

Wharton's New MBA Curriculum Frequently Asked Questions

On December 3, 2010, the Wharton faculty voted by an overwhelming majority to embrace a new vision for MBA education put forward by our MBA Review Committee (MBARC). This is a vision grounded in flexibility for our diverse student body, academic rigor, continuous innovation of course content, and a commitment to lifelong learning. [Click here for a summary of the enthusiastic response we have received in the media.](#)

This bold action continues a 129-year Wharton tradition of advancing business and society through education. It provides further momentum for the School's three strategic pillars of Innovation, Global Presence, and Social Impact. [Click here to view the Wharton School strategy video:](#)

But what does the new MBA curriculum mean for students? Your questions, and our answers, are below.

Can you describe the MBA Review Committee (MBARC) process and results?

In July 2009, Dean Robertson appointed eight senior faculty members to MBARC and charged them as follows:

- *To suggest improvements in the MBA curriculum content and structure that will produce a more rigorous, flexible, and innovative educational culture for both Wharton students and faculty – while enhancing the Wharton identity and brand*
- *To recommend mechanisms for continued innovation going forward*

Between July 2009 and December 2010, this committee solicited extensive input via course evaluations, surveys, focus groups, and interviews with faculty, students, alumni, staff, employers, and board members. In all, some 4,000 people were consulted. This process included numerous meetings with this year and last year's WGA and DGSAC leaders, student focus groups with cohort academic representatives (mainly in the 2009-2010 academic year), the design (in consultation with students) of a set of curriculum-related questions for the 2010 MBA Stakeholder Survey, and the analysis of over 1370 responses from this student survey. As a result of this investigation, MBARC concluded that Wharton's core curriculum structure should be changed. In addition, MBARC proposed a number of new co-curricular activities and initiatives for the MBA Program.

What are the specific features of the new MBA curriculum, and how does it compare to the current structure?

Here are the main elements:

1. The over-arching objectives of the curricular redesign are to give students greater flexibility in tailoring their coursework to their individual goals and to create mechanisms that will result in more frequent innovations in both the content and format of required courses. Specifically:
 - The required portion of the new MBA curriculum will consist of 9.0 CUs, 1 CU less than the current 10.0-CU core. This adds 1 CU of elective capacity to each student's program.
 - In six required Content Areas overseen by six different departments – Accounting, Finance, Legal Studies and Business Ethics, Management, Marketing, and Operations and Information Management – students will be offered at least two “pathways” by which they may complete the required coursework.
 - If they desire students may postpone certain required courses until Year Two – although they still must be mindful of course prerequisites for electives and majors.
 - Students will retain the option to waive most required classes in the new structure.
2. The graded portions of Managerial Economics and Statistics will increase from 0.5 CU to 1.0 CU for each course, and the first one-half of both courses will move from August of Year One to the fall semester. That is, subject to waivers, each student will be required to complete 1 CU of each of these courses in the fall term of Year One.
3. The required Communication class will double in scope from 0.25-CU to 0.5-CU and will encompass both oral and written communication. The course will continue to be taught in small groups.
4. All required courses will be periodically reviewed and updated by their respective academic departments. Although new courses – both required and elective – will continue to be reviewed and approved by the entire faculty, departments may move existing courses into and out of the required Content Areas without a vote of the entire faculty. Instead, a new committee, the Curriculum Innovation and Review Committee (CIRC), will review all proposals to change the required courses to ensure that the content is consistent with the MBARC principles of curriculum design. This committee will also review, on a rotating basis, all courses that are part of the Wharton required curriculum. Student representation on CIRC is a key feature of the implementation process for the new curriculum and program design.
5. The principles of the new curriculum design, as proposed by MBARC and approved by the faculty, are as follows:
 - **Rigorous:** The new curriculum design should create a *rigorous* educational culture that embodies, in appropriate ways, Wharton's emphasis on research.
 - **Innovative:** The new design should create robust incentives for *continuous innovation and curriculum accountability* within our decentralized governance structure.
 - **Flexible:** The new design should provide greater flexibility to exploit *Wharton's unique combination of program scale, faculty breadth, and student diversity*. Such a design should deliver a body of faculty-selected, essential business knowledge, free professors to teach more to their strengths, and give students increased opportunities to craft their own educational pathways.
 - **Brand-Strengthening:** The new design should enhance Wharton's *identity and brand*.

What does increased flexibility mean for the cohort system?

The new curriculum reduces the current model's year-long emphasis on cohorts but will maintain, and in some ways enhance, the academic and social importance of social units, including learning teams, cohorts and clusters, within the Wharton community. Students will be introduced to their cohorts and learning teams during the August Mini-Term (formerly known as Pre-Term) and will

participate in cohort-based activities. The simulation-based leadership course (MGMT 652) and the Learning Team Retreat will remain key elements of Mini-Term. Students will still take the required classes with their cohorts during the fall semester, and these courses are likely to include not only Statistics and Microeconomics but also certain courses in departmental Content Areas. The final number of cohort courses for the fall semester will be determined during the implementation process managed by the Curriculum Innovation and Review Committee. Cohort- and cluster-based activities that further enhance the student social experience will be conducted throughout the two years and will be planned in close coordination with student organizations and WGA leadership.

What about majors, and the ability to waive core courses?

Students will continue to be required to complete a major. Waivers by exam and credential will continue to be available, enabling students with backgrounds in specific core areas to expand elective coursework. Waiver policies will be set by the relevant departments consistent with the standards set by the Curriculum Innovation and Review Committee (CIRC).

When will the new curriculum go into effect?

