



CollegeTrack



# 2022 Social Mobility Report

OUR ALUMNI OUTCOMES



# INTRODUCTION

At College Track, we have an unwavering belief in the power of higher education to fuel our scholars' professional aspirations, and their social and economic mobility. Our alumni represent a vibrant spectrum of first-generation college graduates from low-income communities, who are building futures grounded in opportunity, choice, and power.

The COVID-19 global pandemic put our theory of change to the ultimate test. For more than two years, the pandemic took a devastating toll on the communities that College Track serves, not only from a public health perspective, but across all sectors of our society, further exacerbating the systemic barriers that our students navigate as they pursue their educational and professional passions.

Over the past five years, we surveyed our college graduates to test our hypothesis that a bachelor's degree is the most direct pathway to a life of opportunity, choice, and power. Our Social Mobility Report outlines our alumni outcomes with quantitative and qualitative data, and yet, nothing compares to the power of our alumni voices and experiences, which are included throughout this report.

We have nearly 1,000 college graduates in our growing alumni network and we continue our commitment to examine the relationship between a bachelor's degree and long-term outcomes—including employment, starting salaries, civic engagement, and personal fulfillment. This report answers four key questions to measure access to social mobility for both recent college graduates and our older alumni.



# Guiding Questions

## QUESTION 1

How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted College Track alumni?

## QUESTION 2

Is higher education a powerful tool for young people to embark on a life with more choice and financial security than their parents?

## QUESTION 3

What additional experiences in college yield successful employment outcomes and contribute to stable career growth?

## QUESTION 4

Do our college graduates access opportunity, choice, and power?

### DEFINITIONS

#### RECENT GRADUATES

Scholars who graduated from college within the last year at the time the survey was conducted (August 2020 to July 2021)

#### OLDER ALUMNI

Scholars who were more than one year removed from college graduation (July 2020 and earlier)



"I grew up hearing the narrative that young Black men don't go to college, let alone achieve professional success. So I'm here as living proof that this narrative is wrong."

#### MARCUS

College Track Oakland, Class of 2015

B.A., Economics | Howard University

M.S., Applied Economics | Johns Hopkins University

Employment: AWS Cloud Systems Architect, DaurbTech LLC



## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

**Despite the enormous economic impact of the pandemic,** especially on low-income communities, our alumni continue to achieve social mobility through the power of higher education, career advancement, economic freedom, and personal choice of where to live and work.



# Key Findings

- **88% of College Track alumni are employed or in graduate school** and 92 percent of employed College Track alumni report earning enough to save each month—strong indicators of upward social mobility.
- **Our recent graduates entered the workforce at an incredibly challenging time.** Only 58 percent of recent graduates had full-time employment within six months of graduation (on par with the national average of 59 percent). One year out from graduation, 84 percent were employed full time.
- **Older alumni have been able to bounce back more quickly** than recent graduates: 89 percent of our older alumni, who had initially lost a job during the pandemic, have since returned to their pre-COVID-19 employment level.
- **Our College Affordability Strategy\* continues to demonstrate incredible results:** 33 percent of our recent college graduates have no debt and, on average, they have \$10,000 less debt than the national average. We continue to see a positive correlation between students who have low debt upon graduation and their ability to both choose a job that aligns with their interests and to save money.
- **Our career readiness advising for college students is paying off in the workforce** (e.g., having one or more internships, joining a club on campus, working less than 15 hours per week, etc.). We found that recent graduates who took part in College Track's Corporate Residency Program were 20 percent more likely than their peers to have a job with strong alignment to their career interests and aspirations.
- **The value of a college degree grows, as our alumni progress in their careers:** 89 percent of older graduates feel they have more opportunity, choice, and power as a result of their bachelor's degree, and alumni 30 years and older are earning an average income of \$91,633.



**"As a first-generation student, I didn't know anything about college beyond my own research. Now, I have an accounting degree and I'm studying for my Series 7 General Securities Representative Exam."**

**RICHARDO**

College Track Aurora, Class of 2019

B.S., Business Administration and Accounting

University of Colorado, Boulder

Employment: Portfolio Solutions Group, Charles Schwab

\* College Affordability Strategy outlined on page 16.



## QUESTION ONE

How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted our alumni?

College Track graduates, regardless of age, experienced a range of challenges as a result of the pandemic—from job loss and underemployment, to health issues and the death of family members. However, when it came to employment, our recent graduates were hit hardest. In contrast, our data reveal that older graduates were much more resilient and were able to largely regain their pre-pandemic levels of employment and income.

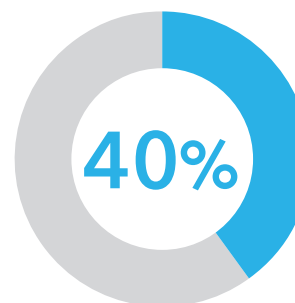


# COVID-19 Impact on Our Alumni

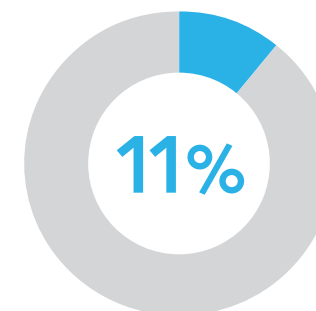
While it will likely take decades for social scientists and economists to fully understand the long-term consequences of the pandemic, we want to understand how College Track alumni have persisted through the ongoing global crisis. Did their bachelor's degree increase their resiliency? Which resources, connections, or experiences have been the most impactful for them?

At the start of the pandemic in 2020, more than two-thirds of our alumni experienced job loss, reduced hours or salaries, and/or health issues. However, older alumni who have longer, better established careers report higher levels of confidence in their ability to rebound.

At the time of our survey in the summer of 2021, one-third of our alumni were still experiencing the impact of the ongoing pandemic, with most attributing the ongoing effect to health-related issues, such as caring for a family member or dealing with their own mental health challenges. The data demonstrate a continued need to increase our services for recent college graduates, including accelerating our career readiness program, networking opportunities, and paid internships.



RECENT GRADUATES



OLDER ALUMNI

**Recent graduates accepted new jobs that required less education and offered fewer responsibilities.**

This discrepancy reinforces the difficulty of entering the workforce as a new college graduate in the middle of a pandemic.

**One-third of our alumni are still impacted by COVID-19**, with the biggest areas of impact related to health issues for themselves or their families.

