

## University of Chicago Booth School of Business

*Welcome to the best Business School in the Universe!*

This summary contains information about the Student Exchange program with University of Chicago Booth School of Business. The following is based on Shelly Bar Nahor's Summary (in Hebrew) of her 2007 exchange period in Chicago Booth and on my own experiences of the 2010 autumn period spent there.

Please feel free to contact me for any further information.

Yariv Horowitz.

### Chicago Booth – General

The MBA program at the Chicago Booth School of Business is the second oldest running business school program in the US. For decades it has been ranked in the top business schools in the world. In 2008 the business school changed its name to honor Alumnus David Booth who donated \$300M to the school (the former name was Chicago Graduate School of Business). The donation and other factors helped the business school to weather the economic crises well. Following that, according to the last Business Schools MBA rankings conducted by Business Week and by The Economist, Booth School of Business is the **best Business School in the world**.

Chicago Booth is known for excellent academic level, especially in the fields of Economics and Finance. The faculty staff includes six Noble laureates, more than any other business school in the world. It is possible to bump into or even take a course with professors that the theories that you studied in school are named over them...

The full time MBA program is a very big one; approximately 550 students start it every year. About 35% of the full time students are international students who come from all over the world while Israel has a significant presence with about 10-12 students per year. Student's average age is 28, average work experience is 5 years and average GMAT score is 714.

The program includes six periods of eleven weeks each (the last week is final exams week) and it usually lasts 21 months.

University of Chicago main campus is located in Hyde Park, about a 20 minutes drive south of downtown Chicago and most of the courses take place on campus, in the business school building called the Harper Center. The school has an extension in downtown Chicago in a building called Gleacher Center and most of the students who study there are part time and weekend students.

The **student exchange program** is quite big and includes about 40 incoming students per semester. As an exchange student, you can attend both the full time courses in the Harper Center and the weekend/part time courses at Gleacher (under some restrictions, see the courses section). In addition, you are allowed to join and participate in the many events that the university offers such as social clubs lectures, conventions, dinner and parties. On the other hand, the professional clubs (such as Strategy Consulting club, Investment Management club) and some of the career services (such as on campus recruiting) are blocked for exchange students.

### **Preparations**

Acceptance notice to the program will usually arrive around March followed by a confirmation mail from the Associate Director of International Programs in Booth (currently, Jessica Oldford). Yet, it will take time until information about the program will be sent by E-mail and later on by paper mail. This time should be used to start up preparations, especially those considering a issuing a Visa to the US. A good way to start is going over the following link that contains detailed information about the program (the most relevant section in the beginning is “Application Process”):

<http://programs.chicagogsb.edu/international/ibep/incoming>

The main issues to deal with prior to departure:

- Preparing the documents for your visa application.
- Sorting your financial issues prior to departure (insurance; loans; etc.).

- Finding accommodation.
- Reading about the university and the studies at Booth and registration to courses via the bidding system.

### **Visa**

This process is very exhausting and long. First, a tourist visa, if you hold such, is irrelevant for purposes of your semester abroad. In order to study in the United States you must choose either the student visa (F-1) or the exchange visa (J-1). This choice is made during your correspondence with the school. There is no significant difference between the two types of visa. The both will allow you to fly to Chicago and stay there for the whole semester and a bit thereafter. The differences between the two visas has to do with the ability to work in the United States during the stay and the “grace period” that you can stay in the States after the semester has ended (F-1 grace period is 60 days while J-1 is 30 days).

In addition, you will receive Form I-20 from the university in Chicago which will determine the exact time period during which you are allowed to stay in the US, which can be shorter than the term of the visa itself but is the crucial one.

### **Medical Insurance**

During your first weeks in Chicago, you will need to decide whether to accept the medical insurance offered by the school (approximately \$700 for the whole semester) or to waive that insurance assuming that you have a different equivalent private insurance. It is highly recommended to thoroughly check this issue before making a decision (the university insurance is considered to be expensive but very good and comprehensive).

