

Trends in Bachelor's Degree Conferrals Provide Insights to Expanding the US Candidate Pipeline

Demographic shifts among bachelor's earners suggest women and Hispanic Americans may be the key to expanding the US candidate pipeline.

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The competitive landscape of graduate management education (GME) programs in the United States continues to expand and diversify with each passing year. The total number of US-based programs accepting GMAT score reports grew 40.6 percent over the last ten testing years (TY), and the proportion of business master's programs among all GME programs grew to 48.5 percent in TY 2017.

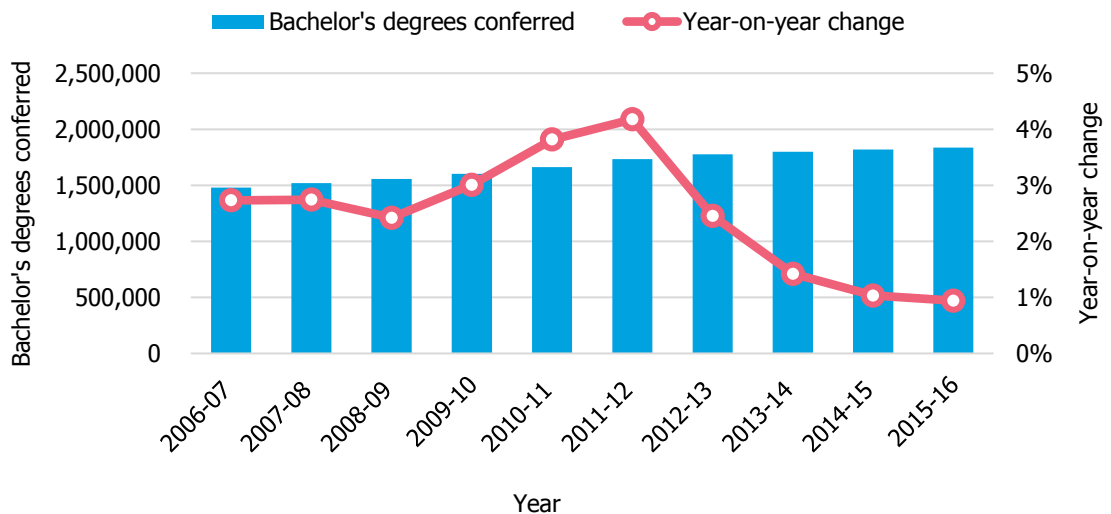
As the number of programs grows (supply), it follows that a greater number of students is needed to fill seats (demand). Over the last decade, demand growth for US programs has largely been fueled by international candidates. Most recently, however, the [political climate](#) in the United States has had a disruptive effect on international student mobility trends, and most US programs report that they are [receiving fewer international applications](#). In this new reality, many US programs are looking to grow their domestic candidate pipelines with renewed urgency.

Trends in bachelor's degree conferrals among US citizens offer a glimpse into the near future of the US graduate business school candidate pipeline and provide insights to where opportunities for expansion may exist.

Overall, the number of bachelor's degrees conferred to US citizens is growing. Between 2006-07 and 2015-16—the last ten years of available data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)—the number of bachelor's degrees earned annually grew by 24.2 percent, rising from 1.48 million to 1.84 million. This growth, however, has recently slowed. While bachelor's conferrals grew an average of 3.2 percent annually between 2006-07 and 2011-2012, year-on-year growth has slowed to about 1 percent in 2014-15 and 2015-16.

While annual additions to the pool of US citizens who are possible GME entrants (bachelor's earners) is growing, the rate of growth has slowed to the point of near flatness. To grow the domestic pipeline, then, US business school programs cannot simply maintain the proportion of US citizen bachelor's degree earners that apply to GME, but must grow that proportion. Demographic shifts among bachelor's degree earners suggest the key to doing this may lie in attracting more women and Hispanic American candidates.

Bachelor's degrees conferred to US citizens



National Center for Education Statistics. 2017 Digest of Education Statistics, [Table 322.20](#).

