



2018 Strada-Gallup Alumni Survey

# **MENTORING COLLEGE STUDENTS TO SUCCESS**



GALLUP®

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# Executive Summary

The Strada-Gallup Alumni Survey is a landmark effort to expand the measures used to define a successful college experience. Instead of relying exclusively on traditional metrics for measuring the value of an education — namely, job placement rates and alumni salaries — the survey employs richer measures of postgraduation outcomes such as life and job fulfillment. Importantly, it also tracks how college experiences prime graduates to succeed in their lives after graduation, giving colleges and universities insights into how the student experience they provide can promote the long-term success of their graduates.

Now in its fourth administration, the 2018 study addresses three critical aspects of the college experience. First, it explores the source and nature of mentoring received by college students. Additionally, this nationally representative study of U.S. college graduates examines whether graduates received career-related advice from faculty and/or the career services office, as well as the helpfulness of the guidance they received. Finally, this study investigates the role of academic rigor in graduates' attitudes about the value and relevance of their education and how professors play a key role in challenging students.

Some of the key findings from this study include:

## Meaningful Mentorship

- Professors are the predominant source of undergraduate mentorship. Nearly two-thirds of recent graduates who agree or strongly agree that they had a mentor during college say that mentor was a professor (64%).
- First-generation college student (FGCS) and minority graduates who had a mentor are less likely than their counterparts to identify their mentor as a professor.
- Graduates' professor mentors were most likely to come from an arts and humanities field: 43% of those who had a professor mentor during college say their mentor taught a subject in arts and humanities, followed by science and engineering professors (28%), social sciences professors (20%), and business professors (9%).

## Career Advice

- Eighty-eight percent of graduates received at least some career advice from either faculty or career services. However, graduates are more likely to have received career advice from faculty or staff members than from the career services office. While a third of graduates say they received career advice from faculty or staff often or very often, 22% say the same about the career services office.
- Graduates indicate career advice from faculty or staff members is more helpful than that from the career services office — 49% versus 30%, respectively, consider it helpful or very helpful.

## Academic Challenge

- Among college graduates nationally, those who strongly agree that they were challenged academically are 2.4 times more likely than those who do not strongly agree to say their education was worth the cost.
- Graduates who strongly agree that they were challenged academically are 3.6 times more likely to say they were prepared for life outside of college.
- Graduates of private nonprofit institutions report the highest degree of academic rigor, with 52% strongly agreeing that they were challenged academically — followed by graduates of public (38%) and private for-profit (32%) institutions.

# Introduction

Strada Education Network and Gallup surveyed over 5,100 U.S. college graduates in 2018 about their college experiences and life after graduation. This study joins the growing portfolio of education research conducted by Strada and Gallup that aims to elevate the voice of education consumers. The 2018 Strada-Gallup Alumni Survey represents the evolution of the Gallup-Purdue Index, initiated by Gallup, Purdue University and Lumina Foundation in 2014 to better understand the college experience through the voice of graduates themselves.

While countless studies measure college quality and outcomes such as alumni earnings, graduation rates and student-faculty ratios, the Strada-Gallup Alumni Survey seeks to empower education consumers by learning directly from them what experiences have had the greatest effect on their life after college and how those experiences have shaped their current attitude toward their alma mater. Studying graduates' experiences and attitudes also provides education leaders with insights about ways they can design programs and initiatives focused on maximizing the student experience.

## What We've Learned So Far

The first Gallup-Purdue Index report in 2014 showed how six critical college experiences — centered on supportive relationships and experiential learning opportunities — strongly relate to outcomes important to both graduates and their alma mater, including employee engagement and well-being later in life.

### The Big Six

#### *Support Experiences*

- My professors at [Institution] cared about me as a person.
- I had at least one professor at [Institution] who made me excited about learning.
- While attending [Institution], I had a mentor who encouraged me to pursue my goals and dreams.

#### *Experiential Learning Experiences*

- While attending [Institution], did you have a job or internship that allowed you to apply what you were learning in the classroom?
- While attending [Institution], I worked on a project that took a semester or more to complete.
- I was extremely active in extracurricular activities and organizations while attending [Institution].

In the second administration of the survey in 2015, Gallup established relationships between these key experiences and graduates' perceptions that their degree was worth the cost. In 2016, the third administration of the survey focused on the extent to which graduates took advantage of career services' offerings, as well as their perceptions of how inclusive their institution was for racial and ethnic minorities and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community.



## The 2018 study takes a closer look at college mentoring relationships — in particular, professor-student mentoring.

Additionally, this study explores the sources and helpfulness of career-related information that graduates receive from faculty and staff members and how that information compares with advice from career services. Finally, it examines the role that academic rigor plays in graduates' perceptions of the value and utility of their education as well as professors' role in challenging students.

The findings detailed in this report can help university leaders — as well as individual staff and faculty members — continue to improve their policies, programs and practices to provide current and future students with the experiences required to be successful during and after college.

