AIGAC
Association of International
Graduate Admissions Consultants

2018

MBA Applicant Survey

Great Expectations

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What will we be talking about today?

- **Candidates' expectations are established during their early interactions in the MBA application process**
  - Candidates expectations are first shaped online
  - They are also finding new resources
  - While candidates look at a lot of sources, they value them differently

- **Candidates expect a lot from each of the schools**
  - Candidates are eager for transparency throughout the application process
  - They desire feedback following an unsuccessful application
  - Expectation setting contributes to perception of how well schools get to know applicants

- **Candidates also have high expectations of consultants**
  - Candidates value consultant advice on preparing the best profile
  - They look to consultants to gain a sense of satisfaction and achievement
  - Candidates are also open to tough messages, want help setting their expectations

- **As MBA applicants look to the future, together we can help to manage expectations**

Schools
University of Virginia, Darden
Cornell, Johnson
Carnegie Mellon, Tepper
Dartmouth, Tuck

Large Organizations
Veritas Prep
Accepted.com
Agos
Stacy Blackman Consulting
Stratus Admissions Counseling
MBA Prep School

Medium Organizations
MBA Empresarial
The Sparrey Consulting Group
Maxx Associates
The Red Pen
Round One Admissions Consulting

Small Organizations
ApplicantLab
Think and Learn Pvt. Ltd (BYJU's)
EXPARTUS
Adam Markus: Graduate Admissions Guru
Personal MBA Coach
August Academy
Shine / MBA Admissions Consulting
Italyx Ventures
Admissions Unlimited
Admit Canada
Salma Qarnain
Oraib Pakistanddf

Affiliates
Dominate Test Prep, LLC
Enrollment Strategies

Other Organizations
GMAT Club

# Candidates have great expectations of the MBA application process

*"[School]'s application process was **steeped in mystery**."*

*"A candidate **waiting for results** is always in an **ultra-sensitive** mode, trying to extract the meaning of any information on his/her expected outcome."*

*"I **don't envy the admissions officers** at top schools - the quality of the candidates that I met throughout the process was amazing and I can't imagine how hard it is to create classes... That being said, I think **schools should be more transparent** about how they evaluate..."*
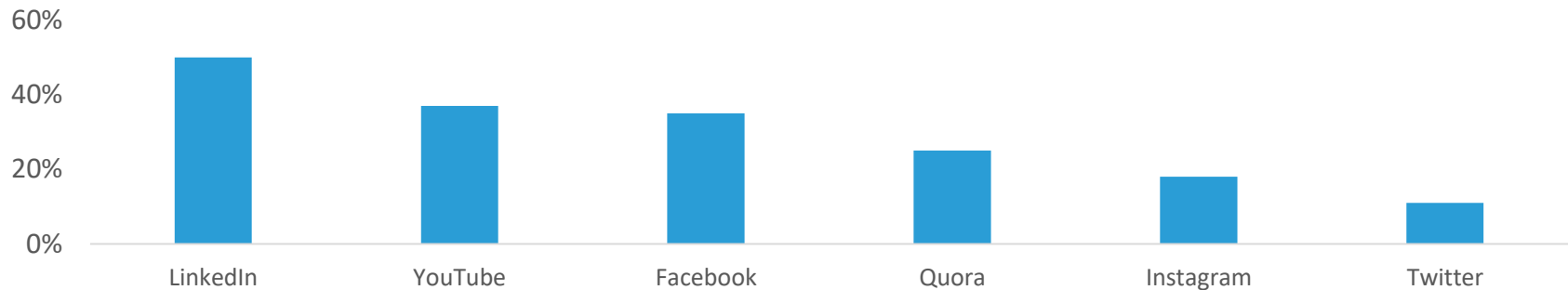
Candidates' expectations are informed by dozens of sources, beginning online

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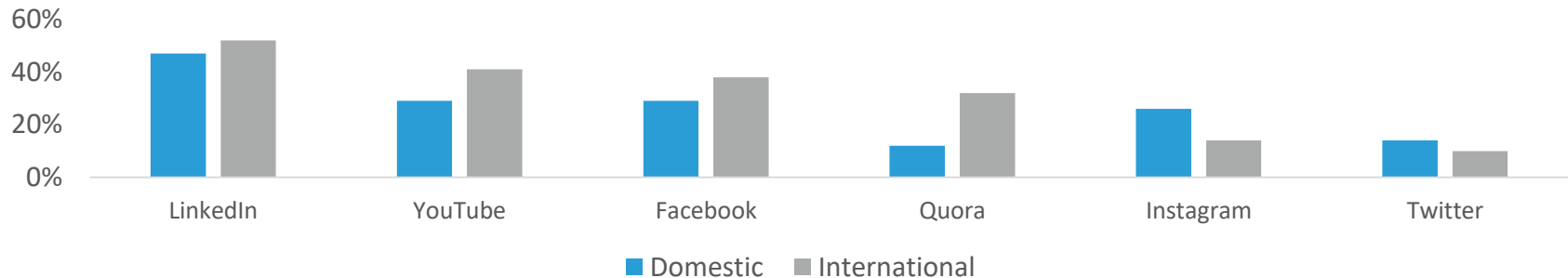Association of International
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School resources used

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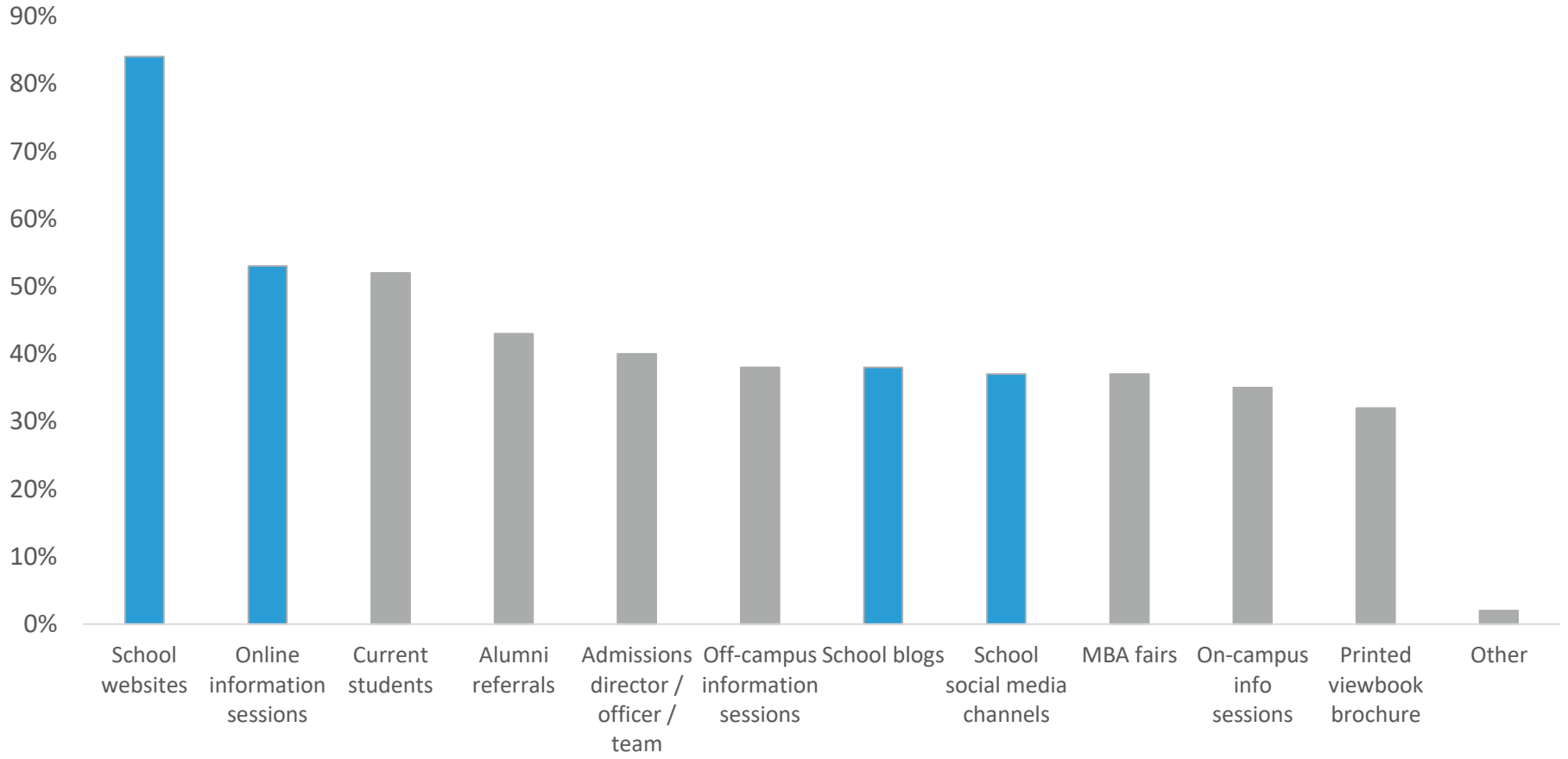
Candidates connect with schools via several channels; Quora is increasing prevalence globally

