



Swiss International
Institute Lausanne

DOCTOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (DBA)

The Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) is a rigorous, practice-oriented doctoral programme designed for senior professionals, executives, and managers who seek to generate original, impactful knowledge at the intersection of academic scholarship and real-world business practice. Unlike traditional PhD programmes, the DBA is explicitly structured around applied research: participants investigate substantive problems drawn from their own professional context and produce a doctoral thesis that contributes meaningfully to both academic theory and managerial practice — one drawn from real organisational challenges, and designed to change how institutions think, decide, and perform.

The programme welcomes two distinct profiles of candidate, reflecting SIIL's conviction that the capacity for doctoral-level inquiry is not determined by academic credentials alone. Applicants may enter through the academic pathway, holding a recognised Master's degree in business, management, economics, finance, or a related discipline, combined with a minimum of three years of post-graduate professional experience. Equally, the programme is open to exceptional practitioners who, while holding a Bachelor's degree, have accumulated a minimum of ten years of senior management or leadership experience and can demonstrate through their professional record the analytical depth, strategic responsibility, and intellectual independence that doctoral study demands. Both pathways lead to the same programme, the same standards, and the same qualification.

Beyond the doctoral thesis, students select a set of elective courses from an approved catalogue of specialist modules, allowing them to broaden their knowledge base, engage with new research methodologies, and refine the focus of their doctoral inquiry through exposure to the latest trends, expert perspectives, and emerging debates in their field. Participation in the annual SIIL Scientific Conference — bringing together Master and DBA students — further enriches this

intellectual environment, creating a community of practice in which scholarly ambition and professional authority reinforce one another.

The DBA equips participants with advanced competencies in research epistemology, quantitative and qualitative research methods, academic writing, and scholarly dissemination. Delivered in a blended format combining intensive seminars, online webinars, and live academic events, the programme is designed to be fully compatible with the demands of a senior professional career, without compromising the highest standards of doctoral-level inquiry.

Graduates of the DBA are recognised as scholar-practitioners: individuals capable of leading evidence-based change, contributing to their discipline's knowledge base, and occupying positions of intellectual authority within their professional field. The programme opens pathways to careers in executive leadership, board advisory roles, independent research, academic teaching, and senior consultancy.

Programme Structure:

Language of instruction / examinations: English

Official duration: 2 years (4 semesters), including doctoral thesis

Credit points: 120 ECTS

Degree awarded: Doctor of Business Administration (DBA)

Mode of delivery: Blended – intensive seminars, webinars, online modules, live annual conference

Admission Requirements

The Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) programme welcomes applications from two distinct candidate profiles, reflecting SIIL's commitment to both academic rigour and the recognition of exceptional professional achievement.

Option1. Candidates applying through the standard academic pathway are expected to hold a recognised Master's degree – such as an MBA, MSc, or equivalent qualification – in business administration, management, economics, finance, or a closely related discipline, awarded by an accredited institution. In addition to this academic foundation, applicants must demonstrate a minimum of three years of post-Master's professional experience in a managerial, leadership, or specialist capacity, providing evidence of sustained engagement with complex organisational or strategic challenges of the kind that doctoral-level applied research is designed to address.

Option 2. Candidates who do not hold a Master's degree may be considered through the professional experience pathway, provided they can demonstrate an exceptional and sustained record of senior professional achievement. This pathway

is open to applicants holding a Bachelor's degree in any discipline who have accumulated a minimum of ten years of experience at a senior management or leadership level. Such applicants are expected to submit a professional portfolio evidencing their strategic responsibilities, decision-making authority, and capacity for analytical and independent thinking. This may include board-level mandates, executive reports, consulting assignments, organisational policies authored, or other demonstrable contributions to their field.

Regardless of the pathway through which they apply, all candidates must demonstrate a satisfactory level of English language proficiency, as English is the sole language of instruction, assessment, and thesis submission throughout the programme. Accepted evidence includes an IELTS certificate with a minimum overall band score of 6.5, a TOEFL iBT score of at least 90, or an equivalent internationally recognised qualification. Applicants who hold a degree that was taught and examined entirely in English, or who are native English speakers, may be considered exempt from this requirement upon submission of appropriate supporting documentation.

