

Demand for Graduate Management Education

United States

With a population of 342 million, the United States is the third most populous country in the world.¹ Eighty-three percent of the population live in urban areas, and the most populous cities are New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago. The median age in the United States is 39, which—like most other parts of the world—is expected to increase in the coming years as the population of people aged 65 and older is projected to rise 47 percent by 2050.²

The largest economy in the world, the United States is highly diversified across sectors, a leading technology innovator, the largest importer of goods and the second-largest exporter, and home to leading financial exchanges.³ The United States fended off years of recession following the COVID-19 pandemic, though inflation reached a high of 9.1 percent in June 2020.⁴ Macroeconomic conditions improved in 2024—including lower inflation, reduced interest rates, and new jobs—yet many remained concerned with high living costs for essentials like housing, food, child care, health care, and fuel.⁵ Still, the average household income per capita is USD \$51,147 a year—the highest of OECD countries.⁶

About Demand for Graduate Management Education

The Demand for Graduate Management Education white paper aims to identify in which markets the demand for graduate business school is largest and strongest. By combining an understanding of macro-level trends in population growth and educational attainment with country profiles of micro-level candidate preferences and behaviors, we aim to offer a comprehensive look at the current and future demand for GME.

Read more at gmac.com/demand-for-gme

¹ "United States." The World Factbook, updated January 22, 2025. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/united-states>.

² Mather, Mark and Paola Scommegna. "Fact Sheet: Aging in the United States." Population Reference Bureau, January 9, 2024. <https://www.prb.org/resources/fact-sheet-aging-in-the-united-states>

³ United States." The World Factbook.

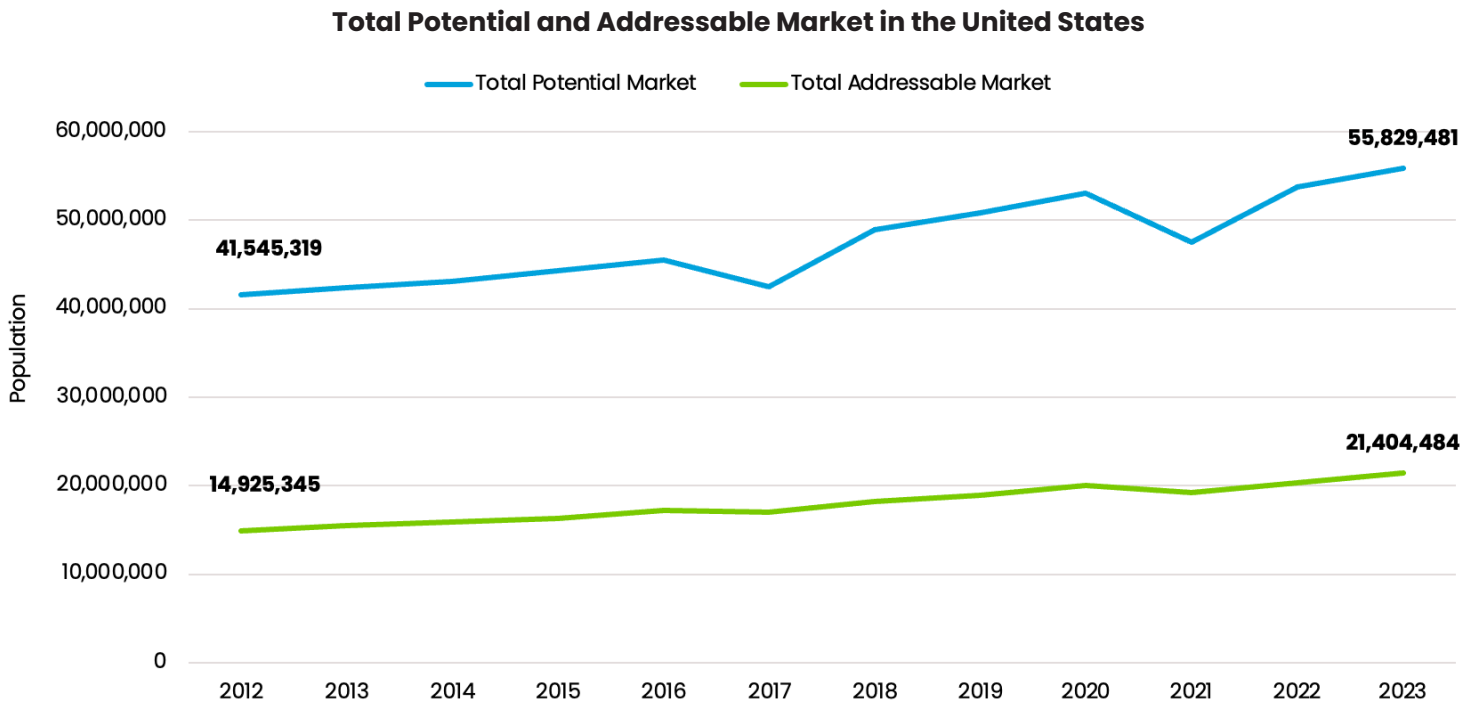
⁴ Jones, Callum. "US Economy Continues to Grow at Robust Rate Days Before Presidential Election." The Guardian, October 30, 2024. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2024/oct/30/us-inflation-gdp>.

