



2019

MBA Applicant Survey

MBA Admissions: The Human Connection

Survey Committee:

Scott Edinburgh

Krithika Srinivasan

Andrea Sparrey

Scott Shrum

Karthik Palaniappan

Executive Summary

- **Even in today's digital world, applicants increasingly value human interaction**
- **Current students are becoming more influential in applicant decisions**
- **Applicants value having a coach to help them find the right MBA program**
- **Standardized LOR questions have made applicants' lives a lot easier**
- **Applicants seek more transparency and honesty from everyone in the application process**

Thank you to all who distributed the survey!

Schools

University of Virginia, Darden
Vanderbilt, Owen

Large Organizations

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

Medium Organizations

The Sparrey Consulting Group
The Red Pen
Maxx Associates
Round One Admissions Consulting
EXPARTUS

Small Organizations

ApplicantLab
Think and Learn Pvt. Ltd (BYJU's)
August Academy
Adam Markus
Personal MBA Coach
Admit Square Consulting
Paul Bodine Consulting
Philadelphia Consulting
Shine / MBA Admissions Consulting
Master Admissions
John Couke
Salma Qarnain

Affiliates

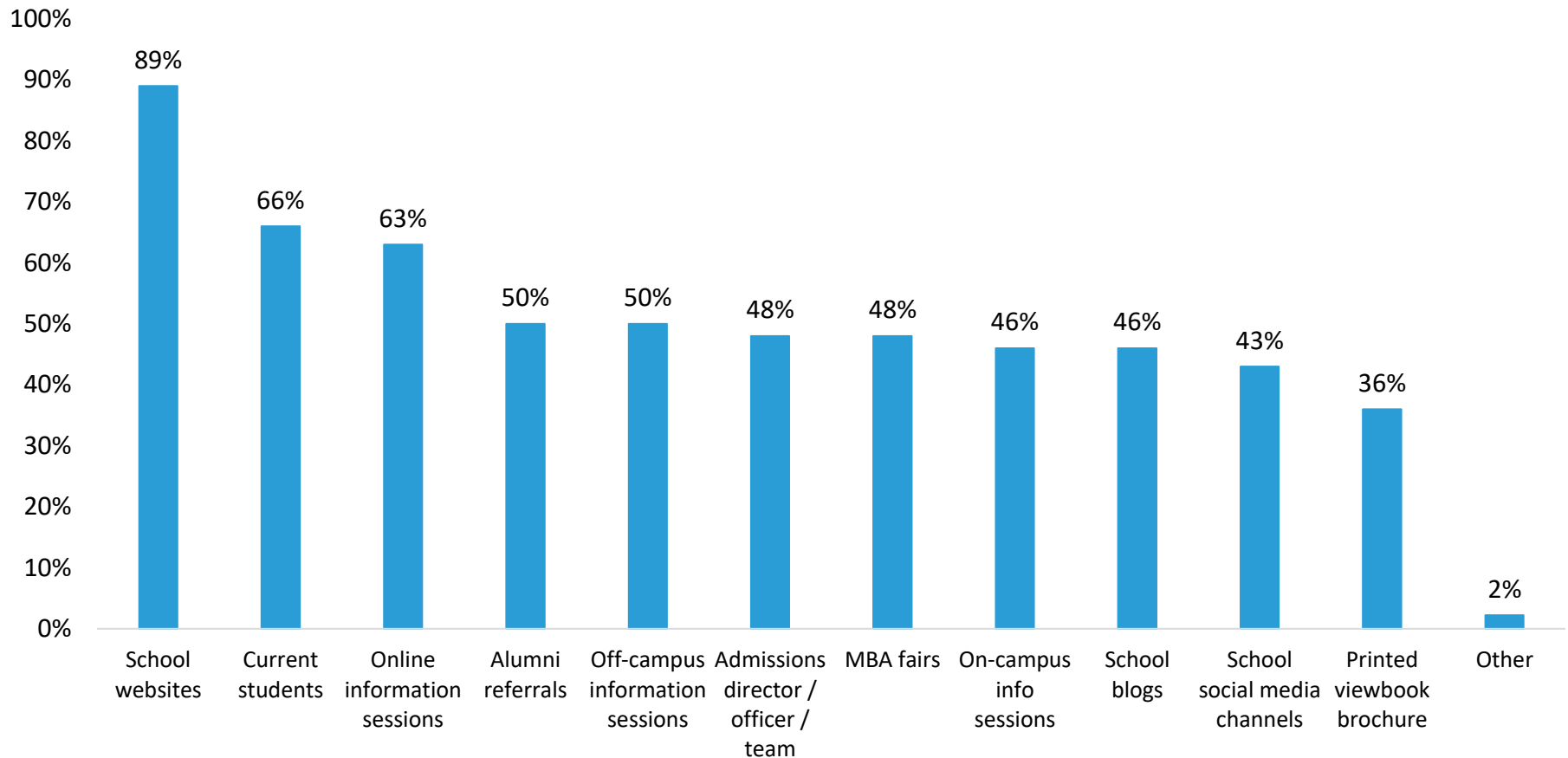
Enrollment Strategies

Other Organizations

GMAT Club

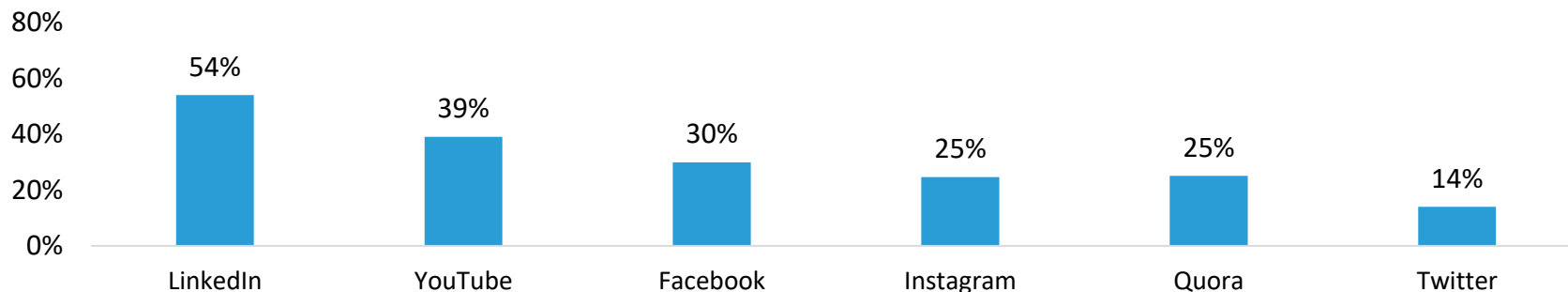
Applicants continue talking to current students. Info sessions and MBA fairs also rise in importance

School resources used (N=866)

