Getting to know the Georgia WebMBA

Alexandra Skinner speaks to Faye McIntyre

The Georgia WebMBA is offered by six University System of Georgia schools. To what extent does this strengthen your value proposition?

The Georgia WebMBA is unique in its consortium format. All professors teaching in the programme have doctoral degrees. The vast majority have industry experience as well. Students in the WebMBA benefit from working with the best faculty from all six universities. These faculty are the best of the best – each school selects faculty with experience in teaching the graduate course and experience teaching online. In addition to continued professional development in their chosen fields of study, faculty receive training in online teaching prior to joining the programme and regular updates of those skills at annual workshops. The quality of the programme is clear to our students – that is why we are rated number one in student satisfaction among 434 online MBA programmes by GetEducated.com.

As one might expect, all course-work pertaining to the Georgia WebMBA is done online. How important is this level of flexibility to current and potential students?

The level of flexibility of the WebMBA is essential to our students. Most are mid-career professionals who lead busy lives with both personal and professional obligations. Many travel extensively, and quite a few are based in other states.

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or countries. They don’t have time to drive to campus to take classes, yet they are committed to furthering their education. As a recent graduate wrote “You have a very unique programme that was 100 per cent perfect for my lifestyle. If I had to go to class, I could never have done this because I travel, a lot.”

**You point to the fact that your graduate education is comparable to that of an on-campus MBA. How do you achieve this?**

We invite only full-time, doctorally-qualified faculty to teach in the WebMBA – the same faculty who teach in our face-to-face programmes. The content of the WebMBA has the same high standards as on campus programmes, and we continually assess learning outcomes to facilitate continuous improvement. All of our MBA graduates receive a degree that says Master of Business Administration, regardless of whether the delivery format was online, on campus, or at a branch campus.

Our virtual classroom reflects real-world working environments perhaps more so than most traditional programmes. The person sitting in the office next to you is probably not going to have the same background or life experiences as you. Engaging with diverse students in the WebMBA programme exposes students to diverse cultures, thought processes and customs that will help broaden their perspective on the world. That is vital in today’s global marketplace.

**Given the current economic climate, self-funded MBAs are naturally price sensitive. How, therefore, do you keep costs down and still offer quality, in terms of faculty, teaching and delivery?**

The financial model for the WebMBA is built on collaboration among the six colleges of business. We each employ faculty who teach in the programme; we each have staff members who recruit for both on campus and online programmes. The WebMBA has only one full-time director dedicated exclusively to the programme. All other staff are part-time employees who are associated with one of the six universities.

The Georgia WebMBA provides an excellent quality programme at a reasonable price, as much as one-third or one-quarter of many competitors. Our goal is not to be the cheapest MBA programme, but to be the best. Our value proposition is clear and consistent. The programme has received a Best Buy designation by GetEducated.com for many years, and our cost structure of just under $21,000 is substantially below the average of $37,015 for AACSB accredited schools. An additional note is that all students pay the same tuition, regardless of their location – in Georgia, other states or other countries.

**Kindly walk our readers through the admissions process.**

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To be considered for admission to the Georgia WebMBA, applicants must have a bachelor’s degree and at least two years’ of professional business experience. Each applicant applies to one of the six WebMBA colleges of business and must meet the admissions criteria for that college: GMAT and GPA minimums (overall and upper division), GMAT waiver conditions, pre-requisites, admissions formula and experience. Each college has an MBA director to assist with the application process.

Once admitted, WebMBA students from all six colleges are pooled together and divided into cohorts of approximately 30 students each. Students form teams prior to the programme start, and the team works together throughout the entire programme – ten courses over five semesters.

If an applicant is lacking the requisite academic qualifications or experience, will they still be considered for enrolment?

For students who lack an undergraduate degree in business, we offer self-paced modules to help meet some of the prerequisite requirements. Admissions committees at each school determine applicants’ eligibility. All applicants can be considered for enrolment; that does not, however, guarantee admittance into the programme.

Please tell us more about the typical profile of your MBA classes.

Most students in the WebMBA are mid-career professionals. However, there is much diversity among students, with some bringing in 30 plus years’ of work experience. Since 2015, the programme has included individuals from 31 US states and six countries. Several of our students have been active military personnel stationed in locations such as China, Afghanistan and Iraq. We have students from global and national companies, students from smaller businesses with a more local or regional focus, and students from non-profits, government agencies, and educational institutions. We leverage this mix to create an interesting and dynamic online classroom environment.

We have long talked about the value of accreditation, and the Georgia WebMBA can boast AACSB accreditation. How important is this third-party validation to potential students and employers?

All six WebMBA colleges of business are fully accredited by AACSB International (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business), a recognition held by fewer than five per cent of business schools worldwide. AACSB is the gold standard for quality in business programmes and is a key competitive advantage for the WebMBA. Accreditation is not our goal – it is the result of excellence in curriculum, highly qualified and productive faculty, and staff that continue to innovate and improve the programme. Students and employers look for third-party evaluations such as accreditation and rankings, like those of GetEducated.com and CEO Magazine, to validate quality. Other indicators of success include a graduation rate of over 90 per cent and numerous positive recommendations from those who have gone through the WebMBA. They provide the best endorsement since they have experienced the programme!  


The Wider MBA Market
In trying to produce effective managers and the business leaders of the future, ethical, social and environmental concerns have been high on the list of many business schools. To what extent has the Georgia WebMBA integrated the aforesaid points into its MBA offering and how important is the triple bottom line – people, planet and profit – to today’s high potential managers?

Profit has always been a key consideration for managers; the emphasis on ethical, social, and environmental considerations has added to the rich discussions of what are appropriate strategies in today’s world. Faculty teaching in the WebMBA use a variety of tools such as case studies, simulations, discussion boards, etc. that incorporate both qualitative and qualitative rigour to facilitate evaluation of complex situations, assessment of risks and development of an appropriate course of action. These topics are clearly articulated in our learning outcomes, and we regularly assess how successfully students achieving these outcomes.

How important is it for universities and business schools to provide students with career services in today’s economic climate, and what efforts do you have in place to this end?

Each of the six colleges of business offer career services (and other student services as well) to students. Since most WebMBA students are working professionals, career services have not been a major request or expectation.

The Future
What developments can we expect from the online MBA market over the next 12 to 18 months and beyond?

The market for online MBA programmes will continue to increase. As working professionals reach out for educational opportunities and as companies demand graduate degrees from applicants, the need for flexible programmes will expand. Those like the WebMBA that offer quality education from accredited institutions can expect to grow, but with increasing competition. Programmes without third-party quality verification such as accreditation or without name brand recognition may find the market more difficult.

Biography

Faye S. McIntyre, Ph.D. is Dean and Sewell Chair of Private Enterprise, Richards College of Business, University of West Georgia. The Georgia WebMBA® is offered by University of West Georgia, Columbus State University, Georgia College & State University, Georgia Southern University, Kennesaw State University and Valdosta State University.

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