

Strategic Communication M.A. Program

2017 Survey Results: Alumni & Prospectives

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.



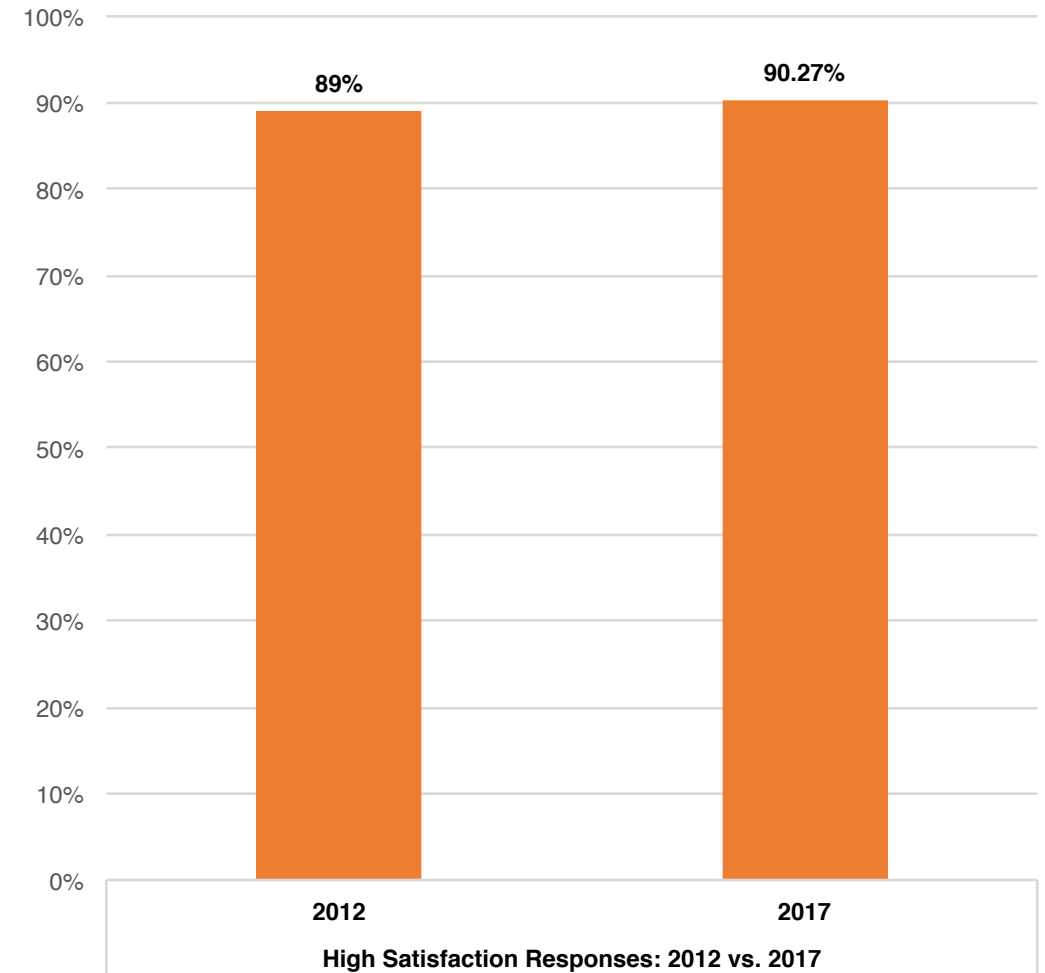
Part One:

Alumni Survey Insights



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



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)



Alumni Satisfaction is Deeply Tied to the Cohort Model

- Significant associations with overall satisfaction include several factors in alumni decision to enroll
- Cohort factors top the list across all graduate eras (2007-2010, 2011-2014, 2015-2017)

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)

