

# From Applications to Aspirations:

## *Insights from International Students studying in the U.S.*

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October 2025

A Duolingo/College Pulse Study



COLLEGE PULSE

# Table of Contents

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ABOUT US

1

3

METHODOLOGY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

5

7

HIGHLIGHTS

# About Us

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## **DUOLINGO**

Duolingo is the most popular mobile learning platform and the most downloaded education app worldwide. The app makes learning new languages, math, music, and chess fun with bite-sized lessons that feel like playing a game. The company's mission is to develop the best education in the world and make it universally available. Duolingo offers lessons in music, math, chess, and language with over 250 total language courses from Spanish, French, German, and Japanese to Navajo and Yiddish.

In addition, Duolingo offers the Duolingo English Test (DET) — an innovative, online English proficiency exam accepted by thousands of institutions around the world. The DET provides a convenient, affordable, and accessible way for learners to certify their English skills anytime, anywhere.

For more information, visit [www.duolingo.com](https://www.duolingo.com).

## **COLLEGE PULSE**

College Pulse is a survey research and analytics company dedicated to understanding the attitudes, preferences, and behaviors of today's college students. College Pulse offers custom data-driven marketing and research solutions, utilizing its unique *College Student Panel*™ that includes over 1 million college students and recent alumni from more than 1,500 two- and four-year colleges and universities in all 50 states and beyond.

For more information, visit [collegepulse.com](https://collegepulse.com) or College Pulse's official X account [@CollegeInsights](https://twitter.com/CollegeInsights).

# Methodology

# Sampling Methodology

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This survey was designed and conducted by College Pulse between March 20th, 2025 and August 4th, 2025. Surveys were completed among a sample of 1,048 international students from Brazil, China, Nepal, Nigeria, India, Vietnam, South Korea, Bangladesh, and more.

The sample was drawn from College Pulse's *College Student Panel*™ that includes over 1 million verified students representing more than 1,500 different colleges and universities. Panel members are recruited by a number of methods to help ensure diversity in the panel population, including web advertising, permission-based email campaigns, and partnerships with university organizations. A post-stratification adjustment was applied based on demographic distributions of the undergraduate responses. Adjustments are informed by analogous national datasets and publicly available demographic information. The post-stratification weight rebalanced the sample based on key benchmarks such as country of origin. The sample weighting was accomplished using an adjustment process that simultaneously balances the distributions of all variables, ensuring that the weighted sample reflects the target population as accurately as possible.

The margin of error for this survey ranges from +/- 3 to 6 percentage points. Margins of error are typically calculated on probability-based samples and are not technically correct for non-probability online samples. We supply them here to provide a general assessment of error ranges that may be associated with the data.

For more information about our methodology, [click here](#).

# Executive Summary

# Executive Summary

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This survey aimed to better understand why international students choose to study in the U.S. and what elements and challenges shape their experience. Studying abroad offers more than a degree, it opens doors to personal and professional growth. Capturing international student perspectives helps ensure higher education remains a bridge to global opportunity.

- **Students prioritize academic quality and university reputation above all.** Prestige, rigor, and long-term value are key drivers. University discovery is shaped heavily by friends, family, and online networks.
- **One-third of U.S.-bound applicants also apply to other countries,** often favoring destinations with more transparent and welcoming visa policies. More than a third of international students studying in the U.S. say they hope to stay after graduation, making post-study pathways a growing differentiator.
- **Most international students today seek help navigating the complex admissions process.** Agents and consultants play a growing role, offering support with timelines, tests, documentation, and visas.
- **The Duolingo English Test (DET) is one of the fastest-growing test options.** The DET appeals to international students because it aligns well with students' top priorities: affordability, flexibility, and friendly format. DET awareness has risen to 62% among first-year international students (up from 32% just four years ago), and one-in-five international students have already used the DET to apply to universities in the U.S.

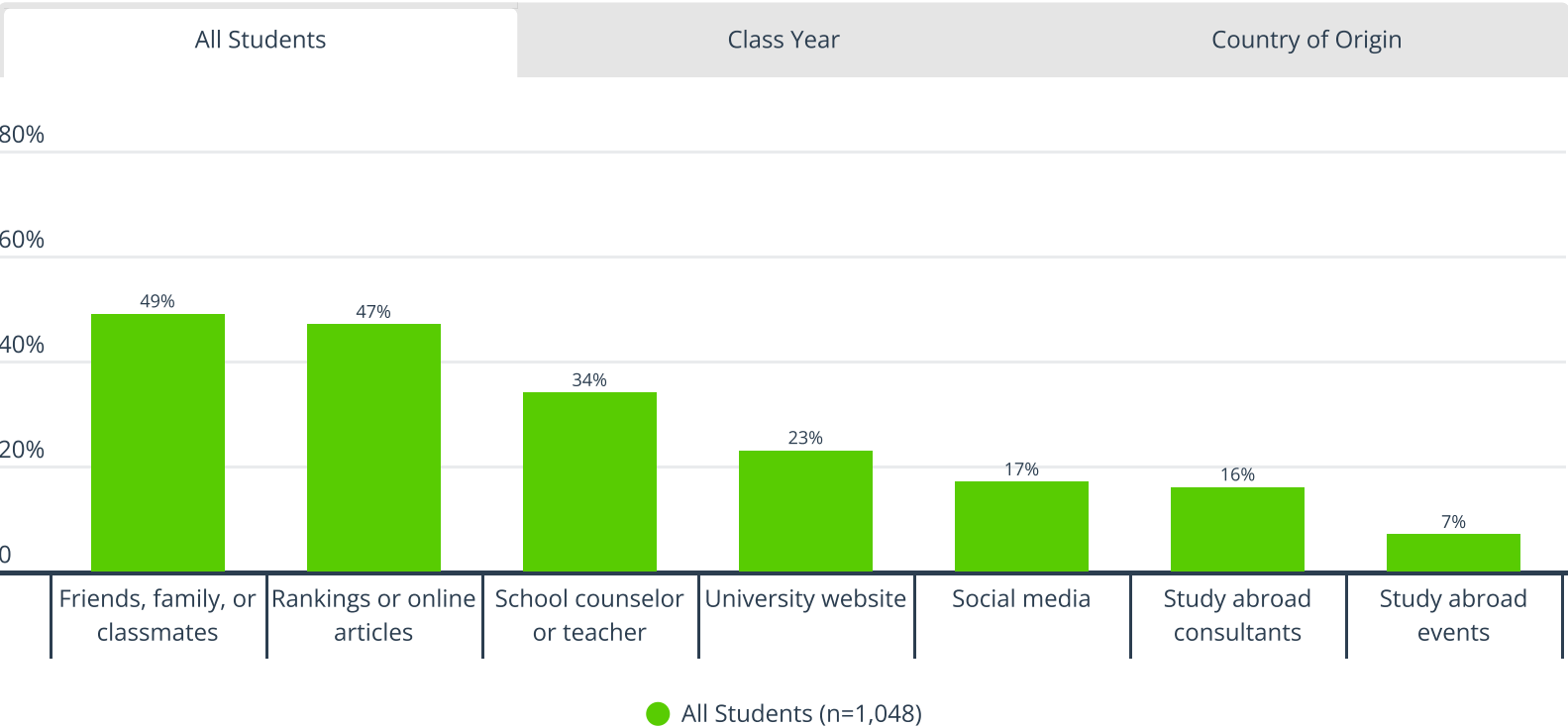


# Highlights

HIGHLIGHT 1 - University Discovery

International students primarily learn about their university from family, friends, classmates, and online rankings.

