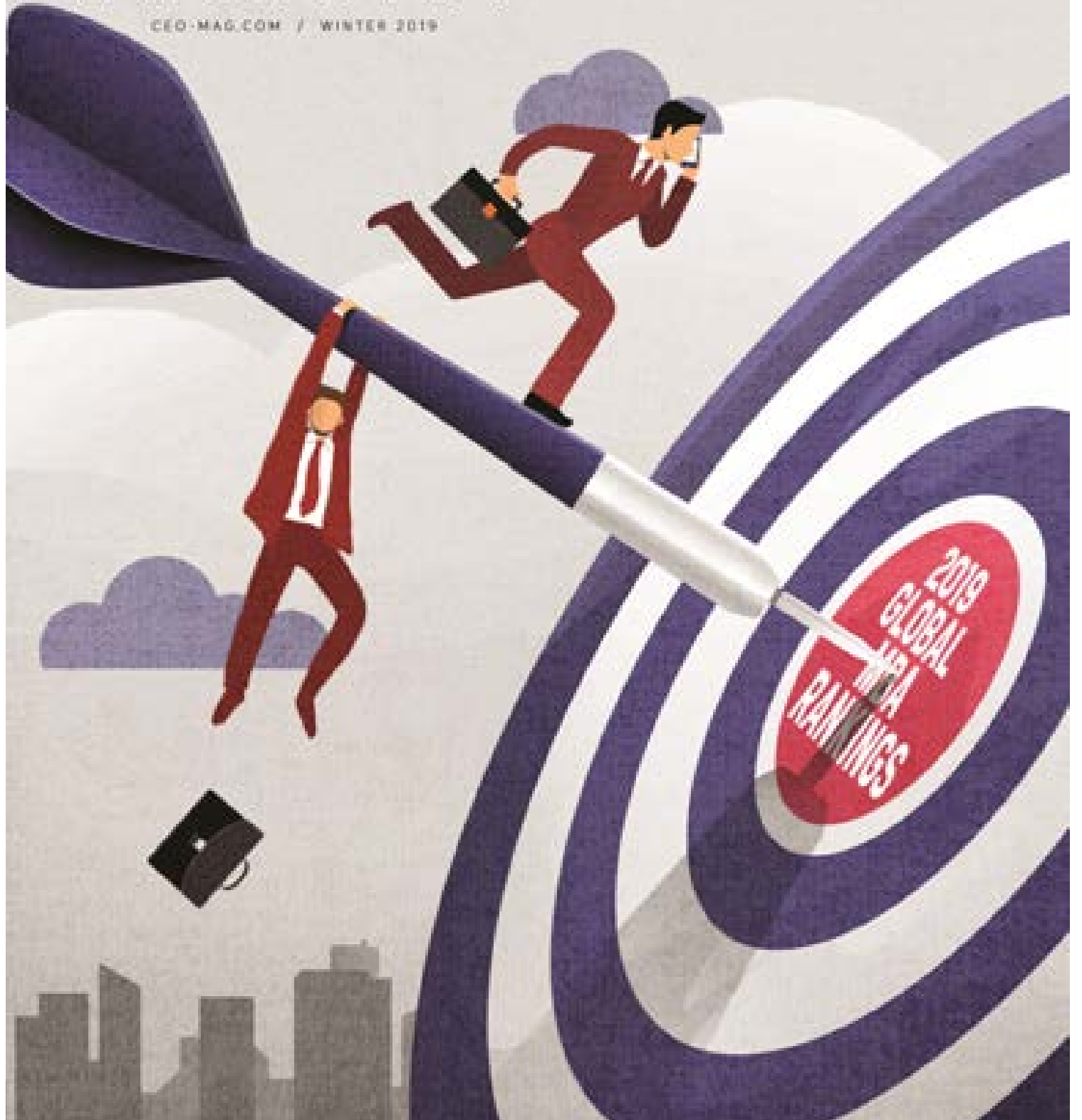


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LEARNING  
WITHOUT LIMITS

ENTREPRENEUR OR  
BUSINESS LEADER?

AM I TOO OLD TO  
SWITCH CAREERS?

RETURN ON  
ENVIRONMENT

# THE UMSL DBA: LEARNING WITHOUT LIMITS

ALEXANDRA SKINNER TALKS  
TO EKIN PELLEGRINI

**Q. What prompted the University of Missouri-St. Louis (UMSL) to roll out a DBA programme?**

The growing demand from practitioners, coupled with our faculty's expertise in working with doctoral students in our PhD programmes, our strong industry partnerships, and commitment to delivering high quality doctoral training, that combines rigor with relevance, prompted UMSL to roll out a DBA programme.

**Q. Whilst the programme is still relatively new, from an application standpoint, how much interest have you received from the local market and wider Midwest?**

We've been pleasantly surprised with the high level of demand since the programme began. We owe this primarily to UMSL's reputation in the region and the college's distinguished dual AACSB accreditation in both business and accounting.

We are centrally located in St. Louis, which is a hub of innovation featuring a rich and diverse business landscape, with established industry-leading enterprises and fast-growing midsize businesses. Our campus is located near the airport, making it conveniently close by for our out-of-state students. As much as we receive interest from the local market and the wider Midwest, half of our students commute from beyond the Midwest, and from all over the country.



