

New Federal Regulations and What They Mean for Your Graduate Programs



Regulatory Trends



Economic Context & Hiring Trends



Engaging Graduate Students in
Career Support

Trend in Federal Regulations

High costs and low ROIs of graduate degrees have become a bi-partisan issue

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Financial Value Transparency

Alumni earnings measured 3 years post-graduation.

Dept. of Education evaluates debt-to-earnings ratios for every program.

IN EFFECT

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Student Tuition & Transparency System

Programs evaluated on alumni earnings 4 years after graduation.

Graduate alumni must out-earn bachelor's degree holders — or programs lose federal loan eligibility.

PROPOSED

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Accreditation, Innovation & Modernization

Accreditors must use student data to evaluate programs by return on investment, career outcomes, and placement rates.

EARLY STAGES

Comparing the Two Frameworks

Financial Value Transparency

All Title IV programs, including graduate programs at public & nonprofit institutions

Debt-to-earnings ratio — accounts for both what students earn AND what they borrowed

Transparency — help students make informed decisions

Public disclosure to inform student choice — no loss of aid eligibility

Program-level earnings & debt data published publicly

Student Success & Taxpayer Savings Plan

All Title IV programs, including graduate programs at public & nonprofit institutions

Earnings premium only — graduates must out-earn bachelor's degree holders in their state

Accountability — penalize programs with poor earnings outcomes

Loss of Direct Loan eligibility after failing 2 of 3 consecutive years

Similar data collected, but debt not used for accountability consequences

The Earnings Threshold in Detail

There are three proposed benchmarks to measure programs

1 Same-State Bachelor's

Median earnings of bachelor's degree holders aged 25–34 in the state where the institution is located.

2 Same-State, Same Field Bachelor's

Median earnings of bachelor's degree holders in the same field of study in the same state.

3 National, Same-Field Bachelor's

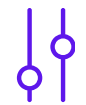
Median earnings of bachelor's degree holders in the same field of study nationally.

Earnings data will come from alumni's IRS tax returns. Data for bachelor's degree holders will come from American Community Survey.

Programs are compared against whichever of these three thresholds is LOWEST, except for programs where 50% or more students are from outside that state. Those outcomes will be national.

Limitations with the Proposed Rule

The Department's own proposed rule acknowledges significant data and methodology problems



Blunt field-of-study data

Comparisons use broad 2-digit CIP codes — grouping very different programs together. A master's in sociology and a master's in economics could be compared against the same benchmark.



Small sample size problem

Fewer than 30 Census survey matches means the threshold can't be calculated — disproportionately affecting uncommon fields and less-populated states.



No regional cost-of-living adjustment

A social work program in rural Colorado and one in Denver face the same benchmark, systematically disadvantaging regional and rural institutions.



Some states have no threshold at all

Where Census data can't support the calculation, no earnings threshold exists. Programs are exempt from consequences, yet data is still published publicly.

Legal and Political Headwinds

The rules are not likely to survive as written.

PROCEDURAL

Master Calendar Timeline

Department is running on a compressed timeline, which likely violates procedures established in the Higher Ed Act.

Clean litigation target.

LEGAL

Litigation Risks

Institutions that now face punitive consequences will likely challenge the ruling, tying it up in courts.

Master calendar violation gives courts easy procedural basis to delay.

POLITICAL

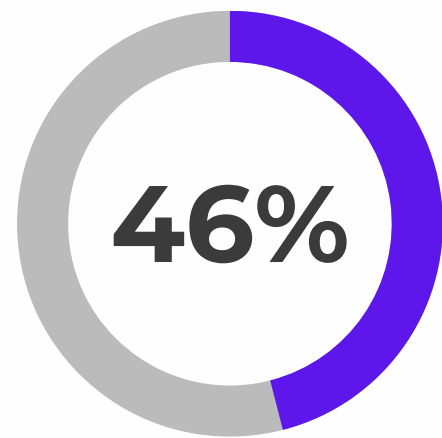
Political Opposition

Democrats favor a debt-to-earnings ratio.

