



ARE YOU READY

The Critical Role of Graduate Education in Institutional Health

RNL's 2023 Graduate Student Recruitment Report

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Vice President, Graduate and Online Research

Survey Overview:

- ✓ 1,502 respondents
- ✓ Administered in March, 2022
- ✓ Three Student Perspectives:
 - ✓ Current Students, Future Students, and Recent Past

25 Findings Across 8 Areas:

1. Motivations and Enrollment Factors
2. Selecting an Institution/Program
3. Program Preferences
4. Search Practices and Patterns
5. Inquiry and Contact Processes
6. Personalized Response
7. Paying for Graduate Study
8. Personas



2023 Graduate Student Recruitment Report

25 key insights for enrollment leaders based on a survey of 1,500 prospective graduate students

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RNL's 2023 Graduate Student Recruitment Report



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What everyone is talking about...

EDUCATION JULY 11, 2023

Americans' Confidence in Higher Education Down Sharply

Shifting Confidence in Higher Education Among Demographic Groups, 2015-2023

% of U.S. adults with "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in higher education

	2015 %	2018 %	2023 %	2015-2023 change pct. pts.
Party identification				
Republicans	56	39	19	-37
Independents	48	44	32	-16
Democrats	68	62	59	-9
Education				
No college degree	54	45	29	-25
College degree only	57	50	47	-10
Postgraduate degree	67	60	50	-17

Percent of the public that has confidence in higher ed:

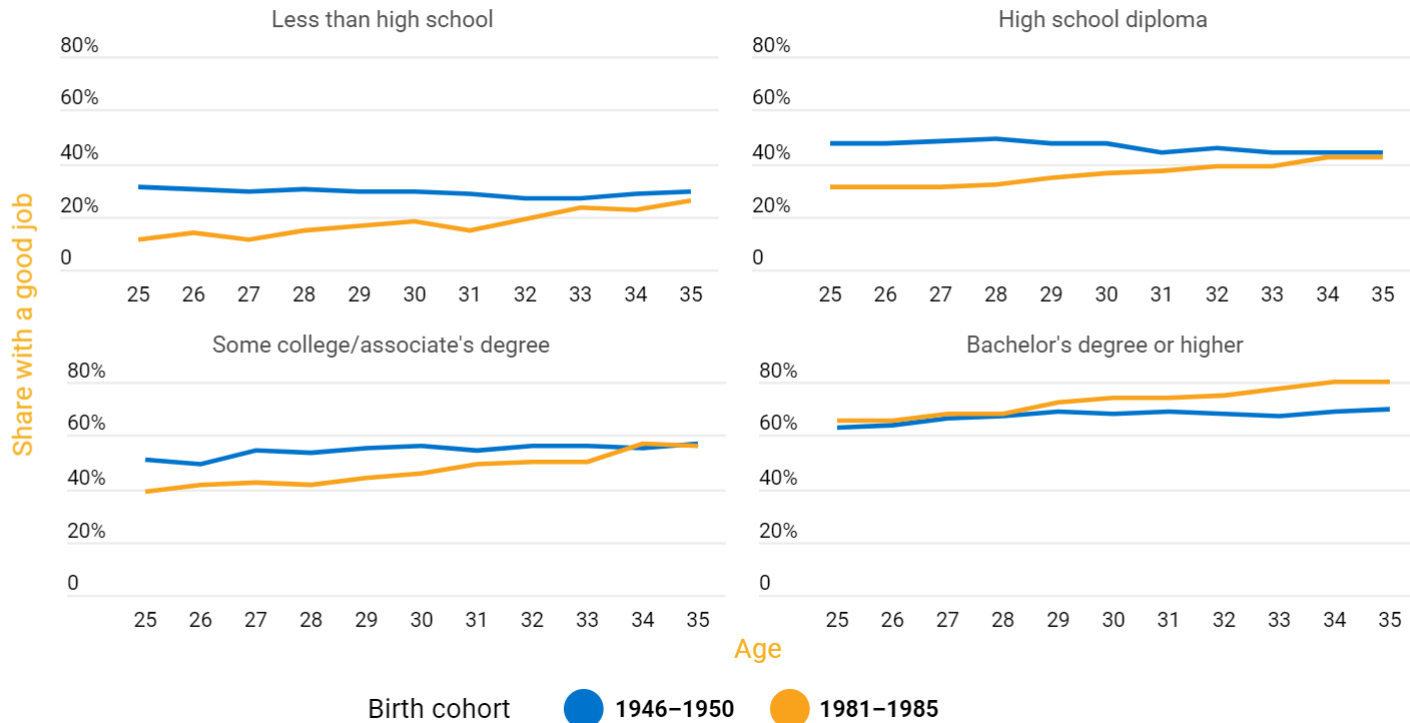
48%

2018

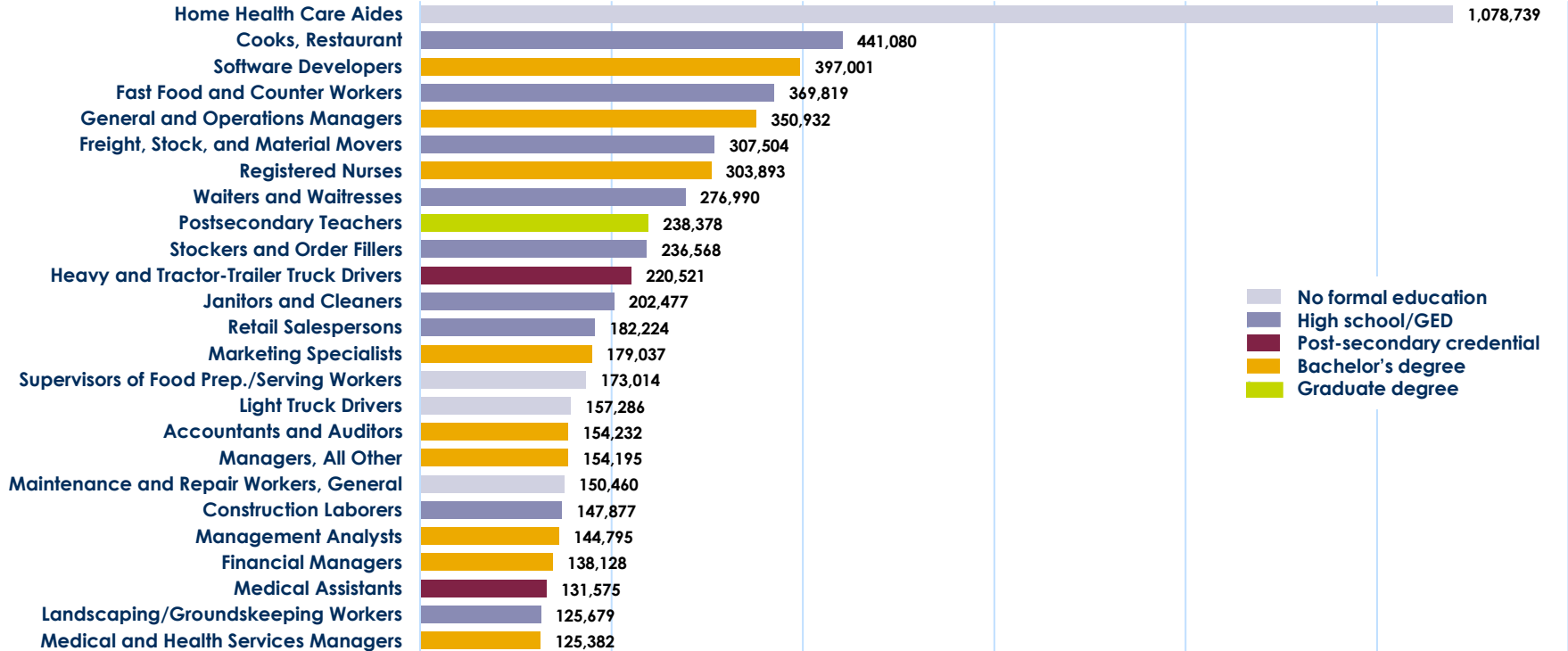
36%

2023

What is driving these attitudes?

