

2025 STUDY ABROAD SURVEY:



THE VOICE OF THE STUDENTS



The fourth annual Terra Dotta study abroad students' survey.





2025 Executive summary

The results are in.

Amid the tenuous higher education landscape, **our fourth annual Study Abroad Survey: The 2025 Voice of the Students, tracks and reveals the study abroad perspectives of U.S. college students**, their interests, their aspirations and their concerns.

The 2025 findings show **high interest in study abroad among students** and the many positive impacts to their personal and professional growth. While students want to study abroad, the survey also identifies **cost as the biggest barrier to study abroad**. From access to funding to learning about financial aid options, students are concerned about managing study abroad expenses. Given that prices seem likely to rise in the short term, cost will be more important for universities to address. Safety is also on students' minds as they say wars could impact their decision to study abroad.

An important milestone for many U.S. college students, study abroad is something students consider in high school when they were making college application and enrollment decisions. That said, there are still too many students who aren't familiar with study abroad which presents an opportunity to better promote the offerings and value of programs.

Collaboration will be key to the success of study abroad in the coming years. Higher education is at the precipice of the looming enrollment cliff, and policies and budgets face uncertainty.

Colleges and universities that promote study abroad and look for ways to maintain programs and partner to streamline program management while expanding program scope can enhance their competitive edge by tapping into students' continued desire to study abroad.



2025 Key highlights

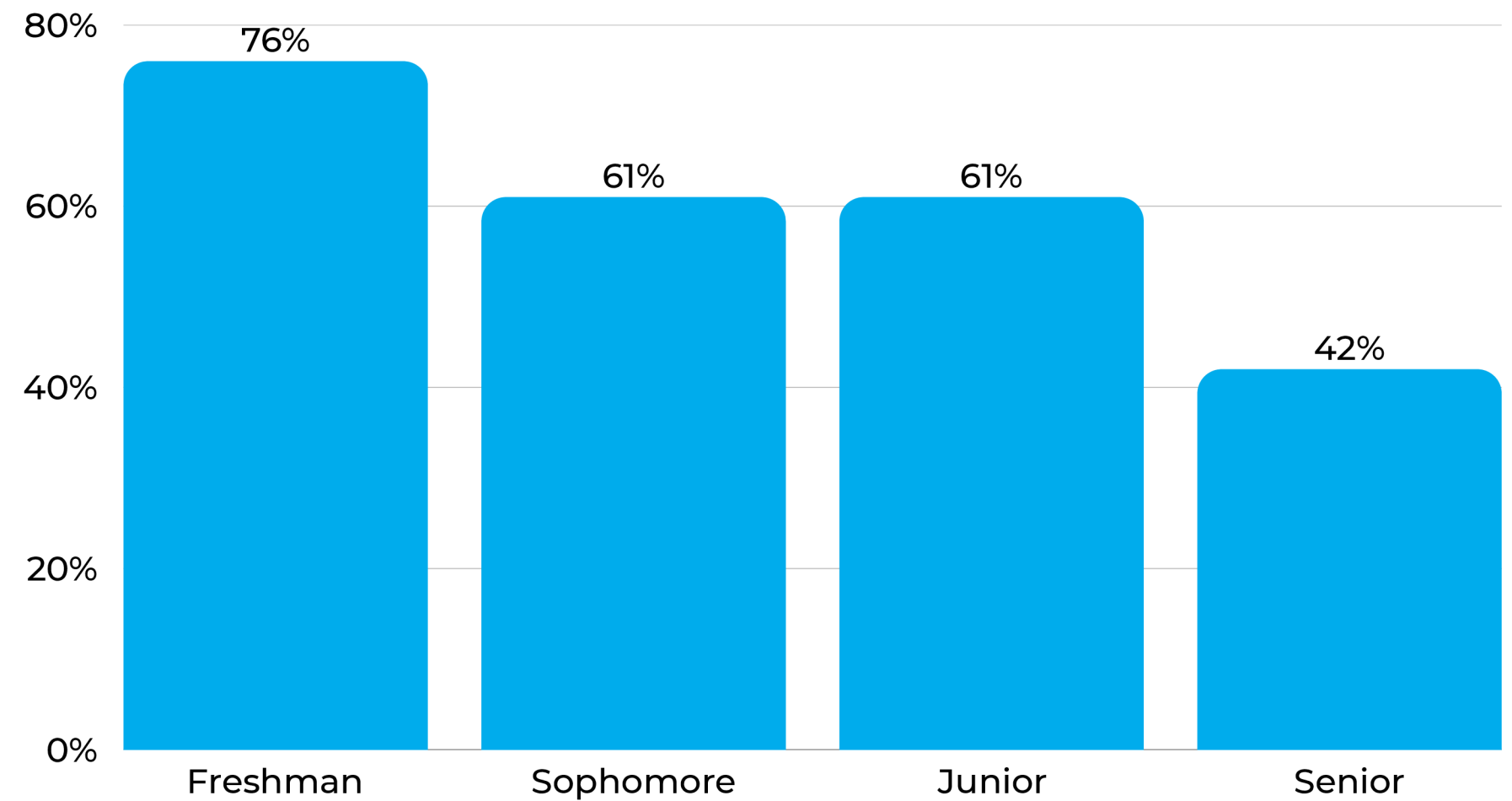
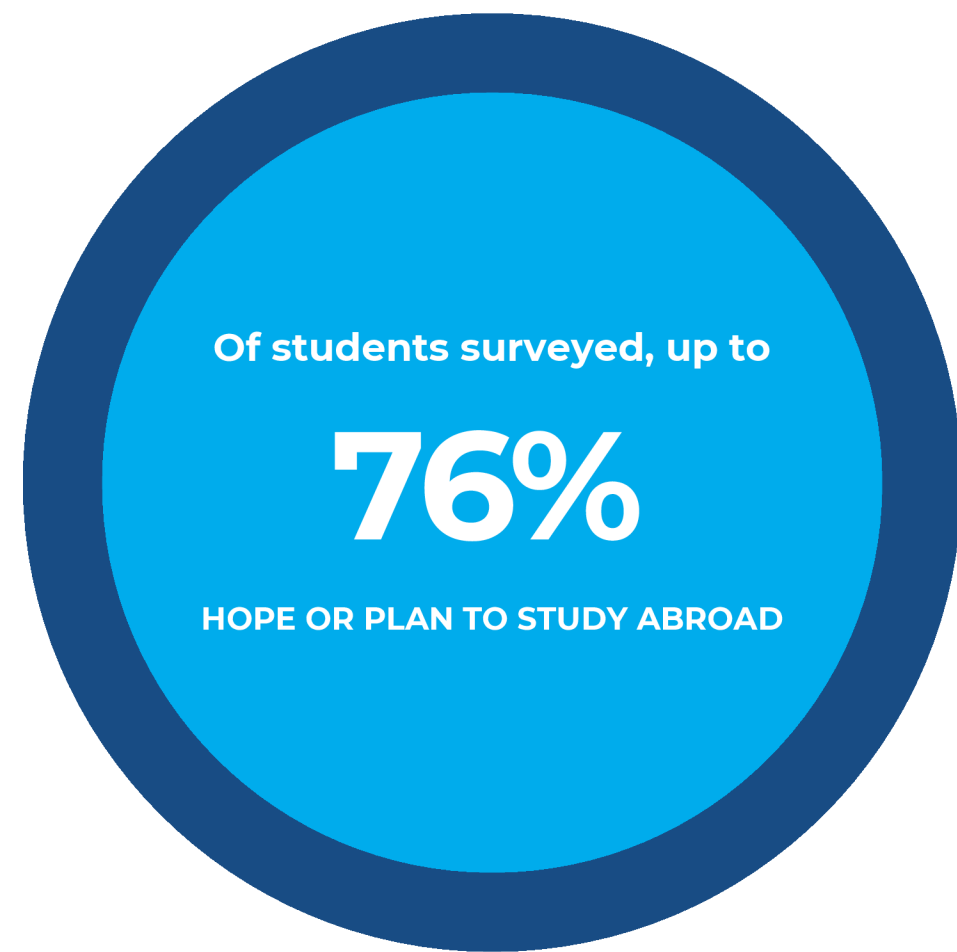
- **High Interest in Study Abroad for Personal Growth:** Interest in international education experiences remains high with up to 76% of U.S. college students surveyed saying they hope or plan to study abroad and more than 90% saying study abroad is important for their personal growth.
- **Preferred Destinations and Timing:** The United Kingdom emerges as the most popular destination, preferred by 41% of the students planning to study abroad. The majority (66%) plan to study abroad for the Spring 2026 semester, highlighting the need for schools' planning and resource allocation to accommodate this interest.
- **Program Costs and Funding:** The cost of study abroad is significant, however, with 43% of students expecting to spend between \$5,000 and \$10,000 on their study abroad experience. Many students (38%) plan to fund their international studies through financial aid and believe their university could be doing more to help students learn about financial aid for study abroad. Schools that offer more guidance and support in accessing financial resources could enhance participation rates.
- **Barriers to Participation:** The main reasons deterring students from study abroad include the high costs (48%) and a lack of information about programs (17%). Addressing these barriers could increase student participation in study abroad programs.
- **Concerns About Traveling Abroad:** While the survey reveals that the primary concerns preventing students from pursuing study abroad include cost (80%) and general safety concerns (44%), geopolitical issues such as wars, civil unrest, and terrorism (28%) are an increasing factor in 2025. When asked specifically about the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, three-quarters said it caused them to think about whether to study abroad.



2025 Key highlights

- **Early Study Abroad Interest and Decision Factors:** Many students (40%) develop an interest in studying abroad as early as high school, and for 35% of the respondents, the availability of study abroad programs influenced their decision on which college or university to attend. Promoting study abroad programs to prospective students could be a strategic and competitive move for higher education institutions to attract applicants.
- **Influence and Information Sources:** Social media, especially Instagram, is the top way students say they first learned about study abroad. Enhancing the online visibility and engagement of study abroad can be an effective strategy for institutions to promote the programs.
- **Recommendations for Improvement:** Students suggest that more accessible financial aid information (37%) and better alignment of programs with academic fields (29%) would make study abroad more accessible. Additionally, enhancing pre-departure briefings and improving communication could significantly improve student experiences.
- **Skills and Professional Development:** Students recognize the value of study abroad experiences for personal and professional growth, with a notable 93% considering it important or somewhat important. Skills such as adaptability, problem-solving, and cross-cultural communication are highlighted as key benefits, underscoring the role of these programs in preparing students for a global workforce.

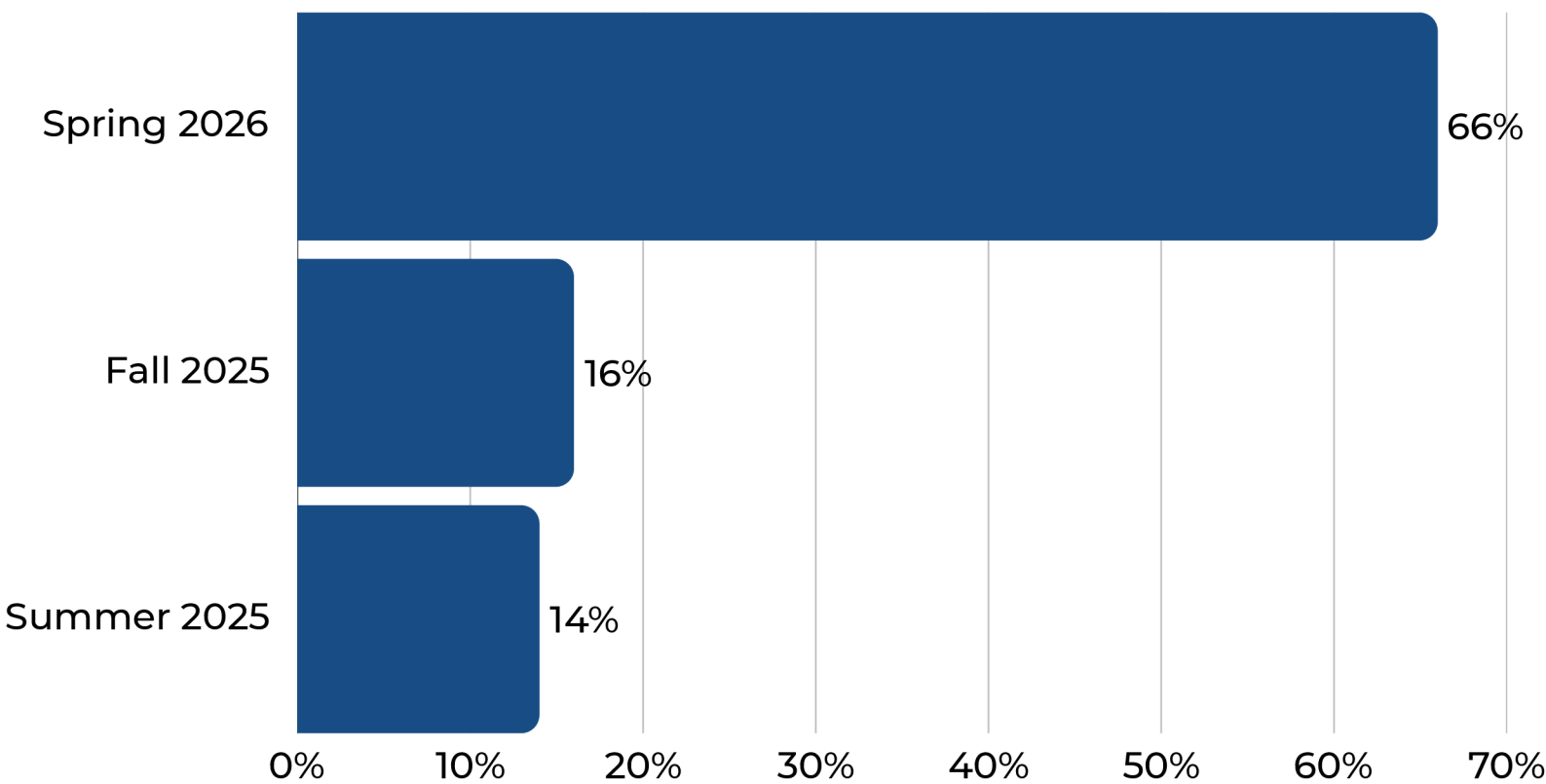
Are you hoping or planning to study abroad in the future?



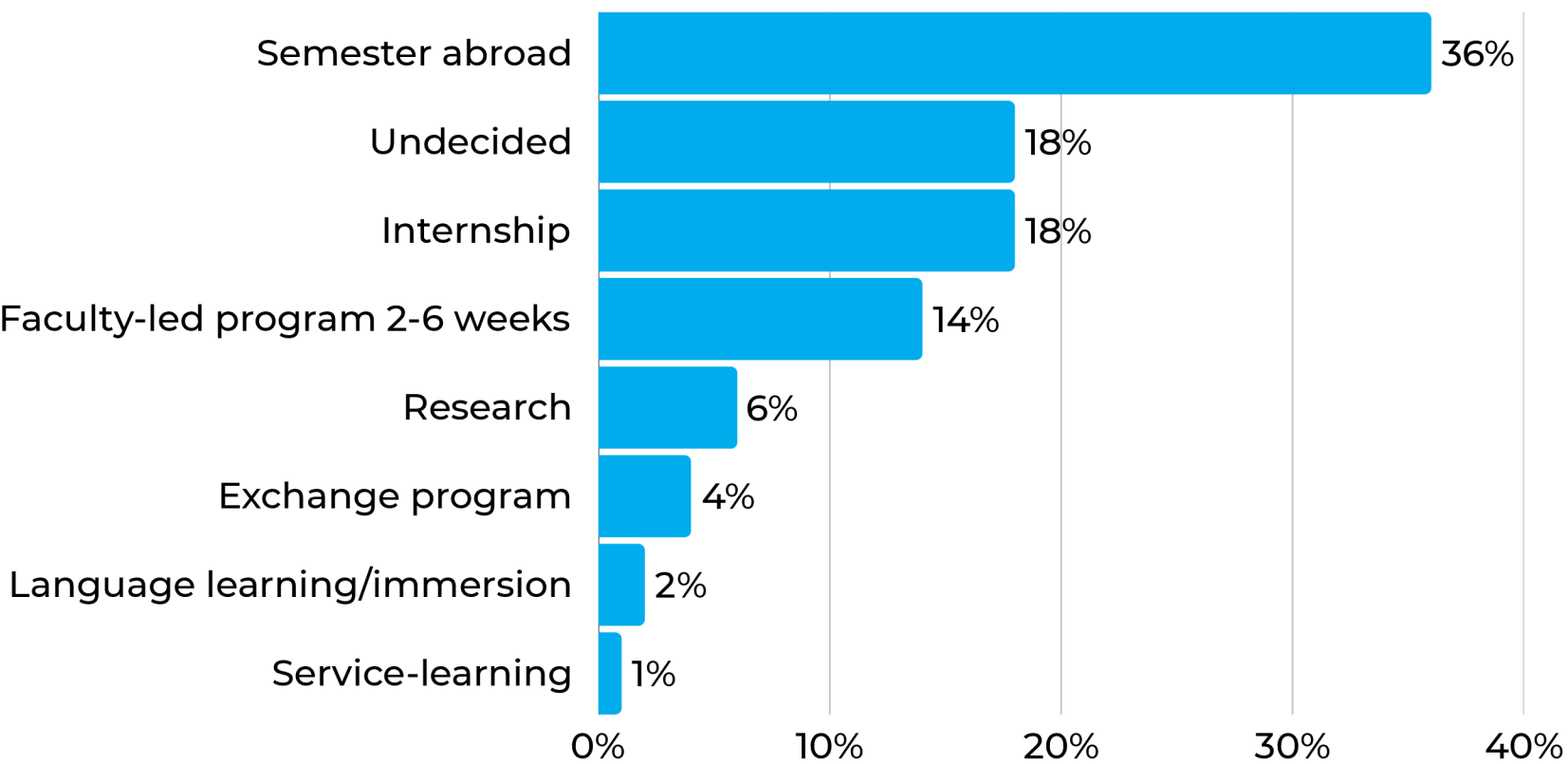
Semester-long Study Abroad is most popular

Most students are planning a semester abroad but 20% of students that want to study abroad are undecided about what kind of experience they are planning for, indicating an opportunity for schools to highlight the many programs available.

