Long-Term Care for Student Pandemic Pains

STUDENT VOICE

INSIDE HIGHER ED

COLLEGE PULSE

Editor's Note

It's a safe bet to say every person working in higher education expected every student returning to campuses this fall to require some level of extra support and care.

Administrators may have encouraged faculty to remember that "we're just continuing to navigate through a pandemic; we're not out of a pandemic," said David Graham of Ohio State University, when interviewed in June about a Student Voice survey on how students currently viewed success in college. The survey revealed that only about half of students would rate the education they received over the prior year as good, very good or excellent (with just 7 percent rating it as excellent). "We need to not disregard what students are telling us in this moment," said Graham, assistant vice provost in the Office of Student Academic Success Transition and Academic Growth.

Student Voice -- a partnership between *Inside Higher Ed* and College Pulse with support from Kaplan -- captured how undergraduates were feeling about various aspects of their college education and experience through monthly surveys beginning close to a year into the pandemic. Equipped with knowledge about "symptoms" brought on by COVID-19, administrators, faculty members and staff can effectively plan for the long-term care and healing of students so they can persist in and complete their education and pursue their post-graduation goals (which, as the surveys have shown, may well have shifted since March 2020).

Academically, many students found themselves taking longer to complete course assignments and unable to concentrate during remote lectures. With the continued public health crisis, they may still lack focus and motivation, and getting them to engage in material can be a huge barrier to teaching. Meanwhile, cheating may be rampant and demands on students' time – such as the need to work more hours – may impact the ability to put full effort into learning. Students could be questioning course requirements that seem irrelevant to their area of study or behind in their academic program trajectory, particularly with courses requiring in-person components.

Socially and emotionally, it's no surprise that students have suffered throughout COVID. Campus life abruptly halted in spring 2020 and students found themselves alone or back home in households with little privacy and no ability to connect in-person with friends. Even as campuses have reopened and nearly everyone still has Zoom fatigue, virtual events remain a norm. A March 2021 Student Voice survey found that two-thirds of students view their mental health as fair or poor, and other research points to mental wellness as a lingering threat. Students who lost loved ones to the virus have lives that are forever changed. In addition, many students have felt out of control with return-to-campus procedures and mandates and may not feel their voices are being heard.

Vocationally, many students are behind on career preparation and experiences needed for post-college career opportunities. One-third of those surveyed believe the move to virtual career services and events negatively impacted their participation, and only about 1 in 5 had an internship during the pandemic. Of the 15 percent of students with virtual internships for their resume, only one-third reported being able to network with professionals while in the position and another one-third couldn't tell if it would be the kind of work they might like to pursue after college.

The academic, mental health and career preparation challenges experienced during the pandemic call for higher ed leaders and educators, who should be long past the triage stage of care, to look more deeply at holistic long-term student treatment plans.

Academic Supports

A common pandemic exercise has involved discussions about whether requirements for individual majors were all truly necessary ones. Eliminating study abroad when few are traveling might be considered the low-hanging fruit. But are there required courses within majors or in the core curriculum that might become optional? Could remedial noncredit courses be replaced with co-requisite courses?

At the institutional level, policy changes could make a big difference to students now and in the future. For example, eliminating the ever-popular hold on student accounts, even for small amounts due, can help ensure students can register for next semester or request a transcript. As Graham from Ohio State said, "You can have as much empathy as you like, but if the policies don't support your empathy, it's hard."

Students who got off track for on-time graduation during the pandemic may be able to win the game of credit catch-up if their institutions created additional, or expanded existing, mini-semesters.

Another key part of academic treatment plans involves encouraging students to reach out for tutoring help when they're struggling in a course. Amber Williams, vice provost for student success at University of Tennessee Knoxville, said that conversations must "flip what success looks like" to get students thinking that assistance seeking is a smart move made by savvy students: "Because I'm an engaged scholar on this campus, I'm going to use these resources."

Wellness Initiatives

Mental health and wellness, already an issue for vast numbers of college students pre-pandemic, took a massive hit during COVID. As research after the 1918 pandemic made clear, a health crisis can bring about lingering mental health effects.

Many students expressed frustration when campuses shut down that it was hard to know who to turn to for support. Institutions such as Goucher College now have a central place for assisting students, the Office of Student Support & Outreach. And consider this: Do administrator titles align with what people – particularly those in support areas – actually do, making web searches for help easier on students?

COVID brought to the forefront an issue that had been smoldering for some time. At the vast majority of institutions, meeting demand for counseling services, especially for students with long-term or intense needs, is nearly impossible based on resources. Now many colleges have poured money into expanding their counseling operations (and counseling team diversity) or at least are being clearer with students about who they can serve and how, and then referring other students to outside counselors who are more likely to be prepared for long-term therapeutic relationships.

University leaders who haven't yet begun thinking that anxiety and stress are the norm rather than the exception would be wise to adopt that mindset. Reaching the masses could involve administering optional mental health screenings or encouraging the use of an app for self-checks of wellness. Some tools, such as the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's Interactive Screening Program, allow students to remain anonymous while getting a response with suggestions or encouragement from a campus counselor.

