MBA Programs Adapt to Changes in Business Landscape

As a commercial lender at a community bank, Brock Haas made a career helping customers fund their growing businesses and building their dreams. But as the credit crunch and real estate crash took their toll on the banking industry, Haas found himself in a new and uncomfortable position — executing a deleveraging strategy because his bank was shrinking its balance sheet and whittling down its loan portfolio.

“It got to the point where I just didn’t want to do that anymore,” Haas says.

Unlike many bankers who found themselves in this situation, Haas was able to make a quick career change namely because he had completed his Master of Business Administration (MBA) a few years earlier. With the help of his MBA, Haas landed a job as the director of off-campus programs at South University in Savannah, Georgia.

“For me, my MBA was more of an access pass to a growing industry, a new career and more opportunity versus just a piece of paper you stick on the wall,” Haas says. “In this market, it’s a key way to differentiate yourself from the competition.”

MBA Jam

Despite a still-depressed job market and scores of highly educated people among the unemployed, MBA degrees remain valuable to employers. According to training and qualifications information from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, many employers now prefer graduates with master's degrees in business administration for business positions such as financial manager, industrial production manager, and marketing and sales managers.

“It always makes sense to invest in one's own skills and education,” says Peter Felix, president of the Association of Executive Search Consultants in New York. “In a very tight employment market, the fact that one has an MBA may make a difference in opening up opportunities and in the longer term may make a real difference to one’s outlook and career development.”

With that said, MBA programs have had to adapt a bit in today’s new economy. Workers not satisfied with their current jobs as well as those who have lost their jobs and are hoping to get back in the job market quickly don’t have the time and/or resources to enroll in a traditional two-year MBA program, Haas says.

“It comes down to opportunity cost,” he says. “What’s the cost of that extra year or those additional six months that you don’t have an MBA and your peers do and they are hunting for the same type of job?”

Since starting at South University Haas has helped develop the Accelerated MBA program that offers students a 12-month program combining classroom instruction with online learning allowing students to get the same education they would from a traditional program in less time.

Mishmash Metriculators

Half the program is conducted online and the other half is delivered every other Saturday at three different locations. Unlike a full-online program, students in South University’s program are able to get some face time with their instructor as well as learn from their fellow students.

Haas believes that peer interaction is an invaluable part of learning.

“If I had the opportunity to enroll in a program like this one, it would have made a big difference for me,” Haas says.

The diversity in the student base leads to some excellent interaction in the courses, Haas adds. One student in South University’s Accelerated MBA program is the owner of a property management company. Another is a corporate trainer for a Fortune 500 company. How each student approaches a topic is very different because of their varied backgrounds, and that is something that everyone in class can benefit from.
Felix of the Association of Executive Search Consultants agrees.

“The opportunity to rub shoulders with classmates and learn via interaction is a major factor in learning,” he says. “It was a highly valued part of my own MBA.”

As of June, South University's Accelerated MBA program has 21 students, but unlike a traditional MBA program, the enrollment period isn't just a few times a year – it's ongoing. Students may enroll 11 months out of the year. This flexible enrollment enables candidates to pursue an MBA when it's right for them — say, for example, when they lose their job or decide they simply must make a career change.

“There are a lot of revolutionary things going on with this program,” Haas says.

Making the Grades

So how will employers view an Accelerated MBA program that combines online and classroom instruction? It's tough to say.

“I'm not sure what perception is for online vs. on ground,” Haas admits. “I can say at least three of our current 21 students put this on their resume and have either landed a new job or were able to transition to a new career.”

Felix, who heads an organization bringing the best job candidates to employers, says that while online programs may carry less weight in the eyes of some employers, when compared to traditional classroom instruction-based programs, all job candidates with MBAs stand out.

“An MBA can never guarantee employment but it does make a statement about a person’s skills and determination,” Felix says. “[MBA graduates show a] commitment and determination which is of value to a future employer.”