

Contact: Rachel Boon

**REQUEST FOR NEW PROGRAM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA: MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (ONLINE)**

**Action Requested:** Consider approval of the request by the University of Northern Iowa for a Master of Business Administration (online) in the Wilson College of Business.

The Council of Provosts and Board office support approval of this program.

**Description of proposed program.** The Master of Business Administration (MBA) program already exists at UNI as a residential program and through two off-campus locations (Shanghai, China and Pella, Iowa). This proposal is to begin offering an online version of the program.

The UNI MBA program is designed for working professionals who are looking to expand their leadership, communication, critical thinking and management skills. These enhanced skills elevate the work of degree holders in their current positions but also opens opportunities for career advancement. The existing residential program offers a modular curriculum structure that allows students the flexibility to pursue their MBA either full-time or part-time, as well as rolling admission opportunities to allow flexibility in their program start and completion dates.

By adding an online offering with the same modular curriculum, UNI will serve a wider geographic audience; specifically, working professionals throughout Iowa and beyond who could not be a part of the residential program due to geographic location or other needs. The additional delivery mode also responds to increasing demand for more flexible delivery modes in graduate education.

**Academic objectives.** Through the UNI MBA, learners will achieve the learning objectives below; each learning objective is also subdivided into specific competencies (not provided for brevity).

Learning Objective 1: Professional Knowledge and Skills Graduates will demonstrate knowledge of current business practices and management techniques necessary to be effective in managing and leading the day-to-day operations of the organization, as well as scanning the business environment and strategically planning for the future.

Learning Objective 2: Critical Thinking Skills Graduates will demonstrate the critical thinking skills to address complex business issues, gather information, identify and evaluate a range of options, and make ethical, thoughtful choices among the alternatives.

Learning Objective 3: Problem Solving Skills Graduates will demonstrate the ability to use appropriate quantitative and qualitative tools and concepts throughout the problem-solving process showing an appreciation for the interrelationships among the various business functions.

Learning Objective 4: Teamwork Skills Graduates will demonstrate the ability to effectively participate as team members, facilitate group processes, and manage team projects.

Learning Objective 5: Communication Skills Graduates will demonstrate the professional communication skills necessary for effective management.

**Need for program.** The UNI Graduate College, through Strategic Planning and ad hoc committees, identified a strong need for additional online graduate programs at UNI. For example,

the 2023 Graduate Student Recruitment Report (RNL & PLEXUSS, 2022) finds that an increasing share of prospective graduate students intend to pursue online programs relative to in-person programs. While cost remains the top factor for graduate student enrollment decisions, flexible course options (online, evening, weekend, etc.) followed closely in importance. This data suggests the need for institutions, including UNI, to embrace online education if they want to maintain or attract graduate students. Over the last few years, we have experienced an increasing number of requests for our program to be delivered entirely online. UNI alumni, in particular, value the coursework, experiences, and relationships they developed during their undergraduate program in the Wilson College of Business. Enrollment in the residential MBA program is not feasible for many of these students, who are placebound (e.g., outside the Cedar Valley) due to work or family commitments. Providing an online modality will allow students located throughout Iowa (and beyond) to earn their MBA at UNI.

Relationship to existing programs at the institution. An online program will not duplicate the existing model, rather it will increase student success by providing a pathway to completion for students who cannot be part of the residential model due to geographic location or other needs. The residential and online programs will have a degree of interchangeability ensuring that all students who begin either modality will be able to finish the program and attain their MBA degree.

Relationship to existing programs at other colleges and universities. There are MBA programs offered by a number of other public and private universities in Iowa. The University of Iowa and Iowa State University both offer programs, and when contacted regarding this new modality for the UNI program, offered their support.

Resources to establish a high-quality program. The Wilson College of Business currently has the personnel, facilities and equipment to support the added delivery mode; no additional facilities or equipment is required as the platforms already exist at UNI. As enrollment in the program increases over time, additional faculty resources may be necessary.

Student demand. The MBA program has consistently received requests for an online delivery model. By moving the current curriculum to an online delivery, the program will serve a wider geographic audience and meet the needs of a new student population. The modular curriculum structure also allows potential students the flexibility to pursue their MBA either full-time or part-time.

Workforce need/demand. According to the Iowa Workforce Needs Assessment, Iowa employers have a need for employees with strong written communication, critical thinking and oral communication skills. Critical thinking and professional communication (both written and oral) are core learning outcomes of the MBA program (see 1b). The existing program generates degree holders who possess the skills to be successful in the workforce and to seek advancement opportunities. By offering an online option, UNI will expand the opportunity for working professionals in Iowa to enhance these skills and seek advancement opportunities.

Nationally, MBA programs have observed a decline in applications (Graduate Management Admission Council, 2022). Surveys of prospective graduate students indicate a growing percentage of prospective students are seeking online programs while a declining percentage intend to seek classroom (in-person) programs (RNL & PLEXUSS, 2022).

Funding and Cost. The online courses will run through the Office of Distance Education at UNI and are supported by student tuition. As noted above, the faculty and facility resources needed to offer this program are already available at UNI through its residential MBA program and existing learning management platform.

Projected student enrollment.

Graduate	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5
Majors	35	40	45	50	50

Accreditation. As a master's degree offered by the Wilson College of Business, the MBA is already part of Wilson College's AACSB accreditation.

Date of implementation. June 2024.