

# BUSINESS EDUCATION

## Online Learning

FINANCIAL TIMES SPECIAL REPORT | Monday March 12 2012

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**Online**  
Michellana Jester from MIT Sloan School of Management talks about action learning

## Schools struggle to stand out in a crowded market

Numbers and types of organisations offering courses have shot up in the past year. Della Bradshaw asks why

Early in 2011 Waitrose, the upmarket UK supermarket chain, recognised it could use the latest technology to impart business school knowhow to its cashiers and shelf-stackers, as well as to its managers and board members.

So the supermarket, part of the John Lewis retail partnership, worked with two UK business schools to launch its PartnerLearn website in July, giving access to all 48,000 of its partners (its permanent staff members).

Waitrose's adoption of e-learning, in collaboration with Ashridge Business School and the Open University, is one example of how the internet can democratise learning, bringing business school programmes, once the prerogative of company executives and aspiring investment bankers, to everyone working in a business.

From degrees to seminars and text books to research publications, the past year has seen significant changes in the ways managers learn about their jobs and professors disseminate their knowledge.

There has been an explosion in the numbers and types of organisations offering courses, says Tony Sheehan, Learning Services Director at Ashridge.

"The competition over the past year has come from every angle," he says, including publishing companies and "open courseware providers", which provide materials free of charge. But as well as the growth in free online management programmes, the past year has also seen the launch of some of the most expensive.

In July 2011, the Kenan-Fla-

'Our real challenge is to make sure that people know why we are different. Getting quality out there is absolutely critical'

gler Business School of the University of North Carolina launched its MBA@UNC, with fees of \$89,000.

At the top end of the market, quality not cost is the key concept, and Kenan-Flagler requires all students to meet the same entry criteria as for its full-time MBA, which includes sitting the GMAT, the Graduate Management Admission Test.

Kelley Direct, the online arm of the Kelley School of Business at the University of Indiana,

also requires its participants to sit the GMAT.

Munirpallam Venkataraman, associate dean for academic programmes at Kelley, says this reassures applicants that participants on similar programmes will be of a similar quality. "We signal to our students that they are going through a rigorous academic experience," he says.

Prof Venkataraman says there is still some scepticism about online education, but that is changing.

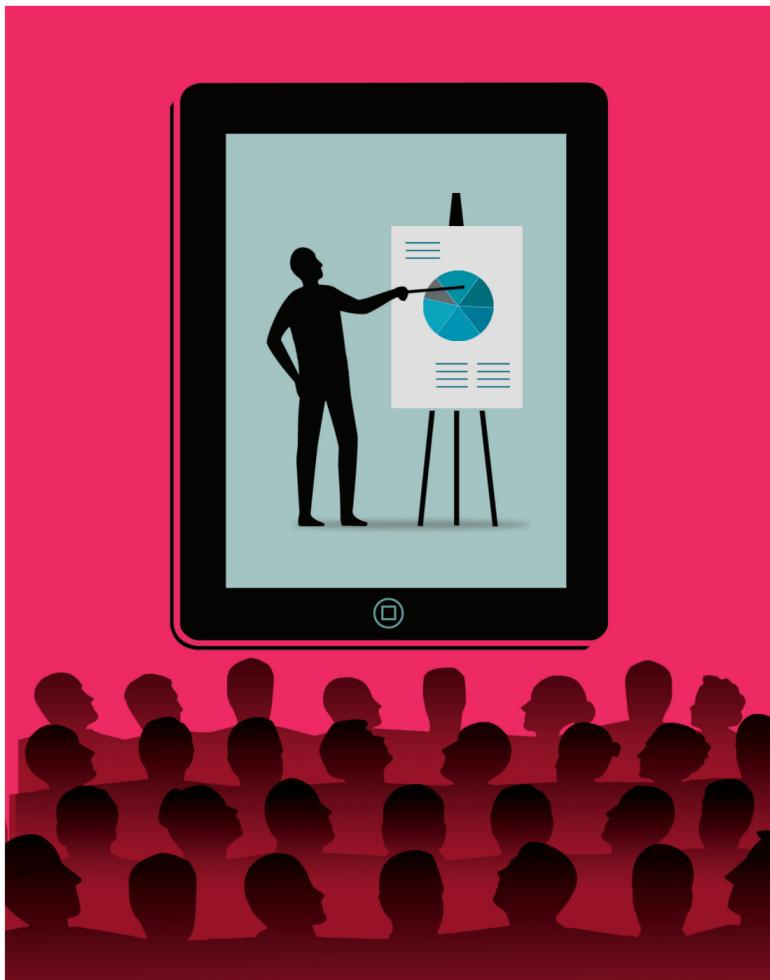
"In the US, we are seeing companies comfortable with online degrees from the traditional bricks-and-mortar-institutions."

Nonetheless, establishing that your high-quality programme is the one to choose in a market awash with low-cost alternatives is proving a hard sell for many business schools.

In particular, it is often difficult for prospective students to differentiate between the plethora of programmes, says Rebecca Taylor, newly appointed dean of the Open University Business School in the UK.

"Our real challenge is to make sure that people know why we are different. Getting quality out there is absolutely critical," she says.

While the past two years have seen interest focus squarely on the devices that students use to access coursework – be that an ebook or a tablet – the emphasis



is now shifting to how data management software can be used to give each student a more "personal" service.

Such software can help analyse where students' strengths lie and where they need extra

help, and can target material according to an individual's preferred learning style, says Robert Goodwin, interim dean of the Graduate School at University of Maryland University College.

"I think what you are going to see is education targeted at individual students. We're right on the cusp of that," he says.

Cost is frequently not an

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INSPIRING LEARNING

## Business Education: Online Learning

# Big names decide to join the fray

### Differentiation

Schools are trying to make their web-based courses as 'rich' as possible, says Adam Palin

Established business schools have been reluctant to launch online degrees, often because of a perceived lack of quality.

But with an increasingly tech-savvy MBA population, and huge advances in pedagogical technology, a number of schools with highly ranked traditional MBA degrees are now seeking to create a presence in this growing market.

Spain's IE Business school in Madrid, ranked eighth in the world for its full-time programme in the 2012 FT Global MBA rankings, and the University of North Carolina's Kenan-Flagler Business School, in the US, where the full-time MBA is ranked 56, are among those that have recently taken the plunge.

At the core of their different approaches is a shared emphasis on ensuring consistency of quality with full-time, campus-based programmes.

At Warwick Business School in the UK, distance students follow the same curriculum as the full-time programme, which is ranked 27 globally.

No distinction is made at graduation between study modes.

Nigel Piercy, associate dean for the Warwick MBA, says: "With the same con-

'The volatility of today's careers demands flexibility in degrees'

tent and standards, distance learning is simply a variation in delivery mechanism, not a different degree."

At Kenan-Flagler, applicants for its MBA@UNC programme have to sit the GMAT entry test just like their full-time counterparts. They also pay comparable fees of \$89,000.

