

## MBA Deferred Admissions Programs – Should I apply?

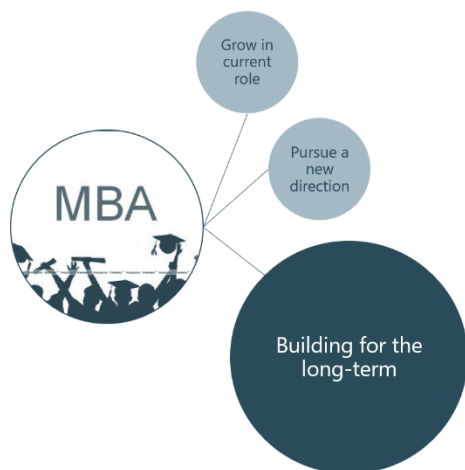
I remember sitting in my department Chair's office, surrounded by a multitude of books, with a window overlooking our bustling campus square. I was in my third year of an Economics degree, with dreams of a finance career, perhaps even breaking into Wall Street. However, having grown up in a relatively small town, I had no idea what options I had. Maybe I could go to an in-country school for further education, or maybe just try to "work my way to the top" (whatever that means). However, I really had NO idea what my options were. That's why my Chair's next words mattered so much. "You know, you could go to a top US school for your MBA."

20+ years and a Booth MBA later, questions we get from clients currently in college resonate deeply with us. Students have questions about everything from classes, extracurriculars, socializing, and recruiting, with less thought about what life could look like in 3-5 years. To gain that certainty, many consider deferred MBA admissions programs (such as Harvard Business School's 2+2 program or Kellogg's Future Leaders). But, is it right for you?

To answer that question, you first need to establish your goal for applying. Are you looking for an easier path to admission? Setting yourself up for longer-run success? Take the pressure off your post-college work experience? The answers to those questions may pull you in different directions.

### Why an MBA?

One of the best parts of our role is getting to hear the candid reasons behind people's plans. There are two types of reasons that people typically explore a graduate business or management degree: preparing for the short-term OR developing for the long-term. What are some of the reasons?



#### Short-term: growing in my current role

After several years in a job, some employers require an MBA on the path from promotion. This varies significantly by industry and specific employer. Candidates in this pool often value from more diverse experiences, introductions to new people, and time to process what they have already learned.

#### Short-term: pursue a new direction

This is one of the most popular reasons to pursue an MBA. New directions can include exploring a new industry or function, considering a new company size or pedigree, moving to a new geography, or exploring plans to start a company. People often

do not know what they want to do immediately following the MBA, but they are confident about areas that they want to explore. The value of an MBA is often in the relationships that people build, the career contacts that they are able to establish, a track record of interest, and most importantly, TIME to build something new. While many people go to business school to start a company themselves, fewer than 5% do so immediately. However, it turns out that almost 50% of MBA graduates do pursue a company at some time in their career.

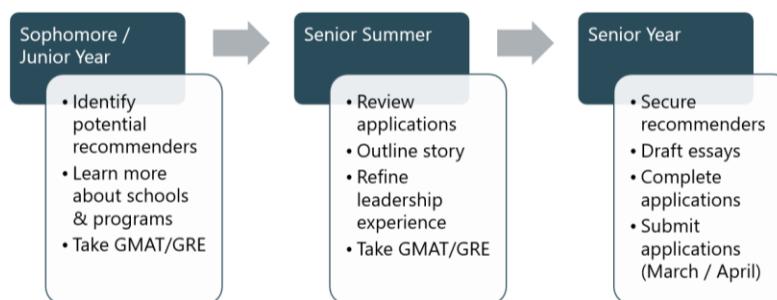
## Long-term: establish relationships, a track record, and skills for life

While many people come to us expressing an interest in the short-term, conversation usually reveals that they are most interested in establish a dynamic long-term career, bolstered by the relationships and skills they'll gain through an MBA. When we talk with alumni who have considered their MBA experience a success, they refer to many of the following aspects:

- Establishing lifelong relationships in an industry
- Growing more adaptable
- Gaining confidence & personal resilience
- Identifying your differentiation, being able to articulate what is different about you and how you'll contribute to others
- Examining goals and desired impact on communities and the world more broadly
- Gaining global exposure, with an introduction to new geographies and people within them
- Exploring the unknown

## How does Deferred Admissions work?

Deferred admissions applications for MBA programs are submitted during **senior year of college**. This differs from other deferred admissions programs (e.g. law school) that happen earlier in the college process. Does that mean that you should wait until senior year to think about applying? Definitely not!



If you even think that you're interested in deferred admissions to MBA programs, you can begin to consider the path early on in your time in college. The admissions process requires recommendations (usually two) and you can begin to develop relationships to support this effort early. By senior summer, you'll want to have a better idea of where you're applying, have taken the standardized tests, and thought about your story.

## Does everyone start an application before senior year?

Again, definitely not! If you haven't been thinking about deferred admissions and you're just starting to think about the path in senior year, you can certainly prepare a great application. It simply means that you're going to work through multiple parts of the process at once.