Factors Influencing Alumni Choice to Enroll

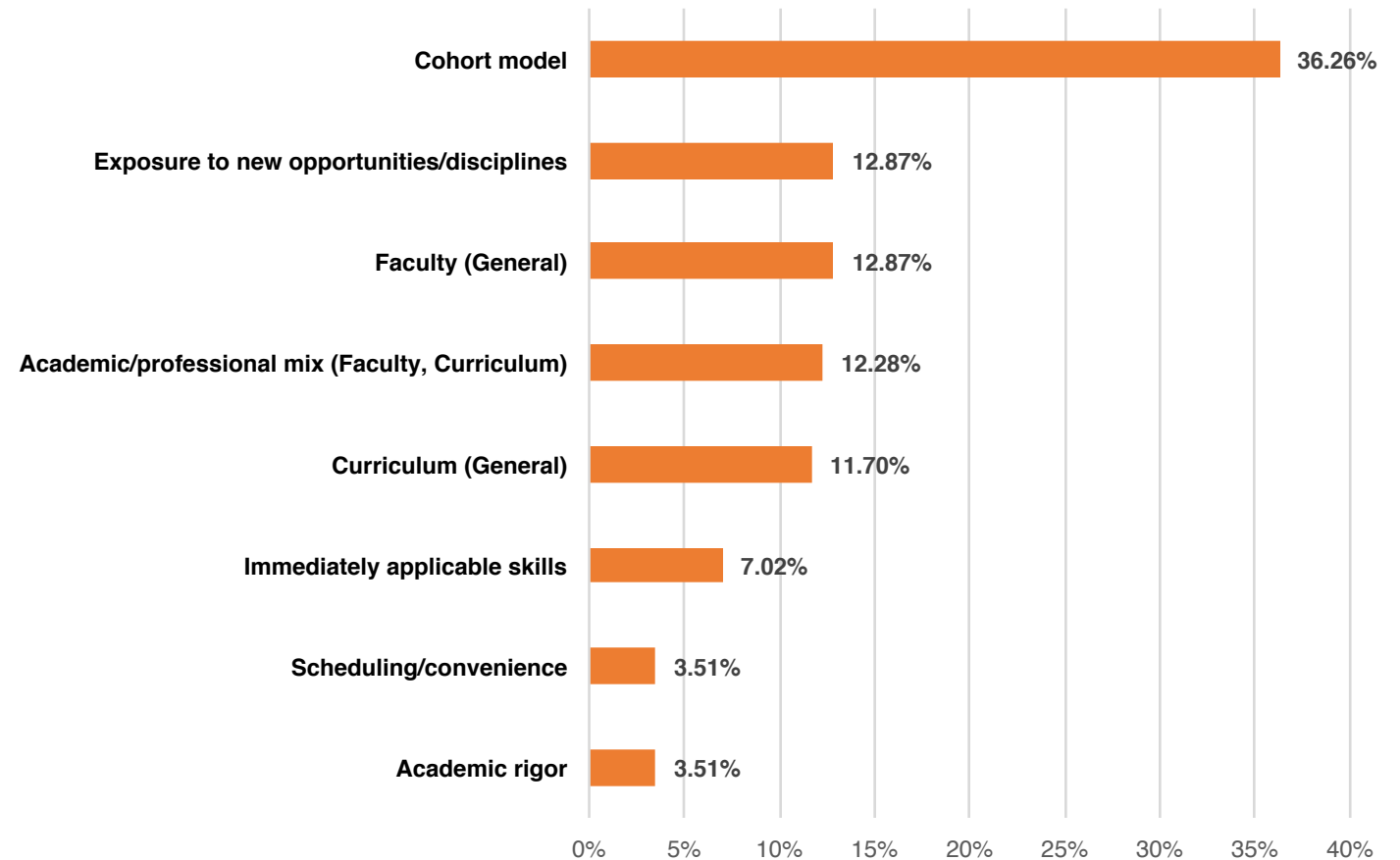
- Evening classes remain the top factor, followed by program duration and course relevance
- Affinity for the cohort model continues to rise
- UMN employment is an increasingly strong factor in enrollment decision

	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)

Cohort Model Tops the List of Best-Liked Elements of Student Experience

- In addition to the cohort model, the favorite aspects of the student experience 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)

What Alumni Wish They Had Learned in the Program

- Desire for program focus on digital and social strategies has declined
- Recent graduates 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

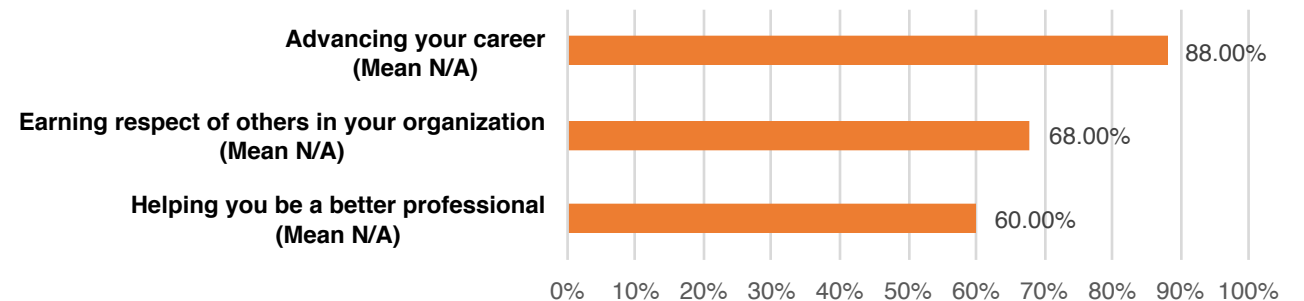
	Era 1 (2007-2010)	Era 2 (2011-2014)	Era 3 (2015-2017)
More time for/integration of capstone	0.00%	2.44%	22.22%
Focus/tracks for specializations	0.00%	17.07%	13.89%
Faculty adjustments	2.86%	7.32%	11.11%
Nothing	20.00%	9.76%	5.56%
More cohesion between courses	0.00%	2.44%	5.56%
Less ad/agency focus	5.71%	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)

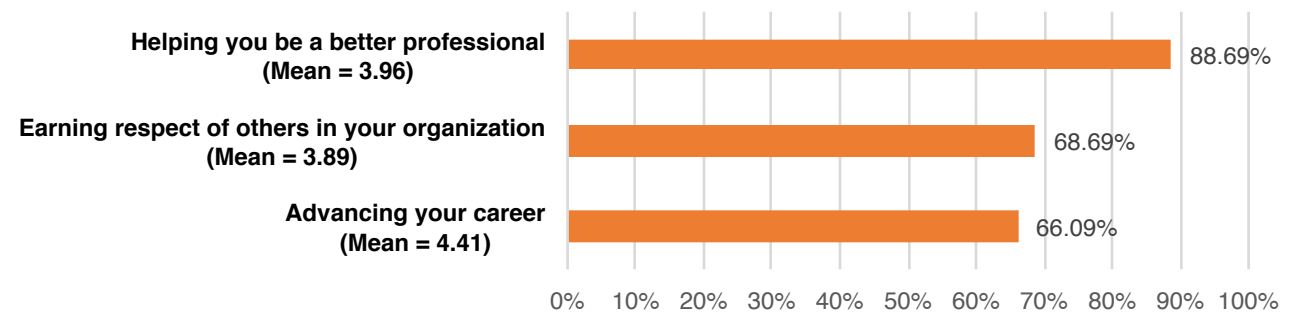
Degree Completion Continues to Deliver High-Value Outcomes

- 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?

