



Against the Odds: MBA Admissions for Indian Applicants



An Accepted.com Report

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Introduction

Indian natives – this report is for you!

Let's get one thing straight: Choosing the best business school for *you* doesn't mean choosing the best program according to *Businessweek* or the *Financial Times*. If you want to stand out from the overrepresented Indian applicant pool, then you'll need to be sure that you're applying to those schools that will *truly* value you for the unique qualities and talents you possess and for your unique post-MBA goals. That means you're going to need to do a lot of soul searching and introspection. You're going to need to really *prepare* for this admissions adventure. In many ways your job is a lot harder than that of the American applicant – you need to work out visa issues, work on your cultural differences (accent, vocabulary), adjust your resume to American standards, and research American schools from halfway around the world.

But don't worry – after reading this report, you'll be much better positioned to tackle the items on your to-do list and apply confidently and successfully to top U.S. business schools. And if after reading this report you still have questions or want individual assistance? Well, we can help you with that as well.



Indian MBA Hopefuls Must Prep for Uphill Battle

Indian candidates face fierce competition on their quest to MBA admission abroad. But that probably isn't news to you.

According to a [2012 study](#) by the Graduate Management Admission Council, India offers up the highest number of foreign MBA applicants (43%), followed by China (27%), and then the U.S. (6%). And according to [an article](#) by *Poets & Quants* on CNN Money, applicants from India and China are four to five times more likely to be turned down from a program than domestic applicants and applicants from Latin America, Europe, Africa, or the Middle East.



For MBA programs, the main issue behind the disparity in foreign applicant pool numbers and their slice of acceptances can be attributed to many factors: the sheer volume of applications from a particular background, the schools' desire to diversify their classes, anticipated student loan debt burdens, and visa hurdles for foreign students who want to work abroad after graduation, according to interviews with MBA officers and [another *Poets & Quants* article](#).

“For us, at Duke, we see lots of candidates from India who are strong in a functional role,” **Dan McCleary, Regional Director for India at Duke’s Fuqua School of Business**, told me during an interview. “The biggest question we ask when trying to decide is how this person going to fair when they are being interviewed for a client-facing role....Getting into business school is only half the battle. We are looking for candidates who can go the distance and get hired by these organizations.”

McCleary goes on to say that over the past four years he’s seen Indian candidates become much more sophisticated in their application approach. They’re not just looking at marketing materials. They’re connecting with business school representatives, current students and alumni. They’re reading blogs to find out insider details. They’re [showing that they’re a good fit](#) with the school’s curriculum and culture. Those who don’t will stand out – but not in a good way.

“We still see applicants from people who haven’t done their homework, and it becomes more obvious.” McCleary advises, “Pick a smaller set of schools to apply to and connect with more people.”

What can you do to get to know more people at your array of school choices – (which should include your dream picks, good fits, and safeties!)?

1. Network with those you know. Ask among your batchmate network or among family friends for referrals to b-school connections. Gauge whether or not it’s safe to ask work mentors or colleagues for introductions to MBA alums (but be careful not to tip off your interest in leaving the company if it’s a sensitive issue). Be prepared with a brief message (about 200 words) detailing why you’re interested in the school and your future career goals. Ask your friends to pass it along in an email introduction.

2. Prepare to ace the first of many [MBA interviews](#). Once you're connected, inquire about meeting for tea/coffee or stopping in for a brief chat. Or if distance doesn't allow, set up a phone call or Skype session. Be prepared and respect their time! You should know the basics about the school and why you think you're a good fit. Come up with good questions so you can get an insider's perspective. If you feel like you've really hit it off, ask for referrals to other alums, a note on your behalf to the admissions committee, and any other advice they can give.

3. Visit the campus, or attend a school-sponsored MBA event. This shows the school that you're really interested in their program. It's not the time for you to monopolize the presentation with all your questions, or rattle off your own profile and ask if you have a chance to get in! MBA programs are more and more looking at emotional intelligence when they decide whom to admit. They want to see that you're personable and approachable, just as you hope they would be. So show them! [Come prepared](#) with one or two insightful questions, introduce yourself to other applicants and current students, and gather contact information for follow-ups.

Bottom line: Prepare yourself now to be the type of student or alum you'd like to network with if you become accepted: well-informed, articulate, and resourceful.



Take a Look at Fit, then Brand

Close your eyes and name the top two MBA programs that come to mind.

Bet I can guess which ones you picked. [Harvard](#) and [Stanford](#) right?

