Diversity Assessment at Lauder Business School: A Student Survey

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Abstract

The present report aims to disclose insights on cultural diversity at the Austrian University of Applied Sciences, Lauder Business School. Results were obtained through a descriptive research design in the format of longitudinal surveys of enrolled students in the study programs of International Business Administration (IBA), International Management and Leadership (IML) and Strategic Finance and Business Analytics (SFBA) during the years 2022 to 2024. A structured questionnaire, which was developed at the research department[1], collects data on students' perceptions on intercultural sensitivity, inclusiveness, openness to intercultural experiences, climate change, socioeconomic aspects and demographics. Findings show that the student body at Lauder Business School is highly socially open and interculturally sensitive. Specifically, female students yield higher scores on both scales in comparison to males. Furthermore, it was found that varying perspectives on adherence to social norms persist in relation to cultural tightness and looseness.

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[1] The study was jointly designed by Prof. (FH) Dr. Christian Reiner (Senior Lecturer & Head of Research) and Dr. Sandra Pauser (City of Vienna Endowed Professorship in Marketing Management).

1   Literature Review on Diversity in Higher Education Systems

In recent decades, the concept of diversity has become increasingly relevant in Austrian institutions and businesses due to societal changes. This shift demonstrates a growing focus on inclusion and integration within the learning processes and highlights the creation of an intercultural learning environment (Herzog-Punzenberger, Brown, Altrichter and Gardezi, 2023, p. 479). As a consequence, diversity management has developed into a key strategic approach for educational institutions (Hofmann, 2020, p. 48). Conceptually, cultural diversity encompasses "a reality of coexistence of diverse knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, religions, languages, abilities and disabilities, genders, ethnicities, races, nationalities, sexual orientations, etc., of human beings, it also extends to the way people react to this reality and the way people choose to live together with this reality" (Lin, 2020, p. 4).

Austria's population has increased significantly, and it is estimated to continue to grow to 10.2 million by 2080. This population growth is mainly attributable by higher levels of migration (Statistics Austria, 2023, p. 1). This in turn leads to higher education institutions that are becoming increasingly more international and multicultural (Ruiz and Sánchez, 2011, p. 17). Besides, student mobility is another notable factor enhancing demographic diversity in Austria and the European Union respectively (Karatekin, Akcaoğlu and Taban, 2019, p. 36). Research in this context assessed the level of multicultural attitudes (by employing the *Multicultural Attitude Scale Questionnaire* in line with Munroe and Pearson, 2006) and found that students in Austria present higher intercultural sensitivity and openness in comparison to students from other countries (Karatekin et al., 2019, p. 36).

In relation to that, a study examined the challenges faced by international students in higher education institutions, including language barriers, cultural adaptation and social integration (Baklashova and Kazakov, 2016, p. 1827). It highlights the relevance of understanding students diverse backgrounds to provide the necessary support for the evolving challenges they encounter during the academic process (Baklashova and Kazakov, 2016, p. 1821).

As reviewed by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, the social dimension including "regional and ethnic origin, socio-economic and educational biographical preconditions" is crucial to higher education processes in Austrian institutions and represents an attractive element in different professional fields (Hofmann, 2020, p. 48). It was found that institutions that present a higher number of international students are more inclined to identify the necessity of focusing on the social dimension. Specifically, "intercultural and transcultural

[..] training and offers could be stepped up in many universities and research institutions in order to strengthen the inclusion of students and staff from other countries of origin or with a migration biography" (Hofmann, 2020, p. 48). This awareness in diversity-related approaches has recently been introduced by scholars under the term "global education" (GE) across the European Union (Angelis, 2021, pp. 55-57). It is regarded as an effective pedagogic "opportunity to serve multiple purposes, to include: contributing to immigrants' inclusive integration across EU host countries; encouraging more welcoming attitudes in host societies; and catering to the manifold learning needs of different types of migrants" (Angelis, 2021, p. 55).

Relative to that, scholars have highlighted the complexity of diversity and the need for a nuanced approach to inclusion (Varsik and Gorochovskij, 2023, p. 7). Recent research explored how different aspects of identity, such as gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background, shape students' experiences of higher education, emphasizing the significance of the concept of intersectionality (Varsik and Gorochovskij, 2023, pp. 9-10). Intersectionality, as defined by Hofmann (2020), "refers to the fact that social and functional distinctions such as gender, social origin and disability do not work in isolation from each other, but are interwoven. They must therefore also be analysed in their interactions with each other" (Hofmann, 2020, p. 98). In addition, in their publication on inclusive education policies in Austria, Buchner and Proyer (2020, p. 83) critizize the fact that most policies in regards to inclusive education are still reduced to a focus on disability. They urge the consideration of the term inclusiveness in a broader manner and advocate institutional support and training purposes. With the continuing development of diversity studies in Austrian universities, ("efforts to develop a more inclusive Austrian education system started in 2007"), there is an ongoing emphasis on intersectional approaches and the development of comprehensive diversity management strategies (Buchner and Proyer, 2020, p. 83).

Furthermore, Claeys-kulik, Jørgensen, and Stöber (2022) in their study about European higher education institutions concluded that there is an existing need of establishing a linkage between the elements of diversity, equity and inclusion. Moreover, the findings of the study indicated that the lack of awareness of these concepts can be considered the main challenge as outlined by the student community. As a consequence, providing training to the different institutional parties (including students) is required for addressing diversity and fostering inclusive environments (Claeys-Kulik et al., 2019, p. 44). In sum, as Ruiz and Sánchez (2011, p. 6) reflected "an education aimed at integration must go beyond mere 'intellectual understanding' of the cultural differences".

2   Descriptives and Diversity Assessment

Employing a quantitative research strategy, this empirical study assessed the current state of diversity at Lauder Business School during from 2022 to 2024. The sample consisted of 470 students, of whom 455 completed the questionnaire. Overall, the results indicate that LBS yields a reasonably diverse student population. For instance, beyond their geographical diversity, students' gender distribution varies by program. Undergraduates predominantly enter with a high school diploma or a bachelor's degree, and their parents tend to have higher education. In addition to demographic diversity, students show a strong global awareness, with topics such as climate change rated among the most serious world problems. Generally, LBS students exhibit high levels of intercultural sensitivity and openness to intercultural experiences.