Or, offer a workshop on resilience like Adelphi University has done to help groups of students who might not otherwise seek out counseling to learn coping skills.

Career Development

Because pandemic workplace closures severely impacted students' ability to get a taste of potential post-college career paths, students may need more help securing experiential opportunities as well as getting the most from them. Many internships are still either fully virtual or maintaining a hybrid format, and students may desperately need tips for setting up a schedule for virtual hours and both completing work and networking remotely. In addition, employers may need encouragement to provide meaningful project-based or team-based work tasks.

Institutions should also be looking to expand alternatives to internships, such as participation in certification programs or student competitions. Such thinking requires faculty members and their academic departments get just as involved in ensuring students have options as career center staff does.

Another idea is to tie internships and other work experiences into coursework, by offering courses to promote success or reflection that students can enroll in prior to or during their experience.

As students begin the transition from college to work, often worrying about landing that first job, they may also need an extra dose of encouragement. Career center staff can ease concerns by seeking out good economic and job outlook news and relaying that information to students who might not on their own be seeing the positives or concentrating on in-demand fields or employer locations.

Read on for more perspective on the academic, social/emotional and vocational aspects of life during the second year of the pandemic for college students — along with ideas and inspiration for other efforts that can help students succeed. Visit the Student Voice news hub for more survey results and ideas for turning those insights into action.

-- Melissa Ezarik, Student Voice editor, *Inside Higher Ed*

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How Will You Adapt to the Changing Education Landscape?

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How COVID-19 Damaged Student Success

Many students think the pandemic impeded their learning and academic progress, but the experience likely taught them some lessons about higher education and themselves.

By **Melissa Ezarik** // June 21, 2021

52%

of students say they learned less in 2020-21 compared to pre-COVID years.

SYAFAK/ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES PLUS

One way to sum up the recent learning lives of students is this: they've had a lot more to worry about than course content.

"I was handling more referrals to emergency services and mental health services than expected," says Catherine Shaw, a first-time adjunct who taught a microeconomics course at Georgia State University in fall 2020. "I wasn't prepared for the volume and sensitive nature of it all."

One student confided about an inability to concentrate because her uncle was battling COVID-19. Two football players shared the pressure they felt as pandemic-era athletes with virus worries and having to meet academic requirements. Others couldn't afford the digital textbook and tried to jam all coursework into the two-week free access period.

Clearly students felt lost, and there was no community of peers sitting nearby for support.

Now a director in the strategy consulting practice of Tyton Partners, Shaw wonders what happened to several of her struggling students after her course.

As for what happened more generally with students during their year-plus of pandemic disruptions, a Student Voice survey of 2,000 college students from 108 institutions provides answers. Conducted by *Inside Higher Ed* and College Pulse from May 24 to 27, 2021, and presented by Kaplan, the survey found that:

- Nearly half of students (47 percent) would rate the value of their education this year as fair or poor.

- More than half (52 percent) say they learned less this year compared to pre-COVID years.

- About one-quarter (23 percent) of freshmen report having felt very unprepared for college; an

additional 35 percent felt some-what unprepared.

- Regarding cheating, 47 percent say it is at least somewhat common in online courses.

- Only about one in five students recalls receiving nudging reminders from their college about both course activity and college business deadlines.

Several respondents chastised their institutions for charging full tuition for an online-only experience and for not ensuring professors were teaching and using technology adequately. One student at a private New York City university wrote, "Don't provide online courses when your professors can not teach online courses. The quality of education has been abysmal as professors flop over themselves trying to understand how to use basic technology … This semester has been inexcusably awful."

On the flip side, the vast majority (88 percent) of the 1,462 non-senior students surveyed say they plan to return in the fall. And even those who think of the year as a disaster are still likely to have learned quite a few lessons -- about their learning realities and academic habits, that is. Following are five such lessons.

1. Virtual courses often take more time.

When asked about completing course assignments this year compared to pre-COVID, 46 percent reported spending more time on them. Four-year college students were more likely than two-year stu-

dents (250 of the survey sample) to take longer.

"I heard repeatedly, 'I've had to work so much harder,'" says Donde Plowman, chancellor of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. "I tried to get to the bottom of what that meant." Pre-COVID, class time might be spent preparing students for required activities outside of class, compared to this past year, when preparation was likely also a solitary pursuit. "My guess is that many of them felt like they didn't learn as much," she adds.

