

THREE LENSES, ONE WORKFORCE: UNDERSTANDING FACULTY, STUDENT, AND EMPLOYER PERCEPTIONS OF INDUSTRY READINESS

PRESENTED BY THE FIRST2
INDUSTRY ADVISORY BOARD AND
THE WV JOBS NETWORK



THE FIRST2 NETWORK IS SUPPORTED BY THE U.S. NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION UNDER AWARD NUMBER: HRD-1834595, HIGH ROCKS EDUCATIONAL CORPORATION.



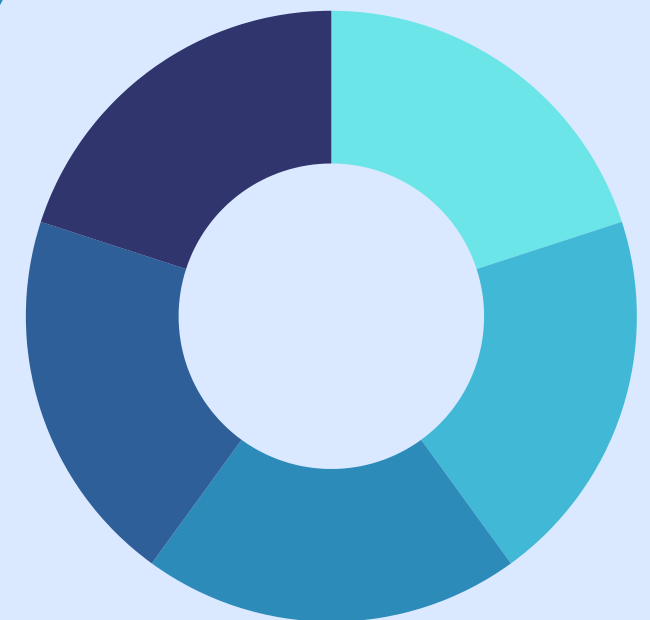
WV JOBS NETWORK IS POWERED BY THE APPALACHIAN REGIONAL COMMISSION, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION, AND THE BENEDUM FOUNDATION

WHY IS THIS UNDERSTANDING IMPORTANT?

INDUSTRY NOTES THAT MANY GRADUATES HAVE STRONG TECHNICAL SKILLS BUT LACK SOFT SKILLS¹

STUDENTS OFTEN OVERESTIMATE THEIR PROFESSIONAL AND CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS¹

STUDENTS OFTEN DON'T UNDERSTAND SKILLS-BASED HIRING AND FEEL THEIR COURSEWORK DOESN'T CLEARLY CONNECT TO CAREER SKILLS²



INDUSTRY VS. STUDENT PERCEPTIONS

A NATIONAL SURVEY BY SERAMOUNT (IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PLATFORMS LIKE FORAGE) FOUND THAT

"ALMOST THREE-QUARTERS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS [STUDENTS] BELIEVE THEY ARE OR WILL BE READY FOR ENTRY-LEVEL ROLES WHEN THEY GRADUATE.

MEANWHILE,

MORE THAN HALF OF HIRING MANAGERS SURVEYED... SAID THAT RECENT COLLEGE GRADS ARE UNPREPARED FOR THE WORKFORCE." (SERAMOUNT, 2025)³



