

INTRODUCTION

The increasingly diverse landscape of American higher education necessitates strategic, evidence-based approaches to boost student retention. Literature consistently shows that meaningful engagement beyond the classroom contributes to a more impactful and enduring educational experience.

OBJECTIVE

Identify the barriers and motivations to involvement within the Department of Animal Science, to improve student experience and persistence.

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS

Undergraduate students enrolled in Introduction to Animal Science or Introduction to Equine Science

RESPONSES COLLECTED

Total responses collected:
N=358

ELIGIBILITY

Consent to participate in the study
N=346

TOTAL INCLUDED

Completed 75% or more of the survey questions
N=335

Survey Structure

- 36-questions administered via Qualtrics
- Student self-reported demographics, academic status, and career goals were collected.
- An additional series of Likert scale questions were employed to measure students' social confidence and their perception of extracurricular involvement as it relates to their overall educational experience.
- All data was analyzed using RStudio.

Perceived Student Confidence and Importance of Extracurriculars in Education

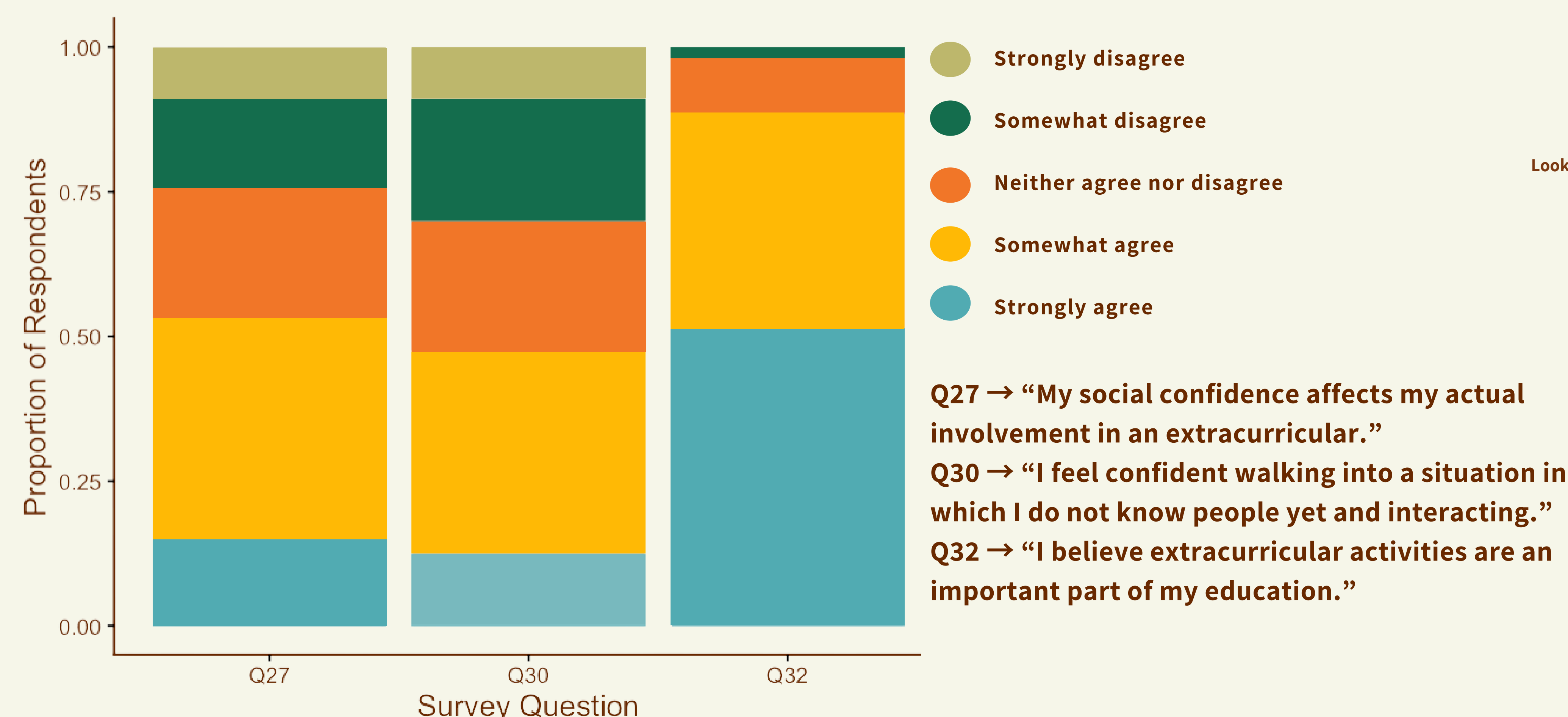


FIGURE 1. THREE REPRESENTATIVE RESPONSES FROM A SERIES OF 10, COMPARING STUDENTS' SOCIAL CONFIDENCE AS IT RELATES TO EXTRACURRICULAR INVOLVEMENT. THESE WERE CHOSEN AS THEY RELATE TO CORE THEMATIC AREAS OF THE STUDY: THE EXISTING SOCIAL CONFIDENCE AND THE PERCEIVED IMPACT OF EXTRACURRICULAR INVOLVEMENT. STATEMENTS WERE PROVIDED AND STUDENTS WERE ASKED TO RANK THEIR AGREEANCE ON A 5-POINT LIKERT SCALE.

