



MBA vs MASTER OF SCIENCE

WHAT'S THE BEST CHOICE FOR YOUR CAREER?



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INTRODUCTION

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The decision to pursue a graduate degree is life changing, especially when you consider the time and the financial investment it takes.

So when it comes to deciding between a Master of Business Administration (**MBA**) and a Master of Science (**M.S.**) degree, you want to be sure you're making the right choice. As you'll discover, the decision isn't really about which degree you pursue; it's a question about how you intend to leverage the degree professionally.

GENERALIST OR SPECIALIST?



The primary distinction between an MBA and an M.S. is breadth versus depth. An MBA degree offers a broader view of business management. You'll receive practical instruction across multiple business disciplines, making it a better choice if you aspire for a career in general management, executive leadership or entrepreneurship.

On the other hand, an M.S. degree hones in on a single specialty, such as accounting, human resources or **information technology**. An M.S. degree program helps you become a deep expert in one functional area, which is suitable for professionals who are clear about their career path. So, if you want to be a CPA, then an **M.S. in Accounting** is likely a better option for you. But if you're not 100% sure of your career path, an MBA will expose you to theory and practical instruction in multiple business disciplines, giving you the flexibility to more easily shift gears later in your career.

IN 2012, 55% OF PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS WERE INTERESTED IN PURSUING AN MBA DEGREE, 28% BOTH AN MBA AND A MASTER'S (NON-MBA), AND 18% CONSIDER ONLY MASTER'S (NON-MBA) PROGRAMS.

Source: GMAC, 2012 Prospective Students Survey Report

MBA M.S.

WHICH IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

Suited for students who want greatest career flexibility that may lead to management or business ownership

FLEXIBILITY

Best option for students who are 100% clear about career path and want highly specialized knowledge in a specific area

Universally recognized value in business world

REAL-WORLD APPLICATION

Specialties may not be as well-known except to some industry professionals

Multi-subject degree that covers topics from finance and leadership to technology and marketing

FOCUS AREAS

Highly specialized degree dives deeply into one topic, often preparing students for professional certifications like Certified Public Accountant (**CPA**), Project Management Professional (PMP) from the Professional Management Institute (**PMI**) or Professional in Human Resources (**PHR**)

Some traditional MBA-granting institutions may require a minimum **GMAT** score for entrance while career-driven programs rely heavily on prior learning assessment and comparable professional experience to gauge preparedness

REQUIREMENTS

Traditional M.S. programs may look for a minimum **GRE** or **TOEFL** score, while career-driven programs look for proof of experience that directly aligns with degree program

If you're still unsure which degree is best, don't let the decision paralyze you. Rest assured, both degrees can lead to highly satisfying and fulfilling careers.

BEFORE YOU DECIDE, ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS

Now that you know more about what distinguishes an MBA from an M.S. degree, it's time to carefully consider which degree is best suited for your unique goals and career aspirations. Start by asking yourself these five questions:

1. WHERE DO I SEE MYSELF IN 5 OR 10 YEARS AND BEYOND?

When asked how he went about discovering the first successful polio vaccine, Nobel Laureate and virologist **Jonas Salk** is said to have replied, “I pictured myself as a virus or a cancer cell and tried to sense what it would be like.” Salk, like countless other successful people—from athletes and celebrities to business leaders and industry professionals—suggests that visualizing goals breeds success. Apply this to your degree decision by picturing where you eventually want to be in your career. Consider creating a virtual vision board on a site like **Pinterest** to make your goals more tangible and easy to refer back to later.

As you develop your vision, be sure to consider your personal and professional preferences and goals. Do you see yourself leading a company or being an expert in your field? Do you thrive at managing people or do you prefer to unravel the details

of a specific challenge? What about your work excites, motivates and inspires you? Visualize your ideal future first, lay it out visually on paper or digitally, and you may find that the choice between an MBA and an M.S. becomes much more simple.

