

A Case Study on Veterans and the Executive MBA

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This research aims to measure the professional outcomes of Veteran students who graduated from the Fordham University Executive MBA Program in New York City. To determine this information, a LinkedIn Study was conducted for this segment to measure professional growth and industry movement. In addition, focus groups were further conducted to measure this movement. The main findings of this study indicate that this Veteran segment was able to increase their management responsibilities and pivot into new industries. In addition, there currently exists geographic diversity in their current work locations.

Keywords: executive MBA, veterans, career services

INTRODUCTION

Should United States Veterans pursue Executive MBA Programs offered by Business Schools? This is a question that Veterans have been reflecting upon in the past and will continue to reflect upon in the future given the robust tuition benefits they have earned through their military service. With this as a background, the goal of this research is two-fold. First, the goal is to discuss a LinkedIn Case Study Analysis of the Professional Outcomes of Veteran students who have graduated from the Fordham University, Gabelli School of Business Executive MBA Program, in New York City from 2011 to 2023 (N = 80). Second and ultimately, the goal of this Case Study is to provide a needed resource of Professional Outcomes to reflect upon during the Career Life Planning Process for the brave women and men who have Served our Country.

BACKGROUND

The transition from military to civilian life has been a growing area of research. It has been noted that providing educational benefits and centralized healthcare services for Veterans positively impacts this transition. (US Department of Veteran Affairs 2022a, 2022b). In addition, it is important for Veterans to develop an individual “civilian identity” and also have this identity aligned to the “collective identity” within civilian life. (Kerr, Lane, Plotnikoff and Ashby, 2023). Furthermore, this transition if not successful can lead to not only professional failure but also emotional and mental health issues which are all potentially interrelated. Hence, one challenge many Veterans face is adjusting from the rigid and structured environments of the military to less structured environments. (Wyner, 2014; Wheeler, 2012; Jones, 2017; Bagby, 2015). Such a challenge has led to “culture shocks” among Veterans. (Dillard and Yu, 2016).

Interestingly, per a recent study, Veterans primarily sought out assistance for employment and educational advancement as opposed to legal, financial, housing, health and social functioning challenges. (Perkins, Aronson, Morgan, Bleser, Bleser, Copeland, Finaley and Gilman, 2019). Also

interesting to note is that Veterans can potentially do well in college and graduate school if they are connected to the necessary institutional resources including mentorship and support groups with other Veterans along with proper education of faculty on the needs of Veterans. (Mendez, Witkowsky, Morris, Brosseau, and Nicholason, 2018). The Veterans of the non-traditional college age also tend to potentially academically outperform traditional college age non-Veteran students. (Lyon, 2019). From a higher education perspective, taking a strategic approach to Veterans can lead to their academic success. (Froula, Eagan, Kukuchka, Morris, Kitta, Perkinson, Messina, and Vincent, 2022).

However, Veterans have experienced not only academic challenges but also professional failures. A wide range of research indicates that PTSD can have a lasting and profound effect on Veterans impacting all facets of their civilian lives. (Sayer, Noorbaloochi, Frazier, Carlson, Gravely, and Murdoch, 2010).

On the professional front, almost 50% of Veterans leave their first post military job within the first year and over 65% of Veterans leave their first post military job within the second year. (Institute for Veterans and Military Families & VetAdvisor, 2014). Veterans leave these first post military positions for several reasons, including a lack of career advancement, low quality and meaningless work, inadequate pay and benefits, and poor job alignment per their educational levels and skills. If the organization's culture and the Veteran's skill level also do not align with their past military experience failure is likely. (Institute for Veterans and Military Families & VetAdvisor, 2014). Veterans also fail professionally, especially early on in their careers, due to the lack of employment opportunities within their preferred geographic location. (Berglass 2012; Curry, 2014; and Keeling, 2018). In addition, it should be noted that Veterans often do not pursue jobs that support their skills and backgrounds, leading to failure. (Kintzle, Castro, 2018).