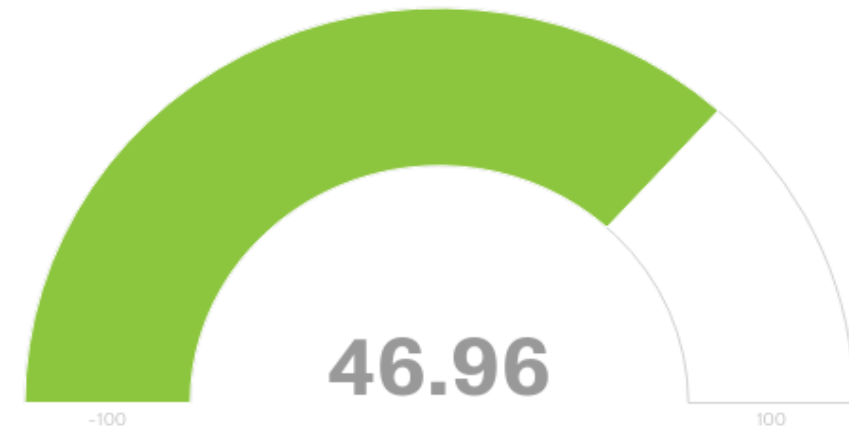
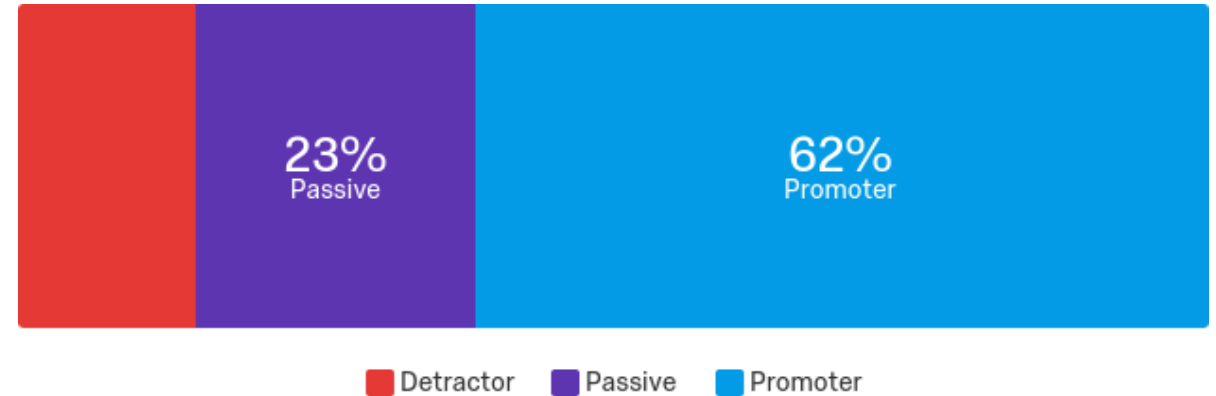
- Strategic and critical thinking are ranked as the most valuable skills learned from the program
- Recent cohorts often cite increased confidence and credibility, while valuing discipline and planning less frequently than their predecessors
- Appreciation for brand positioning and architecture is on 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 Would Recommend Program to Peers