**MORE THAN HALF (54%) OF
APPLICANTS WHO WANT TO PURSUE
A GRADUATE MANAGEMENT DEGREE
ARE DRIVEN BY A SENSE OF PERSONAL
SATISFACTION OR ACHIEVEMENT.**

Source: GMAC, 2012 Prospective Students Survey Report



2. WHAT HAVE RECENT GRADUATES EXPERIENCED?

Once you have a picture of your ideal career path, confirm your instincts by connecting with recent graduates of the degree programs you're considering for informational interviews. You can make these connections in person, by phone or online using professional social networking sites like LinkedIn where you can solicit input from your extended network. Consider asking for an introduction, or send an **InMail** message requesting to have a virtual meeting with someone who has been in your shoes. You'll want to pay particular attention to those who have found success in the career path you're interested in pursuing.

Most universities have a presence on social networks where students, alumni and faculty gather. Visit these communities to post questions and participate in discussions related to your decision. A lively discussion on **CTU's Facebook page** led to one aspiring student's realization that his MBA or M.S. indecision rested on a personal crossroads: he didn't have a clear picture of the future he wanted to create. Conversations like this, whether they occur online or offline, provide valuable insight that will help you make an informed, confident decision about which degree to pursue.

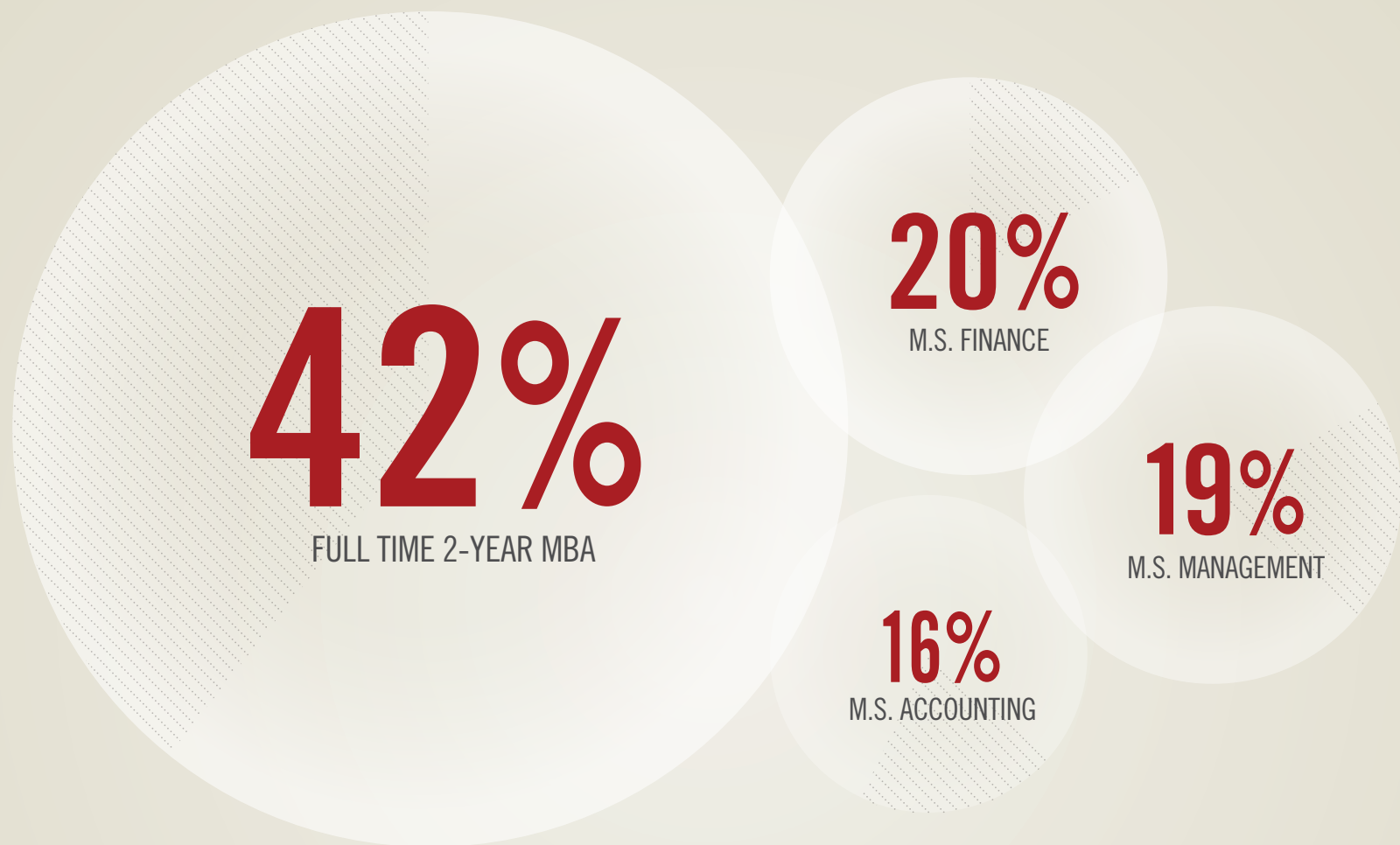
6 QUESTIONS TO ASK RECENT GRADUATES

1. What motivated you to choose your graduate degree?
2. How did you decide between an MBA and an M.S. degree?
3. How did you notice doors open for you once you had your graduate degree?
4. Which aspects of your degree program seemed most valuable to your employer?
5. How has your career improved since earning your MBA or M.S. degree?
6. What advice would you offer to someone considering an MBA or M.S. degree?

CTU ASKED. ALUMNI ANSWERED.

We asked members of **CTU's LinkedIn group** what led them to choose an MBA or M.S. degree. Many offered experience and personal perspectives on what influenced their degree decisions. **Join the conversation**, and pose a question of your own.





MOST POPULAR BUSINESS-RELATED MASTER'S DEGREES

PROGRAM TYPES CONSIDERED IN 2011

Source: 2012 GMAC MBA.COM
Prospective Student Survey

3. HOW ARE PROFESSIONALS USING THEIR ADVANCED DEGREE NOW?

