Graduate Management Admission Council™

What's Driving Application Growth?

November 14, 2023

Andrew Walker, Director, Research Analysis and Communications

GMAC Conferences & Events

European Conference
Nov 29-Dec 1
Masters Leadership Summit: Nov 29
SDA Bocconi School of Management Milan, Italy

GMAC Leadership Conference
January 9-12, 2024
Austin, TX

GMAC Annual Conference
June 19-21, 2024
New Orleans, LA

Asia Conference
Nov 13-15, 2024
Asian Institute of Management, Manila, Phillippines

Masters Leadership Symposium
April 25-26, 2024
London, UK

AINP – Admissions Institute for New Professionals

The Admissions Institute for New Professionals is a unique program designed to provide context for new GME professionals working in recruitment, admissions, and marketing. Six–18 months experience required.

Europe: April 22-24, 2024
Warwick Business School, London Campus
London, UK

North America: July 17-19,2024
Washington, DC

North America: August 7-9, 2024
Irvine, CA

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Agenda

- **GMAC Research**

- **Latest Trends**
  - Region and degree type
  - U.S. spotlight

- **Flexibility or Prestige?**
  - Rank and selectivity
  - Online and part-time delivery

- **Looking to the Future**
  - Building inclusive pipelines
  - New course offerings and micro-credentials
  - Approaches to artificial intelligence

- **Q&A**

GMAC Research

The premier provider of market intelligence for GME, GMAC Research provides timely insights across the candidate lifecycle.

gmac.com/research
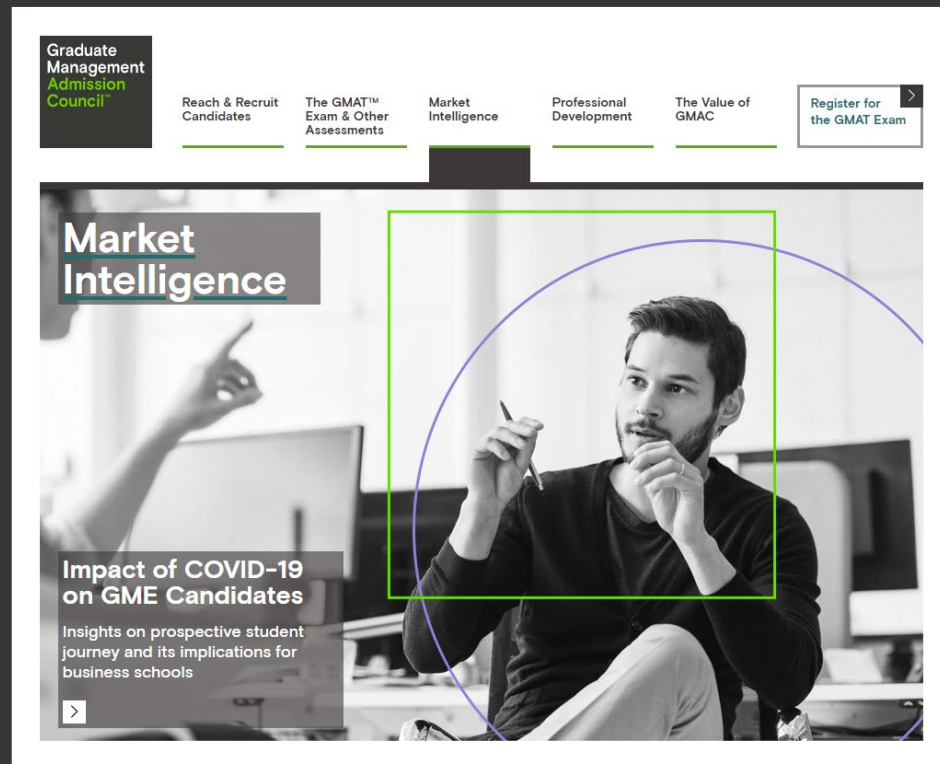
- **Resources**
  - Blogs
  - Infographics
  - Reports
  - White papers
  - Webinars

- **GMAT™ Exam**
  - Geographic Trend Report
  - Profiles of Testing
  - Competitive Intelligence Report

- **Survey Research**
  - GMAC Prospective Students Survey
  - Application Trends Survey
  - Enrolled Students Survey
  - Corporate Recruiters Survey
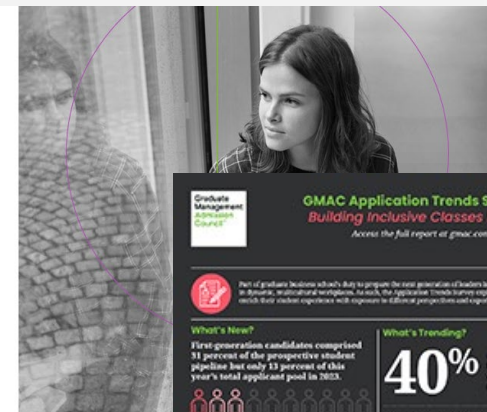
Recent Research & Upcoming Ways To Engage

Year in Review

Recap 2023 research findings about candidates, programs, and employers

"Year in Review" Webinar,
December 12

bit.ly/gmac-review

Application Trends Survey

Benchmark against your peers to stay ahead in a competitive market

- Application volume trends, by program type and region

- Applicant pool composition, by gender, citizenship, and work experience

- Expected changes in enrollment and acceptance rates, program size, and class composition

- Candidate recruitment and outreach targets

www.gmac.com/applicationtrends

893
Graduate business school programs participated in 2023

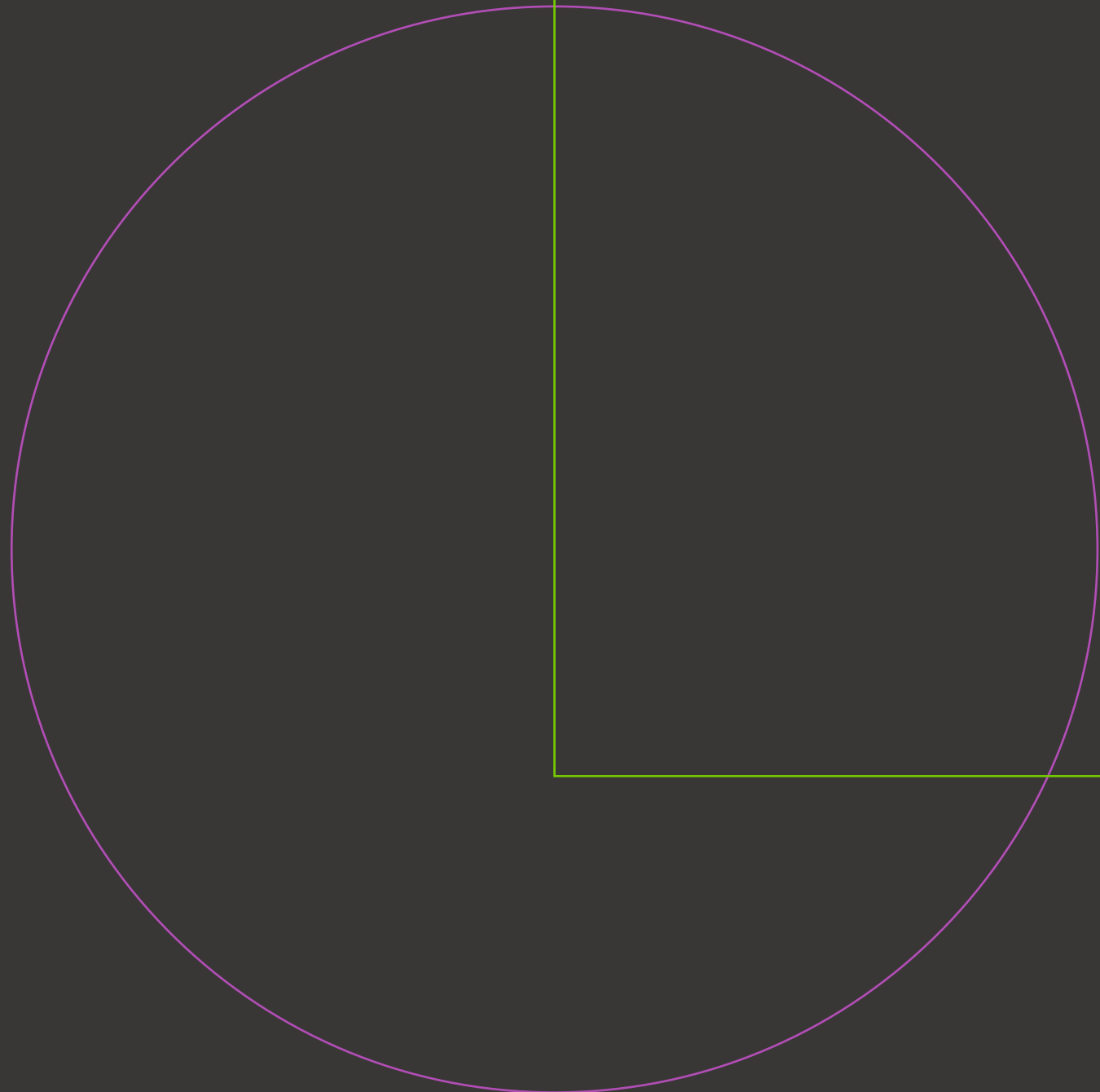**247**
Business schools are represented in the 2023 sample

32
Countries are represented in the 2023 sample

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Latest Trends

Applications across regions and degrees

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Two ways of looking at change in application volume

Relative year-on-year change involves monitoring the number of programs that report application volume growth, stability, or decline compared with the prior year. This takes into account the complete sample of responding programs in a survey year.

