

How GMAT can help you decide if the MBA is right for you

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An MBA remains one of the most sought-after and effective business degrees on the market. According to the [Graduate Management Admission Council \(GMAC\)](#), which issues regular [research reports](#) on how graduates from business schools rate their experience during and after their studies, the vast majority of graduates report personal, professional, and financial rewards gained because of their business education. They say they are prepared for leadership positions, have advanced more quickly in their careers, and increased their earnings since graduating from business school.

Moreover, according to GMAC's [2017 Alumni Perspectives Survey Report](#), at least nine in 10 alumni (92%) would pursue a graduate business degree all over again knowing what they know now, and would recommend graduate management education to a friend or colleague because of the multiple benefits they have reaped from the experience.

The MBA definitely still has huge street cred, says Dr Ailsa Stewart-Smith, who lectures on the UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB) [GMAT Prep Course](#), an intensive five-day short course that provides a thorough overview of what to expect in the GMAT exam. The GMAT is widely used as a key assessment tool for admission to most of the world's top MBA programmes.

"Some say an MBA no longer carries that much weight, because so many people have the qualification. But the content prepares you to have a broad-based understanding of how businesses work, which is always relevant. However, the MBA is not a talisman. If you want to make your MBA count, it has to fit in with what you plan to do with it in your career."

Stewart-Smith adds that the GMAT itself can be used as a useful litmus test as to whether or not the degree is right for you.

"GMAT in itself is extremely time consuming and rigorous – just like the degree it pre-figures. It will help you to understand the MBA curriculum from the inside out and not just see the degree as a badge to be obtained."

The Association of MBAs (AMBA) points out on its website, that if MBA candidates find it hard to stay committed and find themselves buckling under the pressure of the GMAT or realise they are only going about it half-heartedly, that is probably an indication that they are about to flush a lot of their time and money down the drain. Stewart-Smith agrees with this assessment.

"If the MBA curriculum is not going to offer you learning content coverage that is relevant to where you are now in your career, then maybe this is not the time to do it," says Stewart-Smith. "However, it might well be appropriate in five years' time. For example, if you are after specialist progression as an accountant, for instance, you may be better off doing a more specific finance course instead," she says.

GSB GMAT Prep Course convenor Trevor Wegner says business schools - rightly - take factors other than GMAT scores into account in evaluating MBA applications, so high scores don't guarantee admission. However, the skills that GMAT teaches such as how to think clearly, objectively and rigorously, how to deal with people effectively and how to make decisions can help prepare candidates for what lies ahead. They are also skills that stay with you for life.

"The process that you go through in preparing for the GMAT test is what you carry over into the MBA programme, and into your work and personal environment at a later stage. So you need to approach the GMAT with the idea that you are developing important life skills, not just preparing for a test.

According to the [GMAC](#), so-called soft skills account for three of the top five skills that business school alumni use every day on the job. These include interpersonal skills, conscientiousness, and the combined skills of learning, motivation, and

leadership.

“The GMAT is definitely a useful tool for self-evaluation, and can be a good indicator of whether or not you are in fact ready for an MBA at this stage of your career,” says Wegner.

The GSB GMAT Prep course runs in Johannesburg and Cape Town in June, July and September this year. For more information visit www.gsb.uct.ac.za/ee-gmat-prep.

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