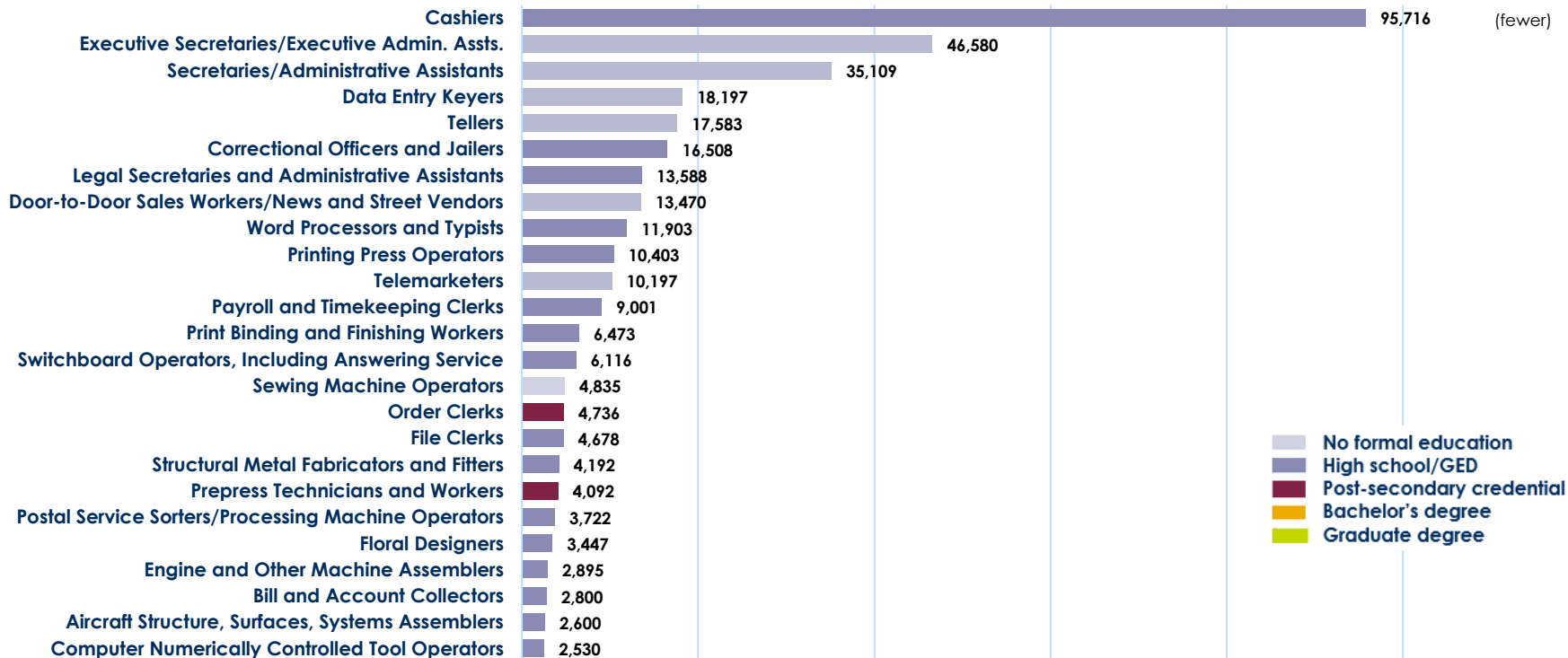


Greatest Growth Occupations (2023-2032)



Source: RNL analysis of U.S. Labor Department, Bureau of Labor Statistics data (retrieved 7/2023, via Lightcast)

Greatest Contracting Occupations (2023-2032)



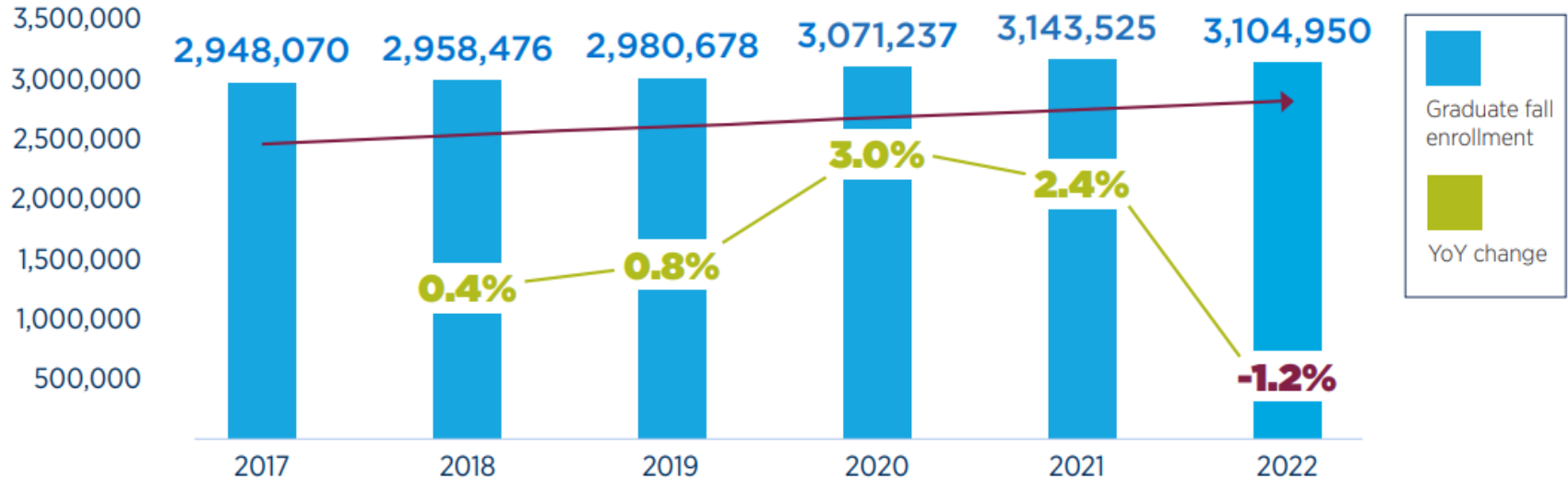
Source: RNL analysis of U.S. Labor Department, Bureau of Labor Statistics data (retrieved 7/2023, via Lightcast)



1 • Graduate Education in 2023

Graduate enrollment is normalizing.

Figure A: Graduate fall enrollment trends 2017-2022



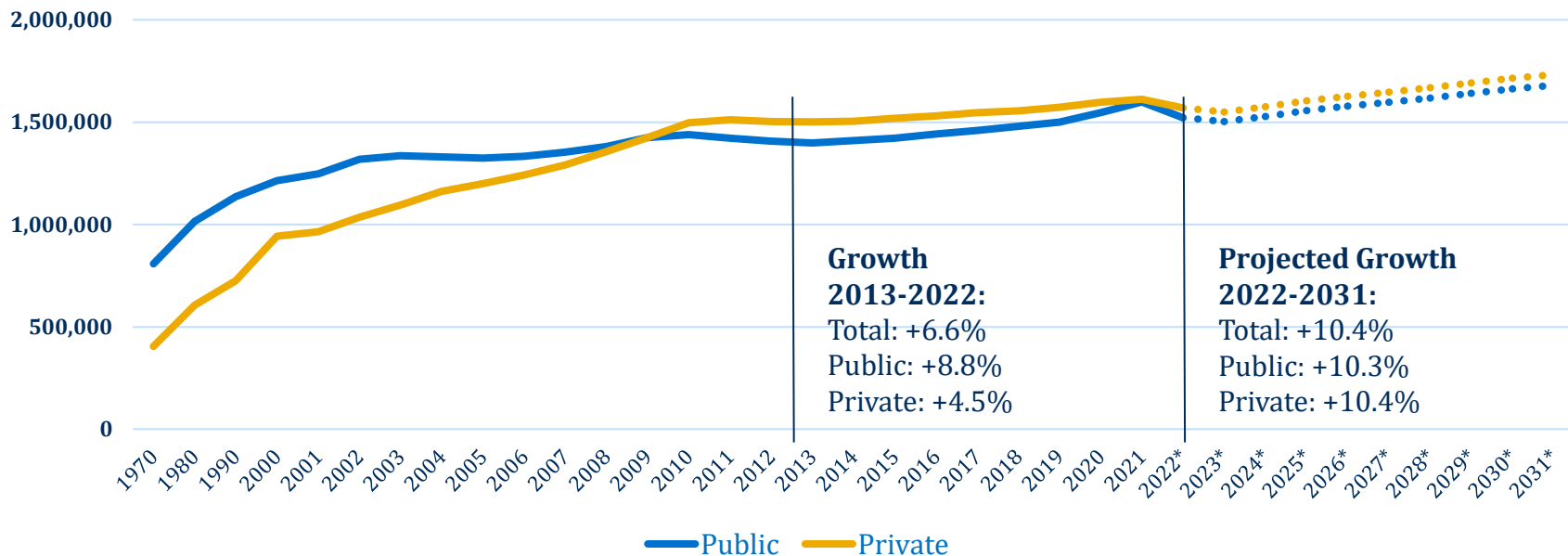
Source: National Student Clearinghouse, CTEE, Fall 2022



Schedule a time for a guided tour of all 25 findings and get access to the full report.

Graduate enrollment will continue to grow across all types of institutions.

