



**Market research on Bachelor of Business Administration dual
degree launch at Nazarbayev University Graduate School of
Business**

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Abstract

The research was conducted to analyze the demand for the Bachelor of Business Administration dual degree at Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Business (NUGSB) in partnership with the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. It aimed to identify the target market, understand the program demand, and develop possible marketing solutions to enhance its communication with customers.

Key findings included the university's choice and decision-making process and the program's appeal. However, the affordability and novelty of the program were seen as the main challenges. The recommendations included digital marketing enhancement, the establishment of partnerships with companies and counselors, and higher student engagement.

Ultimately, the target market (high-achieving students from financially sustainable families in Astana, Almaty, Shymkent, and Aktau) and the level of demand (low with the potential to increase) were defined.

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Introduction

Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Business (NUGSB) is a top research-intensive business school in Central Asia. The school has established strategic collaboration with the Fuqua School of Business at Duke University, USA. It holds accreditations from the Association of MBAs (AMBA) and the Business Graduated Association (BGA). NUGSB is a member of the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD Global) and the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB Business Education Alliance). The school offers degree programs including *Bachelor of Business Administration* (BBA), *Master of Business Administration* (MBA), *Executive Master of Business Administration* (EMBA), *Master of Science in Finance* (MSF), *Doctor of Philosophy in Business Administration* (PhD) and various short-term programs for executive education (About Us_Overview, n.d.). The BBA program was the first tuition-based program in the whole university without any grants, which created many obstacles since Nazarbayev University (NU) has been offering grants-based education for more than a decade for almost all students.

Currently, NUGSB is in negotiations with the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) on launching a BBA dual degree, which will include two years at NUGSB (\$15,000 per year) and two years in Hong Kong (\$21,000 per year). Ultimately, students will have two diplomas and a two-year

work permit in Hong Kong. The condition for the launch of that program is the cohort of 30 students at NUGSB BBA program who are 100% willing to pay for a Hong Kong experience.

The goal of our practicum project was to conduct market research on the BBA dual degree program launch and suggest possible solutions, considering limiting factors such as lack of governmental grants, high competition, the first tuition-based program at NU, and a low number of resources (i.e., time, and employee numbers).

Research Question

We have set 2 research questions:

- Who is our target market for the BBA dual degree program?
- Is there sufficient demand for the dual degree program?

We have set 3 research objectives:

- Understand target customers - motivation, aspiration, thoughts, behavior, needs, wants, location, income.
- Specify how to reach those customers and communicate with them.
- Prove if there is a demand for the dual degree.

Methodology

Firstly, we used various frameworks and concepts (i.e., SWOT, PEST, Porter's 5 Forces, McKinsey 7s) we learned during our MBA degree studies,

especially from Business Communications, Managerial Effectiveness, Marketing, Operations Management, Consumer Behaviour, Project Management, Marketing Research, Strategy, Leadership courses.

Secondly, in terms of secondary data sources, we got the data on all applicants for the BBA program intake in 2024 from the NU Main Admissions Department. Also, we got the statistics on higher education rates in Kazakhstan in 2023 from The Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan and used competitors' websites and social media platforms to do market research.

Thirdly, in terms of primary data sources, we have collected our qualitative data through individual face-to-face interviews. We interviewed current BBA students (6 out of 7), those who rejected the offer (8 out of 15), and 5 parents who have kids aged 16 and above and who can afford to pay for their children's education (over \$15,000).

Also, we interviewed counselors at high-performing (*Bilim Innovation Lyceum (BIL) and Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS)*) and private schools (*Astana Garden School and Tamos Space School*). The counselor at Nazarbayev University Foundation Year Program (NUFYP) was interviewed by us too. Furthermore, we interviewed the staff and top management of NUGSB: *Dean, Vice-Dean for Academic Affairs and Accreditations, Vice-Dean for Research and Development, Academic Director for MSF program, Academic Director for BBA*

program. Finally, we interviewed 3 marketers: the *Head of Marketing at NU*, the *Senior Marketing Manager*, and the *Marketing Manager at NUGSB*.

Regarding the quantitative data, we designed the survey that was distributed to NU Open House Day students (109 people) and their parents (12 people). Thus, we had both qualitative and quantitative primary data for our research as well as secondary data from the university and the government.

Situation Analysis

McKinsey 7S Analysis

We analyzed seven interconnected components: strategy, structure, systems, shared values, style, staff, and skills to assess the NUGSB's positioning for achieving its objectives within a competitive and constantly evolving educational environment. Given the increasing competition from both domestic and international business schools, as well as Kazakhstan's national objectives for economic diversification and digital transformation (President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's State of the Nation Address "Just Kazakhstan: Law and Order, Economic Growth, Social Optimism" — Official Website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, n.d.), NUGSB must ensure that its internal components work cohesively to achieve its strategic objectives. The analysis will provide insights into NUGSB's distinctive strengths and identify critical areas for enhancement to sustain a competitive advantage and align with Kazakhstan's overall socio-economic goals.

Figure 1

McKinsey 7S Analysis

Strategy

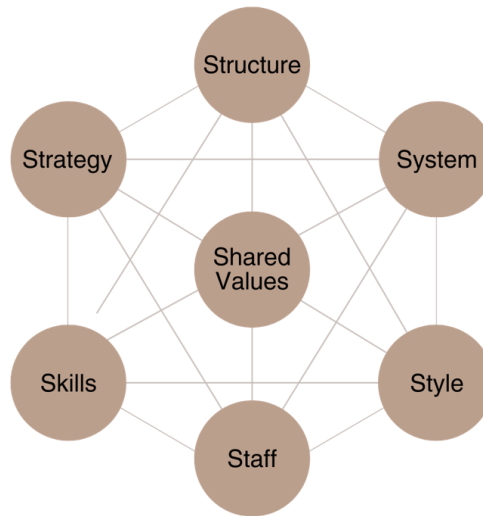
No clear strategic plan and business model for the new BBA program.

Structure

Not clear hierarchical structure, poor cross-functional collaboration with other departments

Systems

Not specific KPIs, no common system for data storage, no content plan and calendar with events. No systems for paid tuition programs.



Style

Disconnected culture. Faculty and administration prioritize long term partnerships. No student-centered style.

Staff

No clear career growth opportunities and development, staff retention issues.

Skills

Academic expertise and research proficiency. Lack of content creation, time management and communication skills.

Shared Values

Supportive learning environment, empathy, innovation and research, excellence in education.

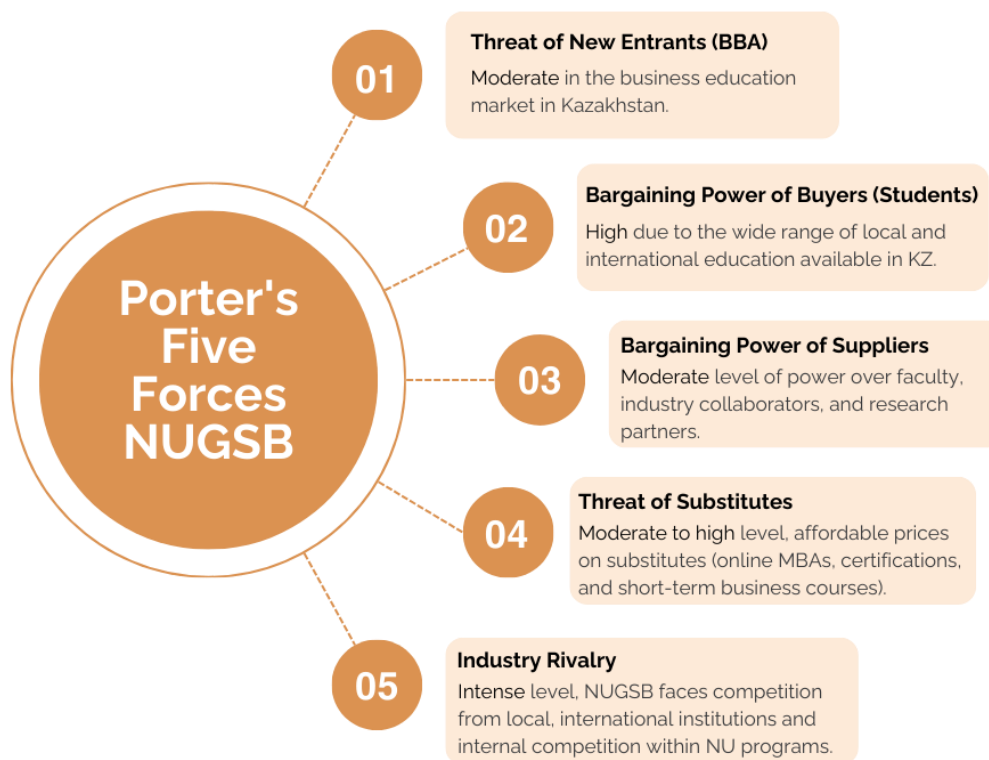
Porter's Five Forces Analysis

NUGSB operates within a rapidly evolving educational landscape, influenced by local and international market dynamics. The higher education industry in Kazakhstan is experiencing substantial transformation, driven by the government's emphasis on economic diversification, entrepreneurship, and technological advancement (President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's State of the Nation Address "Just Kazakhstan: Law and Order, Economic Growth, Social Optimism" — Official Website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, n.d.). NUGSB programs compete with local institutions such as KIMEP and KBTU, as well as international entities like Coventry University. This graphic overview of Porter's Five Forces emphasizes the challenges, opportunities, and

competitive dynamics confronting the institution. Recognizing these influences could allow NUGSB to strengthen its competitive advantage and match its services with overarching economic and educational trends in Kazakhstan.

Figure 2

Porter's Five Forces



NUGSB operates in a competitive environment characterized by the high bargaining power of students and the increasing pressure from local and international competitors. NUGSB has a reputable academic foundation and strong international partnerships, but growing competition and the rising availability of alternatives.

PEST Analysis

1. Political Factors

Kazakhstan's higher education system is linked with the Bologna Process to guarantee conformity with European norms (Lodhi and Ilyassova-Schoenfeld, 2023). This alignment promotes student mobility and improves the worldwide recognition of Kazakhstani degrees, as noted by the World Bank. NUGSB aims to be recognized as a world-class business school through the excellence of its education. The Kazakh government has actively supported foreign collaborations in higher education, promoting partnerships between universities and advancing the internationalization of higher education (President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's State of the Nation Address "Just Kazakhstan: Law and Order, Economic Growth, Social Optimism" — Official Website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, n.d.) such as Nazarbayev University with worldwide institutions. In line with Kazakhstan's initiatives, the NUGSB partnership with Duke University, HKUST Business Schools, and prospective future collaborations will facilitate the development of capabilities, including anticipated collaborations for dual degree programs essential for reaching international recognition.

In response to the regulatory environment and evolving educational regulations, NUGSB's strategy has involved certifying its programs with the Association of AMBAs, Business Graduates Association, AACSB (Member),

and EFMD Global (Member), hence ensuring students and prospective employers of the institution's high quality.

2. Economic Factors

The World Bank (2007) reports that Kazakhstan's efforts for economic diversification are progressively focused on knowledge-based industries. This creates a demand for highly trained graduates in fields such as business administration, engineering, and technology, making studies at NUGSB particularly significant to the nation's economic goals. NUGSB faces challenges with affordability; NU's tuition fees exceed those of local competitors, potentially limiting accessibility for some prospective students. In Kazakhstan, there exists a considerable demand for commercial and administrative competencies, with local enterprises preferring graduates from reputable schools like NU. The new tuition fee structure at NUGSB will affect prospective students' economic ability to afford school, depending on the local economy.

3. Social Factors

Kazakhstan's education system emphasizes public higher education and particularly appreciates prestigious schools such as Nazarbayev University (World Bank Group, 2007). Cultural preferences might affect the types of business programs students prefer and their expectations for post-graduation job trajectories. As reported by the World Bank (2007) there is an increasing youth demographic in Kazakhstan and neighboring Central Asian countries, offering

NUGSB the potential to recruit local students. Furthermore, the rise of globalization may lead to an increasing demand for programs delivered in English, attracting both domestic and international students.

