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Welcome

... to the second volume of Admissionado’s 50 MBA Essays That Worked.

We created our original 50 Essays collection to give aspiring MBA candidates like you a sense of what “successful” looks like in an MBA application. We wanted to inspire you with the crystal clarity, solid arguments, and compelling details of the essays we showcased, while at the same time reassuring you that writing a winning essay is well within your wheelhouse -- the name of the game is Passion, not Perfection.

Our goal was to give you the essays, plain and simple. However, after we published that original collection, we realized that our approach had been a little... hands-off. We didn’t offer any input on what was so great about these essays, or how to go from “blank document, blinking cursor” to “a masterpiece of brevity and zeal worthy of the hallowed halls of Harvard.”

So, we did it again... but better. You still get 50 original essays (selected from a completely new pool of applicants), unabridged and uncluttered. But for this volume, we picked ten of those essays to be “showcase” pieces. We give you the first draft, the final draft, and commentary from one of our MBA experts – a true blue CBS grad – on how each essay went from A(verage) to B(rilliant).

Let’s dig in, so you can marvel at the many successful b-school applicants who have come before you... and prepare to join their ranks.
Note: To protect the privacy of our clients, we’ve made small changes to the identifying details in each essay -- names of places, companies, specific products, etc. For instance, we might have changed an essay about Kazakh pear farming to one about Mongolian apple farming. However, we’ve preserved the style, meaning, and impact of each story on the whole.

And of course, a disclaimer: While essays play a big part in the application process, they’re not the only factor admissions committees consider. Each of the essays in this collection was evaluated in the context of other essays in the app, test scores, academic and work history, demographic factors, and school-specific considerations. Results (good or bad) are never guaranteed!
PART 1: GOALS
PART 1: GOALS

The big picture, the crystal ball

Just about every b-school is gonna ask: “If we give you an MBA, what are you gonna do with it?”

Unfortunately, the answer isn’t always easy. As much as applicants want to say that their decision to get an MBA at Stanford is all part of an ironclad 20-year plan full of salary graphs, promotion charts, and the home phone numbers of all their intended future bosses… yeah. Most of the time, it’s not.

There’s no shame in not having it all figured out. But ultimately, the admissions committee is gonna remember the candidate who wants to do “corporate finance management for a media conglomerate like Time Warner” more than they’re gonna remember the candidate who wants to do “something rewarding.”

The good news is that most people go into the application process with some kind of plan. (If you literally have no idea why you want to go to business school, you might want to take a step back and reflect. It’s kind of expensive.) Maybe you’re thinking, “I want to transition into Finance.” Or “I want to be at my boss’s boss’s level in five years.” Or even “I’d like to start my own company, selling… stuff.”

The big key is that an applicant be passionate about SOMETHING (something other than pineapple-jalapeño pizza or Ryan Gosling movies), even if they don’t know what to do with that passion yet. The applicants included here know that the goals essay is just the first draft of a Life Plan. It’s not a contract -- no Goals Essay Review Board is going to revoke an MBA if the graduate isn’t in the job they said they’d be in after graduation. But nor is it an exploration session, where candidates wander aimlessly through a field of possibilities for 500 words. Pick one potential plan, based on your passions and vague intentions, and tell that story.

What do all the essays below have in common? They lay out ambitious end goals, show us their VISIONS for the future, and take us through how they’ll get there.

Let’s take a look.
What are your short-term and long-term career goals, and how will an MBA from UCLA Anderson specifically help you achieve these goals? (700 words maximum)

Living in Orange County has allowed me to experience the amazing variety of habitats California has to offer. Pristine beaches lie a short drive away from awe-inspiring mountains, and right in between stands one of the largest cityscapes in the world. Collectively they make one huge ecosystem, and I want to spend my life helping that ecosystem thrive economically and environmentally. Clean energy technologies such as wind, solar, and biofuels promise to both advance environmental restoration and generate sustainable profits, but the key to unlocking wholesale environmental change will be to make renewable energy cost-competitive. My professional experience in the banking/lending industry as a Secondary Market Analyst at MFD, combined with an Anderson MBA with a Finance track, will help me achieve my vision of providing cheap long-term finance options to promising sustainable energy projects.

My long-term goal is to open a state-level, public-private Clean Energy Finance Bank (CEFB), or “green bank,” in California. The renewable energy industry is currently too reliant on public capital. However, a recent study from the Jameson Institution suggests green banks can “combine scarce public resources with private sector funds and then leverage those funds to invest in attractive clean energy.” Currently, there is one green bank in the US, Clean Energy Production and Investigation Regulatory Group in Massachusetts. While the movement is young, successful precedents for energy and infrastructure banks exist: LENS and S-V Lester Bank in the US and JgT in Germany. I want to be at the forefront of this clean energy financing industry.

In the short-term, in order to build up the skills and experience needed to transition into the clean energy finance industry, I plan to work as a Research Analyst at a well-known think tank like the Jameson Institution. Exposing myself to the high-level policy research done in programs like the Municipal Policy Program and learning to work with state government on renewable energy projects already in place will be instrumental in developing a sensible and educated plan for starting a CEFB.

Working as a Secondary Market Analyst at a mortgage bank has allowed me to experience firsthand how to run a successful lending and banking
operation. MFD’s motto is “closing loans the right way” and that commitment to avoiding the lure of fast profits in favor of closing safe, quality loans is something I plan to instill at a future green bank. At MFD my ability to rapidly master information under pressure has enabled me to take a lead role in projects such as the implementation of hedging, a new way for MFD to price and sell mortgage loans. My responsibilities include analyzing secondary market conditions, making value-added selling recommendations, and decoding complex investor guidelines. With my expertise and guidance, MFD currently profits .85% more per loan sold, with $900 million in hedged loans in 2011. These skills and my drive to achieve position me to be successful as the leader of a green bank after obtaining my Anderson MBA.

An MBA from Anderson will enable me to develop the general management and financial analysis skills necessary to lead a bank addressing financial challenges in the energy industry. Completing the Leaders in Sustainability specialization offered at Anderson will allow me to interact with students and faculty from a variety of unique backgrounds, and learning to combine the languages of business and clean energy will be vital for my future career. I’m excited to complete the Applied Management Research project in my second year, which will give me firsthand experience consulting with a client in the sustainability industry and introduce me to the daily challenges they face. I intend to take Business and the Environment with Professor Corbett and would love to get involved with his research on examining links between good business practices and environmental protection, which will help me make smart recommendations in future policy and green bank endeavors.

Outside of academics, I plan to become a VP of sports for the C4C club and will join the C4C basketball team to help Anderson compete for the coveted golden briefcase. Overall, an MBA from Anderson will be truly instrumental in helping me start a green bank in California and bring new life into the clean energy finance industry.

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a) Discuss your short and long term career goals. (300 words maximum) and b) How will studying at INSEAD help you achieve your vision? (250 words maximum)

Nowadays security becomes one of the biggest issues in China that threaten our lives. 400 fire disasters happen every day, but 90% of the
buildings are lacking exit devices, ubiquitous in the West for emergency exits. In 2009, approximately 30 children were killed in schools but we failed to identify the murderers immediately because there was no camera in campus. I was shocked by my research result that almost no university in Beijing paralleled those in the USA in security. Gradually, I formed my career goal. I want to become an entrepreneur in security industry providing solutions to safeguard people.

I will start my own business in China, where the market size is about 130 Billion RMB with 22% growth rate. I want to create the attachment between these technical products and the users. I will input the intellect, aesthetics and innovation into these technical products. You could open the door for your children who forget keys via cell phone. You could also monitor your room to see how your puppy is from the laptop even if you are laying on a beach far away. In addition, I’m driven to establish a company positioned as solutions expert rather than product supplier. I want to provide customized solutions by deeply understanding how customers think, work and react.

In the short term, to accumulate professional experience and deepen my industry insights, I plan to seek a senior product manager position for security products in leading companies such as DMT, Sully and Shultz. Product Management, where I can blend the creativity and initiative required for product development and where I lead cross-functional teams to achieve a shared goal, mirrors the experience of starting a company and serves as an excellent training ground for me to develop the skills necessary for launching my own business.

To achieve my career goal, I still need to improve in several areas and INSEAD is the best fit for me.

First, I want to utilize the intensive 1-year program to complement my gap in certain business functions like operation and finance. I will return to my previous industry and functions, more capable and mature. In this sense, INSEAD fits me because I could return in less time. I appreciate efficiency and fast-pace and will definitely adapt to INSEAD’s fast-learning-fast-living environment.

In addition, security industry is related to almost every industry because safety is a common need. To develop total solutions, I need to have a deep understanding of different industries. INSEAD’s big alumni base can help me build up networks in various industries to understand more.
Part 1: Goals

The limit of your languages is the limit of your world. In the past few years, I strongly feel the importance of global perspective in doing business today. And global perspective is something related to social and cultural elements. INSEAD has students coming from 80 countries. I want to leverage the diversity of INSEAD to understand the world outside and thus develop my global perspective.

Showcase: First to Final

Building Structure for LBS

What are your immediate and ultimate career objectives? How will the Sloan MSc in Leadership and Strategy and London Business School help you to meet your objectives? (500 words max)

First Version

As the youngest finance controller in East-Asia region, I started my job in Seoul with a demoralized team and skeptical sales/marketing colleagues. Yet I succeeded to rebuild a strong team in one year by understanding the concerns of my team members, reallocating job functions and building a detailed career development plan for every member. The result was credibility won by leading operation procedure formalization with colleagues representing 7 countries. After 14 month, I was promoted again based upon my proven performance in 2011.

My experience in the past seven years has given me a more mature understanding about the responsibility of leadership as well as more confidence in my ability to become a future global business leader. I attribute these successes to my passion for pushing the boundaries beyond my own safety zone. Moreover, as a professional woman, my nature to be considerate and solve conflicts in a humanistic way has been an asset in various challenges throughout my career.

Beyond daily responsibilities, I also push my frontiers to think the best of business solutions. Some of the questions that keep me up at night include: How can we maintain sustainable growth in today’s ever-changing and highly competitive market? Professor John Mullins’s “A Business Plan? Or a Journey to Plan B?” was enlightening to my puzzles. By breaking
Part 1: Goals

down the business into five key elements quantitatively and identifying analogs and antilogs in the industry as illustrated in the article, I proposed to Managing Director that we develop more eye-catching duty free exclusive gift packing for Blush, a sparkling wine brand that confronted growth limitation due to strong monopoly by competitive brands. My suggestion was adopted by management and the monthly sales have achieved two-digit growth after the new packaging launch. It is this approach of “theory to practice” that motivates me to pursue an MBA degree at LBS where I can take a class with a renowned thinker such as Professor Mullins and temper my strategy vision and leadership qualification to move into a C-level executive. Moreover, my visit of the class of Essentials of Leadership delivered by Professor Jay Conger further strengthened my interests in LBS.

From public accountant to compliance manager, and now as a finance controller, my ultimate goal is to move into the role of Chief Financial Officer straddling both the traditional areas of financial stewardship and the more progressive areas of strategic and business leadership with direct responsibility and oversight of operations in modern business world. With access to LBS’s renowned academic resources and the 12 months rigorous management training, I will return as a brand new finance controller in Luxury industry with more credential and competence and utilize what I learn in LBS to amplify my impact on the organization. I firmly believe that the legacy of LBS in me will be a stepping stone to my goal as well as a life-long treasure.

The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly:
We’ve got the elements here for a really successful essay: 1) solid success stories, 2) realistic career goals, and 3) specific reasons for “why LBS.” However, it’s just not working yet. Why? Mainly because this essay doesn’t focus on answering the question (the writer doesn’t even hint at her “objectives” until the very end!). Moreover, there’s no connection between the successes described in the beginning and the goals at the end. Success is great, but why is she talking about these particular results? What do they have to do with her ability to rock as a CFO? Lastly, when our girl talks about her success, she does more telling than SHOWING. Overall, she needs to improve the structure, get a single narrative going, and be more direct about answering the essay prompt.

Final Version
The late 1800s Dynasty: my ancestor, the businessman Minsoo Kim, actively promoted Western technology to save Korea from destitution.
His legacy of innovation and change lives through me. Today, I am a finance controller at Dom Perignon (DP), pushing changes and creating value. With broad industry knowledge gained from my experience at BCG, I defined the KPI’s of DP’s logistics service provider in contract negotiations, resulting in annual cost-savings of USD100K+. My passion for the wine industry stemmed from my first auditing project at Redfoot Wines and the more I explored this business, the better I understood that wines represent their home cultures, inspiring communication among people. My ancestor’s legacy and my passion for brands have shaped my ambition to become a Chief Financial Officer (CFO) in the wine industry and contribute to the popularization of Korean brands.

Rising to my current position in only 7 years, I began my ascent in Seoul with a disheartened finance team suffering from a heavy workload and skeptical veterans in sales/marketing who doubted this inexperienced young woman’s ability to handle tough situations. By reallocating job functions and building a detailed career plan for each team member, I boosted morale and we succeeded in supporting our business’ expansion with an average annual profit growth rate of 40%+ from 2010 to 2012. I also won credibility by tweaking existing operation procedures, in collaboration with colleagues representing 7 countries, resulting in operational improvements reducing monthly staff over-time by 200 hours, earning a top performance rating based upon my proven performance for 2011 after only 14 months.

These projects have provided leadership experience and the confidence to become a business leader. From public accountant to compliance manager, to Finance Manager and now as finance controller, I now intend to step into the position of Finance Director of a leading Asian beverage company like Tsingtao. To succeed, I need to develop my knowledge of advanced corporate finance, marketing and management, along with my strategic vision, presentation skills and network.

LBS Sloan is my best choice to gain these skills in a short timeframe. The specific tools and knowledge imparted by Advanced Corporate Finance, World Economy Problems and Prospects, and Corporate Strategy, will strengthen my expertise in corporate finance and provide an understanding of macroeconomic environments and strategy development, which I currently lack. The International Assignment Project’s experiential learning provides opportunities to test new ideas to bring the most effective ones to fruition. Furthermore, LBS’ strong and diverse international ties are critical to my aspiration to propel the globalization of Korean and Chinese spirits. Finally, the lively student-
professor interaction I observed in Professor Conger’s Essentials of Leadership class and the engaging conversation I shared with students have fueled my enthusiasm and desire to join their ranks.

120 years ago, Minsoo Kim introduced western technology into classical Korea, initiating industrialization. His long-lasting influence shows me that business’ impact can mean more than just money. With my passion for the spirits industry, I am eager to create my own legacy with the help of LBS.

Admissionado Says:
Whew! What an improvement! This thing went from a haphazard recounting of successes with a brief mention of goals to a tightly organized, single narrative that paints a clear arc of the applicant’s career. It demonstrates why the past (the success stories) is a great precursor to the future (career goals) and how LBS Sloan uniquely fits in to help bridge the gap between them. Furthermore, instead of general statements (“I succeeded to rebuild a strong team in one year by XYZ...”), we have stories that SHOW us the challenges the applicant faced, and the skill she had to use to overcome them.

What are your post-MBA short-term and long-term career goals? How have your professional experiences prepared you to achieve these goals? How will an MBA from Haas help you achieve these goals? (750 word maximum for 5a. and 5b.)

Leading international PR efforts for Viapay (Brazil’s PayPal), I’ve been managing the rollout of a new product called “express payment” from Brazil to the Argentine market. In this project, I’ve advised the product team to adjust the offerings to better suit the local needs. I created Viapay’s social media strategy, advised on marketing campaigns and led the creation of an online user tutorial. My leadership in this effort paid off as payment volume in the region increased by 300%.

My first go-to-market experience ignited my passion for product marketing which not only taught me how to think strategically but also follow through the execution process. More importantly, I was excited to
notice that a successful marketing campaign can actually make a
difference in people's life.

My post-MBA short-term goal is to work as a Product Marketing Manager
at an innovative high tech company such as eBay, Twitter or Apple. I am
seeking a role where I will be responsible for outbound marketing activities
for my products such as the Android Platform or Apple iPhone to obtain
exposure to the best high tech marketing practices. My long-term goal is
to become the CMO of a large Brazilian Internet company such as my
current employer Miravira Group where I redefine marketing for Brazil’s
high tech industry by mapping out refined product strategies and bringing
extraordinary value and experience to Brazilian consumers.

I have five years of work experience in Brazil’s high tech industry, and
have been exposed to diverse vantage points including accounting,
auditing, process improvement, marketing and public relations. After
graduating with a criminal justice degree, I chose auditing as my fast track
into the business world. It took little time and lots of sweat for me to
develop from a complete outsider to an accounting professional. As a
criminal investigator, I was taught to look at everything from multiple
angles and to relentlessly seek information to corroborate my findings.
This has allowed me to develop better problem solving skills and more
holistic view than my peers with only business degrees.

Later at a start-up financial service firm, I was in charge of acquiring and
serving the company’s foreign clients because I was the only one who
truly understands both North and South American markets and could
bridge the communication gap. After one month onboard, I landed the
firm’s first foreign account and increased the firm’s revenue by 15%. As
my portfolio grew, my team increased from 4 people to 8.

At Miravira, I’ve had the privilege of a front-row seat at the most
innovative company in Brazil, and have had the opportunity to roll out the
newest and coolest things to a global audience. I helped to craft
messages for the Brazilian media and coordinated communication among
US, Brazil and Argentina teams. I worked closely with the senior
management on the messaging of the privatization of world’s largest B2B
eCommerce platform which created the largest high tech IPO of US $1.9
billion after Google in 2007. I introduced Brazil’s first cloud-based
operating system, which has been running in over 4 million mobile phones,
and rolled out Viapay as the first online payment option for small
businesses in Uruguay.
These varied positions have prepared me for my long-term goal of being a CMO by teaching me analytical and communication skills, strategic thinking as well as leadership skills. In my career, I envision myself leading the transition from price-driven marketing to a more value-based approach. There is a huge opportunity for Internet companies to better convey the value to users based on a deep insight of customer needs and product positioning which in turn helps to make more great products.

The rigorous general management training at Haas will equip me with the essential business knowledge to solve all sorts of problems in today’s changing business environment from examining all angles of product strategy to analyzing technology investment to enhancing product P&L. I will definitely bid for the Marketing Strategy elective course taught by Professor Villa-Boas where I get to work in teams in the Markstrat simulation making typical marketing decisions in a competitive market with limited information to win more customers. I am convinced that such an experiential learning will help me develop an understanding, the skill, and experience in formulating and planning marketing strategies for my next product, probably Facebook mobile.

Having been an effective event planner for college graduation parties and company annual conferences, I am excited about organizing the annual Play Digital Media Conference in 2013. I am also highly interested in becoming a member of the Haas Technology Club where I could contribute my insights about Brazil’s high tech industry, set up trek visits to Brazilian high tech firms and visit innovative companies such as Google and Amazon with my fellow classmates. These companies are the most innovative in the world, and we will be doing our own creating at their doorstep, in their halls and, someday, in their boardrooms. Nearly 1/3 of recent Haas MBA graduates are working in the technology industry, an invaluable resource in my future career.

Most importantly, I love the vibe at Haas. People are not only smart but also down to earth. When I asked Catherine Lu, a Haas MBA graduate from Bain Capital and Jeremy Patola ’13 what they like most about Haas, they both said it was the close-knit collaborative community where everyone is willing to lend a hand to help others succeed. I am sure I will not only benefit from such a culture but also contribute to maintain that type of connection.
a) Discuss your short and long term career goals. (300 words maximum) and b) How will studying at INSEAD help you achieve your vision? (250 words maximum)

Medical care costs are high for Japanese families, often representing 70% of total income of an elderly couple for medical devices to treat common ailments like cardiovascular diseases and hypertension.

