

How A Top School Screens MBA Applicants

<http://poetsandquants.com/2013/01/25/how-a-top-business-school-sifts-through-a-pile-of-mba-applicants/>

by [John A. Byrne](#) on January 25, 2013 からの抜粋記事



The MBA recruitment and admissions team at the Rotman School of Management

Niki da Silva sits at the head of a long rectangular table in an ultra-modern glass-walled conference room on the sixth floor of the [University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management](#). As director of MBA admissions and recruitment, da Silva is the school's top gatekeeper, the sentry who decides which candidates get in and which get rejected.

Huddled in the room are six other admission officers on her team, each with a red folder placed in front of them on the gleaming white table. Tucked inside each folder is the complete file of an applicant who sorely wants one of the 330 to 350 seats in the next entering class of Rotman's full-time MBA program.

Now that the round two deadlines for submitting applications is over, it is a ritual that is playing out at business schools all over the world: Admission committees meeting to make hard and often painful choices whether to admit, deny or waitlist tens of thousands of jittery candidates.

MBA APPLICANTS FACE DAUNTING ODDS AT THE WORLD'S BEST SCHOOLS

For those who desire an elite MBA, the odds are daunting. At Stanford University's Graduate School of Business, the most selective B-school in the U.S., 94 of every 100 applicants will be turned down. Harvard Business School will rebuff nine out of every 10 applicants. Though Rotman's acceptance rate is much higher, roughly half of the more than 1,200 MBA candidates expected to apply this year will be spurned.

What makes da Silva's job tougher than most is that she is expected to increase the size of the entering class at Rotman while also increasing the quality of the admits. Last year, she managed to increase the students in the entering class to 313, up from 265 a year earlier, while increasing the class' median GMAT score 20 points to 680 in one year. The school expects to welcome 400 MBA students by 2016 so that its total enrollment is similar to such schools as Stanford, MIT, New York University's Stern School and London Business School.

On this brisk, snowy day in January, da Silva's admission committee will render decisions on seven applicants from all over the world: a pair of software engineers employed by one of India's most successful global companies, an out-of-work Brit who lost his job in asset trading after his firm was acquired, an ambitious Chinese woman who is employed by a global investment banking firm, a Russian woman with entrepreneurial ambitions who lives in New York City, and two young female Canadians who work in consulting and communications.

Rotman School of Management class profile

Their GMAT scores range from a low of 620 to a high of 780.

They range in age from 24 to 30.

And they've been educated at a wide variety of undergraduate universities from the London School of Economics to the University of Auckland in New Zealand. They are among the first 300 applicants to the school who have gone through the review process for what will become Rotman's Class of 2015.

With Rotman's round two deadline of Jan. 7, applications for the incoming class this year are already up by some 20% over last year. If the upward trend holds, da Silva and her admissions committee will read and review more than 1,400 applications this year. The bulk of the work is done between January and April when the files pour into admission offices.

Da Silva would be the first to concede that MBA admissions is more an art than a science, with the decisions based on a mix of quick judgments, gut and the raw numbers. She and her colleagues will consider an applicant's undergraduate grades, GMAT or GRE scores, work history and recommendations.

They also will judge candidates by their responses to two written essay questions:

- 1) Discuss your personal and professional development over the past five years and describe how these changes have led you to choose to do your MBA at this time. What are your career goals and how will a Rotman MBA help you to achieve them?
- 2) Tell us about a time when you had to overcome an obstacle and describe the outcome.

Da Silva also is piloting this year a new and to some intimidating video component that requires candidates to answer two questions at their computer without any advance preparation. Applicants get 45 seconds to prepare and 90 seconds to answer each question.

