

# On the Track of Big Data at Reichman University

## New International Global MBA Program trains managers for the Data Revolution

•By ALAN ROSENBAUM



▲ Professor Niron Hashai  
(Photo by Avital Hirsh,  
Makor Rishon)

“In today’s business world,” says Professor Niron Hashai, Dean of the Arison School of Business and head of the MBA programs at Reichman University, “everything depends on data. Very few business decisions that are made are not based on data. Without having a good grasp of data, managers will be at a disadvantage.”

The information revolution is changing the rules of the game in the business world. What are the Big Data skills that today’s managers need to run their businesses properly? This reporter spoke recently with Dr. Gail Gilboa Freedman, Head of the Entrepreneurship Economics Undergraduate program and the MBA program in Big Data at Reichman University, and Professor Niron Hashai, to understand how the university’s Big Data track International MBA program can help prepare the managers of today to understand and use Big Data to their best advantage.

The Big Data track International MBA program at Reichman University, taught in English, prepares students to deal with the Big Data challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with an exclusive combination of managerial and technological tools, including programming skills.

“Every manager should be familiar with the new language of data processing and the new algorithms, even if he is not the one who will code and develop programs,” says Dr. Gilboa Freedman. “He should know the language and be able to communicate with the analyst and ask the questions in order to participate with the assumptions they are making along the way.”

What exactly is the meaning of the term ‘Big Data’? “The Big Data revolution,” she replies, “is composed of three pillars – breakthrough machine-learning algorithms, the cloud for storing large amounts of data, and the power of the computer to provide rapid computational power. When these are combined, the computer can mimic the human abilities to think.” She explains that the very ability to produce large amounts of data is challenging for managers today. “The fact that we have a lot of data can lead to mistakes because it is very easy to analyze data and produce beautiful graphs. Managers who work with analysts should understand what the analyst is doing in order to decide whether to accept or reject his recommendations. It is not magical as

some people believe – that you throw the data into the computer and then receive perfect insights.”

Professor Hashai adds that data is becoming an essential resource for companies to gain a competitive advantage, accelerate growth and survive. Companies need trained managers who can combine the ability to speak to data scientists and understand machine learning, and then talk to the company’s CEO or CTO and explain the meaning of the data in practical terms to help identify problems or spot opportunities.

The Big Data track MBA program at Reichman University equips managers to become creative leaders who can bring about change in their companies. In addition to the core curriculum, students are taught to be entrepreneurs, consultants, innovation officers, and project managers. They will acquire the cutting-edge tools required to spearhead the Big Data revolution.

Professor Hashai notes that today’s MBA students today are interested in learning specific skills. “In general,” he says, “the generic MBA which was popular in the first decade of the 2000s is becoming less attractive worldwide. Students are looking for more specific training. They want a special profile or a specific job or area of jobs. At Reichman, students will study the same core business courses, but they will get significant information in the specific vertical.”

Professor Hashai continues: “We are looking for people with strong quantitative skills. They do not need to know how to program, but they need to think like a programmer, to understand the rationale of a programmer, and also to be able to speak with top management. There is a specific set of skills that require to be able to do that, and this is what we are trying to achieve in this program.”

Many students in the Big Data MBA program at Reichman University are already working full-time, and the one-and-a-half-year program meets twice a week on Sunday afternoons and evenings and Friday mornings. Most of the students already have experience as managers, says Dr. Gilboa Freedman, but they want to reach a higher level and become senior managers. “The market demand for people with the knowledge that we provide is worldwide,” she says. “There is a great need for those who understand the language of data management.”

Graduates of the Big Data MBA program at Reichman University often graduate to senior

managerial positions. Dr. Gilboa Freedman mentions one graduate who was a director of product management and was promoted to become the manager of a data science product group at an AI company. Another student, who worked as a pilot, who had no managerial experience in the business world, became a team leader at a data company after graduating from the program.

Students in the International Big Data MBA program benefit from studying near Tel Aviv, the center of the startup nation. “We have a great deal of experience with the MBA programs that we offer through the Arison school at Reichman University,” says Dr. Gilboa Freedman, “which is a combination of a high academic level and practical experience. The network of people is very unique. Students sitting in class are already managers and can gain from interacting with other students. In addition, the teachers and lecturers that we bring from industry and the program mentors are CEOs and CTOs as well as people from venture capital firms.”

Participants in the Big Data MBA program will also work on a final project in establishing a venture or solving a real-world problem, accompanied by the assistance provided by relevant mentors from the industry. Students may also participate in the Arison Leadership Development Program, which improves and sharpens students’ leadership and management skills and develops motivational skills. In addition, as part of the Big Data MBA program, students will travel to New York to visit companies and innovation centers and expand their networks with managers and entrepreneurs in the industry. The New York trip is subject to alteration or cancellation, depending on COVID-19 restrictions.

Professor Hashai notes that understanding and applying Big Data involves more than numbers. “Some of the big tech companies,” he says, “have so much information about us they are using it to manipulate our choices, our tastes, our choices, and even our voting patterns. The modern manager that knows how to deal with data also needs the responsibility to act ethically. Students in the program at Reichman University will also study the ethical use of data. “The manager of 2025,” he points out, “will not only be judged based on the bottom line but will increasingly be evaluated based on the environmental footprint and the effect on society. For that reason, they need to behave ethically.”

“We do not require people to have a technical degree or a computer science degree,” says Dr. Gilboa Freedman. “But we require that students be curious regarding computers and numbers. This Big Data track MBA program is a very exclusive program, so people have to be ready to work hard.” ■

For more information about  
Reichman University’s Big Data track  
International MBA program  
[https://www.runi.ac.il/en/schools/rris/  
graduate/global-mba/big-data-track/](https://www.runi.ac.il/en/schools/rris/graduate/global-mba/big-data-track/)

This article was written in cooperation  
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Dr. Gail Gilboa  
Freedman  
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Makor Rishon)

