Crimson
Graduate
Admissions

From Malaysia to Wharton MBA

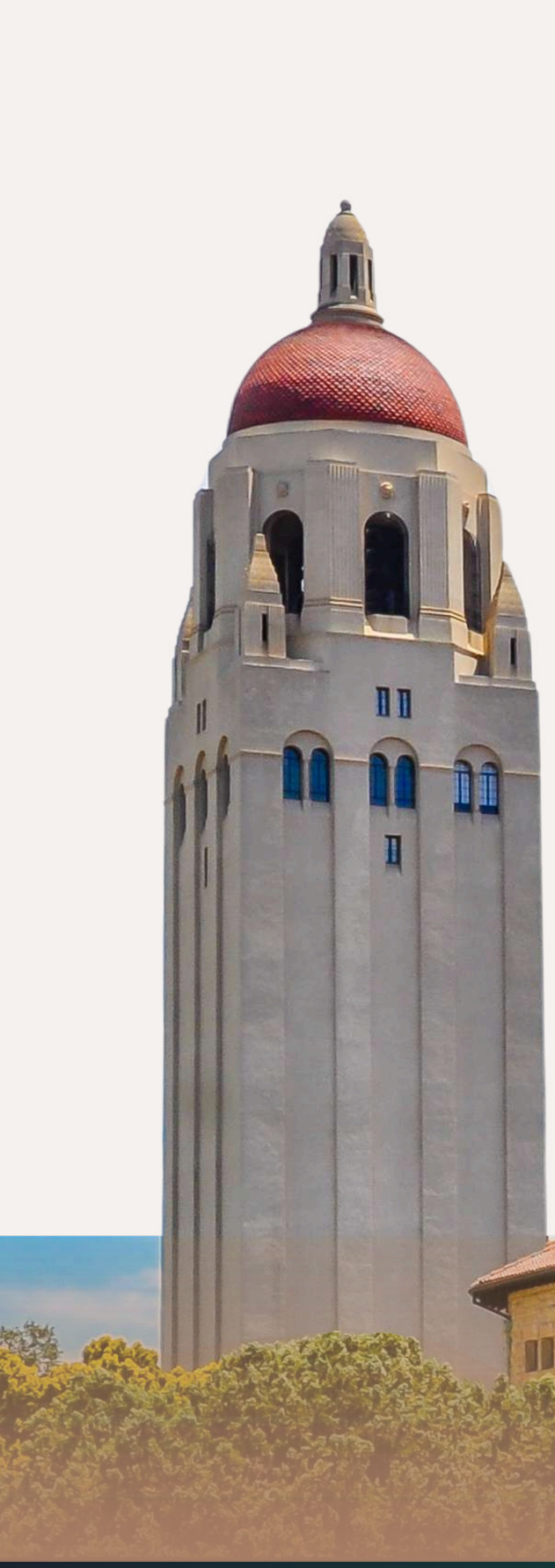
How Ravena Got into Wharton, Kellogg & Booth with Crimson



Introduction

Student:	Ravena Jazmine Rao
Current Role:	IInvestment Banking, Deal Execution | Singapore
Target Programme:	Full-time MBA
Key Acceptances:	• The Wharton School | University of Pennsylvania • Kellogg School of Management | Northwestern • University of Chicago Booth School of Business | University of Chicago

Crimson Support:



01 Comprehensive MBA Admissions Strategy & Application Management

02 Career Mapping, School Selection & Round Strategy

03 Profile Positioning, Narrative Development & CV Editing

04 Unlimited Essay Support, Recommendations & Interview Preparation

05 Post-Acceptance Decision Support & Scholarship Negotiation

Meet

Ravena Jazmine Rao

Ravena Jazmine Rao is twenty-six, Malaysian Indian, and grew up navigating what she describes as a genuinely different experience of being a minority in Malaysia.

