mba.com
Registrants Survey

SURVEY REPORT   **2007**

The **mba.com Registrants Survey** is a product of the Graduate Management Admission Council® (GMAC®), a global not-for-profit education organization of leading graduate business schools and the owner of the Graduate Management Admission Test® (GMAT®). The GMAT® exam is an important part of the admissions process for more than 4,000 graduate management programs around the world. GMAC® is dedicated to creating access to and disseminating information about graduate management education; these schools and others rely on the Council as the premier provider of reliable data about the graduate management education industry.

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The enormous variation in skills, interests, abilities, aspirations, and personalities of individuals interested in graduate management education makes it necessary for schools to identify, attract, and admit candidates within that mix that will fit well in their programs. This report provides a summary of key findings from a survey of individuals who have indicated that they plan to apply to and attend a graduate management education program. Data reported include applicant school selection, likelihood of attendance, school characteristics of interest, and response to various school communication techniques.

Key Findings

- The majority of respondents considers only one type of graduate business program but applies to multiple graduate business schools.
- Citizenship and the likelihood of attending graduate business school outside one's country of citizenship play a role in the program types considered.
- Prospective students hope to improve four sets of skills during a graduate business program: "soft" skills, technology skills, reasoning skills, and technical skills.
- The quality and reputation of the graduate business school, the financial aspects of going back to school, and the career aspects of the school are the top three information categories that a prospective student utilizes in the decision to attend a particular school.
- A school's Web site is an important part of the school's message to prospective students—94% of prospects visit the school's Web site, and 70% consider the Web site an influential part of their decision to apply to a particular school.

This report analyzes various topical areas addressed within the survey under the following headings: *Developing a Marketing Strategy* examines the demand for graduate management education and the types of graduate business programs prospective students consider, apply to, and attend. *Prospective Students* describes candidate motivations, reservations, and aspirations. *Marketing Messages* presents the types of information prospective students use in deciding which graduate business program to attend. *A School's Web Site* reviews candidate perceptions of the level of influence a school's Web site has on their decisions as well as the information they expect from a school Web site. *Additional Communication Channels* explores the reach and influence of other communication channels graduate business schools use to target prospective students.

Mba.com, the GMAC® Web site for prospective students, is the portal to the GMAT® exam and a resource for prospective students interested in learning about graduate management education. Findings in this report are based on responses from 1,058 prospective graduate business students who registered on mba.com—a 25% response rate from the 4,239 individuals contacted. Throughout the report, tests of statistical significance are used with a 95% confidence interval as the cut-off point for significance. This survey is the second of two surveys conducted with this sample to track the progression of prospective students through the graduate business pipeline; the first was conducted in 2005. The survey sample includes respondents of the 2005 mba.com Registrants Survey who had begun the application process, were planning to apply, or were still deciding whether to apply to graduate business school at the time of the October 2005 survey.

In the current higher education environment, with the diversification of graduate management education into various types of programs and with the proliferation of institutions offering graduate business degrees, each program needs to understand its position in the marketplace. This process can start with a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis. Using the information gathered about the program relationship to the marketplace, graduate business programs can map a trajectory of where they wish to be in the future, which may include increasing the number of applications received or improving the quality of applicants attracted to the program.

A self-assessment is only an initial step in the process of developing a marketing strategy, but self-assessment coupled with an understanding of prospective students' needs is essential when creating an appropriate strategy. "By anticipating, identifying, and satisfying customers' requirements and matching these to the skills and strengths of an organization, the benefits to both are there to be realised[1]."

This report emphasizes the importance of knowing the prospective students. Data collected from the 2006 mba.com Registrants Follow-Up Survey focus on the perspective of the prospective student, which can assist in understanding various target markets available to the graduate management education industry.

Demand for Graduate Management Education Programs

Changes in the demand for various graduate management education programs are presented in Figure 1. As shown, there is a slight variation over the past four years in the type of program at which Graduate Management Admission Test® candidates intend to study. Most noticeable is the marginal decline in the percentage of candidates intending to study at full-time programs. In contrast, there is a slight increase in the percentage of candidates intending to study at part-time programs. Among the respondents to the current study who are enrolled in a graduate business program, the distribution among program types resembles the distribution of GMAT® candidates' intended study pace—66% of respondents are enrolled in a full-time program, 25% are enrolled in a part-time program, and 9% are enrolled in an executive program. These percentages suggest accordance between the prospective student's intended program of study and the program in which they enroll. The next section further explores the various program types respondents considered and the yield rate for each.

> Data suggest accordance between prospective students' intended program of study and the type of program in which they ultimately enroll.
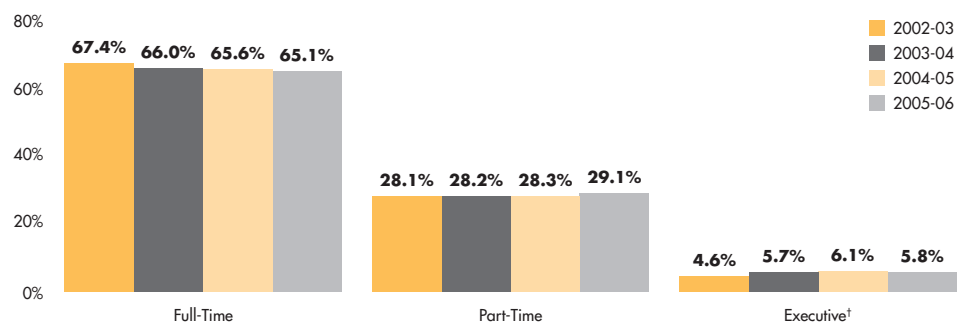
Source: GMAC® (2006) Profile of Graduate Management Admission Test® Candidates: Five-Year Summary.

Figure 1.
Intended Study Pace of GMAT® Candidates, by Testing Year

[1] Hatton, A. and Sedgemore, L. (1992). Marketing for college managers: a workbook for the effective integration of marketing into college planning. The Staff College.
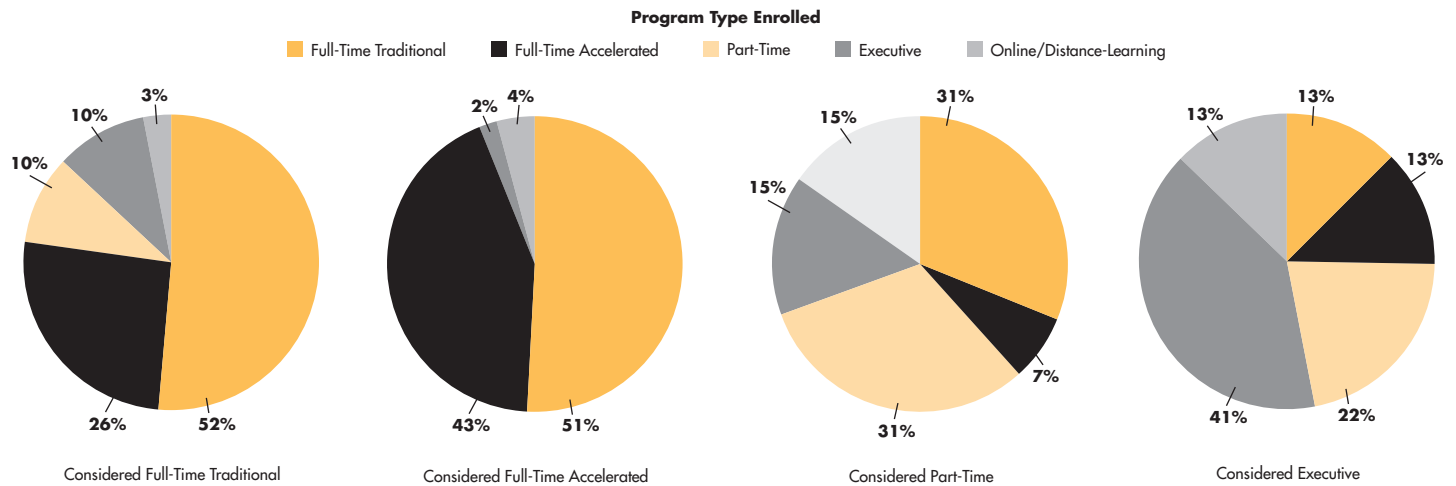
Program Type Enrolled

