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UPFRONT

And Now, Something Completely Different

Unconventional offerings round out programs -- and students

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By EMILY GLAZER

For executives going back to school, case studies and roundtable discussions are only part of the curriculum. There are also treasure hunts, Nascar-style challenges and other unusual programs. Here's a sample of the offbeat offerings.

Improvisation Tactics

PODCAST: Hear more about unorthodox teaching tactics used by executive M.B.A. programs, as improvisation guru Bob Kulhan talks with Emily Glazer.

The Journal Report



In the Journal's first Executive M.B.A. survey, two schools stand far above the rest.

Career advice used to be off-limits for executive M.B.A. students. No longer.

Companies praise executive M.B.A. programs for making managers better -- and more loyal.

If executives can't come to the school, the school comes to the executives.

Advanced management programs aim to give elite executives high-end crash courses on crucial topics.

By teaming up with institutions around the world, programs offer managers a more global education.

Intrepid students commute up to 18 hours to attend their chosen executive M.B.A. program.

Business owners look to executive M.B.A. programs for help improving their operations, profits and business models.

See the complete [Executive M.B.A. Rankings](#) report.

IMPROVISATION

WHERE: Duke University's Fuqua School of Business, UCLA's Anderson School of Management, Columbia University's Graduate School of Business.

WHAT: A variety of improvisation techniques supplement traditional classroom lectures and case studies. The exercises were created at Fuqua by Bob Kulhan, senior partner of Business Improvisations LLC, with Prof. Craig Fox from the Anderson School of Management.

In a "one-word story" exercise, students stand in a circle and each adds a word to a progressing tale to build a narrative. "Close the dictionary, close the thesaurus," says Mr. Kulhan, an adjunct professor at Fuqua. "Relax enough to let your natural intelligence rise to the surface."

WHAT THEY LEARN: Depending on the program and the school, participants learn leadership, team-building skills, innovation and creativity.

THE PIT-CREW CHALLENGE

WHERE: Duke's Fuqua School, Stanford University's Graduate School of Business.

WHAT: Student teams must change tires on a Nascar-style race car. Once they're done, each team strategizes on how to lower their time for a second run. At the end, a professional Nascar pit crew shows how it's done.



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WHAT THEY LEARN: Students experience the pros and cons of collaboration, and see how communicating effectively eases the process. Executives also learn to innovate under pressure and see the value of learning by doing.



Courtesy of Robert A. Parker & Associates

Students in an executive program at Duke University

ORCHESTRA AND JAZZ

WHERE: University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School.

WHAT: A visiting music professor discusses the systematic structure of the orchestra and the creativity of a jazz ensemble. Participants are taught how to use a baton to conduct or lead an orchestra and spend time learning meter, time signature and differences among notes.

WHAT THEY LEARN: To discern how individual parts affect the whole, whether it's one instrument or a group. Participants examine when incremental attention is needed (an orchestra) and when flexibility is preferable (like a jazz ensemble).

COOKING AS A TEAM

WHERE: Columbia Business School.

WHAT: The 60 participants -- who aren't told the full extent of the evening's activities in advance -- are taken to Columbia's large kitchen in Lerner Hall to prepare dinner with Columbia's executive chef, John Santiago. Teams of eight or nine participants work at different stations to bone fish, prepare lamb chops, cut and peel vegetables, whip up dessert, and mix mojitos and cosmopolitans. At the end they gather to eat the final product.

WHAT THEY LEARN: The significance of collaborative work. And as a fringe benefit, participants take away cooking techniques and a book of the evening's recipes.

TREASURE HUNT

WHERE: University of North Carolina's Kenan-Flagler Business School.

WHAT: Students form several groups to find a treasure. Each team must decipher clues written on puzzle pieces leading them from one location to the next to ultimately piece together a puzzle and get a key to the treasure. But as the teams earn their keys, they realize all the groups must join together to solve an even larger puzzle.

WHAT THEY LEARN: The value of joining forces. The hunt isn't about solving the puzzle first, because no one team can finish without the help of the other teams.



Courtesy of University of North Carolina Kenan-Flagler Business School

Students in an executive M.B.A. program at University of North Carolina

HORSE FARM VISIT

WHERE: University of North Carolina's Kenan-Flagler School.

WHAT: Participants work with the horses, first by grooming them to form a rapport and gain their trust. Groups of three or four executives then work collectively or individually with one horse for about four hours to persuade it to perform specific activities, such as walking in a particular formation.

WHAT THEY LEARN: To consider how their behavior affects the horse's response. Students who are aggressive and impatient don't fare as well as those who use gentler approaches.

POETRY

WHERE: University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School.

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WHAT: Executives at Wharton's advanced management program spend an afternoon with Prof. Al Filreis, faculty director of the Kelly Writers House, learning modern American poetry in an exercise aimed at improving communications skills. They do reading and writing exercises and a group critique. Executives read a poem word by word to make sure everyone is comfortable with the meaning and then discuss how to transfer the lessons learned from poetry to communication in the workplace.

WHAT THEY LEARN: A sense of voice, form, tone, rhythm, prosody, theme and metaphor. Participants use these techniques to understand how their leadership is perceived across their organizations and also how to communicate better.

Write to Emily Glazer at emily.glazer@wsj.com

Printed in The Wall Street Journal, page R2

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