Absolute year-on-year change involves comparing the number of applications received by programs that responded to consecutive years' surveys, allowing for an apples-to-apples comparison of the volume of applications received in one year versus another.

Globally, total applications dropped 5% in 2023, and half of programs reported declines in applications

Relative Application Change Among All GME Programs: 2019-2023

■ Growth ■ Stable ■ Decline

Year-on-Year Change in Applications

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Decline	49%	29%	50%	54%	50%
Stable	7%	6%	6%	4%	5%
Growth	44%	65%	44%	42%	45%
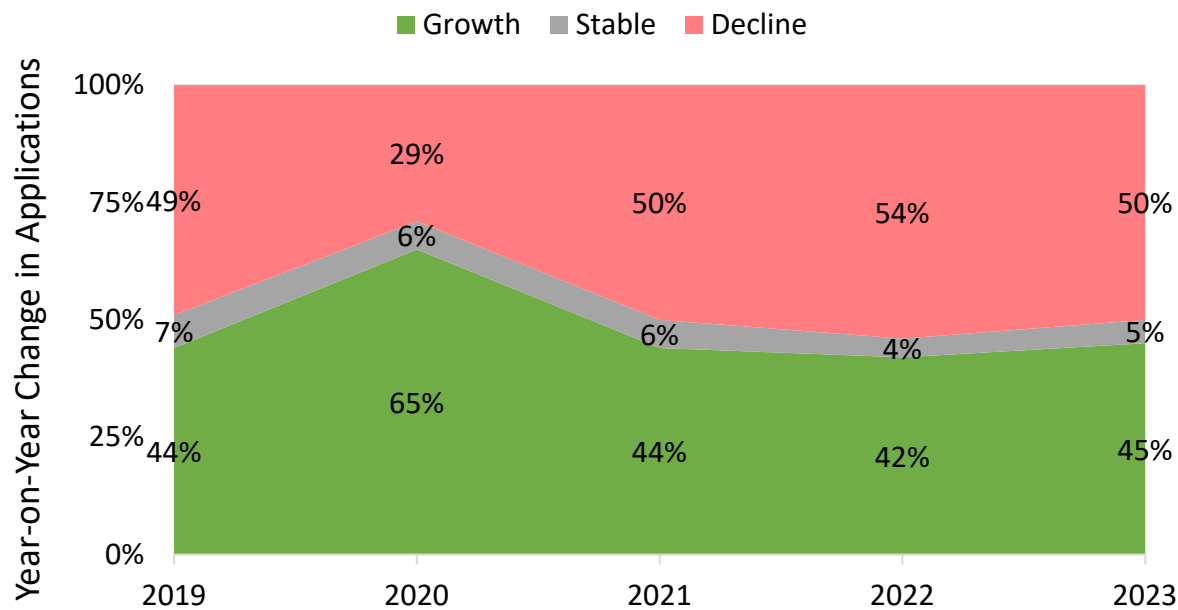
Trends in Absolute Total Number of Applications: 2019-2023

Year-on-Year Change in Total Applications

- 2019: -3.1%
- 2020: 2.4%
- 2021: 0.4%
- 2022: -3.4%
- 2023: -4.9%
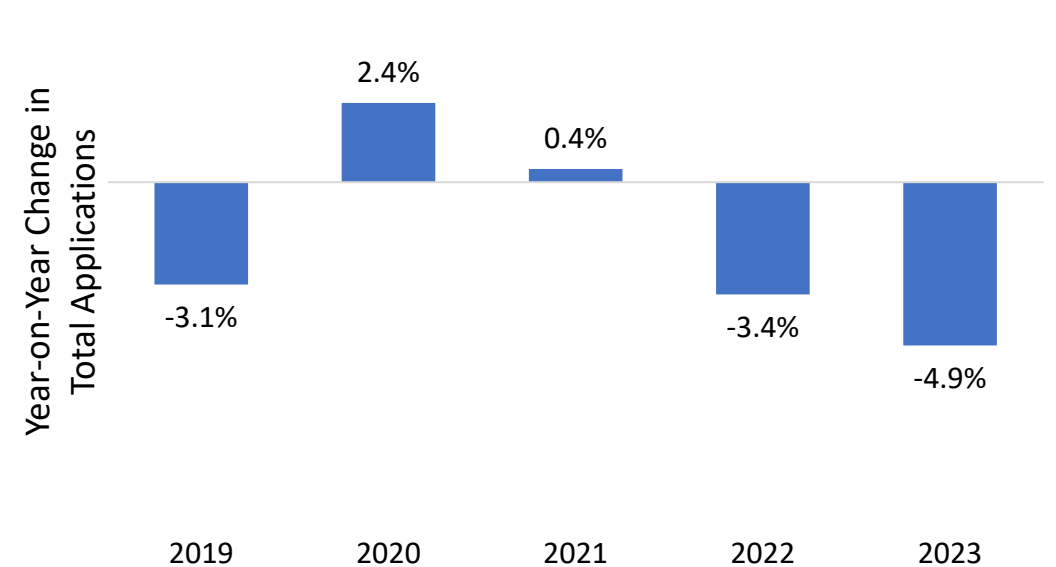
Total applications are down across the GME industry, but effects are felt differently among programs in different regions

Canada
- ⬆ 39% programs report growth
- ⬇ 56% programs report declines
- ⬆ 16% total increase in applications

Europe
- ⬆ 44% programs report growth
- ⬇ 55% programs report declines
- ⬇ 6% total drop in applications

United States
- ⬆ 52% programs report growth
- ⬇ 41% programs report declines
- ⬇ 3% total drop in applications

Asia & Pacific Islands
- ⬆ 31% programs report growth
- ⬇ 67% programs report declines
- ⬇ 6% total drop in applications

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In 2023, most program types reported slightly more declines than growth...

45%
of programs reported
growth in total applications
compared to *50%* *that reported* **declines**

45%
of programs reported
growth in business master's applications
compared to *50%* *that reported* **declines**

47%
of programs reported
growth in MBA applications
compared to *49%* *that reported* **declines**

45%
of programs reported
growth in applications from women
compared to *47%* *that reported* **declines**

47%
of programs reported
growth in applications from U.S. underrepresented candidates
compared to *34%* *that reported* **declines**

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In 2023, most program types reported slightly more declines than growth…

45%

of programs reported **growth in total applications**

compared to 50% that reported declines

45%

of programs reported **growth in business master's applications**

compared to 50% that reported declines

47%

of programs reported **growth in MBA applications**

compared to 49% that reported declines

45%

of programs reported **growth in applications from women**

compared to 47% that reported declines

47%

of programs reported **growth in applications from U.S. underrepresented candidates**

compared to 34% that reported declines

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...but most programs experienced slightly more growth than in 2022

45% ⬆ **3%**
of programs reported
growth in total applications
compared to 50% that reported declines

45% ⬇ **4%**
of programs reported
growth in business master's applications
compared to 50% that reported declines

47% ⬆ **10%**
of programs reported
growth in MBA applications
compared to 49% that reported declines

45% ⬆ **4%**
of programs reported
growth in applications from women
compared to 47% that reported declines

47% ⬆ **18%**
of programs reported
growth in applications from U.S. underrepresented candidates
compared to 34% that reported declines

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Total MBA applications declined slightly, but the more flexible professional MBAs were the most likely MBA types to report growth in applications

