5 Executive MBA Careers

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Executives are perhaps the most influential figures within an organization. They shape a company’s mission and vision and guide its policies, strategies, and operations. Reaching the upper rungs of the corporate ladder requires not just experience and technical know-how but also finely honed leadership skills. While an MBA education can facilitate this kind of development, MBA programs are often designed for individuals newly entering the workforce or those with limited experience seeking middle- or upper-management roles.

For seasoned professionals with C-suite aspirations, an Executive MBA (EMBA) may be the ideal route. Exploring the program format, requirements, and types of careers an Executive MBA can lead to are key to understanding its many benefits.

What Is an Executive MBA?

MBAs are among the most sought-after degrees in the world, widely recognized for their ability to drive students' professional development and prepare them for a wide range of roles across countless industries, including many leadership positions. More than 75 percent of MBA graduates said their business education helped prepare them for leadership roles, according to a survey by the Graduate Management Admission Council.

While traditional MBAs are generally meant for individuals who have only recently launched their careers, an Executive MBA is designed for those who already have considerable professional experience and are looking to advance even further. Put another way: MBAs prepare students, including those who have just started working in their field, for management-level careers; Executive MBAs aim to help working professionals with several years of experience, including in management, become more effective leaders capable of climbing even higher up the corporate ladder.

An Executive MBA can help those who are already established in their field or organization further hone their expertise and leadership acumen, allowing them to take the next step in their professions — without having to put their careers on hold. It also allows students to apply the knowledge and tools they learn in the classroom to their current jobs, making them even more valuable employees.

An Executive MBA may also be beneficial for those looking to start their own businesses by providing in-depth knowledge of business operations, strategy, and leadership, equipping them with the skills to navigate entrepreneurial challenges.

Program Format

Beyond each program's distinct mission, there are some key differences in the format and composition of a traditional MBA program versus those of an Executive MBA.

Traditional MBAs come in various formats, including online, hybrid, and part time. However, the majority of MBA students are enrolled in full-time, in-person programs that emphasize immersion in the curriculum. Because many MBA students are new to their careers — or in some cases, may not have even started working yet — they are able to devote a significant amount to their studies.

On the other hand, its part-time status is one of the key features of an Executive MBA program. Classes are held outside typical work hours, either nights or weekends. This allows enrolled students, who are usually several years into their careers, to maintain full-time jobs while they pursue their education.

Another key distinction between MBAs and Executive MBAs is program duration. On a full-time schedule, students can typically complete an MBA program in two years, or three to four years if they are taking classes part time. Because classes are almost always held on a part-time schedule to accommodate students' work commitments, Executive MBAs can sometimes take longer.

However, since Executive MBA students have already developed foundational business knowledge and skills, drawn in part from their professional experience, some programs take less time to complete than standard MBAs.

Executive MBA Curriculum

While an Executive MBA curriculum may tread some of the same ground as traditional MBA programs — providing students with a holistic understanding of various business concepts and functions, such as business law and finance — it also explores more advanced topics, with an emphasis on developing students' leadership perspective and skills.

The Executive MBA program at the A. B. Freeman School of Business at Tulane University features a comprehensive curriculum that covers the following:

- Economics for managers
- Strategy formulation
- Management communication
- Business analytics
- Financial management
- Operations management
- People management

The program also offers multiple elective courses, which can be used to complete a concentration in finance or management. Though optional, completing a concentration allows students to demonstrate expertise in a particular subject matter and tailor their studies to specific Executive MBA job opportunities.

Additionally, Tulane’s Executive MBA includes a global focus, with a weeklong business seminar held abroad. This experience, facilitated by the institution’s relationships with 30 partner schools in 13 countries, allows students to connect with peers from around the world. Developing an international perspective is critical for MBA students — especially aspiring executives — because the modern business world is increasingly globalized, requiring professionals to have an understanding of diverse cultures, international business practices, and global economic trends.

Executive MBA Requirements

Executive MBA programs generally carry the same admissions requirements as traditional MBAs, with one notable exception: work experience. Some level of professional experience is a prerequisite for all Executive MBAs, though specific requirements vary by program and institution.

Students seeking to enroll in Tulane’s Executive MBA program should have a minimum of seven years of experience, including at least five years in a management position. Some exceptions may be made, based on applicants’ career progression, the depth and breadth of their experience, and the level of management responsibility they have held.