4. Technological Factors

“The Future of Education and Skills” report by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2023), emphasizes the expanding significance of digital technologies in improving learning experiences and outcomes, emphasizing that digital learning platforms and new teaching instruments are becoming indispensable in contemporary education. Due to swift progress in domains such as artificial intelligence, data analytics, and fintech, there is an increasing demand for business experts proficient in these subjects. Collaboration with other NU departments and industry partners can foster innovation and enhance the curriculum's usefulness. The emergence of online business education providers presents a difficulty, as students now have access to prestigious online programs from international schools.

Internal Analysis

Organizational structure

Nazarbayev University is an autonomous research university with a hierarchical organizational structure. The primary units are executive management (board of trustees, president, and other senior administrators), academic schools, administrative departments, and research centers. Inside the

Graduate School of Business, there is a role-based structure with centralized leadership and a vertical chain of command.

Strengths

- High standards in education and research as the #1 in Kazakhstan and Central Asia according to the Times Higher Education World University Rankings, 2025 (Nazarbayev University, 2024).
- International competitive research faculty (professors) from 58 countries at NU, research and academic strategic partnerships with several top-ranked universities around the world (e.g., The University of Cambridge, Duke University, Colorado School of Mines, etc.) (Nazarbayev University, 2024).
- Modern campus facilities, including advanced laboratories, libraries, and student housing, provide a world-class learning environment.
- NUGSB is in the top 3% considering all business schools in the world and the top 30% of research-intensive business schools, according to Times Higher Education World University Rankings (2023).
- NUGSB has been accredited by the Association of MBAs (AMBA) and the Business Graduates Association (BGA) since 2023.

Weaknesses

- As a relatively new university, Nazarbayev University and NUGSB are still developing brand recognition and long-term reputation.

- Lack of cross-department communication and collaboration (e.g. NUGSB Administration with NU Admissions Department, NU Central Marketing Department, NU Event Department, NU Press Office, etc.).

Threats

- Dr. Ilesanmi Adesida retirement expected at the end of December 2024, (Professor Waqar Ahmad’s Post “Provost Prof Ilesanmi Adesida...” — LinkedIn, n.d.) competitors or stakeholders may view the retirement as a sign of instability at NU, while internally his departure as respected leader could impact employee confidence and morale as uncertainty might increase.

Human Resources Analysis of NUGSB

Strengths

- In the internationally competitive research-active faculty at NUGSB, all professors hold a Western type of PhD or equivalent highest-level degree in their respective fields.
- NUGSB has its own internal administrative team that includes admissions, marketing, HR, operations, IT, and Finance departments.
- The NUGSB has an International Advisory Board, comprising representatives from prominent international corporations operating in Kazakhstan, governmental entities, national enterprises, recognized global universities, and current students and alumni of NUGSB, as shown in Table

(see Appendix D). Its purpose is to offer external insights, evaluations, advocacy, and support for the school's programs, strategic direction, and overarching goals.

- Dr. Maksat Mamashev has been appointed as Vice-Dean of Business Development and Vice-Dean of the NU Graduate School of Business since February 2024 (About Us_Leadership, n.d.). A founding member involved in the foundation and development of Nazarbayev University since its inception in 2009.

Weaknesses

- NUGSB struggles to attract and retain local administrative talent, especially in the marketing department.
- There is limited autonomy in decision-making and a lack of good communication between NUGSB administration personnel, academic personnel (professors), and NU central administration.

Threats

- Dr. Jenifer L. Lewis's resignation was announced in August 2024, leaving the Vice-Dean of Academic Programs position unfilled as of now. There is no clear understanding of how NUGSB personnel are going to address the activities and work that Dr. Lewis was performing.

Financial health of NUGSB

Strengths

- Income diversification through contract research projects, open enrollment programs, and tailor-specific skills development programs for industry and business.

Weaknesses / Threats

- Financial constraints with the introduction of tuition fees for NUGSB while other programs at NU remain grant-funded.

External Analysis

Industry Overview

According to the latest available data from the Bureau of National Statistics (December 2023) in the report on Higher Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the total number of students was 592.7 thousand, of whom 53% were women. A total of 171.7 thousand students were admitted during the 2023 academic year, with men making up 47%.

The percentage of students enrolled in public higher education institutions was 45.1% (54.1% in private organizations, and 0.7% in international organizations).

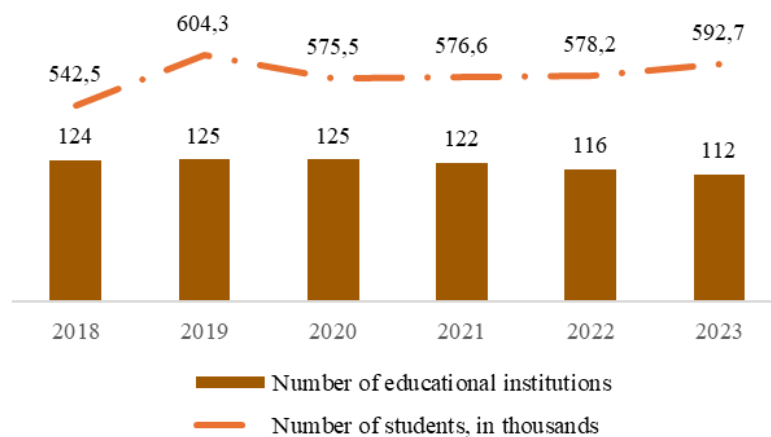
The number of students varied by region, with the highest numbers in Almaty city (186.6 thousand students), Shymkent city (83.4 thousand students),

and Astana city (75 thousand students). This distribution is primarily attributed to the number of higher education institutions in each region: Almaty has 37 higher education organizations, while Astana and Shymkent have only 14 and 8, respectively.

Figure 3 represents the dynamics of the number of students and higher education institutions over the past five years.

Figure 3

The number of students and higher education institutions



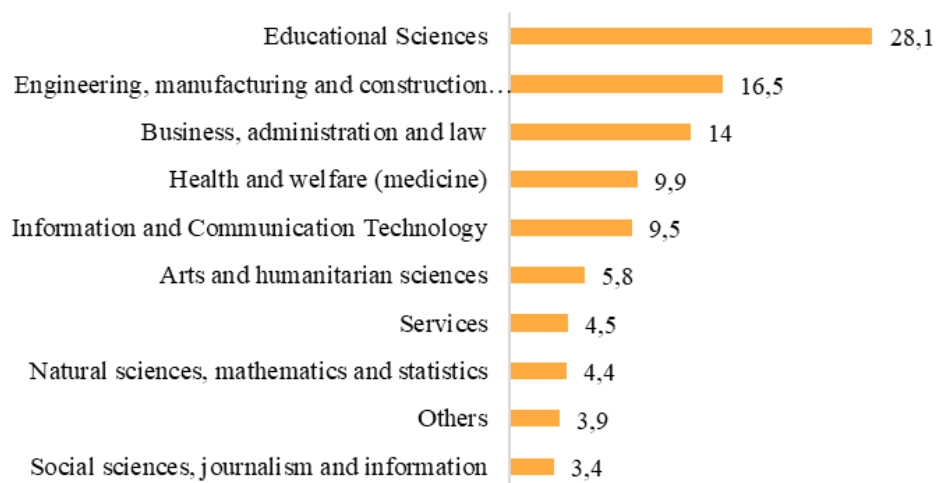
It can be seen that over the last 5 years, the number of organizations providing higher education programs has decreased by 9.6%. In contrast, the number of students increased by 9.3% compared to the 2018-2019 academic year; however, since 2019, this indicator has been reduced. This might indicate the recent growing demand for educational institutions and programs.

In comparison to the 2018-2019 academic year, private educational institutions observed a 10.4% growth, with an increase of 30.2 thousand students,

whereas public institutions saw an 8.7% increase, with an additional 21.4 thousand students. In contrast, foreign-owned educational institutions experienced a decline of 24.4%. Based on this data, the growing number of students enrolled in private institutions reflects an expansion in the market of individuals willing to pay for higher education.

Figure 4

The share of students by specialization (as a percentage at the beginning of the academic year)



The data shows that the largest share of students, 28.1%, were enrolled in Educational Sciences, followed by Engineering, Manufacturing, and Construction with 16.5%. Business, Administration, and Law, with 14% of students pursuing studies in this field, is the third most popular specialization. This demonstrates a significant interest in business-related areas, implying that many students intend to start a career in administration, corporate sectors, law,

and entrepreneurship. The size of this segment reflects a strong demand for business education in Kazakhstan (2023).

Opportunities

- As Kazakhstan continues to grow economically, there is a rising need for business leaders and managers skilled in modern business practices, creating demand for NUGSB graduates.
- NUGSB can attract students from Central Asia with programs focused on regional business practices and cross-border economic collaboration (i.e., the Silk Road Economic Belt).

Threats

- Reliance on government and external funding for growth, NUGSB operations, and new strategies could be vulnerable to budget changes.
- Due to threats from new entrants in the market (e.g., Coventry University), NUGSB faces competition from foreign universities that may attract students with their international prestige and flexible programs.

Market competition

Opportunities

- NUGSB is currently undergoing the process of obtaining accreditation (Graduate Schools of Business, 2024) from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB).

- NUGSB and HKUST BS see great potential for future collaboration with a dual degree program in 2026 and a study tour under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
- NU degree is recognized in China, accreditation from the Chinese Service Center for Scholarly Exchange, under the Chinese Ministry of Education (Nazarbayev University News, 2023).
- NU is placed 129th in THE Asia University Rankings and #106th in THE Young University Rankings in 2025, however, it has been acknowledged as the number one in Kazakhstan and Central Asia overall (Times Higher Education, 2024).

Threats

- National competition from other Business Schools with more agile, industry-focused structures (e.g., KIMEP, KBTU, ALMAU, etc.) could attract more students by offering more tailored (Kazakh and Russian language), flexible, and affordable business education options.
- The "Karyzsyz Qogam" (Debt-Free Society) project aims to enhance the financial literacy of residents, having reached 65,000 individuals (*President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's State of the Nation Address "Just Kazakhstan: Law and Order, Economic Growth, Social Optimism"* — *Official Website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan*, n.d.). It will be substantially extended in 2025, providing education in economics,

finance, and digital skills to the Kazakh population, an opportunity that NUGSB is not currently addressing.

Economic and political climate

Opportunities

- Kazakhstan’s openness to foreign investment and educational partnerships creates an opportunity for NU and NUGSB to establish more collaborative programs with international institutions that are relevant to the internal market, addressing the acute shortage of sector-specific specialists (*President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev’s State of the Nation Address “Just Kazakhstan: Law and Order, Economic Growth, Social Optimism” — Official Website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, n.d.*), including specialties in the professions of the future (e.g. AI).

Threats

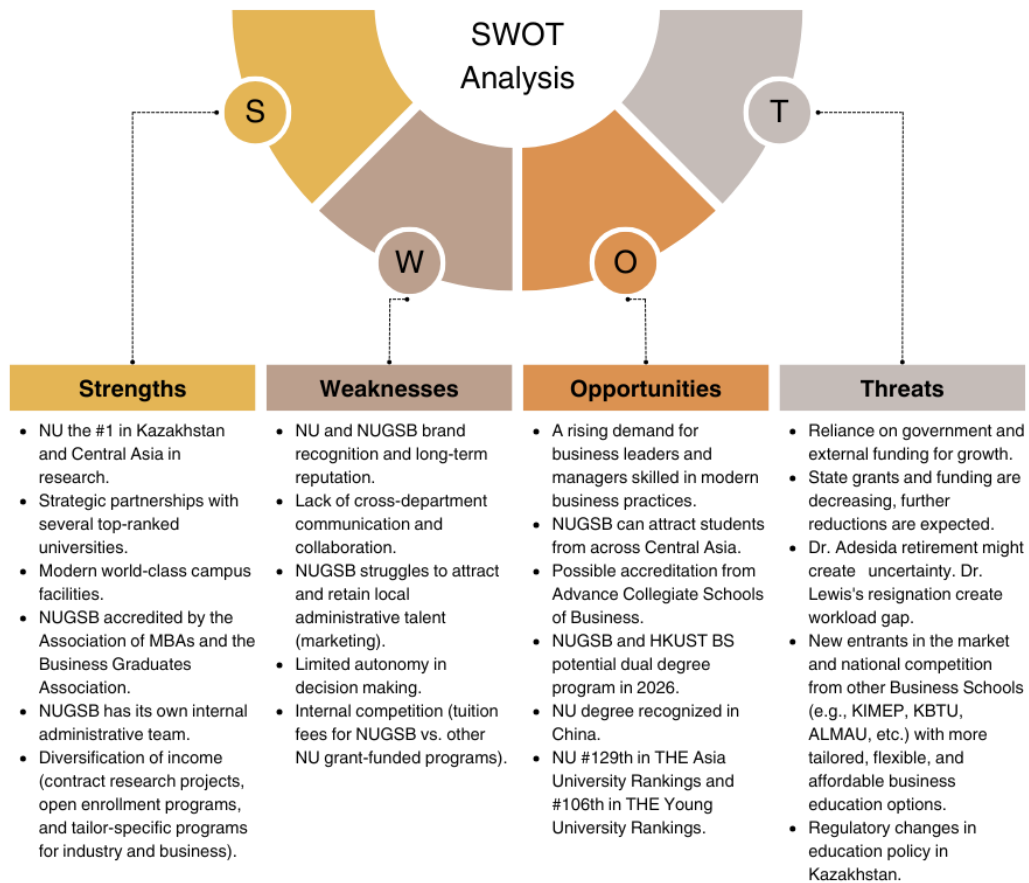
- Regulatory changes in education policy in Kazakhstan could affect the sustainability of NUGSB.
- As state grant and overall funding levels decrease and further reductions at the NU level are expected (*About Us_Strategy, n.d.*), budgets may become increasingly tight.