Relative Application Change by MBA Degree Type

■ Growth ■ Stable ■ Decline
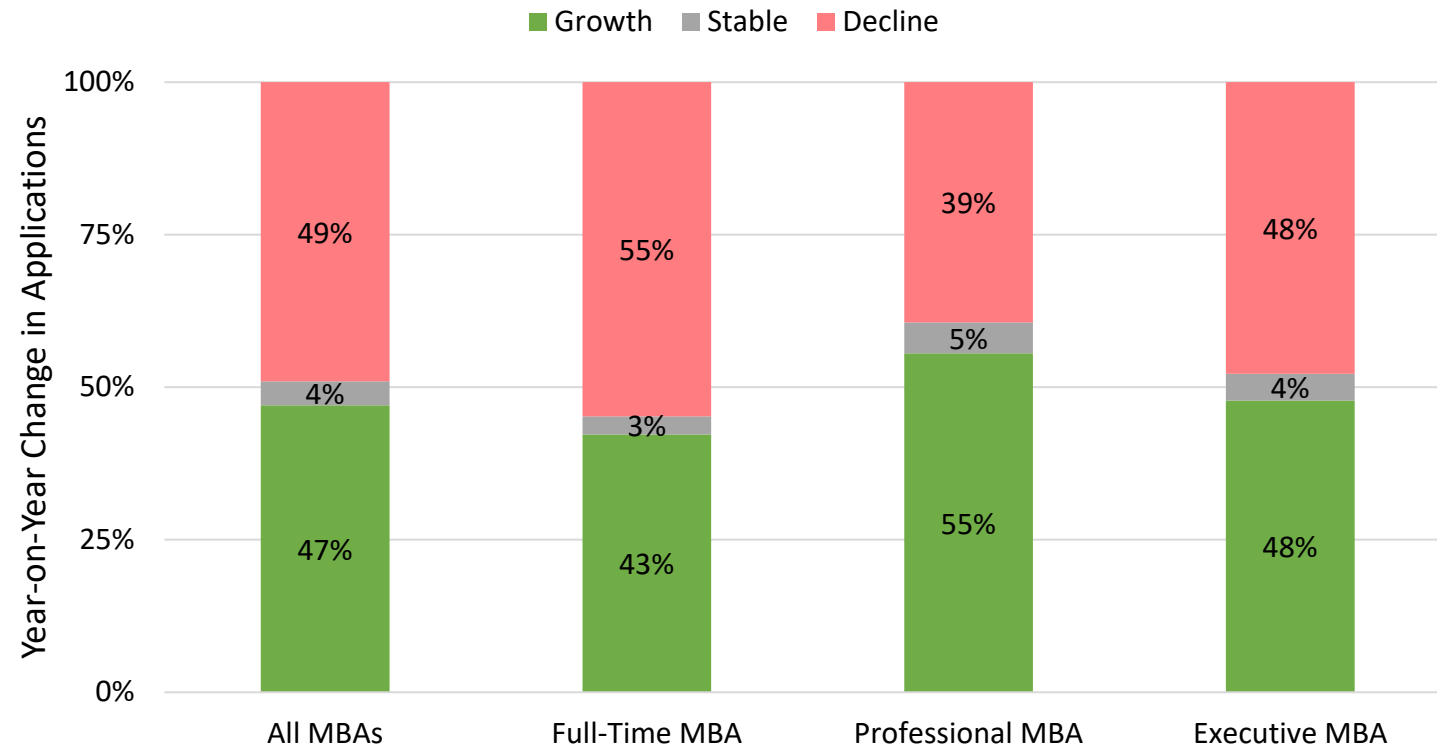
-5%

Change in Absolute Total Applications to MBA programs

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Source: 2023 Application Trends Survey

Total applications to business master's programs declined slightly, but more than half of Master of Finance programs reported application growth

Relative Application Change by Business Master's Degree Type
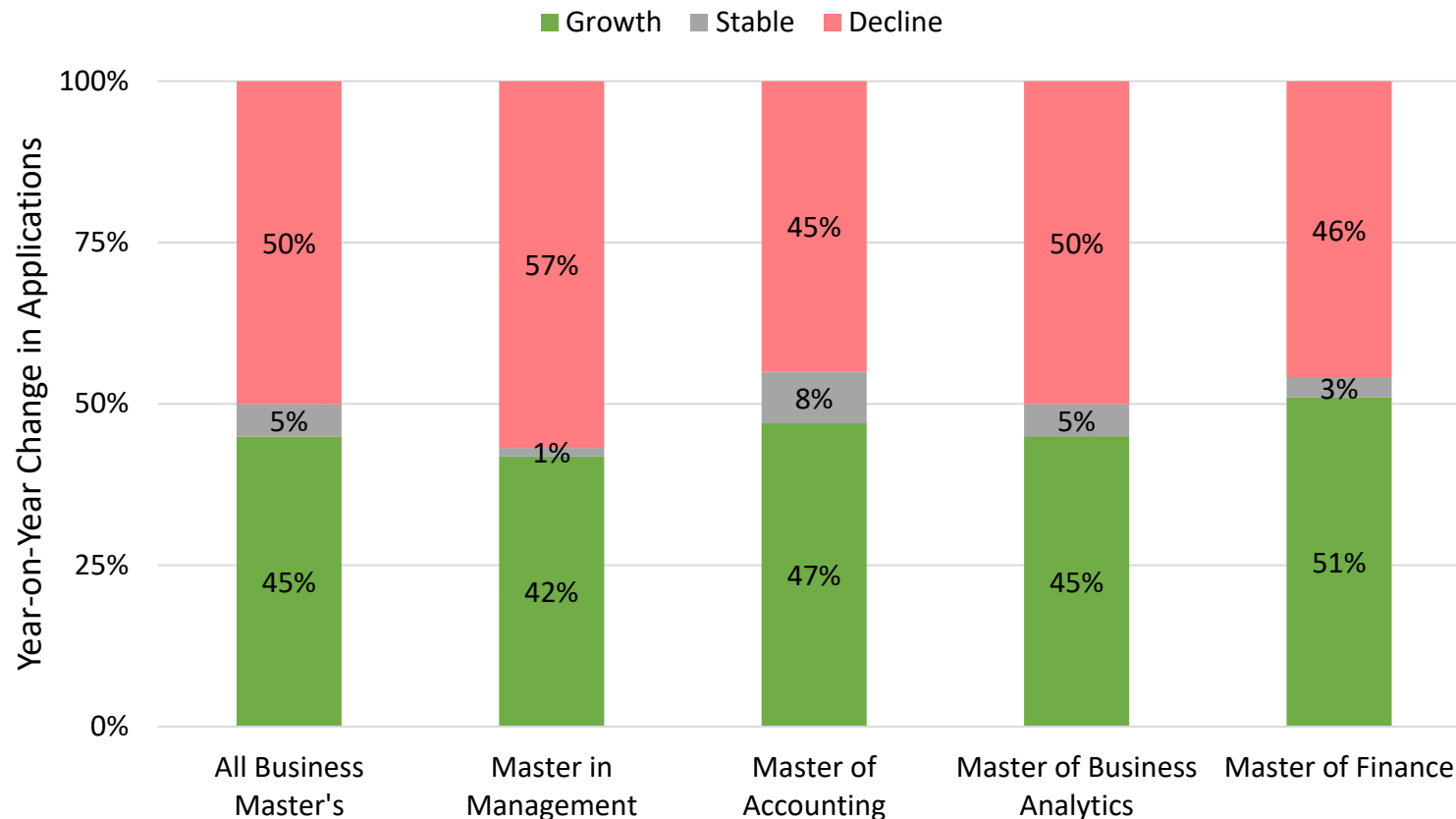
- Growth
- Stable
- Decline

Year-on-Year Change in Applications

Category	Growth	Stable	Decline
All Business Master's	45%	5%	50%
Master in Management	42%	1%	57%
Master of Accounting	47%	8%	45%
Master of Business Analytics	45%	5%	50%
Master of Finance	51%	3%	46%

-3%

Change in Absolute Total Applications to business master's programs

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More than half of U.S. programs reported growth in their 2023 applications though total applications declined slightly

Relative Application Change to U.S. Programs: 2019-2023

Legend: ■ Growth ■ Stable ■ Decline

Y-axis: Year-on-Year Change in Applications (0%, 25%, 50%, 75%, 100%)

