

Breaking B-School Gender Barriers

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An informal BusinessWeek Online survey reveals why many women don't pursue MBA degrees -- and offers some ways to bolster enrollment

Women have made great strides in business, but the glass ceiling is far from completely shattered. They still earn less than men, have a harder time getting promotions and venture capital, and have fewer role models. In addition, women typically continue to take on most of the burdens at home, which makes it even trickier for them to juggle a career, too.

If anything, B-schools are lagging behind many corporations in providing a supportive environment for women. In 2000, the University of Michigan's Center for the Education of Women, and Catalyst, a nonprofit group dedicated to making the corporate world more inclusive, released a study that showed women were more likely than men to be dissatisfied with B-school culture.

In response, administrators, faculty, women's activists, students, and alumni have made greater efforts to draw women to top MBA programs. Yet women made up only about 30% of the most recent incoming MBA classes for most schools among BusinessWeek's Top 30 B-Schools, about the same as four years ago.

BW 2004 Ranking	University	Program	Location	Percent of women in 2004 incoming class
1	Northwestern University	Kellogg School of Management	Evanston, IL	29%
2	University of Chicago	Graduate School of Business	Chicago, IL	26%
3	University of Pennsylvania	The Wharton School	Philadelphia, PA	33%
4	Stanford University	Stanford Graduate School of Business	Stanford, CA	35%
5	Harvard University	Harvard Business School	Boston, MA	34%
6	University of Michigan	Stephen M. Ross School of Business	Ann Arbor, MI	31%
7	Cornell University	S.C. Johnson Graduate School of Management	Ithaca, NY	28%
8	Columbia University	Columbia Business School	New York, NY	36%
9	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	MIT Sloan School of Management	Cambridge, MA	31%
10	Dartmouth College	Tuck School of Business	Hanover, NH	25%
11	Duke University	Fuqua School of Business	Durham, NC	29%
12	University of Virginia	Darden Graduate School of Business	Charlottesville, VA	21%
13	New York University	Leonard N. Stern School of Business	New York, NY	36%
14	UCLA	UCLA Anderson School of Management	Los Angeles, CA	33%
15	Carnegie Mellon	Tepper School of Business	Pittsburgh, PA	20%

16	<u>University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill</u>	Kenan Flagler Business School	Chapel Hill, NC	29%
17	<u>University of California, Berkeley</u>	Haas School of Business	Berkeley, CA	27%
18	<u>Indiana University</u>	Kelley School of Business	Bloomington, IN	26%
19	<u>University of Texas at Austin</u>	McCombs School of Business	Austin, TX	20%
20	<u>Emory University</u>	Goizueta Business School	Atlanta, GA	34%
21	<u>Purdue University</u>	Krannert School of Management	West Lafayette, IN	18%
22	<u>Yale University</u>	Yale School of Management	New Haven, CT	34%
23	<u>Washington University in St. Louis</u>	Olin School of Business	Saint Louis, MO	21%
24	<u>University of Notre Dame</u>	Mendoza College of Business	Notre Dame, IN	28%
25	<u>Georgetown University</u>	Robert Emmett McDonough School of Business	Washington, D.C.	31%
26	<u>Babson College</u>	Franklin W. Olin Graduate School of Business	Babson Park, MA	29%
27	<u>University of Southern California</u>	Marshall School of Business	Los Angeles, CA	25%
28	<u>University of Maryland, College Park</u>	Robert H. Smith School of Business	College Park, MD	34%
29	<u>University of Rochester</u>	William E. Simon Graduate School of Business Administration	Rochester, NY	26%
30	<u>Vanderbilt University</u>	Owen Graduate School of Management	Nashville, TN	20%

NEXT STEPS. What can be done to make B-schools more hospitable to women? An entire organization, Forté Foundation, was founded to unite educators, recruiters, and students to respond to the issues raised in the survey. Now, Forté is leading the charge to reach out early on to high school and undergraduate women to demonstrate the value of an MBA.

