

GALLUP®



Positive Career Outcomes and Equitable Experiences

THE 2020 GALLUP-2U
GRADUATE ALUMNI
OUTCOMES STUDY



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Foreword



A Letter From Our CEO

CHRISTOPHER “CHIP” PAUCEK
2U CO-FOUNDER & CEO

It's hard to believe an entire year has passed since COVID-19 forced all of higher education to move online almost overnight. Today, many colleges and universities continue to deliver all or some of their classes online. It's within this unprecedented context that we are sharing the findings of our second annual Gallup-2U Graduate Alumni Outcomes Study. Last year's inaugural report provided important insights into the experiences — while in school and after graduation — of alumni from degree programs powered by 2U. And the results were clear: Thoughtfully designed online degree programs can deliver learning experiences and career outcomes equal to, and in some cases better than, traditional campus-based programs.

For this year's Gallup-2U report, we wanted to take a deeper dive into understanding the career outcomes of alumni from 2U partner programs. What motivated them to attend graduate school? Have they achieved their goals? Are they thriving in their careers and wellbeing, despite the challenges they faced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic? In the wake of last summer's difficult but necessary societal reckoning on race and racism, we also wanted to know whether the career outcomes and wellbeing of alumni of color differed from those of their White classmates.

As reflected in the pages that follow, our second annual Gallup-2U report tells a clear and compelling story about the positive impact our partners' degree programs have on the careers and wellbeing of their alumni. We think the findings related to the experiences of alumni of color, which in nearly every facet are comparable to their White peers, tell an important and encouraging story about the positive role online education can play in fostering greater access as well as positive and equitable learning experiences and career outcomes.

We also recognize that supporting equitable experiences must go beyond the classroom. At 2U, we are investing more in our Career Engagement Network in order to offer all students the resources, tools and guidance they need to pursue fulfilling employment opportunities and better navigate their career.

The past 12 months have had a transformational impact on colleges and universities, while cementing the central role online education will play in the future of higher education. And we believe this year's Gallup-2U report provides a glimpse into how bright that future can be for students who attend our partners' degree programs.



Introduction

For more than a decade, 2U has partnered with top-tier nonprofit universities across the U.S. to bring their graduate degree programs online. As part of its ongoing efforts to understand more about the student outcomes of its partners' online degree programs, 2U has commissioned a series of quantitative and qualitative studies of recent graduates.

The first-ever Gallup-2U Graduate Outcomes Benchmark Report took place in 2019. From that study, Gallup and 2U learned that 2U partner program alumni had similar or better experiences in many areas of graduate school when compared with national benchmarks of graduate school alumni. 2U partner program alumni were about as likely as national alumni to have had professors who cared about them and mentors who encouraged them to pursue their dreams. They were more likely than national alumni to have had professors who made them excited about learning.

The second study, which took place in 2020 and is the focus of this report, captured alumni's experiences at a rare moment in history. Recent graduates grappled with the global COVID-19 pandemic and the racial justice movement in the U.S. — both of which will undoubtedly have a lasting effect on the landscape of higher education.

The primary focus of the 2020 study was to explore what 2U partner program alumni expected from their graduate degrees, whether their programs delivered these outcomes, which graduate school experiences contributed to their success, and whether these outcomes and experiences were equitable among graduates of color and first-generation graduates.

This report details what Gallup and 2U learned about recent graduates' experiences and outcomes from interviews with 669 2U partner program alumni. The study focuses on the experiences of alumni who received online graduate degrees from a 2U-powered program since 2015, including 223 alumni who graduated in 2020. Graduates from programs at American University, University of Dayton, The George Washington University, New York University, Pepperdine University, Southern Methodist University and Washington University in St. Louis participated in the study.

What Did Gallup and 2U Learn in 2020?

The 2020 Gallup-2U Graduate Alumni Outcomes Study found that:

- Nearly all alumni experienced a positive career outcome after graduation, whether that was finding a more fulfilling career, changing careers, getting a promotion, earning more money, or attaining more up-to-date and relevant skills.
- Many 2U partner program alumni achieved the outcomes they expected from their investment in their online graduate degree. This is true despite when they graduated and regardless of gender, race or first-generation status.
- Graduates who received their degrees during the COVID-19 pandemic are struggling more than those who graduated before it, but many still say they achieved their goals for attending graduate school.

Key Findings

2U partner program alumni almost universally had a positive career outcome after graduation — regardless of gender, race or first-generation status.

97% OF ALL ALUMNI ACHIEVED A POSITIVE CAREER OUTCOME AFTER GRADUATING

— whether it was finding a more fulfilling career, changing careers, getting a promotion, earning more money, or attaining more up-to-date and relevant skills.

94% of Black alumni and 97% of first-generation alumni attained a positive career outcome after graduating.

Alumni enrolled in graduate school because they wanted “more” from their careers. And that “more” wasn’t necessarily money.

THE TOP TWO REASONS FOR ENROLLING IN GRADUATE SCHOOL:

41% wanted more fulfilling careers and 26% wanted to change their careers. Just 9% pursued graduate school for a salary increase.

Most 2U partner program alumni achieved their goal for attending graduate school, but some alumni — particularly those graduating during the pandemic — fell short.

MORE THAN HALF (57%) OF 2020 GRADUATES SAID THEY ACHIEVED THEIR SPECIFIC GOAL

, compared with 69% of those who graduated between 2015 and 2019 and achieved their goal.

Even if having a more fulfilling career was not their main reason for going to graduate school, more than half of alumni of 2U partner programs, including majorities of both Black and White graduates, have found a more fulfilling path since graduation.

MAJORITIES OF WHITE (60%) AND BLACK (58%) ALUMNI SAID THEY HAVE FOUND A MORE FULFILLING CAREER PATH AFTER GRADUATION.

Among those who found these careers, similar strong majorities (85% of both White and Black alumni) rated the importance of graduating from their online program in finding that path a “4” or a “5,” with “5” representing very important.

While making more money may not have been their primary goal, more than half of 2U partner program alumni have seen their salaries increase since graduation.

MORE THAN HALF (53%) OF ALUMNI SAY THEIR SALARIES HAVE INCREASED SINCE GRADUATION, with 20% saying their salaries have greatly increased.

Nearly four in 10 employed 2U partner program alumni are engaged at work.

In a relatively volatile year for most employees in the U.S. — during which Gallup has seen typically stable employee engagement numbers fluctuate more than ever — the **37% OF 2U PARTNER PROGRAM ALUMNI WHO ARE ENGAGED AT WORK** is fairly in line with the national average of 36%.

Even amid a pandemic, the majority of 2U partner program alumni (89%) are satisfied with their lives overall and rate their lives positively enough to be considered thriving (69%).