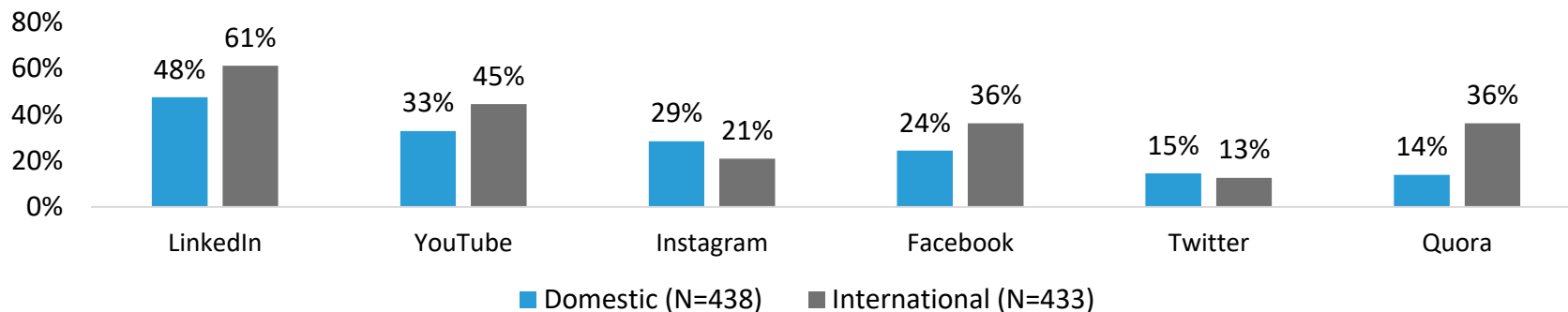


Candidates seek more personalized understanding of programs through social media

Overall (N=871)



By Citizenship



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

Candidates seek regular status updates and transparency

*“Waiting for phone call decisions was agony-inducing...I really think **the phone calls prior to decisions is INCREDIBLY more painful than necessary...** especially when you're waitlisted or dinged.”*

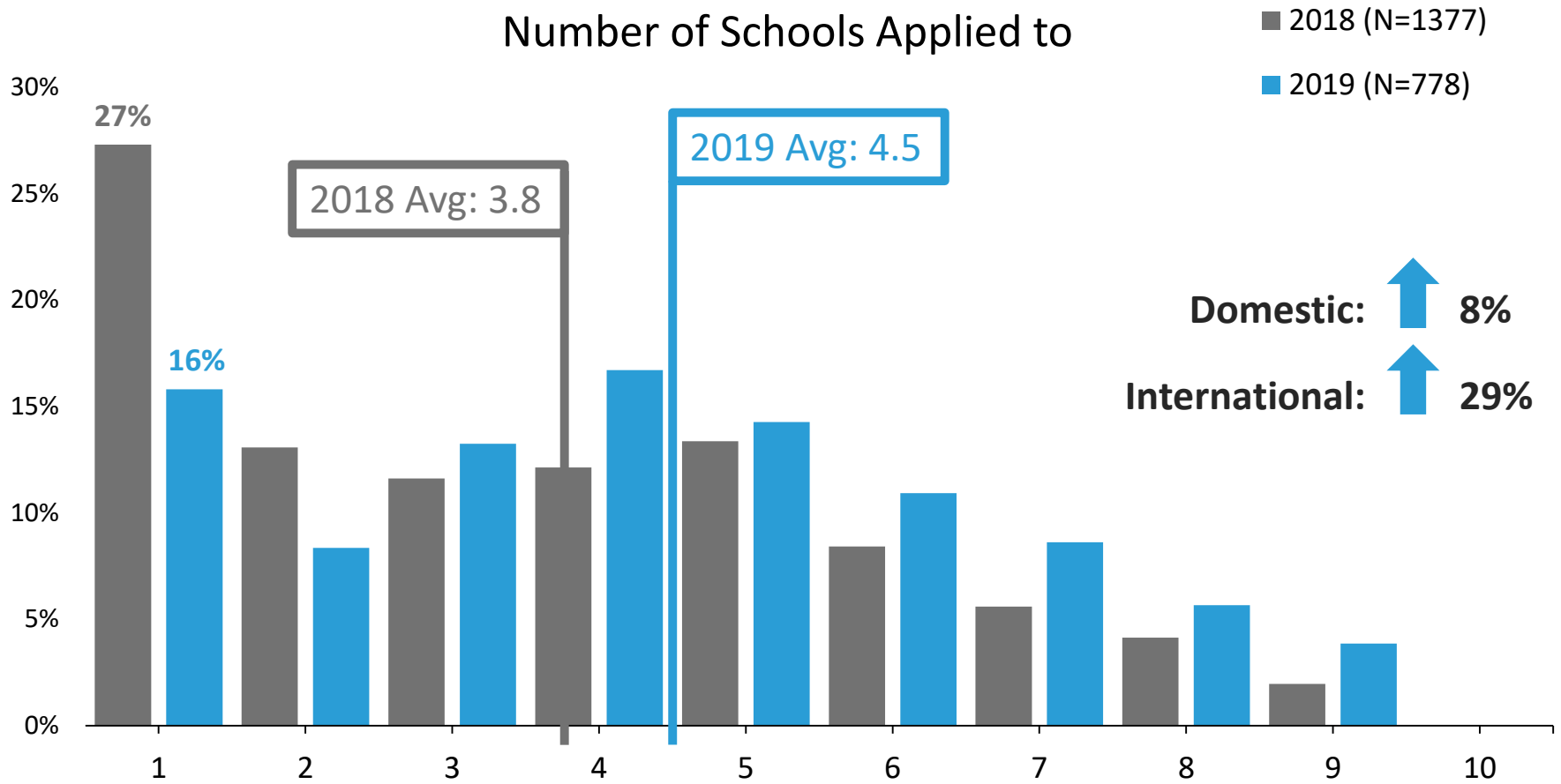
*“If you are waiting on multiple schools (which all release decisions on different days of course), you are stressed out every day. For me, that was four work days that I wasn't at my best. **Best scenario: stop calling everyone.**”*

*“I think from an applicant's perspective it's **very useful to receive communications ...throughout the process**, particularly as an application is going through a final review. There were a few programs I applied to where the team seemed somewhat uncommunicative and this impacted my view of their program.”*

“The process of calling admitted students before releasing decisions is the most anxiety inducing process.”