As noted, the majority of Student Voice respondents feel they learned less this past year. In their self-assessments, two-year students fared best. While 55 percent
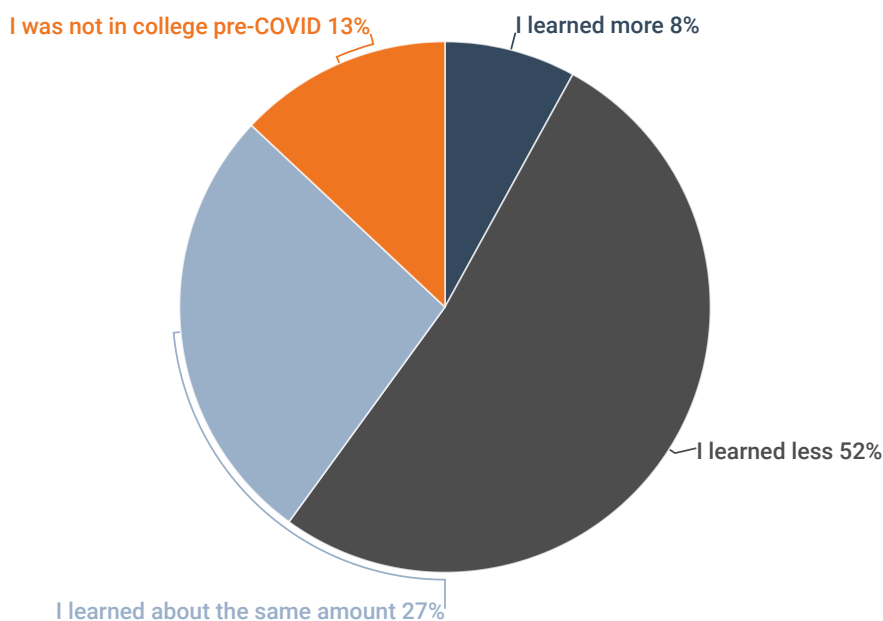
of four-year students say they learned less, just 34 percent of two-year students say the same.

"We see real differences when talking to instructors at two-year schools; there tends to be more of a focus on teaching and learning because it's their primary role," says Kristen Fox, a managing director at Tyton Partners, which along with the organizations Digital Promise and Every Learner Everywhere released a July 2020 report based on a survey of undergrads about in-person courses that moved to online when the pandemic hit. Two-year students were more likely to feel supported in their learning.

Yolanda Watson Spiva, president of Complete College America, adds

Learning More or Less During COVID

Students asked to assess this academic year compared to pre-COVID college

I was not in college pre-COVID 13%

I learned more 8%

I learned less 52%

I learned about the same amount 27%

Source: *Inside Higher Ed /* College Pulse survey of 2,000 college students; explore the data here.
Presented by: Kaplan

that community college students are likely to "be accustomed to things not going as planned, and to disruption."

Student Watch research from the National Association of College Stores found students over age 35 were more satisfied with online course structures than younger students. "This is a flip from what we usually see," says Brittany Conley, a research analyst with NACS's OnCampus Research division. Because the team controlled for having a full-time job and having dependents, Conley believes the finding is probably due to those with higher perceived health risks appreciating the virtual setting. Students over all preferred in-person and hybrid formats to fully online ones.

Results of a NACS faculty survey fielded in fall 2020 show educators weren't thrilled with the pandemic educational experience, either; 65 percent reported negative impacts of the pandemic on the quality of education. Why? The top two responses were the format/learning materials and that classes were less rigorous.

Isabella Draskovic, a Student Voice advisory board member and recent graduate of Santa Clara University in California, would be among the 15 percent of *Inside Higher Ed* survey respondents who say coursework completion took less time during COVID. That's mainly because her professors tended to replace exams with projects, resulting in the need to study less.

But in the virtual setting from her home in Los Angeles, she felt less motivated and probably learned less. "It was harder for professors to get students engaged in the virtual setting. Getting people to participate took time away from time we could have learned new topics," says Draskovic, who took a heavier course load during the pandemic so that she could graduate one quarter early.

Plowman attributes some of students' feelings about learning less to the fact that learning takes place in other campus settings as much as it does in class. Her institution put up tents and hammock stands around campus so that students might spend more time together outdoors. Of the stands, she says, "we'll never put those away."

2. It's easy to lose focus during remote lectures.

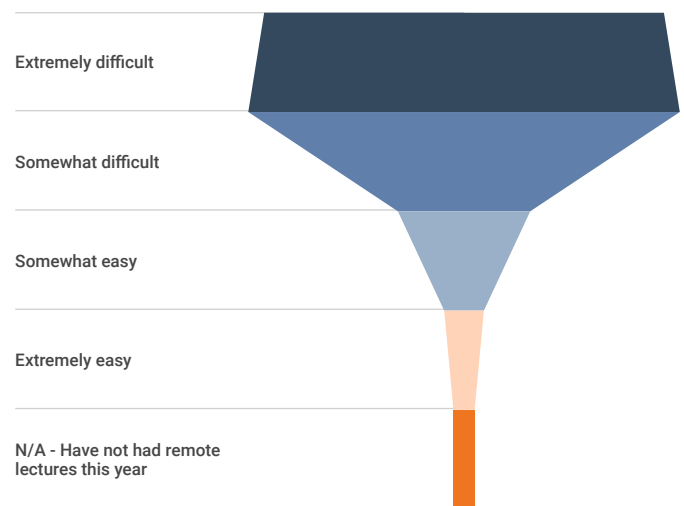Eight in 10 students found it difficult to concentrate during remote lectures -- which also affects how much is learned. Two-year students were less likely to say concentrating was difficult than four-year students were (61 percent compared to 84 percent). But students who spent more time in paid employment during COVID compared to prior indicated the greatest difficulty concentrating during remote lectures (86 percent).

