

Association of International Graduate Admissions Consultants



Defining and promoting professional excellence in serving graduate and professional school applicants worldwide.

Issue 7

NEWS

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Graham Richmond, [Clear Admit](#)

Greetings fellow AIGAC members! The spring has been a busy and exciting time for AIGAC. As such, I'd thought I'd use this space to offer a bit of insight into the tasks that are occupying the Board and numerous volunteers at this time.

Second Annual AIGAC Conference June 16-17, 2009; New York City

As you may have already noted, Anna Ivey (Anna Ivey Consulting) and Jeremy Shinewald (mba Mission) have been adeptly directing the preparations for our Second Annual Conference. This year's Conference builds upon last year's event in every way. We've shifted locations from Chicago to New York City, where we will be graciously hosted by Manhattan GMAT in their spacious Chelsea offices. Jeremy and Anna have also managed to secure campus tours at NYU Stern and Columbia Business School – led by admissions directors Isser Gallogly and Linda Meehan respectively. In terms of panel sessions, we have a host of exciting discussions on tap, ranging from presentations by members of the Dartmouth, Michigan, Berkely and Yale admissions teams to a summary of the AIGAC MBA Search Survey findings, conducted by Slover Linett, a leader

in higher-education research. The Conference will be capped off with a private dinner in the city, offering AIGAC members ample opportunity to catch up, exchange best practices and talk shop.

While there are clearly numerous reasons to join us in NYC this June, perhaps the best argument comes from Stacy Blackman (Stacy Blackman Consulting), one of last year's attendees who shared her thoughts on the First Annual Conference:

"I am still blown away by what an amazing event the Annual Conference was. We toured great universities, met formally and informally with admissions officers, learned from excellent panels, ate delicious food and enjoyed meeting with, and learning from, our peers. The only complaint I heard: 'I wish it was longer!'"

Registration has been brisk thus far – as members seek to take advantage of the early-bird discount (extended to May 22). I urge you to visit www.aigac.org/conference.htm and sign up.

AIGAC MBA Search Survey

The other project that the Board has been working on is the AIGAC MBA Search Survey. In early March, AIGAC launched its first-ever survey of graduate business school applicants. The purpose of this survey was two-fold:

1) To enable AIGAC members who work in the MBA admissions space to better understand

the current trends in the applicant pool.

2) To demonstrate to the leading MBA programs that AIGAC sees a unique slice of the applicant pool, and that AIGAC's members can serve as a valuable resource as schools seek to understand the behavior of top-tier applicants.

Thanks to the dozens of members who promoted this survey to their clients and web site visitors, we shattered the target for number of surveys completed, securing nearly 800 completed surveys from current and future applicants. While I don't want to steal too much of the thunder from the upcoming presentation of the survey at our Annual Conference, I thought it would be helpful for members to get an initial sense of some of the traits we found across the applicants who completed the survey:

- Survey takers had an average GMAT score of greater than 700;
- Beyond rankings, the web sites of admissions consulting companies were the most popular source of independent information on MBA programs;
- Harvard, Stanford, Kellogg, Columbia and Wharton were the schools most targeted by survey participants;
- Survey participants averaged 28 years of age and 3-5 years of work experience;

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- More than half of those surveyed hold citizenship outside of the USA;
- 86% of those surveyed use Facebook.

In brief, the survey has enabled AIGAC to learn a great deal about candidate preferences, concerns and online patterns. The details of these preferences will be shared at the Annual Conference and distributed to all members in a report this June.

Perhaps most importantly, the survey has demonstrated the value of the audience that AIGAC members regularly service. I am pleased to announce that AIGAC has been invited to share our findings at the Graduate Association of Admissions Counselors (GMAC) Annual Conference this June.

That's the news from AIGAC HQ. I look forward to seeing you all this June!

ADMISSIONS CONSULTING BEST PRACTICES

By Paul Bodine, Accepted.com

This issue, we take a different tack. In place of inviting AIGAC members to comment on a pressing issue commonly faced by admission consultants, we kept it simple: If you could ask admissions officials only one question, what would you ask? And if you could give clients only one piece of advice, what would it be?

Here are some of your brilliant responses:

One Question for Adcoms:

- "What is the best way to help a client from an overrepresented applicant pool distinguish him-

self or herself? Indian IT guys immediately spring to mind."

