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Perceived Post-Graduate Job Prospects of University of Montana Wildlife Biology Students

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Background

- According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, over the coming decade the wildlife field is due to see 1% growth (defined by BLS as little to no growth).¹
- It is an incredibly competitive field, and UM is the premier university for it.
- This job growth is notably below the projected national average of 0.5% growth annually.¹
- According to a Federal Reserve study, 38% of college graduated Americans regret their degree.²

Introduction

- The question we hoped to answer is how students in the wildlife program feel regarding their career prospects after graduation. Specifically, how they felt the wildlife program had contributed to those feelings.
- We also wanted to know whether they felt staying in the wildlife profession would be something they could or would do.
- And lastly, we wondered what they thought could be improved about the program for the future.

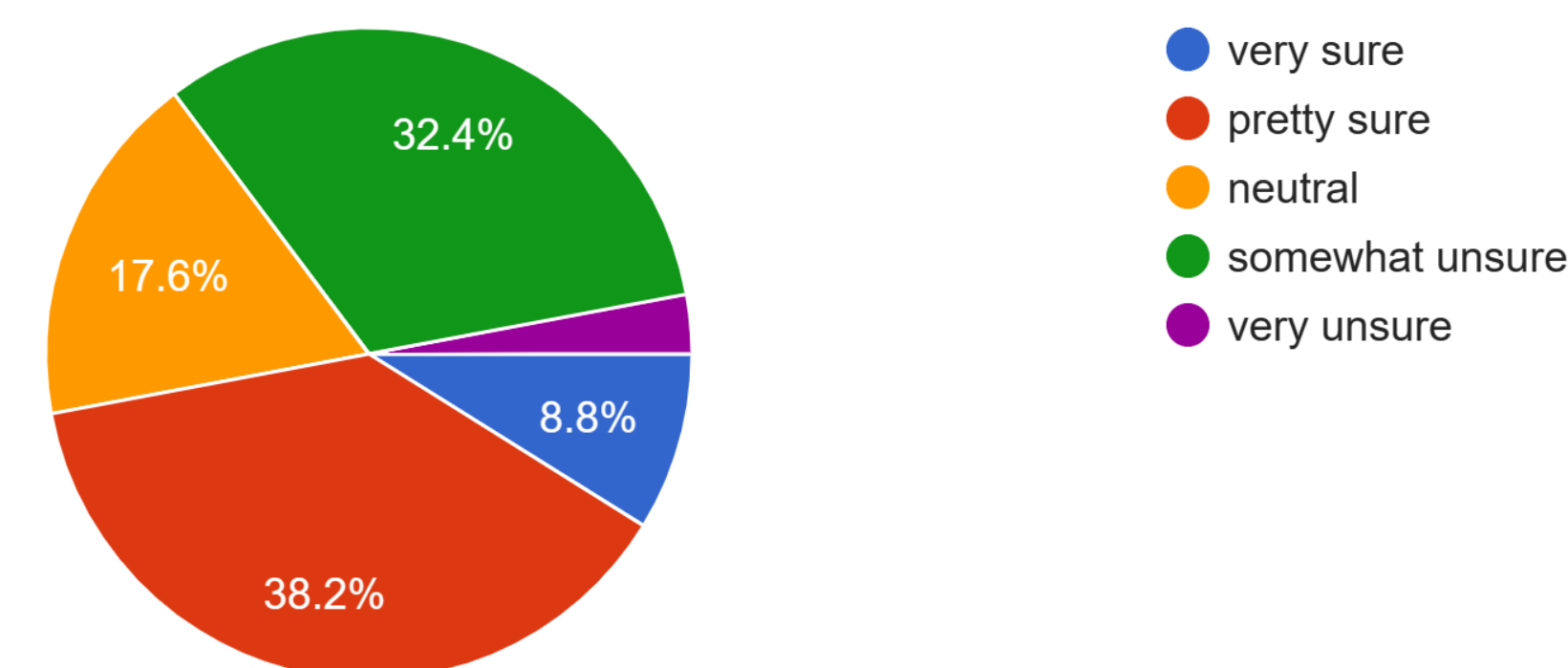
Methodology

- A survey of 13 questions, 11 multiple choice and 2 short answer, were provided to a majority senior wildlife biology class as well as via an email from the Student Chapter of the Wildlife Society here at UM.
- All questions were optional, and the results were completely anonymous. The questions focused on the participants feelings regarding the program, and more specifically, whether they felt it positively or negatively affected their preparation for a post-graduation career.
- With the focus being on post-graduation prospects and participants feelings regarding that, it was decided that seniors of the wildlife program would be the focus. Though thanks to the survey being made available through the UM Student Chapter of the Wildlife Society, there was some underclassman participation.

Results

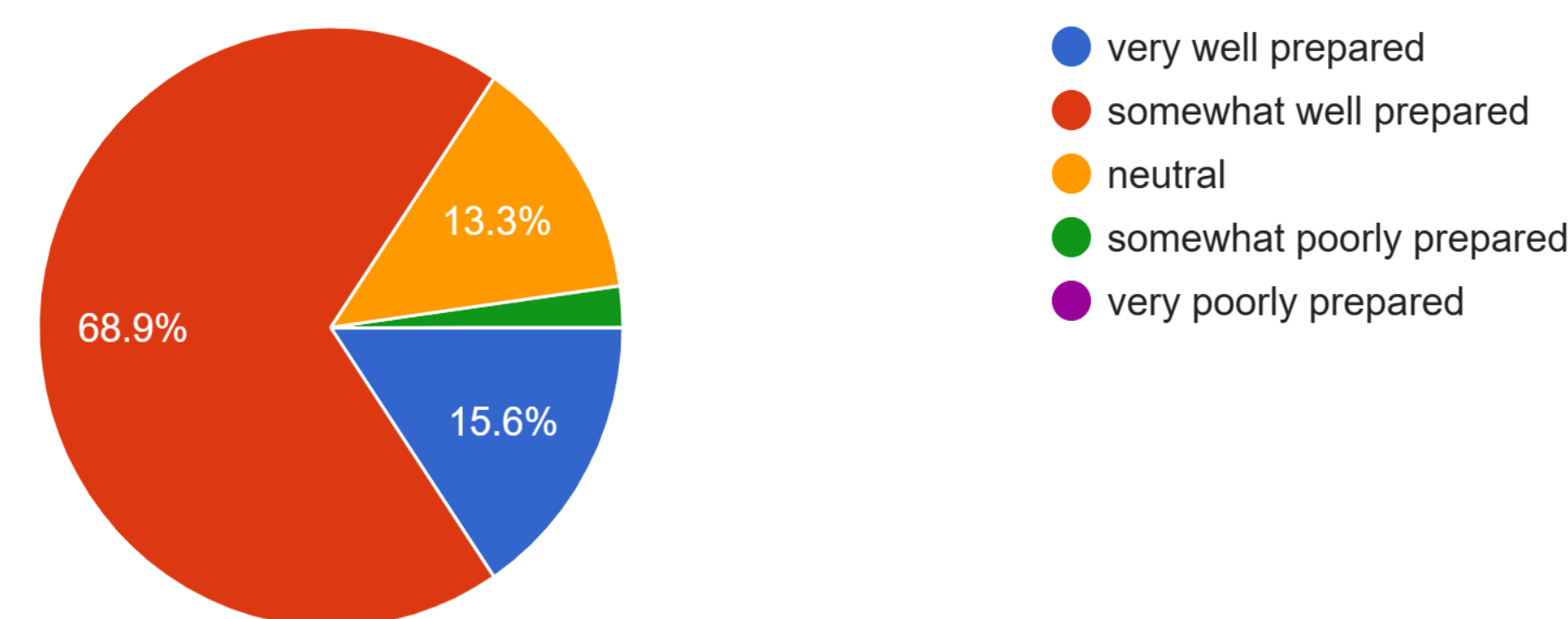
if you have no intention or are unsure about grad school, how would you say you feel about your prospects post-graduation?