The Tyton Partners, Every Learner Everywhere and Digital Promise survey probed students about lecture length during a single online course (self-selected for the survey). The majority of courses referenced "still had lectures that were the whole class period, even though that's not a good practice for online instruction," says Barbara Means, executive director of Digital Promise.

Although Draskovic had some professors attempt five-minute breakout rooms to break up lectures, the format didn't work well in her experience. Peers didn't always have their cameras on and the discussion would rarely relate to the

Concentration During Remote Lectures

How difficult or easy students say it has been to concentrate while listening to lectures in the virtual format this academic year

Extremely difficult

Somewhat difficult

Somewhat easy

Extremely easy

N/A - Have not had remote lectures this year

Source: *Inside Higher Ed* / College Pulse survey of 2,000 college students; explore the data here.
Presented by: Kaplan

course material, says Draskovic, who earned a business management degree and now works as an administrative business partner at Google (initially fully remote).

Remote teaching that utilizes new technologies is typically seen as a best practice, but few Student Voice respondents report having virtual or augmented reality in courses (12 percent). While eye-tracking software to monitor individuals' engagement with course material is an emerging trend, only 14 percent of respondents' institutions are using it.

Research from Digital Promise and its partners found that students whose online courses used recommended teaching practices had the highest student satisfaction levels. Such practices include requiring students to express what they had learned and still needed to learn,

and personal messages from the instructor about progress.

Some institutions created teaching and learning portals to help faculty members shift their courses to a virtual format. For example, Ohio State University's Keep Teaching site offers a large repository of resources and guidance, including how-to videos and bulleted lists of ideas for supporting students.

3. Most professors want to help.

A common COVID leadership action involved asking professors to be flexible as students requested deadline extensions or other accommodations -- and 59 percent of Student Voice survey respondents experienced that. A few demographic groups seeing even greater faculty flexibility are seniors, students at private institutions and Latinx or biracial students. The

Digital Promise and partners report noted that Hispanic students experienced the greatest number of challenges to continued course participation, so it's possible they may have asked professors more for flexibility than their peers.

David Graham, assistant provost in Ohio State's Office of Student Academic Success Transition and Academic Growth, says he told his team of 45 to have empathy and be innovative. As the institution planned to reopen 75 percent of courses for in-person learning in fall 2021, he and his team encouraged faculty to "understand that we're just continuing to navigate through a pandemic; we're not *out* of a pandemic."

At Santa Clara, Draskovic noticed professors expressing that they would be accommodating with requests. Had university leaders likely encouraged that? She isn't sure, but it seemed "they weren't just saying it to check a box," she says.
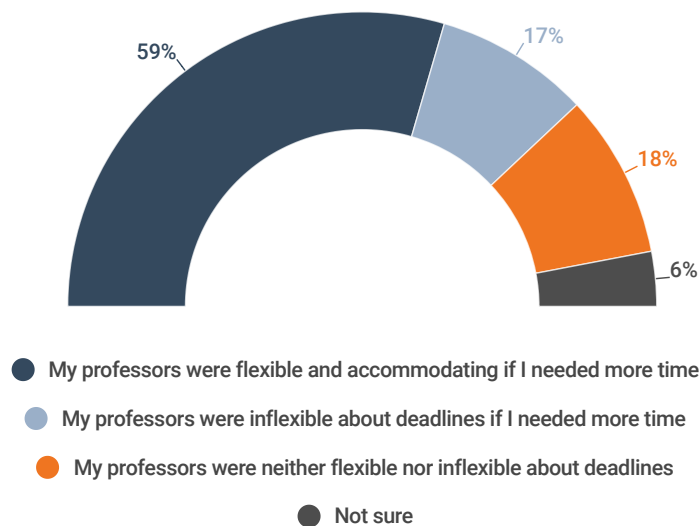
Means says there's a downside to too much flexibility. "Students may tend to put things off too long and get themselves too far behind. Balancing flexibility with fairness and rigor was something many faculty were struggling with."

At Tennessee, Plowman prioritized creativity, compassion and flexibility. Like a lot of other institutions, Tennessee instituted a pass-fail grading option to help students succeed during COVID, especially initially.

Complete College America, however, discouraged pass-fail policies because of unintended negative consequences, particularly finan-

Course Assignment Deadline Flexibility

How flexible students say their professor were this past year about requests to turn in coursework late due to a personal issue

- 59%
- 17%
- 18%
- 6%

● My professors were flexible and accommodating if I needed more time

● My professors were inflexible about deadlines if I needed more time

● My professors were neither flexible nor inflexible about deadlines

● Not sure

Source: *Inside Higher Ed* / College Pulse survey of 2,000 college students; explore the data here. Presented by: Kaplan

cial aid eligibility repercussions, says Watson Spiva.