2.1   Age Distribution

Figure 1 illustrates the total number of valid study participants (455 students) from 2022 to 2024 in the respective study programs (IBA, IML, SFBA). Their ages range from 17 to 53. Among the various age groups, the most represented one is the group between 17–22 years, followed by 23–28, 29–34, 35–40, 41–50. This age distribution has remained relatively consistent throughout all survey years.

**Figure 1** Student sample by year and study program
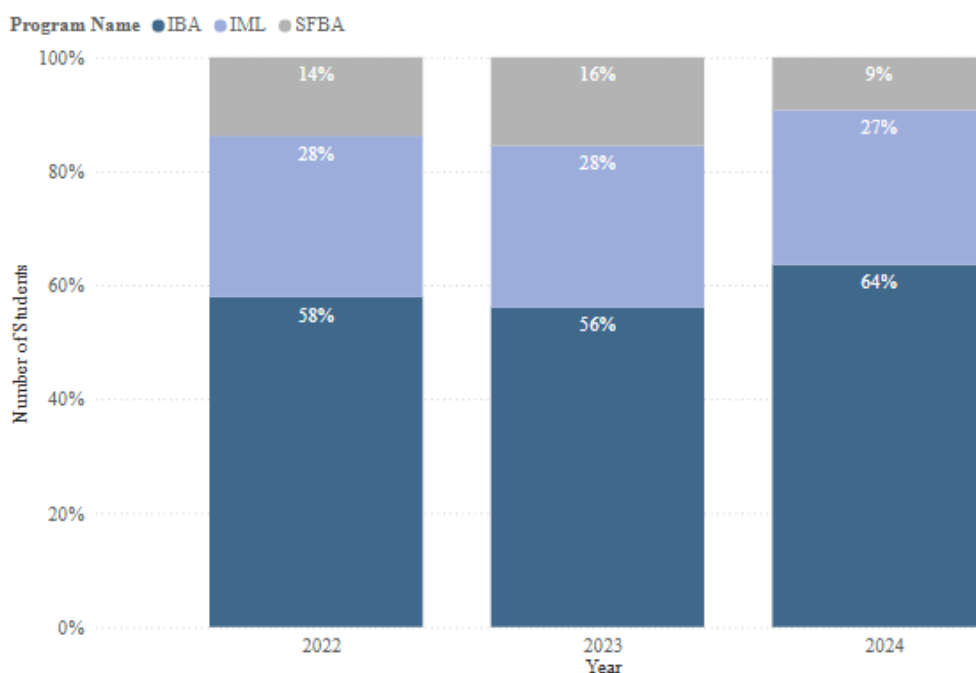
The overall assessment of survey participants by year and program indicates that the curriculum with the highest number of students has been consistently the IBA program (270), which can be explained by the higher rate of acceptance, followed by the IML (127) and SFBA (58) programs, respectively.

2.2   Gender Distribution

When considering students' gender per study program from 2022 to 2024, the IBA program includes a total of 132 females, and 138 males. Secondly, the IML program is comprised of a total of 81 female and 46 male study participants. Lastly, among the SFBA program the gender distribution is relatively balanced with a total of 30 female students and 28 male subjects.

It is relevant to highlight that the obtained results represent a total of 30.33% of male students for the IBA program. The greatest gender difference can be encountered in IML cohorts, in which women outnumber male students by a total of 35 students. Figure 2 below shows the total number of participating students by year, program and gender[2].

Figure 2 Total of students by year, program and gender

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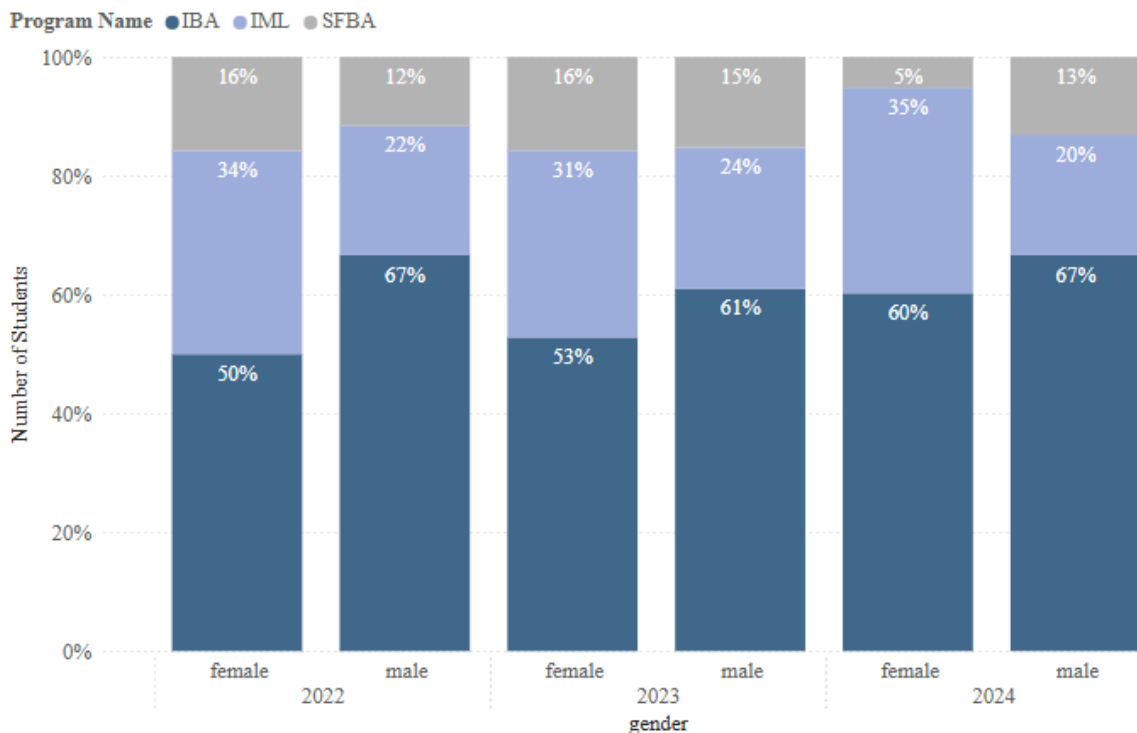
[2] Students that identified themselves as non-binary resulted in a total of 1, 1, and 2 during the years 2022, 2023, and 2024, respectively. However, none of them completed the questionnaire.

