



Alum says MBA Online Offers Support, Cross-Country Community

WRITTEN BY | Hope Aucoin



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Ryan Owens

GRADUATION YEAR
2023

MAJOR
MBA

HOMETOWN
New Orleans, La.

Community is key for New Orleanian Ryan Owens.

After moving to Natchitoches to pursue his bachelor's degree, Owens was active in numerous organizations, including fraternity life and university programming. Since moving back home to New Orleans, he's remained active in his church as well as groups and organizations within his company.

To thrive in an **online MBA degree program**, Owens would need to feel connected.

In choosing the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, he found community among staff, peers and professors.

"The only thing I can say is that if anyone thinks that they want to get an MBA, no matter where they are, they should consider the University of Louisiana at Lafayette because it gives you the tools that you need to succeed," he says. "It is a family. And no matter what, there's always somebody there to help. It was just great, great communication from the staff on down to the courses."

From IBM to MBA

The catalyst for Owens to pursue his MBA was a slow burn.

After he finished his bachelor's degree in computer information systems in 2013, he saw peers immediately launching into grad school.

Owens found enough of a challenge in his first role at IBM as an application development consultant.

"It was an eye-opening experience, because I didn't know what consultants really did," says Owens. "I thought I would just work on certain projects that they would provide, but as a consultant, you had to find your own gigs. You had to find your own jobs by your skill set and manage your skill set in order to stay staffed."

Owens rose to the challenge, building his technological skillset, as well as his interpersonal acumen.

"You're constantly interviewing, and that was a good thing for me because now I'm able to interview on the spot and I know exactly where I want to take a conversation."

With a few years of experience under his belt, Owens saw an MBA degree not only as a professional standard, but also as an opportunity to expand his knowledge beyond his immediate role and gain skills for future management positions.

"We get so comfortable in the things that we're doing today, and we don't get a chance to apply ourselves or rather challenge ourselves in a manner that really will help us in the long run," says Owens. "To put yourself in a different position, there's so much that you can do with that kind of knowledge."

UL Lafayette stood out as a top choice for its affordability and the opportunity for Owens to complete his degree 100% online.

Offered through the B.I. Moody III College of Business Administration, the University's MBA degree program features the same AACSB-accredited curriculum whether students learn on campus, online, or through the college's executive model program.

"It was, at first, very challenging to get the work done in the frequency that I needed, but it was a good challenge for me," he says. "It taught me how to segment my time, so I really enjoyed that. And having that kind of a challenge and having that kind of focus was indeed a big skill for me to acquire."

Coast-to-Coast Connections

Owens says he was able to expand his knowledge and skills in data mining through QMET 510: Data Analysis and gain advanced research skills through courses like IBUS 540: International Business.

"International Business was a lot of writing, and the final project was intense. But I loved it because I did so much research in that class, and this was amazing because I learned so much about my topic," says Owens. "That research will stick with me forever."

Owens especially valued the diverse range of professional and cultural perspectives offered by peers across the country.

For the 2022-2023 academic year, students enrolled in the MBA degree program online from 46 states and Canada.

"My favorite part was the groups — getting different perspectives on how others think and working with people from different states, different countries. I remember there was this one peer, she was from the Caribbean Islands. It was really awesome to work with somebody from there," says Owens. "Then there was this project we were working with someone from Alaska, and the project centered around Alaskan tourism. So working and understanding different perspectives and different cultures and how we could apply all the things that we're learning along with that was really awesome."

And many of those travel to Lafayette at the end of their degree program to see the University's 125-year-old campus and celebrate with their faculty and classmates for commencement.

Including Owens.

"I wanted to show myself that all the hard work paid off," he says. "And because I did this in about two years, I wanted to walk and hear my name called because it was almost like a sign of peace and relief for me that it was done."

With his degree in hand, Owens is working with his team to develop a project using the additional data analytics knowledge he built. And while he's applying some of his new finance and accounting skills personally, he hopes to one day scale those skills as a manager.



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