Attracting high achievers: are they really that different?

CAREER AMBITIONS AND EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS AND RECENT GRADUATES FROM THE WORLD’S TOP 200 UNIVERSITIES
In the war to attract top talent, it’s helpful to delve into the minds of students and graduates of the world’s top universities. What drives their career ambitions and expectations?
Onsite bowling alleys, free gym memberships and flexible work hours are the types of perks that help organizations stand out as employers of choice. But to what extent do they reflect what is truly important to today’s best young candidates?

In this report – part of our Future Talent Insight Series – we explore the career expectations of business students and recent graduates (referred to as High Achievers) from the top 200 universities listed in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2015–2016. We surveyed more than 88,000 people from 10 countries: Canada, China, Germany, Hong Kong, Norway, Singapore, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. More than 18,000 of these students study at the top 200 universities.

While these top-tier schools are by no means the only source of high-quality graduates, exploring what their students seek in a job can help organizations develop targeted strategies for attracting the best talent.

Our analysis also explores how High Achievers differ from their peers at other universities. How do these students think differently, what drives them and what does this mean for employers?
Understanding high achievers
Who are these High Achievers, and what sets them apart from students at other universities?

Career profile
We sought to understand how students view themselves as employees, and what drives them. The top three career profiles of High Achievers are Careerist, Internationalist and Hunter.

Career goals
For all students, work/life balance was their top goal as they prepare to embark on their careers. Further down the list we see some variations, with High Achievers ranking as second a desire to lead or manage people, while students from other universities cite job security. It seems High Achievers are more focused on becoming leaders and feeling competitively or intellectually challenged, and less on job stability. 

Figure 1
FIGURE 1
WHICH OF THESE CAREER GOALS ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU?
High Achievers versus Other Students
Employer qualities
Beyond earning a high salary, High Achievers crave creative and dynamic work that will challenge them, and look for leaders to foster their development.

Attributes of an attractive employer

What do High Achievers want in a workplace and a role? High future earnings is the top priority for all students. If we look closer at salary expectations, we find, perhaps unsurprisingly, that High Achievers expect to earn a higher salary upon graduating. The exception is in Norway, where students outside the top 200 had a higher expectation of salary on average.

High Achievers ranked ‘supportive leaders’ as the second most important employer attribute, followed by a creative and dynamic work environment. Other students cited a similar top three.

Further down the list, there are some key differences. Among High Achievers, prestige and variety are more important, while other students place greater value on working for a company with high ethical standards and a friendly and respectful environment.

The issue of ethical standards is an interesting one. Between groups and across countries we see significant variation in how students feel about this employer attribute.

Target industries

High Achievers seem most drawn to industries where salaries are generally higher and work is potentially more prestigious, strategic and challenging. Their top three industries are management and strategy consulting, banks and financial services, and auditing and accounting.

Agriculture, shipping, arts, entertainment and recreation were ranked among the least desirable industries for all students, suggesting organizations in these areas may need to get creative in their quest to attract talent.
### FIGURE 2
**TOP FIVE EMPLOYER ATTRIBUTES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Achievers</th>
<th>Other Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. High future earnings</td>
<td>1. High future earnings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Leaders who will support my development</td>
<td>2. Professional training and development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. A creative and dynamic work environment</td>
<td>3. A creative and dynamic work environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Professional training and development</td>
<td>4. Leadership opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Leadership opportunities</td>
<td>5. Leaders who will support my development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FIGURE 3
BIGGEST DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HIGH ACHIEVERS AND OTHER STUDENTS

High Achievers versus Other Students

- Prestige
- A friendly work environment
- Respect for its people
- Variety of assignments
- Recruiting only the best talent

High Achievers
Other students

Recruiting only the best talent
Variety of assignments
Respect for its people
A friendly work environment
Prestige
FIGURE 4
ETHICAL STANDARDS IS ONE OF THE MOST ATTRACTIVE ATTRIBUTES IN AN EMPLOYER

By country (High Achievers)

- Canada: 28%
- US: 33%
- UK: 20%
- Norway: 43%
- Sweden: 15%
- Germany: 12%
- Switzerland: 23%
- China: 25%
- Hong Kong: 20%
- Singapore: 32%
- UK: 20%
- Sweden: 15%
- Switzerland: 23%
- China: 25%
- Hong Kong: 20%
- Singapore: 32%

By group

- HIGH ACHIEVERS: 26%
- OTHER STUDENTS: 32%
High achiever profiles
Elsa

Elsa is 22 and in her final year of a Business Administration degree at Lund University in Sweden. Ambitious and determined, Elsa has her sights set on a management career in media.

As part of her final year, Elsa is completing an internship with a local digital media company. Many of Elsa’s peers (both High Achievers and other students) are engaged in part-time or summer work and extracurricular activities. However, more High Achievers, like Elsa, have undergone local internships (48 percent of High Achievers compared to 36 percent of other students). Internships offer valuable on-the-job experience and build networks, potentially giving Elsa an edge in finding employment.

