



mbaMission's Insider's Guide
Harvard Business School

Harvard University
Boston, MA

2019-2020

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About mbaMission

With our collaborative, full-time team of experienced advisors, mbaMission has elevated and professionalized the world of MBA admissions consulting, earning the exclusive recommendation of the world's leading GMAT prep firms, Manhattan Prep and Kaplan GMAT, and hundreds more verified five-star reviews on GMAT Club than any other such firm. mbaMission prides itself on its high-touch client engagement model and robust library of free content that includes these Insider's Guides as well as our Complete Start-to-Finish MBA Admissions Guide. Having already helped thousands of aspiring MBAs from around the world gain entry into elite US and international business schools, mbaMission continues to grow and improve in our quest to "graduate" additional classes of satisfied clients.

mbaMission offers all candidates a free half-hour consultation at www.mbamission.com/consult.

Introduction from mbaMission

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.

Jeremy Shinewald

President/Founder

mbaMission

Introduction from *Poets&Quants*

Over the past ten 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.

We are pleased to offer these guides to our readers as part of our 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 are 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

Poets&Quants

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- Complete Start-to-Finish MBA Admissions Guide
- Brainstorming Guide
- Essay Writing Guide
- Fundamentals of an MBA Candidacy Guide
- Interview Guide
- Letters of Recommendation Guide
- Long-Term Planning Guide
- Optional Essays Guide
- Personal Statement Guide
- Resume Guide
- Selecting Your Target MBA Program E-Book
- Social Media Guide
- Waitlist Guide
- MBA Student Loan Reduction Guide

International Program Guides

- Cambridge Judge Business School Program Guide
- ESADE Program Guide
- HEC Paris Program Guide
- HKUST Program Guide
- IE Business School Program Guide
- IESE Business School Program Guide
- INSEAD Program Guide
- Ivey Business School Program Guide
- London Business School Program Guide
- Rotman School of Management Program Guide
- Saïd Business School Program Guide

Insider's Guides

- Insider's Guide to Columbia Business School
- Insider's Guide to Cornell University's Samuel Curtis Johnson Graduate School of Management
- Insider's Guide to Duke University's Fuqua School of Business
- Insider's Guide to the Haas School of Business at the University of California-Berkeley
- Insider's Guide to Harvard Business School
- Insider's Guide to INSEAD
- Insider's Guide to the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University
- Insider's Guide to the MIT Sloan School of Management
- Insider's Guide to New York University's Leonard N. Stern School of Business
- Insider's Guide to the Stanford Graduate School of Business
- Insider's Guide to the Stephen M. Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan
- Insider's Guide to the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth
- Insider's Guide to the UCLA Anderson School of Management
- Insider's Guide to the University of Chicago Booth School of Business
- Insider's Guide to the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business Administration
- Insider's Guide to the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania
- Insider's Guide to the Yale School of Management

Interview Guides

- Chicago Booth School of Business Interview Guide
- Columbia Business School Interview Guide
- Dartmouth Tuck Interview Guide
- Duke Fuqua Interview Guide
- Haas School of Business Interview Guide
- Harvard Business School Interview Guide
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The MBA Program in Context:

Choosing Harvard

Over the years, we have met many aspiring MBA students who have tried to identify their target schools and quickly become overwhelmed, wondering, “How are the top MBA programs really different?” and “How do I choose the one that is right for me?”

Frustrated, some applicants ultimately choose schools based simply on rankings or the opinions of friends or alumni. Although these inputs have a place in your evaluative process, you should also do the necessary research to find the program that is truly best for your personality and professional needs. In doing so, you will find significant differences between, for example, programs that have a class size in the low 200s and those that have classes of more than 900 students. As you are undoubtedly already aware, an MBA is a significant investment in the short term and a lifetime connection to an institution in the long term. We therefore strongly encourage you to take time now to think long and hard about this decision and thoroughly consider your options. We hope this guide will prove helpful to you in doing just that.