SWOT Analysis of NUGSB

Based on the analysis, the main points can be summarized in a SWOT analysis (Figure 5).

Figure 5

SWOT Analysis of NUGSB



Key Findings

Interviews with NUGSB staff

Overall, all staff members of NUGSB feel optimistic about the launch of the new BBA program, seeing both a challenge and an opportunity for the school. As almost everyone stated, it is too early to judge whether this year's cohort was a failure since more time is needed (at least 3-4 years). Moreover, "there was no proper promotion as the deadline was too tight." As one employee mentioned, "Business is always about risks, and we have to take them to see what works or

not." Although the BBA degree provides NUGSB with many opportunities and gives Kazakh citizens access to world-class education, everyone was concerned about the program's fee. "People are not used to the fact they have to pay for a degree at NU, especially when you can get a full-ride scholarship for an Economics, Computer Science, or Engineering degree and have a similar career path to someone from business school." Another challenge imposed on the team is the change within the organization. Currently, with the new President, new strategies and approaches are being created, so they have to adapt and react quickly to the changes. Lastly, unlike most of the competitors, the school has to maintain high educational standards, and the applicants have to have strong portfolios, English proficiency, and also \$15,000 per year, which creates another obstacle as all criteria must be met. Thus, the cannibalization within the university, specific requirements for the applicants, and uncertainty are among the main challenges.

Furthermore, some of the staff members were not sure what the competitive advantages were, how to promote the program effectively, and how to differentiate from the local and foreign competitors. However, other respondents were very positive and mentioned strengths such as "research-intensive school, rankings, faculty members, NU brand name, facilities, education in English, no need to travel abroad, safety, lower living costs compared to popular study destinations." One of the ways to win the market is to

introduce "sexy names" (i.e., BBA in AI or Entrepreneurship). Also, respondents have high hopes for the new marketing team, alumni network, and building relations with private school counselors because, in their opinion, it will help to attract students.

In terms of market segment, all highlighted the importance of focusing on BIL, NIS, and private schools, mostly in Astana, Almaty, Shymkent, and Aktau. People there have higher purchasing power, and those parents who already pay for their kids' school are more willing to continue paying for higher education. All respondents believe marketing messages should be targeted at parents since they are the decision-makers.

In terms of the BBA dual degree launch, everyone sees it as an excellent opportunity for the school and local citizens. Moreover, it will create a solid competitive advantage since no other university provides such an option. However, there are still concerns about whether NUGSB will be able to attract 30 students who are ready to study in Hong Kong. Still, some interviewees suggested focusing on Chinese students as, in case of a dual degree launch, it can be a "back door" for them to get a diploma from HKUST. At the time of the interview (September 2024), they were waiting for an HKUST delegation visit to negotiate the terms and conditions of the dual degree launch. Consequently, there are many challenges now, and the school should address them in order to create an income source and make the dual degree launch possible.

Interviews with marketers

According to the Senior Marketing Manager, who joined the team at the end of September, there are several goals she would like her team to achieve: (1) create a system where the content creation is automated and no events are missed by creating a detailed content plan with rubrics and sharing it twice a week with colleagues; (2) increase user-generated content by finding school ambassadors and working closely with students. As for the interview, they have not yet divided their responsibilities properly and worked together. However, that might change in the future since she plans to work on strategy and communications with other departments while Marketing Manager will focus on social media management.

According to the Marketing Manager, there are several problems in terms of the marketing strategy. Firstly, she does not have a marketing background and is still learning, which is complicated by the fact that she worked for a couple of months without any senior manager in the department. Secondly, there was no proper handover, so some data and previous analytics were missed. Thirdly, there is a scarcity of resources (i.e., finance, equipment, budget), which affects her performance too, including the fact that the school cannot afford to pay for her proper courses (currently, she learns by watching free resources). Furthermore, as the Head of Marketing at NU noticed, NU now faces a new challenge: attracting fee-paying students, which was never a priority. Also, due to

organizational changes, everything happens fast, and there are many uncertainties, and staff has to react quickly, which is also an additional challenge.

Nevertheless, despite all the challenges, the Senior Marketing manager noticed that the current marketing strategy performance is much better than it was before based on the data (i.e., number of registrations, engagement rate). Both of them are delighted that there is help from the Dean, NU's main marketing department, and Duke University strategy consultants, since all of them advise and provide proper feedback on what to improve. Also, the professors and students are very open to collaboration and filming, though sometimes it is difficult to coordinate due to time constraints. Moreover, as the Head of Marketing at NU expressed, NUGSB was more active than other schools in terms of marketing since the Dean and Vice-Dean always asked for advice and support.

Regarding the BBA promotion, the Marketing manager stated, "There is no separate strategy for that program," as it is being promoted mainly by the main admissions department, on whom they plan to rely. The Senior Marketing manager highlighted that "promoting BBA is a big challenge since the Kazakh population has the mindset that NU provides free education and generous scholarships." Some time should pass before people change this thinking and start being more open to the fee-based education at NU as they are used to KIMEP or KBTU's prices. Regardless, they want to do market research to understand BBA students, keep in touch with their program manager to be up to current events,

and not involve current students till winter, 2024, as they might be overwhelmed. Starting from the next semester, they plan to film them more and motivate them to create their own Instagram / TikTok page where students themselves will film content that NUGSB will later repost. Overall, marketers understand the difficulties of BBA promotion and need more time to build effective working processes.

Interviews with parents

Based on our findings, parents start taking action about their children's education in the 8th grade by discussing possible options, asking friends and relatives, attending university fairs, or buying consultations from study agencies. For example, as one mother mentioned, she enrolled her daughter into a special mentorship program where her daughter visited summer school, did scientific projects, internships, volunteered, and got access to qualitative study materials that boosted her hard and soft skills. Most importantly, she received guidance on the application process and university choice because neither the mother nor the daughter had an understanding of how to do that effectively. Later, her daughter got into New York University Abu Dhabi with an 80% discount. The other 3 families shared similar experiences where they also used such services and were guided by professionals who helped their children get into foreign universities in the UK and China. Those decisions were made on the basis that parents did not have enough understanding of education abroad, especially since most of them

lacked English language skills. "Back in our times, we did not have such opportunities, so, of course, I do not know how to advise my kids and suggest something," as one couple shared. However, all of them were very open to chat about higher education experience with their family, friends, and colleagues who had such experience due to the fact that "I can get some insights from them and later share with my kids. It is good to hear first-hand experience". Thus, parents are ready to pay for other people's services due to language barriers and limited understanding.

In terms of the crucial factors, all parents stated location, budget range, safety, food, rankings, scholarship availability, and further career and immigration prospects. For instance, one mother asked her daughter to apply to only the world's top 50 universities. At the same time, the other suggested focusing on Europe since it's closer to Kazakhstan, and she could visit her more often. Although they expressed those concerns to their children, no one pushed their opinion on them and was open to their kids' opinions, too, who sometimes disagreed with some of the aspects. For example, they worked in a way where "my daughter came to me with her findings, and we started carefully reviewing them." As one father stated, "I told my son the budget range, and the rest is up to him." In fact, all parents had quite the same attitude and gave their kids the right to make the final decision because "it is their journey, their life, and they will have to experience university life every day for the next 3-4 years". Furthermore,

no parents had the idea that their children, even those who had daughters, have to stay in Kazakhstan, so they were very supportive of their decision to study abroad, though "if my son decides to study here, in Astana, I will be okay with that decision too." Thus, it can be concluded that parents state financial limits and share their opinion, while the rest is up to kids.

Overall, parents help their kids with the university search process by sharing their concerns, helping financially, and discussing the options with their kids; however, the final decision on university choice is made by the kids.

Interviews with counselors

According to the NUFYP Counselor, during that year, they help students choose the right path by having guest lectures, hosting Majors Fairs, offering leadership courses with reflection assignments, multiple psychological tests, and research projects where they can explore their interests, strengths, and weaknesses. NUFYP works closely with NU Schools whose representatives do road shows. In his opinion, most of those presentations fail to meet the needs of the students as they start talking about faculty members and curriculum, whereas students want to know what their next year will look like and how they will be able to cope with the academic challenges. Also, they encourage students to join academic club meetings, check websites, talk to professors, and ask about projects. In terms of decision-making, students consult with their parents, discuss with each other, and rely on the popularity of the major among other students,

which is boosted by the social media content of the school too. As a result, most of the foundation year students can be divided into three categories: those who are 100% sure of their future, those who still choose between a couple of options, and those who have no idea. After the end of the program, the majority stay at NU and either choose their major or progress with an undeclared choice, while some students apply abroad for scholarships in Hong Kong, South Korea, Italy, the USA, and the Middle East.

Regarding the BBA degree, he mentioned that students were aware of and interested in that. In his opinion, NUGSB should improve its marketing strategy by doing better work on social media, showing successful cases of graduates, and doing promotional classes where students can see what kind of projects and life NUGSB students have, though the challenge with funding is still present. Also, if NUGSB offers courses with more attractive names ("sexy names"), it should come with actual outcomes. Consequently, there are opportunities for NUGSB to attract students from NUFYP by improving its marketing strategy.

In terms of high school counselors, all of them follow a similar approach where they start with open lectures for the 8th graders and a year later schedule individual sessions with them. During those consultations, they explain about ranking, the application process, the importance of good grades, extracurricular activities, and strong recommendation letters, and advise which criteria to consider when choosing the university and future major. Also, they help them by

offering psychological tests, inviting students from various universities, arranging university fairs, and meeting with representatives from the universities and various industries. Students can have as many meetings as they would like and are encouraged to invite their parents too (at least 1 meeting in a year), though the final decision about the university choice is made by the students, as all of them expressed. All counselors felt positive about NU, noting that every year there are students who apply there, though NIS students consider NU as a "safe choice" since all of them aim to win a scholarship at a foreign university, unlike BIL students who choose NU as a first choice university and prepare for its tests. In terms of private schools, their students mostly consider foreign universities (i.e., all last year graduates at Astana Garden School applied abroad).

Regarding the BBA program, all counselors stated that it is a good program that might interest many students since lots of them want to study business disciplines, work in the industry, or become entrepreneurs. However, BIL and NIS counselors had concerns since the majority of their students rely on scholarships, and considering that most of them are well-performing students, it is not so difficult to win them. Also, none of the parents have issues with sending their students abroad since they believe it is the best they can do for their kids. Thus, as counselors stated, "It is difficult to attract students to the BBA program."

Although students at private schools are not limited by financial factors, most of them have intentions to have international experience, live abroad, and

study at very well-known universities, so they are not so interested in staying in Kazakhstan for their studies. Their parents also do not stop them from applying abroad and fully support their decisions. Hence, it creates an additional challenge for NUGSB, though as all counselors noted, the situation might be improved a bit with the launch of the dual degree with HKUST because it will help to economize money, receive an internationally recognized diploma, and get experience of living abroad.