"We as women have done a phenomenal job of changing the way the game is played," says Majaliwa DeRamus, president of the Black Students Assn. at the University of Michigan's Stephen M. Ross School of Business. "The next step after burning our bras is building a better, more well-rounded corporate world."

BusinessWeek Online recently surveyed a cross-section of women -- from MBA students to educators -- concerned about this issue and asked them to describe the obstacles that keep women from seeking MBAs and to suggest some solutions. Here's what they came up with:

Lack of role models. This is the No. 1 factor discouraging women from pursuing an MBA, according to the 2000 study. Although more women than ever before are taking on senior management roles, they still hold only 13.6% of the board seats at top U.S. companies, according to the 2003 Catalyst Census of Women Board Directors.

Prescription: Recruiting and hiring more women professors is an obvious first step. Writing women-friendly case studies wouldn't hurt either, say many students. A good starting point for promoting the habit of leadership among women is within school organizations. For example, at Stanford Graduate School of Business, women make up more than 50% of the current Student Association and help lead over 60% of the student clubs, says Kristin Najarian, assistant director of MBA Admissions.

Timing. Many talented women choose medical or law school -- where they now make up 50% of the student body. A major reason, some experts say, is that students can attend those programs directly out of undergraduate school. Most of the top MBA programs, on the other hand, require at least three to five years of work experience, which means that a typical woman would start B-school as late as age 28 and graduate at age 30. That's a point in their lives when many are planning to start a family and feel forced to choose between that and a career.

Prescription: Gradually increasing female enrollment is the top priority here. "When men start carrying 50% of the burden for family care, I think we'll see MBA classes made up of 50% women," says Edith A. Hunt, managing director at Goldman Sachs and chairperson of the executive board of the Forté Foundation. "But I'm fairly realistic about that. If we could see 40% in the next five years, then I would say we have leaped forward." Most full-time MBA programs also have made housing more accessible to students with families and opened some events to spouses and children.

Women tend to be more risk-adverse than men. Elissa Ellis, executive director of the Forté Foundation, says women are even more cautious than men about holding onto their jobs and forgoing B-school during an economic downturn, -- partly because women earn less and have less of a financial cushion.

Prescription: Offering more scholarships and financial aid to women will make them more likely to enroll in full-time programs, say experts. Last year, Forté Foundation doled out more than \$1.8 million in scholarships to women pursuing an MBA.

Gender stereotyping. Virginia E. Schein, professor of Management & Psychology at Pennsylvania's Gettysburg College, found that both men and women linked male traits with those of good managers. By the '80s, men still believed male managers were the natural choice, but women didn't, Schein says. "Men are still the decision-makers," she adds. "If they see women as less capable, even if subconsciously, those biases come up in hiring."

Prescription: Making people aware of the misperceptions is a great first step, says Schein, because many men are willing to change once they're made aware of their biases. For instance, the Diana Project, a group established in 1999 to research why so few women-owned businesses received venture capital, was endorsed by several male VCs. "If men exclude women businesses, they might be missing good opportunities, and they know that now that we've identified the problem," says Candida Brush, Diana Project organizer and associate professor of Strategy & Policy at Boston University.

Curriculum. Until recently, the culture at many business schools was a boy's club -- replete with beer busts and golf outings. The classroom curriculum also tended to turn off females, who are usually more interested in using their careers to contribute to the greater good of society, according to Catalyst studies. Students add that the case studies rarely include women subjects or women-friendly businesses, which makes it harder for women to relate.

Prescription: Women are already beginning to network in bars and on the fairway. In the post-Enron era, schools are also starting to add more courses on corporate social responsibility, ethics, and management of nonprofits, which tend to interest women. Now, MBA recruiters need to press schools catch up with corporations, which often are "more progressive [than B-schools] in pursuing gender-based programs and creating more inclusive environments," says Laura Canty-Swapp, senior director of the Western region of Catalyst.

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