Overall

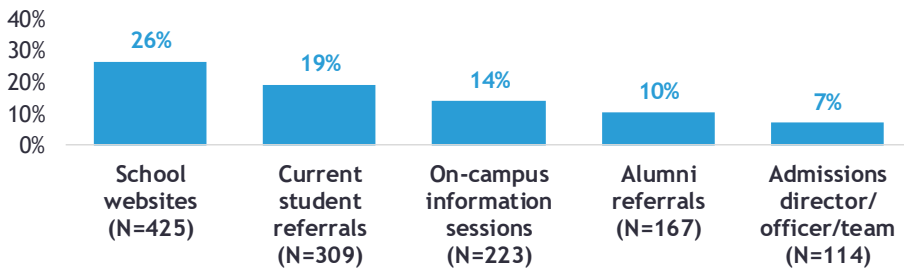| Channel	Value
LinkedIn	50%
YouTube	37%
Facebook	35%
Quora	25%
Instagram	18%
Twitter	10%

By citizenship

■ Domestic ■ International

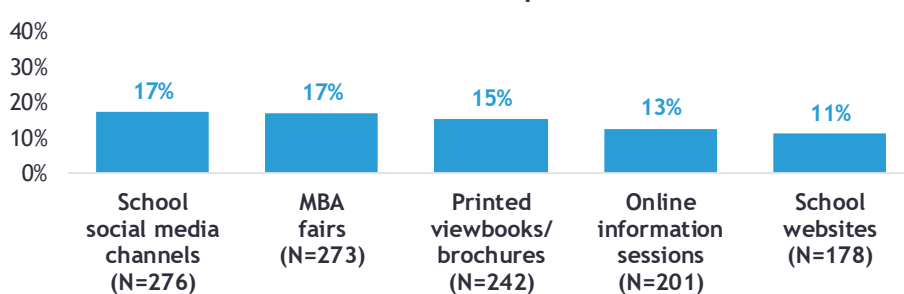Applicants selected all of the social channels they used to research, thus % add up to more than 100%

While many are used, some school-specific resources are more valuable than others

Most Valuable School-Specific Resources

Resource	Value
School websites (N=425)	26%
Current student referrals (N=309)	19%
On-campus information sessions (N=223)	14%
Alumni referrals (N=167)	10%
Admissions director/officer/team (N=114)	7%

*Of those who used at least three sources

Least Valuable School-Specific Resources

Resource	Value
School social media channels (N=276)	17%
MBA fairs (N=273)	17%
Printed viewbooks/brochures (N=242)	15%
Online information sessions (N=201)	13%
School websites (N=178)	11%

*"The [School]'s **website was very easy to navigate** and I really liked their system for **getting connected to current students.**"*

"…Videos, interviews and current or alumni experiences are very valuable."

*"For [School] I attended a couple of **online seminars** (which **reiterated what I'd already seen on the website**). I also was not able to attend their open days…"*

Even the best marketing can be overwhelmed by one negative firsthand experience

*"I didn't have such a good experience with [school], because the people **didn't really seem to love their school** the student ambassador told me he accepted [school] only because of a scholarship."*

*"I am an enlisted soldier, and come from a humble background. I was not impressed with the **elitism of most of the students** in the top MBA programs I visited. This convinced me not to apply to some of the programs I originally planned to pursue."*
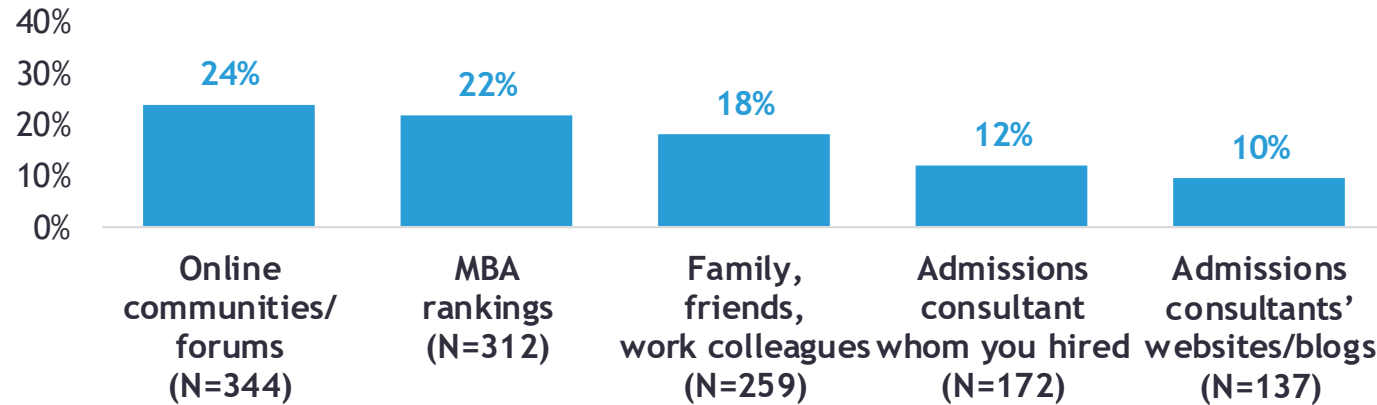
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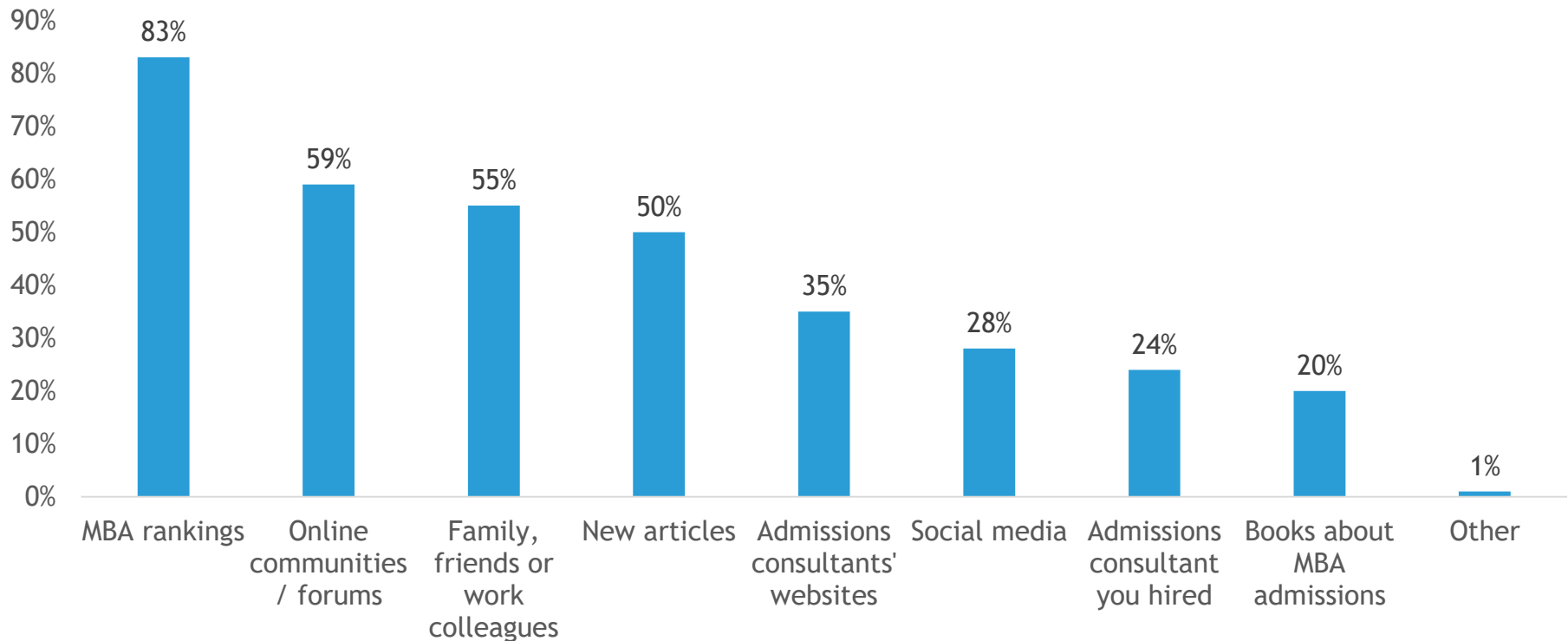
Applicants place the most value on online communities / forums

