Welcome to the VCU School of Business. How did you come to study and work in the United States and at VCU?

Thanks for openheartedly accepting me at VCU, the warmth and friendliness of everyone is really remarkable and much appreciated. In response to your questions, as much as I would like to tell a story of adventure and intrigue – I have to let you down cause I don’t really have one. How I came to study in the United States is similar to the stories of countless other international students that have come to these shores. There is certainly a depth of quality and related opportunities that comes with higher education in the U.S that is difficult to ignore. At the time, it was an opportunity that most kids my age couldn’t necessarily pass up. I came to the United States to pursue my undergraduate education. It just so happened that I would end up getting not just a Bachelor’s degree, but my Master’s and Doctoral degrees as well; all from Oklahoma State University. Coming to VCU was a slightly different experience. To me it seemed like ALL the stars (and probably even some planets) had to be aligned perfectly in order for me to come here. I’m glad they did! I really could not be happier. Ultimately it all boils down to one thing, like everyone else, I’m just chasing The American Dream.

Your academic specialty is innovation. How did you get interested in the subject of innovation?

You are right, the majority of my research attention is directed at the subject of innovation. During my years as a business student, I’ve always been intrigued by the challenge of providing managers and businesses with recommendations and insights as to how they could perform better. During those years we witnessed the launch of revolutionary new products like the iPhone and services like cloud based computing and social networking. This was great, but I personally wondered why it was that not all companies could be innovative and come up with radical new products and services. To me it seemed like something was holding these companies and their managers back, and this became a prime focus during my time as a doctoral student. Innovation, as exciting as it is, is an area that many firms and managers struggle with. My goal is to help companies overcome whatever hurdles they face to become as innovative as possible.

How do you define innovation?

More often than not, when most of us think of innovation, we tend to think first about product innovations. A good example of a product innovation is the MP3 player or the iPhone. This can be attributed to the fact that product innovations receive the majority of the limelight. As a result, we have a tendency to define innovation in terms of how ground-breaking or radical a new idea or concept is. But innovation can happen in other ways that are not as familiar to us. In other words, it is not constrained to just the product you and I may use. For example, many experts have correctly pointed out that innovation is a fundamental process that helps establish a competitive advantage within firms. Through innovation, firms can develop solutions to problems or discover new ideas. Thus, its impact can increase quality, add value, lower prices etc.; and thus provide benefits to the firm’s customers. Innovation can also drives change. When firms engage in innovation, it forces markets to change and adapt. Market participants that do not adapt will ultimately perish, and those that do will
emerge to be successful. Ultimately, while everyone has their own take on innovation, one thing is clear, innovation is a multifaceted and dynamic concept.

**How does the scholarly study of innovation contribute to innovation in business and daily life? Can innovation be taught?**

In regards to the first question, as many of you know, research through various scholarly studies plays a big part in the overall progress of any field of study. Scientific research allows us to explain and/or predict how the worlds works around us. These fundamental ideas apply to innovation research as well. The work innovation researchers do not only helps us to better understand and describe innovation, but also aids in our ability to predict how innovation can be brought about or enhanced. This allows businesses to gain key competitive advantages and contributes to our daily lives by (hopefully) adding more value to it. Now moving to the second question, the answer is very simple, of course it can be taught. Innovation today is a science, where we are actively trying to refine our methods, procedures, and activities so as to bring about more positive results and avoid negative outcomes. More importantly, like any other science, there are multiple key concepts and theories that one has to learn (or be taught) in order to innovate effectively. Secondly, there are many soft skills one has to be familiar with like brain storming, creative thinking, ability to work in teams, dealing with uncertainties and unknowns etc. These skill are well suited to be honed or polished in a classroom environment. In connecting back to the first half of your question, what is taught in the classroom is heavily influenced by the research in the innovation domain which is done by researchers and professionals who bridge the gap between academia and industry. I hope this is not an unfair question.

**Your dissertation is titled “Ambiguity Aversion in the Front-End of Innovation.” How would you describe/explain this topic to a layperson?**

I thought I was being pretty straightforward with the dissertation title! All kidding aside, I can see how the title may be a little confusing or misrepresentative. The simple way to think of my dissertation is to think of it as a study that tries to understand how managers deal with uncertainty in the innovation process. Keep in mind there are many unknowns that managers have to deal with on a day-to-day basis, and this just gets compounded when it comes to new product concepts and ideas. During the early stages of innovation, amongst the many ideas or concepts a firm may be considering, no one really knows for sure which ones are going to be a sure-fire hit, which ones are going to be cash cows for the company, or which ones might just be a total failure. These unknowns cloud managerial judgment causing them to play it safe, and possibly inhibit their ability to make decisions that are in the best interests of the company. Keep in mind that in order to gain a competitive advantage firms are constantly striving to be innovative, and unknowns through a big wrench in their ability to be innovative. My dissertation examines ways managers can overcome these unknowns and make decisions that are going to allow their firms to be as innovative as possible.

**You are a reviewer for the Journal of Product Innovation Management (designated an A-level academic journal by the VCU School of Business). How does your service as a reviewer enrich your own scholarship and academic perspective?**

Well, for one, it keeps you on your toes. Reviewing for a journal like the Journal of Product Innovation Management (JPIM) exposes you to the latest thoughts and perspectives when it comes to innovation related research. It keeps you abreast with what other researchers are working on and what their
findings are while also providing exposure to the latest theories being debated on. It also provides subtle hints and tips as to what direction I should take my own innovation related research. On the other hand, reviewing for JPIM also serves as an avenue for me along with all the other reviewers out there to help advance the field in an appropriate manner. Editors and reviewers serve as gatekeepers in any academic field, they collectively determine what is worth publishing, and what doesn’t make the cut. While this process is not always perfect, these decisions have a collective bearing on the overall nature and quality of research in a subject domain. I’m happy that the innovation domain is very vibrant and healthy research domain. It is a big responsibility and even greater honor.

You will be teaching New Product Development and Management (MKTG 450) this fall. How do you plan to approach this class?

What do you hope to help your students understand? I’m eagerly looking forward to MKTG 450 this fall and meeting with the students in the class. I’ve always been a big believer in the idea that you have to be passionate about two things when you teach. You have to be passionate about the subject, which in my case we’ve established that I more or less live, breathe and sleep product development. Secondly, and more importantly, you have to have a passion to see a student succeed both within the classroom and outside of it as well. If this is the approach one takes to instruct, I strongly believe that it then becomes easy to foster an environment that is conducive to effective learning. My hope is that once students take my class, they begin to understand just how multifaceted and exciting the concept of innovation really is and how product innovation can add meaningful value to consumers’ lives.

What have you most enjoyed about Richmond so far?

Coming from Oklahoma, I surely am a fan of the less extreme weather around these parts. There seems to be a great vibe and excitement about Richmond which is nice to experience. The first few weeks have been great and I’m sure this feeling will continue well into the future.

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