Interviews with current BBA students

According to current BBA students, most of them started the university search process in the middle of the 10th grade or at the beginning of the 11th grade by checking websites, seeking advice from their friends and family, and thinking of possible options. All respondents included their parents in that process, who stated their financial limits and provided feedback on the universities and programs they showed them, though the final decision all students made themselves. Parents also supported that approach and stated that "You choose what you want", and "I cannot decide for you." All students, excluding one, had multiple options to choose from both at local and international universities, especially at European ones. Some of the students used the services of educational agencies that shared programs abroad with them. Their interests also included Business, Computer Science, and Mechanical Engineering, so despite choosing a BBA degree, most of them are still not sure and are open to

choosing alternative paths either within NU or at different universities/countries. As one student stated, "I will see how this year goes, but if I do not like it, I will change the university, and my parents support that." Another student mentioned that "I will do my best to have the highest GPA possible to apply for another major next year and win the grant". Thus, since they do not rely on grants, unlike the majority of other NU students, they can drop out easily from the BBA program.

In terms of the BBA program, the majority of them found out about the program during the major choosing process at the NU platform, while few of them got the information during the roadshows at NUFYP. Once they declared their choice, they started checking the websites and social media of NUGSB, noting that there are many weaknesses from the marketing point of view (i.e., not enough information on the website, mistakes, lack of understanding). The most popular factors behind their decision were: the strong brand name of NU, facilities, opportunities after graduation, English language of studies, international community, academic staff from top universities, networking, and curriculum. Hence, they chose NU first and only then BBA.

Regarding their experience at NU, everyone felt a bit unsure as not so much time had passed, yet there was not any negative feedback. All expressed positive reviews, noting that they like everything, have started building some relations with other students, and acquired new knowledge. However, "I cannot say

anything much about NUGSB because we do not have many lectures there." Thus, more time is needed to understand their perception of NUGSB.

Nevertheless, everyone felt motivated to get the most out of NU experience and receive job offers from top companies or start their own businesses. In fact, one of the students has already opened a business in his hometown and plans to develop a new enterprise in Astana, so it was crucial for him to be in Kazakhstan to manage that. However, one student felt a bit disappointed because she wants to start a career in audit, and she feels that the current curriculum will not equip her with deep knowledge of accounting and finance, unlike other similar programs at MNU, KIMEP, or KBTU. Hence, considering the low number of students, it is crucial to ensure their expectations are met.

In terms of the dual degree launch, students were not sure yet as they needed more information and had to discuss it with their parents due to financial matters. However, some expressed a positive attitude stating benefits such as international experience, two diplomas, and life in Hong Kong, while one student refused to participate in such a program due to his business development plans. Regarding the "sexy names" of the BBA program, most of them expressed interest in AI, Finance, Entrepreneurship, and Marketing. Hence, more information and close work with current BBA students are needed to create an offer they will not want to resist.

Overall, at the moment of the interview, students were content with their experience at NUGSB, though it might change, and the consequences might be extreme as they can easily drop out of the program.

Analysis of BBA applicants for the 2024 year intake

We conducted short telephone interviews with those who declined the university offer to identify the main reasons for rejection and other questions related to the university search processes and how they learned about the BBA program. It was revealed that financial constraints were the main reason for almost all applicants' rejection. Most applicants were unaware that the program is tuition-based when applying to the university because they expected all NU programs to offer a state grant. The majority of refused applicants mentioned they knew about Nazarbayev University and its high reputation since it is one of the most well-known universities in the country. They also discovered the BBA program during the application process and from social media (NU Instagram page), NU alumni, and recommendations from their family members. The BBA program was their first or second choice after Computer Science or Economics.

During the university search process, some considered universities abroad (e.g., USA, Turkey, Poland, UK) and local universities, such as KIMEP, KBTU, KAZGUU, and SDU, to study Computer Science, Business, and Economics. Most of the refused applicants started looking for universities in the final year of their high school by themselves, with little assistance from others. During the

university selection process, they made independent decisions but informed their parents, who supported them without intervening in the final decision.

Currently, some of them study at universities such as KBTU (IT), ENU (Economics), UIB (International Relations), and MNU and mostly get grants, with some paying for education. Some of the other applicants pursue a gap year to apply next year or study at other local colleges and prepare to apply abroad.

NU Open House Day Students' Survey results

To investigate the market and understand the demographic and psychological aspects of the target audience for the BBA dual degree program, we conducted online surveys during NU Open House Day, held on September 14th, 2024. Two separate surveys were distributed to potential students and their parents who were interested in NUGSB. As a result, 109 responses were collected from potential students and 12 responses from parents. The full data can be found in Appendix A.

Among the potential students, 66% of the respondents were female, and 34% were male. The majority of the respondents were 15-17 years old, currently studying in 9-11 grades and residing in Astana (81%). The remaining respondents had come to the Open House Day from other cities, such as Pavlodar, Karagandy, Kokshetau, Ekibastuz, and Almaty.

Regarding their educational background, 49% of respondents attend public schools, 19% come from private schools, 13% study at Bilim Innovation Lyceum

(BIL), 10% are from Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS), and 9% indicated that they are not currently enrolled in any school.

When asked about their future plans for higher education, 49% of respondents were uncertain whether they wanted to complete their bachelor's degree in Kazakhstan or abroad. Meanwhile, 26% of respondents expressed a desire to study abroad, while an equal 26% intend to pursue their studies only within Kazakhstan.

In terms of academic interests, the most popular field is business education, with 54% of respondents expressing interest in this area. Since different fields could be chosen simultaneously, we identified that most respondents who selected business also preferred the Humanities (sociology, economics, journalism) over other fields, accounting for 30% of respondents' choices. Fields such as Engineering and Information Technology (IT) were also popular, with 20% and 17% of respondents, respectively, indicating interest in these areas.

To explore how prospective students navigate the university search process and the extent of their parents' involvement, we posed questions addressing these topics. Based on the survey results, key factors influencing the decision-making process when choosing a university include the availability of scholarships (the top factor with 79% of responses), university ranking and accreditation (63% of responses), and the study curriculum (60% of responses). Other factors, such as the university's location (city/country), the language of instruction (English), the

quality of education, and future career prospects, also play an essential role in the university search process. Notably, 33% of respondents selected the availability of exchange programs as the most significant factor in their university choice.

Respondents' main sources for searching for universities were university websites (72%), social media (63%), and discussions with family and friends (52%). While sources such as blogs on social media and guidance from career counselors were also utilized, they were not as frequently chosen.

Regarding parental involvement in the university search process, we asked respondents to rate the level of involvement on a scale from 1 (not involved at all) to 10 (maximum involvement). As a result, about a third of respondents (32%) rated their parents' involvement as 10. Additionally, nearly 35% of respondents rated parental involvement between 7 and 9, indicating a significant level of interest and involvement from parents during the university search. Despite this high level of involvement, we identified that in 94% of cases, the final decision on choosing a university is made by the prospective student.

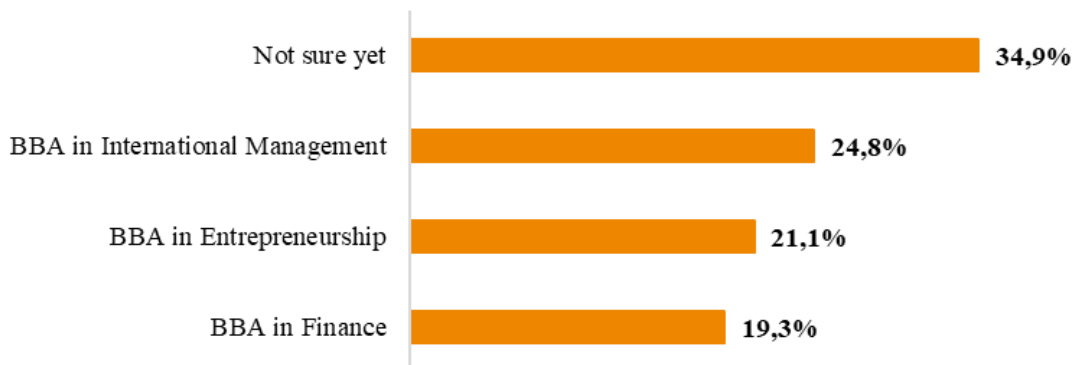
Another set of questions was asked to examine the overall interest in the BBA and BBA dual degree programs. To understand the demand for the BBA program, we inquired whether prospective students were ready to apply, knowing the tuition fee is 7 million tenge per year. Almost 47% responded negatively, an equal proportion indicated uncertainty, while only 10% answered positively. This

highlights the significance of scholarships in the decision-making process for a substantial number of prospective students.

The data on the interest in specific BBA paths is presented in Figure 6.

Figure 6

Interest in BBA path



Although most respondents were unsure about their preferred path, nearly a quarter expressed interest in the BBA in International Management, while 21% were interested in the Entrepreneurship path. The least interest was observed in BBA in Finance, with 19.3% of respondents selecting this option.

To further assess the interest in the BBA dual degree program, we first asked whether respondents are interested in the dual degree program with an Asian university partnership without scholarships. We also indicated the cost associated with the study. Compared to the standard BBA program results, the percentage of respondents interested in the dual degree program increased significantly from 10% to 28%. The remaining respondents were either undecided

(39%) or uninterested (33%) in the program. However, there is a potential for targeted persuasion among the undecided students.

After identifying the general interest in dual degree programs, we asked respondents to select the most desirable Asian countries to study in. South Korea was the most popular destination for the dual degree program, with 52% of respondents expressing an interest in studying there. Other favored destinations included Singapore (36%), Japan (33%), Hong Kong (29%), and China (25%). Hong Kong positions are fourth, which may reflect varying perceptions of the region's educational quality and career opportunities.

NU Open House Day Parents' Survey results

The parents' survey aims to understand the demographics, their involvement in the university selection process, critical factors for making the decision, and the level of sovereignty given to their children in choosing a university.

The demographic part shows that the majority of parents are between 36 and 45 years old. Most of the respondents were women (11 out of 12). The 7 respondents were seeking information about universities for daughters and 5 for sons.

The majority (10 out of 12) attended the “Open House Day” event with their children. This shows that parents’ involvement and interest in educational choices are high. Notably, the idea of attending the “Open House Day” was

shared equally by parents and children. This presents the synergy of collaboration in universities' explorations between the two sides.

It was revealed that most parents (9 out of 12) were actively involved in the university selection process in the final year of secondary school. However, some parents were exploring opportunities for their children as early as 8th grade (2 out of 12). This implies that some families prioritize a long-term approach to planning academic futures and opportunities for their children. The majority of respondents came from public schools (9 out of 12), the rest were from NIS (2 out of 12), and one parent answered that his/her child studies at a private school.

The survey also showed that most parents are ready to let their child study abroad (10 of them), and 1 was strictly not ready, with 1 not sure yet, respectively.

In terms of payment, the majority of respondents answered the question of whether they are ready to pay for tuition fees at NUGSB in the amount of 7 million tenge per year, as of not sure yet (5 out of 12), while 3 parents were ready and 3 were not.

Regarding the interest in dual degree programs, half of the respondents showed interest in the opportunity, 4 parents answered as uninterested, and 2 were unsure.

Half of the surveyed parents emphasized that they are actively involved in the university selection process and shared their advisable opinions on the options that their children showed. Another part of parents (42%) answered that they took

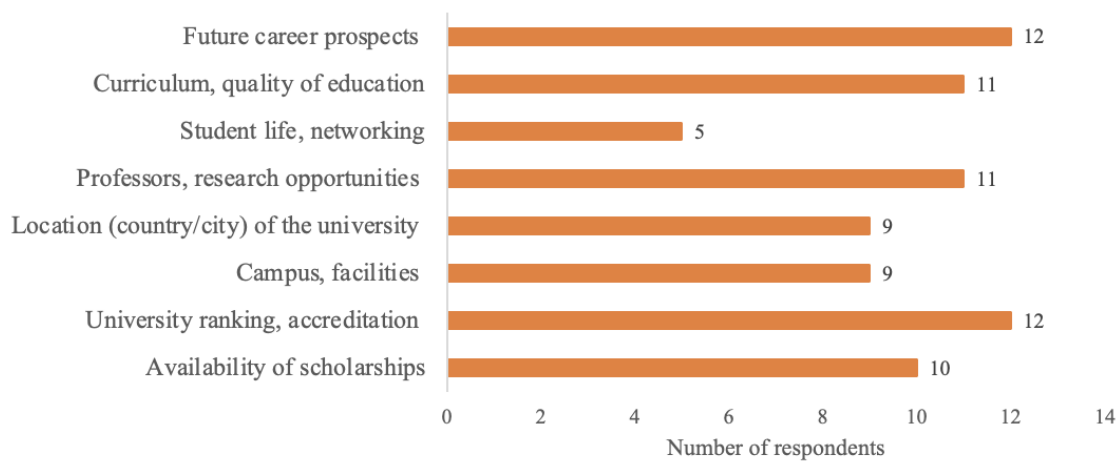
a more proactive approach by independently searching for university options. These parents often research appropriate universities themselves, demonstrating more proactive participation in their children’s future education. Thus, we can observe that while some parents trust their children’s options and give freedom in the selection process, others feel the necessity to take a more active role.

