

**IOWA**



# **GRADUATE & PROFESSIONAL STUDENT NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

**DIVISION OF STUDENT LIFE**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA**

**FALL 2021**



# CONTENTS

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<b>WORK GROUP</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>SURVEY</b>	<b>4-19</b>
>SURVEY INFORMATION	4-5
>CAMPUS RESOURCES	6-8
>BASIC NEEDS	9-10
>ORIENTATION	11
>SENSE OF BELONGING	12-13
>ENGAGEMENT	14-15
>ACCESSIBILITY	16-17
>OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES	18-19
<b>LISTENING SESSIONS</b>	<b>20-27</b>
>LISTENING SESSION INFORMATION	20
>COMMUNICATION	21
>ENGAGEMENT	22
>MENTAL HEALTH	23
>RELATIONSHIPS	24
>BASIC NEEDS	25
>SENSE OF BELONGING	26
>COVID-19 MANAGEMENT	27
<b>MAIN FINDINGS</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>29-33</b>

# WORK GROUP

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## CHARGE

A goal of the 2021-2026 Division of Student Life Strategic Plan is to, “Cultivate virtual and in person programs and physical spaces that promote a sense of belonging, opportunities for socialization, and community development.” A specific tactic within this goal is to, “Complete a graduate and professional student needs assessment and develop intentional outreach that invites graduate and professional students to participate in [DSL] initiatives and programs.” The Graduate & Professional Student Needs Assessment Work Group was charged with creating and administering a needs assessment to graduate and professional students related to DSL programs, services, and spaces that support their sense of belonging, socialization, and community development.

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## MEMBERS

- Alicia Aguiar, Assessment, Improvement, & Research
  - Katie Birdsall, Student Life Communications
  - Mara Cheney, Late Night Programming
  - Michaela Dohleman, Graduate and Professional Student Government
  - Anna Holbrook, Student Care & Assistance
  - Shuhui Lin, Multicultural & International Student Support & Engagement
  - Sarah Lobb, Human Resources
  - Chi Nesah, Graduate and Professional Student Government
  - Tiffany Simon, Graduate College
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  - Trisha Welter, Student Wellness (co-chair)
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## FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT

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# SURVEY INFORMATION

## OVERVIEW

The work group reached out to several campus departments to determine what services are available to graduate and professional students and how well they are utilized. Existing campus datasets were reviewed, including the Student Experience at the Research University, National College Health Assessment and Speak Out Iowa. To aid in our survey design, other universities were also contacted to see if similar needs assessments had been completed among graduate and professional students.

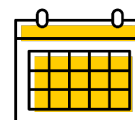
After reviewing the information and identifying gaps, a survey was developed and distributed through email. Students were sent two email reminders and could opt in to enter their name into a drawing for various prizes.

## ADMINISTRATION



9,620 graduate and professional students

were invited to complete the



Qualtrics survey between October 20 and November 7, 2021.



1,486 students completed the survey, a response rate of 15.4%.

## RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

### GENDER

Women: 60.7%

Men: 35.1%

Non-binary: 1.5%

Gender non-conforming: 0.3%

Genderqueer: 0.2%

Transgender Man: 0.1%

Questioning: 0.1%

Agender: 0.1%

Prefer Not to Say: 1.8%

Not Listed: 0.1%

### RACE & ETHNICITY

White: 72.8%

Asian or Asian American: 12.8%

Hispanic or Latino/a/x: 7.5%

Black or African American: 4.7%

Biracial or multiracial: 3.8%

Middle Eastern/North African or Arab Origin: 2.7%

American Indian or Native Alaskan: 0.7%

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander Native: 0.4%

Prefer not to say: 3.6%

Not listed: 1.1%

*\*could select more than one response*

# SURVEY INFORMATION

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## RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS CONTINUED

### SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Straight/ heterosexual: 77.6%  
Bisexual: 7.8%  
Gay: 3.6%  
Queer: 3.0%  
Lesbian: 1.3%  
Pansexual: 0.9%  
Questioning: 0.7%  
Prefer not to say: 3.8%  
Not listed: 1.3%

### YEAR

1<sup>st</sup> year as graduate or professional student: 38.2%  
2<sup>nd</sup> year as graduate or professional student: 28.8%  
3<sup>rd</sup> year as graduate or professional student: 15.3%  
4<sup>th</sup> year as graduate or professional student: 9.3%  
In 5<sup>th</sup> year or higher as a graduate or professional student: 8.3%

### TYPE OF STUDENT/PROGRAM

Full-time student (or full-time equivalent): 84.9%  
In a completely online program\*: 10.7%  
In a program that completely or partially meets outside of Iowa City (e.g., Des Moines, Cedar Rapids, Sioux City, Quad Cities)\*: 10.1%

