Integrating AI into University of Phoenix's MBA Curriculum

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Abstract

As AI proficiency becomes the norm in the business world, the University of Phoenix College of Business and IT took action to integrate AI into the curriculum for the Master's in Business Administration program. This process—as we all the underlying principles that guided it—can act as a blueprint for institutions seeking to integrate AI into their course curriculum.

Executive Summary

While generative artificial intelligence (AI) is likely to touch every role in every industry, for students seeking their Master's in Business Administration, the pressure is particularly high: Not only are many businesses shifting to AI-heavy or even AI-first models, but employees are driving industry expectations that AI proficiency is a must-have, as noted by Mowreader: "Postings requiring generative AI skills for non–computer science or information technology roles grew ninefold between 2022 and 2024." In this light, University of Phoenix, as well as our peers in higher education, have an institutional responsibility to develop curricula that address these important workforce trends. Indeed, students need to enter the workplace with experience using AI so they are not only proficient in practice, but drivers of change.

To address this, the College of Business and IT gathered stakeholders behind the MBA curriculum to identify ways to integrate AI skills into relevant learning outcomes based on how AI is being used in industry. This undertaking included faculty from the college across different fields of study, members of our Industry Advisory Council, and AI specialists. This work was guided by the University of Phoenix's established AI philosophy and ethical

guidelines, ensuring that AI integration emphasized responsible, transparent, and human-centered use aligned with institutional values. It reveals how the University of Phoenix responded to the shifting environment of AI, and how we were able to build upon our institutional legacy of innovation and change in not only a timely manner, but in alignment with current course outcomes and the core principles of the University of Phoenix. . In doing so, we established an adaptable model that can be applied across subject areas and curricula, illustrating how institutions can support continuous change by reinforcing mission aligned frameworks. This approach suggests that a data-driven, skills aligned approach can be utilized as a blueprint for institutions looking to integrate generative AI into course curricula.

Identifying AI Opportunities

While there is no shortage of examples of how AI [1] is upending so many industries, the process of integrating AI into the MBA curriculum began when we assessed a wide swath of data and resources. Doing so enabled us to act effectively and efficiently. This began with our faculty, who participated in work groups, meetings, and surveys to share qualitative data on what they're experiencing in their respective industries. We also leveraged the expertise of members of our Industry Advisory Council, who shared insights into what they're seeing in the field as well as opportunities and needs of future employees. Similar higher ed institutions were researched and evaluated to determine what they were doing to contribute to AI education. Finally, we looked at job posting analytics and demand for specialized skills through Lightcast data so that we could ensure we were up to date with the current labor market.

In doing so, we were able to identify several key opportunities for incorporating AI into the MBA curriculum:

- **Identifying relevant AI tools and applications:** The MBA curriculum must identify the tools students are likely to encounter in the workplace and prepare them to use those tools effectively, providing both hands-on experience and guidance on evaluating their use across different contexts.

- **Incorporate real-world use cases for AI in business contexts:** Courses must showcase how MBA students could be expected to use AI within their respective fields, focusing on the skills needed to apply AI in real-world contexts and articulate the value of both AI and human expertise. This approach was reinforced during

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[1] While AI comprises a wide array of different technology, this white paper focuses specifically on generative AI and its role in the workplace as an accessible tool that can be used across industries and across workstreams.

discussions with our Industry Advisory Council, who emphasized the value of practical AI applications.

- **Provide guidance on how students can use AI tools in assessments:** Students must be able to put AI to work in their MBA courses, not only to succeed as learners, but to gain real experience with AI tools and their effective use. This includes an evaluation of AI outputs to identify shortcomings or blind spots that skilled users should be aware of. This is particularly important at the University of Phoenix, where ongoing innovation in educational tools and emerging technologies enables us to implement best practices that learners can apply directly in the workplace.

The University of Phoenix also follows the Digital Educational Council's AI Literacy Framework, which provides a human-centric approach to AI, mirroring our focus on students' real skills and career-readiness. This provided University of Phoenix with five dimensions for integrating AI:

- Understanding AI and Data
- Critical Thinking and Judgement
- Ethical and Responsible Use
- Human-Centricity, Emotional Intelligence and Creativity
- Domain Expertise

Updates to curricula link directly to these tenets. They also ensure institutional alignment by establishing shared guidance and roadmap for determining how AI is implemented across our programs.

This data-driven approach included a review of how peer institutions across higher education have integrated AI, such as changes to curriculum, faculty training, and AI-related policies. This analysis enabled University of Phoenix to both adopt best practices and differentiate its approach: rather than teaching AI tools or prompting techniques in isolation, the MBA curriculum emphasizes the application of AI in real business contexts. As a result, learners produce portfolio-ready artifacts that demonstrate applied competence and can be leveraged directly in the workplace.

Spotlight on Ethical AI Use

Implementing AI has been difficult for many organizations, especially given concerns around the ethical use of AI. Learners leveraging their MBA in the workplace will likely face decisions around how their organization should implement AI according to industry best practices and the particular needs and ethical concerns of their organizations.

In response to this, University of Phoenix developed [guidelines for ethical use of AI](#) in courses, providing clarity and purpose when developing the changes to the MBA curriculum, while the [Center for AI Resources](#) provides guidance for faculty and students alike. Furthermore, courses, as well as faculty training, provide specific examples and general resources for these ethical concerns, emphasizing this guideline's practical application. AI is not an abstract concept or potential innovation; rather, it is a fully implemented and increasingly relied upon technical solution that needs to be put in context of real business, which requires understanding of ethical as well as practical use.