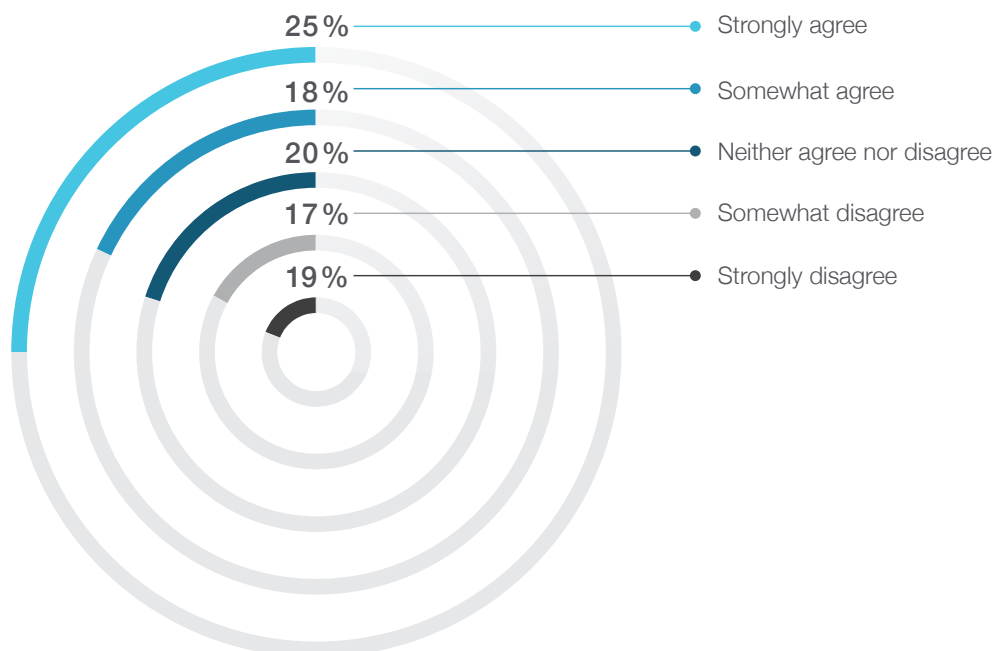
# Meaningful Mentorship



Several recent studies of college students underscore the importance of mentorship to successful undergraduate experiences. Students who have a mentor during college demonstrate greater academic achievement and career development during their time in college.<sup>1,2</sup> Additionally, Gallup's past research has linked meaningful mentoring relationships during college with positive long-term outcomes for alumni after college — including higher well-being, employee engagement and more positive perceptions of their alma mater. **Yet only a quarter of college graduates nationally strongly agree that they had a mentor who encouraged them to pursue their goals and dreams, and nearly one in five graduates strongly disagree with this statement.**

## Undergraduate Mentorship

While attending [Institution], I had a mentor who encouraged me to pursue my goals and dreams.



<sup>1</sup> Campbell, C. M., Smith, M., Dugan, J. P., & Komives, S. R. (2012). Mentors and college student leadership outcomes: The importance of position and process. *The Review of Higher Education*, 35(4), 595-625.

<sup>2</sup> Komaraju, M., Musulkin, S., & Bhattacharya, G. (2010). Role of student-faculty interactions in developing college students' academic self-concept, motivation, and achievement. *Journal of College Student Development*, 51(3), 332-342.

## Professors Represent the Most Common Source of Mentorship

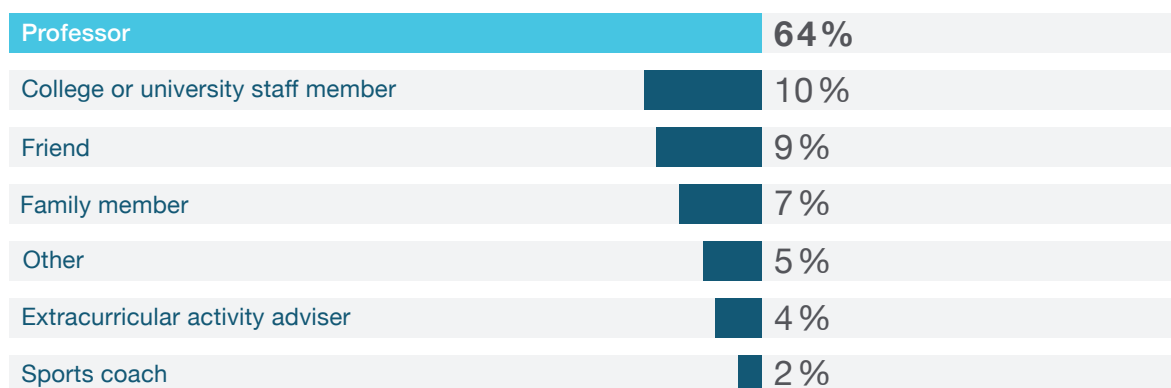
While Gallup has previously reported the positive outcomes related to undergraduate mentorship, this study paints a broader picture of who does the mentoring, the nature of mentoring relationships and the degree to which these relationships extend beyond graduation.

Among recent college graduates (2013-2018), professors represent the predominant source of undergraduate mentorship. **Nearly two-thirds of recent graduates who agree or strongly agree that they had a mentor during college say that mentor was a professor (64%).** Studies have found professors to be particularly effective mentors because students who had relationships with their professors boast both greater academic achievement, a short-term benefit, and higher self-confidence, a long-term benefit that extends beyond the classroom and graduation.<sup>3</sup>

Smaller percentages of alumni say their mentor was a college staff member (10%), a friend or family member (16%), or an extracurricular activity adviser or athletic coach (6%).

