

Students and Instructors of Languages at Community Colleges (SILCC) Surveys: Results from the Student Surveys, Fall 2015

Language at the Community College Nexus,
Center for Integrated Language Communities

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About the SILCC Student Surveys

What motivates students to study language at the community college level? What are the linguistic, academic and demographic profiles of community college language students?

To answer these questions, the Language at the Community College Nexus project at the Center for Integrated Language Communities administered surveys to students and instructors of languages other than English at community colleges in Fall 2015. 1,756 students and 140 instructors at 101 different community colleges in 33 states across the U.S. completed the surveys. The following report presents results from the student surveys.

Survey Methods

Starting with a list of 831 Community Colleges affiliated with the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), email addresses of instructors of languages other than English were manually gathered from public websites of each two-year school during the Spring and Summer of 2015. The survey development team searched for a department of “modern” or “foreign” language, or “humanities,” on each school website. The team also searched for instructors of languages other than English through school directories when possible to identify instructors who taught languages in non-language related departments, such as a Business Department offering Spanish for Business. A total of 3,174 email addresses were collected.

An email requesting participation in the Students and Instructors of Languages at Community Colleges (SILCC) surveys was sent to all 3,174 instructors found with contact information. Participation consisted of completing an instructor survey and administering a student survey to the students of one section of an in-person course taught in Fall 2015. Out of the 3,174 emails sent, 226 were returned as an incorrect or outdated email address. Of the remaining 2,948 instructors contacted, 174 agreed to participate and provided information on the course(s) they taught in Fall 2015, and were mailed a packet of surveys. 151 instructors returned packets of surveys to the researchers. A total of 140

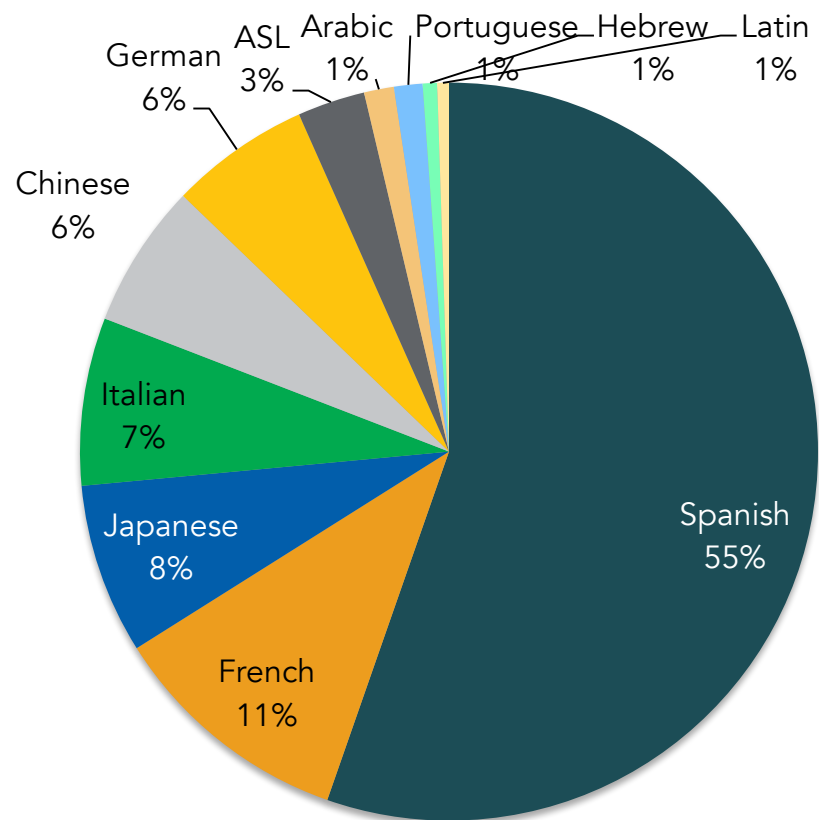
valid instructor surveys and 1,756 valid student surveys were collected from 150 courses at 101 community colleges in 33 states.

Instructors who agreed to participate were asked for the names of the courses they were teaching during the Fall 2015 semester and the number of students enrolled in each section. For instructors teaching more than one course, a course was randomly selected for them from their list of courses in which to administer the survey to the students and about which to answer questions on the instructor survey. Paper surveys were mailed to instructors who agreed to participate in the study. One copy of the instructor survey and a number of student surveys corresponding to the size of the class enrollment were included in the packet, along with a return envelope for the completed surveys. Although response rates to online surveys may be higher than to paper surveys among community college students*, the research team was logistically unable to conduct online surveys without collecting the identities and email addresses of students in the selected course sections. The research team also believed that group-administering surveys in class would likely yield higher response rates than requesting students to complete the surveys outside of class. Instructors who completed the surveys received a \$50 gift certificate as compensation for organizing the administration of surveys and coordinating the receipt and return of survey packets.

* Sax, L. J., Gilmartin, S. K., Lee, J. J. & Hagedorn L. S. (2008). Using web surveys to reach community college students: An analysis of response rates and response bias. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 32, 712-729.

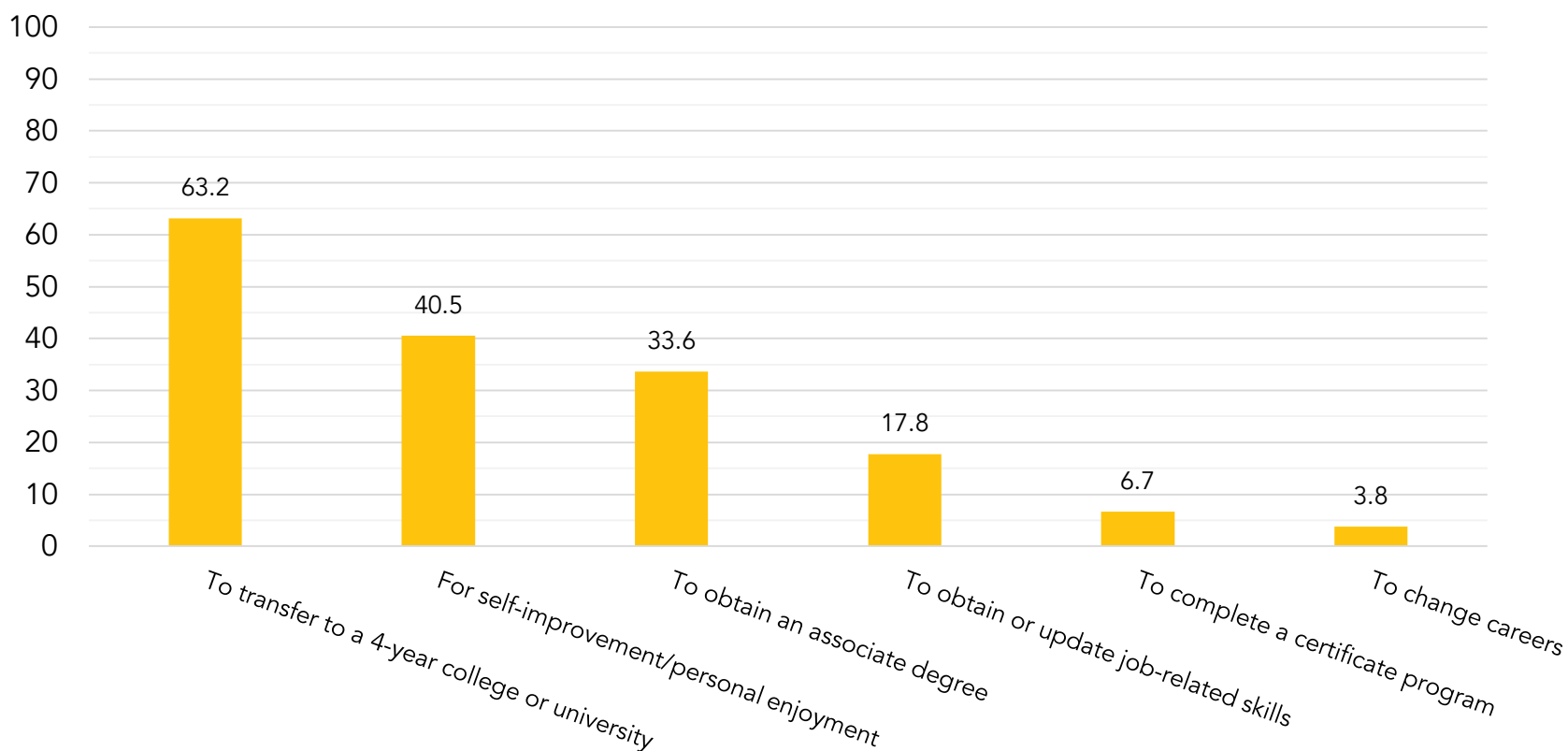
Language Studied and Motivations

What language are you currently studying in this class?