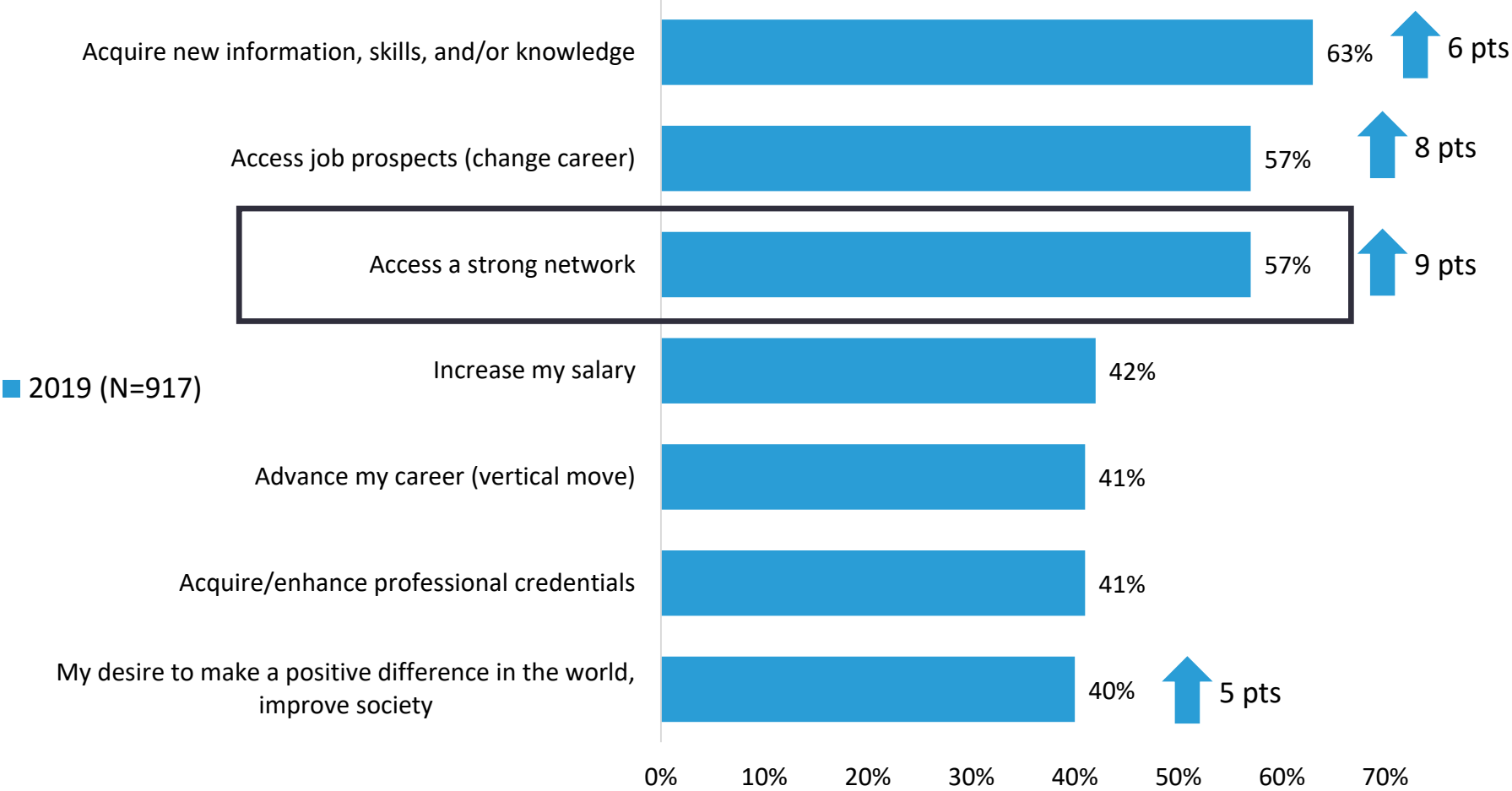
Overall, applicants are applying to more schools

Number of Schools Applied to



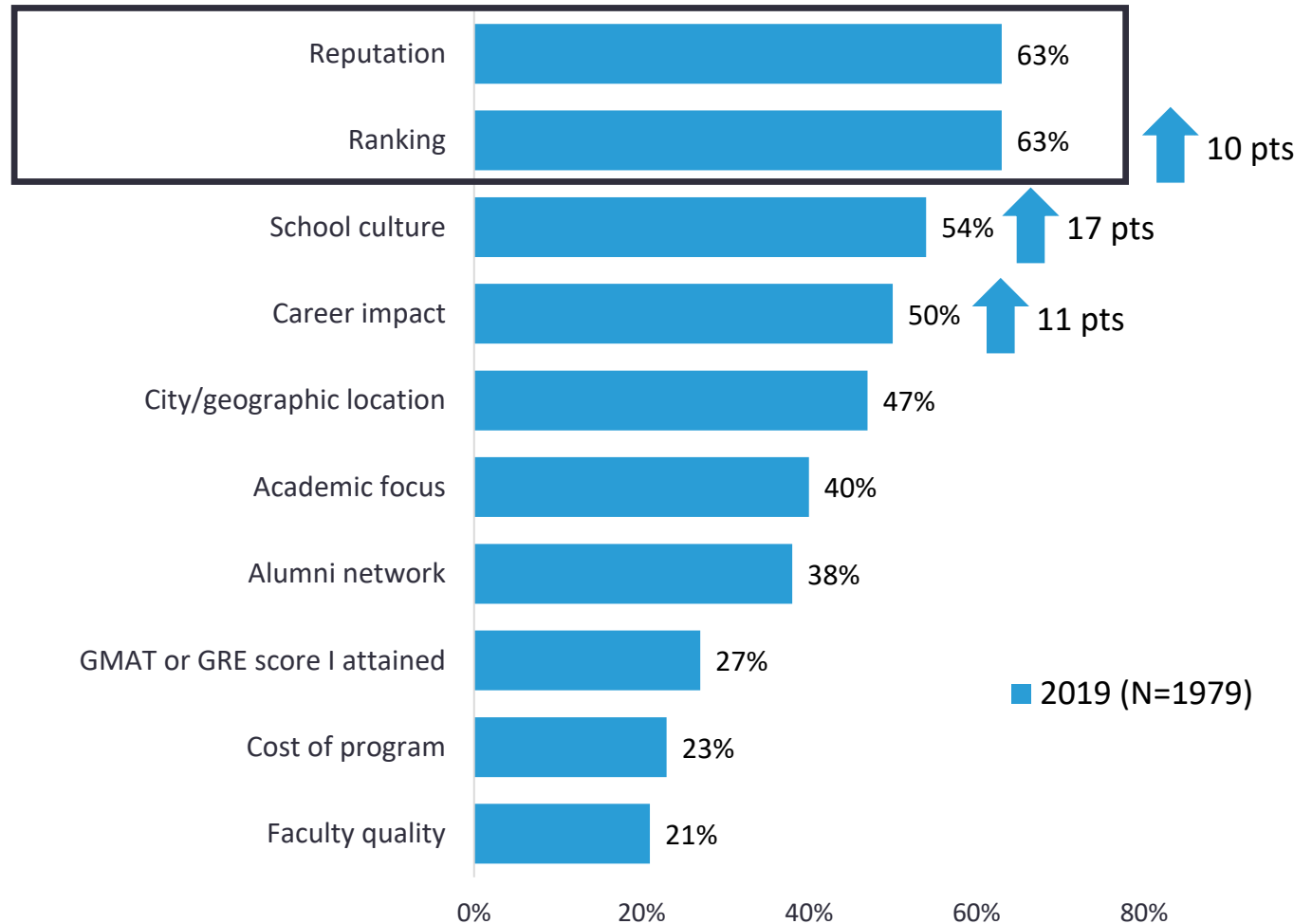
Candidates increasingly value networking in their MBA

