

Strategic Communication M.A. Program

2017 Survey Results

Executive Summary

The Strategic Communication M.A. program is conducting an audit of its curriculum and attributes. As part of this audit, it is studying the experience of program alumni and prospective applicants.

This report details findings from two surveys fielded from October 16 through December 1, 2017.

The first survey, covered in Part One of this report, focuses on alumni in the following areas:

- Satisfaction with the program
- Pre-enrollment considerations
- Student experience
- Outcomes of program completion
- Post-graduation engagement with the program

The second survey, covered in Part Two, focuses on prospective program applicants, particularly regarding their perceptions and experience as they consider applying to the program.

This report concludes by discussing the implications and insights drawn from both surveys.



Part One:

Alumni Survey Results



Key Insights: Alumni Survey

- Over 90% of respondents report high or very high levels of satisfaction with the program, consistent with findings from a previous alumni survey conducted in 2012.
- Alumni satisfaction is strongly tied to the cohort model. Frequency of contact between alumni and their cohorts after graduation is the strongest indicator of their satisfaction with the program.
- As a pre-enrollment consideration, affinity for the cohort model has risen over time. However, the program's evening classes, 2-year duration and course relevance continue to be the leading factors influencing the decision to enroll.
- Strategic and critical thinking skills are most frequently cited as the highest-value attribute learned from the program for alumni careers, followed by understanding of specific models and approaches.



Method

- Questionnaire sent via email to 195 program alumni from graduating classes 2007 - 2017 (Cohorts 1 - 11)
- 121 responses received (response rate = 62.05%)
- 32 questions total, including Likert scales, multiple-selection and open-ended, administered via Qualtrics
- Open-ended responses were coded into categories and content analyzed
- Statistical analysis was used to interpret Likert scale, multiple-selection and content-analyzed responses
- Results benchmarked against 2012 Alumni Survey where applicable

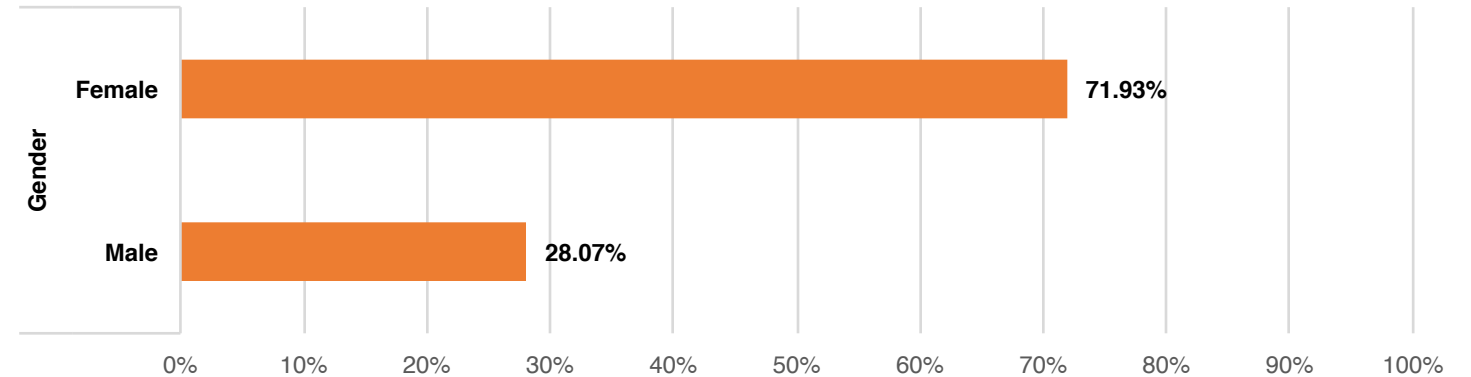


Description of the Sample

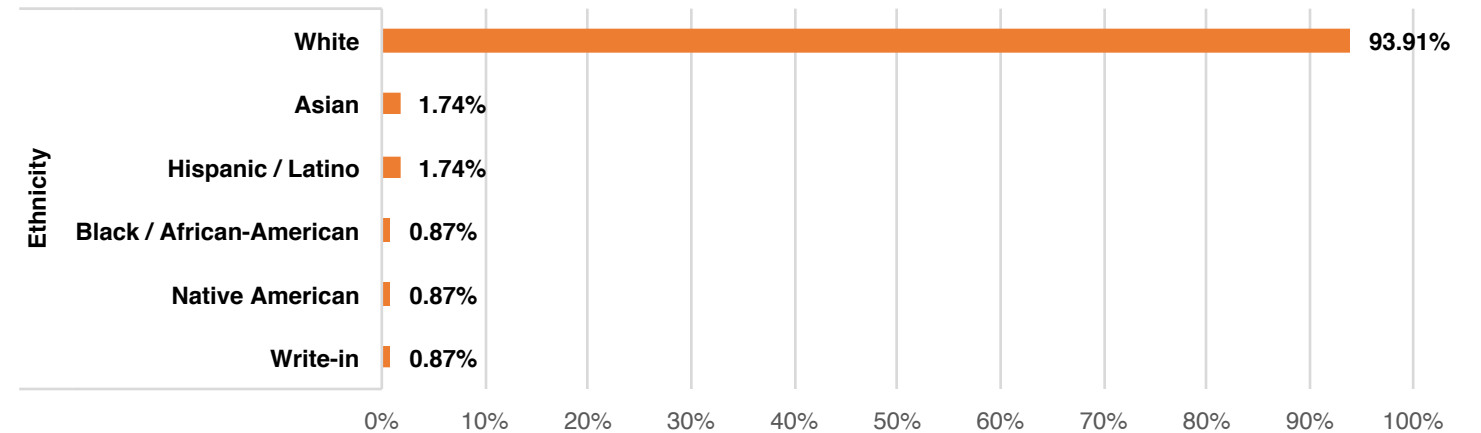


Gender and Ethnicity

- Respondents predominantly identify as female



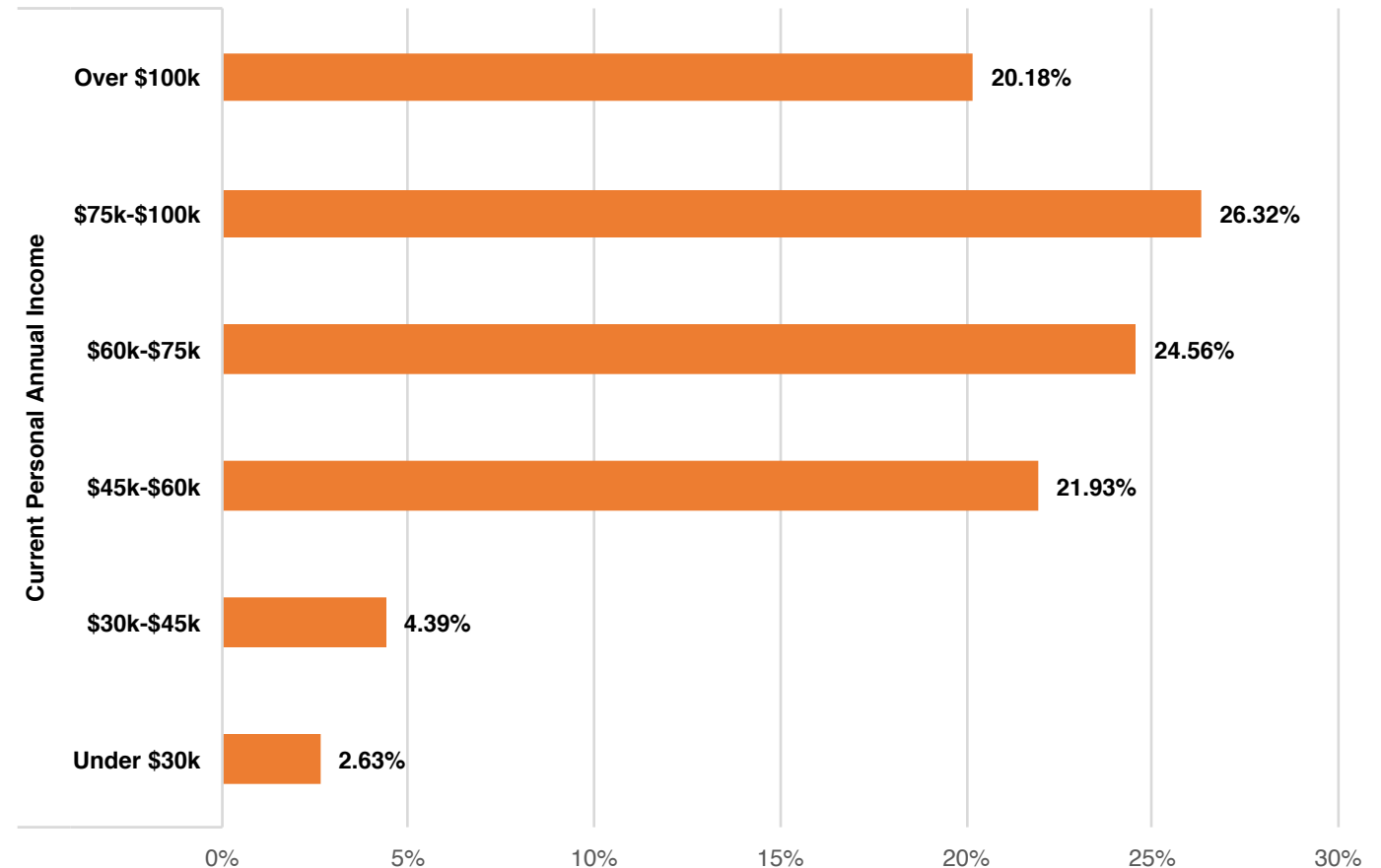
- An overwhelming majority of respondents identify as white



Q23. Gender (n = 114); Q24. With which group do you primarily identify? (n = 115)

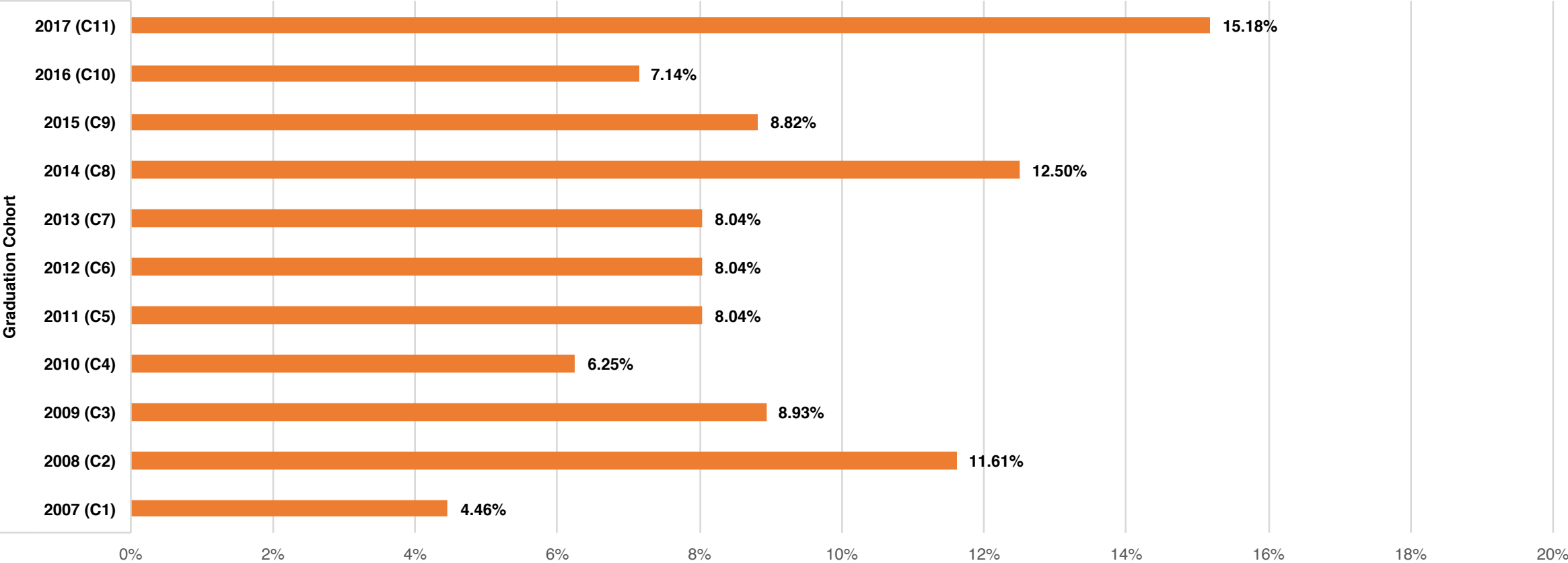
Current Personal Annual Income

- A majority of respondents currently earn between \$60,000 and \$100,000 per year
- Only 7% of respondents earn \$45,000 per year or less
- Note that these figures differ significantly from reported income at time of enrollment, which will be discussed later in this report



Q26. What is your current personal annual income? (n = 114)

