

# The Herald

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## The 24/7 MBA: study by day, work by night

■ Getting an MBA while working full-time is a brutal balancing act. But as the degree becomes a must for future managers, the sacrifice is worth it — if you're ready for the scheduling squeeze.

BY SETH LEWIS  
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When I began an MBA program at Barry University last fall, I knew it would throw my life out of whack.

What I didn't expect was how this balancing act would become a communal affair, affecting everyone around me, in ways striking and subtle.

My wife, Tiffany, has learned to make breakfast our "dinner," since it's the only time we eat together. My 2-year-old son, Jackson, pretends to take tests on days when I have exams, and always awards himself an "A-plus." At The Herald, where I'm an editor in the sports department, my co-workers can't understand why I'd rather read The Wall Street Journal than watch SportsCenter, or why my desk is littered with textbooks.

As for my scrambled schedule, most days go something like this: Wake up at 8:30 a.m., squeeze in time with my wife and two sons, leave for school by 11 a.m., study until 4:30 p.m., start work at 5 p.m., finish at 1 a.m., crash into bed at 2:30 a.m., and start the process all over again. On the weekends, I have class on Saturdays.

Sounds like scheduling suicide, but the sacrifice is worth it. The MBA is worth it. My father is stuck in a job he doesn't love because those three letters are missing from his résumé.

But beyond its promise of pay raises and promotions, an MBA has common-sense appeal. For me, as a journalist, the degree is like all-weather tires — good to have anytime and anywhere, regardless of where I go.

And in business, as more than 100,000 MBAs are awarded each year, the degree has become a must-have.

"It used to be a prerequisite, and now it's a requirement for management-level positions," said Ania Green, assistant dean of the University of Miami's graduate business program.

Accordingly, no other mas-

ter's degree program seems better tailored to full-time workers. MBA classes are offered at night, on weekends, online — and even before sunrise. Barry University has a Breakfast MBA program, with classes from 6:30-8:30 a.m., that targets I-95 commuters on their way into downtown.

But while increasingly convenient, MBA course-loads are no less crushing. A few things to consider before taking the plunge:

### GET SUPPORT

In many ways, a decision to pursue an MBA isn't really yours alone to make.

First, your employer has to approve. And being candid with your boss actually pays off: Firms often allow students flexible work hours, and most large companies will cover some, if not all, of the tuition costs.

"You have to have the support of your company," Green says. "And I don't just mean financial assistance, but maybe a reduced travel schedule. Many of us are working much more than 40 hours a week, so that could mean a reduction in overtime. You need a lot of employer cooperation."

Just as important, the MBA idea has to be sold at home.

"You need your significant other to buy in," Green says. "That's very important. They're the ones stuck babysitting on Saturdays while you're in class."

### FIND YOUR FIT

Full-time workers essentially have two MBA options — an executive program on the weekends or a traditional one on weeknights. The first typically is limited to managers with several years of experience, while the latter is a no-frills approach that lacks the networking benefit of taking class as a cohort.

If an executive MBA is the Hilton, the traditional route is a Holiday Inn; both accomplish the same purpose but at different comfort levels — and vastly different prices.

At Florida International University, for instance, the executive MBA costs \$27,000 more than the school's weeknight version and covers such perks as prepurchased books, meals on class days and an international trip.

For me, the Barry program was the right fit, providing



BARBARA B. FERNANDEZ  
FOR THE HERALD

### LONG DAYS:

Seth Lewis, center, discusses work with Bill Van Smith, left and Fred Gonzalez, right. Lewis works full time as a sports copy editor at The Herald and also attends Barry University's MBA program.

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— ANIA GREEN, assistant dean of UM's graduate business program

some executive benefits — weekend classes and a tight-knit cohort — without the executive price.

### WEIGH THE RISKS

An MBA pursuit can get derailed when you least expect it.

Angel Mesa knows. An Army captain in the Florida National Guard, he was one year into UM's executive program when the Iraq war interrupted his plans, forcing him to transfer to New Jersey this summer.

"This is my job, and I'm OK with that," says Mesa, of Bay Harbor Islands. "But in a personal sense, it's a killer. I was halfway through."

From New Jersey, he soon could be restationed anywhere from Puerto Rico to Kansas — and from there, it's likely on to Iraq. Even with six years to complete his degree at UM, "I don't know when I'll ever finish," Mesa says.

### TAKE A RAINCHECK?

Finally, consider waiting a year or two. In hindsight, as a 26-year-old barely done with my undergraduate work, I probably jumped into the MBA too early.



### MBA PROGRAMS

Local business schools offer these programs to working professionals:

#### UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

- **Programs:** Several versions of executive, weekend and weeknight tracks.
- **Cost:** \$54,720.
- **To learn more:** Call 305-284-4607, or visit [www.bus.miami.edu](http://www.bus.miami.edu).

#### FIU

- **Programs:** executive and weeknights.
- **Cost:** \$42,000 (executive), \$15,000 (weeknights).
- **To learn more:** Call 305-348-1036, or visit <http://cba.fiu.edu>.

#### FAU

- **Programs:** Executive, weekend and traditional (days/nights).
- **Cost:** \$30,000-plus (executive), \$23,000 (weekend), \$10,000 (traditional).
- **To learn more:** Call 561-297-3650, or visit [www.fau.edu/gsb](http://www.fau.edu/gsb).

#### BARRY

- **Programs:** Nights, weekends and 'breakfast' classes (6:30-8:30 a.m.).
- **Cost:** \$23,400.
- **To learn more:** Call 305-899-3535, or visit [www.barry.edu/business](http://www.barry.edu/business).

#### NOVA SOUTHEASTERN

- **Program:** Weekends (Friday nights, Saturdays) and online.
- **Cost:** \$20,855.
- **To learn more:** Call 800-672-7223, or visit [www.huizenga.nova.edu](http://www.huizenga.nova.edu).

"Having some managerial experience, I'm able to immediately apply [the concepts] — and draw the connection between my daily activities and how they affect the business," says Slade Wentworth,

The Herald's imaging manager and the senior member of our Barry cohort.

"I'm recommending to everyone I know to wait a while. Get some experience before you go forward."