

# Domain Master

MBA's seen as ticket to upper management...with a price tag

**T**here was a time when pursuing an MBA was seen as an avenue only for the elite in business. But today, that is no longer true. Whether to merely promote their own desire for personal growth, or holster their careers, adults in all areas of life are directing a critical eye at picking up an advanced degree in business. And schools across the nation are designing business programs that meet the needs of the adult learner.

Beverly Downey, dean of the School of Graduate Business and Management at the University of Phoenix

by Cynthia Scanlon  
photography by Loren Anderson

"The MBA has never been more popular either with employers or potential students," says Lee McPheters, associate dean of the College of Business at Arizona State University. "The MBA, more than ever, is the ticket to upper-level management."

Beverly Downey, dean of the School of Graduate Business and Management at the University of Phoenix, agrees that an MBA has become an extremely popular degree. "Many people are now finding that they need a master's to keep them abreast or ahead of others in terms of what their opportunities are for the future."

The student returning for his or her MBA today has many schools and programs to choose from. The Keller Graduate School of Management offers a traditional MBA along with five other master's-level degrees for working adults. "We cater to people who have full-time jobs," says Jim Keenan, center director at Keller. "The terms are accelerated, and [our students] don't have to worry about moving in a lock step or never having to take a term off, so it's built around their needs."

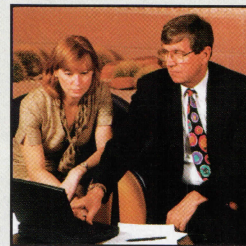
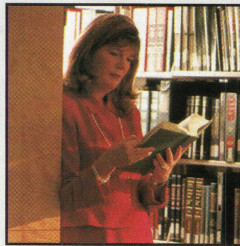
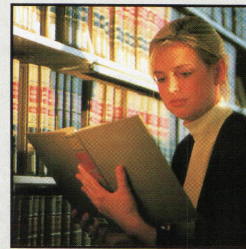
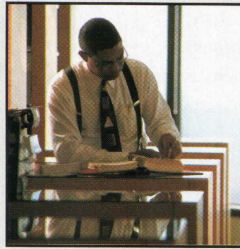
Those graduating from Keller's program will come away with a strong set of business practioners' skills, says Keenan. These will include problem solving for advanced business problems, enhanced analytical skills, the ability to deal with complex business situations and the know-how needed to organize and work well within a team structure. "We also hope they are going to leave here with an appreciation of the importance of business ethics and ethical practices in the business arena," says Keenan.

At the University of Phoenix, you can pick up a traditional MBA, also on an accelerated program, or you can tailor your degree into a specialized field such as Global Management, Technology Management or Health Care Management.

"Our traditional MBA [degree] will have a more broad-based focus with heavy emphasis on accounting, finance, economics and statistics," says Downey. "This is in addition to the basic management courses, strategy courses and marketing."

The specializations, she says, will take on the flavor of whatever degree is being pursued. For instance, the Global Management degree will focus on international finance and global marketing. The Technology Management degree will focus on research and design, technology forecasting and the technological organization.

"Our particular program is different from a traditional university in that our courses are done one at a time, so the student can concentrate on just that one course, finish it and go on to the next one," says Downey. "In addition, students are expected to work in study groups about 15 to 20 hours per week."



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The University of Phoenix also caters to the working adult by providing courses on an accelerated basis and at night. This way, says Downey, students don't have to sacrifice work and family to achieve their degree goal. "The whole motivation behind our students is much different than a traditional university," she says. "They want to get in, they want practical, focused instruction, then they want to get out and move on."

She adds, "The folks our students are going to be dealing with, both in terms of their instructors and their peer group, are working people. So it's a networking opportunity. They are dealing with issues and problems on a day-to-day basis with people who also deal with those same problems."

Students thinking about entering Arizona State University's MBA program have many avenues from which to choose. There is a full-time

**Judy Johnson of the  
Thunderbird Graduate School of  
International Management**

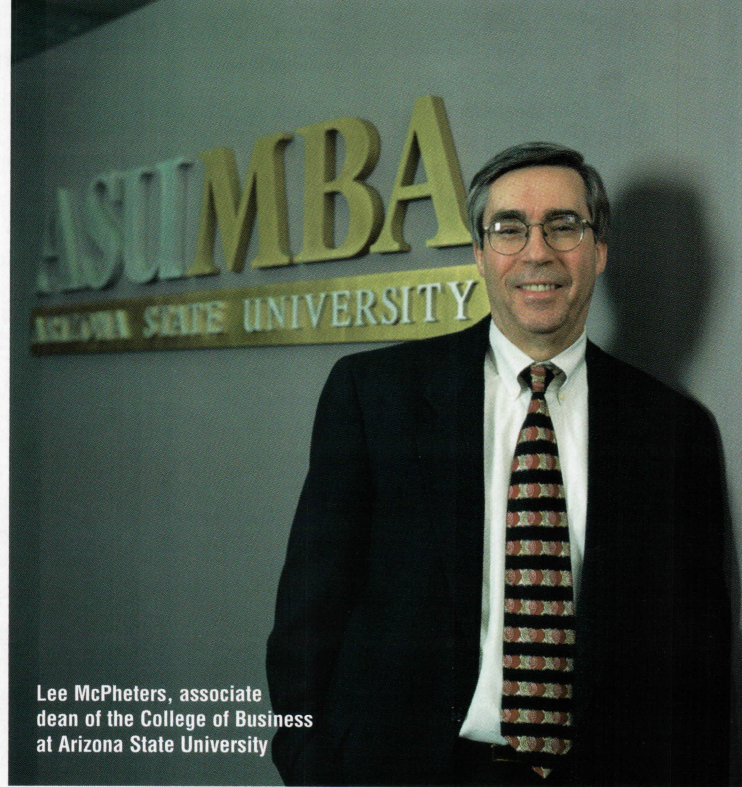


program for those wanting to concentrate solely on the education process and there are specialized degrees in finance, supply chain management, information systems, health administration and service marketing and management. ASU, which has approximately 1,000 students enrolled in its various MBA programs, also offers a technology MBA and an executive program, which is aimed at managers and senior-level managers wanting to move to the very top level of their companies.