THE MAJORITY OF 2U ALUMNI (78%) ARE THRIVING IN AT LEAST ONE AREA OF THEIR WELLBEING.

Alumni are strongest in the areas of social wellbeing (55% are thriving) — which means they have strong, supportive relationships — and career wellbeing (46% are thriving) — which means they like what they do every day and are motivated to achieve their goals.

Graduate Follows Her Dream Without Putting Her Career, Life on Hold

Corrie graduated from Washington University in St. Louis in 2018 with a Master of Legal Studies degree. After earning her degree online, she went from being a manager to a director of marketing at a large professional services organization. She directly credits her accelerated role to her degree.

Corrie said she wanted to attend law school after she graduated from college, but because of circumstances at the time, she needed to “get out of school and start making money.” The Online Master of Legal Studies program allowed her to start following her dream again.

Most importantly, as a married mother of two young children, the online program allowed Corrie to do that without uprooting her family or changing her career trajectory. She could “still get a really, really good education at this prestigious organization without putting my current career or my current life on hold,” she said.

Corrie also needed to be challenged academically, which, she said, the program did. “I think it really challenged me in a way that I didn’t know that I’d be able to be challenged,” Corrie said. “It was a law degree from my house, or my car, or my office — and so that was amazing to me.”

Corrie said even though she was earning her degree from home, she did not feel disconnected from the school. “I was able to know what was going on ... I think they did a really great job of communicating [expectations] for somebody who was wearing multiple hats and juggling lots of things,” she said.

“I was able to not miss a beat and not miss a deadline and it’s because of that.”

It helped, too, that she felt her advisers and instructors were invested in her success. The instructors were “very supportive. They didn’t treat you any differently than the other students,” Corrie said. “They treated you like you were a law student on campus.”

“I think it really challenged me in a way that I didn’t know that I’d be able to be challenged.”

Corrie pursued her degree to increase her knowledge and become a better employee and better leader, but she sees even broader application to what she has learned. “The things that you learn in law school and with this degree are things that can be carried over in anything,” she said. “The skills, techniques, research, planning and strategy are things that carry over very well.”

**— CORRIE,
WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS,
MASTER OF LEGAL STUDIES**



Are Online Degrees Delivering the Outcomes Alumni Want?



2U PARTNER PROGRAM ALUMNI GOALS AND OUTCOMES

Most 2U partner program alumni are achieving the outcomes they desire from their investment in higher education. The majority of graduates of 2U partner programs say they achieved their goal for attending graduate school, whether it was to have a more fulfilling career, make a career change, get a promotion, earn more money, or attain skills that are up to date and relevant to their fields.

Almost all 2U alumni reported achieving at least one positive career outcome after graduation, including those who graduated amid the turbulent economic times of the COVID-19 pandemic and those from the traditionally underserved Black and first-generation student populations.

2U partner program alumni almost universally had a positive career outcome after graduation.

Nearly all 2U alumni (97%) experienced a positive career outcome after graduation, whether it was finding a more fulfilling career path, making a career or field change, receiving a promotion or more pay, or attaining up-to-date and relevant skills.

These positive outcomes occurred despite when these alumni received their online graduate degrees — including those who graduated amid the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 — and regardless of their gender, their race, or whether they were the first generation in their families to attend or graduate from college.

2U partner program alumni enrolled in graduate school because they wanted “more” from their careers, and that “more” was not necessarily money. Instead, it was to find a more purposeful and fulfilling career path.

Recent studies show most U.S. college graduates today need to derive a sense of purpose from their work. Eight in 10 college graduates surveyed in 2018 rated this sense of purpose as very or extremely important to them. Further, when Gallup asked college graduates in 2019 to identify what made their first job “good,” purpose was one of the top responses.

Gallup has found that a sense of purpose is one of the most essential elements of someone’s wellbeing. If people have the opportunity to regularly do something they enjoy, even if it is more of a passion than something that earns them a paycheck, they are more than twice as likely to be thriving in their lives overall.

Similarly, the main reasons why many 2U partner program alumni chose to attend graduate school were more about purpose than a paycheck. Alumni most often mentioned wanting a more fulfilling career path (41%) and wanting to change their career or field of work (26%) as their biggest motivators for pursuing their online graduate degree. Much smaller proportions indicated they wanted to keep their skills up to date and relevant (14%), increase their salary (9%), get a promotion (3%), or named some other reason (7%).

Further, alumni’s main reasons for attending graduate school were similar regardless of their gender, their race, their first-generation status, or when they received their degrees. More fulfilling career paths or career and field changes were the biggest motivators for everyone.

WHAT DOES A MORE FULFILLING CAREER PATH LOOK LIKE TO YOU?

“

I wanted to be in a position and a career that I felt was more impactful to our society, especially to young people.

— VANESSA
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY,
MASTER OF ARTS IN
COUNSELING

Most alumni realized their specific goals for attending graduate school and say their degree was crucial to making that happen. But some alumni — particularly those graduating during the COVID-19 pandemic — fell short of achieving their goals.

Nearly two in three alumni (65%) report that they achieved their goal for attending graduate school, and 82% of those who achieved their goal rate the importance of their degree in reaching that goal a “4” or a “5,” with “5” representing very important.

However, alumni who graduated in 2020, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, are considerably less likely than those who graduated earlier to say they achieved their graduate school goal. Still, well more than half (57%) of 2020 graduates say they achieved their specific goal, compared with 69% of those who had graduated before then.

Black alumni (58%) and alumni of other races or ethnicities (62%) were somewhat less likely to say they achieved their goals than White alumni (70%). Similarly, first-generation alumni (60%) were slightly less likely than non-first-generation alumni (68%) to say they attained their graduate school goals.

Even if having a more fulfilling career was not their main reason for going to graduate school, more than half of alumni of 2U partner programs have found a more fulfilling path since graduation.

While most U.S. college graduates today place a premium on deriving purpose from their work, the same studies show that less than half of college graduates surveyed in 2018 were finding purposeful work after graduation. Alumni of 2U partner programs have encountered more success in this regard: Six in 10 alumni say they have found a more fulfilling career path since graduating from their online degree program. Eighty-five percent of those who did rate the importance of their online degree to finding that path a “4” or a “5,” with “5” representing very important.

WHAT DOES A MORE FULFILLING CAREER PATH LOOK LIKE TO YOU?

“

I have knowledge and I use that knowledge to help others. That’s the most rewarding thing for me. I see others do well because I was able to help them.