All respondents solidly answered that they trusted their child and that the child would make the final decision on choosing a university.

The last question explored the critical factors for university selection, and the majority indicated career prospects, university ranking, and program (curriculum, professors).

Figure 7

Important factors for parents in choosing the university



The NU Open House Day parents' survey highlights the involvement of parents in the university selection process, identified by engagement with their children. Many parents start looking at educational opportunities early before

their child's graduation, trying to support their children's opinion in a search process and making a decision. The survey reveals an eagerness to consider options abroad and indicates different financial opinions and perspectives. Overall, all respondents emphasized that their children would make the final decision in selecting a university.

Limitations

Although there were not many alternative approaches to address the research questions, there were three limiting factors that affected the scope of the research. Firstly, our data sample included people from Astana only, and the number of people who participated in the research was not too high. Furthermore, since one of the huge samples is high school students, the researchers could not get access to them due to ethical considerations and their age under 18. Thus, the sample could be bigger and more diverse, focusing on people from various backgrounds and living in different geographical areas. Also, the school might consider establishing official partnerships with high schools for, but not limited to, research purposes.

Secondly, the BBA program was launched recently. It is the only program at NU that does not provide any scholarships, and its main competitor in Astana, Coventry University, entered the market this year only, so there is not much to compare it to, and the available statistics are very limited yet. Moreover, since the BBA dual degree launch is still at the negotiations stage and most of the

information is under the secret, the researchers could not include much in the research questions in the surveys or during the interviews, which affected the quality and amount of the data. Hence, more time is required to do deeper research and find any correlations, trends and make conclusions.

Thirdly, the research mainly focused on the local market however, NUGSB faces competition from Kazakh and foreign universities. Hence, further research can include higher institutional organizations worldwide.

Consequently, there are multiple ways the research can be enhanced to obtain more data, though the available data still gives insights and can assist the leadership team in making data-driven solutions.

Summary

Overall, the outcomes from interviews, surveys, and application data emphasize the diverse factors of university selection for students, parents, and counselors. Parents' roles are commonly supportive and non-dominant, usually because of their limited knowledge of international education systems. Nevertheless, parents actively participate in financial questions and advise their children regarding professional fields. School counselors along with educational institutions such as NU provide resources and events to guide and assist students as well in broad professional options and education systems overall, but there is room for improvement, especially in adjusting communication channels and

addressing students' real issues about career outcomes and educational challenges.

Even though there is a high demand for business studies, for programs like the BBA, financial aspects and apparent mismatch with students' career objectives limit enrollment. Dual-degree programs represent missed possibilities to attract more prospective students by resolving these issues. Survey results reveal that program reputation and international exposure are crucial factors impacting decision-making. In addition, Nazarbayev University's recognized reputation delivers a strong foundation, but better marketing strategy, implementation, and clearer value proposition could remarkably augment its competitiveness and position. At last, empowering students with transparent and clear communication, a variety of options and opportunities will be essential in influencing future admission trends.

Recommendations

There are suggestions for improving NUGSB's marketing strategy, which is intended to employ NUGSB's strengths. By applying these recommendations, NUGSB can distinguish its position in the education market as a leading institution for business studies in Kazakhstan and the broader geographical area.

The target is significant for the effective use of digital channels, especially audience identification and engagement. Prospective students should be determined by the following criteria: geographic location (primarily major cities

- Astana, Almaty, Shymkent, and Aktau), age (between 14 and 20 years old), and the type of educational background (focus on private schools). Parents have to be considered as well, using geographical criteria by also focusing on the mentioned major cities, and the age group should fall within the range of 36 to 45 years old.

The message that underscores the program benefits has to be distinct for each part, for prospective students highlights from the learning environment, living conditions, and showing career prospects. The content has to include on a daily basis interesting storytelling of current students, showing the educational process, active life with information about different available themed social and business clubs (for example, accountant club, red cross club), business opportunities, and events (NURIS innovation cluster, guest lectures), university facilities (workstation areas, library overview with indicating available unique business literature, sports center, dormitory conditions) and their achievements owing to university's opportunities. In conjunction with this, the success stories of alumni, showcasing how their education at NUGSB has impacted their careers, professors' profiles (background, achievements, research interests, professional and teaching experience), and career perspectives should be highlighted. Also, the launch of online competitions through major digital channels, such as case challenges, hackathons on actual business concerns, interactive quizzes solving with NU merchandise, or other prizes, will be beneficial and can spark interest around the BBA program. Conducting regular webinars and sharing posts on

social networks covering different topics related to academia, application tips, and career opportunities can help keep the audience on a constant base and promote the BBA program even more efficiently. Points earning system can also be used for proactive engagement of the audience, active participation in contests, and taking part in webinars, which can be used for university merchandise or similar offerings. For parents, post-degree opportunities, success stories of alumni, and university facilities must be underscored, emphasizing the payment base of studies with no grants. For both sides, the focus should be placed on the most popular digital channels used by the target audience, where both sides (parents and children) are active, such as LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook. Implementation of different content formats, such as stories, podcasts (audio and video), carousel posts, short videos (Reels, TikTok, YouTube Shorts), NU GSB Magazine issues, posters, infographics, photos, articles, and email newsletters, can significantly strengthen the impact and bring essential benefit to school awareness. Also, using well-selected hashtags is valuable for all content categories as it will allow tracking engagement, increase visibility and brand awareness, and ease the search for potential clients. Thus, NUGSB can effectively emphasize the BBA program's standout benefits by amplifying its awareness in targeted audiences.

The work with school counselors has to be established on a regular basis, as their opinions can significantly influence the choices of prospective students

and increase the visibility of NUGSB. Moreover, good relationships with counselors can help to understand prospective students' motivations and factors in decision-making processes. Implementing multiple regular communication channels, such as groups in messengers, newsletters through emails, webinars, and in-person meetings, will be beneficial. Arrangement of visit days where counselors can explore the campus and observe the educational environment of NUGSB will be highly effective, as well-informed counselors can provide valuable information and good recommendations for the BBA program to prospective students and their parents. Thus, the active involvement of counselors in engagement campaigns is crucial.

The development of prospective student engagement programs, such as summer school, business camps, and the creation of the opportunity to experience the university environment can foster meaningful connections with them and increase applications. These designed short-term (1-2 weeks) programs have to include acquaintance with faculty members and incorporate interactive activities such as simulation games, case studies, entrepreneurship challenges, and specialized workshops focusing on specific skills like negotiation techniques, data analysis, and similar. Also, there will be networking opportunities with current students and alumni. From these engagement programs, the participants will form insights about NUGSB and an understanding of what to expect from the BBA program.

During the roadshows which are provided by the admissions department of NU in major cities such as Astana, Almaty, Shymkent, and Aktau, the information has to emphasize not only the benefits of the BBA program, student experiences, and university facilities but also has to be interesting, value-driven and fulfill participants with essential up-to-date findings and themed with insightful topics such as “How to Become a Leader”, “The Art of Strategic Communication” and similar. The inclusion of interactive activities during the presentations, like polls, small team tasks, and discussions, will deeply engage the audience and leave beneficial insights. Meeting or watching a video with feedback about the program of enrolled students offers a great advantage, giving interested students firsthand information about the program and academic experience. All of these efforts will help to build emotional connections with potential students and will increase their interest in the BBA program.

Establishing partnerships with local companies and multinational corporations is also beneficial. Inviting their leaders for guest lectures covering up-to-date business themes with current trends and experiences will be a considerable benefit. Also, companies can provide practical workshops focusing on the development of practical skills such as finance modeling, project management, and similar, which can contribute to the student's employability and be in demand in the market. Joint research programs enable students to contribute to academic knowledge, develop business solutions, and face and deal with real-

world challenges and issues. Forming mentorship programs with partner companies will help students gain insights into career paths. Mentors can share their career or business experiences and stories, and it will help to understand students' possible valuable work directions and the skills required for significant achievements and success. For companies, NUGSB will be a reliable provider of competently trained graduates and be an advantageous site for brand visibility at the university in return for their involvement in internship programs. The opportunity to offer impactful internships, and career-oriented programs will increase the program's value and position NUGSB as a good conductor to professional success, making the school a center for both students' achievements and companies' brand presence.

Regarding the reduction of dropout rates, NUGSB should encourage current BBA students to be involved in university life, in extracurricular events such as participation in volunteering occasions, be involved in sports activities, different contests, student ambassador initiatives, or specialized themed university clubs. Also, the inclusion of mentorship programs from MBA and EMBA students or professors can bring significant guidance, expand and strengthen academic experiences, and will allow current students better move through their career paths. Feedback sessions will allow current students to feel supported, care, and heard by university representatives, as well as strengthen their connection with the NUGSB and the institution itself. Thus, regular

communication, support, and guidance are essential for keeping students engaged, motivated and mitigating the leave rate. In addition, a unified strategy and action steps aligned with all sides are essential for success. Therefore, addressing communication issues among NUGSB employees is important to ensure cohesive and coordinated efforts to engage and sustain the current students and promote the program among potential ones.

By implementing these recommendations, NUGSB can strengthen its marketing efforts, improve and boost brand recognition and awareness, and increase interest in the BBA program with the further desire to be enrolled. Focusing on precise, targeted messaging and developing opportunities for interaction will allow NUGSB to stand out and distinguish itself in a competitive market.

Implementation plan

To build a solid foundation for the execution of NUGSB's strategic plans, the first three months of 2025 should be devoted to increasing student engagement, strengthening partnerships, and enhancing the school's digital presence. During this stage, the school should concentrate on developing marketing strategies, establishing efficient communication channels, and building connections with important stakeholders, such as potential students, school counselors, and corporate partners. Therefore, in order to successfully implement the proposed recommendations using a more detailed structured

approach, we developed a *three-month Action Plan* prior to a broader *yearly Action Plan*.

Figure 8

Three-month Action Plan

<p>Action: Enhance Program Visibility and Digital Marketing</p> <p>Responsible: NUGSB Marketing Department</p> <p>Timeline: January - March 2025</p>
<p><i>January</i></p>
<p>1. To promote the BBA program and raise awareness of admissions, launch specialized campaigns on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create audience-specific content to target parents and potential students (ages 14–20) in key cities, including Astana, Almaty, and Shymkent. ● Emphasize the main advantages of the program, such as student life, industry-relevant curriculum, experienced faculty, career preparation, and opportunities. <p>2. Develop a biweekly posting schedule that highlights the experiences of current BBA students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Collect interesting stories of current students’ day-to-day life, classes, and projects, and ask about their motivations for choosing the BBA program. ● Design graphics and posts that align with NUGSB branding to provide consistent messaging.
<p><i>February</i></p>
<p>Showcase research and faculty in weekly LinkedIn and Instagram updates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To learn more about research initiatives, publications, and teaching

interests, interview faculty members.

- Make post-formatted professional profiles for every faculty member.

March

1. Evaluate social media analytics to determine engagement and improve strategies:

- Track post-performance data using analytics tools to review likes, shares, comments, and follower growth, then modify content formats or types as necessary.
- Determine the best-performing formats (e.g. video, carousels) for upcoming content initiatives.

2. Expand platform presence by experimenting with the effectiveness of student-driven TikTok content, such as "day in the life" videos with current students:

- Start with pilot postings that highlight daily student experiences and campus life.
- Monitor interaction and make content adjustments in response to comments.

Action: Student Engagement Programs

Responsible: Admissions and Program Development Team

Timeline: February - March 2025

February

Organize offline and online information sessions to introduce programs and share current student experiences:

- Invite current students to speak about their personal perspectives on NUGSB programs.
- To keep prospective students involved, use live Q&A sessions and

interactive polls.