Which schools offer deferred admissions programs?

If you want to learn more about how deferred admission programs work, here are a few of the more popular ones with our clients:

Program	Selection details
<a href="#">Harvard Business School 2+2</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students from any academic background who meet the eligibility requirements are encouraged to apply.</li> <li>Some preference will be given to high potential individuals on paths that aren't as well established in leading to graduate business</li> <li>For the 2021 2+2 application, HBS will be accepting online versions of the GMAT or GRE (where available) even if they do not have a writing section available. If you wish to take the online GMAT, you must take it no later than one week prior to the submission deadline (April 22, 2021), as this version of the test requires one week for scores to be issued. <b>GMAT range: 620-790 Average GPA 3.7</b></li> </ul>
<a href="#">Stanford GSB Deferred Enrollment</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You are in your final year of a bachelor degree or a joint bachelor/graduate program, and your degree will be conferred between 01 October 2020 and 30 September 2021.</li> <li>OR You are currently enrolled in a graduate program, which you began immediately following an undergraduate or undergraduate/graduate program.</li> <li><b>GMAT range: 600-790 Average GPA 3.8</b></li> </ul>
<a href="#">Chicago Booth Scholars</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Applicants from all undergraduate majors and with an array of backgrounds.</li> <li><b>GMAT range: 640-780 GPA range: 3.28 – 4.0</b></li> </ul>
<a href="#">University of Pennsylvania Wharton Moelis Advance Access Program</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Any undergraduate student or master's student in their final year of study can apply to the Moelis Advance Access Program.</li> <li><b>GMAT range: 590-790</b></li> </ul>
<a href="#">MIT Sloan MBA Early Admissions</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Applicants from all undergraduate majors and with an array of backgrounds.</li> <li><b>GMAT range: 680-760 Median GPA 3.54</b></li> </ul>
<a href="#">Yale SOM Silver Scholars</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only current college seniors are eligible to apply.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">UVA Darden Future Year</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students who are completing their undergraduate coursework or a fifth-year Master's program with between September 2020 and August 2021 are eligible to apply</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Columbia Business School Deferred Enrollment</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students graduating during current academic year with a bachelor's degree.</li> <li>Students completing a graduate degree program. Candidates must have started the graduate degree program directly after completing their undergraduate degree to be eligible for the Deferred Enrollment Program.</li> <li>Students enrolled in Ph.D. programs, law school, or medical school are not eligible. Please apply through the standard MBA or EMBA application process.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Northwestern (Kellogg) KFL Deferred Enrollment</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students who graduate between October 2020 and September 2021.</li> <li>Undergraduates in the last year of school, majoring in any discipline</li> <li>Master's students who went directly into a graduate program from undergrad</li> <li>Domestic and international students</li> </ul>
<a href="#">UC Berkeley Accelerated Access</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undergraduate students in their final year of study, with a graduation date between July 1, 2020 and September 30, 2021.</li> <li>Graduate students without full-time employment who enrolled in their graduate program immediately after completing their undergraduate studies, with a graduate degree graduation date between July 1, 2020 and September 30, 2021.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Emory (Goizueta) MBA Early Admissions</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Current Emory undergraduate BBA students with a B or better GPA are not required to submit a standardized test score (GMAT or GRE). All others must submit a GMAT or GRE score. The MBA Admissions office reserves the right to request a score from any candidate.</li> </ul>

What are the specific benefits of Deferred Admissions?

## Ability to plan

The primary benefit of being admitted early is greater visibility on your career path for the next few years. Thinking of starting a business? Exploring a non-traditional career (i.e. highly technical field, artistic endeavors, government service) where you can gain some unique skills? Deferred Admission will significantly limit your downside risk if things do not work out, and if they do, then an MBA will usually offer a platform to accelerate the scaling of your ideas.

However, the value of this benefit will depend on what you choose to do with that visibility. Certainly, one cannot coast during this time, hoping that an MBA alone will help you get the most out of your career. The vast majority of our clients find their recruiting outcomes tied heavily to skills they gained before business school. If you coast, you are likely to be disappointed in your recruiting outcomes during your MBA.

## Confidence in trying new things and taking risks

Depending on your personality, gaining a deferred admission can spur you to try new things. Especially in the year leading up to their MBA applications, many of our clients focus on finalizing outcomes with existing experiences, to gain those coveted resume bullets or stories for recommendation letters. For instance, many of our clients seem wary of starting new community service initiatives, cautious of how it might look to others (“Did you just join this non-profit because you’re applying to school this year?”) and committing more time right when they are spending more time on standardized testing and writing essays. However, students with deferred decisions can continue pushing into new experiences, confident their timing won’t be mis-interpreted and that their insights gained can contribute to their peers when school does start.