Harvard boasts former U.S. presidents, CEOs of JPMorgan and Goldman Sachs and business tycoons like Ratan Tata who cut their teeth on its famed case study curriculum. Stanford has produced tech giants like Sun Microsystems co-founder Vinod Khosla, and these days, a bounteous crop of startups nurtured by Silicon Valley investors with money to burn. They both enjoy a world-famous brand and attract recruiters in droves.



Family pressure and internal ambition may mean limiting your choice to only a handful of the world's most famous MBA brands. But what you really need to ask yourself is – what brand is the best fit for *me*?

Return on Investment

First, you need to think about the return on investment for your time – both pre- and post-MBA.

You'll have limited hours to put together a stellar application – time shaved off from sleep and leisure, and time away from family and friends – so put it to optimal use, not into a pipe dream. Beyond studying for the GMAT, you need to reserve time for researching programs, networking with current students or alumni and writing essays tailored to each school. Don't apply to a dream school just to give it a shot. Apply to the right schools to get in.

You'll also be taking two years off from the work force and spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on tuition. Carefully weigh whether your MBA path will lead you to make up these lost earnings quickly – that doesn't always mean one of the top two or three ranked schools, according to [this excerpt](#) from [AOL Jobs](#):

At Notre Dame's [Mendoza School](#), last year's MBA graduates landed average salaries that exceeded their pre-MBA pay by 149 percent. At the University of Minnesota's Carlson School, the increase was 132.2 percent, and at the University of North Carolina's [Kenan-Flagler Business School](#), it was 122.2 percent, and these numbers exclude starting bonuses and other bennies that are often handed out to MBAs when hired.

Bottom line: Take the time to look beyond the brand to the stats. You may uncover some pleasant surprises.

Know How You Fit the Stats

With a nosebleed GMAT score (740 or above), solid GPA, work experience at a known feeder firm or entrepreneurial venture, and a robust extracurricular leadership role you may beat the [seven percent acceptance rate](#) at Stanford or the cut of one of ten to become Harvard bound. But if you lack in one of the above criteria, especially if you belong to the [overrepresented pool of Indian applicants](#), you'll need to realistically expand your options.

Bottom line: You should place above the average GMAT and GPA scores to consider an MBA program a good fit. Otherwise it's a reach school, and other factors from your background will need to compensate.

Career Interest

Carefully review your target schools' career placement data. You may be surprised that the company you're interested in working for recruits elsewhere besides Harvard and Stanford. With a little extra effort or travel on your part you can land an internship or job in a top market.

This [MIT student](#) gained a spot at top consulting firm BCG in Chicago – the heartland of U.S. manufacturing. This [Cornell Johnson student](#) won a place at Accenture consulting.

This [Darden student](#) says he'd have no problem landing a position at a top consulting firm outside Virginia. This [Duke student](#) landed an investment banking job in New York, and she said the one-hour flight worked to her advantage.

Bottom line: Do your research *now* for where you'd like to work when you graduate. The recruiting season starts almost immediately when you arrive on campus. The specific niches and location of an MBA program may appeal to you more once you scratch below the surface.

Location and Size

Are you a bright lights, big city kind of gal? Are you the type of guy who wants personal attention, after attending a big university where you were just a number?

It's essential that you evaluate the fit and feel of your MBA picks before plunging in. New York, London or Boston may seem exciting, but as [this Darden student shares](#), sometimes smaller class sizes in smaller cities mean better bonds between peers, professors and alumni.

You may already have an established network in or family ties to a specific city. Perhaps there's a strong religious or immigrant community that you or your spouse can tap into to help feel more at home as you transition into your new life. Maybe this city is the hub of your preferred industry.

Bottom line: If you can visit the campus before applying, do so. Just because it looks good on a website or on a business card, doesn't mean it's the best fit for you. You'll be spending two years of your life at this school, and it's the launch pad for your future. Make sure it's a great fit.

Speak to Your Audience (In Their Language)

What I wouldn't give right now to munch on a plump gol gappa from a local street vendor, or to hop into a tuk tuk and take a ride to Khan Market, where I would order a mouthwatering Mutton Seekh Kabab romali roll from Khan Cha Cha!

If you've ever lived in Delhi, you know what I'm talking about. Here for the summer in New York, I'll just have to settle for the memories.