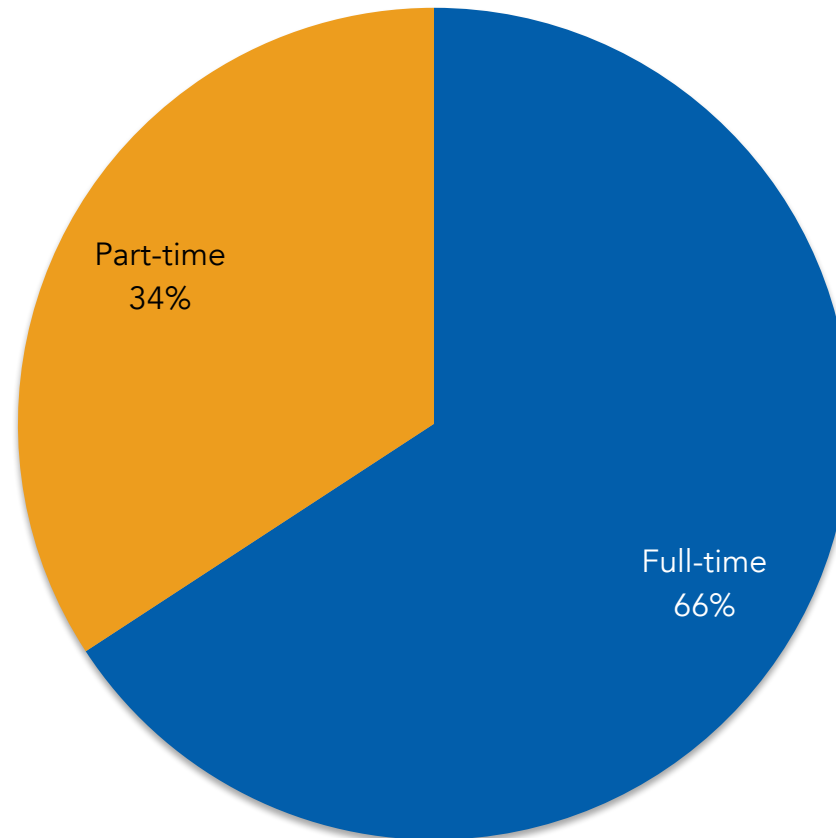
Just over 55% of respondents were studying Spanish, by far the most common language of study in the sample.

Which of the following are your reasons/goals for attending this college?
Check all that apply.



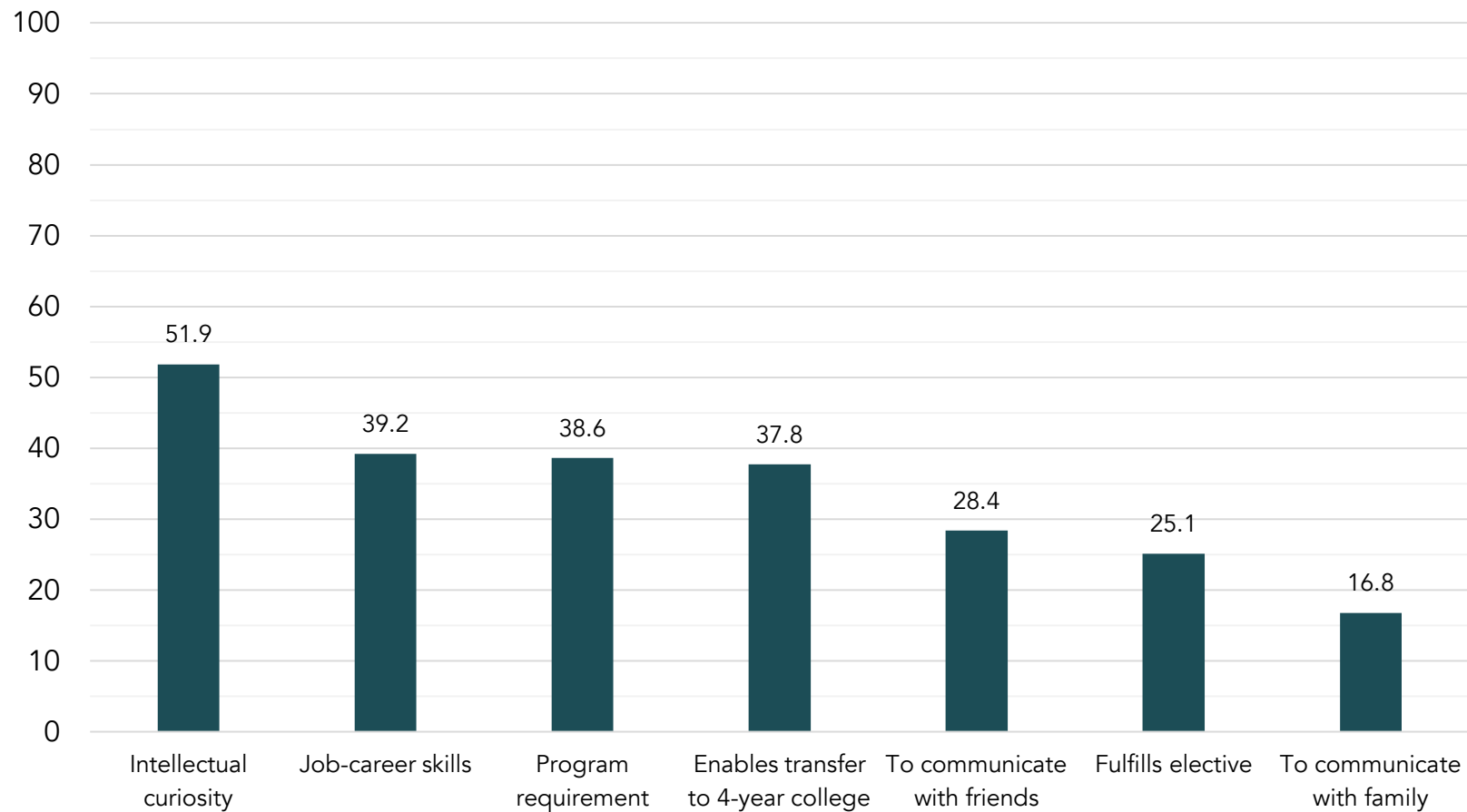
Nearly two-thirds of students reported attending community college for the purpose of transferring to a 4-year college or university. Other frequent reasons were for self-improvement (just over two-fifths of respondents) or to obtain an associate degree (just over one-third of respondents).

For this current academic term, how would you characterize your enrollment at this college?



