New concentration helps MBAs make sense of big data

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Geoff Parker, professor of management science at the A. B. Freeman School of Business, developed the modeling and analytics course taught in the new MBA concentration in analytics. (Photo by Jackson Hill)

Big data is one of the business world"s biggest buzzwords. Now, a new MBA concentration at the A. B. Freeman School of Business gives Tulane University students the skills they need to transform large data sets into actionable knowledge.

The analytics concentration prepares students to master the use of data in business, covering everything from obtaining and managing data to using statistical computing applications to draw meaningful business inferences.

“There"s been quite a bit of interest among students, and we"re seeing huge interest in the employer community,” says Geoff Parker, professor of management science. “It"s an exciting area to be in.”

Courses required for the concentration include marketing research, modeling and analytics, econometrics and forecasting, and advanced spreadsheet modeling. Students will also learn R, an open-source platform for statistical computing that enables them to do some remarkable things.

For his class project in Parker"s modeling and analytics course, Thomas Altman used data from Twitter to generate a heat map that tracked user reactions to the NCAA men"s basketball final in real time, an effort he credits with helping him to land his current job as business analyst with software company Aptify.

“The skills I learned in Geoff"s class aren"t necessarily in my job description, but they"re definitely in demand and being able to talk about them intelligently is important,” says Altman, a 2014 graduate of the MBA program.

That"s just the kind of testimonial Parker hopes to hear more of in the coming years, especially as more students combine analytics with other disciplines.

“Our competitive advantage is applying analytical tools to solve problems in industries where we"ve already built expertise, such as finance, energy and entrepreneurship,” he says. “We"re going to be working very closely with the companies that hire our students to make sure we"re teaching them the right skills they need to solve the right problems.”

Mark Miester is a senior editor in the A. B. Freeman School of Business.

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