

RANKING THE TOP MBA PROGRAMS FOR CONSULTING
MICHAEL A. MISCHE
Marshall School of Business
University of Southern California

Introduction

With starting salaries and bonuses from the top consulting firms for graduates from the premier MBA programs averaging \$147,000 and \$26,050, respectively, it's no surprise that management consulting (MC) remains as one to the most desirable and highly coveted career aspirations.

According to US News & World Report (US News), the national starting salary average for management consulting for 2017 was \$130,329. Not surprisingly, starting salaries for graduates as reported by the schools for the top US News ranked MBA programs exceeded the national average for 2017 at \$140,049, plus bonus and other compensation and ranged from \$134,045 to \$152,500. Competition for top talent was reflected in the average starting salaries offered by the premier firms. According to Business Insider, the average starting salaries for the Elite 8 firms was \$146,063 and \$128,625 for the specialty and mega-integrator firms combined.

For the elite schools, job placement into management consulting remains one of the top industries for graduates. Average job placement into consulting among the top programs ranked by this study was 28%, with a range of 21% to 33% for 2017. In general, the higher the placement of graduates in Elite-8 consulting organizations, the higher the perceptual value and the higher associated ranking of the school.

Consulting training, exceptionally demanding performance thresholds, advanced client relations skills, collaborative team work, and exposure to a variety of industries and situations all combine to make consultants attractive recruits to industry. Early career success in management consulting provides exceptional career mobility and the potential for substantial income. A recent study of the S&P 1000 indicates that the majority of CEOs have consulting in their career pedigree. For many aspiring CEOs, management consulting is the vehicle to the C-suite or the partner's corner office.

Changing Consulting Dynamics

After more than a century of a relatively stable and simple business model, MC is evolving to a significantly different form from the traditional format. Commencing in the mid-1980's, the consulting model began a long-term, systemic transformation that is characterized by changes in both the consulting profession and clients. Business education, evolving client demands, the proliferation of management consultants into the workplace and the pervasiveness of technology and the digital economy are just a few factors that have combined to significantly redefine the management consulting industry. For example:

- Clients are “smarter” and more self-sufficient.
- Clients have far more transparency into and collaboration with the consulting process.
- Clients have more consultants to select from.
- Consultant services are more specialized.
- Client visibility into the consulting process has enabled client buying values to be more demanding.
- Clients have a more definition of expectations and success from the consulting process.

Consulting itself, is more specialized and situational. Traditionally, MC concentrated on strategy, positioning and profit improvement and the parochial path into a consulting career was “strategy centric.” However, the changes in consulting models and client dynamics and buyer values have affected the traditional service models. What was once the exclusive domain of the consultant, is now common practice. Most CEOs already know their strategic issues and who their competitors are, indeed, they should know

them. In many of the largest client organizations, “strategy” consulting has gone “in-house” as more and more companies establish internal strategy competencies. Classic market research, once the purview of research “houses,” has been made available to the masses through the Internet. Consequently, as anecdotal evidence suggests and as noted by Clayton Christensen and co-authors Dina Wang and Derek van Bever in “Consulting on the Cusp of Disruption,” were twenty years ago revenues from “strategic planning” consulting engagements exceeded 70% of a classic strategy firm’s total sales stream, today, consulting services for traditional strategy are less than 20%.

Dominated by eight elite firms, mega integrators and specialty firms, today, competition for clients and talent among firms is fiercer than ever before. Clients are seeking more and more specialized services designed to address specific issues and needs with immediate results. To compete in the 21st century, consulting firms must be well capitalized, rich in talent and diversity, exceptionally agile, and their services asset-based and specialized. Given the robust talent pool of entering MBA from to select, the challenges for many consulting firms is how to best utilize incoming talent and how to immediately apply that new talent to consulting processes and client needs in the most productive manner.

Ranking the Top MBA Programs for Consulting

The changes in the consulting industry and client perceptions and demands for service combine for a unique scenario for top business schools. The business school that recognizes these changes and responds with innovative curricula and programs will be in a superior position to provide the talent that the firms will be seeking and, thus, will accelerate in the rankings and increase in brand value.

But which MBA programs are the “best” at training and preparing students for success in management consulting? To address that question, we analyzed the top 17 MBA programs as ranked by US News & World Report. Using 16 individual criteria, we then quantitatively evaluated and ranked 17 of the top US News 2107 MBA programs. The criteria included published data from the individual MBA programs, top consulting firms such as McKinsey, BCG, Bain and PwC, and various third party sources such as Vault, Glass and Consulting Magazine and over 50 other sources. Some of the individual criteria used to evaluate and rank programs included: course offerings specifically identified as related to management consulting (general management and strategy course were not included), MBA placement statistics into management consulting firms (not internal consulting departments), average compensation and bonuses paid by consulting firm for entering graduates by MBA program, as well as feedback provided by consulting firm recruiters. Quantitative assessments and rankings were performed numerous times with similar results. Our analysis revealed:

1. The top five programs for management consulting for 2017 are: Harvard and Virginia tied for #1; Northwestern and Chicago solidly as #2 and #3, respectively; MIT and Dartmouth tied as #4; and Duke as #5.
2. The top three highest starting salaries for 2017 as reported by school are: Harvard at \$152,500; Penn and Virginia at \$147,500; and Chicago, Dartmouth and MIT at \$147,000.
3. Duke reported the highest placement into consulting for 2017 at 35% of its graduating MBA class, followed by Dartmouth, Chicago and Northwestern at 33%, and MIT and Michigan at 32%.
4. No top ranked US institution has an MS or MA program exclusively *dedicated* to consulting. No program has a dedicated “consulting thought leadership” organization, such as an institute for the research, education, publication, advancement, and external collaboration with consulting firms for industry specific needs and topics.
5. Only a few programs offer advanced certificates in management consulting.