Expand your conversations to include experienced professionals who have already found success in careers you're interested in pursuing. LinkedIn is a good resource to use as you begin making a list of potential people to reach out to. This list may or may not include people you already know. If you want to connect with someone who is not already a personal connection, see if someone you know is connected to him or her, and then ask for an introduction. You can also reach out to individuals you don't know. Many people are happy to share their academic and career path choices with others who may be on a similar track. Just look for an email address under the individual's contact information on LinkedIn, or send an InMail through the platform.

Once you make contact, your goal is to glean as much insight as you can from professionals who have been in your shoes. They've considered various graduate degree options and have made choices that landed them the career success you also want. Don't be afraid to ask questions to gain the clarity and confidence you need to make your decision.

While you're at it, expand your perspective by asking what skills and knowledge they need to do their job effectively. This will help you identify potential gaps in your own background so you can choose the degree program that might close them. You might also find these conversations lead to job references down the road or mature into mentoring relationships as your career advances. So make good use of this time.

5 QUESTIONS TO ASK PROFESSIONALS

1. Did you pursue a graduate degree? Why or why not? Which one and why?
2. What factors did you consider when choosing your degree program?
3. Tell me more about your work and what you do day-to-day.
4. How has your degree helped you succeed in your career?
5. Do you have any regrets? What would you have done differently, if anything?

“

Investigating potential career paths is a critical step to determine which degree choice is right for you. Tap your personal and professional networks to gain access to decision makers that can provide you with clarity about potential career options and the degree needed to be successful.

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Emad Rahim, D.M., PMP

University Dean of Business and Management at Colorado Technical University

4. WHICH DEGREE IS BEST SUITED FOR THE TYPE OF POSITION I WANT?

Job ads can reveal a lot about the skills and education necessary to advance your career. Look for job postings that closely describe the kind of position and workplace that interest you, and then study the job requirements and qualifications. Generally, the minimum requirements, including specified degree requirements, are listed. This information lets you assess the expectations of potential employers.