All applicants, irrespective of pathway, are required to submit a curriculum vitae, a statement of research intent of 500 to 800 words outlining their proposed area of inquiry and its relevance to professional practice, two letters of recommendation from academic or professional referees, certified copies of their academic transcripts and degree certificates, and a valid identity document. Shortlisted candidates will be invited to an admission interview with the SIIL academic committee, during which their research aptitude, professional background, and the viability of their proposed doctoral topic will be assessed.

DISCIPLINES

The DBA programme is structured around three components: Mandatory Core Courses (30 ECTS), which are compulsory for all students; Mandatory Electives (10 ECTS), chosen from an approved list of specialist courses; and the Doctoral Thesis (80 ECTS), the central scholarly contribution of the programme. At the conclusion of the programme, each candidate must defend their doctoral thesis before an independent examination committee (viva voce).

Component	ECTS	% of Programme
Mandatory core courses	29	24%
Mandatory electives (min. 10 ECTS from approved list)	11	9%
Doctoral Thesis	80	67%
TOTAL	120	100%

PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES

Strategic Vision and Organisational Leadership

To develop in each participant the capacity to think, decide, and lead at the highest level of organisational complexity. The DBA equips senior practitioners with the analytical frameworks, the critical distance, and the intellectual authority needed to define long-term strategic direction, navigate uncertainty, and drive sustainable organisational transformation — not on the basis of intuition alone, but on the basis of evidence, rigour, and original insight.

From Professional Experience to Original Knowledge

To enable participants to transform years of professional experience into a structured, original, and academically validated contribution to their field. The DBA is built on the conviction that the most valuable research questions are those that emerge from real organisational challenges — and that senior practitioners are uniquely positioned to investigate them with depth, relevance, and impact.

Applied Research as a Leadership Tool

To equip participants with advanced research competencies — quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods — not as abstract academic exercises, but as powerful instruments for evidence-based decision-making, organisational diagnosis, and strategic problem-solving. Graduates leave the programme able to design, conduct, and interpret rigorous research that directly informs practice.

Influence, Communication, and Scholarly Authority

To build the capacity to communicate research findings with clarity and conviction across multiple audiences — from academic committees and peer-reviewed journals to executive boards, professional conferences, and policy forums. Doctoral-level writing and presentation skills are treated as leadership competencies, enabling graduates to shape debates, influence decisions, and establish themselves as recognised voices in their field.

Responsible Innovation and Digital Leadership

To foster a critical and ethically grounded approach to the use of emerging technologies — including artificial intelligence, digital research tools, and data-driven methodologies — in both academic inquiry and professional practice. As

the boundaries between research and management continue to shift, DBA graduates are prepared to lead responsibly at that frontier.

Epistemological Foundations of Rigorous Inquiry

To ground participants in the epistemological and methodological foundations that distinguish doctoral-level research from professional analysis. Understanding how knowledge is produced, validated, and challenged is not an abstract academic requirement — it is the intellectual foundation that allows practitioners to ask better questions, challenge prevailing assumptions, and produce work that stands up to the highest standards of scholarly scrutiny.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Strategic Vision and Organisational Leadership

1. Demonstrate the capacity to integrate doctoral-level research insights into long-term strategic thinking, translating original findings into actionable direction for complex organisations.
2. Lead organisational transformation initiatives grounded in evidence, exercising the intellectual authority and critical independence that doctoral study confers.
3. Apply research-based reasoning to navigate uncertainty, assess competing strategic options, and support high-stakes decision-making at senior leadership level.

From Professional Experience to Original Knowledge

4. Identify and articulate a substantive research problem rooted in professional practice, formulating it as a rigorous doctoral inquiry that generates original and academically validated knowledge.
5. Situate original doctoral research within a comprehensive and critically evaluated body of literature, identifying theoretical gaps, unresolved tensions, and opportunities for contribution.
6. Produce a doctoral thesis that demonstrates originality, scholarly rigour, and direct relevance to professional practice, constituting a meaningful contribution to both the academic and managerial literature.

Applied Research as a Leadership Tool

7. Design and execute a rigorous doctoral research project, selecting and justifying appropriate research paradigms, strategies, and data collection methods in relation to a professionally grounded research question.

8. Apply advanced quantitative methods (multivariate analysis, structural equation modelling, econometrics) and/or qualitative methods (grounded theory, case study, phenomenology, discourse analysis) as instruments for organisational diagnosis and evidence-based problem-solving.
9. Demonstrate proficiency in mixed-methods and multi-method research designs appropriate to complex, real-world organisational phenomena.
10. Evaluate the quality, validity, reliability, and transferability of research evidence, and translate that evaluation into practical recommendations for managerial decision-making.