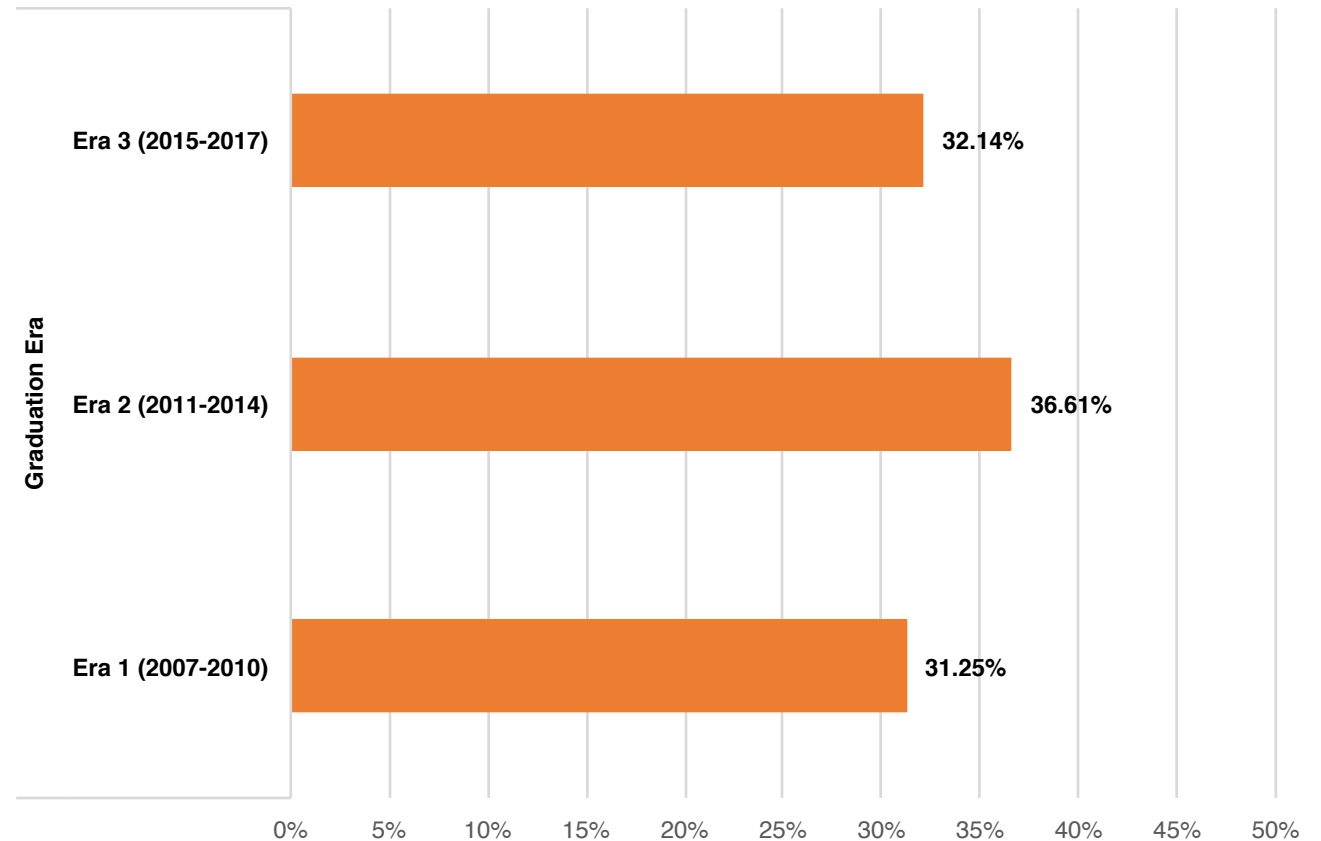
Response Rate by Cohort Graduation Year



Q21. What year did you graduate from the Professional M.A. in Strategic Communication program? (n = 112)

Results By Graduate Era

- Many of the following results are presented according to three distinct eras of graduation from the program:
 - **Era 1:** 2007 – 2010 (n=35)
 - **Era 2:** 2011– 2014 (n=41)
 - **Era 3:** 2015 – 2017 (n=36)
- This framework allows us to view perceptions of the program over time



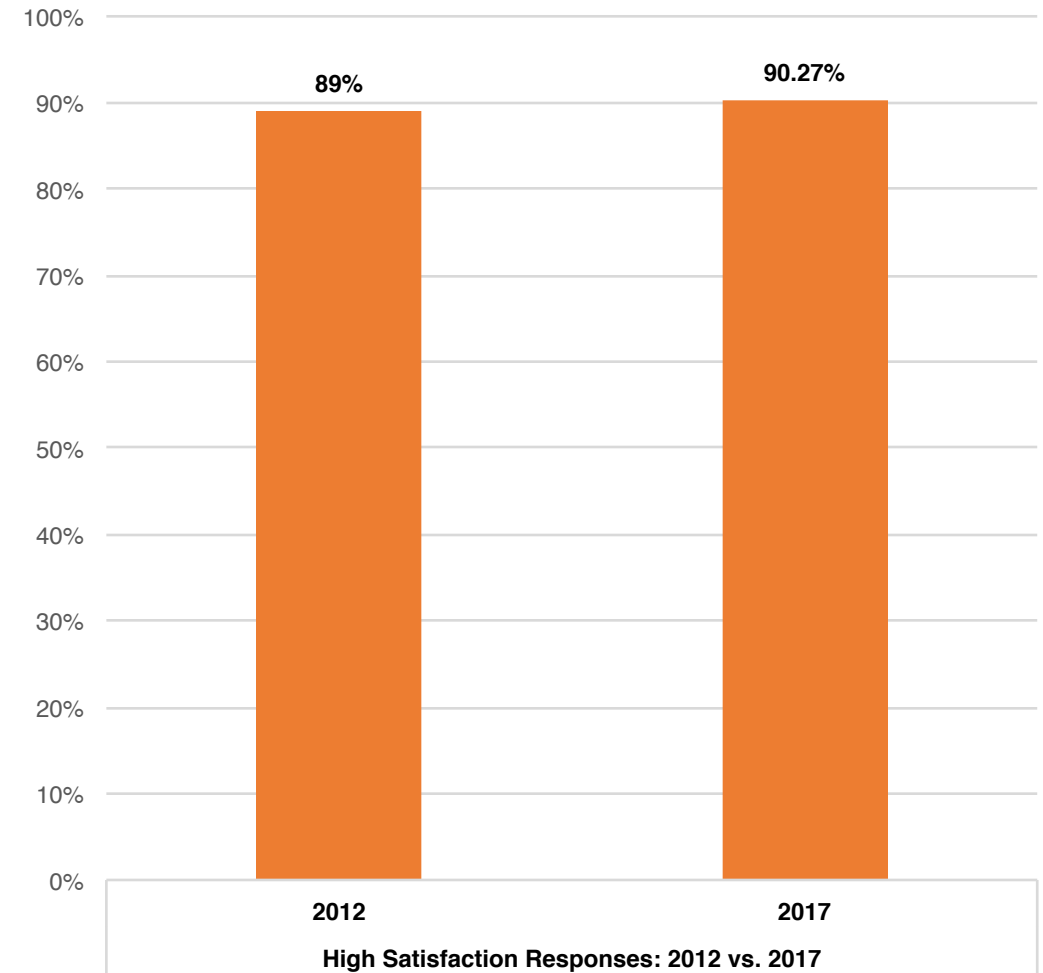
Q21. What year did you graduate from the Professional M.A. in Strategic Communication program? (n = 112)

Alumni Satisfaction



Overall Satisfaction Remains High

- Satisfaction with the program has remained steady over time
- Currently, over 90% of respondents report levels of satisfaction at 4 or 5 out of 5
- This is consistent with 2012 responses, which reported similar satisfaction levels at 89% ($n = 57$)

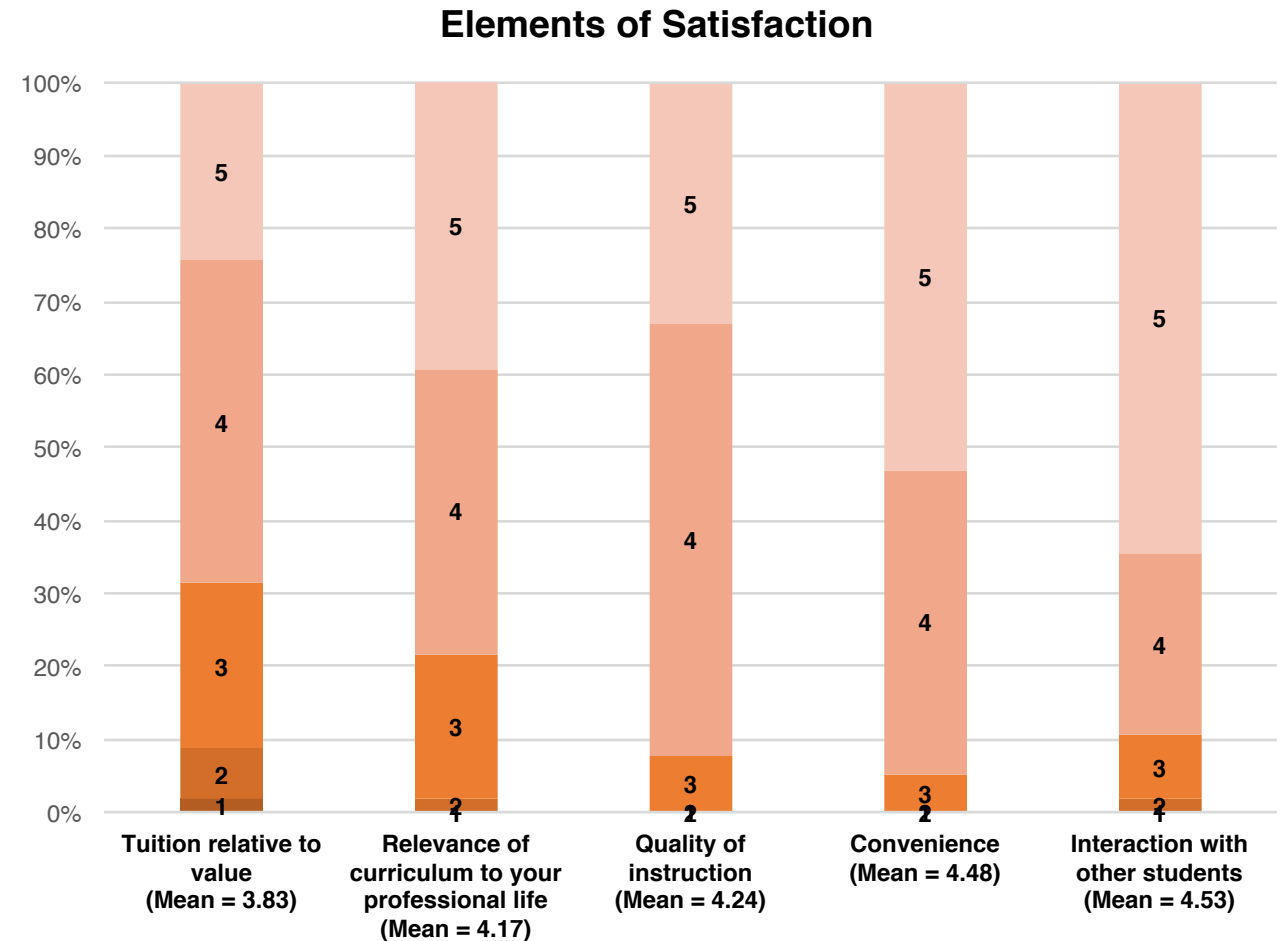


Q4. Looking back at the program, what is your overall level of satisfaction, on a 5-point scale, where 1 means “not at all satisfied” and 5 means “very satisfied”? ($n = 113$)



Leading Aspects of Satisfaction

- Interaction with other students is the highest rated factor relating to program satisfaction
- Convenience and quality of instruction are also highly rated factors of program satisfaction
- Factors are consistent across all three graduate eras



Q5. Now, using the same 5-point scale, please indicate your level of satisfaction with various elements of the program. (n = 115)

Alumni Satisfaction is Deeply Tied to the Cohort Model

Chi-square tests were performed to determine which aspects of the program were most related to overall satisfaction with the program.

Alumni satisfaction with the program is most strongly linked to the cohort model. Alumni who chose to enroll because of the cohort model, and who remain in touch with their cohort after graduation, are most satisfied with the program.