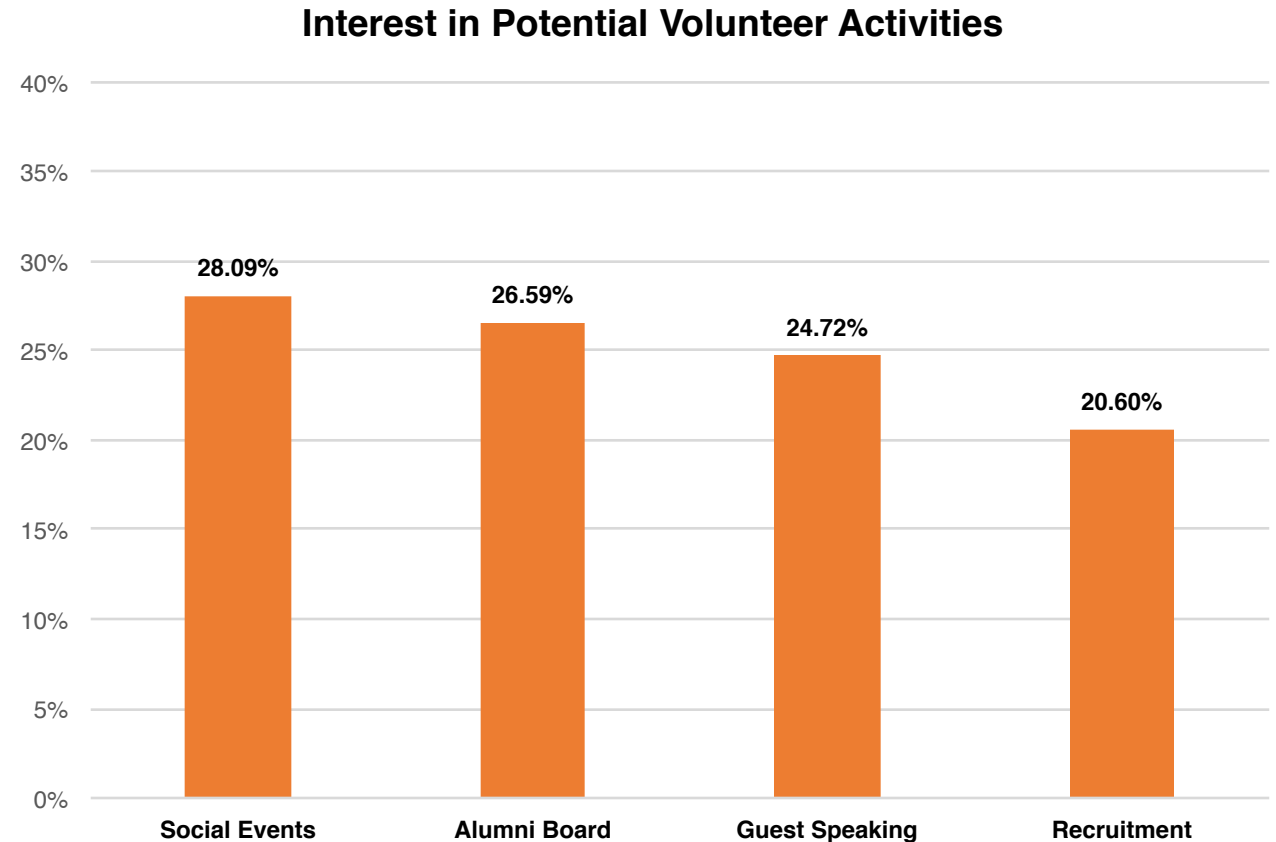
- Alumni overall rate as good to excellent in terms of recommending the program to their peers
- 85% of alumni are likely to recommend the program, and 62% actively due so
- These figures are down slightly from responses to a comparable yes/no question in the 2012 survey, in which 88% of alumni reported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

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)

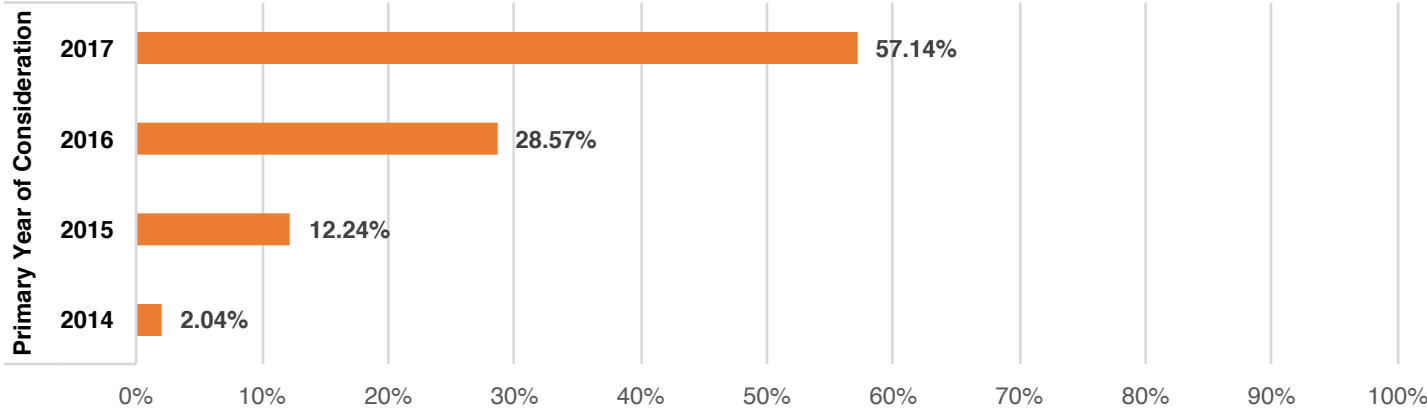
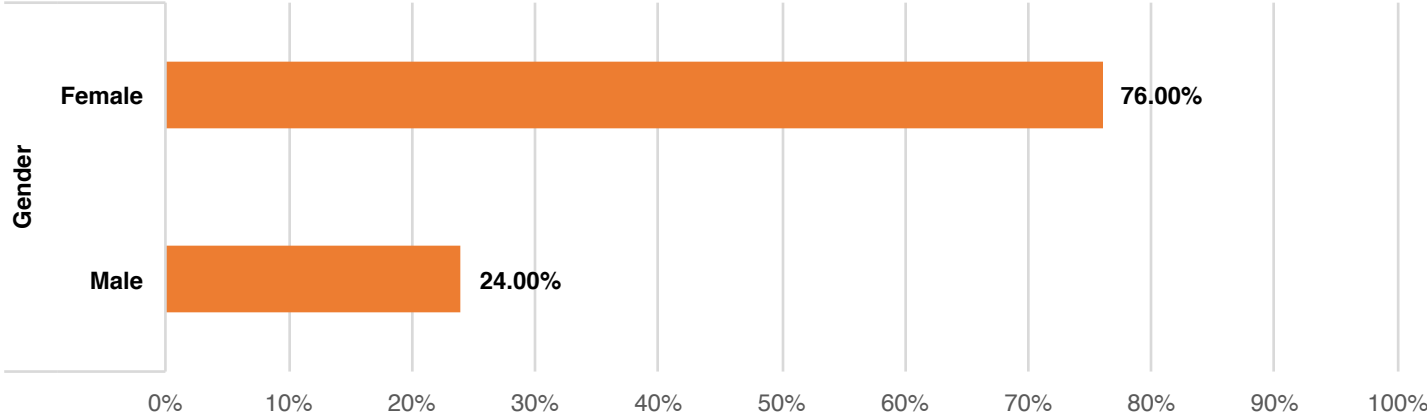
Part Two:

