

January 2013

Factors Prospective Students Consider When Selecting an MBA Program

Lorie Plyler Briggs

University of South Florida, loriebriggs@hotmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd>

 Part of the [Higher Education and Teaching Commons](#), [Marketing Commons](#), and the [Mass Communication Commons](#)

Scholar Commons Citation

Briggs, Lorie Plyler, "Factors Prospective Students Consider When Selecting an MBA Program" (2013). *Graduate Theses and Dissertations*.

<http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd/4446>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.

Factors Prospective Students Consider When Selecting an MBA Program

by

Lorie Briggs

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
School of Mass Communications
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Justin S. Brown, Ph.D.
Kelli Burns, Ph.D.
Sajeev Varki, Ph.D.

Date of Approval:
March 26, 2013

Keywords: decision considerations, graduate business, marketing higher education,
interviews, business schools

Copyright © 2013, Lorie Briggs

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND	3
A Changing Target Market	4
A Change in the Perceived Value of the MBA	5
Market Fragmentation	7
Increased Competition	7
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	10
Research Questions.....	14
Grounded Theory	15
Contribution to Existing Literature.....	18
CHAPTER 3: METHOD	19
Sampling.....	21
Transcribing and Coding	23
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS.....	24
Time to Decision	26
Why Pursue an MBA?	28
More Money.....	28
Career Change.....	29
Required Credential	29
Need for Knowledge.....	30
Benefits of an MBA	31
Where to Pursue the MBA?	31
Just One Answer	36
Market-Specific Competition.....	36
Obstacles.....	38
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION.....	40
Limitations	43
Future Studies	45
REFERENCES	47
APPENDIX 1: RECRUITMENT SCRIPT.....	53

APPENDIX 2: IRB APPROVAL.....	54
APPENDIX 3: INFORMED CONSENT	55
APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	60
APPENDIX 5: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTIONS.....	62
Incoming #1: Casey	62
Incoming #2: Marsha	75
Incoming #3: Ish	87
Incoming #4: Woody	98
Incoming #5: Angie	106
Incoming #6: Chase	112
Incoming #7: Fred	120
Incoming #8: Mike	128
Prospect 1: Jorge	137
Prospect 2: JoAnn	144
Prospect 3: Cassie	152
Prospect 4: Cory	161
Prospect 5: Tina	168
Prospect 6: Lenny	175
Prospect 7: Dani	182
Prospect 8: John	186
Prospect 9: Rusty	194

ABSTRACT

This paper adds to existing literature regarding MBA selection processes and helps identify and better understand the needs that motivate consumers to pursue an MBA degree. Through a series of qualitative, one-on-one interviews with 17 brand-new MBA students or prospective students, this research found that while many people have “always wanted” to earn the advanced degree, most have toyed with the idea of a graduate business degree for many years. The most frequent reasons that people cite regarding their decision to seriously consider an MBA at a large southern university centers around four desires. These are, not surprisingly, the desire to earn more money, the desire to change careers, the desire to advance their careers by obtaining a required credential, and the desire for knowledge that can be obtained by earning the degree. Further, this research identified the single most important factor that prospects considered when determining which university to attend for the MBA degree: the university's ability to help make them more marketable or advance their career. Other answers included cost, university's reputation, convenience, program duration, the university's location, and the caliber of peers in the classroom.

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND

In recent years, according to trend reports from both the Association for the Advancement of Collegiate Schools of Business and the Graduate Management Admissions Council, the number of students enrolled in full-time, AACSB-accredited MBA programs has been, until 2012, flat or, in many cases, shrinking, while enrollment in other graduate business programs has been on the rise. Lifestyle and cultural shifts, as well as the health of the economy, are likely reasons for diminishing enrollment, but business schools themselves should accept some of the blame for sagging enrollment. Market fragmentation, program dilution, the creation of specialized graduate business degree programs, and ineffective marketing and branding programs appear to contribute to the problem.

Regardless of whether enrollments are rising or falling, it is important for business schools to employ effective marketing practices when promoting programs and, for the flagship program in particular, to create marketing messages by starting with the foundational question, “what motivating factors does our target market consider when determining whether and where to pursue the MBA degree?”

The factors prospective students consider in making a decision is not trivial information to be studied. The marketing messages and campaigns that may have “worked for years” no longer do. There is a plethora of competition, among public and

private non-profit institutions as well as national for-profit colleges. At the University of South Florida in particular, its competition in the non-profit arena is often equipped with much larger marketing budgets. In the for-profit arena, USF is faced with competitors that have national advertising campaigns, large marketing budgets, and more local staff recruiters who connect students with loans to support the educational endeavor. In addition, these for-profit schools often have less stringent entry requirements and may not require students to take standard admissions tests. Because of these challenges, marketers at programs such as USF must determine what matters to the target audience in order to craft effective strategic communications messages to recruit new students and hold on to market share as well as to tailor programs that students desire.

Traditionally, total enrollment (both full-time and part-time) in MBA programs in the United States has been countercyclical with the American economy. When the economy was bad, unemployed workers with time on their hands flocked to business schools to pursue an MBA full-time in order to make themselves more attractive to future employers. At the same time, employed businessmen (and women) pursued part-time degrees to remain competitive in the workplace. As a result, enrollment in MBA programs rose during bad economic times, despite the expense of the program.

Shortly after the turn of the century through the early 2010s, however, business school administrators and marketers have been bewildered as enrollment remained flat or rose by relatively small percentages during a sharp economic downturn. According to Dailey, Anderson, Duffy, Krimm and Thomas (2006), applications to *BusinessWeek's* Top 30 MBA programs dropped roughly 30 percent between 1998 and 2006, some seeing declines in excess of 50 percent. The Graduate Management Admissions Council, the

organization that administers the test many business schools use to assess applicants' qualifications for admissions, has been following the trend and, in its 2010 and 2011 reports, noted significant drops in both admissions and the number of people applying to take the entrance test (with the exception of China, where the number of test takers is on the rise). The organization publishes a preview report each fall; the 2012 report indicates that, for some universities, the downward trend did not continue this past year and that some saw improvements in *application volume* over the prior year, but that "fewer than half of each MBA program type reported increased volumes over 2011" (p. 4). Further, the report pointed out that growth in application volume was largely fueled by "application gains among online/distance offerings" and that "45 percent [of all MBA programs] saw declines and 10 percent reported no change" (p. 6).

The *Wall Street Journal* noticed the GMAT reports and, in a September 13, 2011, article, reported "one-third of full-time MBA programs reported drops of more than 10 percent, according to the survey, which included 649 MBA and other business programs at 331 schools world-wide." And in academic literature, researchers Schlegelmilch and Thomas (2011) questioned the future of the program in their research titled, "The MBA in 2020: will there still be one?"

A Changing Target Market

The target market for the MBA is broad. For many public higher education institutions, and the University of South Florida in particular, the target market is comprised of adults who are at least a few years out of undergraduate programs. According to the 2012 GMAC Applications Trends survey, 57 percent of full-time MBA

applicants have at least three years of work experience; for self-paced part-time MBA programs such as the one offered at the University of South Florida, this report shows that 66 percent of applicants have at least three years of work experience (p. 36). The undergraduate program in which they studied is irrelevant, as the broad-based MBA is not designed solely for business majors. While the prospective student's undergraduate major is unimportant, accreditation does matter as AACSB-accredited schools (and likely the vast majority of respected universities) only accept candidates with degrees from institutions accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

Educational background is not the only area that varies for this target. Today's target includes more dual-income married couples. Classrooms are becoming more equal in terms of gender. Many people, especially in large, metropolitan areas, work full-time and attend school part-time. Thus, some within the target market may not earn an undergraduate degree until their mid-to-late 30s. Thus, the MBA target classroom is a multi-generational one, comprised of people ranging from their early 20s to mid-40s, the variance depending on whether (or not) students choose to earn an undergraduate degree straight out of high school by attending college full-time and graduating in four years. The 2012 GMAC Application Trends Survey reports that for full-time MBA programs, 63 percent of applicants are at least 26 years old; for the part-time self-paced MBA programs such as the one offered at USF, 71 percent of applicants are at least 26 years old (p. 36).

Marital status, ethnicity, and gender are not primary considerations when defining the target market.

Business schools may have (likely in an effort to differentiate themselves) fragmented the market by offering a wide variety of specialized master's degree tracks as well as MBA-like and "MBA-light" programs. The following literature review includes a summary of key (sometimes called underlying) factors identified in previous studies.

A Change in the Perceived Value of the MBA

In recent years, it appears that the MBA is no longer considered a "special" degree and that, for many, there has been a significant drop in the perceived value of the program. A survey conducted by Accountemps and referenced by Rapert, Smith, Velliquette and Garretson (2004) found that 80 percent of top executives consider a graduate degree in business essential for rising to senior-level corporate positions. Countless business schools use feature stories and video vignettes of happy, smiling alumni to illustrate how the lessons learned in the program helped the former students gain a promotion or "take my career to the next level." Hundreds of testimonials include the much-used cliché to say that success was just out of reach until attaining the MBA and its concomitant life and business lessons.

There is little question that the program has value, but there are mixed reviews over quality related to value. Regardless, when it comes to marketing the program to

prospective students, what matters is the *perceived* value. In 1997, Goldgehn and Kane reported a drop in perceived value of the MBA, going so far as to state that business schools had lost their mystique, that the business market had become dissatisfied with the MBA product, and to note that there is growing distance between academia and mainstream business. They noted that subjects in their study felt the MBA had become “an average degree, nothing special” and wrote, “the majority felt there is less of a return on investment with an MBA than there used to be” (p. 18). Twelve years later, in an article in the mainstream publication *BusinessWeek* (2010), DiMeglio opened a story on the difficulties of marketing graduate business programs by writing that the MBA program’s reputation is in “tatters.” Noting the rising costs, weakening programs, the fall of major business corporations led by MBA graduates, the collapse of Wall Street, and academia’s slow response to changing times, she wrote, “in some circles, [MBA degrees] constitute a negative brand: one that’s associated with ethical lapses, business failures, and the causes of the financial times.”

More recently, Nicholls, Harris, Morgan, Clarke and Sims (2011) wrote, “It is difficult to define what exactly constitutes an MBA degree because of the variety of product offerings” (p. 31). Nicholls et al. also pointed out that throughout the last two decades, the market has matured and, while prospective students in the 1980s might not have paid attention to differences between programs, the more mature market of the 2010s is more discriminating. Similar themes were echoed in the *Wall Street Journal*

(2011), including one where the headline writer clearly summarized the changing view: “Business School: No Thanks.”

Market Fragmentation

Goldgehn and Kane (1997) suggested that fragmentation in the delivery system was to blame for a weakening MBA as curricula vary from market to market and institution to institution. Business schools no longer offer a traditional MBA program in a uniform format. There are two-year programs, one-year high intensity programs, fast-track options, online, extended, and executive MBA cohort programs. In addition, business schools have created master’s programs with entry requirements that are somewhat less challenging, such as the MS in Entrepreneurship, MS in Management, MS in Finance, etc., programs whose growth may have come, in part, at the expense of the institution’s own MBA program. Johnson, Thomas and Peck (2010) called the shift from traditional MBA programs to specialized programs a trend, saying these specialized programs are tailored to fit the individual student’s needs rather than a one-size-fits-all-MBA. GMAC noted that, in 2012, these specialized programs continued to enjoy robust growth in application volume.

Increased Competition

Not only are there new specialty programs to deal with, but there is also an

increase in competition. In its October 2011 newsletter, GMAC pointed out that 13,670 institutions worldwide offering a business degree. In addition to the sheer number of (accredited and unaccredited) institutions, the traditional on-site MBA program now competes with off-site or out-of-market programs, as well as the variety of less rigorous for-profit programs (that frequently have lower admissions standards) that use corporate marketing strategies. It is easy to see why these researchers consider market fragmentation to be cause for concern.

This thesis explores the reasons why students pursue a graduate business degree and the attributes they consider when selecting a particular institution. An analysis of what matters to both new and prospective MBA students, this study's findings offer information that marketing personnel should consider when designing strategic communications plans and materials to promote the degree and focus on the things that matter most to potential students.

The following literature review sheds light on prior studies focused on MBA marketing and an overview of Grounded Theory, which served as a framework for this research. Chapter three of this manuscript outlines the methods used to collect data and analyze results for this study. Chapter four analyzes the results. The findings are discussed in the closing chapter.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an overview of scholarly research related to the marketing of graduate business programs, particularly the MBA. After presenting the research question, this chapter concludes with an overview of Grounded Theory.

More than two dozen scholarly articles on the marketing of MBA or other graduate business programs worldwide have been written in the last 25 years. Researchers bemoan the fact that there is not a vast amount of published work specific to MBA marketing. Heslop and Nadeau (2010) wrote that “the marketing of higher education has attracted more controversy than study,” (p. 87) and other authors used phrases such as “paucity of information,” and called this niche an “important but little understood area” (Powell, personal communication November 2010; Dailey et al. 2006, p. 144; Ivy & Naude, 2010, p. 92). Because the target market for the MBA is no longer the same as it was in the 1980s and 1990s, only articles from the 2000s (with two exceptions, written in 1995 and 1997) were selected for this literature review, a selection further culled by choosing only articles focusing largely on North America. In addition to these scholarly articles, two unpublished studies were reviewed, as well as mainstream, non-scholarly articles and industry association reports.

In 2006, Dailey et al. gathered information on the reasons why students pursue an MBA, sorting them into broad categories such as “need for knowledge,” “general

business knowledge,” “valuable business credential,” and so forth. Dailey et al. (2006) noted that while the degree was still a credible, valued credential often required for corporate advancement, its value had dropped over the last decade. Dailey’s research identified 26 needs that an MBA fulfills. She concluded by stating, “it is apparent from the results that the needs satisfied by pursuing an MBA degree are not homogenous” (p. 152).

Researchers approached the question of how to market the MBA differently, some looking at hallmarks and elements of programs and process-related characteristics, others at program inputs and immediate, short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes. Some evaluated the importance of specific program features and benefits.

Carrel and Schoenbachler (2001) examined the “decision considerations” for students choosing to study in an Executive MBA program as well as the considerations sponsoring companies use when deciding to financially support employees pursuing an executive degree. Classifying these considerations as personal, academic, financial, or “other,” the scholars found that the most important decision factor for students was the need for new knowledge (designated as a personal consideration), followed closely by the convenience and flexible scheduling of classes (categorized as an “other” consideration). Their findings indicated that students are interested in programs that enhance their on-the-job performance and do not interfere with work schedules.

Rapert et al. (2004) compiled a list of attributes that students considered “hallmarks” of quality programs and categorized them into metathemes of “in-class” and “outside-class” environments. Heslop and Nadeau (2010) approached the question differently, answering four questions in order to craft a list of “must-haves” and

“important-to-haves” for MBA programs. In the only published study (reviewed in this research) that examined views of prospects rather than current students in MBA programs or recent grads, Heslop and Nadeau (2010) surveyed MBA fair attendees to determine what important factors they used to determine whether or not to pursue the degree and what were the important qualities they used in determining the school at which they chose to study. The researchers used this same group to study the attributes of the “most preferred” institution to rank the importance of desired outcomes and rated MBA programs on their ability to deliver these outcomes. Looking at the ease or difficulty of the decision to pursue the degree, Heslop and Nadeau (2010) found that the primary decision factors included financial cost, investment of time, career uncertainty, future job opportunity, and an expressed interest in learning. Heslop and Nadeau (2010) then looked at the factors most often cited as critical for applicants in selecting a particular school in which to study. They found that reputation, quality (of both the faculty and the university as a whole), location convenience, personal fit of program style or goals, scheduling and programmatic flexibility (as well as ease of navigation), cost, and the ability to gain entry into the program were most important (Heslop & Nadeau, 2010). In discussing reputation as a critical factor, it was noted that applicants who were confused or overwhelmed by the myriad of MBA program choices available “can always fall back on others’ opinions (including those of ratings magazines), expressed as reputation, [which] makes justifying their choice of program and school to others very easy” (p. 101).

Next, Heslop and Nadeau (2010) looked at how prospects viewed the “most-preferred” school (as well as other schools researched) using this indirect approach to determine what was important to applicants. The authors found that applicants valued

certain immediate outcomes (a program with a challenging workload and studying in the functional areas of management), intermediate outcomes (developing a network of business contacts; learning strategic decision making, leadership, communication skills; learning how to work in a team and manage change and innovation; studying both business theory and business practice) and one long-term outcome (positioning themselves for a good career).

Moving on to look more specifically at the outcomes that prospects desired from MBA programs, Heslop and Nadeau (2010) then categorized the outcomes into immediate-, short-, and long-term outcomes. They created a top ten (out of 40) list of outcomes. Heslop and Nadeau concluded that the “most critical outcomes for MBA programs reflect general learning (resulting from a challenging course load and specific skills development), program content (skills and functional areas of business), employment and career [opportunities], personal fit (location), and status outcomes (reputation of school).” They determined this list by comparing the elements that appeared in the go/no go decision list, the outcomes that impacted the choice of which institution decision, the top ten ratings of the most preferred program list, and how two particular schools fared on their (perceived) ability to deliver. They then developed a key drivers list for MBA applicants, with “must-haves” and “important to have.” Among the must-haves: learning leadership skills, a challenging workload, and the ability to develop a good network. Among the important-to-haves: location convenience, good career prospects, good reputation, and the opportunity to learn both theory and practice.

Noting that high rankings in magazines did not make either the “must-haves” or “important to have” rosters, Heslop and Nadeau (2010) suggested that rankings serve

only as a quality signal verified by a third-party that could be used to help justify a student's decision to others. The authors also noted that program delivery outcomes such as case studies, faculty experience and teaching ability, program customization, and immediate application of lessons did not make either list, suggesting that these important factors were less a determinant of the MBA program selection process.

In a paper presented at the 17th Annual Professional MBA Conference at DePaul University in 2010, Powell (2010) surveyed 1,100 prospective MBA students who were identified by four public and four private universities. Powell (2010) determined that job security outweighed advancement as a motive for seeking graduate business degrees. Pointing out that a decade ago students earned an MBA to broaden skills and take on additional responsibilities on the job, Powell called the changing goals of MBA seekers a "generational shift," and suggested, in a news release distributed by the University of Texas at Dallas, that "business schools may need to carefully rethink many aspects of how they reach and teach this group of students."

Noting that it is "almost as if they are pursuing the degree as an insurance policy," the news release also pointed out that Powell (2010) found that today's MBA prospects aim to keep themselves competitive and make themselves more valuable to their employer, to seek more security in their jobs, increase their salaries, and position themselves for promotions. Powell's (2010) research paper, which looked solely at students' expectations prior to matriculation, provided important information related to how to manage and meet expectations and examined the go/no go question. It did not delve deeply into the specific factors that prospects consider when selecting a program, but general conclusions were drawn that could aid both administrators and marketers.

Those specific to recruiting prospects included the following: most did not value information sessions; 25 percent of respondents earned less than \$50,000, perhaps indicating the need for greater aid packages or payment options; the caliber of peers matters, as 70 percent of respondents expected to have classmates with high GMAT scores; and nearly half the respondents did *not* want schools to communicate with them via social media. In the classroom, prospects expect faculty to have both PhDs and practical experience; to have access to, along with feedback from and involvement with, faculty; and to have academic questions answered within 24 hours. Prospects no longer value study groups (64 percent plan to study mostly alone) but demand more writing labs, tutoring, and other out-of-class services (Powell, 2010).

While Powell's research examined the expectations of prospective MBA students, Dailey et al. (2006) looked at the needs of the MBA consumer, categorizing them based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1987). While three needs were mentioned most frequently (career advancement, financial security, and job security), the authors found that a need for knowledge/job security, elevated social status/prestige, general business knowledge, and achievement/challenge fulfillment clustered relatively close together in a second grouping.

Research Questions

Whether selling consumable goods, durable goods, or intangible services and programs such as an MBA, marketers must understand consumers' needs – what motivates them to buy and what factors they consider when searching for a product to meet those needs – in order to develop an effective marketing and mass communications

strategy. This study sought to determine:

R₁: What factors do prospects consider when determining whether to pursue the MBA, and, for those making that decision,

R₂: what program elements do they consider most important when opting to attend the MBA program at the University of South Florida?

Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory is often referred to as a theory, but, in a sense, it is really the process that is used to develop a theory that emerges or evolves during the research process, one that is “grounded in data from the field, especially in the actions, interactions, and social processes of people” (Creswell, p. 63). The idea is to generate or discover a theory by using a specific, reflective coding approach to discover processes. Creswell wrote that the theory “is a good design to use when a theory is not available to explain a process.” He also noted that “the literature may have models available, but they were developed and tested on samples and populations other than those of interest to the [particular] qualitative researcher” (p. 66). Because this research examines a particular population (one that has not previously been studied) and the process/behaviors of this group, Grounded Theory serves as an appropriate methodological basis for this inquiry.

Grounded Theory’s founders, sociologists Glaser and Strauss (1967), developed the theory for sociology scholars but, according to Goulding (2010), Licqurish (2011), and Payne (2007), among others, the theory has become a popular qualitative research method across disciplines. Dunne (2011) wrote that the theory has become quite popular

in the last two decades in fields ranging from software development processes to healthcare research. Goulding wrote, “given its emphasis on behaviour it is possible to argue that it has potential for theoretical advancements in the area of, for example, consumer research” (p. 22).

Payne (2007) pointed out that this experiential approach is concerned with inferring meaning about what people think, feel, and do. Given that the purpose of this study was to understand behavior, namely why consumers choose to pursue an MBA and what factors they consider when making this choice, Grounded Theory is, again, an appropriate theory for this inquiry.

Payne also noted that researchers could consider this theory when “relatively little is known about the topic area, there are no ‘grand’ theories to explain adequately the specific...behaviors under investigation [or]...researchers are interested in eliciting participants’ understandings, perceptions, and experiences” (2007, p. 70).

In addition, according to Dunne (2011), Grounded Theory is an “effective research strategy for topics which have been subject to relatively little research and about which there is a paucity of knowledge” (p. 116). It was pointed out earlier in this paper that researchers called this niche an “important but little understood area” and used phrases such as “paucity of information” to describe the amount of inquiry into this area. This gap in existing literature provides another reason why Grounded Theory was well-suited for this exploratory study.

In Grounded Theory, the researcher does not begin with a hypothesis but, instead, poses a question and remains open to whatever theory might emerge from the collected data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). According to Dunne (2011), the

researcher is not focused on testing a hypothesis as much as developing one from empirical data collected in the field. Dunne (2011) also suggested that Grounded Theory provides a framework for the qualitative researcher and provides systematic guidelines that counter criticisms that quantitative researchers had lobbied at their peers in the qualitative arena.

There are specific steps that should be followed when using Grounded Theory, particularly in terms of data collection and the method and timing of data analysis. Grounded Theory, according to Dunne (2011), “demands that data collection and analysis occur concurrently, rather than in a linear sequence” (p. 111).

Scholars use adjectives such as “zigzag,” “spiral,” “circular,” and “constant comparative” to describe Grounded Theory’s framework (Creswell, 1998, Dunne, 2010; Payne, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this process/theory, analysis and data collection are concurrent. The researcher begins data collection and, while it is still early in the data collection process, begins to analyze the data, reviewing and coding it right away, searching for major categories of information. After the initial data collection takes place, followed by open coding and reflection, Grounded Theory’s process calls for more data collection, followed by more coding – and possibly modification/refinement of the questions asked during data collection. Initial coding, also called open coding, involves assigning labels to topics that are mentioned in the interview. Open coding occurs relatively soon after the interview and, as a result, themes begin to emerge.

According to Goulding (2010), coding usually begins with a line-by-line review of the transcribed interview, during which the researcher seeks out key words or phrases that give insight into the subject’s thoughts or behavior. An important point that Goulding

(2010) makes related to the development of theory is that one may not emerge. She wrote, “even for those who do use the method correctly, it is wrong to assume that a theory will automatically emerge” (p. 30).

Contribution to Existing Literature

This study adds to the existing body of research in several ways. First, it uses an approach that has not been used in this area before; prior studies have largely been quantitative in nature. As such, prior work examining studies about motivators lacked the richness that comes with in-depth interviews. Second, it looked at two specific segments: new students who were about to start their coursework or were just a few weeks into their MBA program and prospective students who had not yet determined whether or not to pursue the degree.

Additionally, it examined a very specific population and used the University of South Florida as an illustration of an MBA program in consideration. As a result, this study closes with suggestions for improved strategic marketing and communications efforts at this specific university.

The next chapter discusses this study’s research design, sample selection, intercoder reliability, and data analysis.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

This chapter begins with an overview of the method used for this study. It is followed by a description of the sampling method used to recruit interview subjects. It closes with a description of the transcription and coding process and the steps taken to avoid coder bias.

Goulding (2001) pointed out that interviews and observations are the most common sources of data for this type of research because “interpretations must, or should include the perspectives and choices of those studied” (p. 23). Additionally, according to Payne (2007), interviews were suitable for this study because they “build upon everyday experience of conversations and generally people are pleased to have the opportunity to talk with an attentive person in a face-to-face situation” (p. 72). Marketing researchers Griffin and Hauser (2001) pointed out the interviews are an effective way to gather customer input, saying that “to address both strategic and operational decisions, industry practice has evolved a form of customer input that has become known as the ‘Voice of the Customer’” (p. 2). They also wrote that this qualitative method of inquiry is effective in identifying customer needs. They suggested that a typical study should include “between 10 and 30 customers” who are interviewed for one hour in a one-on-one setting. Further, in the same paper, Griffin and Hauser (2001) wrote that “two one-on-one interviews are about as effective as one focus group...and that four interviews are about

as effective as two focus groups” (p. 7) and that “interviewing 20 customers identifies over 90 percent of the needs provided by 30 customers” (p. 9).

After approval for a qualitative inquiry was received by the University of South Florida Institutional Review Board, 17 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted between December 2012 and January 2013. The interviews began with a review of an IRB-approved consent form (see Appendix 3) and were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for cues into the factors that current students felt were important when considering graduate school and then, once that decision was made, when determining which university might be better suited for each individual.

According to Ruggeri, Gizelis, and Dorussen, intercoder reliability requires that different coders review the collected data and give the same scores on all dimensions. Such random checks help to assess reliability, but “it can be a daunting task to recode previously collected information...and limited monetary resources and time constraints can seriously derail a project” (p. 346). The researchers pointed out that there is no guarantee that spot-checks conclusively identify all major problems but such checks may allow researchers to estimate data reliability. For this thesis, to check against coder bias, a fellow graduate student in the mass communications program at the University of South Florida reviewed the first interview and transcript for accuracy, comparing the recorded interview against its written version. Later, another student randomly selected a different transcript and reviewed the way it was coded into a master spreadsheet that showed

question-by-question answers.

Sampling

A blend of random and purposeful sampling was used for this study. Numerous researchers (Payne, 2007; Gambett & Graffigna, 2012; Goulding, 2010; Licqurish, 2010; and Creswell, 1998) stress that one of the tenets of Grounded Theory is theoretical sampling, which means that “participants are selected based on the basis of the emerging analysis...” (Payne, 2007, p. 664). This sampling method allows researchers to select additional participants as concepts are identified and the researcher notes that subjects with specific backgrounds, genders, etc. are needed to fill in gaps in the studied population and strengthen the findings. Thus, the sampling method for this research began with a random selection of students who were extended an invitation to participate in the study and the first interviews were conducted based on convenience and response order. Later, students were selected for interviews based on a review of the data analyzed at that point.

Subjects were selected at random from two lists provided by the University of South Florida. The first list contained names and email addresses for 38 students who had applied, been accepted, and had paid a deposit to begin MBA classes in January 2013. This group was labeled as incoming students. Invitations to participate in the study were extended via email (see Appendix 1) in three rounds (first to every fifth name on the list, second to every twelfth name on the list – numbers selected at random – then, finally, given that responses were largely female, to every male on the list who had not already been invited to participate). A total of 36 requests to be interviewed were sent via email.

Eight incoming students agreed to be interviewed. All were either about to begin their first semester of classes or were less than three weeks into their first semester of the MBA program.

The second list contained the names of 76 people who had made a reservation to attend an information session regarding the MBA program at the University of South Florida. This group was labeled as prospects. Potential subjects were selected at random and a total of 56 invitations to be interviewed were extended in three waves. The first group was invited via an email to every fifth person on the list; a second wave of invitations was extended only to every fifth person who actually attended an information session. A third wave of invitations was extended to all who had actually attended an information session as of December 2012. Nine interviews were conducted from this group (one person who had agreed to be interviewed but who had been denied admission into the program was not interviewed). See Appendix 1 for the script that was used to recruit participants.

These two different groups were selected to determine if there were any factors that one group recognized as key as compared to the other.

Questions for the interviews (see Appendix 4 for a list of questions) were crafted based on the work of Heslop and Nadeau (2010) and Powell (2010) as both of these studies focused on prospective MBA students and their expectations, rather than current students or recent graduates. Questions were clustered as follows: A) questions related to decision factors, B) questions related to choosing a particular institution, namely USF and C) demographic information. Questions were not always asked in the exact same order

and, based on the conversation and rapport established between the interviewer and subject, sidebar or follow-up questions were occasionally asked.

Transcribing and Coding

Grounded Theory's circular approach requires that data is collected, analyzed, and reviewed as it is collected in order to search for major categories of information. This approach calls for more data collection, followed by more coding – and possibly modification/refinement of the questions asked during data collection. Open coding occurs relatively soon after the interview and, as a result, themes begin to emerge. For this thesis, interviews were recorded and posted on a private YouTube channel with a private link to be used solely by the researcher to transcribe interviews. Transcription took place within a few days of each interview. A graduate student who was not involved in this research reviewed the first interview and transcription for accuracy.

As is common in Grounded Theory research, the interviewer took notes during the interviews and additional notes were taken as the written transcriptions were reviewed by the interviewer. These notes included key words or phrases that may have been cited by others. These simple notes also included words to trigger the interviewer to compare at particular areas when evaluating all of the data.

After all of the interviews were transcribed, a master chart of all answers, by question, was created. Common themes were then identified from the responses contained in the transcripts. To protect anonymity, an alias provided by each person interviewed was used for the transcripts, analysis, and reporting of the results.

The next chapter discusses the results of this study.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Seventeen interviews were conducted, largely in-person (just two were conducted via telephone), at the University of South Florida, though locations were varied based on convenience for the subject, particularly prospective students who had not yet made a decision about studying at the university and did not have a parking pass for the university or regular business to conduct there. After a review of an IRB-approved Informed Consent Form (see Appendix 3), whereby subjects were informed of study goals, interviews were conducted and followed a similar format. The interviews lasted an average of 24 minutes. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded. Per IRB standards, all subjects provided an alias that was used in the resulting transcriptions (see Appendix 5).

Subjects ranged in age from 23 to 44 years of age; most (59 percent, $n = 10$) were in their 30s. Respondents were nearly equally split in terms of gender (47 percent women, $n = 8$).

More than half of the subjects interviewed were single (nine people said they were single, two said they were divorced, five reported that they were married, and one person's marital status was unknown). The majority of the subjects did not have children; only one of the subjects was a parent of more than one child.

In terms of ethnic or cultural background, 65 percent (n = 11) of the group was Caucasian and 20 percent of the people interviewed were Asian (n = 3). A quarter of those interviewed (n = 4) were internationals living in the United States; two indicated a desire to return to their native nations and use the knowledge gained from the MBA program to conduct business there.

Though they often share the classroom with MBA students, students pursuing specialized master's degrees such as the Master of Science in Marketing or the Master of Science in Entrepreneurship were not interviewed. At the time the interviews were scheduled, it was unknown if a prospective student was considering the Executive MBA and/or traditional MBA program. Two people who were interviewed were considering the Executive MBA.

Nearly all of those interviewed were working professionals. Just two people considered themselves full-time students (and both had previously worked full-time); one person, who had formerly been employed full-time as well, considered herself a full-time parent. Subjects worked in a variety of areas, ranging from marketing and communications to school teacher to military analyst. Their employers also varied, with three people working for non-profits and three working for family businesses. Others worked for large employers such as Coca-Cola or Baycare Health Systems.

While it is difficult to draw firm conclusions from just 17 people, this suggests that, for communications purposes, the target market for prospective students could be comprised of working adults ranging in age from 20 to 45 years old, single or married, with no children or very young children. This further suggests that there may not be one specific industry that could be selected as a primary target market from which to recruit

new students, though analysis of USF's entire MBA population might reveal the top two or three industries in which most current students work.

Regarding educational backgrounds, all subjects had earned an undergraduate degree within the last 12 years, with nearly 60 percent (n = 10) earning their degree more than five years ago. Nearly half (47 percent, n = 8) of those interviewed earned an undergraduate degree from the University of South Florida, though their undergraduate majors varied from business to communications. In total, just 47 percent (n = 8) of the people interviewed earned undergraduate degrees in business. Others earned bachelor's degrees in disciplines such as mass communications, Spanish, international relations, hospitality management, engineering, and microbiology.

Time to Decision

Regardless of area of study, more than half of the subjects (52 percent, n = 9) noted that they had thought about getting an MBA since they were undergraduate students, using phrases such as "always on my radar" and "when I first graduated from college" when asked how long they had been thinking about pursuing an MBA.

I thought about it for years, actually. But I just kind of stayed away from it because it is tough to do when you are working full-time. The opportunity cost of stopping making money is tough to swallow...coming back and not being employed made it an easy transition for me to come to school full-time... I get to, kind of, recalibrate my career. – Fred, incoming student

Since I graduated it was an option, but I, well, I started working with my dad and I kept putting it off and putting it off...really, since before graduation, all of my accounting professors pretty much suggested that if you're going to graduate, get an undergraduate degree in accounting, you might as well go for your MBA so you can be a CPA. All of them really suggested it. – Jorge

I always knew that I would go back and get my MBA. – Chase, incoming student

While subjects frequently stated that pursuing an MBA was a consideration they had for years, most people interviewed (76 percent, n = 13) indicated that they had been seriously considering an MBA for at least six months. This may indicate that the MBA sales cycle begins with faculty members and adjunct professors or instructors who promote graduate business programs in their undergraduate classrooms. Once people move to the ‘seriously considering’ stage several years later, the sales cycle ranges from a few months to three years. This may signal marketers, at least those in this particular market, that call-to-action MBA advertising campaigns don’t pay off until many months later.

This suggests that there may be fertile ground for to plant proverbial recruiting seeds by educating faculty about how their seemingly passing comments on graduate education are stored by students. As part of a strategic communications plan, faculty from the business school as well as those in areas far beyond this discipline should be educated about the benefits of pursuing an MBA and encouraged to suggest the graduate business program to their students by discussing the career benefits that could come with the advanced degree. Further, the strategic communications campaign should include outreach to business faculty and instructors that informs them of the impact their suggestions regarding graduate education have upon undergraduate students in their classrooms. It is likely, however, that faculty from other areas of study are likely to encourage students to pursue graduate education in the same discipline.

Why Pursue an MBA?

Subjects found it easier to answer questions about long-term career goals than to identify short-term career goals. Answers were clustered around moving into management or executive-level positions (59 percent, n = 10), or potentially launching their own businesses (23 percent, n = 4), or taking over the family business (12 percent, n = 2).

All of the people interviewed saw the MBA as a means to an end: a promotion, the opportunity to earn more money, the chance to take over family business, or to change his or her career. When asked if there was a specific incident that led to recent inquiries into the MBA, or, for those who were brand-new students, something that prompted enrollment in the program, answers clustered around four areas:

More Money

Eighty-two percent expressed that they considered earning the graduate business degree because they desire to earn a better salary (two people cited money directly, but 12 people (71 percent) cited a desire to advance in their careers, which implies earning more money (though, admittedly, money may not be the key motivator for upward mobility).

Being able to change fields and make more money...it is really about finding a job that pays more money. – Angie, incoming student

Long-term, my salary. That's pretty much it...[the] most important decision I want to make with this is if, you know, if I do get this job that I do make a better salary. That's the main importance. So that, that it's worth going. – Tina, prospective student

Career Change

The desire to change careers or industries was mentioned by several people. A third (35 percent, n = 6) of those interviewed indicated that they are dissatisfied with their current job and/or want to change careers and see the MBA as a way to do so.

And so I said to my husband, "you know, if I just don't love my job making \$37,000, why don't I not love my job making \$100,000?" – Casey, incoming student

And also, a shift in the field of engineering. I am basically going to select an elective like healthcare. So a shift in the field from...software industry to healthcare provision, basically. – Angie, incoming student

...knowing, basically, that I wanted to switch careers, and knowing that without getting formal training it would be difficult to get into a new position...so I figured this is the best step in order to bridge the gap, basically. – JoAnn, incoming student

Required Credential

The desire to prepare for next step in career progression (using phrases such as “diversify skillset,” “become more marketable,” “position myself for promotion” or “can't move up without” an MBA) was mentioned by all but four subjects (76 percent, n = 13). More than half (52 percent, n = 9) of those interviewed pointed out that they feel they cannot move any further up the corporate ladder without the MBA. One referred to the MBA as a “required credential;” another pointed out that he needed the “three letters.”

I think the long-term benefit would be general career advancement. I can't go any further without an MBA. – Marsha, incoming student

It's a competitive advantage over people who don't have a master's degree of some sort. And there are still a large amount of those people out there.

So any competitive advantage is going to get you the initial interview and hopefully will help. – Fred, incoming student

I thought that I wanted to get an MBA because, looking around, everybody has an [undergraduate] degree and an MBA would give me an edge, really, in terms of contacts. And also the quality of people....A lot of experience in hand. I'll be able to talk to the right people. – Ish, incoming student

When I talked to a few headhunters for the positions that I wanted, they, you know, they said "you should start thinking about getting an MBA; it would really help you." – Woody, incoming student

The long-term benefit of an MBA would allow you to move into senior-level management positions, such as, like a [chief operator officer] of the hospital, a vice president of a company, that type of position. – Cory, prospective student

I am really stuck in a place where I can't move up. So that's why. – JoAnn, incoming student

Need for Knowledge

Just four people (24 percent) expressed that their desire for business knowledge prompted their inquiry into the program; three of the four indicated that their career plans involved working in a family business, which, therefore, meant that they needed the business fundamentals that can be learned in an MBA program.

I know before I get too, get too far ahead in the company, that I really do [need], like you were saying, the financial aspect of things. I really do need to get that experience. I do intend to take over the company. I kind of have a five year plan. – Cassie, prospective student

So, if, you know, every once in a while I have an idea that's a great idea. I don't know what to do with it, you know, and so it's kind of... I want to have that kind of foundational knowledge so that I can branch out and

have, you know, have a side business or develop it into something more if that opportunity comes along. – Chase, incoming student

Benefits of an MBA

As one might expect, nearly every person interviewed said the long-term benefits of earning an MBA were related to career and/or salary growth. Prospects and incoming students alike used terms such as "workplace marketability," "differentiate myself," "competitive advantage," or "having an edge over other applicants" when describing how the MBA could help their careers

When asked how long it would take for them to say "this was worth it" when reflecting on the MBA, the answers were varied. Several people struggled to find an answer to the question.

I think, ultimately, after the whole program I would hope to feel well-rounded enough. But I would imagine that starting in the courses I would start to see the return. And talking about those relationships and the people that you are going to be meeting. – Cassie, prospective student

Others looked at it more matter-of-factly, saying when they earn a salary greater than the cost of the program or obtain a position that they could not have obtained without the MBA credential. Of those who gave a specific timeframe, most said a few years after graduation (though, of course, some said immediately after graduation).

Where to Pursue the MBA?

Subjects were asked to simply cite factors they considered when choosing a particular university; they were not provided a list that included particular elements. Not surprisingly, 27 different factors were cited, ranging from ability to gain admission to

face-to-face content to opportunities for spring admissions. The most common factors cited were career opportunities that open up as a result of MBA (12 times), the university's reputation (11 times), face-to-face content preferred over online courses (11 times), and program content or design (10 times).

It positions me in the workplace, right, for a higher level management role as a controller. – Chase, incoming student

Because I wanted face-to-face [classes] and it has, like, the classes are night classes. And they have that whole semesters divided (referring to 8-week and 12-week classes). The whole thing. The way they have this planned out so that you can work around your work schedule. It's awesome. – Marsha, incoming student

There did not appear to be a significant difference in the things that mattered to prospects versus things that mattered to incoming students, however an interesting observation can be made by comparing the two groups. For incoming students, issue of timing was referenced using terms such as “the time is right in my life,” “time is right in my career,” and “job loss makes timing right.” Prospects did not use such terms, instead noting that they were considering the degree because of fears of job loss or a reduction in their company’s workforce or to position themselves to move up or withstand such a change. This might be explained by noting that of course “the time is right” for those who have made the decision to move forward with those who have not yet made this decision have not come to such a conclusion.

The opportunity to network with peers and professors, cost, and location of the university were all cited by a third (35 percent, n = 6) of the people interviewed, prospects and incoming students alike. They indicated that they care about the caliber of

peers in the classroom and that networking with peers and/or faculty was a benefit that could be gained from pursuing an MBA.

I mean, when you are in the classroom environment you don't just learn from whoever is teaching the course, you learn from the people around you...so that is important to me, just knowing what other people bring. What I can learn from these people. Because at the end of the day, I -- most of us are already working individuals, so to see how their experiences can help me to maybe have a better experience at my job or advance my career. – Rusty, prospective student

I completely ruled out doing any kind of internet program. I really don't want to miss out on that face-to-face experience with the professors or the other people in the cohort. That's important to me and from what I have heard, people really enjoy that. – Cassie, prospective student

And the other piece is the collaboration. I mean, with your professors, having those kinds of discussions that you get in the classroom setting and the networking opportunities with other students. – Mike, , incoming student

What kind of business opportunities, what kind of connections, what kind of networking are you really going to be able to do living and going to school in Gainesville? That was a big factor. – Casey, incoming student

Reputation and rankings mattered to some people. Subjects said that they read online MBA forums (six percent, n = 1), looked at *BusinessWeek* or *U.S. News and World Report* rankings (24 percent, n = 4), or cited the vague term "reputation" (53 percent, n = 9) when determining which university to attend.

[rankings matter because] it gives me this thinking that the people that I am going to meet and be meeting is better quality....the quality of the program and the quality of the people. – Ish, incoming student

The decision was if I am going to go back to get my MBA. That was the big decision. And if I am not getting into, you know, a Top 50 school, based on U.S. News and World Reports, I don't necessarily care where I go. It was -- and if I look at schools relative the same as far as their perception in the business world -- I want to go to the one that is easiest and most convenient for me and get my MBA. – Fred, incoming student

Though most subjects indicated that they had considered online options, most implied that online options were considered to be less valuable than face-to-face MBA programs. Only one person expressed interest in earning an MBA online; eleven people (65 percent, n = 11) cited face-to-face instruction as a factor that was important when choosing a university.

