GLOBAL MBA® GRADUATE SURVEY 2004
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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INTRODUCTION

The Graduate Management Admission Council® (GMAC®) has conducted the Global MBA® Graduate Survey annually for five years. The survey is distributed to MBA students in their final year of business school. The survey is typically conducted a few months prior to graduation; therefore, we can ask students’ about their opinions of their education, and the value of their degree, how they chose their school and whether they would recommend it to someone else, and what they intend to do with their degree after graduation, among many other topics. It is possible to ascertain some post-MBA employment information, though not a complete picture, because many of the survey respondents are not involved in a job search at the time they are surveyed, for various reasons.

In order to reach graduates from around the world and to make participation convenient, the survey was conducted over the Internet. Background for the survey design was provided by prior GMAC® research on matriculants in MBA programs; prior GMAC® experience in surveying this audience with the annual Global MBA® Graduate Surveys conducted from 2000 through 2003; and ongoing input from participating schools on their information needs.

In order to develop the sample for the survey, select AACSB International–accredited schools that use the GMAT® in admissions were invited to participate. To encourage schools to participate, GMAC® offered confidential access to data from their students’ responses that could be benchmarked against results for the overall sample. A total of 128 schools from 16 different countries ultimately participated.

The results of Global MBA® Graduate Survey 2004 represent the responses of 6,223 MBA students from 107 different countries. Forty-one percent are citizens of countries other than the United States. Schools located outside of the United States make up 25% of the total sample of schools and account for 21% of the total sample of respondents.

The results of this survey can be used by every area of the business school—admissions, career services, communications, marketing, program management, and student services.
UNDERSTANDING STUDENT MOTIVATIONS

Throughout the years, the value of the MBA degree has received considerable attention. The media that cover business schools frequently attempt to analyze and weigh in on what has come to be known as the “MBA value proposition”—what the degree has to offer its recipients, relative to its cost. In this context, the degree’s value is often measured by salary, bonuses, and demand (the number of new MBA hires in the job market, the number of job offers received by recent or soon-to-be grads, the number of b-schools corporate recruiters visit, etc.). But how do MBA students measure value? How do they decide whether they got their money’s worth?

To understand better what the concept of “MBA value” means to MBA students, it is important to revisit results from our recent GMAC® mba.com Registrants Survey (a survey of people registered on the GMAC® Web site for prospective business school students) to look at students’ motivations for pursuing an MBA. It is also important to read the results of the Global MBA® Graduate Survey 2004 that concern students’ motivations for choosing the school in which they enrolled.

Results of the mba.com Registrants Survey told us that prospective students answer three major questions before they matriculate into an MBA program:

1. Will pursuing a graduate degree further my personal and career goals?

Prospective students’ personal and career goals are typically—

- to remain marketable (competitive)
- to develop management knowledge and technical skills
- to improve long-term income and financial stability
- to gain the professional credentials needed for career advancement
- to gain a sense of personal satisfaction and achievement
- to be a part of an exciting challenge

2. Is an MBA right for me?

People who apply to business school generally believe the following:

- that they have the background and experience to be admitted
- that a graduate management degree is what they need to achieve their career goals
- that they are able to finance a degree or will reap a return on their investment even if financing the degree is difficult
- that they are willing to make the personal sacrifices necessary to earn a degree

People who apply to MBA programs also tend to be confident, realistic (insofar as they acknowledge the personal sacrifices necessary to get the degree), and ready for a challenge.

3. Which school/program is right for me?

Once prospective students have formulated a “short list” of schools they are considering, they enter a phase in which they determine where they will ultimately enroll. They choose the school that best matches their personal criteria, and the one they believe will be most likely to help them attain their personal and career goals.
SCHOOL SELECTION

From the Global MBA® Graduate Survey, we found that four dimensions underlie students’ decision making with regard to where to enroll:

- the quality and reputation of the school
- financial cost
- personal fit
- locality

Regardless of students’ individual characteristics, aspects of the quality and reputation of a school are important in their decision to enroll because these traits ensure a good return on the students’ investment of time and money. Below are the most important school selection criteria that relate to school quality and reputation:

- [the program chosen] was an accredited program
- quality/reputation of the faculty
- prestige or global recognition of the college or university
- career options available to graduates

Differences in School Selection by Student Subgroup

Financial concerns. The most commonly expressed reservation about going for an MBA degree is that business school requires students to take on large financial debts. This especially holds true for women and U.S. minorities, who tend to carry more debt than other subgroups.

