

2026 STUDY ABROAD SURVEY:



THE VOICE OF THE STUDENTS



The fifth annual Terra Dotta study abroad students' survey.



2026 Executive summary

In our fifth annual Study Abroad Survey, the 2026 Terra Dotta Voice of the Students confirms that study abroad continues to hold powerful appeal.

Students see study abroad as more than academic enrichment—it is a catalyst for personal transformation. Time abroad builds independence, adaptability and confidence, while expanding cultural perspective and global awareness.

Despite strong demand, practical realities shape participation. Global conflict is a defining factor.

- Geopolitical uncertainty is influencing how students and families assess risk, increasing demand for real-time travel advisories, clear safety protocols, and contingency planning. Peer insights from students already abroad are influential in building confidence.
- Cost remains a significant barrier, impacting decisions on whether students go abroad and which programs they choose

Students are looking for greater transparency around total cost—not just scholarship opportunities—making affordability and clarity critical to access.

As students' interest in study abroad often surfaces in high school and influences college selection decisions, institutions have an opportunity to broaden their program discovery guidance for enrollment impacts. And sharing clear costs early in students' journeys helps make great decisions - and helps universities be competitive earlier, when high school students are choosing institutions.

Students rely on university websites and peer recommendations, but also want more personalized, major-aligned program support.

For institutions, the path forward is clear: reduce friction and reinforce value. Transparent pricing, flexible program options, and proactive safety communication—paired with personalized guidance and peer-driven storytelling—will be key to institutions' converting strong interest into meaningful participation.



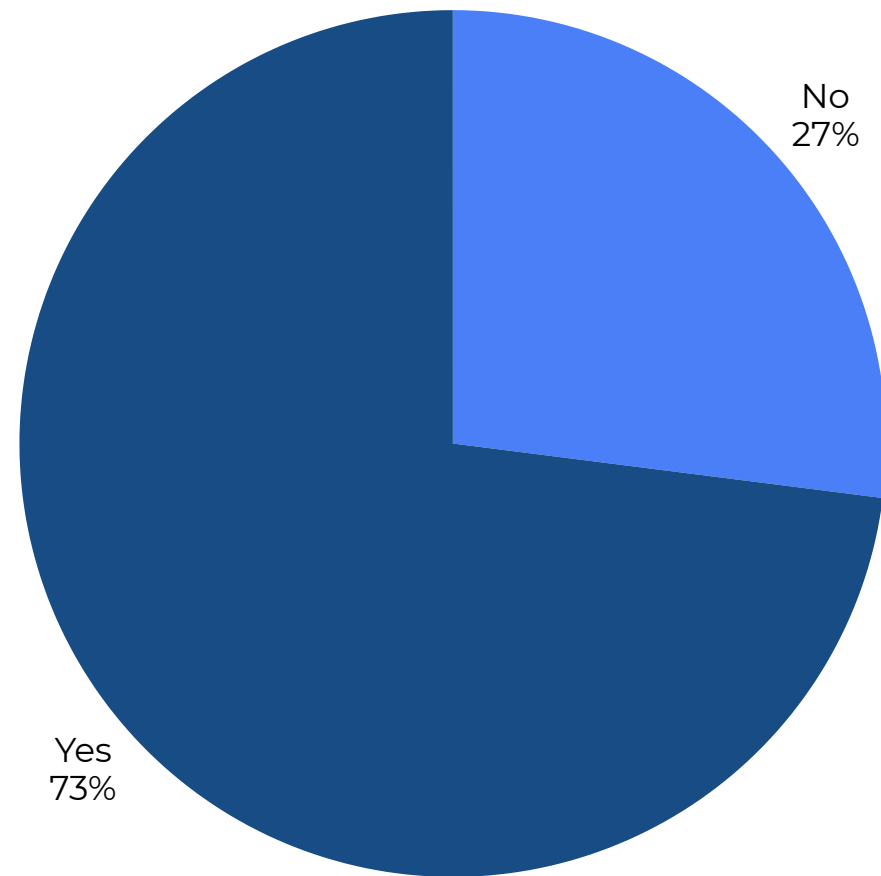
2026 Key highlights

- **Strong Study Abroad Demand—With Enrollment Impact:** Interest in study abroad remains popular with 73% of students planning to participate—many in the near term. Importantly, 44% say study abroad offerings influenced their school choice, reinforcing its role in engagement as well as enrollment.
- **Global Conflict Is Reshaping Decisions:** Geopolitical uncertainty is now a central consideration with 79% of students saying global conflicts influence their decision to study abroad. This elevates the importance of real-time travel guidance, safety protocols, and contingency planning.
- **Cost Is a Defining Barrier:** Financial concerns continue to limit participation with 71% of students citing cost as a key obstacle. Students expect to rely on aid and scholarships but are looking for greater transparency into total costs—not just funding options—making affordability and clarity essential to access.
- **Experience and Safety Drive Confidence:** Students are motivated first by personal growth (32%), more than career outcomes (19%), but concerns around safety (33%), geopolitical risk (28%), and parental influence (27%) remain. Clear, proactive communication and visible support systems are critical to building trust.
- **Guidance and Discovery Gaps Present Opportunity:** Students rely on institutional channels and peers for discovery, but 55% want clear guidance on programs aligned to their major—highlighting a key gap. Institutions that pair personalized advising with peer-driven content will be best positioned to convert interest into participation.

Interest in study abroad remains strong

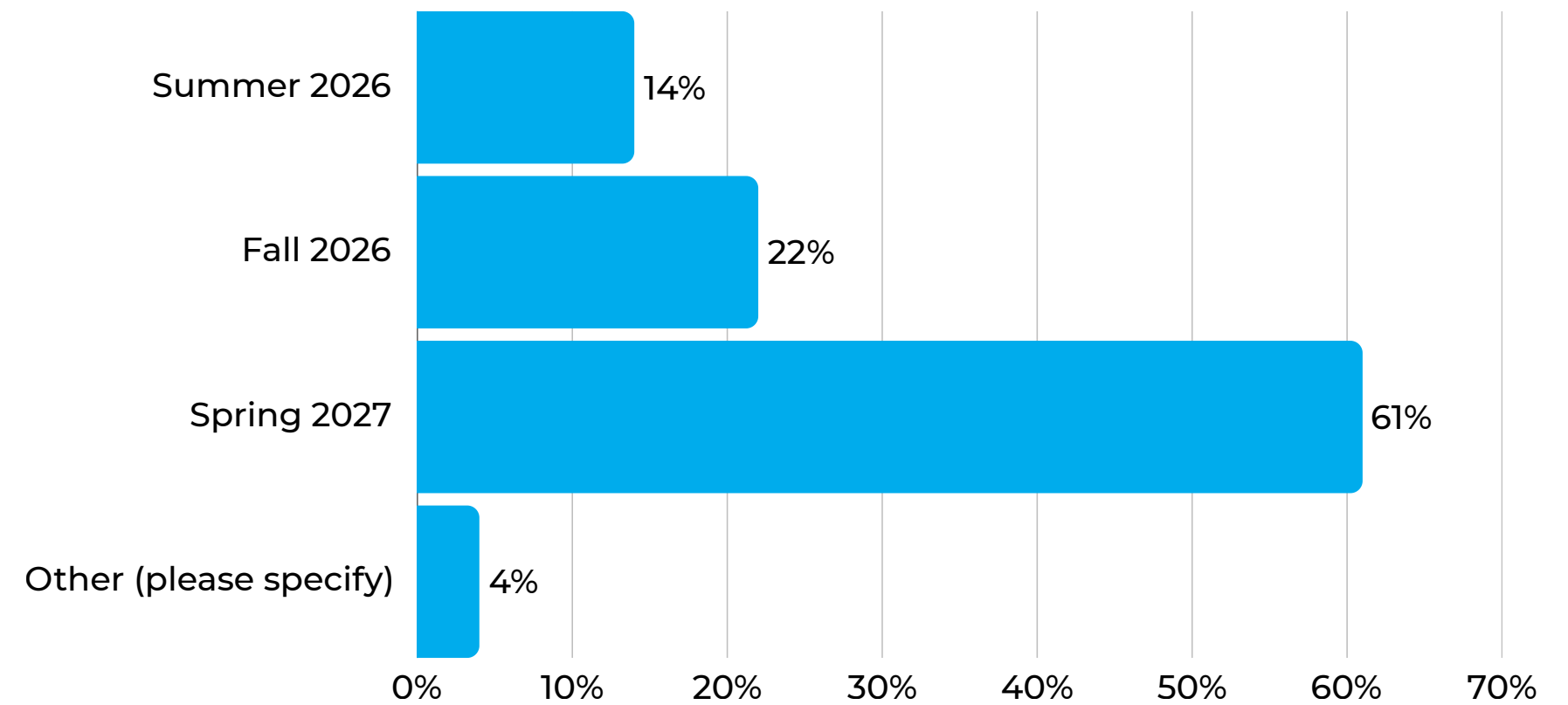
Study abroad is often considered a rite of passage for college students. For the fifth year, study abroad interest among U.S. college students remains strong, hovering around 75%.

Students who plan to study abroad



Sample size = 275 students

Study abroad time frame

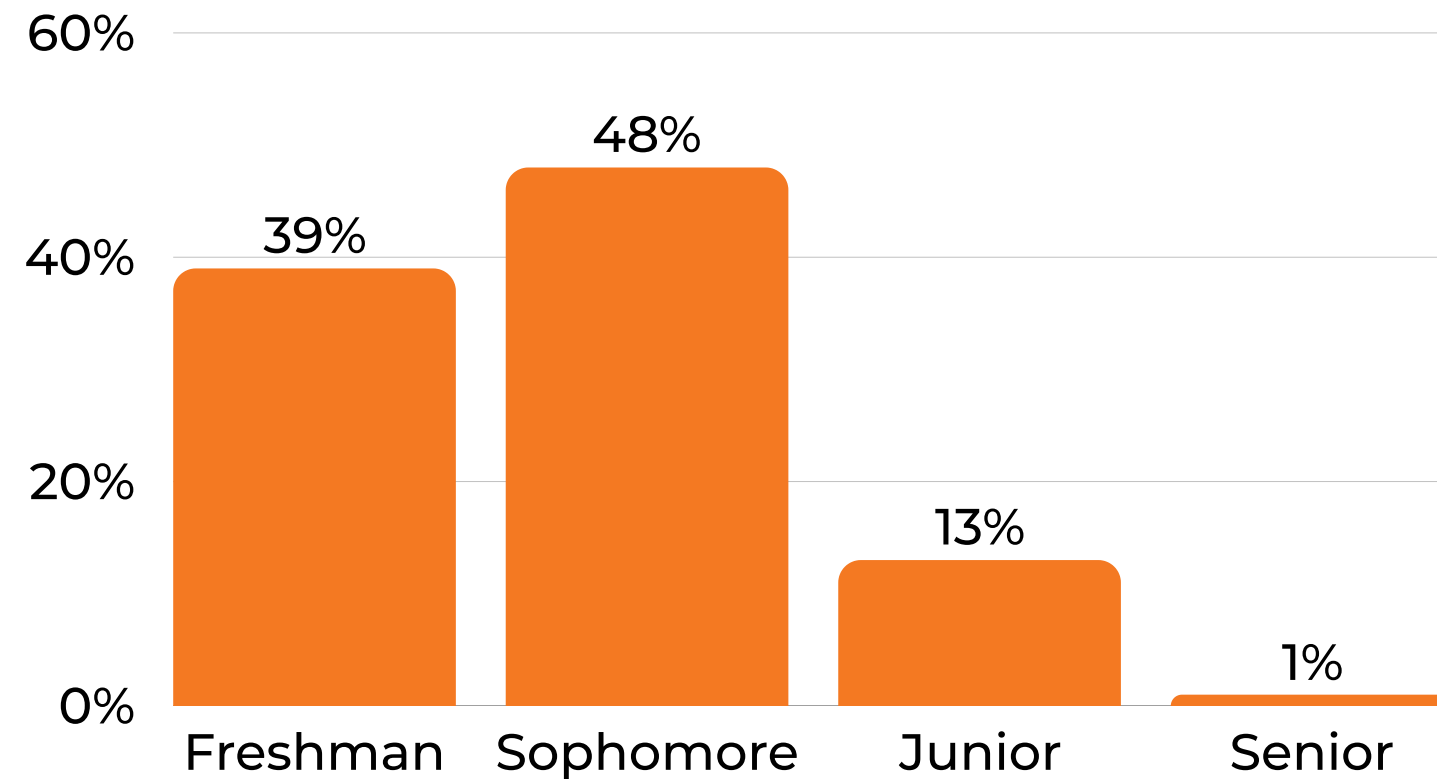


Sample size = 200 students

Study abroad programs impact enrollments

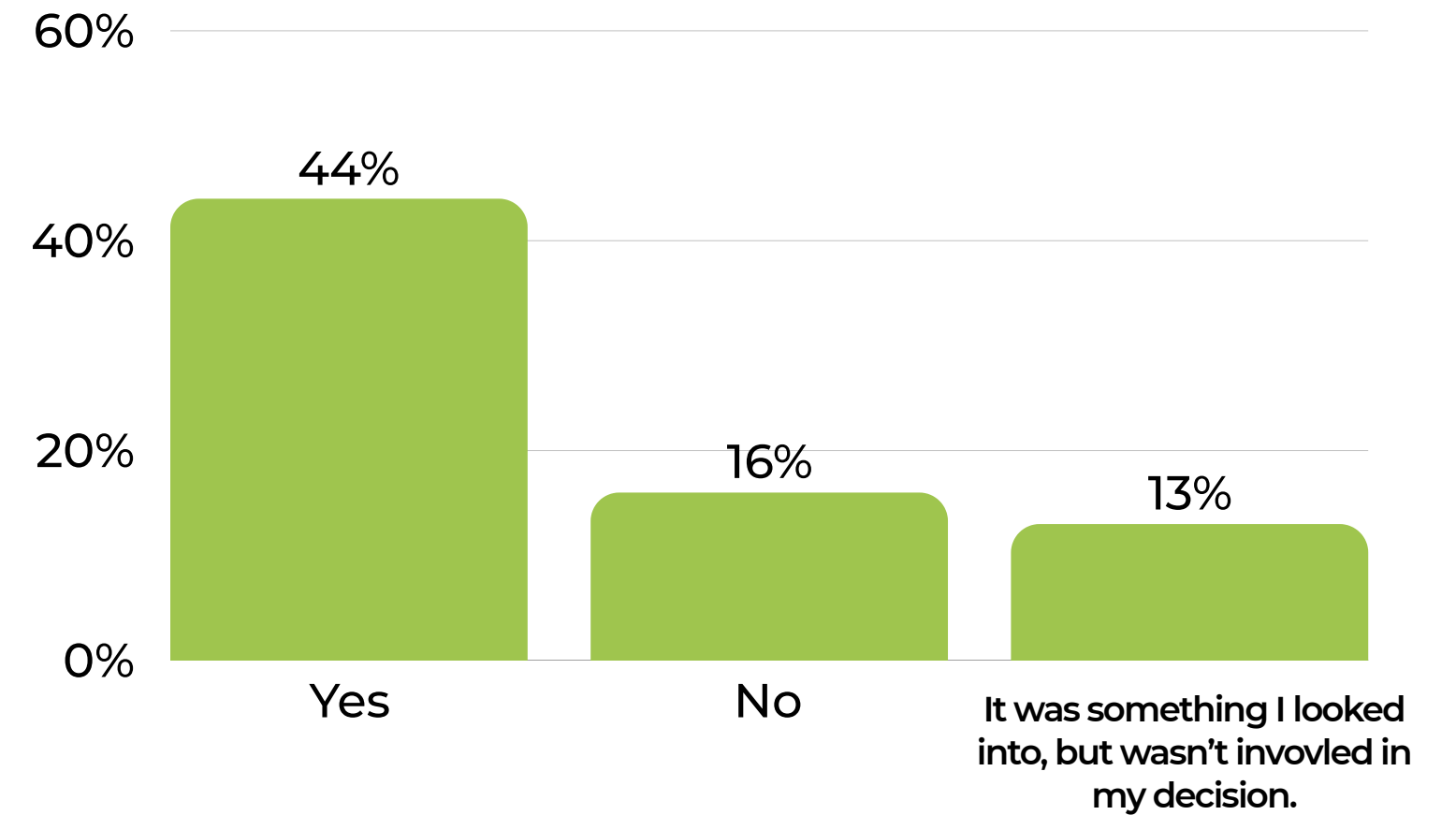
Interest in study abroad starts early in the college journey and, for many, influences students' school selection. Nearly half (44%) say study abroad offerings influenced their institutional enrollment decision.

1st time interested in study abroad programs



Sample size = 200 students

Role of institution's Study Abroad programs in decision to attend?