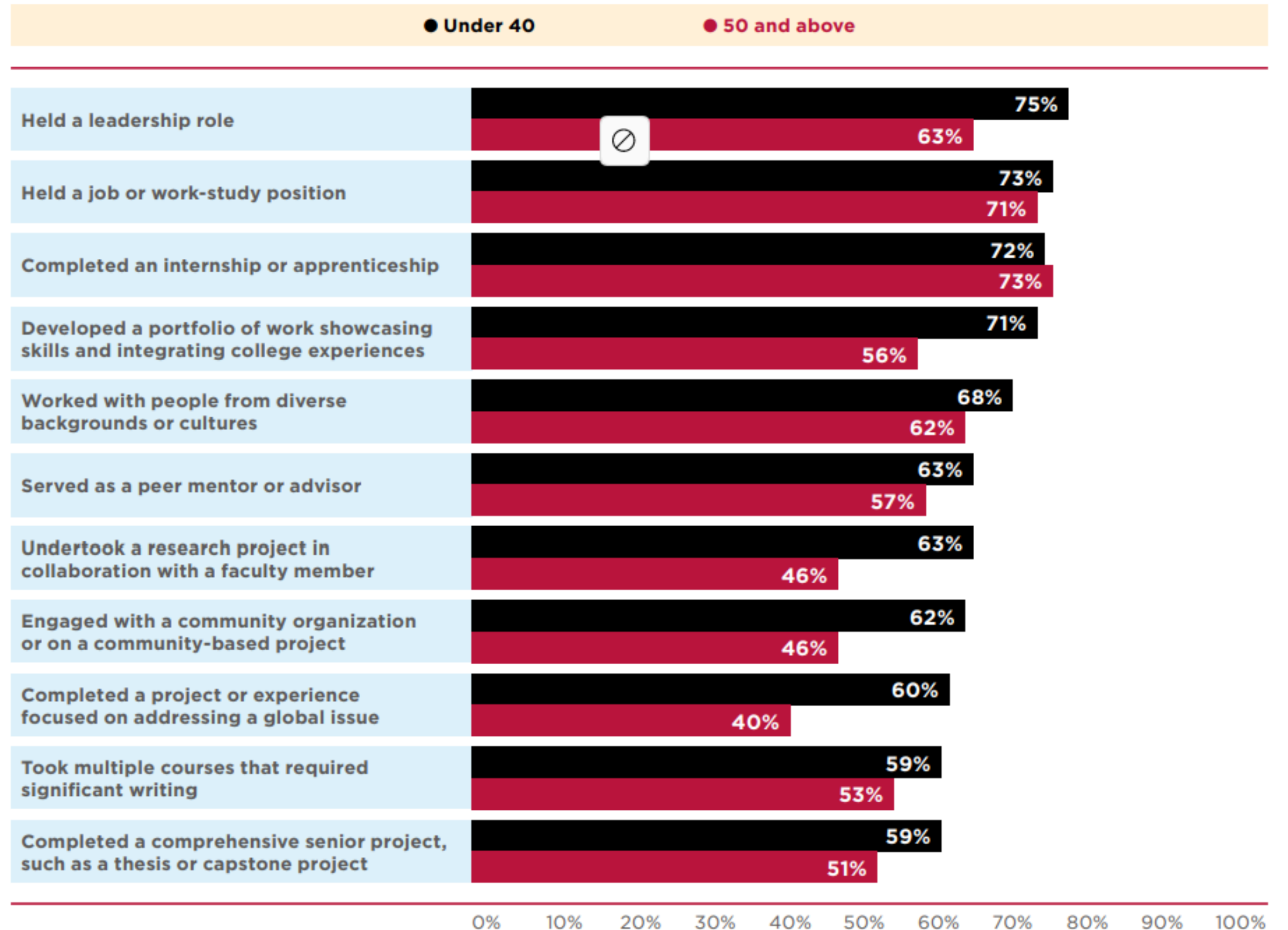
SKILL-BASED HIRING

A hiring practice in which employers evaluate and select candidates primarily on their verified skills and competencies relevant to the job, rather than on formal education credentials or previous job titles.⁴

According to NACE, most employers (64.8%) use skills-based hiring practices.⁵

SKILLS-BASED LEARNING EXPERIENCES ⁶

Percentages of employers under the age of 40 compared with employers 50 and above who indicated they would be “more/much more likely” to consider a job candidate with particular experiences



STUDENT AND EMPLOYER PERCEPTIONS¹

Gaps between perceptions regarding critical thinking, career and self-development, professionalism, and leadership.

Similar perceptions about technology.

FIGURE 1: STUDENT AND EMPLOYER RATINGS OF IMPORTANCE OF AND STUDENT PROFICIENCY IN CAREER READINESS COMPETENCIES, BY PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS.