In what timeframe are you hoping or planning to Study Abroad?



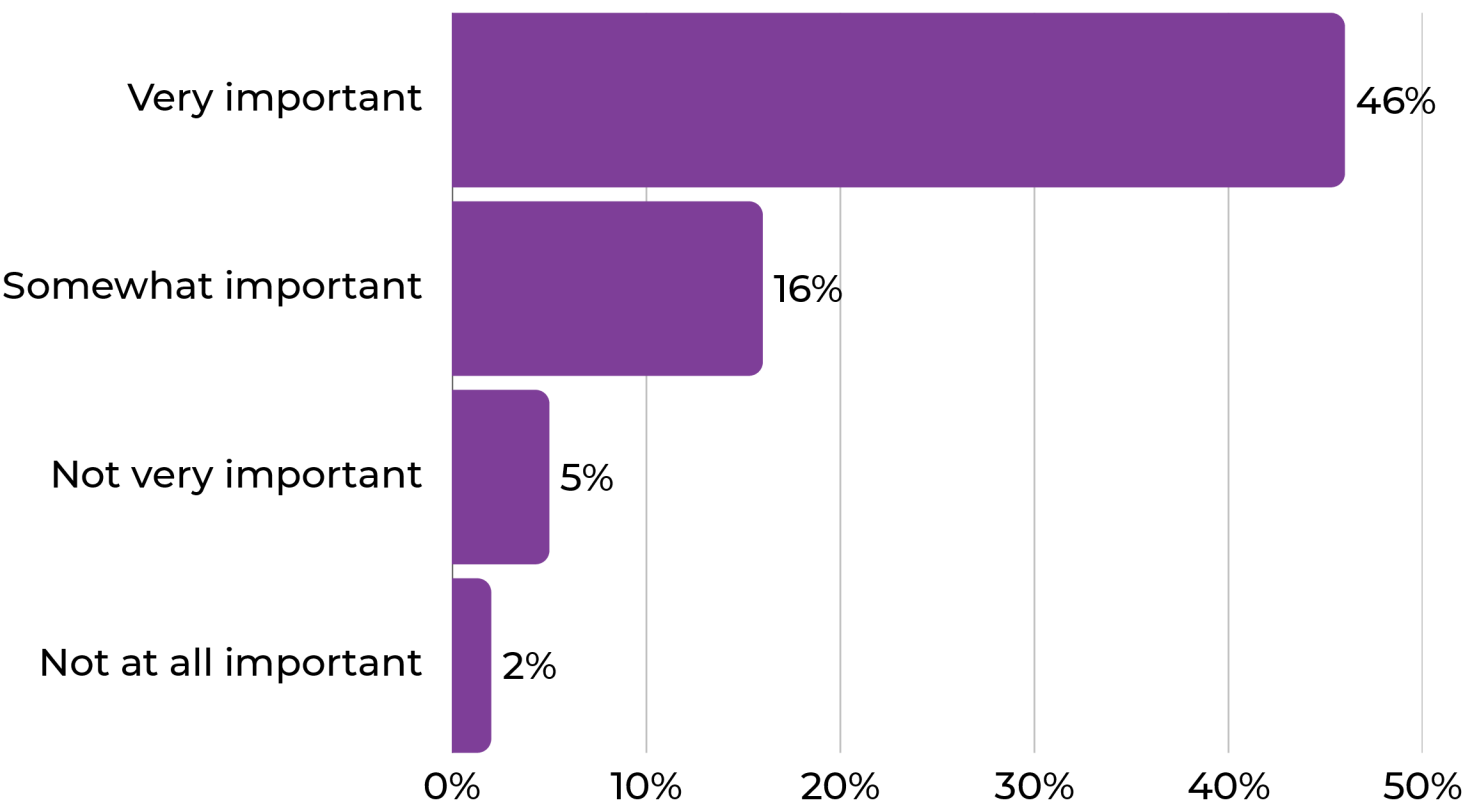
What kind of Study Abroad experience are you planning?



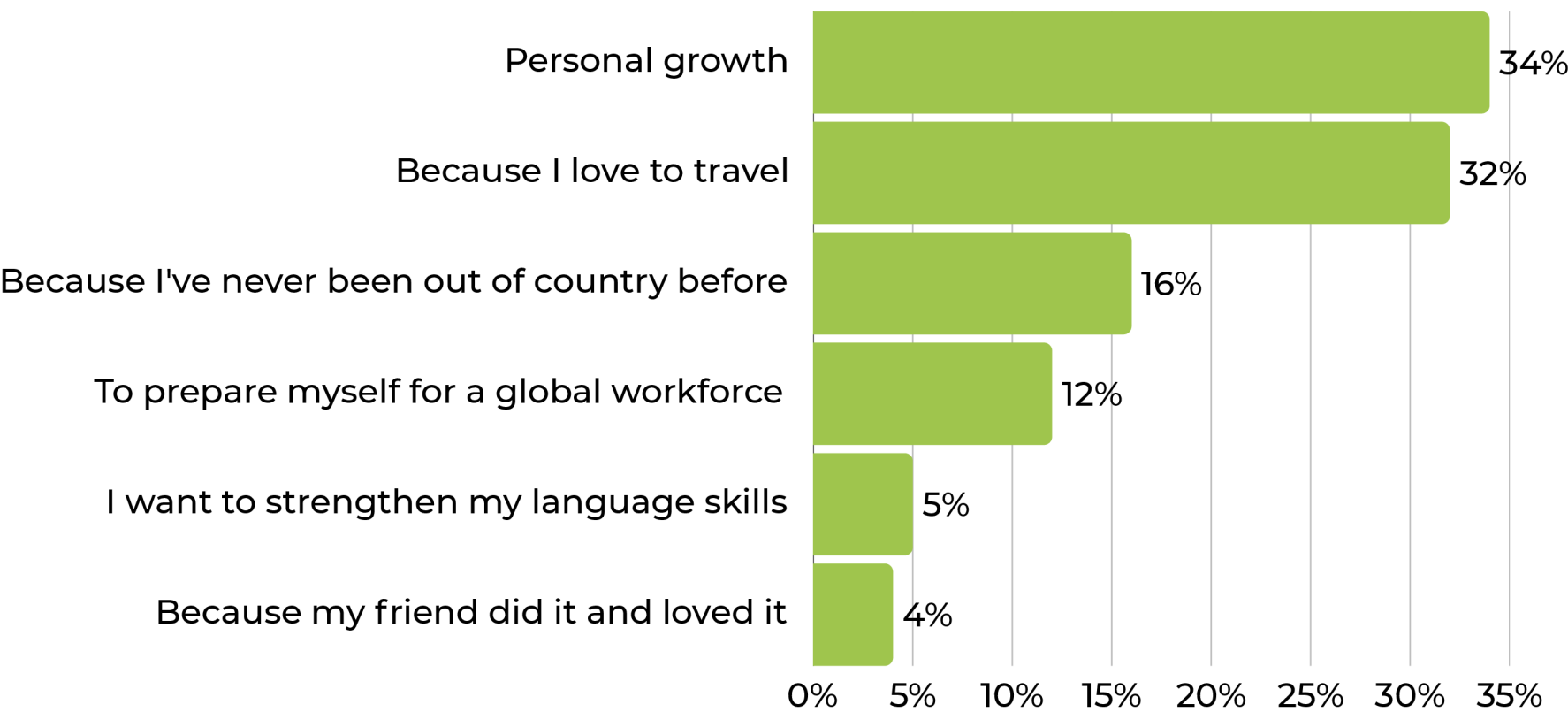
Students say study abroad is important growth opportunity

Nearly all of students say study abroad is important to personal and professional growth, and nearly 20% have never been out of the country.

How important do you think studying abroad is for your personal and professional development?



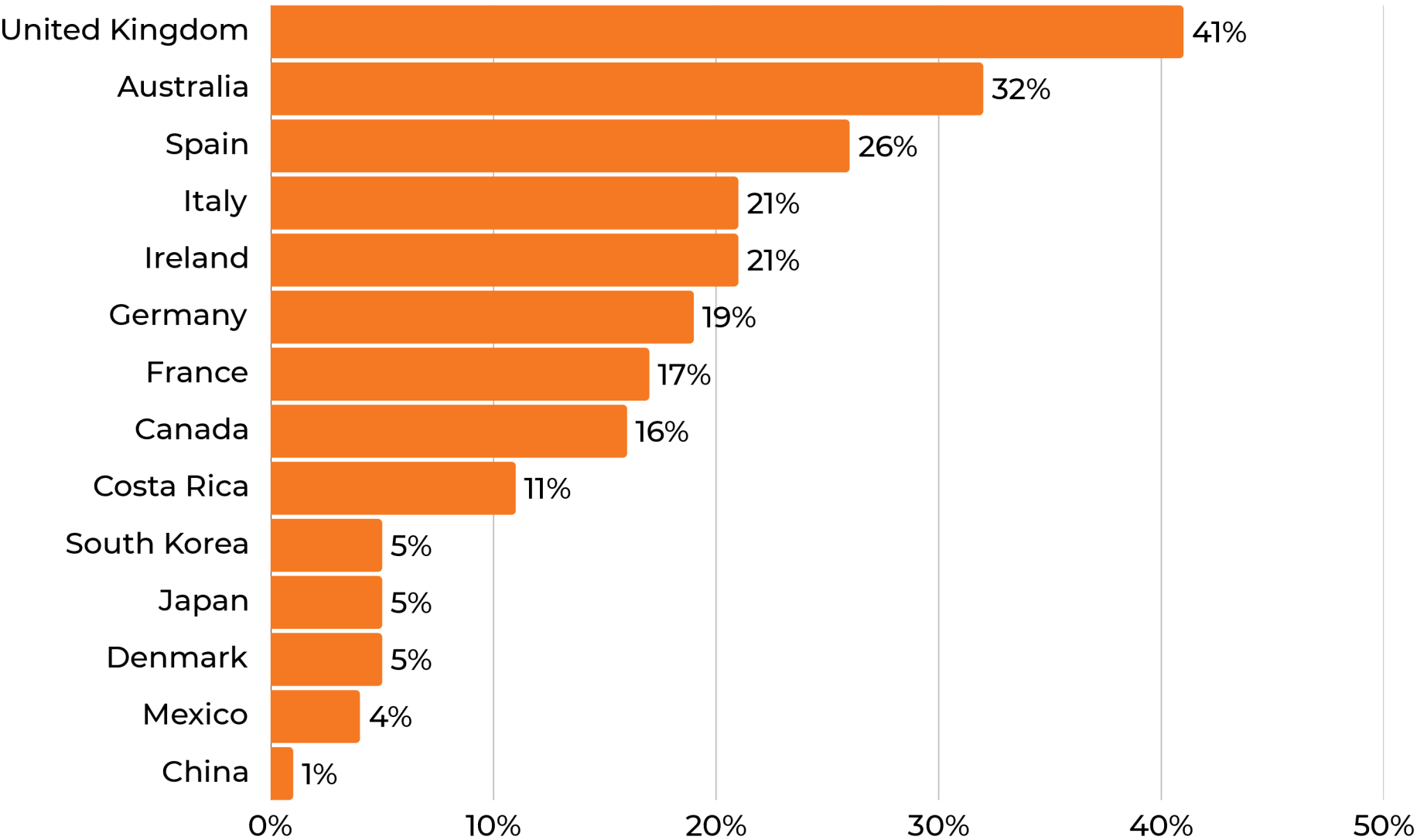
What is the primary reason you are interested in Study Abroad?



The UK is the most popular destination among students

Europe outpaces Australia, Canada, Latin America and Asia for study abroad interest, and the UK overtakes Italy, the top 2024 destination, as the most popular destination in 2025.

In what country are you planning to study abroad?



Source: Terra Dotta, Study Abroad Survey, Base: 170 college students.





Study abroad cost & funding

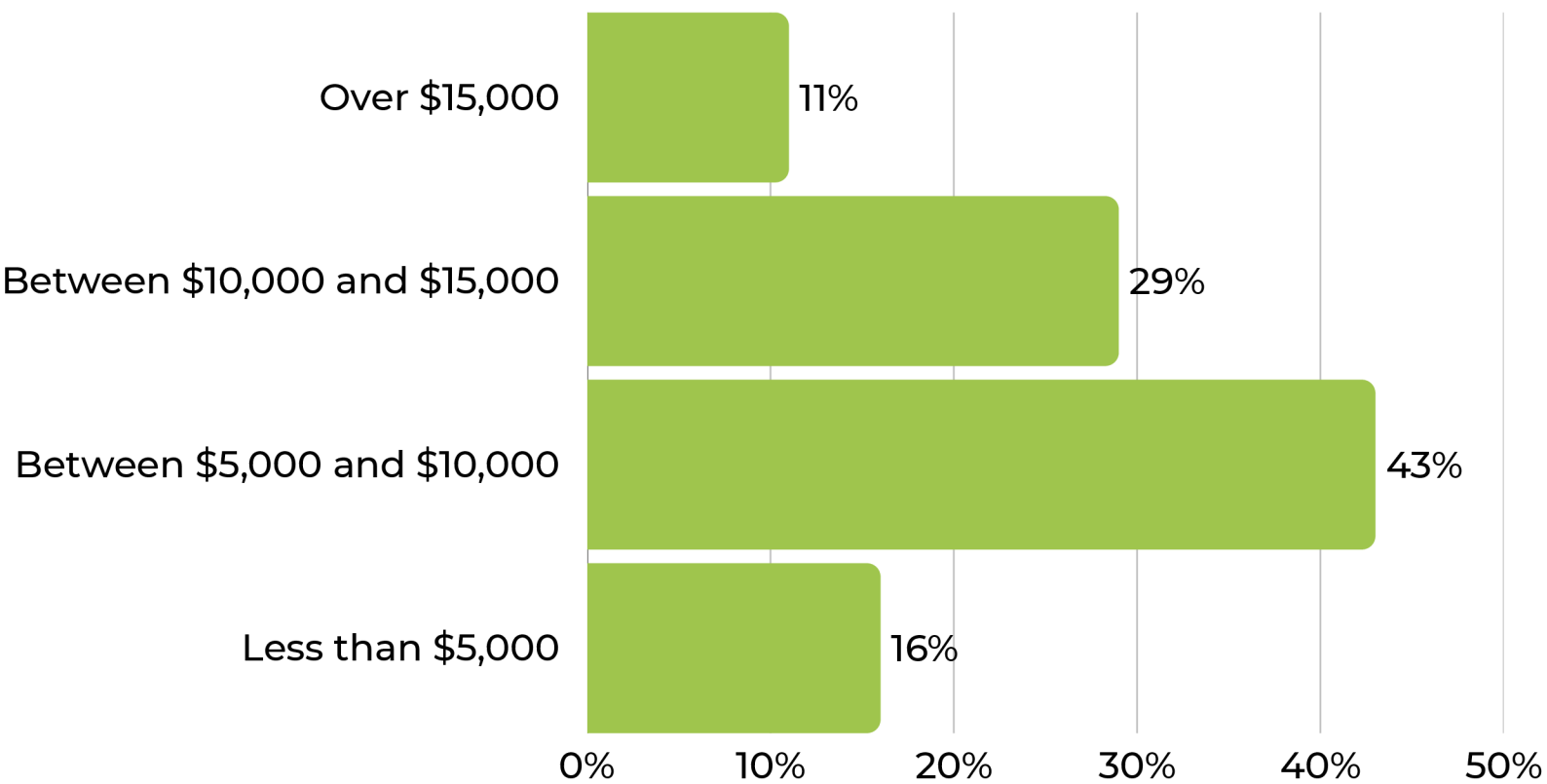
Cost is a major barrier to study abroad participation, with many students citing expense as a key deterrent. And with short-term expenses likely to increase, financial aid is crucial. Growing student demand for easier access to funding options highlights an opportunity for universities to improve study abroad participation as providing more financial aid information can drive higher engagement.