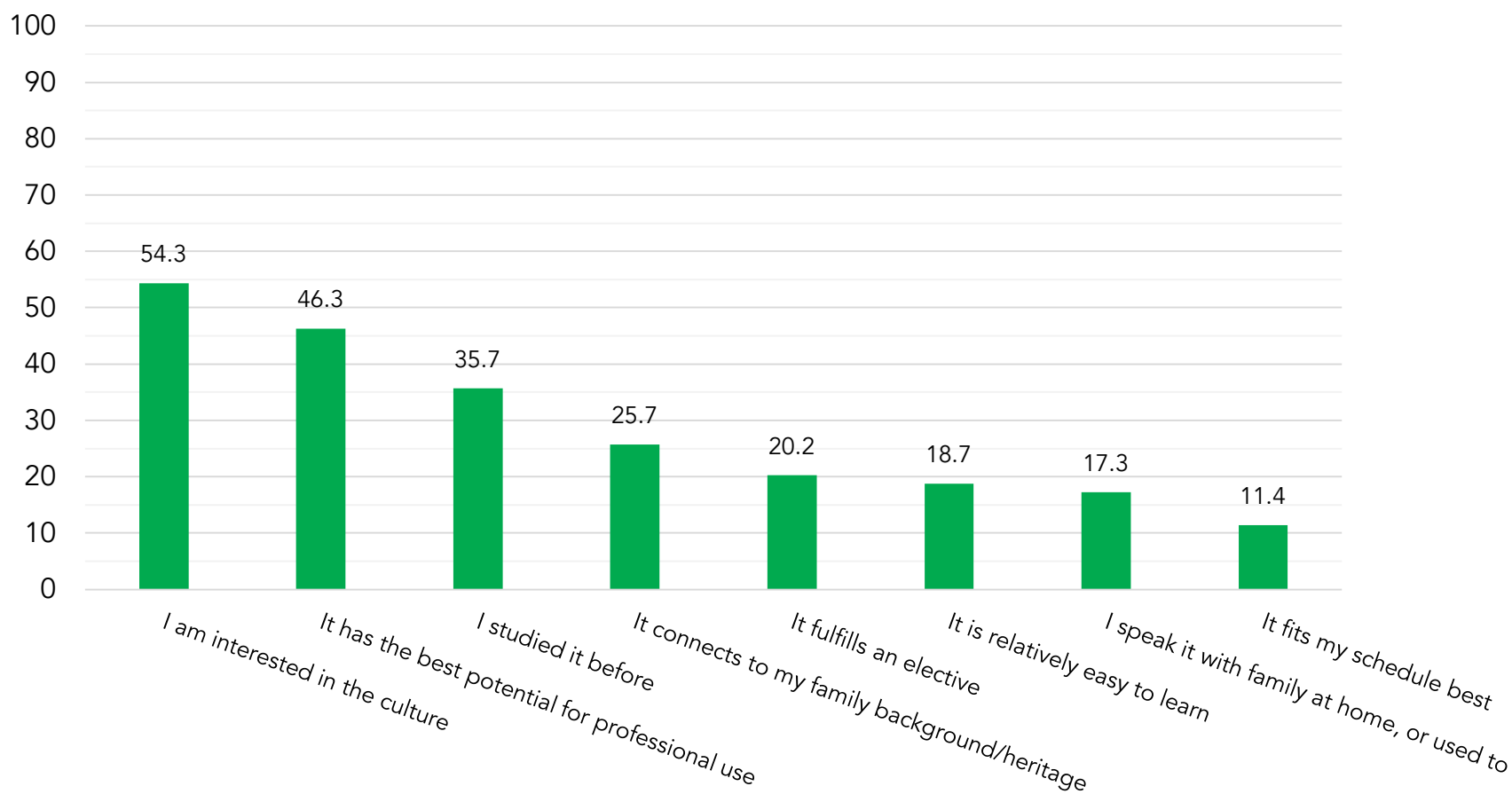
Approximately two-thirds of surveyed students in modern language courses at community colleges were full-time, while one-third were part-time.

Why are you taking this [modern language] course? Check all that apply.



Just over half of respondents stated that they are taking their specific language course for intellectual curiosity. Job or career skills, program requirement, and enabling transfer to a 4-year college all were close behind with a little under 40% of students reporting each.

What led you to choose the particular language (e.g. Spanish, ASL, Chinese, etc.) you are studying? Check all that apply.



More than half of respondents indicate that they chose their particular language of study because of interest in the culture. Just under half report choosing the language because of potential professional use.

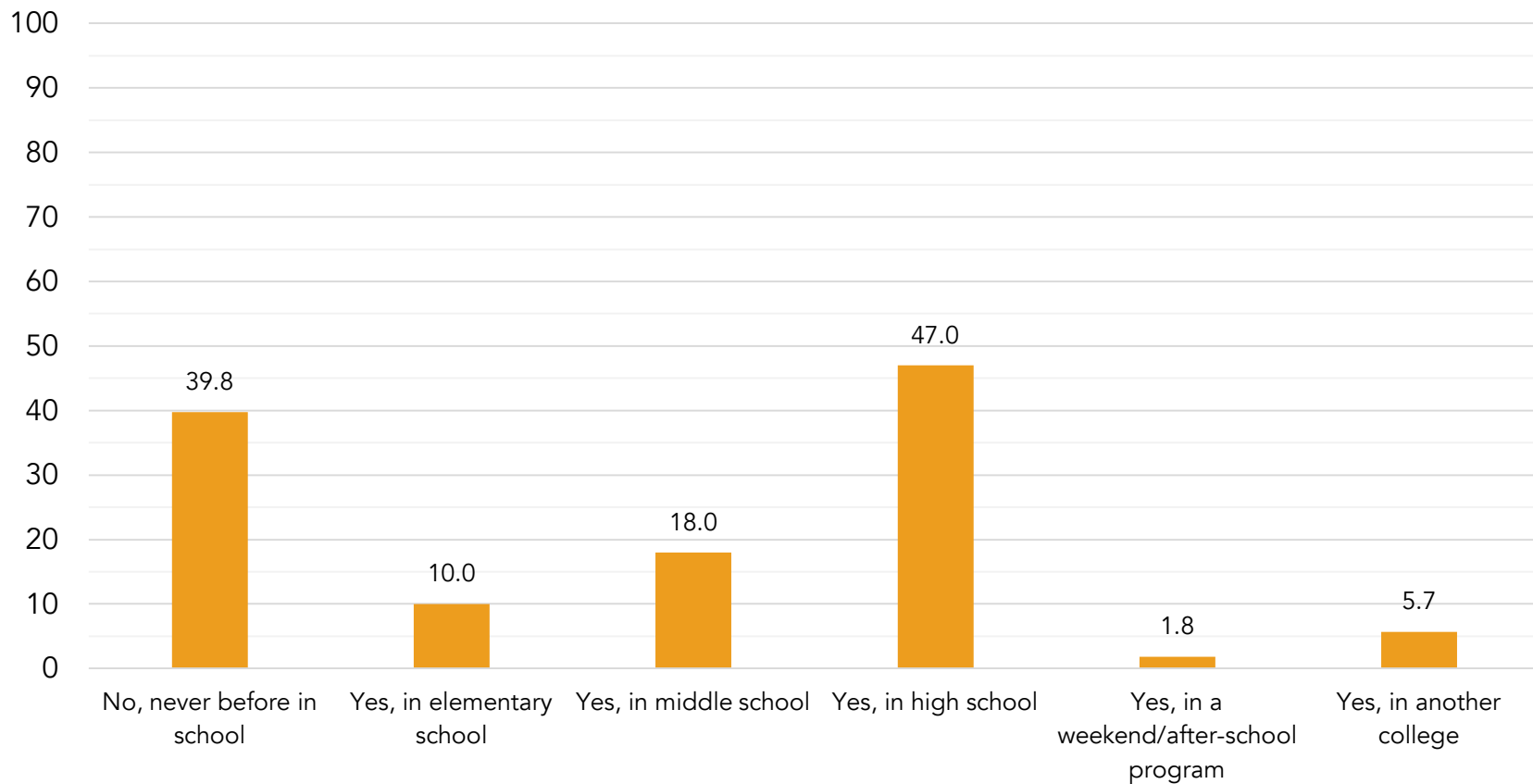
On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being “not important at all” and 10 being “extremely important,” how important is it for you to know a language other than English?