- "How many years of experience are ideal for a business school student to bring into the classroom? How has that figure changed between 1999 and 2009?"
- "What aspect of applications stands out the most to you from your admit pool? (to elicit which part of the application seems to have the most significance or impact on the admissions committee without getting the typical answer that all parts of the application are important)"
- "What is your specific process for determining the composition of the MBA class?"
- "What specific criteria do you employ to screen your less-than-perfect (by test score/GPA profile) candidates?"
- "What is the biggest mistake that you see candidates making in their applications?"
- "What is the minimum GMAT acceptable to your school? The answer should be a number, nothing else."
- "What's the best thing an Indian IT applicant can do to compensate for being an Indian IT applicant?"
- "Same as everyone else: what to do with the Indian IT guys? But, since others may already have asked that I would have to ask: do you REALLY check the word count?"
- "What can older applicants do to prove that now is the right time for the full-time MBA?"
- "What single trait do you believe is the best indicator of whether or not an applicant is a good fit for your MBA program?"
- "How can schools be strong and walk away from U.S. News rankings and go back to making good decisions?"

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- "Percentagewise, what is the best combination of personal and professional variables that yield a coveted profile for your institution?"
- "How far do good essays really go when it comes to compensating for so-so GMAT or grades?"
- "What kinds of things do you really NOT want to see people

use the optional essay space for?"

- "What compelling rationales from applicants to dual degree programs have convinced you to admit the candidates?"
- "It's easy enough to figure the clearly admits and the definitely declines, but how do you make decisions for the large pool that fits in neither category--how do you avoid being arbitrary?"
- "How do you make final selections from among a pool of candidates who interviewed well and have very similar GPA's, test scores and other attributes?"
- For admissions officers, whose programs don't provide acceptance rate and yield data: "Why is your program afraid to provide critical admissions information to applicants?"

One Piece of Advice for Clients:

- "Apply to a smart portfolio of schools - worst that happens is you are admitted and do not go - but it is always nice to have options."
- "Use rich stories/examples in your essays, interviews, wherever you can; talking in generalities is the kiss of death, even for the well-qualified."
- "In essay writing, don't look for grand encompassing themes or messages, but look for a focused, specific message; a subtle point of learning; a seemingly regular experience that was revealing to you in some way. This is how you'll differentiate yourself and deliver real substance."
- "Know thyself (e.g. your candidacy and your goals) and know thy target schools better than your fellow applicants do."
- "Prepare in advance (15 months minimum), do not procrastinate, and do your research thoroughly."
- "Getting the MBA timing right can be the deal breaker. Applying too soon or too late in your career can ensure that you will not be admitted. Thinking about your career in the long term and examining whether an MBA is needed and then building leadership experiences with significant impact will pave the way for a successful application."
- "Recognize that the top programs are looking for truly exceptional people. If you cannot point to a few ways in which you fit that description, then you need to apply beyond the top few programs."
- "From the commitment to maximize your standardized scores to weaving your application successfully, the predictability and ownership of the process lie in the truth that the best preparation in every step meets the best opportunities in the top institutions."
- "Begin the application process early and try to wrap it up as soon as possible."
- "Being real and believable in your application is the best thing you can do, rather than trying to present an image of what you think admissions officers want to see!"
- "Know thyself and present that as effectively as possible to each program you apply to."
- "Know yourself and be yourself. Spend time reflecting on your experiences, both professional and personal, to get a solid sense of who you are and the skills you have gained. Project those skills, experiences, and accomplishments in your application in a grounded and thoughtful way."
- "Look beyond the glamour of a school name and really do your research to see what additional schools will be a good fit for

your career goals *and* your personality and learning style."

- "Be real and realistic."
- "Be patient with yourself, and become the best candidate you can be to live up to your personal potential!"
- "Try to put yourself in the place/mindset of the admission committee's member reading your application."
- "In addition to the old chestnut of 'show don't tell,' I would definitely add 'speak from the heart.' Many times I have seen an 'iffy' application get tipped over into positive territory because of one terrific, heart-felt essay."
- "Your task is to show the adcom who you are--not who you think they want you to be."
- "Remain calm!"

MEMBER PROFILE:

MAXX DUFFY

By Stacy Blackman, [Stacy Blackman Consulting](#)

After meeting Maxx in person at the first AIGAC Conference, I knew that she was an incredibly interesting person. Thus I was happy to have the chance to dig for a few more details in order to write this member profile.

Read on for some fun facts about Maxx Duffy...

