



Closing doors to opportunity: How financial, sociocultural and institutional barriers may inhibit participation in college internships

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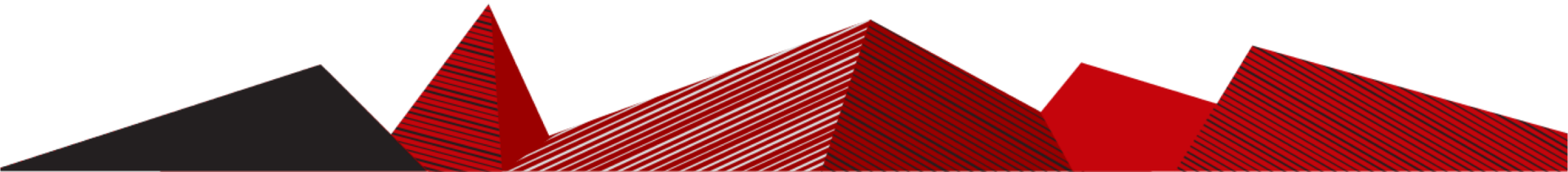
CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON
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Wisconsin Center for
Education Research
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Background: Internship considered a “win-win-win” for students, educators, and employers

1. 49% of college seniors took an internship, practicum, coop, or field experience (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2018).
2. Internships are associated with positive career development and employment outcomes (Hora, Wolfgram, & Thompson, 2017), leading some scholars to consider internships an influential “door opener” to opportunity (Saniter & Siedler, 2014).
3. Internships have been designated as a “high-impact” practice (HIP) that can improve student outcomes (Kuh, 2018; NSSE, 2018); recommending a minimum of two HIPs over the college career, and ideally, 1 HIP per year.
4. Barriers to internship participation: Few studies have examined the nature of specific barriers to internship participation, particularly with respect to low-income, first-generation, and/or minoritized college students.



Background: financial, socio-cultural, and institutional to internship participation

Financial barriers

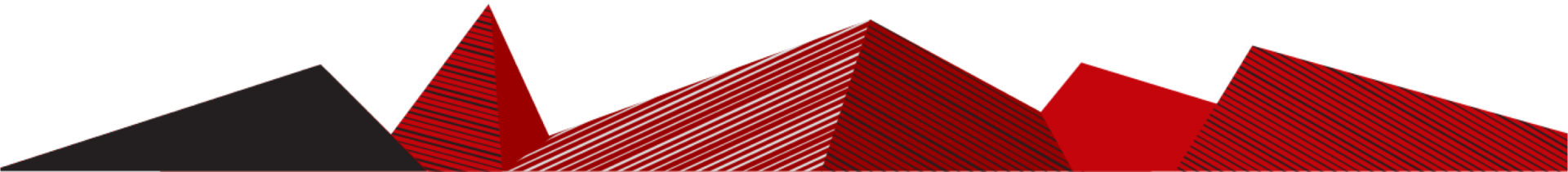
- Problem of the costs to students of unpaid or inadequately paid internships (Matsumoto, 2015)
- High Cost of living, travel, and relocation (Barnett-Vanes, et al., 2014).

Sociocultural barriers

- Social class-based social networks needed to access internships (Ashley, et al., 2015; Boulton, 2015; Frenette, 2013; Milburn, 2009)

Institutional barriers

- The advising, career preparation, and other support services needed to obtain high quality internships are not always accessible to students, and tend to predominate in elite institutions (Finley & McNair, 2013; Allen, et al., 2013).