Rather than pursue a traditional undergraduate degree, she entered the workforce at nineteen, training as a chartered accountant while working full-time as an auditor at PwC through the ICAEW ACA programme.

When COVID hit and her family's business collapsed, Ravena made the decision to move to Singapore, working through a multi-year visa saga to build a career in investment banking from the ground up, with no precedent and no traditional degree to open the doors that usually open for candidates like her.

She now leads investment banking deal execution for her firm's Singapore desk. This autumn, she begins her MBA at the Wharton School, having also been admitted to Kellogg and Booth, with scholarship offers from both.

How did Ravena turn a non-traditional background, four GMAT attempts, and a five-year visa journey into offers from three of the world's top business schools? Read on to explore her journey, the choices she made, and what her story might mean for yours.



The Starting Point: *Discovering Crimson*

Ravena first heard Jonathan's name in 2023, at an HBS coffee chat in Singapore, where a previous client mentioned working with him. What struck her was the reaction around the table: roughly ten other applicants, all recognising his name instantly, all saying the same thing.

She reached out the next day. When they reconnected in March 2025, ahead of her first GMAT attempt, Jonathan remembered exactly what she had told him two years earlier.

It felt, she said, like picking up where they left off.

Why Ravena Chose *Crimson*

Before committing to the MBA admissions coaching, Ravena researched not just Jonathan's individual credentials but Crimson's track record as a firm, having already heard positive accounts from the undergraduate side of the business.

She points to the platform itself - easy scheduling, consistent support and recorded sessions she could revisit - as a meaningful part of the value. She considers that level of consistency across an entire firm rare.





> I definitely need to talk to Jonathan again, so I reached out the next day. The best part was that he remembered exactly what I had told him two years earlier

Ravena Jazmine Rao

Building a Career Without a Blueprint

Unconventional Path to a Distinctive MBA Story

No conventional route

At 19, Ravena entered the workforce rather than university, having been selected as the sole successful applicant to join PwC Malaysia through the ICAEW pathway. She studied part-time while working full-time, building professional credibility without the undergraduate degree that most employers expected. When her family business collapsed during the pandemic, her salary became the family's safety net. What had begun as an unconventional educational decision quickly became a responsibility far larger than herself.

Creating her own way in

Moving to Singapore presented another barrier. After repeated rejections from the Big Four, Ravena studied the employment regulations herself, identified an alternative route, and persuaded KPMG Singapore to take a chance on her despite her unconventional qualifications. Her transition into M&A was similarly non-linear. She completed CFA Level I, qualified as a Chartered Accountant, and eventually joined Abacus Capital. Within three years, she had progressed to leading its six-person advisory team, sourcing and executing transactions for SME founders.

Earning Her Place

Alongside her investment-banking career, Ravena completed a part-time master's degree at the University of London, working full days and studying most evenings until close to midnight. Securing her Singapore Employment Pass after five years therefore represented far more than an administrative milestone. It was tangible proof of every rejection she had absorbed, every workaround she had created, and every qualification she had earned.