If they retake Congress in 2026 or the White House in 2028, it is likely a new administration would resort to the FVT.

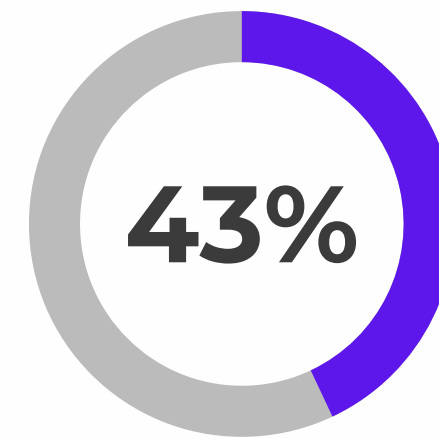
External Studies Highlight Key Challenges

The data shows that many programs are already at risk



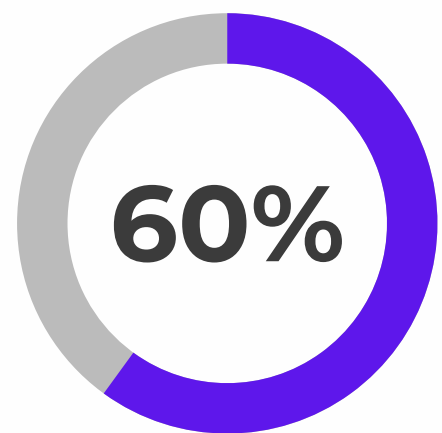
of federal student loan debt is held by graduate alumni, although they only make up 15% of student population

Source: National Student Loan Data System



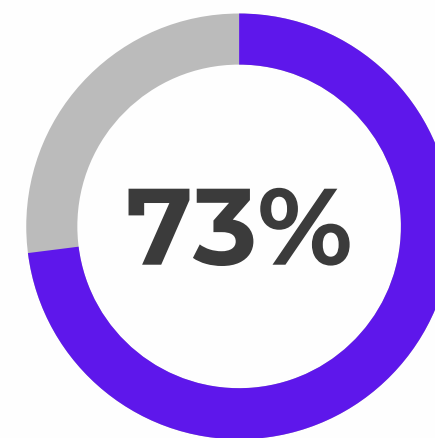
of in-person master's programs do not leave alumni able to out earn someone with a bachelor's degree in their state.

Source: Third-Way



of MBAs and 40% of master's degrees have a negative lifetime return on investment.

Source: FREOPP



of Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, and 34% of STEM PhDs have a negative lifetime ROI.

Source: FREOPP

Institutions can't control moving regulatory targets.
**Graduate programs can maximize the career support
they've already put in place.**