DA SILVA IS THE FIRST TO SCREEN EVERY APPLICATION BEFORE MOVING THEM ON

When an application arrives at Rotman, da Silva will see it first for a quick screen that might last only a few minutes. If a GMAT score is woefully low, something in the 500s, or a candidate is too old for a full-time MBA program, in the mid-to-late thirties, da Silva might immediately toss out the file. This is the sorry fate of 5% to 10% of all the applications Rotman receives in any given year. Otherwise, the file is assigned to one of da Silva's six assistant admission directors. Collectively, the group has more than a half a century of experience in admissions. Each adcom member then will spend between 15 to 30 minutes reviewing an application before deciding whether to invite a candidate to interview in person or via Skype. Last year, Rotman interviewed 70% of its applicant pool. Once an interview is complete, an admissions officer will assign the applicant a grade (50 is the highest possible score) and recommend that the candidate be admitted, rejected or placed on a waitlist. ※学校によって審査方式は異なります。一例としてお考えください。

Then, the applicant's profile comes to the full admissions committee, which will meet at least four times for each of the five application deadlines at Rotman—a minimum of 20 times in all during the admissions season, with each session lasting as long as three hours to decide the fate of an applicant.

A TRACE OF NERVOUSNESS DURING A CRUCIAL ADMISSIONS INTERVIEW

The consultant is perched on the edge of her seat, bearing just a slight trace of nervousness. A small black notebook is at the ready to jot down a thought or insight.

"I'm already familiar with your application package," says da Silva, who sits across from the candidate. "The strategy behind our admissions interview is to really use what you've already told us as the starting point for a conversation. Typically questions from my end will run 20 to 30 minutes and then I'll leave time to cover your questions."

After a knowing nod from the applicant, da Silva delivers her first question:

"Can you walk me through the highlights of your resume and talk a little about not just what you've done but why you've done it and what you've learned?"

"Right now," the applicant answers, "I'm in strategy consulting and have developed a real focus on an industry. It's been a great opportunity to advise clients both in the U.S. and Canada and to work with senior-level executives on strategic and operational issues. I have been able to build a brand for myself in the industry, through published research I've done and by interacting with clients and through industry events."

THE QUESTIONS AND THE ANSWERS FLY DURING THE HALF-HOUR INTERVIEW

Back and forth, the questions and the answers fly.

"How did it happen that you started to publish white papers and build a brand?"

"What contributed to your promotion?"

"Are there brands or organizations you would like to work for?"

"What would you want your classmates to say about you at graduation?"

"What is one big piece of constructive feedback that you have taken to heart?"

The applicant answers each question with relative ease. The latter evokes an interesting response. "I've been told to maintain a poker face when I hear something I don't necessarily agree with," she says.

■CASE1: THE APPLICANTS: A 24-YEAR OLD FEMALE CONSULTANT FROM CANADA WITH A GMAT OF 630

“She has an interesting story,” continues da Silva. “What else can I tell you about her in terms of data? The weak point of her application is a GMAT score of 630. Interestingly, her breakdown is fairly even between verbal and quant, 73rd and 61st percentile. I will tell you why I don’t think it’s an issue or a deal breaker by any stretch of the imagination.

“So the reason she wants to do the MBA is because at her consulting firm she has actually built this really interesting career as an industry specialist which is very atypical for a young consultant. She was promoted after two years onto the consulting side. She is co-authoring white papers and thought leadership on strategy. As I read through her reference letters early this morning, her referees say that ‘she is exceptional.’ A partner lists her in the top 2% of consultants at the firm. And he is very explicit in saying that ‘we would love to have her back anytime and she has had more of an impact on me than any of her peers.’ You really couldn’t see a stronger reference.”

Most of the heads in the room are nodding in agreement.

AN IMPRESSIVE SCORE OF 17 OUT OF A TOP GRADE OF 20 FOR HER INTERVIEW

Da Silva goes on. “Her recommenders point out the same things that were fairly apparent in her interview. I gave her a 17 out of a 20 on her interview.”

At Rotman, admission officials grade candidate interviews on five dimensions, ranging from self-awareness to leadership ability and intellectual curiosity. Some attributes can be graded as high as a five (on a scale of zero to five), while others might be graded no higher than a three. ※学校によって審査方式は異なります。一例としてお考えください。

“She is very impressive,” adds da Silva. “She has some room for growth and development but seems quite coachable. She is aware of some of her areas of weakness. She’s young. She turns 25 this year.”

“She has done well,” affirms Lynda Paterson, an assistant director of admissions, who once was a Montessori teacher before joining Rotman in 2004. “She is very accomplished.”

“For me she is a very strong admit recommendation,” adds da Silva. “I don’t actually see any red flags apart from the GMAT score which is below our average.”