- The high cost of study abroad is preventing some students from participating, as nearly half indicate they are not hoping or planning to study abroad due to the expense.
- Study abroad is a pricey experience, with most students expecting to pay over \$5,000. Although financial aid opportunities remain the most popular method to pay for study abroad, 20% more students plan to pay for the trip themselves compared to 2024.
- Another possibility for schools to improve study abroad participation is through financial aid access and information. Compared to last edition, 50% more students want easier financial aid access.

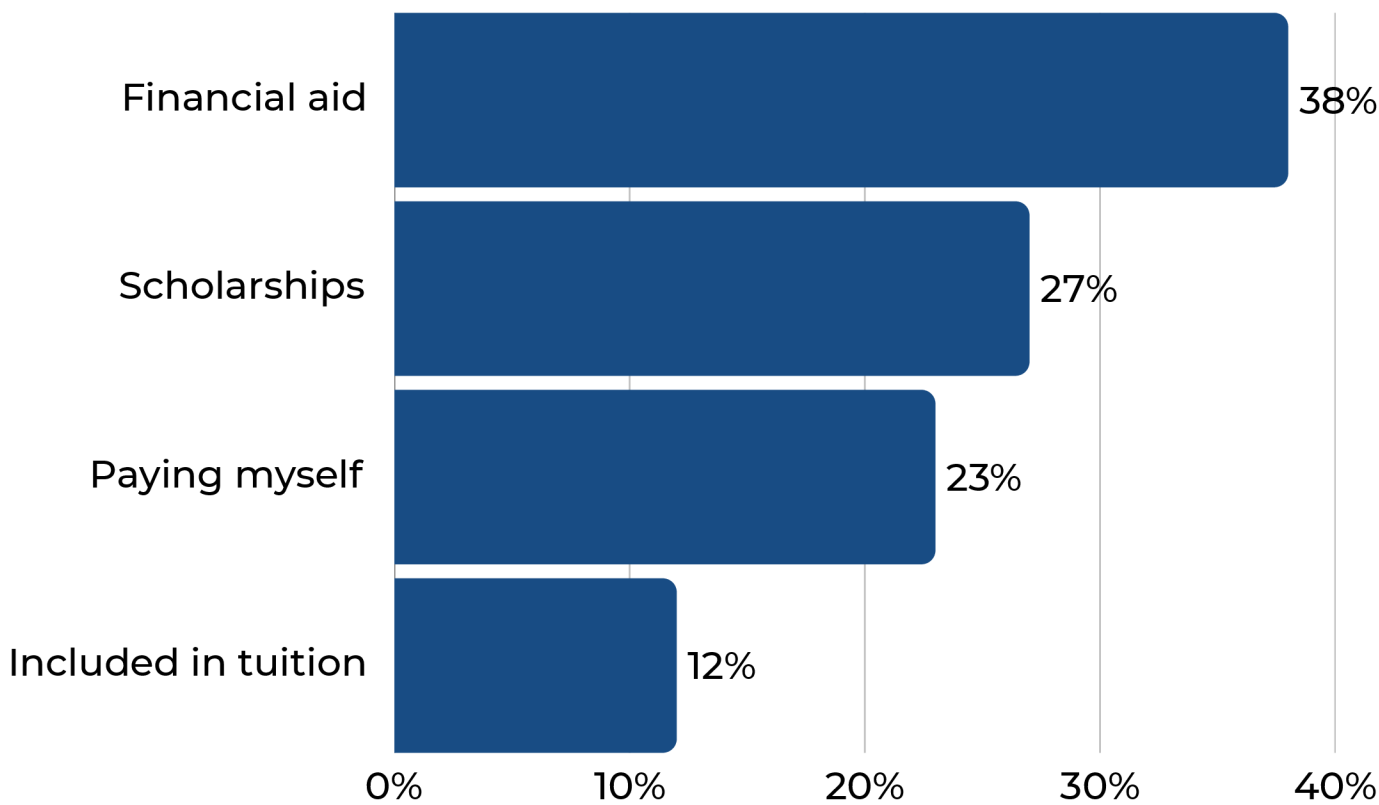
Most students plan to fund study abroad with financial aid

More students are self funding study abroad. There is a 20% increase in students saying they plan to pay for study abroad themselves in 2025 vs 2024.

When you consider the tuition, housing, airfare, and other expenses, how much is your study abroad program going to cost/did it cost you?



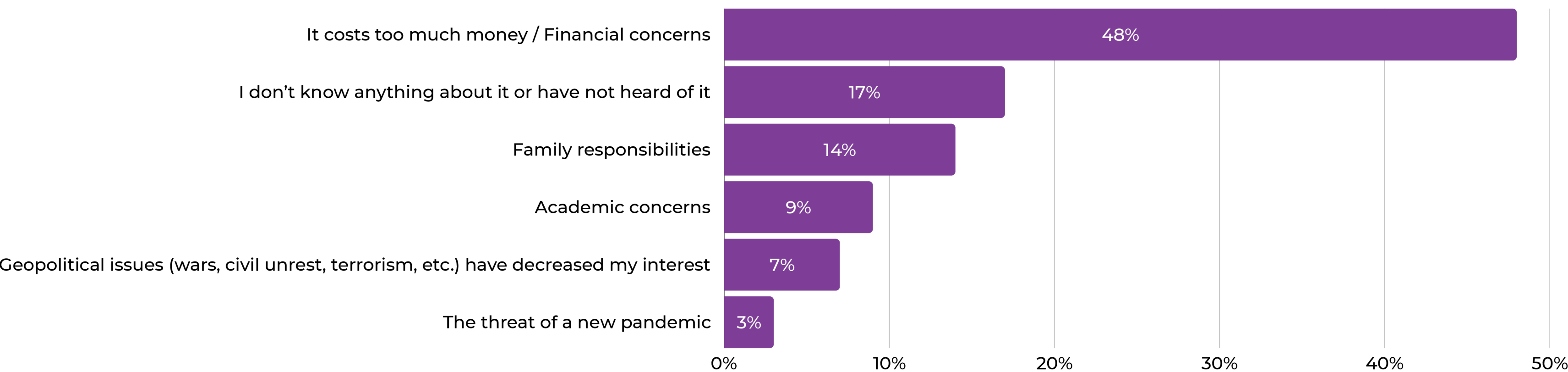
How did you/do you plan to pay for your study abroad experience?



Cost and family responsibilities limit study abroad participation

Nearly 20% of students interested in study abroad say they don't know anything about – or have not heard of – study abroad, indicating an opportunity for schools to reach more students.

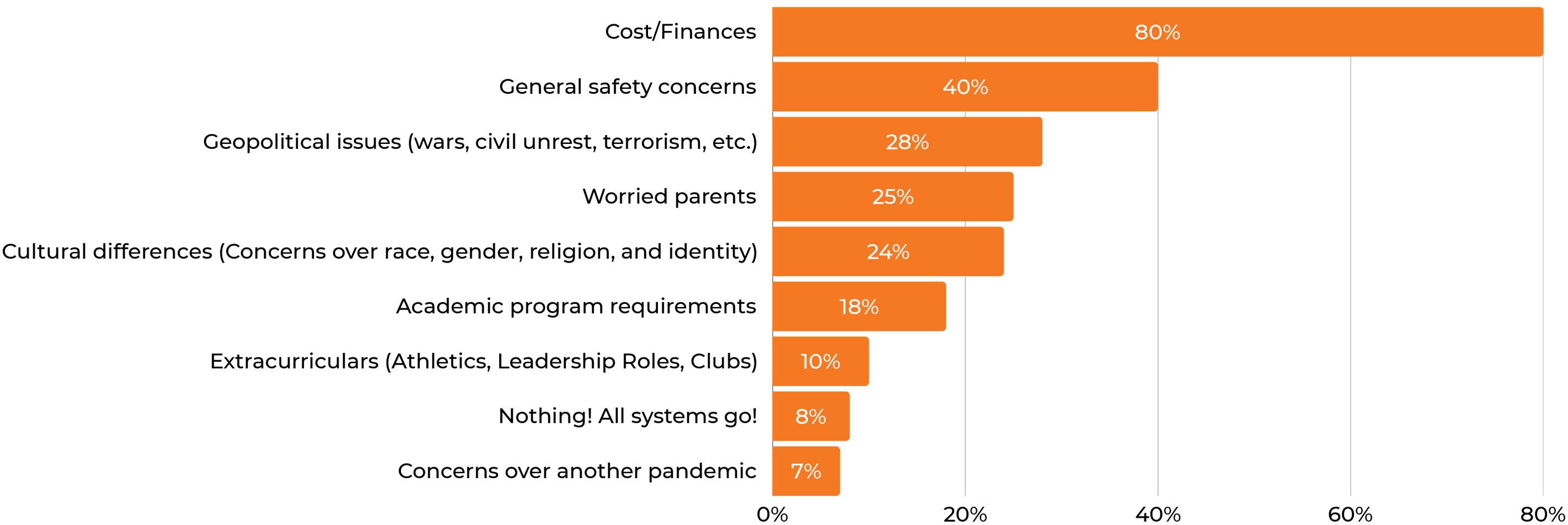
Why are you not hoping or planning to study abroad?



Cost, safety and geopolitical issues impact study abroad

The Top 3 things that students say would prevent them from study abroad are Cost, Safety and Geopolitical Issues, and all have increased since 2024.

Generally speaking, what would prevent you from traveling for Study Abroad?
(Please select up to 3 reasons.)

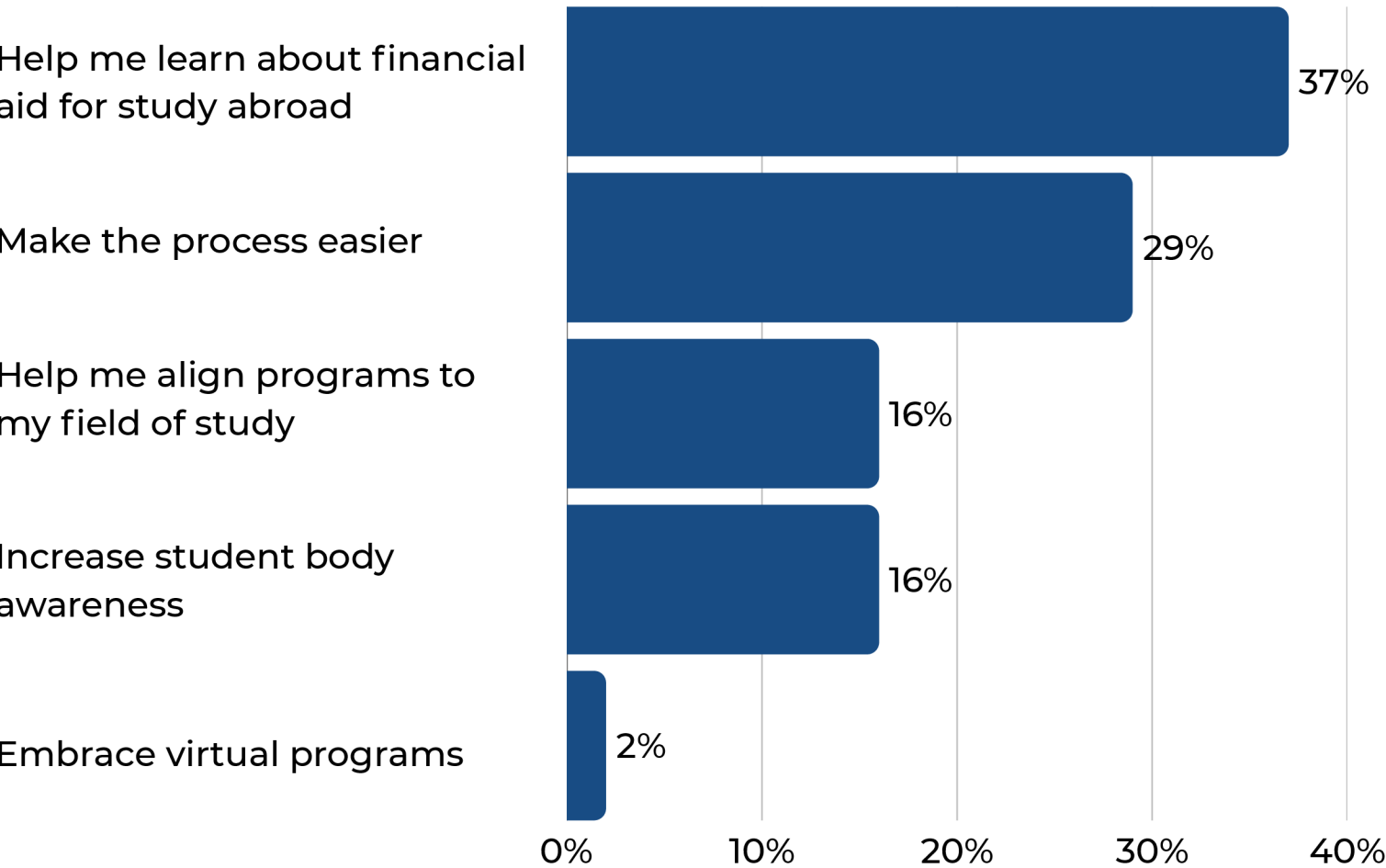


76% of students said events like the wars in Ukraine and Israel/Gaza impact their interest in going abroad.

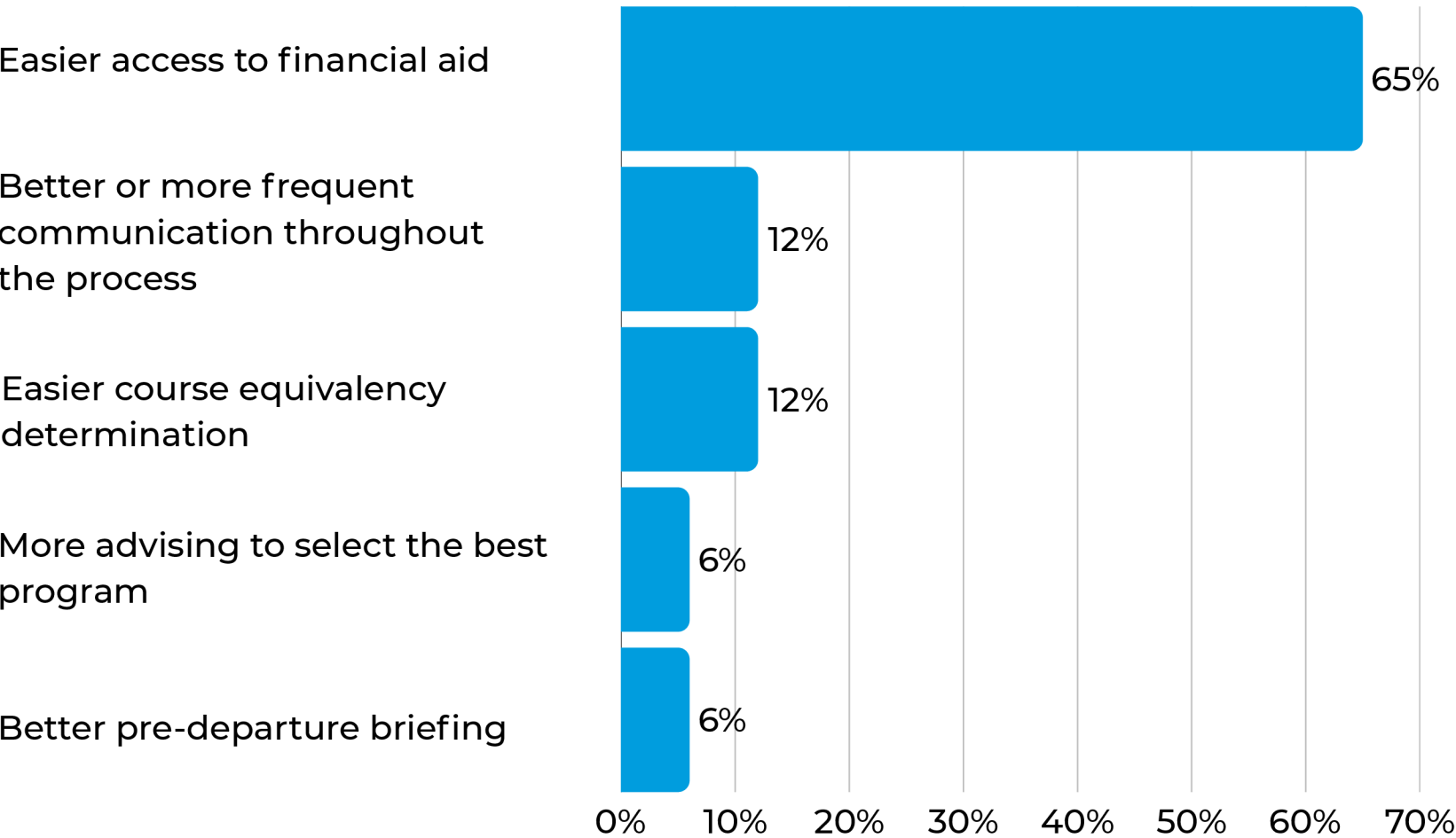
Financial aid info can make programs more accessible

In 2025, more students report wanting easier access to financial aid, a 50% increase since 2024.