At mbaMission, we advise candidates evaluating their potential target schools to consider the following eight specific characteristics (in no particular order) that shape MBA programs:

1. Location: Urban Campus Versus College Town
2. Class Size: Smaller Versus Larger
3. Curriculum: Flexible Versus Mandatory Core
4. Pedagogy: Lecture Versus Case Method
5. Academic Specializations/Recruitment Focus: Resources and Employers
6. Alumni Base: Opportunities to Engage
7. Facilities: Shaping the Academic/Social Experience
8. Rankings and Reputation: Important Metrics or Arbitrary Measures?

You will not likely find a single MBA program that meets *all* your needs and preferences across these eight criteria, but you should be able to identify schools that fulfill the factors that are most important to you. Although this guide is intended to familiarize you on a deeper level with this particular school, nothing will prove more valuable in your decision making than visiting the programs that appeal to you and experiencing them firsthand. Inevitably, no matter what your research may reveal, some schools will simply “click” with you, and others will not.

Note: The authors and editors at mbaMission have made every effort to ensure the accuracy and timeliness of the information included in this guide. However, some discrepancies may exist or develop over time between what is presented here and what appears in the school’s official materials, as well as what may be offered by other content providers in print or online. For the most up-to-date information, always check with your target school directly. The opinions expressed by the people

You may not find a single program that meets *all* your needs and preferences, but you should be able to identify ones that fulfill the factors that are most important to you.

interviewed are those of the attributed individuals only and may not necessarily represent the opinion of mbaMission or any of its affiliates.

We also wish to thank the students, alumni, faculty members, and administrators who gave generously of their time to provide valuable input for this guide.

1. Location: Urban Campus Versus College Town

Pursuing an MBA can be quite intense, and the environment and community surrounding the campus can profoundly affect and even shape your MBA experience. For example, imagine stepping out of a class at New York University’s (NYU’s) Stern School of Business and into the energetic bustle of New York City’s West Village. Now imagine walking outside after a course at the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth and being surrounded by the tranquility and natural beauty of New Hampshire’s Upper Valley. Neither scenario is necessarily “better” than the other, but one might appeal to you more.

An urban campus can undoubtedly offer social and cultural opportunities that a college town simply cannot match. This is not to suggest, however, that college towns are devoid of culture—indeed, intense intellectual and cultural programs exist in college towns *precisely because* the academic institution is at the core of the community.

While schools in college towns tout their close-knit atmosphere and the tight bonds classmates form in such a setting, this environment can be welcoming for some students and overwhelming for others. In contrast, urban campuses are more decentralized, with students often living in various parts of a city and even in the surrounding suburbs. Someone who has a greater need for privacy or personal space might therefore prefer an urban environment. In addition, in major urban centers, some students—particularly those who lived in the city before enrolling in business school—may already have well-developed social groups, and this scenario may again be better for those who find an academically and socially all-encompassing environment less attractive.

One aspect of the MBA experience that candidates often fail to consider when evaluating their school options is weather. Although factoring climate into your school choice may initially seem superficial, if you know you cannot comfortably manage frigid conditions or soaring temperatures, certain programs should be stricken from your list. We encounter many applicants each year who wisely stave off a potentially miserable experience by choosing to not apply to certain schools in locations they just do not feel are “livable” for them.

In addition, housing costs are one expense that many applicants do not stop to consider before choosing a school to target. By researching real estate prices at the top programs, we found that the cost differential between renting a one-bedroom apartment in a Midwestern college town and renting one in New York City, for example,

The environment and community surrounding your chosen school can profoundly affect and shape your MBA experience.

Urban Campus Schools	Urban/College Hybrid Schools	College Town Schools
Chicago Booth	Northwestern Kellogg	Cornell Johnson
Columbia Business School	Stanford GSB	Dartmouth Tuck
Harvard Business School	UC Berkeley Haas	Duke Fuqua
MIT Sloan	UCLA Anderson	Michigan Ross
NYU Stern	Yale SOM	UVA Darden
UPenn Wharton		

can be quite significant—adding up to tens of thousands of dollars on a cumulative basis across two years. This is an important factor to include as you weigh your options and calculate your projected budget.

