

Mentors from Kyrgyzstan MBA

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Kumar Bekbolotov.

In an era of globalisation and fierce competition on the job market, it's worth noting that even professionals with significant work experience need education to develop their careers. In Europe, Asia and the USA business schools have been created to meet this need. Business school graduates are in high demand and as a rule, are generally in employment. In addition, business schools offer the

opportunity to get essential skills in business and expand horizons.

It's no secret that in Kyrgyzstan, only a handful of universities graduate high quality competitive specialists. As a result, graduates who have the desire and the ability to study for an international level qualification go abroad. But what should you do if you want go but are financially limited? How do you get admission to American business schools? What are the advantages of education in the US? **Kumar Bekbolotov** and **Seyitbek Usmanov** are successful graduates of prestigious American business schools and here share their stories and advice.

Kumar Bekbolotov: I graduated from Haas School of Business, University of California Berkeley. I studied for a two year MBA programme. I recently returned to Kyrgyzstan and now work as a consultant in the area of strategic planning in business, social promotion.

Straight after graduating I worked as an internal consultant at the University of California Berkeley. I had the opportunity to continue working in that field but at the outset I'd planned to work in international relations. I was made some offers from the Kyrgyz government, but felt it was too early.

Considering the international scale of the business school industry, there are very few Kyrgyz graduates of the top 30 universities. Our country is small and until recently we had very few examples of others who had successfully enrolled

and completed study at western universities.

I don't know exactly how many Kyrgyzstanis have stayed to live and work in the USA but I'm sure that most don't return to Kyrgyzstan.



Seyitbek Usmanov

Seyitbek Usmanov: I only know of two Kyrgyzstanis who've come back to Kyrgyzstan after completing study at business schools in the USA – they are Kumar Bekbolotov and Cholponbek Jumashukurov. But they are, so to speak, part of a new wave – business school graduates from the last 5-10 years. There weren't any Kyrgyzstanis in the west before that. It's possible that in another 5-10 years more of our fellow citizens will return to their home country after studying abroad.

When I was working as an analyst in New York, I realised that to get to the next step on the career ladder, I would need a springboard: an MBA. I wanted to work in global consulting or banking and there was no other way to get there apart from by doing an MBA. I started to prepare for the GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test, a standardised admission test used by business schools). I found this really

difficult, and I only had eight months to prepare. Late I realised that I hadn't prepared properly: with the right approach it would have taken half the time.

In the first instance, I would advise prospective Kyrgyz business school applicants to get in touch with people who have already graduated. We have a 'Kyrgyzstan MBA' Facebook page and a website, kgmba.org. There you can find a lot of information about how to pass the GMAT, how to write an essay, details about who has been to which university and their contact details (including ours). The main thing is to ensure that applicants are able to obtain good quality and correct information. It will make their lives a lot easier. For example, they can find out whether they can get funding and how to apply for it.

Kumar Bekbolotov: My route to getting into business school is a little unusual. Most applicants have a defined career path and usually work in the business sector. However, all business schools have a significant group of students who come from other backgrounds, such as the military, NGOs or journalism. I was one of that group in my university. Because of my background [in journalism] I found the maths-based subjects like accounting, micro-economics and statistics particularly hard. In the first semester I spent a lot of time working in order to keep up academically with the other students.

After graduating from university in Kyrgyzstan and before going to business

school, I worked in journalism as an editor for the Institute of War and Peace Reporting. After that I worked for the Soros Fund in Kyrgyzstan. It was that experience that got me thinking about the possibility of further study in the area of business.

In 2010 there was inter-ethnic conflict in my native Osh. I undertook my own analysis to try and understand the causes of the conflict. My personal conclusion was that many of the reasons are rooted in economic development. In order to obtain a deeper understanding, I started to look for business schools where the programme wasn't purely about business but where there was an emphasis on responsibility for the future of the world and one's home country, and which aimed to strengthen the role of business and the private sector in development. The Berkeley school was exactly the right fit: I could get a deeper understanding of international economic development and the role of business in social initiatives. For me, those two years were very productive, not just in study but also through practicums. What stood out at this business school was that students wouldn't just study but worked in small groups, for example in consulting, and would work for real-life clients. In most cases this work was paid.

Seyitbek Usmanov: Firstly, I met a lot of interesting people there. Some of them were speakers, some had come from exotic countries and others were just good people. They supported me in my efforts to become better and more successful. I learnt things there that I

wouldn't even have thought of before. For example, the concept of operational processes: you can analyse processes and find ways to make them simpler. That was a big shock for me. Thirdly, I really liked being in the 'MBA club'. I can be in touch with other graduates of our university and get advice from them on professional matters. It's a really solid group. I have lots of friends who I don't know but who, through the internet, I can network with and get advice from. I've already approached a few of them when I was looking for work and they answered my questions.

Kumar Bekbolotov: Two years of study at Berkeley costs \$120,000 – and that's just for tuition. You also need to account for living costs. All universities offer substantial financial assistance. When you get your offer letter, it includes details about your financial aid package. It's based on your individual circumstances and could include a tuition fee discount, the opportunity to work at the university or the opportunity to take out a student loan with very good conditions. Many universities offer student loans over a 20 year period with a low interest rate. Nearly everyone, regardless of where they're from, uses this resource. It's better value than many commercial loans. The advantage for Kyrgyzstanis is that there so few of us studying there, so it encourages universities to compete for our students with other universities.

An energetic group has now been formed from amongst those Kyrgyzstanis who are planning to apply to business school, those who are

currently studying as well as graduates. The group includes Seyitbek Usmanov, Aliya Ibragimova and Chingiz Sadykov. Seyitbek represents the University of Virginia's Darden Business School and Aliya and Chingiz represent Fuqua School of Business at Duke University (in North Carolina). They've created their own group which is called Kyrgyzstan MBA and over the last few years it has run some really interesting events.

They work on the basis that the more of our compatriots go through this education system, the greater the likelihood that they will be able to integrate into major businesses or launch their own initiatives in a range of sectors (not just in business). This group wants Kyrgyzstanis to be represented in the top 20-30 universities globally, not lower ranked universities which they believe will reduce the opportunities for successful careers. Representatives of this group will gladly provide information to others about, for example, how to apply or offer to act as a mentor. It would be fantastic if young people who are interested in studying at business school would get involved in this group.