

RESEARCH REPORT | JANUARY 2020

Peer-to-Peer Student Conversations:

*How influential are they and
what's their value for your
recruitment strategy?*



Academic institutions hire Intead to develop and execute marketing strategies that effectively engage hard-to-reach student segments. We offer a holistic blend of on-the-ground recruiting efforts and digital marketing.

Our use of culturally appropriate and accessible digital platforms enhances the branding, communication and marketing presence of our university, college and private high school clients.

We support our clients with sophisticated market research and marketing campaigns including content development, design, media planning and analytics services, ultimately improving enrollment results.

Ben Waxman, CEO



Experiences shared. Decisions made.
unibuddy.com

Life's path leads all of us to landmark decisions which shape our future profoundly. Which college to apply to? What program to study? Whether to take that job. Where to live. Often, we turn to people we know to help us navigate. They might be family, friends or acquaintances. But not everyone knows someone with the inside track. So where can you go when you don't know who to ask?

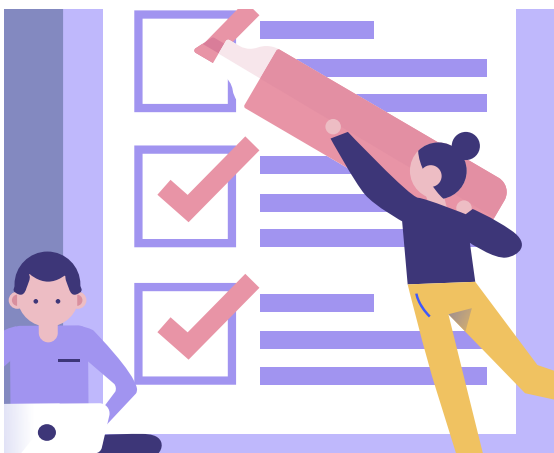
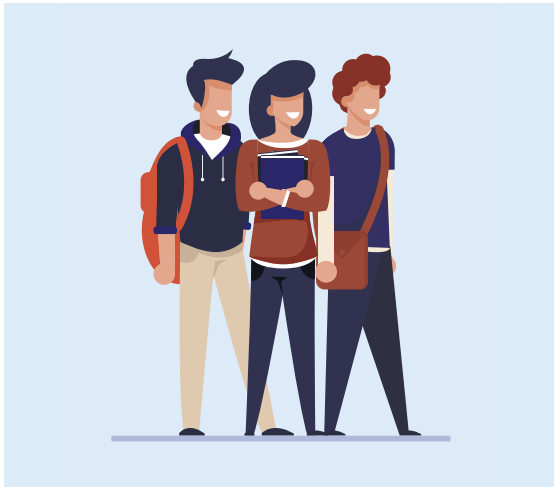
Welcome to Unibuddy. We exist to empower people to make better decisions through shared human experience. And right now we're on a mission to enable students to make the right choice about their college journey.

Since we launched with just five universities in 2017, we've grown at a rapid rate. Now we're working with over 220 institutions around the world, enabling universities to scale meaningful interactions, and carry prospects from inquiry to application, and through to enrollment - with some impressive results.

Diego Fanara, CEO

CONTENTS

PEER-TO-PEER STUDENT CONVERSATIONS



5 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- o Students Felt Influenced by Peer-to-Peer Interactions
- o Data Informs Recruiting
- o Key Takeaways

8 STUDENT DECISION MAKING

9 THE SUBSTANCE OF PEER-TO-PEER INTERACTIONS

- o What Information Was Most Influential by Region
- o What Information Was Most Influential by Degree

12 THE VALUE OF PEER-TO-PEER INTERACTIONS

- o Perceived Honesty and Authenticity
- o Commonality and Connection

14 THE RECRUITING FUNNEL

- o Who Applied and Who Enrolled

18 GUIDING YOUR MESSAGING STRATEGY

19 METHODOLOGY

- o Audience Profile
- o Survey Method
- o Research Advisory Board

370,000+ peer-to-peer conversations

26,000+ student prospects

57 countries

What did we find?



Engaging your target audience is always difficult when distractions abound. Putting the most compelling content in front of prospective students and using the most authentic channel or influencer to convey your message is going to produce the enrollment results you need for your institution.

In spring 2019, Intead and Unibuddy teamed up to learn more about how prospective international students made their university selections. Reaching out to 40 of Unibuddy's university partners in the US and UK, we surveyed a wide range of international students and asked for their feedback on 17 online behavioral questions.

In addition, Unibuddy analyzed 370,000+ peer-to-peer conversations that had already taken place on their global network to learn more about what students were asking and how the answers influenced their university selection process. You can find more about our research methodology at the end of this report.

Executive Summary

Students Felt Influenced by Peer-to-Peer Interactions

Peer-to-peer interactions are powerful influencers in the application and enrollment process for students looking to narrow down their prospects for colleges and universities outside of their home country. The ability of current student ambassadors to instill confidence and provide encouragement goes a long way in convincing prospective students to engage and ultimately commit to an institution. Students specifically referenced ambassadors' unique and honest perspectives on academics, student life and local culture as influential to their university selection process.

Not sure this will impact many students? In our research a strong 57% of students said peer-to-peer interactions influenced their decision; moreover, they said these online conversations were the most helpful resource they utilized when deciding where to apply. That's compared to 47% saying friends and family, whom we previously viewed as the most influential reference for students, were the most helpful.

57% said online conversations were the most helpful when deciding where to apply



47% said friends and family were the most helpful when deciding where to apply

Data Informs Recruiting

Your recruitment messaging by region and level of study is so important. Of course, you know this.

According to our research on student decision making segmented by academic level and geography, across the board, students were influenced by peer-to-peer interactions. Our findings showed that students in Africa and Europe were prone to finding peer-to-peer conversations influential. Overall, graduate students found the interactions more helpful than undergraduate students.

Building a network of brand ambassadors will benefit your recruitment strategy as you create and nurture opportunities for relevant online conversations (see “The Substance of Peer-to-Peer Interactions”).

