

# Success in the first degree

**Kerrin Myres has found success through taking risks, making mistakes, and getting up and trying again. As the first graduate of the Doctorate of Business Administration (DBA) programme offered at the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS), she has achieved an incredible goal and is excited about what lies ahead.**

Kerrin's thesis investigated entrepreneurship and new venture creation in South Africa. Her research and findings have thrown current thinking on its head and will hopefully get policy-makers reassessing. As the daughter of an entrepreneur, it's a topic Kerrin has literally grown up with, and for many years she was adamantly opposed to entering such a world of risk and instability. "It's not just financial risk that's involved; it's personal risk for you and your whole family. You are essentially putting the livelihood of those you love most on the line. It's hectic!"

She changed her tune in 1994 as the winds of change blew across South Africa. Those same winds made their way across to Australia, found Kerrin and shook her into a whole new direction. Armed with an MBA from Macquarie University and an energetic passion for the new South Africa, she and her husband returned home. "The place was throbbing with optimism and opportunity! The time was ripe for new ventures. I became an entrepreneur."

It was an incredibly challenging time for Kerrin. Many people told her she was putting her family's future at risk and she should rather get a 'proper job'. Firmly believing in her idea, she pursued her own management consulting business, but ignored some very good advice along the way.

"I was hearing stuff from all sides and couldn't differentiate the good from the bad. I made so many basic mistakes, and eventually I was running a business that I had no interest in. It had morphed into something I didn't believe in. It had to go."

Not too long after, Kerrin paid a visit to a business associate at GIBS who introduced her to Prof John Verster, the director of the DBA programme, which was still being developed.

"As soon as John started telling me about the programme, I knew it was for me. I knew I had to do it and badgered him to hurry up and get it going!" She applied, was accepted and spent the next five years



→ At the GIBS DBA graduation ceremony (from left): Prof John Verster, Dr Kerrin Myres and Prof Nick Binedell, director of the University's business school.

immersed in an incredible journey of learning and self-discovery.

The DBA offered by GIBS requires an MBA as a prerequisite and re-exposed Kerrin to those disciplines. However, it is not – in her view – a progression of the MBA.

“An MBA is broad-based learning, whereas the DBA is topic-specific. It sounds almost like a cliché, but you have to be passionate about learning to complete the DBA. It’s a process of extremes – five years of high highs and low lows. There are moments of incredible loneliness, excitement, self-indulgence and success. It won’t appeal to everyone.”

The GIBS DBA is best described as a research degree that requires original, empirical study that contributes both to knowledge or theory, as well as to practice in the real world of business.

Under the supervision of some of the best brains in the world, Kerrin developed her thesis topic, *Venture creation: developing theory from South African case studies*, and had it approved by the panel. From day one, Kerrin’s views of the world she thought she knew were challenged and changed.

“We’ve always been told that to start a business you need to find the idea and then away you go. That’s what I did and that’s how the developing world does it. South Africans need to do it differently and our successful entrepreneurs already are. South Africa is a country full of ideas. It’s not ideas you need to find as an entrepreneur here, it’s resources. Take time to prepare and build capabilities and then bring in the idea.”

This is just the tip of the iceberg of all Kerrin’s research and evidence. This research, like all PhD research, is vital

for South Africa as the country aims for a bigger global identity. The GIBS DBA, the first of its kind in South Africa, provides its students with a forum to think, innovate and compete globally to their own and South Africa’s benefit.

The question now is, what does Dr Kerrin Myres plan on doing with her DBA? A list of opportunities spill forth – from teaching to writing a book, doing further research and, of course, brilliant job offers. With all the knowledge gained from her thesis, would she consider starting her own business again? With a smile she replies, “In a way, a DBA graduate is similar to an entrepreneur in that they share a desire to change the world. In other words, you never know.”



→ The University’s Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) provides business and leadership education that is tailored to the South African market, while providing delegates with a global perspective.