



MBA-BOUND:

Are you ready?



There's more than one way to get there, explains Kelly Oto

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ou're headed for the United States in hot pursuit of an MBA, but have you considered this: a certificate program may be the

perfect stepping-stone, an opportunity to gain a business background before jumping right into an MBA. Or, it could lead to a fork in the road.

Why not explore your opportunities first?

Enrolling in an MBA program is a huge commitment, not just a financial one. For international students going abroad the first time, living in a new culture is an adjustment. Wonderful, yes – but an adjustment, nevertheless. Driving on the 'wrong' side of the road and immersion in a foreign language is all part of the adventure. For some, the experience can be a bit overwhelming, however. Practicing a new language, experiencing the cultural landscape and gaining business experience in a certificate program can be invaluable, helping to ease the transition.

Remember, there are numerous different paths for wherever you are in your life. A certificate program is also a good way to test out the environment and find the best location for you. It's short-term (3 to 9 months), so whether you choose to go back home or move forward into an MBA program, it provides that much more footing. Many students who've studied in undergraduate programs don't yet have work experience that MBA programs often expect. Some certificate programs offer internships so you can work for an American company. If your concentration was in the humanities and social sciences and have no prior business background, this is an ideal opportunity to get a little practical business experience under your belt – and on your résumé. After completing the program, arriving at that fork in the road, you might even find it unnecessary to pursue that expensive education after all, deciding to return home to your country, bolstered with

valuable certificate knowledge to advance your career.

Certificate programs are designed for post-graduate study. Typically, for young working professionals who would like an emphasis in a specific area of study, but who do not want to commit yet to an advanced degree. Or, perhaps they've reached a peak and need something to help break through that ceiling and get to the next level.

Not everyone in these programs is a young 25-year-old student. For more mature students, 'life happens' and people with kids do not have time to go back into longer 2-year programs. They might even be in their forties or early fifties, sent by their companies to get overseas exposure – a perk for some employees.

For others coming from the technical side, IT people and engineers, for example, who are advancing up the ranks of management and who think they need to acquire management skills in an MBA program – a certificate program might be a good stepping-stone, or an end in itself.

better place to think about the American landscape and what it is turning into than in Orange County...." But if we work hard, we play hard, too. Our beaches, sunny climate, and world-famous attractions such as Disneyland or Hollywood make a fabulous backdrop to come and study and take in the culture.

Here's something to keep in mind: Out here on the Tech Coast, there are numerous local companies in Orange County – one of the largest business centers and consumer markets in the nation – such as Boeing, Allergan, Edwards Life Sciences, Northrop, Mazda, Taco Bell, Billabong, Broadcom, St. John, Cisco, Samsung, Merrill Lynch, Ameriprise – the list goes on. Many corporations see value in hiring international students for internships to bring an overseas insight to their global industries.

So by going through a certificate program you become more marketable in the long run, having earned practical work experience at a professional level if participating in an

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That is, you may find that a certificate program provides enough of a business background to be successful in your new management career.

It's a big world out there

Why not sample your options, get a feel for more than one region, and then choose the right MBA program for you? East Coast or West Coast? Of course, Boston and New York City's reputations speak for themselves. And Southern California is leading the nation into the 21st century, according to New York Times critic Paul Goldberger, who believes "there is no

internship. But whatever your decision, whether it be an MBA, a certificate program, or the realization that you belong on another career track entirely, make sure to choose the right path for you. ☞

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