Factors with the Most Influence on Decision to Apply to MBA Programs



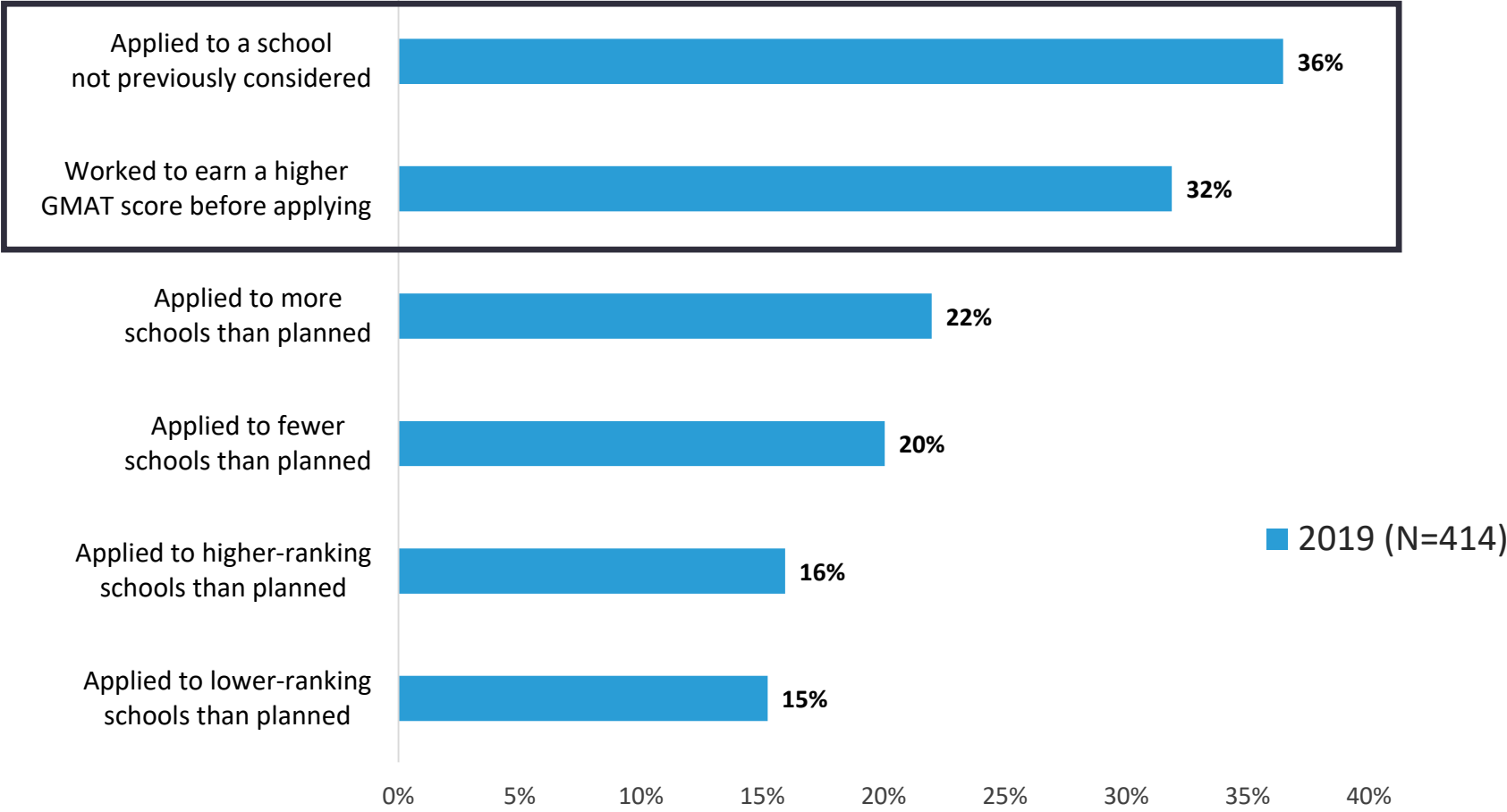
Many candidates continue to rely on reputation and ranking as indicators of future success

Top Factors Influencing Specific Choice of Schools



Consultants advise candidates to target the right schools for them

Top Recommendations Taken from Admissions Consultant



Consultants encourage self-reflection

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

“This whole process helped me understand more about myself, my limitations and goals. I will always be grateful for this process. It was hard, but worth it.”

“My consultant helped me dig deep into my experience and find my story. She helped me articulate my strengths and also communicate my passion and future goals effectively.”

“The biggest help was self introspection. It helped me to articulate my goals, my reasons, my achievements better.”

“Provided a space for me to introspect.”

They also help candidates to plan for their career ahead

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

“She helped me widen the scope of the schools that I applied to and also helped map out my career path that I plan to follow during and after my MBA.”

“The consultant supported me by making my career goal more concrete and feasible.”

Consultants provide support to get through the process, helping candidates stick to goals

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

“The cheers up and the emotional support is priceless.”

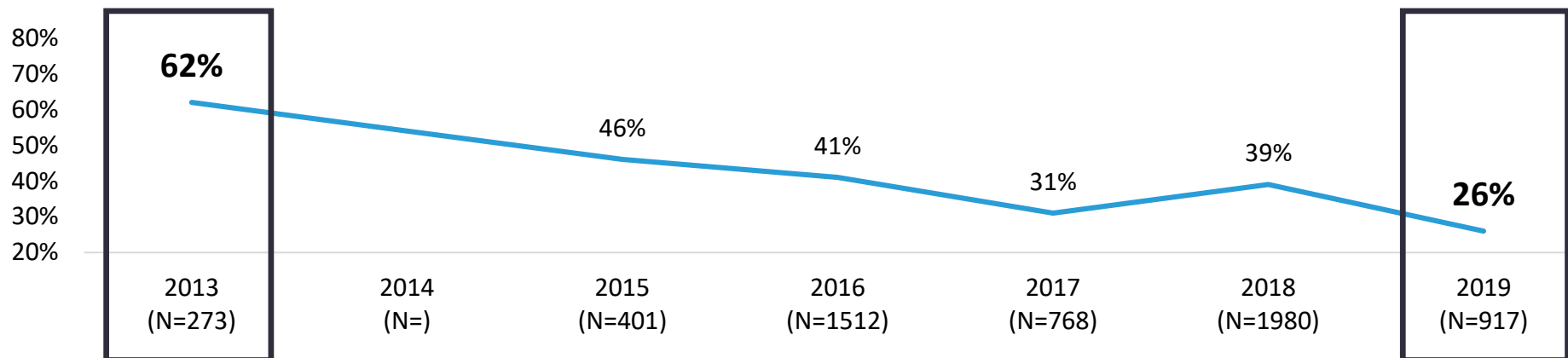
“She really got to know me and my goals/interests/needs. She also provided important moral support when I got a few rejections at the start. She offered advice the whole way through [... including] coming to a decision once I got accepted.”

“She was amazing and helpful as basically a therapist - someone to talk me down when I felt overwhelmed or lost. Great tactical advice as well, but the emotional support was what got me through the hard nights of multiple essay re-writes!”

“My consultant was the guard rails on the bowling lane that prevented me from throwing a gutter ball. She helped me understand the process and answered questions throughout each phase of my application. [] Most importantly, she was just there to be supportive.”

As more schools adopt common LOR questions, fewer applicants are asked to write their own recommendation letters

% of Applicants asked to write their own Recommendations



US: 15% asked
Non-US: 35% asked

Applicants give suggestions for streamlining the letter of recommendation process

Q: Did your recommenders ask that you draft/write recommendation letters for them?