— JEFFREY
WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
IN ST. LOUIS, MASTER OF
LEGAL STUDIES

The majority of alumni, regardless of gender, race or first-generation status, found a more fulfilling career path. However, finding that path usually takes time (49% of alumni say it took them from a few months to a year to advance in their career) and responses suggest it may have been even more difficult to find during the COVID-19 pandemic. Slightly more than half (52%) of alumni who graduated in 2020 say they found a more fulfilling career, compared with 64% who graduated between 2015 and 2019 and found a more fulfilling career.

Although making more money may not have been their primary goal, more than half of 2U partner program alumni have seen their salaries increase since graduation.

More than half (53%) of alumni say their salaries have increased since graduation, with 20% saying their salaries greatly increased. However, some alumni were less likely to have received a similar financial boost. Black alumni were slightly less likely to say that their salaries somewhat or greatly increased (47%) than White alumni (56%). The gap was the same for first-generation alumni (47%) versus non-first-generation alumni (56%).

This salary gap is one of several examples of the inequities (discussed later in the report) that Black and first-generation alumni face after graduation — despite their more equitable experiences while in graduate school.

WHAT DOES A MORE FULFILLING CAREER PATH LOOK LIKE TO YOU?

“

I'm a key stakeholder in the community, so I'm able to leverage my position as a pastor and an influencer. The degree allowed me to leverage the education evidence-based approach to public health and use that to benefit the community.

— JONATHAN
THE GEORGE WASHINGTON
UNIVERSITY, MASTER OF
PUBLIC HEALTH

More pay doesn't translate into more fulfillment at work. And it doesn't affect whether alumni think their graduate schools were worth the cost or the time and effort. Instead, alumni's perceived relevance of their coursework to their jobs may be more predictive of the perceived value of their degree.

While more than half of alumni say they are earning more money since graduation, those who say they have received pay increases since graduation are no more likely than those who have not to be engaged at work, to be deeply interested in their job, or to think they have the ideal job for them.

However, 2U partner program alumni who strongly agree that they have the ideal job for them are 2.2 times more likely to strongly agree that their degree was worth the cost than those who don't. And those who say their current work is completely related to their graduate degree from their alma mater are 2.0 times more likely to strongly agree that their degree was worth the time and effort than those who don't.

Other research confirms that relevance — the perception that one's coursework was directly relevant to one's work — is a far better predictor of the perceived value and quality of an education than gender, race, ethnicity, age, income or field of study.¹

“

I can do a lot of things really well at my job, but there are so many other things that I haven't even thought of exploring that my MPH now allowed me to not only think about, but then gave me the skills to implement and create a different culture at work.

— MARINA
THE GEORGE WASHINGTON
UNIVERSITY, MASTER OF
PUBLIC HEALTH

¹ Auter, Z. (2018). Relevance linked to views of education quality and value. Retrieved April 14, 2021 from <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/233636/relevance-linked-views-education-quality-value.aspx>

What Makes a High-Quality Online Graduate Program?



KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

This research identified a set of experiences (key performance indicators) among alumni of 2U partner programs that are predictive of whether they have positive career outcomes, have great jobs and live great lives after graduation.

Specific experiences in graduate school — including coursework, career preparation and interactions with classmates — predict the likelihood that 2U partner program alumni have positive career outcomes.

Gallup's previous studies of undergraduate and graduate alumni across a wide variety of institutions — including 2U partner programs — all underscore the strong ties between the experiences that alumni have as students and their post-graduation outcomes.

2U partner program alumni were more likely to achieve positive career outcomes — finding more fulfilling career paths, changing careers, achieving promotions and salary growth, and emerging with more up-to-date skills — if they strongly agreed they had the following experiences while they were attending graduate school:

- ✓ **Their coursework prepared them for the job and life they have today.**
- ✓ **They received the career preparation support they needed.**
- ✓ **They interacted with other students regularly, either in person or online.**
- ✓ **Their instructors had real life experience.**
- ✓ **Their educations were worth the time, effort and cost.**

Even among the key experiences that predict positive career outcomes, certain experiences stand out.

For each of the positive career outcomes, Figure 1 shows the experiences where the gaps on the outcomes are the largest between those who strongly agree and those who do not.

FIGURE 1:

Predictors of positive career outcomes

(% Response)

■ Strongly agree (5) ■ Do not strongly agree (1-4)

