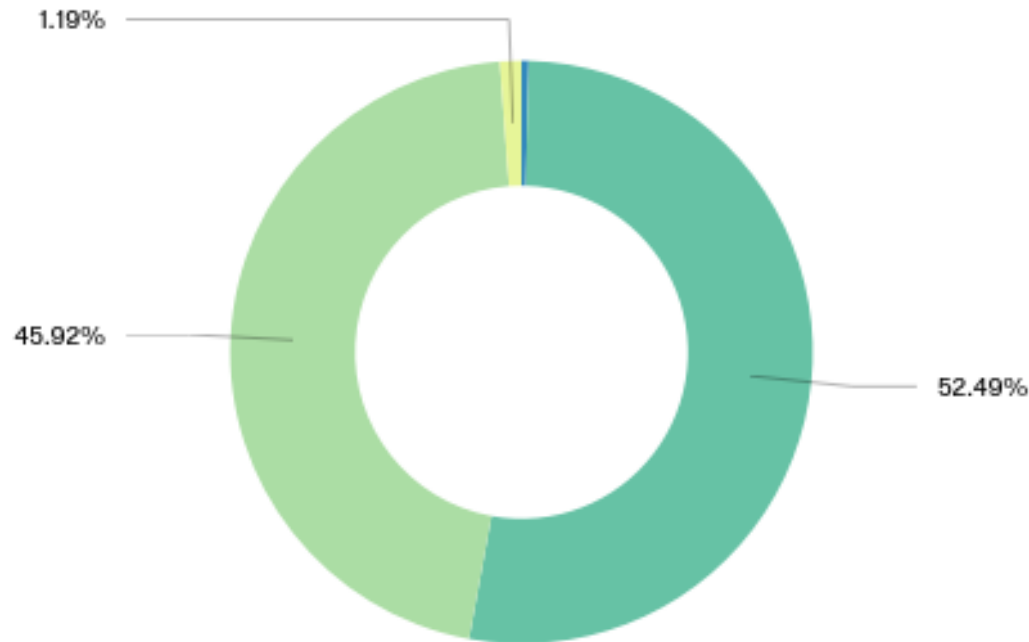



# **Academic Calendar & Schedule Feedback: Graduate Students (n=503)**

June 14th, 2019

1. Which of the following best describes your position at the University in the 2018-2019 academic year?



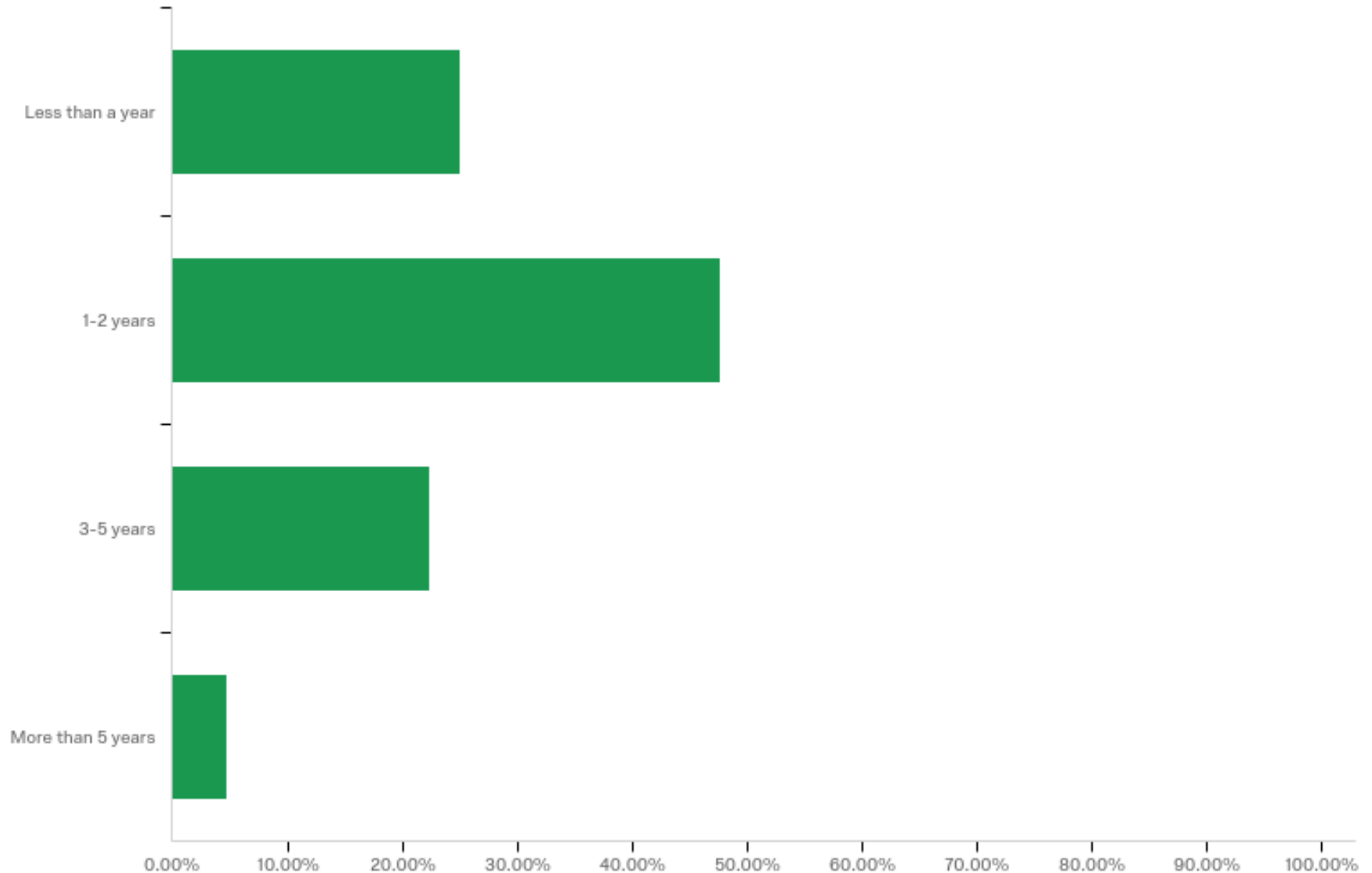
 I'm just taking classes, not in a degree program at the moment.

 I'm in a master's program.

