

Working and Learning in College¹

It is widely known that **the majority of college students – almost 60 percent² – are working learners.³ College students work while learning for two primary reasons: supporting their education and living expenses as well as to gain experience in the workforce. The amount of time worked while attending college varies from part-time work for full-time students and full-time work for part-time students.**

What services are colleges offering students who are working?

Since so many college students are working, it's natural to ask “what are colleges and universities doing to provide employment services and overall assistance for such students?” What types of work and learn programs do colleges offer? Do colleges help students find employment opportunities? What evaluation processes do colleges use when connecting students to internships? Do colleges provide career guidance information or services for students?

Students who had an internship that allowed the student to apply what they learned in the classroom⁴

2X
more likely to
be engaged in
their work

1.5X
as likely to
be thriving
in well being

¹ This brief is based on the following report: Pryor, J.H. (2018). Characteristics of experiential learning services at U.S. colleges and universities. ACT Center for Equity in Learning. Iowa City, IA.

² Blanchard Kyte, S. (2017). Who does it work for? Understanding equity in working learner college and career success. ACT Center for Equity in Learning. Iowa City, IA.

³ Here the phrase “working learner” describes individuals who are enrolled in a formal learning program to earn a diploma, credential, or degree while working more than 15 hours each week.

⁴ Gallup (2014). Great Jobs, Great Lives: The Gallup-Purdue Index Inaugural National Report. Accessed at <http://products.gallup.com/168857/gallup-purdue-index-inaugural-national-report.aspx>.

Types of college work and learn programs



Internships

An internship integrates knowledge learned in the classroom with practical applications and skills development in a professional setting.



Cooperative Education Programs (Co-ops)

Co-ops allow students to work full-time in areas that are aligned with their career goal or major. Students alternate between full-time student and full-time positions related to their interests in order to combine a degree with significant work experience.



Apprenticeships

An apprenticeship allows students to obtain a recognized credential while gaining on-the-job experience. Apprentices shadow their employer and must provide instruction on knowledge in related technical subjects. An apprenticeship is typically full-time and can be a year or more.



Federal Work-Study Positions

Work-study is a form of work and learn that is partially funded through the federal government. Although usually on campus, some can be off campus as well.



Practicums

Practicums place a strong emphasis on linking academic knowledge with real-world application while being carefully assessed by a senior member of the field. A practicum does not necessarily lead to a credential, although certain types such as residencies do culminate in a credential.

College Work and Learn Services Offered and How Well They Are Used %

	Offered	Very Well Used
Résumé review	98	64
One-on-one appointments between students and Career Services Professionals	97	62
On-campus Career Fairs	96	65
Practice interviews	95	35
Résumé workshops	89	35
Online listing of off-campus internships	88	57
Online listing of other jobs off campus (not internships)	86	55
Group sessions for students facilitated by Career Services Professionals	85	32
Online listing of other jobs on campus (not internships)	84	51
Online listing of on-campus internships	76	50

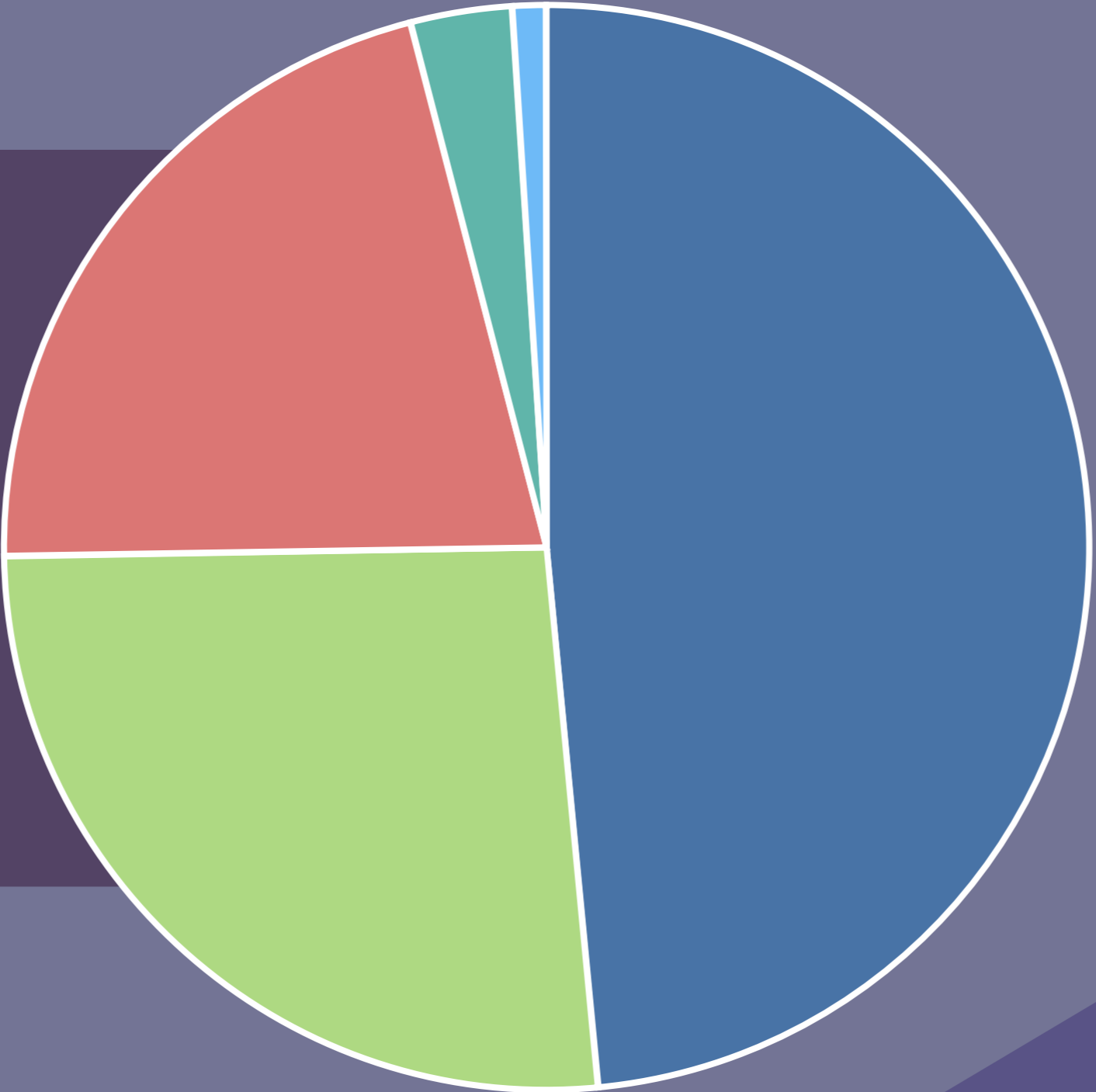
⁵ Data was collected via a partnership with the Cooperative Education and Internship Association (CEIA) who administered the survey. CEIA provided email addresses of their members, which includes educators at colleges and universities who are involved in experiential learning. The survey was emailed to 530 CEIA members who held higher education positions. Researchers obtained 194 responses for a 37% response rate. The responses included 18 respondents from countries outside the United States, therefore final analysis was limited to 176 respondents in the U.S.