Deferred programs also encourage people to take risks, an attitude that will set you up for better longer-run success. Thinking of working internationally? Knowing you’re going to business school in 2-3 years can encourage you to immerse yourself in an international experience that you may not have tried if trying to bulk up your resume with work accomplishments. For instance, one of our clients had always wanted to learn Spanish. Instead of taking classes or signing up for Duolingo, he got a job with a South American retailer. A job that required Spanish as its primary language! Forcing himself to dive into the language, and learn the nuances of business use vs. more casual usage of the language helped differentiate him in future MBA recruiting cycles.

## Flexibility

Most programs offer flexibility of when you can start your MBA. During this time of year, many of our clients are grappling with when to apply – should I wait a year because I’m doing so well at work? What might that year cost me? Even the probability simulations we build for clients, it can be difficult to feel certain when making decisions.

Having deferred admission will give you some flexibility of timing your MBA without the risks of reapplying (though this flexibility differs between specific programs). Instead, you can work with school staff to target a year that works best for you, and possibly adjust plans if circumstances change. This

may minimize your opportunity costs from exiting the workforce during the program. You cannot defer forever, but you do have more flexibility in picking the time that works best for you.

## Post-college support

Once accepted, several schools offer support through networking events and counselling that can enhance your post-college plans. We've had several clients enter highly technical post-college careers. Often, they struggle to find leadership opportunities that will help them build skills to tackle their longer-run goals (I.e., Influencing and negotiation skills to expand their leadership impact). Deferred admissions would expose them to business-savvy people who could guide them through those challenges in ways that technical talent may not be able to.

Acceptance into a deferred admission program also means networking opportunities beyond what you would get post-college. Several schools offer events for participants to get to know one another, and most alumni will treat you as already part of the community. Relationships like that are invaluable as you build skills in your pre-MBA career, expand your business or drive positive change in your community.

## Provides good practice for regular MBA admissions

Applying to top-tier MBA programs is hard. There is a lot to manage (I.e., crafting your core messages, preparing your recommenders, learning about schools, writing essays), and there are always surprises (I.e., which recommenders you can really count on!). Every year, we have numerous clients get top-tier offers on their second try. While they have grown over that extra year, clients also mention that greater familiarity with the process helped.

## When might you decide to take a different approach?

### How certain are you that X school is right for you?

Many of our clients often start the MBA application process thinking a particular school is best for them, and in working with us later discover other schools that are better fits (I.e., culture, industry-focus, geography). This is especially true if you haven't visited the school. In fact, we have had several clients first visit a school after being accepted, only to return realizing it is the wrong fit for them. It takes significantly more discipline from the applicant to be open to other options if accepted to a deferred program, as their focus will naturally be on engaging with the school they are now a part of rather than all the options still open to them. The risk of locking yourself into a sub-optimal path is greater.

### How will you use your time before school?

As mentioned previously, how you spend the time before business school dictates your longer-run success. Many of our clients are content without deferral programs, knowing that the pressure of getting into top-tier programs will spur their professional successes, community involvement, and networking in the years before they plan to apply. Clients also appreciate the time to try new things, knowing that the information and experiences they gather during that time will shape which schools they target. For instance, several of our clients have begun the process targeting US schools, only to re-focus on European schools after experiencing the richness of non-US work experiences in Asia, Africa, and South America.

## How extraordinary were you during college?

Most applicants know that deferred admissions programs are competitive to get into, but a quick look at the numbers highlights just how competitive. At the time of publishing, HBS had 129 students committed in their “2+2” program, a fraction of their overall enrollment of 732 in the Class of 2022 (and a fraction that falls further given not everyone in 2+2 begins their MBA in the same year). Wharton has 173 in their deferred program vs. 916 enrolled as part of the Class of 2022.

All this is to say that admission is generally significantly tougher into a deferred admission program vs. the traditional process. Successful candidates will have something unique to offer schools to offset the chance those schools are taking in extrapolating your future success several years before they would ordinarily assess your candidacy. What did you lead during college? What impact were you able to have on your organizations and people around you? Why should a school take you now vs. waiting to see how you might have turned out 2-3 years from now? If you don’t have clear answers to these questions, consider waiting.

## How much time can you commit to applying?

Applying for a deferred admission spot is a time-consuming process, between networking, writing, and engaging your recommenders. You need to ask yourself if you can put together a competitive enough application that it would still be worth a net positive to your longer-run candidacy even if you didn’t get accepted on a deferred admission basis. Applying for deferred programs is not a free try; your application will go into your formal file. If you don’t take the process seriously, it could actually hurt your chances for admission later in the traditional admissions process.

## When do successful applicants start working toward this path?

As our clients would tell you – applying to school takes significant work – it’s important to consider whether now is the right time to apply. Most of the serious work happens the summer before Senior Year of college and throughout the first half of senior year. However, many successful applicants are considering the option as early as Sophomore year. Why? Because it’s helpful to have time to fully invest in experiences that help you to grow as a leader and a candidate.

Interested in learning more?

We have included a comprehensive summary [here](#) of programs that offer deferred admissions programs. Please [contact us](#) to set up some time to discuss whether this would be a good fit for your short-term and longer-term goals. We've guided many successful applicants through this process, and are happy to get you started in a way that saves you time and stress in the future!