

# State of Disability Inclusion in MBA Programs



## Table of Contents

<b>1. Message from Access to Success Organization.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Pre-Admissions Experience .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>4. Academic Life Experience .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>5. Student Life Experience .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>6. In-Program Recruitment Experiences .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>7. Overall MBA Experience .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>8. Post-Graduate Experience .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>9. Recommendations .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>10. Survey Methodology &amp; Demographics.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>11. Endnotes .....</b>	<b>35</b>

## Message from Access to Success Organization

15% of the world's population, or one billion people, experience some form of disability.<sup>i</sup> Yet, just 7% of business leaders identify as having a disability.<sup>ii</sup> So how do we bridge this gap in representation when it comes to leaders with disabilities? We believe one way to do that – to build a pipeline of future leaders with disabilities – is through business schools and the MBA.

An MBA degree has long been seen as a gateway to leadership roles. A recent survey of over 2000 MBA graduates found that 2 out of 3 respondents were in middle-management roles or higher.<sup>iii</sup> But while business schools have made meaningful strides in fostering diversity and inclusion in their programs, little is known about the number and experiences of people with disabilities in MBA programs. We cannot address what we do not know. Now, we hope we can change that.

The State of Disability Inclusion in MBA Programs report is an attempt to shed light on the experiences of a community that deserves more visibility within business schools. It is intended to serve as a repository of information, experiences and suggestions. We hope it can serve as a helpful resource for systemic change for the inclusion of people with disabilities in MBA programs.



Varun Chandak  
**President, Access to Success Organization**



Enabling persons with disabilities to be full participants in the economy and achieve their ambitions is not just a positive gesture, it contributes to business success and economic growth. Making change happen takes action – not words. We're committed to affecting meaningful change in our business and the communities around us by investing in the next generation of leaders and changemakers.

Anna Goncalves  
**Senior Vice-President, Talent and Workforce Transformation, CIBC**

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## 2. Executive Summary

From October to December 2020, a global online survey was conducted with 184 prospective, current, and recently graduated MBA students. The students identified as having a wide range of disabilities and disability severity levels. We asked the respondents about their experiences in six key stages of their MBA journey –pre-admission, academic life, student life, in-program recruiting, overall MBA experience, and post-graduation experience.

Respondents widely and consistently reported stigma, a lack of flexibility, inaccessible academic, social and recruiting practices, and lack of awareness and representation throughout their experiences. Certain cornerstones of the traditional MBA experience, such as intense pressure, demanding workloads, and social and recruiting events centered around alcohol were also reported as the most inaccessible.

There are bright spots. Among those who requested accommodations, the results were generally reported to be positive and beneficial. Most respondents also reported a high level of satisfaction with their campus Career Centers and the overall MBA experience. Most importantly, respondents clearly identified what they feel would improve the experience for future MBA students.

Recommendations suggested by respondents can be classified into 4 categories – awareness and visibility, resources, accommodations, and training. The most popular suggestions within each category were, respectively, building awareness among faculty and administrators of accommodation-related laws with meaningful consequences for non-compliance, creating campus resource centers, improving the accessibility of and/or eliminating standardized entrance tests, and implementing anti-bias and disability awareness training for peers and recruiters.

This section summarizes our key findings from the survey, followed by an in-depth dive into each stage of the MBA student experience.



## Pre-admissions Experience

1 in 3 respondents faced barriers, yet less than half of them disclosed their disability.

- Disability-related factors played a role in the choice of business school and program for almost half of the respondents.
- 1 in 3 respondents faced disability-related barriers during the application process, of whom a full 65% (i.e., 22% of all respondents) highlighted standardized testing as a concern.<sup>xii</sup>
- Just 46% of respondents chose to disclose their disability during the admission process.
- Over half of the respondents were not presented any opportunity at all to disclose their disability during the application process.
- Just over half of those who did disclose their disability during the application process found it beneficial, while 40% were unsure of the result.

It is possible that business schools may be underestimating the number of students with disabilities applying to and enrolled in their programs. More work needs to be done to encourage MBA candidates to disclose their disability during the application process, clarifying potential benefits and supports available for those with disabilities, and openly addressing the fear of stigma and discrimination.

## Academic Experience

2 out of 3 respondents needed accommodations, but over a quarter of them never requested any.

- A slight majority reported that the quality of their academic experience was impacted by their disability. The most frequently cited problem areas were communication with faculty and peers, participation in in-class discussions, inflexible schedules or workload, and completing evaluation and testing activities.
- 2 out of 3 respondents reported having formal accommodation needs, but just over a quarter of them never requested accommodations. Common reasons for not requesting include finding the process itself daunting, lacking formal diagnostic paperwork, fearing stigmatization, and internalized ableism.
- Roughly 30% of this group said they were not familiar with the formal process to request accommodations, or even knew if such a process existed.

This indicates the need for more awareness about availability of accommodations and the process for requesting them, particularly since respondents who did use such processes were generally satisfied with them.



Respondents cited the need for a wide range of accommodations, which underscores the value of creating flexible policies and training faculty and administrators to proactively recognize and mitigate disability-related barriers. That said, time pressure and excessive workload were so frequently cited as a barrier that these aspects may be a useful focal point for pursuing initial change.

## Student Life Experience

Over 60% of respondents experienced difficulties with casual social interactions and informal social gatherings.

- Just over half of the respondents felt that their social experiences on campus were impacted by their disability.
- Two of the biggest areas of difficulties were casual social interactions with peers (68%) and informal social gatherings (62%). These interactions were most frequently impaired by social anxiety, fatigue and emotional exhaustion due to onerous program demands, among a variety of other reasons.
- Just under 30% of respondents reported needing accommodations for social aspects of the program. Fear of stigma, exhaustion with ongoing self-advocacy demands, and other concerns, however, meant that only half requested their needed accommodations.

Concerningly, respondents noted that their peers were often insensitive or oblivious to even the most obvious and visible needs, such as wheelchair users and the need for venues with elevators. These findings indicate a need for evidence-based anti-bias and awareness training for peers, particularly since a significant majority of respondents also felt such interventions could be helpful.

## On-Campus Recruitment

Half of the respondents had a negative perception of employers' on-campus recruitment drives.

- Half of the respondents said their disability influenced their perception of on-campus recruitment drives. Negative reports included bias, stereotyping, and ableism along with inaccessible recruiting experiences during employer-driven processes.
- On-campus Career Centers were seen more positively, with just 1 in 4 reporting a perception of ineffectiveness.

This suggests that significant efforts are necessary to ensure employers invited for on-campus hiring provide an accessible recruiting experience free of stigma and ableism.

## Overall MBA Experience

2 out of 3 respondents were satisfied with their overall MBA experience.

- Two-thirds of the respondents reported being somewhat or extremely satisfied with their overall MBA experience. Students found the opportunity to create bonds and friendships with other students as the most predominantly rewarding part of the MBA experience, besides the learning itself, networking with faculty, as well as accessing better employment opportunities.
- 1 out of 5 respondents reported being somewhat or extremely unsatisfied with their MBA experience.
- A similar proportion (23%) reported that their disability had a strong or extremely strong impact on their overall satisfaction with the MBA experience.
- Particularly problematic elements included mandatory class participation and presentations, dealing with stigma and discrimination, demanding workloads and stress, and bureaucratic, ineffective administrative services (including Accessibility Offices).
- A substantial minority perceived a lack of inclusiveness in learning materials, teaching approaches, and the overall environment.