Most Valuable Independent Resources

24%	**22%**	**18%**	**12%**	**10%**
Online communities/ forums (N=344)	MBA rankings (N=312)	Family, friends, work colleagues (N=259)	Admissions consultant whom you hired (N=172)	Admissions consultants' websites/blogs (N=137)

Least Valuable Independent Resources

24%	**18%**	**15%**	**13%**	**13%**
MBA rankings (N=349)	News articles (N=252)	Social media (N=213)	Online communities/ forums (N=187)	Family, friends, work colleagues (N=183)

Candidates continue to expect a lot from each of the schools

Candidates expect status updates throughout the application process

*"I think [School]'s **inability to keep applicants updated** on the status of their admissions process is suggestive of the greater culture, regardless of the collaborative and inclusive culture they claim to promote."*

*"Some schools will notify students on multiple days but not openly tell them that beforehand. This **causes much more anxiety than is needed**, we already have plenty of that.."*

*"More transparency in terms of the status of the application will be appreciated. Leading schools like [schools] were **notoriously quiet** about the application for more than 5 weeks."*

*"It's very stressful to not know where you stand. **I found it difficult to sleep.**"*

"I was put in the waiting list. The **uncertainty makes me crazy**."

"I appreciated [school's] process of inviting waitlisted students to set up a phone call to discuss their candidacy further. It's the only school I'm waitlisted on that offers that."

Candidates want feedback on unsuccessful applications to set future expectations

"Feedback on the application and reasons for rejection would be helpful. Diplomatic rejection mail left me **confused.**"

"Feedback at some point would be fantastic. At least some indication of what portion of an application was below expectation would be helpful even just for **personal development**."

"I wish I knew how close to admissions I was. This would help me gauge re-applying or not."
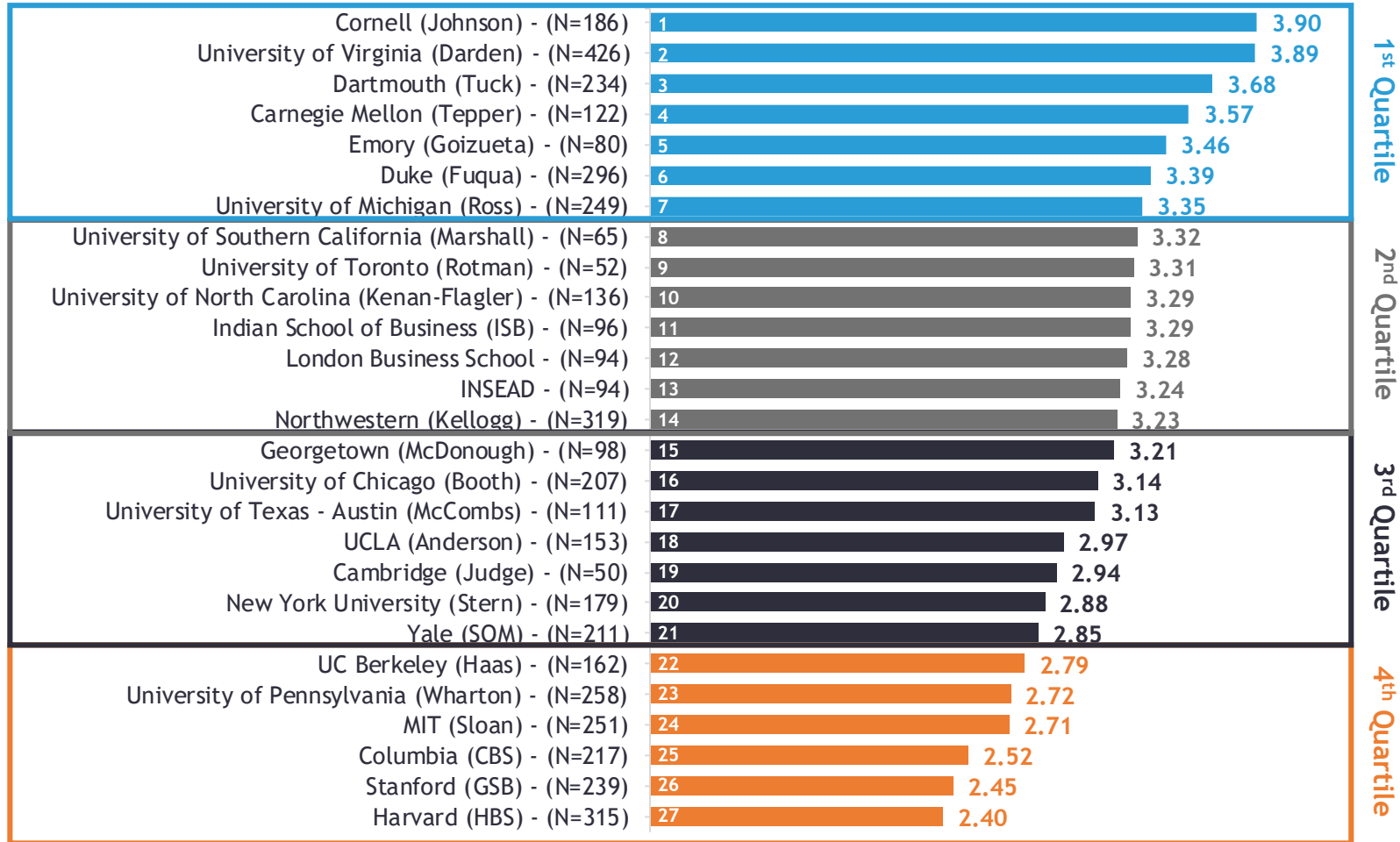
Candidates want feedback on unsuccessful applications to set future expectations

"Business schools should have at least a simple feedback about the denied applicants. Seriously. I would prefer to pay a higher application fee but a one line feedback: e.g. "GMAT slightly below average", or "career goals not clear", or "too many applicants from your region/industry". Anything. I know it would be hard, but the **school that starts doing it will have a great differential factor in increasing number of applicants***."*

