Meet the DEAN

Greg Carnes, University of North Alabama

What is your vision for the University of North Alabama College of Business?

• To offer high quality graduate and undergraduate programs and curricula through flexible delivery platforms that prepare students for a dynamic global business environment.
• To generate and share knowledge capital, both with the region and the global community, through innovative events, experiential learning labs, and research.
• To develop personnel and utilize tools necessary for optimal enrollment, high quality student experiences, and successful careers, through efficient and effective operational processes.
• To engage external constituencies to build collaborative networks that promote mutual value.

We intend to be the MBA program of choice for those seeking a high quality, convenient, cost-effective program.

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What would you say are the school’s key strengths?
UNA’s strong high quality academics combined with a small student to faculty ratio builds true relationships that last well beyond graduation. While our faculty produce excellent research, our key mission is teaching and mentoring our students to prepare them for successful careers. Our program is ranked #3 in the nation by www.eduseeq.com for 2014 Most Affordable Online MBA Programs for Value, #10 in nation by GetEducated.com for Best Affordable Regionally Accredited MBA Online Programs, and is recognized in the 2014 Top 50 Most Affordable MBAs from TopManagementDegrees.com.

What developments and key trends do you see emerging in the 2015 MBA landscape?
Technology will continue to transform the delivery of higher education, especially in the MBA marketplace. Students are demanding customized programs that meet their needs and are convenient. While a broad business core is necessary for a strong MBA program, students also need specialized training in their field of choice. Students will also continue to focus on return on investment in choosing a program, and expect a global lens for curriculum delivery.

How will the University of North Alabama respond to these developments?
While UNA is already ranked highly for return on investment, our ROI will continue to increase as we roll out new specializations in project management, human resource management, and economic development. We will continue to use the latest technology advances to create an excellent learning environment both online and in the classroom. Many executives want to brush-up on their skills without committing the time to a degree. We plan to offer short online courses that will lead to a certificate or badge. We will continue to offer our MBA in Asia through a cohort model and integrate the experiences of our domestic and Asian students.

How can a student get the most from their University of North Alabama MBA experience?
At UNA we focus on the total student learning experience. Students will expand their knowledge of business principles but will also develop skills and competencies that separate them from others. To maximize their experience students develop a network with our faculty and other students to create a learning team that will last long past their graduation date.
Every Dean has a wish list. What are your top three ‘wants’ for areas of change?
For change I am focusing on three areas – brand recognition, new concentrations that focus on skill areas that are in demand, and custom executive curriculum. We are working to expand the brand of UNA MBA beyond our traditional area. We are the 3rd largest MBA program in Alabama and our MBA program is growing in a market that is declining in most areas, indicating that we are delivering strong value to students.

What do you feel are the biggest challenges facing the Deans of business schools?
Technology is forcing Deans to rethink how education is developed and delivered. This challenge presents opportunities for business schools to innovate in the way that many business segments have already experienced. Budget constraints are significant for business schools as states continue to slash budgets. Deans must continue to nurture other revenue streams to fund their programs. Faculty recruiting remains very competitive. The most important thing we do is hire excellent faculty but finding the right fit takes much effort and persistence.

How do you plan to tackle these?
To nurture our MBA revenue stream UNA has increased our focus on digital marketing and organic search engine optimization. We have also been increasing our communication channels by adding a monthly e-newsletter and a social media site for UNA alumni. These two steps can have great impact on the search engine rankings. We have also combined our increased marketing and branding efforts with a timely customer service follow-up program that has increased our enrollment. Our branding efforts also facilitate hiring excellent faculty who want to be part of an innovative business school.

What do you feel executives and high-potentials expect from an MBA programme?
Students expect to be challenged but not burdened with busy work that is not productive. They also want to be recognized as an individual learner with specific goals and needs, even though many are online and physically not on a campus. Students want a total experience that includes application of learning. They are also seeking convenient and cost-effective programs. As many company paid tuition reimbursement programs are cut-back or eliminated, looking for the best choice is a priority for many who want an MBA to advance their careers.

How do you ensure you equip students with this broad perspective?
UNA incorporates international examples into each course so that the student experiences how work and decisions can impact across the globe. Additionally, most of our MBA faculty have taught and/or worked in international communities so they are equipped to discuss their first-hand experiences with students. We are currently evaluating a travel trip to Asia for domestic-based students to coincide with our teaching of Asia Cohorts. The domestic-based students could take a course while in Asia.

How do you maintain a balance between cross-functional expertise and social responsibility in your programmes?
Social responsibility is another growing trend that employers expect their employees to understand to be profitable corporate citizens. The growth of social media changed the environment for communications. All companies must now consider how each action will be received by the public. It is incumbent on those of us leading MBA programs to assure that our students are prepared to lead in a socially responsible manner. We do not see this as a balancing act, but rather as teaching business disciplines through a lens that includes integrity, ethics, and social responsibility.

It’s neck-on-the-line time; list three things that CEO Magazine readers can expect from the University of North Alabama College of Business over the next 12 months.
We know that today’s collaborative business world needs new leaders who can build teams that provide outstanding results without being encumbered by bureaucratic thinking. UNA College of Business will be expanding MBA concentrations, student business contest experiences, and offering an online mini-MBA. All these programs will develop leaders to meet these challenges. UNA College of Business focuses on quality teaching delivered in a convenient format that is timely to the student’s needs.

What are the key components of a successful MBA student cohort?
A strong student cohort is diverse in terms of ethnicity, gender, age, academic background, and industry. Students learn from each other and in the MBA program they should learn that the bringing together diverse minds to solve problems is the best path to success and innovation.

What does having a ‘global view’ mean to you?
A global view is considering the global implication of every business decision. The new competitor that charges your business may be on the other side of the world, but your best customers and suppliers may also be in a different country. Students will work at companies that are part of the world economy. The more we can help students think about the global implications of their decisions, the better their results will be.

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Biography
Dr Gregory Carnes is Dean of the College of Business and Raburn Eminent Scholar of Accounting at the University of North Alabama.