**67%**  
of alumni impacted by COVID-19 during summer 2020

## EMPLOYMENT

**22%** had their hours reduced

**18%** lost their jobs

**14%** had their salaries reduced

**13%** had to take a second job

## HEALTH

**26%** experienced impacts on their family's health

**8%** reported food insecurity

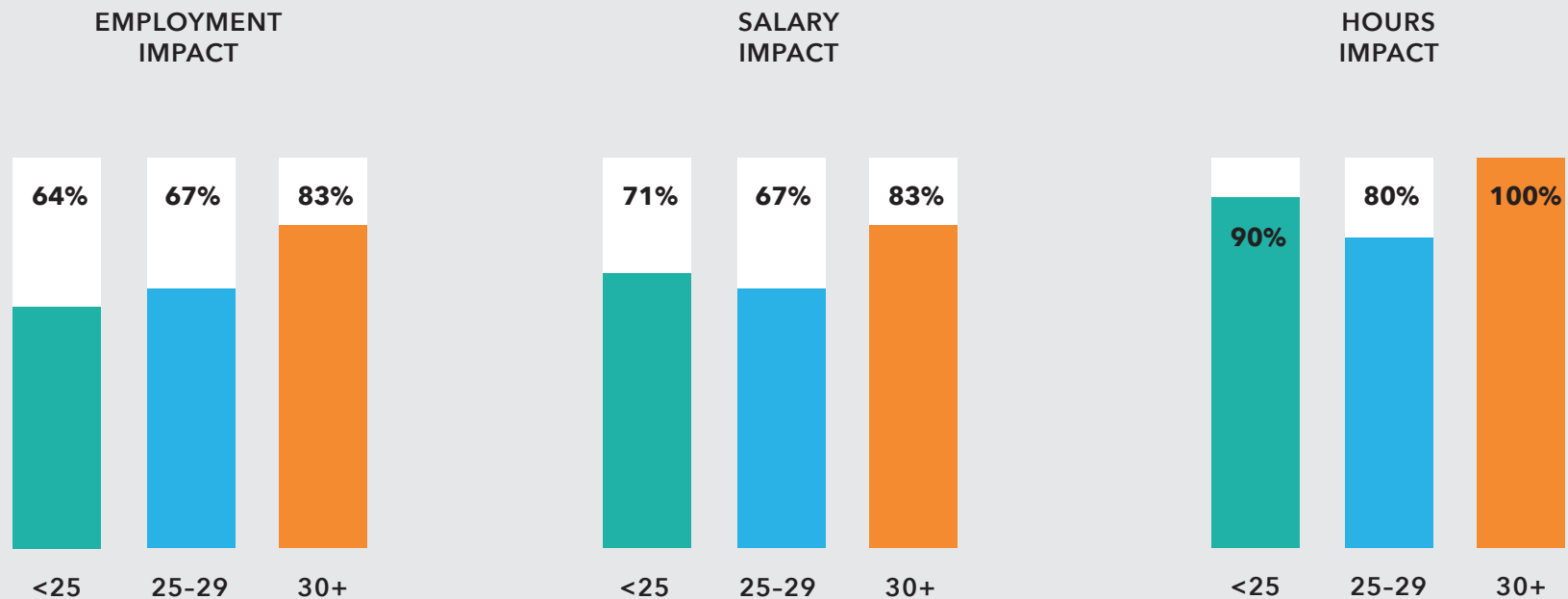
**8%** reported housing insecurity

# Alumni Economic Recovery and Confidence Levels Post-Pandemic

College Track alumni who experienced a loss of employment, wages, or hours were optimistic about their ability to recover their pre-pandemic level of employment. Graduates' level of confidence increased as a function of age, with the highest confidence coming from older alumni who are more established in their careers.

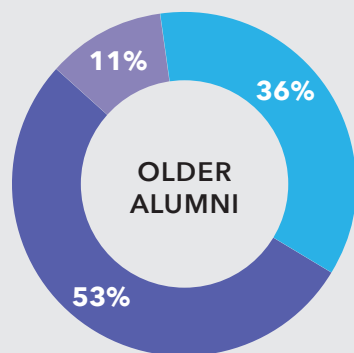
## CONFIDENCE LEVELS BASED ON IMPACT OF PANDEMIC

"I am confident that I will recover my job/salary/hours."





# Employment Recovery



**36%**

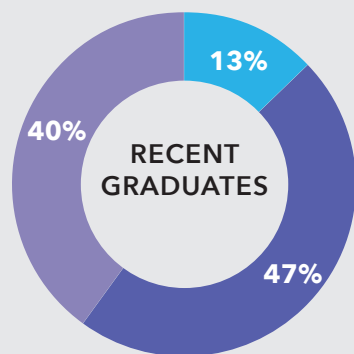
Fully regained pre-pandemic employment

**53%**

Accepted new job requiring similar level of education and responsibilities

**11%**

Accepted new job requiring less education and fewer responsibilities than pre-pandemic role



**13%**

Fully regained pre-pandemic employment

**47%**

Accepted new job requiring similar level of education and responsibilities

**40%**

Accepted new job requiring less education and fewer responsibilities than pre-pandemic role



"I was furloughed in March 2020 at the start of the pandemic and officially laid off in December 2020. In May 2021, I was offered my position back, but unfortunately I was unable to return because I broke my spine in an accident. When I returned to the workforce at PG&E I was given a raise, which made up for the lost income from my previous job at the San Jose Earthquakes."

## ALVARO

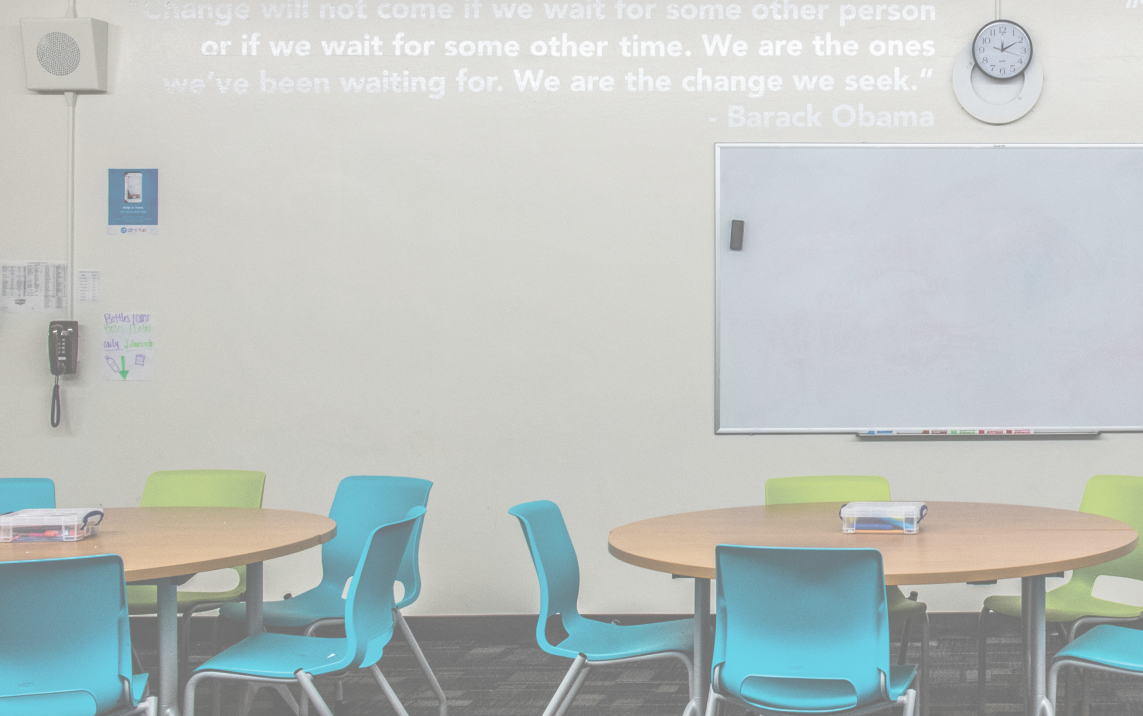
College Track East Palo Alto, Class of 2010  
B.A., Legal Studies and Latin American Studies  
University of California, Santa Cruz  
Employment: Asset Strategist, PG&E