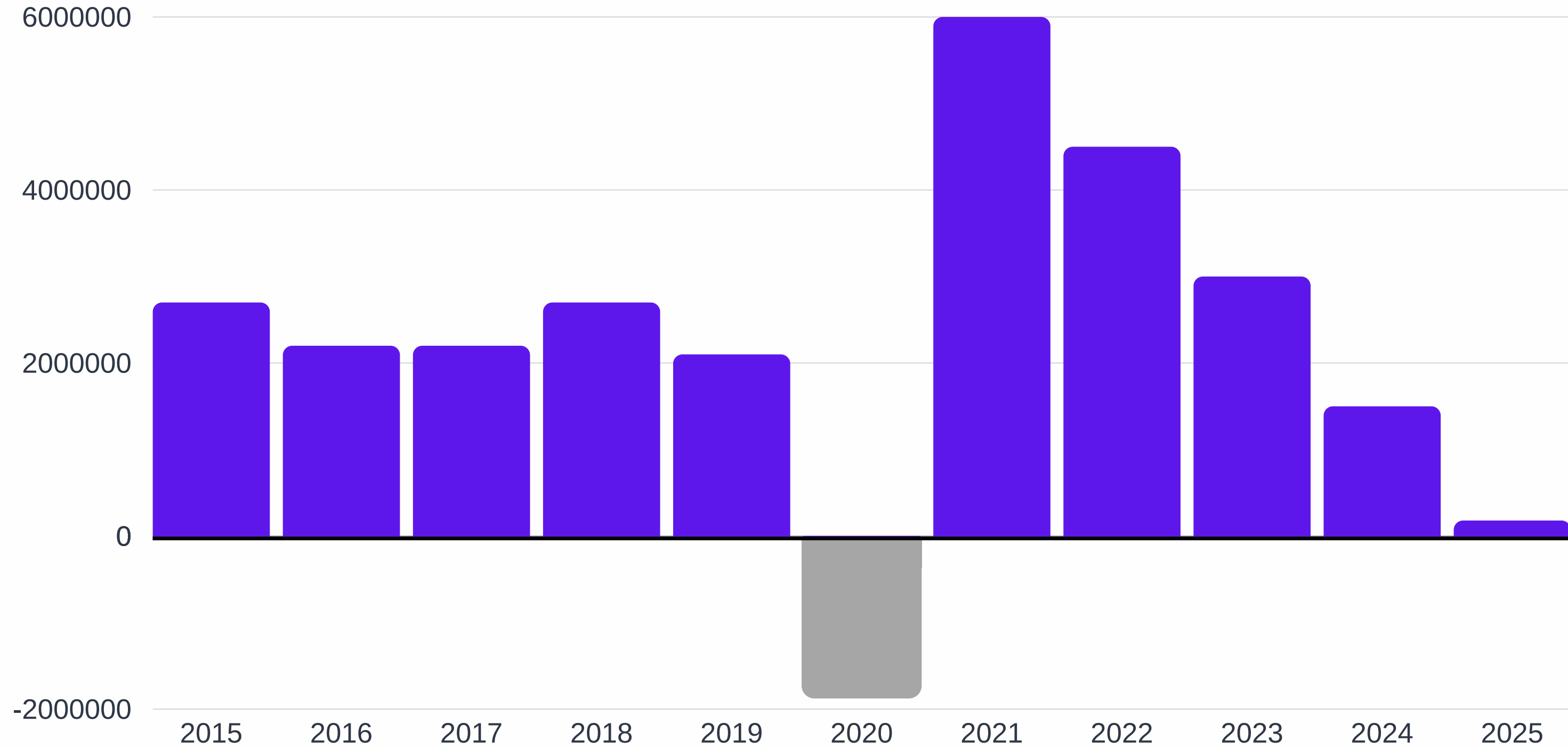


Economic Context & Hiring Trends

Graduate students are facing one of the most difficult job markets in a decade, while simultaneously being inundated with misinformation. AI is changing how employers hire.