Warwick's approach is one of "blended" learning, with certain modules taken on campus. Students can choose more face-to-face sessions, and amend their study mode in line with their circumstances.

"The increased volatility of today's careers demands flexibility in programmes," says Prof Piercy.

Marwa Bouka is one alumnus who combined periods of full-time campus-based and distance learning to study over two years without leaving her job.

"The full time experience, though short, was incomparable, and it gave me a boost to continue the programme at distance."

While studying away from Warwick, students are connected to their MBA community by 'wbsLive' – a virtual classroom where students interact in seminar conditions – and by syndicate groups of 10 for completing joint coursework.

Bringing together individuals across time zones is seen as increasingly rele-

vant in a globalised workplace.

"Virtual communication is an opportunity to develop and enhance one's ability to organise thoughts and debate effectively – and this is another learning process," says Ms Bouka.

Marcel Cohen, director of the Distance Learning MBA at Imperial College London, also advocates group work among students of diverse backgrounds and locations. Spending only three weeks together on campus over the duration of their programme, students must adapt to long-distance networking, "the networking of the future," says Mr Cohen.

Now in its 10th year, Imperial's Distance Learning MBA is taught entirely online, and has different content from the full-time programme.

However, each module is written by faculty members who teach on Imperial's MBA and Executive MBA programmes, and is scrutinised by a committee that ensures consistency and standards across the school's "suite" of MBAs.

Each module is coordinated via its own "Blackboard", which functions as a forum for study material and discussion between students and faculty. "We try to leave discussions alone for a couple of days to allow peer-to-peer debate to develop before intervening," says Mr Cohen.

Professors can track who is following debates, as well as contributing to them, to monitor student engagement.

Across the Atlantic, Kenan-Flagler has embraced cutting edge technology in delivering its MBA@UNC programme, launched in 2011. On top of "asynchronous" study materials that students can watch on demand, including lectures, videos and interviews, there are weekly "synchronous" seminars.

Attendance – logging into the virtual classroom at the scheduled hour – is mandatory. Upon "dialling in", each student's face appears onscreen via webcam. "Everyone is in the front row," says UNC professor Doug Shackelford.

Students also have one-on-one access to their professors in online office hours, and can keep track of content "pinned" to each module's virtual wall.

"While there are advantages being at the forefront of innovations, we are going to be constantly evolving," says Prof Shackelford.

An iPad-compatible study platform is scheduled for late 2012 and the textbooks that were sent out to the first cohorts are to be replaced by ebooks. "There are fewer limits to the technology than you might think," says Susan Cates, executive director of the MBA@UNC.

The programme's "immersion component" – face-to-face courses at locations around the world, is a recognition of some of the technology's limitations.

Students are required to attend at least two "immersions", with sessions including persuasion, influence and performance under pressure. "experiential" learning that is difficult to replicate online.

# Low-tech design aims to broaden reach

### Case Study Royal Holloway

The UK school is keen to attract students from the remotest areas, says Emmanuelle Smith

Whether they study remotely or on Royal Holloway's leafy campus in Surrey, students on the UK college's MBA International Management programmes receive the same University of London degree.

Their experiences in achieving their degree vary widely, however.

For a start, the vast majority of those opting to study remotely are in full-time employment, while their peers on the "home" course take time out of their careers to study intensively.

The differences do not end there. Though the actual syllabuses are "remarkably similar", according to Justin O'Brien, MBA director at

Royal Holloway's School of Management, the online learning MBA and MSc degrees are significantly more flexible – in their delivery, of course – but also in the range of electives.

After all, if you are learning in your own time, you do not need to think about whether options clash with each other on the timetable.

There are also more exams on the distance learning course – since presentations and group work are for the most part ruled out.

However, participants also attend two week-long plenary sessions (120 hours in total), allowing them to network with fellow students and benefit from some "face time" with professors and visitors.

"The most interesting part for me, was the sessions in London," says Simitri Chhabra, who works and lives in Australia and is in his third and final year of the MBA.

"It provided a platform to meet professionals of different ethnic and

cultural backgrounds from more than 50 countries," he says.

The ability to complete the programme from wherever they happen to be and in their own time is a big draw for students.

Albert Hetherington Jones, a business development manager at a translation company in Rome, says: "The main attraction of the course

'The ability to work flexibly suits people with crazy lifestyles – they don't have to sit at a computer at a particular time'

was that it was flexible enough to fit around my life. I am based in Rome, but [right now] I am in Copenhagen Airport after a meeting in Sweden. I constantly travel between several countries and I am unable to study fixed in a single place." He is about to complete his MSc International Management. Mr O'Brien agrees: "The

ability to work flexibly suits people with crazy lifestyles. They don't have to be sat at a computer with a headset at a particular time," he says.

Indeed, unlike some other online courses, students complete the work in their own time – there are no "live" lectures or workshops.

Each of the nine compulsory modules and four electives takes six months to complete, and several can be done simultaneously – the MBA can be taken over a maximum of five years, although, in theory, it can be finished in little more than two.

"It suits people with families or who travel a lot," explains Mr O'Brien.

Mr Hetherington Jones "would recommend [the course] to anybody who cannot put their life on hold to study, and who doesn't know what they will be doing or where they will be in the short term".

Postgraduate study is such a big financial investment that distance learning makes sense for



Royal Holloway's campus in Surrey

those who might not know for certain that they will stay put for two years.

But online study is not for everyone, warns Mr O'Brien, who says it "requires a lot of self-motivation".

