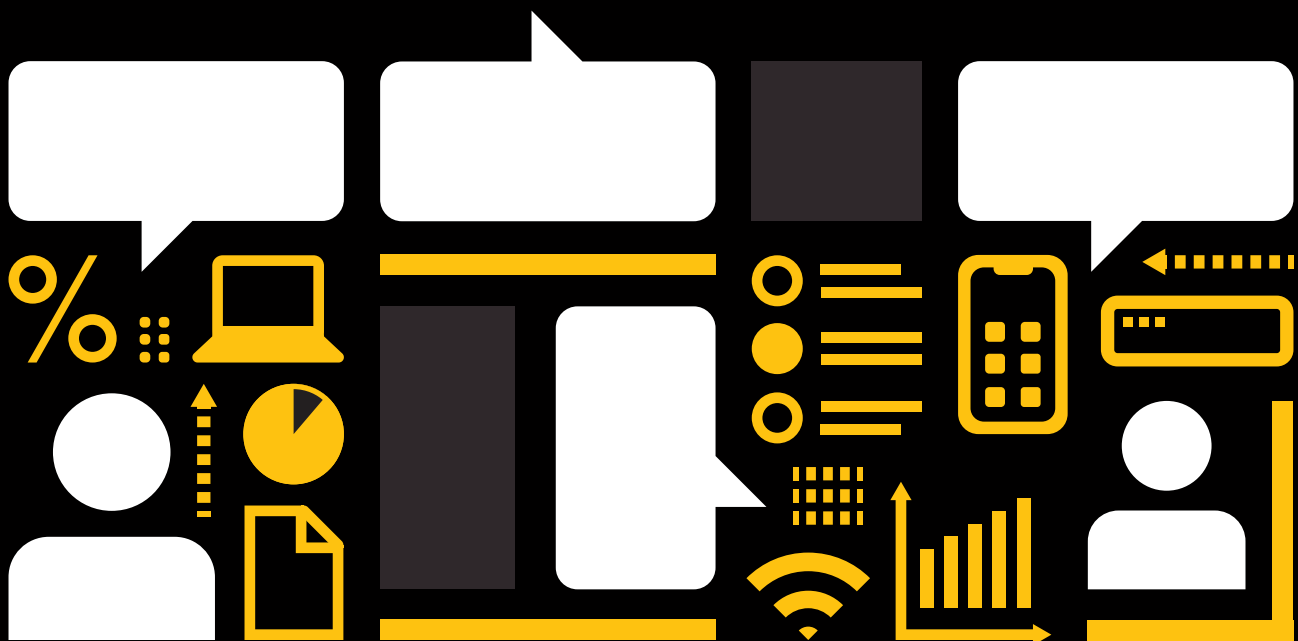![anthology — Advancing Knowledge]

Nationwide Student Survey:

Opportunities to Grow Student Success & Career Preparation

Goal of This Study

The goal of this study was to provide additional context regarding the sentiment of college students about technology needs, career preparation, and other areas of student success and to identify elements for institutions to be aware of to continue to strengthen efforts to engage and retain students. Highlighted below are the key findings to help inform strategies.

Respondent Population

Total respondents: 1,165

Institution type

Community college: **22%**

Public four-year institution: **52%**

Private four-year institution: **24%**

Trade or vocational school: **2%**

Race/Ethnicity *

African American or Black: **15%**

American Indian, Alaska Native, Indigenous, or First Nations: **4%**

Arab or Middle Eastern: **4%**

Asian or Asian American: **16%**

Hispanic or Latina/e/o/x: **17%**

Multiracial/Biracial: **4%**

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander: **1%**

White or European American: **51%**

Other: **1%**

Prefer not to respond: **3%**

*Respondents were able to select more than one option.

Age

18-25: **67%**   31-40: **14%**

26-30: **12%**   41 or older: **7%**

Progress toward degree

Completed less than one-quarter of courses: **15%**

Completed between one-quarter and one-half of courses: **20%**

Completed one-half of courses: **20%**

Completed more than one-half but less than three-quarters of courses: **14%**

Completed three-quarters or more of courses: **31%**

Gender

Respondents were able to select more than one option.

