



# Secrets of a Successful Applicant

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# Overview

- Ideal Candidate
- Admissions Committee
- Application Package
- Final Thoughts and Advice

# PhD Degree

- Not a “Super” MBA
- Terminal
- Master a specific subject or research topic
- Highly Individualized
- Extend the body of knowledge about that subject
- Establish reputation as a scholar; an inquirer, an expert
- Enhance reputation of the academic institution

# Ideal Candidate

- Strong academic credentials
  - good quantitative skills
  - good oratory and writing skills

# Ideal Candidate

- Ability to
  - work independently
  - examine a topic in detail
  - communicate your finding to others
  - persistence / long term career **focus**
- Self directed
- Self motivated
- Highly disciplined
- Work Ethic



# Ideal Candidate



- Intrigued by
  - ideas
  - knowledge
  - understanding how things work and why
- Interested in a research-oriented career at a university
- Curiosity is the Key!





# Admissions Committees

## What will they think?



# Admissions Committees

- Department faculty (research-focused faculty) - PhD Committee
- **Questions**
  - Do we want this individual to be one of 2, or 3 students?
  - Do we want to spend >\$150,000?
  - Do we want to work closely with this individual for the next 5+ years?
  - Do we want to see this individual regularly for the next 3 to 5 years?
  - Does this individual (and their interests) align with our brand, organizational culture, and priorities? Are they a good fit?

# The Application Package

- Objective components
  - GMAT®
  - Academic performance (transcripts)
  - Work experience
  - Research experience (e.g., RA for a professor, research role at a firm)

# Academic Performance

- *Where did this applicant go to school?*
  - *Subtext*
    - *Who do we know on that faculty?*
    - *What type of institution is it?*
- *What courses did this applicant take?*
  - *Subtext*
    - *Was it a challenging schedule?*
    - *Quantitative courses?*

# Academic Performance

- *What were this applicant's grades?*
  - Subtext*
    - *Is this an acceptable GPA?*
    - *Does this applicant know enough to perform well in doctoral seminars and as a research assistant?*
    - *Cues about Work Ethic, Persistence, Consistency*

# Academic Performance

- Advice
  - Review your transcript(s) for potential problems
  - Acknowledge and explain them
  - Take courses NOW - especially calculus, matrix algebra, basic statistics
  - Read an academic article to familiarize yourself with the expected work output.

# The GMAT

- OH NO! NOT THE GMAT
  - The GMAT is an opportunity
- What is a good score? (it depends)
- What happens if I don't get the score I was hoping for?
- How does the admissions committee evaluate my score?
  - What is my score signaling to the committee?
  - Bottom line thresholds.

Class Year	Average Total Score	GMAT Range	Average Quant	Quant Range	Average Verbal	Verbal Range	IR Average
2023	724	600-780	48	39-51	42	34-51	7
2022	720	590-780	47	38-51	41	32-51	7
2021	723	620-780	48	40-51	42	32-51	6.9
2020	722	620-780	48	37-51	41	31-50	6.8
2019	722	620-780	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a



# The GMAT

- **Advice**
  - ***Prepare, prepare, prepare!***
  - ***Consider a professional prep course a high ROI endeavor***
  - ***Don't take it cold!***
  - ***Retest***
- ***If this is what you really want, don't leave anything on the table.***



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# Work Experience: Two Types

- Professional (work) experience
  - Interesting Research Questions
  - Teaching Wisdom and Credibility
  - An asset, but not a necessity
- Academic (higher ed) experience
  - Teaching and Governance
  - Research
  - References

# The Application Package

- The Objectified You
  - Transcripts
  - Resume or CV
- The Holistic You
  - Statement(s): research interests, career goals, diversity.
  - References and recommendation letters.
  - Meetings/interviews with faculty.
  - At every step you convey a grasp of the department's focus and sincere wish to help it succeed.

# Ideal References

- Detailed and strong in affirming your talents.
- Specifically affirms your readiness for academic pursuits through comments about:
  - intellectual abilities (academic performance)
  - self motivation
  - interest in learning
  - creativity
  - persistence and timeliness
  - collegiality (works well with others)

# What is Detailed and Strong

“I gave her focused attention because she was eager to accept new tasks or meet new challenges. She was good at solving problems and seeing tasks through to completion. One example is ...

In addition, she demonstrated the ability to lead when needed, but also strong teamwork skills. For instance, ...

I have seen all these traits and strengths carry over into her career because we have stayed in close contact over the years.”

# Ideal References

- Academic/Higher Education (best reference)
    - Current or former professors
    - The PhD Project network
  - Professional
    - Managers
    - Significant professional colleagues
  - People otherwise familiar with your skills and personality.
- General Principle: References who extol you convincingly are better than ones with prestigious titles.

# Managing References

- Ask if they will provide strong recommendations
- Tell them the deadlines
- Provide them with:
  - transcripts
  - resume
  - personal statement
  - sample reference
- Get more references than required



# The Statement(s)

- You have 100% control (tell your story)
- Clear and concise
- Confident and compelling
- Communicate a strong grasp of:
  - doctoral studies (PhD is a research degree),
  - the academic discipline,
  - the faculty and the institution,
  - Points of alignment with who you are and want to be

# Good Statements

*“My experiences managing technology and human resource functions in the public sector left me with many questions for future research and thirsty to find the answers. I am especially interested in the impact of technology and change on organizations, after playing key roles in three major computer systems implementations.”*

# Good Statements

“My interest in pursuing a doctoral degree in strategic management from... centers around adding to my breadth of knowledge on international development and improving my research and quantitative skills. I also hope to gain a clear insight into firm/state interaction, entry mode strategies, and the impact of political and economic change in emerging markets as firms attempt to sustain a presence in host states.”

# Managing The Statement(s)

- Know the target discipline, faculty, and institution. [Review Faculty's Biography at Target University](#)
- Read academic journals to get a sense of what is being studied and how scientists talk to one another.
- Read business press for evidence of trends to explore and research questions.
- Write, rewrite, get feedback, and rewrite. Typos, poor grammar, and poor spelling are killers.

# Final Thoughts

- Talk to faculty at target institutions
  - Review their background and research before the talk.
  - It works best to have taken the GMAT already.
- Visit the campus – meet faculty and current PhD students.
- *Pay attention to deadlines---Be on time!*
- *Get feedback from faculty as the **process unfolds**, including PhD Project faculty*



# Successful Outcome



# QUESTIONS?

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