

The Four things that the admissions committees of top universities look for in applicants

HOW TO SET YOURSELF APART?



Admissions officials of the top universities of the world are looking for the “Best” candidates for their courses. While devising strategies for applications to such universities, it is important to understand what “Best” means in the context of university admissions. “Best” here refers to the right fit with respect to the criteria, qualifications or qualities set by the school. “Best” here is not an absolute term, but a relative term, where every applicant is compared to every other applicant and the ones found to be relatively closer to the “right fit” are selected. The good news is that there is a way to portray this “right fit” in your application, and thus pave the way for getting into the “Best” list. But first, let us look at what the admissions officials are really looking for -

1) The profile of an applicant must be very close to the average profile of the class as envisioned by the admissions committee. This does not mean that an applicant will necessarily have to have a particular profession or a particular kind of work experience, but it certainly means that an applicant will have to match the average profile of the class in these parameters – a) The base data of the person: GMAT, GPA, age, years of experience, level of undergraduate institution, prestige and reputation of the firms worked in, roles and designations, etc. b) The level of career progression and success achieved by the applicant, especially in managerial roles c) The exposure level of the candidate to various situations, cultures, business environment, economies, etc.

The comparison of applicants in these parameters is important as the level of the lectures, discussions in the class, course work, projects and assignments in the class would be tailored according to the envisioned profile. So, if the average profile of the class is 5 years work experience with middle management experience, then both a fresher without work experience and a top shot CEO of a large company will not get much value in the class. Additionally, one of the vital things that the university wants to create is cohesion in the class where classmates can coexist and thrive with mutual respect and admiration. If someone is either too low or too high in profile with respect to the class, he will either be in awe of his classmates or they will be in awe of him, both of which are bad situations for the class. And worse, there might also be an attitude of disdain towards a less accomplished person.

2) It is vitally important that the applicant can demonstrate that he has a realistic “Plan” in place. This is not only to mean that the candidate has ambitious but realistic post-graduation goals, but also that he has so far built his career as per a plan, starting from his choice of undergraduate study to all the decisions he has made regarding his profession. The choice of doing the MBA or another Master’s program is supposed to be an essential piece of the plan. This is important for the university to know as a person who has so far lived according to a plan has a better chance of following and fulfilling his plans of the future than others who have lived unplanned lives. If the candidate does not have realistic post-graduation plans then

he would most certainly not achieve them and then an impasse would be created. The university would not like to deal with such disgruntled alumni who would recount their university experience with regret.

Additionally, the admissions office would also like to know if the applicant has a plan to utilize the resources in the university so that he can maximize the potential of his time there. Has the candidate thought through how he will participate in the community there (classes, clubs, extracurricular activities) and how he plans to contribute to the university as a student? This is vital, as the university would like to only accept people who are enthusiastic and believe in participation and contribution, and not people who will only attend their classes and then disappear into their dormitories.

3) It is very important to show to the admissions committee that you are already a leader with proven leadership abilities, someone whom they can further train and polish and make into an even better leader who can change the world. Top universities, especially the top business school, take this obligation towards the society very seriously. They strongly believe that they exist to create leaders who will solve the big problems of this world. Thus, it is vitally important that a candidate is able to demonstrate his leadership abilities – where he has shown them, where he has challenged the status quo, the impact that he has created, the maturity and vision that he has created for himself in the process, and the leadership ideas and techniques that he has mastered. Based on how the candidate presents his leadership experiences and potential, admissions officials try to determine if the candidate has enough raw material to benefit from their mentoring.

4) Everyone loves winners, and so do the top universities of the world. They would like to bet on candidates who will be very famous and successful after graduation in their chosen fields and would thereafter go on to not only make the university proud but also contribute to it. Super successful alumni of such universities contribute heavily to their alma maters, through cash donations, by sponsoring research of professors, by starting scholarships in the

university, and by creating career opportunities for students. A prospective applicant is expected to have the potential to contribute in such ways to the university. Since it is impossible to predict the future regarding how a candidate's career graph will progress, admissions officials depend on past data of a person to make a prediction about the future. Thus, based on the profile of the candidate and the way he has brought out his achievements in the application, the admissions committee will make a judgment about the potential about his future.

Marketing yourself to the top universities of the world require a mix of smart strategy and realism. For a winning application, you need to have a very clear idea of the process and what admissions officials are looking for in their applicants. Additionally, you need to have a good view of yourself and how your qualities, differentiators and achievements best match with the requirement of the schools you are applying to. Everything you write in the application – in the essays, resume, recommendations or in the information sections of the application must add to one or more of the four things that the top universities of the world look for in their applicants. If what you are writing in your application does not add information on the parameters that the school wants to judge you on, then that writing is a waste.

With clever strategy, deep thinking and some valuable guidance from an admissions consultant, you can structure your application in a way that can make you come across as "Best" in the four main points mentioned above. That's all it takes for getting accepted to these top universities. Even if this approach does not get you into Harvard, MIT, Cornell or Stanford, it would certainly help you achieve more than your normal potential and reach, and that by itself is good enough.