Having created inventions that save lives, I am passionate about my long-term vision to lead a large medical device corporation, like Meditech, as CEO. I will set the strategy and manage product portfolio, bringing to Japan affordable medical devices, while forming strategic partnerships with class-A hospitals to build an online diagnostic system to further lower the medical cost for patients and government. Not only will patients access doctors all over the country, the doctors in tier-2 cities such as Osaka and Nagasaki can also be fully utilized to lessen the high demand in tier-1 cities, such as Tokyo and Kyoto.

To better prepare to drive an international corporation, after the MBA I will become business development manager for an innovative medical device company, such as N-Type Scientific, and focus on expansion in Asian markets. The broad portfolio of innovative medical solutions and international focus of medical device industry can effectively teach me how to capture customers’ needs and transform them into products, how to grow the revenue through affordable product and innovative services, and how to grow market share through M&A and strategic partnership.

Those skills in growing a company’s front-line will complement my current skill sets in optimizing company’s bottom-line and in driving big organization and product development. With the network I built in Europe and Japan and my existing experience in medical device industry, I will hit the ground running with regional distributors and hospitals.

To lead a truly international organization and craft a portfolio of innovative products, I see no option better fulfilling my needs than INSEAD.

As I would like to focus on Japan’s markets, “Japan Strategy” can provide first-hand experience and insights about competitive strategy and business practice in Japan. Since this course collaborates with top executives of multinational and Japanese companies, they can serve as role models of general management, my ultimate goal. I would also like to
attend Neil’s Management Decision Making course, which I believe can refine my decision-making process and lead me out of the structural way of thinking to explore my intellectual spectrum. Furthermore, Singapore is an outstanding business and culture hub, which makes it a perfect frontier for international companies to test their products before full launch to other APAC counties. Studying in Singapore campus will allow me to interview business leaders in emerging markets and familiarize myself with a market that I will encounter in my business development career. Through campus exchange, I can leverage INSEAD’s influence in Europe to boost my chance in launching a job from the European companies which are expanding in Asia.

I will join Consulting Club, which can educate me on the framework and theorems that are based on INSEAD’s blue ocean strategy, a strategy that encourages innovation and exploration of new market space. I will also join Healthcare Club, helping it organize treks to medical and pharmaceutical companies. Its broad network in Asia will immediately provide the right contacts, saving me time in exploring local business contacts and in building partnerships.

For me, INSEAD is a perfect match.

What are your short-term and long-term career goals, and how will an MBA from UCLA Anderson specifically help you achieve these goals? (750 words maximum)

I hope to become the CFO for a young high-tech company in China, and build it into the next Facebook or Google by developing the right financial strategy to drive its long-term business vision and promoting meaningful changes in operations. To achieve this, I need to build up my expertise in finance and other business functions such as strategy and marketing. An Anderson MBA, through its unique academic and recruiting resources in finance and technology, will help me develop this expertise. Immediately after my MBA I plan to join a rotational program in finance for a multinational technology giant, enhancing my abilities in financial planning and analysis (FP&A) and treasury, which will help me transition to a CFO position.
Part 1: Goals

Both my professional and personal experiences instilled in me a lasting passion to become a finance executive. I witnessed my father, a pioneer of privatization of Chinese accounting firms, turn an inefficient firm into one of the most successful accountancies in Chongqing. Seeing how he combined finance expertise and interpersonal skills motivated me to follow his footsteps, but lead a much bigger organization—scaling up a mid-size company to become an industry leader. As a senior auditor at PwC, I have led teams to actively promote value-adding changes while gaining firsthand knowledge of the financial and operational practices of technology companies. For example, when a telecom operator with over $40 billion revenue implemented an ERP system, I advised the client to fix weaknesses in the capital expenditure process and prevented a potential $1 million accounting error. At PwC, I have mastered technical skills in financial reporting, analysis, and business processes, enabling me to excel in FP&A and controllership as CFO.

However, I feel that my learning curve has flattened, because serving external clients means I couldn’t fully appreciate every aspect of management or actively lead business transformations, which prompts me to accelerate my growth with an MBA to transition into a finance rotational program in technology companies, such as Amazon or Google. There, I can gain in-depth and comprehensive insights into the finance function as an insider, which is essential for my long-term success as CFO. In addition, the responsibilities of CFOs have expanded from merely overseeing an organization’s financial welfare to pinpointing operation deficiencies and formulating strategies with CEOs; in China’s explosively growing but fiercely competitive high-tech industry, companies with poor financial management are forced out of business. CFOs who can adeptly manage financial resources and can fit finance operations into the bigger strategic picture are in great need. Therefore, I need to enhance my knowledge in areas outside of my current expertise, such as strategy, marketing, and capital markets.

An MBA from Anderson will be critical to expand my business knowledge beyond finance. Anderson’s Easton Technology Leadership program, with courses such as Technology Management, will improve my strategic thinking abilities in a tech-focused economy. High Tech Business Association will offer great recruiting support through its Tech-treks and career nights, providing opportunities to learn from seasoned practitioners. In Professor Bucklin’s Price Policies course, I will learn pricing strategies and implementation to work closely with marketers as CFO. The hands-on Applied Management Research Program will let me put my acquired knowledge into practice and dive deep into real-world business.
Anderson’s finance curriculum will also build up finance skills I wasn’t exposed to at PwC. Mergers and acquisitions (M&A) have become an increasingly important growth strategy in China’s high-tech industry, highlighted by a recent $1.9 billion acquisition by Baidu. Professor George Geis, in his Strategy in Digital Economy course, will not only walk me through current transactions but will teach me to strategize about M&A and partnerships deals to better exploit lucrative merger opportunities.

My interaction with Anderson alumni has proved I will benefit both professionally and personally during my two years at Anderson. Anderson alumna and long-time friend, Shen Wenting (’15), shared how Anderson provided her with tremendous recruiting support and helped her switch career from sell-side research to a major mutual fund. Xu Di (’15) described how, in Anderson Career Teams (ACT) of Parker CMC, second-year students offered valuable insights for launching her career in the media industry. The genuine collaborative energy I saw among Anderson alumni grabbed my heart.

With my skills to integrate finance and strategy sharpened at Anderson and gaining access to the incredibly responsive, powerful network, I am ready to be the agent of change as a CFO.

7

Given your individual background, why are you pursuing a Columbia MBA at this time? (Maximum 500 words)

The oil and gas industry is defined by tragedies like the 1989 Exxon Valdez spill and 2010 BP well blowout, which spewed nearly 5 million barrels of oil and killed over 170 people combined. As an engineer in Statoil’s Health, Environment, and Safety (HES) rotational program, I have helped change this reality. I convinced management to commit an additional $300,000 to prevent carcinogens from seeping into 70 Fagersta, Sweden residences and blocked petroleum engineers from initiating an acid injection program that would have destroyed one of the largest oil facilities in the North Sea. I want to be the leader who makes the paradigm shift within the industry to permanently prevent these catastrophes.

I seek to become the Operations Manager and ultimately Chief Operating Officer of a multinational energy company such as Royal Dutch Shell. There, I can directly influence operational performance and corporate
responsibility much like Favio Floresi, COO of Eri Development and Production, who led Eri to proactively apply HES as a competitive advantage rather than an added cost. To prepare myself, I seek to enter an energy rotational program at a company like Total SA, HAB Corporation or Marathon Petroleum upon graduation to gain a broad understanding of the complex issues facing the industry. I am confident that the industry has the tools to prevent these disasters, but skilled leaders need to stand up and proactively apply them.

To champion HES, I must first and foremost be a business leader. However, I currently lack the operational management, strategic planning, and finance skills to effectively lead an organization commercially. I need the resources of a CBS MBA to enhance my leadership skills, increase my insight into business operations and expand my network with a diverse group of future leaders.

I want to learn new techniques to manage risks and improve processes to minimize events like Exxon and BP’s blowout. Courses such as Business Analytics will provide me the resources to make sense of vast amounts of operations and risk data, while Corporate Governance will help me change corporate-level thinking within the energy industry.

Speaking with Veronica Yun of the Energy Club during my visit, I became confident that the Energy Club would help me enter an energy rotational program by retaining and developing ties with energy leaders and recruiters through events such as the Columbia Energy Symposium. I ultimately hope to expand the symposium with innovative local speakers such as Taylor Feinstein of L2 Energy to generate more interest in the energy industry and the challenges facing it.

I also look forward to utilizing the Executives in Residence program for career guidance and business insight. I am specifically interested in working with Francois Saint-Charles from Microsoft to learn his perspectives on enterprise risk management. I plan to apply these lessons to manage the large risks facing the energy industry, one of his areas of interest. I am confident that CBS will prepare me to responsibly drive the operations that power the world.
Building an Identity for HBS

You’re applying to Harvard Business School. We can see your resume, school transcripts, extra-curricular activities, awards, post-MBA career goals, test scores and what your recommenders have to say about you. What else would you like us to know as we consider your candidacy?

First Version

Two percentages came to mind as I was standing in a room full of a client’s senior management, explaining to them the different options they had for their corporate governance structure. 100%. That was the percentage of Chinese people in that boardroom of a leading Chinese telecom equipment manufacturer. 1%. That was the percentage of Chinese people in my hometown in California. What was more incredulous to my former self of only a few years ago was that I deliberately put myself in this “foreign” place, far from the familiar comforts of North America.

Visiting China as a teenager over the course of three summers, I saw the sweeping transformations told in Western newspapers through the streets where my relatives grew up. Each year that I arrived to stay with them, I had a little more difficulty recognizing the place. Around the area, the narrow and pothole ridden paths were replaced with a larger road. The dilapidated old buildings became a row of shopping and office complexes. After the rounds of destruction, only the road name stayed the same – white sand water well. The growth was outwards and upwards, and happening everywhere. Compared to the small town I grew up in, which seemed at a developmental standstill over the years, I was transfixed by what I saw was history in the making over in China.

Though my family and I lived 10,000 km away from the hotbed of activity, we were also a part of China’s socio-economic uplift narrative. Growing up, I saw my dad start our family business by selling Chinese-made lawn furniture out of the back of his car. In the span of under 20 years, this business grew to a large furniture manufacturing company, named Pearson Fuo Corporation, with operations in five countries and over 2000 employees. I grew up interwoven with the company’s growth. As a child, I fell asleep at night to my dad making calls to suppliers in China in his “office”, which shared a space with my bed. I was its first employee in California, acting as the janitor. When the furniture shipped
in had quality control issues, my parents would drive me to the warehouse on the weekends to help out. As a teenager visiting China, I worked on the production line and toured various industrial parks scattered along the eastern coast. It seemed as if China’s opportunities were also my opportunities.

But the final push to come to China came from myself. There were a few distinct times in college where I stepped back and looked at my surroundings, whether at a friend's gathering or in the classroom. In those moments, I consciously felt I was the only "Asian" person around a sea of white. I realized then my racial identity was more complicated than what my town's ethnicity makeup looked like. And so, I dropped the life I carved out in California to come to China - a country I left at the age of three - to better understand what it’s given me economically and further explore my Asian heritage and identity.

After being in China for three years (and counting), I see my Western background as an advantage to creating value. The ability to understand cultural nuances and make connections across borders whether by bridging people or ideas has helped me at my time at Bain Consulting when working with multinationals looking to further penetrate China's markets and leading Chinese companies wanting to become more global.

This in turn has better prepared me to take over the family business. I plan to become CEO and transform Pearson Fuo Corporation into Asia's largest furniture supplier, surpassing industry leaders such as Shi-En and Johnson, through leveraging differences and similarities across boundaries. By bringing in more Western expertise, Pearson Fuo can develop and tailor alternative technologies to the Chinese market to reduce waste, at a critical time when Chinese regulators start to tighten emission standards for factories and the country has simultaneously become the largest market for home furnishings. This retrenching into advanced technologies will give Pearson Fuo stronger bargaining power with vendors and consequently more room to invest into employee training and creating a meritocratic, open corporate culture that is sensitive to Chinese culture. By being able to attract and retain key talent, which is often a bottleneck for more innovation development, Pearson Fuo can further separate itself among the local suppliers, of which most don’t even comply with basic labor laws. In a sense, building Pearson Fuo into a model Chinese furniture supplier will only be possible as a confluence of my family values, my multi-faceted identity and the economic rise of China in the global marketplace.
The Good, The Bad and The Ugly
The best part about this essay is that the thoughtful, introspective storytelling style is inviting. However, what is he getting at? He spends the vast majority of the essay talking about China’s growth and his father’s successes, and then ends by delving into a traditional career goals essay. The applicant tries to do too much. He needs to pick one line of reasoning – one solid story – and stick to it. In the particular case of HBS, we want to know what DRIVES him.

Final Version
The Chinese saying "eat bitter" (吃苦) in its most literal sense means to endure hardship. Coming to China to learn the language and culture, and understand how business is really done on the ground here, I’ve discovered that those two words more aptly describe the ambition to “dream big.”

I grew up in California interwoven with the family business that my dad, a first-generation immigrant, started. He began by selling Chinese-made lawn furniture out of the back of his van. In the span of 15 years, this business grew and changed into a China-based furniture company with operations in five countries and over 2000 employees. As a child, I fell asleep at night to my dad making calls to suppliers in China in his "office", which shared a space with my bed. If I was still up to hear him finish the night, he would remind me that to build something meaningful requires us to “eat bitter.” I would hear these words referenced time and time again, but I was more captured by the results than the process: over time our family of four started to clip considerably fewer coupons for groceries and we finally moved out of a two-bedroom public housing apartment.

I previously thought that in the future I could take over and manage my family’s business from the Bay Area. But seeing the business from only the American side made me feel as if I saw a faceless company. I understood very little about the company’s behind-the-scenes engine of growth, China. What was it that allowed a company to grow at 45% each year? Coming from a town where less than 10% of the population was Chinese, I had no context as to how Chinese people would respond to me as I tried to inspire them to fuel the company’s next stage of growth. My parent’s two words, “eat bitter,” returned to me. I could feel the sacrifice and resolve that they put into this company, and I knew the only way to continue with their legacy was to demonstrate those very qualities. And so, straight after college, I went back to the country I’d left at the age of three.
Living in China for the last three years, those two words have finally come alive in me. I've come to realize that “eat bitter” isn't about enduring hardship for hardship's sake, nor is it solely about sacrifice and resolve; rather it comes from a sense of optimism and confidence to pursue big dreams.

I've seen this "dream big" attitude in my former Chinese roommate who came from elementary school-educated parents and studied his way into one of California's top universities, and in the way dirt roads and dilapidated buildings in China make way for wide roads and gleaming office buildings. I've seen these two simple words come alive in a nation that hungers to rewrite its own narrative and build a more prosperous future. Now I see it in myself.

This new-found appreciation of the true meaning of "eat bitter" has brought me closer to the real spirit that my parents embodied in building the family company. I want to take my dream of effecting positive change and expand its scale.

China’s remarkable economic progress has created problems that need addressing. Pollution and the talent gap, issues that I didn’t fully comprehend while living in a small, quaint American town, are present and in full force here. I’m going to take this "eat bitter" attitude to build on what my family has started and refocus the company to tackle these issues within the manufacturing industry in China. I’m going to take what my parents taught me and pursue my dreams.

**Admissionado Says:**

What a beautiful about-face. What we have here is a tightly written essay around a central theme that digs deep into the WHY behind the applicant’s past decisions and future goals. This is exactly what HBS is looking for. Whereas before we had off-topic descriptions of China and his father’s successes, we now have the story of a lesson his father tried to teach him, and how he came to learn the lesson through his own experience. Finally, we learn how this lesson continues to drive him into the future. He effectively demonstrates the WHY behind the answers to the WHO/WHAT/WHERE/HOW question in his resume and short answers. As a result, he feels like a whole person, a real person... not just an application.
PART 2: PERSONAL
PART 2: PERSONAL

The inside look

The biggest obstacle you’ll face in penning a personal essay is the mistaken belief that your story has to meet some objective standard of “interesting” or “impressive.” Touring with Cirque du Soleil, moving to Myanmar to give volunteer medical aid to refugees, rising out of poverty to become your nation’s first internationally acclaimed flautist... everyone knows that those are the kinds of stories that lead to acceptances. And so they should be! They aren’t just exciting -- they also demonstrate qualities like devotion, persistence, and ambition that b-schools are looking for.

The truth is, however, that these aren’t the ONLY kinds of personal stories that will help you get into b-school. After all, how many applicants can say they’ve done any of the above things, or something similar? Not many. That means schools are going to be slapping a YES on tons of applicants who have never been closer to Myanmar than the time they tripped over the globe in their fourth-grade classroom.

Your story doesn’t have to have a winning tagline. It doesn’t need to have international characters, an exotic setting, or a heart-pounding plot. Schools don’t ask for personal stories because they’ve run out of good books to read -- they ask because they want to see more of who you are. What do you want them to know? How committed you are to the environment? How hard you work to succeed at your hobbies? Why baking helps you succeed at your job? Find your point, and fill out the story around it.

The applicants in this section don’t all have astonishing human-interest stories to share. Their essays succeed because they highlight features and experiences that were important to THEM -- and give us a peek behind the 9-5 curtain.

Let’s check it out...
Describe a personal experience and how it has influenced who you are today. This essay should have a personal rather than a professional focus. (500 words maximum)

When I was a sophomore in high school, my eye was badly injured playing baseball in the national high school tournament which led me to have two corneal transplantations. This was the biggest obstacle in my life and has affected everything that is associated with my personal and academic endeavors.

It was scary to think I might live my whole life with only one of my eyes functioning. I tried to prepare myself for life in total darkness, because the success ratio of the cornea transplantation in 2005 was just 20%, and it meant that I would lose one eye. I am the first person who received the cornea transplantation in Tianjin Hospital. Even the eye expert who did operations over 15 years did not dare to do the operation for me, because this is the first time attempted. But I insisted they try.

Thanks to the careful operation which lasted 7 hours, they were able to revive my sight. I could only see light at first. During my stay in the hospital, I couldn’t do anything but listen to the radio. Every day, I listened to audio biographies of famous historical American figures whose achievement, intelligence, and philosophy encouraged me.

After I got out from the hospital, I insisted to go back to school seeing temporarily only with one eye. My parents were hesitant, but I encouraged them that I should have a try before making any conclusions. I attended my classes every day and it took me a lot of courage and persistence to tackle every challenge of being temporarily sight impaired. Whenever I was reading, tears continued forming; I had to wipe my eye every ten seconds. I could not expose it directly to any light, not even dim bulbs. I needed sunglasses whenever and wherever to keep the environment dark. When night came, I could only stay home.

Having only one functional eye was more than an inconvenience and not something I got easily used to. It’s hard for me to read books and the things that my teacher wrote on the board. I experienced living a wholly different life. I was proud of myself and at the same time, I came to know that every obstacle can be conquered through determination and hard work. I became braver than ever and I believe persistence makes success.
In this challenge, I learned to treasure the gift of sight and appreciate the things I see more than ever. I leaned to become a good listener and quick learner; I leaned to re-show my passion towards the life. I began this renewal process by loving and being thankful for my body. I was thrilled when after my National College Entrance Exam, I scored in top 25 in Shanghai Province and was admitted by the Chinese University of Shanghai. Currently, my left eye can only feel light, but it won’t be an obstacle in my life. I love life, I treasure it as a gift.