In terms of percentages, the IBA program consistently had the highest proportion of students, with an average of 64.78% of male students compared to 54.35% of female students from 2022 to 2024. The IML program was predominantly represented by female students with an average of 33.43%, and male students accounted for 21.90% throughout the same period. Furthermore, the SFBA program had an average of 13.31% male students and 12.21% female students. These results are based on the average of all students who participated in the survey during the period of analysis (2022-2024).

2.3   Geographical Distribution

Lauder Business School is widely recognized for its enrollment of students worldwide. The graph above shows the top 10 represented countries by frequency. These countries are Ukraine, Austria, the Russian Federation, Israel, Bulgaria, Hungary, Germany, Moldova, Colombia, and United States. Below, Table 1 presents the geographical distribution in a visual format.

Figure 3 Geographical distribution of student sample (between 2022 and 2024)
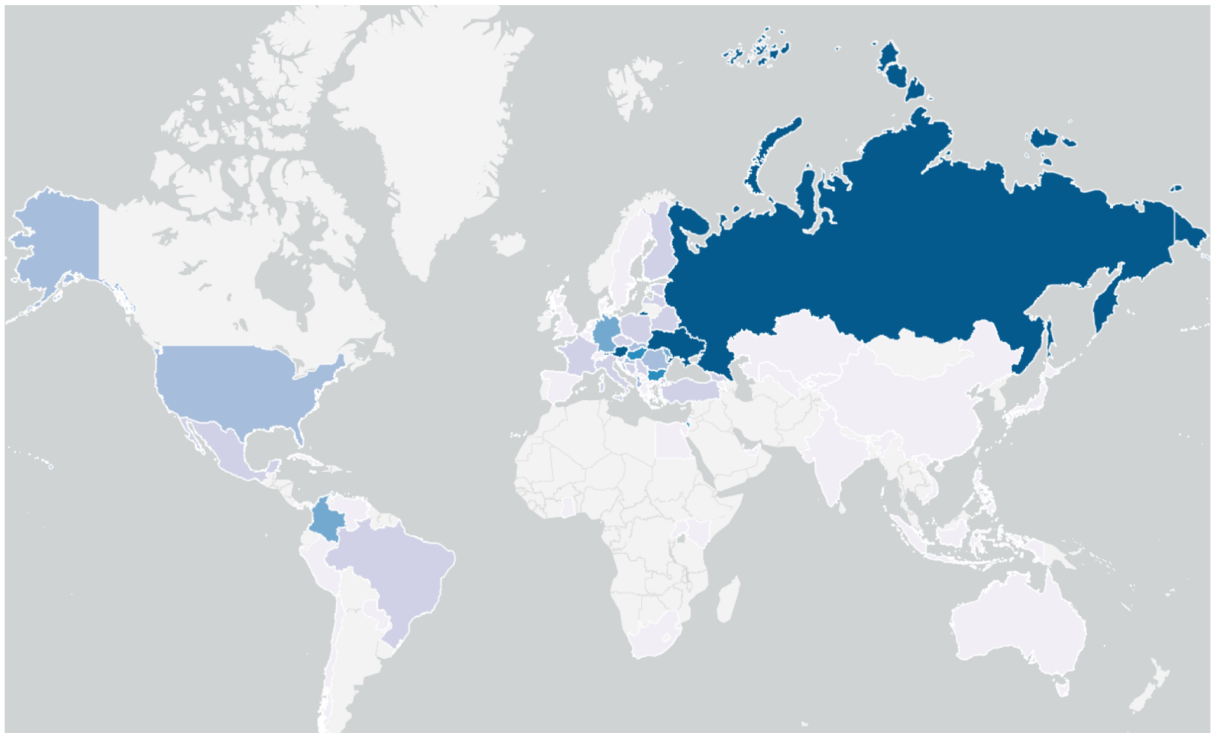
Table 1 Geographical distribution of student sample at Lauder Business School

Country Name	N° Students	Country Name	N° Students
Albania	8	Egypt	1
Armenia	1	Estonia	3
Australia	1	Finland	3
Austria	53	France	3
Belarus	3	Georgia	3
Belgium	2	Germany	22
Bosnia Herzegovina	4	Ghana	1
Brazil	4	Greece	1
Bulgaria	25	Hungary	25
Chile	2	India	2
China	2	Indonesia	1
Colombia	15	Israel	39
Croatia	7	Italy	5
Cuba	1	Jamaica	1
Czech Republic	5	Japan	1
Denmark	1	Kazakhstan	2
Kenya	1	Serbia	4
Kosovo	1	Slovakia	10
Kyrgyzstan	1	Slovenia	4
Latvia	4	South Africa	2
Macedonia	1	Spain	1
Mexico	3	Sweden	2
Moldova	16	Switzerland	2
Monaco	1	Turkey	3
Netherlands	1	Uganda	1
Panama	1	Ukraine	68
Paraguay	1	United Arab Emirates	1
Peru	1	United Kingdom	1
Philippines	1	United States	12
Poland	5	Uzbekistan	2
Romania	7	Venezuela	1
Russian Federation	48	Vietnam	1

The country that presented the highest enrollments (out of 455 participating students) was Ukraine with a total of 68 students, representing 14.88% of the total frequency. In sum, a variety of 64 countries are represented in the institution. According to the results obtained, it can be inferred that the student body at Lauder Business School is broadly diverse.

2.4   Generation

To address generational perspectives of the different age groups, the following question was developed: "Generally speaking, do you think that the life of those who are children today will be easier, more difficult, or about the same as the life of those of your own generation?" Figure 4 illustrates the collected responses and perspectives on generational concerns from students at LBS.