Prospective Applicant Survey Insights



Gender and Year of Program Consideration

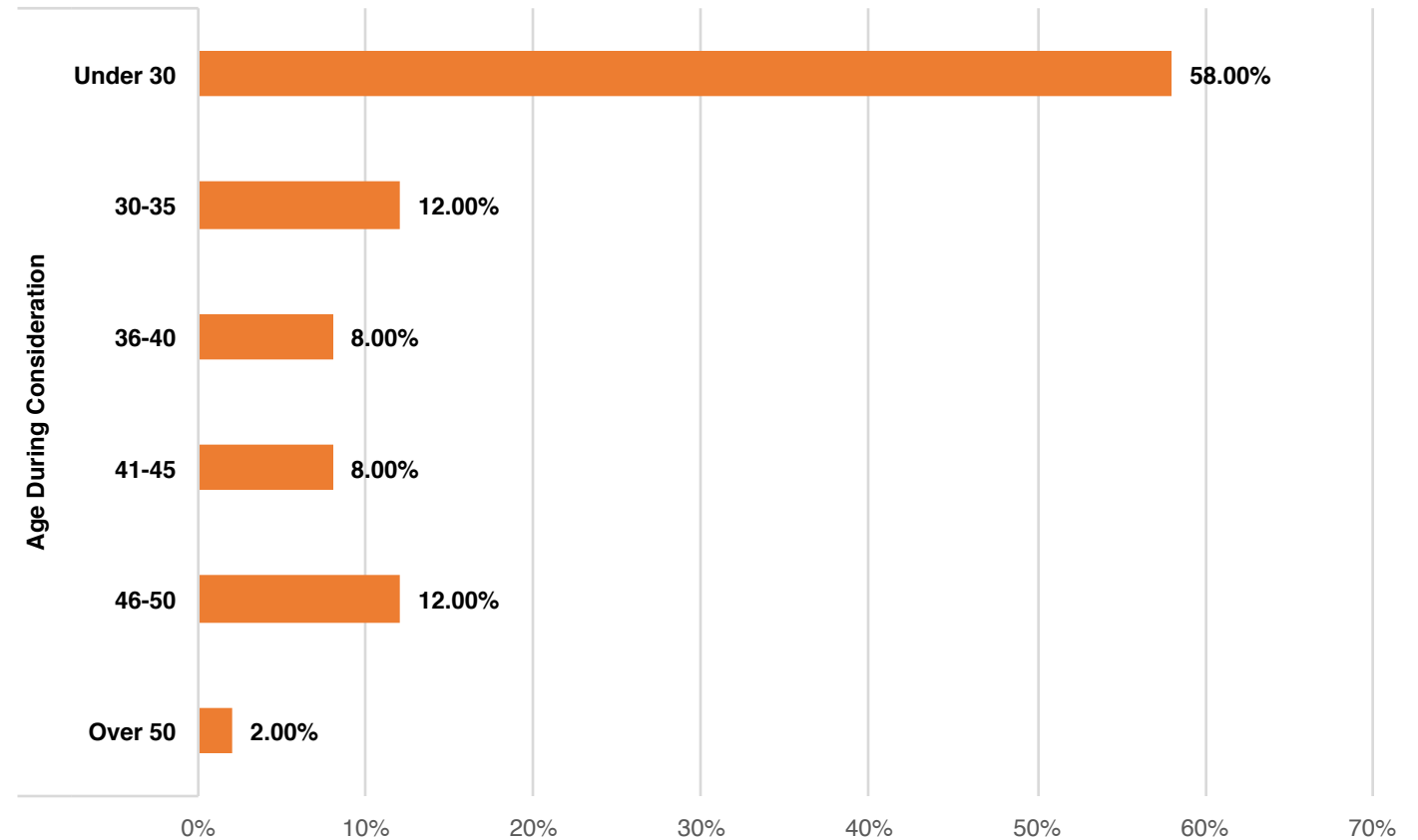
- Similar to the Alumni Survey, respondents predominantly identify as female
- Over 85% of respondents considered the program over the past two years