Analytical and Critical Thinking

11. Critically analyse and synthesise a substantial body of academic and professional literature, identifying convergences, tensions, and gaps directly relevant to the research problem and its organisational context.
12. Construct and defend a coherent, evidence-based theoretical framework and argumentation structure capable of withstanding rigorous academic scrutiny and informing strategic professional judgment.
13. Exercise independent intellectual judgment in the interpretation of complex, ambiguous, or contradictory data and findings, demonstrating the capacity to move beyond established frameworks when the evidence demands it.
14. Challenge prevailing assumptions — both academic and managerial — on the basis of systematic inquiry, contributing to a culture of evidence-based critical reflection within professional organisations.

Influence, Communication, and Scholarly Authority

15. Communicate research findings with clarity and precision across multiple audiences — from academic examination committees and peer-reviewed journals to executive boards, professional conferences, and policy forums.
16. Present and defend doctoral research before an expert examination committee, engaging confidently and critically with specialist questioning.
17. Participate actively in the Annual SIIL Scientific Conference as a presenter and scholarly discussant, contributing to a community of practice that bridges academic inquiry and professional leadership.
18. Produce professional outputs — executive reports, policy briefs, strategic recommendations — that translate doctoral research into formats accessible and actionable for practitioner audiences.

Ethical and Professional Practice in Research

19. Apply ethical principles rigorously throughout the research process, including informed consent, data protection, confidentiality, and the avoidance of research misconduct in organisational settings.
20. Demonstrate integrity in the citation and attribution of sources, including the responsible, transparent, and critically reflective use of AI-assisted tools in both academic and professional work.
21. Critically evaluate the ethical, legal, and organisational dimensions of applied research, exercising sound professional judgment when research intersects with sensitive institutional, commercial, or human contexts.
22. Model and promote a culture of research integrity, responsible innovation, and evidence-based accountability within professional and organisational settings.

Epistemological Foundations of Rigorous Inquiry

23. Demonstrate a systematic and critical understanding of the major epistemological traditions and paradigms relevant to management and business research — including positivism, interpretivism, critical realism, and pragmatism — and their consequences for research design.
24. Evaluate competing ontological positions and their methodological implications, selecting and defending an epistemological stance appropriate to the research question and professional context.
25. Apply epistemological awareness as a practical intellectual tool — interrogating the basis of organisational knowledge claims, challenging assumptions embedded in managerial practice, and producing research that meets the highest standards of scholarly scrutiny.

DOCTORAL THESIS

The doctoral thesis represents 80 ECTS (67% of the programme) and constitutes the primary original contribution of the candidate. The thesis is conducted in two supervised phases under the guidance of an assigned doctoral supervisor and subject to regular panel review.

Phase 0 — Year 1, Semester 1, Research Prospectus (5 ECTS)

During Phase 0, doctoral candidates begin by identifying and articulating a substantive practical problem drawn from their professional experience, formulating it into a focused and researchable question that will anchor the entire doctoral journey. This initial intellectual exercise is supported by a preliminary review of the academic literature, engaging with 15 to 25 scholarly sources in order to situate the problem within existing knowledge and signal the candidate's capacity for independent academic inquiry.

On the basis of this early literature engagement, candidates are expected to outline a proposed research methodology, indicating whether the investigation will follow a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods approach, and providing a rationale for that choice in relation to the research question. These elements are synthesised into a written prospectus of 10 to 15 pages, which serves as the first formal scholarly document of the programme.

The prospectus is submitted to the candidate's doctoral supervisor, who provides written commentary before conducting a focused question-and-answer session. This supervisory defence is designed not as a high-stakes examination but as a collegial intellectual exchange aimed at strengthening the research direction. Following this session, a formal decision is issued: candidates who demonstrate sufficient clarity of purpose and methodological awareness are granted admission to the full development of their doctoral topic, and their research question is officially approved.

Candidates who do not meet the required standard at this stage are not penalised permanently; they are given one month to revise and resubmit their prospectus, ensuring that all doctoral candidates enter the subsequent phases with a solid and validated research foundation.