Maxx grew up in a western suburb of Chicago called River Forest. She says she loves the city and has many relatives who still live there. When she was 16 years old, her family moved to Santa Barbara, California and life as she knew it changed with the seasons – or lack of them! She fell in love with the beach and surfing. Though she long ago gave up surfing, she remains very much a warm climate girl.

She now lives in Monrovia, California, a city situated at the base of the San Gabriel Mountains and nine miles east of Pasadena. Deer regularly eat her roses; bears have been known to sleep at her neighbors' doors; and coyote abound.

She is married to a film and television writer and consultant whose career has taken them to 35+ countries in the world; they often live abroad for months at a time. Most recently, they spent the winter months in Moscow and last year they lived in Bucharest, Romania. Her favorite places to date include Sydney (Australia), Christchurch (New Zealand), Istanbul (Turkey), Bratislava (Slovakia), Zurich (Switzerland), and Berlin (Germany).

Maxx has a daughter, Katie, who has a Masters in Art, Education and teaches fourth grade in the greater Boston area; a son-in-law, Randy, who is a patent lawyer, and a granddaughter, Evie, who is 2 years old. In September 2009 she will have a grandson.

Maxx's career began when she graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with a BA in Sociology. She then worked a few years on Penn's campus including a stint in undergraduate admissions, focusing on transfer students. Eventually she decided to obtain her MBA and gained admission to Wharton's January class, which existed back then. Her MBA program was unusual. She spent her first year (Spring and 2 Summer terms) at Wharton and her second year at HBS under a special arrangement with the Dean of the program, receiving the Wharton MBA in 1974. Maxx explained that experiencing both programs was amazing on several different fronts:

“At Wharton, the number of women in the MBA program hovered at the 10% mark (out of ~530 students), so we were all still paving the way for future generations of women. At HBS, the percentage of women in the program was even less. It was not unusual to be the only woman in a class. I often found myself having to defend not only my opinion but Wharton's reputation as well. Additionally, the strategic perspective of HBS combined with the specialized focus of Wharton provided me with a very unique set of skills which bore fruit in my entrepreneurial efforts years later. This dual MBA experience also played a role in my becoming an HBS Admissions Officer. HBS Admissions had typically only hired graduates of HBS, so my having experienced both programs worked in my favor.”

Upon graduating with the Wharton MBA and still being tied to Harvard and Boston, Maxx joined Harvard Business School's Admissions Office as an Assistant Director, rising to Associate Director. She was the only woman on the board at the time, and one of three women who read applications. Maxx said, “I loved this job - traveling to meet prospective students; giving presentations; evaluating applications; and collaborating with the international students on campus and alumni abroad, which was my specialty area.” After leaving HBS, Maxx moved to Texas to join Southern Methodist University's School of Business Administration (now The Cox School) as the Director of Communications. There she coordinated management seminars between the business school and the Dallas business community for such speakers as: former President Gerald Ford, Secretary of the Treasury W. Michael Blumenthal, and Dallas businessman H. Ross Perot.

Maxx then returned to Boston, taking positions first at the Boston Consulting Group, and later at a small, Cambridge-based, marketing firm. It was at this point that her career turned entrepreneurial. She simultaneously co-founded a franchise consulting firm and a private label pantyhose company, assuming Director of Marketing responsibilities for both. At the same time, Maxx founded Maxx Associates as a part-time business. It transitioned to a full-time enterprise shortly thereafter, when she moved to Southern California.

As far as how Maxx Associates came about...it happened by accident. When she left HBS Admissions, she had friends who asked for help in their efforts to apply to HBS' MBA program. She did so casually, but eventually realized that there was a part-time business taking shape. She says, “my early days were amusing: I got family members to pass out fliers at GMAT test sites to advertise my services! It grew from there – locally, regionally, nationally, globally.”

She says that her clientele is worldwide – she has served clients from 39 countries across North and South America, Eastern and Western Europe, Africa, Australia, and Asia.

Maxx says that she feels privileged to be a co-founder of AIGAC: “After 30+ years as a graduate school educational consultant, many of those years ‘flying under Admissions’ radar,’ it is exciting to see the interaction between Admission Offices and educational consultants. It is particularly wonderful to get to know colleagues from around the world and exchange views and strategies on common challenges. The opportunities for dialogue with colleagues and Admissions are what

I feel that I have most gained; it is an uplifting feeling!"