She advocates for more flexibility at the institutional level to help students succeed. For example, mini semesters or summer terms can help with credit catch-ups, and partnerships with other colleges can allow students to take needed courses from there virtually.

4. Ethical violations and missteps are trackable.

One in five students says cheating in online courses is extremely common. That's especially the case at four-year institutions compared to community colleges, and men were more likely to say cheating is common.
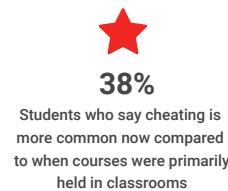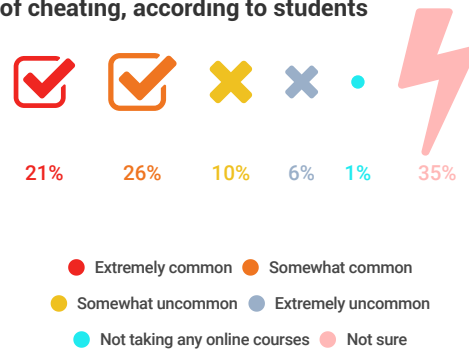
Cheating seemed to be happening at the time of the survey more than pre-COVID, said 38 percent of students (an additional 38 percent weren't sure).

Watson Spiva had expected to see lower numbers of students admitting the pervasiveness of cheating. Regarding why cheating is happening, she says it's about having more opportunity and feeling as if you need to "cheat for survival." Students want to feel capable and keep their GPAs up.

More broadly, technology is helping by tracking online course interactions and institutional business activity and then nudging students to engage more or on time. However, one-third of Student Voice survey respondents don't know if they ever received such reminders about classes or college business -- even though it's been a trend in higher ed for several years and this
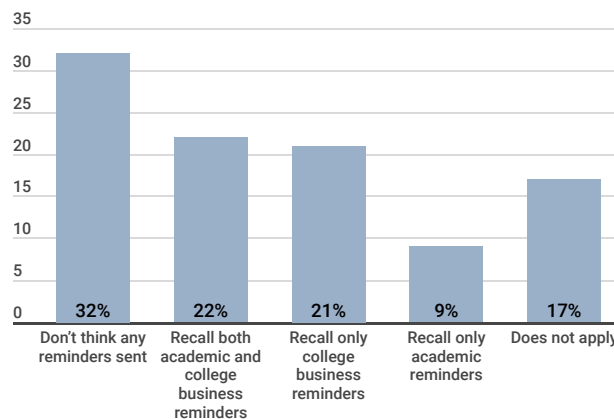
Cheating in Online Courses

Current prevalence of cheating, according to students

| 21% | 26% | 10% | 6% | 1% | 35% |

- ● Extremely common   ● Somewhat common
- ● Somewhat uncommon   ● Extremely uncommon
- ● Not taking any online courses   ● Not sure

38%

Students who say cheating is more common now compared to when courses were primarily held in classrooms

How Much Colleges "Nudged" Students

Students asked if their college sent reminders about not engaging in course material or about college business-related deadlines

Don't think any reminders sent	Recall both academic and college business reminders	Recall only college business reminders	Recall only academic reminders	Does not apply
32%	22%	21%	9%	17%

Source: *Inside Higher Ed* / College Pulse survey of 2,000 college students; explore the data here. Presented by: Kaplan

is the year students likely needed the help most. Community college students were more likely than four-year institution students to recall getting both types of reminders (38 percent compared to 20 percent).

"We nudge to the point where it might desensitize students to the word 'nudge,' because it becomes normalized," says Graham. Ohio State uses data analytics to determine the best groups for outreach, including first-generation students, transfers and those with financial need. Of students who entered the university in autumn 2019, 93 percent returned for autumn 2020, he adds (the average is 1 or 2 percent higher).

Fox and Shaw from Tyton Partners note that nudging can be automatic through tools such as the LMS or manual at the professor level. "We were told there were widgets we could use, such as, 'Hey, the exam is going to close in one hour. Start now,'" says Shaw of her adjunct experience. "You have to be smart about the instances in which you set this outreach."

5. Freshmen may need special attention.

Nearly six in 10 fall 2020 first-years felt at least somewhat unprepared for postsecondary education because of COVID shutdowns as they wrapped up high school. Students at four-year institutions were twice as likely to feel very unprepared (26 percent, compared to 13 percent of new two-year students).

Administrators "really wanted to make sure those first-year students would want to come back," says Watson Spiva.

Amber Williams, vice provost for student success at UT Knoxville, realizes that students enroll without a clear understanding of how success differs in high school and college -- such as how to study and how to engage with peers in class. "We don't want to assume they know what's expected of them," she says. Plus, the virtual engagement everyone just experienced looks different.

