

How to find the perfect color



Getting that just-right color is part art, part science. We'll show you. *Continued* ►

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Hidden in your photo is the color palette you need. Here's how to get it out.

No single visual element has more effect on a viewer than color. Color gets attention, sets a mood, sends a message. But what colors are the right ones? The key is that *color is relational*. Colors don't exist in a vacuum but are always seen with other colors. Because of this, you can design a color-coordinated document based on the colors in any element on the page. Here's how.



Here's the situation: We have an academic schedule for a women's college to design, and for a photo we have this no-nonsense, freckle-faced model. The goal is to look fresh, alive and personal (no buildings and grounds shots) while conveying the sense that the program is serious and businesslike. A note of trendiness will be good. Color is involved in all of it.

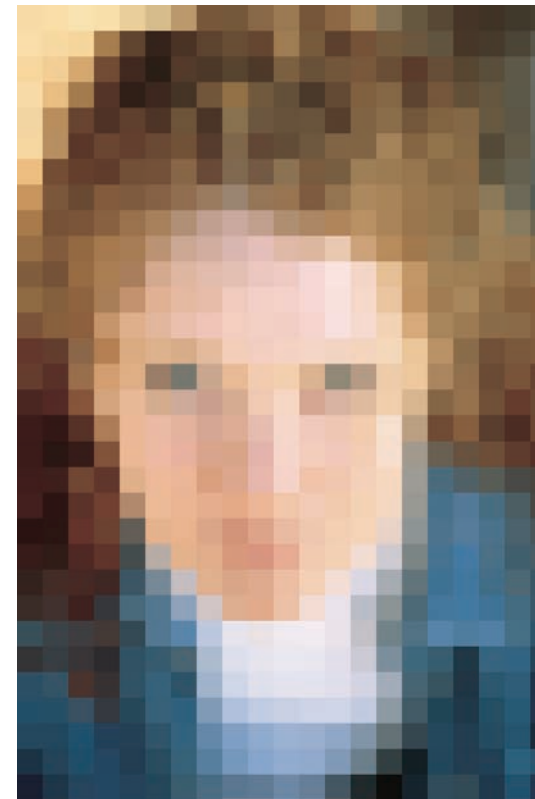


Look close, closer, closest

Every photo has a natural color palette. First step is to find it and organize it. Zoom in on your photo, and you'll be astonished by how many colors you see.



At normal viewing distance (left) we see a few dozen colors: skin tones, red hair, blue eyes, blue jacket, but zoom closer, and we see millions! First step is to reduce all those colors to a manageable few; you want 16, 32, 64 tops. In Photoshop, first duplicate the photo layer (so you don't lose the original), then select Filter> Pixelate> Mosaic (right). A large Cell Size gives you very few colors; if you need more, reduce the size.

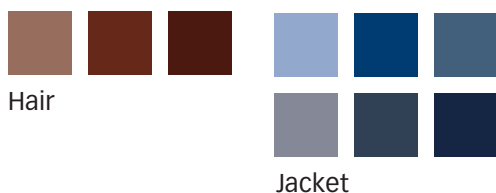


Pull out the colors

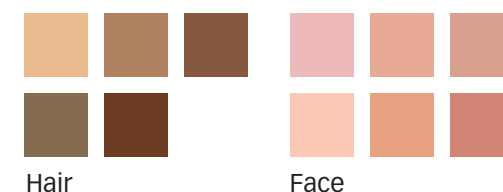
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Shadow side