Worst Job Market in a Decade

Job growth in the United States from 2015 through 2025



Over 1 Million Jobs Were Cut in 2025

Key sectors that employ master's and doctoral students saw layoffs



Federal Government

-310,000
jobs lost



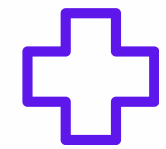
Technology

-145,000
jobs lost



Finance

-50,000
jobs lost

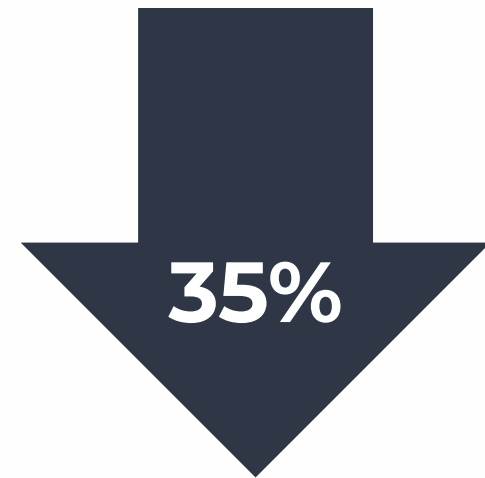


Pharmaceutical

-25,000
jobs lost

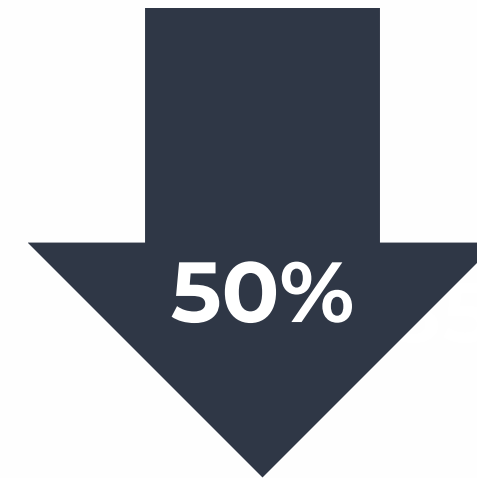
Decline in Entry-Level Positions

AI is creating uncertainty in once stable careers for graduate students



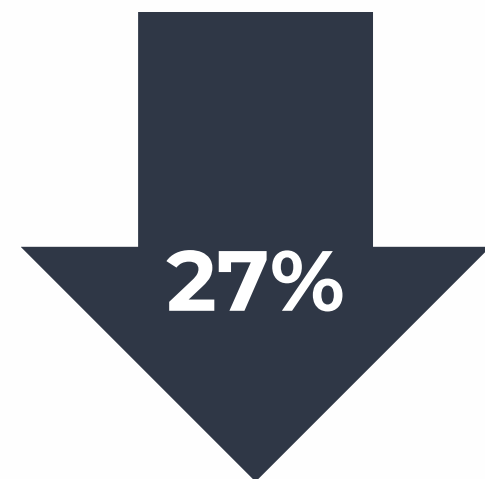
Decline in entry-level jobs in the US since January 2023.

Source: Revelio Labs



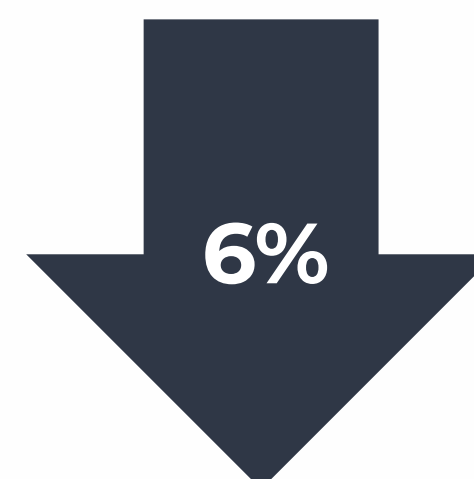
Decline in jobs in tech for people with less than 1 year of experience since 2019.

Source: SignalFire



decline in computer programmer roles since ChatGPT arrived. Now the lowest level since before 1980.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics



Decline in employment of entry-level workers in AI-exposed occupations, compared to a 9% growth in experienced workers.

Source: Stanford Institute for Human-Centered AI

Bad Advice and Tools

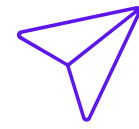
Graduate students are hurting their job search by how they use AI.



RESUMES

Generic and inaccurate

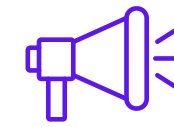
Resumes written by AI are often generic and simply mirror the job description. Are often inaccurate.



APPLYING

Volume over quality

Use AI platforms to submit hundreds, if not thousands, of resumes to online job postings.



INTERVIEW PREP

False confidence

AI is overly affirmative and can provide a false sense of confidence in interview prep.



INTERVIEWS

Dishonest and detectable

Some students rely on AI during interviews to craft answers. Dishonest and generic.