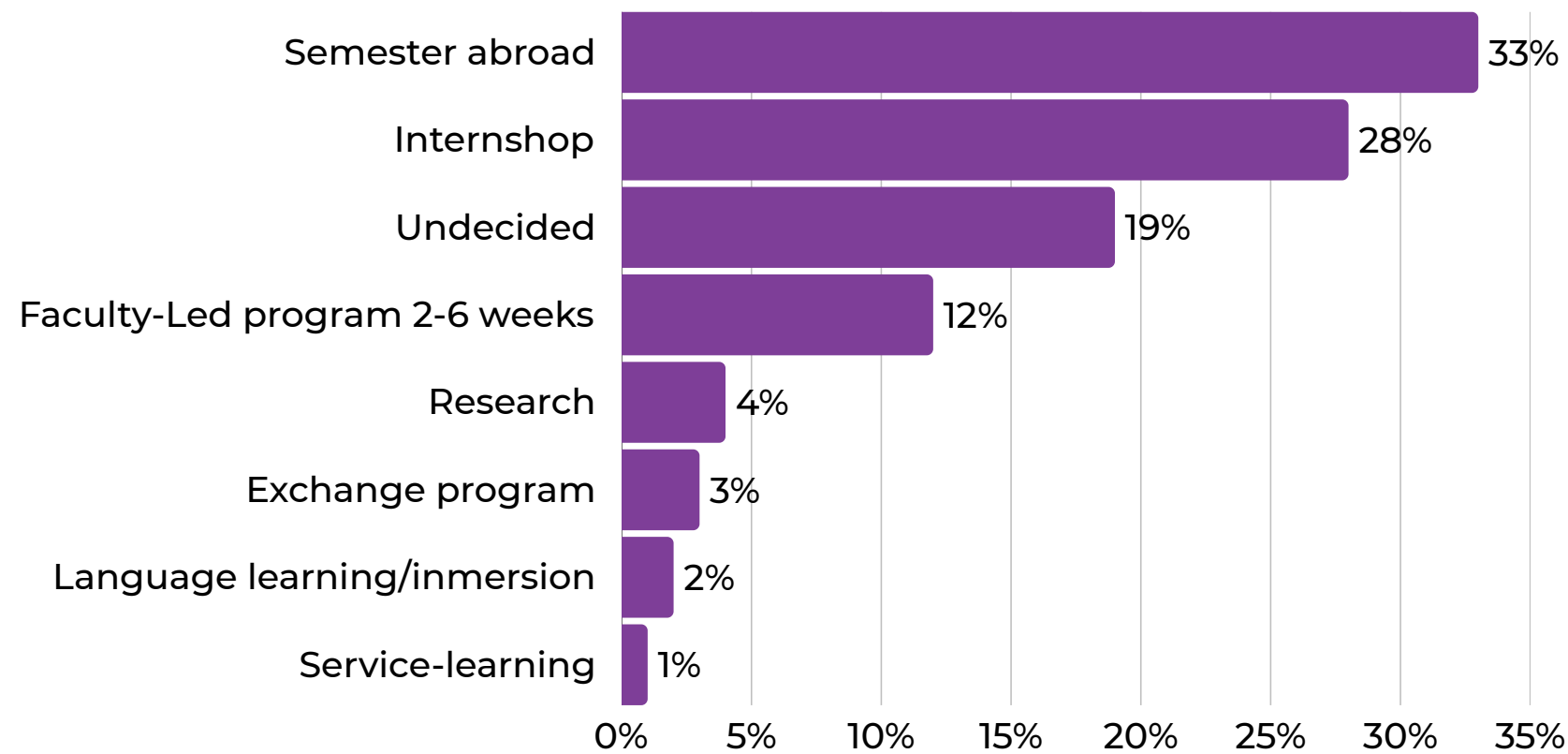


Sample size = 142 students

Internships gaining on semester-long programs; Spain is No. 1 destination

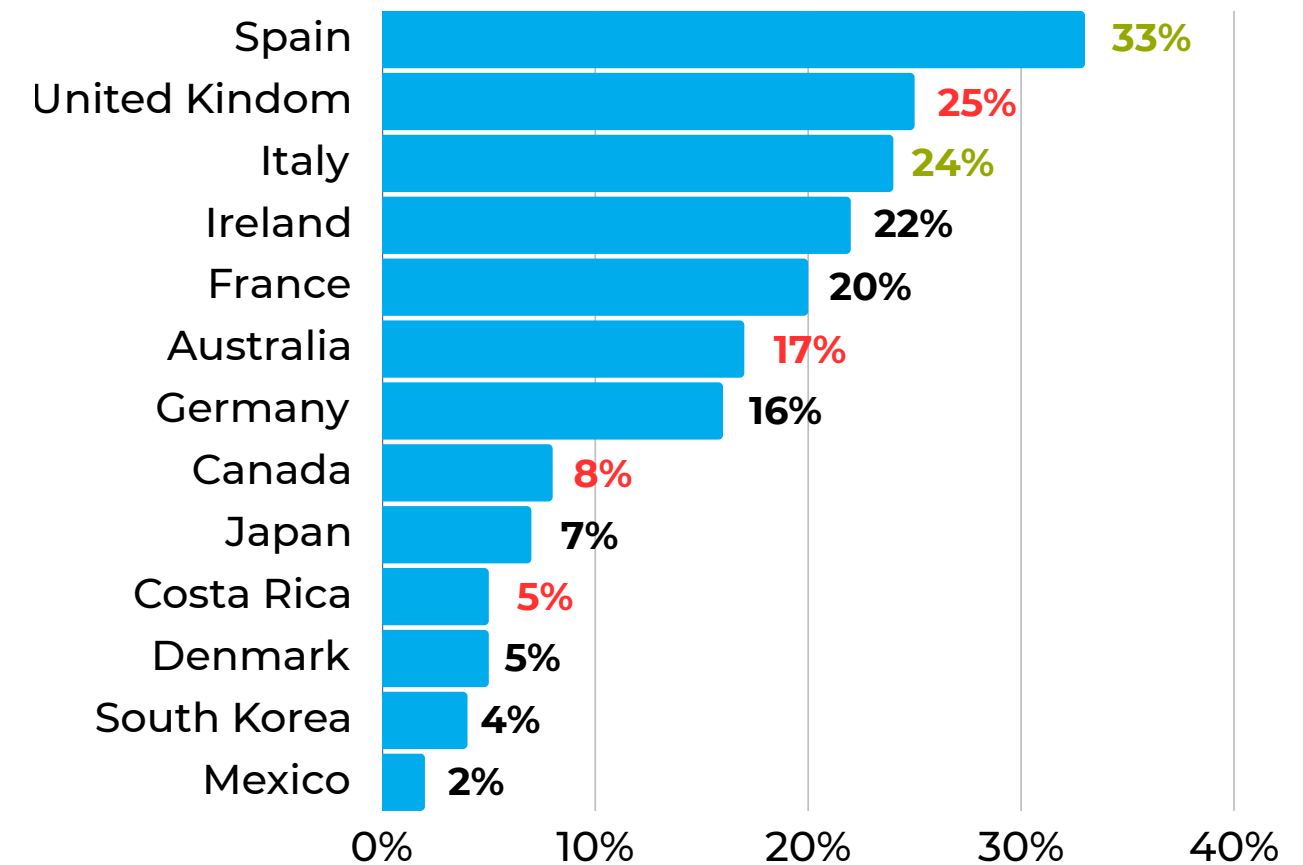
Most students are planning a semester-long program but one-third of students want an internship abroad – a 50% increase in the past year. Europe continues to outpace other destinations of choice as Spain overtakes previous leaders U.K. and Italy while plans to study in Australia and Canada drops 50%.

Type of program sought



Sample size = 200 students

Program countries of interest



Sample size = 200 students

Green Increase from 2025
Red Decrease from 2025



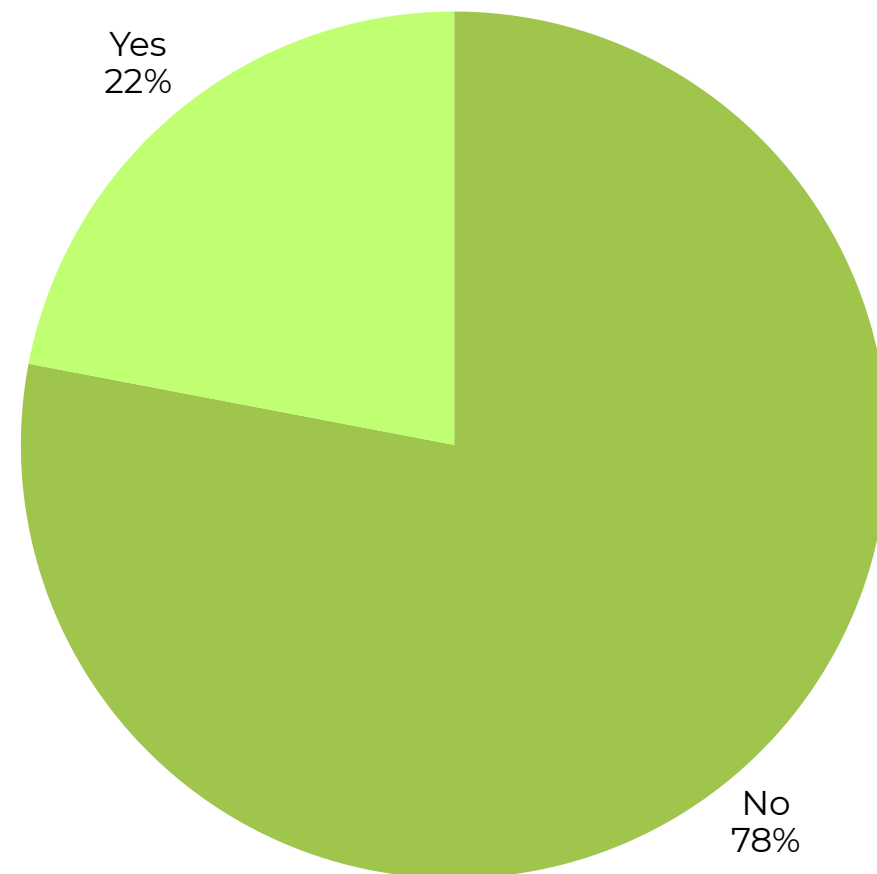
Global conflict and safety

Geopolitical instability and global conflict – both those ongoing and new – have a direct influence on students' study abroad decisions. Institutions that prioritize proactive communications and strong duty of care safety and emergency practices will help ease worries and ensure continuity during turbulent times.

Global conflicts influence study abroad decisions

While geopolitical instability is an ever-present factor, heightened and deepening conflicts may have more college students – and their families – on edge. Four out of five students say international conflicts are a factor in their study abroad decisions.

Do international conflicts impact decision to study abroad



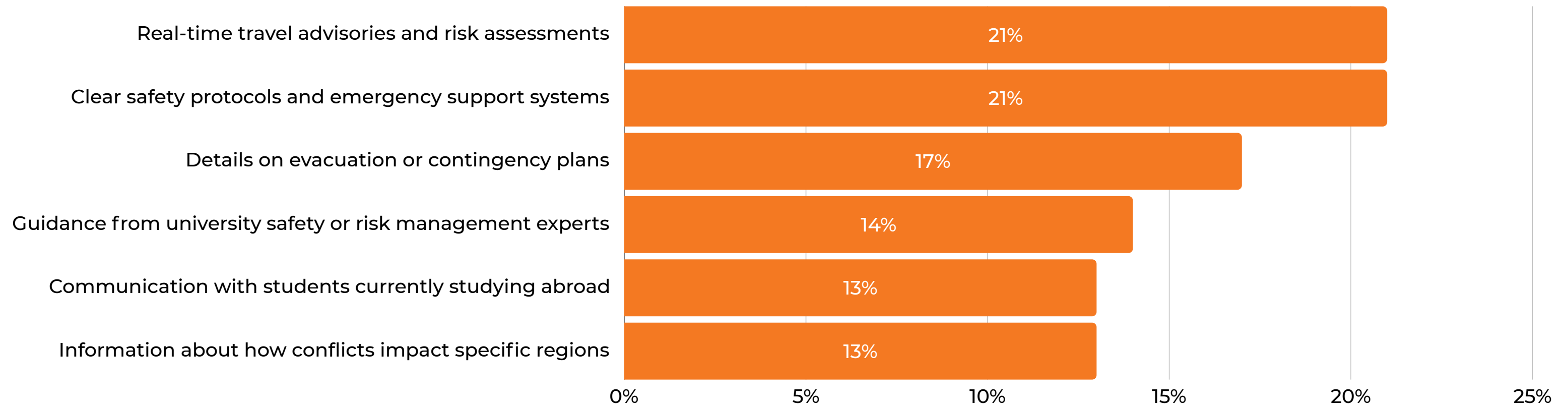
Sample size = 200 students



Easing student worries

Geopolitical uncertainty is reshaping how students and families evaluate risk, driving a growing need for real-time travel updates, transparent safety measures, and well-defined contingency plans.

What universities could offer to ease worries

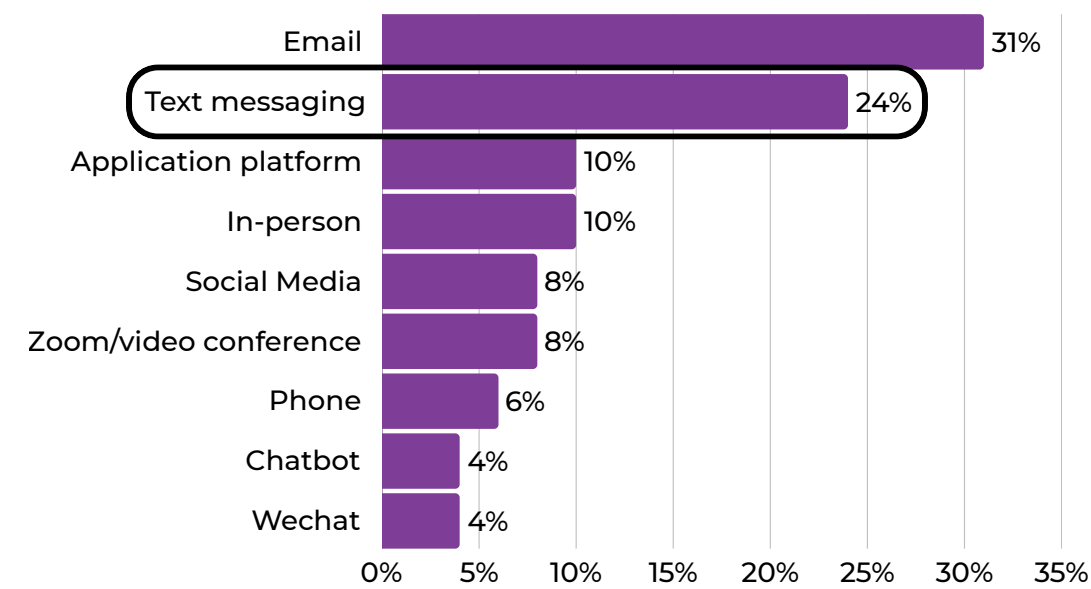


Sample size = 142 students

Student communication while abroad

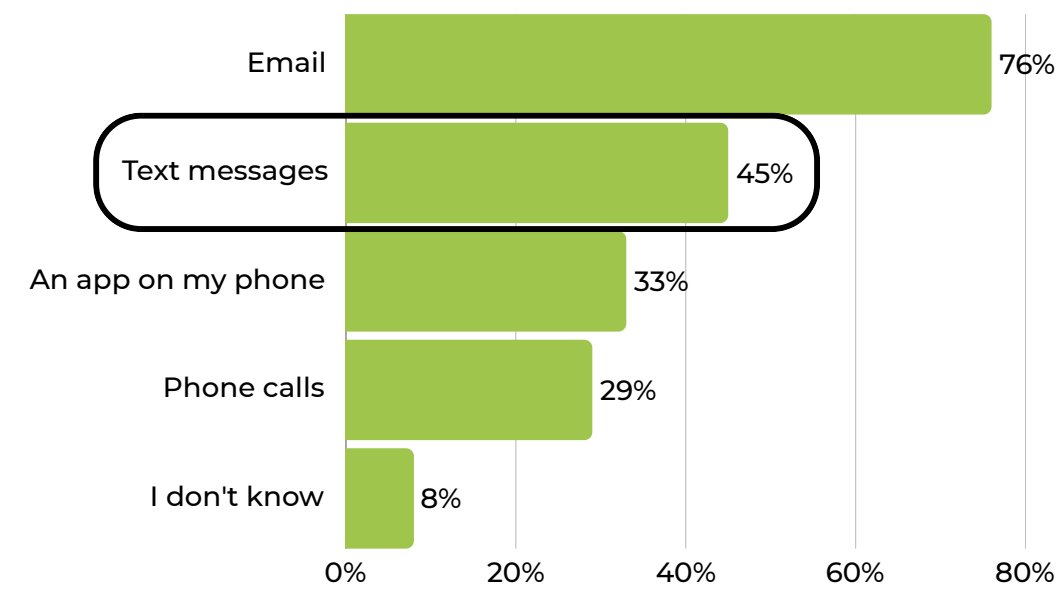
Email still reigns in students' communication with institutions, but nothing beats a live phone call for staying connected with parents while abroad. Text messaging is a consistent and dominant channel for all communication.