Respondents recommended more awareness of disability-related rights and needs for faculty, staff, and peers and more proactive advertising of disability-related services on campus. Better representation in marketing materials, learning materials, and among faculty were also requested, as were a wide range of specific accommodations such as remote access to lectures and pre-assigned groups.

## Post-Graduation Experience

40% of respondents reported being underemployed or involuntarily unemployed.

- Mental disabilities (as compared to physical disabilities) and disability severity had a notable negative impact on the number of interviews respondents were able to convert into job offers.
- An alarming 40% of respondents who had graduated reported being underemployed (22%) or involuntarily unemployed (18%).
- Among the employed respondents, nearly half reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their job, while over a quarter reported being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.
- Respondents with mental disabilities were slightly less likely to be satisfied with their jobs than those with physical disabilities.

# State of Disability

## Inclusion in

## MBA Programs



**access**  
**STUCCESS**







# 3. Pre-Admissions Experience

## 3.1. Disability and Program Selection

Disability-related factors influenced the choice of business school and program format for nearly half of the respondents. This implies that candidates may not even apply to a program based on concerns about accommodations, flexibility and class sizes, fear of stigmatization, and unmet accessibility needs. Importantly, respondents identified an interest in business schools that specifically communicated and demonstrated support for students with disabilities.

3 out of 4 respondents favoured full-time, classroom-based learning. Respondents with severe disabilities or more than one disability were more likely to factor disability-related considerations into their choice of program.

Concerningly, 16% of respondents said that information about their programs of interest was not provided to them in accessible formats. They cited resistance from administrators and program representatives' limited understanding of accommodations as reasons why their accessibility requests were not fulfilled. In some cases, respondents said that administrators even denied accommodations claiming high costs of accessible materials.

**50% of accommodations don't cost anything.**

The average cost of the remaining accommodations is just \$500.

The assumption that accommodations are costly is a common misconception – according to a 2020 study, half of the workplace accommodations requested don't cost anything at all, while the average cost of the remaining half is just \$500.<sup>iv</sup>

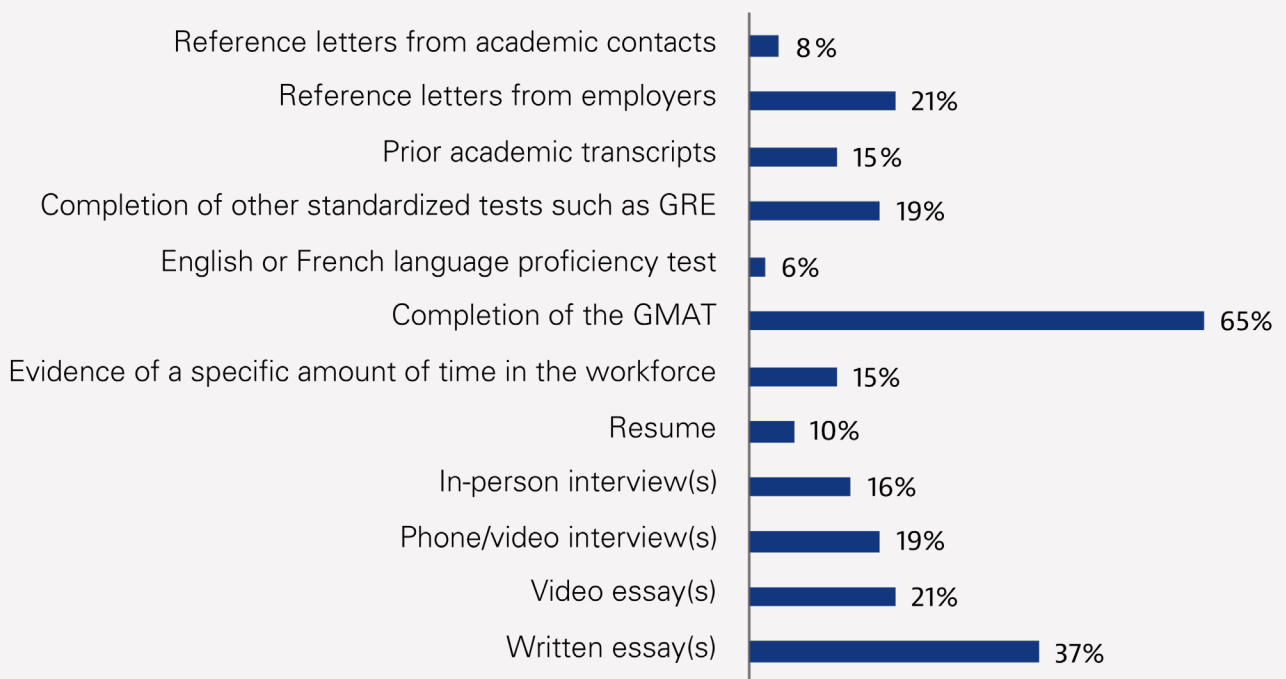


## 3.2. Application Process

1 in 3 respondents faced disability-related barriers during the application process. Notably, 65% of respondents who encountered barriers (22% of the overall sample) highlighted standardized testing as a concern. Respondents described the test accommodations process as complex, time-consuming, labour-intensive, and difficult. Specific issues highlighted include inconsistent messaging on accommodation between test centre employees and organizational representatives, trouble receiving a doctor's note to meet requirements, medical documentation being deemed outdated, difficulty accessing a scribe, and receiving extra time.

*\*Several issues related to accessing standardized testing have subsequently been addressed by the relevant agencies during pandemic-induced process optimization projects.*

### Primary barriers encountered during the application process



“Due to the COVID-19 lockdown, I wanted [to] take the online GRE that they were offering. I was [able] to set up a time with my accommodations (extra time and screen magnification), but when I checked my system to prep for the exam, the software that they used disabled my screen magnifier. When I called back, they said the online version [does not support] my accommodations. This was a very frustrating experience because I spent weeks preparing for the online exam, not knowing it would be inaccessible.”

“People with learning disabilities cannot register for a test online like everyone else, but need to call a phone number, wait 1-3 hours on hold (I timed it so this is not an exaggeration). Then when you get on with a representative, they tell you they will call you back in a week with possible times. They have only ever called me back once, and you have to call them back a week later to remind them and they tell you they are working on it and cannot schedule anything now. Because tests with learning disability accommodations are longer, there are far fewer times from which to choose to schedule your test.”

*\*Note that GMAT takers were heavily over-represented in the sample due to data collection methods.*

These findings point toward issues with standardized testing as a critical barrier to MBA program entry. Notably, in the intervening time since data collection, meaningful process-related changes have been made to improve disability accommodation in GMAT testing. Regardless, as discussed later, waiving the GMAT and GRE exams was frequently brought up by respondents. This is noteworthy in light of the recent trend of certain business schools dropping standardized testing requirements since 2021.<sup>v</sup>

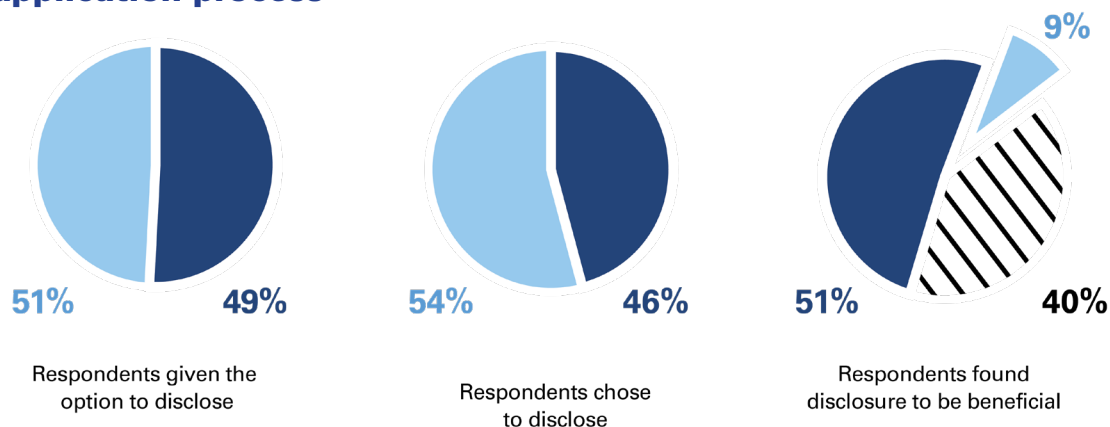
### 3.3. Disability Disclosure

Less than half of the respondents (46%) chose to disclose their disability during the application process, either voluntarily or when given an opportunity. In fact, 51% of the respondents were not presented any opportunity at all to disclose their disability during the application process.