34 responses



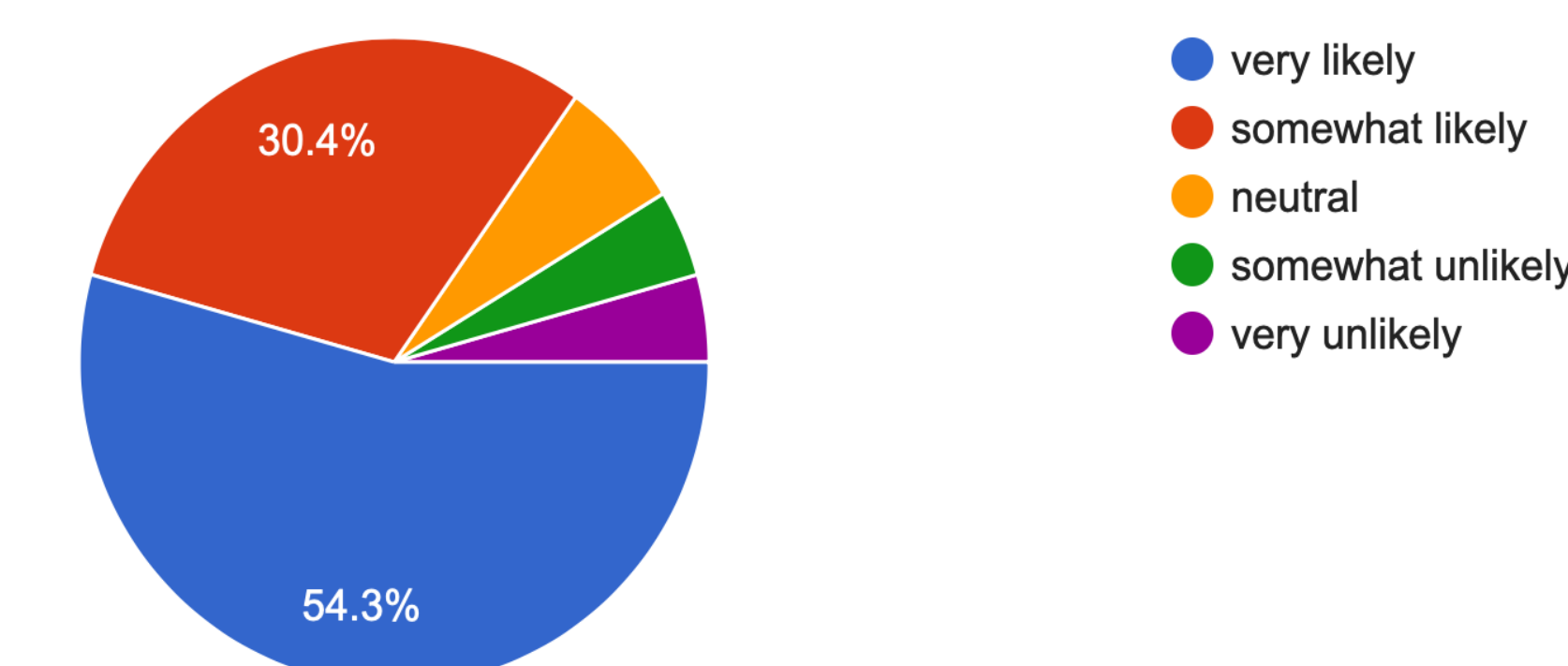
how do you feel you have been prepared for a job or career in the wildlife field?