What is the top action your institution could do to make study abroad experiences accessible to more people?



If you could give one piece of advice to your home university to improve the experience for study abroad students in the future, what would it be?





Learning about study abroad

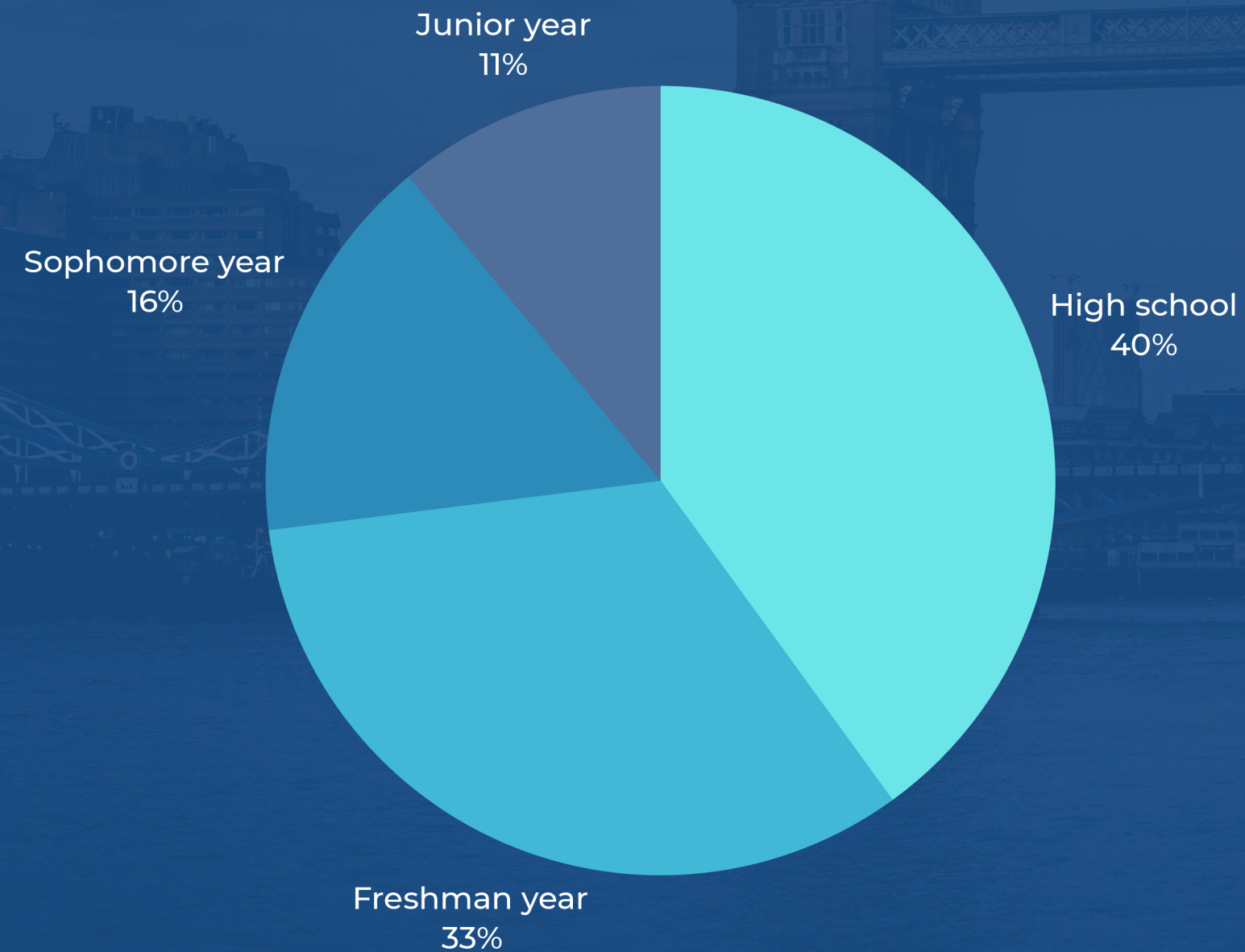
Study abroad programs can be a major factor in college selection decisions. Given the looming enrollment cliff, schools that raise awareness of study abroad can attract more students, particularly those early in their academic journey. Highlighting study abroad opportunities also enhances a university's global appeal and competitive edge.

- Study abroad planning starts early, with three-quarters of students interested in study abroad showing interest by sophomore year. Nearly 80% of students say they looked into study abroad prior to making their college enrollment decisions. This means study abroad can be a huge enrollment driver for universities.
- Most students discover study abroad as a possibility through social media – with half learning about it through Instagram.
- An emerging barrier of participation is knowledge about programs. Almost 20% of students say they know nothing about study abroad or have never heard of it, revealing an opportunity for schools to reach more students.
- As for university provided information, nearly half of students go to the university website for more information about their school's programs.

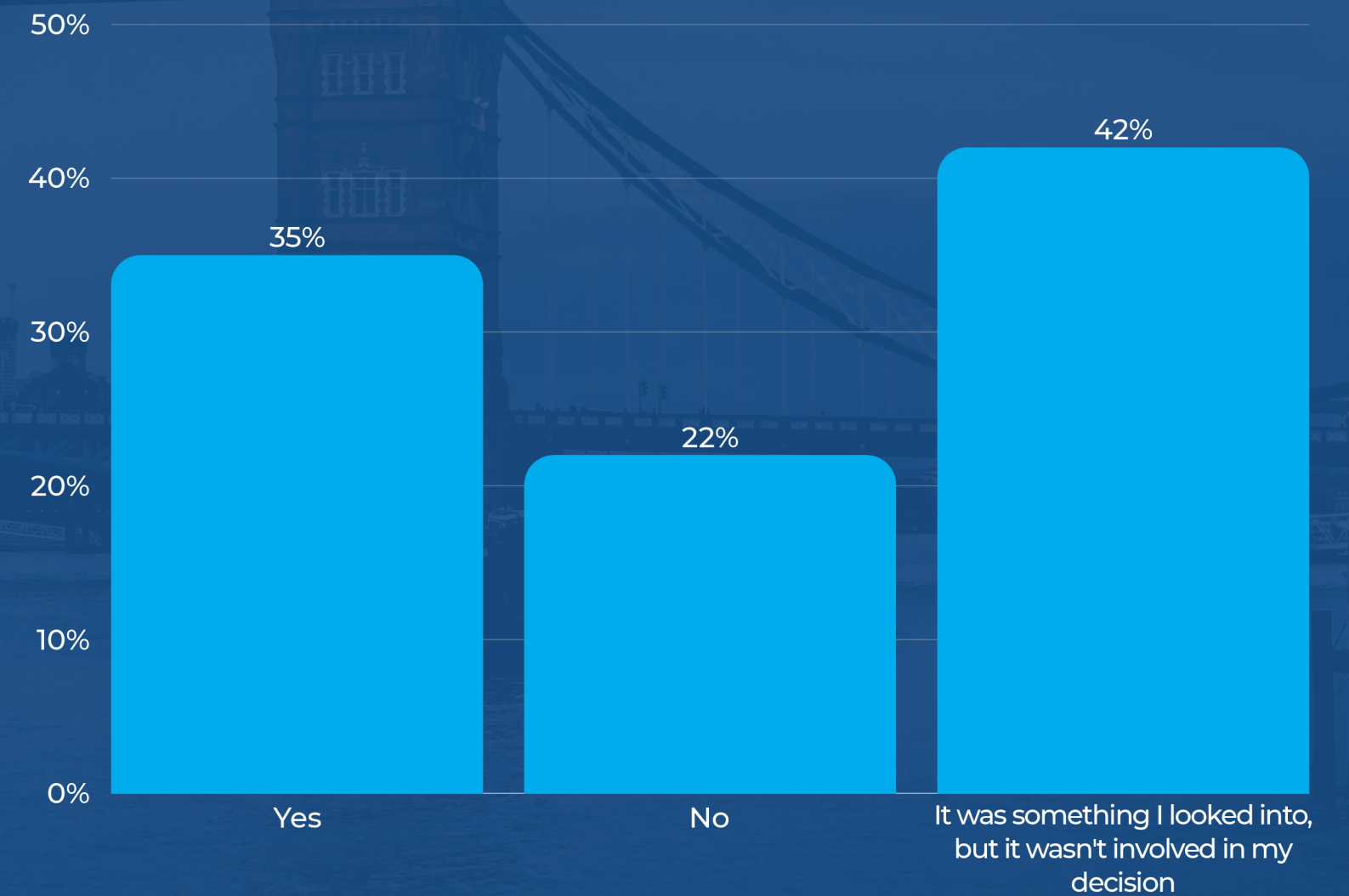
Interest in study abroad starts early, plays a role in school selection

Three-quarters of U.S. college students are interested in study abroad by Sophomore year. In 2025, 77% of students say they considered study abroad as part of their college selections.

When did you first get interested in study abroad programs?



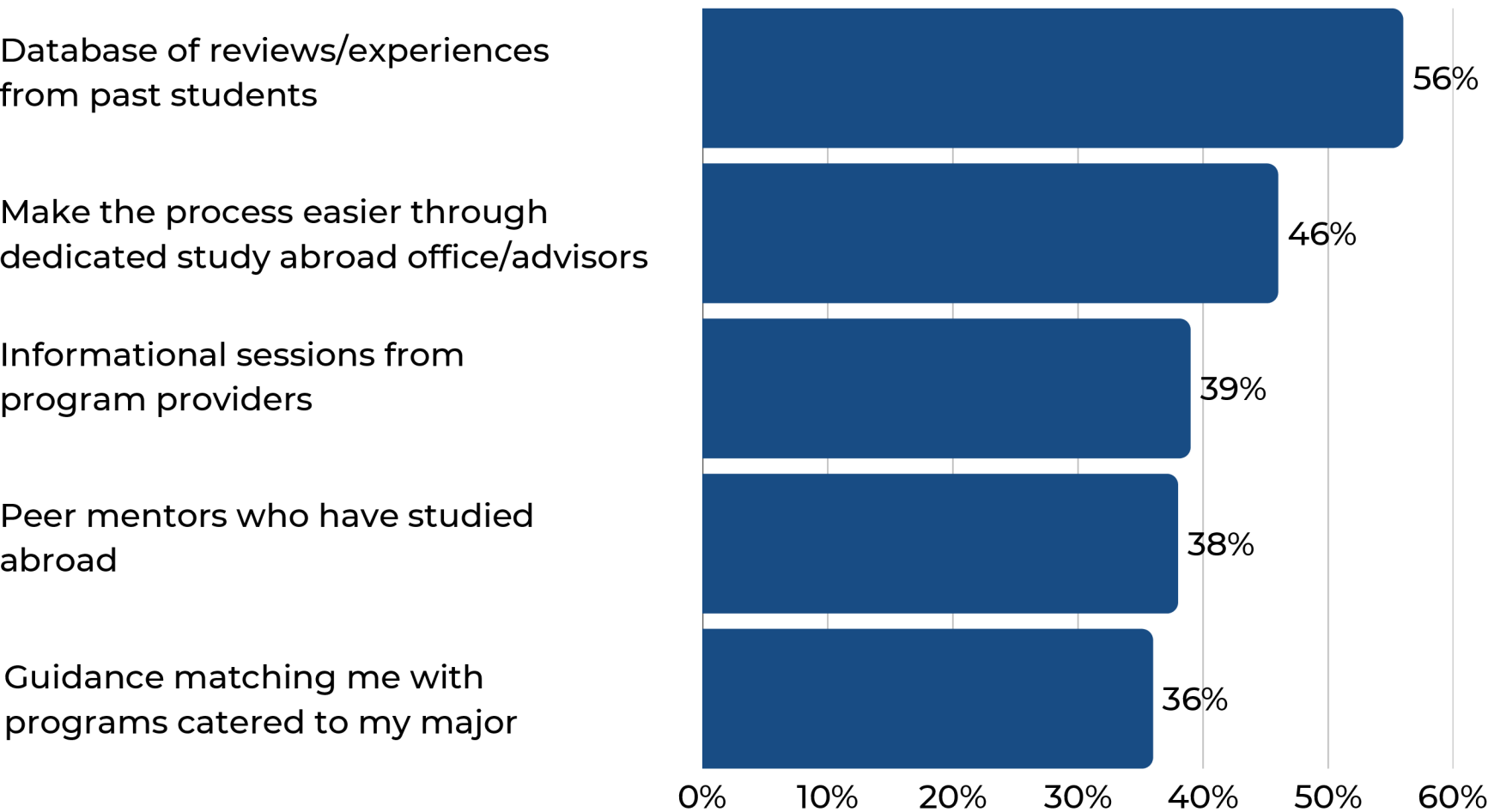
When looking at colleges and universities, did an institution's study abroad programs and/or support play a role in your decision to attend?



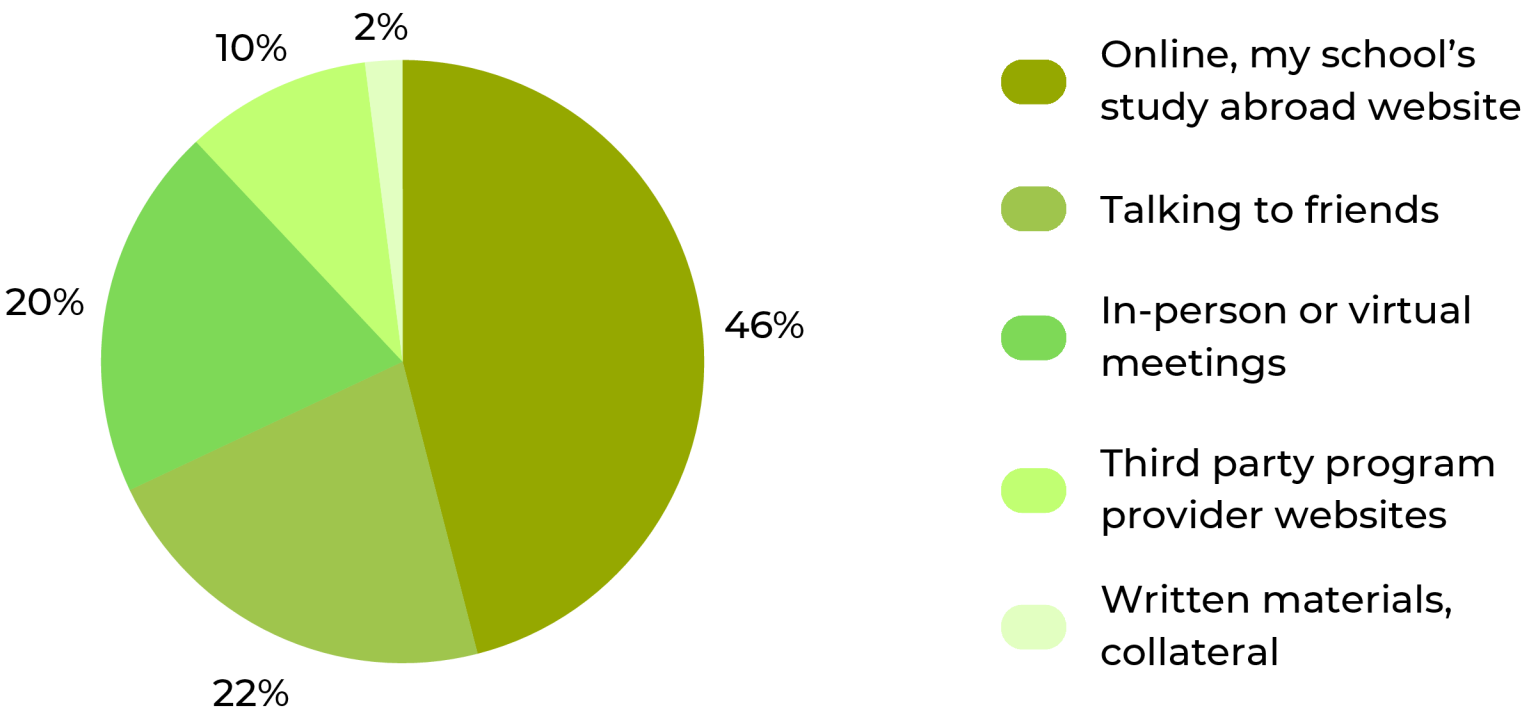
Students want more program reviews & study abroad advisors

Colleges and universities' dedicated study abroad websites are crucial to communicating programs, opportunities, criteria and costs. More students want schools to add a database of reviews to help inform program decisions.