Female: 67%

Male: 27%

Genderqueer: 3%

Non-Binary: 3%

Transgender: 1%

Unsure: 1%
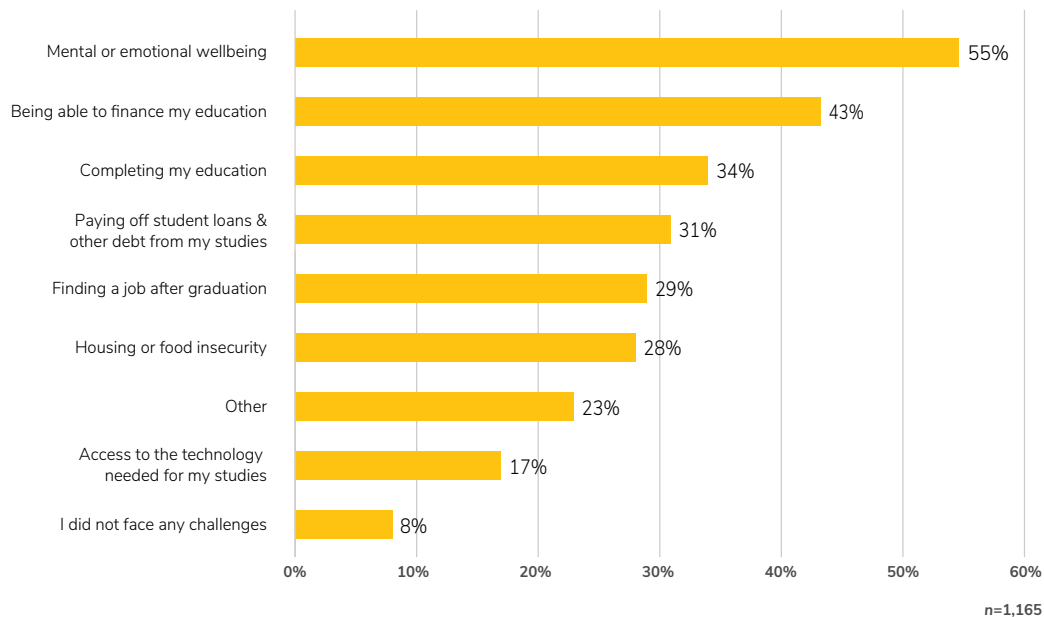
Prefer not to respond: 1%

First-generation student status

First-generation: **46%**

Continuing-generation: **54%**

Pandemic Impact on Respondents

The COVID-19 pandemic has, to some degree, impacted almost every single aspect of higher education. Students enrolled at colleges and universities across the United States are unfortunately not an exception to the negative impacts of the pandemic. When students were asked to reflect on their challenges within the past year, over half of respondents indicated their mental/emotional well-being was an area of concern. At the same time, 43% identified being able to finance their education as a challenge. Students also indicated that they had experienced difficulties associated with completing their education, finding a job post-graduation, and with housing or food insecurity. Institutions, therefore, should continue to invest in assessing their student support services and take immediate action to ensure that campus-provided services meet the needs of their unique student population. Continued evaluation and documentation in this area will be necessary to show the results of data-informed actions to create and maintain the needed resources to support their student populations. Eighty-nine students, or fewer than one in ten respondents, acknowledged not facing any challenges within the past year
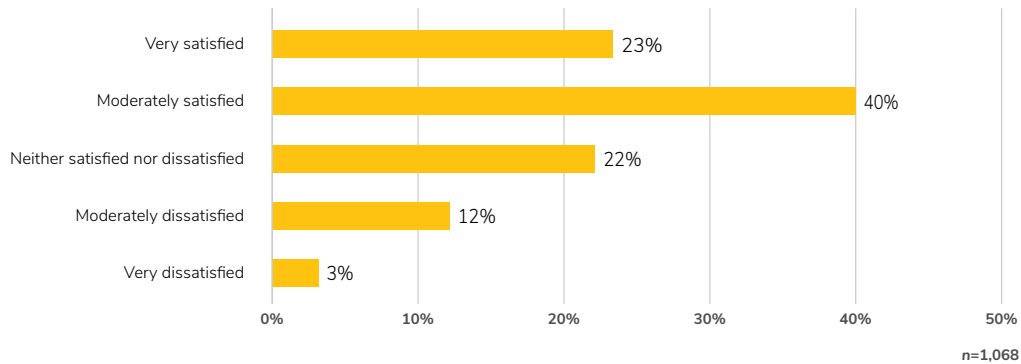
Have you experienced challenges with any of the areas below within the past year?

Challenge	Percentage
Mental or emotional wellbeing	55%
Being able to finance my education	43%
Completing my education	34%
Paying off student loans & other debt from my studies	31%
Finding a job after graduation	29%
Housing or food insecurity	28%
Other	23%
Access to the technology needed for my studies	17%
I did not face any challenges	8%

n=1,165

Regardless of the difficulties students have faced over the last year, the majority of students (63%) responded that they are either moderately or very satisfied with their college's response to their challenges. This is an encouraging data point. It is important to acknowledge and celebrate the work institutions have done to assist students throughout the pandemic with the various challenges that they dealt with and are continuing to face.

Nearly a quarter of respondents indicated that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their institution's response to their challenges, and almost 15% indicated that they were either moderately or very dissatisfied with their institution's response to their challenges. While many students were pleased with their institution's support, it is essential to keep in mind that this data also highlights the opportunity for continued investigation, growth, and improvement. Specifically, it is important to understand more about students who are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied or are unhappy with their institution's response, especially given that only a small percentage of students reported facing no challenges.
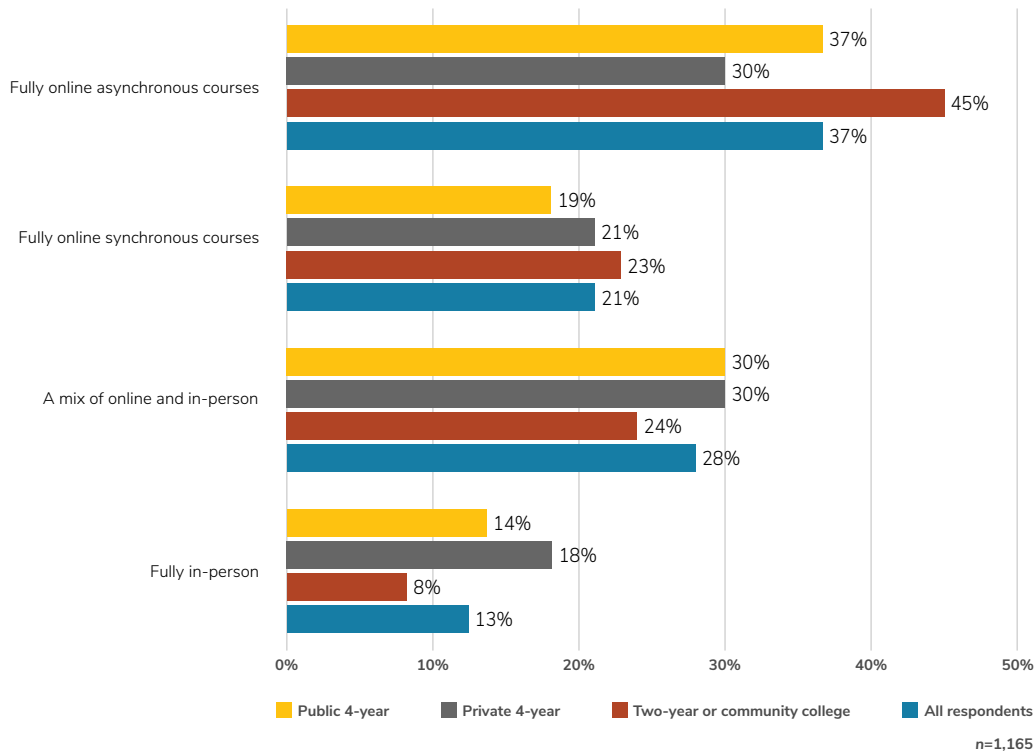
How satisfied have you been with the college's response to the challenges you faced this past year?