X-axis: 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023

Data labels:
- 2019: 56% (Decline), 7% (Stable), 37% (Growth)
- 2020: 27% (Decline), 6% (Stable), 67% (Growth)
- 2021: 54% (Decline), 5% (Stable), 41% (Growth)
- 2022: 55% (Decline), 4% (Stable), 41% (Growth)
- 2023: 41% (Decline), 6% (Stable), 52% (Growth)
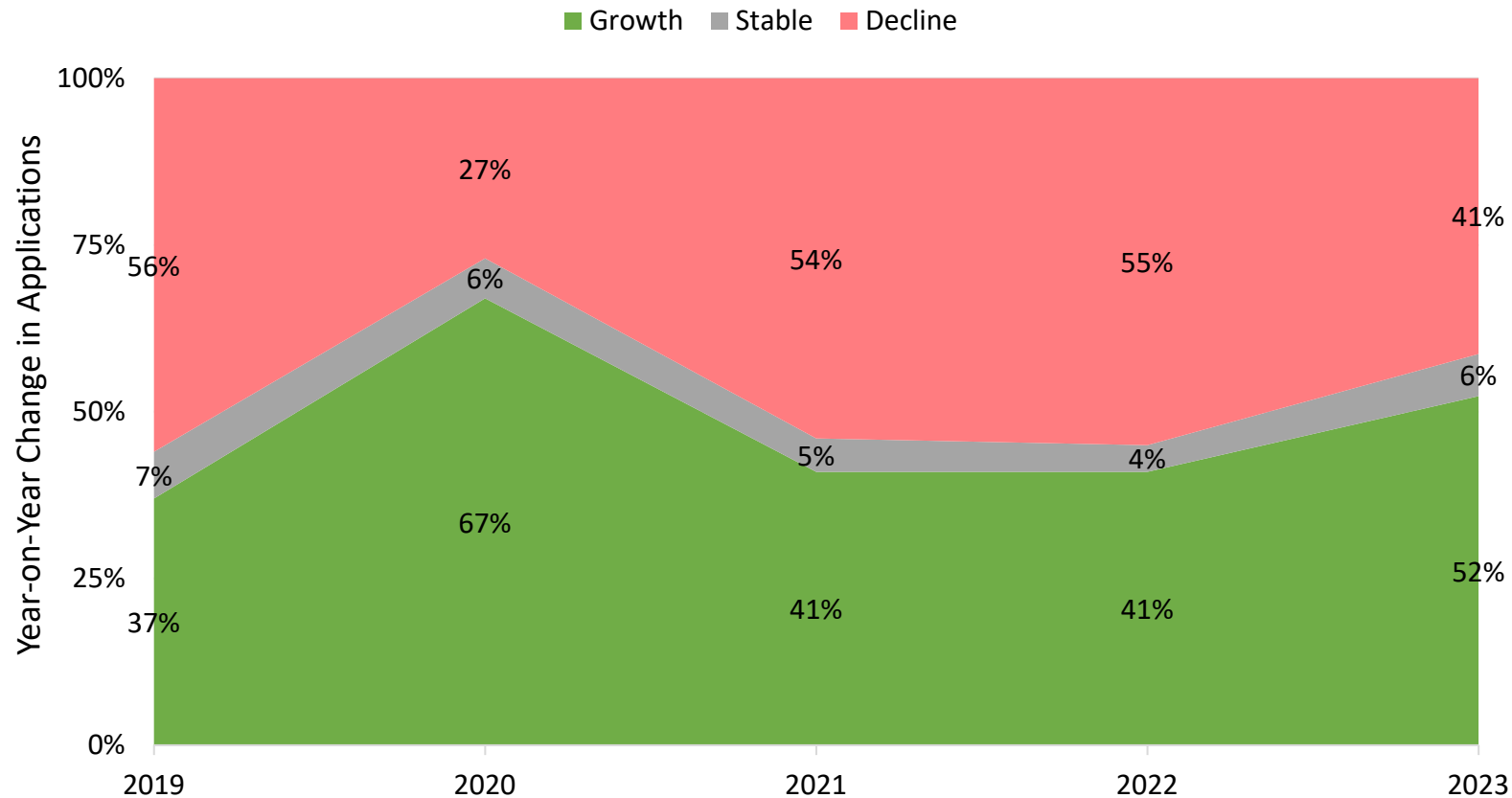
Change in Absolute Total Applications to the U.S.

-3%
Total Applications

-2%
Total Domestic Applications

-5%
Total International Applications

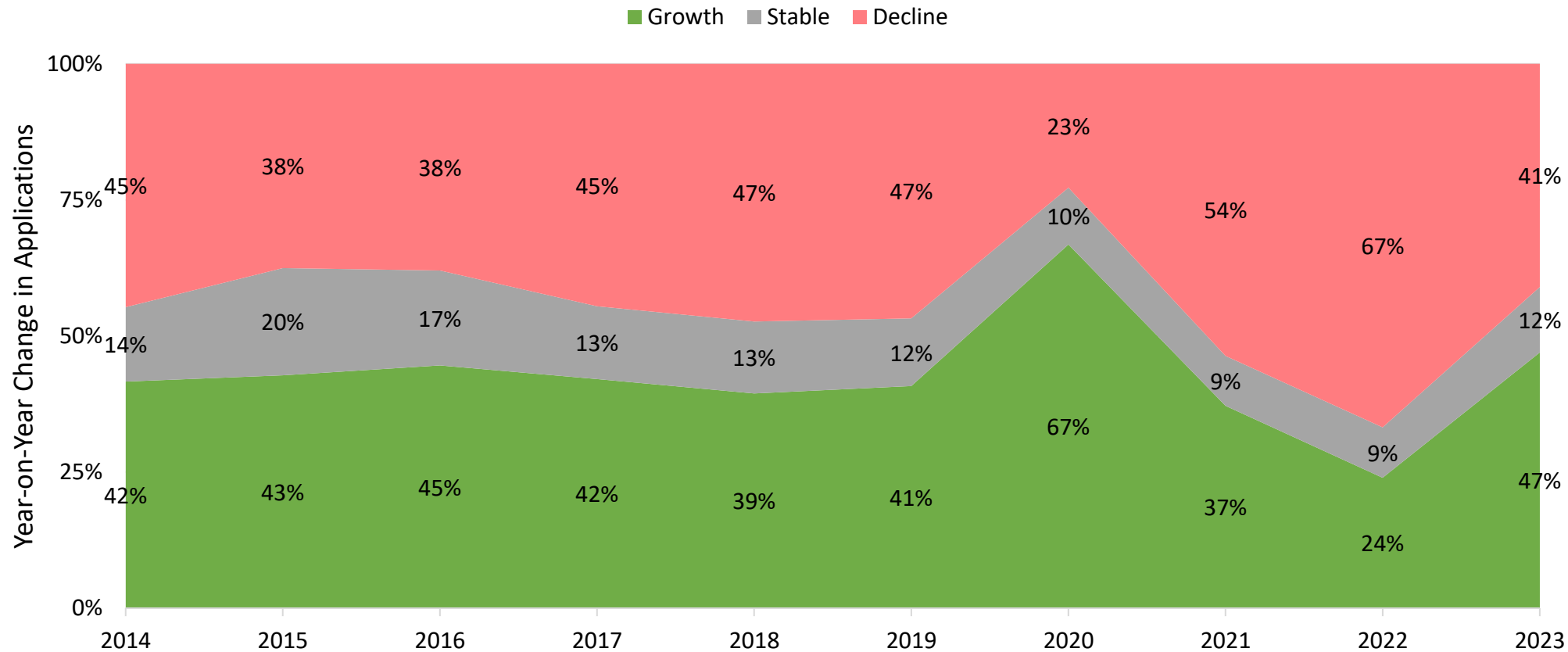Source: 2023 Application Trends Survey

Programs reporting growth in international applications to U.S. programs dipped in 2023 but remain higher than the lows seen in 2017-2019

Relative Change in International Applications to U.S. Programs: 2014-2022

Legend: ■ Growth ■ Stable ■ Decline

Y-axis: Year-on-Year Change in Applications (0% to 100%)

Decline:
- 2014: 38%
- 2015: 35%
- 2016: 39%
- 2017: 48%
- 2018: 53%
- 2019: 48%
- 2020: 34%
- 2021: 41%
- 2022: 31%
- 2023: 38%

Stable:
- 2014: 19%
- 2015: 21%
- 2016: 21%
- 2017: 20%
- 2018: 19%
- 2019: 22%
- 2020: 19%
- 2021: 16%
- 2022: 15%
- 2023: 18%

Growth:
- 2014: 44%
- 2015: 44%
- 2016: 40%
- 2017: 32%
- 2018: 28%
- 2019: 30%
- 2020: 47%
- 2021: 43%
- 2022: 54%
- 2023: 45%

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Source: 2023 Application Trends Survey

Programs reporting growth in domestic U.S. applications rebounded after sharp declines following the pandemic

Relative Change in Domestic Applications to U.S. Programs: 2014-2023

Source: 2023 Application Trends Survey

Most U.S. programs experienced application growth across degree types

65%
U.S. full-time one-year MBA programs
reported growth in total applications
compared to *30%* that reported **declines**

58%
U.S. online MBA programs
reported growth in total applications
compared to *38%* that reported **declines**

53%
U.S. part-time MBA programs
reported growth in total applications
compared to *43%* that reported **declines**

49%
U.S. full-time two-year MBA programs
reported **growth** in total applications
compared to *48%* that reported **declines**

53%
U.S. Master of Finance
reported growth in total applications
compared to *41%* that reported **declines**

53%
U.S. Master of Business Analytics
reported growth in total applications
compared to *39%* that reported **declines**

43%
U.S. Master of Accounting
reported growth in total applications
compared to *46%* that reported **declines**

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Most U.S. programs experienced application growth across degree types

65%
U.S. full-time one-year MBA programs
reported growth in total applications
compared to 30% that reported declines

58%
U.S. online MBA programs
reported growth in total applications
compared to 38% that reported declines

53%
U.S. part-time MBA programs
reported growth in total applications
compared to 43% that reported declines

49%
U.S. full-time two-year MBA programs
reported **growth** in total applications
compared to 48% that reported declines

53%
U.S. Master of Finance
reported growth in total applications
compared to 41% that reported declines

53%
U.S. Master of Business Analytics
reported growth in total applications
compared to 39% that reported declines

43%
U.S. Master of Accounting
reported growth in total applications
compared to 46% that reported declines

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Source: 2023 Application Trends Survey

GME application trends are subject to global/macro conditions

- Economic conditions
- Geopolitical conditions
- Gen Z expectations
- Workplace expectations

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Flexibility or Prestige?

