Master of Business Administration

M.B.A. Academic Program

The Darden School's two-year program leading to a degree of Master of Business Administration prepares men and women of high promise to be leaders in the world of practical affairs. Darden M.B.A.s are taught to be action-oriented, take an enterprise perspective, and lead with integrity, vision, judgment, determination, and social responsibility. The Darden curriculum is an integrated program that provides an understanding of the fundamental areas of business while it develops the capacity to analyze managerial problems and present intelligent and resourceful solutions to these problems. The M.B.A. program compresses years of experience through the study of several hundred real business situations or cases involving a breadth and depth of analysis impossible to gain in years of on-the-job training.

The educational approach employed by the Darden School places significant responsibility for self-development on the individual student. Students are admitted not only for what they can learn, but also what they can teach their classmates in a discussion oriented setting. The curriculum is carefully planned and coordinated by the faculty, but the daily discussion revolves around student preparation and participation. This shared faculty and student responsibility for the classroom learning makes the Darden classroom experience highly dynamic and stimulating.

The Darden curriculum also emphasizes the ethical nature of leadership through required course work and broad integrated discussions of the role of the corporation and its leaders in business and society in general. The school’s concern with ethical values continues the tradition of the University of Virginia evident in the Honor System.

The Student Body

The Darden School admits approximately 310 highly qualified individuals yearly. New students come from around the world and virtually every profession. These students are then organized into learning teams of five to six students and sections of 65 students. Each learning team and each section are designed to have a diversity of functional skills, demographics, and international background. Darden students quickly learn that one of the most important assets of their education is the network of relationships built among classmates from all over the world. The first year sections are shuffled at the beginning of the second semester in January to provide maximum opportunity to meet, learn from, and form long-term relationships with a wide range of classmates.

The Case Method

The Darden School uses business problem oriented cases in the vast majority of classes. In case method, students learn in four steps: individual case reading, preparation and analysis; learning team discussion; section discussion; and post-class reflection and integration. Each case presents students with a real business situation and related decisions to make. Most cases require the student to decide and present extemporaneously what they would do in that situation. Students are expected to define the issues they identify in the case, use sound analytical techniques in applying their knowledge to the available data, evaluate the alternatives, make a
reasonable decision, and recommend measures to implement their plan. This process simulates the function of modern managers in a wide variety of different industries, products, processes, and styles of management.

Case method is demanding. Potential students should be prepared to commit 60 to 80 hours each week to their academic endeavors. Darden School students will spend 3-5 hours a day on individual preparation, 2-3 hours in learning team meetings, 4.5 hours a day in class meetings with their section of 65 classmates, and 1-2 hours a day integrating the day’s learning into their business judgment base. Classroom time is spent largely in discussion, focusing on the definition, analysis, and a wide range of feasible approaches to a problem. To attain academic and personal growth in this environment, the student is required to participate in case discussions. Students’ grades are based in large part on the quality of their in-class contributions. Classes in the second year vary in size, but case discussion is still the chief learning experience.

While the following first year schedule is intended only as an example, it does indicate the degree of commitment expected of our students:

Weekdays:

8:00 - 9:25              First class
9:25 - 10:00            Coffee
10:00 - 11:25          Second class
11:45 - 1:10            Third Class
Afternoon                Prepare cases for next day
Evening                   Meet with learning teams

While the case-method philosophy dominates the program, other methodologies (role-playing, simulations, field trips, guest lecturers, and exercises of various sorts) are used to augment students’ understanding of modern business practice. The Darden educational experience is a careful blending of theory and current practice designed to equip students to act confidently in a complex world.

Academic Regulations

Standards for the M.B.A. Degree The Darden School requires a minimum performance standard for its M.B.A. graduates. In addition, the school has performance standards for the first year program, each semester of the M.B.A. program, and each course.

In administering these standards, the school uses five grades, defined by the faculty as follows: A, Distinguished Performance; B+, High Performance; B, Standard Performance; B-, Low Performance; and F, Unacceptable Performance. In addition, occasions arise that necessitate assigning a grade that falls outside the standard range. The symbol IN (incomplete), assigned in such cases implies that, for reasons known to the individual faculty member, an enrolled student has not completed the work of the course at the end of a specified academic period.

An important element of student performance is classroom participation. Depending on the appraisal criteria of the instructor and course, classroom participation frequently accounts for up to 50 percent of a student’s grade. This proportion reflects the central role and importance of active engagement by the student in the learning process.

While assessments about classroom participation are incorporated into grades received by students at the end of each term, the first year program expects each student to be aware of, and responsible for, her or his participation on an ongoing basis. Although individual faculty, course faculty, or section faculty may find it appropriate to provide an assessment of student participation during a term, there is no requirement that