### **Accommodation:**

The first decision to make regarding accommodation is which area to live in. The two main possibilities are Hyde Park, where the main campus is located and Downtown Chicago (or the surrounding area) where the smaller Gleacher center is located.

Roughly 85% of the full time MBA students choose to live in or near downtown, while only a third of the exchange students do so. There are no university accommodations in the downtown area, so you are quite on your own finding an apartment to rent.

Relative advantages of living in the city:

- 1) Most full time MBA students live there (convenient for study groups and social life)
- 2) Proximity for all the “good things” of a big city, especially Chicago; bars, clubs, restaurants, live music, culture centers, shopping centers and most touristic sites.

Relative disadvantages of living in the city:

- 1) Generally more expensive accommodation than Hyde Park
- 2) Only Independent housing, need to find by self.
- 3) Distance from main campus means commuting by the Metra for most classes (unless you have a car).
- 4) Harder to get to social and other activities held in and around campus.

Once you choose the location, you have three main options for accommodation:

- 1) I-House.
- 2) University housing.
- 3) Independent accommodation.

**1) I-House:**

This is a big dormitory building which accommodates mostly the foreign students (full timers and exchange) in the university (not only Booth). The Office of International Affairs, which is the body which is responsible for the visas, is also located in this building and you will have to visit it at least once upon arrival.

**Advantages:**

- Only two blocks from Booth and two blocks from the Metra station.
- Allows social life: it is very cold outside and there are limited options in the neighborhood so this is a great meeting spot.
- Free Internet access and a land line in the room.
- Flexibility in the renting period: option for extensions on a daily basis. Easy to book everything in advance.

**Disadvantages:**

- Small rooms (do you can rent bigger rooms for a higher price).
- Shared bathrooms and showers on each floor.
- Shared kitchen (can be fun but burdensome most of the time).

My first reaction was that I should rent a bigger apartment for a similar price in which I will have privacy. Throughout the course of the semester, I have started to see the advantages of the I-House: the lobby is a great place to study at, for mutual dinners, random parties and, in addition, you always have someone to go home with (we were about twelve Booth exchange students in my semester). Therefore and despite the clear disadvantages, if you are arriving on your own, I would recommend staying there.

For more details:

<http://ihouse.uchicago.edu/>

## **2) University Housing:**

The university had purchased several buildings around the city and uses them as housing for the students. Here the advantages are the lease period flexibility, the furnished rooms (optional) and the inclusion of gas, water and electricity. The buildings are located in the university's neighborhood: it is recommended to find an apartment as closer as possible to 58-59 street (Booth's street) but not southern (60 Street and southern is rather unpleasant). A walk from 53<sup>rd</sup> street to 59<sup>th</sup> is about 15-20 minutes (and, when it gets cold, these are long 20 minutes).

## **3) Independent Housing:**

Apartments in the Hyde Park area will cost very roughly about \$1,000 for a one bedroom apartment (two rooms). In downtown Chicago the apartments will roughly range from \$1,500 to \$2,000 per month. The advantages of Independent Housing are clear: more privacy and comfort. The main disadvantage is that you have to find them by yourself and pay extra for the short stay. A good place to start looking for is Craigslist: <http://chicago.craigslist.org>. If you are keen on Independent Housing, I would recommend you to arrive at Chicago an extra few days in advance (though few students managed to arrange everything on-line from back home). You can also try the following link to a real estate broker that works with

Booth: [http://www.colfaxrealty.com/resources\\_chicago.php?img=7](http://www.colfaxrealty.com/resources_chicago.php?img=7)

I have added an appendix with information about Chicago's different neighborhoods.

### **What to Bring?**(Very partial list...)

Bed sheets: none of the above accommodation options includes bed sheets; you can buy a blanket and a pillow at the University Book Store. The I-House purchases through it a set of sheets that will be waiting for you upon arrival. This is much more expensive but also very convenient.

Laptop: a must have. Don't forget to bring adapters.

School equipment.

Warm clothing (but don't buy any winter cloths in Israel, it is cheaper and more accessible in Chicago).