Light side



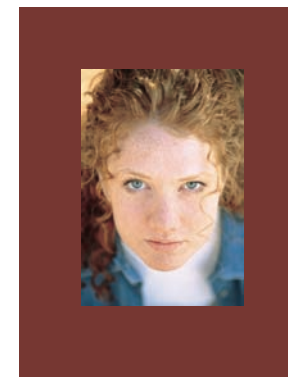
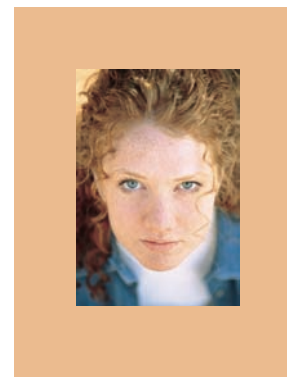
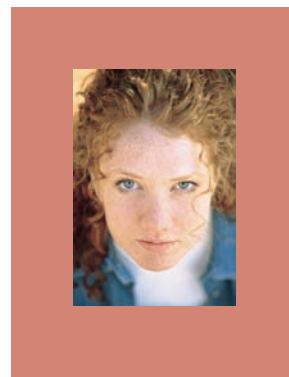
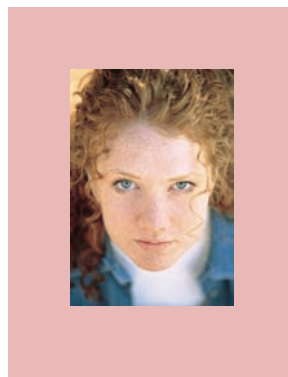
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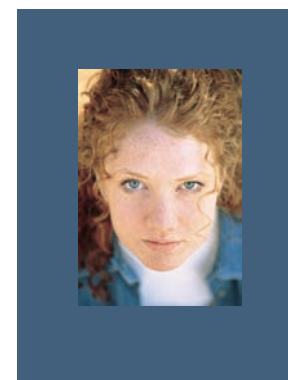
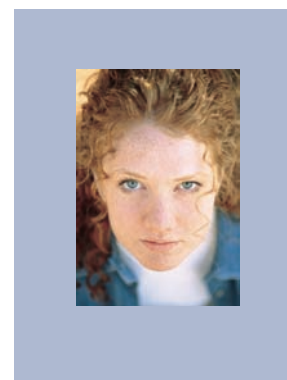
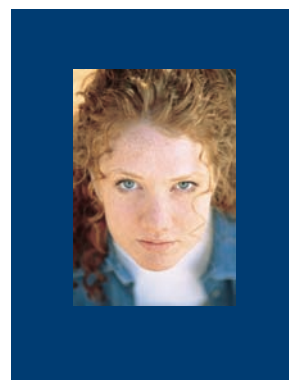
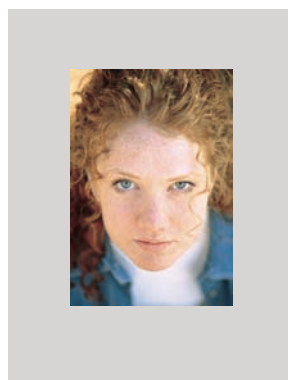
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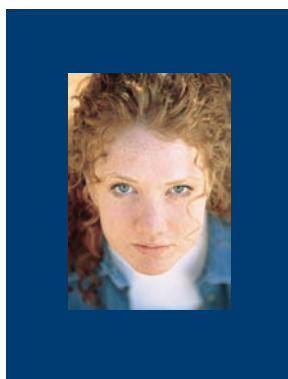
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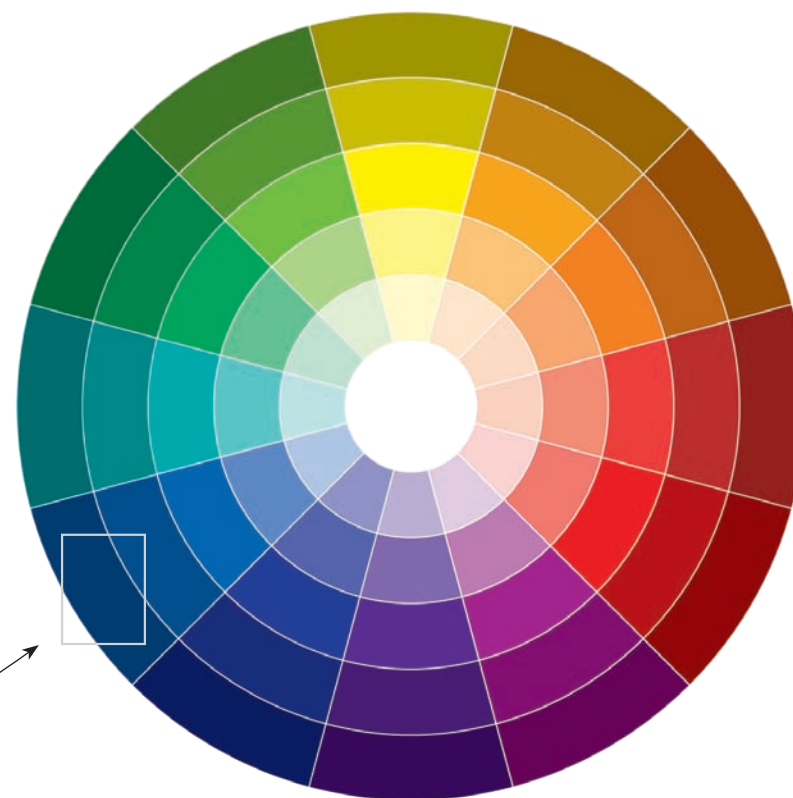
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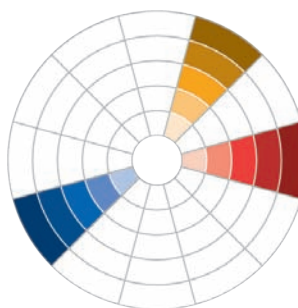
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Directly opposite the base color is its complement—in this case, the orange range. What the complement brings is *contrast*. A color and its complement convey energy, vigor and excitement. Typically, the complement is used in a smaller amount as an accent; a spot of orange on a blue field, as shown above.