The research has also noted that career progression paths are important for Veterans and critical for their success. (Hunter-Johnbson, Niu, Whitaker, Wells and Charkasova, 2020). In addition, employment programs such as resume writing, interviewing skills, transition coaching and career life planning can greatly assist Veterans for early professional success. (Morgan, Davenport, Aronson, McCarthy, Bleser and Perkins, 2022).

With this as a background, it is clear that Veterans are a unique segment that require specific support for their academic and professional success post military. It should also be noted that organizations illustrate an interest in hiring and supporting Veterans. For example, institutions such as Morgan Stanley and JPMorgan Chase & Co. have made their commitment for Veterans clear through their websites. More specifically, per the Morgan Stanley website (<https://www.morganstanley.com/people/experienced-professionals/veterans>), their CEO James P. Morgan states "Morgan Stanley thanks you for your service. The military's emphasis on the mission and the team, leadership accountability, and continuous improvement aligns well with the culture of our Firm".

Overall, this research, taking all of these moving parts into account, addresses the professional outcomes of Veterans. More specifically, this research presented, which is unique within this space, offers a LinkedIn Case Study Analysis of the professional success of the Veteran students enrolled within the Fordham University, Gabelli School of Business Executive MBA Program, within New York City.

METHODOLOGY

A LinkedIn Outcomes Study was conducted for the Veteran Students who graduated from the Fordham University, Gabelli School of Business Executive MBA Program, from 2011 to 2023 (N = 80). The following data was secured.

**TABLE 1
LINKEDIN STUDY**

BACKGROUND DATA	PROFESSIONAL DATA @ PROGRAM ENTRY	CURRENT PROFESSIONAL DATA
Name Gender Graduating Class	Management Level (Technical Specialist, Entry, Middle Management and Senior Management) Title Industry	Management Level (Technical Specialist, Entry, Middle Management and Senior Management) Title Industry

Source: Petit, Francis. (2024). Fordham Gabelli EMBA Alumni Veteran LinkedIn Study.

In addition, focus groups were conducted on a sample set of Fordham Gabelli EMBA Veteran graduates (20) to determine how this academic experience had impacted their professional careers.

The data was then reviewed and analyzed, to determine, using Fordham Gabelli EMBA Veteran graduates as a Case Study, trends within their career trajectory and industry movement.

RESULTS

Three (3) central themes regarding career trajectory and industry movement emerged from this Case Study which can be seen below.

Theme #1 - Increased Management Responsibilities

When comparing the management levels of the Fordham Gabelli EMBA Veteran students when they commenced the EMBA to their current management levels as indicated on their LinkedIn profile pages, one will see an upward trajectory within their professional careers for more than half of the sample. The table below illustrates the distribution of this movement.

**TABLE 2
INCREASING MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES**

INCREASE IN MANAGEMENT LEVEL	% INCREASE
Technical Specialist to Entry	0%
Technical Specialist to Middle Management	10.00% (8/80)
Technical to Senior Management	3.75% (3/80)
Entry to Middle Management	20.00% (16/80)
Entry to Senior Management	6.25% (5/80)
Middle Management to Senior Management	18.75% (15/80)
Overall Increase in Management Level	58.75% (47/80)

Source: Petit, Francis. (2024). Fordham Gabelli EMBA Alumni Veteran LinkedIn Study.

Within the Technical Specialist to Middle Management journey, which included 10% of the sample, the Veteran students initially had roles such as “Technician”, “Banker” and “Agent” and were able to move to roles such as “Area Manager”, “Senior Director” and “Branch Manager”.

Also, within the Technical Specialist to Senior Management moves, which included 3.75% of the sample, the Veteran students initially had roles such as “Engineer”, “Specialist” and “Coordinator” and were able to move to roles such as “Chief Technology Officer” and / or start their own ventures.