In my travels around the globe, I've often found that chatting about cuisine is a great conversation starter, and often leads to exciting dinner invitations. When I'm homesick, I always feel a quick bond with other travelers who can talk up their favorite New York City eateries – and love NYC's [lemon poppy seed muffins](#) as much as I do. If you crave these delectable pastries, *you definitely speak my language.*

Right now – that's your challenge. If you're planning to apply to a U.S.-based MBA program you need to make sure you're speaking to the admissions committee in their language.

Make Your Essays Local

Admissions officers can be the jealous type. They want to know that theirs is not just one of a dozen programs to receive your application. You need to show that you've done extensive research, talked to locals, even walked in their shoes.

For example, [Columbia](#) wants to know [why the New York location](#) is important to your goals. Quoting lyrics from [this song](#) will not be convincing enough.

Be *specific*. What doors opened for your friend at last year's [Venture Capital conference at the Digital Sandbox](#) on Broad Street? What [HACKATHON](#) event did you attend where you networked with entrepreneurs who've received startup funding? Do you plan to unwind on Sundays up in Van Cortlandt Park playing on the 35 acres of [new cricket pitches](#)?

Supplying this level of detail applies to every school. It's easiest to be specific after you've [visited](#). If that's not possible, talk with those who have, send emails to organizers, or to people who've been profiled in event media coverage. Use this local information to write your essays. I can't guarantee they will all respond, but that's part of the hustle you'll need to stand out.

But will they understand what a stand out I am in India?



You've already worked so hard to rise to the top in India's competitive testing climate. Many Indian applicants are concerned about whether or not American MBA programs fathom their level of academic achievement, as U.S. vs. Indian GPA systems are very different.

Don't fret though. [Top MBA programs](#) are savvy enough to understand the Indian grading system. They should also take into account that if you've majored in a technical subject like engineering, then your GPA might be comparatively lower. Feel free to mention briefly on your resume if you received an accolade like first class, or "With Distinction." You do not, however, need to worry about converting your GPA. List it as given from your undergraduate institution, unless your target school requests that you convert it.

Use Words the Admissions Committee will Understand

Finally, scour your [essays](#) to make sure they are written using terms an American audience will understand. It's not placing a value judgment on the language used – it will just make it easier for your target audience to comprehend your message. That's key in good communication.

Dan McCleary, the Regional Director for India over at Fuqua, has a great [list of terms](#) that might trip up an American reader. Also, ask an American friend to read over your essay to make sure there is nothing else that stands out as confusing, or too culturally specific to India.

Bottom line: Make the effort to go local so you can present your top MBA choice with your unique perspective!

DOWNLOAD FREE!

5 Fatal Flaws to Avoid

*Eliminate the most common flaws
in your MBA application essays.*

Find a Way to Pay

A quick survey of total out-of-pocket MBA expenses at some of the world's [top business schools](#) may leave you weak in the knees. The range is about \$150,000 to over \$200,000 USD. That's before adding in lots of extra costs like travel, computers, and loan interest repayments.

Now most schools offer some sort of financial assistance. [Harvard](#), for example, boasts that 65% of students receive some sort of financial aid.

But as an Indian applicant, you may have a few additional hurdles ahead as you secure financing for a U.S.-based MBA. The current 1 USD → 60 Indian rupee exchange rate means you'll have to dig deeper into your bank account to cover costs. You also have fewer resources than U.S. citizens when it comes to securing loans if you choose an American MBA program.

What are your options then for financing your MBA?

Personal and Family Resources and Company Sponsorships

Most schools suggest you should first rely on your own savings, then assistance or loans from family. For those who've been savvy savers or lucky enough to have deep-pocketed relatives, this zero percent interest approach is a great way to start chipping away at your behemoth tuition fees and expenses.

If you plan to return to the company where you're currently employed, then ask for corporate sponsorship! Not only will this cut down on your costs out-of-pocket, but it may also enhance your chances of acceptance. Many one-year and accelerated MBA programs look very favorably on sponsored candidates as it means guaranteed tuition payment and guaranteed job placement.

Loans

Please note that all these resources are suggestions, not endorsements. Loan terms may be subject to change after publication of this report. Be sure to verify these sources on your own.

Domestic Loans from India

Start at home on your hunt for loans. **But school financial aid websites can also be a good place to start!** [Cornell Financial Aid](#) has a great website listing domestic loan options specifically oriented to Indian students. [Columbia](#) also has a page that lists domestic Indian loan and grant options.



U.S. Federal Student Loans

Unfortunately, international students are not eligible for U.S. federal student loans through the Department of Education, unless you are a permanent resident with a green card, or in the case of some other [very rare exceptions](#).