In summary, a college town can be appealing for some candidates because its smaller size tends to create strong bonds within the business school’s community, though for others, the lack of privacy could be undesired or overwhelming. Furthermore, some find a slower pace of life calming and comfortable, whereas others crave the energy and bustle of a city. If you strongly prefer one or the other, you should be able to quickly eliminate certain schools from your list.

Harvard Business School (HBS) is located in Boston, Massachusetts, across the Charles River from Cambridge, where most of Harvard University’s historic campus is located. More than 65% of HBS students live on campus in dorms or apartment complexes, including One Western Avenue, a LEED Silver-certified tower that offers views of Boston, Cambridge, and the Charles River.

Because of the high demand for on-campus housing, spaces are assigned via a lottery. Boston’s housing market can be quite expensive, and on-campus housing is no different. For example, rents for a one-bedroom apartment in One Western Avenue range from just under \$2,100 to approximately \$2,450 per month.

Although Boston is a major city with a large, diverse population, most HBS students, particularly during their first, or Required Curriculum, year, spend their time socializing almost exclusively with classmates. Between preparing for daily case discussions, participating in student club activities, applying for internships or full-time jobs, and getting to know classmates, students find that the HBS experience can truly be all-encompassing.

Boston is a large city, characterized by numerous quaint old neighborhoods and historical monuments, many of which are showcased on the Freedom Trail, a 2.5-mile walk that leads followers past 16 historic sites that tell the story of the American Revolution. A day at Fenway Park—home of the Boston Red Sox baseball team since 1912—is not to be missed. Boston also boasts high-end shopping, rich culinary offerings, and a vibrant

Average Monthly Rent for a One-Bedroom Apartment			
NYU Stern	New York, NY	\$3,259	within .33 mile radius of campus
MIT Sloan	Cambridge, MA	\$3,219	within .50 mile radius of campus
Columbia Business School	New York, NY	\$2,767	within .50 mile radius of campus
Stanford GSB	Stanford, CA	\$2,655	within 1.50 mile radius of campus
UCLA Anderson	Los Angeles, CA	\$2,555	within .75 mile radius of campus
Harvard Business School	Cambridge, MA	\$2,378	within .33 mile radius of campus
UC Berkeley Haas	Berkeley, CA	\$2,191	within .75 mile radius of campus
UPenn Wharton	Philadelphia, PA	\$1,681	within .50 mile radius of campus
Yale SOM	New Haven, CT	\$1,494	within .50 mile radius of campus
Dartmouth Tuck	Hanover, NH	\$1,397	within 5.0 mile radius of campus
Northwestern Kellogg	Evanston, IL	\$1,291	within 1.0 mile radius of campus
Chicago Booth	Chicago, IL	\$1,228	within 1.0 mile radius of campus
Michigan Ross	Ann Arbor, MI	\$1,144	within .50 mile radius of campus
Cornell Johnson	Ithaca, NY	\$1,042	within .75 mile radius of campus
UVA Darden	Charlottesville, VA	\$995	within 1.0 mile radius of campus
Duke Fuqua	Durham, NC	\$921	within 1.5 mile radius of campus

According to Rentometer.com, accessed June 2019.

club scene that caters to the city's large student community. Other cultural amenities include the Boston Pops Orchestra, the Museum of Science, and the New England Aquarium.

HBS students wishing to make the most of the school's location can easily visit such places as New York City and Quebec City, and can take weekend trips throughout New England to ski, go whale watching, take a hike, or simply tour the region's fall foliage. Most students are able to get around town without a car, thanks in large part to the easy availability of taxis, buses, and, especially, the "T" (short for MBTA, or Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority), Boston's subway system.