10

Showcase: First to Final

Narrowing it Down for Columbia

What will the people in your Cluster be pleasantly surprised to learn about you? (Maximum 250 words)

First Version:

I enjoy feng shui because it combines my two distinct interests – quality living and travelling. For me, feng shui doesn’t merely mean create beautiful rooms, but provides a superior quality of life for house-owners. Because life is precious and cannot be rewound, one’s life should be spent in places that could revive the spirit and impart the vigor, that’s why I pour my passion into plan of a house. Also, travelling brings inspirations to my design. The lavender Provence countryside beauty in French, olive groves, vineyards and architectural legacy in Toscana, and Southeast Asian resort style are all elements or styles that I adopted when considering how to best orient a home. I embrace the diversity and am always looking for the next. I hope my passion to quality living and travelling can enhance the experience of my Cluster, and if my classmate needs me to help decorate his or her apartment, I would love to!

I’m an eager basketball fan, but I do more than jubilate on the stand; I personally coach a seven-kid team in a local junior tournament. People usually say kids are too young to learn tactics and let them play and follow their natural instincts. While I partly agree with this view, I wanted to give those kids a chance to learn more sophisticated knowledge to test their potentials. I also want them to find out what it really tastes like to
be a champion. Champion is a habit that breeds further glories. So I instructed them how to position, cut into spaces and organize defense. The tactics made these kids a rigid team and occasionally a flash of wit broke the deadlock. Finally we won the tournament, leaving all of us an unforgettable summer.

I am good at picking clothes and styling hair. Maybe it’s partly because I was raised in a family that has art skills. My father is skilled in calligraphy and my mother calls painting as her favorite. Tell you a secret. I am better than my girlfriend at styling. When we attend important social occasions, it’s me who picks out her outfit. Also, I have been voluntarily organizing free style workshops for senior college students since 2010. I, together with several other volunteers, teach students how to dress up for their job interviews, ensuring they appear in front of the interviewer with professional and charming makeup look rather than edgy look. I hope my stylistic skill will add color/flavor to Columbia community, providing makeup support for varied extracurricular activities like the Follies.

The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly:

When writing essays it’s important to calibrate what you hope to accomplish with the word limit. With 250 words, this guy really only has space to tell one or maybe two stories well... but he has three. He’s gotta focus! The good news is that any one of these stories is great material, and will certainly surprise his cluster. Ultimately, the point of this essay is to give the admissions committee a sense of what kind of a community member he’ll be in the MBA program, and how he’ll contribute to making CBS a more vibrant place to spend two years.

Final Version:

I’m amazing at picking clothes and styling hair – truth be told, I’m better than my girlfriend and when we attend important events, I help her out. Outside work, I organize free workshops where I teach students to dress up for job interviews. I wanted to help them land their dream job by showing them how to create modern, professional looks. I really get a kick out of seeing their astonished reactions when they see how amazing they look! I hope this skill can add color to CBS, and I look forward to providing hair and costume support for extracurricular activities like CBS Follies.

I’m also a huge basketball fan who coaches a junior team in a local tournament. Most kids spend their entire summer in front of computer games, and it is important to me to show them how pursuing goals can be fun. Some say kids are too young to learn advanced tactics and they
Part 2: Personal

should just follow their natural instincts, but I love giving those kids a chance to learn sophisticated techniques to test their potential. This summer, I showed them how to position themselves, cut into spaces and organize their defense. Witnessing their improvement week by week, I felt so proud that they were both learning and having fun. These tactics turned us into a dynamite team and with some luck, we actually won the tournament, a memory none of us will ever forget.

So here I am: a basketball fanatic who is amazing at styling hair. You don’t see that every day!

Admissionado Says:

We have two mini-stories here – one that directly makes a connection to CBS, and another that showcases the applicant’s extracurricular leadership experience. Right on! Whereas before we were way over the word limit and told three stories half-well, we now have two power-hitting stories that showcase very different but cool sides of the applicant. Sounds like a guy I want in my cluster!

11

What matters most to you, and why? (750 words)

As a child, the aura of prominent businessmen fascinated me. Donald Trump was one of my favorites. This led me to The Apprentice, and in season 5 in 2006, I witnessed Dr. Robert Dash not only make history as the first African American to win the show but also abolish his competition in the process. His leadership skills led me to learn more. I found that we had similar goals and philanthropic interests, and I saw myself as the African version of him. He inspired me to further build on my desire to succeed and have an impact, a desire that I developed at a young age. His life example pushed me beyond my limits and inspired me to break my own mental barriers. What matters to me most is creating new pathways for others by pushing myself to achieve beyond expectations. The inspiration that people draw from successful leaders breaks mental barriers and helps develop new leaders.

I grew up in South Africa with Kenyan parents. When I was 13, they separated and my mother moved with my siblings and me to Deneysville, a small Afrikaans town. Every year, people graduated from high school with average grades and began working average jobs; it was what
everyone did. That all changed when Gerald Lyga, a family friend, did what no one else before him had dared: he applied for a Nelson Mandela scholarship to study at the University of Cape Town (UCT), the best university in Africa, and won it. I was 15 at the time and his achievement gave me clear evidence that there was more to life than just “getting a job.” I too wanted to break new ground and leave a lasting impression. I believed that I belonged at UCT where I could learn from and contribute to the greatest leaders in Africa. If he could be a leader then so could I.

In 1998, only 4 years after South Africa’s first democratic election, I was accepted to Grey College School, one of only three black students out of a thousand. My peers, mainly wealthy Afrikaans students, spoke a different language, played different sports and alienated me during group projects. This extremely difficult environment fueled my determination to forge an easier pathway for other minority students and I focused on building bridges to my classmates. After a while, I excelled socially and academically, was ultimately elected to a prestigious position as prefect, and graduated with distinction. When I earned a very competitive scholarship and attended UCT, I developed my analytical skills and brought creative thinking into the classroom. My groundbreaking efforts and mentorship of friends in Deneysville led to Letshelo Lioma and Monica Nchochoba, other minority students, attending UCT two years after I did. My achievements further broke the color barrier and helped more Deneysville minority students to succeed at UCT. I had done it; I led an emergence of new leaders.

Strangely, the pride I felt in my achievement was quickly replaced with a sense of emptiness. At this point, I realized that the only way to keep myself motivated was to set higher and higher groundbreaking goals. The next one was to build an influential resource-driven company that could further develop Africa.

In pursuit of this dream I entered the financial sector, specifically commodities. I wanted to build my commodity skills and at the same time inspire and motivate others who came after me to excel in the corporate world. This goal drives me to reach an executive position at Securtec so that I can promote employment equality at the executive level within the firm and the entire country. This will show people that it really is possible to succeed in business today as a black South African with determination and hard work.

In six years, I will launch and lead a market-leading, multinational private equity fund focused on the resource industry. Africa is a resource
continent with enormous potential. Through my fund, I intend to develop regional African economies, while also building a world-class company that creates job opportunities and gives back to local communities. I hope to inspire South Africa by creating entrepreneurial leaders that will combat the high unemployment rate of 27% that plagues our country.

Earlier this year, I attended a leadership summit aimed at sharing intellectual capital where prominent leaders such as Michael Porter, Tony Blair and Sir Terry Leahy spoke. Sitting in the crowd, I imagined myself in the future breaking another barrier, giving a speech to thousands of people and inspiring them with my own story.

12

Imagine your work obligations for the afternoon were cancelled and you found yourself “work free” for three hours, what would you do? (500 words)

I would kick off my free time by going to the next restaurant on my “to eat” list. During my childhood, the delicious smells emanating from my grandmother’s stove got me hooked on cooking. Inspired by the TV show “Chef Patel,” I often spent Sundays in college organizing “cook-offs” with my hallmates. In New York, friends would call to ask for restaurant recommendations, and my vivid descriptions of dessert recipes even convinced one to become an avid baker.

Earlier this year, I spearheaded the Culinary Series at the India Institute. Realizing food is a great medium through which to share culture, the goal was simple: give prospective members the opportunity to enjoy Indian cuisine, while educating them on the important historical, cultural, and social influences behind the food. For the kickoff event, I visited several Indian restaurants in the city, and reached a deal with a Food Network featured restaurant, negotiating down the cost for our event by offering to connect them with food bloggers and marketing contacts that I knew.

To plan the budget, my team focused on maximizing profits. However, I spoke with the India Institute Senior Directors, and discovered that their main objective was actually increasing membership. Subsequently, I decided to lower ticket prices by 25%; this not only drew more people to the event, increasing membership after two years of no growth, but also won us more funding from the Senior Directors going forward.
After scouting out my potential next restaurant for the Culinary Series, I would go swim another set of laps in the pool. At age fourteen I still didn’t know how to swim, but was up for a challenge – literally being thrown into the water when I joined Thompson’s Gator Swim Club. As I struggled to learn flip turns my first season, a trail of white water clouded my view as other swimmers, most two or three years younger than I, sprinted by. During weekend swim meets, the crowd admired the accomplished swimmers who raced ahead of me, but by the time I swam, spectators had made their way to the food stand. Beyond this first lane, I watched former Olympic Coach Thompson pushing along his promising young athletes.

To improve faster, I attended 5am morning practices. As the only junior member, it was a rare opportunity to get personal attention from my coach. Sometimes, we reviewed videotapes of my swimming to work on technique. Other times, I practiced diving into the water through foam “noodles” that were formed into rings. By the end of these practices, my stomach would be red from the belly flops. However, the hard work paid off: by senior year, I was Captain of the high school Varsity Team, was awarded Bay State Conference All-Star, and qualified for the State Competition. Swimming taught me invaluable lessons about hard work and determination, propelling me to succeed as a small fish in the large Wharton undergrad and Wall Street ponds. Jumping back into the pool never fails to bring back my childhood moments and fuel me to succeed.

Give a candid description of yourself, stressing the personal characteristics you feel to be your strengths and weaknesses and the main factors, which have influenced your personal development, giving examples when necessary (600)

Determination and adaptability: these qualities sustained me at times during my international upbringing. When I was 15 years old, my parents sent me to San Francisco, California to attend high school. I bid my parents and friends farewell and started my new life away from home. Being a teenager in a foreign country had me tongue-tied. In fact, I went through my first week of school proclaiming, “I don’t remember,” to every question. And much to my horror, I actually meant to say, “I don’t understand!”
However, the language barrier and culture differences ultimately taught me how to adapt. Instead of turning to fellow Korean classmates, I was determined to understand this new environment and overcome this cultural barrier. With my broken English, I tried out for the drama club. I still remember how lost I felt during my first drama practice, being expected to improvise lines in a new language. But I did not give up. I took my time, used the dictionary and practiced all day. Luckily, my classmates were encouraging enough to invite me to their homes to practice. I carefully observed the way they said and expressed the lines. And after a month of practice, I landed a role with 10 English lines in the play.

This experience was a life-changing lesson for me because it made me realize how embracing change and hard work can pay off. I carried this learning towards my career as a consumer analyst. My determination and keen observation had helped me put myself in my client’s shoes and identify effective solutions to their problems. My ability to embrace changes also was the motivation behind my move to return to Korea and join the educational travel start-up at Abacus International. And in terms of my personal life, I wanted to share my cultural adaptation experience with others. That was the reason I led volunteering positions to help immigrants in San Francisco and Sydney.

While determination has allowed me to take on challenges, stubbornness is my key weakness. I remember when I was 12, some international friends came to visit me over summer holidays. Before they arrived, I spent a week researching places to visit and making restaurant reservations. To make sure I maximized their stay, I made a daily calendar and laid out activities down to the hour each day. When the planning was done, I was proud to show them all the best parts of my hometown. But as it turned out, my friends were not as excited as I was about seeing tourist site after site. After one day following my “military style” schedule in the crowded city, they were exhausted and suggested that we skip a few sites on the next day. After a few days, my friends eventually told me directly that they could not go on with my schedule anymore. My initial reaction was to defend my detailed plan but seeing their exhausted faces, I realize that I might have focused way too much on the logistics of the trip, forgetting that the purpose was to catch up and hang out together.

From this incident, I realize that sometimes people have different interpretations of a goal. And instead of drilling details and doing things
my way, I learned to take a step back, listen to others and make decisions based on the big picture.

14

What will the people in your Cluster be pleasantly surprised to learn about you? (Maximum 250 words)

Let’s play “Two Truths and a Lie.”

1. I’ve completed several ultra-marathons.
2. I taught myself how to read and write Japanese by watching Japanese dramas.
3. I’m a cocktail aficionado who can’t mix drinks.

Which is the lie?

Number one is true. Every year, I run 108 miles from Queens to the tip of Long Island, a multi-day mental and physical challenge reminding me that I can accomplish anything, from closing a 20-million dollar deal to launching my own company.

Number two is also true. Despite being a native Japanese speaker with strong ties to my cultural roots, I am embarrassed to say that I couldn’t actually read Kanji until my teens. In eighth grade however, I became addicted to the thrill of Japanese dramas and saw a perfect learning opportunity. I watched every episode with subtitles, memorizing characters that I didn’t recognize. Later, my self-taught Japanese got me hired by Toshiba, and I now view everything I do as another learning opportunity.

Number three is... a lie! While I am most definitely a fan of good cocktails, I’m proud to say that I’m also quite the bartender! My travels along with my passion for learning about new drinks have fueled my interest in bartending. From old fashions to the latest cosmos, I love experimenting with international ingredients and have even launched my own blog “The Undercover Bartender” to share my creations. Perhaps I’ll share my latest recipes as a member of the CBS Wine and Spirits Club!
Introduce yourself to your future Ross classmates in 100 words or less.

My name is Jack Fantaga and I want to disrupt education. I started as a mild-mannered analyst for Apple, but after seeing firsthand the challenges in education through my work with Teen Talent and Dynamo Economics, I decided to take matters into my own hands and become an education consultant. Whether it’s using knock-knock jokes to teach English or using Anchorman for economic theory, I embrace unconventional, disruptive, technology-driven approaches to education. I want to work alongside public schools and leverage technology to help drive down the performance gap through innovative education strategies like blended learning.

Showcase: First to Final
Streamlining for CBS

Describe a personal experience and how it has influenced who you are today. This essay should have a personal rather than a professional focus. (Maximum 500 words)

First Version:
In 2008, when I was in Princeton University, I served as the vice president for the Princeton Japanese Student and Scholar Association. And I was nominated as the director for the Spring Blossom Festival Event (a most important annual festival for Japanese) to get together the Japanese community in New Jersey/New York area and to welcome new-coming students from Japan. The whole process took me three months to prepare. The event lasted two hours and included 17 programs.

During the period, I emailed and phoned hundreds and thousands of times to have dynamic communication with different personnel with responsibilities that ranged from stage performance, flyers, menus, light, photograph, and video record, etc. A great number of memories reside in my mind and will never be wiped off. I highlight some of the most impressive stories: First, it was the first time that I initiated a 20-min
stage show, which had never appeared on Princeton Spring Blossom Festival event. I composed the script and assigned it to a team to take responsibility. Second, it is the first time that I organized a fashion show to show up in the event and the first time we used software to make a 10-min new movie with a combination of different scenes from many old movies to tell a completely new story. Third, most of the actors are science and engineering PhDs/Masters, who are timid and reluctant to show on stage, so I visited their labs and apartments one by one and persuaded and encouraged them to participate in the show. It is the hardest part to successfully ask some stubborn techies and geeks to step on the stage to sing, dance and perform talk show! The event finally ended up with around 90 actors and more than 900 audiences, which my business school friend described as “the best ever case of human resource practice.” The event was finally reported by local newspaper. And from that year after, Spring Blossom event began to have fashion show, mini-show. Importantly, the event cultivates intimacy, friendships and a future network, especially among new students who had just arrived to the United States. It helped them assimilate to a new life!

Since then I became much more confident and I dug out my leadership potential which I never felt of myself before. I learned to be an initiator rather than a follower. These characteristics have shaped me inwardly and tremendously. Then after graduation in 2009, I began have idea in mind to initiate an enterprise rather than simply be a follower or worker. This led to my first startup in 2010. Several years later, this spirit of innovation and initiation also led me to found the first Consulting Club in University of Illinois history, to finish a pioneering job supposedly done by business school students. I took one year to accomplish the process from initiating, founding the club, organizing lectures and presenting to club members cases. During the past five months, the club has increased its size from zero to 60 members, including undergraduate, Master and PhD. To conclude, I believe this character of innovation and initiation has already become part of my personal traits and it will affect me dramatically in the future as well.

The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly:
Underneath all of these details is a great story about stepping up to an unprecedented challenge and knocking it out of the park. More importantly, the applicant took some lifelong lessons away from it. But right now, the narrative has way too much going on to be easily understood. The conclusions at the end are admirable, but it would be
more effective to go even deeper into how the lessons learned contributed to these later successes.

Final Version:

From scientist to fashionista, pretty awesome, right?

In 2008, at Princeton University, I was nominated for director of the Spring Blossom Festival Event, a huge celebration in the Japanese student community. Through hundreds of daily emails and twice as many phone calls, I took charge of flyers, menus, lighting, photography, video and a 3-hour stage performance. Among the 17 events, the most dazzling were a 15-minute comedy sketch with 5 performers and 12 crewmembers, and the fashion show with 17 models and 25 crewmembers. After a long day in the lab, I’d go home and be writing sketch-comedy until 3 a.m. I also led casting calls, asking engineering and science students to become part-time comedians or fashion models. That’s where the trouble started.

“Absolutely not!” It turns out that science majors aren’t fans of the catwalk. I was perplexed: “how to get these techies on-stage?” When I asked them to perform, they said they weren’t qualified for the show or made up excuses. Thinking on my feet, I prodded out any previous performing experience: “You played violin as a kid right? It’s the same!” From that point on, it was all encouragement - “You can make it! You’ve got talent!” Finally, I let them know that the show wasn’t a competition. Instead, this would be a fun way to make new friends. “No pressure!” I promised. By the time I was done, 25 people agreed to participate in the show!

After 4 weeks of practice, 90 performers took the stage in front of a sold out crowd of 900 people. The show was a roaring success and was even covered by Japanese Press, a publication reaching the northeast’s entire Japanese community. Our show helped introduce new students to life in America, and many Americans to a wonderful Japanese festival. Best of all, I made lifelong friends: I met my business partner at this event, which led to my pharmaceutical startup in California.

Through this show, I learned to be a risk-taker rather than a follower and learned to come up with new ideas on the spot, instead of waiting for other people’s suggestions. This shaped my character tremendously, pushing me to become a scientist, who will always research the unknown and think in innovative ways, which will help me deliver novel products. Subsequently, I also learned to take the initiative by stocking my CRO’s
Part 2: Personal

catalog with 300 all-new products, to distinguish our start-up from the competition, increasing total annual sales by 40%.

Finally, before the show, I was fairly shy, but this experience pushed me to become more confident in directing others. Without the confidence gained from directing this show, I would have never been able to persuade clients to purchase our products, to argue with manufacturers for materials and equipment and to coordinate and manage teams on academic and scientific projects.

Admissionado Says:
This story was streamlined tremendously and given more narrative structure, and behold! The results are tremendous. What was initially a list of festival events has become a deep story of personal growth. We can now feel, together with the applicant, how being thrust outside of one’s comfort zone and overcoming difficulties completely changed the applicants perspective from that of a follower to that of a leader. At the same time, we get a sense for the applicant’s penchant for creative thinking and fun, a great combination when combined with a scientific mind!

Share with us your list of "25 Random Things" about YOU. Your complete list should not exceed 2 pages.

