

**Graduate
Management
Admission
Council™**

Market Intelligence

Demand for MBA and Business Master's Programs: Insights on Candidate Decision Making

Summary Report

**mba.com Prospective Students
Survey 2019**

April 2019



Demand for MBA and Business Master's Programs: Insights on Candidate Decision Making Summary Report, mba.com Prospective Students Survey 2019 is a product of the Graduate Management Admission Council (GMAC), a global, mission-driven association of 223 leading graduate business schools. Founded in 1953, we are actively committed to advancing the art and science of admissions by convening and representing the industry and offering best-in-class products and services for schools and students. GMAC owns and administers the Graduate Management Admission Test™ (GMAT™) exam, used by more than 7,000 graduate programs worldwide. Other GMAC assessments include the NMAT by GMAC™ exam, for entrance into graduate management programs in India, South Africa, and the Philippines, and the Executive Assessment, specifically designed for Executive MBA programs around the world. The Council is based in the United States with offices in the United Kingdom, India, and China.

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Introduction

Nearly 10,000 mba.com registrants worldwide responded to the mba.com Prospective Students Survey in 2018

Each month, the Graduate Management Admission Council (GMAC) surveys a random sample of individuals who three months prior registered on mba.com—the GMAC™ website for prospective graduate business students. Their survey responses provide an inside look into the decision-making process of people currently considering applying to a graduate business school program. The findings detailed in this report are based on responses from a total of 9,617 individuals surveyed between January and December 2018, as well as responses from more than 126,000 individuals surveyed between the years 2009 and 2017.

Survey respondents represent demand for various MBA and business master's *program categories*, including full-time MBA, professional MBA, executive MBA, and business master's programs. Each program category contains specific *program types*. For example, full-time MBA programs include full-time one-year and full-time two-year MBA programs. Professional MBA programs include part-time, flexible, and online MBA programs. Business master's programs include Master in Management, Master of Finance, Master of Data Analytics, and Master of Accounting, among others.

This report—the first in a series of topical reports based on mba.com Prospective Students Survey responses collected in 2018—summarizes the findings associated with candidate demand for business school programs and study destinations. A separate [supplemental report](#) provides detailed breakdowns of 2018 candidate survey responses by a number of variables of interest to school professionals, including by program type, candidate country of citizenship and residence, and candidate preferred study destination.

About the Data

The results of this survey do not necessarily reflect a statistically representative sample of the global prospective student population. Rather, the results reflect responses from prospective students who register on mba.com. Because of this limitation, the results of this research study should not be used to generalize about the global prospective student population, but rather the mba.com registrant population.

Explore and Filter the Data for Yourself

An Interactive Data Research Tool accompanies the mba.com Prospective Students Survey 2019. Available exclusively to school professionals at GMAT™ score-accepting institutions, the tool allows users to customize data searches by multiple survey response variables, such as candidate segment, citizenship/residence, gender, age, preferred program type, and more. Access it with your gmac.com login at:

www.gmac.com/prospectivestudents.

Business School Participation in GMAC Research

GMAC Research offers graduate business schools opportunities to gather data and generate insights about the business school pipeline.

Schools can sign up to participate in the GMAC Application Trends Survey and Corporate Recruiters Survey on our survey sign-up page:

www.gmac.com/surveysignup.

Ten years of survey responses highlight candidate choices in an increasingly complex and global GME marketplace

For a decade, GMAC Research has been surveying mba.com registrants with a consistent slate of core questions to gain an inside look into the candidate decision-making process along the journey to graduate management education (GME). Analysis of these survey responses over time provide insights into candidate considerations, preferences, and attitudes related to their business school choices.

Over this period, GME as an industry has evolved in a number of meaningful ways that have expanded candidate choice. Beyond the traditional offerings of full-time and part-time MBA programs and business master's programs like the Master in Management, Master of Accounting, and Master of Finance, business school candidates now choose from an expanded portfolio of more specialized program options, including programs offered in a variety of different formats and delivery methods. At the same time, the number of high-quality business school options around the world is greater than ever before. These forces combined have had the effect of increasing candidate options. Among 2018 survey respondents, 79 percent are considering multiple program types, and 58 percent plan to apply to programs outside their country of residence.

To narrow their GME choices, about half of candidates say their first consideration is determining the type of degree program they want to pursue (47% of candidates). Even as program options have expanded, the MBA remains the most popular offering in GME among mba.com registrants. Overall, 4 in 5 candidates are considering an MBA program type (79%), and 3 in 5 candidates prefer an MBA program type (61%). Consideration of both full-time one-year and two-year MBA

programs has increased in recent years. Overall consideration of one-year MBA programs (47%) surpassed two-year MBA programs (45%) in 2018 for only the second time in the last decade of survey data. Among business master's program types, the Master of Finance is the most considered (24%), followed by Master of Data Analytics (19%), which has grown its consideration each year since it was added to the survey in 2013.

While the percentage of candidates who plan to apply to international programs has held steady over the past five years, their study destination preferences have recently shifted. Among candidates who plan to apply internationally, preference for the United States as their study destination has declined sharply over the last two years in an acceleration of the long-term, gradual decline seen over the previous eight years. After declining from 54 percent to 48 percent between 2009 and 2016, preference for the United States declined to 44 percent in 2017 and 40 percent in 2018—a trend likely driven in part by the current political climate. Between 2016 and 2018, preference for Western Europe as a study destination among the same segment of international candidates grew from 31 percent to 40 percent.

This report, *Demand for MBA and Business Master's Programs: Insights on Candidate Decision Making Summary Report, mba.com Prospective Students Survey 2019*, provides school professionals around the world with insights on candidate decision making related to their journey to GME based on analysis of 10 years of survey data.

Key Findings

Even as program options expand, the MBA remains the most popular candidate choice for their GME.

- Overall, 79 percent of candidates are considering an MBA program type, and 61 percent of candidates prefer an MBA program type. The full-time MBA remains the most popular option, as 65 percent of candidates overall are considering a full-time MBA program type, and 40 percent say it's their preferred option.
- Consideration of both full-time one-year and two-year MBA programs has increased in recent years. Overall consideration of one-year MBA programs (47%) surpassed two-year MBA programs (45%) in 2018 for only the second time in the last decade of survey data. Twenty-one percent of candidates prefer the full-time one-year MBA, and 19 percent of candidates prefer the full-time two-year MBA.
- Nearly half of candidates are considering both MBA and business master's program types (47%), and 1 in 5 candidates are only considering business master's program types (20%). Master of Finance is the most considered business master's program type (24% of candidates), followed by Master of Data Analytics (19%), which has grown its consideration each year since it was added to the survey in 2013.

Shifts in candidate study destination preferences are accelerating.

- Overall, about 2 in 3 candidates plan to apply to a program in the United States (65%), making it the most popular destination in terms of application plans, despite year-on-

year declines (68% in 2017). Candidate plans to apply to programs in Western Europe are up compared to the previous year (37% in 2017 and 42% in 2018), as are plans to apply to programs in Canada (19% in 2017 and 20% in 2018).

- Among candidates who plan to apply internationally, preference for the United States as their study destination has declined sharply over the last two years in an acceleration of the long-term, gradual decline seen over the previous eight years. After declining from 54 percent to 48 percent between 2009 and 2016, preference for the United States declined to 44 percent in 2017 and 40 percent in 2018.
- The opposite trend is observed in international candidate preference for Western Europe, and to a lesser degree Canada. Among candidates who plan to apply internationally, preference for Western Europe as their study destination grew from 31 percent in 2016 to 40 percent in 2018. Preference for Canada rose from 8 percent to 9 percent.
- Notably, the United States remains a more common international application target and preferred study destination than Western Europe among residents of East and Southeast Asia and Central and South Asia—regions that are major sources of international candidates.

Key Findings

In narrowing their GME choices, about half of candidates say their first consideration is the type of degree program they want to pursue (47%).

- Thirty-eight percent of candidates say their first consideration is identifying the specific school or schools they are interested in, and 15 percent of candidates say their first consideration is the regional location in which they want to study.
- Candidates preferring business master's programs are the most likely to first consider the type of degree program they plan to pursue (55%), while candidates preferring full-time MBA and executive MBA programs are more likely to first consider specific schools (47% and 45%, respectively).
- Candidates preferring professional MBA programs are more likely than those preferring other program categories to first consider the regional location (29%).

Candidates most often say quality/reputation (e.g., rankings, accreditation, faculty) is the most important selection criteria they have in choosing a school.

- Candidates preferring full-time MBA and executive MBA program types are especially likely to say quality/reputation is most important to their school decision.
- More so than candidates preferring other program types, candidates preferring professional MBA programs tend to place relative greater importance on specific program aspects (e.g., desired program format and length) and financial aspects (e.g., total costs, availability of scholarships).

- Candidates preferring business master's programs tend to rank curriculum (e.g., specific curriculum offered) higher than other candidates.

Most candidates are considering alternatives to business school to achieve their professional, educational, and personal goals (89%).

- Employment is the most widely pondered alternative, whether it be candidates thinking about pursuing a new job (50% of candidates) or continuing in the same job (29%).
- Other notable alternatives candidates consider include shorter and cheaper educational options, including professional certifications (37% of candidates), graduate certificate programs in business (23%), and corporate training programs (19%).
- Reservations related to cost are the most likely to impact candidates' pursuit of business school. Overall, about a quarter of candidates say that having to take on large debts (26%) and that business school requires more money than they have available (23%) may prevent their plans to pursue GME.

Graduate Management Education Decisions

The path to pursuing GME is complex and requires several decisions along the way. Among the questions business school candidates must ask themselves are:

- *What type of degree program do I want to pursue?*
- *Which business school do I want to attend?*
- *Where in the world do I want to study?*

The order in which candidates prioritize and determine the answers to these questions has implications for which programs they apply to and which they will ultimately decide to attend.

At the same time, candidates weigh their reservations to attending business school and consider alternative means to accomplish their professional, educational, and personal goals. Understanding these various aspects of candidate decision making can provide business school professionals with insight into the candidate mindset and enhance strategies to position the value of their programs.

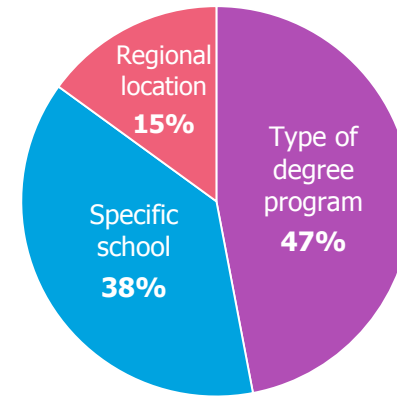


About half of candidates' first consideration is to select the type of degree program they want to pursue

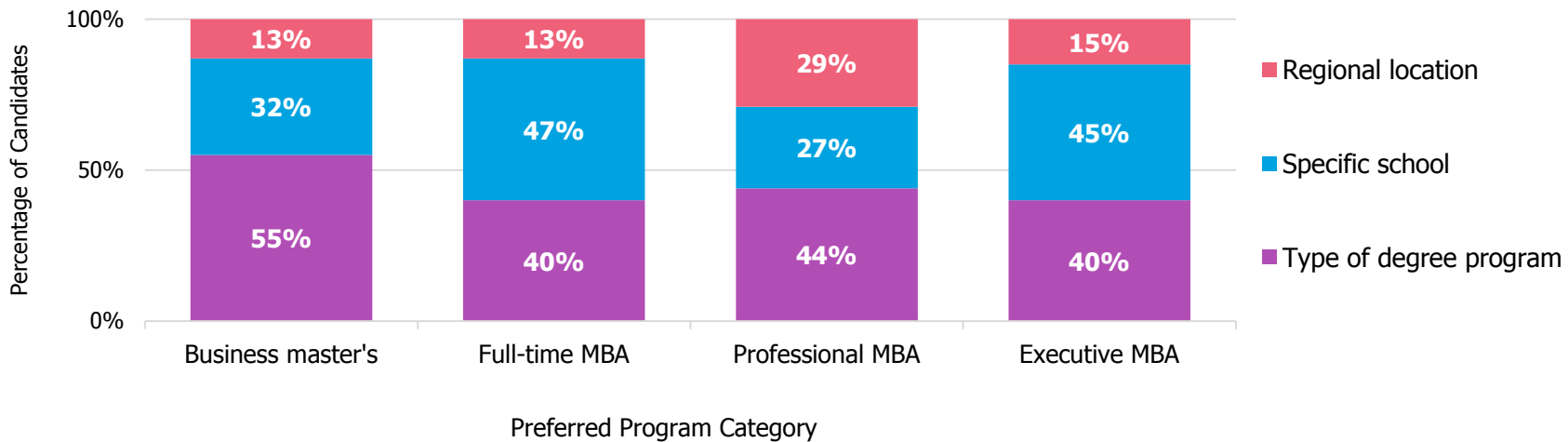
In weighing their options for GME, candidates make a number of considerations in order to narrow their choices. Overall, about half of candidates say that their first consideration is the type of degree program they want to pursue (47%). Thirty-eight percent of candidates say their first consideration is identifying the specific school or schools they are interested in, and 15 percent of candidates say their first consideration is the regional location in which they want to study.

