

re·generation

# REWRITING BUSINESS

2024 REPORT ON SUSTAINABILITY INTEGRATION IN BUSINESS PROGRAMS

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## we are the **re•generation**

We're a Canadian youth-led nonprofit on a mission to empower the next generation of leaders to **re•think** how the economy can support human and ecological well-being.

Our organization is dedicated to advancing sustainable and socially just business practices by amplifying youth perspectives and providing youth with skill-building and career resources. re•generation has influenced policymaking discussion, including the Climate-Aligned Finance Act; led Canada's most significant youth-led movement to re•imagine the future business education through the [Our Future, Our Business Manifesto](#) campaign; and has published cutting-edge research like our recent report [Falling Behind: Canada's Future in a Low Carbon World](#).

In 2024, we're launching the REWORK YOUR FUTURE Campaign to call on employers to accelerate the clean economy. We're bringing youth voices from across the country together to show companies that young workers want to make an impact through their careers and expect employers to take steps towards a just transition for Canada.

 [@regeneration.ca](#)

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# THE INTRODUCTION

A polycrisis emerges when multiple crises occur simultaneously, and their collective impact causes greater harm than what would be experienced if each crisis unfolded independently.<sup>1</sup>

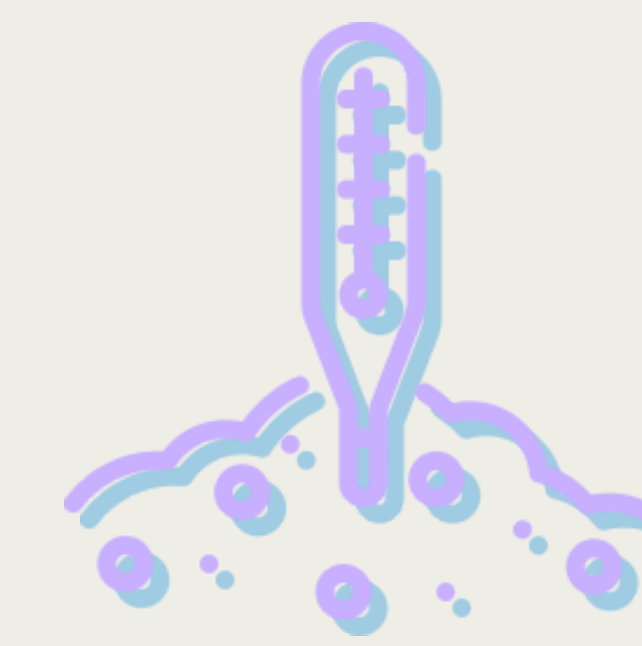
Currently, we are witnessing a series of crises that, while seemingly distinct, are in fact deeply interconnected. These include but are not limited to:



**Climate Change**



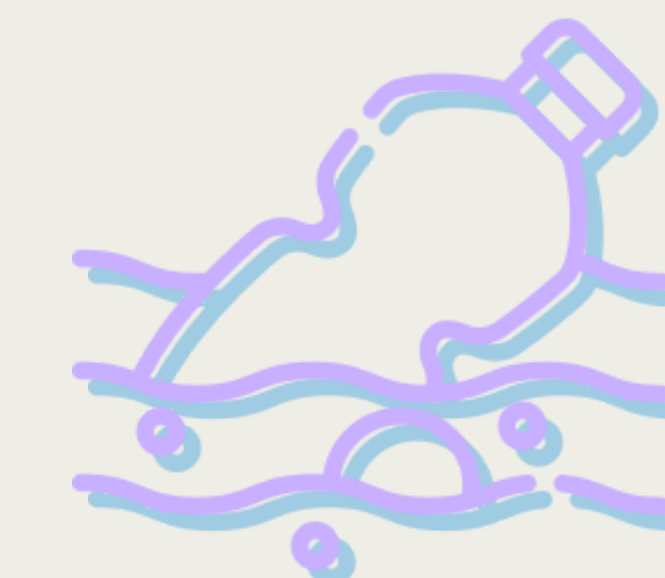
**Biodiversity Loss**



**Soil Degradation**



**Water Security**



**Chemical Pollution**

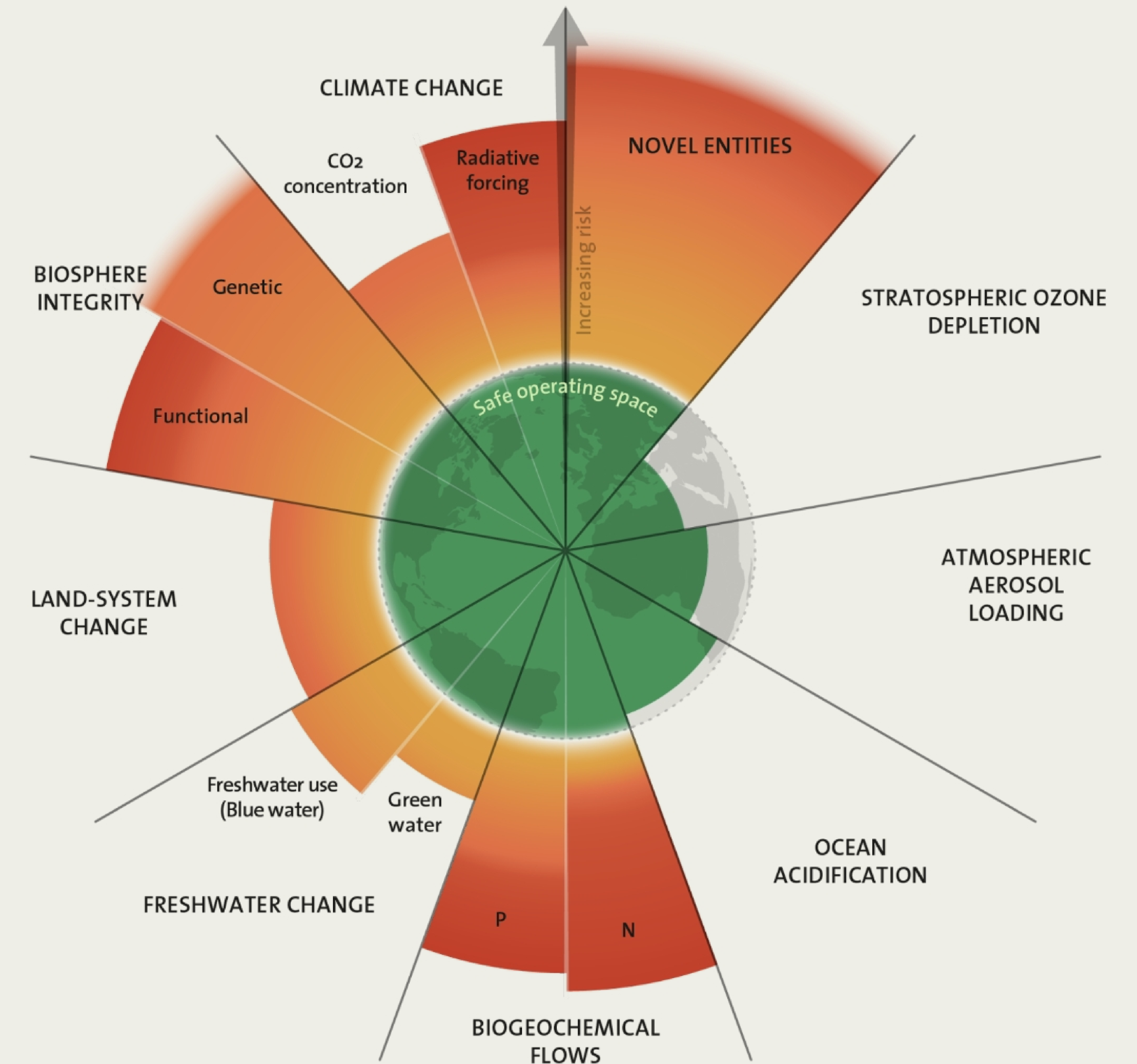
The interrelationship among global issues is best described by the *Planetary Boundaries* framework, which details how the collective operation of nine pivotal Earth systems within specific thresholds is paramount in maintaining the favourable conditions our planet has had for the past **10,000 years** (i.e., the Holocene epoch).