1. I am happily married to a girl I met when I was 3 years old, although we only started dating 20 years after that fateful first encounter. Definitely not love at first sight!
2. I first saw the heartbeat of my 6-month old baby on my 27th birthday.
3. I took 15 social dancing courses in college, half of them for credit, as a break from all the upper level science courses I was taking at the time. My favorite was West Coast popping and locking but I also took Country Western out of a desire to try new things and test myself.
4. I love Dim Sum and although I have had it at multiple restaurants in Hong Kong, I still think that Chung King in New York City has the best Dim Sum.
5. I was born in Xi’an China, home of the terracotta warriors. My connection to China’s culture and people was a driving force behind my first startup - Wushan.co.cn.

6. Although born in Northern China, I can’t stand noodles and dumplings, Northern staple foods. However, my family loves them and much conflict arises when dinnertime comes - they usually win, but after some negotiation I get to pick dessert.

7. I moved to the US when I was 6 years old, but moved back to China when I was 10, then back to the US when I was 12, then back to China when I was 15, and then finally settled in the US when I was 20. As a result of this, I am fluent in Mandarin Chinese and taught Chinese to high school students when I was a college senior. I helped one of my students receive an 800 on her SAT Chinese subject test.

8. I love to read biographies. My first biography was "The Autobiography of Malcolm X." I have worn a watch every single day since finishing the epilogue of this book.

9. I love buying books I find useful as gifts for people. The first gift I gave my future wife was in fact a book, entitled "The New Thigh Diet For Women." I still get a hard time from her.

10. My favorite plant is the lotus. This white flower makes me feel very serene and watering it every few days helps me concentrate.

11. I am having trouble naming my unborn child because we need to give the child both a Chinese and English name.

12. I love public speaking. My first MC act was for a rodeo contest in Texas. I have been MC for multiple Chinese New Year events in college since. My favorite part of being an MC is making the audience laugh and get involved.

13. While representing my current lab at an International HPV vaccines conference, had an unforgettable ski trip in Mont Tremblant, Canada. It was my first time skiing and I made it all the way down from the peak, even accidentally zipping down a blue slope.

14. I started kayaking as a hobby with my wife. We enjoy watching for birds and turtles in lakes and rivers near New York and New Hampshire. Our first adventure together was during our honeymoon in Samoa, when we circled our island resort in a double kayak.

15. I have a sister named Linda who is currently studying western literature as a college freshman in Tucson, Arizona. I enjoyed spending hours reading with her as a child, although I prefer non-fiction while she prefers fiction.
16. I enjoy fishing with my uncle.
17. I was crazy about badminton during college, and even played for 3-4 hours a day in 100-degree weather when visiting China. I entered a badminton tournament in Beijing, but was eliminated in the first round. OK - I’m not good, but I never back down from a challenge.
18. I entered a humorous speech contest at my Toastmasters club during college and won second place. It was about my dream of playing in the NBA, and I concluded that the reason I failed was because I hated eating my veggies as a child.
19. I love Hip-Hop music, and started listening to it regularly after taking a break dance course in college. My favorite song is 2Pac’s "Dear Mama," because it reminds me of my mother.
20. I won first place in the county with baseball little league team Wildcats when I was in 6th grade. I hadn’t felt that much pride again until my website’s servers went live last year.
21. I have to have breakfast first thing in the morning, regardless of what time I wake up.
22. I spent a night at a Bed and Breakfast in the township of Bloemson, which is a 30-minute drive outside of Johannesburg, South Africa. I tasted the clamor of a crowded South African township and saw first-hand the struggles of the townspeople. My passion for global health was ignited, later leading me to found my university’s R.E.L.I.E.F chapter.
23. I spent Christmas 2010 in Uganda with other RELIEF chapter leaders as its first student convoy to the country. We celebrated by cooking a homemade Christmas dinner and having drinks with our team’s doctors and Ugandan Country Director Mark Leblanc.
24. My wife’s and my wedding bands were a special gift from my best friend and roommate in college, Jamie Lee. I know that our wedding bands are unique, and that Jamie and I can always depend on each other for help.
25. I plan to take my wife on a horseback trek through China to immerse in the scenery, local culture and history. This was inspired by reading 腹臢英雄, or "The Legend of the Condor Heroes," a famous novel when I was a junior high student in China.
PART 3: PROGRAM
PART 3: PROGRAM

The fitting room

Let’s say you’re looking for a new pair of pants and you come across a stylish pair of jeans that you fall in love with instantly. However, the jeans are Extra Small, and when you go to try them on, you can’t get the pant legs up past your knees. Let’s face it: the jeans may be amazing, but they’re not a good fit.

When schools ask you why you’re interested in their program, and how you think it will help you achieve your goals, they want to know two things. First, that you’ve even looked into the program -- if your essay only includes generic thoughts and phrases like “top-notch curriculum” and “various clubs,” they’ll assume that you never looked any deeper than a rankings list. And if you didn’t care, why should they? Believe us when we say that research is key here. At the very least, lose yourself in their website for a few hours, following link after link.

Second, they’re wondering about fit. Do they really have what you need? Are you the kind of student they’re looking for? A good fit (say, an aspiring tech entrepreneur and a school famed for its tech classes and entrepreneurial program) means that you’re more likely to attend if they accept you, and more likely to achieve your goals once you’ve been through their program. A bad fit means... the opposite. If you’re aiming to become a consultant or a project manager, it’ll be hard to find a bad fit... but equally hard to prove a good one. The more nonstandard your goals are, the more polarized your responses will be.

Our best advice is this: if you have no idea why a school is a good fit for you (or how they’ll help you achieve your goals), you need to do more digging. Email a student, read a campus blog, research alumni, comb through course descriptions, whatever. But don’t try to fake it! The essays showcased here demonstrate that the applicants have specific knowledge of the programs they’re applying for... and a real desire to attend!
Part 3: Program

Columbia Business School is located in the heart of the world’s business capital - Manhattan. How do you anticipate that New York City will impact your experience at Columbia? (Maximum 250 words)

To be a dynamic leader who leverages capital within the tech industry, I need the perspective that only New York City can provide. Attending events such as New York Technology Week or the Cloud Solutions forum will help me learn new perspectives on the future of the industry and connect with energy leaders. I especially look forward to the annual talk on game-changing developments in the Big Data and analytics industry such as Wolfram Alpha’s computational framework or friction-free online shopping.

NYC will also provide the innovation resources I need to find new ways to leverage my start up as a competitive value. Having local access to people like Jenny Tang of Jump Associates, who specializes in taking new ideas to the market, will give me an opportunity to discuss ways to drive innovation within the risk-adverse software industry.

Many NYC non-profits share my passion for providing access to safe sustainable food. I want to work with “project: food” and its passionate founder, Ronald Clarkson, to help them more efficiently provide sustainable farming solutions by applying the lessons I have learned in the Peace Corps around working with local communities and governments to ensure project sustainability. Through events such as the NYC International Food Forum, I will leave CBS with the skills to implement programs that add both social and business value. I look forward to the plethora of opportunities presented by NYC, and will take advantage of them to be a leader in the tech, innovation, and social impact sectors.

Why are you pursuing an Evening MBA at this point in your life? (300 words)

I am currently building on my nine highly productive years at Samuel & Leftman and honing my abilities in corporate management to take the next step towards becoming a CFO. Pursuing a Booth evening MBA will
allow me to apply my education to my current position at Seneley, and continue developing my skill set moving forward.

My desire to obtain a Booth MBA began when I moved to Chicago to begin my career at S&L. Through three years in the audit practice and two years overseas, I led large multi-national client projects, securing three promotions. I then worked in the intense and highly competitive Transaction Recommendation practice, consulting on more than 40 private equity and corporate M&A transactions including Foxcom’s $23 billion acquisition of Rem Circuitry.

Subsequently, I took my current senior financial management position at a local manufacturer to hone my abilities in corporate management and round out my skill set. That’s where a Booth MBA comes in: my employer (Seneley) strongly supports my pursuit of an MBA and appreciates the value it adds to the company, committing to fully sponsor my degree. Having graduated from your part-time MBA program in 1989, my supervisor speaks enthusiastically of Booth’s contribution to his success. While I developed robust project management, accounting and corporate finance skills at S&L, and am bolstering long-term corporate management skills at Seneley, a Booth MBA will broaden my skill set in marketing, strategy development, communications and M&A financing – all essential as I pursue my plan to become a more comprehensive strategic business professional, and rise through the ranks at Seneley. It will enable me to help Seneley achieve its strategic growth objectives and prepare for the day when I will be called upon to step into the most important financial role of a company – that of CFO.

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How will you contribute to and make a lasting impact on the Goizueta Business School community as a student or alumnus? Please limit your response to 300 words.

When my parents were laid off from small, state-owned factories during the Chinese economic reform in 1990s, we had to borrow money for living expenses. This experience is why I desire to improve China’s money flow to vitalize industries and individual companies as a portfolio strategist at a sovereign wealth fund like CIC.
As a risk manager for Citigroup and DBS Bank over the past 5 years, I’ve learned how money runs the economy, witnessed passionate entrepreneurs get rejected for bank loans, and understood the tight connection between a bank’s operational risk and its product strategy. I am committed to devising better strategies to fund small businesses in China.

The difficulties I faced growing up, and being consistently challenged by front-office sales in my risk management role, is why I pursue leadership roles, challenge the status quo and face obstacles. In university, I arranged more than 20 activities for the student union. In my role at DBS, I worked closely with the VP in Consumer Banking to achieve a 35% reduction in operational loss for the department, and even encouraged colleagues to work out in the gym. At Emory, I’ll take a leadership role in Finance Club, where I can organize an exchange of ideas between bankers, consultants, and industry elites. I can also promote cross-industry learning in course work, and strengthen the communication between Chinese and U.S. students through clubs, projects, and recreational activities.

By connecting with 10,000 Goizueta alumni, I will be part of a global family post-MBA. Keeping in touch with alumni working in key industries like TMT and FMCG in China will allow me to make informed investment decisions. I would like to be an alumni mentor to offer financial industry insights and provide career advice to future students.

Describe why you are interested in becoming a part of the Columbia community. (Maximum 250 words)

I can see it now: I’m in the heart of New York, business capital of the world. To my right a venture capitalist ready to fund my projects, to my left my future partner in my company. This is what I’ll gain from Columbia’s unique cluster system and student clubs.

With more club activities than any other leading school, Columbia is the perfect environment to launch my dreams. The Healthcare Industry Association (HCIA) will expand my horizons by inviting outside speakers to discuss a variety of related issues. Specifically, for 2011’s annual conference, co-organized by HCIA and the Healthcare and Pharmaceutical Management Program (HPM), I’m particularly interested in the Venture Capital and Entrepreneurship Panel, Emerging Markets Panel and Medical
Technologies Panel. I’m also thrilled to hear from executives including Amelia Lobos, Vice President of Strategy from Boston Hospitals, and Takashi Sito, Marketing Officer from HenchHealth.

Taking a leading role, I intend to initiate the first student-led HCIA panel forum among members with previous healthcare industry experience, in order to share knowledge among my fellow students. As a speaker, I will discuss my professional experience running my CRO, and intriguing stories of innovative start-ups in Champaign, Illinois. Products I intend to discuss include drug-distributing bandage coating, fiberglass tissues to substitute collagen as biomedical material, and new specialty pharmaceuticals with unique controlled-release technology, all of which I helped invent.

With these plans and my strong track record in Healthcare, I hope to become a valued member of the CBS community.

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How will a Wharton MBA help you achieve your professional objectives?

Many people don’t really like banking – including bankers. The first day I pushed through the turnstiles at JP Morgan, I feared I was venturing into a land of dull work. However, from day one, the brilliant people and innovative thinking had me hooked.

I have worked for the past three years in JP Morgan’s Clarity group, which is responsible for assessing and clearing all potential pieces of new business. We reach out to senior bankers, scrutinize client histories, and analyze position data to uncover potential conflicts of interest, mitigating risk and determining which opportunities JP Morgan can pursue. In this role, I see a side of banking that is fascinating: the balancing act of protecting our reputation while serving our clients.

My experience, helping bankers to see the larger, more global impacts of potential transactions, is an excellent foundation for my long-term goal: a role as a divisional COO at an investment bank. This role is a perfect fit for my background since I have worked with nearly all JP Morgan’s divisions guiding business plans. My unusual experience has led me to identify changes I’d like to introduce to the banking sector, including heightened risk management, community engagement, and increased transparency. As a divisional COO, I would be positioned to do exactly that.
Directly out of Wharton, I will join a group like Corporate Investments or Market Risk Analysis at JP Morgan. There I will learn how a bank manages its non-transaction risks, such as ensuring there is enough cash on hand, sourcing funding, and safeguarding shareholder value. To lead effectively as COO, I will require expertise in areas beyond the traditional focus on revenue-producing business units.

Wharton suits this goal perfectly. I am especially drawn to Wharton’s commitment to continuous improvement. When I spoke with a friend who recently graduated from Wharton, she described how students are always evaluating (even revamping) their curriculum, clubs, and even how activities are structured. Such self-evaluation skills will be essential in rethinking the management and continuous improvement of investment banks.

Further, Wharton’s strong core finance courses will be essential for my career. I’m hard-pressed to find a better course for me than Professor Richard Herring’s Issues in International Banking, given its mix of analytical frameworks and historical analysis (as opposed to just cases, for example). This combination of historical precedents with the math to back them up will make me a far more effective leader. I am also excited by the broad range of Wharton’s electives, and the fact that students can now experience them during their first year. For all these reasons and more, Wharton is exactly where I want to be.

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Showcase: First to Final
Addressing the Prompt for LBS

What is the School’s responsibility to you and what is your responsibility to the School? (400 words)

First Version:
I am an eclectic mixture of Russian, Iranian, and French culture, having spent six, eight, and seven years in each country, respectively. As such, I will be a valuable addition to the diverse London Business School community, and will contribute both inside and outside the classroom.
Within the lecture hall, my aim is to leverage my extensive experience creating executive reports in a data-heavy environment, hence fortifying the overall strength of the peer group and its discussions in core courses, such as “Data, Models and Decisions”, “Financial Accounting”, and “Operations Management.” Furthermore, my experiences as a perpetual expatriate have taught me how to communicate with others and create an environment that is comfortable and conducive to the voicing of different opinions. I seek to utilize this expertise to enrich the academic setting and my study group by working to ensure that all of my colleagues have a chance to participate, and thus learn from one another.

In the extracurricular arena, my goal is to become involved in several student clubs. I am especially eager to become a member of the Eastern Europe Club and to help in organizing amazing events such as the Eastern Europe Conference, thus helping acquaint my fellow students with a region that, to my knowledge, is relatively underrepresented at London Business School. In my second year, I will lead a Career trek to this region; my preferred destination for this is either Kiev or, political situation permitting, Moscow, where I could act as a guide and a conduit to strengthen the relationship between the region and the LBS brand. In short, my intention is to bring my high energy levels to the London Business School campus and to become involved in as many activities, academic or otherwise, as my waking time permits.

The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly:

What’s good about this essay is that it demonstrates a lot of research. Nice! But there are two principal problems with this essay. First, it’s extremely dry. This guy’s essay will be a lot more compelling with a little more personality and a little less stiff formality. Second, and CRUCIALLY, the applicant doesn’t answer the question. LBS wants to know what the applicant’s responsibility to the school is, which goes beyond just what he/she plans on contributing. And there is no mention of the school’s duty to the applicant. Gotta answer the question!

Final Version:

As a student, I have three major obligations to the School. The first is to use my experience and expertise – the lessons learned by living on three continents, completing two university degrees, and working in financial services in order to enrich the classroom. For example, I have very specific knowledge of how large banks react to complicated regulatory environments. This expertise will surely be of interest to some of my classmates, and I have a responsibility to share my insights.
My second obligation is to be an integral part of the London Business School community, not just another paying customer. I hope to become a productive member of the School, contributing to its classroom, clubs, and events with all my efforts. By becoming immersed in these activities, I can take full advantage of amazing opportunities, while also enhancing the value that they provide to other students, by virtue of my own contributions.

My final responsibility is to act as a conduit between the School and other interested parties. When visiting the School in May 2012, current students were actively promoting the program and its benefits, which encouraged me to apply. As a student, I intend to reciprocate by organizing events and informational sessions. Upon graduation, it becomes my responsibility to be a positive representative of what it means to be educated at London Business School. I will be an ambassador for the School and an active member of regional alumni organizations. In return, I have the right to an education that offers the knowledge I need to achieve my goal of designing financial products. The School must create stimulating learning experiences and invite illuminating guest speakers and lecturers to both inspire me and prepare me to be a business leader in the future.

I also have the right to a Career Services department whose personnel and activities are devoted to my development. It is the responsibility of the School to provide students with multiple opportunities to participate in workshops and networking events where we can hone our professional skills and expand our career prospects. Finally, the School is also responsible for arranging career fairs that attract top employers and give each student the chance to interface with recruiters. Ideally, the School should do everything in its power to bring attractive companies to campus and allow its students the chance to obtain multiple job offers prior to graduation.

**Admissionado Says:**

In the first essay the applicant skirted around answering the question. In the final version what we have is a crisp and direct response to the prompt. Crisp and direct is good! Furthermore, the applicant was still able to leverage the research he conducted, which helps to convince the admissions committee that he really wants to go to LBS. The writing style is also a bit less stodgy. While this essay isn’t necessarily a page-turner, it’s direct, thoughtful, and clear.
When asked by your family, friends, and colleagues why you want to go to Duke, what do you tell them? Share the reasons that are most meaningful to you.

(2 pages, double-spaced)

When I visit my father, a successful entrepreneur in the pharma industry, we go for long walks in the mornings and often talk about my future plans—and thus, lately, Fuqua. When he asks why I want to attend Fuqua, I first explain that at Fuqua I’ll attain the best combination of business and biotech education, necessary for achieving my long-term goal of commercializing early-stage biotech products by launching a startup. Fuqua’s academic structure and abundant biotech learning resources from the Health Sector Management (HSM) program are what I need to thrive in my internship and first job post-MBA. The global biotechnology firms I am targeting—RebeccaRx, Genbiotech, and GenUp—all recruit at Fuqua and target HSM grads. Fuqua’s 6-week per term curriculum would allow me to take 3-4 HSM electives in my first year, as my friend and current 2nd-year HSM student Michael Patel has done. Having taken Health Care Operations and Biotechnology: Management of Drug Discovery, I will have an edge during my summer internship, especially important as, according to my 2nd year MBA contacts, companies recruit heavily from their intern pools. Speaking with Michael, I am especially excited about the Health Care Practicum courses and exploring hands-on learning opportunities like mentored study at Quintiles and the business consulting project involving the Duke School of Medicine. My friend Catherine Johnson ’05, director of Global Innovation at Duke Medical School, is sponsoring many current HSM students and is actively integrating the MBA program with the healthcare opportunities at the medical school. With industry specific skills that I can only gain from HSM coursework, I’ll have the best preparation to obtain a position at a leading biotech company.

I tell my father that my plan is to continue building management skills, biotech-specific business knowledge and operations experience by working as a project manager at a leading biotech company such as GenUp after Fuqua. With my strong scientific background I am already particularly qualified for managing biotech projects and leading scientists, and at the SJU I have risen from research assistant into a leadership role usually held by doctorates. However, as he agrees, I need a Fuqua MBA with its unparalleled HSM electives to transition into a project management role in a biotech firm.
I’ve learned from my father that a network is of the utmost importance. Fuqua’s ideal location in Research Triangle Park will grant access to an abundant network of biotech executives, entrepreneurs, and investors. My plan is to fully utilize this unique resource, attending industry networking events. The annual Duke MBA Health Care Conference will give me the unique opportunity to develop personal ties with speakers and biotech professionals. I am particularly excited about the opportunity to visit local biotech companies on treks, and to learn about the experiences of people like COO of RebeccaRX Chris Hildebrant, by inviting local biotech executives to our classroom - a common occurrence in HSM classes. By expanding my network at Fuqua and later at VimTechnologies, I will lay the groundwork for recruiting a founding team and obtaining investors for starting my own biotech company, I tell my father. I look forward to leveraging my network at the SJU and my father’s network in the biopharmaceutical industry in China to bring in speakers, such as Steve Jameson, Deputy Director of Licensing and Entrepreneurship at the SJU Office of Technology Transfer.

