



Student Employment
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON



2026 Student Employment Engagement Survey



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Executive Summary

The 2026 Student Employment Engagement Survey, designed to gain feedback about the student employment experience at the University of Wisconsin-Madison gathered 923 responses. These results are intended to be used to help inform improvements in the experiences of student employees.

Takeaways

923
Responses

74% of Respondents currently
work

Top 3 motivating factors for
working:

- Money
- Experience
- Transferable skill development

Top 3 skills learned:

- Oral communication
- Effective decision making
- Teamwork

40% of students would prefer to
work hybrid

Students work an average of 15.8
hours per week

Compared to 2024 & 2025 Student Engagement Surveys:

- 2026 had the highest number of responses in 3 years with 923 responses:
 - 55.65% increase from 2025 (593 responses)
 - 42.44% increase from 2024 (648 responses)
 - 4.5% increase from 2023 (883 responses)
- The top 3 motivating factors for students has not changed from 2023 to 2026, in order:
 - Money, work experience, and skill development
- Compared to 2025 the top 3 skills gained have remained consistent, in order:
 - Oral communication, effective decision making, and teamwork

Top 3 challenges students faced in 2026 when finding employment opportunities:

With the goal of helping students find employment during their time at UW-Madison, some students have had challenges relating to different areas of the process with many reporting the following:

- No response from employers, or long wait times before hearing back
- Positions available do not reflect interests or career track goals
- Worry about their qualifications or not meeting requirements

These concerns also highlight the consistent concern regarding competition in obtaining student jobs.

Student employment experience takeaways:

- Overall, a majority of students strongly agree that they felt supported by their supervisor.
- Students in departments that utilized WiGROW reported on average higher agreement with all statements relating to employment environment and supervisor support.
- Students working on campus in graduate assistantships or UW-Madison student hourly positions indicate a higher average level of agreement with statements relating to employment environment and supervisor support compared to those with off-campus jobs.

Student Employees

UW-Madison has over 13,000 students working across 15,000 student jobs (studentjobs.wisc.edu). This survey was designed to better understand the experience of our students in these roles. 923 students responded anonymously to our 2026 Student Employment Engagement Survey. In this survey, no questions were required to be answered. This section will look at student statuses in multiple areas.

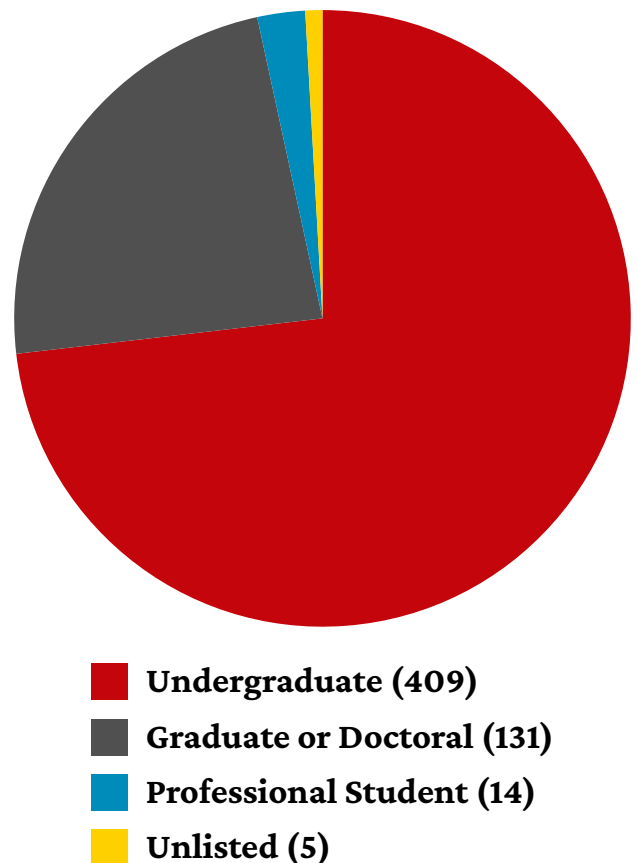
Of the 923 students who responded:

- 73% were undergraduate students
- 35% of undergraduate students were in their first year
- 58% were Wisconsin residents

These characteristics are similar to respondents in both 2024 and 2025 with all numbers falling within 5 points.

Student Status

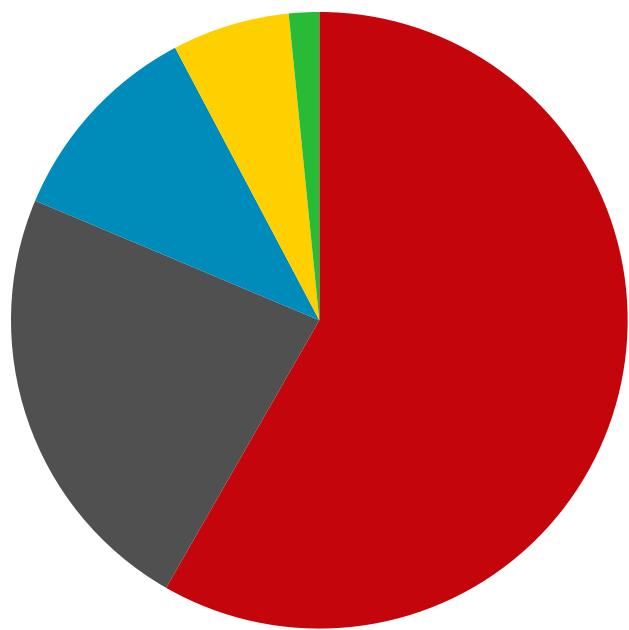
UW-Madison has opportunities for student employment for all types of students. A majority of survey respondents indicated being an undergraduate student. With a total of 559 responses, 73% identified as undergraduates, 23% as Graduate or Doctoral students, 3% as Professional Degree seeking students, and 1% being a student in another capacity.



Within the undergraduate students, over a third were first year students. There were a total of 404 undergraduate students that responded.

Year in School	Percentage of Responses	# of Responses
1st	35%	141
2nd	24%	97
3rd	23%	92
4th+	18%	74

Resident Status



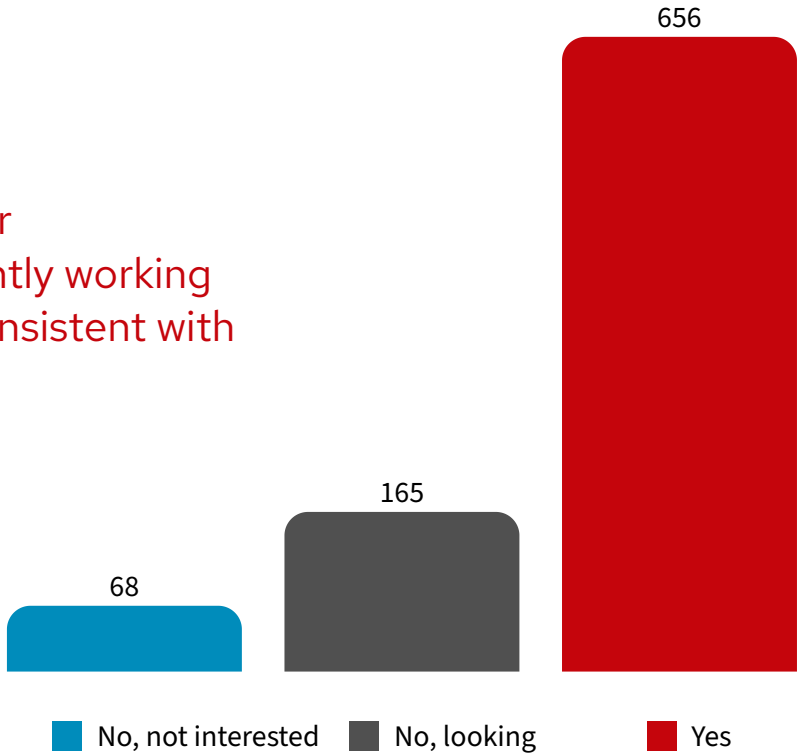
- WI Resident (331)
- Out of State (131)
- International (62)
- MN Resident (35)
- Prefer Not to Share (9)

As a top university, UW-Madison hosts students from all 50 states, and over 130 countries (UW Visiting International Student Program, 2025). To gain a better understanding of who pursues student employment opportunities, we asked students to self-identify residency status.