Employers Are Overwhelmed by AI Sludge

45% more applications per LinkedIn job posting in the past year — **11,000 submitted every minute**

90% of recruiters report an increase in low-effort or AI-generated applications. It's difficult to identify candidates from the bots.

78% of companies now actively check for AI-generated content.

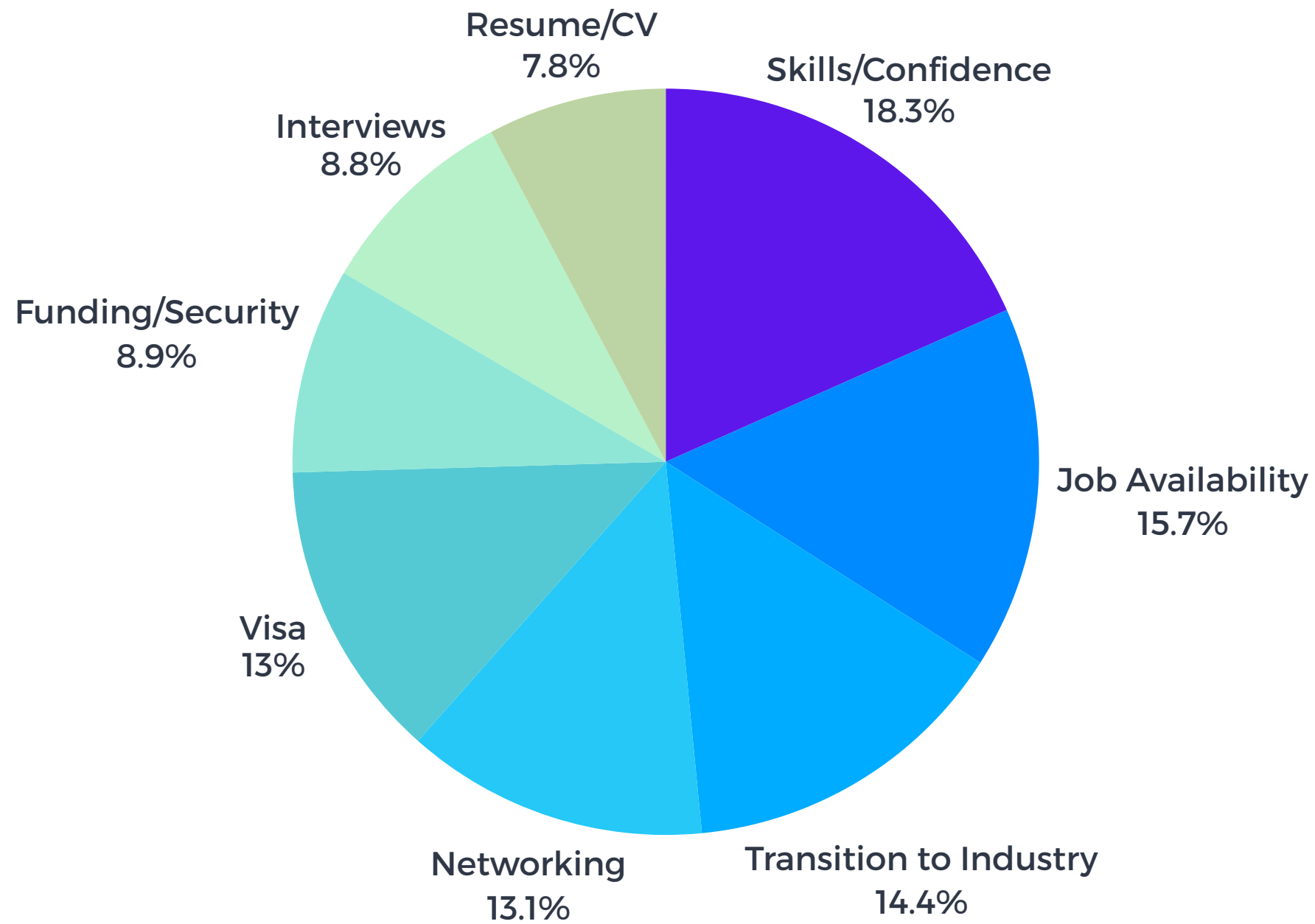
62% of hiring managers will reject candidates who submit resumes generated by AI without personalization.