Figure 4 Student body perspectives on generations´ life difficulties
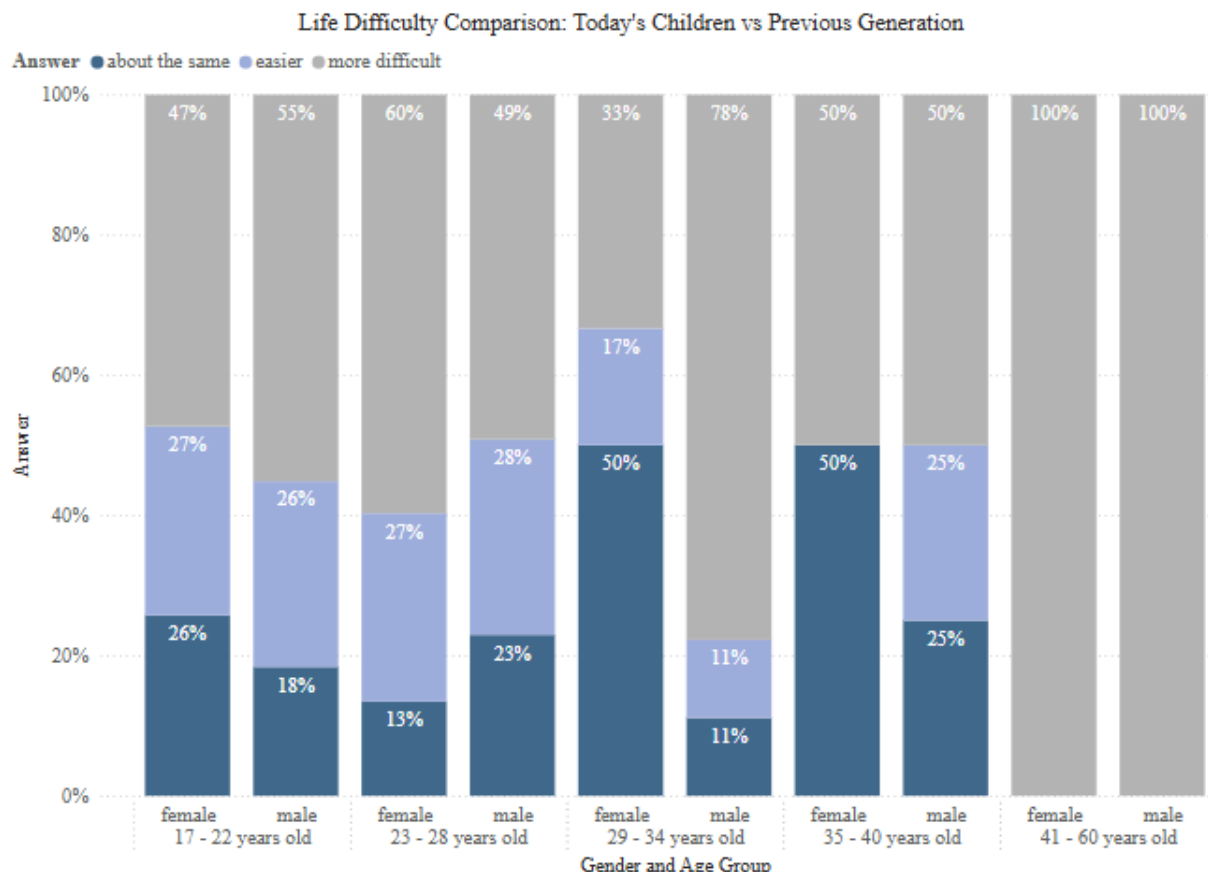
Across all gender and age groups, the responses suggest that the majority of respondents believe that life for today´s children will be more difficult. In particular, the younger age groups (17-28 years old consider that life will be more difficult for children today, with a minority of responses suggesting it will be easier. Older age groups overall highly agree that life will be more difficult for today´s children. The perceptions for the responses "about the same" and "easier" are more visible in younger male groups (29-34 years old).

3   Survey Dimensions on Diversity

This section discusses the survey results on students' intercultural diversity, openness to intercultural experiences, and tightness vs. looseness.

3.1   Intercultural Sensitivity

The concept of intercultural sensitivity refers to the "ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences" (Hammer et al., 2003, p. 421-443). Intercultural sensitivity was assessed using the 7-item Likert scale by Chen, Starosta (2000), with 1 representing "strongly disagree" and 5 representing "strongly agree". The items include topics such as social and intercultural interactions, open-mindedness, and personal perspectives on intercultural experiences. Table 2 presents the scale items and mean values across all study participants. Psychometric properties yield satisfactory results (Cronbach's alpha: 0.74).

**Table 2** Intercultural sensitivity scale

Scale Items	Average Score	Standard Deviation
I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures	4.53	0.78
I tend to wait before forming an impression of culturally distinct counterparts	3.83	0.98
I am open-minded to people from different cultures	4.56	0.71
I often give positive responses to my culturally different counterpart during our interaction	4.28	0.82
I avoid those situations where I will have to deal with culturally-distinct persons[3]	3.85	1.13
I often show my culturally-distinct counterpart my understanding through verbal or nonverbal cues	3.62	0.96
I have a feeling of enjoyment towards differences between my culturally distinct counterpart and me	3.86	0.92
Average score	4.08	0.97

Overall, the results suggest that respondents feel open, accepting, and positive about engaging and interacting with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. This is visible in the responses to the questions "I am open-minded to people from different cultures", "I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures", and "I often give positive responses to my culturally different counterpart during our interaction".

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[3] This item was coded in a reverse manner.

Furthermore, it is relevant to analyze whether gender differences exist in the assessment of cultural sensitivity at LBS. A Kruskal-Wallis test confirms that females, on average, exhibit higher levels of intercultural sensitivity compared to their male counterparts. This finding is statistically significant (p=0.004).

