”

Mrs Grays urged executives to show caring and nobility. Mr Rong and Mrs Grays warmly thanked their classmates for their comradeship, and their families for the sacrifice of supporting their loved ones in carrying out extra study.



Irene Rosberg

The duo paid special tribute to the unstinting support of Ms Rosberg.

Ms Rosberg in her concluding remarks said: “We have come a long way since the programme’s inception and the Blue MBA is now considered the best in the world. The great value of this programme lies in its uniqueness. We have achieved this through diversity and the members of the international faculty and in the work and the activities of our alumni and graduates.”

The platform party and graduates had proceeded from the campus courtyard into the hall to the stirring music of the Gordon Pipes and Drums of Copenhagen. The presence of the kilted dozen-strong band is now a hallowed tradition of Blue MBA graduation day.

The highly regarded MBA programme comprises eight modules based mainly in Copenhagen, with one each in London and Hamburg. Participants, who hold senior rank in their companies or organisations, graduate after completing all modules and the final master thesis.

The Class of 2021 begins work in September 2019. Further information is available from programme director Irene Rosberg at ir.mbs@cbs.dk

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