Characteristics of College Work and Learn Programs

What are colleges and institutions doing to align work experiences with what the student is learning in school? About half (48 percent) of colleges did a lot to align the two, with a quarter (26 percent) who did a moderate amount, another quarter (25 percent) putting forth only some to no effort to align student work and learn experiences.

College alignment of work and learn experiences

- Did a lot 48%
- Moderate effort 26%
- Some effort 21%
- Little effort 3%
- No effort 1%



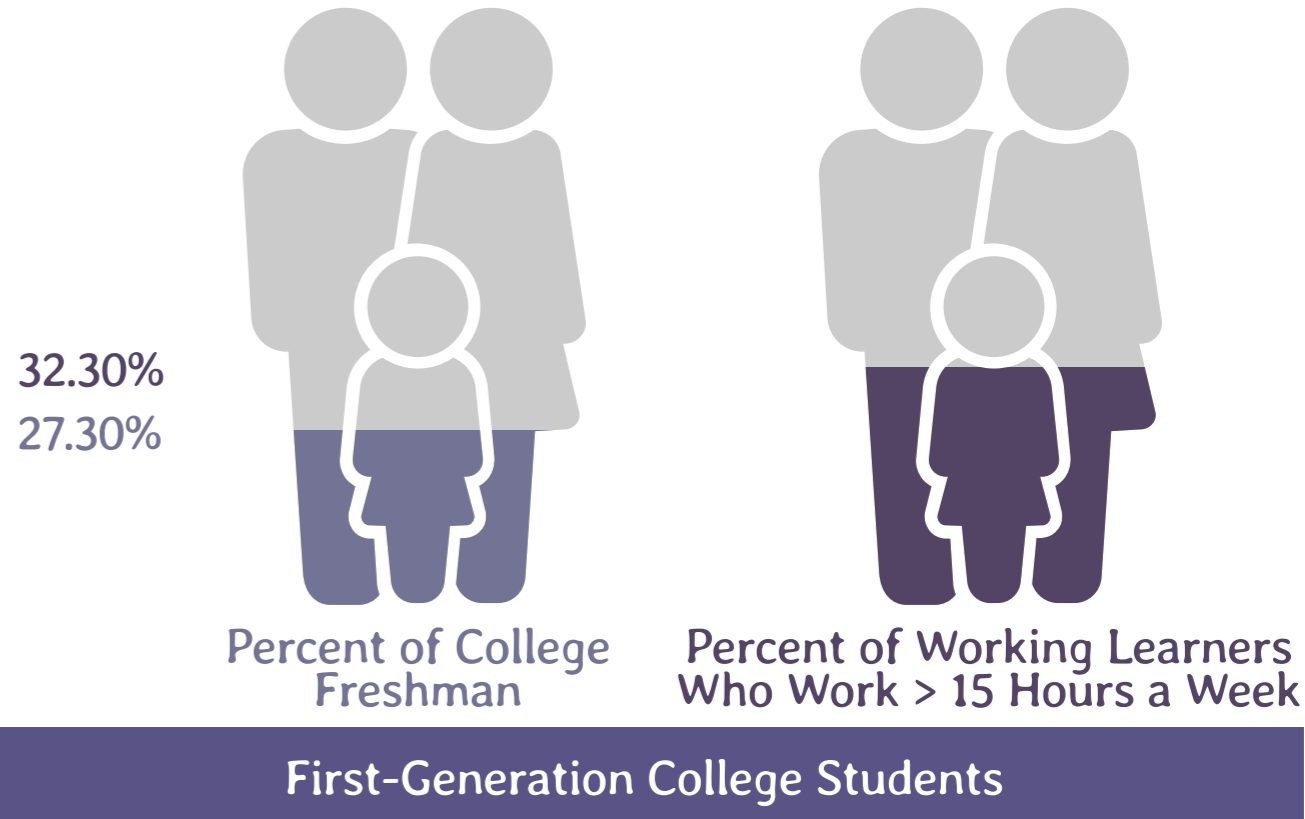
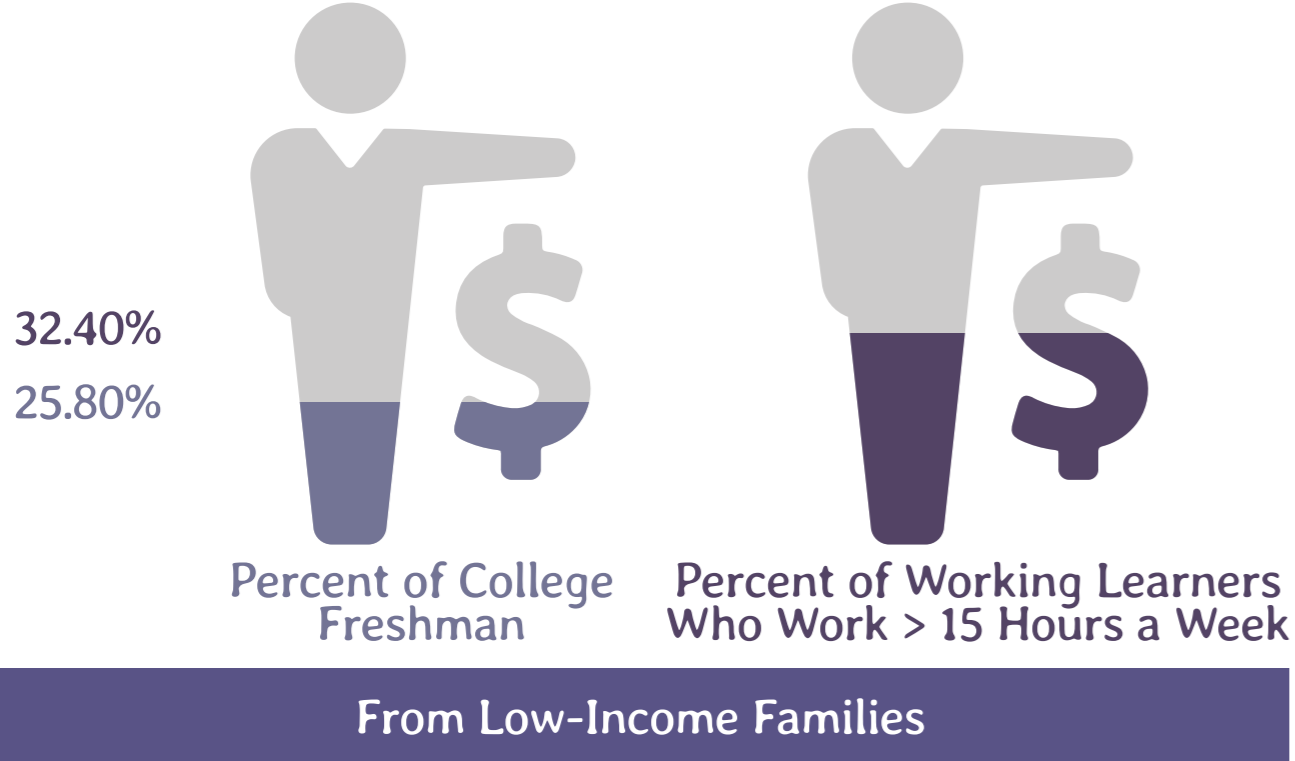
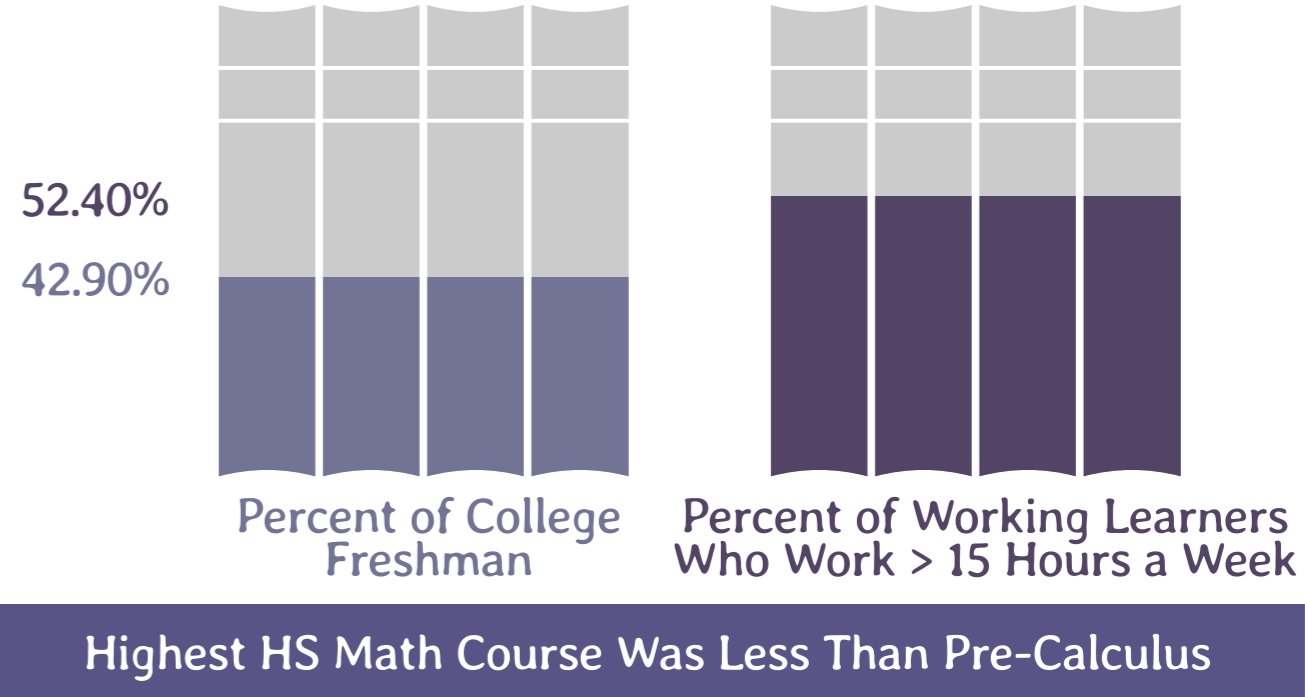
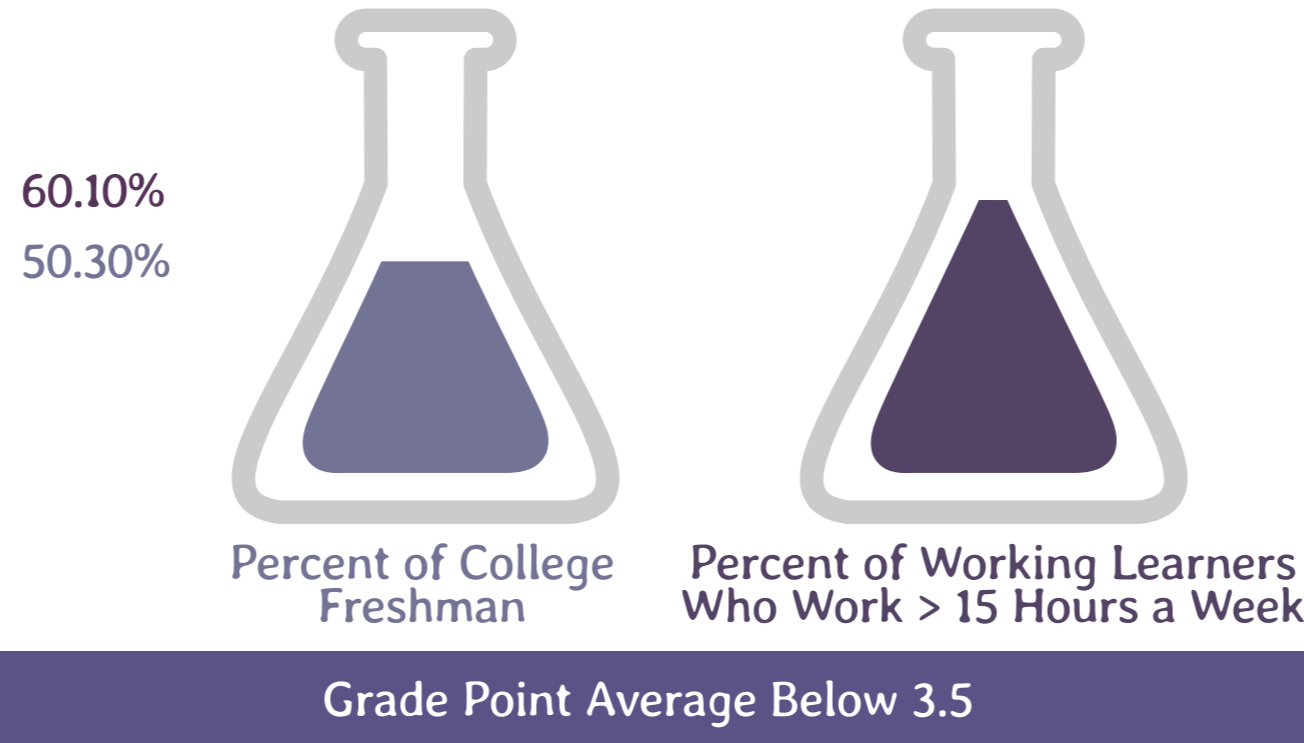
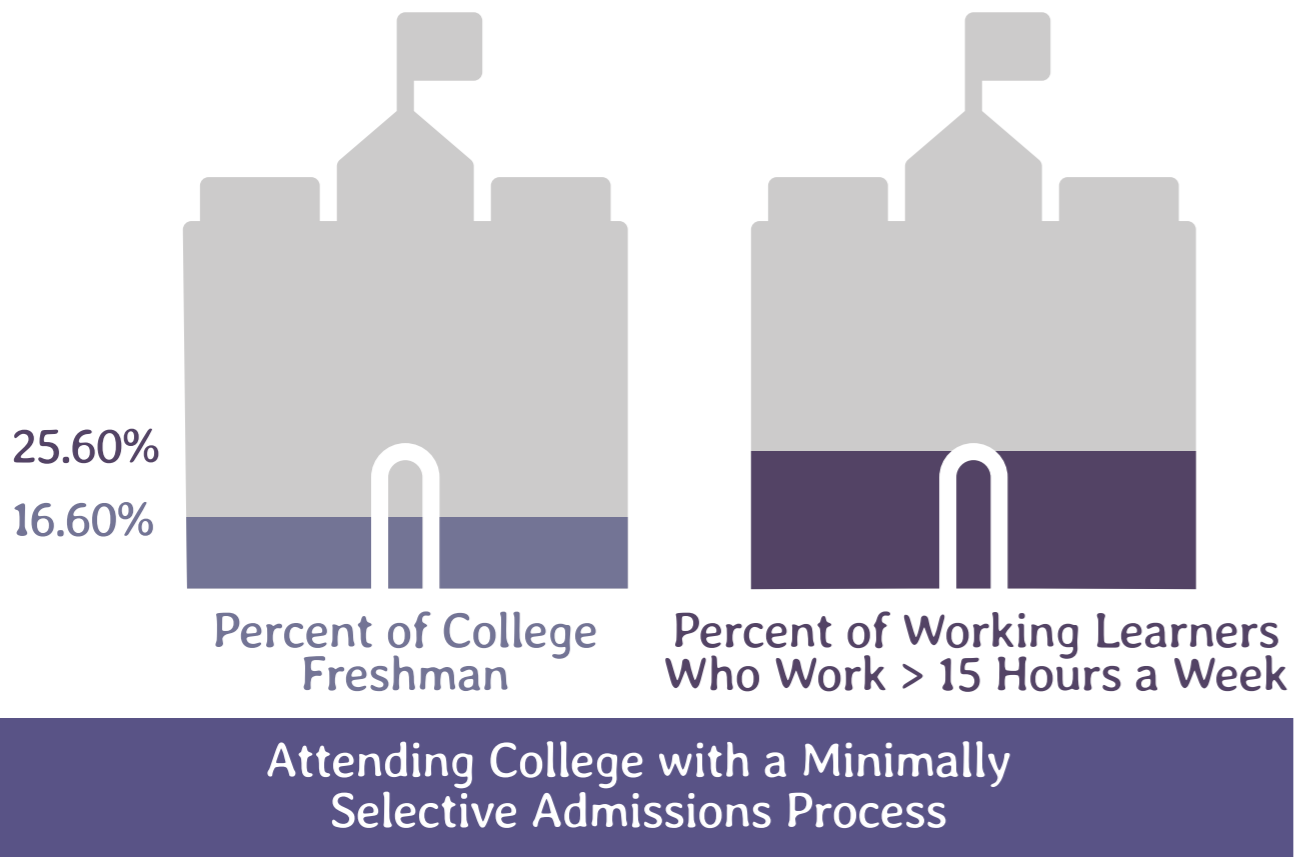
Within a work and learn program, what characteristics do colleges require for students?