Admissions requirements for Executive MBA programs generally adhere to a standard pattern. Students seeking to enroll in Tulane’s Executive MBA program need to submit the following for their application to be considered:

- **Undergraduate Transcripts From All Colleges and Universities Attended:** Completion of a bachelor’s program is required to qualify for admission to the Executive MBA program, with very few exceptions.
- **Resume:** This should cover an applicant’s employment history and academic background, including a list of professional distinctions, affiliations, and activities.
- **Two Letters of Recommendation:** One letter should come from a senior officer at the applicant’s current employer, and the second should be from an immediate supervisor who has personal knowledge of the applicant’s work.
- **GMAT Scores**
- **Personal Essay**

What Can You Do With an Executive MBA?

Career outcomes are fairly similar across MBA programs, including full-time MBAs and professional MBAs, the latter being a type of part-time program also designed for working professionals, though it caters to those with less experience.

The career paths of Executive MBA graduates, however, tend to reach the upper echelons of the business world. As the program's name suggests, Executive MBA graduates often become executives, sometimes in specialized roles that focus on a particular business area, such as finance or marketing.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that employment opportunities for executives will grow by 6 percent over the next decade, equating to around 343,000 job openings each year. This consistent demand is a positive sign for ambitious professionals seeking to advance their careers through an EMBA education, potentially qualifying them for the roles below.

1. Chief Executive Officer

As the title implies, the chief executive officer (CEO) is the highest-ranking executive in an organization. They are responsible for setting the overall vision and strategic direction of the company, making major corporate decisions, and ensuring that the company meets its goals.

A CEO's duties encompass numerous functions and tasks, varying significantly depending on the industry and the type and size of the organization they lead. CEOs at large corporations primarily deal with very high-level strategic decisions, such as entering new markets and approving mergers and acquisitions. At smaller companies, however, they may be more involved with day-to-day operations.

Although their specific responsibilities may vary, CEOs at many organizations typically do the following:

- Develop the strategic vision of the organization.
- Craft and implement programs and policies to meet business goals.
- Act as the public face of the organization, often entailing speaking with the media and participating in events.
- Direct and collaborate with other executives and managers.

- Report to the board of directors and act as a liaison between the board and the rest of the organization.

CEOs are also responsible for establishing the company culture and work environment, setting the tone at the top, and ensuring that organizational values are reflected in daily operations and leadership practices.

Because of their outsize role, CEOs have a significant impact on an organization's performance and profitability. According to McKinsey & Co., about 45 percent of a company's performance can be attributed to the CEO.

CEO Salary

Unsurprisingly, given their status as the highest-ranking executive, CEOs are typically well compensated. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median annual wage for chief executives in 2023 was approximately $206,700. However, CEO pay can vary dramatically depending on various factors, such as industry and organization size. Additionally, incentives such as profit-sharing and bonuses can greatly influence a CEO's compensation.

2. Chief Operating Officer

While CEOs are responsible for shaping and guiding an organization's strategic vision, chief operating officers (COOs) are responsible for implementing that vision and directing administrative and operational resources to achieve it. Another role for Executive MBA holders to aspire to, COOs are generally considered to be the CEO's second-in-command.

COOs oversee day-to-day operations, coordinating resources, including staff, to ensure the smooth execution of various business activities. However, a COO's role and responsibilities can vary widely from company to company, depending on the industry as well as the organization's corporate structure and needs. In general, though, COOs often perform and/or oversee the following business functions:

- Recruitment and hiring
- Financial activities, including budget management
- Operational strategy, including developing and streamlining processes to optimize efficiency

- Data analysis, such as assessing production metrics or customer satisfaction reports

COOs are also responsible for communicating operational policies to employees and department heads and ensuring that they are implemented properly.

Although a good deal of their job focuses on daily operations, COOs also play a vital role in aligning tactical decisions with the organization's long-term strategic vision. They often advise on capital investments and work closely with other executives to identify operational improvements that minimize waste, maximize profits, and ultimately help the business grow.

COO Salary

As the second-most influential person within an organization — after the CEO — COOs are also usually well paid. The average salary for a COO in December 2024 was approximately $148,900, according to Payscale, with salaries ranging between $80,000 and $252,000. A COO's pay may be influenced by numerous variables, such as bonuses and other incentives.

3. Chief Technology Officer

The chief technology officer (CTO) position has become increasingly influential. A CTO, sometimes known as a chief technical officer, develops and directs an organization's technological vision and strategy.