### OTHER

Parent: 16.2%  
International student: 12.8%

### COLLEGE

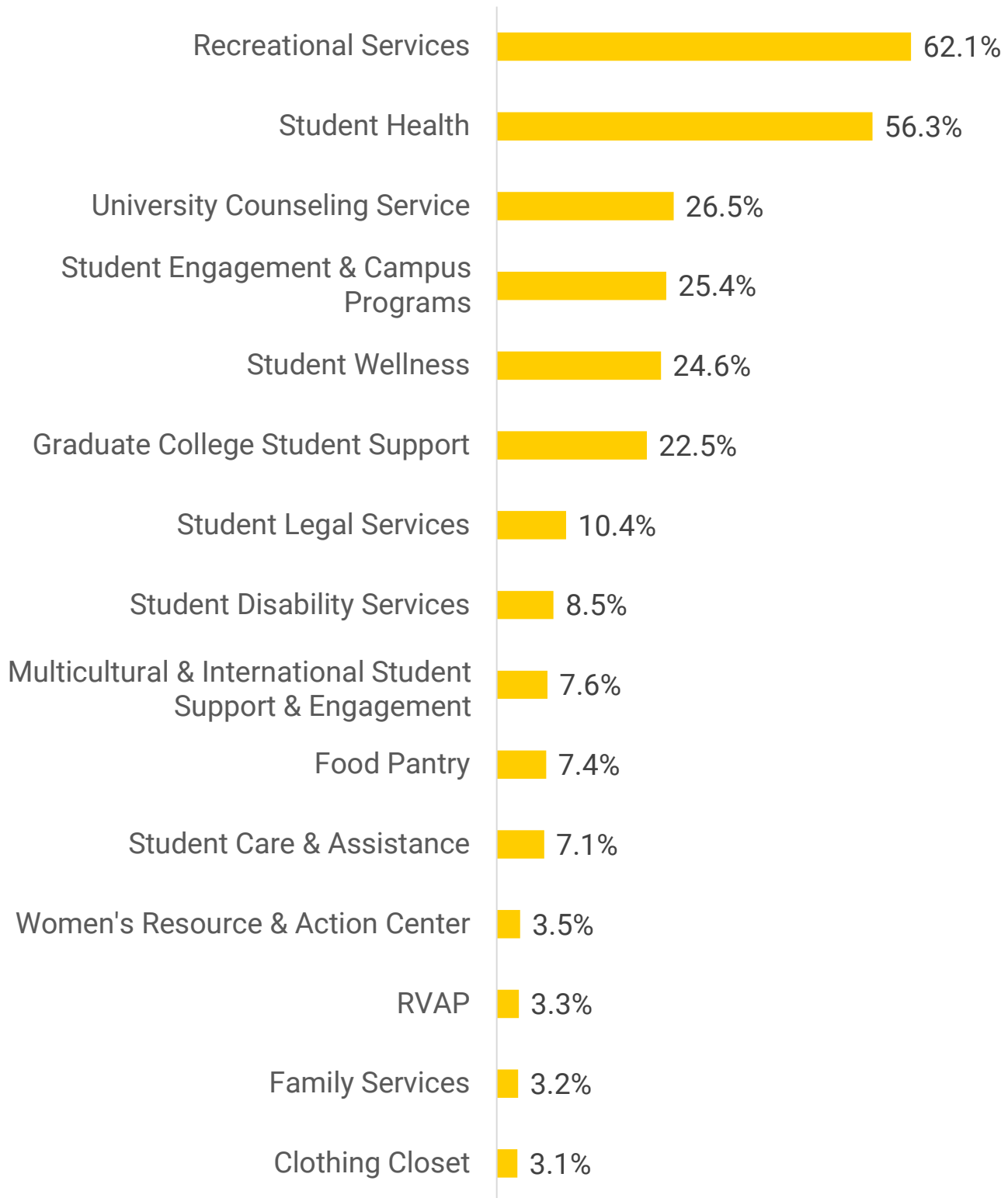
\*

Business: 4.4%  
Dentistry: 3.0%  
Education: 8.3%  
Engineering: 3.8%  
Law: 10.2%  
Liberal Arts & Sciences: 17.9%  
Medicine: 18.6%  
Nursing: 2.3%  
Pharmacy: 6.0%  
Public Health: 6.5%  
Graduate College: 24.2%  
Other: 3.0%

*\*could select more than one response*

# CAMPUS RESOURCES

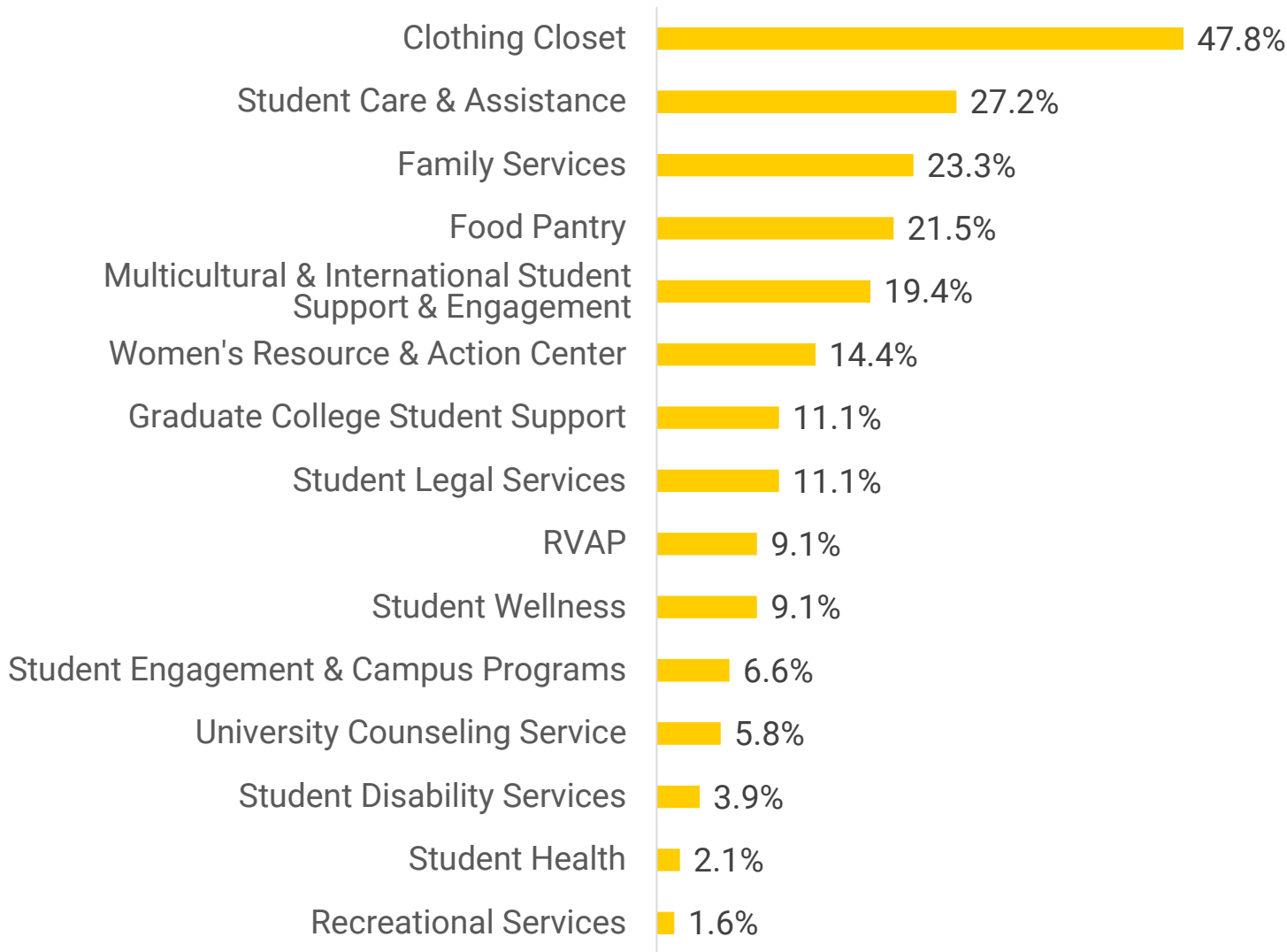
USED AT LEAST ONCE\*



*\*during their time at UI as a graduate or professional student; excludes students who reported "Not applicable"*

