



Manage-A Bull MBA Podcast

University at Buffalo MBA Student Ambassadors series

- Intro [00:00:00](#) Hi, I'm Jake Walsh and I'm Orion LaMontagne. Thank you for tuning in to the Manage-A-Bull MBA podcast where we have deep dive conversations with students, faculty, staff and alumni. To give you a comprehensive picture of the life inside of a top Tier MBA program. In this episode we'll be talking with Erin O'Brien, assistant dean and director of Graduate Programs Office for the university at Buffalo School of Management. If you're thinking about getting your MBA or are already in the application process, this episode is a must listen for you. In our conversation, Erin explains the significance of the MBA, the quality she looks for in perspective candidates, details about the application process, and several other interesting topics. Be sure to check out our show notes where we'll post links to the UB MBA webpage and contact information for Erin O'Brien and ourselves. If you enjoy this podcast, follow us on Twitter at @UBSchoolofMGT to stay up to date with what's happening in the UB School of Management where extraordinary is normal. Thank you and enjoy.
- Jake [00:01:13](#) Well, I guess for those of you who may be joining, we are recording the second installment of our soon to be named podcasts even though this might not be the second in line. This is the second official recording. We are here today with my partner Orion LaMontagne. I can never pronounce that right. Um, and we are here with Erin O'Brien who is, what's your official title? You want to enlighten us please?
- Erin [00:01:35](#) I am assistant dean and director of graduate programs for the University at Buffalo School Management. And that's a really long title. But what I actually means is I'm responsible for all of our full time graduate programs here in the school and all the students that are either considering those programs currently in those programs or being graduated from those programs.
- Jake [00:02:00](#) Okay. How many students is that?
- Erin [00:02:02](#) Uh, when you add up all of our full time programs, we have roughly, depending on when you count, we have somewhere between 500 and 600 full time graduate students and our full time MBA. We have a Master's of Science in accounting, a Master's of Science in finance, a Master's of Science in management information systems. Uh, we also have a PHD in six different disciplines and we're relaunching our Masters of Science in operations and supply chain management.



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- Jake [00:02:35](#) Okay. Well we are keeping busy. Um, so as you know, part of your role and being in charge of all these students, where do you see yourself playing the most influence, whether it be with incoming students are with the current students, or students on the way out? Where do you fit into that puzzle the most do you think?
- Erin [00:02:53](#) So my team has responsibility for strategy, marketing, recruiting, academic advising, student servicing, programming and events, all the way to commencement. So from the time you think about getting a degree to the time, we actually put a piece of paper in your hand, you are in the care of the graduate programs office. Um, and so if you want to think about where we make the most impact, um, you'll have an entry point where we work with you to, um, include the University at Buffalo School of Management in your set of consideration for graduate management programs. And then when you get in, we work with you to make sure you can successfully get through the program to achieve the goals that you've set for yourself. So it's not just our academic goals, academic performance is important, but your, um, utilizing this program, this academic program to achieve what your career goals are. So whether your career goals are to be an entrepreneur or the to be in investment banking or you want to tap into social innovation or you're a finance person or marketing person or an it person and you want to go work for Google, it doesn't matter. Those are your goals and you're leveraging this degree program in order to be able to get to those goals. So our job as your academic advisor is to ensure that you achieve that academic performance as well as leverage all of the other experiences that go on within the school of management, case competitions, global travel immersion learning, working with external partners and leverage all those things into a total package by the time you graduate and when you think about it, MBAs have roughly four semesters and a summer and accounting student, masters of accounting student has two semesters. So we're packing in an enormous amount of opportunity into those semesters. On top of this stuff that you already get in terms of your academic classes, like your traditional college experience coursework.
- Jake [00:05:05](#) So kind of feeding off of that, the development of these programs. Where do you, how do you view the MBA as it's transitioning as students, prospective students are looking to move into the world, like what does the MBA really doing for people today? What would be the selling point for people who may be considering getting the MBA and going back to school?



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Erin [00:05:23](#)

So in the full time day program we have switchers and launchers. Switchers are folks who are out in the career, the career market place or the workforce and they want to switch whatever they're doing, whether they were, you know, in a say an engineering position and they want to move into management, they might switch or they were traditionally in an accounting role and they want to switch into finance or they were, um, you know, they have a liberal arts degree and they want to switch into management or social innovation or leverage a type of background like an MD into, um, a healthcare administration career path. So those are our switchers. Um, those are people who have probably more work experience. So somewhere in the neighborhood of six, seven, eight, maybe more than 10 years of work experience who are willing to step out of the career marketplace for a couple of years and go back to school. There are those students who don't want to step out of the current marketplace and they'll, they'll go into our professional MBA or EMBA program. Um, but for the full time we have a lot of students who were willing to jump out for a couple of years to invest in themselves to be able to jump back in at a higher place. Um, so those are our switchers. And then we have our launchers and our launchers are mostly are dual degree students. So we have at last count 19 dual degree categories within the full time MBA program. And we have everything from 3-2 undergraduate engineering combined with an MBA all the way through to surgical resident have already finished medical school and they're a third year surgical resident and they want to, uh, incorporate an MBA into their, into their residency. So our launchers or more at the beginning of their career paths and they are interested in piling in as much value into the beginning of their career so that they start higher and move faster. So that's why launchers want to do the MBA. So when you talk about, is the MBA dead? No, it's not dead at all. It's being utilized every single day by switchers and launchers as a platform to get them into their career. So it's, it's a pretty important, uh, it's, uh, it's an important tool kit tool to have in your toolkit.