What additional resources would have been most useful to have from your home university when selecting a program? (Please select all that apply.)



Where do you find most of your information about your institution's study abroad programs?





Communication

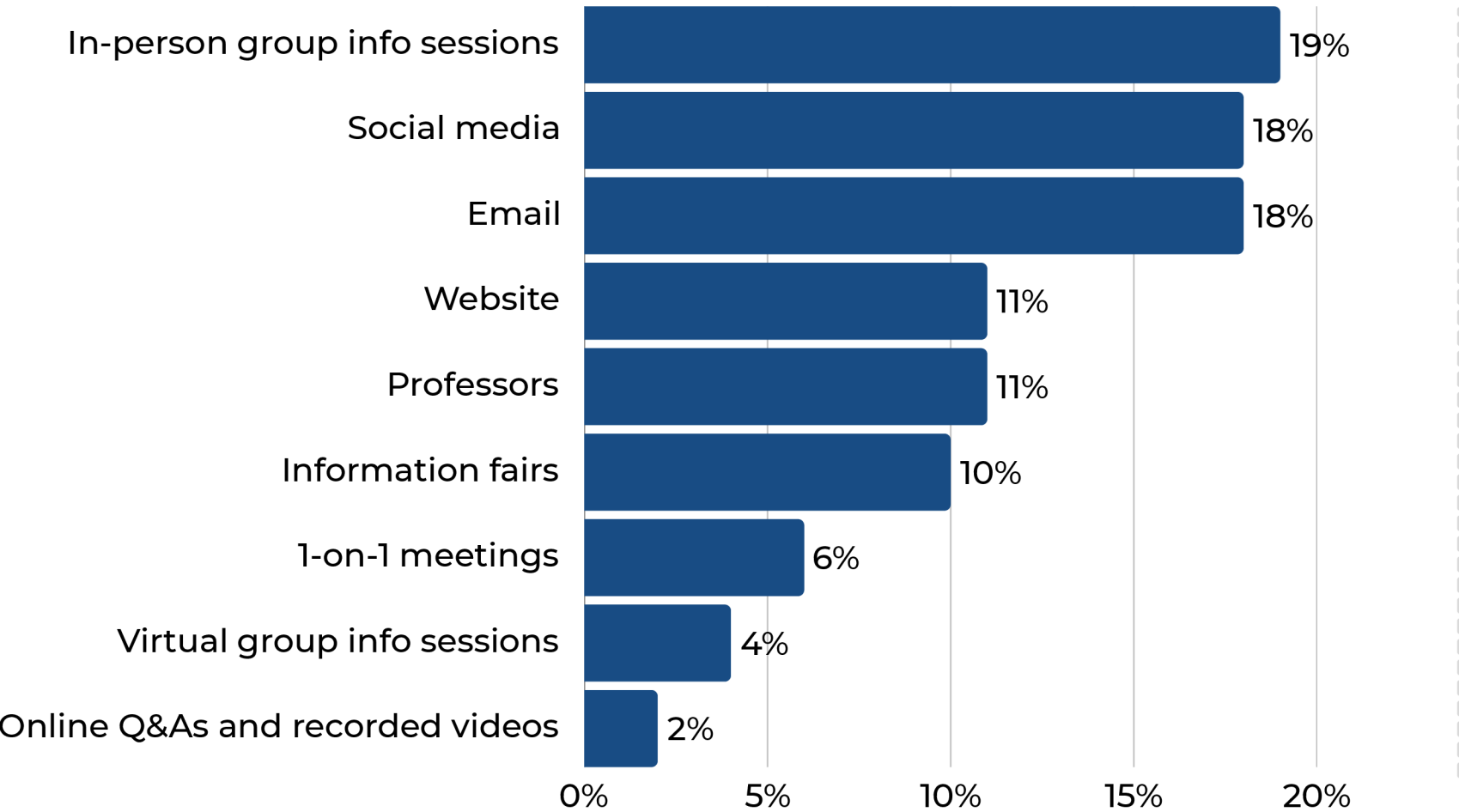
Effective communication about study abroad is key – both for promoting opportunities, engaging students in the application and pre-departure processes – as well as while they are abroad. Students prefer email for information but also engage with in-person sessions and social media. While there's room to improve, universities are successfully educating students about key details like credit transfer and financial aid. Staying connected with students abroad is essential.

- Although students strongly prefer email communication from the study abroad office, in person sessions, social media and email are all popular to promote study abroad options.
- Most students report they feel at least somewhat informed about study abroad details including the credit transfer process, financial aid and tuition management, and how to fulfill their degree requirements. While there is room for improvement, schools are doing a good job of educating students on the process.
- During their program, many students plan to stay connected with their school through email, while they primarily plan to connect with their parents through phone calls and text messages.

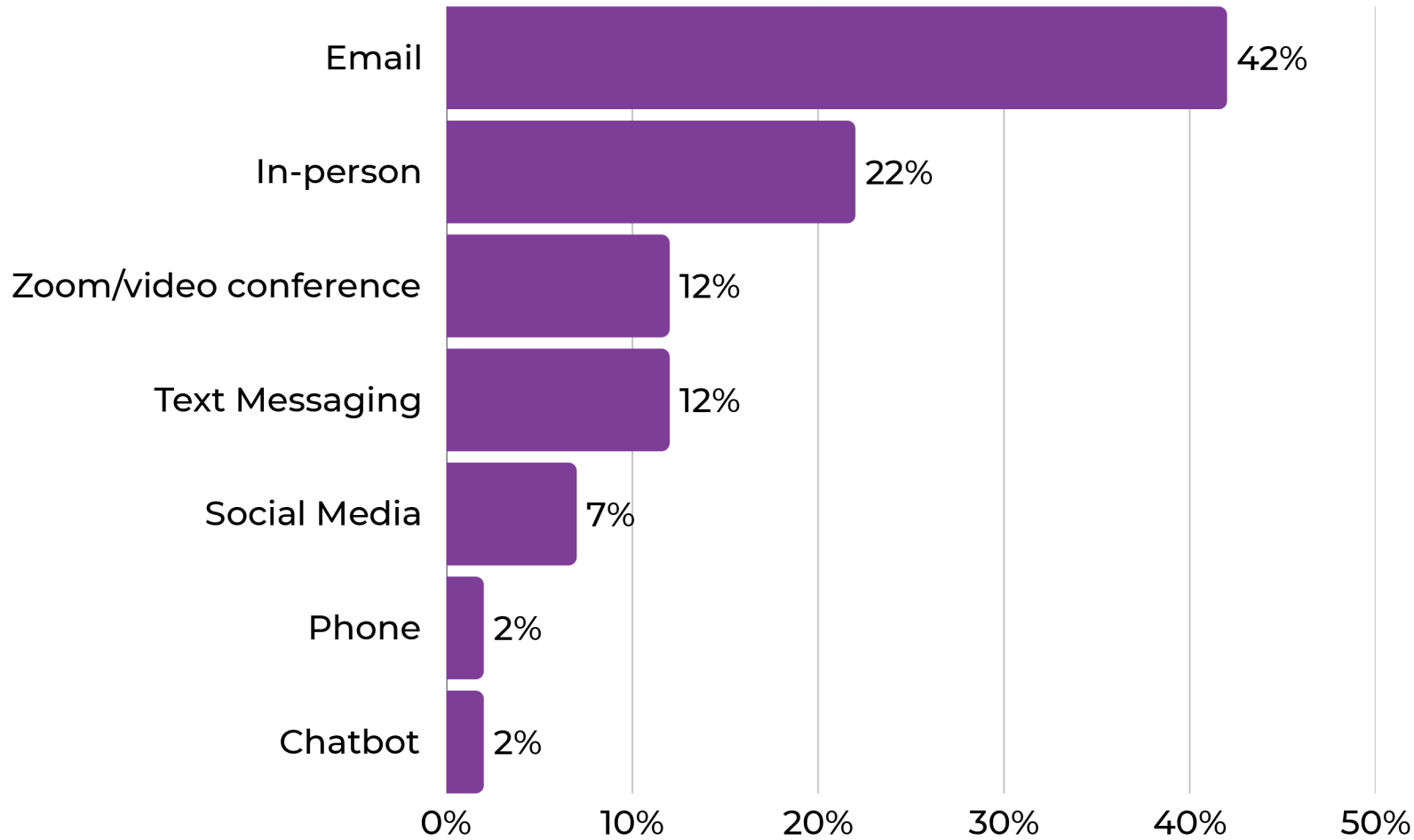
Students' communication preferences

In-person sessions, social media, and email are students' top sources for learning about study abroad opportunities. For ongoing communication, email reigns supreme.

What is the best way for your college to promote study abroad program ideas, options, and availability?



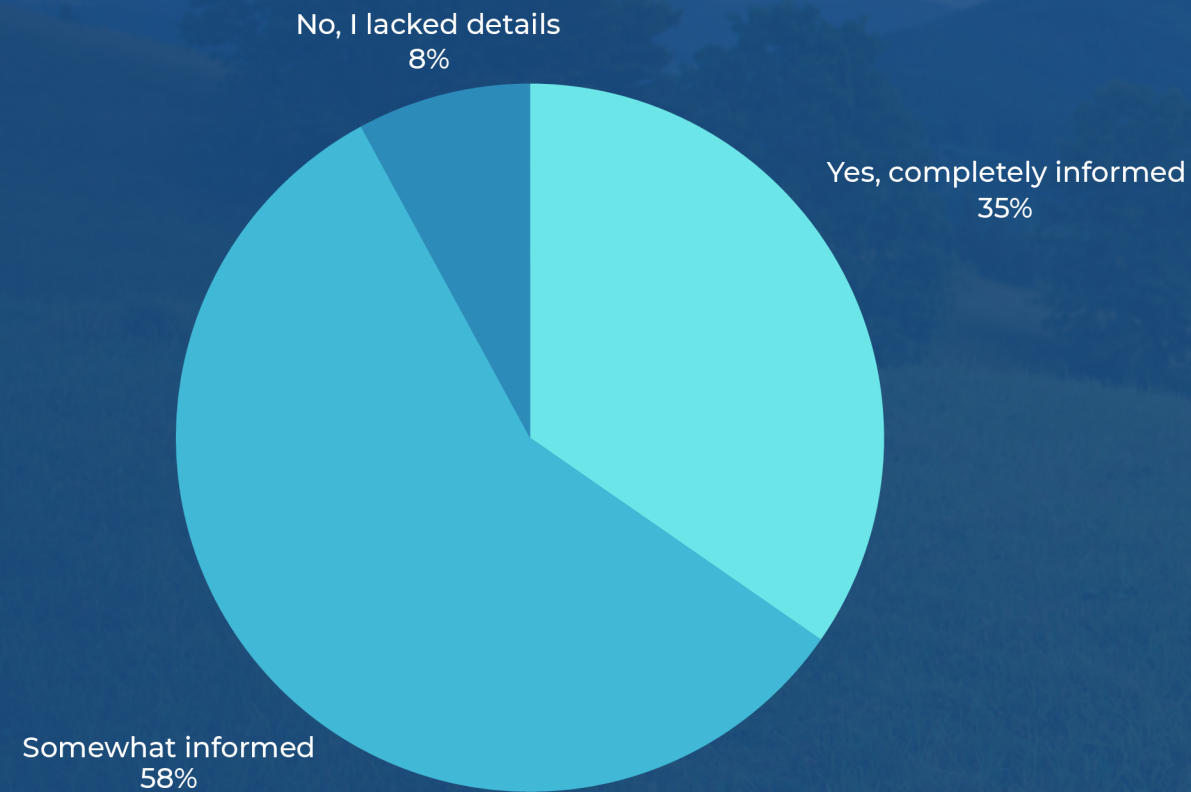
What is your preferred mode for ongoing communication with your study abroad office?



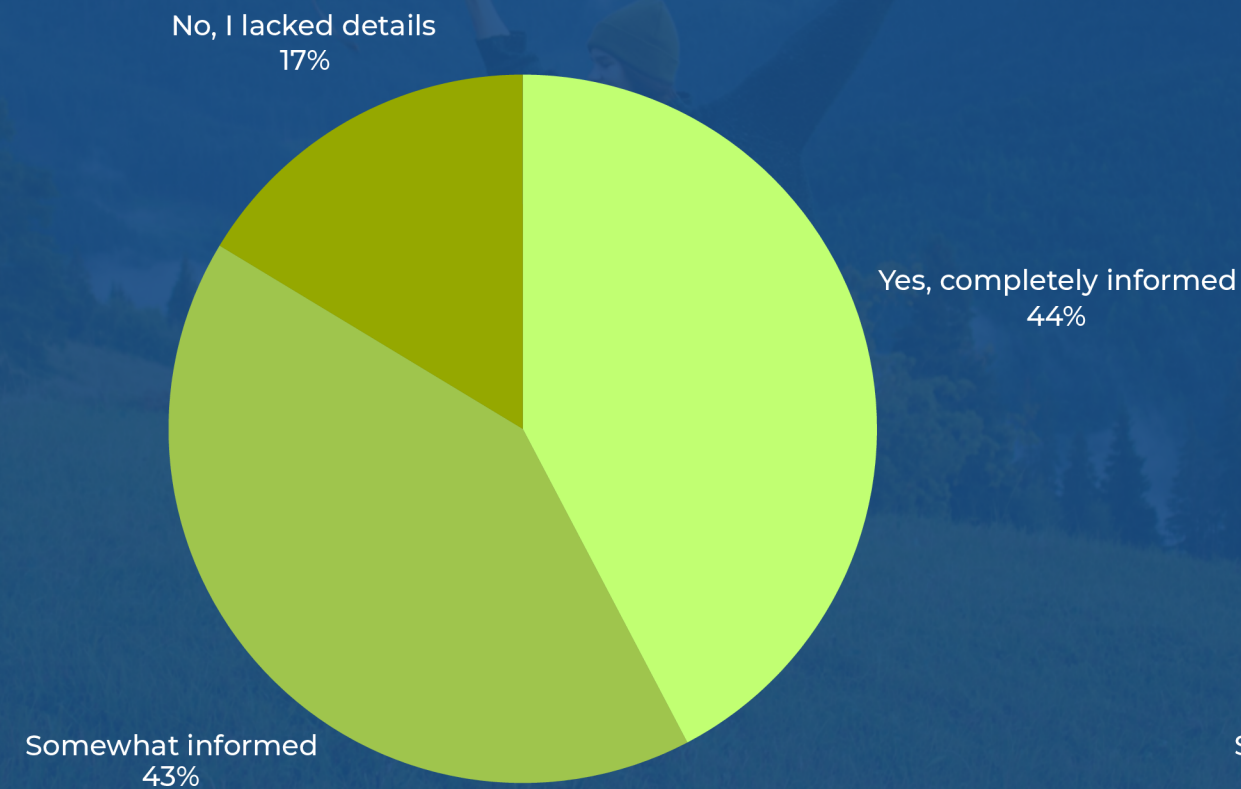
Most students feel informed about study abroad details

Did you feel fully informed by your university about...