“She hopes to continue in consulting?,” asks Sheldon Dookeran, the only male admissions officer in the room. With the exception of da Silva, Dookeran, a slim young man with a neatly trimmed mustache and beard, has been involved with admissions at Rotman less than anyone else in the room. He joined the team in April of 2011 after eight years of recruiting and admitting undergraduate students at the University of Toronto.

“Good point,” notes da Silva. “She doesn’t want to continue in consulting. I asked what is next for you and she jumped to wanting to transition into retail strategy. She is trying to focus herself and built her brand as a leader in the industry. She said a Lululemon summer internship would be ideal. So she has done her research and her homework.”

Lululemon, a fast growing company based in Canada that makes and retails fashionable yoga and workout clothes, is one of the hot MBA employers on campus right now. In fact, Rotman is the only Canadian school at which Lululemon recruits MBAs.

“So it’s not a huge career switch,” observes Paterson.

“So I didn’t see any issues there,” agrees da Silva. “She came in overall with a 42 on our ratings system. She is incredibly bright and has had fantastic work experience. She is strong in self-management skills and in team skills. She might be someone we want to insure comes to Rotman with a small scholarship. I would like Leigh’s (the head of career development) perspective. She is a definite admit.”

“Do you know if she is considering anywhere else?,” asks Dookeran.

“She didn’t really disclose if she was considering any other place,” says da Silva.

“I have seen her at two fairs and a lot of events,” says Marie-Eve Roy, an assistant director who has been at the school since 2006. “She seems to be very well researched in terms of doing her MBA. **She is really personable.** You can tell she is quite bright. I definitely concur with what you’ve said from my interactions with her.”

“Alright,” says da Silva, “who’s up next?”

The entire discussion took slightly under six minutes. There was no disagreement and surprisingly, perhaps, no debate over the candidate’s GMAT score which is 50 points below last year’s median for the class. But typically in rounds one and two, da Silva believes, a school sees its best applicants and Rotman tends to over admit in these early rounds.

■CASE2:THE APPLICANTS: A 28-YEAR OLD ENGINEER IN INDIA WITH A GMAT OF 710

The outcome for another candidate at the meeting, however, wasn't nearly as good. The applicant, Sameer, is from India, where Rotman has gotten its most MBA students after only Canada. That's why two of the school's assistant admissions directors are assigned to recruit and evaluate candidates from India alone. In the class that arrived last fall, 54% hail from North America, 36% from India and China, 3% from Latin America, and 2% from Europe. Chinese and Indian students find Canada especially welcome these days because the country grants three-year work visas to graduates, giving Rotman a distinct advantage over U.S. and U.K. business schools.

"I think I'm up next," says Roy, who with Dookeran mainly reviews applications from India. "Unfortunately, I have a no. This person's name is Sameer. His resume is decent. **He has four years in a pretty big company in India as a test engineer. He is 28. He scored 710 on the GMAT. He wants to get into IT consulting.**

"At first glance, he seems pretty good," she continues. "Then, I discovered that his GPA falls below our minimum requirement so he actually has second class standing." (50-59%)

At Rotman, any applicant with an undergraduate grade point average below 3.0 cannot be admitted to the school without approval from the University of Toronto's School of Graduate Studies. In any given year, Rotman will ask for approval to admit "non-standard" candidates for about 3% of its admits. But this applicant isn't going to be one of them. ※すべての学校ではない

"I decided this person would not be a good fit for Rotman when I interviewed him," Roy revealed. "He was **very informal in the interview. He came across as immature. When I asked him to talk about a negative, he mentioned that he was a procrastinator. I thought it was probably not a good idea to tell me that especially for an intensive program like ours.**"

Most of the admission officials in the room nod in approval.

"**Everyone is going to want to get out of his group,**" jokes Bailey Daniels, who reviews applicants from the U.S., Western Europe and Africa.

"The minute he said that I was like okay," continued Roy. "I found him again to be on the immature side to have said that and then upon further examination **both of his referees mentioned that he waits until the last minute to get things done. And another said, he needs to work a little on his time management skills.**"

"At least, he's self-aware," chimes in Claire Gumus, who reviews the files from China.

"But at the same time he doesn't meet the minimum," adds da Silva. "The grades aren't good."

"Based on the grades, my interaction with him and the interview and **his career goals in consulting,** I don't think he would be a good fit for Rotman," concludes Roy.

