

Understanding Long Term Florida Master Gardener Retention Rates

FOR THE

#GATORGOOD

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Introduction

- Master Gardener (MG) volunteers are a huge part of the Extension mission!
- Extension succeeds in recruiting & educating volunteers
- However, we fail in retaining volunteers, particularly past four years
- Avg. long term retention is historically around 2 MGs per class in Walton County
- “Poor” retention (<25% after 4 years) was measured & defined in Walton via the VMS & anecdotal evidence from county coordinators & state program leader



FLORIDA
**MASTER
GARDENER**
VOLUNTEER

Why should we care about retention?

- Obviously we don't even *want* to retain everyone
- Some volunteers leave for reasons we can't predict/control
- However, costs to retrain new volunteers are *much* higher than maintaining existing volunteers
- AND retention of existing volunteers is more time efficient.
- Time & effort to retrain new volunteers to stay at replacement level is substantial!



Purpose of this study



- There is little research outlining how to influence retention in volunteers
- However, Strong & Harder (2011) did identify the importance of motivational characteristics in MG *participation* statewide

Purpose of this study



- Strong & Harder's research informed this study.
- Recommended further study on effect demographics and motivations have on MG tenure.
- Also, surmised recommended study would be beneficial to coordinators as a tool to better attract volunteers, predict volunteer tenure, and serve volunteer needs

Purpose of this study

- Do identifiable characteristics exist that influence MG *retention/tenure*?
- Understanding volunteer retention would help Extension educators conserve costs, use time efficiently, and reach more clientele
- Contributes to the art of volunteer management by connecting links between MG motivations & demographics to describe long-term retention techniques.



The background is a blue-tinted photograph of a university campus. It features several tall palm trees in the foreground and middle ground. In the background, there is a large, multi-story building with a prominent tower or clock tower. The scene is set on a paved walkway or street, with some people visible in the distance. The overall atmosphere is academic and serene.

Let's Dive into the Study!

Methodology

Two objectives:

1. *Describe demographic, motivational orientations, and volunteerism preferences among MGs both active & inactive in the program.*
2. *Determine if relationships between demographics, motivations, volunteerism preferences & MG tenure beyond 4 years exists.*

Methodology

- To identify motivations, a version of Mergener's (1979) Education Participation Scale (M-EPS) adapted by Strong (2011) was used
- Measures 6 constructs: *Learning, Socialization, Community Service, Vary Routine, Professional Enhancement, & Other's Perceptions*
- M-EPS construct variables measured on 5-point scale (1 = *very much influence* - 5 = *very little influence*)
- Example variables included: *"To feed an appetite for knowledge", "To Participate in Group Activities", "To Provide a Contrast from the Rest of My Life", etc.*
- Mean responses for individual variables and overall constructs were recorded

Methodology

- To identify demographics, 8 questions were asked (*age, occupation, education, race, & gender*)
- To measure volunteerism preferences, 4 questions were asked (*prefer finite or ongoing projects, favorite types of educational projects, and an open ended question regarding their experience with the program*)



Methodology

- Qualtrics surveys were emailed to 169 participants with 25 undeliverable (email address no longer valid).
- Of the 144 surveys successfully sent, 60 completed their survey (42% response rate) – tested for nonresponse
- Respondents were *super* homogenous. (Well-educated, high-income, white women – per MG norms)



Methodology

- Data was recorded using SPSS software for Windows
- To measure data in Obj. 1, descriptive statistics were used:
 - ✓ Demographic & volunteerism data reported in frequency tables
 - ✓ Motivational data reported frequency, mean for variable/construct, and SD
- To measure data in Obj. 2,
 - ✓ For motivational data, independent samples t-tests were used
 - ✓ For demographic and volunteerism data, chi-square tests were used