Recent studies unequivocally demonstrate that **human activity has disrupted the equilibrium** of six out of the nine planetary boundaries, as seen in Figure 1. Each of these disruptions, accompanied by their respective cascading consequences have cumulatively driven the Earth past the threshold of its “safe operating space.”<sup>2</sup> This shift ultimately indicates a decrease in the environmental stability and predictability that is essential for the sustainability of our interdependent global society. In light of these findings, it becomes apparent that

## HUMANITY IS ENTRENCHED IN A POLYCRISIS

Tackling this complex dilemma necessitates the timely adoption of ways of thinking that emphasize root cause analysis, foster the deployment of innovative solutions, and acknowledge the limitations of the ideologies that have led to this situation. This underscores the need for **an unprecedented level of interdisciplinary collaboration and synchronization** within the coming decades to prevent further environmental degradation and to develop resilient, equitable societies capable of enduring the already-felt impacts of the polycrisis.

**Figure 1:** Transgression of 6 out of 9 Planetary Boundaries



Source: Stockholm Resilience Center, 2023

# BRIDGING THE ACTION GAP

**In Canada, there are signs of hope** as business leaders, investors, governments, and consumers signal their growing aspiration to contribute towards solutions for these issues. For instance,

- 50%** • **50%** of Canadian CEOs ranked sustainability as their number one priority.<sup>3</sup>
- 58%** • **58%** of Canadian institutional investors cite the desire to “positively affect society and the environment” as their primary motivation.<sup>4</sup>
- ↓40%** • The Canadian government has shown a commitment to sustainability, aiming to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by **40% ↓** below 2005 levels by 2030.<sup>5</sup>
- 61%** • **61%** of Canadian consumers plan to pay more attention to the environmental impact of what they consume.<sup>6</sup>

**However, desires and commitments are yet to translate into action:**

- 81%** • **81%** of Canada’s largest companies don’t financially quantify their climate-related risks.<sup>7</sup>
- \$115bn** • The annual investment shortfall to meet the country’s climate commitment is projected to be as high as **\$115 billion**.<sup>8</sup>
- 49%** • **49%** of measures to meet the 2030 Emission Reduction Plan lack deadlines, milestones, and targets, showcasing that the plan is insufficient to meet Canada’s reduction target.<sup>9</sup>
- ↑3X** • The average Canadian emits **↑3x the global average** each year.<sup>10</sup>

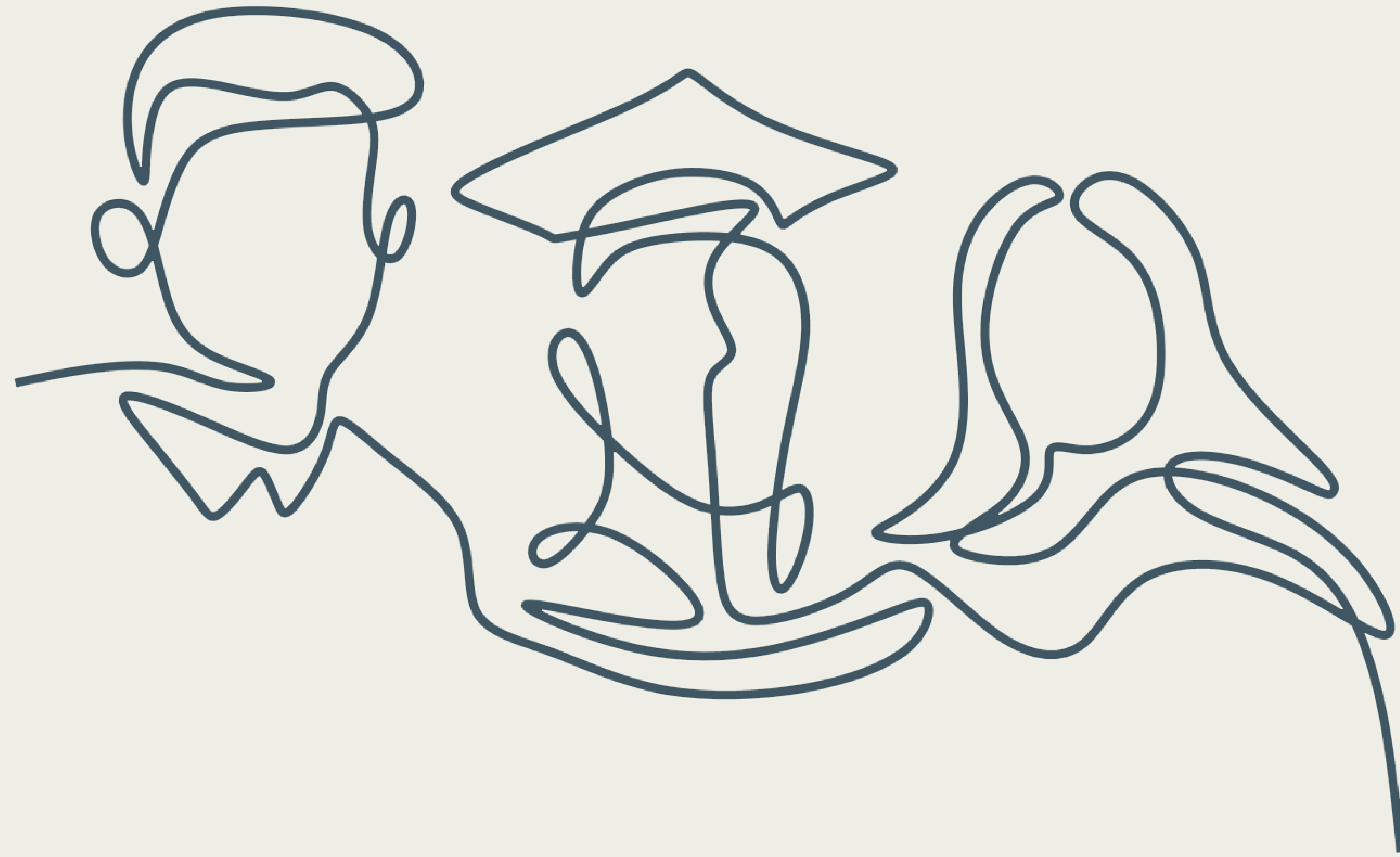
# EDUCATION IS A SOLUTION

Currently, only 1 in 8 workers have the necessary skills to meet expectations in sustainability-related roles, indicating a clear shortage of qualified employees.<sup>11</sup> With nearly 50,000 undergraduate students, business currently represents Canada’s most popular field of study by total annual graduates.<sup>12</sup> As a result, various thought leaders have advocated for a more progressive business education as a practical solution to address the existing talent gap and the multifaceted challenges we are currently facing.

In Canada, this sentiment is best illustrated by the **“Our Future, Our Business” Manifesto**, a decisive **call to action from 1500 business students and alumni, over 130 executive leaders, and over 100 civil society organizations**, all advocating for a change in how business is taught. Two years after the manifesto call to action, re•generation was eager to understand:

**ARE UNDERGRADUATE BUSINESS DEGREES  
IN CANADA EFFECTIVELY PREPARING  
STUDENTS TO PUT INTO ACTION  
THE SUSTAINABILITY-RELATED  
ASPIRATIONS OF TODAY?**





## METHODS

Throughout 2023, **re-generation** conducted a survey which was distributed to **over 4,000** undergraduate business students across Canada, successfully garnering responses from **924 participants**. This initiative was based on the recognition that the knowledge and beliefs developed during a student's formative academic years are likely to be reflected in their future strategic and operational decisions throughout their career.<sup>13</sup>

To learn more about how the survey was developed and distributed, please see the Methods section of our full report [here](#).