Only 13% of job seekers in 2025 landed a job by submitting resumes to online job portals, compared to 60% who secured positions through personal or professional networks.

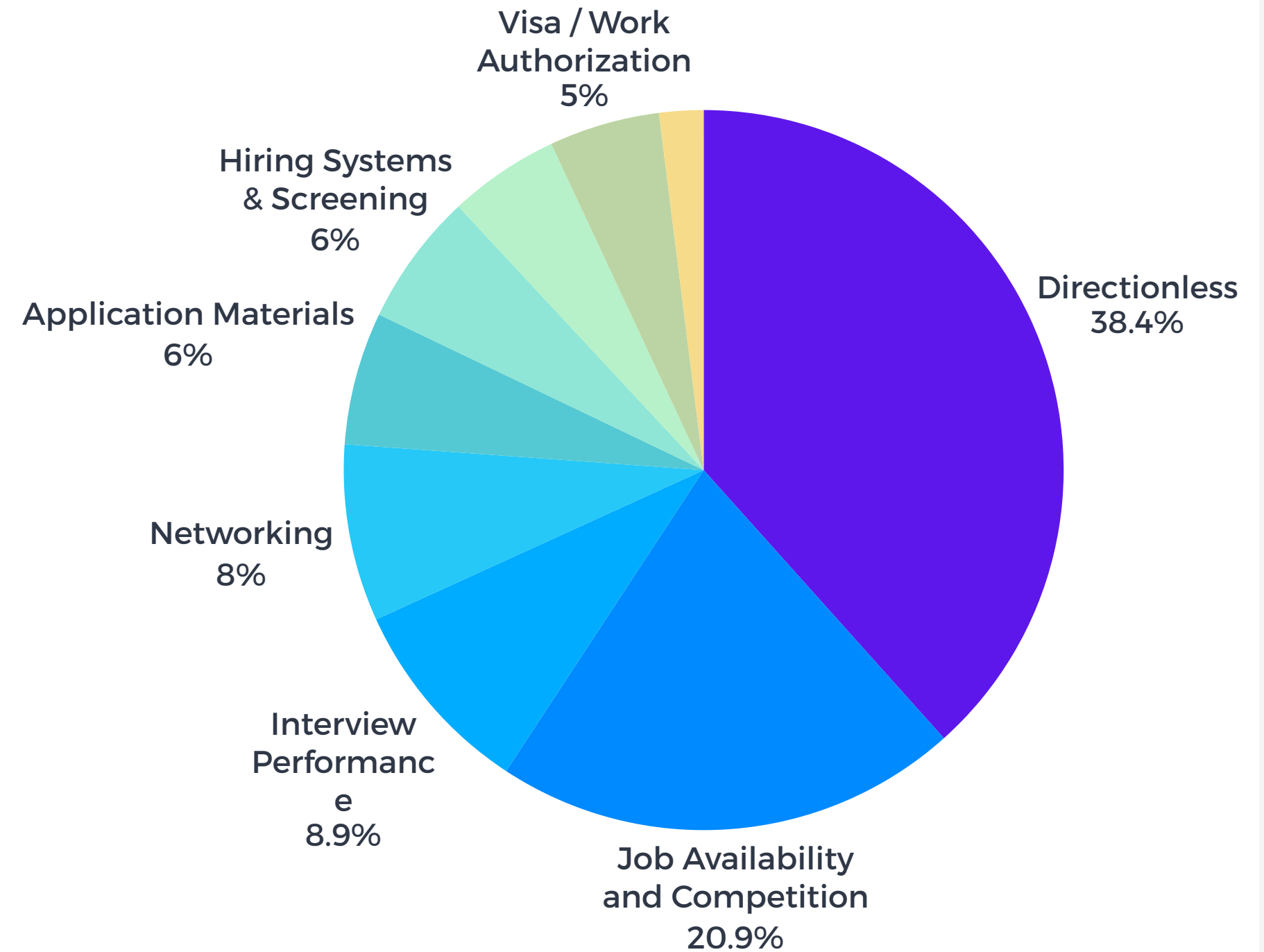
Institutions can't control the economy.
But we can control how prepared our students are.