And, although all student subgroups indicate that school selection criteria regarding the quality and reputation of a school are important, some groups, such as females and U.S. minorities, also consider many other factors important to their decision. From the business schools’ perspective, communications with these groups when they are prospective students are more complex than with others and should be aimed at providing answers to common questions and information to address concerns that may be a deterrent from attending business school.

Gender differences. Women responding to the recent GMAC® mba.com Registrants Survey were significantly more likely than men to report having debt from college loans (41%, compared with 29% of men). There are definite gender differences in the criteria students find important when selecting schools to attend. Whereas prestige or global recognition and published rankings of a school are more important to men’s decisions than to women’s, the following factors are more important in women’s selection of schools:

- [the program chosen] was an accredited program
- location of the college or university
- the school offered the specific curriculum desired
- local respect [for the school or program]
- diverse backgrounds and experiences of students and faculty
- financial cost of the school
- there were “people like me” at the school or program
- convenient class schedules
- availability of scholarships, grants, or other financial aid
- personal experience [at the school] as an undergraduate
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*Differences by U.S. Race/Ethnicity.* Blacks/African Americans (71%) and Hispanic Americans (68%) are significantly more likely to report having debt from college loans than whites (45%) and Asian Americans (44%), as reported in the mba.com Registrants Survey. U.S. minorities weight the following criteria significantly more heavily in their selection of schools than do whites. (The criteria are listed in descending order on the basis of how much more important the criteria are to U.S. minorities than to U.S. whites.)

- availability of scholarships, grants, or other financial aid
- diverse backgrounds and experience of students and faculty
- the school’s reputation in placing students
- published rankings of the graduate management program
- career options available to students
- [the school chosen] was an accredited program
- prestige or global recognition of the college or university
- there were “people like me” at the college or university
- quality/reputation of the faculty
- the school offered the specific curriculum desired
- reputation of alumni

*Differences between Domestic and International Students.* Twenty-eight percent of the respondents to the Global MBA® Graduate Survey attended business school outside their country of citizenship. A school’s reputation for placing its graduates in jobs, the availability of financial aid, and the diverse background of students and faculty are more important to international students. Accreditation and location of a school, the convenience of class schedules, and local respect for the school or program are more important to domestic students.

The chart below shows the difference in how domestic students (those studying in their country of citizenship) and international students (those studying outside their country of citizenship) weigh the factors rated extremely important in the selection of a school.

![School Selection Criteria, Type of Student Chart]

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Additionally, international students reported that they believed the school they chose would—

- offer a better-quality education than that which was available in their own country
- provide better career opportunities than schools in their home country
- broaden their international experience/exposure
- expose them to different cultures/ways

It is against the background of these questions and expectations that we can better understand how students think about the value of their degree and how they determine whether they would recommend their business school to someone else who is considering going for an MBA.
HOW STUDENTS RATE THE VALUE OF THE MBA

Members of the graduating MBA class of 2004 were asked to rate the overall value of their MBA education as they approached graduation. To do so, they were asked to compare the total monetary cost of their MBA degree with the quality of the education they received. Fifty-eight percent of the students feel the value of their MBA is outstanding or excellent.

What Drives Ratings of the Value of the MBA Degree?
A stepwise multiple regression was used to discover potential drivers of the overall value ratings. Twelve potential drivers (factors that affect overall value) emerge as statistically significant and explain 48% of the variance in MBA value ratings.

Five of the drivers come from a list of seven aspects of an MBA program that respondents were asked to rate. Five other drivers come from a list of nine potential benefits of the MBA with which respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction. Two drivers come from a list of 17 school selection factors, which respondents rated in terms of their importance in the decision to enroll in a particular school.

