

# NOTE WITH ADVICES FOR ADMISSION IN PhD/DBA/MSc PROGRAMS

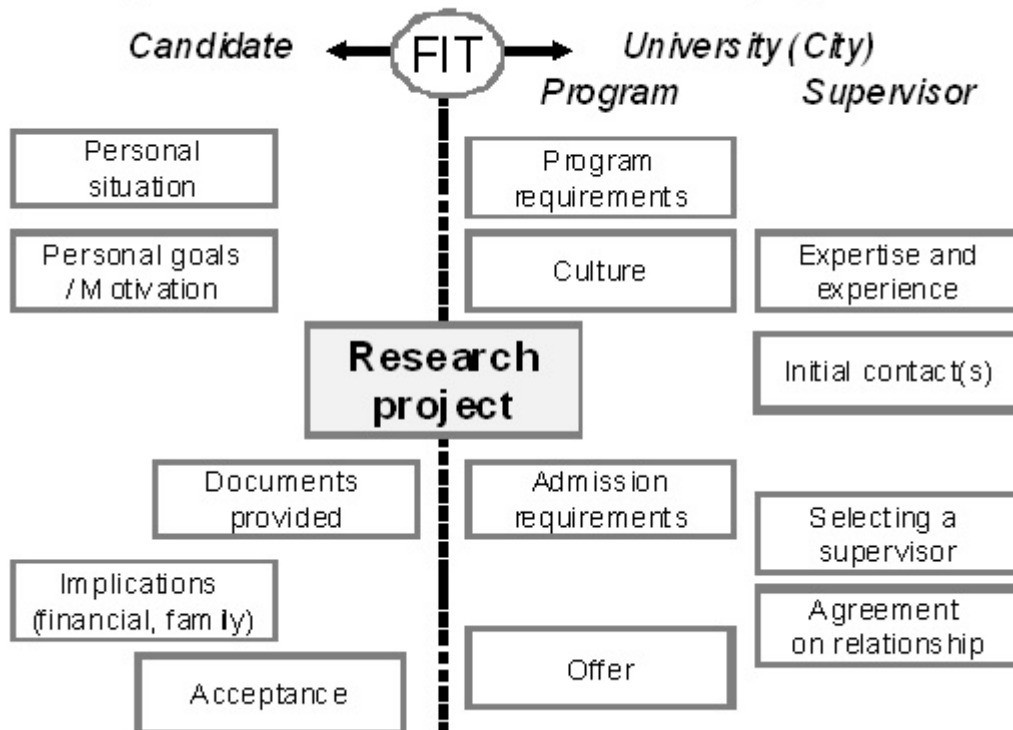
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This note is written to provide advices / tips and ask questions for reflections toward admission in a graduate research program. This guide is only a personal opinion based on experience to help potential PhD/DBA/MSc graduate students with their admission in a program in Business /Management.

## A Fit between the Candidate and the University / Program / Supervisor

A fit is necessary between the Candidate, research project and University / Program / Supervisor on a number of dimensions (see Figure A).

**Figure A – Admission in PhD/DBA/MSc programs**



## GENERAL COMMENTS

- Graduate studies is a learning process, with people and environment that will help you with your objectives.
- Admission into the program will be judged primarily on the applicant's ability to undertake research successfully and her/his prospects for completion of the program. An important consideration is the expectations of completing the degree.
- Start the admission process as early as possible.
  - Know yourself.
  - Think and decide about your area of research. This will be your area for a while.
  - Prepare for the required standardized tests (GMAT, GRE, ESL (CAEL, TOEFL, IELTS)) as soon as possible and study for it.
  - Learn about your potential universities / schools / programs. Visit them.
  - Make due diligence about potential supervisors.
  - Ask for letter of recommendations as soon as possible.
- Consider choosing first a city, a university or a supervisor.
- When looking at a supervisor, a couple of options exist:
  - A) determine your personal research project and find a supervisor for it (My pick.)
  - B) find a supervisor and adopt one of their research project
  - C) find a research group, then a supervisor and adopt one of their research project
  - D) respond to an advertised research project from a supervisor and be hired
- You are applying to a research program, please do your research about the process.
- Characteristics of an ideal candidate:
  - academic knowledge and ability
  - passionate and enthusiast
  - perseverance, resilience, commitment and motivated
  - communication skills (written and oral)
  - curiosity to learn, love of learning and learning from errors
  - hard working, productive and discipline
  - work independently and creative
  - time management and organizational skills
  - rigor, attention to detail
  - ask questions when needed
- Don't hesitate to ask questions to everyone during the journey toward admission (and after).

## KNOWING YOURSELF AS A CANDIDATE

It is important to know yourself : your personal situation, your personal goals, your motivation.

### Personal Situation

- Examine your personal situation for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.
  - Examine your situation.  
What are your values, objectives, goals, and priorities?

- Examine your family trajectories.  
What is your family situation?
- Examine your professional trajectories.  
Do you want to pursue in the same career or a different one?
- Examine your financial situation.  
How do you plan to finance your PhD/DBA/MSc degree?
- Examine your education trajectories.  
Which type of learner are you?  
Do you want to pursue in the same field, a different one or a complementary one?
- Prepare a written personal financial statement.