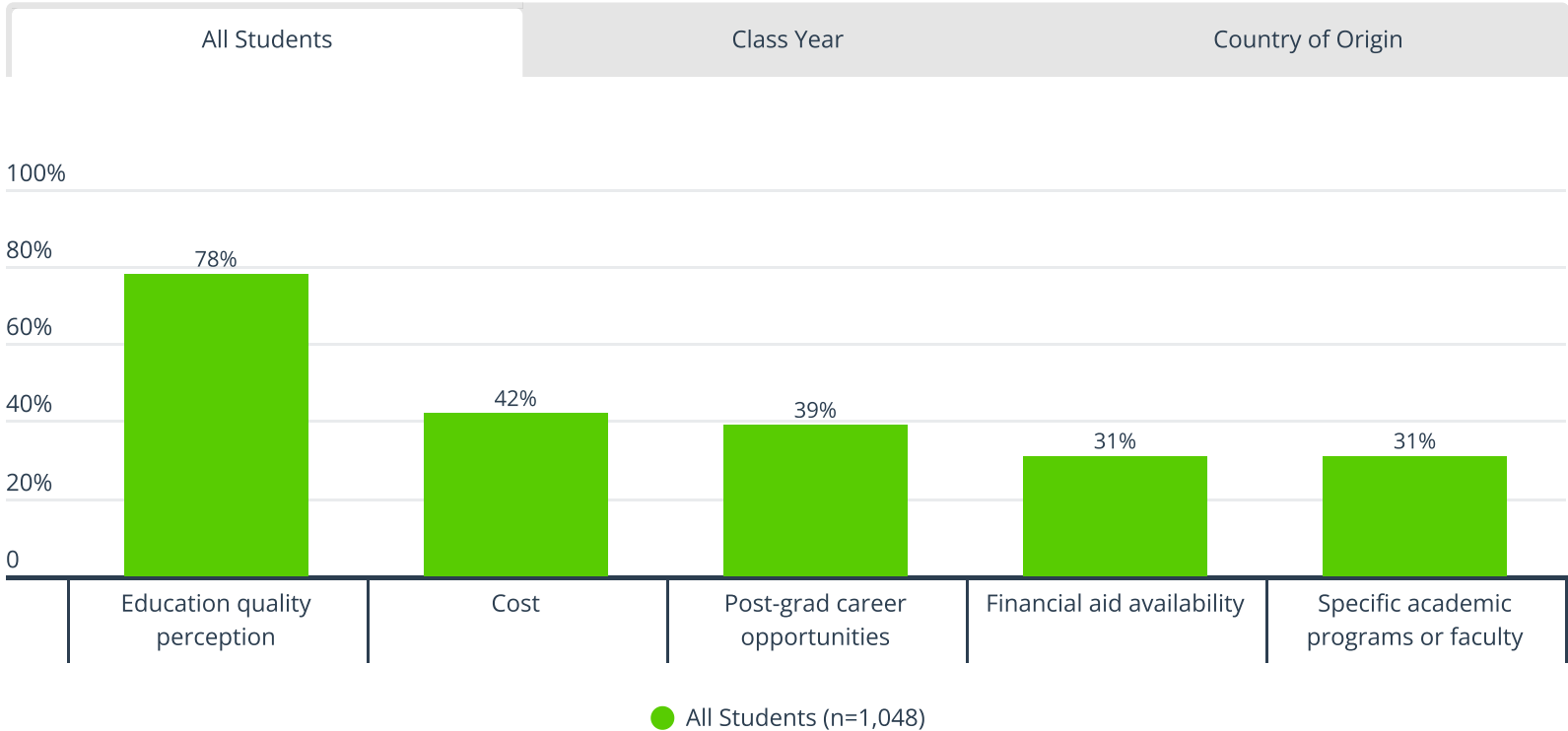
- About one-quarter of international students learn about their university from the university website, and one-third of international students learn about their current university from school counselors or teachers.
- Students graduating in 2027 (41%) and 2028 (39%) are more likely to say they learned about their current university from school counselors or teachers.



HIGHLIGHT 2 - University Decision Drivers

International students primarily say education quality perception is the most important factor in deciding which university to apply to.