Influence of rank, selectivity, and program delivery methods
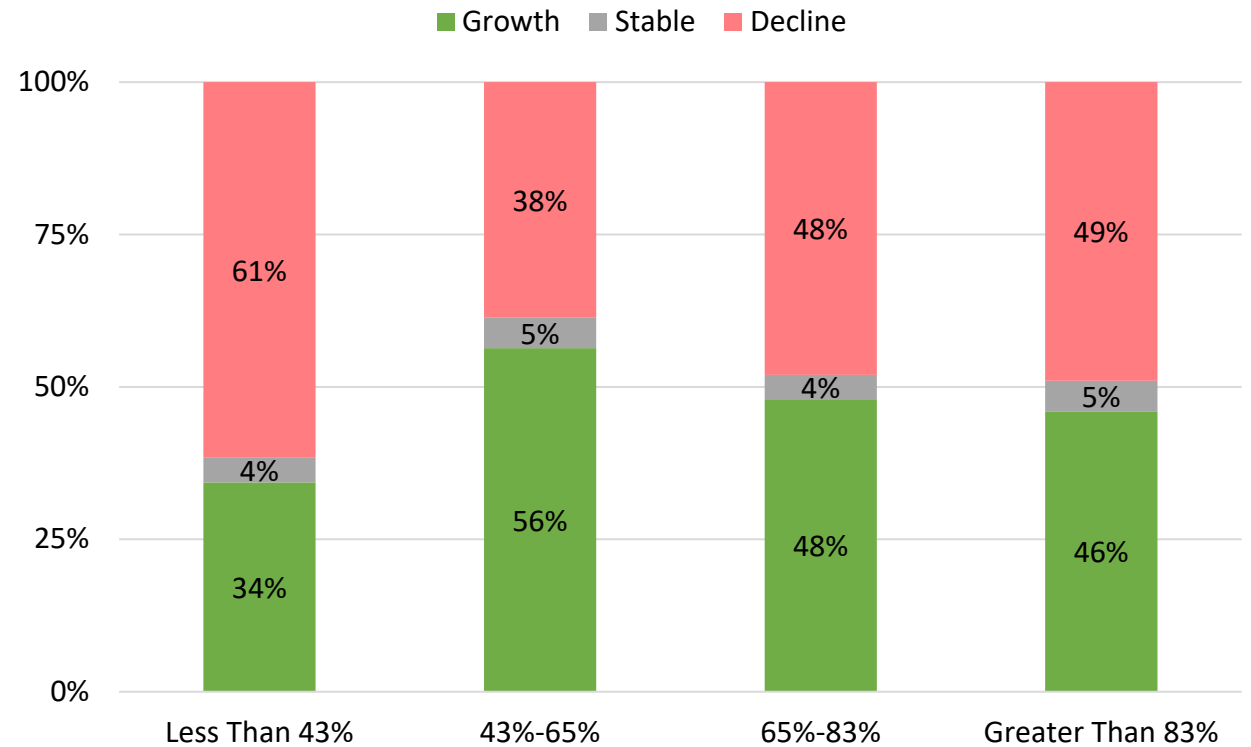
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Lower-ranked and moderately selective programs were most likely to see applications increase in 2023

Relative Application Change by School Rank

■ Growth　■ Stable　■ Decline

Year-on-Year Change in Applications

	Rank 1-50	Rank 51-100	Rank 100+ or Unranked
Decline	54%	55%	45%
Stable	4%	4%	6%
Growth	42%	41%	49%
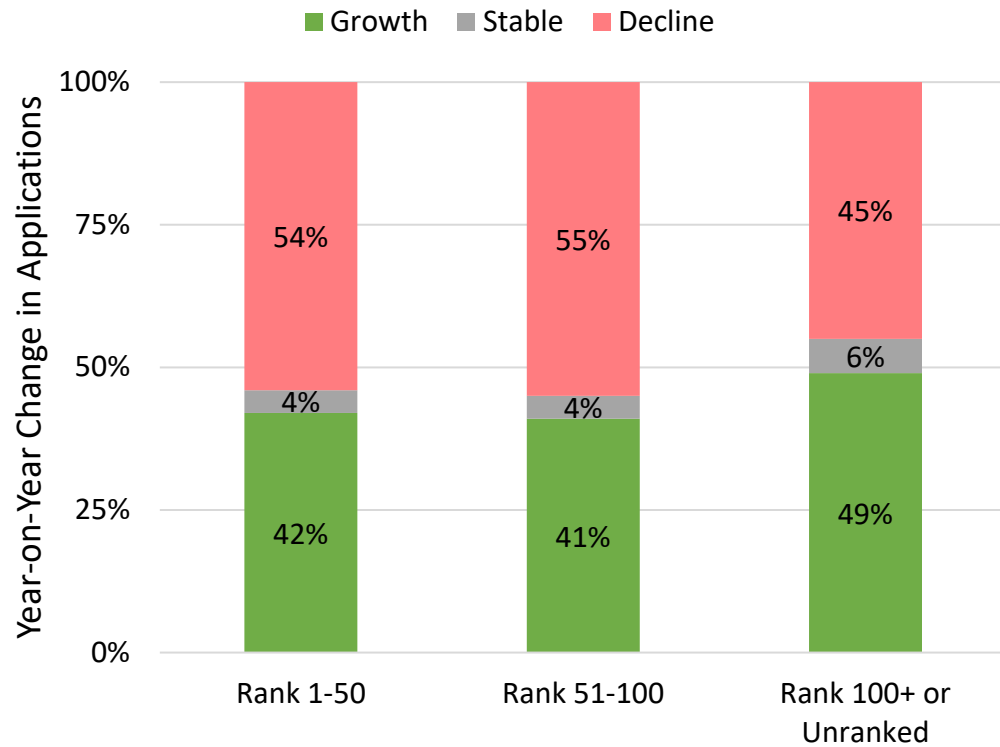
The first two categories in this figure use the Financial Times and U.S. News & World Report list of the Top Business Schools of 2023 for ranks 1-100. The third category combines schools that U.S. News & World Report ranks greater than 100 as well as schools that are not ranked on either list.

Relative Application Change by Acceptance Rate

■ Growth　■ Stable　■ Decline

	Less Than 43%	43%-65%	65%-83%	Greater Than 83%
Decline	61%	38%	48%	49%
Stable	4%	5%	4%	5%
Growth	34%	56%	48%	46%

Each category is broken into quartiles, with each bar representing approximately 25 percent of the applications received by respondents in 2023.

Source: 2023 Application Trends Survey

Among MBA programs, those with flexible delivery methods were more likely to report application growth

Relative MBA Application Change by Program Delivery

■ Growth ■ Stable ■ Decline

Delivery	Growth	Stable	Decline
Online	60%	4%	36%
Weekend	60%	1%	39%
Hybrid	60%	7%	33%
Evening	62%	5%	33%
Full-Time in Person	41%	2%	56%