COMPETENCY	NEW GRADUATES		EMPLOYERS	
	IMPORTANCE	PROFICIENCY	IMPORTANCE	PROFICIENCY
Communication	96.3%	78.1%	96.1%	53.5%
Critical Thinking	94.0%	80.0%	96.1%	55.9%
Teamwork	90.5%	83.5%	93.9%	81.5%
Career & Self-Development	87.8%	61.5%	65.6%	43.2%
Professionalism	88.9%	79.7%	89.4%	50.3%
Leadership	84.6%	66.0%	45.0%	31.0%
Technology	77.9%	60.5%	71.7%	72.0%
Equity & Inclusion	78.3%	79.5%	70.0%	63.3%

Source: National Association of Colleges and Employers. Data are from NACE's [2024 Student Survey](#) and [Job Outlook 2025](#) survey. Importance ratings are the percentages of responding students and employers that, on a five-point scale, rated the respective competency either "very important" (4) or "extremely important" (5). Proficiency ratings are the percentages of responding students and employers that, on a five-point scale, rated recent graduates either "very proficient" (4) or "extremely proficient" (5) in the respective competency.

INDUSTRY VS. FACULTY PERCEPTIONS

IMPORTANCE OF SKILL DEVELOPMENT VS. SKILL APPLICATION

FACULTY FOCUS
ON STUDENTS
LEARNING
SKILLS

AND

EMPLOYERS
FOCUS ON
STUDENTS
DEMONSTRATING
AN ABILITY TO
APPLY SKILLS



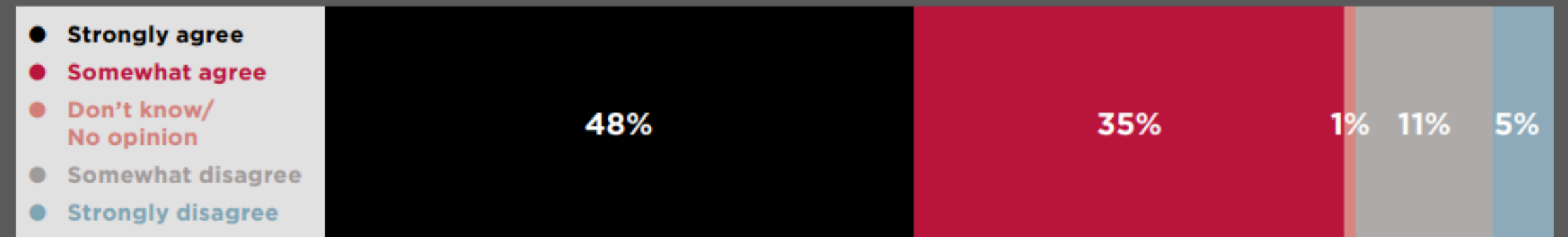
K-12 EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS

According to research done by Building Bridges to Careers in their service area, K-12 educators feel community members, “distrust youth and their readiness to participate meaningfully in the workforce and life of the community.”⁷

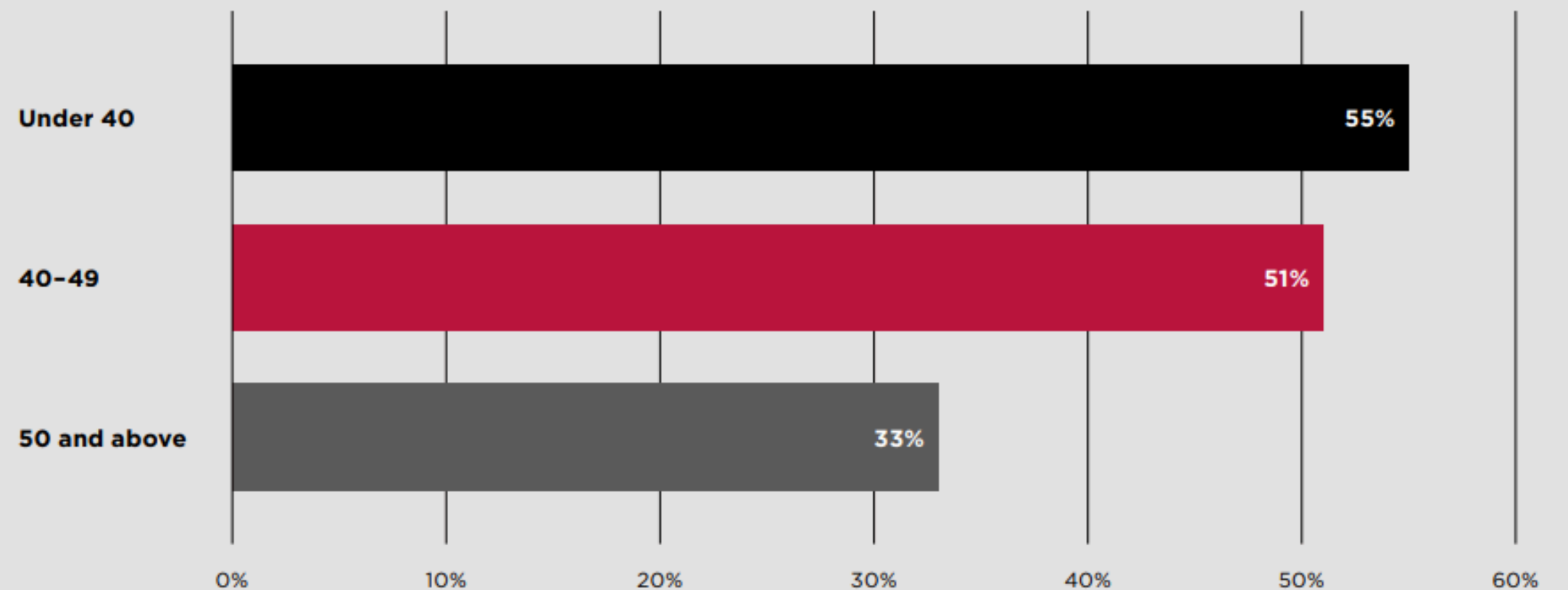
CONFIDENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION⁶