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

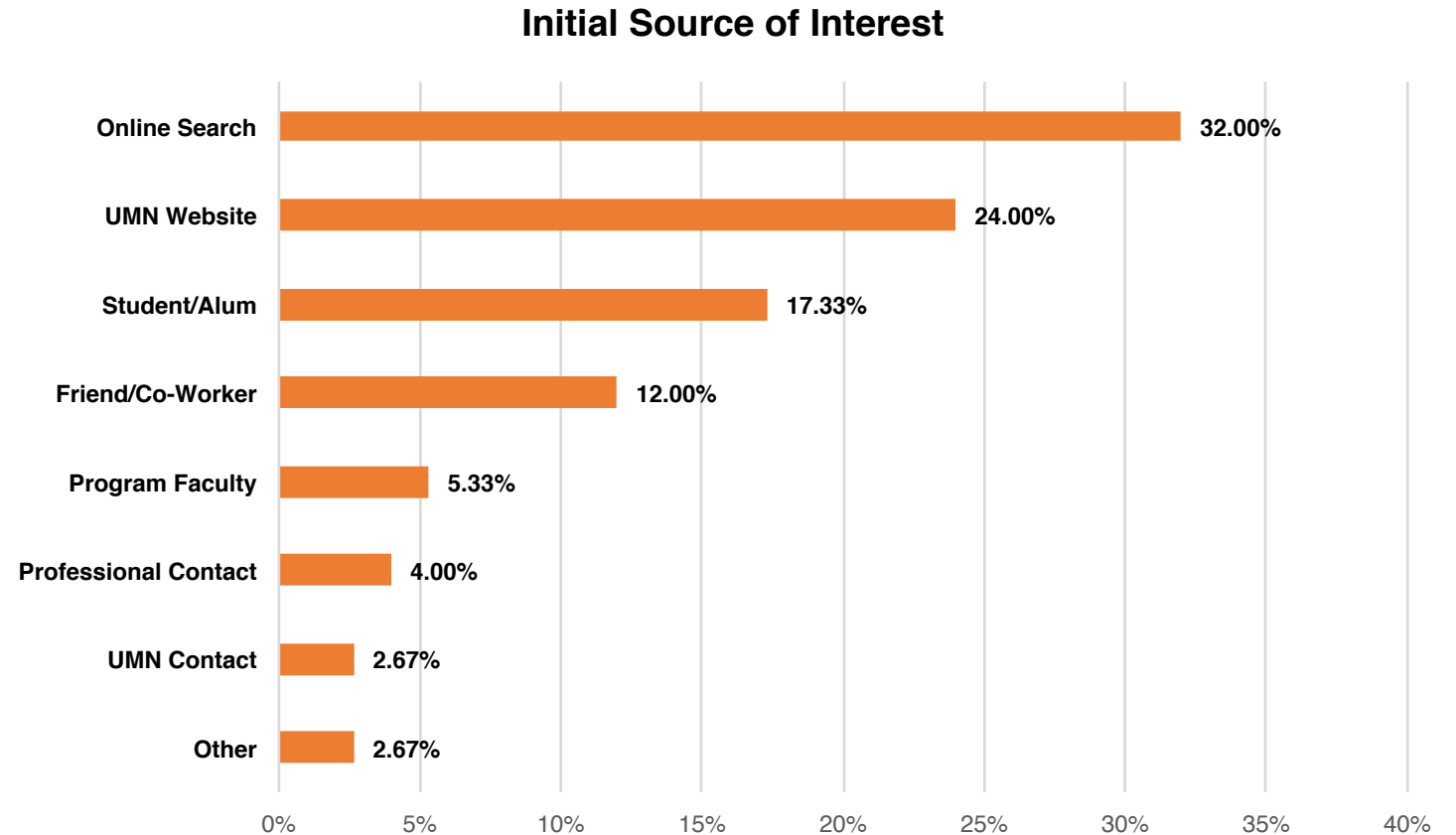
- Respondents' average age skews strongly under 35
- Fewer than 15% of respondents reported their age as over 46
- These figures are similar to those found in the Alumni Survey