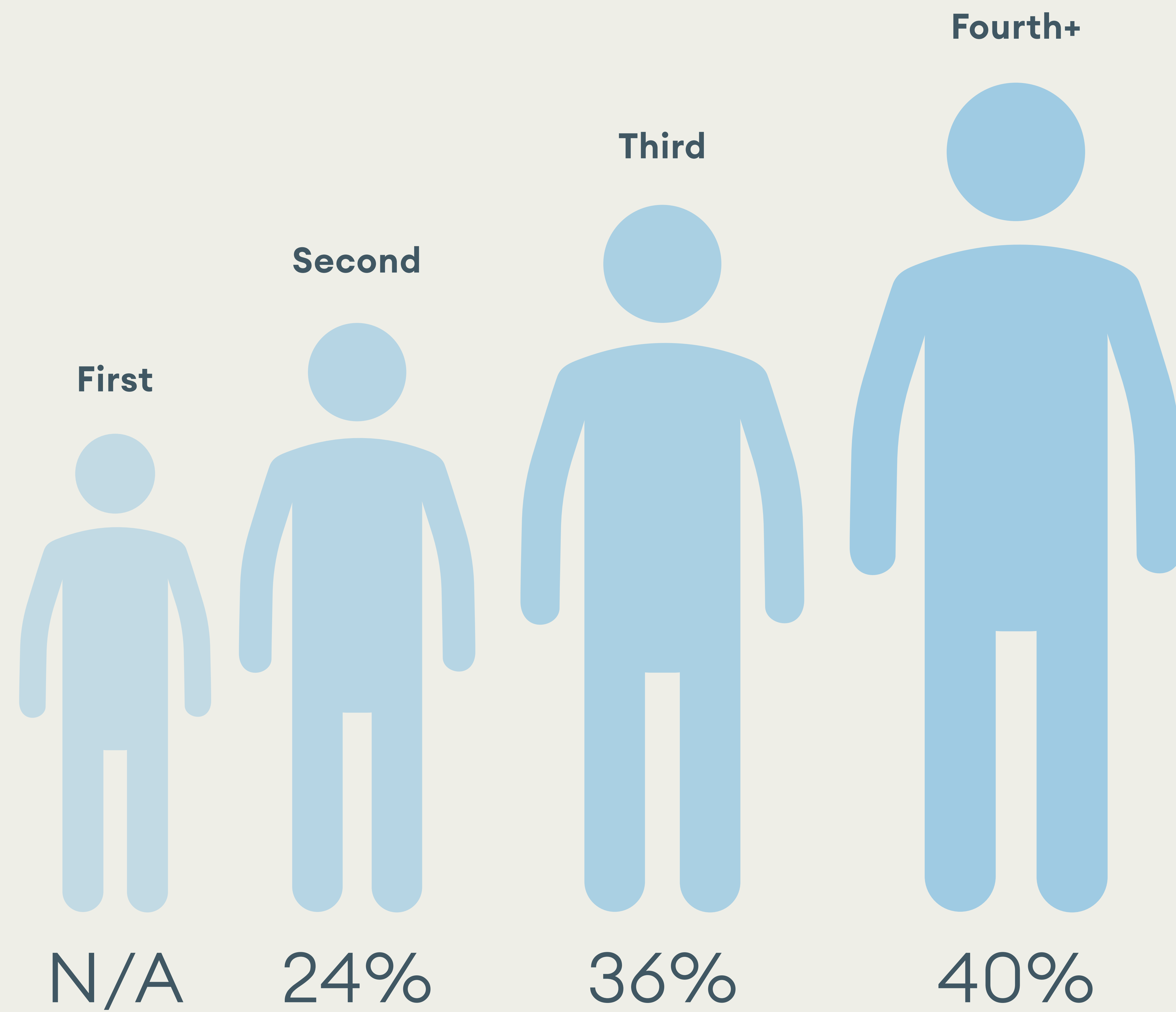
## HEADLINES

- The majority of business students still report an **absence of sustainability content throughout all mandatory courses** within their degree
- Over half of students specializing in accounting, finance, and marketing report a **lack of sustainability content throughout specialized courses**
- The majority of business students indicated they are not taught **multidisciplinary sustainability frameworks** such as the Planetary Boundaries, Nature-Based Solutions and Science Based Targets
- Faculty, administrators, and students have the **opportunity to reimagine business education**

## Demographics

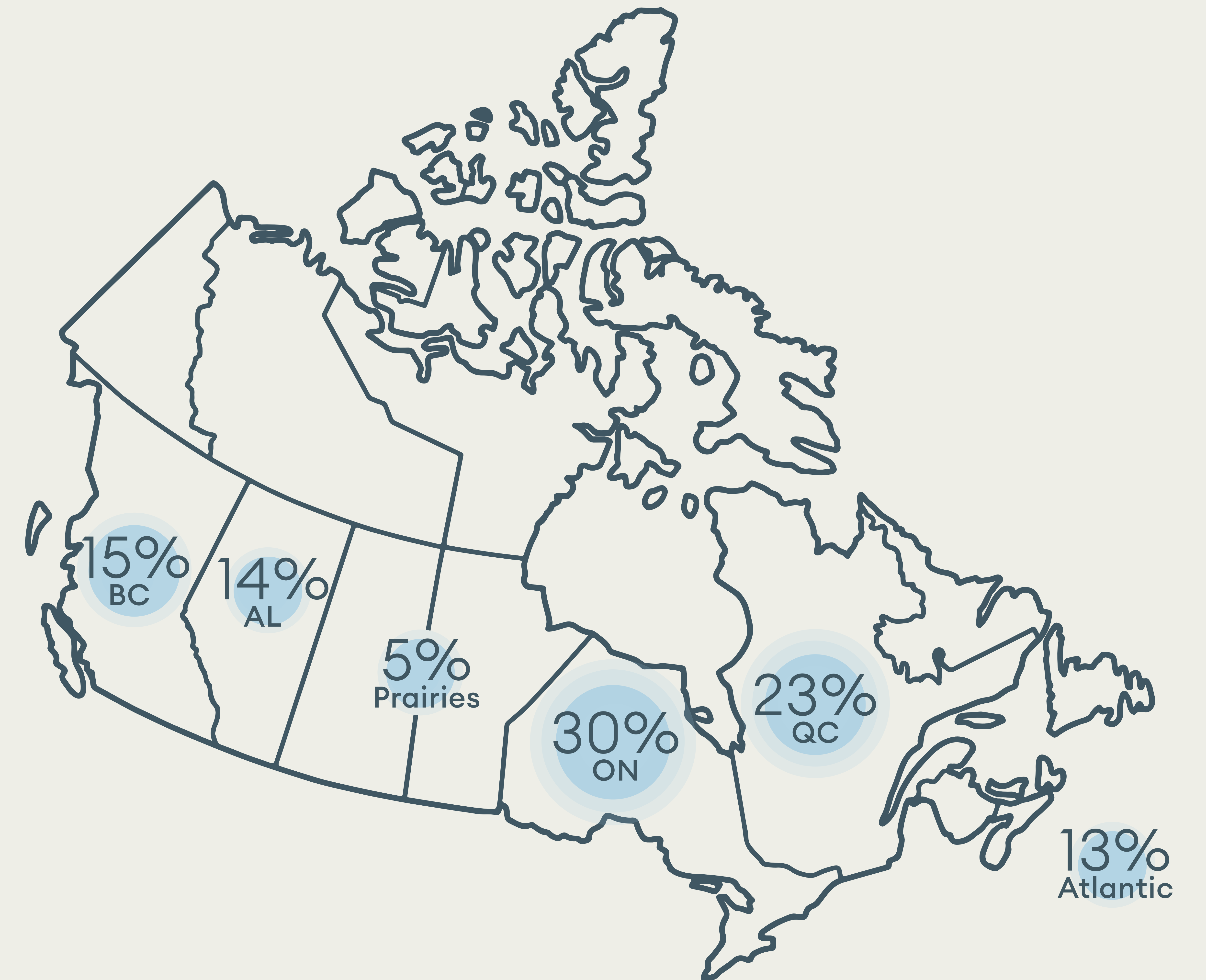
### Enrollment Year Among Survey Respondents

