

A Single Path to Hiring MBA Talent:

The expanded role of career services for students and alumni, and what it means to recruiters

The growth of part-time and executive MBA programs creates an opportunity for an unprecedented partnership between corporate recruiters and schools' career services offices.

Introduction

Since the publication of last year's white paper on findings from the Leadership Summit of the MBA Focus™ Advisory Council (*"New Directions in MBA Recruiting: Managing the Talent Pipeline in a Changing Environment"*), it has become clear that the importance of career services offices to hiring firms has greatly increased. These offices now are serving more MBA alumni as well as students in executive and part-time MBA programs, increasing both the quantity of good candidates available to hiring firms and the need for these firms to learn how to recruit them.

This current paper focuses on the fact that MBA career services offices are evolving, with increasing rapidity, to serve not only students from all three walks of MBA programs – part-time, full-time and executive – but also alumni. Through broadening their services to all of these groups, MBA career services offices also boost their value to firms that seek to hire MBA graduates and alumni.

The fundamental premise herein is that the growth of part-time and executive MBA programs, along with rapid expansion of lifelong career services to alumni, have created an opportunity for an unprecedented partnership between corporate recruiters and schools' career services offices. Campus recruiters seeking new graduates from business schools are no longer the only ones working through the career service office; experienced-hire recruiters are finding a new source of highly experienced and well-credentialed talent at the same location. As pointed out below, though, firms must employ different tactics and approaches to recruit these more experienced leaders.

This paper is based upon several primary sources:

- In early 2008, MBA Focus convened a summit meeting in Miami of the MBA Career Services Office directors of 31 of the top U.S. MBA programs and the leading MBA recruiters from 47 corporations.
- In the spring of 2008, the company convened a similar meeting in Barcelona of 19 top European and Asian MBA programs and recruiting leaders from 10 leading global firms¹.
- Prior to each of these meetings, attendees responded to a comprehensive survey on trends in MBA recruiting, the results of which comprise much of the data herein. In addition, extensive workshop sessions led to much of the anecdotal and trend information.
- As the leading provider of career service office technology and corporate MBA recruiting databases, MBA Focus is in contact daily with the leaders in the field and maintains a close watch on trends and issues.

The highly experienced MBA

Surprisingly, most corporate recruiters are not yet aware of two major trends in top MBA programs across the country – the phenomenal growth of executive MBA and part-time MBA programs, and the development of career services to these executive and part-time graduates as well as to alumni. Among the 65 top-ranked programs with whom MBA Focus partners, the majority now have both part-time and executive MBA programs. A recent survey² found that approximately 80 percent of MBA students are enrolled in either executive or part-time programs.

Once relegated to secondary importance, executive and part-time programs are now often the equal of and sometimes superior to the full-time program. With the high tuition fees of these programs, students are given access to the top faculty and are expected to perform at levels comparable to the full-time program. Moreover, they attract a highly motivated, and often highly experienced, student.

At the same time, as noted below, the alumni of top programs are learning to rely upon their alma mater for career services and social networking, and the schools are realizing that services to these alums are a valuable way of maintaining their allegiance.

Companies now have access to an experienced talent pool of executive and part-time graduates, as well as the entire range of alumni.

¹ For more information on the MBA Recruiting summit meetings in the U.S. and Europe, please contact MBA Focus at info@mbafocus.com.

² This survey was conducted by Georgia State University's J. Mack Robinson College of Business in conjunction with the MBA for Working Professionals (MBAWP) Affinity Group of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Businesses (AACSB).

Because of this, a growing number of MBA program career services offices have become a valuable resource not only to full-time students but also to part-time and executive students, as well as alumni. They are aligning staff, services and technology to represent these substantial candidate populations. In the process, they greatly increase the pool of talented candidates for firms.

Most firms know their way around the process for recruiting full-time MBA students. Unfortunately, many either do not focus on recruiting the non-traditional candidate or alumni through career services offices, or they are not yet structured to do so. As a result, they continue to miss out on rich sources of top MBA talent.