2. Class Size: Smaller Versus Larger


Another element that affects the character of a school's MBA experience is class size. You might want to reflect on your high school, college, and work environments to help you determine whether you would be more comfortable in a larger class or a smaller one—or whether this is even a consideration for you at all.

Students at smaller schools (which we define as having approximately 350 students or fewer per class) tend to interact with most of their peers and professors at some point during the typical two-year MBA period. Thus, the smaller schools are generally considered more "knowable," and their communities tend to be quite closely knit. Also, consider that assuming a leadership position is easier in a smaller environment, because, for example, the Finance Club may have only one president at both a small school and a large school, but competition for such a position would obviously be greater in the larger program.

Some individuals might prefer to be at a larger school where they can better maintain their anonymity if they so choose. A student at a school with close to 900 people or more in each class will not likely get to know each and every one of their classmates by the end of the program, and some people might prefer this. Further, advocates of larger classes tout the advantage of being able to interact with more people during one's MBA experience—and to thereby develop a broader and more robust network of peers. Note that many schools divide students into smaller groups—called "sections," "clusters," "cohorts," or even "oceans"—in which approximately 60–90 students take certain classes together, and this approach can help foster a stronger sense of community within the larger programs.

HBS is one of the country's largest business schools, with an incoming class of more than 900 students each year (930 in the fall of 2018 and 928 in the fall of 2017). One of the benefits of such a large class is that students can easily find others who share their personal and professional interests. A student at a school the size of HBS will not likely know all their 900 or more classmates by graduation day, but the school organizes students into smaller groups that allow them to get to know one another well. And the general interaction among

Over the past several years, many of my top applicants interested in biotech and health care innovation have ended up choosing HBS. Being located in the fabled Boston "biohub" offers unique opportunities to build a lifelong network among health care professionals from many different disciplines.

 Katharine Lewis, mbaMission
Senior Consultant and HBS
Alumna

Reflect on your past academic and work environments to determine whether you would be more comfortable in a larger or smaller class—or whether this is a consideration for you at all.

School (Class of 2020)	Women	International	Minorities
Chicago Booth	42%	30%	31%
Columbia Business School	39%	42%	33% ¹
Cornell Johnson	33%	27%	32% ¹
Dartmouth Tuck	45%	36% ^{2,3}	20% ¹
Duke Fuqua	42%	38%	16%
Harvard Business School	41%	37% ²	26% ^{1,2}
Michigan Ross	43%	32%	23% ¹
MIT Sloan	42%	38%	NA
Northwestern Kellogg	46%	34%	27% ¹
NYU Stern	35%	39% ^{2,3}	29% ^{1,2}
Stanford GSB	41%	42% ^{2,3}	27% ¹
UC Berkeley Haas	43%	43% ^{2,3}	38% ^{1,2}
UCLA Anderson	34%	33%	29%
UPenn Wharton	43%	33%	33% ¹
UVA Darden	38%	31%	18% ¹
Yale SOM	43%	45% ^{2,3}	27% ^{1,2}

Class Size	
900 to 1,000	Harvard Business School
800 to 900	UPenn Wharton
700 to 800	Columbia Business School ¹
500 to 600	Chicago Booth
400 to 500	Northwestern Kellogg Duke Fuqua Michigan Ross Stanford GSB MIT Sloan
300 to 400	NYU Stern UCLA Anderson Yale SOM UVA Darden
200 to 300	UC Berkeley Haas Dartmouth Tuck Cornell Johnson

Schools are listed in order from largest class to smallest within each category.

¹Includes J-Term students.

¹Specified as U.S. minorities.

²Includes permanent U.S. residents.


³Includes dual citizens.

students does appear to be positive. A first year we interviewed reported that she wished more people knew about the school's collaborative energy, saying, "The people here are not competitive. We support each other."

Most notably, HBS's first-year class is divided into sections, each of which includes approximately 90 students of various ethnicities and nationalities and who have diverse professional backgrounds. During the first year, students take all their courses exclusively with those in their section and always in the same classroom—professors rotate in and out. Students are given assigned seats at the beginning of each first-year semester. According to those we interviewed for this guide, rather than being oppressive, this arrangement creates a kind of family environment within what might otherwise be an overwhelmingly large student body.