With the opportunity to participate in Duke’s Startup Challenge, Fuqua is the perfect place for an entrepreneur. When I was in college, I first gained my passion for entrepreneurship by founding my university’s Amnesty International chapter and recruited a team that successfully raised $5000. After college, I further developed my entrepreneurial skills as founder of Shizan.cn, where I led a team of 5\7 people, developed a 20-page business plan, and successfully launched our website into the market. I will build on these experiences with a concentration in Entrepreneurship and Innovation. By taking courses like Raising Capital: Financial Instruments, Institutions and Strategy and Intellectual Capital and Competitive Strategy, I will gain well-rounded knowledge on how to finance and build early stage biotech companies. I learned from Louis Bastien, Co-Chair of the Duke Global Entrepreneurship Network and panelist for the Fuqua info session I attended, that many of the finalists in past years have been teams with projects in biotechnology and medical devices. By participating in the Challenge, I will expand my network and gain hands-on experience in writing a business plan and commercializing early stage technologies. When I begin reaching out to investors in my network developed at Fuqua and GenUp, a clearly developed business plan will be necessary to obtain financial backing. The next step will be recruiting top-notch scientists to develop the early stage technologies my company will license to big pharma. My plan is to attend research seminars at Duke Medical School and meet with researchers over coffee to discuss commercialization opportunities, something that I have already
begun doing at the SJU as a technology commercialization consultant, building long-lasting relationships that will help me recruit talent. We end our walk and I gaze at the small lake behind my father’s house as it takes me back to when I went fishing with him as a 9 year old—before he started his pharma company. Now as a biotech professional I recognize the immense challenges he faced. However, I feel invigorated by my decision to apply for a Fuqua MBA. I am certain it will help me trump similar challenges and prepare me for difficult situations that even my father has yet to encounter.

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Showcase: First to Final

Looking Ahead for CBS

Columbia Business School is located in the heart of the world’s business capital - Manhattan. How do you anticipate that New York City will impact your experience at Columbia? (250 words)

First Version:

I’ve lived in Japan and all over the United States: Los Angeles, Baltimore, New Orleans, Houston two separate times, and though I’ve appreciated the individuality of each place I’ve lived, none can compare to New York. Maybe it’s the energy, the speed, the inexplicable edge. Fueled by fierce competition and diversity of all kinds, New York is a hub for development and innovation—a place where everyone is moving and changing.

I’m looking for a well-rounded business school experience that goes beyond just strong academics and professional support. I want to be in an environment that motivates me, keeps me energized and pushes me to reach my full potential.

Having attended Columbia for my undergraduate degree, I am well aware of all the unparalleled intellectual and cultural benefits offered by both Columbia University and NYC. I have fond memories of attending a Ford Speaker Series before hopping on the 1 train for a dance performance of Giselle at Lincoln Center. I remember rushing to internship after internship, pushing through fellow stoic-faced suits during rush hour before returning to the gated sanctuary of campus.
NYC is where I want to be. I want to sit in on Global Healthcare conferences hosted by names like Orton and Randolph Patel before joining the CBS Wine Society on a tasting at Casellula. I want to attend World Leaders Forum discussion before running back to Watson to work on a Masters Class case with my cluster.

It’s that kind of experience that no other school can compete with. Columbia’s location makes it easy for the movers and shakers of the business world to pop in for a lecture. Be it through a one-on-one with Herb C. LeGrand of the Executives in Residence Program or through internships with some of the biggest strategy or healthcare consultancies in the world, I plan on taking full advantage of these resources to aid in my transition into consulting.

**The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly:**

This essay looks backwards more than it does forwards. We don’t really get the sense that the applicant is excited about the prospect of “being an MBA student in New York” so much as just “being in New York.” She certainly knows what New York has to offer, and she peppers her essay with specific references to people and places (which is good!). But we need to move away from her undergrad experience and draw a more direct connection between her goals and how the opportunities afforded by CBS’s position in NYC are going to get her there.

**Final Version:**

Pursuing an MBA in New York City will allow me to build invaluable connections with industry leaders, enhancing both my professional and personal development.

As part of the Health Care Industry Association, I will attend the Healthcare Career Supercharger to network with industry leaders like Marcus Danielson and Fritz Firestone, the chairmen of HCA and C.A.R.E. Additionally, I will join the Management Consulting Association and leverage Columbia’s unique relationships with giants like Deloitte and Bain to facilitate my transition into consulting. Specifically, I will utilize the CBS online alumni database to connect with members of Columbia’s 40,000 strong alumni network and build relationships with alumni currently living in New York and working at Bain and other consultancies.

NYC will also develop my leadership and strategic planning skills through community-focused interest groups. As an undergraduate I was heavily involved with NYC organizations spanning issues like social justice,
education in rural Namibia and opportunities for women. As a strong advocate of women’s empowerment, I will join the Columbia Women in Business Club (CWIB) where in addition to taking advantage of the career services on offer, I hope to establish a mentorship program in the Bronx dedicated to providing disadvantaged young women with academic, career and life guidance from successful female role models. Furthermore, I will balance my academic and professional endeavors by exploring NYC’s hidden secrets. Among my favorites is the Namaste, a speakeasy yoga studio combining my passions for yoga, vegan food, and helping small businesses.

**Admissionado Says:**
Huge improvement! Before we had an essay that mostly talked about the past. Now the essay clearly focuses on how being an MBA student in NYC is going to uniquely help her achieve her goals. We have an essay gazing strongly at the future with a wink towards how the past will inform that future. Lastly, we have a really nice balance here between professional and personal, focusing on the former but paying homage to how much culture NYC has to offer.

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**How will the Wharton MBA help you achieve your professional objectives? (400 words)**

People say I ask a lot of questions. For the three years I worked as a journalist, finding the facts meant finding the story. Now that I work at Injevo, a technology startup that provides global trade intelligence, asking the right questions has helped me grow the company amid uncertainty. In two years, I’ve led an expansion into Latin America, orchestrated a quarterly $300k up-sell strategy, and managed strategic relationships with F500 enterprises like Target and Best Buy. But now I ask myself, what do I need to create technology that changes the world?

My goal is to pursue a career in technology entrepreneurship, and I need a Wharton MBA for my general management education, analytical expertise, and leadership and network development. Post-MBA, I will take a managing role in business development at a large technology company, like Ebay, Facebook, or Microsoft, where I will learn how innovative companies grow and scale. After three to five years, I will start an education technology company that changes the way the world learns.
To excel in a business development role, I’ll have to develop a strategic vision for the company and align engineers, product developers, and sales executives with that vision. Sharp analytical skills will be necessary to quantify the impact of a particular partnership. Finally, in the external negotiation phase, I’ll have to get all sides to agree. To do so, a Wharton education will be invaluable.

In Stuart Diamond’s class, “Negotiations and Conflict Resolution”, I’ll become a better negotiator, which will be essential to structuring revenue-share contracts. Since I’ll be working in technology, Kartik Hosanagar’s “Enabling Technologies” will provide an indispensable overview of the industry’s past and present. I plan to take full advantage of Wharton’s numerous entrepreneurship initiatives, including Founder’s Day and the Wharton Entrepreneurship Club. I will also submit my startup, a language-learning platform, to the Wharton Business Plan Competition. Lastly, I’ll contribute to and benefit from the global Wharton network. My conversations with dozens of alumni have assured me that the Wharton network is accessible, powerful, and empowering.

Experiences at Wharton will teach me how to build and manage a technology business. My fellow students will help me discover new opportunities and become an effective leader. I know that an MBA from Wharton will help me get to where I want to go, so long as I ask the right questions along the way.
PART 4: ACCOMPLISHMENTS
PART 4: ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The trophy case

Theoretically, we all like talking about our accomplishments. In practice, it’s harder than it looks. But that doesn’t mean it’s impossible… you just need three things.

First, you need a mountain to climb. Have you climbed Everest? Yes? Then BAM, you’ve got your essay. If not, you’ll have to come up with another mountain. It doesn’t have to be as tall or as literal as Everest, but if you want to convince us that you’ve achieved something, you have to show us that it was difficult to do. Did others struggle at the same task? Was it way outside your comfort zone and area of expertise? Is it just legitimately, objectively hard (like climbing Everest is)?

Second, you need a point. Your story doesn’t have to be super important (like saving Gotham or inventing the Mac), but it does have to be super important to you. Getting an A on an exam, for instance, is a terrible story choice for most people -- we’ve all taken tons of exams, and if you’re applying to an elite school, you’ve probably aced many of them. But maybe your proudest accomplishment is, instead, getting a B+ on an exam… licensing you to become a youth soccer coach, after recovering from a knee injury. (Keep in mind that you should have some professional AND personal stories ready, because essays will often ask for one, the other, or both.)

Finally, you need a “just the facts, ma’am,” attitude. People will tell you that your application is a chance to brag… but that’s not really the case. More accurately, it’s a chance to NOT be humble. What’s the difference? Well, the first looks like this: “I came up with much better ideas than my team members.” The second looks like this: “I was the only one on my team whose ideas were incorporated into the final solution.” We all know who we want to accept… and who we want to punch in the face.

So get in there and shine a spotlight on yourself, like the following applicants do... making sure to thrill us with the challenge, dazzle us with the tangible results and move us with the personal significance.
What is your proudest achievement outside the workplace, and how has it impacted you? (700 words maximum)

There I was on stage drenched in sweat, ears ringing, fingers raw, and guitar in hand. I felt tired, yet full of adrenaline. I looked to my left and saw three of my best friends and band mates, all with smiles ear to ear. I turned to look out over the crowd, a diverse collection of friends, family, and fans. A raucous chant of “one more song” began to ring out. It was December 2011 and my funk band, The Reservoir Dogs, had just concluded playing our biggest show to date, selling out Smiley Joe’s, the largest music venue in our hometown of Montana Springs.

This show was the culmination of a year consisting of countless hours of writing, practicing, and performing music with the ultimate goal of earning enough money through the band’s exploits to pay for our own self-produced album. The performance at Smiley Joe’s finally gave us enough to begin recording our first LP, which is due for release at the end of February. The immense pride I felt as the band’s lead guitarist and songwriter was enhanced due to my additional role as band manager.

Having a physical record to show bar managers and club promoters is enormously important to the success of a band, as it is the most efficient way to showcase your music is a good fit for their venue. Therefore, from the inception of the band in February 2011, I knew that a record was going to be our ultimate goal. Although each member had a full-time job, we wanted to be able to pay for the record exclusively through the band’s earnings. I determined the vast majority of these earnings would come from playing live shows, well enough to ensure audience growth throughout the year. We recognized there was a lack of funk-based rock ‘n’ roll being created by local bands, and developed a new twist on that old genre by incorporating a variety of unique influences including hip-hop and dance music. I dedicated my efforts to writing original music and choosing complementary covers, as well as booking monthly shows, promoting those shows, and scheduling rehearsals as often as possible. I worked hard to guarantee the band would eventually become a self-sustaining entity, making enough money to create a record that would enhance our future earnings potential exponentially. Standing on stage at the end of our set at Smiley Joe’s represented the achievement of that goal, and I am enormously confident about the future success of the band.
I always felt writing and performing music would be the most difficult part of leading a band, but the management aspect has consistently proven to be more challenging for me. Managing a band has a lot in common with running a small business, and has resulted in tremendous growth in my leadership abilities. Over the past year I scheduled a variety of shows that fostered the determination and flexibility required for us to succeed as a band, booking monthly paid gigs ranging from parking lots to professional venues and arranging unique sets lasting from 20 minutes to 3.5 hours. Managing the band while working full time is exhausting, but it has helped drastically improve my time management skills. Moreover, I learned to develop crucial diplomacy skills necessary for soothing band member disagreements and communicating with difficult venue representatives. Performing live is messy and unpredictable, but my band thrives in that chaos due in part to my calm leadership. Learning to maintain my composure in the most uncertain moments has allowed me to boost the confidence of the people around me, whether they are band-mates, classmates, or co-workers.

The performance that night at Smiley Joe’s was the culmination and validation of a lot of hard work, fun, and growth over the last year. Writing music isn’t black and white; it’s more like having an amorphous vision. Bringing my visions to life in a live setting is one of the greatest feelings in my life. Knowing that The Reservoir Dogs will soon have physical representation of our hard work in the form of a self-produced LP that can launch us into the next phase of our career is incredibly exciting.

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Describe what you believe to be your two most substantial accomplishments to date (if possible specify one personal and one professional), explaining why you view them as such. (400 words maximum)

Talk about dirty business!

Two years ago, to help evaluate the Indian market for a hazardous waste disposal company, I took on the murky world of Indian waste-management. Speaking to over a hundred technicians, dischargers, regulators and disposers, I finished a comprehensive report, working 14 hours a day for 9 weeks. To my astonishment, millions of tons of
hazardous waste were being dumped in India without any proper oversight. Most government officials knew nothing of this, because the culprits always concealed their crimes.

I didn’t wait for things to change: instead I decided to be the one to change them. First I reached out to my friends at Green Feather, an environmental NGO, who informed me that the government was planning to correct this regulatory blind spot but that the process was agonizingly slow. Next I convinced an environmental journalist to help send my research to the related officials, who then invited me to give suggestions on how to craft the legislation.

After months of investigation and discussion, the government finally published a series of targeted regulations to strengthen the disposal of hazardous waste. This accomplishment not only opened a new market opportunity worth US$11 billion for the company we were investing in, but also ensured the health and safety of millions of people.

When the 2008 West Bengal floods hit, I made it my mission to help local children in need. Instead of donating money to the Red Cross as expected, I organized a team of 20 employees to provide tents and supplies to a remote school. As an international team stretching across India, The United Kingdom, Singapore and America, we arrived at the school as the first external volunteers, even when the local infrastructure had not fully recovered.

Our efforts paid off when we saw the children’s smiles. With enough tents to sleep in, they could resume schooling the next day using the books and stationeries we brought. I also taught them an original song during a music lesson, one telling them to be brave in the face of challenges.

This experience taught me that giving money never replaces direct help. More importantly, my actions changed someone’s life - years later, some of these kids wrote to tell me that they’d successfully been admitted to a top local high school and that my example inspired them to give back to society in the future, the same way I did.

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Showcase: First to Final

Developing Context for INSEAD
Describe what you believe to be your two most substantial accomplishments to date (if possible specify one personal and one professional), explaining why you view them as such. (400 words maximum)

First Version:
Volunteering for the Deployment Lead role I knew it was going to be difficult and stressful but I wanted to try a different aspect of the project. For the 3 months leading up to the real migration, I was one of 6 people who, in teams of 3, led the week-long trial migrations – 24/7. Then came the real migration where I was one of 3 people, taking turns on 13 hours shifts across 7 days, leading the migration. I instructed various teams/individuals to perform activities as per the run sheet, ensured people/system readiness for the upcoming activities, waited anxiously for that “It’s complete” message so that I could kick off the next activity, updated the control room and program manager on progress, and dealt with those “we have a problem” moments – such as when the connectivity to one of the backup servers failed. The entire run sheet had more 1200 activities, and with 40,000 clients and $8 billion dollars in assets being moved, there was plenty of attention from senior executives. When the “Reconciliation - passed” message was announced, I breathed a sigh of relief and collapsed at someone’s desk – my toughest and most rewarding week at work was over.

The hardest thing I ever did was, at the age of 18, call my parents from South Africa whilst they were in China and tell them that their son had met with a car accident and passed away. My parents wanted to bury my brother in China so I convinced them that I would handle everything in South Africa and bring him to China. I visited the coroner to identify my brother, dealt with the road traffic authority and police, borrowed money, organized my visa and plane ticket, found a mortician, organized a ceremony in South Africa, organized transportation for the body, and within a week flew to China – all of this whilst coming to grips with what had happened. Arriving at 2 a.m. things got worse - customs refused to let me and my brother out of the airport as I had not brought his passport. After much negotiation and getting a photocopy of the passport faxed, I was released under the condition that I surrender my passport which would be returned when my brothers’ was presented. Coming out of the airport I saw my parents, I hugged them, and that’s when I knew that I had completed what I had to do.
The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly:

While both of these stories were clearly emotionally trying (and in the second case, wrenching), neither comes across as a particularly impressive accomplishment. With the work story, it seems that the applicant was simply going through the motions. What did he learn? What skills did he have to employ to overcome challenges? Was there anything he did to make the migration succeed that a lesser person would not have done? With the second story, it’s definitely hard to write about such a personally tragic situation. But since he’s chosen to do so, our guy needs to focus more on the solutions he came up with rather than the problems he faced.

Final Version:

Having acquired KLN, South Africa’s second largest wealth management company, and VIVCO, owner of the award-winning Compass wealth management platform, National South Africa Bank (NSAB) decided to migrate all KLN accounts onto the Compass platform. Three months before the launch, trial migrations were failing, and a call went out for volunteers to form a deployment team. I volunteered - forming a team of four to manage the migration of 40,000 accounts, representing 70% of NSAB’s wealth management business worth $8.5 billion in assets. I created the plan detailing the migration activities that had to be performed.

On the week of the migration, tensions were high: everyone was tired and I had to ensure that milestones were punctually met. I found myself instructing other teams on when to execute their activities. I was also managing dependencies, updating the control room, and dealing with setbacks. The week-long migration involved 1000+ activities, and had the CEO’s attention, as failure at this scale would have been very embarrassing for KLN. Therefore, when I found out that the accounts were migrated correctly, I breathed a sigh of relief and collapsed at someone’s desk – my toughest, most rewarding week at work was over.

In my personal life, the hardest thing I ever did was, at the age of 18, call my parents in China from South Africa and tell them that their son had passed away in a car accident. My parents wanted to bury my brother in China so I convinced them that I would handle everything in South Africa and bring him to China. Nauseated, bewildered and angry about what had happened, I was unable to concentrate - nonetheless I visited the coroner to identify my brother, dealt with the road traffic authority and police,
borrowed money, organized my visa and plane ticket, found a mortician, organized a ceremony in Cape Town, organized transportation for the body, and a week later flew to China. Arriving at 2 a.m. things got worse - customs refused to let me and my brother out of the airport as I had not brought his passport. After much negotiation and getting a photocopy of the passport faxed, we were released on the condition that I surrender my passport which would be returned when my brother’s was presented. Exiting the airport, I saw my parents; exhausted, relieved and emotionally drained, I hugged them, knowing I had completed what I had to do.

**Admissionado Says:**

What the applicant has accomplished in this final version is to become the protagonist of his own stories. In the previous version, he was more of a passive participant... it seemed like events dictated his actions, rather than the other way around. In the first story, he now talks about how HE volunteered and HE managed the team. And in the second essay, he better articulates how he was able to make tough decisions in an emotionally distraught state.

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**What has been your biggest challenge, and what have you learned from it? (200 words maximum)**

As a preemie with a weak leg, I was homeschooled. I could rarely participate in outdoor activities and seldom had contact with other kids. Lonely and self-contemptuous, I yearned for normalcy.

When I was seven, I was determined to attend school with my peers. With the assistance of a doctor I developed a one-year practice plan to strengthen my legs. I began walking daily for an hour in summer and increased my training slowly, jogging in the fall. The toughest training came during winter. Although I helped myself through the use of a brace, I limped badly, but I stuck to the plan every day and gradually built up strength.