Beginning last fall, UT assigned each student a Vol Success Team, including an academic adviser, academic coach and "one-stop" counselor for college business (this fall, that team also included a peer mentor). "These are your people, your squad," students are told during summer onboarding as they begin meeting their team, which helps develop a personalized academic plan based on Gallup strengths assessments.

Last fall, 75 percent of freshmen engaged with their success team, Williams says. Those who did reported less stress, a greater sense of belonging and higher perceptions of academic success.

One aspect of the program involves framing tutoring as something successful students do, rather than a deficit. "*Because* I'm an engaged scholar on this campus, I'm going to use these resources," students begin to believe. Such conversations, Williams says, "flip what success looks like." ∎

Did Freshmen Feel College-Ready?

How prepared first-year students felt for college for the 2020-21 academic year because of pandemic closures at the end of high school
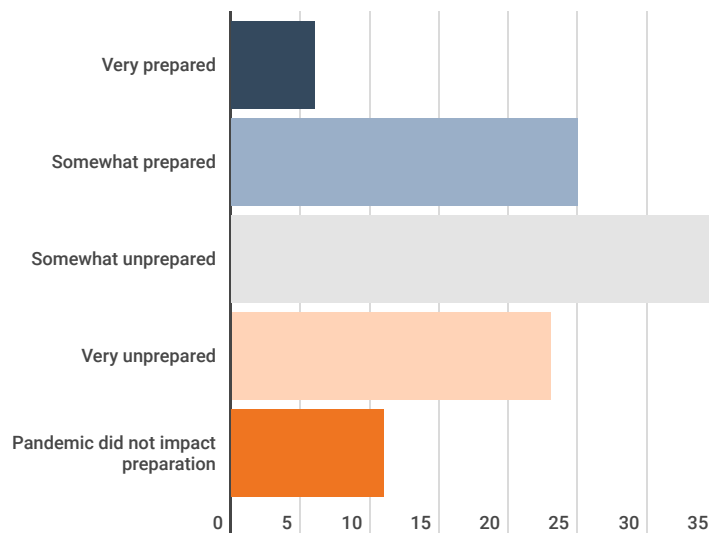
Source: *Inside Higher Ed* / College Pulse survey of 2,000 college students; explore the data here.
Presented by: Kaplan

Stepping Out from COVID

Campus leaders and educators can help college students get back on track after the challenges of learning within the confines of the pandemic. Here are three approaches to take.

By Melissa Ezarik // June 23, 2021

Only **7%** of students would rate the value of education received in 2020-21 as excellent.

AARON HAWKINS/ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES PLUS

Although higher ed leaders feel immense pride about how their teams pivoted to virtual everything practically overnight when the pandemic hit, students are in much less agreement on that point. "This last year in my opinion was a lot of money for almost no actual learning," wrote one respondent to the latest Student Voice survey of 2,000 college students, while others shared similar sentiments.

Conducted by *Inside Higher Ed* and College Pulse from May 23 to 27, 2021, and presented by Kaplan, the survey explored how students believe the pandemic affected their academic progress and overall success in college.

Asked to rate the value of the education they received over the past year, 44 percent of students felt it was very good or good. But only 7 percent rated it as excellent, and nearly three times as many rated it as poor. Men and students who are nonbinary in gender were much more likely than women to slap down a poor rating (23 percent each, compared to 15 percent of women).

"We need to not disregard what students are telling us in this moment," says David Graham, assistant vice provost in the Office of Student Academic Success Transition and Academic Growth at Ohio State University. "Before the

pandemic, there was a value proposition of higher education being questioned, and the pandemic only accelerated or amplified that question. We as administrators need to listen to our students about their perceptions and expectations."

Colleges "went 180 degrees in March" of last year, he adds, and moving forward must involve continuing to "redesign and reimagine higher education" to meet student needs.

In a National Association of College Stores student survey conducted a few months into the pandemic, less than half of students said they had been asked to provide feedback

Rating the Value of Education

Students asked to rate the value of the college education they received in 2020-21
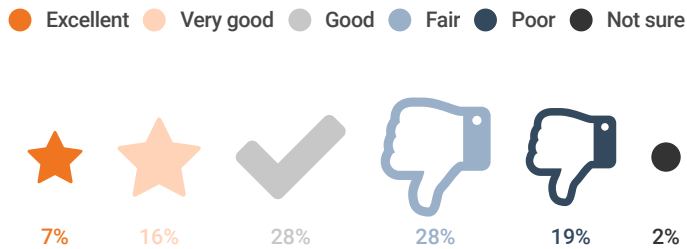
● Excellent   ○ Very good   ○ Good   ○ Fair   ● Poor   ● Not sure

★	★	✔	👎	👎	●
7%	16%	28%	28%	19%	2%

Source: *Inside Higher Ed* / College Pulse survey of 2,000 college students; explore the data here.
Presented by: Kaplan

yet to their institutions about the switch to online, explains Brittany Conley, a research analyst with NACS's OnCampus Research division. "I don't think you can design something to work with students if you have not gotten input from them," she says.