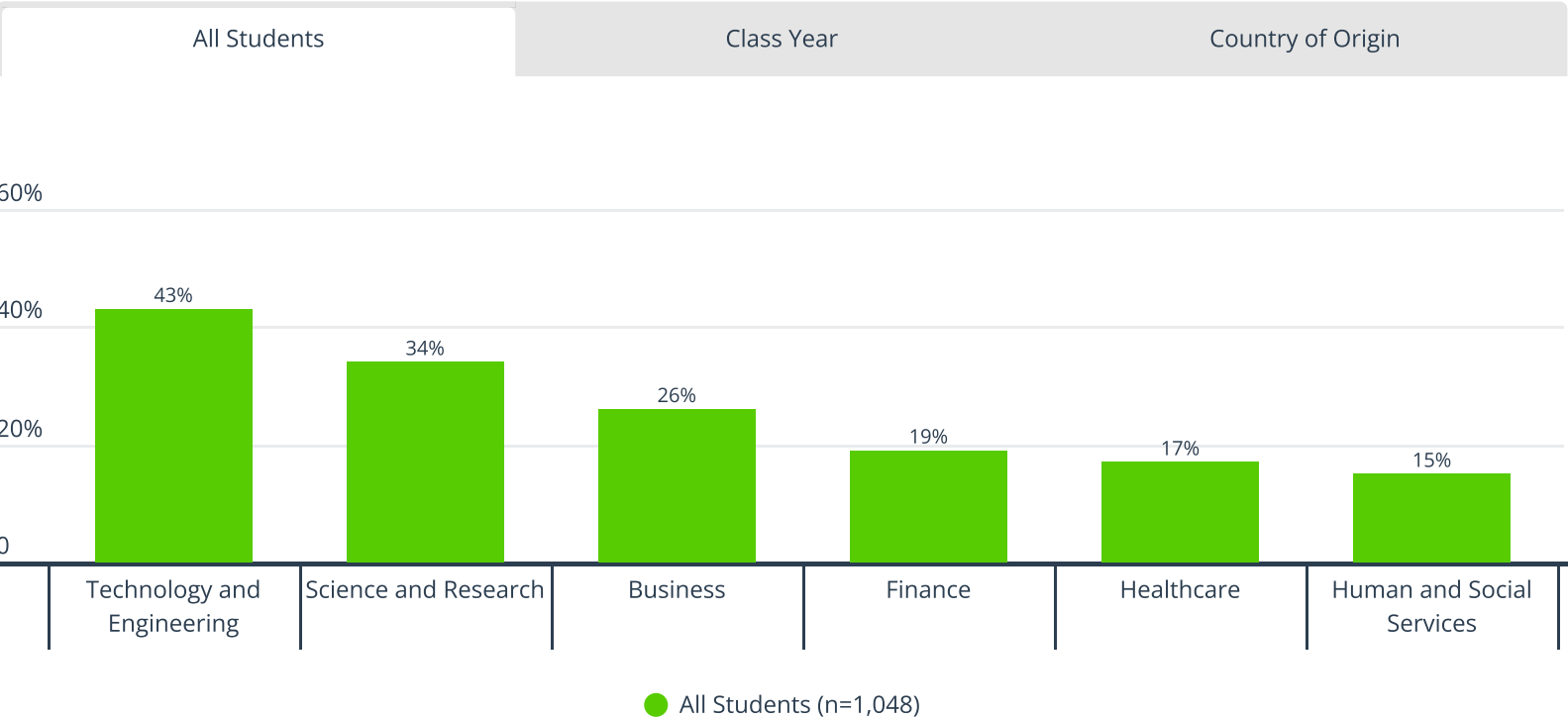
- Students from China are the most likely to say that education quality perception (94%) are top of mind when choosing a university. Meanwhile, students from India are more likely to say that cost (53%) and financial aid availability (27%) are the most important factors.
- Students graduating in 2028 (35%) are less likely than students graduating in 2025 (48%) to say that cost was the most important factor in deciding which university to apply to.



HIGHLIGHT 3 - University Decision Drivers

Science, research, technology, and engineering are most appealing fields of study to international students studying in the United States.

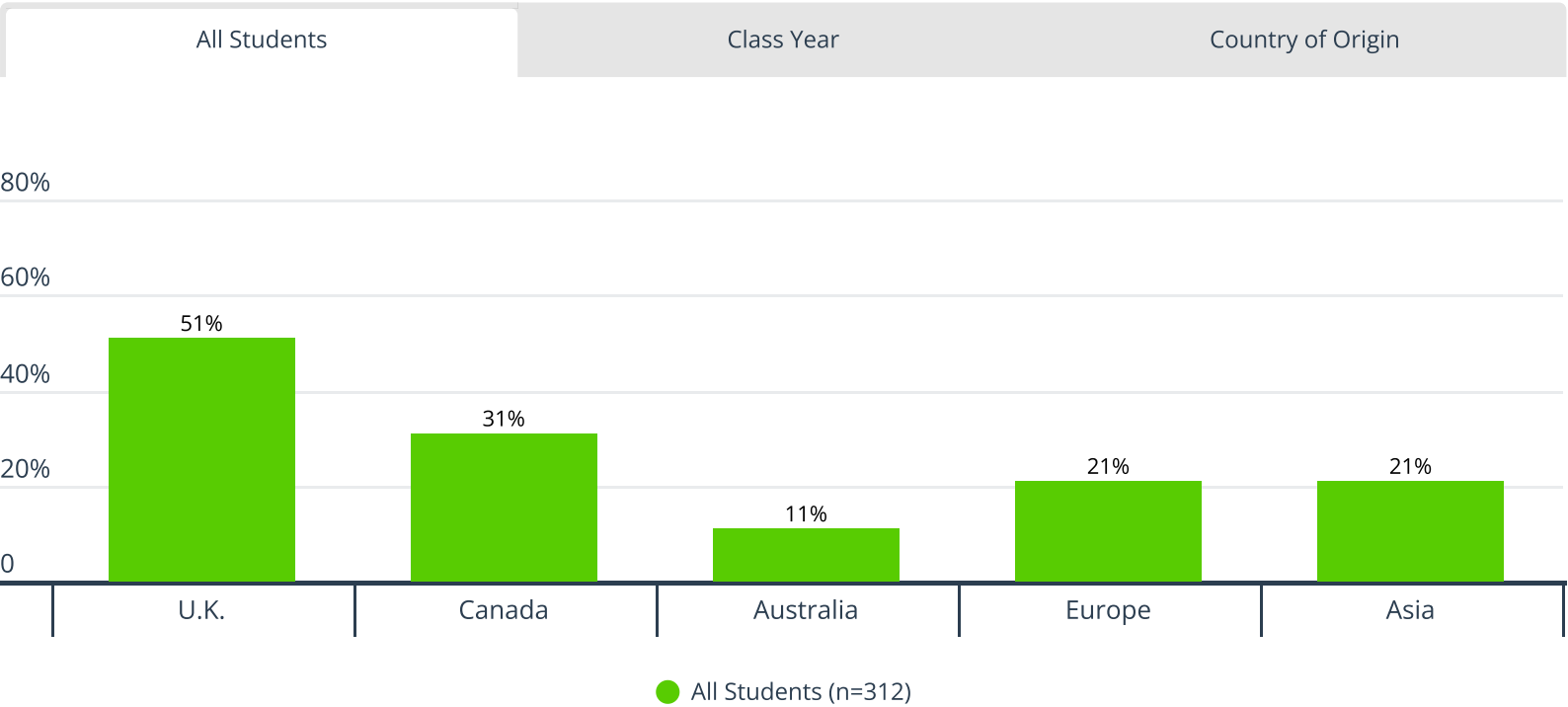
- Students from India (58%) are more likely than students from China (41%) to say that technology and engineering fields were most appealing to them. However, students from China (28%) are the most likely to say that human and social service fields were most appealing.
- Students graduating in 2028 are less interested in technology, engineering and finance fields than their peers, and more interested in healthcare and human and social services fields.



HIGHLIGHT 4 - Global Application Trends

Thirty-two percent of international students in the U.S. also applied to universities outside the U.S. Among those, 51% applied to universities in the U.K. and 31% applied to universities in Canada.