**Figure 5** Gender differences on intercultural sensitivity
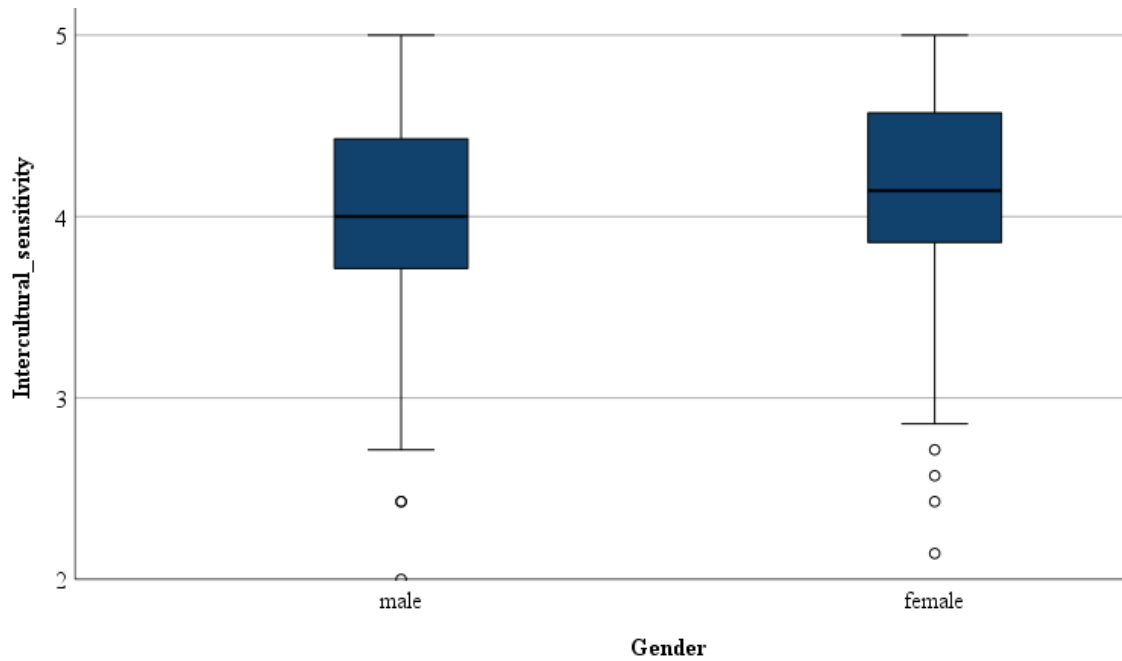
These results are in line with earlier studies. For example, Lin and Ranger (2003), assessed a total of three predisposition including (i) apprehension about intercultural communication, (ii) ethnocentrism, and (iii) intercultural willingness to communicate. They found that women present lower intercultural communication apprehension, resulting in lower discomfort in engaging in intercultural relationships than men (Lin and Rancer, 2003, pp. 195-200). Moreover, the study findings align with research conducted by Neuliep, Chaudoir, and McCroskey (2001, pp. 137-146), who evaluated gender differences on ethnocentrism. It was found that females yield lower ratings on ethnocentrism as compared to males, and women were generally characterized by differing personality traits, such as being more trusting and open than men (Neuliep et al., 2001, pp. 137-146). Table 3 below aims to present the obtained results of cultural sensitivity by program.

Table 3 Intercultural sensitivity scale by study program

Cohort Name	Average of Intercultural Sensitivity	Standard Deviation
IBA	3.99	0.59
IML	4.15	0.52
SFBA	4.29	0.49
Total Average	4.08	0.57

The results demonstrate that the curriculum with the highest sensitivity score is the SFBA program, followed by IML, and lastly the IBA program. The programs of SFBA and IML exceed the total sensitivity average. These results could be explained by a broader exposure to diverse cultural perspectives and geographical representations during their student life. These statistically significant differences among the Bachelor and Master cohorts were confirmed by non-parametric tests, as Figure 6 demonstrates.

Figure 6 Comparison of intercultural sensitivity by study program
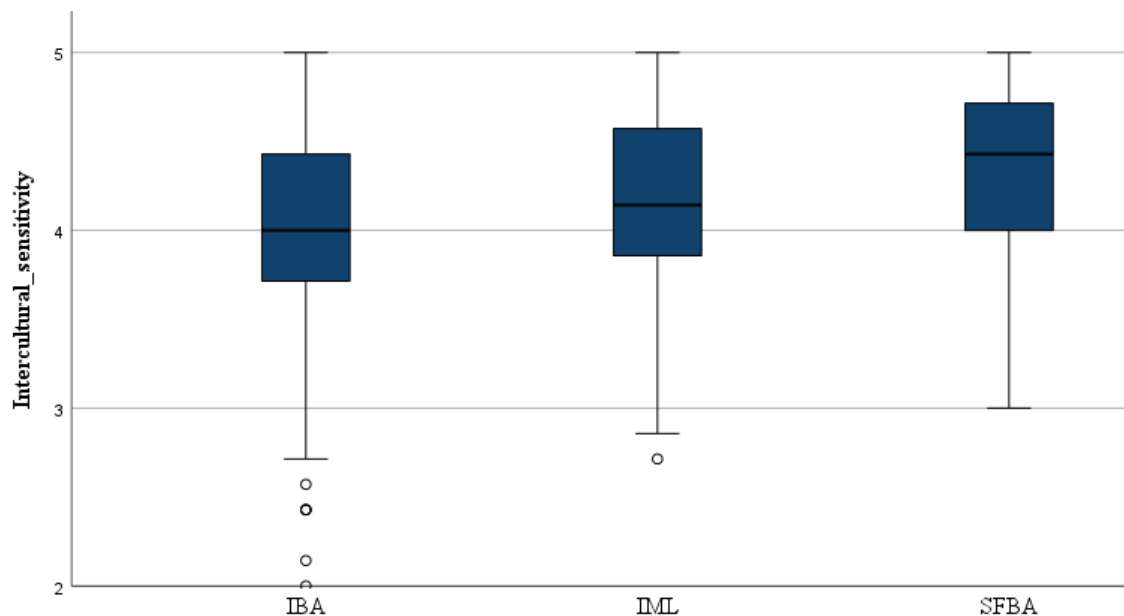
An additional finding to be considered is the educational background and its relation to intercultural sensitivity.

