

# Secrets behind successful SOP and LORs

NISTHA TRIPATHI

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MBA Dropout, NYU Stern

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# Nistha Tripathi



- When I was an engineer, I thought that I could never manage to study in USA, I am from a middle-class family. Thank God, I did not give up.
- I went to Top 10 schools in USA for my MS and MBA
- I earned \$100K+ seven years ago
- In last one year, I have helped 50+ students go to Top 40 universities in USA.

SCHOLAR  
STRATEGY

So, I know that studying abroad is for anyone and everyone. Many students have built a successful career by studying abroad and so can YOU.

SCHOLAR  
STRATEGY

# Agenda

1. Application Documents
2. SOP Strategies
3. LOR Strategies
4. About Scholar Strategy
5. Q and A

MS in USA Application Process

# WHAT APPLICATION DOCUMENTS ARE REQUIRED?

# Application Materials

- Statement of Purpose (SOP)
  - What's your story?
- Letter of Recommendation (LOR)
  - Choose right people and help them
- Resume
  - Download our free template at [www.scholarstrategy.com](http://www.scholarstrategy.com)

# What is Admission Committee looking for?

- Candidates with **good technical exposure** and passion
- Candidates who are accomplished, showing promise to be their field leaders in future
- Candidates who have **clear goals**
- Candidates who need MS/MIS to attain those goals
- Candidates whose **research interests align** with what the university has to offer
- Candidates who are **excited to study at this university**

# What you don't want to be?

- Immature/Mediocre/Weak at communication
- Confused about field of study
- Aimless about goals
- Lacking passion or expertise in your core subjects
- Not excited about the university you are applying to

# Secret of a successful application

Craft a compelling story in your SOP and LORs

Its all in your hands

**SOP**

# What's your story?

- Background - Academic, Personal, Professional and Extracurricular
- What are your goals?
- How does MS fit into it?
- Why are you applying to University XYZ?
- Why should the University accept you? Why you are good?

# Components of an effective SOP

1. Background and Aspirations
  - a) Clear goals help
2. Academic and Professional relevance
  - a) Show you are good in your field
3. Personal Story
  - a) Show a face behind the application
  - b) Talk about how you have overcome challenges, what motivates you?
4. Talk about how you have applied your learning
  - a) Show that you can execute your lessons in practice
5. Why are you applying to this school?
6. Why should this school admit you?

# Intro example

“From programming cells of an excel sheet with math formulas in my fourth grade to building a security plugin for Mozilla Firefox considering the current threats to privacy and security on Internet, I have realized that problem solving is what excites me. After a year and a half as an Application Developer in Risk Technology at JP Morgan Chase, I have found my passion in improving the way Information is used in businesses. Therefore, I wish to return to school to pursue a Master's degree in Computer Science that will allow me to explore the subject in greater depth, particularly the fields of Data Mining, Database and Software Engineering, and use it effectively to address real-world challenges.”

He knows about his field

Solid background and proficiency

Clear goals

# Showing Personal Side

“With my father’s illness and added responsibilities at home, my academic performance in second year suffered a lot and my GPA took a plunge. However, it only made me more motivated to work harder and restore my confidence. With extra hours and renewed focus, I was able to restore my GPA to a more respectable figure. While it is way below what I feel I am capable of, I am proud that I could take care of my family when needed and still manage three B’s in that semester.”

- Turns shortcomings into strengths
- Shows that anyone can stumble but its important to note that you got back up and learned your lesson/did best under the situation
- Shows courage of talking about your weak points

# Introducing the SOP Canvas

1. Where are you coming from?	2. What are your goals?	4. Why should you be admitted to XYZ?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe your background</li> <li>• What are the defining events of your life?</li> <li>• What are you applying for?</li> <li>• Why did you choose to study this subject?</li> <li>• What has furthered your interest in it?</li> <li>• What are your significant projects, papers, and internship experiences?</li> <li>• What have you learned from these?</li> <li>• Why did you choose to work in this company/research lab? (For applicants with work experience)</li> <li>• What have you gained from your professional/research experience?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What drives you professionally and academically?</li> <li>• What are your short and long term goals?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why are you poised to succeed after MS? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What are your major accomplishments?</li> <li>- What are your valuable skills?</li> <li>- How have you overcome challenges in life?</li> <li>- Why should the weaker sections in your profile be overlooked?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What do you contribute to the classrooms? (Important for MEM/MIS)</li> <li>• How is your research work significant and how does it fit with the work going on at XYZ? (Important for PhD)</li> </ul>	
<b>3. How does MS/PhD from XYZ help you?</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why is MS/PhD next logical step towards your goals?</li> <li>• What do you hope to accomplish in graduate school?</li> <li>• What courses, labs, research projects, faculty at XYZ cater to your interest and ambitions?</li> </ul>	

If you fill out this worksheet sincerely,  
you can rest assured that your SOP  
would be better equipped than  
majority of the applicants out there!