"I know that not all schools can make it, but [school] has an amazing feature of feedback session for non-admitted applicants who are interested in re-applying ....As applicants, we **spend a lot of money, time and neurons** *trying to figure out ...the admission process...how adcoms really look at our application. The feedback possibility it is a great resource that more schools should adopt."*

Expectation setting contributes to the perception of how well schools got to know applicants

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Ratings for How Well Schools Got to Know Applicants (N => 50)

1st Quartile
#	School	Rating
1	Cornell (Johnson) - (N=186)	3.90
2	University of Virginia (Darden) - (N=426)	3.89
3	Dartmouth (Tuck) - (N=234)	3.68
4	Carnegie Mellon (Tepper) - (N=122)	3.57
5	Emory (Goizueta) - (N=80)	3.46
6	Duke (Fuqua) - (N=296)	3.39
7	University of Michigan (Ross) - (N=249)	3.35

2nd Quartile
#	School	Rating
8	University of Southern California (Marshall) - (N=65)	3.32
9	University of Toronto (Rotman) - (N=52)	3.31
10	University of North Carolina (Kenan-Flagler) - (N=136)	3.29
11	Indian School of Business (ISB) - (N=96)	3.29
12	London Business School - (N=94)	3.28
13	INSEAD - (N=94)	3.24
14	Northwestern (Kellogg) - (N=319)	3.23

3rd Quartile
#	School	Rating
15	Georgetown (McDonough) - (N=98)	3.21
16	University of Chicago (Booth) - (N=207)	3.14
17	University of Texas - Austin (McCombs) - (N=111)	3.13
18	UCLA (Anderson) - (N=153)	2.97
19	Cambridge (Judge) - (N=50)	2.94
20	New York University (Stern) - (N=179)	2.88
21	Yale (SOM) - (N=211)	2.85

4th Quartile
#	School	Rating
22	UC Berkeley (Haas) - (N=162)	2.79
23	University of Pennsylvania (Wharton) - (N=258)	2.72
24	MIT (Sloan) - (N=251)	2.71
25	Columbia (CBS) - (N=217)	2.52
26	Stanford (GSB) - (N=239)	2.45
27	Harvard (HBS) - (N=315)	2.40

*Quartiles based on schools receiving at least 50 applications (N=>50). Highest-ranked 25% (5-point scale) make up "1st Quartile."

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Candidates have high expectations of the interactions

*"I really appreciated [school's] …LEAD event…I was able to meet other applicants, get an in-depth look into [school's] experience, and get a strong feel of the student culture…**this event allowed the admissions committee to get to know me better and understand me** beyond just the MBA application…"*

"I enjoyed the conversation/interview at [school] and felt like it was truly a "get to know me" session as opposed to a hardcore "grilling" of experience and knowledge."

*"…I had 30 min appt with the admission director initially, but because our conversation got deeper… the admission director continued the conversation with me for another 30 min and I could feel his sincerity…. Honestly, [school] was not my first choice, but now it is… I **could see how [school] cares about students including prospective applicants** just from the conversation."*

*Quartiles based on schools receiving at least 50 applications (N=>50). Highest-ranked 25% make up "1st Quartile."

Candidates expect schools to get to know them better

> *"I felt absolutely no effort was made to get to know me outside of my paper application and that without using a consultant of some kind I effectively had little chance of succeeding..."*
>
> *"Though I fell in love with [school] during my campus visit, I felt that their application process was very impersonal, and I didn't feel like I had enough of an opportunity to show the school who I was with a video and a [short essay]..."*

*Quartiles based on schools receiving at least 50 applications (N=>50). Highest-ranked 25% make up "1st Quartile."

How Well Schools Got to Know the Applicant

	Cambridge (Judge) (N=48)	IE (N=25)	Stanford (GSB) (N=233)	Oxford (Said) (N=39)	University of Chicago (Booth) (N=202)	UC Berkeley (Haas) (N=160)	Emory (Goizueta) (N=80)
Female	3.58	3.33	2.14	2.83	3.44	2.56	3.72
Male	2.83	3.95	2.69	3.30	3.02	2.98	3.31
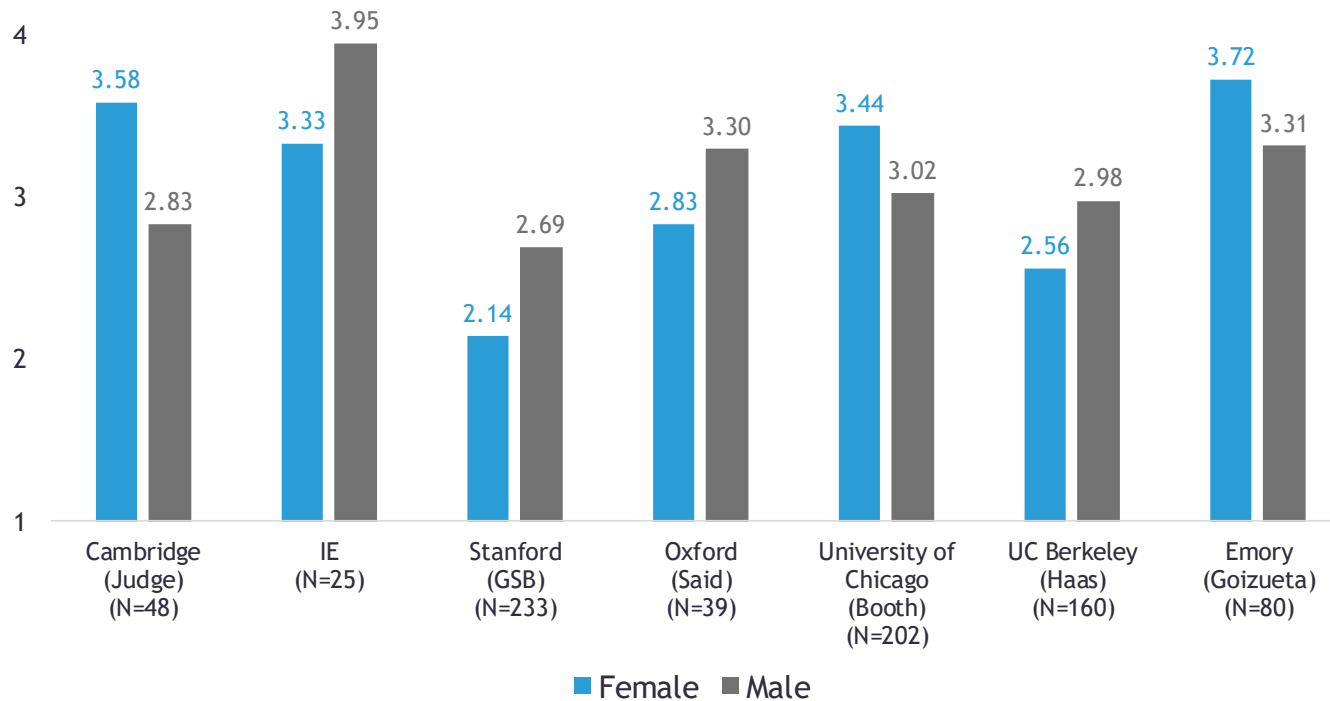
■ Female ■ Male

*Schools rated on a 5-point scale, 1 = *Not at All Well*; 5 = *Extremely Well*

Current students are valuable and help schools get to know applicants, but bias can be a risk

"I'm female and I feel like the interviewer (a male first year student) was distracted by looking at me (I am attractive) ..."

"I witnessed LGBT micro-aggressions and even what could be considered sexual harassment of an LGBT student and decided to decline their admissions offer."

"I was completely turned off (and honestly a little disgusted) when I visited campus... in particular, I remember sitting in a circle, talking to a current student (male); I am a female and was in a circle with five other males. I would ask questions and the male student would respond looking at other males and not me."

"My interviewer talked to me about how attractive he thought one of his female professors was, which made me uncomfortable."