Response	Percentage
Very satisfied	23%
Moderately satisfied	40%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	22%
Moderately dissatisfied	12%
Very dissatisfied	3%

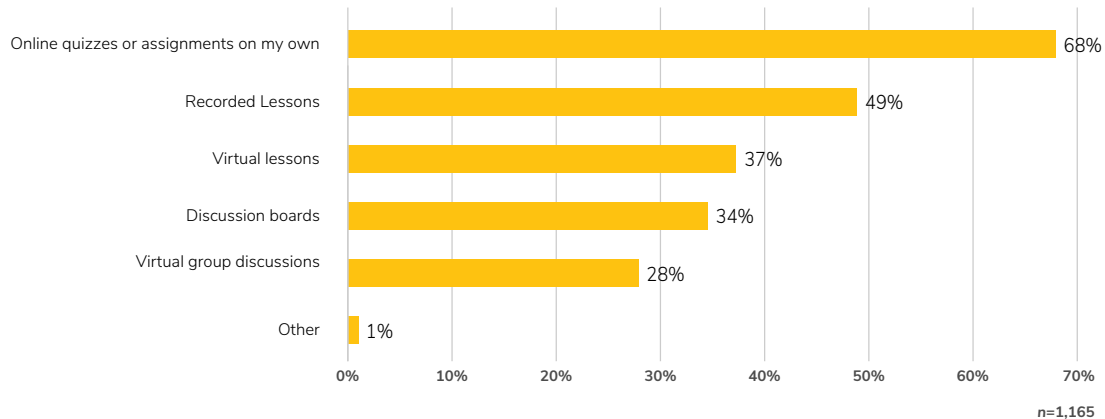n=1,068

Course Structure, Technology, and Expectations

A key aspect of the survey was to gain a deeper understanding of students' preferences and expectations related to how courses are delivered, the type of interventions that they would potentially benefit from, and their preferred learning styles.

What is your preference for how courses are structured?

Fully online asynchronous courses
- Public 4-year: 37%
- Private 4-year: 30%
- Two-year or community college: 45%
- All respondents: 37%

Fully online synchronous courses
- Public 4-year: 19%
- Private 4-year: 21%
- Two-year or community college: 23%
- All respondents: 21%

A mix of online and in-person
- Public 4-year: 30%
- Private 4-year: 30%
- Two-year or community college: 24%
- All respondents: 28%

Fully in-person
- Public 4-year: 14%
- Private 4-year: 18%
- Two-year or community college: 8%
- All respondents: 13%

Legend: Public 4-year | Private 4-year | Two-year or community college | All respondents

n=1,165

Most students are taking at least some courses online, with about half currently in online-only courses, including both synchronous and asynchronous courses. This matches with students' stated preferences for course delivery, as nearly four in ten reported online courses with no set meeting times to be their preferred option. There was consistency across institution types, so institutions should review opportunities to create more online course options given the results of this survey. Online courses are potentially even more important for non-traditional students, with about half of students over 25 years old reporting this to be the preferred method of course delivery.

Online learning format

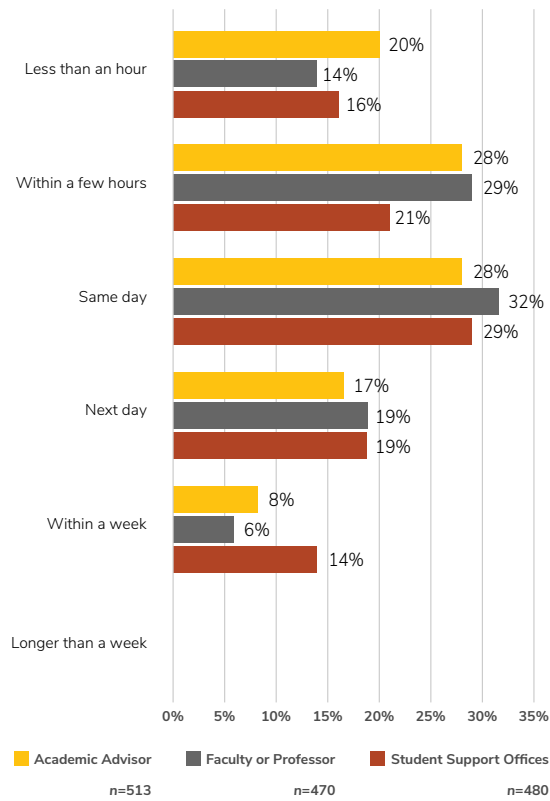| Format	Percentage
Online quizzes or assignments on my own	68%
Recorded Lessons	49%
Virtual lessons	37%
Discussion boards	34%
Virtual group discussions	28%
Other	1%