Graduate Enrollment Projected to 2031 (by institution type)

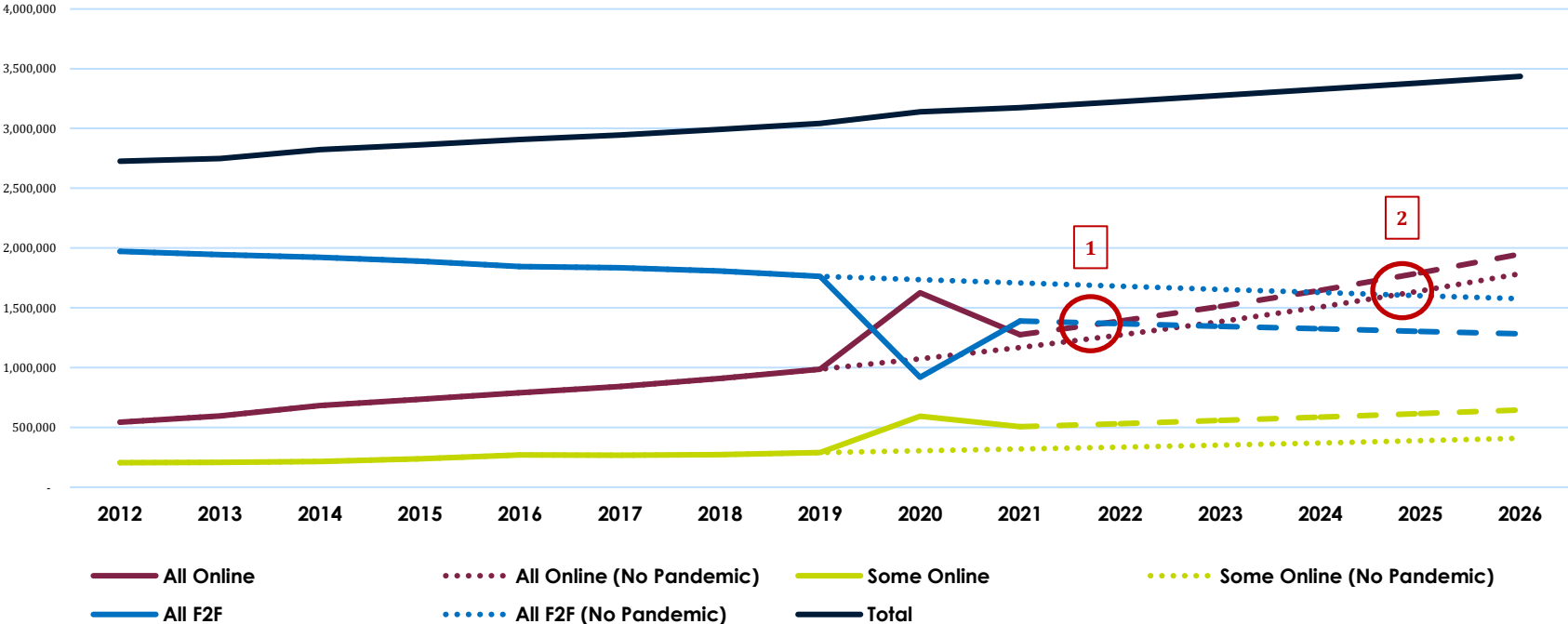


*Source: IPEDS, Digest of Education Statistics 2021.

Graduate Enrollment Trends and Format Choice

(With and Without the Pandemic)

Fall Enrollment: Graduate



Source: RNL Analysis of IPEDS Fall Enrollment Snapshot data. (U.S. degree-granting institutions of at least two years.)

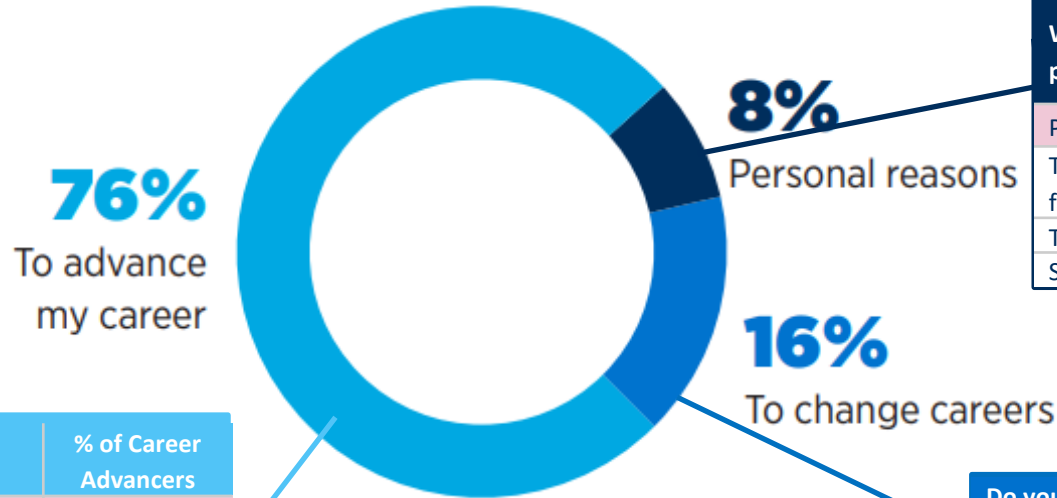
2

Graduate Student Motivations and Enrollment Priorities



Graduate students enroll in order to advance their careers – and make more money.

Primary Motivation for Enrolling in Graduate Study



Which is closest to your personal reason?	% of Personal Reasons
Personal fulfillment	50%
To set an example for family member(s)	14%
To make more money	27%
Something else	9%

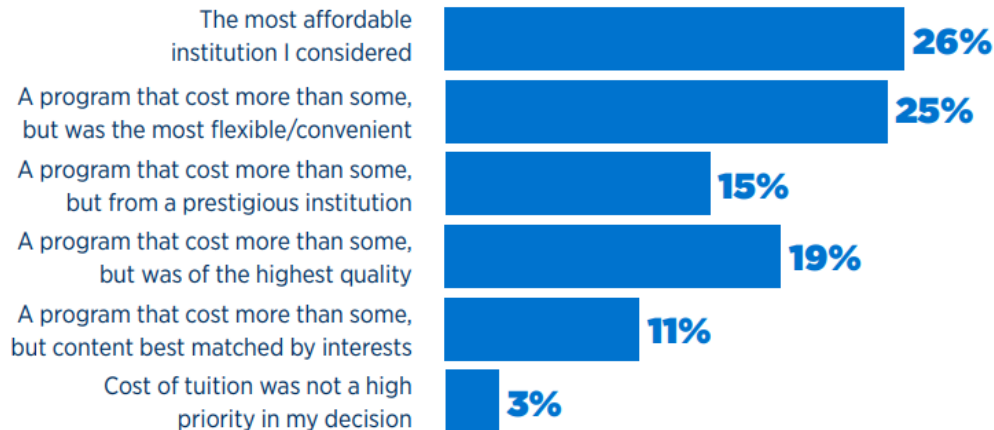
Which is most important to you in your advancement?	% of Career Advancers
To make more money	66%
To have a better title	14%
To have more responsibility	12%
Something else	8%

Do you plan to change industries/sectors when you change careers?	% of Career Changers
Yes	89%
No	11%

2/3. Cost, future employment, and flexible course options drive enrollment decisions, but....

IMPORTANCE OF FACTORS IN ENROLLMENT DECISIONS	IMPORTANT (IMPORTANT AND VERY IMPORTANT)	
	NOT YET ENROLLED	ENROLLED
Cost	77%	72%
Future employment opportunities	70%	70%
Flexible course options (online, evening, weekend, etc.)	72%	63%
Financial aid/scholarship opportunities	69%	68%
Academic reputation	66%	69%
Campus location (close to work/home)	54%	53%
Personalized attention prior to enrollment	39%	41%
Recommendations from family/friends/employer	33%	36%
Size of institution	22%	28%