Candidates also have high expectations of admissions consultants

Admissions consultants have active champions, we also have our detractors
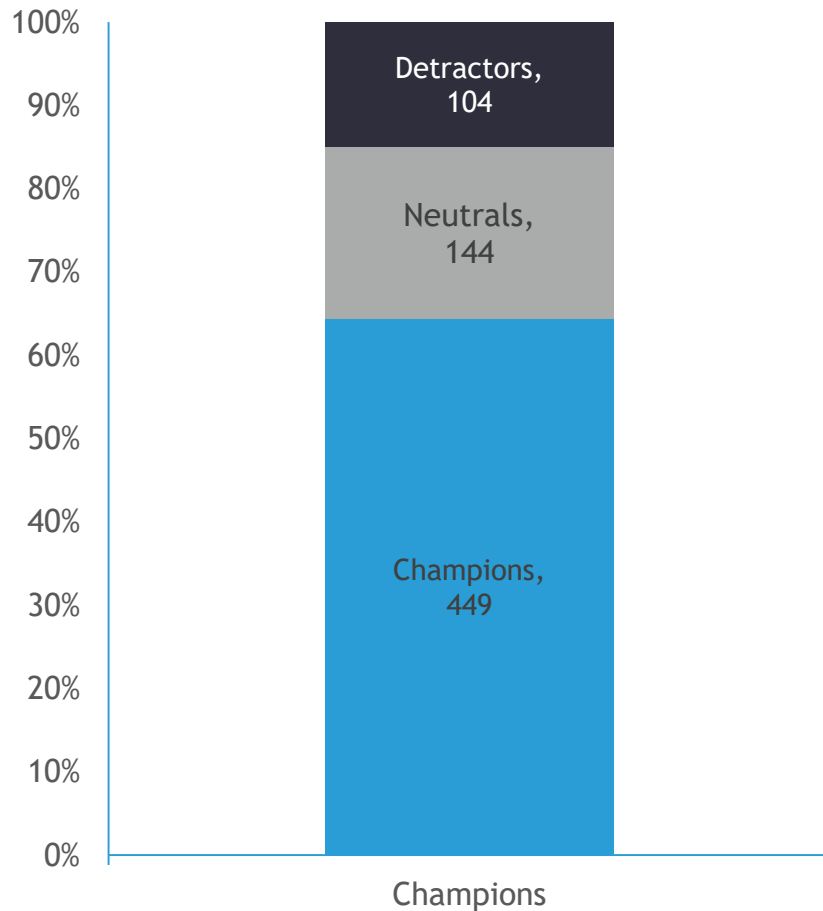
- **Detractors:** Dissatisfied and will spread their negative feelings about MBA admissions consulting services used.

- **Neutral:** Not dissatisfied, but feel no particular loyalty to these services.

- **Champions:** Very satisfied with their service and experience; will highly praise MBA admission consulting services used to others.

*'N' value includes those answering C2, C3, and C4

Consultants advise candidates to improve their profile and broaden school choices

Top Recommendations
Taken from Admissions Consultant

Recommendation	Percentage
I applied to a school that I had not previously considered (N=274)	38%
I worked to earn a higher GMAT score before applying (N=268)	37%
I applied to more schools than I had planned (N=155)	22%
I applied to higher-ranking schools than I had planned (N=112)	16%
I applied to lower-ranking schools than I had planned (N=111)	15%
I applied to fewer schools than I had planned (N=106)	15%

Those who did so ended up enjoying the process of working with a consultant best

Recommended admissions consultant actions

Legend: ■ Champions ■ Detractors

Categories:
- Applied to a school I hadn't previously considered
- Worked to earn a higher GMAT score
- Applied to more schools than planned
- Applied to higher-ranking schools than planned
- Applied to fewer schools than planned
- Applied to lower-ranking schools than planned
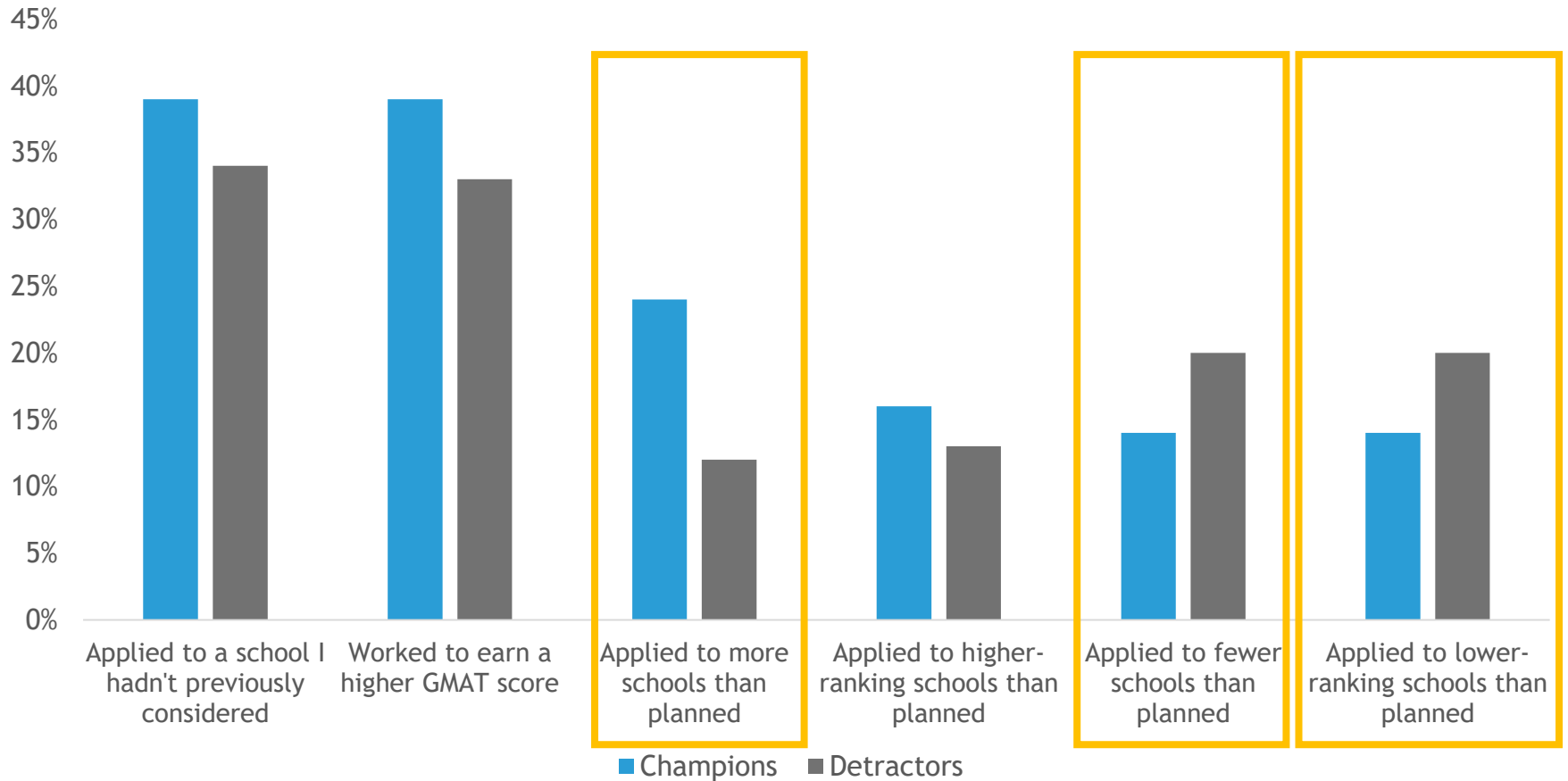
Champions = 449
Detractors = 104

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Champions noted that their consultant set proper initial expectations

Q: Looking back on your MBA application experience, in what ways did your admissions consultant serve your needs well?