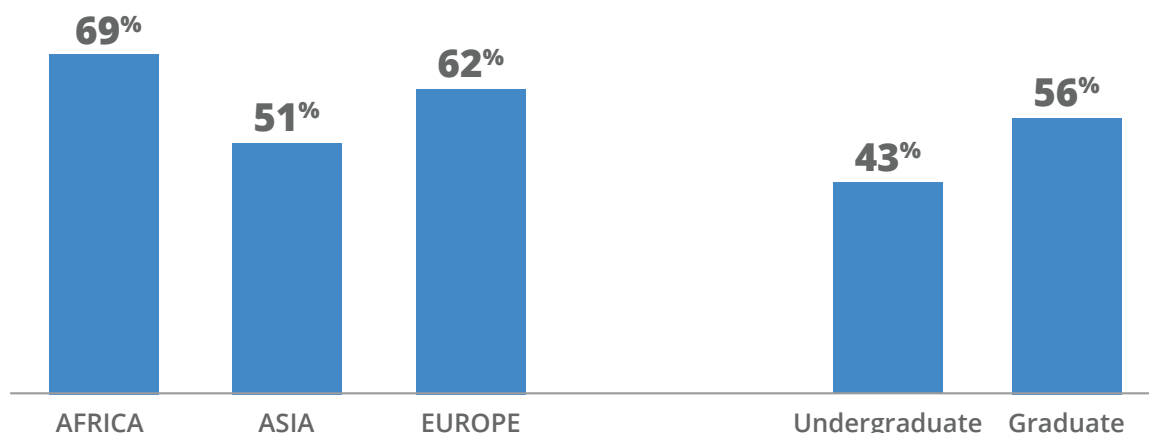
Our research points to powerful messaging

for brochure, website, digital advertising and social media promotional content. Our research insights also support your recruitment team as they develop their plans to engage students in different regions. Consider the travel recruitment guide you give to your team as they prepare for their trips (you have a guide like this, right?).

This brief report will support your efforts to fine-tune your messaging by region and edge out the competition at the important attraction and conversion points in your student interactions (the recruitment funnel).



Did chatting with a Unibuddy student ambassador affect your decision about whether to apply to a university?



Total (n=172) Africa (n=32) Asia (n=76) Europe (n=64) Undergraduate (n=47) Graduate (n=19)

Key Takeaways

We looked at more than 370,000 peer-to-peer conversations from international students. These included Africa (comprising 18% of conversations), Europe (36%), and Asia (38%).

Our top three takeaways are:

- Peer-to-peer interactions do not work as an attraction tool but rather as a resource that students use to deepen their knowledge on institutions they are already aware of. Therefore, building your brand awareness continuously will leverage the use of peer-to-peer interactions.
- Student ambassadors are powerful influencers in the application and enrollment processes and are especially valuable to graduate students, despite the fact that graduate students still consider friends and family a more helpful decision-making resource than undergraduates.
- Student ambassadors instill confidence in prospective students and provide encouragement along the way. This provides a unique and honest perspective about academics, student life and local culture.

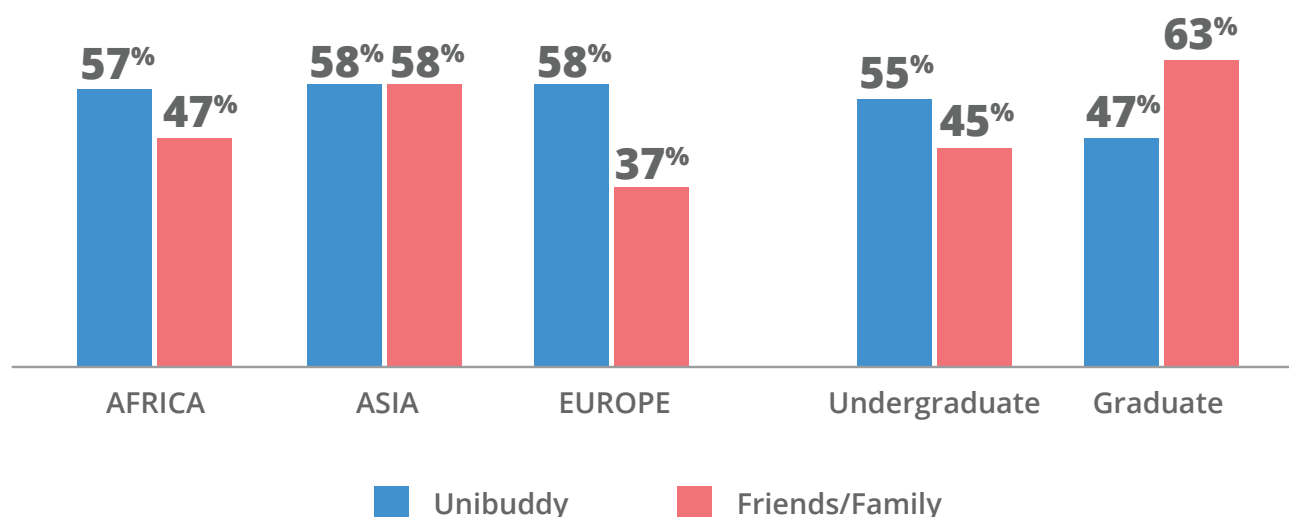


Student Decision Making

To further dissect our results, we broke down each segment by undergraduate and graduate prospective students. Our findings for this part of the analysis are more guideposts than statistically reliable results as many participants chose not to disclose their level of study.