568 students answered the question, of them, 58% report being considered a WI resident, 23% out of state, 11% international, 6% a Minnesota resident and 2% preferred not to share.

Employment Status

889 students responded about their employment status, with 74% currently working on or off campus. This number is consistent with 2025, but down from 81% in 2024.



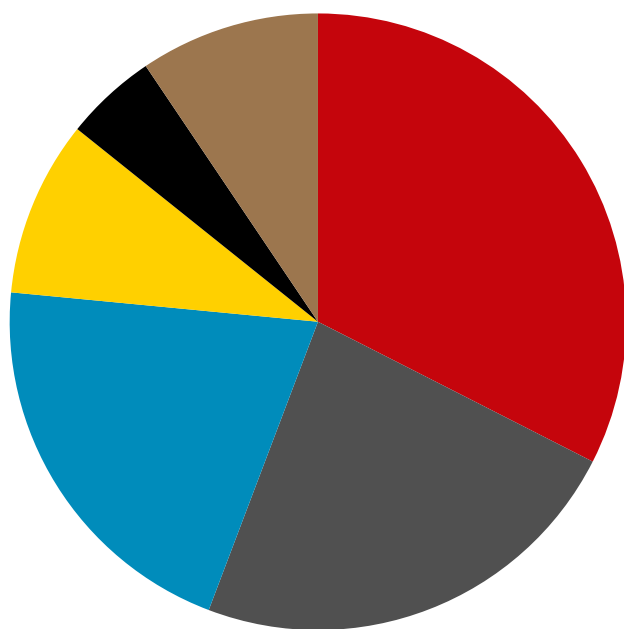
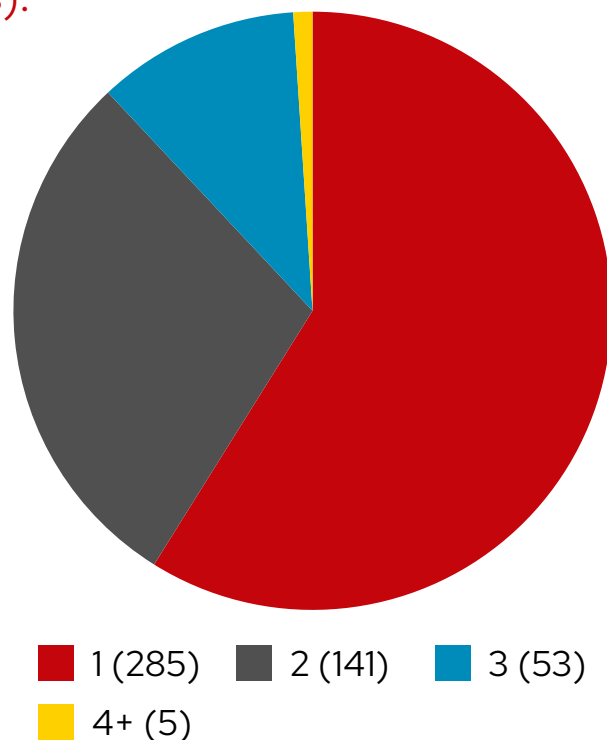
Position Types Held

Students that held positions were asked to indicate what kind of role(s) they were in. 695 students responded with some holding more than one position type.

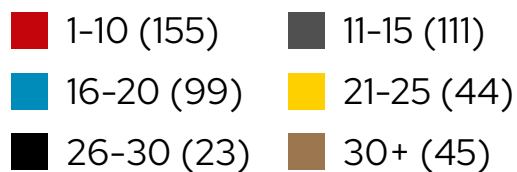
Position Type	# of Responses
UW-Position	488
Non-UW	210
Assistantship	122

To gain a better understanding of what students work-life balance is we asked how many jobs student hold either on or off-campus as well as how many hours a week they work at their job(s).

484 students responded to the question asking how many jobs they work. 59% of students indicated working one job while another 29% said two and 11% working three. The lowest group was 4 or more with a 1% response.



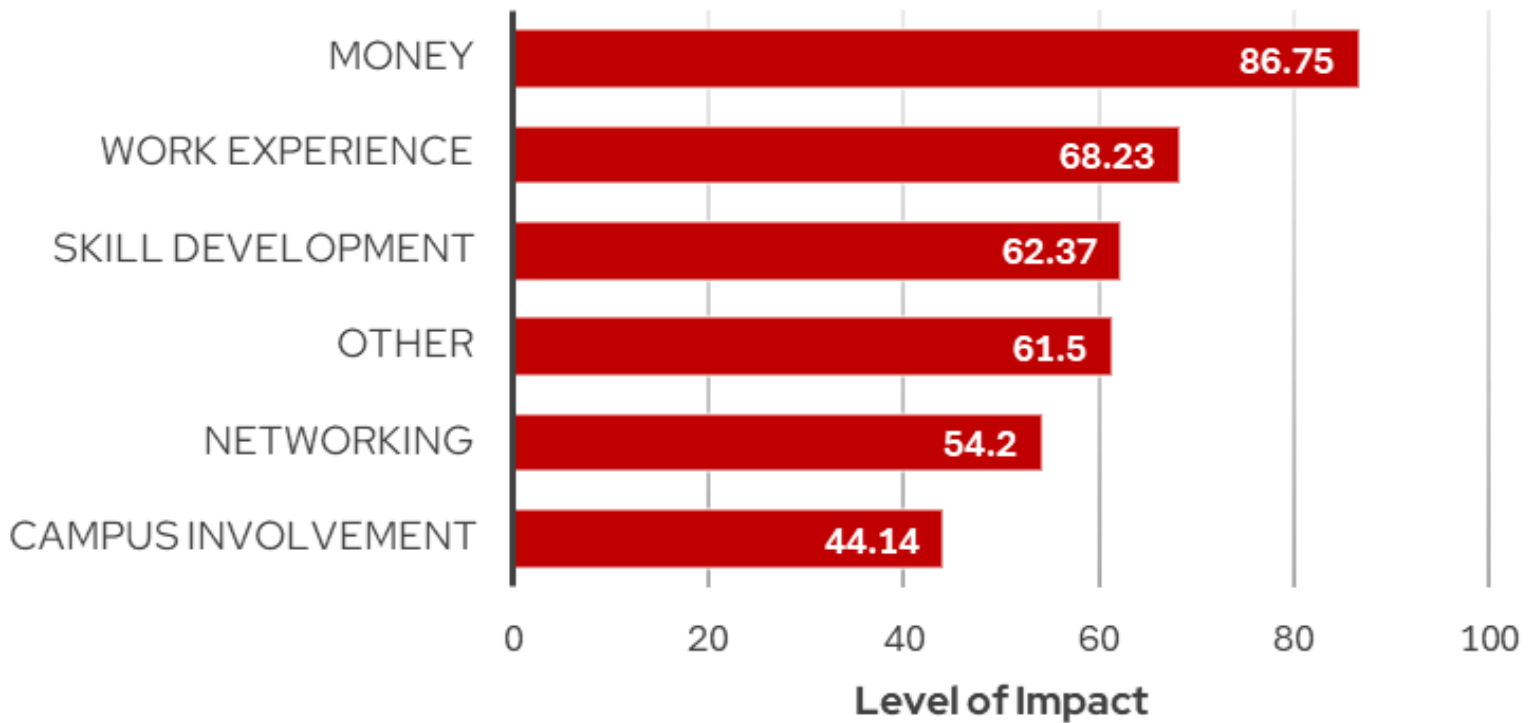
483 students responded to the question asking how many hours per week they work across all jobs. 32% work 1-10 hours per week, and 23% work 11-15 hours. Another 20% said 16-20 hours, and 21-25 hours and 30 hours or more both having a response of 9%. The lowest group was 26-30 hours at 5%.