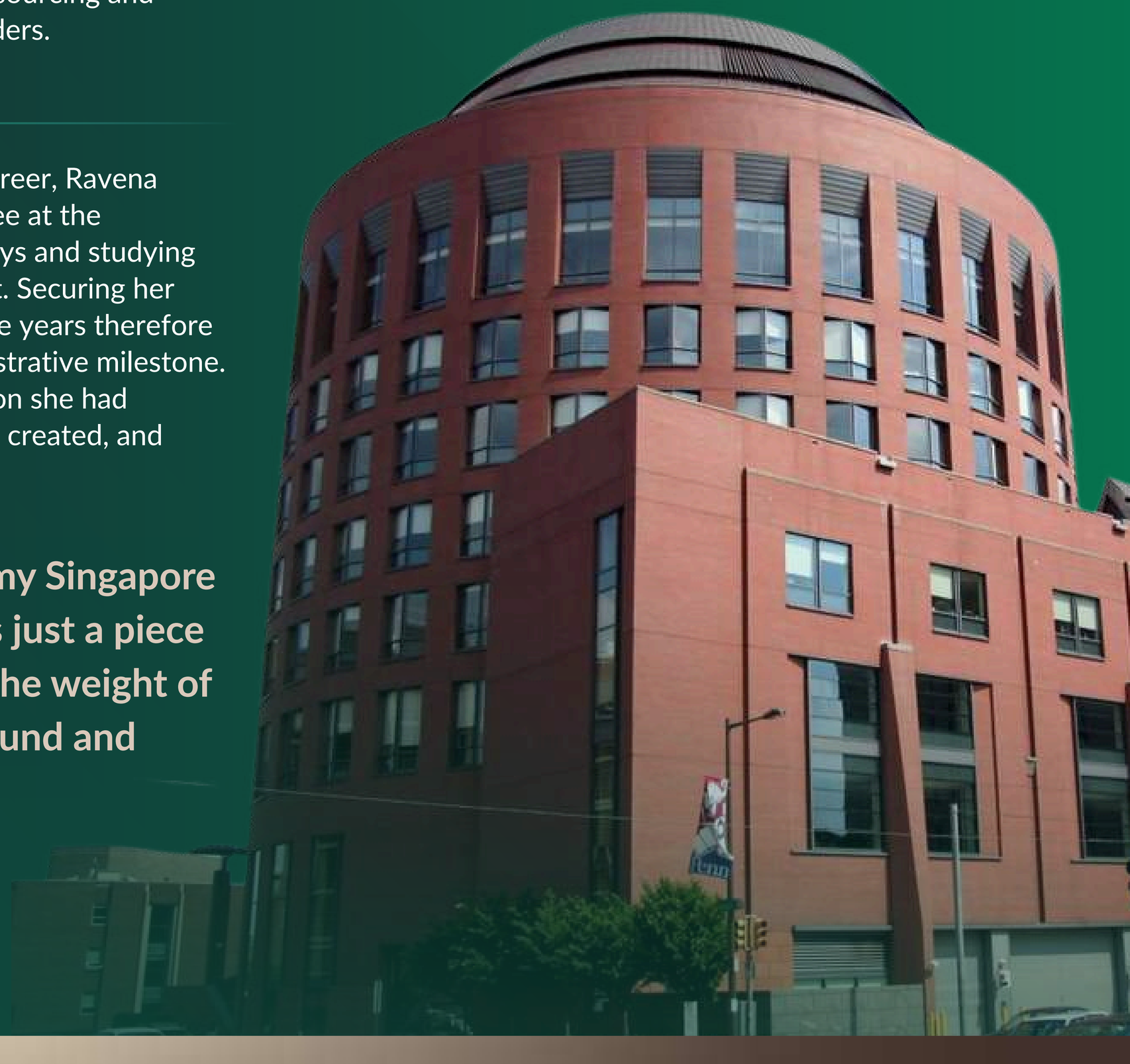
> **"When I finally received my Singapore Employment Pass, it was just a piece of plastic, but it carried the weight of every rejection, workaround and late-night study session**

Why an MBA

For Ravena, the MBA was never simply another credential. Her experience had shown her how invisible barriers - education, regulation, access and networks - can determine who receives an opportunity before ability is ever considered. She now wants to move from executing transactions to allocating capital, ultimately building a platform that invests in and operationally strengthens Malaysian SMEs.

Buildidng Her Story

Ravena and Jonathan worked closely across the entire application cycle. Together, they determined how to present her unconventional academic path, rapid progression in investment banking and long-term ambition for Malaysian SMEs as one coherent and credible case for admission. Her first essay went through more than 10 rounds of revision, ensuring that every component of the application reinforced the same distinctive story, without flattening the complexity of the journey behind it



Q&A with Ravena

In the Q&A below, Ravena shares her application journey to Kellogg, Booth, and Wharton, including her choice of schools, how she stood out, the joy of getting her offers, and advice for future applicants who don't see their own background reflected in a typical MBA story.