Orion [00:07:46](#)

That's something that, that we talked about too then, you know, as students, we really appreciate about the program is it's really a diverse, uh, you know, group of people. You've got people that are coming from all walks of life, different, different areas in their career. And so there's a really awesome opportunity to, you know, crosstalk and learn from, from those different, I guess, uh, life a pass. And so I was wondering, could you talk a little bit about, about your background? I know you



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were also a student here and so I think it would be interesting to kind of get your perspective and kind of, uh, you know, how, how you ended up, uh, in the role that you're in now.

Erin

[00:08:30](#)

Sure. I'm a switcher, so I had a whole career in hospitality and hotel management prior to doing my MBA. Uh, I didn't start, I didn't start my MBA until I was 30, and when I was filling out all my applications to MBA programs, I had said to my mother, I whined and I said, I'm going to be 32 by the time I graduate in college. And she said, you're going to be 32 anyway, you might as well have a degree. So that has set the tone for my entire academic career. Uh, so I enrolled in the UB School of Management Full Time MBA program when I was 30. I graduated when I was 32. I did an internship with IBM while I was here as a student. Uh, and that led into a full time position. I was with IBM for 14 years before I decided to, it was planes, trains, and automobiles for 14 years because I traveled for work. So, um, when a position came open here at the university, they called me and they said, hey, are you interested in doing something? And I had been a very active alum and a corporate partner and an employer all during those, those IBM years. And so it was easy for me to say, yeah, it's the right time for me to step out of my travel career with IBM and maybe do something that feeds my soul a little bit more. Um, so I started working, I started in the role as assistant dean almost six years ago. And it has been an amazing career move because I'm in the business of doing good every single day. So I get to help people like you guys, figure out what it is that you want to do and make a plan to get there and actually see you walk into your career dreams, which is, which is a pretty cool reward in terms of compensation. Um, it's a, it's, it's definitely the thing that, that keeps you going and a higher education role is being able to help our students get out and go do amazing things, uh, because it just cycles back and just cycles back and it makes the program more awesome and it makes the, it's the relationships that you build with people while they're considering going to school while they're here. And as they, as they ponder what their next step is going to be once they graduate and then you know, once they graduate and get back out there. So, so that's kind of the last 20 years in a nutshell. Um, but at the same time I've launched my own updated career paths and now I'm back in school full time as well as being the assistant dean because I decided to go get another degree and be a PHD eventually. So I'm in the same boat as all my students. Which lends a little bit of credibility to the things that I say when I talked to you guys



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Jake [00:11:39](#) It consistently blows my mind how you were able to accomplish so much, I find it very interesting, but pretty cool that in a sense I'm going to school with you, like you're in the same building and doing your PHD and the fact that one of the people who's been incredibly influential on us becoming students here is in the books alongside us. I think that's a really cool experience and it does, you know, kind of ground, um, the, the experience altogether.

Erin [00:12:08](#) Yeah, sure. I think that relationships are the most important thing about an MBA program. And I can tell you that, cause I just saw a whole bunch of them for a couple of weeks ago. The relationships that you build in your MBA program, whether you're here or somewhere else, the relationships that you build in your MBA program or with you forever, and those relationships with faculty, with peers, with the institution, they stay with you forever and they become your forever network, which is super important because 20 years from now you might need to tap into that network or those are the people that are going to support you in whatever idea that you have that you're trying to, to achieve, whether it's your business or, or whatever it might be. Um, a lot of my MBA network now work for one another. They've started businesses. They've really, you know, it's all, it's a long, strong relationship. And as an assistant dean, I want to make sure that my relationship with all of our graduate students, I mean I can't possibly have a one on one relationship with every single person every single year, but I try and I, and we all try really hard. That's the thing that I think is unique about our program is you're a first name basis with everybody in this building, from the dean on down to your peers. And so we're, we've already jumped into your network as students and we're already here waiting for you guys to be part of our network. Um, but those relationships I think are the things that make the program awesome. They make your experience here are amazing. They are the foundation of your experience after you leave here. Uh, and, and our goal is to build really strong relationships so that they last in perpetuity. And if my being here doing statistics on a Saturday morning, and Jake you are in your office doing statistics on a Saturday morning than that is not just misery loves company, but that's a strong relationship. It's a strong relationship. So, so those things are important.

Jake [00:14:31](#) Yeah. It's funny, I remember coming in some weekends and it'd be like, uh, yeah, I'll turn the coffee pot on and Erin will probably be in the next hour.



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Erin [00:14:40](#) Yes. So we're, so we're all in and, and you know, I wasn't the only one in the building. You know, you're, several of your faculty members here in the building Tim Maynes is always here, Frank Krzystofiak is always here, Chuck Lindsey is always here. So your faculty or it was here too and you have those relationships with them, which again are super important because you can walk up a Saturday afternoon to Tim's office and ask them a question. Or if you find Chuck desperately clutching a cup of coffee as he runs around the building being awesome, you know that you can ask them a question and you get, you build those relationships.