**51% of respondents were not presented any opportunity to disclose their disability.**

Stigma, particularly as it relates to mental disabilities, emerged as the most prominent reason that prevented respondents from disclosing their disabilities. We also identified a few key correlations. Firstly, respondents with mental disabilities were less likely to disclose than those with physical disabilities. Secondly, respondents with less severe disabilities were less likely to disclose them. Lastly, women were less likely to disclose their disability than men. Besides stigma, fear of discrimination, embarrassment and rejection, a desire for privacy, and limited options for disclosure were quoted as prominent reasons why respondents opted not to disclose a disability.

#### Disability disclosure in the application process



■ No
 ■ Yes
   Unsure

On a brighter note, among respondents who did disclose their disability, over half of them found it produced positive results. These respondents quoted differentiating their application essays, access to accommodations, need to explain low standardized testing scores and other aspects of educational and work history, and beliefs about being honest, transparent, and confident as reasons for disclosure.



“

I felt [disclosing] was relevant for defining my character.”

Of the remaining respondents who disclosed their disability, just 9% felt it was not specifically beneficial, while 40% were unsure of the impact. This suggests that more work needs to be done to encourage MBA candidates to disclose their disability during the application process, clarifying potential benefits and supports available for those with disabilities, and openly addressing the fear of stigma and discrimination.

“

I was diagnosed over half my life ago. I am still very wary of disclosing my disability status to anyone, let alone an MBA program. Mental illness is too often written off, I didn't want to be branded a slacker or seem like I wouldn't be successful in the program.”

“

I did not want to be viewed on a lesser playing field or incapable of keeping up with the coursework.”



## 4. Academic Life Experience

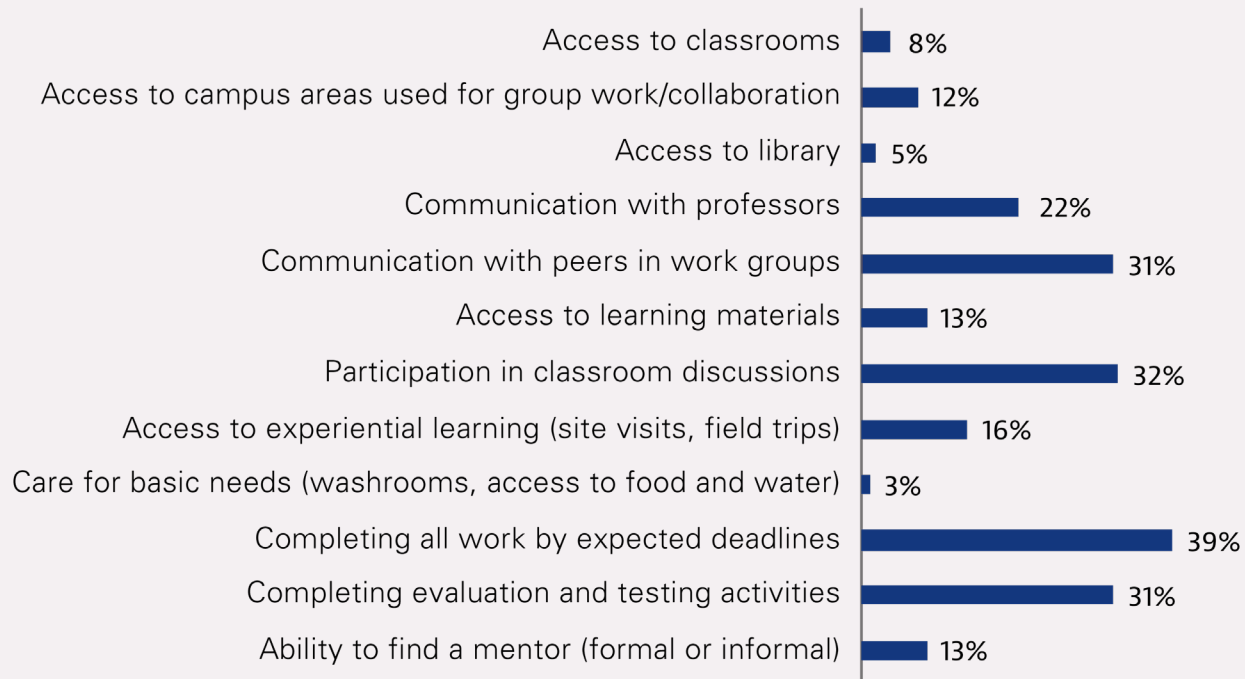
### 4.1. Impact of Disability on Perceived Caliber of Academic Experience

57% of the respondents said their academic experience was impacted by their disability. The most frequently cited examples included completing all work by expected deadlines, participating in classroom discussions, completing evaluation and testing activities, communicating with peers in work groups, and communicating with professors. Several people also reported having great difficulty sitting for 3-hour classes.





## Ways in Which Disability Impacted the Academic Experience



Descriptive responses to this question were varied, informative, and concerning:

- One student was still expected to hand in an assignment on time despite having had a seizure, while another was required to do a presentation online from their hospital bed.
- One student was not given extra time despite having to scan all handouts, articles, and book chapters before being able to read them.

I requested online resources for classes that were not granted. However, I'm frustrated because the excuses that were made for not granting me these accommodations suddenly didn't exist when classes had to transfer online during the pandemic (e.g., class recordings)."

"Our classes are 3 hrs long, and if we didn't get a break to move around, I would begin getting symptomatic. This meant I had to leave (and if we weren't getting a break, you know the professor didn't want you stepping out of the room at that time), lie down on the floor in the hallway, and elevate my legs. And cross my fingers that no one saw me."

## 4.2. Accommodation Related Needs

15 of the top 25 most requested accommodations do not cost anything.

2 out of 3 students said they needed academic accommodations. Notably, 15 of the top 25 (60%) of the most cited accommodations do not cost anything and just require flexibility. This finding closely aligns with existing research that shows 56% of accommodations cost “absolutely nothing.”<sup>vi</sup>

1. More time during exams.
2. More time for assignments.
3. Better access to lecture materials through the use of recorded lectures (preferably with text-searchable content) or competent note-takers.
4. Better access to reading materials, including digital and audio textbooks and screen reading software.
5. Wheelchair accessible facilities including classrooms (without having to check and arrange it themselves), site visits, field trips, and washrooms.
6. Distraction-free, quiet testing environments.
7. More frequent breaks with a quiet place to retreat to during those breaks.
8. Permission to eat in class and take bathroom breaks mid-lecture without social or academic penalties.
9. Ability to type exams or use a touch laptop and stylus.
10. Front row seating in lectures.
11. Use of video captions.
12. Access to speech-to-text software.
13. Non-punitive absenteeism policies.
14. Share lecture slides in advance of the class.
15. Do not expect people to read then discuss a lengthy case during class time – provide the reading ahead of time.
16. Do not require updated diagnosis paperwork to access accommodation. Accept childhood diagnostic paperwork and/or notes from a family physician rather than requiring a psychologist report.