- The most significant indicator of overall satisfaction with the program is alumni frequency of contact with their cohort after graduation

Pearson Chi-Square: χ^2 (12, $N = 113$) = 43.875, $p < .0000$

- The second-most significant association with overall satisfaction is respondents' listing the cohort model as a factor influencing their decision to enroll

Pearson Chi-Square: χ^2 (3, $N = 79$) = 21.869, $p < .0000$

Q4. Looking back at the program, what is your overall level of satisfaction, on a 5-point scale, where 1 means "not at all satisfied" and 5 means "very satisfied"? (n = 113); Q11. Since graduation, how much contact have you maintained with your cohort? (n = 114); Q3_2. What factors influenced your choice to enroll in the Strategic Communication M.A. program? Select all that apply. (n = 114)

Additional Alumni Satisfaction Associations

- Significant associations with overall satisfaction also include several factors in alumni decision to enroll
- Cohort factors top the list

Satisfaction Association	Significance
Cohort contact post-graduation	$p < .0000^{***}$
Cohort model	$p < .0000^{***}$
Reputation of UMN	$p = .0018^{***}$
Relevance of courses	$p = .0073^{***}$
Faculty qualifications	$p = .0100^{***}$
2-year degree completion	$p = .0110^{***}$
Age at enrollment	$p = .0156^{***}$
UMN employment	$p = .0183^{***}$

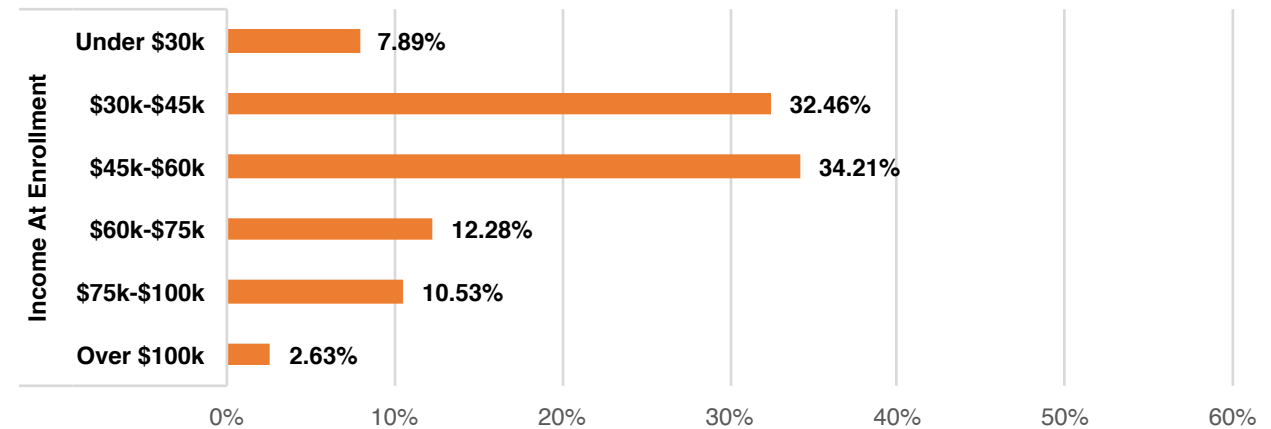
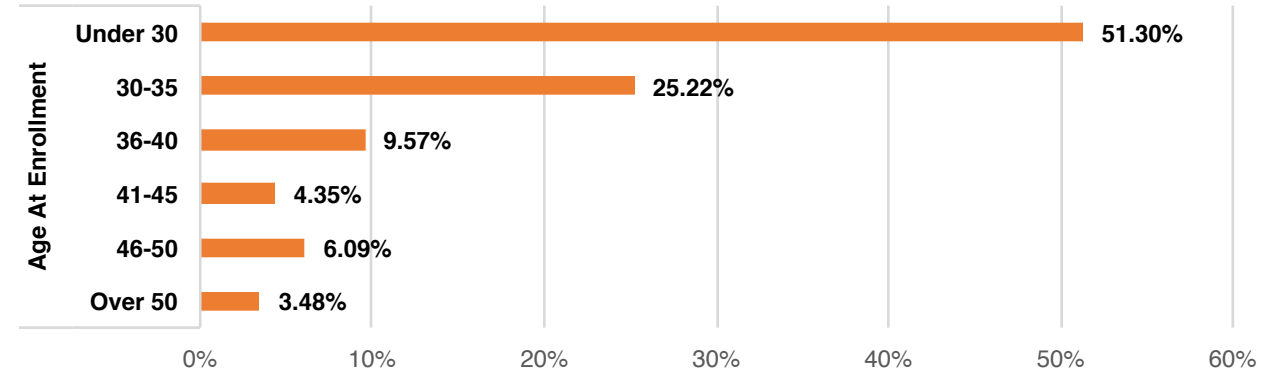
Q4. Looking back at the program, what is your overall level of satisfaction, on a 5-point scale, where 1 means “not at all satisfied” and 5 means “very satisfied”? (n = 113); Q11. Since graduation, how much contact have you maintained with your cohort? (n = 114); Q3_2. What factors influenced your choice to enroll in the Strategic Communication M.A. program? Select all that apply. (n = 114); Q22. What was your age when you began the program? (n = 115)

Pre-Enrollment Considerations



Age and Income Upon Program Enrollment

- Age upon enrollment skews heavily toward those 35 or under (76.52%)
- Age figures echo those from 2012, in which only 16% of respondents were over age 40 at enrollment
- A majority of alumni (66.67%) earned income between \$30k and \$60k upon enrollment
- Income figures are extremely similar to those reported in the 2012 survey



Q22. What was your age when you began the program? (n=115); Q25. Please estimate your personal annual income when you enrolled in the program. (n=114)



For Those Considering a Master's, Our Program is on the Rise

- The Carlson M.B.A. and the former St. Thomas Master's of Business Communication are still leading alternatives, but consideration of them has slipped among graduation eras over time
- Increasingly, the Strategic Communication M.A. at the U of M is the only program considered
- The write-in "Other" category includes various Mass Communication M.A., M.F.A, and Health Communication programs from around the globe

	Era 1 (2007-2010)	Era 2 (2011-2014)	Era 3 (2015-2017)
UMN Carlson	51.43%	48.78%	38.89%
St. Thomas MBC	37.14%	39.02%	25%
None	14.29%	9.76%	25%
Other	8.57%	26.83%	25%
UMN Humphrey	25.71%	12.20%	19.44%
St. Catherine	2.86%	2.44%	5.56%
St. Thomas MBA	2.86%	9.76%	0%
Concordia	2.86%	2.44%	0%
Metro State	2.86%	0%	0%
Online degree	2.86%	4.88%	0%

Q2. Thinking back to your decision to enroll in the Strategic Communication M.A. program, what other graduate degree programs did you consider? (n=121)

Factors Influencing Choice to Enroll

- Evening classes remain the top factor, followed by program duration and course relevance
- Course relevance as a reason to enroll has declined over time
- Affinity for the cohort model continues to rise
- UMN employment is an increasingly strong factor in enrollment decision

	Era 1 (2007-2010)	Era 2 (2011-2014)	Era 3 (2015-2017)
2-Year Degree	85.71%	78.05%	80.56%
Evening Classes	91.43%	92.68%	88.89%
Cohort Model	68.57%	63.41%	77.78%
Course Relevance	80.00%	70.73%	66.67%
UMN Reputation	77.14%	60.98%	63.98%
Employed by UMN	28.57%	31.71%	41.67%
Location/Convenience	22.86%	34.15%	38.89%
HSJMC Reputation	51.43%	39.09%	30.56%
Faculty Qualifications	25.71%	31.71%	25.00%
Only Program Available	60.00%	24.39%	22.22%
Other	11.43%	9.76%	11.11%
Tuition	11.43%	17.07%	8.33%
Employer Preference	0.00%	4.88%	2.78%

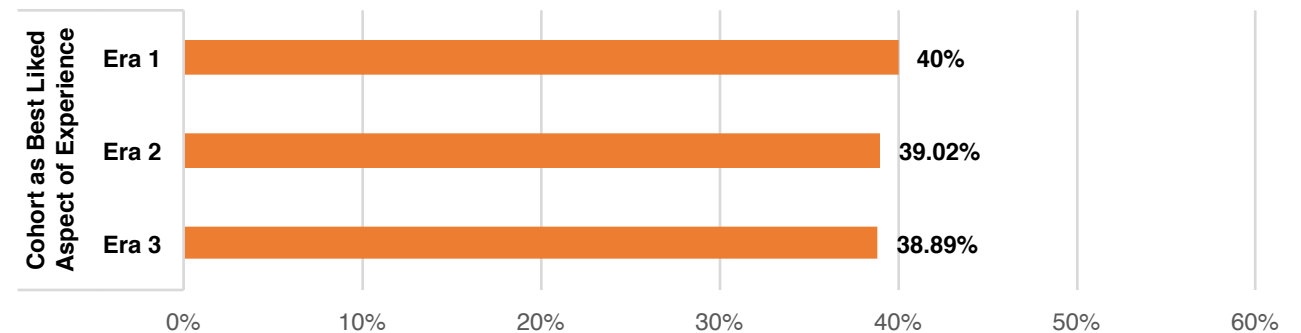
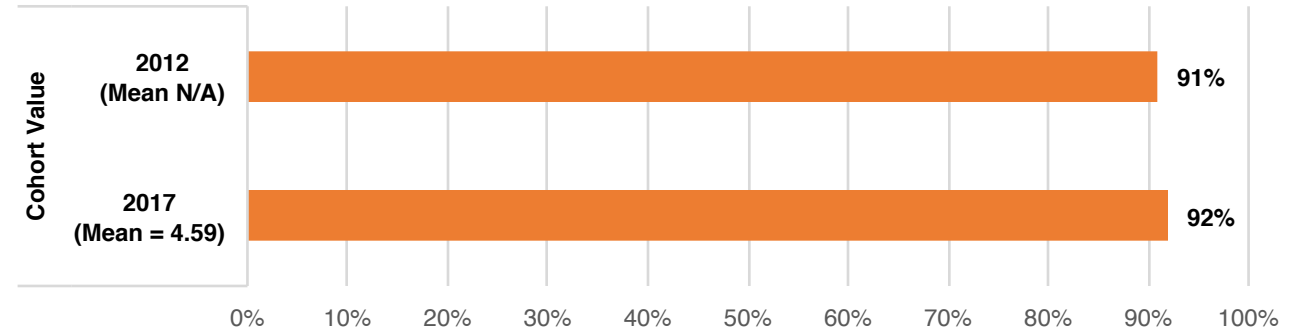
Q3. What factors influenced your choice to enroll in the Strategic Communication program? (n=121)

Student Experience



The Cohort Model is the Most Valued Aspect of the Program Experience

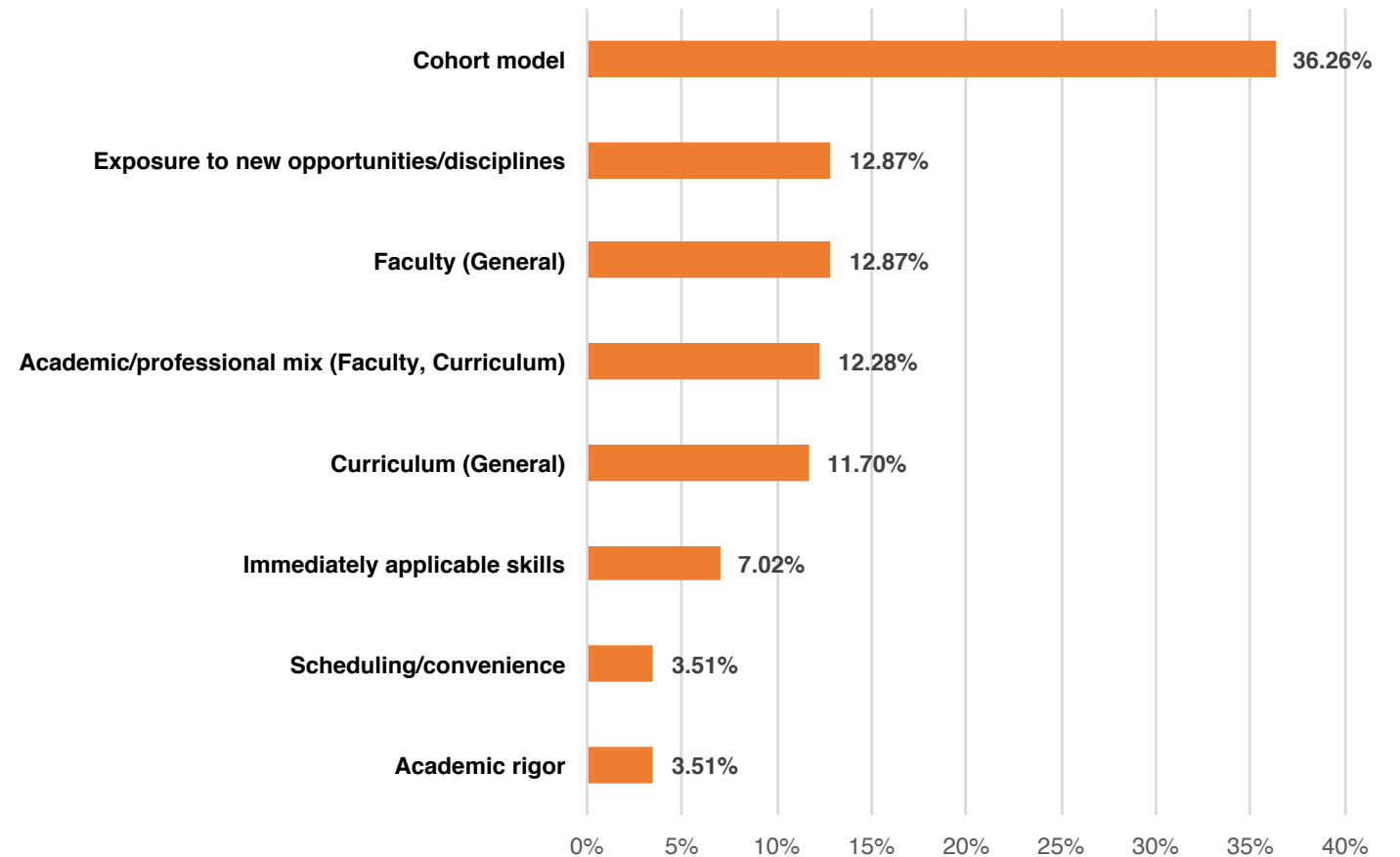
- Over 90% of alumni describe the cohort model as highly or very highly valuable to their experience in the program
- In open-ended responses, the cohort model is reported as the best-liked element of the program, by more than twice as much as all other factors
- These views hold true for alumni across all three graduation eras