⁵ Otte, Jedidjah. "No Social Life, No Plans, No Savings: Americans Aren't Reaping Benefits From Booming US Economy." The Guardian, November 4, 2024. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2024/nov/04/americans-not-benefiting-from-booming-economy>.

⁶ "United States." OECD Better Life Index. <https://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/united-states>.

Figure 1: The U.S. addressable market of young people likely to get master’s degrees increased by more than six million people since 2012.

The total potential market of people with bachelor’s degrees also increased, but not at quite as high of a rate.



Source: World Bank, U.S. Census Bureau, analysts’ calculations

Note: Total potential market is the population aged 25+ with a bachelor’s degree but no master’s degree, and total addressable market is the portion of the total potential market actually expected to get a master’s degree



Countries with the largest shares of GME candidates who prefer to study in the United States

- 1. United States **90%**
- 2. Mexico..... **62%**
- 3. Pakistan..... **53%**

Candidates’ top reasons for studying in the country

- 1. The reputation of the educational system **67%**
- 2. Better preparation for career **51%**
- 3. Availability of financial aid..... **27%**

Source: GMAC Prospective Students Survey 2024

How international students study in the United States

The United States is one of the largest suppliers of graduate management education in the world, with 550 business schools accredited by AACSB, EFMD, or AMBA. As such, it is a premier destination for international talent, with 44 percent of global candidates saying they prefer to pursue graduate management education in the United States.

International graduate students enter the United States to study full-time primarily with F-1 student visas. After graduation, those interested can apply to work in the country with H1-B visas for skilled labor or through the Optional Practical Training—a program that allows students with F-1 status to work in the United States for one to three years after graduation.⁷ The COVID-19 pandemic unsurprisingly resulted in a drop in issuances of F-1 and H1-B visas; however, the number of these visa approvals exceeded 2019 levels by 2022, with 445,418 F-1 visas and 265,777 H1-B visas issued in 2023.⁸ In June of 2024, new policies were introduced to ease the process for international students to pursue employment in the United States following graduation.⁹ But the increases in visa approvals were paired with increases in visa denials. In 2023, the rates of F-1 visa denials for applicants from Africa, Asia, and South America exceeded even pre-pandemic 2019 visa denial rates.

Following the reelection of Donald Trump as president of the United States, uncertainty abounds about the possible effects his policies may have on international student mobility to the country. Notably, visa denial rates expanded under President Trump and President Joseph Biden alike.¹⁰ However, the first Trump Administration also witnessed a marked decrease in the favorability of the United States abroad, fewer international graduate students entering the United States, and declines in international students applying to GME programs. In the lead-up to the 2024 presidential election, international students said the outcome would not influence their decision to study in the United States. Because this neutrality occurred at much higher rates compared to previous election cycles, it is possible the impacts seen during Trump's first presidency will be diluted if they are repeated.



⁷ "Extension of Post Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) and F-1 Status for Eligible Students under the H-1B Cap-Gap Regulations." U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, updated January 17, 2025.

⁸ "Nonimmigrant Visa Statistics." U.S. Department of State – Bureau of Consular Affairs. <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/legal/visa-law0/visa-statistics/nonimmigrant-visa-statistics.html>.

⁹ "Easing the Nonimmigrant Visa Process for U.S. College Graduates." U.S. Department of State – Bureau of Consular Affairs, updated July 15, 2024. <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/News/visas-news/easing-the-nonimmigrant-visa-process-for-u-s--college-graduates.html>.

¹⁰ Walker, Andrew. "Influence of the U.S. Presidential Election on Business School Application Plans." Graduate Management Admission Council, September 2024. <https://www.gmac.com/market-intelligence-and-research/research-library/admissions-and-application-trends/2024-us-presidential-election>.