n=1,165

Similarly, self-paced assignments are overwhelmingly the preferred teaching style for online courses, with more than two-thirds of respondents selecting this option. Even students who reported being dissatisfied with the current level of support being offered to them indicated that online, self-paced courses are their preferred course delivery method.
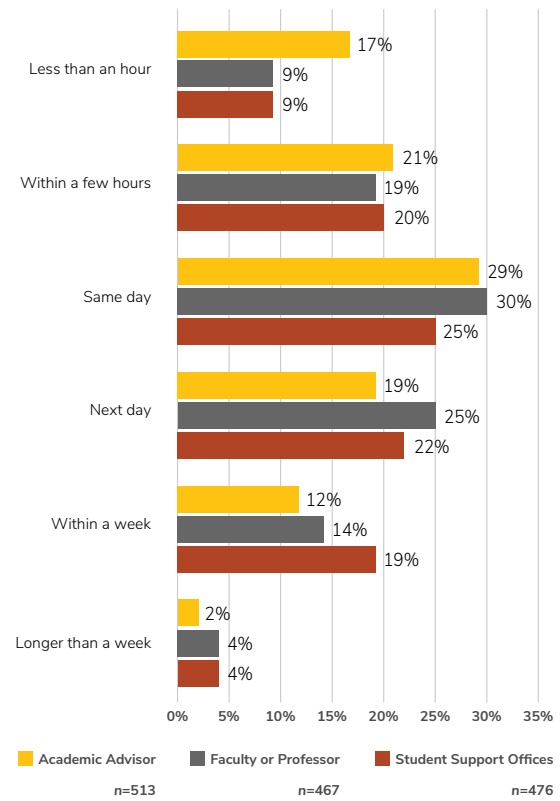
Despite online courses being the preferred form of course delivery, technology may still be a barrier for some students. This is especially true for first-generation students and for students attending community colleges, with 20% and 21% reporting technology access as a barrier to success, respectively. This barrier is not limited to remote learners, with it being reported equally by students who currently live on campus and those who do not. It will be important for institutions looking to increase the percentage of online courses to ensure that the content is accessible to students and that support is available to those who may not have a desktop or laptop computer.

Even though there is a clear interest in a higher percentage of online courses and institutions should seek to offer more courses in an online format based on the survey results, there are additional changes that may be needed. Students in fully online courses have different expectations of how quickly they will get responses to questions. While less than ten percent of students living on campus stated that they expect an academic advisor to respond within one hour, that more than doubles for students taking online-only courses. This trend continues for expectations of faculty and support staff, with an expectation of a response time of less than one day being the most selected answer across all three groups. More importantly, the speed of response seems to impact students' perception of feeling supported: among students who report being very dissatisfied with the offered support, one in three report student support offices taking longer than a week to respond. Of respondents who report being very satisfied, response time improves significantly, with only 2% of respondents indicating that student support offices take longer than a week to respond. Even though there is an opportunity to improve response times, institutions are generally responding quite quickly, with most responses within a day. However, institutions should still review response times and identify potential ways to reduce this as one avenue to improve the feeling of support among students as well as their satisfaction, in particular for those taking all courses online. Technology solutions would likely be able to be used to increase efficiency.

Online student: expected response time

	Academic Advisor	Faculty or Professor	Student Support Offices
Less than an hour	20%	14%	16%
Within a few hours	28%	29%	21%
Same day	28%	32%	29%
Next day	17%	19%	19%
Within a week	8%	6%	14%
Longer than a week			

Academic Advisor n=513   Faculty or Professor n=470   Student Support Offices n=480

Online student: Actual response time

	Academic Advisor	Faculty or Professor	Student Support Offices
Less than an hour	17%	9%	9%
Within a few hours	21%	19%	20%
Same day	29%	30%	25%
Next day	19%	25%	22%
Within a week	12%	14%	19%
Longer than a week	2%	4%	4%

Academic Advisor n=513   Faculty or Professor n=467   Student Support Offices n=476

One way that technology can be used to support students is through automated reminders. Based on the survey results, receiving automated reminders may help students become more engaged in campus life and assist with their academics. Over half of respondents indicated that reminders would make them more likely to attend a social event or student organization meeting. This is true for both students who live on and off campus but seems to have less of an impact on older students, with about one in four respondents over the age of 25 reporting that an automated reminder would not impact their likelihood to participate. Reminders have the potential for an even greater impact in academic areas, as nearly three in four students indicated that reminders for advisor meetings would "probably" or "definitely" make them more likely to attend. Among students who reported being strongly dissatisfied with current services, 95% indicated they would be at least probably more likely to attend, and none stated they would "definitely not" be more likely to attend. In addition, three in four students reported that they would definitely or probably be more likely to register for classes with an automated reminder. However, when looking at students who report that they are currently dissatisfied with services offered, there is a less positive impact of reminders, with 15% stating that they would definitely not be more likely to register. Students also highly desire automated reminders for course assignments, whether in online or in-person classes, with eight in ten indicating that they are more likely to turn in an assignment following a reminder.

3 in 4	**8 in 10**	**1 in 2**
Probably more likely or *Definitely more likely* to attend an **advisor meeting** if receive an automated reminder	More likely to **turn in an assignment** if they receive a reminder	More likely to **attend a student organization meeting** if receive a reminder
n=1,165	n=1,165	n=1,165

Therefore, there are some key adjustments that institutions should consider as it relates to student support and additional considerations related to course offerings. From the survey results, respondents generally expressed a preference for more online courses, but that also comes with expectations of increased levels of support, especially as it relates to response times when questions arise. Respondents also indicated the importance of reminders for both coursework and co-curricular activities. The good news is that these can be automated through a variety of solutions and, based on responses, will likely result in higher participation, completion of assignments, and satisfaction. Overall, higher education institutions must continue to consider opportunities to make more courses available online. Given students' pandemic experience, there is broader acceptance and interest in online courses. There cannot just be a return to pre-pandemic norms without taking student expectations and preferences into account.

