

» MBA RANKINGS 2019



CLASS OF 2012

Five Adelaide University alumni reflect on how their MBA has helped them think differently and get ahead.

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For Andrew Cooper, the MBA was part of earning his stripes outside the family company.



When Andrew Cooper joined Coopers Brewery in 2017, he had an MBA under his belt, as well as an economics degree, four years as a stockbroker and more than four years working at two of the world's biggest alcohol companies.

Sure, being part of the sixth generation of Coopers to work in the family-owned company helped (his father, Glenn, is the chairman), but it wasn't enough.

"It's very important to earn your stripes outside the company," he says, adding that family members must be at least 30 and have relevant education and experience before being invited to join Coopers. "I went

about trying to build a career, so it didn't matter what my last name was."

Cooper did his MBA over 15 months in 2011-12 at the University of Adelaide, where he had done his undergraduate degree. He quit his private client adviser job at Macquarie Bank so he could study full-time. At 27, he was keen to get a broad understanding of business and how all the parts interrelate.

"Full-time gives you the time and space to think broadly about business and build a level of confidence and conviction about what makes a great business," he says. "When you're in the trenches of a job day to day, you don't always have that luxury."

His first post-MBA job was as a commercial manager with global wine and spirits company Pernod Ricard, where his MBA was a talking point in the job interview.

Then he took on a sales and marketing planning role at global spirits giant Diageo, based in Singapore, where he'd completed his final three MBA subjects as an exchange student at the Ngee Ann Academy.

"The MBA was a springboard into the alcoholic beverages industry," says Cooper, who is now based in Melbourne as national account manager at Coopers, which has about 5 per cent of Australia's beer market.

"I could go with confidence for roles, both laterally across industries and upwards."

He hopes to still be involved with Coopers for its 200th anniversary in 2062, when he will be 78. "We have a very long-term way of thinking; as we move into the sixth generation, I'd like to play my role. It's hard to pinpoint how the MBA helps, but I'm sure I'm better equipped for having done it."

» CAMERON MUDGE can pinpoint exactly how his MBA helps in his role as Network Ten's Adelaide sales director. He started his MBA at the University of Adelaide in 2008, about 10 years into his career, to

build his financial skills after focusing on marketing and operations in his undergraduate degree. He finished his MBA in 2012 with a much better understanding of people.

His first lecture, on the fundamentals of leadership, was the first Saturday in many years he was not playing sport, following an injury-induced sporting retirement.

"I was wishing I was playing footy – but within five minutes I thought, 'Wow, this is amazing. This is probably the real reason I'm doing an MBA,'" says Mudge, who was then 31 and a client executive at DMG Radio (now Nova Entertainment Group), responsible for a group of advertisers but not managing an internal team.

"It was a light-bulb moment for me, thinking about how humans interact. It changed my thinking quite substantially. It made me not be as quick to pass judgment or jump to conclusions without all the information at hand."

His people skills were further enhanced, he believes, by doing the degree face-to-face rather than online, interacting with engineers, lawyers, doctors and others from diverse industries.

He now oversees a team of 12, and says he adjusts his management style slightly for each person.

"That's been the greatest learning

from the MBA for me, thinking about leadership and what it means. Being right doesn't matter – it can be a matter of opinion."

Mudge, who is aiming for a general manager or chief executive role in the future, says success is about performance rather than a piece of paper. "But the MBA has prepared me for when opportunities come along. And it's helped me cope and thrive in uncertain times, especially in the media."



• • • ANNE COLLINS saw an MBA as a ticket out of the science lab. With a science degree from Oxford Brookes University, a master's degree and doctorate from University College London, and more than 10 years

Studying an MBA had an immediate benefit for family business owner George Ujvary, right.



working in medical science, she wanted to beef up her commercial and management skills.

"I felt I was being pigeon-holed as a scientist and I didn't want a career in the lab. I needed to diversify," says Collins, who started her MBA in 2006 at the University of Adelaide. She was in her late 30s and working full-time at the Adelaide subsidiary of global pharmaceutical company Hospira (now part of Pfizer). She travelled frequently to Hospira's US headquarters and was the single mother of a two-year-old daughter.

"It took me six years, juggling work, family, travel and study," says Collins, who had been to a Hospira leadership course in the US and found that every job she aspired to in that company required an MBA. Despite the juggle, she preferred learning face-to-face rather than online, and spent 4pm-7pm most Wednesdays at a lecture on campus, close to her office and home. She also did a few subjects as summer intensives, taking 10 days off work.

In 2015, three years after finishing her MBA, she landed a role as general manager of microsampling at Trajan Scientific and Medical, developing devices to collect biological samples such as blood and skin. While the MBA was not a prerequisite, as it was for many US jobs, she says the skills it gave her "to tackle problems and drive decisions" were a factor in her success.

"You learn a lot – about who am I, about how organisations work, about

grey rather than black and white. I use [the finance stuff] every day without thinking about it. And the course in knowledge management – how you drive knowledge transfer and create value – was very helpful."