Doctoral and Master's Students Have Different Career Concerns

DOCTORAL STUDENTS



MASTER'S STUDENTS



A Gap We Can't Afford to Ignore

We've made real progress supporting doctoral students. But most career support was built for undergrads or PhDs — and master's students rarely fit either model.

Doctoral Students

On-campus, working in labs, teaching, researching etc.

Embedded in programs for anywhere from 1 - 7 years.

Relationship to institution built through close relationships with advisors, faculty, peers.

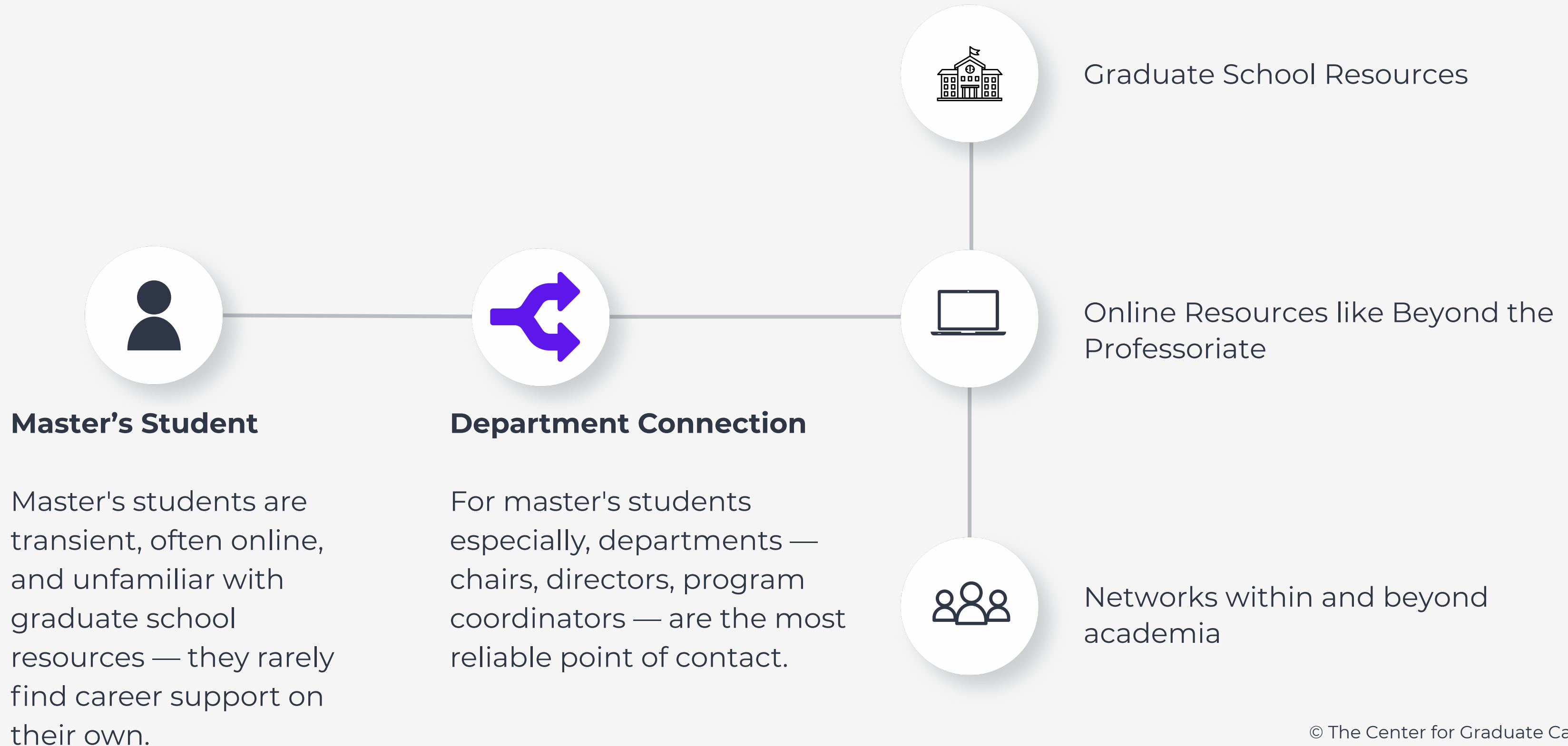
Master's Students

On-campus sometimes, increasingly online as well.

Master's students are in and out of programs, often in less than 2 years.

Relationship to the institution is often limited — juggling work, part-time studies, or fully online programs with minimal contact with campus offices.

For Master's Students, the Department is Often the Only Reliable Touchpoint



Communication Principles

What we've seen work — three principles



Go Through Departments

Departments are the first place students look — and often the only place they look.

Communicate regularly with department staff, graduate directors, and faculty.

Provide time-sensitive information to share with students.



Email First

University websites are bloated and difficult to navigate.

Students will not find resources passively listed on a website.

Students aren't buried in email the way faculty and staff are — they're still opening emails, especially from department contacts they know.



Build Career Readiness Culture

Graduate students (especially master's) are transient. It's difficult for central offices to build deep relationships.

Focus on building relationships with staff, faculty, and other officers, who regularly interface with students.

Communication Tactics

What this looks like in practice



Go Through Departments

- Consistency is key.
- Share upcoming events a few times a year.
- Provide information they can immediately forward to students.



Email First

- Send from a person, not an address. An email from a real name — someone students recognize, or at least someone who sounds like a person — gets opened.