Remember when we said we found that students considered peer-to-peer interactions to be the most helpful resource, even above family and friends? We broke those students down by region and level of study as well, and here are the findings:

Found Resource Very Helpful in Choosing Where to Apply



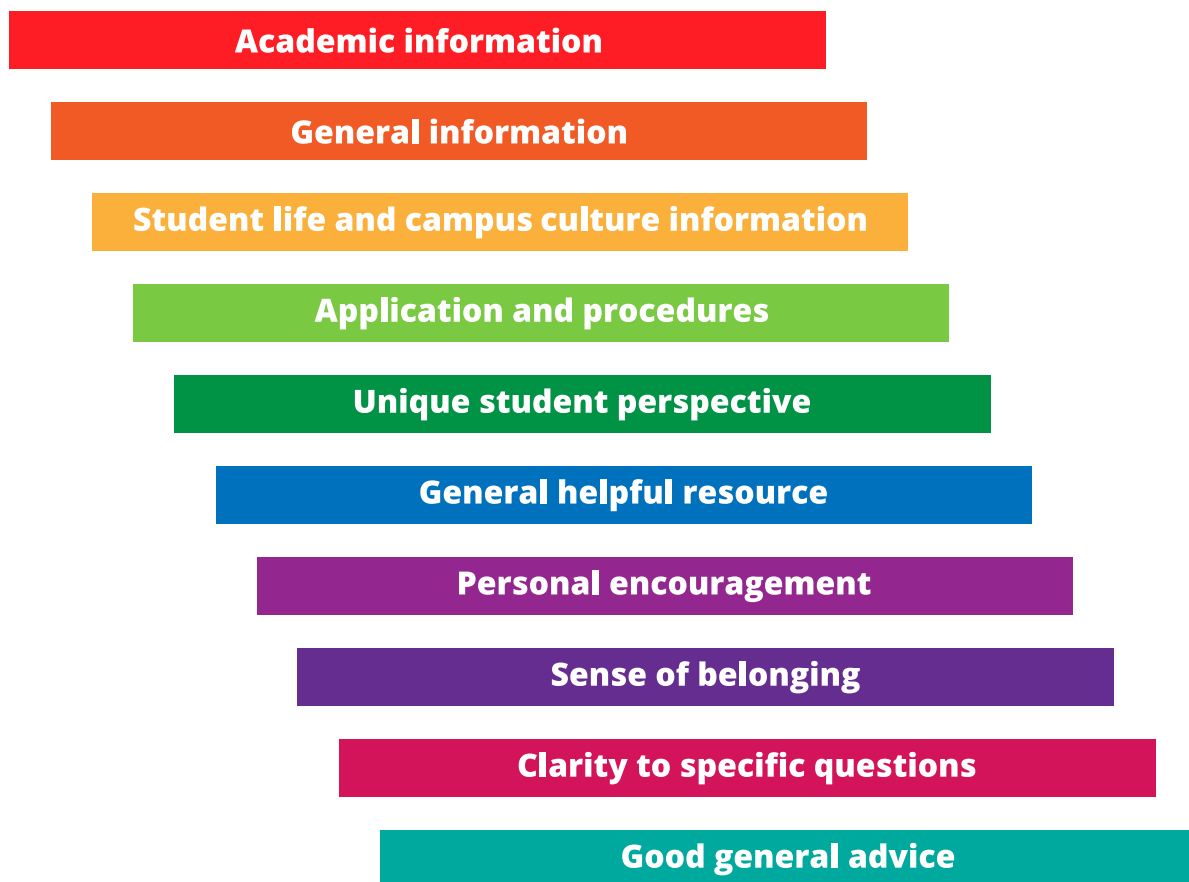
Prospective graduate students valued peer-to-peer interactions, but they were the one group still valuing family and friends more as aids to their decision making.

Could this data point to the younger crowd feeling even more comfortable with online chat as a trusted source of information and support?

The Substance of Peer-to-Peer Interactions

This is the point where you ask us what exactly it is that students find so helpful about these peer-to-peer interactions. We asked students, and these are the reasons, most helpful to least helpful...