The wide range of accommodation needs identified highlights the value of creating flexible policies and training faculty and administrators to recognize and mitigate disability-related barriers. It also highlights the need to treat each person as an individual.

That said, time pressure was so frequently cited as a barrier that it may be a useful point of focus for broader changes that can assist many students with many types of disabilities. Significant time pressure is often deliberately built into MBA programs since it is widely perceived as replicating the hectic and challenging business environment. However, this does not reflect all (or even most) workplaces but instead creates a meaningful barrier to participation and success.

### 4.3. Rates of Accommodation Requesting and Granting

Among students who said they needed academic accommodations, 3 in 4 requested them. For those who requested accommodations, 80% successfully received them. In fact, 75% of the accepted accommodations requests were delivered within 2 weeks. In other words, most students who complete the process of requesting accommodations receive them reasonably fast.

1 in 3 students were unaware of a formal process to request accommodations.

However, nearly a third of the students reported not being aware of the existence of a formal process to request accommodations. Those who deliberately did not request accommodations identified several concerns:

- Accommodation request process itself is lengthy, “onerous”, “daunting”, and “overly bureaucratic”.
- Cost of getting a sufficiently current, formal diagnosis was a barrier.
- Fear of being stigmatized or discounted.
- Not knowing of any process to identify accommodation needs.



“

It's easier to hide it than to make a fuss. Especially with some professors' attitudes about attendance. It's also anxiety-inducing to have to discuss it.”

“

It would have involved privately speaking with instructors after class and making myself stand out in a bad way.”

#### 4.4. Reasons for Accommodation Denial

Some of the noteworthy reasons why accommodations requests were denied included:

- Individual faculty members and administrators were reported to be unwilling to follow documented policies and procedures.
- Need for consistency was cited, with students being told their requests for extra time in exams and assignments were not “standard”.
- Administrators were reported to have expressed concerns that recording lectures would compromise in-class attendance for the individual and/or the entire cohort of students.

#### 4.5. Other Aspects of Academic Experience

Respondents were more attracted to programs that advertised disability-related supports.



We asked the respondents if there was anything else they wanted to communicate about their academic experience:

- Individual professors make all the difference, as many were reported to be supportive while others were cited as not appropriately trained in disability rights.
- Exhaustion due to the extra effort required to self-advocate was frequently cited as a problem.
- Feeling of isolation was commonly cited and magnified by the lack of disability representation among faculty, as well as by the lack of inclusion of disability-related issues in course curriculum.
- COVID-19 pandemic-related switch to online formats improved matters in some ways, since it eliminated transportation and access challenges.
- Group work was especially difficult for neurodiverse students.
- Signaling is important – respondents were more attracted to programs that advertised their disability-related supports.
- Needs of students with mobility impairments were rarely considered and they themselves had to take the time to check venues and alert the administration when classrooms, site visits, collaborative work areas, and social venues such as restaurants were not wheelchair accessible.

“

The level [of] disability awareness is still very low among some people in authority and this affected my academic work since some just ignored my challenges and treated all students at the same level. Some colleagues also fail to understand that having a disability does not make you stupid or less human.”

“

Professors, and other faculty being better trained to work with students with disabilities and understand how the disabilities impair them so that teaching style can accommodate them.”

“

It is frustrating to hear diversity talked about in the classroom with disabilities not included.”

“

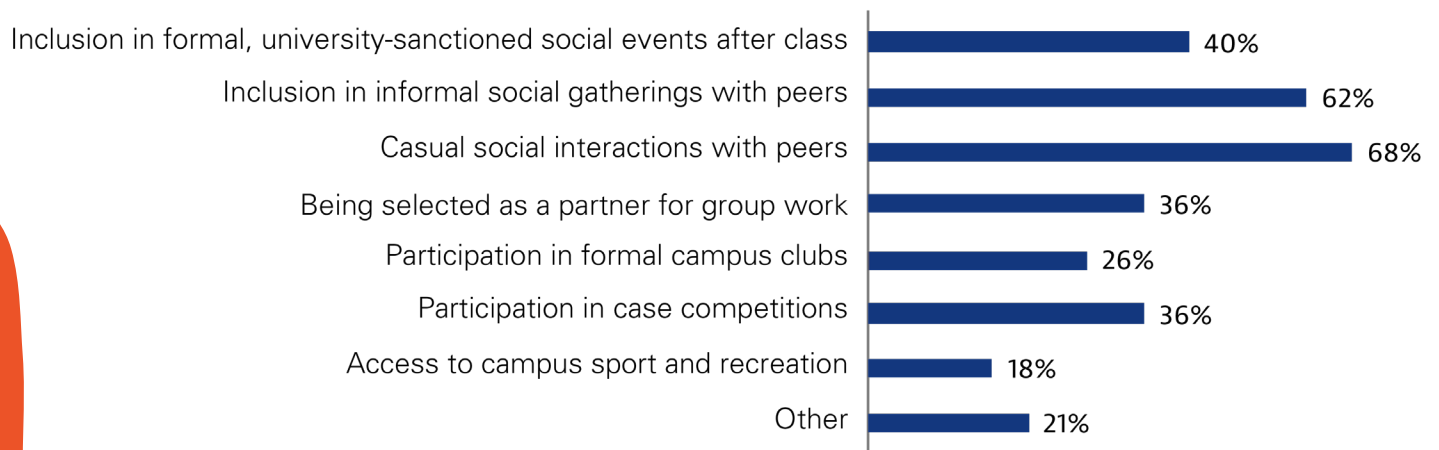
I think that when a university is open about their disability programs and resources it makes you feel more comfortable and welcome in the environment.”

# 5. Student Life Experience

## 5.1. Impact of Disability on Student Life Experience

There was a roughly even split among students when asked if their disability had impacted the caliber of their social/student life experience during their MBA. However, a strong majority experienced difficulties with casual social interactions with peers (68%) and informal social gatherings (62%).

### Experience of Social Difficulties





## Qualitative responses were revealing:

1. Disability-related symptoms inhibited social participation due to social anxiety, stress, and impaired social information processing.
2. Academic demands of the program were so strenuous and demanding that respondents were unable to physically and/or emotionally cope with additional social demands.
3. Fear of being stigmatized or rejected was cited several times.
4. Venues and settings in which social events took place were frequently inaccessible or hostile to respondents.
5. Alcohol consumption being the primary focus of social events created barriers due to an inability or lack of desire to drink.
6. Several respondents reported not being able to hear conversations in the crowded and busy settings that were generally selected for social events.

“

A lot of social events are heavily centered around alcohol and/or significant physical activity. I can't engage with these as much as other people do.”

“

By not being able to hear people properly in noisy environments (such as the school, bars or classrooms) I found it extremely difficult to keep conversations with people. In the end, I preferred to avoid social interactions to prevent the embarrassing and awkward moments where I can't hear other people and have to guess what they are telling me.”