	Required	Not Required	Not Considered
Regular supervision	90	8	1
Job description	88	10	2
Alignment with student learning	70	26	3
Paid position	20	69	10



College Services for Underserved Working Learners

Underserved students are overrepresented among those working more than 15 hours each week.⁶



⁶ Blanchard Kyte, S. (2017).

Considering the fact that underserved students are overrepresented among those who are working learners in college, what services do institutions offer for this student population?

Roughly half (**58 percent**) of colleges offer work- and-learn resources designed specifically to assist underserved populations while **10 percent** were considering offering such a resource. Even more troubling were the colleges who had no such resources nor plans to implement due to: either not having sufficient budget to do so, or a perceived lack of need for such services.



58% offer work and learn resources for underserved students

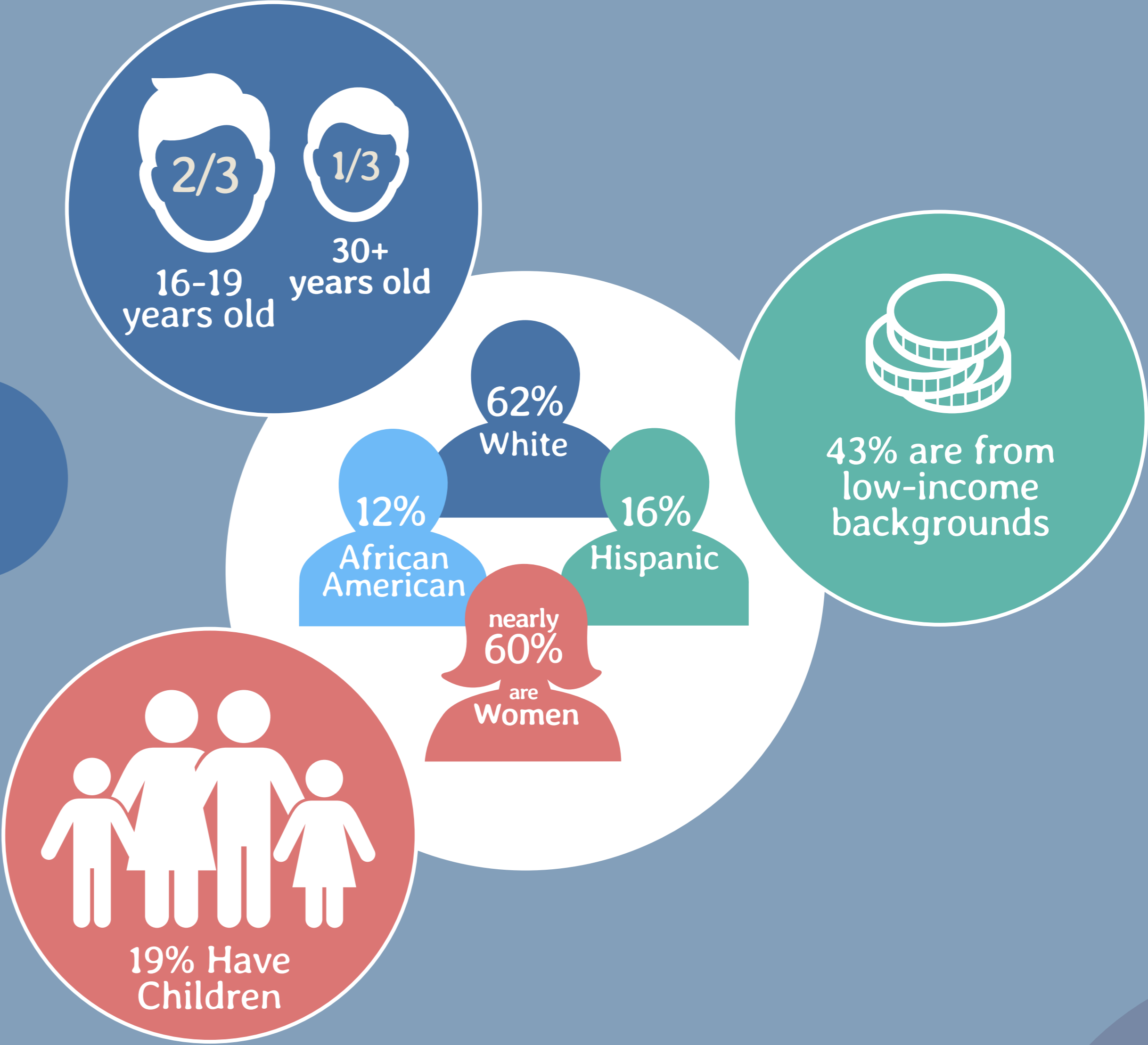
32% did not have a service

10% considering offering

College Support for Working Learners

Working learners in college often struggle to balance work and college demands, largely due to the fact that they are not what administrators' commonly perceive to be "traditional students".