Motivators in Employment

This section will look at the motivation of students in finding employment during their time at UW-Madison.

Average Rank of Motivating Factors



*This graph shows how students rank various factors in motivation for finding a job. The higher the number the more they felt motivated by that factor.

Students indicate "Money" as the top motivation for having a student job, which has remained consistent since 2023. This year students rated the average level of impact at 86.75, compared to 80.5 in 2025 and 82.5 in 2024.

The second highest motivator was "Work Experience" with an average rating of 68.23, consistent with 69.76 in 2025.

The third highest was "Skill Development" with a rating of 62.37. This number is lower than what we found in 2025 when skill development had a rating of 67.03.

In the "Other" category there were 67 responses with an average rating of 61.5. These responses consisted of students motivated by housing, tuition remission for graduate and professional students, and access to a Social Security Number (SSN) for international students, as well as some students looking for social outlets.

Considerations in Selecting Jobs

Students were also asked to rank the following factors from most (1) to least (8) important when considering what jobs to apply to. There were 522 responses, with the most important factors by average rank being scheduling flexibility, competitive wages and being relate to their career goals.

Most important factor by average rank: Scheduling Flexibility

Most important factor by number of #1 rankings: Competitive wage

Important Factors in Applying



*This graph shows how students rank various factors they consider when looking at jobs to apply for. The lower the number the more important they consider it to be.

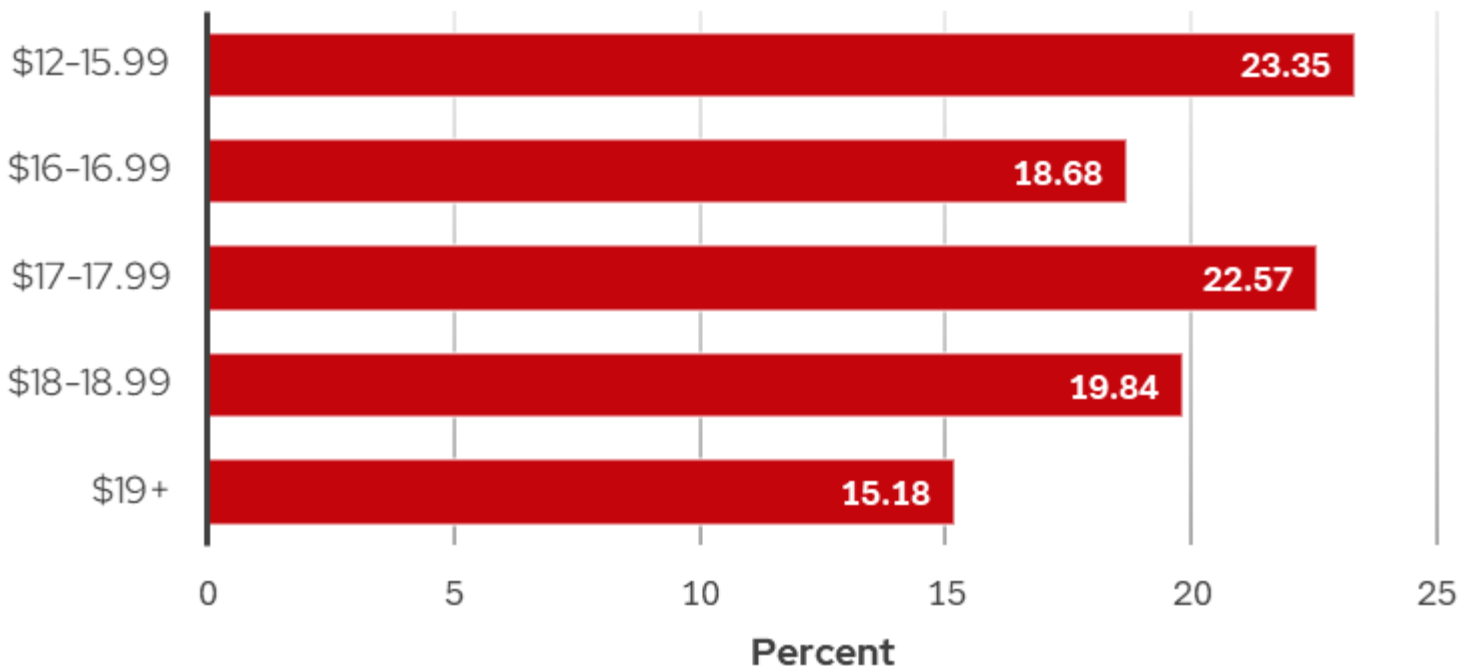
Pay Expectations

As we see money becoming an increasing motivator for students to find a job we asked students what they got paid and what they would consider to be a competitive wage. This section is broken down into undergraduate students and graduate/professional students.

Undergraduate Average	Graduate/Professional Average
\$16.54	\$22.01

In 2025-2026 the average pay among respondents was \$16.54/hour for undergraduates and \$22.01/hour for graduate and professional students.

Competitive Pay - Undergraduate



When looking at what undergraduate students would consider competitive pay, the largest group at 23.35% indicated they would consider \$12-15.99. The next group was \$17-17.99 at 22.57%.