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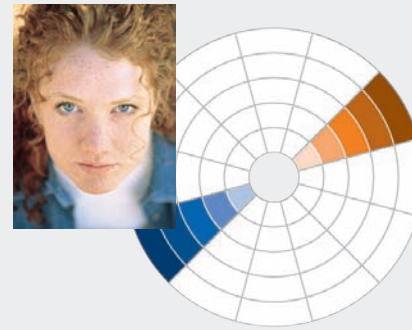
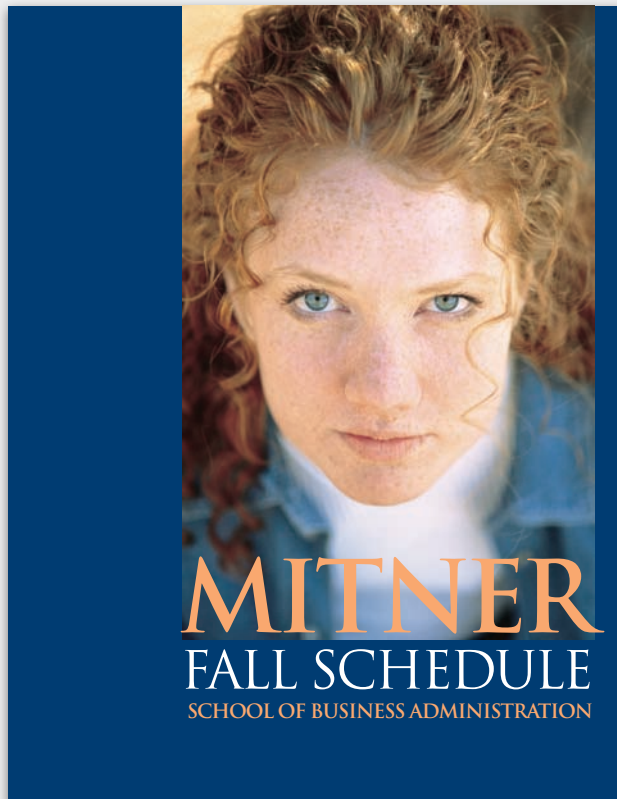
Opposite colors,
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