Data from 751 survey respondents



### Associated Province\*\*

Data from 751 survey respondents

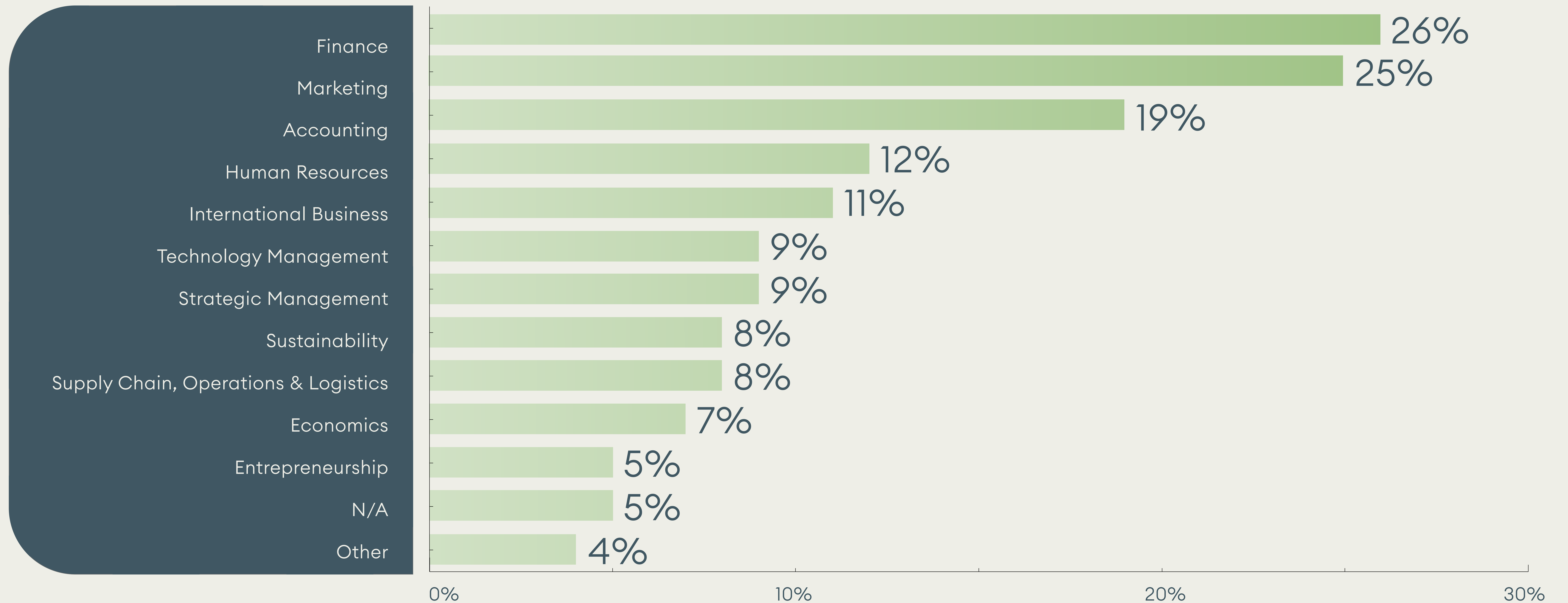


\* Of the 924 students, 751 were undergraduate business students who completed their first year of studies. The results highlighted throughout this summary report are derived from partial and complete responses of these students.

\*\* Respondents selected from a list of Canadian institutions. The proportions displayed reflect the allocation of each chosen institution to the province where it is situated.

## Specialization(s) Selected\*

Data from 751 survey respondents



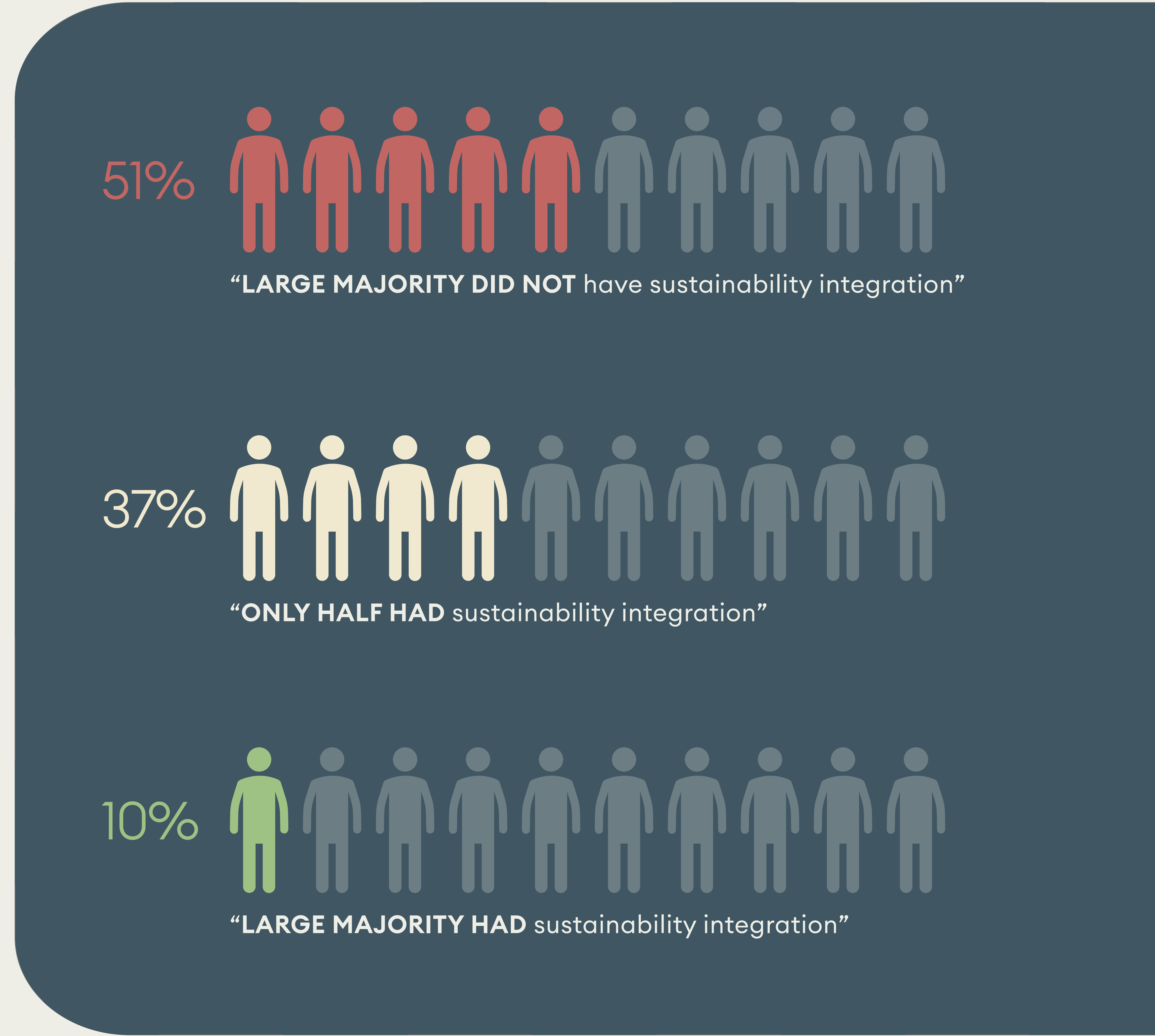
\* The percentages presented do not sum to 100% due to the survey design permitting students to select multiple specializations if applicable.