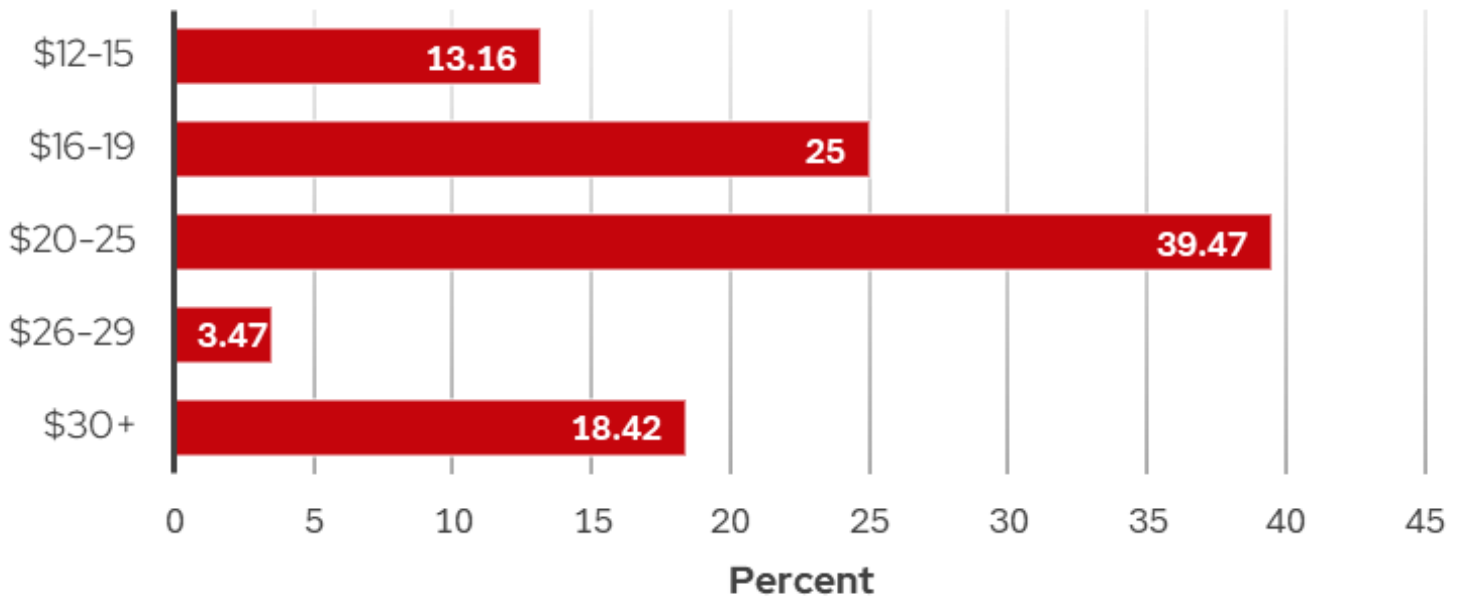
Competitive Pay By Year in School

1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year	4th+
\$16.52	\$17.12	\$17.31	\$17.84

In undergraduate students, we found that the further they are in school, they more they consider a competitive wage to be. The chart below breaks this down further into competitive pay selections by range. The chart is reported in percents for each year, where the highest percent for each year is highlighted.

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th+
\$12-15.99	32.9	28.6	21.7	7.4
\$16-16.99	23.3	21.4	15.9	14.8
\$17-17.99	26.0	14.3	26.1	24.1
\$18-18.99	8.2	23.2	18.8	33.3
\$19+	9.6	12.5	17.4	20.4

Competitive Pay - Graduate/Professional



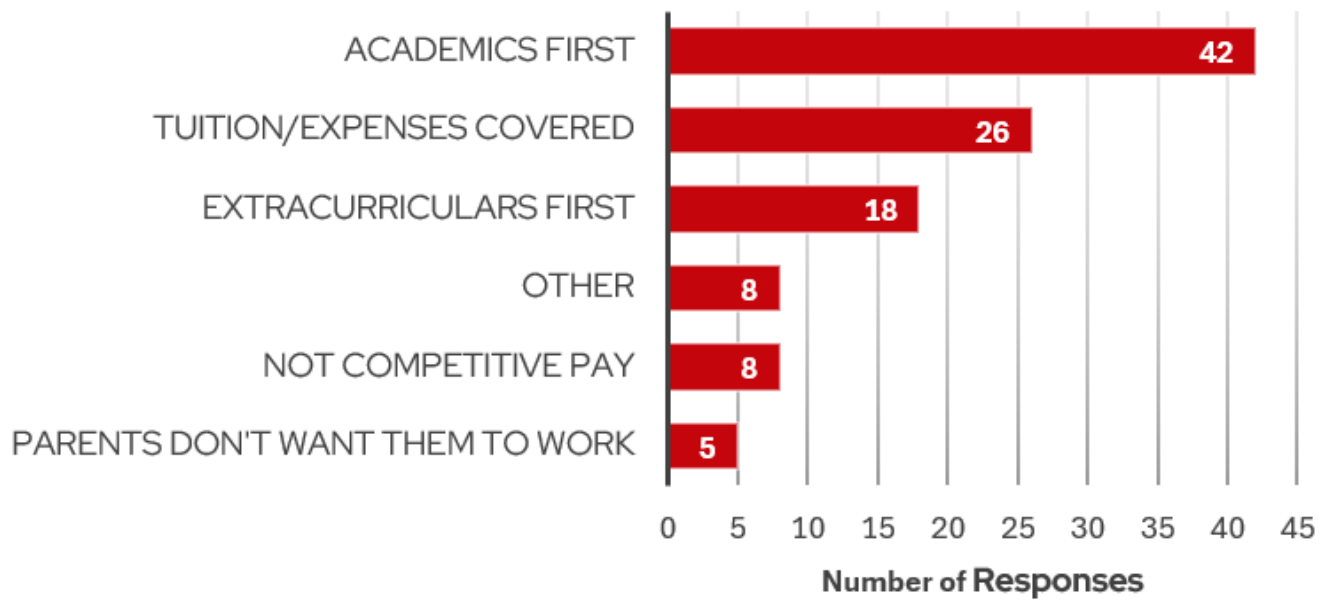
In graduate and professional students 39.47% indicated viewing competitive pay as being between \$20-25. The next pay bracket was \$16-19 with 25% of students.

Factors for Not Pursing Employment

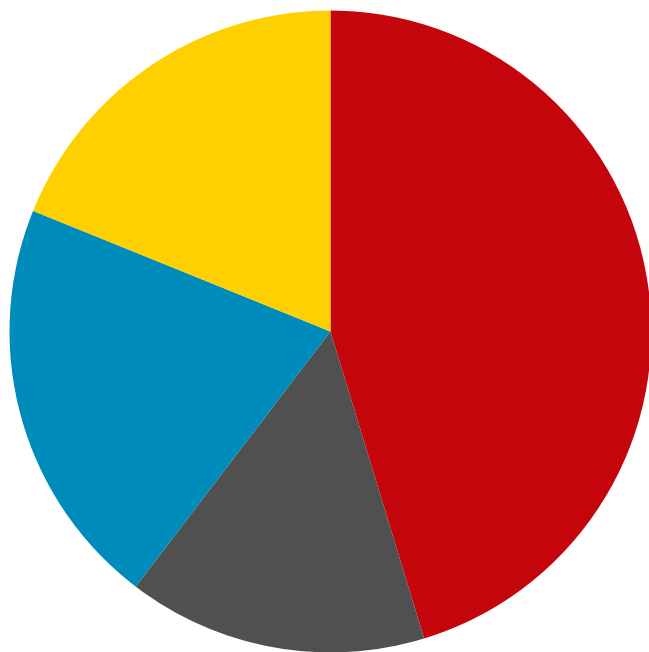
Some students choose not to hold employment during their time at UW-Madison. To understand the factors impacting their decision we asked the following questions.