Q7. The Professional M.A. in Strategic Communication program differs from some others in its firm adherence to a cohort model – about 20 students at a time going through the required courses together. How valuable do you feel the cohort model was to your experience in earning your degree? (n = 112); Q15. What did you like best about your experience in the Professional M.A. in Strategic Communication program? [Open-ended] (n = 114)

Cohort Model Tops the List of Best-Liked Elements of the Program

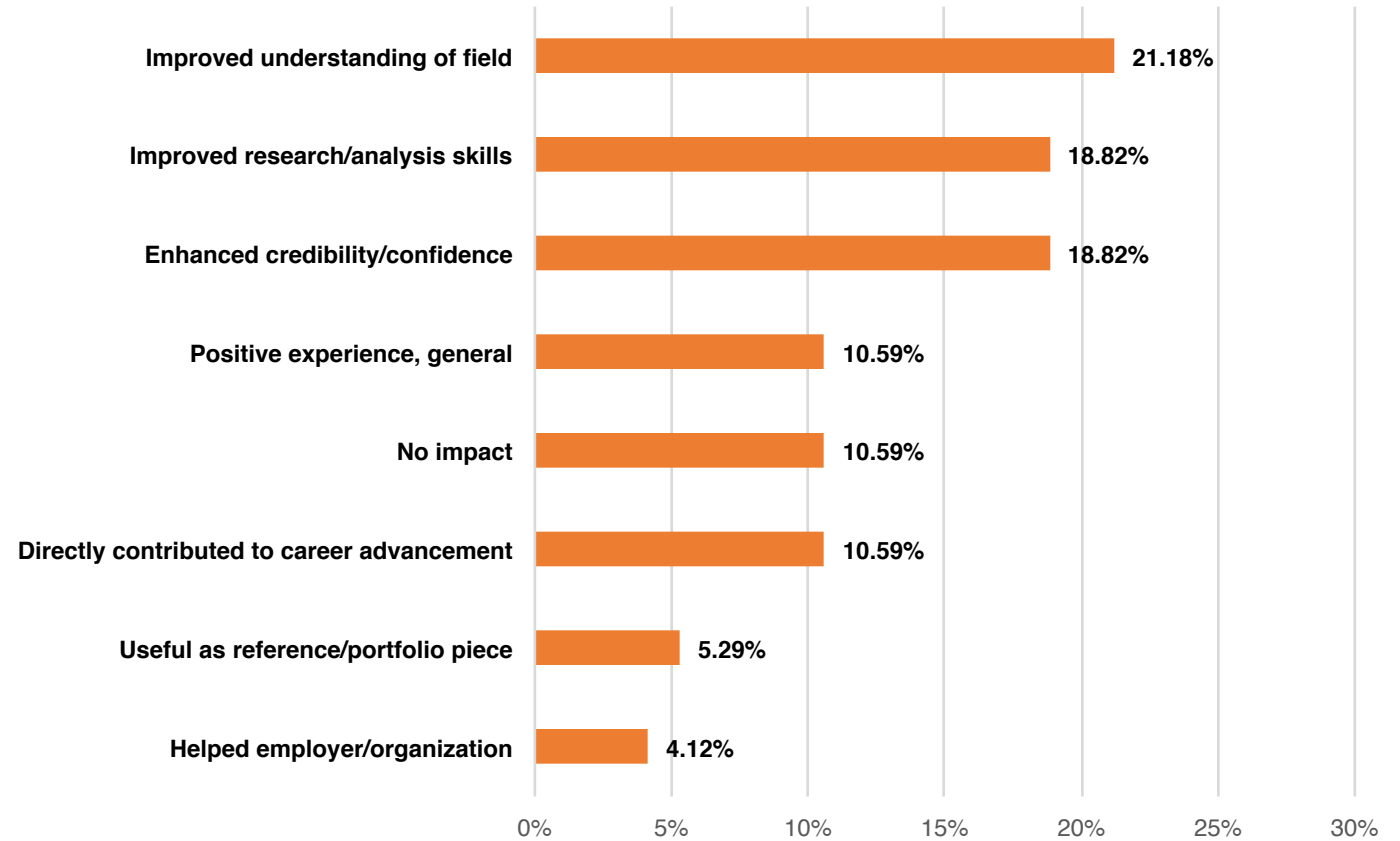
- In addition to the cohort model, the favorite aspects of the program include:
 - Faculty and curriculum
 - Exposure to new opportunities and disciplines



Q15. What did you like best about your experience in the Professional M.A. in Strategic Communication program? [Open-ended] (n = 114)

Capstone Experience and Impact

- Alumni cite the capstone process as having a positive impact on their professional development for a variety of reasons
- These effects frequently include improved understanding of the field, stronger research and analysis skills, and enhanced credibility and confidence



Q8. The Professional M.A. in Strategic Communication also differs from other programs in its requirement of students to complete a capstone project. How has completing this project helped your professional development or your career? [Open-ended] (n = 103)

What Alumni Wish They Had Learned in the Program

- Alumni who graduated between 2007 and 2010 (Era 1) request more program focus on digital and social strategies and tools than those who graduated after this period
- More recent graduates (Eras 2 and 3) are more interested in communications in specific sectors and disciplines

	Era 1 (2007-2010)	Era 2 (2011-2014)	Era 3 (2015-2017)
Comms in Spec. Sector	5.71%	9.76%	19.44%
PR / Media Relations / Crisis Communications	5.71%	0.00%	19.44%
Leadership / Management / Professional Development	14.29%	9.76%	11.11%
Research / Data Skills	11.43%	9.76%	8.33%
Technical / Production Skills	2.86%	9.76%	8.33%
Digital / Social Media Skills	25.71%	17.01%	5.56%
Budgeting / Media / Evaluation	0.00%	9.76%	5.56%
Nothing	5.71%	14.63%	5.56%
Content Strategy / Planning	2.86%	7.32%	2.78%
Business / Finance / Marketing	11.43%	4.88%	0.00%

Q17. What do you wish you had learned in the program that you didn't? [Open-ended] (n = 86); Q18. If you could add one course to the program curriculum today, what would it be? [Open-ended] (n = 86)

What Alumni Would Change About the Program

- Era 1 alumni are more likely than more recent graduates to state that they would change nothing
- Era 2 is particularly interested in adding specific tracks and disciplines
- Era 3 would have liked to have had more integration of the capstone into prior elements of the program

	Era 1 (2007-2010)	Era 2 (2011-2014)	Era 3 (2015-2017)
More time for/integration of capstone	0.00%	2.44%	22.22%
Focus/tracks for specializations	0.00%	17.07%	13.89%
Faculty adjustments	2.86%	7.32%	11.11%
Nothing	20.00%	9.76%	5.56%
More cohesion between courses	0.00%	2.44%	5.56%
Less ad/agency focus	5.71%	4.88%	5.56%
More flex/guidance in electives	2.86%	2.44%	5.56%
Modify class schedule	5.71%	0.00%	5.56%
More network development/field trips/internships	8.57%	9.76%	2.78%
Cheaper tuition	2.86%	2.44%	2.78%
More rigor/exclusivity	2.86%	4.88%	0.00%
Eliminate/modify cohort model	8.57%	2.44%	0.00%

Q19. If you could change one thing about the program, what would it be? [Open-ended] (n = 77)



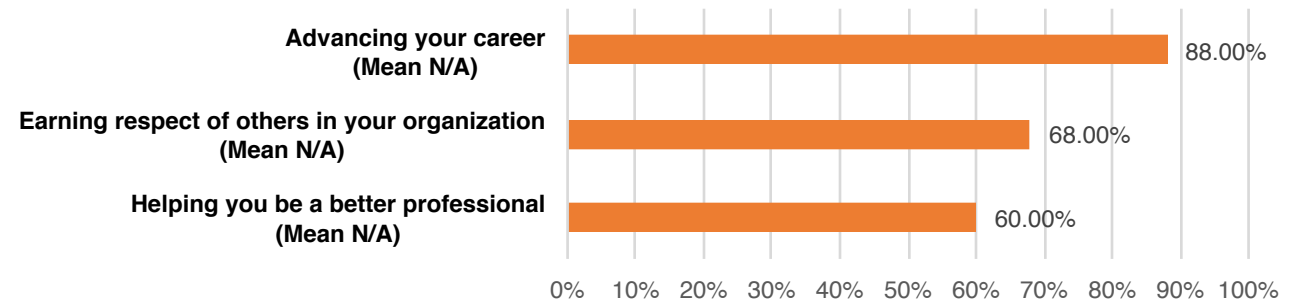
Outcomes of Program Completion



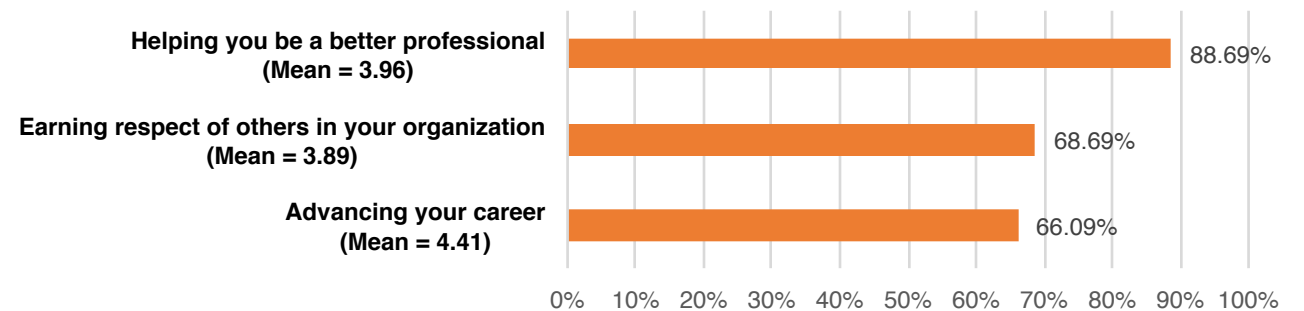
Degree Completion Continues to Deliver High-Value Outcomes

- The majority of alumni attribute high or very high value to their degree completion in terms of:
 - Improving their professional performance
 - Increasing their respect from others
 - Advancing their career
- These views remain largely constant between the 2012 and 2017 surveys

Valued Outcomes 2012



Valued Outcomes 2017



Q6. How valuable has your degree been in terms of: Helping you be a better professional; Advancing your career; Earning respect of others in your organization? (n = 115)

What Does the Program Offer that's Most Valuable for Careers?

- Strategic and critical thinking are ranked as the most valuable skills learned from the program
- Earlier cohorts tend to value particular models of analysis and planning
- Recent cohorts often cite increased confidence and credibility, while valuing discipline and planning less frequently than their predecessors
- Appreciation for brand positioning and architecture is on the rise over time

	Era 1 (2007-2010)	Era 2 (2011-2014)	Era 3 (2015-2017)
Strategic/critical thinking skills	31.43%	46.34%	50.00%
Confidence/credibility	5.71%	12.20%	30.56%
Brand positioning/architecture	5.71%	14.63%	16.67%
Research/analysis skills	11.43%	12.20%	16.67%
Particular models	22.86%	39.02%	13.89%
Discipline/planning	20.00%	9.76%	5.56%
Presentation skills	2.86%	2.44%	5.56%
Writing skills	5.71%	0.00%	0.00%
Relationships with cohort/faculty	2.86%	2.44%	0.00%
Nothing	2.86%	0.00%	0.00%

Q16. What is the most valuable thing you learned from the program in terms of your career today? [Open-ended] (n = 95)

Alumni Enjoy Sizeable Increases in Income

- Alumni across all three graduate eras report increases in annual income post-graduation
- Though Era 1's larger income can be attributed to its cohorts' seniority to later eras, Era 3's earnings compared to that of Era 2's cannot
- Note that although income increases occur across the board, alumni unanimously did not volunteer this effect as a reason for their satisfaction with the program or its value