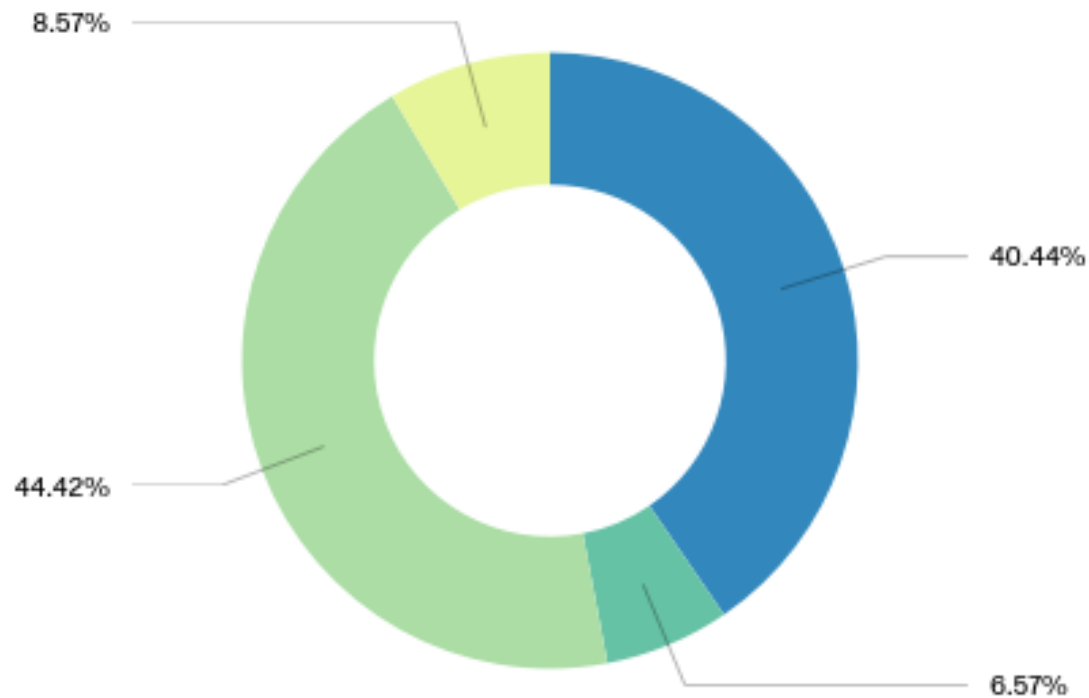
 I'm in a doctoral program.

