

Life University Breaks New Ground in Practice Management Education

Guy Riekeman, DC, President, Life University

Chiropractic students entering Life University will learn the business of chiropractic practice from day one, study with expert business professors, and cap off their experience by completing a full practice management program with one of the leading external consulting firms in the profession as part of the school's newly introduced practice management curriculum.

Unlike any other business program offered in chiropractic education today, this intensive curriculum will weave throughout a student's entire academic career at Life, engaging them in 25 credit hours (approximately 14 courses) of diverse and intense business education so they graduate fully competent - and confident - in their ability to start and manage a practice.

Research Shows Lack of Preparation Nationally

Through a joint research project involving alumni from Life University, Life Chiropractic College West and New York Chiropractic College, we gathered baseline data that showed just how dissatisfied chiropractic students from around the country are with the business component of their education. Chiropractic students and alumni, as well as alumni from other health professions, frequently report that their academic programs do an excellent job of equipping them to be highly qualified clinicians, yet do not cut the grade in preparing them for the business of health care.

Too often, new graduates prepare to enter practice and quickly realize they do not feel ready. Often, they retain a practice management consultant to help them get their footing, adding the pressure of unanticipated expenses to the start-up procedure. I've witnessed the same thing traveling the country as a chiropractic college president, and for years as owner of my own consulting firm interacting with more than 7,000 chiropractic offices around the world.

To set a new standard in chiropractic business education, I charged Life University Provost Brian J. McAulay, DC, PhD (13 years of experience in private practice and a PhD in management) with drawing on the unique on-campus talents of faculty from our business school, as well as the expertise of the profession's best consultants, to reinvent practice management education at Life.

Business Education From Day One

Right from the first quarter, Life University students will work with a nationally recognized practice management consultant (and new Life faculty member), Lyn DaSylva, DC. Drawing on her unique experience with Whitney Transitions, Dr. DaSylva will provide instruction in our newly designed program for chiropractic students in quarters one through five.

During these early quarters, students will explore what it means to be a professional, what the practice environment is like, the opportunities available in chiropractic, and how various communication styles impact interactions with patients and staff. At the conclusion of this component, students will have a solid idea of the breadth of knowledge they need to master to be successful as a small business owner or as a group partner.

In the next phase (quarters six through 10), students will learn the nuts and bolts of office and patient procedures. They will learn and practice how to conduct a report of findings, develop and present a lay lecture, process insurance and billing paperwork, and communicate with patients in the campus clinic setting.

Coaching With Top Practice Management Consultants

During the unique capstone phase of their business education, Life University students will have unprecedented access to experts in business as well as in chiropractic practice. Students in quarters 11-14 will choose one of three proprietary practice management and coaching firms - the biggest names in chiropractic consulting - and complete the firm's full package of services often purchased by new graduates. This incredible resource is simply part of their Life curriculum and is provided at no additional cost.

Students will choose to enroll in the programs offered by Waiting List Practice, The Masters Circle or Whitney Transitions and will engage in on-campus programming and be invited to professional off-campus seminars, where they will learn from and network with field chiropractors. A fully integrated aspect of the Life experience, educational outcomes for a students' interaction with their practice management coaches are defined clearly and will be assessed with course assignments and testing, just as with a traditional course offering.

Studying Business With Business Faculty

At the same time students are rubbing shoulders with the best in the profession, they will be mastering the underpinnings of contemporary business thinking with expert faculty from our business school. Each of these faculty members holds a doctoral degree in business and is well-versed in the latest research in the field. Key topic areas such as marketing, small-business management, leadership and team building, entrepreneurship and new venture analysis will be taught by individuals who possess a depth of knowledge only possible with years of focused study and research. Students will know how to analyze an area statistically to identify promising practice locations, find and evaluate a building, review a lease, negotiate a bank loan, develop a marketing plan, and hire, train and assess staff.

As Life Provost Dr. McAulay explains, "What we're offering has never been done before in chiropractic education. Our students will get a full year of coaching with a nationally recognized chiropractic consulting firm, plus in-class education from Life business faculty who know the disciplines of business inside and out. Instead of learning marketing, for example, from a chiropractor who has studied the topic peripherally, our students will learn the principles of marketing from a business faculty member who has a PhD in the discipline and has conducted doctoral research in the field. Add to that the specific applications of chiropractic marketing they'll gain from the most advanced chiropractic management experts in the country and these students will be equipped with a very powerful and unrivaled combination of skills."

The practice management coursework is also integrated with the "Eight Core Proficiencies" that distinguish a Life University education. The business coursework is particularly linked with the proficiencies of Leadership and Entrepreneurship, Integrity, and Communication and Relationship Theory.

Anticipated Outcomes

After completing 14 classes of business education, interwoven throughout the curriculum and provided in diverse formats and from a variety of highly qualified sources, Life University

chiropractic students will not need to shy away from the business of health care. They will be able to hit the ground running, as confident in their abilities to put together a business proposal for a bank loan as they are in delivering care to patients.

Rob Scott, DC, PhD, dean of the college of chiropractic, perhaps says it best: "I expect in the future that when I meet with Life alums who have been out in the field [for] two years, they will talk about how much they enjoy the diverse aspects of being in practice - that the challenges of being in business are more exciting than stressful, and that they are as comfortable talking with their banker as they are seeing patients. With the arsenal of skills we're giving them, I think they will love practicing chiropractic."

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