“

It's easier to opt out of informal outdoor gatherings than to have to explain why we need to meet somewhere with bathroom access over and over again to new groups of peers.”

## 5.2. Accommodations

Significantly fewer respondents needed accommodations in social situations (28%) compared to those who needed academic accommodations (68%). Only half of the respondents who needed accommodations in social interactions actually requested them, including accessible venues and online social opportunities.

Reasons for not making an accommodation request included fear of stigma, not wanting to be a burden, not being sure how to go about it, and fatigue about repeatedly having to self-advocate even when issues should be readily apparent to the casual observer (such as lack of wheelchair accessibility). For example, one respondent who uses a wheelchair reported that university-sanctioned, formal social events were planned at inaccessible venues 6 times in a row even though her exclusion was noted, commented on, and was very obvious.

“

My cluster was incredibly non-inclusive and planned many non-accessible events, and then ignored feedback. At one point they planned an inaccessible Halloween party, then asked me to decide if I wanted to go or not a week before, in order to see if they could avoid moving the party if I wasn't attending. My cluster [planned] at least 6 events at locations that were not wheelchair accessible despite knowing my access needs and being reminded.”

“

I think in general the world just needs to understand that people can't just be constantly "on." It benefits everyone when we build in time for rest and normalize that.”

“

I don't like the process of having to advocate for myself over and over again. If it became normalized to list all relevant information such as bathroom access or consider invisible chronic illnesses in planning events that would be great.”

# 6. In-Program Recruitment Experiences

## 6.1. Perception of On-Campus Recruitment Drives

Similar to social situations, respondents were evenly split about whether their disability had an influence on their perception of recruitment experiences. Interestingly, just one person reported a positive impact of having a disability on their recruiting experience – they were hired at an on-campus recruiting event held specifically for students with disabilities. Negative impacts included:

- General bias, stereotyping, and ableism were cited on the part of campus career counsellors and potential employers.
- Exhaustion combined with recruiting events being held primarily in the evening after classes left many physically and mentally unable to participate.
- Respondents with hearing impairments, vision impairments, and sensory sensitivities struggled with recruitment events held in busy, noisy bars.
- Respondents who used wheelchairs reported physically inaccessible recruitment events and/or employer offices.
- Respondents who use cell phones as a medical accommodation reported intense stigma associated with looking at cell phones during recruitment events.
- Some employers were reported to have expressed concerns about unpredictable flare-ups of chronic conditions.



I use my phone as a medical device. I could not ask for accommodations to look at my phone, and looking at my phone in recruiting events would have removed [me] from consideration from a job.”



Several respondents reported having problems with employer-driven recruitment and selection processes. These disability-related difficulties included problems with effective self-presentation and communication in interviews, difficulties completing time-limited standardized selection tests, and openly ableist comments made by interviewers.

In one example, a respondent was told by a prospective employer that they had much younger candidates and that between their age and their disability, the respondent “*would be too much trouble*”. Another person reported that as a result of past discrimination, they now only apply for jobs with employers who already have reputations for effective disability accommodation.

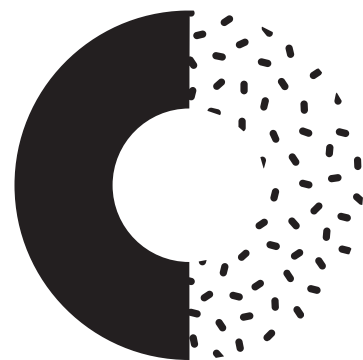
Multiple respondents also noted that their own self-doubt and anxiety were significant barriers to employment. Neurodiverse people in particular tended to comment that in order to get a job they needed to “*adjust and be less myself*”.

## 6.2. Perception of On-Campus Career Center

70% of those who participated in on-campus recruiting found jobs as a direct result.

Half of the respondents had a positive view of their campus Career Center in light of their disability. 1 in 4 respondents reported a perception of ineffectiveness, while a similar number were neutral. Positive reviews of Career Centers stemmed heavily from a perception of being generally supportive and proactive about inquiring about accommodation needs. Among those who participated in on-campus recruiting, 70% reported finding a job as a direct result of campus-based recruitment efforts.

Reasons for negative perceptions primarily arose from respondents feeling that the Career Centre was optimized for able-bodied people only. A near-exclusive focus on full-time opportunities was cited as another reason, when some people with disabilities require part-time work to address health-related needs.



# 7. Overall MBA Experience

## 7.1. Overall Satisfaction

Two-thirds of the respondents reported being somewhat or extremely satisfied with their overall MBA experience. Students found the opportunity to create bonds and friendships with other students as the most predominantly rewarding part of the MBA experience, cited over twice more often than the next most rewarding aspect.

22% of the students reported being somewhat or extremely unsatisfied. Interestingly, a similar percentage (23%) reported that their disability had a strong or extremely strong impact on their overall satisfaction with the MBA experience.

Problematic aspects included mandatory class participation (particularly for those with hearing loss or anxiety), ineffective Career Centers, difficulty forming strong social bonds with peers, discriminatory professors, and administrators not following their own accommodation policies.

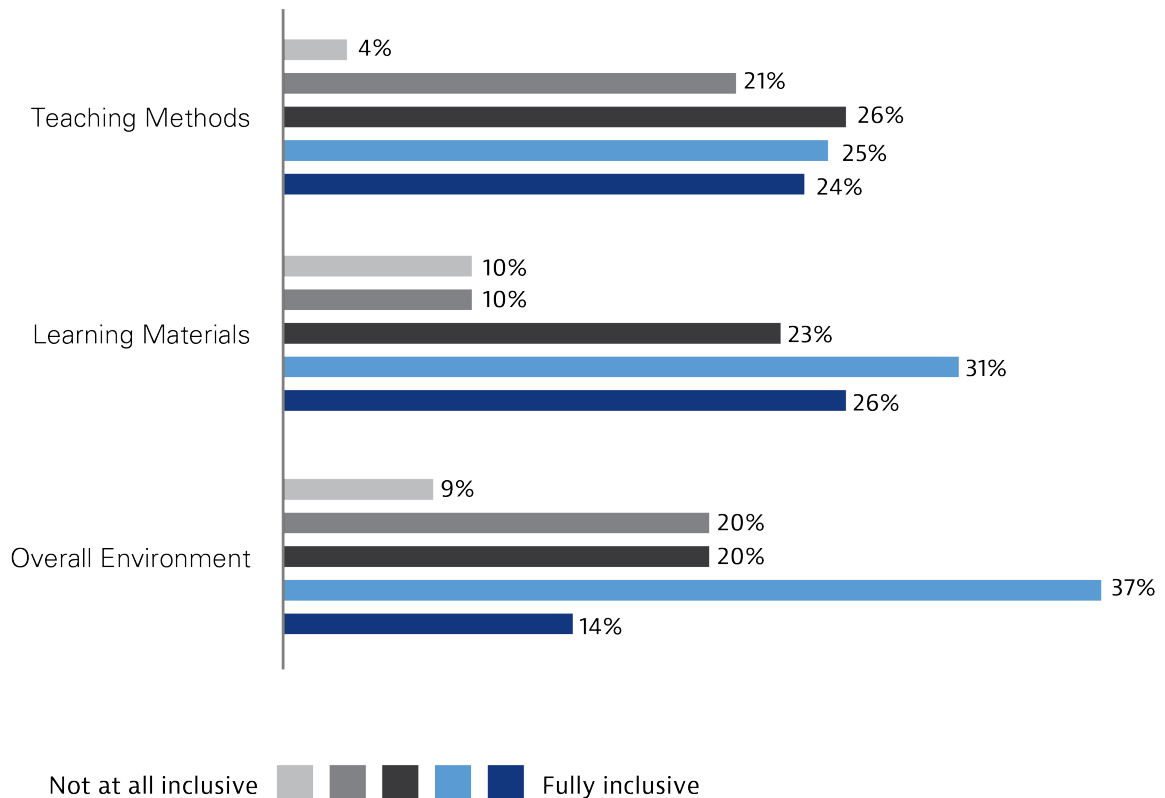
Concerningly, the disability accommodations process itself was cited as the most problematic part of their entire MBA experience