The **College Internship** Study

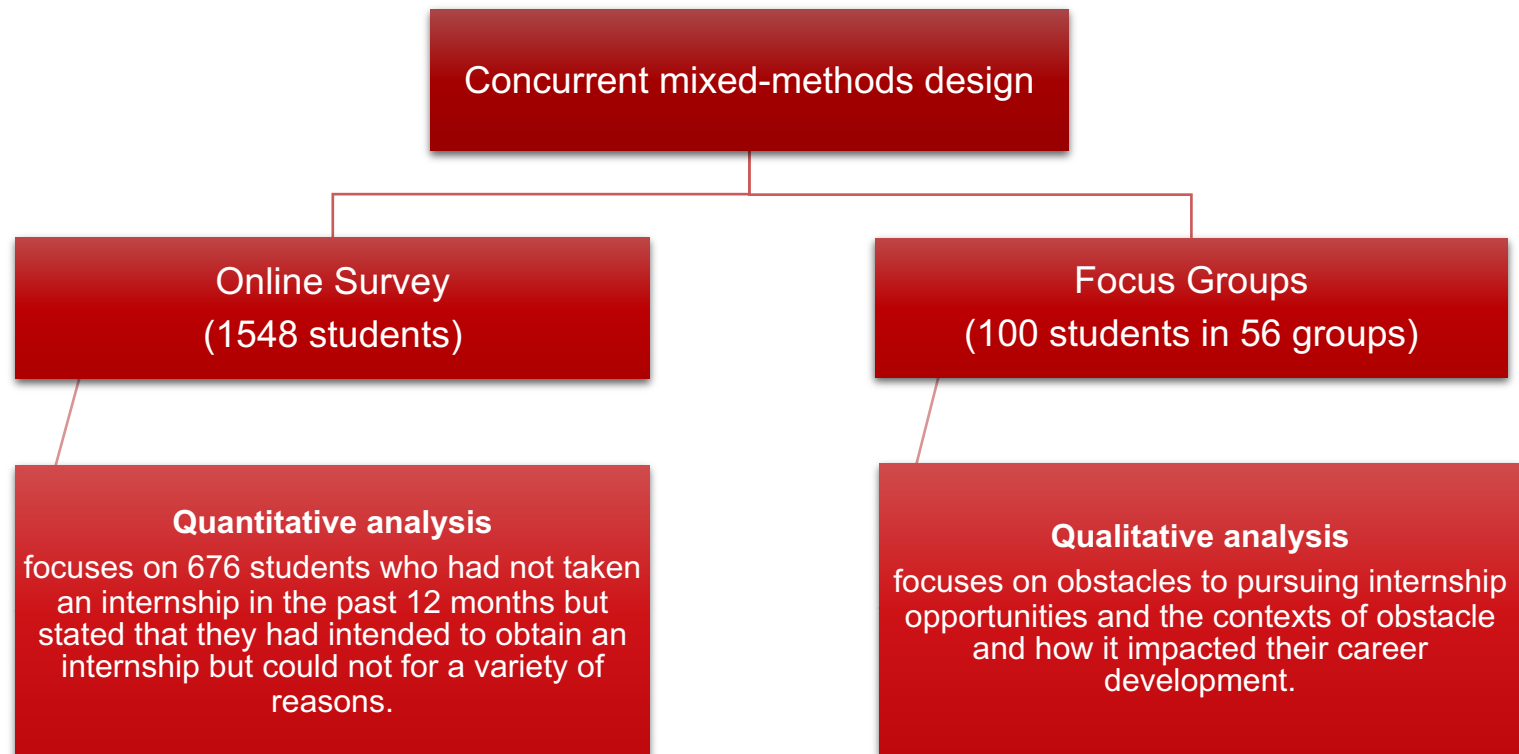
Research Questions

RQ1: What types of barriers keep students from participating in internships?