Artificial Intelligence in the Real World

To support the integration of AI into the curriculum, University of Phoenix MBA faculty were engaged through surveys, workgroups, and structured working sessions with the curriculum team to provide guidance on the course redesign process. Through this data, the college developed the following key tenets to guide revisions for the program:

- Course content should include references to AI where applicable, such as updated readings, discussions, and videos.
- Summative assessments and formative assessments for each MBA course should be updated to align with course objectives and the AI skills that have been embedded into the curriculum.
- Weekly discussion prompts and case studies should incorporate real-world AI use cases where relevant.

These changes were intentionally integrated within existing course designs to preserve established learning outcomes while strategically incorporating AI.

Consider one example: In a management course, learning outcomes focus on the ability to analyze organizational needs in a changing global business environment. This isa representative example of something learners will face in their industry, and a way to understand the rise of AI. The course outcome already emphasizes evaluation, strategy, and decision-making, as well as the underlying course skill of business administration; therefore AI was integrated to develop the specific skill of AI-driven decision-making to align with how analysis and strategy are performed, once again without shifting what students are already asked to demonstrate.

In the original assignment, students were asked to analyze a company's [SWOT](#) and identify unmet organizational needs in order to propose a competitive business initiative—a task centered on human-led analysis and strategic reasoning. In the updated version of the assignment, which integrates AI use and skills, that core question remains the same, but the scope of analysis expands. While students still analyze the organization, its SWOT, and

its strategic needs, now they also examine how AI is being used in the industry, how competitors leverage AI for advantage, and how AI-driven insights can inform organizational decision-making. Instead of proposing a generic initiative, students propose an AI-driven business opportunity that responds to the same unmet needs identified through the SWOT. Moreover, students are not prescribed a particular tool; rather, they are encouraged to explore different AI tools, honing their ability to evaluate these tools' effectiveness in different circumstances and contexts. In other words, students evaluate the tools and their outputs and use critical thinking skills to assess their accuracy, efficacy, and real-world utility.

In addition, the Course Student Learning Outcome (CSLO) did not change, nor did the assessment become more technical; all that changed was the strategic toolkit students are expected to consider when responding to real-world business challenges. For example, the CSLO, "Analyze the needs of organizations within a changing global business environment" remains the same; however, students now complete this analysis with AI tools, reflecting the real-world application. So, the integration of AI into this assignment is visible in a few main ways:

- The analysis includes AI as part of the organizational and industry context, not as a standalone topic.
- Students must assess how AI supports better strategic decisions, efficiency, or competitiveness, directly connecting AI use to organizational goals.
- The proposed initiative requires students to articulate why AI is essential to the solution, including the type of AI involved and how it supports ethical and strategic management.
- This exercise, itself a real-world scenario mirroring how students can expect to use AI in the workplace, provides hands-on practice as well as tangible deliverables that students can speak to with expertise.

This was, of course, just one change in just one course in the MBA curriculum. But its implementation, as well as its grounding in data analysis and planning, speaks to the actionable ways the University of Phoenix is integrating AI skills into its curriculum and serves as a model for future integration. In short, these changes have updated the MBA program as well as reaffirmed a core principle of the university: Providing students with career-ready skills.

Spotlight on MBA Faculty

The effort to integrate AI into the MBA curriculum was a collaborative effort for numerous stakeholders at University of Phoenix. Faculty assisted as subject matter experts and

shared insights through surveys, providing input to the curriculum team and instructional designers to support targeted revisions to assignments, discussions and course materials. Faculty then utilized these changes and supported the integration of AI with their instruction. This integration builds on existing expertise, as many of our practitioner faculty already use AI in the workforce in alignment with the expectations we set for our students.

To support our faculty, University of Phoenix provides multiple opportunities for training and input on AI integration, emphasizing the importance of providing students with the same tools faculty are putting into practice. As an institution, all faculty were required to complete training on the use of AI in their courses, touching upon topics including ethical and responsible use of AI, AI tools and prompting, AI safety and privacy, and benefits and limitations of AI.

Additionally, for each course that is revised, faculty members receive detailed guidance on the changes that are coming, including course previews of each new element. For the AI integration, this guidance includes what faculty should be providing to students for resources and what to look for while grading. The faculty supervisors were also trained and brought in on these changes to ensure they are prepared to provide individual coaching to faculty that may need extra assistance.

Like the Center for AI Resources, the faculty resource center has a variety of resources including a 5-day workshop, just-in-time one-hour trainings, FAQs and articles, and a Viva Engage faculty engagement community dedicated to AI use.

Conclusion

Incorporating AI into the University of Phoenix MBA required collaboration across the organization, with the curriculum team leading the effort and drawing on input and data from administrators, industry leaders, and faculty.

While integrating AI is a critical and rapidly evolving priority, it reflects the University of Phoenix's longstanding commitment to continuous innovation in response to changes in the business environment, a commitment that will continue as AI reshapes industry and creates new opportunities.

Our data driven approach, informed by input from stakeholders and business field experts, provides other institutions with a roadmap for integrating AI while maintaining a focus on these core skills. Ultimately, while this effort came about in reaction to the rise of AI, it also reflects our mission of providing our students with the real-world skills they will need in the workplace. Taken together, this approach demonstrates how institutions can intentionally

and sustainably integrate emerging technologies while preserving academic rigor and career relevance.

Author Bios

Since 2014, **Natalie Pratt** has served University of Phoenix in curriculum and design as faculty, and most recently, as the Associate Dean of Business Programs in the College of Business and Information Technology. Pratt supports the college in curriculum design and program development, faculty support, vendor relationships and academic operations. She has more than 19 years of experience in education and currently holds an M.Ed, MC, and MBA.

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