Ongoing communication with study abroad office



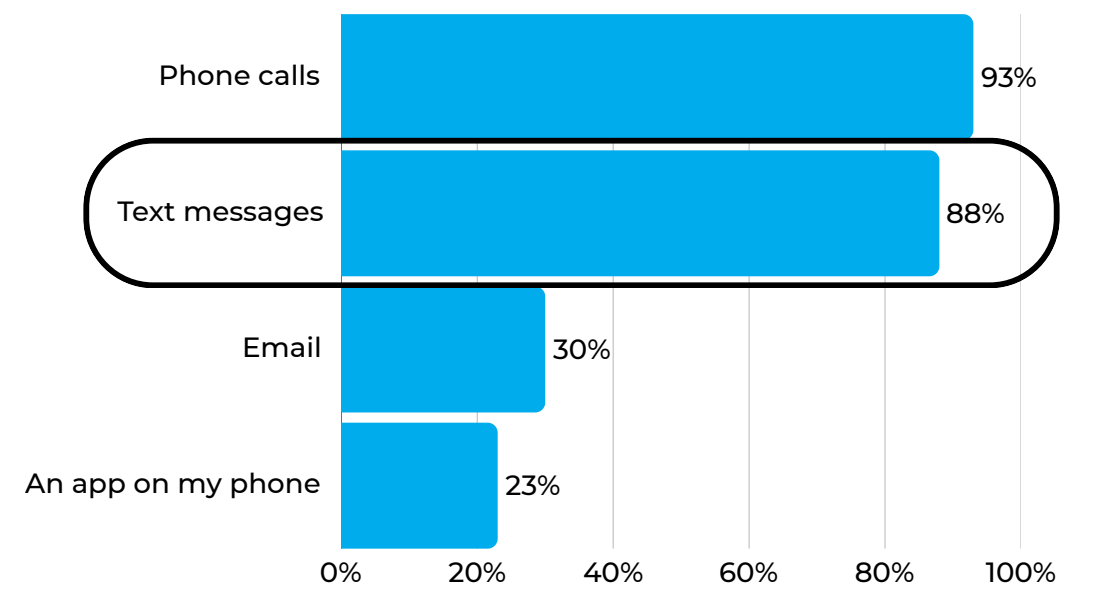
Sample size = 200 students

University communication methods while abroad



Sample size = 200 students

Parent communication methods while abroad



Sample size = 200 students



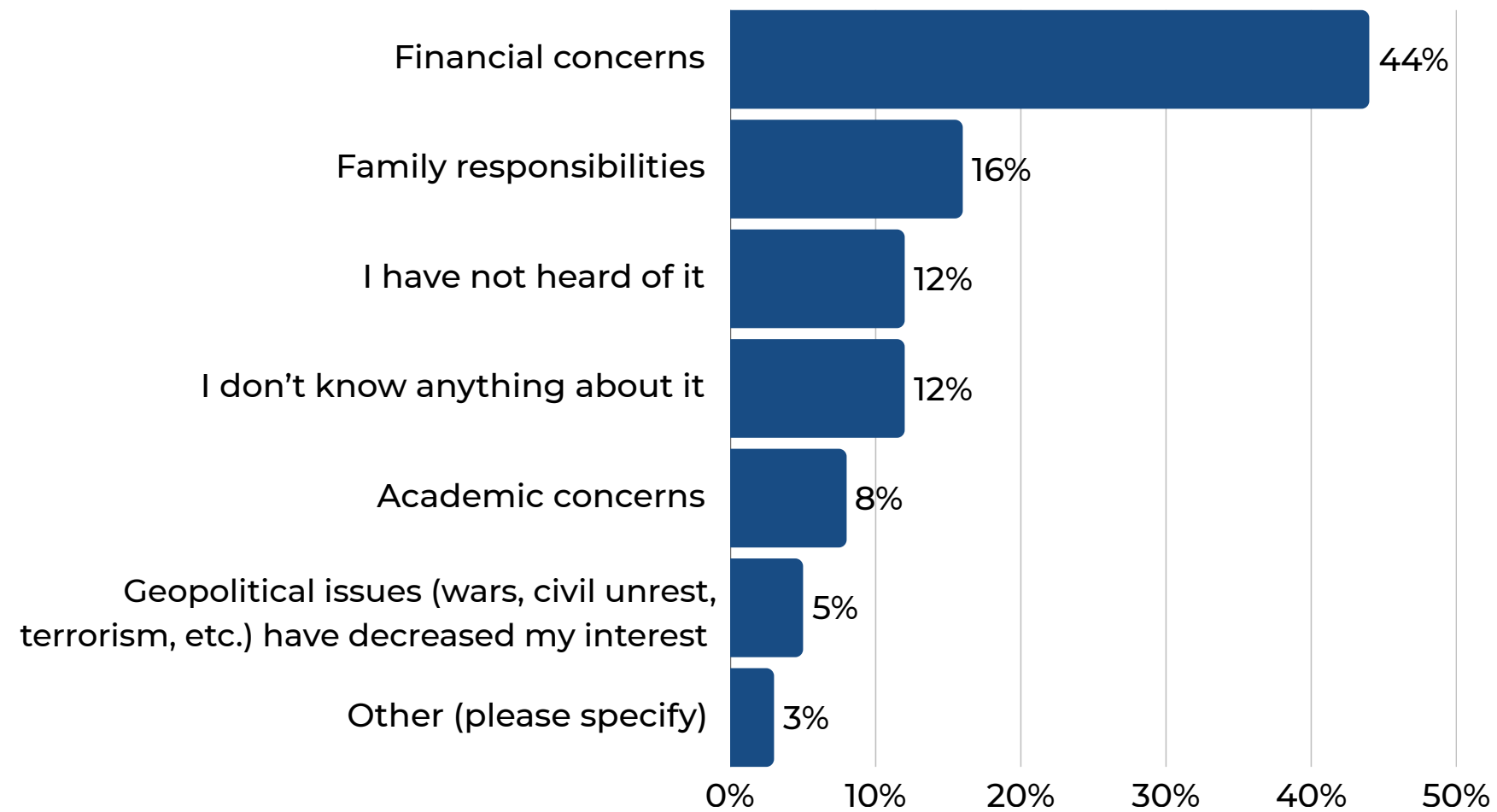
Program costs & funding

Cost is the biggest hurdle to study abroad, shaping both participation and program decisions. More than funding alone, students want clear, upfront pricing so they can fully understand and justify the investment.

The biggest barriers to study abroad

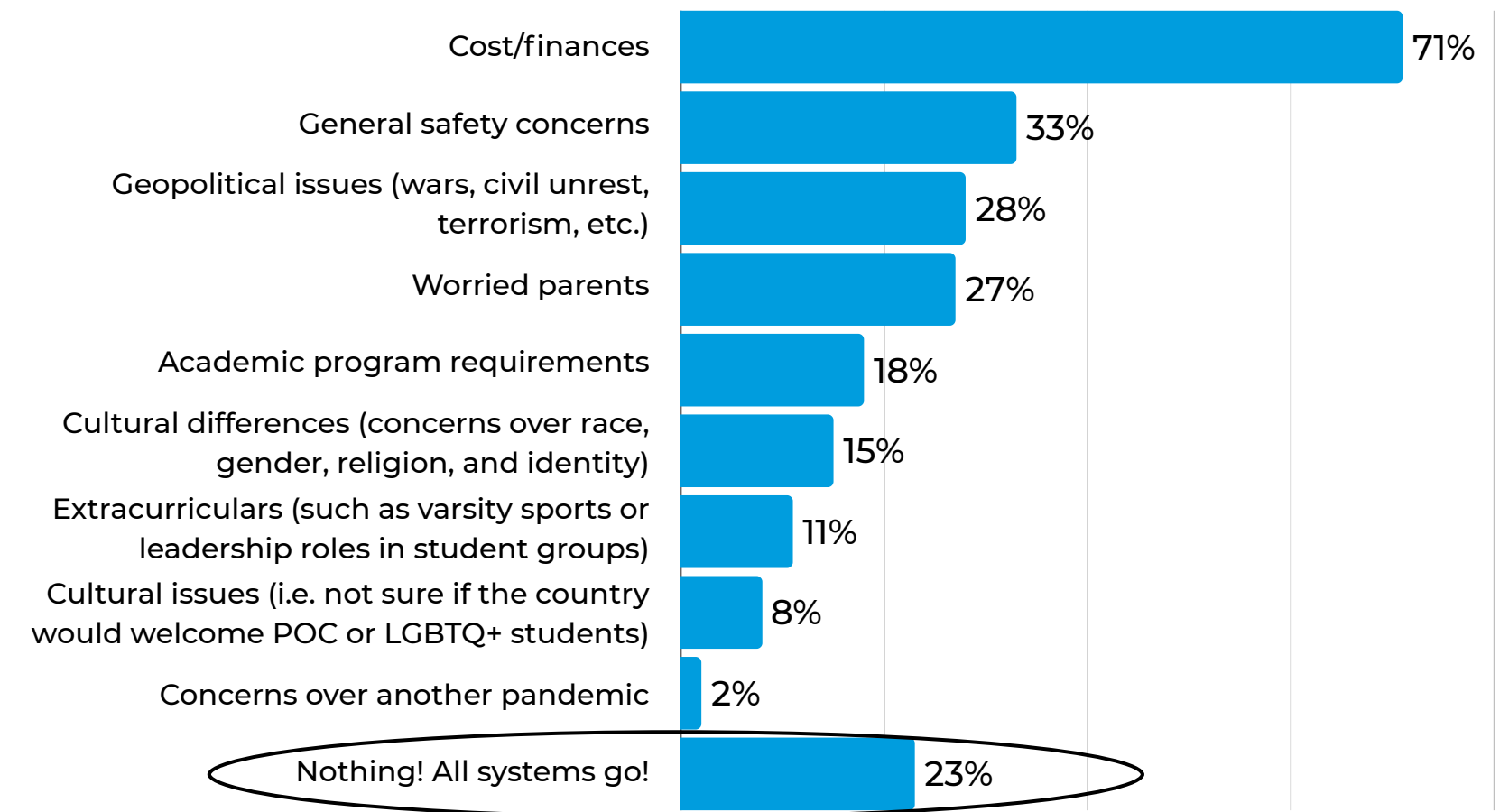
Cost continues to be the No. 1 reason limiting the number of students who study abroad—with safety a close second. However, more students than last year said nothing can prevent them from studying abroad.

Reasons for not wanting to study abroad



Sample size = 75 students

What prevents students from studying abroad

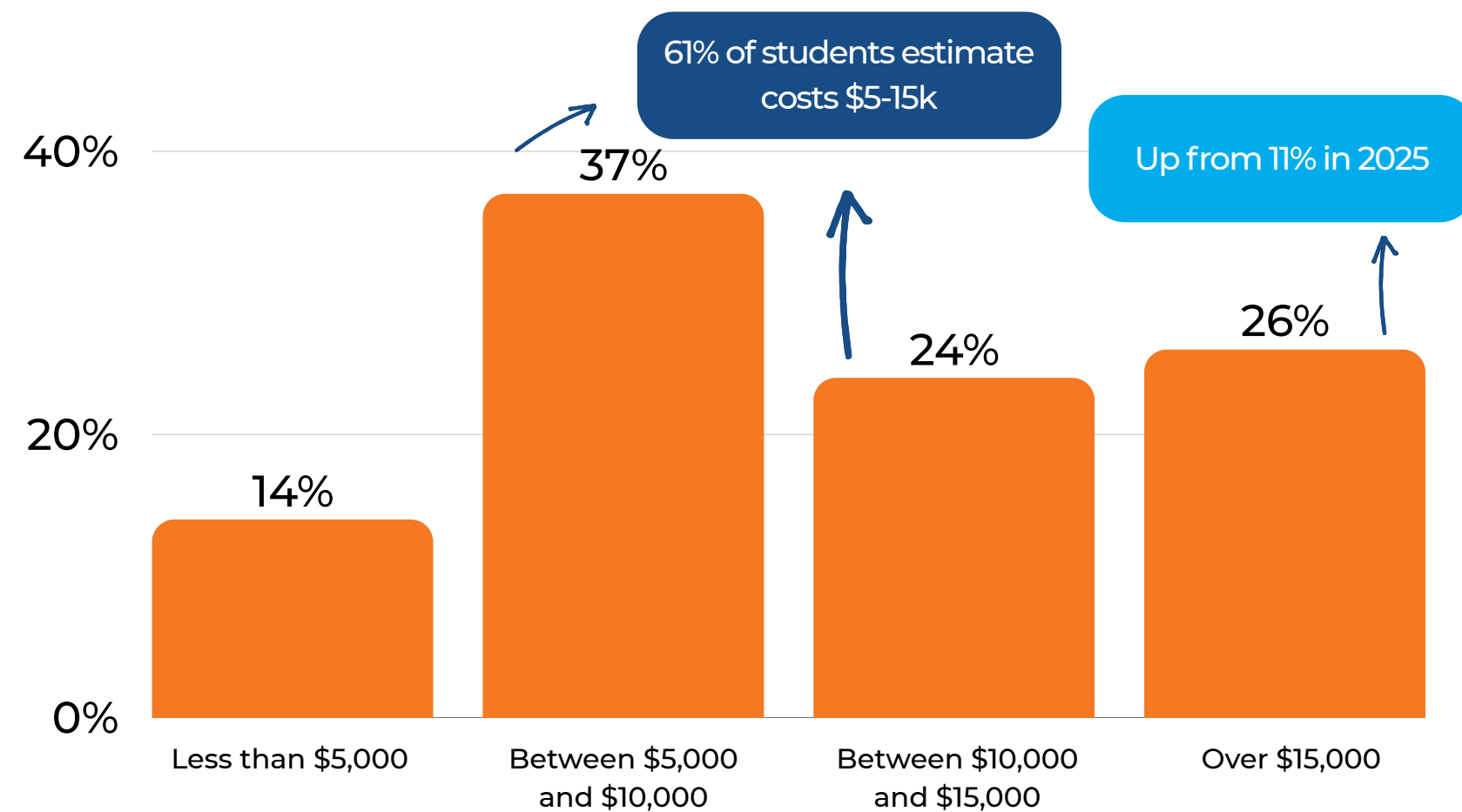


Sample size = 200 students

The cost & funding of study abroad

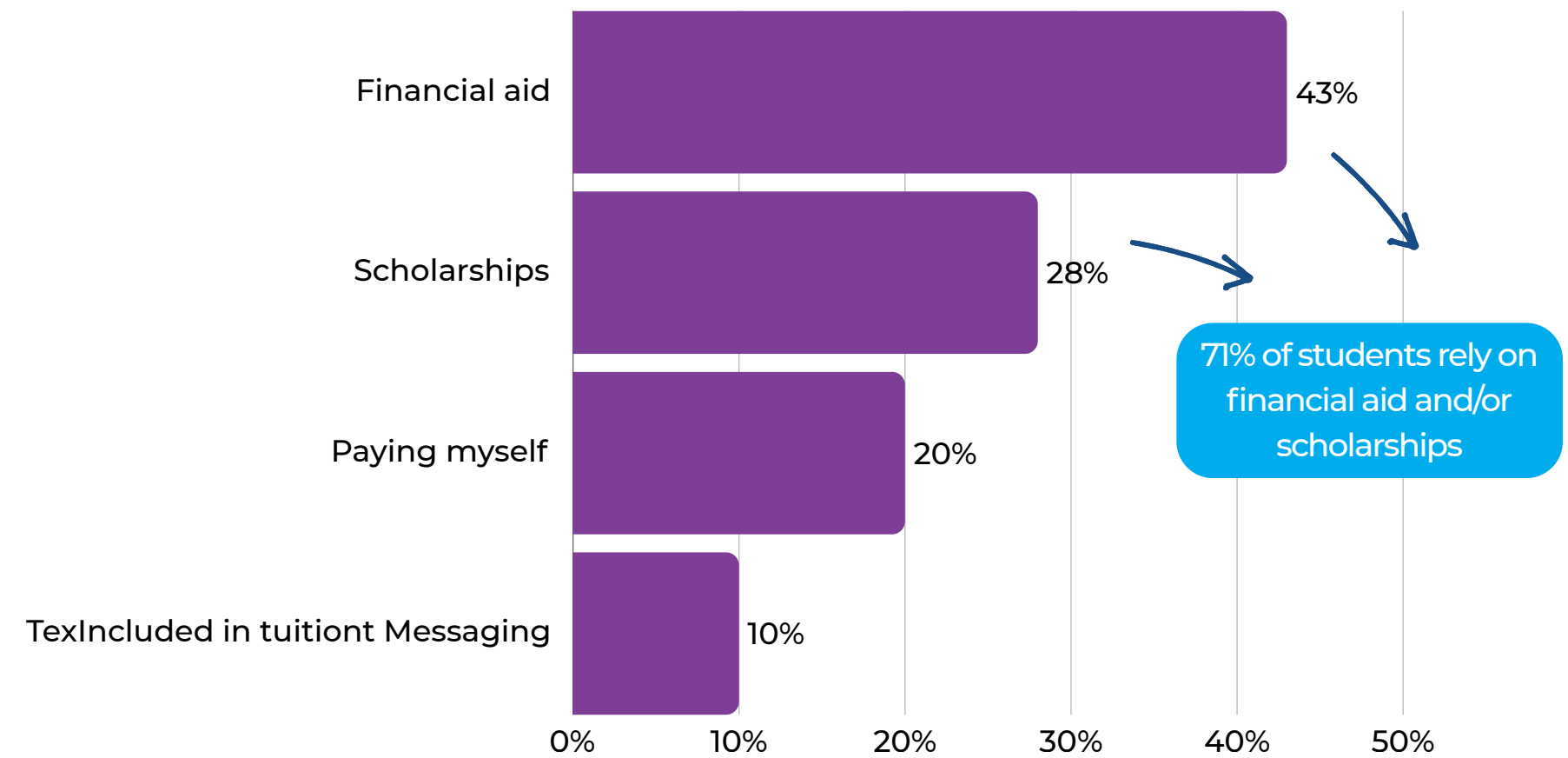
While most students estimate study abroad costs to be \$5,000-\$15,000 and rely heavily on financial aid and scholarships, the number of students estimating the costs to be more than \$15,000 has more than doubled in the past year.

