

Asian business schools battle for top MBAs

by Amanda Vermeulen 2 days ago



Executive education is a competitive business, and no less so than in Asia where local and foreign institutions are engaged in an increasingly robust tussle to recruit the top students.

In particular, demand for executive education is growing in China, which has dozens of tier one and tier two universities producing quality undergraduates keen to further their education, as well as an ever-expanding population of mid-level executives on executive MBA programmes.

MBA providers outside China are facing stiff competition from their Chinese rivals, which now account for five of the top 11 MBA programmes globally, according to the 2012 FT executive MBA ranking.

The surge in the popularity of MBAs in China is evident in the recent announcement that the world's leading business school – according to Bloomberg's Businessweek – will relocate its main Asian campus from Singapore to Hong Kong. The University of Chicago (Booth campus) says the shift was motivated by needing to be closer to China to cater to the rising demand.

There are other factors to consider too, if you take the Economist's Sea Turtle Index into account. The index ranks university cities from both an education and an investment destination – and in this regard, Hong Kong is not only one of the best in the world, it is the leading Asian contender.

The latest index ranked Hong Kong the third best city for an overseas education, based on five criteria: educational returns; real estate returns; financial returns; work experience and the social experience. In comparison, Singapore was ranked 12th. Beijing comes in at 27, and Shanghai is in 49th position.

Singapore universities and business schools maintain that the city state remains an attractive hub for business education, despite Hong Kong's ranking. A number of Singapore business schools cited the multinational make-up of both the student bodies and faculty as advantages in producing 'Asia-ready' business people with networks that span geographies and disciplines.

Singapore's INSEAD MBA, for example, is delivered by a faculty comprising 35 nationalities, while the classes include people from 80 different nations, with no single country dominating the student body.



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Tan Wee Teck, marketing manager for the business school of the National University of Singapore, says the Lion City is 'in the heart of Asia' and this makes it the "perfect place to learn about doing business in this region".

He says that an additional strength is the medium of education. English is the official working language in Singapore, and the global language of business. Tan says that this provides accessibility for professionals who are thinking of developing a career outside of their home (Asian) country.

This is also true of INSEAD's focus, with Pejay Belland , director of marketing, Admissions & Financial Aid/ Degree Programmes, noting that the business school's global MBA graduating class in 2012 found jobs in 422 different companies across 63 countries with 34% in Western Europe and almost 30% in Asia Pacific.

Asia-focused education is a major focus for many of the MBA providers in Singapore. Singapore Management University (SMU) has a young MBA programme, but Anne Boelling, Director of MBA Programme Office of Postgraduate Professional Programmes, says that it is reviewed regularly, and the latest enhancements have raised the emphasis on Asia.

"SMU's case writing initiative produces case studies focusing on Asian companies and these supplement case studies written on western companies. A focus on Asian business permeates the entire MBA experience."

Strathclyde says its Singapore MBA takes the rapid growth of businesses in Asia into account, and has – accordingly – structured its curriculum to provide students with the fundamentals to running a company as well as a focus on strategy.