

So You're Considering An MBA...


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By Chiao-ih Hui, current GSWSE President

In the past decade, business schools around the country have experienced a recent surge in enrollment from engineers and scientists. And it's no wonder, as more technical companies are filling management positions from their in-house, technical expertise. As a result, many engineers are recognizing their need to strengthen their communication and organizational skills, methods to motivate their teams, as well as strengthen their understanding of how their business strategically operates in their industry.

Understanding this dynamic, universities have started to integrate curriculums, from the College of Engineering and the School of Business, together. This year, spearheaded by Dr. Cynthia Furse of the University of Utah's ECE department and Dr. Rohit Verma from the David Eccles School of Business, a new class has been jointly held with Electrical, Computer Engineering, and MBA students called Product Innovation and Consulting. Schools like Iowa State University and Notre Dame University offer joint engineering / MBA degrees, giving their students a competitive edge to enter technical management positions or at least recognize that the most technologically advanced products don't always succeed nor do the products at the lowest price – a concept that many engineers coming out with just a B.S. don't yet grasp.

I'm certainly not claiming that all engineers have no leadership or personable skills. I've had several wonderful managers, with advanced technical degrees, that have already positively impacted my short career. Nor am I suggesting that someone with a math-based degree should have difficulty figuring out break-even points or sustainable growth rates. What I am saying is that an MBA helps an engineer hone critical skills that have not been used or developed, some are most often known as



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“the soft skills”. An MBA gives an engineer the opportunity to grow in ways unimaginable; it opens doors to opportunities that never even have been considered before. An MBA formally trains broad skill sets that can be applied to any position in any situation.

As a current engineer about to finish an MBA degree, I've been exceptionally pleased with both the hard and soft skills learned through my program. Never did I imagine I'd understand financial statements and analysis, nor did I realize how complicated product pricing strategies are. I'm quickly finding that an MBA is the most versatile degree one can pursue. While other professional and graduate degrees pigeonhole individuals into a specialty or profession, an MBA broadens the possibilities of career and knowledge.

With the right program, supportive faculty and staff, an MBA student feels as if he or she can accomplish any challenge. This spring, as I walk to get my diploma in my robes, wearing the coveted Master's hood, the question won't be, “Now what?” rather it'll be “On to the next!” ■

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