MOST HELPFUL

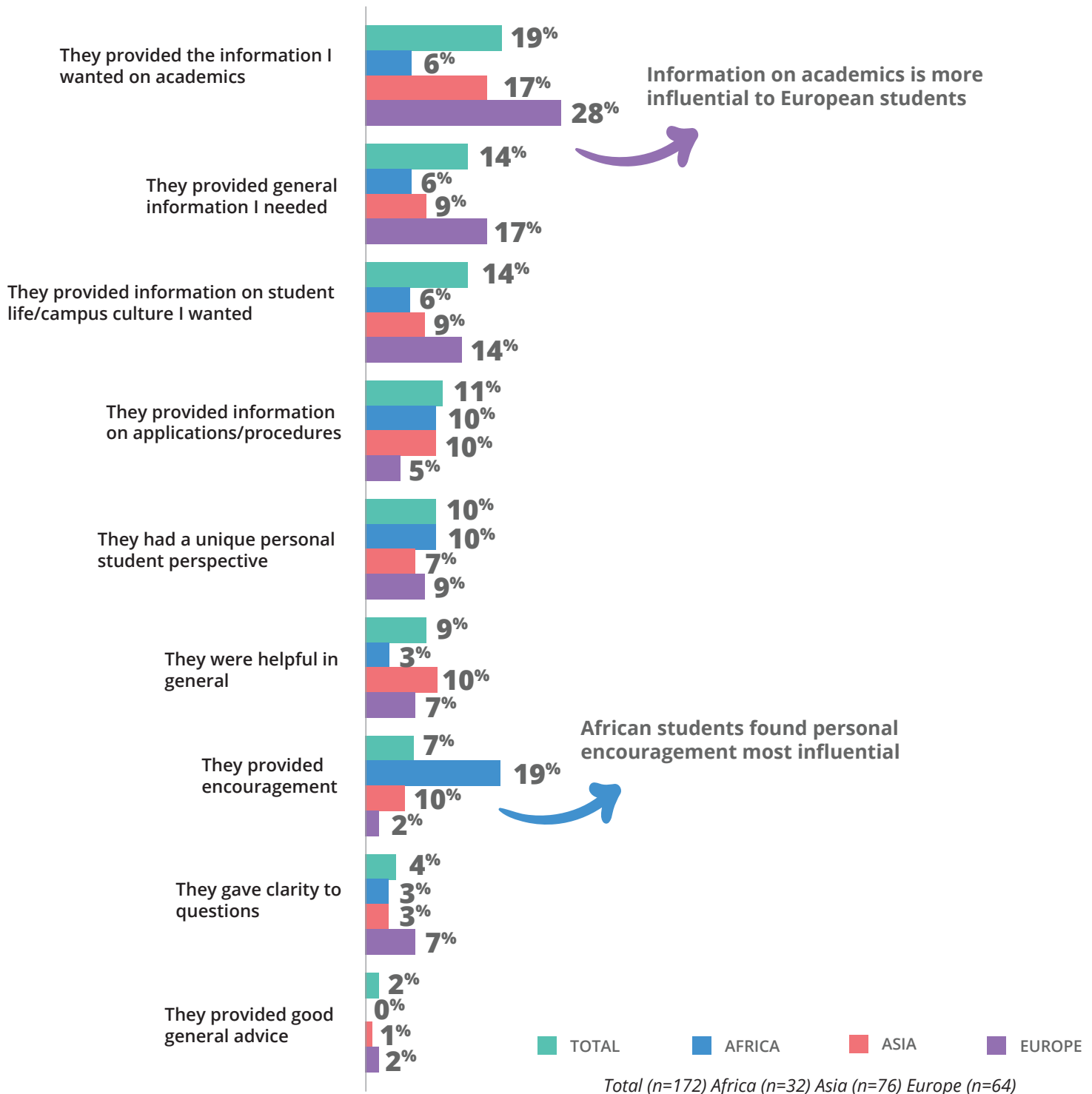


LEAST HELPFUL

For a more specific idea of what was most influential to students in each region and by academic level, take a look at the following charts. While you look, consider this: Asia and Europe found the information on academics most helpful, but Africa found personal encouragement most helpful. This wasn't a small difference, either.

What Information Was Most Influential By Region

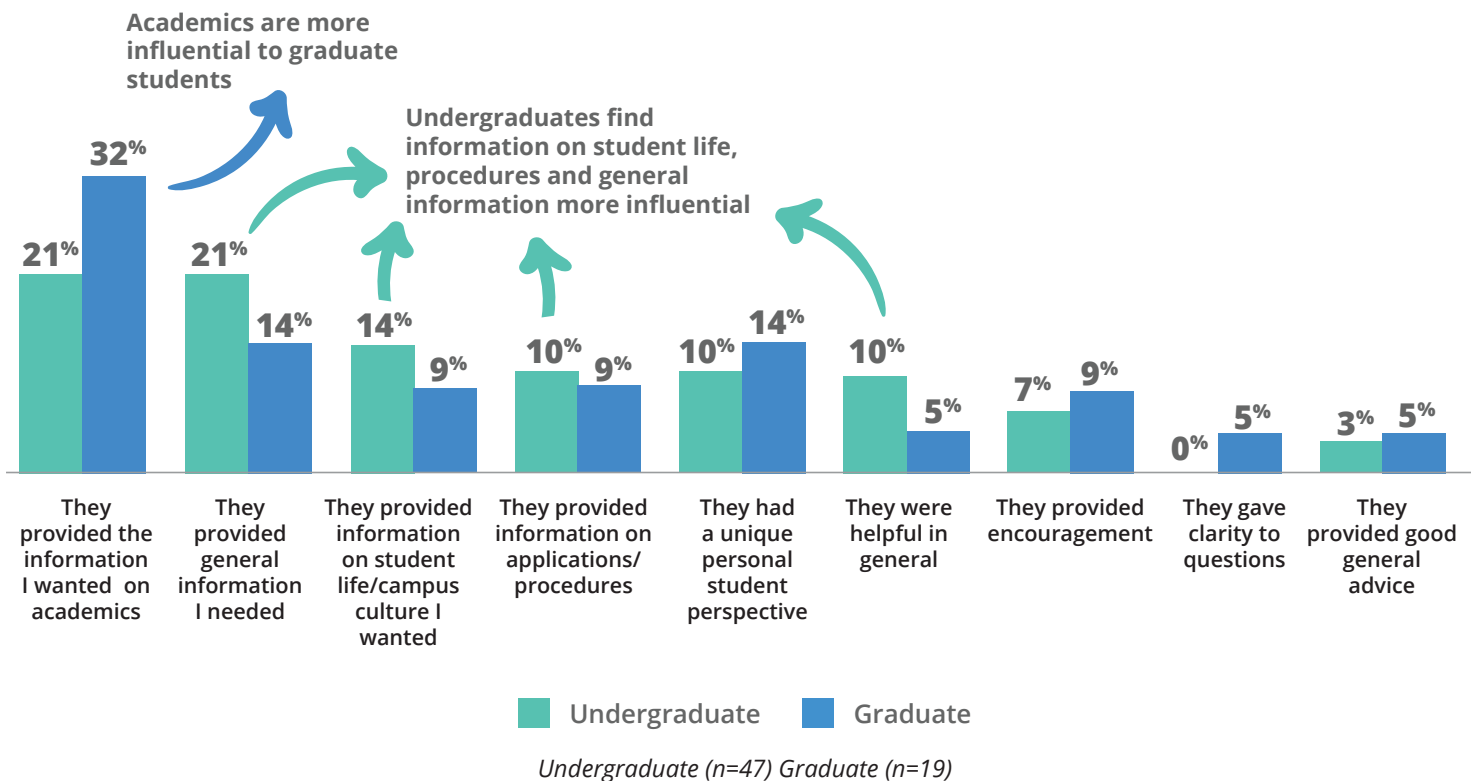
Did chatting with a Unibuddy student ambassador affect your decision about whether to apply to a university? How?



What Information Was Most Influential By Degree Level

The chart below highlights what most institutions already know: prospective undergraduate students are more interested in knowing about student life and general information that will provide them with a better sense of “fit” when choosing their university. On the other hand, prospective graduate students want to explore academic information, ranking, curriculum, concentrations available and faculty, among other details that will help them evaluate their decisions based on career outcomes.

Did chatting with a Unibuddy student ambassador affect your decision about whether to apply to/enroll in a university? How?



What does this mean for your student recruitment?

Strengthen the relevance of your message by region and academic level – on your website, social media, in your brochures, digital ads and in your guide for the travel team on how to engage students.