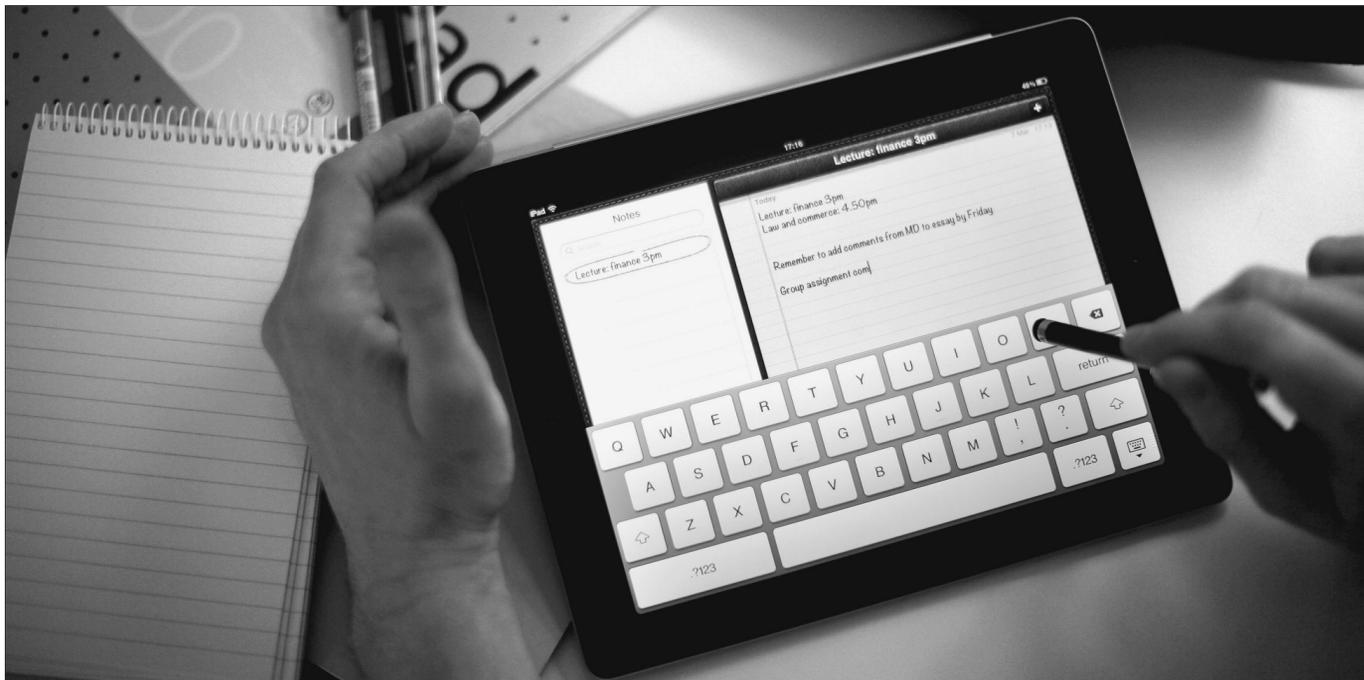
Furthermore, the design of the University of London/Royal Holloway course is deliberately pared-down, with no bells and whistles, or "gimmicky" uses of technology.

"We're quite a conservative, traditional

college," says Mr O'Brien. But this is a strength, he says. "We are keen to attract people from the remotest parts of the world – not only those with the best bandwidth.

One of the beauties of our programme is that we haven't embedded massive files and multimedia," he says.

"There's no use having super-savvy stuff that works in some countries but not others. We can't use Skype, for example, as it doesn't work in China."



Key stroke: Josh Koppel, chief creative officer of ScrollMotion, a developer of etextbooks, says: 'Touch changes the intimacy of the experience'

Charlie Bibby

# To dominate in class, tablets will need to let us take notes

### Gadgets

Most students need to write to retain information. Chris Nuttall looks at moves to help them

Two years after Steve Jobs held up the first iPad at its launch in San Francisco, Apple staged another event in January at the Guggenheim Museum in New York.

The company that had single-handedly created a tablet market was now proposing to expand in the education sector by using the iPad for online textbooks.

Apple is not the first to focus on this area, but with the 100m iPad sales milestone expected to be passed this year and the company's magical ability to enthuse consumers with its vision, tablets and their software could have a significant impact on online learning.

"As students are being introduced to iPads, some remarkable things are happening; we're on the cusp of something really great," Phil Schiller, head of worldwide marketing, with typical Apple bravado, said at the event.

The announcement at the Guggenheim was all about software and services: iBooks 2, offering interactive textbooks at less than \$15, iBooks Author – an application to create them – and an iTunes U app, expanding the podcast lectures that universities offer through Apple, into full online course materials.

The medium for all of this material was the touch-enabled iPad, rather than a MacBook laptop or an iPhone. Some 1.5m iPads are already in use in educational institutions.

Brent Trowetzky is product lead on the eTextbook Reader, a cloud service that enables access to digital textbooks on any device, which has been created by Chegg.com, the textbook

rental service. He says: "We find that when students are reading on tablets rather than on a PC, they consume more pages in a session. They seem to be sitting down and focusing more with a tablet."

Josh Koppel, chief creative officer of ScrollMotion, a developer of etextbooks, agrees. He says: "Touch changes the intimacy of the experience. When you touch the content, it resonates psychologically in a different way from when you're just reading it. It changes the way you engage."

But tablets are still in the minority among electronic tools used by students. Osman Rashid, a co-founder of Chegg who is now chief executive of Kno, the education software company, says: "In five years, tablets are going to be the dominant platform globally for learning, but in the meantime, laptops will still have to be supported."

Dan Rosensweig, Chegg's chief executive, says that its research shows students use a minimum of three devices for learning.

"While we believe tablets will continue to grow, they may not be the tool of choice for a student – touch is really cool and fast, but the tablet has yet to be shown to be a really good input device for taking notes," he says.

Chegg's approach has been to produce a reader based on open HTML5 standards that adapts itself to any device.

"We're open-minded about which device students use and we believe they will use more than one device and more than one vendor. Apple's announcement meant content crea-

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#### Online Q&A

Online learning has a reputation for being cheap and cheerful but the past year has challenged perceptions as high quality degrees have appeared. However, given the high price tag, are they worth it in terms of education and employability of graduates?



**On the panel are:**  
Mark Taylor, Dean, Warwick Business School



Douglas Shackelford, Associate Dean of MBA at UNC, Kenan-Flagler Business School



Della Bradshaw, Business Education Editor, Financial Times

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This means students receiving instant feedback on how they are performing, through software monitoring their progress and comparing it with that of others.

Similarly, teachers can monitor the performance of their class more closely and take corrective action sooner with students having difficulties.

Analytics will also help authors and publishers improve their textbooks – the data feedback can show if particular sections are not being used by teachers or students.

Content creation tools also allow the teachers themselves to update course materials.

"If I read a great story in the Financial Times in the morning," says Brad Wheeler, professor of information systems at Indiana University's Kelley School of Business, "I can go into the software and find a chapter, highlight a paragraph, add a web link to the article and say: 'Here's an illustration of what we were talking about'."

"I just changed everyone's textbook, it wasn't some email note stripped of context, that kind of thing starts to bring the text to life."

Mr Koppel says the potential is there for many further improvements in areas such as making education more social as students help one another.

"There's so much there already that's not being used. Imagine using FaceTime or Skype video calling to change our notion of a classroom, getting user-motivated demos and exploring social media – the next step is to put all these pieces together."

'In five years, tablets will be the dominant platform for learning'

He sees tablets and their software as being revolutionary in education. "We will relearn how to learn because of tablets; that's how profound the impact is going to be."



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## Business Education: Online Learning



Cracking idea: one MBA student used crowdfunding to commercialise her venture to produce body-care butter from African shea nut trees

Alamy

## Platforms to push a project

Below is a selection of crowdfunding websites that help people raise money for projects and start-up ventures.