8.6

With a mean response of 8.6, students ascribed high importance to knowing a language other than English.

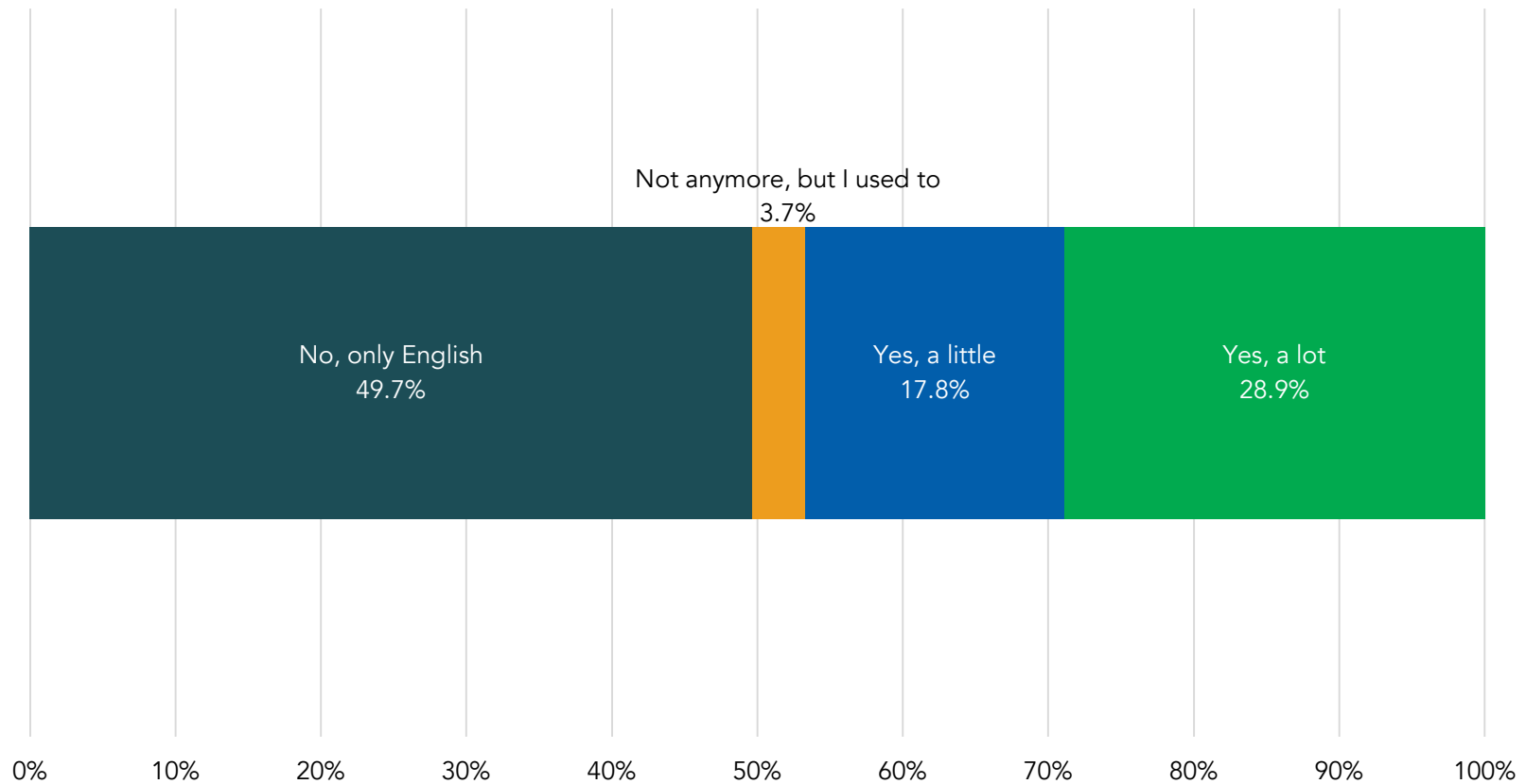
Previous Experience with Language

Before studying this language at this college,
had you studied it in school before? Check all that apply.



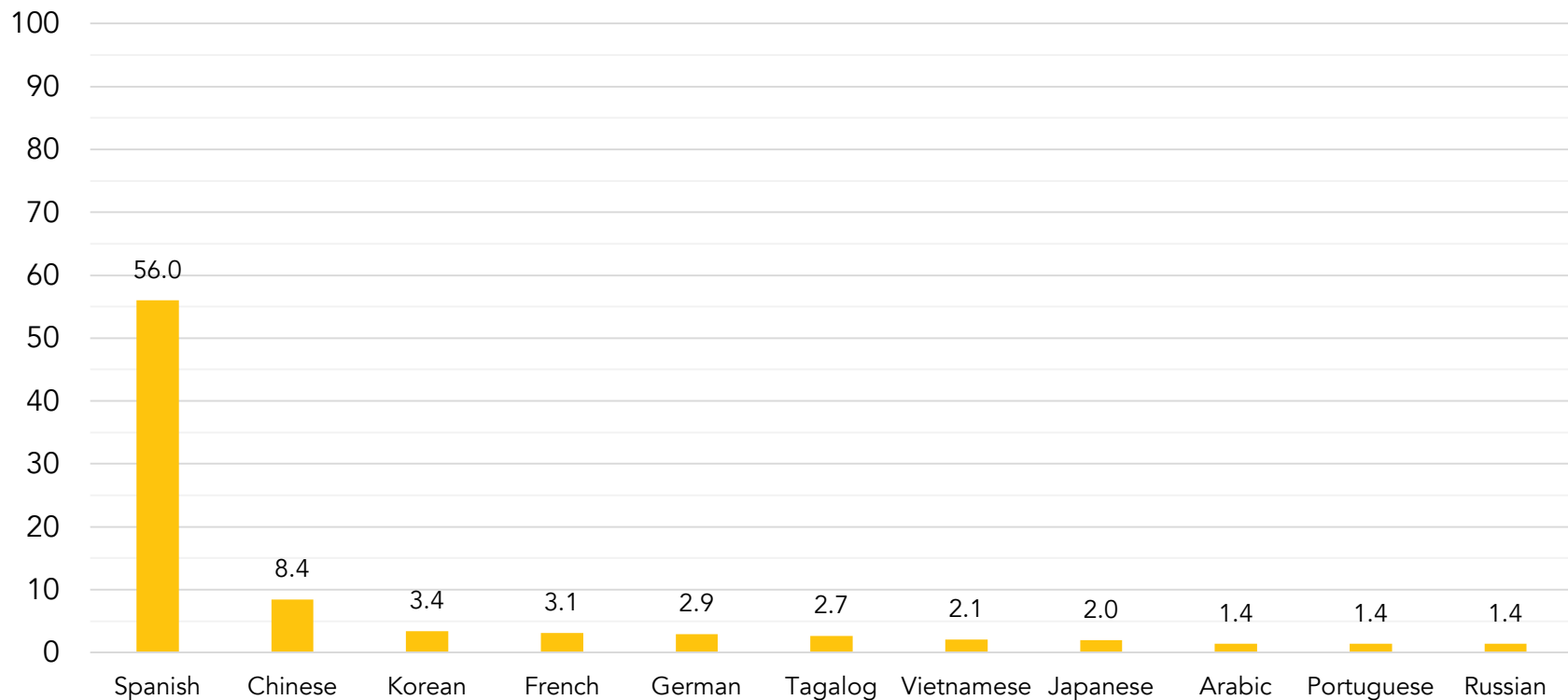
Approximately 60% percent of students had studied the language of their course previously. High school was the most common place where that study occurred.