 Other

## 2. How long have you been a graduate student at the University of Southern Mississippi?

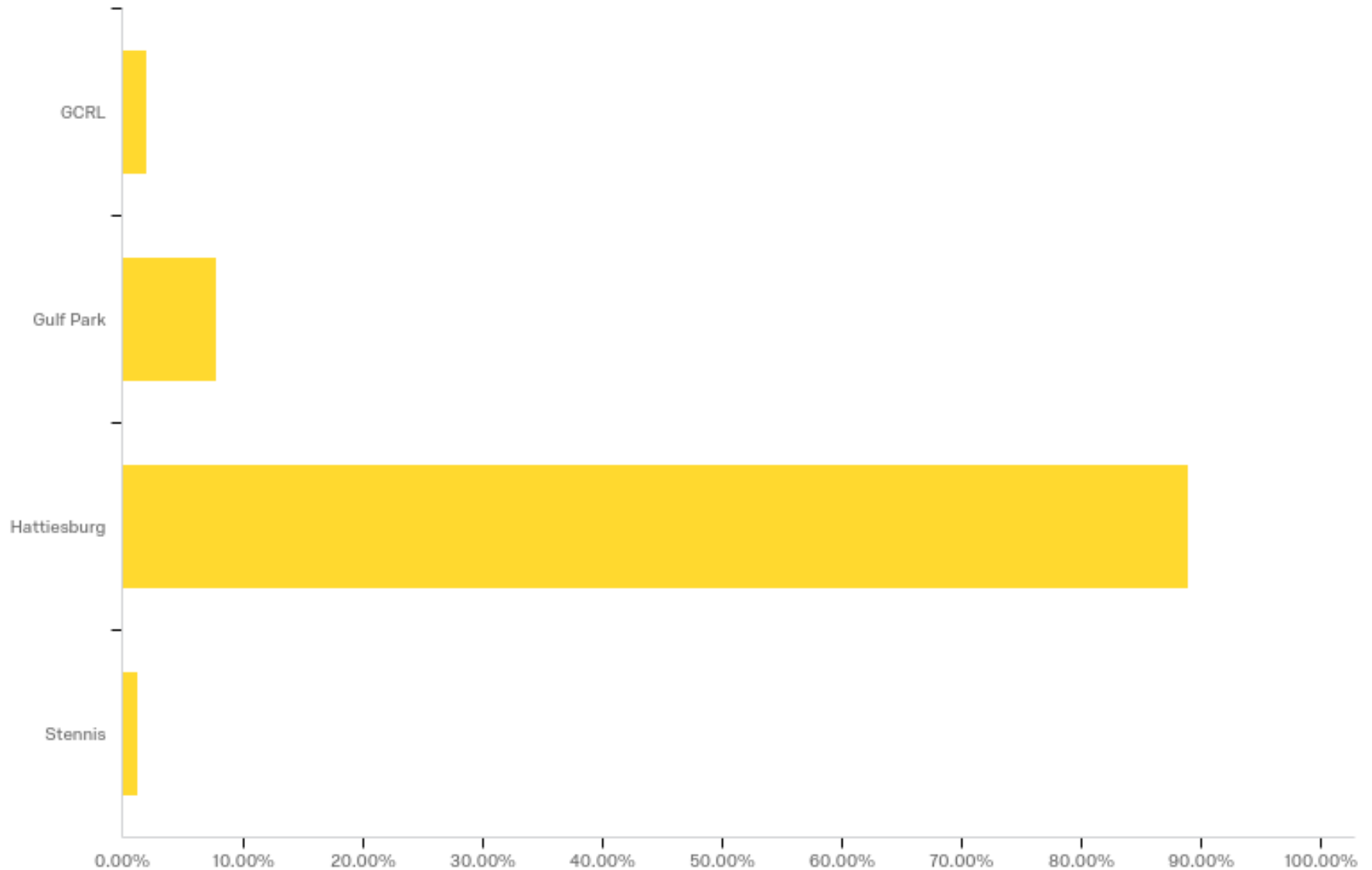


### 3. With which college are you primarily affiliated?

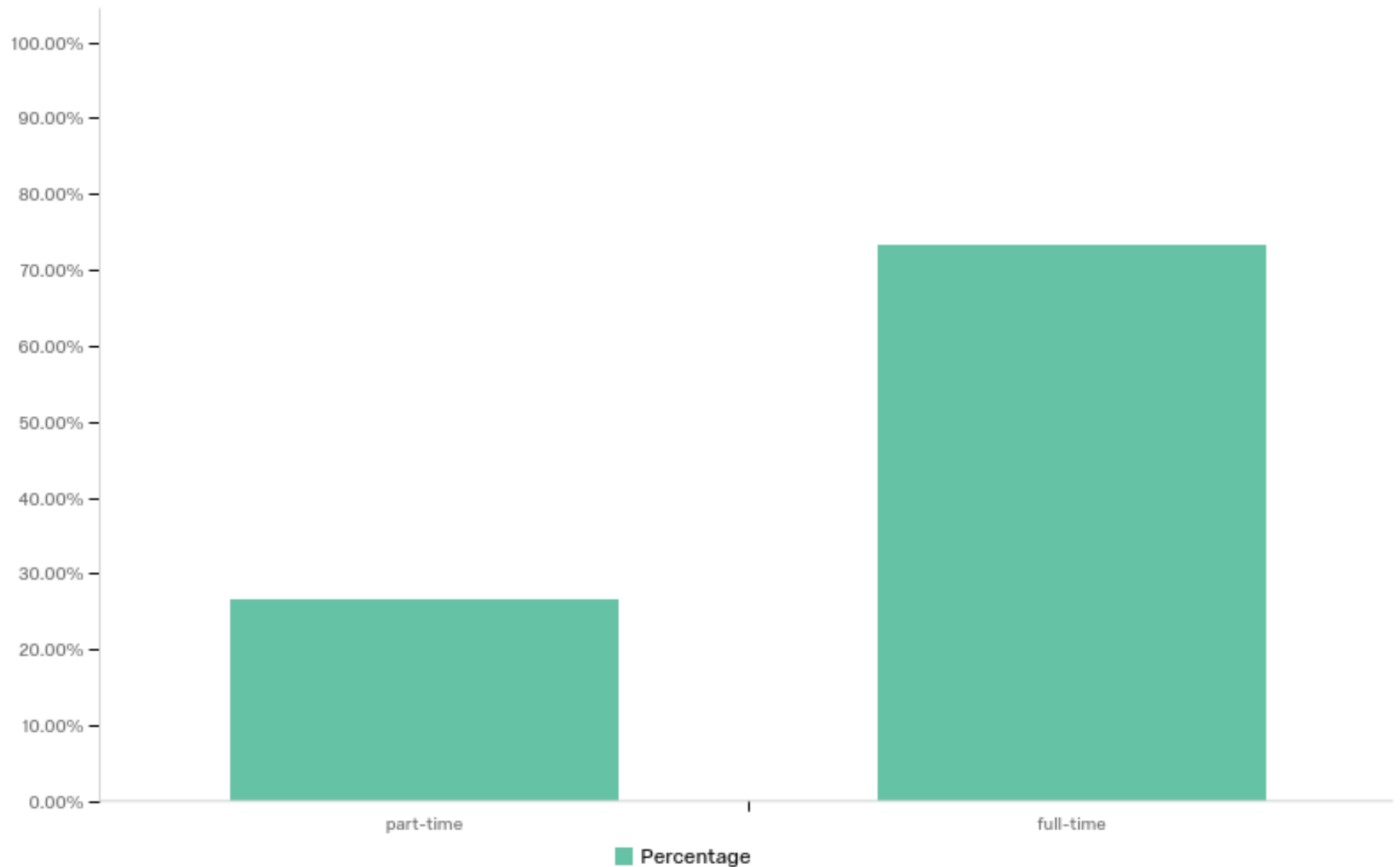


Arts and Sciences    Business and Economic Development    Education and Human Sciences    Nursing and Health Professions

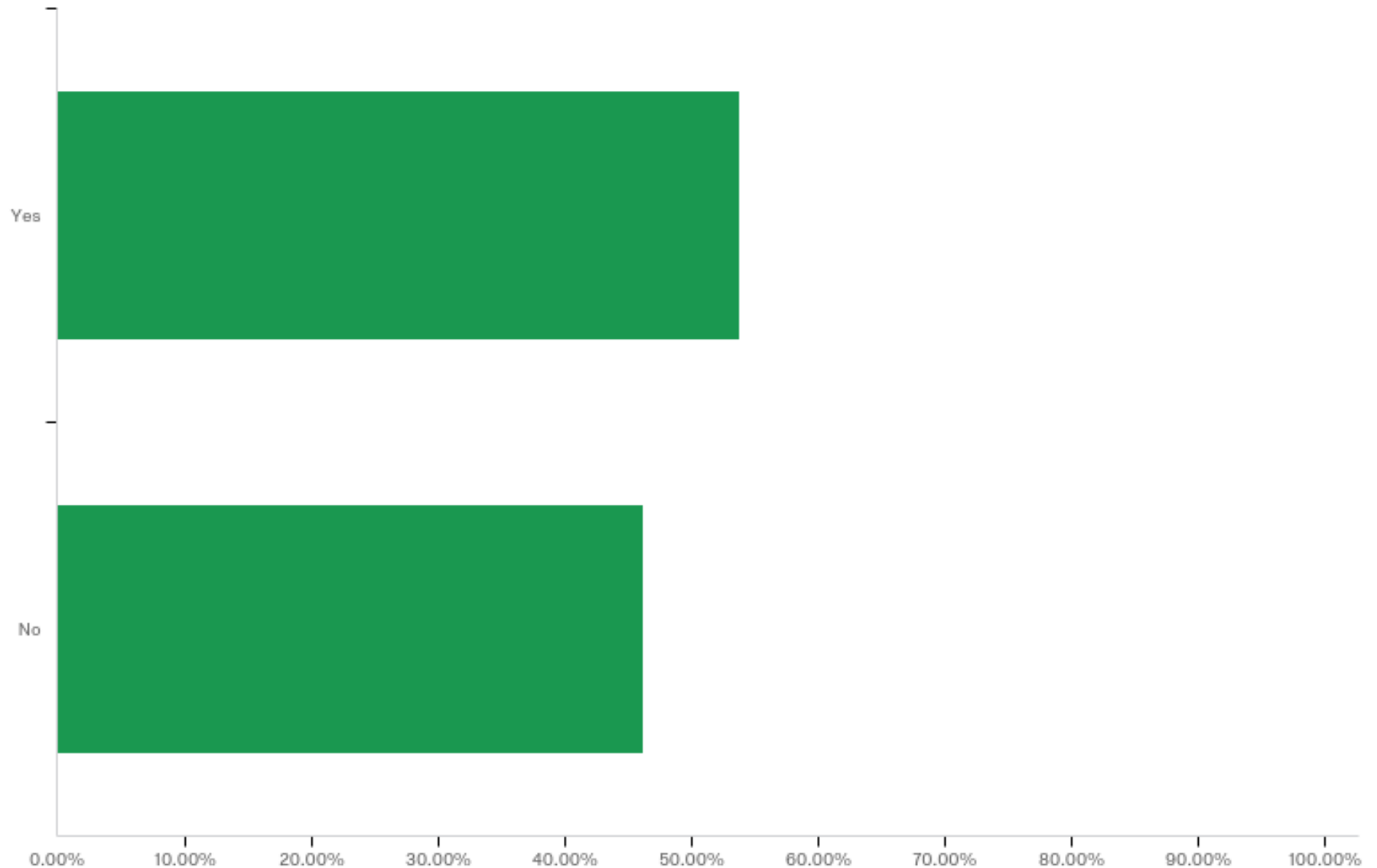
#### 4. Which of the following is your primary campus?