Private U.S. Loans

That leaves the private loan market as the only lender source for Indian nationals. It will take dedicated research to identify the right loan provider for your needs. Several U.S. loan programs that did not require a creditworthy U.S. co-signer shut down in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. Deutsche Bank then launched an alternative program in 2009 called ALPS (Affiliated Loan Program for Students) that was embraced by some top MBA programs, but they have since stopped offering loans to new borrowers. Lenders have a tendency to start and stop their programs frequently. It is thus best to confirm directly with schools that a loan program is still in existence before deciding to depend on it as a funding source.

Private U.S. Loans – No U.S. Co-Signer

Several MBA programs such as [Wharton](#), [Harvard](#), [Stanford](#), [Cornell](#) and others offer loans through credit unions that do not require a U.S. co-signer. Carefully read the terms of the loan though. Wharton's program covers only 80% of the first and second year budget. Cornell's arrangement funds "cost-of-tuition only less any scholarship received." If you choose this option, you will likely have to cover additional expenses with another funding source.

Private U.S. Loans – With U.S. Co-Signer

Again, make school financial aid websites your first stop when on the hunt for such lenders. Check out numerous schools' sites, even if you don't plan on applying. They may have information on private loan sources that your choice hasn't mentioned. For example, [Cornell](#) has a list of resources for private loans requiring a U.S. co-signer. Check it out!

School Grants or Fellowships, Outside Scholarships

If you're a standout applicant, it's likely you'll be offered some money to attend.

Schools make this decision as part of the application process. If you don't receive an offer with your letter of acceptance, it's likely you won't be considered for an award. But after you're accepted, it still never hurts to ask.

If you do receive money from one school, be careful and tactful about playing schools off each other to get more award money. Each program may have different criteria to determine who gets awards. Money may be available to you at one school, but not another.

Some schools make additional grants taking your background or nationality into consideration. Stanford just announced the new [Reliance Dhirubhai Fellowship](#) that covers "everything for up

to 5 Indian students to attend Stanford GSB, and the top 50 finalists for the Fellowship will even receive a break on applying – submitting Stanford’s application for free.”

Check out this list of other school fellowships oriented to students from developing countries. And again, scour your top choice schools’ financial aid websites for more information:

- Wharton: <http://www.wharton.upenn.edu/mba/admissions/grants-and-fellowships.cfm>
- INSEAD: http://mba.insead.edu/schlmgmt/dsp_schl_info.cfm?schlcode=EC01
- Esade: <http://www.esade.edu/ftmba/eng/fees-and-financing/need-based-scholarships-programme>
- HEC: [http://www.mba.hec.edu/How-to-apply/Funding/\(level2\)/281](http://www.mba.hec.edu/How-to-apply/Funding/(level2)/281)
- IMD (fellowship for women):
<http://www.imd.org/programs/mba/fees/scholarships/Nestle.cfm>

Finally, here’s a brief list of outside scholarships oriented to Indian students. They’re all competitive, but worth your time to consider.

- AAUW (fellowship for women): <http://www.aauw.org/what-we-do/educational-funding-and-awards/international-fellowships/>
- Aga Khan Foundation: http://www.akdn.org/akf_scholarships.asp
- Fulbright: <http://www.iie.org/Programs/Fulbright-Foreign-Student-Program>

Every penny counts, especially those you don’t have to pay back!



**DOWNLOAD OUR *FREE*
SPECIAL REPORT!**
Navigate the MBA Maze

Prepare for Your Job Hunt Now

So what if you make it? You get into your dream MBA program. Next you're expecting to land your dream job upon graduation – in the U.S.. It might not be that simple if you're an Indian national.



According to a [Bloomberg article](#), only two out of the top MBA programs responded to a survey about international student job placement rates: [Chicago Booth](#) at 95.2 percent, and [Stanford](#) at 91 percent. Those are pretty good stats, but they do not differentiate between placement inside the U.S., or whether those jobs were elsewhere.

Across the board, new MBAs hit a rough patch in the immediate aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, especially foreign nationals. Some U.S. investment banks and other companies stopped hiring foreigners and even [rescinded offers](#).

Hiring practices have recovered since those dark days, but stats are still hard to find. Some sectors, though, didn't change their recruiting – like tech firms who value strong analytical and engineering skills, say admissions officials. They offer jobs to many Indian nationals and have been consistently hiring.

