

# GMAC Prospective Students Survey

## 2025 Deans Summary

### About GMAC Prospective Students Survey

For more than a decade, the GMAC Prospective Students Survey (PSS) has provided the world's graduate business schools with critical insights into the decision-making processes of people actively applying to, considering, or researching graduate management education (GME) programs.

This year's report, which considers data collected throughout the 2024 calendar year, continues to explore trends in the candidate pipeline, program preferences, mobility considerations, and career goals. The first section builds on previous years' results with more detailed information about candidate interest in artificial intelligence (AI), along with data from new questions about desired business skills and how candidates might feel about a future employer's position on sustainability. The report then considers candidates' plans for financing their degree as well as their preferred communication channels and decision-making factors. We then explore the latest in our long-tracked trends in degree and format preferences; geographic mobility; and preferred careers.



#### 2024 Survey sample stats

**4,912** Survey respondents

**147** Countries of citizenship represented

**45%** Female respondents

**67%** Gen Z respondents (b. 1996-2012)

**28%** Underrepresented U.S. respondents

**93%** Plan to enroll in GME within 2 years

As business schools continue to match their offerings with market demands, the **GMAC Prospective Students Survey – 2025 Report** can help programs meet students where they are. According to the survey results, the MBA remains the preferred degree among more than half of global candidates, maintaining strength in its traditional strongholds like India, Canada, and Latin America (Figure 1). However, the MBA has lost some favor among U.S. candidates compared to last year.

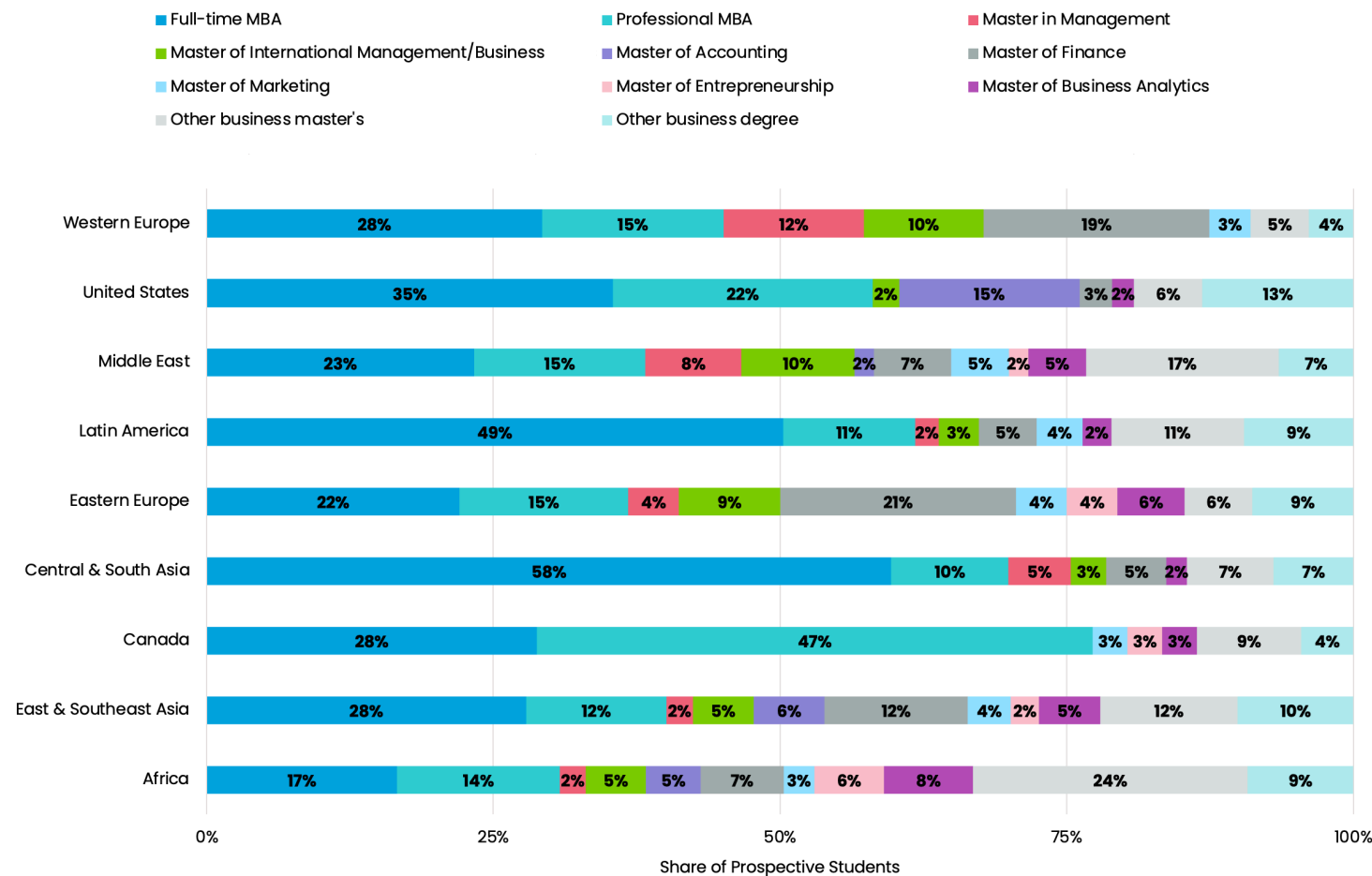
This may be a driving force behind a global increase in preference for business master’s degrees—especially the specialized programs that have been rolling out at business schools over the past several years. When it comes to program modality, we found a resurging preference for in-person delivery, perhaps related to more “return to office” mandates or younger candidates’ desires to interact in-person (Figure 2).