Estimated costs



Sample size = 200 students

Funding options

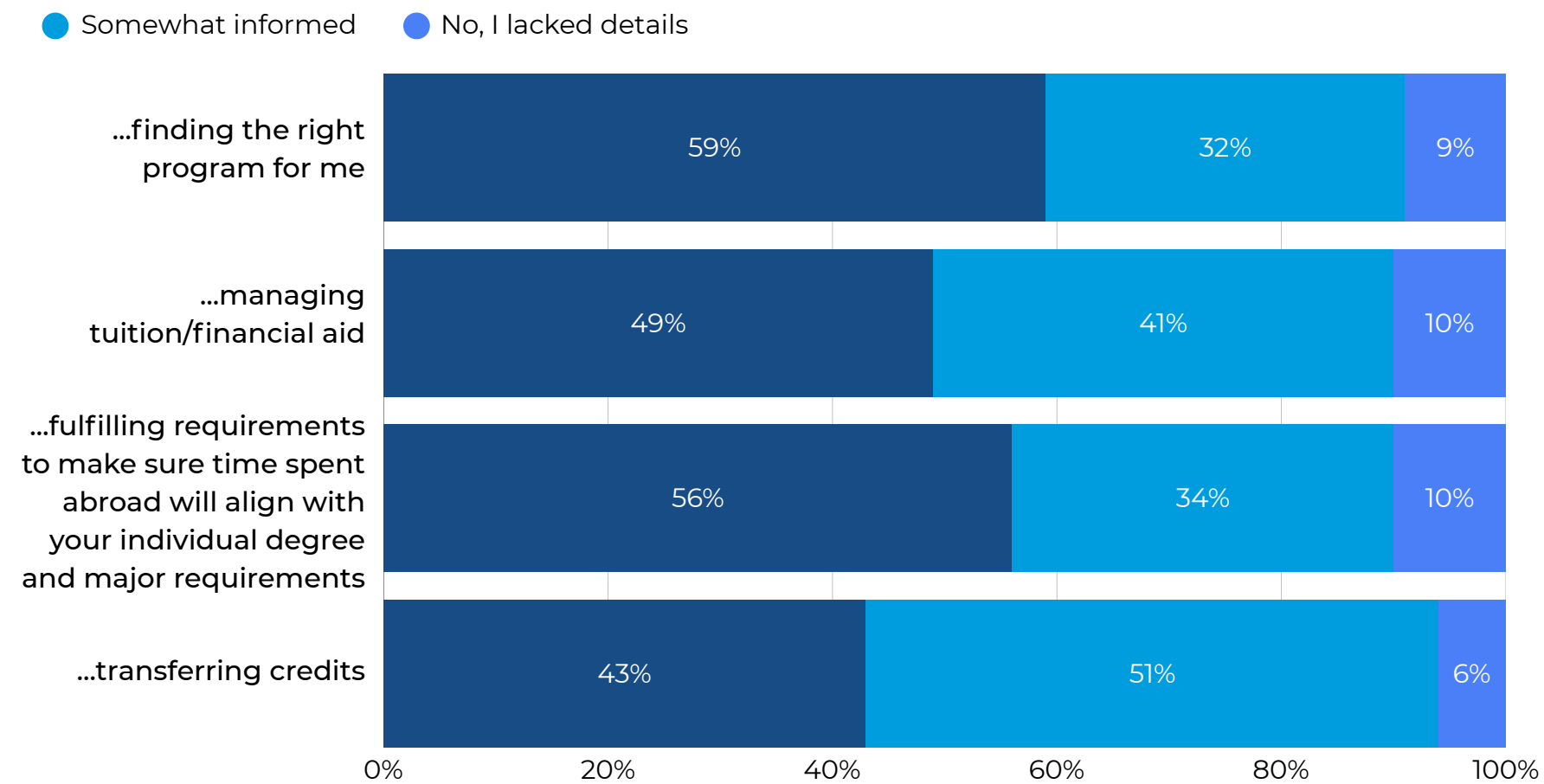


Sample size = 200 students

Student supports

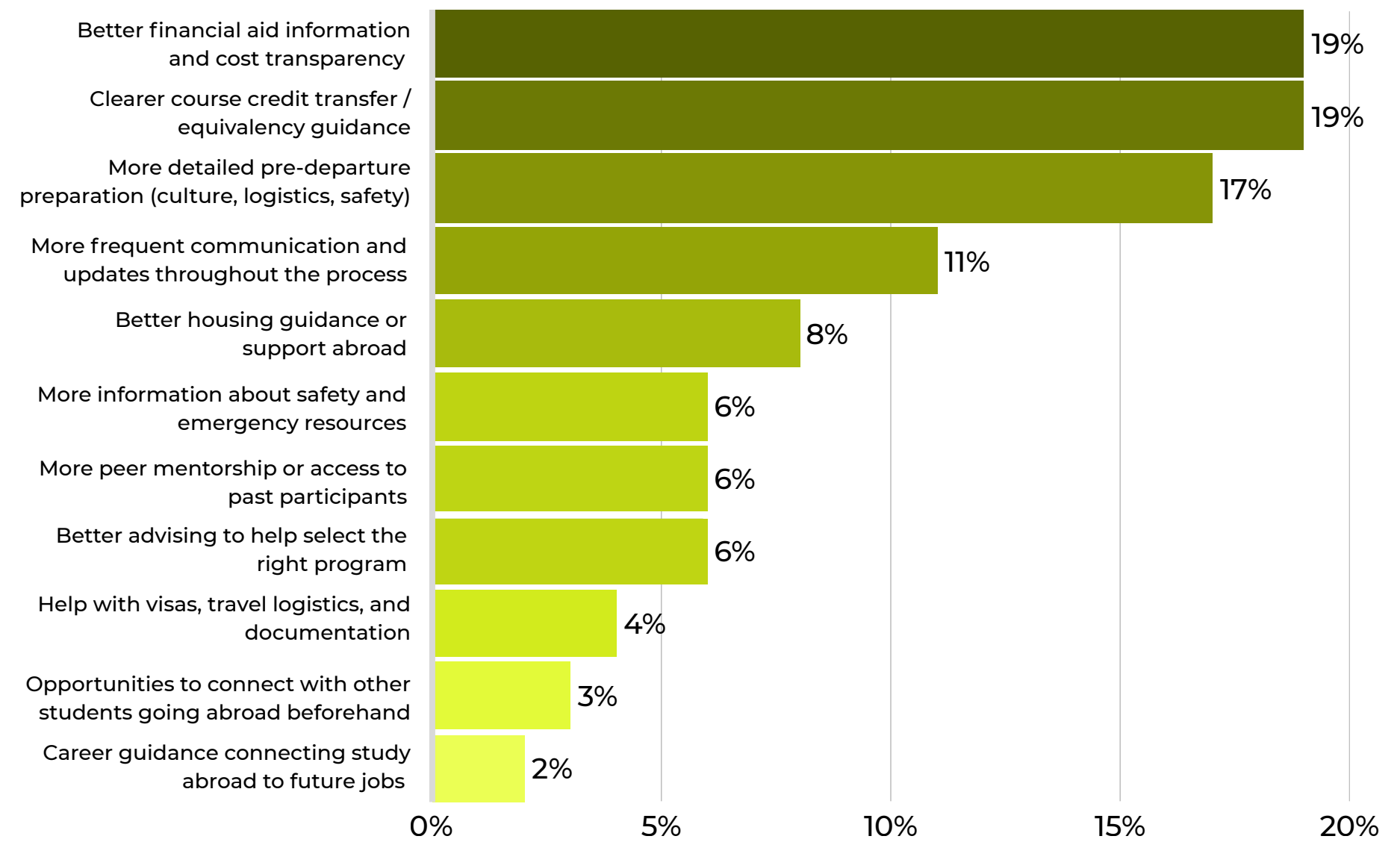
Many students feel somewhat informed about the decision factors for study abroad but want clearer guidance on finances, credit equivalency and program selection.

Feeling informed...



Sample size = 200 students

Ways to provide better support



Sample size = 118 students



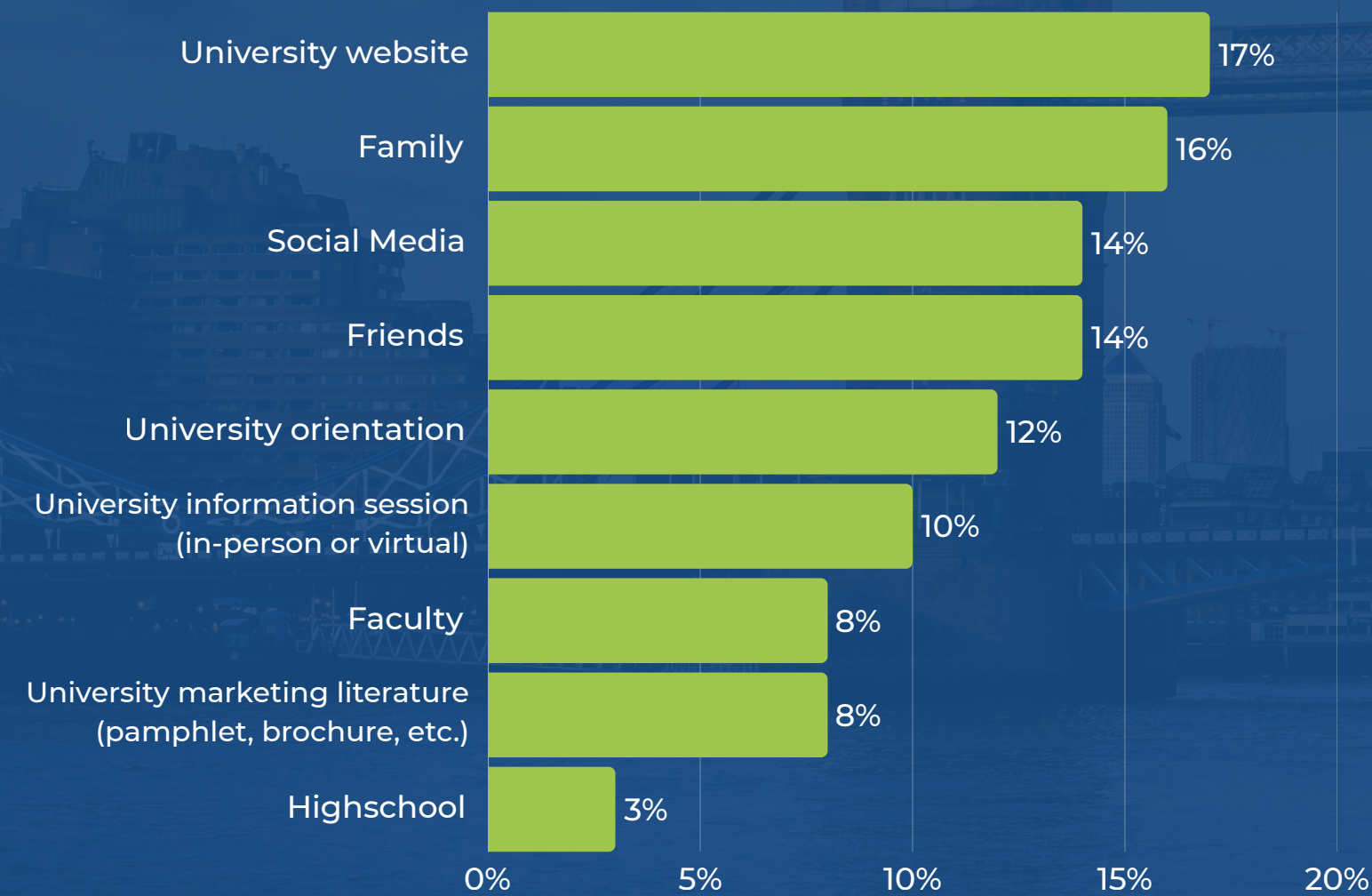
Marketing study abroad

How institutions promote study abroad plays a critical role in moving students from interest to action, with peer stories and clear, accessible information often carrying more weight than traditional messaging. Institutions that combine authentic student voices with personalized, easy-to-navigate program guidance will be best positioned to drive engagement and participation.

Program discovery

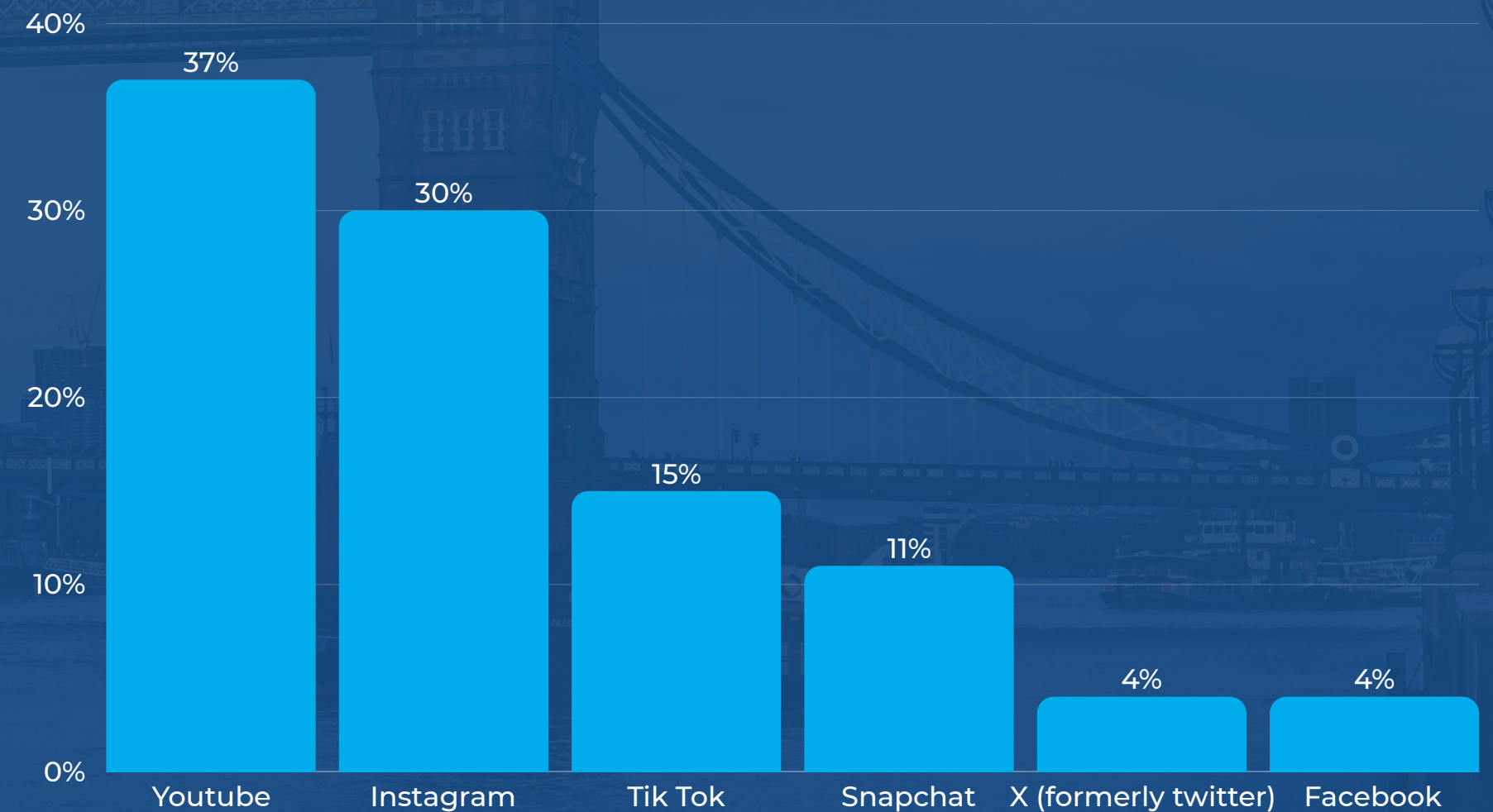
University resources and word of mouth drive initial awareness, while YouTube and Instagram lead social discovery.