**Kickstarter** A US-based crowdfunding platform where donors fund creative projects, large and small, without receiving an equity stake.  
[www.kickstarter.com](http://www.kickstarter.com)

**Crowdcube** UK-based website that styles itself "The world's first business finance crowdfunding platform for businesses to raise equity finance."  
[www.crowdcube.com](http://www.crowdcube.com)

**Funded By Me** Platform based in Sweden – each project is required to reward donors for their donations, whether it be with "a hug, a CD, tickets or a concert at their birthday".  
[www.fundedbyme.com](http://www.fundedbyme.com)

**Cofundit** Founded by EMBA graduates from the IMD business school in Lausanne, this Swiss website connects businesses with investors to help raise money through debt offerings.  
[www.cofundit.com](http://www.cofundit.com)

**Grow VC** The Hong Kong-based Grow Venture Community connects entrepreneurs with early-stage investors.  
[www.growvc.com](http://www.growvc.com)

**SeedUps** This UK and US-platform matches tech start-ups with investors. More than £33m in funding has been raised through SeedUps.  
[www.seedups.com/](http://www.seedups.com/)



## Student entrepreneurs tap their networks

## Start-up finances

## Alanna Petroff on the uses and limits of 'crowdfunding'

When Stephanie Getson, a US citizen, was working as an intern at a UN refugee agency in Chad, she learnt about an agricultural innovation that accelerated the growth of shea nut trees.

This inspired her to launch Sahara Botanicals, a for-profit business that produces body-care butter from shea nuts.

The company aims to "create jobs in conflict-affected communities by producing all-natural body-care products," she says.

Ms Getson worked on commercialising her venture while studying for her MBA at the University of Oxford's Saïd Business School.

She often made presentations about her business plan and after one such, she was approached by employees from a "crowdfunding" website, who recommended their fundraising platform.

Buzzbnk – as the site is called – is aimed at social enterprises and allows volunteers to donate money or time to support them. Ms Getson was soon canvassing her friends, family and classmates. In the end, 77 people donated £3,530 through Buzzbnk, helping her reach her £8,000 target.

She used the funds to fly to Chad, where she produced and exported her first batch of products.

"It was a really good way of raising the profile of the organisation [and] it was very effective in raising the small amount of capital I needed," she says.

Business students are increasingly pursuing their own ventures, but securing funding through traditional routes can be a challenge.

Crowdfunding presents a solution: helping entrepreneurs raise funds while also promoting their projects.

After Ms Getson's success, four of her classmates launched their own Buzzbnk campaign for their start-up – mDiagnostica. They tapped classmates, friends and business contacts, raising £2,800 for their for-profit business, which aims to improve healthcare services in developing nations.

In this type of venture,

donors give money without the option to take an equity stake, because they want to support start-ups that have socially responsible goals.

Other business school students and graduates are catching on to the crowdfunding trend.

Joey McMahon is using crowdfunding to collect donations and raise the profile of his charity, The Monday Life.

The first-year MBA student at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business in the US created a website that asks for \$1 donations every Monday to fund improvements at the Duke Children's Hospital.

The crowdfunding model encourages people to donate as well as lend their knowledge and expertise, he says. So far, he has raised \$50,000 and plans to extend

the model to hospitals in other US cities.

Adrian Johnson, an MBA alumnus of Insead, is in the process of launching a crowdfunding website to help finance *The Laughter Clinic*, a film to be directed

'There were a lot of benefits. [But] I felt bad asking for money without giving something in return'

by Ed Blum, a Bafta nominee.

"The goal is to create a site that will, on the one hand, get the audience involved in the film and build a fan base. [On the other hand, it will] raise

some money for the film," says Mr Johnson.

Donors will have the chance to win perks such as on-set visits and premiere tickets, he says.

Crowdfunding is not only about financing, but also about gaining support for ideas, says Panagiotis Ipeiritis, a crowdfunding specialist at New York University's Stern School of Business.

It provides entrepreneurs with "market validation" ahead of a launch, he says. "You know there is demand, you are combining market research with raising funds."

However, crowdfunding can only get a business so far.

Rules prevent small companies from selling equity in their business through crowdfunding. Therefore, it

generally has a short shelf life.

"If I did it again, I probably wouldn't use crowdfunding," says Nigel Tunnacliffe, one of the founders of mDiagnostica.

"There were a lot of great benefits that we got [and] I was grateful to all the people who contributed. [But] I felt bad about asking them for money without giving something in return... I want people who contribute to our success to share in our success."

Ms Getson echoes these sentiments, saying she will not use crowdfunding in the future. "I want to get beyond the donation route... to prove we are a financially viable business."

For the next round, I'd be looking for working capital loans, eventually leading to equity investment."

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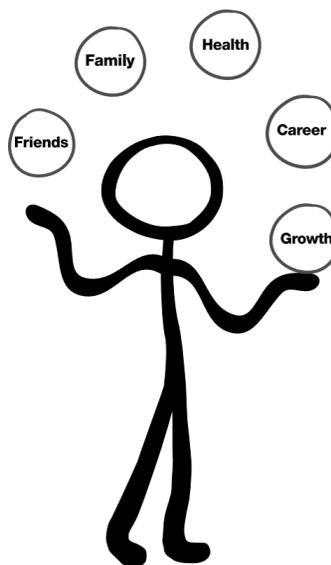
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# Business Education: Online Learning



French connection: HEC Paris uses Apple's iTunes U to deliver video lectures that showcase its work free of charge

## Options expand for those who find paying a problem

### Non-profit offerings

**Wai Kwen Chan** considers various delivery models and how providers are choosing to fund them

An increasing number of institutions are creating non-profit initiatives to provide free courses and educational materials online.

Many of these offerings do not lead to qualifications, but can benefit those that use them. They can give insight into subjects, as well as facilitate knowledge-sharing and promote learning without the financial commitment.

However, delivering something for nothing has a price for the provider. Financial investment is required to produce materials. How can free education sustain itself?

Open Yale Courses (OYC) provides free and open access to video lectures and other materials for 35 non-credit courses taught by faculty at Yale. The OYC site had more than 3.5m unique visitors by the beginning of February 2012.

Ben Polak, professor of economics at the school, explains that the principal aim is to make Yale materials available to a wider audience who may not have access to university education otherwise. Since 2008, every week he has received emails with feedback and questions about his Game Theory course on OYC from all over the world.

Since 2006, the project has been

funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, which has donated nearly \$4m.

Diana Kleiner, founding director of OYC, confirms that it has just received the last portion of funding that will support the service until the end of this year.

"We are always looking to make the project financially scalable. We continue to attempt to bring costs down without losing quality," she says.

In December 2011, a "donate" button appeared on the OYC website with a message encouraging people to support the project. Money has been rolling in.

OYC has also formed a partnership with Yale University Press. The plan is to convert the transcripts from a course into a printed book and an ebook.

Professors who edit the books receive royalties and a percentage of Yale University Press' profits will be shared with OYC. There are three titles due out in spring 2012.

Apple's iTunes U, an education content provider that business schools and universities are using to present their video lectures and podcasts, is also attracting attention.

HEC Paris is using the platform and has made available at no charge video lectures on subjects such as corporate finance and B2B marketing.

Delphine Wharmby, communications director at the school, says using iTunes U is an effective way of showcasing the school's work.

She explains that this is an extra service for their students, to enhance their experience and it serves as a teaser for those not studying at the school.

If you are a student seeking qualifications, there are significant developments in the pipeline to create free courses that offer the chance to gain a certificate of achievement with a well known brand name.

This year, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has launched and funded a non-profit initiative called MITx.