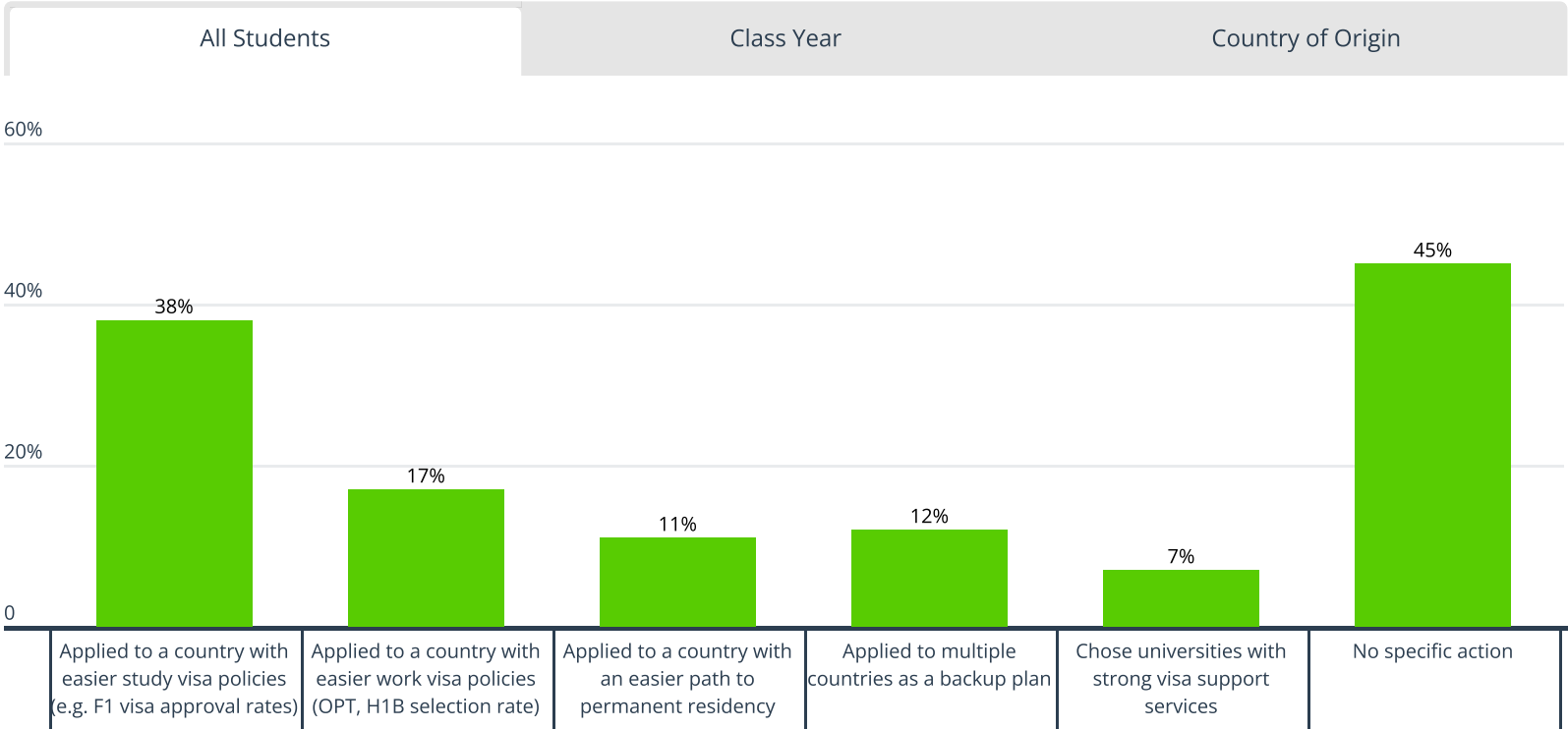
- More than half of students graduating in 2027 (55%) and 2028 (55%) applied to universities in the U.K.
- Students graduating in 2025 (28%) and 2026 (28%) are more likely than students graduation in 2027 (14%) and 2028 (13%) to apply to universities in Europe.



HIGHLIGHT 5- Global Application Trends

More than one-third of international students specifically applied to universities in a country with friendlier study visa policies.

- Students graduating in 2025 are more likely to apply to a country with friendlier study visa and work visa policies. Similarly, students from India are more likely than students from China to apply to a country with friendlier study visa and work visa policies.