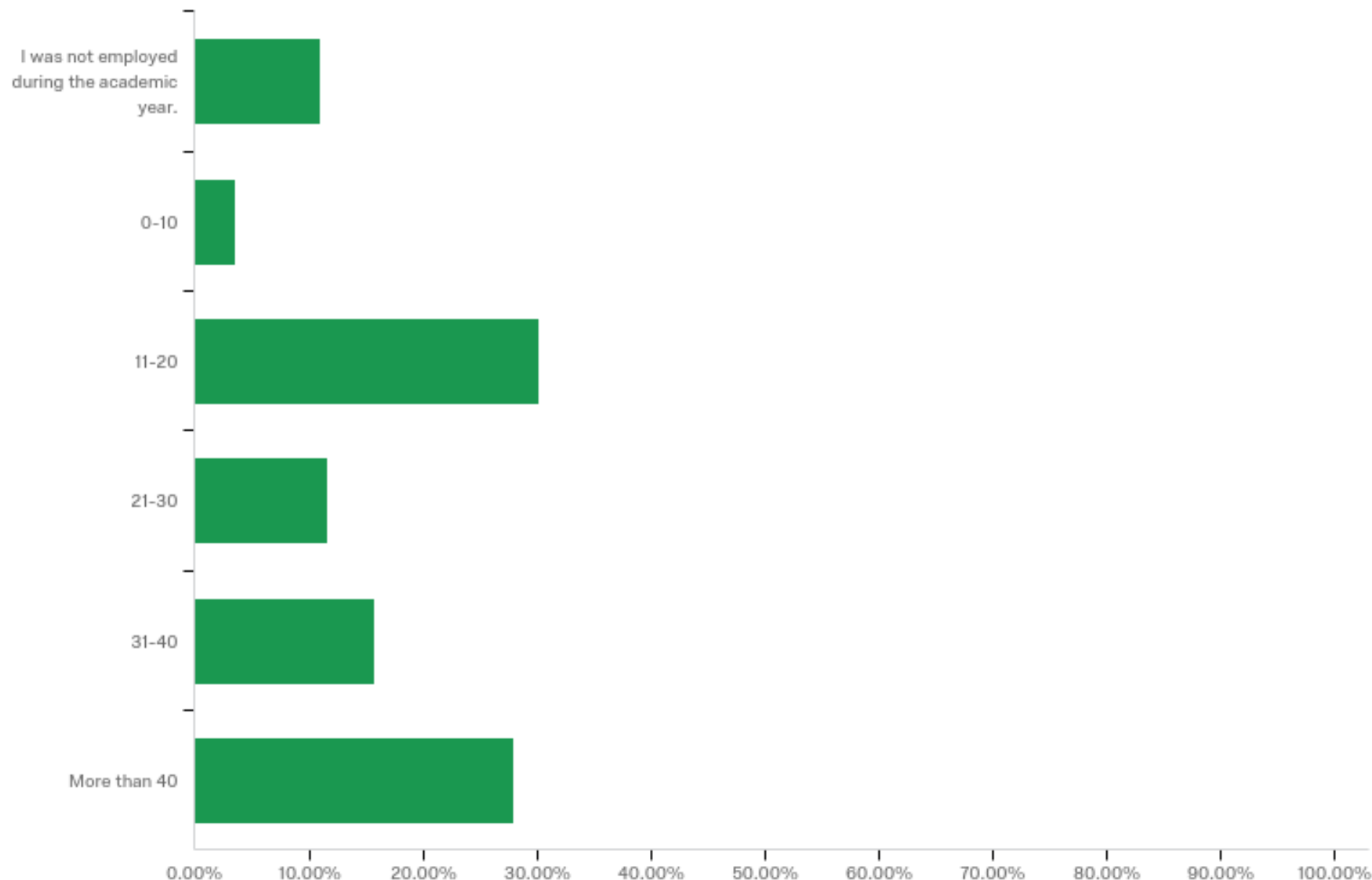
5. During the 2018-2019 academic year, which of the following best describes your status as a student?