A third (35 percent, n = 6) of those interviewed cited the length of the program (duration of the program) as a decision factor.

There were a few surprises in the findings. Just nine people (52 percent) said that program cost was a primary factor in their decision to pursue the degree.

The cost wasn't, it really wasn't that much of a deciding factor. The cost. The network of people was more important to me. That was ultimately why I decided not to get an online degree for Florida or Auburn, Penn State, or something like that, because, yeah, it has name recognition, but what you pay for in a master's program is the people that you meet. Yeah, at least, that's where I put my value. The only way I was going to, you know, take advantage of that was to go to a local university. – Chase, incoming student

You know, the money is, for what it is going to, you know, give me for the rest of my life, it is kind of a drop in the bucket. It's -- no, I can't think about the money. – Woody, incoming student

An interesting observation is six of the nine people who indicated cost was important were prospects. Only three of the people who said cost was a significant factor

were incoming students. One possible explanation for this difference might be justification. Students who have already chosen to take on the expense of the program may be justifying the cost whereas, for those who have not yet decided to pursue the MBA, this is a weightier issue.

In addition, few subjects – incoming students and prospects alike – listed AACSB accreditation when freely naming program elements or features that were important. In nearly half of the interviews (47 percent, n = 8), accreditation was not mentioned by the subject or the interviewer. In cases where the interviewer directly asked, in a follow up question, if accreditation mattered, several people said it mattered but that it was not information that they sought out. Three people said it didn't really matter. One person said, "it's just that there's a blanket level of trust" that the university is accredited. Asked why accreditation was not a key factor in his decision where to study, he summed it up by saying,

...to me it's not relevant. I mean, I am sure that there are others where it might [be relevant]. I trust that the university would take the program seriously and hire very competent professionals to instruct. – John, prospective student

Oh, [accreditation], that really didn't matter. I didn't even know about this. – Jorge, prospective student

It [accreditation] mattered. But [I] just wanted to know it had it. – Cassie, prospective student

This might signal marketers that the AACSB-accreditation seal is something to be featured on advertisements but it should not be one of the key communications messages. Future studies might investigate how often and in what industries such accreditation matters when it comes to hiring managers.

Just One Answer

When asked to narrow down all factors to the single-most important factor, 41 percent (n = 7) of the subjects narrowed their answers down to the university's ability to help make them more marketable or advance their career. Other answers included cost, university's reputation (cited twice), convenience, program duration, university's location (cited twice), and the caliber of peers in the classroom (cited twice).

Market-specific Competition

USF's competition for MBA students, based on this sample, is largely the University of Florida and The University of Tampa, perhaps indicating that USF's potential students are place-bound.

I love where I live in Sarasota and wanted to find a program where I could live in Sarasota at least for the next year and a half. – Woody, incoming student

I didn't put all these schools next to each other and say, "oooh, I wonder where I should go." It was sort of like, "I am going to USF." – Marsha, incoming student

Ideally I would love to go back to [the University of Florida] just because I went there and am a diehard Gator, but, at the same time, the traveling; it would really be what is going to hold me back, I think. – Cassie, prospective student

Fifty-three percent (n = 9) of the subjects indicated that they considered the University of Florida; 47 percent (n = 8) cited The University of Tampa. Only four people indicated that they considered universities outside of Florida and, in those cases,

two of them only considered non-Florida colleges because of an online MBA option. Only one person mentioned a for-profit university.

As would be expected, most subjects said their journey to learn more about the MBA programs began with an online search. Seven people attended the info sessions hosted by USF's MBA office. Interestingly, of the brand new students interviewed, only 38 percent (n = 3) had attended an info session but nearly all of the prospects had attended the info session (note: the list for new students included any recently accepted student who had paid a deposit; the list for potential subjects was obtained by pulling people who had RSVP'd for an info session which could explain why the percentage of people who attended is so much higher for prospects than new students).

Only two people had attended an info session for a university other than the University of South Florida. Most of those who attended USF's information sessions found it to be satisfactory, though two of the ten who had attended a session indicated that having current students or recent alumni there would improve the sessions.

I was a little under-impressed. I kind of felt the same way about orientation...I think a lot about the attitude and the energy and how you want to portray your program. And the info sessions seemed a little too casual. I was expecting it to be more. You know, to have that "fancy business feel." And it didn't. – Casey, incoming student

It was informative, but, to be honest, I kind of felt like if I read the website I really didn't need to go. I didn't really gain more information. But I was glad that I went. – JoAnn, prospective student

Three-fourths of those interviewed indicated that they sought out information on the program informally through word-of-mouth. Several specifically sought out current students in USF's MBA program to talk about their experiences. Given that the most

frequent suggestion for improving USF's info session was to include current students or young alumni as presenters or panelists, it is clear that prospective MBA students want to hear from people who are traversing the road that the prospect is considering.

Obstacles

Prospective students said that they worried about being successful in the program and being able to achieve academically. In addition, while most people expressed a desire to network and get to know the "right" people, or stated that the caliber of peers in the classroom was important, nearly 65 percent (n = 11) of those interviewed indicated that they personally worried about being the "right" people, about their own ability to gain admission into the program.

Half of the people interviewed indicated that they worried about passing the GMAT and all of the prospects interviewed still have the GMAT test ahead of them (including two who took it as undergraduates but are not satisfied with those early scores). Fifty-five percent of those the prospects interviewed (n = 5) have already narrowed their school choices down to just two schools or indicated that they are very likely to choose USF. Of those who have already begun their first semester of coursework, 75 percent (n = 6) had already decided on USF before taking the test. This suggests that purchasing lists of GMAT test takers or registrants in order to send direct mail or email blasts might *reassure* test takers that their selection of USF as a likely school is a good decision. It is unlikely, however, to sway those who have not yet considered USF as a potential school.

These results are discussed in the next chapter, which also includes some suggestions for practitioners to consider when creating a strategic communications program for USF's MBA program.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine what mattered to potential MBA students in order to craft strategic communications messages that are used to promote a particular university's MBA program and to recruit potential students.

Results from this study suggest that, when trying to reach a target audience similar to the one described in this study, several changes could be made in the advertising and communications messages used to promote the University of South Florida MBA. Some tactical suggestions are offered below, as well as some broader information that should be considered when crafting a strategic communications plan.

First, the university's advertising creative and communications messages should be improved to better reflect what matters most to potential students: how long is it going to take, who am I going to be studying alongside, and can I get in?

In response to suggestions from faculty and university leadership about the importance of world-class faculty and relevant research, advertisements for the USF MBA were tweaked in the last two years to feature several faculty members, from a variety of disciplines, and talked about their research credentials and the relevance of their scholarly inquiries. In addition, the AACSB-seal was added to advertisements and inserts placed in the regional editions of the *Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes*, *BusinessWeek*, and the like.

Promoting the faculty credentials and the college's AACSB accreditation is not a bad thing, of course, but it runs counter to this study; according to those interviewed, these factors do not appear to be of primary importance to the college's target market. Ads should, instead, point to the program's face-to-face learning and networking opportunities and the MBAs ability to help students advance their careers. Communication materials (everything from the website to online ads to social media posts) should point to the caliber of students that prospects would be studying alongside, perhaps using current students and/or recent alumni to talk about the new business partners they met in the MBA program. The challenge, of course, would be to do so without making the admissions requirements and credentials seem unattainable as so many people expressed concern about their own ability to gain admission.

The vehicles used for the communications materials should be reviewed carefully. Prospects revealed that their information seeking began with online searches, so the university's search engine rankings and search engine optimization strategies should be explored. If direct mail is to be included in the university's buy plan, this study revealed that purchasing lists of GMAT test registrants and test takers in order to send such revised messages about the caliber of peers in the classroom would likely affirm choices already made (which is a good thing); this is unlikely to be an avenue to sway people who have not already narrowed down their choices. Therefore, the purpose of the direct mail campaign should be clearly defined or the use of other lists should be explored.

Secondly, given that several subjects shared that they sought out information from current students that they work alongside, using current students as informal ambassadors could be a guerilla-marketing tactic that could prove to sway people who are still in the

“always wanted to do it” stage to start investigating MBA programs. This could be accomplished by providing promotional items for all MBA students upon admission to the program. If this were something for the office, the item could be used to spark conversation amongst coworkers. This could be something fairly inexpensive, such as sticky note pads that proudly proclaim the students status as a “Business Bull” or something more expensive, such as photo frames for soon-to-be graduates who are registering for their final semester of classes.

In addition, certain features that might seem bland or fairly common could be highlighted to better reflect the benefits of USF’s program. For instance, USF offers 16-week, 12-week, 8-week, and one week semesters, depending on the course. This feature could be better highlighted to address a benefit that mattered to most of the subjects interviewed, namely “how long is the program going to take me to finish.”

Also, given that the caliber of peers in the classroom and geographic location were two important considerations for those interviewed, messaging should convey USF’s physical location in Tampa and point to its business connections as part of a large metropolitan community.

Given that the website is the first place that prospects said they sought information about the program, messages and content on the MBA website should be edited to convey similar messages. While the current website includes all the specific information about program content and features, it should speak more to the benefits of the program. In addition, more photos and testimonials should be added that could illustrate how current students or recent graduates have been able to advance up the corporate ladder.

Several people, prospects and new students alike, indicated that while all of the content provided at the sessions was accurate and relevant, that the sessions could be, in a sense, “dressed up” to have, as one subject put it “that fancy business feel.” An easy way to tweak information sessions to convey a more formal business feel would be by having students and employees in business attire. In addition, several people who attended the sessions implied that they did not learn anything that they could not have learned via a careful review of the website; including opportunities for attendees to interact with current students or recent graduates would make the sessions more meaningful. It would also serve to illustrate the caliber of students in the classroom as well as reaffirm that the decision to attend USF would be a smart one, in the eyes of these credible third-party (somewhat) peers. This would likely be very easy to accomplish by recruiting a small team of informal ambassadors from the program and providing tchotchkes or special recognition for those who participate in several sessions per semester. Given that it was fairly easy to recruit brand-new students and prospects for this study simply by sending email, recruiting a cache of a dozen or so new students or recent alumni would likely be fairly easy to do.

Limitations

Among the limitations of this research: the sample only included prospective graduate students who had registered to attend an information session at USF or those who were enrolled in first-year MBA classes at this particular university, therefore revealing only what matters to those already interested in USF. It did not reveal information that mattered to those who considered USF but chose to attend another

institution or those who never considered this university. Interviews with those who attended information sessions at other universities would provide additional data that might enhance the findings, as would interviews with those who considered USF but opted to attend a different institution.

Another limitation of this study is its sample size. While 17 interviews are certainly enough to determine themes among the new and prospective students, it falls short of Griffin and Hauser's (1993) "recommended 20-30 interviews...necessary to get 90-95 percent of the customer needs" (p. 12). One of the tenets of Grounded Theory is that the researcher conducts research, analyzes it, and then continues to conduct additional research until one of the categories that has developed is fully saturated. While 17 exploratory interviews seemed to be enough to saturate some categories, such as reasons to pursue an MBA, more interviews could be conducted in order to fully saturate every category.

Further, while two different graduate students reviewed the researcher's work to check for coder bias, Griffin and Hauser (1993) suggest that "multiple analysts or team members should read and interpret the raw transcripts" (p. 12). Time and a lack of staffing resources prevented such a review.

As Goulding (2010) pointed out, grounded theorists must acknowledge that there are risk factors associated with this method, which include the lack of an emergent theory or research that is "an eclectic empiricism in which too many categories are combined in an a-theoretical framework whereby causal relations and tendencies...are lost" (p 30). In this study, no concrete theory emerged and the resulting information is simply a narrative

exploration of the factors new students considered when deciding to pursue an MBA at USF.

Recognizing that using this study is limited to one particular site, another limitation is that because of its the sample size, the results of this study are not generalizable or transferrable.

Finally, the author of this thesis is a current graduate student in the mass communications program at the University of South Florida. When contacting subjects to request interviews, she presented herself as such, however, at some of the interviews, during casual banter, many of the subjects asked where the interviewer worked or why she would choose to conduct this particular study. The interviewer and study author revealed that she was as a student in the mass communications program but was also an employee of the USF College of Business. This fact may (or may not) have affected the subjects' candor.

Future Studies

There are many ways that future studies could extend this research. The most obvious: to examine what prospects who opted to attend another university considered when making their decision to pursue an MBA as well as where to obtain the degree. If the samples included USF's two primary competitors, namely the University of Florida and The University of Tampa, such an additional inquiry might inform marketers of the primary factors that mattered to prospects choosing other universities as well as perceived differences among programs.

Future research might also delve deeper into areas that surfaced later in this particular inquiry, namely the areas of accreditation and the caliber of faculty. In this research, the interviewer did not ask questions related to these areas until after it became apparent that these were not being included in the free response answers about factors that mattered. Future inquiries could include questions about these areas from the onset in order to gather more data as to whether these omissions are due to an assumption about the faculty's caliber based on the university's reputation.

Future inquiries could look to see how theories such as the Theory of Reasoned Action, which is used to predict behavioral intent, or the actions people will take based on their attitudes, might apply to this area. Such a study might reveal if it is possible to predict behaviors for prospects, should certain factors, such as endorsements or encouragement from supervisors, be present – or which factors must be present in order to predict certain behaviors.

A quantitative study might extend this research by using a Likert scale to measure the level of weight or importance that could be assigned to the factors cited by the subjects in this study.

Finally, future research might look closely at the information sessions hosted by the university. The prospect group used for this research largely included people who attended an information session. Future inquiries could examine how those who did not attend such a session determined where to study.

References

- AACSB International. (2010). *Overview of U.S. Business Schools: Data from the 2009-10 Business School Questionnaire*. Tampa, Florida.
- AACSB International. (2009). *Overview of U.S. Business Schools: Data from the 2008-09 Business School Questionnaire*. Tampa, Florida.
- AACSB International. (2008). *Overview of U.S. Business Schools: Data from the 2007-08 Business School Questionnaire*. Tampa, Florida.
- AACSB International. (2007). *Overview of U.S. Business Schools: Data from the 2006-07 Business School Questionnaire*. Tampa, Florida.
- AACSB International. (2006). *Overview of U.S. Business Schools: Data from the 2005-06 Business School Questionnaire*. Tampa, Florida.
- Bruce, G., & Edgington, R. (2008). Factors influencing word-of-mouth recommendations by MBA students: An examination of school quality, educational outcomes, and value of the MBA. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 18(1), 79-101.
10.1080/08841240902100303
- Carrel, A. E., & Schoenbachler, D. D. (2001). Marketing Executive MBA programs: A comparison of student and sponsoring organization decision considerations. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 11(1), 21-38. 10.1300J050v11n01_02
- Carvalho, S. W., & De Oliveira Mota, M. (2010). The role of trust in creating value and student loyalty in relational exchanges between higher education institutions and their students. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 20(1), 145-165.
10.1080/08841241003788201
- Corbin, J.M. & Strauss, A.L. (2008). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. 3rd Ed.

- Creswell, J. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dahlin-Brown, N. (2005). The perceptual impact of "U.S. News & World Report" rankings on eight public MBA programs. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 15(2), 155-179. 10.1300/J050v15n02_07
- Dailey, L., Anderson, M., Ingenito, C., Duffy, D., Krimm, P., & Thomson, S. (2006). Understanding MBA consumer needs and the development of marketing strategy. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 16(1), 143-158. 10.1300J050v16n01_07
- Di Meglio, F. (2010), The MBA marketing machine. *BusinessWeek.Com*, Retrieved from <http://Search.Ebscohost.Com/Login.aspx?Direct=True&Db=Aph&An=51499441&Site=Ehost-Live>
- Dunne, C. (2011). The place of the literature review in grounded theory research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 14(2), 111-124. 10.1080/13645579.2010.494930
- Executive MBA Council. (2007). *2006-07 Student Exit Benchmarking Survey Competitive Intelligence Report*. Orange, California: Precept Research.
- Executive MBA Council. (2010). *2010 EMBA Council Membership Program Survey: Industry Trends and Research Results Aggregate Report*. Orange, California: Precept Research.
- Fernando A., Albena P., & Josep R. (2010): A market segmentation approach for higher education based on rational and emotional factors, *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 20:1, 1-17.
- Gambetti, R.C., Graffigna, G., & Biraghi, S. (2012). The grounded theory approach to consumer-brand engagement. *International Journal of Market Research*, 54(5), 659-

687. 10.2501/IJMR-54-5-659-687

Glaser, B.G. (1978) *Theoretical Sensitivity: Advances in the Methodology and Grounded Theory*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B.G., & Strauss, A. (1967). *Discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.

Goldgehn, L. A., & Kane, K. R. (1997). Repositioning the MBA: Issues and implications. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 8(1), 15-24. 10.1300/J050v08n01_02

Goulding, C. (2001). Grounded Theory: A magical formula or a potential nightmare. *Marketing Review*, 2(1), 21.

Graduate Management Admissions Council, (2010), 2010 Application Trends Survey, Retrieved from http://www.gmac.com/NR/rdonlyres/62DB70EE-CC4D-46B8-9DEC-EA9BB2D22F30/0/2010ApplicationTrendsSurveyReport_web.pdf

Graduate Management Admissions Council (2011), 2011 Application Trends Survey, Retrieved from <http://www.gmac.com/gmac/researchandtrends/surveyreports/applicationtrendssurvey>

Graduate Management Admissions Council (2012), Early Release Edition: 2012 Application Trends Survey, Retrieved from <http://www.gmac.com/gmac/researchandtrends/surveyreports/applicationtrendssurvey>

Graduate Management Admissions Council (2011), Graduate Management News, Retrieved from <http://www.gmac.com/gmac/NewsandEvents/GMNNNews/IssuePrint.htm?Article={11B689>

Griffin, A., & Hauser, J. (1993). The Voice of the Customer. *Marketing Science*, 12(1), 1-27.

Hawker, S., & Kerr, C. (2007). Doing Grounded Theory. In E. Lyons & A. Coyle (eds.),

- Analysing qualitative data in psychology (pp. 87-97). Longon: Sage.
- Hayes, S. (2012). University of South Florida's online programs ranked among best in the country. *Tampa Bay Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.tampabay.com/news/education/college/university-of-south-floridas-online-programs-ranked-among-best-in-the/1270622>.
- Heslop, L. A., & Nadeau, J. (2010). Branding MBA Programs: The Use of Target Market Desired Outcomes for Effective Brand Positioning. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 20(1), 85-117. 10.1080/08841241003788110
- Ivy, J., & Naude, P. (2004). Succeeding in the MBA marketplace: Identifying the underlying factors. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 26(3), 401-417. 10.1080/1360080042000290249
- Johnson, J. W., Thomas, V., & Peck, J. (2010). Do specialized MBA programs cultivate alumni relationships and donations? *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 20(1), 119-134. 10.1080/08841241003788144
- Korn, M. (2011), Business school, no thanks?, *The Wall Street Journal*, Retrieved from <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424053111903532804576566611053380594.html>
- Licqurish, S., & Seibold, C. (2011). Applying a contemporary grounded theory methodology. *Nurse Researcher*, 18(4), 11-16.
- Liu, Scott S. (1998). *Factors Influencing Students' Decision to Attend the Graduate School at the University of South Florida*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Maslow, A. H. (1987), *Motivation and Personality*, 3rd ed. New York: Harper & Row.
- Nicholls, J., Harris, J., Morgan, E., Clarke, K., & Sims, D. (2011). Marketing higher education: the MBA experience. *International Journal of Educational Management*,

9(2), 31-38.

Payne, S. (2007). Grounded Theory. In E. Lyons & A. Coyle (eds.), *Analysing qualitative data in psychology* (pp. 65-86). Longon: Sage.

Powell, M. S. (2010). *Professional MBA Student Expectations Survey*. Paper presented at the 17th Annual PMBA Conference at DePaul University. Chicago, Illinois.

Rapert, M. I., Smith, S., Velliquette, A., & Garretson, J. A. (2004). The meaning of quality: Expectations of students in pursuit of an MBA. *Journal of Education for Business*, 80(1), 17-24.

Ruggeri, A., Gizelis, T., & Dorussen, H. (2011). Events data as Bismarck's sausages? Intercoder reliability, coders' selection, and data quality. *International Interactions: Empirical and Theoretical Research in International Relations*, 37(3), 340-361.
10.1080/03050629.2011.596028

Schlegelmilch, B. & Thomas, H. (2011). The MBA in 2020: will there still be one? *Journal of Management Development*, 30(5), 474-482.

Stiber, G. (2001). Characterizing the decision process leading to enrollment in master's programs: Further application of the enrollment process model. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 11(2), 91-107. 10.1300/J050v11n02_05.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 - RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

As a fellow graduate student at the University of South Florida, I am emailing to ask for your participation in a research study about factors prospective MBA students consider when deciding whether or not to pursue an MBA, and, in particular, factors considered when you chose to pursue an MBA at the University of South Florida. The purpose of the study is to help create strategic communications messages that are created considering those factors that are most important to future students.

Participation is simple: you would simply be interviewed, in person, by a researcher who would inquire about your decision to pursue an MBA and your selection of this particular program. It would require approximately 45 minutes of your time, to be scheduled at a mutually agreeable time. The interviews would be conducted at a convenient location for you, preferably at USF in the College of Business.

To be eligible for this study, you must be pursuing an MBA and in the first semester of study at USF. You must also be at least 21 years old.

If you are willing to participate, please reply to this email and you will be contacted to schedule an interview.

Name of interviewer/investigator: Lorie Briggs, lbriggs@usf.edu, 813-732-6233.
USF IRB number Pro **ID**:Pro00010367

APPENDIX 2 - IRB APPROVAL



DIVISION OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799
(813) 974-5638 • FAX (813) 974-5618

November 26, 2012

Lorie Briggs
Mass Communication
4202 E. Fowler Ave., BSN3403
Tampa, FL 33620

RE: **Exempt Certification** for IRB#: Pro00010367
Title: Target Marketing: Factors Prospective Students Consider When Selecting an MBA

Dear Ms. Briggs:

On 11/25/2012, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) determined that your research meets USF requirements and Federal Exemption criteria as outlined in the federal regulations at 45CFR46.101(b):


(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:
(i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

As the principal investigator for this study, it is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted as outlined in your application and consistent with the ethical principles outlined in the Belmont Report and with USF IRB policies and procedures. Please note that changes to this protocol may disqualify it from exempt status. Please note that you are responsible for notifying the IRB prior to implementing any changes to the currently approved protocol.

The Institutional Review Board will maintain your exemption application for a period of five years from the date of this letter or for three years after a Final Progress Report is received, whichever is longer. If you wish to continue this protocol beyond five years, you will need to submit a new application. When your study is completed you must submit a Final Report to close this study.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,


John Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX 3 - INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent to Participate in Research
Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study
IRB Study # Pro00010367

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. This document is called an informed consent form. Please read this information carefully and take your time making your decision. Ask the researcher or study staff to discuss this consent form with you. Please ask him/her to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. We encourage you to talk with your family and friends before you decide to take part in this research study. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below.

We are asking you to take part in a research study called:

Factors Prospective Students Consider When Selecting an MBA Program

The person who is in charge of this research study is Lorie Briggs. This person is called the Principal Investigator. However, other research staff may be involved and can act on behalf of the person in charge. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Justin Brown.

The research will be conducted at the University of South Florida Tampa campus.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to:

- Determine the factors that prospective students consider when selecting an MBA program.

It is part of a master's thesis for a student in the USF School of Mass Communications.

Should you take part in this study?

Before you decide:

- Read this form and find out what the study is about.
- You may have questions this form does not answer. You do not have to guess at things you don't understand. If you have questions, ask the person in charge of the study or study staff as you go along. Ask them to explain things in a way you can understand.
- Take your time to think about it.

This form tells you about this research study. This form explains:

APPENDIX 3 (CONTINUED)

- Why this study is being done.
- What will happen during this study and what you will need to do.
- Whether there is any chance of benefits from being in this study.
- The risks involved in this study.
- How the information collected about you during this study will be used and with whom it may be shared.

Taking part in this research study is up to you. If you choose to be in the study, then you should sign this informed consent form. If you do not want to take part in this study, you should not sign this form.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this study is to find out what factors prospective students consider when looking at an MBA program, and, in particular the factors that were most important to you in your recent decision to pursue an MBA at the University of South Florida.

Why are you being asked to take part?

We are asking you to take part in this study because you are a graduate business student who began coursework toward an MBA within the last year.

What will happen during this study?

You will be asked to spend about one hour in this study. This hour will include a one-on-one interview with the PI to discuss your decision to pursue an MBA.

A study visit is with the person in charge of the study or study staff. You will need to come for one study visit in all. Most study visits will take about one hour. Some study visits may be longer.

The interview will be recorded, with consent, for the purposes of transcription and, once transcribed, subjects will be assigned an alias and the recordings will be destroyed.

Total Number of Participants

About a dozen individuals will take part in this study at USF.

Alternatives

You do not have to participate in this research study.

Benefits

We are unsure if you will receive any benefits by taking part in this research study.

APPENDIX 3 (CONTINUED)

Risks or Discomfort

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

Compensation

You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

Cost

There is no cost to participate in this study.

Privacy and Confidentiality

We will keep your study records private and confidential. Certain people may need to see your study records. By law, anyone who looks at your records must keep them completely confidential. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are:

- The research team, including the Principal Investigator, study coordinator, research nurses, and all other research staff
- Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study. For example, individuals who provide oversight on this study may need to look at your records. This is done to make sure that we are doing the study in the right way. They also need to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety.
- The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and its related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, staff in the USF Office of Research and Innovation, USF Division of Research Integrity and Compliance, and other USF offices who oversee this research.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your student status (course grade) or job status.

New information about the study

During the course of this study, we may find more information that could be important to you. This includes information that, once learned, might cause you to change your mind

APPENDIX 3 (CONTINUED)

about being in the study. We will notify you as soon as possible if such information becomes available.

What happens if you decide not to take part in this study?

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel there is any pressure to take part in the study to please research staff. If you decide not to take part in the study you, will not be in trouble or lose any rights you normally have.

You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints.

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, call Lorie Briggs at 813-974-7280. If you have questions about your rights, general questions, complaints, or issues as a person taking part in this study, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638.

Consent to Take Part in Research

It is up to you to decide whether you want to take part in this study. If you want to take part, please read the statements below and sign the form if the statements are true. I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

Signature of Person Taking Part in Study

Date

Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent and Research Authorization

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I hereby certify that when this person signs this form, to the best of my knowledge, he/ she understands:

- What the study is about;
- What procedures/interventions/investigational drugs or devices will be used;
- What the potential benefits might be; and
- What the known risks might be.

I can confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in the appropriate language. Additionally, this subject reads well enough to understand this document or, if not, this person is able to hear and understand when the form is read to him or her. This subject does not have a medical/psychological problem that would compromise comprehension and therefore makes it hard to understand what is being explained and can, therefore, give legally effective informed consent. This subject is not under any type of anesthesia or

APPENDIX 3 (CONTINUED)

analgesic that may cloud their judgment or make it hard to understand what is being explained and, therefore, can be considered competent to give informed consent.

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

Date

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

APPENDIX 4 - INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Where did you attend school? How long ago did you graduate?
2. What did you study as an undergrad?
3. Do you work? Where and how many years of work experience do you have?

Thinking about when you first began to consider an MBA...

4. How long ago did you first start thinking about pursuing an MBA degree?
5. Was there a particular incident that led you to consider an MBA, or was there a particular reason you began to think about the degree?
6. What did you think the long-term benefit would be?
7. Did you think there might be some short-term benefits? Headaches?

Thinking about your process to decision...

8. How long did you think about it before you began researching programs?
9. Did you think about program first, then university, or university first, then program?
10. When did you take the GMAT...before exploring programs, after exploring programs but before exploring universities, after the decision and location had been determined?

Deciding on a program...

11. How did you go about seeking information on the programs?
12. What factors were important to you as you began to research programs? For instance, were you looking at the program content or other factors?
13. How would you rank those factors in terms of importance to you at that time?

Deciding on a university...

14. Once you decided to go for the degree, what universities did you consider?
15. How did you find out information about the specific universities? Did you attend in-person information sessions? Get all the information online? Seek word-of-mouth reviews from friends? Ask coworkers about particular institutions?
16. What factors were important as you determined the institution you would attend?
17. How would you rank those items in terms of importance to you at the time?

APPENDIX 4 (CONTINUED)

18. What was the one thing that was most important to you all along this process?

Once you obtain the degree...

19. What are your career aspirations, short-term? Long-term?

20. How long do you believe it will take to see a monetary gain as a result of earning the degree?

APPENDIX 5 - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTIONS

Interview Date: December 11, 2012
Interview Location: USF College of Business, Tampa
Interview Subject: Casey, 35 year old female, Incoming #1
Interview Duration: 36 minutes

Casey is a Caucasian female who has applied, been accepted, and paid the deposit to begin the MBA program at USF in the coming semester. She had attended the new student orientation a few days prior to the interview but had not yet begun MBA classes. She has worked for several years since earning an undergraduate degree in Spanish from Northeastern University in Boston, Mass. When contacting Casey to schedule the interview, it was discovered that Casey and her husband are both employees at the University of South Florida, both working in the student services field. There was some initial banter about the university's gratis tuition program for employees prior to the interview, as this was relevant to the couple's decision(s) related to graduate education. As her husband is also considering the MBA program, and he is an influencer in her life, she included commentary about his choices throughout the interview.

1 Interviewer: So, first, where did you attend school for your
2 undergrad?
3 Subject: I went to school at Northeastern University in Boston.
4 Interviewer: How long ago did you graduate and what did you study?
5 Subject: I started my undergrad degree in 1996 and studied
6 abroad, and then moved abroad. I didn't go back to
7 finish my undergrad degree until '05. So I actually
8 graduated in '06.
9 Interviewer: Did you graduate from the same school?
10 Subject: Yes, I went back to Northeastern. I graduated with a
11 Bachelor of Arts in Spanish.
12 Interviewer: Where did you study abroad?
13 Subject: Argentina. And then I had a – my first master's is a
14 master's in education in curriculum instruction with a
15 concentration in college student affairs.
16 Interviewer: Where did you get that degree?
17 Subject: That was from Northeastern, too.
18 Interviewer: And earlier (*prior to the interview*) you said you were in
19 a linguistics program as well?
20 Subject: I am. It's a master – it's an MA, so a Master of Arts
21 degree. It's a TSOL program, so teaching English as a
22 second language at the college level (*unintelligible*).
23 Interviewer: So why in the world, with one, er, one and a half degrees
24 behind you, would you consider starting the MBA?

25 Subject: Well, I like to take classes. I feel like it's a . . . it's a
26 benefit . . . it's a very financially worthwhile benefit for
27 us to take classes, so I enjoy school, so I always found
28 something interesting to study. That's kind of why, why
29 school. The MBA, I got started thinking about it, you
30 know, working with students every day, hearing about
31 their job opportunities just [as they are] finishing the
32 business undergrad degree. And seeing the kinds of
33 experiences they're having and all the different
34 directions they're going in, primarily, hearing about
35 their salary, you know, just with their undergrad degree
36 and no work experience [they are] going off and making
37 \$60,000-\$65,000. And it just, it got me thinking. A little
38 bit about long-term goals. My husband and I are very
39 aggressive savers and want to retire young. We have
40 other income streams besides our job, you and we
41 probably picked the worst field to work in to try and
42 save money. So it started with that. Last year my
43 brother-in-law did a one-year accelerated at [the
44 University of] Florida and so we learned a little bit more
45 about the MBA program, it sort of became demystified
46 in a way. I didn't study . . . I, you know, studied Spanish,
47 and so business concepts are very anecdotal to me,
48 very, very new, unfamiliar. And, so I was intimidated
49 about the idea of the MBA. Now I think, "God, I wish I
50 had done this in '06." But, hearing his (*her brother-in-*
51 *law's*) experiences [now] . . . he had a background in
52 theater or something like that . . . talking about the
53 different classmates and the *quality* of the classmates,
54 you know, it wasn't all cream of the crop, so it started to
55 feel a little bit more like a possibility. I was kind of at a
56 point with the linguistics where it was going to take me
57 a couple of extra semesters because of [the sequence of
58 how] the classes are offered. And so I just kind of
59 started talking with my husband about, "you, what do
60 you think?" . . . see what's it like. Take a couple of classes
61 and see how it goes. And I feel committed to it. But I still
62 have a little bit of fear that I am not going to be able to
63 do it. But, I've felt that way before and gotten through it
64 successfully, so I am kind of like trying to squash that
65 fear (*unintelligible*).

66 Interviewer: So are you dropping out of the linguistics program or
67 are you just pushing it aside?

68 Subject: No, I have very little left to do. It's actually the
69 internship that is like, kind of . . . it's very difficult
70 schedule wise. Because the best time for me to do it is in

71 the summer, but, you know we are slammed with
72 orientation the summer and it's difficult. Our office is
73 understaffed. So it's like, I can do the internship if it is
74 like, this day and this day . . . between these three hours.
75 So getting it scheduled has just been challenging. And so
76 (*unintelligible*) have been kind of putting it off. I will
77 finish it; I just have two classes left and the two
78 internships. And the classes are only offered whatever
79 semester, so it is probably going to take me until
80 summer of '14, *if* I am able to do the internship this
81 summer. And having to pay for [the internship, since it
82 isn't covered under the free tuition plan], is kind of . . .
83 I'm going back and forth about *why am I really doing*
84 *this?* Do I really need it? I've taught English before, you
85 don't really need to have the degree. But the thought is
86 that it will be a real benefit later on. I'll retire and I'll
87 have that credential and be able to teach later on
88 (*unintelligible*). Sorry I rambled on a bit there (*both*
89 *interviewer and subject laugh*).

90 Interviewer: And so, do you work? Yes, you work at USF. How long
91 have you worked at USF?

92 Subject: Two years.

93 Interviewer: Did you work before that?

94 Subject: Yes, I worked at a university in North Carolina, ECU
95 [Eastern Carolina University]. Those are the jobs that I
96 have had since I was 30 (*unintelligible*) since I got my
97 masters. I have a colorful work experience before that,
98 but . . .

99 Interviewer: So you talked a little bit about your brother-in-law got
100 the degree at UF, the accelerated degree. Was that when
101 you started thinking about pursuing an MBA? How long
102 have you been thinking about it?

103 Subject: Yeah. He would have started his MBA in May '11. I
104 would say then is when I started talking about it. He
105 was actually interested in it first. Then I kind of
106 gradually thought that would it really be helpful if we
107 were both making more money. But, again, I kind of saw
108 it as a pipedream at first. But then I started learning
109 more about the classes. I have another friend who is
110 doing a post-bac in accounting. Her experiences in the
111 classes as an older student who already has a master's
112 is very different from what I hear from the undergrad
113 students. The undergrad students constantly talk about
114 how hard it is, how impossible, how this teacher, that
115 teacher . . . hearing it from the perspective of someone
116 who shares a little bit more in common with me was

117 helpful. My brother-in-law is actually still unemployed,
 118 which we were not expecting at all since he graduated
 119 in May. Florida has a high placement rate. He actually
 120 won the case competition, the (*subject struggles to find*
 121 *name*). . .

122 Interviewer: The Intercollegiate Case Competition?
 123 Subject: Yes. The [case subject company] Popeye’s has hired
 124 him; they liked the idea so much –I think they just hired
 125 him from his team – but they have hired him as a
 126 consultant to work on developing that idea, so he is
 127 gainfully employed at this time, but he is still waiting for
 128 full-time employment. So we were kind of – to get back
 129 to that idea – Kevin and I, my husband and I were kind
 130 of waiting to see what happened with Brad. Was he
 131 going to get a \$100,000 offer right away? What was his
 132 experience? Because depending on how much money
 133 we are really going to be able to make, is it worthwhile?
 134 So, those are some of the factors that I was . . .

135 Interviewer: So you were looking at return on investment?
 136 Subject: It’s one of the big factors, yeah.

137 Interviewer: Now, Brad, is he your husband or your brother-in-law?
 138 Subject: Brad is my brother-in-law.

139 Interviewer: Kevin, you said he was thinking about an MBA, too?
 140 Subject: Yes.

141 Interviewer: Is he going to get an MBA?
 142 Subject: Kevin is going to be applying to the Executive MBA. He
 143 has many years of management experience. He doesn’t
 144 want to take it slowly; he wants to just do it. So he
 145 hasn’t applied to the program just yet, but he has,
 146 almost completely I think, decided on the Executive
 147 MBA (*unintelligible*).

148 Interviewer: So, the next question you have kind of danced around,
 149 but was there any particular reason that you started
 150 thinking about it?
 151 Subject: Yeah, I would say certainly that my brother-in-law going
 152 back to school. You know, he did very poorly in his
 153 undergrad but had a very successful career in theater
 154 development, writing grants and stuff like that. And so
 155 when he was considered as an applicant, even though
 156 he didn’t have a stellar undergrad degree, and so I
 157 thought, “well, if he can do it, I can do it.” And so,
 158 hearing about his experience and, knowing that he
 159 could get in, that it wasn’t all, like, everyone’s a genius,
 160 you know. It wasn’t like that at all. He had a lot of
 161 frustrating experiences with classmates, teammates,
 162 especially those without much life experience . . . It

163 really, like I said, kind of demystified it for me. It made
164 me feel like it was an option.
165 Interviewer: So by demystifying it . . . was one of your worries, “am I
166 going to be able to get in?”
167 Subject: No. [It was] am I going to be able to do it? I mean, I have
168 really high grades. I have a good GRE score. But I have
169 always chosen classes that I like and pursued careers
170 that interested me and that I am good at. So I had
171 always avoided . . . math, basically. Math classes of any
172 kind. And so knowing that there’s a lot of economics
173 math, accounting math; there’s going to be a lot of
174 calculation and the fact that I really kind of shied away
175 from classes like that since I was, say, 15 [years old], it
176 made me feel a little apprehensive. So that’s what I
177 mean about demystifying it. Is it the kind of thing that
178 only certain people can do? Do you have to already
179 know this? You know, so I started to see that it really
180 wasn’t that. And I know that I am a really hard worker.
181 Grades are really important to me. Admiration from the
182 professor is really important to me. So, if I don’t get
183 something, I work really hard at it. And so, I think that
184 was what I mean by demystified; that it was not
185 something that I couldn’t do.
186 Interviewer: So you’ve talked a little bit about what you think the
187 long-term benefits would be. I’m hearing you say salary,
188 personal growth. Are there other things that . . . I mean,
189 is that what I am hearing you say? Are there other
190 things?
191 Subject: Yeah. It is really about finding a job that pays more
192 money. I am kind of coming from a place where . . . you
193 know, I would consider my field . . . it is a very low-
194 income field unless you can manage to get into a dean’s
195 or key position. And I don’t see myself pursuing a PhD,
196 which is what I would need to do. So what you hear a lot
197 from people in the field is “I am so passionate about
198 this,” or “I love my job,” “I love to get up every day and
199 see the students, it’s worth the sacrifice.” And I just
200 don’t feel that way anymore. And so I said to my
201 husband, “you know, if I just don’t love my job making
202 \$37,000, why don’t I not love my job making \$100,000?”
203 You know what I mean? It kind of – I mean, he was
204 really trying to dig into, [saying] “*why do you really want*
205 *to do this?* Are you going to like this? You keep
206 searching for things that are going to make you happy
207 and they’re not.” And I’m like, “I know, I think I just
208 don’t like to work. I’m *willing* to work. It’s just that I am

209 never going to be that person who is like “I love to be at
210 work every day, it’s so much fun, it fulfills me, it’s just
211 that I love what I do.” I don’t know it’s just not a reality;
212 it’s never been a reality for me. And so, having some of
213 the long-term plans that we have it makes a lot more
214 sense to try and get into something that *would* help us
215 out more [financially] in the long run. And the fact that I
216 can do it, you know, with some financial assistance from
217 the school is, well that’s another big factor. I don’t think
218 that I would be doing an MBA if it wasn’t for the tuition
219 assistance.

220 Interviewer: And how long do you think it is going to take you?
221 Subject: I have to do 42 [credit] hours, and so I thinking
222 probably four years if I don’t do any more than two
223 [classes] per semester. Because in the beginning I’ll still
224 have some linguistics classes I have to take here and
225 there. And I think that may change, you know,
226 depending on how it feels once I get started. I have
227 considered taking three classes per semester but I am a
228 little concerned about the load. Paying for it is one thing
229 [since the tuition assistance offer is restricted to two
230 classes per semester]. It’s a thousand dollars. It’s not a
231 fortune but handling the full-time work and three
232 classes is concerning. I get really excited about it, sort of
233 at the *end* of the semester. And again at the beginning of
234 the next semester, but then halfway through I get . . .

235 Interviewer: (*laughing*) “I can’t believe I am doing this!”
236 Subject: Yea, well, I haven’t done it yet . . . but I get like, “I can’t
237 even believe I thought about taking three.” So I haven’t
238 . . . so I think it will probably take me four years (*both*
239 *interviewer and subject laugh at the subject’s animated*
240 *appearance awhile discussing mid-semester panic*).
241 Because I have to do ALL the foundation classes as well.

242 Interviewer: So how long did you think about it before you began
243 researching programs? I think you said about a year?
244 Was that it? Or was it more, or less?

245 Subject: Yeah, I think it was about a year.

246 Interviewer: And did you think about program first, and then
247 university, or did you think about university first.

248 Interviewer: Program first. Once the idea of the MBA sort of,
249 emerged. I considered [the University of] Florida only
250 because I will now have two master’s degrees from USF
251 [after finishing the linguistics degree and MBA]. So I
252 thought a little bit the diversity and the value of the
253 diversity. My husband, I think, *is* going to do the
254 Executive MBA at Florida because he has an undergrad

255 and grad degree from USF. And they offer a distance
256 option. But, for me [to study at UF], it would mean . . . it
257 would have had to have been . . . he and I getting jobs in
258 Gainesville . . . or working at USF. And looking at
259 Gainesville more than anything else. What kind of
260 business opportunities, what kind of connections, what
261 kind of networking are you really going to be able to do
262 living and going to school in Gainesville? And that, that
263 was a big factor. In our fields, you bounce around
264 schools all the time, so that [moving to Gainesville]
265 wasn't as unrealistic as it might sound, but, you know,
266 it's applying to jobs and going to Gainesville. It was a
267 possibility. But it was really the Tampa community and
268 the fact that it was something that we could do [in
269 Tampa] as soon as we decided. It would have been a
270 much longer process to get started up there. And
271 considering his idea of wanting to do . . . At first he was
272 considering . . . so I guess my husband's choices had a
273 lot to do with it as well . . . he was considering doing the
274 full-time day program that was over here like his
275 brother did. And that was part of the consideration of
276 potentially moving to Gainesville. But he came here [to
277 USF] and the info session here, with me, and got info
278 about the Executive MBA program. And we started to
279 think, "oh, so that's an option, too."
280 Interviewer: But he is not considering USF's Executive MBA?
281 Subject: (*shaking head no*) Well, he's considering both. I mean,
282 the way he looked at it was (*long pause*) he perceives UF
283 as a better (*subject motions with hands to indicate air*
284 *quotes*) "name." A more recognizable name, one. It was
285 more expensive but not much more expensive. And it
286 offered, for him it would be . . . another degree from USF
287 with no other degrees from anywhere else. He is a little
288 concerned about that as well.
289 Interviewer: Okay.
290 Subject: So that's where he . . .
291 Interviewer: So you have already taken the GMAT?
292 Subject: I didn't have to take the GMAT because I am doing the
293 dual masters. Because I am already a USF graduate
294 student and matriculating into the program, I was able
295 to not have to take the GMAT. And because my GRE
296 scores are on file, even though they are expired, they
297 are already scanned into our system. And so, I didn't
298 have to take the GMAT, I could circumvent
299 (*unintelligible*). Which helps out a lot.
300 Interviewer: I know! I'm thinking, "wow" (*unintelligible*).