**Average Income Increase Since Enrollment
(Approximate)**



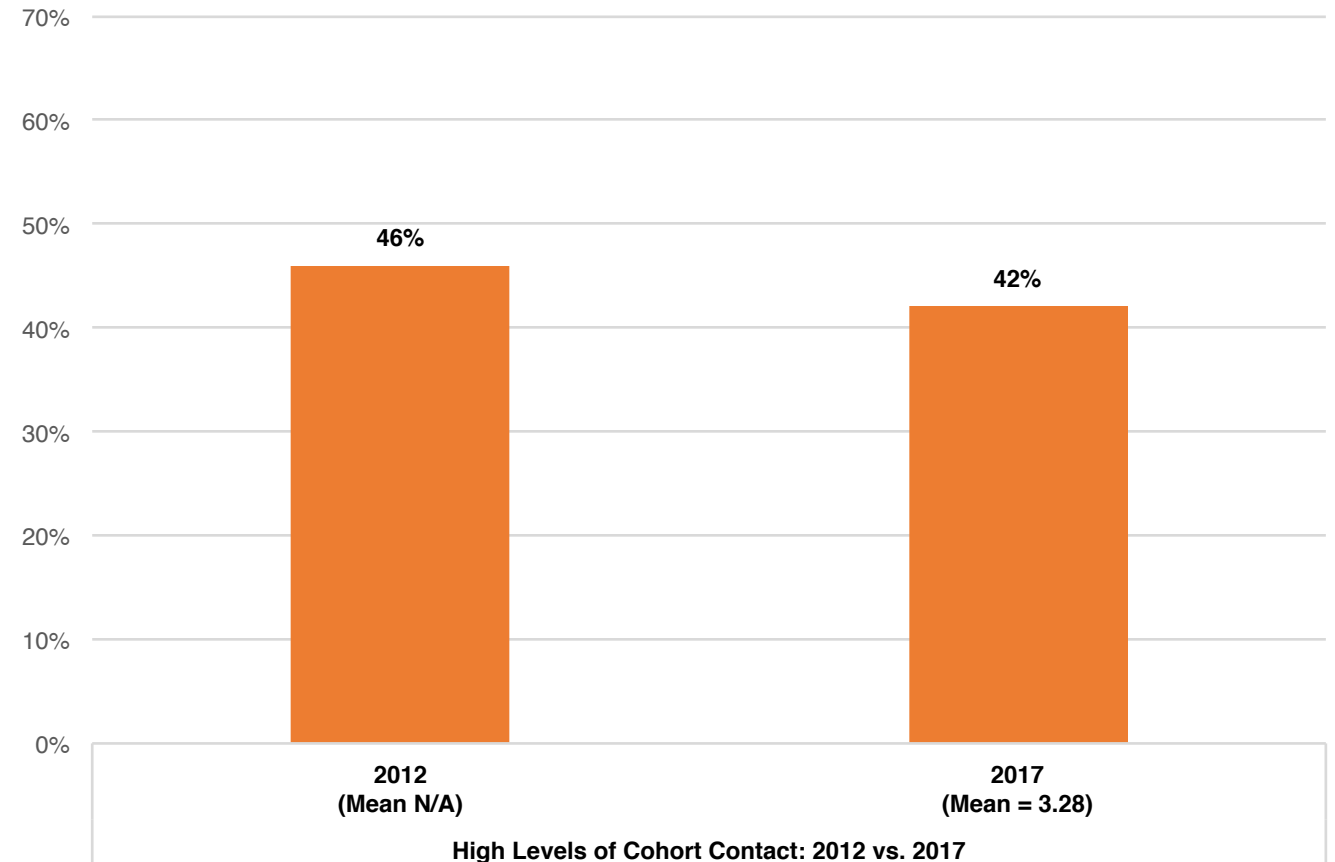
Q25. Please estimate your personal annual income when you enrolled in the program (n=114); Q26. What is your current personal annual income? (n = 114)

Alumni Engagement



Post-Graduation Cohort Contact Dipping Slightly from 2012

- 42% of alumni report remaining in frequent or very frequent contact with their fellow cohort members after graduation, down from 46% in 2012
- 34.21% report maintaining a fair amount of contact with their cohort
- Recall that the frequency of post-graduation cohort contact is the most significant indicator of alumni satisfaction with the program

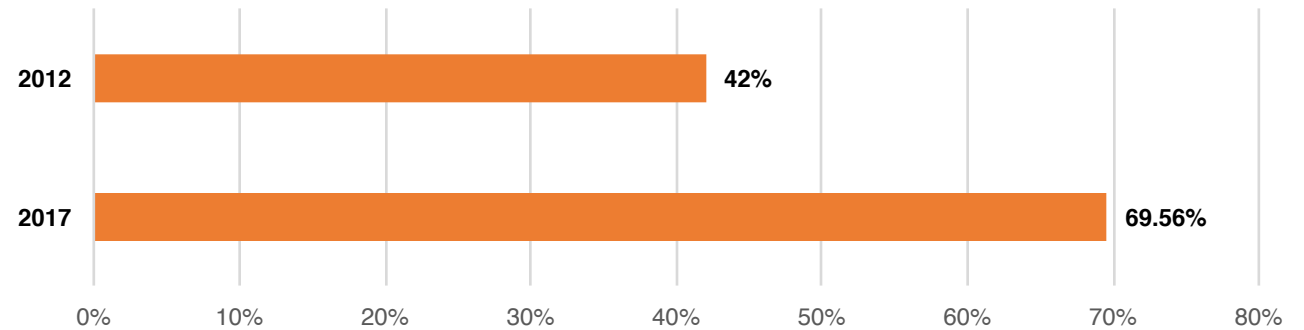


Q11. Since graduation, how much contact have you maintained with members of your cohort? (n = 114)

Forum Attendance and Perceptions on the Rise

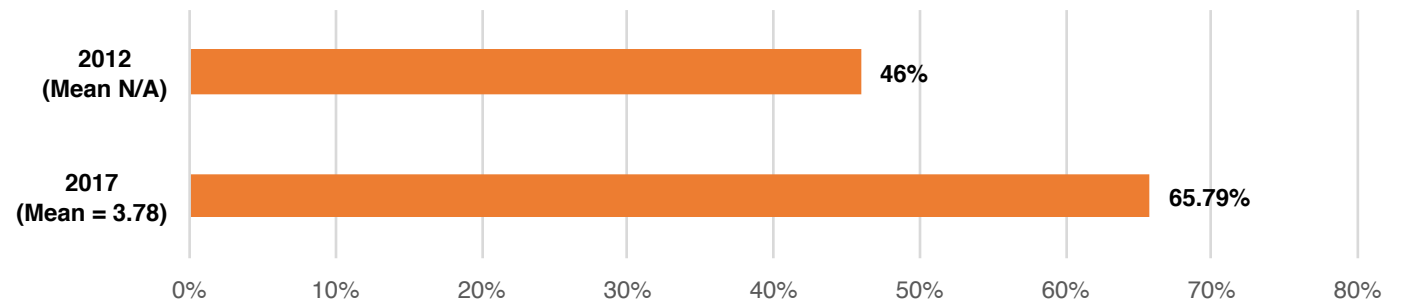
- A majority of alumni have now attended two or more forums, with 37% having attended four or more

Have Attended 2 or More Forums



- Similarly, a majority of alumni now find the forums to be highly or very highly valuable

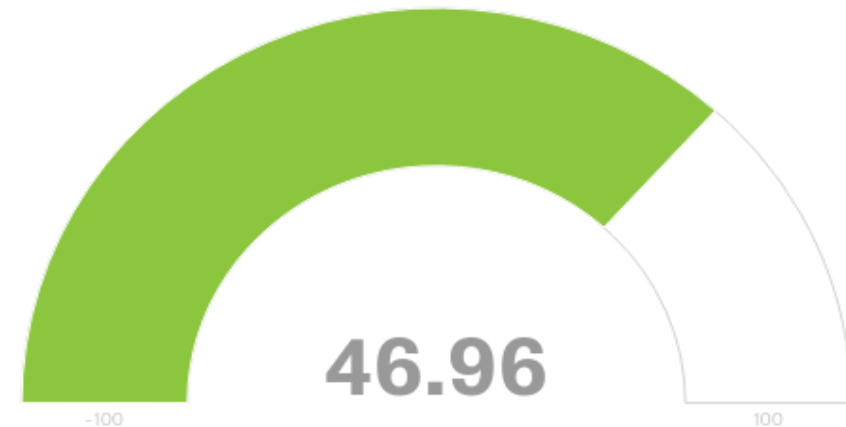
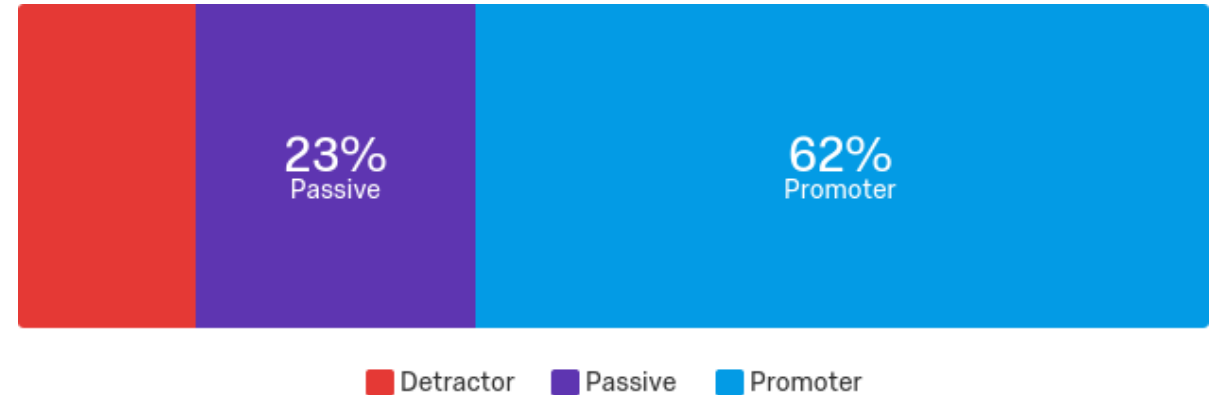
Find Forums Highly Valuable



Q12. Once or twice a year, the program sponsors a forum, involving refreshments and a prominent speaker, addressing students, alumni and professional leaders. How many of these forums have you personally attended? (n = 115); Q13. How valuable do you consider the forums to be? (n = 114)

Alumni Would Recommend Program to Peers

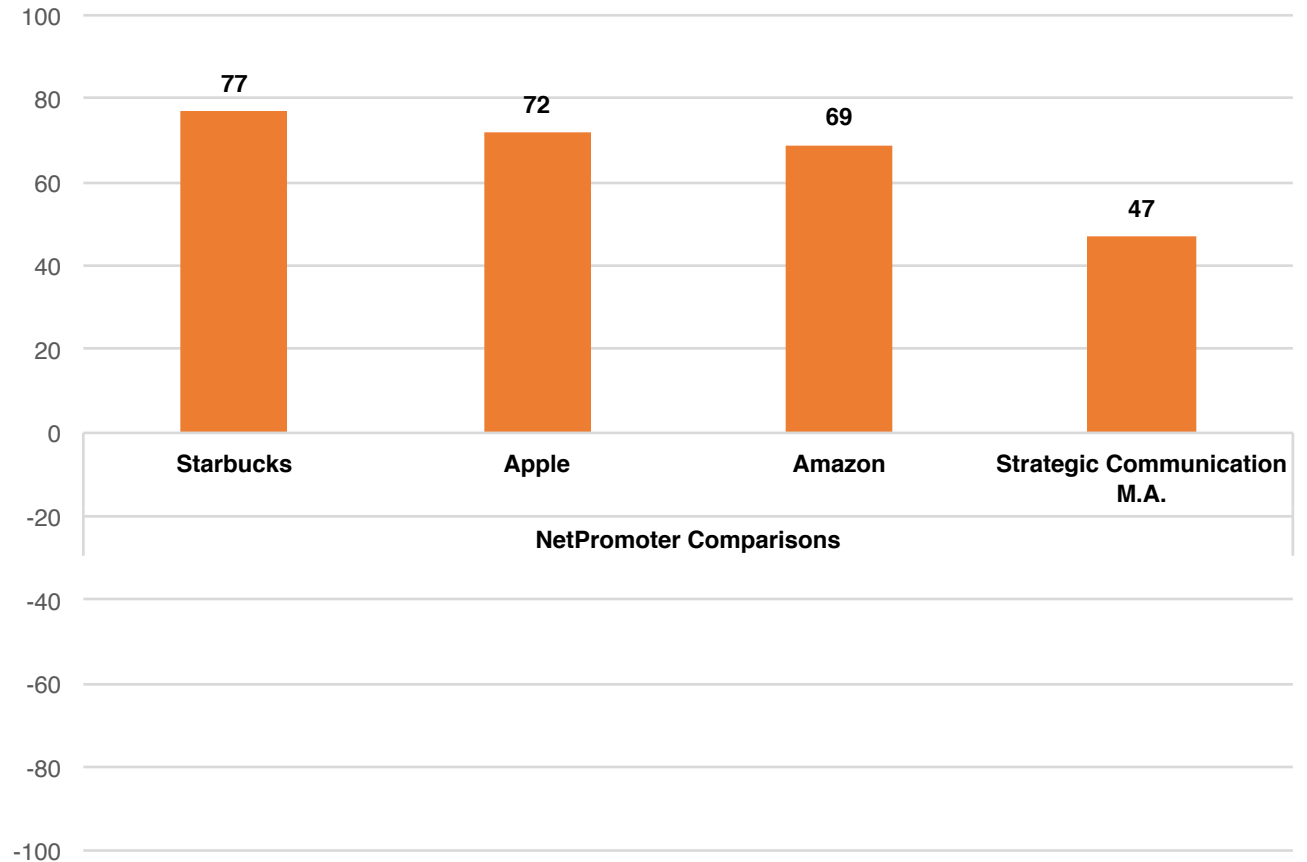
- With a NetPromoter Score of 46.96, alumni overall rate as good to excellent in terms of recommending the program to their peers
- 85% of alumni are likely to recommend the program, and 62% actively due so
- These figures are down slightly from responses to a comparable yes/no question in the 2012 survey, in which 88% of alumni reported that they would recommend the program



Q14. On a 10-point scale, in which 1 means "not at all likely" and 10 means "very likely," how likely are you to recommend the Strategic Communication M.A. program to others? (n = 114)