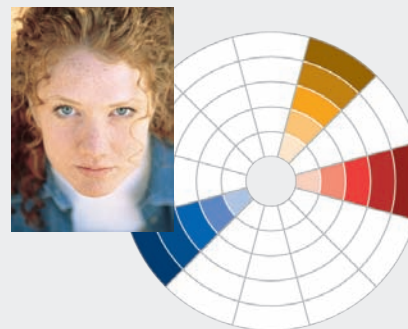
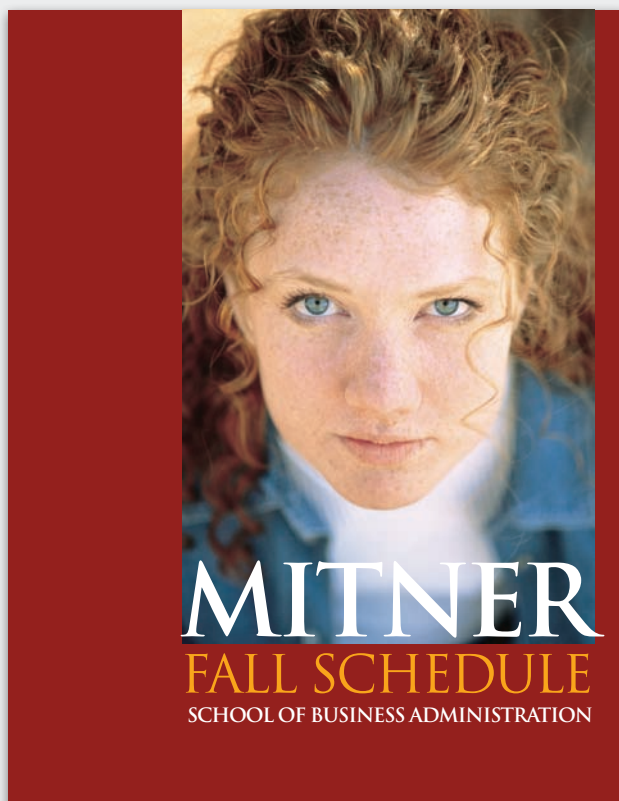
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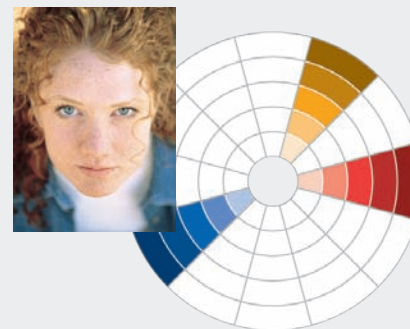
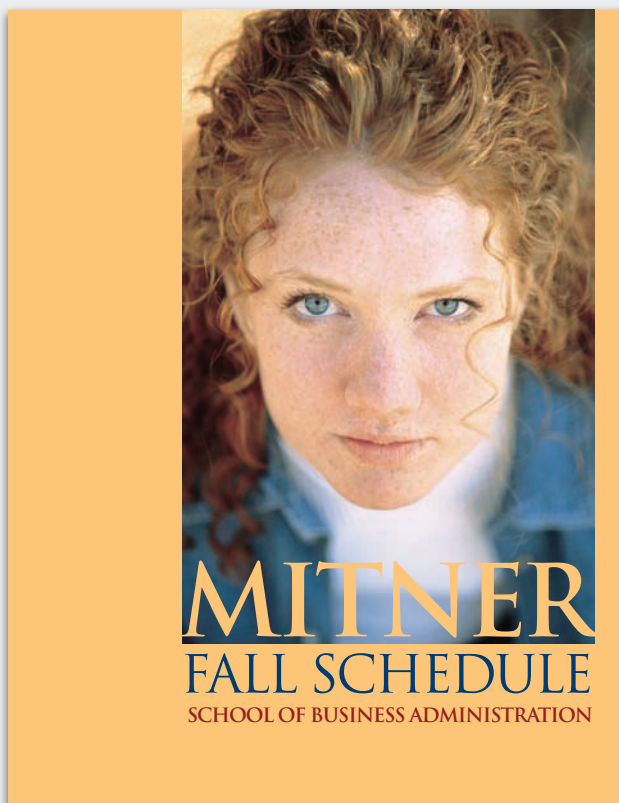