- Don't rely on newsletters. They create decision fatigue and have lower click through rates.
- Promote events, not just resources.

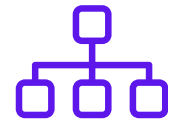


Build Career Readiness Culture

- Building a culture of career readiness takes time.
- When departments, faculty, and coordinators mention resources in passing, it becomes part of the culture.
- Check in on your strategic plan and measurable goals for team over the next 1, 2, 3 years.

You Have the Resources. Are Students Finding Them?

How are students finding and using the resources you have?



Map your touchpoints

Who in your institution regularly interacts with master's students? Department coordinators, graduate directors, program admins, orientation staff?

Are these people aware of the resources available — and are they actively part of your distribution network?



Are you reaching students at the right moments?

Are resources being promoted when students are actually thinking about their careers — at orientation, at key program milestones, during job search season? Or promoted once a year?

Timing matters as much as channel.



Look at your communication methods

Are you relying on newsletters, a website listing, or social media to reach students? Or are you using direct, personal email?

We know email is the strongest channel — but only when it comes from a person, with a single clear ask, at the right moment.



Who else is in your corner?

Career support for graduate students doesn't sit with one office alone. Are you building relationships across campus — with faculty, department chairs, student services, orientation teams?

The institutions that see the strongest engagement aren't doing it alone.

What does graduate career support at your institution
look like in three years —
and does it include master's students?

Save the date:

Partner Planning Session coming in July



Who in your institution regularly interacts with master's students, PhDs, and/or postdocs?



Are career resources visible to them on a regular basis?



Upcoming webinar on tactical steps and tools for increasing engagement.