Candidates preferring business master's programs are the most likely to first consider the type of degree program they plan to pursue (55%), while candidates preferring full-time MBA and executive MBA programs are more likely to first consider specific schools. Candidates preferring professional MBA programs are more likely than those preferring other program categories to first consider the regional location (29%).

First Business School Consideration



First Business School Consideration, by Preferred Program Category

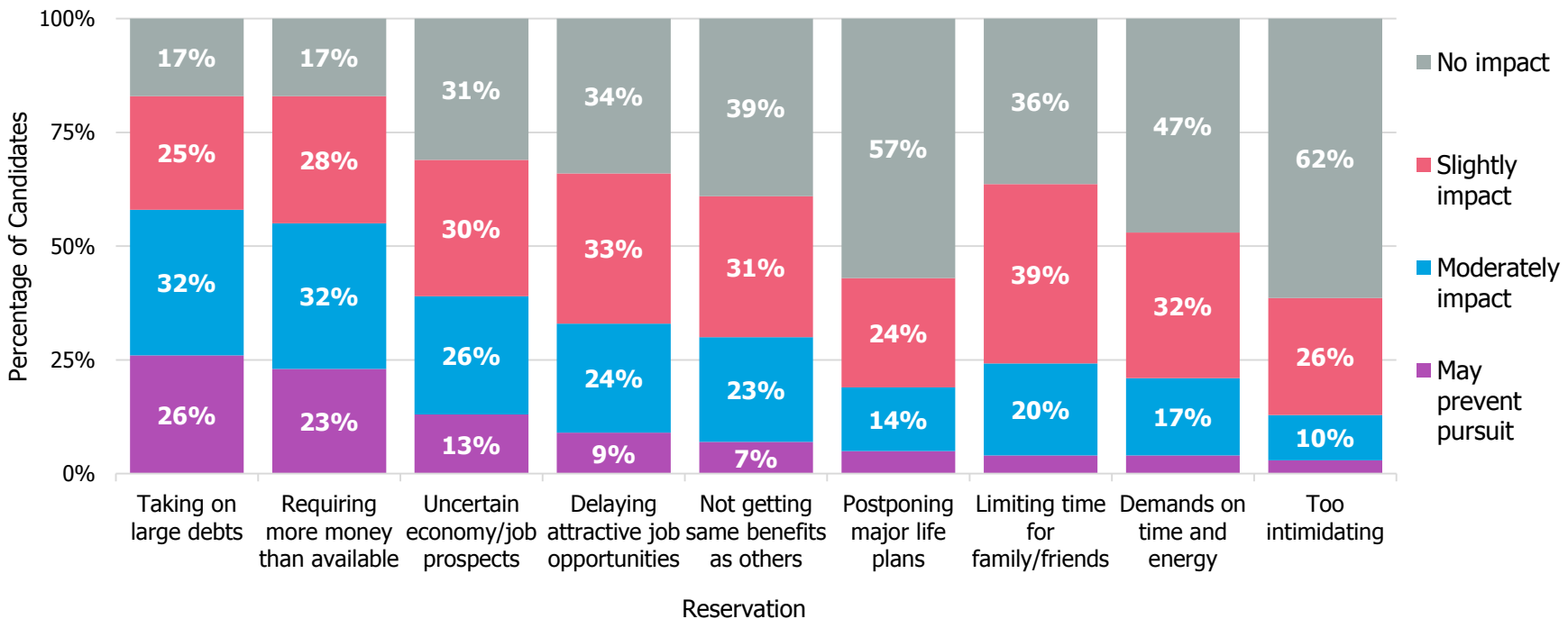


Reservations related to cost are the most likely to impact candidates' pursuit of business school

Cost is the chief source of reluctance among candidates in deciding whether or not to pursue GME. Overall, about a quarter of candidates say that having to take on large debts and that business school requires more money than they have available may prevent their plans to pursue GME. Only 17 percent of candidates say these factors have no impact on their decision to pursue business school. More than half say these factors will have a slight or moderate impact on their choice.

Other notable areas of reservation include uncertainty around the economy and job prospects, the need to delay attractive job opportunities, and concerns that they will not get the same benefits from GME as others.

Impact of Reservations on Pursuing Business School



Pursuing a new job is the most commonly considered alternative to business school

The vast majority of candidates are considering alternatives to business school to achieve their professional, educational, and personal goals (89%). Consistent with past years, employment is the most widely pondered alternative, whether it be candidates thinking about pursuing a new job (50% of candidates) or continuing in the same job (29%). Candidates who prefer full-time MBA programs are more likely to be considering pursuing a new job (56%) than continuing in the same job (33%), whereas candidates who prefer professional MBA programs are equally likely to consider each (46%).

Other notable alternatives candidates consider include shorter and cheaper educational options, including professional certifications (37% of candidates), graduate certificate programs in business (23%), and corporate training programs (19%).

Alternatives to Business School Considered

Alternatives	Overall	Preferred Program Category			
		Business master's	Full-time MBA	Professional MBA	Executive MBA
Pursue a new job	50%	47%	56%	46%	45%
Professional certifications	37%	39%	32%	43%	39%
Continue working in the same job	29%	17%	33%	46%	35%
Graduate certificate program (business)	23%	26%	18%	25%	25%
Corporate training program	19%	21%	15%	22%	23%
MOOC	18%	18%	15%	21%	23%
Professional workshops/seminars	17%	16%	14%	26%	18%
Graduate certificate program (nonbusiness)	10%	12%	9%	10%	10%
Nonbusiness graduate degree program	19%	17%	18%	20%	13%
None of these	11%	11%	11%	10%	12%

Program Choices

Overall, about half of candidates say that their first consideration in weighing their GME options is the type of degree program they want to pursue (47%). More so than ever before, candidates have a wide variety of options to deliberate in the process of identifying their best-fit program type.

To get a sense of which program types candidates are open to, the survey asks candidates to select from the complete list of program types which they are considering. From those programs, candidates are asked to identify which one is their preferred program type. Analyzing candidate responses over the last 10 years reveals shifts in demand by program type that provide business school professionals with insights into the increasingly competitive market for talented candidates.

Among 2018 respondents, 79 percent report considering multiple program types, including 47 percent that are considering both MBA and business master's program types. Overall, full-time one-year and two-year MBA programs remain the most considered and preferred program types. Over the last several years, multiple program types have seen growth in candidate consideration, including full-time one-year MBA, full-time two-year MBA, and Master of Data Analytics programs.



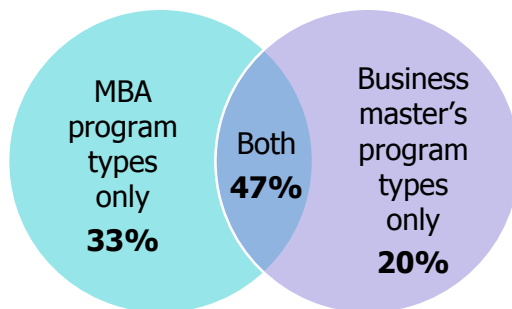
Program Choices

The full-time one-year and two-year MBA top the list of most considered program types

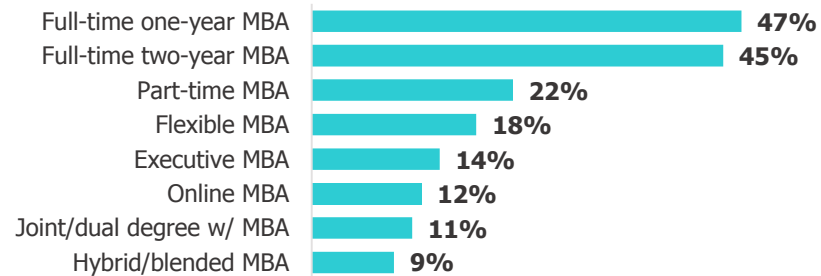
The MBA remains the predominant credential sought in GME, as overall 4 in 5 candidates are considering an MBA program type (79%). Two in 3 candidates are considering either a full-time one-year or two-year MBA program (65%). Consideration of one-year MBA programs (47%) eclipsed two-year MBA programs (45%) in 2018 for only the second time in the last decade of survey data.

On par with last year, 1 in 5 candidates are exclusively considering business master's program types (20%). Topping the list of most considered business master's program types are the Master of Finance (24%) and the Master of Data Analytics (19%), the latter of which has grown its consideration each year since it was added to the survey in 2013.

Program Considerations



MBA Program Types Considered*



Business Master's Program Types Considered*

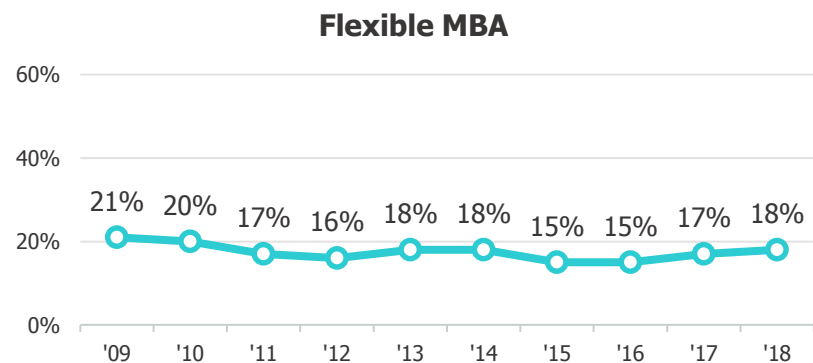
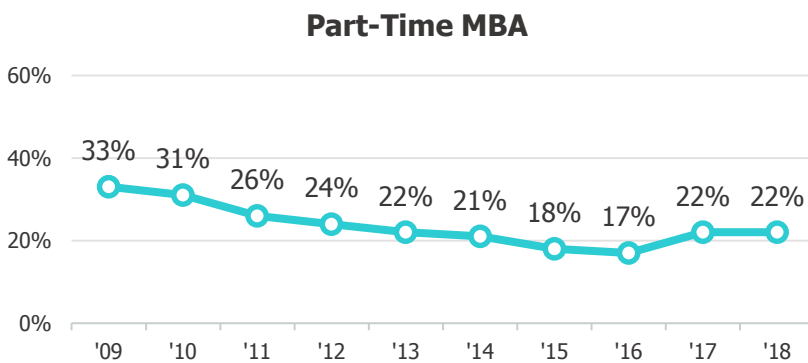
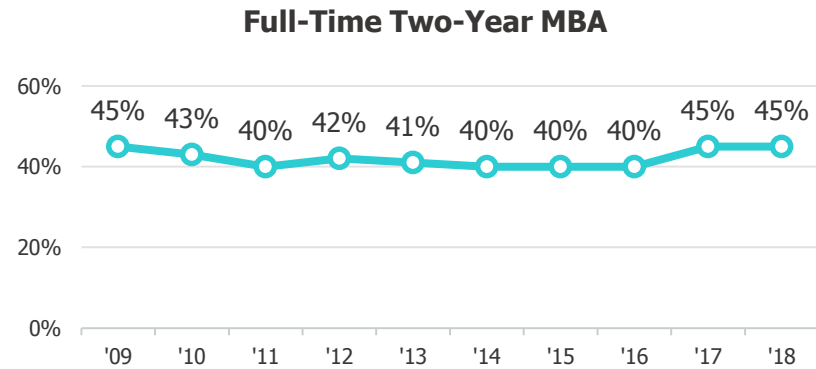
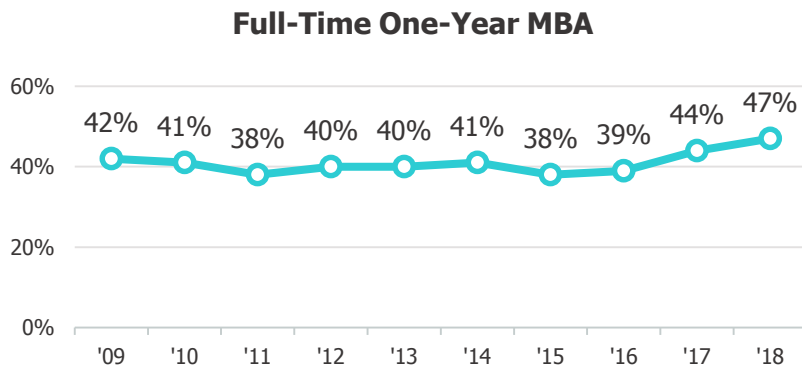


*Total does not sum to 100 percent because of multiple selections.