*Review the design goal on [page 2](#)



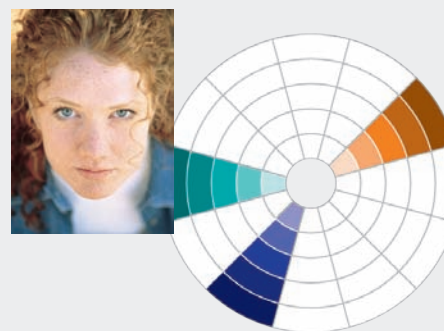
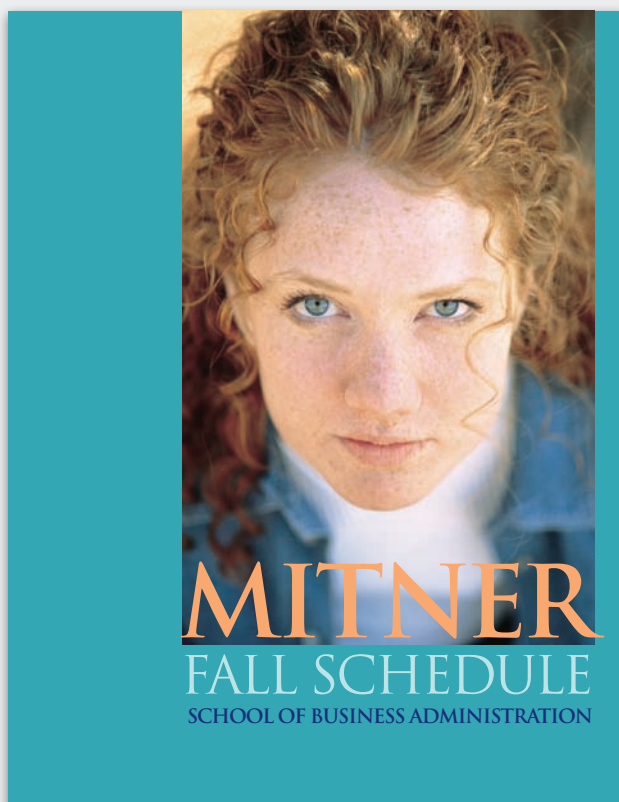
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Intense—The highlights in her hair carry this page; the blue accent lends contrast and depth. An unexpected point of interest is the yellow headline, which seems cut out of the photo. Dimensionally flat, this mix is intense and engaging (and would win the design contest), but it takes a daring client to choose it.

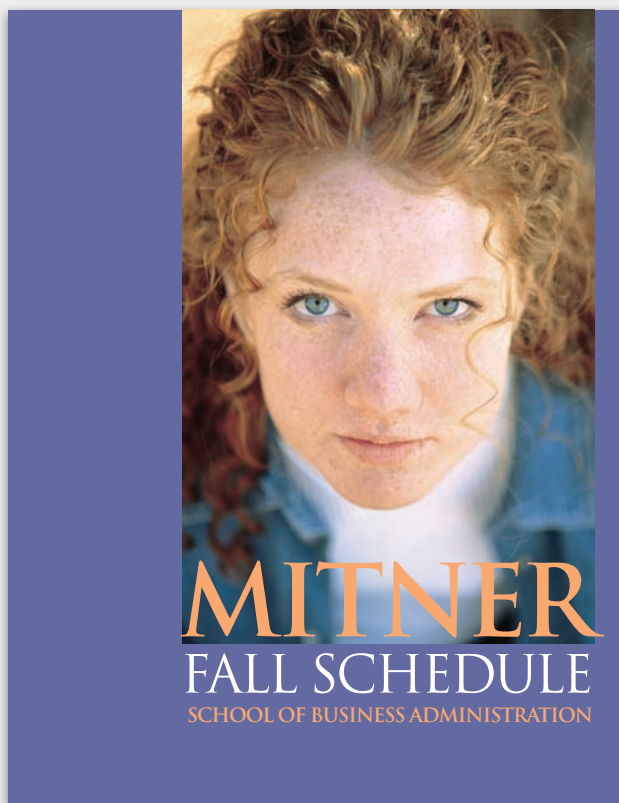




Casual—Analogous to the blue—a step toward green—is teal, a beautiful color not in the photo. Its difference adds depth and vibrancy and relaxes the message somewhat; it's trendier now, more approachable. Her eyes, which against blue looked blue, now look green. Type color, still light orange, is a soft contrast.