Putting NetPromoter Score in Context

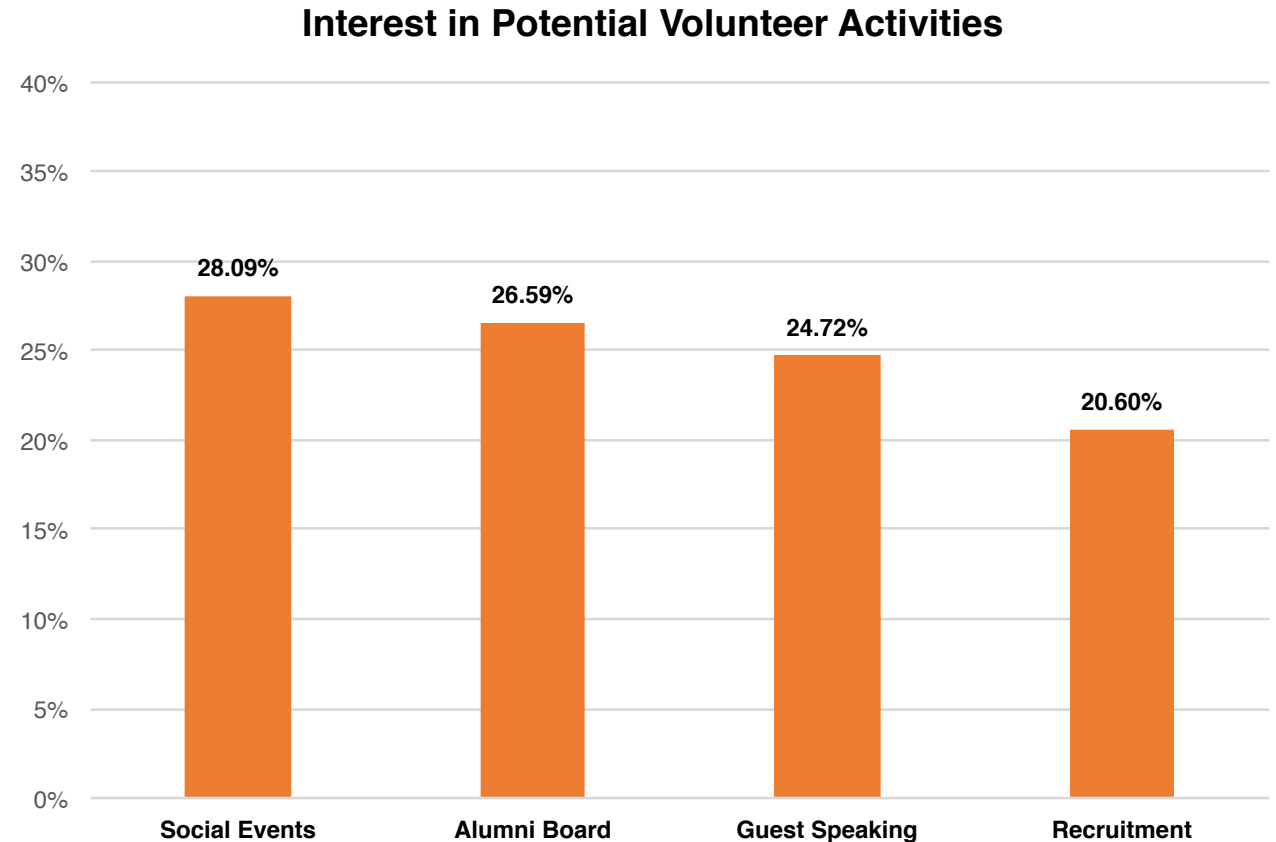
- NetPromoter Score is typically used in the private sector, and is scored on a scale from -100 to 100, rating respondents from least likely to most likely to recommend a given brand
- While NetPromoter Scores for competing graduate programs are not publicly available, scores from three of the world's top brands are presented alongside that of the Strategic Communication M.A. program for context



Source: Customer Gauge NPS Benchmarks 2018: Consumer brands. Accessed April, 2018. https://npsbenchmarks.com/industry/consumer_brands

Alumni Are Willing to Give Their Time to the Program

- Approximately 25% of alumni express interest in specific activities with the program
- Alumni show the most interest in participating in social events and the HSJMC Alumni Board
- Over 20% of alumni would be willing to participate in the program's recruiting efforts



Q33. In which of the following activities would you be willing to participate on behalf of the program? Select all that apply. (n = 114)

Part Two:

Prospective Applicant Survey Results



Key Insights: Prospective Applicant Survey

- About 25% of the prospective applicants surveyed indicate that they are either still considering or actively planning on applying to the program.
- Strong majorities of those still considering or planning to apply say word-of-mouth was influential in their initial interest in the program. These conversations were with current students, alumni, friends and co-workers.
- The Strategic Communication M.A. is a near-exclusive member of prospective applicants' considerative set; fewer than 4% of prospects report declining to apply due to stronger interest in an alternative graduate program.



Method

- Questionnaire sent via email to 175 prospective applicants indicating interest in the program between 2015 and 2017
- 54 responses received (response rate = 30.85%)
- 9 questions total, including multiple-choice and multiple-selection with available fill-in, administered via Qualtrics
- All responses analyzed using statistical techniques
- No precedent survey available for benchmarking

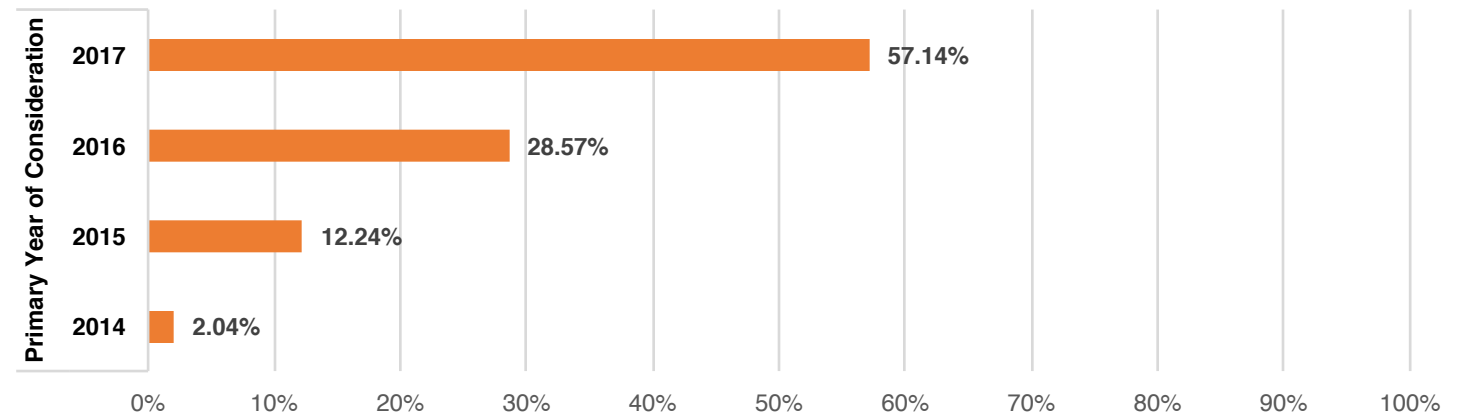
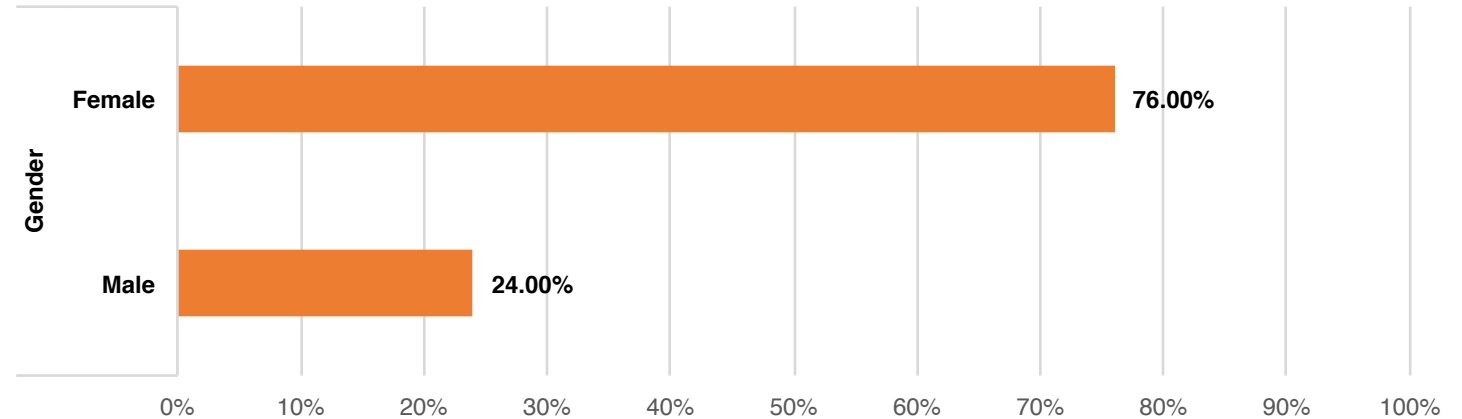


Description of the Sample



Gender and Year of Program Consideration

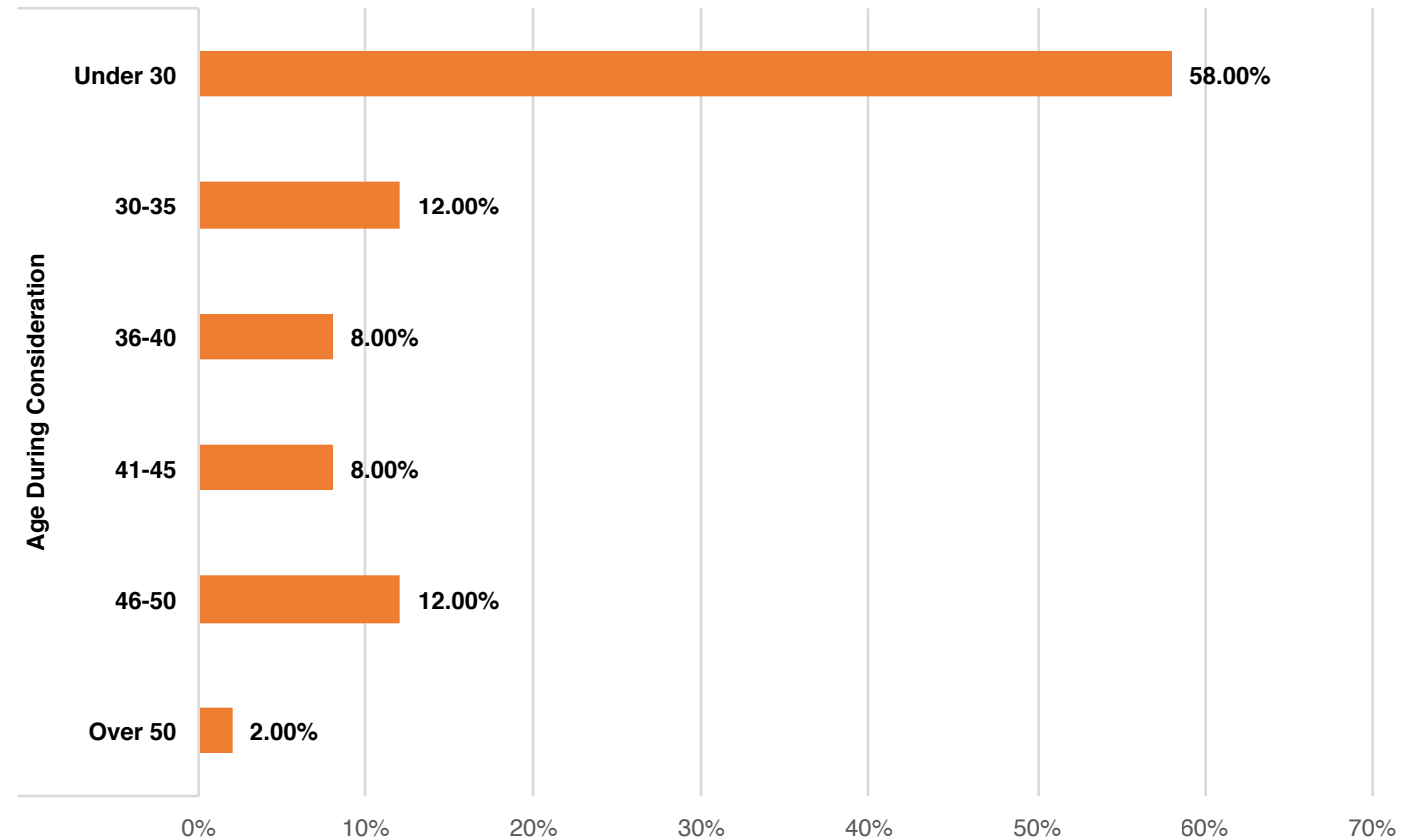
- Similar to the Alumni Survey, respondents predominantly identify as female
- Over 85% of respondents considered the program over the past two years



Q9. During what year did you primarily consider the Strategic Communication M.A. Program? (n=49); Q10. Gender (n=50)

Age During Consideration of Program

- Respondents' average age skews strongly under 35
- Fewer than 15% of respondents reported their age as over 46
- These figures are similar to those found in the Alumni Survey



Q8. What was your age when you considered the Professional Strategic Communication M.A. Program? (n=50)