“A recent Gallup survey found that the combined percentage of Americans reporting that they had a “great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in higher education was just over a third (36 percent)...compared to 57% percent in 2015, which is a 21 percent decrease over 8 years.

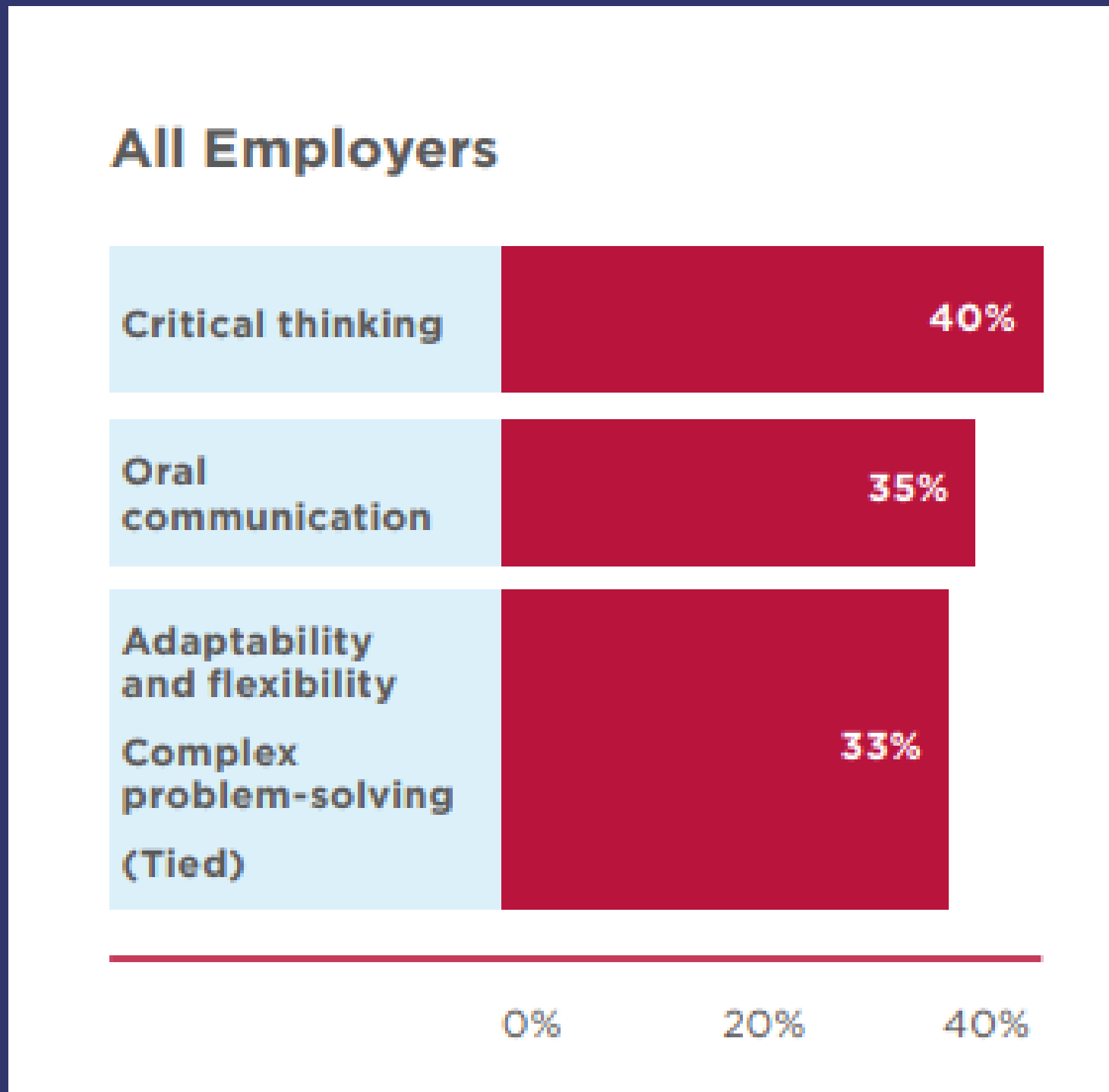
I am confident that higher education is preparing graduates to succeed in the workforce.