Consultants encouraged candidates to own their own process

*"By making me realise where I stand, and helping me chalk out **a plan of action**, my admissions consultant served me well. Also, there was **no spoon feeding** involved, which made me do things in the right direction, and by myself."*

Consultants encouraged candidates to learn about more schools and to assess expectations

*"**Gave me a sense of what business schools are looking for** in applicants. Helped me refine my resume for business school purposes. Provided insight based on others' experiences that **would have been difficult** to obtain just from talking with friends."*

*"..Helped me **understand my true potential** and thereby I am in a position of applying at those school which are more likely to give an admit to me rather than those ambitious schools."*

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Q: Looking back on your MBA application experience, in what ways did your admissions consultant serve your needs well?

Consultants also helped candidates to evaluate goals

*"My admissions consultant helped me be **more decisive** by providing guidance on issues that I otherwise wouldn't have been able to answer myself. She gave me the **confidence** that I was on the right track and consistently gave me **constructive feedback** to help me improve."*

*"My consultant helped me: choose the **right schools** for me; realize what my **post-MBA goals** are; figure out **what to highlight** from my background."*

*"He can provide me more inside opinions of the culture of different schools and **what makes each school different** from others."*

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Applicants want honesty, even if it is difficult to take

*"I feel like they were **too much of a cheerleader** at times, and weren't totally honest with me about how much stronger [my] application would be if I took a supplemental quantitative course."*

*"I would have loved them to tell me that **my GMAT quant score wasn't enough** for the MBA programs I was applying to."*

*"I loved my consultant. She was **really tough and brutally honest**. While this led to frustration at times, I understood her points and ultimately my application benefited even if I wasn't happy at the given time."*

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Applicants expect personalized service and empathy

*"I didn't feel much of a personal connection with my consultant which would have helped through the stress. It was **mostly transactional and formal.**"*
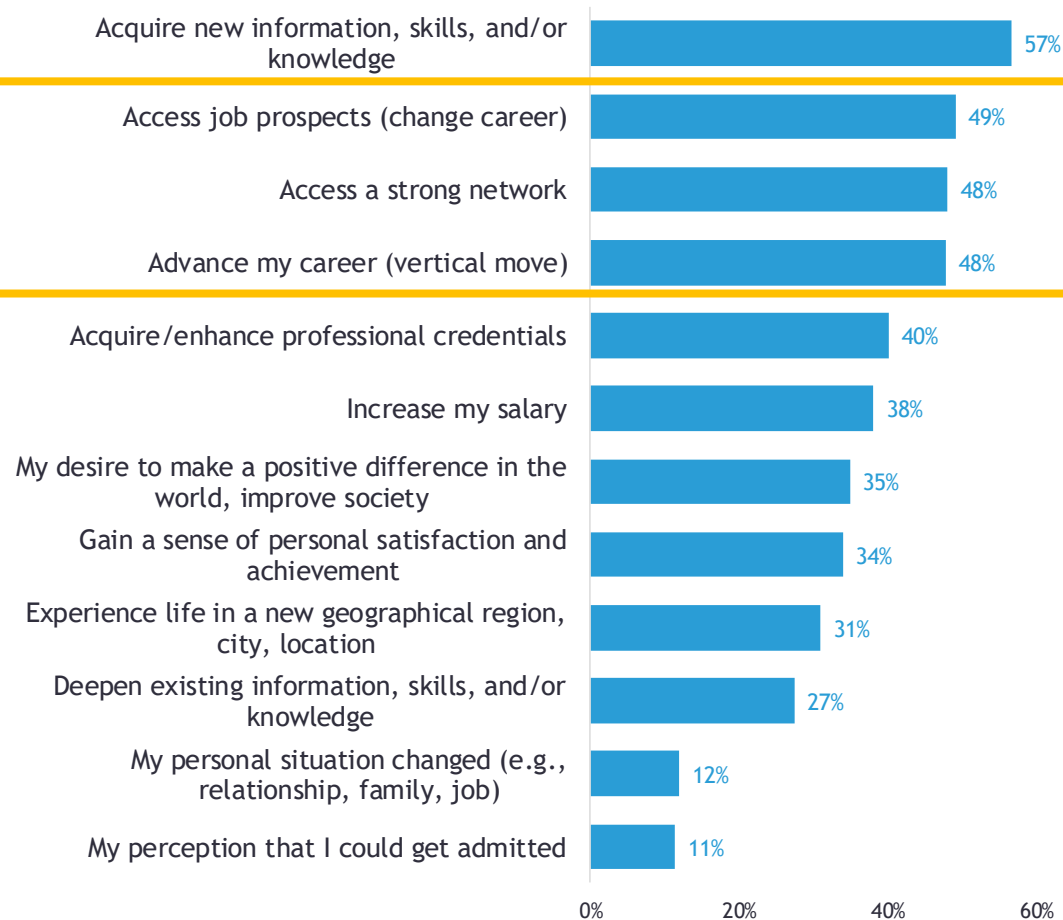
*"Have a better understanding and appreciation for my unique profile and background. Be more versed in **how schools beyond top 15** assess candidates and apply that knowledge in advising me..."*

As MBA applicants look to the future, there are additional expectations to manage

Students are expecting that MBA programs will prepare them for a successful career change
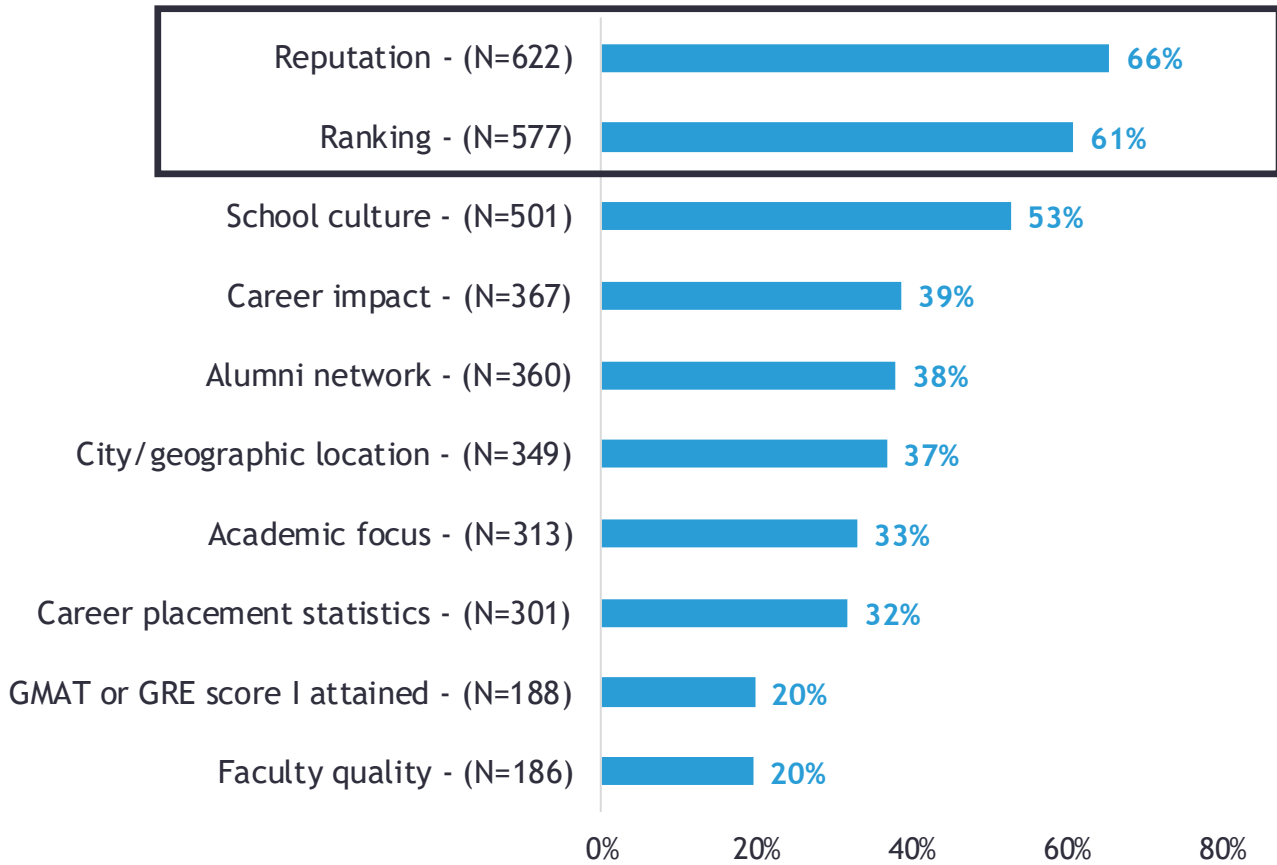
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Factors with the Most Influence on Decision to Apply to MBA Programs