What Students Want to Gain from Extracurriculars

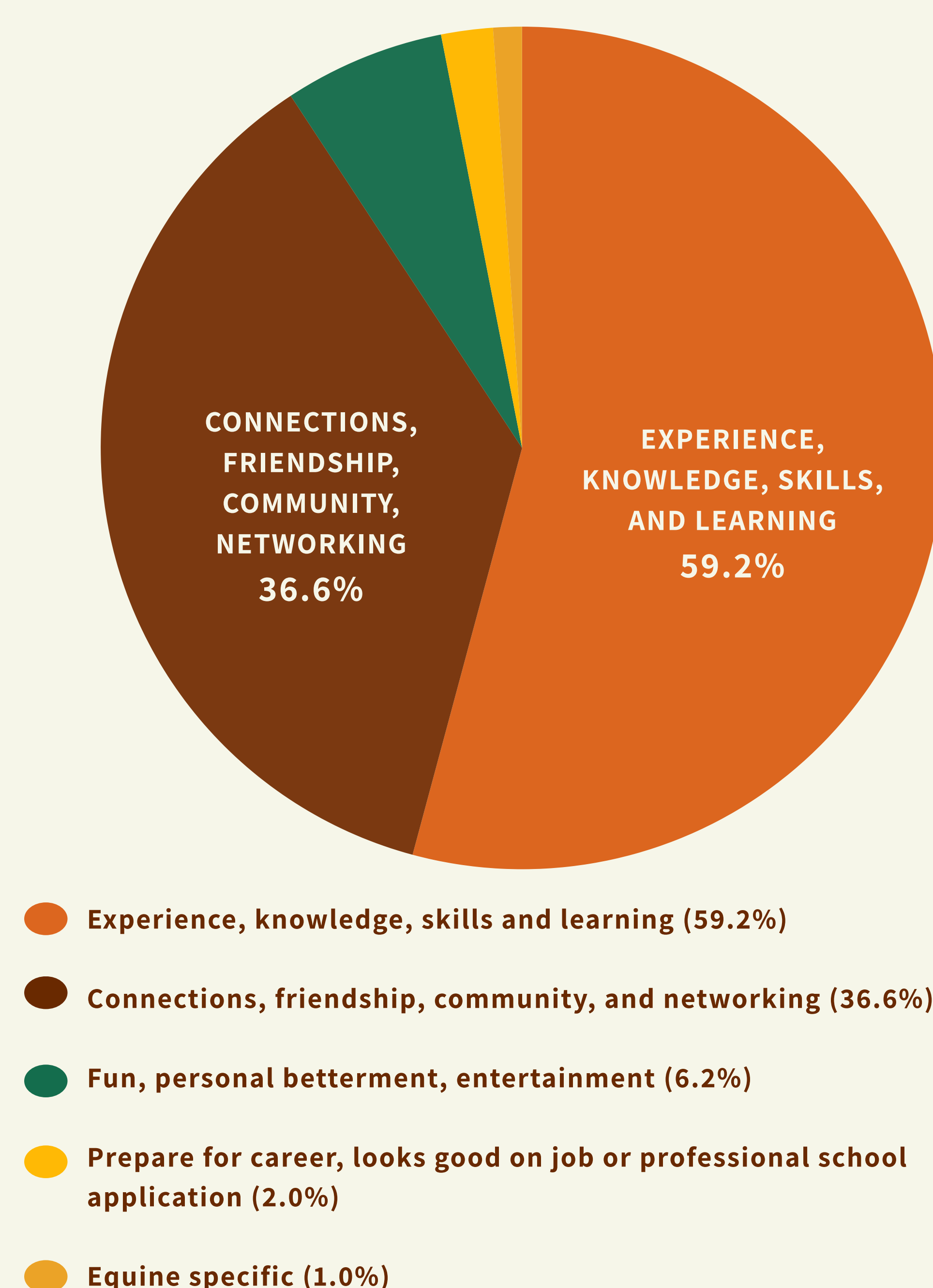


FIGURE 2. MAJOR THEMES DRAWN FROM STUDENT RESPONSES TO THE PROMPT, “WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO GAIN BY BEING INVOLVED IN EXTRACURRICULARS?”