301 Subject: It's something that . . . it kind of worked out, you know,
302 with Karen [in the USF MBA office] talked about my
303 options, and things I have pursued, and we kind of
304 talked about that. For some reason, the dual degree
305 seemed reasonable. It was helpful, something I hadn't
306 thought of.

307 Interviewer: So how did you go about seeking information on the
308 MBA?

309 Subject: I read over the website and as soon as we saw an
310 information session available, we came to an info
311 session.

312 Interviewer: And what did you think of the info session?

313 Subject: (*very long pause*) I was a little under-impressed. I kind
314 of felt the same way about the orientation. And because
315 I do things like that, also, I think a lot about the attitude,
316 and the energy, and how you want to portray your
317 program. And the info session seemed a little too casual.
318 I was expecting it to be more. You know, to have that
319 "fancy business feel." And it didn't. Do you know what I
320 mean by that?

321 Interviewer: Uh-huh.

322 Subject: So I was a little surprised by that. It gave me all the
323 information that I needed. A lot of people had questions
324 and every question got answered. And it was really
325 helpful to split up because I wouldn't necessarily want
326 to sit there and listen to all of those Executive MBA
327 program's questions, so it was good that they divided it.

328 Interviewer: So, were there alumni . . . it sounds like the presentation
329 was fine, it was the presentation of the content?

330 Subject: (*nods head in agreement*)

331 Interviewer: So would you say that if it had been dressed up, for lack
332 of a better term, it . . .

333 Subject: A little bit more. Maybe alumni present.

334 Interviewer: Would that have made it a better presentation?

335 Subject: Alumni, if they were, you know, *engaging alumni*. That
336 would have been great. I didn't feel it was lacking, but
337 now that you say it, it would have been great. One
338 example is in the presentation there is a video. And the
339 video didn't play. Which, I know that occasionally
340 happens. And the presenter went, okay, no video, and
341 went on to the next slides. Rather than [telling the
342 audience] what was on the video. [I wondered] what are
343 we missing? I've seen such videos, so I know it isn't any
344 unique content, but I was thinking, "what if I need to
345 know what was on the video?" Whatever, that is just
346 one example. But yeah, it was an informative session

347 but having alumni at the info session or orientation
348 session – especially if they were there for one-on-one
349 questions after – or sharing some of their experiences
350 about how the MBA benefitted them, that would have
351 been helpful.

352 Interviewer: So as you began to research these programs, you
353 mentioned that you looked at the website and went to
354 the information session, what kind of information were
355 you looking for? What kind of program content? What
356 were the factors that you were trying to find out about?

357 Subject: I wanted to see what the classes were, what the subjects
358 were. I was looking for some guidance as to the
359 sequencing – which I didn’t find – and that really was
360 not addressed at the orientation session I attended
361 either. I wanted to see how long it would take. It [the
362 information I was seeking] was really more related to
363 the classes and what kind of things would I want to
364 combine, what kinds of things I wanted to keep separate
365 (*unintelligible*) things like I don’t want to take finance
366 and Stats II together. And so I was really looking at the
367 subjects (*unintelligible*) I wanted to see when
368 accounting would end and economics would begin so I
369 that I could take it right before finance so that there
370 wouldn’t be a [gap] between accounting and finance
371 (*unintelligible*) because for me those are the classes
372 where I think I am going to struggle. I am thinking that
373 if I can sequence them, then . . . but I would imagine
374 that I might be able to see that information once I can
375 register, but, anyway, I was looking for order, I was
376 looking for some of that information and I didn’t find
377 that on the website, nor at the orientation that I just
378 attended. Because I did go to the orientation just this
379 past weekend.

380 Interviewer: So you mentioned sequencing, subjects, kind of
381 guidance on those kinds of things . . . what was *most*
382 important to you? If you had to rank them sort of “this
383 was most important to me,” time to degree, or
384 whatever.

385 Subject: Time to degree. Just knowing [it]. Not necessarily
386 because I am looking for something that I can complete
387 quickly. But just being able to conceptualize it. Sort of,
388 “how long do I have to stay at USF?” You know, because
389 (*unintelligible*), sort of being able to talk about these
390 things with my husband because he also works at USF.
391 And kind of forecasting ahead [in terms of schedule].

392 Interviewer: So it would be time to degree, followed closely by
393 sequencing?
394 Subject: Yes, ma'am.
395 Interviewer: Okay. And, once you decided on the degree, what
396 universities did you consider?
397 Subject: UF, USF. Just those.
398 Interviewer: Not UT [University of Tampa], no UCF [University of
399 Central Florida]?
400 Subject: Nope.
401 Interviewer: And how did you go about finding information about
402 those universities?
403 Subject: I didn't look up any information about UF. I had sort of
404 the first-hand experiences of the brother-in-law so I
405 didn't go very far into seeking info about UF. I have,
406 however, a friend who used to work in admissions for
407 the College of Business at UF, so I already knew some
408 information about UF (*unintelligible*).
409 Interviewer: Did you seek word-of-mouth information from friends?
410 Subject: Just my family.
411 Interviewer: Did you ask your coworkers at all about particular
412 institutions?
413 Subject: I didn't want them to know [that I was thinking about
414 getting MBA] (*subject laughs*)
415 Interviewer: So when you were looking at USF vs. UF, what factors
416 were important to you?
417 Subject: Location, financial constraints. You know, location in
418 terms of having to move but also location in terms of
419 Tampa being such a big area, the likelihood that we
420 would stay in Tampa once we changed careers, so the
421 being able to be here while in school, meeting people,
422 creating contacts, being able to take advantage of
423 opportunities. I didn't see that being possible in
424 Gainesville. So that was a huge benefit [of USF].
425 Interviewer: And would you say...which one was most important to
426 you? Location, money?
427 Subject: (*long pause*) Financial.
428 Interviewer: What was the one thing, thinking back to when you first
429 had the idea, what was the one thing that was most
430 important to you all along?
431 Subject: Being able to change fields and make money.
432 Interviewer: So now, what are your career aspirations, both short-
433 and long-term?
434 Subject: (*long pause*) I had forgotten about this, but now that
435 you mention this, what really decided – what really
436 made me fill out the application for the MBA was the
437 info session that I went to about NASA (*USF hosted an*

438 *info session about careers at NASA*). NASA came to
439 campus a couple of weeks ago and I told with my
440 husband, “Hey, I want to work at NASA” (*both*
441 *interviewer and subject chuckle*). We joked about it, you
442 know? And then, my husband said, “it’s an option, you
443 know. You gotta do what you gotta do.” And so that was
444 kind of the [impetus], that got me moving. So I really
445 was impressed with [NASA’s] internships, the job
446 opportunities. So for short-term after the degree, I
447 would like to – actually, before the degree is finished – I
448 would like to do the internship at NASA where you go
449 over there and work for a year then you come back and
450 finish the degree. And I really don’t have any
451 restrictions as far as long-term. I am not committed to
452 any one community - or industry, I should say - or even
453 any specific job at this point. I really don’t have enough;
454 I haven’t researched it enough or really thought about
455 any long-term opportunities or alternatives. I’m in a “I’ll
456 take it one semester at a time” kind of mode of thinking
457 right now, but the idea is to definitely get a new job as
458 soon as possible, a new line of work. As soon as a good
459 one comes along, I will consider it. Whether I am done
460 with the degree or not.

461 Interviewer: Okay. You’re not place-bound, are you? That’s what I
462 am hearing you say.

463 Subject: Well, (*said with hesitation*) I mean, really, no.

464 Interviewer: Do you have children?

465 Subject: No, I don’t have kids. All of my husband’s family are in
466 this area, Tampa Bay, but we are willing to move
467 internationally. Or around the country. IF (*emphasis*)
468 the right opportunity comes along. That’s what it is
469 really all about. And we’re weather-bound.

470 Interviewer: (*laughs*) But it’s not like...

471 Subject: I mean, I’m from New York...

472 Interviewer: So it isn’t like you have strong ties to Tampa [as if you
473 said] “I chose USF because I ...”

474 Subject: (unintelligible)

475 Interviewer: And, what kind of headaches do you anticipate will
476 come along with the MBA?

477 Subject: Did you say headaches?

478 Interviewer: (*nods head indicating yes*)

479 Subject: One of my biggest concerns was the exposure [that] I
480 will now have to be with students that I am working
481 with professionally. I was really interested in the
482 student organizations that they talked about [at MBA
483 orientation] and I know that there are undergraduate

484 members. And so I feel like it is going to be difficult to
485 balance, you know, my relationship with these students
486 – not the MBA students but the undergraduate students
487 – as a professional. But then also to be a student
488 [alongside them] and take part in the opportunities that
489 are available for students. So I am a little apprehensive
490 about that. It was one of the reasons I didn't want to tell
491 anyone I was thinking about it until I was really sure I
492 was going to do it. Because I am not sure how it is
493 perceived. I am not sure...I don't see anybody else in the
494 college going after the MBA, definitely not anyone in the
495 advising office. I didn't ask anyone's permission or talk
496 about it with anyone really because I ... (*subject trails*
497 *off*).

498 Another concern I had was, I was also, and I still am,
499 really nervous about being successful. I didn't want it to
500 look like, "well, here's an employee and she's failing the
501 classes" (*both interviewer and subject chuckle*). I didn't
502 go around telling everybody I did it until I knew I that I
503 was going to go forward. So those are my two kind of
504 biggest concerns. I am little bit worried about some of
505 the courses that I perceive as being more harder than
506 others, but I know deep down in there I can get through
507 things. There will be classes that I struggle with and
508 that's just the way it is (*unintelligible*). I think before I
509 have a little bit more first-hand experience with the
510 program, for me, at this point, it is just kind of nebulous.
511 I feel the same way about what my professional goals
512 are as a result of the MBA. I don't know. We'll see. I
513 really just don't know.

514 Interviewer: And how long do you think it will be to see an ROI
515 (return on this investment)?

516 Subject: (*long pause*) Well, I am not putting any money into it,
517 which is a great benefit for me, so I also think that
518 (*pause*) that I am, that I have a possibility of changing
519 professions in the middle of the program, because I
520 have some experience in banking. You know, I have had
521 a lot of jobs and business experiences (*pause*) so I think
522 as soon as I change careers is when I will start to see the
523 investment pay off, because I won't have to make up any
524 losses.

525 Interviewer: Okay.

526 Subject: And, I've never studied ROI, so I don't know...
527 (*interviewer and subject both chuckle*).

528 Interviewer: Well, you've got a time investment...

529 Subject: (*laughing*) I want to answer that, but I really don't know
530 what it is (*laughing*)...

531 Interviewer: But there is a time investment that you've got involved
532 here.

533 Subject: Yep.

534 Interviewer: How long will it take for you to think, that you say, "this
535 was worth it?"

536 Subject: Gotcha. I think probably 18-24 months in a new
537 position. You know I feel like I am in a place where I
538 really belong, to feel like I am in control of it, feeling
539 comfortable and professional, you know? To feel like I
540 am creating goals (*unintelligible*). I think about 18-24
541 months after I am in a position to really feel like "this
542 was right, I did it."

543 Interviewer: Great. That's all the formal questions that I have. I will
544 tell you, though, that I didn't tell anyone I was going to
545 start my master's until after I accidentally saw Irene
546 (*USF's MBA Program Director*) at grad school
547 orientation and she was like, "what are you doing here?"
548 I didn't wanna...I wasn't sure I could do it, I didn't
549 choose the MBA because I was fearful of the finance
550 classes, so I had very similar [angst].

551 Subject: I know...the same thing, when I was finishing my
552 undergrad, you know, I was 28 and I [initially] had
553 thought I wanted to teach Spanish in high school [but] I
554 did not want to teach Spanish in high school, but I was
555 so close to finishing the degree.... I talked to the
556 [college] Career Center and you know, I kind of batted
557 around the idea of law school – I never thought of the
558 MBA – but even with law school it was the same thing. I
559 never, I mean, I graduated my undergrad degree
560 [program] with like a 3.8, I am a good student, I'm not, I
561 just, I think I just lack confidence. It's taken me a really
562 long time to see, like (*unintelligible*) that there are
563 incapable people in every field and they still get through
564 school. So who are you (*referring to herself*) to think
565 that you can't do it? And so, looking back, I wish I
566 hadn't gone to a private school, I wish that I had gone,
567 that I had transferred to a public school, not paid all that
568 tuition, wondering "why did I lack the confidence?"
569 Yeah, why did I shy away [from a business degree]?

570 Interviewer: Well, I thank you for your time. I think you have given
571 me some great information.

572 Subject: Great.

#

#

#

Interview Date: December 21, 2012
Interview Location: Fletcher Avenue Starbucks, Tampa
Interview Subject: Marsha, 32 year old female, Incoming #2
Interview Duration: 36 minutes

Marsha is a 32-year-old Caucasian female who has applied, been accepted, and paid the deposit to begin the MBA program at USF in the coming semester. She is not a United States citizen; she came to America many years ago via an education Visa, coming to America from Estonia. Upon learning that the Marsha was from Estonia, the interviewer noted that she had helped plan an event at USF featuring Estonia's President Toomas Ilves; it was discovered that Marsha had attended that event at USF a few years ago before to inquiring about the MBA program, but that had been her only prior interaction with USF. At the time of the interview, she had recently attended the new student orientation but had not yet begun MBA classes. She has worked for several years since earning an undergraduate degree, most recently in marketing for a professional association.

1 Interviewer: So, you have been accepted into the MBA program and
2 you start classes soon, correct?
3 Subject: Yes, in January.
4 Interviewer: Where did you earn your undergrad [degree]?
5 Subject: The University of South Dakota.
6 Interviewer: And how long ago did you graduate?
7 Subject: 2002. December 2002.
8 Interviewer: Okay. And what did you study?
9 Subject: My degree is a Bachelor of Science in Contemporary
10 Media and Journalism; emphasis is PR (public relations)
11 and a minor in English. The "with emphasis on PR" is
12 interesting because that is actually what is on my
13 diploma. It reads: Bachelor of Science in Contemporary
14 Media and Journalism with Emphasis in Public
15 Relations. Isn't that crazy?
16 Interviewer: It is, because mine is...
17 Subject: Really long.
18 Interviewer: Mine was in advertising; it was in mass comm with an
19 emphasis in advertising, but it just says mass comm on
20 the diploma.
21 Subject: Yeah.
22 Interviewer: Okay. So what did you do after you earned the degree?
23 Where did you work? What was your career path?
24 Subject: Well, from there, I actually, I need a - well, a lot of my
25 career path has been sort of like molded by the fact that
26 I have special requirements being an international
27 person to be able to work in the United States, so I
28 needed to find a company. I didn't really have a lot of

29 choice in terms of where I worked. It was almost as if
30 they picked me up then I could, you know, like because
31 they...

32 Interviewer: They have to sponsor you for a few years?
33 Subject: (*nods head in agreement*) They have to sponsor me for a
34 work visa and there is money involved and a lot of
35 process and they have to really take me on as sort of a
36 project. And so I was originally hired in Ames, Iowa, by
37 the American Agricultural Economics Association. And
38 so that's how I sort of got into the association world;
39 which is what, that's the area where I work in now. I
40 work for professional associations. I have a certificate
41 and our credential and I am a Certified Associations
42 Executive. So I have earned that and that was sort of
43 like, I guess, the most commonly known like CPA would
44 be, because you are required to take an exam to certify
45 for it and then you are required to take continuing
46 education hours every year to be able to renew your
47 credential. In the association world, that's one major
48 thing that one would need to be successful in
49 association management, in the higher levels [such as
50 an] executive. So, so that's how I got started. I joined the
51 American Society of Association Executives, which is the
52 association that supports association management
53 professionals and so I was working for AAEA and sort of
54 fell into that field, you know? So my specialty - so the
55 area that I got into was communications.

56 Interviewer: Okay.
57 Subject: So a lot of activities involving that. I originally started
58 out being like hands-on, with desktop publishing and I
59 put out a newsletter and I did the press interviews, and
60 coordinated all the marketing and advertising and the
61 website. This was a relatively small organization, so I
62 was it. It was a one-man show. So I worked there until
63 December of 2005. I was hired on October of 2003 and I
64 worked there until December of 2005 and I happened to
65 have a friend down here in Tampa who had an opening
66 at her company for a coordinator position. So I applied
67 for that because I wanted to leave the place where I was
68 [working]. Because I had been there for two years and I
69 felt like I was sort of, you know...

70 Interviewer: I'm done.
71 Subject: Yeah. And so the company down here, BICSI, is who I
72 work for now and that company hired me on as the
73 communications coordinator. Shortly after I came on
74 board, about four months later, they promoted me to

75 communications manager. So I started managing a
76 department of 11 individuals and they . . . and all of this
77 again is a professional organization that I work for now,
78 since January of 2006. So I manage a department of 11
79 in communications. Then we transitioned into
80 marketing. Then in 2009 is when I actually earned my
81 credential, my CAE, and then I was promoted. Two
82 months later I was promoted to director of membership
83 and marketing, which is what I am now. So they gave
84 me two departments, so there's 15 or so individuals
85 reporting to me now.
86
87 So with the whole grad school thing, originally when I
88 graduated college I wanted to go into international
89 trade law actually. I wanted to become an attorney. So, I
90 am not entirely sure why, really. It was always
91 something that I wanted to do and there was a good law
92 school at the University of South Dakota and that was
93 sort of what I was going to do. I actually started to
94 practice for the LSATs, which is the . . .
95 Interviewer: The entry exam.
96 Subject: Yeah.
97 Subject: I did very well on my practice exams and was ready to
98 go but then I realized that I had \$37,000 in school loans
99 because I had to pay international out-of-state tuition,
100 plus all of my living expenses. I took everything out on
101 private loans because, as an international, I don't qualify
102 for any government assistance. At all. None. So
103 everything I had was a private loan and I had to start
104 paying that back. So that's quite a bit of money. And I
105 would have had to take out additional loans to go for
106 law school and it is extremely expensive, obviously.
107 Interviewer: Right.
108 Subject: *(jumping from thought-to-thought during conversation)*
109 So I decided that I was going to try to find a job instead,
110 and to work. And I sort of had given up on the whole
111 idea of grad school at that time. I think that I was always
112 wanting it. In fact, there was a girl that worked for me
113 that had graduated. And any time I have hired I really
114 looked to, to really like mentor you know young women
115 who had graduated out of college. You know, so that
116 they can get on their feet. I feel like they, like they are
117 the individuals that can be most likely molded into
118 successful, you know, whatever, that you can have the
119 most impact. So there was this girl who had graduated
120 from USF and -- at this company that I work for now --

121 but she no longer works for me. She was trying to get
122 into grad school and what she was going to go for was
123 an MBA. And she was trying to take the GMATs, I think,
124 and she didn't do well. She tried several times and so
125 she did not do well enough. So I think she gave up on
126 the idea. Actually, she ended up not going to grad
127 school. But I think that's kind of, sort of, when I started
128 to really think about what it is that I wanted to be. Plus
129 my, the boss that came on board then actually promoted
130 me to director. He is the CEO of the company and is
131 extremely – he is my mentor – and he is very, very, he's
132 like a high profile individual, he came from, I don't
133 know. He has an MBA, he a CAE, and he's the CEO. I sort
134 of look to him as . . . for a while there I wanted to go to
135 from director to [vice president], from VP to CEO. I
136 wanted to become an executive director for an
137 association myself and I needed to figure out a way to
138 do that. Plus, I had always wanted to go back to grad
139 school. Plus, my new boss, as he was promoting me, you
140 know he took me out to lunch to talk kind of about the
141 promotion, he'd bring it up. That was the first thing that
142 he wanted to talk about. You know, "what do you want
143 to do with, as far as professional development, where
144 do you want to go from here?" He is really big on
145 people continuing to educate themselves. Plus, my
146 company provides a pretty good educational assistance
147 program, where they give me some money to be able to
148 go take classes or whatever I want to do. So, at that time
149 [over lunchtime conversation], it was kind of like a spur
150 of the moment thing, that I just sort of blurted out, "I
151 want to go get my MBA!" You know, because I think had
152 been thinking about it all along anyway, because he has
153 an MBA and (*laughing*) I wanted to be just like him, you
154 know?

155 Interviewer: It's the credential you needed?
156 Subject: Yeah. Because I already had the CAE, which is one of
157 those. I mean, in reality, there's really only, if you go and
158 look at the successful association executives, the ones
159 who are executive directors or CEOs, you will see that
160 they have the certified association executive credential.
161 It's like the one and only credential there is in the
162 association management world. And most likely if you
163 want to go and have an executive director position
164 somewhere, you should technically have that credential.
165 The other thing that is really, really common is that
166 people have advanced degrees. The one that I see most

167 commonly is the MBA. There's other ones, but the MBA
168 is really, you know, you don't, it doesn't box you into
169 one specific area, it's sort of like, it's just the, it shows . . .
170 My boss always says this, he says, "what I learned in
171 grad school is that I learned to think." And that's sort of
172 what he, you know, "so I am really excited that you are
173 going to go." So he (*pause*) so anyways, so he promoted
174 me. And it got really rough at work, so I didn't even . . .
175 That was in 2010, March of 2010, so I didn't . . . so I
176 ignored what I had said and I didn't do anything toward
177 getting into grad school at all.

178 Interviewer: Okay.

179 Subject: I was just trying to focus on my new position, trying to,
180 you know what I mean? But I was still saying that I was
181 going to do it. And then I had my review with him six
182 months later . . .

183 Interviewer: (*laughing*)

184 Subject: And he says, "sooooo, what is it that you want to do?"
185 And I'm saying I don't know. He says, "No, really, what
186 do you want to do?" I said, "I still want the MBA but it's
187 really not a good time right now, I just can't do it." He's
188 like, "no problem." So I get a review every six months
189 right now because I am on whatever he calls a fast-track
190 thing, whatever. So he asks me again the next time. And
191 I was like, I really feel like I've got to do something and
192 then I said to him that I wanted to be considered - he
193 had established a new level in the company because
194 previous to this there were only some managers and
195 directors, and directors reported directly to the CEO;
196 well, he established a vice president level. He promoted
197 our CFO to vice president and hired on two vice
198 presidents. So with that happening, I thought, "okay, I'm
199 a director, what's the next logical step?" Well, I want to
200 be a vice president, so how do I do that? So I talked to
201 him. I said, "You know, I really want to be a vice
202 president." Right now my only option is to move up in a
203 company that I'm in; I really can't look externally
204 because I need to stay there for immigration purposes. I
205 really need to stay within my existing company because
206 I am on like temporary green card waiting status. So I
207 really *can't* go anywhere else. Which is fine, because I
208 am happy where I am at and I have a really excellent
209 job. It's awesome; it's like, a dream. You know, like, I
210 don't think (*pause*). I'm very lucky. Just say that. Great
211 benefits, great pay. My life is awesome. Great people,
212 whatever. And this great boss. So I would really just

213 love to become a vice president. I asked him whether or
214 not he saw that in my future at that company. He said
215 yes, that the position that I was in was certainly
216 something that could look it . . . he was like, “you know,
217 you can’t do vice president of [human resources] or vice
218 president of accounting but you could certainly, can be
219 vice president of membership and marketing; that’s
220 something that would be a fine position to create.” He
221 said, “you already have your credentials, really all you
222 need is to get started on the MBA program. At least start
223 taking some classes and [to gain] a little bit more
224 experience.” So I was like, okay. So I think it was at that
225 time that it sort of clicked like, okay that I really don’t
226 have a choice here. And it wasn’t that I was trying to
227 delay it necessarily because I didn’t want to do it. I think
228 I have always wanted to go to grad school. It’s my
229 dream come true. Like, I am beyond excited.

230 Interviewer: Good!

231 Subject I can’t even tell you. I like flipped out when I found out I
232 was accepted. I think that my primary concern has
233 always been the financial aspect of it. I am completely . .
234 . I have to completely do this by myself. I’m not even
235 able to take out a loan right now. I paid off my other
236 loans, but, in order for me to take out new loans I have
237 to have a co-signer on my school loans.

238 Interviewer: Because of your status?

239 Subject: *(nodding head)* Because of my status. Because I am not a
240 resident. Even though I work, I pay taxes like a citizen in
241 every other way except for the fact that have this, that I
242 am sort of temporary, that I could be deported at any
243 time. That kind of a thing. And I don’t want to make the
244 people who helped me co-sign my loan the first time, I
245 don’t want to ask them again because that was a big
246 thing, for somebody to trust me. So I needed to figure
247 out a way to do it by myself, but eventually I was kind of
248 like, “you know what, I am just going to take this a
249 semester at a time.” I’ve gotten a lot of pay raises in
250 between from when I first considered it to now, so I am
251 making a lot more money. And my company provides
252 assistance and, you know, I think that I just need to do
253 this. And so I started moving toward the process early
254 last year without considering the financial aspect of it. I
255 thought to myself that I am not going to figure this out
256 right now. I am just going to trust that it will somehow
257 work out and I am going to start applying. Once I get
258 accepted, then I will figure out where I am going to from

259 there, financially. There's always a way, you know?
260 There's got to be.

261 Interviewer: Okay.
262 Subject: So I went, so I started studying for the GMAT. Well, that
263 was really, well, first I had an appointment with an
264 advising, whatever. I was like, "what do I need to do?"
265 And they said to take the GMAT. I was like, okay. So that
266 was my first step. And it was sort of non-committal. I
267 mean, all it is is studying for an exam. It was a few
268 hundred dollars and it doesn't mean a commitment to a
269 university. It's just . . .

270 Interviewer: A test.
271 Subject: Yes, it's just taking a test. So I just ignored the rest of it
272 and just focused on the exam. I didn't do nearly as well
273 as I wanted to. It was an average score and I was just, I
274 don't know, okay, well, we'll see (*both interviewer and*
275 *subject chuckle*). Let's see what happens. So then I put
276 my application together. I was going for the fall
277 semester but what happened was the . . . even though I
278 don't need a Visa to go to school they classified me as an
279 international student and they basically said I missed
280 my deadline; even though I met the deadline but the
281 system classified me as something else than what I
282 actually was.

283 Interviewer: Oh, yeah.
284 Subject: I was like okay, yeah, well that doesn't matter. It's better
285 anyway. It gives me more time, right? So that is what,
286 hence the mid-year start. It would not have been my
287 preference, but I think, well, now I am grateful that that
288 is the way it worked out. So I submitted my application
289 and everything and I had to get recommendation letters
290 and obviously my CEO wrote me one. Must have been
291 good. I don't know. He's really been pushing me to get
292 this thing, so . . .

293 Interviewer: So it also let him know that you were moving, that you
294 were doing something . . .

295 Subject: Yeah, you know. And the other thing was I needed to
296 work with the school to get them to give me in-state
297 tuition, even though they consider me an international
298 student. And that was – that was kind of a lengthy
299 process. I had to provide a lot of paperwork to show
300 that I have been . . . because I have been in Florida since
301 2006, but in terms of resident, I am not a Florida
302 resident, I am an international person. So they can't
303 classify me as a resident anywhere. But, luckily for me –

304 because an international student tuition per credit
305 tuition is like \$800-whatever dollars.
306 Interviewer: It's a lot.
307 Subject: Yeah, it is like twice as much. So that was basically going
308 to decide whether or not I was going to be able to even
309 consider this thing. If they had given me international
310 out-of-state tuition I would not have been able to go.
311 But I met with somebody at the MBA office or whatever.
312 And the woman said, she was like, "no, definitely, I think
313 you qualify for in-state." You know they determine
314 resident for tuition purposes is different for what a legal
315 resident? Luckily. So I did everything I needed to do
316 and, thank God, they gave me in-state tuition. So I was
317 like, okay, another hurdle crossed. And then, basically, I
318 was just waiting to get accepted. And I got accepted. In
319 fact, I didn't get my acceptance letter. What I got was,
320 from the international student office, I got this weird,
321 cryptic message like "as a student who has been
322 accepted to USF, you know, we need to also review your
323 immigration files" or whatever.
324 Interviewer: You got that before you got your . . .
325 Subject: Yeah, congratulations on your acceptance to USF. I was
326 like, yeah, I guess that means I am accepted! I got all of
327 that and like five emails from the international office
328 and nothing from the USF College of Business . . .
329 Interviewer: You're in!
330 Subject: Yeah, nothing saying your acceptance letter, or
331 whatever. I got all of that the next day and then the
332 accepted emails after that. So that was a happy day! I
333 was really very excited. I didn't really think that that
334 would happen. I don't know why. Just didn't think my
335 GMAT was, I mean, I think it was an acceptable score; I
336 just didn't think it was excellent.
337 Interviewer: But they look at the total package, you know. You had
338 work experience; you had good letters from your
339 employer . . .
340 Subject: Yeah. Ten years of solid executive work experience. Not
341 just, [experience in] *business (emphasis)*, not just in
342 anything regular. Not just regular work experience, but
343 business work experience.
344 Interviewer: So the portfolio admission clearly helped.
345 Subject: Yeah. I graduated cum laude from my undergraduate
346 program, so that probably had something to do with it,
347 too, a little bit.
348 Interviewer: Sure.

349 Subject: Yeah (*stumbling over words*), but I really didn't – I don't
350 know why – I just didn't think that I would get accepted
351 or whatever but I did, so . . .

352 Interviewer: Okay, so you have already answered several of these
353 questions . . . how long ago, you started in 2010;
354 particular incident, it was really career planning
355 (*subject indicates agreement*) and those, the influence of
356 your boss. What did you think the long-term benefit
357 would be? I think I heard you say it was really that vice
358 president position – or is there something else?

359 Subject: I think the long-term benefit would be general career
360 advancement. I can't go any further without an MBA.

361 Interviewer: And what about short-term benefits?

362 Subject: Well, first of all, it's showing my boss that I am moving
363 forward with our plan. I feel like he promoted me on the
364 condition that I would go forward and get an MBA.
365 Because most of the other directors have an MBA and I
366 don't.

367 Interviewer: Do you think there were any short-term headaches?
368 Anything you were kind of dreading?

369 Subject: The financial is number one. Secondly is the time. My
370 job is not a standard 8-to-5. I work all the time, nights,
371 weekends. I have a very crazy schedule to begin with
372 and I assume this is going to add to my workload.

373 Interviewer: It will (*chuckling*). So once you decided you were going
374 to do this, how long did – how did you research
375 programs? How did you think about it? Did you go
376 online?

377 Subject: It is almost as if I didn't. USF is sort of, right there.

378 Interviewer: So you thought about the program first, and then the
379 university, not the university first.

380 Subject: (*displays quizzical look*)

381 Interviewer: It was, I want an MBA, not USF, it wasn't like USF, then I
382 will go for an MBA.

383 Subject: They were both kind of natural [decisions]. In fact, USF
384 was the only university that I applied to.

385 Interviewer: Oh, okay.

386 Subject: Yeah, I didn't even apply to anywhere else because USF
387 is down the street from here. It is physically close. It is a
388 respected four-year school. And I wanted a face-to-face
389 program; I didn't even want to consider anything
390 online. I didn't consider the University of Tampa
391 because of the expense and I think that USF is the best
392 school all around.

393 Interviewer: (*unintelligible, laughing*)

394 Subject: Yeah, I know!

395 Interviewer: So you took the GMAT before you even explored the
396 program?
397 Subject: Yeah.
398 Interviewer: No, you explored the program first because they told
399 you that you needed to take the test.
400 Subject: Honestly, though, I don't really know what the word
401 explore means here because I didn't really explore the
402 program at all. Because after I got accepted people were
403 like, "so how many credits do you have to take?" And I
404 don't know (*both interviewer and subject chuckle*).
405 "What classes are you going to take?" I don't know . . .
406 (*laughing*) I am just going to go and get this MBA, I don't
407 know.
408 Interviewer: But you went – you did go to the office? You went in-
409 person and talked to people?
410 Subject: Yeah.
411 Interviewer: Did you go to the info session as well or no?
412 Subject: Well we just had the required MBA orientation [this
413 past weekend]. All day.
414 Interviewer: Right, but before going in, to get info . . .
415 Subject: No.
416 Interviewer: Okay. How did you go about finding any information?
417 Did you go online? Did you request brochures?
418 Subject: No, anything that I, really . . . it was all online.
419 Interviewer: So did you find everything you needed on a website?
420 Subject: It was a little difficult to navigate, honestly. Like the
421 whole . . .
422 Interviewer: How so?
423 Subject: Because I had a lot of different, like specific, things that I
424 had to find. Like the stuff about the tuition classification
425 info. Those things were complicated and in several
426 different places. Like the application. You know when
427 you log in you fill out the [online] application [form].
428 Well, it was so rigid it wouldn't allow for my specific
429 circumstances. So it was just, you know...I had unique
430 circumstances that you couldn't qualify it in a drop-
431 down. And I had, you know, I had to call them several
432 times to ask them what do you want me to put here?
433 What fits?
434 Interviewer: So the information seeking was fine, it was the actual
435 navigation [of the grad school application]?
436 Subject: Just how well the process [of applying] was thought out.
437 I think that there were a lot of . . . plus there's [a lot of
438 different sites], well think about it. There's general USF.
439 Then there's USF Grad School, then MBA school, then
440 College of Business. And each of them have their own

441 sections of the website and their own requirements. So
442 you sort of have to do a full sweep of each section,
443 especially during the application process because you
444 don't want to miss stuff. You have to think, "well, I have
445 to take care of this, that, and the other thing, so . . ." Plus
446 it is a big school, big website.

447 Interviewer: Yes, it's huge.

448 Subject: Yeah.

449 Interviewer: What was most important to you as you – you kind of
450 told me it was a respected four-year institution, you
451 wanted face-to-face, that you were, partially – I mean
452 not partially – totally, at location.

453 Subject: It couldn't be a more perfect fit in reality. Because I
454 wanted face-to-face and it has, like, the classes are night
455 classes. And they have that whole semesters divided
456 (*referring to 8-week and 12-week classes*). The whole
457 thing. The way they have this planned out so that you
458 can work around your work schedule. It's awesome. It's
459 really thought out for working professionals, on like,
460 how to get it. The only thing I am concerned about is the
461 five-year thing. Because I need to make sure I get this
462 done in five years. And I hope it isn't going to take that
463 long but I am concerned. This first semester I am only
464 taking seven credits and that is because of the financial
465 thing.

466 Interviewer: Well, on a personal level, I have to finish in five years,
467 too, and I am only taking two classes a semester max.
468 And so I was concerned; I thought I would end up
469 getting the degree at 50 [years old] and I will end up
470 getting it at 48.

471 Subject: Oh, nice.

472 Interviewer: Once you get in it you realize there are some things that
473 are really cool, like the one-week classes. You have to
474 take vacation, take a week off of work, but you get three
475 credits done.

476 Subject: Yeah.

477 Interviewer: I hear so much good stuff about the LEAN class. I wish I
478 had taken it but I took the improv one.

479 Subject: I hear it is great.

480 Interviewer: Even though it will cost you a week of vacation, it will
481 shave a year off.

482 Subject: I have way too much work vacation saved up because,
483 not because I never take it but because I have been
484 there for such a long time that I have like seven weeks
485 of vacation right now (*laughing*).

486 Interviewer: Okay, you can take a week off for a class!

487 Subject: *(unintelligible)*
488 Interviewer: So out of all of these things, which was the most
489 important to you? I heard place, the reputation, face-to-
490 face, night classes, program design, and finance. Was
491 there any one thing for you? Those are all things that I
492 am hearing.
493 Subject: I don't know. You know, I didn't look at them that way. I
494 just looked at the whole. It wasn't like I had a choice. I
495 didn't put all these schools next to each other and say,
496 "ooh, I wonder where I should go." It was sort of like, I
497 am going to USF.
498 Interviewer: Did you even consider like a [University of] Phoenix?
499 Subject: Absolutely not. I would never. And not to sound
500 pompous, but I hire people. And I don't believe in online
501 education. I just don't. As much.
502 Interviewer: Okay. Well, I didn't ask them in order, but you have
503 essentially answered all of these questions. How long do
504 you think it will take for you to get a monetary return
505 on your investment in this degree? How long do you
506 think it will take before it has paid for itself?
507 Subject: *(long pause)* No idea. I just feel like, maybe . . . *(long*
508 *pause)*
509 Interviewer: How long do you think it will be until you get
510 promoted?
511 Subject: A year or two. Probably.
512 Interviewer: Well is there anything else you'd like to add?
513 Subject: Oh, no, I talked a lot!
514 Interviewer: But you know what? You made it easy for me. You
515 essentially answered every question, I didn't have to
516 ask. You went through and answered every one of them.
517 So that's it.

#

#

#

Interview Date: January 4, 2013
Interview Location: Subject's Home, Tampa
Interview Subject: Ish, 28 year old Singaporean male, Incoming #3
Interview Duration: 26 minutes

Ish is a 28-year-old Singaporean male who has applied, been accepted, and paid the deposit to begin the MBA program at USF in the coming semester. He is not a United States citizen; he came to America a few years ago via an education Visa, coming to America from Singapore, where he was a student in USF's program at the Center for American Education. Upon learning that the Ish was from Singapore, the interviewer noted that she had been to the CAE in Singapore twice; it was discovered that the subject had been a student there during one of the two visits. At the time of the interview, Ish had recently attended the new student orientation but had not yet begun MBA classes. While the interviewer was setting up the video recorder, Ish chatted informally about his thoughts on MBA students and the anticipated group projects that will be involved in the program (part of this conversation is captured and is included below, since it provides some insight on one of his highest-ranked factors, namely the caliber of students in the program).

1 Subject: Usually, MBA students, because of how hard it is to get
2 in, you have to get the recommendations, have a good
3 GMAT score and all that, I think most of them are quite
4 driven. The only thing that I am concerned about is
5 that most of them are working, and they have families,
6 some of them that might make them go astray.
7 Interviewer: That means you have to do your work at night with
8 them (*subject implies agreement*). I've taken four
9 classes in the MBA program as all of my electives.
10 They've been good [but they have] all had group
11 projects. This semester I am taking my last one. It's the
12 brand class. I don't know if you are taking that one.
13 Subject: Brand Management?
14 Interviewer: Uh-huh. I'm taking that. That will be my final class.
15 Subject: That's in marketing, right?
16 Interviewer: Yes, but every MBA student has to take a certain
17 number of marketing courses. But you'll be – you're
18 starting in January?
19 Subject: I'm starting in January.
20 Interviewer: So you'll be taking your foundation courses.
21 Subject: Yeah, I do. I think I do need . . . I am exempted from
22 some foundation [courses] because I am a business
23 student.
24 Interviewer: Oh.
25 Subject: There are some required courses, but foundational
26 ones [are waived].

27 *Interviewer and subject discuss the pronunciation of his name.*
28
29 Interviewer: So, you studied business as an undergrad, then. Where
30 did you get your degree?
31 Subject: USF.
32 Interviewer: Oh, okay.
33 Subject: I did marketing.
34 Interviewer: So I am taking Biswas for marketing. Have you had
35 him yet?
36 Subject: Who?
37 Interviewer: For brand, this coming semester.
38 Subject: *(not understanding reference to faculty member)* No, I
39 am actually doing MBA.
40 Interviewer: Did you take Biswas as an undergrad?
41 Subject: No.
42 Interviewer: So how long ago did you graduate?
43 Subject: Actually, I graduated last year, last spring.
44 Interviewer: So that would be spring 2011.
45 Subject: No, 2012.
46 Interviewer: Oh. So like, just this past May.
47 Subject: Great.
48 Interviewer: Okay. So, do you currently work?
49 Subject: No, I'm a full-time student.
50 Interviewer: Have you ever had a job or work experience?
51 Subject: Yes, I have four years of work experience. Two years
52 as a firefighter and another two years running my own
53 business back in Singapore.
54 Interviewer: The only place I have been that is out of the United
55 States is Singapore. I went there twice.
56 Subject: Oh, really? For vacation?
57 Interviewer: I loved it there; I would go back in a minute. No, USF
58 has a program in Singapore to get your USF degree in
59 Singapore, and I went over there.
60 Subject: But you were there, really?
61 Interviewer: Uh-huh.
62 Subject: I was there. I did my first year over there.
63 Interviewer: Really, with Mrs. Chan?
64 Subject: Yeah. Then after that I decided to come here because I
65 wanted to change my major. Over there you can only
66 get business administration [major]. And I wanted to
67 do marketing. So I moved here. And it is also to get a
68 breather from the hustle and bustle of the city. But I
69 didn't know you were there.
70 Interviewer: Yeah, I came twice. With Jackie Nelson. I probably have
71 photos of – I went over and took photos for marketing
72 and newsletter purposes.

73 Subject: Really.
74 Interviewer: Made a video with Mrs. Chan that they played at
75 graduation. Did you know Erwin?
76 Subject: When were you there? 2010?
77 Interviewer: I went 2009 and 2010, or 2010 and 2011. I went two
78 years in a row.
79 Subject: Probably 2010 and 2011, you probably saw me; we
80 just didn't recognize each other.
81 Interviewer: There were only about ten students in the class?
82 Subject: Yeah.
83 Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. So you worked two years in Singapore and
84 two years in a family business, or your own business?
85 Subject: Yeah, family business.
86 Interviewer: What kind of business did ya'll have?
87 Subject: We have a chain of restaurants in Singapore. We are
88 doing pretty good. So this is the reason why – and
89 before I left I actually handed over my duties and my
90 responsibilities to my family and when I got here, I left
91 behind everything.
92 Interviewer: Did you ever invite Dr. Stamps over for dinner?
93 Subject: Yeah. I did.
94 Interviewer: I have heard of you! She loves you. She . . .
95 Subject: *(laughing)*
96 Interviewer: You were her favorite student over there.
97 Subject: Oh, really?
98 Interviewer: Well, I wouldn't know it from a name, but she told me
99 stories where she went to a – one of her students his
100 family owned a restaurant and she went to dinner
101 with them. She loved you.
102 Subject: *(laughing)* I haven't met her for so long I think I should
103 when school starts.
104 Interviewer: She just retired.
105 Subject: She just retired?
106 Interviewer: So she is only on campus like one or two days a week.
107 Subject: Oh really? How do I get in touch with her?
108 Interviewer: Um, I will send you her contact info. Okay.
109 Subject: Great.
110 Interviewer: Everybody from USF loved going to Singapore. We
111 were really disappointed that program didn't take off
112 more and Mrs. Chan is selling the CAE.
113 Subject: It's the laws. The laws are getting tighter and honestly,
114 to me, they did not do good marketing. Not enough
115 marketing to draw the locals. They cannot depend just
116 on international students.