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Article resources



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- 9 C60 M0 Y20 K15
- 10 C30 M0 Y12 K0
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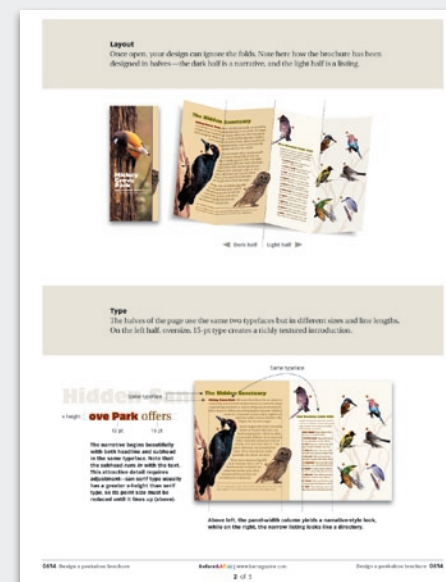


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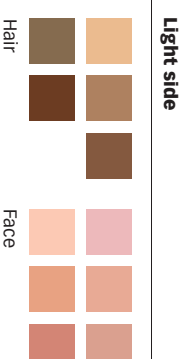
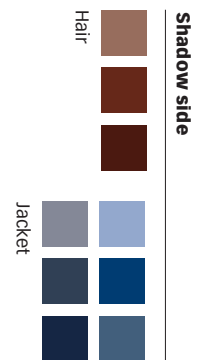
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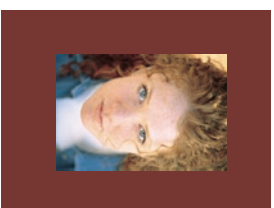
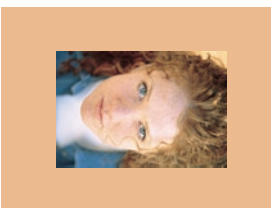
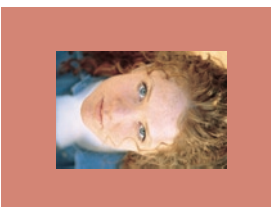
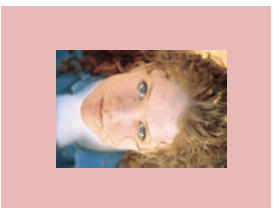
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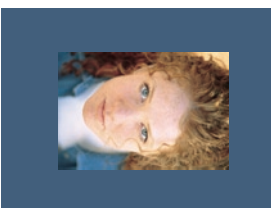
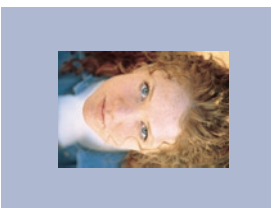
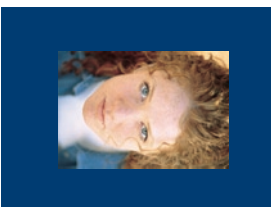
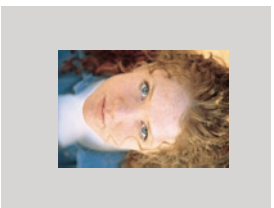
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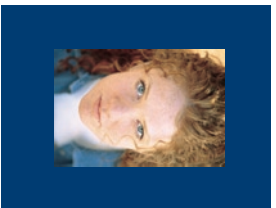
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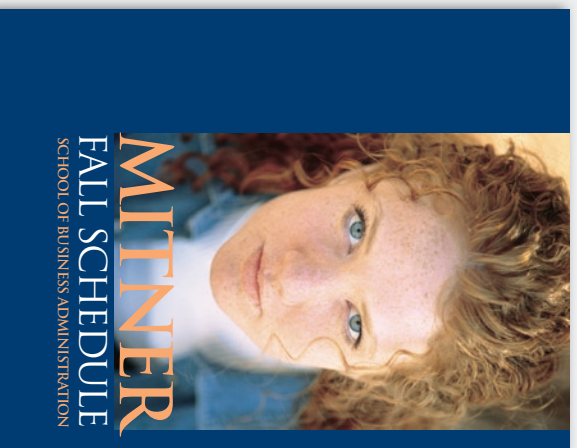
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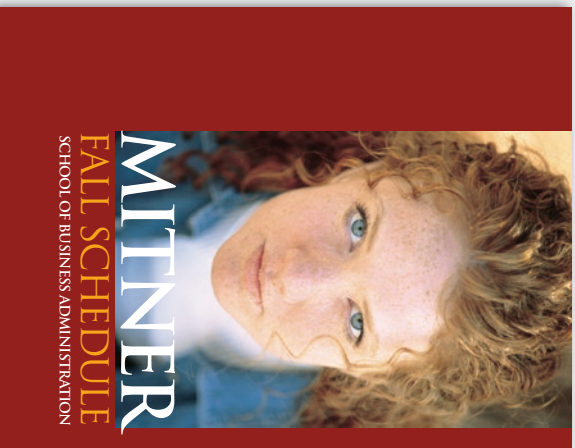
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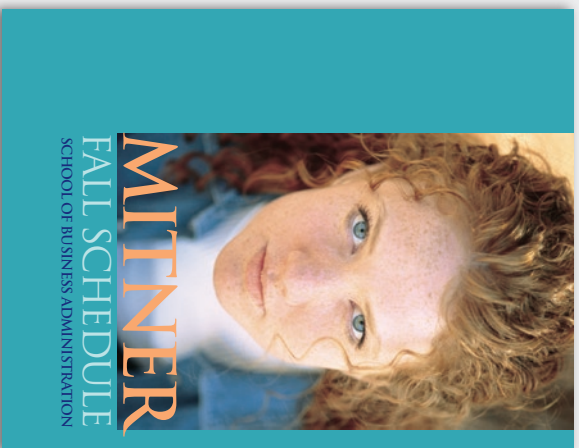