Phase I – Year 1, Semester 2 (after completion of all courses), Thesis Proposal (15 ECTS)

Phase 1 builds directly upon the foundations laid in the Research Prospectus and represents the first major scholarly milestone of the programme. At this stage, candidates are required to produce a substantially expanded review of the academic literature, engaging with a minimum of 50 sources. This is not merely a descriptive survey of existing work; candidates are expected to construct a coherent theoretical framework that positions their research within ongoing scholarly debates, identifies key tensions and gaps in the field, and articulates with precision the research problem that their doctoral thesis will address.

The methodology section at this stage moves well beyond the initial sketch submitted in Phase 0. Candidates must now present a fully elaborated research design, specifying their chosen philosophical stance and the strategic approach it entails. This includes a detailed account of the sampling strategy – defining who or what will be studied, on what basis, and in what scope – as well as a clear description of the data collection instruments that will be deployed, whether interview guides, survey instruments, observation protocols, or documentary

sources. The analysis plan must also be articulated, demonstrating that the candidate has a command of the analytical techniques appropriate to their methodology and that these techniques are coherently aligned with the research question and design.

A mandatory step at this phase is the submission of an Academic Integrity Declaration. Candidates must obtain formal ethical clearance before any data collection can begin, and the certificate issued by the IRB must be included as part of the submitted proposal. This requirement reflects the programme's commitment to responsible research practice and ensures that all doctoral work meets institutional and international standards for the ethical treatment of participants and data.

All of the above is synthesised into a written thesis proposal of 20 to 25 pages, a document that will serve as the authoritative blueprint for the doctoral research that follows.

Phase II – Year 2, Semesters 3-4, Thesis Completion (60 ECTS)

Semester 3 marks the transition from planning to active research. Having received ethical clearance and secured approval of their thesis proposal, candidates move into the field to collect the empirical material that will form the evidential core of their doctoral work. Depending on the research design approved in Phase 1, this may involve conducting in-depth interviews with carefully selected participants, administering surveys to a defined sample population, consulting and extracting data from archival or documentary sources, or combining several of these approaches within a coherent mixed-methods framework. Rigorous attention to data quality, consistency, and ethical conduct is expected throughout this collection process.

As data collection progresses and reaches sufficient volume, candidates begin preliminary analysis work in parallel. For qualitative studies, this involves systematic coding and thematic organisation of the material; for quantitative work, it entails running initial statistical procedures and testing distributional assumptions; and for simulation or model-based research, it requires the construction and calibration of the relevant analytical models. This early analytical engagement allows candidates to identify emerging patterns, flag unexpected findings, and refine their analytical approach before entering the intensive writing phase.

Semester 4 is devoted to the completion of the doctoral thesis in its entirety. Candidates conduct their full and final analysis, interpret their findings in light of the theoretical framework developed in Phase 1, and engage critically with the implications of their results for both academic theory and professional practice. These elements are woven into a structured thesis, typically comprising five to six chapters: an introduction that frames the research and its significance; a literature

review that establishes the theoretical and conceptual foundations; a methodology chapter that justifies and describes the research design in detail; a results chapter presenting the empirical findings; a discussion chapter that interprets and contextualises those findings; and a conclusion that synthesises the contribution, acknowledges limitations, and proposes directions for future research. Once the substantive writing is complete, candidates undertake a thorough proofreading and formatting process to ensure that the thesis meets the programme's formal submission standards.

The culminating moment of the DBA is the viva voce, an oral defence conducted before an examination committee of three to four members, which includes at least one external examiner who is independent of the institution and brings specialist expertise in the candidate's field. The viva voce is designed to assess the depth of the candidate's understanding of their research, the rigour and originality of their contribution, and their capacity to engage critically with expert scrutiny. It is both an intellectual examination and a scholarly conversation, and its successful completion marks the candidate's formal recognition as a Doctor of Business Administration.

ELECTIVE COURSES

Participants must select a minimum of 11 ECTS from the approved elective list below. All elective courses are delivered via edX and must be completed during Year 1 (Semesters 1 and 2).