In addition, within the Entry to Middle Management journey, which included 20% of the sample, the Veteran students initially had roles such as “Operations Supervisor”, “Service Manager” and “Departmental

Manager” and were able to move to roles such as “Regional Service Manager”, “Director of Operations” and “Senior Project Manager”.

Furthermore, within the Entry to Management to Senior Management moves, which included 6.25% of the sample, the Veteran students initially had roles such as “Supervisor”, “Assistant Vice President” and “Operations Manager”. They were able to move to roles such as “Product Owner”, “General Manager” and “Commander”.

Lastly, within the Middle Management to Senior Management journey, which included 18.75% of the sample, the Veteran students initially had roles such as “Director”, “Operations Officer” and “Vice President” and were able to move to roles such as “Chief Executive Officer,” “Chief Operating Officer” and “Partner”. Please note that some of this pivoting resulted from new ventures started by these Veteran students.

In addition, it should be noted that of the twenty (20) Veteran students that were included in the focus groups two themes emerged when it came to upward mobility and these themes include: (1) Self-Awareness; and (2) Negotiation Skills.

Regarding Self-Awareness, Fordham University is the Jesuit University of New York. Building Self-Awareness is a key pillar within a Jesuit Education and also prevalent among leaders in the private and public sector who have been Jesuit Educated. (Lowney, 2003). With this as a background, the Fordham Gabelli EMBA Program offers an elective course on el Camino Ignaciano in Spain titled “Jesuit History and Leadership Culture”. More specifically, within this one-week three-credit course the students follow the path of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, post his conversion, by trekking twenty (20) kilometers per day on el Camino Ignaciano learning about Jesuit History and Leadership Development. Some of this trek is in silence and the students reflect on the personal and leadership themes for the day. Upon reaching the evening destination, the students shower and have an evening session before dinner. Overall, the feedback regarding Self-Awareness from this experience from the Veteran students has been highly impactful. More specifically, please find some examples of this feedback from the interviews below.

I am so grateful to have experienced the Jesuit History and Leadership Culture course on el Camino Ignaciano. I came home with new knowledge of myself and the person and leader I want to be within my professional and personal life.

To me the Ignatian Camino was not only a physical trek but also a profound spiritual and mental transformation that allowed me to learn about what is truly important for me.

The week in Spain was life changing and reinforced things that I not only know about myself but also offered me unique insight and gave me a new found appreciation of things I never paid attention to before.

Overall, this experience plus other leadership development initiatives conducted throughout the EMBA journey has allowed the Veteran students to secure key Self-Awareness skills which they believe greatly assisted them with their careers.

In addition, the Veteran students within the focus groups also echoed that the negotiation skills gained from their EMBA experience was also critical for their upward career trajectory post-graduation.

More specifically, these negotiation skills, according to many Veteran students within the focus groups, allowed them to communicate how they “deliver value” within their organizations that is not only “measurable” but also increases “operational efficiency”. The latter point was not surprising given many Veterans enroll in the Fordham Gabelli EMBA Program with a strong logistics skill set.

Theme #2 -Transitioning to New Industries

Many Veteran students who graduated the Fordham Gabelli EMBA Program have been able to successfully pivot into new industries. Finance, Consulting and Technology appear to have secured the most traction in this regard. More specifically, Amazon, which is considered a technology / e-commerce

organization, has been a landing spot for many Veterans who have secured positions within the management and logistics of the Amazon Fulfillment Centers. In addition, large financial institutions and specific consulting organizations have been very supportive of the “Veteran Transition”. These organizations have recruited Veteran students and offered training programs for them in this regard.

Of the eighty (80) Veteran students / alumni in the sample, forty one (41) or 51.25% were able to successfully secure employment within new industries post their EMBA studies. The table below illustrates the distribution of the Veteran students who have pivoted careers post EMBA Program.