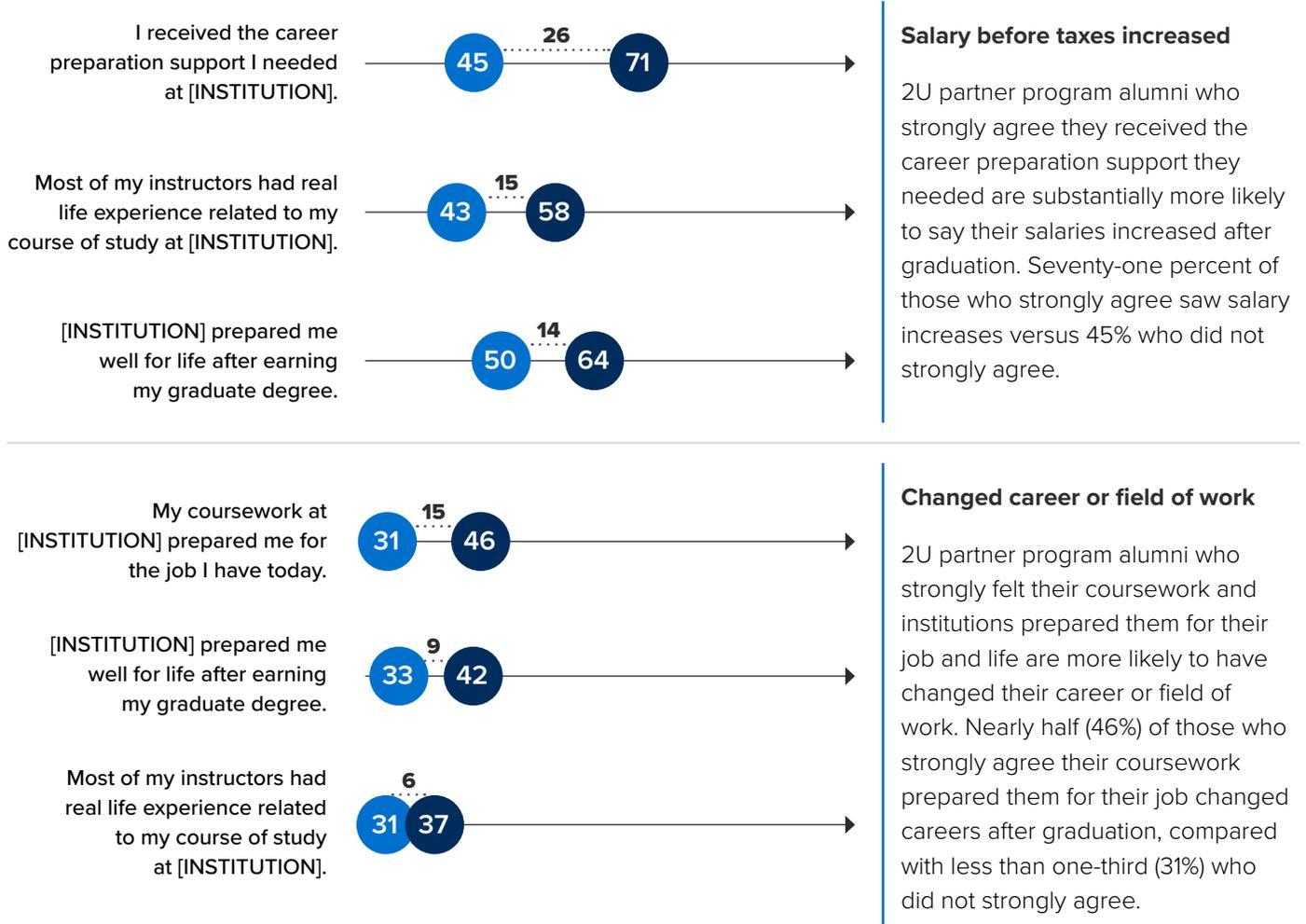
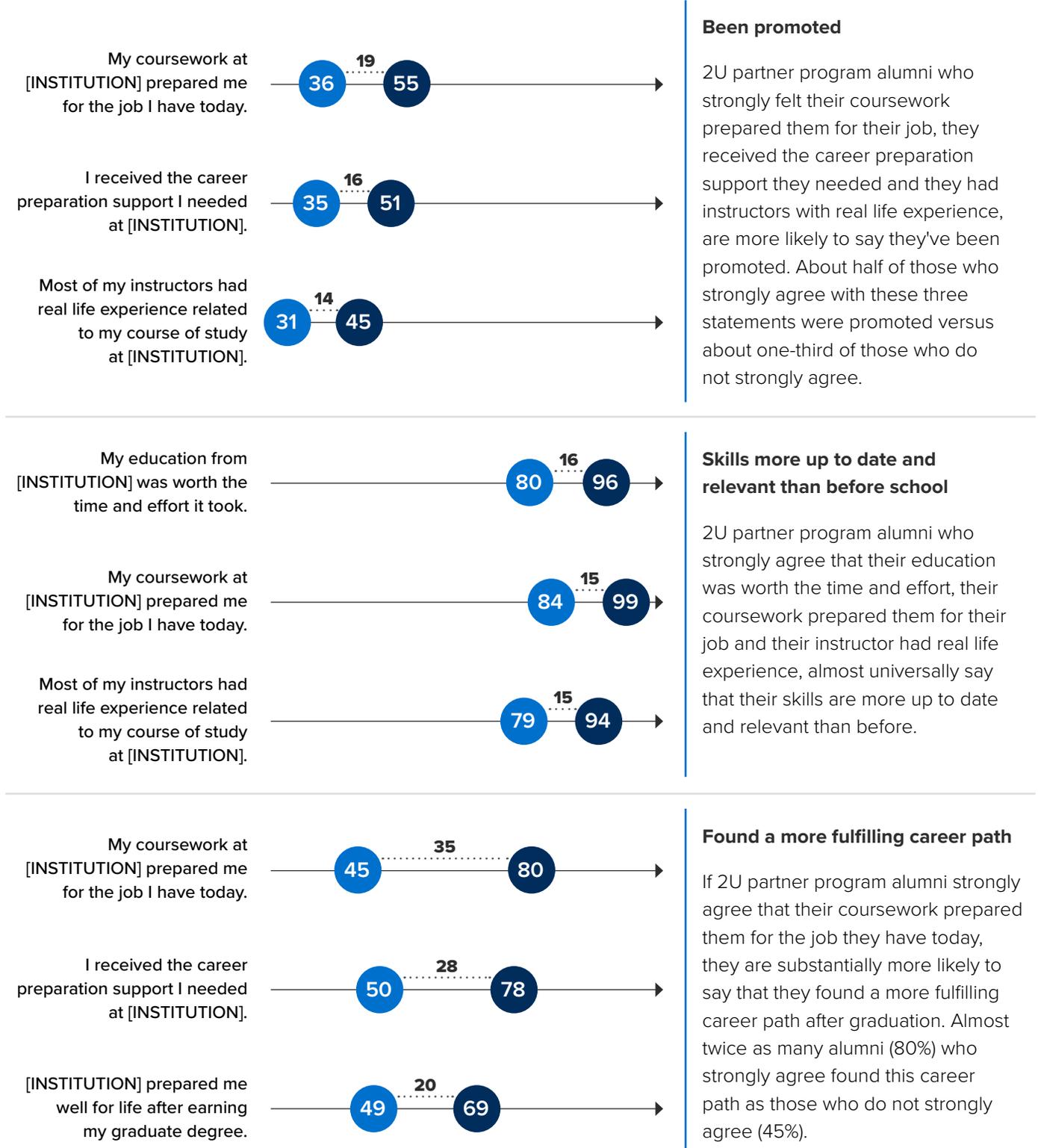


FIGURE 1:

Predictors of positive career outcomes (continued)

(% Response)

■ Strongly agree (5) ■ Do not strongly agree (1-4)



Been promoted

2U partner program alumni who strongly felt their coursework prepared them for their job, they received the career preparation support they needed and they had instructors with real life experience, are more likely to say they've been promoted. About half of those who strongly agree with these three statements were promoted versus about one-third of those who do not strongly agree.

Skills more up to date and relevant than before school

2U partner program alumni who strongly agree that their education was worth the time and effort, their coursework prepared them for their job and their instructor had real life experience, almost universally say that their skills are more up to date and relevant than before.

Found a more fulfilling career path

If 2U partner program alumni strongly agree that their coursework prepared them for the job they have today, they are substantially more likely to say that they found a more fulfilling career path after graduation. Almost twice as many alumni (80%) who strongly agree found this career path as those who do not strongly agree (45%).

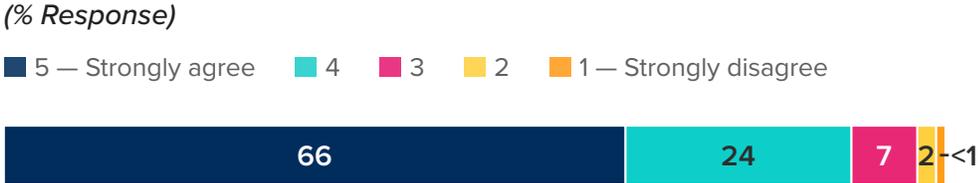
Importantly, the results also illuminated how 2U partner programs are delivering on these key performance indicators. Further, they revealed a great deal of parity in the experiences that these programs deliver to Black and first-generation alumni compared with White alumni and those who are non-first-generation alumni (explored in further detail in the next section of the report).

