

What is a DBA? Complete guide to the Doctor of Business Administration

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IRVINE, CA, UNITED STATES, August 5, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- For working professionals weighing the next step in their careers, one question keeps surfacing: what is a DBA, and how is a Doctor of Business Administration different from a traditional Ph.D.? As demand grows for practitioner-scholars who can apply advanced research to real business problems,

California Intercontinental University (CIU) is breaking down what a [DBA degree](#) is, who it's for, and why its 100% [online DBA program](#) is built specifically for working professionals who want a terminal degree without pausing their careers.



What is a DBA Degree?

A Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) is a terminal degree — the highest level of education available in the business discipline — designed for experienced professionals who want to apply doctoral-level research to real organizational challenges rather than pursue an academic research career. Where a traditional business Ph.D. is built to train future professors and produce theoretical research, a doctorate in business administration is built around applied research: using rigorous methodology to solve problems inside an organization, industry, or sector. In practice, this makes the DBA degree the more common path for working professionals, and the Ph.D. the more common path for those pursuing full-time academic or research careers. Both are legitimate, rigorous doctoral degrees; they simply optimize for different outcomes.

By the numbers*

The growing demand for business doctorates:

- 4,485 business doctoral degrees conferred in the U.S. in 2021–22, up from 1,180 two decades

earlier

- 58,131 total research doctorates awarded by U.S. institutions in 2024
- 40% of 2024 doctorate recipients with job commitments went into industry or business roles

*Sources: NCES IPEDS, Digest of Education Statistics, Table 324.10 (2023); NSF NCSES, Survey of Earned Doctorates, 2024 (NSF 26-315).

According to NCES's Digest of Education Statistics, the number of business doctoral degrees conferred by U.S. postsecondary institutions has climbed steadily — from 1,180 in 2000–01 to 2,828 by 2012–13 and 4,485 in 2021–22, tracking a broader rise in doctoral business education as more experienced professionals pursue a doctorate in business management to advance into senior leadership.

Separately, NSF's Survey of Earned Doctorates found that of the doctorate recipients who reported non-postdoctoral employment commitments in 2024, industry or business roles accounted for as many placements as academia — each roughly 40% — underscoring how doctoral training increasingly feeds directly into the private sector rather than exclusively into faculty positions.

DOCTOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION VS. PH.D.: KEY DIFFERENCES

Ph.D. in Business:

- Focus: Original theoretical contribution to a field
- Outcome: Dissertation advancing academic knowledge
- Career direction: Faculty, tenure-track research roles
- Learning format: Often full-time, cohort-paced
- Delivery mode: Frequently in-person or hybrid residency
- Time to completion: Often 4–6 years
- Ideal candidate: Aspiring researcher or professor

Doctorate in Business (CIU):

- Focus: Applied research
- Outcome: Applied research project solving a workplace problem
- Career direction: Executive and senior leadership advancement
- Learning format: Online, asynchronous
- Delivery mode: 100% online
- Time to completion: As few as 2.5 years
- Ideal candidate: Working professional seeking a practitioner-scholar path

MATCHING DOCTORAL RESEARCH TO REAL-WORLD BUSINESS CHALLENGES

CIU's DBA is structured so applied research maps directly onto pressing issues employers are managing right now:

- Supply chain disruption: Applied studies in resilience planning and logistics strategy
- AI and digital transformation: Research on technology adoption and organizational change management
- Healthcare operations: Applied research in healthcare management and leadership effectiveness
- Financial risk and fintech: Doctoral-level analysis of risk models and financial strategy
- Organizational change: Practitioner-scholar research into leadership, culture, and change adoption

"We built our DBA program because working professionals shouldn't have to choose between advancing their careers and advancing their education. Our applied, practitioner-scholar model lets experienced leaders turn doctoral-level research into solutions for the challenges they're already facing at work — on a flexible, self-paced timeline that respects their careers and their lives outside of it." — David Rodriguez, Chief Operating Officer, California Intercontinental University

ABOUT CALIFORNIA INTERCONTINENTAL UNIVERSITY

California Intercontinental University (CIU) is an accredited university dedicated to helping experienced professionals advance their careers through flexible, 100% online business education. CIU offers a Doctor of Business Administration with six specializations, designed for working professionals seeking a terminal degree through applied, asynchronous learning. CIU is institutionally accredited by the Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC), is a member of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), and is approved by the California Bureau for Private Postsecondary Education (BPPE). CIU's DBA program is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP).

Full program details, tuition, and specializations are available at caluniversity.edu/prdba

Manuel Valencia Nava

California Intercontinental University

+1 949-359-0045

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