



Setting Your Own Agenda

Pursuing a Career in Business Academia

Following Your Passion

"Prior to my career in academia, I worked as a consultant and found that I rarely had the time to develop the ideas and conceptual models that I was offering to clients. Instead, I found myself pulling ideas off the shelf that others, academics generally, had developed. That upfront intellectual work was what I was missing."

"If you are the type of person who loves to dive deep into organizational and business problems, then a doctoral degree is a wonderful career path to pursue."

—Monica C. Higgins
Associate Professor,
Harvard Business School
PhD in Organizational Behavior,
1995, Harvard Business School/
Graduate School of Arts and
Sciences

Valuing the Flexibility

"The two greatest benefits of a career in academia for me are self-determination of work content and the ability to balance professional and personal goals. In the first case, I don't think any profession other than entrepreneurial ventures can offer an individual the opportunity for self-directed work that is found in academia. In the second case, and related to the self-determination of the first, I can create a schedule that achieves my objectives on a number of fronts. Schedule flexibility has allowed me to meet challenging career objectives while becoming a new parent and remaining an active volunteer in my community."

—Shannon Anderson
Associate Professor, Jones
Graduate School of

Why Academia?

While all academicians can make their mark in a field, those in business have the opportunity to influence both the educational and the corporate sectors. Because most research is grounded in the reality of business, many scholars today see their theories enacted in actual practice across the business spectrum. Often, business professors work with the top people in a wide variety of fields and can be found advising leaders of industry, collaborating with colleagues on cutting-edge research, and guiding students as well as executives returning to the classroom in search of new ideas and practices.

Your role as a scholar can prove vitally important in devising policy and practice at the corporate level, but your work can take on an even broader purpose. Business academics play integral roles in the growth of nonprofits, entrepreneurial ventures, and—with the advent of ever-emerging technologies—a number of Web-based firms that are changing the way we do business in the real world. Due to the critical impact business has on society today, academics find themselves recognized by the public and media as experts on a wide range of issues.

Research may evolve into published works that are hailed by both academia and popular culture, and many professors assume leadership roles as consultants to and board members of international corporations that define the way our world does business. Academics also work on issues and ideas that affect emerging global markets and infrastructures of national economies.

Quality of Life

Although the work is challenging and demanding, many are drawn to academia because of the flexibility it offers. As an academic, you are an entrepreneur—your time is essentially your own. And while you can expect to put in at least as many hours as those in the corporate sector, you have the opportunity to create your own schedule and organize your workload as you see fit. As a career that offers a diverse mix of professional opportunities, working as an academic requires that you serve as your own manager—compelling you to be exceptionally disciplined and self-guided, but rewarding you with the freedom to pursue ideas and topics that most interest you.

Pursuing a doctorate can also offer you a satisfying financial picture. Academics in business administration can expect to earn salaries competitive with other professional practices over the course of their lifetime. In addition, there are many opportunities for outside consulting, research, publishing, and other professional liaisons that can often add significantly to total compensation.

"I went back to school because I wanted to understand the

Management, Rice University
PhD in Business Economics,
1993,
Harvard Business School/
Graduate School of Arts and
Sciences

things I saw and did in industry. Pursuing a doctorate in business has given me a chance to reexamine a set of events that fascinates me—the software boom in the late 1990s—and untangle some of its mysteries. I want to uncover the kind of games that were played, determine how the rules evolved, and, most importantly, reveal the lasting lessons for future players."

—Jason Woodard
PhD candidate in Information, Technology & Management,
Harvard Business School/Graduate School of Arts and
Sciences

Succeeding in Academia

"A critical element to personal success in business academia is that you enjoy all the different facets of the field equally—the teaching, the research, and, as an offshoot of these, the interaction with corporate leaders required to push management thought."

—Ranjay Gulati
Michael Ludwig Nemmers
Distinguished Professor of
Strategy and Organizations,
Kellogg Graduate School of
Management,
Northwestern University
PhD in Organizational Behavior,
1993,
Harvard Business
School/Graduate School of Arts
and Sciences

Pursuing a Doctoral Degree

While some basic foundations are helpful in the pursuit of a doctorate, the most important requirements involve who you are. To undertake doctoral studies, you must be self-directed, motivated, and highly disciplined because you hold ultimate responsibility for your success. You must have a passion for knowledge and be driven to develop new ideas and paradigms. Scholarly pursuit requires the ability to work independently and to examine a topic in detail for extended study, involving long periods of reading and reflection on your own.

As success is determined in large part by your ability to communicate your findings to your peers, mentors, and the business world at large, you must possess excellent written and oral communication skills. Overall, the standards for admission are quite high: Successful candidates must not only hold exemplary academic credentials, but must also exhibit superior leadership qualities, as well as the potential to do outstanding research.

