



# Not All Internships are Created Equal: Research Findings & Strategies to Enhance Internship Experiences & Outcomes



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# College Internships

What do you hope to learn?

# The Value of College Internships

## ‘High-impact’ practice

- Acquire knowledge & skills to assist in transition to labor market
- Explore compatibility with chosen career
- Develop hands-on experience valued by employers
- Increase employability

Yet...

empirical evidence is sparse & disparities exist which inhibits our ability to engage students in college internships

(e.g., Busteed & Auster, 2017; Kuh, 2008; Nunley et al., 2016)



*The internship lets you get your feet in the water to understand what it is you are looking for if the internship or the field of the internship is something that you want to pursue more, or if ... you find that you don't want to go that exact route.*

*When I think of internship, I think of a new place, new people, new project, something new, something that you will not get on campus. And I think that's what's pretty important because internship and you're going to be in a different lifestyle. You're going to have a different day-to-day routine.*

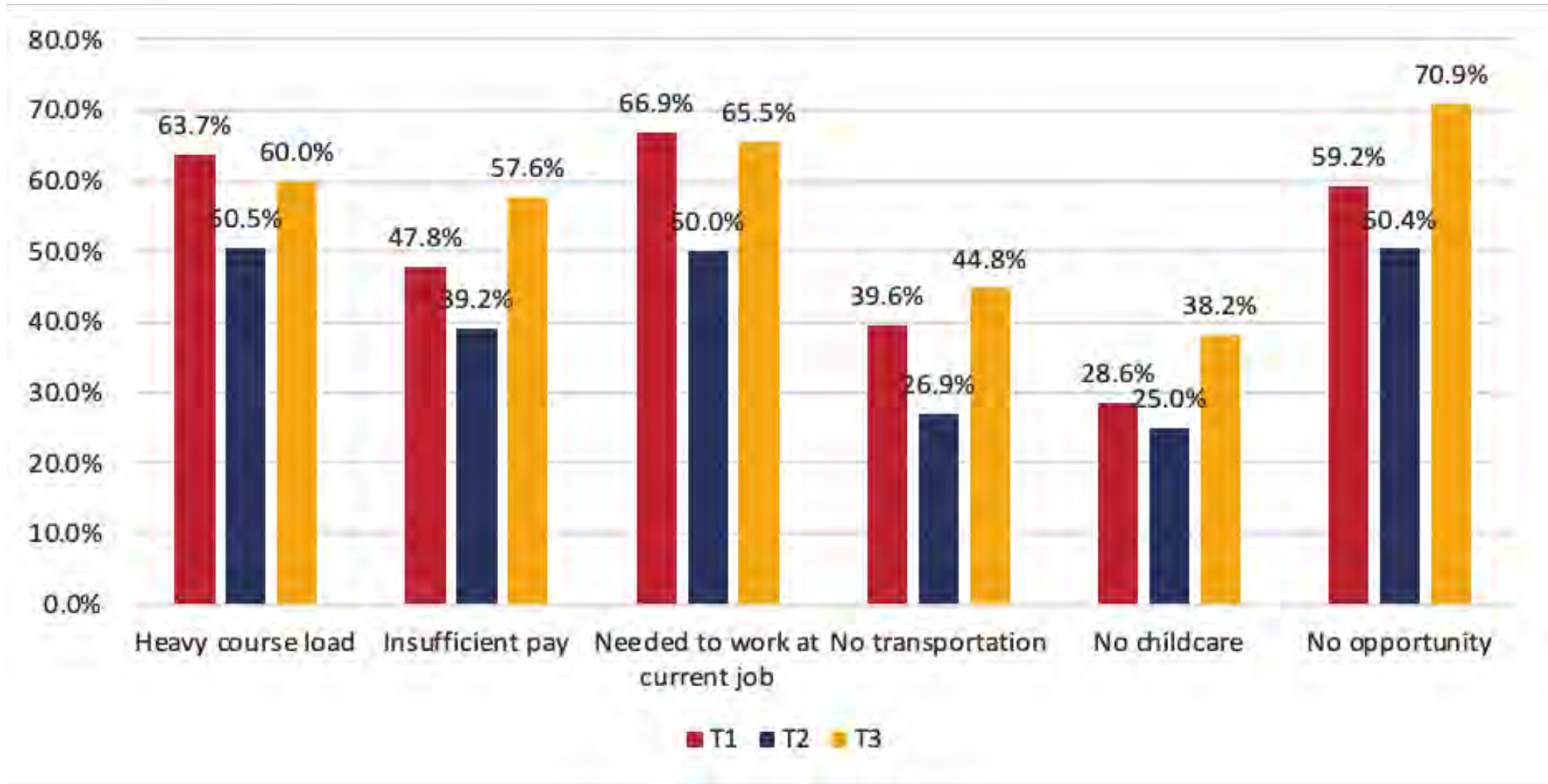
*Your mind opens up to the possibilities that you see that are within that field, and you get to learn where your place stands. By learning where you stand, you may learn that you actually do not want to do this whatsoever in the slightest.*

*From being in those different internship positions I've seen [sic] a variety of leaders that people can be and what the duties and roles are for these leaders, and the values that they embody. After observing these various leaders, I decided that I definitely want to be in a leadership position.*

# Who is taking College Internships?

## Access & lack thereof

- ~30% of college students in U.S. complete a college internship (Baccalaureate & Beyond, 2022)
- High-quality internships often accessed by students from specific programs (e.g., engineering, business) & those with more financial, social, & cultural resources (Moss-Pech, 2021)
- Students of color attending MSIs participated in internships at higher rates than peers at PWIs (Hora, Thompson, et al., 2023)
- 64% of students who did not take an internship wanted to take one (Hora, Thompson et al., 2023)