### **The Weather**

The city of Chicago has distinct seasonal differences and two main factors determine the weather and temperatures in the city. The city is set in the center of a continental land mass, meaning that the summers are particularly hot and the winters very cold, although the nearby lake tends to moderate the weather extremes and adds a level of humidity. Generally the most pleasant times in the city are from mid-September to October and from May to early June, when the climate and weather is most pleasant (14°C - 16°C). If you plan any trips, this would be the ideal period for it.

Spring in Chicago is relatively short, lasting from the beginning of April to the end of May and temperatures are fairly moderate, with frosts during the night. Summer however is however much hotter and June, July, August and September are the hottest and most sunny months in the city (you will be able to walk solely with a T-shirt). The humidity in the summer is often high, but the cool breezes from Lake Michigan are very refreshing. Evenings can be cool and when attending outdoor events it may be necessary to take a light jacket.

In the winter, the Chicago climate in December (-5°C but feels like -15°C because of the wind), January and February can be particularly cold, with some icy days and harsh winds. This is also the wettest time of the year, and snow often also falls in the winter. You will need a very warm coat, gloves, hat, etc. (you can find these in Chicago for very low prices).

With average daily temperatures of around 26°C in the summer, the climate is very pleasant and warm. In general, temperatures in the heart of the city tend to be slightly higher than the rest of Chicago, as the heat

is absorbed into the large buildings, skyscrapers and concrete. Whatever the weather, there is always plenty to see and do in this part of Illinois.

### **Flight**

There are two international airports in Chicago- O'Hare and Midway. The first one is pretty far from the city (45 min cab ride) and the second one is close (20 min). Even though you can use the train (CTA), it is easier to use take a taxi upon arrival. A taxi from Midway will cost around \$25 and from Midway around \$55. You can also use the Omega Shuttle that will cost \$30 but will take more than an hour and will take you to the I-House: <http://www.omegashuttle.com>

### **Transportation**

- (1) Public Buses (of CTA): they run till late at night, also on weekends. A single ride costs about \$2 (there is no change so you need the exact amount in cash or a ticket which you can purchase on in the subway stations). Around the university you can ride some lines for free using your student card. If you are looking for transportation from Hyde Park to the downtown campus: line 6 is frequent and stops close by. Line 173 stops right next to the Harper Center (Kimbark and 59<sup>th</sup>) but they run only once every half an hour in the afternoons and stops near the Gleacher Center. The CTA also runs trains (some of them underground) in the city. They are very convenient for traveling to downtown Chicago and the northern neighborhoods, but they are considered unsafe for traveling to south Chicago (including those which reach the west of Hyde Park) especially at night.

<http://www.transitchicago.com/>

- (2) University Buses: free lines for students that are run by the university around Hyde Park.
- (3) Train (Metra): one of the most convenient ways to get from Hyde Park to downtown and back (about 20 minutes). It costs about \$2. The schedule can be found in the main station (Millennium). You should have a close look at it otherwise you might find yourself waiting for a long time. There is a stop on 57<sup>th</sup> and 59<sup>th</sup> streets.

<http://metrarail.com/metra/en/home.html>

(4) Taxi: the most comfortable and expensive way of commuting. You can find them everywhere. One minute will cost about \$1. A taxi from the center to Hyde Park should cost about \$25.

### **Communication**

Most of the apartments should have a land line which you will be able to activate for a reasonable payment. Otherwise, installing the land line will cost \$135 (even though you can ask the real estate agency that got you the apartment to pay for it). On 53<sup>rd</sup> street in Hyde Park and down town you can find stores of the cellular companies such as AT&T which have pre-paid deals to offer (you get a phone and pay only for air time).

If you have a laptop you can easily access the university's Wi-Fi on campus and from the I-House. The username and password (CnetID) will be provided to you by the person in charge of the exchange upon arrival. Some of the other university housing buildings have partial coverage of the wireless Internet and that is something you should make sure in advance. If you don't have Wi-Fi access, you can order Cable Modem or ADSL.

Upon arrival, you should compare the prices of the international calls since the differences may be significant.