Do you speak a language other than English at home and/or with family?



Approximately half of students reported speaking only English at home and with family, while approximately half reported speaking a language other than English at home and with family, whether presently or previously.

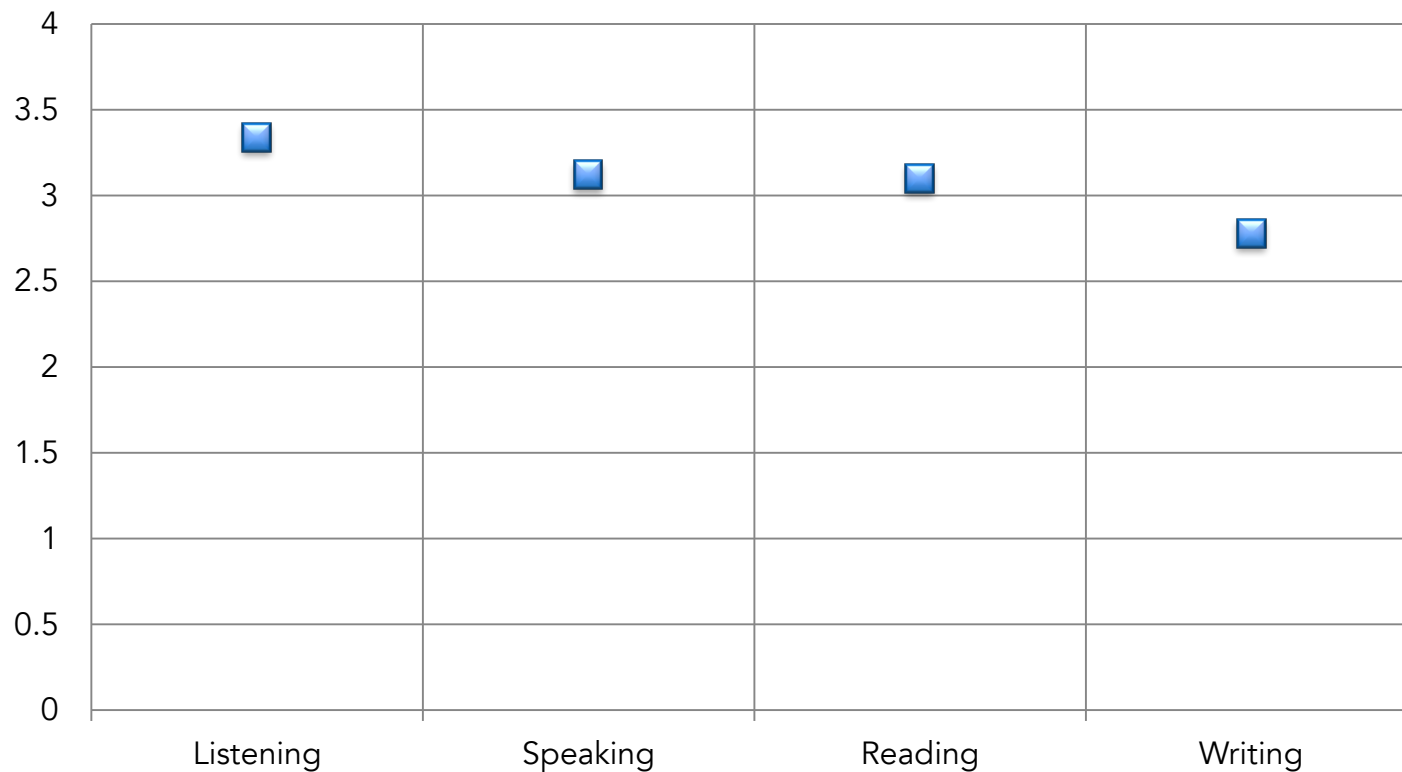
If you do (or did) which language(s)? (First reported language other than English)



Of those who reported speaking a language other than English at home and with family, 74 different languages were reported, with a maximum of 5 languages other than English reported by any one respondent. Spanish was by far the most common language, reported as a first language other than English by 56% of those reporting another language.

Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese combined) was the next most common with 8%, followed by a long tail.

How well do you communicate in this [home/heritage] language?
(1=Not at all, 2=Not so well, 3=Well, 4=Very well)



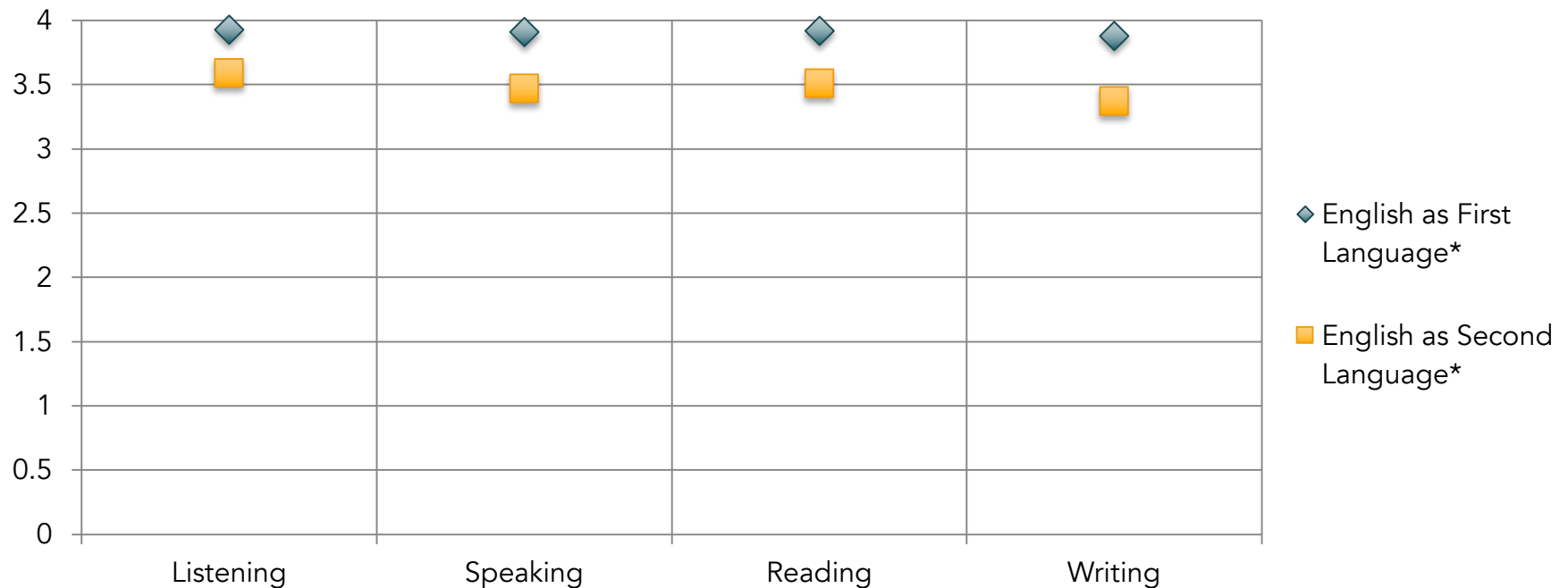
Of those self-reporting their language abilities in a language other than English, the highest reported communication skills were for listening, followed by speaking, then reading, then writing.

Is English your native (first) language?

74% Yes

Nearly three-quarters of respondents indicated that English was their native language.