Jake [00:15:19](#) That's something we had talked about in our previous conversation. No. But it's how it really amazes us how accessible all the, the, the faculty and staff was here and being able to do, you know, you're working on a project Saturday and you're like, I wonder if Frank's here, wait, of course Frank is here. And being able to just go down and ask that question, but I want to, I want to step back a bit and build on within the relationships. I remember one of the first things that you told us during our advantage session was "every conversation is an interview" essentially. And that really stuck with me cause I, I haven't heard it phrased quite like that, but I'd been a believer in the phrase of you can never, um, "you never get a second chance at a first impression". And so that really stuck with me and I found that very beneficial because I tried to keep that outlook going through the whole first semester. But also part of the reason I came to UB as well was for the connection that UB has within the city of Buffalo and, and beyond that. So I think those kind of coupled together, I'd like to hear your, your perspective on as a student coming into UB, how has UBS network within Buffalo itself, and even looking farther, I know we have plenty of alumni, it, it major companies throughout the country. Like how do you find that relationship being able to benefit current students?

Erin [00:16:30](#) Let me, let me try to dissect that a little bit. So we have relationships across the spectrum of employers, whether it's geography, multinational based in the United States, outside the United States, um, household name, pet companies versus little more local, regional eight counties of western New York. Um, we were just talking about it in another discussion that I was having earlier today, but it's kind of mass customization and that we develop relationships one on one and we work to strengthen those relationships. And, um, from, from an employment standpoint, um, those, those, those relationships,



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there's a lot of owners in, in those relationships. The Dean has relationships, the career resource center has relationships. The graduate programs office has relationships. You have relationships. The way it works is you have to do the math right? You, you leverage all of those resources into those really strong relationships. And that in turn creates opportunities for our students. So how does it create opportunities for our students? We understand that specifically with the MBA and we can talk about masters as well cause they, they look fairly similar but from an MBA standpoint, we know it takes two years for you to develop the type of relationships that you want that will lead to the jobs that you want at the end of this journey, at the culmination of this MBA journey. And so that's why we start those relationships very early in orientation, MBA advantage or even prior to when you get here, we've got people who are in the school of management network talking to you before you even show up on campus. So you might talk to a current student, we might talk to a current employer, you might talk to an alum. It depends on how you know what you're interested in as an applicant. So by the time you get to us in orientation, we have now jam packed two weeks of relationships starting in before you even start classes. So if you recall what your advantage experience was like, how many employers do you think you talked to? How many alumni do you think you talked to in that two week period? You can't even count. You can't, there's like there are literally hundreds of them. There are literally hundreds of them because that relationship is really important. We, we, your entire first semester is packed with relationship between Corporate Champions and all the other networking events that you do. Your whole first semester is all about a strong foundation of that relationship. Through experiential learning opportunities, you are proving to those, to that network that you actually are going to be a great product at the end of this and so they should start considering you tired you now and then when you go through the rest of your MBA program with us we have, those are those relationship opportunities are, are packed all the way through so that you get your internship, which ultimately leads to your full time position. And so taking advantage of all of those opportunities helps to develop all of those relationships. But I want to get back to your question about maybe the geography of those relationships. Western New York versus New York state versus downstate New York City versus somewhere else in the world. We have all those relationships and it may be that we have, you know, many people in New York City who are willing to hire you, be MBAs or Master's students. It may be that we have Buffalo



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companies who are willing to hire or Rochester companies. We have Canadian companies who are willing to hire our students. So it's taking advantage of the spread of that and working it back into your plan. So I would, I would take your question and I'm, I'm going to rephrase it and ask you a question. You know, what you should be a students be considering is who do you want to work for? Where do you want to work? What do you want to do? So what geography, what function, what type of company? Because I pretty much guarantee you that we have somebody in that space. But you have to define what that space is. I can't guess. So if you tell me that you want to go work on the west coast and you want to work for Google and you want to be in a business analyst position, yes we have those relationships. If you tell me that you want to work for Goldman Sachs in banking and you know you eventually want a career in investments and you want to run your own fund. Yes we have those relationships. Do you want to work in social innovation in the western New York area and make an impact? Um, um, uh, immigrant businesses within Western New York? Yes. We have our relationship there too. So the answer to your question is actually inside your own plans. And if you say, I want to be in this particular space, I can almost guarantee you we can connect the dots to somebody somewhere within the school of Management and network, whether you be network where you could pick up the phone or send an email and say, I'm really interested in what you're doing because that's what I want to do and we can make a human to human connection. And because we approach all these relationships here and the school of management with, um, a certain dose of kind of underdog humility, I'm pretty sure that almost any Buffalo person that you call, any UB person that you call this is going to pick up the phone. Yeah.