A fascinating social dynamic seems to take hold in the room. An admissions officer who feels strongly in favor of an applicant becomes that person's unbridled advocate. She coddles and protects the candidate against every gentle and pushy challenge. She extols the great promise of a successful young professional but still unformed future corporate leader or entrepreneur. And among the evaluators, the enthusiasm for any one person tends to become infectious. A favorable swell forms and support for the applicant builds.

But if the admissions officer is against the candidate, the opposite effect tends to occur. Little by little, the group seems to pile on cautious disapproval, reinforcing each other's negative views that the applicant isn't a good fit for the school. **The person might not survive the rigors of the first-year curriculum, might not work well in a team, and could very well be considered an "admissions mistake" by the career services staff when the recruiters come and few offers are extended.**

"I think you're right," agrees da Silva. "His GMAT is not enough. Alright, who's next?"

Within the next few days, the applicant will receive an email from the school that will inform him of the decision.

■CASE3:THE APPLICANTS: A 25-YEAR OLD ENGINEER FROM INDIA WITH A GMAT OF 690

By sheer coincidence, Dookeran has another candidate who works for the very same firm in India as the rejected applicant.

"His name is Nikhil. He's 25 and he's got a 690 GMAT and an engineering degree from the Indian Institute of Technology, with a 3.9 GPA, which he earned in 2010. He works for the same company. He started as a systems engineer and then he moved on to be team lead and an IT analyst and now he's a business analyst. So in almost three years he has had quite a few promotions.

"And he also did a lot of business development for his family business. What impressed me were his transitions at work but also his involvement in the family business. He was able to land new accounts from very big and well-known U.S. companies. That requires a lot of soft skills, negotiating and interaction which we don't always see from people coming from places like this company."

"Did he work with his family at the same time he was working at the company?," asks Claire Gumus, an assistant director who is responsible for recruiting and evaluating applicants from China.

"He did," says Dookeran.

"Is he energetic and good at time management?" Gumus asks. "Did you get that in the interview?"

"Yes. His referees all talked highly of his communication skills, which came out in his interview. He interviewed well. In terms of his career, in the short term he said he wants a career in consulting in the supply chain industry, and long-term he wants to expand his family business internationally.

"In terms of his writing, he wrote well. No major issues. But really what stood out were his communication skills, his business development and his promotions. The only red flag I saw was that one referee mentioned a time when he could have worked better with a client but the referee went on to write how he had learned from that."

"We are not always perfect," chimes in Paterson.

"He's strong academically, he communicated well, and he does have the soft skills to fit in. So I think we should make him an offer of admissions," concludes Dookeran.

"What is his GMAT again?," asks Gumus. "It's 690 with a 3.9 grade point average."

"What were your thoughts on the skills that we have seen are necessary for people who are successful as consultants?" probes da Silva.

"In terms of presence, he will do fine. He is polished and professional. So I think he's got that. And in terms of dealing with people, like I said, I think he has the soft skills to carry on a good conversation."

"Why does he want Rotman?," asks Roy.

"Because of integrated thinking," answers Dookeran. "He brought up a supply chain example of integrative thinking that was in the Rotman magazine two issues ago with Wal-Mart."

"Did you send him the magazine?," asks Roy. "No."

"He's done his homework," da Silva observes. "He seems like a solid admit. He's not a scholarship candidate but he seems solid. He is a contrast to the other candidate because their backgrounds are similar. But it is a world of difference when you get them on paper."

“And this guy can obviously manage his time because he was working full-time at a top firm and at the family business at the same time,” adds Afrodite Cruz, another assistant director sitting at the end of the table.

“And this one got promoted several times at the company at and the other one has been in the same job for four years,” chimes in Roy about her own candidate.

“There’s definitely more leadership DNA in this guy,” agrees da Silva. “I like.”

“So we have an admit?,” asks Dookeran.

“Yes, we have an admit,” concludes da Silva.

Several of the assistant directors let out a cheer. “Yay,” they say in unison.

Once an applicant is approved, the red folder is passed to da Silva at the end of the table. When a candidate is either “on the bubble,” as da Silva puts it, or is deemed worthy of a scholarship award, the red folder goes to a broader admissions committee which includes all seven admission officials, plus MBA program managing director Frey and career services head Leigh Gauthier who wants to feel confident she can get the applicant a job after graduation.