Y-axis: Year-on-Year Change in Applications (0% to 100%)
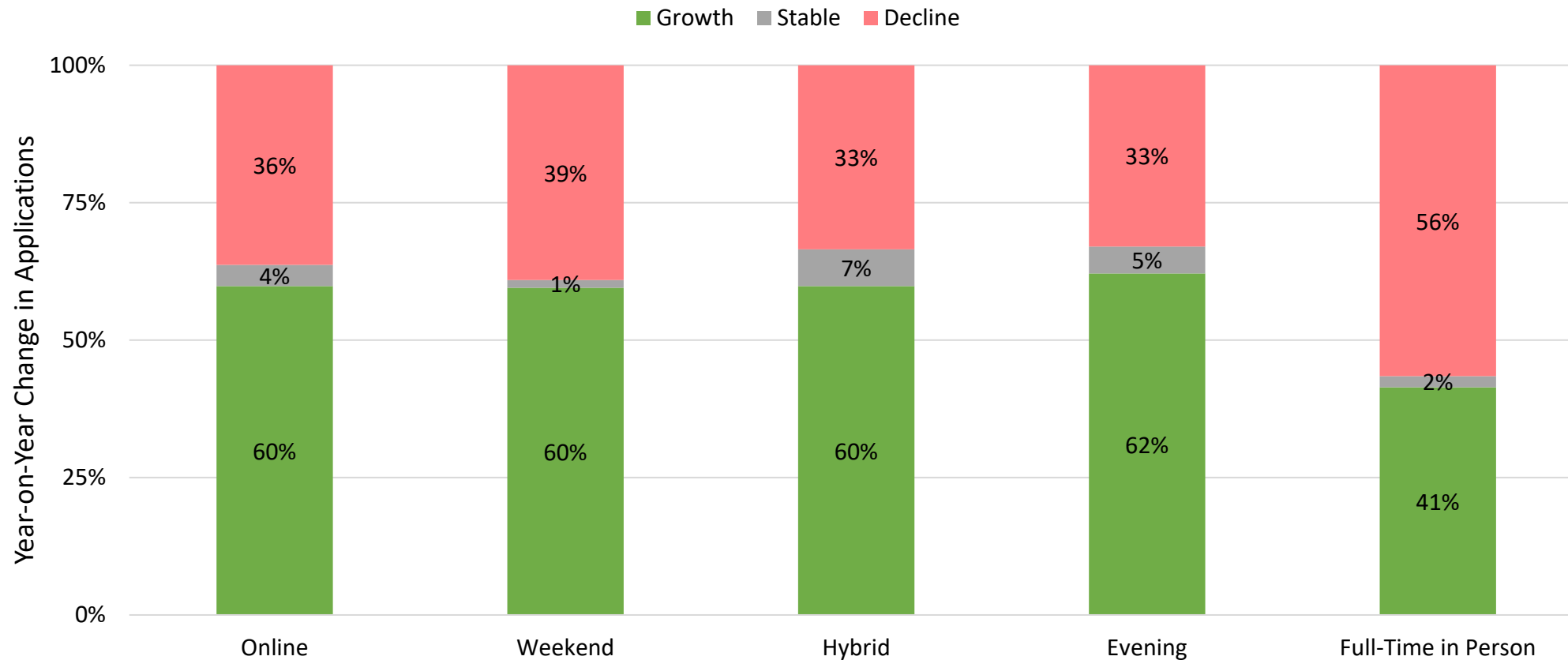
Among business master's programs, online delivery did not fare as well as other flexible options

Relative Business Master's Application Change by Program Delivery

Legend: ■ Growth ■ Stable ■ Decline

Program Delivery	Growth	Stable	Decline
Online	43%	8%	49%
Hybrid	61%	4%	35%
Evening	57%	4%	39%
Full-Time in Person	44%	5%	51%

Y-axis: Year-on-Year Change in Applications

Source: 2023 Application Trends Survey
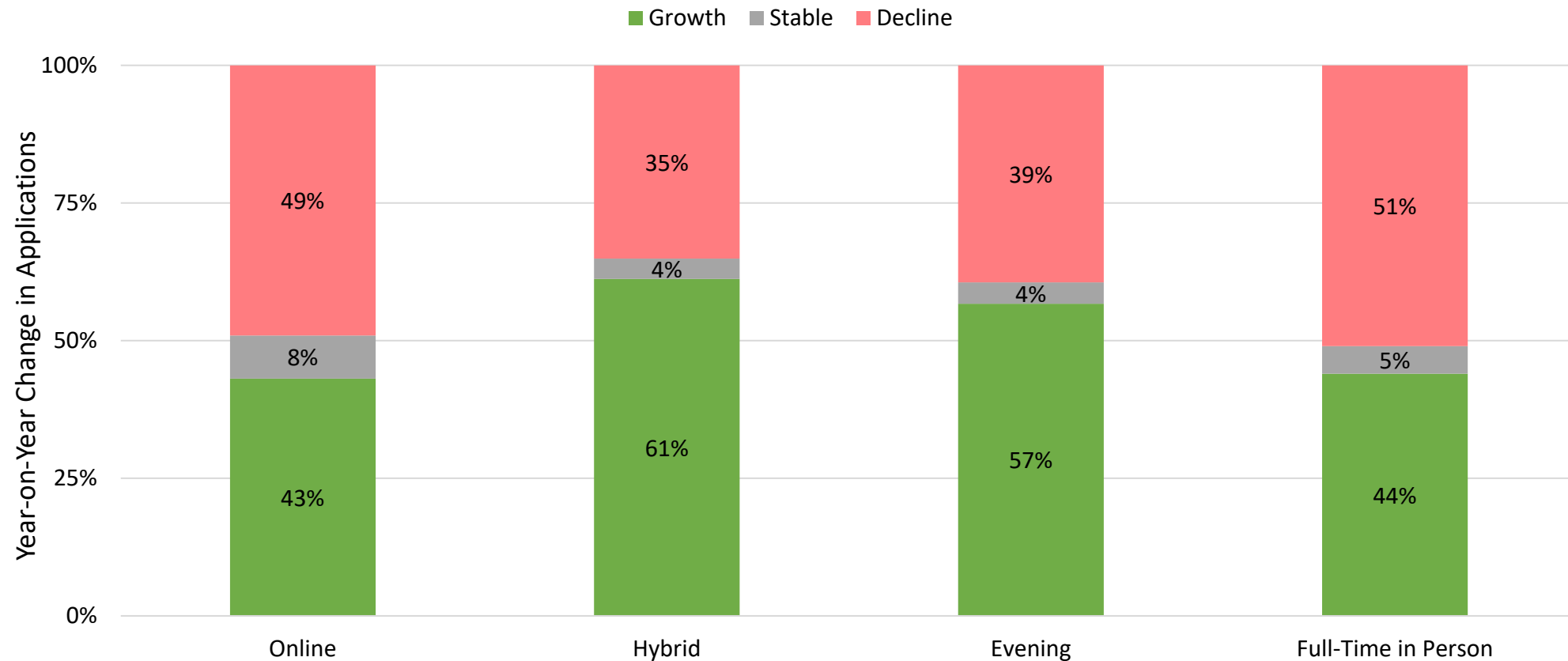
Gen Z have come to expect flexibility in their day-to-day studies

Gen Z   **Millennials**

87% — Prefer full-time program delivery — **72%**

80% — Prefer in-person program delivery — **69%**

13% — Prefer hybrid program delivery — **18%**
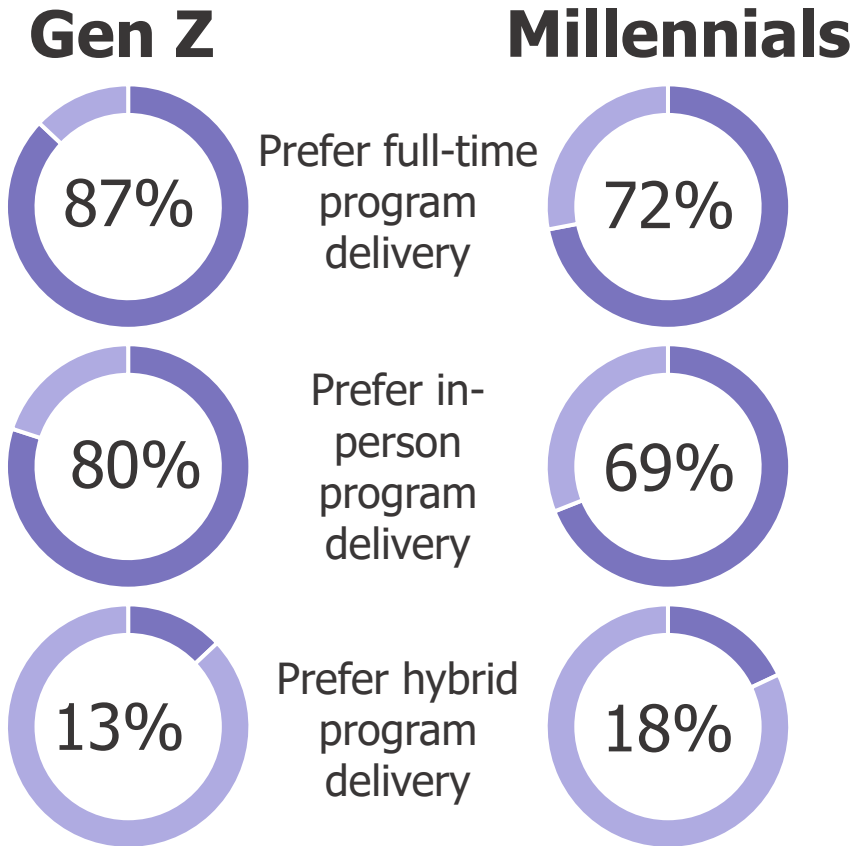
"Almost everything in person, since I consider that face-to-face is the best way of learning. Targeted to students who work, give them the opportunity to see the class recording."
– Peru, male, 20

"Face-to-face with some online lectures from industrial experts throughout the world."
– India, male, 23

"Courses would either be online or face-to-face, created to suit the student who applies." – Nigeria, female, 22