6. During the 2018-2019 academic year, did you have a graduate assistantship at USM?

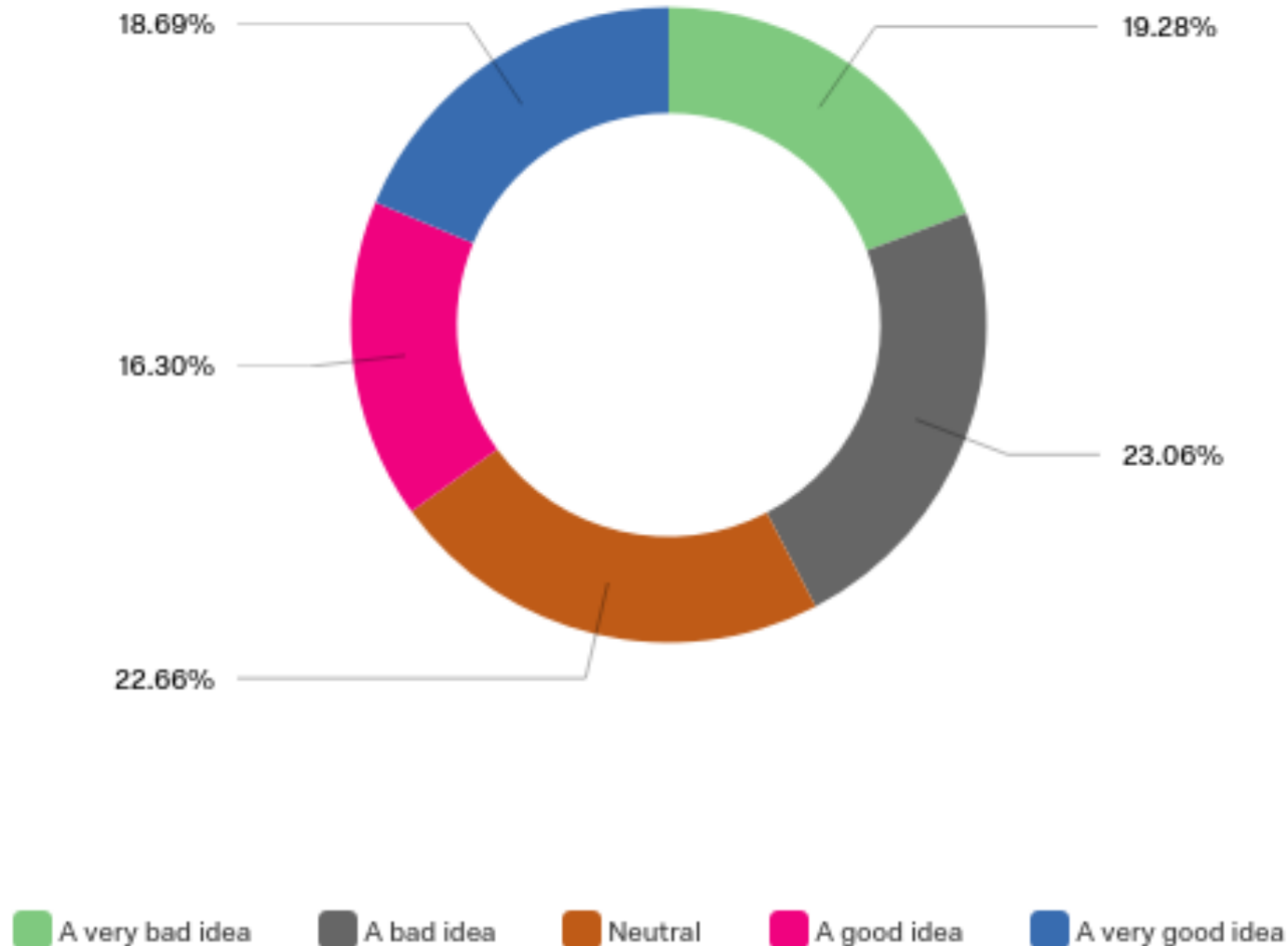


## 7. How many hours per week did you work during the 2018-2019 academic year (including any graduate assistantship)?

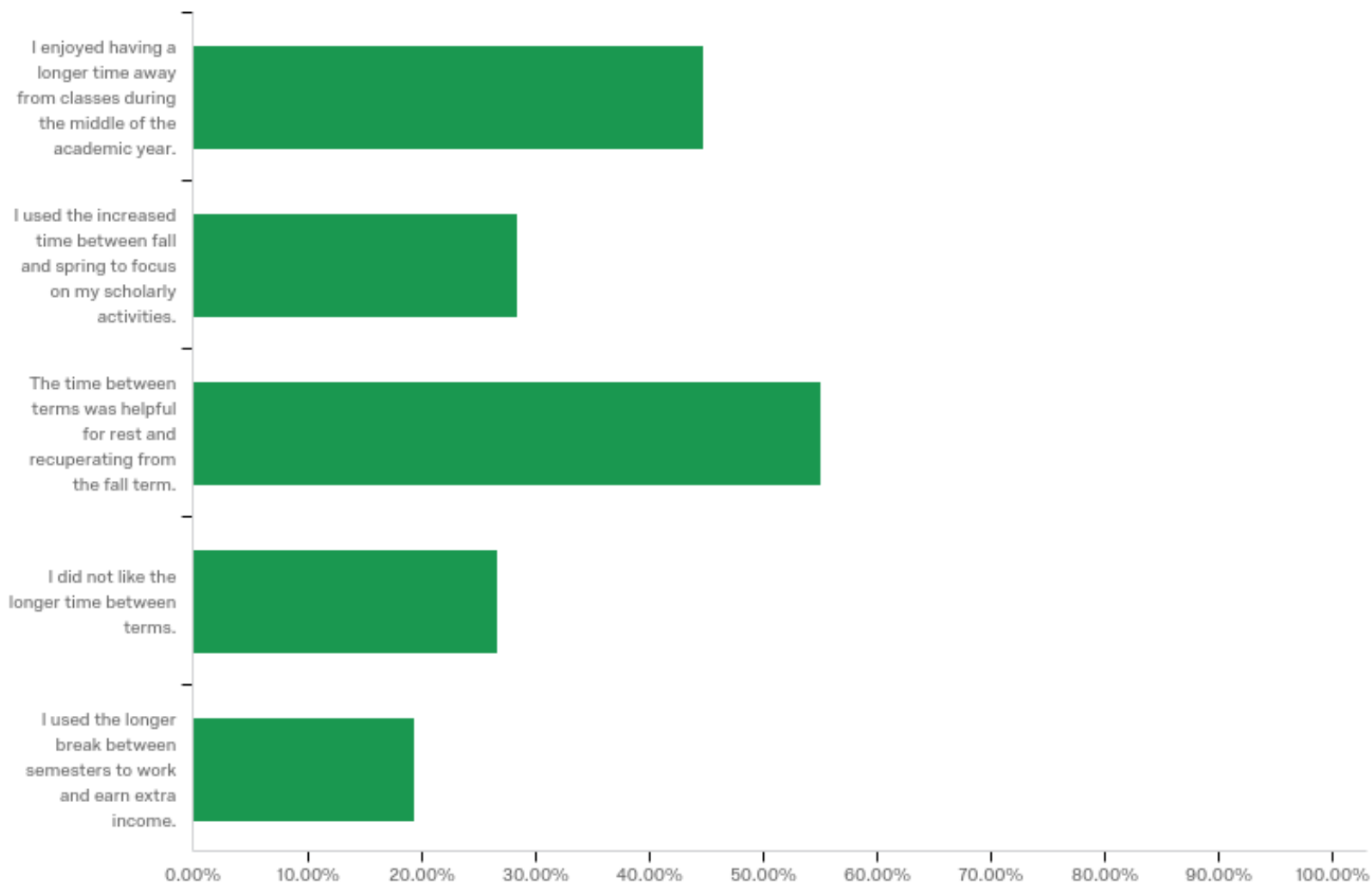




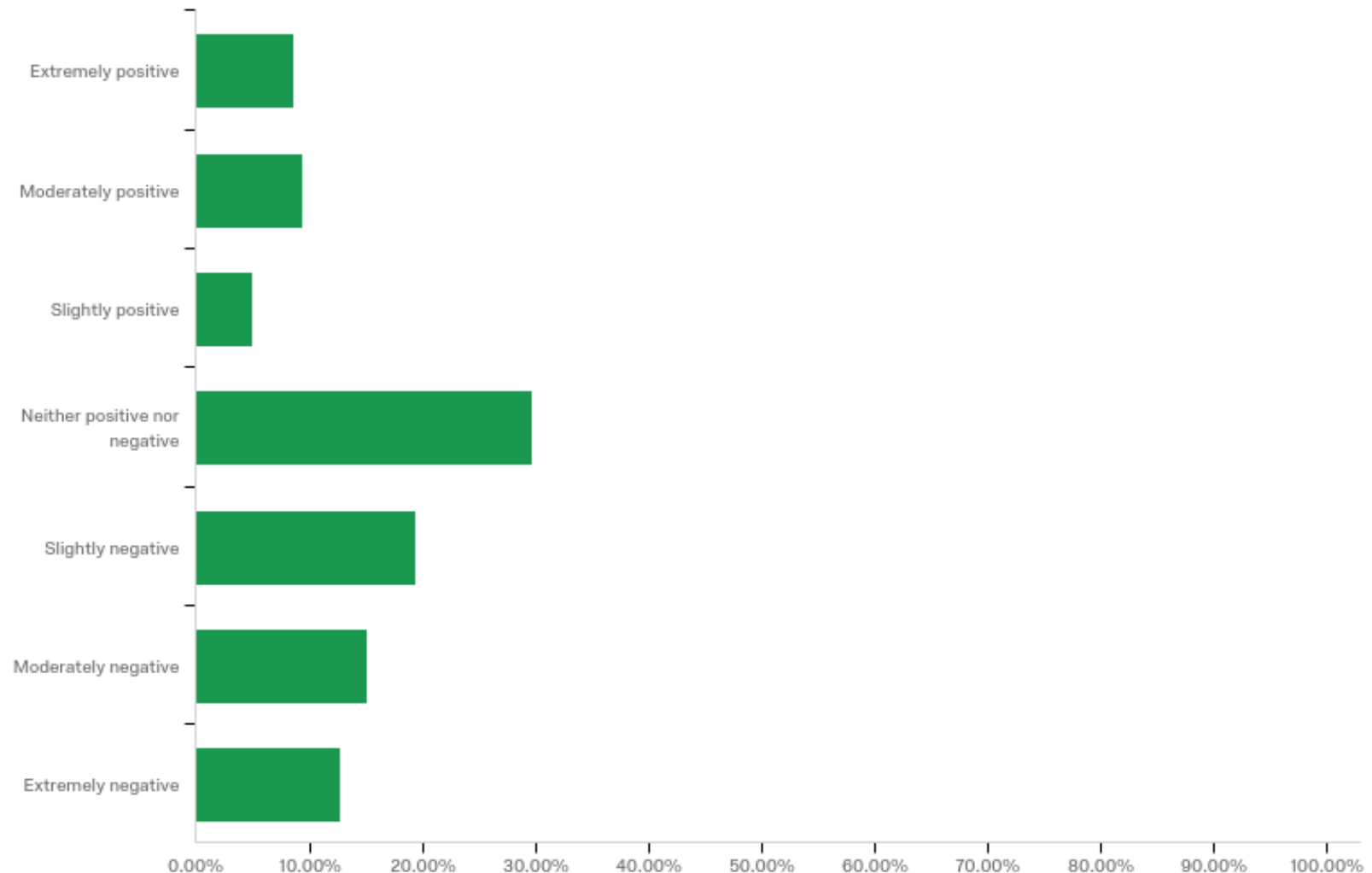
8. In the 2018-2019 academic year, the University transitioned from a 17-week semester to a 15-week