Students who indicated that they were not currently working and not interested were asked to describe the factors that impacted their decision not to work. 52 students responded and were able to select multiple answers.

Factors in Not Working



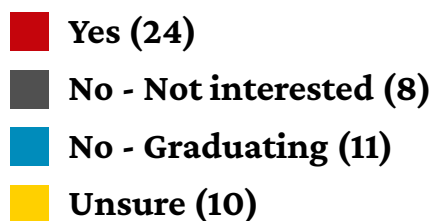
81% of students indicated they were putting their academics first, and 50% said they were not interested in working because tuition and expenses were covered. The last major group selected prioritizing extracurriculars at 35%. "Other" responses to this question include time restrictions or one student indicated that their program does not want students to have a job.



As well as asking for factors that influenced their choice, they were asked if they plan to look for a student job in the future. Of 53 responses, 45% of them answered yes.

Students were asked what factors would make employment more intriguing to them. 24 students responded to the short answer question which were largely three categories:

- Higher pay
- Flexibility in scheduling
- More career oriented positions



Challenges to Securing Employment

This section will look at barriers and challenges in job search and attainment.

Students who indicated that they had not worked in the past year either on or off campus were asked to select factors that impacted their ability to find a job in the past year. 85 students responded to this question, and were able to select multiple answers.

Impacts to Finding Campus Jobs



In finding campus jobs, many students (55%) note that it can be very difficult due to a lack of communication from employers, or it taking a long time to hear back. This same feedback is noted in the student jobs challenges as well.

44% of students also mention academics and extracurriculars as impacts due to scheduling. 34% have troubles finding jobs that align with their interests or career goals and 28% have trouble with not meeting qualifications or requirements of the role.

"Other" responses to this question noted interview skills and a competitive market.

Challenges Applying on Student Jobs Website

Students were asked what their biggest challenge was when applying on the student jobs website. 337 students responded to the short answer question and some included more than one challenge. Their answers were broken down into the following 4 themes as they relate to student employers and their breakdowns. Themes unrelated to employers were not included in this report, but are available.

Lack of employer communication (62)	Job description, requirements and criteria (31)
Application process and materials (24)	Scheduling concerns (20)

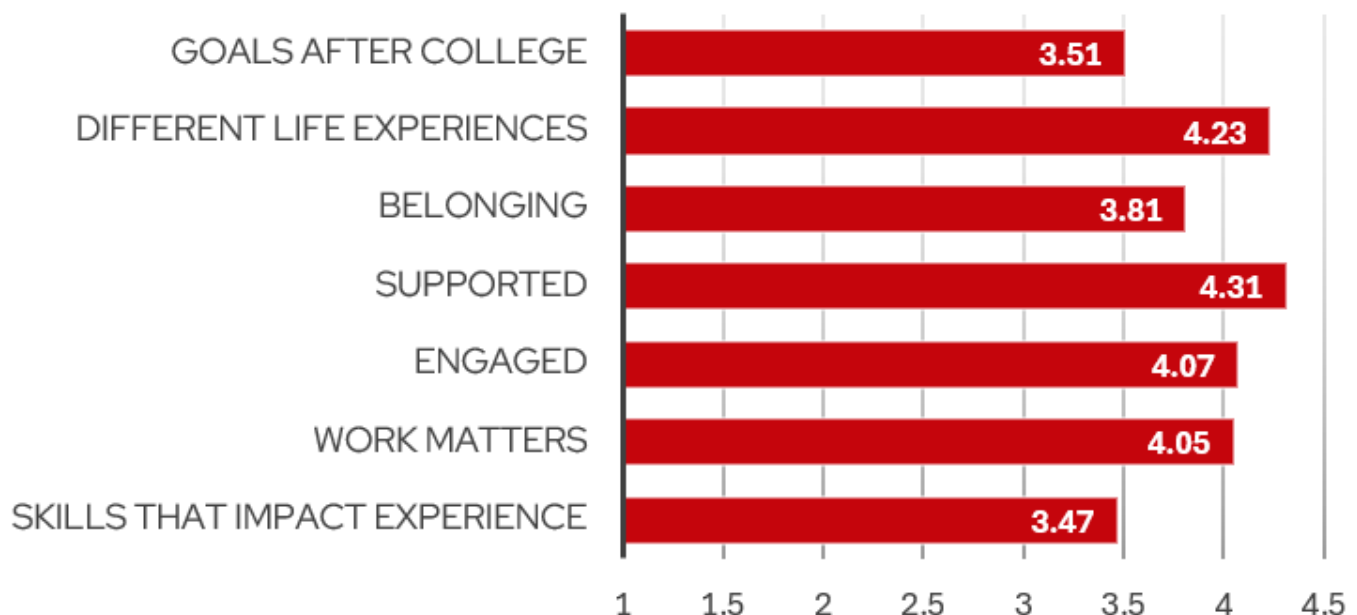
- Lack of employer communication
- This was the most notable category. Many students note that it can be very difficult to get a response from employers about application status, or a long time in between with one student saying one took over a year to hear back.
- Job description, requirements and criteria
 - Experience creates a barrier for students where they feel underqualified or do not meet the requirement. (7)
 - Many students mention job descriptions not being complete such as the job description being short, missing or misleading. (13)
- Application process and materials
 - Many students mention cover letters, not knowing how to write one or struggle having to change it for each job. One student said they automatically put applications off if they require one. (11)
 - Resumes were another factor students bring up, having to create or edit for certain jobs. (4)
 - Providing references proves a barrier for students, especially first year students who do not have professional connections. (4)
- Scheduling concerns
 - Students worry about finding jobs that work with their class schedules and other commitments. (10)
 - Others also mention worrying about the number of hours per week. (4)

Student Employment Environment

One goal of student employment is making sure students feel supported in various way no matter what role they are in. To look at employment environments students were asked the following questions where they answered on a five point scale of strongly disagree to agree which was then coded into a 1 to 5 scale where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree. Higher numbers indicate more positive responses.

- In my current job(s), my supervisor(s) helps me reflect on how the skills I learn and use at work will transfer to my goals for work after college.
- My current job(s) help me better work with people who have different life experiences than me.
- My job(s) help me feel a greater sense of belonging at UW-Madison.
- I feel supported by my supervisor(s).
- I feel engaged in my job.
- I feel like my work matters.
- In my current job(s), my supervisor(s) helps me reflect on how the skills I learn and use at work impact my experience as a student at UW-Madison.

