

**Darla Moore School of Business**  
University of South Carolina

# Full-Time **MBA Programs**

**International MBA • Accelerated MBA**



**Project Profile:**  
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**IMBA Class of 2011**  
**Company: Creative Concrete Concepts**  
**Location: Sharajah, UAE**



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## Journal Entry #1

I favor e-mail. It seems so straight-forward to me: send someone a message, they check it and respond when they have time, I check it and respond, and so on. Unfortunately, my preference for e-mail does not reflect what is normal in the Middle East where face-to-face communication is much preferred. Business is transacted over leisurely meals and late nights at the *maqha* (café) over cups of piping hot Arabic coffee with cardamom, served with dates and other *halawiat* (sweets). How does somebody find an internship in the Middle East? Certainly not online, and definitely not over e-mail. I invited a friend of my family's out to dinner in Dubai, to pick his brain about possible internships in the United Arab Emirates (of which Dubai is one of seven emirates), and much to my surprise, the dinner ended with an offer to work for my friend's company, Creative Concrete Concepts. That was just one of many lessons in adaptability from my fifteen months overseas during the 3-year Arabic track.



I am a San Diego native, quite used to sand and sea, but not the temperatures common in Oman and the UAE. I graduated from UC Berkeley with a degree in Near Eastern Studies. Realizing that a life of academia, with summers spent digging in the Middle East wasn't for me, I returned to San Diego and spent the next four years working—first as an electronics store manager and then as a legal and administrative assistant for a religious non-profit organization. I knew that I had to go back to school to move up the career ladder, and while debating the merits of law school and business school, I found the IMBA with the Arabic track and everything fell into place. Here was an opportunity to use my Bachelor's degree, improve my Arabic, earn a Masters, and change my career path. My husband was on board for the adventure, and in the first two years of this program we have traveled to fifteen countries over three continents, including Oman, India, Jordan, Turkey, Ukraine, Bulgaria, and Morocco.

One of the many benefits of the three-year track was having over seven months to complete an internship. During the Core classes in Columbia, it occurred to me that completing two internships in those seven months would be ideal, experiencing an international work environment as well as that of an American corporation. My second internship, which will be starting in June, is with Target in their distribution center in Lugoff, South Carolina. I am gearing up for my second cross-country drive back to Columbia, having completed my first internship.

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My title at Creative Concrete Concepts (CCC) was Internal Consultant, and my main duties were preparing the company for ISO 9001:2008 Certification as well as researching and choosing server components and updating their Web site. While English was the official language of business, the international work force spoke many other languages including Levantine and

Egyptian Arabic, Tagalog, and Bangla, giving me many opportunities to learn Palestinian and Jordanian slang.

I am still tinkering with the Web site from California and I have to start packing for my next move, so a lengthier description of my internship abroad will have to wait until next time.

## Journal Entry #2



Business is global, especially when it only takes a three days to get a package from the UAE to Columbia without expediting. The Web site project is ongoing with Creative Concrete Concepts, and it was one of my projects while interning with them. My primary task at Creative Concrete Concepts was to get the company ISO 9001:2008 certified. ISO Certification is very important in the UK, India, and the Middle East, although you may not have heard of it here. Simply put, it is a framework for manufacturing

and service industries to collect and record data, troubleshoot problems and provide a timeline and designate responsibility to investigate and fix them.

I was trained by an outside company as both a Quality Manager and Internal Auditor during a series of classes. My biggest challenge was focusing in on obscure business-speak and translating them into deliverables, and it took a couple weeks with our ISO Binder to begin to make sense of it. In essence, I had free reign to create our human resources (HR) documents, understand and map all relevant processes to

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manufacturing and quality, and identify opportunities. I had been involved on the fringe of HR when I was a Ritz Camera store manager because I was responsible for hiring, firing, and disciplining, as well as answering basic HR questions. As such, my familiarity comes from an American standpoint, and specifically from California. The ISO training company provided standard Canadian documents, and I had to delve into United Arab Emirates (UAE) employment law to come up with specifics. UAE law is based on British law with a mix of Islam-specific rules, such as leave to complete a pilgrimage (the Hajj).



When it came to creating the process maps using Visio, I had to tread carefully and navigate cultural differences when I interviewed employees. Asking someone about the specifics of their job duties can have very different effects ranging from eager and helpful to suspicious and defensive. It took a bit of trial and error with a healthy dose of perseverance to get the full-picture. My last duties were technical: buying the parts to assemble our own server in-house and updating the Web site. I had dabbled in computer and website building during undergrad and occasionally afterwards, so this gave me the opportunity to get up to speed with the latest technologies and programming languages.