How students 1st learned about study abroad programs



Sample size = 200 students

Social media channels where they learned about it

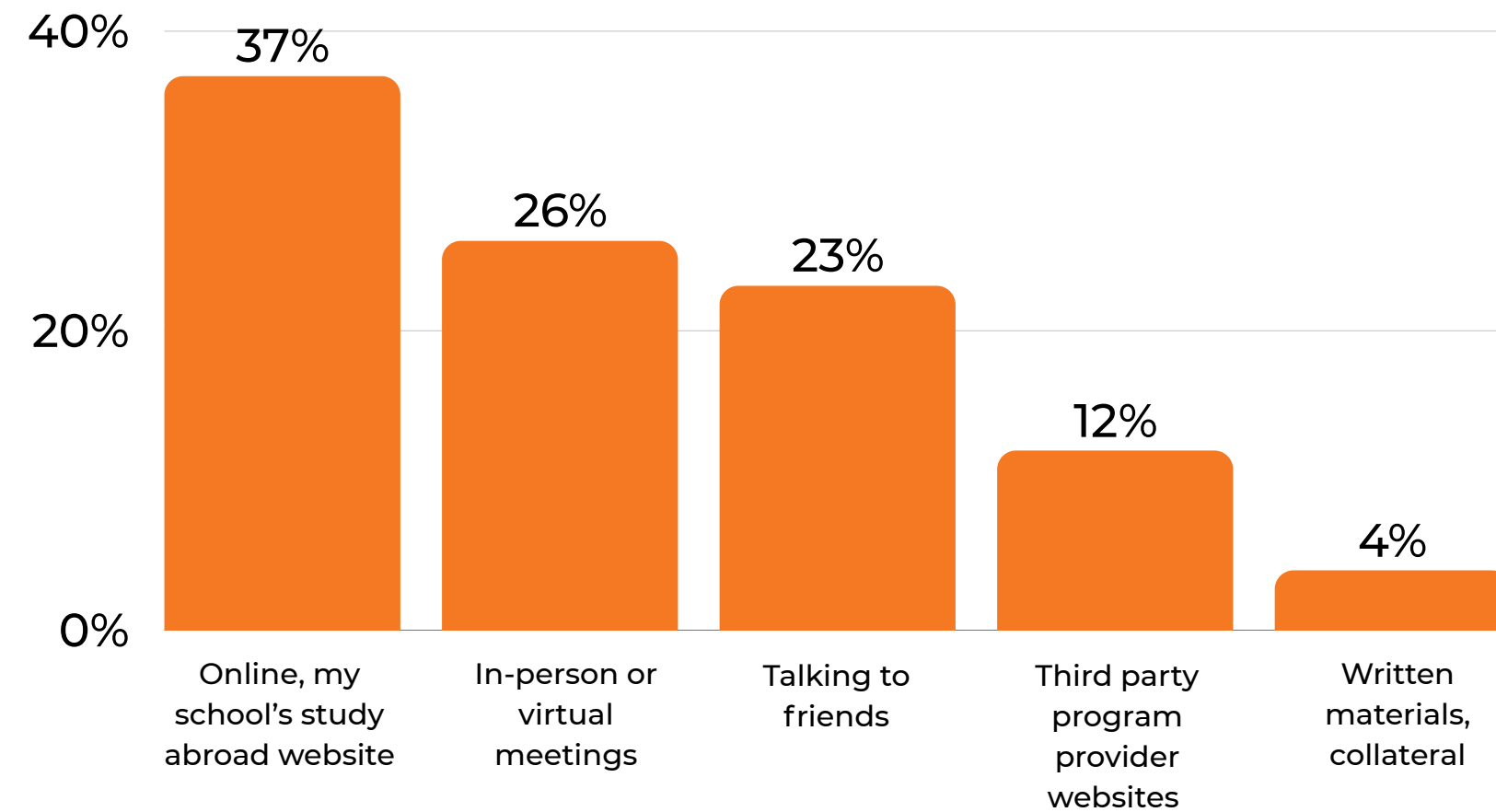


Sample size = 27 students

Study abroad student planning resources

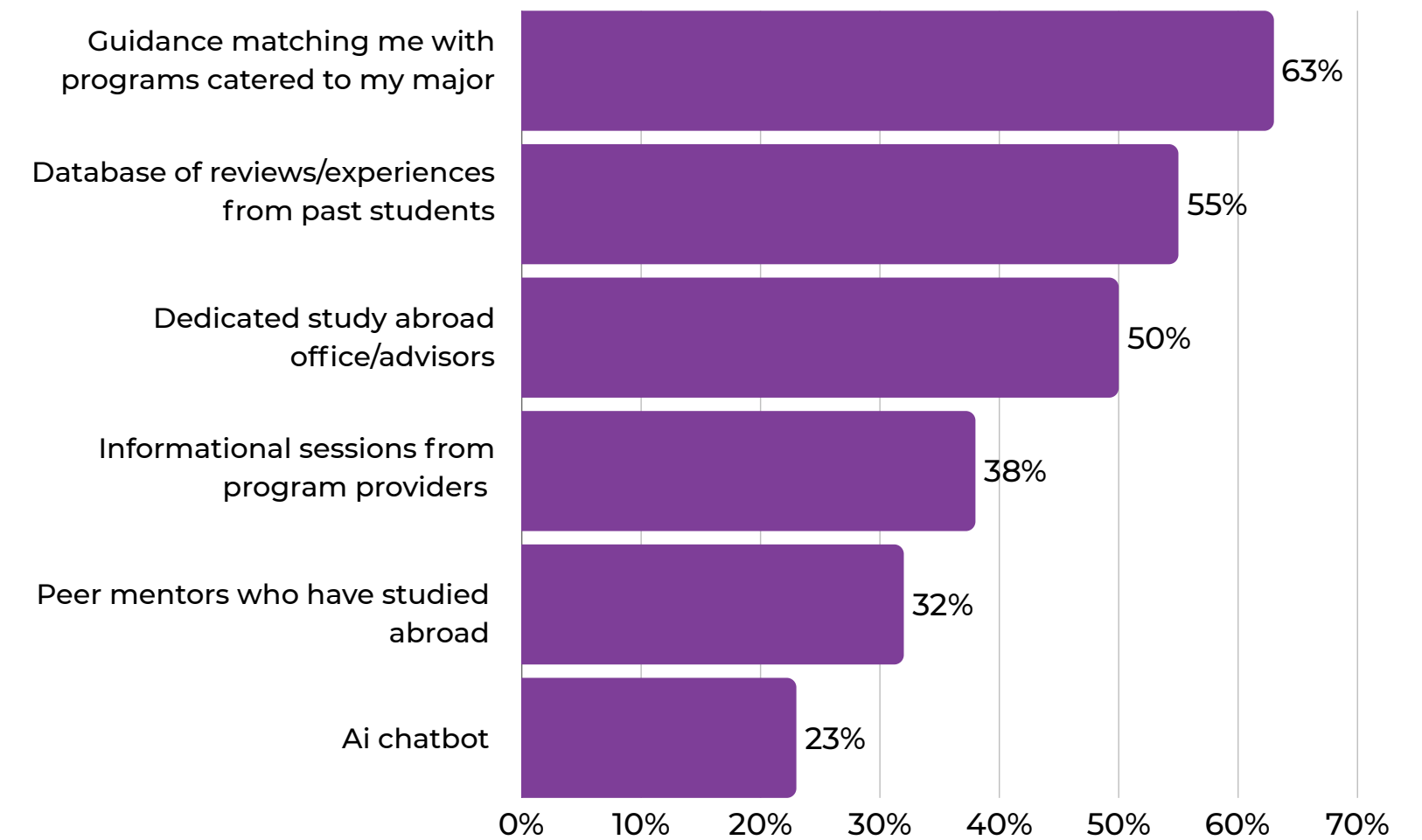
Most students rely on university websites and advising for planning but want more peer insights guidance. More than half of students want major-matched program guidance — indicating a institutional opportunity.

Where students find most information



Sample size = 200 students

Funding options

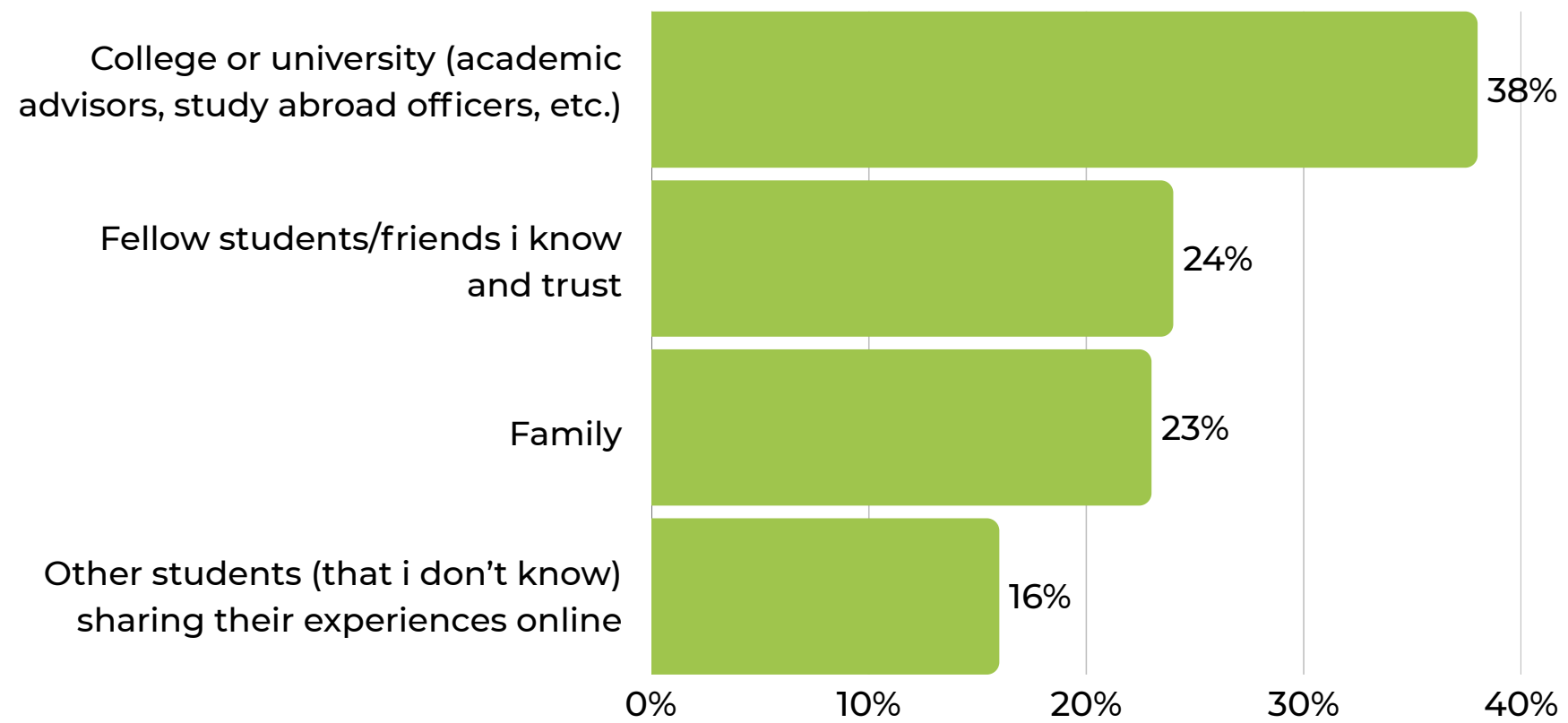


Sample size = 200 students

Program decision factors

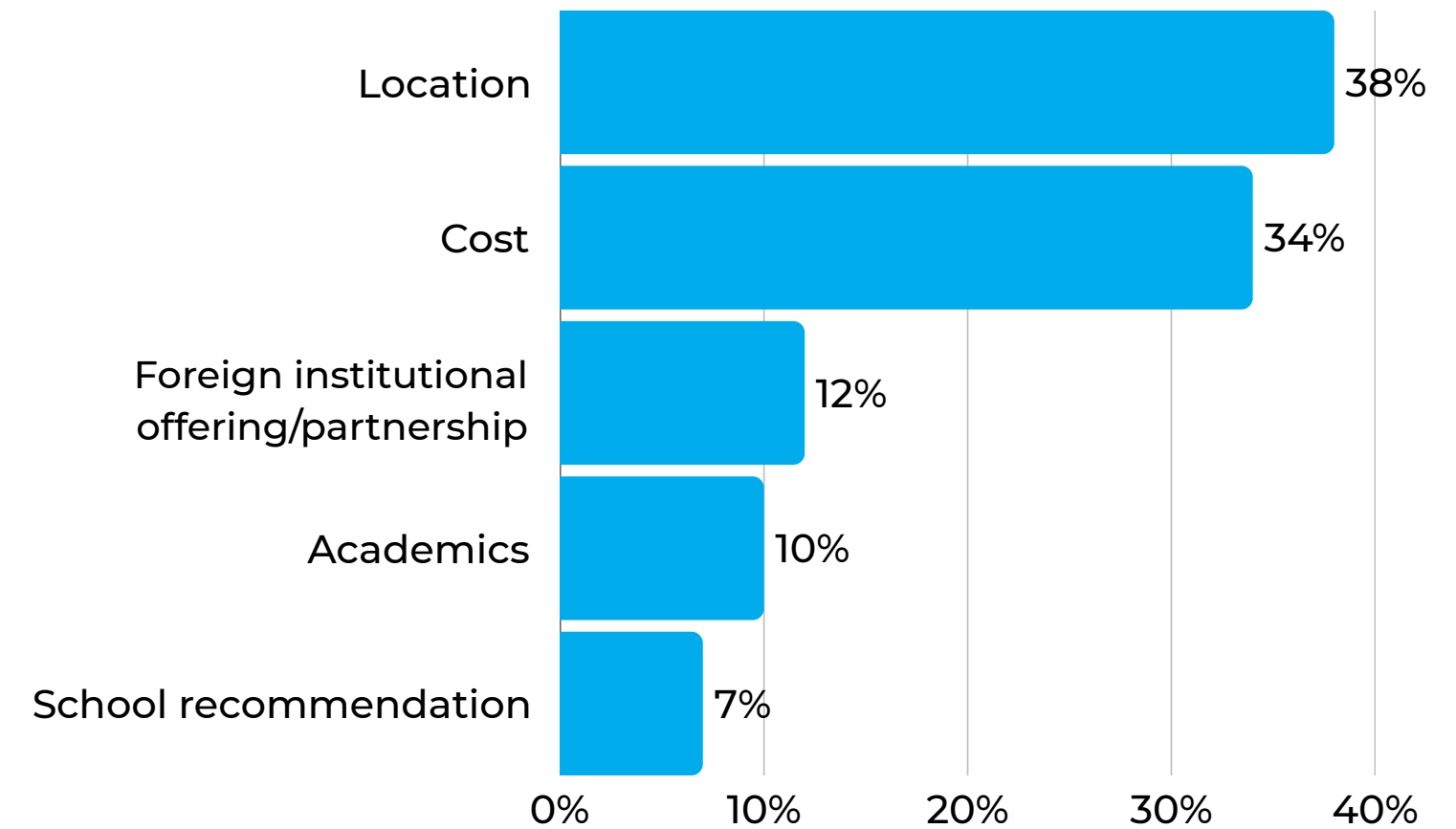
Peer experiences and institutional guidance strongly influence study abroad decisions while location and cost have the final say.