**TABLE 3
VETERANS WHO PIVOTED INTO NEW INDUSTRIES**

NEW INDUSTRY	TOTAL	% OF SAMPLE (N=80)
Finance	10	12.50
Consulting	8	10.00
Technology	6	7.50
Healthcare	2	2.50
Pharma	2	2.50
Real Estate	2	2.50
Training	2	2.50
Construction	1	1.25
Digital Solution	1	1.25
Energy	1	1.25
Fashion	1	1.25
Government	1	1.25
Logistics	1	1.25
Pay Processing	1	1.25
Security	1	1.25
Transportation	1	1.25
Total	41	51.25%

Source: Petit, Francis. (2024). Fordham Gabelli EMBA Alumni Veteran LinkedIn Study.

Once again, it should be noted that a large percentage of the career switching was with organizations that welcomed and supported the Veteran community along with other organizations that wanted to capitalize on their logistics and operations prowess.

In addition, it should also be noted that of the twenty (20) Veteran students that were part of the focus groups, two themes emerged when it came to transitioning to new industries and these themes include (1) EMBA Career Coaching; and (2) Confidence.

In terms of the EMBA Coaching that the Veterans received during their academic experience, the Veteran students noted that this was critical for their career transition and also enabled them to build the needed confidence to move forward. EMBA Coaching entails a personalized process of establishing a key understanding of current strengths and weaknesses and developing a plan to address those competencies and capitalize on the strengths to penetrate new organizations. In addition, the process entails mastering the art of networking and presenting networking opportunities for this segment as well as Career Coaching post-graduation. Overall, the main themes from these discussions was that the Career Coaching was critical to this process which in turn grew their confidence. More specifically, please find some examples of this feedback from the focus groups below.

The career coaching received during the EMBA allowed me to know what are my strengths, deficiencies and what is marketable. This allowed me to develop a plan and keenly focus on this plan.

Transitioning post military always seemed very daunting. The EMBA Career Coach made this process less daunting and was extremely helpful in allowing me to establish my path and also gave me the needed confidence to pursue this path.

Having civilians in my cohort along with the career coaching received was extremely helpful to see what was next and what was possible in my post military life.

Overall, a good percentage of Veterans enrolled in the Fordham Gabelli EMBA Program were able to transition into new industries.

Theme #3 - Geographic Reach

This LinkedIn study has also found that the Fordham Gabelli EMBA graduates held geographic diversity within their employment. This was also slightly more prevalent with the Veteran students who transitioned into new industries. Below please find two tables which illustrates the distribution of this geographic diversity.

**TABLE 4
VETERAN STUDENTS WHO TRANSITIONED INTO NEW INDUSTRIES LOCATIONS**

LOCATION	TOTAL	% OF SAMPLE (N=80)
New York	17	21.25
Texas	4	5.00
Virginia	4	5.00
California	2	2.50
District of Columbia	2	2.50
Florida	2	2.50
Indiana	2	2.50
New Jersey	2	2.50
Hawaii	1	1.25
North Carolina	1	1.25
Ohio	1	1.25
Pennsylvania	1	1.25
Tennessee	1	1.25
Washington	1	1.25
Total	41	51.25

Source: Petit, Francis. (2024). Fordham Gabelli EMBA Alumni Veteran LinkedIn Study.

TABLE 5
VETERAN STUDENTS WHO DID NOT TRANSITION INTO NEW INDUSTRIES LOCATIONS

LOCATION	TOTAL	% OF SAMPLE (N=80)
New York	26	32.50
Florida	3	3.75
Arizona	1	1.25
Delaware	1	1.25
District of Columbia	1	1.25
Hawaii	1	1.25
Maryland	1	1.25
Massachusetts	1	1.25
Oregon	1	1.25
Pennsylvania	1	1.25
Tennessee	1	1.25
Virginia	1	1.25
Total	39	48.75

Source: Petit, Francis. (2024). Fordham Gabelli EMBA Alumni Veteran LinkedIn Study.

As noted in the above tables, a higher percentage of Veteran students have not transitioned into new industries and have remained in New York for employment. (32.50% verse 21.25%).

