

2021 Forecast: Internships and Investment in Sponsored Research

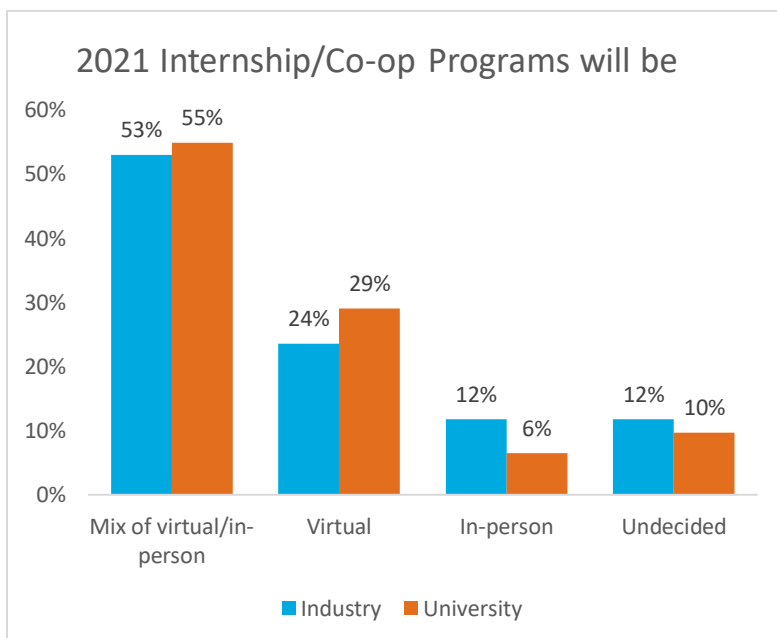
December 2020-January 2021 | n=58

Early in 2020, UIDP surveyed its members about workforce and talent development plans and the anticipated issues and barriers caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite rapid development of vaccines, the fate of the 2021 round of student internships and co-op programs is top of mind for professionals managing these programs. Economic factors could also affect partnership priorities. UIDP fielded separate surveys for university and industry members to retake the temperature about internships, co-op programs, and anticipated interest in sponsored research in 2021. This analysis compares and contrasts current responses with similar surveys completed in 2020. It should be noted that respondent pools for the 2021 survey are different, and there were fewer respondents (17 from industry and 41 from universities) compared to the 2020 survey results.

More than three-quarters of responding universities (76%) maintained student internships in 2020, and **73% have firm plans to keep these programs in 2021**, with another 7% undecided at the time of this survey. **Among industry respondents, 100% maintained their internship programs in 2020, 94% plan to do so again in 2021**, and a similar proportion to university respondents (6%) are undecided at this time.

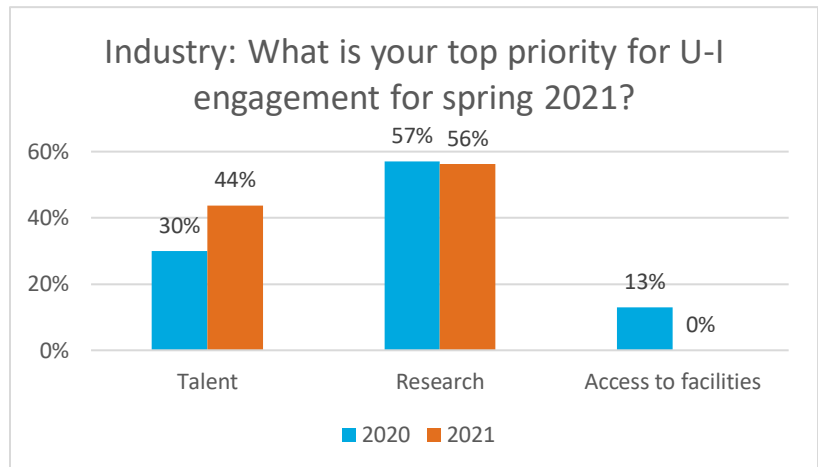
“The global outbreak of COVID created difficulty for Microsoft with recruiting, and engaging students in a meaningful way. It shifted recruitment to being 100% digital and impacted our ability to have those personal 1-1 connections with our students, and the onsite university presence that we historically have been deeply invested in. Nonetheless, as with any major upheaval and change, there will inevitably be a period of realignment and transition, and this is where Microsoft continues to be steadfast, continuing our goal to foster our deep connections with and among universities and our students. With our 100% virtual internship program and continued virtual digital recruiting strategies, we believe that Microsoft, students and universities can all learn from each other during these unprecedented times.”

