

THE MBA YOUR WAY

ALEXANDRA SKINNER SPEAKS TO DR. NORM O'REILLY,
DEAN OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MAINE

Q. Your MBA offering has enjoyed tremendous success in a relatively short period of time. To what do you attribute this success?

A. Meeting high calibre business students where they are (literally and academically) with an exceptionally high calibre faculty and high-touch MBA program. The MaineMBA, which resulted from a merger of the University of Maine (a top-tier public research R1 Carnegie Classification) and the University of Southern Maine's programs to create an AACSB accredited MBA program, has been met with high-level interest from students in Maine, across the United States and globally. I attribute the success to three key factors. First, our faculty. We have world-class professors from six continents who have that rare balance of teaching with a passion for student connection while also leading in cutting-edge research and scholarship. Second, our curriculum is a STEM-based MBA program with a challenging analytical core and 12 concentrations - or specializations - that students can choose from to customize their MBA. Finally, like many MBA programs today, we are fully flexible in our offerings and meet students online and with flexible scheduling. The MaineMBA offers every possible option - with courses available in 8-week intensive formats from wherever you are, synchronous, asynchronous and hybrid. We offer an array of student choice. Our students, especially our many full-time executives love the fact they can control their MBA sequence to balance their demanding schedules.

Q. The MaineMBA is offered on-campus and online; are the programmes identical in terms of curriculum, electives, pace, and pricing?

A. Yes. We are very proud of the fact that the MaineMBA can be taken online or in-person, and from Maine, from across the



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United States or from anywhere in the world at the same price, with the same professors, and with the same course options. We like to say “it is the MBA your way.” We know that our professors, and access to them, is a big asset as compared with programs that may rely on teaching or research assistants, for example.

Q. Have you experienced a surge in demand for your online MBA given the uptick in remote working courtesy of the pandemic?

A. Yes. Interest in the MaineMBA grew considerably during COVID but is continuing post-COVID.

Q. Faculty from the University of Maine and the University of Southern Maine work together on the MaineMBA. Can you unpack how this works and what this means for your students?

A. This is one of the strengths of our program and MBA offering as we draw talented faculty from two historically strong business schools from two cities with deep, proven expertise. The student experience

is seamless. You come for the MaineMBA and get access to the best faculty for the best courses. The online format along with the few in-person offerings mean that we can draw from two business school faculties who have different areas of specialization. We dramatically diversified our concentrations and courses with this model. Our students have more options, concentrations and the best professors possible.

Q. In regards to your on-campus MBA offering, class sizes are kept small; is this designed to safeguard quality, and is this approach reflected online?

A. Our ratio of student to faculty is a key strength. Our professors really know their students and create a sense of community in-person and online. This is a challenge and growth opportunity for all - to build community when teaching and learning online from across the globe. I think we are doing really well in this area. Students are connecting through various modalities, and tell us they are getting what they want and need. The in-person experience has far fewer students and



this is largely a function of demand. Interest in our online and hybrid offerings is much higher than for in-person learning. But in every case, our teacher-student connection is strong and we continue to invent new ways to succeed in remote learning.

Q. To meet the needs of today's VUCA business environment, MBA specializations are growing. Can you expand upon the specializations you offer at Maine and the thinking behind them?

A. A volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world is definitely what students are preparing for. We have prioritized interdisciplinary offerings of joint degrees and MBA specializations. The thinking behind our 12 MBA concentrations is to build where we have exceptional leadership and subject matter expertise as well as to create outside of the box. We factor in two key things when deciding up creating our concentrations. The first is our faculty strength, whether from the two business schools or one of our partner institutions (e.g., Maine Law, Muskie School of Public Service) or an industry leader, that

allows us to offer quality courses. The second is the market and industry need, which has led us to offer concentrations such as outdoor industry management, business analytics, sustainability, engineering management, and new ones such our emerging work in the blue economy and healthcare.

Q. Your MBA offering is one of the most competitively priced in the market; what does this mean in terms of accessibility?

A. For us, our 'sweet spot' is very high quality at a very reasonable price. Our MBA is ranked by Fortune, and US News, yet we are priced at a fair and reasonable \$650/credit hour. We draw from over 30 states and 15 countries, we are above the national average in terms of female-to-male ratios and attract a more diverse cohort of students each year. Recently, thanks to the Harold Alfond Foundation, we are bringing in 2 fully-funded MBA students each year from under-represented populations as Alfond Ambassadors.

Q. Can you walk our readers through the admissions process in respect of requirements, timing, and tips?

A. We recognize that our graduate learners are juggling multiple obligations and competing priorities. This is why we offer rolling admissions and flexible programs with six entry points throughout the year. Our dedicated graduate student advisor offers a highly personal admissions process that sets the tone for the entire MBA experience.

Q. What do the next 12 months hold for the MaineMBA?

A. Transformation. The MaineMBA is poised for an exciting time. The Graduate School of Business is now fully staffed and we're moving into a new state-of-the art building in downtown Portland. Our new location is prepared for the technology of online learning as well as being in the heart of the business district in Maine's largest and most dynamic city. We are building out interdisciplinary partnerships with University of Maine Law School, University of Maine's world-renowned College of Engineering, and the University of Southern Maine's Muskie School of Public Service. In addition, we are working where Maine leads in areas such as climate, agriculture and emerging technologies. We will expand our interdisciplinary options and are planning joint and dual degrees, beyond our joint degree/MBA to further our graduate business offerings to the world.



BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Norm O'Reilly, MA, MBA, Ph.D., CPA is Dean of the University of Maine's Graduate School of Business. Dr O'Reilly has expertise in a range of business topics, including analytics, marketing, sponsorship, social media, sport finance, social marketing, physical activity and management education. He has authored or co-authored 16 books, 14 case studies in the Harvard/Stanford series, and more than 145 peer-reviewed journal articles.

