



Interview with Business Professor Dursun Delen, Oklahoma State University

Dursun Delen, PhD teaches in the Department of Management Science and Information Systems in the Spears School of Business at Oklahoma State University. Prior to his academic career, Delen worked for a private company as a research scientist to develop analytics solutions for government agencies, including the Department of Defense, NASA, the Department of Energy, and the National Institute of Standards and Technology. He has published seven books and more than 50 peer-reviewed journal articles on analytics-related topics. Additionally, Delen serves in editorial roles for a dozen reputable academic journals.

Why do you choose to teach with SAS?

SAS is the creator of the most powerful and most widely used analytics software tool. I want my students to develop skills in a software tool that has the best reputation in the business world so they can find well-paying, exciting jobs.

What does the analytics skills gap mean to you?

We live in a business world defined by globalization and increasingly more challenging competition. Success – or mere survival – requires solving problems and taking advantage of opportunities rapidly and accurately. The key enabler of such effective and efficient decision-making capability is the analytics, which can simply be defined as using data and models to derive actionable insight. Companies are now well aware of the fact that they need analytically savvy people to add value to their organizations. The need is great, and the supply is having a hard time keeping up.

Realizing this gap, many universities around the US and abroad have started degree programs specific to analytics both at the graduate and undergraduate level. Having a degree in analytics or a closely related field has become a significant differentiator in the job market. Coupled with hands-on experience and technical skills in SAS, my analytics students often receive multiple attractive job offers even before they graduate.

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You've been a strong advocate for using SAS Visual Analytics in the classroom. What advantage does this tool offer your students?

SAS Visual Analytics makes analytics approachable to less technical students across a wide variety of degree programs. It provides a visually appealing user interface to easily and rapidly query the data; create charts and graphs; and ultimately discover the insight that we all need to make faster and better decisions. The exciting part is that SAS makes this software available to professors and students for free via the Teradata University Network. I've been an advocate for teaching students to use SAS Visual Analytics for several years because I believe it provides them a distinct advantage in their job search.

What's the most effective thing you've done using analytics?

Analytics has been very good to me. I teach it and I practice it. The coolest thing that I did in analytics is undoubtedly the box-office success prediction project for Hollywood movies before their production. With a colleague of mine, we have worked on this project since 2001. We have published several papers, and have delivered numerous presentations at conferences and symposiums. For a short while we got famous with interviews on television and radio. In fact, I had a 15 minutes of fame on Discovery Channel talking about this very project in 2006. Students love this analytics project because they can readily relate to it, and enjoy learning about it and developing their own analytic models.

What advice would you give students or adult learners interested in pursuing an analytics career?

They should have no doubt that with analytics knowledge and skills, they will have no problem finding a great job and having a rewarding and enjoyable career. Once called "geeks," these analytically savvy individuals are now the coolest in the business world. As the authors of the popular article on Harvard Business Review called it, data scientist is the sexiest job of the 21st Century.