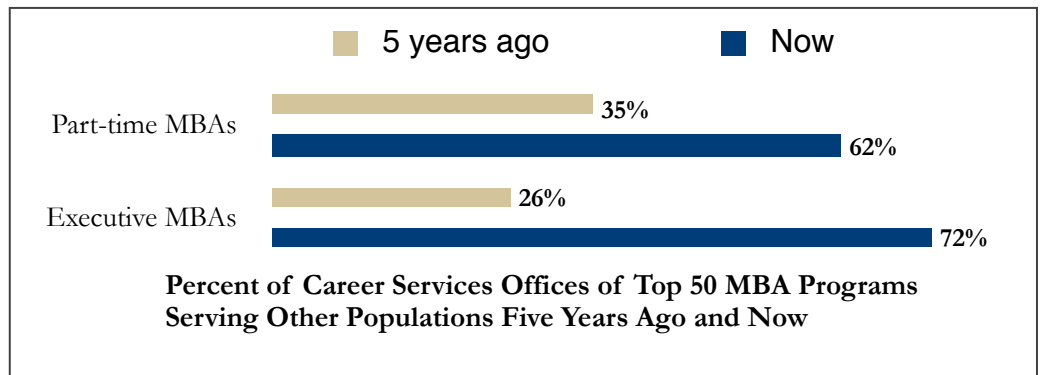
To illustrate the degree to which companies are unaware of the opportunity to recruit executive and part-time MBA graduates: An informal survey among the 40 firms at the Miami Recruiting Summit showed that in the past year, they had collectively hired some 2,100 full-time program graduates – but had recruited and hired only 20 part-time or executive MBA students!

So why haven't corporate recruiters been chasing these more experienced students and alumni as avidly as they could? Several myths have held them back:

Myth—Executive and part-time MBAs are sponsored by their corporations and therefore are not fair game for recruiting.

In fact, recent surveys have shown that fewer than 30 percent of executive MBAs are fully sponsored by their employers. Even the sponsored students often want to speak with potential employers, if only for a future position. Many sponsored students have waivers from their employers allowing them to use career services.

In addition, the majority of top MBA programs have now begun including their executive and part-time MBA students in career services activities. As can be seen by the following chart, career services to these candidates will continue to increase in the future, and the schools that offer these services will be prime hunting grounds for recruiters within corporations looking for experienced and motivated talent.



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Myth—Recruiting executive and part-time MBAs is the same as recruiting full-time MBAs, so we just need to expand our current activities.

This couldn't be any further from the truth. Part-time and executive MBAs are busy people who have established careers. Unlike many full-time MBAs, they have a clear sense of what they want to do, and they already have significant experience in functional areas within their companies. Therefore, they are much more likely to respond to individual contacts who are targeting their specific talents than to the group recruiting activities so prevalent for the full-time student. Given the fact that they are balancing careers and school, and the fact that their programs are no less rigorous than the full-time programs, winning and dining is not as important a recruiting activity as it is for full-time students. Furthermore, they are not necessarily looking for entry-level jobs, and it's clearly a waste of talent for recruiters to try and place them there. Therefore, the executive MBA doesn't fit the bill for the typical MBA recruiter who is looking to fill a large number of similar positions (associate, management trainee, etc.). Like candidates in the experienced-hire group, these leaders are much more appropriate for specific talent requisitions.

Myth—Executive and part-time MBAs and alumni are not interested in career services or new jobs.

Unlike in the past, when most executive MBA and part-time MBA students were seeking advancement in their current jobs, today many are getting their MBA as job switchers. They more closely resemble full-time MBA students in this regard. Even many of those who are sponsored have received waivers from their corporations and are quite willing to entertain new opportunities. Because they are generally older and more established, they may have more specific needs regarding relocation, job level, etc.; however, experienced-hire recruiters are accustomed to these requirements.

Myth—Experienced-hire recruiters within firms know how to recruit the executive and part-time MBA students – as well as alumni using career services.