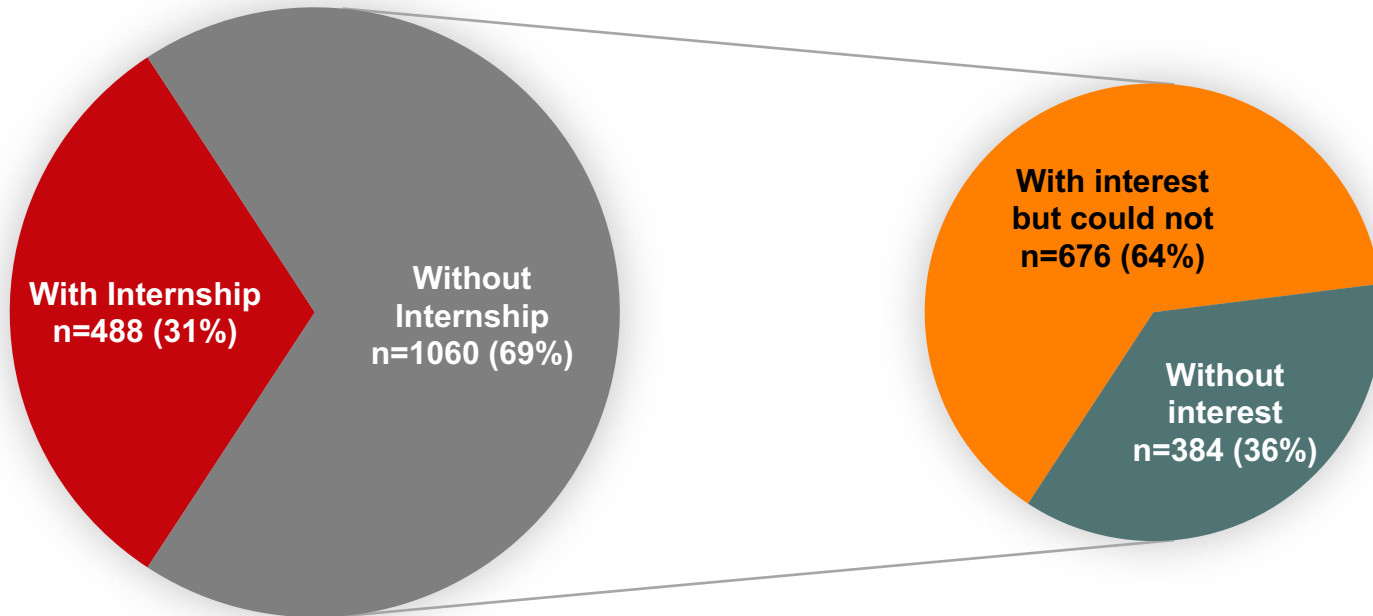
RQ2: How, if at all, do these barriers vary across student socio-cultural, academic, and financial characteristics?

RQ3: What are the mechanisms by which these barriers obstruct access to internships?

Methods: Study Design and Data Collection



Methods: Study Sample



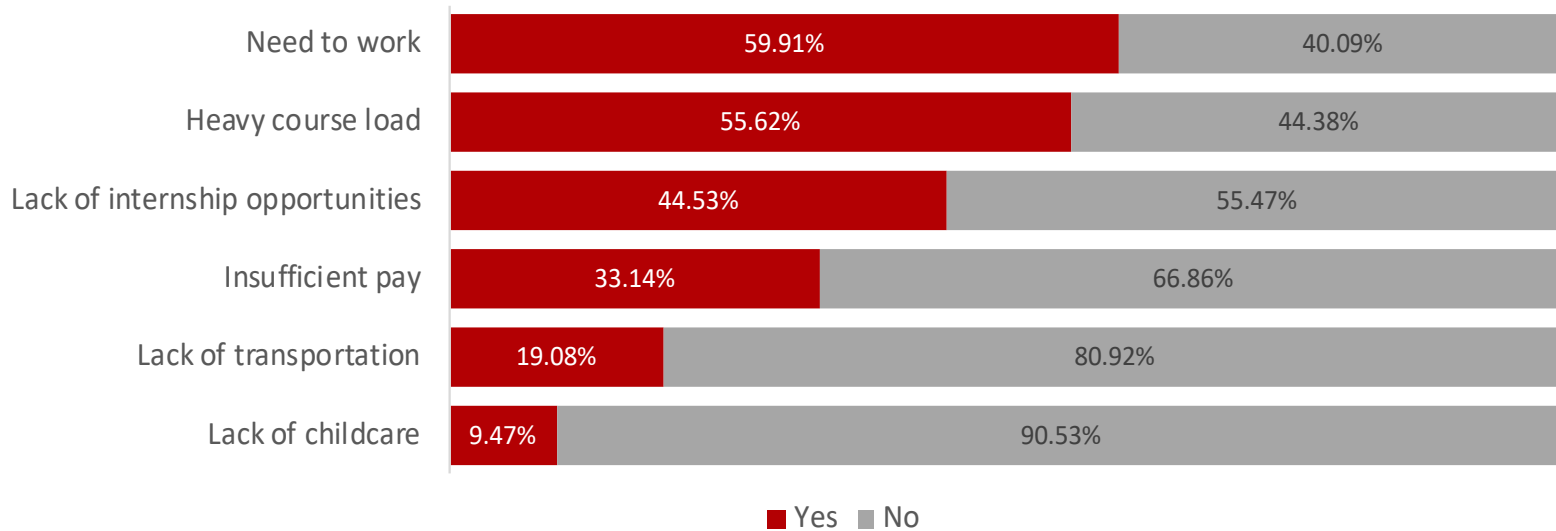
Methods: Study Sample

Five postsecondary institutions: a private Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in the Southeastern U.S., (2) a technical college in Wisconsin, (3) a comprehensive university in Central Wisconsin, (4) a comprehensive university in Southern Wisconsin, and (5) a comprehensive university in Maryland.