# SOP Mistakes

- Rehashing the resume
  - “I have CCNA and CCNP certifications in most of the fields to serve as a proof for my knowledge in these fields”
  - “For instance, in my math class, I found myself getting frustrated with my calculator because it could not handle matrices with complex numbers. I took the matter into my hands and wrote a java program to find the determinant of a matrix involving complex numbers, which would run on my mobile phone. It worked well, and this was just the beginning of bigger things for the next three years.”
- Hollow claims - SHOW, don't TELL
  - Don't say you are passionate, show what you did
  - “As it is evident, my academic qualifications in the field of networking are exceptional.”
  - “During the internship, I faced a crunch situation while designing a Cost-effective Power Generation Unit. Since factors such as time to procure and implement the solution were not considered by me before designing the circuit, the entire complexion of the solution got changed - which taught me my first lesson in engineering management.”

# SOP Mistakes continued...

- Lack of confidence

- “I wish to return to academic study to build on my learnings from undergraduate school particularly in the fields of Theory of computation and Network Security so that I may be able to provide more effective produce in academia or industry.”

- Discounting your failures

- Don’t ignore weaknesses in your application, tell me why they don’t define your capability
  - “My GRE exam happened to coincide with a big project release at my work. The professional in me could not let my work suffer and unfortunately in the process, I had to compromise with my GRE preparation. Without seeking an excuse, I can only request the admissions committee to not judge my candidacy by my GRE score alone.”

- Cheesy cliches and generalisations

- “I hope to apply the knowledge I gain, back in India, if required with suitable adaptation, to alleviate globally pervasive problems.”

Let others confirm your story

**LORS**

# What is a LOR?

Place where a third person can confirm that you deserve to be admitted!

*A good LOR is one that validates your candidacy by sounding genuine, vouching for your ability to excel at your target program and coming from someone who is credible.*

# Right person to get LOR from?

## 1. Credible

- Universally known (some internationally renowned person or someone with very notable achievement)
- Very senior e.g. HOD
- Has great background (PhD, studied from a wellknown place etc)

TIP: people at higher positions are expected to connect with more number of students and therefore their evaluation can be more trustworthy

# Right person to get LOR from?

## 2. Someone you worked closely with

- Who has spent enough time with you to be able to comment on your abilities genuinely!  
(your project guide, team leader, Professor etc)

TIP: don't choose to get LOR from Dean of your college if you haven't worked closely with him because he won't have really good things to say about you!

# Right person to get LOR from?

3. Project Manager/Lead at work (Fulltime or Internship)
  - For people with any kind of professional experience outside college

TIP: adds a new dimension to your profile by commenting on your ability to work in a professional environment

3 LORs

2 Academic

+

1 Professional (if you have any interesting  
internship/fulltime work experience) else  
another Academic one

# For MIS/MEM

- At least ONE PROFESSIONAL LOR should be there

# Writing the actual LORs

- Senior Professors, Managers can do it themselves
  - Help them by giving them a brief summary of what things you want them to cover in the LORs
    - Your achievements under them
    - Your characteristics that you would like highlighted
- Some might ask you to draft

# When drafting the LORs yourself

- Don't overpraise yourself! Be realistic
- Write subtly and formally as a recommender would write
- Vary your language slightly for each LOR so that it doesn't seem that same person has written 3 LORs! You might try to ask your friends to write these

# Follow up with your recommenders

- Remind them of your accomplishments
- Brief them on your work and what/where you are applying to
- Provide them with written descriptions of projects that they can use in their letters directly
- Follow up politely so that the process gets done on time (remember they are busy people)

Improving the state of things

# **SCHOLAR STRATEGY**

# SCHOLAR STRATEGY

## Indore's Nistha Tripathi develops strategy for scholars

Saswati Mukherjee | June 11, 2015 at 4:00 pm



A tech enthusiast, Nistha Tripathi, a resident of Indore, toyed with several startup ideas before zeroing in on a venture close to her heart – Scholar Strategy. It is an alternative, purely online strategic counseling service for engineers interested in pursuing higher studies (MS/MIS/PhD) in US universities.