Program Choices

The percentage of candidates considering full-time one-year and two-year MBA programs has increased in recent years

10-Year Trend in Program Type Consideration

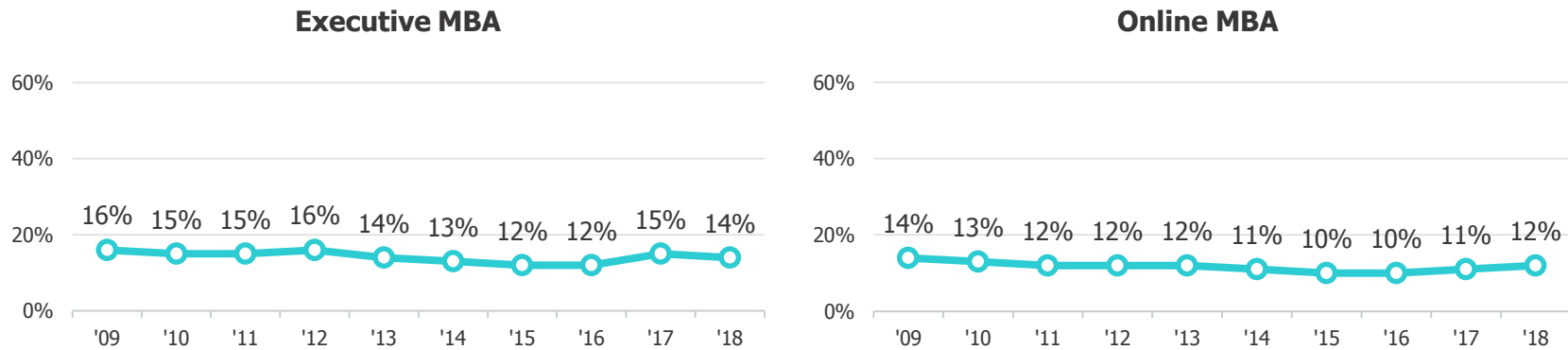


Note: The way candidates are asked about the program types they are considering was modified in 2017. Prior to then, candidates were first asked which program category types they are considering (e.g., full-time MBA, business master's) and then asked which program types within those categories they are considering. From 2017 and forward, candidates select from a list of all program types.

Program Choices

Consideration of Executive MBA and Online MBA programs has remained relatively stable over the 10-year period

10-Year Trend in Program Type Consideration



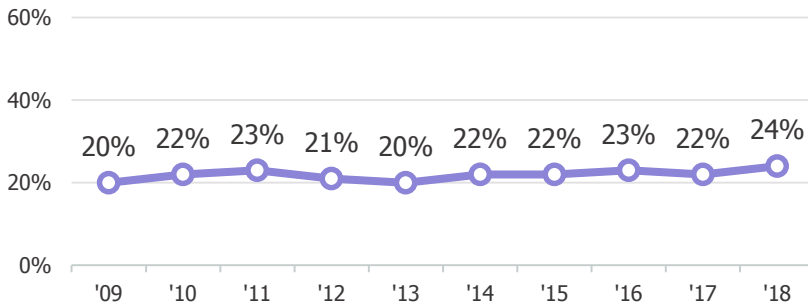
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Program Choices

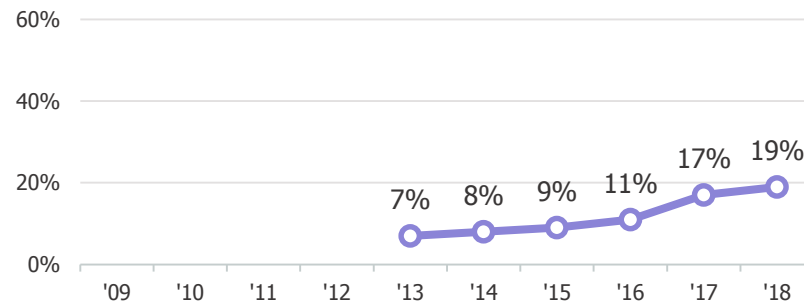
Master of Finance remains the top business master's program type considered; Master of Data Analytics on the rise

10-Year Trend in Program Type Consideration

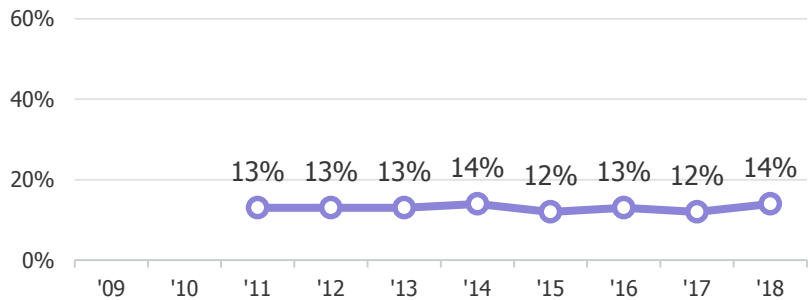
Master of Finance



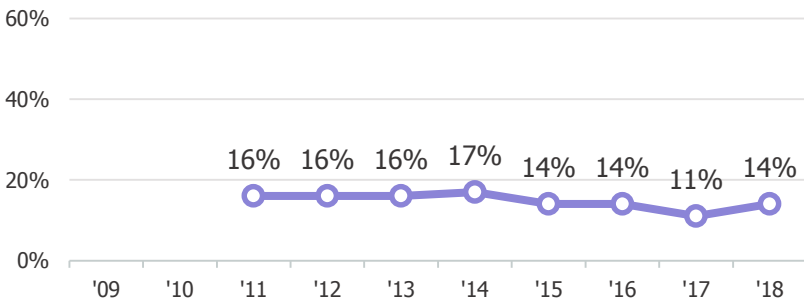
Master of Data Analytics



Master in International Management



Master in Management



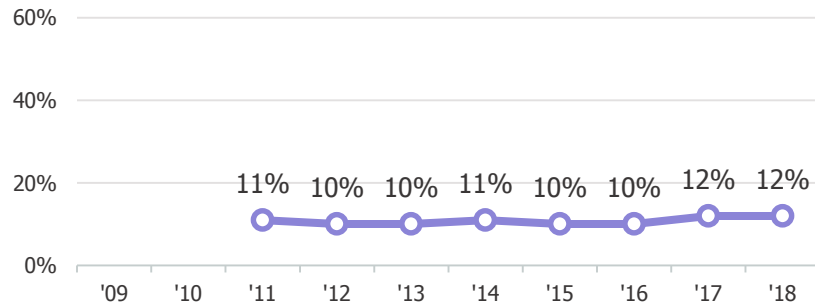
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Program Choices

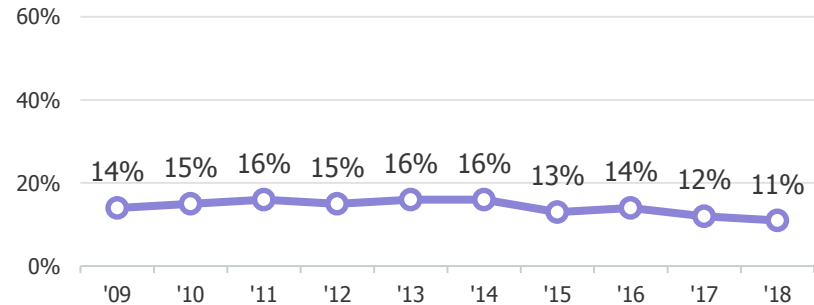
Consideration of Master of Accounting has declined slightly; Master of Information Technology trending upward

10-Year Trend in Program Type Consideration

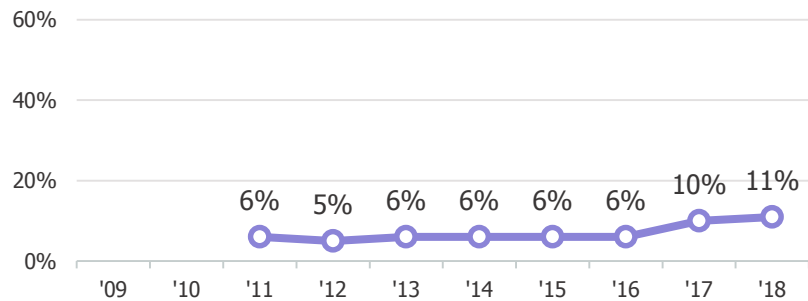
Master of Marketing



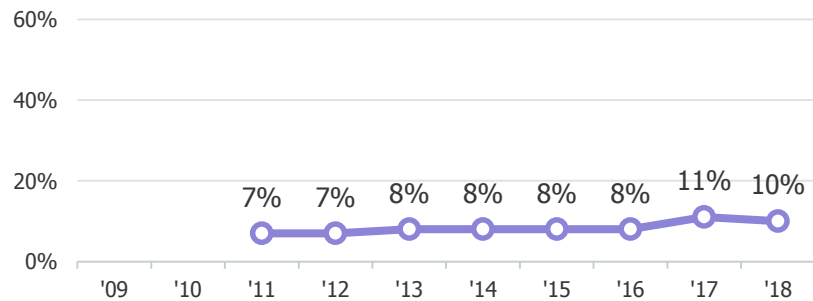
Master of Accounting



Master of Information Technology



Master of Project Management



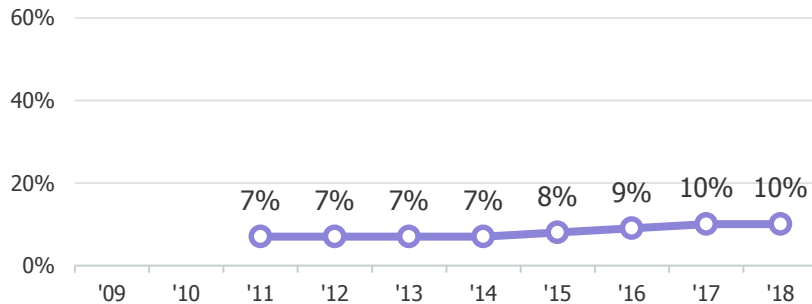
Note: The way candidates are asked about the program types they are considering was modified in 2017. Prior to then, candidates were first asked which program category types they are considering (e.g., full-time MBA, business master's) and then asked which program types within those categories they are considering. From 2017 and forward, candidates select from a list of all program types.

Program Choices

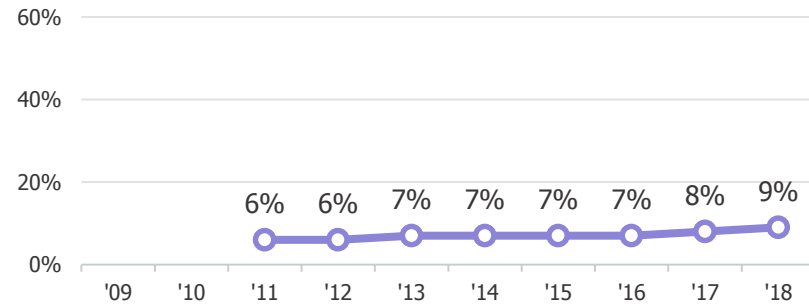
One in 10 global candidates are considering Master of Entrepreneurship and Master of Supply Chain Mngmt. programs