Supporting Students Throughout Their Education

As indicated earlier, students faced a number of challenges throughout the pandemic, and there was general satisfaction with the institutional response to those challenges. Student support services are critical to giving students the assistance and help they need throughout their education. When asked specifically about the services and resources to support their success, nearly seven in ten respondents showed agreement with being satisfied with these services, while fewer than one in ten were dissatisfied. Results were similar for first-generation and continuing-generation students, as well as for four-year private and four-year public institutions. We do report a slight decrease in satisfaction among community colleges, as just under six in ten were satisfied with services and resources. Community colleges should continue to invest in services that impact a holistic approach to student success and wellness. Across institution types, over half of students surveyed feel that resources are available to assist them.

There is similar positive feedback about student success teams understanding students' needs and providing meaningful services throughout the term. Over five in ten students indicated that teams completely or significantly understand their needs. Only one in ten students reported having unmet needs from their support service areas. The countless hours that teams have spent supporting students over the last several years have had a positive impact, as students overall feel that their needs have been met and that teams understand them. Similarly, there was general agreement among respondents that there are enough ways to get involved outside of courses,

with nearly seven in ten agreeing or strongly agreeing. Just-in-time support services and holistic opportunities to engage in community outside of the classroom are helping students see value in their higher education endeavors.

Students were asked to rank seven common support services that aid in course success. Students rated the ability to meet virtually with faculty members as the most important. Therefore, institutions have an opportunity to encourage faculty members to continue offering virtual meetings even after the pandemic. Virtual appointments for counseling and mental health services, making student organizations available for online participation, and offering virtual options for career services were ranked lower in importance. There was a variance in students' preference between offering more in-person versus more-remote coursework. This suggests that both course flexibility and community engagement are high priorities for students today. Students attending four-year institutions ranked in-person courses as more important than students attending community colleges or public four-year institutions. This is an interesting dichotomy and seems to indicate that students have a strong interest in online courses but do not want to lose the on-campus experience and, in all likelihood, prefer to take a mix of online and in-person courses.
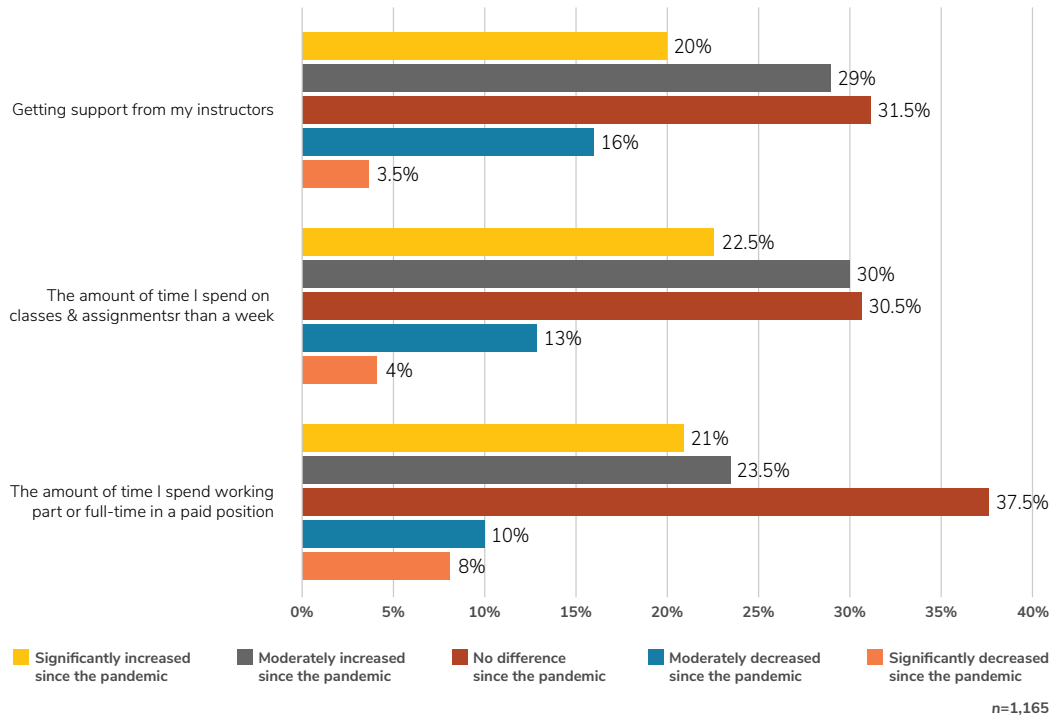
Obstacles to College Completion

One of the purposes of this survey was to identify opportunities for colleges and universities by examining obstacles that hinder students from successfully pursuing and finishing their degrees. Completion rates are one of the most used metrics to gauge student success. They also help inform institutions whether they are meeting their intended mission. Although completion rates are trending higher, 6-year graduation rates still range from less than half of students completing their intended degree (public two-year colleges) to approximately three-quarters of students (private four-year colleges). Low rates come at a cost to students, taxpayers, and universities themselves.

There is good news for institutions as respondents were generally positive about their actual experience compared to their expectations. In fact, when asked about their college experience, over one-half reported that it was better (or much better) than expected, with slightly more than one in three reporting that it was about the same as expected. Only 1% reported their experience to be much worse than expected.