- Mandatory class participation (especially problematic for those with hearing impairments and social anxiety), and mandatory presentations
- An ineffective Career Office.
- Difficulty forming strong social bonds with peers.
- Discriminatory professors (both ableism and sexism were cited).
- Administration and professors not following their own accommodation policies.
- Coping with personal stress/anxiety.
- Being excluded from activities due to disability.
- Dealing with the Disability Office itself and bureaucratic accommodation processes.
- Lack of representation generally within the University and faculty (referring to both disability and females)

## 7.2. Perception of Inclusiveness

Respondents rated the disability inclusiveness fairly evenly across the board for their learning materials, the teaching methods used, and the overall environment.

### Perceived Inclusiveness



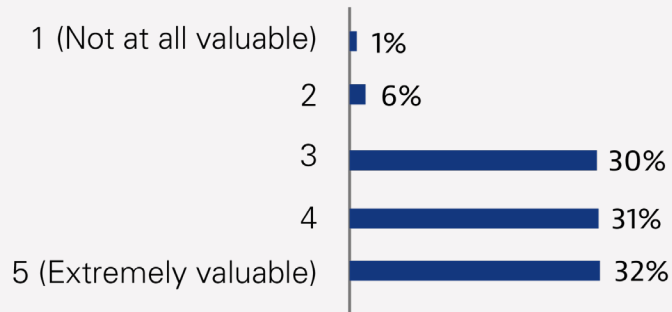
Interestingly, perceptions of inclusiveness were similar across disability types and severity. In other words, it is not primarily the most severely disabled students with conditions that require the most accommodations who perceive lack of inclusion (as is commonly thought). People with mild disabilities and relatively simple accommodation needs feel excluded in similar proportions as well.



### 7.3. Post-Graduation Perception

Among those who had already graduated, an overwhelming majority perceived their MBA as valuable to extremely valuable for their career. In this case, disability severity was a significant predictor. For each one-unit increase in severity the likelihood of perceiving the MBA as valuable decreases 39%. In other words, a lot more needs to be done to attract candidates with more severe disabilities and ensure their positive experience.

#### Post-graduate Perceptions of Whether MBA is Valuable to Their Career



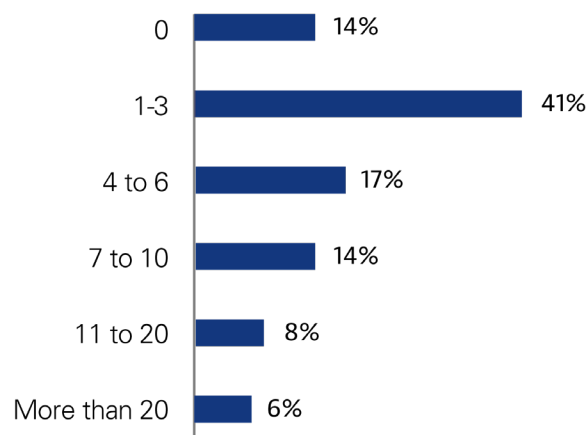
# 8. Post-Graduate Experience

## 8.1. Interviewing

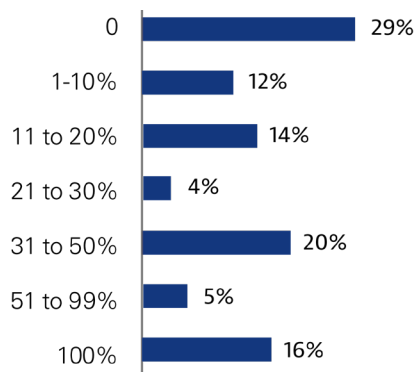
Among candidates who applied for jobs, 14% had not received any interviews, 42% received between 1-3 interviews, and the rest achieved higher numbers of interviews. Of those who interviewed, just over a quarter did not receive any job offers, while 16% received job offers after every interview.

We found that candidates with mental disabilities (as compared to physical disabilities) were able to convert interviews into job offers 27% less often. Also, for each one-unit increase in disability severity (on a scale from 1-5), 13% fewer interviews resulted in job offers. These findings are consistent with other research that indicates increased stigma associated with mental health impairments and more severe disabilities<sup>vii,viii</sup>, as well as the comparatively greater impact of mental health impairments such as anxiety or autism on interview performance as compared to physical disabilities.<sup>ix</sup>

### Number of Job Interviews



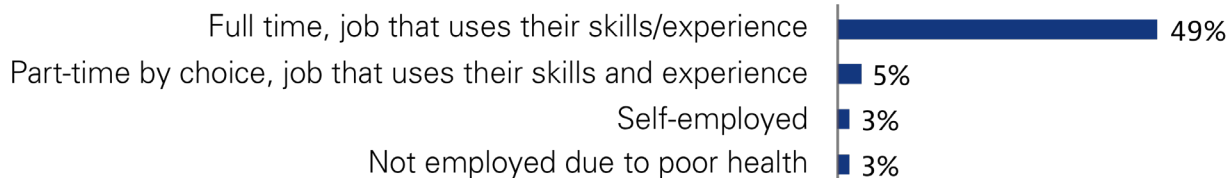
### Percentage of Interviews Resulting in Job Offers



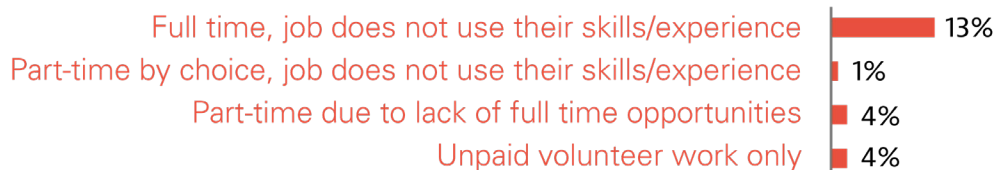
## 8.2. Employment

An alarming 40% of respondents who had graduated reported being underemployed or involuntarily unemployed. Specifically, 22% were employed in jobs that did not use their skills or experiences, worked part-time due to lack of full-time opportunities, or were doing unpaid volunteer work. Another 18% were not employed due to lack of opportunities or lack of accommodations.

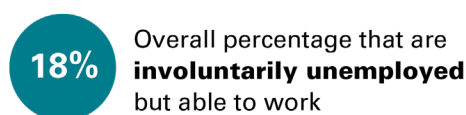
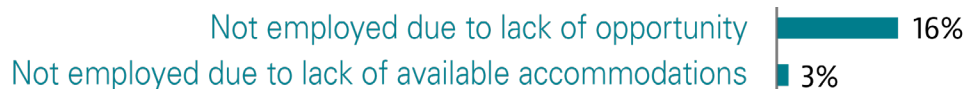
### Employment Status



### Underemployed



### Involuntarily Unemployed



## 8.3. Job Satisfaction

Among the employed respondents, over a quarter reported being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their job, while 47% reported being satisfied or very satisfied. Respondents with mental disabilities were slightly less likely to be satisfied with their jobs than those with physical disabilities.

