

A low-angle shot of a graduation ceremony. Numerous blue graduation caps are being tossed into the air, creating a dynamic pattern against a clear blue sky. In the foreground, the tops of graduates' heads and their raised arms are visible, some holding up their caps. The overall atmosphere is one of celebration and achievement.

# Leadership LESSONS

Ready to hit the books? Find the perfect program to jump start your career. BY ELA SCHWARTZ

**T**here's no question that an MBA gives women a competitive edge and is a key selling point when it comes to rising through the ranks to the executive suite. But despite the fact that women now make up about half of the student body in law and medical schools, female enrollment in business school still hovers at about 25 percent. What gives?

**ACCORDING TO A** 2000 study by Catalyst, the University of Michigan Business School, and the Center for the Education of Women at the University of Michigan, business school students surveyed listed concerns about work/life balance and an overly aggressive and competitive environment as factors that deter women from enrolling.

Another roadblock for many women is timing. Unlike law, medical, and other graduate programs that students can enroll in right after finishing their undergraduate work, business schools require a minimum of two years of applicable work experience, with five years being more the norm. Prospective students must decide whether to quit lucrative jobs to attend full-time or to add part-time classes to their already hectic work schedules. All this at a time when many women are considering starting a family or have young children to care for.

In response, business schools are adapting to meet the needs of female students, says Elissa Ellis Sangster, executive director of the **Forte Foundation**, an Austin, Texas-based consortium of 26 companies and 32 businesses formed to encourage women to further their business educations and advance into leadership positions. She cites **Harvard Business School's 2+2 program** launched in September 2007, which guarantees undergraduates a place in the two-year program after completing two years of approved work experience, and accelerated, one-year, full-time programs offered by **MIT Sloan**, **Cornell Johnson**, and **Simmons School of Management**, which reduce the amount of time students must spend out of the work force.

Both Simmons in Boston and **Pepperdine University's** Graziadio School of Business and Management in Los Angeles also initiated morning classes for their part-time MBA students, which allow parents to take classes while their children are in day care.

Graziadio's Dean Linda A. Livingstone says that female students also appreciate that Pepperdine's program is

flexible, with evening and weekend classes available at five regional campuses. "It's not a lockstep program," she says, explaining that students don't have to finish in two years.

Deborah Merrill-Sands, dean of Simmons School of Management, says that since the program is relatively small, "we can make individual adjustments if a student gets a promotion or has a baby." Simmons is also experimenting with offering courses online.

B-schools are also bringing in more women faculty and speakers and adapting their curriculums to reflect areas women tend to be drawn to, such as nonprofit and entrepreneurship. Livingstone says Pepperdine's "strong emphasis on ethical and responsible leadership and the impact of business on society" resonates with women, as does the school's collaborative environment.

But there's more to choosing a business school than the feminine side.

## Putting Your Education to Work

There's more to leveraging an MBA than listing it on your resume or pinning a diploma to your wall.

**Placement, please.** If you're job hunting, take advantage of what your school offers in career advisement or job placement programs.

**Talk it up.** Tell your employer—not just that you got a degree but what your new skill sets are. That means letting supervisors know you can look over financial statements if you're in human resources or pull off a marketing plan in addition to number crunching.

**It's the network.** Both educators and alumni say the network of fellow students and faculty is an invaluable part of the MBA experience. Magliato hired six Anderson students to work on a plan for a multidisciplinary women's health center at St. John's. When Katherine Lilygren, a graduate of the EMBA program at UCLA Anderson, decided to change careers, a fellow alum mentioned an opening and she got the job—she's now admissions director for the very same program she graduated from.

## GET THE PROGRAM

**B-SCHOOLS REQUIRE STUDENTS** to take core courses and then specialize, so you want a program that fits your career goals. For example, Maribeth Towers-Toth, SVP, New Initiatives for Warner Bros. Consumer Products in Burbank, California, chose Pepperdine primarily for its strong international program where she could spend her second year overseas.

Find out which MBA programs are valued in your targeted industry or with your employer. Ann Matise, who works in finance at IBM in Santa Monica, California, attended **UCLA Anderson's EMBA program** because of its reputation for teaching entrepreneurial skills. For Glenn Sumrell, director, corporate financial planning and analysis for Thousand Oaks, California-based Amgen Inc., the fact that many of her coworkers at Amgen are Anderson graduates and that the company views it as the B-school of choice for its financial executives were factors.