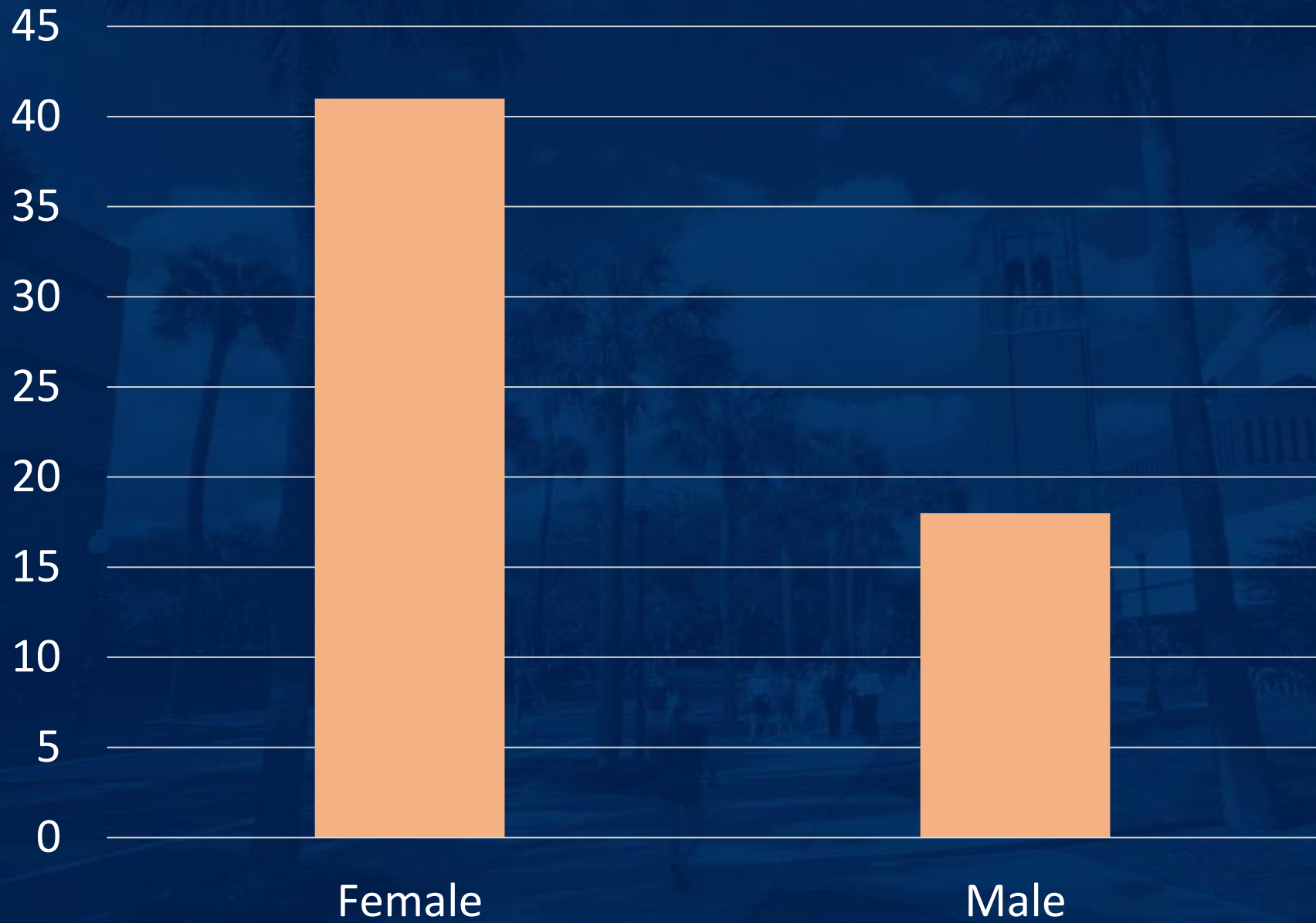
Findings: Objective 1

Describe demographic, motivational orientations, and volunteerism preferences among MGs both active & inactive in the program.