Maxx wants AIGAC to be the benchmark in quality graduate school educational consulting. She wants having the AIGAC logo on one's website or by one's name to mean that the consultancy or consultant is respected worldwide – by colleagues, applicants, universities, and complementary entities. She explains, "AIGAC has already made great strides in the two years of its existence, but I envision AIGAC being represented in every country in the world; having open and respectful communication with all admission offices globally; and being a key resource for candidates, colleagues, and admissions alike."

I asked Maxx what part of her business she found to be the most exciting. She explained, "My Eastern European MBA clientele is growing dramatically, and I look forward to more growth in this area and other developing regions of the world. I am also seeing my EMBA and Grad Arts/Sciences clientele growing. I am also excited about my career changing candidates, who are transitioning from one industry to another. In some cases, the transitions are dramatic, i.e., Technology to Journalism or Finance to Speech/Language Pathology, so advising them presents compelling challenges. As my clients' approaches to their careers become more creative, my approach to helping them must become more creative as well."

In terms of business challenges, she easily answered: "Technology! There is no question that I am way behind in this. I have a love/hate relationship with it. On one hand, technology has greatly facilitated collaborating

with clients worldwide; on the other hand, just keeping up with all the changes and available new tools is almost a full time job." Another challenge is globalization. She explained, "someone is always awake in the world. During my busy season, I don't get enough sleep."

Finally, a sentiment many of us can understand, "I also have always found it challenging to deal with a client's rejection by a program. Despite years of practice in dealing with this, I am just as disappointed and sad as my client. In my approach to educational consulting, I build close connections with my clients and forge long-term bonds with them. The downside of this is that I feel the pain of their rejection as strongly as they do."

Despite these challenges, there is plenty to love about her work. "I like getting to know the personal stories of my clients. Over the years, I have often found myself awed, humbled, and privileged to hear these stories. The initiative taken, personal courage displayed, challenges encountered, and achievements attained are inspirational. Additionally, my clients are at critical turning points in their professional lives, when they need experienced help in charting their course. I am honored to play that role for them, and to have a positive impact on their futures."

Maxx's business keeps her busy but she still has time for fun. She says, "I love to snorkel so visiting islands often is high on my list. I have been lucky to have been to the Great Barrier Reef, Fiji, Tahiti, and Greece. Hawaii is a frequent destination. I also enjoy walks in the mountains, working out, movies, and decorating (I change my environment regularly and have been known to trip up

my husband with a piece of furniture in a surprising new location!) And, I must confess that I enjoy playing poker - no-limit Texas hold'em."

Thank you, Maxx, for giving us this glimpse inside your business and life!

APPLICATION WAITLIST STRATEGY

By Tanis Kmetyk, Accepted.com

The numbers may not be out yet, but the 2008-09 season may well go down as having one of the highest levels of waitlist activity in years. And the situation isn't about to change. With more applicants, more competition amongst the schools and the globalization of the applicant pool, the waitlist is here to stay.

Helping our clients through the waitlist process is arguably the most stressful parts of our job. Indeed, managing clients' expectations often turns us into substitute shrinks, babysitters and marriage counselors. Or, as my accepted.com colleague Sonia Michaels puts it, "There's a strong emotional/ psychological component to dealing with waitlists. I tend to spend a lot of time talking waitlisted clients "off the ledge"--trying to get them to focus on the task at hand rather than spinning out into worries about reapplying next year." Adds Adam Markus, of Graduate Admissions Guru, "it is very important for us to be highly supportive of clients who are in waitlist limbo."

In addition to emotional support, the key to guiding our clients through this stressful process is to offer them solid advice. My informal poll of several AIGAC members reveals an unsurprising cohesiveness in our advice.

- 1) Be proactive. How you approach the waitlist situation is a good way to show the school how you function in manager mode. The waitlist means you have a competitive status. If you don't do anything, other waitlisted candidates will surpass you if and when vacancies appear.
- 2) Set a waitlist strategy that aligns with the school's waitlist policy. Contact the waitlist advisor or the admissions office (depending on the school), and ask what kind of additional information is acceptable during the waitlist period. Some schools welcome an extra essay talking about recent accomplishments not included in the application. An additional letter of recommendation might add a different angle to your previous recommenders. Other things like a new GMAT score, a promotion, a new assignment, a new publication, are also valuable. Some schools even welcome the occasional phone call. However, Chioma Isiadinso, of Expartus LLC adds that "those schools that specifically state that they do not want further contact from the applicants" like Harvard, where she used to handle the international waitlist, "mean it!"
- 3) Re-think your priorities. As Ricardo Betti of MBA Empresarial notes, "It is important to reassure the candidates that waitlists often work, more in some schools than others. For instance, fewer people approved to the very top schools will give up their place, in comparison with lower ranked schools. Hence, the chances of success for a waitlisted candidate are inversely proportional to the school's ranking."
- 4) Analyze your application's (potential) weak spots and try to mitigate them. Re-taking the GMAT or a TOEFL, asking for