Reasons for not completing an internship among students who wanted to complete an internship but could not (n=554)



# How do students describe their experiences with the internship process over 2 years?

(Thompson et al., 2021)

## Students' Desire for an Internship

- The Role of wanting to Do Good
- Internships as a Valuable Component of Career Development
- Familial Messages about Internships & Career Development

## Internship Application Process

- The Importance of Support from Others
- Limitations in Internship Opportunities: Major, Regional Restrictions, & Perceived Bias against HBCUs

## The Role of Finances in Internship Decision-Making

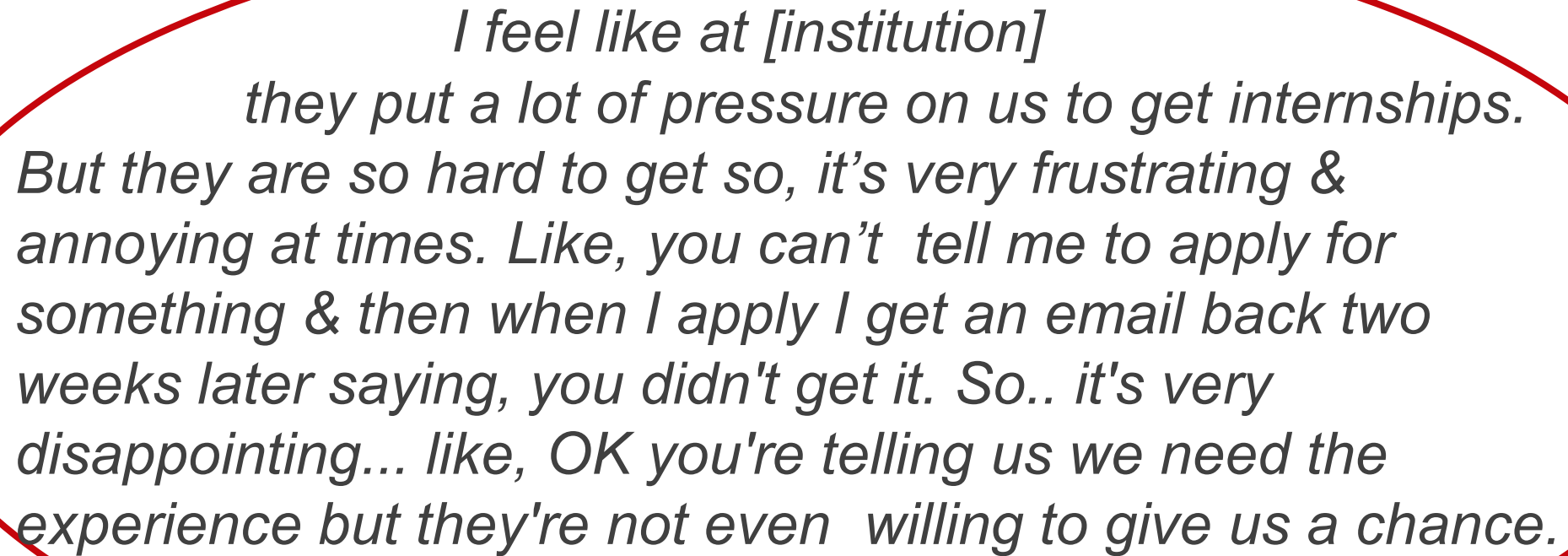
## The Value of Internships

- Personal Growth & Exploration
- Skill-Building
- Professional Development & Networking
- Clarifying Future Educational and Career Goals

## Stepping Out and Projecting into the Future

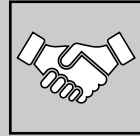
- Realistic Appraisal of Anticipated Future Challenges: Job Search, Work-Life Balance, Coping with Discrimination
- Future Visioning





*I feel like at [institution]  
they put a lot of pressure on us to get internships.  
But they are so hard to get so, it's very frustrating &  
annoying at times. Like, you can't tell me to apply for  
something & then when I apply I get an email back two  
weeks later saying, you didn't get it. So.. it's very  
disappointing... like, OK you're telling us we need the  
experience but they're not even willing to give us a chance.*

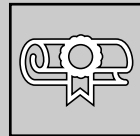
# What can we do with these findings?



Engage in conversations with students about familial support, financial expectations & responsibilities



Enlist hiring agencies & employers to buy into realization that internship accessibility is contingent upon compensation packages



Enlist campuses to connect applicants to internship resources & create campus-based incentives (e.g., tuition waivers, stipends)



Evaluate majors that receive the most & least amount of support to determine ways to increase equity across majors

A close-up photograph of a silver pen tip resting on a document. The document has fields for 'Name', 'Signature', and 'Date'. The pen is positioned diagonally, pointing towards the bottom left. The background is slightly blurred, showing the text of the document.

# Paid v. Unpaid Internships

# How many internships are unpaid?

**31%**

Estimation based on the Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal study (B&B 16/17; NCES, 2017)

**43%**

Estimation based on the College Internship Study, 2018-2020 (Hora, Jang-Tucci, and Zhang, 2022)

**31%**

Estimation based on the National Survey of College Internships, National Sample, Spring 2023

# 1 Million

Unpaid interns a year; estimation based on enrollment data from NACE 2020 and internship data from B&B 16/17.



(Hora, Jang-Tucci, and Zhang, 2022).