117 Interviewer: I agree with you. Okay, so how long ago did you think
118 about getting an MBA? When did you first start
119 thinking about it?
120 Subject: Um, I started to think about doing an MBA when I was
121 about to leave for the United States so 2011, fall.
122 Interviewer: Okay. And was there something that led you to start
123 thinking about it or was there a particular reason you
124 were thinking, "I might get an MBA?"
125 Subject: Yeah, I thought that I wanted to get an MBA because,
126 looking around, everybody has a degree and an MBA
127 would give me an edge, really, in terms of contacts.
128 And also the quality of people. Pretty much their full –
129 they have their careers, you know? A lot of experience
130 in hand. I'll be able to talk to the right people. As
131 compared to undergrads, there is a mixture of kids
132 and, like, working adults and, like you know, it is a
133 massive mix. So you have to really make the right
134 connections. And with an MBA I am hoping to do that.
135 Interviewer: Okay. So it was the quality of the peers in the
136 classroom that was a big part of it?
137 Subject: Yes.
138 Interviewer: So what do you think the long-term benefits of getting
139 an MBA will be?
140 Subject: Opportunity.
141 Interviewer: Meaning?
142 Subject: Meaning, like I said before, the connections that I will
143 make, the friends that I will be able to meet and from
144 there, you never know what kind of opportunities I
145 will get. Business deals. Access to different markets.
146 Or, yeah, things like that.
147 Interviewer: Okay. Do you plan to return – are you from Singapore,
148 are you an international student in Singapore?
149 Subject: I am from Singapore.
150 Interviewer: Do you plan to return to Singapore?
151 Subject: Yes, I plan to return to Singapore.
152 Interviewer: You plan to stay there?
153 Subject: Uh-huh.
154 Interviewer: So what did you think – for the MBA – would be some
155 short-term benefits? You told me long-term.
156 Subject: Short-term?
157 Interviewer: Yes.
158 Subject: Hmmm. I guess it is the education, the educational
159 value of it. Things like finance, marketing, accounting.
160 Those kinds of things would be useful for business
161 later on. A lot of the things you learn in the MBA
162 program I do expect it, that I can apply it into my

163 business. Because I just recently finished undergrad I
164 know that there are things like marketing that I can
165 apply back to my business. So this is what I am hoping
166 [to gain] from MBA program as well, in the short-term.
167 Interviewer: Do you think there will be any headaches?
168 Subject: Headaches?
169 Interviewer: Yes.
170 Subject: Such as? Like?
171 Interviewer: Well, I don't know. Is there anything that you are not
172 looking forward to?
173 Subject: I was never really strong in math, so think I might
174 have problem with finance.
175 Interviewer: Yeah.
176 Subject: Yeah, but I did pretty well in finance before. It is just
177 that when you don't have the interest --
178 Interviewer: Did you have [USF finance professor] Besley?
179 Subject: Yeah (*laughing*). I did not have good experience with
180 him.
181 Interviewer: (*laughing*) I've heard students say that.
182 Subject: I did pretty well. Yeah, and I also don't see myself
183 doing finance in the future. Maybe the lack of interest
184 and also the usability of what I am going to learn is
185 probably the biggest obstacle I am going to face
186 moving on.
187 Interviewer: Okay.
188 (*brief interruption as roommate returns early from soccer game*)
189 Interviewer: So did you think about the MBA and then think about
190 where you would get it, or did you think about
191 continuing ed at USF and then --
192 Subject: I was, no, I wasn't thinking of continuing at USF.
193 Interviewer: Okay.
194 Subject: When, initially, I went to look at the MBA, I thought
195 that after I graduated from my undergrad I was going
196 to go home, work for a few years, and after that I will
197 start thinking about doing my MBA. But, as I got closer
198 to my graduation, I realized that I was on a roll. I was
199 like, student living, student life, my mindset is that
200 kind of mindset and I don't want to have to go back to
201 work and after that and -- you've been to Singapore,
202 you know how busy it is?
203 Interviewer: Yes.
204 Subject: And it is so difficult to get away from all that. It took
205 me a long time; it took me a whole year to just, you
206 know, disconnect myself from work to come here. And
207 I have a feeling that if I were to go home and to get my
208 MBA later on, it would take me very long to

209 disconnect. It would be very, very difficult because I
210 will have more responsibilities than before. So I
211 thought that maybe I should think about doing my
212 MBA right after my undergrad. So that's when I started
213 preparing for it. I began studying, looking at schools . . .
214 Interviewer: So it fits with your lifestyle now?
215 Subject: Yes.
216 Interviewer: And so where did you think about going?
217 Subject: I was thinking about NU, the National University of
218 Singapore, Singapore Management University, the
219 University of Florida, USF, of course, and the
220 University of Miami.
221 Interviewer: And so when did you take the GMAT? Before
222 exploring programs? Had you decided on a university
223 before you took the GMAT? Kind of, when did you . . .
224 Subject: Yeah, I kind of like decided that those are the
225 universities that I want to attend. I started to do the
226 GMAT right after graduation. Starting preparing for it.
227 And right, right, a few months ago I just finished my
228 GMAT and I enrolled for spring.
229 Interviewer: Great. And so how did you go about seeking
230 information about the programs?
231 Subject: What I did was, I, well, I was doing my GMAT with
232 Kaplan. And they gave me a kit with all this
233 information about how to choose business schools. I
234 also looked for online forums reviews to see which
235 schools are best for me and how I could contribute to
236 the program as well as contribute to my personal
237 interests.
238 Interviewer: So were there, like, MBA forums, or did you just Google
239 to see what kind of forums popped up?
240 Subject: Google is mainly for the reviews. Forums are mainly
241 for students who are in there and they have personal,
242 they have personal interests that they want to share
243 with other people who are interested in joining them.
244 Interviewer: So what was important to you as you began to
245 research them, as you were looking at what these
246 students had to say, what was important to you?
247 Subject: Really the people who [are] in the program. Will I be
248 able to connect with them? Will I be able to, you know,
249 draw out experiences from them, and, yeah, just things
250 like that. And how they teach. Academically, modules.
251 Interviewer: Program design?
252 Subject: Yes.
253 Interviewer: Kind of? Okay.
254 Subject: Yes.

255 Interviewer: (*stumbling over words*) Were you looking at program
256 content or other factors? It sounds to me like you
257 were looking at who were your peers going to be,
258 would you fit in with them, the way the program was
259 taught. Was there anything else you were considering?
260 Subject: Then length of time.
261 Interviewer: The duration, oh, okay.
262 Subject: Because I wanted to do it within a year, to finish up
263 within a year. And most of the programs promised
264 that. Sort of. Well, USF didn't promise that. I just
265 assumed that I could finish. I didn't realize the
266 schedule was a rolling schedule.
267 Interviewer: Uh-huh.
268 Subject: So I can't finish it within a year. One year, three
269 months instead. It's not that bad.
270 Interviewer: Oh, that's not bad.
271 Subject: Yeah, but . . .
272 Interviewer: Make sure you take advantage of the one-week
273 courses. They are so worth it.
274 Subject: One-week courses? They have one-week courses?
275 Interviewer: Yeah, every spring break . . .
276 Subject: Oh, for summer.
277 Interviewer: No, every spring break they offer a one-week course in
278 Lean. It's 8-5 every day for an entire week. It
279 consumes your life, but at the end of that week, you
280 have three credits finished.
281 Subject: Really?
282 Interviewer: And the week before fall semester starts they have an
283 improv class. It's managerial improv. Again, same
284 thing, 40 hours. It's consuming, but then at the end of
285 the week it's done.
286 Subject: Ahhhh. Five days?
287 Interviewer: Five days.
288 Subject: Oh, my.
289 Interviewer: Monday through Friday, 8-5. If you could do [classes]
290 in Singapore with the way the finance course was
291 taught, you could do these classes.
292 Subject: Okay (*laughing*).
293 Interviewer: (*unintelligible*) Finance is another story.
294 Subject: Yeah, finance is another story.
295 Interviewer: So, duration of the program was also important to you.
296 So out of all of those things, which [were] duration,
297 experiences, your peers, teaching style, what was the
298 one thing that was most important to you?
299 Subject: Peers.

300 Interviewer: Alright. So you told me which universities you
301 considered. What made you decide on USF?
302 Subject: Mainly because, like I said before, the length of the
303 program. The duration. And I wanted to finish up as
304 soon as possible. The problem with UF, SMU – no, not
305 SMU, UF in the U.S. and Miami is that they only start
306 every fall. So that means that I would have to wait
307 until the next fall to get in. And I was thinking, “What
308 am I going to do for the next few months?” I mean, I
309 could go back to Singapore and work for a little bit, but
310 that means that I cannot commit to them [his
311 employer]. And that would like, be a problem.
312 Interviewer: And you are here on a student Visa, I assume.
313 Subject: Yeah. So I would rather right away get to school, get to
314 finish and then when I go back I am done, finished
315 with school and I can commit 100 percent to my work.
316 Because before [as an undergraduate in Singapore] I
317 was working full-time, studying full-time and it was
318 hectic, yeah.
319 Interviewer: I would imagine. So how did you go about finding
320 information about all of these universities? Did you go
321 online?
322 Subject: Their websites. And they have, like, information
323 officers; I emailed them and I gave them a list of
324 questions that I had.
325 Interviewer: Did you go to info sessions?
326 Subject: No. No reason.
327 Interviewer: Does that not appeal to you?
328 Subject: Well, the universities in Singapore [are] a bit far away.
329 Interviewer: Yeah (*chuckling*).
330 Subject: UF, I don’t know why, but I didn’t want to travel all the
331 way there and I don’t see why I should travel there
332 when I can email them and get all the, they will give
333 me all of the answers. So, I don’t think I need it.
334 Interviewer: It was just something unnecessary.
335 Subject: Yes.
336 Interviewer: So did you seek word-of-mouth recommendations
337 from your friends?
338 Subject: No. Honestly, I don’t have that many friends that have
339 an MBA. I only have one at that time, so the only
340 person I had to ask was my friend, but he had an MBA
341 from [the University of] North Carolina. He gave me a
342 lot of tips on how to get admitted to schools. Yeah, but
343 in terms of types of schools, not really. He didn’t really
344 give me any input.

345 Interviewer: Yeah (*stumbling over words*). The admissions process,
346 how difficult was it? Was it easy for you to navigate?
347 Subject: Yeah, it was pretty easy. Different schools have
348 different criteria but they list them very clearly. Things
349 like number of essays [applicants] have to make,
350 GMAT score, average GMAT score, those kinds of stats.
351 Interviewer: Would you say USF's website is pretty clear and easy
352 to navigate?
353 Subject: If rating out of five, I would say three and a half stars.
354 Interviewer: So that would be a C+/B-?
355 Subject: Yeah.
356 Interviewer: Okay. So what are your career aspirations long-term
357 and short-term? The next three years, what do you
358 want to do?
359 Subject: In next three years, what I am planning to do is I want
360 to streamline everything in my company. Make it more
361 organized, very clear. Everything more consistent.
362 Basically lay the foundation to make it stronger so that
363 later on – I am hoping that, either – this is long-term –
364 that I either venture out into new markets for us
365 because the Singapore market is very saturated. There
366 is too many competition, labor laws are getting tighter
367 and tighter. It is very difficult to grow over there. We
368 can maintain, but it is very difficult to grow. So I can,
369 by having a strong foundation and a strong brand, and,
370 of course, good food, branch out into neighboring
371 countries. Indonesia, Malaysia, and, I don't know, if we
372 could go all the way to Australia that would be great.
373 But that's too far ahead. So Malaysia, Indonesia, and
374 then we branch out from there. The labor is pretty
375 cheap, the food is pretty cheap, and it is easier to do
376 business over there. So I hope to be able to do all of
377 that in the next ten years.
378 Interviewer: This is your family's restaurant or is it your personal
379 restaurant?
380 Subject: It is our family restaurant.
381 Interviewer: But you'll be taking on, it sounds like a leadership role.
382 Subject: Yes, it is a leadership role. Every time I talk to my mom
383 she is complaining, "I'm tired" and "when are you
384 going to come back?"
385 Interviewer: (*laughing*)
386 Subject: Yeah, complaining. And they are actually getting ready
387 to retire. They are like, you know, the things that they
388 are doing is sort of like they are in retirement mode
389 right now. So I have to go back as soon as possible.
390 That's why I keep emphasizing the length of time. This

391 small [amount] of time that I have and I have to finish
392 this by this time.

393 Interviewer: Good. Well how long do you think it will take to see a
394 monetary gain as a result of the investment you have
395 made in the MBA in terms of both monetary and time
396 investment.

397 Subject: Maybe three to five years.

398 Interviewer: Was financing – you really haven’t mentioned finance
399 at all. So you really weren’t concerned with expense?

400 Subject: No.

401 Interviewer: No concern with expense?

402 Subject: No, well, not really because it is all being paid for by
403 my family, that is why.

404 Interviewer: Okay. So you weren’t...I think UM is considerably more
405 than USF.

406 Subject: It is. I think UM is like my final choice. My first choice
407 was actually SMU, Singapore Management University.
408 My second choice was UF. My third choice was USF.

409 Interviewer: Why UF over USF?

410 Subject: They are ranked higher university.

411 Interviewer: Rankings matter?

412 Subject: Yeah. It gives me this thinking that the people that I
413 am going to meet and be meeting is better quality.

414 Interviewer: So it helps measure the quality of the program or the
415 quality of the people in the program?

416 Subject: The quality of the program and the quality of people.
417 Because, honestly, I was not very impressed by USF’s
418 orientation.

419 Interviewer: Uh-huh.

420 Subject: When I found out that during the orientation they had
421 to educate the people there on how to dress as a
422 business person, how to behave like a business person,
423 I didn’t realize that they had to educate people that
424 way. Because the people that I am going to be mixing
425 with should know all of that, you know? That’s why
426 they come into the business program. These kinds of
427 things are things that are common sense for people
428 who are already working. [I was thinking] “You mean
429 that have to educate people?” It gives me a bad
430 impression. Like, I am thinking, “oh my gosh my peers
431 don’t know this?!”

432 Interviewer: (*laughing*) okay.

433 Subject. Then I am like, ugh.

434 Interviewer: Well, let me ask you (*stumbling over words*). For
435 instance, we have a woman who owns a ballet studio
436 who was enrolled in the MBA program. She’s never

437 done any business work at all. In terms of professional
438 dress she's in dance attire all day. And then we have a
439 woman who runs a chain of beauty salons, and she is
440 in the program. So there are people who I think that
441 [the lesson] was targeted toward, but for people with a
442 background in business or an undergrad in business
443 like you said, how would you balance that? So that
444 someone with a background in theatre or
445 anthropology has the same background?
446 Subject: Still talking about the orientation, right? Why I was
447 concerned was that I did see some people wearing t-
448 shirts and, like, Bermudas. And it was clearly stated
449 business casual. And the thing about business is that
450 (*unintelligible*) you can get something like this and
451 when it was clearly indicated business casual, what do
452 they do.
453 Interviewer: It means slack and a nice golf shirt.
454 Subject: Yeah. Still a polo tee and slacks is better than
455 Bermudas and t-shirts and slippers. That's not
456 business casual.
457 Interviewer: No, that's casual.
458 Subject: Yeah, so that concerned me a lot. I would assume that
459 a lot of people that I will interact with they should at
460 least know all of this. Or they are not doing good
461 business.
462 Interviewer: Good point. Okay, I was just curious. I think that that
463 may be all of the questions that I have.

#

#

#

Interview Date: January 8, 2013
Interview Location: USF College of Business, Tampa
Interview Subject: Woody, 27 year old male, Incoming #4
Interview Duration: 18 minutes

Woody is a single Caucasian male who is just beginning the MBA program at the University of South Florida. He had just bought his books and was attending his first classes on the same day as the interview. Woody recently changed jobs and moved to the Sarasota area to pursue a new career in the fast-casual restaurant industry.

1 Interviewer: I have twenty questions, largely related to graduate
2 school, but first, where did you attend school for your
3 undergrad?
4 Subject: I went to the University of Central Florida.
5 Interviewer: Okay. And how long ago did you graduate?
6 Subject: That would be four years ago.
7 Interviewer: So that would be 2009? Or '08 with the year change?
8 Subject: '08, in December.
9 Interviewer: And what did you study?
10 Subject: Economics.
11 Interviewer: Where is their economics? Is it in business or in the
12 arts over there?
13 Subject: They're in business.
14 Interviewer: At USF, it's in both places. Kind of confusing.
15 Subject: Right.
16 Interviewer: Did you work while going to school? Have you worked
17 since you graduated?
18 Subject: Yes. And yes.
19 Interviewer: Okay. Care to elaborate?
20 Subject: In school, I was a server during school and in summer
21 I worked on fishing boats in Massachusetts. After I
22 graduated, I got a job with Richard's Foodporium, a
23 chain of health food stores on the west coast of
24 Florida. Grew that from 11 stores to 16 and then just
25 decided that there wasn't going to be enough
26 opportunity there. I was already the general manager.
27 And I needed, wanted more. So here I am, to get my
28 MBA.
29 Interviewer: So do you still work for them?
30 Subject: I do not. I work as a consultant for a restaurant group
31 called Eat Here.
32 Interviewer: I have not heard of that.
33 Subject: It's - have you heard of the Beach Bistro on Anna
34 Maria Island?
35 Interviewer: Ah-huh.

36 Subject: The same owner who owns Beach Bistro. We're
37 starting a new chain of restaurants.

38 Interviewer: Didn't they just remodel the Beach Bistro?

39 Subject: Yes.

40 Interviewer: I went in there while it was under construction. Just
41 want to make sure it's the one that I am thinking of.
42 Yeah, I've been there. Okay, so how long ago did you
43 first start thinking about getting an MBA?

44 Subject: Um, I thought about it coming out of my undergrad but
45 I really wanted to enter the workforce first. I had some
46 great opportunities, three different opportunities
47 leaving college.

48 Interviewer: In 2008?

49 Subject: In 2008. So I didn't think about it too hard (*chuckles*).

50 Interviewer: Given the recession at that time and you had three
51 offers, yeah.

52 Subject: Yeah. And over, um, over the four years, it wasn't in
53 the first three [because that is] where I thought, "Oh,
54 this company is going to take me where I want to be."
55 Until the last year, things weren't moving
56 progressively where I wanted to go.

57 Interviewer: Okay.

58 Subject: So I, um, about a year and a half now I've been thinking
59 about it.

60 Interviewer: Okay. And was there a particular incident that led you
61 to think about pursuing a degree?

62 Subject: (*thoughtful pause*) Umm...

63 Interviewer: Well, you said the company wasn't where you thought
64 it was going to be?

65 Subject: Well, I tried to start my own company after leaving
66 Richard's, um, and it just - it didn't really work out. So
67 I started looking for jobs and things of that nature. And
68 when I talked to a few headhunters for the positions I
69 wanted, they, you know, they said "you should start
70 thinking about getting an MBA, it would really help
71 you." And then I consulted with friends and family and
72 just decided, yeah. It's the right thing to do. And I can
73 afford not to have a career for a year and a half; get it
74 done and go from there.

75 Interviewer: Okay. And what did you think the long-term benefit
76 would be of having an MBA?

77 Subject: Workplace marketability. You know, being able to be
78 in larger companies, Fortune 500 companies. My - I've
79 always liked smaller companies and working for a
80 chain with 16 stores grossing \$18 million was very
81 good for me. I mean, I managed around 130 people.

82 But I do understand that there are more opportunities
83 in larger firms and bigger organizations. Having my
84 uncle, who was president of IBM Asia, president of
85 IBM South America, on and on and on, and a lot of
86 other family that work in large Fortune 500 companies
87 as directors and such, it just seemed like, well, I can do
88 that, too. Because it's just not every day that you walk
89 into being a general manager of a small business. It
90 doesn't – those opportunities just aren't there like you
91 could get in a big company, you could climb your way
92 up.

93 Interviewer: Okay. And did you think about any short-term
94 benefits?

95 Subject: Well, when I left Richard's and started my own
96 company – tried to start my own company – I had a
97 purpose. I was going to this. And then I was like, "Nah,
98 this isn't right." So I thought about starting the MBA in
99 the spring. And I just started travelling for like three
100 months, and enjoying myself. So the short-term benefit
101 would be to stop "butterflying" around the world
102 (*interviewer laughs as subject makes butterfly motions*
103 *with hands*). To get back to having a purpose in life.

104 Interviewer: Okay. A butterfly...

105 Subject: Yeah.

106 Interviewer: And what – did you think there would be any
107 headaches?

108 Subject: (*pause*) Um, you know, I look at my undergrad – at the
109 time I thought it was difficult. I thought an economics
110 degree was difficult to achieve. And then what I was
111 able to achieve in four years in the workplace, working
112 sometimes 80 – 100 hours a week, um, I'm not
113 concerned with the workload. Um, I know there will be
114 a need to study and a need to be focused and
115 committed, but I'm not overly concerned.

116 Interviewer: Okay. And are you, um, looking at any sort of tuition
117 reimbursement? Scholarships or anything? Are you
118 paying for this out of your own pocket?

119 Subject: (*pause*) Um, I am going to seek financial aid. Hopefully
120 mostly pay for it out of my own pocket. Depending on
121 how much I can – this new restaurant group that I am
122 working for is relatively new and the job's new – I
123 have only been there for a little less than a month, so I
124 am not sure where that is going to pan out or when I
125 can open new stores for them or whatever. Um,
126 hopefully it will work out and I will have a decent

127 wage and I'll be able to pay for it on my own. That's my
128 plan.

129 Interviewer: I am writing a note to myself to remind me that after
130 this interview that I want to tell you something. Okay,
131 so how long ago did you think about it before you
132 actually began to research programs? So you've been
133 toying with this idea back in your undergrad but you
134 weren't researching programs.

135 Subject: No. Not at all. I would study for the GMAT by helping
136 friends who were taking the GMAT. I am pretty good at
137 math and I could help them with things for the GMAT.
138 So I'm like, "oh, I can take this test." And I was
139 thinking about just taking it. But I never did. I never
140 really thought about it that hard because I really did
141 want to be in the workplace. I worked. You know, the
142 two years prior to graduating is the time I spent to get
143 those three jobs lined up and to finally make a decision
144 where I was going to go.

145 Interviewer: Okay. So how long – so did – so about a year and a half
146 ago is when you said you seriously started to think
147 about it, so then how long ago was it that you really
148 started to research the program?

149 Subject: Okay. So it had to be a couple of weeks before the
150 deadline is when I started looking in the state of
151 Florida. I really wanted to come to USF. I love where I
152 live in Sarasota and I wanted to find a program where
153 I could live in Sarasota. At least for the next year and a
154 half. I know that after getting an MBA my
155 opportunities may be elsewhere but while I am in
156 school I would like to live where I live now. So two
157 weeks before and then they let me take my GMAT
158 because I was leaving the country – I am a consultant
159 for a company that rents cruise ships – so I was out on
160 a cruise for two weeks and I told them I don't know
161 how much I am going to be able to study, so I would
162 like to take like a week when I get home and study for
163 the GMAT and then take it, so they gave me until the
164 15th of whatever month that was, October, November.
165 November 15.

166 Interviewer: Okay, then so September-ish is when you began to
167 look at it?

168 Subject: Yeah.

169 Interviewer: Okay, so did you think about it as deciding on the MBA
170 and then looking a university, or choosing a university
171 and then choosing between an MBA or an MS in
172 Entrepreneurship, and then the degrees?

173 Subject: I wanted an MBA.

174 Interviewer: Okay. So the program first? And what other
175 universities did you consider?

176 Subject: Well, with quick research learning that all the
177 deadlines were coming up, not many schools accepted
178 MBA students in the spring. It was here and [Florida
179 Atlantic University] that accepted people in the spring.
180 UCF didn't. UF didn't.

181 Interviewer: So you considered UCF, and UF and FAU but because
182 the others deadlines didn't work for you, you knocked
183 them out [of consideration]?

184 Subject: Right.

185 Interviewer: Were you looking anywhere else?

186 Subject: Nope.

187 Interviewer: Basically just the larger schools in the state of Florida?

188 Subject: Right.

189 Interviewer: How did you go about seeking info on the programs?

190 Subject: I called. I spoke to one of the ladies downstairs, Karen.

191 Interviewer: Ah-huh.

192 Subject: A little bit of research online. They [USF's MBA office]
193 were familiar with the companies that I have worked
194 for in the past and were excited to get my résumé and
195 my application. I figured all I have to do is get a half-
196 way decent test score on the GMAT.

197 Interviewer: And you did not take the GMAT first, you took it after
198 you had applied.

199 Subject: Yes.

200 Interviewer: So when you began to research the programs, what I
201 really want to know is what factors were important to
202 you. I am hearing you say location, deadline, what else
203 did you look at?

204 Subject: Um, (*pause*) obviously I didn't want like an online,
205 unaccredited MBA program, which, there's like a dime-
206 a-dozen of those. I wanted a legitimate school. And
207 then there was location. I mean, I live on the beach in
208 Siesta Key and I kind of want to stay there as long as I
209 can.

210 Interviewer: So would you say out of all of these, location was the
211 most important?

212 Subject: Yeah.

213 Interviewer: Okay. Once – oh, you already answered that one. Never
214 mind. Did you attend the in-person info session before
215 you applied?

216 Subject: No.

217 Interviewer: Did you seek word-of-mouth reviews from friends?

218 Subject: No.

219 Interviewer: Did you ask coworkers about USF's MBA?
220 Subject: No.
221 Interviewer: So I guess you have already answered this one, what
222 factors were important to you as you chose the
223 university – not just the program, but the university. I
224 guess you've already mentioned those again, the
225 location being primary.
226 Subject: Yes.
227 Interviewer: What was the one thing that was most important to
228 you all along?
229 Subject: *(long pause)*
230 Interviewer: Reputation of the university? The education, the
231 location?
232 Subject: Certainly the education is important. Um, Mainly my
233 goal is to be more marketable in the year ahead.
234 Interviewer: So the personal development, the marketability.
235 Subject: Right.
236 Interviewer: And so – you've actually already kind of answered this
237 one, too – what are your career aspirations, short- and
238 long-term?
239 Subject: Um, short-term, I'm enjoying the restaurant business.
240 Being in retail for four years, I wasn't fond of retail
241 grocery. I enjoy the restaurant business. I do want to
242 own my own restaurant. Chain. Or a few. Um *(pause)*.
243 That could be short- and long-term. Short-term, this
244 meeting the owner of the Beach Bistro and getting
245 involved in these restaurants was kind of a blessing in
246 disguise. Things may go well from here, but it's still
247 really too early to tell.
248 Interviewer: And then long-term, earlier you were talking about
249 getting into a for-profit, Fortune 500 [firm] kind of
250 moving up the ladder. Is that still something?
251 Subject: That's not a goal.
252 Interviewer: Okay.
253 Subject: That's not a goal. That's a, maybe a necessity to get
254 where I need to go or it's something that helps me
255 build a résumé for the future. Uh, if I, if I could stick
256 myself in another company with 150 employees and
257 decent sales, I'd be fine. But if I can't, I could go out,
258 through my contacts, and my networking ability and
259 find a job at a larger corporation.
260 Interviewer: And how long do you believe it will be before it will
261 take for you to see a return on your investment of
262 either time or money when it comes to the MBA. How
263 long will it take for you to say, "This was worth it?"

264 Subject: I think right after I graduate. I think one year and four
265 months.
266 Interviewer: (*puzzled chuckle*) Okay.
267 Subject: I mean, obviously it is going to be a busy year and four
268 months but, you know, my plan – as I graduated with
269 my undergrad was –to have a job when I graduate.
270 And I had that lined up. I am sure I am going to have an
271 idea where my future is going to go before I graduate
272 and go travel again. That [the traveling] was only a
273 blip this year that after four years of a lot, a lot, a lot of
274 work, I decided to buzz out and take off.
275 Interviewer: And if you can do it, yay for you!
276 Subject: Yeah.
277 Interviewer: Okay. Um, I didn't hear you mention cost of the
278 program or duration of the program at all. Were these
279 not primary factors for you?
280 Subject: No. I'd like to get it done as short as possible.
281 Interviewer: But it wasn't what made you choose USF over
282 anywhere else.
283 Subject: I (*pause*) I had a cousin that just graduated with a
284 master's in accounting at University of Tampa. And I
285 thought – I thought maybe that would be – I looked a
286 little bit at University of Tampa – but she really wasn't
287 very happy with her degree program from there. I
288 basically thought it was overpriced for what it was.
289 Not a lot of connections. Not a lot of resources from a
290 smaller university. She thought maybe she made the
291 wrong decision, that she should've come here since
292 she lived in Tampa. Um, so when she kind of said that,
293 I went, "okay, it's a lot of money, obviously, for a
294 private university." You know, the money is, for what
295 it is going to, you know, give me for the rest of my life,
296 is kind of a drop in the bucket. It's – no, I can't think
297 about the money.
298 Interviewer: Okay, so you are aware of it [cost] but it isn't a driving
299 force in choosing a university?
300 Subject: (*shaking head no emphatically*) No.
301 Interviewer: Same with duration?
302 Subject: No (*meaning in agreement, as with above*).
303 Interviewer: You mentioned networking opportunities was
304 something you considered. It wasn't a primary factor,
305 but it was important to you, or no?
306 Subject: Yeah. Absolutely.
307 Interviewer: I think that is everything I have. And it took less than
308 half an hour!
309 Subject: Fair enough.

310 Interviewer: Anything you want to add? Have you been to
311 orientation?
312 Subject: Yeah, orientation was fun, sure (*sarcastic grin*).
313 Interviewer: (*laughing*) you had it last Saturday?
314 Subject: No, it was before Christmas.
315 Interviewer: Oh, Saturday they had one for the stragglers.

#

Interview Date: January 8, 2013
Interview Location: USF College of Business, Tampa
Interview Subject: Angie, 32 year old female, Incoming #5
Interview Duration: 16 minutes

Angie is an Asian female who is just beginning the MBA program at the University of South Florida. She was attending her first class on the same day as the interview. She is a married mother with several years of work experience but she has not recently worked (she has stayed at home for five years to raise her son). She is involved with a local organization for Indian families as she is from India (and still has most of her extended family there). She is classified as an international student at USF but she is a resident of Tampa.

1 Interviewer: So you are looking at an MBA?
2 Subject: Yes.
3 Interviewer: And have you applied and been accepted?
4 Subject: Yes.
5 Interviewer: Have you started classes already? You started this
6 week?
7 Subject: Yes.
8 Interviewer: And where did you go for your undergraduate degree?
9 Subject: I did it in India.
10 Interviewer: Okay. What was the name of the school?
11 Subject: It's Mahatma Gandhi University.
12 Interviewer: And what did you study?
13 Subject: I studied engineering. A bachelor's in engineering.
14 Interviewer: How long ago was that?
15 Subject: It was in 2002.
16 Interviewer: And what did you do after that? Did you work?
17 Subject: I was a software engineer for about five years.
18 Interviewer: In India, or here?
19 Subject: In India. Then I worked for the client over here for
20 about six months.
21 Interviewer: Okay. And so you have five years of work experience
22 total or did you work while going to school.
23 Subject: No, not while going to studies. After studies, I worked
24 for five years.
25 Interviewer: And how long ago did you start thinking about getting
26 an MBA?
27 Subject: From the time I finished engineering (*chuckles*).
28 Interviewer: Was there a particular incident? What led you to say, "I
29 think I want to do this?"
30 Subject: I can't say there was a particular incident, but after
31 shifting to the U.S., I took a break from my career for

32 about five years. Now, I am finding it kind of difficult to
33 find a job. So that was it.

34 Interviewer: So you worked for five years and you have been off for
35 five years?

36 Subject: Yes.

37 Interviewer: Did you have kids or were you raising a family?

38 Subject: Yes, that is it.

39 Interviewer: That means you must have one in that five, six, seven
40 year old range?

41 Subject: Yes, he's four now. I never worked after I married.

42 Interviewer: The four and five and six year old age range are just
43 my absolute favorite ages.

44 Subject: *(laughing and nodding in agreement)* Yeah.

45 Interviewer: They are such interesting little people then. And, of
46 course, they are done with diapers. *(Laughing)*.

47 Subject: Yes, they are! That's the best part!

48 Interviewer: Okay.

49 Interviewer: So, what made you decide to come to the United
50 States?

51 Subject: To the United States? Because my husband was
52 basically working here.

53 Interviewer: What made you think about USF for a master's degree?

54 Subject: Because the MBA is pretty good. It's rated high at USF.
55 That's one reason. And second reason, obviously,
56 because I can't stay away from my family right now. So
57 my only real option is USF because the other
58 universities [that I would consider] are far. And the
59 third is, like if I go to other private universities, the
60 fees/price, that's a major difference.

61 Interviewer: Oh?

62 Subject: Yeah.

63 Interviewer: Okay, so, well – I'm going to jump ahead. What other
64 universities did you consider? Was USF really the only
65 one you considered?

66 Subject: No, I considered Southern Uni – Florida Southern
67 University *(likely meant Florida Southern College)*.
68 University of Central Florida, too, in Orlando, yeah.

69 Interviewer: Uh-huh. I went to Florida Southern for my undergrad
70 my first two years.

71 Subject: It's a nice college, right?

72 Interviewer: It was. It was just expensive because it is private.

73 Subject: *(laughing)* yeah.

74 Interviewer: Okay, so when you thought about the MBA, what did
75 you think the long-term benefit would be?

76 Subject: To start my own business. Because my husband is in
77 business field. So I want to do something, to start

78 something of my own, too. So if I have, so to get into
79 that, so I have to hold [know in] full how to run a
80 business.

81 Interviewer: Okay. And do you think there are any short-term
82 benefits that come with getting an MBA?

83 Subject: Short-term? Like after the studies, or during the
84 studies?

85 Interviewer: Maybe during or immediately after...

86 Subject: Immediately after, of course, a job, because that's one
87 thing that I need. And second thing, it's like; right now
88 I am not doing nothing at all so it's like efficient use of,
89 effective use of time.

90 Interviewer: Okay. And do you think there will be any headaches or
91 hassles involved with getting an MBA?

92 Subject: *(laughing)* yes.

93 Interviewer: *(also laughing)* Of course!

94 Subject: Yes, yes, of course.

95 Interviewer: What might those be?

96 Subject: Because my family is kind of difficult to manage. The
97 kid –and the timing, you know – it's not regular
98 daytime studies that we are doing most of the classes
99 are night time. It's like the family to manage. Kind of
100 difficult. We don't have any family here. All of our
101 family is in India. My family is in India. So it is kind of
102 going to be difficult to manage the kid, the timings for
103 him.

104 Interviewer: Okay, the juggling?

105 Subject: Yeah.

106 Interviewer: Okay, so how long did you actually think about getting
107 an MBA before you started researching programs?

108 Subject: About six months. I started looking for the programs,
109 maybe, in June.

110 Interviewer: So, did you look at the programs first, and then the
111 university, or did you think USF and then decide the
112 program, decide which program to pursue?

113 Subject: I decided first the program.

114 Interviewer: So you had decided on the MBA over the M.S.
115 program?

116 Subject: No, I applied for an MS, too. An MS in electrical
117 engineering. So, I was like either get a master's degree
118 in engin – because I already did engineering, electrical
119 engineering, so *(unintelligible)*. I wanted to shift from
120 software engineering field, basically. So that was one
121 of the main things for me. But then I applied for [an MS
122 in] electrical engineering then I looked at the job
123 scenario in Tampa. And I came to know that there are

124 not many companies which are doing electric
125 engineering or engineerings works, and, you know,
126 other than the lower range works you don't get into,
127 there are not very many very big companies here. If
128 you get into engineering again you get end up being in
129 software and I didn't want to do that, so...

130 Interviewer: Okay, So how did you go about seeking information on
131 the programs and the universities?

132 Subject: I contacted them first. Um, and I have many friends
133 who have done an MBA from here. Many people. I
134 know about four or five of them. So basically most of
135 my contacts have been through them. Like, I went to
136 them to ask, like, how this is how it works out; most of
137 the info I got is through them.

138 Interviewer: Okay. And did you visit the websites and so on?

139 Subject: Yes.

140 Interviewer: (*stumbling over words*) Did you go to an information
141 session?

142 Subject: No, no information session.

143 Interviewer: Okay. And you don't work, so you didn't ask co-
144 workers. Umm, when did you take the GMAT? Was it
145 before you even got started on exploring the programs
146 or after you had decided where you want to go?

147 Subject: After what I decided. After I contacted here, at the
148 graduate studies. After I inquired with them what the
149 - you know I did GRE actually I didn't do GMAT. So I
150 did GRE and I asked, I inquired with them how much
151 the score should be, and after that.

152 Interviewer: Okay. So, by the time you have took the test, if
153 someone was to try to persuade you to go to a
154 different university, by the time you've taken the test
155 you have already decided where you are going?

156 Subject: Yes.

157 Interviewer: And, so when looking at the reasons that you've said
158 you were thinking an MBA. I've heard you say that you
159 were looking at the ratings of the school or reputation
160 (*subject is making affirmative ah-huh sounds during*
161 *this portion*), location, cost, changing your industry,
162 and finding a job (*subject laughs yes!*) and possibly
163 owning your own business.

164 Subject: Yes.

165 Interviewer: Which one of those would you say is the most
166 important to you?

167 Subject: Right now, most important would be my immediate
168 goal, which is to get a job.

169 Interviewer: Okay, and then after that? What would – as you were
170 thinking about the decision whether to do this or not,
171 what was maybe the second most important thing?
172 Subject: To go higher in the ladder. Because I was already a
173 senior software engineer. So I want to go into
174 management, so engineering was not an option for me.
175 Interviewer: Okay, great (*brief pause*). And, oops, I already got that
176 one (*referencing a question on the form*). I jumped
177 ahead so I am having to take a look and see...actually,
178 you've already answered that one, too. The ratings
179 really mattered to you, you said.
180 Subject: Yes, yes they did.
181 Interviewer: But you investigated those ratings largely through
182 word of mouth?
183 Subject: Yes, and also the site, the website. And I did contact a
184 number of universities just to, you know, collect what
185 they offer and I did search on all those business
186 journals, business magazines, and all those sites to see,
187 like, you know...
188 Interviewer: So you went to see, like BusinessWeek's rankings?
189 Subject: Ah-huh. Yes.
190 Interviewer: And *U.S. News* rankings and all that kind of stuff?
191 Subject: Yes.
192 Interviewer: And, so your career aspirations, short-term, are to get
193 a job?
194 Subject: Yes.
195 Interviewer: And a job that is higher than you were? Is that what I
196 am hearing you say?
197 Subject: Yes, and also a shift in the field from engineering. I am
198 basically going to select an elective like healthcare. So
199 a shift in the field from, you know, software industry
200 to healthcare provision, basically.
201 Interviewer: And long-term, what do you want to do? Five, ten
202 years from now?
203 Subject: I want to own my own business.
204 Interviewer: You want to own your own?
205 Subject: Yes.
206 Interviewer: And do you have any idea what kind?
207 Subject: (*laughing*) I already have established everything. Like
208 textile industry. Something like taking some good
209 brands from here and as we have big exports in India
210 and here, something from... Normally what people do
211 is take from India and invest it here, right now I am
212 thinking like India is a good market, a developing
213 market, so I am thinking like good brands from here
214 and, you know, doing something there.

215 Interviewer: Cool. So in retail, or more on wholesale side?
216 Subject: Retail.
217 Interviewer: India is an emerging market, that's for sure.
218 Subject: Yeah.
219 Interviewer: Perfect. So how long do you think it will be, it will take
220 you, how (*stumbling over words*). Back up. How long
221 do you believe it will take for you to see a return on
222 your [MBA] investment, both in terms of time and
223 money? How long will it take for you to say, "This was
224 worth it"?
225 Subject: Um, I would say six months.
226 Interviewer: Really?
227 Subject: About six months to one year I should be...I will know
228 like more tied, like, it's hard to say (*unintelligible*). As
229 soon as we finish the studies we'll know, like, what job
230 we'll get when doing an MBA from here. If I do good, if
231 I do my homework good, then yeah, I think I can line
232 up a good job.
233 Interviewer: Great. So that would be one of the biggest ways you
234 would measure your success, is that you have a job?
235 Subject: A job in the desired field. You know, in the desired
236 area.
237 Interviewer: Well, all along what was the one thing that was most
238 important to you as you decided which university to
239 attend?
240 Subject: Family. Because I don't have any option to leave them.
241 If I go, you know, I couldn't consider any other
242 university. Even if I get a call from Harvard, I can't go.
243 It's not that I will get that, it's just that even if...
244 Interviewer: Right.
245 Subject: I don't have an option to leave, because my son is too
246 young. I can't just leave. My husband is kind of busy
247 with his work. And we don't have any family here. So I
248 just can't leave here and go.
249 Interviewer: And I heard you [say] cost was important to you, but it
250 wasn't one of the primary factors.
251 Subject: Yes.
252 Interviewer: Are you depending on any sort of scholarship or
253 tuition reimbursement or anything like that?
254 Subject: With my current international student status I am not
255 eligible to apply for any financial aid. But
256 scholarships, I am planning to apply for one or two of
257 them, yes.

#

#

#

Interview Date: January 23, 2013
Interview Location: USF College of Business
Interview Subject: Chase, 37 year old male, Incoming #6
Interview Duration: 19 minutes

Chase is a married Caucasian male with one child (who is six years old). He works full time in the insurance industry and he is in his first semester of MBA classes.