Balancing cost and other factors



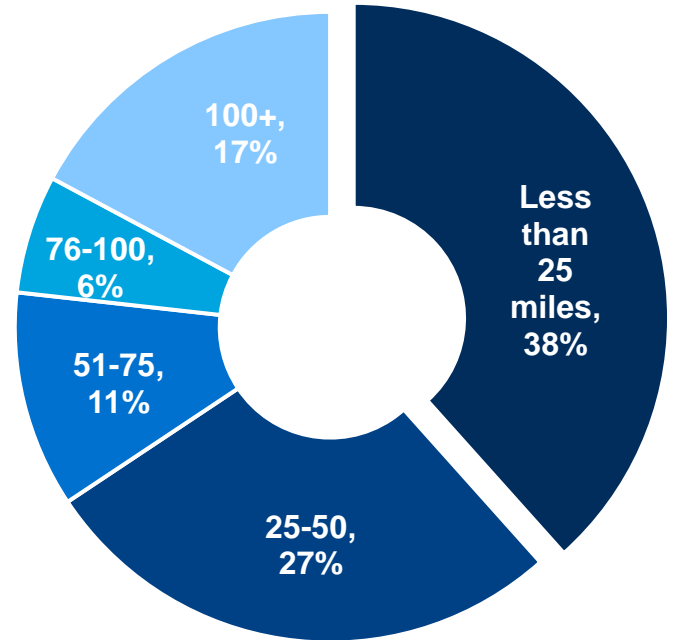
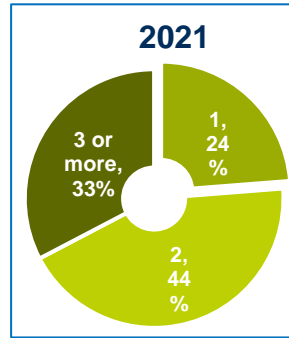
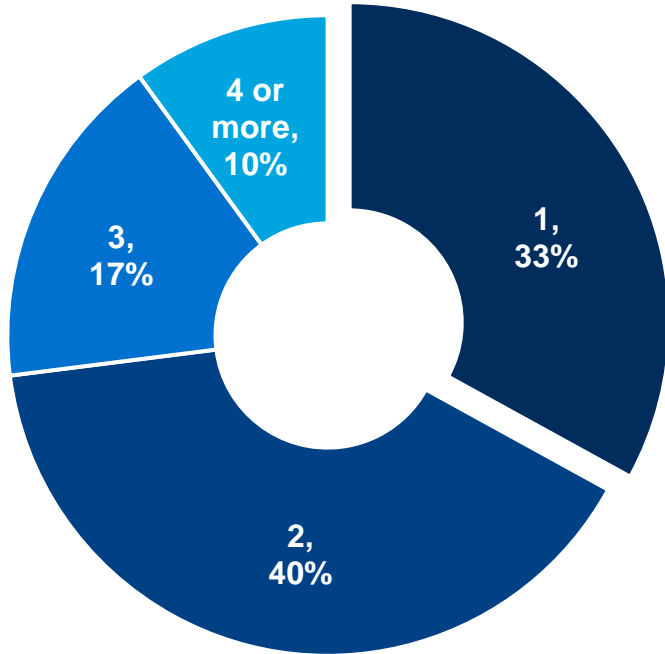
*Note: data are organized by the percent of ALL respondents who indicated that each factor was important.



3. Selecting an Program

4/5. You are competing, and your competition is local – even for online students.

To how many schools/programs did/will you apply?



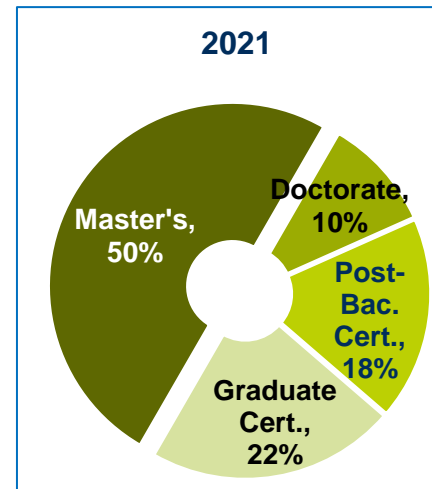
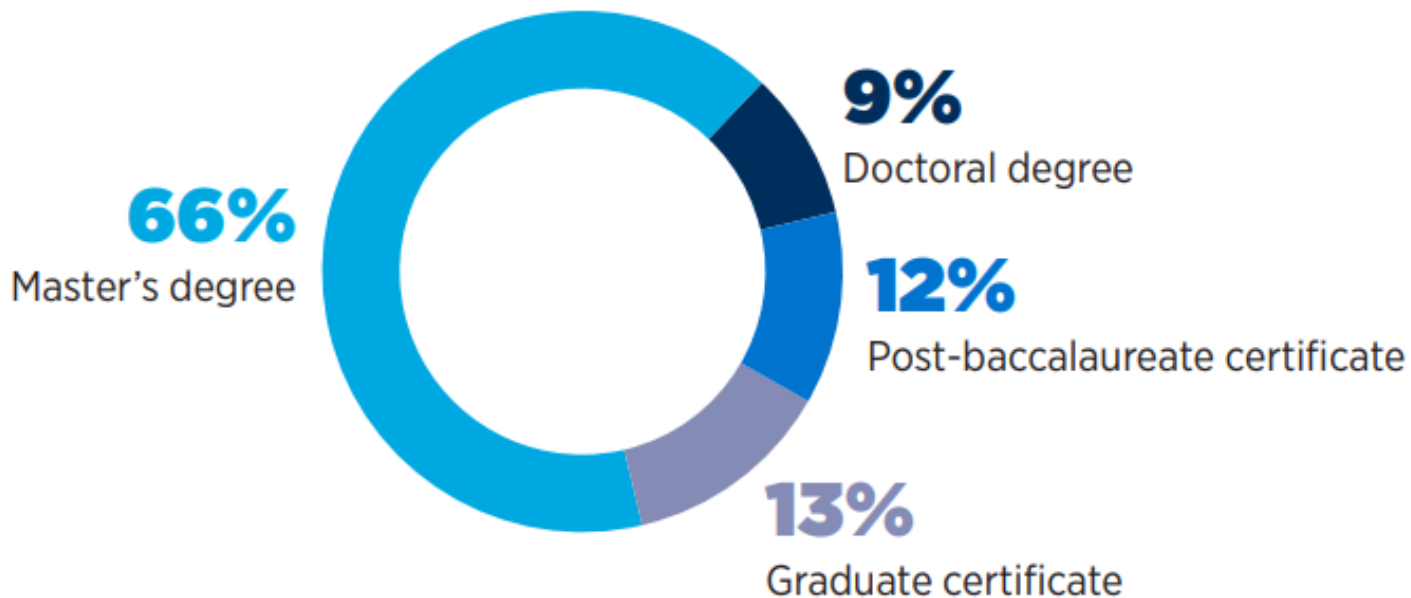
How far from where you reside (or resided at the time) was the furthest school/program you considered?



4. Program Preferences

6. Master's degrees continue to dominate the graduate market with steady demand for non-degree

Which type of program did/will you consider or enroll in? (Select one)



7. Business dominates, but demand for health and computer/info sciences programs continue follows.

Subject by level of program

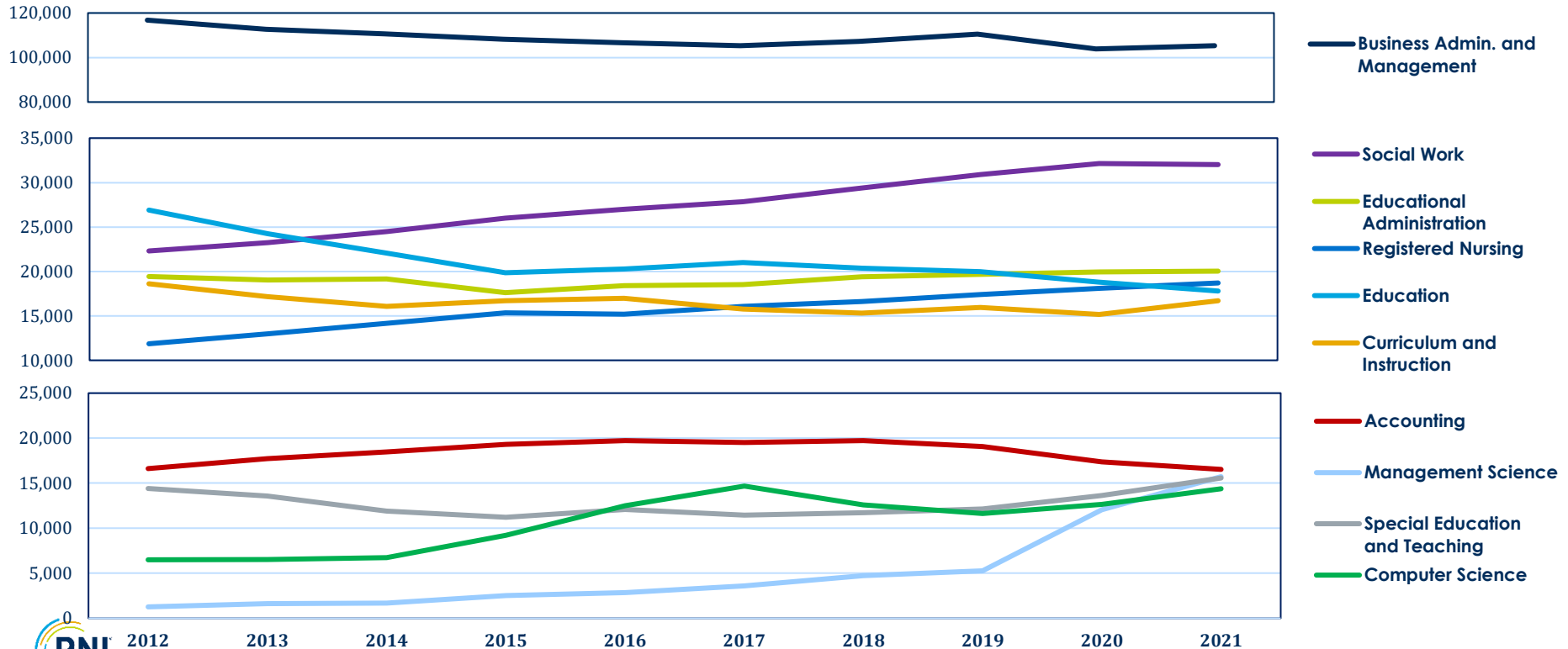
SUBJECT	POST-BACCALAUREATE CERTIFICATE	GRADUATE CERTIFICATE	MASTER'S DEGREE	DOCTORAL DEGREE	ALL
Business	22%	24%	27%	8%	24%
Health Professions	16%	11%	11%	30%	13%
Computer/Information Science	12%	13%	10%	8%	11%
Education	7%	8%	9%	10%	9%
Counseling/Psychology	9%	6%	7%	11%	7%
Arts and Humanities	5%	6%	6%	2%	6%
Social Work/Public Administration	3%	4%	5%	2%	5%
Engineering	7%	6%	5%	4%	5%
Biological/Physical/Earth Sciences	3%	3%	5%	8%	5%
Communications	3%	6%	4%	3%	4%
Criminal Justice/Law/Homeland Security	3%	4%	4%	7%	4%
Social Sciences	3%	2%	4%	2%	3%
Other	8%	7%	4%	7%	5%