On my first day of school, the classroom was as beautiful as I had imagined: brand new desks and chairs, colorful posters, and enthusiastic teachers and friendly classmates. They even prepared a party to welcome me. I had dreamed of this day, and because of my hard work, it was finally here.
Over the years I continued to challenge myself physically: jogging, Russian dance, and skydiving. There were no limits to what I could do. I came to see myself as a challenge seeker rather than a challenge avoider. This experience taught me the importance of perseverance, and that I can overcome almost any obstacle with determination and confidence.

Showcase: First to Final

*Increasing Enthusiasm for Wharton*

Tell us about a time when you put knowledge into action. (500 words)

**First Version:**

Last winter, I was trying to learn Portuguese and kept hitting a wall. I was enrolled in advanced conversational classes in a prestigious Manhattan language-learning center, but I could barely order dinner, let alone engage in business conversations with Brazilian firms. Instead of passively listening to a teacher go through verb tenses for two hours, what I needed to do was have a conversation with a native speaker and be forced to speak, listen, and think in Portuguese. I thought, why don’t I just find someone in Brazil who might want to have a conversational exchange, and connect via Skype? I scoured the Internet but didn’t find an easy way to do that. So I created one.

I got to work brainstorming a solution to my problem, and within a few weeks I created a basic website for English and Portuguese speakers. I called it “Babel”, since it’s a platform that enables people to find language-learning partners or teachers across the globe. In the few months that it’s been up and running, I’ve helped facilitate several conversations for individuals in the United States and Brazil. Users in both countries have commented that the solution is much needed.

Babel was a solution that I devised to a particular problem I had, and I knew it was a problem that would resonate with other language learners. But it was also much more than that -- it was an example in which I used my linguistic, technological, and entrepreneurial skills to empower others to learn. Specifically, it was the combination of my years of experience
learning languages, along with my more recent expertise using technology to link cultures and solve problems.

I have a lot of experience learning languages. After graduating from college, I moved to small town in China without being able to utter more than 5 phrases of Mandarin. After a year there, my Mandarin ability progressed so much that I was able to give a commencement speech at the school where I taught. For me, the key to learning Mandarin was supplementing lessons with real life conversations. I set up conversational exchanges to make friends and force myself to speak the language. This was the same approach I took to learning Spanish when I studied abroad in Spain, and now I can speak the language fluently. Thus, when I was in the research and ideation phase, I knew that the solution would have to be centered around conversation.

I’ve learned languages, and also I’ve seen firsthand how language creates opportunities. Because of my fluency in Spanish, I was able to interview families of copper miners in Chile’s Atacama Desert, and travel and file reports from Columbia, Argentina, and other Latin American countries. In the same way, I’ve also seen how lacking language ability makes it difficult to progress in a career, especially for those who don’t speak English. In high school I worked with many Mexican immigrants in Houston, Texas, and I saw how just a little more English comprehension can make a big difference and open many doors for them. But just as there is more than one person in a conversation, the benefits of language learning aren’t singled-sided. Thus, my long-term vision includes incorporating features like conversations with certified teachers, charged by the hour, so that students and teachers are both enriched.

When developing the structure for Babel, I used principles that I learned from my job at an enterprise technology company. After working with technology-based solutions on a much larger scale for Fortune 500 companies, I realized that other simple solutions, like social networks and video chat, could vastly improve and simplify the language learning experience. My objective with Babel is made possible due to technologies like voiceover IP and drawing screens (i.e., Skype meets the meeting room).

My objective with Babel is to make it easy for people to find, connect, and communicate, and ultimately to learn a new language via conversation. But it doesn’t stop there. I’m already at work on the next iteration, which includes incorporating Spanish language, as well as developing a network of teachers in Latin America that students can pay for hourly lessons. In
this way, not only would the service enable the share of knowledge and bridge cross-cultural ties, it would also create career opportunities in emerging markets. In that way, I hope to build a company that will create value beyond the business itself.

**The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly:**
This story is certainly intriguing, but right now, there’s too much fluff that’s only tangentially related to the story of creating Babel. The applicant needs a stronger structure to carry the story to the end without wandering all over the place. Moreover, there’s no real excitement in here – our boy created an amazing service to solve a personal problem that has tremendous applications, but he’s writing about it like it was a walk in the park! His tone should reflect some of his entrepreneurial enthusiasm.

**Final Version:**
I’ve seen firsthand how language creates opportunities. Thanks to my fluency in Spanish, I’ve reported from Columbia, Argentina, and other Latin American countries and at Injevo, I led the company’s expansion into Latin America. I quickly realized however, that my Spanish skills didn’t get me very far in Brazil, so last winter I started studying Portuguese.

I enrolled in advanced classes at Word Ahead, a business language school, but I kept hitting a wall. After two months, I could barely order dinner, let alone engage in business discussions with Brazilian firms. As a multilingualist, I was frustrated by my lack of progress: after spending over $700 and a few hours each week in class, it seemed like a waste of time and money.

Part of my problem, I realized, was that I wasn’t having conversations in Portuguese. When I lived in China, I learned to speak Mandarin by conversing with neighbors and colleagues, even when I could utter only a few phrases. I used the same approach to learn Spanish in Spain and throughout Latin America. Instead of going through Portuguese verb tenses for two hours, I needed to be forced to speak, listen, and think in the language.

I knew that if I was going to make progress, I had to augment my classroom learning with conversation. I thought, why don’t I just find someone in Brazil with whom to have a conversational exchange via Skype? There was no easy way to do that, so I made one. Within a couple
months I created a website and called it “Babel,” a platform enabling people to find language partners across the globe.

My objective with Babel was to make it easy for people to connect and learn languages through conversation. Transforming the idea to reality turned out to be tougher than I expected. I didn’t have programming skills or any insight into the online language learning industry. On top of that, there were the myriad other obstacles (different time zones and languages) involved when connecting people across continents.

Undaunted, I started by devouring everything I could find about language learning. I reached out to other companies to get advice on business models and marketing strategies. I bought a domain name and was able to teach myself enough coding to build a modest website. Soon enough, I had users from the US and Brazil, and we were online!

I’ve already started on the next iteration of Babel and have been selected to participate in Startup Leadership, a yearlong incubator program, which will help me take the service to the next level. My upcoming improvements include a Spanish language version, as well as developing a network of teachers in Latin America that students can pay for hourly lessons. Not only will Babel enable knowledge sharing across cultures, it will also create education-based career opportunities in emerging markets. Oh, and I can finally converse in Portuguese.

Admissionado Says:
This structure is SO much more effective. The applicant first describes the importance, then the problem, then the solution, then the struggles he had to make the solution work. In doing so, he makes the narrative 100x easier to follow and 1000x more pleasurable to read. We really get the sense that he is an entrepreneur with purpose here! Right on.
Ahmed Ankara
Amman, Yemen

December ____, 2012

Mr. Rod Garcia
Senior Director of Admissions
MIT Sloan School of Management
50 Memorial Drive
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02142

Dear Mr. Garcia:

It is with the passion and ambition that have successfully driven my professional and personal life that I am pursuing a seat in the 2014 Sloan LGO class.

Spanning over eight countries, my professional and personal achievements in aerospace and sustainability have been effective in inspiring my vision of an environmentally sustainable, socially responsible, and innovative aviation and aerospace industry. The LGO program is a powerful stepping-stone towards facilitating my role in compelling that change and the ideal culture in which I thrive.

Fascinated by planes and aviation while driven by the scarcity of opportunities in the Middle East, I left my family to pursue my passion by studying Aerospace Engineering at the University of Wisconsin. I graduated with High Honors at the top 6% of my class, earning the Distinguished Scholar Award, while leading a class of 50 pledging candidates as Candidate Officer at Alpha Beta Epsilon, the National Aerospace Honor Society. But it was when I piloted my first solo-flight after only 10 hours of Private Pilot License training that I realized my childhood dream.

Upon graduation I joined Nokuma Consulting as a Technology Consultant, working with Bombardier. I successfully led the design and implementation of a supplier management reporting system used by both the 900+ line employees and senior management. This instant impact earned me the highest performance rating among all first and second year analysts nationally.

During a twelve-month sabbatical, I volunteered in Azerbaijan, Jordan, and the West Bank. While organizing and leading empowerment camps,
cultural diversity seminars, and photography workshops for at-risk youth, I learned how to construct and support their creativity as they envisioned a brighter future.

My sabbatical showed me the wide impact professionals and corporations can have in improving the world. And thus, I joined SustainBalance, a boutique-consulting firm aiming to accelerate sustainability in the Middle East. Within 6 months, I moved to an Engagement Lead role, managing the firm’s sustainability projects with billion dollar companies. Most notably, I manage our work with the state owned Yemeni Oil Company, where I lead the development of a sustainability group for the company and 20 of its subsidiaries.

The LGO program is the only program that would prepare me towards my vision. Sloan’s flexible curriculum and action-learning based classes such as the L-Lab and S-Lab will allow me to explore the business strategy and leadership aspects of sustainability. The Aero Engineering program will deepen my understanding of the aerospace industry. The first class academic preparation of MIT is unparalleled. However, it is Sloan’s culture of driven and results-oriented professionals who approach their work with collaboration and humility that attracts me. Such collaborative and open culture was evident when I talked to professor Mark Morison and several LGO, SDM, and other graduate students of MIT. Drawing upon this dynamic culture, I will envision breakthroughs in the Aerospace industry.

I look forward to the opportunity of an interview. Meanwhile, I would be happy to address any questions.

Best regards,
Ahmed Ankara

Describe what you believe to be your two most substantial accomplishments to date (if possible, specify one personal and one professional), explaining why you view them as such. (400 words)

Personal:
When I was accepted into Dartmouth’s Medical Education Program (MEP), which automatically guaranteed my place in Dartmouth’s medical school as an incoming freshman, I was certain that I would follow in my father’s
footsteps in medicine. From childhood, I was groomed to believe this was best for me. As an only child, I didn’t dare to disappoint my Korean parents, figuring that my own career goals would simply align with their expectations of me.

While completing my MEP studies, I was increasingly drawn to Dartmouth’s Entrepreneurship Program. By senior year, I had taken numerous business courses and launched my own startup, which developed an innovative approach to increase the efficiency and ease of performing laparoscopic surgeries. I realized that practicing medicine would not afford me the same creativity and versatility as the business world.

Upon graduation, I traded in my guaranteed medical school spot for a consulting job. Despite my best efforts, my father and I still argue about this life-changing decision, but I’m grateful to have finally found my own voice. My most significant personal accomplishment is that despite disappointing my father, I have made the right choice in my career, following my true passion.

Professional:
Last year, I persuaded the ToDo co-founders to allow me to bring on a new client, AM Records. After researching AM Records and the data management field, I recognized an industry as-yet untouched by our company, with the potential to generate over $300,000 in annual revenue. The ToDo co-founders were wary of this unfamiliar space because of its extreme technical nature. Nevertheless, I singlehandedly spearheaded the efforts through numerous meetings with my CEO and the client, volunteering to lead an initial 2-month trial phase.

During the trial, I had to quickly earn the client’s confidence, a challenging feat considering their mercurial nature. The work required intense attention to detail, and the slightest error could have catastrophic repercussions. At one point, we were in danger of losing the client, potentially jeopardizing ToDo’s revenue goals. Thus, I began proactive measures to carefully document all correspondences, ensuring that my team was doing precisely what the client had asked. Thanks to my diligence and attention to detail, the client signed an annual contract, which led to us securing two additional clients from the data management industry. My efforts directly created $670,000 profit, 15% of the total gross revenue for 2012.
PART 5: FAILURE

The honest answer

A failure story is a comeback story, simple as that. If, after failing, you didn’t make amends, do better next time, learn an important lesson, change your attitude, or take the experience to heart... we don’t want to hear about it.

Of course, to have a comeback, you need to be down in the first place. A failure essay isn’t a trick -- no committee member is going to read your heartfelt story and cackle, “Mwahaha, this sucker actually told us about a real FAILURE!” before dropping your app into a crocodile pit. They really want to hear about a failure, because they want to know that all your ambitious and noble plans aren’t going to fall to pieces the first time you hit a setback.

So don’t beat around the bush or try to convince us that your biggest failure ever was in middle school when you got a C on a science test. Keep in mind that failures come in all shapes and sizes: things we do to other people, things we do to ourselves, projects we bungle, goals we don’t reach... even if you’ve had a pretty successful life, we’re sure you can dig up something valid.

Our final note on the topic is this: you’re not writing The Count of Monte Cristo, and this shouldn’t be a story about all the people who wronged you. The applicants featured here understand that the blame for their failures rests on their own shoulders, and they’re not afraid to own it. But the best part? Seeing them use their failures to become better, stronger people.
Tell us about something you wish you had done better. (400 words)

Two years ago, I zested my first lime when I inherited my first TYBG assignment: to manage the final stages of bringing a citrus-zesting rasp grater to market. I was determined to replicate the speed of development I had learned at my last job in the fast-paced entertainment industry. The zester patent, held by a rival named Paveon Industries, was due to expire, and our new line of graters would go head to head with their line at retail. Launching on time was essential. Our version would offer a bi-directional grating surface, with the goal of doubling the efficiency of zestng, not wasting the return motion after each forward zest. When the first samples arrived, my engineering counterpart and I zested 25 bushels of limes and lemons. The zest came out fluffy and fast, and the graters held up after rounds of dishwasher cycles and force and drop tests. It looked like a winner.

While we completed our testing, the deadline for approval approached and the sales team pressured me to release the item in time for Target’s annual planogram re-set. Awed by the apparent functionality and durability of the design, I did not think twice about approving the graters to ship. I was sure this zester heralded my first TYBG success. Annual sales were projected to top $600,000 and five-star online reviews raved about the bi-directionality of the device. The initial feedback reinforced my enthusiasm.

Then TYBG’s president Robert Khaa brought one home and everything changed. He tried it out and it worked fine, but after employing the traditional taste test, discovered the one flaw that we never noticed. Sure, the bidirectional zester zested nearly twice as fast, but it also produced a less tasty zest with the return motion, which zested more of the bitter pith. We had great product functionality, swift and efficient, but poor-tasting zest, which was, indeed, the final product. We needed to develop and launch a new version, and this time, I made no promises on the expected launch date until I was sure we had designed the best possible zestng surface, able to produce zest without pith. I had learned one of the most important lessons of product development: only the end-user can provide the ultimate green light for product release. Since then, I have championed scheduling additional rounds of user testing and feedback as part of the development process for all our products. Adopting this approach, I no longer feel I have to choose
between delaying a launch and bringing the best possible product to market. It is without bitterness that I have turned the lemon zest, pith and all, into product development lemonade.

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Describe a circumstance in your life in which you faced adversity, failure or setback. What actions did you take as a result and what did you learn from this experience? 500 words

Growing up I was always the “big guy”. As a teenager I was 6’6” and 320lbs and I looked like an NFL offensive lineman. My confidence could not have been lower. Even as a child, I knew that my weight had health risks, as I saw my father struggle with diabetes and my grandfather die from heart disease. My doctor informed me that if I did not lose weight, he fully expected me to follow the same path as my father and ultimately my grandfather.

As my weight increased, my health gradually decreased. Finally, I’d had enough. I had lived most of my life as a heavier person, and I was sick of it. In addition, my wife had just given birth to our first son and I did not want my weight to impede my ability to raise him. I told myself that I was going to take back my future and move forward with a happy, healthy life for my family and me.

Determined, I mapped out my weight loss attack plan and began working out three hours a day and following a strict diet. Certainly there were many days, particularly after a long day at the office, when I just wanted to come home and veg out. During the holidays I struggled to stay on my diet, but I was able to quickly get back on track by slightly loosening my restrictive diet so that I was less tempted to cheat. I knew that I needed to be realistic to achieve the long-term results I wanted. That slight change in behavior increased my morale and gave me the drive to continue. My efforts paid off: after six months, I had lost nearly 100 pounds. I had taken back my life.

I have always had strong sense of determination. I was one of eight children and my dad was unemployed for most of my childhood, so my parents struggled financially. Growing up I promised myself that I would out-hustle and out-work anybody to ensure a better life for my family. My responsibility as a husband and father continues to fuel my drive.
However, through this experience I discovered that determination alone is not enough to reach my goals. I realized that the key to success is a combination of unwavering determination and a slow, steady approach to avoid setbacks and achieve lasting results.

Discovering my winning strategy for long-term success has helped me accomplish difficult things both personally and professionally and will help me reach my goals in energy. The sector has a large number of diverse and political stakeholders, extensive government oversight, and slow adoption of new ideas. I expect setbacks, opposition and adversity as I look to shape its evolution, but I recognize now that strong will and determination with a thoughtful and steady approach is the best solution to overcome these setbacks. I am certain that with this strategy, I will achieve a tailored renewable energy solution through the combination of new-tech and traditional approaches.

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Tell us about something that has fundamentally transformed the way you think. (200 words maximum)

Check. A 14-year-old Laotian boy in the mountain town of Thakhek was one move from beating me at chess. By now I had worked in remote regions from Zimbabwe to Bhutan, but I had been cruising with an air of superiority. Sure, these people were generous, I thought, but I can think critically. At this moment, the evidence that had been mounting against me came tumbling down, burying me in my assumptions. As he moved his queen into position, I realized that I was not at all intellectually superior to the “simple” people in the developing world.

Previously, it was easy to dismiss Tibetan rice famers as kind, simple people. However, these same farmers managed to explain why the Maoists are favored in the rural areas of the country in ways that The Economist failed. With my mind open, I had my own customs challenged, like why we light fires on pastries during birthdays, why we reward people for talents randomly distributed at birth, and whether the majority should always have its say. While this mental shift was initially daunting, I found a world rich with perspectives. I started to do a lot less talking and much more listening.
Have you ever experienced culture shock? What insights did you gain? (250 words maximum)

In Sweden, I joined fika to get to know my team at IKEA. Fika means coffee break in Swedish, which is a pivotal daily activity of Swedes. There are two fikas in a day, each 15 minutes long. It was a good chance to learn about local culture and colleagues’ private life.

However, as a lead consultant and a foreigner from an all-business culture, I decreased my time with fika group to get more work done. Furthermore, I hoped to set an example for those who ‘over-fika’ed’.

To my surprise, the work I finished during fika time was cited negatively by one of the consultants as “Japanese express service.” Most of my colleagues told me that I put unnecessary pressure on them and I should learn to relax. They called me “running-boy” because I run to the coffee machine and then back to my desk again.

My action unfortunately drew a line between working hard and creating a harmonized working environment. I had an open talk with the others about working cultures, personal values, and societal norms. I explained that we were falling behind our deliverable schedules and it felt like lengthy fika may have been part of the problem. However, I also expressed to the team my understanding of fika and promised I would join twice a week. Surprisingly, my colleagues added discussions around improving workplace productivity to the usual idle chat during fika, efficiency measures that have since increased work completed by 15% daily.

Showcase: First to Final

*Opening Up for INSEAD*

Describe a situation taken from your personal or professional life where you failed. Discuss what you learned. (400 words maximum)

*First Version*:
Five years ago, as the captain, I failed to lead my department basketball team to defend the university championship.

I’d been a key player of the basketball team of Economic Department since my first college year. We constituted a strong team and won the university championship for three times. When I became the team captain in my fourth year, most of the experienced players were leaving the team due to graduation (I have a five-year double-major study). The youngsters severely lacked the match experience. I thought it would be too late to bring them up to the speed, so I decided to take on more responsibilities and let other players to cover for me to score, after all, I had been the MVP of my team last season. I wanted to be the person who saved my team.