- Jake [00:22:27](#) I called and got connected to Aaron and I had a conversation with him later that week, came in and met him and it was very friendly from the start.
- Erin [00:22:37](#) Just for clarification purposes, they're talking about Aaron Shaw
- Orion [00:22:41](#) Yeah. With an A,
- Erin [00:22:43](#) Not Erin O'Brien, me, but Aaron with an A who happens to be our recruiter.
- Jake [00:22:47](#) Yeah. Stay tuned. One of the future podcasts to follow. Um, so to follow up on that, I, I kind of want to get back into the, the



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why MBA, the why UB. So given these, these connections, like a lot of business schools will have those connections. So if I'm, you know, thinking about getting my MBA, um, and I want to stick to the upstate New York area and I'm looking at UB, I'm looking at it, Canisius looking at Rochester and looking at Syracuse. Um, clearly, you know, being a state school, we do beat them on the bang for the buck and the price point. But if we're going to set that aside because we can kind of see that going in, what do you think sets UB apart? What would be your argument for UB, because I'm sure, um, you know, these are established business programs? They, oh, they will also have those connections as they also have good programs, good professors. What is it about UB that you would really argue is, um, the, the reason for coming here was going to set you aside, was going to prepare you coming out of UB as opposed to one of those other schools

Erin

[00:23:46](#)

So the thing that I, I share with most students who are applicants who are interested in our programs are when you look at MBA programs, we teach relatively the same things no matter where, no matter where you go, you can go here or a top 20 school. We're teaching the same foundations. We teach statistics and accounting and finance and marketing and supply chain and operations and uh, economics and entrepreneurship. So we're teaching a lot of the same things. They laws of supply and demand don't change between here and there. So when you're looking at, because we all have relationships and we all teach the same thing and we all have rock star faculty and we all have global experiences. We all have leadership programs, we all have all the same content within our degree programs. I think it boils down to fit. I think it's where you fit, where you think you fit, where you can have the strongest connection to what your outcome is going to be. So I will tell you that if you think that your outcome is going to be Wall Street, you would want to pick the school where you fit that profile and that profile fits you With UB, Um, I'd say our, our fit is, we work hard because we have two week and it's just, it is, it is absolutely the Buffalo underdog mentality that you see are professional sports team is that we work with a lot of heart because we can't rest on the laurels of a brand name that is just going to draw students. Um, the grant, we work really hard and if you ask our faculty or our employers or those other external relationships, when they hire a UB students, they hire you be student because they know, they know how it work. They're not going to rest on the brand name of their degree. They're going to get in. And you know where we are in New York state, which puts us kind



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of in that east coast geography. But I would say our attitude is way more Midwestern in terms of our work ethic and really not afraid to get our hands dirty. Um, and so from a fit standpoint, we work, we work really hard. And at the end of the day, an employer does not want to bring in a superstar with an ego because they're not going to get the work done. They're going to turn to the people who actually know how to work. And so I, that's the bang for the buck is that employers know, and we had the same employers that everybody else does. Employers know that hiring a UBC student means the work will get done.

Jake

[00:26:57](#)

That's good to hear. I mean, that's something that I can relate to the grind and maybe it's part of this, this cold, snowy weather, but it's, you know, that it's hard people around here who are willing to hunker down and do the work and work towards that goal. Um, so kind of playing off that, say I'm a prospective student. Um, it's, you know, January 22nd, I'm thinking about coming here next fall. Um, or maybe even later than that, but I'm a prospective student and I'm reaching out to, to get a feel to determine if I'm that proper fit for UB. What are the questions you have for me? And then what are the questions you're looking to hear from me? What are the types of questions that I should be asking that would help you understand if they're a good fit and then your questions to that individual as well.

Erin

[00:28:03](#)

Okay. Let's start with the questions that I would have for you and then I'll talk about the questions that I would expect from you. So the questions that I have for you would be, do you know why you want to do this? That'd be my first question. Why is it that you want to enter into two years of a hundred hours of work a week? Because it's not easy. MBA programs are not easy. Pick here, pick somewhere else. Doesn't matter where it is. MBA programs are not easy. And when we go back to those switches and launchers, my switchers have a hard time switching back to being students again. And my launchers have a hard time shifting from their prior higher education career into our daily work intense MBA program. Um, you know, we're a team based cohort, prescriptive curriculum in the MBA and that brings, that brings in extra layers of difficulty like team dynamics and working with other people who don't necessarily share the same vision that you do. It very much mirrors the working world. You get dropped into a team and you have to be successful. So um, what does that result in that results in a lot of work and a lot of reprioritizing your life and shifting commitments. And you can see at the beginning of the process,