10-Year Trend in Program Type Consideration

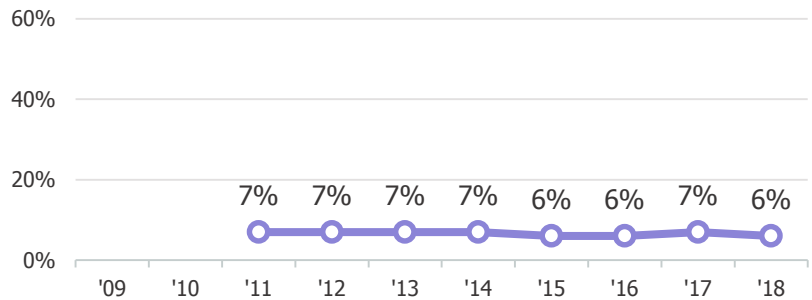
Master of Entrepreneurship



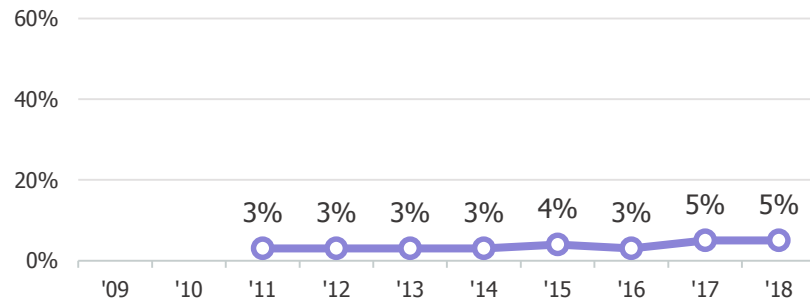
Master of Supply Chain Management



Master of Human Resources



Master of Engineering Management

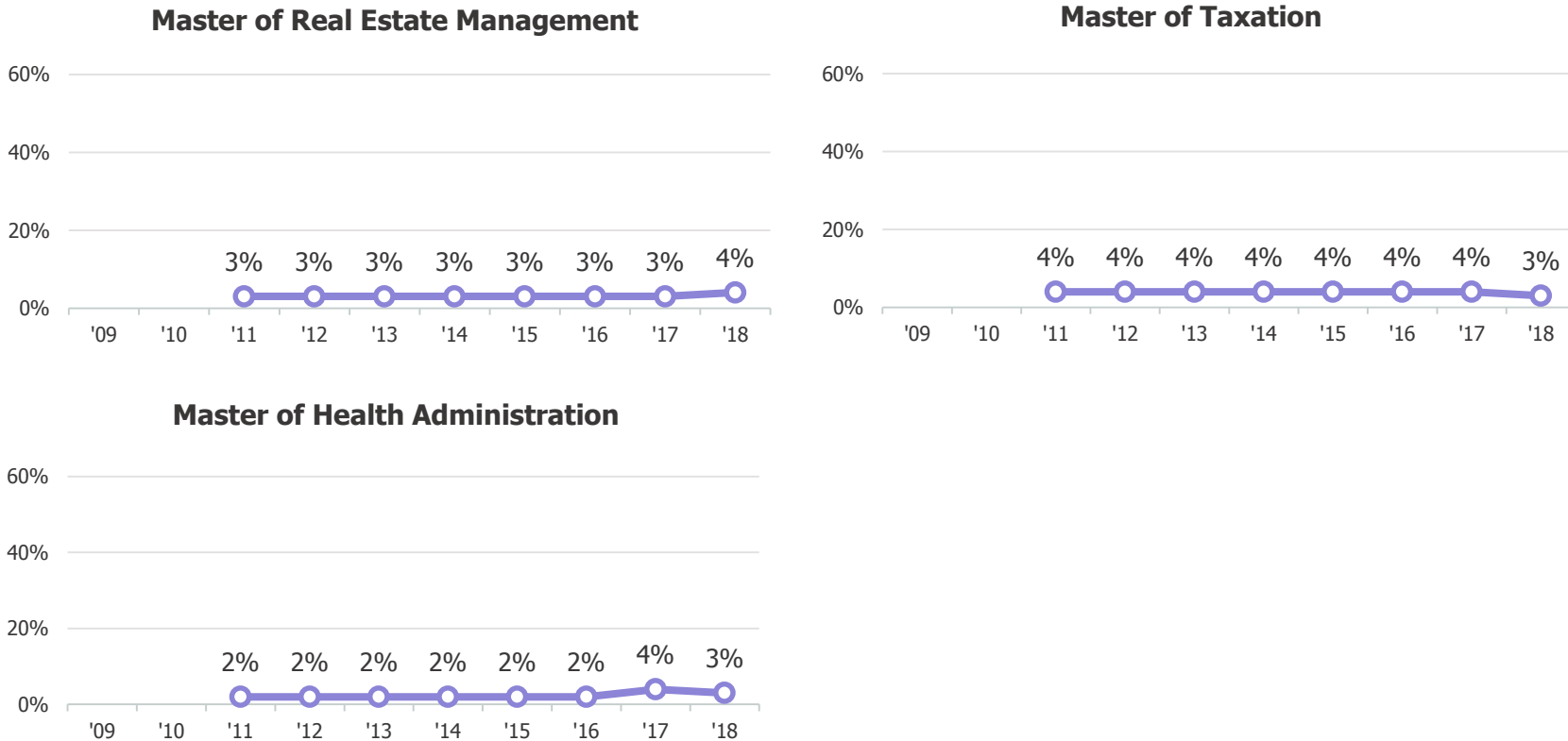


Note: The way candidates are asked about the program types they are considering was modified in 2017. Prior to then, candidates were first asked which program category types they are considering (e.g., full-time MBA, business master's) and then asked which program types within those categories they are considering. From 2017 and forward, candidates select from a list of all program types.

Program Choices

Real estate, taxation, and health administration programs appeal to a small niche of business school candidates

10-Year Trend in Program Type Consideration



Note: The way candidates are asked about the program types they are considering was modified in 2017. Prior to then, candidates were first asked which program category types they are considering (e.g., full-time MBA, business master's) and then asked which program types within those categories they are considering. From 2017 and forward, candidates select from a list of all program types.

Program Choices

Most candidates consider multiple program types (79%), often selecting from among similar program types

Four in 5 candidates are considering more than one program type in their business school decision-making process (79%). Often, there is overlap in program type consideration among similar program types. For example, more than half of candidates considering full-time one-year MBA programs are also considering full-time two-year MBA programs, and vice versa. Candidates considering a professional MBA program types tend to consider other professional MBA program types as well. Business master's program types are less likely to be considered among these candidates as they tend to be further along in their careers and less likely to be seeking specialized study. Candidates considering business master's program types, however, are likely to be considering full-time MBA program types, as well as program types with similar specializations. For example, most candidates considering Master of Accounting programs are also considering Master of Finance programs (57%).

Top Five Alternative Program Types Considered, Candidates Considering MBA Program Types

		Program Type Considered					
		Full-time one-year MBA	Full-time two-year MBA	Part-time MBA	Flexible MBA	Executive MBA	Online MBA
Top Five Alternative Program Types Considered	1	Full-time two-year MBA (57%)	Full-time one-year MBA (59%)	Flexible MBA (52%)	Part-time MBA (63%)	Full-time one-year MBA (55%)	Part-time MBA (65%)
	2	Part-time MBA (24%)	Master of Finance (22%)	Full-time one-year MBA (51%)	Full-time one-year MBA (61%)	Full-time two-year MBA (46%)	Flexible MBA (51%)
	3	Flexible MBA (24%)	Part-time MBA (21%)	Full-time two-year MBA (42%)	Full-time two-year MBA (48%)	Part-time MBA (44%)	Full-time one-year MBA (46%)
	4	Master of Finance (21%)	Flexible MBA (19%)	Online MBA (35%)	Online MBA (33%)	Flexible MBA (36%)	Hybrid/blended MBA (36%)
	5	Master of Data Analytics (18%)	Master of Data Analytics (18%)	Executive MBA (28%)	Hybrid/blended MBA (29%)	Online MBA (24%)	Full-time two-year MBA (35%)

Program Choices

Most candidates consider multiple program types (79%), often selecting from among similar program types

Top Five Alternative Program Types Considered, Candidates Considering Business Master's Program Types

		Program Type Considered					
		Master of Finance	Master of Data Analytics	Master of Accounting	Master in Int'l Management	Master in Management	Master of Marketing
Top Five Alternative Program Types Considered	1	Full-time one-year MBA (42%)	Full-time one-year MBA (44%)	Master of Finance (57%)	Master in Mngmt. (47%)	Master in Int'l Mngmt. (47%)	Full-time one-year MBA (49%)
	2	Full-time two-year MBA (41%)	Full-time two-year MBA (41%)	Full-time one-year MBA (35%)	Full-time one-year MBA (46%)	Full-time one-year MBA (41%)	Full-time two-year MBA (45%)
	3	Master of Data Analytics (31%)	Master of Finance (39%)	Full-time two-year MBA (30%)	Full-time two-year MBA (42%)	Full-time two-year MBA (38%)	Master in Int'l Mngmt. (33%)
	4	Master of Accounting (25%)	Master of Info. Technology (32%)	Master of Data Analytics (27%)	Master of Finance (35%)	Master of Finance (32%)	Master of Data Analytics (30%)
	5	Master in Int'l Mngmt. (20%)	Master in Int'l Mngmt. (22%)	Master of Taxation (26%)	Master of Data Analytics (29%)	Master of Data Analytics (26%)	Master in Mngmt. (30%)
		Master of Information Technology	Master of Project Management	Master of Entrepreneurship	Master of Supply Chain Management	Master of Human Resources	Master of Engineering Management
Top Five Alternative Program Types Considered	1	Master of Data Analytics (54%)	Full-time one-year MBA (49%)	Full-time one-year MBA (50%)	Full-time one-year MBA (49%)	Full-time one-year MBA (51%)	Full-time one-year MBA (51%)
	2	Full-time one-year MBA (44%)	Full-time two-year MBA (42%)	Full-time two-year MBA (49%)	Full-time two-year MBA (44%)	Full-time two-year MBA (48%)	Full-time two-year MBA (48%)
	3	Full-time two-year MBA (41%)	Master of Data Analytics (37%)	Master of Int'l Mngmt. (38%)	Master of Data Analytics (43%)	Master of Int'l Mngmt. (38%)	Master of Data Analytics (42%)
	4	Master of Finance (33%)	Master of Int'l Mngmt. (36%)	Master of Data Analytics (35%)	Master of Project Mngmt. (35%)	Master in Mngmt. (37%)	Master of Project Mngmt. (37%)
	5	Master of Project Mngmt. (26%)	Master of Marketing (33%)	Master of Marketing (34%)	Master of Int'l Mngmt. (30%)	Master of Marketing (32%)	Master of Sup. Chain Mngmt. (30%)

Program Choices

Most candidates consider multiple program types (79%), often selecting from among similar program types

Top Five Alternative Program Types Considered, Candidates Considering Business Master's Program Types

		Program Type Considered		
		Master of Real Estate Management	Master of Taxation	Master of Health Administration
Top Five Alternative Program Types Considered	1	Full-time one-year MBA (49%)	Master of Accounting (81%)	Full-time one-year MBA (53%)
	2	Master of Finance (45%)	Master of Finance (60%)	Full-time two-year MBA (44%)
	3	Full-time two-year MBA (43%)	Full-time one-year MBA (36%)	Master of Data Analytics (34%)
	4	Master of Data Analytics (38%)	Full-time two-year MBA (33%)	Part-time MBA (33%)
	5	Master of Project Mngmt. (34%)	Master of Data Analytics (31%)	Flexible MBA (33%)

Program Choices

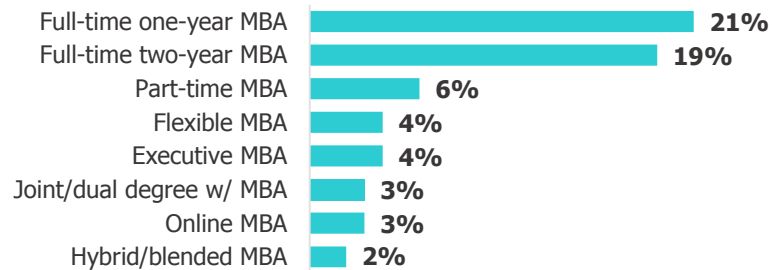
Overall, 61 percent of candidates prefer an MBA program type while 36 percent prefer a business master's program type

While most candidates consider multiple program types (79%), the survey asks candidates to identify a single option as their preferred program type. Generally speaking, trends in candidates' preferred program types mirror trends in candidate consideration.

Overall, more candidates prefer an MBA program type (61%) than prefer a business master's program type (36%). Two in 5 candidates prefer a full-time MBA program type (40%). Similar to trends in consideration, a slightly higher percentage of candidates overall prefer full-time one-year programs (21%) to full-time two-year programs (19%). A smaller proportion of candidates prefer professional and executive MBA program types.

Overall, 1 in 10 candidates identify the Master of Finance as their preferred program type (10%), double the share of candidates that prefer the next highest among business master's program type, Master of Data Analytics (5%).

Preferred Program Type, MBA Program Types



Preferred Program Type, Business Master's Program Types



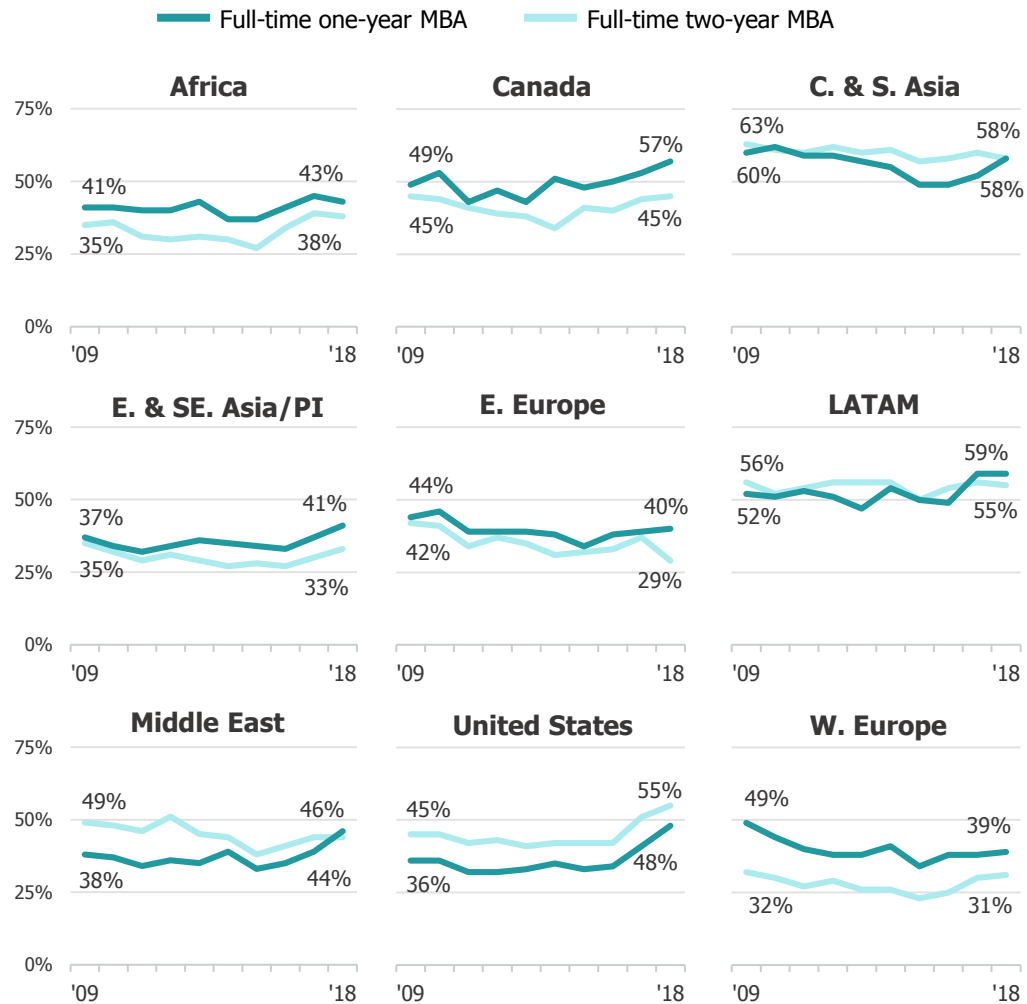
Focus on full-time MBA programs

Overall, a slightly larger percentage of candidates are considering full-time one-year MBA programs (47%) than full-time two-year MBA programs (45%) among 2018 survey respondents.