## **Personal Goals / Motivation**

- What are your aspirations (professional, family, financial, education)?
- Determine your personal goals on short, medium and long term.
- Why are you doing a graduate program?
- Why do you want a PhD/DBA/MSc in Management degree?
- What knowledge, skills and attitudes do you want to acquire or develop?
- What do you want to be known for after graduation?
- What will be your niche after graduation?
- What kind of career do you want after graduation (Plan A & Plan B)?
  - academia
  - public service
  - private sector
  - non-profits
- Be honest and true to yourself. Present yourself as you are, not as another ideal person.
- Prepare a written personal statement.
- Be confident. Don't fear the imposter syndrome.

## **RESEARCH PROJECT**

- Define your research interests.
  - Identify a research theme or issue you would like to pursue.
  - Identify a research question you would like to pursue.
- You should be passionate about your research theme and research project. It is your project. You will encounter ups and downs, it is better if you like a lot your research topic.
- Describe your chosen field of research and any experience that you have in that field.
- Prepare a 1 page summary of your research (title, theme, research question). Some may ask for a 10 pages summary.
  - No need to write a proposal with research methodology. This will come much later.
  - Remember the objective is to present something interesting.
  - Your thesis research will probably be different than the one in your application.

## CHOOSING THE UNIVERSITY / SCHOOL / PROGRAM

Choosing a university is a foundational decision toward a graduate degree. Various dimensions enter in the decision equation, such as academic, geographical / location, economical / financial, technological, political, legal, human, and social.

### Choosing the University / School

- Choose a city (living close to existing home, studying in the same country, studying abroad) (maybe a constraint for family reasons?)
- Choose a university / school / program (size, prestige, reputation, professors)
- Is the university accredited (AACSB, EQUIS, AMBA, NIBS)?
  - AACSB - Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business
  - EQUIS - European Quality Improvement System
  - AMBA - Association of MBAs
  - NIBS - Network of International Business Schools
- Why are you choosing a specific School of Business to pursue your degree?
- Is it possible to study part-time vs full-time? (This may affect funding.)
- Why is the school a good fit for you personally?
- What is unique in the university / school / program?
- A more prestigious university will be more competitive.
- What is the cost of living in the city?
- Interview other students studying at that university / school for comments.
- What is the normal duration of the degree (coursework, exam, proposal, thesis)?
- What are the job market opportunities for graduates?
  - What is the completion rate of candidates?
  - What are the job position obtained by graduates?
- What are the institutions where candidates work after graduation?
- Consider visiting the city / university / school to do some reconnaissance.
- A university / school may accept students in their programs, but not all professors are willing to accept students.
- How many professors are aligned with your research interests in that university / school? More than one will offer various perspectives and a backup plan if changes happen.

### Program Requirements

- Some common program requirements:
  - Bachelor and/or Master's degree in Business or a related field with a minimum grade.
  - GMAT (Graduate Management Admissions Test) with a minimum score.
  - Proficiency in English.
  - Basic knowledge of statistics and at least two areas of management: (accounting, entrepreneurship, finance, information systems, international business, management, marketing, supply chain management)
  - A number of years of work experience is desirable.
- Some explanations may compensate for some deficiencies.
- Some real minimum score may be different compare to official published threshold.

## Culture

- What is the culture of graduate studies in general?
- What is the culture of the university / school / program?
- What is the research culture of the university / school / program?
- What are the resources available at the university / school / program for graduate students?  
(research support, space, administrative support, research centers / groups, library)
- What are the requirements for funding?  
(grant, teaching assistant duties, research assistant duties)
- What are the research opportunities available at the university / school / program?  
(networking, publications, research seminars, conferences, foreign exchange)
- What are the teaching opportunities available at the university / school / program?  
(teaching courses available, preference over contract instructor, teaching training)
- Interview graduate students society.

## Admission Requirements and Documents Provided

- Make sure to respect the deadlines set for admission.
- Sometimes a formal interview may happen with candidates.
- You may apply at multiple universities, but only if you are really interested to attend those schools. Don't put all your eggs in the same basket. You may apply to distinguish safety schools (likely to get accepted), competitive schools and dream schools.
- Make sure to provide all documents required. Missing documents may affect or delay the decision and reduce opportunity of funding.
- Documents may include:
  - Transcript(s) of all post-secondary institutions (Bachelor degree / Masters degree)
  - Letters of reference / letters of recommendation from faculty members
  - Statement of intent / personal statement
  - Curriculum vitae CV / Resume
  - GMAT, GRE & Other test score(s) (score valid for a limited number of years)
    - GMAT (Graduate Management Admissions Test)
    - GRE (Graduate Record Examination)
  - Language proficiency in English
    - ESL (English as a Second Language) test score (CAEL, TOEFL, IELTS)
  - Funding sponsorship (if applicable)
    - Letter detailing the duration and level of funding from an external agency
- All foreign documents must be translated into English and be notarized.
- Avoid generic documents. One size doesn't fit all.
- Make sure you don't have the name of another university / school in your application.
- Provide answers to specific questions in the required format.
- As programs are competitive, your application needs to stand out.
- Spend enough time on your application dossier.