semester with three intersessions per year. Overall, how would you rate this change?



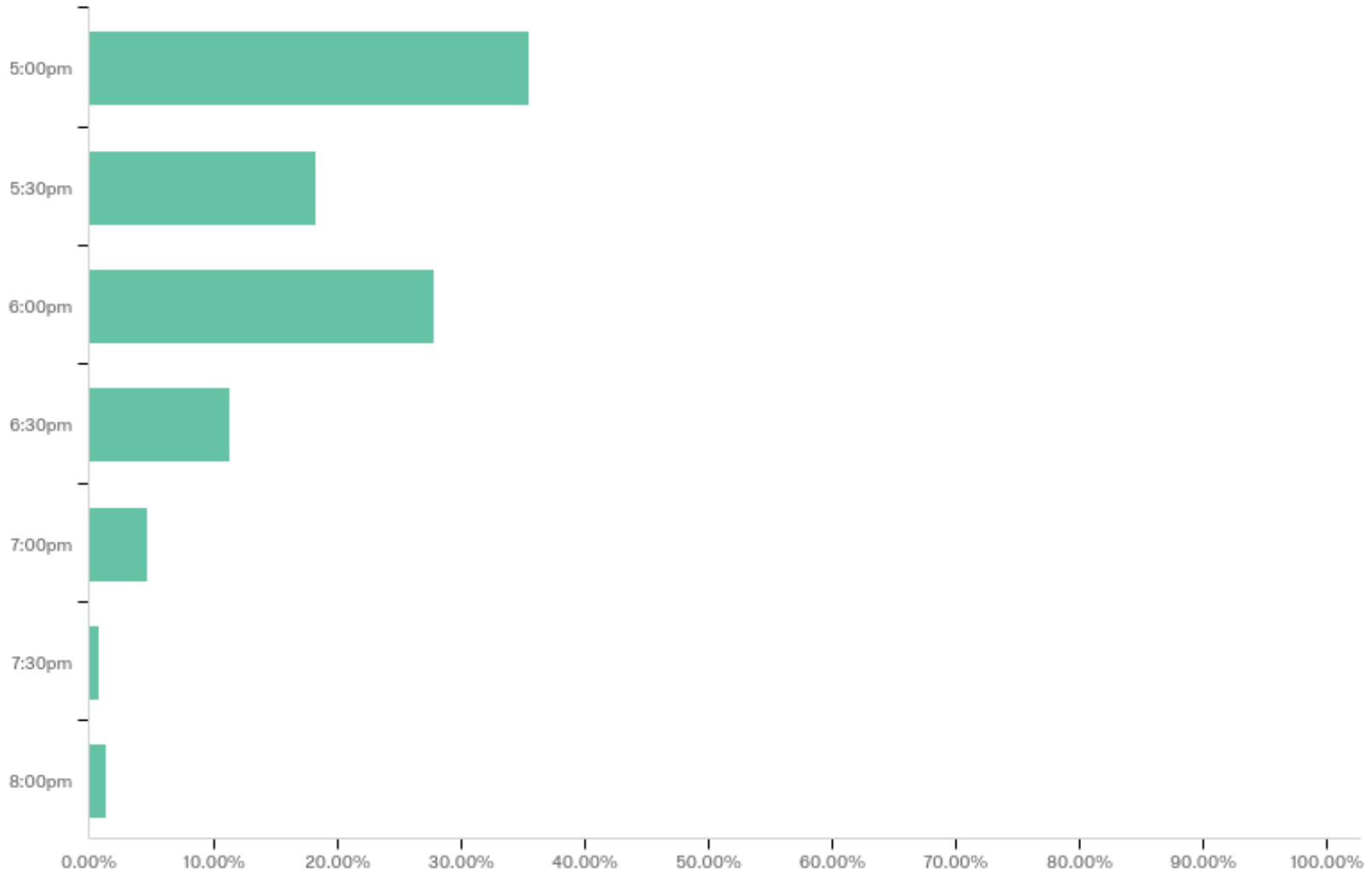
9. With the changes to the academic calendar in 2018-2019, the break between the end of fall semester classes and the beginning of the regular spring class session was much longer than in prior years. Please select all of the statements below that are true for you about that extended time between terms.



