

MBA or Specialized Master's Degree

What are the differences?¹

There are several key differences between an MBA and M.S. degree. The one you choose depends on your career goals, experience, finances and more.

Focus

- MBA programmes are more all-encompassing. They are meant for students looking to gain functional knowledge across all aspects of business.
- A specialized master's programme is exactly that — it focuses on a specific area of business and provides a deep and precise knowledge of that subject.

Programme

- The programmes can differ in length and requirements. MBA students often enter business school after a few years of experience in the workforce. They're looking to take their career to the next level, and will have to spend an average of two years to earn their business degree.
- M.S. programmes can be shorter, sometimes just one year, and usually accept students with little work experience. M.S. programmes provide an accelerated way to gain the depth of knowledge required to secure a position within the specialization.

Cost

- An MBA can cost more to attain, but it can also provide a higher ROI. Companies will pay top dollar for an experienced professional who carries a broad range of business knowledge — base salaries can be more than \$60,000 higher for MBA graduates at some consulting firms, for example.
- While a specialized master's programme also provides great returns, it is often a more affordable route to career success.

Goals

- If your career track requires an overall business knowledge, you'll want an MBA.
- If you are certain of your job interest and would like to become an expert in that particular field, a specialized degree could be your best bet.

MBA Vs Masters: Which Should You Choose?²

In the fall of 2018, King's Business School opened at a brand-new, dedicated site at Bush House in central London. Emerging from King's College London's School of Management and Business, the revamped business school hosts 2000 students, from 80 countries, who are taught by over 100 academic staff.

King's offers a wide array of under-graduate, post-graduate, and executive education programs. But, trawling through the glossy pages of the school's brochures, there's one glaring omission: there's no MBA program in sight.

¹ MBA or Specialized Master's Degree: Which One is Best for You?

https://community.mbaworld.com/looking_to_do_an_mba/b/thinking-about-doing-an-mba/posts/mba-or-specialized-master-s-degree-which-one-is-best-for-you August 2, 2017

² Written by [Marco De Novellis](#) 18 Jun 2018 <https://www.businessbecause.com/admissions/5335/mba-vs-masters>



Stephen Bach is dean at King's Business School, which doesn't offer a flagship MBA program

.Instead, King's offers specialized masters degrees—shorter, more affordable, more concentrated post-graduate management courses. King's is launching new master's in digital marketing and entrepreneurship and innovation this year. It offers a Masters in International Management as the closest alternative to a traditional MBA.

The school's dean, Stephen Bach, says the decision was taken in response to employer demand. "The MBA market is changing," Stephen explains.

"Employers and students tell us that the appetite for MBAs has softened, hiring trends are moving towards earlier career graduates with strong analytical and inter-personal skills, an entrepreneurial mindset, and a well-developed sense of personal responsibility and resilience."

MBA vs. Specialized Master's Degree Programs³

London Business School recently launched a Master's in Financial Analysis (MFA) program for students with little or no work experience. This program is another addition to a growing number of specialized master's degree programs launched by business schools in recent years.

Specialized master's degree programs are designed for students who wish to enter in a particular business field only, for example, a master's degree in accounting, marketing, finance, data analytics and numerous other fields.

Some of the leading specialized master's degree programs offered by business schools are:

- London Business School – Master in Finance
- Columbia Business School – Master in Marketing Science
- The University of Pennsylvania – Master in Accounting
- MIT Sloan – Master of Business Analytics
- Bocconi – Master in Green Management, Energy, and Corporate Social Responsibility

ADVANTAGES OF SPECIALIZED MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAM

Master's degree program gives you a "deeper dive" into a subject and at a lower cost than an MBA. If you are clear that you want to build a career in a particular field, these courses can be more suitable for you.

Many of the master's degree programs can be completed in 12 months than a two-year MBA. A major attraction of specialized master's degree program is that they can be completed straight after an undergraduate degree. This is unlike an MBA, which requires at least two years of work experience and necessitating a career break.

³ Gmat club 07 Aug 2015 <https://gmatclub.com/forum/mba-vs-specialized-master-s-degree-programs-244608.html>

MBA v Specialized Masters Program Comparison		
	MBA Programs	Specialized Masters Programs
Program Types	Part-Time MBA (Fast and Flex Tracks) Online MBA Executive MBA	Master of Accountancy (MAC) Master of Science in Finance (MSF)
Class Schedule	Part-time MBA: Weeknight classes EMBA: Weekend classes (Fridays and Saturdays)	MAC: Fall and Spring semesters are part-time distance learning. Two classes in the Fall and 2 classes in the spring. Summer semester is full time, consisting of 6 courses, in person weekday classes 4 days a week 9:00 a.m.- 4:00 p.m. MSF: Full-time, in-person, weekday classes Monday- Thursday. The program begins in the summer (June) with students graduating the following May.
Curriculum	A professional degree that focuses on developing functional business skills such as accounting, finance and marketing, etc. and then applying these skills in business applications	Specialized degree with coursework that is isolated to the particular area of study you choose
Required Work Experience	Yes	No
Standardized Testing Required	Varies by program	GMAT or GRE required for MSF
Which Program to choose (Career Objectives)	If your interested in moving up within the management ranks in an organization or looking to make a career change to a new industry. Also, an MBA is valuable to those how have an undergraduate degree in another discipline and are looking to learn the fundamental business skills	If you're interested in gaining deeper knowledge of a specific discipline and become a specialist. Also, if you are just graduating with your undergraduate degree, a specialized masters may be a better fit