It's natural to assume that since these more mature MBA students are "experienced," then the experienced-hire team should be targeting them. This may indeed be true from the perspective of the types of positions they need to fill but cannot be carried off effectively without some significant orientation and planning on the part of the lateral and experienced-hire recruiters. The reality is that most experienced-hire recruiters are "hunters," not farmers, and are used to doing whatever it takes to source and attract a talented person. In contrast, recruiting from MBA programs is governed by a formal and informal set of rules and practices that are violated at great risk. For example, schools set dates when recruiters can contact students and when they can't, timelines when offers can be made and how long the offers have to be left open, and even

restrictions on amount of contact and type of contact. For the executive MBA and a part-time MBA, these rules may be not particularly appropriate, but the school may still wish to enforce them. In this case, an experienced-hire recruiter using all of the tricks of his or her trade may inadvertently violate guidelines and put the entire MBA recruiting program at risk. Clearly, hiring firms and MBA career services will work together on ways to address this issue, but experienced-hire recruiters need to be aware of it.

A hidden gem for finding talent: alumni of top programs

The job of the experienced-hire recruiter has also changed dramatically over the past several years. In many circumstances, companies have formed internal recruiting teams to replenish lower senior- and middle-management ranks and avoid some of the massive search firm fees they sometimes incurred in this area. Many of these recruiters are finding that their time is now spent on the internet as much as it is on the telephone seeking connections and candidates. But what if these recruiters who now use the “six degrees of separation” strategy of LinkedIn and Facebook could go directly to the source and find the graduates of the world’s top MBA programs?

MBA program alumni can post their resumes in school-supported online databases in the same way that current students do and put their names before recruiters looking for a new pool of business leaders.

They can. Unbeknownst to many corporate recruiters, a majority of the top business programs have significantly expanded their career services to alumni. In the past, these services consisted generally of job counseling and some minor networking activities; now, their alumni can post their resumes in school-supported online databases in the same way that current students do and put their names before recruiters looking for a new pool of business leaders. Most top business programs also have job posting systems which allow companies to post jobs specifically for their alumni. The result is a large and rapidly growing storehouse of both active and passive candidates who hold MBAs from the top programs and have years of experience. Unfortunately, because of the separation between school recruiters and experienced-hire teams, most experienced-hire recruiters in corporations are not even aware of these databases.

Recruiters have an enormous opportunity with the growth of alumni career services. There are almost 800,000 graduates of the top 65 MBA programs with which MBA Focus partners, alone. Given that the average MBA changes jobs or companies three times in the first 10 years after graduation, the pool of available experienced talent is growing rapidly. Furthermore, many programs are automatically including new graduates in their alumni resume databases and job posting systems, ensuring the continued expansion of this database. Combine this with the power of the internet (social networking, school e-mail address for life, online fundraising), and it is not hard to see that the business school can remain a career hub for its alumni long past graduation.

Where will all these alumni come from? As the table below shows, career services support to alumni has become a significant priority among career services offices at top MBA programs.

Trends in Career Services to Alumni (top 50 ranked programs)

Schools providing alumni career services five years ago: 59%

Schools providing alumni career services now: 94%

Schools who anticipate maintaining current level of alumni career services: 20%

Schools who anticipate the level of these services will grow: 80%

How to recruit the experienced MBA—alumni, executive and part-time MBA

As noted above, the alumnus, the executive and the part-time MBA offer an extremely promising talent pool for the corporate experienced hire recruiter. But how can these recruiters access this talent pool in an effective manner?

- Develop an up-to-date listing of which graduate programs offer executive and part-time MBAs, how the calendar for these programs operates, and which programs maintain online resume databases and job posting systems for these candidates. Also, track which schools offer career services to alumni, including resume databases and job posting systems. These resources should be treated as pools of candidates just like existing corporate databases and internet sources.
- Understand the “rules of engagement” for recruiting executive and part-time MBAs in each program. It is critical that recruiters establish relationships with the specific individuals in career services office who are responsible for these programs, make their interest in the candidates known, and develop a recruiting plan based upon each school’s policies.
- Coordinate efforts between the full-time MBA recruiting team and experienced-hire team to some degree so that all concerned can extract maximum value from MBA career services offices. MBA programs have traditionally been a source of full-time MBAs; now, they are a much deeper source for a more experienced group of future and current business leaders.
- Target the executive and part-time MBA as you would an experienced hire, not a new full-time MBA graduate. These candidates have up to twice the experience of the typical MBA with a clearer functional focus. There are many “career switchers” among this population who would be ideal for middle-management positions, particularly in technology companies. For example, a significant number of executives and part-time MBA students are highly experienced engineers looking to make the jump into management. A careful screening process can unearth significant talent for future leadership.