### Who was the mentor who encouraged you to pursue your goals and dreams?

*Among recent graduates who had a mentor during college*



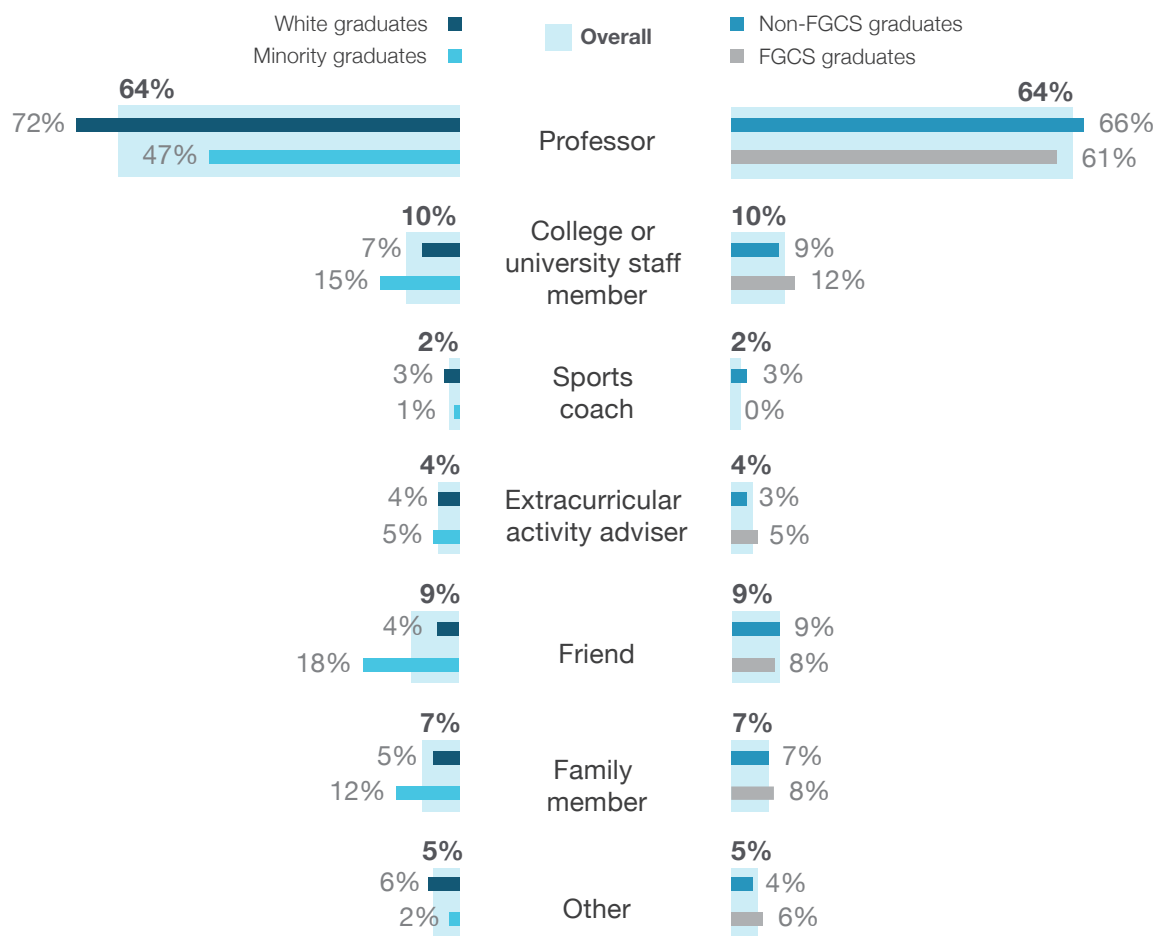
## FGCS and Minority Graduates Less Likely to Have Professor Mentor

Among recent graduates who agree or strongly agree that they had a mentor, FGCS and minority graduates are less likely than their counterparts to say their mentor was a professor, though professors still remain the primary source of mentorship for both groups. **While nearly three-quarters of white graduates say their mentor was a professor (72%), less than half of minority graduates say the same (47%).** Two-thirds of non-FGCS graduates say their mentor was a professor, compared with 61% of FGCS graduates.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

### Source of Mentorship, by Demographic Group

Among recent graduates who had a mentor during college



Prior research has suggested that mentees seek mentors with similar experiences and backgrounds, and that minority students often seek mentors of the same race/ethnicity and find information more helpful when their mentor is of the same race/ethnicity. Unfortunately, minorities remain underrepresented in higher education.<sup>4</sup> Results from the Strada-Gallup Alumni Survey suggest that the continued commitment to diversity in higher education is important to expanding the percentage of mentorships and high-quality mentor relationships between minority students and professors or other staff members.

These results suggest an opportunity for colleges and universities to encourage minority and first-generation students to develop personal relationships with their professors. Fostering professor-student interactions for minority students is particularly important since they are less likely to feel a sense of belonging at their institution<sup>5</sup> and more likely to face disproportionate difficulties in developing informal relationships with professors.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Flaherty, C. (2016). *More faculty diversity, not on tenure track*. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/08/22/study-finds-gains-faculty-diversity-not-tenure-track>

<sup>5</sup> Johnson, D. R., Soldner, M., Leonard, J. B., Alvarez, P., Inkelas, K. K., Rowan-Kenyon, H., & Longerbeam, S. (2007). Examining sense of belonging among first-year undergraduates from different racial/ethnic groups. *Journal of College Student Development, 48*(5), 525-542.

<sup>6</sup> Milkman, K. L., Akinola, M., & Chugh, D. (2014). What happens before? A field experiment exploring how pay and representation differentially shape bias on the pathway into organizations. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Forthcoming.

