

# FINANCIAL TIMES

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## INSIDE TRACK BUSINESS EDUCATION

### Diversity as a creative force at GSIEF

Dato Sandroshvili, a 26-year-old MBA candidate, already knew four languages before he enrolled at Brandeis University's Graduate School of International Economics and Finance. He had worked for three companies in two countries. But when the man from Georgia, the former Soviet republic, arrived on campus even he was astounded by the school's diversity.

"I have never seen so many people from different countries together in one place," he says. "I've worked for an international organisation, I've been in conferences with people from 10 or 15 different countries - but this was about 27 countries and only 60 people. Mexico, India, Ecuador, China - it's like an Olympic village where you go to school."

That was exactly what Brandeis University had in mind when it launched its MBA programme six years ago, says Peter Petri, dean of the Boston, Massachusetts school.

"It was clear that global markets and the global economy were driving forces in what businesses would be down the road," Prof Petri says. Brandeis wanted a curriculum devoted to international issues and a student body that reflected its focus.

"Part of the learning experience is what takes place among students," Prof Petri explains. Of the 200 MBA candidates at Brandeis, about 70 per cent are from countries other than the US.

"It's all over the world," says Prof Petri, a Hungarian, who moved to the US when

he was 10. "It's like throwing darts at a map."

Mr Sandroshvili's room mates are Spanish and Italian. His best friends are from Mexico, India, Ecuador and China. He spent one weekend last term celebrating Mexico's independence with a Mariachi band, then watching Russian films without subtitles. His programme director is from Curacao and his professors are from Turkey and Taiwan as well as the US.

"While I can learn about different cultures, I don't want to miss that chance," he says. He recalls one discussion in which Indian classmates helped explain their country's caste system, including the exclusion of its "untouchable" class from jobs.

"They were giving really vivid examples and helping us understand the reality," Mr Sandroshvili says. "Just reading the case you could be extremely critical but when you hear the story at first hand, you're not as judgmental as you would have been."

Students must learn to cope with team partners who have different work styles based on their cultures. Mr Sandroshvili struggled through one financial modelling class with an American and a French-Laotian as team mates. Melissa Otto-Yano, his American team mate, says it was a terrific experience.

"It was extremely detailed work and if one person made one mistake, we were in trouble," she says. "But communication wasn't a problem. Everyone speaks



English, so you just slow it down and you don't use slang. It was one of the best teams that I've worked on."

Diversity is what drew Ms Otto-Yano to Brandeis. Her husband had been relocated to Boston, so she was considering all business schools in the area, including names such as Harvard and MIT. "I was really thinking of going to Harvard but I started looking at the types of tools and skills I wanted out of a programme [and] I felt the other MBA programmes weren't really international," she says. "I had taken a year abroad in London and lived in Japan for three years, Peru for a year and a half. I wanted to be with other students who had done different things. I went to Brandeis and I felt right at home. It just matched who I was."

Brandeis requires all its MBA candidates to live abroad for at least a semester and to learn a second language, if they have not done so already.

"That is such a core thing," says Ms Otto-Yano. "It's one thing to read cases about international business but it's another thing to live in Peru and have the electricity go off for 10 days or see the bank president get annoyed with a school because one of the teachers won't sleep with him."

She hopes the hands-on international experience will impress employers. "We're small and we don't get as many on-campus recruiters," she says. "I've had friends in other MBA programmes say: 'You're never going to get a job at Goldman Sachs [the investment bank]' but I had an internship last summer. It's the attitude of the students here. We don't rely on the brand name."

Mr Sandroshvili had an internship with Salomon Smith Barney in London and expects to take a job there after graduation. "Our student body [provides] an amazing global network," he says.

"Brandeis has people everywhere."

That is what sets the school apart from its US competitors, according to Prof Petri. "You find some [US] business schools that are very strong in international finance, but they are still largely focused on American career paths - Americans pursuing American job opportunities," he says. "We [realise] that cultural differences matter and people come at problems with different perceptions. We're trying to figure out how to make those people collaborate."

"That is ultimately what makes these students so valuable in the marketplace."

He acknowledges that Thunderbird, which last semester had a student body that was 64 per cent international, has similar strengths.

"But they're not entirely consumed by this idea that global markets are what matter," he says. "We are."

He argues that Brandeis offers more opportunities for inter-departmental work, as well. "We are part of a major research university," he says. "We have ways to incorporate science, biotech, ethics . . ."

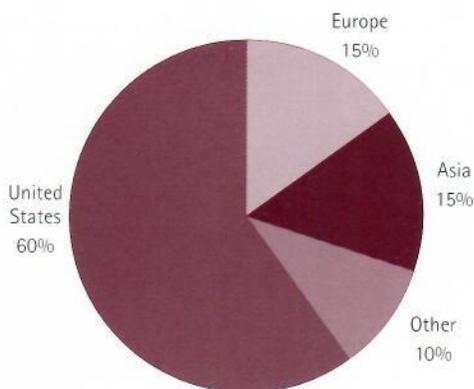
Prof Petri says that European schools such as Insead in France are his benchmarks. At the same time, he thinks that Brandeis' US location gives it an advantage over even the institutions that he tries to emulate.

"The American economy has been a magnet for people interested in business careers. We've grown from eight students in our first year to 200 and we expect to double in size during the next five to seven years." The trend, he says, is accelerating.

Mr Sandroshvili, who is at Brandeis on a State Department fellowship, agrees. "You have [for example] London Business School and Insead but I think the US offers much stronger academics. It is the strongest economy, the largest financial market. You can keep a finger on the pulse right here. Learning about different people . . . together with strong academics, is just priceless."

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Employment by Region of 2001 Graduates



Nationalities of the Student Body 2001/2002