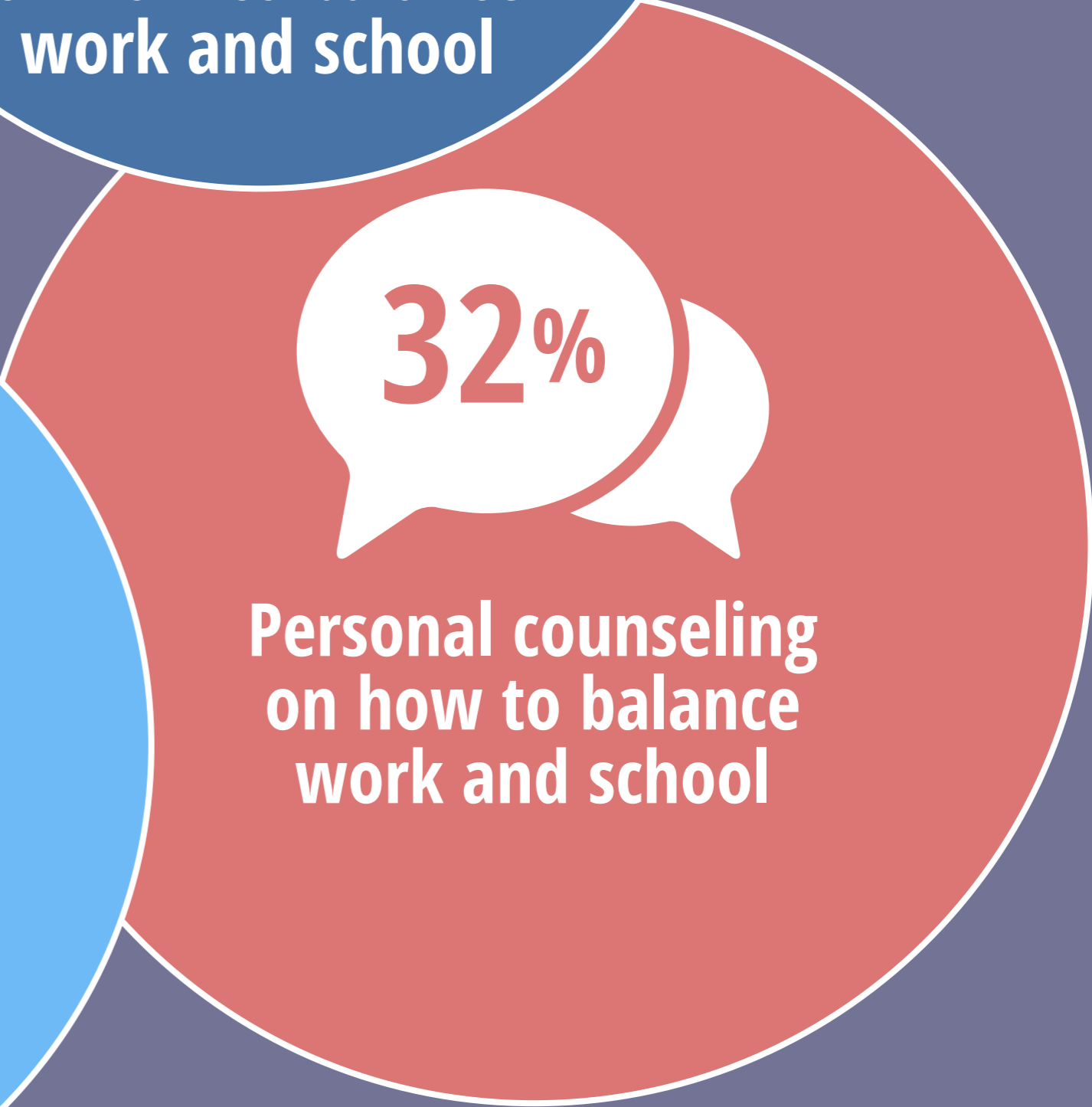
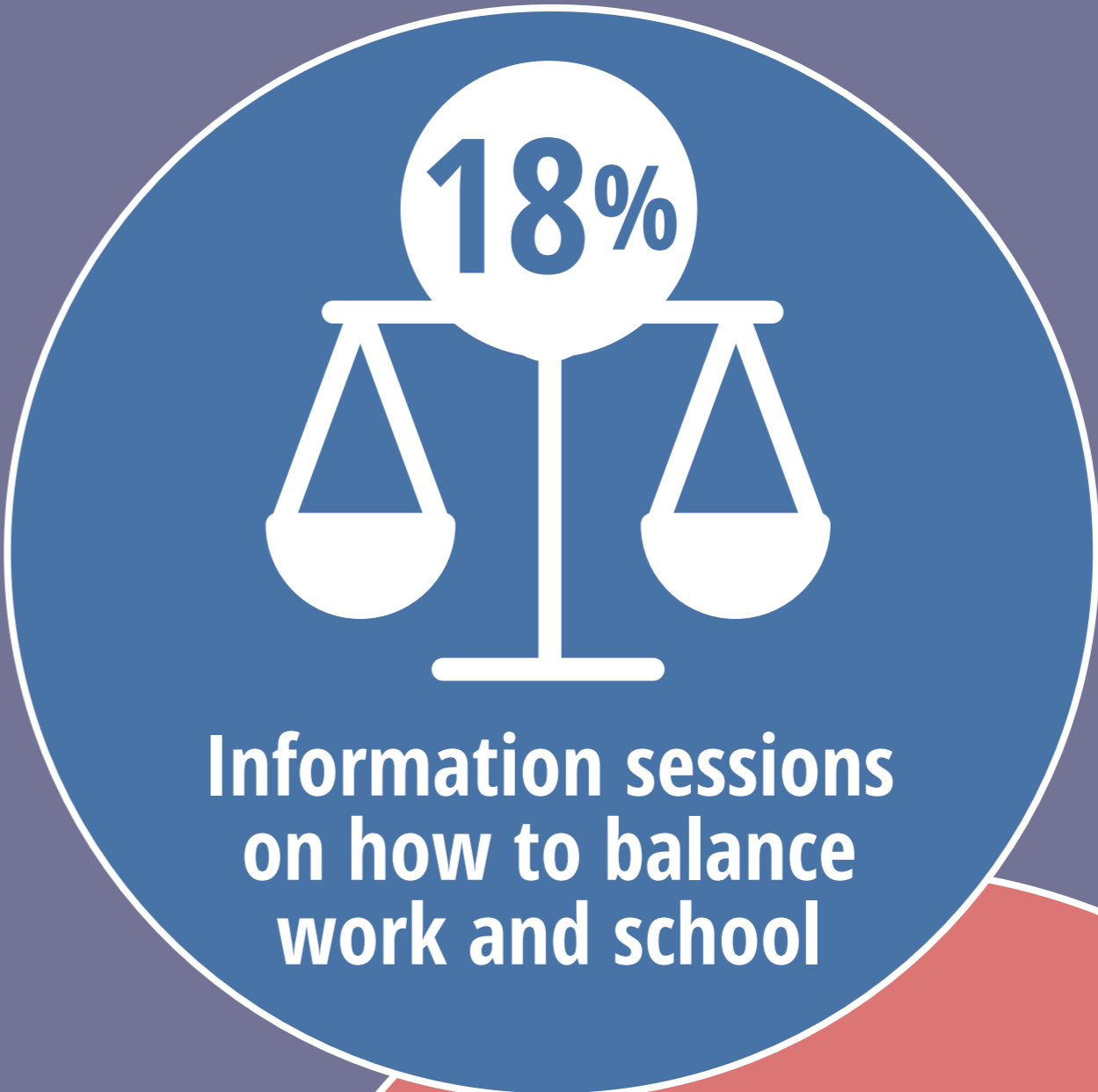
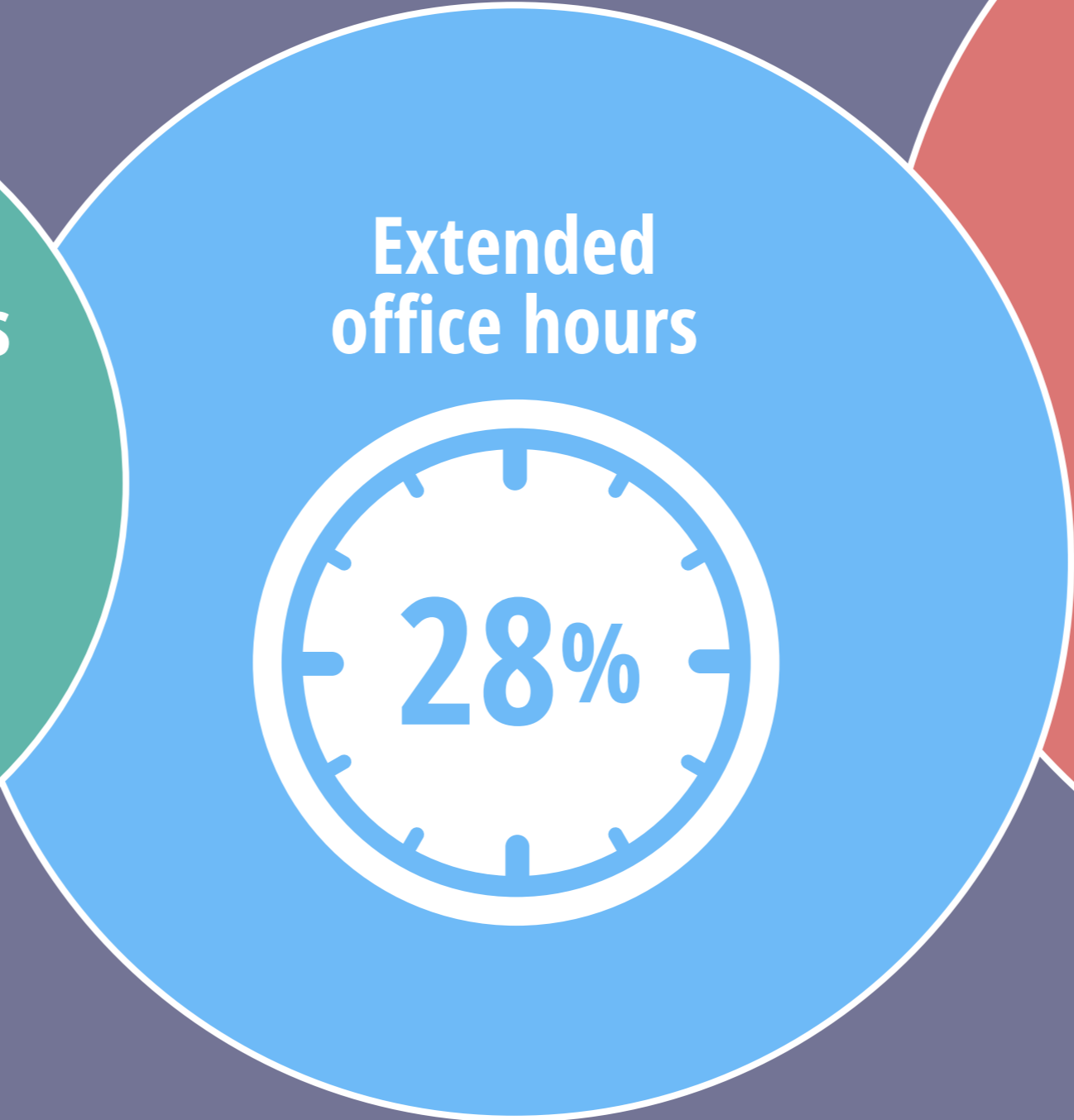