Image: Villanova University, "MBA vs Specialized Masters"

<https://www1.villanova.edu/villanova/business/graduate/specializedprograms/msf/compareprograms/mbavsspecializedmasters.html>

In the US, many of the master's degree programs can be classified as Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) qualifications. Courses with this classification can offer non-US students an additional 24 months on their visas to remain in the country.

Economic and political uncertainties and increased competition have caused greater demand among employers for "well-rounded" employees who have deep knowledge of a particular field. Specialized master's degree programs provide students an intellectual maturity and independence to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

For a country like China and India, where students face intense competition in the job market, having a specialized master's degree offered by schools in the US and in Europe give them a great advantage over their peers.

APPLICATION TRENDS

According to GMAC's 2016 Application Trends Survey Report, Master in Finance continues to be the most popular specialized master's degree program. For the second year in a row, a majority of the Master in Finance programs reported growing application volumes.

Top schools providing specialized master's degree program are helped by a rise in applications from emerging markets, particularly India and China. In 2016, about 50 percent of all international students in the Financial Times' ranking of global master's in finance programs is from China.

One of the newest programs in the master's degree space – Master in Business Analytics – has seen growing demand in recent years. As per the GMAC report, more than 90% of the schools offering business analytics program reported growing application volume.

From the students' blogs ⁴:

Anonymous, August 30, 2018 8:05 AM:

I had the option of getting an MBA (top 20), but I opted for the specialist route (Business/Data Analytics). MBAs are becoming quite expensive nowadays, whereas specialized degrees are cheaper and are a shorter duration. In addition, if you are a specialist, it is harder for a company to replace you, whereas MBAs are pretty much a dime a dozen. Not everyone knows a combination of databases, python/R, and statistics, along with Tableau/Cognos BI. Specialist masters may start out with a lower salary initially, but you can easily surpass the 100K mark within 3-5 years.

ICALLBS, August 31, 2018 12:17 AM:

MBAs from a top 15 school are far from "dime a dozen". In addition, you're talking about passing the 100k mark within 3-5 years after a specialized program. MBAs from a Top 15/20 program will START OUT at 140k-175k, looking at ~200k-250k 3-5 years out.

You're a data guy, would you rather have minimal student loan debt and make 100k or significant (100k-200k) loan debt and make 200k? Here's an idea, you can save the additional 100k every year (obviously it will be less because of taxes, but for argument

⁴ "MBA Apps Take A Shocking Plunge" by: John A. Byrne on August 29, 2018 Poets&Quants <https://poetsandquants.com/2018/08/29/mba-apps-take-a-shocking-plunge/>

purposes) and put it towards your loan and pay it off within 3 years. And now, you're making 100k more than you would if you did a specialized program. When people talk about cost, it seems like a BS reason. Most MBAs are making in the 60-90k range pre-mba and most either double or triple their income post MBA. The student loan payment (which can very easily be paid off within 7 years, if you plan) more than easily justified getting paid 100k more per year than you did pre mba.

Lastly, no offense but there are SOOOO many people who know all of the things you mentioned (Tableau, Stats, R, etc..). Not really that specialized man.

Adaris Milan, September 2, 2018 1:17 PM:

If starting salaries are the only metric we will discuss, non-MBA's win that battle easily - in the short-run at least.

Long-run, you are on the money.

Nevertheless, computer science, data science, analytics, and project management graduates make as much as, or more than, most MBA graduates.

I know first-year CS grads topping the \$150K mark (they're at Google, Microsoft and Amazon).

They're barely 21 years old and still have pimples on their faces. Some don't even have their driver's licenses yet. But tech salaries don't increase by much.

CS jobs are really the blue-collar jobs of the future. They will be to our economy what the auto, steel and mining jobs were from the 1940's until the 1980's.

FXTrader33, September 3, 2018 1:11 AM

"Nevertheless, computer science, data science, analytics, and project management graduates make as much as, or more than, most MBA graduates."

I think you're comparing apples to oranges. People from mediocre schools (whether MBA or CS) get the Joe Schmo 40k - 60k jobs. At the elite schools (whether it's CS or MBA) people get the elite jobs.

Adaris Milan, September 23, 2018 6:52 PM:

Which category does Northeastern fall under? I know a class full of CS graduates all making the same 6-figure salaries as people from Michigan, Washington, Stanford, Berkeley, and MIT. (all top-10 CS schools).

MBA graduate salaries from second tier B-schools might be lower than those of grads from top-30 schools, but CS is like medical school: it doesn't matter which school you go to.

If you can knock it out of the park during your codewalks and other interview tests you're in!