## QUESTION TWO

Is higher education a powerful tool for young people to embark on a life with more choice and financial security than their parents?





"The only limit to the height of your achievement is the reach of your dreams and your willingness to work hard for them."  
- Michelle Obama



## Employment, Earnings, and Financial Security

Our recent graduates faced a number of challenges entering a workforce ravaged by the global pandemic and our survey data reflect these difficulties. The percentage of recent graduates employed within six months of graduation dropped by 21 percent (from 79 percent in 2019 to 58 percent in 2021).

This is in line with the National Association of Colleges and Employers data showing the impact of COVID-19 on recent graduates entering the workforce, where only 59 percent were employed within six months for the Class of 2020 nationwide.

Once employed, our recent graduates report high earnings and are on track to being financially secure: **70 percent of recent graduates report earning more money than at least one of their parents in their first job, and 90 percent report the same among our older graduates.**

"In addition to my full-time job, I own an investment property that I maintain as a residential rental and I also have a small group of clients as an Educational Consultant, mostly in college admissions and guidance counseling. Both have taken their share of time in addition to my regular 9-to-5 job, but I am interested in growing different sources of income and exploring new opportunities that give me flexibility and allow me to be my own boss."

### ROGER

College Track East Palo Alto, Class of 2008

B.A., Political Science | Saint Mary's College of California

Employment: Development Manager, The Pat Tillman Foundation

Our recent college graduates earn starting salaries lower than the national median

**\$47,500** College Track

**\$54,686** National<sup>1</sup>

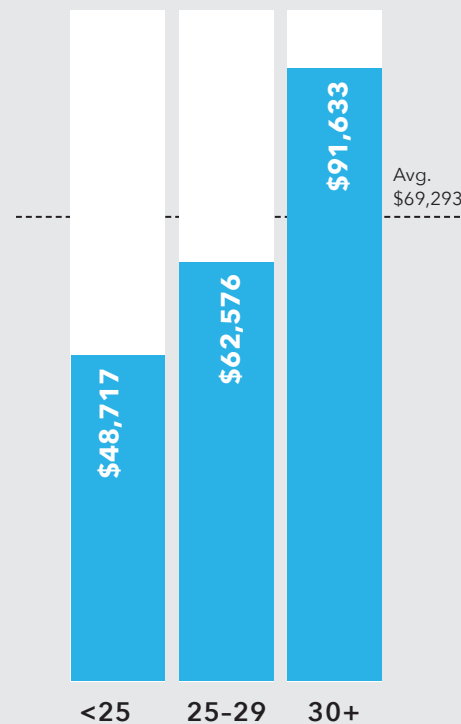
Anxious to begin earning an income, first-generation college graduates nationwide start their careers underemployed—they are overqualified and earn lower salaries than non-first-generation college graduates.<sup>2</sup>

One year after graduation, only 44% of first-generation college graduates nationwide held jobs that require a bachelor's degree,<sup>3</sup> compared to 58% of College Track recent graduates. While this data is encouraging—that our alumni have a much better rate of securing jobs that require a college degree than the national average—we are confident that our career-readiness program will strengthen this outcome for future College Track alumni.

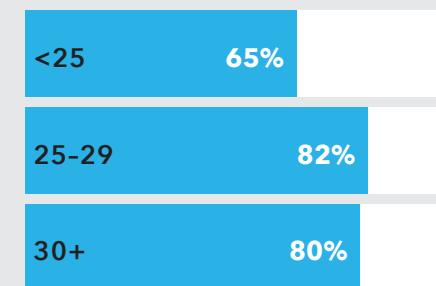
## SALARIES BY AGE GROUP

**\$91,633**

average income for alumni 30 years and older



The **vast majority of older alumni** report earning enough to afford a comfortable life for themselves and their dependents.



## 48% of our alumni report financially supporting non-dependents

Our alumni are often responsible for the financial support of non-dependents in their household, such as siblings, parents, or older relatives.

### Sources

<sup>[1]</sup> Retrieved March 2022 from <https://www.nacweb.org/uploadedfiles/files/2021/publication/free-report/first-destinations-for-the-class-of-2020.pdf>

<sup>[2]</sup> "College degree doesn't pay off as well for first-generation grads," Hechinger Report, Sept. 24, 2021

<sup>[3]</sup> Retrieved March 2022 from [https://firstgen.naspa.org/files/dmfile/FactSheet\\_04.pdf](https://firstgen.naspa.org/files/dmfile/FactSheet_04.pdf)



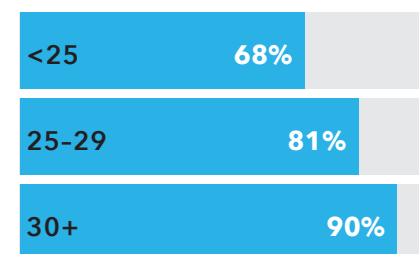
"In high school, I remember filling out the FAFSA at College Track, putting my mom's income down and I didn't think twice about it. Now that I have my degree and I'm working as a Special Ed teacher earning \$55,000 salary, I don't know how we survived on \$15,000 per year. As the oldest daughter, I pay my mom's phone bill, the upgrade to Wi-Fi for my younger brothers' online learning, and sometimes the electricity bill. It's tough because sometimes my family won't have enough to cover rent each month, and I'm living on my own and my income doesn't always cover everything. At the moment, I'm thinking of moving districts or going to work in education policy. I love Oakland, it's where I grew up, but the income is not enough to sustain me and my family."