The Student Voice survey asked about institutional services that helped with learning during COVID, and more than one-third of respondents said that none of the listed items did. One-third of students found academic advising useful, and one-quarter found tutoring helpful.

Only 17 percent felt that career services had contributed to having a more successful academic year.

As administrators and professors look toward opening campuses up more fully, the survey results point toward actions that could help get students back on track after three semesters impacted by COVID.

1. Support on-time graduation.

Nearly one-quarter of students surveyed believe (somewhat or strongly) that the pandemic will result in a later graduation date. Those at two-year colleges and those at public

colleges are more likely than those at four-year and private institutions to indicate that delayed graduation is at least somewhat likely.
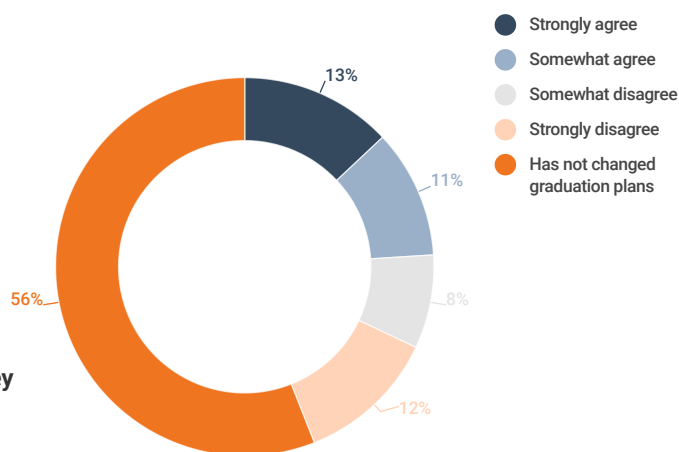
Officials at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville have asked academic departments to examine ways to be flexible about requirements, such as eliminating study abroad mandates for particular programs, says Chancellor Donde Plowman. Other institutions are examining course requirements. One survey respondent at a public university, noting that "time is money," made an argument for eliminating classes not crucial to one's major. "Being a 'well-rounded student' is not a valid reason to continue with this way of education," the student wrote.

The president of Complete College America, which has long called for states and institutions to examine policies that are impediments to graduation, says the pandemic has highlighted why such actions make sense. "We've been saying, 'Let's identify policies you abandoned in the temporary sense and think about how to hold on to [the changes] in the long term,'" says Yolanda Watson Spiva. "Thinking about campuses, I can imagine there being 20- to 50-year-old policies."

Changes made after a policy audit might, for example, allow staff to be more flexible about the ramifications of holds on student accounts, such as those that impede the ability to register for the next semester or get a transcript. "Everybody has been in fight-or-flight mode," says Watson Spiva, so colleges haven't prioritized policy change. But as the country comes back from the

The Pandemic's Impact on Graduation Timing

Students were asked how much they agree that they agree that they will graduate from college later than planned due to COVID

● Strongly agree
● Somewhat agree
○ Somewhat disagree
○ Strongly disagree
● Has not changed graduation plans

- 13%
- 11%
- 8%
- 12%
- 56%

Source: *Inside Higher Ed* / College Pulse survey of 2,000 college students; explore the data here.
Presented by: Kaplan

pandemic, she has seen more willingness.

She'd like to see more attention placed on remedial noncredit courses, with colleges moving toward co-requisite courses for students entering college who need more basic knowledge of a subject. "How do students maintain momentum while in college? It's by being in college-track courses," she says.

As Graham points out, "you can have as much empathy as you like, but if the policies don't support your empathy, it's hard." Ohio State is looking at how its systems can work with students in crisis, he adds. "Not that we can't chew gum and jump rope at the same time, but it's been an exhausting year, and everyone was operating outside of their element."

Watson Spiva would also like to see colleges offer more terms, such as during breaks, so that students can catch up on credits. And to manage challenges in offering required courses more frequently so students can take them, she suggests partnering with other colleges. A student might take a virtual class through that institution but earn credit at the home institution.

2. Anticipate new and more intense student needs.

Students' primary concerns for fall were centered around motivation and concentration, with mental health concerns also significant. Nearly one-quarter of students expressed lingering concerns about COVID-19.

"I think motivation is a bigger issue than we have faced in the past, and we're becoming more aware of how important that motivation and engagement is," says Barbara Means, executive director of the nonprofit education-focused organization Digital Promise. She anticipated motivational issues lessening in the fall for most students but not disappearing, especially if the teaching is not engaging or the content is difficult.

"I think there's an assumption that students will feel normal and more satisfied once they go back to in-person classes, but it's not something we should assume," says Conley, of NACS.

On the mental health front, Watson Spiva points out that even students doing well academically may be suffering from severe loneliness. Research after the 1918 pandemic found lingering mental health effects from that health crisis, she adds.