“Applying to business school is a tremendous amount of work, which is fine for the applicant, but asking recommenders to complete numerous different essays and forms is really too much to ask.”

“In today's age recommendation should be a video interview of the recommender. Because it takes time to write a good recommendation but the video will capture an instantaneous feedback.”

“The letter of recommendation is one aspect I feel is very much biased against genuine applicants who don't want to do unethical work of getting a great letter of recommendation by interfering in the process of filling it. But as a result they suffer as they don't get out a bloated, great LOR. So I believe letter of recommendation ... does not give a right view of the applicant.”

The LOR process restricts applicants from applying to schools of interest

Q: Did your recommenders ask that you draft/write recommendation letters for them?

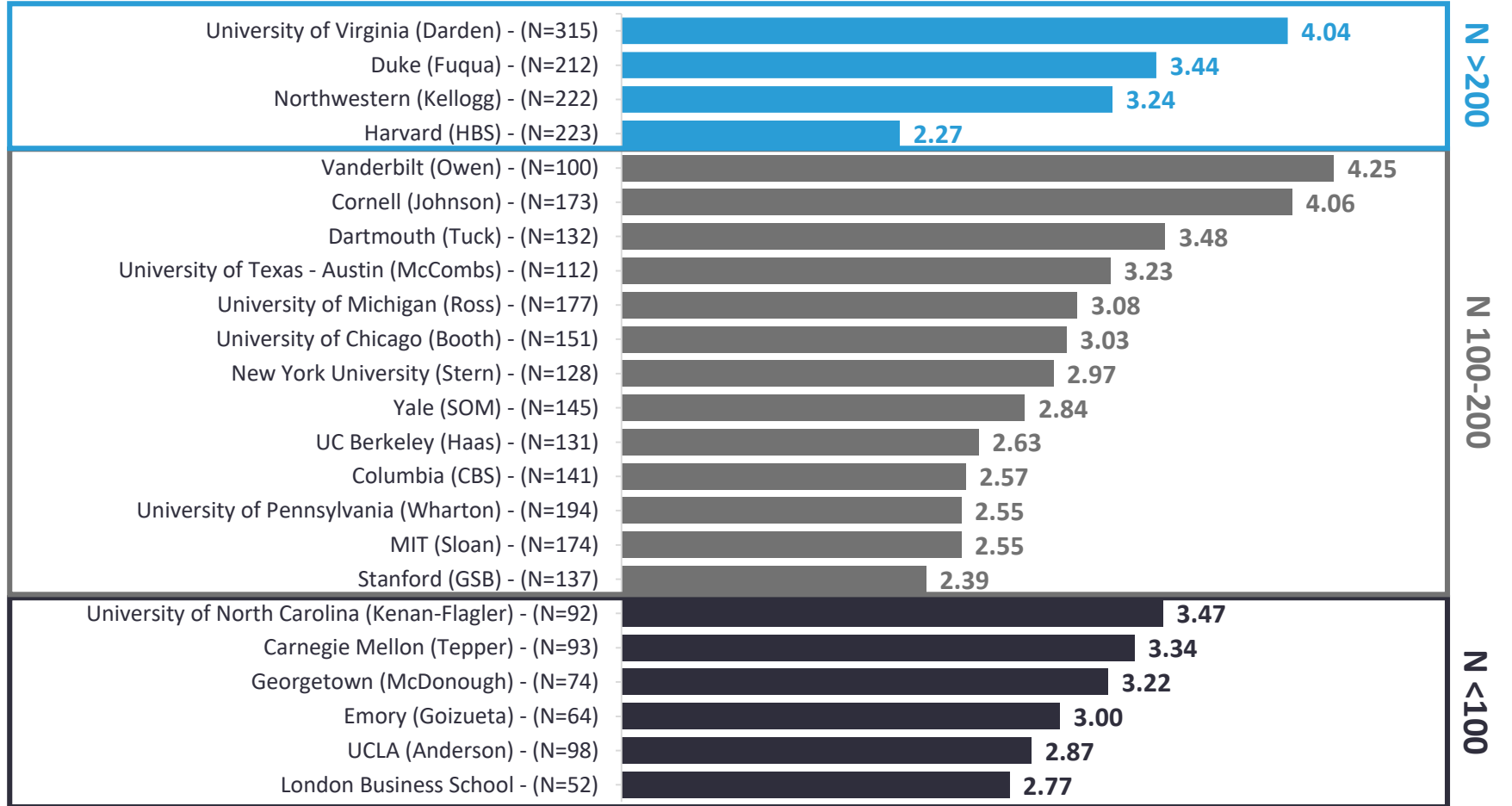
“I think that if recommenders could fill out one common recommendation that could be sent to all schools, it would alleviate a lot of stress I may have applied to a few more schools if I didn't have to ask my recommenders to write additional recommendations...”

“XX had unique recommender essay prompts, which was an extra burden for the two people writing my letters of recommendation.”

“I would have applied to at least three more programs than I actually did...if it had not meant I would have asked my recommenders to complete more forms. In fact, XX was one of my top choice schools, and I didn't even apply because they require a unique essay from recommenders.”

Applicants continue to pay attention to how well schools get to know them

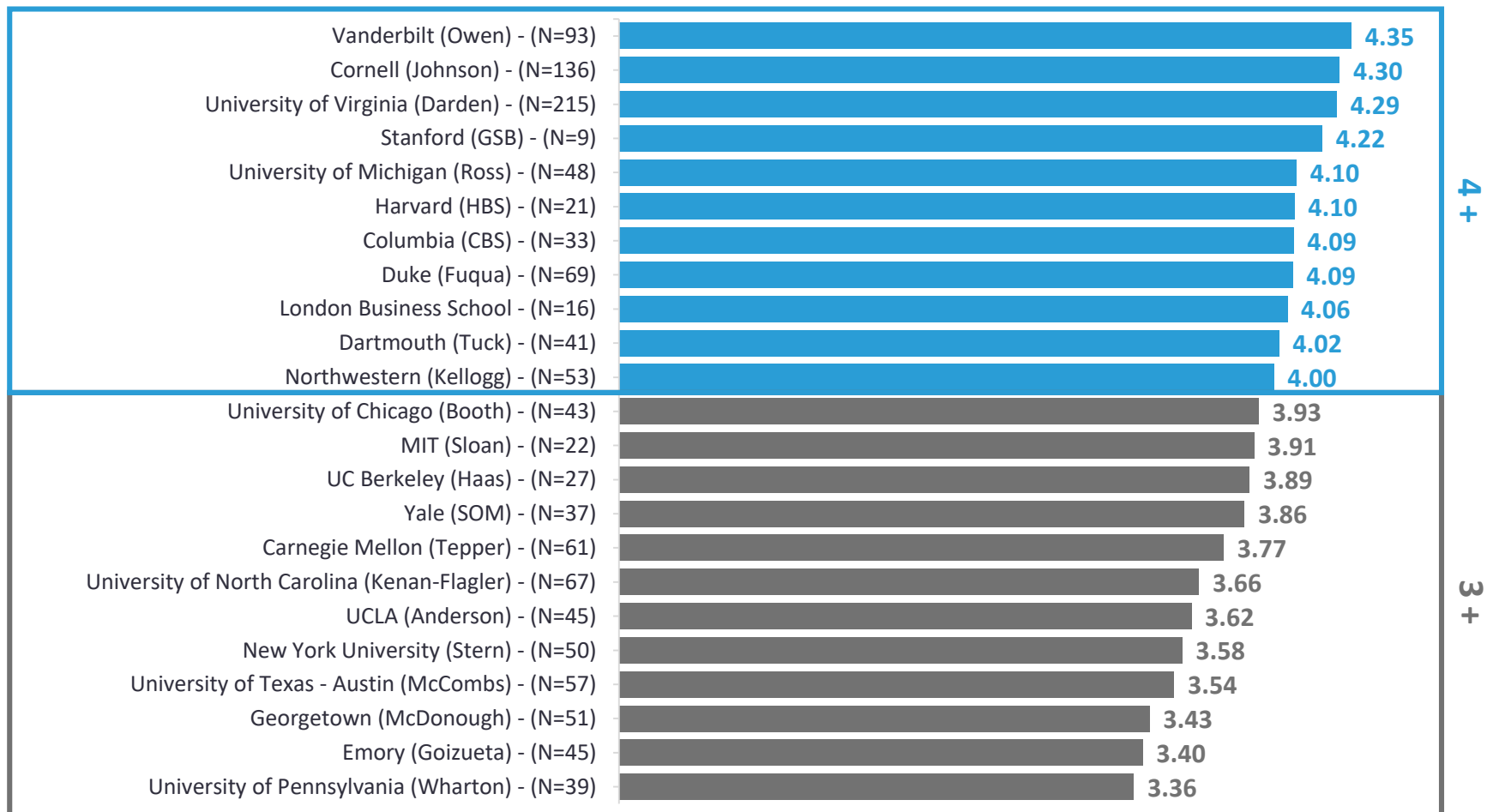
Ratings for How Well Schools Got to Know Applicants (Applied, N>50)