**MARIA**

College Track Oakland, Class of 2020  
B.A., Sociology | University of California, Berkeley  
Employment: Special Education Teacher,  
Oakland Unified School District



**90%**  
of alumni, 30 years  
and older, report  
earning more than at  
least one parent



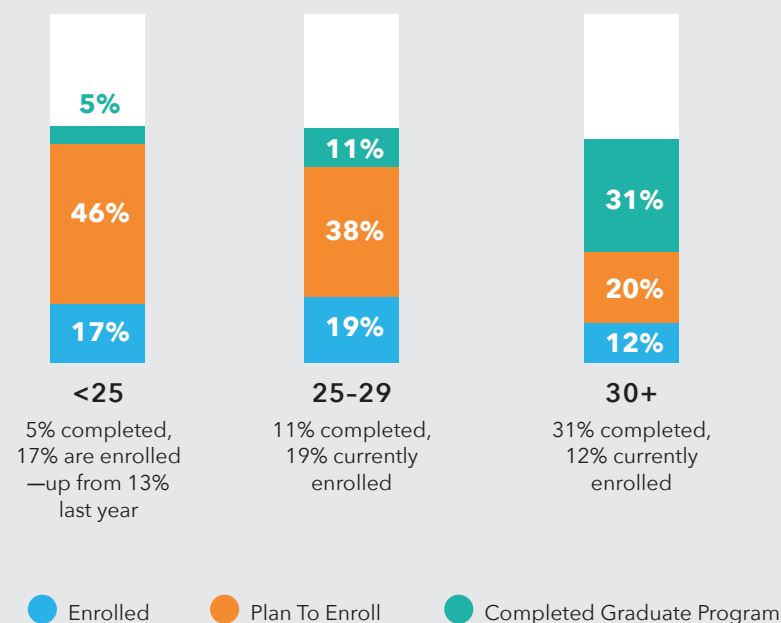


## Graduate School

Our college graduates are on track to surpass graduate school enrollment and completion rates nationwide.\* On average, more than forty percent of our graduates under the age of 30 report planning to enroll in graduate school, and 31 percent of graduates over the age of 30 have already completed a graduate degree program. For alumni under the age of 25, graduate school enrollment has increased by four percentage points from the previous year.

91% of older alumni are employed or enrolled in graduate school

### ALUMNI SEEKING GRADUATE EDUCATION



Source

\*Retrieved March 2022 from [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/86981/who\\_goes\\_to\\_graduate\\_school\\_and\\_who\\_succeeds\\_1.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/86981/who_goes_to_graduate_school_and_who_succeeds_1.pdf)





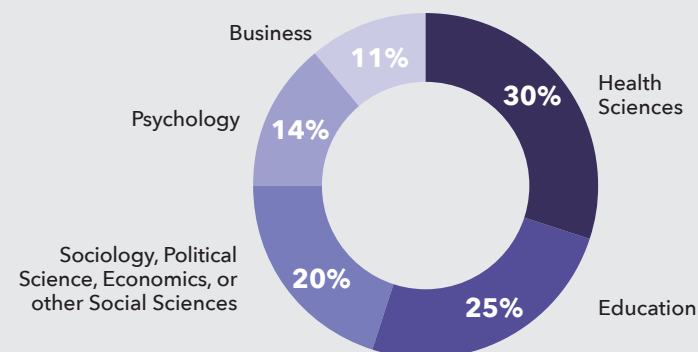
“I’m currently pursuing my license to become a mental health counselor in Washington state. One of the main reasons I chose to go to graduate school was to pursue a career in healing that would give back to QTBIPOC communities. I feel incredibly honored to be able to use my voice and create change in the mental health field, by actively seeking ways to create a more inclusive healing space.”

**JOHANNA**

College Track East Palo Alto, Class of 2011  
 B.S., Psychology | University of California, Davis  
 MFT, Counseling Psychology | Santa Clara University  
 Employment: Mental Health Counselor, Vancouver Wellness Studio

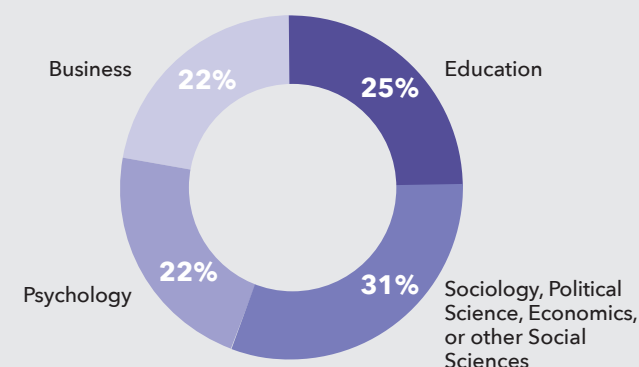
## Top Five Graduate School Fields of Study