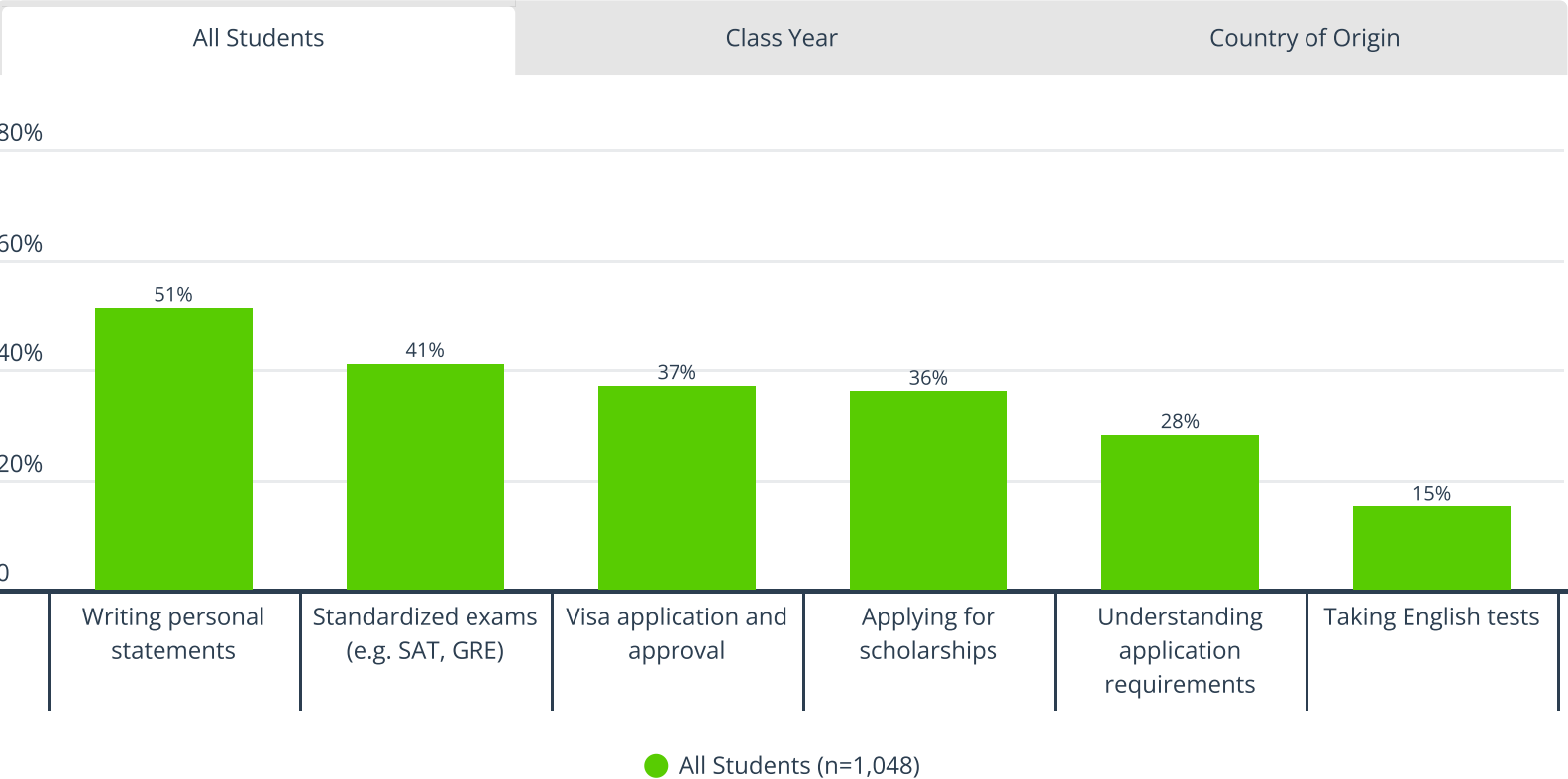


● All Students (n=1,048)

HIGHLIGHT 6 - Application Challenges

Over half international students say the biggest challenge they face during the application process is writing personal statements.

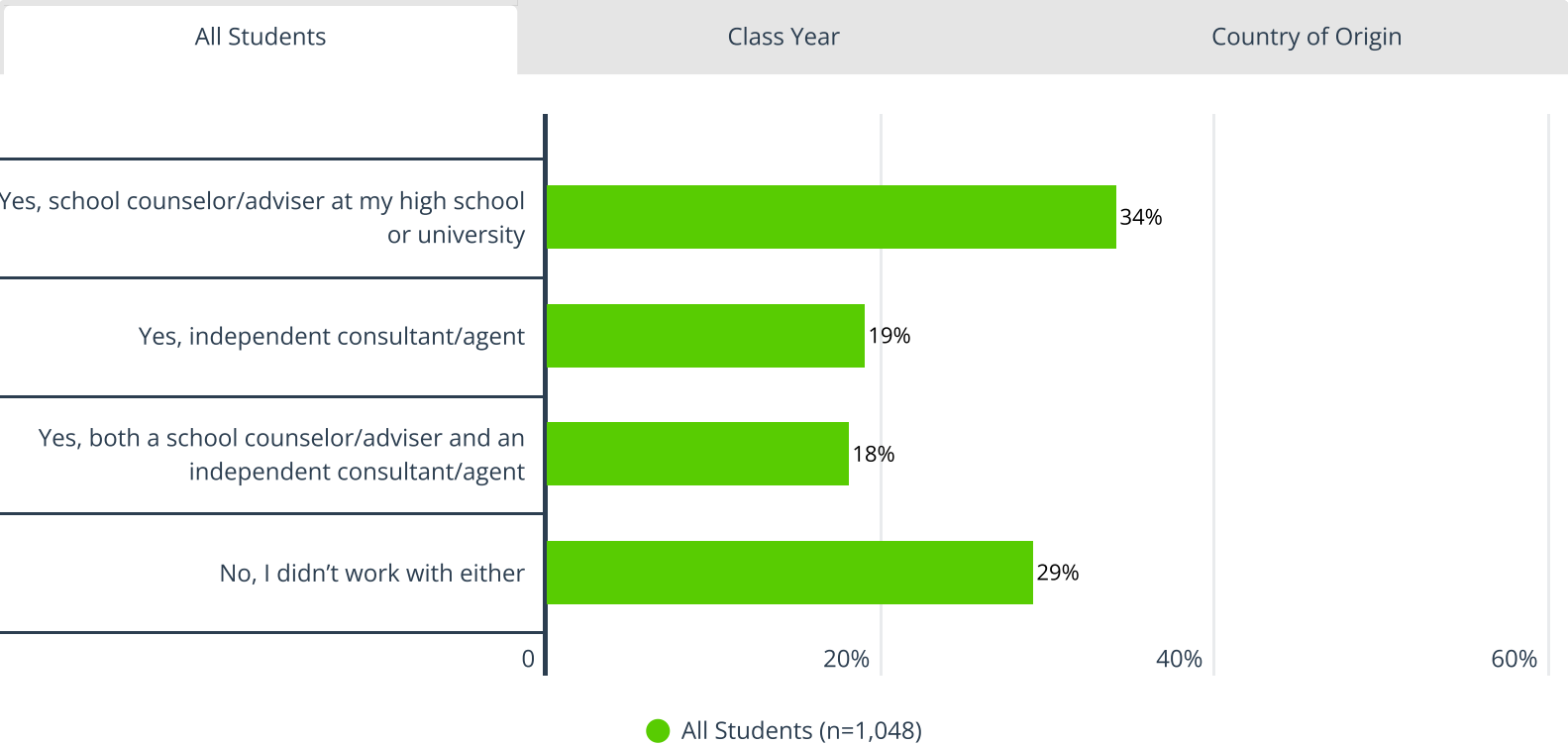
- Students from India are more likely to say their biggest challenges were visa approval (44%) and scholarship applications (44%). Students from China (73%) were much more likely to say that writing personal statements was their biggest challenge in the application process.



HIGHLIGHT 7 - Seeking Support

Over two-thirds of international students used professional help during the application process.

- More than three-quarters of students graduating in 2027 (76%) and 2028 (79%) worked with school counselors and/or consultants during the application process.
- Most students from China (86%) and India (64%) worked with school counselors and/or independent consultants in the application process.