### **Campus and Social Life**

The campus offers many activities from the day of your arrival and until your departure. There are many students' clubs based on shared hobbies, interests or other (Thursday Night Drinking Club, Wine, Football, Golf, Consulting, Investment Banking, Movies, Jewish Club, VC, Latin America etc.). These clubs' even if they look strange to us Recanati people, are a great way to meet new people and learn new things. The clubs present themselves in a fair in the first week of studies and joining for one quarter costs about \$10-\$50. Unfortunately, the professional clubs (such as Strategy Consulting club, Investment Management club) are blocked for exchange students.

Except the clubs, other events such as guest lectures, professional workshops, cocktail parties, gatherings, shows and others take place in the Business school and the University campus. It is worthwhile going over the large amount of e-mail that you receive and check notifications on the Booth portal. It is also

worthwhile hanging in the university campus (outside of the business school) and get a bit of the feeling of an American campus.

Outside of campus, Chicago is a great city. A few examples of things you can do: go to the Willis tower observatory (the tallest building in America), watch a professional Basketball/Baseball/Football/Ice hockey game, see Chicago's beautiful sky line from Navy pier, visit the Shed aquarium and the other great museums, walk around Millennium Park with its awesome sculptures, drink whisky and listen to live jazz music in Al Capone's favorite bar and more.

### **Studies**

In general, the studies in Booth are intensive and high level. Before every lesson (sometimes even before the first lesson of the semester) there are many readings and assignments to do (even though the amount varies very much between courses). Most classes begin with a lengthy discussion between the students and the professor about a case study, and student participation is expected and marked.

All students are required to take 3-5 courses per semester, while most take 3-4 courses. Since each course requires additional 3-15 hours of work at home (in addition to the lecture hours) it is not recommended to take more than 4 courses.

Registration to the courses is done by a bidding process somewhat similar to the one in Recanati which is called *ibid*. You will receive 10,000 bidding points which you can allocate between different courses. The bidding process begins at the end of August and has multiple runs that continue after the semester begins.

So, how to choose courses and devise a bidding strategy?

A good way to start is getting information via this link:

<http://programs.chicagobooth.edu/international/ibep/incoming/academics.aspx>

And the Booth Portal: <http://boothportal.chicagobooth.edu/portal/server.pt/user/guest/2>, which also includes a lot of other information relevant for students. You will get access to some of the information only after you receive a student username and password.

Important points for choosing courses:

- Understand the bidding instructions and don't miss the bidding dates.  
(<https://ibid.chicagobooth.edu/registrar-student/Home.tap>)
- Use the "course search" in the Booth portal to find the relevant offered courses for the semester.
- Read course descriptions. Check if they have Strict Prerequisites. If you want to bid for any course that has Strict Prerequisites you must gain the professor's approval before bidding starts.
- View course evaluations (by link in the course description or <http://programs.chicagobooth.edu/courseeval>). Pay special attention to average number of hours per week spent in preparation (this runs from 3-20 hours per course).
- Check course price history to get an idea how hard will it be to get the course in the bidding.
- Most courses which are held in the Gleacher center in downtown (numbered 30000-81 or 30000-85) open for bidding for exchange students only in the 3<sup>rd</sup> round of bidding.

### **The Courses I Took**

#### Accounting and Financial Analysis II – Haresh Sapra

This advanced course mainly deals with the accounting perspectives of Mergers and Acquisitions. The professor is excellent; proficient, responsive and very funny. The course will give a lot for someone who wants a career in investment banking, but will be too specific and not worth the effort for someone who doesn't see himself working in the field in the future.

#### Cases in Financial Management - Nathaniel Gregory

This is an advanced course in corporate finance that tries to provide a bridge between theory and practice. Most of the work is done on case studies (and you better get a good study group), as the professor assumes that you already know most of the theory. The professor is

very experienced and makes you think in a practical managerial way even if the initial analysis is model structured.

#### Competitive Strategy - Emir Kamenica

This is a course on corporate strategy and decision making from a microeconomic and game theory point of view. This is considered a relatively basic course in strategy (and it is done a lot in the conceptual level). Yet, The young professor is excellent and pushes the student to imply critical thinking in the analysis of business situations which leads to deep insights.

