

Harvard Business School Executive Education

“Smart ways to get Harvard Business School on your CV”

BBC capital

<http://www.bbc.com/capital/story/20160725-smart-ways-to-get-harvard-on-your-cv>

By Alina Dizik

27 July 2016

When tennis ace [Maria Sharapova was hit with a two-year suspension by the International Tennis Federation](#), after failing a drugs test at the Australian Open, the star athlete made a surprising career move: signing up for Harvard Business School.

Not sure how this happened but Hey Harvard! Can't wait to start the program!

It was a bolt from the blue. Not least, it seemed, to Sharapova herself. “Not sure how this happened but Hey Harvard! Can't wait to start the program!” she tweeted in June to her 3.38 million Twitter fans.

Other A-listers — including rapper LL Cool J and actor Channing Tatum — have also followed academic ambitions, accepting positions to study at some of the best universities in the world. But what they're omitting from their Twitter statuses is that these courses aren't quite the same as getting the traditional MBA (Harvard accepts only about 12 out of every 100 people who apply).

It's not the same rigour as getting an MBA from an elite school

Further, the courses attended by A-listers may only last for a couple of weeks. Indeed, Sharapova's Global Strategic Management course was just a week-long programme. So, why bother?



Former world number one female tennis player, Maria Sharapova (Credit: Alamy)

Top business schools, including Harvard, have long attracted business people who want to further develop their skills, build their network and hone a competitive edge. But unlike degree programmes — where admission rates can be as tough as just 7% of applicants and require near-perfect GPAs (Grade Point Averages) and test scores — many of the executive education programmes have few academic admission requirements.

Interested? You'll still need several years of appropriate work experience and deep pockets, but time is on your side as candidates are admitted on a rolling basis. And, as many of the top business schools including Stanford and Columbia University plus London Business School and IESE in Barcelona, Spain, have similar offerings, you can choose a course that fits with your location and work schedule, not just your career aspirations.



Harvard Business School (Credit: Alamy)

“It’s not the same rigour as getting an MBA from an elite school,” said Columbia University’s associate dean of executive education Michael Malefakis. “We do a serious review of who is coming to our courses — they need a good executive track record — but it’s less about the academic preparation.”

It’s less about the academic preparation

An unbeatable network, for a price

At Harvard, courses cost anywhere from \$4,500 for a three-day programme to \$80,000 for eight weeks and they are taught by professors who lecture on the school’s degree programmes. (Often, specialised programmes take places in other countries.)

For those who can afford to splurge — or are lucky enough to be sponsored by their employers — forming a network is part of the draw.

This was the case for Jon Hussey, 38 who attended a leadership programme at Harvard earlier this year, geared towards executives in academia and paid for by his employer, George Washington University in Washington DC. Hussey still keeps in touch with a handful of his classmates and is part of a LinkedIn group of Harvard executive education alumni, which he hopes will one day be helpful should he decide to switch jobs, he said. “I’m not kidding myself,” he said. “I’m not going to tell anyone I went to Harvard, but I did learn from Harvard professors.”

I’m not going to tell anyone I went to Harvard, but I did learn from Harvard professors

For business schools, executive education programmes have long been lucrative. Many take up fewer resources than degree programmes. Some executive education courses take place off campus and universities may tailor offerings specifically for company employees. At Harvard Business School, executive education revenue made up \$168 million out of \$707 million total revenue in 2015, according to the [University’s financial report](#).

Classes can feel like more of a conference environment than being back at university. Those who attend often spend the day in one classroom where professors come in to teach individual sessions. Group work is assigned throughout the day and will often involve studying and discussing business cases.



US rap musician, LL Cool J attended a Harvard University course (Credit: Alamy/Jeffrey Mayer)

When Hussey attended his four-day programme at Harvard, the 40-person class lived in the dormitories with roommates and ate breakfast in the dining hall. In the evening, dinners took more of a fine dining approach along with a formal dinner at the former Harvard’s president’s home.

The pseudo MBA

Those who commit to longer courses known as advanced management programmes (AMPs) can have an experience that more closely mimics the MBA degree, with the opportunity to develop

closer friendships and almost full access to university alumni minus the rigorous admissions process. Alumni of the longer Harvard programme includes Australian foreign minister Julie Bishop and Ratan Tata, former chairman of India's Tata Sons, holding company of the Tata Group.

At Harvard, participants live on campus for eight weeks, during which time they review more than 130 business cases and have full days of classes six days per week. Participants live in 'pods' of nine people where each get a bedroom with ensuite bathroom but share a kitchen and living area, said Harvard Business School's Ranjay Gulati. After the end of class, participants typically spend an additional three hours on team projects, which helps build their network further.

For longer programmes, access to a school's alumni and invites to networking events is similar to those who've completed full MBAs. At Columbia University in New York those who participate in at least 18 days of non-degree programmes get a Columbia alumni email address, invites to global meetups and access to the alumni directory, said Malefakis. Harvard offers similar perks.

But it's not just budding titans of industry to whom these courses appeal. In the last decade or so, the profile of who attends executive education programmes has changed to encompass professionals without a traditional corporate background, say course administrators.

For example, four years ago, IESE in Barcelona started offering an Advanced Management Program in Media and Entertainment, which takes place over five four-day modules in New York, Los Angeles and Barcelona over a 10 month period. Many of the participants come from new media start-ups or entertainment firms and are looking to learn classic "business chops", said Idunn Jonsdottir, a managing director of executive education at the Barcelona-based IESE Business School. "These people are self-made and they have not been able to build up that kind of foundation," said Jonsdottir.

Is it worth it?

While executive education courses can help you succeed in your current role, they may not be worth the cost for job hunters, say career experts. Those looking for a new position may not want to splurge on courses with a name brand, because it's possible to fill in gaps in knowledge through professional associations or other types of training programmes in non-academic settings, said Paul McDonald, senior executive director at Robert Half International, a human resource consulting firm. "If you are looking at a certificate, it's a nice to have, but not weighted very high," he said. On the other hand, a two-year MBA degree from an elite school can be a true attention getter, he added.

This is a step above going to a conference, this is concrete learning and I see the merit in it

Students say the learning can be addictive. In November, Hussey is hoping to attend a behavioural economics course at the Yale School of Management, and plans to pay \$6,850 for the three-day course out of his own pocket. The costs outweigh the price for Hussey who said the courses give him a global perspective. "This is a step above going to a conference, this is concrete learning and I see the merit in it," he said.



Channing Tatum stars in '22 Jump Street' (Credit: Columbia Pictures/Entertainment Pictures)

The bottom line is: Don't commit to a course based on the brand name alone, said McDonald. Ask questions about the professors, size of the class, specific topics covered and understand the networking opportunities available at the end.

Additionally, it's important to weigh the type of knowledge that's covered in the course against your own professional gaps. "You can get star struck by a brochure or PDF, but if you don't dig into it, you may be spending a lot of money but walk away and be dissatisfied," he said.