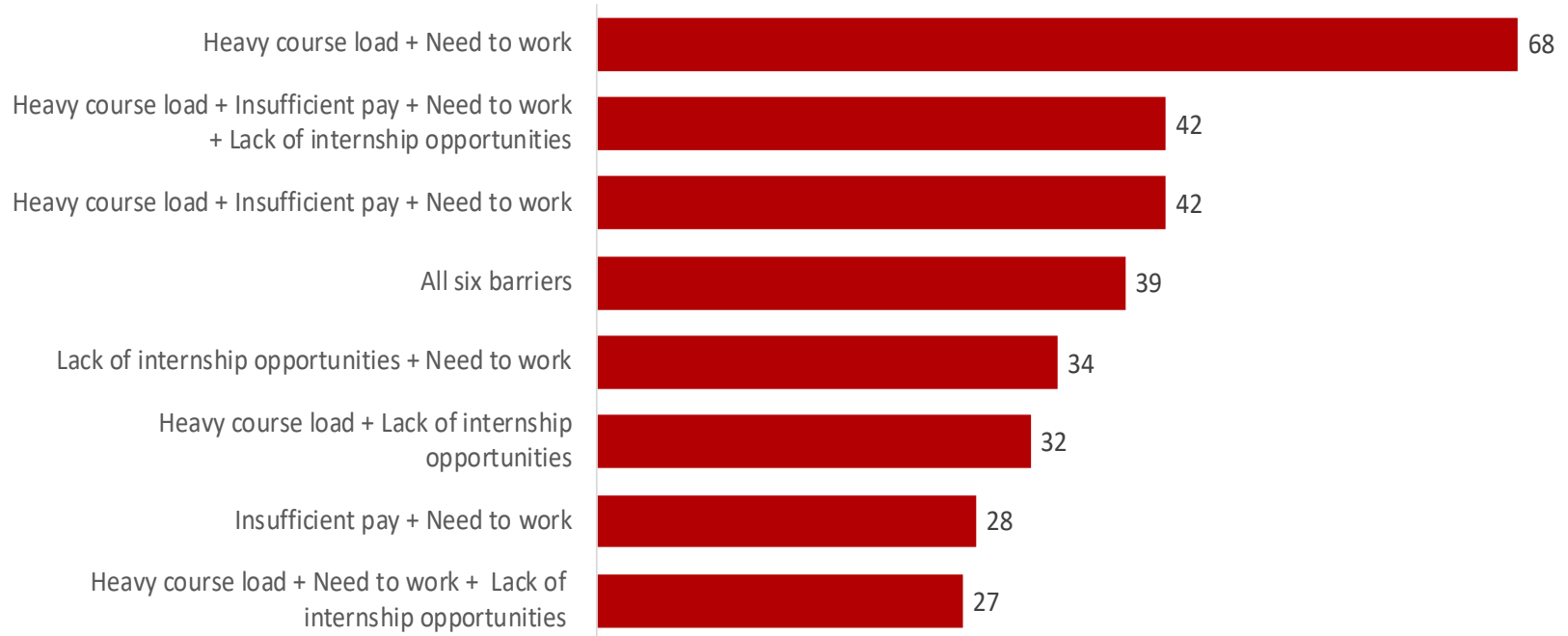
Table 1. Study sample characteristics (n=676)

Characteristics		Frequency	Percent
Socio-cultural			
Age in years, mean (SD)	26.11 (7.88)		
Gender	Male	246	36.39%
	Female	407	60.21%
Race	Asian or Asian-American	56	8.28%
	Black or African American	166	24.56%
	Hispanic or Latino	59	8.73%
	White or Caucasian	366	54.14%
First-generation status	First-generation students	272	40.24%
	Continuing-generation students	404	59.76%
Academic			
Academic enrollment	Full-time enrollment	525	77.66%
	Part-time enrollment	151	22.34%
Financial			
Employment status	Full-time employment	109	16.12%
	Part-time employment	381	56.36%
	No employment	176	26.04%