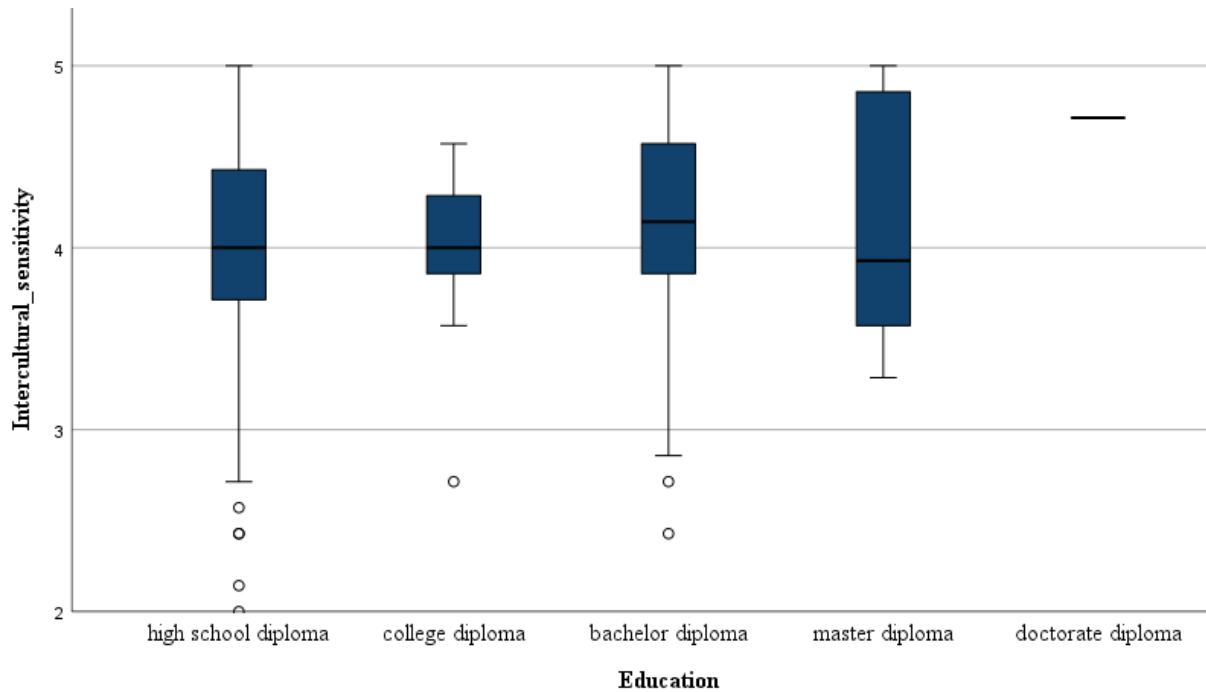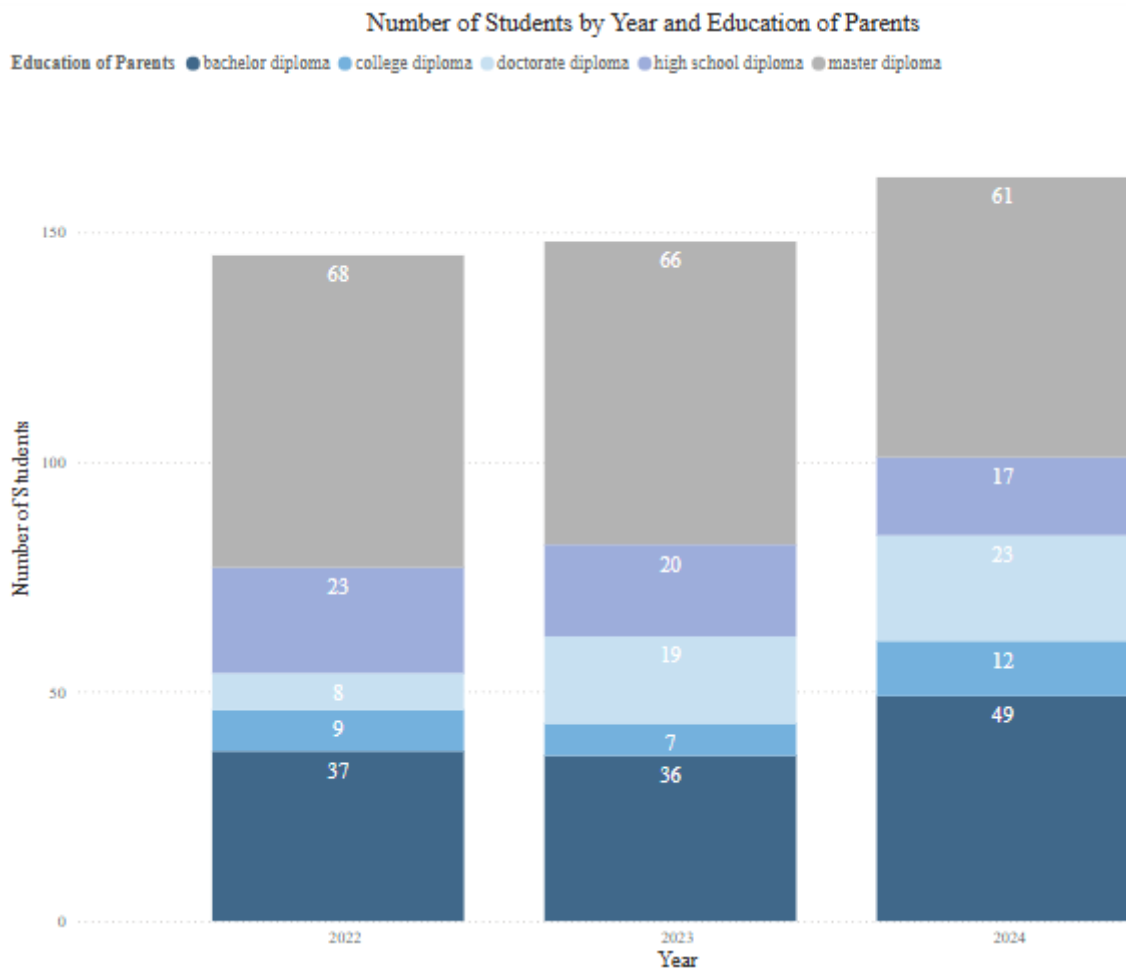**Figure 7** Educational background and intercultural sensitivity

Figure 7 shows the different educational backgrounds by the student body at Lauder Business School in relation to their cultural sensitivity. It indicates that students with higher educational levels yield higher ratings on intercultural sensitivity. This can be seen in doctorate holders with an average score of 4.71, while college diploma holders constitute the lowest sensitivity score of 3.98. The observable trend suggests that more education could expose students to a wide range of cultures, ideas, and critical thinking. This in turn indicates that higher education enhances intercultural sensitivity, which was confirmed statistically employing a Kruskal-Wallis test (p=0.017). A study by Szőke (2023) discusses the relevance of intercultural sensitivity in higher education, while analyzing the engagement of students enrolled in management and business studies. The study indicates that students are more likely to present intercultural sensitivity while being involved in culturally diverse programs, as this facilitates smoother interactions in their futures and career opportunities (Szőke, 2023, pp. 687-697).