Nistha was disappointed with the guidance being given to students in the name of counseling in the market, so she started her own venture in the field. While some of the other ideas could not shape up due to logistical problems, [Scholar Strategy](#) was different; it was an enterprise that she could run completely on her own.

- Recently featured on YourStory for our innovative counseling and success
- Strategic one on one guidance for students

# Mentioned by UIUC CS page

The screenshot shows the official Facebook page for the University of Illinois Computer Science department. The page features a large header image of a modern glass building at night. Below the header, the page title is "University of Illinois Computer Science College & University". The main menu includes "Timeline", "About", "Photos", "Reviews", and "More". On the left sidebar, there are stats: "4,451 people like this", "Fariba Khan and 8 other friends", "117 people have been here", "Closed now · Opens Monday 8:00AM - 12:00PM... Get additional info", "Invite Friends to like this Page", and "4.7 of 5 stars · 12 reviews View Reviews". The "ABOUT" section contains the text "CS @ ILLINOIS is shaping the future of computing." and a link to "http://cs.illinois.edu/". The "PHOTOS" section shows a grid of small thumbnail images. The right side of the page displays a post from "University of Illinois Computer Science" about alumna Nistha Tripathi, with a large profile picture of her and a bio text.

**University of Illinois Computer Science**  
College & University

Like Follow Message

Timeline About Photos Reviews More

4,451 people like this  
Fariba Khan and 8 other friends

117 people have been here

Closed now · Opens Monday 8:00AM - 12:00PM...  
Get additional info

Invite Friends to like this Page

4.7 of 5 stars · 12 reviews  
View Reviews

**ABOUT**

CS @ ILLINOIS is shaping the future of computing.  
<http://cs.illinois.edu/>

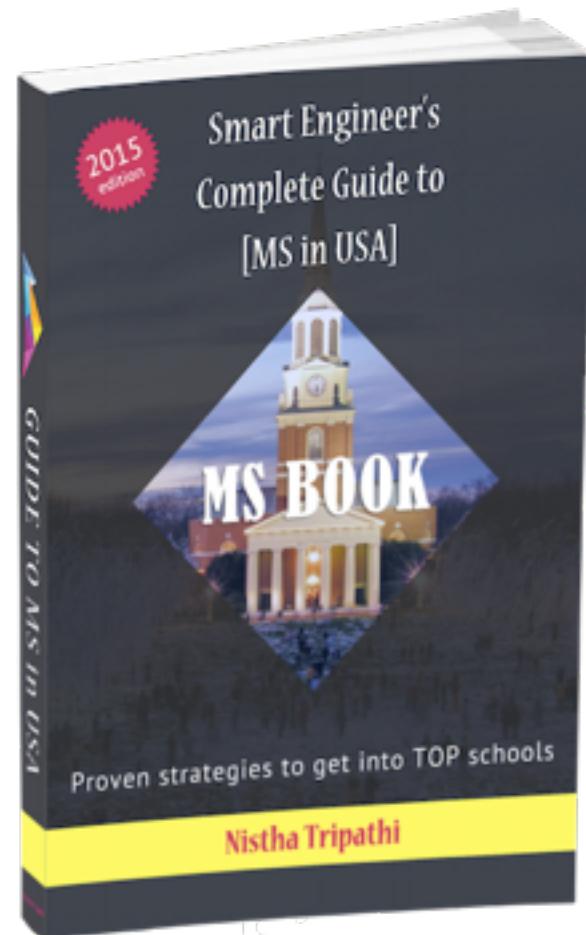
**PHOTOS**

Nistha Tripathi from Indore starts her online counseling, trains engineering students for...  
Nistha Tripathi is an author, tech enthusiast and an entrepreneur.  
[HER.YOURSTORY.COM](http://HER.YOURSTORY.COM/nistha-tripathi-0611)

**SCHOLAR STRATEGY**

# MS Book: Smart Engineer's Guide to MS in USA

- Launched MS Book last month, already a hit
- Insider tips for Applications
- How to manage MS finances
- Interviews of Professionals
- Sample SOPs, SOP canvas download etc
- [www.scholarstrategy.com/  
smart-engineer-book](http://www.scholarstrategy.com/smart-engineer-book)



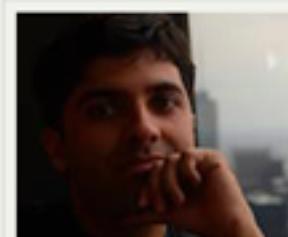
Drawing on interviews with...



