

# Why you need an MBA

## Masters of Business Administration... how useful is this degree to a librarian?



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...gives a voice to the new generation of library and information professionals. If you have any suggestions or topics for this column, please contact the column co-ordinators, Kate Davis, [kdavis@nla.gov.au](mailto:kdavis@nla.gov.au), or Naomi Doessel, [nomesd@yahoo.com.au](mailto:nomesd@yahoo.com.au).

After completing a BA(Lit) and a Grad Dip Info Science, I worked as a corporate librarian for a southeast Queensland local government organisation for a year before taking a job-share library manager's position with a federal department in Townsville. It was then, one year after becoming a librarian, that I enrolled in a Masters in Business Administration degree.

I had been casting my eye around for a further degree to do, partly because I enjoy studying, but also, as a mature-age graduate, to give me an edge in the job market. An MBA seemed to be the best option as it was a generic degree aimed at managers in all fields. The MBA program at James Cook University offered lots of subject choices, which meant I could tailor it to suit my requirements. In addition, I had taken a minor in management in my BA and had enjoyed the subjects very much, as different as they were to my heart's love, literature.

#### **How relevant is an MBA to a librarian?**

But first I attempted to ascertain how relevant an MBA might be to a librarian, and I have to say I didn't get very far. I wanted to talk to some librarians with MBAs but found very few who have this degree, although I'm sure that there must be lots of them out there. I asked for responses on some e-lists from librarians either studying or in possession of an MBA, but got few replies.

I did a literature search and came up with a fairly low hit rate there, too. Elisabeth Leonard's article in *Academic Brass* (December 2003) was somewhat helpful.

Leonard surveyed 200 respondents from three US e-lists and published the results. She found that the most important benefit of gaining an MBA (74 per cent of respondents) was 'increased subject knowledge', followed by 'increased the amount of respect and/or credibility I receive from faculty' - 41 per cent of responses. Leonard, however, was working as a business librarian in the academic library sector, as were most of her survey respondents, so the knowledge acquired by her survey respondents was directly applicable to their work environment.

One of my major motives in doing an MBA (apart from the enjoyment gained from studying) was to be better positioned in the job market. This was not an option in the Leonard survey, though the 'benefits of an MBA in enabling the respondent to receive a promotion in a current position' rated as the third most important reason for undertaking the degree (40 per cent).

#### **What I have gained from my MBA studies**

Undeterred, I enrolled in the James Cook University MBA program at the beginning of 2005. I discovered that MBAs are very much geared to full-time working professionals, with subjects offered as weekend intensives or evening classes.

Soon after beginning my studies I went back to full-time work in a busy branch librarian position with a local government public library and found that part-time study was very manageable, even with family obligations and a social life. I am now only two subjects away from completing my MBA and have gained so many incredible benefits from it already.

With subjects such as Data Management and Information Technology; Marketing and Innovation; Competitive Strategy; Leadership in Contemporary Organisation; Conflict Management; and Human Relations in the Workplace, the MBA program encourages students to think outside their individual perspectives and begin to understand the issues involved in analysing and managing within complex organisational structures.

Every MBA subject I have done has some relevance to my work as a librarian. Case studies (in-depth, longitudinal examination of a single instance or event which provides a systematic way of looking at events, collecting data, analysing information, and reporting the results), class discussions, presentations, readings, and guest lecturers all help to equip students with the power to develop and communicate their own workplace strategies. This can then be aligned with the overall strategies of their parent organisation.

Ultimately, however, what I have found to be of the most value is the serendipitous synthesis of all the inter-related theories, knowledge, ideas, and concepts; as well as the experiences of being challenged, having to argue my case, compromise, negotiate, persuade, and stretch my imagination. These are the benefits of my MBA from which I will gain the most in my future, both professionally and personally.

#### **Would I recommend other librarians take an MBA?**

Absolutely.

Leonard, Elisabeth, (2003), 'Weighing the benefits of an MBA: survey results', *Academic Brass*, vol 1 no 3, <http://www.ala.org/ala/rusa/rusaourassoc/rusasections/brass/brasspubs/academicbrass/acadarchives/vol1no3/academicbrassv.htm>

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