



mbaMission's Insider's Guide
**Stanford Graduate School
of Business**

Stanford University
Stanford, CA

2018–2019

Introduction

After more than a decade helping MBA applicants get into top business schools, we have learned what can compel an admissions committee to send that coveted letter of acceptance. Selecting the right MBA program for your needs and developing a true understanding of and familiarity with that program are crucial in crafting a successful application. We have therefore invested hundreds of hours into researching and examining the leading business schools—including speaking with students, alumni, and other representatives—to construct these guides, with the express goal of helping applicants like you make informed decisions about this important step in your education and career.

We hope you enjoy this guide and encourage you to visit us at www.mbamission.com for complete and detailed analysis of the leading schools' essay questions, weekly essay-writing tips, MBA news and trends, and other valuable free information and resources. And for any advice you may need on applying to business school, please contact us for a free 30-minute consultation. Our consultants are extensively trained to help applicants present themselves in the most interesting and compelling way and take advantage of every opportunity that might increase their chances of being admitted to their target MBA program.

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Over the past eight years, *Poets&Quants* has become the foremost authority on the top business schools. Our mission has always been to help young professionals with one of the most important—and potentially most expensive—decisions of their lives: whether to pursue an MBA.

This Insider's Guide is part of a new editorial partnership between *Poets&Quants* and *mbaMission*, the world's leading MBA admissions consulting firm. We closely evaluated all such guides currently on the market, and I am confident that you will not find a more thorough analysis of an MBA program than *mbaMission's*. These in-depth reports are well researched and well written, offering the detail and examination applicants need to really understand a school's culture, offerings, and outcomes. We are thrilled to offer these guides to our readers for free, thanks to our new partnership.

Moreover, the guides are a great complement to the daily coverage of MBA news, students, programs, and admissions practices on PoetsandQuants.com. We hope you will visit our site often to stay informed about the programs that interest you and the one you ultimately attend. We will continue to provide the most relevant and current resources on the MBA world to help you make the best possible decisions on your path from school selection to career advancement.

I wish you the best of luck on your journey to what will undoubtedly be a transformational experience.

John A. Byrne

Founder & Editor-In-Chief

PoetsandQuants.com

Table of Contents

9	The MBA Program in Context: Choosing Stanford
10	Location: Urban Campus Versus College Town
14	Class Size: Smaller Versus Larger
17	Curriculum: Flexible Versus Mandatory Core
21	Pedagogy: Lecture Versus Case Method
23	Academic Specializations/Recruitment Focus: Resources and Employers
25	Alumni Base: Opportunities to Engage
27	Facilities: Shaping the Academic/Social Experience
28	Rankings and Reputation: Important Metrics or Arbitrary Measures?
35	The Stanford Graduate School of Business
35	Summary
36	The Dean
38	Professional Specializations
38	Consulting
39	Entrepreneurship, Private Equity, and Venture Capital
43	Finance
44	Health Care and Biotechnology
46	International Business
47	Marketing
49	Nonprofit/Social Entrepreneurship
52	Notable Professors and Unsung Heroes
54	Social/Community Life
55	Academic Summary
57	Admissions Basics
59	Stanford Graduate School of Business Essay Analysis, 2017–2018
63	Appendix: Stanford Facts and Figures
63	Basics
63	Class Profile (Class of 2019)
64	Employment Statistics (Class of 2017)
67	Bibliography

Year-Over-Year Class Profile Data: Stanford GSB	Class of 2019	Class of 2018	Class of 2017	Class of 2016	Class of 2015	Class of 2014	Class of 2013	Class of 2012	Class of 2011
Total Number of Applicants	8,173	8,116	7,899	7,355	7,108	6,716	6,618	7,204	7,536
Students	418	417	407	410	406	398	397	389	370
Average GMAT	737	737	733	732	732	729	730	730	730
GMAT Range	610–790	590–790	570–800	550–790	550–790	550–790	580–790	580–790	540–800
Average Years of Work Experience	4	4	4	4	4	4.2	4	4	3.9
Range of Years of Work Experience	0–14	0–13	0–17	0–15	0–12	0–14.4	NA	NA	NA
Female Representation	40%	41%	40%	42%	36%	35%	34%	39%	38%
U.S. Minority Representation	29%	29%	19%	23%	21%	20%	27%	23%	23%
International Representation (includes permanent residents and U.S. dual citizens)	41%	40%	40%	44%	41%	42%	38%	37%	34%

3. Curriculum: Flexible Versus Mandatory Core

Many business schools have a “core” curriculum—a standard series of courses that all students must take. However, these core requirements can vary tremendously from one program to the next. For example, one school may teach its required curriculum for the entire first year, meaning that students will not take any elective courses until their second year, whereas another MBA program may stipulate only one or two required courses.

