

# BusinessWeek

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## Getting Into Michigan

The Ross School's admissions director talks about recommendation letters, essays, and how the school evaluates MBA candidates

[Soojin Kwon Koh](#) is the admissions director at the University of Michigan [Ross School of Business](#). Prior to becoming director in 2006, Koh spent two years as a senior associate director of admissions. Before coming to Ross in 2004, Koh was a manager at [Deloitte Consulting](#).

Koh recently spoke with BusinessWeek.com reporter [Alina Dizik](#). Here is an edited transcript of their conversation:

### **Are there any major changes to the application process this year?**

Not this year. Last year we moved to an interview by invitation.

### **Are you seeing more applications now than in the recent past?**

Yes, in the first round it was a double-digit increase.

### **What's the most unusual or difficult essay question on your application? What's your advice to students on how to answer it?**

The question is: If you were not pursuing the career goal that you outlined in your essay, what would be the alternative career path and how would that interest help you in being on multidisciplinary teams? People usually have questions about whether we are looking for something within business or not business, but we just want them to be honest. We want to know what else motivates them. There's no right answer. The whole purpose is to get to know the applicants as people.

### **What do students tell you is the hardest part of the admissions process at your school? How do you help students deal with it?**

I think the essay questions are the hardest for them. Often they think we are looking for a particular answer and we are really not. Really we are just trying gain an understanding of what that applicant is all about.

### **Do students apply in rounds? Are there any benefits to being in an earlier round?**

There are three rounds. After each round, students find out about the admissions decision at the same time—it is not rolling admissions. The main benefits for applying in the first two rounds are that there are more scholarships, and the opportunity to attend our admitted-student weekend. We don't reserve a percentage of spots for each round.

### **How important is an applicant's quantitative GMAT score?**

We don't have a cutoff, but we do recommend that the applicant look at our average just to get an idea of the kind of scores that have been successful in the past. Another area we look at for quantitative skills is their work experience, and how much they needed to use [quantitative skills] in their undergraduate coursework.

### **What's the typical amount of work experience you're looking for in an applicant? How do you regard applicants with less business experience than that?**

Typically it's been five years. We don't have a goal of trying to get to five years; the range is two to eight years. For folks who have less than the five years we are looking at the quality of their work experience and what they have achieved, including what kind of impact they have had on their organization.

**What do you want to see in applicants' recommendation letters?**

Ideally we want to see letters from a supervisor who knows their work skills and their potential to do well. He or she should give examples of how they have excelled and how they can work with other people. We are not looking for someone with a big title who hasn't worked directly with them, since they are not in a position to give us a glimpse.

**How do interviews work? What are some of the key mistakes applicants make?**

I think by virtue of our switch to invitation-only, [our interview process] has made it clear that we are evaluating you. [Admission interviews] are not an opportunity to do your homework. After the fact, the applicant has a chance to ask some questions but the primary purpose is for us to get to know you.

**What financial aid opportunities are available to students?**

Students who apply to the first two rounds are considered for merit-based scholarships. Overall, about a third of our students are awarded merit-based scholarships. We also have need-based aid, and a little under 10% of our students are eligible for that. About 75% of our students take out loans. We have federal loans and a partnership loan with Citibank ([C](#)) which has a low interest rate and does not require a co-signer.

**How do you attract women and underrepresented minorities? Do you have any special programs to attract these students?**

We do lots of outreach and we do have UpClose, an under-represented minority preview weekend in the fall. We are currently in the planning stages for a weekend focusing on women's issues.

**Do you have any special initiatives or procedures for international applicants?**

We host information sessions in many parts of the world. We have participated in events within Latin America, Asia, and Europe.

**What are some common mistakes candidates make in their applications?**

They try to use a one-size-fits-all concept to their essay responses. I think people are doing so many that they forget to quality-check before they hit the submit button. Also they should think hard about who they are asking to write their recommendation letters and talk to them. They should ask them: What do you think of my performance and my skills? Are you comfortable writing a letter of support for me? Give them a way to bow out if the answer is no.

**In a nutshell, what kind of person would be a good fit?**

Ross is a very team-based collaborative environment, so if you are not the kind of person who enjoys working with other people, it may not be the right fit. We are looking for people who thrive in an environment of working with others.

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