However, due to lack of proper support, I had to run every corner to get rid of the opposite and was too tired to control my shots, while fresh players appeared to be too timid on the court and still tended to pass the ball to me even when I was tightly marked. Not surprisingly, we lost three consecutive matches even to some mediocre teams and got the worst result in our team’s history. Until then did I realize that I ignored to give enough guidance and opportunities to the juniors during the peak time of our team. Furthermore, it was impossible to win the game relying on my individual heroism.

Hence, I spent my last year to coach the junior players. I noticed one of our forwards, Tom, had very balanced skills except shooting accuracy. I thought he would be a good leader for the team if he could improve this. So I worked with him for months to help improve the weakness. Two years later, this Tom finally became a qualified leader and led the team to recapture the championship.

Years later, after I worked with dozens of entrepreneurs as an investor, I realized the lesson I learned from my failure, also enlightened me on how to fulfill my career aspirations. To support environmental business needs more than my personal effort. We need every people and every community to collaborate together to defend our blue sky. In this way, I decide to support and work with more environmental business leaders, just like the “Tom” in my team.

The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly:

Our buddy here has made one of oldest mistakes in the book: to avoid talking about a real failure, he picked an insignificant topic that a business
school admissions committee is not going to care about. Furthermore, his essay doesn’t even really describe a failure. He became captain when all of the good players had already left. No one would be expected to coach a team to victory in that situation! Overall, this is a wasted opportunity to reveal something important about himself.

**Final Version:**

“Mumbai’s worst storms in 70 years kill 147, reveal crumbling drainage infrastructure...”

This year, international media covered this devastating flood. Editorials and global readers lamented: “India, a superpower? Not with that infrastructure!”

Prior to this storm, American Associated Drainage (AAD), one of our invested companies and the largest US drainage pipe manufacturer, wanted to introduce its leading products to the Indian market. During my preliminary work, I found most Indian cities had shoddy drainage systems and used inferior pipes, which were easy to break and vulnerable to storms. Initially I was certain that AAD’s products would soon replace lower-quality pipes as long as we showed local customers the huge difference in quality. Unfortunately, my over-confidence prevented me from fully understanding our clients’ demands.

I worked with AAD engineers and prepared detailed documents to illustrate our products’ excellent performance. However, the final materials were too technical for local officials and our customers didn’t see why they should pay for premium products.

Still, I thought we just needed to be more persuasive, so I relentlessly insisted on the superiority of our products and that an insufficient infrastructure would make the city a ticking time bomb. However, we only won few contracts after several months. Most project managers complained that municipal budgets were too limited to adopt high priced pipes. I was crushed, what had I done wrong?

Finally, I realized that I failed to understand my client’s position. In addition to helping the environment, I needed to understand customer concerns: I’d been so insistent that I let my passion blind me. I should have realized that municipal contractors would push for the sale of cheaper pipes to increase their profit margins due to a lack of regulations. Had I seen the warning signs, I could have found solutions such as local
manufacturing to reduce our price and done a cost analysis to prove to customers that our products would not only resist storms, but also save them money in the long run. I quickly adjusted my marketing strategy, but a huge amount of inferior pipes had already been purchased.

I didn’t have enough power to prevent this kind of flooding tragedy in Mumbai and many other Indian cities, but with an INSEAD experience, I’ll get myself ready to fight for a sustainable, green and safe environment for my people.

*Admissionado Says:*

This is a GREAT failure story. He messed up big time, but he showed serious introspection and demonstrates the ability to learn from it. Admissions committees want an applicant who is mature and humble enough to admit that he failed but determined enough to learn from his mistakes... And this applicant knocks it out of the park.

Describe a time in your career when you were frustrated or disappointed. What advice would you give to a colleague who was dealing with a similar situation? (500 word maximum)

In March 2010, my wife was pregnant with our first child and I was about to receive a promotion to team lead of DIOTECH’s upcoming professional services group. At the same time, one of our direct competitors opened in Montreal and offered me an engineer position with nearly 25% more pay than the upcoming team lead role. I chose to stay with my current company to best hone my client-facing and management skills. In my spare time, I developed my longtime passion – my company Footballyze, and was in talks with an investor. Everything looked rosy.

In April, things started to topple. First, my wife had a miscarriage. Then the failure of a vital company project forced widespread layoffs, including me. Lastly, my potential investor ended talks and moved back to India. Shocked and under financial pressure, I quickly realized I must continue on the path I’d chosen – I was down but not out.

From April to October, I was playing three roles: a husband, a boss, and a job hunter. In the morning I drove my wife to the doctor, or to the lake
for a walk. In the afternoon I worked on Footballyze’s core architecture, or arranged project meetings with my contractors or agents that could possibly bring in investments. Then in the evening I would research employers, send in resumes, or prepare for interviews. Days were never long enough.

In August Footballyze locked down its first customer, a betting company using Footballyze to analyze odds of soccer game data. The deal brought in nearly $30,000 in revenue. In October I earned multiple job offers from top financial companies, but I took an offer from a large casino gaming company, Radioactive Gaming, as I wanted to learn more about betting clients who were a large part of Footballyze’s base. This enabled me to better understand how my models could help set up odds, and the combined career and startup income has gained extended time to help my wife to stay home longer for a more stable recovery.

While not many experience all these setbacks at once, I have some advices for a colleague who might be in a similar situation. First and foremost, it’s important to stay calm in big waves of turbulences and not regret past decisions. Instead, look forward to the next decision, and the next action to take. Remember, don’t look at the scoreboard when the game is still in play. Second, logically evaluate your options, and plan a path that is both sound and emotionally satisfying - follow the heart. True passion will not only provide entertainment but motivation at difficult times. Last but not least, the fact that we feel frustrated is because we are passionate about our goals and we worked towards them but did not get there the first time. The only way to dispense that frustration is to continuing trying. Life is like a soccer game, don’t stop trying until the final whistle.

Describe a situation taken from your personal or professional life where you failed. Discuss what you learned. (400 words)

While consulting for Centrom, two weeks before the summer holiday, I was tasked with creating a time-sensitive proposal for an upcoming project, estimated to bring in $700,000 of revenue the following year. The proposal was due by Monday July 19th, so that the Senior Manager would have sufficient time to proofread and approve the final copy by the Friday before our office closed. As the youngest employee in my office, I
was determined to establish myself as a formidable consultant amongst my older peers. Although I was fighting flu-like symptoms, I figured I could complete the 70-page proposal and then recover after some rest during the holidays. Three days before the proposal was due, my condition worsened. Instead of asking for help, I requested a 2-day extension, still determined to impress.

On the night before it was due, my roommate took me to the emergency room, where I was diagnosed with an acute respiratory viral infection and severe bronchitis. My roommate emailed my Senior Manager about my condition, and informed her that I would be unable to finish the proposal before the deadline. The client ultimately didn’t receive our proposal until after August 1st, and the deadlines for all impending work on this project were pushed back two months.

This incident could have been avoided had I simply asked for help. Promotions were on the horizon and I wanted to prove that, despite my age, I was just as capable as my more experienced peers. Insistent on doing the work by myself, I potentially jeopardized the entire project and our company’s reputation. My actions damaged my reputation and worst of all, I put my own health at risk.

I’m grateful to have learned that asking for help isn’t a sign of weakness; oftentimes, it’s a marker of strength. Recently at MacroGreen, the CEO assigned me a new project that needed to start right away. Because I was already overseeing 12 other projects, I didn’t have the time to take on another immediately. Rather than foolishly insisting that I would do it all by myself, I approached our newly hired Operations Manager to help me co-lead this project. Sharing the responsibilities not only helped me prioritize my time, but also allowed me to develop the young manager’s skills.

I no longer put my pride before the company’s goals, which leads to a more collaborative, healthier work environment for all.
PART 6: LEADERSHIP
PART 6: LEADERSHIP

The spotlight

When you’ve drafted your leadership essay, ask yourself just one question.

“Are there other people in it?”

If the answer is no, find a new story. “But what about…” Nope. Find a new story. “But this story shows…” Nyet. Find a new story. The key to a leadership essay -- and by “key” we mean “the only possible way to unlock this sucker” -- is that you must be interacting with people on some level to show true leadership.

Of course, there’s more to interaction than just managing a team or running a company. You can be a leader in your family, in your community, or even on a work team where everyone has a higher rank than you. But don’t make the mistake of thinking succeeding is the same as leading. Even if you’re in a leadership position -- say, managing a sales team -- that doesn’t automatically guarantee you have a good leadership story. If you’re just the middleman passing along orders from on high to your subordinates, it doesn’t count.

That’s because the second key to a leadership essay is uncertainty. We don’t want to see you following a recipe you’ve made a hundred times... we want to see you making decisions and coming up with solutions on the fly. True leadership is risky, and we want to see that you’ve got what it takes to shoulder those risks.

The following essays show that leadership has many sides -- but it’s never a paint-by-numbers experience.
Tell us about your most meaningful collaborative leadership experience and what role you played. What did you learn about your own individual strengths and weaknesses through this experience? 500 words

Last year a co-worker, James, and I volunteered for a Santa Fe nonprofit, Amigos Por Ayuda (APA). We consulted for its battered women’s shelter, La Mariposa, on a project to create a self-sustaining catering business that would provide guests of La Mariposa opportunities to gain culinary, marketing, and sales skills.

Our complementary skill sets ignited a strong start. As a manager at IBM, James had the soft skills to motivate and encourage the team members on the tactical side, while I brought seasoned experience in finance and strategy. In a few weeks, I wrote the business plan and raised over $15,000. James was making great progress with the team in developing the training and partnering with our vendors. I fully expected to be generating revenue in a couple weeks.

Fast-forward six months, we lost use of the kitchen, lacked proper insurance to sell our products, and had zero sales. This was crushing. Each day we fell behind meant another day lost to help these women. During a team meeting, I finally lost it. I raised my voice, telling the team how frustrated I was that we were six months behind schedule and that it was all due to team members not completing critical tasks.

The room fell silent; nobody spoke. Afterwards, James told me he shared my frustrations but felt I handled the situation quite poorly. “This isn’t IBM!” he said. “These folks are trying their best.”

He was right. I was trying to get “private sector results” from a nonprofit and volunteers. I thought that I could approach this situation exactly as I would a problem at IBM. But the situation was different, and I didn’t take the time to properly understand the nuances of working in the nonprofit sector.

I was grateful for James’s insight. Without him, I probably would have wasted more time before stumbling onto that breakthrough. Working with James and seeing his strong “soft skills” helped me recognize that I needed experience working closer with the team.
So, I proposed that we clearly articulate and assign small, specific tasks along with their due dates to each team member. James agreed, and we immediately saw productivity improvements. Two weeks later we had all the required permits and licenses, and we began selling at farmers markets. To date, we have trained a dozen guests and earned over $6,000 for the shelter.

Our collaboration helped me gain clarity on my own strengths and weaknesses. I struggled on this project because I became frustrated rather than working with the team to address the issues at hand. I was able, though, to develop a vision for how to successfully work through our problems. I also sought feedback from team members and was willing to change course as needed. This experience taught me that in environments with many different stakeholders, it is critical to be flexible and adapt my strategy to produce the outcomes I desire.

At Chicago Booth, we believe each individual has his or her own leadership style. How has your family, culture, and/or environment influenced you as a leader? (750 words)

My head was spinning the day I arrived at Samuel & Leftman’s office in Dhaka, Bangladesh. I’m not sure if it was the 14 hour time-zone difference, the severe culture shock, my desperate attempt to remember the names of my 27-member team, the seemingly endless “urgent” requests or the sudden, unexplained power outage; but I snuck into a conference room to gather my bearings. As I sat in the room, I thought to myself, “what am I doing here?” When the electricity came back, I took a few deep breaths, and began developing a plan for my four-week stint in Bangladesh.

My assignment’s primary objective was to identify and propose a detailed strategy to improve S&L’s off-shoring group. More specifically, I was charged with streamlining the process in which our offshore group compiled, organized and summarized the mountains of corporate data we would get for specific M&A engagements. I knew the task wouldn’t be easy because I had to balance the extremely high expectations of the head office for long-term improvements in the overall system with the short-term needs of my home office to process a backlog of data for specific engagements. How would I be able to meet both their needs?
The immense pressure hit me that night back at my hotel. I contemplated various ways in which I could cut my trip short and simply return home in a respectable fashion. However, I thought back to my father’s fundamental belief underlying my work ethic: always follow through with your commitments. I knew that I had to move forward. From stepping into the role as President of my 75-member college fraternity to embracing uncertainty when I moved to London, my father always taught me to take risks and lead the way.

I vividly remembered the time my father took the decision to resign from his executive director position at a large firm in order to fulfill his dream of starting his own company. Throughout life, he not only encouraged me to trust my instincts and take risks; but more importantly, he taught me to take calculated risks. For example, my father succeeded as an entrepreneur because he executed on his business plan after gaining buy-in from key investors. I employed a similar approach in Bangladesh, hoping it would help dig me out of this hole.

Properly managing expectations on all fronts was my first challenge. Then, my attention quickly shifted to the cultural issues as I looked to gain insight from my Bangladeshi team. I started with another lesson learned from my father, who taught me the foundation of my leadership style: listening to people as a key element in building sound relationships. Applying that leadership technique to my Bangladeshi team, however, proved to be difficult because of their perspective on management hierarchy. In contrast to the Western business culture, in which subordinates actively offer suggestions to their managers, my Bangladeshi team was much more accustomed to simply taking orders. Although my team was remarkably warm and welcoming, I had to work extra hard to break down barriers and gain participation. In the end, by demonstrating my intent to help and listening attentively, I finally was able to gain the insights I needed, assess the situation and develop a comprehensive strategy to improve the off-shoring group.

This strategy earned significant recognition from FST America’s Leadership upon my return, as evidenced by my promotion to Senior Manager and a $7,000 bonus a few months later. In addition, utilization of the off-shoring group by the New York FST practice surged by over 600%, translating into several hundred thousand dollars in savings in only a few months. Leveraging the lessons I learned from my father – such as acting on my plan only after gaining full acceptance from FST leadership – was ultimately the key to my success in Bangladesh.
My father’s work ethic, balanced with his strong family and moral values, has shaped who I am today – as a father, a husband, and a business professional. More particularly, my experience in Bangladesh reinforced my deep passion for leading people – training, developing, and mentoring. I plan to continue developing these essential soft-skills in my role at Seneley as I prepare myself for executive management opportunities in the future.

Describe a situation in which teamwork was a requirement in achieving a goal at a point in your career. What was the team structure, what were the dynamics, was the goal achieved, and what were the elements that ultimately brought about success or failure? What was your contribution? (650 words)

Shortly into my tenure as the finance controller of Courvoisier’s Asia Region Wholesale Business Unit, I encountered the toughest challenge of my career. Covering duty-free businesses in fifteen markets and ranked as the second largest profit center in Asia, our business unit was expanding rapidly with an annual turnover of USD 150M and annual profit growth rates of 34%+. Subsequently, highly detailed financial analysis was required to facilitate decision-making in our growing business, and operational efficiency became a key target. However, insufficient human resources combined with differing practices across markets seriously limited our ability to reach this goal. To comply with higher standards and free additional resources for advanced business analysis, I identified the need for a set of standard operation procedures across all regions. My biggest challenge was to coordinate with sales and marketing managers based in 8 countries with different business practices, all of whom were resistant to change since this required extra work and additional approval procedures.

To gain support for this plan and to convince my colleagues that this shift in practices was necessary for our growth, I arranged a video conference with all sales/marketing managers and prepared a set of presentations illustrating our financial growth, the best practices in other markets and the advantages of a formalized procedure. “Piece of cake, right?” I confidently expected they’d agree with my proposal but was I ever wrong!
Their awkward silence spoke volumes and quickly dampened my mood: they definitely weren’t happy with my suggestions. The project kicked off anyway, but I knew I hadn’t won them over. Disappointed but reluctant to give up, I pushed myself to consider the root causes behind their resistance.

I soon realized that, coming from a financial background, I was viewing this situation from a narrow perspective, illustrating potential problems through abstract numbers rather than practical cases. Dusting myself off, I contrasted our existing procedures to the new practices and provided a series of examples to help sway my colleagues. Unfortunately, I still felt resistance: the managers still didn’t see the need to change. After listening to their feedback, I proposed the ways that a set of standard procedures would improve overall efficiency, which would in turn make everyone’s jobs easier. I took our new price letter preparation process as example to illustrate the drastic improvements in the total required man-hours to finish this task; proving how it could be reduced from 60 hours to 40 for each individual market. Finally things clicked: their attitude changed and they began to participate in the process. We developed numerous additional ideas during our brain storming sessions and everyone worked cooperatively during the trial implementation thereafter.

Our hard work paid off: the new system worked so well that even the once skeptical managers reported positive feedback and I presented these improvements as a best practice at Courvoisier’s Asia’s Regional Meeting. Furthermore, I won substantial credibility as a young finance controller, eliminating any doubts regarding my inexperience. This project taught me how to propose complex ideas across business units and how to work in a divided team; skills I later successfully applied as a market leader of a global information system development project involving the Asia regional project team, Indian IT consultants, and multinational sales & marketing representatives. This experience also taught me that in order to gain buy-in across an organization, I needed to consider problems from an overall perspective and take initiatives to better understand my counterparts. At times, my lack of management and leadership theory led to difficulties explaining why this change would benefit everyone involved. With broad interactions with experienced managers from all over the world in an LBS Sloan classroom, I believe I can efficiently gain the leadership and management I need to move forward.
Describe a time when you questioned an established practice or thought within an organization. How did your actions create positive change? (250 word maximum)

Last year, I was assigned to oversee the production of an 8-minute customer video prepared for the Nasdaq-listed Miravira.com’s Annual General Meeting (AGM). Three months earlier, the company’s CEO stepped down after a massive fraud scandal on the e-commerce platform.

In two weeks, I visited 29 small businesses in 10 cities with an in-house camera crew of 5 people. While I received my share of positive and glowing testimonials, there were also many customers who were downright angry and critical of our business. During the editing process, conflict emerged. While I was planning to include the negative comments in the video the project manager was concerned about the demoralizing impact because all the videos we made before were so positive.

Although I was nervous about the consequence, I felt confident in my decision to include the customer criticism. Those sharp comments effectively captured the challenges we were facing. If we were to become a company that is a respected company we should at least have the courage to admit our own problems. I structured the video so that it included a portion of customer criticism followed by the part where customers expressed their confidence in the company.

My palms were sweating when we showed the video to Jeffrey Hernandez, our chairman. “Very good!” Jeffrey said, “that honesty is exactly what we need to hear.” The video was well received by the investors and employees at the meeting and was later viewed over 7,000 times in the company’s internal forum. “Inspiring!” was the most common response from our colleagues. After this experience, I know that burying my head in the sand will never solve the problem while being honest is always the best policy.
Part 6: Leadership

Please describe a time when you had to convince a person or a group of your idea. (500 words or fewer)

*First Version:*

As a Project Manager and Lead for Ajman Fuel Additives Company (AFAC), I had to secure the top management approval and support to create an overall company sustainability strategy in addition to developing their first sustainability report. AFAC was an important client to our firm as the overall project constituted 15% of total revenue of 2011. And thus, I had to deliver a strong business case that persuades the top management of the benefits and importance of creating a sustainability strategy and implementing it afterward through a 45 minutes presentation.

