



Big Data & BUSINESS

Exciting career opportunities for executive education await in the rapidly evolving world of digital intelligence.

There's little doubt that big data—using analytics to understand customer behavior, develop new products, and cut operational costs—is transforming the way business gets done today. As a result, MBA programs and executive education offerings are now providing a new path in this exciting space.

The opportunities are creating big changes—and need—in the IT field. A report by consulting firm McKinsey & Co. forecasts that in the years ahead there will be a significant shortage of big-data talent in the U.S., and that by 2018 the country could face a shortfall of 140,000 to 190,000 workers with deep analytical skills, including “managers and analysts who know how to operate companies by using insights from big data.” The report projects a need for 1.5 million managers and analysts who are able to ask the right questions and use big-data analysis effectively.

But, as Leo Vijayasathy, an associate professor of computer information systems in the College of Business at Colorado State University (CSU), points out, all the right pieces need to be in place. “Just because someone has a background in IT doesn’t mean those skills naturally carry over into a career in big data,” he says.

At CSU, online MBA students—who typically have been in their careers for 10 to 15 years—can tap into course offerings that develop managers’ understanding of the role that big data can play in reshaping and optimizing

organizational performance. For instance, the business school offers a graduate certificate in Business Intelligence that can be used to complement an MBA or function as a stand-alone component of professional development. The courses involve harnessing vast data stores to solve problems, enhance decision-making, and discover new opportunities. Vijayasathy explains that this approach combines business intelligence with data mining, analytics, and visualization to optimize, forecast, detect, predict, classify, and discover new ways of using data to make a business more productive and efficient.

Clearly, today’s MBAs must be adept at harnessing the immense potential of big data. “Our Wisconsin MBA students learn about big-data technology and are well versed in digital analytics,” says Neeraj Arora, professor of marketing and executive director of the A.C. Nielsen Center for Marketing Research at the Wisconsin School of Business at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. “They are highly prepared to lead data scientists on business teams.” MBA students specializing in marketing research at UW are immersed in the latest methods, design, and technology—tools that equip them to make strategic business decisions using a big-data perspective.

By taking advantage of these actionable offerings, today’s MBA and executive education candidates can immediately leverage their big-data knowledge in ways that can transform business—and the bottom line. ●

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