■ Full-Time Traditional ■ Full-Time Accelerated ■ Part-Time ■ Executive ■ Online/Distance-Learning

Considered Full-Time Traditional

Considered Full-Time Accelerated

Considered Part-Time

Considered Executive

Figure 2.
Yield Rates for Various Graduate Business Programs (Respondents Who Considered Multiple Program Types)

Programs Considered

Overall, 69% of enrolled respondents considered only one program type. Of those, 52% considered a full-time traditional program, 18% considered a full-time accelerated program, 22% considered a part-time program, 5% considered an executive program, and 3% considered an online/distance-learning program. Figure 2 shows the program type yield rates among the remaining 31% of respondents who considered multiple types of programs. The yield rate is the percentage of respondents who enrolled in the various graduate business programs by the type of program considered.

As shown in Figure 2, full-time traditional programs retained a majority of respondents (52%) who considered multiple program types. Also, slightly more than half of the respondents (51%) who considered

a full-time accelerated program enrolled in a full-time traditional program. Of those who considered an accelerated program, 43% actually enrolled in a full-time accelerated program. Among respondents who considered a part-time program, about a third enrolled in a part-time program and another third enrolled in a full-time traditional program. Two-fifths of respondents who considered an executive program enrolled in an executive program, and about a fifth enrolled in a part-time program.

Program consideration among enrolled respondents is shaped in part by respondents' citizenship. Respondents from Asia (75%) are significantly more likely compared with respondents from the United States (52%) and Europe (40%) to consider a full-time traditional program. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of Asian respondents enrolled in a program outside their country

of citizenship, which may account for their greater likelihood of considering a full-time traditional program—many countries that issue student visas for foreign students require these students to attend school full time.

European (44%) and Asian (38%) respondents are significantly more likely compared with respondents from the United States (15%) to consider full-time accelerated programs. However, the prevalence of full-time accelerated programs in Europe might explain the heightened interest in these programs among European respondents. Conversely, respondents from the United States (53%) are significantly more likely than Asian (13%) and European (21%) respondents to consider part-time programs. Additionally, European (25%) respondents are more likely than Asian (9%) and U.S. (12%) respondents to consider executive programs.

There are no significant differences by citizenship in the percentage of respondents who consider multiple types of programs, but there are significant differences in the average number of applications submitted to full-time traditional programs by location of study. Figure 3 presents the average number of applications submitted by enrolled respondents to standard program types by location of study and number of program types considered. Respondents who enrolled outside their country of citizenship submit significantly more applications to full-time traditional programs compared with the number of applications submitted by respondents who enrolled in a program within their country of citizenship.

Although 69% of the respondents considered only one type of graduate business program, the majority of respondents applied to multiple graduate business schools (61%). Among these respondents, 91% have a preferred school in which they would like to enroll, but a majority (70%) are also applying to schools in which it is nearly guaranteed they will be accepted ("safety" schools). Many (55%) are also attempting to obtain admission to a school for which they may not qualify ("stretch" schools). These data suggest that there is a notable desire among prospective students to gain admission into a graduate business program. By applying to multiple schools, respondents are trying to guarantee admission to a graduate business program even if the program is not their first choice.

After a few years of declining demand, the demand for graduate management education is on the rise[2]. Schools are reporting an increase in application volume [2] and more GMAT® tests were administered during the 2005-06 testing year compared with the previous testing year[3]. The landscape for graduate business education appears bright, which provides ample opportunity for graduate business schools to reach out to prospective students and promote their programs.

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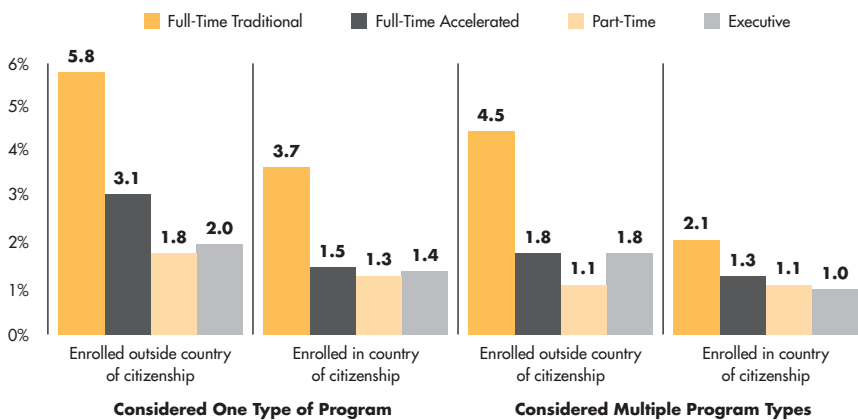> • • • • •

Figure 3.
Average Number of Applications Submitted to Graduate Business Programs, by Location of Study and Number of Program Types Considered

[2] Schoenfeld, G. (2006) Application Trends Survey: 2006. Graduate Management Admission Council®. Available at www.gmac.com/gmac/ResearchandTrends/SurveyResearch/ApplicationTrendsSurvey.htm.
[3] GMAC® (2006) Profile of Graduate Management Admission Test® Candidates. Graduate Management Admission Council®. Available at www.gmac.com/gmac/ResearchandTrends/GMATStatistics/ProfileofGMATCandidates.htm.

In this highly competitive environment, where "brand" competition (one school competing with another school) and "product" competition (one program type competing with another program type) are fierce, attempts at promoting your graduate business school and programs should be grounded in the outcome of an internal analysis, such as a SWOT analysis. But these efforts might fall flat without an understanding of prospective students' requirements. By linking the customer's needs with the school's offerings, graduate business programs can target communications to their desired market of potential students and improve their visibility, thereby potentially increasing their market share.

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Prospective students are motivated to attend a graduate business program by the potential to enhance their careers, develop their skills and themselves personally, and/or provide assistance in changing careers.

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Student Motivations

What are the primary motivations of the prospective student? Motivations to pursue a graduate management education degree are relatively consistent from survey to survey. When asked to explain their primary reasons for pursuing an advanced degree in business, respondents indicate that they are principally motivated by the potential to enhance their career, develop their skills and themselves personally, and/or provide assistance in changing careers. An in-depth discussion of the motivations and reservations of prospective students can be found in the report for the first round of mba.com Registrants surveys conducted in 2005[4].