Perceived Barriers to Participation in Extracurriculars

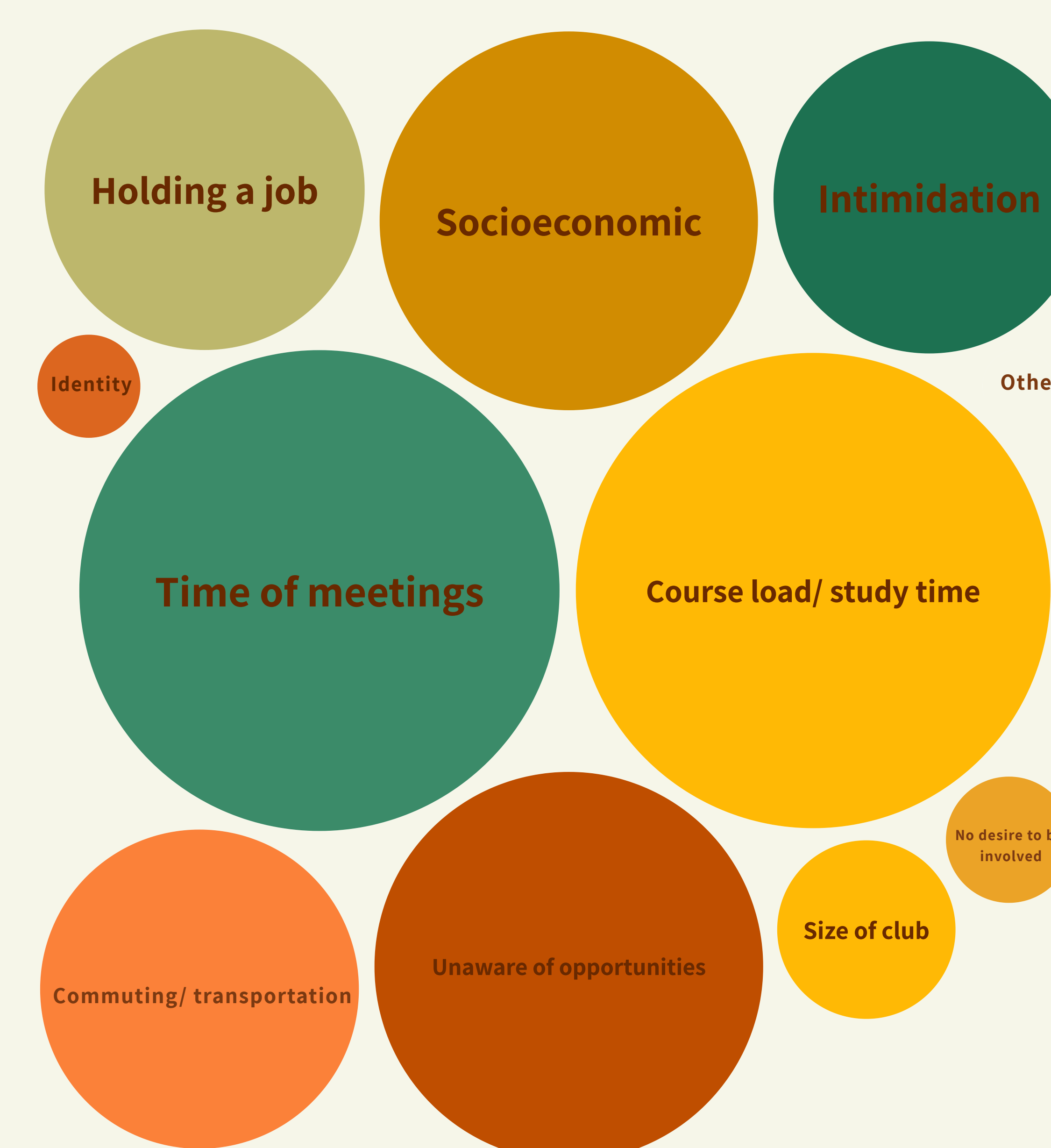


FIGURE 3. SELF REPORTED BARRIERS TO EXTRACURRICULAR PARTICIPATION. FREQUENCY OF RESPONSES CORRESPOND WITH THE SIZE OF THE BUBBLE.