45 responses



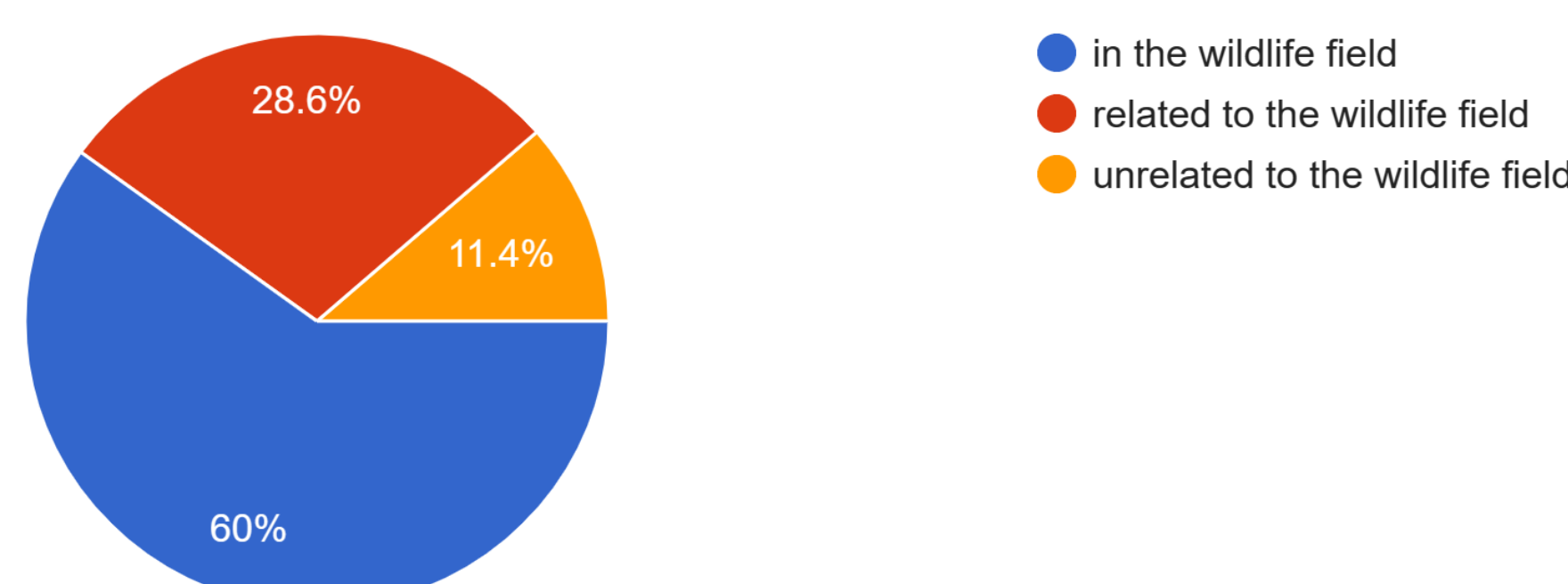
how likely would you say you are to continue into a career in the Wildlife field post-graduation?

46 responses



if you do intend on proceeding into a graduate program, would that program be within, related to, or unrelated to the wildlife field?

35 responses



Discussion

- The graphs in the results section hit at the general trend found from the survey.
- Students, when talking about the field, were generally less confident and more varied.
- When talking about the program, they were far more differential to the program
- The neutral option being present undoubtedly assisted in making the unsure plurality more visible, when they could have just as easily been divided by more hardline questioning.
- Not pictured the responses to the short answer questions, which included multiple reoccurring topics. Notably:
 1. R and GIS being more integrated into the program
 2. More classes and more opportunities for experience
 3. More hands-on learning
 4. Decision making and applied knowledge

Conclusion

- A noteworthy minority of wildlife students are up in the air regarding the wildlife field with almost half being unsure of their ability to stay in the field.
- Calls for improvement fall along similar and often repeated lines.
- There is a general sentiment of positivity regarding the program, but a streak of realism when regarding the field and their prospects in it.
- Future revisiting of these research questions should either delve into alumni or expand to include other programs to put these numbers into better context.

Acknowledgements and Citations

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(1) Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, Zoologists and Wildlife Biologists, at <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/life-physical-and-social-science/zoologists-and-wildlife-biologists.htm> (visited March 21, 2023).
(2) Federal Reserve Board Publication (n.d.). <https://www.federalreserve.gov/Publications/Files/2021-Report-Economic-Well-Being-US-Households-202205.pdf#Page=76>.