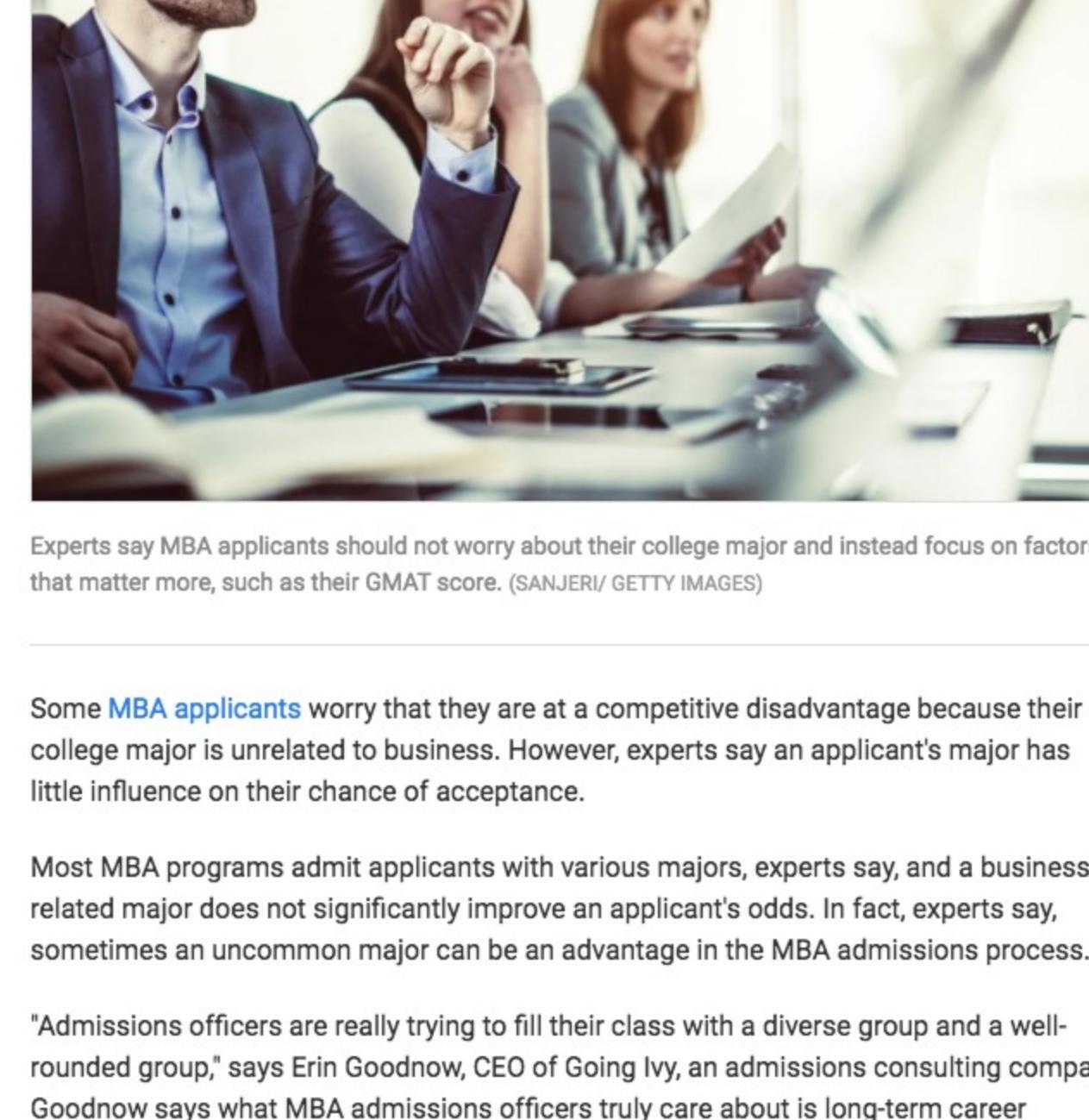


## College Major Rarely a Deal Breaker for an MBA

A college major will not make or break an MBA application, experts say.

By Ilana Kowarski, Reporter | Jan. 9, 2017, at 9:30 a.m.



Experts say MBA applicants should not worry about their college major and instead focus on factors that matter more, such as their GMAT score. (SANJERI/ GETTY IMAGES)

Some **MBA applicants** worry that they are at a competitive disadvantage because their college major is unrelated to business. However, experts say an applicant's major has little influence on their chance of acceptance.

Most MBA programs admit applicants with various majors, experts say, and a business-related major does not significantly improve an applicant's odds. In fact, experts say, sometimes an uncommon major can be an advantage in the MBA admissions process.

"Admissions officers are really trying to fill their class with a diverse group and a well-rounded group," says Erin Goodnow, CEO of Going Ivy, an admissions consulting company. Goodnow says what MBA admissions officers truly care about is long-term career potential, not an applicant's college major.