They identify an organization's short- and long-term technological needs, oversee research and development initiatives, and make investment recommendations to help the organization achieve its goals. A CTO's focus is primarily outward facing, as they seek ways to leverage technology to enhance the customer experience and grow the business. Chief information officers (CIOs), on the other hand, typically oversee technologies that support a company's internal operations and processes. CTOs often report to the CIO, though this may vary from one organization to another.

The role of a CTO may differ depending on the size of the business. Large organizations often employ both a CTO and a CIO to address distinct technological and strategic needs, whereas smaller organizations tend to have one or the other, or merge the two roles into one.

Common responsibilities for a CTO include the following:

- Conduct cost-benefit and ROI analyses for technology projects.
- Identify and implement technologies to drive business growth and improve customer experience.
- Lead technology or engineering departments and manage staff.
- Stay current with emerging technologies, including big data, cloud solutions, and Internet of Things advancements.

As technology has become further integrated into business, the CTO role has expanded across industries, including health care, e-commerce, telecommunications, and government.

CTO Salary

Because of their crucial role in driving innovation and helping companies maintain a competitive edge, CTOs earn high salaries. Payscale reported that the average salary for a CTO in December 2024 was about $177,500 — though as with other executives, multiple factors (bonuses, profit- sharing, commissions) can affect how much they make. The salary range for CTOs was between $101,000 and $265,000.

4. Chief Financial Officer

An Executive MBA career field where there is substantial demand is finance, and the chief financial officer (CFO) is the foremost figure in this field. Often the third highest-ranking member of the C-suite, CFOs manage the financial health of their organization. They oversee critical elements of financial operations, such as cash flow and financial planning, including investment activities.

CFOs are also responsible for ensuring that a company’s financial records are accurate and its activities comply with regulatory standards, including the generally accepted accounting principles.

Although their duties may differ among organizations, CFOs are often responsible for the following:

- Managing cash flow, financial planning, and taxation issues
- Overseeing finance and accounting departments
- Advising on investments, capital structure, and budgeting

- Providing financial insight to support strategic initiatives

CFOs play an essential role in business, as many high-level decisions are based on their insights and analysis.

While many CFOs work in the private sector, local, state, and federal governments often rely on their expertise as well to handle taxation matters and the management of government funds.

CFO Salary

Like other executives, CFOs commonly earn six-figure salaries. According to Payscale, the average salary for a CFO in December 2024 was approximately $149,800, with a salary range of $86,000 to $242,000. Several variables can influence what CFOs earn, including the industry they work in — private sector CFOs tend to make more than government CFOs — and whether their employers offer incentives.

5. Chief Marketing Officer

A chief marketing officer (CMO) oversees every aspect of a business's marketing activities, from planning to execution. This can include advertising, market research, brand management, marketing communications, and even customer service.

CMOs support the development and implementation of marketing campaigns, guiding marketing teams to create strategies that drive brand awareness and revenue growth. The CMO reports to the CEO.

A CMO's job description can vary based on the industry they work in and the needs of their employer. Typical responsibilities of a CMO often include the following:

- Direct the development of strategies that promote brand awareness and customer loyalty.
- Perform market research, including surveys and focus groups, to identify customer needs, competitor offerings, and product popularity.
- Analyze data from market research and present findings to the CEO and other executives.
- Oversee marketing communications to ensure clear, consistent messaging to target markets.

CMOs are vital to business growth, helping companies promote their brand and identify opportunities in a dynamic business landscape.

CMO Salary

Their expertise in crafting and promoting brand identity and understanding consumer behavior makes CMOs highly valuable across numerous industries. CMOs earned an average salary of approximately $187,000 in November 2024, according to Payscale, with salaries ranging between $94,000 and $285,000.

Why Choose Tulane's A. B. Freeman School of Business for Your Executive MBA?

Executives are instrumental in shaping organizational strategy and driving growth, making strong leadership essential in today's business landscape. An Executive MBA can facilitate career advancement, equipping graduates with the tools to excel in leadership roles.

If you are an experienced professional who is interested in ascending the corporate ladder, consider the Executive MBA program at Tulane's business school. Designed for working individuals, the program holds classes just two weekends a month, allowing students to keep their jobs while they earn their degree. In less than 1 1/2 years, you can develop the business expertise and leadership skills to reach new career heights. As an exclusive EMBA alumni benefit, the EMBA Lifelong Learning Initiative invites you to return to the classroom, mastering emerging frameworks alongside world-class faculty, on your terms.

Learn more about Tulane's Executive MBA and its many other graduate business programs.

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