The Value of Peer-to-Peer Interactions

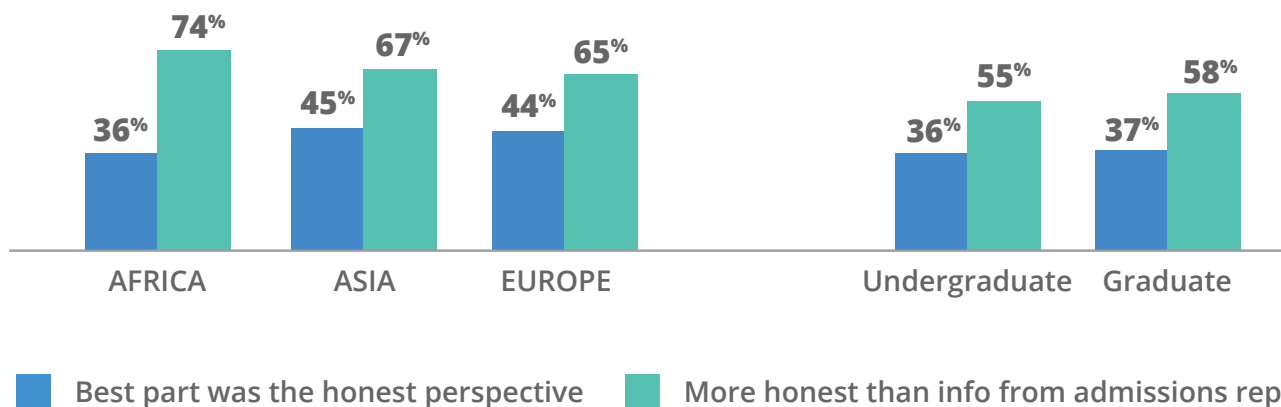
Perceived Honesty and Authenticity

An important factor to consider: students really valued the perceived honesty from their peer-to-peer interactions. Students valued peer and family opinions more highly than information gathered from other sources.

"The Unibuddy student really told me what she thought about the study. And the admission representatives usually only tell you about the good things." - Female, Age 17

The following chart demonstrates how students see their peers as a more honest source of information than admissions representatives. For more research on who might be the best messenger for you in different regions, see our past [Know Your Neighborhood](#) research done with FPPEDUMedia.

**What was the best part about chatting online with a student ambassador?
Do you think you got more honest information than you would have from an admissions representative?**



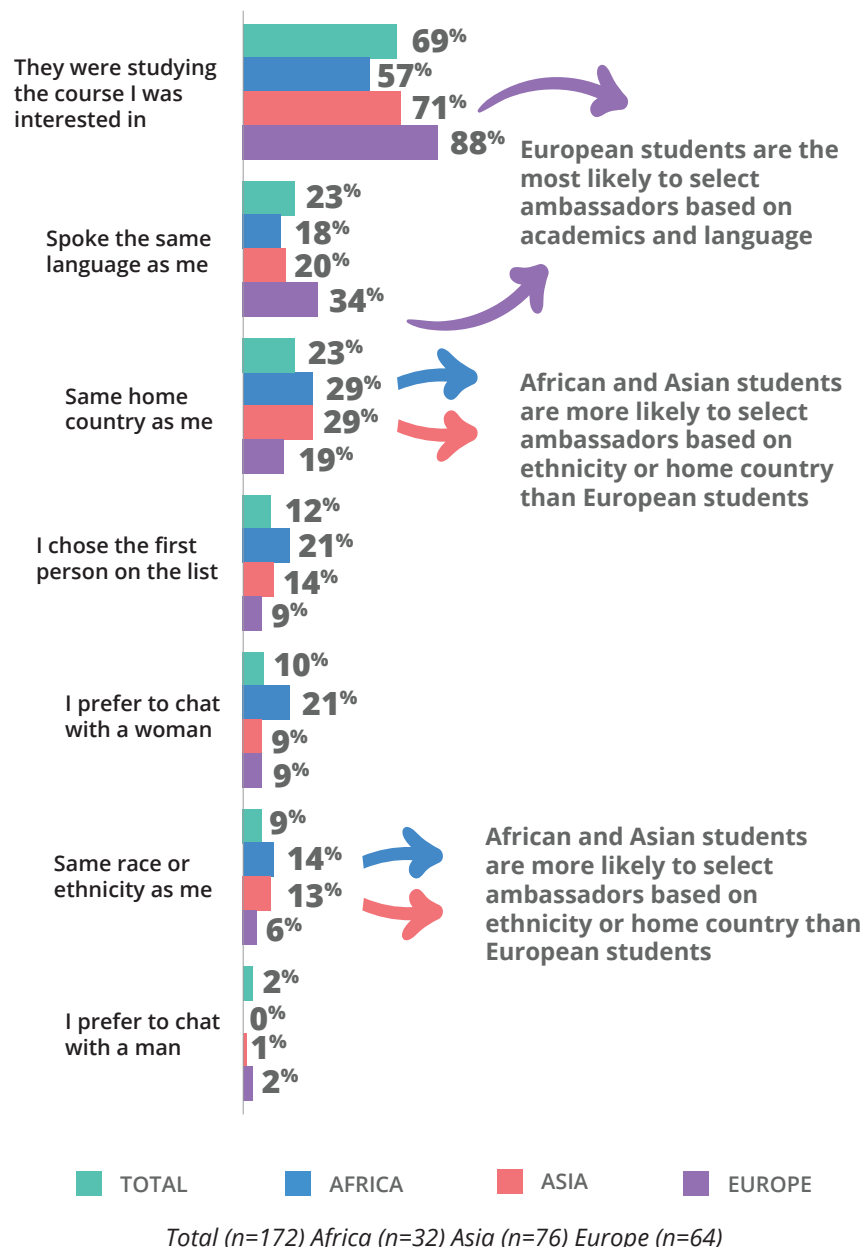
Total (n=172) Africa (n=32) Asia (n=76) Europe (n=64) Undergraduate (n=47) Graduate (n=19)

"The admission representatives give honest information as well most of the time, but the students provide a more realistic day-to-day life perspective. They know more about the practical issues." - Female, Age 18

Commonality and Connection

Looking at the following chart, notice the common elements students from each region relied on to make decisions. Prospective students with a particular academic interest valued speaking to a peer who was studying in that same area.