RQ1 Results: Barriers to Internship Participation



Co-occurrence of Barriers



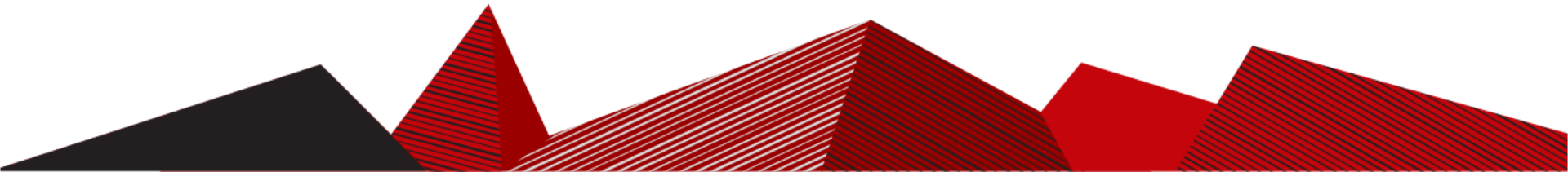
Identified Barriers in Qualitative Data

1. **Compensation**
2. **Scheduling**
3. **Availability**
4. **Location**

“My biggest struggle is most of them are unpaid. I am 26, getting married in a year... trying to do adult things and not getting paid for several months is just not something I can afford to do right now. I'm currently working a sad minimum wage job but it's at an animal shelter. So I'm at least getting some money.

But I wouldn't be able to do classes, do the internship and like actually work to make money. Which is kind of important because I'm basically just paying for school as I can, at the moment. And I've got bills, phone, paying rent, and I have a wedding to save for. [laughs] Money is unfortunately an important motivator in what I'm looking for in an internship, and very few are paid”

(Student at PWI in WI)

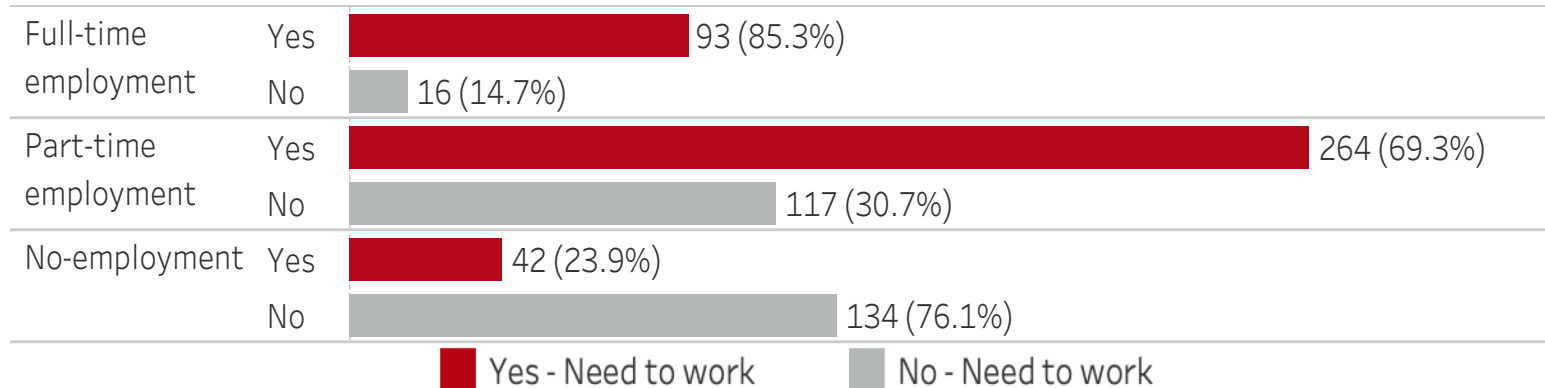


Quantitative Results for RQ2:

How do these barriers vary across students' socio-cultural, academic and financial characteristics?