01.

Why did you decide to work with Jonathan and Crimson?

I had first met Jonathan two years earlier and remembered how clearly he understood both my background and the barriers I was navigating. When we reconnected, he remembered details from that first conversation that even I had forgotten. I also wanted more than someone who could edit essays. **I needed an adviser who could look at the full picture - my career, academic history, GMAT, ambitions, and school choices - and tell me honestly where I stood**. Crimson gave me that combination: a highly personal relationship with Jonathan, supported by the structure and resources of a larger firm.



02.

What did the Crimson support look like in practice?

Jonathan acted as the central adviser across the entire process. We worked through my career direction, target schools, application timing, positioning, CV, recommendations, essays, and interviews. He was also the person I turned to whenever I felt uncertain. He helped me separate decisions that genuinely affected my candidacy from the things I was simply overthinking. That was incredibly valuable while managing ten applications alongside a demanding full-time job.

03.

How did the process go beyond essay editing?

The essays were only one expression of a much broader strategy. Jonathan continually challenged whether my goals were credible, whether my school choices made sense, and whether each part of the application supported the same overall case for admission. There were times when an essay sounded polished but did not yet say anything meaningful. He would push me back into the underlying experience - what I had decided, what had been at stake, and why it mattered. **My first essay went through more than ten rounds**, not because we were changing individual words, but because we were refining the thinking behind the entire application.

04.

How did Jonathan help you navigate the GMAT and the decision to apply?

The GMAT was the hardest part of the process. I took it four times and never reached the score I had originally hoped for.

Before my fourth attempt, Jonathan and I reviewed the application as a whole and had a very honest conversation about the risk. He did not give me false reassurance, but he also did not allow one number to erase everything else I had built. We made the decision to apply based on the strength of the full candidacy - my professional progression, academic evidence, leadership, goals, and personal story.

That judgment gave me the confidence to move forward without pretending the weakness did not exist

05.

What distinguished Jonathan's approach?

Jonathan was like my **North Star**. He gave me direction, but he never tried to turn me into a version of the applicant he thought schools wanted. He knew when to challenge me, when to simplify something, and when to leave an imperfect but honest detail in the application because it was genuinely mine. By the end, the applications felt more polished and strategic, but they still sounded unmistakably like me.

06.

How did you feel when the offers finally arrived?

Wharton's decision was delayed on release day, and when the email did not arrive, I assumed the worst. I logged into the portal anyway and saw a blue banner welcoming me to the Class of 2028. I sat there for two full minutes believing it had to be a mistake. After everything it had taken to reach that point, **receiving offers from Wharton, Kellogg and Booth** felt almost impossible to process.



Ravena's Advice

"Your unique story is something that makes you valuable."