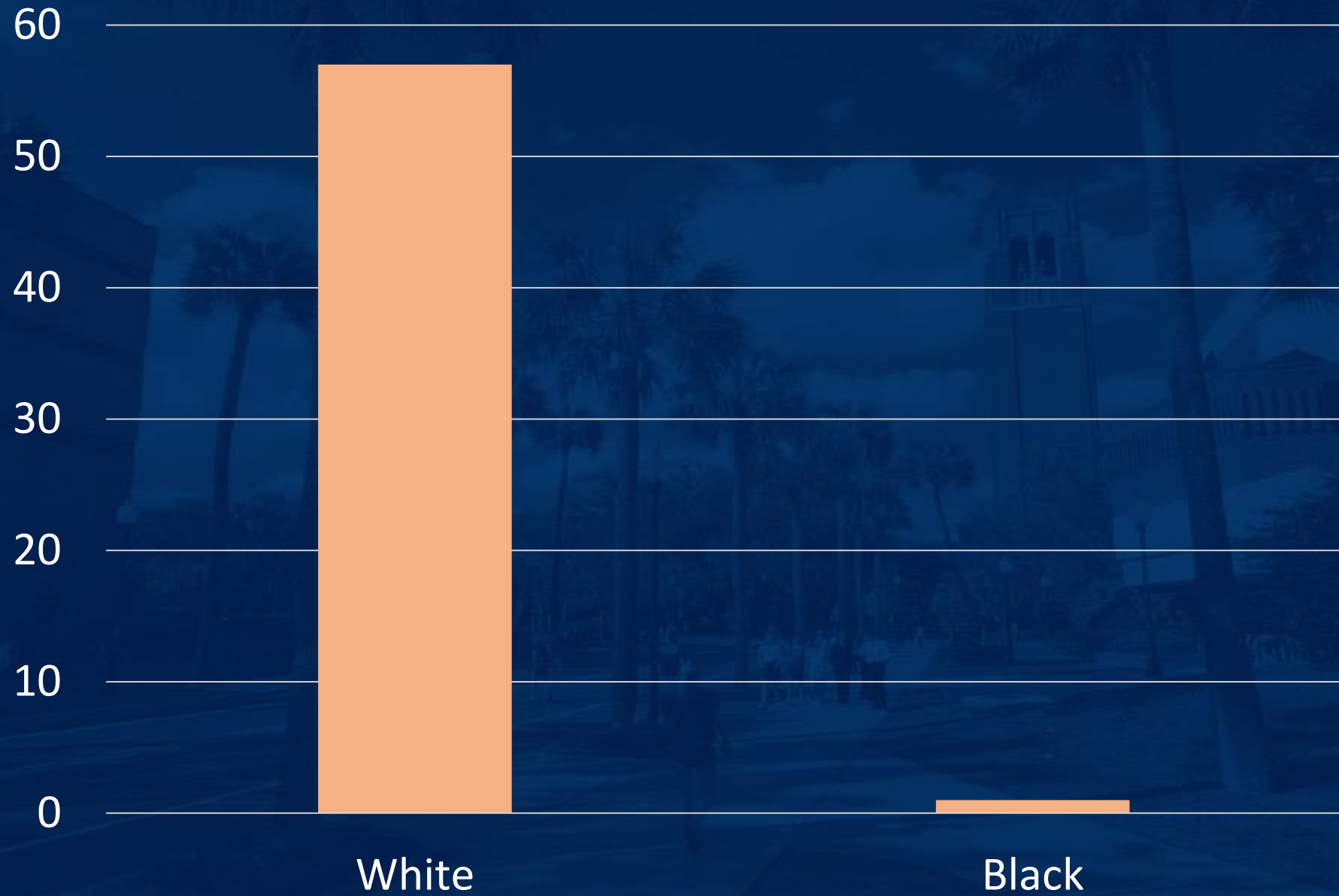
Findings: Objective 1 (Demographics)

- A majority of survey respondents were:
 - ✓ White (n = 57, 97%)
 - ✓ Female (n = 41, 70%)
 - ✓ 66 years old or older (n = 45, 78%)
 - ✓ Had at least a 4 year college degree (n = 38, 64%)
 - ✓ Had a median annual income of more than \$75k (n = 35, 69%)

