



GLOBAL STUDY MAGAZINE

UK (online)

**February 2009**

100,000 readers worldwide

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## Love on the MBA

**Signing up for an MBA can bring life-changing experiences; promotion, fresh challenges, a new career. You'd assume that the long hours of studying which are part of the package would leave little time for romance - but some graduates leave business school with an MBA and a partner for life. By Widget Finn**

Leading business schools boast their international credentials so it's not surprising that students from different parts of the globe get together and sometimes even stay together. Alem Muminovic who is Bosnian and Lorena Fridman from Mexico met at the Monaco Business School and married in Mexico two years after graduating.

Reshma Raquel who is Indian and Stephan Bauer from Germany met at Lancaster University Management School (LUMS), while Aleksandra Jaworska from Poland and Laurent Collignon who is French probably take the prize for long-distance courtship. They met in India at a seminar for the ESCP-EAP Executive MBA, and their relationship grew during other MBA events held in Canada, the US and developing countries.

Life becomes very complicated when conducting a global romance comments Aleksandra. "We were visiting interesting places, working hard, and learning about each other too." Their wedding was appropriately across borders with a civil marriage in France and a religious one in Poland.

The close-knit community of an MBA programme means that people get to know each other very quickly, and what starts as friendship can blossom into love. Loreta and David Kirkland met while they were doing an MBA at LUMS. Loreta, who is Peruvian, says "It can be lonely as a foreign student in a strange country speaking an unfamiliar language. At first David was just a good friend to talk to over a cup of coffee, then we spent a lot of time together when we were doing our dissertation."

Studying as a couple can have its advantages as Aleksandra Jaworska points out. "Laurent's strengths lay in marketing, while finance is my strong point, so we could help each other with the exercises and case studies which meant we got the most out of the lessons."

Though for Reshma and Stephan Bauer it was probably just as well that they were doing different subjects. "I'm a perfectionist and was the nerdy one studying hard" says Stephan "while Reshma showed efficiency in putting in the minimum amount of time to get the maximum results."

One of the benefits of an MBA is the opportunity to build up a network of contacts from all over the world. Often a new relationship excludes outsiders as Lorena Fridman rather wistfully acknowledges. "Because of our relationship we were apart from the group. I would have liked to know other students a bit more and spent some time with them."

But Aleksandra and Laurent made lasting friends among fellow students. "They supported and encouraged us, came to our marriage and will always be part of our lives."

The rosy glow of a new romance may survive the pressures of a tough programme, but how do married relationships fare? Robert Erenstein from the Netherlands and Patricia Paic, a Croatian, met in 2001 and after their marriage encouraged each other to do the Open University Business School (OUBS) MBA. Patricia says "We had to give up our private lives, so no friends, parties – or shopping! Studying together meant that we shared the same problems, but were moving in the same direction."

The pressure of exams had an added twist – Patricia gave birth to daughter Lorella the day after her finals, while Robert visited them after finishing his exam. "OUBS were very supportive" she says "and arranged for me to do the exams at home."



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For Jordanian-born Amr and Maha Abuhijleh, both doing the Henley Executive MBA while working in Qatar affected home and family life in a positive way. Amr explains "Our whole life became MBA-orientated. When queueing in a shop we'd discuss how it could be better managed, and our household finances came under scrutiny." Even their children aged 5, 13, 15, and 18 became involved, reading course materials and joining in business discussions.

Undoubtedly the close-knit community of a residential MBA programme has its pitfalls. 'Married But Available' is not necessarily a joke and bright, ambitious thirty-somethings may have reached a stage in life when they're questioning whether in the past they chose the right partner. Anne Woodhead, director of the Executive MBA at Durham Business observes "MBA applicants often feel they want change in their lives without realising that they feel constrained by their relationship. On an MBA programme they may meet someone who is like-minded."

Not all MBA romances have a storybook ending but for the couples who together survive the stresses of accelerated learning and work overload, emerging triumphant with an MBA and each other, there's every chance that they'll live happily ever after.

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