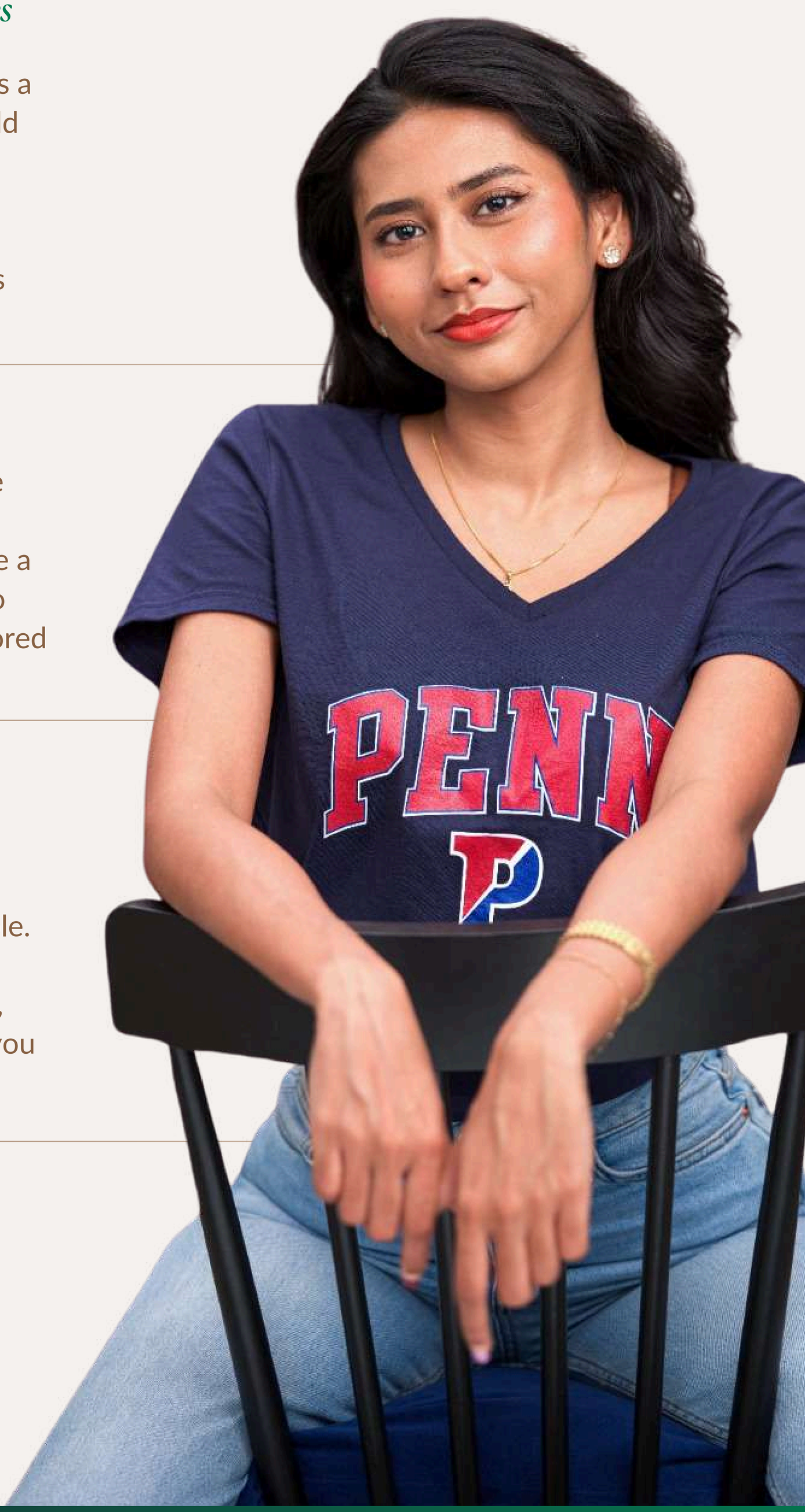
"Your non-traditional path, or what you feel is a weakness, does not discount you, and it would not deter someone from accepting you. Your unique story, because we come from APAC, because we have very different lived experiences, is actually something that makes you valuable in any context."

"Go in with conviction."

"Understand clearly why you are pursuing the degree, and do not let the scale of the commitment talk you out of starting. We have a tendency in the Asian applicant community to default to self-doubt before we've even explored the options seriously."

"You have something to say at the table."

“We're just as talented, and your lived experiences are just as unique, or even more unique. You have something to say at the table. And if you do have that confidence, and you really think that you have something to bring, then go for it. Don't let anyone tell you that you can't."



The Crimson Difference:
Strategic Alignment & Coordinated Expertise

Ravena's journey powerfully demonstrates how Cimson supports applicants at every stage of their MBA admissions process.