What does all this mean? Students’ perception of the value of their MBA degree is affected by actual aspects of the program they attend, how satisfied they are with the benefits of the degree, and what they were looking for as individuals when they chose a business school. The higher students rate the quality of their school’s faculty, curriculum, program management, career services, and admissions, the higher the probability that they will give the overall value of their MBA a high rating.

This should be gratifying news for business schools. Despite the various ways the media assess and rank business schools and the value of an MBA, students focus most on characteristics of their particular programs when they assess value. This means that schools have considerable influence over the way students and alumni feel about the value of the degree and how they talk about the degree’s value with potential students and others.

Furthermore, the more satisfied students are in their increase in earning power, preparation to get a good job, personal improvement, earning of the credentials they wanted, and development of management knowledge and skill, the higher the probability that they will give the value of their MBA a high rating.

The more important the financial cost of the school was in a student’s school selection process, the higher the probability that he or she will rate the value of the MBA high.

The survey results showed one interesting negative relationship between school selection criteria and value ratings of the MBA. The more important published rankings were in students’ selection of a school, the lower the probability of their giving the value of the MBA a high rating. What this means is a matter for further investigation, but it could suggest that when a prospective student focuses heavily on rankings in a school selection decision, he or she neglects other important considerations, for instance, how the school’s offerings fit his or her specific career focus and goals. This result also seems to suggest that published rankings of business schools are not an accurate measure of the quality of a school’s faculty or curriculum—both of which are powerful determinants of a high rating of MBA value.
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More about What Drives Students’ Perception of MBA Value

The following chart shows the 12 factors that drive a student’s rating of the value of the MBA. The higher the value on the “power index” shown below, the more powerful the factor is in predicting how students rate the value of the MBA. Each factor makes an independent contribution to the model. An index of 100 indicates a factor of average power in determining the value rating; anything higher than 100 is a strong factor in the value rating, and anything lower has less-than-average power in determining the value rating.

As shown below, the quality of a school’s faculty (with an index of 188) and curriculum (index of 161), and the importance of financial cost as a factor in school selection (index of 152) are the most powerful contributors to the value rating. The use of published rankings, as mentioned above, is shown as having a negative effect on students’ value ratings.

What does the power index say about how students assess the value of their degree? The powerful factors in the value rating reveal that students recognize and value the instrumental benefits of the degree (preparation to get a good job in the business world and the earning of desired credentials), personal benefits (opportunity to improve oneself personally), and intellectual benefits (development of management knowledge/technical skills). Each of these factors makes its own independent contribution to the prediction of overall value of the degree.

To better understand how particular groups of students assess the value of their degree, it is helpful to look at how value ratings differ among these groups and what is driving each group’s ratings.

Differences in Value Ratings among Different Student Groups

Students in full-time programs rate the overall value of the MBA higher than do students in part-time and executive programs, as the following table shows.
As discussed in the School Selection portion of this report, students in part-time and executive MBA programs are more than 10 times as likely as students in full-time programs to rely on employer reimbursement or sponsorship to pay for their degree. Yet students in part-time and executive programs rate the overall value of their programs (the total monetary cost of their MBA degree compared with the quality of the education they received) lower than do students in full-time programs.

The value predictor power index shows why different students have different perceptions of value. Both full-time and executive students rate the quality of faculty and curriculum higher than do part-time students. But full-time students rate the importance of the financial cost of a school and their satisfaction with their increase in earning power and preparation to get a good job significantly higher than do part-time and executive program students.

It might be argued that students in part-time and executive programs should rate the overall value of the degree higher than full-time students, because the degree costs them less. But the findings of the survey do not support this argument. What the findings suggest is consistent with what has often been found in consumer behavior research: Perceptions of value are positively related to financial outlay. That is, pay more, and you are likely to value the product more. Beyond the monetary cost of school, there is also a considerable expenditure of time and effort necessary to earn a degree. The compressed and intensive nature of a full-time program may make those costs seem higher to full-time students and thus elevate their value ratings.