While this is only the second year this has occurred over the last decade of survey data, full-time one-year programs have been the more frequently considered full-time MBA option for most citizenship groups over the same period. This is particularly true among citizens of Canada and countries in Africa, Western and Eastern Europe, and East and Southeast Asia.

In 2018, the United States is the only citizenship group among the nine major citizenship groups examined in which the full-time two-year MBA is more widely considered than the one-year alternative. Even among US citizens, however, the gap in consideration between two-year and one-year programs has narrowed slightly over the 10-year period.

Consideration of Full-Time MBA Programs by Region of Citizenship



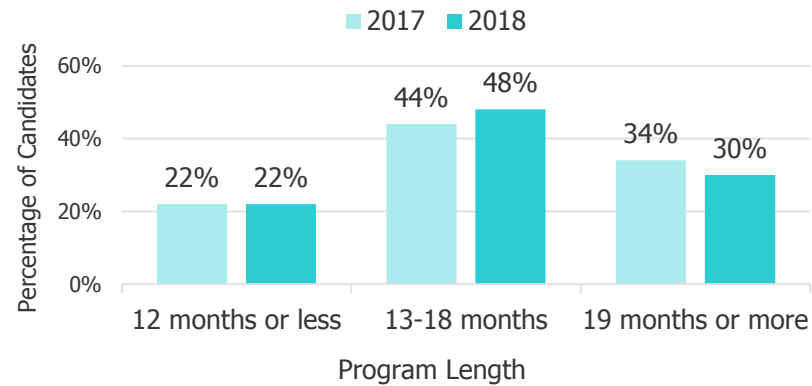
Focus on full-time MBA programs

Apart from the survey items that examine candidates' considered and preferred program types, a separate survey item inquires about candidates' preferred program length. In line with the trends discussed earlier, program duration preferences have shifted somewhat over the last year among candidates who prefer full-time MBA program types. The percentage of these candidates who say their preferred program length is 19 months or more (i.e., two-year programs) declined overall from 34 percent to 30 percent, while the percentage who say their preferred length is 13-18 months (i.e., one-year programs) increased from 44 to 48 percent.

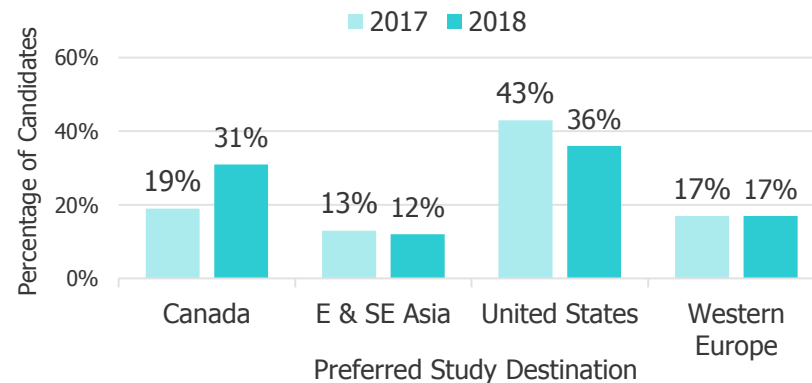
Trends in program length preference differ by candidates' preferred study destination. Among candidates whose preferred study destination is the United States, preference for programs of 19 months or longer declined from 43 percent to 36 percent, while among candidates preferring Canada it increased from 19 percent to 31 percent. These shifts are likely driven in part by larger shifts in candidates' preferred study destination that are discussed later in this report. Among candidates preferring full-time MBA programs 19 months or longer who plan to apply to international programs (i.e., programs outside their country of residence), the share that prefer Canada as their study destination increased from 5 percent to 11 percent between 2017 and 2018, while preference for the United States declined from 73 percent to 67 percent over the same period.

Candidates Preferring Full-Time MBA Programs

Preferred Program Length, 2017 vs. 2018



Percentage That Prefer Programs 19 Months or Longer by Preferred Study Destination, 2017 vs. 2018



School Selection Criteria

For many candidates, identifying the specific business schools they are interested in attending is their first consideration in weighing their options for GME (38% of candidates overall). This is particularly true among candidates preferring full-time MBA (47%) and executive MBA (45%) program types.

Among the different aspects of business schools that candidates take into account in deciding where to attend are financial aspects (e.g., total costs, availability of scholarships), specific program aspects (e.g., desired program format and length), student class profile (e.g., the percentage of women, underrepresented minorities, nationalities, or other groups within the class), curriculum aspects (e.g., specific curriculum offered), career aspects (e.g., job placement, career services quality), quality/reputation (e.g., rankings, accreditation, faculty), and school culture (e.g., competitive vs. collaborative, vocational vs. academic).

Understanding how candidates weigh the importance of different school selection criteria can give school professionals insight into how to best highlight the features of their schools to different candidate audiences.

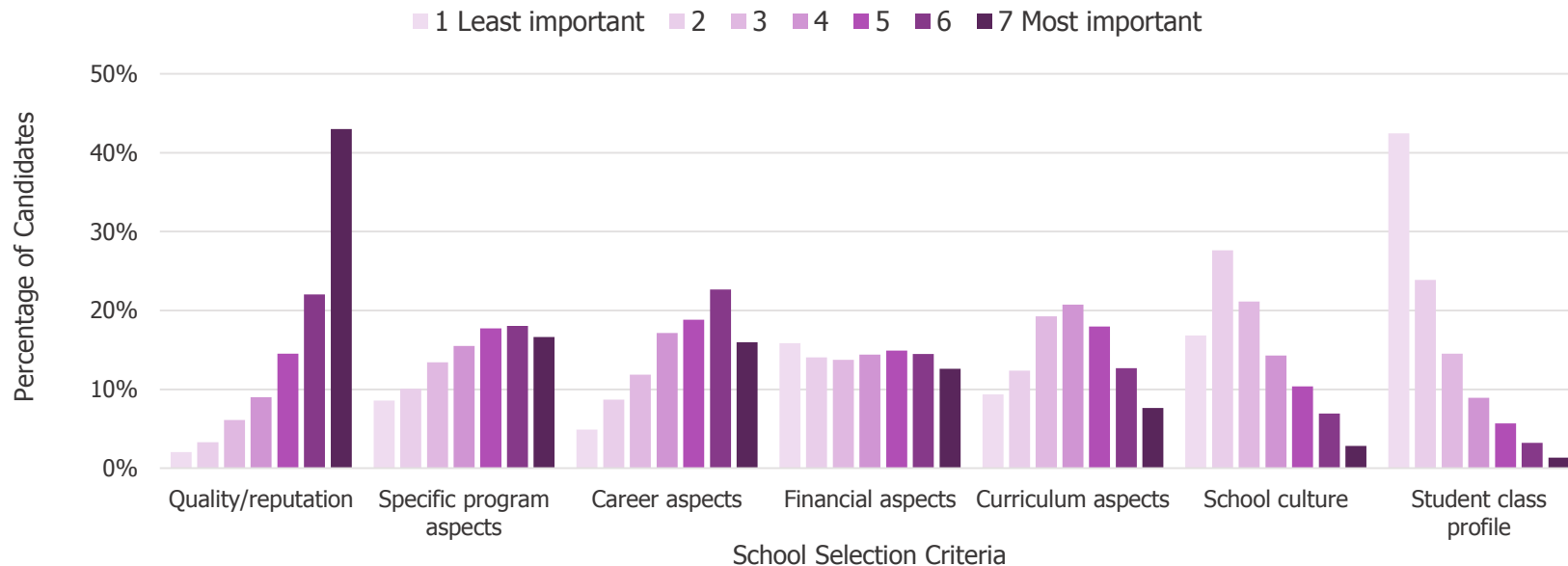


School Selection Criteria

Candidates most often say quality/reputation is the most important selection criteria they have in choosing a school

Candidates weigh a number of factors in determining which specific business schools they are interested in attending. These factors, of course, are not all equal in their power to sway candidates' decisions. In the survey, candidates are asked to rank the importance of seven school selection criteria from most important to least important. Overall, quality/reputation is the most common selection as most important (e.g., rankings, accreditation, faculty, 43% of candidates), followed by specific program aspects (e.g., desired program format and length, 17%), career aspects (e.g., job placement, career services quality, 16%), and financial aspects (e.g., total costs, availability of scholarships, 13%). School culture (e.g., competitive vs. collaborative, vocational vs. academic) and student class profile (e.g., the percentage of women, underrepresented minorities, nationalities, or other groups within the class) tend to be viewed as less important to candidates relative to the other factors.

Ranking of Importance of School Selection Criteria



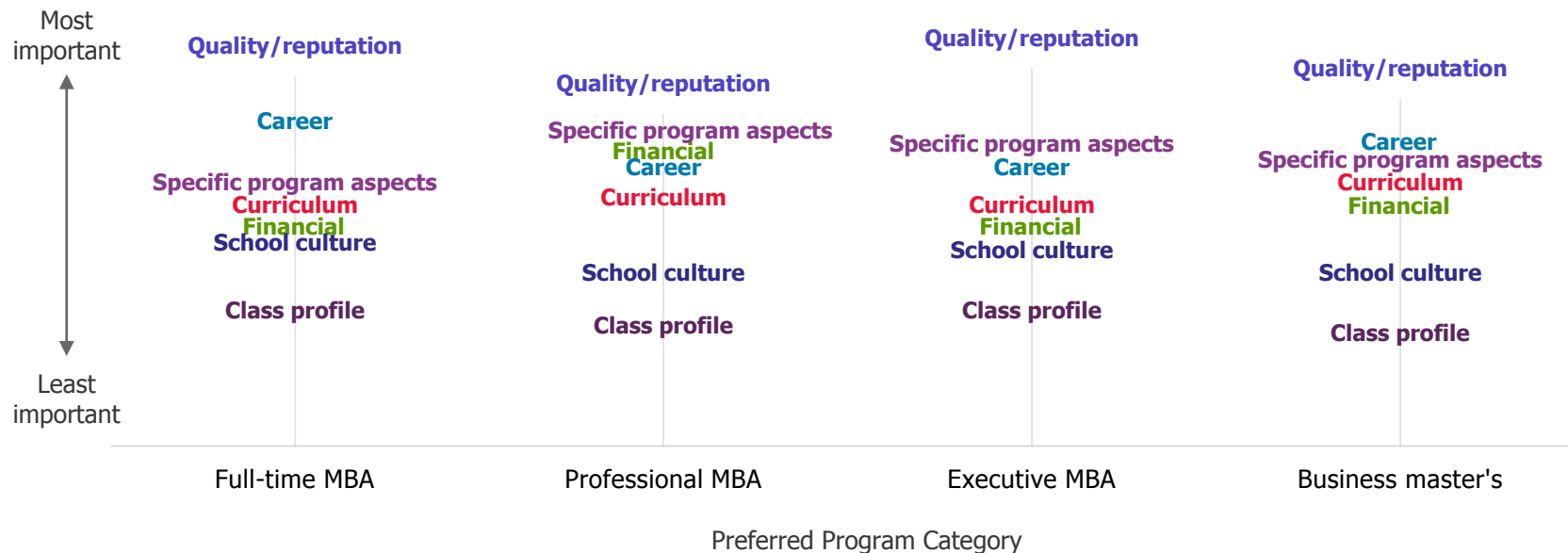
School Selection Criteria

Candidates' school selection criteria vary by the type of program they prefer

The relative importance candidates place on these school selection criteria vary somewhat by their preferred program category. Across all, quality/reputation is the most common selection as most important, although to a greater degree among candidates preferring full-time MBA and executive MBA programs. School culture and class profile are ranked similarly low across preferred program categories.

Candidates preferring professional MBA program types tend to place greater importance on specific program aspects and financial aspects, while candidates preferring full-time MBA and executive MBA place lower importance on financial aspects. Candidates preferring business master's programs tend to rank curriculum higher than other candidates, which makes sense given the specialized nature of many of these programs.