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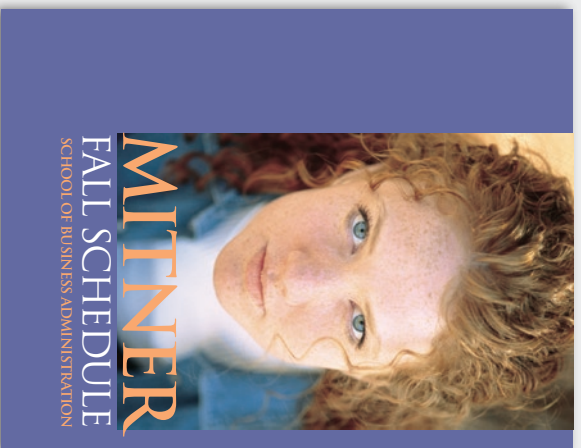




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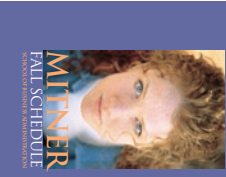
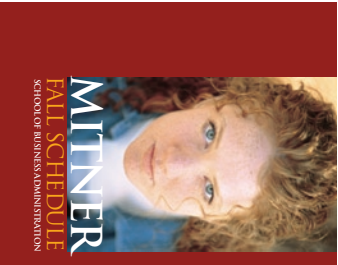
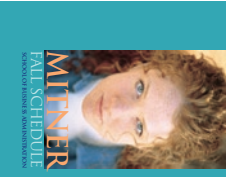

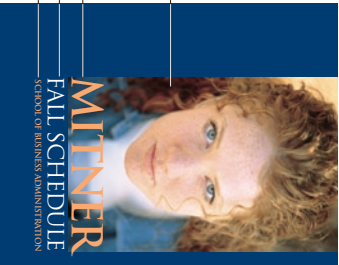


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