



Photograph by Tetra Images/Corbis

MBA Admissions

Understanding the MBA Application Background Check

Posted by: [Erin Zlomek](#) on February 01, 2013

[MBA Rankings: Top Schools for Diversity](#)

If you're applying to business school, chances are you'll undergo a background check. B-school admissions officers outsource this process to the same companies employers do. On average, criminal record checks turn up information on people 12 percent to 15 percent of the time, says Diana Acuna, a product manager with the background screening firm [HireRight](#), which performs checks for several of the business schools ranked by *Bloomberg Businessweek*. Acuna says that if a screen raises a red flag, schools may intensify their search on that applicant. *Bloomberg Businessweek's* [Erin Zlomek](#) spoke to Acuna about other things B-school applicants may want to know about

how background checks fit into the MBA admissions process. What follows is an edited transcript of their conversation.

What are admissions officers generally looking for?

It depends on each school's policy, but many are checking for criminal history, checking the sex offender database, verifying previous employment to confirm any job experience claimed, and checking education to confirm the degree held, the major, and the schools attended. Student screening falls under a different permissible purpose than pre-employment screening under the Fair Credit Report Act (FCRA). The requirements for what records can be reviewed are different than those for employment purposes.

What are examples of things that might show up?

They can range from felony drug possession, to misdemeanor DUI, to falsified employment information. Some of the most common screens are national criminal checks and county criminal checks based on the applicant's address history. FICO scores and motor vehicle record checks are not used for this screening purpose. Paid and unpaid parking tickets also would not come up.

Is there anything that would surprise an applicant if it popped up?

If the person was charged with a crime, it may show up, even if the charges were dismissed or the person was considered not guilty. In those cases, it would be up to the school to decide if they would consider it or not. If the record was expunged, we shouldn't be able to see that.

Is there any reason you would call an applicant while you conduct your search?

Yes. If a past employer doesn't have a record of the applicant for some reason, we'd ask them for a company pay stub or a W-2. If a school didn't have a record of the applicant's graduation, we would ask him or her for a copy of their diploma and then we would authenticate that with the institution.

Are applicants able to dispute something that shows up?

Should adverse information show up on the background report that would prevent a student from being admitted, the institution has a responsibility to send a copy of the report, along with an adverse letter to the student. If the student believes the information is inaccurate, the student would then need to notify the school that they are disputing the findings and would need to initiate a dispute process with the background screening vendor. The background screening company will launch an investigation and

will work closely with the student to get further information to verify or clear up any misinformation in the records.

What is your advice to applicants who hope to pass a check without complications?

Candidates should be honest about their background, experience, and qualifications. It's in their best interest to self-disclose. Be honest and work with the admissions officer and screening company to quickly provide any information that is needed. Provide the best phone number and e-mail address so they can contact you if they have questions.

Join the discussion on the Bloomberg Businessweek [Business School Forum](#), visit us on [Facebook](#), and follow [@BWbschools](#) on Twitter.

Zlomek is a reporter for Bloomberg News in New York.