The rigidity or flexibility of a school’s first-year curriculum affects students’ education and socialization.

The rigidity or flexibility of a school’s required curriculum affects students’ education and socialization. Regardless of their professional experience, students at a school with a rigid core curriculum must all take the same classes. At some schools, for example, even CPAs must take the required foundational accounting course, whereas at others, students can waive selected classes if they can prove a certain level of proficiency. Again, both approaches have pros and cons, and what those are depends on your perspective.

Proponents of a rigid core curriculum would argue that academics understand what skills students need to become true managers and that when students “overspecialize” in one area, their overall business education can ultimately

suffer. A significant body of academic writing has been devoted to critiquing programs that give students a narrow view of business, notably Henry Mintzberg’s *Managers Not MBAs: A Hard Look at the Soft Practice of Managing and Management Development* (Berrett-Koehler, 2004) and Rakesh Khurana’s *From Higher Aims to Hired Hands: The Social Transformation of American Business Schools and the Unfulfilled Promise of Management as a Profession* (Princeton University Press, 2007).

Advocates of the core curriculum approach would also argue that having all students take the same classes creates a common language and discussion among the classmates because of the shared experience. In addition, proponents contend that a rigid core curriculum facilitates learning, because students who have applicable direct experience bring that knowledge and insight into the classroom and can thereby help teach others. Finally, schools with mandatory cores generally keep students together in their sections for several months, if not an entire academic year, and students who interact every day in this way ultimately forge strong bonds. This sustained contact and connection can create a deep sense of community among the students.

In contrast, those who would argue in favor of a more flexible curriculum feel that students benefit from the opportunity to specialize immediately—that time is short, and students need power and choice in preparing for their desired careers. So if, for example, a student intended to enter the world of finance, an advocate of flexibility would argue that the student should be able to study

finance in depth *throughout* the MBA program, possibly even from day one, so as to gain as much experience as possible in this area—especially before interviewing for a summer internship. Furthermore, proponents for flexible curricula caution that experienced students could end up “wasting” hours taking courses in subjects in which they already have expertise. Finally, they would assert that a flexible schedule allows students the opportunity to meet a greater number and wider variety of their classmates.

Average GMAT of Incoming Students (Class of 2019)	
Chicago Booth	730
Columbia Business School	724
Cornell Johnson	700
Dartmouth Tuck	722
Duke Fuqua	NA
Harvard Business School ¹	730
Michigan Ross	716
MIT Sloan	722
Northwestern Kellogg	732
NYU Stern	714
Stanford GSB	737
UC Berkeley Haas	725
UCLA Anderson	716
UPenn Wharton	730
UVA Darden	713
Yale SOM ¹	730

¹ Represents median rather than average.

Can Waive/ Test Out of Classes	Cannot Waive/ Test Out of Classes
Chicago Booth Cornell Johnson Columbia Business School Dartmouth Tuck Duke Fuqua Michigan Ross Northwestern Kellogg NYU Stern UC Berkeley Haas UCLA Anderson UPenn Wharton	Harvard Business School MIT Sloan Stanford GSB UVA Darden Yale SOM

Notable Professors and Unsung Heroes

One first-year student we interviewed gave the following overview of the school's faculty: "Professors here have a lot of autonomy. They are always looking to improve their teaching. They ask for feedback from students and are open to suggestions. Those who are here are at Stanford because they really want to be here and plan to stay. And they are serious about improving the school and maintaining its reputation."

H. Irving Grousbeck (www.gsb.stanford.edu/faculty-research/faculty/h-irving-grousbeck): One of the cofounders and former directors of the Stanford Center for Entrepreneurial Studies, Irving Grousbeck first began teaching at the GSB in 1985 after co-founding Continental Cablevision (later MediaOne) in 1964 and teaching at Harvard Business School (1981–1985), where he helped found the entrepreneurial management department. According to an alumnus with whom mbaMission spoke, students find Grousbeck's "Managing Growing Enterprises" class so useful because in it, they must assume the role of CEO of the companies they discuss, and Grousbeck then forces them to deal with particular managerial challenges, strongly emphasizing execution. Designed for students who anticipate becoming entrepreneurs or joining a start-up shortly after graduating from business school, the course is capped at 40 people and includes frequent role-plays.

