

The Secret Guide to the MBA Curriculum

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Ever wonder what goes on behind the closed doors of graduate business schools? We've decoded a typical MBA curriculum (inspired by the one at Harvard Business School) and added a real-world perspective to let you know what's worth learning and what's a waste of your time.

Finance

Course Description:

Examines the role of finance in supporting the functional areas of a company and fosters an understanding of how financial decisions create value. Topics include basic analytical skills, principles of corporate finance, functions of modern capital markets, and risk analysis.

Most Useful Skill:

How to read a balance sheet.

Most Useless Skill:

Understanding the history of double-entry bookkeeping.

Hidden Agenda:

How to exploit investors without getting caught.

Organizational Behavior

Course Description:

Examines teams, individuals, networks, group culture, managing subordinates, establishing productive relationships with peers and seniors, developing a vision of the future, aligning the organization behind that vision, motivating people to achieve the vision, and strategic career management.

Most Useful Skill:

Ability to speak fluent biz-blab.

Most Useless Skill:

Ability to speak fluent biz-blab.

Hidden Agenda:

Increasing sales of the professor's latest book.

Technology and Operations

Course Description:

Enables students to develop the skills and concepts needed to ensure the ongoing contribution of a firm's operations to its competitive position. Includes process analysis, cross-functional and cross-firm integration, product development, information technology, and operations strategy.

Most Useful Skill:

Using Excel and PowerPoint to make truly spectacular slides.

Most Useless Skill:

Actually understanding what open-source software is.

Hidden Agenda:

Playing World of Warcraft during lectures in the auditorium with the wireless hotspot.

Business Strategy

Course Description:

Provides an understanding of how to sustain competitive advantage, how to generate superior value for customers by designing the optimum configuration of the product mix and functional activities. Particular attention is paid to competitive positioning, understanding comparative costs, and addressing issues such as cannibalization, network externalities, and globalization.

Most Useful Skill:

None.

Most Useless Skill:

Pretending that you're actually running a real company.

Hidden Agenda:

Providing endless fodder for Dilbert comic strips.

The Entrepreneurial Manager

Course Description:

Teaches students how to identify potentially valuable opportunities, obtain the resources necessary to pursue an opportunity and create an entrepreneurial organization, manage the entrepreneurial organization, grow the business into a sustainable enterprise, and create and harvest value for the organization's stakeholders.

Most Useful Skill:

How to write a business plan that might interest a venture capitalist.

Most Useless Skill:

Believing that a startup actually needs somebody with an MBA.

Hidden Agenda:

Constructing corporate bureaucracies where they're neither wanted nor needed.

Negotiation

Course Description:

Students learn how to effectively negotiate through the use of exercises, cases, readings, and videos; learn and how external and internal negotiation has become a way of life for effective managers in a constantly changing business environment.

Most Useful Skill:

How to get a better price on your next automobile purchase.

Most Useless Skill:

None. This is actually a pretty useful course.

Hidden Agenda:

Negotiating a higher grade from your other B-school professors.

Corporate Accountability

Course Description:

Examines the legal, ethical, and economic responsibilities of corporate leaders; teaches students about management and governance systems that leaders can use to promote responsible conduct by companies and their employees; shows how personal values can play a critical role in effective leadership.

Most Useful Skill:

Ability to differentiate between what's illegal and what's merely unethical.

Most Useless Skill:

How to comply with Sarbanes/Oxley requirements.

Hidden Agenda:

Seeing who can cheat the most on the final exam.

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