The new curriculum will take effect for the class entering in fall 2012. We will, however, pilot select ideas that came out of MBARC discussions. For example, we have been experimenting with shorter, more intensive “modular” courses that are being delivered on campus and at several international locations over the winter and spring breaks.

What other co-curricular innovations have been proposed as a result of MBARC?

Some proposals that will be considered are:

1. *Additional administrative support to cohorts and clusters.* It is anticipated that the enhanced curricular flexibility will create increased demand for student advising. The MBA Program Office plans to increase advising capacity to keep pace with this need. Student input on these potential new services will be sought and considered.
2. *Feedback and Coaching Network.* MBARC and the Wharton Leadership Program envision a system throughout the two-year experience that will enable students to: a) collect extensive feedback from peers across a broad range of competencies (in settings including coursework, co-curricular programs, and clubs, conferences, and special events); b) analyze and compare these data across time and multiple team experiences; and c) create personalized development plans and track performance through an executive coaching relationship. Student Leadership Fellows will play a key role in the testing and implementation of this system.
3. *Modular courses.* We will continue to experiment with shorter modular courses. This will encourage course innovation, increase course options for students, and offer additional opportunities for students and faculty to gain global knowledge and experience. Current options include existing core classes being offered on campus (ACCT 622), several new courses at our Philadelphia and San Francisco campuses, and modular courses in Brazil, China, India, Israel, South Africa, and the United Kingdom. We welcome student input on how to offer a stronger and greater variety of course formats.

4. *August Mini-Term.* With Managerial Economics and Statistics now taking place in the fall term, we will re-evaluate the length and content of the Mini-Term period. We will closely consult with students as part of this reevaluation process.

Can you clarify the lifelong learning opportunity?

A novel part of the new curriculum is Wharton's commitment to lifelong learning for our MBA graduates. Initially, we have launched the program for MBA alumni graduating in 2010 and beyond. We are studying ways to extend a version of the program to all of our 86,000 alumni.

For the classes of 2010 and beyond the commitment is a specialized, tuition-free executive education experience once every 7 years beginning 7 years after graduation. Courses eligible under this program include our 30 open enrollment courses, which are usually 4 or 5 days in length. Participants will be asked to pay for room and board only. In other words, during every 7-year window after graduation, our alumni can take one tuition-free course. For example, WG'11 alums can take one course any time between 2018 and 2025 and another course any time between 2025 and 2032. The program excludes our 5-week Advanced Management Program and our 2-week Executive Development Program, both of which are general surveys of business topics rather than specialized programs on a single area of content.

We recognize that we may also design new programs, perhaps exclusively for alumni, and we recognize that in the future, more of our programs may involve an element of distance learning – but this has yet to be determined. In the meantime, we provide, or will soon provide, other lifelong learning opportunities for our graduates:

- MBA alumni may audit MBA courses with permission of the instructor.
- Knowledge@Wharton – now in its 11th year – is a free, ongoing source of up-to-date business knowledge and ideas. We encourage you to subscribe.
- Each year we offer Global Alumni Forums focused on the latest knowledge. In 2010 we held 2-day forums in Seoul and Madrid.
- We are considering the launch of a Wharton Digital Press to publish books of interest to alumni and other business executives.
- We will be putting more course content on our website, as we have done with the Advanced Seminar on Private Equity. [Click here to view.](#)
- We will offer more experiences such as the Wharton Entrepreneurs Workshop, which is being offered at our San Francisco campus. [The first session, with Rob Coneybeer, WG'96, Co-founder and General Partner of Shasta Ventures can be seen by clicking here.](#)

How will the new curriculum benefit MBA Career Management?

A curriculum more aligned with the needs of the global marketplace is a win for Wharton. Employers were consulted and surveyed in the design process and they told us how important it was to maintain Wharton's unique strength in analytical thinking while augmenting our prominence in leadership and communications. In this way, the new curriculum design gives our students a distinct competitive advantage with employers.

Increased curricular flexibility allows students the chance to better combine their academic studies with their individual career aspirations. Whether students want more breadth or more depth, they now have a greater degree of choice among Wharton courses and courses at other Penn schools. This emphasis on individual needs will benefit their summer and full-time searches.

Finally, the emphasis on feedback and coaching will be helpful to students both academically and with regard to their short- and long-term career goals. This not only makes students better prepared for their own career paths, but also more valuable to employers.

What happens next?

The approved MBA curriculum is an architecture rather than a set of new courses. This semester we will be appointing the Curriculum Innovation and Review Committee (CIRC) to oversee implementation. This committee will include faculty, students and staff. As noted above we will seek further student input as specific implementation questions arise, including how to maximize learning and classroom engagement.

How will current students be involved in implementation?

We need and want your opinions and thoughtful guidance as we implement the curricular and co-curricular aspects of this new design. In addition to CIRC and the WGA, there are many avenues through which you can provide this feedback to us. Members of the MBA administration will be seeking your counsel through various advisory groups that already exist and that will be transitioning to include first year representation. You will also have opportunities to share your thoughts with administrators at a number of small group lunches that we will be publicizing soon. Further, most MBA administrators have office hours and are open to discussing these important issues with you. Please take some time to craft your thoughts into actionable items that we can consider through our 18-month implementation process. We have relied on student input throughout this process and we want to continue in that vein.

Further, we need you to understand the goals and details of these changes so that you can continue to be the strong ambassadors for the program that you always have been. Whether at Welcome Weekend, at your internship, or in conversation with an old college friend, we want you to be able to convey the whole story of the Wharton MBA Program.

We trust that you will be proud to have been an integral part of this important next step for the Wharton School.