1 Interviewer: So, we'll start first with the really hard ones. Where
2 did you attend school for your undergraduate degree
3 and what did you study?
4 Subject: I went to the University of South Florida St. Petersburg
5 campus. I was an accounting major.
6 Interviewer: How long ago did you graduate?
7 Subject: '07. '06, actually, December '06.
8 Interviewer: And did you work while going to school?
9 Subject: I did. I did. I worked part-time. Not in the field, but I
10 did work.
11 Interviewer: Have you worked in the field since you graduated?
12 Subject: I have.
13 Interviewer: How many years and what do you do?
14 Subject: About six years. I'm an accountant.
15 Interviewer: What firm do you work for?
16 Subject: So, right now I work for a company called Cunningham
17 Lindsay. They, um, we are in the insurance industry, so
18 what we do is loss adjustment on a global scale. We
19 operate in about 44 countries. I'm not sure how
20 familiar you are with loss adjusting, but...
21 Interviewer: Not very. But I am assuming it is pretty self-
22 explanatory. Adjusting the balance sheets for loss
23 (*chuckling*).
24 Subject: So in the insurance industry you have underwriters.
25 And you have a house, right? You have homeowners
26 insurance whatever, so, um, generally somebody like
27 State Farm or, you know, Travelers, somebody like
28 that. So let's say your kitchen catches on fire and you
29 call State Farm and they send someone out to look at
30 your kitchen. That person that comes out is a loss
31 adjuster. So it's not always, but oftentimes, it is a third-
32 party that's hired by the underwriters. So the
33 insurance, the actual insurance company, who is
34 basically holding all the risk, they are underwriting
35 your policy, right? So they would take a loss on the
36 damage to your kitchen. The third party - it's not
37 always a third party, but oftentimes is - this loss

38 adjuster comes in. They actually make their money
39 when the transaction happens. So it's an inverse
40 relationship from a revenue standpoint. And, you
41 know, when there is a hurricane that comes through
42 or anything like that, the underwriter, or the insurance
43 company, takes huge losses but that's when we make
44 money. It's putting, basically, putting people who have,
45 you know, gone through the cataclysmic events, you
46 know, back on their feet.

47 Interviewer: Okay. And you're not, you're not a loss adjuster; you're
48 an accountant, right?

49 Subject: I'm, yeah, I am in the finance and accounting
50 department.

51 Interviewer: Okay. So, how long ago did you start – first start –
52 thinking about getting an MBA?

53 Subject: Um. It was probably always on my radar. As soon as I
54 went to college for an accountant. My first goal was to
55 get my CPA license. So that was first. That, um, I was
56 licensed in January of 2011. So, after my undergrad I
57 had to do additional coursework to satisfy the
58 educational requirements for the CPA. So I got that out
59 of the way and then I took a break because I started
60 my family and stuff. It was always, it was always, I
61 always knew that I would go back and get my MBA.

62 Interviewer: So do you have a MAcc [Masters of Accountancy]
63 degree?

64 Subject: I don't. I just did additional coursework.

65 Interviewer: To satisfy the require –

66 Subject: I have enough credits, to, um; I didn't need enough to,
67 you know, warrant getting a master's degree at the
68 time. So I just did three or four classes. That's all I
69 needed to sit for the CPA [exam].

70 Interviewer: So, at this point, why are you thinking about an MBA
71 versus a MAcc?

72 Subject: Because I would like to be a controller. There's two,
73 there's two reasons, basically. So, one, my current
74 career trajectory; I have my eyes on being the
75 controller of an organization at some point, so to get to
76 that point, you know, if I am sitting in a room
77 interviewing for the same position with someone else
78 who has an MBA, then chances are I might lose out, all
79 other things being equal. Okay?

80 Interviewer: Right. Okay. So, was there a particular incident that led
81 you to think more about it more recently?

82 Subject: *(pause)*

83 Interviewer: Kind of, what sparked where you are now?

84 Subject: It's just a good point in my career. So, um, so about
85 three years ago I – let me back up a little bit. When I
86 got my undergraduate degree I went to work for OSI
87 Restaurant Partners. I was there for about three
88 years. Um, at that point, I moved on to where I am
89 now, Cunningham Lindsay. So as soon as I hit, you
90 know, hit the ground at Cunningham Lindsay, it was
91 non-stop go. So it is lots of change, lots of –
92 Interviewer: How many years there?
93 Subject: Three and half, almost four. Constant change, been real
94 busy. Lots of experience and everything, so I wanted to
95 get my MBA but I hadn't had time. And now, things
96 have slowed down to a point to where it is just a
97 natural point in my career to do this.
98 Interviewer: And you are in your first semester of classes, right?
99 Subject: Yes.
100 Interviewer: So when you started thinking about the MBA, what did
101 you think the long-term benefit would be?
102 Subject: So a long-term benefit, obviously, positions me in the
103 workplace, right, for a higher level management role
104 as a controller. On the other hand, I also would, what
105 really attracts me about the, um, the program here, is
106 the entrepreneurship program. So, if, you know, every
107 once in a while I have an idea – “that's a great idea, you
108 know, I don't know what to do with it” – you know,
109 and so it's kind of, I want, I want to have that kind of
110 foundational knowledge or whatever so that I can
111 branch out and have, you know, have a side business
112 or develop it into something more if that opportunity
113 comes along.
114 Interviewer: And did you think there might be any short-term
115 benefits?
116 Subject: Um, not really. I mean, short-term meaning what?
117 One, six, twelve months?
118 Interviewer: One to three years?
119 Subject: Um, I am a senior corporate accountant right now. I
120 have a staff of three reporting to me. The next logical
121 step in my career trajectory would be accounting
122 manager, so this would, this would help with that.
123 Interviewer: Okay. And what about any headaches? Do you think
124 there will be any headaches associated with this
125 degree?
126 Subject: Just hard work. I don't know if I would call it a
127 headache or not. Possibly because of time and other
128 resources.

129 Interviewer: Yep, you'll use all of those resources. So how long did
130 you think about getting the degree before you actually
131 began to research programs?
132 Subject: (*pause*) Uh, well, like I said, when I was in my
133 undergrad, I knew that eventually I was going to get an
134 MBA. So probably in, um, maybe around the beginning
135 of this last year is when I started sensing that, you
136 know, it is probably a good time to start looking, and I
137 started investigating several different programs. So
138 probably about a year ago, I guess.
139 Interviewer: Okay. So, for you, it sounds like you had already
140 decided on the degree program before you decided on
141 the university.
142 Subject: Yes.
143 Interviewer: And what, um, well, before I get to that one – did you
144 take the GMAT before exploring programs, after
145 exploring programs, once you knew where you were
146 going?
147 Subject: Um, after.
148 Interviewer: After you knew where you were going?
149 Subject: Yeah, pretty much.
150 Interviewer: Okay. So, what other universities did you consider?
151 Subject: Um, there was Auburn, Penn State, University of
152 Florida – primarily because of their online programs.
153 Um, I liked them for their name recognition. And the
154 fact that I could do them online. Ultimately, I decided
155 against it. I didn't look at any other schools in the area,
156 though. I don't, I really don't consider University of
157 Tampa and USF on the same level. That's just personal
158 opinion.
159 Interviewer: Okay. So how did you go about seeking information on
160 the programs?
161 Subject: Online.
162 Interviewer: Did you go to any info sessions?
163 Subject: No, I found everything I needed online at USF's
164 websites.
165 Interviewer: Did you seek any word-of-mouth reputation,
166 reputational kind of reviews from friends? Co-
167 workers?
168 Subject: No. Not really. I have a friend who went through the
169 MBA program here and he had good things to say
170 about it. You know, having gotten my undergrad at
171 USF, I am comfortable with the quality.
172 Interviewer: And what about co-workers or bosses or anyone like
173 that? Did you ask any of them?
174 Subject: For their opinion? On where to go? No.

175 Interviewer: What factors were important to you as you began to
176 research the programs? For instance, were you
177 looking at program content? Or were there other
178 factors?

179 Subject: A couple of different things. First of all, the program
180 content. The entrepreneurship program is kind of
181 unique. That was a big plus in my mind. The cost
182 wasn't, it really wasn't that much of a deciding factor.
183 The cost. The network of people was more important
184 to me. That was ultimately why I decided not to get an
185 online degree from Florida or Auburn, Penn State, or
186 something like that, because, yeah, it has name
187 recognition, but really what you pay for in a master's
188 program is the people that you meet. Yeah, at least,
189 that's where I would put my value. The only way I was
190 going to, you know, take advantage of that was to go to
191 a local university.

192 Interviewer: Okay. What – how – let me go back here. Once you
193 decided on the degree – you already told me the
194 universities you considered – was there anything
195 about those universities that was really a factor for
196 you? You mentioned reputation or name. Was there
197 anything else? Was size, faculty, anything else?

198 Subject: No, literally, it was for the name. There was nothing
199 better – from what I have found – there was nothing
200 better about those programs. You know, when I
201 compared them to USF's MBA program.

202 Interviewer: But you would not put USF and Penn State and Auburn
203 and the University of Florida all in the same league?
204 Or would you?

205 Subject: I don't know why not.

206 Interviewer: Okay.

207 Subject: The only, the only difference is the name recognition,
208 really. Right? Because everybody all over the country
209 knows Penn State and the University of Florida. But
210 not, you know, not everybody knows USF. But that's
211 okay. You know, working in central Florida basically
212 everyone knows where USF is and, eventually, if I
213 leave, if I am in Boston or Chicago, or, you know, some
214 other big city or whatever, what's going to matter
215 more? First of all, they are going to want to know that
216 it is a reputable college, that it's an accredited college
217 so it is obviously a reputable university. But more,
218 more important than that is my work performance. My
219 work history. The last several years. Way more

220 important in any kind of hiring decision than where I
221 went to school.

222 Interviewer: Alright. You're right. So, of all the things that you have
223 mentioned – I am going to list a whole bunch of them
224 here – the network of people, you know, the caliber of
225 people in the classroom; career trajectory and your
226 position in the workplace; the entrepreneurship
227 option; online options versus face-to-face; the name or
228 reputation of the university; program content; and
229 cost. All of these, it sounds like, were factors that you
230 were considering.

231 Subject: Yes.

232 Interviewer: What was the ONE most important out of all of them?

233 Subject: It was the network of people.

234 Interviewer: Okay. Jumping here...are you on any sort of tuition
235 assistance program, employer tuition assistance?

236 Subject: Yeah, I am.

237 Interviewer: Okay. Because I am pleasantly surprised that cost is
238 not – that has not been number one for everybody. It
239 hasn't been.

240 Subject: No, not really (*unintelligible*) but, um, it's hard for me
241 to say it was the network of people because I haven't
242 found an entrepreneurship track at any other schools.
243 So that was very attractive to me. That's a close
244 second, if not first. It's hard. If it's not one it is the
245 other.

246 Interviewer: Make sure you get in Dr. Fountain's class for
247 something.

248 Subject: Dr. Fountain?

249 Interviewer: He's the guy in charge of all of the entrepreneurship
250 programs.

251 Subject: I have Professor Lux for my next class that starts on
252 the [February] 4th.

253 Interviewer: So, um, I jumped around so I am looking back to see if I
254 missed any questions. You didn't go to any info
255 sessions for any universities?

256 Subject: No, I didn't. Yeah, I got some information from the
257 University of Florida via mail but that was all.

258 Interviewer: So what was – my question is what are your career
259 aspirations short-term and long-term. Long-term, you
260 have really already told me. You told me to be
261 controller of a company.

262 Subject: Right.

263 Interviewer: What are your short-term career goals?

264 Subject: Short-term career goals would be making accounting
265 manager. So, yeah, I'd like to manage managers. Even

266 now, I have a staff and in some organizations it would
267 be called an accounting manager anyway. Um, but
268 what I really want is that next step in, you know, in
269 being able to, um, manage or lead other managers.

270 Interviewer: How long do you believe it will take for you to see a
271 monetary gain as a result of earning this degree.

272 Subject: Well, you know, it's hard. It's hard to quantify, right?
273 Because I wouldn't know if I get a promotion unless
274 they tell me, "it is because of the MBA degree," then I
275 would not know. Okay, so, I anticipate getting a
276 promotion within the next year. So, I won't have my
277 degree by then (*chuckles*). So I anticipate that --

278 Interviewer: Would a degree open doors at work for you for a
279 promotion?

280 Subject: Of course it would. In, um, two or three years.

281 Interviewer: Let me ask this a different way then. How long do you
282 believe it will take for you to say this degree was
283 worth it?

284 Subject: Um, I would say three to five years.

285 Interviewer: You were a very fast interview! You hit all of my
286 questions. Do you have anything you want to add?
287 Anything I didn't ask you, kind of as you thought about
288 the MBA?

289 Subject: Um, can you, can you kind of tell me again what the
290 interview is for?

291 Interviewer: Um, my - I am going for the master's degree in
292 strategic communications and so my research
293 question is "what factors do prospective MBA students
294 consider when deciding whether or not to go for the
295 degree and then, once they have made that decision,
296 which university to attend.

297 Subject: Sure.

298 Interviewer: And the reason I want to know this is so that I can
299 write effective messages.

300 Subject: Sure.

301 Interviewer: That do that. For instance, the past five, six ads that I
302 have put out about our MBA program have all talked
303 about the quality of our faculty. And how they are
304 awesome. And that is almost never been even on the
305 list of what students say. So I am lauding the wrong
306 thing. I need to talk about our reputation more. I need
307 to talk about more of the people in the classroom. This
308 [project] is going to help me better target our
309 audience. So - the only way to know what people are
310 thinking about when they are just starting an MBA is
311 to ask them.

312 Subject: Yeah, that's interesting. I remember coming across,
313 um, I forget the actual ranking, but the ranking of the
314 school on an ad on a national, public school basis. And
315 the MBA program itself. I think it is ranked, so it was, it
316 was, you know, well ranked. In the top 50 of
317 something like
318 Interviewer: Yeah, I think we are number 34 or something like that.
319 So, Florida has got us beat but, um, Florida is also
320 twice as old as we are.
321 Subject: It is always about the football programs. Has nothing
322 to do with academics or anything.
323 Interviewer: (*laughing*).

#

#

#

Interview Date: January 31, 2013
Interview Location: USF College of Business
Interview Subject: Fred, 34 year old male, Incoming #7
Interview Duration: 20 minutes

Fred is a single Caucasian male with no children. He is works full time in the non-profit industry and he is in his first official semester of MBA classes (he took a few classes the semester prior but only recently was formally accepted into the program, which explains how he was on the list of first semester students). Prior to the interview, he noticed that the interviewer had a plaque from Tampa Connection in her office; it was discovered that both of them had been through a leadership development program and had acquaintances in common.

1 Interviewer: So, the easy questions are at the beginning. Where did
2 you go to school for your undergrad degree?
3 Subject: USF.
4 Interviewer: Okay. And how long ago did you graduate?
5 Subject: I graduated in, it's actually, technically I think it is
6 2003 but I completed my graduation requirements in
7 2001.
8 Interviewer: Okay. And what did you study as an undergrad?
9 Subject: Communication.
10 Interviewer: Not mass comm, just communication?
11 Subject: Correct.
12 Interviewer: Did you work while you went to school?
13 Subject: Yeah, I did.
14 Interviewer: In your field or –
15 Subject: No.
16 Interviewer: I was a waitress, so –
17 Subject: I was the same thing, pretty much.
18 Interviewer: Have you worked since you graduated?
19 Subject: Yep.
20 Interviewer: What do you do? What kind of jobs have you done?
21 Subject: My career has primarily been involved with – it
22 started with consulting for non-profits and then got
23 into ad sales. And I was in ad sales for probably eight,
24 nine years.
25 Interviewer: What kind of sales? TV, radio?
26 Subject: It was all sorts of business. Print, online, search engine
27 marketing things, television. For broadcast television I
28 worked for Newschannel 8 and the Tampa Tribune
29 here. So pretty much all media.
30 *(Interview interrupted by cell phone call)*
31 Subject: Do you need to get that?
32 *(Interviewer answers the call briefly)*

33 Interviewer: Okay, so you worked for WFLA and did ad sales and all
34 of that. Is that what you do now? What do you do
35 now?
36 Subject: No, I left there in December of last year. Started
37 working for an ad agency based out of New York and
38 went overseas, opened their first international office
39 in Dubai and then left there in June of this year. And
40 then started school in August. Full time.
41 Interviewer: Was there a particular incident that led you think
42 about getting an MBA?
43 Subject: Um, good question. Um, actually my experience in
44 Dubai was – I thought about an MBA for years,
45 actually. But I just kind of stayed away from it because
46 it is tough to do when you are working full-time. The
47 opportunity cost of stopping making money is tough to
48 swallow. But, um, it was while I was in Dubai, I just
49 learned that there is a lot of stuff that I don't know
50 about in business. And there are a lot of things that I
51 wanted to know. And coming back and not being
52 employed made it a good, an easy transition for me to
53 come to school full-time.
54 Interviewer: Okay. How long ago was it that you first started
55 thinking about it? Was it when – you said June – you
56 stopped working for that ad agency?
57 Subject: Um, I mean, yes and no. I initially started thinking
58 about it immediately after I was done with my first
59 two years of work after I graduated. So I thought about
60 it, but I just didn't consider it for another eight years.
61 Does that make sense?
62 Interviewer: Yeah. And you said largely because of the opportunity
63 cost, is that correct?
64 Subject: Yep.
65 Interviewer: Was the – what did you think the long-term and short-
66 term benefits of getting an MBA would be?
67 Subject: Um, the short-term benefits would be (*long pause*)
68 probably what everyone else would say. It's a
69 competitive advantage over people who don't have a
70 master's degree of some sort. And there are still a
71 large amount of those people out there. So any
72 competitive advantage is going to get you the initial
73 interview and hopefully will help. So that's short-term,
74 but I also think that would be long-term. Um, (*long*
75 *pause*) probably another short-term benefit is that it is
76 kind of like pushing the "reset button on the Nintendo"
77 on life a little bit. You know, I'm 34, I am not 22, I'm
78 not 27, I'm 34 and it's rare that someone who has had

79 a career for 10 years can stop what they are doing and
80 go back to school.

81 Interviewer: Okay.

82 Subject: So, that's nice and it's, um, it is considered still
83 reputable to the business world to go back to school
84 full-time. It's not as if I'm couch-surfing and playing
85 video games all – you know what I mean?

86 Interviewer: M-hmm.

87 Subject: So by having that gap in my résumé, it may actually be
88 a help instead of a hindrance, in my opinion. Only time
89 will tell.

90 Interviewer: So, kind of looking at that reset button as doing it
91 while gaining a tool that is going to enhance your
92 résumé, getting something?

93 Subject: Yeah, and also, I guess when I say – what you said is
94 accurate – but it is more of a reset button on life. I get
95 to, kind of, recalibrate my career.

96 Interviewer: Oh, okay.

97 Subject: It's tough to do that midstream.

98 Interviewer: Right. And, actually, of the people I have talked to,
99 quite a few people have used this as an opportunity
100 change careers or redirect or fine-tune their careers.
101 What about the long-term benefits?

102 Subject: Um, I would say the last stuff that I talked about are
103 more long-term as well. But, um, (*pause*) long-term
104 benefits, I would say confidence. Confidence and
105 decision-making skills. Being grounded in [a] sound
106 understanding of business fundamentals.

107 Interviewer: Okay.

108 Subject: Of course, that's the hope, you know. But I am already
109 seeing it.

110 Interviewer: Are you?

111 Subject: I am already seeing it, yeah.

112 Interviewer: And you are in your first semester of classes?

113 Subject: Second.

114 Interviewer: Oh, I thought you were in your first.

115 Subject: I started in...oh, okay, I – this is the first semester that I
116 am taking classes where I have actually been an MBA
117 student. I took them as a non-degree seeking student
118 last year because I said, "I am going to get accepted, I
119 don't, I mean, they might say no but I don't care; I'm
120 still going to go." Because I am going to get my MBA,
121 so –

122 Interviewer: Oh, okay. And, um, so how long did you think about it
123 before you began researching MBA programs?

124 Subject: How long did I think about it? I thought about it
125 (pause) –
126 Interviewer: I mean, seriously. I am not talking about the two years
127 after you graduated.
128 Subject: I've got ya. I thought about it pretty strongly, I would
129 say, for about six months before I started studying for
130 the GMAT.
131 Interviewer: And did you think – oh, wait, let me back pedal for a
132 minute – speaking of the GMAT, did you take it before
133 you had decided where to go or after?
134 Subject: Oh, before I decided where to go?
135 Interviewer: Mhmm. Where were you in your decision-making
136 when you took the test?
137 Subject: I had made the decision to go back to school. I had not
138 made the decision on which school to go to.
139 Interviewer: Okay. And then, this actually leads into the next
140 question. Did you decide on the program before you
141 decided on the university? Like, did you decide MBA
142 and then looked at options, or did you decide “I am
143 going to go to USF” and then looked at the options that
144 you had here?
145 Subject: I was probably 95 percent sure that I wanted the MBA.
146 Before I decided the school or anywhere.
147 Interviewer: What other universities did you look at?
148 Subject: Um, Harvard, University of Florida, UT.
149 Interviewer: You mean Tampa, not Texas or Tennessee?
150 Subject: Tennessee, yes.
151 Interviewer: Tennessee?
152 Subject: (chuckles) No, no, no! Yes, Tampa.
153 Interviewer: (chuckles) Okay.
154 Subject: When you say UT I think Tennessee, because that is
155 where I am from, (unintelligible).
156 Interviewer: And I said Texas! Okay. So that was it?
157 Subject: Yeah.
158 Interviewer: Alright. How did you go about seeking information on
159 these programs?
160 Subject: Mostly it was talking to friends who had gone there. I
161 did go to an information session at UT. Didn't pursue
162 UF and my GMAT score was nowhere near getting into
163 Harvard.
164 Interviewer: Did you go to an info session at USF?
165 Subject: Yes.
166 Interviewer: Do you recall those info sessions? Could you tell me a
167 little bit about them? How were they?
168 Subject: Yeah, um, I remember it being pretty friendly. Small.
169 Interviewer: At UT or at USF?

170 Subject: Which are you asking about?

171 Interviewer: Well, actually, both.

172 Subject: Okay.

173 Interviewer: So let's talk about UT first.

174 Subject: Okay, back up then, because I was talking about USF

175 earlier.

176 Interviewer: Okay.

177 Subject: At UT's, there were probably 20-25 people there.

178 Three different presenters. I want to say it lasted

179 maybe two hours.

180 Interviewer: Two hours?

181 Subject: Yeah. I mean this was more than a year ago, so

182 probably a little fuzzy but somewhere around there.

183 Does that sound long or short?

184 Interviewer: I don't really know. I, I've never went to one, so –

185 Subject: Oh, okay.

186 Interviewer: I don't know, but, to me, I am thinking that is a lot of

187 time.

188 Subject: It may, it may have been, yeah, it might have been a bit

189 shorter than that. And that's really all I remember

190 from it. They had a question and answer. Talked a little

191 bit about their accreditation and stuff.

192 Interviewer: And what do you remember about USF's? Other than

193 friendly and small.

194 Subject: Yeah, it was a smaller group. Smaller group, larger

195 room. Good question and answers. It was generally a

196 positive experience.

197 Interviewer: Do you know why you chose USF over UT?

198 Subject: Cost. (long pause) And my general feeling that it was

199 more challenging to be in the MBA program here. They

200 seemed to be more flexible with the GMAT there. I

201 mean, I know there is flexibility with the GMAT here –

202 I definitely didn't blow it away.

203 Interviewer: So, that flexibility you want, but are you saying it lends

204 itself to reputation?

205 Subject: Probably.

206 Interviewer: Okay. So is it who is in the classroom with you?

207 Subject: Yeah. I guess I would look at it as a program that has

208 higher criteria, has higher acceptance standards, yeah,

209 typically is more of a little bit better school. Now,

210 whether there is a correlation there, I really don't

211 know whether there is any truth there. I don't know,

212 but –

213 Interviewer: That's your perception?

214 Subject: Yeah?

215 Interviewer: The harder it is to get into; it must be a better
216 program.
217 Subject: Yep.
218 Interviewer: Okay. Let me back-up here. I went off on a tangent for
219 a little bit. You said you found reviews from friends,
220 co-workers – did you ask co-workers about
221 institutions or were you working when you were
222 seriously thinking about it?
223 Subject: Um, I did ask a co-worker. And she was the one who
224 encouraged me to go to UT. Actually, from Tampa
225 Connection, I had a friend who went here.
226 Interviewer: Well, what factors were you looking at when you
227 began to research the program? Obviously, you
228 looked at, you mentioned, admissions criteria.
229 Subject: M-hmm.
230 Interviewer: What else were you looking at?
231 Subject: *(long pause)*
232 Interviewer: You said cost?
233 Subject: Yeah. Cost. Um *(long pause)* I think, it was, it was just
234 people's perception of the program. It really, to me it
235 wasn't, the decision wasn't where am I going to go.
236 The decision was if I am going to go back to get my
237 MBA. That was the big decision. And if I am not getting
238 into, you know, a Top 50 school, based on *U.S. News*
239 *and World Reports*, I don't necessarily care what
240 school I go to. It was – and if I look at schools relatively
241 the same as far as their perception in the business
242 world, I want to go to the one that is easiest and most
243 convenient for me and get my MBA. If going for the
244 MBA is not a good decision then I am just not going to
245 do it all.
246 Interviewer: Okay.
247 Subject: So the school wasn't as important.
248 Interviewer: Great. That's what I am trying to figure out with this
249 thesis.
250 Subject: Right.
251 Interviewer: Um, so, as you went through the whole process, some
252 of the things that I have heard you mention as factors
253 you considered were admissions criteria, cost, some
254 people's perception or reputation of it, the rankings,
255 the opportunity to, um, kind of create a competitive
256 advantage for you, the chance to enhance your résumé,
257 possibly change careers, or confidence. What, out of all
258 of those things, was probably the primary driver for
259 you, the most important factor?

260 Subject: (*very long pause*) Let me think about this. It's probably,
261 it's a close race, but it is probably first to advance my
262 career. And then second in line would be just, um, to
263 give me confidence. Confidence in, you know, my
264 business acumen. It's really close.

265 Interviewer: Great. Um, what are your long-term and short-term
266 career aspirations now that you have this degree or
267 are working toward this degree?

268 Subject: Um, since I have the advertising background
269 marketing is a good fit. And so I think an option would
270 be a marketing director or marketing VP for any
271 brand, that would be good, a good at least mid-term
272 career ambition, a near-term career ambition. Beyond
273 that, maybe leveraging that position into other
274 managerial positions. Healthcare is another area that I
275 am looking to go into, healthcare administration. I
276 haven't really gotten into the classes yet but I am
277 surrounded by friends employed in the industry.

278 Interviewer: A marketing background and healthcare
279 administration would be a nice complement.

280 Subject: Yeah.

281 Interviewer: How long do you think it will take for you to see a
282 monetary gain as a result of earning this degree?

283 Subject: Um, I am certainly – let me tell you what I think and
284 then what I am hoping.

285 Interviewer: Okay.

286 Subject: Um, I think that, within a year of graduating, I will be
287 above the level where I was prior. I think that is
288 feasible.

289 Interviewer: Are on any sort of tuition assistance or tuition
290 reimbursement? You're paying full -- rate, I guess. I
291 am not sure what you'd call it.

292 Subject: Yeah, I am paying out of pocket.

293 Interviewer: So how long will it take – because you are obviously
294 going to have some expenses you've got to recoup –
295 how long will it take – or what will it take – for you to
296 say, "this was worth it"?

297 Subject: That's a good question. (*long pause*) I mean, the easy
298 way to look at it is do a pay-back period calculation
299 and figure what the difference in salary is going to be
300 and divide that by, divide that into the investment, so I
301 don't have those numbers in front of me. And I am not
302 sure that is what you are looking for. But that's an easy
303 way to –

304 Interviewer: Well, some people say, "for me, it is worth it when I
305 have paid off the student loans and I am making more

306 than I did before.” Other people have said, “I’ll say it is
307 worth it when I change fields.” Other people have said,
308 “I’ll say it is worth it the day I walk across the stage.”
309 Subject: Yeah.
310 Interviewer: What would it take for you to be satisfied that you
311 made a good choice in going to do this?
312 Subject: Okay. I can answer that pretty easily then. I think
313 making, um, making the money that I was making
314 before within a year in an industry that I want to be in.
315 Interviewer: Okay.
316 Subject: So, I don’t want to be necessarily – I don’t necessarily
317 need to see a monetary immediate return but I want to
318 live at the same – early on – at the same level that I
319 was before but to be doing something that I am
320 enjoying.
321 Interviewer: Gotcha.
322 Subject: You know what I mean?
323 Interviewer: M-hmm. I like the idea of what you said, kind of a re-
324 set button; you get to change careers before you are
325 entrenched into a career and stuck in a job that you
326 don’t enjoy.
327 Subject: M-hmm.
328 Interviewer: Okay, so I think that is all I have. Let me look here
329 because I did skip a whole bunch.
330 Subject: Okay.
331 Interviewer: I think that is it. Great. Thank you!
332 Subject: Hope that it helped you.

#

#

#

Interview Date: February 4, 2013
Interview Location: USF College of Business
Interview Subject: Mike, 31 year old male, Incoming #8
Interview Duration: 19 minutes

Mike is a married Caucasian male with one child, a three-year-old daughter. He works full time as a marketing manager at AAA Automobile Club and is in his first few weeks of classes in the MBA program. He was scheduled several times for an in-person interview but had to reschedule due to travel constraints. Therefore his interview was conducted via telephone.

1 Interviewer: So, the easy questions are at the beginning. Where did
2 you go to school for your undergrad degree and how
3 long ago did you graduate?
4 Subject: I started at Drexel University, back in '99.
5 Interviewer: Okay
6 Subject: And then I transferred down to USF undergrad in '01.
7 Interviewer: Okay.
8 Subject: And then graduated in '08.
9 Interviewer: Okay. What did you study?
10 Subject: Marketing.
11 Interviewer: Out of curiosity, why did you transfer? Drexel's got a
12 pretty good name.
13 Subject: Yeah, it was, um, interesting. Parents were living in
14 Baltimore so it was a quick train ride back and forth
15 from Philadelphia. Um, then in 2000 they moved down
16 to Florida. I stayed up there another year. And (*sigh*)
17 with the Drexel system, you go to school for six
18 months and you intern for six months. When the
19 economy came down in the 2000-2001 timeframe, the
20 internships dried up. So the benefit of the school is,
21 you know, losing value. It was cheaper to go in-state
22 [tuition] down in Florida and my family was there. So I
23 made the move.
24 Interviewer: Okay. Did you work while going to school?
25 Subject: I did.
26 Interviewer: In your field or was it more waiting tables, kind of
27 paying the bills kind of work?
28 Subject: Started bartending for the first couple of years and
29 then moved over to my family's business. And they
30 were in the wholesale industry.
31 Interviewer: Okay.
32 Subject: I started there driving trucks, warehouse manager,
33 those sorts of work and then, about a year before I
34 graduated, I moved into a sales and marketing
35 management role.

36 Interviewer: So it was related to your degree.
37 Subject: It was.
38 Interviewer: Is that what you do now? What have you been doing
39 since you graduated?
40 Subject: I am currently a marketing manager over at AAA.
41 Interviewer: Okay.
42 Subject: I focus on product marketing.
43 Interviewer: Alright. So when did you first start thinking about
44 getting an MBA?
45 Subject: Um, right when I graduated with my undergrad.
46 Interviewer: So you thought about for four years? Or you thought
47 about it and then decided against it? Or – kind of, why
48 the gap?
49 Subject: Um, I thought about it, and then was waiting for
50 timing. I got married in '07. You know, my parents'
51 business, we ended up going out of business in 2010
52 and, obviously, you know, all through '09 we were on
53 the brink of surviving.
54 Interviewer: M-hmm.
55 Subject: So the timing wasn't right then. And I was working 70-
56 80 hours a week at that point.
57 Interviewer: Okay.
58 Subject: And then my wife got pregnant. So, about a year ago,
59 my wife and I sat down and really had a conversation
60 as far as "does this really make sense?" and how do the
61 finances align, because I didn't want to take out a loan
62 for it. So, the stars all aligned and that is when I started
63 the application process.
64 Interviewer: So would it be fair to say that you had been toying
65 with the idea since graduation but really only a year
66 ago did you start seriously thinking about it?
67 Subject: That would be correct.
68 Interviewer: Okay. Was there a particular incident that led you and
69 your wife to sit down and have that conversation?
70 Subject: Ummm....
71 Interviewer: Or a reason?
72 Subject: No. I was doing a lot of, I guess, informal learning.
73 Reading every book I could get my hands on. Probably
74 went through about 30 of them over the course of a
75 year and a half. All business and marketing related.
76 Um, and then that was kind of the catalyst as I found
77 myself more and more interested in it. And then
78 looking at the landscape and wanting to be
79 competitive in the career, you know, it was kind of a
80 culmination. And then, then finances started to align.
81 So we sat down probably, maybe, July of 2012 and had,

82 you know, started having the conversation of how do
83 we make this work.

84 Interviewer: Okay. And what did you think the long-term benefit of
85 getting an MBA would be?

86 Subject: I think it is maybe two-fold. One, it gives you a bunch
87 of different facets that you can go into so you are not
88 going to be niched into a marketing role. You have a
89 general business background and a high business
90 acumen, so if you needed to go into a finance role or if
91 you needed to go into an operations role you have that
92 background and gives you a lot of flexibility.

93 Interviewer: Okay.

94 Subject: I think the other piece is that it, maybe, gives you
95 opportunities that you wouldn't have without it.

96 Interviewer: Okay.

97 Subject: And so different job opportunities, a faster career
98 progression, more or less. So those were the two big
99 things that I thought I could take out of it.

100 Interviewer: So kinds of opens some doors for you that are closed
101 otherwise?

102 Subject: Correct.

103 Interviewer: Okay. So do you think there are any short-term
104 benefits to getting an MBA?

105 Subject: I think you, ah – at least in my first month of classes – I
106 have gotten some good takeaways from it. Um, that I
107 can apply and it makes me a better worker. Makes me
108 more effective. So I think the short-term benefits are
109 what you can apply to your current field. Um, I don't
110 think there is any financial gain out of it, right out of
111 the gate, but I think, you know, the information that I
112 have gotten so far has been very applicable which I
113 have been able to transfer into my current role.

114 Interviewer: Great. What about any headaches? Were you worried
115 about any headaches that might be involved in getting
116 an MBA?

117 Subject: (*chuckles*) yeah, yeah. There's, uh, the work-life
118 balance. You got a three year old, you got a marriage
119 you like, you got a house, you got a full-time job, you
120 know, 50 hours a week or so, um, yeah, you tack on to
121 that 8-10 hours of classes, 10 -15 hours of homework,
122 um, so yeah, the time-stress is a little bit of a headache.

123 Interviewer: Okay.

124 Subject: As far as the pain point. It's um, I am pretty familiar
125 with the information. I wasn't stressed about being
126 overwhelmed with the concepts. It was just the

127 workload and getting my – getting back into the
128 routine of being in school.
129 Interviewer: Okay, yeah, because it would have been three or four
130 years since you had done that.
131 Subject: Correct.
132 Interviewer: And when you were in school previously you weren't
133 married and weren't a father.
134 Subject: Right (*chuckles*).
135 Interviewer: (*chuckling*) Um, so how long ago – how long did you
136 think about it before you began researching the
137 programs?
138 Subject: I first started researching, you know, informally, in
139 that March 2012 timeframe. And, like I said, I have
140 been toying with it ever since. I was, in '07-'08, that
141 was the next move that I wanted to make. Um, started
142 looking at different programs, weighing the cost, going
143 out to *U.S. News and World Report*. I work with a
144 couple of MBAs so I had some coffee with them and
145 asked them what they thought about it. You know,
146 what the pay-off was and do they think it was worth it.
147 So I kind of had those informal discussions in research
148 right around that March-April timeframe.
149 Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Then, did you think of – were you – let me
150 back up. It sounds like you were already sold on the
151 idea of the MBA, so it wasn't graduate school and then
152 choosing the degree; it was choosing the degree and
153 then figuring out where you were going to get it?
154 Subject: Correct.
155 Interviewer: Okay. Did you take the GMAT before you started
156 exploring the programs or after you had already
157 decided, "I want to go to USF?"
158 Subject: I took it after I did my initial analysis and, you know,
159 weighed the cost-benefit stuff, I said USF. USF was the
160 only school that I applied to.
161 Interviewer: Okay.
162 Subject: So I took the GMAT, um, end of September.
163 Interviewer: Okay.
164 Subject: And that kind of solidified my acceptance into USF. My
165 GPA in undergrad wasn't as strong as I would have
166 liked it to be.
167 Interviewer: Mm-hmm.
168 Subject: But the GMAT basically, identi – solidified that. I toyed
169 with [University of Tampa] and University of Florida
170 but the cost didn't – the cost outweighed the benefits
171 on that program, on those programs.

172 Interviewer: But USF was the only one where you actually put in an
173 application?
174 Subject: Correct.
175 Interviewer: So, when you were looking and doing this informal
176 and then a little bit more formal information seeking,
177 how did you go about finding that info?
178 Subject: I basically Googled.
179 Interviewer: Okay (*laughing*).
180 Subject: I, you know, checked out *Forbes* and, you know, *Inc.*,
181 and a couple of those little pieces of information and
182 publications out there. And after I had four or five
183 different conversations with other MBA, people with
184 their MBA.
185 Interviewer: And when, when you were looking at those, what kind
186 of factors were you considering as you had those
187 conversations or as you looked at those magazines?
188 What were you, what kind of information were you
189 trying to find out?
190 Subject: I was trying to look at, you know, basically,
191 information to fill the cost-benefit analysis. Um, so if I
192 am out-of-pocket, you know, so many thousands of
193 dollars, and I am putting in all this work, what is the
194 net payout of it all? So I was kind of looking at a
195 ranking versus a tuition cost.
196 Interviewer: Okay.
197 Subject: Once I decided that I was going to go get one, and I
198 think UF is in that \$46k-\$52k range, you know, UT is
199 kind of in that same range, USF – at least the part-time
200 MBA program which I was interested in – you know, I
201 am going to get out the door with probably \$15 grand
202 out-of-pocket.
203 Interviewer: Okay. And would you consider USF to be on, um, the
204 same level as UT and at UF?
205 Subject: I think it is probably a little better than the program at
206 UT. Um, I think UF might have a better name
207 recognition.
208 Interviewer: Okay.
209 Subject: But I don't think that the recognition that UF brings is
210 worth \$20 grand. Or \$30 grand.
211 Interviewer: Gotcha.
212 Subject: So, you know, it's a "you pay for what you get"
213 circumstance and I think getting my undergrad at USF
214 played a lot into it.
215 Interviewer: Right.

216 Subject: I mean, the quality of professors that I had in my
217 undergrad marketing, my upper-level undergrad
218 marketing business classes

219 Interviewer: Right.

220 Subject: They kind of playing into, too. And proximity. You
221 know, I live in Riverview, so hiking up to Gainesville,
222 you know, once or twice in a month, wasn't very
223 feasible.

224 Interviewer: Great. So, um, the factors that I am hearing you
225 mention along the way are, um, the financial cost of it,
226 the learning opportunities that it would provide, kind
227 of career opportunities it would open up for you, your
228 work-life balance, rankings versus tuition, kind of the
229 ROI or cost-benefit, as you put it, the program's
230 reputation, and, actually, the geographic, physical
231 location are all things that you considered.

232 Subject: Yes.

233 Interviewer: Out of all these things, what was the most important
234 thing to you?

235 Subject: Um, probably the balance between, um, reputation and
236 the quality of the program versus the cost of tuition.

237 Interviewer: Okay.

238 Subject: So whatever that, that ratio I did in my head, or
239 analysis that one that outweighed. So it was a decision
240 of, "do I go get one from USF or do I not get – you
241 know, I toyed with online a little bit and that, it didn't
242 seem like you got value out of it, so I erased that one
243 pretty quickly.

244 Interviewer: Now, a number of people have made that similar
245 statement. What is it about – what is missing for you to
246 say that online doesn't have quite the same value?

247 Subject: I think it is a combination of things. One, I learn better
248 in a classroom. So that setting, you're going back to
249 gain as much knowledge as possible, so I wanted to
250 make sure that I was putting myself in a position to get
251 that knowledge as effectively as possible. And then I
252 don't think the online programs have the credibility or
253 the reputation that an actual brick-and-mortar
254 institution does.

255 Interviewer: Okay.

256 Subject: And the other piece is the collaboration. I mean, with
257 your professors, having those kind of discussions that
258 you get in the classroom setting and the networking
259 opportunities with the other students.

260 Interviewer: So those are all things that, in a sense, are factors that
261 you definitely considered along the way?

262 Subject: Correct.
263 Interviewer: Okay. Um, when you were, um – once you decided,
264 “yes, I am going to go for it” -- did you – you said you
265 only applied to USF; you considered UT and UF – did
266 you go to any information sessions?
267 Subject: Just the USF info session.
268 Interviewer: Okay.
269 Subject: Once I researched tuitions and, um, the programs, I
270 mean, I was kind of then set upon USF being the only
271 option.
272 Interviewer: Okay. What did you – I know it has been a little while –
273 but, what were your thoughts on that info session?
274 Subject: Um, I thought it was pretty informative.
275 Interviewer: Okay.
276 Subject: Um, you know, it gave you the basic gist of the
277 program and laid everything out from the curricula to
278 what you would be learning to what you would be
279 paying, which is what I was trying to get out of it.
280 Interviewer: Okay, so it answered all of your basic questions?
281 Subject: Correct.
282 Interviewer: Alright. And, um, did you seek any word-of-mouth
283 reviews from friends or ask co-workers about
284 particular institutions?
285 Subject: Uh, yeah, I had a, uh, a friend who graduated with a
286 USF MBA, um, so I talked to her a little bit. And then I
287 had someone who talked – who went to the University
288 of Miami Executive MBA program – and I tried to kind
289 of get the differences between the two. And that
290 played a little bit of a factor, but not as much.
291 Interviewer: Alright. So, what was the one thing – I think I already
292 know the answer to this – the one thing that was most
293 important consideration to you all along as you
294 decided, one, to go for the degree and then, two, where
295 to get it from?
296 Subject: Um, I guess the value of the program. Um, and that’s,
297 you know, the cost outweighing the benefits you get
298 out of it.
299 Interviewer: Well let’s talk about that. What is, um, the ROI? What
300 is it going to take for you to say this was worth it?
301 Subject: (*sigh*) Well, if you do straight dollars and cents, I have
302 to make \$15,000 more dollars than I would without it
303 over the course of a 30-, 35-year career. So, it would
304 seem like a relatively a no brainer for that. And then it
305 was sitting down with my wife and saying what we
306 could afford, um, because I didn’t want to take out a

307 loan and be stuck with, you know, with that for 10, 15,
308 20 years.

309 Interviewer: Right. So how long do you think it will take before you
310 see a monetary gain as a result of this degree?

311 Subject: Um, probably – I don't know if it comes down to just
312 the degree as being the primary factor as to how it
313 changes your income and your career progression. I
314 have worked with several MBAs [who] didn't know
315 their – a rock from, you know, they didn't know their
316 elbow from whatever it is.