- For online sessions, set up breakout rooms for program-specific discussions.

March

1. Launch a business case or simulation competition for potential students so that they can get an understanding of the NUGSB experience:

- Define competition rules and judging standards, and prepare awards or recognitions.
- Existing students can be designated as mentors to assist participants and increase the participation rate.

2. After the event, gather feedback from participants to understand its effectiveness and the areas that need improvement:

- Distribute surveys to attendees to collect feedback on the events.
- Analyze the results to improve future events.

Action: Establish Partnerships and Industry Collaborations

Responsible: Program Development Team

Timeline: January - March 2025

January

1. Start by researching and connecting with local businesses and multinational companies in fields that align with the career paths of BBA students, such as finance, consulting, and marketing:

- Create a list of firms that are relevant to BBA students and schedule introductory meetings with them.
- Discuss partnership opportunities that will include internships, guest lectures, workshops, and mentorships.

2. Develop partnership proposal material by preparing a presentation

highlighting BBA's strengths and potential collaboration benefits:

- Include in the presentation curriculum strengths, student achievements, and how the companies can get involved.
- Emphasize how partnerships can benefit young professionals while also providing mutual advantages.

February

Start organizing a series of guest lectures with business leaders in roles that BBA students would like to pursue:

- Find and work with company representatives to conduct online and offline lectures that will align with core BBA courses (e.g., project management, marketing, and finance).
- To inform students about upcoming guest lectures, develop a promotional plan (e.g., email, Instagram posts).

March

1. To create special internships and mentorship opportunities for BBA students, negotiate with partner companies about:

- Terms of offers, job scope, and expectations for each company offering internships or mentorships.
- Prepare introductory sessions for the students to increase their awareness of the company's culture, internship tasks, and business etiquette.

2. Welcome new partners and express gratitude for their participation in the BBA program by organizing an introductory event.

Following the initial three-month action steps, the table below depicts the year-long Action Plan, which provides a structured approach for the remainder of 2025 with clear responsibilities and timelines.

Table 1*Action Plan*

Action	Responsible	Timeline	Details
Digital Marketing Strategy Execution	NUGSB Marketing Department	January - December 2025	First, develop a segmented marketing strategy aimed at prospective students (ages 14-20) and their parents (ages 36-45) in major cities. Implement the plan and attract potential students by promoting student life, success stories, and alumni achievements on LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook based on the key performance indicators (KPI), which will be discussed later. Regularly monitor the engagement of each audience segment.
School Counselor Engagement Program	Admissions Team	January - December 2025	In order to build and maintain relationships with school counselors, launch a newsletter, webinars, and group communication by March. Organize campus visit days in June to showcase NUGSB's facilities and educational environment. Conduct follow-up

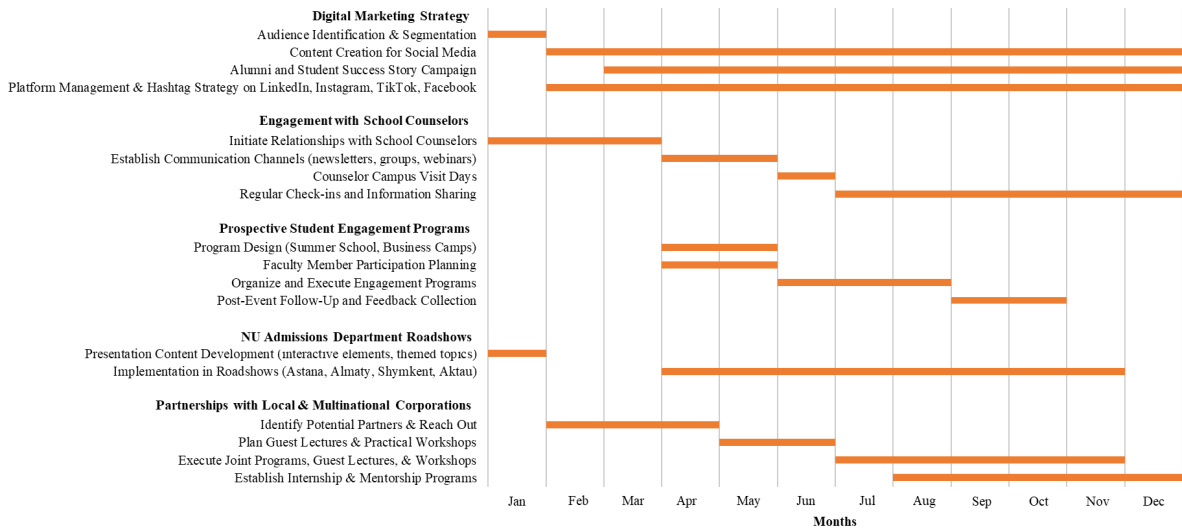
			activities throughout the year to keep counselors informed about program updates.
Prospective Student Engagement Programs (Summer Schools and Business Camps)	Program Development Team and Faculty Members	April - October 2025	Design short-term summer programs and business camps with interactive activities (case studies, workshops, networking) by May. Execute the programs in the summer (June-August) and collect participant feedback in September-October for future improvements.
NU Admissions Department Roadshows	Admissions Team	January, April - November 2025	First, prepare interactive presentations by January with leadership and strategic communication themes. Then, between April and November, host roadshows in major cities (Astana, Almaty, Shymkent, Aktau) by integrating enrolled students' polls, discussions, and feedback videos to create an engaging experience.

Corporate Partnerships for Guest Lectures and Practical Workshops	Program Manager	February - December 2025	Identify and contact potential partner companies by April. Starting in June, schedule guest lectures and seminars focused on skill development and practical industry insights. By August, establish ongoing internship and mentorship programs with partner companies.
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The Gantt chart with the yearly Action plan is presented below and can also be found in Appendix D.

Figure 9

Action Plan on the Gantt Chart



The NUGSB Marketing Department, Admissions, Program Development Team, and Program Manager are primarily responsible for carrying out this implementation strategy. Each team is in charge of their own areas, with the

Program Manager organizing timetables and ensuring inter-departmental communication.

Progress will be reported through monthly team meetings and milestone check-ins. The developed Gantt chart will be used as a visual assistance to track the status of each task and ensure adherence to deadlines.

To maintain consistency in the Digital Marketing execution plan, the key performance indicators (KPI) for Instagram, LinkedIn, and other platforms should be implemented. The KPI suggestions are presented in Tables 2-4.

Table 2

KPI suggestions for Instagram

Instagram	
3 posts in various formats	weekly
5 stories	every other day
Follower’s growth rate of 5–10%	monthly
Expand reach by 5%	monthly

Table 3

KPI suggestions for LinkedIn

LinkedIn	
3 posts in various formats	weekly
Increase impressions by 15%	monthly
Follower’s growth rate of 5–10%	monthly

Table 4

KPI suggestions for other channels

Other Channels	
3 posts on Telegram	weekly
1 Youtube Shorts	weekly
2 Tiktok	weekly
Email Newsletter	weekly
1 Issue of the Magazine	weekly

Conclusion

To conclude, the research has analyzed NUGSB and its brand-new program BBA with a focus on dual degree launch. Based on the findings, the target market for the dual degree program is families with above-average income, studying at high-performing or private schools, and living in big cities such as Astana, Almaty, Shymkent, or Aktau since its citizens are more solvent. They have quite high grades and a high English level proficiency. They are interested in getting a qualitative, academically challenging education in the English language at a top university that will later provide many opportunities in terms of their career. The amount of the annual cost of the degree they are willing to pay for should be around \$20,000. Hence, they are mostly interested in education in European and Asian universities rather than American ones due to financial

reasons, though they feel positive about local universities such as KIMEP, KBTU, and DMKU. They should also be open to having an actual international experience in Hong Kong for 2 years, receiving a double diploma from HKUST, and be able to afford all the costs associated with that (i.e., accommodation, and travel expenses). Thus, the target market is very small and specific, whose customers consider both local and foreign universities. So, the university is competing in both markets. As the research has shown, since the final decision is made by students after consulting with their parents, marketing strategy should be targeted at both parties with the main focus on the students. To reach those customers, NUGSB should actively use social media platforms to communicate its key messages and promote the program, work closely with educational centers, and school counselors, and do effective roadshows, open lectures, and online webinars. Since the majority of students start the university searching process in the last couple of years of their secondary education, marketing strategies should be aimed at those students and their parents.

Regarding the demand for the dual degree, based on our findings, it can be considered as low since the current majority of the applicants cannot afford to pay for the BBA degree at NU, whereas the costs of the dual degree are much higher due to high living costs in Hong Kong. Although current BBA students expressed some interest in that program, the majority of them needed to discuss it with their parents and they had doubts and concerns due to uncertainty and lack

of information, while one student refused to consider that option at all due to his business development plans in Kazakhstan. It is important to note that most of the current BBA students are not sure about their NUGSB choice and are still considering other options, so the school cannot rely solely on their answers, especially since at the moment of the research they just started their bachelor's degrees and have not gotten much experience at NUGSB. Furthermore, the majority of students at high-performing schools aim to win full-ride scholarships, while students at private schools can easily afford to pay for their education abroad, so those who decide to stay in Kazakhstan will most likely continue studying here at private universities. Also, if they become too involved in NU, the decision to leave that experience for Hong Kong might be quite difficult to make and they may remain here till the end of the program. Thus, the school should be aware of such risks as well as the possibility that even those who expressed initial interest in the dual degree, might change their minds. While the data shows that there is some interest in the dual degree, it does not mean the readiness to pay for the program. Thus, the school should have quite a big pull of applicants to ensure they go through all the stages of the sales funnel and pay for the dual degree program, even after the first 2 years at NUGSB.

However, it is important to mention that there is always an opportunity to change people's opinion and increase the demand by having a strong marketing strategy, preferably targeted at the younger generation, especially since there is

some interest in the dual degree program and the demand for qualitative education both locally and internationally. Thus, if marketers successfully promote the benefits of the program, the situation can be improved because it has been only a year since the launch of the regular BBA program, and it is too early to make precise conclusions. Hence, with more students at NUGSB, more time, and a stronger marketing strategy, the demand can be increased. Consequently, the school should keep improving its marketing strategy to develop the BBA program and attract more students, among which they should make the majority of the students interested in the dual degree program.

Glossary of Key Terms

AACSB - Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business

AI - Artificial Intelligence

ALMAU - Almaty Management University

AMBA - Association of Masters of Business Administration

BBA - Bachelor of Business Administration

BGA - Business Graduated Association

BIL - Bilim Innovation Lyceum

BRI - Belt and Road Initiative

EFMD - European Foundation for Management Development

EMBA - Executive Master of Business Administration

ENU - L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University

GSB - Graduate School of Business

HKUST - Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

IT - Information Technology

KBTU - Kazakh-British Technical University

KIMEP - Kazakhstan Institute of Management, Economics and Strategic Research

MBA - Master of Business Administration

MNU - Maqsut Narikbayev University

MSF - Master of Science in Finance

NIS - Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools

NU - Nazarbayev University

NUFYP - Nazarbayev University Foundation Year Program

NUGSB - Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Business

OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PEST - Political, Economic, Social, and Technological

PhD - Doctor of Philosophy

SDU - Suleyman Demirel University

SWOT - Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

THE - Times Higher Education

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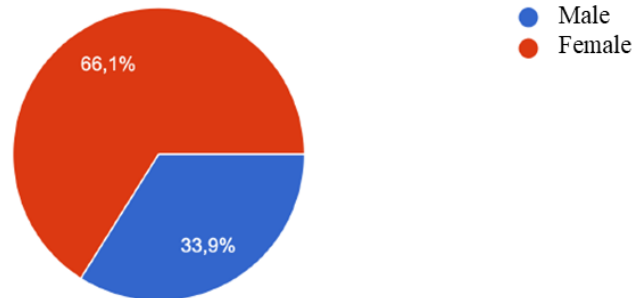
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Appendices