[Get a head start on b-school by improving your quantitative skills.]

David Tang, an MBA student at the **Kellogg School of Management** at Northwestern University, says applicants should describe in their **application essay** how their major fits into their **journey to business school**.

"Making the case is all about connecting the dots between your past achievements, how it led to the b-school decision and what you want to accomplish post b-school," Tang said via Facebook. "The story needs to be genuine, personal and believable."

Alicia Stewart, an MBA admissions counselor at the IvyWise consulting group and a former assistant director of admissions at **Columbia Business School**, says a small minority of business schools have preferences regarding college major.

"There may be school-specific preferences for major, so the key is to look into the school you are interested in and see what their class profile looks like," Stewart said in an email. "Get an idea of the culture, and you will see the types of students they admit and also assess your own fit to the community."

[Learn how to **overcome a low quantitative background in MBA admissions**.]

### Any Major Can Lead to Business School

Laurel Grodman, director of admissions, analytics and evaluation for the **Yale School of Management**, says admissions officers often get questions from nervous MBA applicants who wonder if their major ruins their prospects. This is particularly common among liberal arts majors, who often describe themselves as "nontraditional" to MBA admissions officers, she says.

"We always kind of chuckle to ourselves, because there really is not a nontraditional background when you look at the applicant pool," Grodman says.

Grodman says that, regardless of major, applicants need to explain why business school makes sense for them.

She says Yale evaluates MBA applicants with different college majors based on a consistent set of standards, such as GPA, **GMAT scores**, work history and the rigor of undergraduate courses.

"We've actually got tremendous diversity when it comes to college major," Grodman says. "We have a healthy representation from all of the big major groupings, so we're certainly not advantaging or disadvantaging any particular group, and we certainly don't go out on the onset looking to hit some sort of quota."

[Understand **what matters most in MBA admissions**.]

### The Importance of Explanation

The ability to explain a college major and describe how it fits into a career is more important than the actual major, says Ryan Barba, an MBA admissions consultant based in Boston and a 2011 MBA graduate from the **Samuel Curtis Johnson Graduate School of Management** at Cornell University.

Barba says when he applied to MBA programs as a biology major, he was often asked why he was switching gears. "It was not a concern, but it was something I had to explain clearly," he says.

Anna Henschel, a first-year student at the **Iserberg School of Management** at University of Massachusetts-Amherst, says the fact that MBA interviewers asked her to explain her religious studies major created an opportunity for her to discuss her undergraduate experience at **Bard College**.

Henschel says the key for MBA applicants is to present their college major with pride. "Say, 'This is what I gained, and these are the skills I bring to the table,'" Henschel suggests.

### A Liberal Arts Major Is Not a Disadvantage

One recent MBA graduate says his college major in philosophy served him well before, during and after business school, and he says MBA applicants with a liberal arts background should emphasize it in their MBA application.

Robert Green, an engineering project leader in Florida and a 2014 MBA graduate from the **College of Business Administration at University of Central Florida**, says a liberal arts education gets people in the habit of being creative, which is a strong asset in the business world.

"We need people who can think in abstract or gestalt perspectives to see things in a way that transcends routine mindless thought and actually give people what they need, not just what they ask for," Green said via email. "People with a philosophical background tend to be visionary and may connect with people at a very emotional level or tap into a social or psychological vein that exposes a market opportunity that the MBA would want to service and satisfy."

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Ilana Kowarski | REPORTER

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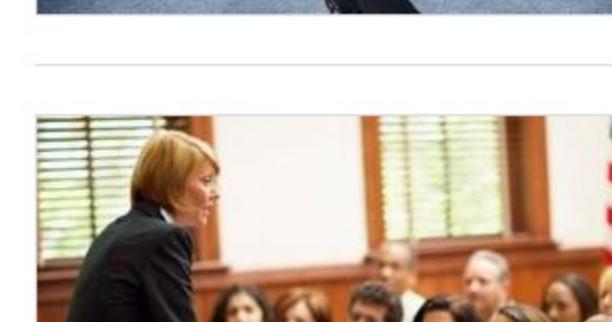
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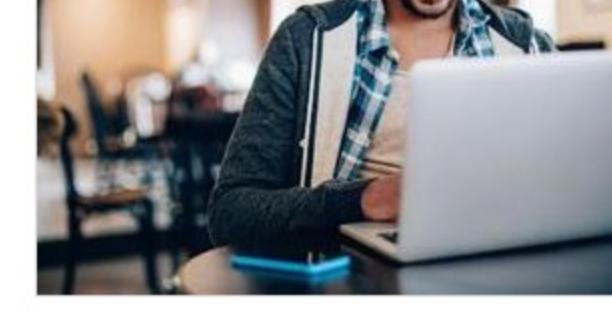
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