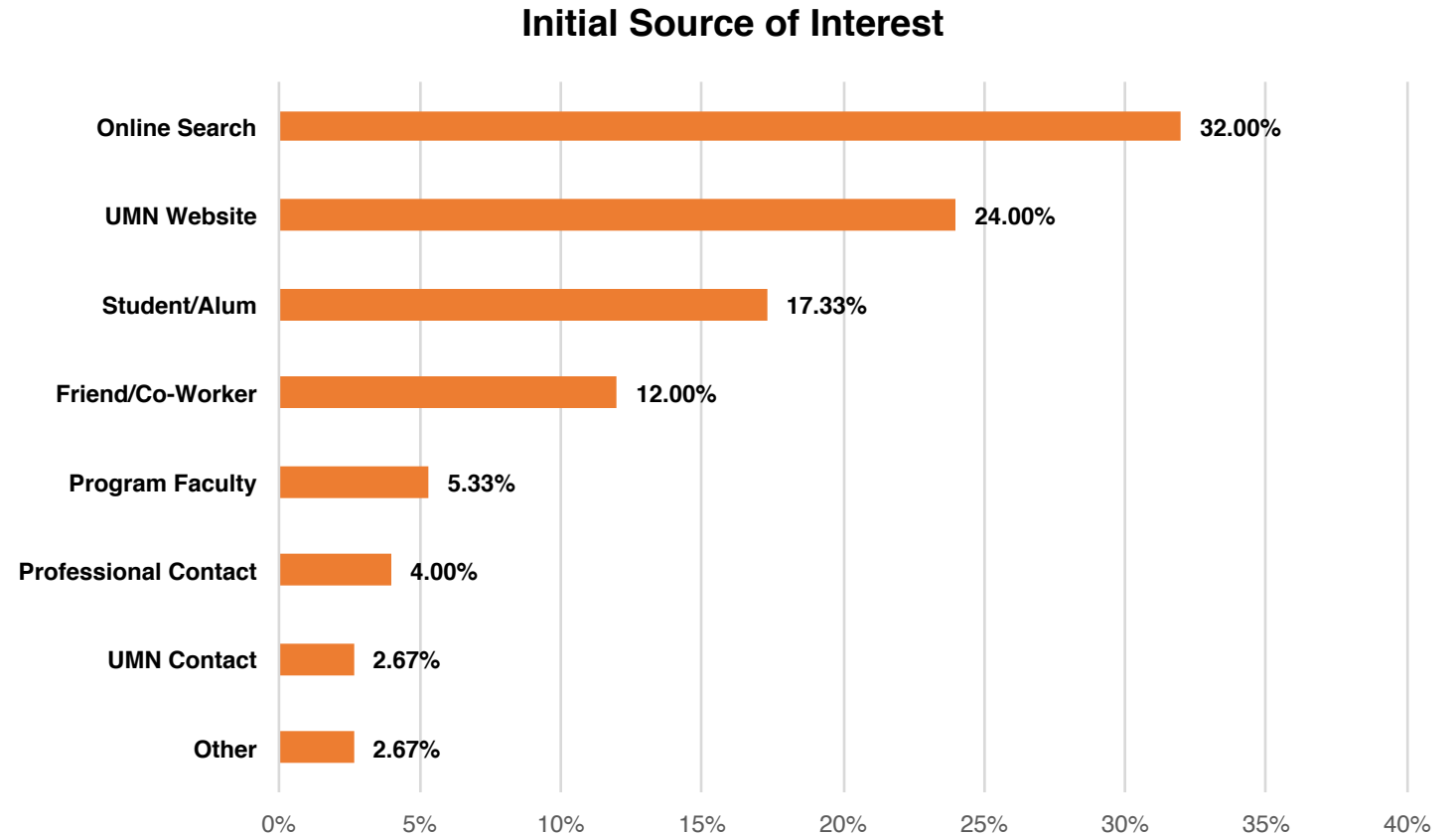


Prospective Applicant Experience and Considerations



Prospects' Sources of Initial Interest in the Program

- Prospective applicants first become interested in the program primarily through digital sources (56%)
- Many rely on current students or alumni, program faculty and peers (38.66%)

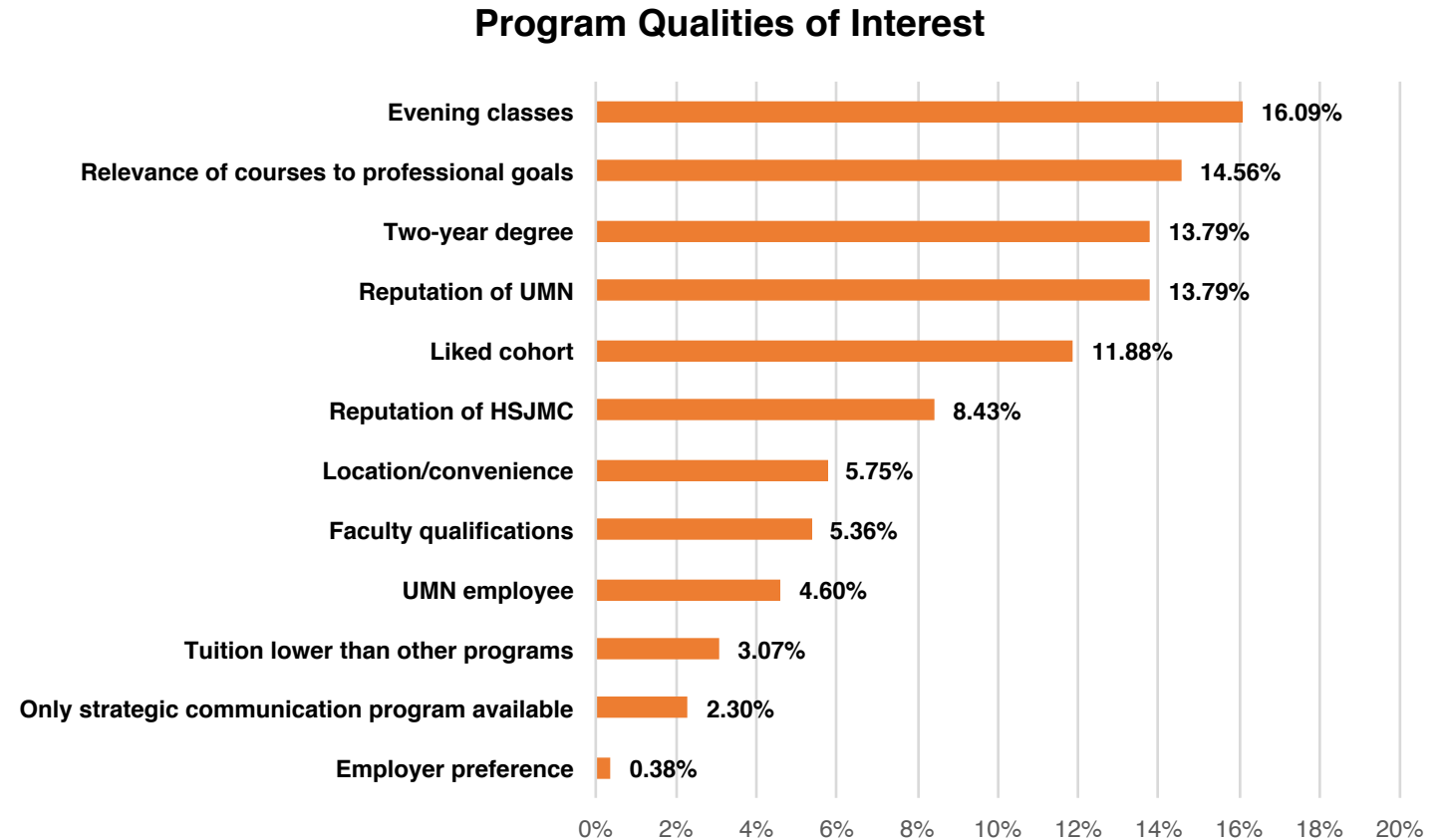


Q2. How did you initially become interested in the Strategic Communication M.A. program at the University of Minnesota? Please select all that apply. (n=54)



Prospects' Affinities for the Program are Similar to Those of Alumni

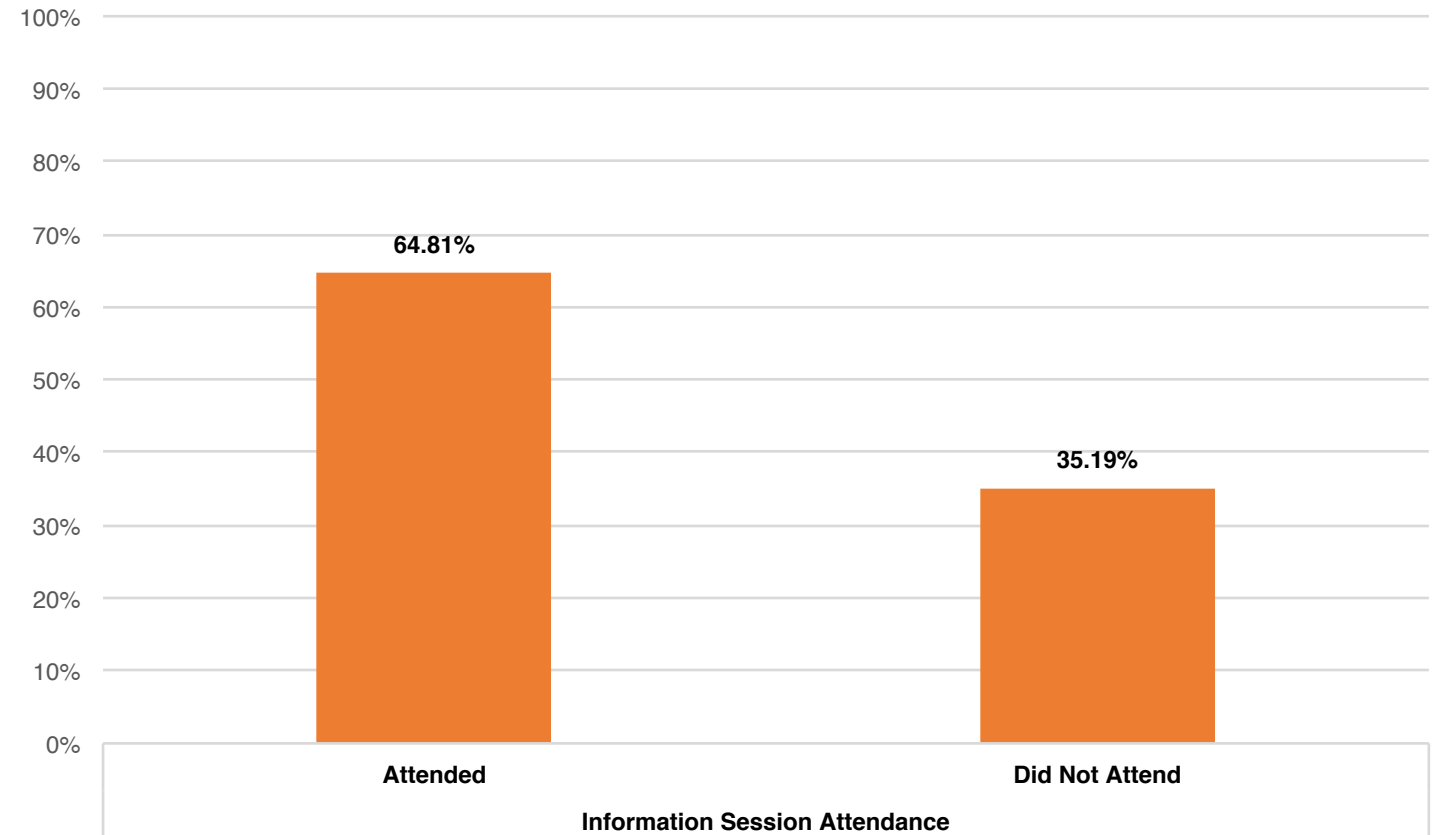
- Like alumni, prospective applicants frequently cite factors of convenience, such as evening classes and program duration, as drivers of their interest
- Similarly, prospects also show affinity toward the cohort model, as well as perceived curricular and faculty qualities



Q3. What qualities of the Strategic Communication M.A. program interested you? Select all that apply. (n = 54)

Most Respondents Attended a Program Information Session

- Somewhat countering the hypothesis that lack of information-session attendance is an indicator of prospective applicants' exit from the consideration process, a strong majority of respondents to the survey did attend the session.
- However, due to the nature of unexpected information arising in this survey, this hypothesis may still be accurate. This will be discussed in more detail shortly.

