Master's in Business Analytics vs. MBA: Key Differences

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Modern organizations face complex management issues every day. They rely on talented professionals to lead teams to address those issues effectively and efficiently. Holding a graduate business degree can be a significant asset for professionals who are ready to advance in their careers, and many are considering a master's in business analytics vs. an MBA as they make their choice about which degree to pursue.

Master of Business Analytics programs focus heavily on technical knowledge and applications, while Master of Business Administration (MBA) programs concentrate on the skills needed to manage financial strategy and lead teams across industries. Understanding the distinctions can help individuals identify which is right for their career.

What Is a Master’s in Business Analytics?

A Master of Business Analytics is a degree that demonstrates expertise in interpreting data to deliver insights that contribute to an organization’s efficiency and growth. Proficiency in working with data and analytics is increasingly important to organizations in every sector, and being able to make data-driven decisions has become a necessary skill.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a crucial tool in modern business analytics, and master’s in business analytics programs give their students a foundation in AI’s potential and its risks, including the need for guardrails and internal governance of AI use.

Earning a master’s in business analytics provides professionals with a strong background in data management, analytics interpretation, and strategic leadership.

What Do You Learn in a Master’s in Business Analytics Program?

Coursework in a master’s in business analytics program prepares students to advance in their industries by helping them gain capabilities in strategic analysis, risk management, and problem-solving. Those with a bachelor’s degree in business can benefit from the further specialization the master’s program provides.

Courses cover topics such as data and analytics interpretation, machine learning, software implementation, and management, and they incorporate hands-on case studies about real business data problems. Graduates with a master’s degree in business analytics go on to lead product development teams, act as data and intelligence leaders, and specialize in analysis and market research.

Technical Expertise

To work in business analytics, professionals need to have a strong background in technical data management, visualization, and computing technology to be able to support data-informed decision-making within their organization.

Business analytics master’s programs help students develop expertise in tools such as:

- **Tableau:** Business intelligence and analytics software
- **Python:** Programming language for deep learning

- **Structured Query Language (SQL):** Relational database language that extracts from data tables
- **R:** Programming language for predictive modeling

Skills with these tools can be applied to areas that include:

- Database management
- Predictive and prescriptive analytics
- Statistical modeling
- Machine learning
- Data visualization

Though different organizations may use different tools, fluency in these foundational areas is critical to success in senior business analytics roles.

What Is a Master of Business Administration?

A Master of Business Administration is a degree that showcases mastery of business management with a focus on marketing, finance, and accounting.

An MBA program teaches students how to make confident leadership decisions across functions in any organization. Like their counterparts in master's in analytics programs, MBA students need to be able to interpret and analyze data. But in an MBA program, the focus is on using the data to improve business operations and drive economic growth and sustainability.

Both full-time and part-time MBA degree programs typically require students to complete independent studies or get hands-on experience to apply their coursework to real business situations.

What Do You Learn in an MBA Program?

Coursework in MBA programs teaches core business fundamentals in areas such as operations, marketing, finance, and leadership. MBA graduates go on to manage teams, work in C-level roles, and found their own companies as entrepreneurs.

Business and Management Skills

MBA programs cover financial and marketing concepts alongside team leadership and management skills. MBA students learn skills and concepts in areas that include:

- Data analytics
- Financial analysis
- Strategic planning
- Teamwork
- Change management
- Time management
- Long-term investment strategy
- Global economics
- Corporate communications
- Accounting
- Supply chain management

Master’s in Business Analytics vs. MBA: Key Differences

For those assessing pursuing a master’s in business analytics vs. an MBA, the right choice depends on what kinds of business operations the individual is drawn to. The programs for both degrees offer advanced business courses, but they have different emphases.

A Master of Business Analytics program is a specialized technical degree program that focuses on data modeling, quantitative analysis, and using data to solve business problems. Graduates often work in data-centric roles such as data engineer or business intelligence analyst.

An MBA program is a more general management degree program that offers a broad foundation in business concepts and functions that balances strategy, marketing, and accounting with communication and human resources in its coursework. MBA graduates often work in management and executive positions.

Specializations

The two degree programs offer different opportunities to specialize.

Many Master of Business Analytics programs offer specializations in areas such as:

- **Accounting and Finance:** Bookkeeping systems, risk management analysis, and econometrics forecasting

- **Energy:** Specific challenges of the energy industry, including investing and trading for energy companies
- **Marketing and Management:** Media analysis, technology systems, and using data to drive decision-making

Many MBA programs offer specializations in areas such as:

- **Finance:** Investing research and strategy for students interested in working in hedge funds and private equity
- **Marketing:** Marketing analytics and market research, digital marketing, and brand management
- **Strategy and Innovation:** Organizational change, corporate decision-making, and technology strategy
- **Energy and Sustainability:** Energy modeling, renewable energy finance, and energy markets

Job Outlook

When comparing career opportunities for master's in business analytics vs. MBA graduates, the job outlook looks promising for both.

Occupations for master's in business analytics graduates are projected to grow faster than the national average. Consider the 2024 salary data and job growth predictions between 2024 and 2034 from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) for these jobs:

- **Management analyst:** Median annual salary of $101,190, with positions predicted to increase 9 percent
- **Market research analyst:** Median annual salary of $76,950, with positions predicted to increase 7 percent
- **Operations research analyst:** Median annual salary of $91,290, with positions predicted to increase 21 percent

Occupations for MBA graduates are also expected to see faster growth than the overall job market. Consider the BLS data for these jobs:

- **Advertising, promotions, or marketing manager:** Median annual salary of $159,660, with positions predicted to increase 6 percent

- **Project management specialist:** Median annual salary of $100,750, with positions predicted to increase 6 percent
- **Human resources manager:** Median annual salary of $140,030, with positions predicted to increase 5 percent

Jobs in analytics and business management are projected to rise in the coming years, and many employers require or prefer candidates with an advanced degree for senior-level positions.

Advance in Your Career in Analytics or Business Administration

When making the decision about which degree is right for you, a master's in business analytics vs. an MBA, it is important to consider where your interest lies.

A Master of Business Analytics is a technical degree that typically leads to a career in data management, statistical modeling, and using AI to analyze operations efficiency and financial plans. A Master of Business Administration is a general business degree focused on a broad overview of marketing, finance, and management that can lead to leadership and executive positions.

The Freeman School of Business at Tulane University offers master's programs that provide students with the opportunity to tackle real-world case studies with industry professionals and experienced faculty. Students can choose from the Master of Business Analytics and AI program and nine MBA program options, which include the following:

- Full-Time MBA
- Executive MBA
- Professional MBA
- Online MBA
- Baccalaureate/MBA
- MBA/Master of Health Administration (MHA)
- MBA/Juris Doctor (JD)
- MBA/Doctor of Medicine (MD)
- MBA/Master of Management in Energy (MME)

Find out which of Freeman's programs is right for you, and start the journey toward the next stage of your career today.

Sources:

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IBM, “What Is Business Analytics?”
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U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Operations Research Analysts
U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Project Management Specialists