# Results

## “TO WHAT EXTENT WAS SUSTAINABILITY INTEGRATED INTO THE COURSES YOU TOOK WITHIN YOUR BUSINESS PROGRAM’S COMMON CORE?”

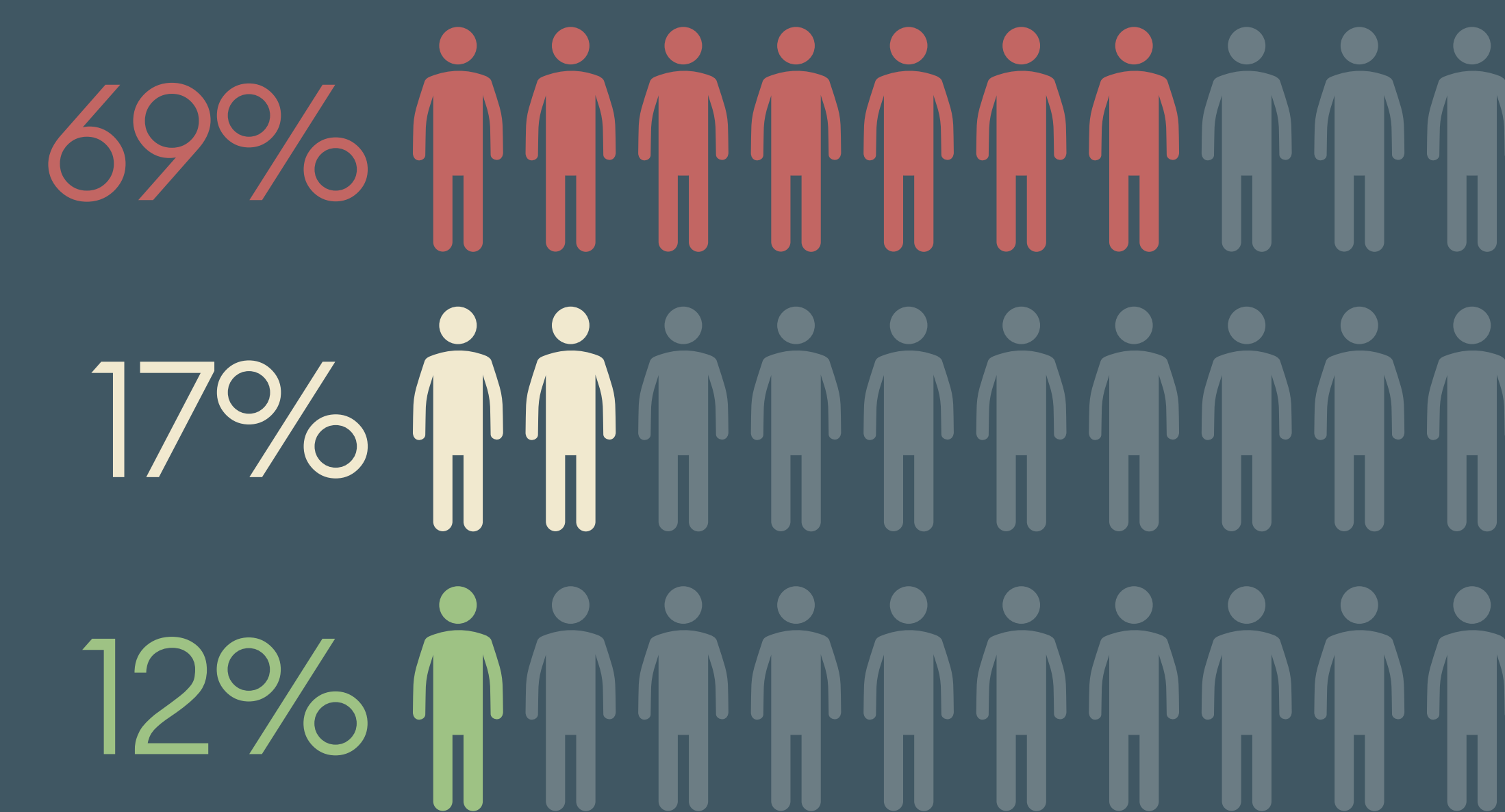
Prior to encountering this question, participants were introduced to over 20 sustainability concepts. Additionally, context was provided to communicate that “Sustainability is integrated within a course when it offers multiple lectures, readings, case studies and/or guest speakers that refer to social and/or environmental sustainability” and to “Consider the concepts in the previous section as a non-exhaustive list of examples of what your courses could have taught in lectures, readings, case studies and/or guest speakers to integrate sustainability.”

**In response, 51% of participants indicated that the "large majority of their courses did not have sustainability integration."** Furthermore, 37% reported that “only half of their courses had sustainability integration,” and only 10% stated that “a large majority of their courses had sustainability integration.”