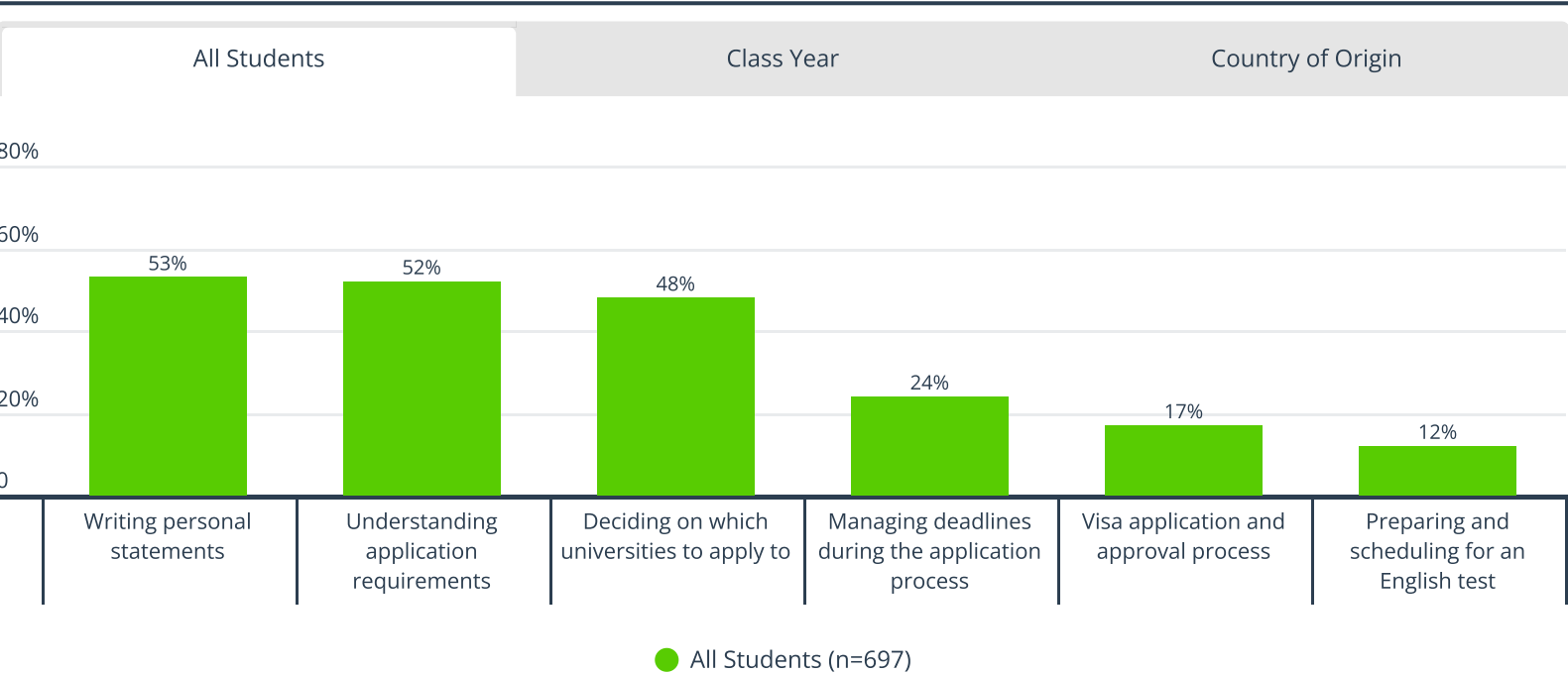




HIGHLIGHT 8 - Seeking Support

Counselors and consultants were most valuable to international students in writing personal statements, understanding application requirements, and helping students decide which universities to apply to.

- Students from India (17%) were more likely than students from China (4%) to say that counselors and consultants are most valuable in preparing for English tests.
- Students graduating in 2028 (58%) are more likely than other students to say that counselors and consultants were the most valuable in deciding which schools to apply to.

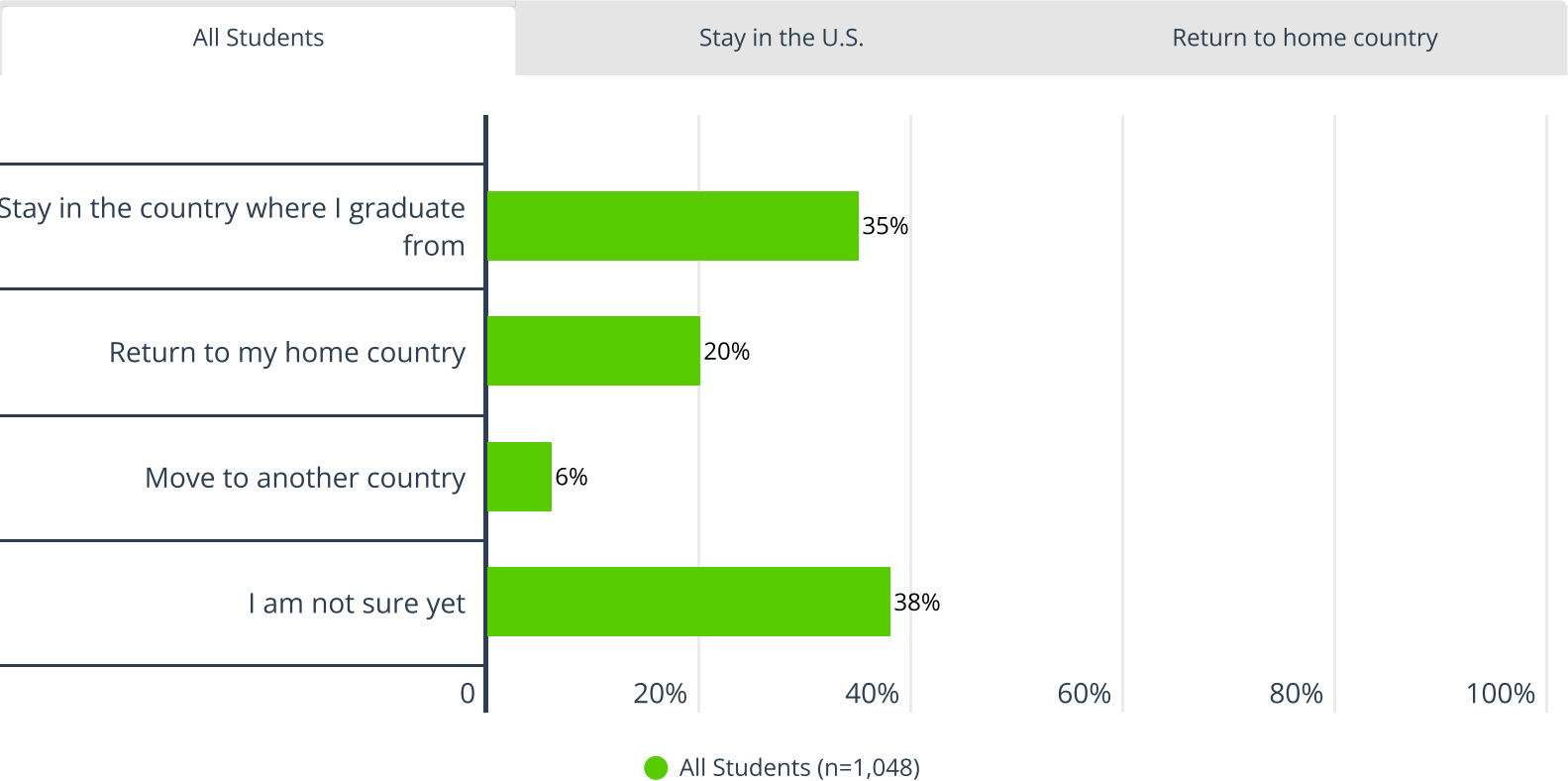


What was most valuable about your school counselor/adviser or independent consultant/agent?  
Select up to 3.  
[Asked to students who worked with a school counselor/adviser or independent consultant/agent]