CURRENTLY ENROLLED



## Top Four Graduate School Fields of Study

PROGRAMS COMPLETED



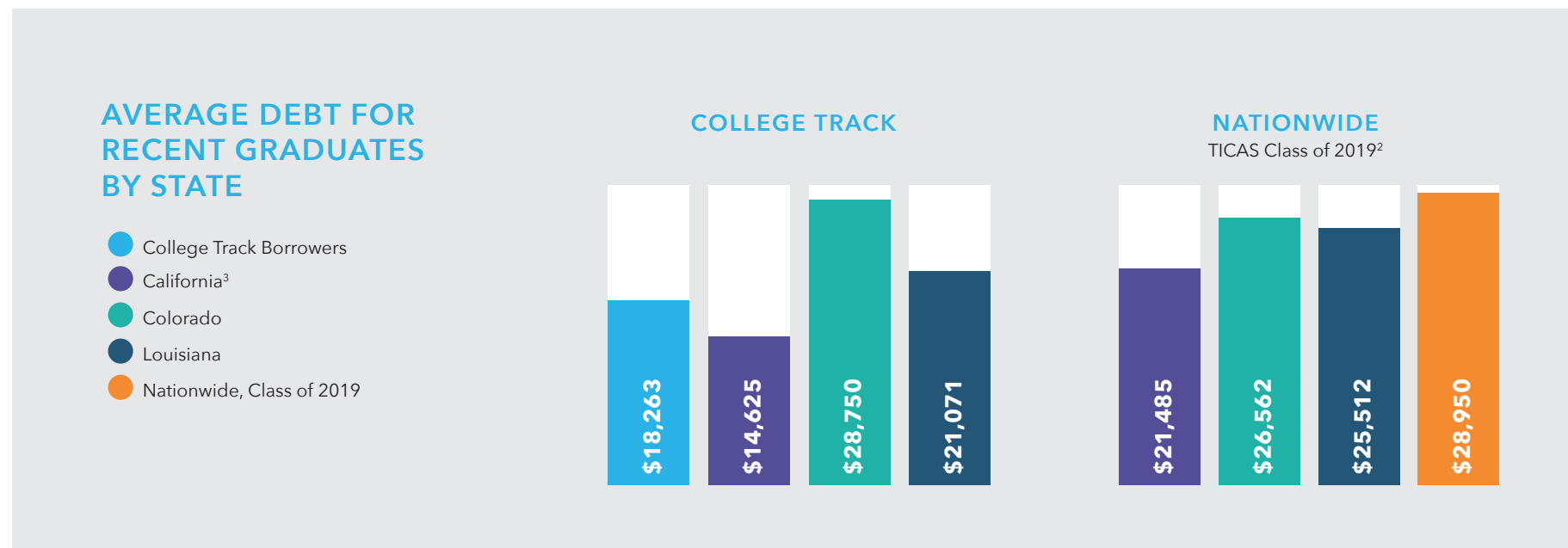


# Our College Affordability Strategy Ensures Lower Debt Upon Graduation

**One of the determining factors for our students to achieve social mobility is where our students attend college.** Specifically, whether the institution has a higher than average graduation rate (greater than 57 percent), reasonable student loan debt (under \$30,000), and on-campus resources and support services for our student population. Paired with our merit and need-based scholarships, attending a Best Fit college ensures that our students can repay their loans, attain financial security, and have choice in their early career options. Our data demonstrate that this strategy is effective: more than one-third of our recent college graduates completed their degree with zero debt and 93 percent finish with less than \$30,000, which is \$10,000 below the national average.<sup>1</sup>

Among College Track graduates with no student loan debt, 79 percent graduated from a College Track recommended Affordable Option institution. This includes colleges that have high graduation rates, low debt post-graduation, and support services for first-generation students.

Notably, we are also seeing a strong correlation between lower student loan debt and choosing a career that is aligned with our alumni's career aspirations. When graduates do not have looming debt, they are more selective about the jobs they accept, which are more aligned with their career interests and passions. This reinforces the tenets of our college affordability strategy, as well as our career readiness program.



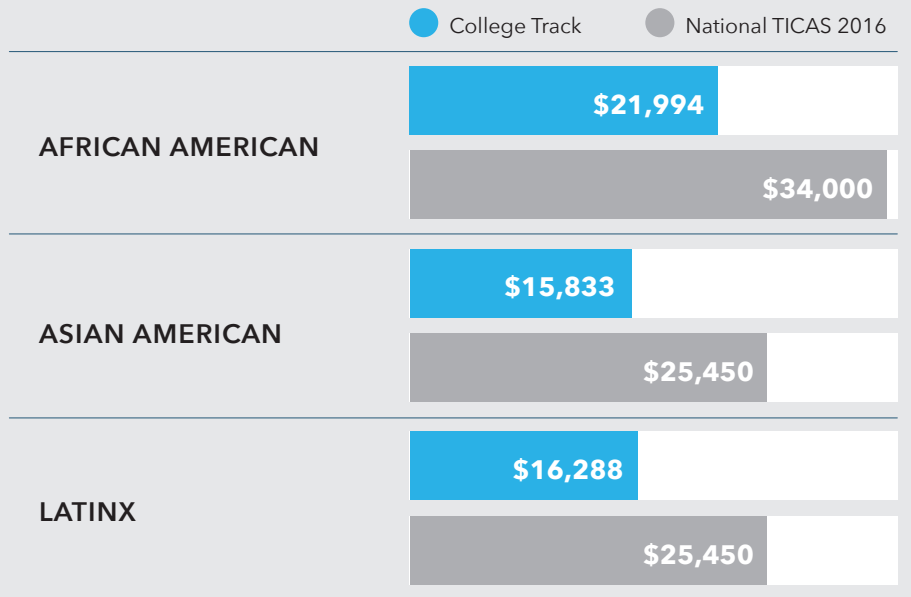
## Sources

<sup>[1]</sup> Retrieved March 2022 from [https://ticas.org/files/pub\\_files/qf\\_about\\_student\\_debt.pdf](https://ticas.org/files/pub_files/qf_about_student_debt.pdf)

<sup>[2]</sup> Retrieved March 2022 from <https://ticas.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/classof2019.pdf>

<sup>[3]</sup> California has the most robust financial aid packages for higher education across the U.S.

## AVERAGE DEBT FOR RECENT GRADUATES BY ETHNICITY



## SIX-YEAR GRADUATION RATE BY COLLEGE FIT TYPE

### BEST FIT

high grad rate / high affordability

75%

### GOOD FIT

lower grad rate / lower affordability

45%

### LOCAL AFFORDABLE

grad rate usually lower, varies by region / high affordability (proximity to home)

45%

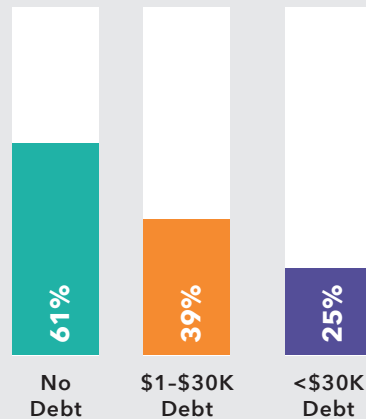
### NO FIT TYPE

37%

## CAREER ALIGNMENT BY DEBT LEVEL

Carrying less student loan debt makes it easier to make a job choice aligned with career aspirations

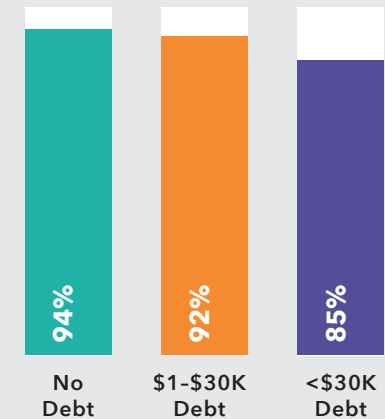
61% of recent grads with no student loan debt report strong alignment of their job with career aspirations