Most employers who seek business candidates with master's level education specifically request an MBA degree, but may accept a master's level degree in a similar or related field depending upon the occupation. Spend time getting to know the curricula for all programs and notice what speaks to you, your interests and your strengths.

If you're feeling bold, you may consider reaching out directly to hiring managers and recruiters, many of whom you can find on LinkedIn. Use your network to gain access to decision makers and others who may either be in the position you eventually want to hold, or may be the person hiring for the career you're pursuing. This step not only adds to your arsenal of information to make a good decision, but also helps grow your professional network. You never know where those connections might be useful down the road.



A smiling man with short brown hair and black-rimmed glasses, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and dark tie. He is looking directly at the camera. A horizontal dotted line is positioned above the main text.

IN 2012, OVER 19,000 JOB POSTINGS LISTED AN MBA DEGREE AS A PREFERRED QUALIFICATION. HERE'S A SAMPLING OF OCCUPATIONS THAT SPECIFICALLY CALL FOR AN MBA.

Marketing Manager

Director of Human Resources

Project Manager

Financial Analyst


Account Executive

**Director of Business
Development**

Business Analyst

Sales Representative

Source: Burning Glass/Labor Insight

A horizontal dotted line is positioned below the source text.

3 QUICK TIPS TO CONNECT WITH RECRUITERS AND HIRING MANAGERS ON LINKEDIN

1. **PERFORM A SEARCH USING KEYWORDS OR PHRASES** associated with the person who might be hired for a position you might be interested in. For example if you want to move into information technology (IT) management search: “IT recruiter” or “IT hiring manager.” At this point, don’t worry about location settings, since you’re only seeking advice.
2. **SEARCH JOB POSTINGS** and identify a few that match your vision and career goals. Each job posting shows the person who posted the opening. Send him or her an InMail or invitation to connect. Since most recruiters and hiring managers are inundated with applications, be sure your message is clear, direct and indicates that you’re looking for advice related to the specific position.
3. **POST AN UPDATE** on your profile to indicate you’re researching future career options and want advice. Your default privacy setting may limit the visibility of your updates to your existing network only, so be sure your update is posted as public to receive more responses. Also consider posting questions or participating in LinkedIn groups related to the industry, profession or line of work you’re interested in pursuing. Look for individuals who are active in these groups and ask them individually for advice. Everyone loves to feel like they’re helping others – so just ask and pay it forward.



5. DOES THE CURRICULUM OFFER THE SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE AND FLEXIBILITY I NEED TO REACH MY GOALS?

You've learned what differentiates an MBA from an M.S. degree. By now, you may have already decided which degree you want to pursue. But don't stop there. Not all degree programs are alike. Each program can vary in curriculum, teaching method, duration and delivery options. Some programs may focus heavily on theory over real-world application. Find out who developed the curriculum. Is it current and based on relevant industry trends? Will you have exposure to faculty who are real-world experts in their field? Also consider asking about relevant skills you'll be taught. Will those skills position you to achieve your career goals? Ideally, the degree program you choose will offer personalized learning and one-on-one career coaching to support you in reaching your career goals. Finally, consider **how the degree is delivered**, which can vary from full-time commitment residency programs to more flexible online, distance-learning programs.

Carefully review the details of each program and also reach out to academic leaders at the universities that have really caught your eye. Many universities offer open houses where you can learn more about their programs, but also get a true sense of the learning environment. Is it a fit? Some schools, like CTU, have university deans and program directors participating on popular social networks. You can tweet **@CTUBusiness** for real-world business perspective and academic advice.

After examining the curriculum alongside your career goals, you may enjoy a concentration in information technology but have a goal to eventually grow into an IT management position. An MBA degree encompasses multiple business disciplines that you can apply to a niche concentration and to your role as a leader.

MBA OR M.S.?

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STUDENTS ASKED. CTU ANSWERED.



Every day we receive questions from aspiring graduate students. Here are three of the most common with responses from our University Dean of Business and Management, **Emad Rahim, D.M., PMP**:

HOW WILL A MASTER'S DEGREE FROM CTU PREPARE ME FOR THE CHALLENGES I'LL FACE AT WORK?