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during the admissions process you can say, oh yeah, absolutely. I know, I know exactly how I'm going to prioritize my life. But until you're in the thick of the first semester, you had no idea I a real priority, right? Yeah. So what did they say? Man plans. God laughs. So we know that you know you as a, as an applicant pool, you tend to be very similar. MBA students tend to be very similar. You're all over achievers, you're very well. You know you're very well planned with your time management and you go into this with foresight and awareness, but the reality hits you in the first semester and then you have to figure out how to adapt, which in and of itself is a learning goal while you're here. How to adapt to vague situations. So my question might usually, my lead off question is why do you want to do this? So you need to have a really strong answer and you're, you're really strong answer can be as specific as I know I want to do this for this company and that then that's great. Or it can be I want to open my own business and that also is a good answer or I have a great idea and I want to launch this thing. All good answers. But you have to have an answer like, and it has to be a reasonable answer. You can't, you can't come to me and say, um, you know, I have my undergraduate degree is in communications, but I want to work in quantitative finance. That to me, that is not a reasonable jump on lasts. You have a background that would lead itself to be successful. You might be great at it. And this I'm not talking about like any specific individual. You might be fabulous at it, but that to me is with no work experience, no internships. I've never been in quantitative finance. I've never written an algorithm and my entire life and that's what I want to do. Well, can you achieve that in two years in an MBA program? Do you need more education? Do you need more certifications? Do you need a background in math? Do you need a background in programming? All of those fun things. So it has to be, you have to have a reasonable answer to the question of, why do you want to do this? Um, and I'm actually quite comfortable when applicants say to me, I'm not sure what I want to do, but I know this is the thing that I need. This is the tool that I needed in order to get there. And here's my framework. I want it and present it as a framework. I want to, I know that I want to advance my career and um, in this particular area, but I know that I will never get there if I don't even start here. That again, is a reasonable answer. So yeah, you can go from communications to quantitative finance if you're in a position, the answer as I got to start here and here's what my plan looks like. We adapt plans, plans may change. So that's cool too. Your plans may completely change when you get here, after you take your finance course and decide the quantitative finance is not where



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you're going. So that happens too. And that's okay. But you gotta have a clam and you've got to have a strong plan, a reasonable plan and achievable plan. Something that is milestone based or broken down into how I'm going to do this, I'm going to achieve x, y, and Z. Get these credentials, move forward. So my question is how you going to do it or why, why are you in this in the first place? Um, and the reason I asked that question outside of all of this, the reason I asked that question is fairly quickly in the first semester, you're gonna ask yourself, Oh, why did I even decide to do this? This is crazy. And if you have that, then we're not actually doing our jobs, so you have to call on that. This is why I'm doing it. You have to be able to recall that and use that as the fuel to get you through, not the fire that will consume you. So you have to be able to hold on to that reasoning for your entire time in this program because it's a lot of work and it's hard work. So that's what I, that would be the question that I would ask to or that I do ask to anybody who's interested in this program is make sure you know why you're doing this. Because you're about to put in an enormous amount of time and financial resources and energy into those. You'd better be, you better be committed and in return we will give you everything that we can possibly give you in order to make you successful. So it's a two, it's a two way street. So let me shift to what questions would I expect? I expect questions when I interview someone. I expect questions around. Okay. The basis of the question is usually, how do I use this tool that you have, whether it's career resource center, Corporate Champions, Advantage, experiential learning, and global programming. How do I use this tool in my toolkit? What's the best way to use this tool in my tool kit? Or how do I leverage the thing that you have to get me the relationships that I need in order to get the jobs that I want? So those are the type of questions that I think show me as an interviewer that not only have you done your research, but you've thought about, you've given critical thought as to how you're going to use this tool in your plan. It's not my plan. It's your plan questions that I think really don't have a ton of value are things that can be answered that are already on the website. I do not need you to regurgitate the website to me. I actually wrote it so I know what's on there. Um, so don't you know, if you want to know about LeaderCORE, asked me the questions that show you're interested about LeaderCORE. Just, you know, don't, don't drop it on the desk and say, I heard you have a leadership program. Can you tell me about it? You can learn everything you want to know about LeaderCORE, Corporate Champions or any advantage or all the cool stuff that we do right there on our



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website. We give you the details. Go a level deep. Understand why you want to know this stuff and how you're going to use it in your own career planning. Ask me something about, you know, you, you have, who's your, who's your best alum, like who's the, who's the alum that, I'm going to get this question now in every single interview, so I just killed myself. But who's the alum that you know, work this program the most to their advantage? What's their pathway? That's a good question because that tells me you're thinking about all the things that you need to do and you're going to work hard when you get here and you're going to make, you know, you're a project planner and you're going to check off that entire project plan, which will lead you to the job that you want when you get out of here.

Jake

[00:36:26](#)

So continuing down this road, um, I applied in the fall, and I am now accepted to come here next fall. Um, what, what would be any advice you may have to give to me as someone who's been accepted and will be coming in and how to prepare for this crazy two year journey. And then maybe, I don't know, being in this position for a while, has there been any characteristics that you've seen from students that as you've watched, you know, multiple years of graduates go through the program, is there any, any characteristics or things that stuck out to you of people who did successfully well and really did work the MBA to their full advantage?