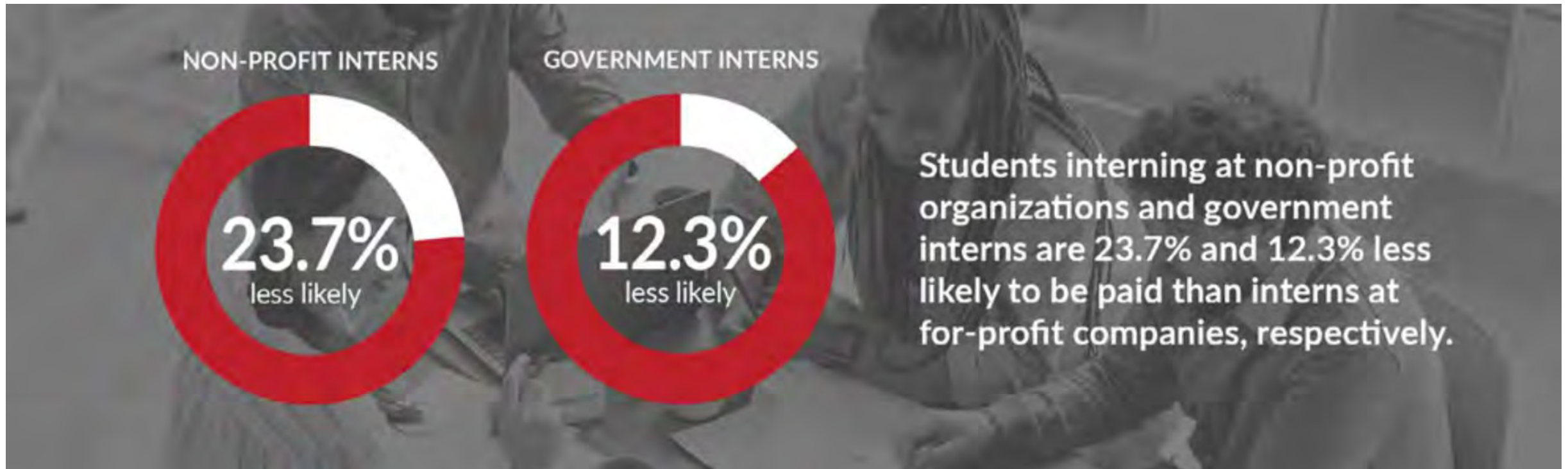
# What are the problems with unpaid internships?

- Financial exclusion;
- Favoritism for the elite and well-connected;
- Evidence that unpaid positions are less valuable than paid positions;
- Legal issues with uncompensated work;
- Unpaid labor is a basic violation of worker rights and the ethical treatment of college students.

*“The reason why I never really looked into an internship was because of the fact that I thought that it was going to be unpaid. And as a full time student and also working and paying bills, I was like - I’m not going to be able to afford to do an internship because of that fact. Like, I closed my eyes on a lot of stuff.”*