The first course on offer, a prototype, is Circuits and Electronics. It is available to everyone in the world and there are no formal entrance requirements. The plan is to offer more courses in the autumn of 2012. Stud-

Providers of free education will surely need revenue-generating business models in order to survive

dents study free and if they want a certificate, they can pay to take an assessment online.

If successful, they will be awarded an MITx certificate. As Circuits and Electronics is a prototype course, the assessment fee will not apply.

Rafael Reif, MIT's provost, explains that "MITx will be tied to an MIT-wide research initiative into online learning. That initiative will investigate ways in which students - whether on MIT's campus or part of a virtual community beyond it - learn best."

He points out that "MITx certificates will bear the name of MITx, not MIT, and we have no plans to offer MITx credit toward an MIT degree. [It]

is designed to augment, not replace, traditional forms of education."

For those who are keen on working towards a degree without having to pay tuition fees, there is an online option.

The University of the People (UoPeople) - an online non-profit university - offers degrees in business administration and computer science.

Launched in 2009, the university was founded by Shai Reshef, who wants to deliver university education to those who cannot afford it. Student numbers are growing and this year there are 1,300 students from 126 countries.

Even though the organisation is staffed mainly by volunteers, the university needs money to run the operation, for example to pay administration and admissions costs.

To make the venture sustainable up to 2014, an estimated 15,000 students and \$6m are required.

After that, Mr Reshef hopes that the university will sustain itself from exam processing fees, to be introduced this year, and from application fees.

The fees paid by students will depend on the economy of the country in which they live. UoPeople is seeking donations, applying for grants from foundations as well as investigating partnerships with corporations.

Providers of free courseware and education offer an accessible alternative way to learn and gain qualifications, but there are costs for the providers, who will surely need revenue-generating business models in order to survive in the long run.

## Information networks are vital to success

### Social media

**Charlotte Clarke** finds out how various tools are used for online learning and how effective they are

Building a presence on social media extends far beyond creating a Facebook page these days.

Tools have grown increasingly complex and varied and 2011 is widely seen as marking a tipping-point in the evolution of social media.

Business schools are endeavouring to keep up. But how effective are these tools for online learning? Can they really assist education or are they yet another distraction?

Jessica Rogers, an adjunct marketing instructor at Texas A&M University and Southern New Hampshire University is a strong advocate.

"Social media create a whole new world," she says. "Schools embracing these tools deserve a lot of kudos."

Students can log on whenever they want, for example, and read whatever they are interested in.

"If I watch the news, I can get my phone, open my laptop and immediately get more information. When I was at high school, I could only go to the library and read a book written five years ago!"

Social media can also make students feel more connected to their school by helping them feel they can build a rapport with professors.

"As an online student, you don't just want to be a number; you want the professor to take a personal interest. These platforms help that," says Ms Rogers.

"Each student has a different story, different goals. I can tweak things a bit, make case studies a bit more relevant - if they are relevant, they will learn."

Similarly, students become more connected to one another - something that is harder to achieve in traditional online courses, according to Eric Johnson, director of the Glassmeyer/McNamee Center for Digital Strategies for Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth in the US.

One tool used on a large scale by Tuck is Chatter. This is an application that is very similar to Facebook, but offers users more privacy and the facility to create numerous subgroups.

As well as engaging with the whole online group, MBA students can go off into separate chat rooms to share slides and videos.

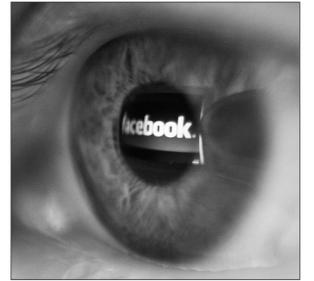
Students are introduced into Chatter as soon as their places at Tuck are confirmed, so they can start to get to know each other and the school.

These tools can also help adapt lessons to the different ways in which people think.

Ms Rogers says: "There are so many good info-graphics out there, you might as well make use of them, especially as some students like to see information, others like to read it and others are more hands on."

At the very least, knowledge of social media should help students when it comes to applying for jobs: they can develop their own social media marketing strategy for self-promotion.

At the University of Nevada, for example, the online EMBA programme includes a course on personal



Looking for connections

branding. All students create a Google+ profile, LinkedIn page, Twitter account, professional Facebook page and blog, which they update throughout the course.

Such is the abundance of information now provided by social media, students can feel overwhelmed.

"Every semester, I get a couple of students stressing about it" says Ms Rogers. So much information can make it hard for them to focus on their goals.

However, social media can also be used to help organise the reams of data. "You can consolidate feeds into the right channel, which students can access when they want. This reduces the overload," says Prof Johnson.

Google's blog reader, for example, sends posts from blogs you have chosen, in one email, so you do not have to visit each individual site. Twitter can organise your feeds into lists of topics.

Simon Learmount, director of the

"When I was at high school, I could only go to the library and read a book written five years ago"

Executive MBA programme at the University of Cambridge Judge Business School in the UK, prepares his students by talking about "co-creating a learning resource".

In one of his classes, for example, there are 47 students, representing 26 nationalities, so they have many experiences - a "collective intelligence" - to share.

Social media can help them do this. It also allows them to analyse their own experiences, in addition to case studies.

Fundamentally, the most important thing is that social media tools are used well and widely, not just by the students but by the faculty also.

"I think resistance only comes if social media tools are used poorly or incompletely implemented," says Prof Johnson.

If a professor is using social media but also still using other methods to send information, such as email, the student could feel overwhelmed and less likely to see the benefits of social media.

"You have to go in wholeheartedly," he says.

Prof Learmount agrees, emphasising the importance of faculty putting all the information in one place and then using social media to direct everyone there.

"The more information we get the better, but the way it is organised is critical."

## Flexibility for participants must be the watchword

### Analysis

**Adam Palin** examines the FT listing and draws out trends

With the number of online programmes growing all the time, this year's Financial Times listing of distance learning MBAs - now in its seventh year - is the largest to date.

Using a web-based questionnaire, 48 business schools - nine of which are in the listing for the first time - outlined the courses they offer. The details of these are summarised in our table (opposite).

Listed first are schools accredited by either AACSB or EQUIS; participation in the FT's Global MBA Ranking requires this certification. They are followed in our listing by schools that do not have this accreditation.

Among the 61 degrees in total, 90 per cent are generalist programmes.

While relatively few courses are specialist - the Global Energy MBA at War-

wick Business School is one such - the more general courses offer varying levels of specialisation.

The Warwick MBA by Distance Learning allows students to choose six electives from 13 options. This selection is trebled to 39 if distance students opt to study full-time for any period.

"Students may mix and match according to their circumstances," says Nigel Piercy, associate dean for the Warwick MBA.

There are about 50,000 students enrolled on the programmes in the listing.

While many of the larger programmes - such as those of Edinburgh Business School at Heriot-Watt University, which has more than 10,000 MBA students on its books - have rolling enrolment, other schools have a limit of two or three intakes a year.