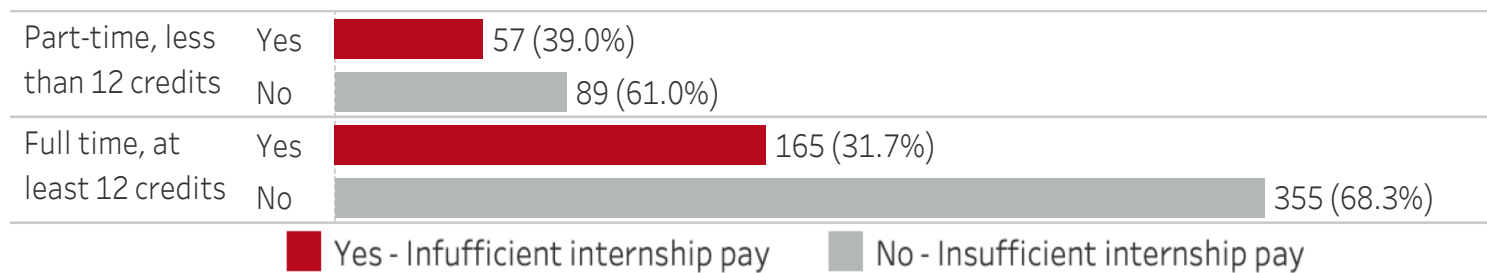
Students working full time are most likely to experience financial and scheduling related barriers:

Need to work at current job and **heavy course load**



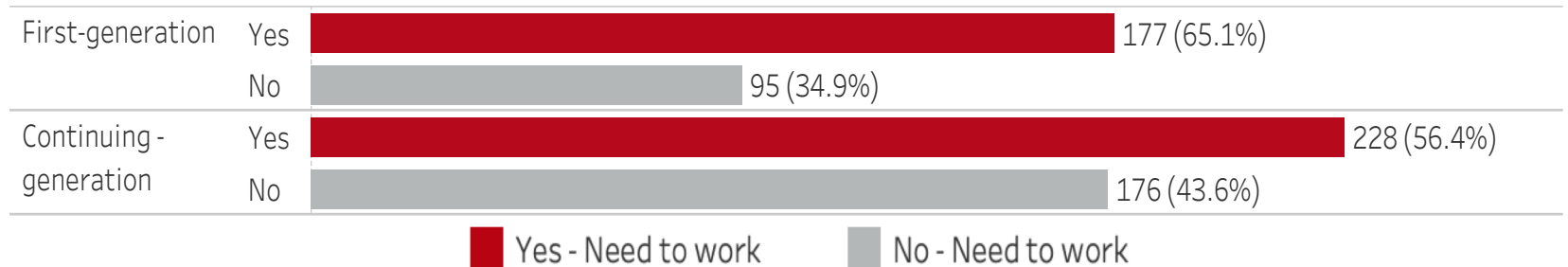
Part-time enrolled students are more likely to experience financial related barriers:

Insufficient internship pay

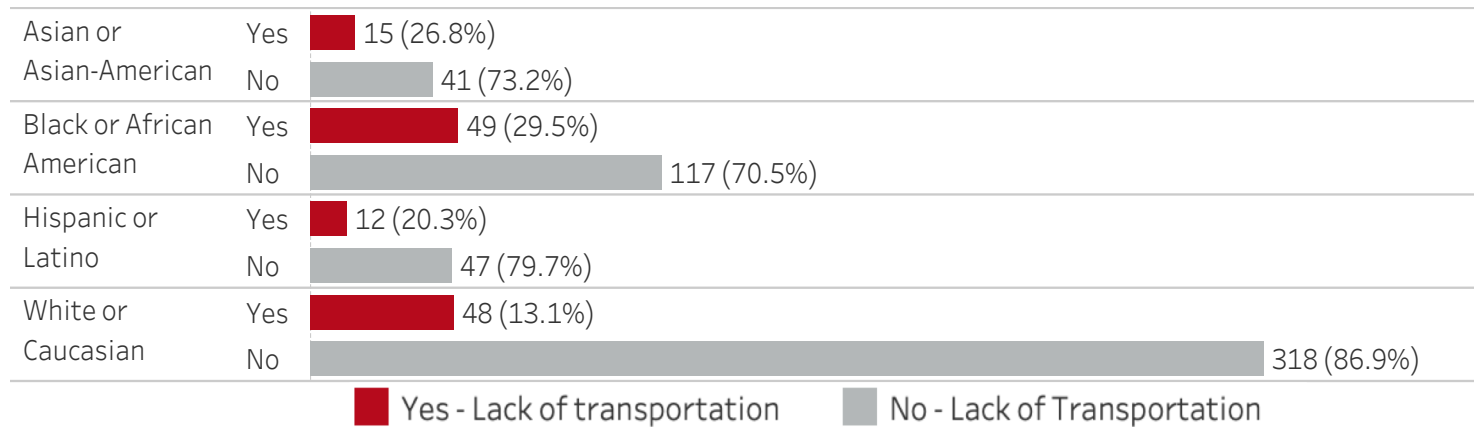


Quantitative Results for RQ2

First-generation students are more likely to experience work schedule barrier:
Need to work at current job