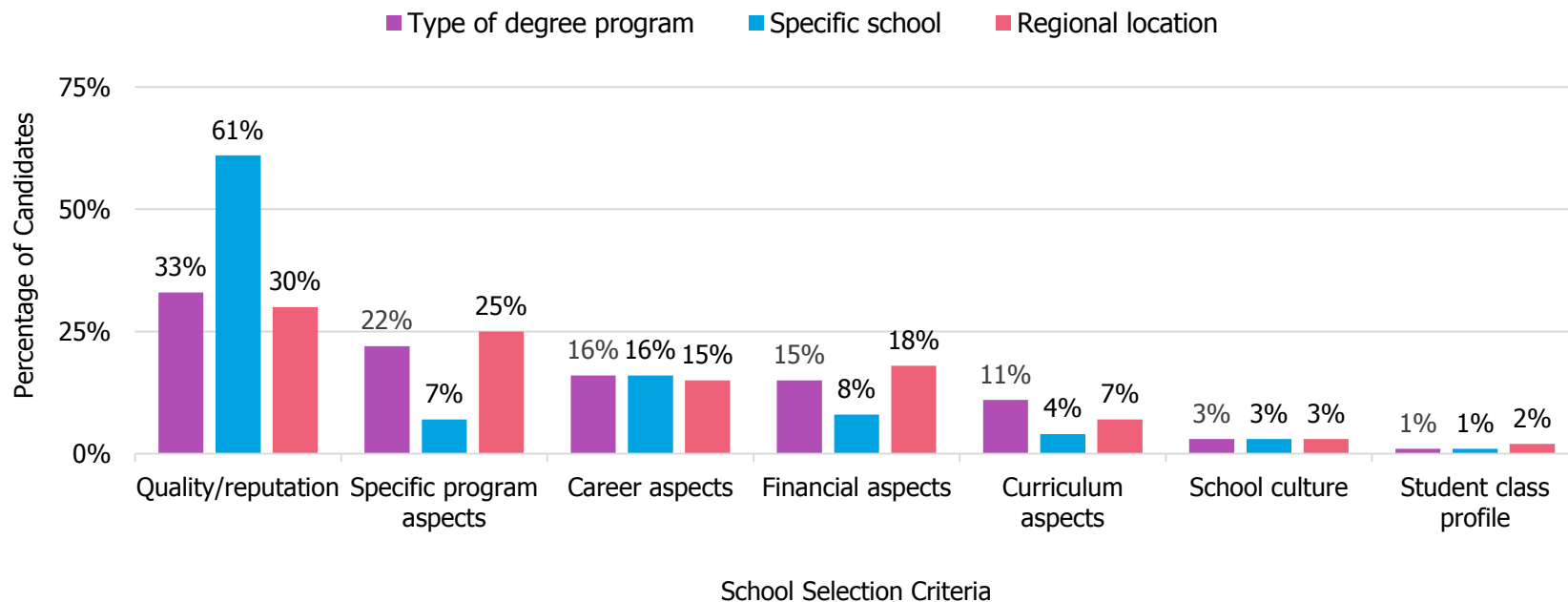
Average Ranking of Importance of School Selection Criteria by Preferred Program Category



Candidates whose first business school consideration is a specific school are twice as likely to say quality is most important

The relative importance candidates' place on different school selection criteria also vary by what their first business school consideration is. For example, among candidates who say their first consideration in weighing their options for GME is identifying specific schools they are interested in attending, 61 percent say quality/reputation is their most important school selection criteria. These candidates are less likely to indicate financial costs or specific program aspects are most important. Among candidates whose first business school consideration is type of degree program, curriculum aspects are viewed as relatively more important compared with other candidates.

Most Important Factor in Selecting a School, by First Business School Consideration



Study Destination Considerations

GME has long been an enabler of candidates' international mobility, making available to them opportunities to study, live, and potentially work in parts of the world they otherwise would not have been able to.

To understand trends in candidates' application plans and study destination preferences, the survey asks multiple items related to where in the world candidates want to study. Specifically, survey items probe candidates application plans by world region/country, their preferred study destination by world region/country, and their reasons for selecting their preferred study destination. Analysis of candidate responses over time reveal important shifts in candidate attitudes and preferences with implications for school professionals across the globe.

Most recently, changes in the political climate in key study destinations have had the effect of accelerating what had been long-term, gradual shifts in candidate study destination preferences. Between 2016 and 2018 among candidates who plan to apply internationally, the percentage that prefer the United States as their study destination decreased from 48 percent to 40 percent, while the percentage that prefer to study in Western Europe increased from 31 percent to 40 percent.

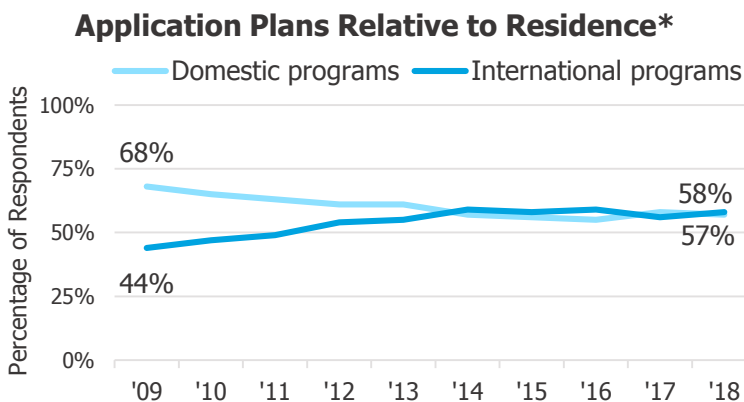


Study Destination Considerations

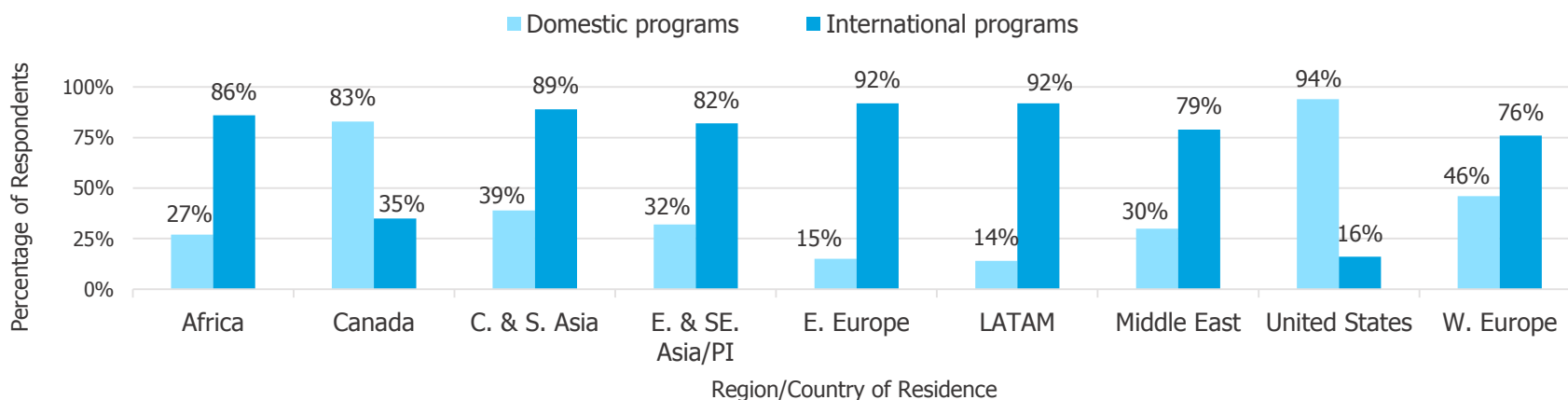
The percentage of candidates planning to apply internationally has been stable over the last five years

Between 2009 and 2014, there was a steady increase in the percentage of candidates who planned to apply to business school programs outside of their country of residence, growing from 44 percent to 58 percent. In the years since, candidates' international application plans have remained stable.

In all regions/countries of residence examined, a greater share of candidates plan to apply internationally than domestically, with the notable exceptions of the United States and Canada. Overall, 15 percent of candidates plan to apply to both domestic and international programs. This is most common among residents of Central and South Asia (27%) and Western Europe (22%).



Application Plans Relative to Residence, by Region/Country of Residence*



*Totals sum to more than 100 percent due to candidates planning to apply both domestically and internationally. Candidates with international application plans are those who plan to apply to programs outside their country of residence.

Study Destination Considerations

Two in 3 candidates overall plan to apply to a US program; United States and W. Europe are the top int'l application targets

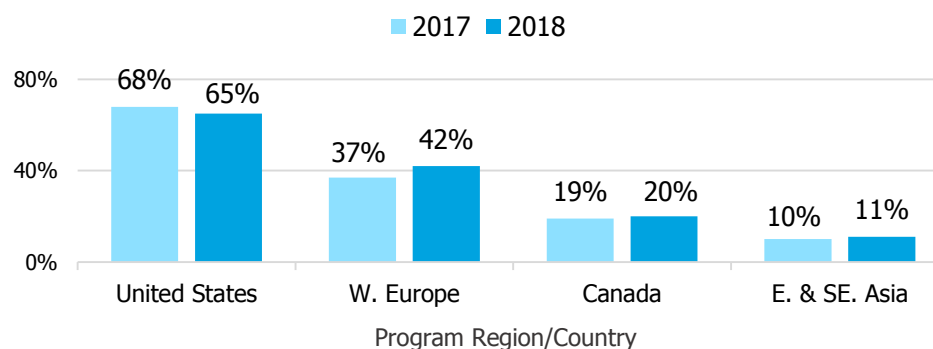
Overall, about 2 in 3 candidates plan to apply to a program in the United States (65%), making it the most popular destination in terms of application plans, followed by Western Europe (42%), and Canada (20%). Compared to 2017, candidate application plans for US programs declined by three percentage points, while application plans for Western Europe grew five percentage points and application plans for Canada increased one percentage point.

Looking specifically at candidates who plan to apply to programs outside their country of residence, a slightly higher percentage of candidates plan to apply to programs in Western Europe (62%) than the United States (61%). Similar to the overall trend, US programs declined year-on-year whereas Western European programs increased. International candidates' plans to apply to Canadian programs held steady at 28 percent.

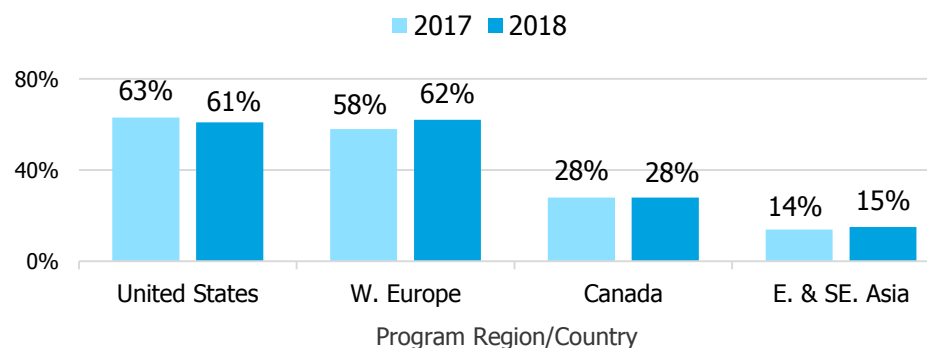
Notably, the United States remains a more common international application target than Western Europe among residents of East and Southeast Asia (60% vs. 51%) and Central and South Asia (69% vs. 56%, details on next page), though Western Europe made gains with both of these groups compared with last year.

*Totals do not sum to 100 percent due to multiple selections. **Candidates who plan to apply to programs outside their country of residence.

**All Candidates
Application Plans by Program Region/Country***



Candidates With International Application Plans
Application Plans by Program Region/Country***



Study Destination Considerations

Most candidates with international application plans intend to apply to programs in multiple world regions/countries

Candidates With International Application Plans*
Application Plans by Candidate Region/Country of Residence and Program Region/Country

		Overall	Region of Residence**								
			Africa	Canada	C. & S. Asia	E. & SE. Asia/PI	E. Europe	LATAM	Middle East	United States	W. Europe
Program Region/Country	Africa	2%	16%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%
	Australia & PI	14%	18%	8%	25%	14%	7%	7%	16%	9%	5%
	Canada	28%	49%	73%	47%	18%	14%	22%	38%	17%	10%
	C. & S. Asia	8%	4%	4%	22%	4%	3%	1%	5%	6%	3%
	E. & SE. Asia	15%	8%	13%	20%	27%	8%	3%	9%	14%	10%
	E. Europe	15%	21%	6%	27%	9%	15%	13%	15%	8%	10%
	LATAM	2%	3%	0%	2%	1%	1%	7%	1%	2%	1%
	Middle East	2%	5%	0%	2%	1%	2%	1%	12%	2%	1%
	United States	61%	62%	69%	69%	60%	44%	71%	60%	85%	39%
	W. Europe	62%	53%	50%	56%	51%	76%	66%	63%	68%	84%
Don't know	3%	3%	1%	3%	4%	2%	0%	1%	3%	2%	
Avg. # of regions residents intend to apply to		2.1	2.5	2.3	2.8	1.9	1.7	1.9	2.2	2.2	1.7

*Candidates who plan to apply to programs outside their country of residence. **Column totals do not sum to 100 percent due to multiple selections.