Erin

[00:37:05](#)

Sure. I have data, real true hard data that shows that the most engaged MBAs are the happiest and most satisfied MBAs. So in terms of preparation and characteristics, engage, engage, engage, engage, engage, network like it is your day job. Now this might get me in trouble with faculty, but academics are only half the experience of the MBA program. There is a transfer of knowledge and an acquisition of knowledge that happens in an MBA program, but it doesn't, it's not limited to what's in the classroom. Right back to my first answer. It's the relationships that you build was this entire ecosystem. So what can you do to prepare? There's some simple things that you can do to prepare. You could from an academic standpoint, you could go and do any free online baseline academic familiarity type of courses. You know, an accounting for dummies basically to, if you've never had accounting before, you might want to familiarize yourself with terms and in accounting. Um, so that's an easy thing to prepare. That's a one off, you know, investment of two hours. I think that the better thing, not the better, I don't want to characterize it as better. I think the effective way to



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prepare is engage, engage, engage - do everything as much as you possibly can. Do every event, go to every event that you get invited to go to of all the alumni events, go to this, the career resource center events, go to any webinars that you can, that we might offer. All of those things will allow you to develop the relationships that we talked about earlier in our conversation. And you might think, okay, well I'm not even there yet. Why am I putting all this work in? Because the early bird gets the worm. So if you're the first one to engage and if you're the one who walks into the networking events with your hand out, ready to shake hands with a business card in your hand, your relationships are going to be, they're going to, they're going to be richer. You're going to have an opportunity to meet more people. You're going to be able to be the first one to see the opportunity. The opportunity is presented to everybody else. Network, network, network, engage, engage, engage. That's the best thing that you could do to prepare. And when you come to us for orientation, during MBA Advantage, come to us with an open heart and an open mind and be the first person in the room who's shaking everybody's hands and you know, getting to know who all your new teammates are. That is, again, that goes back to the relationships and the foundation that we have in this program. I would say for the most part, you all do that. Like you all, you all jump right in at the beginning of advantage. Um, it's easy to do that because it's the beginning of this journey. Uh, but I would say remind yourself as you're going through this program, that that's what you need to do with everything. Every conversation is an interview. So it truly is. So if you're talking to faculty, um, they might be able to connect you to an employer. If you're talking to the career team, they can connect to show employers. If you're talking to the graduate program, they can connect to, if you're talking to the dean, if you're talking to alumni, if you're at lunch with the Dean's Advisory Council, if you're at an alumni networking event, if you're out volunteering in the community, every single conversation, there's a connection. If you go to Network New York, like our students just did last week, you know, there were hundreds and hundreds of students and School of Management Alumni in New York city talking about relationships and jobs. So all of those, when you jump in and engage you have a much more effective pathway through the MBA program. So if you're, if you're thinking about preparing for showing up in the fall, I would include that as part as your, as part of your plan to figure out what your networking strategy is going to be. How are you going to work this whole program so that you get the most out of it? So your second part, the second part of your question was



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the characteristics, if I'm not mistaken of the most successful MBAs. Um, so everything that I talked about was relationship based. So you have to be relationship based, you have to know how to identify, foster and maintain relationships. Um, you have to, I think our most successful MBAs have figured out how to do the most in this program. Like they've reprioritize things in their world so that they can engage in all those great opportunities. Um, there is a certain amount of, we'll say the collection of characteristics are resilience, grit and competitiveness. Okay. Well I'm a type A personality. We do have some type A personalities, but they're stick-to-itiveness right. I'm not going to let mid semester October is hard. And the first semester, I'm going to make it through. We've had to counsel some other students who have cut and run on October when things start to win, the pot starts to boil over and they'd cut and run and they've not been ready for this program. The ones who make it through successfully are the ones who when things start to get uncomfortable, they put their head down and they keep going and they, they break through. And I'm one of the stories that I'm sure you heard me tell in Advantage that I will always say and now it's going to be recorded forever, is that the MBA program is a crucible. A crucible has to get hot enough to transform metal into a liquid. And when things get hot and uncomfortable, you are being changed. So you have to let yourself actually be changed. Don't fight it. Don't fight it. And so when you talk about the characteristics of a successful MBA, let yourself be changed by this experience. It is a transformative experience. Um, and you know, you probably have noticed that my answer has nothing to do with the most quantitative person or the one with the most work experience. Those are all great things to how caring into an MBA program, but the ones that make it through and really make an impact are the ones who are willing to work for it.

Jake

[00:44:00](#)

Yeah, and that's something I think that we noticed a lot is well during the first semesters it's not to, not to discredit the hard skills are the technical skills at all, but if you really wanted to, you could teach yourself technical skills to a certain extent, but the soft skills that come into play when you're dealing with a seven person group within a 50 person cohort within a hundred person class or multiple classes, that type, those types of interactions really was a growing experience and a learning experience that I kind of saw it coming but wasn't fully prepared for how much it would change myself and also how my perspective, my, my work ethics, all of that. It was one of the things that kind of caught me off guard, but I found to be one of



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the most beneficial things of this entire last semester was that ability to really work in multiple diverse groups across classes. Um, so I think that's very important in the grit to stick through it. You know, that's one of the big things. I mean we were talking in our last conversation that time end of October, early November, there were some groups that we saw, you know, falling apart a little bit because they, they either weren't getting through it or they hadn't properly been proactive and prepared for it. And not to say that our group didn't have its own issues here and there, but we planned ahead and then when those issues arose, we didn't let them get in the way of what we needed to get done.

