

# **RUTGERS:** **MORE THAN** **JUST** **AN EMBA** **POWERHOUSE**



## ALEXANDRA SKINNER SPEAKS TO FARROKH LANGDANA

**Q. As a top-tier EMBA, potential students expect rigour, but what does this look like in terms of pre-class preparation, time on campus, wider reading, etc.?**

At Rutgers Executive MBA, also known as The Powerhouse, our students come from extraordinarily diverse backgrounds. Aside from the usual corporate executives and managers, we have curators of museums and directors of ballet, just to cite some examples. Given this diversity, we at Rutgers EMBA start from scratch in every subject once the fall semester begins. To bring everyone up to speed, we offer a short ‘Math Prep’ course prior to the commencement of the programme where we review all the math that is really necessary. We also offer a basic Excel course for those who could use a refresher.

**Q (a). In regards to curriculum, typically, MBAs follow a fixed pathway, which certainly makes life easier for faculty; however, you have resisted this trend opting instead to update your curriculum as market trends and the needs of your students require. Can you walk me through how this works and what this means for your students?**

Given the rapidly changing global business workplace, and even more so, post-Covid, we simply do not have the option of having a static curriculum. The Rutgers EMBA team is ‘embedded’ with our MBAs on every class day and at every class meal. The feedback, suggestions, and requests from students are promptly noted, and once we ascertain that we do indeed have a ‘critical mass’ of current students who are very interested in a current topic, digital transformation or data analytics, for example, then we deploy rapidly. Our promise to our students is to deliver curricular changes while they are still with us in the four-semester programme. This is indeed a very tight window, but we at The Powerhouse have always delivered. Being nimble in terms of curricular change makes for a great and literally rewarding experience for our students; to be honest, it is exhausting work. Any EMBA programme can add a new module; this is the easy part. Finding the right professor who is a subject-matter expert and who can also leverage the inherent experiences of some of the participants to enrich the class is the hard part. At The Powerhouse, it is only this calibre of professor that we deploy, hence our consistently high global rankings.



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**Q (b). Looking back over the last two years, what have your curriculum updates and upgrades encompassed?**

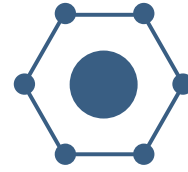
The Leadership course is now multi-faceted and taught by six different professors who specialise in different aspects of global leadership. These range from leading teams virtually across different cultures and time zones, crisis leadership, and presentation skills for communicating effectively with not just employees but also the media and board members. Other examples include a whole course on digital transformation strategy, a short module on innovation strategy, and a greater emphasis on trade wars in the global macroeconomics course. In addition, we now have an elective on ETFs and portfolio strategy, electives on start-up strategy and social media marketing, and a new ‘prologue to big data’ course in the first semester, to list just a few of our constant curricular upgrades.

**Q. You have talked about the Rutgers EMBA being student-centric; is this the secret to your success, and what does this mean in terms of faculty-student relationships and support during and after the EMBA?**

The secret to our success is really quite simple. During the four semesters (20 months) the students spend at The Rutgers EMBA Powerhouse, our only goal is to constantly deliver a programme that will (i) not waste their valuable time and (ii) add value to their lives. Plain and simple. This has been our only goal, and while exhausting, it has been exceedingly rewarding. The rankings, while excellent, were never the primary objective. They were (and are) the organic and endogenous reward of Team EMBA delivering on its promises.

**Q. The networking opportunities attached to an EMBA are significant; however, the pandemic attenuated these opportunities as schools were forced to move delivery online. Can you expand upon your current delivery method?**

Aside from two courses in the spring, we are back in person. In fact, sixteen out of eighteen courses are in person. It wasn’t just the networking that suffered while we were driven online by Covid; the learning suffered too. The programme requires about 10 years of experience as part of the admission criteria, but on average, at Rutgers EMBA, our students have 12-14 years of experience. Given this large residual amount of experience embedded in the class, much of the learning is also between students learning from each other. It was this aspect that suffered while we were online, so we are very thrilled to be back in person and in class.