**Kindly define the make-up of your current cohort.**

We have two cohorts going through the programme, and another forming now that will start in fall 2019. Our student demographics look like this:

 **Students** **31** **Approx. 15** persons per cohort



**Average age:** **45** **Average years of work experience:** **21**

**45** **21**

**Percentage with a graduate degree:**

**99%**

**Female:**

**32%**

**States students commute from (n=12):**  
**AR, IL, IN, KY, MO, MT, OH, TN, TX, VA, WA, WI**

**Q. What are the entry requirements for your DBA, and what advice would you give to potential applicants?**

We review each application as a whole. Admissions decisions are based on a composite of information including the candidate's previous academic performance, continuing education, managerial work experience, proposed research statements, and commitment to a rigorous doctoral programme. At the very minimum, we require 10 years of managerial work experience, a master's degree, proficiency in written and oral English, and continuing intellectual development.

I suggest that potential applicants research programmes well, and look at accreditation, the faculty's research records, as well as faculty and college connections with industry.

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I strongly advise potential candidates to visit the programmes they're considering during a residency weekend, prior to enrolment.”

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I strongly advise potential candidates to visit the programmes they're considering during a residency weekend, prior to enrolment. This will be your second home for the next three years and your cohort members will be like family. It's important that you feel supported, not only academically, but administratively, which is just as crucial. A first-rate administrative service is the backbone of a successful DBA learning experience, where students can completely focus on learning without having to worry about hotel arrangements, data analysis software licenses, or the myriad of proposal and dissertation forms that need to be filled out. A positive, supportive, student focused, collaborative learning environment with close cohort connections can only be assessed by an in-person campus visit during a residency.

**Q. What do you expect from your DBA students, in terms of time spent on campus?**

The first year of the programme has 10 residencies, and in the second year we meet nine times, with a full day on Friday and Saturday. We expect students to be on campus during DBA residencies, especially in the first two years. If a student cannot make it to a residency, we use Zoom to live-broadcast the courses so they can participate in real-time from anywhere. We also archive Zoom recordings so that students have the opportunity to review them if they cannot connect live due to time differences.

We are reasonably flexible, however, for timely graduation I cannot reiterate strongly enough the importance of attending each and every monthly residency in person.

**Q. Are UMSL MBA students able to move on to the DBA once they have completed their MBA?**

UMSL MBA students apply and go through the admissions process in a similar manner to all DBA applicants. They are not automatically granted admission to the DBA, given an MBA from an AACSB accredited institution is only one criterion in the UMSL DBA admissions process.

**Q. You have a Fortune 25 corporation headquartered on campus. To what extent does this inform classroom discussion around management theory and practice?**

We are fortunate to have Express Scripts headquartered on campus, and we have an Executive MBA programme specifically tailored to them, and DBA students from the company.

The close connection between UMSL Business and Express Scripts definitely elevates the quality of all our degree

programmes, including the DBA. I must add, UMSL also boasts two graduates who serve as CEOs of Fortune 25 corporations.

**Q. Is the DBA the new MBA?**

The DBA, as a terminal business degree, will quickly become the new MBA, because research partnership between business schools and business practitioners is long overdue.

The goal of the DBA is to marry rigor with relevance, which is increasingly the goal of practitioners seeking to inform business practice with scholarly research. Academic researchers are also increasingly interested in partnering with practitioners as it serves their quest to create new knowledge with a heightened focus on relevant research and actionable, practical implications.

**Q. What is the main goal of your DBA students coming into the programme?**

The primary motivation our students communicate to us is an unquenchable thirst for knowledge. They are already in successful senior management positions and hold graduate degrees, but are primarily interested in a terminal business degree because they are passionately curious, life-long learners. Some are interested in consulting or career advancement in their industries, whereas others are interested in cultivating closer



connections with academia as adjunct professors and helping educate the next generation of business leaders.

**Q. How do you meet these expectations?**

We personalise the learning experience of each student based upon their degree-completion goal. For example, if the student is interested in an academic position, we work with them from the outset in starting their research portfolios. With students interested in practitioner conference presentations or practitioner publications, we work with them outside of class to fine-tune their course papers into posters, presentations, or publications.

The primary goal in our programme is to train practitioner scholars with a strong focus on quantitative and qualitative research methods.

**Q. What does the future hold for DBA graduates?**

The DBA is a terminal degree and it is the highest academic credential in business. DBA scholars will add this academic credential to their already successful business careers. It's an incredible personal achievement to become a nationally, or even globally, sought-after content and domain expert in your industry.

A DBA earned from an AACSB accredited

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“The newly gained expertise in informing business problems with scholarly research, coupled with strong data analytics skills, will make them game-changing performers in their current fields.”

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institution provides SA (Scholarly Academic) qualified faculty status as per AACSB standards. SA status qualifies DBA scholars for a variety of business faculty positions in AACSB accredited, distinguished business schools throughout the world.