# CAMPUS RESOURCES

## NEVER HEARD OF\*



*\*excludes students who reported "Not applicable"*

## TOP IDEAS FOR PROMOTION OF SERVICES\*

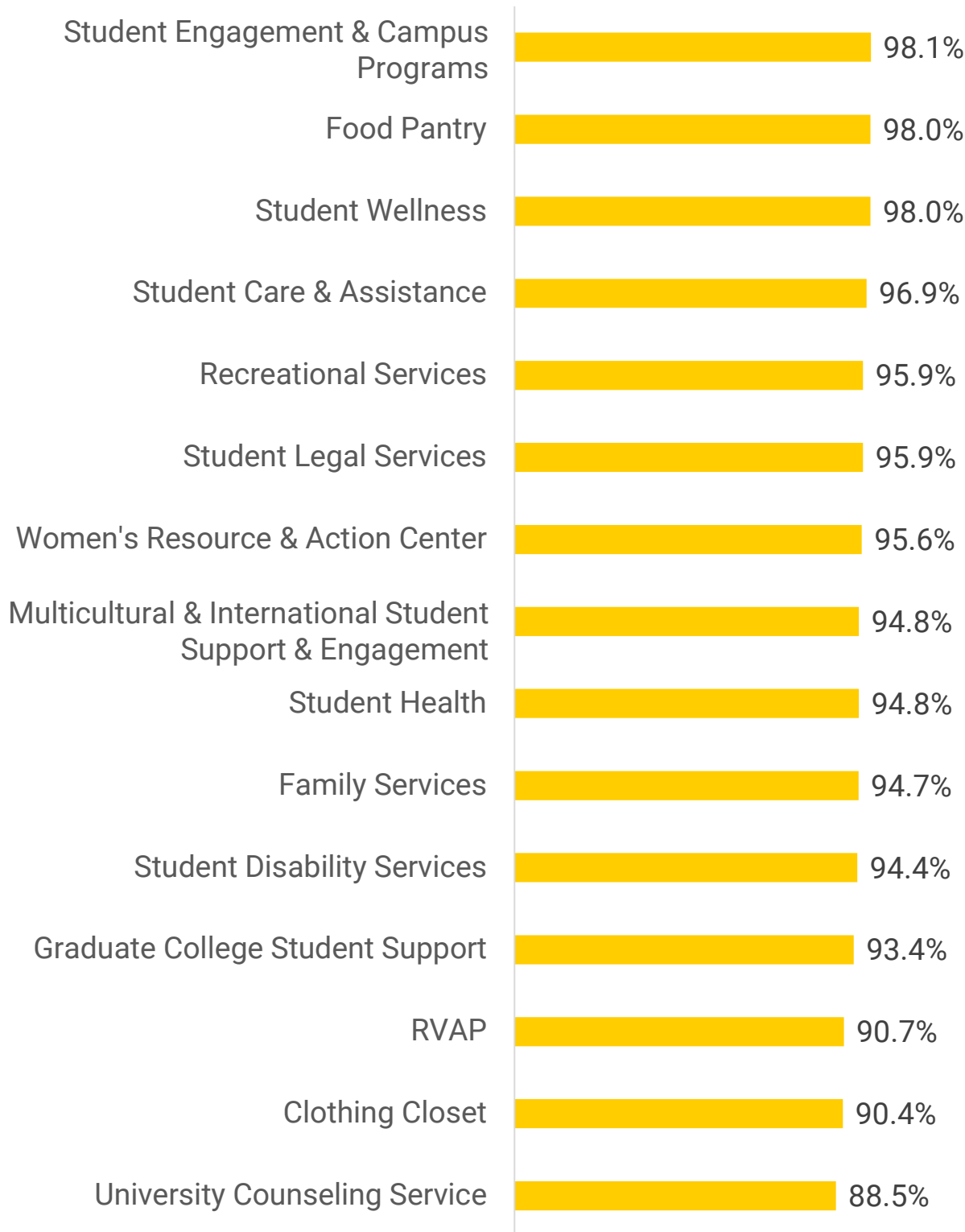
- Email (n=187, although 12 students mentioned email was overused as well)
- Flyers, posters, pamphlets or other print material (n=82)
- Orientation (n=67)
- In-person outreach such as presentations, fairs, or tabling (n=38)
- Website for graduate student resources or a link from college/department website (n=24)
- Faculty or advisors (n=15)
- ICON (n=13)
- Social media (n=13)

*\*asked of those who hadn't heard of at least one campus office/department*

# CAMPUS RESOURCES

## USER SATISFACTION WITH SERVICES

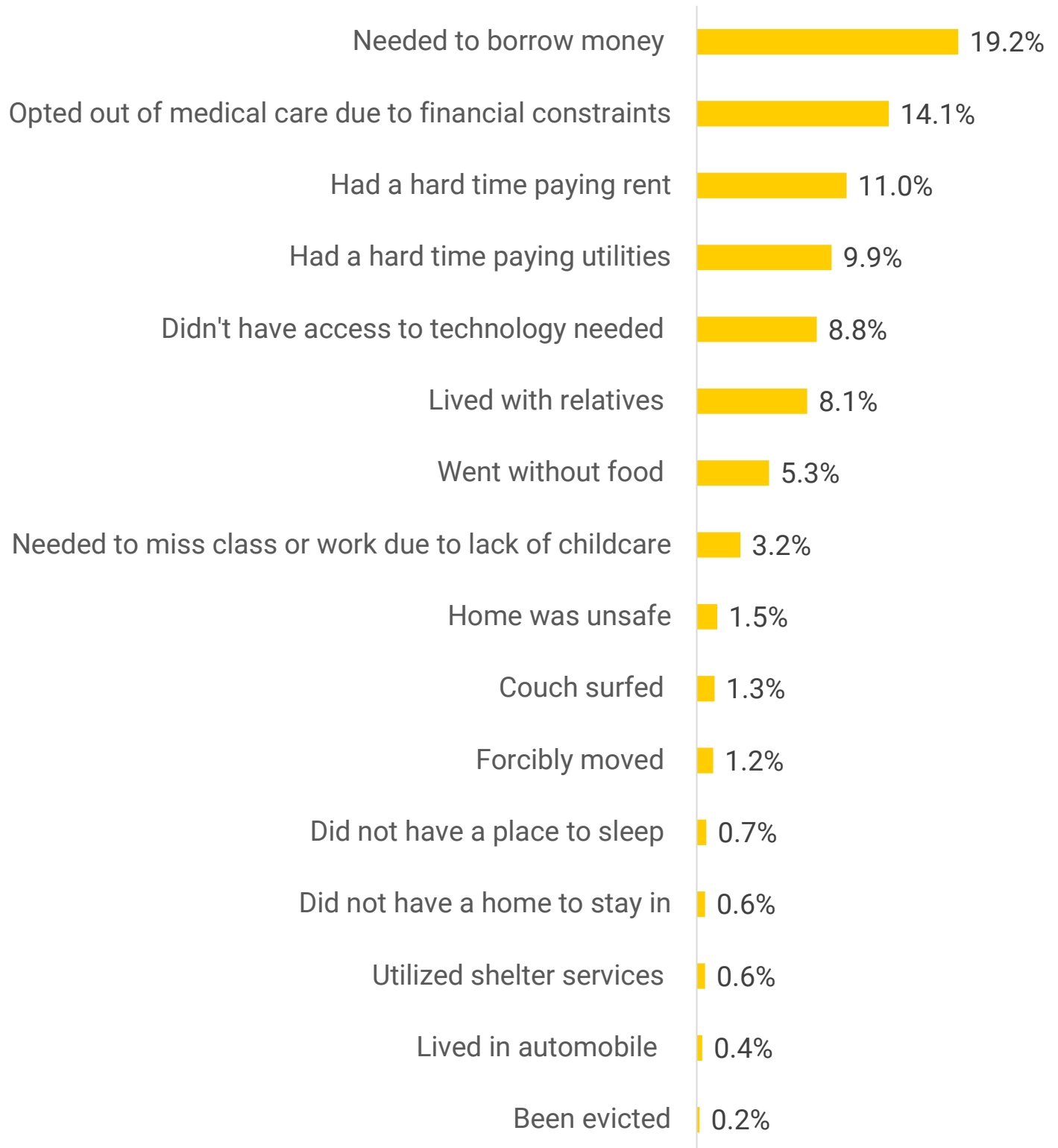
*of those who indicated they used the services at least once; sum of extremely satisfied, satisfied or somewhat satisfied*