The following diagram presents the highest level of education achieved by students' parents. The link between educational level achieved by parents with student's own openness to diversity was assessed. Statistically significant relationships could not be established.

Number of Students by Year and Education of Parents

Education of Parents ● bachelor diploma ● college diploma ● doctorate diploma ● high school diploma ● master diploma

3.2   Openness to Intercultural Experiences

This section discusses the survey results on openness to intercultural experiences. Openness is defined as a "person's tendency to seek out new experiences and to be willing to explore ideas, values, emotions, and sensations that differ from their previous experience or established preferences" (Raya et al., 2023, pp. 1-10). In line with Caligiuri, Jacobs and Farr (2000, p. 30), "four theoretical dimensions of openness: attitudes, participation in cultural activities, past experiences, and comfort with differences" were assessed on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 represents "strongly disagree" and 5 represents "strongly agree".

The results obtained from the study suggest that overall students are open-minded and enjoy interacting with people from different cultures. This finding can be explained by the fact that the majority of students have spent time abroad or a place distinct from their country of origin. Furthermore, students at LBS are fluent in other languages and they seem to enjoy

interactions with different cultures. Figure 9 presents findings on gender differences in openness to intercultural experiences.

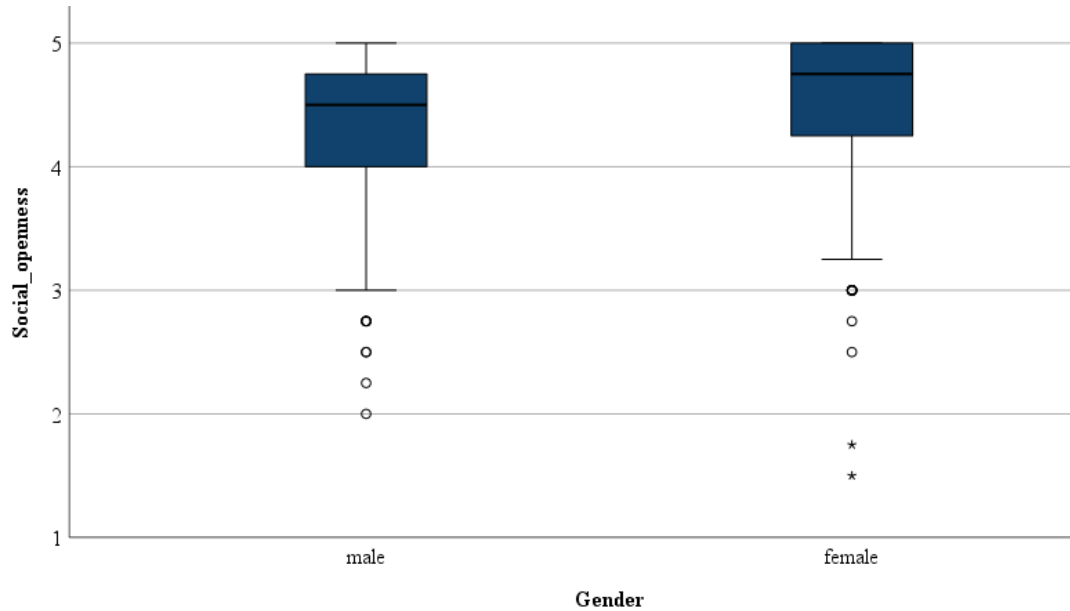**Figure 9** Gender differences on openness to intercultural experiences

Table 4 Openness to intercultural experiences of the student body

Scale items	Average of Openness to Intercultural Experiences	Standard Deviation
Other cultures fascinate me.	4.27	0.90
I am fluent in another language.	4.49	0.90
I have spent time abroad.	4.52	0.93
I eat at a variety of ethnic restaurants.	4.21	0.99
Average score	4.37	0.94

The study's result further highlights gender differences, showing that female students present a higher openness to intercultural experiences relative to males. Thus, statistically significant findings were obtained by means of a Kruskal-Wallis test (p=0.002). The study's findings support the discussion realized by Cundiff and Komarraju (2008), who confirmed that women present a higher level of ethnic and cultural empathy than men, providing general insights on gender and social openness (Cundiff and Komarraju, 2008, pp. 5-15). Figure 10 below presents differences of openness to intercultural experiences by study program at Lauder Business School from 2022-2024. In regard to openness to intercultural experiences, the cohorts of IML and SFBA exceed the total scale average. Nevertheless, the IBA program demonstrates a high result.

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Figure 10 Differences in openness to intercultural experiences by cohort
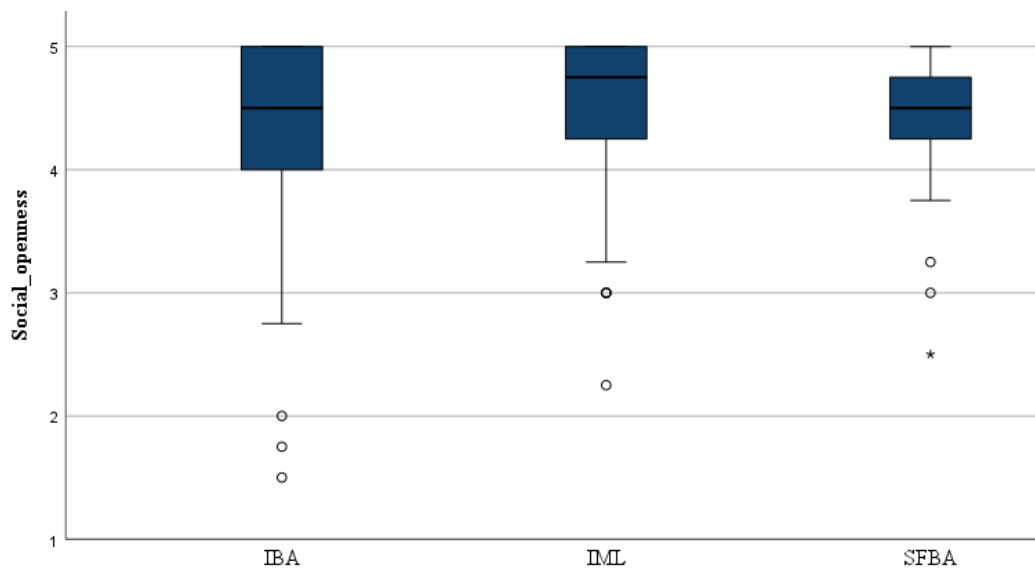