Sections are a large part of student identity at HBS; each one elects student representatives (akin to student government) and develops section "norms" or protocol. This protocol

A client of mine returned from her campus visit completely surprised and impressed by how tight-knit the culture was at HBS. She said the section concept made what could be an intimidating environment feel like a small family.

 Kate Richardson, mbaMission Senior Consultant

addresses classroom issues such as what to do when a section mate is speaking too softly (knock on your desk) or how to signal the professor to indicate that you have a clarifying question, rather than a comment (wave your name card). Sections also plan group trips and compete against other sections to win the Section Olympics. Not at all academic, this one-day competition take place toward the end of the second semester of the first year and include such events as Twinkie-eating contests, three-legged races, and dodge ball games. Some sections even arrange reunions during the second year, when students have split up to pursue their individual interests as a part of the Elective Curriculum.

Several years ago, HBS established formal learning teams—also known as discussion groups, according to a second year with whom we spoke—organizing first-year students into five- to six-person teams during orientation, before classes start. Each team is made up of students from different sections.

Most Common Undergraduate Major for Incoming Students (Class of 2020)

Chicago Booth	Economics	25%
Columbia Business School	Business	29%
Cornell Johnson	Business	29%
Dartmouth Tuck	Arts / Humanities / Social Sciences	51%
Duke Fuqua	NA	NA
Harvard Business School	Economics / Business	46%
Michigan Ross	Economics / Business	42%
MIT Sloan	Engineering	31%
Northwestern Kellogg	Economics / Business	50%
NYU Stern	Business	27%
Stanford GSB	Humanities / Social Sciences	48%
UC Berkeley Haas	Economics	21%
UCLA Anderson	Business	26%
UPenn Wharton	Humanities	45%
UVA Darden	NA	NA
Yale SOM	Humanities and Social Sciences	29%

Year-Over-Year Class Profile Data: Harvard Business School	Class of 2020	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
Number of Applicants	9,886	10,351	9,759	9,686	9,543	9,315	8,963	9,134	9,524	9,093
Number of Full-Time Students	930	928	934	937	935	932	919	905	903	937
Median GMAT	730	730	730	730	730	730	730	730	730	719
GMAT Range	610–800	580–790	690–760 ¹	700–760 ¹	510–790	550–780	570–790	490–790	550–790	670–760
Average Age of Candidates	27	27	27	27	27	27	27	27	26	26
Female Representation	41%	42%	43%	42%	41%	41%	40%	39%	36%	36%
U.S. Ethnic Minorities	26% ²	25% ²	25% ²	28% ²	24% ²	25%	24%	23%	23%	22%
International Representation	37% ²	35% ²	35% ²	34% ²	35% ²	34%	34%	34%	34%	36%

¹Middle 80%.

²Includes permanent residents.

Students also interact outside the classroom through student club meetings and events, FIELD study research, and Career Treks. And because most HBS students live on or very near the relatively compact urban campus, informal interactions take place daily in the dining hall, the Shad gymnasium, and the Spangler Center.

A second-year student we interviewed described his classmates as “tremendous people,” adding, “There’s a great sense of humility among the people here. Quite ambitious, incredibly intelligent, very social, very aware of the world. People you would see and think, ‘Hey, this is someone I could work with or work for.’ And I think people tend to be very humble and very nice and very welcoming and friendly.”

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 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

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

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

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.