# BASIC NEEDS

## EXPERIENCED IN THE LAST MONTH



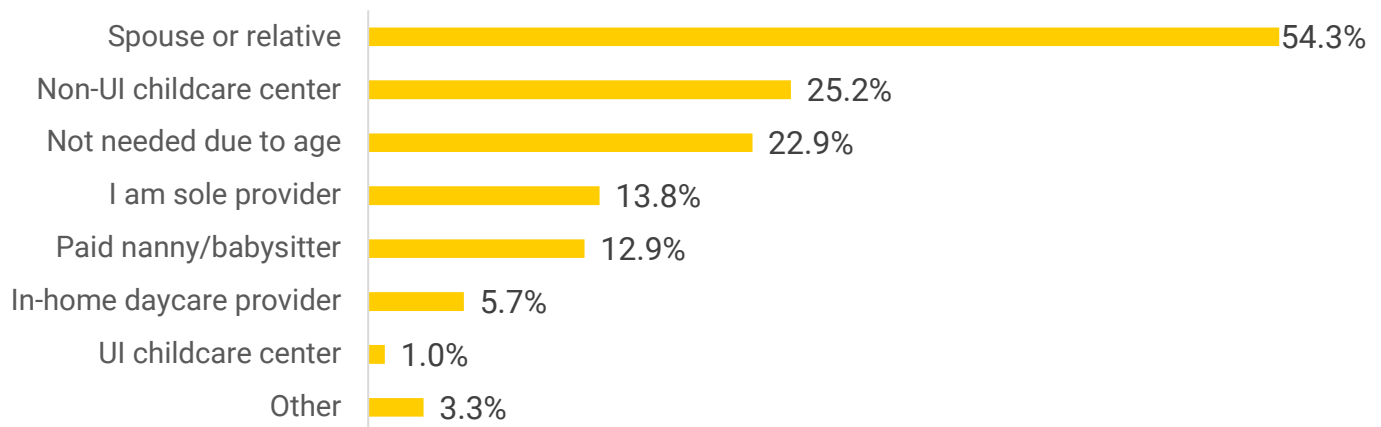
# BASIC NEEDS

## ASSISTANCE

3.7% of respondents reported using government assistance (such as food stamps-SNAP). 5.6% reported that they had received funds from the Student Life Emergency Fund.

## CHILDREN

16.2% of respondents reported having at least one child. Of these students, 91.7% reported that their child(ren) lived with them. Of those, primary childcare arrangements included the following (could select more than one):



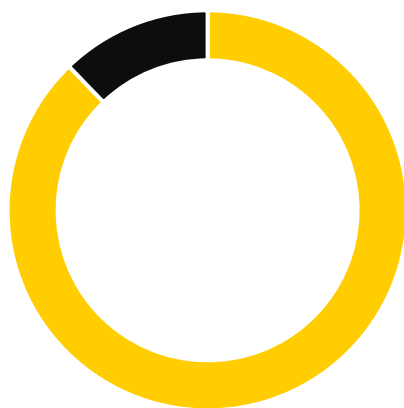
## MANAGING CARE

4.7% of respondents reported that they were managing care for someone who was ill, disabled, aging or in need of special services. Of these students, 64.1% reported that they had the resources to manage that care.

## FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR OTHERS

6.3% of respondents reported that they were financially supporting someone outside of their household. Of these students, 54.5% reported that they had the resources to do so.

# ORIENTATION



87.6% of respondents reported attending orientation for their program, department and/or college.

Of these, 68.6% reported that they learned about campus resources outside of their department at orientation.

## TOP RESOURCES STUDENTS WOULD LIKE PROMOTED AT ORIENTATION\*

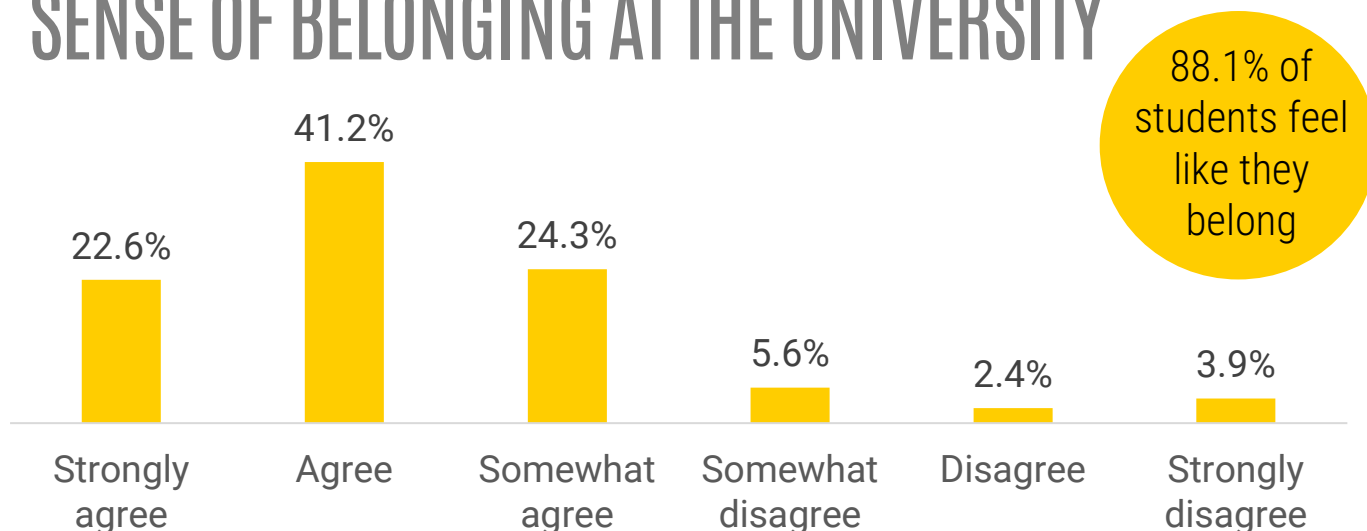
- Financial and/or basic needs assistance (e.g., Food Pantry, SNAP, Clothing Closet, Student Emergency Fund, Financial Aid; n=67)
- An overall stronger or more in-depth overview of resources (n=50)
- Mental health resources (e.g., University Counseling Service, psychiatry; n=50)
- Wellness resources (e.g., Rec. Services, Student Health, Student Wellness; n=33)
- Student success and career services (e.g., Graduate Student Support, career planning; n=20)
- Student Legal Services (n=11)
- Diversity, equity & inclusion resources (e.g., MISSE, DEI, LGBTQ+ , CDE, ISSS; n=10)
- Women's Resource & Action Center and/or RVAP (n=9)
- Family Services (n=8)
- Resources for distance learners (n=8)
- Student Disability Services (n=6)
- Study spaces (n=4)

In addition, 12 students noted that orientation is often overwhelming and retention of information is low. They recommended other strategies to increase awareness of resources (e.g., packets, follow-up emails, continued outreach after classes start, etc.)