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

No surprise... accepted candidates claim that schools got to know them better

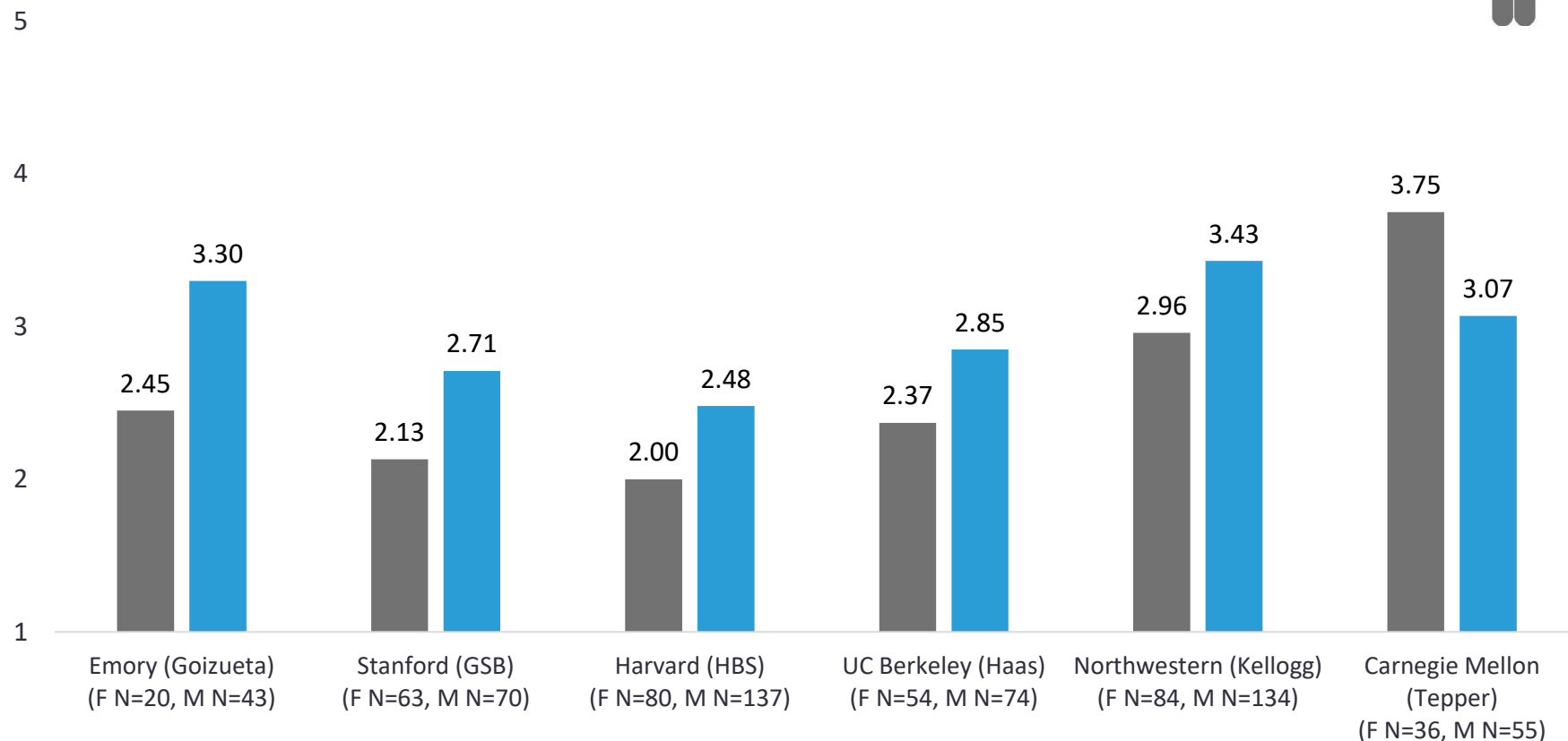
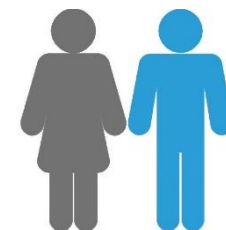
Ratings for How Well Schools Got to Know Applicants (Accepted)



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

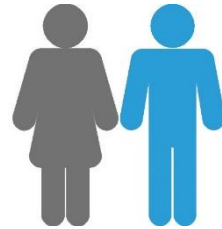
We saw some gender differences when asking respondents how well schools got to know them

How Well Schools Got to Know the Applicant (Largest Disparity - Applied)



