



Economic factors such as globalization and less-stable careers are driving students to expect MBA programs that are more closely tailored to their needs, say leaders at UNC Greensboro's Bryan School of Business and Economics.

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ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

MBA programs around the state evolve to fit new types of students and their needs.

When Suresh Gopalan settled into his role as interim dean of Winston-Salem State University's School of Business and Economics last June following the resignation of Dean Jessica Bailey, he found himself leading an MBA program that is drastically different from that of previous generations.

In the few short years since 2004, when he was first recruited to the university as a professor of management

and director of the MBA program, he has seen vast changes in curriculum offerings and new trends in how the MBA program is delivered.

"We're seeing increased competition for a shrinking pool of students," Gopalan says. "We also are seeing programs that are creating joint ventures and strategic alliances with other programs around the world. Back in the day, we didn't discuss diversity and different cultures as we do now. Technology has changed everything."

These changes are dictating how WSSU and other colleges and universities are designing their MBA and executive-education programs. They are leading academics and administrators to build in affordable pricing, creating flexibility in scheduling and delivering classwork, and allowing students to design special studies.

At WSSU, a historically black university, the MBA program enrolls 45 to 60 students, offers evening classes twice a week and caters to a much different student body than 25 years ago.

"The MBA program of old served midcareer executives in their 40s, but over the last couple of years, we are seeing more and more students in their mid-20s," Gopalan says.

The MBA platform was expensive and time-consuming. The curriculum focused on three core areas: economics, finance and marketing. Today's MBA program offers flexibility, lower costs and online learning.

UNC Charlotte's Belk College of Business serves a diverse population of students from engineering, the arts, finance, manufacturing and health care, according to Gary Kohut, program director of UNCC's dual MBA program and the EGADE Business School Tecnológico de Monterrey of Mexico.

While the UNCC program offers concentrations in business analytics, financial services, energy and market-ing management, it can accommodate

students who want to tailor their MBA curriculum to their own profession.

"We offer a student-structured MBA concentration in which students can take the core MBA classes and tailor a concentration to suit their interests, Kohut says. "For example, if you work in nonprofit administration, you could get an MBA with a concentration in nonprofit management."

For the busy executives who want to polish their management skills without investing significant time and money in the entire MBA program, UNCC also offers an open enrollment executive-education program.

"We have been offering various executive-education courses for a while, but we formalized [the program] five years ago," says Karen Ward, associate director of client solutions for the Belk College of Business' executive-education program. "It's a nonacademic program of custom courses for organizations and stand-alone courses for individuals."

The Belk College also offers finance and accounting immersion for business leaders who want to fill gaps in their area of expertise, she adds.

Immersion and in-depth learning can eventually lead to an MBA.

"While people want to become more expert in some areas, the gold standard is still the MBA," Kohut says.

UNCC's MBA program, which was started in 1970, enrolls about 300 students.

At High Point University, health care professionals are enrolling in the Earl N. Phillips School of Business to earn their MBA, according to Dave Tofanelli, an assistant professor and director of the MBA program who has had a long career in health care administration.

"It's very exciting," he says. "Often, clinicians are promoted to head their departments without having any experience in profit management, cost efficiencies or business man-

agement. Getting an MBA can help them understand markets and teach them how to strategize, and they can use their knowledge and training to be more successful."

Campbell University also offers an MBA in a variety of specialized areas, including financial services, government and law, health care management and business analytics, says Kevin O'Mara, dean of the Lundy-Fetterman School of Business.

In fact, flexibility is the name of the game at Campbell, where the entire MBA program was redesigned last year.

"We are now in our 40th year and have moved to multiple formats," O'Mara says. "We offer a part-time program housed in our law school in downtown Raleigh for working professionals. We have a 4+1 program on campus that serves students who go straight to the MBA program after graduating with a bachelor's degree. We also have an online program."

Students can stay in one format throughout the entire MBA program, or they can mix and match by switching formats from semester to semester, starting and stopping, and tailoring their MBA education to their personal schedules and needs.