*\*open-ended question asked of students who have attended orientation*

# SENSE OF BELONGING

## SENSE OF BELONGING AT THE UNIVERSITY



## REASONS STUDENTS DID NOT FEEL LIKE THEY BELONGED AT THE UNIVERSITY\*

### Top Theme Example Responses

**Lack of support or connection (n=72)**

- Feel somewhat on the outskirts
- Graduate research is just a stepping stone so all of the education and guidance expect you to get your shit done and leave. Why would you belong?
- I know what imposter syndrome is, but I still feel that.....I'm one of the few people in my family to get a graduate degree, and I'm the first in my family to be in a doctoral program. So, I feel really out place sometimes, and I feel like I have to prove that I deserve to be here.
- I mean the undergrads are the core of the university culture, which makes sense, but as a result I don't feel like I totally belong.
- I am not sure that I am a good fit for the culture of my department.
- I do not feel a connection to the university; my program is transactional.
- I feel like the culturally accepted norms of this college, that being one that does not support an academic environment and one which supports an alcohol and drug use culture strongly contrasts my personal lifestyle. This impairs my personal ability to fit in with a vast portion of the student population.
- I feel no support from my mentors or colleagues who I barely see every week maybe an hour max for each.
- ..the TA position and grad life can feel isolating

*\*asked of students who disagreed that they belonged*

# SENSE OF BELONGING

## Top Themes **Example Responses** (Continued)

**Lack of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI; n=26)**

*-I don't feel I belong with my cohort. I think people are afraid of my diversity.  
-I am a woman of color who has very different lived experiences than many here....At times it seems that expectations from the university and administrators is based on a white version of reality and then when I discuss things like not knowing certain information I get responses of shock, as though they hadn't thought about that as an option.  
-Lots of lip service paid to being accepting, eliminating racism, eliminating sexism, etc....*

**COVID-19 (n=18)**

*-As someone with an autoimmune disease, I'm on a campus that won't ask everyone else to mask up to help me not get sick.  
-My peers don't care about covid or protecting me or each other. It's disheartening to go to school with people who refuse to wear masks or get vaccinated in the middle of a pandemic. I don't feel like many peers or professors believe COVID precautions are important.*

## SUGGESTIONS ON STEPS THE UNIVERSITY CAN TAKE

**Top Themes**  
**More efforts related to DEI (n=49)**

### **Example Responses**

*-Better support of DEI services, seriously. And then backing up words of support for DEI with actual actions.  
-Increased DEI efforts at all levels (e.g., recruiting and RETAINING staff, faculty, grad students, having more graduate groups that represent different identities, making DEI a priority and not just "surface-level" promises).*

**More social opportunities (n=31)**

*-More events between different graduate colleges to encourage making connections at the graduate level.  
-More graduate specific events.*

**Address financial concerns (n=22)**

*-Treat graduate students with any respect, pay us a living wage  
-Pay graduate students a commensurate stipend; Target and fast food employees make more than graduate students who help keep classes going and research happening at this university.*

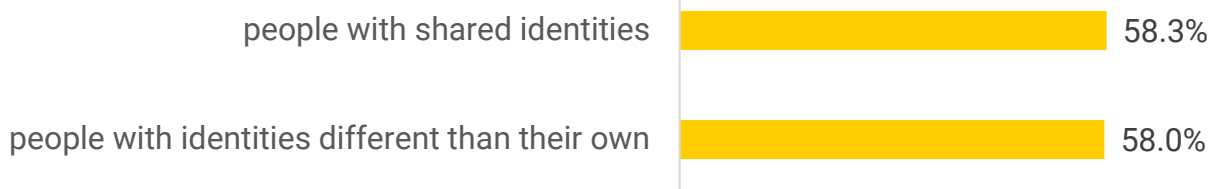
Other common themes included COVID-19 (n=19), remote connection (n=16), acts of appreciation (n=12), listening and advocating for students (n=11).

*\*asked of students who disagreed or somewhat agreed that they belonged*

# ENGAGEMENT

## CAMPUS EVENTS AND PROGRAMS

Have participated in events or programs with...



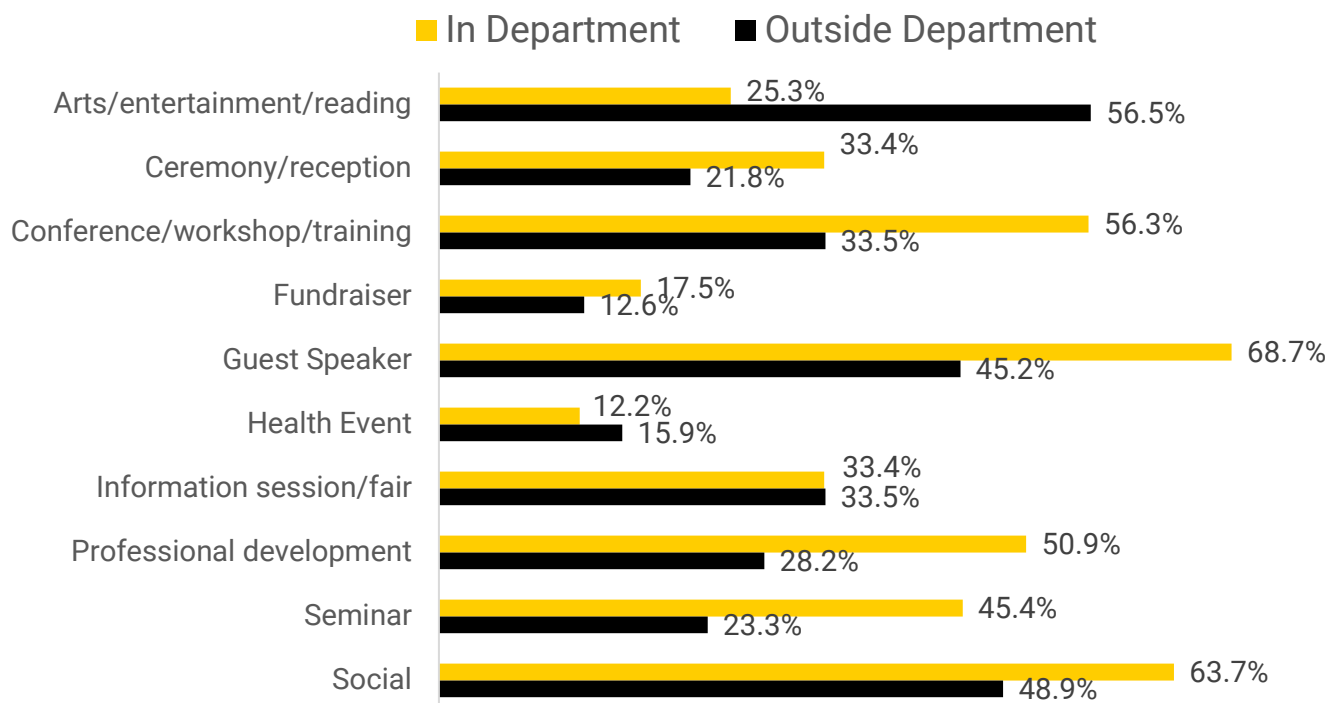
**68.5%** of respondents reported attending at least one campus event.



Of these...

- 58.5% reported attending events hosted both inside and outside their academic department
- 34.2% reported only attending events hosted by their department
- 7.3% reported attending events only hosted outside their department

### Types of Events *(of those who have attended events in or out of department)*



# ENGAGEMENT

## VOLUNTEERING



**33.9%** of respondents reported volunteering:

- 14.5% both on and off campus
- 12.1% off campus only
- 7.3% on campus only

40.0% of students reported that they didn't have time to volunteer, and 10.1% reported that they were not interested in volunteering.