317 Interviewer: *(laughing)*

318 Subject: They are just clueless. Um, very book smart but didn't
319 have the business execution or the discipline that you
320 would expect out of them.

321 Interviewer: Okay.

322 Subject: So I think it is a combination of the person and the
323 knowledge. Like I said, I think the MBA gives you
324 opportunities but it is up to the person to do the work
325 and, you know, make the most of those opportunities.

326 Interviewer: Okay. So what will it take for you to say this was worth
327 it in terms of the – not only the cost-benefit analysis,
328 but the time that you spend in doing it. What would it
329 take for you to be talking with your wife and say,
330 "yeah, I am really glad I did this."

331 Subject: If I got a job that required an MBA that paid me a lot
332 more than what I am making now.

333 Interviewer: Okay.

334 Subject: That I wouldn't be qualified for without the, without
335 the three letters.

336 Interviewer: Okay. Last two questions here. What are your, um,
337 short-term career aspirations?

338 Subject: Um, by the next two to three years I want to get into a
339 management role of some sort. Right now I am an
340 individual contributor. So I would like to get into some
341 kind of leadership role in the next two to three years.

342 Interviewer: Okay. And long-term?

343 Subject: Long-term, I want to be in the executive suite.

344 Interviewer: Okay. In the same industry that you are in now or in a
345 different industry.

346 Subject: I want to get into a – probably more of a category of
347 brand management. As opposed to a marketing
348 communications role. So I would like to stay where,
349 kind of the industry I am in, product marketing. But
350 probably move over into a CPG or a retail kind of an
351 industry as opposed to a service industry.

352 Interviewer: And it sounds like more in the strategy area instead of
353 the tactical implementation area.
354 Subject: Correct.
355 Interviewer: Okay. Great. Is there anything you'd like to add?
356 Anything I forgot about?
357 Subject: No, I think the interview covered it pretty well.

#

Interview Date: December 1, 2012
Interview Location: Barnes & Noble, South Tampa
Interview Subject: Jorge, 25 year old male, Prospect #1
Interview Duration: 48 minutes

Jorge is a Hispanic male who is considering an MBA program but has not yet applied to a particular university. He has worked for two years since earning an undergraduate degree in accounting from the University of Tampa. He was accompanied by his girlfriend, Gertrude, a current USF student who thought he might need occasional assistance with the interview since English is not his first language (he is a native of Honduras). Shortly after introductions and some opening banter, however, it was apparent she was not needed. She did not remain present for the majority of the interview; she returned near the conclusion.

1 Interviewer: Where did you attend school for your undergraduate
2 degree?
3 Subject: I went to the University of Tampa. I graduated in May
4 2010.
5 Interviewer: What did you study?
6 Subject: I studied accounting.
7 Interviewer: And what did you do with that degree? Are you
8 working now?
9 Subject: So far, I've only . . . me and my father opened an
10 automobile repair shop and I do the bookkeeping
11 there. I'm trying to find a job with a firm . . . I'm going
12 to start looking in January, actually.
13 Interviewer: What do you want to do?
14 Subject: To tell you the truth, I'm not sure.
15 Interviewer: Do you want to work for a Big Four firm or do you
16 want to work for a smaller shop?
17 Subject: Yep, Big Four, but I don't know if I'm going to do
18 auditing or tax accounting or financial statement
19 accounting; I don't know.
20 Interviewer: Yeah. So you currently have work experience...
21 Subject: Yes.
22 Interviewer: How long have you worked at the repair shop with
23 your dad?
24 Subject: Two years.
25 Interviewer: Did you work before that?
26 Subject: No.
27 Interviewer: So yes, you work now. Do you like it?
28 Subject: Yes (*unconvincing tone*).
29 Interviewer: Do you? It's so different from what I do...
30 Subject: It's not bad. It's just . . . when it is slow, it's depressing
31 being at work and not having people come in the door.

32 But when it is busy, I like it. I like to be on top of
33 things, you know, constantly doing something.

34 Interviewer: So, Gertrude says you are thinking about an MBA and
35 are choosing between USF and UT? How long ago did
36 you start thinking about the MBA degree?

37 Subject: Well, since I graduated it was an option, but I . . . well, I
38 started working with my dad and I kept putting it off
39 and putting it off . . . you know . . . I think it is time. Two
40 years have gone by since I graduated, so . . .

41 Interviewer: Out of curiosity, why are you looking at an MBA
42 instead of a MAcc [Master's of Accountancy]?

43 Subject: The master's in accounting, well . . . 'cause I asked
44 teachers around and they're like, if you want to focus
45 solely on accounting, do accounting, do the master's in
46 accounting, but the MBA will give you a more broad
47 perspective on business and I feel like that's what I . . .
48 well, in the end, I'll have my own business, or that's
49 what I hope . . . I figure if I am going to do a master's in
50 accounting I am just going to stick to accounting my
51 whole life and I don't know if that is what I really want
52 . . .

53 Interviewer: Okay. So, was there a particular incident or incidents
54 that led you consider an MBA? What made you say,
55 "now is the time?"

56 Subject: Just because, well, the ultimate goal for an accountant
57 is to get a CPA and in order to get a CPA, you have to
58 have certain credits beyond your undergrad, so ...
59 pretty much the only reason I'm going to do a master's
60 is to get a CPA.

61 Interviewer: Okay. So that is one of the long-term benefits; it will
62 open up the door for the CPA. What other long-term
63 benefits might there be?

64 Subject: For the master's? Well . . . [long pause] . . . being better
65 prepared, I suppose . . . better prepared for . . . (*subject*
66 *shrugs*).

67 Interviewer: But you want to open your own business one day?

68 Subject: Yes, but it could even be a CPA firm, you know, a small
69 CPA firm.

70 Interviewer: Do you think there might be some short-term benefits
71 of the MBA?

72 Subject: What do you mean, short-term benefits? Like, what
73 does that mean?

74 Interviewer: Well, I don't want to ask a leading question, but
75 obviously this, the CPA is a little bit further down the
76 road (*subject agrees*), so a little closer, in the next year

77 or two, what benefits might you receive by getting the
78 MBA?
79 Subject: [pause] I don't know, maybe I will learn something
80 that I have never applied to . . . to my life . . . at the
81 moment.
82 Interviewer: Okay. Do you think there will be any headaches?
83 Subject: Oh, definitely. Yes. Accounting is not. that. fun. It's fun,
84 but it's very detailed.
85 Interviewer: (laughing) What kind of headaches do you think will
86 come with the MBA?
87 Subject: The hassle of . . . not being in school for two years,
88 working and going back to school, and having to
89 readjust my life, you know?
90 Interviewer: Alright, so... how long did you think about an MBA
91 before looking at USF or UT?
92 Subject: Really, since before my graduation, all of my
93 accounting professors pretty much suggested that if
94 you're going to graduate, get an undergraduate degree
95 in accounting, you might as well go for your MBA so
96 you can be a CPA. All of them really suggested it.
97 Interviewer: So, at UT they are obviously pushing for you to get a
98 grad degree . . . (subject nods head in agreement) but
99 they are implying that the MBA is more valuable than
100 the MAcc?
101 Subject: No, no, no, no. They, my accounting professors suggest
102 you get the MAcc. I think it is called the . . . it's not even
103 called the MAcc, it's called the master's . . . MSA, that's
104 what it is called there. But yeah, they highly suggest
105 that for after graduation.
106 Interviewer: So, are USF and UT the only two schools that you've
107 thought about?
108 Subject: Yeah. I like Tampa, so that's the reason why, the
109 location.
110 Interviewer: There are a fair number of MBA programs in Tampa,
111 have you ever even looked at the other ones?
112 Subject: Not really.
113 Interviewer: Do you have any idea why?
114 Subject: No, I just, well, to tell you the truth when I got into
115 college, I only applied to two schools.
116 Interviewer: Those schools . . . ?
117 Subject: UT and Elon University. I got into UT. I didn't get into
118 Elon.
119 Interviewer: Okay, so, it sounds to me like I already know the
120 answer to this, but did you think about the program
121 first and then the university, or the university first,
122 and then the program?

123 Subject: Honestly, I've always liked UT, so . . . I thought about,
124 my first choice was UT, and then . . .

125 Interviewer: But you thought about, "I'm going for the degree
126 before you decided where you wanted to go instead of
127 "I want to go back to grad school at UT?"

128 Subject: Yes.

129 Interviewer: Have you taken the GMAT?

130 Subject: Yes (*uncomfortable pause*).

131 Interviewer: And you did obviously before exploring programs?

132 Subject: Yes.

133 Interviewer: Some people wait until after they've decided to go take
134 it. Did you take it right after college?

135 Subject: No, I waited like a year (*uncomfortable pause*) . . .

136 Interviewer: So you had not made a decision yet or where to go yet?

137 Subject: No, well, after graduation, I was an illegal resident
138 (*subject shrugs and laughs*). But now I am . . . I was
139 undergoing an immigration process that didn't let me
140 work, so it was like six months after graduation that I
141 couldn't do anything. My education visa expired . . .

142 Guest: He couldn't get hired but if he left the country he
143 couldn't get back in.

144 Subject: Yea, so, but now I have my green card . . .

145 Interviewer: Okay. So, how did you seek information on these MBA
146 programs? Did you go to the website, did you seek
147 brochures, did you call?

148 Subject: I actually went to the graduate admissions office at UT
149 and I spoke with them about it. They gave me a
150 brochure. Then Gertrude told me about USF. I knew
151 about it because I was in Beta Alpha Psi, but Gertrude
152 told me it was a better program.

153 Guest: Well, our Beta Alpha Psi program has won national
154 honors something like 37 years a row?

155 Interviewer: What factors were important to you as you began to
156 research programs? For instance, what made you say
157 you would even look at USF and UT.

158 Subject: To tell you the truth I don't know much about their
159 program, I just know to get my CPA I need to do this. I
160 don't even know what the program has in it.

161 Interviewer: Okay. So you were *not* looking at things like the caliber
162 of faculty or where the classes were held, offered day
163 or night . . .

164 Subject: No, no, no, no. I didn't. I don't even know what courses
165 are in the program. I just know that I've got to get it
166 done.

167 Interviewer: It's a requirement, a hurdle you have to jump in order
168 to get . . .

169 Subject: Yes. Exactly.

170 Interviewer: So that leads me back to my earlier question, why
171 would you not consider a St. Leo [University] or
172 another program, a [University of] Phoenix?

173 Subject: I guess the name of the school and the, what do you
174 call it?

175 Interviewer: The reputation?

176 Guest: The reputation? This is one of those words that
177 doesn't translate well.

178 Subject: Yeah, the reputation.

179 Interviewer: So you really don't have any factors to rank, just
180 reputation?

181 Subject: Yes.

182 Interviewer: Did accreditation matter?

183 Subject: *(subject gives quizzical look to guest)* Accreditation?

184 Guest: Accreditation, like SACS, IAC, AACSB, the quality signal.

185 Subject: Oh, no, that really didn't matter. I didn't even know
186 about this.

187 Interviewer: Okay. Once you decided to go for the degree, what
188 universities did you consider . . . you've already told
189 me that . . . how did you find out about USF once
190 Gertrude told you about it? Did she bring home a
191 brochure, did you go online?

192 Subject: No, honestly, I still don't know. I still haven't seen
193 anything about USF.

194 Interviewer: *(laughing)* you need to take home a brochure to give to
195 him!

196 Subject: Yeah, you do!

197 Guest: You saw the commercials.

198 Subject: Yeah, I did *(unintelligible between subject and guest)*.

199 Interviewer: So did you attend any in-person info sessions?

200 Subject: I did at UT. I went to graduate degree seeking student
201 info session.

202 Interviewer: Not just for the MBA?

203 Subject: No, for all programs. They let you know about where
204 they pay for you and all that . . . what's that called?

205 Guest: An assistantship?

206 Subject: Yes, that's it. Assistantships, there you go.

207 Interviewer: Did you get any info online.

208 Subject: Yeah, I read some on the UT website.

209 Interviewer: Did you seek word-of-mouth info? Did you ever talk
210 with co-workers about it? Well, I guess your co-
211 worker situation is a little bit different if it is you and
212 your dad.

213 Subject: Yeah, they're all much older than me, mechanics.
214 They're not really much into school. They are looking
215 for certifications in auto repair.

216 Interviewer: So, what are you going to consider when making your
217 decision between USF and UT? What is going to sway
218 you one way or the other?

219 Subject: To tell you the truth . . . [*pause*]. I just don't think it is
220 that important to me. It doesn't really matter. The one
221 that takes me in, you know. Because I've been to UT
222 already, I would prefer to go there.

223 Guest: Is that because you're familiar with it.

224 Subject: That's it, I am familiar with it. I am familiar with the
225 faculty, I am sure some of my old teachers teach the
226 graduate courses as well. It is a smaller school. I like
227 small.

228 Interviewer: If they both accepted you, what would you consider?

229 Subject: Probably the one with the better accounting program.

230 Interviewer: And how would you determine which one has a better
231 accounting program?

232 Subject: Well, I guess reputation, one, and then course load and
233 how . . . how they schedule courses.

234 Interviewer: Are you talking about the flexibility in the order of
235 classes, or how the courses are scheduled in terms of
236 duration, how long it takes you to get through it?

237 Subject: How long it takes to get through it. I figure it is going
238 to take two or three years.

239 Interviewer: You can do it in 18 months if you take full course loads
240 and . . .

241 Subject: Well, if I am planning on working, I probably can't.

242 Interviewer: Okay, well, that's all my questions.

243 Subject: Anything else?

244 Interviewer: No, anything you want to tell me? When do you think
245 you'll make a decision?

246 Subject: I am hoping, well, I have been putting it off for a year
247 or two now but I am hoping next August. I can pass my
248 GMAT. I took it twice, actually, and I didn't do good.
249 But I didn't really take the time to study much for it
250 (*unintelligible*). And I took the GRE.

251 Interviewer: English is not your first language, correct?

252 Subject: No, it's not (*unintelligible*).

253 Interviewer: If you knew you could start before you got the GMAT
254 score you wanted, would you have started already?

255 Subject: Oh, yeah. I tried to waive it. I went to UT and tried to
256 waive it, but they wouldn't let me.

257 Interviewer: If USF offered, would you start classes in January?

258 Subject: Yeah, but don't they waive it for a period of time and
259 then you still have to take it?
260 Interviewer: Well, there is a new certificate program where you
261 come in and you get started on your core courses
262 before you take it; at some point you still have to take
263 it, but you can get started. If you knew about that
264 would you have started already?
265 Subject: *(unintelligible)*
266 Interviewer: So, if you didn't have to take the GMAT, you would
267 have started already?
268 Subject: Oh yes, definitely.
269 Interviewer: And you are unaware of the certificate option?
270 Subject: Yes.
271 Interviewer: So that was my follow-up question: you said you have
272 been putting it off and putting it off, why?
273 Subject: Because of my GMAT scores, and the fact that I work
274 and don't have time to study. I have a full-time job
275 Monday through Saturday. And I took a GRE course,
276 but it was two months before the test, and in between,
277 I was focused on work and didn't keep practicing.
278 Interviewer: So, to summarize, if you didn't have to take the test, or
279 had that hurdle to jump through, you would have
280 already started. And the only reason you are thinking
281 about the advanced degree is because it is required to
282 advance to take the CPA exam?
283 Subject: Right.
284 Interviewer: Thank you so much!

#

#

#

Interview Date: December 6, 2012
Interview Location: USF College of Business, Tampa
Interview Subject: JoAnn, 25 year old female, Prospect #2
Interview Duration: 22 minutes

JoAnn is a Caucasian female who is considering an MBA program and has applied to USF and is considering several other universities. She has not yet decided where she will pursue the degree. She has worked for two years since earning an undergraduate degree in international studies from the University of South Florida. When contacting JoAnn to schedule the interview, it was discovered that the interviewer used to work with JoAnn's mother at a prior job (about seven years prior); there was some initial banter about that coincidence prior to the interview.

1 Interviewer: How are you doing? I understand you have been
2 studying for the GMAT?
3 Subject: Yes, I take it in two weeks.
4 Interviewer: Have you been studying?
5 Subject: Yeah, I am just ready for it to be over (*laughs*).
6 Interviewer: Where did you attend to earn your undergrad
7 [degree]? I think you went here to USF, didn't you? I
8 remember your mom being real proud that you were
9 admitted to the Honors College . . . which is something
10 to be proud of . . .
11 Subject: (*subject laughs*) Yes, I went here, to the University of
12 South Florida.
13 Interviewer: And what did you study?
14 Subject: I studied international studies.
15 Interviewer: What is the difference between international studies
16 and international business?
17 Subject: It's more focused on the social science aspects of trade,
18 and, like international relationships. It is more focused
19 on the theory of international relationships as
20 opposed to the business side of it. It is more like . . . I
21 called it, like, the softer side, softer version of it
22 because it wasn't as much hard facts, it was more
23 social sciences. It's closer to political science [than
24 business].
25 Interviewer: Okay. And when did you graduate?
26 Subject: I graduated in 2009.
27 Interviewer: That's right; you told me you now work. Where do you
28 work?
29 Subject: New Jerusalem Christian Academy. It's like a school in
30 Seffner.
31 Interviewer: How long have you worked there?
32 Subject: Two years.

33 Interviewer: What do you do?
34 Subject: I am a teacher (*said with a bit of resignation*)
35 Interviewer: Did you expect to be a teacher?
36 Subject: No . . . (*said wistfully; subject and interviewer both*
37 *laugh*)
38 Interviewer: What made you choose teaching?
39 Subject: I guess when I was finishing my major, I was looking at
40 some of the options, and, because I graduated in 2009
41 and that was the slump of the economy; it was a [time
42 when] a lot of people weren't getting jobs and I think I
43 was a bit fearful that I wasn't going to find a job. And
44 so I did an AmeriCorps program, which was focused
45 on education. And, I was more interested in the service
46 part of it. At the time, I wasn't making a lot of money
47 but it was more like the experience kind of thing. But it
48 was focused on education, which I didn't know before
49 I participated in it. But then once I was there, I like,
50 "you know, this is really cool, I am making a difference
51 for kids," kind of thing. I thought, "what if went back to
52 for teaching?" And I actually started grad school for
53 teaching. And I got into it [the graduate program in
54 education], and then I was like, uh, maybe not. (*both*
55 *subject and interviewer laugh*).
56 Interviewer: Okay.
57 Subject: So it was just kind of like a flow of events. My first job
58 out of college kind of led me to being interested in
59 education.
60 Interviewer: Okay, but you deciding that a master's degree in
61 education was not what you wanted for you. What
62 made you think that?
63 Subject: That wasn't right?
64 Interviewer: Yes.
65 Subject: I think . . . I started the master's program and then I
66 started teaching. So I think the actual experience of
67 teaching led me away from finishing, to thinking, "this
68 is not what I want to do."
69 Interviewer: And, so (*unintelligible*) how long ago did you first start
70 thinking about the MBA degree?
71 Subject: Well, really not 2-3 months ago.
72 Interviewer: And was there a particular incident that led you to
73 start thinking about it, or a particular reason you
74 started thinking about the degree?
75 Subject: I wouldn't say a particular incident, but the reason was
76 just knowing my strengths and knowing that they
77 were not being brought out in the classroom, and
78 knowing, basically, that I wanted to switch careers,

79 and knowing that without getting formal training it
80 would be difficult to get into a new position; and,
81 knowing my personality, I like to be prepared and so I
82 figured that this is the best step in order to bridge the
83 gap, basically.

84 Interviewer: And so . . . what did you think about the long-term
85 benefits, I mean, you've already told me a bit about
86 that now, that, one is that it will prepare you for your
87 career (*subject nods and sounds in agreement*), but
88 what long-term . . . how do you think long-term this
89 will help you?

90 Subject: (*slight pause*) I think . . . I am looking at long-term, not
91 necess- . . . just being able to work my way up . . .
92 because, just because, well, teaching it like, this is the
93 beginning and this is the end (*subjects uses hand*
94 *motions to indicate a stalled career path*). I like to move
95 up. I think the MBA does that. I mean, I think the
96 bachelor's degree does that as well, but . . . well, I
97 haven't seen that work, yet, and so I am really stuck in
98 a place where I can't move up. So that's why.

99 Interviewer: So, really, if I were to summarize – these are my
100 words, not yours – but you saw it as an opportunity for
101 a career trajectory?

102 Subject: Yes. Yes.

103 Interviewer: Okay. And did you think there would be some short-
104 term benefits?

105 Subject: Uh-huh. That I wouldn't have to teach (*said in light-*
106 *hearted manner with a laugh*).

107 Interviewer: (*laughs with subject*) Are you thinking that you would
108 be a full-time student, or part-time?

109 Subject: Yes, probably full-time. I think the short-term
110 opportunities are just the benefits would just be the
111 benefits that I mean, that being in a college
112 atmosphere provide. I mean, just networking with
113 professors and other students, or job opportunities, or
114 internships.

115 Interviewer: Any headaches you think that are going to come along
116 with this?

117 Subject: (*long pause*) I mean . . . I think . . . I don't want to
118 under-, well, I don't want to equate an undergraduate
119 degree to a graduate degree, but I think that the
120 workload will probably be more than what I was
121 accustomed to, so I am going to have to readjust from
122 being a working professional to being on the schedule
123 of being a student again.

124 Interviewer: Okay. So how long did you think about it – it being to
125 go for the degree or not – before you began
126 researching programs?

127 Subject: Maybe, like, three hours. No, I mean, like maybe a day.

128 Interviewer: *(laughs)*

129 Subject: I am a fast worker. I like . . .

130 Interviewer: Did you think about MBA first, and then think, “Okay,
131 where am I going to get it?” Or did you think, “I’m
132 going back to one of these universities and this is the
133 degree I am going to get there?”

134 Subject: *(short pause)* I was definitely thinking MBA. And I was
135 thinking about the options I would have in terms of
136 where to go. And USF was definitely the first school
137 that popped into my head, because I have gone here, I
138 live close to here. But there are other schools, too, that
139 I have researched and looked online at.

140 Interviewer: What other schools are you looking at?

141 Subject: UNF [University of North Florida] in Jacksonville and I
142 have also thought about FSU [Florida State University]
143 and UF [University of Florida], just because they’re
144 equal to USF. UNF is, you know, kind of the fall back
145 position.

146 Interviewer/Subject: *(sidebar chatter about interviewer’s daughter’s*
147 *consideration of UNF for undergraduate degree).*

148 Interviewer: So you thought about the program first, and then the
149 university. And you have not yet taken the GMAT?

150 Subject: No.

151 Interviewer: *(unintelligible)* So, when it came time to look at
152 universities, how did you go about finding information
153 about the programs that you wanted?

154 Subject: The Internet was definitely my first avenue for
155 research, but then I signed up for the information
156 session here, because it was advertised on the website.
157 So I signed up for that and really those are the two
158 avenues that I have been exploring.

159 Interviewer: Have you gone to any other info sessions?

160 Subject: No.

161 Interviewer: And how was USF’s info session?

162 Subject: It was informative, but, to be honest, I kind of felt like
163 if I read the website I really didn’t need to go. I didn’t
164 really gain more information. But I was glad I went.

165 Interviewer: Okay. So what factors were important to you as you
166 began to look at the programs?

167 Subject: *(looks at interviewer questioningly)*

168 Interviewer: I don’t want to give you . . . I don’t want to lead your
169 answers. Where there certain things that you said, “I

170 want to look at this, I want to look at this . . . what was
171 important to you?
172 Subject: Just in comparing schools, I would first look at course
173 selection, like times, because I wanted to know if it
174 was geared toward being a full-time student or geared
175 toward the working professional getting the MBA. So
176 that was the first thing I looked at. I also looked at
177 (*long pause*) . . . I also looked at . . . you know how
178 there is always like this section on the website about
179 people who have graduated from this program or this
180 is the market that they went into upon graduation; the
181 percentage of people who got jobs. The stats that
182 show what the end result that there has been for other
183 graduates.
184 Interviewer: So the testimonials, they ring true to you on the
185 website? They don't . . .
186 Subject: Yes (*nods to indicate testimonials ring true*).
187 Interviewer: Were you looking at program content, I mean, did you
188 look down as far as "I am interested in X and they have
189 a lot of courses in X;" did you look at, "I'd have to take
190 these specific courses?"
191 Subject: I was looking more at . . . well, generally all of the core
192 courses are the same, so I was looking at the specific
193 concentrations that the schools offer, and just seeing
194 what courses were required for that, or how you
195 could, like, for example, USF has the MBA in Sport and
196 Entertainment Management program as a separate
197 program, whereas, at UNF, it's a concentration. I'm an
198 athletic director at my school, so that was one of the
199 things that caught my attention was that, here I would
200 have to do it as a separate program and there I would
201 have to do it as a concentration. And so, I guess I was
202 looking at how each program was structured and
203 where its content fell, if that makes sense.
204 Interviewer: It does. So what I heard you say was that you looked at
205 course selection and times, you looked at testimonials
206 and kind of percentages of grads, and you looked at
207 kind of the core versus specializations.
208 Subject: Uh-huh (*subject nods head in agreement*).
209 Interviewer: If you had to rank those as far as which one was most
210 important to you as you were looking at them, which
211 one was most important?
212 Subject: I think the most important was the statistics of
213 employment.

214 Interviewer: Okay. And, once you decided to go for the degree,
215 which universities did you consider? You told me
216 UNF, FSU, UF. Did you look at UT?

217 Subject: No, I didn't.

218 Interviewer: How did you find out information about the specific
219 universities? You told me basically on the web,
220 seeking information online. Did you seek any word-of-
221 mouth reviews from friends?

222 Subject: No. I really don't know many people who have gone
223 for their MBA or really have a business degree. I
224 mean, I have all education majors around me and all
225 that, so I really didn't.

226 Interviewer: So it is the reputation of the *university* that you
227 considered more than the reputation of USF's MBA
228 program?

229 Subject: Yes.

230 Interviewer: And were there any other factors that were important
231 to you that helped you determine – well, you haven't
232 determined yet – which institution you are going to
233 attend?

234 Subject: Well, I do know what will help me decide is the
235 scholarship availability and financial aid just because
236 grad school is more expensive, so, you know, there are
237 assistantships and scholarships available at different
238 universities; that's something that is very important to
239 me.

240 Interviewer: And did you see a lot of information on those online?

241 Subject: For USF, no, but I think that is just because there . . .
242 when I went to the info session that was cleared up a
243 little bit more but it wasn't advertised because it
244 wasn't, there really isn't that much scholarship
245 [money] available. Most of it is more specified to
246 specific people and it is more on an invitation basis, so
247 it's not really like you can apply for that. But on other
248 [competing university] websites I found information
249 that they have more general scholarships.

250 Interviewer: What was the one thing, as you looked at all of this,
251 that you thought that was most important?

252 Subject: For deciding which program or for deciding . . .

253 Interviewer: Which program.

254 Subject: I feel like still that the statistical evidence that says,
255 "60 percent of our graduates get a job" versus "90
256 percent of our graduates get a job or work in the field
257 of their preference" is most important.

258 Interviewer: So basically evidence of success?

259 Subject: Right.

260 Interviewer: Alright, so once you obtain the degree, what are your
261 short-term career aspirations?
262 Subject: Short-term, so like upon graduation?
263 Interviewer: Yes.
264 Subject: Rule number one would be to be employed (*laughs*).
265 Interviewer: (*laughs*) Good one.
266 Subject: But I think . . . (*long pause*) I think being well trained
267 for the job that I am going to enter into, so I guess, just
268 feeling equipped, feeling ready to enter into whatever
269 position I do acquire, which after two years of grad
270 school that's what I would obtain.
271 Interviewer: But you don't have it narrowed down to, "after school I
272 want to work in healthcare, or to be a marketer, or to
273 be . . ."
274 Subject: No. I am looking more at international business and
275 finance, just because I was an international studies
276 major and finance is just really interesting to me.
277 Those are the two areas I would say I was *hoping* to be
278 working in, but I am not, you know, "this is the only
279 area I see myself in."
280 Interviewer: Okay. What about long-term career goals?
281 Subject: I would hope that [not just] lateral moves up the
282 corporate ladder. I don't have a goal of owning my
283 own business or anything, but I do have a goal to . . .
284 (*frustrated pause*) to contribute to a company in a way
285 that would benefit it, whether it was finance or
286 international business. Not just staying status quo, you
287 know? That's one thing that frustrates me. And I think
288 that is part of the reason why I am going back to
289 school, or, rather, hopefully going back to school.
290 Interviewer: Okay.
291 Subject: So, really, these are more general goals but main one is
292 to help build up the company that I end up working
293 for.
294 Interviewer: How long do you think it will take for you to see a
295 monetary gain, kind of a return on the investment of
296 the MBA?
297 Subject: Well, I think this is kind of subjective, because I am a
298 teacher (*both interviewer and subject laugh*) but I
299 would say immediately. My first job would . . . I expect
300 to make more money than I do now. That alone
301 would make the investment in the education worth it.
302 Interviewer: Well, that didn't take anywhere near as long as I
303 thought it would. Do you have any thoughts or ideas to
304 share with me? Any feedback on USF as you looked at

305 it, information that you maybe saw as missing, or
306 [where you] said, "I really liked this?"
307 Subject: The only thing that I would say is that the information
308 session, it was (*pause*) . . . it was very . . . general, I
309 guess. It was just what I read and what I researched. I
310 mean, I really liked the fact that they offered the live
311 info session but, um, I went because I was thinking this
312 would be better. But other than that, I really don't
313 think . . . I guess because since I am not *in* the program
314 yet, I am just going one step at a time, so I really don't
315 have . . . I haven't met with an advisor yet, so I really
316 don't have . . . as a prospective student, I don't feel as
317 prepared. Once I get all my stuff in, my paperwork [I
318 might have more to say].
319 Interviewer: And how has that been? The application, the actual
320 chores of applying, getting your transcript in. Has it
321 been easy?
322 Subject: Yes, it's been very easy.
323 Interviewer: Okay. Thank you

#

#

#

Interview Date: December 6, 2012
Interview Location: Starbucks on Hillsborough Avenue, Tampa
Interview Subject: Cassie, 26 year old female, Prospect #3
Interview Duration: 20 minutes

Cassie is a Caucasian female who is considering an MBA program but has not yet made the commitment to begin (though she has made a commitment to pursue the degree at some point). She has not yet decided where she will pursue the degree. She has worked for four years since earning an undergraduate degree in event management and hospitality from the University of Florida. When contacting Cassie to schedule the interview, it was discovered that the interviewer and the subject have a mutual friend who recently asked the subject to contact the interviewer about a potential sponsorship for an Emerge event with the Tampa Chamber of Commerce. There was some initial banter about that coincidence prior to the interview. There was also some banter about the degree program the interviewer is finishing.

1 Subject: So, are you going for the MBA?
2 Interviewer: No (*laughing*) I think I should have gone for the MBA
3 but I am going for the MS in Strategic Communications.
4 Because I was afraid of all the finance courses [in the
5 MBA program].
6 Subject: That's what my biggest fear is (*laughing*). But I know
7 that is why I need to go back. Because I need that, I
8 need that experience.
9 Interviewer: That's exactly where I am. I went for the MS in Mass
10 Communications (*sidebar conversation with*
11 *interviewer's son, who was seated nearby during the*
12 *interview*). So I went for that degree instead. If I had
13 gone for the MBA, I wouldn't be doing this thesis. An
14 MBA doesn't require a thesis.
15 Subject: Yeah. I didn't think so. That's okay; you'll have your
16 degree soon!
17 Interviewer: So the purpose of my thesis is really just to talk to
18 people about what they are thinking about when they
19 are considering the MBA. People are at different
20 stages. Some have decided to do it, some have decided
21 not to do it, some have decided to do it and are
22 starting in January. So where are you in that process?
23 Subject: I would like to start my MBA in the fall next year. So I
24 have been to info sessions for USF. I am also
25 considering the University of Tampa. And I am also
26 considering [the University of] Florida. I went to
27 Florida for my undergrad, so...
28 Interviewer: Okay, so when did you graduate there?

29 Subject: I graduated from my undergrad in 2008, August 2008.
30 Ideally, I would love to go back there just because I
31 went there and am a diehard Gator, but, at the same
32 time, the traveling; it would really be what is going to
33 hold me back, I think. I'd rather – I live and work in
34 South Tampa. I work for my family's company, so I am
35 just really, really connected to the South Tampa
36 community. I would prefer not to be traveling. It's not
37 necessarily every weekend, the program that I am
38 looking at; it's only one weekend a month up there.
39 But that's still, you know, a lot of driving plus hotel
40 expenses, which I would not have to worry about with
41 USF or UT.

42 Interviewer: And USF has the weekend program, too.

43 Subject: Right.

44 Interviewer: So what did you study at UF?

45 Subject: Hospitality management.

46 Interviewer: I didn't know they had a hospitality management
47 program there.

48 Subject: They do. It is in the College of Health and Human
49 Performance. It falls under the hospitality, tourism,
50 operations umbrella. It's actually becoming quite
51 popular, believe it or not. The University of Central
52 Florida has a great hospitality and tourism program,
53 too, so...

54 Interviewer: Yeah. So obviously you work now; I heard you say for
55 your family's company, um...

56 Subject: I do.

57 Interviewer: Is that the only job you have had since you graduated?

58 Subject: Actually, yes. My dad owns a title insurance company.
59 When I graduated in '08, it was 2008 and it was a
60 terrible time to graduate [due to the economy]. It was
61 a terrible time to get into event planning. So,
62 fortunately, I started to work for that company. It was
63 not what I wanted to do nor was it what I intended to
64 do. But it actually turned out to be a blessing. And now
65 I am really getting involved in the company and that's
66 why I am getting my MBA. I plan to take it over one
67 day and I need the experience, so...

68 Interviewer: Oh, okay. Wow. So how long have you worked for your
69 family's company now, I guess four years?

70 Subject: Honestly, since we opened in 2006, on and off during
71 break and whatnot while in college, but, full-time,
72 2009.

73 Interviewer: So how long ago did you first start thinking about
74 getting an MBA?

75 Subject: I would say probably about six months ago.
76 Interviewer: And was there something that prompted you to think
77 about it or something that made you say, "Now is the
78 time?"
79 Subject: Um, well now is the time, I think, because I am young
80 enough. I am 26. And I know before I get too – get too
81 far ahead in the company – that I really do [need] like
82 you were saying, the financial aspect of things. I really
83 do need to get that experience. I do intend to take over
84 the company. I kind of have a five-year plan. My dad
85 won't necessarily be out in five years, but, as I start
86 moving up I know there's only so much that I can learn
87 from him and learn in the office, that – I should have
88 gotten a business degree at Florida but, um, so, I think
89 that is the strongest reason that I am going back. I
90 know I am going to need that, that education, that
91 experience that I haven't gotten previously, so...
92 Interviewer: Okay, and so, for you, you said you– the question is
93 "what do you think the long-term benefit would be,"
94 for you. It sounds like you have a plan.
95 Subject: Yes, for the knowledge and for the experience. I would
96 say within the next five to ten years. Five years for
97 getting my license for title insurance, which is actually
98 going to happen within the next six months, really. Um,
99 I would say within the next three years, starting and
100 completing my MBA. And just kind of working
101 different roles throughout the company. Really
102 learning the ins and outs of everything that relates to
103 title insurance and the financial industry as well. So,
104 um, within the next ten years (*unintelligible with*
105 *camera movement*) within the ten-year frame, push my
106 dad out and I can take over and feel comfortable. For
107 me right now, I really am fearful that I do not have that
108 knowledge and that experience. And I'd hate to be in
109 that position where I am like "I don't know what I am
110 doing." You know, and to have people not be able to
111 rely on me because I don't have that experience or I
112 don't know what I am doing; I don't like not knowing
113 what I am talking about, so...
114 Interviewer: Okay. Do you think that there are going to be some
115 short-term benefits to getting an MBA?
116 Subject: Um, just the networking. Building relationships with
117 other people, I think, in the cohort and in the
118 community, which I think would eventually be long-
119 term as well, also.

120 Interviewer: Have you thought about what Tampa's networking
121 opportunities would provide for you versus
122 Gainesville's?
123 Subject: (pause) Um...
124 Interviewer: Gainesville obviously has some – I don't know who
125 your customers are in a title insurance company. Are
126 they mostly Tampa people?
127 Subject: We are able to close transactions nationwide but
128 obviously the majority of our deals are in Florida,
129 more locally, in Hillsborough, Pasco, Pinellas counties.
130 So I think, locally, I am really very involved with, as I
131 was telling you, with the Chamber [of Commerce] and
132 a lot of different groups and organizations in Tampa,
133 so I think that would just help strengthen those
134 relationships and my involvement in the community.
135 As far as [the University of] Florida is concerned, I
136 don't know if there's – I think there might be more
137 benefit going to school somewhere locally. Florida's
138 got a great network and a great alumni network as
139 well, but I think that I would meet more local people
140 here than I would going to Gainesville.
141 Interviewer: Okay. So do you think there are going to be any
142 headaches involved with getting an MBA?
143 Subject: Ha! Financially! Finance and accounting. Anything to
144 do with math and finance. Yeah, that would be a
145 headache (*chuckling*).
146 Interviewer: Oh yeah.
147 Subject: Studying for the GRE and the GMAT alone is going to
148 be a headache!
149 Interviewer: Well, that actually – I am going to jump ahead here –
150 that is one question: have you taken the test yet?
151 Subject: No. I have not. I actually, well, I actually did take the
152 GRE just to kind of try it out, probably back in 2007 or
153 '08. I couldn't even tell you how I did. I don't
154 remember. I think it was probably pretty bad as well.
155 Because I just didn't study for it. Um, but no, I have
156 not taken it yet.
157 Interviewer: Scores are valid for five years.
158 Subject: Yeah, I don't think I want to use those scores.
159 Interviewer: The time is probably pretty close anyway.
160 Subject: Yeah.
161 Interviewer: Okay, so obviously you started thinking about the
162 program and you told me three schools that you are
163 looking at,
164 Subject: Ah-huh.

165 Interviewer: How long after you started thinking about an MBA did
166 you go online or go seek info or visit?
167 Subject: Pretty quickly, actually. I would say – what are we now
168 – I would say summer time is when I thought I really
169 need to get serious about this. I had talked to my dad
170 with a couple of other people, a couple of other
171 mentors of mine. And then I just started to sign up for
172 the info sessions. I went to Florida’s info session, then I
173 went to USF’s info session. And then UT. So I have gone
174 to all of them and feel like I have all of the information.
175 Truthfully, now it is just starting to apply. And, like I
176 said, studying and taking the exams.
177 Interviewer: Okay. And, I’m going to jump ahead.
178 Subject: Sure.
179 Interviewer: I want to talk about info sessions. What were your
180 impressions of USF’s info session versus Florida and
181 some of the others?
182 Subject: Um, let’s see. I am trying to remember. USF’s was, I
183 think, at the hotel over on Cypress. I think they were
184 having some technical issues that night. Which really –
185 it wasn’t a big deal, but, um, the women that did it
186 were knowledgeable. I had a couple of questions and
187 they were able to answer them. I liked it because I
188 already know what the MBA program should look like,
189 um, I just have a few specific questions and they got us
190 in and out of there pretty quickly. Florida’s was good.
191 It was very, very detailed. Very planned out... Which
192 was nice, but, I was like, okay. UT’s, truthfully, was a
193 little long-winded. They talked about a whole lot of
194 options and I just wanted to hear about the MBA. And
195 that was it. The MBA for working professionals, that’s
196 what I was there for. And they talked about ten other
197 degrees that night that I didn’t care about. So that was
198 a little bit lengthy.
199 Interviewer: So would it be better if they just mentioned these are
200 the degrees that we have?
201 Subject: Right, exactly. And have specific info sessions for
202 those. I didn’t want to sit through everybody else’s
203 session! (*laughing*). I wanted to hear about mine,
204 which is selfish, I guess. But if you are talking about
205 that many different degrees, you should probably
206 break it up, not do it all in one shot. Um, but I think
207 they [USF] said, “Is anybody here for the Executive
208 MBA program?” And nobody was, and they said,
209 “Okay, we won’t even talk about that then!” They

210 moved on instead of wasting everybody's time, so, it
211 was good. I got what I needed.

212 Interviewer: And, so how did you go about seeking information on
213 the programs? Obviously you went to info sessions.

214 Subject: I went online. I went online as well. Um, my – I know
215 quite a few people that have gotten their MBA at
216 Florida so I spoke to a couple of them. My best friend
217 actually works in the admissions department at the
218 University of Tampa and she is starting her MBA so
219 she has been able to give me a lot of information. And
220 as far as USF, it just is the other, you know, big
221 university in the area, so I just went online.

222 Interviewer: And you said you also talked about it a little bit with
223 some mentors in your life?

224 Subject: Ah-huh.

225 Interviewer: So what factors were important to you as you began to
226 research these programs? What is it that you were
227 saying, "ooh, that's good for that one," or, "that's not
228 good for that one?"

229 Subject: Right. Okay, I want to say obviously the location.
230 That's probably going to be pretty important in the
231 long run. I completely ruled out doing any kind of
232 internet program. I really don't want to miss out on
233 any of that face-to-face experience with the professors
234 or the other people in the cohort. That's important to
235 me and from what I have heard, people really enjoy
236 that. So I don't want to miss out on that. I don't want to
237 miss that opportunity. I know a couple of the
238 programs talked about the opportunity to study
239 abroad, too. I don't know if I will have the means or
240 even the time to be able to do that but just having the
241 option, I think, is important. Ah, I am trying to think of
242 the different programs and different info sessions. But
243 I know that none of them really talked about, though I
244 know all three of them do, that you can pick some of
245 these different electives to choose from as well. So
246 you've got your main courses that you have to take but
247 then you can kind of mix and match to...

248 Interviewer: To customize it.

249 Subject: Exactly, to customize it and tailor it to what your
250 needs are. Which is important. Because there are
251 certainly classes that I am going to love to take and
252 then there are classes that I know I should take. So I
253 will be like, ugh....

254 Interviewer: *(laughing)*

255 Subject: These all sound so great but I really need to take these!
256 So...I think cost. Cost is, obviously, the big factor. I
257 don't think there is too much of a variance between
258 the three universities but I haven't sat down and
259 compared them dollar to dollar yet. So, I figure I am
260 going to be paying a lot of money regardless of where I
261 go (*chuckling*).

262 Interviewer: Do you have tuition assistance through the company?
263 I mean, it's family, so...

264 Subject: I will, I will, I will have assistance, yeah. Fortunately.

265 Interviewer: Um, so out of all of these that you mentioned...you said
266 location, face-to-face time, travel abroad opportunities
267 whether you take advantage of them or not, the ability
268 to tailor or customize, and cost. Which is the single
269 most important to you?