Greatest influence on decision



Sample size = 200 students

Ultimate factor in decision

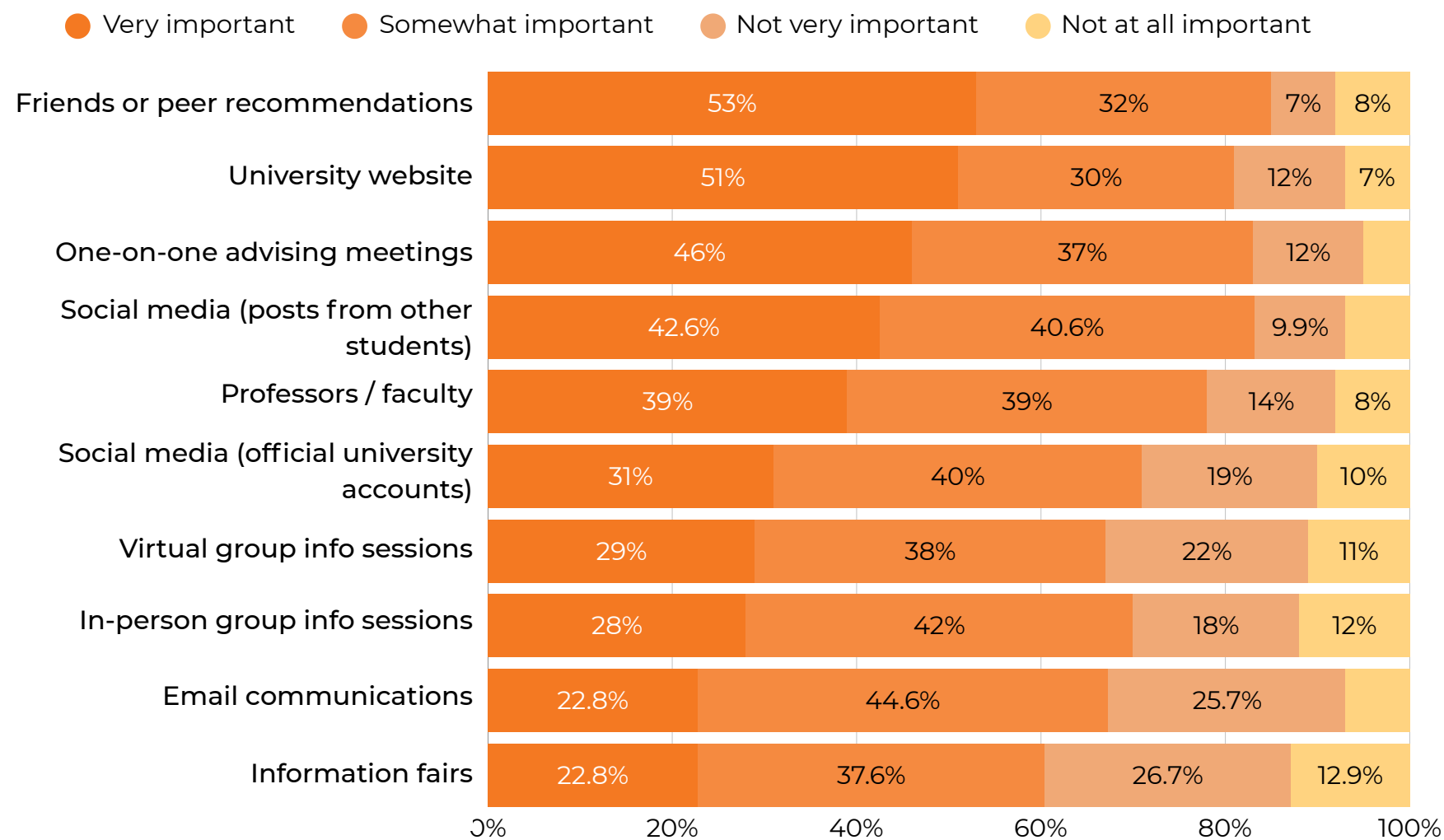


Sample size = 200 students

Program promotions

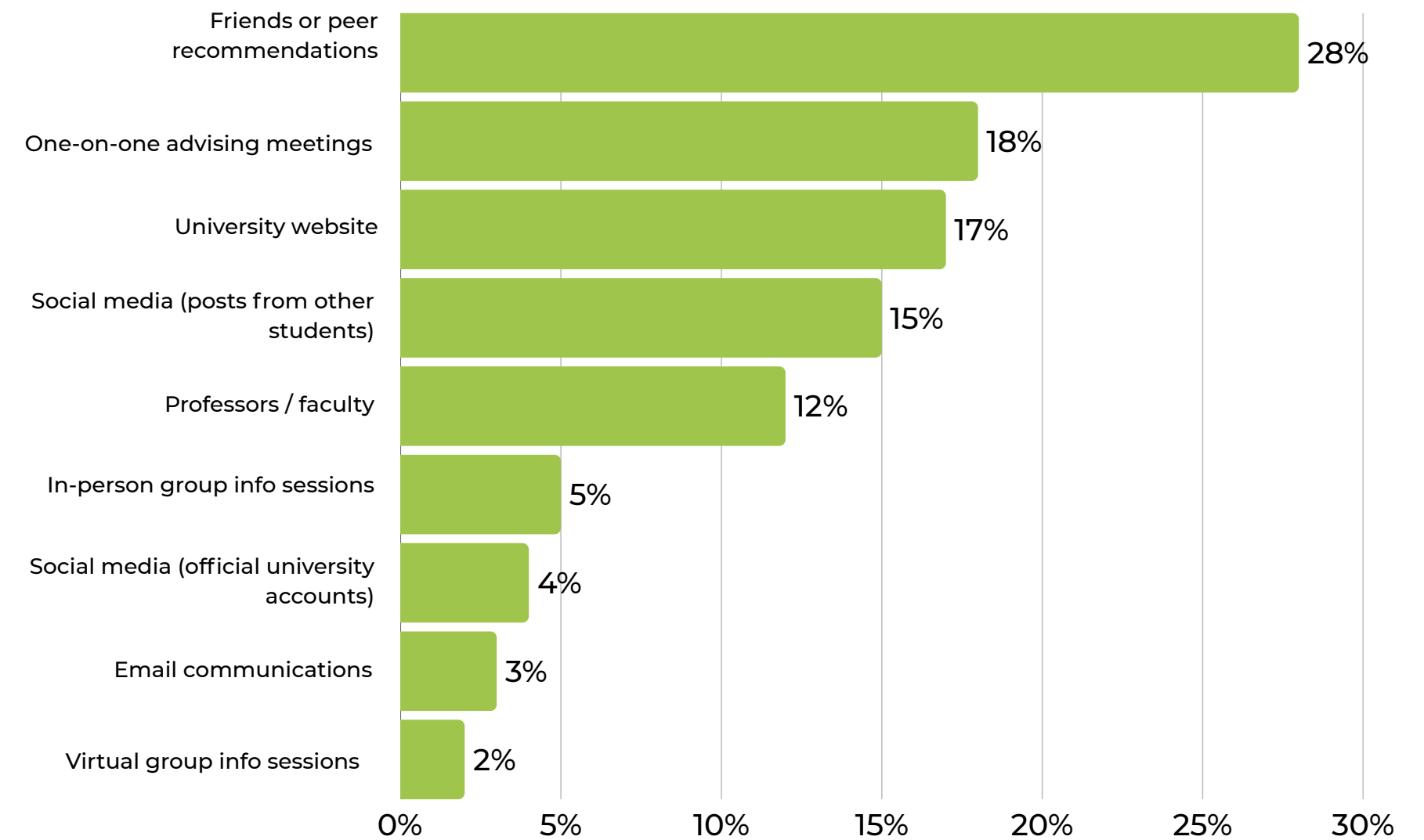
Peer recommendations, study abroad advisors, and university websites are the most effective channels for promoting study abroad programs.

Importance of methods to promote study abroad programs



Sample size = 200 students

Most important promotion method for study abroad programs



Sample size = 200 students



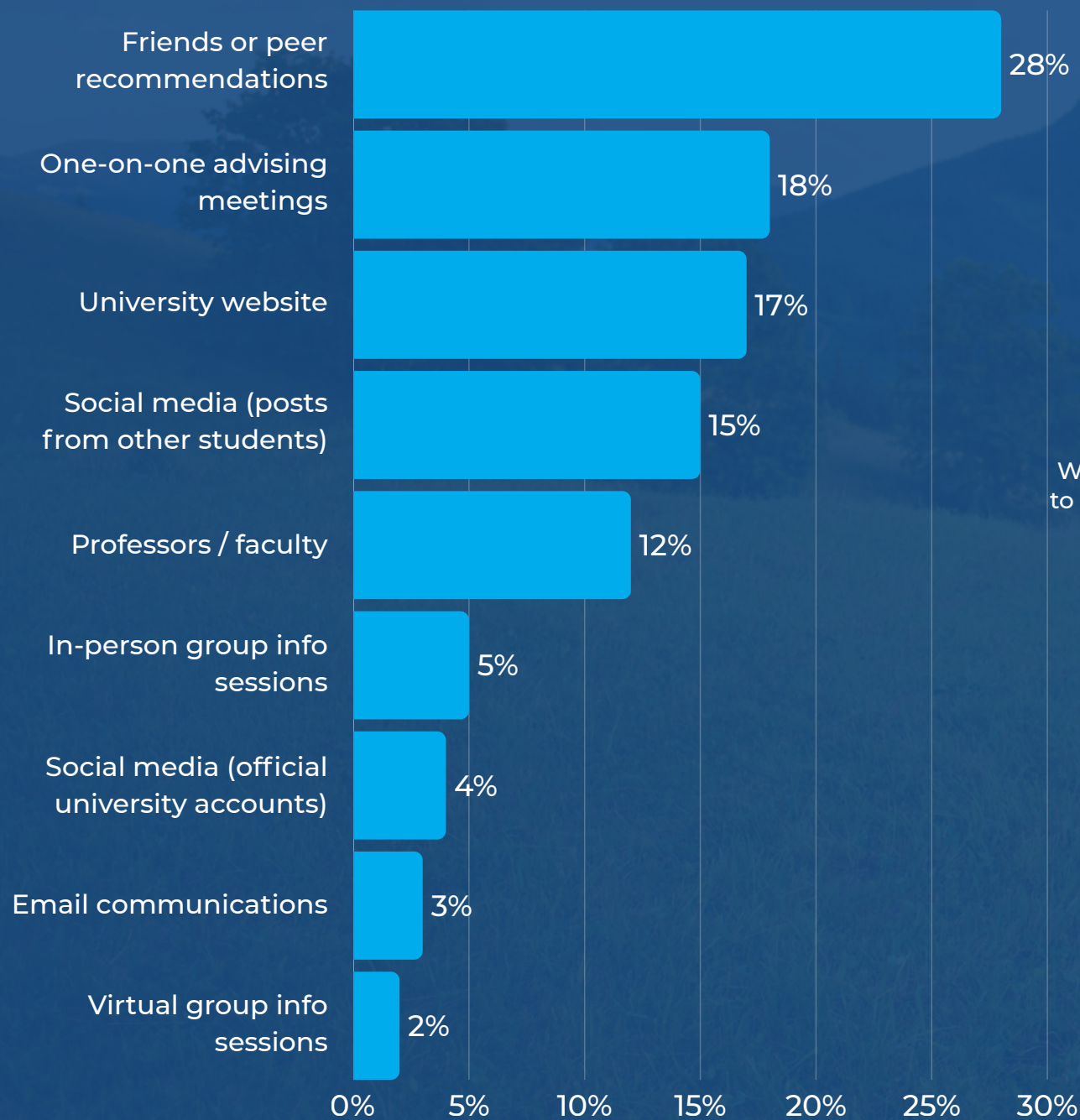
The value of globalization

In an increasingly interconnected world, study abroad equips students with the global perspective, cultural fluency, and adaptability needed to navigate complex international environments. These experiences not only broaden worldviews but also prepare students to contribute meaningfully in a global economy.

Reasons to study abroad

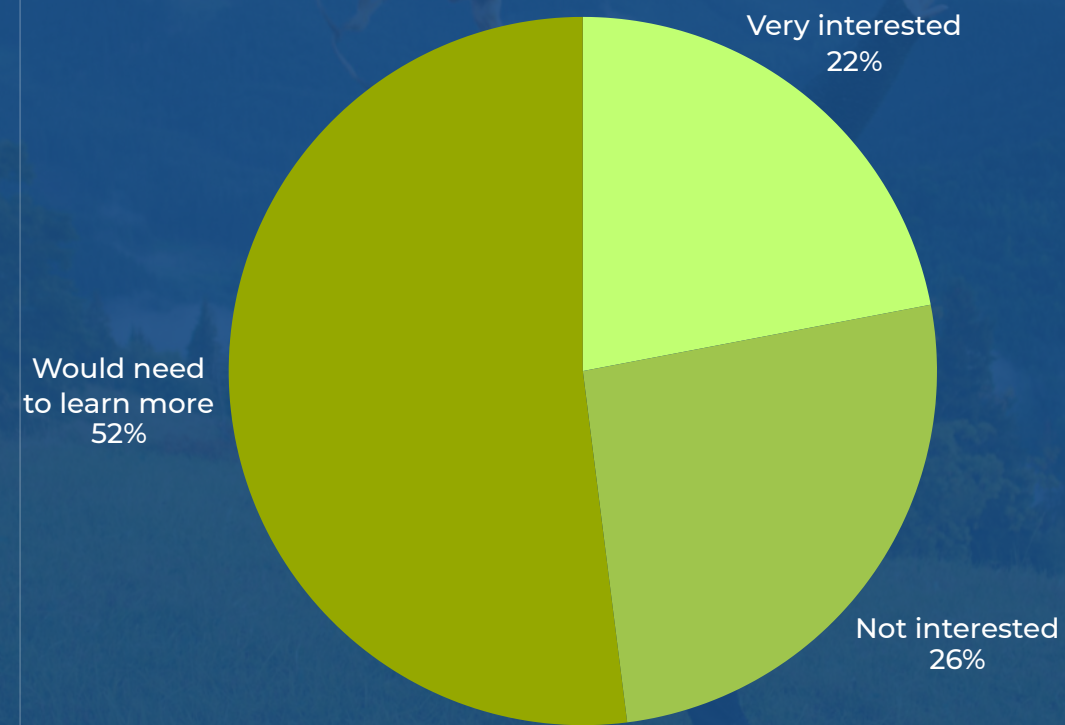
Students respond most favorably to personal growth and cultural immersion messaging. Personal growth messaging outperforms career/workforce framing (32% vs. 19%).

Most compelling description of program



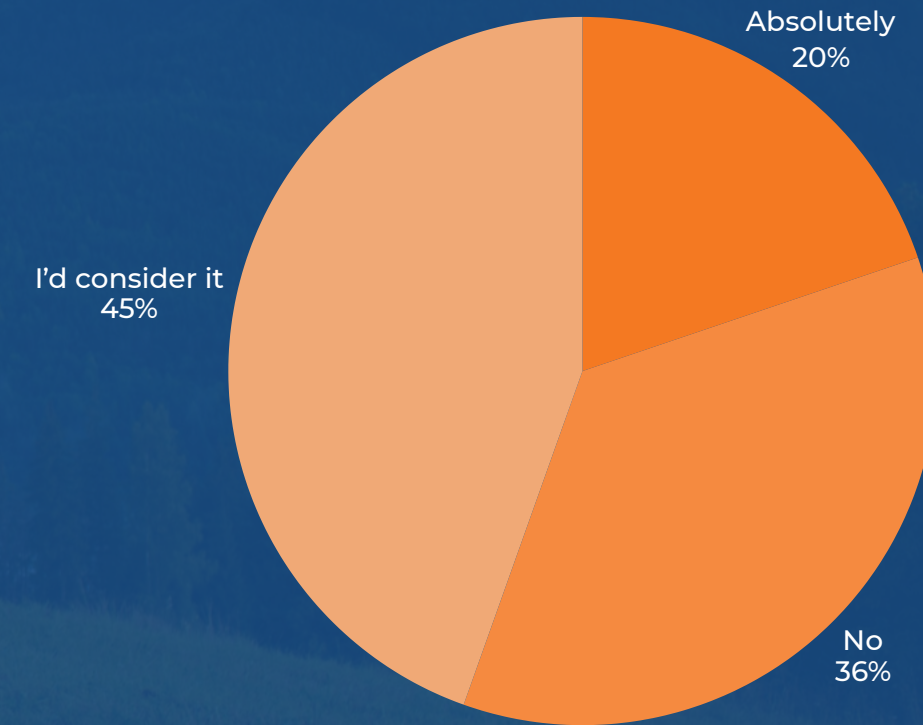
Sample size = 200 students

Interest in virtual travel programs



Sample size = 200 students

Interest in domestic travel programs

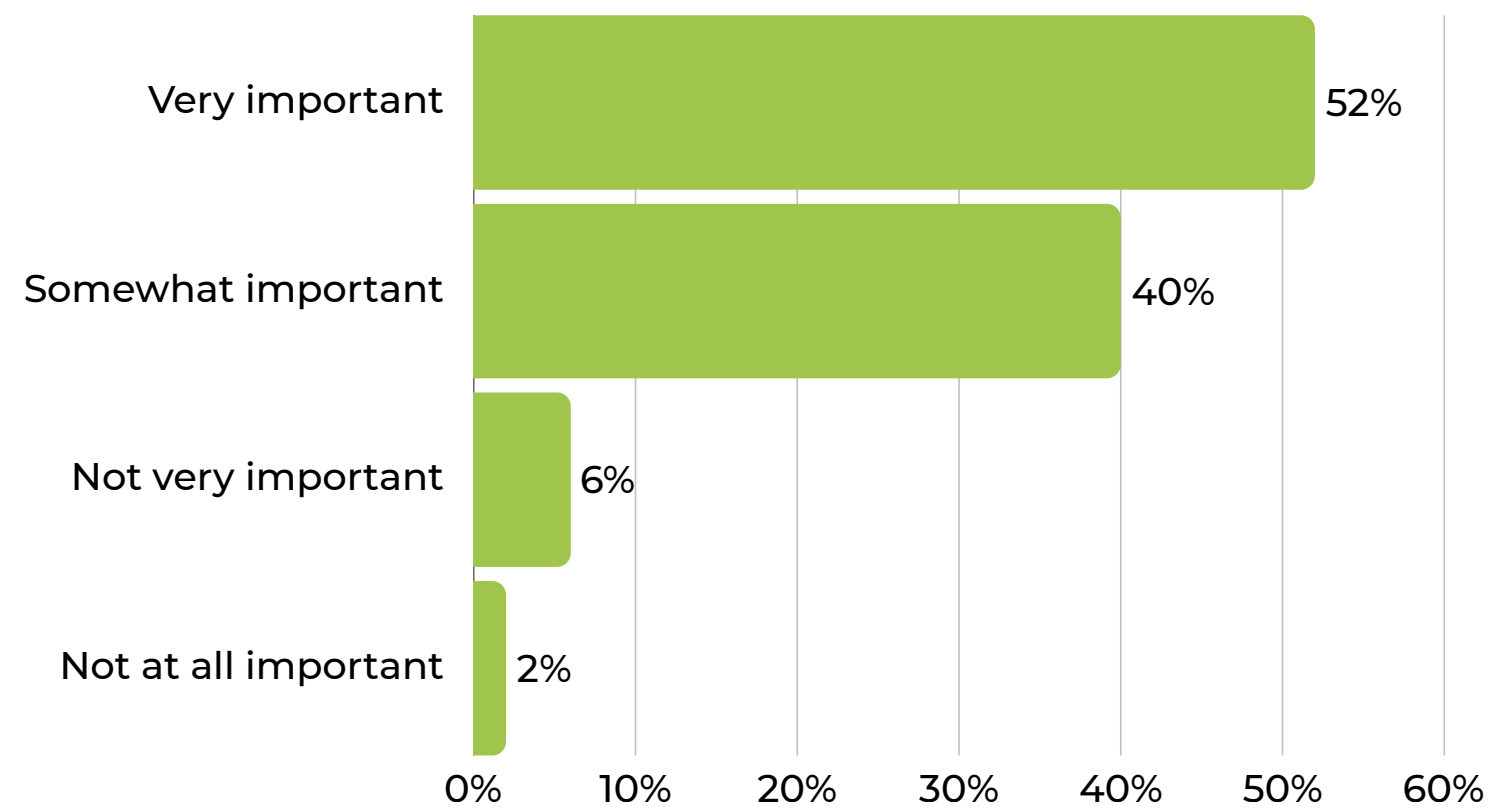


Sample size = 200 students

Study Abroad motivators

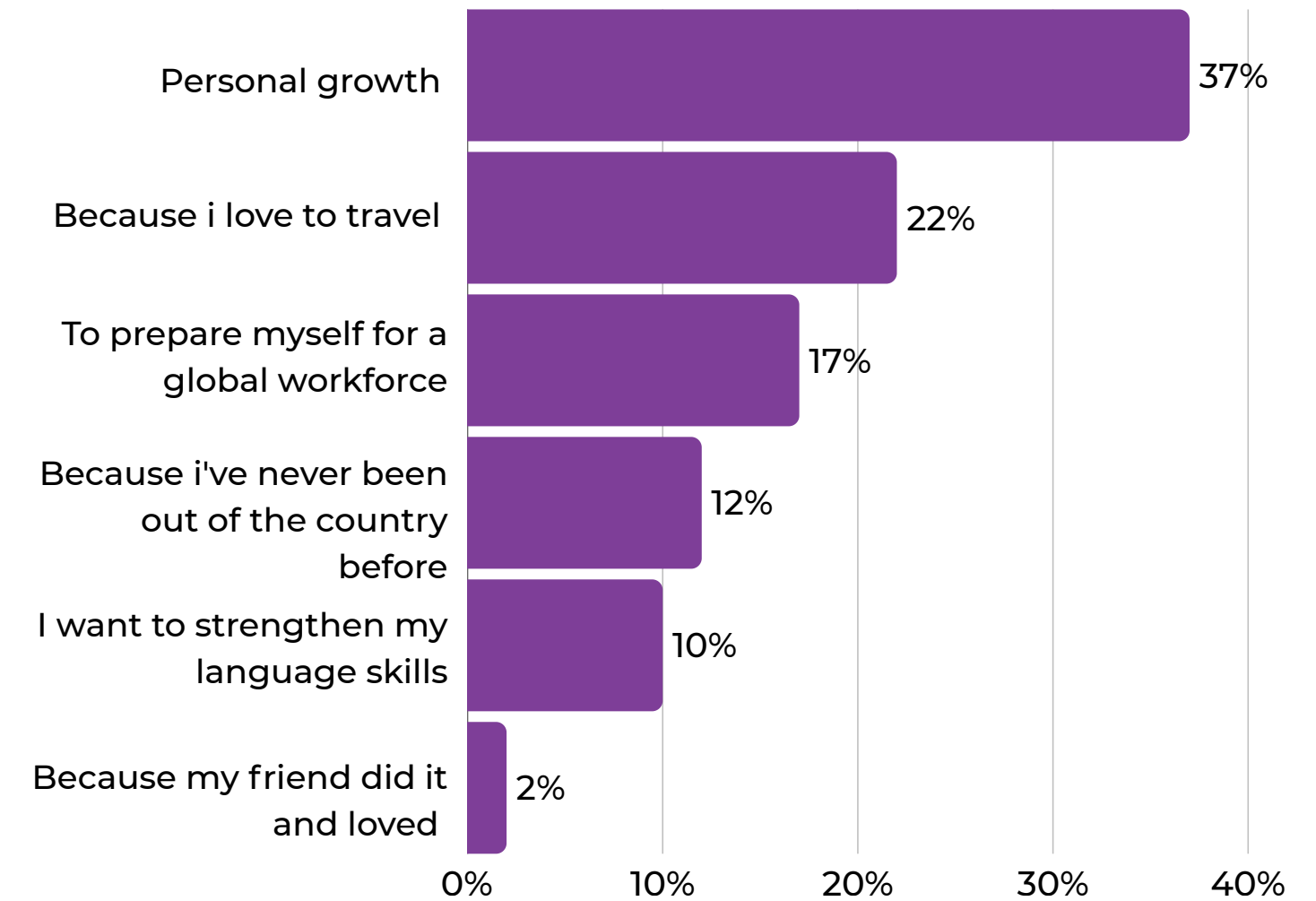
Nearly all students planning to study abroad say it is important to their personal development, with personal growth, an interest in travel and global career preparation emerging as the strongest motivations.