2021-2023 Comparison:

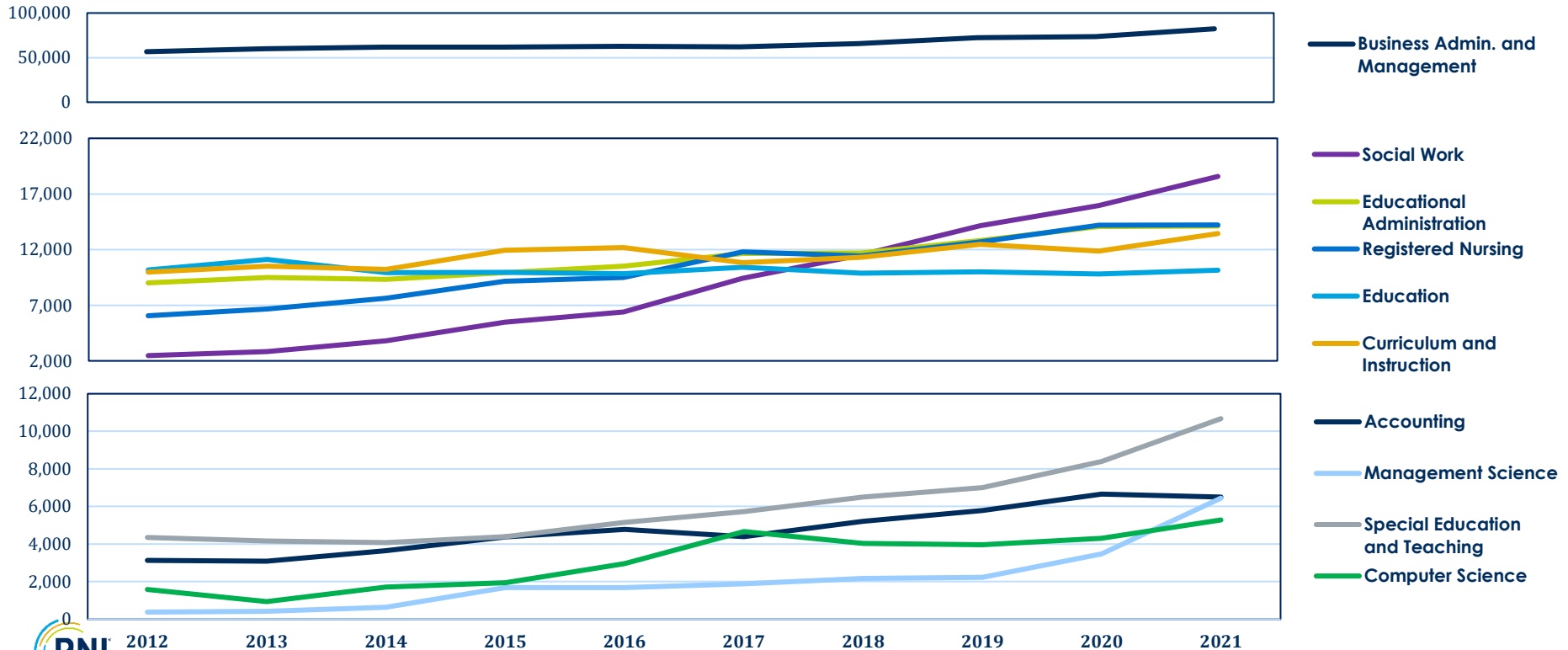
In 2021, 20% indicated that they would enroll in Business, 14% in Health Professions, 12% in Computer/Information Sciences, and 10% in Education.



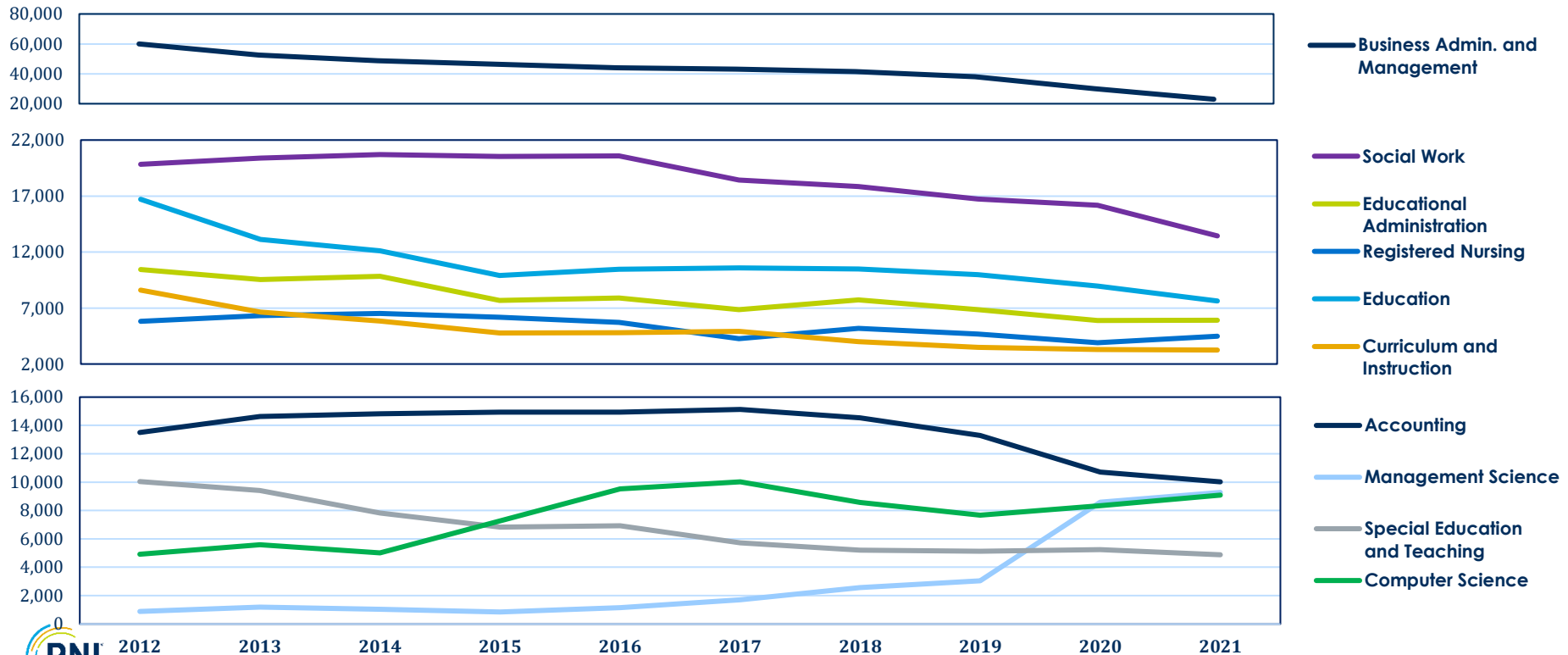
10 Largest Master's Growth 2012-2021 (All Formats)