Each of these indicators, although based on the experiences of 2U alumni, may yield useful insights for other education providers into what makes a high-quality online graduate education.

Their instructors had real life experience, and they received the support they needed from them.

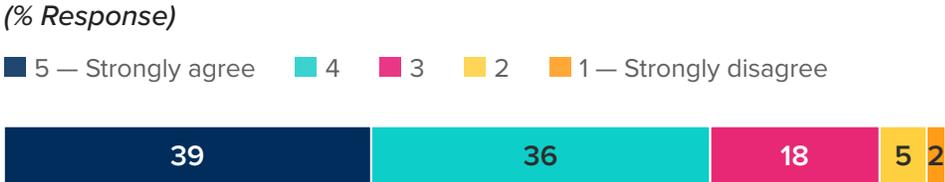
Nine in 10 2U partner program alumni agree (rating their level of agreement a “4” or “5” on a five-point scale) that most of their instructors had real life experience related to their course of study.

FIGURE 2:
Most of my instructors had real life experience related to my course of study at [INSTITUTION].



Three in four alumni rate their level of agreement with the statement that they received the academic support they needed at their institution with a “4” or a “5” on a five-point scale, where “5” is strongly agree.

FIGURE 3:
I received the academic support I needed at [INSTITUTION].



Their educations were worth the time, effort and cost.

The vast majority of 2U partner program alumni agree that their education was worth the time and effort, with 80% rating their level of agreement a “4” or a “5” on a five-point scale, where “5” is strongly agree.

FIGURE 4:

My education from [INSTITUTION] was worth the time and effort it took.

(% Response)

■ 5 — Strongly agree ■ 4 ■ 3 ■ 2 ■ 1 — Strongly disagree



About half (48%) of alumni agree that their education was worth the cost, which other Gallup research shows tends to be a tough sell among more recent graduates, particularly those who may be paying off student loans.² For example, when asked this same question, 65% of recent undergraduate alumni surveyed in 2015 answered a “4” or “5” on a five-point scale, where “5” is strongly agree, that their education was worth the cost. Seventy-seven percent of all alumni similarly agree.

FIGURE 5:

My education from [INSTITUTION] was worth the cost.

(% Response)

■ 5 — Strongly agree ■ 4 ■ 3 ■ 2 ■ 1 — Strongly disagree



² Crabtree, S., and Seymore, S. (2015). *Recent grads less likely to agree college was worth cost*. Retrieved April 14, 2021 from <https://news.gallup.com/poll/185819/recent-grads-less-likely-agree-college-worth-cost.aspx>

Their coursework prepared them for the jobs — and lives — they have today.

More than half (58%) of 2U partner program alumni rate their level of agreement a “4” or a “5” on a five-point scale, where “5” is strongly agree, that their coursework at their institution prepared them for the job they have today. A similar 62% of 2U partner program alumni agree that their school prepared them well for life after graduation, which is on par with the 63% of national graduate alumni who said the same in surveys before the COVID-19 pandemic.

FIGURE 6:

My coursework at [INSTITUTION] prepared me for the job I have today.

(% Response)

■ 5 — Strongly agree ■ 4 ■ 3 ■ 2 ■ 1 — Strongly disagree



[INSTITUTION] prepared me well for life after earning my graduate degree.

(% Response)

■ 5 — Strongly agree ■ 4 ■ 3 ■ 2 ■ 1 — Strongly disagree



“

I think from just the business courses that filled in the blanks of things I didn't have in undergrad and to the real-world experiences I already had — that kind of made me more well-rounded, but also from a leadership perspective. I definitely gained some new tools that I could apply a lot of times to what I was learning the next day.

— KEVIN

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON, MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

They interacted with other students regularly, either in person or online.

Six in 10 2U partner program alumni agree they had regular opportunities to interact with their classmates at their institution, whether it was in person or online. Twenty-five percent rate their level of agreement a “4” and 35% rate it a “5,” with “5” meaning strongly agree.

FIGURE 7:

I regularly interacted with my classmates at [INSTITUTION], either in person or online.

(% Response)

■ 5 — Strongly agree ■ 4 ■ 3 ■ 2 ■ 1 — Strongly disagree



They received the career preparation support they needed.

One in three (33%) 2U alumni rate their level of agreement with the statement that they received the career preparation support they needed while in graduate school as a “4” or a “5,” with “5” meaning strongly agree. A sizable 24% of alumni said they never sought this type of support because they didn’t need it.

FIGURE 8:

I received the career preparation support I needed at [INSTITUTION].

(% Response)

■ 5 — Strongly agree ■ 4 ■ 3 ■ 2 ■ 1 — Strongly disagree
■ Didn't need career preparation support



“

For me, it was life-changing. I'm an introvert and in person, I would never talk to anybody. I feel like it helped me [open] up ... All the students were different. There are people with different backgrounds ... That variety really helped me because I would see their perspective.

— ERIKA
THE GEORGE WASHINGTON
UNIVERSITY, MASTER OF
HEALTH ADMINISTRATION

Providing Equitable Experiences in Higher Education



GOALS AND OUTCOMES FOR TRADITIONALLY UNDERSERVED ALUMNI

Students of color make up much larger shares of the undergraduate and graduate populations in the U.S. now than they did 20 years ago, and they now represent a larger share of students who earn degrees. However, degree completion rates among Black and Hispanic students generally still lag those of White students, and students of color are taking on a disproportionate amount of student loan debt.

The racial justice movement in the summer of 2020 laid bare the diversity records at corporations and college campuses in the U.S. There are few better times for honest conversations about access to higher education, as well as the quality of that education and the experiences of underserved student populations.

Gallup's national studies of college graduates have shown that as undergraduates, Black students tend to experience significant challenges in accessing the academic resources they need while completing their degrees. Additionally, fewer Black college graduates than White graduates strongly agree that their professors cared about them as a person.

However, the experiences and outcomes of alumni of 2U partner programs who are Black, first generation, or of another race or ethnicity³ suggest it doesn't have to be this way — higher education can help narrow and even close the opportunity gap. The experiences of graduates from 2U partner programs show it is possible for institutions to deliver equitable, high-quality experiences to all students while they are in school, and to all alumni after graduation.

³ Results from alumni who identified as Hispanic, Asian or as another race or ethnicity are not reported separately because sample sizes are too small to report results with reliability.