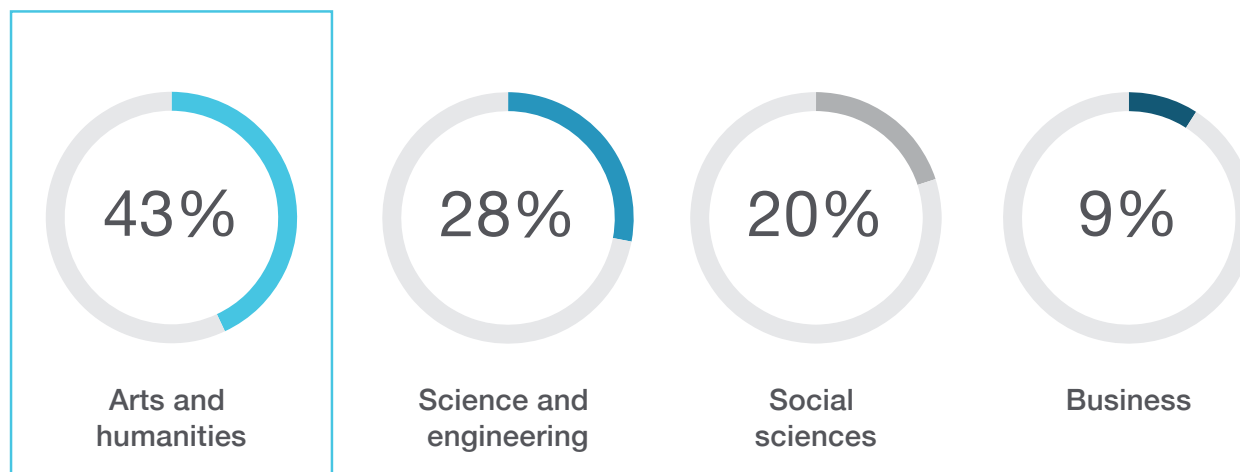


## Arts and Humanities Professors Are Most Common Mentors

While professors are typically the most common mentorship source for college students, professors in some fields of study are more likely to be mentors than others. Professors in arts and humanities fields, for example, most commonly mentor students. Forty-three percent of those who had a professor mentor during college say their mentor taught a subject in arts and humanities, followed by science and engineering professors (28%) and social sciences professors (20%). Fewer alumni say their professor mentor came from a business field of study (9%).<sup>7</sup>

### Major or Field of Study Taught by Professor Mentor

*Among recent graduates who said their mentor was a professor*



## College Mentoring Centers on Academics and Career Development

Regardless of mentorship source, college graduates say the advice they received from their mentor generally focused on their studies and career plans. **About nine in 10 recent graduates who agree or strongly agree that they had a mentor say their mentor provided guidance on academic issues (92%) or their career (90%).**

Fewer alumni say their mentoring included advice about personal issues (54%) or physical or mental health (53%). However, six in 10 alumni report mentoring on personal issues did occur in the strongest mentoring relationships — 62% of graduates who strongly agree that they had a mentor who encouraged them to pursue their goals and dreams say their mentor advised them on their personal life or relationships. Only about a quarter of recent alumni say their mentor provided advice about financial issues (26%).

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix for more information about major/field of study classifications.

**Which of the following did this mentor provide you advice about?**

% Yes

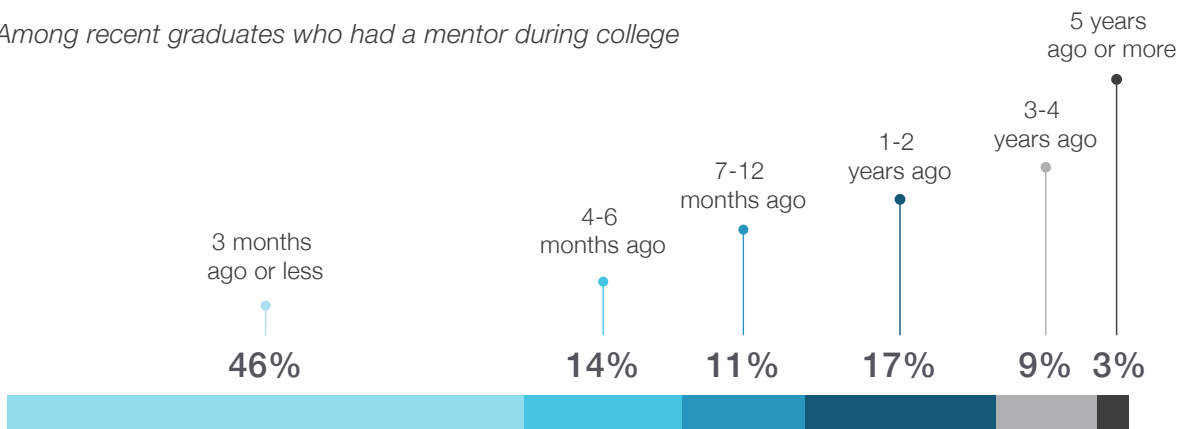
	Agree or strongly agree they had a mentor during college	Strongly agree they had a mentor during college
Academic issues	92%	92%
Your career	90%	92%
Your personal life or relationships	54%	62%
Your physical or mental health	53%	55%
Financial issues	26%	28%

**Many Graduates Still Communicate With Their College Mentor**

Many recent graduates are still in contact with their college mentor — 46% say they have communicated with their mentor in the past three months. Only 29% say it has been a year or more since they last communicated with their mentor.

**When was the last time you communicated with this mentor?**

*Among recent graduates who had a mentor during college*





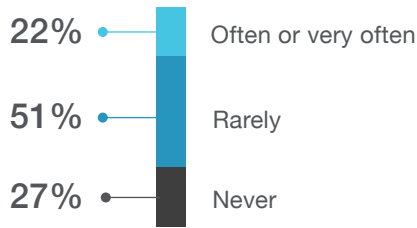
## Nearly Nine in 10 Graduates Report Receiving Career Advice From Faculty, Staff or Career Services

Recent research demonstrates the importance of faculty and staff members' involvement in career-related conversations with students. The 2017 Strada-Gallup College Student Survey showed that students who had these types of conversations are more likely than other students to feel confident about their future upon graduation.

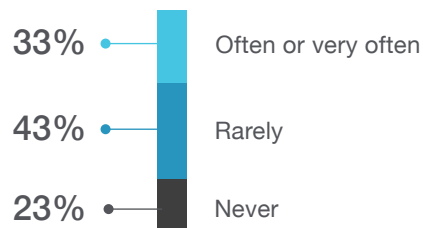
Graduates report that they were more likely to have received career advice from faculty or staff members than from the career services office. While a third of graduates say they received career advice from faculty or staff often or very often, 22% say the same about the career services office.