GME preferences of U.S. citizens

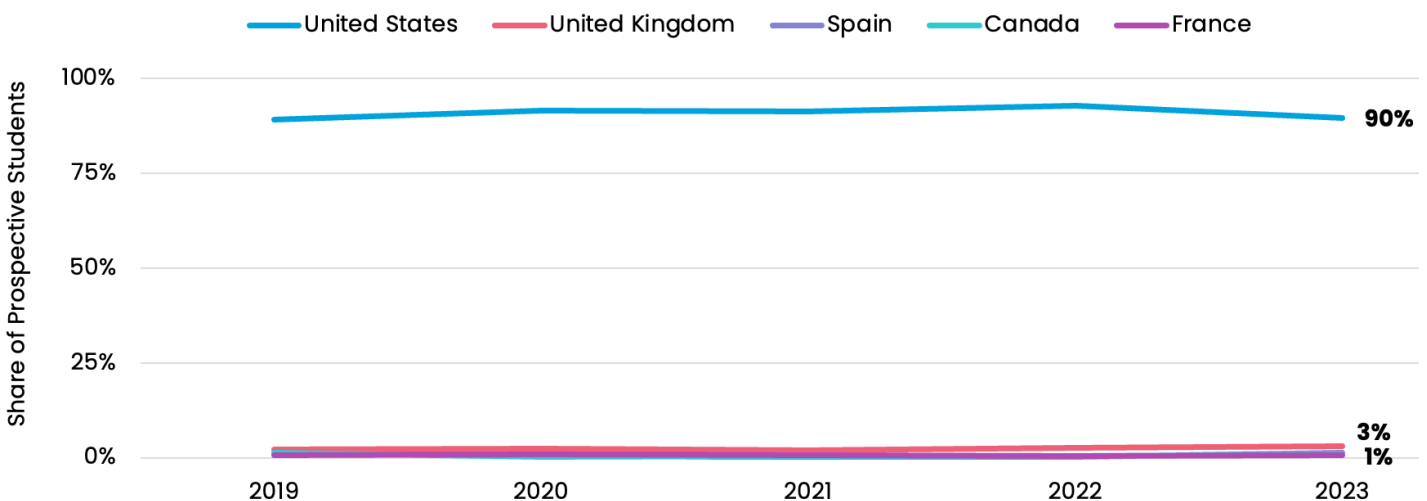
U.S. GME candidates are most interested in pursuing some type of MBA degree in the United States. According to the GMAC Prospective Students Survey, more than half say their top post-GME career goal is to earn more money, with most aspiring to consulting roles and the products and services

industry. The average prospective student in the United States plans to fund half of their degree with a combination of financial aid and loans. With regard to outreach to these candidates, nearly three-quarters say they have sought out GME information on LinkedIn.

Figure 2: U.S. citizens overwhelmingly want to pursue GME in the United States—which has long been the case.

The United Kingdom, Spain, Canada, and France are also top destinations for a small share of U.S. candidates.

Top Five Preferred Study Destinations for U.S. Citizens by Country, 2019–2023



Source: GMAC Prospective Students Survey 2024



Top 3 destinations for GMAT score sending in 2024

1. United States
2. United Kingdom
3. France

Source: GMAT Geographic Trend Report 2024

Figure 3: U.S. citizens most prefer MBAs of different lengths and delivery formats compared to business master’s degrees.

The most preferred MBA type is the full-time two-year and the most preferred business master’s degree is the Master of Accounting.

Preferred Program Type for U.S. Citizens



Source: GMAC Prospective Students Survey 2024

Figure 4: The average candidate in the United States plans to finance half of their graduate management education through financial aid and loans.

They intend to finance the other half largely through a combination of employer support, personal earnings and savings, and support from their parents.

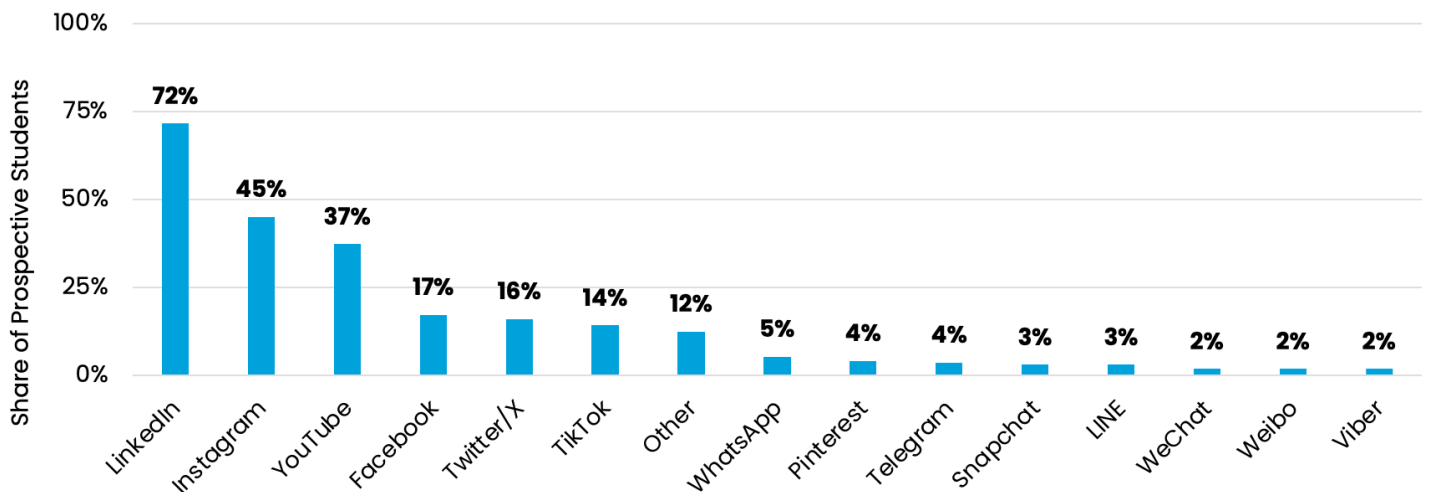
Average GME Financing Plans for U.S. Citizens



Figure 35: LinkedIn is the top social media platform for most U.S. citizens researching GME.

Sizeable shares of U.S. candidates can also be found on Instagram and YouTube.

Most Used Social Media Platforms for U.S. Citizens



Source: GMAC Prospective Students Survey 2024