How well do you communicate in English?
(1=Not at all, 2=Not so well, 3=Well, 4=Very well)



For both those who reported English as a native language and those who did not, English language communication abilities were self-reported as very high.

**Respondents are categorized as "English as First Language" or "English as Second Language" based on response given to Question #19: "Is English your native (first) language?" Results of Question #19 shown on page 18 above.*

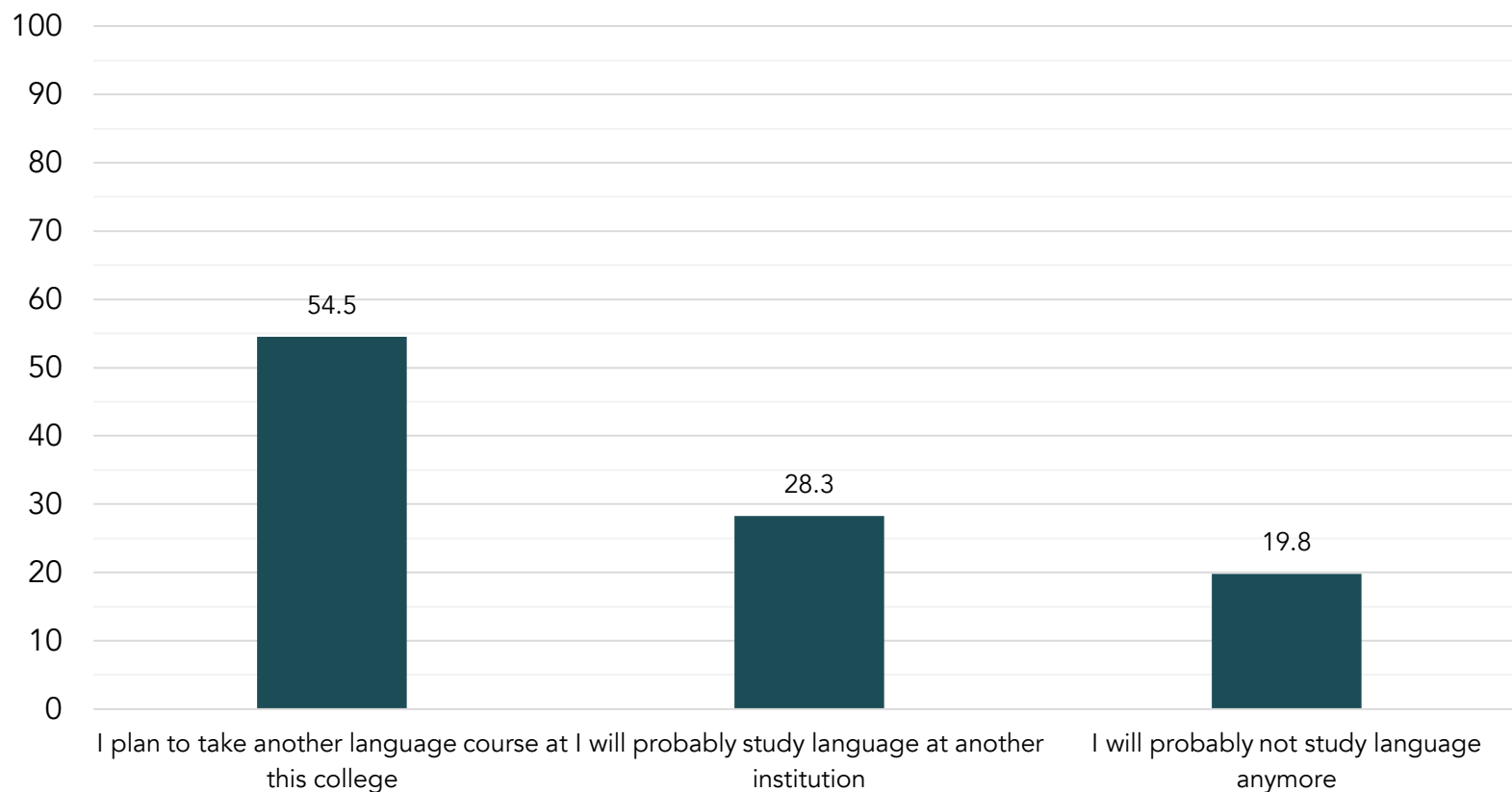
Future Plans

Do you plan to attend a four-year college or university?

88% Yes

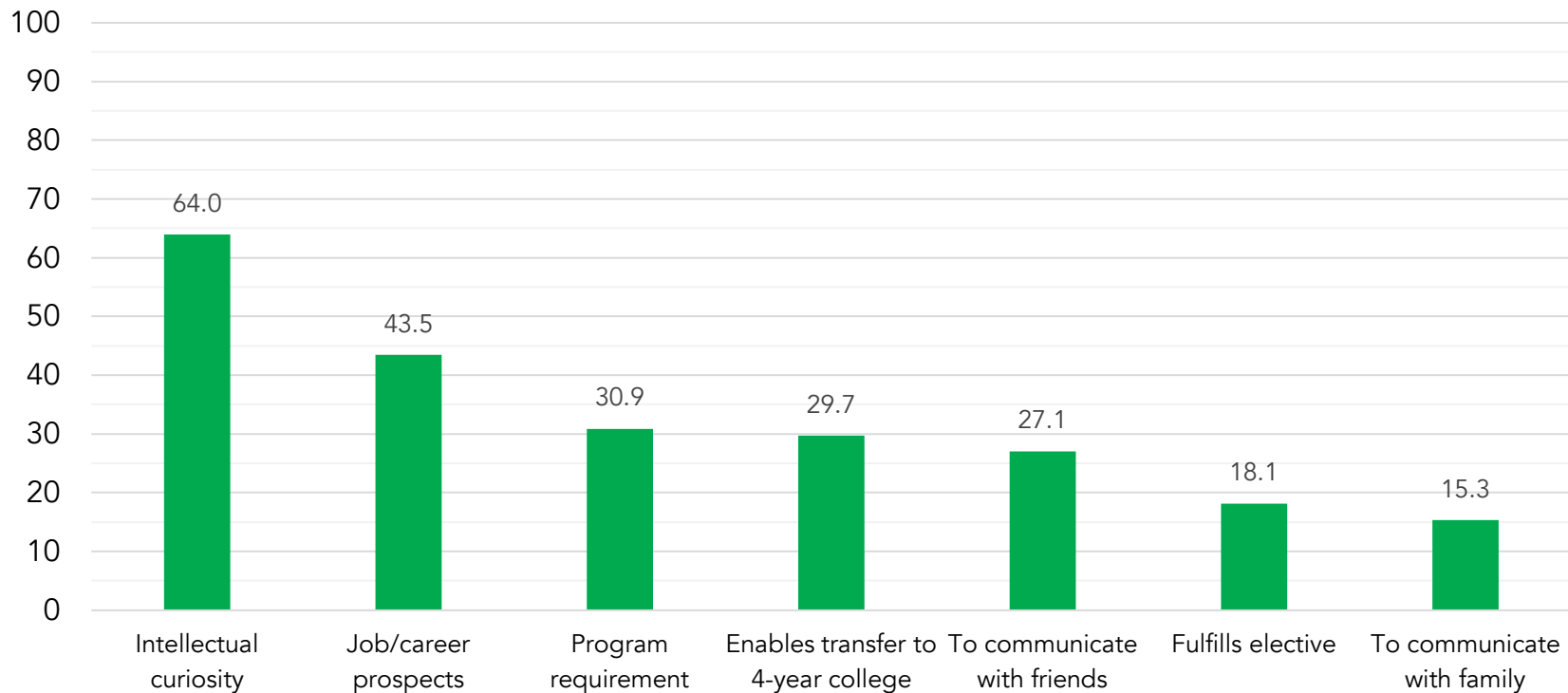
The overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that they planned to attend a four-year college or university.