Factor	Percentage
Acquire new information, skills, and/or knowledge	57%
Access job prospects (change career)	49%
Access a strong network	48%
Advance my career (vertical move)	48%
Acquire/enhance professional credentials	40%
Increase my salary	38%
My desire to make a positive difference in the world, improve society	35%
Gain a sense of personal satisfaction and achievement	34%
Experience life in a new geographical region, city, location	31%
Deepen existing information, skills, and/or knowledge	27%
My personal situation changed (e.g., relationship, family, job)	12%
My perception that I could get admitted	11%

Top Factors Influencing Specific Choice of Schools

Factor	Percentage
Reputation - (N=622)	66%
Ranking - (N=577)	61%
School culture - (N=501)	53%
Career impact - (N=367)	39%
Alumni network - (N=360)	38%
City/geographic location - (N=349)	37%
Academic focus - (N=313)	33%
Career placement statistics - (N=301)	32%
GMAT or GRE score I attained - (N=188)	20%
Faculty quality - (N=186)	20%

While other candidates recognize the need to own their own future

*"I was more concerned about the **school's location** and **potential job opportunities** than I was about the school's rankings...Several other students I have met at other schools also chose their MBA program based on the location and opportunities to work in specific cities."*

*"I think it is becoming increasingly important for students because of the need to network - especially for **small firms** and **start-ups**."*

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This cohort of students has only experienced a strong economy

Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey

Series Id:	LNS14000000
Seasonally Adjusted	
Series title:	(Seas) Unemployment Rate
Labor force status:	Unemployment rate
Type of data:	Percent or rate
Age:	16 years and over

Middle school

High school

College

Post-college
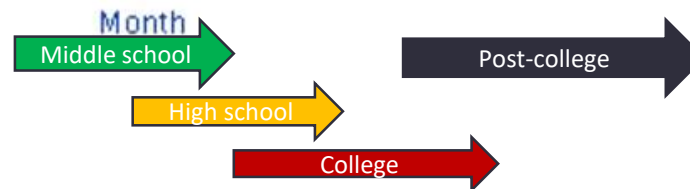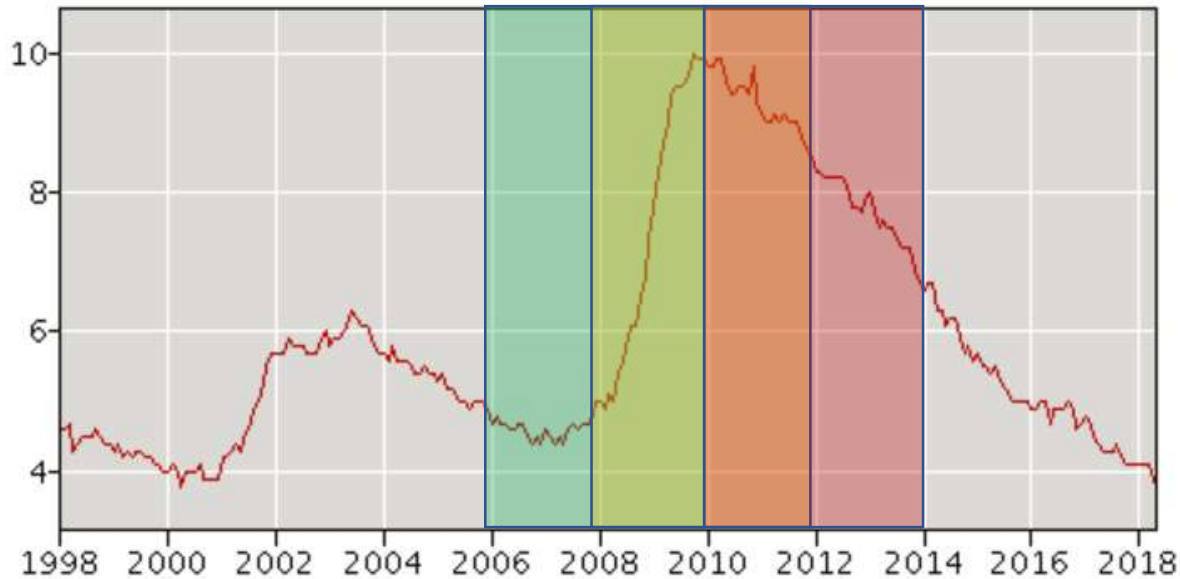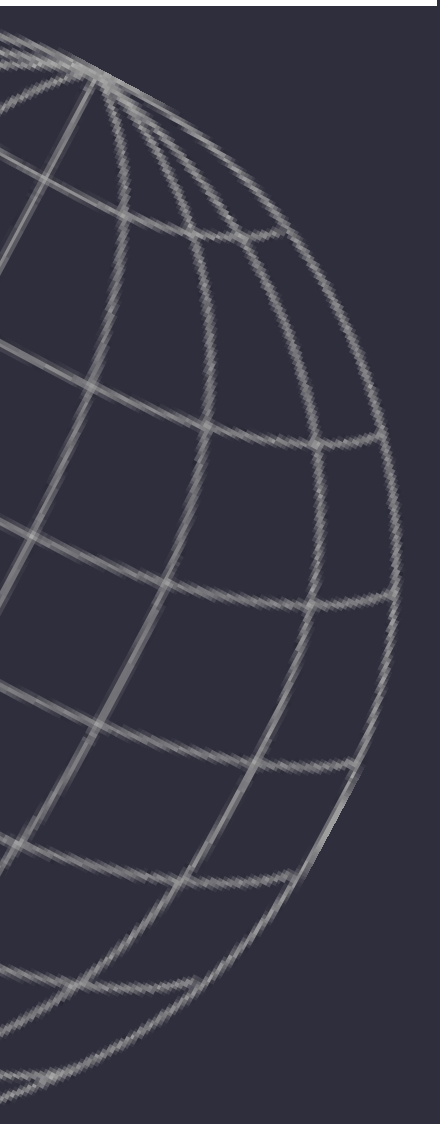
Case studies