Despite the positive effect that these conversations have on students, 23% say they never received career advice from faculty or staff members outside the career services office. Further, 27% say they never visited or accessed resources made available by the career services office. In total, 12% of graduates report never receiving career advice from either of these sources, suggesting that a meaningful percentage of students graduate without any guidance from faculty or staff members about their potential career path.

**While attending [Institution], how often did you visit, or access resources provided by, the career services office?**



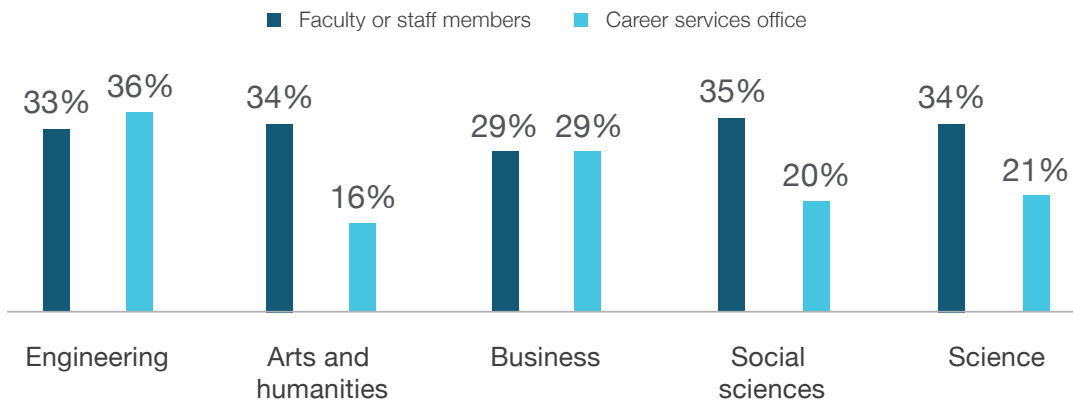
**How often did you receive career advice from other faculty or staff members at [Institution] who were not career service employees?**



The percentages of graduates who received career-related advice from faculty or staff members are consistent across majors, while the use of career services resources differs more significantly by major. **Engineering and business graduates are most likely to say they visited the career services office often or very often while obtaining their undergraduate degree** (36% and 29%, respectively). Nearly half as many arts and humanities majors (16%) report using resources provided by the office.

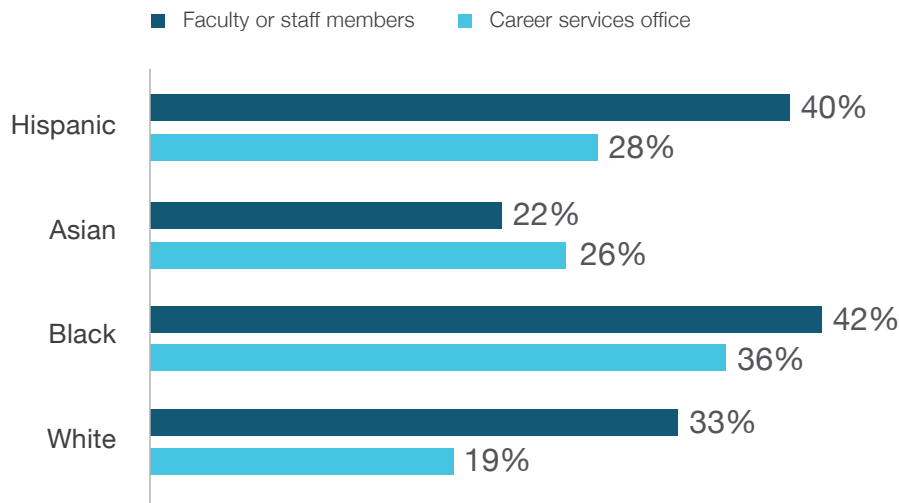
Graduates who did not receive advice from either faculty or staff members or the career services office are equally likely to have studied a variety of majors — that is, students from one particular major or field of study are no more or less likely to have been left behind.

**Percentage Reporting They Received Career-Related Advice From Faculty or Staff Members or the Career Services Office Often or Very Often, by Major or Field of Study**



While 22% of all recent graduates report having visited the career services office or having used its resources often or very often, higher percentages of black and Hispanic graduates report having done so. Black and Hispanic graduates are also the most likely to have received career advice from faculty or staff members. That minority graduates are the most likely to have received career advice from these two groups contrasts with the earlier finding showing that minority graduates are less likely to have had professors as mentors. Taken together, these findings suggest that minorities' interactions with faculty, for example, are more functional — focused on the giving and receiving of career advice. But the interaction between minority students and faculty stops short of developing into mentoring relationships.

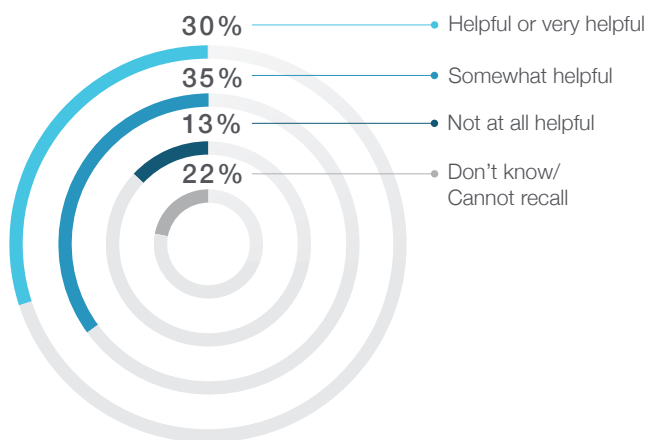
### Percentage Reporting They Received Career-Related Advice From Faculty or Staff Members or the Career Services Office Often or Very Often, by Race