But there are key issues that Indian nationals should be aware of as they contemplate the end game in their MBA experience – the job offer.

Visas

One obstacle that can stand in the way of international MBA students seeking placement in the U.S. is obtaining a work visa. According to [Bloomberg](#):

International students have F-1 visa status, which means they are non-immigrant students in the eyes of the law. They can all stay in the U.S. to work for 12 months after graduation without an additional visa; those with pre-MBA backgrounds in science, technology, or engineering can stay for 24 months. After that, international grads must get an H-1B visa, which requires employer sponsorship.

Most top MBA programs have already thoroughly vetted the companies that recruit on their campuses. They know which firms are willing to hire foreign nationals and sponsor their visas, or not. For each position you consider, be prepared to show how your specific skill set is vital to that job description – an essential part of the visa process. Do that research now so that you know in advance if your goal career is attainable.

Stay Informed

Take a close look at your chosen industry. Careers in tech, [consulting](#) and supply-chain management are globally oriented and employers are seeking international candidates to expand their reach. Marketing, however, is increasingly hyper-local. With your cultural knowledge, you may be better served to look for placement, even an MBA, domestically in India. Several [MBA programs](#) are sending out summer reading packets about U.S. business upon acceptance. Delve into these materials so you have a clear picture of what's ahead.

Be Flexible

Associate Dean of Admissions at [Emory Goizueta](#) Julie Barefoot says she would give the same advice to Indian nationals as she would to any student on the job hunt: "Be flexible. There's more than one desired path, and you might have to take an interim step."

That could mean working for your choice employer back in India, or elsewhere outside the United States. Some companies now offer a training year in the U.S. before sending MBAs back to their home country. They're aware of the U.S. salary differential, and may offer a bonus or commensurate salary to make it worth your while, [according to Bloomberg](#).

Be Prepared

To properly prepare for your job search, [Kellogg](#)'s Director of International Coaching and Global Relations Carla Edelston says the first step is to be self-aware – of your strengths, your preferences and weaknesses you need to improve.

She advises foreign nationals to take advantage of the resources they are already paying for as part of their MBA experience to successfully land a post-MBA position. Kellogg offers access to the Career Leader, a psychological assessment tool designed by two Harvard faculty members, to help students identify a career match. Job hunters are then advised to conduct a market-assessment, and network with fellow students who are some of the best resources for leads and connections.

Finally, job seekers need to prepare themselves for interviews. They need to learn how to convey what Edelston calls "an executive presence" – the ability "to speak with a firm tone, with confidence." Career offices offer many opportunities to work on your interview skills and MBA officials strongly recommend that you internalize their feedback, and willingly adjust your style.

Here are some common issues Indian nationals can run into during the interview process for U.S. companies:

- **Fixation on touting credentials over answering the question.** Interviewers want to know they are being heard. Avoid weaving in your academic record or list of awards in responses. They can gather this information from your resume. Recruiters want direct answers.

- **Pronunciation problems.** Candidates from many English-speaking countries, not just India, can be difficult to understand to a foreign recruiter. Get some honest feedback from a U.S.-based friend or coach and work on your phrasing or vocabulary. This is important across the board, but especially important for communications-heavy positions like consulting.

- **Overly long [resumes](#).** One page. Just one page. That is the only format acceptable in U.S. business practice.

Again, take the time now to research how best to target your industry, and start working on your “executive presence.”

An MBA is just a piece of paper – you need to embody the title.



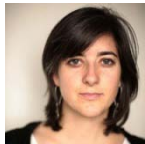
Epilogue

We hope that you have benefited from our special report, *Against the Odds: MBA Admissions for Indian Applicants* and that it will help you create a b-school application that will make you stand out in your crowded profile group.

If you would like one-on-one consulting or editing for your applications, or need help with any other aspect of the MBA admissions process, please [contact Accepted.com](#). While our experienced professional editing staff won't write your essays for you, [we can help you](#) from the beginning, as you're defining your topics and themes, or we can [edit your essays](#) to ensure that your application is as strong as it can be. If you would like to work with the author of this report, just request Michelle Stockman.

If you have any questions about this report, or questions about admissions in general, please feel free to post them to our [Facebook wall](#). We look forward to hearing from you!

About the Author



[Michelle Stockman](#) is a professional journalist, former Columbia Business School admissions staff member, and experienced MBA admissions consultant. Having both the insider admissions knowledge and the years of experience in shaping narratives, Michelle can help you stand out from the competition with a well-written, compelling, and highly persuasive application.