10 Largest Master's Growth 2012-2021 (Online growth)

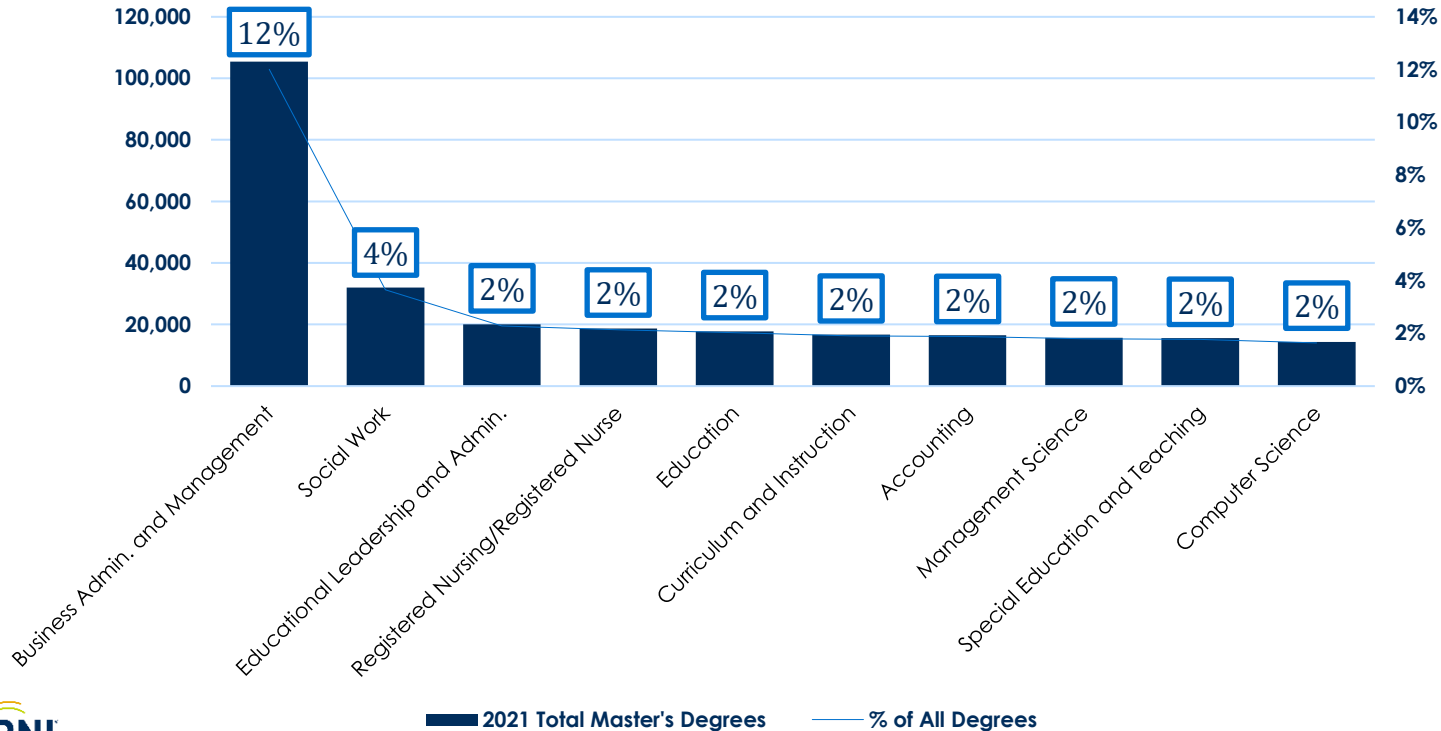


10 Largest Master's Growth 2012-2021 (Classroom growth)



The 10 largest degree areas dominate the market

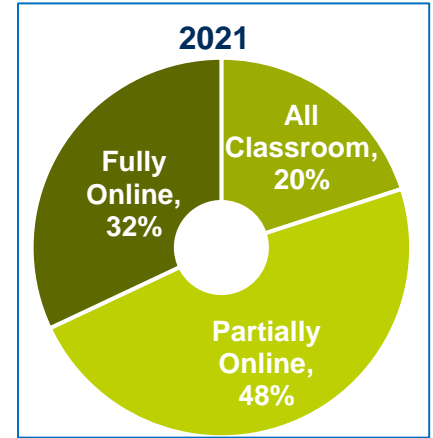
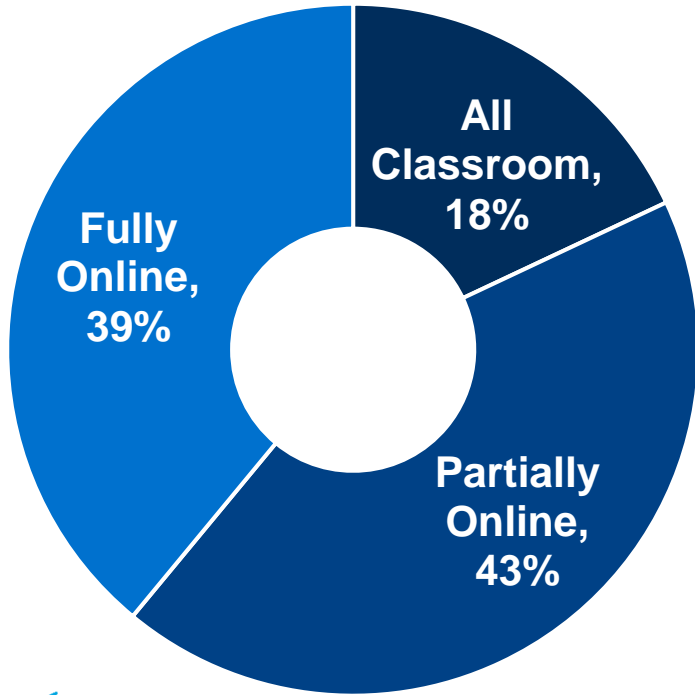
2021 Master's Degree Production: 10 Largest Programs



Among 1,003 different master's degree categories, the 10 largest degree areas account for 32 percent of the total in 2021.

8. The pandemic had no negative affect on online demand, in fact it has increased in the last two years.

In which instructional format did/will you enroll in graduate classes?



Format: By Level	Post-bac. Cert.	Grad. Cert.	Master's	Doctoral
All online	42%	42%	44%	20%
Partially online	44%	43%	40%	37%
All classroom	14%	15%	16%	43%

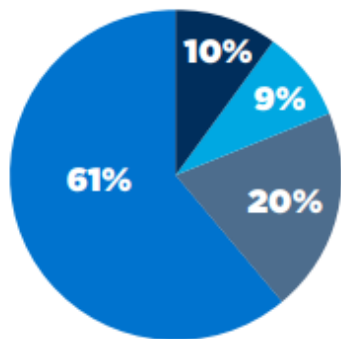
2021 and 2022 data indicate that graduate students – expect accelerated courses.

2021 Graduate Student Recruitment Report

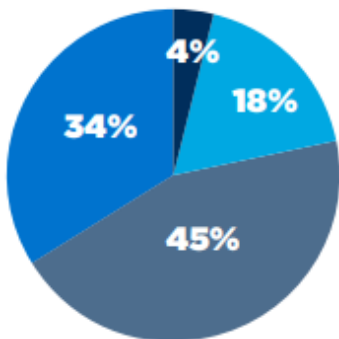
Only classroom students want semester-length courses and programs.



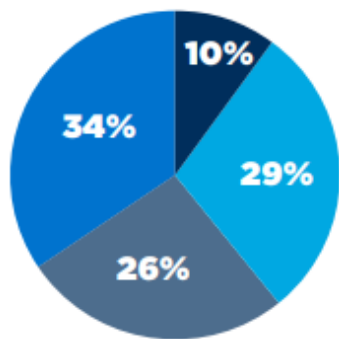
CLASSROOM



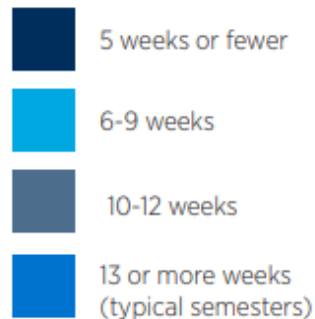
HYBRID



ONLINE



Preferred Course Length



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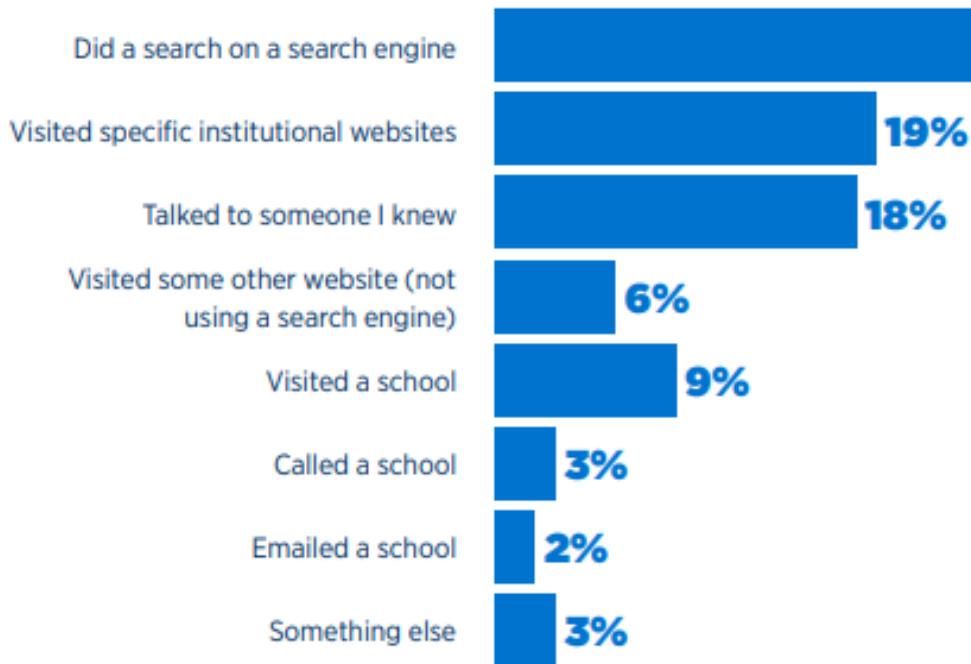




5 • Search Practices and Patterns

9 & 10. Nearly all graduate students use a search engine in the opening days of their search.