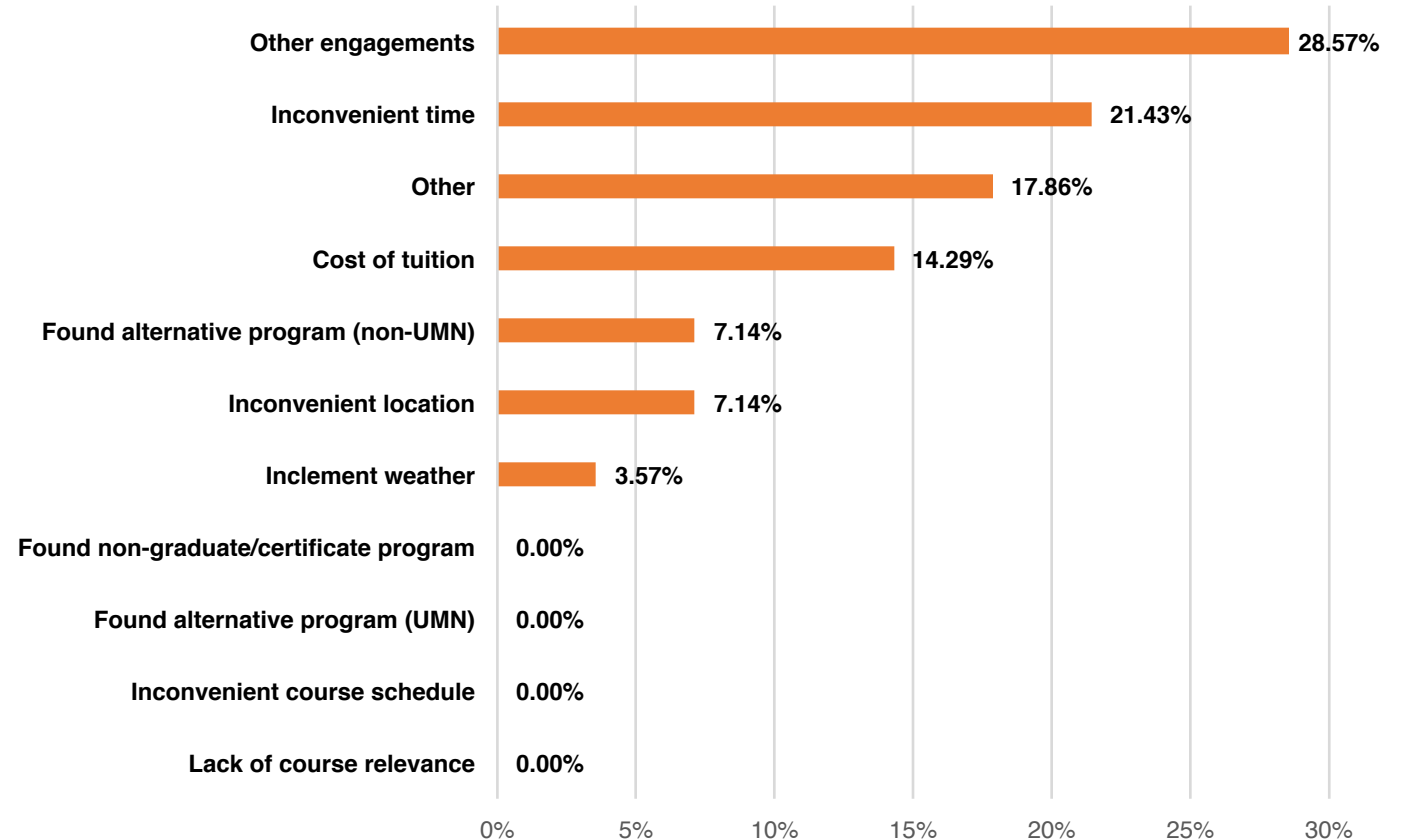


Q4. Did you attend an information session for the Strategic Communication M.A. program? (n = 54)



Factors in Skipping an Information Session

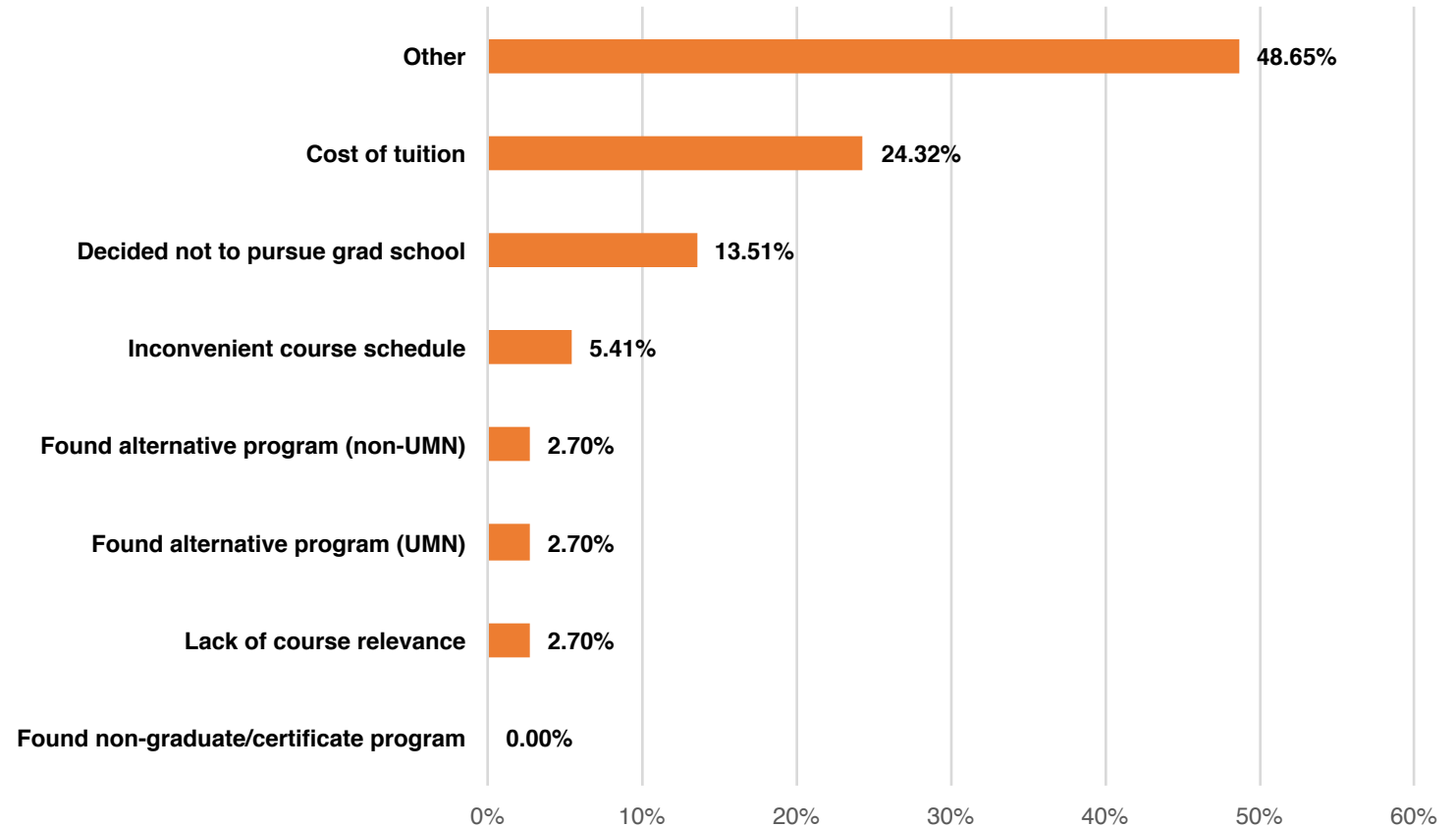
- A majority of prospects who did not attend an information session skipped the event due to various scheduling or logistical conflicts
- Those who cited “other” frequently specified their reasoning as either still finishing their undergraduate degree or being unsure of whether to attend graduate school in general



Q5. What factors influenced your decision not to attend an information session for the Strategic Communication M.A. program? Select all that apply. (n = 19)

Factors in Not Applying to the Program

- Nearly half of prospective students listed “Other” as their reason for not applying to the program
- Of those “Other” responses, one-third specified that they were either still strongly considering the program or planning to apply
- 5% of non-applicants wrote in concerns with their GRE qualifications
- The primary reason for not applying appears to be general uncertainty in terms of career direction or finances

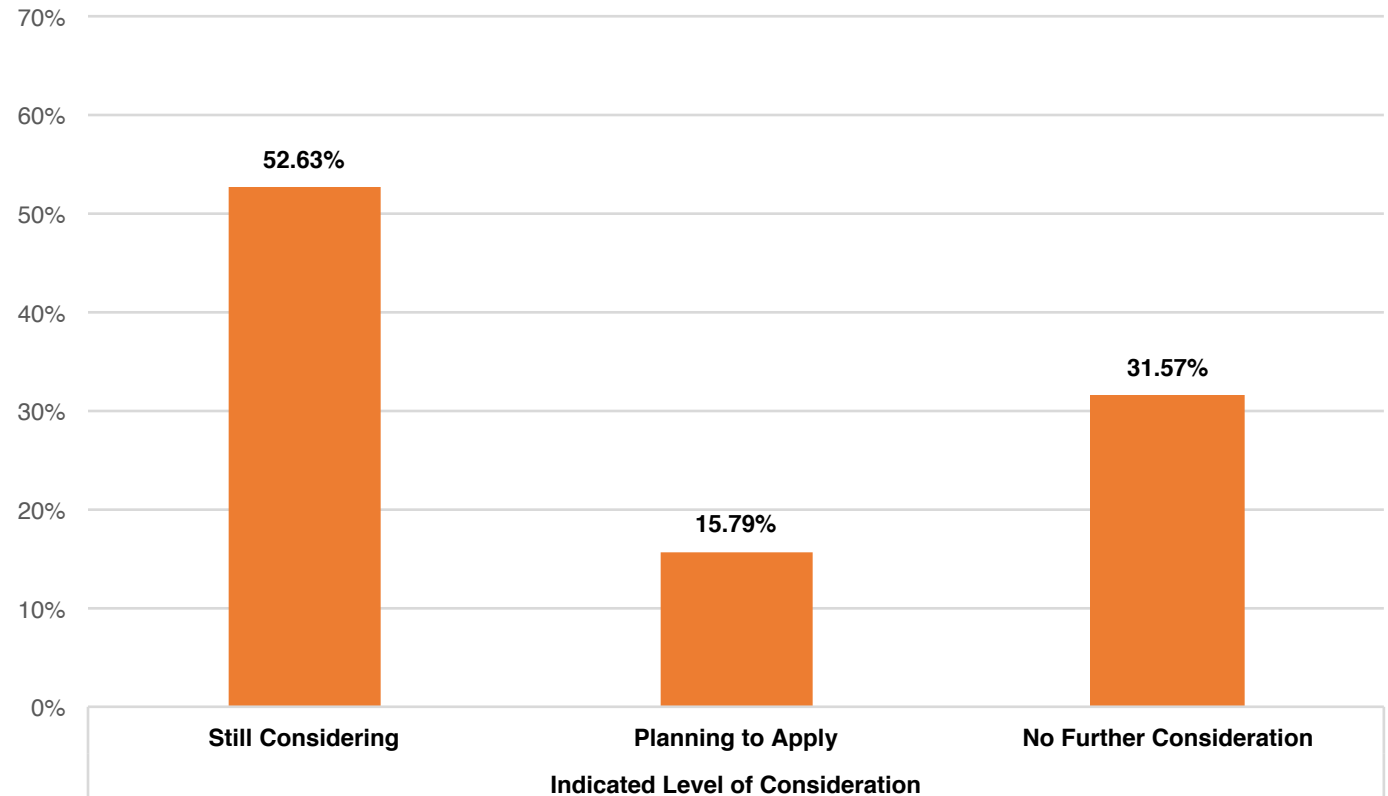


Q6. What factors influenced your decision not to apply to the Strategic Communication M.A. program? Select all that apply. (n = 35)



Many Prospective Applicants are Still Considering the Program

- Although the survey did not intentionally seek an answer to this question, **35% of respondents indicated their level of continuing interest in the program**
- Of this 35%, a majority remains open to or is actively planning to apply to the program



Q5. What factors influenced your decision not to attend an information session for the Strategic Communication M.A. program? Select all that apply. (n = 19); Q6. What factors influenced your decision not to apply to the Strategic Communication M.A. program? Select all that apply. (n = 54)



Level of Consideration vs. Initial Source of Program Interest

- The majority of those who indicated that they are no longer considering the program tend to cite digital sources as their initial path to interest in the program more than any other
- While many find the program online, those who are still considering or planning to apply cite personal contacts to a much higher degree

	No Further Consideration	Still Considering	Planning to Apply
Friend/co-worker	16.67%	10.00%	66.67%
Program student/alum	0.00%	50.00%	33.33%
Professional contact	16.67%	10.00%	33.33%
UMN contact	0.00%	10.00%	33.33%
Online search	66.67%	40.00%	33.33%
UMN website	50.00%	40.00%	33.33%
Program faculty	0.00%	10.00%	0.00%
Other	0.00%	10.00%	0.00%

Q2. How did you initially become interested in the Strategic Communication M.A. program at the University of Minnesota? Select all that apply. (n=54); Q5. What factors influenced your decision not to attend an information session for the Strategic Communication M.A. program? Select all that apply. (n=19); Q6. What factors influenced your decision not to apply to the Strategic Communication M.A. program? Select all that apply. (n=54)

Putting It All Together: Insights From Both Surveys

Implications: Alumni and Prospective Applicants

- Findings from the Prospective Applicant Survey suggest that alumni and word of mouth remain the program's strongest assets in drawing in prospective applicants with higher probabilities of enrollment than those who find the program through digital sources.
- The greater alumni satisfaction with the program, the more likely they are to recommend the program to their peers. With over 90% of alumni reporting high levels of program satisfaction, 62% categorized as active promoters, and 25% willing to lend their time, the program is well-positioned to capitalize on this asset.
- The cohort model remains critical to the program's success in terms of both student experience and recruitment. In addition to being a leading source of affinity for alumni and prospective applicants alike, alumni frequency of contact with their cohort after graduation is the strongest associative indicator of their satisfaction with the program.

Implications: Student Needs and Experience

- As the program and its prospect pool continue to become populated by digital natives, the need and desire for digital/social media-specific courses is likely to continue to decrease, as lines blur between what is considered “digital media” and what is simply “media”
- Cohorts from more recent graduation eras expressed that they would have liked the program to focus more on communications in specific sectors, such as healthcare and non-profit, as well as on particular disciplines, including public relations, media relations and crisis communications.
- The capstone remains a valuable requirement of program completion. Alumni find that the process has a strong positive impact on their professional development and understanding of the field, and appreciate the capstone’s integration into earlier stages of the program. More recent graduates report a desire for even more of this integration.