270 Subject: (*long pause*) probably location but USF and UT are
271 both here. I guess location.

272 Interviewer: So what - wait, I already asked you that - actually,
273 you've already answered that one, too - um...

274 Subject: Well, I know that all three of those are accredited by
275 the what's it, the AA...

276 Interviewer: AACSB.

277 Subject: AACSB, so it didn't really seem like one was really,
278 um....

279 Interviewer: So accreditation mattered to you but ...

280 Subject: It mattered.

281 Interviewer: But you just wanted to know it had it.

282 Subject: Right. Exactly.

283 Interviewer: Did you look at schools such as [the University of}
284 Phoenix or some of them like that? Why not?

285 Subject: Um, I wanted a university. A strong university. I
286 thought Phoenix was an online program as well. I
287 could be wrong. And I didn't want, if that is the case I
288 did not want an online program.

289 Interviewer: I think they are a hybrid.

290 Subject: Oh, um, well....

291 Interviewer: But they are not accredited.

292 Subject: Right. Truthfully, I had somebody, I had a mentor tell
293 me you need to go to Duke or somewhere like that.
294 And I thought, I am not getting a degree because I am
295 in a corporate setting where I am going to need that
296 degree to move up the ladder and impress somebody
297 with what, you know, with what school the diploma
298 has on it. I need this because I need the experience.
299 And I don't want to get it from a Webster or a Phoenix
300 or something like that. But I was fine with considering

301 Florida and the two local universities around here
302 because I know that they are great schools. They are
303 great organizations. So I didn't worry about that
304 qualification, the professors or the academics at all. I
305 knew it was going to be strong at any of those three
306 universities.

307 Interviewer: Because of reputation?
308 Subject: Absolutely.

309 Interviewer: Um, What are your career aspirations. You already
310 told me, long-term, it's to take over the company. And
311 short-term, what are you looking to do?
312 Subject: Um, short-term, I think I, like I was saying earlier, I
313 really do want to kind of bolster my confidence a little
314 bit, as far as my knowledge of different aspects of
315 running a business and operating a business and
316 financials are concerned. Um, again, it is important to
317 me to build those relationships with people that I
318 know will ultimately, you know, we can give business
319 back and forth to each other. I think that's great and I
320 have heard a lot of success stories from people who
321 have come out of those programs and stay in touch
322 and still stay in touch with people in their cohort. Um,
323 short-term, I just need to get that degree. I need to get
324 that knowledge. I need that experience. So I know it is
325 going to be a lot of work and I probably won't see the
326 light of day for the next two, two and a half years, but I
327 am sure it will be worth it.

328 Interviewer: If I can do it with a 13- year-old and an 18-year-old
329 who is just starting her freshman year of college, you
330 can do it.

331 Subject: (laughing) That's good. That's good to know.

332 Interviewer: How long do you think it will take to see a monetary
333 return, a monetary gain as a result of both your time
334 investment and your financial investment?
335 Subject: (*long pause*) Hmm... when you say monetary gain, I
336 am not in a...I am not going to be talking about a raise.

337 Interviewer: Some people – how long do you think it will take
338 before you see some sort of return on this investment?
339 Because you are investing time and you're investing
340 money.

341 Subject: I would think that would be evident within the first
342 couple of semesters, honestly. I think ultimately after
343 the whole program I would hope to feel well-rounded
344 enough. But I would imagine that starting in the
345 courses I would start to see the return. And talking
346 about those relationships and the people that you are

347 going to be meeting, so I don't think it will be too long
348 before you start to see.
349 Interviewer: Okay. I think, actually, that is all of my questions. I
350 know I skipped around a bit. Oh, wait, I did...here's
351 one. Did you think about the program first, and then
352 the university, or the university or then the program?
353 Subject: The university.
354 Interviewer: You thought of the university before the program?
355 Subject: Oh, you mean the MBA as the program? Oh, yeah, I
356 thought about the MBA program first.
357 Interviewer: Okay. And you have not yet taken the GMAT?
358 Subject: No.
359 Interviewer: I think that's everything.
360 Subject: Great.
361 Interviewer: Thanks

#

#

#

Interview Date: January 9, 2013
Interview Location: Burger King on Florida Avenue, Tampa
Interview Subject: Cory, 44 year old female, Prospect #4
Interview Duration: 19 minutes

Cory is a Caucasian female who is considering an Executive MBA program but has not yet made the commitment to the degree program or to a university. She is a single mother whose grown son is now a single parent; she is essentially raising her granddaughter. She has enjoyed a long career in the healthcare industry, working while pursuing an undergraduate degree in business. After she earned her degree, she advanced at her company and eventually changed jobs to move up the ladder at another corporation. She was recently laid off by that company and will be returning to the job she formerly held (a move she perceives as a necessity, but as a step backward).

1 Interviewer: So my topic is what people think about when deciding
2 whether or not to go for an MBA and then what they
3 look at when considering universities. So I need
4 people who have already made that decision. I need
5 people who are still thinking about it and I need
6 people who are in process.
7 Subject: Okay. (*Brief review of IRB permission form*)
8 Interviewer: So you are thinking about getting an MBA. Where did
9 you get your undergrad?
10 Subject: I have my bachelor's degree from USF, the University
11 of South Florida
12 Interviewer: And what did you study?
13 Subject: Business administration.
14 Interviewer: How long ago did you graduate?
15 Subject: I graduated December 2006.
16 Interviewer: So did you – what did you study in terms of business?
17 Subject: Management and marketing.
18 Interviewer: Did you work while going to school?
19 Subject: Yes, I'm – I have been a single parent so I worked
20 while going to school.
21 Interviewer: What did you do?
22 Subject: I actually was an executive assistant to the president
23 of St. Joseph's Hospital and to the Board of Trustees
24 for 11 years. And that is with Baycare Health Systems.
25 And I went to school while working as an executive
26 assistant and being a single mom.
27 Interviewer: That's a lot of stuff to do. So what have you done since
28 you got your undergraduate degree?
29 Subject: With my degree I was able to move into a management
30 position. I was actually manager of donor relations for

31 Baycare Health System which is, again, St. Joseph's
32 hospitals. I handled all of our major donors and board
33 members that give to the hospital.

34 Interviewer: So basically in development. So is that what you do
35 now?

36 Subject: No. I moved into training in our billing and insurance
37 departments, so I basically went to our business office
38 for Baycare, which, again, is St. Joe's and 11 hospitals
39 total in their system. Business office does all of the
40 billing and the insurance piece for all 11 hospitals. So,
41 I learned...

42 Interviewer: That's quite a transition from development.

43 Subject: Yeah, I learned the systems, the IT system. I trained
44 registrars who came in through the system, 500
45 registrars across Baycare. I did training on our IT
46 applications and on-the-job training and audits, that
47 kind of thing.

48 Interviewer: So was there a particular reason you started thinking
49 about getting an MBA? How long ago did you first
50 start thinking about it?

51 Subject: I started thinking about getting my MBA once I
52 realized that you cannot move into a director-level
53 position within Baycare without an MBA.

54 Interviewer: Okay.

55 Subject: Not all hospital systems are, and not all businesses
56 require an MBA for a director level, um, but Baycare
57 does.

58 Interviewer: And so how long ago was it that you first started
59 thinking about it? Two years ago, five years ago?

60 Subject: It's been about 2-3 years. But I am paying student
61 loans, like everyone else so I kind of put it off for a
62 little bit. I then got - another health system, Iasis
63 Healthcare, which is Town 'N Country Hospital, they
64 actually inquired. They contacted me at Baycare and
65 recruited me into a director-level position at their
66 hospital, which only required a bachelor's degree.

67 Interviewer: So you are now at Town 'N Country?

68 Subject: Um, I was just laid off.

69 Interviewer: Oh, okay.

70 Subject: So, um, I became a director of patient registration and
71 billing and insurance at Town 'N Country Hospital and
72 was there for one year and was then laid off.

73 Interviewer: So do you think you want go back to Baycare?

74 Subject: Yeah. They actually, I am supposed to start on Monday.

75 Interviewer: Congratulations. What are you going to be doing?

76 Subject: I am going to be back in training and development
77 again. So, eventually I will be pursuing my degree – my
78 master’s degree – because it is mandatory if you want
79 to move up in the system into like senior-level
80 management. But right now, I am kind of putting it off
81 because of the economy and until I am back working.
82 Interviewer: Okay, so what do you think is the long-term benefit of
83 getting an MBA?
84 Subject: The long-term benefit of an MBA would allow you to
85 move into senior-level management positions, such as,
86 like a [chief operating officer] of the hospital, a vice
87 president of a company, that type of position. If you
88 look online, most positions that are director level and
89 above require an MBA.
90 Interviewer: And did you think there would be any short-term
91 benefit?
92 Subject: (*long pause*) um, I have always gone to school part-
93 time, so it has never been a short-term of anything
94 (*laughing*). I have had to work while going to school
95 so, no, none that I can think of at the time.
96 Interviewer: And did you think there would be any headaches?
97 Subject: Yeah. Maybe the short-term benefit would be, you
98 know, your head focused on school and be able to, you
99 know, contain the information, the education that you
100 have already learned because I know the older you get
101 that you have a lapse in memory (*laughing*). So that
102 would be my short-term benefit.
103 Interviewer: So did you think there would be any headaches
104 involved in going back to get the MBA?
105 Subject: Yeah, I think the biggest headache that I am finding
106 right now is the cost. It’s anywhere from \$40,000-
107 50,000 a year to go back to school for an MBA and also,
108 um, the time away from work. At USF, you have to do
109 every other Friday and one Saturday a month.
110 Interviewer: If you were to do the Executive MBA.
111 Subject: So that means your employer would have to approve
112 you being out of work on a Friday a couple of times a
113 month.
114 Interviewer: No, one time a month (*unintelligible*).
115 Subject: So it would basically be your probably paid time off
116 day that you get.
117 Interviewer: So you are considering the Executive MBA not the
118 traditional MBA?
119 Subject: Right. Because I have management experience. And
120 that kind of lets you take the fast-track, the executive
121 program.

122 Interviewer: It's an awesome program.
123 Subject: Yeah. I did go to the open house and was seriously
124 considering it. But I think I have to get my GMAT done
125 and decide whether I am going to – want to invest
126 \$40,000 more in student loans. Because I – that's a lot
127 of money.
128 Interviewer: Yeah. It is. So how long did you think about the MBA
129 before you actually began to research the programs?
130 Subject: I have been thinking about it for a couple of years, but
131 I have just started researching it in the last six months.
132 Interviewer: Did you look at the degree first, and then the
133 university? Or did you say, "I'm going to USF" and
134 then explored the MBA, Executive MBA, the MS in
135 Marketing, stuff like that?
136 Subject: Well, I knew I wanted to get a degree in business
137 administration. My second option would be a master's
138 in healthcare administration. But I was leaning more
139 toward the business one because you can use it at
140 pretty much any type of industry, rather than just
141 healthcare. Um, what was the question?
142 Interviewer: Well, you actually answered it. Were you looking at
143 MBA and then choosing the university or were you
144 looking at the university and then choosing the
145 degree? You had the degree already in mind.
146 Subject: Right. And USF was actually my first choice, but my
147 other reason for being kind of hesitant is that I would
148 prefer online classes. So I looked at USF. I looked at
149 University of Florida in Gainesville. They do have an
150 online class but there's limited seating that they allow
151 in that. I have also looked at South University and the
152 University of Phoenix. But I am kind of leery of those
153 universities. Because I am finding out here that even
154 like an RN, if they haven't gotten their degree from a
155 regionally accredited school then it's not always
156 accepted. So I am looking for something that – those
157 two schools are –
158 Interviewer: I know they're not AACSB accredited. I am not sure
159 about regional accreditation. I don't think they are, but
160 I don't know that. So how did you – well you haven't
161 taken the GMAT yet, right?
162 Subject: No.
163 Interviewer: How did you go about seeking information on the
164 programs? You said you went to USF's info session.
165 Did you go to other info sessions? Did you go online?
166 Did you call?

167 Subject: Well, I went online. Um, I signed up for the open house
168 that was about a month ago for the University of
169 Tampa and for USF.

170 Interviewer: Okay. So you went to their websites as well?

171 Subject: Right.

172 Interviewer: What were your thoughts on the info sessions?

173 Subject: Um, well the one at USF, um, it gave an overview of the
174 MBA program and then it broke it down into the two
175 different groups, whether you were looking at the
176 traditional MBA or the Executive MBA. I think it was
177 informational, but I think it would be better if they had
178 someone who could do one-on-one and sit down with
179 prospective students to see if – to see what the
180 concerns are.

181 Interviewer: So if they have that, it was not clear to you from the
182 website that that was an option?

183 Subject: Well, I think it would probably, well, I could make an
184 appointment with an advisor, but what I am saying is
185 that at the info session it would be good if they had
186 that available. I think that would have – because I
187 think I – that’s your time that you’re – and I live far –
188 so just to get to USF is kind of hard.

189 Interviewer: So at the info session? Okay.

190 Subject: Right.

191 Interviewer: So the degrees – rather, the universities that you have
192 considered have been USF, UT, South, and the
193 University of Phoenix. Any others?

194 Subject: I have had some universities call me, like Indiana
195 Wesleyan and Eckerd but they kind of fall in the same
196 category of Phoenix with the accreditation problem.

197 Interviewer: Okay. And did you seek any word-of-mouth reviews
198 from friends? Ask any coworkers?

199 Subject: Well I did ask my boss whether I should pursue the
200 master’s degree. My old boss, who now is again my
201 current boss – he’s a VP of financial services for
202 Baycare – he suggested that I not [pursue the degree]
203 at this time, because, with the economy and how
204 difficult it is to get into a job, adding the additional
205 \$40,000-\$50,000 in student loans at my age, um, he
206 didn’t recommend it at this time. But with the job
207 market, if it gets better and when more positions open,
208 it is probably something that I would think about.

209 Interviewer: Okay, so when looking at all of these things, I am
210 hearing the fact that – well, actually, let me go back. I
211 don’t want to go there yet. What factors were
212 important to you as you began to research the

213 programs? Were you looking at program content?
214 Were you looking at other factors? Well, obviously
215 you – I have heard you say cost and time.
216 Subject: Cost. Content. Time. The accreditation. Because I know
217 that with employers it's not always accepted, you
218 know, whether it is regionally or whatever it is?
219 Interviewer: AACSB is the business school accrediting body.
220 Subject: And my age (*laughing*).
221 Interviewer: So of these, I've heard you say cost, the time away
222 from work, the option for online, the program content,
223 accreditation, your age....what was the most important
224 factor to you as you are looking at whether or not you
225 are going to do this?
226 Subject: The cost.
227 Interviewer: And does Baycare offer any sort of tuition assistance,
228 reimbursement?
229 Subject: They do, um, they do for an undergraduate degree. It's
230 minimal but for master's, they don't. I think they may
231 be adding that into their program, but it's minimal. It's
232 like \$1,500 a year. It's something that is not very
233 helpful.
234 Interviewer: (*unintelligible*) the one thing that has been most
235 important to you all along?
236 Subject: The ability to move up the career ladder. And it's been
237 a little bit difficult because I started late going to
238 school. And so where some students have just
239 graduated and they may be in a position similar to
240 mine, I am 44 [years old], you know, so it is a little bit
241 difficult as far as, um, the career ladder piece.
242 Interviewer: Yeah, I am 48 and I am almost always the oldest in the
243 class. Every once in a while there is someone older
244 than me, but not often. So you already told me about
245 your career aspirations, how long do you think it will
246 take before you, um, make a decision to go forward
247 with this, in terms of both the time and the money?
248 How long will it take for you to say, "This is worth it?"
249 Subject: Well, I think the program lasts two years, so I think
250 there [would] probably be a \$30,000 - \$40,000 a year
251 increase in my income, so probably 2-3 years.
252 Interviewer: Okay. Anything you want to add?
253 Subject: I think it is important for students who are young to be
254 able to work and get the work experience at the same
255 time as getting their master's rather than going
256 straight into a master's program because, without the
257 experience, the master's really doesn't help you. All
258 employers want work experience, even the – I have a

259 huge amount of experience at my age but they still
260 want more. So I think a master's program is important
261 but I would recommend that students go ahead and
262 pursue their career ladder after their bachelor's
263 degree, or even before. And then consider the MBA
264 once they get their foot in the door with an employer
265 and they have gained the experience.
266 Interviewer: Personally, I agree with you. That's why USF
267 implemented a two-year work requirement for the
268 traditional MBA and for the Executive MBA they want
269 seven years work experience.

#

#

#

Interview Date: January 10, 2013
Interview Location: Premier Parking on Florida Avenue, Tampa
Interview Subject: Tina, 32 year old female, Prospect #5
Interview Duration: 15 minutes

Tina is a married Indian female, a working mother who is considering an Executive MBA program but has not yet made the commitment to the degree program or to a university. She works full-time in her family's downtown parking business, a move she made just a year or two ago, moving to Tampa after working in banking in Atlanta for a few years. When setting up the interview, she said she was interested in the Executive MBA program at USF but she was unsure if she wanted to go to China (an international experience is a requirement of the program and the last few years the group has travelled to China). She also mentioned that she is only interested in weekend classes.

1 Interviewer: Well I have 20 questions for you. As mentioned, they
2 are relatively painless. There is no earth-shaking
3 information that I am going to get here, but, um, it's
4 thinking about graduate school, and, in particular, the
5 MBA.
6 Subject: Okay.
7 Interviewer: So have you started grad school? Have you applied?
8 Where are you?
9 Subject: I been interested in USF and I was interested in the
10 University of Tampa. And I just went over there to the,
11 um, thing over there.
12 Interviewer: At USF? Or UT?
13 Subject: Yeah, at USF. And I am interested in the Executive MBA
14 program.
15 Interviewer: Okay, great. I don't have anyone [to be interviewed]
16 from the Executive MBA program yet. Yay! It's a great
17 program, too. Holy cow.
18 Subject: I know. It's wonderful.
19 Interviewer: So where did you attend school for your bachelor's
20 degree?
21 Subject: University of Florida.
22 Interviewer: What did you study?
23 Subject: Business. Management.
24 Interviewer: And how long ago did you graduate?
25 Subject: I graduated in 2002.
26 Interviewer: Okay. So did you work while going to school?
27 Subject: No.
28 Interviewer: And what have you done since you graduated?
29 Subject: I have been doing all managerial things.
30 Interviewer: Here at this company? Or at other companies?

31 Subject: I was at Wells Fargo in Atlanta. And then I have been
32 with my brother pretty much ever since.
33 Interviewer: So this is a family business here?
34 Subject: Yeah.
35 Interviewer: Okay. How long were you in Atlanta?
36 Subject: A couple of years?
37 Interviewer: Do you like Tampa better?
38 Subject: Well, now I am married and have two kids. Yeah.
39 Interviewer: How old are your kids?
40 Subject: Three and seven months.
41 Interviewer: Ahhh. Isn't that a great age? And a great age to do the
42 MBA program.
43 Subject: Oh, yes.
44 Interviewer: Mine are 18 and 13.
45 Subject: Really.
46 Interviewer: It would have been better to do this when they were
47 little. They go to bed. They don't need driving
48 anywhere.
49 Subject: (laughs) Yeah.
50 Interviewer: So what do you do here?
51 Subject: Here, I am a property manager. So my main role is to
52 collect rent. And then there are other things. Like
53 today we had a fire inspection. Stuff like that.
54 Interviewer: Okay. So how long ago did you first think about getting
55 an MBA?
56 Subject: Probably when I first graduated from college?
57 Interviewer: Why was that?
58 Subject: Because a lot of my friends went into law and they did
59 it at University of Florida. But I moved to Atlanta. And
60 then I came here. And I actually, one of my – a couple
61 people I know went to USF. One is Rupesh Shaw. He
62 was at Wellcare. And my second cousin, his name is
63 Durpan. He was there.
64 Interviewer: Okay. So you have heard about USF, a little bit of word-
65 of-mouth from family.
66 Subject: Yes. And my uncle, Dr. Kiran Patel.
67 Interviewer: Oh, I had no idea that was your uncle.
68 Subject: Yes.
69 Interviewer: He's quite familiar with USF.
70 Subject: That's the main reason (*chuckling*).
71 Interviewer: Okay. Great. So was there a particular incident that led
72 you to think about getting an MBA? You mentioned
73 friends going to law school, was there something at
74 Wells Fargo?
75 Subject: I think I just need more money.
76 Interviewer: Okay.

77 Subject: Yeah.
78 Interviewer: And what did you think the long-term benefit would
79 be from getting an MBA?
80 Subject: Long-term, really my salary. And that's pretty much it.
81 Interviewer: And did you think about any short-term benefits?
82 Subject: Yes. Really, for, like, my responsibilities at work.
83 Interviewer: How so?
84 Subject: Well, I think it would help the company more. If there
85 were somebody that had – if I got my MBA, the
86 company would be better.
87 Interviewer: And did you think there would be any headaches?
88 Subject: Yes (*laughing*). There are always headaches.
89 Interviewer: What kind of headaches?
90 Subject: Well, just balancing work life and family life.
91 Interviewer: Okay. So have you actually – it sounds like you have
92 done some researching of programs. How long did you
93 actually think about it before you began researching
94 programs? I am guessing ten years. Nine, ten years?
95 Subject: (*laughing*) that's a long time. I know. It's been on my
96 mind. You're right.
97 Interviewer: But how long have you seriously been thinking about
98 it?
99 Subject: Couple of years.
100 Interviewer: And so have you decided – you haven't decided yet if
101 you want to do it, I suppose, but did you think about
102 MBA first, and then where would I get it? Or did you
103 think, "I want a graduate degree at USF, which one do I
104 want to go for?"
105 Subject: Well, now I am really thinking about public/private.
106 And I think the University of Tampa is private. And I
107 think that I am better off doing public, because I went
108 to public school, so that is why I am thinking this is
109 better. For me.
110 Interviewer: But you have already decided on a degree? You are
111 not deciding between an MBA...
112 Subject: Oh, yeah.
113 Interviewer: Or an MS in Management or an MS in Marketing...
114 Subject: No.
115 Interviewer: Okay, so program first. Okay. Have you taken the
116 GMAT?
117 Subject: No.
118 Interviewer: So, how did you go about seeking information on the
119 programs?
120 Subject: Just online. I like the brochure. I was reading the
121 brochure.
122 Interviewer: So you downloaded the brochure?

123 Subject: Ah-huh.
124 Interviewer: Did you find all the information you needed in it?
125 Subject: Yeah.
126 Interviewer: What kind of information, specifically, were you
127 looking for?
128 Subject: Hours.
129 Interviewer: Hours meaning time of day hours?
130 Subject: Class hours.
131 Interviewer: Hours they were offered or duration of the program?
132 Subject: Duration.
133 Interviewer: So, meaning, it's going to take me two years, or
134 because the classes are offered at night?
135 Subject: Two years.
136 Interviewer: Okay. What other kind of information were you
137 looking for?
138 Subject: Well, you know I went over there [to the info session]
139 and they were talking about going to China. And my
140 main concern is whether I want to spend \$40,000. You
141 know, is it worth it? But, I really do want to do it.
142 Interviewer: And were you looking at program content? You know
143 the kind of classes that you were going to study? Or
144 were there other things that you were looking at?
145 Obviously the international trip.
146 Subject: Well, yeah. I mean, finance is really important.
147 Interviewer: So, I heard you mention a number of things. One was
148 the return on investment.
149 Subject: Yes.
150 Interviewer: One was the international trip. Program content. The
151 duration of the program. A public versus a private.
152 How are you going to balance this in your life? And is
153 this going to help you make more money. Out of all of
154 those things, which would you say was the very most
155 important to you in making this decision?
156 Subject: Hmm. Most important decision I want to make with
157 this is if you know, if I do get this job that I do make a
158 better salary. That's the main importance. So that,
159 that it's worth going.
160 Interviewer: So, again, it goes back to that return on investment.
161 Subject: Yes. Exactly.
162 Interviewer: Okay. Um, so once you decided – or as you decide – on
163 the degree, what universities did you consider? I
164 heard USF and UT. Have you looked at any others?
165 Subject: No.
166 Interviewer: And is that all you plan to look at?
167 Subject: Yeah.
168 Interviewer: Alright. What stuck out about these two for you?

169 Subject: Well, USF, now, because it's public, that's why I am
170 considering that way. Plus, some of my friends have
171 taken it, too. A couple of my friends.

172 Interviewer: In the Executive program or the traditional?
173 Subject: I think it is called COBA. And they have some classes
174 over here, in downtown. Yeah.

175 Interviewer: Soon they may be offering a class or two at CAMLS
176 (USF Health's downtown facility). For MBA or
177 entrepreneurship students, I think, one or two classes
178 there.

179 Subject: Wow.

180 Interviewer: Not for the Executive MBA.

181 Subject: Uh-huh. In there?

182 Interviewer: But for the traditional MBA at the College of Business.

183 Subject: Wow. That's really good.

184 Interviewer: I am not sure when that's going to start (*unintelligible*).

185 Subject: That's really good. Because I have been here, they've
186 built that whole thing.

187 Interviewer: Um, okay, so you did attend the information session.
188 How was it?

189 Subject: Good. Very good.

190 Interviewer: Why do you say that?

191 Subject: Well, I really like the fact that it's new. It is nice, it's
192 really nice; they have done, like, some renovation over
193 there.

194 Interviewer: You mean the facility.

195 Subject: Yeah. It's very nice.

196 Interviewer: Okay. And what else?

197 Subject: Well, you know, just. It's time. I think it is time. It's
198 time.

199 Interviewer: So, when looking at the factors that were important to
200 you as you determined which institution you would
201 attend, you've mentioned location – being Tampa, not
202 downtown versus other. Location, the facility, was
203 there anything else that was important to you as you
204 determined the university?

205 Subject: (*uneasy pause*)

206 Interviewer: Did you consider a Phoenix or a Southeastern or...

207 Subject: No.

208 Interviewer: Why not.

209 Subject: Just because that's not – if I can get into USF I would be
210 happy there.

211 Interviewer: Did accreditation matter?

212 Subject: Yes.

213 Interviewer: The way you were nodding your head...

214 Subject: (*laughing*)

215 Interviewer: ...led me to believe that you didn't think much of those.
216 Of the Phoenix. Or the South Univ...

217 Subject: No.

218 Interviewer: Because of accreditation?

219 Subject: Yeah (*chuckling*).

220 Interviewer: Um, so, out of location, facility, accreditation, or
221 reputation, which was most important to you?

222 Subject: I would go with reputation.

223 Interviewer: Okay, so what are your career goals? Short-term and
224 long-term.

225 Subject: I want to be able to focus more on my responsibilities
226 here. And long-term, I want to be, like, the CEO.

227 Interviewer: What kind of company? I mean, this company?
228 Another company?

229 Subject: I would really like to stay here. That's why I am in
230 limbo. Because I am – now I am doing well. So I need
231 to decide, so I want to go on Sa – I mean, I don't mind
232 going on Saturdays, it's just all about, well, investment.
233 Yeah.

234 Interviewer: Well, that's actually my last question here. It's how
235 long do you think it will take before you see a return
236 on your investment in terms of time or money? How
237 long do you think it would take?

238 Subject: I think three years.

239 Interviewer: Three years before you think it was worth it?

240 Subject: Yeah.

241 Interviewer: And why do you say that?

242 Subject: Well, I think because the first couple of years you are
243 still, you know, in that class mode. And then you start
244 really using all of that work.

245 Interviewer: So do you mean three years after graduation, or three
246 years including the time it takes to do it?

247 Subject: I would say after.

248 Interviewer: After. Okay.

249 Subject: Yeah.

250 Interviewer: So when do you think you might start? Because the
251 Executive [MBA] only starts once a year.

252 Subject: Yeah.

253 Interviewer: So you would have to be taking that test pretty soon.

254 Subject: The GMAT?

255 Interviewer: Ah-huh. Because if it starts in August, I think the
256 applications are due in June, maybe July. So you'll need
257 to take the GMAT before June.

258 Subject: Before June?

259 Interviewer: I think. I am not in admissions, but I think that is it.

260 Subject: Yeah, that sounds right.

261 Interviewer: Admissions aren't my responsibility at all, I'm just
262 looking at this, but knowing they start - the Executive
263 MBA only starts in August.
264 Subject: Yeah.
265 Interviewer: Great. Anything else you'd like to add?
266 Subject: No. I just really think USF is really the way things are
267 going. I have just done a lot of research and I think that
268 is a very good school.
269 Interviewer: Good.

#

#

#

Interview Date: January 10, 2013
Interview Location: Via telephone
Interview Subject: Lenny, 35 year old male, Prospect #6
Interview Duration: 24 minutes

Lenny is a married male who is considering an MBA program but has not yet made the commitment to the degree program or to a university. His ethnicity/race and marital status were not revealed during the interview, which was conducted via phone as the planned Skype interview was unable to be conducted due to technical difficulties. Lenny indicated that he had recently decided to take a course via USF's continuing education program, one that allows him to "test the water" and take classes for a business certificate program, courses that could potentially be applied toward MBA work. He works full-time in management and in the IT arena for a telecom company.

1 Interviewer: I just have twenty questions for you. It should take
2 about twenty minutes or less, sometimes a little
3 longer. Starting here with the hard one. How old are
4 you?
5 Subject: Oh, no, no, that's not hard. I am 85 (interviewer
6 laughs). No, no, I am just kidding. I am 35.
7 Interviewer: Okay. And, um, where did you attend school for your
8 undergraduate degree?
9 Subject: In the Dominican Republic. That's in the Caribbean.
10 Yes, I attended the Pontificio Catholic University.
11 Interviewer: How long ago did you graduate?
12 Subject: What?
13 Interviewer: How long ago did you graduate?
14 Subject: Oh, that was ten years ago.
15 Interviewer: Okay. And what did you study while you were there?
16 Subject: I studied a Bachelor's of Science in electrical
17 engineering. Over there it is called telematics
18 engineering. My major was in telecommunications.
19 Interviewer: Did you work while going to school? Or have you
20 worked since you graduated? Or both?
21 Subject: Repeat that, please?
22 Interviewer: Did you work while going to school?
23 Subject: I worked only for one year.
24 Interviewer: Okay.
25 Subject: One year and a half. Something around there. One
26 year, one year and a half. But then I quit the job and
27 went full-time.
28 Interviewer: Okay. And what have you done as a career since you
29 graduated?

30 Subject: Um, I would say a mix of telecom and [information
31 technology].
32 Interviewer: Okay.
33 Subject: I work completely now in IT, but within the telecom
34 company, still.
35 Interviewer: Like a Verizon or something like that?
36 Subject: Yes, correct. I work in Verizon.
37 Interviewer: Oh, that is your company (*laughing*)? I was guessing.
38 Subject: Yes, yes. I thought maybe you saw it in a signature, in
39 an email signature or something like that.
40 Interviewer: Okay. And are you a U.S. citizen?
41 Subject: Yes. I was born in Brooklyn, New York.
42 Interviewer: Okay. What made you choose to go to school in the
43 Dominican Republic?
44 Subject: Oh, I didn't have a choice. My mom sent me over there.
45 Well, the thing is, my mom, she had a business, a
46 supermarket in the Dominican Republic and she
47 wanted to be present there for her business to
48 succeed. And, you know, being her son, you know, I –
49 mom takes you wherever she wants.
50 Interviewer: Yep!
51 Subject: So that's why I ended up in the Dominican Republic. I
52 lived there for about, ah, almost twenty years.
53 Interviewer: Okay. But you're, you – where do you live right now?
54 Subject: I live here, in Tampa.
55 Interviewer: Okay. Alright. So, how long ago did you first start
56 thinking about getting an MBA?
57 Subject: How long ago, um (*long pause*)...I would say...maybe
58 uh, like somewhat like six or eight months ago. Nine
59 months ago. Yeah.
60 Interviewer: Okay. Was there something that happened, or a
61 particular incident, that led you to start to think about
62 the MBA? Or was there a particular reason you began
63 to think about it?
64 Subject: Yes. I wanted to diversify. You know, looking at myself
65 as basically a product. I asked myself, you know, what
66 I have to offer, you know, if, let's say, worst case
67 scenario, if I am laid off. Or if, another scenario, maybe
68 I decide that, you know, I want to take another
69 direction or change jobs or be somewhat resilient. So
70 that I am not depending on just one skill set. And,
71 basically my job, for the last five years, has been – my
72 skill sets are very narrow and focused in technology.
73 And, even though that technology is broad, but I want
74 to have – to diversify myself and to have – and to also
75 learn something or acquire skills that can help me

76 become independent. So that one day maybe I'll start
77 my own business or maybe one day, you know, make
78 some savvy business decisions that financially help out
79 myself and my family.

80 Interviewer: And, what did you – you danced around this answer
81 already – but what did you think the long-term benefit
82 of getting an MBA.

83 Subject: Just to clarify, before I answer that question, I am not,
84 in a strict sense, in the MBA program. I am in the
85 graduate business foundations certificate degree. You
86 know, I, um, so I don't know how you got me in your
87 system that – it might appear that I am an MBA
88 student but I am not.

89 Interviewer: Right.

90 Subject: I enrolled in the graduate certificate.

91 Interviewer: Right, yeah, I know that. Because I am looking for
92 people who are not yet MBAs but have thought about
93 it as well as people who are in it.

94 Subject: Oh, okay. Okay, I just wanted to clarify. You kept
95 referring to the MBA student, you know, I don't want
96 to give you, you know, the wrong impression.

97 Interviewer: Yeah. You're not there yet, you are thinking about it.

98 Subject: Exactly, yeah. I wanted to test the waters and see if I
99 really end up liking it. But going back to your question
100 – your question was again, I'm sorry.

101 Interviewer: What did you think the long-term benefit would be if
102 you were to go for the MBA?

103 Subject: Oh, um, well, I looked at it from a personal perspective
104 of that I would acquire some business skills and
105 complement the technical skills that I have. And let's
106 say if I decide to stay within corporate America at least
107 I will have more mobility in the company. Going
108 upwards in high management positions and/or maybe
109 changing fields, going into more business, a more
110 business-like job. But if I don't decide to stay
111 (unintelligible) working in the company then at least I
112 will have the tools to start my own business. At least,
113 that's what I hope to learn from the MBA and the
114 certificate.

115 Interviewer: Okay. Did you think there would be any short-term
116 benefits?

117 Subject: Yes, I would start looking at things from, you know,
118 from the perspective of a business person, you know.
119 Not so strictly in the technical sense. And that was also
120 one of the reasons that inherently made me want to
121 choose something that would complement my

122 technical skills, in this case, business. Because I was in
123 a situation – well, I partly was in a situation where a
124 then-critical situation was going on in outage and – in
125 service outage – and, the – even though in my
126 department we knew what to fix in a technical sense,
127 to make things work again, the decision was made to
128 go ahead and do it by a business person, by an
129 executive. So that kind of gave me the sense that, you
130 know, I am here, working, you know, fixing and
131 maintaining and guiding the network but at the end of
132 the day it boils down to an executive making the
133 decision, a business person who doesn't know exactly
134 how to fix it but he's the one that calls the shots. So I
135 am not really then basically anything. I am just a
136 monkey here. The one that does, you know, the one
137 that pushes the button that needs to be pushed. Can I
138 push it? And he says yes or no. So I am not really
139 linking it to this.

140 Interviewer: Okay. So do you think there will be any headaches
141 involved with getting a graduate business degree?

142 Subject: Oh yes, I'm sure. Yeah, yeah.

143 Interviewer: *(laughing)*

144 Subject: Any degree can be, you know, categorized as more
145 easy than another. It might have less, um, you know,
146 less "stressful situation," you know, and that I've
147 known because I have some friends that have studied
148 medicine, went to medical school. They tell me stories
149 that they are in situations where they are trying to
150 come up with a diagnostic on saving lives. I know
151 that's going to be more stressful than me fixing a
152 service for somebody that can't watch TV. I know they
153 aren't going to die if they can't watch CNN or Matlock.

154 Interviewer: *(chuckling)* They might think they can!

155 Subject: Yeah *(chuckling)*. So there, it's, you know – it's not
156 either less or more easier. All of them come with some
157 level of difficulty.

158 Interviewer: Okay. So, you've been – you started thinking about this
159 six or eight months ago, how long before you began
160 researching programs?

161 Subject: Well, um, researching programs – I would say... *(long*
162 *pause)* as soon as I thought about it I started, you
163 know, researching programs. But I – it was – I
164 narrowed down my choices pretty fast for me because
165 I didn't want to do an online program, which there I
166 would have more of a broader spectrum of choices.
167 Here I just said, "Well, I would like to go to a

168 traditional brick and mortar university, you know, be
169 present there. So I narrowed it down to USF or UT .
170 That's it.

171 Interviewer: That's it, no other? Okay. And, um, how did you find
172 out information about USF and UT and their programs.

173 Subject: Online. Checking their websites, and then, um, I have a
174 few friends and I checked with them. Checked with
175 people who went through a UT MBA and then, um,
176 unfortunately, I didn't find anybody with an MBA from
177 USF, but I did find some people that did a bachelor's in
178 management information systems. You know, they
179 told that they did a little bit of business courses there,
180 so that's how I kind of, um, narrowed it down.

181 Interviewer: So before you started researching, you didn't know
182 about the certificate program, I'm assuming.

183 Subject: No, no, I, um, I knew about the, um, that USF had some
184 certificate programs but I didn't know specifically that
185 they had one for business. Yeah, I – at that time, when I
186 went in I was just wandering around the certificate
187 page – I mean USF's certificate webpage – and looking
188 at an engineering certificate since I have a background
189 in engineering. My bachelor's was in engineering so I
190 was just looking around, seeing how difficult it was
191 and then, that's when I bumped into business.

192 Interviewer: Okay. And so, the things I have heard you say that
193 were important factors to you as you considered this
194 program were the opportunity to strengthen your
195 skillsets and make yourself more marketable, financial
196 benefit or job security for your family, the opportunity
197 to change fields, maybe even become an entrepreneur,
198 um, you wanted online classes. Out of all of these
199 things, what was the most important thing for you?

200 Subject: Oh, just to correct something, I didn't say I wanted
201 online classes.

202 Interviewer: Right, that you wanted no online classes.

203 Subject: Exactly. No online. Yes. And now your question is?

204 Interviewer: Out of all of those things, what was the one thing that
205 was the most important thing you were thinking about
206 during all of this?

207 Subject: (*long pause*) Diversify. You know, diversity myself. To
208 have, um, you know, other skill sets that would open
209 other doors.

210 Interviewer: Okay, and when you were looking at the particular
211 websites and pages to look at, what kind of
212 information were you looking for?

213 Subject: The curriculum, like what courses I would have to take
214 and hopefully find some description of the courses.
215 And, um, and also information about the schedule,
216 potential schedule, you know, something that would
217 draw me a picture, a big picture of how life would be if
218 I was to decide to go for it.

219 Interviewer: Okay. Okay. Hang on, I'm trying to write this down. So,
220 the – did you attend UT's information session?

221 Subject: No, no. I didn't even – I kind of, um, discarded UT also
222 because of – it is not going to be as close as USF, one.
223 Second, it's more expensive. Third, I um, um, I saw a –
224 I'm trying to remember. If I remember correctly, I saw
225 their curriculum and... I don't know right now. I
226 remember it was something about the curriculum that
227 I didn't kind of like much. Um, you know so *(pause)* I
228 don't have – it kind of gave me the feeling that it was
229 going to be an uphill battle to get into their MBA. Yeah,
230 I don't know. I kind of find that with USF, with the
231 graduate certificate I got the perception – I hope I am
232 not wrong once I go through with that – that USF was
233 offering a path, a thoughtful path, to get you to obtain
234 an MBA. You know, by offering you a foundational
235 course for those that don't have the business
236 background or the business degree.

237 Interviewer: Right.

238 Subject: I kind of thought that by having the business, the
239 graduate business foundation it was more of like a
240 strategic way to get you to obtain an MBA if you decide
241 to go for it. I do see UT as more of like an uphill
242 journey.

243 Interviewer: That's my understanding of it as well. I mean, I am not
244 involved in that but that is the way that I understand
245 it. Is that it is kind of the pathway, kind of once you
246 successfully do that, as long as you make certain
247 grades, then you – other than taking the GMAT – are
248 ready to go in.

249 Subject: *(unintelligible)*

250 Interviewer: So then, how would you rate – oh, never mind, I
251 already asked you that question. So how long do you
252 think it will take for you to see a monetary gain or a
253 return on your investment when it comes to this
254 degree?

255 Subject: *(pause)* Wow. That's a hard one. That's a hard
256 question I am not going to be able to answer. I am not
257 sure there.

258 Interviewer: What would it take for you to be able to say, "This was
259 worth it?"
260 Subject: If I, if I see that, um, let's say, if it opens a door for, to
261 get into a job that I see that needs some business skills.
262 Or if I find myself in a situation at work where those
263 business skills I saw that help me arrive at a decision
264 or help to resolve something. That's all I can think of
265 right now.
266 Interviewer: So you how long after you get your degree do you
267 think it would take for that to happen?
268 Subject: I am sorry, what did you say?
269 Interviewer: How long do – do you think that would happen
270 immediately as you got your degree program, or
271 maybe after the degree? When do you think you
272 would be able to apply what you have learned?
273 Subject: Well, um, that's a difficult question. Specifically in the
274 job that I am at right now, I don't foresee that would
275 happen any time soon. Maybe after I am almost done
276 with the certificate but I don't see that happening with
277 the job that I am at right now.
278 Interviewer: Okay. I think that's all the questions I have. Do you
279 have anything you want to add?
280 Subject: No, no, that's basically it, yeah. Well, now after we
281 finish this, I would like to ask you personally, um, a
282 couple of questions, but not related to the survey in
283 itself.
284 Interviewer: Okay.
285

#

#

#

Interview Date: January 23, 2013
Interview Location: USF College of Business
Interview Subject: Dani, 35 year old female, Prospect #7
Interview Duration: 20 +/- minutes

Dani is a single Caucasian female who is considering an MBA program but has not yet made the commitment to the degree program or to a university. She indicated that she had recently attended an information session for graduate business programs but that is as far as she has carried her inquiries. During the course of the interview, it was discovered that Dani currently holds a job that the interviewer previously held for many years in a local non-profit agency. There was a fair amount of banter about this coincidence and the mutual acquaintances as a result. During the interview the recorder malfunctioned, so only the latter portion of the conversation was captured. However, since this was noted before Dani left the premises, the interviewer summarized the conversation based on her notes and Dani agreed that the essence of the conversation had been captured.