Orion

[00:45:29](#)

We powered through that kind of state, cohesive and I mean, I think we were lucky. We, we, uh, we didn't have any, any real, no, we had a good personality. But at the same time we were clear with each other upfront and like, hey, when this, when we do start bumping heads, let's make sure we take these steps to make sure it doesn't get anything more than just bumping heads. So you've talked a lot about relationships. Um, and so one of the things that I thought of when Aaron Shaw was first talking about wanting to do podcasts and I said, hey Jake, we should, we should tackle this is there's, um, you know, going through this program, something that, that I've really, really admired is, um, how much integration there is and you know, with faculty and with the CRC, with the Career Resource Center, um, you know, and I think that's hard to capture on a website or even, uh, you know, when you do the initial interviews, um, and something that maybe this is a good forum where we can kind of try to get that out there. Cause I think it's something that, that is kind of unique about, about this program. And I was wondering, you know, from a leadership perspective, if we could kind of have you talked a little bit about, the staff and how will that happens? Because, you know, it's, it's really interesting we're going to do Tim and Frank and Mary cause they kind of have this, uh, this trio thing, you know, within the program and then the CRC and stuff. And, and I kind of marvel at how dedicated everybody is, you know, as far as the staff goes. Um, can you kind of talk about how, how that all works here?

Erin

[00:47:15](#)

There's a lot in that question. So I'll try to, I'm trying to break it down a little bit. The, so I'll start with the integration, the integration in any MBA core classes. Um, we seek to actually integrate the content and seed the content throughout the core courses. So as you just experienced after in your first semester



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when you're in statistics, you're learning concepts of organizational behavior and team dynamics. When you're an organizational behavior and team dynamics are learning concepts of communications and you're in communications, you're learning statistics as well. So, so, so we try to, and the second semester we'll bring the same thing. So when you're in economics or store operations, um, you're learning about those concepts as they are applied in each other. Okay? That's really important. If you plan on getting out of here and getting a job because you're going to go to any company big or small private republic and it's going to, you're going to be working with the various functions. So as a finance person, you have to know what your impact is on marketing. You can't just blindly go through life just by achieving the financial goals. You have to know how it impacts sales and marketing and operations and human resources and etc. And you're probably going to be leading a team. So you have to understand team dynamics. So from an integration a, where do you stand point? The integrated courses are really important. You learn domain. So think of it as verticality. You were in a particular domain, but you also have this horizontal integrated experience. Corporate Champions is built so that you can execute a large corporate project as soon as you get here. And understand the impacts that it has on all of those domains that you learned in the first semester. Um, your capstone experience is the same way you, so we book end the beginning of the MBA program and the end of the MBA program with those integrated experiences. And hopefully by the end of the MBA program you will have an elevated integrated experience because now you have all this, you've acquired all this education and all these experiences. So now you can put that in your toolkit and apply that to your capstone experience. So, so the, the integration of things, the integration of the academic content, the projects, they mirror what you would expect post-graduation when you're out, you know, using that MBA degree. Um, so it's, it's, it takes a village to pull this stuff off from an internal operations perspective, which I think is the second half of your question is how do we wrangle everybody to make this awesome experience for you guys? Because you're experiencing it. But there is an enormous amount of work that goes into actually materializing it has an opportunity for you. And the same can be said of everything else that we do in this program. So everything from MBA advantage to Corporate Champions to leader core to the career resource center to global travel and global programming. It takes a village to make sure all these opportunities are available to our MBA students. Um, the core team would be is the



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graduate programs office, the Career Resource Center and the faculty and that triangle of creativity and collaboration. We each have our own domains. So we approached problems from a team aspect just like you learn in the MBA program. So what do we need an order to make an enriched experience for our students? And we asked that question of the faculty. We ask that question of the graduate programs team. We ask of the Career Resource Center, what do our employers want from a Newbie MBA student? What do they expect? And so we critically look at all those things to build a program at the foundation of it is that occasion, I mean, we're in this with you guys. I mean we've, we've made a, we talked about it at the very beginning. I have the best job in the world. There is no other greater job than mine because I get to do this stuff every single day and we get to think of really cool stuff for you guys to do and I'm on my way to a conference this afternoon that's going to talk about more cool things for MBAs to do. How can we make the experience more engaged? How can we get better outcomes? How can we get better results for you? This is your plan. Walking through our program. You guys actually drive a lot of the change. You come to us and you say it could be better this way and because we have this open relationship, we accept that and internalize it and we say, okay, how can we make this better? How can we achieve this? The greatest changes in our program have been student driven. Corporate Champions came from a student idea. It's a student idea. When we come up, when what we've learned over the course of time is that if we come up with all the ideas, it's like pushing a robot hill. You guys, you know like, okay, here's another idea. Oh, here's something else that I have to do that I check it off when we engage you and pull you in as the leaders, student leaders that you are. We do amazing things together. Our domain is administration, faculty, administration, Academic Administration. We're in the business of education. You guys are a both a consumer and a product of this higher education. That's a really symbiotic relationship where we can do a lot collaboration. So you know a couple of years ago we started about, we started talking about case competitions and our UBM use have always gone out and done really well in case competitions in other schools. But we wanted to host our own national level case competition. So what did we do? I found a student leader who wanted to partner with me and that person continued to work with me to help seed the conversation in the MBA program pulled in more students. We created a team, we created a case competition club where you guys could talk and learn from one another. And we made the mission of one of the