**Nikhil Rasiwasia**  
Cofounder at Fashlate  
(acquired by Snapdeal)  
PhD in ECE, UC San Diego



**Ankit Srivastava**  
Professor at IIT Chicago  
PhD in ECE, UC San Diego



**Abhinav Bhatele**  
Researcher at Livermore  
National Lab  
PhD in CS, UIUC



**Manish Maheshwari**  
Mobility Engineer at  
Motorola  
MS in Mechanical, UIUC



**Bhavesh Sanghvi**  
Software Engineer at  
Amazon  
MS in CS, Iowa SU



**Vivek Y**  
Managing chemical  
manufacturing family  
business  
MBA, Columbia; MS in CS,  
UIUC



**Roopa V**  
Manager at British Telecom  
MBA, Chicago Booth; MS in  
IT, RPI



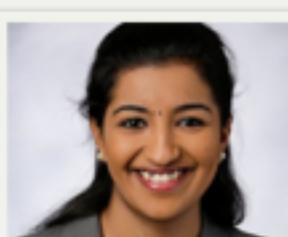
**Parth Shukla**  
Project Engineer at J.  
Roberts, Inc.  
MS in Civil, UMCP



**Arushi Arora**  
going to Columbia for MS  
in Data Science



**Akash Gandotra**  
studying MISM at CMU



**Kanchana**  
studying MEM at Duke



**Krish Prasad**  
studying MS at UT Dallas

# OUR MS APPLICATION COUNSELING SERVICE

## COUNSELOR-

- Nistha (Me)
- MS from UIUC (briefly worked with Adcom, RA)
- MBA from NYU (worked as a TA)
- Wall Street, Tech Startups in New York
- Wrote a book on MS in USA for Engineers
- Other Mentors:
- Successful professionals on Wall Street, Consulting, Tech firms, Startups...

## Our Network:

- Alumni in UIUC, Cornell, Columbia, CMU, Duke etc

# Why Scholar Strategy?

- Lack of genuine advice in the market
  - No good university has tie ups with counselors!
- Personal experience
  - Have done it myself - twice at TOP universities
  - Admission committee insights
- Better resources and connections
  - Network of students and professionals in US and UK

# Our approach

- We do a detailed call to craft student's story and then formulate strategy for SOP and LORs
- NEVER use templates! Each application should be unique

# SOP evolution (Before)

“My long and enjoyable interaction with computer science goes back to my fourth grade vocational course, when I applied math formulae to cells of an excel sheet. Programming since has had my interest and my motivation to choose to computer science as my major. After a year and a half as an Application Developer in Java and ETL logic at JP Morgan Chase, I wish to return to academic study to build on my learnings from undergraduate school particularly in the fields of Theory of computation and Network Security so that I may be able to provide more effective produce in academia or industry.”

# (After)

“From programming cells of an excel sheet with math formulas in my fourth grade to building a security plugin for Mozilla Firefox considering the current threats to privacy and security on Internet, I have realized that problem solving is what excites me. After a year and a half as an Application Developer in Risk Technology at JP Morgan Chase, I have found my passion in improving the way Information is used in businesses. Therefore, I wish to return to school to pursue a Master's degree in Computer Science that will allow me to explore the subject in greater depth, particularly the fields of Data Mining, Database and Software Engineering, and use it effectively to address real-world challenges.”

# OUR STUDENTS ARE GOING TO...

Our Students have received admits from



UC San Diego  
Jacobs School of Engineering



NC STATE UNIVERSITY  
Department of Computer Science



Duke  
MASTER OF  
Engineering  
Management



# PACKAGES

Check our counseling packages at

<http://scholarstrategy.com/counseling-packages/>

# Check out these free resources

- ✓ Scholar Strategy - [www.scholarstrategy.com](http://www.scholarstrategy.com)
  - ✓ Free resume templates, free process guides, case studies
  - ✓ Our newsletter has grown 500% in last 6 months
- ✓ Edulix forums
- ✓ US News rankings
- ✓ Quora - [www.quora.com](http://www.quora.com) (can ask insightful questions)
- ✓ LinkedIn - Use to effectively contact with students studying abroad
- ✓ StupidSid - Aggregates useful information about US universities

# TO DO list for YOU

- Get your copy of <http://scholarstrategy.com/smart-engineer-book> (now is the right time)
- If you need personal guidance, contact us
  - <http://scholarstrategy.com/contact>