While the survey results suggest that institutions have responded to the challenges of the pandemic, respondents indicated that the pandemic had impacted their experience in a variety of ways. Almost half of respondents reported that support from their instructors, the amount of time spent on assignments, and working in a paid position had moderately or significantly increased since the start of the pandemic. Comparatively, few students reported that support from instructors decreased, which is another indication that institutions responded well to the challenges of the past several years. Furthermore, students spent more time on assignments and working in paid positions. Therefore, students likely had less free time than before the pandemic and were being pulled in more directions.
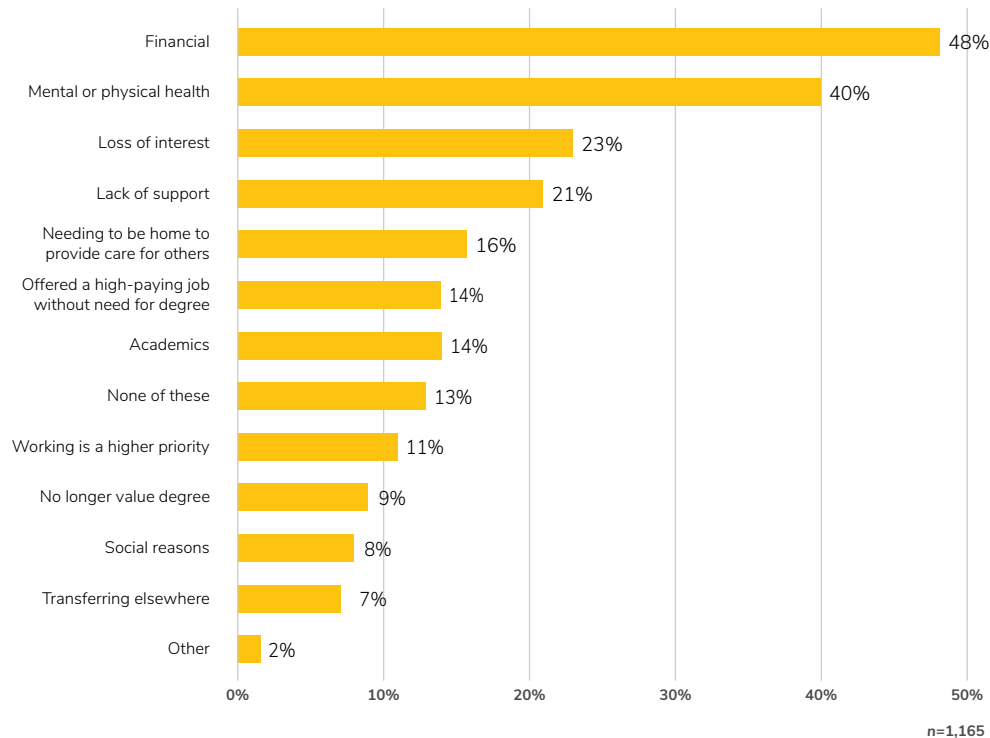
How have the following changed since the start of the pandemic?

Getting support from my instructors
- Significantly increased: 20%
- Moderately increased: 29%
- No difference: 31.5%
- Moderately decreased: 16%
- Significantly decreased: 3.5%

The amount of time I spend on classes & assignmentsr than a week
- Significantly increased: 22.5%
- Moderately increased: 30%
- No difference: 30.5%
- Moderately decreased: 13%
- Significantly decreased: 4%

The amount of time I spend working part or full-time in a paid position
- Significantly increased: 21%
- Moderately increased: 23.5%
- No difference: 37.5%
- Moderately decreased: 10%
- Significantly decreased: 8%

Legend:
- Significantly increased since the pandemic
- Moderately increased since the pandemic
- No difference since the pandemic
- Moderately decreased since the pandemic
- Significantly decreased since the pandemic

n=1,165

The pandemic had an impact on respondents' progress toward their degrees. More than six in ten indicated that they paused their studies, reduced credit hours, or changed their major during the pandemic. More than one in ten respondents left their existing college and enrolled in another college or university during the pandemic. The good news is that the majority of respondents plan to continue their studies as scheduled and complete their academic program, with those most likely to persist enrolled at a public college or university. This highlights the challenges brought on by the pandemic and that institutions need to continue to support students and encourage them to complete programs.

Another indication of this is that the majority of students cited financial reasons as a concern that may keep them from completing their degree. The second most mentioned concern was related to their mental and physical health, with four in ten respondents indicating that this may keep them from completing their degree. More students enrolled at public colleges and universities than at other types of institutions selected these reasons.
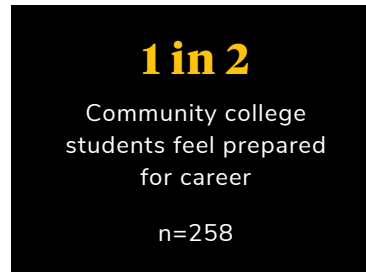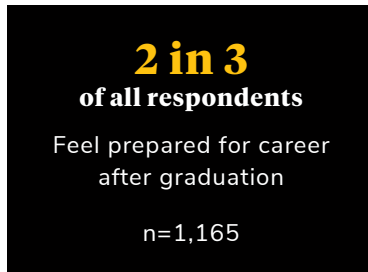
**Which of the following, if any, are reasons
you might not continue in college?**