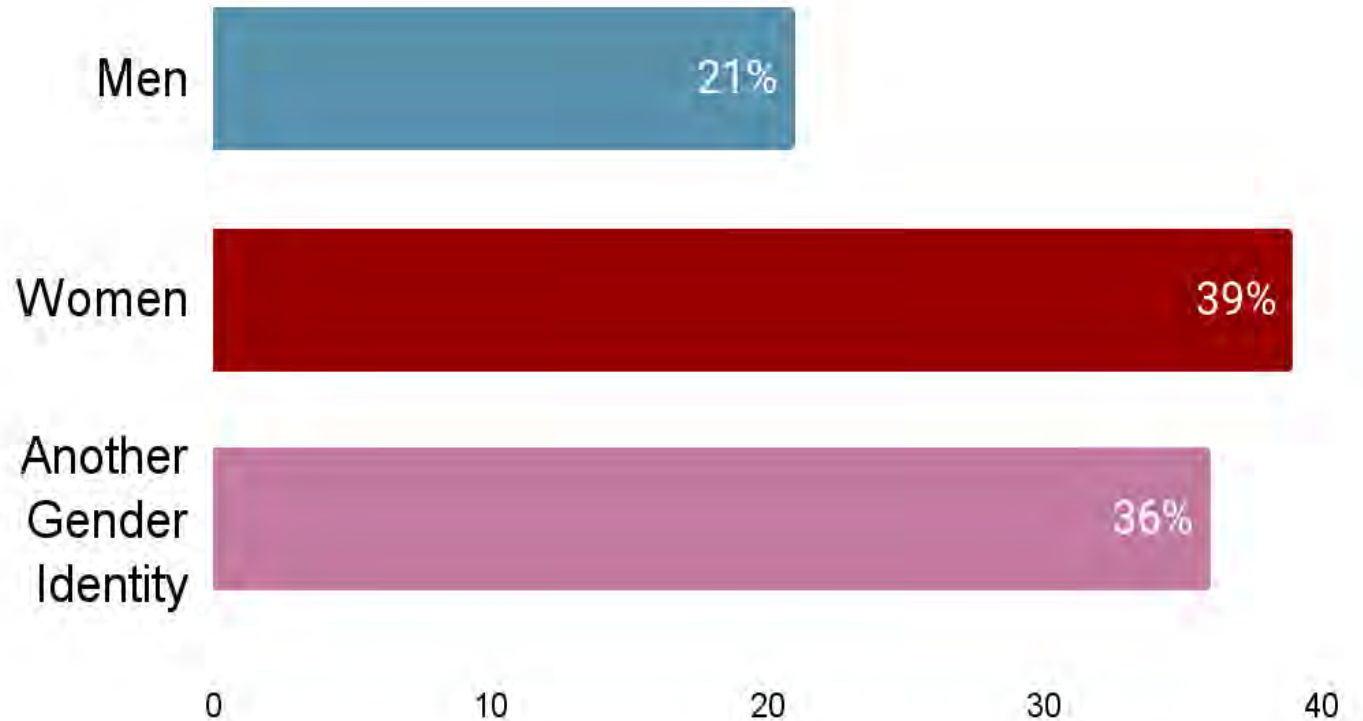


# Who are the unpaid interns?



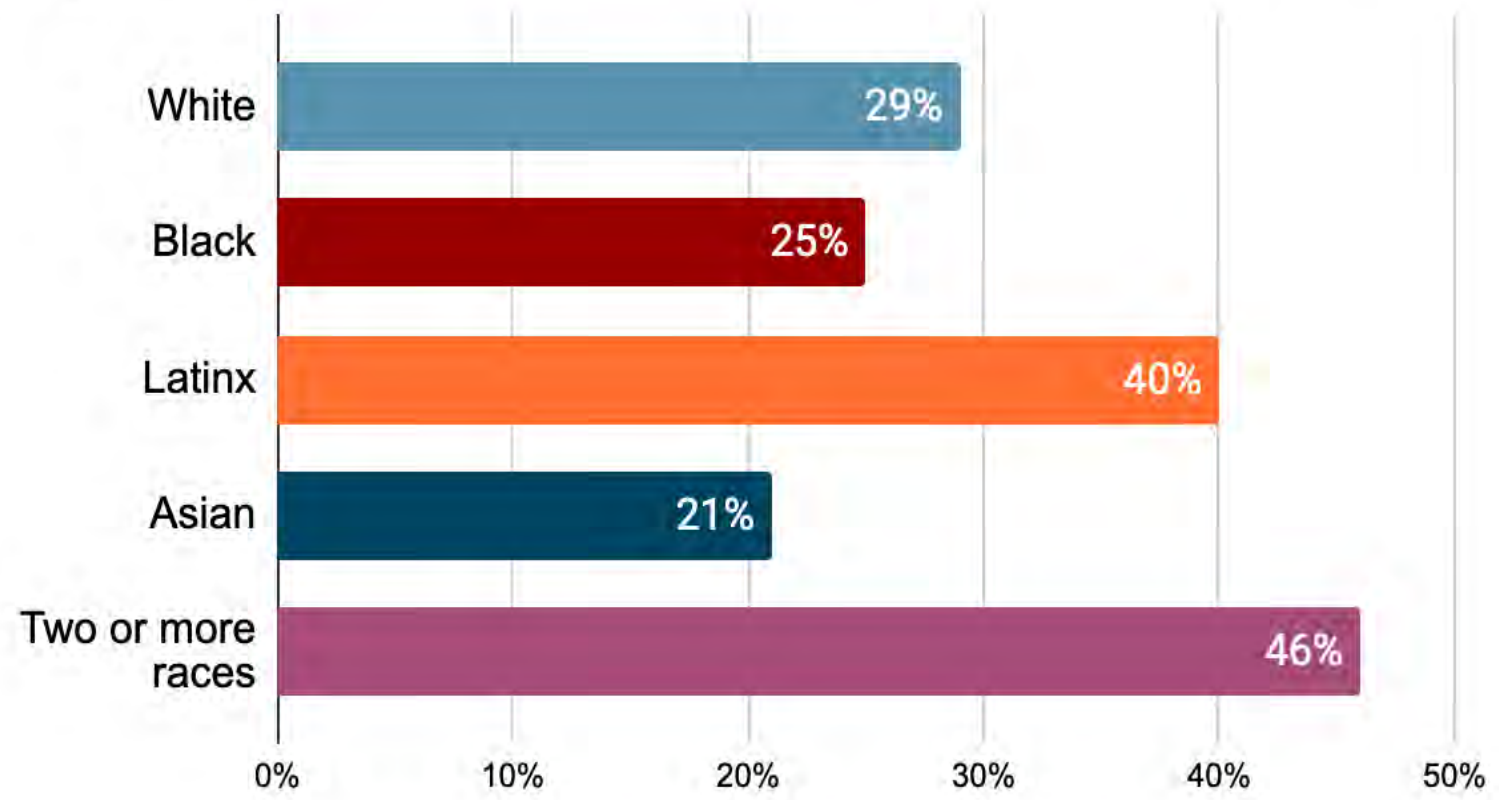
(Hora, Jang-Tucci, and Zhang, 2022)

# Percentage of Unpaid Interns by Gender Identity, NSCI 2023 National Sample



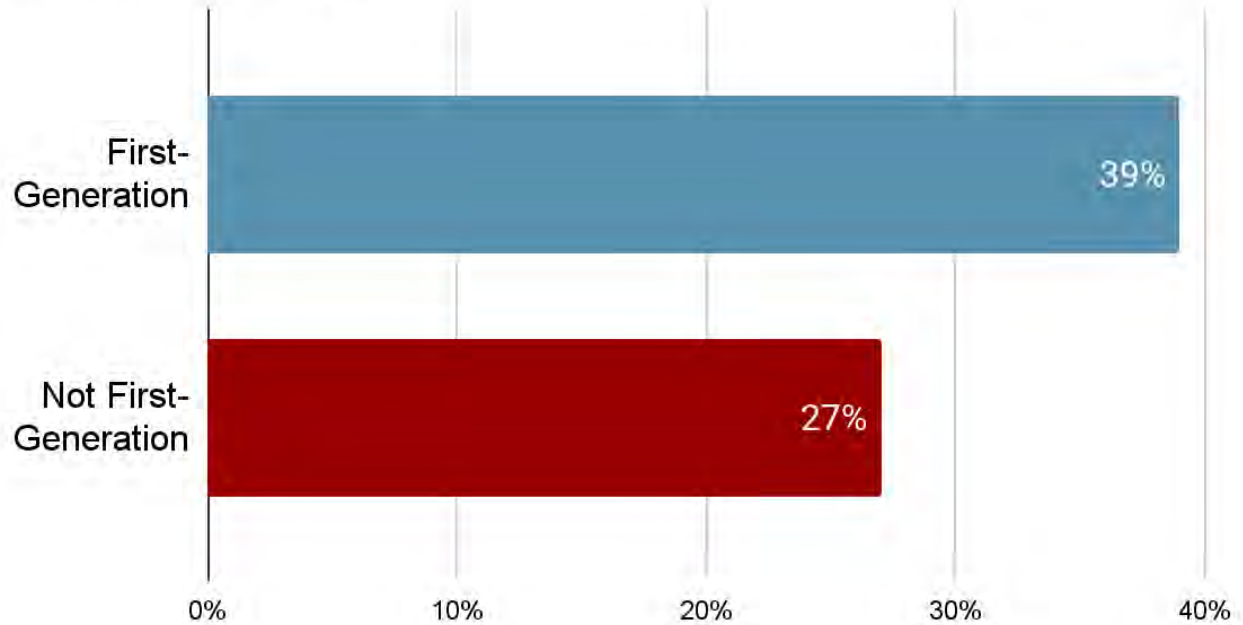
Significant  
Racial  
Disparities in  
Paid vs Unpaid  
Internships