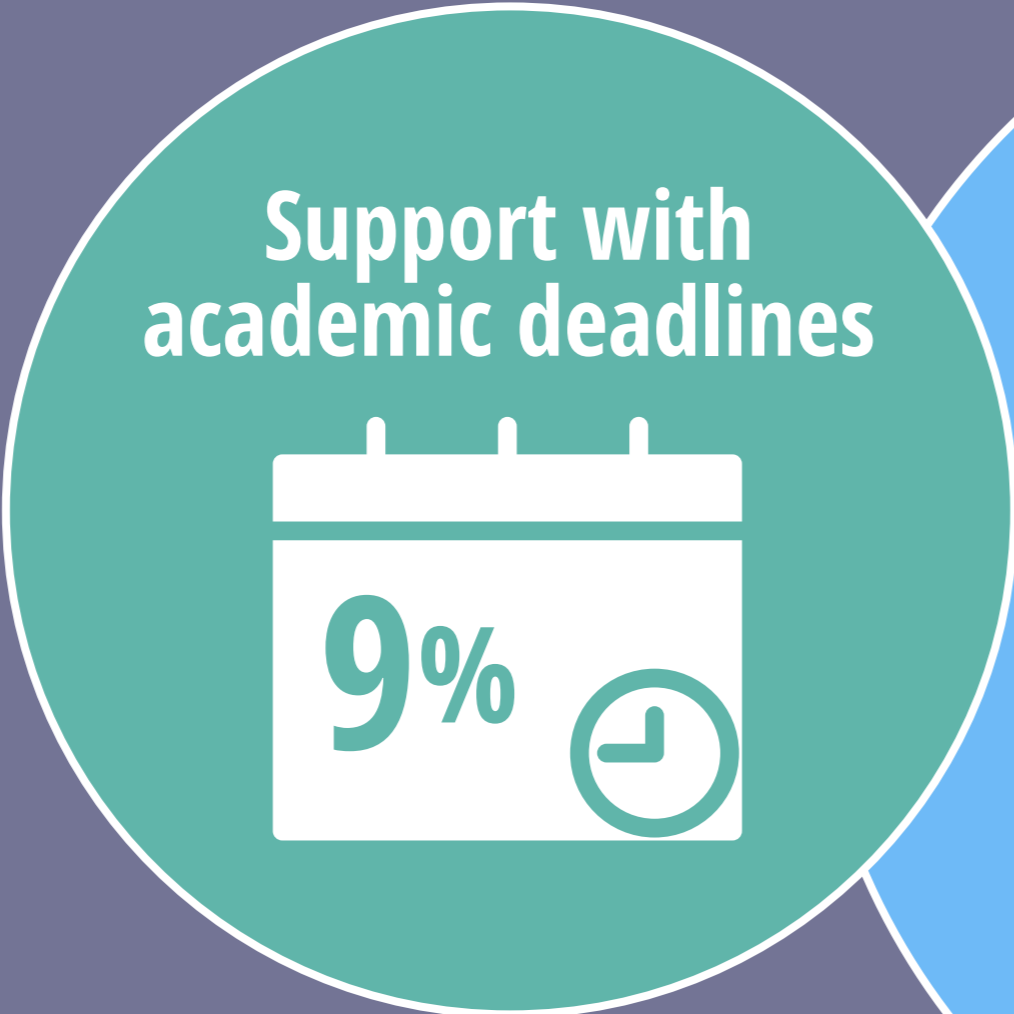
Working Learners Are Made Up of Individuals with Diverse Backgrounds⁷



