

**THE BROAD MBA VS. SPECIALIZATION:  
AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF EMPLOYMENT ADS AND MBA PROGRAMS**

**Pola B. Gupta, Wright State University, 3640 Colonel Glenn Highway, Dayton, OH 45435,  
(937) 775-3046, [Pola.Gupta@wright.edu](mailto:Pola.Gupta@wright.edu)**

**Jeremy Smith, Wright State University, 3640 Colonel Glenn Highway, Dayton, OH 45435,  
(937) 231-8804, [smith.329@wright.edu](mailto:smith.329@wright.edu)**

**ABSTRACT**

MBA programs have witnessed a trend of offering more specialized programs that tailor a degree within a specific functional area. This paper ponders whether businesses really seek graduates with a specialization in MBA over a general MBA.

The general MBA program tends to focus on core subjects that are aimed at developing knowledge and skills in fundamental management disciplines. The thought is that students can attain a well-rounded overview of basic classes while specializing in a particular field. Many schools have gone as far as offering specific niche specializations to cater to meeting the students' needs. Employers preferred MBA graduates with specializations, according to a study conducted by Hunt and Speck (1986).

Employers continue to value the MBA as a guarantee of all-round business skills and knowledge. The business community seems to be sending mixed signals. They complain that B-schools aren't producing potential leaders, but then they hire MBAs with narrow specializations.

The purpose of this study is to empirically examine whether employers prefer a general MBA or a MBA with specialization. Based on the analysis of 758 employment ads and 27 MBA program offerings, we find a disconnection between what employers want and what B-schools offer.

We performed a content analysis of 758 advertisements in which employers mentioned MBA as one of the qualifications for the advertised position. Approximately 95% of the ads mentioned that a MBA is preferred, which means only 5% of the positions actually required a MBA degree. From the above results, it seems a large number of advertised positions didn't require a specialization in the MBA program at all. However, where special skills were desired for the positions, the employers asked either for a specialization in the MBA program or required a particular major in their undergraduate program. Results of this study suggest that an overwhelming

number of positions prefer or require only a general MBA degree.

Based on the analysis of the top 13 MBA programs in the U.S., all of them are offering specializations. The range of number of specialization across these schools varied from six to eighteen. However, a content analysis of 758 employment advertisements from online newspapers and websites show that the vast majority of employers didn't care about specializations in the MBA degree. The research is completely slanted in favor of no specializations in MBA programs and yet B-schools keep offering more and more niche programs.

Future research should focus on surveying employers to see exactly what they are looking for in potential employees. Research should also be conducted among MBA students to find their views of general MBA vs. MBA with specializations. It is possible that even if the employers are not asking for specializations, students may prefer specializations to update their knowledge in their functional areas. Until we find a clear answer, we believe, B-Schools should continue to offer both a general MBA degree and specializations.

**REFERENCES**

- Hunt, Shelby D. and Paul Surgi Speck (1986). "Specialization and the MBA: Is the Broad MBA passé?" *California Management Review*, 29(3)