Percentage of Unpaid Interns by Race, NSCI 2023 National Sample



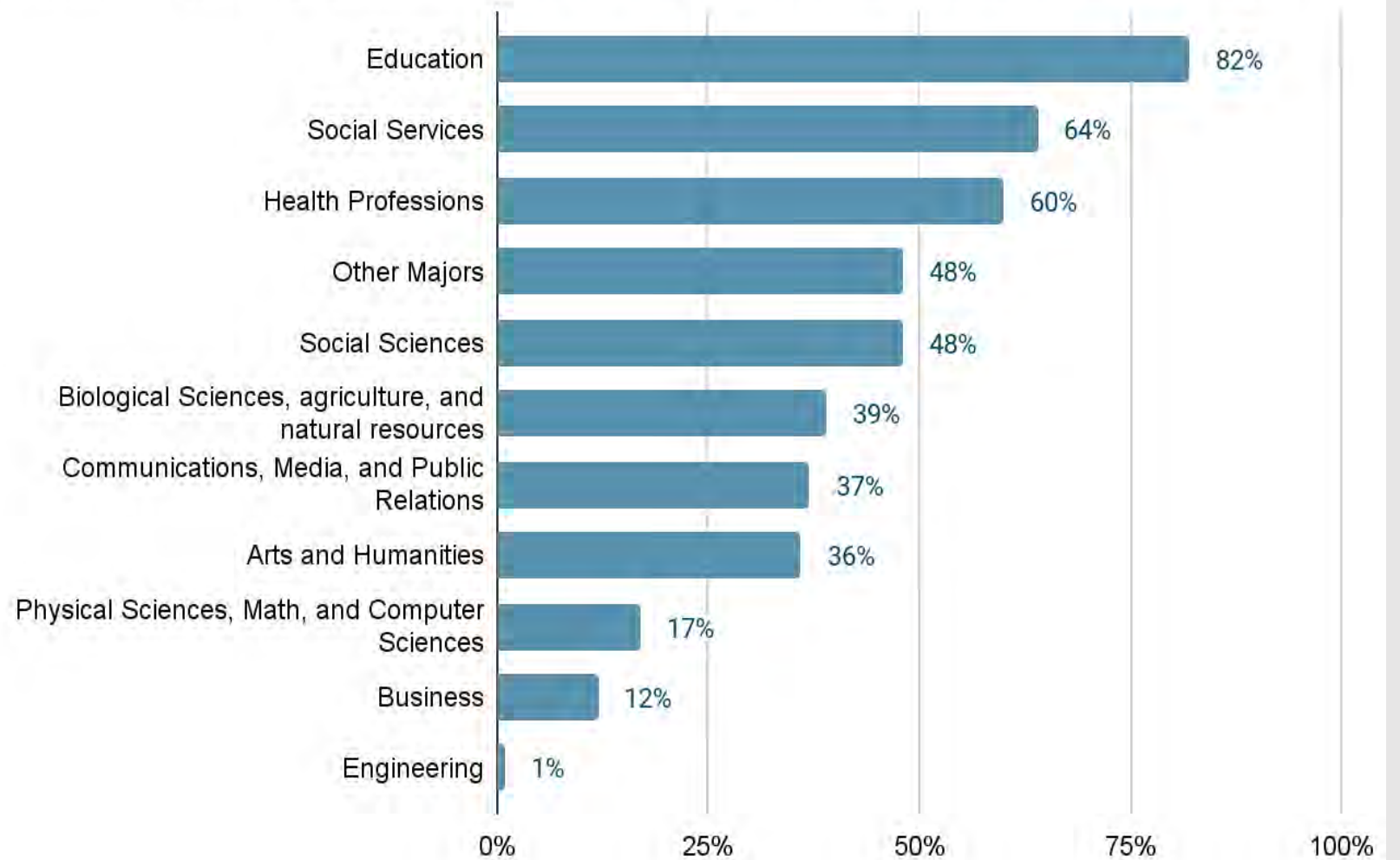
# Significant Disparities Between First-Generation & Non-First-Gen Students

Percentage of Unpaid Interns by First-Generation Status, NSCI 2023 National Sample



**Significant  
Disparities  
Across  
Majors**

Percentage of Unpaid Interns by Major, NSCI 2023 National Sample



# What are the practical implications?

- Collect more data on internship pay
- Target interventions to women, marginalized, low-income, first-gen students, & non-profit internships
- Dedicate financial aid funding to support students doing unpaid internships
- Build partnerships across campus units and with external partners to end unpaid internships
- Advocate for government to fund government and industry-specific internships
- Expand classroom-based work-integrated learning to make internship experiences more accessible