Although there are no required courses to begin a doctoral program, candidates should have a strong grasp of the fundamentals of mathematics, statistics, and economics. Depending on your individual program of study, it may also be beneficial to have a good understanding of the basic principles of your chosen field; for example, psychology or sociology, if you are pursuing graduate work in organizational behavior. Whatever area you choose, you should be prepared to forge through a rigorous disciplinary curriculum before you begin to work more specifically in your field of study.

Shaping Your Direction

"During your first year of doctoral study, your interests can change every two minutes. In my case, I started out with an interest in studying, of all things, what constitutes change and how we can characterize different types of change in an organization. This focus on organizational change evolved into an interest in the role of senior management teams and how they are sometimes able to effect revolutionary change within their companies."

Finding the Right School

The most important factor to consider in choosing a school is how well its program supports your research interests. The schools you apply to should offer both coursework and opportunities for research in your chosen field that are compatible with your career goals. For example, if you are planning to pursue research that has a practical application in brand marketing, the school you attend should focus on research that managers in this field will actually employ in their work. As you review your choice of schools, you will find that each school not only specializes in different fields, but also prepares its students for various roles within academia—from highly theoretical to more practical applications.

By visiting a school's Web site, you can learn a great deal

"As a doctoral student, you are encouraged to think deeply, to go further, and to look at concepts in a new and critical way."

—Amanda Paige Cowen
DBA candidate,
Policy & Management,
Harvard Business School

Relishing the Journey

"I can attest that the pursuit of doctoral study is a significant commitment. It's far more than just an investment of time. The first year can be especially challenging, and people who enter a doctoral program have to expect some tough times—that's all part of the learning experience. Fortunately, a special kind of kinship will often emerge between faculty and doctoral students, creating meaningful relationships and enduring friendships."

—Harini Parthasarathy
PhD candidate in
Business Economics,
Harvard Business School/
Graduate School of Arts and
Sciences

Transforming Lives

"Teaching is, above all, a compelling experience and one of the noblest things you can do. It is not always easy, but gifted teachers can expand insight, enable thoughtful inquiry, and fundamentally help others to

about a doctoral program's curriculum and admissions process, as well as various faculty members' research interests. Some candidates also review professional journals to identify scholars and schools that are working on the topics they hope to study. Because of the competitive nature of admission to top doctoral programs today, potential candidates should identify several schools to which to apply.

"Research requires a lot of energy and patience. One has to have true passion for knowledge. You cannot continue unless you really want to know."

—Jiro Kokuryo
Professor, Keio University Graduate School of Business
Administration
DBA, 1992, Harvard Business School

Making the Commitment

Before embarking on a career in academia, you should consider the significant professional and personal commitments you will be making. A doctoral program entails at least four years of intensive study, offering little time for outside pursuits or employment. Fortunately, many programs provide financial support that covers tuition and a portion of living expenses, allowing candidates to focus on their studies. For more information on specific grants and aid, contact the schools that interest you for the most up-to-date financial aid opportunities and grant listings.

In most programs, students concentrate on required coursework for the first two years. They then spend the remaining years researching and completing a thesis in a specific field. Candidates must wholeheartedly embrace all aspects of the curriculum to get the most out of the doctoral experience. Although the challenges of graduate study are weighty, the hurdles facing doctoral students can be overcome by the well-prepared and highly motivated candidate.

"A career in business academics allows you to think deeply about questions that fascinate you, while at the same time affording you the opportunity to have an important impact on the practice of management. Through your research, writing, and teaching, you affect how businesses operate in the long and the short run. This career gives you the freedom to explore ideas and methods broadly, seeking answers to questions that are firmly grounded in practical reality."

—George P. Baker III
Professor, Harvard Business School
PhD in Business Economics, 1986,
Harvard Business School/Graduate School of Arts and
Sciences

The Face of Doctoral Studies Today

The profile of today's doctoral students in business administration reflects a diverse cross section of society—virtually all life stages, professional experiences, nationalities, and economic and ethnic backgrounds are represented. The existing range of schools and programs offers a wealth of possibilities for those interested in finding a

change their lives so that they can make a difference in the world."

—Kim B. Clark
Dean of the Faculty,
Harvard Business School

program that will closely match their individual needs.

It's never too soon to consider a career in academia—nor too late. Today, many college students are encouraged to investigate this route early, so that they can make the most of their undergraduate education in preparation for their doctoral study.

Doctoral programs also take an interest in exceptional candidates who have embarked on a corporate career, but who have found that they are drawn to a field that allows them to focus more deeply on the study of business phenomena. If you possess an intense desire to learn and teach, have a solid commitment to all aspects of academia, and are ready to accept the challenge of setting your own agenda, a doctoral program may be the key to a fulfilling career for you.

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