

INSIDE
HIGHER ED

Student Voice: Student Perspectives on Their Academic Lives

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What Is Student Voice?

- Collaboration with College Pulse
- Debuted in 2021
- 2023 Survey Slate:
 - Academic Life
 - Student Health and Wellness
 - The College Experience
 - Life After College



The Academic Life Survey

- 3,004 undergraduate respondents
- 128 universities and community colleges represented
- Margin of error: +/- 2%
- Field period: January 19 to February 2, 2023

More About the Survey

Questions on:

- Academic advising
 - Registration
 - Barriers and boosts to success in a class
 - Grading
 - Engaging with and purchasing course materials
-
- Demographic filters

Sample Questions

- What kinds of assistance have you received during academic advising since starting college?
- Which of the following, if any, have made it difficult for you to succeed in a class since you started college?
- What's a frustrating issue related to course materials that doesn't get talked about enough in your opinion?

Top 10 Findings (1-5)

1. Students most want to see professors to adopt **flexible deadlines** and **experiment with different teaching styles**.
2. The No. 1 and No. 2 **barriers to academic success** in a class are **teaching style** and **overly difficult materials or exams**, respectively.
3. **Balancing** schoolwork and other responsibilities, **unclear expectations** and **mental health** struggles round out the top five barriers to success in a class.
4. Just over half of students say they've received **basic academic advising**.
5. Just 2 in 5 students are **required to meet** with an adviser.

Top 10 Findings (6-10)

6. 1 in 5 students has had an **administrative hold** that prevented them from registering for classes
7. 3 in 10 students saw a course they need to graduate fill up **before they could register**
8. Two-thirds of students say they feel like their professors **grade fairly** over all
9. More than half of students prefer **a mix of digital and physical course materials**
10. Just 3 in 10 students say they think their professors take **affordability** into account when choosing those materials

Closer Look: Advising and Registration

- Just 55% of students say they've received academic advising on required courses and course sequences needed for graduation.
- Most students are assigned an adviser but just 2 in 5 students are required to meet with them.
- 1 in 5 students over all has had an administrative hold that prevented them from registering for classes (29% of Black students and 24% of Latino students)
- 3 in 10 students over all saw a course they need to graduate fill up before they could register (18% for two-year college students)



Martine Doucet/E+/Getty Images

A Student's Perspective

Academic holds can be “*dangerous to someone’s energy,*” or momentum, says Ariadne Farina of Borough of Manhattan Community College, CUNY. “*I’m getting good grades. I’m working full-time and going to school. So I was working very hard. And to have this roadblock smack me in the face and say, ‘Hey, you have to pay this or you’re not going to finish your final semester?’*”

Closer Look: The Classroom (1 of 2)

- 55% of students say they've struggled in a class due to a teaching style that didn't work for them
 - 67% for students with learning disabilities or related conditions (n=649)
 - 60% for LGBTQIA+ students (n=899), compared to 53 percent of straight students
- 49% of students say they've struggled in a class due to overly difficult materials or exams.
 - Higher for women, and for students in the natural sciences and at four-year institutions.)
- Balancing schoolwork and other responsibilities, unclear expectations and mental health struggles round out the top five barriers to success in a class



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Closer Look: The Classroom (2 of 2)

- Being more flexible about deadlines and more open to experimenting with different teaching styles are the No. 1 and No. 2 faculty actions students say would promote their academic success
- 2 of 3 students say they feel like their professors grade fairly over all but 2 in 5 have had a professor grade too harshly
- 1 in 4 students says they've have had a professor whose grading they didn't understand

A Student's Perspective

“One time, I got confused with a deadline and thought an assignment was due at 10 p.m. instead of 10 a.m.,” says a Louisiana State University student. “I raced after my professor, told them about the situation and how I had so much on my plate at the time (school, club, research, grad apps, etc.). They let me turn in the assignment late without penalty and were very understanding. That gesture alone made me more motivated to attend class and do well in the course. I got 10 times more engaged in the material and did extremely well in the class.”

Closer Look: Course Materials

- More than half of students prefer a mix of digital and physical course materials over digital (31%) or physical (16%) materials alone
- Two in three students say their professors choose up-to-date instructional materials but just 3 in 10 students say they think their professors take affordability into account when choosing those materials



Jacek Kita/Getty Images

A Student's Perspective

"The cost of materials has prevented me and many other students I know from receiving course materials easily or getting course materials at all, thus negatively impacting our performance in the course," says a student from DePauw University. *"I and other students have also experienced not having access to the list of course materials until right before the course begins, and this is extremely frustrating because it means materials may not be delivered and in students' possession by the start of the semester, leading to a poor start to the semester."*

Implications for Advising

- Gaps in core advising stem from systemic issues (high caseloads, high turnover, ineffective policies), not individual failures
- Policies and practices should seek to boost meaningful student engagement with advising services
- Case Study: Tallahassee Community College

An Adviser's Perspective

Locksley Knibbs (Florida Gulf Coast University) doesn't think *"a lot of folks at higher education institutions understand the importance of academic advising and the importance of academic advisers to student success. If we're not a part of that equation, how are your students supposed to navigate and get out on time when most colleges are pushing a four-year graduation? That doesn't happen without advisers in the midst of that."*

Implications for Teaching

- Practice active learning, but make it inclusive
- Inclusive teaching is effective teaching
- Be transparent about how you teach and grade and why
- Researchers to watch: Sara Brownell (Arizona State), Scott Freeman (University of Washington)

An Administrator's Perspective

That instruction- and classwork-related barriers barely outrank school-life balance and mental health *“reminds us that our students are carrying a lot into the classroom, and that is impacting their ability to be successful,”* says Amy Salazar, associate vice provost for student success at Sam Houston State University. *“All of these point back to a generation of students who are coming to college less academically prepared given pandemic learning loss, with more financial concerns and higher rates of mental health needs.”*

Q&A

- What stands out to you?
- What do want to know more about?

Thank You!

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Thanks ...