The academic year at Harvard is divided into two semesters (fall and spring). As mentioned earlier, the first-year curriculum at HBS is called the Required Curriculum (RC), because students must take all the same classes, without exception. The RC consists of the following 12 courses:

Term 1

- “FIELD Foundations”
- “Finance I”
- “Financial Reporting and Control”
- “Leadership and Organizational Behavior (LEAD)”
- “Marketing”
- “Technology and Operations Management (TOM)”

Term 2

- “Business, Government, and the International Economy (BGIE)”
- “The Entrepreneurial Manager (TEM)”
- “FIELD Global Immersions”
- “Finance II”
- “Leadership and Corporate Accountability (LCA)”
- “Strategy”

The HBS website states that the first semester of the RC focuses on giving students “a firm grasp of broad-based fundamentals” and that the second-semester RC courses allow students to “acquir[e] specific analytical and quantitative skills, ... become acclimated to MBA Program standards of communication and collaboration, and develop strong, lasting relationships with one another.” Although some might bemoan the lack of choice with respect to first-year courses, one of the school’s stated goals is to foster leadership—and this begins in the RC classroom, as students provide their insight and share personal lessons based on their profes-

Average GMAT of Incoming Students (Class of 2020)	
Chicago Booth	731
Columbia Business School	732
Cornell Johnson	699
Dartmouth Tuck	722
Duke Fuqua	NA
Harvard Business School ¹	730
Michigan Ross	720
MIT Sloan	728
Northwestern Kellogg	732
NYU Stern	716
Stanford GSB	732
UC Berkeley Haas	726
UCLA Anderson	719
UPenn Wharton	732
UVA Darden	717
Yale SOM ¹	730

¹ Represents median rather than average.

sional experience. A second year with whom we spoke appreciated the school's emphasis in this area, saying, "Leadership is fascinating to study, and HBS does a great job of driving the discussion."

HBS's use of the case method allows for nuanced discussion of business problems and of all possible solutions, so even students who have years of experience in one or two particular areas can ultimately be exposed to new angles and approaches on otherwise familiar topics and subject areas. One first-year student with whom mbaMission spoke said, "Even though I worked in finance for four years, the first-year finance courses taught me things I didn't know ... different ways to approach the same problem and the thinking behind formulas that I had used for years but didn't really understand."

In the 2009–2010 academic year, the previously required "Negotiation" half-course was eliminated and the "Leadership and Corporate Accountability" course, formerly a half-course, was lengthened to a full semester. In addition, the school began experimenting with longer RC cases taught by multiple professors. For instance, in an interview with mbaMission, one first-year student said, "We did a case on online retailer Zappos. We had three professors who led the case discussion, one each hour for a three-hour class—we had a short break, though. The case discussion included leadership, operations, and finance, one discipline discussed per hour. The school is trying to integrate subjects, which is really interesting. When one professor is teaching, the others are in the room." The student continued, "The finance professor can relate to what you said about operations and ask about the implications for the company's financial situation, or the leadership professor can ask about how it will affect employees, so you can't just say anything without thinking through all of the implications. In the first semester we had three of these classes. It was really fun to look at business holistically."

In 2011, HBS announced the addition of Field Immersion Experiences for Leadership Development (FIELD) as part of the RC. FIELD spans the full academic year and is broken into two course components, each of which is meant to complement the school's use of the case method. Workshops held in interactive, flexible classrooms called "hives" comprise the FIELD Foundations portion, in which students explore their personal leadership styles and develop team-based skills. The second component, FIELD Global Immersions, occurs during spring semester and challenges students to develop a service or product for a real international organization.

The second-year curriculum is called the Elective Curriculum (EC) because it involves no required courses—all courses are electives. Note that HBS does not offer concentrations or majors. Students take up to five classes per semester and so may choose, for example, to enroll in five finance classes in a single semester or to take a more diverse set of courses.

4. Pedagogy: Lecture Versus Case Method

Students will likely encounter multiple styles of learning while in business school—including participating in simulations, listening to guest speakers, and partaking in hands-on projects—but the two most common MBA learning styles are case method and lecture.

Pioneered by HBS, the case method, or case-based learning, requires students to read the story (called a “case”) of either a hypothetical or a real protagonist who is facing a managerial dilemma. As the student reads, the student explores the protagonist’s dilemma and has access to various quantitative and qualitative data points meant to facilitate further analysis. (Cases can vary in length but are typically 10–20 pages long.) After reading and studying the entire case, the student generally understands the profundity of the problem and is typically asked a simple question: “What would you do?” In other words, how would the student act or react if they were in the protagonist’s place? What decision(s) would the student make?