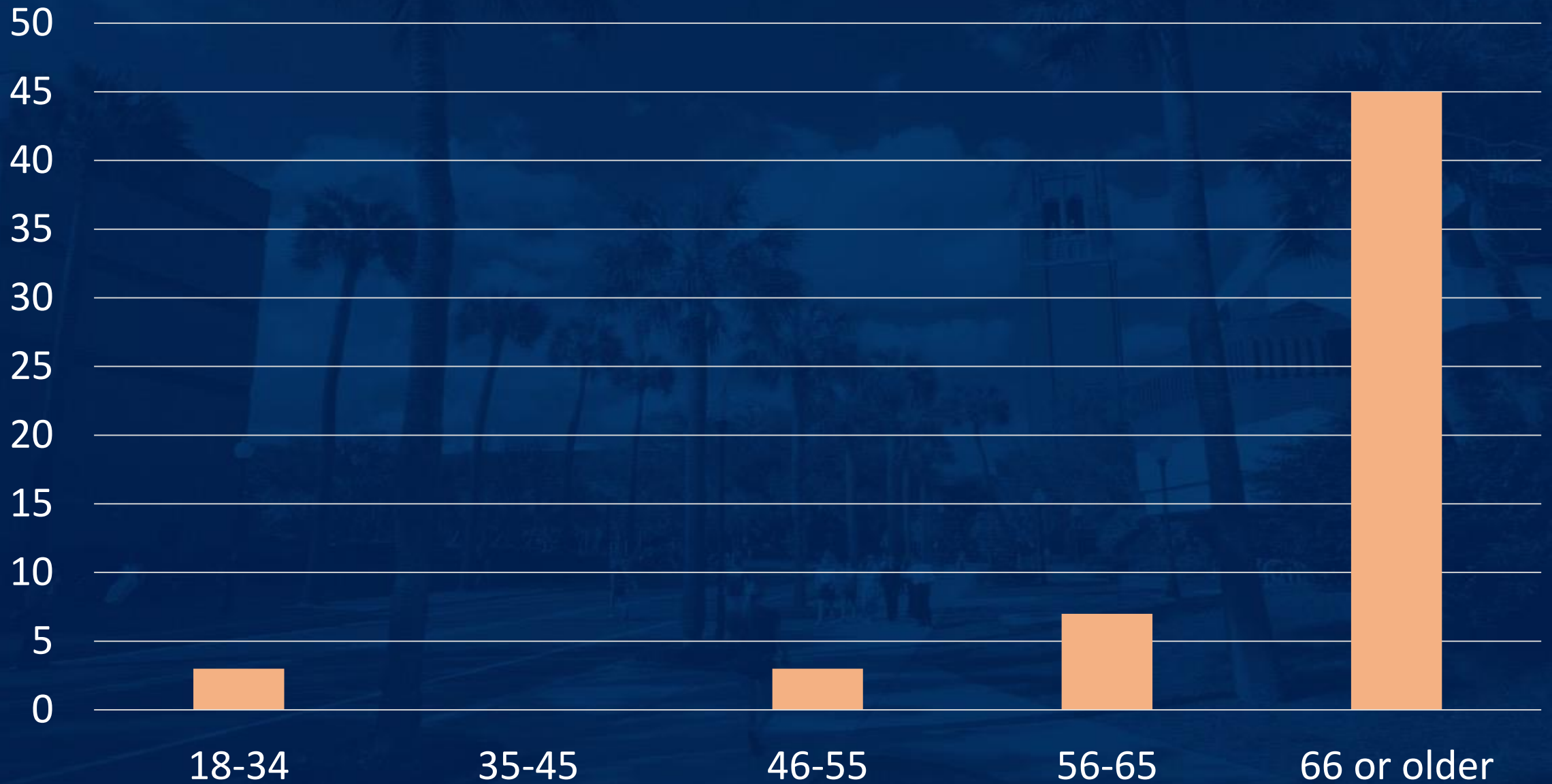
Gender



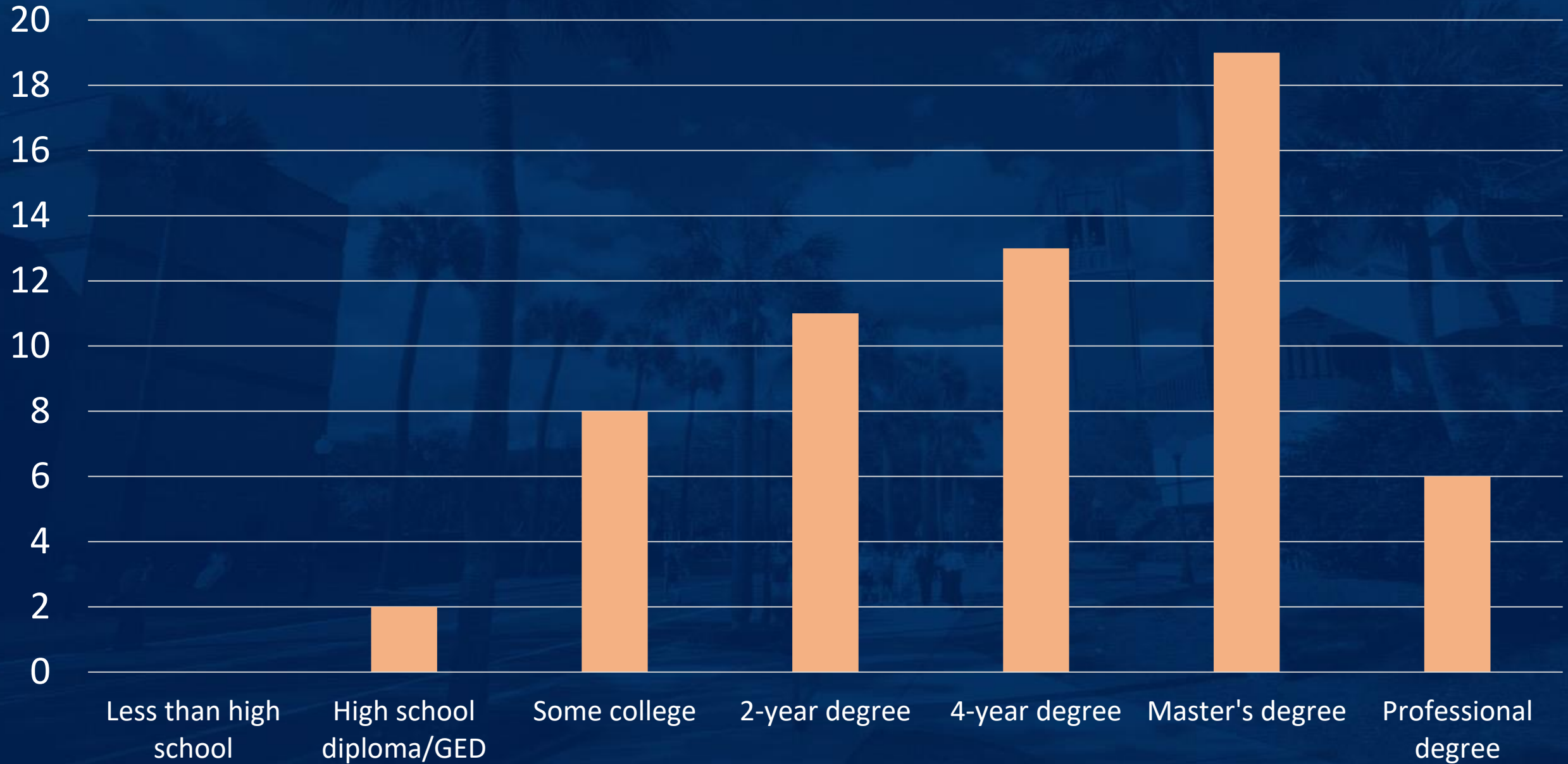
Ethnicity



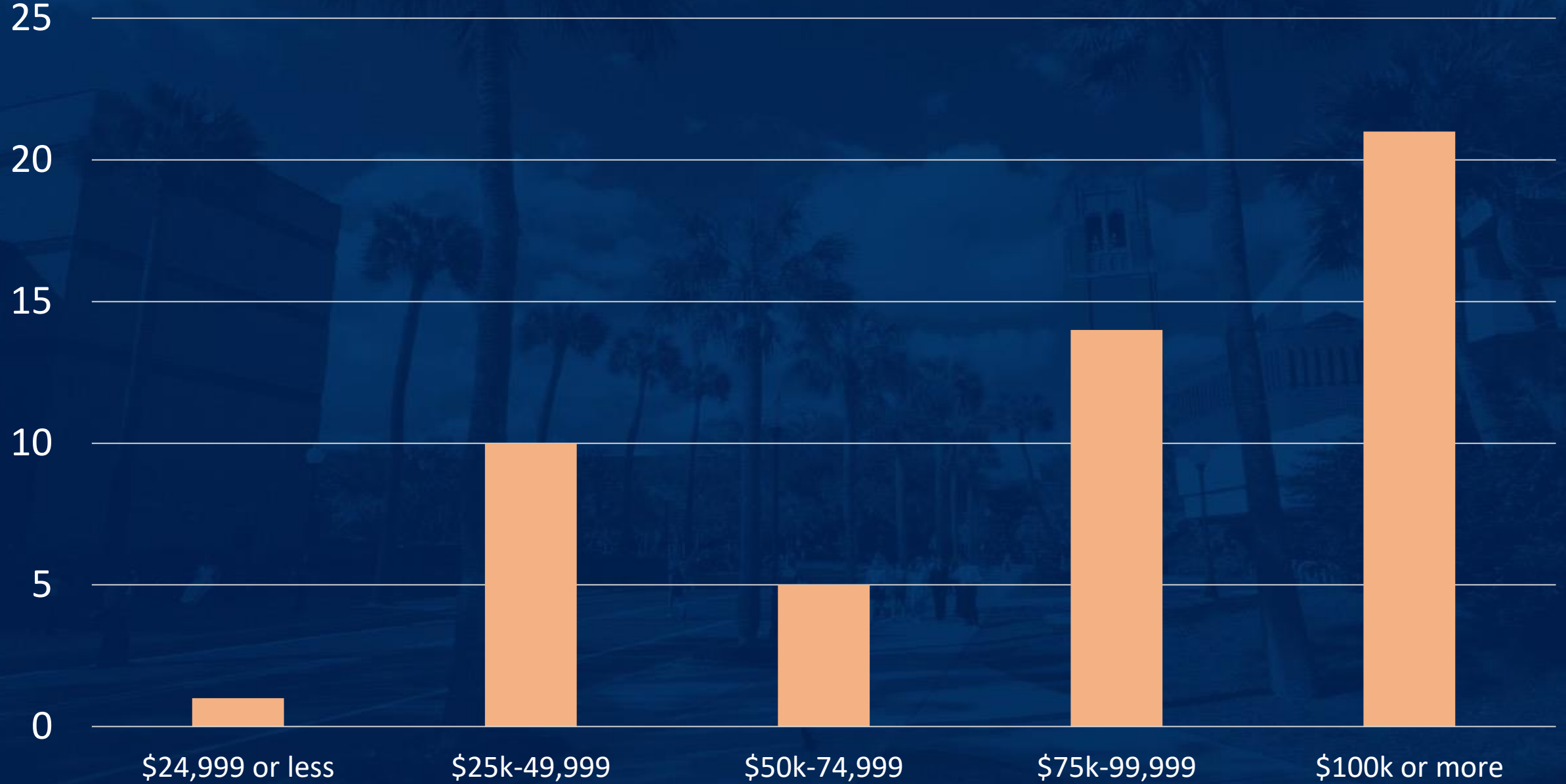
Age



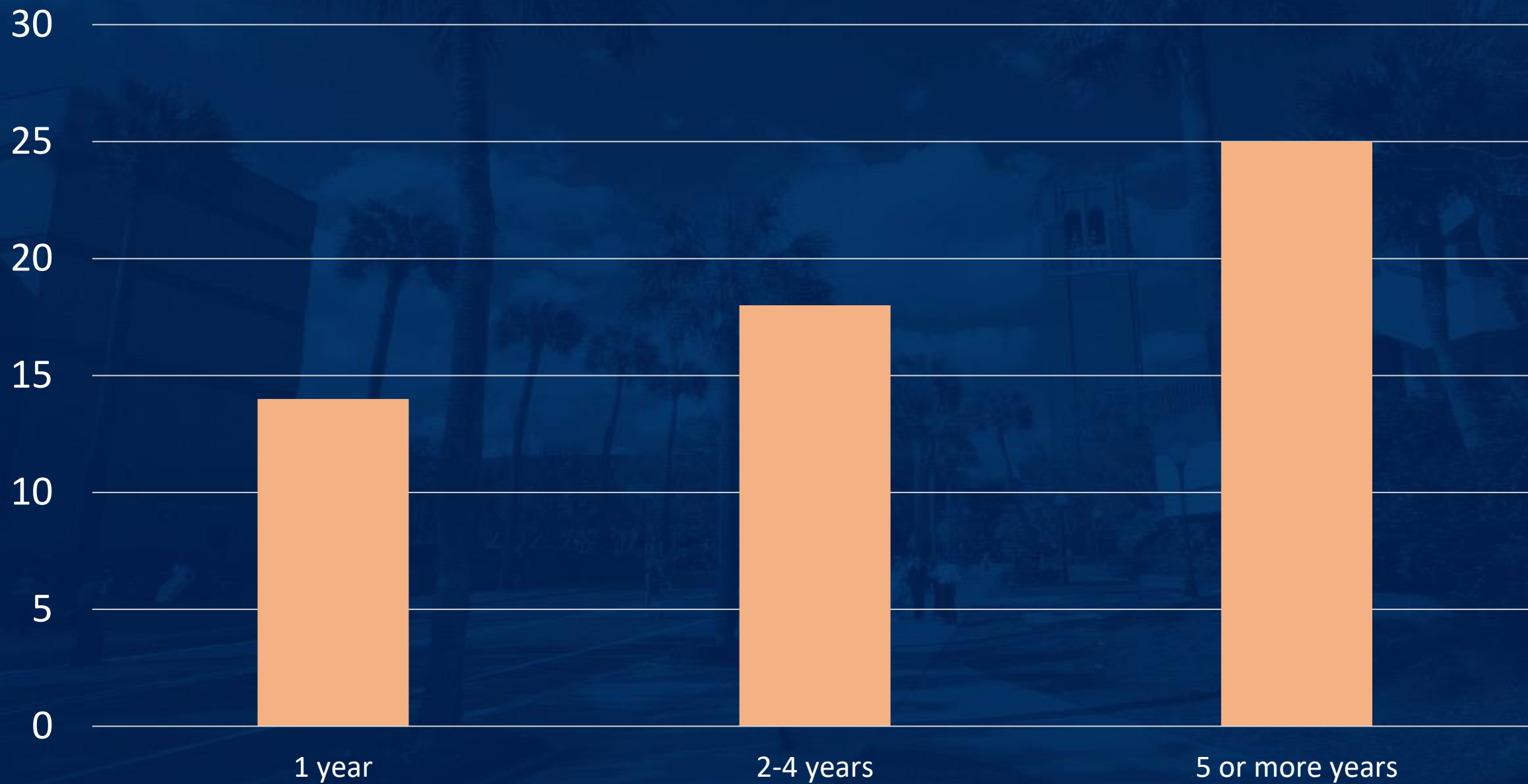
Education Level



Income



Years of Active Service



Findings: Objective 1 (Motivations)

- Learning was perceived to have “*much influence*” on volunteer participation
- Community Service & Socialization perceived to have “*moderate influence*”
- Vary Routine perceived to have “*little influence*”
- Professional Enhancement and Other’s Perceptions had no influence on participation



Constructs & Items	N	M	SD
Learning	59	1.7401	.67755
Community Service	57	2.1368	.83252
Socialization	58	2.2931	.95749
Vary Routine	58	3.4113	.98941
Professional Enhancement	56	4.5357	.69114
Other's Perceptions	57	4.3947	.82233

Note. Scale: 1 = very much influence, 2 = much influence, 3 = moderate influence, 4 = little influence, = no influence.