Reason	Percentage
Financial	48%
Mental or physical health	40%
Loss of interest	23%
Lack of support	21%
Needing to be home to provide care for others	16%
Offered a high-paying job without need for degree	14%
Academics	14%
None of these	13%
Working is a higher priority	11%
No longer value degree	9%
Social reasons	8%
Transferring elsewhere	7%
Other	2%

n=1,165

These results continue to indicate the opportunity for institutions to provide additional support services for students as they are suffering from the negative impacts of the pandemic, as evidenced by the relationship between student satisfaction with how their institution responded to challenges during the pandemic and satisfaction of services provided to positively impact student success. A high percentage of respondents remain at risk of not completing their programs. Anything that institutions can do to continue to support students in similar ways as during the pandemic will prove beneficial in helping students to complete their programs.
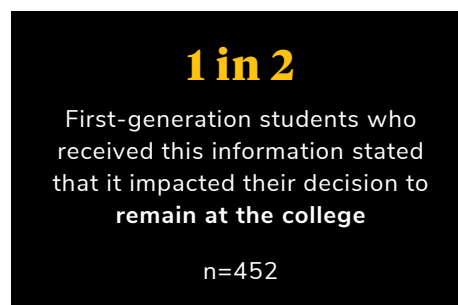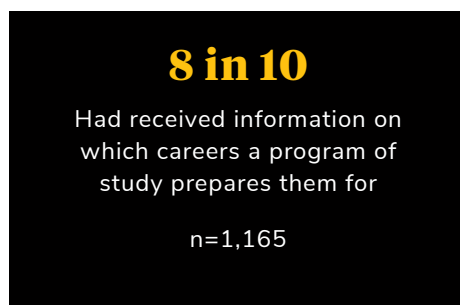
Educational Experience and Career Preparation

Institutions of higher education have continued to place more emphasis on career preparation, whether through enhanced career service offerings, introducing discussions about careers earlier in the student experience, or mapping out which classes students should take and when.

2 in 3

of all respondents

Feel prepared for career
after graduation

n=1,165

1 in 2

Community college
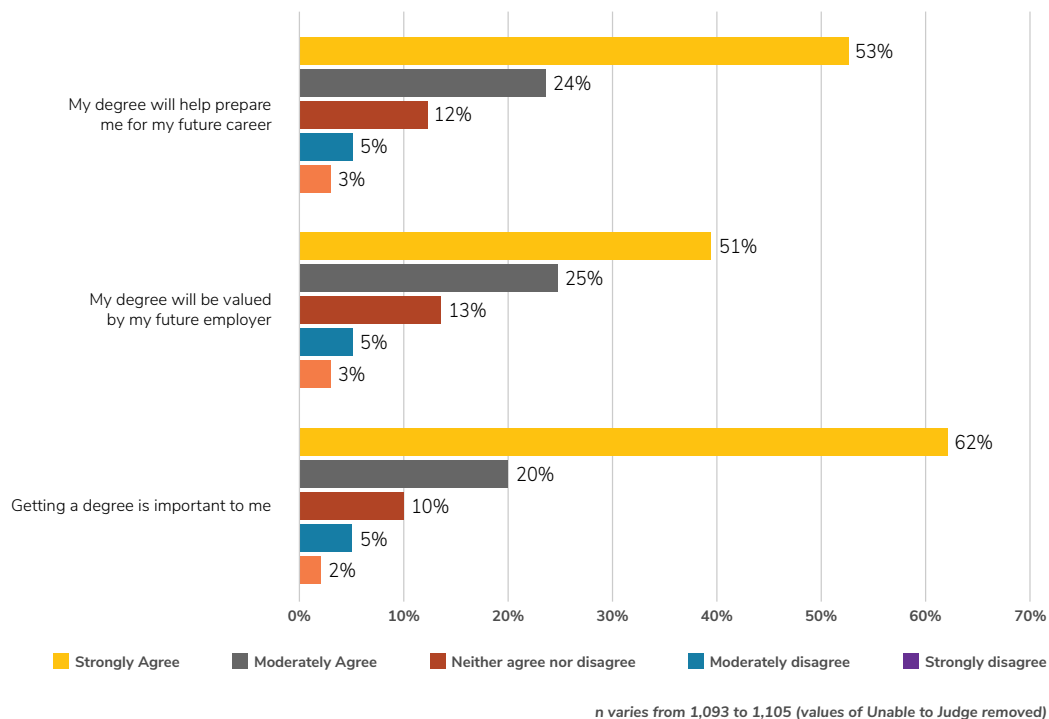students feel prepared
for career

n=258

Overall, respondents felt prepared, with two of three indicating that they either moderately or strongly agree that they feel prepared for a career after graduation. However, there were differences by type of institution, with only just over one-half of community college respondents indicating agreement, compared to seven in ten respondents who are enrolled at either public or private four-year institutions. This highlights a potential opportunity for community colleges to continue to focus on career preparation of their students. Notable is that a slightly higher percentage of first-generation respondents indicated that they felt prepared for a career after graduation compared to respondents who are continuing-generation students. This is an indication of the support that students are receiving.

Even though overall, the picture seems positive as it relates to career preparation, three in ten respondents indicated that they have concerns about meeting the demands of the workforce. In looking at the qualitative responses, many expressed uncertainty about their level of preparation and whether they were taught the right things, as well as not having experience when applying for positions following graduation. Some respondents also expressed concerns about the pandemic and how that is impacting future employment. A similar number of respondents indicated that they were extremely or very concerned about finding a job in their field following graduation, while nearly four in ten expressed moderate concern. Only slightly less than one in three were slightly or not at all concerned. This highlights a need on the part of institutions to continue to provide ways to ease the concerns of students about finding jobs after graduation, whether through career services, career fairs, networking opportunities with alumni, or other ways to increase students' confidence in their abilities.

8 in 10

Had received information on
which careers a program of
study prepares them for

n=1,165

1 in 2

First-generation students who
received this information stated
that it impacted their decision to
remain at the college

n=452

Institutions are clearly investing time informing students about which careers a program of study would prepare them for. Based on the survey results, over eight in ten respondents indicated that they had received this type of information, with only one in ten stating that they had not been given this information. For those who received it, four in ten indicated that it had a positive impact on staying enrolled at their institution. A higher percentage of first-generation students indicated that they received this type of information, and nearly one in two indicated that it impacted their decision to enroll or remain at the college, compared to just over four in ten continuing-generation students. Private institutions appear to be doing a slightly better job of sharing this information, with over eight in ten respondents indicating gaining these insights, compared to a slightly lower percentage at public institutions and about three in four respondents at community colleges. Overall, institutions should continue to provide information about careers that are being prepared for throughout a student's time at the institution – especially as it also impacts their likelihood of remaining at the institution.