In July 2011, the first cohort of the newly launched MBA@UNC at the University of North Carolina's Kenan-Flagler Business School was made up of only 19 individuals.

"We are determined to ensure consistency in standards with our full-time

programme across the board, including admissions standards," says Susan Cates, executive director of the MBA@UNC.

With minimum tuition fees of \$89,000, the MBA@UNC is among the priciest of the featured programmes. The Executive MBA offered in partnership by IE Business School in Spain and Brown University in the US is the most expensive, with fees of €72,000 (\$94,500).

The divergence in the minimum fees of listed courses between the US and Europe broadly mirrors the pattern in full-time MBA degrees.

Of schools accredited by AACSB or EQUIS, tuition costs are on average \$60,000 in the US, more than double the UK average of £18,000 (\$28,400).

Of the 48 listed schools, 70 per cent can support their distance MBAs in each global region. Only 8 per cent are restricted to one region.

Despite this international reach, US-based programmes reported that an average of only five per cent of their students live outside the country.

For programmes based in

Europe, this figure is 71 per cent. Applicants for the Distance Learning MBA at Imperial College London, for example, come from about 60 countries this year, says Marcel Cohen, the programme director.

With the competition between schools for top students unrestricted by physical distance, "the key concept is flexibility", says Mr Cohen.

"Talented students that we want are often faced with the dilemma: 'How can I leave my job to study?'"

To accommodate the unpredictability of individuals' careers, many schools deliver teaching material, coursework and even exams online and also extend time limits for degrees to be finished.

At the UK's University of Strathclyde Business School, students are allowed up to six years to complete their Flexible Learning MBA.

"The demands of people's jobs may necessitate a less intense period of study", says George Burt, MBA director, "and the beauty of flexible learning is that students can adjust their pace to work commitments".

### Regional relativity

Comparing online with full-time programme fees

Of the 48 schools featured in this year's FT Online MBA Listing, 12 have full-time programmes ranked in the world's top 100 in the FT Global MBA Ranking 2012.

Six of these are based in the US, and six in Europe - five of them in the UK.

Given the status of the full-time campus-based MBA as a benchmark for quality, it is instructive to compare these schools' relative positions in the Global MBA ranking and the tuition fees of their distance degrees, which are not ranked by the FT.

The chart illustrates the difference in fees charged by six of the 12 US and European schools.

All six ranked US schools charge more for their distance MBAs than Spain's IE Business School, whose

campus-based International MBA is ranked eighth in the world.

In Europe there appears to be a link between a school's ranking and its distance MBA fees.

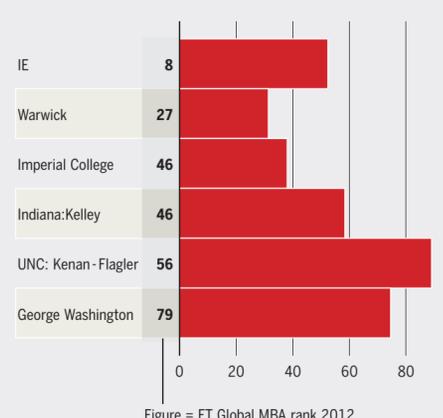
Bradford University School of Management, 95 in the 2012 Global MBA Rankings, charges £12,950 (\$20,400) for its distance learning MBA, equivalent to less than half the €39,000 (\$51,200) charged by IE for its programme.

For US schools, however, the link is not clear. Indiana University's Kelley School of Business charges less for its distance MBA than the five other US institutions ranked by the FT, despite having the highest placed on-campus MBA.

Adam Palin

### Atlantic divide: the top six schools in the FT Global MBA ranking 2012 that are also included in the online MBA listing

Online MBA programme fees (\$'000)



"We have observed that distance students appear to identify more with the school than those on campus"

While some schools offer extended time limits, others, including IE Business School in Madrid, offer distance programmes with a full-time schedule.

Alvaro Garcia de Soto, executive director of IE's Global MBA, says: "Our courses are designed to engage and stimulate students, and require consistent participation on both an individual and group level."

At the University of Florida's Hough Graduate School of Business, the Internet Two-Year MBA must be completed in 27 months. "One of the strengths of the cohort model is that the students learn and collaborate throughout the programme", says Alex Sevilla, MBA director.

Fears that increased flexibility leads to higher drop-

out rates are not supported by the data in this listing, which do not show an obvious link between time limits and degree completion.

Overall, 88 per cent of students are reported to graduate within five years.

"Curiously, we have observed that distance students appear to identify even more with the school than those on campus," says Mr de Soto.

# Business Education: Online Learning

## Financial Times Online MBA programme listing 2012

48 of the top online MBA providers: schools listed alphabetically by region and country