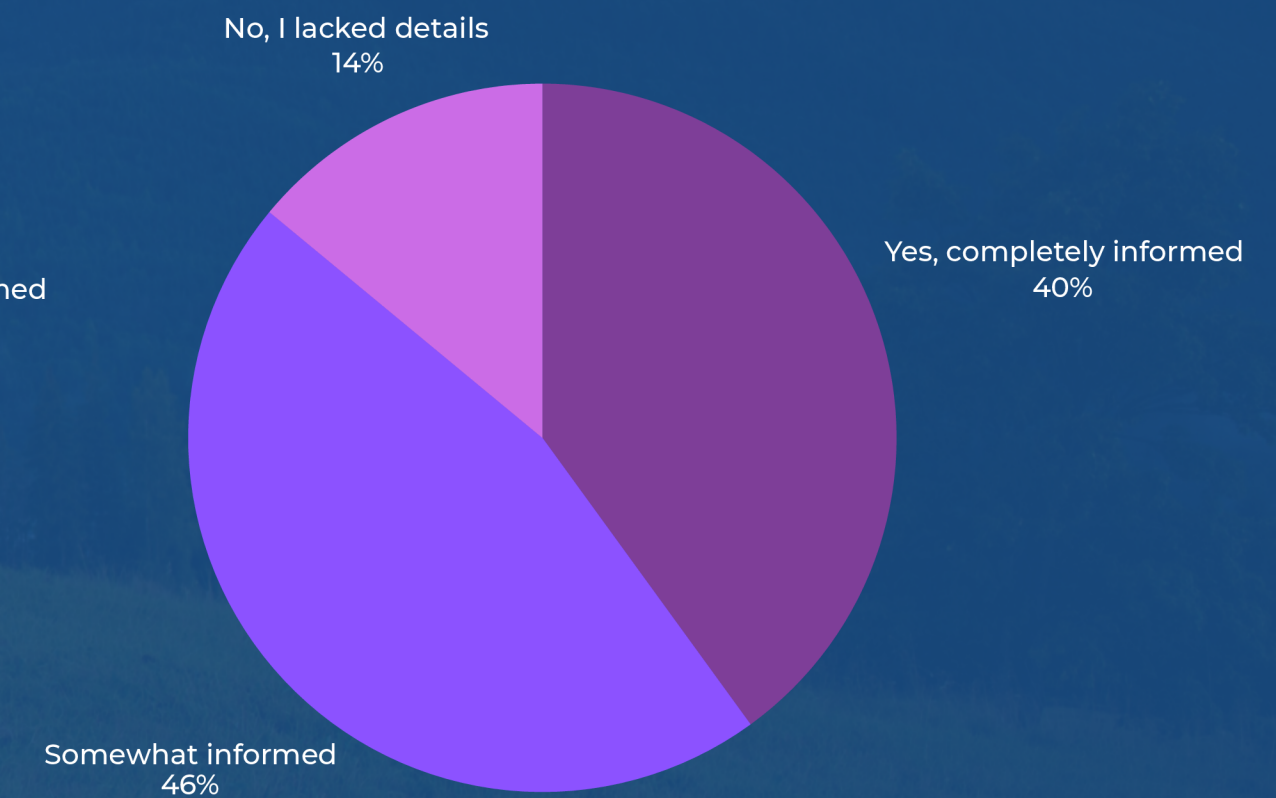
...transferring credits?



...fulfilling requirements to make sure time spent abroad will align with your individual degree and major requirements?



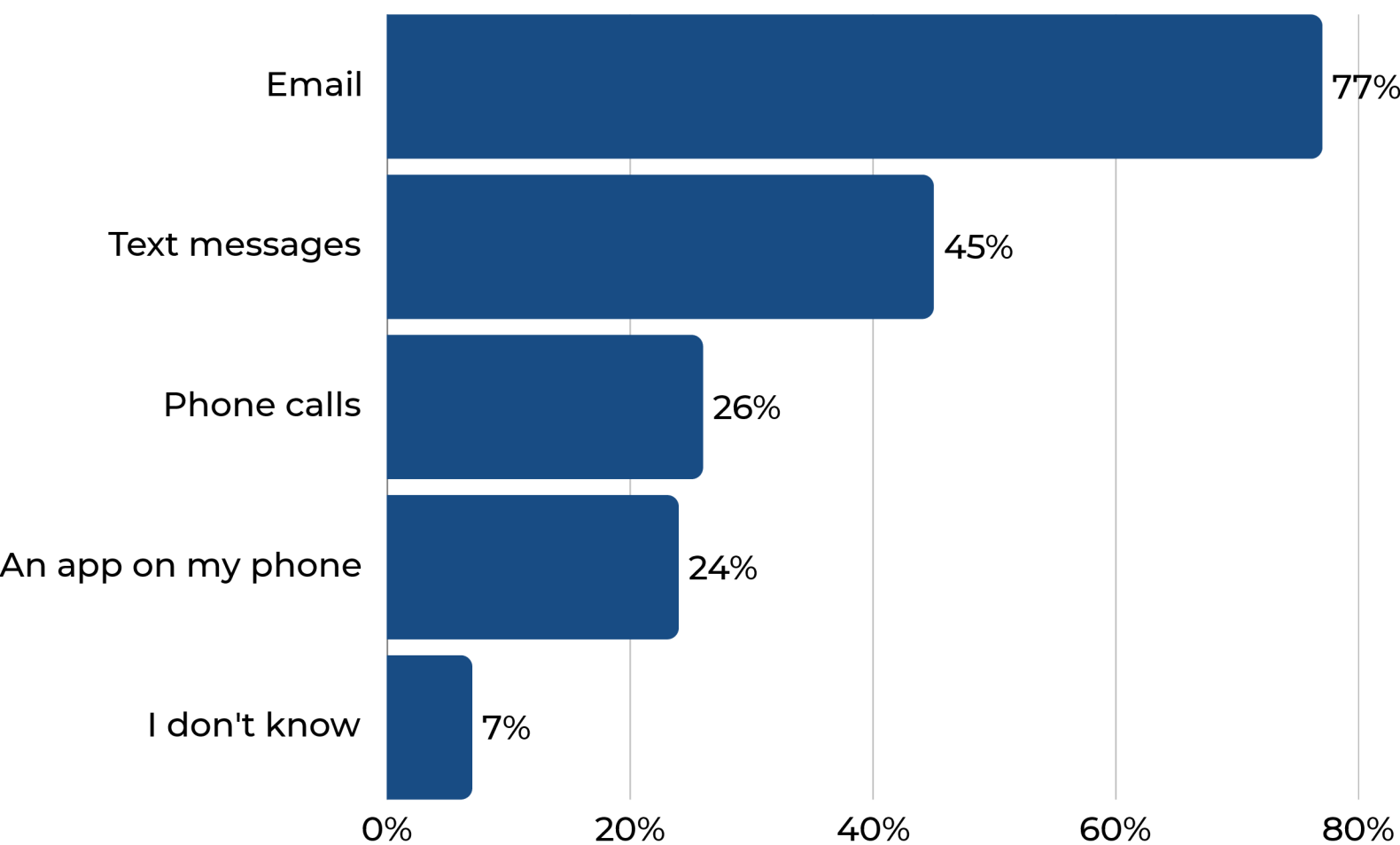
...managing tuition/financial aid?



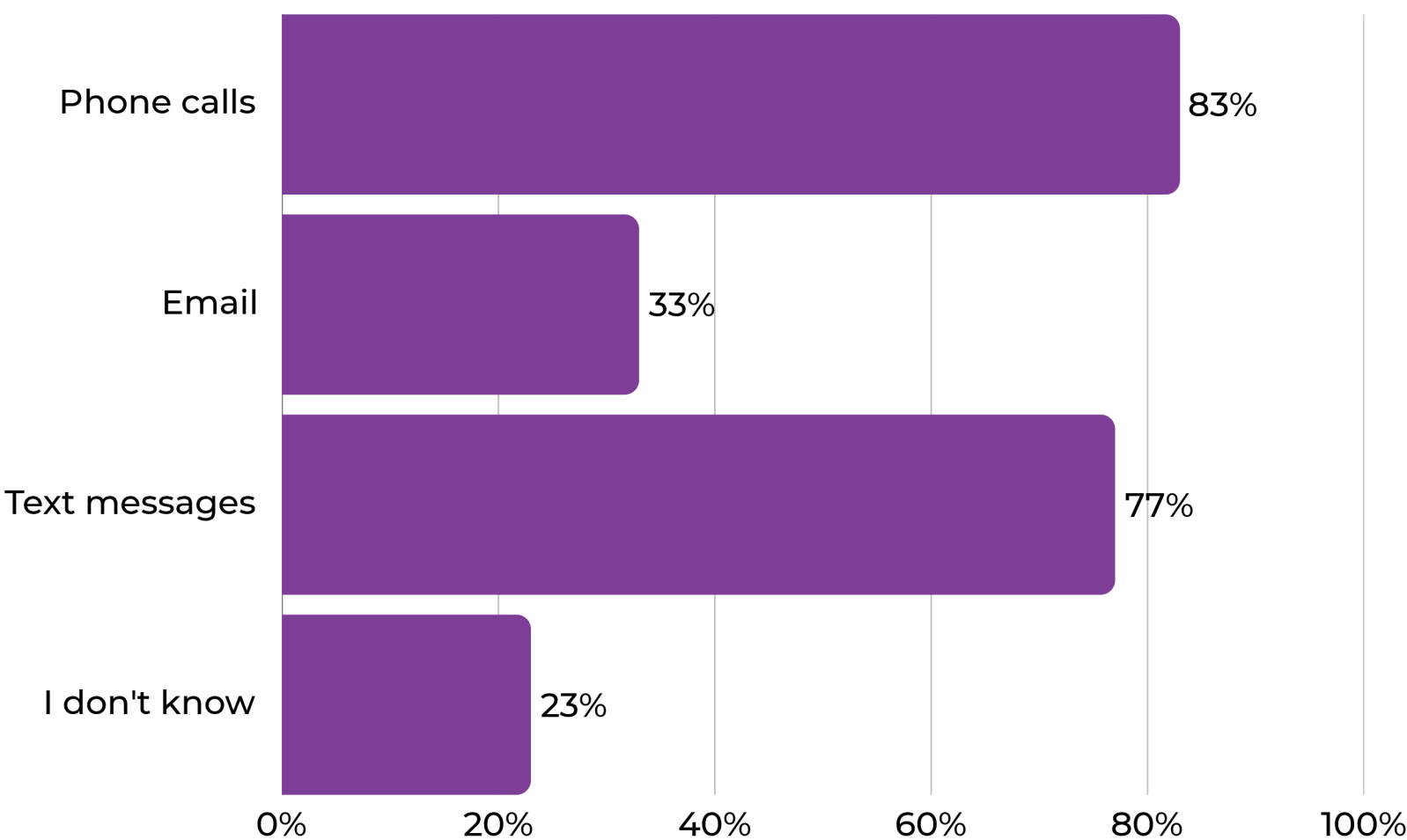
Once abroad, students plan to keep in touch via email & calls

One-quarter of students plan to use an app to connect with their school and parents while abroad.

How will your school keep in touch with you while you are abroad? (Please select all that apply.)



How will your parents keep in touch with you while you are abroad? (Please select all that apply.)





The value of study abroad

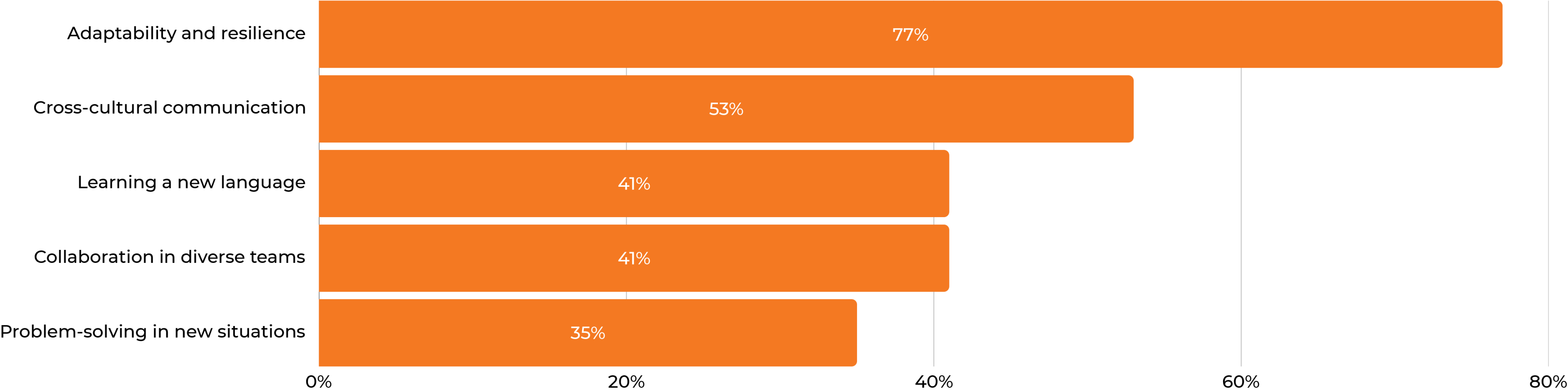
Study abroad provides students with a unique opportunity to expand their cultural perspectives and overall worldview which can improve personal, academic and professional fulfillment and success.

- The lessons learned through study abroad are immense: adaptability, problem solving, learning a new language and even collaboration in diverse teams.
- Many students report that differences in social norms and etiquette were among their biggest surprises while studying abroad, and interestingly, nearly half of students say they felt more connected to the local community abroad than to their own at home, perhaps because of the smaller cohorts of peers who study abroad.
- While the pandemic saw a rise in study away and virtual study abroad programs, students still have interest in these alternative global opportunities.

Study abroad lessons learned: adaptability and communication

Global experience can be a differentiator for college graduates looking to start their careers.

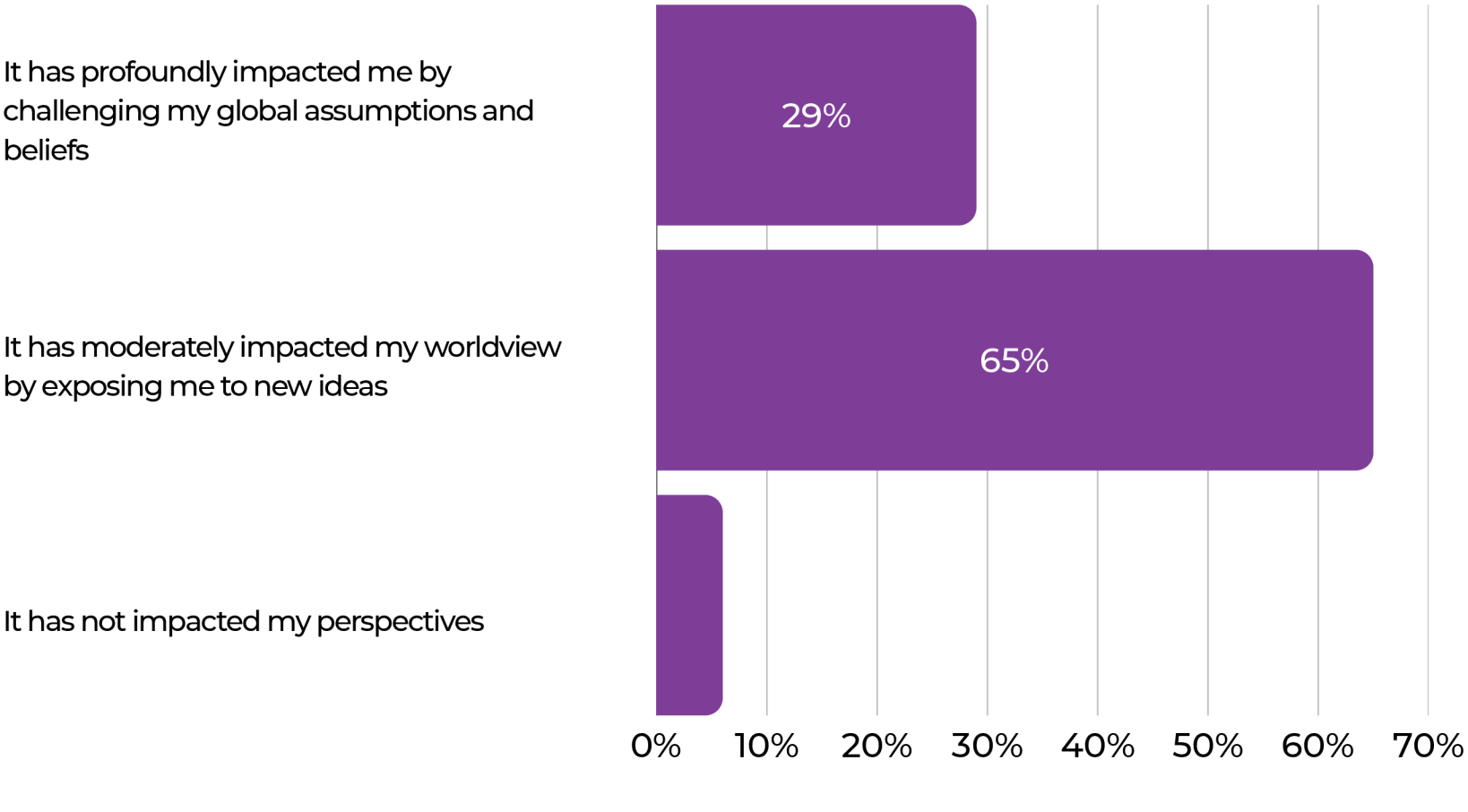
What skills or lessons learned abroad are most relevant to your future career?
(Please select all that apply.)