Career-enhancers are motivated by the desire to improve their current employment situation, which is accomplished through the attainment of the credentials manifest in an advanced degree. On the other hand, career-switchers generally have a desire to change the industry in which they are employed or the job function they hold. Developers are motivated to increase their knowledge, skills, and abilities in order to perform more effectively in their jobs and their careers. As shown in the 2005 survey, these motivations are not mutually exclusive among the respondents; rather, respondents are typically motivated by a combination of these factors. The current study explores in-depth the skills prospective students hope to improve during a graduate business program.

[4] Schoenfeld, G. (2005) mba.com Registrants Survey: 2005-2006. Graduate Management Admission Council®. Available at www.gmac.com/gmac/ResearchandTrends/SurveyResearch/RegistrantsSurvey.htm.

Skill Improvement

Twenty-five percent of respondents cite skill development as a primary motivator for them to pursue an advanced degree in business. In the current study, respondents are asked to indicate the skill areas they hope to improve during a graduate business program. Figure 4 presents the top eight skills prospective students hope to improve. Graduating business students surveyed said the top two key drivers of satisfaction with long-term potential through the development of skills and abilities are the ability to think strategically and leadership skills[5]. This kind of correlation between prospective students' needs and graduates' satisfaction may provide an avenue for schools to connect with candidates, especially considering that corporate recruiters assess graduates in their strategic thinking abilities, analytical thinking abilities, and quantitative skills when making hiring decisions[6].

To better understand the skills that prospective students hope to improve, a principal components analysis was conducted with Varimax rotation, which converged in seven iterations and explains 48% of the variance uncovered in four components. The skill components revealed in the principal component analysis are defined as soft skills, technical skills, reasoning skills, and technology skills. Soft skills include interpersonal skills, oral communication, leadership, and networking, to name a few. Technical skills consist of conducting cost/benefit analysis; financial analysis; market research; and analyzing, organizing, and interpreting statistical data. Reasoning skills include strategic thinking, analytical thinking, developing a strategic plan, and developing creative problem-solving skills. Technology skills include computer and related technological skills and technical skills for your specialty.

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> **Twenty-five percent of respondents cite skill development as a primary motivator for them to pursue an advanced degree in business—of those, 81% hope to improve their strategic thinking abilities.**
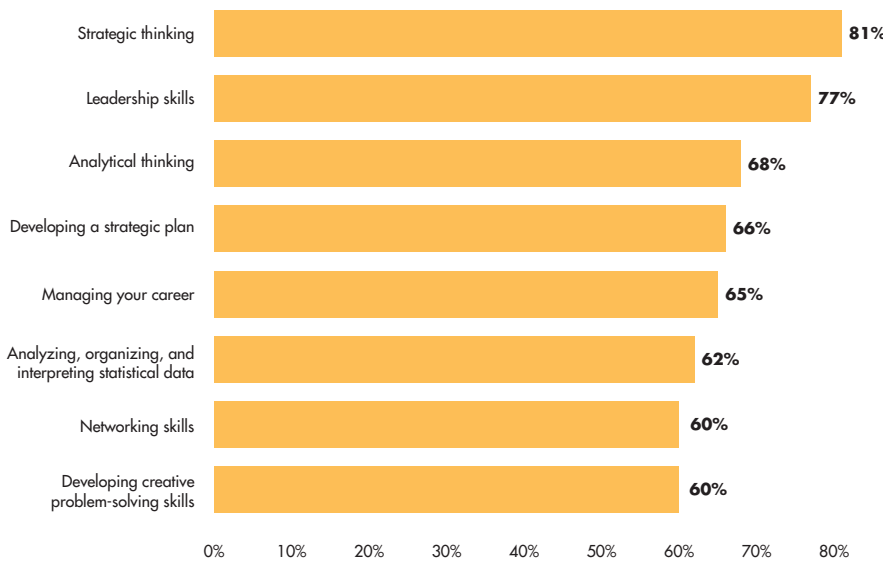> • • • • •

Figure 4.
Top Eight Skills Prospective Students Hope to Improve during an MBA Program

[5] Schoenfeld, G. (2006) Global MBA® Graduate Survey: 2006. Graduate Management Admission Council®. Available at www.gmac.com/gmac/ResearchandTrends/SurveyResearch/GlobalMBAGraduateSurvey.htm.
[6] Schoenfeld, G. (2006) Corporate Recruiters Survey: 2006. Graduate Management Admission Council®. Available at www.gmac.com/gmac/ResearchandTrends/SurveyResearch/CorporateRecruitersSurvey.htm.

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Respondents enrolled in executive programs are significantly less likely to desire improvement in their technology skills compared with respondents enrolled in other program types.

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Knowledge of the skills desired by prospective students can be useful to schools when developing their program offerings and communication messages. However, prospective students are not a homogeneous group of individuals[7]; rather, each has a unique set of needs, including the skills that they desire to improve. Radar charts show the mix of skills respondents desire to improve by various characteristics—a point closest to the center of the chart represents a low value and a point further from the center represents a high value. Figure 5 presents a radar chart for the skill mix by the type of program in which respondents enrolled. As shown in the chart, the most notable difference among respondents enrolled in various program types is in their desire for technology skills—respondents enrolled in

executive programs are significantly less likely to desire improvement in their technology skills compared with respondents enrolled in other program types. The following is the skill mix for each program type in order of the desired improvement anticipated.

- *Full-Time Traditional*: Soft skills; Technology Skills; Technical Skills; Reasoning Skills
- *Full-Time Accelerated*: Technology Skills; Soft Skills; Reasoning Skills; Technical Skills
- *Part-Time*: Technology Skills; Reasoning Skills; Soft Skills; Technical Skills
- *Executive*: Reasoning Skills; Soft Skills; Technical Skills; Technology Skills

There are also significant differences noted in the skill mix for reasoning and technology skills by the age of the respondent. Respondents ages 25 to 28 are less likely to desire improvement in reasoning skills compared with those age 24 and younger and those age 33 and older. Respondents' age 24 and younger report a greater desire for improvement in technology skills compared with respondents ages 25 to 32. By gender, women are more likely than men to hope to improve their technology skills—the only significant difference in the skill mix by gender.
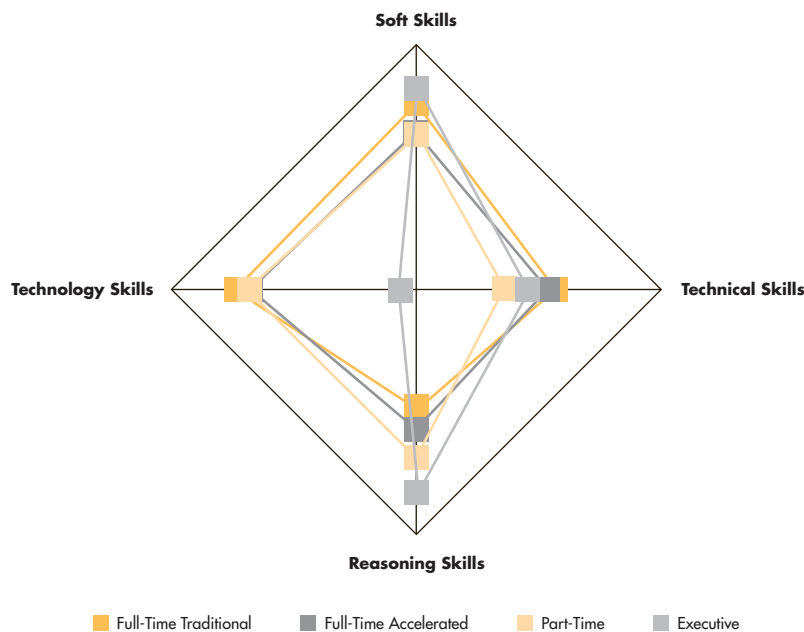

Figure 5.
Desired Improvement in Skill Mix, by Program Type

Legend: Full-Time Traditional | Full-Time Accelerated | Part-Time | Executive

[7] Nicholls, J., et. al. (1995) Marketing higher education: the MBA experience. *International Journal of Educational Management*, Vol. 9, No. 2, pp. 31-38.