Student Employment Environment

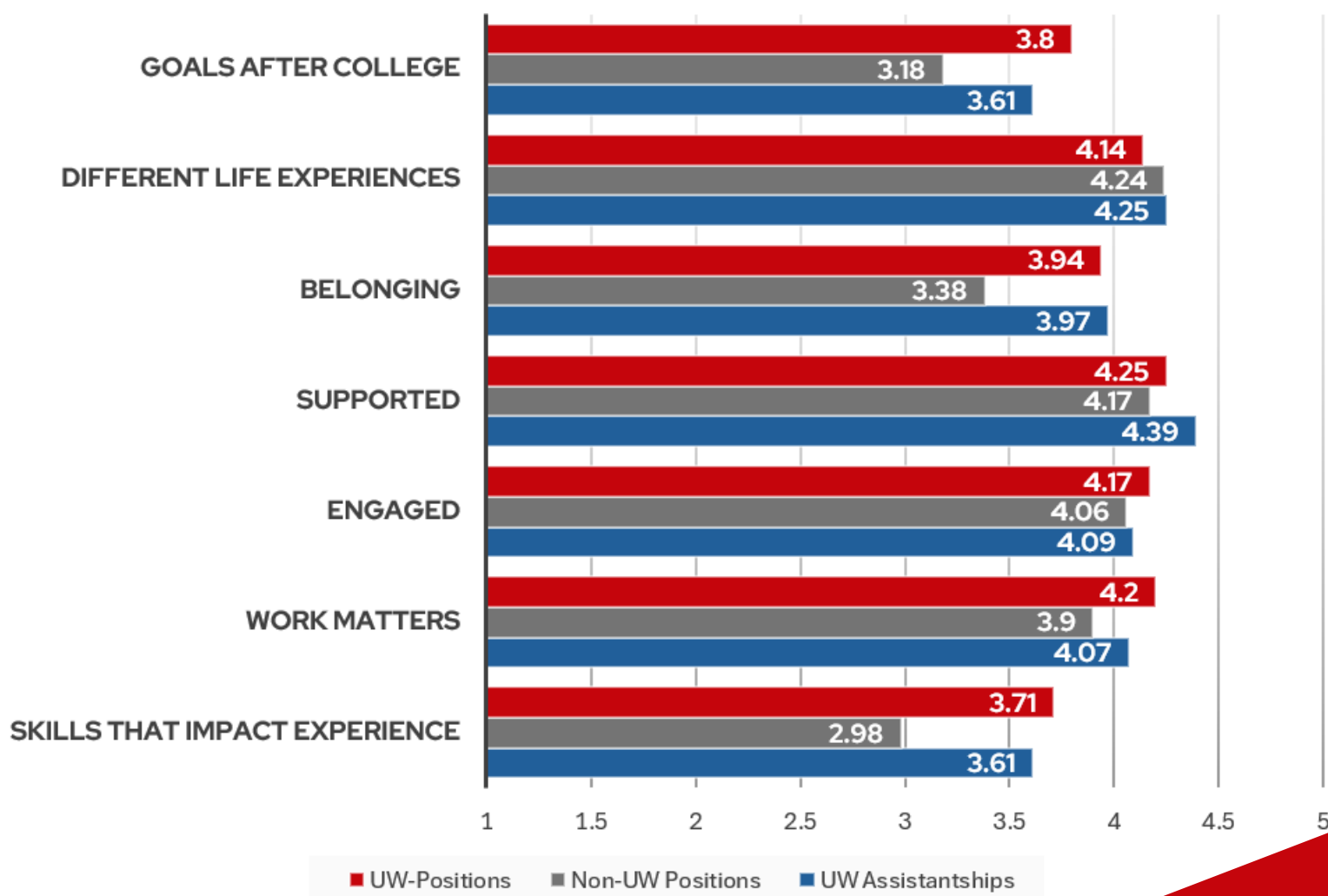


Overall, on average students were likely to agree with all statements.

- "In my current job(s), my supervisor(s) helps me reflect on how the skills I learn and use at work impact my experience as a student at UW-Madison" had the lowest average with 3.47 on a five point scale.
 - This is consistent with previous years' results also placing this as the lowest rated, with 2025 being 3.54 and 2024 being 3.43.
- "I feel supported by my supervisor(s)" had the highest average with 4.31.
 - This is also consistent with previous years' also placing this as the highest rated, with 2025 being 4.35 and 2024 being 4.17.

Students were also broken down into position type to look at differences across UW and Non-UW positions as well as assistantships.

Position Sorted Student Environment



Out of all categories students in UW-positions ranked highest in four categories including:

- Skill transfer for goals after college
- Feeling engaged in their work
- Feeling like their work matters
- Skills that impact their experience at UW

The remaining categories ranked highest for assistantship positions and include:

- Working with those with different life experiences
- Sense of belonging at UW
- Feeling supported by their supervisor

Skills Gained in the Workplace

Along with job responsibilities, students that hold employment learn many interpersonal skills. 493 students responded to the question "Which of the following skills have you gained overall during your job(s)?" Students were invited to select all that apply.



Three skills identified had a response of over 75% including: oral communication, effective decision making, and teamwork. 9 Students also selected "Other". In this category most students listed skills related to their roles including: teaching, cooking, research and analysis, and patient care. Other responses mention time management skills.

WiGROW

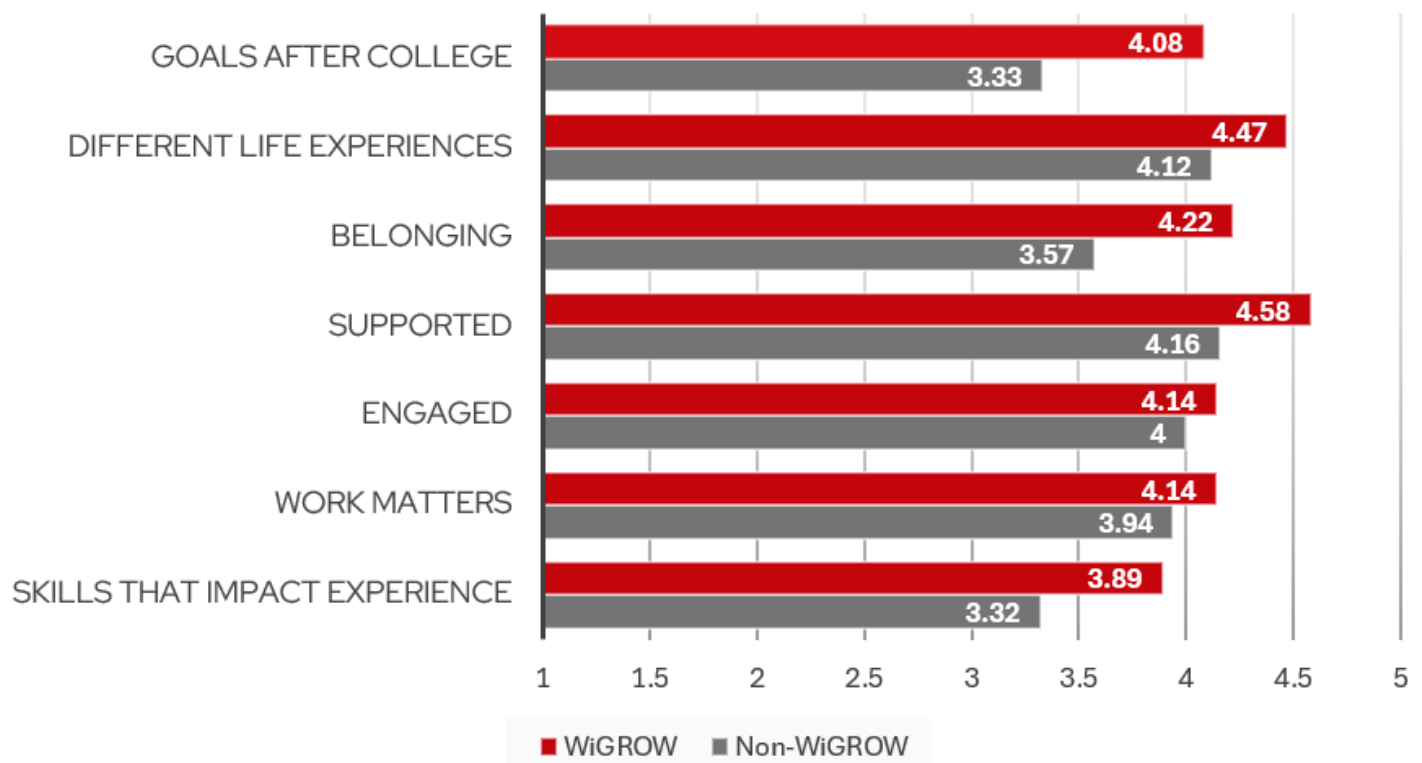
WiGROW is an engagement initiative designed to support the learning of student employees, Supervisors and student employees engage in intentional, reflective conversations each semester, providing the opportunity for connections between on-campus employment, career goals, and the college experience to flourish.