What was/will be the first step in your search for a graduate program?



WHAT WERE YOUR OTHER EARLY SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT GRADUATE PROGRAMS?

Search engines	52%
Institutional websites	49%
Printed materials from institutions	23%
Ads on social media sites	21%
Other websites	21%
Videos on YouTube or elsewhere	19%

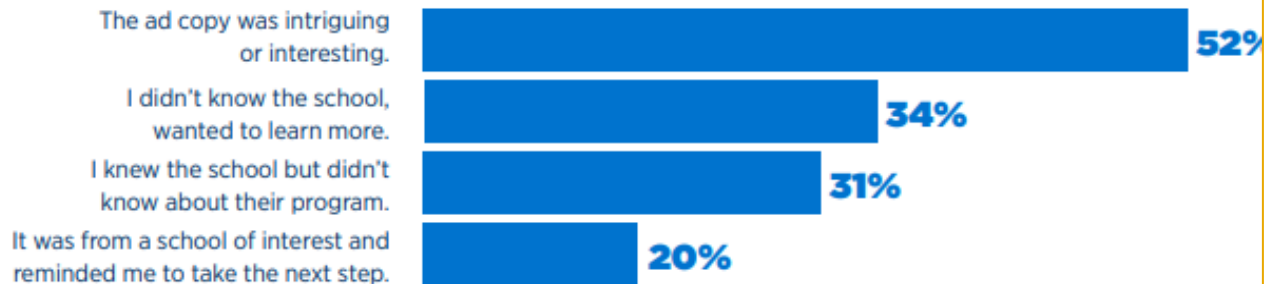
11/12. Graduate students are not being sufficiently intrigued or interested by the typical digital ad (unlike


Did/will you click on digital ads for graduate schools/programs during your search?



WHY DID/WILL YOU CLICK ON ADS?	ALL
It was for a school I am interested in and the ad reminded me that I needed to take the next step.	35%
I'm aware of this school but didn't know anything about their programs	25%
I didn't know about the school and I wanted to learn more	24%
The ad "copy" was intriguing to me and made me want to click	15%

Most compelling reason **online** students click on a digital ad

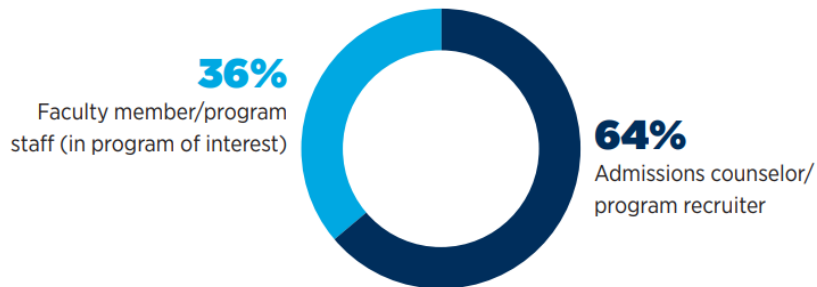




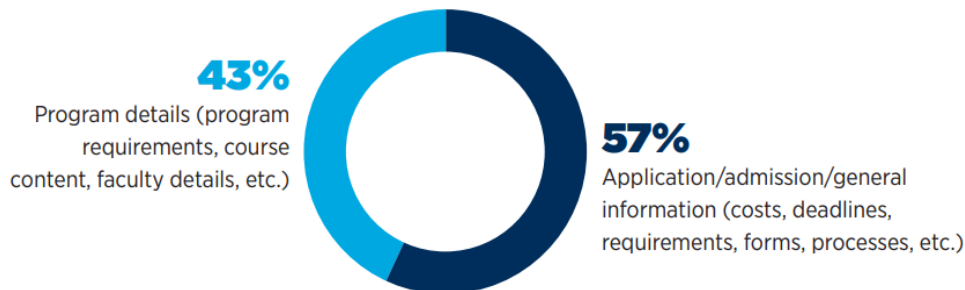
6 • Inquiring/Contacting Programs of Interest

13/14. Graduate students want to interact with a recruiter and are looking for general information.

Who would you prefer to respond to your early inquiries/questions during your search?



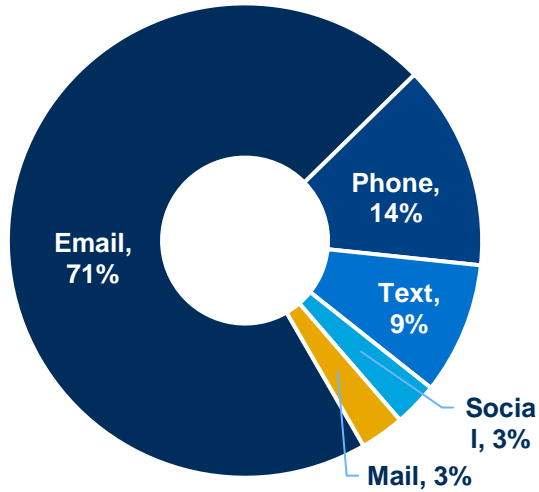
What are you more likely to be looking for when reaching out to programs of interest before submitting your application?



15/16. Graduate students prefer email, and expect a response within hours (they are more forgiving than online students).

How do you prefer schools/programs respond to you?

?

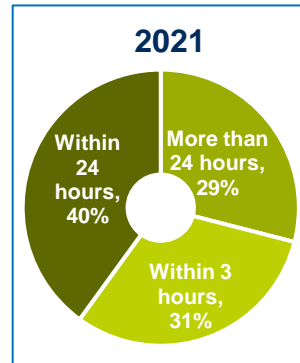


After how long do you expect a response to an inquiry or question

49%
Within 24 hours

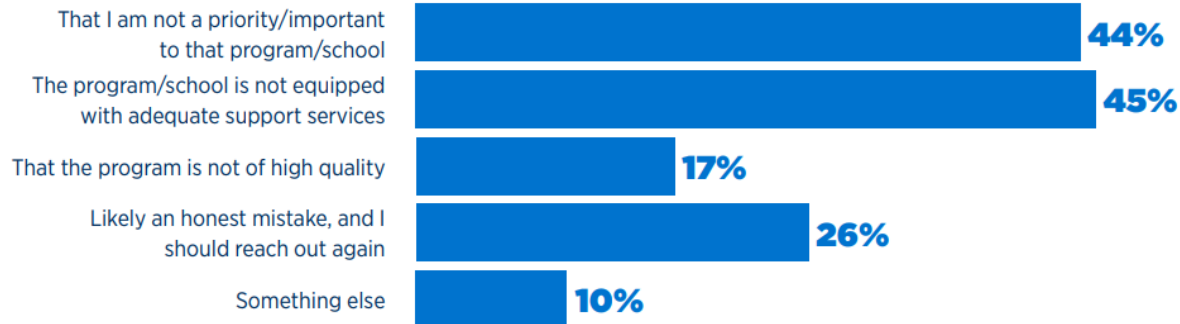
14%
More than 24 hours

37%
Within 3 hours

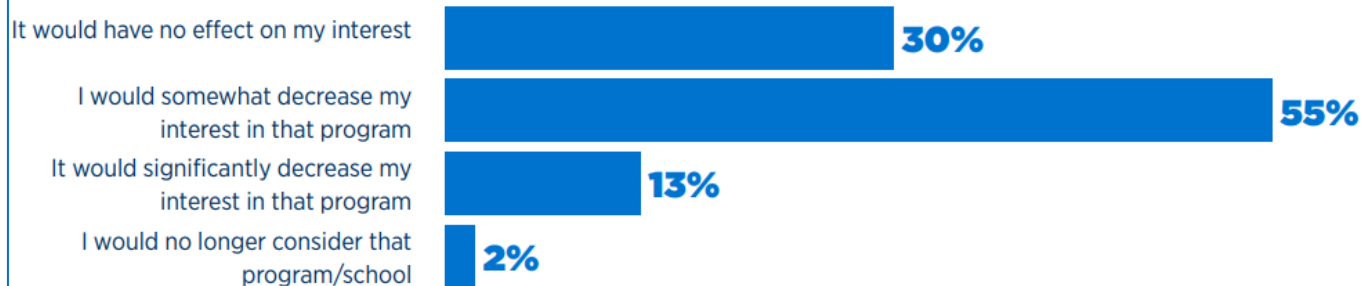


17/18: The best programs with the best marketing, are stunted by ineffective cultivation and follow up.

What does a slow response signify to you?



To what extent did/would a slow response affect your willingness to consider a particular program?