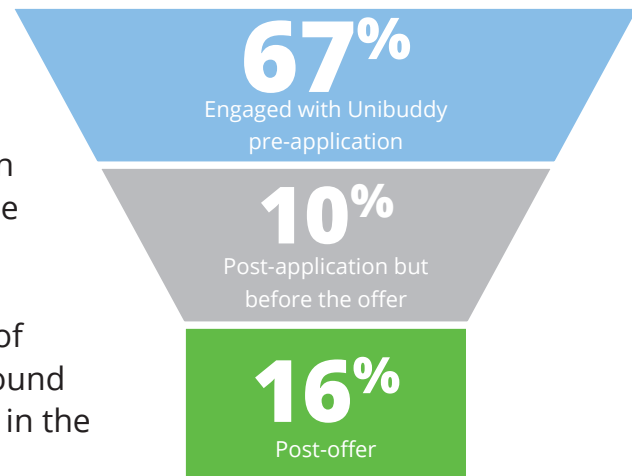
When you used the Unibuddy system, you were given a choice of students to speak to. Which of these factors was most important in your choice of a chat partner? Please select your top three.



The Recruitment Funnel

When it came time for applying to schools, an impressive 65% of students applied to the universities where they were able to chat with a student ambassador. But at what point in the process did these students decide to use the Unibuddy system? Take a look:

Pre-application, the attraction phase, saw 67% of students speaking with an ambassador. They found their discussion not only helpful, but influential in the decision-making process.



While the attraction phase saw the most engagement with the Unibuddy system, some students continued to engage with their student ambassador post-application and even post-offer.

"It reassured my previous notions of the school. I also learned more about how my ambassador has utilized help from the school which encouraged me to apply." – Male, 22

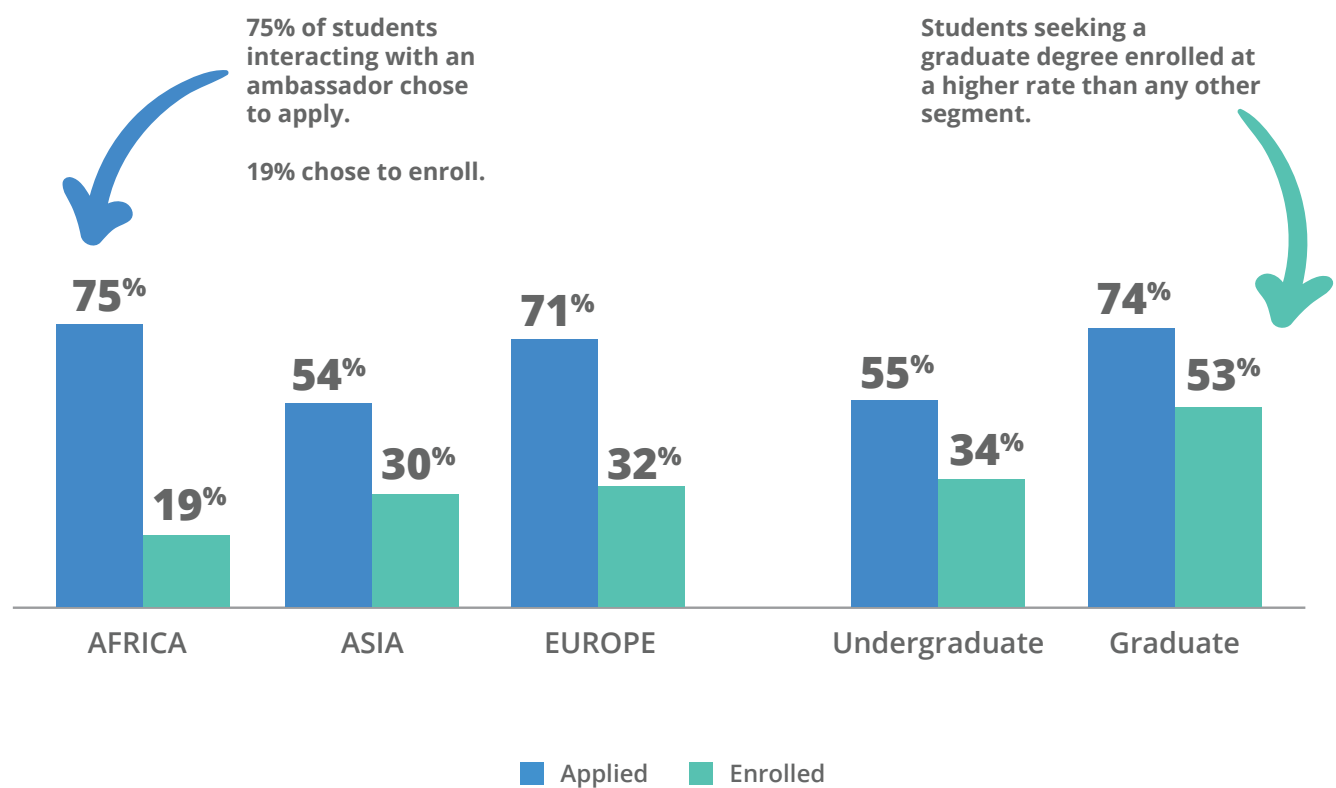
"Did not affect my decision, as I applied beforehand, however, made me more eager to attend the university." – Male, 18

"Yes, [peer-to-peer conversations] made me feel welcome and cemented my confidence in my decision to choose this university." – Female, 18

Who Applied and Who Enrolled?

We further broke this data down by who applied to the university and who enrolled. We found that more than half of prospective students who chatted with the Unibuddy ambassadors, across all regions and degree levels, and as many as 75% in Africa, chose to apply to that university.

Did you end up applying to or enrolling at a university where you had chatted with a Unibuddy student ambassador?