There are also significant differences for soft skills and technology skills by location of citizenship. Respondents from Asia are more likely than U.S. respondents to desire improvement in their soft skills, and respondents from Asia and the United States are more likely than European respondents to desire improvement in technology skills. Understanding these differences can assist schools in designing curriculum and appropriate messages about the curriculum and services offered for the targeted market segments.

Figure 6 shows skill development by the motivating factor of the respondents. There are distinct differences in the skills respondents intend to improve during a graduate business program according to their motivation to seek a graduate business degree. It is difficult to understand respondents who have a mix of motivations, as each of the skills are relatively high and congruent on their priority list. Among the respondents who have a single motivating factor, each group has a unique set of priorities.

Respondents who are motivated by the potential to enhance their careers hope to improve, by order of importance, their technology skills, reasoning skills, technical skills, and soft skills. With the rapid changes in technology in the workplace, improving technology skills is seen as a way to advance and get ahead of the learning curve. Respondents who are career-switchers are interested in improving their technical skills, which will assist them in changing their careers. For instance, a respondent who wishes to make a change from an engineering function to a management function needs to learn the tools and techniques needed to manage a business. Respondents who are motivated by self-development are interested in pursuing advancements in their soft skills and reasoning skills.
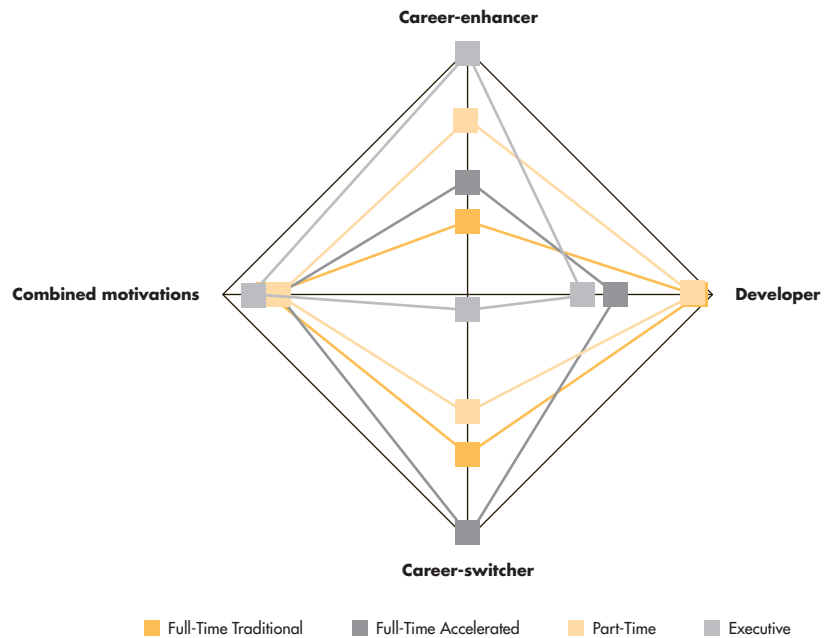

Figure 6.
Desired Improvement in Skill Mix, by Respondent's Motivation

Reasons for Postponing Graduate Business School

One in 10 (10%) respondents plans to postpone graduate business school. Table 1 lists the top five reasons for postponing their education. More than two-fifths of these individuals have financial concerns that are inhibiting their forward progression in the b-school pipeline. Whether these prospective candidates who have postponed their education are concerned about the return on investment or just unsure about how they will pay for a graduate business education, opportunities exist for schools to reach out to this group of prospective students. For instance, 63% of graduating students consider the overall value of their degree to be outstanding or excellent [5], and one year after graduation, alumni, on average, report recouping 45% of their investment[8].

Perhaps with additional outreach that emphasizes the availability of loans, grants, scholarships, and other options, as well as messages that inform about the potential return on investment, schools can assist these individuals through the pipeline.

Table 1 also shows that about a quarter (26%) of the individuals postponing their education is doing so because of the time required to prepare for the application process. In 2005, more than half of the prospective students waiting to submit an application to gradua hool would be right for them [4]. These needs present opportunities for schools, particularly in the area of assisting candidates to determine whether their schools are right for these candidates. The next section of this report provides details about the information needs of prospective students when determining which graduate business school to attend.

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Reasons	Percentage
It would require more money than I am willing to invest right now.	42%
I need more time to prepare for the application process.	26%
My employment situation changed.	22%
My career plans have changed.	17%
It would require more time than I am willing to invest right now.	15%

Source: GMAC® mba.com Registrants Survey, 2006.

Table 1.
Top Five Reasons for Postponing Graduate Business School

[8] Schoenfeld, G. (2006) MBA Alumni Perspectives Survey, April 2006. Graduate Management Admission Council®. Available at www.gmac.com/gmac/ResearchandTrends/SurveyResearch/MBAAlumniPerspectivesSurvey.htm

To effectively recruit students, graduate business programs should first understand the information prospective students utilize when searching for schools[9] and then match these to the strengths of the organization [7]. This section presents the various types of information that prospective students use in deciding which school to attend.

Important Aspects of a Graduate Business School

In the current study, prospective students are asked to rank, in terms of importance, the various aspects of a graduate business program they use in deciding where to attend. These include financial aspects (e.g., financial costs, availability of scholarships), specific program aspects (e.g., length, type, location), stu-

dent class profile (e.g., women, minorities, nationalities, age, experience), curriculum aspects (e.g., study abroad opportunities, specific curriculum), career aspects (e.g., career services offered, job placement opportunities), and quality/reputation of the graduate business school (e.g., faculty, rankings, accreditation).

Overall, the top three school aspects that prospective students rate as most important when choosing a graduate business school are: the quality and reputation of the graduate business school (44% rated as most important), the financial aspects (16% rated as most important), and the career aspects (14% rated as most important). Figure 7 presents these top three followed by the second-most prevalent aspect rated by importance. These second-tier rankings represent responses from 59% of the participants.