What are your plans for future language study? Check all that apply.



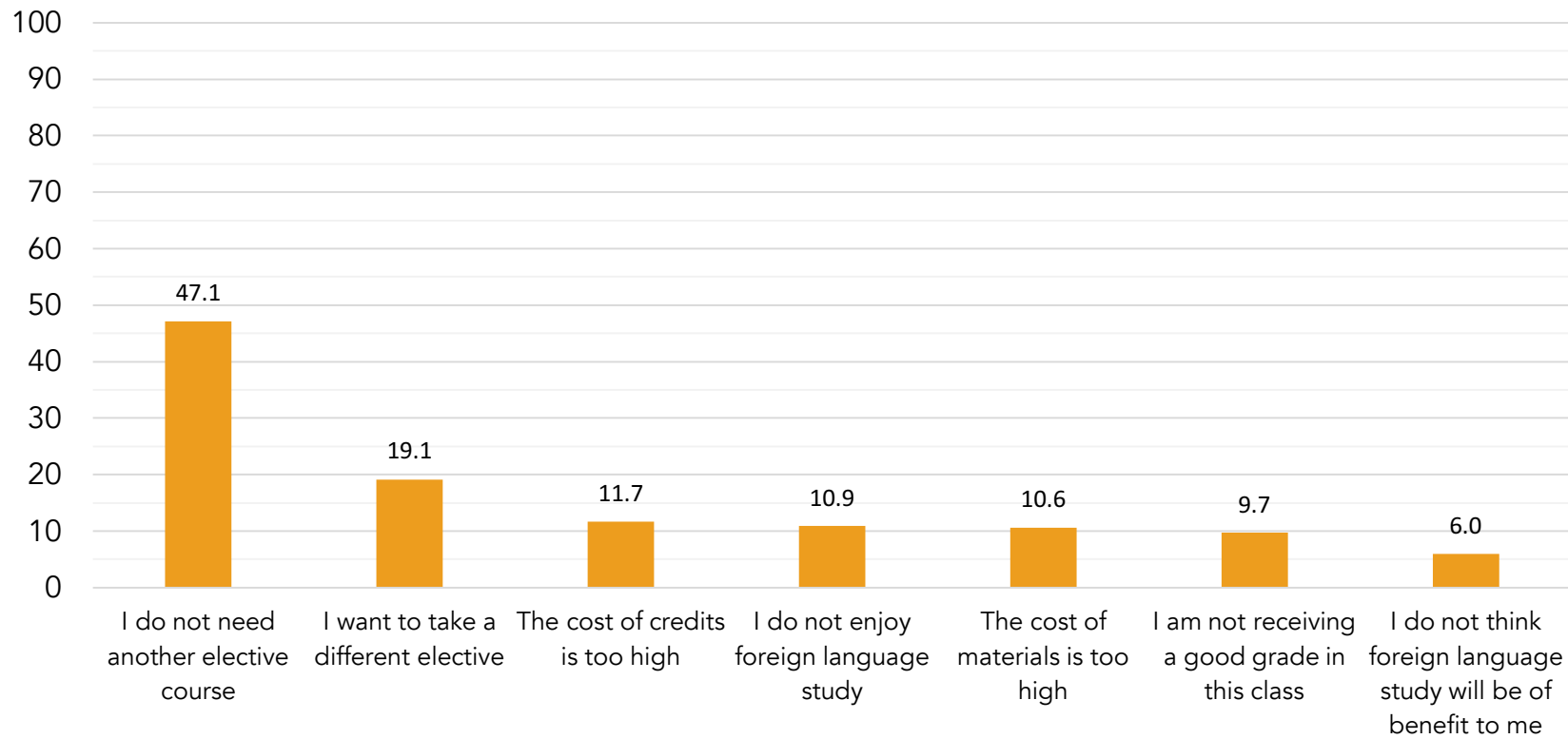
Only about 20% of respondents indicated they had no plans to study language again in the future. More than half planned to continue their language studies at their institution. (Note: these answer choices were not mutually exclusive.)

If you plan to take another semester of language study, please indicate why you plan to do so. Check all that apply.



Of those who planned to continue their language studies, nearly two-thirds reported that intellectual curiosity played a role in their reasoning. Job/career prospects was the next most commonly reported reason, reported by about 43% of respondents.

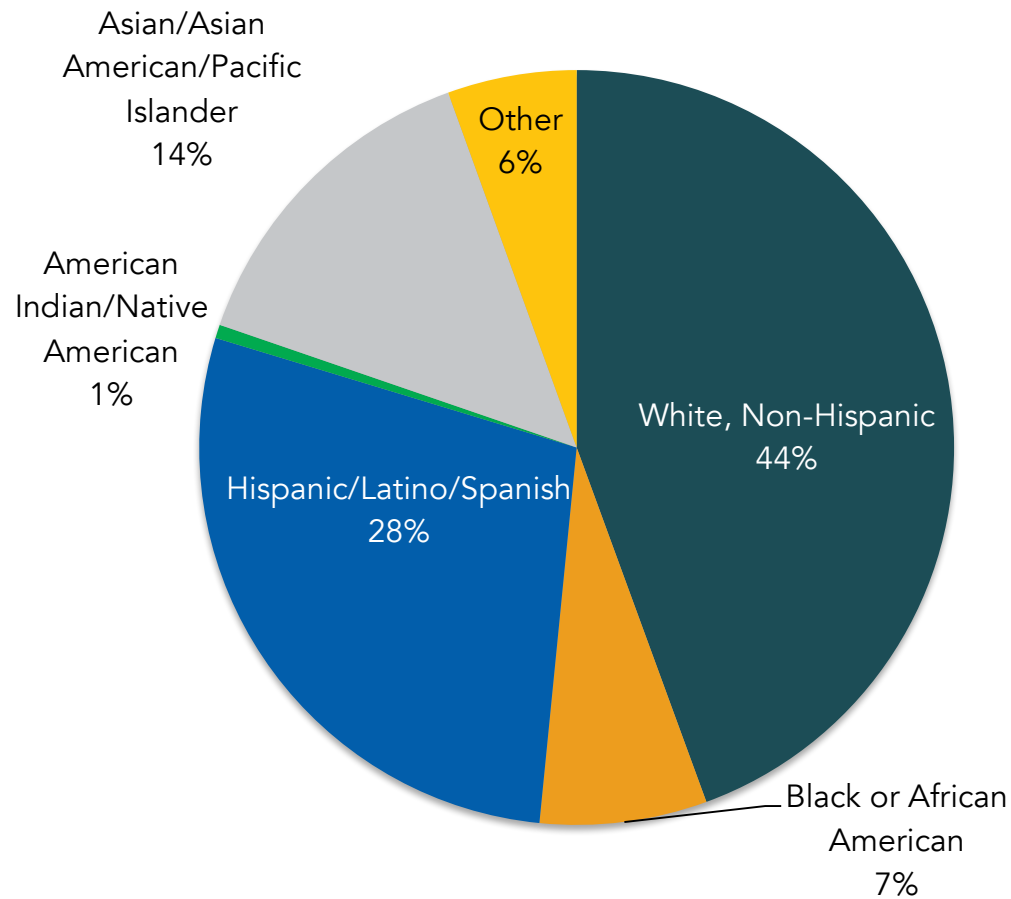
If you do NOT plan to take another semester of language study, please indicate why you do not plan to do so. Check all that apply.



Of those reporting they do not plan to continue their language studies, the most common reason was that they had already fulfilled their electives.