A third of the school’s MBA students get some form of scholarship to help with the two-year tuition of \$99,710 for international students (tuition is \$87,103 for permanent residents of Canada), a sum that does not include additional fees of \$3,300 or estimated living expenses of between \$31,800 and \$40,456 a year.

Da Silva nudges the meeting along. There are no detours from the job at hand, not even a bit of social chitchat.

■CASE4:THE APPLICANTS: A 27-YEAR OLD FEMALE BANKER FROM CHINA WITH A GMAT OF 750

“Ok,” she says turning to Gumus, “who do you have?” Gumus is the team’s resident admissions expert on China. She has spent months traveling the country, from big cities to small towns in the hinterlands, helping to recruit applicants for the school and then evaluating them once their files come in. Today, Gumus has an unqualified winner, a young woman who had done a two-year stint with a global accounting firm before ending up at one of the world’s most prestigious investment bankers.

“We have Changying from Beijing, China. And unfortunately I have never met her in person but luckily she went to our dinner in Beijing last night for incoming and prospective students. I have been working with her since last year because she started her application then but for family reasons she couldn’t continue and she carried over her application.

“She is bringing six years of experience. She is 27 and she studied in New Zealand at the University of Auckland and did really well with a 3.7 GPA—a double major economics and finance. Her language skills are very strong. We had a very good Skype interview. She presents herself really well. The GMAT score is 750 and she is working toward her CFA level two. So she is very serious and progressive.”

Gumus keeps giving more detail.

“She was an accountant for two years—2007 to 2009. Then she moved to the investment-banking firm in Chengdu. I’ve been to Chengdu. It is a small town and she is very accomplished because she then got a promotion and was transferred to Beijing. The references are very strong. In the interview she mentioned that she is not a career changer. **She wants to continue with banking. She is mainly interested in Canada.** She was an international student before so she knows the challenge of being a student in another country. She finds Canada to be very friendly so a Canadian business school is on her radar, but we are not the only Canadian school on her radar. She didn’t mention any names but I have a feeling we know who she is after.

“She is very mature given her age. Her analytical skills are her key strengths. I have no doubt she is going to survive in the program. So I think **she is a good fit given that she has this diverse experience. In Australia she did lots of volunteer work and she was a relief volunteer during the Sichuan earthquake in 2008. I really admire what she has been doing with her life so far. My recommendation is to bring her to the broader committee to get Leigh’s perspective and to see how she interacted at the dinner with others.”**

“Sounds like a scholarship candidate,” advises Paterson.

“I think she will end up with multiple offers so I think we need to make a competitive offer,” adds Gumus. “I think **she has a lot to offer.**

“Are we missing anything?” asks da Silva. “Are there any red flags? She’s almost too good to be true. She’s perfect. What about her interview?”

“In terms of the interview,” responds Gumus, “we do have equally strong candidates but she is going to be a good fit. Her paper application was too good to be true so I was waiting for the interview eagerly. The interview was very impressive. Unfortunately, I don’t have a video essay for this person because she started her application last year and carried it over.”

“I think we definitely want to review for scholarship,” agrees da Silva.

“And lots of money,” adds Paterson. “Who goes next?” says da Silva.

■CASE5:THE APPLICANTS: A 25-YEAR OLD FEMALE SPECIAL PROJECTS COORDINATOR FROM CANADA WITH A GMAT OF 620

Afrodite Cruz steps forward with her applicant, a 25-year-old Canadian woman. Cruz has been working in admissions since 2003. She joined Rotman six years ago and has recruited students in South East Asia, the U.S. and Canada.

"I am also presenting someone who I am recommending as an admit," Cruz starts. **"She is Liza, has three years of work experience, mainly in marketing and communications. She is a special project coordinator at an agency in Windsor. Liza has a 4.0 from the University of Windsor in communications studies."**

"Her GMAT was 620, so nothing outstanding considering that her grades were all As throughout her four years. That doesn't worry me. The highlight of her application for me was her interview. I actually ranked her 20 out of 20."

"This is the best interview that I have had this year so far and one of the best interviews I have had in all my time at Rotman," continues Cruz. "She was fantastic."