The top three school aspects that prospective students rate as most important when choosing a graduate business school are: the quality and reputation of the graduate business school, the financial aspects, and the career aspects.
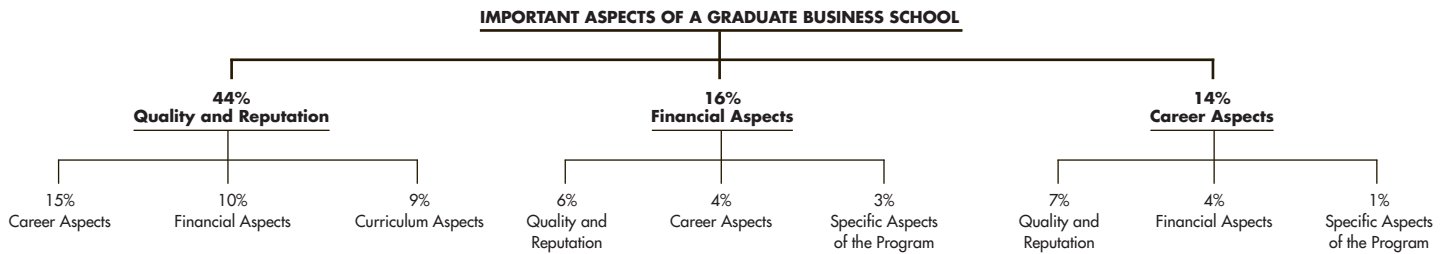
IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF A GRADUATE BUSINESS SCHOOL

44% **Quality and Reputation**			**16%** **Financial Aspects**			**14%** **Career Aspects**		
15% Career Aspects	10% Financial Aspects	9% Curriculum Aspects	6% Quality and Reputation	4% Career Aspects	3% Specific Aspects of the Program	7% Quality and Reputation	4% Financial Aspects	1% Specific Aspects of the Program

Figure 7.
Most Important Aspects When Choosing a Graduate Business School

[9] Mark, D.R., Daniel, M.S., & Lusk, J.L. (May 2002). Comparing Agricultural Economics Graduate Programs: What Are Prospective Students' Options? (Rep. No. 179), Lincoln: University of Nebraska, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

Knowing the aspects of a school the prospective students consider when making their decision can improve the school's message to their targeted market. Because prospective students are a heterogeneous group, the key aspects in the decision-making process are analyzed by various demographic characteristics, which can further assist schools in tailoring their messages to key segments in the marketplace. As shown in Figure 8, there are slight differences in the average importance and order of ranking for the aspects used in choosing a graduate business school to attend. The ranking of key aspects by program type considered are as follows:

- *Full-Time Traditional*: Quality/Reputation; Career; Curriculum; Financial; Specific Aspects of the Program; Student Class Profile
- *Full-Time Accelerated*: Quality/Reputation; Career; Financial; Curriculum; Specific Aspects of the Program; Student Class Profile
- *Part-Time*: Quality/Reputation; Specific Aspects of the Program; Financial; Curriculum; Career; Student Class Profile

- *Executive*: Quality/Reputation; Specific Aspects of the Program; Financial; Curriculum; Career; Student Class Profile

Other demographic characteristics account for differences in the ranking of key aspects. Some of these differences are listed below.

- Men rank career aspects significantly higher than women do, but women rank the specific aspects of the program higher than men do.
- Respondents age 33 and older rank career aspects lower than younger respondents do but rank financial aspects and specific aspects of the program higher.
- U.S. respondents rank career aspects lower than Asian and European respondents do and financial aspects lower than Asians and Africans do. However, U.S. respondents rank specific aspects of the program higher than all other respondents do, with the exception of Canadians.
- Asian Americans rank career aspects higher than African American and white respondents do. African American respondents rank financial aspects higher compared with Asian Americans and whites.
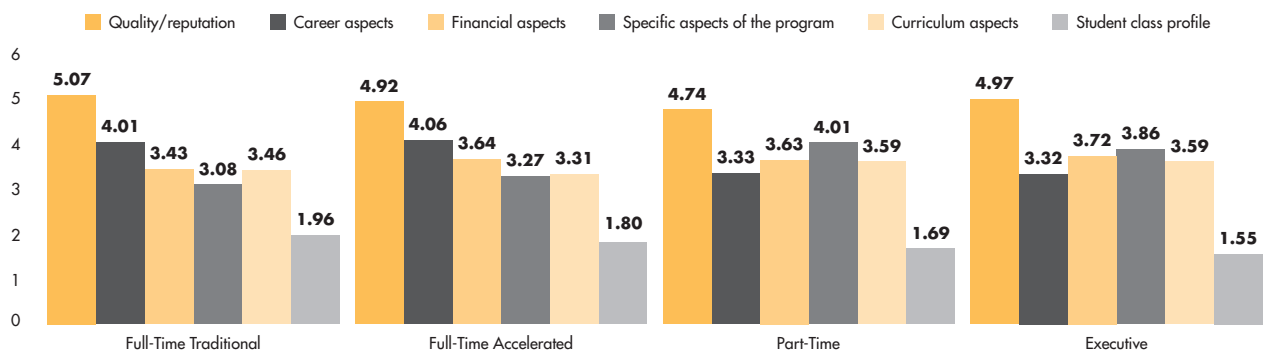

Figure 8.
Average Importance of Various Aspects in Determining Which Graduate Business School to Attend, by Program Type Considered

Specific Components of Information

For each of the top three aspects, respondents were asked follow-up questions about specific components they consider important when assessing that aspect. The top three components of quality and reputation are quality of the faculty, job placement reputation of the school, and accreditation of the program. The most notable difference in component rankings for the quality and reputation aspect is in the high level of influence of published ranking among respondents from Asia compared with other respondents. Among Asian respondents, published ranking is the third-most important component used in their decision-making process. Among U.S. and European respondents, published ranking is eighth. Also, Europeans consider the quality of the current students more important than other respondents do.

Among U.S. respondents, Asian Americans rank faculty quality third and all other U.S. respondents rank faculty quality at the top. Asian Americans, instead, consider the job placement reputation of the school as most important, but that component ranked sixth and seventh among other U.S. respondents.

The top financial components are total tuition, availability of scholarships, and availability of research, teaching, and other assistantships. Total tuition and the availability of scholarships are among the top financial aspects among all demographic groups. For financial aspects, the most notable differences among demographic groups are as follows:

- Older respondents weigh the opportunity costs of lost wages and other compensation higher than younger respondents do.
- Respondents from the United States rank the availability of loans for domestic students higher compared with other respondents. However, only 2% of prospective U.S. students plan to enroll in a program outside their country of citizenship compared with 81% of Asians and 82% of European respondents.

The top career components ranked are the quality of career services, percentage of the graduating class receiving job offers, and starting annual base salary. There are few general differences regarding information about career aspects of the graduate business program. One notable difference is among U.S. respondents concerning access to an alumni network—Asian Americans and Hispanic Americans rank access to an alumni network higher compared with African American respondents.

This information may prove useful in tailoring specific messages to prospective students, but once formed, the message must be disseminated. The following sections discuss channels of communication for school marketing messages with data on saturation and influence of these efforts.

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The top three components of quality and reputation for prospective students are quality of the faculty, job placement reputation of the school, and accreditation of the program.

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The 2003 mba.com Registrants Survey shows that individual school Web sites are the most valuable sources of information about graduate management education and graduate business schools, followed closely by mba.com—the GMAC® Web site for prospective students[10]. In the current study, 94% of respondents visited the Web sites for the schools to which they had applied or planned to apply. Seven in 10 (70%) of the respondents who visited the schools' Web sites cited the Web sites as extremely or very influential in their decision to apply to the programs. These data suggest that school Web sites play an important role in a school's marketing strategy.

Statistically, there are no differences in the percentage of respondents who visit a school Web site by gender, age, citizenship, and U.S. subgroup. However, there are slight, yet significant, differences in the influence the school's Web site has on respondents' school selection. Men (73%) are more likely than women (64%) to consider the school Web site extremely or very influential in their decision, and respondents from Asia (75%) and Europe (72%) are more likely than respondents from the United States (63%) to consider the Web site influential.