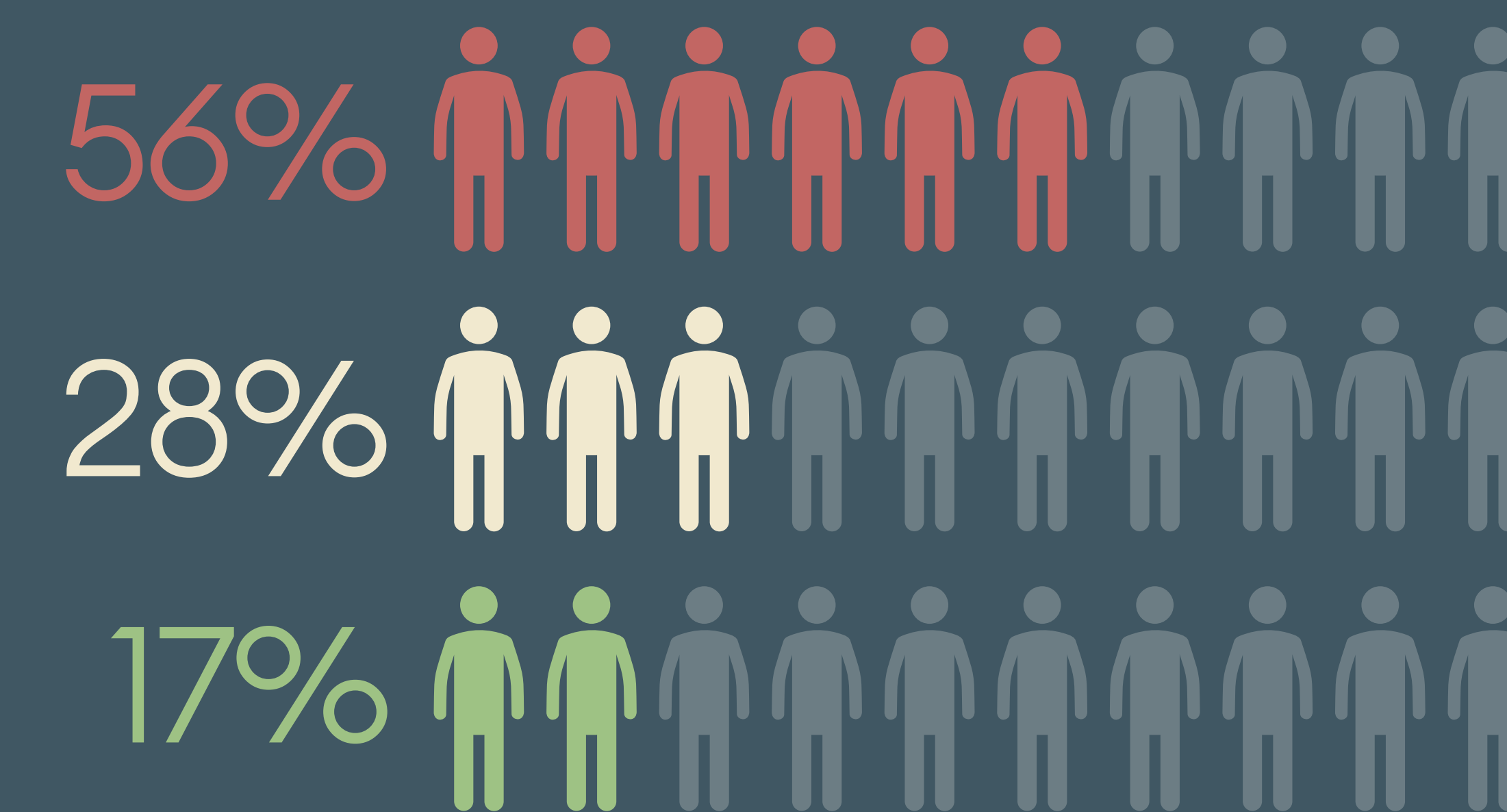


## TO WHAT EXTENT WAS SUSTAINABILITY INTEGRATED WITHIN YOUR PROGRAM'S [SELECTED SPECIALIZATION] COURSES?

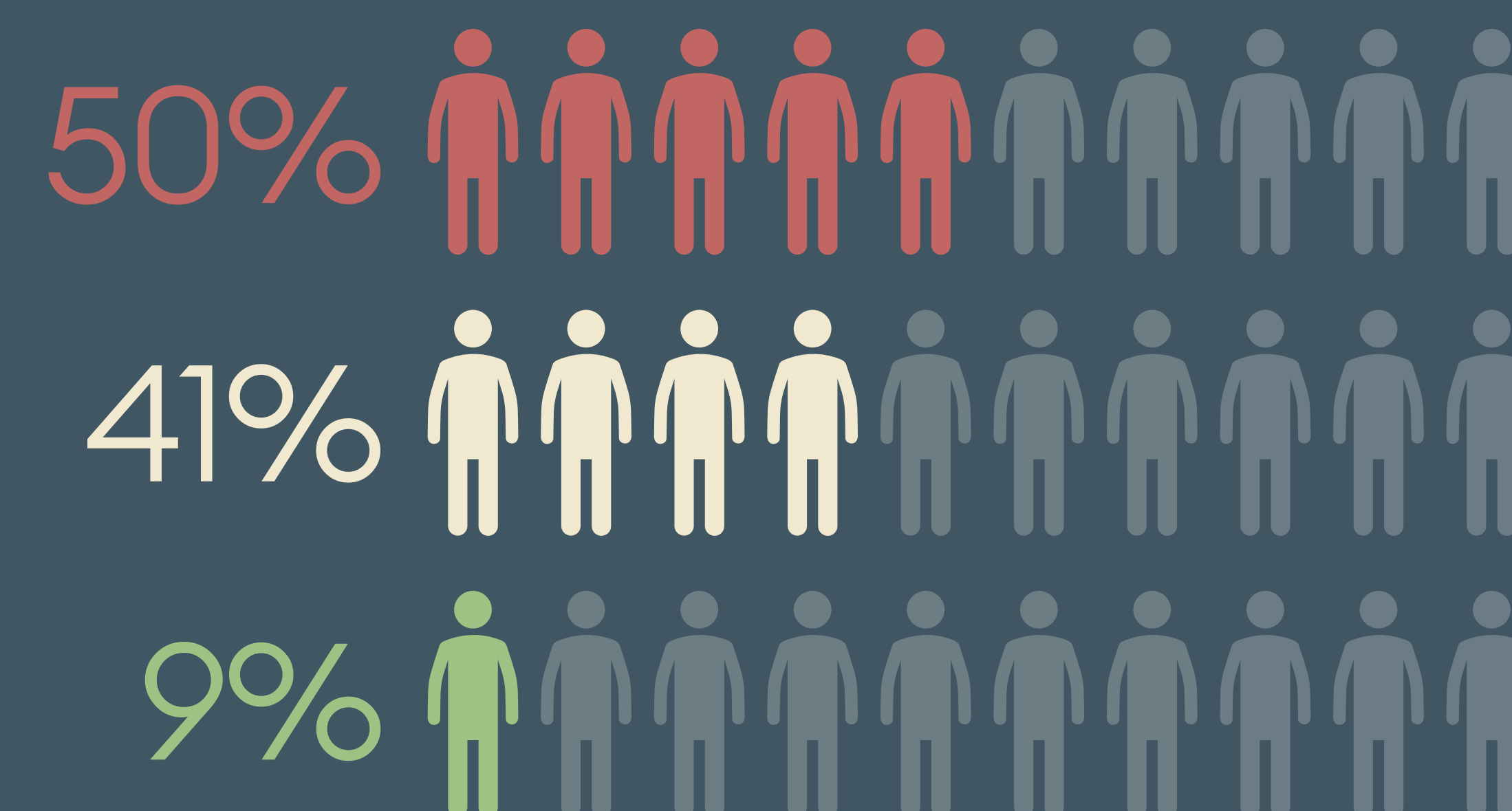
### Accounting



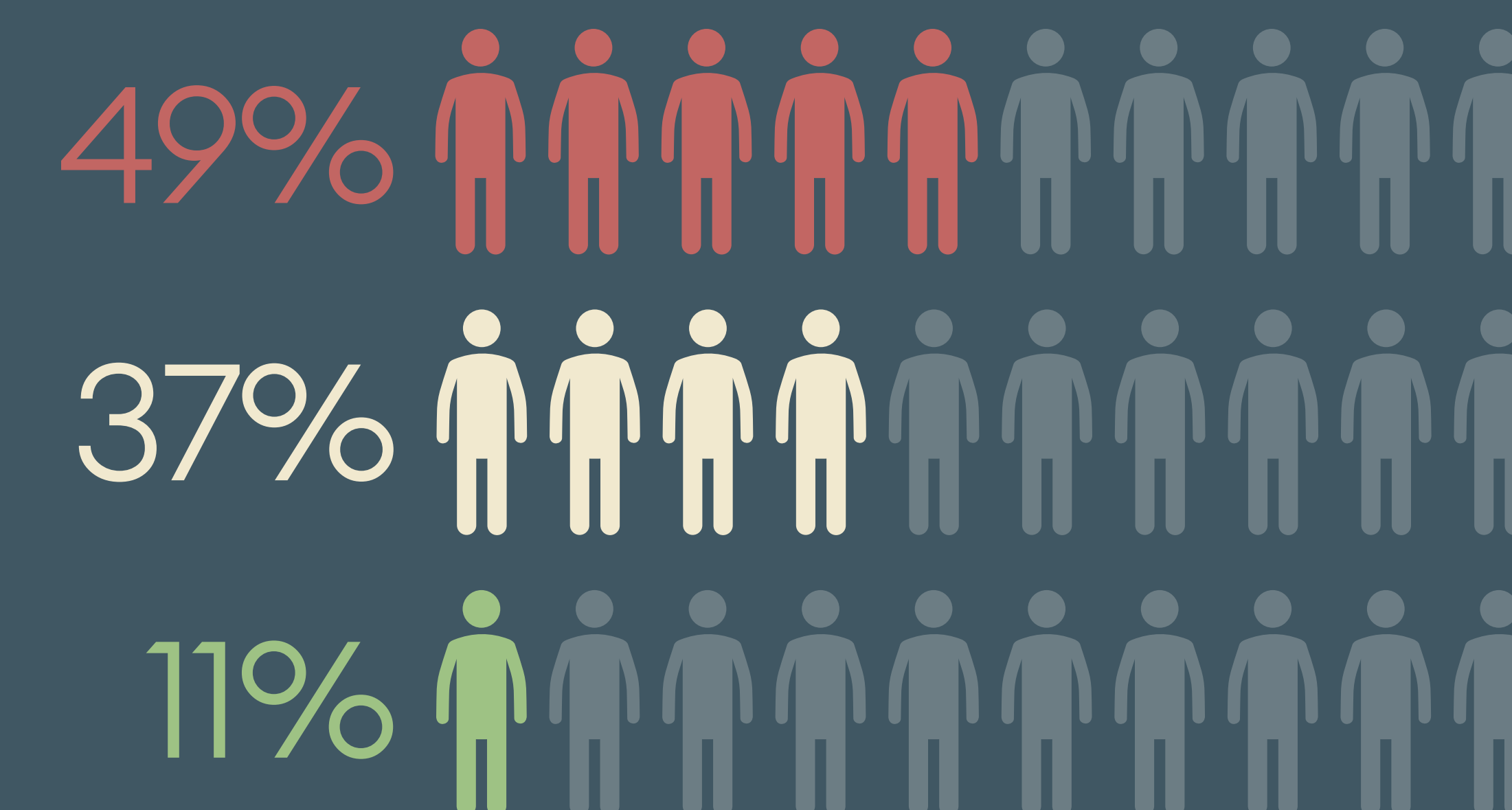
### Finance



### Human Resources



### Marketing

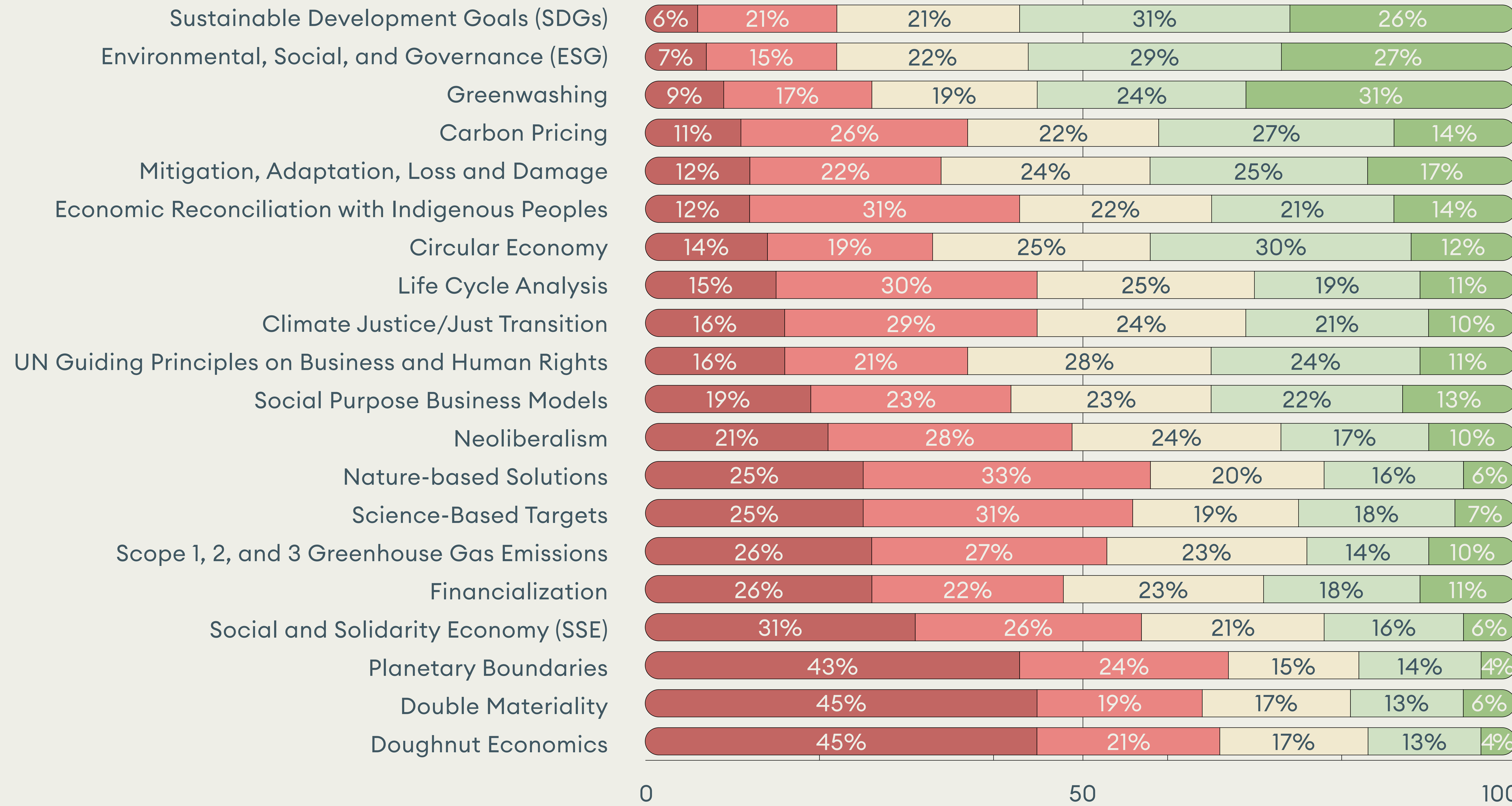


Across the four most commonly selected specializations—accounting, finance, human resources, and marketing—a **significant portion of respondents (69%, 56%, 50%, and 49%, respectively) indicated that “the large majority of their specialized courses did not have sustainability integration.”**

- **LARGE MAJORITY DID NOT** have sustainability integration
- **ONLY HALF HAD** sustainability integration
- **LARGE MAJORITY HAD** sustainability integration

# TO WHAT EXTENT HAVE YOUR BUSINESS COURSES TAUGHT YOU ABOUT THE FOLLOWING CONCEPTS?

This question was asked to obtain insights into the **extent to which respondents were taught specific sustainability concepts**. This was followed by a curated list of twenty foundational sustainability concepts. Respondents were then given the opportunity to evaluate the extent to which they had been taught each concept by selecting one of the following Likert scale options:



- I am unfamiliar with the term
- I recognize the term, not taught
- Taught, but not enough to explain