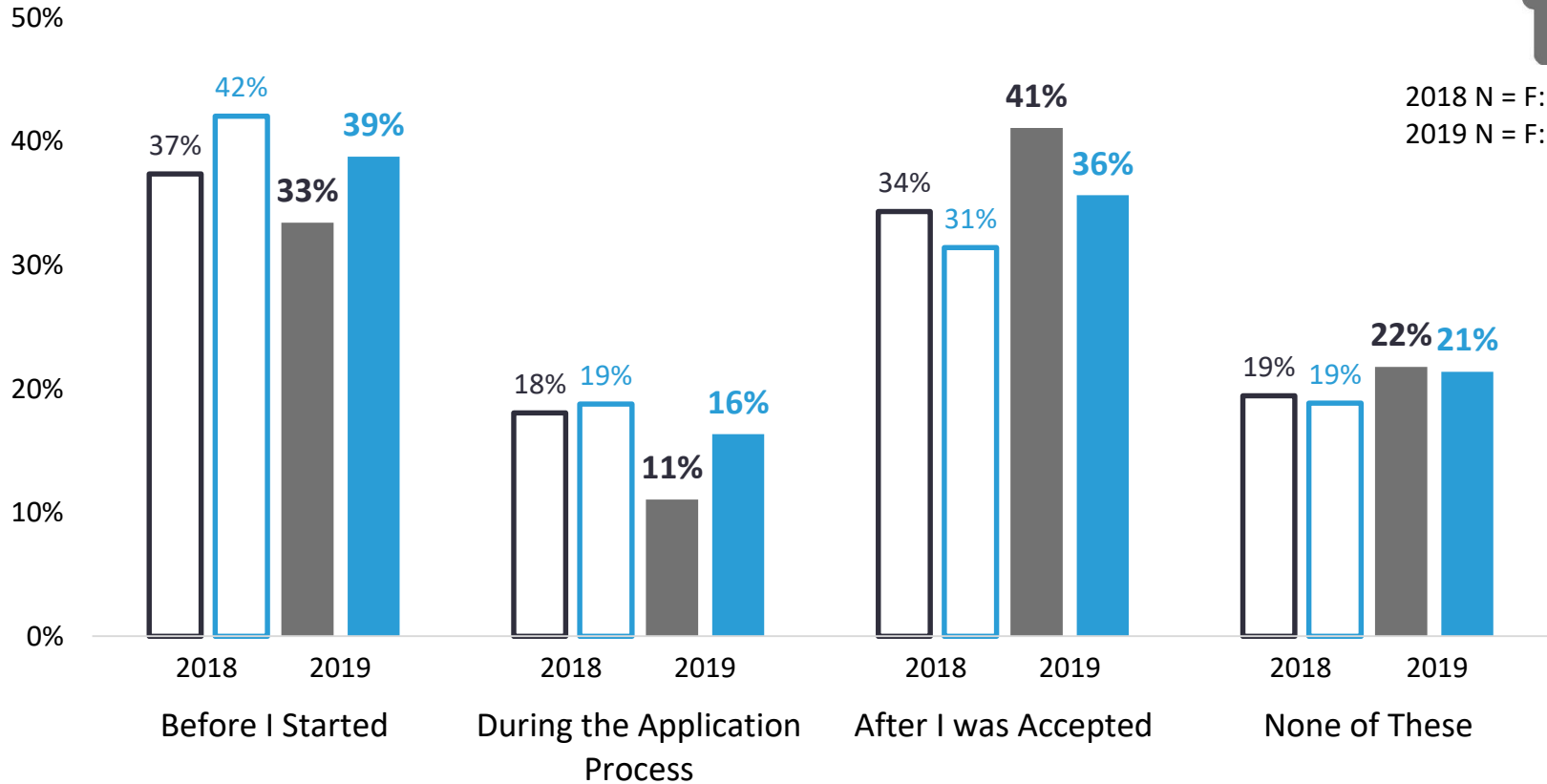
*Schools rated on a 5-point scale, 1 = *Not at All Well*; 5 = *Extremely Well*

Many women start financial planning after acceptance; more men plan before applying



2018 N = F: 725 M: 1225
2019 N = F: 326 M: 575

Financing Degree – Male vs Female



Applicants judge the schools with every interaction and seek a human connection

“XX Campus visit program is not very well organized and it feels like they don't even want students to apply. Class visit was boring and students there were rude to visitors. Decided not to apply because of this experience.”

“...the comfort level and sense of community that I felt, along with the perceived happiness and engagement of the current students I heard speak on panels most strongly influenced my decision.”

“Overall, the on-campus information sessions were pretty unhelpful. The class visits, however, were very impactful to my decision-making process.”

“Schools should have more in-depth curriculum / school experience information sessions and not limit themselves to just the modalities of the application process.”

Interacting with applicants is tough in the age of immediate communication

“Some schools seem to know who their applicants are. Others seem to have no clue. For example, XX (did not apply) has a marketing engine that insisted on sending me EMBA promos at least weekly, perhaps based on my age. It continued even after I unsubscribed and reestablished my profile. My interest in XX went from top 5 to zero almost entirely on that factor.”

“A communications strategy during and after applications that is proactive, honest, and... human? ...goes a long way in establishing trust and (perhaps) yield.”

“I think from an applicant's perspective it's very useful to receive communications from the admissions committee throughout the process, particularly as an application is going through a final review. There were a few programs I applied to where the team seemed somewhat uncommunicative and this impacted my view of their program.”

Questions

Appendix

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

- **Methodology**

- Percept Research helped design and field web-based MBA Applicant Survey from **March 16 to April 7, 2019**
- # of participants: **24 AIGAC Members & Affiliates**
- Participating schools: **Owen, Darden**

- **Response Counts**

- 917 completed interviews
- 778 Respondents who applied to at least 1 school

- **Reading charts:**

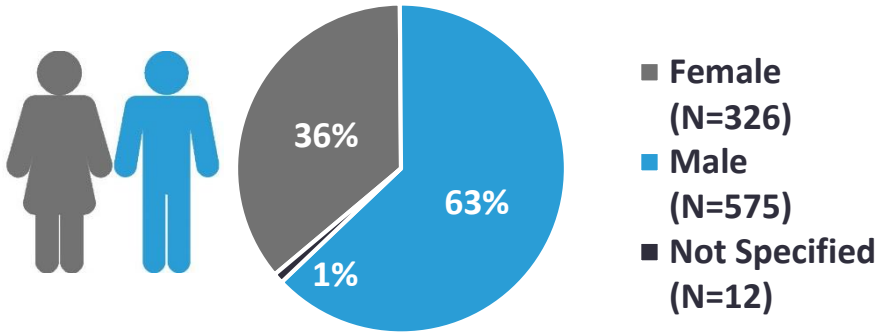
- Percentages rounded off; checkbox answers may exceed 100%
- Data cleaning (speeders and inappropriate responses removed)
- ‘N ‘ values (# of valid responses, will differ for non-mandatory questions)

- **How big is Association of International Graduate Admissions Consultants (AIGAC)?**