Respondents who visited the Web site for the school to which they applied or intend to apply are asked to indicate the types of information they were seeking when they visited the Web site. Figure 9 presents the types of information that respondents sought at school Web sites. As shown, the top three types of information sought are costs and tuition, admissions criteria and processes, and applications and deadlines.

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Seven in 10 (70%) respondents who visited the schools' Web sites cited the Web sites as extremely or very influential in their decision to apply to the program. Prospective students most commonly sought information about costs and tuition when visiting the sites.

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[10] Edgington, R. (2003) mba.com Registrants Survey, 2003. Graduate Management Admission Council®. Available at www.gmac.com/gmac/ResearchandTrends/SurveyResearch/RegistrantsSurvey.htm.

Respondents who enroll in various programs search school Web sites for different types of information. The following is a list of significant differences in the types of information sought at a school Web site by program type.

- Respondents enrolled in part-time and executive programs sought information about the program types offered at a school more often than did respondents enrolled in full-time traditional and full-time accelerated programs.

- Respondents enrolled in executive programs were less likely than those enrolled in full-time traditional, full-time accelerated, and part-time programs to search for information about admissions criteria and process or financial aid.

- Specializations and concentrations were of more interest to respondents enrolled in full-time traditional programs compared with respondents enrolled in other program types.

- Respondents enrolled in full-time traditional and full-time accelerated programs were more likely to search for information about career services and job placement statistics compared with respondents enrolled in part-time and executive programs.

- Information about student activities were sought more often by respondents enrolled in full-time traditional programs compared with those enrolled in other program types. Additionally, respondents enrolled in full-time traditional and full-time accelerated programs searched for information about services for international students more often than respondents enrolled in part-time and executive programs.

- Respondents enrolled in full-time accelerated programs were the most likely of the respondents to search for information about international exchange programs.
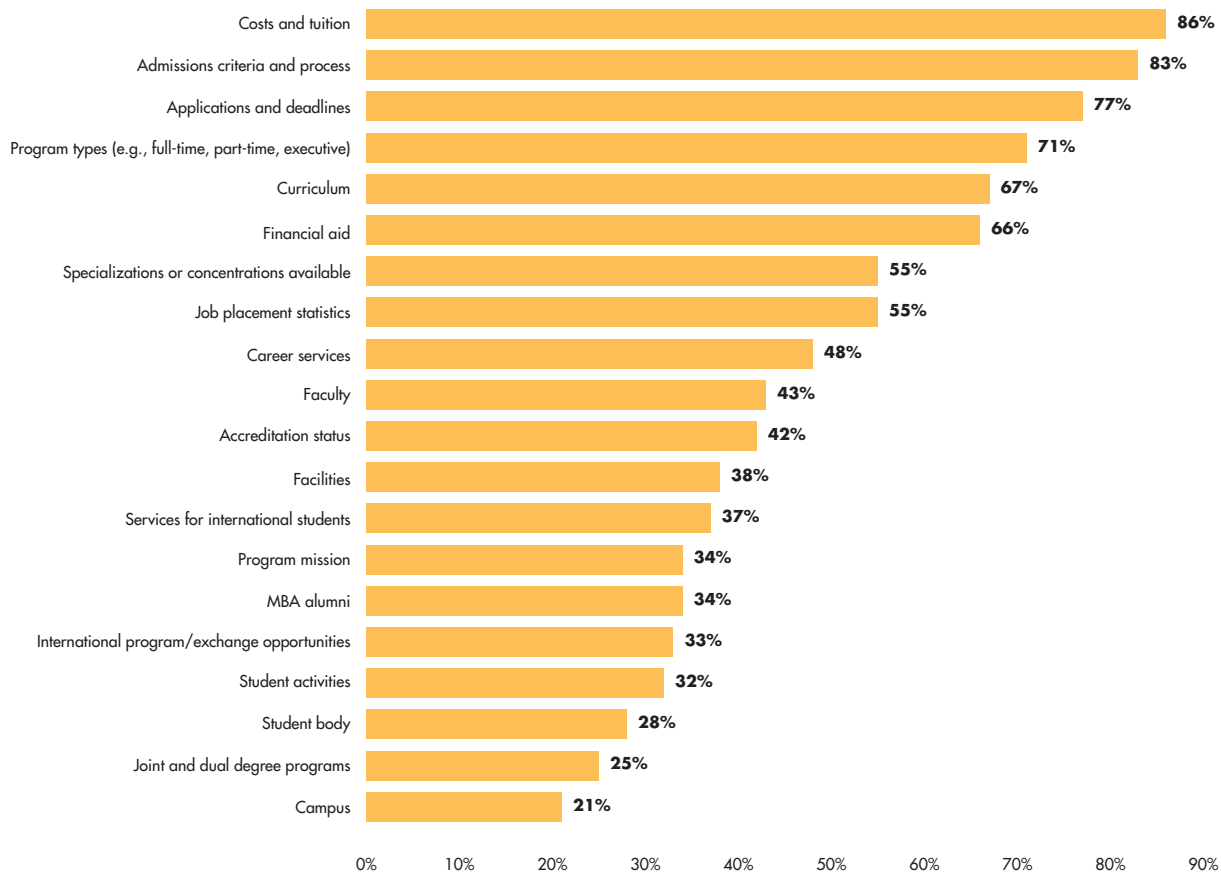

Figure 9.

Types of Information Sought at a School Web Site

Figure 10 presents the significant differences in information sought at school Web sites by the citizenship of the respondents. North American respondents search for information about program types, curriculum, and specializations/concentrations more often compared with respondents from Asia and Europe. Asian respondents are more likely to search for information about services for international students, job placement statistics, career services, and financial aid. Among U.S. respondents, Asian Americans are more likely than other U.S. respondents to search for information about career services, student activities, and the student body.

The digital divide[11] is apparently not an issue among prospective business school students, considering that nearly all (94%) of the respondents viewed school Web sites. In light of the saturation achieved through a school's Web site and the influence the site has on a prospective student's decision to pursue graduate business education and attend a particular school, a significant amount of attention should be paid to the information available on the Web site. Information that connects the school's strengths to the needs of the prospective student can yield a competitive advantage for the school.