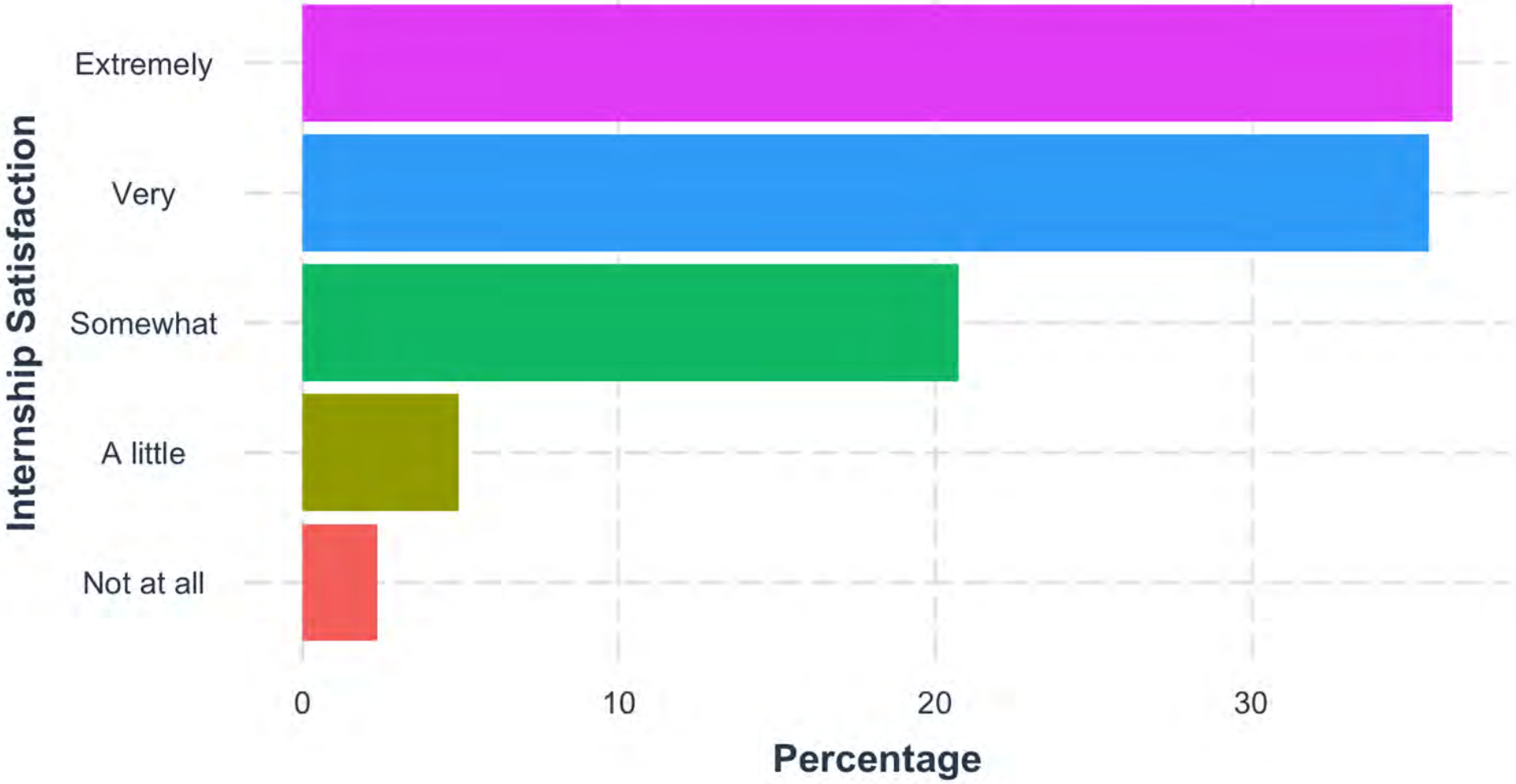




# Student Internship Satisfaction & Experiences

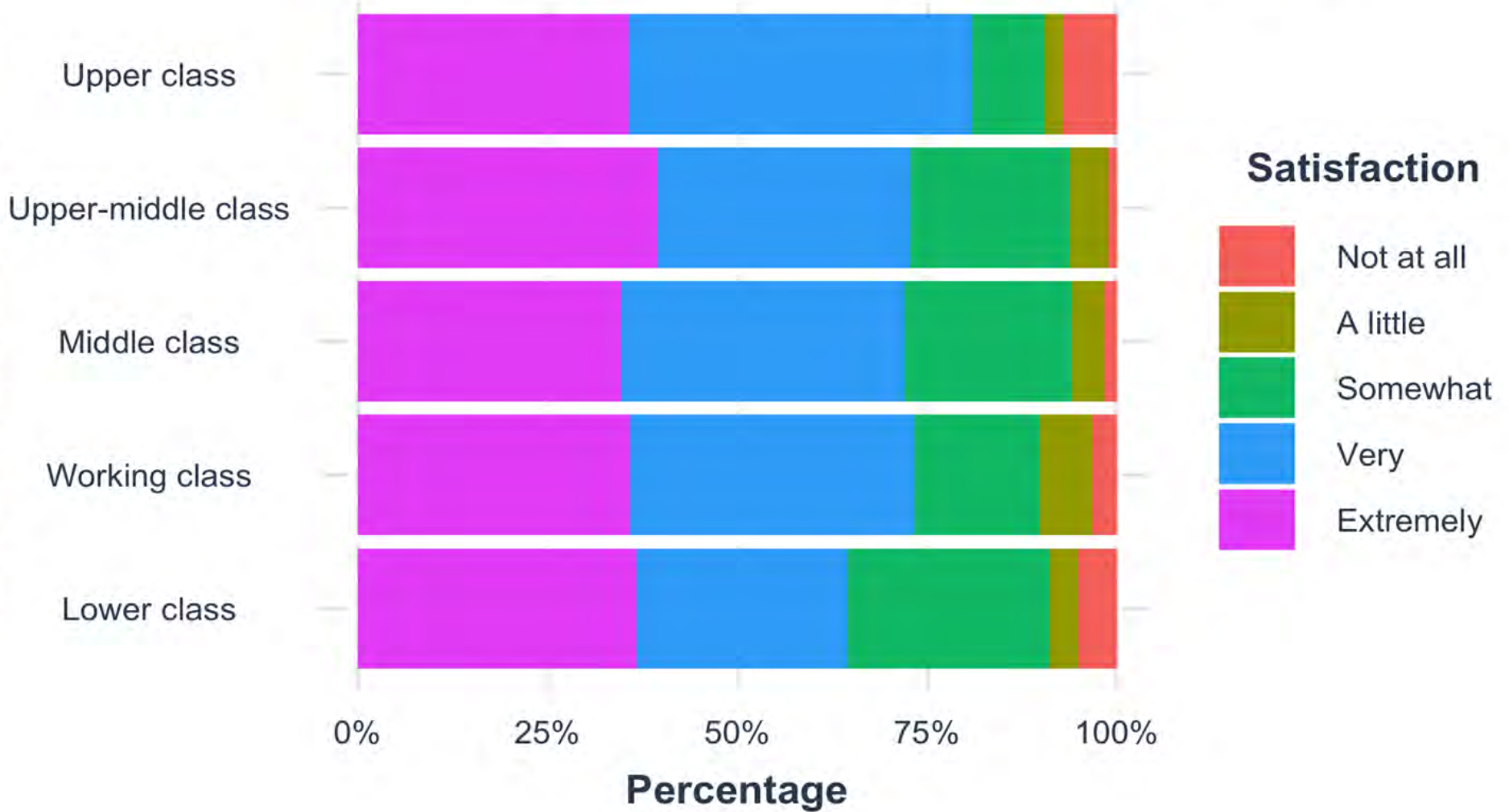


# Overall Internship Satisfaction, NSCI 2023



# Internship Satisfaction by SES, NSCI 2023

Student Socioeconomic Status





# What are the crucial programmatic elements of internship experience?

## 1 - Task goal clarity and autonomy

- Task goal clarity is associated with student satisfaction, especially for newcomers (Feldman & Weitz, 1990; Bauer et al., 2007).
- Mixed findings regarding autonomy: a certain level of autonomy may be beneficial but too much could be detrimental (Ramani & McHugh, 2019; Virtanen et al., 2014).

## 2 - Alignment and Coordination with Academic Programs

- The alignment between internship, academic major, and career aspirations are positively associated with student satisfaction (Liu & Glave 2023).
- Yet a lot of misalignment exists and varies across academic major programs.

## 3 - Quality of Supervision

- Supervisor support and mentoring are positively related to internship outcomes (D'abate, Youndt, & Wenzel, 2009; Liu, Xu, & Weitz, 2011).

# What are the key features of intern-supervisor relations?

- Communication of tasks.
- A proper level of intern autonomy.
- Proximity and availability of supervisor.
- Attention to intern learning.
- Provision of feedback.