a new project at work with more responsibility, taking advanced math classes; these are some of the things that will show the Admissions Committee how serious you are about improving your profile.

- 5) Pace your communication with the school. You want to engage the school and let them know how motivated you are, but you don't want to become so obnoxious that they will ding you out of sheer exasperation. Be succinct and provide a calm, focused effort that gives more reasons to admit you, rather than telling everything you have ever done, said, or thought. "Getting clients to understand the idea of a prolonged, focused and well-paced campaign is important," maintains Paul Bodine of accepted.com.
- 6) Visit the school, if possible. Showing that you have taken the trouble to visit, to network, to sit in on classes and to broaden your knowledge of the school is a clear message of your interest.
- 7) Dig into your network. "Depending on the school, I would also encourage my client to utilize their connections to alumni and current students to get additional support," says Adam Markus.
- 8) Understand that the schools "feel your pain." Though it may seem that they are being sadistic, especially the schools that "re-waitlist," rest assured that they are just as stressed about making sure that they have the best incoming group as possible which, if you make it in, you will appreciate very much.

A solid waitlist campaign can not only yield results for your clients, but also help your business (not to mention your mental health!) As Betti concludes, "After clients

hear my explanations, they tend to manage their initial disappointment and immediately shift into the "Do-Something" mood, which in my view is the best antidote for the "Waitlist Depression Syndrome." And when the final decision arrives, the positive cases rejoice and thank me for guiding them throughout the process, and the negative ones leave the process with the feeling that we did everything we could, we almost got there, and next time it will be different."

A DISCUSSION OF ETHICS

by Jessica Freedman, MD, MedEdits

Recently I was talking with the parent of a prospective client who asked me, "Do you take on everyone who wants to hire you?" My answer was "No, I will not accept clients whom I think don't have a chance of acceptance or someone whom I feel is not well suited for a career in medicine, but I will advise them about their options and suggest different alternatives." But, this got me thinking.

I then attended the American Medical Student Association meeting in March. I casually started speaking with a young woman. What struck me about her was that this woman could barely make eye contact with me, had extreme difficulty communicating and was quiet and meek. I assumed she was attending the conference as a premed with lofty aspirations to attend medical school. I was shocked when she told me that she was a medical student at a top-notch school. How on earth could this woman be accepted to medical school when she was uncomfortable carrying on a casual conversation?

She then went on to say that she thought the only reason she was accepted to school was because of the consultant whom she hired. She said she had very low MCATS and a low GPA and she never expected to get into medical school until she called this consultant. She went on to tell me that the consultant did “a lot of behind the scenes work” to make sure she was accepted and that now she was having a difficult time in medical school.

Did the consultant do the woman, and her future patients, a favor? Would this woman have been better suited for a different career? Aren't we, as admissions consultants, supposed to help people make wise choices that will enable them to capitalize on their strengths and not highlight their weaknesses?

I realize these are difficult questions but, I think that as consultants we have a moral obligation to do the right thing as stated in the AIGAC Principles of Good Practice. While we all are trying to make a living doing what we do, shouldn't we collectively agree that we are in this business to help others succeed and not, potentially, set them up for failure?

I have seen what happens when someone who may not have the skills and attributes to become a physician gets into medical school. Residency admission committee members sometimes make excuses when they interview someone they feel is a less than stellar applicant: “The applicant was having a bad day. She must be OK if she got in to XXX medical school, which is outstanding.” This is how such applicants get residency positions. But, this is when they really suffer. If they don't have the knowledge, confidence and communication skills to succeed during resi-

dency, which is quite rigorous, they can end up in remediation and being pushed through a program.

I realize this is a controversial topic that I hope generates some discussion. Have you ever been hired by a client, who, for any reason, you did not feel was equipped to go to professional school? How did you handle this situation? Have you ever helped someone whom you didn't truly believe in? Why did you make this choice?