## OTHER LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES



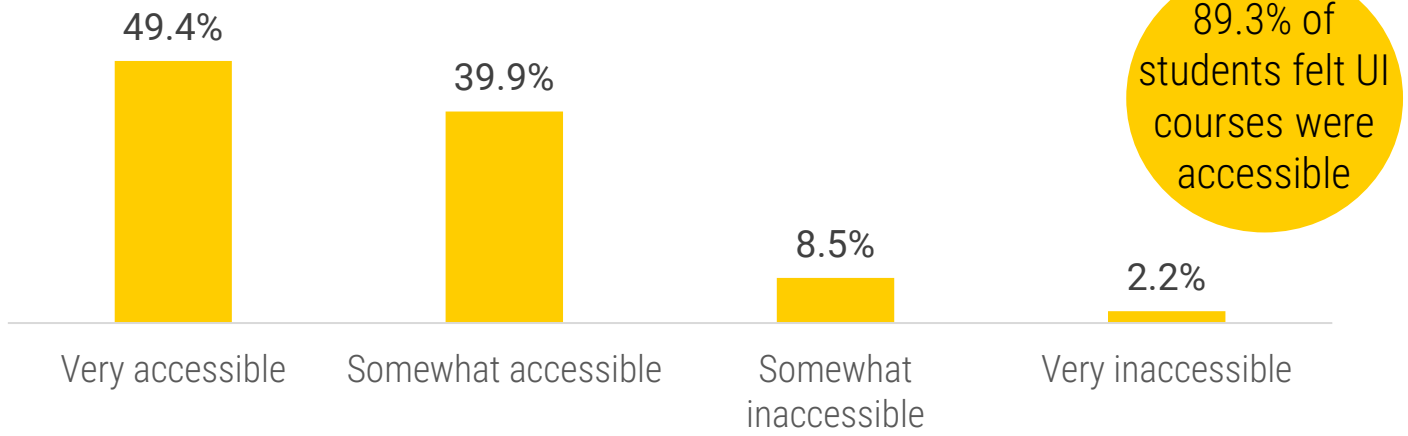
**43.1%** of respondents reported participating in a leadership opportunity.

Of those who had...

- 52.7% reported that it was in their academic department
- 17.9% reported that it was outside their department
- 29.4% reported participating in leadership opportunities both inside and outside their academic department

# ACCESSIBILITY

## PERCEIVED ACCESSIBILITY\* OF UI COURSES



*\*“Accessible” on this page and the next page was defined as when a person with a disability is afforded the opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services as a person without a disability in an equally effective and equally integrated manner, with substantially equivalent ease of use.*

## COURSE ACCESSIBILITY CONCERNS\*\*

### Top Concerns

Faculty who lack knowledge and/or are unwilling to accommodate needs (n=19)

COVID-19 pandemic (n=15)

Inaccessible buildings or spaces (n=10)

### Example Responses

-A lot of professors don't really have awareness of accessibility. They'll put the required statements on their syllabi, but they typically have no training in what is accessible or not...

-Many professors are not informed about the multiple physical, emotional, and mental abilities of students and structure their courses on biased standards.

-Professors who don't want to meet my SDS accommodations...

-COVID means people with many common preexisting medical conditions cannot safely attend in-person without risking their health. Make classes hybrid.

-Safety regarding COVID. Mask and vaccine mandates.

-Multiple buildings on this campus are completely inaccessible to people with mobility aids...

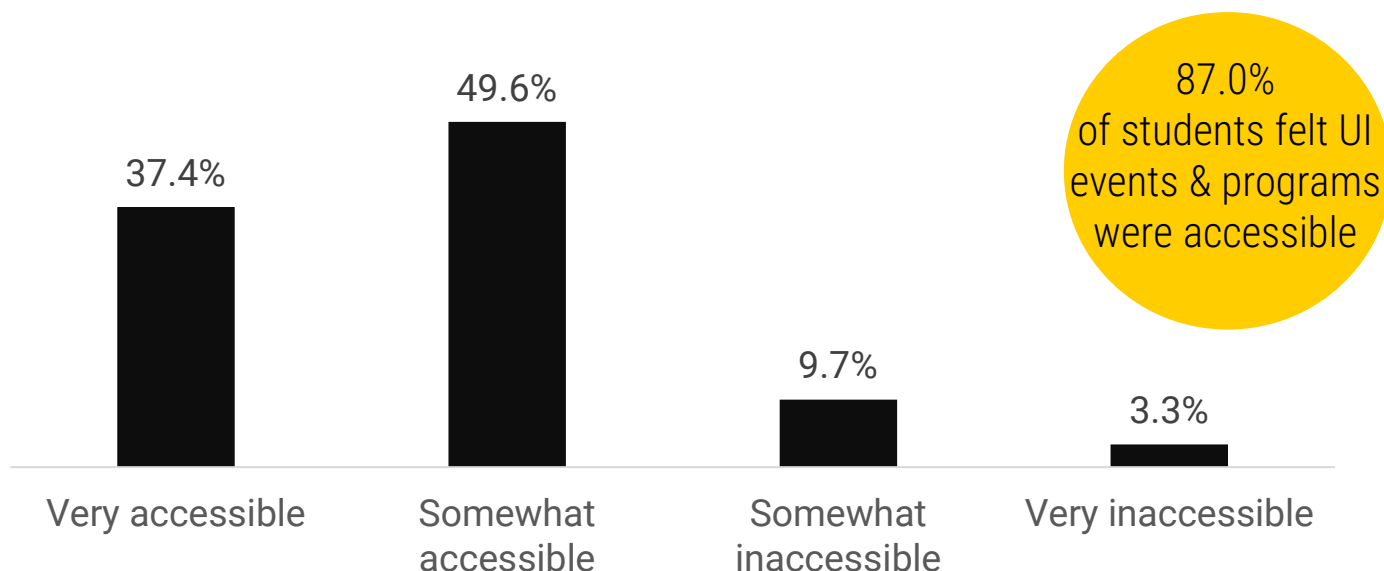
-Every building I spend any time in is almost impossible for someone in a wheelchair to navigate.

*\*\*asked of students who didn't think UI courses were accessible*



# ACCESSIBILITY

## PERCEIVED ACCESSIBILITY OF EVENTS/PROGRAMS



## EVENT/PROGRAM ACCESSIBILITY CONCERNS\*

### Top Concerns Example Responses

**Physically inaccessible spaces (n=23)**

- Events are not planned with wheelchair users in mind.
- Some events happen in locations that limit people with mobility issues. If you host an event, especially on green space, consider the mobility of those with walking aids or wheelchairs.
- Location of some events would be difficult to get to.

**Lack of assistance for hearing or visual impairments (n=11)**

- Students who are deaf or hard of hearing may not be able to understand what is being said during events, programs, or ceremonies because no sign language interpreters are present.
- As someone with vision disability, I am keenly aware of the amount of information I miss that others gain...Speakers refer to what is on the slide and does not always read it out loud, but asks people to think about what is there, whether visual or written. It makes me feel left out.
- On Zoom, people have to request to have captions turned on instead of captions being the default.

**COVID-19 (n=11)**

- COVID precautions are laughable and show a despicable disregard for faculty and students' well being, especially those with compromised immune systems. I am ashamed to attend this university.
- Every single event that gathers huge amounts of students without masks or any safety measures.

*\*asked of students who didn't think UI events and/or programs were accessible*

# OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

What can the University of Iowa do to better support the health, well-being and leisure needs of graduate and professional students?