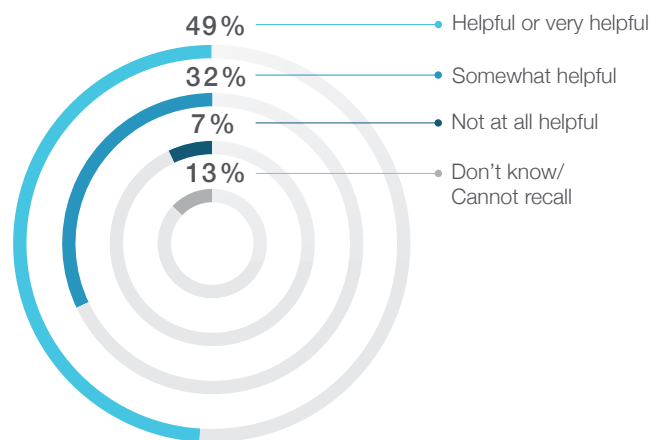
### Faculty and Staff Career-Related Advice Viewed as Most Helpful

Although about three-quarters of graduates report receiving at least some advice from the career services office or from faculty or staff members about their career, more significant differences exist in graduates' perceived helpfulness of each information source. While only 30% say the information they received from the career services office was helpful or very helpful, 49% say the same about the advice they received from faculty or staff members.

#### How helpful was the information you received from the career services office?



#### How helpful was the career-related information you received from these faculty or staff members who were not career service employees?



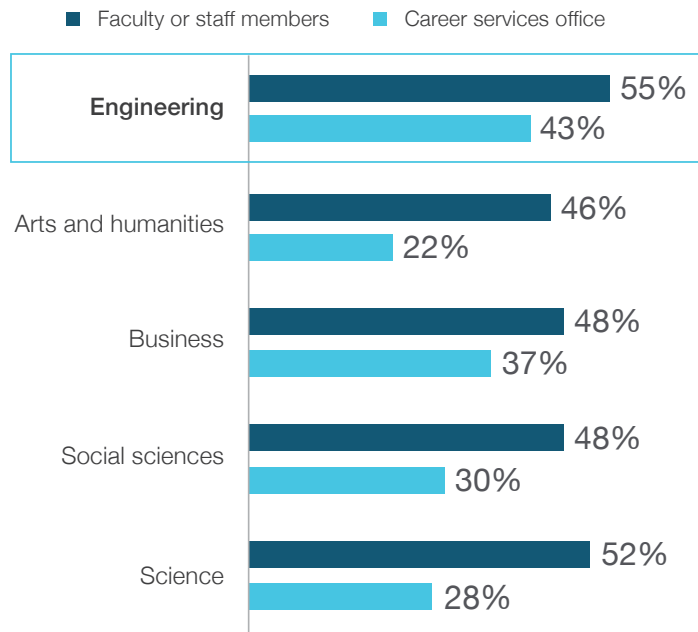
Rather than building larger, more centralized career services functions, universities may want to consider how they can build capacity for career advising across departments and faculty. These universities should perhaps consider creating incentives and encouragement for faculty to spend more time discussing career opportunities and weaving career-relevant examples and applications into their curriculum.

### Engineering Grads Most Likely to View Career Advice as Helpful

Among all graduates, about half say the information they received from faculty or staff members was helpful or very helpful. However, variation in perceptions of helpfulness exists by major or field of study.

In the case of both career-related advice from faculty or staff members and resources provided by the career services office, engineering graduates are most likely to have found this advice helpful or very helpful. Fifty-five percent of engineering graduates say the career-related information they received from faculty or staff members was helpful or very helpful, and 43% who visited the career services office or accessed its resources online say the same.

### Percentage Reporting Information They Received Was Helpful or Very Helpful, by Major or Field of Study

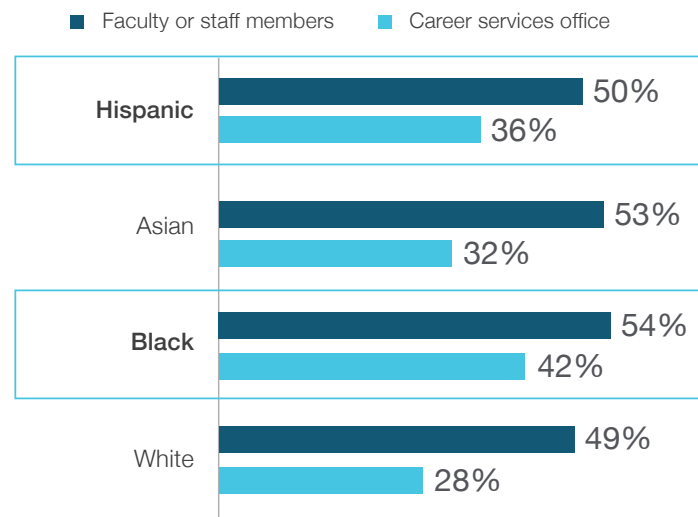


### Black and Hispanic Grads Most Likely to Say Career Services Office Advice Was Helpful

While graduates in general are about equally likely to say the information they received from faculty or staff members was helpful or very helpful (regardless of race), black and Hispanic graduates are more likely than other graduates to say the information they received from the career services office was helpful or very helpful.

These findings are consistent with the 2017 Strada-Gallup College Student Survey, which showed higher helpfulness ratings of these offices among underrepresented minority groups.

### Percentage Reporting Information They Received Was Helpful or Very Helpful, by Race



# Academic Challenge



Since conducting the first nationally representative study of college graduates in 2014, **our research has consistently demonstrated that key student experiences drive critical outcomes after graduation, such as well-being, employee engagement, alumni attachment, and perceptions of the value and benefit of one's education.**<sup>8,9</sup>

These key experiences are centered on having supportive relationships with faculty and mentors and having opportunities to learn outside the classroom, such as working on long-term projects, obtaining relevant internships and being involved in extracurricular activities.