- Manage your recruiting efforts for these students in the same way you do for any fully employed lateral hire you are recruiting. Specifically, do not expect them to attend group meetings and orientation sessions or even social events often held for full-time students. Also, understand that these students do not participate in the on-campus extracurricular activities that full-time students do and thus cannot be reached through clubs and other networking organizations. This might change as more of the executive and part-time students demand participation in campus life, but this trend is only beginning, and more indirect methods of attraction are still indicated.

Summary and Conclusions

Historically, career services offices served only graduates in full-time MBA programs. However, they now are beginning to open their doors to the rapidly increasing number of students enrolled in part-time and executive MBA programs – many, matching the excellence of their full-time counterparts – as well as their alumni. As career services expand the number of students and alumni they serve, so do they increase their role in serving recruiters of both the traditional, full-time MBA student and MBA alumni and recent graduates who bring the level of experience for mid- and top-management positions.

In spite of the exponential increase in part-time and executive MBA students over full-time students, recruiters do not seem to be pursuing them as actively as they do traditional MBA students. Their reluctance to do so could be based on a belief that these students are sponsored by the companies for which they currently work. In fact, a large percentage of students enrolled in these non-traditional programs are “job switchers,” open to exploring new positions – and not necessarily at the companies where they currently work.

Even if recruiters recognize part-time and executive MBA students as viable candidates, they might not know how to approach them. They cannot employ the same recruiting methods typically used to pursue full-time MBA students; these students aren’t likely to attend on-campus recruiting events, for example. Nor can experienced-hire recruiters assume they can recruit these candidates as they would traditional candidates. Instead of aggressively pursuing these candidates on their own, recruiters must reach them through the career services office, vigilantly following the office’s procedures and timetables.

This paper begins to clear a path for recruiters to reach the breadth of MBA talent now served by many of the career services offices. Recruiters must first identify which schools offer part-time and executive MBA programs, and which then offer access to these students through resume databases and job posting systems – and to their alumni. They also need to learn each school’s recruiting policies. They need to coordinate with the schools; but they also need to coordinate internally, ensuring that the corporate recruiting team responsible for hiring full-time MBA students is working alongside the company’s experienced-hire team to more effectively reach both the part-time or executive MBA

student or the MBA alumni and be able to consider them for the appropriate positions.

The shift toward providing career services to all students as well as alumni is changing the rules of MBA recruiting. At the same time, it opens powerful new possibilities for mid-sized and large employers across the globe. For the first time, they have the opportunity to work through career services to cost-effectively tap a single source of MBA talent for all leadership positions within a company. This ability greatly strengthens the value of MBA programs, as a talent resource, for companies, and can significantly reduce the cost of recruiting while increasing the number and quality of candidates – and simplifying employer access to them.

About MBA Focus™

For two decades, the MBA Focus team has provided advanced recruitment technology to the world's top-ranked graduate business schools. These schools count on MBA Focus for their online resume books, job boards and office automation needs. In partnership with them, MBA Focus has created a unique network for employers to access elite MBA students and alumni.

Today, the MBA Focus network includes more than 65 of the top-ranked MBA schools in North America, Europe and Asia – including all *U.S. News* 2008 top 20 “best business schools.” Through the network, MBA Focus provides employers online access to a fast-growing database that already includes more than 40,000 part-time, full-time and executive MBA students as well as alumni. The company offers the single, most efficient channel to access qualified business leaders for internship and permanent positions at top and mid-sized global companies.

MBA Focus enables employers to reach high-caliber candidates through three avenues: Global Focus®, a web-based leadership recruiting platform for worldwide candidate sourcing, outreach and tracking; MBA MultiPost Job Network™, a new technology, to be released fall of 2008, that enables employers to simultaneously post job opportunities directly to top-ranked MBA schools; and online MBA resume books, searchable talent databases of a single class, program or club in the MBA Focus school network. These technologies are in line with progressive virtual recruiting strategies.

As a foremost expert in MBA recruiting, MBA Focus reaches beyond technology to advance the field and shares best practices among career services offices and the recruiters who seek to hire their students and alumni.

MBA Focus operates from offices in Dublin, Ohio and London, England.

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