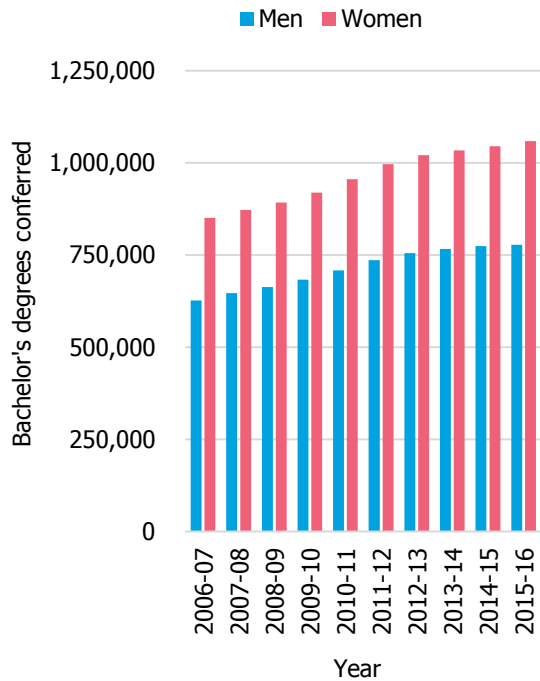
Since the late 1980s, every year women have earned more bachelor’s degrees than men among US citizens. While the proportion of bachelor’s degrees earned by women has held steady at about 58 percent over the last ten years, the overall growth in bachelor’s conferrals during this period means the gap between the total number of degrees earned by women and men annually has grown 25.3 percent. In 2015-16, about 280,000 more women than men earned a bachelor’s degree—an increase of about 56,000 more than the difference ten years earlier and the greatest difference by sex in the history of the NCES dataset.

Like the US population overall, the pool of bachelor’s earners is growing more diverse from a race/ethnicity perspective, with Hispanic Americans experiencing the largest increase in representation. Over the last ten years, the number of bachelor’s degrees earned annually by Hispanic Americans increased 104.5 percent, growing an average of 8.1 percent annually. Compared with 2012-13, nearly 50,000 more Hispanic Americans earned a bachelor’s degree in 2015-2016. Over the same period, the number of white students earning a bachelor’s degree declined nearly 25,000.

In summary, US programs seeking to offset declines in international applications with domestic ones should consider striving not only to grow their domestic pipeline, but to expand it to include more of the types of applicants who are seeing the most growth in bachelor’s conferrals: women and Hispanic Americans.

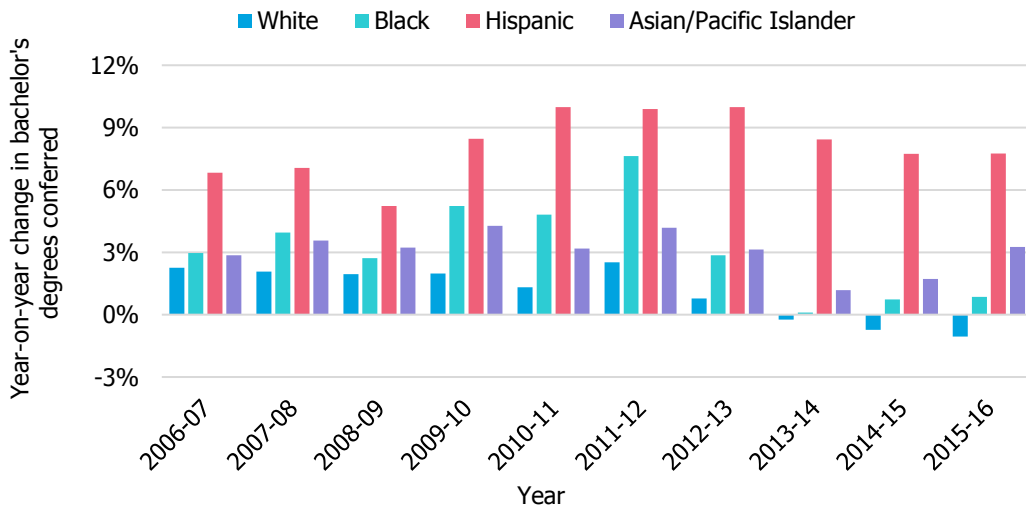
For insights on connecting with and recruiting these candidates, read the GMAC white papers [What Women Want: A Blueprint for Change in Business Education](#) and [Keeping Pace: Insights and Strategies for the Future of US Part-Time MBA Programs](#) and the research brief [Key Diversity Statistics: Hispanic Americans](#).

Bachelor’s degrees conferred to US citizens, by sex



National Center for Education Statistics. 2017 Digest of Education Statistics, [Table 322.20](#).

Year-on-year change in bachelor’s degrees conferred to US citizens, by race/ethnicity



National Center for Education Statistics. 2017 Digest of Education Statistics, [Table 322.20](#).