In 2001, *Fortune Small Business* magazine named Grousbeck one of the ten top minds in the country, writing that to Stanford's GSB students, "he is godlike. Nearly all Stanford MBA students try to get into Grousbeck's ... classes." In a "Student Stories" feature on the school's Website, a 2012 alumna included taking Grousbeck's "Managing Growing Enterprises" course among her favorite memories from her second year in the program, saying, "We learn practical tips on how to run new companies from GSB alums. It's a must-take class at the GSB."

"Interpersonal Dynamics": Although this is a course rather than an outstanding GSB professor, we feel it deserves a special mention. Also known as "Touchy Feely," this class is so beloved that students have voted it the most popular elective at GSB for more than 45 consecutive years, and it is typically taken by nearly 90% of students. The course is regarded as one of the quintessential GSB experiences and is all about interpersonal relationships. Some alumni have insisted to mbaMission that the class is "not to be missed." In fact, one GSB graduate who did not take the course while in school wrote an article in *Stanford Business Magazine* about how grateful he was for the opportunity to take a weeklong version of the class at Stanford as an alumnus. In the article, he explained, "The approach was much more interactive and application-oriented than anything I remembered from the GSB, and I pushed myself intellectually, emotionally, and physically in ways I could not have anticipated before I arrived. And yes, I did cry."

Another alumnus noted to mbaMission that indeed, "everyone ends up crying" at least once during the course of the class, quickly adding that he found the experience extremely valuable and that it had a positive impact on his relationships with his GSB classmates, friends, and family. Via unstructured and structured course time, videotapes, role-plays, and a weekend retreat, students exchange feedback on how they interact with others. In addition to meeting for a regular class session two days a week, students are divided into 12-person T-groups ("T" is

for training) to work with an outside facilitator on communication goals. The experience is often so powerful that some Touchy Feely sections even have reunions after graduation. According to an alumna, Touchy Feely section reunions are very informal and sometimes even involve annual weekend trips, such as to Las Vegas. The class has become such a staple of the GSB experience that it was introduced to the Executive Education program for high-performance executives in the summer of 2015.

Margaret (Maggie) Neale (www.gsb.stanford.edu/faculty-research/faculty/margaret-neale): One former GSB student described Maggie Neale to us at mbaMission as “somewhat intimidating” but quickly followed with “I love her teaching style! She pushes each student way out of their comfort zone to make them a better negotiator using whatever style is appropriate for the situation.” Neale’s research is based on the psychology of conflict and negotiation. She was the Graduate School of Business Trust Faculty Fellow for 2011–2012 and serves as director of two of Stanford University’s executive programs—Influence and Negotiation Strategies, and Managing Teams for Innovation and Success—and as co-director of the Executive Program for Women Leaders.

A first year described Neale to mbaMission as “wonderful, legendary,” adding, “She’s been around the Stanford community for a long time. She is very popular, engaging, and friendly. If you have the opportunity to take a class with her, you should. But be warned, her classes are oversubscribed.” In 2011, she became the 13th recipient—and first woman—to be presented with the business school’s Davis Award, which is bestowed upon a faculty member for lifetime achievement.

Baba Shiv (www.gsb.stanford.edu/faculty-research/faculty/baba-shiv): “Baba Shiv is a legend,” declared a first-year student with whom we spoke. Shiv, who is co-director of the Innovative Marketing for Strategic Advantage Program and director of the Innovative CIO Executive Program and the Stanford go•to•market Mexico City program, received his MBA from the Indian Institute of Management and his PhD from Duke University before joining the Stanford GSB faculty in 2005. Shiv’s research concentration is in the area of neuroeconomics, and he focuses his studies on the systems of the brain that lead individuals to like and want things and how those systems shape people’s decisions. His work explores self-control and why people make certain choices, even when logic tells them that those choices may not be in their best interest. He was the R. Michael Shanahan Faculty Fellow in 2013–2014.

A 2008 GSB alumni magazine article describes Shiv as “a favorite uncle who is always interested in your life and eager to talk about new, exciting ideas,” and Dan Ariely, a colleague of Shiv’s and a professor at Duke Fuqua, notes in the same article, “Shiv’s mere presence makes everything around him seem better.” A second year and Marketing Club officer told mbaMission that Shiv “tries to be a career resource for people who want to pursue marketing careers” and is “engaging and exciting to listen to. He is one of the favorite members of the whole faculty; people love him.”

states the school's site. Applicants should choose recommenders who know them well and can provide anecdotes and examples of what they have done and in what manner. The admissions committee has also stated on its site, "We are impressed by what a reference letter says, not by the title of the individual who wrote it or the writing skills of the recommender."