Black 2U partner program alumni are choosing to go to graduate school for largely the same reasons their White counterparts do — they are most likely doing so in search of a more fulfilling career. And Black alumni are just as likely as White alumni to find one after graduation.

Nearly all Black alumni (94%), like White alumni (97%), achieved a positive career outcome after graduation. Similarly, first-generation alumni have similar goals and success as those who are not the first in their families to attend or graduate from college. Nearly all first-generation alumni (97%) and alumni who are non-first generation (96%) have achieved a positive career outcome after graduation.

Although Black alumni (58%) and alumni of other races and ethnicities (62%) are somewhat less likely to have achieved their specific graduate school goal than White alumni (70%), they are just as likely to have found a more fulfilling career after graduation. Majorities of White alumni (60%), Black alumni (58%) and alumni of other races and ethnicities (62%) said they have.

Among those who found these careers, similar majorities (85% of White alumni, 85% of Black alumni and 84% of those from other races and ethnicities) rate the importance of graduating from their online program to finding those careers a “4” or a “5,” where “5” means very important.

“

I think what prompted me [to go to graduate school] was that as a Black man in America, I have to be twice as good to get half as much. And so, I recognize that there was nobody going to come save me, so I needed to do it myself. And the only way for upward mobility is through education.

— AKIL

WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
IN ST. LOUIS, MASTER OF
LEGAL STUDIES

Are 2U partner programs helping to close the opportunity gap in higher education?

Black 2U partner program alumni and first-generation alumni are often just as likely as their White counterparts to have had the experiences in graduate school that predict positive career outcomes and great lives.

Black and first-generation alumni are about as likely as their counterparts to strongly agree their degree was worth the time, effort and cost, that they received the academic support they needed, that they regularly interacted with classmates, and that their schools prepared them well for life after graduation.

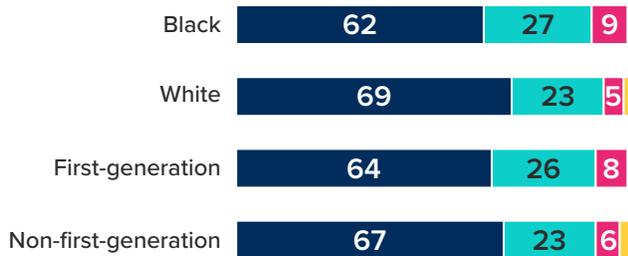
FIGURE 9:

Percentage of alumni who strongly agree with each statement

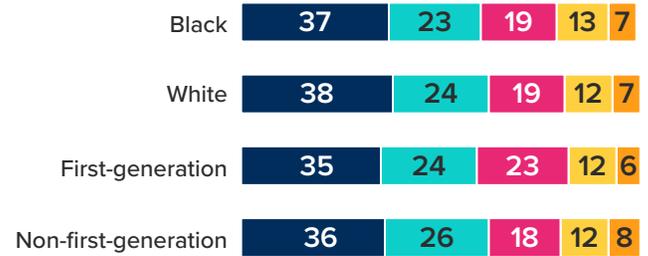
(% Response)*

■ 5 — Strongly agree ■ 4 ■ 3 ■ 2 ■ 1 — Strongly disagree

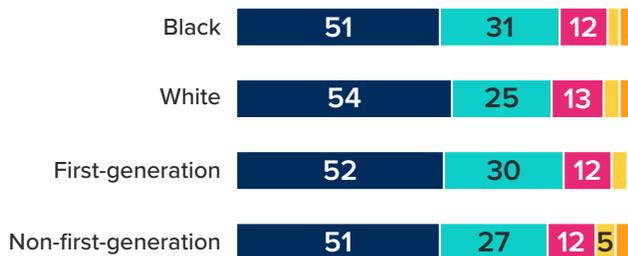
Most of my instructors had real life experience related to my course of study.



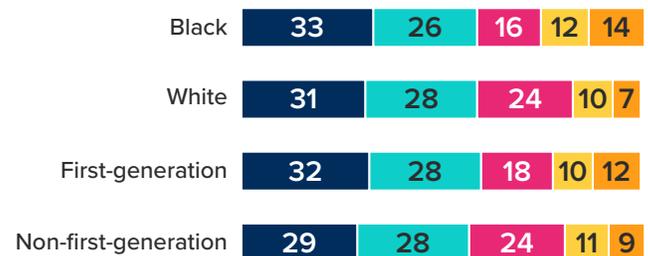
I regularly interacted with my classmates at [INSTITUTION], either in person or online.



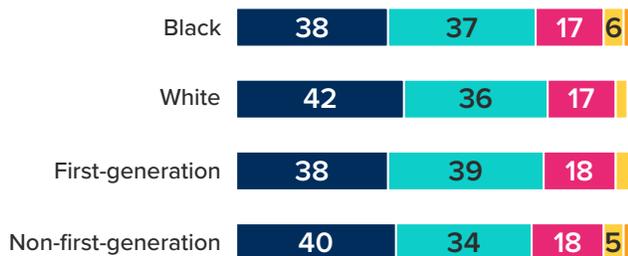
My education from [INSTITUTION] was worth the time and effort it took.



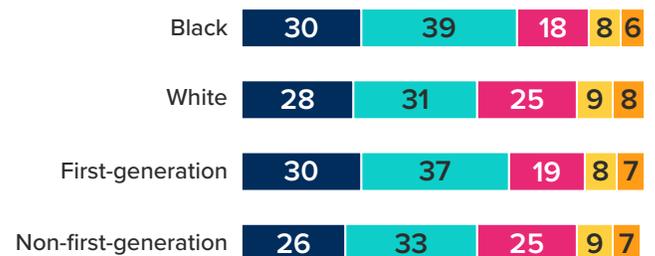
My coursework at [INSTITUTION] prepared me for the job I have today.



I received the academic support I needed at [INSTITUTION].



[INSTITUTION] prepared me well for life after earning my graduate degree.



* Numerical values shown when 5% or higher.

