

'Merit & need blindness are our guiding principles,' KSBL Dean Dr Shaukat Brah

OVERVIEW (November 23, 2012) : "Even with the best infrastructure and the smartest pool of students, no educational institution can attain a world class reputation without attracting the most distinguished faculty members," said the Dean of the Karachi School of Business and Leadership, Dr Shaukat Brah. In a recent interview with BR Research, the distinguished professor outlined his plans for raising KSBL to the ranks of the best higher education institutions of the region. The newly developed campus of KSBL includes state-of-the-art multimedia facilities in all classrooms, a comprehensive library complemented by online access to various archives of scholarly journals, and a strategic collaboration with the Judge Business School at the University of Cambridge. But the Dean insists, faculty members are the most crucial ingredient for an educational institution that wishes to establish itself as a choice destination for the best and brightest students. "Business schools are in the business of producing generalists. But the faculty must be specialists in their respective fields to be able to provide depth of knowledge to their students" he said, adding the institution was solely targeting the leading educationists to fill its ranks. Brah has previously served as the Dean of the Suleman Dawood School of Business, Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), helping that institution emerge as the premium business school in the country. "My model there was simple; we targeted the most accomplished expats and foreigners with the precondition that they must be passionate about achieving the goals set forth for LUMS" said the Dean. Building on his argument, Brah recalled that the salary he was offered by LUMS was less than his monthly savings, while employed with the National University of Singapore. "The rational decision making model doesn't lean in favour of accepting a job where your remuneration drops significantly. But there are many very accomplished people that are willing to make such a sacrifice to be able to become a part of a movement aimed at improving the level of professional education in Pakistan," contended Brah. "The top guns of each field always have greener pastures available to them in terms of the amount of money they can make, so the educational institution has to provide an inspiring vision and an actionable plan to retain them," he said, adding that "eventually everyone will figure out whether you are actually dedicated to your stated goals or simply providing lip service." KSBL has recently commenced its MBA Programme, with an inaugural batch of 38 students. Dr Shaukat Brah contended that the School made a conscious decision to limit the size of the first batch. "Our guiding principles are merit and need blindness and this is evident from the profile of students that have been admitted in the first batch. They are all brilliant students with strong academic credentials and two-thirds of them are receiving financial assistance" said the Dean. When quizzed over the sustainability of KSBL's promise of need blindness, he asserted that "money is hardly an issue for the best business schools. When companies are convinced that the School is providing quality education, they will find it worth their while to help put more and more students through our MBA, executive education and other programmes". He added that KSBL would be able to meet its operational costs through its own revenues while donors would be tapped for capital expenditures associated with expansion and for providing more scholarships to deserving students. The KSBL Dean pointed out that "Dr Ishrat Husain has raised Rs 5 billion for the

renovation and upgradation of the Institute of Business Administration, which is a very sizeable amount indeed. So this shows you that there is funding out there as long as people believe that you have a credible plan and are whole heartedly committed to it." At present, 70 percent of the students enrolled in the MBA Programme are from Karachi while the remaining 30 percent hail from other parts of the country. The Dean expressed hope that in the near future, Pakistanis residing abroad will also join the ranks of students at KSBL. "Hopefully within the next five years we can start accepting international students and also sending our students abroad on exchange programmes," said Brah. "Research will be the key differentiator for us, given the fact that the other prominent MBA schools in the country are already well entrenched and recognised," he said, drawing attention to the fact that the KSBL faculty boasts strong international research credentials. Brah also pointed out that the strategic partnership with the University of Cambridge brings transparency to the operations of KSBL since their experts are periodically consulted for assessing the efficacy of the decisions taken by KSBL. "A vibrant business school needs 50-60 professors and we expect to reach that level within the next five years at which point our own resource pool will be sufficient and we can phase out our use of visiting faculty from Cambridge," said the KSBL Dean. Given the hype surrounding its establishment, KSBL is being keenly watched not only by prospective students and donors but by the other leading business schools of the country. The first MBA batch will doubtlessly be a key litmus test for KSBL and its success may drive existing educational institutions to step up their value proposition for current and future students. Dr Shaukat Brah previously served as Dean of the Suleman Dawood School of Business, Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), Pakistan, and as Dean of the College of Business Studies, Al Ghurair University, United Arab Emirates. Earlier, he taught at the National University Singapore (NUS) Business School for over 16 years. He has been very active in executive education, teaching in a broad range of open and customised executive programmes including programmes for Samsung Asia, Indah Kiat Pulp and Paper Corporation, PSA-NUS operations management program, and Toshiba Asia. He has a PhD from the University of Houston.

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