*If I had questions, I could always go to them... I can't really think of a situation where I ever had a question that wasn't answered within an hour.*

*You would watch them do [it] initially, and then they would have you do it on your own.*

*Every two weeks we would meet up and we would debrief and see where we were [at] and see how we were doing and if it was overwhelming, or if we thought that we needed to be doing more.*

# What are the Practical Implications?



- Potential **socioeconomic disparities** in student internship experiences; more data needed.
- Interventions to help students achieve better **internship-major-career alignment**.
- **Supervisor support, care, and mentoring** are crucial factors associated with student internship satisfaction, experience, and outcomes.
- Supervisors should navigate the tension between being highly **communicative and attentive** on one hand, while also providing **autonomy** to the student on the other hand.
- The degree of supervision and autonomy should vary depending on the **experience level of the intern**, the **nature of the task situation**, and **intern learning**.

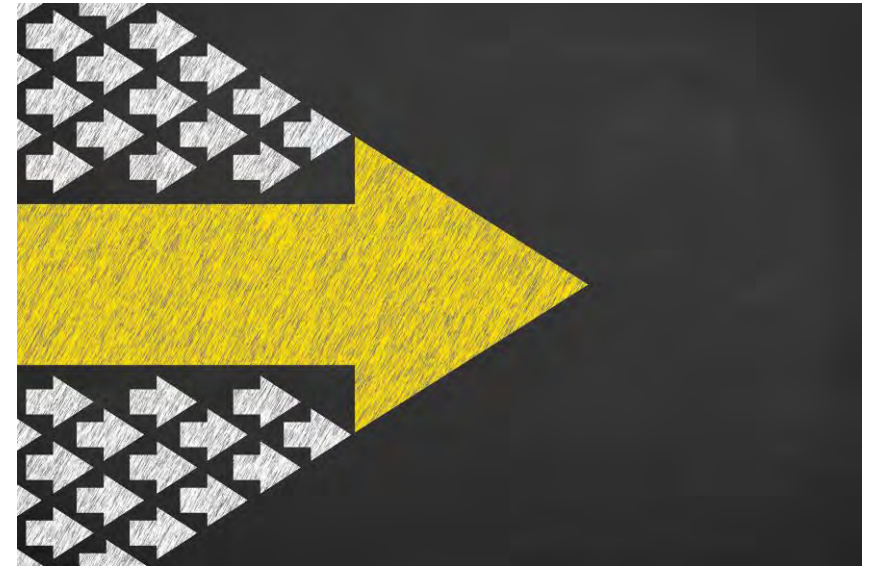


# Internship Completion & Post-graduate Outcomes



# What are long-term impacts of college internship participation or lack thereof?

- 2-Wave Longitudinal Data
  - N = 847
  - Lee & Thompson, 2024
- 3-Wave Longitudinal Data
  - N = 554
  - Jang-Tucci & Thompson (in review)