## SAVINGS RATE BY DEBT LEVEL

Graduates with lower student loan debt report being able to save money

90% of all alumni are able to save at least some money each month





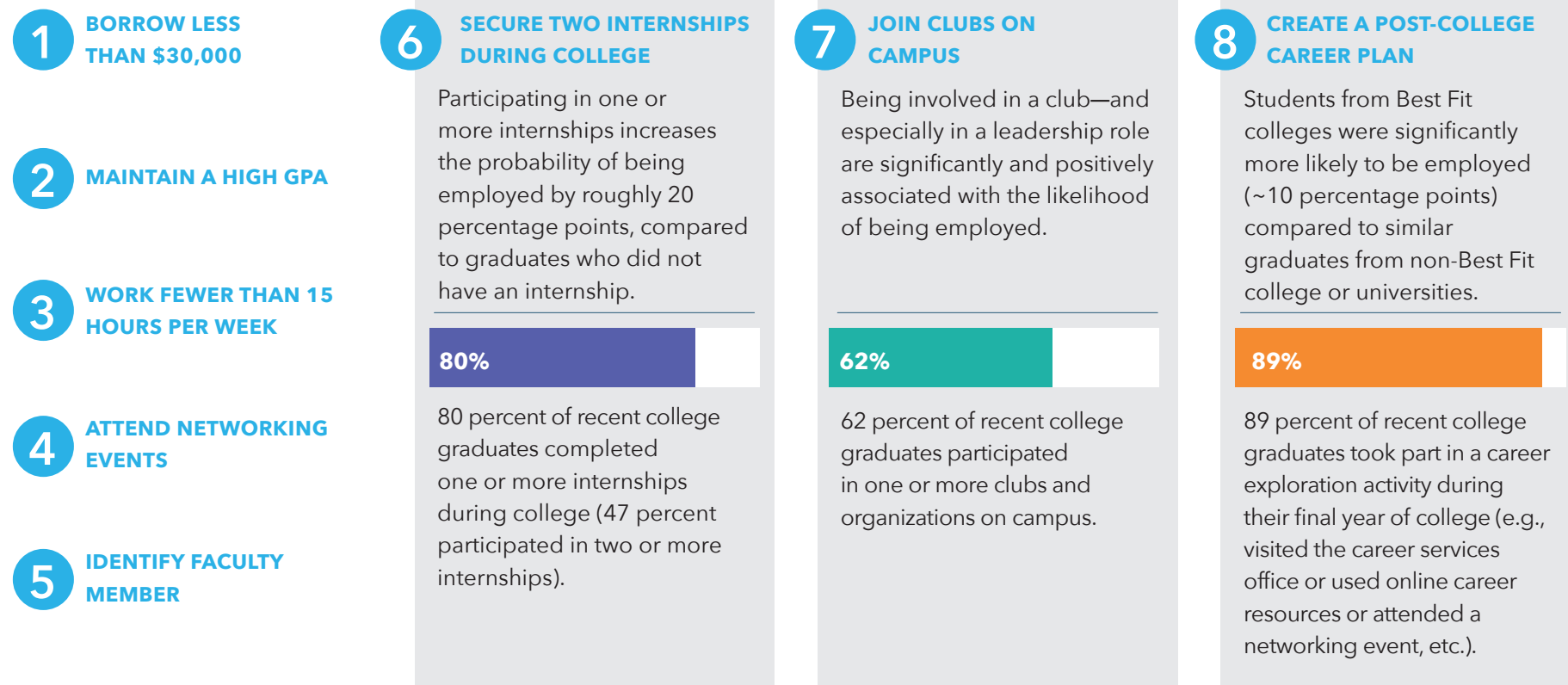
### QUESTION THREE

What additional experiences in college yield successful employment outcomes and contribute to stable career growth?

Based on 25 years of experience working with first-generation college students and industry research, College Track has identified the following best practices for increasing the value of time spent on campus and a bachelor's degree.



## EIGHT STEPS TO MAXIMIZE THE VALUE OF A COLLEGE DEGREE



We saw an increase in our students' satisfaction with their College Track College Completion Advisor. The rating of their advisor in helping them to "identify or evaluate potential career options" jumped from 52 percent in 2020 to 61 percent in 2021. Nationally, only 28 percent of students rated their academic advisor as "very helpful" in identifying or evaluating career options.\* Over the course of 2020-2022, we evolved our program model to differentiate support—online and in-person—at each step of the college completion journey.



#### QUESTION FOUR

Do our college graduates achieve opportunity, choice, and power?

Our data continue to show that the value of a college degree increases over time, with 89 percent of our older graduates reporting they have more opportunity, choice, and power as a result of earning their bachelor's degree. However, for our alumni who continue to experience COVID-19-related issues, there is a stark difference in the value they see in their college degree, which demonstrates the need for increased support services for alumni who graduated college during the pandemic.



In order to address our graduates needs, we continue to grow and refine our corporate partnerships, which provide career exposure, experiential learning opportunities, and internships that fuel our students' long-term professional success, including two specific programs geared toward college students.

**Corporate Residency:** a six-week rotation through day-long company visits where college students gain exposure to and mentorship from corporate employees in a variety of industries.

**Corporate Fellows Program:** a 10-week paid summer internship program, which builds meaningful career experience for our students and provides companies with an actionable talent strategy centered on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The data also reveal the strong correlation between internships and the alignment of career aspirations with a first job. We see similar trends when looking at debt upon college graduation—recent graduates with no debt land first jobs with much higher alignment to their career interests. One hypothesis may be that alleviating the financial burden of repaying student debt leaves college graduates with more professional choices.



"The biggest lesson I took from my College Track Corporate Residency was seeing professionals in the banking, healthcare, and science industry who looked and spoke like me. Being able to connect with individuals who had similar upbringings and struggles was inspiring. It made me realize that I had the capability to overcome any obstacle standing in my way."

**LEONARDO**

College Track East Palo Alto, Class of 2020

B.S., Business Administration | Sonoma State University

Employment: Marketing and Sales, Blue Planet Energy

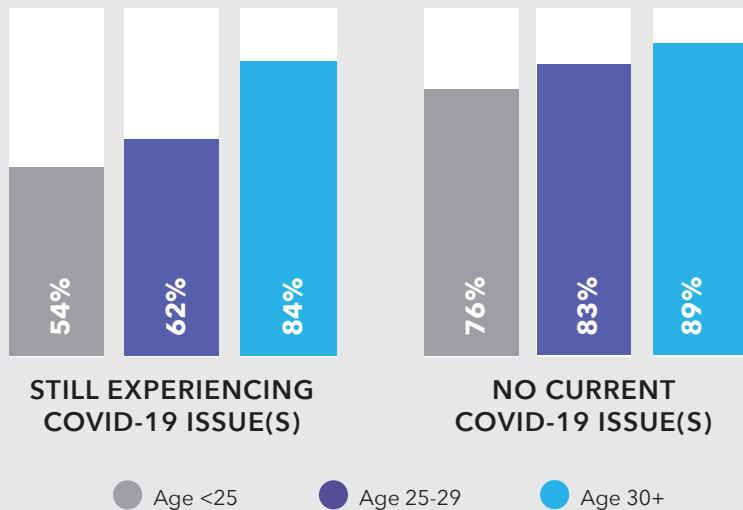


# Opportunity, Choice, and Power

When asked about having more opportunity, choice, and power as a result of earning a bachelor's degree, alumni responses varied based on the impact of the pandemic and age.