The message to schools is that there are both controllable and uncontrollable factors that underlie students’ assessment of the value of the MBA. Although schools can ensure the quality of faculty, curriculum, and services, there is also a monetary component to the value rating that may be harder to control. A slightly different picture emerges when we try to understand students’ likelihood of recommending their school to others.
WILLINGNESS TO RECOMMEND ONE’S SCHOOL

Asked if they would recommend their school to someone who is considering pursuing an MBA, 62% of respondents said “definitely yes.”

What Drives Students’ Willingness to Recommend Their Schools?
Although nearly three-fifths of the respondents would definitely recommend their schools, the rest are less positive. A stepwise multiple regression was used to discover potential drivers of students’ willingness to recommend their schools. Eleven potential “drivers” (factors that affect willingness to recommend one’s school) emerge as statistically significant and explain 46% of the variance in respondents’ willingness to recommend their schools.

Six of the drivers come from a list of seven aspects of the MBA program that respondents were asked to rate. Four drivers come from the nine potential benefits of the MBA with which respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction. One driver relates to the type of MBA program in which the respondent was enrolled.

The following chart shows the drivers of willingness to recommend one’s school and the power each has relative to the others. An index of 100 indicates average power to influence the decision to recommend one’s school; any factor with a higher power index is more influential, and anything with a lower power index has less influence.

As the chart below shows, the higher students rate the quality of their school’s program management, curriculum, fellow students, faculty, student services, and career services, the higher the probability that they will recommend their school to others.

The more satisfied students are with their preparation to get a good job, having gained the credentials they sought, their development of management knowledge and skills, and their personal improvement, the higher the probability that they will recommend their school.

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Students are sensitive to the perceived quality of their school’s program management (defined on the survey questionnaire as consisting of a program’s mission, standards, and continuous improvement)—it is the most powerful driver of the willingness to recommend one’s school. Perceived quality of the curriculum is also a key driver, a close second to program management.

The perceived quality of fellow students emerges with the third-highest power index. Interestingly, the power index for the quality of fellow students is higher than the index for the quality of faculty. This result shows that assembling classes in which students contribute meaningfully to each other’s learning can actually aid in future recruiting efforts.

Satisfaction with the instrumental benefits (preparation to get a good job in the business world), intellectual benefits (development of management knowledge/technical skills), and personal benefits (opportunity to improve oneself personally) of the degree are drivers of the willingness to recommend one’s school. But they have less power in this model than in the model for the overall value ratings of the MBA. That is, the instrumental, intellectual, and personal benefits of the degree are more likely to positively influence students’ rating of the overall value of the MBA than their willingness recommend their school to others.

What is notable about the differences between the model that predicts value and the model that predicts willingness to recommend is the effect of fellow students and quality student services in the “recommendation” model and the absence of monetary factors and published rankings as predictors in that model. And, although instrumental, intellectual, and personal benefits of the degree are key drivers in the recommendation model, as in the value model, they are not as powerful as the quality of the school’s program management, curriculum, fellow students, and faculty.

Interestingly, enrollment in a part-time or executive MBA program contributes positively to the likelihood that a student will recommend his school to others. Yet, those in executive programs are more likely to say they would recommend their school than those in full- and part-time programs, as shown in the table below.

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<th>SCHOOL RECOMMENDATION, BY PROGRAM</th>
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<td>School recommendation (collapsed)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitely yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably/definitely no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
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*p (Executive > Full-time, Part-time) = <.05

Students in part-time programs rate the quality of the following program aspects lower than do those in full-time and executive programs: admissions, curriculum, faculty, program management, student services, and fellow students. In addition, students in part-time programs rate curriculum and career services lower than do students in full-time programs. And, students in executive programs rate curriculum higher than do students in both full- and part-time programs. So, the power of these aspects of a program outweigh the effects of being enrolled in a particular program.
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But why would enrollment in a part-time or executive MBA program be a driver in the recommendation model, when part-time and executive students differ significantly in how they rate the quality of aspects of their program? One reason could be that those enrolled in part-time or executive MBA programs tend to be career enhancers, earning the degree to further an existing career, rather than career switchers, who earn the MBA degree to help them change career paths. Career switchers want and expect more benefits from gaining their MBA degree, and career enhancers tend to realize the benefits sooner. By analyzing the answers to questions about pre- and post-MBA employment, we determined that 54% of the respondents to the Global MBA® Graduate Survey are switching industries and 46% are remaining in their current industry.