- Taught enough to explain
- Taught enough to explain and apply

For a comprehensive view of our survey results, including findings for **over 50** sustainability concepts, please refer to the Results section in our complete report [here](#).

Data from 677 survey respondents

Over the next decade, major economic sectors are expected to undergo substantial shifts, with up to

**20% OF NEW ROLES  
REQUIRING SUSTAINABILITY EXPERTISE.<sup>14</sup>**

In Canada alone, this evolution is set to transform **3.1 million jobs, equating to 15% of the workforce.**<sup>15</sup> However, the current lack of sustainability integration in educational programs is leading to a **significant skills gap**, with many firms struggling to find qualified candidates for these interdisciplinary roles.

The results of our survey indicate that the majority of upper-year students enrolled in a business degree across Canada perceive very little to no integration of sustainability in their core or specialized courses throughout their program. Furthermore, there is a lack of familiarity with essential sustainability concepts and frameworks.

Consequently, we must recognize that while past ideologies may have benefited previous cohorts of business graduates, **today's context demands significant change.**

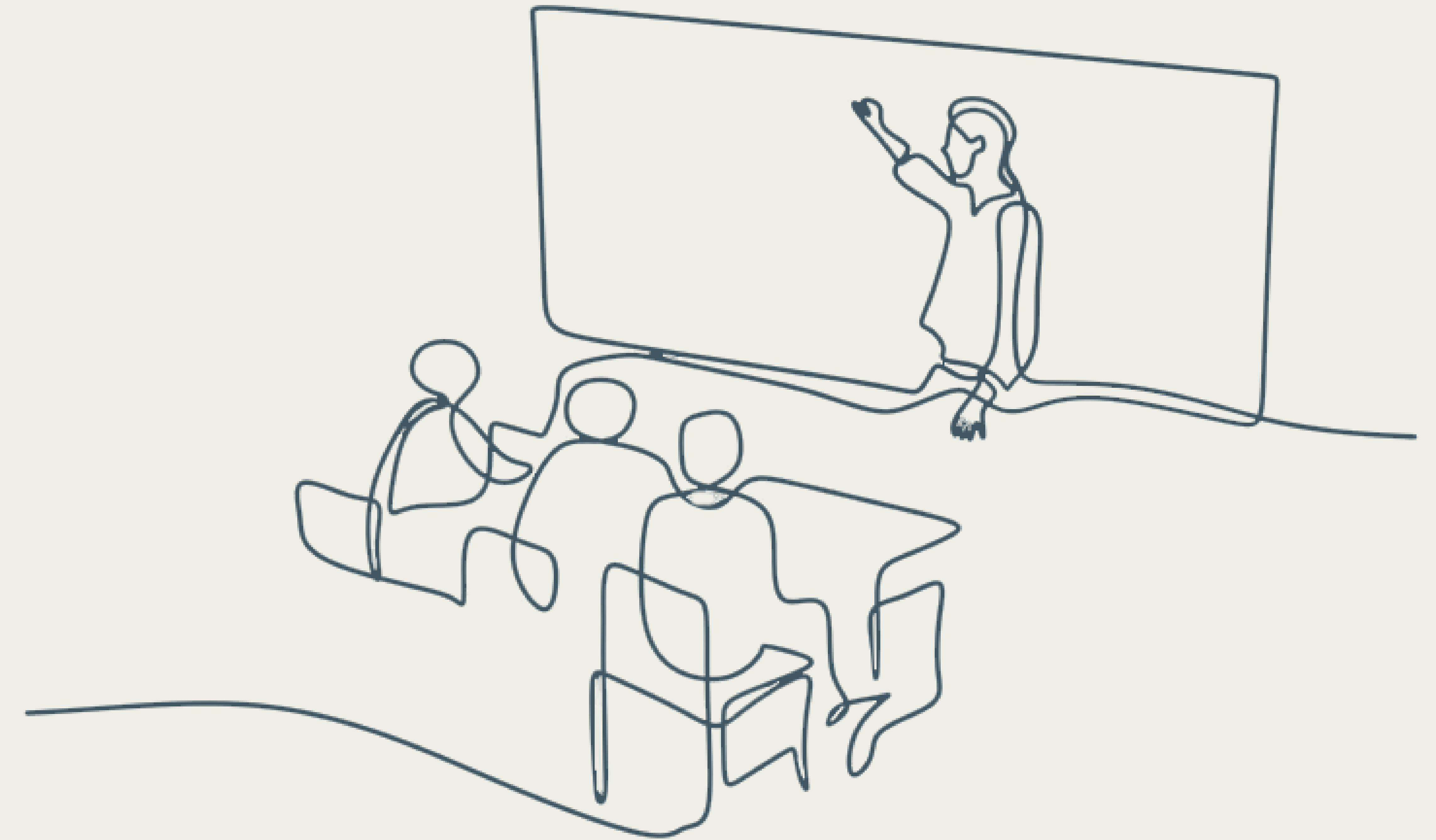
# WHAT CAN WE DO?