## Top Requests

## Example Responses

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>1. Increased financial support (n=75)</p>     | <p><i>-The tuition requirements for graduate students are significant and oftentimes unfeasible.</i><br/> <i>-Pay us more (5)</i><br/> <i>-Almost every single graduate student who works for the university is overworked and underpaid</i></p>   |
| <p>2. Expanded mental health access (n=67)</p>   | <p><i>-Have embedded mental health personnel in each college</i><br/> <i>-Include mental health days in time off</i><br/> <i>-Graduate and professional students are often in need of counseling services but do not want to attend group sessions potentially with their own students.</i></p>  |
| <p>3. More social events or spaces (n=64)</p>    | <p><i>-Plan events and activities that serve a wide range of individuals and not just those with niche experiences or a small subset of the graduate school population.</i><br/> <i>-More inter-program events for students to meet and connect with students in other fields of study</i><br/> <i>-Provide graduate lounges on campus</i></p> |
| <p>4. Promotion of existing resources (n=56)</p> | <p><i>-I think a website that lists all of the resources in a very easy to see way would be very helpful.</i><br/> <i>-Remind the students of the support offered more frequently</i><br/> <i>-Maybe have more community outreach like tabling events to remind us of the support we have</i></p>  |
| <p>5. COVID-19 policies (n=31)</p>               | <p><i>-Not risk graduate student's lives during COVID (move classes online).</i><br/> <i>-Require COVID vaccines! Require masks!</i></p>   |

## Other Common Themes

Recreational Services/physical health (26) | Virtual programming (23)  
 Programming specific to graduate/professional students (19) | Parking (16)  
 Location (15) | Healthcare (14)

# OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

What programs or services would you like to see from the University of Iowa to better support the graduate/professional student experience?

## Top Requests

## Example Responses

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>1. More financial resources (n=58)</p>                    | <p><i>-Funding for students unable to have TAs</i><br/> <i>-The threat of summers without pay is overwhelming and one of the most challenging things for grad students.</i><br/> <i>-Do more to actively give scholarships to students.</i></p>   |
| <p>2. Expanded mental health access and resources (n=53)</p> | <p><i>-More counseling services! Stop turning away so many people. We all know the rates of mental health among grad students are high, yet all of my friends but one is seen in the counseling center. Is it possible to grow this area? Have specific services for students in graduate programs?</i><br/> <i>-I have heard of a graduate student support group when I first entered the program, but I'm not sure if it's phased out or has not reached students in my department.</i></p> |
| <p>3. More opportunities for socializing (n=52)</p>          | <p><i>-I think more programs designed to introduce graduate students to each other outside of their programs would be good. It would allow grad students to step away from their subject for a bit and provide them with the opportunity to connect with people across campus.</i><br/> <i>-More social events.</i></p>   |
| <p>4. Additional support for career transitions (n=42)</p>   | <p><i>-Career services to support the transition from the classroom to the next stage.</i><br/> <i>-Networking opportunities.</i></p>   |
| <p>5. Expanded wellness services (n=27)</p>                  | <p><i>-More wellness activities.</i><br/> <i>-More morning classes at the gym. Offering fitness classes at the Fieldhouse (near hospital). Massage therapy, acupuncture services offered.</i></p>   |

## Other Common Themes

Services related to Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (23) | Involvement (20)  
 Academic-related services (17) | Services or support for parents (17)

# LISTENING SESSION INFORMATION

## OVERVIEW

The work group wanted to supplement the data collected from the survey with additional qualitative information from listening sessions. Administrators from graduate and professional student departments were contacted to see if a departmental listening session could be set up and promoted to their students. The work group also offered several sessions which were open to graduate and professional students from any department. These sessions were most heavily promoted via email to students who indicated interest in a listening session after taking the survey.

A drawing took place after each listening session, with one student from each session winning 5 free one-hour parking passes.

Questions focused on these topics:

- Engagement
- Relationships
- Well-Being
- Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
- Services & Support

## ADMINISTRATION



Facilitator and notetakers: Each session had a facilitator and a notetaker. There were 6 different facilitators and 5 notetakers.



Number of Listening Sessions:

Scheduled: 14

Completed: 11

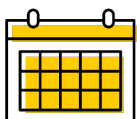
On Zoom: 9

In Person: 2 (3 scheduled in-person sessions had no participants)



Range of group size: 2 – 28

Total participants: 83



Date range of sessions: 11/8/21 - 11/16/21

# COMMUNICATION

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**Current marketing and messaging to graduate and professional students are not sufficiently meeting their needs. They repeatedly shared that the method, timing and content of information they receive does meet their needs.**

- a. Students commented across multiple questions that they were **overloaded with information and resources during their orientation sessions that they have not retained**. They expressed a need for **information to be introduced early and reinforced throughout their experience** so when they needed support, they knew what resources are available to them.
- b. Students described wanting both **active and passive methods of receiving information** and expressed the importance of **information being clearly relevant** to them. Due to the rigor of their programs, graduate and professional students will often prioritize information they receive from their PI, department, or Dean. Mass emails to the general student population (like Iowa Now) are not always as helpful. Students also asked for **information to be shared in spaces they already are frequenting** like their department seminars and in their classes.
- c. Students commented that it is **not clear what services are available to both undergraduate and graduate/professional students**. Much of the marketing and messaging is viewed to be focused on a traditional undergraduate student experience and needs. Students asked for **clear marketing toward their population** and to not use the same messaging that undergraduate students receive.

# ENGAGEMENT

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**It is difficult for graduate and professional students to meet peers and professionals outside of their department or academic program, and there is earnest interest in building more connections to others across social, academic and career interests.**

- a. Students regularly shared a **desire to have casual opportunities to meet others outside of their department**. While many valued the relationships they have within their department, many students missed casual social connections that were not based on their academic department.
- b. **For underrepresented students, having social connections with people outside of their department was seen as especially important** because they often are in academic spaces where they do not feel understood, valued or supported. Connections outside of their department helped increase their sense of belonging and provide more culturally relevant support.
- c. **Students are interested in a dedicated space on campus for graduate and professional students.**
  - i. This was seen as a resource that could meet multiple needs for them. It would facilitate opportunities for casual connection to other students, and it would be an ideal spot for sharing resources.

# MENTAL HEALTH

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## **Graduate and professional students need more access to mental health resources.**

- a. Students talked about the **heavy pressure and challenges** they face as graduate and professional students. Themes of **isolation, self-doubt and anxiety** came up throughout the listening sessions.
- b. **University Counseling Service (UCS)** was named multiple times throughout the listening sessions as an **area of frustration** for participants. Students expressed wanting...
  - i. **More access to therapists** who are able to support students' unique needs and who can accommodate their schedules.
  - ii. When UCS makes referrals off campus, for those **referrals to be covered by** the graduate and professional student health insurance.
  - iii. **A case manager** specifically for graduate and professional students.
  - iv. **Additional embedded therapists** for some colleges and an embedded therapist in colleges that do not have one.
- c. Students also expressed needing **more support from the university and their departments around mental health and well-being**. Departments often focus on academic progress and research output, at times at the expense of students' mental health.

