

More than a test: How the GMAT gauges your MBA future

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The GMAT is a daunting first step towards an MBA, but its benefits go beyond getting you into the school of your choice - evidence shows it also helps students cope better once they have embarked on their MBA studies.

One of the most feared exams in the academic world, the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) is an obstacle faced by prospective graduate business students worldwide.

The three-and-a-half hour long exam assesses analytical writing and problem-solving abilities. Its questions address areas like data sufficiency, logic and critical reasoning that are vital in real-world business and management.

Each year a quarter of a million would-be students take the test. Over 1,700 universities worldwide list it amongst admissions requirements, including the University of Cape Town's Graduate School of Business (UCT GSB).

While the school has attracted criticism for its insistence on the GMAT, Dr Ailsa Stewart Smith, a senior lecturer at the UCT GSB, who has been running a GMAT Prep course for over 20 years, says the test is more than just an admissions hurdle.

"Many MBA applicants have been in the workplace and out of study for some time, and the GMAT is in itself a preparation for a return to academia," says Smith.

Most business schools, including the UCT GSB, require previous work experience. That means GMAT is also a way for students to gauge how likely they are to succeed at the MBA itself.

"If you're struggling with quant for example, that is a clear indicator that you may not be prepared for the quantitative portion of MBA studies. Students can assess where their weaknesses are, overcome them and reapply when they are more prepared," she explains.

According to research from the Graduate Management Admission Council (GMAC), the GMAT score is a solid indicator of an applicant's potential, and a good predictor for academic success. The exam earns a validity score of 0.48 out of 1.00 for predicting students' grades in the first year of an MBA programme.

GMAT scores were found to be better predictors of grades than undergraduate grade point average.

And this is one of the reasons the UCT GSB boasts a near-perfect 100% graduation rate for its MBA classes.

"Once a student has managed to master GMAT, it is unlikely that they will find any material on the MBA that they won't be able to cope with," Smith says.

Smith's prep course, which she teaches with Dr Trevor Wegner, a former Associate Professor of Statistical Sciences at UCT, is designed to boost confidence by familiarising students with the test. Content and layout are covered, as are answering techniques and time management.

More than 25% of applicants who participated in the GMAT Preparation Course in 2013 were accepted into the 2014 GSB MBA programme. That investment in the front end of their MBA future will turn out to be money well spent.

The GSB is consistently ranked in the *Financial Times* Full-Time MBA Global Top 100. GSB graduates are ranked 20 out of 100 by the Financial Times in terms of weighted salary average after they graduate and 25 in terms of career progress.

"If you want an MBA from a good school, that school is going to require a lot from you to get in. The GMAT test is not meant to be easy. You've got to prepare yourself to get in, and once you do, you've got a good future ahead," Smith says.

UCT's Graduate School of Business five-day GMAT Preparation Courses will run in Cape Town and Johannesburg. For more information and GMAT Preparation Course dates log on to <http://www.gsb.uct.ac.za/gmat-prep-ct> (Cape Town) and <http://www.gsb.uct.ac.za/gmat-prep-jhb> (Johannesburg).

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