# What are long-term impacts of college internship participation or lack thereof?

2-wave Data { • Increased autonomy & goal clarity from supervisor → career adaptability gains among interns

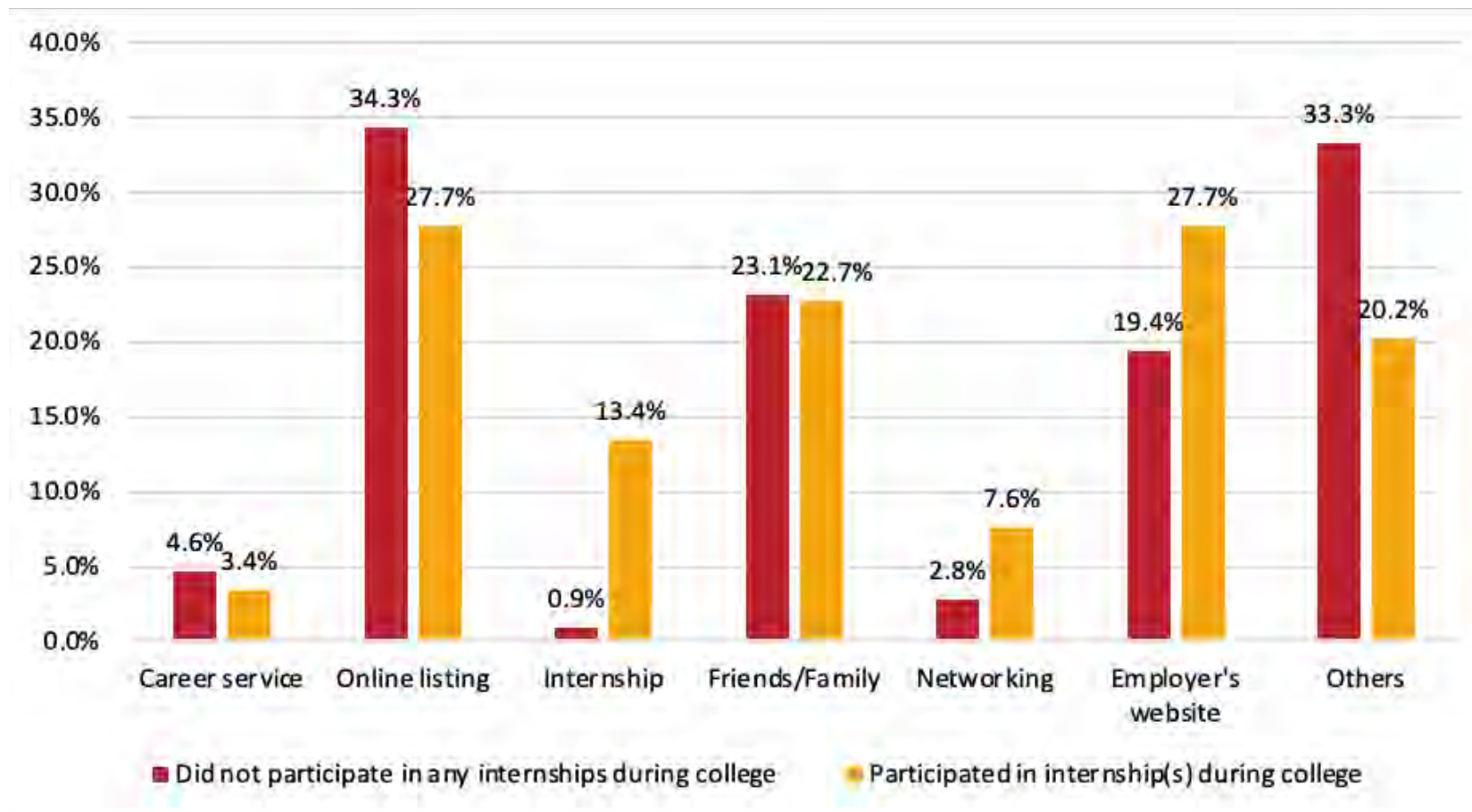
• Students with internships:

- Tended to secure employment with higher relevance to majors
- 3 times more likely to enroll in graduate school rather than enter the labor market
- 3 times more likely to be in the mid-to-high income group rather than the lowest income group

3-wave Data { • Disparities in career development opportunities & outcomes, even after controlling for the effects of internship

- FGCS graduates: jobs less related to majors as compared to CGCS graduates
- Black & African American graduates: 3 times more likely to take longer to find employment as compared to White peers

# What methods did students use in their job search?



Hora, Thompson et al., 2023: (no internship n=120; internship n = 111) at Year 3



What were some of COVID-19's impacts on career plans & goals?

2021-2022 (n=554)



# How might we design more effective college internships?

- Support students to:
  - Develop concrete skills & strategies to connect internship experiences with career exploratory behaviors
  - Translate knowledge & skills gained through internships to the classroom & vice versa
  - Connect career goals with concrete action steps
- Engage with employers to co-design & support internships
- Support career development as holistic process



# How might we design more effective college internships?

- What would student-designed internships include?

# Which Questions Remain?

# What do we need to know?



How do we best engage employers as a critical piece of internship puzzle?



What is the state of the internship labor market post-COVID-19? Will a supply & demand imbalance continue to negatively impact the internship labor market?



What other forms of work-based learning benefit students' intrapersonal skills & employability?



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Thank you!