After completing their independent analysis of the case, the student typically meets with the members of their study group or learning team (if the school in question assigns such teams) for further evaluation. Together, the group/team members explore and critique one another’s ideas and help those students who may have had difficulty understanding particular aspects of the issue or progressing as far on their own. Often, though not always, the team will establish a consensus regarding the actions they would take in the protagonist’s place. Then, in class, the professor acts as facilitator and manages a discussion of the case. Class discussions can often become quite lively, and the professor will guide students toward resolving the dilemma. Sometimes, the professor will ultimately reveal the protagonist’s decision and the subsequent results—or even bring the actual protagonist into the classroom to share and discuss the case’s progression and outcomes in person.

In short, the case method focuses primarily on the analytical process and illustrates that the problems presented have no clear-cut right or wrong responses. For a student to disagree with the protagonist’s chosen path—even after it has proved to be successful—is not unusual. After all, another approach (or even inaction) may have produced an even better result.

Note that case-based learning is not specific to one academic discipline. Cases are available in finance, strategy, operations, accounting, marketing, and still other areas. Further, many cases are interdisciplinary, meaning that they address more than one area at a time, such as requiring students to think about how a financial decision might affect the operations of a manufacturing company or the ways in which a marketing decision might involve significant financial considerations. Importantly, students in case environments are often graded on their “contribution” to the class discussion (measured by the level of one’s participation in discussions and analysis, not on the frequency with which one offers “correct” answers), so the case method is not for those who are uncomfortable speaking in class. However, it can be incredibly helpful for those who want or need to practice and build confidence speaking publicly.

Lecture is the method of learning that is familiar to most people—the professor stands in front of the class and explores a theory or event, facilitating discussion and emphasizing and explaining key learning points. Often, students have read chapters of a textbook beforehand and have come to class with a foundation in the specific area to be examined that day. Although the case method gives students a context for a problem, those who favor lecture tend to believe that the case method is too situation specific and therefore prefer a methodical

Students will encounter many different styles of learning during their time at business school, but the two most common are case method and lecture.

Average GPA of Incoming Students (Class of 2020)

Chicago Booth	3.60
Columbia Business School	3.60
Cornell Johnson	3.40
Dartmouth Tuck	3.49
Duke Fuqua	NA
Harvard Business School	3.71
Michigan Ross	3.50
MIT Sloan	3.48
Northwestern Kellogg	3.60
NYU Stern	3.45
Stanford GSB ¹	3.73
UC Berkeley Haas	3.66
UCLA Anderson	NA
UPenn Wharton	3.60
UVA Darden	3.50
Yale SOM ²	3.71

¹ U.S. schools, 4.0 scale only.

² Median GPA listed.

exploration of theory that they feel can be broadly applied across situations. In lecture classes, the professor and their research or theory are technically paramount, though students still participate, challenge ideas, and debate issues.

Note that at some schools, professors may alternate between cases and lectures within a single semester of classes.


HBS pioneered the case method, and its website explains that via this method, students find themselves “in the role of the decision maker. There are no simple solutions; yet through the dynamic process of exchanging perspectives, countering and defending points, and building on each other’s ideas, students become adept at analyzing issues, exercising judgment, and making difficult decisions—the hallmarks of skillful leadership.” Students both learn from and teach their classmates, and although professors facilitate the discussions, they never provide “the answer”—especially given that simple or “correct” answers rarely exist for the problems presented. In some courses, students might be able to provide more insight or share more lessons, given their past experiences, but in others, these students will benefit more from the expertise of their section mates. Everyone is a teacher and everyone is a student.