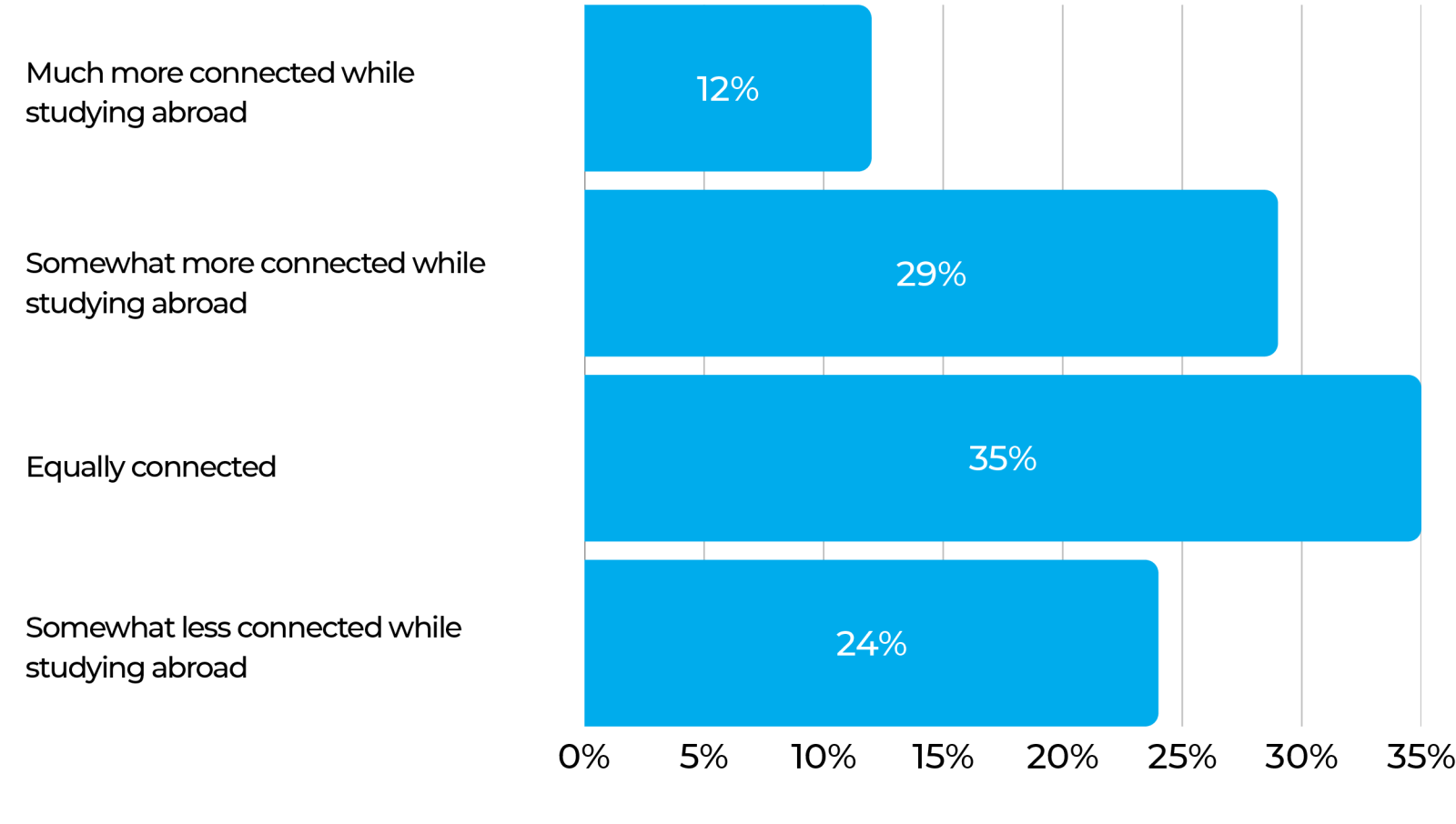
Study abroad impacts student worldviews

Generally, all students that study abroad say that it has impacted their worldviews – challenging assumptions or exposing new ideas. Also, nearly half of students say they feel more connected to the local community abroad than at home.

How has your experience abroad changed your worldview?



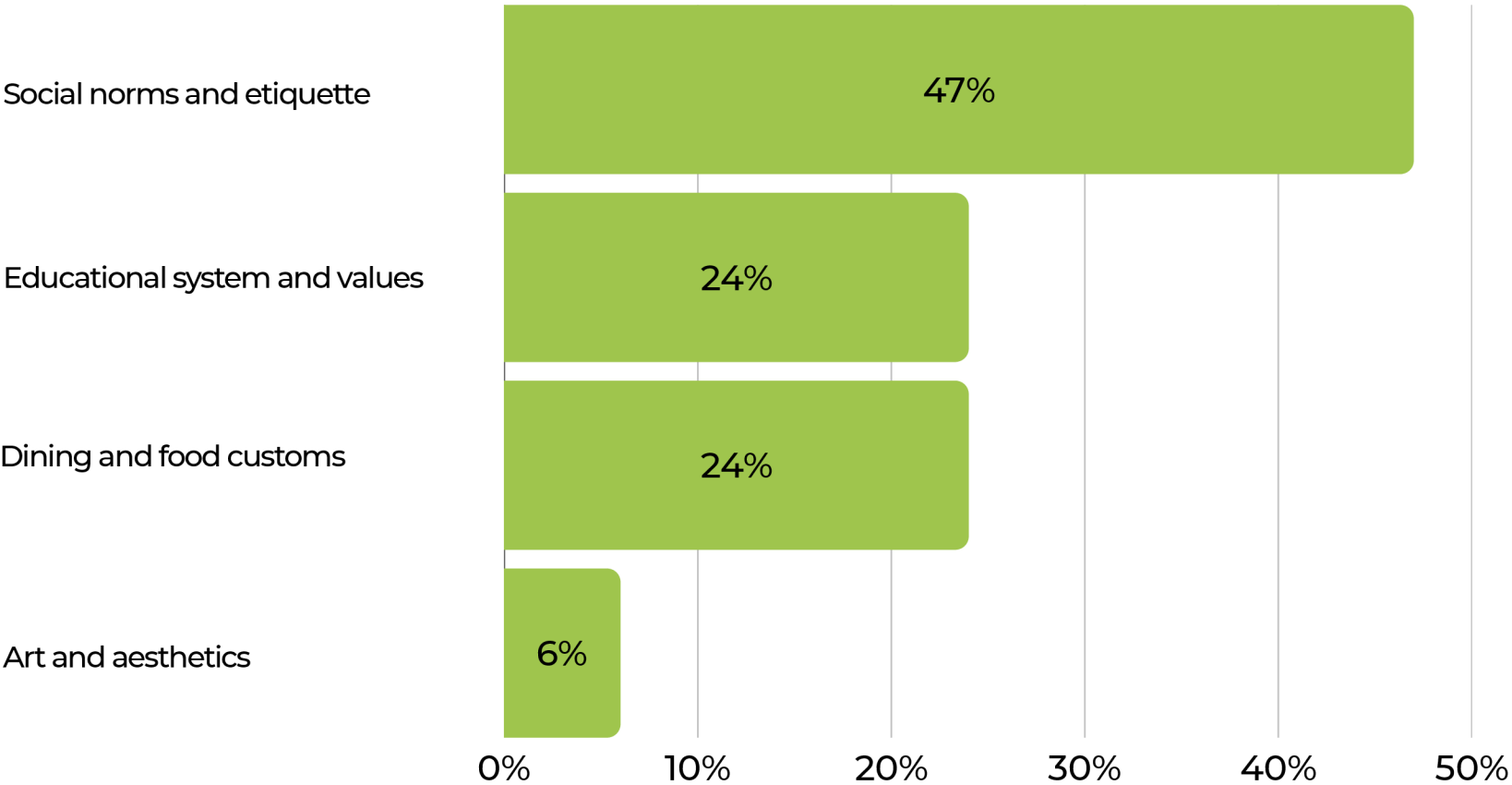
How connected did you feel to the local community abroad compared to at home?



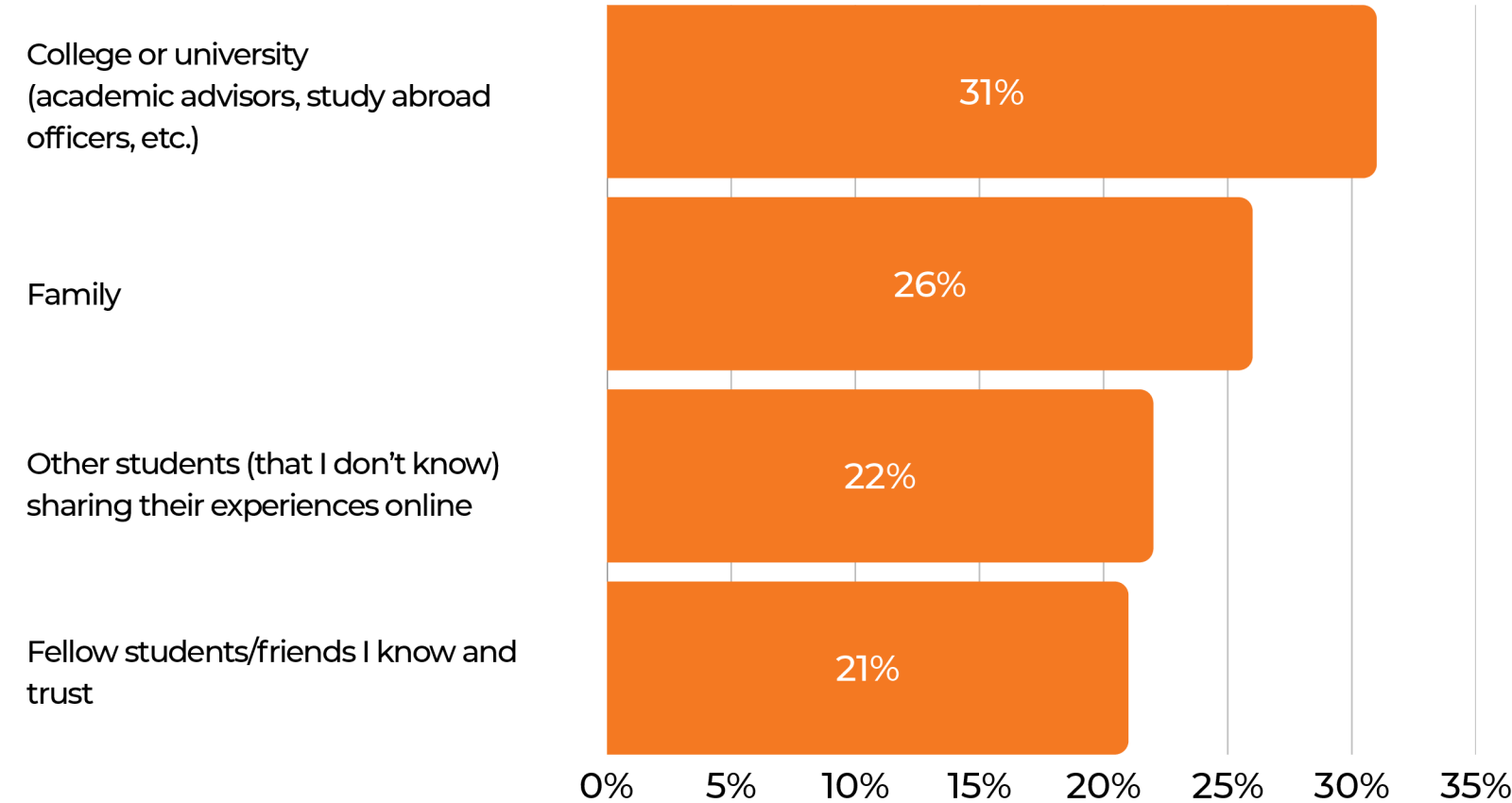
Study abroad surprises: social norms and pace of life

Students that study abroad have a unique opportunity to broaden their cultural views. Differences in social norms and etiquette was the biggest surprise for students abroad.

What surprised you most about cultural differences abroad?



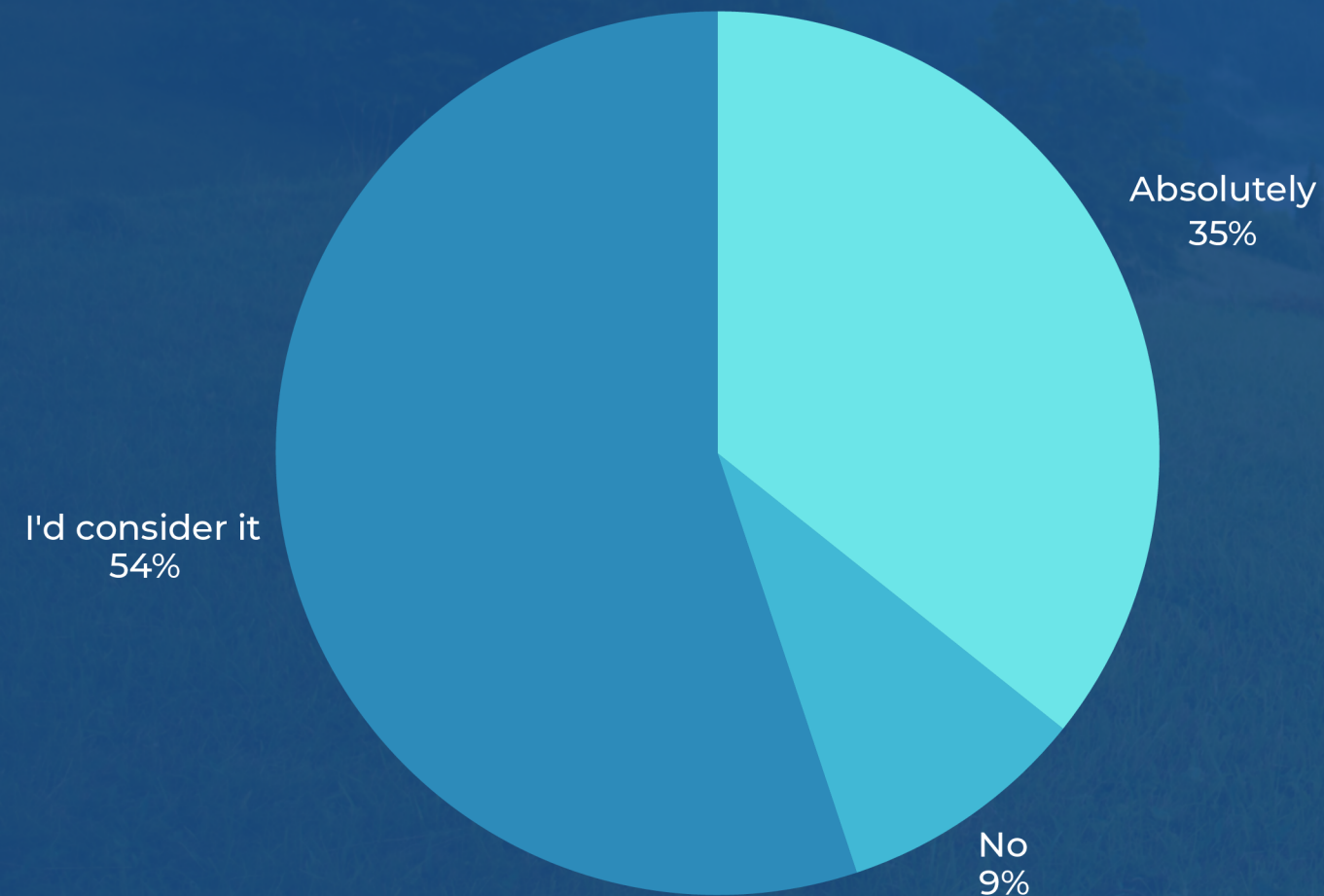
Who has the greatest influence on your choice of program?