Differences in how students intend to use their degree affect the criteria they use in choosing a business school and the type of program in which they enroll. Their decisions in turn affect their ultimate satisfaction with their school. Beyond the overarching career and personal goals mentioned previously, some other reasons students seek an MBA are—

• to enhance their careers by increasing their chances of promotion where they currently work and allowing them to remain marketable (competitive)
• to use the MBA to help them switch from their current occupational area to a specific new one
• to pursue the goal of starting their own business
• to make a transition from a nonbusiness undergraduate degree
• to prepare to seek international employment

Career switchers and career enhancers have very different motivations for pursuing their MBA degree and thus describe very differently the ways an MBA increases career options, as shown in the chart below. More so than career enhancers, career switchers seek to dramatically change their career path, departing from their current industry, occupation, or nonbusiness educational background. In contrast, career enhancers seek more intangible, modest benefits of the degree.
Career switchers’ and enhancers’ different goals and beliefs about what the degree will do for their careers have implications for their expectations and assessment (in the form of satisfaction ratings) of the educational and career outcomes of the MBA.

Now that we better understand students’ personal and career goals, it is important to discover how they hope to achieve their goals.
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EMPLOYER SELECTION

Where Is the Class of 2004 Going?
As reported earlier, 54% of the MBA graduating class of 2004 intends to switch careers. This pattern of career migration is having a profound impact on some industry groups, with some seeing the departure of numerous employees and others seeing an influx of new qualified professionals. The high-technology and nonprofit/government industries are seeing the greatest number of people transitioning out. The products and services, health care, and finance industries are seeing substantial increases in the number of people entering the industries.

Some of this movement from industry to industry can be explained by the industries’ ability to hire new MBAs. According to the GMAC® Corporate Recruiters Survey 2003–04, employers in the finance, products and services, and health care industries are the least constrained in their recruiting plans. The high-technology industry is most constrained.

The Global MBA® Graduate Survey results regarding students’ employment plans indicate that the MBA class of 2004 is responding appropriately to hiring conditions in the various industries, moving to the ones that are most able to hire and leaving the ones least able to hire.

Of course, the number of MBA graduates switching out of their pre-MBA industries does not show the whole picture, because there are also MBA graduates switching into or remaining in the same industry groups. To truly understand where the class of 2004 is going after graduation, we need to look at where graduates are going, leaving, and staying, and use this information to determine the “attractiveness” of the various industries to new graduates.
We can determine the relative attractiveness of industry groups to new MBA graduates by dividing the percentage switching into an industry group by the percentage switching out and multiplying the result by 100. The following “attractiveness index” shows the attractiveness of each industry group to both the class of 2004 and the class of 2003.

The three industry groups most attractive to graduates in 2003 continue to be attractive to the class of 2004. Finance and health care, although still the top two industries in terms of attractiveness, have slipped slightly, whereas the attractiveness of the products and services industry has increased slightly. Consulting comes in fourth in attractiveness in 2004—the same relative position it had in 2003—but with a slight dip in its absolute attractiveness.

The four other industries in the eight-industry lineup have more out-switching (departures by employees) than in-switching (people entering the industry from another industry), as reflected in attractiveness indexes below 100. Three of the four, however, have increased their relative attractiveness in 2004: energy/utilities, manufacturing, and nonprofit/government. The high-technology industry is low in absolute and relative attractiveness in both 2003 and 2004—no surprise after the shakeout of the sector that began in 2000 and has caused so many layoffs and company failures since.

**How Do MBA Graduates Decide on Post-MBA Employment?**

It is important to understand that industry attractiveness is measured not only by employers’ ability to hire but also by their ability to attract the interest of students. For students, the most important criterion in the decision about what job to take after graduation is whether the work will be challenging and/or interesting. The next-most important job selection criteria are competitive salary and opportunity for advancement.

