



Pepperdine University provides flexibility and access to online MBA students across the world



Pearson

Many hats, one passion

Judicial hearing officer.

English teacher.

Staff development manager.

Director of online learning.

"I've done a lot of different things," Blake says.

"I've been working directly or indirectly in education much of the time."

"It's what I'm passionate about."

"Because of responsibilities at work and at home, it's not always feasible to attend classes on campus. This program is an answer to that logistical challenge."

Putting the passion to work

Today, Blake is putting his passion to work as Director of Online Programs at Pepperdine University's Graziadio School of Business and Management.

Blake was instrumental in the launch of Pepperdine's online MBA program.

He says the program was created to give students across the country and around the world one very valuable thing: flexibility.

"This program is an answer to that logistical challenge."

"Our students are working full-time [a minimum of two years of work experience is required for admission], in locations across the country and internationally, while earning their degree."

Partnering with Pearson

"There were 22 students in the first cohort in the spring of 2013," Blake says.

"That was a very good start."

"Now we have more than 275 students working towards their MBA through our online program."

In the year leading up to the launch of the online MBA program, Blake says, Pearson helped Pepperdine with marketing, recruitment, and course development and design.

With Pearson's continued help, he says, the program continues to grow.

"We have an extremely high retention rate," Blake says.

"I believe that's because our students are having great experiences with Pepperdine and Pearson."

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Creating connections with technology

Blake says that the administration and faculty have worked hard to ensure there is always collaboration among the students in the MBA program.

"Unlike on-ground students, our online students have limited opportunity to meet in-person with professors and with each other every day."

"We do our best to provide lots of options and tools for virtual communication and engagement," he says.

Professors are required to hold one-hour VSIs, or "virtual synchronous sessions," each week, Blake says.

"The sessions are held via Adobe Connect web conferencing software, so professors can hear and see their students."

"What the professors do during that hour is up to them — they may present new material, discuss material previously covered in class, answer specific student questions, or hold a review session before an exam," Blake says.

"What I can tell you is that nearly all professors spend much, much more time than just that required hour per week engaging with their students."

"They communicate constantly via email, phone, web conferences, and in other ways, too."

Reflecting the real world

There is another aspect of the online MBA program that attracts students to Pepperdine, Blake says.

It's called Education2Business (E2B).

"We bring executives from some of today's leading corporations and our MBA students together in a virtual, collaborative environment."

"The executives present a current business challenge to the class, and the students work together in groups to address, analyze, and offer solutions to their 'client,' in real-time," Blake says.

"We are particularly proud of this component of our MBA program, because it's a true reflection of what our students experience during the program, and after graduation in the real world."

Advancing during — and after — the program

Blake says he gets frequent positive feedback from the online MBA students at Pepperdine.

"They are students, but they are also professionals who are working full-time when they're not in classes."

"The vast majority of our students tell us they advance in their careers after graduating with a degree," Blake says, "but we also hear that many advance during the time they are enrolled in the program as well."

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"On more than one occasion, a student who worked with an executive through an E2B course has been offered a job at the corporation because they impressed the executive so much through their E2B work."

Continuing to grow

"Success in business is the combination of education and experience. We at Pepperdine, with Pearson's assistance, continue to help our students elevate both of those things."

Blake says he expects the online MBA program at Pepperdine will continue to grow.

"At the start of each new trimester," he says, "I talk with as many incoming students as I can about what they hope to gain from our online program."

"Time and time again, I get the same three responses," he says.

"Students are looking to move up and increase their value within their company, move into another area within their company, or move to a totally new company."

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