Importance of Study Abroad to development



Sample size = 200 students

Primary reason for interest in study abroad program

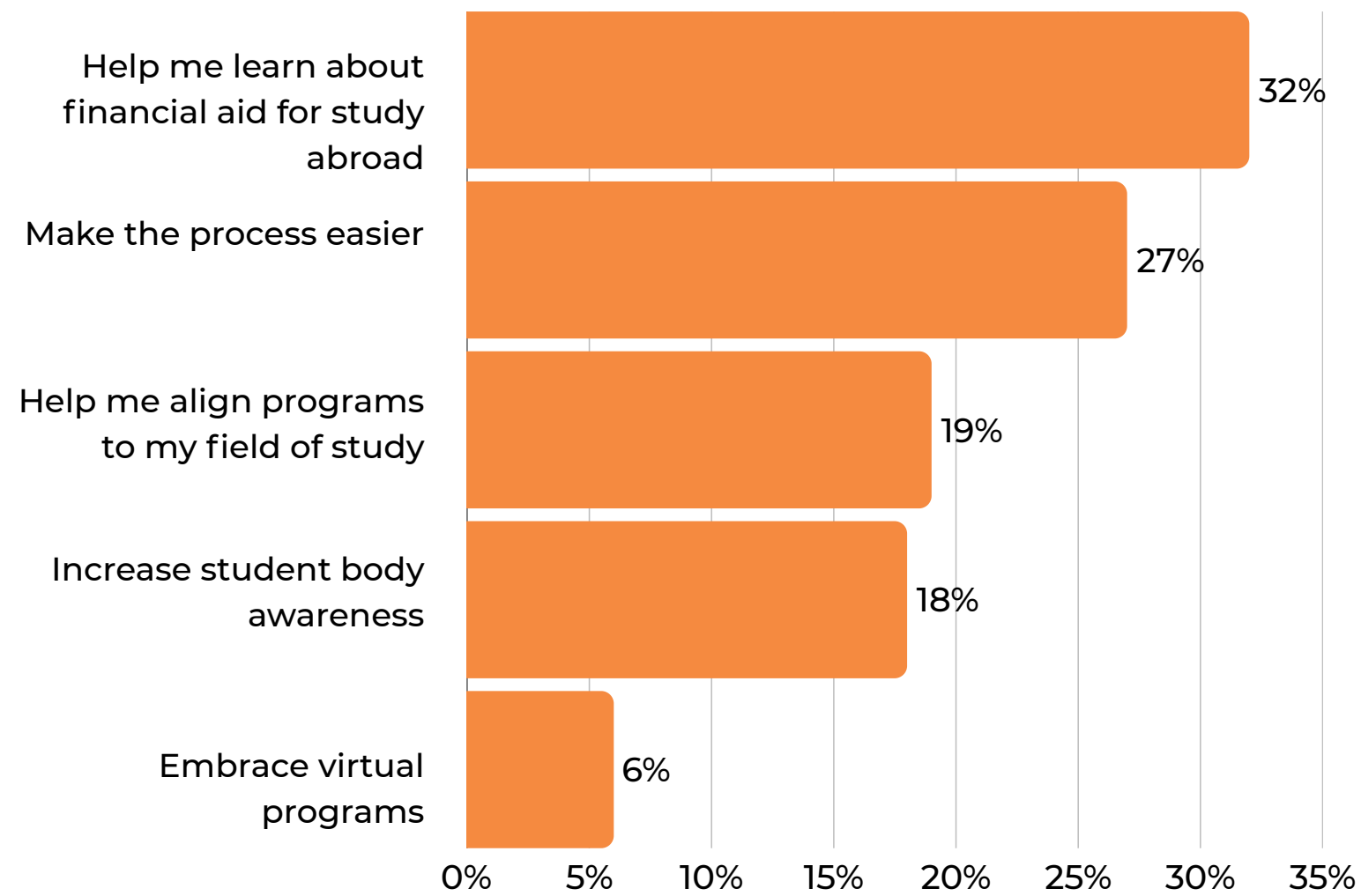


Sample size = 200 students

Students advice to institutions about study abroad

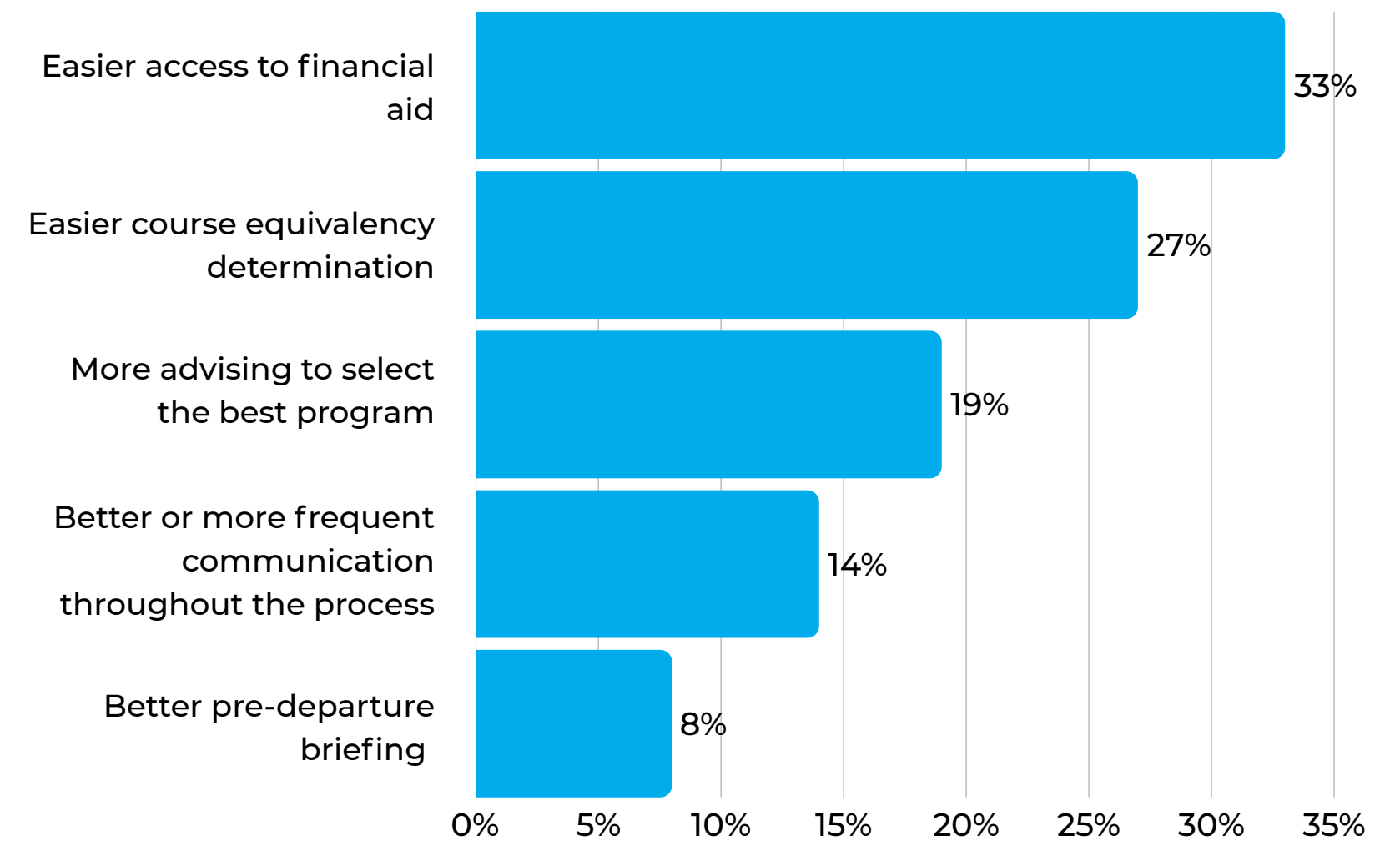
Students consistently identified expanded financial aid and stronger alignment between study abroad programs and their major as the biggest opportunities to improve accessibility and the overall experience.

Top things to make programs more accessible



Sample size = 200 students

Advice to improve the experience



Sample size = 200 students



Conclusion

The 2026 Terra Dotta Voice of the Students survey reinforces a clear reality:

Demand for study abroad is not the challenge as students continue to see these experiences as transformative, shaping who they are and how they engage with the world.

But turning intent into participation requires institutions to meet students where they are.

- **Geopolitical uncertainty** has raised the bar for safety communication and real-time guidance.
- **Cost transparency**—not just access to funding—has become critical to decision-making.
- And students are looking for more **personalized, major-aligned pathways** and authentic peer perspectives to build confidence in their choices.

With study abroad influencing college selection, institutions have a timely opportunity to lead.

Those that **simplify access, communicate clearly, and elevate the value and the experience** of study abroad will not only reduce barriers—they will stand out in an increasingly competitive landscape and turn student interest into lasting impact.



Appendix



Methodology

OBJECTIVE:

Terra Dotta wanted to learn more about the demand for studying abroad among college students.

METHOD:

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

QUOTA AND QUESTIONNAIRE:

There were 275 interviews conducted from February 18-March 5, 2026. The survey took about 5 minutes, on average, to complete.