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

Prospects' Sources of Initial Interest in the Program

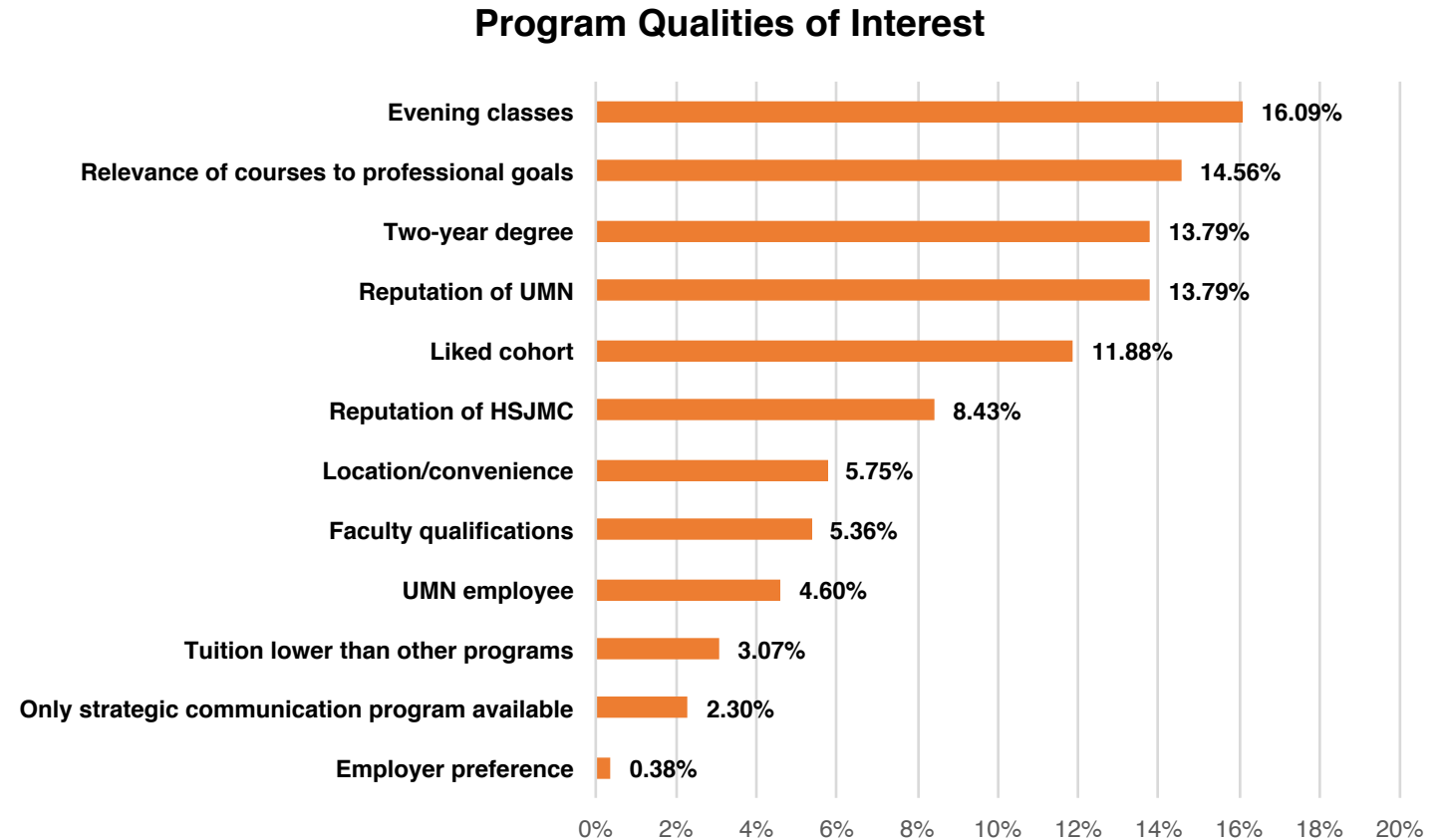
- Prospective applicants first become interested in the program primarily through digital sources (56%)
- Many rely on current students or alumni, program faculty and peers (38.66%)



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

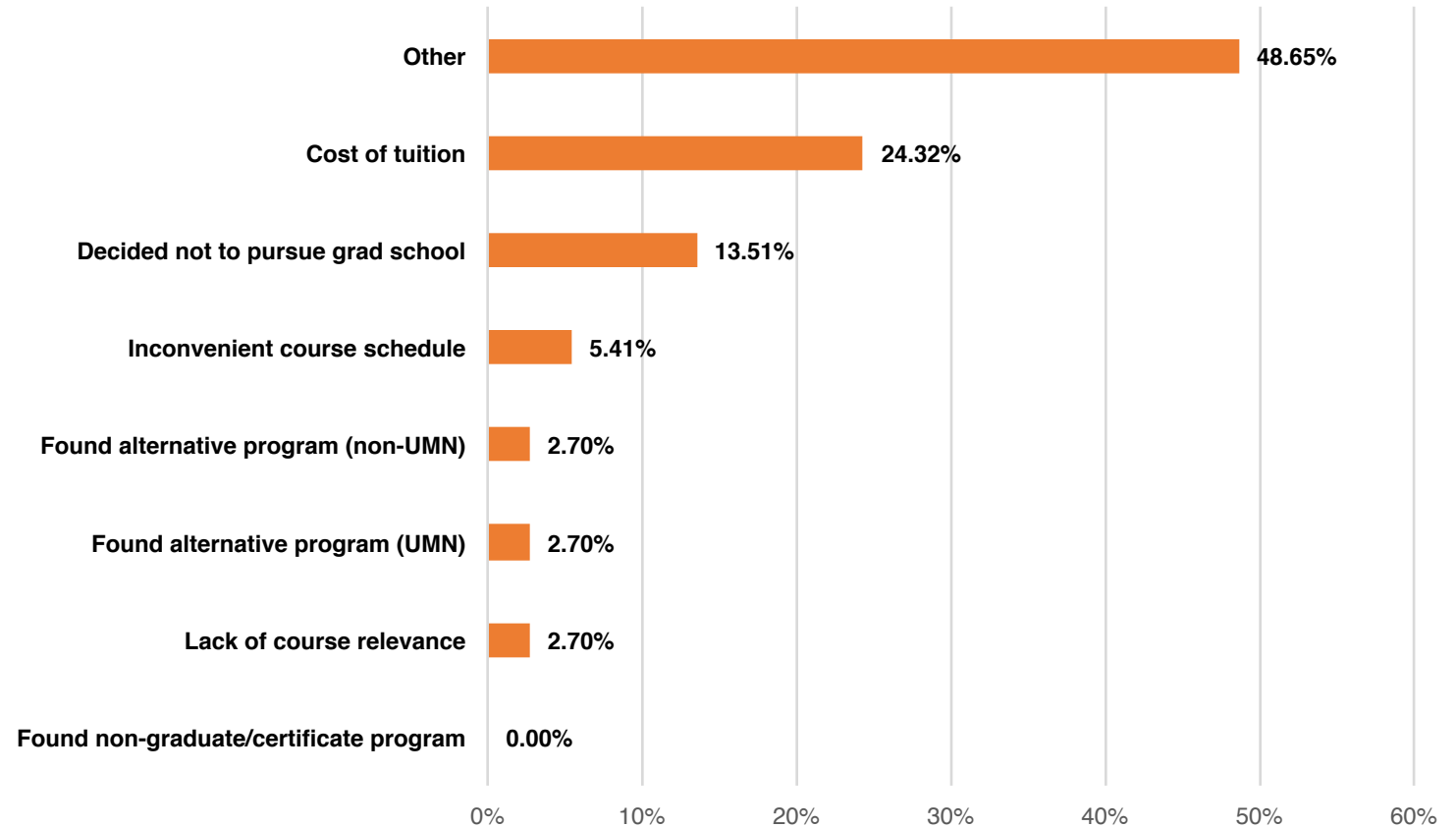
- Like alumni, prospective applicants frequently cite factors of convenience, such as evening classes and program duration, as drivers of their interest
- Similarly, prospects also show affinity toward the cohort model, as well as perceived curricular and faculty qualities