6. Top programs utilize a combination of academic coursework and practical consulting training including:
 - a. Practicums
 - b. Fee for service projects
 - c. Centralized control, marketing & management of consulting projects

7. All programs have fundamental and common assets such as:
 - a. Consulting clubs
 - b. Case competitions
 - c. Case analysis
 - d. Consulting projects

	2018- MBA CONSULTING PROGRAM RANKING																																																													
1	US NEWS & WORLD REPORT RANKING -2017																																																													
2																																																														
3	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>PROGRAM</th> <th>CONS. RANK</th> <th>USNWR-RANK</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>HARVARD</td><td>1</td><td>1</td></tr> <tr><td>VIRGINIA</td><td>1</td><td>13</td></tr> <tr><td>NW-KELLOGG</td><td>2</td><td>6</td></tr> <tr><td>CHICAGO</td><td>3</td><td>2</td></tr> <tr><td>MIT</td><td>4</td><td>5</td></tr> <tr><td>DARTMOUTH</td><td>4</td><td>10</td></tr> <tr><td>DUKE</td><td>5</td><td>11</td></tr> <tr><td>WHARTON</td><td>6</td><td>3</td></tr> <tr><td>COLUMBIA</td><td>6</td><td>9</td></tr> <tr><td>UC-BERKELEY</td><td>7</td><td>7</td></tr> <tr><td>NYU</td><td>8</td><td>13</td></tr> <tr><td>MICHIGAN</td><td>9</td><td>7</td></tr> <tr><td>USC</td><td>10</td><td>20</td></tr> <tr><td>STANFORD</td><td>11</td><td>4</td></tr> <tr><td>CORNELL</td><td>12</td><td>15</td></tr> <tr><td>UCLA</td><td>12</td><td>16</td></tr> </tbody> </table>										PROGRAM	CONS. RANK	USNWR-RANK	HARVARD	1	1	VIRGINIA	1	13	NW-KELLOGG	2	6	CHICAGO	3	2	MIT	4	5	DARTMOUTH	4	10	DUKE	5	11	WHARTON	6	3	COLUMBIA	6	9	UC-BERKELEY	7	7	NYU	8	13	MICHIGAN	9	7	USC	10	20	STANFORD	11	4	CORNELL	12	15	UCLA	12	16	
PROGRAM	CONS. RANK	USNWR-RANK																																																												
HARVARD	1	1																																																												
VIRGINIA	1	13																																																												
NW-KELLOGG	2	6																																																												
CHICAGO	3	2																																																												
MIT	4	5																																																												
DARTMOUTH	4	10																																																												
DUKE	5	11																																																												
WHARTON	6	3																																																												
COLUMBIA	6	9																																																												
UC-BERKELEY	7	7																																																												
NYU	8	13																																																												
MICHIGAN	9	7																																																												
USC	10	20																																																												
STANFORD	11	4																																																												
CORNELL	12	15																																																												
UCLA	12	16																																																												
4																																																														
5																																																														
6																																																														
7																																																														
8																																																														
9																																																														
10																																																														
11																																																														
12																																																														
13																																																														
14																																																														
15																																																														
16																																																														
17																																																														
18																																																														
19																																																														
20																																																														
21	SUMMARY																																																													
22	PROGRAM RANKING SCORE AVERAGE: 238.69																																																													
23	PROGRAM RANKING RANGE: 185 to 299																																																													
24	MAXIMUM POSSIBLE SCORE: 300																																																													
25	RANKING CRITERIA INVOLVED 16 FACTORS & WEIGHTINGS																																																													
26																																																														
27																																																														
28																																																														
29																																																														
30																																																														
31																																																														
	50	100	150	200	250	300																																																								
	2018- CONSULTING PROGRAM RANKING SCORE																																																													

2018- CONSULTING PROGRAM RANKING											
1	Chicago	3	1	1							
2	Wharton	6	4	2							
3	Harvard	1	3	3							
4	Stanford	11	4	4							
5	MIT	4	5	5							
6	Northwestern	2	6	6							
7	Michigan	9	7	7							
8	UC-Berkeley	6	8	8							
9	Columbia	5	9	9							
10	Dartmouth	4	10	10							
11	Duke	8	11	11							
12	Cornell	12	12	12							
13	NYU	8	13	13							
14	UCLA	13	14	14							
15	UCLA	13	15	15							
16	UCLA	13	16	16							
17	UCLA	13	17	17							
18	UCLA	13	18	18							
19	UCLA	13	19	19							
20	UCLA	13	20	20							
21	2018- CONSULTING PROGRAM RELATIVE STRENGTH										
22	HIGHEST CONSULTING RANKING										
23											
24											
25											
26											
27											
28											
29											
30											
31											

For Further Information Please Contact
 Professor Michael A. Mische
 Email: mische@marshall.usc.edu