An analysis of the significance of these decision factors shows that challenging and/or interesting work is significantly more important to graduates choosing jobs than competitive salary; both of
these factors are significantly more important than the opportunity for advancement. This result is consistent with results from years past. MBA graduates continue first and foremost to seek jobs that are interesting and challenging rather than those that promise the most money or a quick trip up the corporate ladder.

**What Can Schools Do with This Information?**

Business schools can monitor industry attractiveness to identify the fields they can target when seeking to recruit prospective students, when developing program content and direction, and when developing business contacts for employment recruitment.

Career services professionals can use the Employer Selection section of this survey and other information—for instance, the GMAC® Corporate Recruiters Survey and the CareerLeader® online career assessment (www.mba.com/careerleader)—to work with students to develop individual SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analyses. Students can then use the results of their SWOT analyses in their job searches by targeting the industries, job functions, and organizations that offer the best chance of job offers and long-term satisfaction and success.

Understanding how students make decisions about their post-MBA careers and how recruiters approach the hiring of MBA grads can help make successful matches between students and companies that can offer desirable jobs and internships.
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CONCLUSION

This executive summary is merely a brief sample of the findings of Global MBA® Graduate Survey 2004. The comprehensive survey report contains more survey results, including information broken down by school size and geographic regions that can be used to benchmark against the school results provided to participating schools. Information provided in the Global MBA® Graduate Survey comprehensive report can be used—

1. to better understand trends in the graduate management education industry, which can help in managing the expectations and satisfaction of students
2. to develop strategies to enhance relationships with current students and attract new applicants
3. to benchmark against other schools

School professionals who wish to develop strategies to enhance relationships with current students and attract new applicants can use the comprehensive report—

- in conjunction with a marketing audit and SWOT analysis
- to decide which subsets of the population to target (once the SWOT analysis and marketing audit are completed)
- to define targeting options (this would involve segmenting the school’s market of potential applicants and identifying which segments are most promising and are therefore best to target)
- to develop and implement plans related to these decisions (all of which have to be made in the context of available resources)

Schools can perform a marketing audit of the “controllables” at the school (price, product, promotion, and place) and conduct a SWOT analysis—the school’s strengths and weaknesses, as well as its opportunities and threats. The marketing audit and SWOT analysis would provide a basis for determining strategic direction with regard to recruiting applicants.

A SWOT analysis should involve consideration of the uncontrollable factors faced by a school. At a minimum, these include the following:

- the strength of the national, regional, and/or local economy
- external constraints on recruiting, such as visa restrictions
- limited staff, budget, and resources for recruiting applicants and implementing program changes

A marketing audit should include consideration of the following controllable variables:

- price—including tuition and housing, as well as opportunity costs
- product—what the school offers in terms of quality faculty, curriculum, and services
- promotion—how the school promotes itself to candidates
- place—the school’s physical location; the effect of location on the school’s opportunities; whether the school faces a national, regional, or local market; and where target applicants are located, etc.

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Strategic marketing theory suggests that schools have three basic choices in developing a marketing strategy. The choice of a strategy depends on the school’s distinctive assets (revealed by the SWOT analysis). The following are possible competitive strategies:

- **Low cost**: Lower tuition and other related expenses, or create flexible programs that allow students to continue to work full time.
- **Differentiation**: Appeal to the entire market through differentiation.
- **Niche**: Appeal to a narrow segment of the market by developing a focused strategy (industry, specific school strength—program, location, etc.).

To be successful, schools should adopt one of these strategies. As noted above, the choice of one of these generic strategies should be based on a school’s distinctive assets and resources. Positioning is an integral part of implementing the chosen strategy, but to correctly position itself, a school must know its customers (current and/or potential). This knowledge involves a customer analysis that considers differences across age, gender, citizenship, and race/ethnicity. The Global MBA® Graduate Survey is designed to support this type of customer analysis.

**For More Information**
This executive summary has presented only a selected set of findings from the study. Additional findings can be found in the comprehensive report, and school-level data can be accessed by participating schools through the online reporting facility.

For more information about this and other surveys, their use, and how to participate, please contact Rachel Edgington, associate director, research, at research@gmac.com or 1-703-749-0131.