## FULL-TIME OR PART-TIME?

**GOING BACK TO** school full-time means you'll have to quit your job for one to two years, which isn't an option for many would-be students. A part-time MBA can usually be completed in two to three years, but you'll be juggling work and classes.

How to decide? "If you want to change careers, consider full-time," says Sangster. "It will give you the latitude to explore, meet people, and learn about different opportunities and options." On the other hand, part-time is the best choice if you want to advance your career and stay within the same industry—at least for the near future.

If you're a mid-career professional, look into an executive MBA that will help you develop broad-based management skills.

## A CLASS ACT

**ASK ADMISSIONS OFFICERS** about class size, male/female ratios, and the ages and ethnic backgrounds of students enrolled. Larger class sizes expand your network; smaller classes create more intimacy among students and faculty. Find out about the environment at the school—some B-schools are extremely competitive, while others foster a more cooperative environment.

Ask which fields faculty and students are involved in. You won't learn as much about the entertainment industry if you're surrounded by health-care execs or would-be Wall Street tycoons. But don't discount how your career can benefit from being around businesspeople outside your field. Cheryl Fudge, program manager for Deloitte, based in Boston, says that while she works in finance, she found her experience at Simmons was enriched by being with women from the health care and non-profit fields; Dr. Kathy Magliato, director of women's cardiac services at St. John's Medical Center, was drawn to UCLA Anderson specifically so she wouldn't be around health-care professionals. "I wanted to talk, eat, and breathe business with businesspeople and tap into their intellectual resources," she says.

## THE ALL-WOMEN'S ALTERNATIVE

**IN ADDITION TO** asking about the male/female class ratio, consider an all-women's college. "The level of engagement and discussions that happen and the freedom people feel to express their views and dig into management dilemmas is quite striking," says Merrill-Sands about the Simmons experience.

Fudge admits that the all-female aspect is not what initially attracted her to Simmons. "I was skeptical," she says. "I work in finance, which is about 80 percent male, and everyone in a leadership position is a man. I thought what I needed was to learn how to deal with men." Instead, she found being with women

## Mothers Make the Grade

**It may sound daunting to think about juggling work, child care, and school but these alumni prove it can be done!**

Dr. Kathy Magliato, director of women's cardiac services at St. John's Medical Center, and Ann Matise, who works in finance at IBM, both from UCLA's EMBA program, as well as Cheryl Fudge, program manager for Deloitte at Simmons, all gave birth to their first children while working and attending school.

How did they manage? "I had an understanding husband and friends, an employer that was very supportive, a school that was very accommodating, and a great peer group within the program," Matise says. Fudge says both sets of grandparents helped out while she and her husband were both working and in school, while Magliato credits her scheduling skills and a terrific nanny (her husband is a busy liver-transplant surgeon).

Glenn Sumrell, financial planning and analysis [director] for Amgen Inc. and a single parent, says, "I always I wished I had my MBA because it would give me even more of a competitive edge. When my sons were 18 and 14, I said I can do this—I can get an executive MBA and work full-time." She credits her ex-husband for being there for her younger son while her older son was away at college. "You also learn to use your network—friends, neighbors, coworkers—everyone pitched in to help," she adds.



Ann Matise

Cheryl Fudge

Kathy Magliato

Glenn Sumrell

gave her opportunities to address gender issues and made her feel more confident and able to take on leadership roles, and she says her school experience absolutely translated to work.

## TUITION

**MBAs DON'T COME** cheap; the average two-year program will cost you about \$100,000 for tuition alone, and the more prestigious the school, the more you'll typically pay. Employers will sometimes cover at least some of the cost, so it pays to look into this as well as scholarships and financial aid.

But don't evaluate an MBA solely in terms of how quickly you can reap your ROI. Alumni interviewed can't say enough about how their experiences have made them more marketable to employers, increased their confidence, helped them interact more equally with senior executives, and enabled them to further career goals or change fields.

Katherine Lilygren, admissions director at UCLA Anderson School of Management, says, "I don't know a single graduate who regrets getting a degree. They all say it's the best decision for personal development and growth they've ever made." •