Value of Education

Strongly Agree | Moderately Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Moderately disagree | Strongly disagree

n varies from 1,093 to 1,105 (values of Unable to Judge removed)

The value of higher education has been widely discussed in recent years. Several survey questions focused on the perceived value of the education respondents were receiving and the potential benefits. For nearly three in four respondents, getting a better job was the most often mentioned benefit, which highlights that among respondents, there is a clear feeling that higher education is beneficial to their

future careers. More than half of respondents also indicated that they are hoping to build life-long skills during their education, with a similar percentage mentioning the hope to make more money based on completing their education. Overall, individuals completing their education identify clear benefits, indicating that institutions should likely continue to use messaging about the value and return on investment. Perhaps notable is that a higher percentage of continuing-generation respondents selected the various presented benefits of a post-secondary education compared to respondents identifying as first-generation college students. The largest gap was in seeing a better job as a benefit that they hope to gain from their education, followed by making connections in their field or the job market. There may be an opportunity for institutions to focus more on highlighting some of these benefits of a college education, especially with an eye toward first-generation students. Respondents enrolled in a four-year public institution generally had the highest percentage who hoped for the presented outcomes, followed by individuals at four-year private institutions and then community colleges. Another notable difference was related to leadership experience, as nearly six in ten students at private institutions indicated that they were hoping to gain leadership experience during their education, compared to fewer than half of respondents at public institutions and just over one-third of those attending community colleges.

Final Thoughts

The focus of the survey and analysis was to identify continued opportunities to improve the student experience, especially given the pandemic experience. There is clear interest on the part of respondents to see more flexibility in how courses are offered, while there are also a number of concerns and factors that may impact their likelihood of completing their degrees. However, there was also good news for institutions related to how pandemic challenges were addressed, the level of career preparation of students, as well as the importance placed on attaining their degrees. Institutions should continue to seek to enhance how students are supported to positively impact retention and completion based on the overall survey results.

Opportunities for Institutions

- Continue to support students as they were supported during the pandemic, given the lasting effects and the expressed concerns about mental health

- Identify opportunities to increase support of students and seek to identify those who are facing challenges in continuing their education

- Increase the number of courses that are being offered online

- Identify ways to proactively identify students for whom access to technology remains a barrier

- Leverage technology and potentially other resources to seek to reduce response times from offices, in particular for online students

- Adopt technology that facilitates automated reminders of due dates and meetings, and encourage faculty and staff members to take advantage of these options to improve communication with students

- Continue to enhance career-related support for students, especially at community colleges

- Ensure that students are learning about potential careers for their major throughout their student experience, as this increases the likelihood of remaining enrolled

- Consider highlighting the benefits of higher education in communications to current and prospective students, given the high percentage of respondents who tie their education to clear benefits following completion

About the Authors

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Jenna Ralicki is a senior director for campus strategy at Anthology. She came to the organization in 2014 and now designs and delivers training and resources for internal and external audiences and gives presentations at conferences throughout the United States. In her time with Anthology, Ralicki has collaborated with more than 200 campuses to grow a systemic culture around student learning that is holistic and driven by centralized and innovative technology infrastructures. Her efforts support higher

education institutions in using a model of continuous improvement that results in high-quality program review, accreditation, and strategic planning processes. She is passionate about focusing on the student experience as the main driver for institutional and analytic initiatives.

Jennifer Schiller, Ph.D., celebrates 15 years of progressive experience leading institutional and student learning initiatives in the public and private sectors. She leverages horizontal and vertical leadership skills in her day-to-day work to drive effective outcomes for both higher education institutions and business stakeholders. Schiller's team architects and delivers data strategy and change management student learning analytic services for higher education partners. These implementation and strategic advising offerings support campuses on their journey of leveraging data to improve student success metrics. Schiller holds a Ph.D. in teacher education with a specialization in data literacy and diagnostic instruction. Her expertise is in action-research methods that create effective K-20 teaching and learning partnerships. Schiller's academic interests focus on continuous improvement, organizational change management, student learning analytics, and reflective practice. Her publications include peer-reviewed and mainstream sources, and she excels at bringing those findings to life in executive business review and professional development settings.

Mirko Widenhorn, Ed.D., is senior director of engagement strategy at Anthology. Widenhorn joined the Anthology team in 2013, bringing over 11 years of higher education experience. Most recently, he was the director of alumni relations and annual giving at Wilkes University. In his role at Anthology, he works closely with customers on alumni engagement scoring projects while also focusing on thought leadership for higher education. Widenhorn is a Drew University graduate and completed his Ed.D. in higher education administration at Wilkes University, focusing on whether giving differs based on participation in different types of alumni programming.

Methodology

Data was collected through a nationwide survey conducted in March 2022 utilizing a national survey platform. To qualify for the survey, respondents had to indicate that they were currently working toward an associate degree, a bachelor's degree, or completing a certificate program. A total of 1,165 responses were considered valid and used for the analysis. For each data point referenced above, null values were excluded.

About Anthology

Anthology offers the largest EdTech ecosystem on a global scale, supporting over 150 million users in 80 countries. The company's mission is to provide dynamic, data-informed experiences to the global education community so that learners and educators can achieve their goals.

Through over 60 SaaS products and services, Anthology advances learning in partnership with K-12, higher education, business and government institutions. Tapping into this unmatched portfolio of solutions, only Anthology can leverage data from across the EdTech ecosystem to create intelligent experiences that lead to better outcomes.

Learn more about our mission at www.anthology.com.