Motivation for Joining Extracurriculars

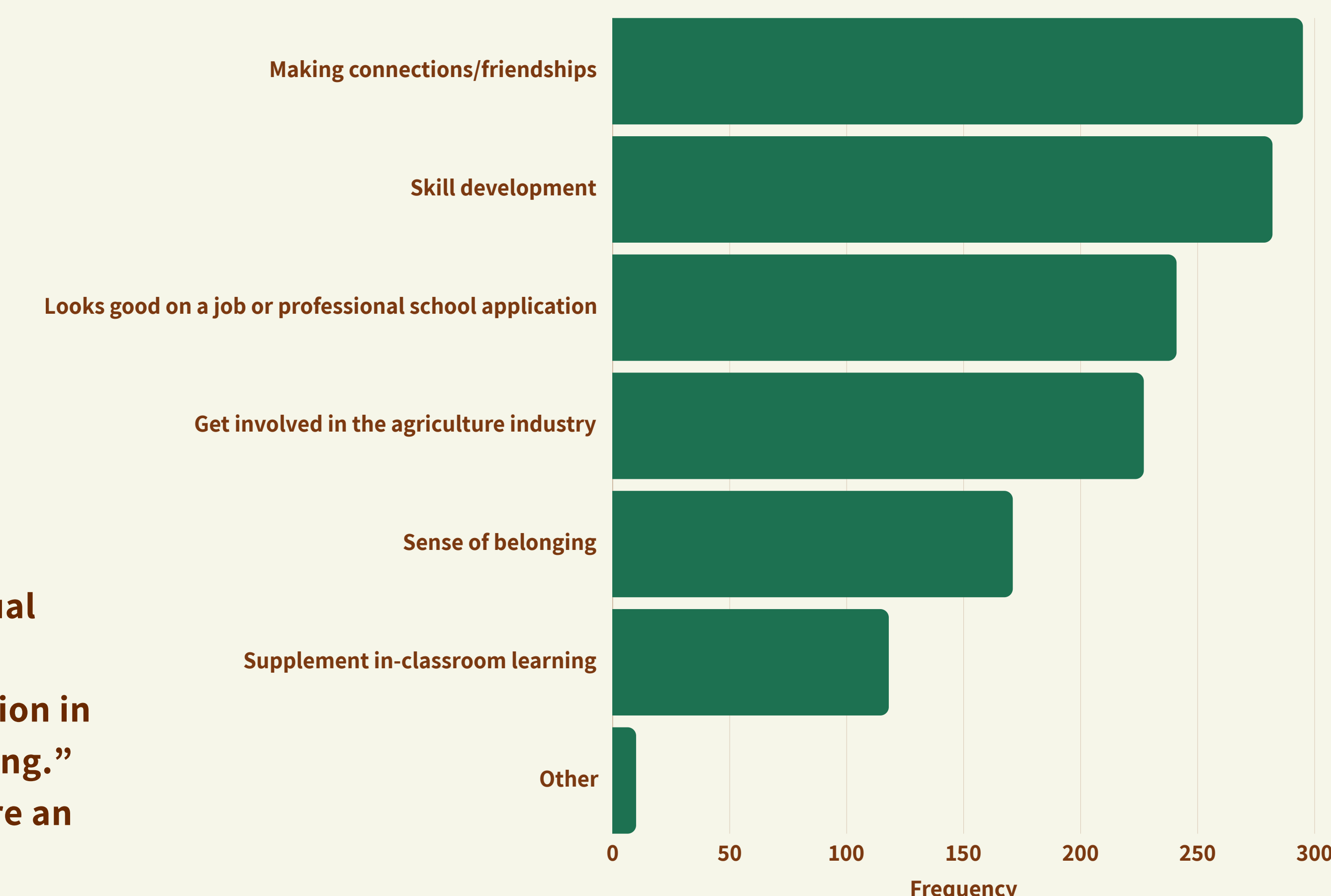


FIGURE 4. SELF REPORTED MOTIVATIONS FOR JOINING EXTRACURRICULARS. PARTICIPANTS WERE ABLE TO SELECT MULTIPLE RESPONSES.

- 75% OF PARTICIPANTS IDENTIFIED AS “WHITE (A PERSON HAVING ORIGINS IN ANY OF THE ORIGINAL PEOPLES OF EUROPE, THE MIDDLE EAST, OR NORTH AFRICA)”
- 30% OF PARTICIPANTS IDENTIFIED CSU FIRST GENERATION STUDENT (ONE WHOSE PARENTS HAVE NOT COMPLETED A BACHELORS DEGREE)
- 61% OF PARTICIPANTS PREVIOUSLY RESIDED IN A STATE OR COUNTRY OTHER THAN COLORADO
- 52% OF PARTICIPANTS DID NOT HAVE AN PREVIOUS DIRECT INVOLVEMENT IN THE AGRICULTURAL COMMUNITY PRIOR TO CSU



2 in 10 students' households live below the poverty line for Fort Collins

FIGURE 5. STUDENT SELF-REPORTED DEMOGRAPHICS

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Departmental assessment of the impact and quality of extracurricular offerings to ensure worthwhile student investment.
- Streamline resource access to ensure students, especially those underrepresented, are aware of extracurricular opportunities.
- Redesign core courses to embed research or community-engaged projects, guaranteeing universal high-impact experience participation.
- Cultivate departmental community and culture to facilitate social connections and strengthen student social confidence.