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***Undergraduate Resource Series***

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[www.ocs.fas.harvard.edu](http://www.ocs.fas.harvard.edu)

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## IS BUSINESS SCHOOL RIGHT FOR YOU?

Graduates of MBA programs can be found in almost any type of organization. Business school will prepare you to create or lead an organization, manage resources, develop effective operational strategies, and more. Once admitted, required coursework typically includes: Organizational Behavior, Marketing, Accounting, Finance, Strategy, and Operations Management. This is followed by elective coursework that allows the student to customize their experience. Some students consider an MBA as essential for advancement to a management role while others will use it as a means to change careers. As an undergraduate student, it is unlikely that you will be admitted to enter directly into an MBA program without first working for a few years. This period of employment will give you time to think about your long term goals and help you determine if a graduate degree is appropriate.

### Informational meetings

Talking with people (with whom you have an interest) is extremely helpful as you

Be sure to ask:

- How is an MBA viewed?
- Will an MBA improve your career?
- If that person has an MBA, how did it help them?
- What was most helpful?

Your conversation can help you determine if your goals. Also, speak with a professional. Inquire about their experience.

### What should you do?

There's no magic formula for success. Achievements, pre-MBA recommendations. Not just a career goal or industry you aspire to work. What MBA programs they find opportunities are motivated, have a strong sense of themselves, and have a clear vision of how they want to grow.

Business schools tend to focus on impact more than scale. Make sure, therefore, that the academic and extracurricular choices you make truly reflect your interests, demonstrate initiative, and give you opportunities to play a leadership role in the organization. A strong undergraduate academic record and GMAT (or possibly GRE) score are also important parts of your application to business school. Many schools allow you to sit in on a class to gain insight into what a typical course looks like. Take advantage of this opportunity!



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## What can you do during the summer?

Summers provide you with opportunities to enhance the skills you'll most likely want to use in your work, to explore various industry options, and build your professional network. As with your academic and extracurricular choices, anything you do in the summer that adds value to your credibility as a leader or someone with a strong sense of initiative will be useful to your candidacy for business school. That can be anything from starting a swimming program to teaching ESL.

## WHEN TO APPLY?

### Regular admission

Most undergraduates typically apply in the fall. Many decide to apply or not based on two factors:

1. That they have had a successful summer
2. How their MBA application will look

Business schools do not typically have summer opportunities in an area of your interest and leadership in that field.

**HBS 2+2** is a deferred admission program where you can apply in the spring of your sophomore year, two years prior to matriculating. This gives you the most up-to-date application materials. Stanford also has programs with a similar structure and a focus on leadership.

**TIP: CONSULT THE** career center for excellent advice about your application strategy.

### Joint-degree programs

A joint or dual degree program allows you to pursue a graduate program of study while completing your undergraduate degree.

- law
- medicine
- healthcare administration
- engineering
- technology
- international studies
- public policy
- dentistry

You must apply separately for each program. While both programs are usually at the same school, some cooperative relationships between schools do exist. The second program determines total program length, but joint degrees generally take three to four years to complete.

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### **Advantages**

- Joint degree programs are most attractive to individuals who want to work at the intersection of both professions. For example, an aspiring healthcare entrepreneur may seek a joint degree for a career developing new healthcare resources or managing a healthcare organization.
- Students who want to make a career transition may like the fact that the joint or dual degree option allows them to earn two degrees faster than if they pursued the degrees separately, because some courses will fulfill requirements in both programs.

### **Limitations**

- Joint degrees require an extensive absence from the job market—usually three or more years. Therefore, you may have to leave your current career path and start over.
- Prospective employers may view a joint degree as a sign that you chose to pursue a less traditional path.

## **WHAT IS THE API**

### **Timeline**

Most US business schools have three admission cycles:

- fall (September/October)
- winter (January/February)
- spring (March/April)

Check each school's admission requirements and deadlines. Most schools require that all application materials be reviewed and accepted by the admissions committee by the deadline. Applications are held in a "rolling" calendar, so spaces fill up quickly. Once all spaces have been filled, the school will not accept more applications.

### **Researching programs**

There are over 1900 business schools in the U.S. and over 1000 worldwide. Try these resources to help you research:

- [www.mba.com](http://www.mba.com) The MBA.com website is a free resource developed by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International (AACSB). You can create a free account on the website and search for business schools. The website also provides information on the GMAT search service database, so schools can find you.
- [www.ocs.fas.harvard.edu/business-school](http://www.ocs.fas.harvard.edu/business-school) Tools on the OCS website to help you evaluate MBA programs.
- <https://www.usnews.com/best-graduate-schools> U.S. News and World Report annual ranking of MBA programs.





