



Commercial Real Estate Trends 2004

Graduate degrees for the real estate professional: Which one is for you?

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In today's job market, graduate degrees are becoming more prevalent and almost expected in many sectors of the real estate industry. This is particularly true in commercial real estate if one wants to work in mid-to-upper management in development, finance, appraisal, marketing, law or management. With the new Masters of Science degree in Real Estate (MSRE) scheduled to begin in Fall 2004 at the University of San Diego (USD), there will be at least four different options that will be available to students looking for a graduate degree with a real estate focus. Other choices include obtaining a traditional MBA, an international MBA (IMBA) and a JD/MBA -- all with a real estate emphasis.

With the slowing economy affecting the real estate markets, some individuals are looking to transition their careers and are making plans to complete a graduate degree. Some of these individuals are asking about the difference between the various degrees. Why should one consider completing an MSRE degree when the MBA or IMBA has "name recognition?"

The answer to this question lies in the graduate candidate's career goals and aspirations. If someone is certain that they have caught the "real estate bug" and know they want to work in real estate, then the MSRE is probably the correct degree program. However, if one is not sure about the real estate industry but is more interested in making sure he/she is promoted and/or obtains a higher-level management position, then the MBA, IMBA or JD/MBA leaves the graduate with more options and flexibility when the degree program is completed.

The major difference between the two degrees is the focus of the required courses. In the MSRE program, all courses are taught by teachers with real estate or real estate related expertise. The courses all have a real estate focus and concepts taught in the courses utilize real estate examples. In many courses, the students will have "live" real estate projects designed to help use the tools that are being taught in the classroom. Students are immersed in the issues and problems that face the real estate industry from the very first class all the way to the end of the 11-month program. The MSRE program is set up as a cohort-based program in which the majority of students are full time and will start and end the program together.

The program begins with a week-long "boot camp" course during which the foundation will be laid so the students begin to understand the multi-disciplinary nature of the real estate process, as well as how, as socially responsible leaders, they will play an integral role in enhancing our communities. They will be introduced to the vast array of real estate professions. The course also provides an environment where students begin to learn the skills of networking among themselves and the real estate professional community.

With more than 60 real estate professionals working with the Real Estate Institute at USD, the MSRE students have ample opportunity to meet the leaders in the San Diego real estate community. In addition, the program has a unique weekend seminar series designed to bring in real estate experts from outside San Diego. The seminar allows for a more in-depth analysis of real estate issues and more networking opportunities for the graduate student.

After 32 units of real estate courses, MSRE graduates have been exposed to enough real estate problems that they will have the background to ask the right questions and get the job done with confidence. Graduates will find careers at the middle-to-upper management levels or have the skills to run their own entrepreneurial venture.

The MBA and IMBA degrees offered at USD provide students with a solid background in business or international business administration. Core courses provide a wide breadth of background in business and graduates are prepared to enter a wide range of career opportunities in any type of industry at the middle-to-upper management level.

The program is designed to be extremely flexible so students have the option to take the program as a full-time student and complete the program in two years, or to take it part time with as little as one class a term. The majority of classes are offered in the evening so working professionals can complete the degree while they continue to work. Electives can be taken in real estate, but students are limited to only one area, in order to maintain the broader breadth nature of the MBA. These graduates are equipped with a more generalized understanding of business. There are only three real estate courses for the MBA emphasis -- investments, finance and law - and other courses cover the major business functions but they are more general in nature. In most cases, these courses are taught by individuals without real estate expertise and examples and problems used in the classroom could involve a wide variety of industries.

Both the MSRE and the MBA with a real estate emphasis are valuable degrees for individuals who are working in the real estate industry. Although undergraduate degrees are also extremely valuable (and a requirement for most graduate degrees) they often do not provide a focused, in-depth learning environment. Most students are younger when they complete their undergraduate programs and the college experience is much more than just an academic experience. When one goes to the next level and enters a graduate program, the courses will focus more directly on a given discipline.

All of the real estate programs at USD are built on the reputation and strength of the School of Business Administration and its Real Estate Institute, emphasizing leadership skills, negotiations, ethical decision-making and professional competencies.

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