#### Strategy Development – Marc Knez

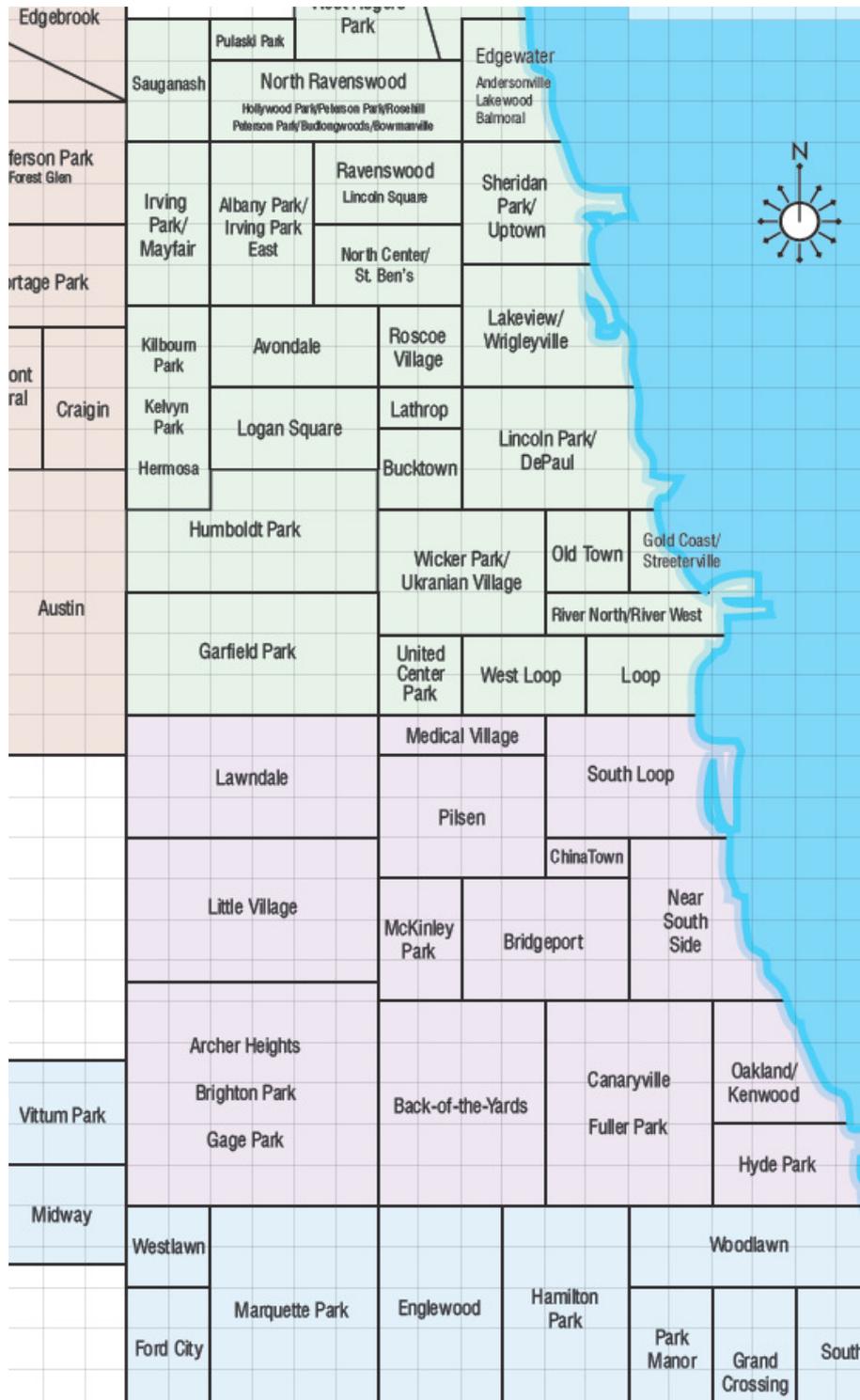
This course focuses on concepts and frameworks for developing and assessing business strategies. Yet, The theory and models are not the highlight of the course but the clever way in which the professor and class analyze different business situations. The professor gives only very up to date cases, many of them considering new technological developments. In the end of the course each group submits and presents their final project which includes a newly developed business concept and business plan.