Appendix A: NU Open House Day Students Survey Results

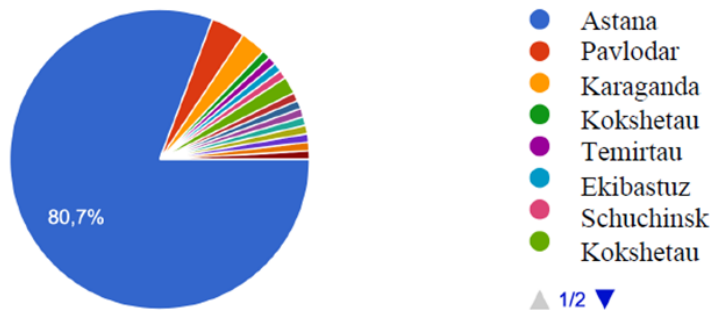
Gender

109 responses



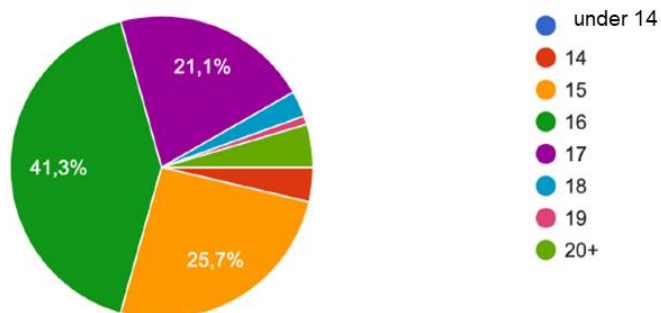
City you live in

109 responses



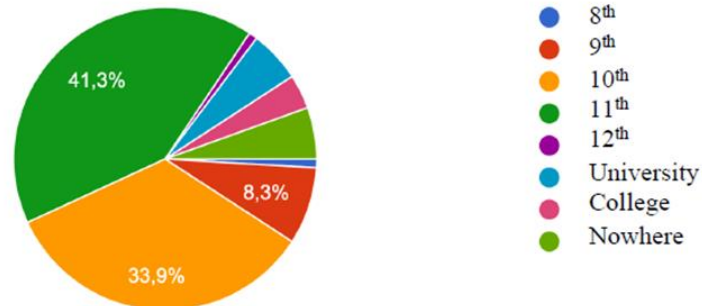
Age

109 responses



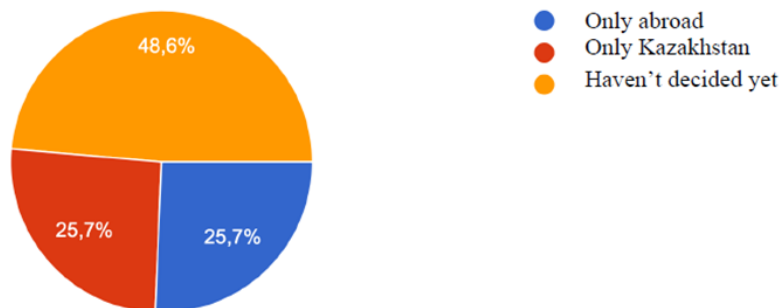
In what grade do you study?

109 responses



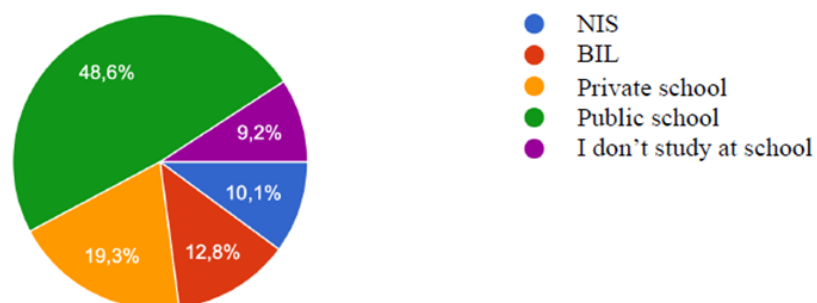
Where do you want to study for your bachelor's

109 responses



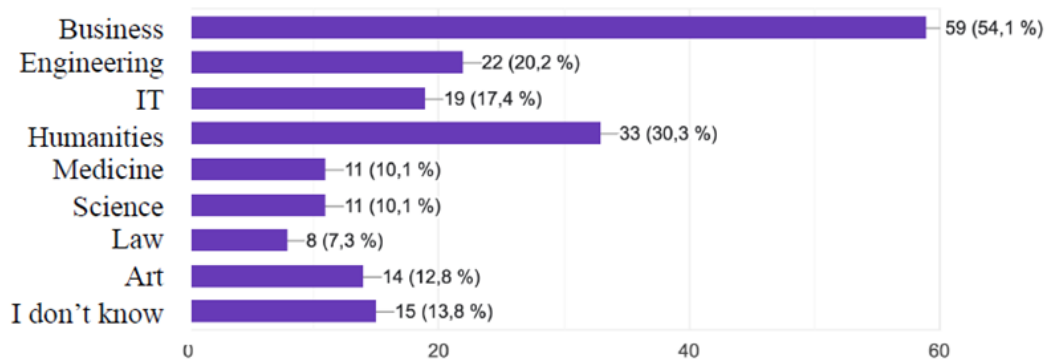
In what school do you study

109 responses



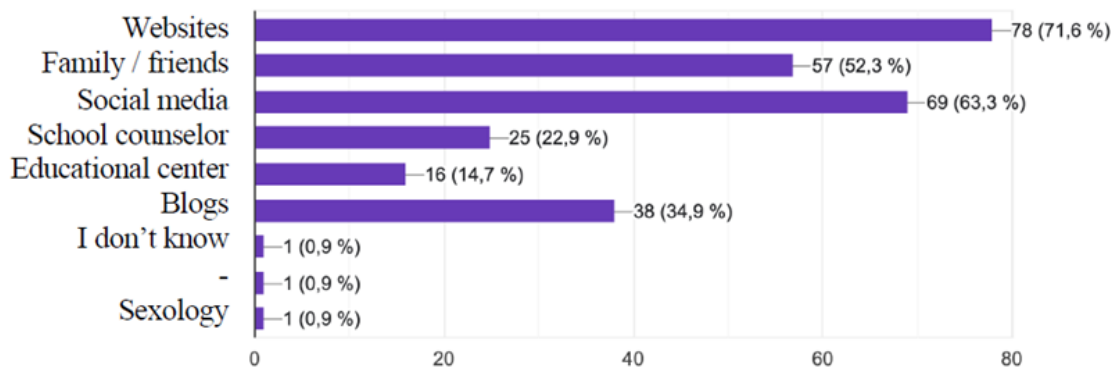
What sphere are you interested in?

109 responses



How do you research universities?

109 responses



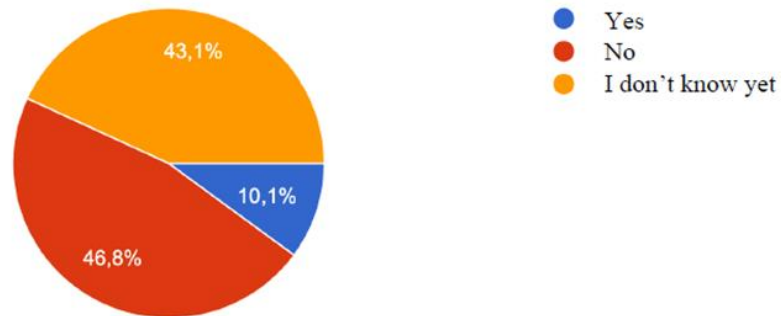
Which BBA programs interests you the most?

109 responses



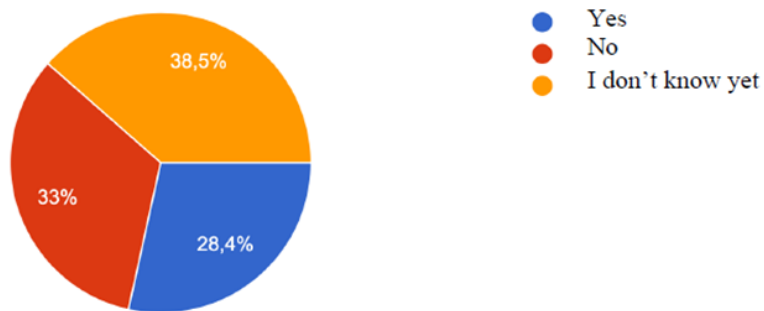
Will you apply for BBA program, knowing there are no grants, and it costs 7m tenge / year?

109 responses



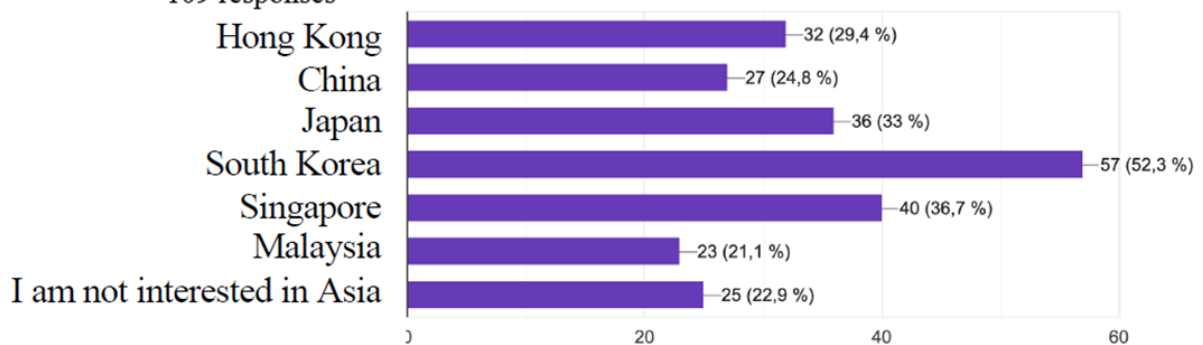
Are you interested in dual degree diploma? (2 years at NU, 2 years in Asia, fee in Asia - 10m tenge / year)

109 responses



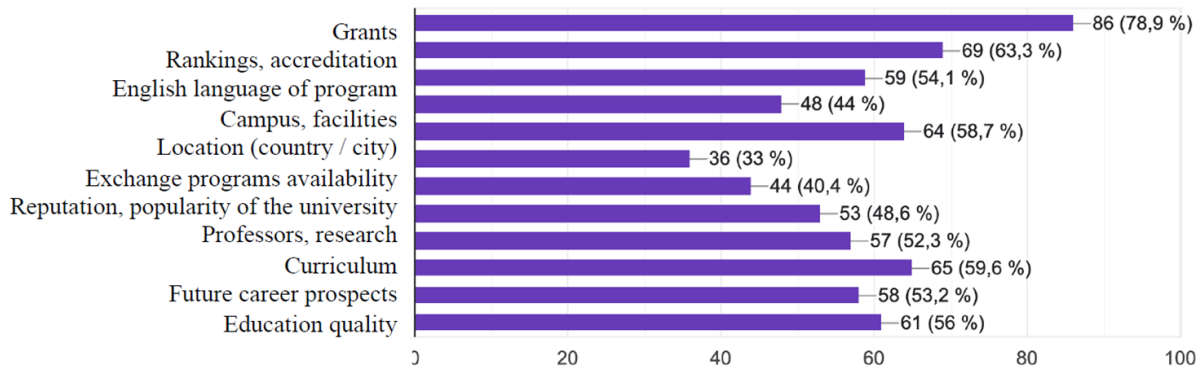
Which Asian country interests you the most?

109 responses



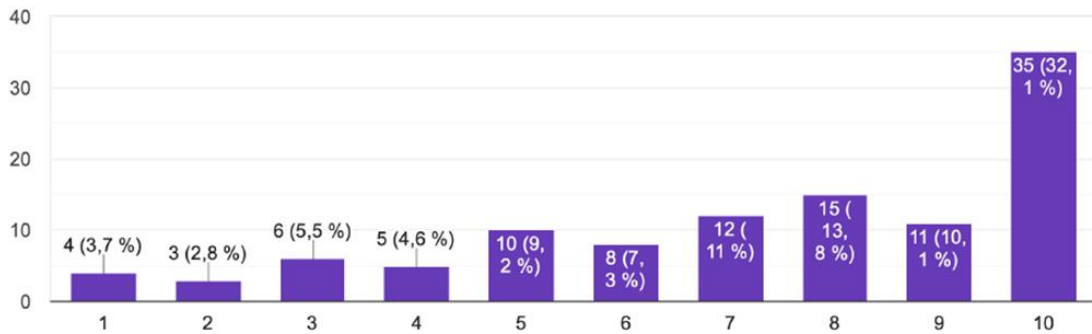
What are the most important factors for you when choosing the university?