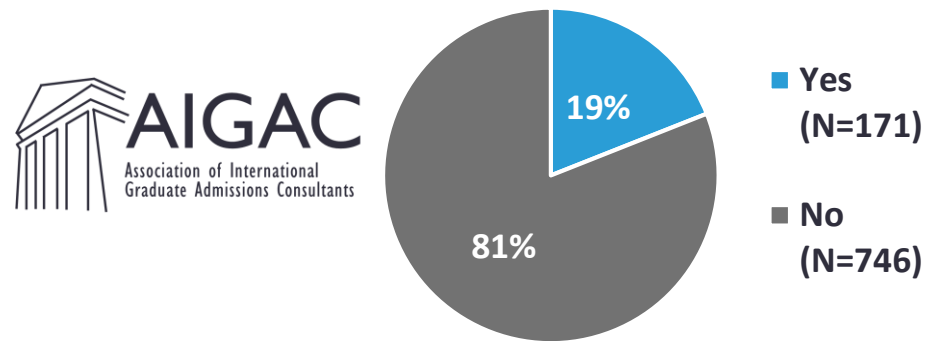
- 180 representatives from 13 countries

Survey Demographics

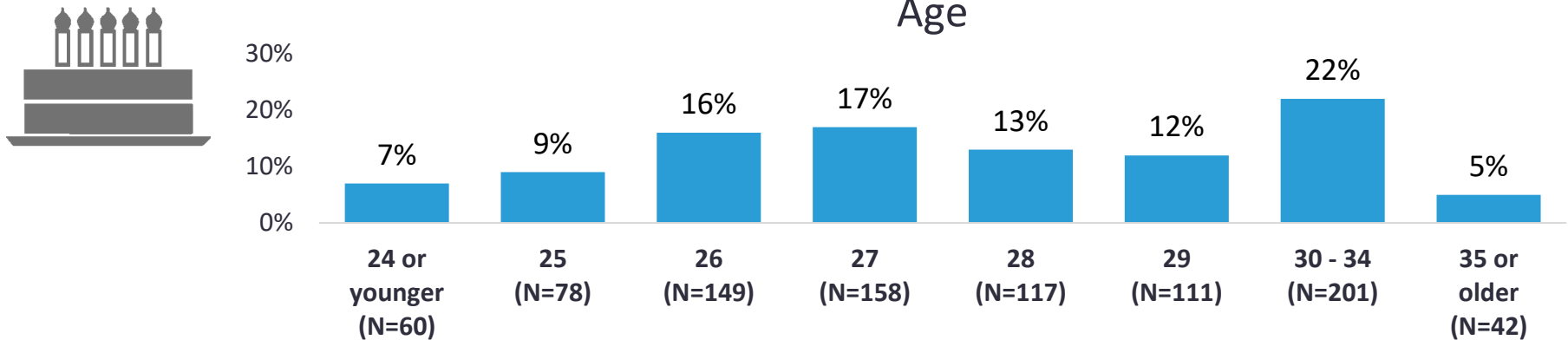
Gender



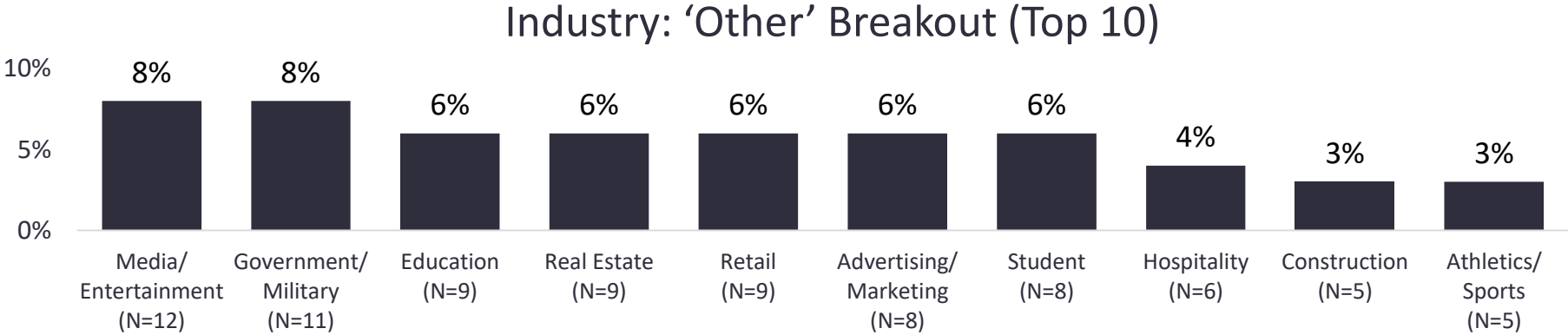
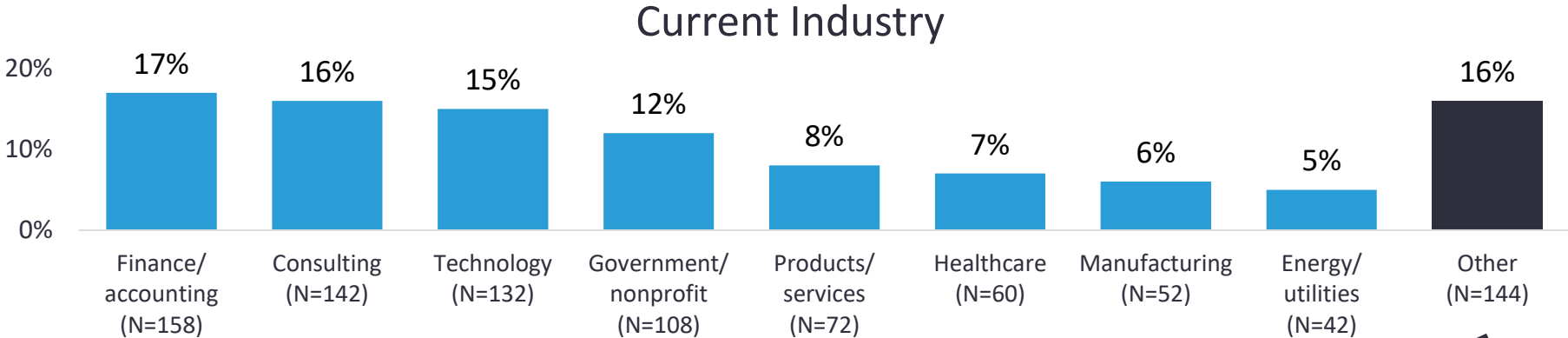
Has heard of AIGAC



Age



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



COMMITMENT TO HIGHEST STANDARDS OF INTEGRITY & COMPETENCE

The Association of International Graduate Admissions Consultants (AIGAC) provides insight and transparency into the graduate admissions process and promotes ethical standards and professional development among our members and stakeholders worldwide.

Membership: 180 Representatives from 13 countries including including Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, India, Israel, Japan, Russia, Singapore, Spain, Taiwan, Ukraine and the United States

[AIGAC Website Link](#)

AIGAC Principles for Members:

- Serving clients and prospective clients in an ethical manner, with professionalism and respect.
- Insisting that clients write their own essays.
- Advocating that clients' recommenders write their own recommendations.
- Avoiding any relationship that creates or appears to create a conflict of interest.

[linkedin.com/company/association-of-international-graduate-admissions-consultants/](https://www.linkedin.com/company/association-of-international-graduate-admissions-consultants/)

twitter.com/OfficialAIGAC

facebook.com/OfficialAIGAC

About Percept Research

TURN INSIGHT INTO ACTION

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



Marketing Communications and Consulting

<http://bschoolreseat.ch/consulting>

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



Market Research

<http://bschoolreseat.ch/customresearch>

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

CONNECT AND STAY UPDATED WITH US

Subscribe to our **blog** for tips and best practices in research and marketing communications.

mbalifecycle.com/blog

Stay up-to-date with the graduate management industry via our **social networks**.

twitter.com/perceptresearch

facebook.com/PerceptResearch

linkedin.com/company/percept-research