### Level of Satisfaction



# 9. Recommendations

Respondents were asked what strategies they would recommend to increase MBA enrollment among people with disabilities. We have categorized their responses into four broad categories – awareness & visibility, resources, accommodations, and training.

## 9.1. Awareness & Visibility

- More awareness among faculty and administrators of accommodation-related laws and requirements with meaningful consequences for those who wilfully refuse to comply.
- Proactive advertising of the availability of disability supports and accommodations.
- Profile more students with disabilities in marketing materials.
- Engage in proactive outreach and recruiting of students with disabilities (possibly with quotas).
- Hire more faculty members with disabilities (several students commented that they had not seen anyone with a visible disability teaching in their program, or any other program).
- Have more dialogue on campus about disability, including formal diversity training.

## 9.2. Resources

- A campus resource center or similar help resource devoted to students with disabilities.
- Have formal support groups on campus for students with disabilities.
- Provide financial support.
- Provide better access to mentors.
- Have a formal disability advocate on campus.

## 9.3. Accommodations

- Eliminate the GMAT and GRE exams or improve their accessibility.
- Focus on the needs of individual people rather than compliance with a generic accommodation policy.
- Offer flexible deadlines.
- Permit remote access to lectures.
- Automatically ask about accommodation needs when candidates are applying and clarify the reason for the proactive question (i.e., to provide support, not to remove people from consideration).



## 9.4. Training

Respondents overwhelmingly support anti-bias and disability awareness training.

An overwhelming majority of respondents felt that anti-bias and disability awareness training would be useful for peers (70%) and recruiters (80%). In fact, managerial training on specific disabilities and associated anti-stigma education was one of the most frequently requested interventions. Research supports the effectiveness of evidence-based disability accommodation training, which can help managers identify approaches to accommodation that they may not have previously been aware of.<sup>x</sup>

Respondents also cited widespread lack of knowledge about disability, particularly invisible disabilities, and the need to lessen managerial dismissiveness of their needs. Some felt that providing personas of workers with disabilities highlighting their effectiveness would help lessen stigma. As one person commented, *“at least it opens up [managers] to the existence of disabilities that are unspoken and unseen.”*



Current diversity and inclusion hiring trends seem to be making it more attractive for employers to hire people with disabilities as a form of social impact philanthropy. It can feel tokenizing, but it’s helping.”

Lastly, multiple respondents from three different countries reported that prospective and current employers do not follow existing laws and regulations related to disability inclusion and discrimination. The lack of enforcement of existing legislation was identified as a barrier, as was the perceived lack of meaningful consequences for problematic behaviour even when legislation is enforced.

Real teeth to the EEOC [US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission] and hiring laws [are needed]. Companies have no consequences for their behavior, none.”

“[We need] better labour laws... to address working hours and maybe an institution or helpline to be able to speak to someone regarding the issues that exist. Because all this leads to is mental health challenges in the long-run.”

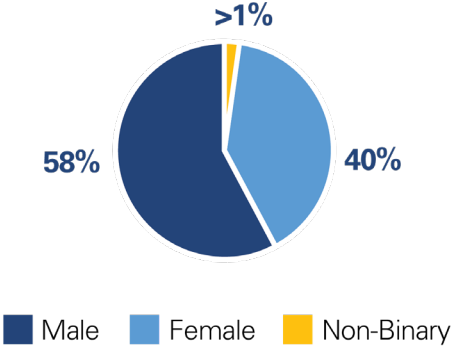
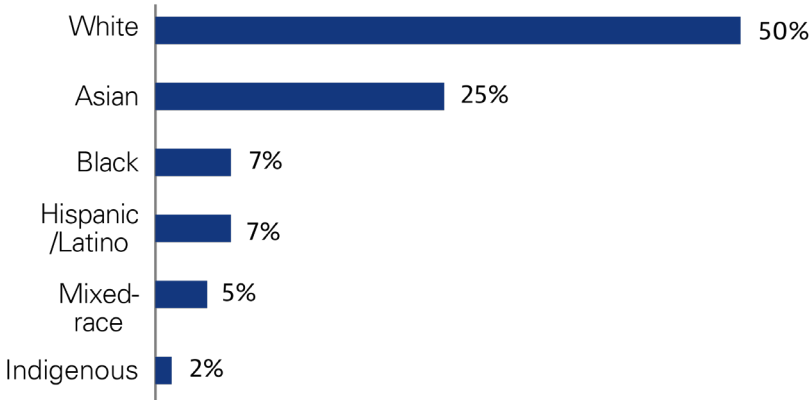
# 10. Survey Methodology & Demographics

## 10.1. Methodology

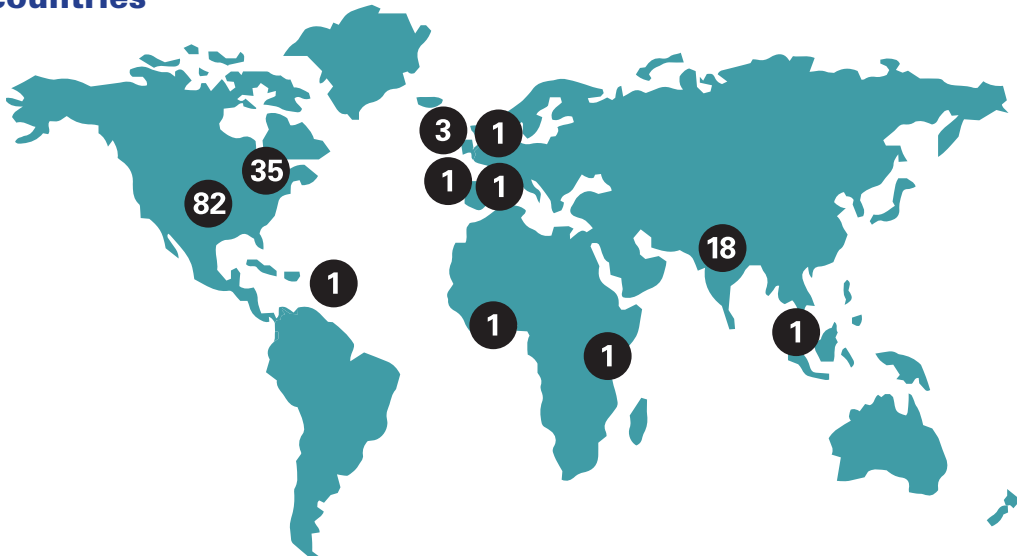
The survey was designed by Dr. Katherine Breward from the University of Winnipeg, Dr. Dan Samosh, Post-Doctoral Fellow at the University of Toronto, and Varun Chandak, President, Access to Success Organization. The survey was pilot tested with a sample of prospective, current, and prior MBA students. Respondents for the main survey were recruited via e-mail and social media posts (distributed through the Graduate Management Admission Council™), Lime Connect, communications with administrators of 50 business schools, postings to disability community networks, and other forms of online advertising. Notably, the survey was delivered during the pandemic when many schools and testing agencies were transitioning to new, more efficient online processes. As such it may not capture recent technical and cultural developments and their impacts on accommodation.