109 responses



How much are your parents involved into university search process?

109 responses



Who will make the final decision regarding university choice?

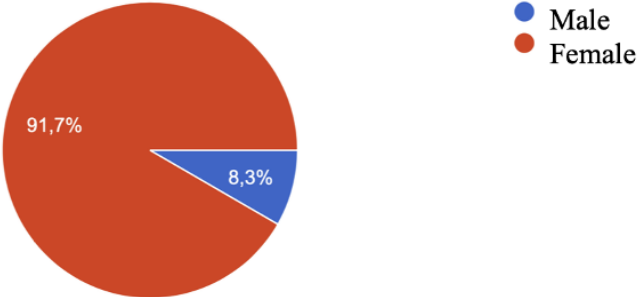
109 responses



Appendix B: NU Open House Day Parents Survey Results

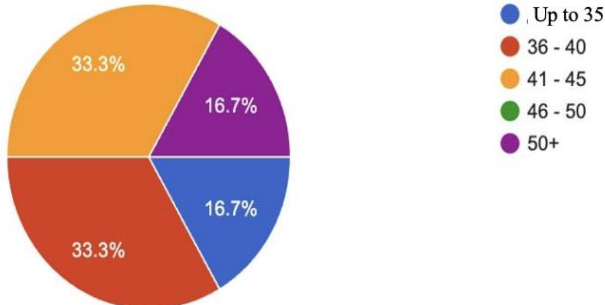
Gender

12 responses



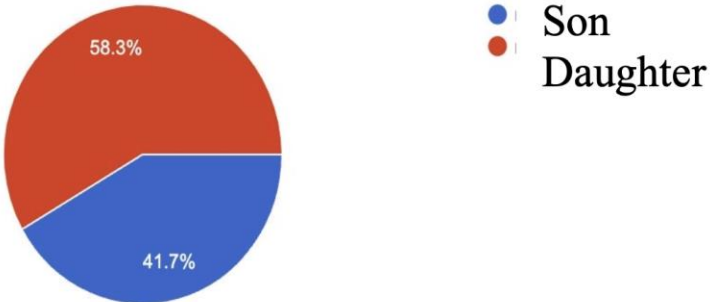
Age

12 responses

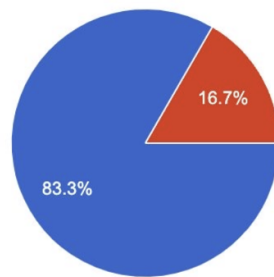


Child going to the university is my ...

12 responses

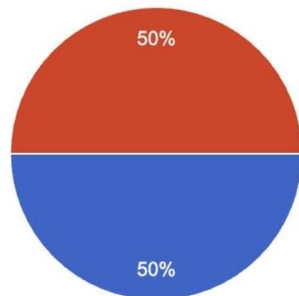


Have you come to NU Open House Day with the child you are looking university for?



- Yes, we came together
- No, without them

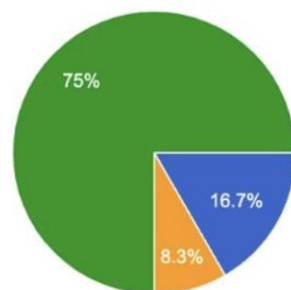
Whose ideas was to come to NU Open House Day?



- Mine
- Child's

In what grade does your child study?

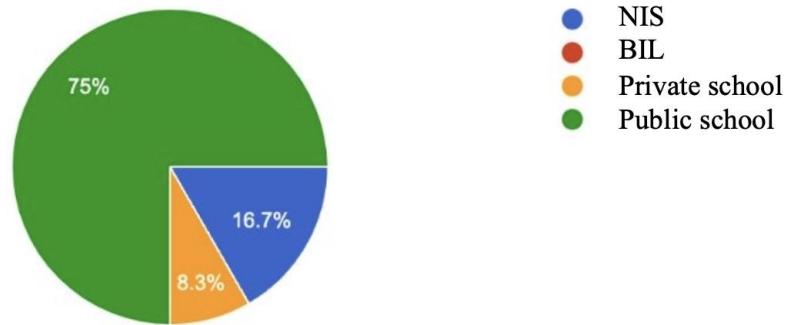
12 responses



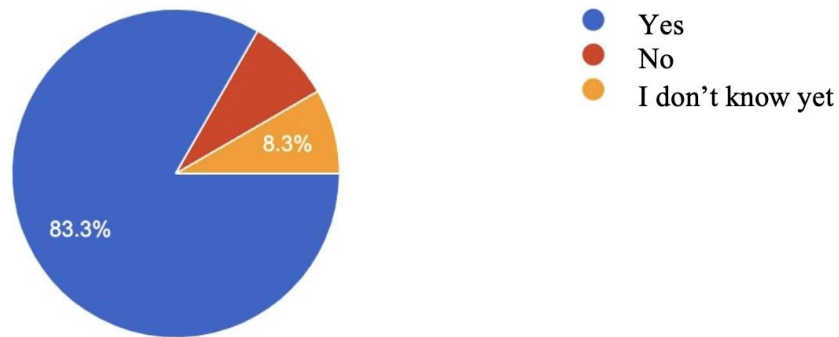
- 8th
- 9th
- 10th
- 11th
- 12th
- University
- College
- Nowhere

In what school does your child study?

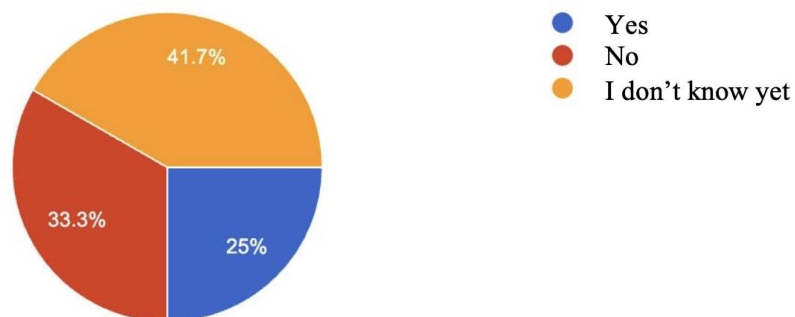
12 responses



Are you ready to send your child abroad?

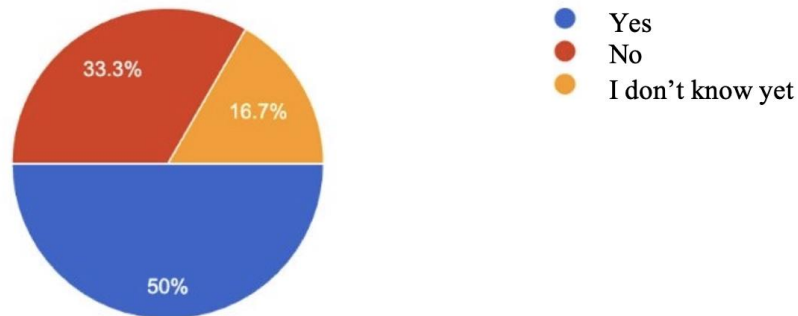


Are you ready to pay for BBA program? (7m tenge / year)



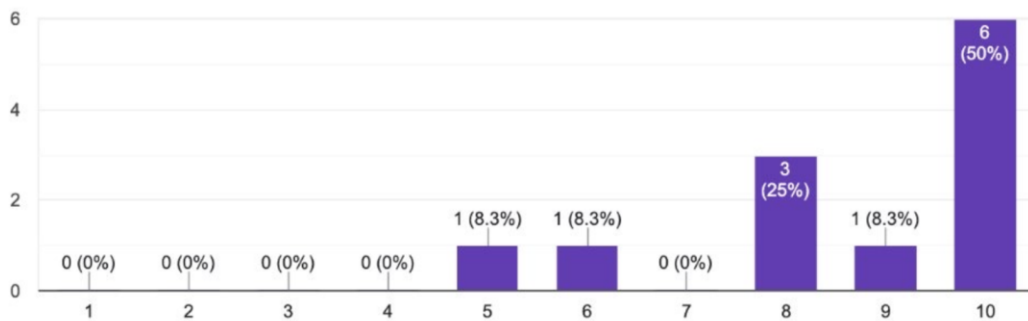
Are you interested in dual degree program (2 years at NU, 2 years in Asia); price in Asia – 10m tenge / year

12 responses

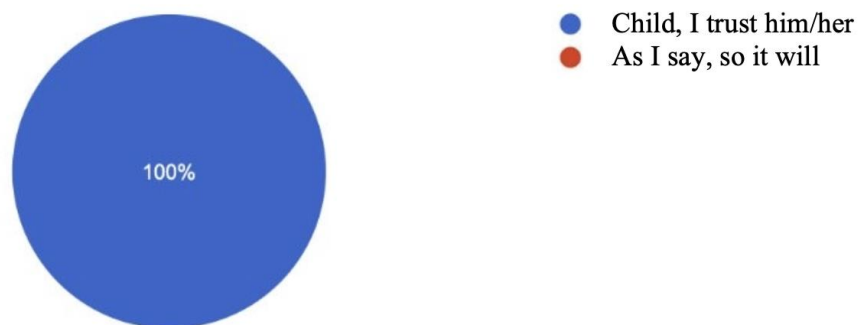


How involved you are into university search process?

12 responses

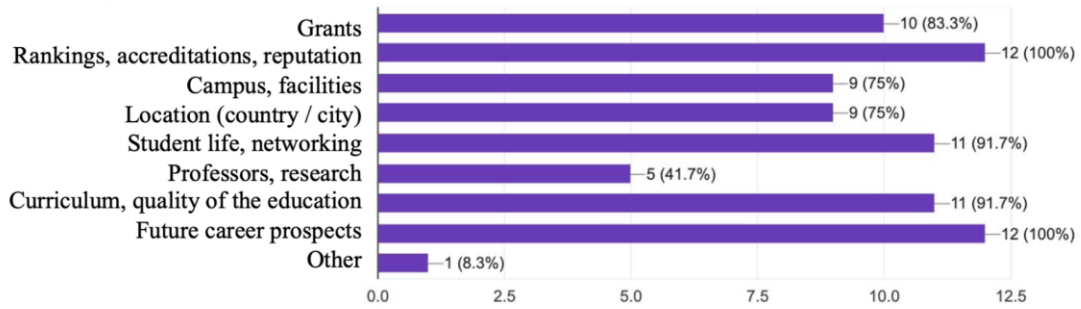


Who will make the final decision regarding university choice?



What are the most important factors when choosing the university?

12 responses



Appendix C: International Advisory Board at NUGSB

№	NAME	POSITION
1	Umut Shayakhmetova	Chair of the IAB, Halyk Bank, CEO and Chair of the Managing Board
2	Yelnar Adaibekov	NOVOPACK, CEO, Former CEO, Transtelecom
3	Akylzhan Baimagambetov	National Bank of Kazakhstan, Deputy Governor
4	Kamshat Baizhanova	TCO, General manager Human Resources
5	Berik Bitabarov	Kazakhtelecom JSC, Chief Operations Officer
6	Alexey Bogatov	Laurus Invest, CEO
7	Oliver De Groot	University of Liverpool Management School, Head of Economics group
8	Olivier Gueris	Astana International Exchange, Chief Operating Officer
9	Lyazzat Ibragimova	Otbasy bank, Chairwoman
10	Talgat Imangaliyev	General Director of Worley Kazakhstan
11	Anasstasiya Kruch	ERG, Director of Talent Management
12	Zhomart Mominbayev	Technogroupservice LLP, Chairman of the Supervisory Board
13	Adil Mukhamejanov	Central Securities Depository (KCSD), Chairman
14	Sholpan Omarbekova	Kazakhstan Temir Zholy, Chief Economist

15	Gulbanu Pazylkhaiyr	Altyn Samruk Qazaqstan, General Director
16	Dolores Pshembayeva	Pavlodar river port, Chairwoman
17	Adil Syzdykov	EY, Partner
18	Kamilla Syzdykova	Tranco group, Chairwoman
19	Yerbol Tulegenov	Center for Strategic Initiatives (CSI), Associate Partner
20	Galym Ussen	Baiterek, Deputy Chairman of the Board

Appendix D: Gantt Chart of Implementation Plan