Campus Visits: All candidates able to visit the campus can register to visit a class, have lunch with a student, and tour the GSB and Stanford University campuses. The Admissions Office has stated on its Website that a campus visit will not give applicants an advantage, so candidates should not worry about not being able to visit if a trip to Stanford is not feasible for them.

Interviews: Interviews are by invitation only, and almost all are conducted by alumni, with a small proportion conducted by admissions officers. Interviews typically last approximately 45 minutes to an hour and focus on past behavior, rather than hypothetical situations. Applicants may be placed on the waitlist without an interview but may be invited for an interview after accepting a position on the waitlist. For the 2017–2018 admissions cycle, the school stated that it expected to interview approximately 1,000 applicants.

Financial Aid: The admissions committee makes decisions about whom to accept without any knowledge of candidates' ability to pay for school; that is, decisions are need blind. Most financial aid packages are a combination of loans and fellowships, and fellowships are available to U.S. citizens as well as to international students, who typically do not need a U.S. co-signer to qualify. Applying in Round 1 or 2 will allow applicants to receive a financial aid award before the date by which they must respond to the school's offer of admission. Approximately 50% of students receive funding. The GSB also has one of the most generous loan forgiveness programs for graduates entering the nonprofit or public sector (see the Nonprofit/Social Entrepreneurship section).

Reapplicants: Reapplicants are required to complete a new application in its entirety and should address any weaknesses in their candidacy, such as a low GMAT score or a lack of evidence of leadership experience. Moreover, reapplicants should include information about how their candidacy has improved. Candidates who are reapplying are not obligated to submit letters of recommendation from the same people who completed their recommendations for their previous application and should therefore consider whether other people may be able to provide stronger letters of reference with their reapplication. The Admissions Office does not provide feedback to applicants who have been rejected. Although reapplicants' previous application materials are available to the admissions committee, the candidate's admission decision is based solely on the person's current application.

Stanford Graduate School of Business Essay Analysis, 2017–2018

Like several of the other top MBA programs that have released their essay questions for this year, the Stanford Graduate School of Business (GSB) has remained faithful to the prompts it presented last season. But with a total maximum word count allowance of 1,150, the school gives its applicants a little more room in which to express

themselves. Although the Stanford GSB is an institution well known for generating and encouraging innovators, the school uses its application essays not to ask candidates to share their imaginative new ideas but rather to look inward and examine their motivations and values. These are your opportunities to demonstrate the parts of your personality and profile that are not readily conveyed through transcripts, scores, and lists of professional accomplishments. Here we present our advice on how you might do so effectively...

Essay A: What matters most to you, and why? (School-suggested word count of 750)

For this essay, we would like you to:

- **Do some deep self-examination, so you can genuinely illustrate who you are and how you came to be the person you are.**
- **Share the insights, experiences, and lessons that shaped your perspectives, rather than focusing merely on what you've done or accomplished.**
- **Write from the heart, and illustrate how a person, situation, or event has influenced you.**
- **Focus on the “why” rather than the “what.”**

When candidates ask us, “What should I write for what matters most to me?,” we offer some pretty simple guidance: start brainstorming for this essay by asking yourself that very question. What *does* matter most to you? This might seem like obvious advice, of course, but many applicants get flustered by the question, believing that an actual “right” answer exists that they must provide to satisfy the admissions committee. As a result, they never pause to actually consider their sincere responses, which are typically the most compelling.

We therefore encourage you to contemplate this question in depth and push yourself to explore the psychological and philosophical motivations behind your goals and achievements—behind who you are today. We cannot emphasize this enough: do not make a snap decision about the content of this essay. Once you have identified what you believe is an appropriate theme, discuss your idea(s) with those with whom you are closest and whose input you respect. Doing so can help validate deeply personal and authentic themes, leading to an essay that truly stands out.

Once you have fully examined your options and identified your main themes, do not simply provide a handful of supporting anecdotes—or worse, recycle the stories you used in a similar essay for another school. A strong essay response to this question will involve a true exploration of the themes you have chosen and reveal a thorough analysis of decisions, motives, and successes/failures, with a constant emphasis on *how* you conduct yourself. If you are merely telling stories and trying to tie in your preconceived conclusions, you are probably forcing a theme on your reader rather than genuinely analyzing your experiences, and any experienced admissions reader will see right through this. In short, be sure to fully consider and identify your most authentic answer(s), outline your essay accordingly, and then infuse your writing with your personality, thoughts, feelings, and experiences.