However, schools must first attract prospective students to their Web site. The next section of the report evaluates various communication channels that can be used to reach out to potential students.
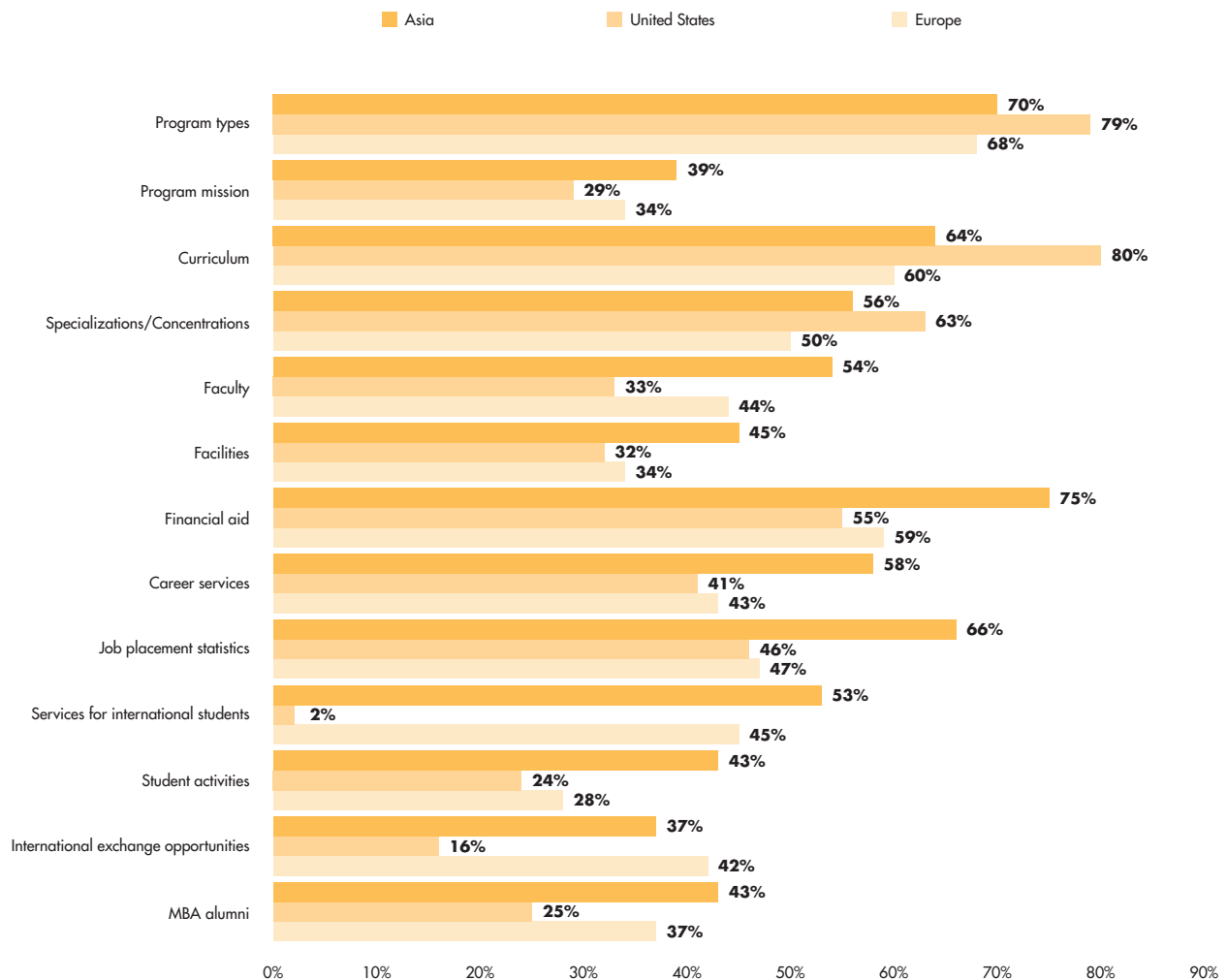
Legend: ■ Asia ■ United States ■ Europe

Category	Asia	United States	Europe
Program types	70%	79%	68%
Program mission	39%	29%	34%
Curriculum	64%	80%	60%
Specializations/Concentrations	56%	63%	50%
Faculty	54%	33%	44%
Facilities	45%	32%	34%
Financial aid	75%	55%	59%
Career services	58%	41%	43%
Job placement statistics	66%	46%	47%
Services for international students	53%	2%	45%
Student activities	43%	24%	28%
International exchange opportunities	37%	16%	42%
MBA alumni	43%	25%	37%

Figure 10.
Information Sought at a School's Web Site, by Citizenship of Respondents

[11] "Digital Divide refers to the gap between those able to benefit from digital technology and those who are not." Retrieved on December 26, 2006, from www.digitaldivide.org/dd/digitaldivide.html.

In the current study, respondents are asked to indicate whether they encountered, in the last six months, advertisements for graduate business programs. Figure 11 shows the penetration of messages across various communication channels among prospective students and the influence each media type has on the prospect's decision to pursue a degree and to consider the program advertised. School advertisements online and through the mail have the greatest penetration among the respondents—more than half of the respondents have encountered these advertisements. Additionally, about a third of the respondents encountered advertisements in newspapers and magazines. Fewer than one in 10 of the respondents encountered a school advertisement on television or on the radio.

The most influential media in terms of the decision to pursue a graduate management degree are the Internet, magazines, newspapers, and mail. In terms of the decision to consider the advertised program, the most influential media are the Internet, mail, and newspapers. When combining the penetration and influence of the advertisements by delivery media, the following rank order emerges: online, through the mail, in newspapers, in magazines, on television, and on the radio.

The following differences in the market penetration of different communication channels by various respondent characteristics were noted:

- Respondents enrolled in executive (27%) and part-time (20%) programs are more likely than respondents enrolled in full-time traditional (9%) and accelerated (6%) programs to have encountered advertisements for graduate business programs on the radio (27%).

- Respondents enrolled in full-time accelerated (57%) and executive (58%) programs encounter newspaper advertisements more often than respondents enrolled in full-time traditional (32%) and part-time (36%) programs.
- Respondents enrolled in executive (62%) programs are more likely to encounter magazine advertisements compared with other respondents.
- Men are more likely to encounter advertisements in newspapers and magazines compared with women, and women (12%) are more likely to encounter advertisements on television compared with men (7%).
- U.S. respondents (18%) are more likely than Asian (5%) and European (5%) respondents to encounter advertisements on television. Additionally, U.S. respondents (22%) are more likely than respondents from Asia (2%) and Europe (5%) to encounter advertisements on the radio.
- European respondents are more likely than U.S. and Asian respondents to encounter newspaper and magazine advertisements.

• • • • •

In order, the most effective advertisement methods for prospective students were delivered online, through the mail, in newspapers, in magazines, on television, and on the radio.
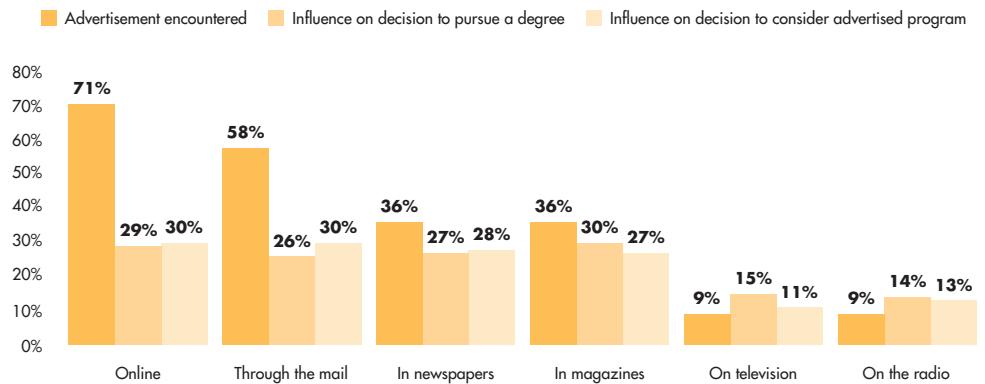
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Advertisement encountered **Influence on decision to pursue a degree** **Influence on decision to consider advertised program**

Figure 11.
Market Penetration and Influence of Advertisements in the Last Six Months

Published Rankings

With the explosion of published rankings, including *Business Week*®, the *Financial Times*®, and *U.S. News & World Report*®, the current study engaged respondents to rank these rankings in terms of how each influenced their decision to apply to a certain program. Overall, respondents are most familiar with *Business Week*®, followed by *Financial Times*®, *The Wall Street Journal*®, and *Forbes, Inc.*

Figure 12 shows the percentage of respondents who are familiar with each of the various ranking publications, by respondents' location of citizenship. Respondents from North America (89%) and Asia (85%) are more likely compared with respondents from Europe (72%) to be familiar with *Business Week*®. On the other hand, respondents from Europe (85%) are more likely than North American (70%) and Asian (78%) respondents to be familiar with the *Financial Times*®. Respondents from the North America (86%) are more likely than Asian (74%) and European (69%) respondents to be familiar with *The Wall Street Journal*®.