Code	Course Title – Partner (via edX)	ECTS	Level
	Module 1 – Strategic Leadership and Organisational Behaviour		
DBA-ELO 1	Strategic Leadership <i>Doane University</i>	2	Intermediate
DBA-ELO 2	Leadership for Contemporary Organizations <i>University of Canterbury</i>	2	Advanced
	Module 2 – Change Management and Innovation		
DBA-ELO 3	Organizational Change & Innovation <i>University of Canterbury</i>	2	Advanced
DBA-ELO 4	Organizational Innovation and Creativity <i>Tecnológico de Monterrey</i>	1	Advanced
DBA-ELO 5	Design Thinking: Ideation, Iteration and Communication <i>Rochester Institute of Technology</i>	3	Intermediate
	Module 3 – Digital Transformation and AI for		

Code	Course Title – Partner (via edX)	ECTS	Level
	Executives		
DBA-EL0 6	Digital Strategy and Transformation <i>Tecnológico de Monterrey</i>	1	Advanced
DBA-EL0 7	Generative AI for Executives & Business Leaders <i>IBM</i>	1	Introductory
DBA-EL0 8	AI for Managers <i>Babson College</i>	1	Intermediate
	Module 4 – Financial Management and Risk Management		
DBA-EL0 9	Financial Information and Its Analysis <i>Tecnológico de Monterrey</i>	1	Advanced
DBA-EL1 0	Management Accounting <i>Association of Chartered Certified Accountants</i>	4	Intermediate
DBA-EL1 1	Financial Management <i>edX Partner – TBC</i>	0.5	Advanced
DBA-EL1 2	Risk Management and Credit Principles <i>New York Institute of Finance (NYIF)</i>	0.5	Advanced
DBA-EL1 3	Cybersecurity Fundamentals <i>Rochester Institute of Technology</i>	4	Advanced
	Module 5 – Sustainable Development (ESG) and Corporate Responsibility		
DBA-EL1 4	Corporate Responsibility <i>Dartmouth College</i>	0.5	Intermediate
DBA-EL1 5	Sustainability and ESG <i>edX Partner – TBC</i>	1	Intermediate
	Module 6 – Business Analytics and Data Visualisation		
DBA-EL1 6	Data Representation and Visualization in Tableau <i>Rochester Institute of Technology</i>	1	Intermediate
DBA-EL1 7	Data Visualisation and Storytelling <i>edX Partner – TBC</i>	2.5	Introductory
	Module 7 – Business Communications and Academic Writing		
DBA-EL1 8	Business Communication <i>Rochester Institute of Technology</i>	0.5	Introductory

Code	Course Title – Partner (via edX)	ECTS	Level
DBA-EL1 9	Business Writing Techniques <i>Doane University</i>	1	Introductory
	Module 8 – Research Methods		
DBA-EL2 0	Introduction to Data Science and Basic Statistics for Business <i>Tecnológico de Monterrey</i>	1	Advanced
DBA-EL2 1	Simulation for Digital Transformation <i>Dartmouth College</i>	2	Intermediate

STUDY PLAN

The table below presents the full study plan for the DBA programme. Elective credits (11 ECTS, mandatory) are chosen from the approved elective list above. The doctoral thesis spans Years 2 and 3 under continuous supervisory guidance.

Course Code	Course / Module	ECTS	Assessment
	YEAR 1	54	
	Semester 1	26	
DBA1001	Epistemology and Philosophy of Sciences	4	Written coursework
DBA1002	Research Methodology	6	Written coursework
DBA1004	Software Citation and AI Use in Research	1	Written essay
DBA1005	Thesis Writing (webinar series)	1	Research-based written essay
DBA-EL	Electives (chosen from the approved elective list below)	9	Varies by elective
DBA-PH0	Phase 0 – Research Prospectus Development	5	Research Prospectus
	Semester 2	28	

DBA1003	Advanced Research Methods	6	Written coursework
DBA1005	Thesis Writing (webinar series)	1	Research-based written essay
DBA-EL	Electives (chosen from the approved elective list below)	2	Varies by elective

DBA1006	Annual Master & DBA Scientific Conference (live)	4	Conference paper & presentation
DBA-PH1	Phase 1 – Thesis Proposal Development	15	Thesis Proposal

	YEAR 2	66	
	Semester 3	31	

DBA1005	Thesis Writing (webinar series)	1	Research-based written essay
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DBA-TH1	Phase 2, Part 1 – Thesis First Draft	30	Thesis Draft
	Semester 4	35	

DBA1005	Thesis Writing (webinar series)	1	Research-based written essay
DBA1006	Annual Master & DBA Scientific Conference (live)	4	Conference paper & presentation

DBA-TH2	Phase 2, Part 2 – Thesis Final Draft	30	Thesis Defence
	TOTAL PROGRAMME	120	