Black students are more likely to experience transportation barrier:
Lack of transportation



Qualitative Results for RQ2

1. ***Students juggling financial obligations.***
2. ***Older students with obligations.***
3. ***First-generation college students.***
4. ***Place-bound students.***

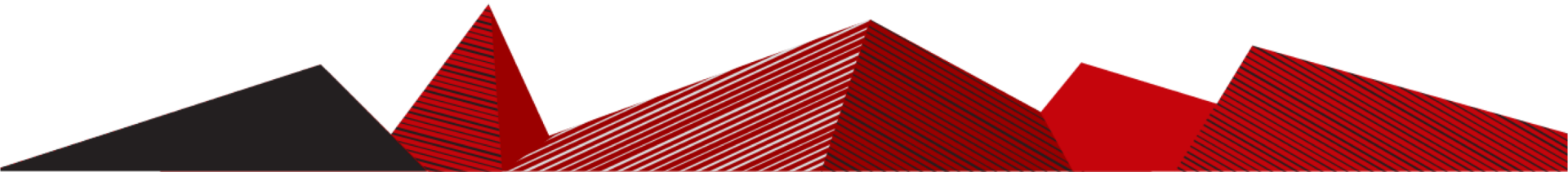
Student 1: I mean, if the internship is like two hours away. How am I going to get there? You provide the transportation? You going to lend me your car? [Laughter]. I'd like that, you know. Not everybody has a car. Not everybody has a car. Not everybody has money. You know what I'm saying. I can't go to New York City or go to Atlanta. You know, just live downtown. I can't do that.

Because I don't have money. You know, you got to pay me something, \$7.25 an hour. No. What's that going to pay for?

[Laughter, multiple speakers]

Student 2: Get you some polish at the store and you can paint your own nails. [Laughter].

Student 1: And that's nothing
(*Student at HBCU in SC*).



Qualitative Results for RQ3:

What are the mechanisms by which these barriers obstruct access to internships?

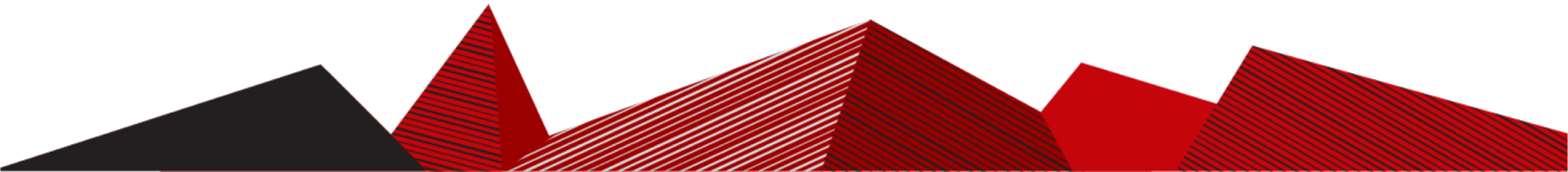
1. ***Barriers impose intractable time conflicts.***

Students felt they lacked connections, skills, and needed voluntary experiences in order to obtain an internship, setting up the ironic catch-22, you need experience to gain experience.

2. ***Barriers create challenges in the internship search and vetting process.***

For example, one student from Maryland lacked the transportation needed and time away from work to obtain volunteer experiences—which she felt was needed obtain an internship—and this situation “... kind of discourages me from applying altogether.”

3. ***Barriers collectively create conditions for students to self-select not to participate.***



Conclusions and Next Steps for *The College Internship Study*

- In our larger study, internship participation is associated with beneficial study outcomes. However, for students who wanted to participate but could not, the barriers to internship participation often affect students in an additive, multi-dimensional manner—not just a single one—and first-generation college students and working students with family obligations (not a small group) are at a particular disadvantage.
- The problem of barriers to internship participation should be a central concern to discussions and efforts to scale up internships (as an impactful HIP) in order for institutions to make them accessible to ALL students.
- Expansion of the study and longitudinal follow-up is ongoing, and analysis of educator/employer interviews to understand their perspectives on internships.

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