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missions of the case competition club was to host a competition. Well you can't do it on your own and I can't do it on my own. So we get together, we go to partners, external partners to raise money. We put together the structure, we do all the operations when we do the budget together, and the collaboration between us results in awesome things for the MBA program. So, um, so when you talk about what's in the kind of the inner workings and why we do all this or how we create all this stuff, we do it together. And I, I wouldn't want any other partners besides our school administrative team and our students because whenever we include you, we make awesome things. So if it's just me, it's not, it's not interesting. It doesn't give you guys an opportunity to create and learn and come up with amazing stuff. Now what that also means is I put all the accountability on you to get it done. But, um, but we work in partnership and I will commit and I will commit to any MBA student that I will be the strongest advocate. Same thing with the military students. So the word with the military group, you've been there, right? And that's super important because that started out with, you know, how do we, the, the simple question was how do we engage more military and veteran students in our MBA program to the benefit of everybody, to the venom of the school, the program, the faculty, the staff, the students, everybody, everybody benefits from this. It's such a win, win, win relationship. So how do we do it? Well, I found a couple external partners. I found a couple student partners and we got our heads together and we figured it out and you know, created a thriving, a thriving ecosystem for military and veteran students in the school of management. And I'm the first person to stand up and say, if you need help, I am. Well, I am living not of, not just my office now, my desk now, my business card, but me personally, I'm here to stand right with you to figure it out so that we make a better program for military and veteran students. And we're talking about diversity or women or you know, uh, any type of student students who are interested in health care, students who were interested in entrepreneurship. Let's work together and figure out how to make an awesome program for you because you're the ones who have to consume it. You're the ones who have to produce the results and you're the ones who have to leave here and go do awesome things with their lives.

Orion

[00:56:46](#)

That makes a lot of sense. And I think, um, it's been my experience and I'm sure gen x too that you see evidence of that. And, uh, for example, working with M&T bank was the corporate champion's project that we did, we met with a lot of



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the alumni from the MBA program from here UB. And you just hear over and over again the, uh, the, they talk about, um, you know, some of the best, best years of their lives were in this program and the relationships that you build, a lot of them want to come back. And uh, I've heard several times to be adjunct professors, um, and to be, to be involved with the school and, and I think that that just kind of, uh, that reinforces what you're talking about, that those relationships are really strong.

Erin

[00:57:29](#)

Another example is Frank. Now, for those of you who don't know who Frank is, these guys know who because you'll get Frank in the first semester, but Frank is professor Frank Krzystofiak and he teaches our statistics sequence and the MBA core as well as data modeling. Frank changes lives literally and completely Frank will change your life and taking his course will change the way you think. I owe my entire career to Frank Krzystofiak because I took his courses and they changed the way I think. And you know, you talk about why is he, he's a professor. He's invested in the course that he teaches. He just happens to be awesome and amazing in terms of being a professor. He's a hugely influential, impactful person in this program. Um, but he has legions of fans or over the last 30 years that he's been teaching this because of the fact that he has such a great impact. And I don't think there's anybody in this building who, this goes back to the accessibility question too. You're on a first name basis with Frank and Frank is Frank. Frank is not necessarily, I mean we defer to professor cause Krzystofiak because of his title, but I mean you walk up to him and he's Frank and he will help you. And will legitimately answer a question. It's not an esoteric vague figure it out on your own response. I mean he'll tell you to figure it out on it, but, but it, it is, it is a helpful figure it out on your own, you know, put you on the path that you need to be on. And, and it's that type of dedication but also coupled with the accessibility and the relationship. And I know this is the of what we've been talking about, but it's, it's all interconnected. You can't separate them. You have to have the accessibility, you have to have the relationships, you have to have the impact. You have to be on a first name basis with Frank. That's what the experience of this MBA program is. It's not lofty. Yeah. It's real and it's, it's in your hand while you're here. Um, and I think that's what makes us different from other programs too. We're all in pretty much every one of us.



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- Jake [00:59:49](#) Yeah. That's very clear. I'm not, our previous conversation we talked about how one of the biggest things and businesses, it's not, it's not what you sell. It's why you do it, you know? And we were able to really see that from everyone in the building early on, that everyone who works here, everyone was involved. They know their why, they know why they're doing what they do and they live it out. They don't, it's not, you know, it's not just something that they say they're going to do is clearly visible through the actions of the people within this building. How dedicated they are to the program. To the students. To the school. Yeah. And that seeing that type of dedication from the people around you is, it was incredibly influential in my ability to pursue it through the hard parts of this semester because I didn't feel like it was, you were just student doing this. It's like everyone in the building is, they know what we're going through. They feel it. Yes. They kind of put us in that situation, but they did it because they know it's for the benefit of our personal growth.
- Erin [01:00:38](#) They dropped you in the deep end and make you swim. Yeah. Trial by fire a little bit. If you get in and you swim, but you know, we're there when you need us and we'll push you in the right direction.
- Jake [01:00:53](#) Well thank you for that. It's been a wonderful conversation. Thank you. Thank you for taking the time. For all you prospective students currently accepted students, current students. Please stay tuned and we'll be here again next week. Thank you. Thank you so much.
- Erin [01:01:36](#) Thank you