Study Destination Considerations

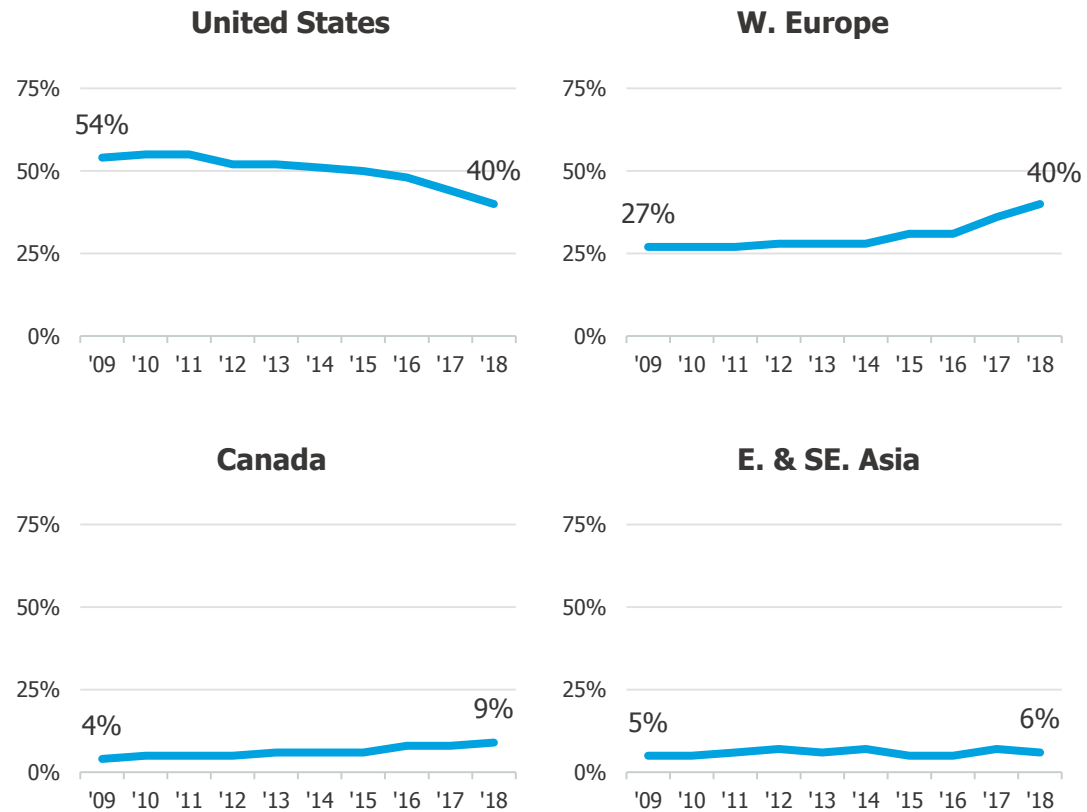
10-year trend in international candidate study destination preferences shows acceleration of decline for United States

In addition to asking which regions/countries candidates plan to send applications to, the survey asks candidates to identify their one preferred study destination region/country.

Among candidates who plan to apply internationally, preference for the United States as their study destination has declined sharply over the last two years in an acceleration of the long-term, gradual decline seen over the previous eight years. The opposite trend is observed in international candidate preference for Western Europe, and to a lesser degree Canada—that is, an accelerated increase over the past two years following a longer period of gradual increase.

This acceleration is likely driven in part by the political climate in the United States, which [ongoing GMAC research](#) shows has elevated concerns among non-US citizen candidates about their ability to obtain work visas in the United States post-GME, among other negative impressions.

Candidates With International Application Plans*
Preferred Study Destination



*Candidates who plan to apply to programs outside their country of residence.

Study Destination Considerations

Equal shares of candidates who plan to apply internationally say their preferred destination is the United States and W. Europe

Among candidates with international application plans, equal shares prefer the United States and Western Europe as their study destination (40% each). Notably, preference for the United States is greater among residents of East and Southeast Asia (45% vs. 31%) and Central and South Asia (41% vs. 30%)—regions that are major sources of international candidates. Most residents of Western Europe and Eastern Europe with international application plans prefer to study in Western Europe (71% and 59%, respectively), and most US residents who plan to apply internationally prefer to study in the United States (73%).

Candidates With International Application Plans*
Preferred Study Destination by Candidate Region/Country of Residence and Program Region/Country

		Overall	Region of Residence								
			Africa	Canada	C. & S. Asia	E. & SE. Asia/PI	E. Europe	LATAM	Middle East	United States	W. Europe
Program Region/Country	Africa	1%	6%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	Australia & PI	1%	2%	1%	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%
	Canada	9%	21%	31%	13%	5%	3%	9%	16%	2%	2%
	C. & S. Asia	2%	0%	0%	9%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	E. & SE. Asia	6%	2%	7%	5%	16%	3%	1%	4%	4%	4%
	E. Europe	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	LATAM	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%
	Middle East	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	3%	0%	0%
	United States	40%	33%	40%	41%	45%	30%	46%	36%	73%	21%
	W. Europe	40%	34%	19%	30%	31%	59%	42%	38%	20%	71%

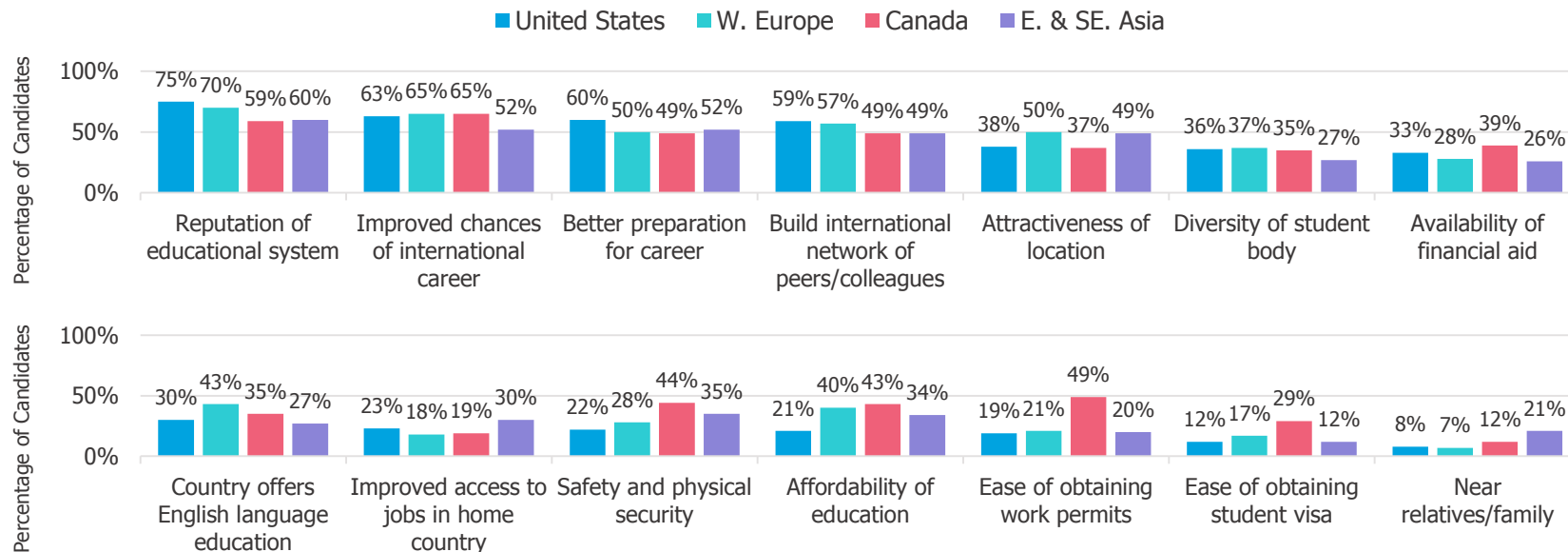
*Candidates who plan to apply to programs outside their country of residence.

Study Destination Considerations

International candidates who prefer to study internationally select different study destinations for different reasons

Different study destinations have different appeals that attract international candidates. The United States and Western Europe are most likely to be selected because of the reputation of their educational systems and improved chances of an international career. Canada is more likely to be selected than other destinations because of the ease of obtaining work permits and student visas, as well as the availability of financial aid and safety and physical security. East and Southeast Asia is more likely to be selected than other destinations because it allows candidates to be near relatives/family and improves access to jobs in candidates' home countries. The United States is less likely than other destinations to be selected for safety and physical security and affordability.

Candidates Who Prefer to Study Internationally*
Reasons for Selecting Preferred Study Destination, by Preferred Study Destination



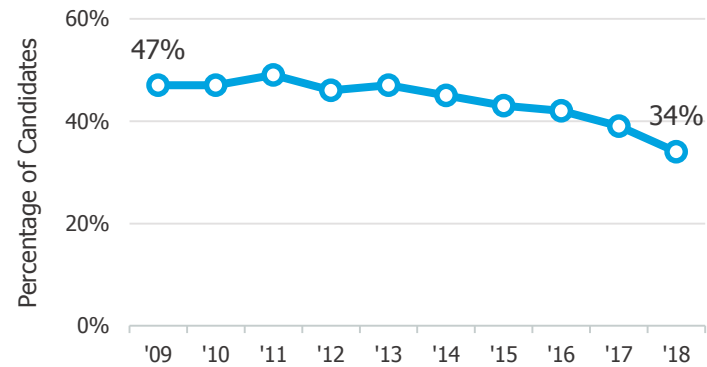
*Candidates whose preferred study destination is outside their country of residence.

Focus on international study in the United States

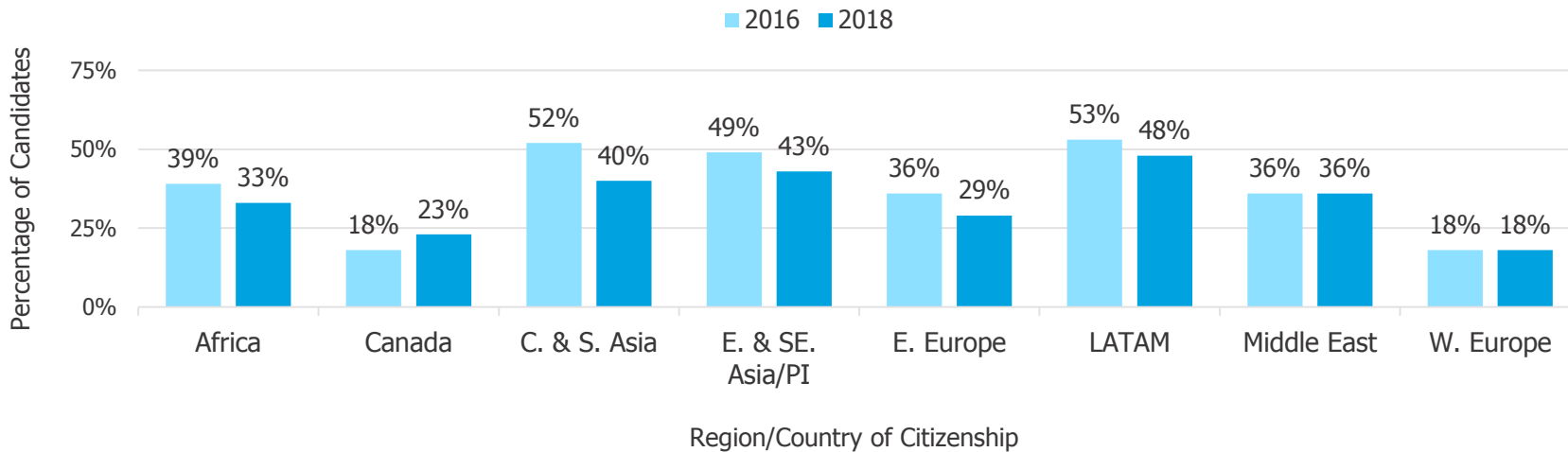
Similar to the trend seen among candidates with international application plans, the percentage of non-US citizens who say the United States is their preferred study destination has declined in the last two years following a long-term, more gradual decline seen over the previous eight years. Between 2009 and 2016, the percentage of non-US citizens who preferred to study in the United States declined from 47 percent to 42 percent. In 2018, it declined to 34 percent.

By region/country of citizenship, the two-year decline is greatest among citizens of countries in Central and South Asia, declining from 52 percent to 40 percent.