Of the twenty (20) Veteran students who participated in the focus groups, there was mention that “willingness to relocate” helped secure these positions in their industries of choice. Perhaps this is one explanation of such geographic diversity. Overall, it should be noted that the total Veteran students geographic reach within their current employment stretches to eighteen (18) States plus the District of Columbia.

LESSONS LEARNED

While additional research needs to be conducted, some lessons are learned from this initial Case Study for Veterans who are considering Executive MBA Programs.

More specifically, the research indicates that Veterans can increase their professional management level as a result of completing an Executive MBA Program. The greatest movement within the sample included Entry to Middle Management (20%) and Middle Management to Senior Management (18.75%).

It should also be noted that most Veterans who began the EMBA categorized as Entry into Management were recently either transitioned out of the military and / or have been civilians for a period of time and began a management role as a result of their technical expertise (i.e. logistics) within their organization.

It should also be noted that of the Veteran students who transitioned from Middle Management to Senior Management, 73% left their organizations for a position of increased responsibility.

What is also interesting to note is that for the students who experienced the largest jump in management responsibilities (Technical Specialist to Senior Management = 3.75% and Entry to Senior Management 6.25%) these individuals either began start-up organizations and/or have transitioned from a large organization to a much smaller company which allows them the ability to showcase their skill set with increased responsibilities.

In addition, the research indicates that Veterans can also transition to new industries as a result of completing an Executive MBA Program. It should be noted that when companies were fully financially sponsoring their employees for Executive MBA Programs, these individuals had a clear trajectory within their organizations. Over the last twenty plus years there has been a precipitous drop in corporate financial sponsorship within the EMBA sector. According to EMBAC, the official international governing body for

Executive MBA Programs, approximately 16.1% of EMBA students were fully financially sponsored and 56.24% were self financially sponsored (i.e. paying their own way) in 2023. (EMBAC, 2024). To illustrate this shift, these percentages were 44% for full sponsorship and 19% for self-sponsorship respectively in 2003. (Shinn, 2004). Therefore, there is an industry trend of students enrolling in EMBA Programs wanting a career transition. With this as a background, Veteran students are not unique in wanting to transition into new industries.

Furthermore, it is unsurprising that Veteran students now have a wide geographic reach within their current employers. Throughout the past fourteen years the Fordham Gabelli EMBA Program has attracted Veteran students from all across the United States. These prospective Veteran students have been attracted to Fordham and for qualifying for and receiving the New York City Housing Allowance during their enrollment. Since the Fordham Gabelli EMBA Program only meets one weekend per month and it is a full time academic load, Veteran students have flown into New York City for the weekend and then fly home at the conclusion of the weekend class session. These Veteran students can then capture the New York City Housing Allowance while working full time at their home location. Therefore, with such geographic diversity with their employers upon enrollment it is not surprising that current geographic diversity exists within their positions as alumni.

Lastly, it should be noted that the Yellow Ribbon Program, which greatly financially assists Veterans with tuition and their civilian transitioning efforts, was part of The National Defense Authorization Act of 2008. With this said, the data regarding Veterans and the EMBA is still in its early stages. Business Schools should consider administering a similar LinkedIn study like this one to track the career trajectories of Veteran students. The Gabelli School of Business will also strongly consider the continuation of tracking its Veteran students as they continue to travel within their careers.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Veterans are presented, through their military benefits, a unique opportunity to pursue Executive MBA Programs. Within this initial Case Study it has been determined that Veterans have increased their management levels and also pivoted to new industries as a result of enrolling in and graduating from the Fordham Gabelli EMBA Program. In addition, this initial Case Study has found that Veteran students also, post EMBA, do hold geographic diversity within their current positions. This initial research has further found, not surprisingly, that specific programming and initiatives that are targeted to this segment can lead to their success. Overall, while further research needs to be conducted, Veterans considering pursuing Executive MBA Programs should take note as this experience can have a profound impact on their career trajectory.

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