**Figure 1: Full-time and professional MBAs are preferred by more than half of candidates in the United States, Latin America, Central and South Asia, and Canada.**

*The Master of Finance is the most preferred business master’s degree in Western and Eastern Europe and East and Southeast Asia about three-fifths of candidates 40 and older.*

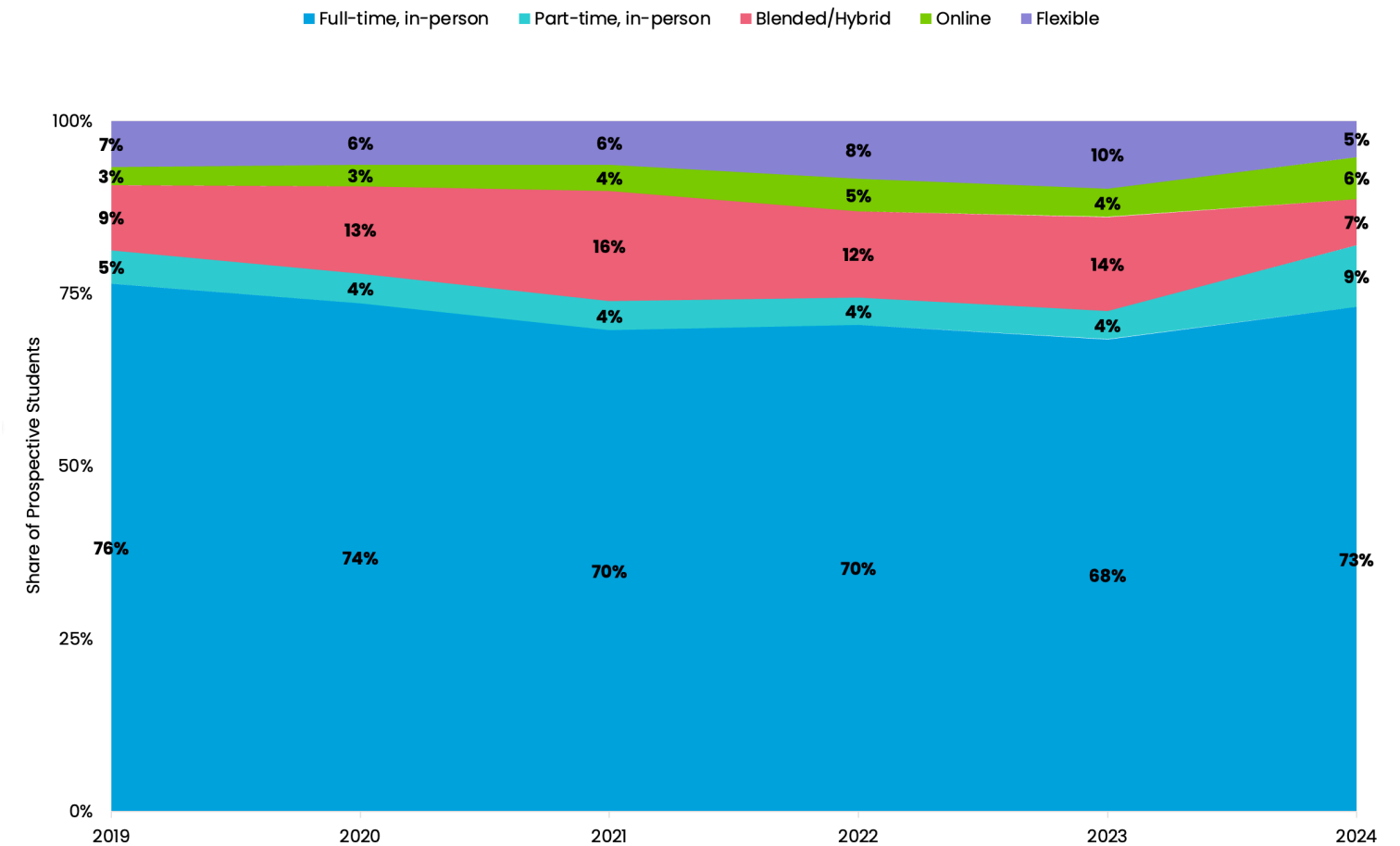
**Preferred Program by Region of Citizenship**