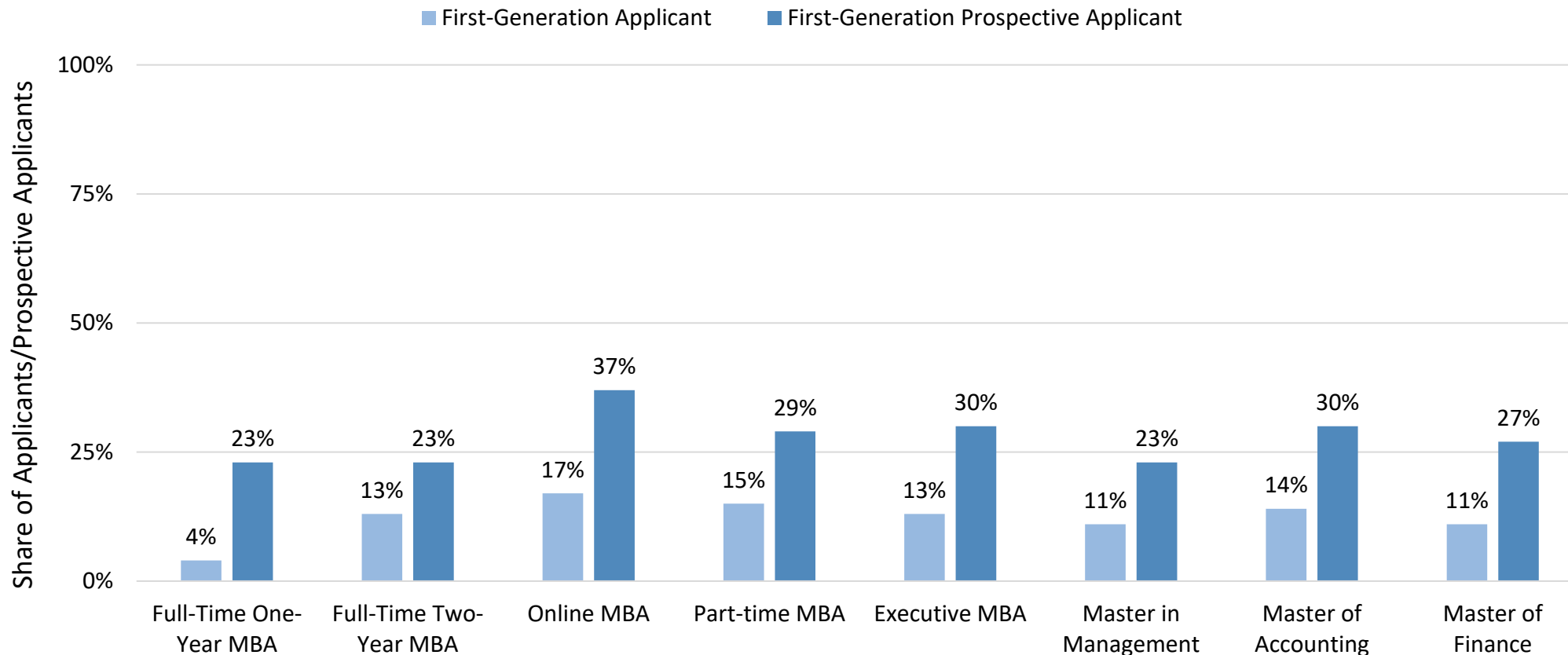# Flexibility or Prestige?
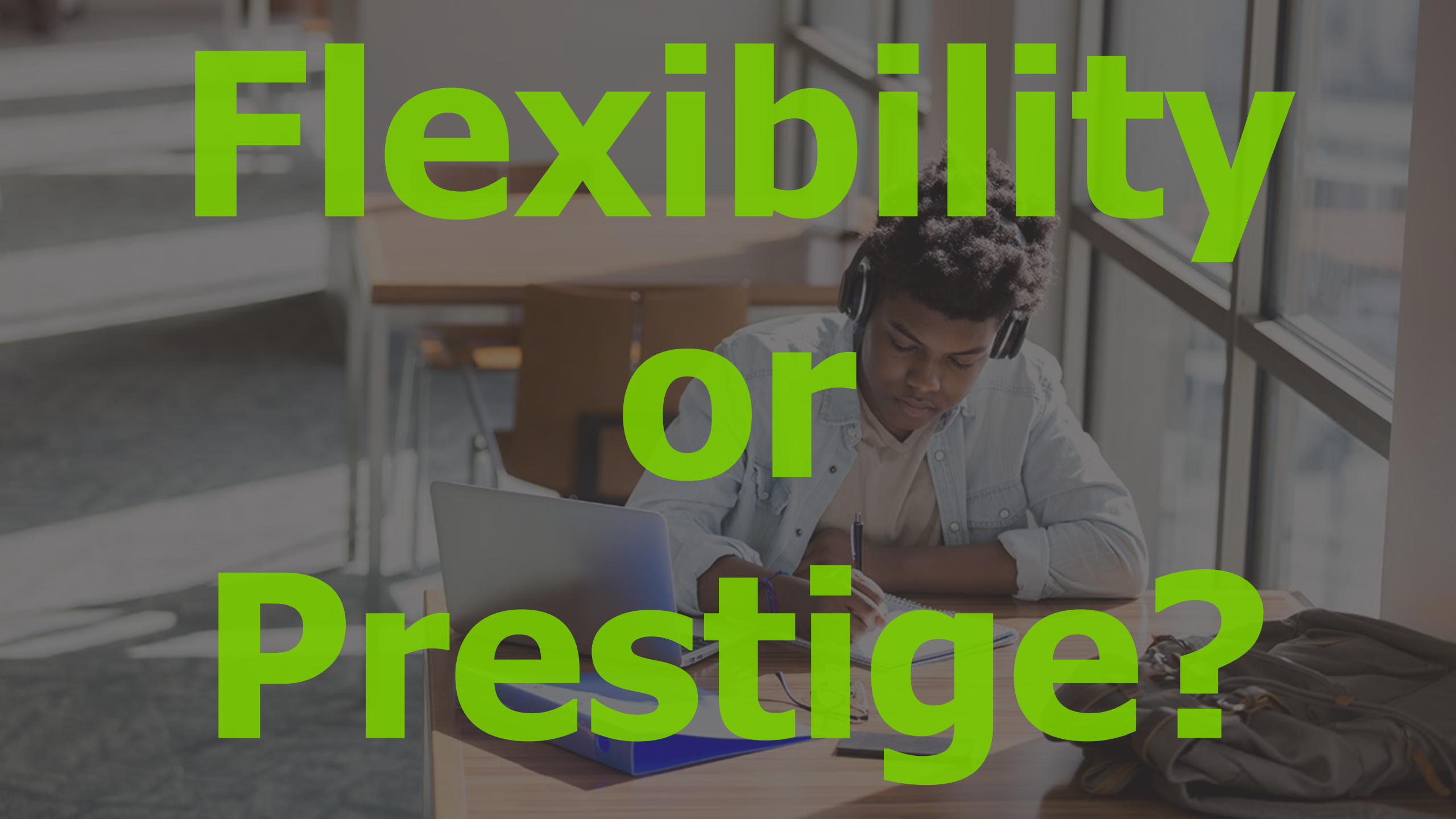
Looking to the Future

Inclusive pipelines and approaches to micro-credentials and AI

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Targeted outreach can close the wide gap between first-generation prospective students interested in GME and those who actually apply

First-Generation Share of Applicant and Prospective Applicant Pools

■ First-Generation Applicant ■ First-Generation Prospective Applicant

Program	First-Generation Applicant	First-Generation Prospective Applicant
Full-Time One-Year MBA	4%	23%
Full-Time Two-Year MBA	13%	23%
Online MBA	17%	37%
Part-time MBA	15%	29%
Executive MBA	13%	30%
Master in Management	11%	23%
Master of Accounting	14%	30%
Master of Finance	11%	27%

Y-axis: Share of Applicants/Prospective Applicants

Despite targeted outreach from 39% of GME programs, the median share of applications from women has hovered around 40% for the past decade

Relative Change in Applications From Women: 2014-2023

Legend: Growth | Stable | Decline | Median Share of Female Applications

Y-axis: Year-on-Year Change in Applications (0% to 100%)

Decline (top/pink): 2014: 41%, 2015: 37%, 2016: 36%, 2017: 36%, 2018: 40%, 2019: 42%, 2020: 31%, 2021: 46%, 2022: 48%, 2023: 47%

Stable (middle/gray): 2014: 15%, 2015: 14%, 2016: 16%, 2017: 17%, 2018: 13%, 2019: 14%, 2020: 11%, 2021: 10%, 2022: 11%, 2023: 8%

Median Share of Female Applications (dashed line): 2014: 41%, 2015: 43%, 2016: 43%, 2017: 42%, 2018: 42%, 2019: 42%, 2020: 42%, 2021: 41%, 2022: 41%, 2023: 40%

Growth (bottom/green): 2014: 44%, 2015: 49%, 2016: 48%, 2017: 47%, 2018: 47%, 2019: 44%, 2020: 58%, 2021: 44%, 2022: 41%, 2023: 45%