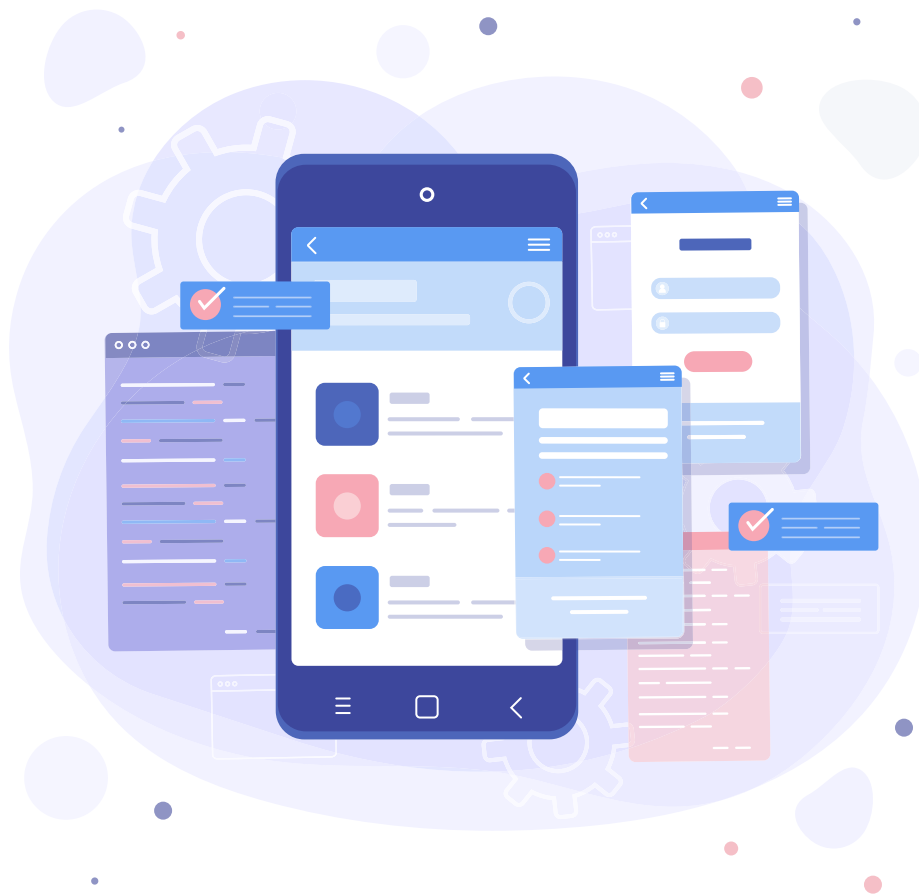
Total (n=172) Africa (n=32) Asia (n=76) Europe (n=64) Undergraduate (n=47) Graduate (n=19)

Guiding Your Messaging Strategy

Consider the value of students as your messengers. They are perceived as more authentic and are better able to encourage prospective students to apply and enroll. Peer-to-peer interactions during the recruitment process will add a new level of depth and value to your recruitment strategy.

Engaging your target audience is always difficult when distractions abound. Putting the most compelling content in front of prospective students and using the most authentic messenger to convey that message is going to produce the enrollment results you need for your institution.

Our data helps you do just that.

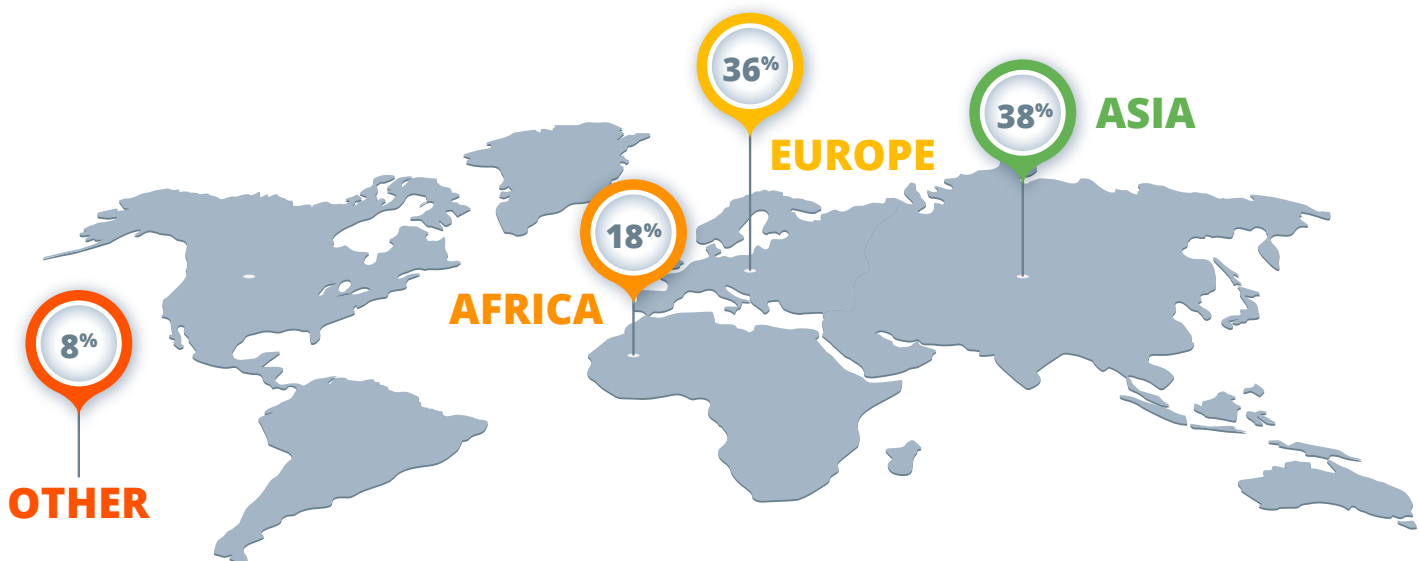


Methodology

Audience Profile

For the data from the Unibuddy platform:

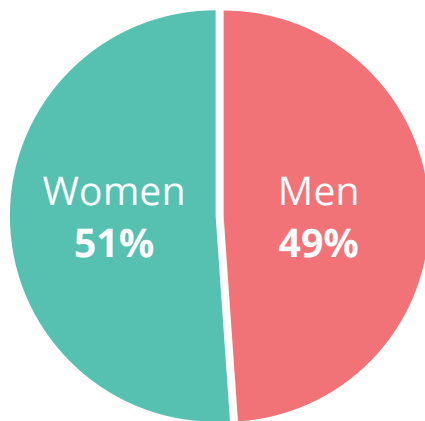
Since its launch in 2017, Unibuddy has grown rapidly and is now working with over 170 institutions around the world. The data for this paper is drawn from 62 active institutions from 13 different countries. The data presented in this report is based on over 370,000 messages exchanged from over 26,000 student prospects. These prospective students hail from all over the world - with over 217 different countries and territories represented.