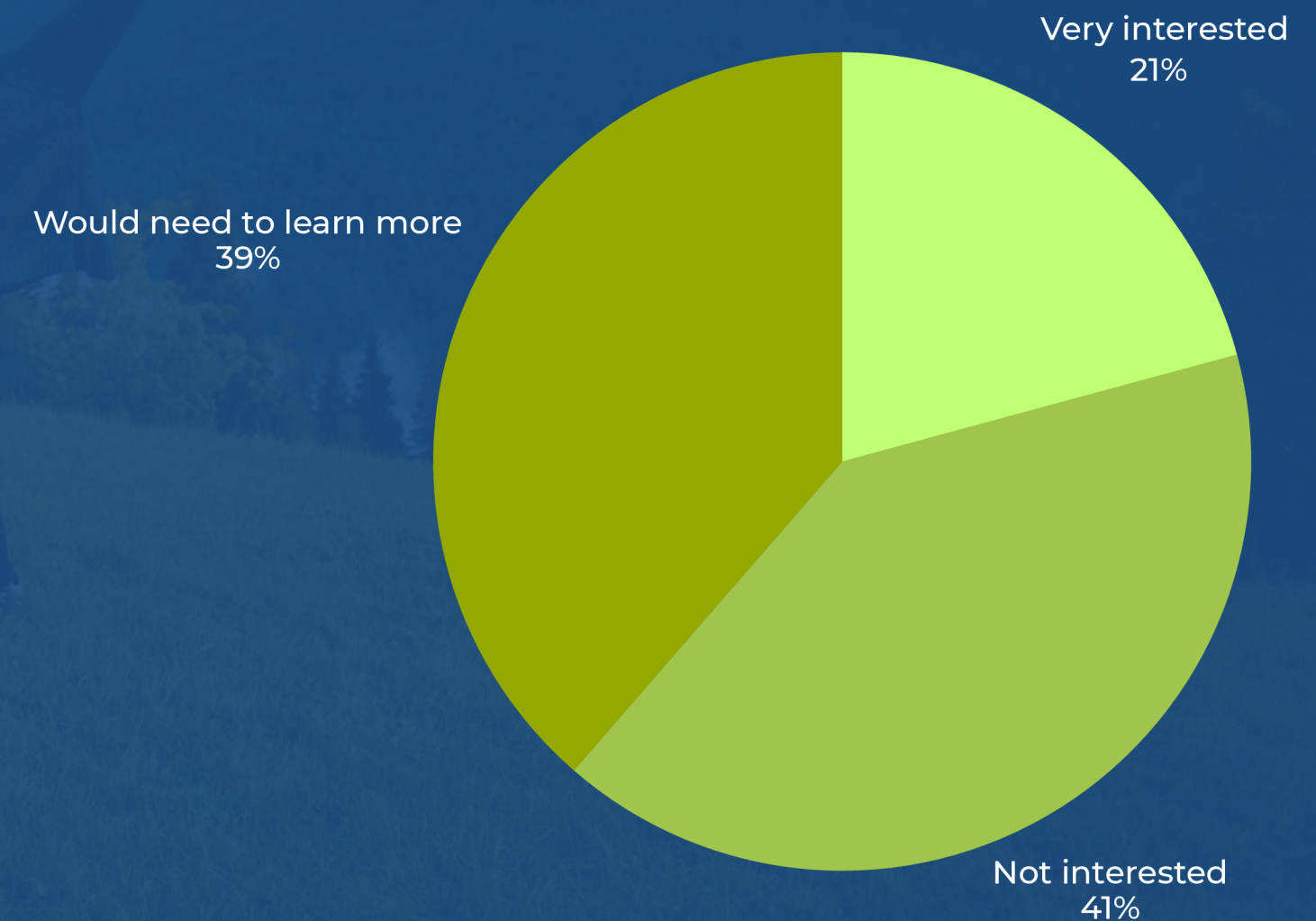
Interest in study away and virtual international experiences remains

Study away and virtual study abroad programs gained traction during the pandemic when global travel was limited. Interest in these alternative programs remains.

How interested are you in institution-sponsored domestic travel programs as a replacement for international travel (often called Study Away)?



How interested are you in taking part in a virtual international experience instead of traveling?





Conclusion

The 2025 Voice of the Students Survey underscores sustained and robust interest in study abroad among American college students. Despite concerns regarding cost and safety, it is evident that students continue to regard study abroad as an invaluable experience—one that offers unparalleled cross-cultural exposure and a broader global perspective. This emphasis on the transformative potential of international study speaks to the growing recognition of its importance in fostering personal, academic and professional development.

To further enhance student participation, higher ed institutions should invest in the visibility and accessibility of study abroad programs. This includes increased promotion of program availability as a competitive differentiator and greater visibility for financial aid options to support the cost of study abroad. By leveraging social media and ensuring that comprehensive information is readily available online, schools can more effectively engage a wider student audience and demystify the process.

As a trusted partner in international education, Terra Dotta is continuously advancing its global education solutions. We are committed to ensuring that study abroad remains a central and transformative aspect of higher education, preparing students to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world. Technology is essential to facilitating the seamless management of study abroad initiatives and is a bridge to strengthening the connection between students and institutions.



Appendix



Methodology

OBJECTIVE:

To better understand students' current perspectives on study abroad, Terra Dotta commissioned a survey of 250+ U.S. college students. This is the fourth edition of the Study Abroad Survey: The Voice of the Student.

METHOD:

Data collection was conducted online (via an online panel) among college students in the U.S. Respondents were required to be enrolled at a public or private institution.

QUOTA AND QUESTIONNAIRE:

There were 275 survey responses collected from February 17-25, 2025. The survey took about 5 minutes, on average, to complete.

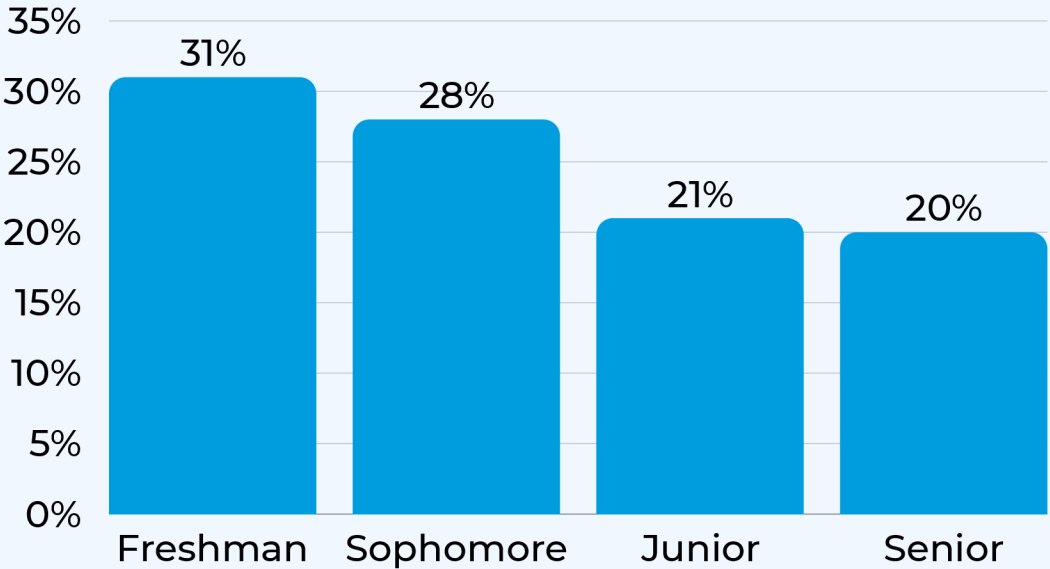


Respondent profile

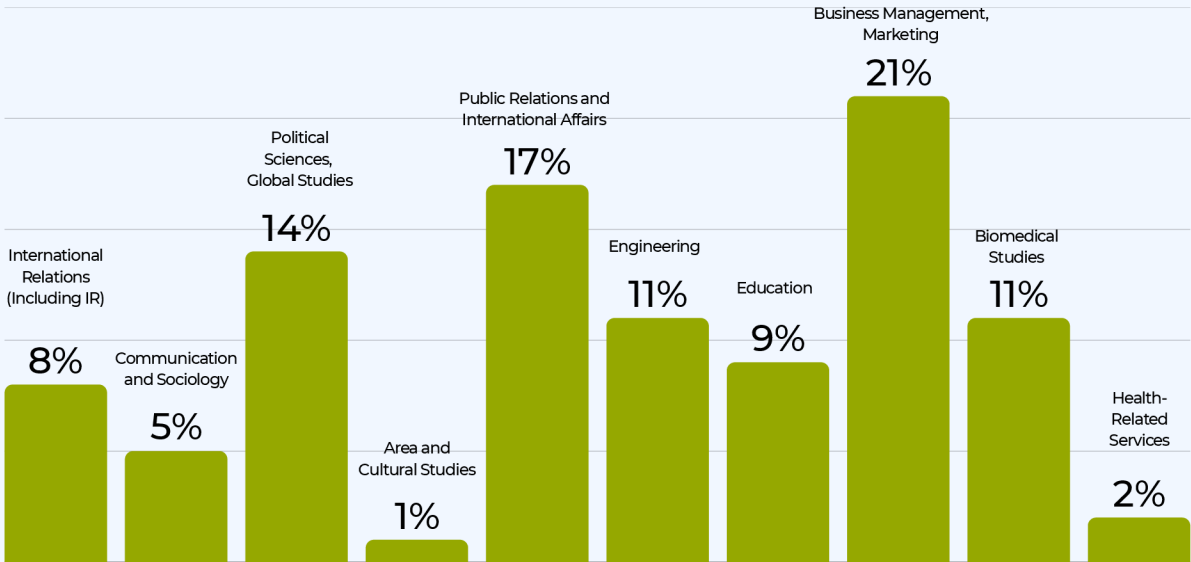


FOCUS ON STUDENTS
INTERESTED IN STUDY
ABROAD PROGRAMS.

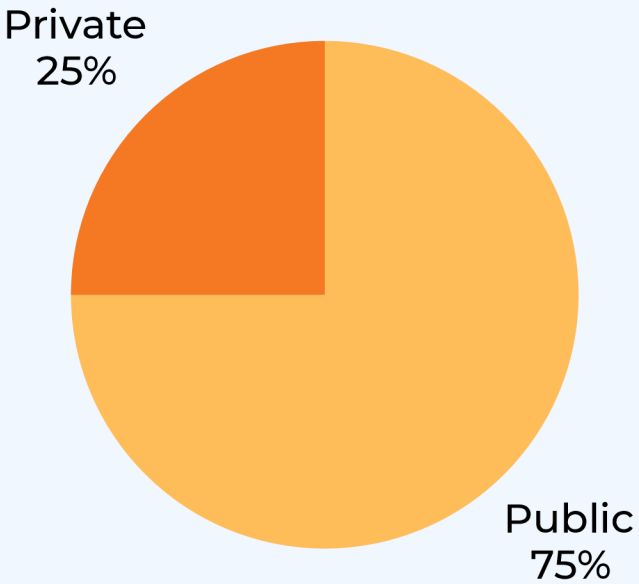
Respondents
by class



Respondents
by major

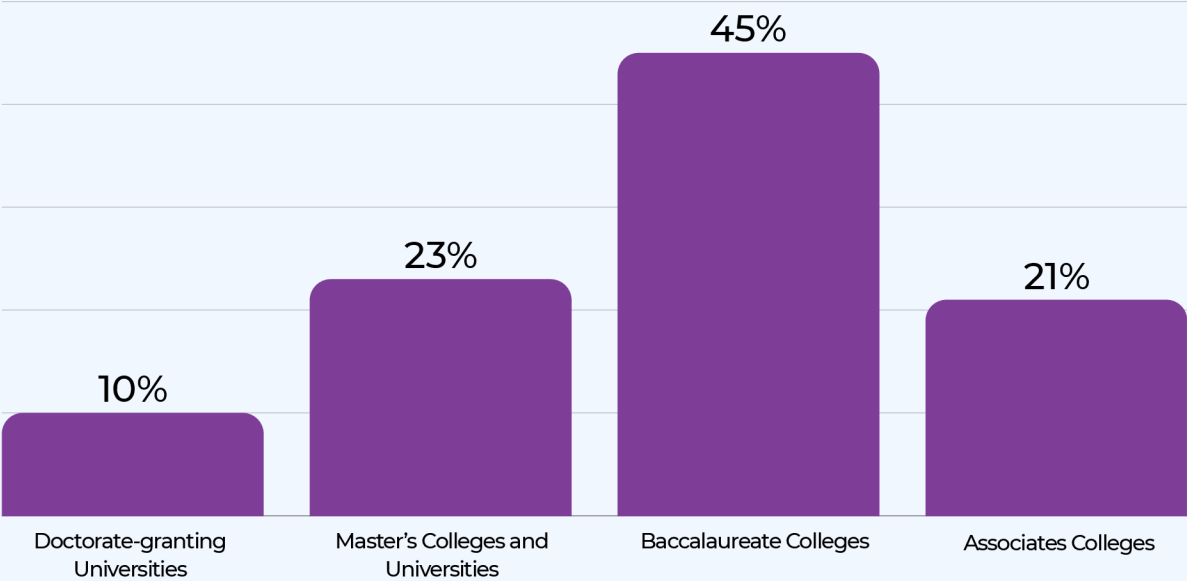


Respondents by type
of institution



Respondent profile

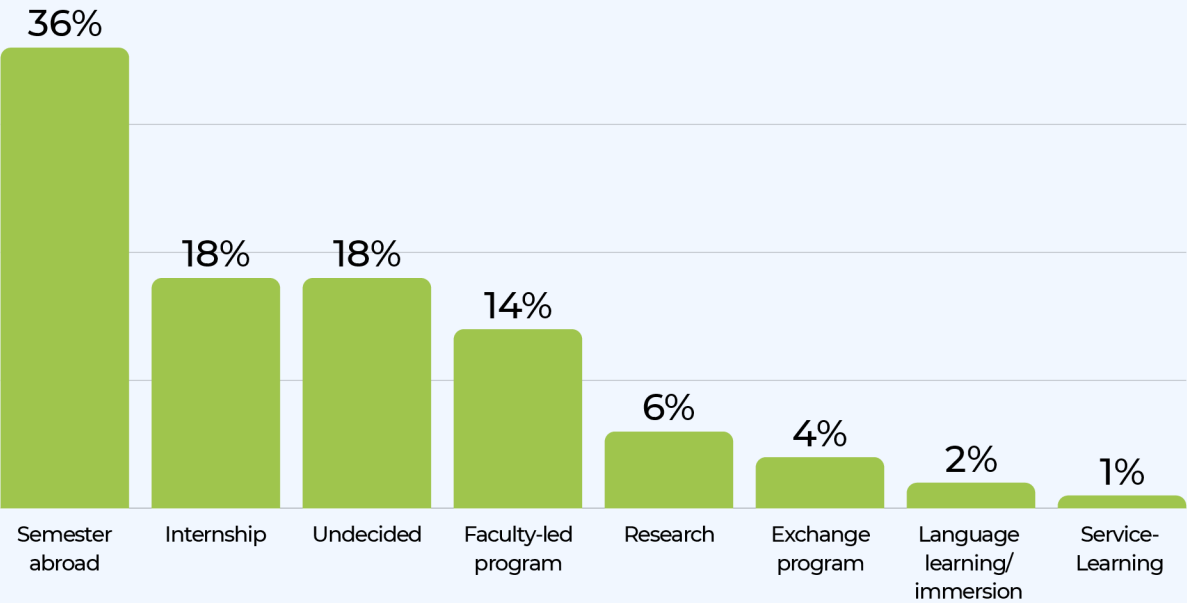
Respondents
by **institution**



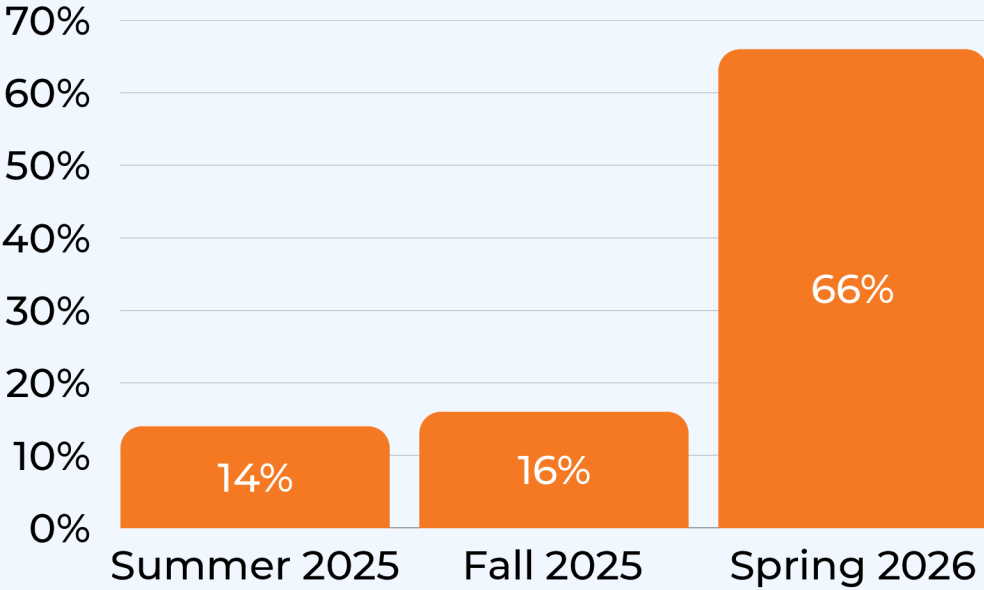
Respondents
by **planning to study abroad**



Respondents
by **program type**



Respondents **by date of study abroad**



Terra Dotta for Global Engagement

Our cloud-based, modular solutions encompass study abroad, international student and scholar services (ISSS), student engagement, global engagement dashboards, and travel risk management—including our award-winning AlertTraveler® mobile application.

Offering a seamless user experience, the platform serves as a hub for institutions' global experience programs, pulling in relevant cross-campus student data to enable advanced global engagement analytics.



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