The Campbell program is designed to be completed in two years, but some students are able to earn their MBA in one year. Others may take five years, which is the deadline for completion, according to Somer Johnson, MBA director.

William Brown, professor of finance and associate dean for internal affairs at UNC Greensboro's Bryan School of Business and Economics, believes flexibility is the future of MBA programs.

"The traditional, part-time MBA program was designed when people worked 9-to-5, lived and worked locally, and had a relatively stable career path,"

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he says. "The changing workday, increased globalization, technology and less-stable careers mean that students want shorter programs, the ability to speed up or slow down the program as needed, increased flexibility of class offerings and the ability to take classes both online and face-to-face."

Brown also predicts an increasing demand for helping students develop soft skills, allowing for personal development.

The Bryan College serves 55 students in its experienced professional, part-time track and 109 students in its early professional, full-time track, according to Brown. The early professional program requires 42 credit hours plus an internship.

From big data to a brand new Women in Tech Leadership Camp, N.C. State University's executive education program in the Poole College of Management takes advantage of every-

thing the entire university has to offer, including its well-known expertise in agricultural sciences, biomanufacturing, computer science, design, statistics, textiles and other sectors. Director of Executive Education Dan McGurrin calls this "contextualized learning."

"We're seeing a market change with more consulting firms playing a stronger role in education and training, so we have had to be more expert in delivering context, not just content," he says.

With a high volume of subject-matter experts in the university, the executive education program is positioned to offer specialized coursework. Custom programs include innovation, leadership, product management, risk management, supply-chain management and sustainability.

N.C. State's hands-on, project-based approach also lends itself to delivering specialized training.

Through its unique "collaboratories," N.C. State brings in experts for half-day workshops to help senior leaders develop strategies for solving challenging business issues and problems.

N.C. State's MBA program also reflects market demands, according to Christine Ferrell, director of marketing and media relations for the Poole College of Management and the Jenkins MBA program.

"We believe what sets N.C. State apart from other university MBA programs is how we approach what our students study outside the core MBA offerings," she says. "Students are expected to gain functional knowledge through real, hands-on project work."

Of the roughly 850 students enrolled in the Jenkins MBA program, 80% are working professionals, taking classes on the main campus in Raleigh or a satellite campus in RTP

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in the evenings or online, according to Ferrell.

In 2015, Calvert Holdings founder Russ McLauchlan and his wife, Cara, provided funding to establish the McLauchlan Leadership Series, giving Jenkins MBA students access to corporate executives and community leaders for a unique coaching experience. To date, 72 MBA students have been named McLauchlan Fellows.

Some MBA programs in North Carolina are trending toward maintaining tight connections to their communities.

WSSU's School of Business and Economics, which targets students within a 30- to 40-mile radius of Winston-Salem, is uniquely local, according to Gopalan.

"We encourage them to get involved and apply their business skills to help local businesses and improve the quality of life in their community," he says.

Part of Campbell University's mission is to stay relevant to the communities it serves. Located in the Triangle region, home to the N.C. State Capitol, and in an area flush with biotechnology and life-sciences companies, health care and government are good choices for MBA students interested in specializing.

"We look for strategic synergies, what we can do well and what the local business community looks for," O'Mara says. The university also looks for programs that attract millennial students who seek meaningful careers.

This falls right in line with Campbell University's mission, according to O'Mara.

"Campbell's philosophy is 'leading with purpose,' and we designed our program with that element in it, enabling us to resonate with millennials," he says.

Maintaining a local focus also enables MBA and executive-education programs to create synergy with area businesses, and most universities are tapping into the marketplace for feedback on curriculum and program advice.

The UNCC executive-education program brings university faculty leaders and key business practitioners together to give a unique perspective to the classroom, according to Ward.

Bringing professionals into classrooms also creates an environment for experiential applied learning.

"At Elon, we engage in role-playing, using real-life situations, and we pair real clients with students to discuss real-time challenges and how they break down into projects," says Kristy Ruiz, director of graduate programs at Elon University.