#### ***To Sum Up,***

The student exchange program in Chicago Booth was a great experience for me. I studied in the highest level with the best professors and business students in the world, I opened my horizons and more important than all, I had lots of fun with the interesting people I met and became good friends with.

If you are willing to take on University of Chicago's famous academic rigor and the Windy City's notorious winter you are expected to have an unforgettable experience as I had.

**Appendix - Neighborhoods in Chicago**



These are the most popular housing locations for Chicago Booth students:

<b>Neighborhoods</b>	<b>Things to consider</b>
Hyde Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy commute to campus (bus service)</li> <li>• Cheaper apartments (typically) and cheaper parking. Many students choose to live in <a href="#">Regents Park or Hyde Park Towers</a> which are a bit more expensive.</li> <li>• Not as many restaurants/bars in the neighborhood</li> <li>• Transportation to/from Hyde Park in the evenings is not very convenient as cabs are not as available</li> <li>• Easy to find apartment</li> <li>• Most first-year Booth students live in Hyde Park</li> <li>• Some students recommend keeping a car but many students don't</li> </ul>
Downtown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Longer commute to campus (best public transportation option is to take the <a href="#">Metra</a>; 15-30 min. by car)</li> <li>• More expensive apartments and parking</li> <li>• Easy to find apartments. Millennium Park Plaza and Columbus Plaza are very popular.</li> <li>• No need for car; many transportation options are available</li> <li>• Good restaurant/bar selection and entertainment options (theaters etc.)</li> <li>• Proximity to students; many students choose to live in downtown</li> </ul>
Old Town/Gold Coast (located just north of downtown)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Longer commute to campus. Public Transportation: no direct train, will have to make connection and take Metra; 25-35 min. by car) – Would not recommend moving here without a car!!</li> <li>• Very connected to the rest of Chicago</li> <li>• More expensive apartments and parking</li> <li>• Not as easy to find apartments. Best to use apartment finding services</li> <li>• Excellent restaurant/bar selection and entertainment options (theaters etc.); Best nightlife in close proximity</li> <li>• Very close to North beach (most popular</li> </ul>

	<p>lake beach spot in Chicago)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very distinct Chicago neighborhood feel</li> </ul>
<p>Lincoln Park (located north of Old Town)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Longer commute to campus. Public Transportation: no direct train, will have to make connection and take Metra; 30-45 min. by car) – Would not recommend moving here without a car!!</li> <li>• Very connected to the rest of Chicago city</li> <li>• Cheaper apartments (more vintage looking) and parking compared to downtown and Gold coast</li> <li>• Not as easy to find apartments. Best to use apartment finding services</li> <li>• Excellent restaurant/bar selection and entertainment options (theaters etc.); Very good nightlife</li> <li>• Many students (esp. second years) will live here</li> <li>• Very distinct Chicago neighborhood feel</li> </ul>
<p>Lake View (located north of Lincoln Park)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Same as Lincoln Park with a longer commute. Car a must!!</li> <li>• Apartments are cheaper than even Lincoln Park</li> <li>• Good location to <i>buy</i> apartments</li> <li>• Not as good nightlife as Gold Coast or Lincoln park but much better than Hyde park</li> </ul>
<p>Wicker Park</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Probably the longest commute to campus. Public Transportation is not really an option; 30-45 min. by car) – Would not recommend moving here without a car!!</li> <li>• Apartments are cheaper than even Lincoln Park. Many lofts are available for rent. Parking is quite cheap.</li> <li>• Fairly well connected to the rest of Chicago</li> <li>• Not as easy to find apartments. Best to use apartment finding services</li> <li>• Excellent restaurant/bar selection and entertainment options (theaters etc.); Very good nightlife</li> <li>• Very distinct Chicago neighborhood feel</li> </ul>