Figure 13 shows the influence these ranking publications have on a respondent's decision to apply to a certain program by the respondent's citizenship. The top three rankings publications among Asians, North American and European respondents are as follows:

- Asians—*Business Week*®, *Financial Times*®, and *U.S. News & World Report*®
- North American—*U.S. News & World Report*®, *Business Week*®, and *The Wall Street Journal*®
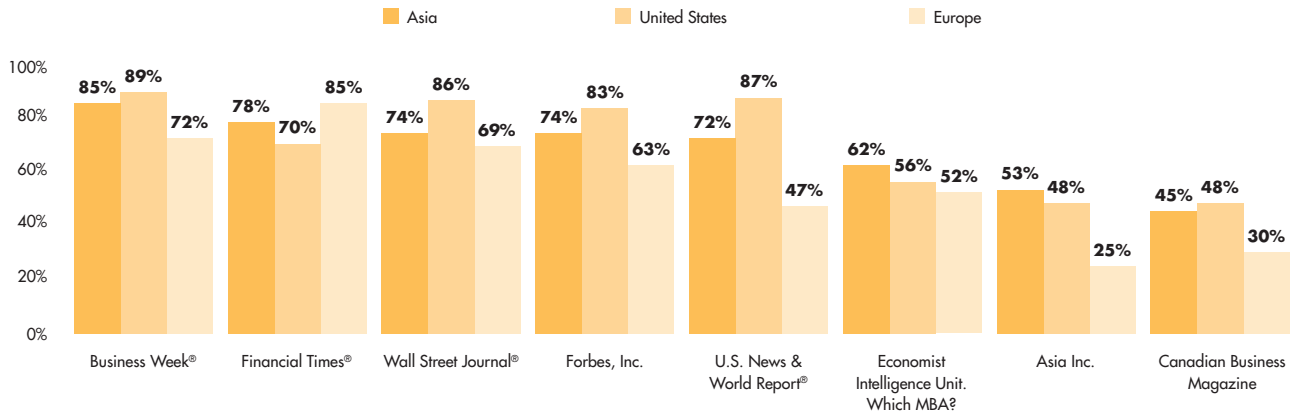- European—*Financial Times*®, *Business Week*®, and *The Wall Street Journal*®

Figure 12.
Familiarity with Various Ranking Publications, by Citizenship
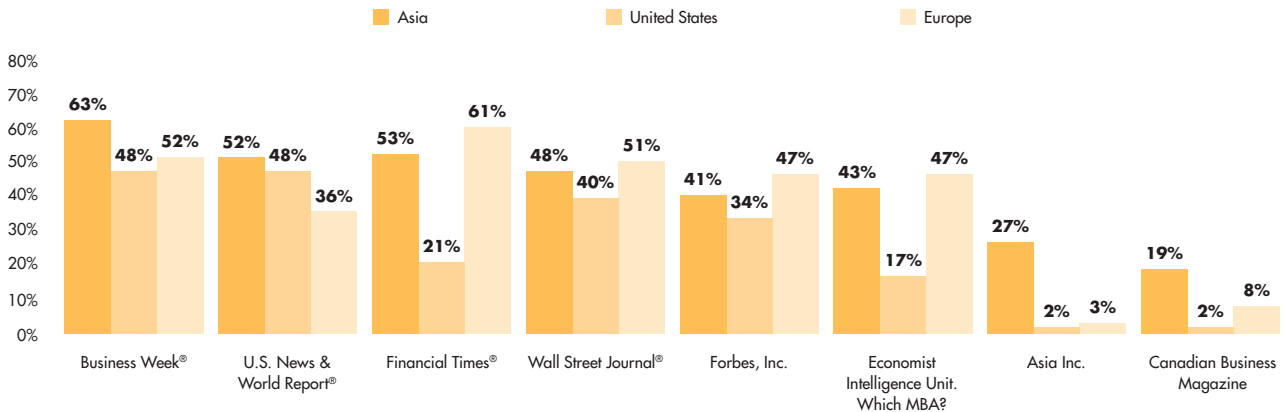

Figure 13.
Influence of Various Ranking Publications, by Citizenship (Percent Extremely or Very Influential)

This report is designed to provide context and a holistic view of major survey results from the 2006 mba.com Registrants Survey. For more details about the survey response, please refer to the mba.com Registrants Survey Comprehensive Data Report, which is available at www.gmac.com/ RegistrantSurvey. The comprehensive report provides data tables and summaries of the overall findings, including breakdowns of the data by various demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, and world region. Figure A-I displays the table of contents for the comprehensive report.

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Respondents from the United States (53%) are significantly more likely than Asian (13%) and European (21%) respondents to consider part-time programs.

For schools, a good marketing strategy identifies potential student groups and then targets each group with marketing activities that specifically address the needs of the group. Any such marketing activities ought to be defined by the results of an assessment of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats uncovered in an organizational assessment. Finally, the marketing efforts should be continuously monitored and evaluated to determine the effectiveness of the strategy. Hence, a marketing strategy requires a school or program to expend time and resources to conduct research throughout the process. This report provides a platform for graduate business schools to begin their development of such informed marketing strategies.

Contact Information

If you have questions or would like additional information or a copy of the comprehensive data report, please contact the GMAC® Research and Development department at research@gmac.com.

Authorship

The following individual(s) made significant contributions to the concept and design or analysis and interpretation of data, and drafting/revising of the manuscript for intellectual content:

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The **mba.com Registrants Survey** is one in a series of five annual or biannual surveys produced by the Graduate Management Admission Council®. The surveys are designed to explore relevant issues, offering data at various depths, depending on the desire of the user and the participation of the school. Survey reports provide an overview of the data in addition to giving context for and implications of the research. They are frequently used to help drive strategic decision-making processes in graduate business schools. All survey reports are available on the Web (www.gmac.com/surveys). Print copies (while supplies last) are free upon request from the GMAC® Research and Development department, research@gmac.com.

Other surveys include—

Corporate Recruiters Survey

Who hires MBAs and why? What are the hiring plans in various industries? How do companies decide where to recruit? Launched in 2001–2002, this annual survey helps schools better understand the job market, clarify employer expectations, and benchmark their career services practices. Employers use the survey results to benchmark the MBA recruitment activities of their companies.

Application Trends Survey

How does a school's application volume compare with that of other schools? Since 1999, this annual survey has gathered comparative application data for the current and previous year from business school programs worldwide.

Global MBA® Graduate Survey

What do students think about the MBA experience as they prepare to graduate? Launched in 2000, this annual survey is conducted every February to provide a comprehensive picture of who MBAs are and where they are headed after they graduate, as well as how they chose their schools and how satisfied they are with their MBA education.

MBA Alumni Perspectives Survey

What happens to MBAs after they graduate and begin to evaluate the value of their degrees? Launched in 2001, these biannual surveys follow MBA graduates long-term to understand their career progression, their expectations, their attitudes about work, their assessment of their education, and general market trends.

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