HIGHLIGHT 9 - Post-Graduation Aspirations

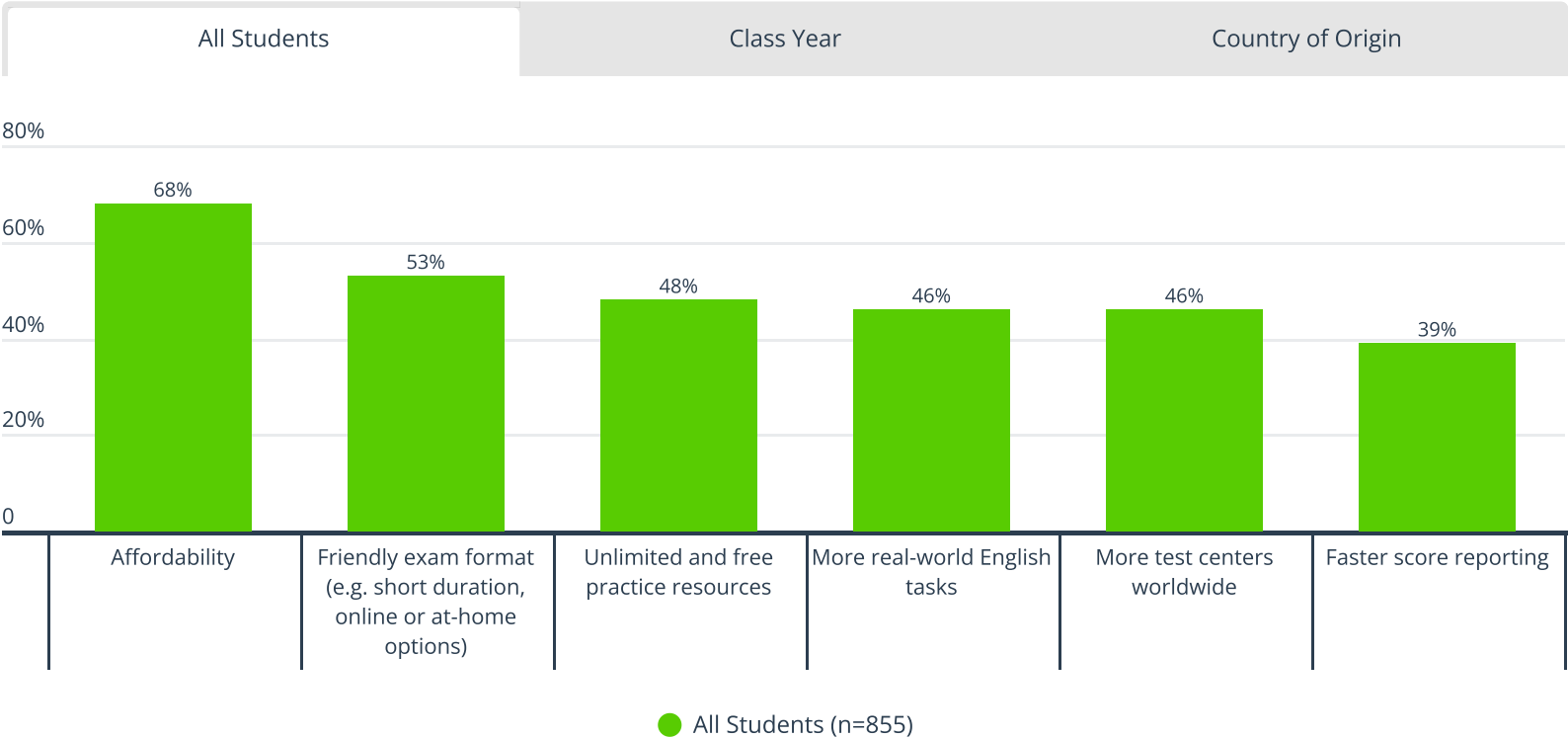
More than one-third of international students plan to stay in the United States after graduation.

- Among students who plan to stay in the U.S. after graduation, over half of students graduating in 2027 (56%) plan to pursue further studies.
- Among students who plan to return to their home country, the majority of students plan to work in their home country upon return.



International students primarily say that the perfect English test would be low cost with a flexible, friendly exam format.

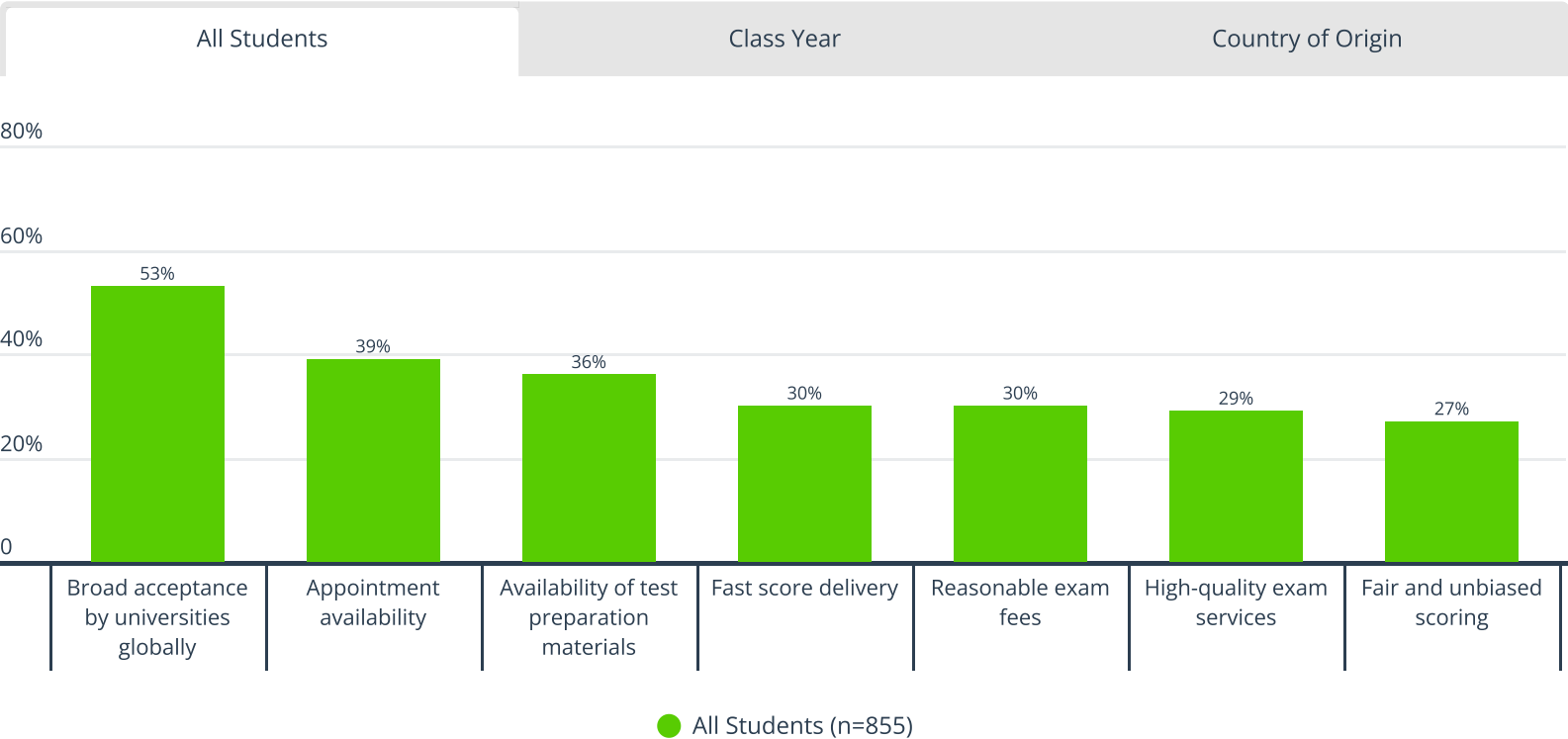
- Students graduating in 2028 (46%) are more likely than students graduating in 2025 (35%) to say that the perfect English test would include faster score reporting.
- Students from India (52%) are more likely than students from China (38%) to say that the perfect English test would include unlimited and free practice resources.



