

# USB beats top USA business schools

A team of three black, final-year MBA students of the University of Stellenbosch Business School (USB), Pambili Booii, Kagisho Mahura and Fortune Ngwenya, came first in the National Black MBA Association (NBMBA) Case Competition in the USA, held in September.

The winning trio from the USB receiving their prizes are (from left), Pambili Booii, Fortune Ngwenya (far right) and Kagisho Mahura – with (second from right) Frank Fountain, vice-president of DaimlerChrysler.



trio has also been invited to the Daimler-Chrysler head office in Detroit to meet the top management of the company.

Booii, the operations manager for Capitec Bank in the Eastern Cape, says in their presentation they had to combine everything they had learned during their MBA studies at the USB.

"We had to present our solution to a judging panel that comprised an independent judge and several vice-presidents from DaimlerChrysler and IBM. The presentations were formal, with very practical business problems that had to be addressed. We were grilled for 10 minutes by these big thinkers. In the final round we had to make our presentation in front of a live audience who included recruitment specialists from a host of global companies," says Booii.

The Stellenbosch team was accompanied by Dr Johan Smith, senior lecturer at the USB.

Smith commented: "The winners of the case competition are front-page news in the USA. Our team was inundated with interviews by the media and, more importantly, head-hunters. The competition was a true test of the students' MBA skills and in my opinion the USB team had a distinct advantage, as they had a focused approach to integrating business objectives with social responsibility. The fact that some other teams used world-renowned business consultants to arrive at their suggested solutions further highlights our team's achievement," says Smith.

Commenting on the victory, Prof Eon Smit, director of the USB said: "The outcome of the competition once more confirms that the USB's policy of internationalisation is bearing fruit and that USB students can compete with the very best in the world." ■

The competition forms part of the NBMBA Convention – one of the largest and most influential events on the USA business calendar, where companies from across the globe come to attract talent.

The competition, sponsored by DaimlerChrysler, forms an integral part of the organisation's objective to expose talented minorities to business leaders across the world.

Twenty-nine leading business schools from the USA participated in the competition to find the best solution for a real business problem in DaimlerChrysler.

As part of the case study, Booii, Mahura and Ngwenya had to work out and present solutions for, what DaimlerChrysler called, a minority supplier which had become uncompetitive and found itself in financial distress owing to, *inter alia*, competition from Chinese suppliers with very low labour costs.

"We had to come up with a procurement strategy for this minority supplier and help them to help themselves. All three of us in the USB team are very argumentative and we pushed each other very hard – always focusing on the work at hand," says Mahura.

All the teams had to tackle the same problem and present their findings to a panel of judges in several rounds. Tension

mounted as the USB team was announced as one of the six finalist teams on the evening before the final presentations and award ceremony.

"At the awards ceremony, they first announced the team that came third. I then thought, okay, we did not make it and started to relax. But when they announced that we were the winning team, it took a few seconds for us to realise what was going on. I'm very proud of the USB. Clearly, they are teaching us relevant information. And people like Prof Eon Smit, Prof Wim Gevers and Dr Babita Mathur-Helm really supported us," said Ngwenya who works for Absa Private Bank in Johannesburg.

He continued: "Our victory shows that we can apply our MBA skills in any industry. The same business principles apply everywhere. You need strategy, you need analytical skills, and you need logical and lateral thinking to come up with solutions."

"We often undermine ourselves and think we cannot compete against first world countries. The fact that we won shows that the competencies we have acquired at the USB can be applied to any business problem anywhere in the world," said Mahura.

As winners of the competition, each member of the USB team received a prize of \$5 000 (about R38 600). The winning