Non-US Citizens Preferring to Study in the US



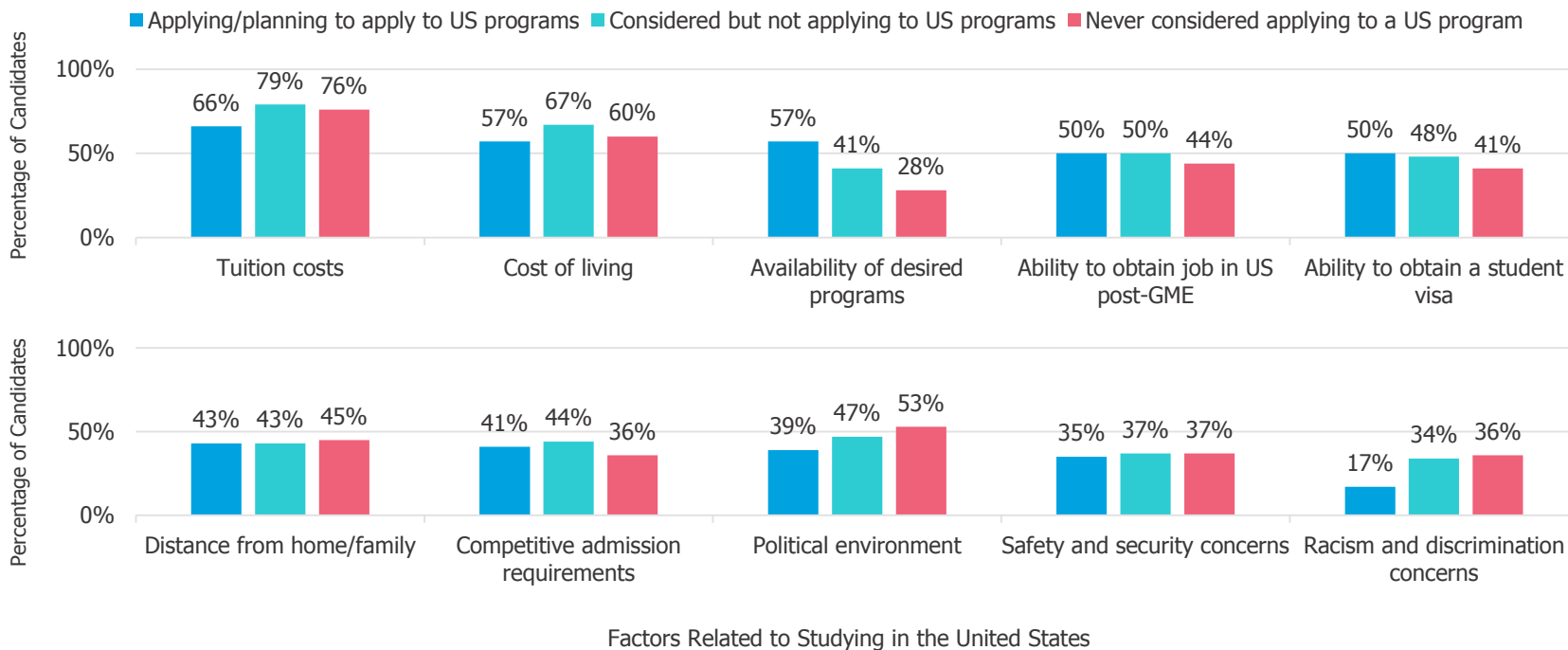
Candidate Preference to Study in the United States by Region/Country of Citizenship



Focus on international study in the United States

Regardless of where programs in the United States factor into candidates' choices—whether they are planning to apply, considered but not applying, or never considered applying—tuition costs and cost of living are the biggest factors that may prevent them from pursuing GME in the United States. Those who are planning to apply and those who considered but are not applying are more likely to have concerns about their ability to obtain a job in the United States than they are to have concerns about the political environment.

Non-US Citizens
Percentage Who Agree Factors May Prevent Them From Pursuing GME in the United States, by Application Plans



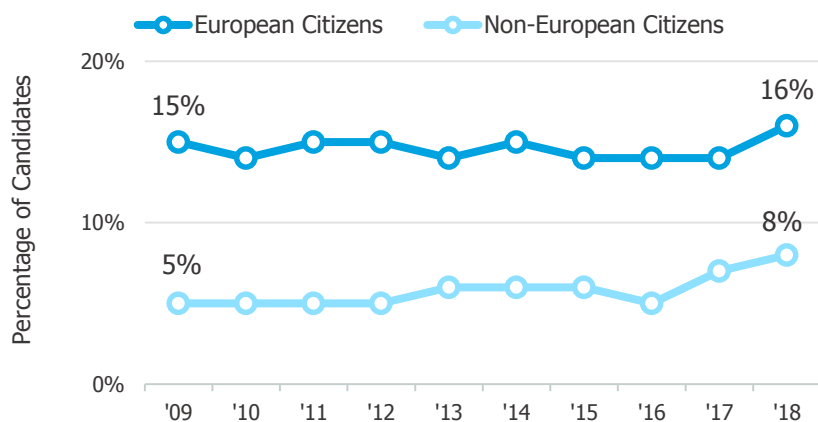
Focus on international study in the United Kingdom

As shown in [other GMAC research publications](#), candidate survey responses continue to suggest that concerns about Brexit's impact on international student mobility to the United Kingdom have not come to fruition. While there has been a decline in the percentage of UK citizens who say the United Kingdom is their preferred study destination in the last two years, preference for the United Kingdom as a destination has increased among non-UK citizens, both among non-citizens residing within and outside of Europe.

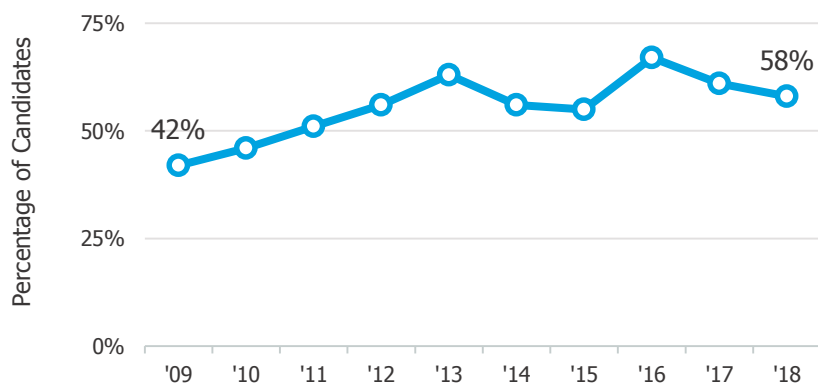
The top reasons non-UK citizens cite in selecting the United Kingdom as their preferred study destination include the reputation of the education system (75%), improved chances of an international career (64%), the opportunity to build a network of international peers/colleagues (59%), better preparation for their career (54%), and the attractiveness of the location (52%).

In the last year, there has been an increase in the percentage of non-UK citizens who say they prefer to study in the United Kingdom because of safety and physical security (21% in 2017 and 28% in 2018) and the ease of obtaining a student visa (8% in 2017 and 14% in 2018). A portion of this increase is likely attributable to internationally-minded candidates shifting their preference away from the United States and to the United Kingdom. The majority of non-UK citizens who prefer the United Kingdom considered the United States at some point in time (72%).

Non-UK Citizens Preferring to Study in the UK

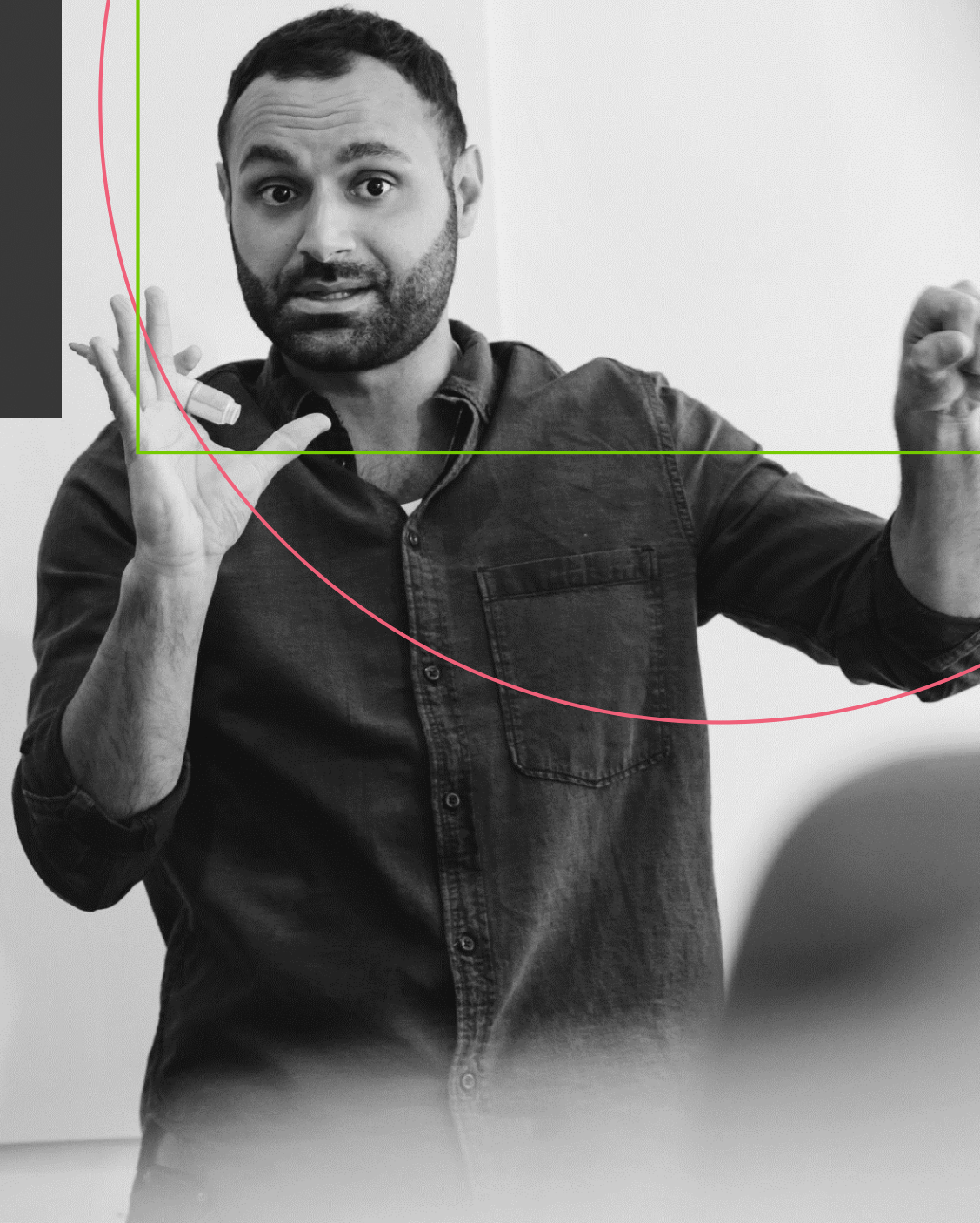


UK Citizens Preferring to Study in the UK



Respondent Demographic Profile

This section details the gender and age details of 2018 survey respondents by their country of citizenship and residence.



Respondent Demographic Profile

		Overall*	Gender			Age				
			Male	Female	Other	22 and under	23 to 24	25 to 30	31 to 39	40 and older
Global		9,617	5,411	4,161	45	2,631	1,659	3,402	1,383	444
Citizenship	Africa	780	486	290	4	133	297	196	63	486
	Australia & Pacific Islands	84	53	29	2	11	27	16	12	53
	Canada	376	210	161	5	46	153	79	33	210
	Central & South Asia	1,409	947	459	3	297	511	169	22	947
	East & Southeast Asia	1,684	645	1,031	8	248	459	171	35	645
	Eastern Europe	308	133	173	2	50	74	58	10	133
	Latin America	465	300	165	0	62	252	94	26	300
	Middle East	218	134	84	0	31	81	58	16	134
	United States	2,901	1,618	1,268	15	467	1,210	397	177	1,618
	Western Europe	1,281	823	453	5	298	300	123	38	823
Residence	Africa	703	437	261	5	119	270	180	50	437
	Australia & Pacific Islands	106	59	45	2	16	29	22	11	59
	Canada	448	244	197	7	66	178	92	36	244
	Central & South Asia	1,260	848	412	0	271	454	119	17	848
	East & Southeast Asia	1,452	588	856	8	191	421	155	41	588
	Eastern Europe	211	94	116	1	36	48	37	11	94
	Latin America	415	272	142	1	52	241	81	19	272
	Middle East	263	166	97	0	35	95	70	13	166
	United States	3,235	1,765	1,456	14	535	1,296	465	193	1,765
	Western Europe	1,413	876	531	6	322	332	140	41	876

*Subtotals may not sum to global or overall figures due to missing demographic data.

Contributors and Contact Information

Contributors

The following individuals from the GMAC Research team made significant contributions to the publication of this report:

Rhonda Daniel, Senior Research Manager, questionnaire development and interpretation of data, and drafting of the manuscript for intellectual content; **Matt Hazenbush**, Research Communications Senior Manager, editorial and manuscript review; **Gregg Schoenfeld**, Senior Director, Research & Data Science, manuscript review; **Tacoma Williams**, Research Senior Coordinator, sample development; **Devina Caruthers**, Associate Research Manager, survey management.

Contact Information

For questions or comments regarding the findings, methodology, or data, please contact the GMAC Research Department at research@gmac.com.

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