

# UNC Becomes Latest MBA Program To Embrace STEM

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UNC Kenan-Flagler MBA students will now have the option of taking a concentration in business analytics and management science that is STEM-designated. File photo

Applications to full-time MBA programs are down across the board and that has some schools scrambling to respond. One way they're addressing the crisis: designating parts or all of their MBAs as STEM — science, technology, engineering, and math — which helps schools in appealing to newly reluctant international students by dangling the possibility of as much as three years of post-graduation work in the United States.

So it is at UNC's Kenan-Flagler Business School. Among the top-25 U.S. programs examined this summer by *Poets&Quants*, only one school has had a worse decline in application volume than UNC, which saw its apps plunge in 2018-2019 to 1,323 from 1,758, a drop of nearly 25%; in the last three cycles, UNC's apps tumbled 38.5%, second-worst in the top-25 after only Indiana University's Kelley School of Business (see table below). No wonder, then,

that UNC would be looking for ways to stem the bleeding: The school has announced the launch of a new STEM-designated concentration in business analytics and management science in its full-time MBA program, which will be open to MBA students in January.

“Our focus is on strategic decision-making to prepare our graduates to use analytics to lead companies,” says Rajdeep Grewal, the Townsend Family distinguished professor of marketing and a concentration leader, in a news release from the school.

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“Today managers are inundated with data that comes in large volume at immense velocity and in diverse, structured and unstructured forms. Through the concentration, our students will develop a deep understanding of business problems and the analytics skills to make informed, data-driven strategic decisions.”

## WHAT KENAN-FLAGLER IS OFFERING WITH THE NEW STEM CONCENTRATION

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Courses in the new Business Analytics and Management Science concentration will build the data analytic toolkit for business applications and business acumen, says Vinayak Deshpande, professor of operations and a concentration leader, refining them for a diverse set of business functions. The toolkit includes computational tools, predictive and prescriptive models, and statistical methods, and the business knowledge encompasses functions ranging from finance to human resources, marketing, operations, and strategy.

As students build their course portfolios, they will hone their data analytic skills across business functions and “go deep” in selected functions, the school says. These skills help students succeed in:

- Traditional business sectors such as retailing, industrial markets, energy, real estate, and consumer packaged goods;
- Emerging sectors that include the digital marketplace, fintech, biotechnology, and healthcare;
- New ventures that seek to exploit opportunities provided by big data in business-to-consumer and business-to-business markets.

## SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

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The introduction of STEM to the UNC Kenan-Flagler-Flagler MBA is designed to give international applicants hope that upon graduating from it, they may be eligible for a two-year extension on the initial one-year Optional Practice Training period for working in the U.S. Which is not to say that the only reasons for embracing STEM are cynical. (Though some, certainly, are.) Doubtless, such programs also give students valuable job skills, as the administration of UC-Berkeley's Haas School of Business recently stated in announcing that all of their MBA programs are now STEM-designated, or as Northwestern University's

Kellogg School of Management touted in their [announcement of a new STEM major](#).

“At UNC Kenan-Flagler we continue to innovate so we can prepare students not only for today’s job market, but also for the future,” said Brad Staats, associate dean of MBA programs and professor of operations, in the news release. “With our new STEM-certified concentration we draw on the rich analytical skills across the school and apply them to diverse industries to create unique learning opportunities for our students.”

Learn more about the new STEM-designated concentration in business analytics and management science [here](#).

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