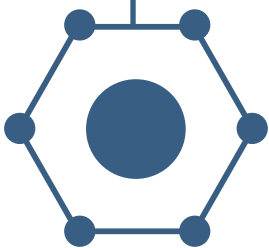


**Q. You are based in Newark and New Brunswick and, as a corollary, have some well-known b-school neighbours, which are priced considerably higher than Rutgers Business School. Given the success your EMBA continues to enjoy, will the cost be increasing?**

It all begins at the top. Starting with Dean Lei, the head of Rutgers Business school, and then down to Team EMBA, our primary goal has been, as discussed earlier, to improve the quality of life of our graduates. Period. A relentless attempt to maximise profits by charging exorbitant and ever-increasing rates of tuition is not our objective function; it is as simple as that. Now, keep in mind, with the excess demand for the Rutgers EMBA, and given our full classes (pre-Covid), we could have certainly increased tuition, but we did not, nor do we intend to for 2022-23 either. As the director of the programme, I have spoken to the spouses/partners of prospective students about the cost implications of the programme on nest eggs and kids’ college funds, and having ‘been there’ myself, I can really relate to the challenges they face.

**Q. In continuing to think about neighbours, you have no shortage of large corporates on your doorstep. What does this mean for the EMBA in regards to corporate partnerships, and what influence do these partnerships have on your curriculum and the learning experience as it relates to your students?**

We have graduates from virtually every major corporation, but not just large ones, even small, family-run organisations, not-for-profits, and certainly from the US armed forces; we graduated three US Army colonels just recently. However, our curriculum is impervious to the companies that employ our students. Our only focus is the students themselves and the skills and topics they need to ‘nail it’ in the business world right now. Our mantra has been, “we will give



you in class today what you will use in the real world next week.” All our curricular tweaks and upgrades originate from student feedback, or from EMBA faculty who in turn transmit student feedback to Team EMBA. We then strive to incorporate this feedback with appropriate curricular upgrades within that short four-semester window in the programme.

**Q. Having made the decision to apply to the Rutgers EMBA, what do potential students need to be aware of in terms of entry requirements, and can you offer any tips?**

Some of the courses need Excel proficiency. We offer two optional Excel workshops: the introductory one in the first few weeks of the first semester and an advanced Excel workshop in the second year in preparation for the advanced strategy and finance courses. The interview with me (the director) is simply a meeting to get to know each other better. The whole admissions process is highly streamlined. Applicants must realise, however, that the programme does include ‘heavy lifting’, and they should expect to put in 10-15 hours of work per week in addition to class time.

**Q. What can students expect to take away from the Rutgers EMBA?**

What can students expect to ‘take away’? Three things: (i) A vast toolbox of very current and powerful tools and skills to really succeed at work, (ii) an extremely strong and thriving Powerhouse alumni network, and most important, (iii) another ‘family’. Many EMBA programmes are characterised by frenzied dog-eat-dog competitiveness in class. Not here. The Rutgers EMBA Powerhouse is characterised by an extraordinary degree of collaboration among the students. Our philosophy is that there is enough rabid competition in the world out there—who needs more on the weekends, and for two



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years in the classroom? At Rutgers EMBA, our students graduate with another ‘family’ with whom most will continue to stay close for years to come.

**Q. What do the next 12-18 months hold for Rutgers Business School?**

In the summer following the second semester, we typically travel to China; however, we are now going back to Europe. This year it will be Copenhagen and Athens, where participants of this three-credit summer seminar course will visit a host of companies representing all the different sectors. We will conduct panel discussions with key industry leaders and, of course, network.

Our online alumni seminars were very well attended during Covid, and we will continue to have regular updates on key business subjects online, but will now also go back to the in-person ‘meet and greets’ that we used to conduct all over the New Jersey/New York area. Finally, the goal is to integrate subjects like big data, artificial intelligence, machine learning, blockchain and digital transformation into all aspects of Rutgers EMBA education. Constant and relentless upgrading is our mantra, and we take this very seriously.

**BIOGRAPHY  
Professor Langdana**

is a professor in the finance and economics department at Rutgers Business School and is also the director of the Executive MBA. Professor Langdana's areas of specialisation include monetary and fiscal policy implications and international trade and global macroeconomic policy.