One of the ways to assess the effectiveness of WiGROW conversations is to measure student employment objectives against impact of conversations. We asked students if they currently have WiGROW conversations in their campus job. 491 students responded.

Yes	No	Unsure
90	237	164

Looking at student employment environment questions, we are able to compare perceptions of those who participate in WiGROW with those who do not in WiGROW departments.

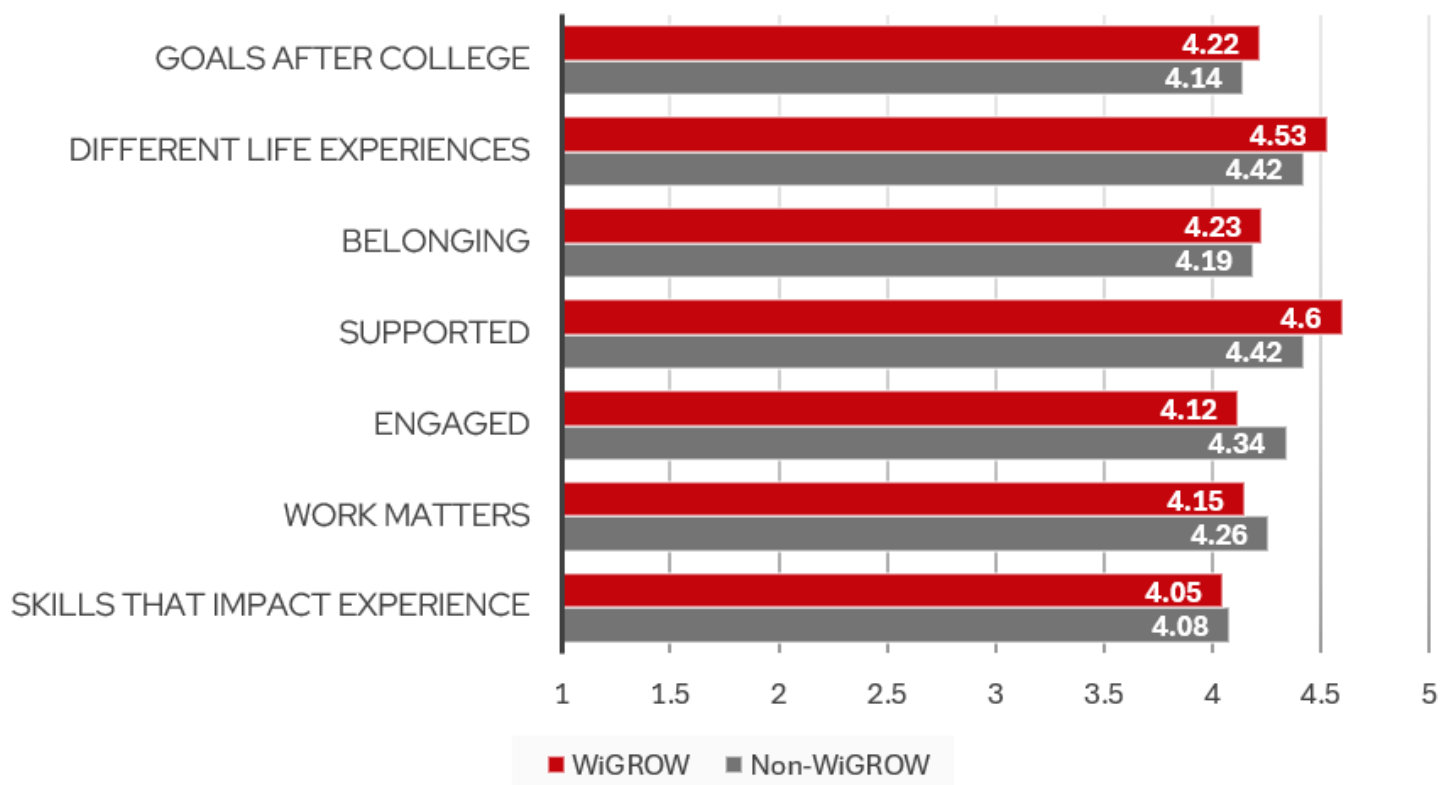
WiGROW vs Non-WiGROW Student Perceptions



Students in WiGROW departments were more likely to agree with all statements about student employment environments and support. The highest category students reported was feeling supported by their supervisor with an average of 4.58.

For both groups, the lowest response was reflecting on skills that impact their experience at UW-Madison. Non-WiGROW averaged 3.32 and WiGROW averaged 3.89.

Conversations - Knowing or Unknowing



Students were asked to indicate to what degree "My supervisor has facilitated reflective conversations with me to identify the skills that I'm learning and the connection between my work, career goals, and overall college experience." Options included once a semester, less than once a semester, more than once a semester and no and unsure.

Students who indicated that they did have conversations like these at any frequency were broken down into those who knew they were in WiGROW departments and those who said no. Participants that knew they were having WiGROW conversations were more likely to agree with four of the seven areas including:

- How skills can be transferred after college.
- Working better with people with different life experiences.
- Sense of belonging
- Feeling supported by their supervisors.