Those who continue to experience challenges related to COVID-19, report lower confidence levels in the value of their college education across all age groups. However, older alumni have a stronger belief in the value of their degree, regardless of whether they are still impacted by the pandemic.

## ALUMNI CONFIDENCE LEVELS IN THE VALUE OF THEIR BACHELOR'S DEGREE, BASED ON IMPACT OF PANDEMIC AND AGE



## CAREER ADVANCEMENT

92%

of all employed alumni report having internal advancement opportunities within the past year

38%

of all employed alumni were promoted within the past year

## PURPOSEFUL CAREERS

76%

of employed alumni feel their current job is meaningful

Percent who feel their work is meaningful because it is aligned with their career aspirations

90%

Aligned

48%

Not Aligned

# Opportunity, Choice, and Power

We found that recent college graduates, who took part in College Track's Corporate Residency Program, were 20 percent more likely than their peers to have a job with strong alignment to their career interests and aspirations.



"My experience in the Corporate Residency Program helped me land my current role at Deloitte, as I was able to carry with me the soft skills I developed in the program and I became more comfortable initiating and holding conversations with professionals. I was also able to leverage the skills I developed to land an internship with the Renaissance Entrepreneurship Center and Emerson Collective's First Gen program. During my internship at Renaissance, I developed a really close relationship with one of my supervisors who referred me to one of his friends who worked at Ernst & Young. His friend shared insights with me about his role in auditing, which helped me decide on my current role as an Audit and Assurance Assistant. Overall, the College Track's Corporate Residency Program has been an immense help in my recruiting journey. The program gave me the skills to be comfortable speaking about my professional experiences in a clear, concise, and meaningful way."

## MICHEL

College Track San Francisco, Class of 2021

B.A., Business Economics | University of California, Irvine

Employer: Audit and Assurance Assistant, Deloitte

## INTERNSHIPS AND ALIGNMENT TO CAREER INTERESTS

Percent of College Track recent graduates who have a strong alignment with their current job and career aspirations by number of internships

### 3+ INTERNSHIPS



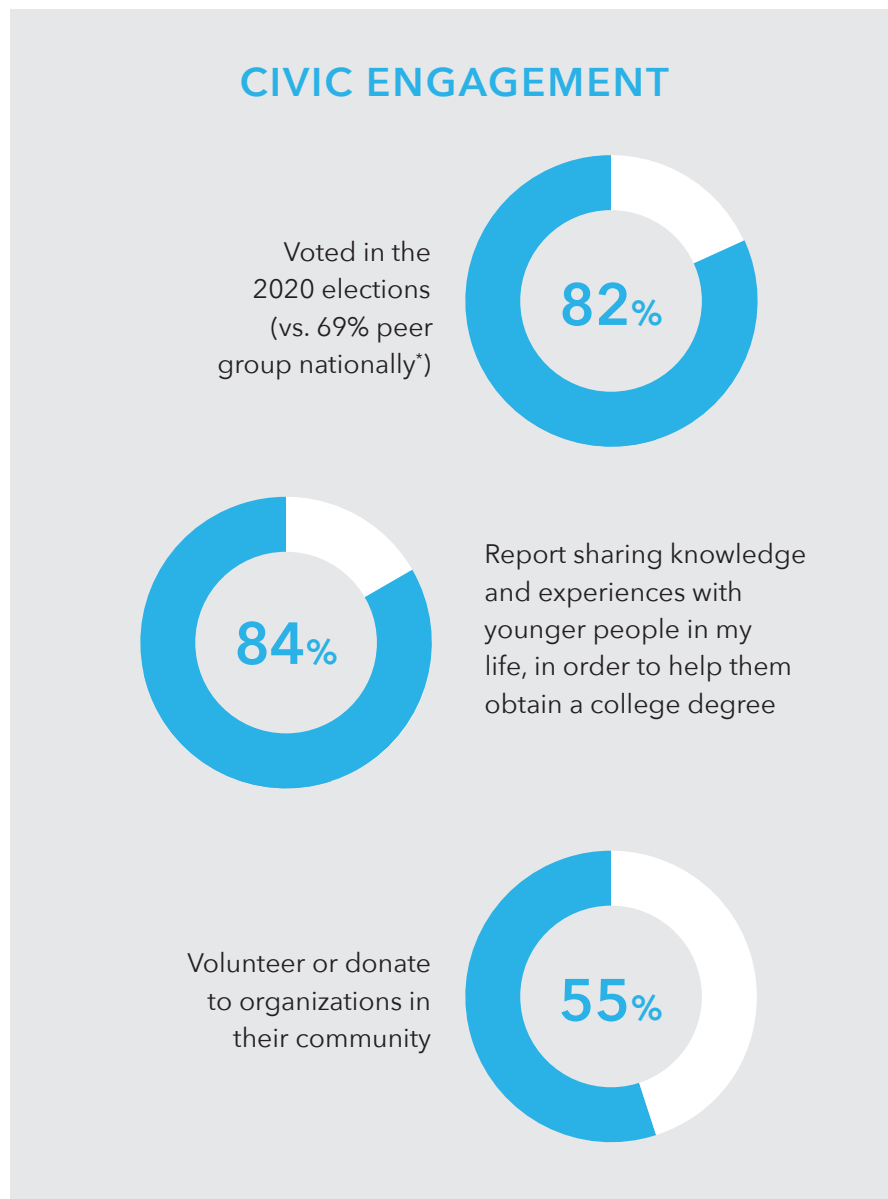
### 1-2 INTERNSHIPS



### 0 INTERNSHIPS



# Opportunity, Choice, and Power



"I'm a rising second-year law student at UVA Law. Initially, I wanted to become a law professor, but as my experiences as a first-generation law student played out, I realized I wanted to use my degree to address the inequities and systemic obstacles in attaining higher education for students like me."

**ESALYNA**

College Track San Francisco, Class of 2018

B.A., Business and Managerial Economics | University of California, Davis  
J.D. Candidate | University of Virginia School of Law



# Combination of Factors Drives Lifelong Social Mobility

## OUTCOME

## COLLEGE TRACK PROGRAMMATIC SUPPORT

**1** Graduate with lower than average debt

Financial literacy advising, need- and merit-based scholarships, college application and selection guidance

**2** Secure first job with equitable starting salary

Career readiness advising, professional development workshops, Corporate Residency and Corporate Fellows programs

**3** Secure first job aligned with career aspirations

Ten-year journey that begins with exploring career passions in ninth grade and continues with meaningful summer experiences, internships, and opportunities to job shadow and network with corporate partners

In the face of intense economic and social turmoil, our alumni remain steadfast in their pursuit of lives of opportunity, choice, and power. As they progress in their careers and make their mark on the world, College Track will continue to adapt to meet the needs of our students, including an increased investment in our social-emotional wellness services. We will continue to listen to our students and alumni, stay data-driven in our approach, and work tirelessly to understand the first-generation college student experience, in order to strengthen our program.