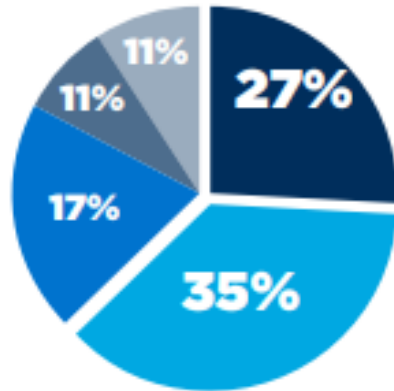


RNL's 2021 and 2022 studies document that graduate students reward programs that respond and admit quickly.

2022 Online Student Recruitment Report

LIKELIHOOD OF ENROLLING IN THE PROGRAM THAT RESPONDS FIRST TO INQUIRY

GRADUATE DEGREE



2021 Graduate Student Recruitment Report

STUDENTS WHO SAID THEY DEFINITELY OR VERY LIKELY WILL ENROLL AT THE FIRST PROGRAM TO ADMIT THEM

82%

Classroom

89%

Hybrid

83%

Online

19/20. Meeting personalization expectations may be easier than you think.

IMPORTANCE OF PERSONALIZED COMMUNICATION	ALL
Very important	15%
Important	49%
Neutral	18%
Not very important	15%
Not at all important	2%

HOW CAN SCHOOLS/ PROGRAMS BEST PERSONALIZE THEIR RESPONSE?	RANKING					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Use my first name in emails/texts	51%	18%	13%	9%	6%	3%
Send me information specific to my program of interest	26%	30%	26%	9%	6%	3%
Appear to know me and my situation when I make contact	10%	16%	20%	16%	28%	9%
Send me videos in which my name is used	6%	20%	11%	14%	23%	26%
Call me regularly to check in on my needs and questions	4%	8%	13%	16%	17%	43%
Share information reflecting/related to my demographic (age, background, etc.)	3%	8%	17%	35%	20%	16%



7 Paying for Graduate • Study

21. Only one-quarter of graduate students use an employer benefit.

How do/did/will you pay for your graduate studies?



50%
Personal funds

50%
Student loans

31%
Private grants
and scholarships

26%
Employer tuition
reimbursement

11%
Other loans

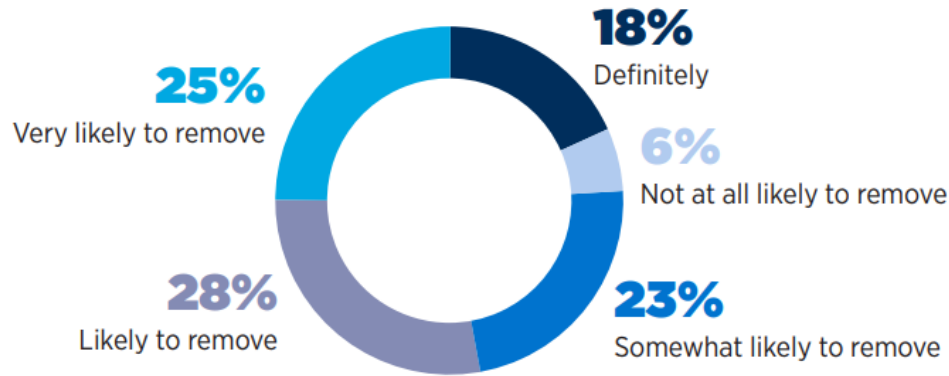
30%
Government
grants

Methods of payment by age of student

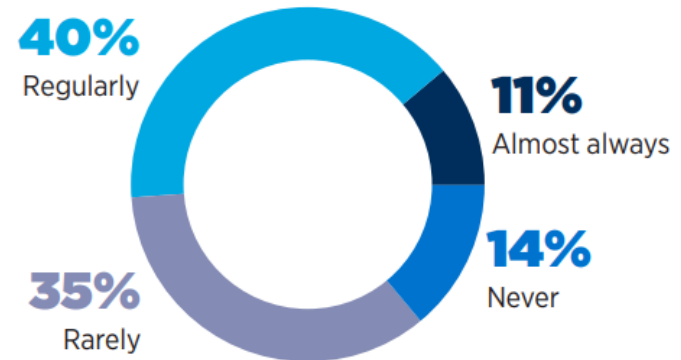
METHODS OF PAYMENT	20-24	25-29	30-39	40-49	50+
Personal funds	48%	52%	47%	55%	64%
Student loans	53%	53%	50%	36%	36%
Other loans	13%	12%	9%	6%	4%
Employer tuition reimbursement	23%	23%	30%	34%	21%
Private grants and scholarships	27%	34%	32%	29%	25%
Government grants	29%	30%	33%	23%	25%

22. Graduate students remove programs that are too expensive and limit credits to manage expense.

How likely would you be to remove a graduate program from your search if the posted tuition costs were higher than you thought you could afford?



How frequently did/will you limit the number of credits in which you enroll in order to manage your “out of pocket” expenses?

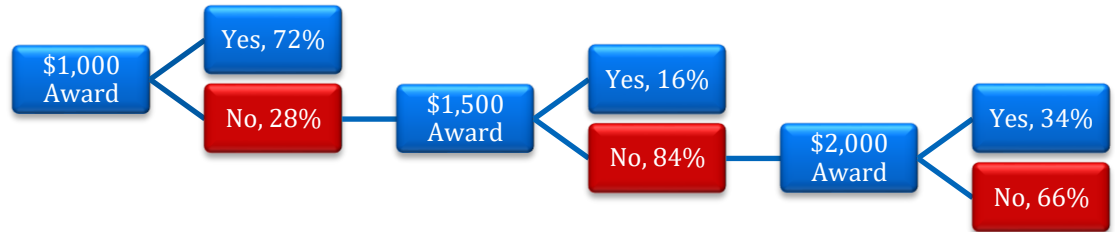


24. A small-ish award can have a big impact.

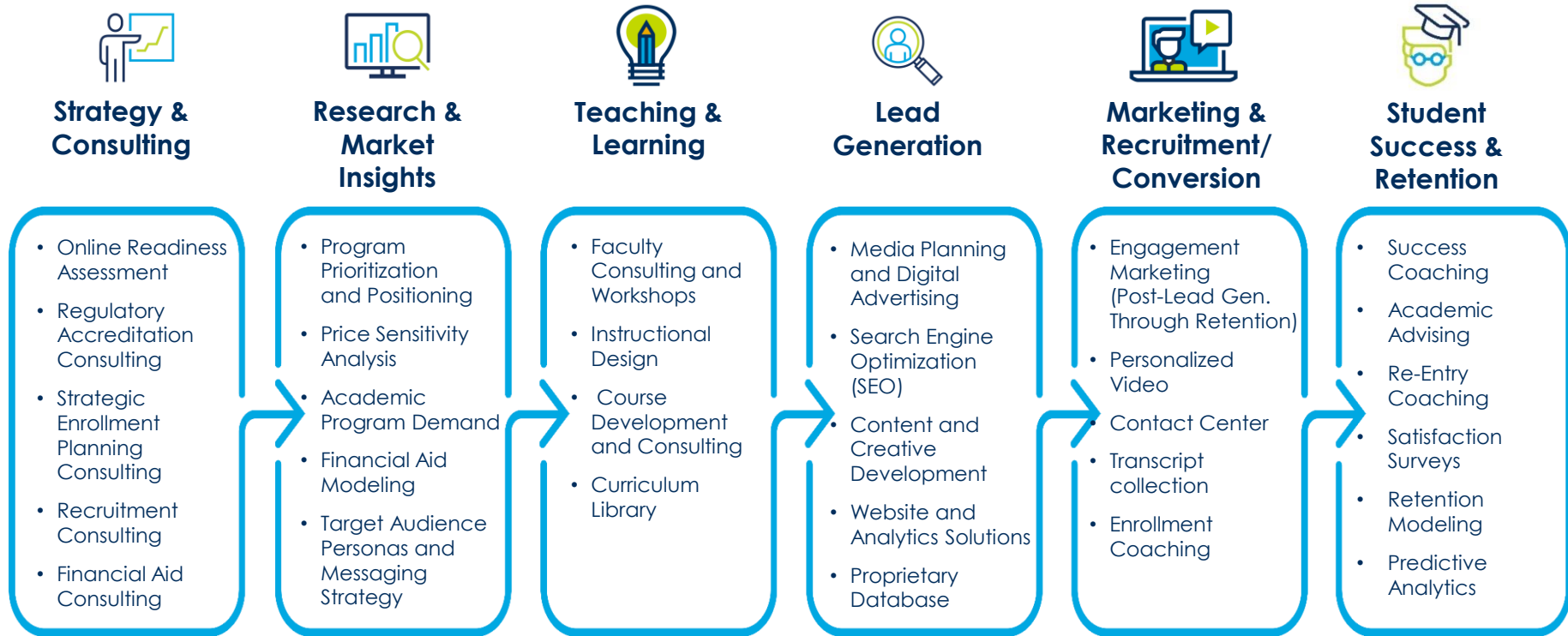
“Would a one-time award of \$_____ make you enroll in one program over another?”



Note: Respondents who answered “no” were advanced to the next higher dollar value.



RNL Enable: Transforming Enrollment Success



RNL Envision: Higher education's leading enrollment growth platform

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