The newly gained expertise in informing business problems with scholarly research, coupled with strong data analytics skills, will make them game-changing performers in their current fields. The DBA training will also elevate the careers of those who are interested in higher level leadership positions in their companies or industries.

**BIOGRAPHY**

Ekin Pellegrini is an Associate Professor of Global Leadership and Management, Director of Executive Education, and Director of the Doctor of Business Administration programme for the College of Business Administration at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.





# THE DBA STUDENT EXPERIENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI-ST. LOUIS

**ALEXANDRA SKINNER  
TALKS TO DON MUETH**

**Q. Why the UMSL DBA?**

I received my BSBA - Finance from UMSL in 1984 - and in recent years became reacquainted with the university by serving on the Finance Advisory Board, the Dean's Leadership Council and other committees. Along the way, I heard about the creation of the DBA programme and became intrigued. After looking more closely, I determined it was right for me, at the right moment, and at the right school. The complete package is a perfect fit for me and I view it as a capstone to my career in business.

**Q. With regards to the admissions process, what advice would you give to potential applicants?**

Spend plenty of time thinking about the programme in advance of the admission process. Consider the stage of your career, as well as your stage of life. I also suggest thinking about specific business issues you may be faced with that could benefit from your studies in the DBA programme. With those mature thoughts you will be ready to proceed through the application process and eloquently describe why you are interested in the UMSL DBA.

**Q. Can you expand upon the make-up and calibre of your fellow UMSL DBA participants and what they bring to the programme and your learning experience?**

My cohort consists of 12 business professionals who are professional in every sense. We have people from the financial services industry, the legal community, academia, healthcare, law enforcement, information technology, hospitality, manufacturing and more. We come from eight different metropolitan areas, a variety of educational backgrounds, and varying stages of life. The diversity of our group adds to the richness of the programme in so many ways, but the one common trait is that each individual is committed to the programme and committed to their own success. That combination makes for an exciting and dynamic classroom experience, as well as a challenging and enriching environment.

**Q. What do you consider to be the highlight of the programme thus far?**

By far, the highlight of the UMSL DBA programme is the interaction with all the great people involved with it. This includes the staff and faculty, as well as other cohort members. Each day is a learning experience, and everyone has something to add to the overall programme. College was a long time ago for me, but the people involved in the DBA programme have made my transition back into university life as comfortable as can be.

**Q. What is the hardest thing about the programme?**

The hardest part of the programme is the ongoing time commitment. There is a professional expectation that we will each stay on track, which requires us to read, write and study nearly every day. That can be a challenge when balancing full-time work schedules, family commitments and other time-consuming responsibilities. This required commitment is not a surprise, however, as the programme leaders were very clear from the beginning as to what would be expected.

**Q. What has been the most challenging thing about returning to education, and what mechanisms have you put in place in order to manage the increased workload?**

The most challenging aspect of my return to education is managing all of the information and data. During my undergrad days way back when, and even when I studied for the CFA exams in the late 1990s, students were given a finite amount of information to study and were then required to seek additional information if needed. Finding data and information was sometimes as difficult as learning the information itself. Now, information finds the student and we are required to organise it and make sense of it without being overloaded. It's a real change to the learning process. Fortunately, I've developed techniques for organising information throughout my career and have applied those techniques to my DBA studies. In addition, the UMSL DBA programme provides a lot of help and tools to make our job easier. They of course put all materials up on Canvas, but they also set up shared drives so that we can

work together on certain documents. They also print hard copies of documents if that's what's needed. Basically, whatever we need to manage the process, they are there to help.

**Q. Are there unique elements of the programme that you feel will enhance your career objectives?**

The emphasis on rigor and relevance is the thing that will help me most in my career. Traditional academics may be focused more on pure rigor, while business practitioners emphasise relevance, but this programme insists on both. By doing so, it really bridges the gap between academia and the business world and that can only help me personally as I take newfound knowledge back to my business.

**Q. Has the programme met/exceeded your expectations?**

I expected great things out of this programme because I knew the people involved in creating it. I am happy to report that they have not let any of us down. The programme is great and getting better every day.

**Q. How would you summarise your DBA experience at UMSL to date?**

For me, the DBA experience is a journey. Just like when you plan a trip, you make a decision about your destination, get very excited about it and then go about planning all the details. When the big day of departure arrives, you may be a little nervous but definitely excited and happy. Then you go about discovering new things every day and become so immersed in your journey that you begin to look at life differently. If you're gone long enough, you even forget about some of the daily struggles that you left behind back home. There are

bumps in the road and issues may arise, but you overcome those and continue on to your destination. You want to experience the whole trip, but knowing that each day brings you closer to your destination, you kind of dread the end of the journey. I'm one week into a three-week trip. I'm completely settled in and enjoying it immensely, but I'm already starting to think about the end, which makes me a little melancholy. For now, I'm enjoying the experience and appreciating each day and each opportunity to learn something new.

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**PROGRAMME PROFILE**

The Doctor of Business Administration programme at the University of Missouri-St. Louis provides participants with the skills needed to conduct rigorous research with the objective of applying the findings to real-world decision-making in industry and government. DBA graduates will be equipped for high-level positions in higher education, consulting, or career advancement in their industry.