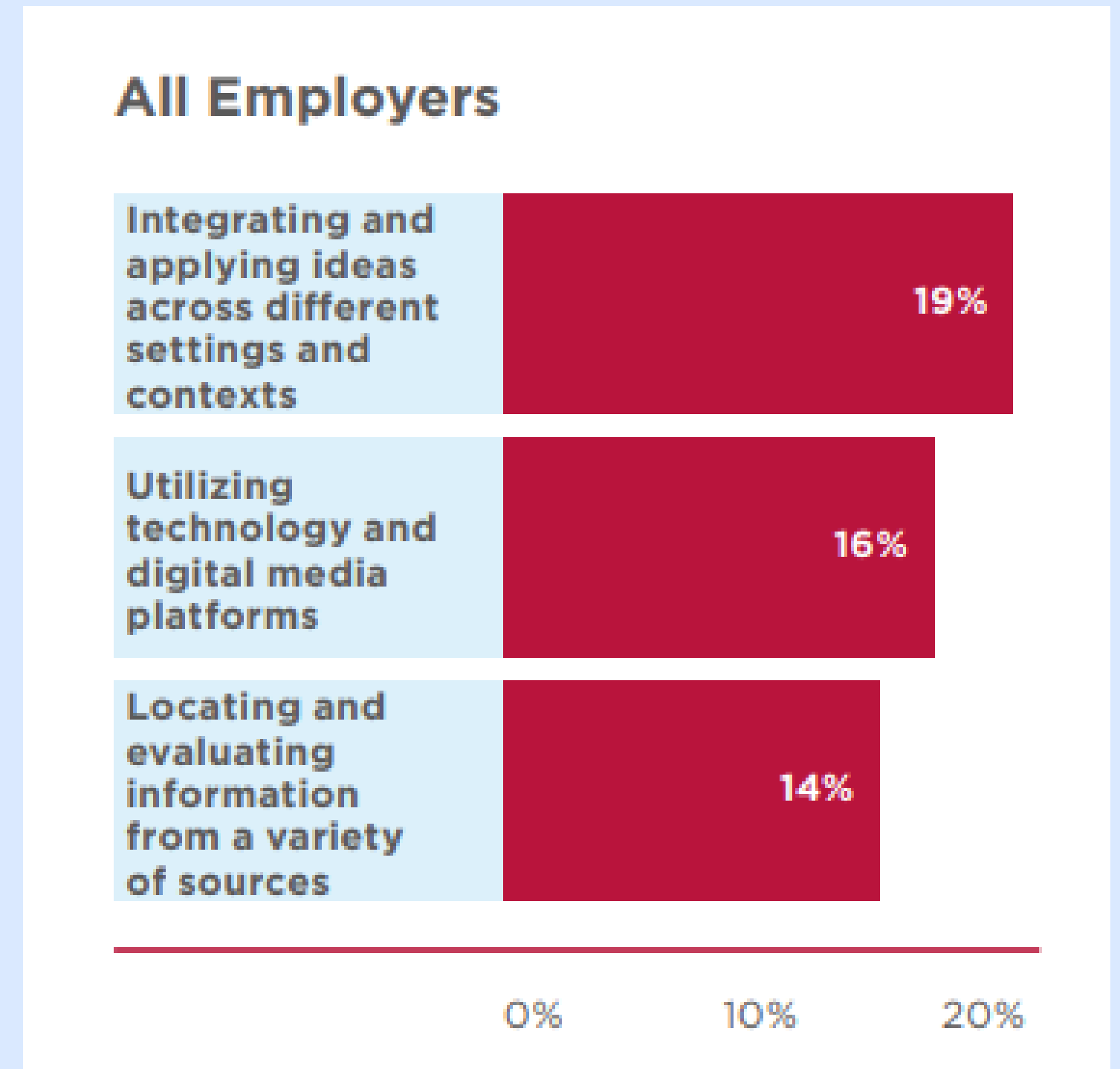
Employers under 40 years of age vs. employers 50 and above who “strongly agree” with the statement: “I am confident that higher education is preparing graduates to succeed in the workforce.”