Nearly all employers of CTU graduates surveyed find CTU graduates as prepared, or even better prepared, to work than their other employees. Employers of CTU graduates also find that a large majority of CTU graduates display strong analytical, interpersonal communication and leadership skills. (Source: 2012 CTU Employer Experience Research, prepared by Consumer Insights, June 2012.)

IS YOUR SCHOOL ACCREDITED? DO EMPLOYERS VIEW YOUR MASTER'S DEGREE AS CREDIBLE?

Yes, CTU is regionally accredited by The Higher Learning Commission and is a member of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. CEO Magazine ranked our **online MBA program** as a 2012 top-10 online MBA program, and select degree programs align with leading industry organizations like the Society for Human Resource Management (**SHRM**) and the Project Management Institute (**PMI**).

WHAT LEARNING OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO ME?

At CTU, you have the flexibility to choose the pacing that best fits your lifestyle: Career Pace, Traditional Pace or Part-time Pace. Depending on how you choose to take classes, you could be a graduate of CTU's MBA program in as little as 18 months.

YOUR CHOICE IS THE RIGHT CHOICE



It may seem there are endless considerations when weighing your options. It's reasonable to want to make the right decision, but remember that your degree is only the first step in your long-term career success. Do your due diligence, and then trust your gut. There isn't a silver bullet to pinpoint the perfect choice but you're definitely in the driver's seat. Whether you choose an MBA or an M.S. degree, it's how you use the education and the connections you develop that will be larger factors in whether you reach your career goals.

A portrait of Gail Whitaker, D.M., a Black woman with short dark hair, smiling. She is wearing a black blazer over a grey top and a pearl necklace. Her arms are crossed. The background is a blurred office setting with a window showing greenery.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

GAIL WHITAKER, D.M.

Gail Whitaker, D.M., is the **Director of Business and Management** Graduate Programs at Colorado Technical University. She has more than 25 years of management training and is committed to helping students achieve their goals through education.

Connect with Dr. Whitaker on Twitter **@DrGailWhitaker**

LEARN ABOUT OUR GLOBALLY RANKED ONLINE MBA PROGRAM

OWN EVERY OPPORTUNITY WITH A CTU MBA

Our online MBA curriculum provides what future business leaders need today. It's not a traditional MBA. It's a highly relevant, problem-based experience. Learn skills ranging from ethics to economics and global leadership to innovation – all driven by today's employers and labor market trends. The Financial Times' 2013 ranking of high quality online MBA programs, placed 5 of CTU's career-focused MBA program concentrations amongst the top programs from the hundreds it reviewed. Our program is ranked as a 2012 top-10 online MBA program by CEO Magazine, a publication of the International Graduate Forum

and The Military Times ranks Colorado Technical University **#1 online school for military veterans**. Voted Top College for Veterans in online and nontraditional category. CTU's MBA program offers a career-relevant curriculum developed in collaboration with entrepreneurs, business leaders and subject-matter experts. Choose from relevant degree programs that align with leading industry organizations such as The Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) and the Project Management Institute (PMI). CTU also offers **Master of Science degrees** in a variety of focus areas.

TWEET OUR UNIVERSITY DEAN

Connect with Dr. Rahim: [@CTUBusiness](#)

BUSINESS THOUGHT LEADERSHIP ARTICLES

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Watch this video to learn more about the MBA from our University Dean



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Founded in 1965, Colorado Technical University (CTU) provides higher education for today's career-focused students and is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission and a member of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. CTU's industry-focused curriculum has courses taught by instructors – many with experience in the fields that they teach. At CTU, students can collaborate with peers all over the country in an award-winning Virtual Campus, which was recognized as the “Best of the Best” in the Education and Academia category of the 2009 Computerworld Honors program. Students can choose from more than 100 undergraduate and graduate programs online and at campuses in multiple cities. For more information, visit www.coloradotech.edu.

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