As a Careerist, Elsa is ready to climb the corporate ladder and put in the work required. Like many Careerists, she wants to work in an environment that recognizes and rewards hard work. She will seek an employer that fosters her development and advancement, offers work/life balance, provides regular training and promises a variety of challenges.
Hugo

Hugo, 26, has recently completed his Masters in Business Law and Economics at the UK's University of Liverpool. He hopes to build a career as a strategic consultant for multinational companies.

Hugo is an Internationalist; a natural-born leader, he is strategic and adaptable. He is looking for a job that offers variety and diversity, and opportunities to lead and inspire others. Hugo completed a semester in Germany and hopes to work in a role that sees him travelling overseas, or at least interacting with international clients and colleagues.

This ambition is common to many High Achievers. More than half (52 percent) have traveled overseas, compared to 43 percent of students at other universities, while more than one-quarter (28 percent) of High Achievers have studied abroad, compared to 18 percent of other students. Hugo is conscious that in today's global economy, international experience is seen as an advantage by many employers.
Implications for employers
Gaining that elusive competitive edge often comes down to the talent that walks in your doors. Find ways to offer, and communicate, what your candidates want and you’ll have far more chance of standing out.

Find your balance

Our research has consistently found that young professionals care deeply about work/life balance. However, this shouldn’t be confused with an unwillingness to work hard and ‘pay their dues’ – a stereotype often associated with the younger generation. In a 2015 Universum report on millennials, the top three definitions of ‘work/life balance’ from respondents were *enough leisure time for my private life*, *flexible work hours* and *recognition and respect for employees*.

Employers set on hiring fresh talent can’t ignore this insight. How will you support employees’ desire for balance?
Provide a roadmap

A 2016 Deloitte report on the career expectations of millennials revealed that in an ideal work week, young professionals wanted significantly more time devoted to the development of their leadership skills and to coaching and mentoring. This hunger for regular training and support is reflected in our research, which reveals it is a top-five employer attribute for High Achievers.

The organizations most successful in attracting these candidates will have robust training plans in place and clear roadmaps for supporting employee advancement.

Build your brand

Cultivating a strong employer brand is a crucial aspect of successful recruitment – and even more so for organizations targeting High Achievers. As we explored above, these top students and graduates place a higher value on prestige than their peers; they want to work somewhere that is seen to be attractive by others.

Among the employer attributes that High Achievers rated lowest were corporate transparency, customer focus, gender diversity and overtime pay. While these are important issues in business, it seems they’re not effective selling points in the battle to attract top candidates.

The best employer brands understand the unique, distinct and credible values of their company and build this into all of their talent communications. What is your organization doing to build its employer brand and stand out from the crowd?
MORE INFORMATION
Want more information about attracting top candidates, cultivating your employer brand, or simply taking the first steps towards better understanding your organization?

The Talent Insight Series is only a small selection of questions from the larger Universum Talent Survey. We explore in depth the career expectations of talent by asking them to evaluate their chosen employers based on four drivers of employer attractiveness: employer reputation and image, people and culture, job characteristics, remuneration, and advancement opportunities. To get insights on your employer brand and understand how you compete with other employers, contact us.

Learn more about Universum’s research services

Find out about Universum’s consulting services

Contact Universum today and let us help you build a better employer brand

BECOME A MEMBER
Explore a comprehensive range of solutions, from industry insight reports and data dashboards to content analysis platforms accessed via large enterprise membership packages.
Each year, Universum gathers insights about the career expectations of more than 1,500,000 career seekers from 57 countries, and publishes dozens of reports on the top issues affecting global talent and the companies that hire them. The Talent Insight Series focuses on students nearing graduation, or who have recently finished university.

This report is based on business students and recent graduates from The Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2015–2016. Global averages are a weighted average of the selected countries; weighting is by GDP.

Based on an exclusive survey – distributed via university and alumni contacts, the Universum Panel and local partners – Universum ensures the quality and validity of the end result by continuously maintaining a close dialogue with leading academics in the field. Our vast experience in the field, and cooperation with leading professors from top universities, enable us to stay at the front line of the development of employer branding. Our findings are also used all over the world as material for new research. They are created based on more than 25 years of experience, extensive research within HR and focus groups, and communication with both our clients and talent. Global perspective – local insight.

Although Universum conducts research in 57 markets, this report covers only 10 countries. If you would like to learn more about talent within your market, please contact us.
## METHODOLOGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRIES</th>
<th>GDP IN $</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
<th>NUMBER OF TOP 200 STUDENTS</th>
<th>NUMBER OF OTHER STUDENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>17,950 billion</td>
<td>46.22%</td>
<td>5747</td>
<td>15183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>2,849 billion</td>
<td>7.34%</td>
<td>3136</td>
<td>3654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>292.7 billion</td>
<td>0.75%</td>
<td>2214</td>
<td>1442</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>492.6 billion</td>
<td>1.27%</td>
<td>1729</td>
<td>5034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>1,552 billion</td>
<td>4.00%</td>
<td>1679</td>
<td>4642</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>3,358 billion</td>
<td>8.65%</td>
<td>1599</td>
<td>13753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>309.9 billion</td>
<td>0.80%</td>
<td>1067</td>
<td>897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>664.6 billion</td>
<td>1.71%</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>5633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>10,980 billion</td>
<td>28.27%</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>16538</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>389.5 billion</td>
<td>1.00%</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>3893</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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