Since we began surveying our alumni in 2016, our network has grown to nearly 1,000 college graduates. By 2024, College Track will serve 5,000 first-generation students and alumni in Northern California, Colorado, Los Angeles, New Orleans, and the D.C. Metro Area. No matter where they are on their educational and professional journey, we will continue to work with our students to create the just and equitable world that they so rightly deserve.





## CONCLUSION

We are living in an urgent moment in America—this generation inherits a world in dire need of a collective, collaborative, inclusive approach to decision-making. The global pandemic has not only laid bare the systemic inequality embedded in this nation, but also has resulted in disproportionate challenges and personal loss for young people from low-income communities.

In 2022, our alumni data show that any decreases in outcomes (e.g., securing a first job within six months of college graduation, the average starting salary, etc.) are in line with the decreases in the U.S. population. And these results reaffirm that a bachelor's degree remains one of the greatest levers to affect deep and lasting change in the movement to democratize potential.

Together, we will reclaim higher education as the cornerstone of our democracy.\*

Source

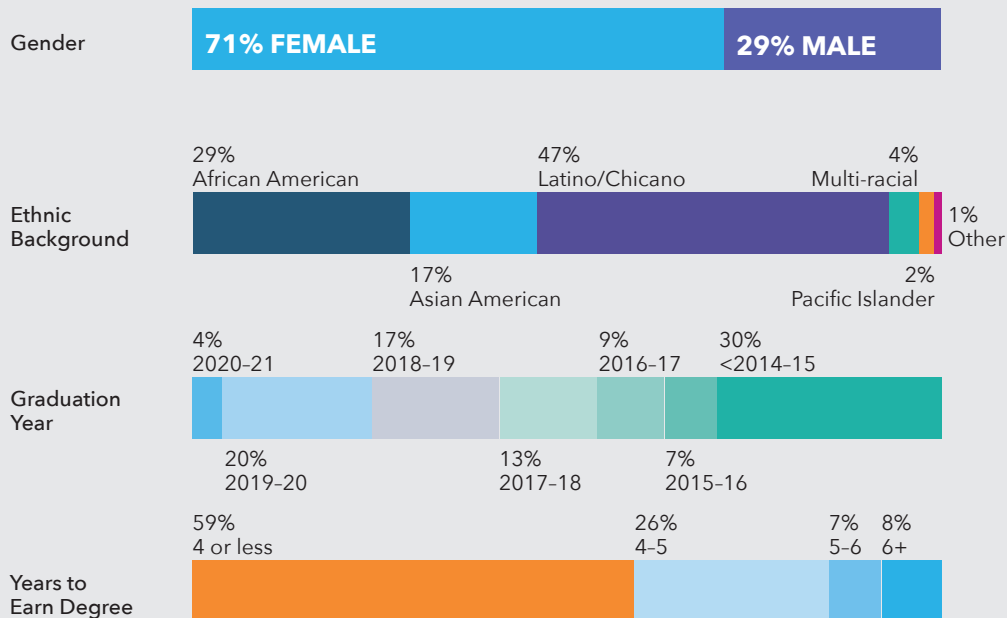
\**The Tyranny of Meritocracy: Democratizing Higher Education in America*, Lani Guanier, Beacon Press, 2015

# APPENDIX

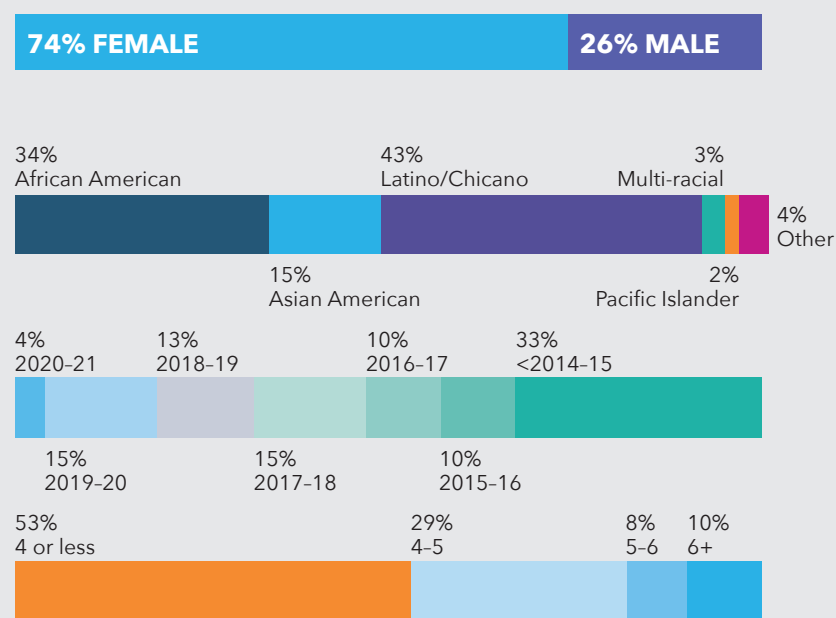




## RESPONDENT (N=410)



## NON-RESPONDENT (N=388)



## Appendix A: Methodology

In June 2021, we reached out to 798 alumni, including both recent graduates (i.e., within one year of receiving their B.A./B.S. degree) and older graduates (i.e., one or more years post graduation). Due to administration challenges presented by COVID-19, we kept this year's survey open throughout the summer to ensure we could collect as many responses as possible. Overall, we had 449 graduates respond giving us a response rate of 56 percent which is up from 2019 (46 percent).

Our current alumni network of college graduates will grow to more than 1,600 by 2024. To ensure that these young people have the opportunity to participate and thrive in our nation's changing economy, we will develop new programming and resources that will meet the needs of our alumni. In Fall 2019, we launched College Track Connect, an online portal to

connect alumni with each other, to career growth opportunities, and to the greater College Track community, enabling our graduates to lead a life of opportunity, choice, and power.

As the table below shows, respondents generally resemble the overall population with a few exceptions: (1) males were slightly more likely to respond than in years past, (2) our Asian-American and Latino graduates are slightly overrepresented as respondents, and (3) our African-American graduates are slightly underrepresented in the respondent group. It is also important to note, that while the vast majority of our alumni surveyed still come from our Bay Area centers (83 percent), we are starting to see a larger proportion of respondents from students in other regions (New Orleans = 9 percent; Colorado = 6 percent; Los Angeles = 2 percent).



## Appendix B: Survey Questions

For a complete list of the survey questions, please scan the QR code or visit [collegetrack.org/press/alumni-survey-2021/](https://collegetrack.org/press/alumni-survey-2021/).

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