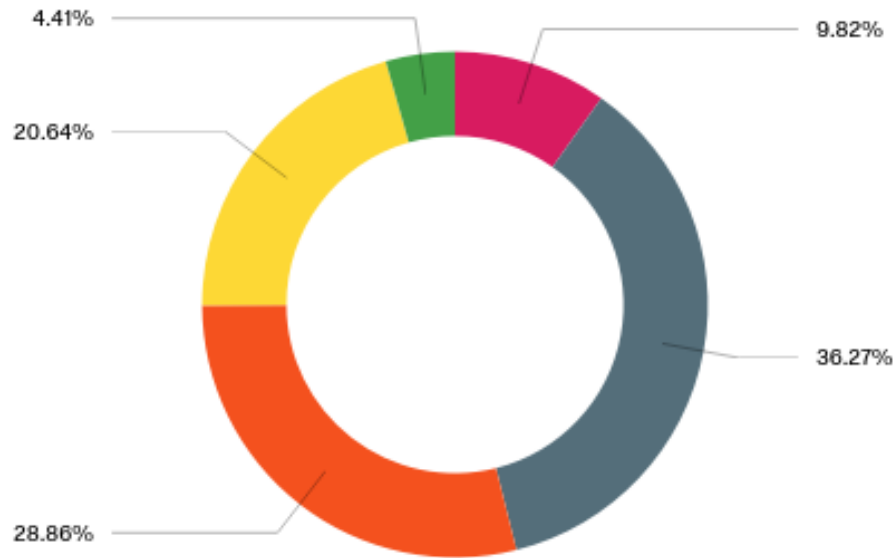
10. The reduction from 17 weeks to 15 weeks in the University calendar increased the length of class sessions (e.g., once a week classes increased from 2 hrs 45 min. to 3 hours 15 min). Overall, what impact would you say this change in class session length had on your ability to learn course material effectively?




11. Many graduate students take one-meeting-per-week night classes. Depending on the length of the semester, those classes run from 2.5 to 3.5 hours in length. Based on your personal schedule and life circumstances, which of the following starting times for night classes would you prefer?





## 12. Which of the following configurations of the academic calendar is most appealing to you?




 Reducing the regular semester further to 14 weeks with three intersessions and allowing longer breaks between terms. (Slightly longer class meeting periods than currently)

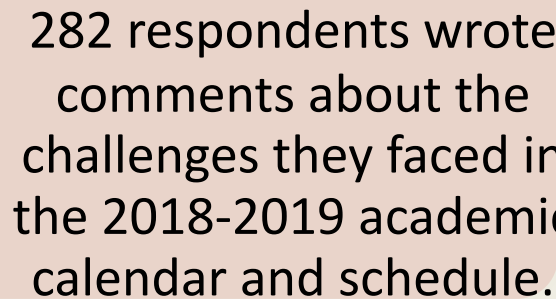
 Keeping the current 15 week semester with three intersessions each year.

 Increasing the regular fall and spring semesters to 16 weeks, reducing the number of intersessions to two per year. (Slightly shorter class meeting periods than currently, with a slightly reduced break between semesters)

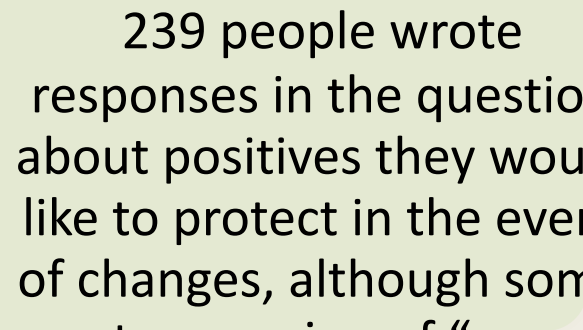
 Increasing the regular fall and spring semesters to 17 weeks, reducing the number of intersessions to two per year. (Slightly shorter class meeting periods than currently, with a reduced break between semesters)

 Increasing the regular fall and spring semesters to 18 weeks, reducing the number of intersessions to one per year. (Shorter class meeting periods than currently, with a significantly reduced break between semesters)

# Graduate Student Comments on the Survey



282 respondents wrote comments about the challenges they faced in the 2018-2019 academic calendar and schedule.



239 people wrote responses in the question about positives they would like to protect in the event of changes, although some wrote a version of “none.”

***The following slides include excerpts from the comments provided. The anonymous selections represent recurring themes in both the negative and positive comments.***

# Graduate Student Comments



- ❑ I felt cheated out of the extra class time. I don't feel that the professors amended their plans to account for the shorter semester, so it felt like we just missed out on two weeks of classes. Things were more hectic since we had to cram the same amount of work into 15 weeks.
- ❑ As a full time graduate student, having classes from 8am to 2pm straight is almost impossible and on top of that each one of those classes has lab that accompanies it meaning that our schedule is 8am-to 10pm M-Thurs. So having that Friday off doesn't make any difference because its packed with catching up on the weeks prior work. The sciences are hard to condense down to four days a week and to keep the attention of students for 2 hours at a time of dense and hard to digest material. It would be great if the science students had the chance to have the normal schedule or if we had labs on fridays instead of starting at 7pm at night.
- ❑ As a part time student trying to get in touch with and meet with faculty, they are not available during the breaks, so it makes it harder to find times to meet with them. Their teaching schedules also become more crowded with the longer class times which also makes finding meeting times difficult.
- ❑ As a music student, the short amount of time can be quite stresfull, since learning music requires lots of practicing. The second part of the semester feels too cramped and nerve racking, almost to the limit of exhaustion.

# Graduate Student Comments



- The challenges our cohort faced in the reduced semester was fulfilling the required amount of 450 hours in our field practicum in a single semester. Also, currently some important foundation classes we are enrolled in have been reduced to two credit hour courses rather than three. If the University is to keep this schedule then some definitive changes need to be resolved so as not to be so overwhelming.
- The most significant challenge was the lack of a universal break. It was difficult to schedule meetings for groups because there wasn't a time where there was a break from classes for all. I believe that during the longer semester there used to be a break between 11:15 to 12 that was convenient for meetings and professionalization panels.
- Poor communication resulted in poor planning. Some faculty said they hadn't heard anything about it (which may or may not be true). Those that did had incorrect information or little time to prepare since the schedule took too long to figure out for some classes/programs. We couldn't get advised until way late because the department couldn't figure out what they were supposed to do and no one was talking to each other. The students had more information than the faculty and program directors had.



