



Artificial Intelligence, FinTech & The 5 Hottest Topics On The MBA Curriculum In 2019

From CEO Activism to cutting-edge tech, business schools are updating their MBA curricula to meet demand from employers and prospective students

Written by [Seb Murray](#) 2 Jan 2019

The MBA may have been created over a century ago, but the curriculum is always changing.

Beyond the bread and butter of business—accounting, finance, marketing—an MBA will include a wide range of optional courses on everything from entrepreneurship to big data, luxury strategy, interpersonal dynamics, and social media.

The demands of corporate recruiters and students are driving the changes. There is a need for more niche skills like data analytics, which can help students secure jobs on graduation. They know this, and are asking for new content, on blockchain, risk management, design thinking, social enterprise, and more.

Business schools have responded. [Cass Business School](#) in London, for example, offers seven concentrations as part of its MBA program, letting students gear their education towards a certain area of management, like real estate.

London Business School, meanwhile, has rolled out 22 new MBA electives in the past five years. The portfolio of courses never stands

still, says Gareth Howells, executive director of MBAs at LBS: “The MBA is constantly evolving.”

Here are the five hottest topics on the MBA curriculum in 2019:

1. Artificial Intelligence

Intelligent algorithms promise to fundamentally change how we do business, automating low-skill tasks, freeing time up for more creative and higher value work. It could both destroy and create jobs, and an MBA is designed to equip candidates to cope with that change.

Electives on artificial intelligence (AI) are in the offing, with LBS already having introduced a machine learning for business elective, while the broader ‘digital economy’ theme is actively being explored by the school.

MBA students will need to understand the impact of AI on business, but also how it can create new business opportunities, products and services. Some understanding of the technical aspects of algorithms will also be required. The Kellogg School of Management in the US has introduced a course on AI while Chicago’s Booth School of Business teaches this to its Executive MBA (EMBA) students.

2. Corporate Social Responsibility

Business school students today need to consider more than just the bottom line. Companies are under pressure from their shareholders, customers, employees, politicians and regulators to consider their wider impact on society and the environment. Business schools have responded with a slew of new courses set to launch in 2019.

London’s Cass Business School, for example, is interested in running a corporate social responsibility (CSR) elective in British Columbia, Canada. “This would emphasize our commitment to encouraging Cass students to be a part of their wider communities and

to understand the importance of social business,” says Steve Thomas, associate dean of MBA programs.

[Rotterdam School of Management](#) (RSM) in the Netherlands—a country whose companies tend to dominate rankings of business sustainability—is a leader in the field. CSR is a core part of the curriculum and it enriches all RSM’s activities, from teaching to research. The first of its kind to be accredited by the Association of MBAs (AMBA), Birmingham Business School’s [100%-Online MBA](#) also features a ‘business in society’ module.

3. Change Management

We live in a VUCA—volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous—world. That may explain why change management is one of some business schools’ most popular MBA elective courses this year, including LBS. “The sheer pace of change in businesses—and the geopolitical environments they operate in—make agility essential, and change management more important than ever,” says Gareth.

At the UK’s [Cranfield School of Management](#), managing people, change and sustainability is a core part of the MBA curriculum. NYU Stern in New York City runs a change management MBA specialization, while NUS Business School in Singapore has an MBA elective on organizational change and development.

Madrid’s IESE Business School (*pictured*), has a course on innovation strategy. “We are constantly thinking about the future of business—where it is heading, what new challenges are on the horizon, and how we can help tomorrow’s future business leaders thrive in such an environment,” says Marta Escardó, executive director of the school’s MBA.

4. Fintech

Financial technology is high on the agenda across the finance world, as incumbents seek to avoid disruption by nimbler startups and as every financial company, large and small, turns to tech to improve efficiency and create new products and services. IESE is offering a course on the rise of fintech, Stern offers an entire fintech specialization, and MIT Sloan and Berkeley Haas have long been offering such classes as part of their MBAs.

Chinese schools are also leading the way, incorporating courses on cryptocurrency and blockchain into their MBA curricula. They include [CEIBS](#) and [CKGSB](#) in mainland China and [CUHK](#) and [HKUST](#) in Hong Kong.

Financial employers need people who can understand how technology is and will impact their business, and who can lead teams of technologists—an increasing portion of their workforce. The courses are also applicable to entrepreneurs, with many of the world's most famous fintech companies founded by MBAs, including TransferWise and alternative student loans provider [Prodigy Finance](#), both founded by INSEAD graduates.

5. CEO Activism

Many people dislike public speaking, but today's business leaders are being called upon by all their stakeholders to take a public stance on often heated and controversial subjects, like gun control.

With dean Bill Boulding (*pictured*) at the helm, Duke University's Fuqua School of Business is pioneering a course on how future leaders can navigate this new landscape. Stanford ran a series of seminars on the subject, while Harvard is using case studies to teach EMBA students about CEO activism. The courses focus on how business leaders can speak out on issues not directly related to their business and how to avoid it backfiring.

In Europe, IESE runs a course on public speaking for leaders and has introduced an elective on public affairs for 2018/19.

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