# RELATIONSHIPS

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**The academic program and faculty are key factors which impact graduate and professional students' experiences, the support they receive, and their well-being.**

- a. In navigating incidents of harm, a number of students described experiences where their **academic program did not adequately support them** or direct them to resources.
  - i. A few students experienced harassment, including sexual assault and bias based on religion. They also felt **department staff did not have the ability or knowledge to support them.**
- b. Graduate and professional students are incredibly busy and are **not always supported by their programs in pursuing opportunities outside of their academics.** This enhances feelings of pressure or guilt when students felt like they were struggling or needed a break.
- c. Many graduate and professional students see the **staff of the Division of Student Life as partners** who could provide additional training for faculty and provide information about and access to resources.



# BASIC NEEDS

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## **Consistent access to basic needs is a barrier for graduate and professional student success.**

- a. **Financial concerns** were mentioned during every listening session. Many students shared how financial stress impacted them and asked for **more resources and support for funding**.
- b. While food insecurity was not directly mentioned, students frequently mentioned how helpful it would be to have more events where meals are provided. One student shared, **“People don’t understand how much a free meal means to grad/professional students.”**
- c. Students specifically stressed how **access to affordable housing** is a barrier to meeting financial needs, as well as **reliable transportation and affordable parking**.

# SENSE OF BELONGING

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**Campus climate and issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion have had a significant impact on the experience for many graduate and professional students.**

- a. Some graduate and professional **students with underrepresented identities expressed greater isolation** within their academic program due to peers or faculty not understanding their experiences.
  - i. They also expressed needing **more support from faculty to challenge undergraduate students' biases** toward international student TAs.
- b. Many students expressed feeling like the **University is not following through or making progress on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) action plans and commitments.**
  - i. There were some requests for the Division of Student Life to provide leadership in holding academic programs more accountable in making progress.
- c. Many students have had to **navigate experiences of bias or the ramifications of highly public DEI incidents within their college**, which have negatively impacted their experience.

# COVID-19 MANAGEMENT

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**COVID-19 and frustration towards how the University has handled the pandemic have impacted the graduate and professional student experience.**

- a. COVID-19 impacted the financial security, graduate research, feelings of safety and the ability to connect with others. Being a graduate and professional student is already difficult, and the pandemic added additional challenges that heightened their stress.
- b. Several students also expressed frustration with the COVID-19 mitigation efforts at the institution. Some felt nervous to teach and many did not know how to get support during or after being sick with COVID-19.
- c. Graduate and professional students with children or other family members they were supporting described needing more resources, especially to navigating quarantine protocol.

# MAIN FINDINGS

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*Findings from the survey and listening sessions indicate that...*

- Division of Student Life (DSL) **resources** were used at varying levels, but **satisfaction was generally high** among users.
- Current **marketing and messaging are not sufficiently meeting the needs** of graduate and professional students, and information about services needs to be disseminated in a variety of ways.
- Academic program and faculty **relationships are key factors** to graduate and professional student experience, support and well-being.
- It is difficult for graduate and professional students to meet peers and professionals outside of their department or academic program, and there is interest in building **more connections** to others across interests and academic disciplines.
- Graduate and professional students need **expanded access to mental health** resources that meet their unique needs.
- **Consistent access to basic needs** is a barrier for graduate and professional student success.
- Campus climate and **issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion** have had **a significant impact** on the experiences of many graduate and professional students.
- **COVID-19** and frustration towards how the University has handled the pandemic **have impacted** the graduate and professional student experience.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

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## 1. Communication

- Develop a Division of Student Life communication plan, in partnership with Student Life Communications, that addresses requests and needs expressed by graduate and professional students. The plan should include active and passive communication methods.
  - Work with college administrators to understand the best methods for communicating to their graduate and professional students (Iowa Now, email communications from administrators, digital signage, etc.).
  - Provide graduate and professional programs with examples of communication options that might reach students, such as best practices.
  - Clarify in messaging that services and programs are available to graduate and professional students.
  - Go directly to graduate and professional students to promote services (e.g., tabling, classroom announcements)

# RECOMMENDATIONS

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## 2. Engagement

- Partner with the Graduate College and professional schools to provide programming and organizational opportunities for graduate and professional students to connect with others socially, academically and through career interests across campus.
  - Consider hosting a fall resource/involvement fair specifically targeted toward graduate and professional students within the first few weeks of the semester following their orientation (see: [Ohio State University](#)).
  - Work with departments within the Division of Student Life to consider tailoring programming specifically for graduate and professional students (e.g., intramural sports leagues for drop-in play during the day; health fairs hosted near the west side of campus; etc.). Carefully consider timing and location (e.g., west side) to appeal to graduate and professional student needs (such as a beginning of year student organization training on the west side of campus exclusively for graduate and professional student organization leaders).
- When feasible, provide food at events.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

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## 3. Accessibility of Resources

- Division of Student Life departments and units should review the extent to which their programs, services and activities are accessible for graduate and professional students. Consider partnerships with ITS and Office of Teaching, Learning & Technology.
  - Identify training and education needs. Support additional training for faculty, staff and students on concepts of universal design to enhance accessibility and equity.
  - Provide programs and services at times and locations, and use delivery methods that are convenient and easily accessible for graduate and professional students.

## 4. Meeting Basic Needs

- Intentionally promote basic needs resources for graduate and professional students to increase awareness and destigmatize use of resources.
  - Specifically highlight the west side food pantry at the Pride Alliance Center.
  - Communicate about community resources through the UI basic needs webpage. Consider expanding the collaboration with the Iowa City Downtown District to help communicate the resources more broadly.
  - Identify and connect students who do not otherwise qualify for financial aid to resources.
- Continue to prioritize support for basic need services. Advocate for additional funding and resources.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

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## 5. Health and Well-Being

- Develop a comprehensive plan with University Counseling Service, Student Health, Student Care & Assistance, Student Wellness, Recreational Services and the graduate and professional colleges to evaluate and create opportunities for improved mental health and well-being support for graduate and professional students.
  - Mental health and well-being support should be holistic and include, but not be limited to, a case manager and/or additional embedded counseling staff for graduate and professional students, support groups tailored to this group, and increased access to mental health resources in the university and community.
- Solicit graduate and professional student feedback on any new plans for a well-being center.
  - If a well-being center is developed on the east side of campus, explore how services can still be provided on the west side.

## 6. Staff/Faculty Support

- Partner with the graduate and professional colleges to provide faculty and staff with information on programming and resources for supporting graduate and professional students, with an emphasis on safety, health and wellness, and student engagement beyond academic programming.
  - Increase outreach to college staff (e.g., deans/associate deans, academic advisors, program coordinators) and student organization advisors to promote basic needs services.
  - Better understand the academic college resources and DSL resources to increase efficiency, reduce duplication and remove barriers for students.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

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## 7. Sense of Belonging

Partner with the Division of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion to...

- Adjust communication strategies to increase awareness that MISSE & other DSL-related services are available to graduate and professional students.
- Create additional DEI-related programs directed specifically for graduate and professional students.
- Support additional DEI training and development opportunities for DSL staff.
- Reevaluate the DSL DEI Strategic Plan to see if strategies need to be modified for graduate and professional students.
- Provide intentional opportunities for students to build community outside of their academic programs or departments.
- Remain committed and accountable to DEI-related strategic initiatives that are directed at graduate and professional students and take actionable steps so students know their voices are heard. Share back with students what has been implemented.

## 8. Miscellaneous

- Follow up with specific colleges regarding key findings specific to their area from the survey and/or the listening sessions.