While promoting these critical experiences is important for colleges and universities, it is not enough. Gallup has discovered that another key attitude is linked to graduate outcomes: perceptions of academic rigor. Overall, 42% of college graduates nationally strongly agree that they were challenged academically at their institution.<sup>10</sup> However, perceptions of academic rigor vary by both field of study and institution type.

## 42%

of college graduates nationally strongly agree that they were challenged academically at their institution.

<sup>8</sup> Gallup & Purdue University. (2014). *Great jobs, great lives: The 2014 Gallup-Purdue Index report*. Retrieved from <https://news.gallup.com/reports/197141/gallup-purdue-index-report-2014.aspx>

<sup>9</sup> Gallup & Purdue University. (2015). *Great jobs, great lives: The 2015 Gallup-Purdue Index report*. Retrieved from <https://news.gallup.com/reports/197144/gallup-purdue-index-report-2015.aspx>

<sup>10</sup> Tran, T. (2018). *Academic rigor linked to alumni perceptions of college value*. Retrieved from <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/228263/academic-rigor-linked-alumni-perceptions-college-value.aspx>

## Academic Rigor Strong Predictor of Key Alumni Outcomes

Even in a higher education era marked by ongoing debates about grade inflation at colleges and universities, academic rigor still plays a prominent role in graduates’ perceptions of the value and utility of their degree.

Among college graduates nationally, those who strongly agree that they were challenged academically are 2.4 times more likely than those who do not strongly agree to say their education was worth the cost.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, graduates who strongly agree that they were challenged academically are 3.6 times more likely to say they were prepared for life outside of college.

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### Academic Rigor and Education Perceptions

	Strongly agree challenged academically	Do not strongly agree challenged academically
Strongly agree their alma mater prepared them well for life outside of college	50%	14%
Strongly agree their education was worth the cost	75%	31%

Using multivariate regression analyses that control for graduates’ demographic characteristics and various student experiences, perceptions of academic rigor are the strongest predictors of graduates’ perceptions of the value of their education and the degree to which their institution prepared them for life after college. **These results indicate that rather than students viewing their college experience negatively when they are challenged to push themselves academically, they ultimately perceive their education to be more valuable and are more likely to credit their institution with preparing them to succeed after graduation.**

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.



## Perceptions of Academic Rigor Strongest Among Grads of Private Nonprofit and Highly Selective Institutions

Graduates of private nonprofit institutions report the highest degree of academic rigor, with 52% strongly agreeing that they were challenged academically — followed by graduates of public (38%) and private for-profit (32%) institutions.<sup>12</sup>

Additionally, graduates' perceptions of academic rigor reflect external measures of selectivity, with graduates of very selective colleges — as measured by the National Center for Education Statistics — being the most likely to strongly agree that they were challenged academically during college. Interestingly, however, outside of the most selective colleges, graduates of colleges with selective and inclusive academic standards are equally likely to strongly agree that they were challenged academically.

### Academic Challenge, by Institution Type and Selectivity

*I was challenged academically at [Institution].*

Institution Type	Strongly agree
Public	38%
Private nonprofit	52%
Private for-profit	32%

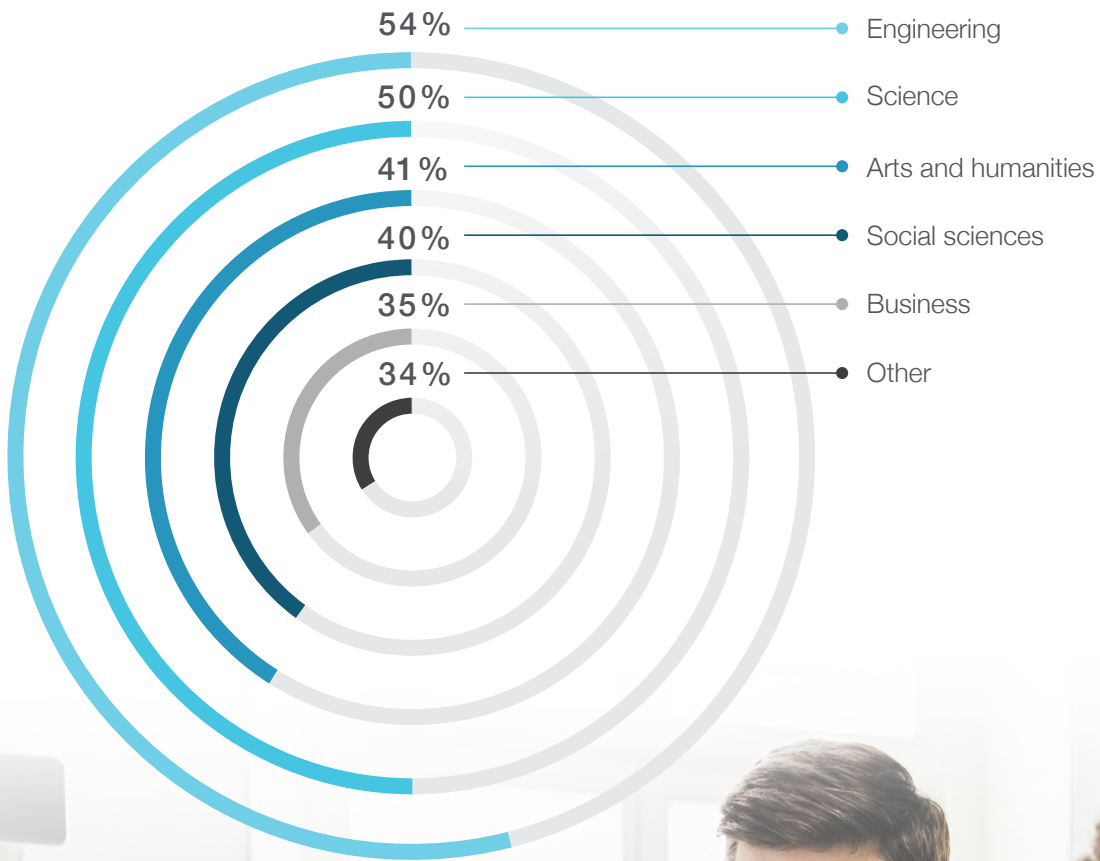
Institution Selectivity	Strongly agree
Inclusive	34%
Selective	34%
Very selective	50%