Personal Strategy. Full-Cycle Support

Ravena's journey demonstrates how one trusted strategist, backed by Crimson's platform and wider expertise, can guide every decision from initial school selection through to final interviews and offers

School Selection & Application Strategy

Jonathan built a ten-school portfolio that balanced ambition, fit and admissions risk. Each programme had a clear positioning thesis, shaped by Ravena's unconventional academic background, professional trajectory, GMAT profile and long-term ambitions.

Narrative, CV & Recommendations

Across hours of strategy, Jonathan helped Ravena connect her unconventional education, visa challenges, rapid progression in M&A and ambitions for Malaysian SMEs into one coherent admissions case, while her CV and recommendations were developed to reinforce the same central positioning.

School-Specific Positioning

The core story remained consistent, but its expression changed for every programme. Jonathan advised Ravena on how to adapt her experiences, goals and contributions to each school's questions, culture and evaluation style - ensuring that every application felt individually built rather than replicated.

Interview Prep & Support

Ravena interviewed with 6 schools across substantially different formats, from Wharton's Team-Based Discussion to more conventional individual interviews. Jonathan conducted multiple tailored mock sessions, helping her refine both the substance of her answers and the clarity, confidence and adaptability of her delivery.

Crimson Platform & Infrastructure

The personal advisory relationship was supported by Crimson's wider infrastructure: streamlined scheduling, recorded sessions Ravena could revisit, centralised application management and the backing of a firm with an established MBA admissions track record.

The Result

3 M7 Admits

Kellogg · Booth · Wharton

The Coach Behind the Journey

13+ years in business education · 550+ MBA candidates coached from 60+ countries · >90% M7 acceptance rate

Jonathan has never viewed MBA consulting as simply an exercise in gaining admission. His work is centred on long-term career strategy: helping candidates define ambitious but credible goals, understand the routes available to them and use graduate education as a platform for the next decade of their careers. Around 80% of his MBA clients have ultimately secured the role or career direction they mapped out together before applying.



Jonathan DeForge

Platinum MBA Admissions Coach



> ***"I have always been drawn to candidates whose potential is greater than the conventional markers on their CV. Ravena was one of those people. From our first conversation, I knew she was exceptional. She had entered PwC without a degree, created her own route to Singapore, broken into M&A and risen rapidly through judgment, resilience and sheer resourcefulness. Long before the offers arrived, I believed she was capable of something extraordinary. My role was never to manufacture that potential, but to help the schools see what was already there."***

That conviction shaped the entire engagement. Rather than treating Ravena's unconventional background as weaknesses to defend, Jonathan helped her present them as evidence of the qualities that had driven her success. The result was an application that helped her stand out.

Reimagine What's Possible with *Crimson MBA*

Who We Are

Crimson MBA is the graduate admissions arm of Crimson Education, the world's leading university admissions consultancy. We match you with a personalized expert MBA admissions coach, selected for their experience, their track record, and their fit with your target programs, who stays with you through your entire application journey.

Every session is one-on-one. Every strategy is built around your profile, your industry, and your timeline.

Our Services

Crimson MBA's bespoke services help you achieve your educational aims.

- Admissions Strategy Consulting
- Essay & Application Mentoring
- GMAT/GRE Test Prep & Score Strategy
- Interview Preparation
- Career & Post-MBA Goal Coaching
- Recommender Strategy
- Scholarship & Funding Strategy
- Profile & Extracurricular Positioning

600+
Offers to top Business School

200+
Offers to M7 MBA Programs

90%
Acceptance Rate to M7 MBA Programs

98%
Acceptance Rate to INSEAD, LBS, & Oxbridge

3.7x
Crimson students get the Top US, UK, & EU Business Schools



Crimson
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“I definitely couldn't have done it without your support. Crimson and Jonathan especially — I wouldn't have been here at all without that.”



Ravena Jazmine

Wharton Class of 2026

Start your MBA journey with Crimson now.

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