If you could create the perfect English test, what features would it have? Select your top 3  
[Asked to students who took an English test]

# Over half of international students say that broad acceptance by universities globally is the most important factor in choosing which English test to take.

- Students graduating in 2028 (41%) are more likely than students graduating in 2025 (33%) to say that appointment availability is the most important factor when choosing an English test.
- Students from India are more likely than students from China to say that reasonable exam fees (32% vs. 16%) and fast score delivery (42% vs. 18%) are the most important factors when choosing which English test to take.

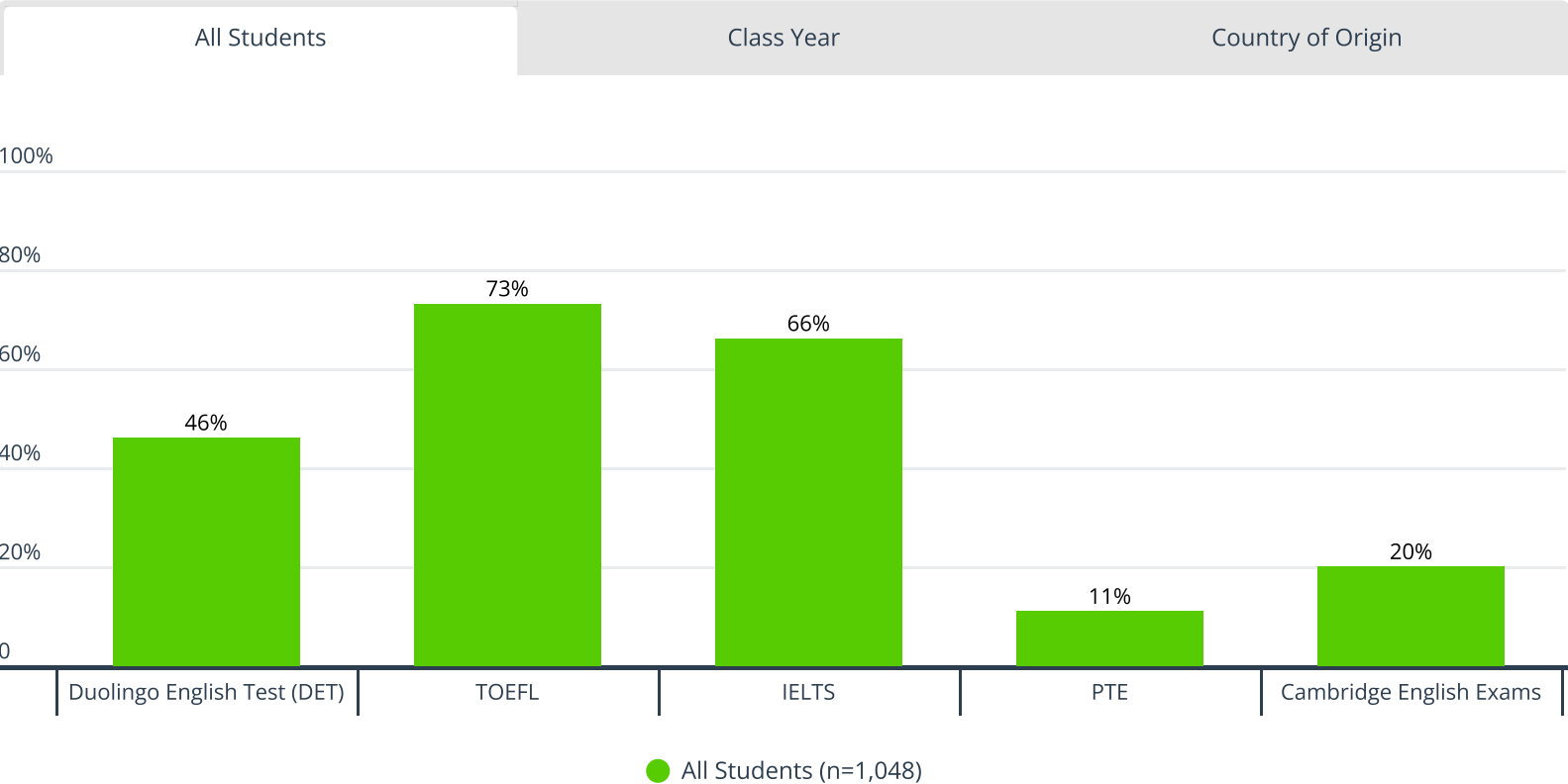


What were the most important factors in choosing which English test to take? Select your top 3.  
[Asked to students who took an English test]

HIGHLIGHT 12 - English Test Awareness

Three-fourths of international students are aware of TOEFL, two-thirds are aware of IELTS, and just less than half are aware of the Duolingo English Test.

- Students graduating in 2028 (62%) are much more likely than students graduating in 2025 (34%), 2026 (43%), and 2027 (48%) to be aware of Duolingo English Test before applying to universities.



HIGHLIGHT 13 - English Test Taken

One in five international students took the Duolingo English Test.

- Over half of international students (52%) took the TOEFL exam, one-third of students (31%) took the IELTS exam, and about one in five students (19%) took the Duolingo English Test.
- Students graduating in 2028 (21%) are more likely than students graduating in 2025 (13%) to take the Duolingo English test.



What English test did you end up taking?  
[Asked to students who took an English test]



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