TOP THREE SKILLS that employers would like colleges and universities to place more emphasis on to improve college student preparedness:



BOTTOM THREE SKILLS that employers would like colleges and universities to place more emphasis on to improve college student preparedness:



STUDENT VS. FACULTY PERCEPTIONS

IMPORTANCE OF JOB-SPECIFIC SKILLS VS. TRANSFERABLE SKILLS⁸

STUDENTS
FOCUS ON
MASTERY OF
JOB-SPECIFIC
SKILLS

VS.

FOCUSING ON
MASTERY OF
TRANSFERABLE
SKILLS



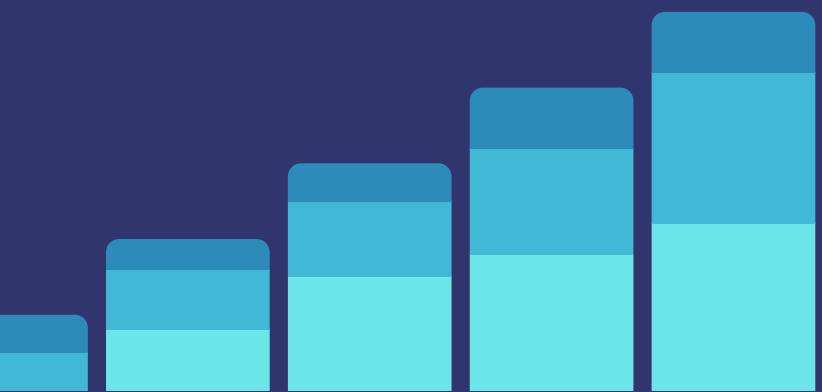
PERCEPTION OF SKILL IMPORTANCE⁸

Four most important skills
faculty believe students need to
obtain a job after graduation:

- Interpersonal skills
- Critical thinking
- Problem solving
- Teamwork

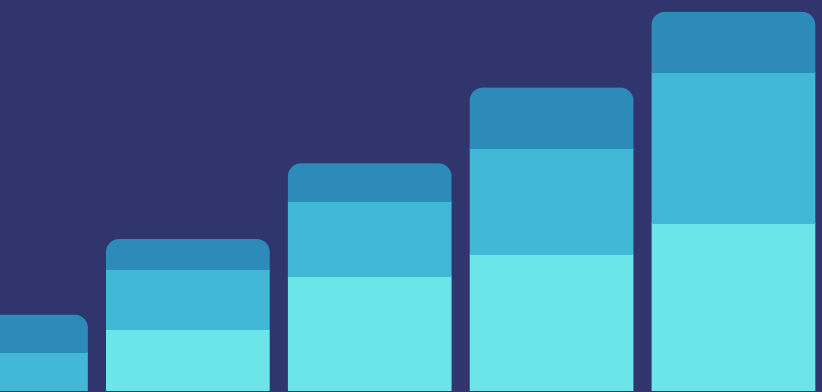
Four most important skills
students believe they need to
obtain a job after graduation:

- Management
- Interpersonal skills
- Teamwork
- Time management



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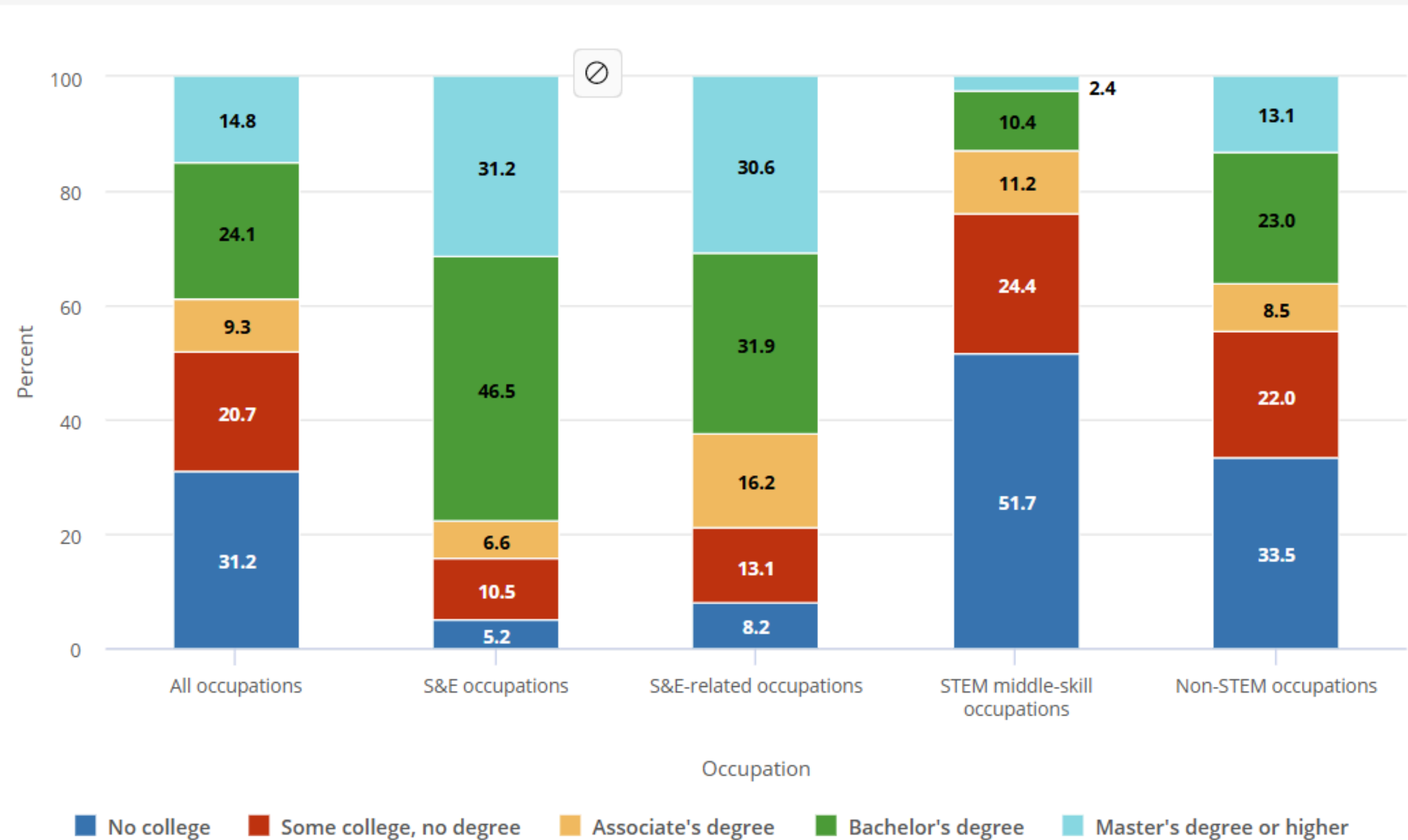
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EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IN STEM

“The use of STEM skills is widespread in the United States, with STEM workers making up nearly a quarter of the total workforce and more than half holding less than a bachelor’s degree.” (National Science Board, 2024)⁸

Educational attainment of STEM workers, by occupation group: 2021



8. National Science Board, National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics. (2024, May). The STEM labor force: Scientists, engineers, and skilled technical workers (Science and Engineering Indicators 2024). U.S. National Science Foundation. <https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsb20245/conclusion>

PERCEPTIONS REGARDING MICROCREDENTIALS⁶

Strength of a job candidate with a college degree and a microcredential in a technical skill