## 10.2. Demographics

### Respondents

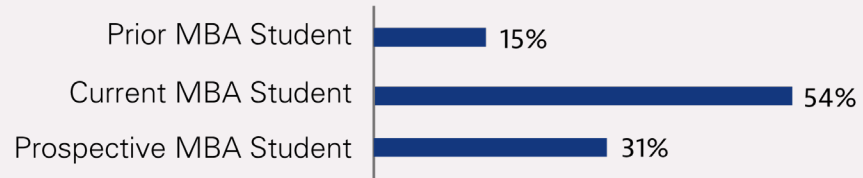


### Respondents Participated in MBA programs across 11 countries

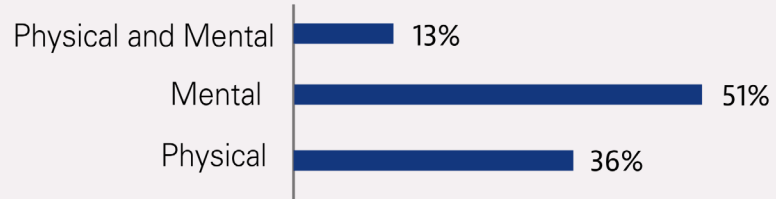




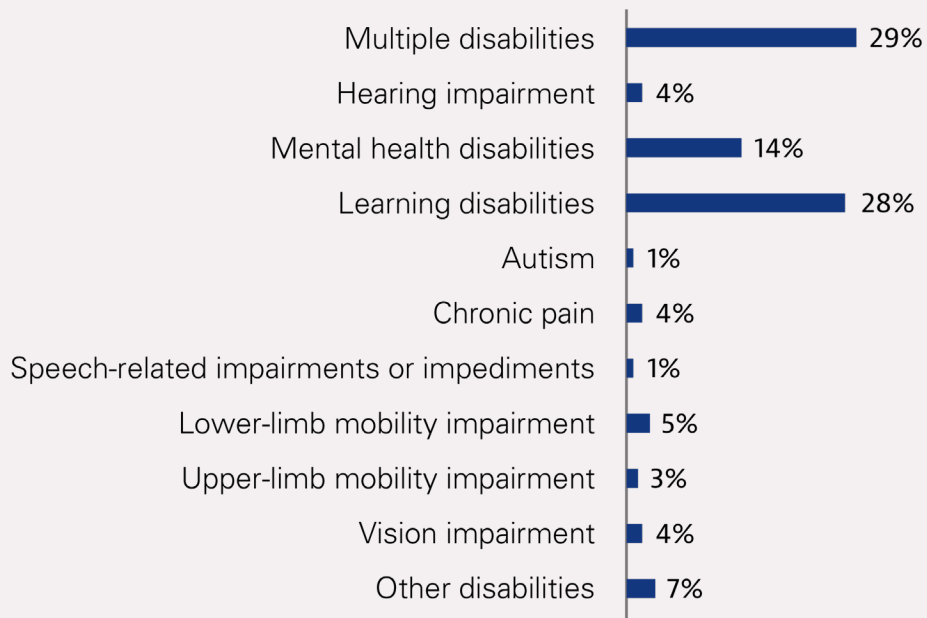
### Respondent Student Status



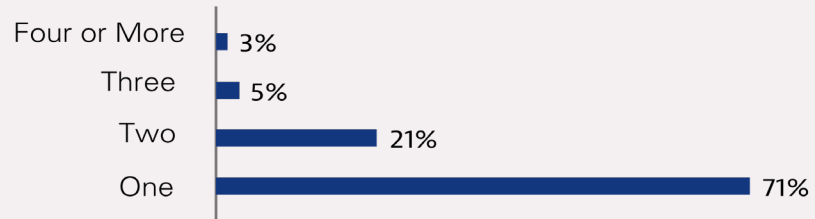
### Respondent Disability Type



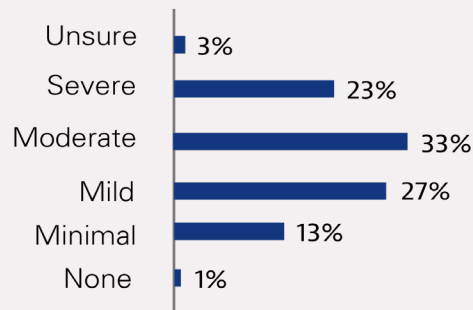
### Respondent Disability Type By More Specific Category



### Number of Disabilities



### Disability Severity



## 10.3. Acknowledgements

The Access to Success Organization led the ideation and publication of this study under the leadership of its President, Varun Chandak. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to this study's proud sponsor, CIBC. We would also like to acknowledge the valuable contributions of the Graduate Management Admission Council™ and Lime Connect for their support in planning and disseminating the survey. We thank our research assistant, Akshay Mohan, Ph.D. Student at the University of Toronto, for his support in data analysis. Lastly, our deepest gratitude goes to Dr. Katherine Breward, Associate Professor at the University of Winnipeg, and Dr. Dan Samosh for their countless hours preparing the survey, analyzing the data, authoring this report, and not the least, answering innumerable questions in the process.

# Endnotes

- i World Report on Disability, World Health Organization and The World Bank, 2011)
- ii The Business Leadership Imperative, Valuable 500 and EY, 2019 ([https://assets.ey.com/content/dam/ey-sites/ey-com/en\\_us/topics/diversity/ey-the-business-leadership-imperative.pdf](https://assets.ey.com/content/dam/ey-sites/ey-com/en_us/topics/diversity/ey-the-business-leadership-imperative.pdf))
- iii "International MBA Survey 2020 Part 1: Employers", Association of MBAs and Business Graduates Association, 2020.
- iv Average Costs of Reasonable Accommodations in The Workplace, Job Accommodation Network Survey 2020 prepared for the US Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (<https://askjan.org/topics/costs.cfm>)
- v M.B.A. Programs Debate Dropping GMAT, The Wall Street Journal, July 13, 2020 (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/m-b-a-programs-debate-dropping-gmat-11594643327>)
- vi Due to the timing of the survey, data related to post-graduation experiences, including recruiting, employment and job satisfaction, may be influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic
- vii Robin Marie Kowalski, Megan Morgan & Katlyn Taylor (2017) Stigma of mental and physical illness and the use of mobile technology, The Journal of Social Psychology, 157:5, 602-610.
- viii Crosby Hipes, Jeffrey Lucas, Jo C. Phelan, Richard C. White, The stigma of mental illness in the labor market, Social Science Research, Volume 56, 2016, Pages 16-25
- ix Dipeolu, A.; Storlie, C.; Johnson, C. (2015) College Students With High-Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder: Best Practices for Successful Transition to the World of Work, Journal of College Counselors, 18, 2, 175-190)
- x Waxman, D. (2017), "Model of Successful Corporate Culture Change Integrating Employees with Disabilities", Factors in Studying Employment for Persons with Disability (Research in Social Science and Disability, Vol. 10), Emerald Publishing Limited, Bingley, pp. 155-180
- xi Certain percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.
- xii GMAT and GRE provide their guidance on how candidates with disability can apply for accommodation following the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, which is developed by the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education to guide the practices of professional testing agencies. See more details of GMAT and GRE accommodation policies from the following links: GMAT: <https://www.gmac.com/gmat-other-assessments/prepare-candidates-for-the-exam-classroom/accommodations-for-test-takers-with-disabilities>. GRE: [https://www.ets.org/gre/revised\\_general/register/disabilities/](https://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/register/disabilities/)



**Access to Success** is a Toronto-based not-for-profit organization that supports the development of future leaders with disabilities and accessibility technology. It manages the Access to Success Fellowship, which provides up to C\$90,000 in annual scholarships to MBA students with disabilities. It also runs ATS Labs, Canada's first accelerator for accessibility, mental health and aging tech startups.



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