Business school	School overview			Programme overview										Programme details						Other information					
	Principle country	International accreditation	Programme name	General programme	Specialised programme	Programme established	Intakes per year	Number of students enrolled*	International students (%)	Time limit for study (yrs)	Average time to complete (months)	Complete in 5 years (%)	Teaching materials delivered online (%)	Online coursework (%)	Online teamwork required	Examinations required	Online examinations (%)	Local study centres	Local centre study required	Campus study required	Languages	Minimum fees (currency)	Minimum fees	Regions supported	
<b>AACSB / Equis accredited schools</b>																									
<b>Europe</b>																									
EuroMBA Consortium	Netherlands	AACSB, Amba, Equis**	EuroMBA	✓		1996	2	77	96	2	36	98	50	70	✓	✓	0	✓	✓	✓	English	€	28,500	Europe	
IE Business School	Spain	AACSB, Amba, Equis	Global Executive MBA	✓		2001	3	117	72	1	12	96	Varies	80	✓	✓	Varies	✓	✓	✓	English	€	59,700	Global	
			Global MBA	✓		2006	3	131	86	1.25	15		98	Varies	95	✓	✓	Varies	✓	✓	✓	English	€	39,000	
			IE Brown Executive MBA	✓		2011	1	24	95	1.25	15		n/a	Varies	70	✓	✓	Varies	✓	✓	✓	English	€	72,000	
Aston Business School	UK	AACSB, Amba, Equis	Distance Learning MBA	✓		2009	3	63	35	5	30	95	100	100	✓	✓	0	✓	✓	English	£	17,000	Global, excl. Australia, Oceania		
Bradford University School of Management	UK	Amba, Equis	Distance Learning MBA	✓		1998	4	313	76	6	36	90	80	100	✓	✓	0	✓	✓	English	£	12,950	Global		
Durham Business School	UK	AACSB, Amba, Equis	The Global MBA	✓		1998	4	604	61	5	42	73	75	50	✓	✓	33	✓	✓	English	£	14,000	Global		
			The Global MBA in Finance	✓		2008	4	28	32	5	42		95	75	50	✓	✓	33	✓	✓	English	£	14,000		
Henley Business School	UK	AACSB, Amba, Equis	Henley MBA by Flexible Learning	✓		1985	2	1,878	75	5	45	n/a	85	100	✓	✓	0	✓	✓	English	£	20,000	Global		
Imperial College Business School	UK	Amba, Equis	MBA (Distance)	✓		2002	1	287	66	4	36	80	100	100	✓	✓	0	✓	✓	English	£	24,000	Global		
Open University Business School	UK	AACSB, Amba, Equis	MBA	✓		1989	2	5,200	40	7	36-48	70	Varies	100	✓	✓	0	✓	✓	English, Russian	£	16,000	Africa, Asia, Europe, Middle East		
			MBA (Technology Management)	✓		1989	2	362	35	10	36-48		70	Varies	100	✓	✓	0	✓	✓	English	£	16,000		
University of Strathclyde Business School	UK	AACSB, Amba, Equis	Strathclyde Flexible Learning MBA	✓		1983	2	172	55	6	36	85	30	5	✓	✓	5	✓	✓	English	£	13,500	Global		
Warwick Business School	UK	AACSB, Amba, Equis	The Warwick MBA by Distance Learning	✓		1986	3	1,804	63	5	36	80	95	100	✓	✓	0	✓	✓	English	£	19,800	Global		
			The Warwick Global Energy MBA	✓		2009	3	91	72	5	36		n/a	50	70	✓	✓	0	✓	✓	English	£	31,200		
<b>Americas</b>																									
Tecnológico de Monterrey	Mexico	AACSB, Equis	Global MBA	✓		1998	1	399	34	5	24	97	95	0	✓	✓	95	✓	✓	English	US\$	45,800	North America, South America		
Centrum Católica	Peru	AACSB, Equis	Virtual Management MBA	✓		2006	2	194	15	3	27	100	70	85	✓	✓	85	✓	✓	Spanish	US\$	24,000	Global, excl. Australia, Oceania		
Arizona State University: Carey	US	AACSB	W. P. Carey Online MBA	✓		2003	2	454	2	6	24	91	100	100	✓	✓	100	✓	✓	English	US\$	50,284	Global		
Babson College: Olin	US	AACSB	Fast Track MBA	✓		2003	2	360	2	8	24	95	60	60	✓	✓	100	✓	✓	English	US\$	77,000	North America		
Drexel University: LeBow	US	AACSB	MBA Anywhere	✓		1997	2	114	5	2	24	97	90	100	✓	✓	100	✓	✓	English	US\$	58,000	Global		
			MBA in Pharmaceutical Management / Healthcare	✓		2002	1	33	7	2	24		95	80	100	✓	✓	100	✓	✓	English	US\$	64,000		
Florida International University: Chapman	US	AACSB	Corporate MBA	✓		2009	5	703	1	6	18	75	100	100	✓	✓	100	✓	✓	English	US\$	37,500	Global		
George Washington University	US	AACSB	Healthcare MBA Program	✓		2004	2	290	0	5	24	100	100	100	✓	✓	100	✓	✓	English	US\$	74,550	Global		
			Professional Online MBA Program	✓		2012	2	-	n/a	5	n/a		n/a	97	97	✓	✓	100	✓	✓	English	US\$	74,550		
Indiana University: Kelley	US	AACSB	Kelley Direct Programs - MBA	✓		1999	2	1,109	7	5	30	89	95	95	✓	✓	95	✓	✓	English	US\$	58,395	Global		
Northeastern University	US	AACSB	Northeastern University Online MBA	✓		2006	9	1,380	6	5	24	n/a	100	100	✓	✓	100	✓	✓	English	US\$	65,000	Global		
Syracuse University: Whitman	US	AACSB	IMBA	✓		1977	3	208	1	7	42	72	94	94	✓	✓	43	✓	✓	English	US\$	65,619	Global		
Temple University: Fox	US	AACSB	Fox Online MBA	✓		2009	2	54	0	2	24	67	100	100	✓	✓	100	✓	✓	English	US\$	70,000	North America		
Thunderbird School of Global Management	US	AACSB	Global MBA - On Demand	✓		2005	2	206	11	5	24	92	80	75	✓	✓	98	✓	✓	English	US\$	68,800	Global		
University of Florida: Hough	US	AACSB	Internet One-Year MBA	✓		2001	3	49	0	1.3	16	98	87	89	✓	✓	32	✓	✓	English	US\$	41,400	Global		
			Internet Two-Year MBA	✓		1999	3	103	2	2.25	27		89	89	87	✓	✓	25	✓	✓	English	US\$	47,150		
University of Nebraska-Lincoln	US	AACSB	University of Nebraska-Lincoln Distance MBA	✓		1993	4	260	6	10	39	97	100	100	✓	✓	50	✓	✓	English	US\$	25,500	Global		
University of North Carolina: Kenan-Flagler	US	AACSB	MBA@UNC	✓		2011	4	51	2	3	n/a	n/a	90	95	✓	✓	80	✓	✓	English	US\$	89,000	Global		
University of Texas at Dallas: Jindal	US	AACSB	Online MBA	✓		1999	3	213	0	6	26	70	100	100	✓	✓	90	✓	✓	English	US\$	43,522	Global		
			Global Leadership Executive MBA	✓		1996	3	52	5	6	23		99	100	75	✓	✓	100	✓	✓	English	US\$	67,500		
<b>Other schools</b>																									
<b>Europe</b>																									
Eude	Spain		MBA	✓		2005	Rolling	1,731	21	2	12	100	100	90	✓	✓	100	✓	✓	Spanish	€	8,000	Caribbean, Europe, North America, South America		
Instituto Europeo de Posgrado	Spain		MBA	✓		2007	3	711	75	1.3	16	85	100	100	✓	✓	100	✓	✓	Portuguese, Spanish	US\$	13,350	Global, excl. Asia, Australia, Oceania		
Isead	Spain		Executive MBA	✓		2003	3	172	79	3	14	89	91	90	✓	✓	100	✓	✓	Spanish	US\$	14,000	Global, excl. Africa, Australia, Oceania		
			MBA	✓		2003	3	98	59	3	14		79	95	95	✓	✓	100	✓	✓	Spanish	US\$	10,500		
OBS Online Business School	Spain		Executive MBA	✓		2007	2	65	58	1.5	18	100	100	100	✓	✓	100	✓	✓	Spanish	€	12,500	Global		
			Global MBA	✓		2007	2	55	67	1	12		100	100	100	✓	✓	100	✓	✓	Spanish	€	12,500		
Educatis	Switzerland		Distance Learning MBA	✓		2003	Rolling	98	90	5	48	90	100	100	✓	✓	0	✓	✓	English, French, German, Spanish	€	8,580	Africa, Asia, Europe, Middle East, South America		
			MBA in Sustainable Management	✓		2012	Rolling	-	n/a	5	n/a		n/a	100	100	✓	✓	0	✓	✓	English, French, German, Spanish	€	8,580		
Robert Kennedy College	Switzerland		University of Cumbria MBA at Robert Kennedy College	✓		2010	Rolling	683	95	5	18	n/a	90	90	✓	✓	90	✓	✓	English	Swiss Fr	11,500	Global		
SBS Swiss Business School	Switzerland		Global Distance MBA	✓		2004	Rolling	387	82	5	30	87	90	90	✓	✓	70	✓	✓	English, French, German, Spanish	Swiss Fr	19,000	Asia, Europe, Middle East, North America, South America		
Swiss Management Center	Switzerland		MBA	✓		2005	Rolling	2,231	93	3	24	91	100	100	✓	✓	100	✓	✓	English, Spanish	€	10,300	Global		
Aberdeen Business School, Robert Gordon University	UK	Amba	e-MBA	✓		2005	2	101	68	5	32	95	100	100	✓	✓	100	✓	✓	English	£	12,000	Global		
			MBA Oil and Gas Management	✓		2007	3	222	72	5	32		100	100	100	✓	✓	100	✓	✓	English	£	16,000		
Edinburgh Business School, Heriot-Watt University	UK		MBA	✓		1990	Rolling	10,335	89	n/a	36	68	100	0	✓	✓	0	✓	✓	Arabic, Chinese, English, Russian, Spanish	£	9,000	Global		
London School of Business and Finance	UK		MBA	✓		2009	4	367	77	5	15	n/a	100	100	✓	✓	100	✓	✓	English	£	8,500	Global		
Oxford Brookes University	UK	Amba	Global MBA	✓		2002	2	352	65	5	30	77	100	100	✓	✓	0	✓	✓	English	£	12,500	Global		
RDI - Resource Development International	UK		MBA (University of Wales) at RDI	✓		2007	4	2,515	65	4	24	n/a	100	100	✓	✓	0	✓	✓	Chinese, English, Russian, Spanish	£	6,995	Global		
Royal Holloway, University of London	UK	Amba	MBA International Management by Distance Learning	✓		1999	2	477	89	5	36	50	100	20	✓	✓	5	✓	✓	English	£	11,506	Global		
University of Derby	UK		MBA	✓		2000	3	51	50	6	36	100	100	100	✓	✓	n/a	✓	✓	English	£	11,148	Europe		
University of Leicester	UK	Amba	MBA	✓		1989	4	4,593	87	5	48	n/a	90	0	✓	✓	0	✓	✓	English	£	9,130	Global		
University of Liverpool	UK	EFMD Cel	MBA	✓		2001	Rolling	1,617	92	6	30	n/a	100	100	✓	✓	n/a	✓	✓	English	US\$	21,700	Global		
<b>Americas</b>																									
Athabasca University	Canada		Executive MBA	✓		1994	3	820	5	5	30	96	50	94	✓	✓	100	✓	✓	English	C\$	45,076	Global		
University of Maryland University College	US		MBA	✓		1999	4	2,074	2	5	24	90	100	100	✓	✓	100	✓	✓	English	US\$	29,892	Global		
Walden University	US		MBA	✓		2002	6	1,574	10	5	25	54	100	100	✓	✓	100	✓	✓	English	US\$				