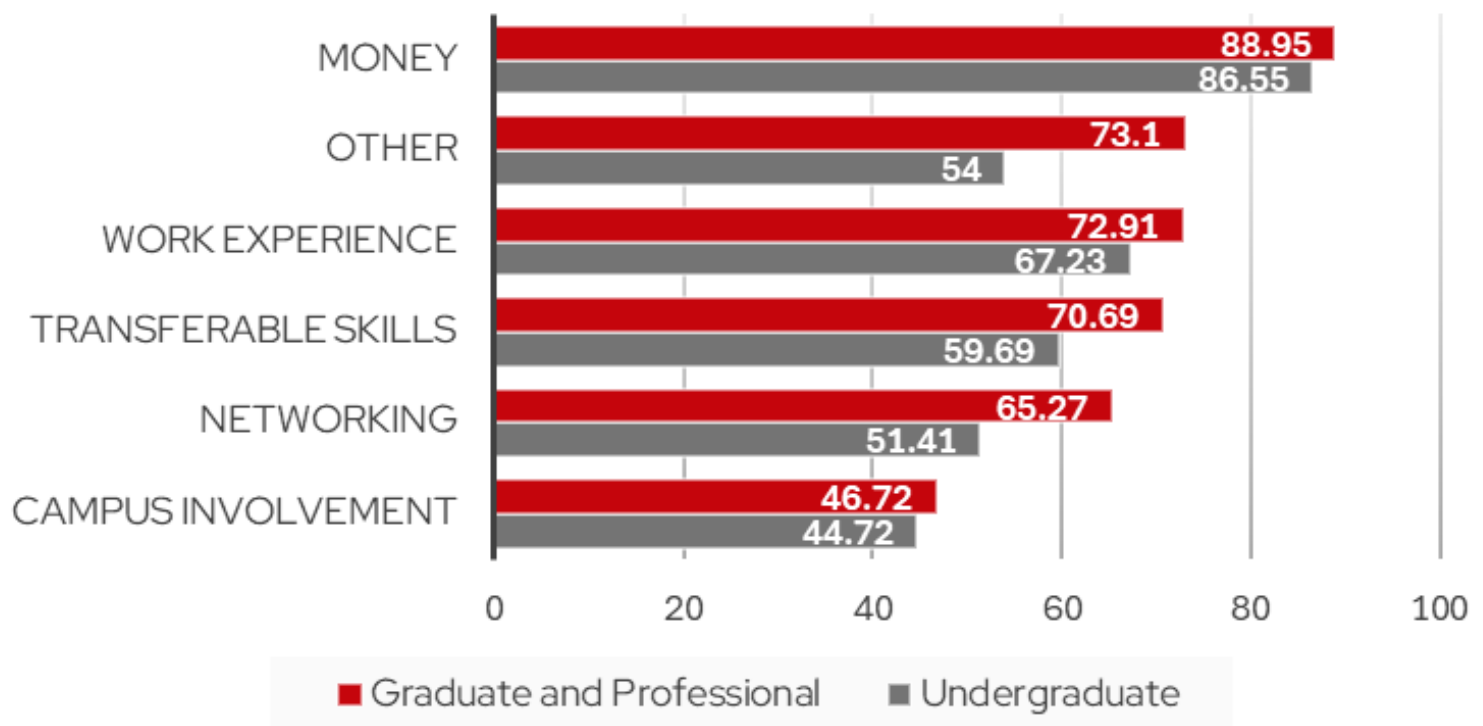
Students who were not aware that conversations they were having could be considered WiGROW report being more likely to feel engaged in work, feel like their work matters and slightly more likely to be able to reflect on skills that impact their experience at UW.

Graduate and Professional Students

As a public research university, UW-Madison hosts a large number of graduate and doctoral students as well as those on professional tracks. 146 graduate and professional students responded to the student employment survey making up about 18% of responses. With this information it can be important to look at what students in these programs need and how it differs from undergraduate students.

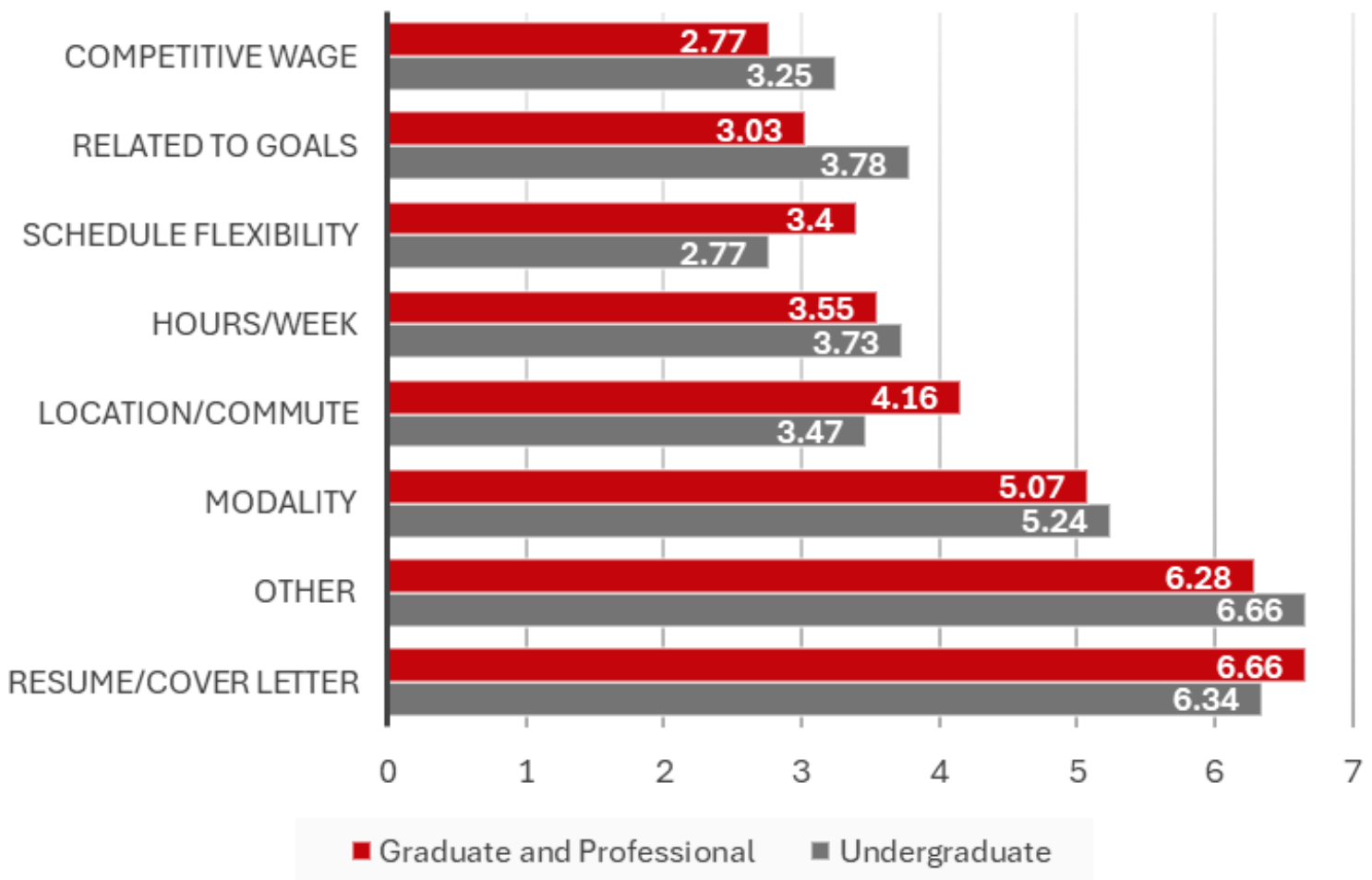
This section focuses on graduate and professional student differences in the categories of motivating factors, and considerations when applying.

Motivating Factors by Degree Level



When looking at the motivating factors, graduate and professional students rank "other" factors higher than undergraduate students, largely because of tuition remission being a factor in their employment. Besides this, graduate students on average are more motivated by every factor by at least two points.

Impacting Factors by Degree Level



Comparing undergraduate and graduate students, there are differences in what factors are more important when applying to jobs. Numbers that are lower indicate more importance.

Graduate students comparatively are more influenced by pay, how related to their goals the role is, the number of hours per week, modality and other factors. They are less influenced by schedule flexibility, location and commute and whether the application requires a resume and cover letter.