## CHOOSING A SUPERVISOR

It is important / highly recommended to contact and try to find a faculty supervisor with a fit on the research interests and compatible with your personality and interested with your research project. Securing a supervisor before sending your admission may bring someone which will defend your application. Based on expertise and experience, a supervisor will support the candidate throughout their research project by showing interest and providing feedback on a regular basis.

### Supervisor - Expertise and Experience

- Who are the experts in your planned field / area of study?
- Who are the experts in your planned field / area of study in your planned university / school?
- Select a number of potential supervisors that may be suitable.
- Familiarize yourself with the potential supervisors.
  - Expertise (What are their research interests - current, not just previous interests?)
  - Publications (What is the publications history of potential supervisors?)
  - Teaching (Is there involvement in graduate programs?)
  - Experience (Any previous supervision experience?)
  - Prestige and reputation
  - Style (hand-on or hands-off)
- Determine if the potential supervisor is an active and productive scholar.
  - Is there recent presentations or publications?
  - Is there recent presentations or publications with students or graduates?
  - Existence of research centers / groups associated with supervisor?
  - Integration of students in research centers / groups?
- Evaluate the experience of potential supervisors in supervising candidates.
  - How many graduate students have the supervisor supervised during their career?
  - Have they received any awards for teaching?
  - Is there any potential sources of funding from the supervisor?
- What is the duration of previous students to complete their program under the supervisor?

### Initial Contact

- Make sure potential supervisor accept to supervise graduate students. Don't waste everyone time if professor is not interested to supervise graduate students.
- Do your research before contacting a potential supervisor. Know them. Look at their website.
- Check maybe the professor has a website on supervision. (I have one.)
- Show the supervisor that you know them and their work.
- Avoid mass mailing to potential supervisors. It is not a good idea.
- Don't waste the opportunity to make a first good impression.
- Contact some potential supervisor by email with some information
  - a clear subject line (to avoid spam folder)
  - a letter of presentation (introduce yourself, explain your intent and possible fit)
  - a 1 page summary of the research project
  - a curriculum vitae

- Contact as soon as possible some potential supervisor before applying for admission.
- Meet (virtual or in-person) the potential supervisor for fit / compatibility between you.
- If you contact multiple professors in the same school, contact them simultaneously. Faculty members talk to each other (sometimes).
- It is pretty rare (never?) that a candidate like all the exact same interests as their potential supervisors. Supervisors don't look for clone of themselves.
- Even if professors are not your selected supervisor, they may be on your committees or could offer research assistant work.
- Due to different circumstances, it may take some time before receiving a response to an email from a professor.

## **Selecting a Supervisor**

- When reducing the number of potential supervisors, it may be appropriate to request a meeting.
- Communicate (in-person or in Zoom / Skype) with your potential supervisor to test the personal connection. A supervisor accepting a meeting has a minimum of interest. It is as much an interview of the candidate than the supervisor; it goes both ways.
- Interview other students in the university for recommendations regarding potential supervisor
- Interview students working with the potential supervisor  
(interactions, quantity, frequency, quality, delay in responding)
- Ask recommendations from undergraduate professors / mentors, employers or friends, if they know the field or the university setting.
- Assess the availability of the supervisor to provide feedback.
- Assess the potential candidate-supervisor relationship.

## **Agreement on Relationship between Candidate and Supervisor**

- Determine the roles & responsibilities between candidate and supervisor. Usually universities have standard roles and responsibilities on their website. It is a share responsibilities between the university, the school, the supervisor and the student.
- Determine the expectations of supervisor.
- Determine your own expectations as student.
- Determine resources available from the supervisor.
- Determine the type of relationship between the student and the supervisor.
- The commitment should be a win-win situation for the candidate and the supervisor.

## FINALIZATION

Finalization is the last phase in the admission process. Or you don't receive an offer or you receive an offer. The offer or offers need to be examined for their respective implications.

### Offer

- Is there any conditions in the offer?
- Financial assistance from the university / school attached to the offer?
  - Fellowship (no need to work)
  - Scholarship (no need to work)
  - Awards (no need to work)
  - Grants (need to work or no need to work)
  - Teaching assistant duties (need to work)
  - Research assistant duties (need to work - on your theme of research or other themes)
- If you are not accepted in a specific university / program, it may just be a wrong fit (not you).

### Implications

- Moving into a new country / city
- Funding from family
- Financial assistance from the school
- Financial assistance from other sources
  - SSHRC - Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
  - OSAP - Ontario Student Assistance Program
  - OGS - Ontario Graduate Scholarship
  - OTS - Ontario Trillium Scholarship
- Housing
- Transportation

### Acceptance

- The final part is accepting the written offer.
- Maybe some additional questions are necessary before accepting.
- Maybe some negotiations are possible before accepting.