## Business Education: Online Learning

# A path of study that demands planning and will

### Hopes and Fears

BRIGIDA SCHOLTEN

Learning has always been important to me – in formal and informal settings.

At the moment, I am balancing part time education with full time employment in a healthcare organisation in Ontario; aligning my studies with my career path to attain job success and satisfaction.

By May 2009, I thought a graduate study programme was the next logical step in my academic pursuits. I also felt it was a necessity to prepare and position myself to advance to a senior leadership role.

At the time I made this decision, I was employed at William Osler Health System, a hospital group, as corporate manager of telecommunications and patient registration and admission, a job I held for about 10 years.

During a coaching session, one of Osler's senior leaders recommended Athabasca University to me as a place to study. I had decided to opt for distance learning and, based on my coach's testimonial of her positive experience there, I chose Athabasca.

The AU distance learning model was well established, mature and seemed reliable from an IT perspective.

The flexibility of distance learning was most appealing, as I had often found it draining to work full-time and commute to Toronto while raising two school-aged children during my previous studies at Ryerson University.

I have to admit, returning to academic study while I was still working full-time at Osler was quite taxing.

The study workload was heavy and varied depending on the subject matter and my own level of knowledge.

I spent anywhere from 20 to 60 hours a week on course work and each week there was a tremendous amount of required reading, along with assignments that made us apply concepts covered in the reading, and participation in online class discussions.



Brigida Scholten: figuring out a routine was important. 'I spent anywhere from 20 to 60 hours a week on course work,' she says

D W Dorken

What I enjoyed most was the opportunity to explore strategic business concepts in the context of my organisation and industry.

I was often challenged to apply concepts in our non-profit sector, but have expanded my "translation" skills and knowledge of healthcare strategy in the process.

Working on an applied project for nearly six months was the most challenging and

rewarding part of my experience.

I had the benefit of one-on-one coaching with one of the faculty, who is an expert in her field. This was much like having a personal trainer for half a year, coaching me on my topic, as well as the art of graduate-level writing.

I have also developed deeper understanding and expertise on the topic of organisational change as it applies in hospitals; a subject that

continues to gain importance in healthcare.

Balancing job, study and the rest of my life was the biggest challenge.

I certainly struggled in the beginning, until about half way through my first course, when I figured out a routine that worked. I read at the weekend, posting my initial assignment on Monday or Tuesday, and got up early to read the class discussion threads every day.

I often pondered the different

comments throughout the day and talked to colleagues to gain insights and perspectives on the weekly discussion topics, then added my contributions to the class discussions in the evenings after supper.

Developing a work plan in advance and being disciplined were vital. There were many occasions where I took a vacation day from my job to focus on an assignment, which I planned for well in advance.

We live in times of profound change and we do ourselves a disservice if we are not always striving to develop and improve

Support from my husband was also critical, as he absorbed most of the "tasks of daily living" so I could study.

He also provided a "live audience" with whom I could discuss my thoughts and ideas before I posted my contributions to class discussions.

My fellow students were wonderful. Everyone I interacted with faced similar challenges and sacrifices.

People were open and generous in sharing their knowledge and experience of a variety of industries as well as their support and encouragement. We learnt from each other and I noticed how my writing skills and those of my classmates advanced.

Since I enrolled in the MBA, I have been seconded to two corporate projects in a position of leadership.

Both these opportunities have provided me with more knowledge in the clinical and political arenas of Osler, and have raised my profile.

I have honed my business strategy knowledge, which I can use in any industry. I am confident that I will soon have an opportunity to apply my skills, enhanced by my studies, at a senior management level.

Although the road I have travelled has been long and, at times, arduous, requiring discipline and dedication, the reward has been worth it.

We live in times of profound change and I believe we do ourselves a disservice if we are not always striving to develop and improve.

Much of what I have learnt in the programme transcends business concepts. I have learnt a great deal about myself as a leader, a follower, a student, and as a person.

Three years of reading, writing and reflecting have changed me.

I am clearer about my goals and motivation. My confidence and determination to lead and transform an organisation have never been stronger.

Brigida Scholten will complete her third and final year of the Athabasca Online Executive MBA at the end of April

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