

UCT's Executive MBA programme cracks prestigious global Top 50 ranking

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The UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB) is ranked 47th in the world, and the best in Africa, for its MBA specialising in Executive Management (EMBA) according to the Financial Times (FT) EMBA Rankings for 2019. The UCT GSB EMBA has now been ranked by three separate organisations (including Eduniversal and Quacquarelli Symonds) as the best EMBA in Africa and is the first African programme to be ranked in the top 50 worldwide.



“This is a big deal,” says interim director of the UCT GSB Associate Professor Kosheek Sewchurran. “This ranking is a significant endorsement for the innovative work we are doing here in Africa to find better ways to produce ethical, aware and empathetic leaders capable of leading with impact in the 21st Century.”

The UCT GSB EMBA ranked 10th globally for Career Progress and 5th in the world for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Career Progress is calculated according to changes in the level of seniority, and the size of company alumni work in now, versus before their EMBA. CSR measures the proportion of core courses dedicated to CSR, ethics, social and environmental issues.

Sewchurran said that this is a further endorsement of the UCT GSB’s commitment to developing leaders who are morally, socially and environmentally aware. Its MBA programme was recently awarded a place in the Top 40 2019 Corporate Knights Better World MBA Ranking, that aims to identify and rank business schools around the world that seek to equip graduates with the skills and attitudes to change the world for the better.

“At the UCT GSB our teaching, learning and research is geared towards building a more integrated and sustainable world and it is very rewarding to see that this approach is translating into real currency on the global stage,” he says.

The EMBA programme is one of the fastest growing postgraduate degrees at UCT and is known for its focus on the practice of management and leadership rather than on traditional training in business functions. “We’ve really pushed the boundaries of what business education can be,” says Sewchurran. “In a sense we have been the academic equivalent of a venture capitalist – investing in our own ideas to build a degree that is truly distinctive.”

Now in its 21st year, the programme has seen a host of captains of industry pass through it over the years. Furthermore, a recent innovation has seen the EMBA taken even closer to business, through a customised offering for a group of executives from a corporate seeking to retool for their business’ specific challenges.

Sewchurran says that the EMBA can lay claim to being the only true practice degree of its kind in the world and its popularity is in part because its graduates recognise the transformative impact it has on their work and life. “Managing is an embodied experience and can be overwhelming. Theory alone will not get you very far in the modern workplace,” he says. “Managers and leaders are constantly in situations where they have limited agency, and the situation requires rapid adaptation and collaboration. This requires wisdom and you can’t teach this emphasising just knowing – since wisdom only comes through coaching and habitation of moral character in practice.”

The EMBA provides reflective strategies and practical insight to build students’ capacity to thrive in ambiguity, tension and complexity. It was one of the first business programmes in South Africa to teach mindfulness as part of the core curriculum. The programme depends on a strong mix of academics, practitioners and professional support staff – as well as, of course, talented students from a wide variety of disciplines and backgrounds – to function effectively.

“The essence of practice in management, of really coming to grips with the lived experience of ambiguity, tension and complexity, is a crucial skill for leaders in disruptive and uncertain times,” says Sewchurran. “In this the UCT GSB is leading the way. As a business school in an emerging market, we are perhaps more exposed to complexity and flux – but in a volatile and uncertain world, our expertise in navigating this is increasingly being recognised and endorsed by the FT and others.”

About the FT EMBA Ranking

EMBA programmes must meet certain criteria to be eligible for consideration in the prestigious FT ranking. First the school must be accredited by either the US’s Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business or the European EQUIS. The EMBA must be cohort-based, with students enrolling and graduating together, with at least 30 graduates each year. Data for the ranking are collected using two online surveys, the first completed by participating schools and the second by alumni who graduated from programmes in 2016. The FT requires a response rate of 20 per cent (or 20 fully completed responses, whichever is the greater) from the alumni survey for a school to be considered for the final ranking. The only other African programme to feature in the 2019 ranking is the Gordon Institute of Business Science at the University of Pretoria which is ranked at 82.

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