3.3 Cultural Tightness vs. Looseness

The subsequent section of the study contained questions about students' cultural tightness vs. looseness. For this purpose, "cultural tightness was measured using the six-item scale developed by Gelfand et al. (2011). The items on this scale assessed the clarity and number of social norms, the degree of tolerance for norm violations, and overall compliance with social norms in each nation" (Aktas, Gelfand and Hanges, 2016, p. 300). Response formats ranged from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" on a 5-point scale, whereas higher values indicate higher cultural tightness.

When comparing cultural tightness vs. looseness among cohorts between 2022 and 2024, it can be observed that statistically significant differences exist between the study programs (p=0.014). Bachelor students seem to be tighter, while Master students in the IML and SFBA program seem to, for example, experience a great deal of freedom in deciding how they want to behave in most situations.

Table 5 Cultural Tightness Scale

Scale items	Average Score	Standard Deviation
There are many social norms that people are supposed to abide by in my country.	3.48	0.95
In my country, there are very clear expectations for how people should act in most situations.	3.50	0.95
People agree upon what behaviors are appropriate versus inappropriate in most situations my country.	3.62	0.97
People in my country have a great deal of freedom in deciding how they want to behave in most situations[4].	2.57	1.20
In my country, if someone acts in an inappropriate way, others will strongly disapprove.	3.57	1.09
People in my country almost always comply with social norms.	3.12	0.92
Average score	3.31	1.08

Figure 11 Cultural tightness vs. looseness by cohort

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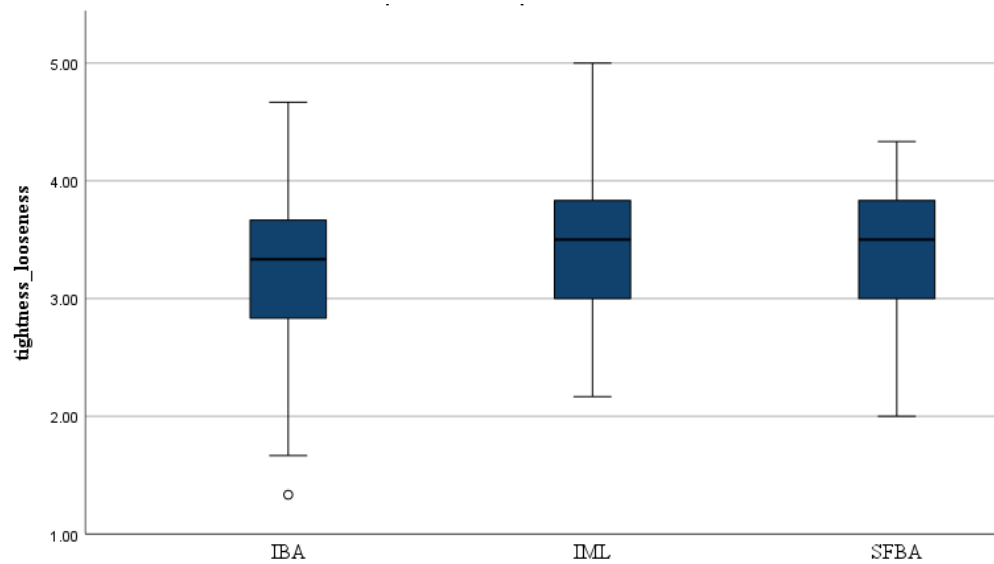
[4] This item was coded in a reverse manner.

4   Conclusion and Main Takeaways

Lauder Business School's cultural diversity survey, conducted between 2022 and 2024, reveals a number of significant trends and insights. The student population is predominantly young with an average age of 21.6 years, ranging from 17-53 years. This suggests that the university is particularly attractive to recent graduates and young adults starting their higher education journey.

In terms of program enrollment, International Business Administration (IBA) is the most represented program, followed by International Management and Leadership (IML) and Strategic Finance and Business Analytics (SFBA). Gender distribution varies between programs, with IML having a significant female majority, while IBA maintains a more balanced proportion. Regarding educational attainment, students are predominantly bachelor's degree holders, indicating a mix of undergraduate and postgraduate students. Parents' educational attainment tends towards higher education, with tertiary education being the most common among parents. These findings imply that Lauder Business School students are not only demographically diverse, but also diverse in their global perspectives and concerns, reflecting a student population that is engaged in contemporary global challenges.

The student body at Lauder Business School scores highly on intercultural sensitivity and openness to intercultural experiences. The survey results reveal that students are interested in engaging and participating in intercultural experiences. Female students yield higher scores than male students in intercultural sensitivity and openness to intercultural experiences. This finding aligns with previous studies suggesting that females tend to exhibit greater openness and cultural sensitivity than males.

In relation to cultural tightness and looseness, students considered their cultural environment as relatively loose, while overall indicating moderate levels of cultural tightness. The results show an existing perception of social norms and behaviors. These behaviors, as indicated in the scale, might vary across different cultures and countries.

Overall, these study's findings show that Lauder Business School attracts a wide and diverse student body. Students demonstrate awareness of their surroundings and show concern about the future. While they are highly socially open and interculturally sensitive, cultural differences and varying perspectives on adherence to social norms persist.

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