Stakeholders across the education system have an opportunity to **contribute to the transformative change we need**. Our recommendations represent actionable suggestions for key groups, including:

**Faculty**  
**Administrative Staff**  
**Students**

**“PULL A THREAD HERE  
AND YOU’LL FIND IT’S ATTACHED  
TO THE REST OF THE WORLD.”**

- Nadeem Aslam -



# FACULTY

As the primary conveyors of course content, faculty arguably possess the greatest potential to **drive change and empower students** to reflect on the ecological and social consequences of their decisions. The four recommendations outlined below are provided to assist faculty in meeting the increasing demand for sustainable business education.

## 1 TAP INTO THE WEALTH OF EXISTING RESOURCES

Many faculty members across Canada express concern about the lack of sustainability-related teaching materials.<sup>16</sup> In light of this, we compiled a collection of resources to facilitate teaching sustainability. These include resources developed by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AACSB) and the Network for Business and Sustainability (NBS).

## 2 PURSUE RESEARCH WITH A SUSTAINABILITY FOCUS

Through engaging in sustainability-focused research, faculty can indirectly contribute to the integration of sustainability expertise into course content, case studies and classroom discussions. Networks such as the Alliance for Research on Corporate Sustainability and the Impact Scholar Community can support faculty in this endeavour.

## 3 EMBRACE INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGY

Revolutionizing traditional educational methods by co-developing course material with students and incorporating hands-on learning experiences is crucial for nurturing future leaders. Utilizing resources like the i5 Playbook and the Education Partner Evaluation Tool enables educators to easily pinpoint opportunities for teaching innovation.

## 4 NETWORK AND COLLABORATE WITH VALUES-ALIGNED FACULTY

Expanding your network to include faculty from diverse disciplines and institutions enhances interdisciplinarity and facilitates knowledge sharing and collaboration. We highlight organizations such as OPEN dedicated to connecting and mobilizing educators to advance sustainability efforts.

If you are interested in reviewing any of the resources mentioned above, please view the Faculty Recommendations within our full report [here](#).

# ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

Deans, senior management, department heads, program leaders, and accreditation administrators are pivotal in **fostering action and embedding sustainability into the curriculum**. Below are a few practices for individuals in these positions to ensure that future leaders are well-prepared to contribute to the solutions we need.

## 1 DEVELOP SUPPORTIVE ROLES AND TEAMS

Advancing sustainability initiatives in teaching, research, and outreach within business schools is a complex and demanding endeavour. Given the existing workload of administrative staff, adding this task without a reallocation of priorities and resources is not feasible. Recognizing the growing need for new roles, an increasing number of business schools are establishing “sustainability centers.”<sup>17</sup>

## 2 CREATE AND FREQUENTLY UPDATE A SUSTAINABILITY COURSE INVENTORY (SCI)

A Sustainability Course Inventory (SCI) consists of a digital database that catalogues course offerings and indicates which ones incorporate sustainability. A well-designed SCI enables prospective students to easily identify and select courses with sustainability content and provides faculty with inspiration on ways to deepen integration.<sup>18</sup>

## 3 IDENTIFY AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Rusinko’s matrix offers guidance in identifying the method of sustainability integration that is implemented within a business program. Administrators should set goals to ensure sustainability is mainstreamed throughout the common core while also developing cross-disciplinary minor(s), major(s), and program(s).

## 4 EMPOWER FACULTY TO ENACT CURRICULUM CHANGE

Educational institutions should adopt innovative strategies to train and reward faculty members who are actively engaged in or demonstrate a willingness to develop and incorporate sustainability-related materials into course content.

## 5 EMPOWER STUDENT LEADERS TO PARTICIPATE IN COURSE DEVELOPMENT

The 2023 Positive Impact Rating Report highlighted that students globally are calling for business schools to “integrate sustainability broadly into the curriculum - and make it mandatory.”<sup>19</sup> Student leaders across Canada are working with faculty to reform the curriculum. Providing them with support is critical for their success.

## 6 TRACK AND SHARE PROGRESS

Sharing the methodology and outcomes utilized to enact curriculum change is crucial. This supports enrollment, offers insights for other institutions, and involves participating in networks such as AACSB, Principles for Responsible Management (PRME), and the Council on Business and Society.

For insights into institutions that have successfully navigated each step, and to access resources that may facilitate the completion of each process, please refer the Administrative Staff Recommendations in our full report [here](#).

# STUDENTS

As one of the primary stakeholders within the education system, students have the capacity to **drive tangible change** by leveraging their influence to ensure environmental and social sustainability is adequately discussed across all course content. Our community of student change agents have identified core activities to guide students in this endeavour.

## 1 ASSEMBLE A TEAM

To accomplish curriculum change, it's crucial to work with individuals who support your mission as they are valuable allies. Establishing a working group, recruiting participants, defining objectives, and developing an action plan are the key steps to complete before jumping into action.

## 2 UNDERSTAND THE CURRENT STATE OF PROGRESS

It's essential to assess your institution's current state of sustainability integration by examining how well such topics are incorporated into the curriculum, gauging the student body's perception, and identifying the barriers to change.

## 3 IDENTIFY KEY ALLIES

Engaging with various stakeholders such as students, faculty, administration, and alumni is essential to demonstrate demand for your proposed changes and ultimately generate broader buy in.

## 4 RESEARCH BEST PRACTICES AND ADVOCATE FOR CHANGE

Come to conversations prepared with recommendations for how your institution can enact change by integrating sustainability across courses, into extracurriculars, and onto campuses.

If you are interested in reviewing comprehensive guides for each activity, please see the Student Recommendations section of our full report [here](#).

# REWRITE THE FUTURE

Students represent the forthcoming generation of leaders tasked with reshaping the trajectory of the Canadian economy. Hence, business education in Canada must continue to adapt with the evolving perceptions of sustainability to foster leaders who will **translate commitments into actionable strategies**.

As we contemplate the future, we must ask:

**WILL POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS EVOLVE AND CONTINUE  
TO BE VISIONARIES THAT ADVOCATE FOR THE TRANSFORMATIVE  
SOLUTIONS WE NEED, OR WILL THEY FALL BEHIND?**

Interested in learning more about our research on the current state of sustainability integration in Canadian business schools and our recommendations for each stakeholder?

**Read our full report: [Rewriting Education: 2024 Report on Sustainability In Business Programs in Canada](#) - found [here](#).**



- Develop a deeper appreciation of how sustainability trends will influence our economy, and further **explore why educating the next generation of business leaders is key to addressing these changes** effectively.
- Discover the extent to which business students are being taught an **additional 38 emerging sustainability concepts**, such as Impact Investing, A Credible Climate Transition Plan, and the IEA's Net-Zero by 2050 Scenarios.
- **Access over 50 resources and examples** specifically tailored for integrating sustainability into higher education.
- Gain a comprehensive understanding of **how the survey was developed and distributed**.

#### Contact Us

[curriculum@re-generation.ca](mailto:curriculum@re-generation.ca)

[re-generation.ca](https://re-generation.ca)

## re•generation | REWORK YOUR FUTURE

In March 2024, we are launching a multi-year campaign with the goal of **empowering youth to work in the clean economy and demand climate action from Canadian employers**. Through creating a documentary series, hosting career events and launching a job board, we aim to excite youth about the opportunities in the clean economy. The sectors of focus include: green infrastructure, impact investing, sustainable food systems, ecosystem restoration, clean energy, sustainable mobility and curricular economy. Additionally, we will use this movement to call on employers to accelerate the just transition to a clean economy by asking them to raise their support for clean energy, reduce their emissions in line with global climate goals, and respect Indigenous rights and sovereignty.

## down to earth

Down to Earth is a newsletter by **re•generation exploring the visions and stories of systems change**. We explore topics related to the intersection of money, power, and the environment to figure out how we got to where we are now—and how to move forward toward a future that works for both people and the planet.

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