Findings: Objective 1 (Volunteer Preferences)



- Volunteers prefer projects that involve personal learning, giving back to their community and an opportunity for socialization!

Preference	<i>f</i>	%
Delivering oral presentations/programs	22	36.1
Exhibits at fairs/festivals/markets	24	39.3
Demonstration garden development	28	45.9
Writing newsletter/articles	14	23
4-H youth activities	15	24.6
Publicity/Advertising	5	8.2
Greenhouse propagation	14	23
Community service projects	35	57.4
Fundraising activities	12	19.7
Facilitating meetings/trainings	37	60.7
Committee leadership	13	21.3
Volunteer development	3	4.9

Findings: Objective 2

Determine if relationships between demographics, motivations, volunteerism preferences & MG tenure beyond 4 years exists.

Findings: Objective 2 (Demographics' Effect on Tenure)

- There was a significant difference in respondents' tenure by gender – women more likely to remain active long-term
- No other significant differences in tenure by other demographic characteristics (homogenous, small sample likely played a role and this should be studied more!)



Demographic Characteristics	Active		Inactive		X ²	p	ϕ
	f	%	F	%			
Education Level							
Less than high school	0	0	0	0	2.445	.928	2.93
High School Diploma/GED	1	5%	0	0			
Some college	3	15%	2	22.2%			
2-year college degree	6	30%	2	22.2%			
4-year college degree	2	10%	0	0			
Master's Degree	5	25%	4	44.4%			
Doctoral/Professional Degree	3	15%	1	11.1%			
Income							
\$24,999 or less	0	0	1	14.3	2.869	.769	.348
\$25,000 to \$49,999	1	5.9	0	0			
\$50,000 to \$74,999	3	17.6	1	14.3			
\$75,000 to \$99,000	3	17.6	1	14.3			
\$100,000 or more	10	58.8	4	57.1			
Gender							
Male	2	10%	5	55.6%	7.034	.016	-.493
Female	18	90%	4	44.4%			

Findings: Objective 2 (Motivational Orientation Effect on Tenure)

- No significant difference observed between motivational orientations of long-term MGs and whether or not they remained active
- However, when the samples were amended to define “long-term” as 5 years or more, differences began to appear
- Also, this comparison confirms that learning, community service and socialization were primary reasons for volunteerism regardless of volunteer status

Constructs	N	Mean Rank	SD	Mann-Whitney U	p
Learning					
Active	20	14.93	.77	88.5	.945
Inactive	9	15.17	.76376		
Community Service					
Active	20	14.85	.7821	87.0	.908
Inactive	9	15.33	.78174		
Socialization					
Active	20	15.08	.80125	88.5	.945
Inactive	9	14.83	.55478		
Vary Routine					
Active	20	14.53	.89811	80.5	.660
Inactive	9	16.06	1.21429		
Professional Enhancement					
Active	20	15.55	.56034	79.0	.627
Inactive	9	13.78	.55551		
Other's Perceptions					
Active	20	14.88	.77332	87.5	.908
Inactive	9	15.28	.46956		
Note: *p < .05.					

Findings: Objective 2 (Volunteerism Preference Effect on Tenure)

- No significant differences were found among active and inactive MG volunteers in any of the volunteerism preferences categories

Conclusions

- A majority of Master Gardener volunteers continue to be highly educated white females more than 66 years old with an annual income over \$75,000.
- MGs overwhelmingly volunteer to continue learning, give back to their community and cultivate social experiences
- MGs prefer volunteer activities that hit the “sweet spot” of the above three constructs
- Not only are females more likely to participate as MGs in general, they are significantly more likely to remain active long-term

How to Use this Information/Recommendations

1. MG coordinators can better meet volunteers' needs if they better understand the makeup and motivations of their volunteers
2. Coordinators should focus programming to correspond with the 3 primary motivational orientations influencing MG volunteerism
3. Volunteers may become disenchanted and leave the program when these needs aren't met!
4. Florida MGs continue to lack diversity among all demographic measures. Coordinators should seek strategies to overcome this.
5. This study should be replicated across the state to determine if the small, homogenous sample accounted for lack of differences among active & inactive volunteers

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