

15 Biggest Regrets Of MBA Students

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Jeff Schmitt

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“Well begun is half done.”

It reads like a quip from Mary Poppins, a practically perfect mix of sensible and steady. Among MBAs, it is often the advice they regret not following.

Come August, the process will begin anew. For first-years, business school can be a paradise. So much and so new all at once. No wonder they feel so alive! Many equate it to “drinking from a firehose.” Clubs, activities, speakers, trips – MBAs are bound to find something that taps into their passions. Let’s not forget the people! What happens when you blend students from various industries and countries? Energy, that’s what – and ideas too. While these students may be different on the surface, dive deeper and you’ll find

they're wired the same way. They're adventurers and risk-takers – life-long learners and relentless achievers – who can lose focus when the demands of classes and recruiters bear down.

“A WHIRLWIND”



Yale SOM's Tony Senanayake

That's what **Tony Senanayake** experienced. He describes his first months at Yale SOM as “a whirlwind of professional opportunities, social connections, and information overload.” Looking back, the 2020 grad believes he should've invested more time in researching and planning.

“Prior to starting business school, I wish that I had more clearly articulated my goals for my time at business school in order to help distinguish the signal from the noise,” he tells *Poets&Quants*. “It is easy to get caught up in the crowd early in the MBA experience, especially if you have some uncertainty in your goals. A mentor recommended the process of writing your goals and then having them automatically sent to you via email every month to help guide your decision-making and having taken on this advice, I would recommend it prospective applicants and soon-to-be MBA students.”

On the opposite coast, UCLA Anderson's **Ajey Kaushal** describes business school as “a life lesson in prioritization.” The student body president, Kaushal encourages MBAs to talk to current and former students ahead of time about the experience, so they can identify what brings the greatest value to their limited time.

“EASY TO LOSE YOURSELF”

“It’s so easy to get distracted by literally all of the fantastic events and programming that enrich the experience,” he admits. “But it’s equally easy to lose yourself and stretch yourself thin. I would have done a better job of speaking to my peers ahead of me and identifying what are the core aspects of the experience I should definitely immerse myself in, and pick one or two other aspects that I could use for stress relief and strengthen relationships with my peers. Otherwise, it can lead to some pretty late nights and some skipped meals.”

Many times, first-years take off the summer before business school to travel and re-charge. That wasn’t the case for **Sonovia Wint**. Instead, she worked up until a week before she entered Dartmouth College’s Tuck School. As a result, Wint says, she regrets missing out on the downtime needed to “make the mental transition,” let alone engage in self-reflection.



Danielle Mayorga, U.C. Berkeley

“I firmly believe that having an understanding of not only what you hope to gain from the MBA but also what you hope to contribute will guarantee a high impact experience. Because of the overwhelming number of opportunities available right away, having your goals written out and a loose plan can help you stay on track and not lose sight of your motivations for joining the program in the first place.”

CONSTANTLY RE-EVALUATE WHERE YOU ARE

One caveat: those goals can quickly change once first-years arrive on campus (or after they complete their internship). That's what **Danielle Mayorga** learned at U.C. Berkeley's Haas School. Her advice? MBAs should be constantly re-evaluating their goals and quickly remove any activity that doesn't contribute to their ever-evolving long-term vision.

“Everyone always says how fast time flies during an MBA program, but you don't really understand the magnitude of activities, clubs, and case competitions that can distract you from your goals until you get here,” asserts the 2020 grad and P&Q MBA To Watch. “With that in mind, I started off my first year by outlining some big- picture goals for my MBA, but I wish I would have checked in with myself more often. I would have asked myself more frequently: *Am I honoring my priorities with my time? Are these still my goals? If not, how have they changed?* It's something I've been doing a lot more in my last semester, but it would have been more valuable to do more consistently.”

Being slow to change course is just one of the regrets cited by MBAs. This year, as part of nominating our 2020 **Best & Brightest MBAs** and **MBAs To Watch**, we asked top graduates the following question: “*Looking back over your MBA experience, what is the one thing you'd do differently and why?*” Wondering what mistakes you should avoid as you begin preparing for business school? From pursuing perfection to skipping case competitions, here are the biggest regrets of the top MBAs from the Class of 2020.

1) Started a Company: “The one thing I would do differently is the piece of advice so many alumni gave— I would have attempted to start my own venture. Even if I did not or could not feasibly get my own idea off the ground, at least I could have taken advantage of the time and access to resources to lay a foundation. At Darden we have multiple classes on entrepreneurship; we have the iLab dedicated to entrepreneurship and business school itself is kind of a think tank. This is not to say I will never start my own venture, but taking my first steps at Darden would have put me that much closer to launch if I decide in the future to go for it.”

Vita Wu, University of Virginia (Darden)



University of Virginia's Vita Wu

2) Lived In The Moment: “I think if I had to do it again I’d slow down and soak the experience in a little bit more. In the first year, I felt pressure to perform academically, to secure an internship, participate in events and case competitions, and get to know my classmates. I got involved early and in many things, but I wish I’d slowed down to celebrate the successes and to mourn the disappointments more, rather than moving on to the next thing. These two years went by in a flash – what I learned was to be cardinally present with every experience and emotion because it’s through processing these that I have grown the most.”

Nari Malkhasyan, Boston University (Questrom)

3) Spoken Up Earlier: “I would have tried to have more confidence early in my time at SOM. I was surprised in my first year by how hard it was to take up space and airtime. Being surrounded by so many accomplished classmates made it difficult to justify speaking up in group settings. I would tell my first-year-self something I’ve realized through this program: it’s really hard to guess what other people are thinking and how they may react to you. In a class of 70 students, there will likely be 70 different reactions to anything you do, and you probably can’t predict most of them; so why not just speak up, knowing your contribution will most likely be valuable to someone? Trust that you deserve to be here and to be heard.”

Helen Knight, Yale SOM

“Looking back to my first semester at Sloan, I would have spent less time worrying about whether my answers were right, or my opinions were valid and shed anxieties that come with imposter syndrome. I have since overcome this and have built the confidence to speak up in class but know that I missed opportunities to contribute to meaningful conversations.”

Celi Khanyile-Lynch, MIT (Sloan)



MIT Sloan’s Celi Khanyile-Lynch

“Know my worth. Coming into the program, I knew that my fellow students were more experienced and had managerial experience. That knowledge was daunting. For a while, I suffered from strong imposter syndrome. I found myself undervaluing my own skillset and worth, especially since they were less technical or expansive as my peers. Looking back, I fear that I wasted too much time trying to compare myself to others and going after opportunities simply because I saw other people taking them. Ultimately, it dawned on me that everyone was admitted into the program because their individual talents were helping to create the unique Foster tapestry. If I could go back and change one thing I would push myself to speak up earlier and fail often! One of the great advantages of returning to school is returning to the safety of an environment that encourages failure and iterative learning.”

Zara Mahmood, University of Washington (Foster)

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