"To be totally candid, I wouldn't have guessed that based on her resume," counters da Silva.

"She did the video so could you look her up," says Cruz. "You guys will like her video and actually she gave a quirky answer to her second question which made me like her more."

The candidate's video pops up on the screen and she describes herself as energetic fun loving, driven, motivated, and passionate.

"She has a very natural presence," says da Silva. "She looks like she would fit in quite well," adds Roy.

"What's your sense of her quant ability because her GMAT score is lower?" asks da Silva.

"Her degree in communications doesn't give you confidence in her quant skills," observes Dookeran.

"Well," says Cruz, **"she wants to stay in marketing, branding and communications. So she is not going to be a career switcher** and at the end of the interview she asked me about some of the pre-courses that we offer to help students who don't come from a business background. **So she is willing to come to Toronto beforehand and take some of those classes."**

"Good," says da Silva. "The fact that **she is that self-aware says a lot about her."**

"Those workshops will give her the fundamentals so she should survive in her first year," adds Gumus.

"What were the references like?" asks Paterson.

"Very good," replies Cruz. "When I spoke to her and saw the video this is exactly who I hoped to see. **The referees painted a very accurate picture. Some of the things I cut out of the references were: 'She is extremely self-aware and mature and comes across as genuine. She is well put together, a good communicator. She works well with others and her work is well beyond her experience...one of the most intelligent people I have ever met...an excellent team player with excellent leadership skills.'**"

"Very good," observes Gumus. "And the team will also help her with the quant skills."

"Based on my observations, her essays, and what her referees have said, I recommend that we admit her," finishes Cruz. "We would be lucky to have her. I think she's going to be one of the people who will represent the school very well."

"Agreed," says da Silva. "She is very solid. I like her perspective. Who goes next?"

■CASE6:THE APPLICANTS: A 30-YEAR OLD TRADER FROM BRITAIN WITH A GMAT OF 780

“Me,” says Paterson, who is sitting next to da Silva. “I have Robert. He is 30 years old with six years of work experience. He has a degree in economics from the London School of Economics. He is a U.K. citizen. I interviewed him the other day on Skype, and I gave him a 20 (the highest possible score) on the interview.”

“Have you had other 20s?” wonders da Silva.

“Yes. I have had other 20s but he would be the best. He has a 780 GMAT. He is 83% on his quant and 81% for integrative reasoning. His references are highly positive. He is highly collaborative, extremely motivated, operates great with initiative, he’s a valuable team player, a good listener and extremely personable. The only thing is he is currently unemployed.”

The red flag is hoisted and the room, completely silent as Paterson described the candidate’s profile, immediately comes alive. The questions from around the table are fired out like bullets from an assault weapon.

“For how long?” asks da Silva.

“Since June.” “And why?” wonders da Silva. “What’s he doing?”

Several others chime in with similar questions.

“He left his job in asset trading because the firm in Switzerland was taken over and his job was deemed redundant. He did have a job offer but turned it down because he realized he is not going to stay there. He wants to pursue his MBA, and he hopes to do that in Toronto. He just got married a couple of months ago and he and his wife do hope to make Toronto home.”

“Therefore Rotman,” smiles da Silva.

“So that’s Robert,” says Paterson. “I would like to see him get a scholarship. I know he’s not working right now but...”

Da Silva cuts in. “What did he say he was going to do between now and the start of the program?”

“He’s taking French courses right now and he’s speaking with the company that offered him a job about doing some temporary consulting work,” replies Paterson.

“We had a similar candidate earlier in the year who you guys probably remember,” says da Silva. “And one of the big decisions was let’s get Leigh’s perspective. She then said that she wants to see how this person would package the story for employers. Does he have presence?”

“He totally has presence,” Paterson offers. “He’s lovely.”

“He’s done the video?” asks da Silva, about the new video portion of the application that Rotman put in as a pilot this year.

“Yes. And I did the Skype interview with him. By the way when he’s finished with the MBA, he wants to get into principal investments in the energy sector.”

“Let’s see the video,” says da Silva. She toys with a mouse on the conference table, clicks on a button and an image of Robert pops up on the large flat screen at the end of the room.