⁷ Ibid.

Support Provided to Working Learners

Most colleges and universities do not provide specific support for working learners. At best, **one in three** provide counseling on how to balance work and school. About as many offer extended office hours for students who work during the day (**28 percent**). Only about one in five, or **18 percent**, offered information sessions on how to balance work and school. Even fewer colleges, **9 percent**, offer support for flexible academic deadlines, such as assignments and tests, for students who worked. **Clearly there is room for improvement here.**



Outcomes for College Work and Learn Programs

Knowing that a majority of working learners in college are also underserved and struggling to balance work and college requirements, what are colleges doing to monitor work and learn programs and to evaluate their effectiveness for students?

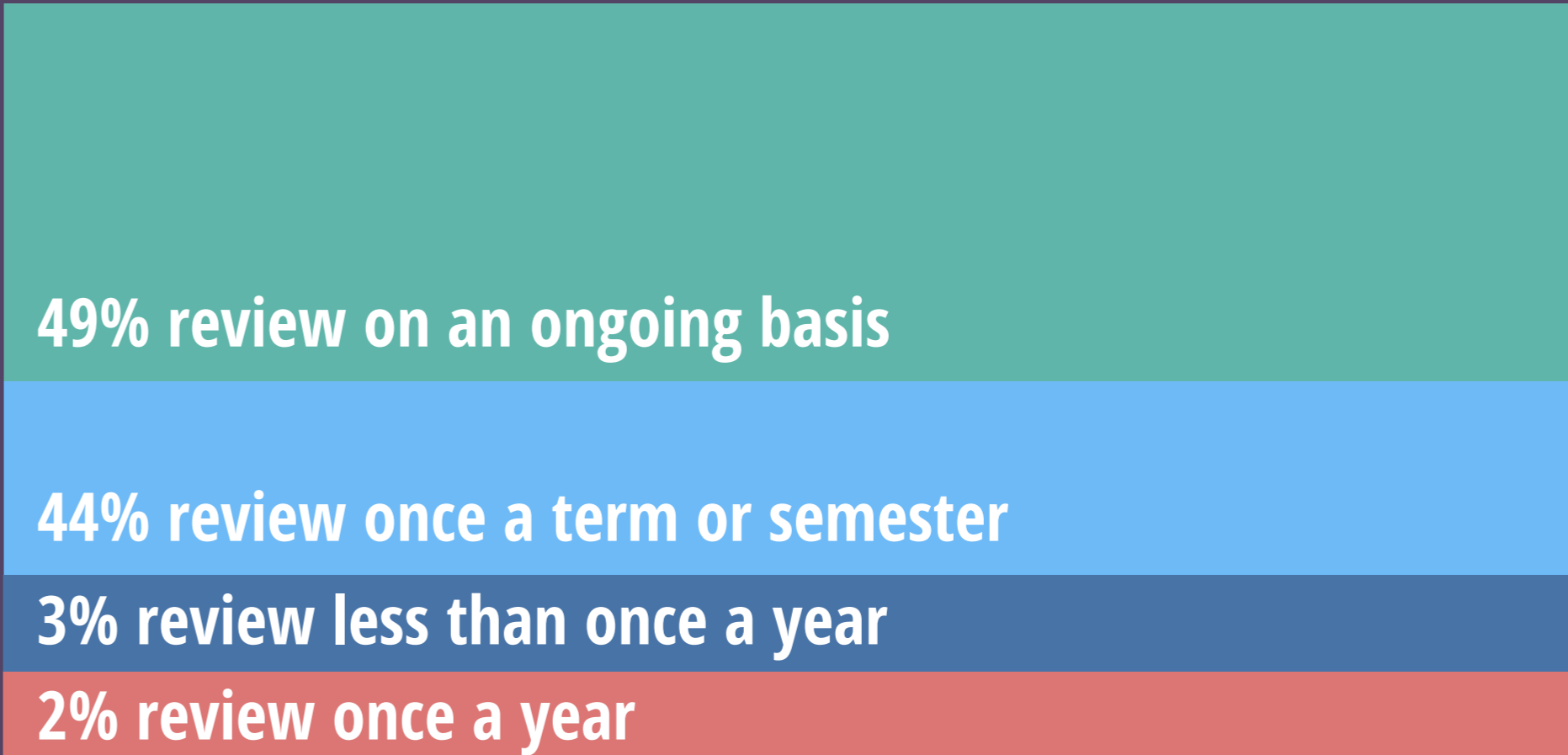
College monitoring of experiential learning programs varies considerably. A third (**27 percent**) of colleges have regular meetings with the students during the program with a minority (**15 percent**) holding regular meetings with the student's work supervisor. A small share (**7 percent**) of colleges conduct regular meetings with institutional staff (e.g., an internship coordinator) while **16 percent** did not monitor work and learn experiences at all.

Of the colleges that review student work and learn experiences, the type and frequency of review varies considerably.

Types of college work and learn program reviews



Frequency of college work and learn program reviews



Potential On-Campus Solutions

Experiential learning, is largely seen by colleges as important, but such program are often not well supported by institutions or well-coordinated with employers.

Therefore, we recommend that postsecondary institutions provide additional funding and positions to support experiential programs for working learnings and for increased marketing to them. Additional funding could also be used to provide stipends to these students taking unpaid internships, invest in data management systems, and create programs to help prepare students for work.

Moreover, the shortage of paid internships for work and learn opportunities makes such programs unavailable for students who cannot afford to take an unpaid position. These “microadvantages” for students who can afford to take unpaid work, can hinder the development and success of students who must choose paid work over unpaid internships. Thus, we recommend that colleges expand the number of paid internship opportunities. Even if institutional resources were not an issue to adequately fund staff and paid internships, there needs to be a greater understanding of the importance of work and learn experiences for all students.



The path of least resistance is one that favors those who can afford to take an unpaid internship and do not have obstacles to using services that are only offered during regular business hours. This is an increasingly small proportion of college-going students. Both upper level administrators who set budgetary priorities and employers who decide to offer a paid or unpaid position need to recognize the importance to these programs not only to the educational mission of the institution, but the future staffing of organizations in the United States.

Last but not least, postsecondary institutions should establish emergency aid programs. If a working learner experiences a sudden change in their working life (e.g., cut in hours, cancellation of shifts, etc.), financial aid could be tapped to smooth out the disruption and offer some relief to students who are trying to juggle education and employment responsibilities.