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

Factors in Not Applying to the Program

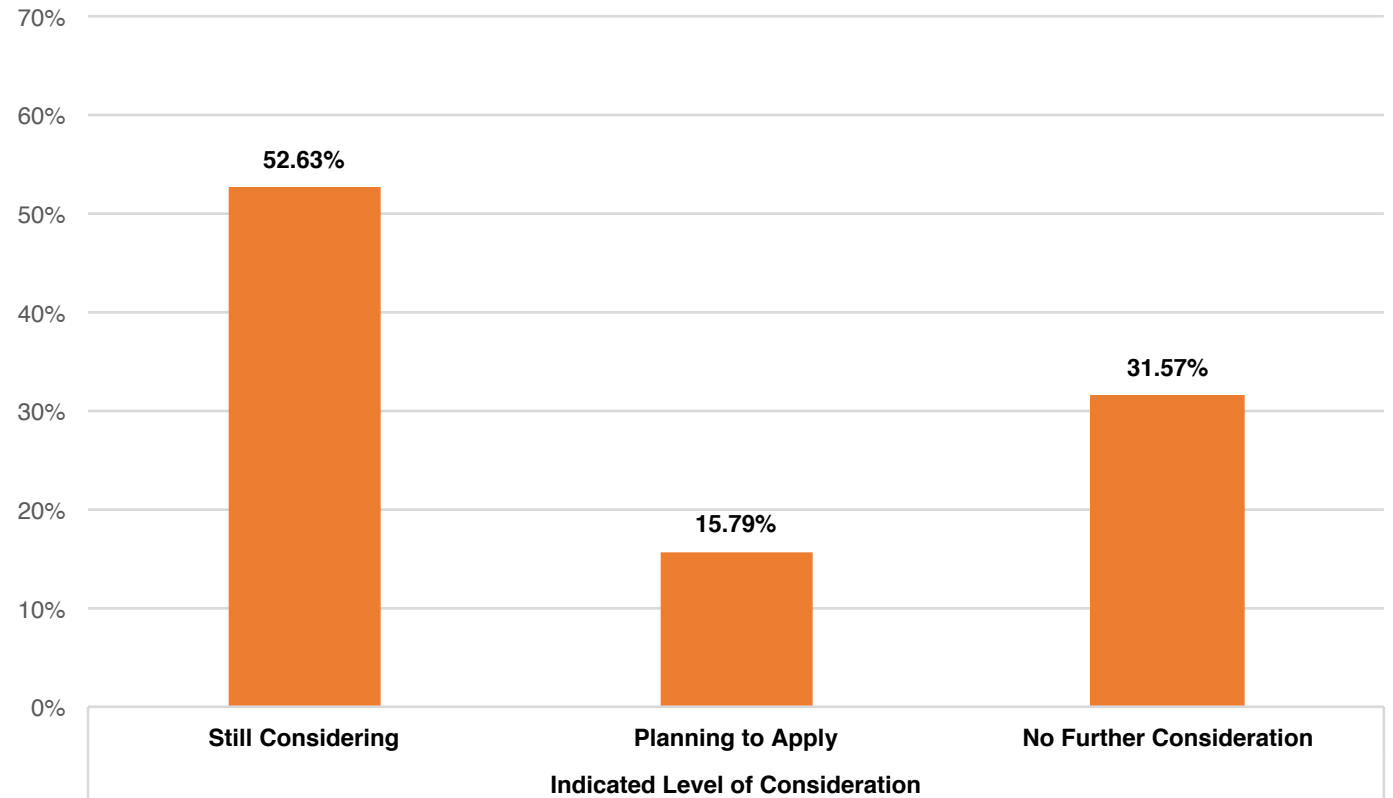
- Nearly half of prospective students listed “Other” as their reason for not applying to the program
- Of those “Other” responses, one-third specified that they were either still strongly considering the program or planning to apply
- The primary reason for not applying appears to be general uncertainty 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: Implications From Alumni & Prospectives

Implications: Alumni and Prospective Applicants

- 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.
- 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.
- Alumni satisfaction with the program correlates with likelihood 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 student experience and recruitment.
- 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

- 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”
- Recent cohorts 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.
- Alumni find that the capstone 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.