At first, I had to understand the client overall culture and general strategy so that I can appropriately and clearly set the main goals and main points of the business case. In 2010 AFAC had an exceptional economical performance that doubled its revenue to $3.07 US Million per employee, and currently the company is going through a full strategy revaluation project. The company is going through change. They are open to change. In addition, AFAC has been under the national spotlight after contracting Mitsubishi Heavy Industries to build the largest Carbon dioxide Reuse (CDR) plant in the region, and striking an agreement with the largest national bank, ANB, for an $80US Million loan to fund the project. Consequently, AFAC was invited to COP18-Doha, the 18th session of the Conference of Parties for the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change hosted by Ajman. However, CO2 is a critical raw material in their production. And, this was a clear business investment. Focus on the business opportunity for AFAC.

The company is amidst growth and change, which included large environmentally beneficial investments. Therefore, there is a strong sustainability potential within the company if there is a strong sustainability strategy in-place that capitalizes on recent investments, maximizes benefits of future investments, and comprehensively cover social aspects as well. My challenge then was to present the drivers and benefits of a clear sustainability strategy to help the business bottom line of AFAC as well as the benefit of all stakeholders.

Among other points, the business case presented the issue of ecological carbon footprint as one of sustainability drivers, hence, the issue of corporate responsibility toward improving the national carbon footprint.
Ajman is ranked the second highest ecological carbon footprint per capita in the world according to a 2010 study. And thus, it was a delicate and critical point to present. However, it was a necessary strong point to show the necessity of a purposeful sustainability strategy. A conversation ensued between those in agreements and those in disagreements. I persuaded them that this issue can be addressed by strong sustainability strategy. On the one hand, the concepts of transparency within sustainability allow for accurate and indicative numbers. On the other hand, Ajman is a leader in the Oil and Gas industry. Shouldn’t Ajman seek to be leader in terms of cleaner industry and overall footprint? AFAC has the potential and responsibility to be a leader in Ajman’s sustainability efforts.

The business case concluded with the business benefits of adopting a sustainability strategy, after which in an individual meeting with the General Manager, he gave the overall approval of the project and discussed expanding the work-scope of our current agreement to enlist our firm’s support in full implementation of sustainability strategy, guidelines, and a management team.

*The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly:*

This essay focuses too much on the business and not enough on the applicant. It’s also just way too dense for someone without the same technical background as the applicant. We need to simplify. Furthermore, the applicant needs to focus on how he, and not his research, is the protagonist of this story.

*Final Version:*

On a Thursday afternoon, I was enjoying a late lunch before catching an early flight home to Yemen for the weekend from Ajman. Damien Suoso, the president of SustainBalance, called me. He only calls when it’s urgent. “Ahmed, call AFAC (Ajman Fuel Additives Company) now. They want us to start immediately. Congrats, you are lead on this one,” he said. I was thrilled to be leading a project only 6 months after I joined, especially one that constituted 15% of the firm’s revenue at the time.

I was tasked to convince the GM to develop and adopt a sustainability strategy. Preparation was key. I directed my team to conduct background research about FAAC, best practices in the industry, and an industry wide quantitative benchmark in areas of sustainability performance while I met with the client’s department heads. Most importantly I wanted to understand what made the GM tick. Though he was a new GM, he was
focused on competing in the global market. That was enough for me. I had a strategy.

I started the presentation with slides introducing sustainability and discussing industry trends. However, I quickly noticed that I was not catching their attention. I had to revert to my back-up plan. I presented a recent ranking putting the State of Ajman as the country with the highest carbon footprint per capita worldwide.

“Don’t buy it ... ” marketing manager said. “Where is this from?” plant manager asked. “What does this mean?” the HR manager inquired. I looked toward the GM waiting for a reaction. He was typing a message on his iPhone. I thought I had lost his interest, and lost the opportunity to convince him. He then raised his head and squinted at the slide. You could hear a pin drop. He said: “Is this even relevant? With a small population, and one of the largest productions of Oil and Gas in the world, this is expected.” He challenged.

I was expecting that, and that is when I could deliver my point. Ajman is a leader in the Oil and Gas industry. So, what is holding us back from becoming environmental leaders? Globally, sustainability is topping the agendas of important issues to address. Ajman must stay globally competitive. I told him that as a country we have the access to the resources and technology to offset the large production in respect of the population. And, AFAC is already ahead of the pack in planning to build a CO2 recovery factory and with a strategic approach, it can lead the industry in other initiatives.

Afterwards, The General Manager asked me to join him in his office, where he expressed full support to our project. Consequently, I led them to publish their first sustainability report, while I am currently working to complete AFAC’s sustainability strategy. And, the president of my firm is elated as we negotiate with AFAC a long-term engagement to support their sustainability efforts.

**Admissionado Says:**

The shift in perspective towards the feelings/thoughts/actions of the applicant is overwhelmingly more effective. We can relate to him now. And we can understand the narrative, because it is in fact a narrative (rather than a research paper). The intro immediately grabs the reader’s attention, and the use of dialogue makes the story more vivid. Lastly, we
are able to identify the applicant’s actual contribution in making the sales pitch and attribute it to him. Before, it was unclear what he really DID.

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Have you ever experienced culture shock? What insights did you gain? (250 words)

My first trip to Manila in 2011 was also my first time working closely with a Filipino team. Meeting to discuss an action plan for a new project, I sat at the head of a conference table and asked the team questions about their expertise, background, and expectations. I directed most of the questions at Ryan, the team leader, who was shaking and his voice trembling when he spoke.

After the meeting, I pulled Ryan aside and spoke candidly about my observations. He told me that he was unaccustomed to this type of meeting. Because it was our first encounter, Ryan wasn’t prepared to suddenly work so hands-on with a foreign stranger, and it wasn’t the cultural norm to put him on the spot so quickly. I felt guilty yet determined to correct the situation. I needed to defuse the tension and ensure that cultural differences would not interfere with our impending work.

Amidst the ensuing 12-hour workdays, I organized several team outings that allowed us to bond outside of work. I learned that Ryan works best when he is prepared in advance, so I made sure to meet with him separately before holding team meetings. Ryan and I scheduled daily check-ins, so he was prepared and not caught off guard. Doing this ultimately helped me gain Ryan’s trust and respect, which contributed to the success of this project. More importantly, I learned that building rapport and trust amongst colleagues is the best way to create professional, cross-cultural relationships.
PART 7: OPTIONAL & REAPPLICANT
PART 7: OPTIONAL & REAPPLICANT

The last word

Optional essays... re-applicant essays... any kind of “special” essay that not everyone has to write is probably going to be read at the end of the application, when the reader can already see the finish line and the uptick in their “Reviewed” pile.

In other words, the last thing you want to do is drag this sucker out. You want to keep it short, if you can... but more importantly you want to keep it on target. If you need 500 words to explain that you’ve had seven jobs in the last three years because you were being pursued by government agents for a crime you didn’t commit, that’s fine. But it doesn’t take long to explain “My recommendation comes from a former supervisor because I just switched jobs,” so if you find yourself trying to slip in one last story of your achievements, or a few words you couldn’t fit into another essay... stop. Get in, get out -- that’s our motto.

When you have to explain away a blemish, the most successful essays will involve concrete proof that you’ve got what it takes... despite your slip-up. “I got a C in every math course ever but I’ve always loved math” won’t cut it, but “I got a C in every math course ever but a perfect score on the GMAT quant section and a promotion to Lead Accountant” will. (Whatever you do: don’t apologize for something that doesn’t need it! No one wants to read your essay on “Why I had a disappointing 3.9 rather than a 4.0...”)

The applicants who wrote these essays knew that admissions committees are NOT looking for excuses -- as to why you weren’t accepted previously, why your GPA is low, etc. They offer up honest explanations and valid mitigating factors... and then they politely put the mic back in its stand and walk out with their heads held high. Respect.
Optional Essay: If there is any important information that is relevant for your candidacy that you were unable to address elsewhere in the application, please share that information here. (300 words)

Over the past year, I have gained a better understanding of Booth through information sessions and interactions with alumni and current students, and confirmed Booth is the best place for me to realize my career ambition.

I talked with Jenny Shao, ’13, my former colleague at Vestax, about my career plan, and she felt strongly that I would benefit from the Polsky Center for Entrepreneurship. Chicago Booth greatly emphasizes Entrepreneurship, which is now the second-largest concentration, and the Polsky Center is the best place for me to test my entrepreneurial ideas in real-world settings. The Polsky Center contributes to the regional business community by providing assistance to emerging entrepreneurs, small businesses, and social ventures, which is exactly my career pursuit—creating a social impact by setting up a consulting firm specializing on local small enterprises.

In a Booth Coffee Chat this summer, Mary Nguyen, ’12, told me Booth increased her international exposure, and she highly recommended I take full advantage of the International Business Exchange Program, which covers 26 partner schools in 17 countries. A global horizon is crucial for me to apply advanced business models from other parts of the world into China.

I look forward to gaining experience in another culture, studying business issues from another perspective, building a global network, and preparing for my future career.

An optional fourth essay will allow you to discuss any issues that do not fall within the purview of the required essays.

In college, I joined many student associations and community activities. I was the soccer player in accounting department team, the supervisor of
approvals department of student government, and the director of Outdoor Survival Camp. I also became financially independent and had to work many part time jobs to afford tuition, rent, and living expenses. Some of my classmates, who planned to study abroad after graduation, chose a particular professor’s course to get easy scores. However, I took a different route: several challenging courses, unfortunately resulting in relatively lower grades.

As a freshman, the first time living away from parents, everything was novel and exciting. I became absorbed in my extracurricular activities, and this led to bad time management. I neglected my studies and lowered my GPA. But I am grateful for this lesson.

Learning from this mistake, I did great at my GMAT (750, and full score in quantitative section) and I enhanced my professional accounting skills through self-study. My abilities were acknowledged during my first job at YCMB, where I led a team as early as my third year (1 year ahead of schedule).

Optional question: Is there anything not addressed elsewhere in the application that you would like the Admissions Committee to know about you to evaluate your candidacy? (300 word maximum)

My university GPA is not a reflection of my full academic potential. I was an exceptional student throughout my adolescence: my 11th and 12th grades were fully funded by my school in recognition of my outstanding performance and I won several scholarly debates. I was also accepted to the Sun Yat Sen University, China’s top undergraduate program, and then to the University’s Scholars Program, which accepts only the top 3% of each cohort. However, during my second semester at SYSU, I developed an unidentifiable ailment. I was given heavy painkillers and advised to abandon my degree: an unacceptable course of action. Over the next year I continued to struggle with pain and blackouts, visiting seventeen different specialists in China and The United States before receiving a diagnosis: Crohn’s. This affliction is very rare in Asia and my symptoms were unusual, delaying this discovery. By the time I received appropriate treatment, my GPA had taken a heavy hit. I decided to make the best of my remaining SYSU experience by interning a semester at Goldman Sachs and by going on exchange to the Technical University of Texas. Finally, I
graduated with honors and a much-coveted USP certification in spite of a debilitating intestinal surgery. Since then, I have put substantial efforts into my career and continue to volunteer for causes I believe in.

My letters of recommendation are from my previous managers who have guided me throughout my career, even after we parted ways. Unfortunately, due to the dissolution of my previous department, I’ve recently transitioned to a new team. My new manager and I have spent little time working together and subsequently, she is not positioned to comment about my professionalism and efforts. I believe that our work together gives my current recommenders a strong basis to evaluate my performance.

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Re-applicant Essay: Please share with us the self-reflection process that you underwent after last year’s application and how you have grown as a result. How did it shape your commitment to Fuqua and inspire your decision to reapply? (2 pages, 1.5 line spacing)

This May, after LND’s latest board of directors meeting, my grandfather, the co-founder of our family business, told me the board appreciated my performance over the past six years, and he wanted me to take over his role in the company within five years. After collecting myself, I realized earning a top-tier MBA was more urgent than ever.

After my previous application to Duke, I took the opportunity to reflect on my career path and the extent to which I wanted to be involved in my family’s business, recalling a defining reason why I joined LND after graduation. At the time, LND’s overly aggressive sales style was causing significant customer complaints. When I read those complaints, I felt sick to my stomach: I couldn’t bear to see my family’s painstaking efforts tarnished by shortsighted sales goals and inefficient management. I joined the company’s marketing department, standardizing service offerings and solving brand-trust issues in the bud. Since that encouraging start, I have kept on growing with LND and this period of reflection helped me realize that the long-term goal stated in my previous application—starting a consulting firm to help family businesses in Pakistan—was not what I ultimately wanted. Indeed, I have gradually realized that LND isn’t just another company; it is a legacy that I want to maintain and expand. I’m
now certain that I want to become the CEO of LND, leading and expanding our venture into a beauty giant. This is what I was born to do.

Correspondingly, I have re-aligned my short-term goals to better prepare myself for this challenge. Post-MBA, I will join a consulting firm with strong connections in the consumer packaged goods industry. This industry exposure will hone my strategic thinking skills, allowing me to develop long-term plans for LND.

Additionally, a top consulting firm’s reputation together with Duke’s credentials will prove invaluable in winning LND investments. These are intangible benefits that I could not gain if I returned to LND immediately post-MBA.

Reapplying also developed my ability to handle disappointment. With strong encouragement from many Fuquans and my family, I accepted this temporary setback and pressed forward. Since then, I have taken every effort to strengthen my application, re-taking the GMAT (now 730, 96%), TOEFL iBT (now 109), and a series of online pre-MBA courses including accounting, finance and statistics, all while keeping contact with the Fuqua community. I have experienced significant successes early in my life— from getting into my college of choice to experiencing solid job progression—but overcoming this setback proves that I can also deal with unforeseen obstacles.

With another year’s experience in the beauty industry, and intensive exposure to project management and expansion initiatives, I believe now is the best time for me to bring my experience to both benefit from and contribute to Duke’s MBA program. Since last year’s application, I have assumed greater responsibilities at my family business, as I was promoted to lead several key projects. For instance, I led a group of elite employees from marketing, sales, finance and operations to identify potential growth opportunities, organizing weekly “opportunity vision” meetings where we brainstormed and expressed our opinions on potential new directions. Through market research, we identified a promising skincare product to complement LND’s haircare-dominated lineup. After I convinced senior management to approve a 3-year $600,000 exclusive deal with this product’s supplier, we sold out our first order within one week and are estimating this initiative will lead to sales of $2.2M by the end of 2014. Furthermore, under my leadership, our e-commerce business has also expanded rapidly. I adopted creative strategies: organizing professional styling training online to answer our customers’ questions, leapfrogging competitors that used videos – an industry-first in Pakistan; and further,
asking R&D to launch a new online-only product line. To date, our e-commerce revenue accounts for 11% of our overall sales—amounting to $4.2M—and is increasing at a double-digit rate.

These successes have only deepened my commitment to pursue a Duke MBA to realize my career goals. Reaffirming my commitment to Fuqua, I visited Durham this September and decided to apply in the Early Action Round. Meanwhile, through my continuing interactions with Luke Li, Duke’s Regional Director, Wilson Fong (Daytime ’11), and Rahul Patel (Daytime ’11), I have been truly impressed by these gracious, smart and all-rounded individuals. Fuqua is without doubt the community I’m looking for.

Go Blue Devils! Go Duke!
Afterword

Hey -- we’re Admissionado. Over the past seven years, we’ve guided clients through more than 15,000 applications to elite business schools like HBS, Wharton, INSEAD, and LBS. In other words, we’ve seen a LOT of b-school essays.

We curated this collection of essays from our pantheon of successful clients. From the larger pool of “applications that led to acceptances,” we selected a wide range of different subjects, applicant backgrounds, writing approaches, and fluency levels to highlight.

When clients sign up with Admissionado, they’re not just signing up for a copy edit. We don’t just cross your t’s and dot your i’s. We go through four rounds of edits with each application, guiding the client through each step of the revision process.

For our showcases, we’ve offered up the first draft (what the client originally submitted to us) and the final draft (what they eventually submitted to the school). What did the journey from first to final look like? Well, on the first and second edits, we asked a LOT of questions and suggested shifts in focus or structure. We helped clients settle the “big picture” fully in place. On the third and fourth edits, we made suggestions on smaller phrases/transitions that weren’t quite working for us as readers and proofread the essays for typos and errors.

After each edit, the clients revised their own essays -- incorporating suggestions, providing new information, and redirecting their focus based on our feedback.

Wanna see an example of an Admissionado edit? Well, lucky you: we’ve included a sample:
What is your most significant accomplishment?
(Max: 250)

My most significant accomplishment has to be my direct involvement with implementing hedging at MBF American Capital. [Uh-oh... This is a great accomplishment, and "direct involvement" just does not do it justice. Let’s switch that out for something that gives a sense of your role/importance... seems like you were the lead man on this, so we need something that says right off that you were in the vanguard] Prior to February 2011 MBF only sold loans on a Best Effort basis, meaning you lock a mortgage interest rate the second it is requested at a fixed price. There is less risk, but welcomed predictability. [...and more modest rewards?] Hedging, or selling Mandatory, brings more risk but greater reward. It allows our secondary marketing team the flexibility to decide when and where to sell a loan in the hopes of making a greater profit. [Is this the cutting edge or something that everybody does and was necessary to catch up? why is it important to MBF?] A team at MBF, prior to my employment, tried to instill this process but failed rather spectacularly. [because...? what didn’t they have that you eventually brought to the table? What were the challenges that had to be overcome for you to eventually find success?] However, with my involvement the company felt comfortable enough to move forward a second time. [Would they have just given up on the whole idea if you weren’t there? What happened to that prior team, and did you face the same challenges/potential for failure? Right now, if this was a fairy tale, we’d have a hero (you, with the awesome abilities mentioned below) and a princess (hedging!) but no dragon. We need a better sense of what you had to overcome to win your happily ever after!] My secondary marketing manager cited to me specifically that it was my ability to learn new processes and apply past expertise in a swift and reliable way that led the owners to agree to green light the idea. [Sweet! Any specific past experiences they drew this confidence from? Also, what exact position in this venture did they put you in? Were they just like, “Ok buddy, we’re gonna start you on this and see what happens” or did they say “You’re gonna learn this and then instruct and manage the entire team as Head of Hedging Practices”? Let’s be super clear on how big of a responsibility/change this was] Additionally my ability to master tasks quickly allows me to provide guidance to co-workers and provide value added input. Helping manage our day-to-day tasks such as this one allows the team to run smoothly and minimizes micro managing [is this
challenging, but you do it anyway because you rock? or is it easy because you have XXX skills already, because you rock?]. Every morning I help decide where to sell based on the MBS market and work closely with our investors (Fannie Mae, Wells Fargo, Chase, etc.) to insure accurate pricing and execution. [Again, is this difficult? Does it require great instincts, snap decisions, deep knowledge, specific skills?] On average since implementation the company has increased profits by 4% monthly. Hedging forecasts to continue to increase profits as we add more types of loans to our hedging portfolio. [let’s reframe this ending to reflect YOU! this isn’t “the Tale of How Hedging Helps Companies” but “the Tale of Johnny Goeman and the Great Hedging Success.” We probably want to end this on a sense of your achievements and skills and the way YOU will continue to increase profits as more challenges come up...]

Right now this essay is solid – there was a goal, other people couldn’t reach it, you were chosen, you achieved it, it’s brought good things. But since this is your MOST SIGNIFICANT achievement, we’re gonna need a better sense of why it was so important, why it was hard, and how you specifically were able to succeed where others couldn’t! The structure of this flows well – we understand what’s happening... Now make us hang on every word!

Hopefully, these 50 Essays that Worked have given you insight, inspiration, and that extra push you need to cross the finish line. Best of luck on your b-school application! We know you’re going to rock it.

And in case you need any help along the way (school guides, essay analysis, editing help or just someone to chat with), feel free to check out our website at www.admissionado.com. We’re always around!