• • • GEORGE UJVARY does not hesitate when asked about the most helpful aspect of his MBA. For a project on business performance improvement, his study group analysed Ujvary's family business, Olga's Fine Foods, and came up with manufacturing improvements that in the first year saved the \$38,000 cost of the MBA.

Another benefit was a broader understanding of all aspects of business. Unlike others from the University of Adelaide's class of 2012, Ujvary hasn't used his MBA to change industries or jobs. He had been the managing director of Olga's, a meat and smallgoods producer founded by his father in 1978, for four years before he began the MBA in 2010, aged 35. And he already had a physiology degree and PhD from Oxford University, as well as two master's degrees from the University of Adelaide.

"I had a good understanding of the food manufacturing industry, but I knew nothing about marketing, finance – there were lots of gaps. If you are taking over a family-run business, you have an obligation to formalise your understanding of all aspects of



Left: Cameron Mudge values the people skills he learnt. Above: For Anne Collins, an MBA meant she was no longer seen as just a scientist.

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business; I think it's negligent not to," he says, adding that he doesn't need to be an expert in everything, but he needs to be able to critically analyse if the expert he is talking to is any good.

The broader perspective has also been useful in a couple of board appointments – something Ujvary hopes to expand on in the future. "I don't think I'd be in a position to do the board work without the MBA," says Ujvary, who chairs Master Butchers Co-Operative and is a director of Food South Australia.

Ujvary's wife, Helen, was another factor in his decision to do an MBA. She had begun an international technology innovation consultancy after working as an investment banker in London and urged her husband to join her doing an MBA.

"She kind of got me into it; I really didn't want to do more study. She said: 'I think it would be really romantic if we did an MBA together.'"



● >>> Matthew Walsh wanted to broaden his technical knowledge in areas such as leadership, management, negotiation and entrepreneurship.

Like Ujvary, Walsh has the same employer from before his MBA. But he has climbed a couple of management rungs, from relationship manager at

Bendigo and Adelaide Bank when he began his MBA in 2010, aged 32, to his current position as a senior manager, risk and assessment, in the bank's portfolio funding division.

Walsh was already a chartered accountant, but he was keen to broaden his technical knowledge in areas such as leadership, management, negotiation and entrepreneurship.

"In 2010, the GFC was in full swing and I was thinking about ways to improve my marketability and make myself a bit more recession proof," he says.

He believes the MBA delivered on that front, improving his problem-solving skills and self-awareness, and giving him a better understanding of how people work in groups and in different ways.

The highlight? Interviewing Bendigo and Adelaide Bank's then managing director Mike Hirst for a group assignment.

"It gave me a much broader view of what he did and how some of the MBA theory was put into practice," says Walsh, who completed his MBA in 2012, three weeks before the birth of his first child.



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Professor Nick Wailes.



LESSONS IN FLEXIBILITY

When it comes to school choice, the ability to work around busy schedules beats reputation.

WORDS RUTH CALLAGHAN

● >> Being able to fit MBA study around busy lives and work schedules has become more important for students than the reputation of a business school or university.

According to the student survey for the 2019 BOSS MBA Rankings, the mode of coursework delivery was the top consideration for 63 per cent of MBA students who graduated between 2016 and 2018, ahead of reputation of school (52 per cent) and reputation of university (51 per cent).

But while schools go to enormous effort to talk up the quality of their coursework, academy and student cohort, they are only more recently spruiking more flexible learning.

"People are getting busier and they have got competing commitments, so there's increasing demand for flexibility," says Professor Nick Wailes, the director of AGSM and deputy dean of the UNSW Business School. "One of the big decisions that people make when they consider an MBA is, 'Is it doable? Will it fit with my family commitments, my work commitments, and all those other things?'"

AGSM's online-only MBAX launched in 2014 and quickly became one of the world's top-ranked online MBAs (albeit a small group). Earlier this year, the UNSW Business School announced

the MBAX was enjoying 20 per cent year-on-year growth.

"It was really introduced to cater for people wanting flexibility as well as high-quality education, and the second reason was the desire to couple the breadth of an MBA with specialisations in areas," Wailes says. "It's our biggest program by far, with about 900 students enrolled at the moment. We take about 300 in each year. Some people finish it quickly, some take a bit longer."

AGSM has also rolled out different formats for its executive MBA, which starts with a residential module before giving students the option to mix face-to-face and online learning.

Despite the overall enrolment numbers, individual classes remain small. "When we do online courses, we tend to have groups of 20 to 25 with an individual facilitator," Wailes says. "If there's additional demand – a lot of people want to do digital innovation, for example – we add more streams. "We want to keep it small because in an MBA you learn as much from the people you are studying with as from the facilitators of the program."

University of Queensland MBA director Dr Nicole Hartley says the demand for flexibility is fuelled by the changing nature of students' work. "We've got people needing to be