By the end of my three months, I had gotten the company certified, created all the necessary documents, and the parts for the server had even arrived from America. Leaving was bittersweet because I did love living in the Middle East, speaking Arabic, and having a job where I was able to learn so many new things, but coming home and putting away the suitcases has been a welcome change. I am still having mini-moments of culture shock and speak Arabish (Arabic + English) without realizing it. Next time... life at a Target distribution center!

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## Journal Entry #3

### Target Regional Distribution Center - Lugoff, SC

It's July and you know what that means—another internship! I am wrapping up my fourth week at one of Target's 26 regional distribution centers. I had hoped to have two internships; I wanted one internship to be international, preferably at a locally or regionally owned company where I could incorporate my language skills. Done! I wanted the second internship to be stateside, corporate, and for a Fortune 500 company. Done! Target is a Fortune 50 company, focused on leadership development as well as process efficiency, and the culture is unbeatable. And the cherry on top? I am able to commute from Columbia.



I am a Distribution Operations Intern along with a fellow IMBA, Joshua Faigen. Due to the nature of my 3-year and his 2-year track, we hadn't met before Target. We have our separate projects, but we are collaborating to pool our collective brain power and points of view. It's immensely helpful to have a partner in crime to make sense of how everything works—especially when it comes to all the acronyms! My project is to identify and suggest methods to reduce bicycle damage and Josh is studying and recommending routes to increase the efficiency of moving freight in the warehouse. It's been a lot of data to absorb and synthesize, but with the numerous resources at the distribution center, the weekly calls with other interns across the nation working on the same project, and the support from experts and specialists at headquarters, help is never far off.

This experience has been overwhelmingly positive due in large part to the people—from the team members on the floor, executives, clericals, and senior leaders. I have particularly enjoyed getting my hands dirty during the second week when we worked in all the departments. Sometimes the easiest way to learn something is to do it, and all the pieces of the puzzle started to click together when I actually helped make the boxes move, which is not as simple as it sounds. It can be easy to be single-minded about a project, so I try to keep the bigger picture in mind. I spend a good deal of my time with group leaders—learning how they make decisions that impact the whole system.

I have a little over six weeks left to finish my internship and then dive right back in to my last year in the IMBA program. I'm trying to take the heat in good stride and I've been spending many of my evenings with recently-graduated IMBA's, meeting some new

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classmates, and even driving up to D.C. for a reunion with my Morocco classmates. That's it for now, because I'm off to another Cheap Bowling Tuesday!

### Journal Entry #4

Monday will be my two-month anniversary with Target. Sometimes it's hard to believe that it's only been eight weeks, and that in just two more weeks, it will be over and I'll have to buy textbooks for the first time in two years.



I'm starting to feel that the end is nigh; I've stopped my daily information gathering routine in favor of compiling all the data, observations, and suggestions that I've collected. My project has been to identify causes of damage to bikes throughout the distribution process.

This internship has had minimal structure, allowing each intern to make of it what he or she wants. That is a challenge I gladly

accepted! I have a tendency to jump into problems and projects head first, but I did my best to hold back and just absorb as much as I could about this facility's operations and the company. The first couple weeks were scheduled for us, which gave us the opportunity to work in each department and learn by doing the jobs of team members. Since then, we have had the flexibility to make our own schedules and determine the best method to pursue our projects. This has allowed me to partner with customers and suppliers throughout the supply chain at all hours of the day.

My preferred work style for projects like this is to immerse myself in everything quite abstractly and let it all sink in before organizing my thoughts and laying out my path to the conclusion. That said, it is always refreshing to work with a team that has different approaches to projects. There are about a dozen of us working on this throughout the country, and each of us brings a unique perspective to the table. With that comes information, contacts, and experiments that add value to all of our analyses.

Ending an internship is always bittersweet; I am excited about completing my work, but I will miss the people and the company as a whole (although I will remain a devoted Target shopper). The prospect of our recommendations being implemented and adding value to Target is exciting and I wish I could see it through.

People are slowly trickling in to Columbia and with the end of this internship comes the start of my final year and a whole new set of meaty projects. One thing is certain: I'll never look at a bike the same way again.

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