“How would I like my classmates to see me?” he says in a clipped British accent. “As someone who is good to work with. I would like to be seen as someone who questions norms—not asking questions for the sake of it but

somebody who doesn't accept things at face value but tries to understand the real reasons behind decisions. I am quite proud of the fact that I have gotten things done and I would like to share that with people."

The video clip done, da Silva seems somewhat relieved. **"I think he has what the careers folks will hope he has—that sense of confidence—but because it is an atypical situation I would like to bring him to our next conversation."**

"Yes, with a scholarship I am recommending," adds Paterson.

"Yes," agrees da Silva. "Any other thoughts?"

"He seems strong," Dookeran tosses in.

"If it weren't for the current gap, we probably wouldn't be having much of a dialogue. That's an important consideration for us."

Paterson rushes in to defend her candidate. **"It would be different if for the six years he worked he wasn't strong.** He also wants to travel a bit with his wife before he gets into an MBA program and have a bit of a honeymoon."

"Nice," says Bailey Daniels, another of the assistant directors.

"I'm sure the career coaches can help him with how to address that gap on the resume," adds Gumus.

"I think that is half the battle, making sure he is someone who is coachable, who has a story and a skill set and is making valuable use of his time off," concludes da Silva.

"I like him a lot," adds Paterson.

"And last but not least," says da Silva, turning to the only assistant director who has yet to present a candidate.

■CASE7:THE APPLICANTS: A 25-YEAR OLD FEMALE ARCHITECT FROM RUSSIA WITH A GMAT OF 650

“Almost all of us at the table have met her,” says Bailey Daniels, who is assigned the folders of applicants from the U.S., Eastern Europe and those interested in Rotman’s JD-MBA dual degree program. “She is from Russia but she is living in New York. Sheldon originally met her in September. I met her in November. Niki met her in December, and Niki actually conducted her interview when she was there.

“Let me tell you about Valeria. She is 25, with a bachelor of architecture from Russia, a 3.9 GPA and a 650 GMAT score. So she is getting close to the average.

“Nice,” says da Silva quietly.

“She was working in Moscow as an architect and then moved to New York and did work with an architectural firm there as well,” continues Daniels. “She left in August because she wanted a career change. She has very good communication skills. Her references are very strong. Niki gave her a 14 on the interview. She wants to come to Rotman because she is interested in business design like many of our candidates are. And we like to have those kinds of people in the program. She’s solid overall.”

“She brings good life experience, too,” says Gumus. “Russia. New York. And then Canada, too. I think that’s the difference.”

“She does,” acknowledges Daniels. “And in the future she wants to do business development in the real estate field but her long term goal is to launch a construction materials retail chain in Russia and invest in real estate projects there. She wants to do the Home Depot of Russia so she has the entrepreneurial bug.”

“It sounds like she would add some nice diversity to the class,” says Roy.

Agrees da Silva, “She sounds like someone who would add to her team and the class. She has that kind of diversity we want built into the class.”

“Her family has a construction business so she has this in her background,” continues Daniels. “She has been working with them since the age of 14.”

“That’s really interesting,” says da Silva. “She has construction/real estate/architecture backgrounds. I didn’t rate her interview above average but she is in a solid, good category. She has a fascinating life story and interesting exposure in a family construction business as a young woman and seemed passionate about it. Her father was her inspiration to go into architecture. Her work is a little bit more individually oriented so it is harder to give her a stronger interview rating. I think she will do quite well here.”

“She is passionate about the arts,” adds Daniels, “she enjoys working out, and she says in her essay that her experience in New York has taught her that there is nothing she can’t do.”

“I like it,” adds Paterson.

“That is a great attitude,” affirms Cruz.

“I remember that she taught herself English,” adds Dookeran.

“She is a good candidate for the venture lab we’re opening next year,” says Gumus. “She can run her Home Depot for Russia idea there.”

The meeting ends abruptly as da Silva gathers up the red folders of the approved applicants under her arm. As these things go, it's a winning afternoon. Six applicants gain a yes, and only one gets turned down. The average GMAT of the candidates who will get phone calls from Rotman as a result of this session is 687, 14 points above last year's 673 average.

But there are already another 260 more folders in the house to be read and evaluated, hundreds of interview sessions to schedule, and three more application deadlines to go until the final decisions are handed to this year's hopefuls by the end of June.