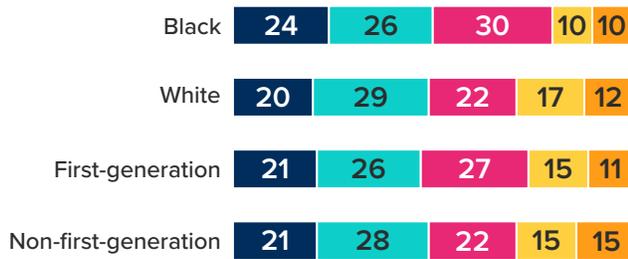
FIGURE 9:

Percentage of alumni who strongly agree with each statement (continued)

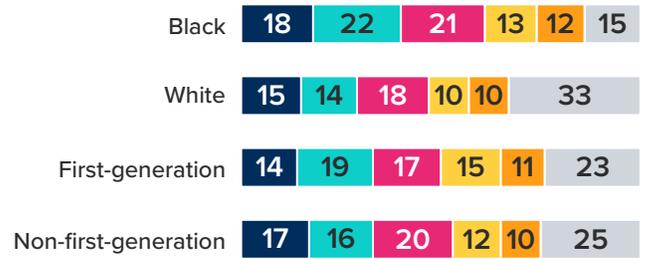
(% Response)

■ 5 — Strongly agree ■ 4 ■ 3 ■ 2 ■ 1 — Strongly disagree ■ Didn't need career preparation support

My education from [INSTITUTION] was worth the cost.



I received the career preparation support I needed at [INSTITUTION].



Despite these equitable school experiences, Black and first-generation alumni continue to experience inequities in their careers after graduation, highlighting areas where higher education could play a greater role in graduates' long-term success.

Black alumni fall short — relative to White alumni — on reaching all their goals post-graduation. Black alumni are nearly as likely to earn promotions after graduation, but they are less likely than White alumni to see their wages increase or to change their field of work. Black alumni are also less likely than White alumni to feel they have more up-to-date and relevant skills upon graduation.

First-generation 2U partner program alumni also fall short — compared with those who are non-first-generation alumni — on reaching all their goals post-graduation. First-generation alumni are as likely as those who are non-first-generation alumni to say their skills are more up to date and relevant, but they are less likely than their counterparts who are non-first-generation alumni to get promotions after graduation, change careers, and see their wages increase somewhat or greatly.

Further, Black 2U partner program alumni are less likely to be engaged at work than their White counterparts. Forty-one percent of White alumni are engaged at work, compared with 27% of Black alumni. The gap is the same between first-generation alumni (31%) and non-first-generation alumni (45%).

These differences in employee engagement levels are not unique to 2U partner program alumni and are part of a much broader discussion about race in the workplace. Panel surveys from Gallup's Center on Black Voices show that Black workers in the U.S., and particularly Black female workers, are less likely to be engaged at work compared with White workers. These data reinforce the need for higher education institutions to not only build equitable experiences in their classrooms but provide more intentional support to alumni in building the competencies, connections and career skills that position them for success after graduation.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Online Graduate Program Was “Right Direction” for Graduate

Aaron graduated from American University with a Master of Business Administration. He currently works as a government affairs consultant.

Aaron already had a demanding job when he decided to attend graduate school. “I needed that next level of understanding and instruction and experience with corporate structure,” he said. “And that’s why I decided to get my MBA.”

But Aaron needed to find a graduate program that allowed him to continue working full time. He could not afford to take any time off. “I don’t come from a family of too much means ... I was on the hook to pay for my own graduate degree,” he said. “I decided to just do the online program because the schedule was much more amenable to my work schedule ... I just felt like that was the right direction for me.”

“I needed that next level of understanding and instruction and experience with corporate structure.”

While in graduate school, Aaron said he wanted to fully explore the nexus of government and the commercial sector. “I would say that my studies, and what I learned, and the relationships that I gained at American, have certainly helped me ... merge my knowledge of government and the legislative and the regulatory process with the challenges that companies and corporations face,” he said.

**– AARON,
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY, MASTER OF
BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION**

2U Partner Program Alumni Show Resiliency Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic



Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, 2U partner program alumni are staying engaged at work and maintaining a deep, emotional and intellectual connection to their workplaces. Most alumni remain satisfied with their lives, and many are still rating their lives positively enough to be considered thriving. None of them are suffering.

Nearly four in 10 employed 2U partner program alumni are engaged at work, similar to the national average.

In a relatively volatile year for most employees in the U.S. — during which Gallup has seen typically stable employee engagement rates fluctuate more than ever — the 37% of 2U partner program alumni who are engaged at work is in line with the national 2020 average of 36%.

These figures are important because Gallup analysis shows that employee engagement is a strong predictor of performance in crises. It takes an exceptional amount of resiliency for employees to thrive amid such a disruption.

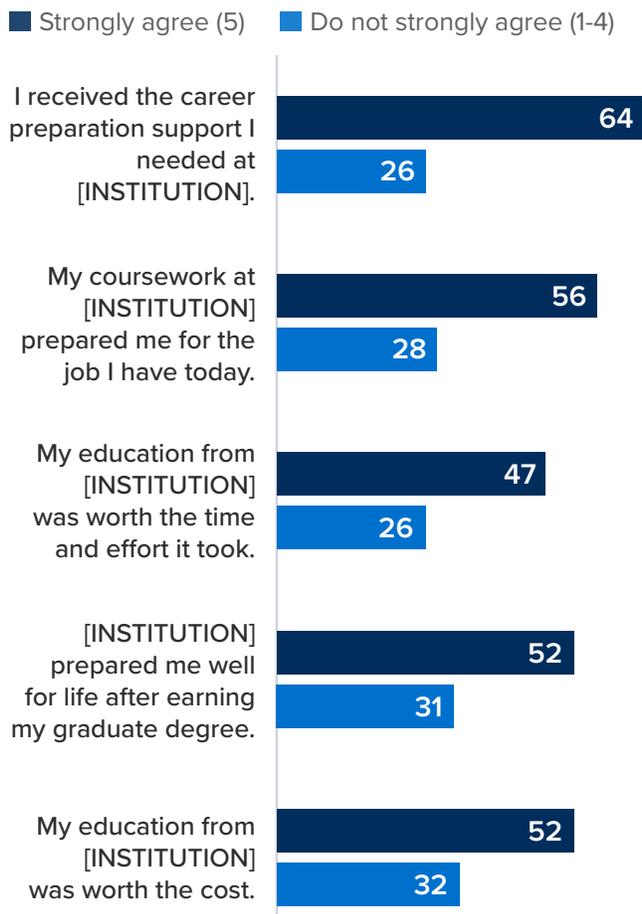
Some of the resiliency among 2U partner program alumni may be rooted in their experiences in graduate school: If they strongly agreed that their programs were worth the time, effort and cost, they were more likely to be engaged at work.

Having mentors and challenging coursework in their graduate programs was also predictive of their engagement at work. Often, these mentors remain in touch with graduates long after graduation and can be helpful partners in navigating workplace and career challenges graduates face after completing their degree.

Sixty-four percent of 2U partner program alumni who strongly agree that they received needed career preparation and support in graduate school are engaged at work versus 26% of those who do not strongly agree. Figure 10 shows the gaps in the percentage of alumni who are engaged at work between those who strongly agree with each item and those who do not.