1 Interviewer: So you definitely thought about program first?
2 Subject: Yeah, mm-hmm. Yep, program first.
3 Interviewer: So have you taken the GMAT?
4 Subject: Not yet. No. Or the GRE.
5 Interviewer: How did you go about seeking information on the
6 programs?
7 Subject: I went online. I did look online to see what programs
8 you guys have, et cetera. The basic information.
9 Interviewer: What kind of information were you seeking?
10 Subject: Um, basically, what do you guys offer, do you have an
11 MBA, do you have just a regular MBA, do you have
12 EMBA? I mean, what options are available. And then,
13 of course, the costs involved as well. Which is a huge
14 question mark for everybody.
15 Interviewer: And are you looking at the MBA or the Executive MBA,
16 or you haven't decided?
17 Subject: That's what - I guess that's what I, I am a little bit torn
18 on right now, because I feel like the EMBA fits into my
19 schedule but I don't know, I just am still a little torn on
20 that one.
21 Interviewer: Okay. So what factors were important to you as you
22 began to research the programs? For instance, were
23 you looking at program content or other factors?
24 Subject: Um, Yeah, content. And as far as reputation, I mean,
25 obviously you want to go to a school that has a
26 reputation for having people that are successful after
27 they achieve their MBA. So things like that were - are
28 - important to me.

29 Interviewer: Okay. So, as you've talked here, I've heard you mention
30 career progression, learning business information or
31 lingo, kind of the usefulness of the degree, face-to-face
32 contact, cost, program content, and reputation. Out of
33 all of those things, which would you say was the most
34 important thing that you've considered?

35 Subject: Hmmm. Probably career progression to me is one of
36 the big things.

37 Interviewer: Great. Was there anything else you considered that I
38 haven't given you a chance to tell me?

39 Subject: Hmmm. I don't think so. I think that pretty much is a
40 good synopsis of everything.

41 Interviewer: Okay. Once you decided – well, you haven't yet decided
42 to go for the degree . . .

43 Subject: Right.

44 Interviewer: What universities are you considering? You've already
45 mentioned USF, UT, maybe St. Leo?

46 Subject: I haven't looked into theirs, but I know they do offer
47 one, so . . .

48 Interviewer: Okay. How did you go about seeking information on
49 the specific universities? You already said you went to
50 an information session. Did you seek word-of-mouth
51 reviews from friends?

52 Subject: Um... I haven't done that yet. Actually, that is a good
53 option so (laughing) thanks for the suggestion!

54 Interviewer: Did you ask co-workers, kind of, about institutions?

55 Subject: I did, actually. I did talk to one of my co-workers that
56 did the MBA here, I believe. At USF, so . . .

57 Interviewer: Okay.

58 Subject: I talked with her about that.

59 Interviewer: Great. And what factors were important to you as you
60 think about USF vs. UT? Or whatever.

61 Subject: I think that for me it's just maybe the, um, probably,
62 like the reputation and just the experience overall.
63 Because, as I said, you know, I had the big school
64 experience. So I am kind of torn. Do I want to try
65 another "I'm in a huge institution" experience or do I
66 want to go for something small and private.

67 Interviewer: And so, all along, what is the one thing that is most
68 important. What do you want to get out of this?
69 What's – what's, you mentioned the program
70 experience, but what's most important to you all
71 along?

72 Subject: I think still the career, I mean, as far as like, career
73 progression, yes, definitely. Really how can I apply it to

74 my everyday life, how can I be even more successful
75 with the information that I will get from the MBA?
76 Interviewer: So, the next two questions you have already really
77 mentioned. What are your career aspirations, short-
78 term and long-term? Long-term I am hearing you say
79 possibly the E.D. (executive director) or CEO of a non-
80 profit.
81 Subject: Absolutely.
82 Interviewer: So you definitely want to stay in non-profit?
83 Subject: I think so, yeah.
84 Interviewer: Okay. And what about your short-term career goals?
85 Subject: Short-term? Um, pssh (laughing and pause). I've been,
86 like, thinking about the long-term! I haven't thought
87 that much about the short-term! I guess for me it's
88 just always a chance to grow, to learn. I mean, those
89 are my everyday goals. You'll learn something every
90 day. Try to grow personally and professionally every
91 day and, um, have fun, too. You can't leave out the fun,
92 so... (laughing).
93 Interviewer: So, how long do you think it will take before you would
94 be able to see a monetary gain as a result of earning
95 this degree?
96 Subject: I don't know. You know, I really don't. That's, um,
97 maybe one of the questions I am still, you know, that I
98 have a question mark on, because we kind of went
99 through the earning potentials but, honestly, to me, it
100 didn't seem like that much of a jump. You know, with
101 the MBA. That is part of the reason, like, that I haven't,
102 you know, gone forward with the idea.
103 Interviewer: So if you were to get the degree and you didn't see a
104 huge monetary jump, but it opened a door for you,
105 would that then make you say it ...
106 Subject: That would still, be impressive. Yeah, that would still
107 be worth it. It would. And again, you've still got the
108 personal growth and everything that you would
109 achieve. I mean, everybody - I do know people that
110 have gotten their MBA and they do say, like, "Hey, it is
111 definitely, it changes your life." You know, it is
112 something that, um, you are always happy that you
113 did.
114 Interviewer: Perfect. Um, I want to go back and check and make
115 sure that was recording!
116 Subject: (laughing)
117 Interviewer: Before I go and do that, do you have anything else you
118 want to add?
119 Subject: No, not really.

120 Interviewer: I didn't ask, do you have kids?
121 Subject: No, I don't.
122 Interviewer: And you live in Tampa, right? For demographic
123 purposes.
124 Subject: Yeah.
125 Interviewer: So, let's check this recording device (discovers first
126 portion of interview did not record properly). Okay, so
127 the first eight questions that I asked you, um, you
128 attended USF for your undergraduate degree.
129 Subject: Yes, I did.
130 Interviewer: You graduated in 2001 with a degree in microbiology.
131 You were planning to always go back to grad school
132 but you didn't necessarily know ex –
133 Subject: Exactly what degree, yes.
134 Interviewer: You are currently not using your degree.
135 Subject: No.
136 Interviewer: You are working at Big Brothers Big Sisters; you do
137 training and match activities.
138 Subject: Yep.
139 Interviewer: You first began thinking about the MBA six months to
140 a year ago, and the particular incident that led you to
141 see that was that you started to see kind of like a void
142 in the non-profit world in terms of business acumen or
143 knowledge. And because you eventually would like to
144 be promoted.
145 Subject: Yeah. Exactly.
146 Interviewer: Possibly become a CEO.
147 Subject: Yes.
148 Interviewer: The long-term benefit for you would be the
149 opportunity to be in charge of an agency, as a CEO or
150 an executive director. The short-term goal for you
151 would be that you like to learn. And you want to gain
152 that business knowledge.
153 Subject: Yes.
154 Interviewer: And, in terms of headaches, you (both interviewer and
155 subject laugh) acknowledge that, um, yeah, there is a
156 bit of work. Um, that you might have no social life. And
157 that sometimes grad school can cause a strain on
158 relationships.
159 Subject: They are all very true.
160 Interviewer: Is that all accurate? I got it?
161 Subject: Those are all accurate, yes.
162 Interviewer: Okay. And you're 35 years old and your name is
163 "Dani," for this purpose.
164 Subject: Yes.

#

#

#

Interview Date: January 24, 2013
Interview Location: USF College of Business
Interview Subject: John, 34 year old male, Prospect #8
Interview Duration: 18 minutes

John is a divorced Caucasian male with no children, but he has a girlfriend who has two children and is expecting his child. He is considering an MBA program. Retired from the military, John still works at MacDill AFB, doing so as a civilian employee (Department of Defense) at Special Operations Command.

1 Interviewer: So, obviously you have a bachelor's degree. Where did
2 you attend school and when did you graduate?
3 Subject: USF, August 2005.
4 Interviewer: What did you study here?
5 Subject: International Relations. International studies.
6 Interviewer: So not a business student?
7 Subject: No.
8 Interviewer: That's in humanities? What is...?
9 Subject: It's in the College of Arts and Sciences.
10 Interviewer: Arts and Sciences? I had somebody else that I
11 interviewed that had the degree and background. So
12 what did you, when you were graduating, did you
13 think you would be doing with that degree?
14 Subject: Well, I already worked for the government. In the
15 intelligence community, so I wasn't - sometimes you
16 need that bachelor's degree to check a block, so to
17 speak. And I was active duty military when I was here.
18 And I graduated, so I was stationed at MacDill. So you
19 can see that it kind of lined up just to come here and
20 take the evening and weekend classes, online classes.
21 Get the degree that way. So I did.
22 Interviewer: Are you still active duty?
23 Subject: No.
24 Interviewer: Okay. And so then you worked, obviously, while going
25 to school?
26 Subject: Yes.
27 Interviewer: And do you, have you, stayed in the same job? I am
28 thinking obviously not.
29 Subject: Same career field. Definitely yes.
30 Interviewer: Okay. What do you do now?
31 Subject: I am an intelligence analyst.
32 Interviewer: What company?
33 Subject: I am a government employee. So you can put
34 Department of Defense. Defense intelligence agency,
35 U.S. SOCOM.
36 Interviewer: Oh. But you are a civilian employee at SOCOM.

37 Subject: That is correct.

38 Interviewer: Okay. And how many years of work experience do you
39 have?

40 Subject: (*pause*) Probably close to 14, 15.

41 Interviewer: Really? Well how long ago did you first starting
42 thinking about pursuing an MBA?

43 Subject: Probably about four months ago. Three or four months
44 ago.

45 Interviewer: Oh, relatively quickly.

46 Subject: Yes.

47 Interviewer: Was there a particular incident that led you to do that?

48 Subject: No. Just trying to increase my marketability for future
49 scenarios.

50 Interviewer: Were you passed over for anything or did you think
51 about applying for something?

52 Subject: Well, I am always passed over for everything, but...
53 (*Slightly sarcastic tone*)

54 Interviewer: (*chuckles*)

55 Subject: Nothing in particular. But if I had a business degree.
56 No, nothing like that.

57 Interviewer: So you are just forward thinking.

58 Subject: Right. Trying to be, yeah.

59 Interviewer: Alright. What did you think the long-term benefit –
60 you just told me – of having an MBA would be?

61 Subject: Eventually to leave government service and get a job
62 in corporate America. Or, at a minimum, enhance my
63 career progression in the government.

64 Interviewer: And did you think about any short-term benefits?

65 Subject: (*pause*) Um, not really. No.

66 Interviewer: Do you think there will be any headaches involved. . .

67 Subject: A little.

68 Interviewer: . . . in getting an MBA?

69 Subject: Several. Sure, I mean, if it were easy everybody would
70 have one. So...

71 Interviewer: True. What kind of headaches to you think might be
72 involved?

73 Subject: Mainly family issues. My girlfriend has two kids and
74 we have one on the way. So it is going to be an
75 automatic job. (*Interrupted by interviewer sneezing and*
76 *resulting "bless you's."*) If I go back to Afghanistan,
77 that's always a possibility, so that might take me out of
78 the game for a semester, maybe two. So there are
79 always work-related and family-related issues.

80 Interviewer: Okay. So – you've actually already answered this one
81 sort of, too – how long did you think about it before
82 you began researching programs?

83 Subject: I came to the – I don't know how I thought about it – I
84 just looked it up online and it was – there was an
85 information seminar the next week. That was like,
86 November or something. October, November
87 timeframe.
88 Interviewer: So you didn't see an ad that led you to that, you just
89 thought, "I should explore getting an MBA and..."
90 Subject: Right.
91 Interviewer: So had you decided you wanted to come back to USF
92 and then thought about the degree, or had you
93 thought, were you thinking "I want an MBA and USF
94 may be one of the choices."
95 Subject: The latter. I was thinking about the MBA and USF is on
96 my way home, so ... and I had been here before.
97 Interviewer: Okay.
98 Subject: I love the school. I just – I have a master's degree from
99 Troy University that I got in residence at their campus
100 on Kennedy Boulevard – and as useful as that is, it's
101 somewhat useful – again, it's not meeting my desire to
102 diversify myself and make myself more marketable for
103 future opportunities.
104 Interviewer: What other universities might you consider?
105 Subject: (*pause*) I would have to look, probably. I am not a fan
106 of online schools. I took a couple of classes online both
107 for my master's and bachelor's and it wasn't really
108 enamored with it. It would have to be USF. I can't
109 imagine going to UT or anything like that
110 (*unintelligible*).
111 Interviewer: Great. So have you taken the GMAT yet?
112 Subject: No I have not.
113 Interviewer: Or the GRE? Any entry test?
114 Subject: No.
115 Interviewer: How did you go about seeking information on the
116 programs? You mentioned online.
117 Subject: I went to the on-site information seminar and I came
118 in, probably in the middle of December, to speak with
119 the coordinator for the certificate program.
120 Unfortunately the timeline that they needed was a
121 little too accelerated for me to catch up for this spring
122 semester. Even though classes start, you know, first
123 week of March, I needed to have everything in by the
124 first week of January, which, to me, defeats the
125 purpose of rolling admissions, but, you know, here I
126 am. Ready to start but if I start it will have to be the
127 fall.
128 Interviewer: So you are looking at a fall start?

129 Subject: If anything. If I do start, yeah.
130 Interviewer: Right. And what factors were you looking at as you
131 began to research the programs? What kind of
132 information were you looking at pertaining to the
133 program?
134 Subject: Of course, was always looking at entrance
135 requirements. Looking for a program that catered to
136 the working professional. Evening, maybe weekend
137 classes like with my other master's. So those were the
138 kind of, the two primary things. And then I talked to
139 someone – her name escapes me – that talked with me
140 about how quickly I could get it done. The certificate
141 program didn't appear all that challenging as far as
142 time. Length.
143 Interviewer: And the certificate program is simply an entryway into
144 the MBA?
145 Subject: Right, exactly. And it serves two purposes for me. One,
146 it would give me something and, two, it would set me
147 up for future [classes]. It is the perfect scenario for me.
148 Interviewer: Did you know about that before you started exploring
149 this option?
150 Subject: No. No, not until I went to the information seminar.
151 Interviewer: So that's where you learned about it, at the info
152 session?
153 Subject: Yes.
154 Interviewer: That does appeal to you, then?
155 Subject: Absolutely, yes. It does.
156 Interviewer: So the factors that I have heard you mention are
157 marketability and the ability to diversify your skills,
158 the opportunity to enhance your career progression,
159 you wanted face-to-face, no online classes . . .
160 Subject: Preferably.
161 Interviewer: . . . can you get in/the entry requirements, the
162 [program that is tailored toward] the working
163 professional, the duration/how long it is going to take
164 you to complete. Out of all of those, which would you
165 say is the most important?
166 Subject: I would say the diversification. You know,
167 marketability. Same thing.
168 Interviewer: Okay.
169 Subject: I have two liberal arts degrees and it is not always the
170 most marketable in these economic times. So, it's great
171 in government now, but before I move on I need
172 something different.

173 Interviewer: What is your long-term career goal? Do you want to
174 stay – it sounds like you don’t want to stay in, kind of,
175 D.O.D. . . .

176 Subject: It’s not that I don’t want to stay, it’s just that I don’t see
177 the – it’s a changing world. Missions change.
178 Government policies change. I mean, I am sure you are
179 familiar with the, um, potential furloughed employees
180 coming up in March. I mean, there’s a lot of, a lot of
181 negative – I don’t want to say negative – different
182 challenges.

183 Interviewer: Challenges?

184 Subject: Challenges, that’s a good way to put it.

185 Interviewer: Okay. So you’re thinking ahead. Kind of, if those
186 challenges impact you.

187 Subject: Right.

188 Interviewer: Well, I am going to just jump ahead here. So that’s kind
189 of your long-term career goals. What are your short-
190 term career goals?

191 Subject: Well, I mean (*stumbling over words*) as far as having a
192 job, I’m pretty safe. However, [my chances to] advance,
193 those chances are dwindling, it seems. So, I mean, I
194 could either stay where I am at and be comfortable, or
195 I can venture out and... I have a friend who just got a
196 job at Citigroup and he has no business background
197 whatsoever. I think he has a bachelor’s in business,
198 but I mean, beyond that -- or a bachelor’s in
199 management or something like that – there are
200 opportunities out there that I think my skillset already
201 have. Add my MBA or a certificate to that and it would
202 be something – you know a lot better than just having
203 a business background. I have cultural...

204 Interviewer: The analysis factor.

205 Subject: Right.

206 Interviewer: Citigroup is actually hiring quite a few business majors
207 for business intelligence and business data analysis
208 and so forth. So, I’m going to go back up. So, once –
209 well you haven’t decided on the degree yet at this
210 point, you’re still in limbo. When do you think you
211 might make a decision?

212 Subject: After I see if the timeline for fall admissions might
213 work. And look backwards. As terrible as it might be,
214 we all procrastinate and put things off, so ...

215 Interviewer: So, in a sense, you need a reminder, “hey, fall
216 admissions are around the corner...”

217 Subject: Yeah. Remember, I am having a child in May or June,
218 so that might affect the timeline as well.

219 Interviewer: True. So, you did attend the in-person information
220 session.
221 Subject: Yes.
222 Interviewer: Just USF's? You didn't go to any others.
223 Subject: Right.
224 Interviewer: What did you think of it?
225 Subject: It encouraged me enough to seek out the requirements
226 and schedule a meeting, a follow-up meeting to look
227 and the timeline was just too rushed for me to really
228 complete before Christmas. I came here and they kept
229 referencing to get all these things done and I just
230 couldn't see it happening. Which is too bad? Because
231 classes haven't even started yet.
232 Interviewer: Yeah.
233 Subject: So that's my one criticism so far of this program, I
234 would say.
235 Interviewer: It's the lead time required to get in?
236 Subject: If it's open enrollment, rolling enrollment, then why
237 not, well, if I am accepted into the program and get
238 everything done in the next week, then why can't I just
239 start classes the week after, if there are some starting
240 then?
241 Interviewer: Okay (*long pause*). I'm writing this down. I mean, I
242 have it on tape. From John Elway (*the subject's*
243 *preferred alias*). So, what factors are important to you
244 as you think about which universities to attend? You
245 already mentioned your comfort with USF.
246 Subject: Right. I already have a degree from here. My ex-wife
247 went here. I am a season ticket holder for football, so I
248 get another free ticket, perhaps, if I, you know, become
249 a . . .
250 Interviewer: It's in the student section, you know (*laughing*). So
251 what is it - you mentioned, "I don't see myself
252 attending UT." What is it that makes you say that?
253 What is it that you - how do you view the two
254 universities differently?
255 Subject: I think familiarity is the key. Location. I live in Land O'
256 Lakes and work at MacDill. It's a commute, but it is
257 almost on the way.
258 Interviewer: Right.
259 Subject: I'd rather avoid traffic if I can.
260 Interviewer: Okay.
261 Subject: (*unintelligible*) I am a USF fan. I try to keep active, at
262 least through sports. Basketball and football,
263 especially.

264 Interviewer: And so you've mentioned, basically, it is the comfort of
265 USF and USF's location. Are either one of those more
266 important than the other?
267 Subject: Not really. It's just the comfort. I've been here before
268 and it is convenient.
269 Interviewer: Now, there are three things that I have not heard you
270 mention at all. I am curious if they are things that you
271 thought about or if they matter. One is the caliber of
272 the faculty. Two is accreditation. And three is cost. Are
273 these not things that you have considered?
274 Subject: The first two, no. I mean, to me it's not relevant. I
275 mean, I am sure there are others where it might. I trust
276 that the university would take the program seriously
277 and hire very competent professionals to instruct and
278 would do whatever the university can to ensure that
279 its programs are accredited.
280 Interviewer: So you really, it's not that you don't care, it's not
281 something that you went out seeking as "what kind of
282 faculty I am going to have?"
283 Subject: Right.
284 Interviewer: It's that there's a blanket level of trust that --
285 Subject: Right. There's no one professor that I am looking at or
286 one, you know, criteria that I am focused on.
287 Interviewer: And you didn't mention cost. Is that because you have
288 military benefits?
289 Subject: I have GI bill benefits to help. Which expire in a couple
290 of years. So if I transfer to a job I better get that done.
291 That's part of the timeline.
292 Interviewer: Better get started. With a newborn, take one class.
293 Subject: Yeah.
294 Interviewer: One class. Get one out of the way.
295 Subject: I would like to have been taking one or two classes
296 now but the timing screwed that up.
297 Interviewer: Get started. I started with one. Let me just see if I can
298 do one.
299 Subject: That was the idea. The schedule seemed really
300 attractive. Eight weeks. The durations were flexible
301 and varied to the point that if you really want to ...
302 Interviewer: If you push yourself you could get through quickly. But
303 if you are afraid or if your job load doesn't let you do
304 that, you can go at a much slower pace.
305 Subject: Right.
306 Interviewer: Last couple of questions here. They are related to ROI.
307 How long do you think it would take for you to see a
308 monetary gain as a result of earning the degree?

309 Subject: That depends on if I stay with the government or if I
310 jump to the corporate world.
311 Interviewer: So if you stay with the government, will you get any
312 kind of bump?
313 Subject: No. Not directly.
314 Interviewer: But if you move to corporate...
315 Subject: I would expect to. Some sort of benefit, whether it be
316 job satisfaction, financial, travel, or something.
317 Interviewer: Well that leads to the second part of this question. It's
318 what would it take – and how long do you think it
319 would take – for you to say this is worth it? If you do
320 this, you are going to have some headaches.
321 Subject: I'm sure.
322 Interviewer: What would it take for you to say it is worth it.
323 Subject: I'll probably go start looking for, you know, jobs. Not
324 now, certainly, when I am closing in on any certificate.
325 So, once again, I may not need to pursue the MBA but I
326 am going to try to hit the ground running to try to see
327 what's out there. Or at least say, "Hey," and get any
328 confirmation from corporate America that "hey, you
329 need to go back and get your MBA," so I can be, like,
330 "Okay, thank you."
331 Interviewer: While you are a student there is a lot of activity here
332 that can help you in that job search. There's actually
333 something going on in the atrium right now.
334 Subject: Yeah, I was wondering what that was.
335 Interviewer: They are having resume review sessions.
336 Subject: Should have brought mine.
337 Interviewer: Do you have it online? I'll pull it up for you and you
338 can walk down there.
339 Subject: (*unintelligible*).
340 Interviewer: (*laughing*) well, that's all the questions I have. It didn't
341 take long at all. Great. Anything you want to add?
342 What's driving your decision here? The hesitancy
343 sounds like it is baby and procrastination.
344 Subject: Well, I mean, yeah, the spring kind of, if I had made
345 that inquiry probably a month sooner I would
346 probably be enrolled some time. But it is going to be a
347 lot of paperwork, which is boring, but uh
348 (*unintelligible*). Yeah, but I see myself here in the fall, if
349 all things go well. I had a 3.6, 3.7 as an undergrad and
350 got a 4.0 in my master's so I don't see the process as
351 being limiting, just being time consuming.
352 Interviewer: Okay.

#

#

#

Interview Date: January 24, 2013
Interview Location: USF College of Business
Interview Subject: Rusty, 23 year old male, Prospect #9
Interview Duration: 20 minutes

Rusty is a single Black male who is considering an MBA program but has not yet made the commitment to the degree program or to a university. Rusty indicated that he had recently attended an information session for graduate business programs, but that is as far as he has moved forward in this decision. He works full-time in sales for an international Fortune 500 company

1 Interviewer: I just have twenty questions for you, pretty easy, and,
2 like I said, it is going to take about twenty, twenty-five
3 minutes. Not bad.
4 Subject: Okay.
5 Interviewer: So, obviously, you have an undergraduate degree.
6 Subject: Yes.
7 Interviewer: And I am thinking it is not in business from USF.
8 Subject: It is in business, but just not from USF.
9 Interviewer: Okay. Where did you go to school?
10 Subject: I went to Morehouse College.
11 Interviewer: Oh! I was just at Spellman last week. Or two weeks
12 ago.
13 Subject: Oh really?
14 Interviewer: It made me wish my daughter went to that school. It's
15 M-o-o-r-e, right?
16 Subject: It's M-o-r-ehouse.
17 Interviewer: How long ago did you graduate?
18 Subject: A year and a half ago.
19 Interviewer: So that would be . . .
20 Subject: 2011.
21 Interviewer: And you studied business.
22 Subject: Yes.
23 Interviewer: Did you work while you were going to school?
24 Subject: No. Only internships during the summer and one
25 during my senior [year] fall semester.
26 Interviewer: And have you worked since you graduated?
27 Subject: Yes. Been working ever since.
28 Interviewer: What do you do?
29 Subject: I am an account manager for Coca-Cola.
30 Interviewer: On the sales side, or are you over here in finance
31 operations?
32 Subject: Yes. Sales. On the sales side. I have been looking into
33 the finance operations. I want to get some exposure to
34 that, but, not yet.

35 Interviewer: Okay. So was your background in general business?
36 Or marketing...

37 Subject: Yes. Business. Marketing. Yep, that's it; (laughing)
38 you're on it!

39 Interviewer: Great. So, what – um – let me back up. How long ago
40 did you first start thinking about getting an MBA
41 degree?

42 Subject: While I was an undergrad. But the thing I found is that
43 most schools prefer their candidates to have work
44 experience. And that was something that, obviously, I
45 didn't have coming straight out of undergrad, so that's
46 the main reason why I didn't go straight in. I would
47 prefer to work first.

48 Interviewer: It's – at least that is the case at USF – we prefer it, too.
49 Every once in a while, somebody worked while going
50 to school, but...

51 Subject: Yes.

52 Interviewer: So you thought about it as an undergrad, but how long
53 have you really been thinking about it recently?

54 Subject: Very seriously? I would say, I guess, hmm, for about
55 the past four or five months or so. After I got that first
56 year under my belt.

57 Interviewer: Was there a particular incident that led you think
58 about it more seriously, or recently?

59 Subject: Just, um, looking at career opportunities and seeing
60 what – a lot of these career opportunities, they want. I
61 guess, those people that are interested to have more
62 than one degree. To have, you know a higher degree
63 than just an undergrad. And so, beyond that, just
64 realizing that it is becoming more and more
65 competitive. An undergrad is becoming more and
66 more common, I guess, for lack of a better word, so it's
67 better to differentiate myself, a little bit better, I
68 thought, to have an MBA. So just thinking about things
69 like that just made me sit down and decide that this is
70 something that I need to do for myself.

71 Interviewer: Mmm-hmm.

72 Subject: I'm trying to slow down. I keep forgetting that you
73 have to go back and...

74 Interviewer: I've got a pause button, don't worry about it now!

75 Subject: Alright.

76 Interviewer: So what did you think the long-term benefit would be?

77 Subject: Long-term benefit, more career opportunities, I guess.
78 Obviously more money. More success. And really, I
79 guess, just – maybe I will be happier because I will
80 have more opportunities, you know? A small fish in a

81 big pond as opposed to a small fish in a little pond. You
82 know?

83 Interviewer: Okay. Did you think there might be some short-term
84 benefits?

85 Subject: Short-term benefits? I mean, yes. Just having the
86 degree under my belt. Um, obviously higher pay raises.
87 Maybe a better position within my company. Faster
88 growth.

89 Interviewer: Meaning personal growth or corporate/career growth.
90 Subject: Both, both, both. Corporate growth. Corporate ladder
91 and personal.

92 Interviewer: Okay. Anything else?
93 Subject: That's it off the top of my head.

94 Interviewer: Did you think there would be any headaches involved
95 with, uh, getting it?

96 Subject: Yes. Yes. Only because – well for a couple of different
97 reasons. Obviously, you know, it's getting –well, I'll
98 start from A and go to B. Since I have been out of
99 school for a little while, obviously first and foremost
100 will be getting back in that rhythm of being in school,
101 being a student. And then secondly, being a student
102 and, in the MBA program that's more, I guess, rigorous
103 while at the same time maintaining a full-time job,
104 um...

105 Interviewer: Balancing.
106 Subject: That's right. The balancing, managing my time. Um,
107 while still, you know – I guess just while still having
108 time for myself. Doing everything well. Not sacrificing
109 one at the expense of the other.

110 Interviewer: Okay. How long did you think about it before you
111 actually began researching programs?

112 Subject: (sigh and pause) Probably for a while. So I would
113 probably say over a year, um. Mostly because I started
114 entertaining the idea when I was in undergrad. And
115 then once I got out and started working, I was really
116 focused on working. And then once that time passed
117 where I felt like I had a decent amount of experience
118 [that] is when I really started thinking about the
119 program. That's when I really started to focus on it and
120 sit down and really put my attention toward it.

121 Interviewer: Okay. So you have decided on MBA, and not necces – if
122 you go forward – you've decided degree. You're
123 looking at the degree before you are looking at
124 university.

125 Subject: Yes. I knew I wanted to get the MBA. It was really just
126 a matter of I guess – not really circumstances, but I am

127 not really sure where I would possibly be pursuing my
128 degree. For example, when I started thinking about it,
129 I was in – I was going to school in Atlanta. So I started
130 looking at colleges there. But I didn't necessarily know
131 if I was going to be there after I graduated. And I
132 wasn't. I came down here to Tampa. That's where I got
133 a job. So now I am looking at schools in this area.

134 Interviewer: Okay. What schools are you looking at?
135 Subject: I, um, the University of South Florida and the
136 University of Florida.

137 Interviewer: No others?
138 Subject: Nah. There was one – I think it was a UCF, I think it
139 was UCF but that was for an online program. These are
140 for – because I am close these are for me to go and
141 actually, you know, do in-person and attend classes.

142 Interviewer: You prefer face-to-face?
143 Subject: I do. I like that, you know, the interaction.

144 Interviewer: Great. And have you taken the GMAT yet?
145 Subject: Not yet. That's coming up. That's, that's another
146 obstacle. I hear --

147 Interviewer: Yup.
148 Subject: I hear a lot of things about that test.

149 Interviewer: I was afraid of the test. I stalled on it. And finally just
150 did it. And it wasn't as – it wasn't easy – but it wasn't
151 as bad as I –

152 Subject: Really?
153 Interviewer: -- thought it would be. But, um, I am a lot older than
154 you. A lot older.

155 Subject: (chuckles) Was it a lot of studying?
156 Interviewer: Well, remember, I took it at 46 years old.
157 Subject: Okay.

158 Interviewer: And it had been a long time since I used algebra. So I
159 had to brush up on it (laughing).

160 Subject: Right. Gotcha.
161 Interviewer: Some skills. Um, I would encourage you to go ahead
162 and take it now.

163 Subject: Alright.
164 Interviewer: Scores are good for five years.

165 Subject: Okay.
166 Interviewer: Take it while this stuff is relatively fresh.
167 Subject: Right.

168 Interviewer: How did you go about seeking information on the
169 programs?
170 Subject: Seeking information on the programs. I went to each
171 school's website. And I actually saw a commercial for
172 the MBA program for this school on television and it

173 was for an open house. So I went to the open house
174 and it was a lot of great feedback. A lot of great um, I
175 guess it was more like a panel discussion. It was a
176 presentation of information and a question-and-
177 answer session afterward. So I was able to ask specific
178 questions, things that might not be readily available on
179 the website. Those things that's not really general
180 knowledge. I guess more of the intricacies. That's
181 when I was able to really inquire about. So that was
182 mainly the – so I guess the main thing was just
183 websites and the open house.

184 Interviewer: But the commercial is what spurred your attendance
185 at the info session?

186 Subject: Yes. Right. So it works! (chuckles)

187 Interviewer: Good! You don't happen to recall where you saw
188 it...(laughing).

189 Subject: (laughing) I don't remember the channel no...I saw it a
190 couple of different times, though, and I was like, you
191 know, this is a sign. Because it was the only one I had
192 seen for, um, an MBA program for a college, so I was
193 like, you know what, this is one of my options. I could
194 go, let me just go check it out. And then I got this email
195 (requesting the interview) and I was like, you know
196 what? All these signs are just pointing me in this
197 direction!

198 Interviewer: You know what, go apply! (laughing)

199 Subject: Yeah.

200 Interviewer: So what factors were important to you as you began to
201 research the program? What were you looking for
202 when you were looking at these websites? Or when
203 you came to the info session? What kind of
204 information were you looking for?

205 Subject: Um, one of the things is, um, the type of program. I
206 guess what people had said about it. I guess really, I
207 say that to [mean] "how is the program ranked among
208 other schools?" Reputation wise, I guess.

209 Interviewer: Okay.

210 Subject: The rigor of the programs and the program
211 requirements. Originally I was looking at some schools
212 that didn't require a GMAT. I was considering a lot of
213 online possibilities. Then I was like, you know, maybe
214 I'm just being lazy! (laughing) So I need to expand my
215 options. And so, yeah...

216 Interviewer: Okay. Now, I've heard you mention a lot of things
217 through the course of this interview. So – rankings,
218 which I think also lends to reputation.

219 Subject: Right. Reputation. That's what I was looking for. I was
220 trying to think. Reputation, that's it! That's perfect.

221 Interviewer: Okay. So rankings, career opportunities and a career
222 track for you, to differentiate yourself, to grow your
223 salary, personal growth. I heard you say time
224 management, that you prefer face-to-face, that you
225 considered program rigor. You also considered would
226 you get it. Entry requirements. Out of all of those
227 things, which is a lot, what would you say is the one
228 most important thing to you.

229 Subject: (made agreeing sounds as interviewer said each
230 attribute but then paused to think about the answer to
231 the question) I guess building my skill set so that I can
232 create more opportunities for myself going down the
233 road. Long story short: long-term success. That'd be
234 the best way.

235 Interviewer: Okay.

236 Subject: Long-term success.

237 Interviewer: I am going to jump here. Back to the info session.
238 How was it?

239 Subject: It was good. It was good. It was really insightful. Very
240 informative. Um, there is, I think, two – two individuals
241 spearheading it. Once was for the Executive, and one
242 was for the MBA, just the regular MBA that I am going
243 for, so I spent more time talking to her [the MBA
244 recruiter]. She was very helpful, very insightful. Gave a
245 lot of great feedback. A lot of advice on what to do,
246 what not to do. They gave out some handouts that
247 were really good. That I still refer to. So it was good
248 overall.

249 Interviewer: Great. Um, so, if you decide to go for the degree, you're
250 mentioning UF and USF as your primary [schools]; USF
251 – rather UCF you have kind of knocked out.

252 Subject: Mm-hmm. Yes.

253 Interviewer: What, um, information, um, are you looking for, or
254 factors are you loo – thinking about when you are
255 deciding which one of the colleges to attend?

256 Subject: I guess the same. The same things we talked about
257 when we talked about – considering just the
258 reputation. What kind of experience am I going to have
259 when I go here? What am I going to be able to take
260 away? I guess, you know, more than just a degree?
261 How much will I really know? How much will I have
262 really learned? How much will I have really grown as
263 a person? Um, once I leave, I guess, talking to other
264 students who have either gone through or still are

265 pursuing it, their degree at this school, seeing what
266 they have to say about it. Because that's important, I
267 think, today. You know, the people that are actually,
268 you know, in that situation that you're going to be in.
269 Of course, everybody at the school is going to say that
270 it's good but, you know You know. Do you get the
271 really hands-on?

272 Interviewer: Was there anybody there like that at the info session
273 you attended?

274 Subject: No, everybody there was a prospective student and
275 the only two people there that were not were the
276 people that were just leading the session. But, I did
277 come across someone at my job that is currently here.
278 He said that he, that he would, that he thinks it is an
279 excellent program. He transferred from somewhere, I
280 forget where, maybe somewhere in Pennsylvania, and
281 when he moved down here he said he – it came highly
282 recommended by him, so it just led me to look into
283 further, more.

284 Interviewer: That's actually my next question. Did you seek word-
285 of-mouth reviews from friends or ask coworkers about
286 institutions?

287 Subject: One coworker, yes. When I was still pursuing the
288 online – she's told me about what options she is
289 pursuing – that was pretty good for her because she's
290 also a mom, so she's a little bit busier. So no, but that
291 one, I just happened to have – it just came in general
292 conversations. Are you, you know...I don't even know
293 how I started it. They told me they were in grad
294 school. And I was, like, oh? Where? And what degree
295 were, are you pursuing the MBA at USF? I was like, oh,
296 well, I'm thinking about it.

297 Interviewer: Thinking about it.

298 Subject: Right. And so I picked their brain a little bit. So they
299 said a lot of great things.

300 Interviewer: Okay. Just out of curiosity, what, do you recall what
301 kind of things they were talking about?

302 Subject: Yeah, just like, how, um, it's good. All the classes are
303 really good. All the teachers are really informative. It's
304 really hands-on. You get a lot of great interaction. You
305 really get a lot of feedback so that you know how you
306 are progressing. Um, just everything is really – they
307 really put emphasis on you as a student. Not so much
308 just you being here, just being more so "how can we
309 help you to become a better person?" Like, by the time
310 you leave this program, how much will you know?

311 How much will you, how successful will you be based
312 off what you learned here? So I heard that there is a
313 lot of emphasis on the students. Which is something
314 that I, like, you know, really look for when exploring
315 programs as well.

316 Interviewer: Good. Um, so what's the one thing that's been most
317 important to you all along as you think about this?

318 Subject: Just in general, or in terms of ...

319 Interviewer: Because it sounds like you haven't made the decision
320 to go yet.

321 Subject: I have. I just. I'm leaning more and more and more and
322 more towards USF. I am going to go, it's just a matter
323 of where. But I think I have decided on USF. It's just
324 (unintelligible). So I guess - I suppose the most
325 important thing - considering just getting the MBA or
326 ...

327 Interviewer: Getting the MBA at USF.

328 Subject: At USF. It's really just the type of experience that I
329 have. Um, how, you know, because, like I said, I do
330 work, so I need to make sure that I will be, that I am
331 going to be able to get the most of this experience.
332 Because I can't concentrate full-time as a student, so
333 for the time I am able to spend here I want to just, you
334 know, make sure that I make the most of it. So I want
335 to make sure that it's as valuable as possible. And that
336 I can be as successful as possible by the time I leave.

337 Interviewer: There's a couple of things that you haven't mentioned
338 along the way.

339 Subject: Okay.

340 Interviewer: It's the faculty who are teaching the program, our
341 accreditation, and cost. Have you looked at any of
342 those things? Are they just not as important to you?

343 Subject: Well, the faculty, well, well, I kind of, I guess I kind of
344 bunch that in with the whole experience. The type of,
345 you know, teachers that I am going to have, the
346 professors that I am going to have. Cost, yes, I don't
347 even know how I forgot about that one (laughs). I
348 don't even know how I forgot about that one! Yeah,
349 that's definitely a factor as well.

350 Interviewer: Are you on a tuition, will you have tuition
351 reimbursement through your employer or anything
352 like that?

353 Subject: Yeah. It will be tuition reimbursement, but after I
354 complete the program. So right now it would be all on
355 me. And then, you know, after I am finished, then
356 that's when that becomes a factor.

357 Interviewer: Okay, well, speaking of money, how long do you think
358 it would take for you to see a monetary gain as a result
359 of earning the MBA?
360 Subject: Realistically, I would say within, I want to say, two or
361 three years. It's all depending on, I guess, if I change
362 jobs or careers or um, if I stay within the company,
363 probably I would say less than that. But if I change,
364 probably a little longer
365 Interviewer: There will be headaches associated with doing this. I
366 mean, call it what it is. How long do you think it would
367 take for you to say, "this is worth it."
368 Subject: That's a great question (pauses). That really kind of
369 depends on what happens after-the-fact. But I think,
370 honestly, I think it would be worth it the day, probably
371 the day I graduate. After the headaches are gone, after
372 it is done, I can say, "You know what? I completed this.
373 I'm done, I'm done with this stage of my life. I can
374 move on to something else." So I don't really think it
375 will take too long. I'd say the day after. The day after
376 the cap and gown (starts to laugh).
377 Interviewer: You get that cap and gown and the (unintelligible)
378 smile.
379 Subject: Yes, yes. Either that or when I get a pay raise.
380 Interviewer: Yup! Last couple of questions here. I didn't also hear
381 you mention anything about the caliber of people that
382 you're learning with. We mention - you mentioned
383 earlier in the interview that most schools prefer a little
384 bit of work experience and that is because it enriches
385 the classroom.
386 Subject: Right.
387 Interviewer: Does that matter to you? Who else is in the
388 classroom? The selectivity.
389 Subject: It does. Only because I like -I mean, when you are in
390 the classroom environment, you don't just learn from
391 whoever is teaching the course, you learn from the
392 people around you. And that's why I thought it was
393 awesome that they put so much emphasis on us as a
394 student because they really want to see what we can
395 bring to the table and how we can kind of use that to
396 bounce back and forth. So that is important to me, just
397 knowing what other people bring. What I can learn
398 from those people. Because at the end of the day, I -
399 most of us are already working individuals, so to see
400 how their experiences can help me to maybe have a
401 better experience at my job or advance my career.
402

403 It is important.
404 Interviewer: Okay. Well, the last two questions are actually related
405 to your career.
406 Subject: Okay.
407 Interviewer: What are your career goals long-term and short-term?
408 Subject: Long-term and short-term. My long – I guess it would
409 be easier to do long-term. My long-term goal is to be in
410 business for myself. I want to own my own business. I
411 know it takes some time to get there. It takes
412 knowledge, and, obviously, financial [support]. Short-
413 term, I just would like to work my way up the
414 corporate ladder because every level there is
415 something new that I can learn to better myself. You
416 learn something new each and every day but there
417 comes a point where, you know, how much more am I
418 really learning? So it's like before I get to that next
419 level, well, how much more can I learn here? So short-
420 term goal is to keep working my way up and keep
421 learning as much as possible.
422 Interviewer: Great. Well is there anything I forgot to ask? Or
423 anything you want to add?
424 Subject: There was like one question that I kind of blanked out
425 on. When you asked me about factors, um...
426 Interviewer: What was the one most important thing to you all
427 along. Kind of, when you are deciding, ok, it's, well, let
428 me back up. It's, it sounds like you are going to go for
429 an MBA at some point.
430 Subject: Right.
431 Interviewer: So as you are deciding, when to do it and where to do
432 it, what's the one thing that has been most important
433 to you. Kind of the thing that's, um, like, "man, I can't
434 afford it right now," or "I don't want to start studying
435 again." These are just – what's the one thing – these
436 are a couple of examples, what's the one thing that you
437 really have been thinking about?
438 Subject: This is really if I am going to be, if I am able to be
439 successful in it while I am working. I don't want to
440 sacrifice. I don't want to stop working but I don't want
441 to take, you know, years and years to complete the
442 MBA or the EMBA, so I am going to (unintelligible). So
443 the thing is, am I going to be able to do this in two
444 years and be done. Financially, yes, but, I figure if I
445 look at options, there are kind of like, just working on
446 it as I go. I mean, I can do that, but really, is it going to
447 be – how taxing is it going to be? To be able to do it in
448 this economy and the goal I set for myself.

449 Interviewer: Great, that's all the questions I have.

#

#

#