X-axis: 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023

Share of Applications From Women

54%
Master of Accounting

49%
Master in Management

42%
Online MBA

Source: 2023 Application Trends Survey
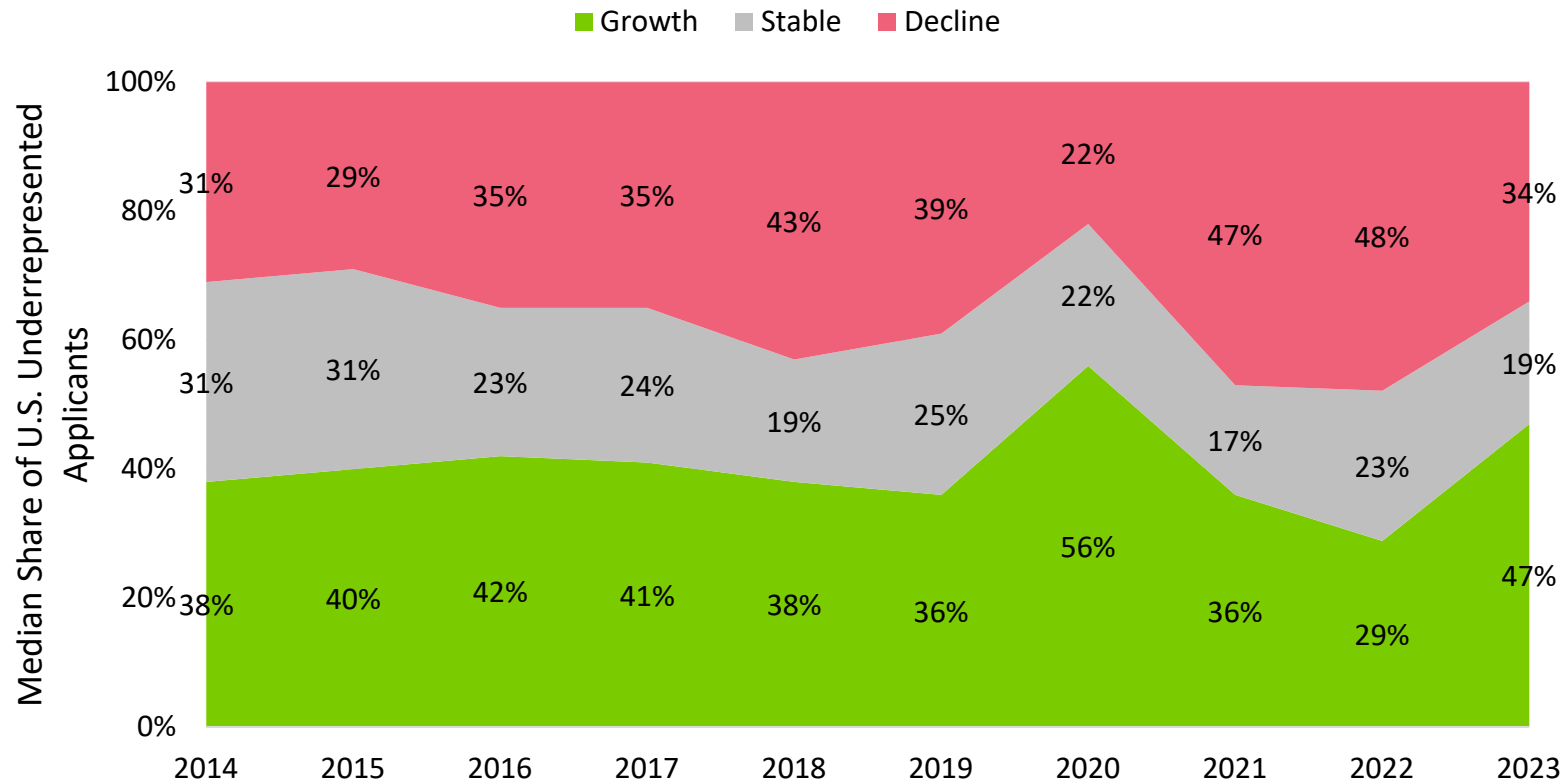
As U.S. programs reconsider race-conscious admissions policies, more programs reported growth than declines in applications from U.S. underrepresented candidates

Relative Change in Applications From U.S. Underrepresented Candidates: 2014-2023

Legend: ■ Growth ■ Stable ■ Decline

Median Share of U.S. Underrepresented Applicants

Year	Decline	Stable	Growth
2014	31%	31%	38%
2015	29%	31%	40%
2016	35%	23%	42%
2017	35%	24%	41%
2018	43%	19%	38%
2019	39%	25%	36%
2020	22%	22%	56%
2021	47%	17%	36%
2022	48%	23%	29%
2023	34%	19%	47%

Programs Reporting Growth From U.S. Underrepresented Populations

63%
Part-Time MBA

59%
Full-Time Two-Year MBA

49%
Master of Accounting

What GME programs are saying about new course offerings

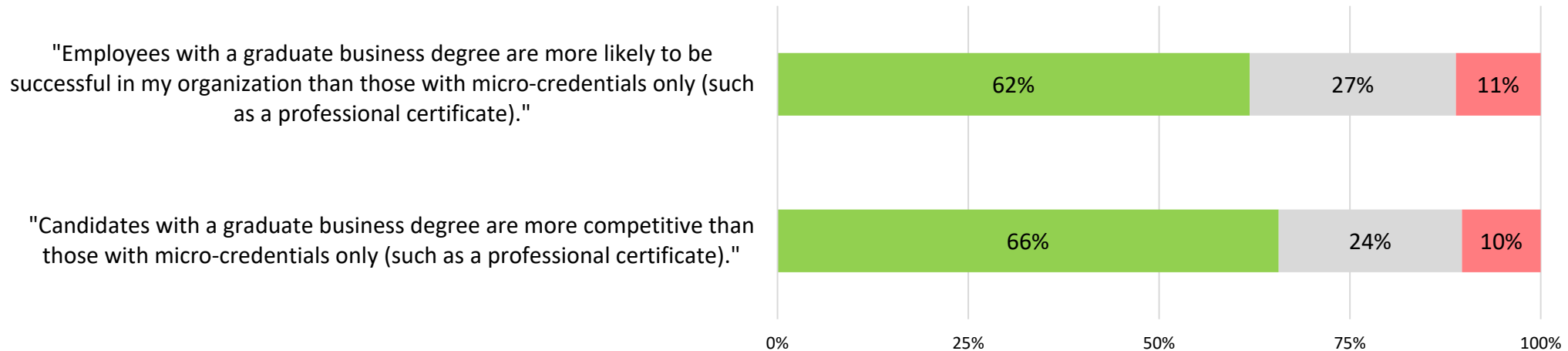"Actively exploring to add micro-credential availability by 2025."

"We intend to add these programs [non-credit-bearing workshops, MBA concentrations and certificates, construction management dual degree] to meet the needs of our growing non-traditional student population and to meet the needs of dual certification in numerous industries."

"Launched several new nano online open courses (NOOCs)—designed new learning experiences with companies to facilitate experiential learning and hands-on simulations."

"Alumni are able to come back to take courses and can avail of career services any time."

Employers and candidates view business degrees to be more competitive than micro-credentials only

Employer Agreement With Statements About Micro-Credentials

■ Agree or Strongly Agree　■ Neither　■ Disagree or Strongly Disagree

"Employees with a graduate business degree are more likely to be successful in my organization than those with micro-credentials only (such as a professional certificate)."
62% | **27%** | **11%**

"Candidates with a graduate business degree are more competitive than those with micro-credentials only (such as a professional certificate)."
66% | **24%** | **10%**

0%　25%　50%　75%　100%

Prospective students who view micro-credentials as alternatives to GME

12%
Prospective MBA students

20%
Prospective Executive MBA students

13%
Prospective business master's students

What GME programs are saying about artificial intelligence

"We are not putting a disclaimer on our website asking students not to use AI (ChatGPT) for essays—it's the future."

"A curriculum review is underway to ensure new technologies and AI are relevant in the courses."

"Adding additional capacity to current [AI] courses since so many students want to take them."

"AI is not being used in the admissions process. Faculty are using various techniques to manage AI issues with regards to academic integrity."

Source: 2023 Application Trends Survey

Summary

- Most GME programs reported declines in applications, but most programs also fared better than last year—with similar growth to pre-pandemic levels.

- More than half of U.S. programs reported growth in their program's applications, with a notable year-over-year rise of programs reporting growth in their domestic applications.

- Demand remains for the most selective schools, but the average candidate may be more willing to sacrifice prestige for flexibility.

- There is opportunity to translate interest among first-generation candidates to actual applications and enrollment through more concerted efforts.

- Programs are not uniform in how they approach AI—some have rolled out new electives, others have leaders actively considering its role, and many still have no plans.

Webinar Feedback Form

Share your feedback about this webinar to improve our future programming

Q&A

THANK YOU

Webinar Feedback Form

Share your feedback about this webinar to improve our future programming

Year in Review Webinar

Recap 2023 research findings about candidates, programs, and employers