FIGURE 10:

Percentage of alumni who are engaged at work by level of agreement with each statement



Gallup studies show that individuals who are thriving in five interrelated elements of their wellbeing — career, social, financial, community and physical — are less likely to change employers voluntarily and are more resilient in the face of layoffs or natural catastrophes.⁴ They are better able to take care of their own basic needs, adapt to change, and contribute to and support the success of their organizations and communities — all of which have been critical traits in 2020 and 2021.

4 Witters, D. (2018). *Record 21 states see decline in well-being in 2017*. Retrieved April 14, 2021 from <https://news.gallup.com/poll/226517/record-states-decline-2017.aspx>.

“

Even after graduating, I was building my first model and I reached out to one of my professors who was very hands on, in-depth and detailed, and he actually helped me.

— CHRISTOPHER
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY,
MASTER OF SCIENCE
IN ANALYTICS

Even amid a pandemic, the majority of 2U partner program alumni (89%) are satisfied with their lives overall, and rate their lives positively enough to be considered thriving (69%).

The majority of 2U alumni (78%) are thriving — or strong and consistent — in at least one of the five elements of wellbeing that Gallup measures. Alumni are strongest in the areas of social wellbeing (55% are thriving) — which means they have strong, supportive relationships — and career wellbeing (46% are thriving) — which means they like what they do every day and are motivated to achieve their goals. Both figures are higher than the latest U.S. national averages (35% of national adults are thriving in social wellbeing and 32% of national adults are thriving in career wellbeing).

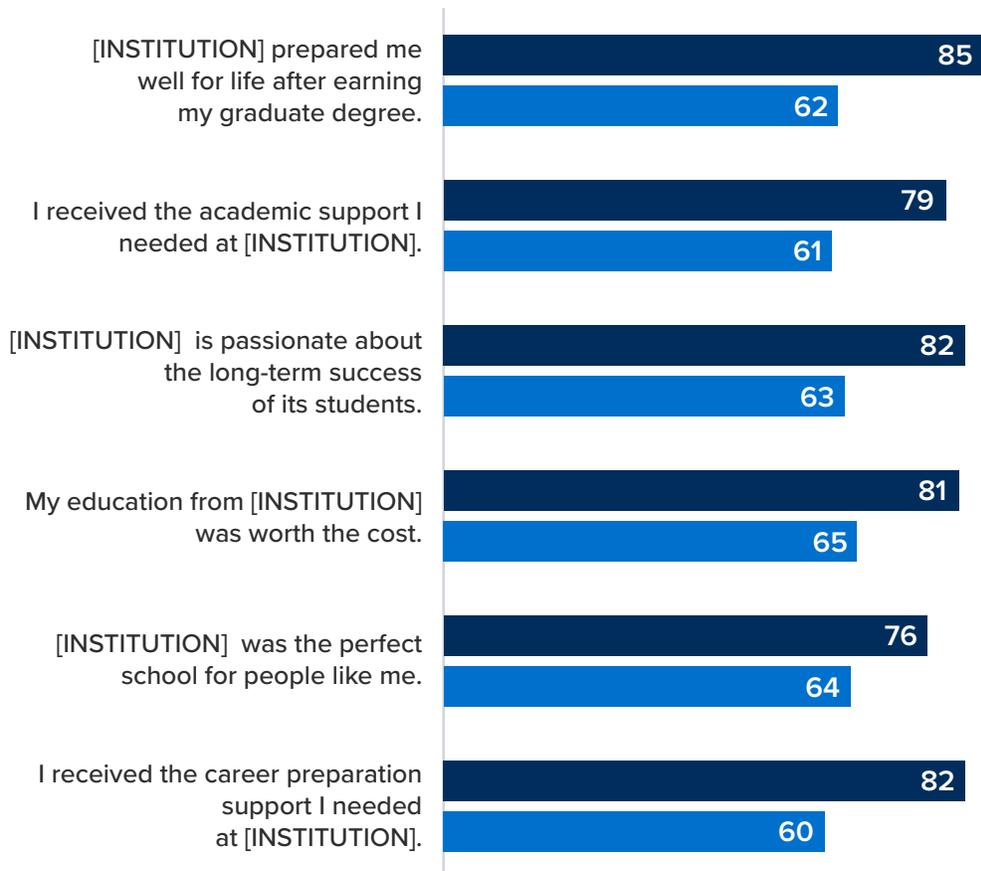
Some of the experiences alumni had in graduate school may have prepared them for this moment. If alumni strongly agree their education prepared them for life after college, they received the academic and career preparation support they needed, and they felt their education was worth the cost, they are more likely to give high life evaluations.

Figure 11 shows the gaps in the percentage of alumni who are thriving in at least one element of wellbeing between those who strongly agree with each item and those who do not.

FIGURE 11:

Percentage of alumni who are thriving in at least one element of wellbeing

■ Strongly agree (5) ■ Do not strongly agree (1-4)



Conclusion



The second Gallup-2U partner program graduate alumni study offers insights into what is working for students in their online graduate programs. Overall, the results show it is possible for graduates to get the outcomes they want from an online graduate program. Nearly all alumni — regardless of gender, race or first-generation status — achieved a positive career outcome after graduation and most of them achieved their personal goal for attending graduate school.

Further, the study reveals that many of these alumni were able to achieve these outcomes in truly extraordinary times and circumstances, and they demonstrated resilience at work and in their lives in general.

The study also reinforces how alumni's experiences as students in graduate school play an important role in their success after graduation. Alumni were more likely to get what they wanted from their online program if they had instructors with real life experience, received the career preparation support they needed, interacted regularly with other students and had coursework that prepared them for the jobs they have today.

Nevertheless, even if graduates have equitable experiences in graduate school, as many 2U alumni from traditionally underserved populations do, they may still face inequity in the workforce after graduation. 2U alumni of color are not seeing the salary boost after graduation that their White peers receive, and they are less likely to be engaged at work. While higher education institutions cannot control what happens in the workplace, this study suggests they can do more to provide career support services to graduates and help bridge the gap between classrooms and careers.

Methodology

Results for The 2020 Gallup-2U Graduate Alumni Outcomes Study are based on web surveys conducted Oct. 7-Nov. 9, 2020, with a sample of 669 respondents who completed online graduate degrees at 2U-powered programs between 2015 and 2020. These respondents graduated from a variety of graduate programs that are hosted on the 2U learning management system at the following institutions: American University, The George Washington University, New York University, Southern Methodist University, Pepperdine University, University of Dayton and Washington University in St. Louis. Gallup-2U Graduate Alumni Outcomes Study interviews were conducted in English only.

About 2U

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About Gallup

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