# Graduate Student Comments



- ☐ Perhaps the most difficult challenge within the school of performing and visual arts was trying to create meaningful works of art in a Safe way that did not harm the students physically or mentally. We are really having to push the undergraduate to work faster and harder in our shops, and that can sometimes lead to mistakes and injury. Because of the new calendar, the turnover rate between shows within the theater department is incredibly fast paced. Because of the content schedule, I maybe had two weekends off each semester. We would work continuously without a break throughout most of the year. The cramp schedule will often result in high tension, and low morale.
- ☐ I feel like we would do fine with the 15 weeks if we were just students or just teachers. Being both a full-time graduate student and a graduate instructor was really rough. We felt the pressure as students as our teachers struggled to adjust their teaching. We also felt the pressure as teachers as we adjusted our teaching. We had to teach longer periods (mostly to freshmen who may struggle themselves to pay attention during longer periods) and sit in our own classes as students longer. Our days were marathon days. It wasn't uncommon for us to be on campus for 12 hours straight working the whole time.
- ☐ Class times that start late because they end at 10 o'clock at night. With a two hour commute and a full-time job it's very difficult to drive back that late at night and get home so late and then have to get up and work all day the next day

# Graduate Student Comments



- As a graduate student, my ability to collect data was impeded by this shortened semester. This was a common criticism among many graduate students who had fewer opportunities to collect data for projects that involved human subjects, as the class times were set up to where no one had time to participate between classes and Fridays were completely ineffective for data collection, as there were no people on campus then. The latter is less of an issue but the former was critical in undermining efforts to collect data effectively....
- Short semesters mean closer deadlines for papers, which leads to a lower quality in research than a longer semester would accommodate. Schools should work to provide ways for students to get a start on their research in the prior semester according to the guidelines of the particular class, or provide ways - specifically time - to continue on research from a previous semester as to not neglect current tasks.
- Timelines for graduate student defense and graduation are already tight, and this compressed timeline exacerbates the problem. As it currently stands, theses and dissertations have to be completed the semester prior to graduation because they are due only a couple of weeks after the semester starts. Either relax the timelines for graduate defense documents, or lengthen the semester to allow graduate students to actually work on their defense in their final semester.

# Graduate Student Comments



- Even though we technically have the same amount of classroom time, the shortened semester reduces the amount of time I had to work on projects and the number of times I had to meet with my instructors face-to-face. I feel like the time between classes can be just as important as the time in class. Being able to go home and review the material and then come back to class and ask questions is definitely a part of my learning process. The shorten semester cut out two weeks of that kind of time for me.
- + You see, we have the same amount of assignments (i.e. papers of significant length that we prefer to be en route to journal caliber) in a lesser amount of time to research and complete them --- NOT TO MENTION that GAs also have less time to grade all of the other students' assignments (and meet with them, etc.). + Yeah, our professors are completely zonked. IF our professors do use the entire period (which most of them most certainly do not), then they are all spent by the end of the day, which makes the afternoon/evening classes (which are most of our grad sections) grade A horrible for everyone. + The compressed schedule disallows me to hold an outside job to help pay for ... basic minimum living expenses. + The "extra break" means practically nothing when everyone else you know back home is already back at university and you are just twidling your thumbs before jumping into the iron cage death match that is the 15-week schedule. ....

# Graduate Student Comments



- ☐ Faster pace was wonderful. It kept me focused on my school work.
- ☐ Specifically for the sciences, having a day or even half day free is nice to allow for office hours, study groups, or other meetings to occur without the worry of too many conflicts.
- ☐ I feel longer class periods are helpful because you can spend more time ensuring that all your students understand the material.
- ☐ The longer periods of time in the classroom allowed for better understanding of the content being taught. It seemed to make more sense to be in class longer than to crush everything in a short period of time and longer amounts of days to meet each week. Shorter classes are rushed and cut off the time to process and understand what's being taught.
- ☐ The longer breaks allow a mental break for me and allowed me to spend some much needed time with my family. I think that USM should keep the 15-week academic calendar for student satisfaction.
- ☐ Keep as is....working great and seems to give students more time to refocus.
- ☐ For those of us that don't have the luxury of taking a trip on spring break, the extra time in-between semesters is appreciated. Also, for those of us who work full time, those breaks are greatly appreciated, and prevent burnout. The 15-week layout is best for students who aren't traditional and juggling multiple activities.

# Graduate Student Comments



- ☐ I travel one-way for 90 minutes to get to night class. Having fewer weeks greatly impacts my traveling time and expenses in a positive manner.
- ☐ I am done with classes, and my primary focus is research. Having the semester end earlier gives me more time to focus on research.
- ☐ It provides a break between fall and spring semesters which is welcomed between all the things that graduate students are juggling.
- ☐ The longer breaks were very helpful for me as my family lives farther away and it gave me more time to travel and see them.
- ☐ A definite pro is that I was able to work a full-shift on Friday and pay for college with cash/scholarship. Because my schedule is demanding as a music student, having Fridays allowed me to keep my well-paying job. Not being available on Fridays would not allow me to keep my job.
- ☐ I loved the longer breaks and shorter semesters because they were very organized by the months. For example, the first week of the semester being the last week of the first month and finals week being the first week of the last month helped me to keep my bearings time-wise during the semester. I also love that it was a kind of sprint. Personally, I feel as though I would be working nearly just as hard with a longer model, but just needing to do so for a longer period of time. I would also feel just stressed about classwork in both types of semester length, with the 15 week semester, I am equally stressed but for a shorter amount of time. This helps me avoid burn-out and mental health crises.

# Graduate Student Comments



- ☐ I do like having more time in between the sessions. As a full time band director in the public schools, we are usually wrapping up our term as well and the to-do list gets very lengthy very quickly. So I appreciated not having to focus on grad school when the work load with my jobs was at its highest.
- ☐ You also instituted no Friday classes to some extent. I wish the whole campus would shut down on Fridays to reduce costs and remove the temptation to now cram a dozen meetings and workshops into every Friday.
- ☐ For full-time employed, part-time student, the additional "breather" between shorter semesters is refreshing and restful.
- ☐ I am currently using the Post 911 GI Bill which counts the actual days in the month when calculating payments and usage. Although this means the payout for the monthly stipend (\$1205) is reduced, it also means more classes can be taken so the payoff is better for those wanting to go to graduate school (\$1200+/class).
- ☐ More class time to discuss and complete course work... More time to focus on other scholarly activities during the breaks that would typically be hindered by a longer academic calendar.
- ☐ I do like the start date that we have began to use (late August). It has allowed me to be able to keep my summer internships longer.

# Graduate Student Comments



- ☐ The longer breaks allowed me, as a graduate student, to have more time to get ahead on research plans which I thought was really helpful. It also allowed a reasonable and good amount of time to go home and be with my family.
- ☐ The intersessions gives an opportunity for more classes to be taken and applied towards graduation. The 15 weeks allows for working students to obtain graduate degrees, at the 2 year program pace, without the overwhelming length of time or strain on financial resources.
- ☐ As an online graduate student and an adult learner, I found the 15-week semester refreshing. It gave me the flexibility to spend more time with my family between sessions and the evening start times allowed for flexibility at home. The only challenge with the once-weekly online class length is that I'm on the east coast, so during the spring semester, some of my courses didn't end until 10:30 p.m. EST -- and more than once I dozed off \*on\* my keyboard! :(
- ☐ I work full-time as a teacher and part-time as a coach, tutor and doing special programs at my school. I also have young children at home. I would rather stick to a bit longer nightly classes and shorter time frame to get them in (15 weeks). It allows me more quality time with my kids between semesters and time to recuperate. I also feel I get more out of a bit longer nightly classes as there is more time for discussion and answering questions.