The traditional program, which runs predominantly during the day, is designed for people who want to change their careers, says McPheters. "A typical example would be someone who had gotten their undergraduate in history, fine arts, or engineering and wanted to move into business, accounting or finance," he says. "We attract students all across the country for that program." ASU's most popular program is the one offered in the evening, which is aimed directly at working professionals. These students, says McPheters, have his or her eye on advancement within the companies they already work for. "They look at the people that are above them in the organization and they see that many of them have an MBA," he says, "so

**ASU MBA**  
ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

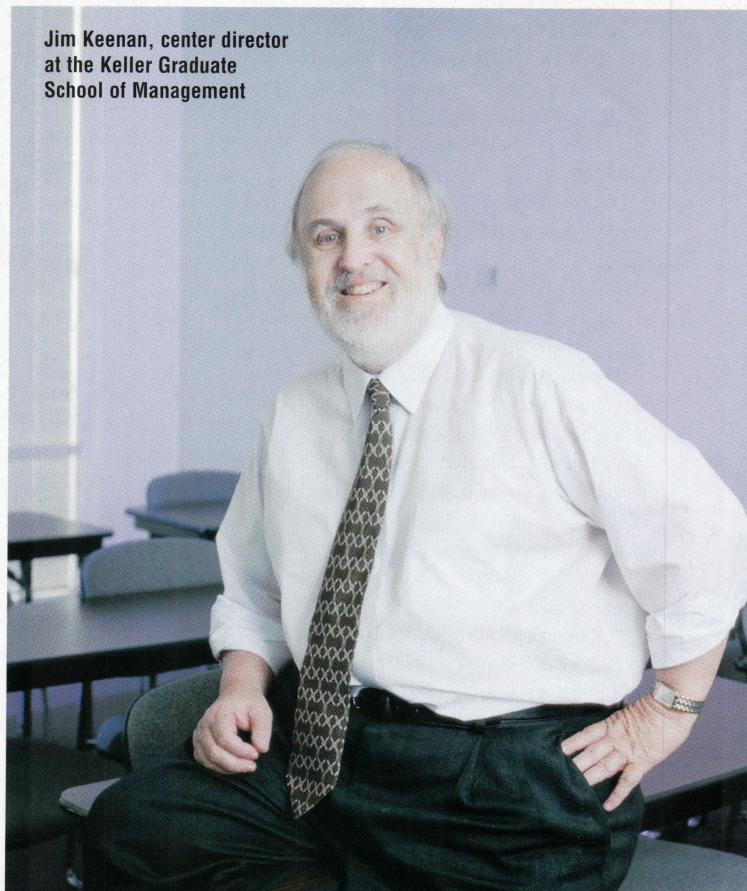
**Lee McPheters, associate  
dean of the College of Business  
at Arizona State University**



they decide they need to have an MBA to move up, and they come to ASU to get it."

Pursuing an MBA won't be a cheap endeavor, either in terms of time or money. Depending on what type of program you select, it can take anywhere from one and a half to three years to complete at a cost that can run into the thousands. But because schools offering the MBA understand the kind of commitment that is involved, they have tailored their programs to fit just about any schedule desired. And in terms of cost, one of the things that has clearly made the MBA more affordable and more attractive is the company support it is now receiving. Many businesses now offer not only tuition

**Jim Keenan, center director  
at the Keller Graduate  
School of Management**



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reimbursement, but time off to actually go to class and meet with study groups.

"The work place is behind them because they recognize this individual may be potentially a stronger employee," says Downey, "so the employer is very much a part of this decision as to go forward or not."

ASU's McPheter's agrees. "Companies are very interested in sponsoring their students to get an MBA," he says. "Companies are trying to have an organizational structure where there's much more of a group orientation with fewer managers able to lead a small group and this is what the MBA curriculum is about these days."

If returning to school as an adult to pursue your MBA is something you are thinking about, but the idea of being a student again is giving you pause, take heed. Many universities are acutely aware of returning adults and their special needs. Clearly they are more than willing to provide flexible schedules, compelling curriculums and a variety of specialized programs to help you meet your needs. What they ask in return is for the students to question their motivations for returning to school and then have the enthusiasm and motivation to make the journey a success for everyone involved.

"[Potential students] need to think about where education fits into their overall career strategy," says Keenan. "What they want to consider is whether or not advanced education is going to be their ticket to the type of success they are looking for. Then it's a matter of sitting down, doing the homework and picking the program and school that's the best fit for them."

Despite some of the personal and professional obstacles encountered by returning adults, Downey says they make some of the best college students. "Generally we find that there's something that's driving adults coming back to school," she says. "Either they are seeking promotion within the organization looking for a career transition, or in some way trying to make themselves more marketable. It's not mom and dad paying for them, so they come in motivated to learn."

If you decide in the future to walk the MBA path, know that you will be in good company. As Downey points out, the adult students returning to school bring a vast background of experience and knowledge with them that creates a challenging educational environment. "There's a whole dynamic going on with adults that's rich," she says.

Perhaps it is a dynamic many Arizona business professionals would like to take part in.

**AB**

Cynthia Scanlon is a Tempe free-lance writer.