Questions

Appendix

We conducted a survey for ~1 month and gathered almost 2,000 responses

- **Methodology**
  - **-Percept Research** helped design and field web-based MBA Applicant Survey from **March 13 to April 8, 2018**
  - –# of participants: **31** AIGAC Members & Affiliates
  - –Participating schools: **Darden, Johnson, Tepper, Tuck**
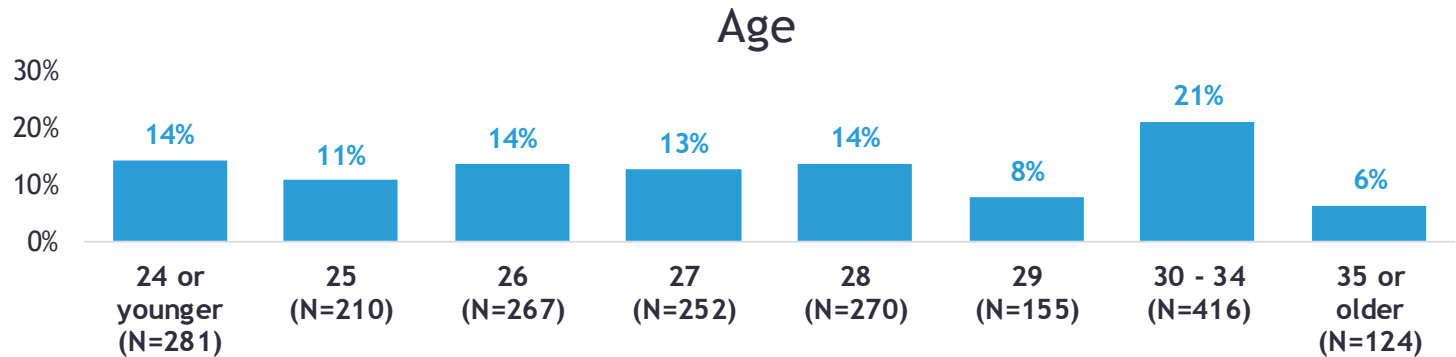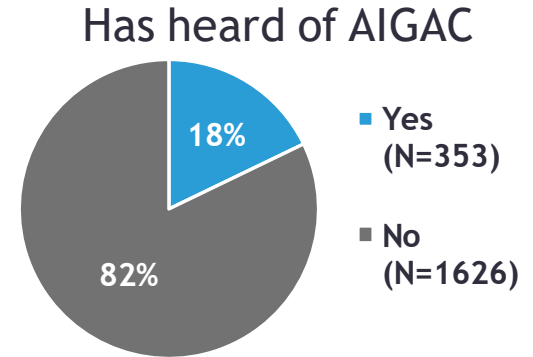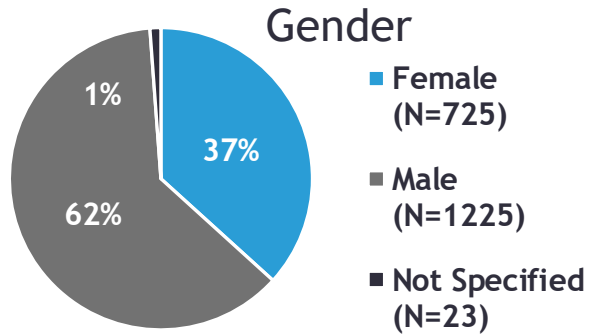
- **Response Counts**
  - –1979 completed interviews
  - –1377 Respondents who applied to at least 1 school (compared to 750 from 2017)
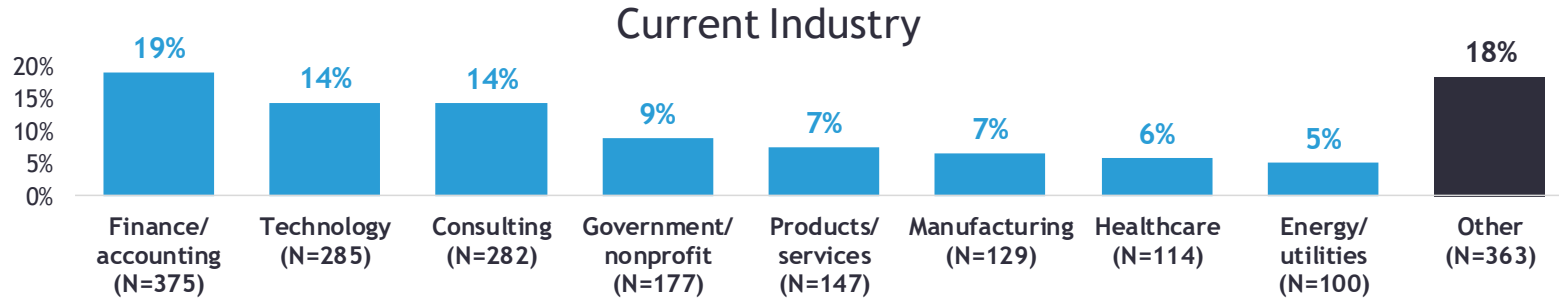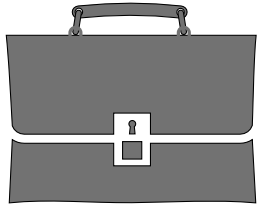
- **Reading charts:**
  - –Percentages rounded off; checkbox answers may exceed 100%
  - –Data cleaning (speeders and inappropriate responses removed)
  - –'N ' values (# of valid responses, will differ for non-mandatory questions)

- **How big is Association of International Graduate Admissions Consultants (AIGAC)?**
  - -130 representatives from 14 countries

Survey Demographics

Gender

- Female (N=725)
- Male (N=1225)
- Not Specified (N=23)

37%
62%
1%

Has heard of AIGAC

- Yes (N=353)
- No (N=1626)

18%
82%

Age

24 or younger (N=281)	25 (N=210)	26 (N=267)	27 (N=252)	28 (N=270)	29 (N=155)	30 - 34 (N=416)	35 or older (N=124)
14%	11%	14%	13%	14%	8%	21%	6%

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Views represent the variety of applicants across industries that we see applying to schools

Current Industry

	Percentage	N
Finance/accounting	19%	N=375
Technology	14%	N=285
Consulting	14%	N=282
Government/nonprofit	9%	N=177
Products/services	7%	N=147
Manufacturing	7%	N=129
Healthcare	6%	N=114
Energy/utilities	5%	N=100
Other	18%	N=363

Industry: Other Breakout (N => 10)

	Percentage	N
Education	10%	N=36
Entertainment/Media	10%	N=35
Student	7%	N=26
Advertising/Marketing	6%	N=21
Retail	5%	N=17
Real Estate	4%	N=16
Banking/Finance	3%	N=11
Government/Miltary	3%	N=11
Construction	3%	N=10
Legal	3%	N=10

About Percept Research
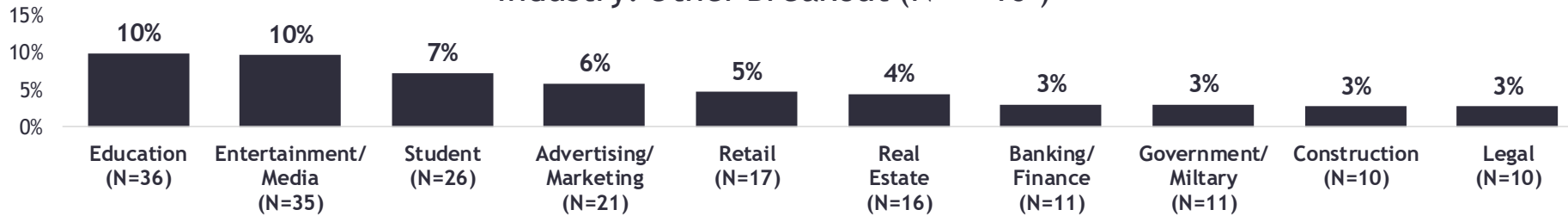
TURN INSIGHT INTO ACTION

Our consultant team has decades of experience in every aspect of the delivery of MBA programs, using data-driven, collaborative approaches to assess your challenges and devise the most effective and efficient strategies. The administrative and faculty experience of our consultant team can be leveraged to advocate for change so you can create buy-in and unify your colleagues around those strategies. Contact us to learn how your school can stay ahead and grow through stakeholder-centered innovation.

Marketing Communications and Consulting

http://bschoolresear.ch/consulting

- Influential Testimonial Development
- Information Sessions Optimization
- Lead Nurturing
- Marketing Communications (messaging)
- Media Rankings Management
- Referral Programs Development
- Social Media Strategy

Market Research

http://bschoolresear.ch/customresearch

- Admissions Funnel Assessment
- Brand Positioning Assessment (Image & Awareness)
- Competitive Secondary Analysis
- Focus Groups (Internal & External)
- Identify & Naming Assessment
- In-Depth Interviews
- Product Expansion Feasibility (Attitude & Usage)

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