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ty's Love School of Business. "Students have an opportunity to work on real client projects, to hone their management skills."

According to High Point University's Tofanelli, a typical MBA course at the school lasts three hours, with 20 minutes devoted to lecture and the rest allocated for group discussion and interaction.

"In real life, students need to learn how to collaborate, work together in groups and deal with different types of personalities," he says. MBA programs are also becoming more agile, with the ability to adapt quickly to the ever-changing marketplace.

N.C. State takes advantage of its renowned college of engineering to

create a highly rated curriculum offering in supply-chain management, Ferrell says. In 2016, Gartner Inc., a business-research firm, ranked the university's supply-chain program 19th in the nation.

The university also focuses on big data. In the executive-education program, a multilayered approach to data analytics for novices, IT professionals and leaders could lead to earning a degree in data science.

At Campbell University, O'Mara and Johnson continue to watch the business landscape and focus on innovation and assessment to develop a flexible and relevant curriculum.

One curriculum that is trending and expected to touch professionals from nearly every business sector is business analytics.

"The study of analytics is becoming popular," Ruiz says. "According to research, there are a half-million open analytics jobs in health care, IT, marketing, packaged goods and other sectors."

At UNCC, data analytics is incorporated into many classes, and it is almost the norm to have data analytics as part of all university majors.

"We are building custom-designed analytics programs ... for a wide range of skill sets," Ward says.

The way classes are delivered is ever-evolving too. Thanks to technology, students can earn their MBA in a variety of ways.

"We are starting to combine face-to-face classes with online classes, which allow busy executives to take two classes at the same time by attending one in person and taking the other one online," Kohut says. "Barriers no longer exist, and you can now get your MBA while working full time, spending time with your family and traveling." ■

— Teri Saylor is a freelance writer from Raleigh.



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At community colleges across North Carolina, executive education is focused on serving the needs of corporate and community partners, and it can be customized to suit the needs of local business owners, large and small.

That's exactly what Wake Technical Community College's Corporate and Business Solutions division does, according to Michelle Fauver, media relations coordinator for communications and marketing.

The program tailors training programs to match business needs and organizational goals. With more and more companies moving to North Carolina, bringing new employees up to speed quickly with optimized training is crucial.

"Our most popular course content tends to be company-specific information-technology skills, project management and Lean Six Sigma, leadership, team building and data analytics," says Barbara Brothers, executive director of corporate and business solutions at Wake Tech. "But we can create a program as specialized as collaborative robotics technician skills, to as universal as customer service best practices."

Pitt Community College specializes in training incumbent and prospective employees for business and industry in Pitt County.

"We work to maintain a close relationship with all of our community partners to understand their workforce needs and deliver training solutions customized to fit their business goals and strategies," says Jerry Jones, director of business and industry.

PCC officials are also seeing the need for more short-term training programs to help local residents earn sustainable salaries, according to Kristin S. Braswell, dean of continuing education.

"We currently are offering a variety of construction trade courses in Spanish to meet the needs of our Hispanic and Latino population," she says.

Whether preparing for a dream job or reinventing a career, Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte offers continuing-education courses and certificate programs to help expand the local workforce's skills and knowledge to help workers find opportunities.

In addition to offering coursework, the college posts Charlotte's Top 25 Jobs in Demand Report, which lists the top available job opportunities ranked by the number of online postings from the most recent six-month period. The monthly report also provides the top specialized skills that appear in these postings and the top occupations that typically require less than a four-year degree.

CPCC also helps local employers prepare and keep a ready, talented and knowledgeable workforce by providing flexible, focused programming and services that cover all aspects of business, from startup to operations to workforce development.

Some of CPCC's programs include a corporate learning center to help businesses connect with experienced professionals, provide group training opportunities and host job fairs.

CPCC also offers an internship and apprentice program, a small business center for entrepreneurs and a global-logistics center for employers who want to expand and succeed in global operations.

Developing a local, diverse workforce through the community-college system brings value to the marketplace and also helps workers who need to keep their skills polished and prepare for job opportunities.

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