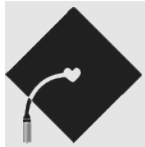


Graduate Student

Master of Business Administration (MBA)
Candidate at Arizona State University



Elvis Diaz

Berry College, Class of 2015

Describe your current position and the journey that led you here.

I am currently an MBA candidate at Arizona State University graduating in May 2019. When I first started at Berry College, I knew that I wanted to work in business, which led me to pursue a major in finance. However, during my time at Berry as a Bonner Scholar, I struggled with how to connect my service work with my major.

After college, I worked for the Bonner Foundation as a Summer Intern and granted a full-time position Program Associate and Fiscal Manager for the New Jersey Bonner AmeriCorps Program for a few years to gain experience in the non-profit sector.

I then decided to pursue my MBA in order to learn more about the business side, focusing my studies on corporate social responsibility. In my MBA program, I am doing a specialization in Sustainable Enterprise which allows me to take courses in social responsibility and sustainability.

What does an average day and year look like for you?

Because my MBA program is in quarters and not semesters, taking four to six classes every seven weeks, it can be very demanding. We have to truncate a semester's worth of information into two months all while balancing all the group work that encompasses in each of our classes. Due to the collaborative nature, you spend most of the time working in teams which switch up every quarter and class. The work itself isn't hard, but it entails managing a lot in a mere twenty-four hour day. In addition to class work, you are always in recruiting mode looking for a summer internship or a full-time job. You are constantly meeting with recruiters, writing cover letters, doing research on companies, preparing for interviews, and meeting with career services to ensure that you'll be set for life after graduation. When I say it's a full-time MBA program, it's no joke. I easily spend more than sixty hours a week studying, in class, and in team meetings.

Do you stay engaged in the community through work or life? How?

For my MBA program in order to receive funding, I am required to do an assistantship. For my assistantship I was originally paired with Junior Achievement of Arizona, a non-profit that brings entrepreneurship and financial literacy skills to K-12 classrooms. Unfortunately, due to my conflicting class schedule and unable to make it off campus, I had to drop this position.



However, I am still able to be involved in the community through my coursework. During the second year of my program, I will be paired with other graduate students outside of the business program to work on a real-world problem in the nearby community in what we call an Intellectual Fusion Learning Lab. Specifically, I will be working with master's students from the College of Public Service and Community Solutions to collaborate with the Arizona Department of Child Services to address issues with efficiencies and logistics in serving children.

Furthermore, I also have been connecting with the LGBTQ organizations in the area and have started one within the business program.

What was the most important factor in choosing a business school?

When looking at business schools, I first applied through the Consortium for Graduate Study in Management. This Consortium is a non-profit organization comprised of twenty top business schools and over seventy-five corporate partners dedicated to increasing the number of underrepresented minorities in business schools and corporate leadership and even offers full-ride fellowships. Diversity was important to me and I wanted to make sure I was at a school that encompassed this. Part of the application required an essay about what work I have done to promote diversity in my life, of which Bonner work fit very well to include. Although I did get accepted to the Consortium, I did not receive the full funding I needed.

I was pleased to hear that I was later accepted to ASU's program which fully funded my entire MBA class in their new launch of the Forward Focus Program. Since ASU is doing this, it allowed for individuals who would not traditionally be your typical business students to enter the program. I am glad that I get to share a classroom with many people from different countries, who also come from non-profit, were teachers, PeaceCorps Alumni, and even AmeriCorps service members.

How would you recommend interested students or individuals get involved in this field?

If a student is interested in finance, they need to be good with spreadsheets, interpreting analytical information, and understanding the concepts of how finance works. However, if business in general is something that they're interested in, it's all about relationships, critical thinking skills, and being comfortable with ambiguity.

The biggest misconception about finance is that careers only involve investment banking or stock trading. This tends to intimidate a lot of people, as it did me. I would like to highlight that there are other paths one can take with finance. Specifically, if they want to continue their Bonner work after graduation, every non-profit or social justice organization needs someone to manage their money.