Cammy Vasquez, Sr PhD & Specialized
Recruiting Manager, Global Talent
Acquisition
Microsoft University Recruiting

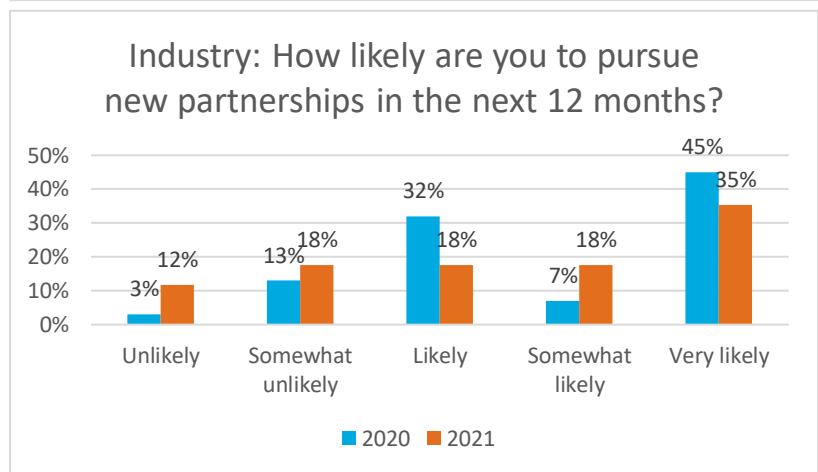


There was significant agreement among respondents from university and industry about whether 2021 internship and co-op programs would use in-person, virtual, or a mix of both formats. **A majority anticipate a mix of both virtual and in-person options for students in summer 2021**, and a similar percentage from both groups (10% university, 12% industry) have yet to decide this important question.

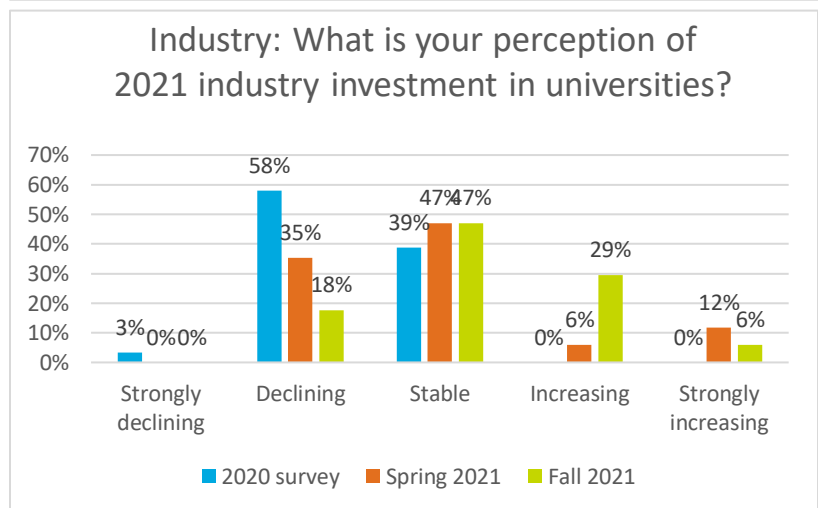
In 2020, UIDP asked industry respondents about their near-term priorities for university engagement. **Respondents this year again ranked research as their top priority, but talent has grown in importance for many.** None of the 2021 respondents ranked access to facilities as their top priority.



With research partnerships the primary focus of engagement with universities, **a majority of industry respondents also indicated they are more likely than not to pursue new partnerships over the next 12 months, although a substantial proportion (40%) say they are unlikely or somewhat unlikely to do so.** This finding aligns with observations from UIDP COVID-19 Response Calls that were explored in *the COVID-19 Response Report*.



With declining research capacity at universities, and with challenges posed by distance requirements and isolation protocols, companies and universities are more interested in working with established partners than forming new partnerships. The exception in 2020 to this caveat was new research partnerships formed to address COVID-19 related needs. As urgency has waned, so has interest in pursuing new partnerships in the continuing constrained environment.



Although industry respondents remain cautious about new partnerships, they offered a rosier forecast for investment in universities overall than they did in spring 2020. The contrast between 2020 and 2021 responses is especially sharp on the extreme positions on the rating scale. **None of the current respondents believe investment will be strongly declining in the next 12 months;**

however, last spring, none of the respondents thought investment would be increasing or strongly increasing in the near future. A solid majority of current respondents believe investment will remain stable or will increase in spring and fall 2021, which bodes well for stronger partnership engagement focused on both talent development and sponsored research collaboration.

FURTHER READING: UIDP hosted seven weekly calls to address challenges arising from the need to shift from in-person meetings to remote collaboration approaches. In the [COVID-19 Response Report](#), see the 10 key takeaways and learn how companies and universities adapted.