A second year we interviewed offered this explanation about how class participation is valued: “Let’s say your class grade is 50% class participation and 50% final grade or some combination of a mid-term and a final, but mainly a final. Within that 50% class participation, that includes making quality comments that contribute to the discussion and show you’ve done the analysis. So if you don’t speak and you don’t make insightful, analytical, good comments, you’re not going to get a good grade.”


During their time at HBS, students will participate in more than 500 case discussions, and in a number of classes, participation accounts for 50% of a student’s final grade. In doing research for this guide, mbaMission learned that a hallmark of case discussions at HBS is participation by the case protagonist. Many professors invite case protagonists to class to observe the students’ discussion, answer questions, and share their perspective on the real-world business problem they faced and how it was resolved. Prospective students can learn more about the case study experience by visiting the HBS website (www.hbs.edu/mba/academic-experience/Pages/the-hbs-case-method.aspx).

During their EC year, students can collaborate with professors to write cases for future classes—roughly 350 new cases are produced each year. Approximately 33% of the new cases developed each year involve management issues that are international (non-U.S. based) in scope.

With its case method, HBS offers one of most immersive and engaged MBA programs—one in which you have to attend class, have to read the case, and have to speak up (50% of the grading depends on class participation). So you really get to know the students around you more than at any other business school.

 Katharine Lewis, mbaMission Senior Consultant and HBS Alumna

Given HBS’s case method approach, it’s important that your fit with this methodology come across in your application.

 Susan Kaplan, mbaMission Senior Consultant

5. Academic Specializations/Recruitment Focus: Resources and Employers

Schools' brands and reputations develop over time and tend to endure, even when the programs make efforts to change them. For example, many applicants still feel that Kellogg is *only* a marketing school and that Chicago Booth is *only* for people interested in finance, even though both programs boast strengths in many other areas. Indeed, this is the exact reason mbaMission started producing these guides in 2008—we wanted applicants to see beyond these superficial “market” perceptions. Make sure you are not merely accepting stereotypes but are truly considering the breadth and depth of resources available at each school.

We have dedicated the majority of this guide to exploring the principal professional specializations for which resources are available at this particular school, and we encourage you to fully consider whether the MBA program meets your personal academic needs by supplementing the information here with additional context from the school's career services office, by connecting with the heads of relevant clubs on campus, and perhaps even by reaching out to alumni in your target industry.

Do not merely accept stereotypes but truly consider the breadth and depth of resources available at each school.

Most Common Pre-MBA Industry (Class of 2020)		
Chicago Booth	Consulting	24%
Columbia Business School	Financial Services	25%
Cornell Johnson	Finance	23%
Dartmouth Tuck	Financial Services	26%
Duke Fuqua	Consulting	24%
Harvard Business School	Tie: Consulting; High Tech / Communications; Venture Capital / Private Equity	16%
Michigan Ross	Tie: Finance, Consulting	16%
MIT Sloan	Consulting	21%
Northwestern Kellogg	Consulting	24%
NYU Stern	Financial Services	25%
Stanford GSB	Investment Management / Private Equity / Venture Capital	21%
UC Berkeley Haas	Consulting	24%
UCLA Anderson	Finance	26%
UPenn Wharton	Consulting	27%
UVA Darden	NA	NA
Yale SOM	Consulting	20%

School	Top Industry for 2018 Graduates	% Entering the Industry
Chicago Booth	Financial Services	31.6%
Columbia Business School	Consulting	33.6%
Cornell Johnson	Financial Services	29.0%
Dartmouth Tuck	Consulting	30.0%
Duke Fuqua	Consulting	32.0%
Harvard Business School	Financial Services	29.0%
Michigan Ross	Consulting	30.1%
MIT Sloan	Consulting	31.6%
Northwestern Kellogg	Consulting	30.1%
NYU Stern	Consulting	28.4%
Stanford GSB	Technology	33.0%
UC Berkeley Haas	Technology	31.7%
UCLA Anderson	Technology	29.5%
UPenn Wharton	Financial Services	36.9%
UVA Darden	Consulting	32.0%
Yale SOM	Consulting	34.9%