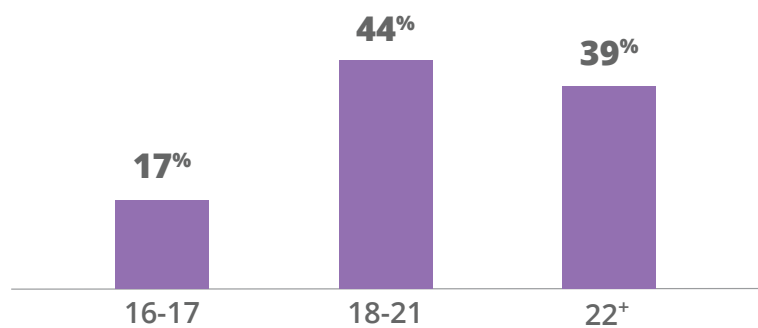
OTHER		AFRICA		EUROPE		ASIA	
AUSTRALIA	MEXICO	ALGERIA	NIGERIA	AUSTRIA	LATVIA	AZERBAIJAN	NEPAL
CANADA	PERU	CAMEROON	SUDAN	BELGIUM	MACEDONIA	BANGLADESH	PAKISTAN
CHILE	SAUDI ARABIA	EGYPT	UGANDA	BOSNIA/HERZEGOVINA	NETHERLANDS	BRUNEI	PHILIPPINES
COLOMBIA	UNITED STATES	GHANA	ZAMBIA	CROATIA	POLAND	CHINA	SINGAPORE
GUATEMALA	VENEZUELA	KENYA	ZIMBABWE	DENMARK	ROMANIA	INDIA	THAILAND
LEBANON				ESTONIA	SLOVAKIA	INDONESIA	UZBEKISTAN
				FRANCE	SPAIN	MALAYSIA	VIETNAM
				GERMANY	TURKEY	MONGOLIA	
				HUNGARY	UNITED KINGDOM		
				ITALY			

Audience Profile

Demographics

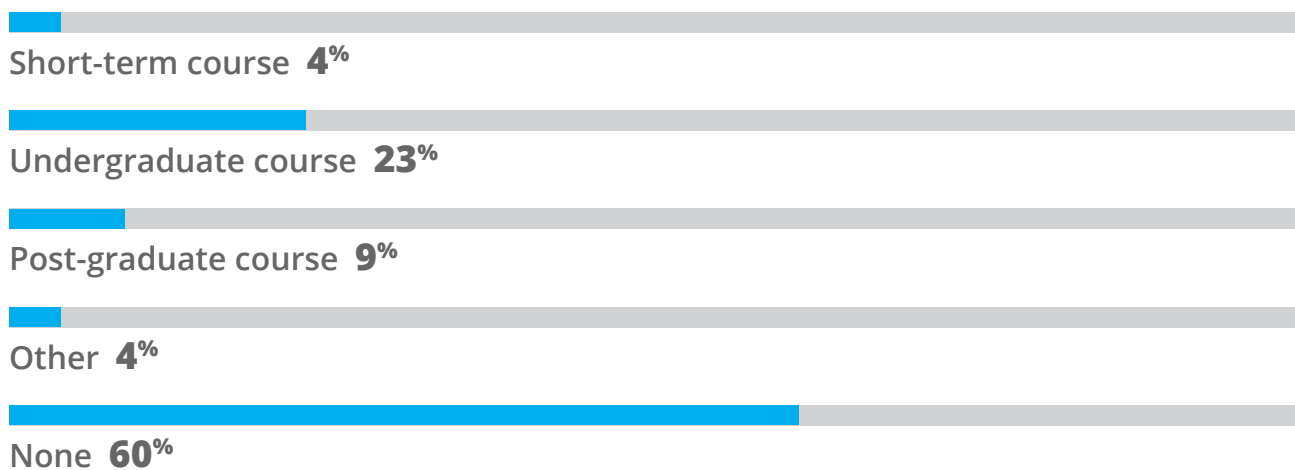


GENDER



AGE

Current Enrollment



Are you currently enrolled in a university program? (n=211)

Survey Method

To reach the prospective students who use Unibuddy, consent from partner universities was required in order to invite the students to complete our survey. Over 40 partner universities in the US and UK were contacted with 8 from the UK providing permission to reach out to the platform users. The survey invitation was sent to a total of 2,821 students who were current or recent past users of the Unibuddy platform. The survey collection tool was made available on Survey Monkey. 280 users from 57 countries provided responses to the questionnaire with valuable insight into how the Unibuddy peer-to-peer interactions influenced their university selection process.

Research Advisory Board

Intead is fortunate to have a team of global veterans guiding our research in the academic field. This is a fantastic group of individuals for us to turn to for a fresh look at domestic and global student trends.

- **Hillary Dostal**, Director, Global Initiatives at Northeastern University & Adjunct Lecturer, Commerce & Economic Development at Northeastern University
- **Kirsten Feddersen**, Senior Director, Global Operations, International Enrollment Management at Northeastern University
- **Lakshmi Iyer**, Executive Director & Head of Education at Sannam S4
- **Daniela Locreille**, Global Education Marketing and Student Recruitment Professional and Career Coach
- **Santhana Naidu**, Associate Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer at Indiana State University
- **Jessica Sandberg**, Dean of Enrollment at Duke Kunshan University
- **Michael Waxman-Lenz**, CEO at American Technion Society





unibuddy.com

intead GLOBAL & LOCAL
® ACADEMIC BRANDING

intead.com

intead.plus