Imagine tying for #1 best in the world on a business aptitude test offered to students from more than 3,500 participating universities. Then ask NIU Finance major Franz Varga exactly how he did just that.

Varga arrived at the top spot by way of the Bloomberg Aptitude Test in business and finance (BAT). His journey included an outstanding performance on the September 2015 exam, paving the way for this senior finance major to tie with one other person for best in the world. Along the way, Varga also landed another two-way 1st place tie in yet another BAT exam category, the Americas category. And all of this after what had been, just 12 months earlier, his impressive 2014 BAT performance, when as a junior, Varga ranked among the Top 5 in the Americas category.

“Franz’s performance on the BAT continues to be stellar. His performance this year—his personal best of #1 in the world—is something to be celebrated,” says Denise Schoenbachler, Dean of the NIU College of Business. “At the same time, Franz’s achievement provides another powerful example of the incredible students and incredible academic programs here.”

Varga’s claim to the top spot in the world also positions Northern Illinois University above the scores produced by students at schools like the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, the London School of Economics and Political Science, and the National University of Singapore, among many other academic institutions in the states and around the globe.
It’s safe to say that Varga—much like NIU’s College of Business—stays hungry, stellar results notwithstanding.

“This is actually my fourth time taking the BAT,” he shares. “It’s free to NIU students, so I’ve never really seen any negatives to taking it. Each test I’ve taken is a bit different in terms of questions, but the structure—the various categories of questions—for the two-hour test is the same.”

The BAT covers eight different topics that range from math, analytical reasoning to economics. It’s a highly competitive global challenge with participants from more than 3,500 universities. The Bloomberg Institute created the exam in collaboration with financial professionals, recruiters, and academics to assess students’ aptitude for business and finance. As important, the BAT also provides an effective means for financial industry recruiters to discover highly knowledgeable potential new hires from a global pool of universities. In fact, the exam received attention last month in a Harvard Business Review story that described the BAT as an effective performance-based exercise that measures knowledge and skills specific to investment banking. Also noted in the HBR story, the BAT helps students and recent graduates connect with financial employers by way of the BAT Talent Search, a tool that contains test-takers’ test scores and is reviewed by financial professionals around the world. High achievers like Varga gain even more opportunities by entering the Bloomberg Hall of Fame. The Hall of Fame is an invitation-only exclusive designation that provides top performers like Varga with direct access to more than 25,000 recruiters at elite global investment and financial institutions seeking to identify candidates for entry-level roles in areas across the financial spectrum: from hedge funds to traditional asset management and everything in between.

“The opportunity to be featured in the BAT Hall of Fame as an international finalist is exciting because it helps broadcast my name to employers,” Varga explains then adds with genuine modesty, “I hope my score in the BAT will make me more competitive in the industry. I’m most interested in careers in corporate finance or investments.”

Did we mention Varga tied for best in the world?

Unsurprisingly, Varga’s hope was realized within a handful of days, when he received
and accepted an offer for a position with Epic Systems in Verona, Wisconsin. Securing a position in a fantastic company in the field of your dreams and a full seven months before graduation, well, it doesn’t get much better than that. Clearly, results like this require full commitment: seizing opportunity, being tenacious and talented, and giving it your all.

“I’m really proud of my accomplishment. It reaffirms that I’m improving through my courses at NIU,” the senior says. Then, with his tenacity front and center, Varga continues, “I wouldn’t want to have peaked in my junior year!”

So what would Franz Varga suggest to anyone considering taking the BAT? The number one piece of advice from the number one best in the world is: “Get a good night’s sleep! The BAT test is designed so you don’t need to prepare for it beyond being in your best mental shape when you take it.”

Which is also very sound advice for addressing an all-important question not necessarily found on the BAT…but one each of us encounters at some point in life: What’s your ‘why?’ What motivates you? What do you believe?

For Varga, his answer is near immediate. Clearly, he’s long since put his best mental thought processes to this question, too. And he’s very clear about what’s important to him.

“I find myself most motivated by the people that I care about. I pull a lot of my drive to succeed from the support of my fiancé, my family, my friends, and the faculty members at NIU. Those people are the most important part of every day. I wake up knowing I can look forward to having breakfast with my brother in NIU’s New Hall, going to the Katz Dog Park near the university with my fiancé and our dog, spending time catching up with friends, meeting with peers in student organizations, learning from faculty members deeply immersed in their respective fields. Every day is a new, exciting adventure. I’m very happy with my life, and wouldn’t change it for the world.”