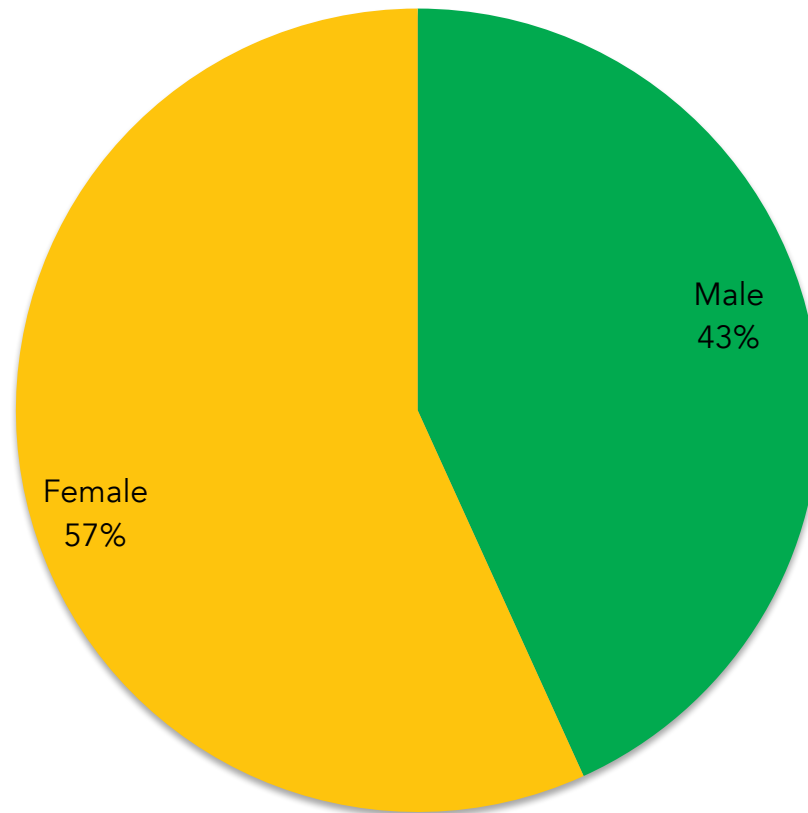
Demographics

What is your race/ethnicity?



When asked to pick one race/ethnicity, 44% of respondents reported White, Non-Hispanic. The next largest group was Hispanic/Latino/Spanish, reported by a little over a quarter of students.

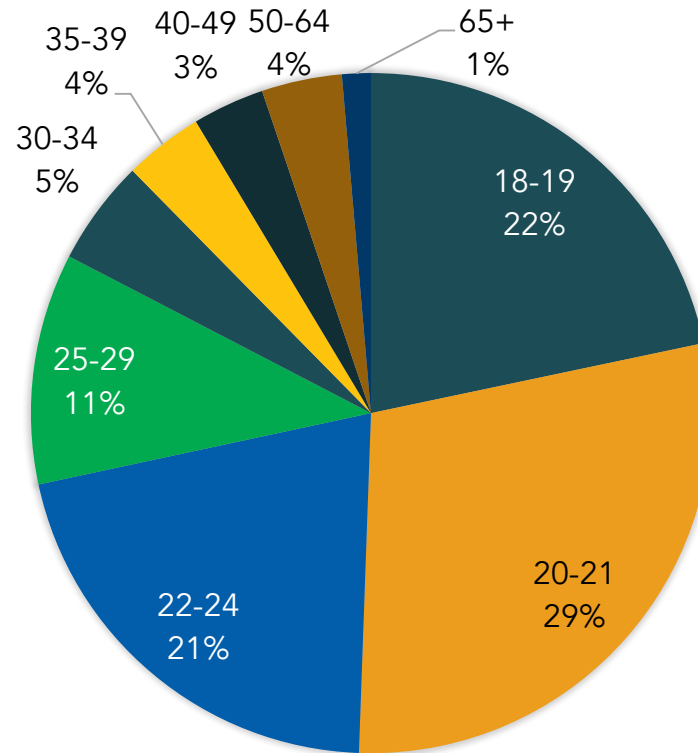
What is your gender?



Approximately three-fifths of respondents were female, and two-fifths were male.

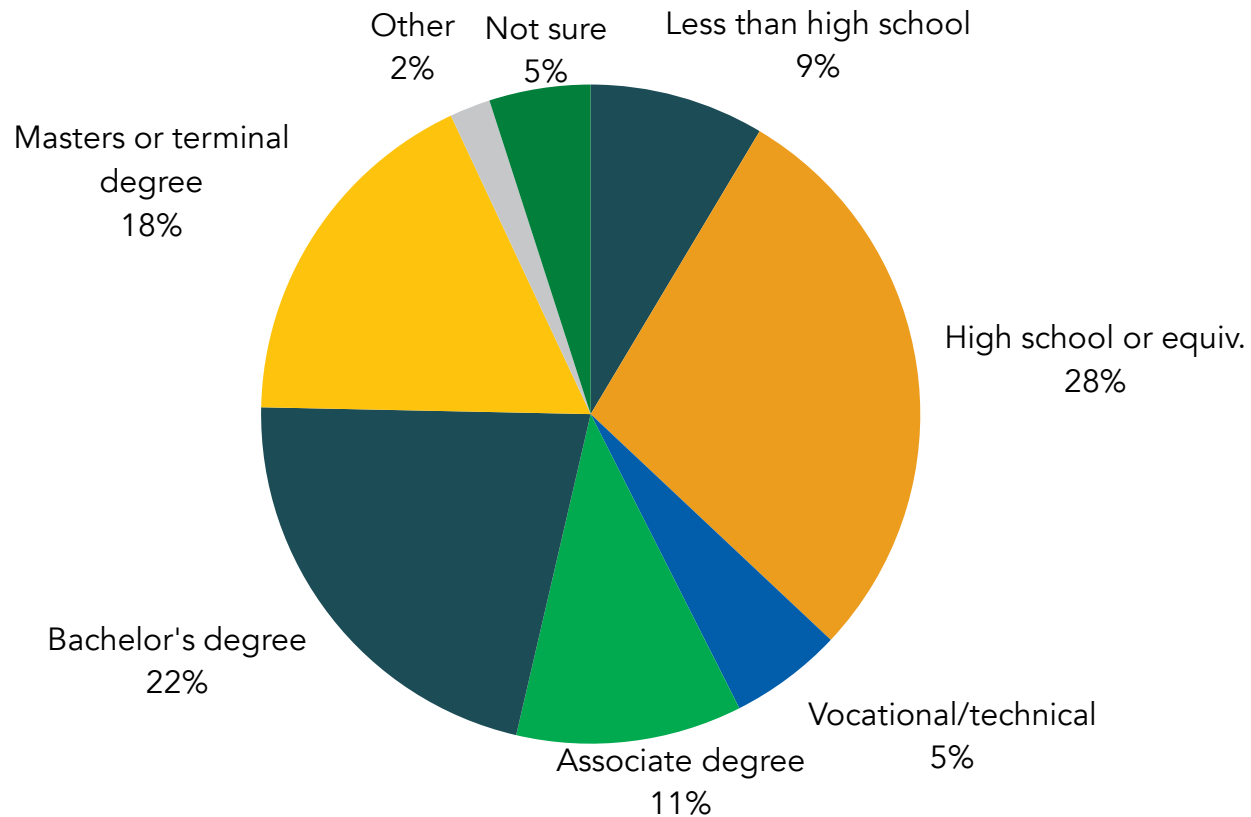
Age

(Derived from question: What year were you born?)



Just over half of respondents were between the ages of 18 and 21, and just under a third of respondents were between the ages of 22 and 29.

What is the highest academic credential a parent of yours has earned?
Check one.



Just under two-fifths of respondents reported that their parents' highest degree earned was a high school diploma or less, while another two-fifths reported that their parents' highest degree was a Bachelor's or higher.