**Figure 2: Nearly three-quarters of candidates prefer full-time, in-person programs, reversing a multi-year decline.**

*Preference for flexible and blended/hybrid programs has decreased below pre-pandemic levels.*

**Preferred Delivery Format for Global Candidates, 2019–2024**



Given candidates' growing expectations around their post-GME outcomes and careers, this year's report also aims to help business schools understand how candidate preferences align with employer expectations. Based on our surveys of both groups, prospective students and their future employers agree that AI is best used in the classroom as a tool for learning how to develop strategies

and make business decisions. They also agree that despite the recent proliferation of AI, strategic thinking and problem-solving remain the top skills students should learn in business school (Figure 4). However, employers place a greater premium than candidates on the human skills GME graduates will need in the workforce, such as emotional intelligence, adaptability,

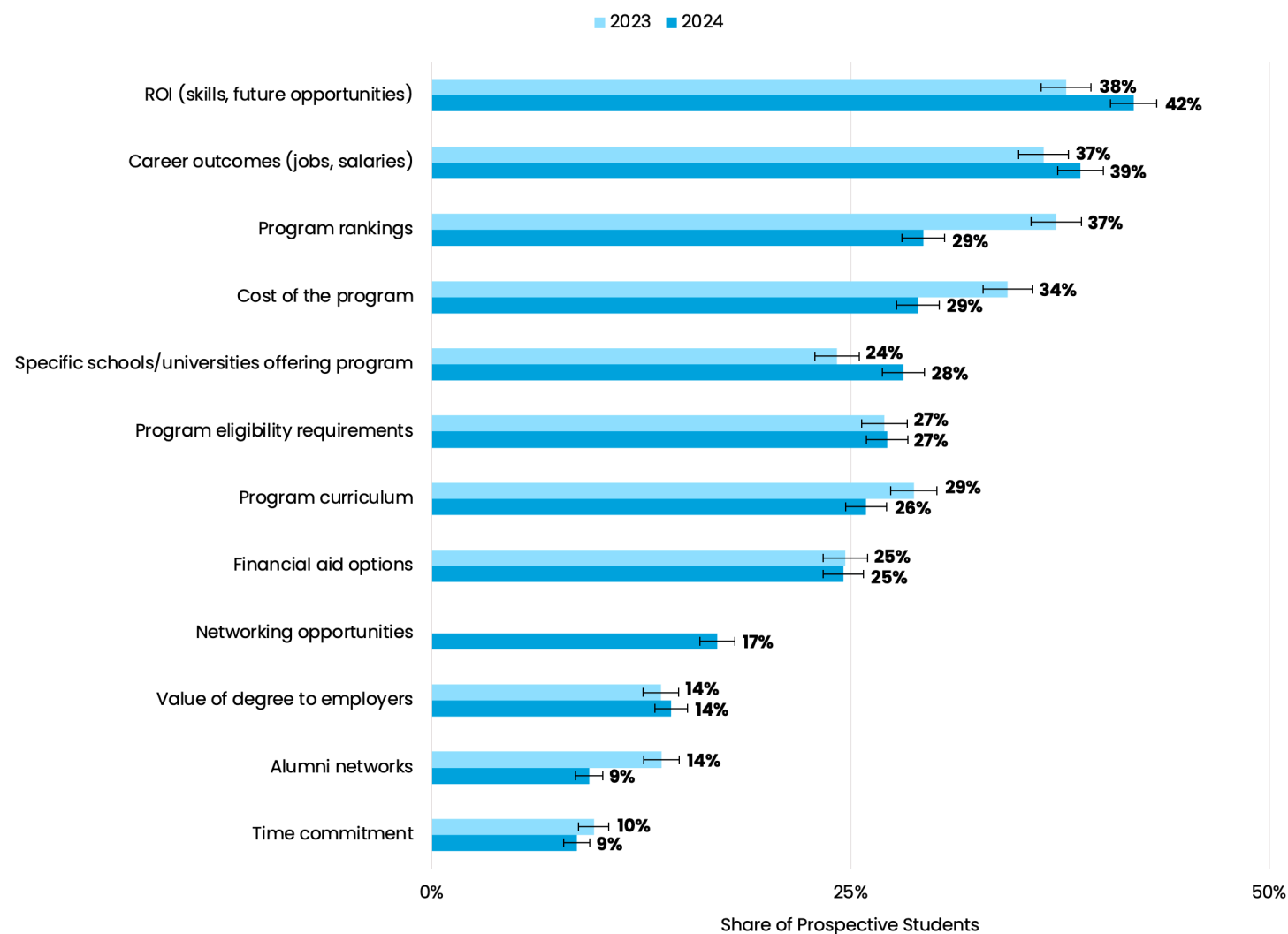
and coachability—indicating the need for schools to reinforce to their candidates and students which skills make them most employable. Last year, the Prospective Students Survey report examined new trends in how candidates want to pursue GME, focusing on their preferences related to social impact, AI, flexibility, and mobility. This year, our report picks up on many

of these trends but also aims to give business schools the tools to more effectively and authentically connect with candidates where they are. By aligning offerings, messaging, and engagement strategies with these emerging trends, business schools can reinforce the enduring value of graduate management education.

**Figure 3: The share of candidates who say program rankings are among the top three aspects they focus on when researching GME has significantly decreased, while the share focused on ROI has increase.**

Program rankings are now tied with cost of the program as the third most commonly researched dimension of GME, behind ROI and career outcomes.