According to college graduates, academic rigor is not evenly distributed across fields of study. While at least half of college graduates nationally with an engineering or science major strongly agree that they were challenged academically, about a third of business majors say the same (35%). Between those poles, about four in 10 graduates with an undergraduate degree in arts and humanities (41%) and social sciences (40%) strongly agree they were challenged academically.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

### Perceptions of Academic Rigor, by Field of Study

*% Strongly agree they were challenged academically*



## Professors Play Integral Role in Challenging Students

If graduates’ perceptions of the degree to which they were pushed academically play a key role in how they value their education, it is important to understand the types of experiences that promote a sense of academic challenge. Graduates who say their professors were invested in them personally and made the material they taught relevant are far more likely to say they were challenged academically.

Nearly seven in 10 graduates nationally (69%) who strongly agree that their professors cared about them also strongly agree that they were challenged academically, compared with only about a third of those who do not strongly agree that their professors cared about them (35%). Similarly, graduates who strongly agree that they had at least one professor who made them excited about learning are more than twice as likely as those who do not strongly agree to say they were challenged academically in college.

These findings point to the importance of teacher quality and professors’ commitment to both the students and the material they teach. By demonstrating that they care about their students and showing that they, themselves, are excited about their course material, professors can push students academically.

### Academic Challenge and Professors: “Professors Cared About Me as a Person”

	Strongly agree professors cared about them as a person	Do not strongly agree professors cared about them as a person
Strongly agree challenged academically	69%	35%

### Academic Challenge and Professors: “Had at Least One Professor Who Made Me Excited About Learning”

	Strongly agree had at least one professor who made them excited about learning	Do not strongly agree had at least one professor who made them excited about learning
Strongly agree challenged academically	55%	23%

# Methodology

Results for the Strada-Gallup Alumni Survey are based on web surveys conducted April 25-June 3, 2018, with a random sample of 5,107 respondents with a bachelor's degree or higher, aged 18 and older, with internet access, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia.

The Strada-Gallup Alumni Survey sample was recruited via the Strada-Gallup Education Consumer Survey. The Strada-Gallup Education Consumer Survey sample includes national adults with a minimum quota of 70% cellphone respondents and 30% landline respondents, with additional minimum quotas by time zone within region. Landline and cellular telephone numbers are selected using random-digit-dial methods. Landline respondents are chosen at random within each household on the basis of which member has the next birthday. Education Consumer Survey respondents with a college degree who agreed to future contact were invited to take the Strada-Gallup Alumni Survey online.

Strada-Gallup Alumni Survey interviews are conducted via the web, in English only. Samples are weighted to correct for unequal selection probability and nonresponse. The data are weighted to match national demographics of gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education and region. Demographic weighting targets are based on the most recent Current Population Survey figures for the aged 18 and older U.S. bachelor's degree or higher population.

For results based on the total sample of those with a bachelor's degree, the margin of sampling error is  $\pm 1.3$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level. The reported margin of sampling error for the sample of all college graduates includes the computed design effects for weighting.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.



# Appendix

## Major/Field of Study Categories

### Arts and Humanities

- Art (Fine and Applied)
- Anthropology
- Classical and Modern Languages and Literature
- English (Language and Literature)
- Ethnic/Cultural Studies
- History
- Journalism/Communication
- Music
- Music/Art Education
- Philosophy
- Political Science
- Theater/Drama
- Theology/Religion
- Women's/Gender Studies

### Business

- Accounting
- Business Administration
- Entrepreneurship
- Finance
- Healthcare Administration/Studies
- Human Resources Management
- International Business
- Management
- Marketing
- Real Estate

### Engineering

- Biological/Agricultural Engineering
- Biomedical Engineering
- Chemical Engineering
- Civil Engineering
- Computer Engineering
- Computer Science
- Electrical Engineering
- Engineering Science/  
Engineering Physics
- Environmental/Environmental  
Health Engineering
- Industrial/Manufacturing Engineering
- Materials Engineering
- Mechanical Engineering
- Mechanics
- Robotics Engineering

### Science

- Aerospace/Aeronautical/  
Astronautical Engineering
- Animal Biology (Zoology)
- Architecture/Urban Planning
- Astronomy and Astrophysics
- Atmospheric Sciences
- Biochemistry/Biophysics
- Biology (General)
- Chemistry
- Clinical Laboratory Science
- Computer/Management  
Information Systems
- Earth and Planetary Sciences
- Ecology and Evolutionary Biology
- Environmental Science
- Geography
- Kinesiology
- Library Science
- Marine Biology
- Marine Sciences
- Mathematics/Statistics
- Microbiology
- Molecular/Cellular/  
Developmental Biology
- Neurobiology/Neuroscience
- Nursing
- Pharmacy
- Physics
- Plant Biology (Botany)
- Therapy (Occupational,  
Physical, Speech)

### Social Sciences

- Agriculture/Natural Resources
- Criminal Justice
- Drafting/Design
- Economics
- Elementary Education
- Psychology
- Public Policy
- Secondary Education
- Social Work
- Sociology
- Special Education

### Other

- Building Trades
- Data Processing/Computer  
Programming
- Electronics
- Health Technology
- Hospitality/Tourism
- Media/Film Studies
- Military Sciences/Technology/  
Operations
- Physical Education/Recreation
- Security/Protective Services



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