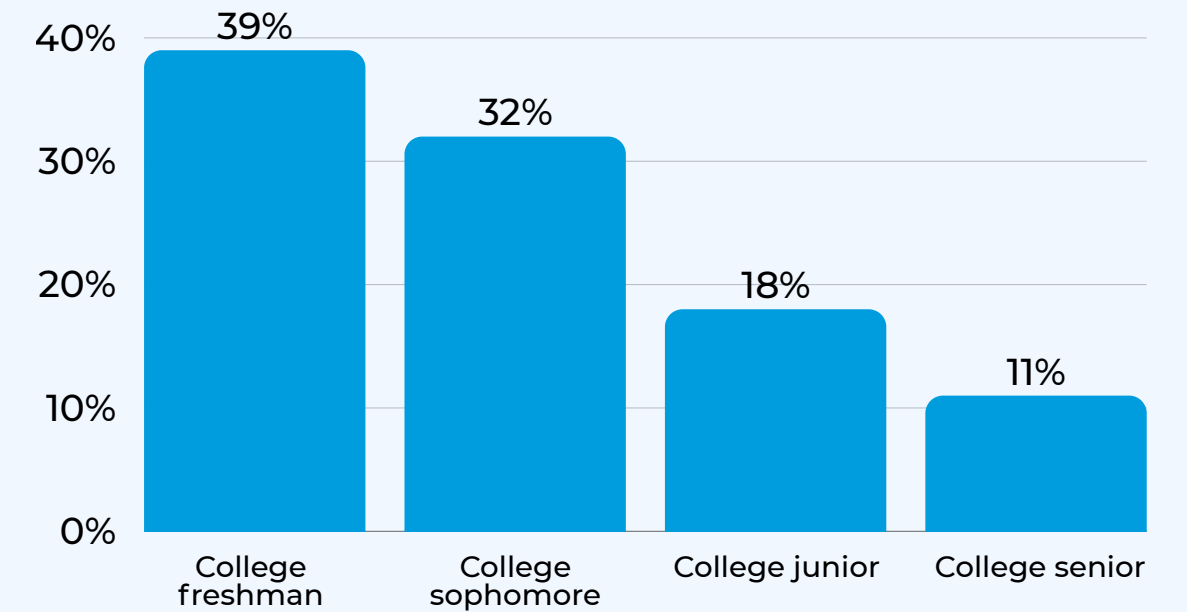


Respondent profile

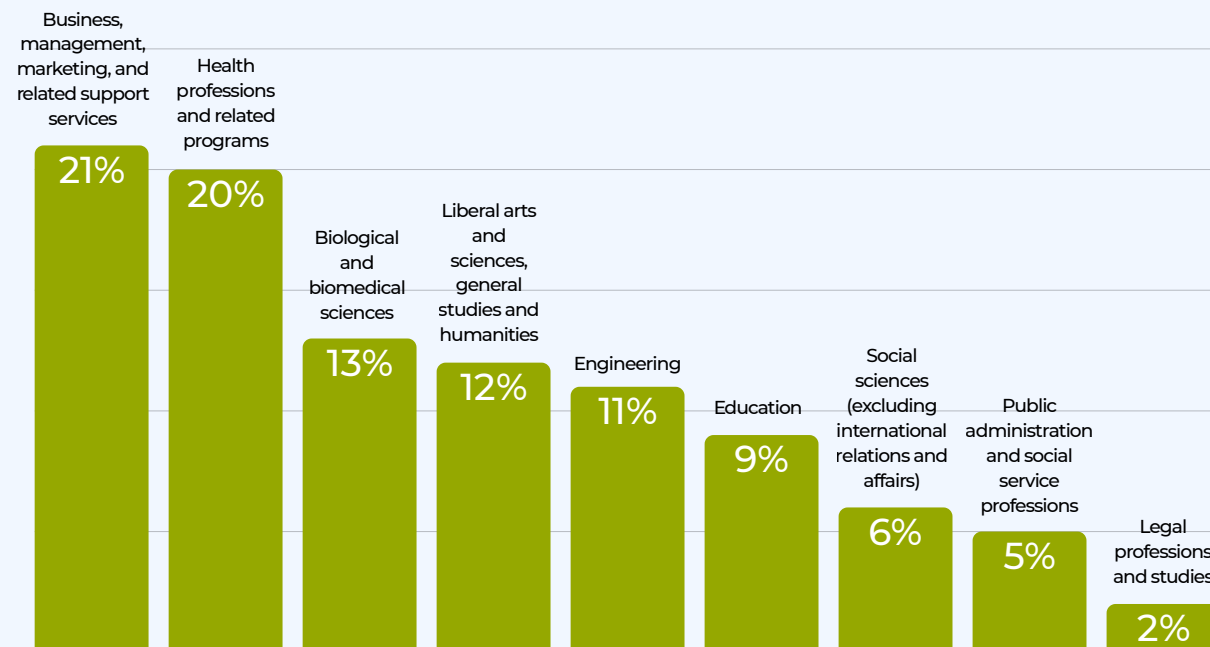


**FOCUS ON STUDENTS
INTERESTED IN STUDY
ABROAD PROGRAMS.**

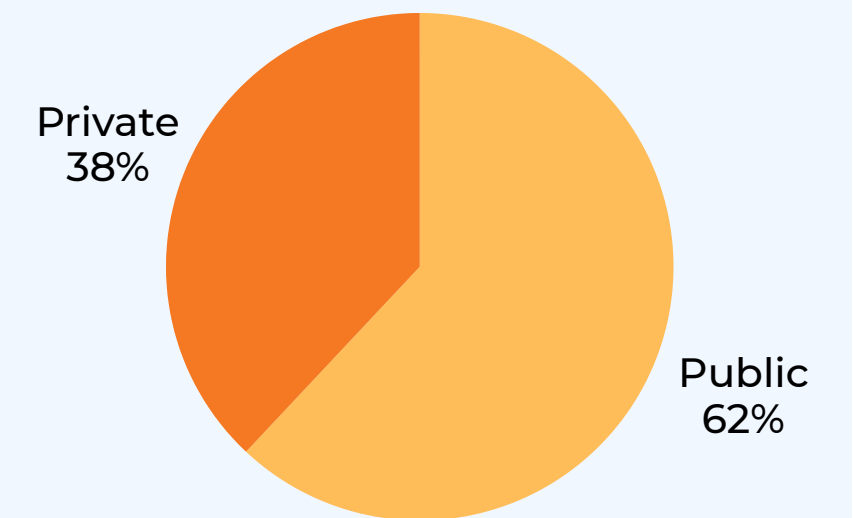
**Respondents
by student
situation**



**Respondents
by major**

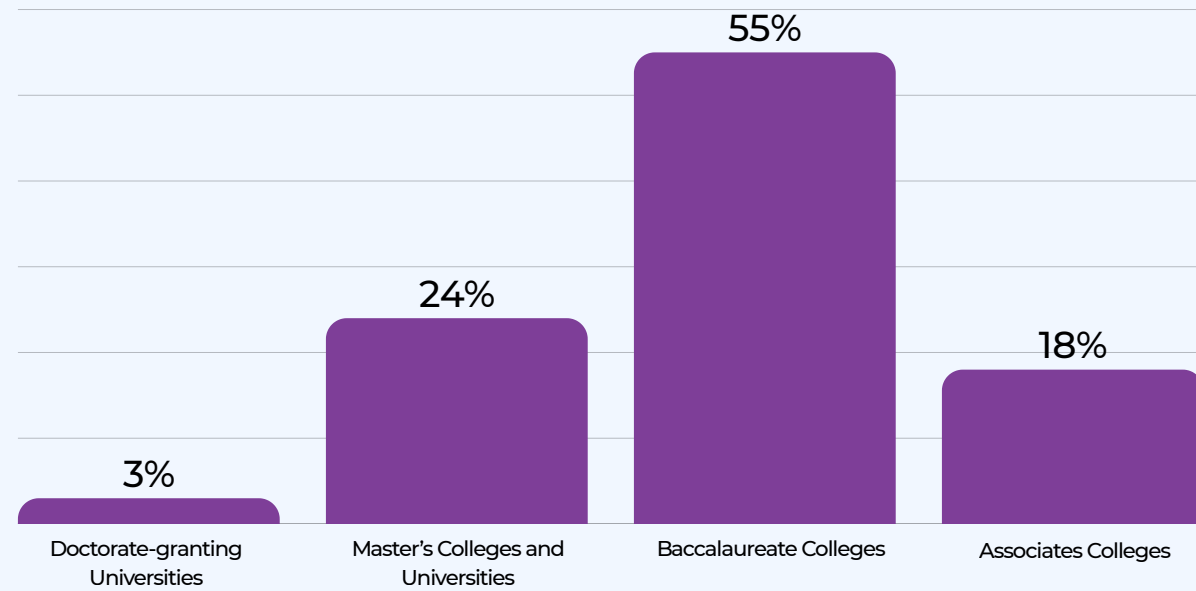


**Respondents by type
of institution**

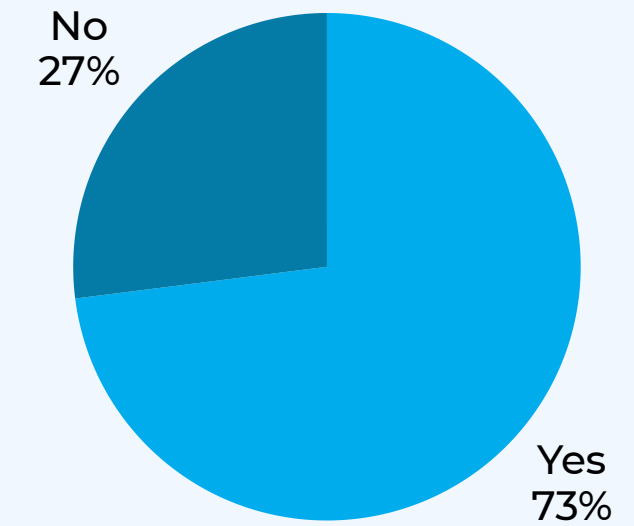


Respondent profile

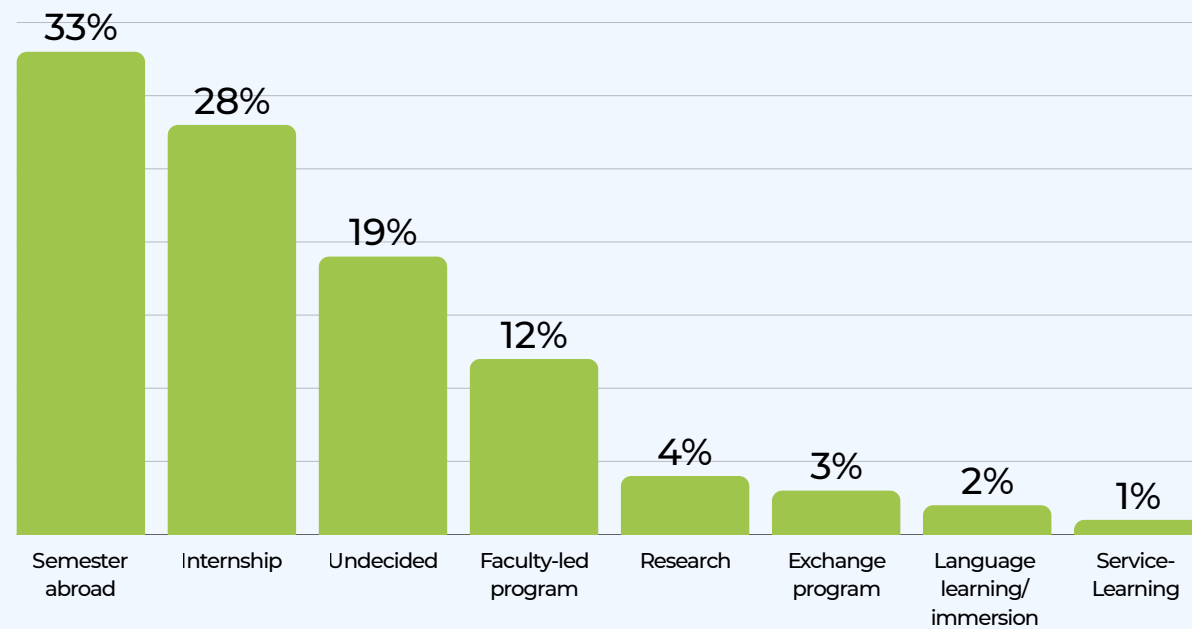
Respondents by institution



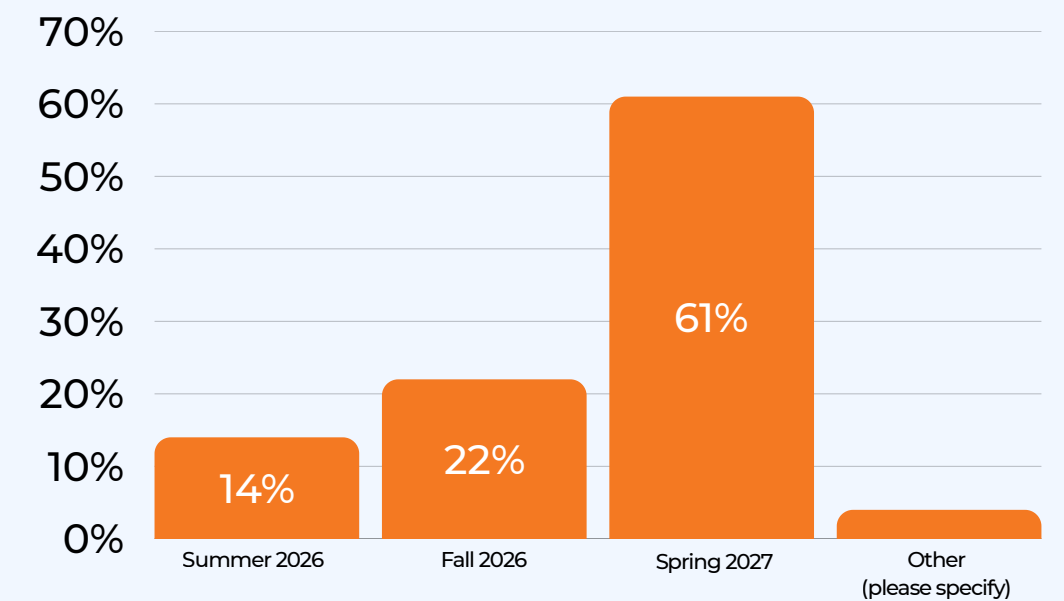
Respondents by planning to study abroad



Respondents by program type

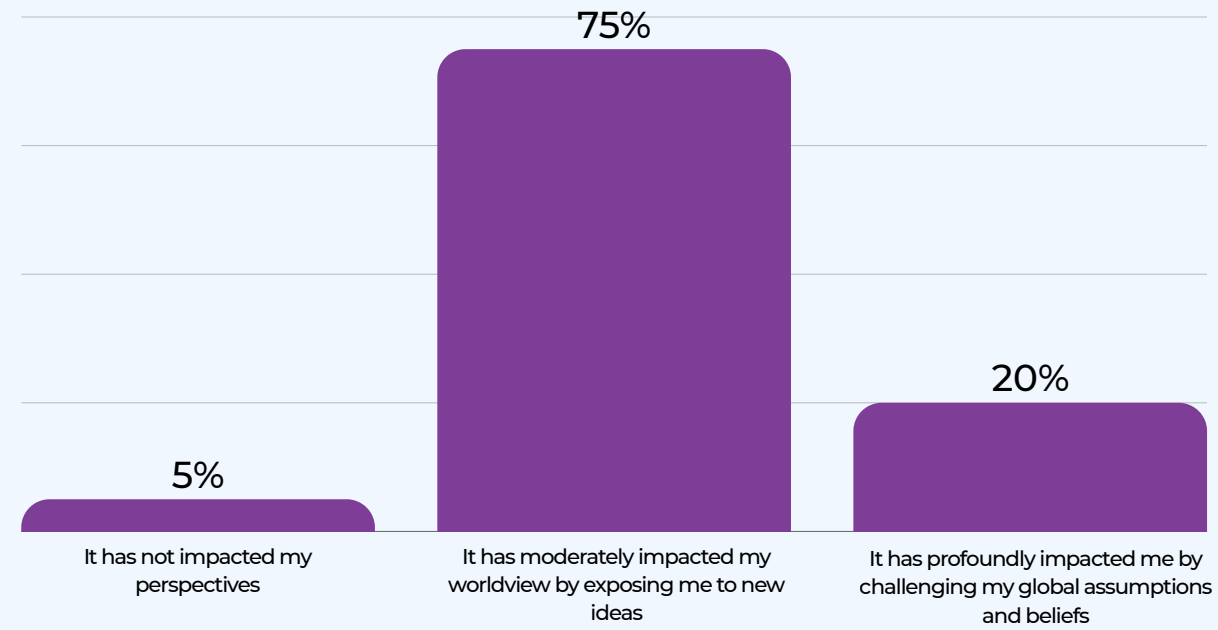


Respondents by date of program

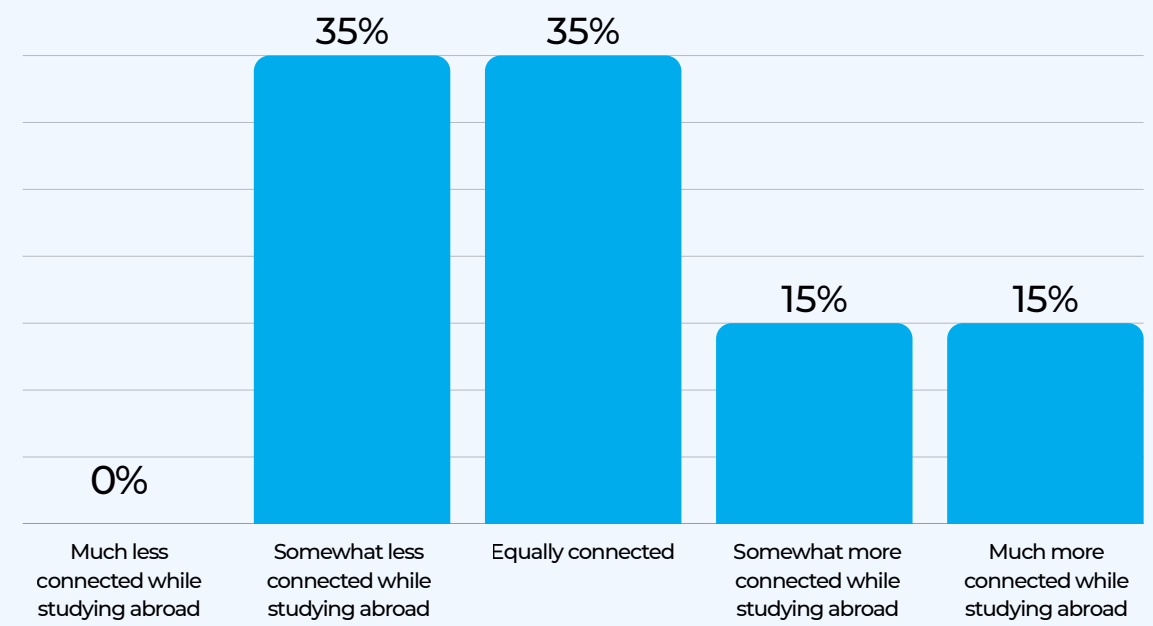


Worldview and student outcomes

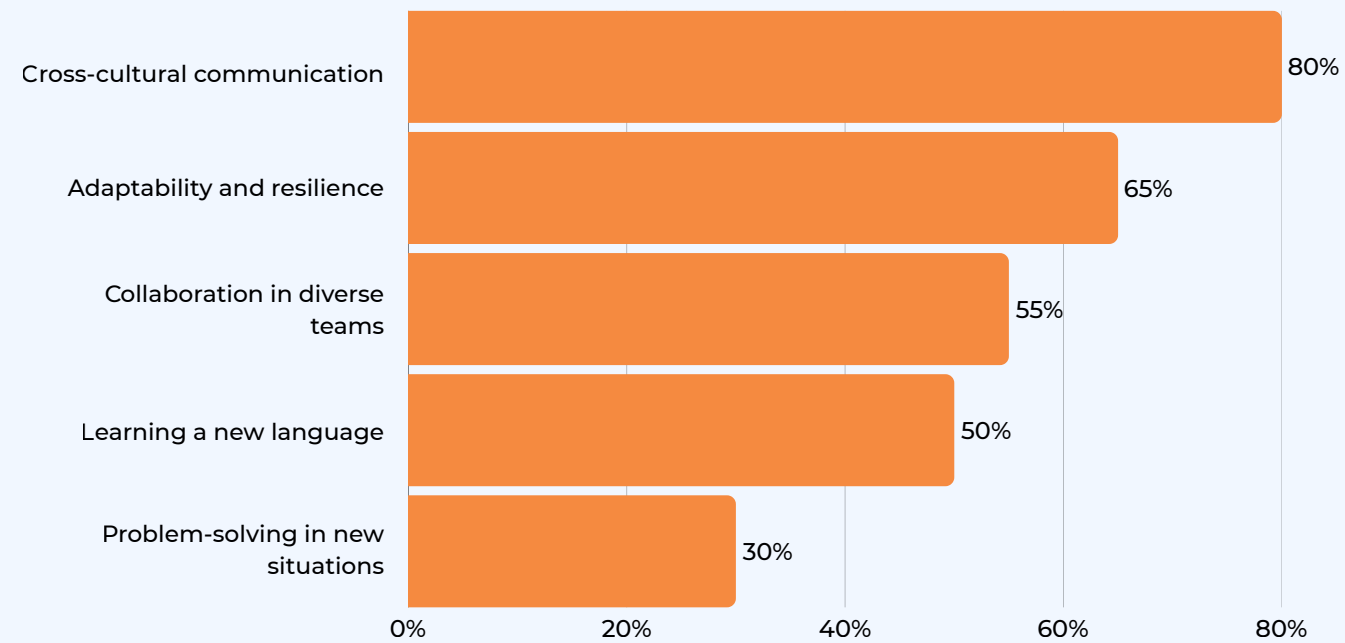
Worldview impact



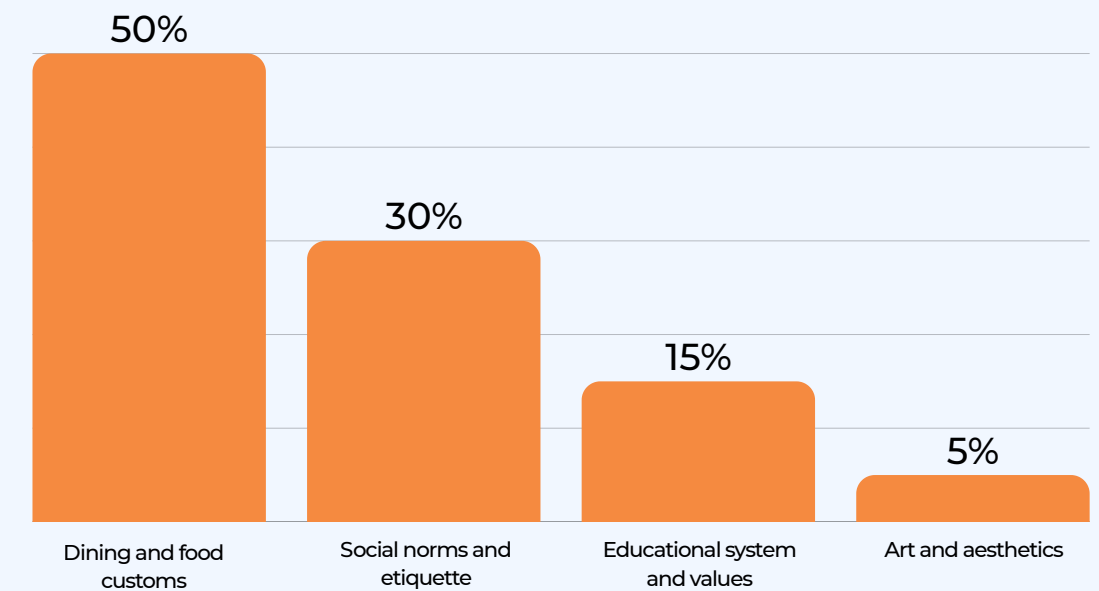
Connection to local community



Most important skills or lessons learned



Surprises about cultural differences



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.



SEE FOR YOURSELF.

We invite you to learn how Terra Dotta can help you streamline your international education processes.

Reach us online or contact your Terra Dotta representative.

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