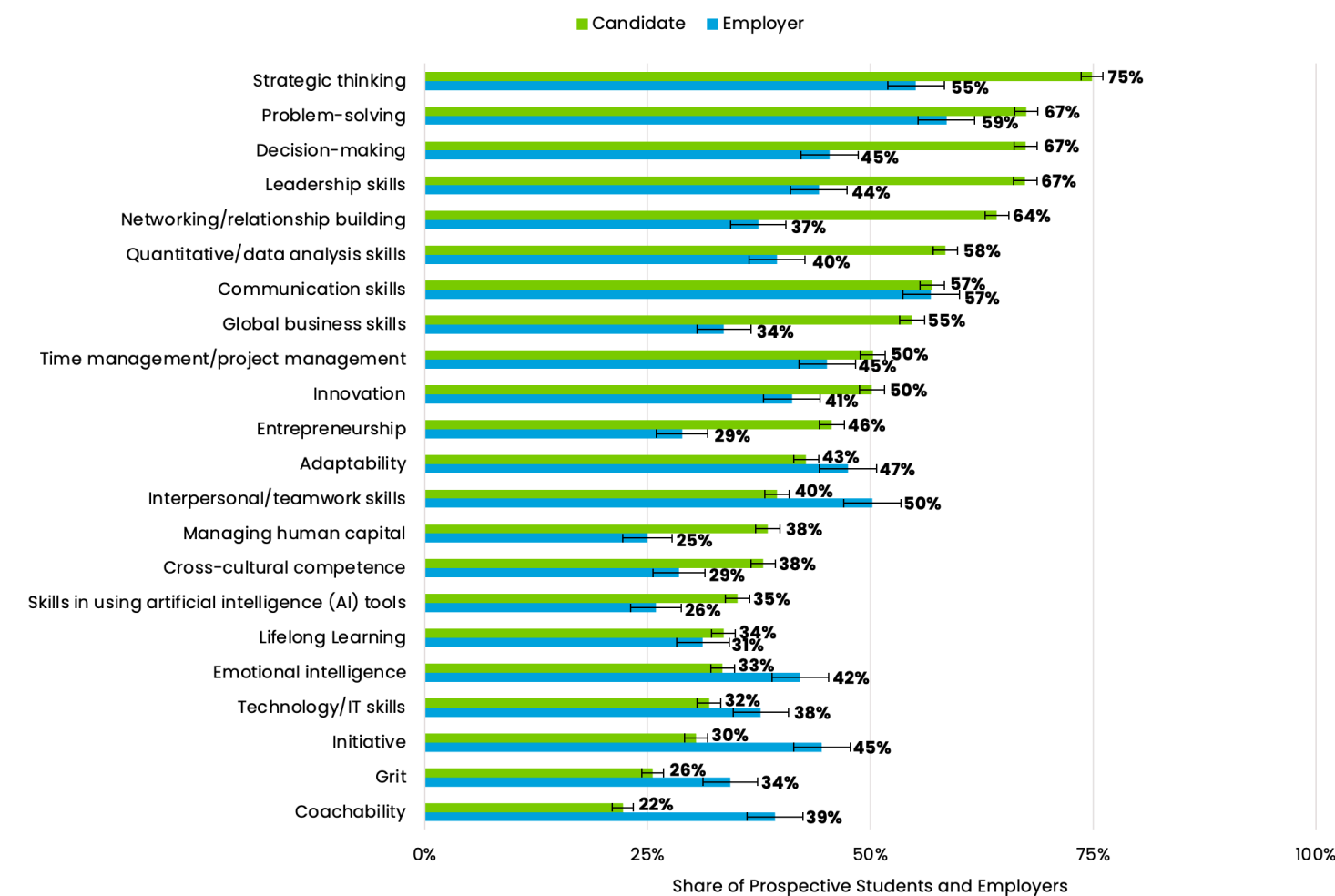
### Candidates' Most Researched Aspects of GME Programs, 2023 and 2024



**Figure 4: Strategic thinking and problem-solving are top skills for students to learn in business school for both employers and candidates.**

Employers place a greater premium on "human" skills like teamwork, initiative, or coachability compared to prospective students.

### Candidate and Employers' Top Skills to Learn in Business School



Source: GMAC Prospective Students Survey and Corporate Recruiters Survey

# More key findings



## What's new in 2025

Candidates are more interested in hands-on AI classroom experiences than how programs leverage AI to personalize their learning journeys, with interest in learning about AI increasing with a candidate's age.



## Financing plans

Candidates from places in continental Europe like France, Germany, and Italy—where tuition tends to be less expensive—plan to use less financial aid than candidates in other countries.



## Communicating with candidates

While candidates may be prioritizing research about rankings less than before, the perceived overall quality and reputation of a business school still remains the number one factor when candidates decide whether to apply to a program.



## Degree and delivery preferences

Fewer candidates are considering micro-credentials as alternatives to GME compared to last year.



## Geographic mobility

The United States and Western Europe remain top study destinations, with candidates in India and Greater China increasingly considering programs at home.



## Career goals

Consulting, financial services, and technology still top the list of preferred industries to work in following graduation, though there has been a small but statistically significant dip in candidate interest in the tech sector.



How business schools position their value to candidates is even more critical as prospective students zero in on the ROI of their graduate management education. From how programs integrate artificial intelligence or social impact into the classroom to how business schools help students finance their degrees, prospective students are considering a range of criteria on their path to GME. Knowing that today's candidates are making decisions with a

clear focus on outcomes, business schools can leverage information from the latest GMAC Prospective Students Survey to ensure their offerings satisfy the skill development and career goals of their future students.



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