## School rankings

Over the years, the media and MBA program brochures have elevated the significance of business school rankings as one of the most important benchmarks for choosing a school to attend. However, school rankings often depend on which publication you read and what research methodology was used. In some cases, information is subjective and may include results that are not checked for accuracy. Most importantly, rankings do not take into account the unique elements of certain programs and how these attributes might meet your individual needs. *Rankings tell you what schools are "best" but do not take into account "best fit."*

## Admissions testing

Most MBA programs require at least one graduate admissions test score.

- [www.mba.com](http://www.mba.com) (GMAT)
- [www.ets.org](http://www.ets.org) (GRE)

Consult the individual school's website for graduate school admissions testing and have the flexibility to take one of the test-preparation courses.

## Essays and personal statements

Most business schools require you to write a range of subjects such as your academic, community engagement, and career goals. You, as the candidate, are responsible for your accomplishments and aspirations.

- **Write to express** your thoughts on what you think is important to you and an MBA degree.
- **What will you bring?** Give-and-take principle. Also about what you can bring to the class and the entrance requirements.
- **Why this school?** Why this particular school is a good fit.
- **Reality check:** Is this school right for your career, right now?

Find out what MBA employers look for in candidates by talking to students, alumni and the school's career services office. If you don't have enough experience right now to benefit fully from an MBA, further define your goals and apply later.

Candidates complete their essays and are comfortable with the process on their own using the test website.

Common prompts may include: "Describe your accomplishments, and how they tell one story." "What are the strengths of your character, and how do they know you better."

When you're just writing, it's hard to know why you want to go to business school.

Business school community is a business school, it's about what value they can bring and how well they match your goals.

Why pursue an MBA at a particular school and why you want to go.

Is this school to advance your career to a large extent on what you want to do?



## Letters of recommendation

A recommendation letter needs to:

1. Support how well you can manage the academic demands of the MBA program and your potential to succeed in your chosen career.
2. Validate or expand on your credentials, strengths, and aspirations.
3. Help the admissions office to get an overall sense of you as a candidate.

Choose a good cross-section of people who can attest to your dependability and who know about your plans for MBA study, such as employers, colleagues, and faculty. Schools may have different recommendation requirements. Check with each school you are applying to before you select your recommenders. Each program requires a specific number of recommendation letters, usually two or three. *Don't exceed the*

Recommendations are not from people with improper

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s. Avoid getting letters for work.

## Resume

There is not a special format for resume templates on the experience as well as your

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## Interviews

Many schools conduct a Admissions website. Each admissions interview provides your interest in the program

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## Financial aid

You can find information resources at the official to you through grants and employers may offer to for them. Total costs include \$110,000 per year.

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## PRE-MBA CHECKLIST

### Learn on the job

- ☐ Ask yourself if you would genuinely enjoy working in a management-related role in that industry.
- ☐ During your summer internship(s), take time to talk with senior managers and ask about their backgrounds.
- ☐ Identify mentors who have completed an MBA program and ask how their program influenced their career.

### Learn about yourself

- ☐ Read the *Wall Street Journal* and other industry-specific publications regularly.
- ☐ Connect with people in your industry to gain knowledge about the industry.
- ☐ Assess how your degree will help you decide which lifestyle you want.

### Visit and evaluate

- ☐ Visit some of the business schools you are applying to.
- ☐ Talk to students who are currently in the program to find out what they like and dislike.
- ☐ Learn about what degree programs offer a greater emphasis on entrepreneurship.

### Test preparation

Most students report that they suggest that you:

- ☐ Give yourself time to study for the tests.
- ☐ Download the free GMAT and GRE practice tests.
- ☐ Purchase a test prep book or take a test prep course.

### Application preparation

- ☐ Your application essays should reflect your personality as a candidate as well as your career strategy for pursuing an MBA.
- ☐ Ask your mentors and professional advisors to read them to assess how clearly you present your candidacy once you complete a draft for each essay.
- ☐ Have your resume reviewed, including your most up-to-date information.

It's important to bear in mind that you are a "prospective customer" as well as an applicant. Don't be afraid to ask questions to ensure that you make an informed decision about which program you ultimately choose according to your academic, career, and educational community needs!



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