In addition, students who used to be able to get by with part-time or no paid employment could be working full-time jobs now. Students who may have had health care, or daycare for a dependent, before may not have it now, says Watson Spiva. "Circumstances have changed -- 2019 student data can't be utilized now. Who are the students we're serving and what challenges are they bringing to the table? Students are going to come back changed."
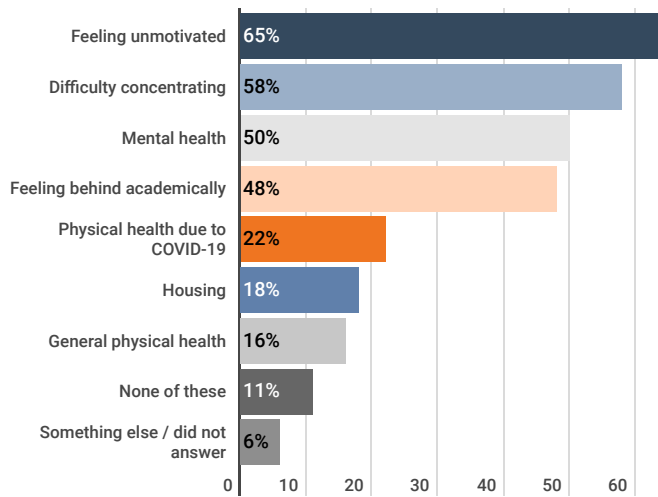
Which calls, of course, for data collection and analysis. "These are going to be the most surveyed students ever," she quips.

3. Prepare for a support-packed new academic year.

An overwhelming majority of Student Voice survey respondents -- even those who as of this spring were still learning completely from home -- did plan to re-enroll in their institutions for the fall term; only 5 percent said they would not be returning. (NACS research, however, found that 30 percent of students seriously considered dropping out during this academic year.)

Academic Concerns about 2021-22

College students' concerns regarding the ability to complete coursework and get good grades

Feeling unmotivated	65%
Difficulty concentrating	58%
Mental health	50%
Feeling behind academically	48%
Physical health due to COVID-19	22%
Housing	18%
General physical health	16%
None of these	11%
Something else / did not answer	6%

Source: *Inside Higher Ed* / College Pulse survey of 2,000 college students; explore the data here.
Presented by: Kaplan

Many institutions are thinking of sophomores as "the new freshmen" and included them in orientation events or creating separate orientations for this group of students.

UT Knoxville, where Plowman reports that enrollment is up for this academic year, is launched the Vols Start Back initiative to reorient returning sophomores, juniors and seniors to in-person campus life. "In some ways, we're orienting three first-year classes: those coming from high school, sophomores who spent freshman year in a predominantly virtual environment and juniors who had only one semester fully in person. We're approaching this as if all of them are first-year students," says Amber Williams, vice provost for student success.

Upon completion of in-person programming over six weeks, each participating student receives a $250 stipend. "Some of it involves academic support services and meeting with a coach. Some of it is leadership development and participating in career development activities, and there's an inclusion and diversity bucket, too, with a menu of activities," Williams says. "To get them on the right foot to finish off their college careers, we need them to connect with each other."

On the academic side, professors at Tennessee have made orientation content requests. One was to work with students on how to work as teams for group assignments. "And

Will Students Return?

Response from freshmen, sophomores and juniors when asked in May if they planned to re-enroll in their colleges for fall 2021
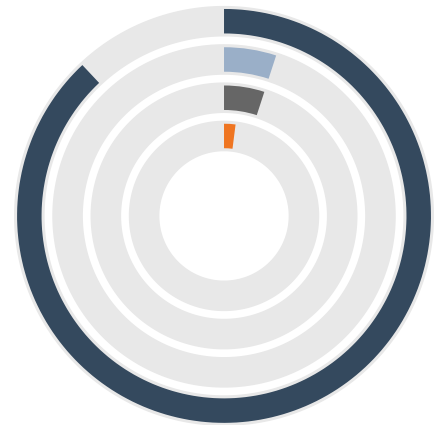
Source: *Inside Higher Ed* / College Pulse survey of 2,000 college students; explore the data here. Presented by: Kaplan

● Yes ● No ● Not sure ● Something else

No one wants to assume students know what it means to be successful in college.

we'll be having intentional conversations around engagement in the classroom, what it looks like. When should they approach faculty if having a challenge in a course? When would they approach the academic chair?" Williams explains, adding that understanding hierarchy is necessary. "When students have had frustrations, they were either putting them on social media or emailing higher-ups in organizations."

The university launched a six-week orientation for freshmen this past year that will continue for 2021-22. The goals for helping students navigate campus are to create an environment where they feel confident and motivated, to set high expectations but help them be met, and to

create structures to ensure students are successful, Williams says.

Math advising and coaching teams, for example, explain what success looks like, and the study group or tutoring session participation is incentivized. "They'll get prizes for showing up to study," says Williams. No one wants to assume students know what it means to be successful in college, Plowman adds.

Watson Spiva's hope is that colleges will keep the students at the center of their work. "Students, especially those from underrepresented, low-income, first-generation groups, need college -- they don't just want it," she says. "We must create an environment to help them meet their goals." ∎

Do Students Feel Heard on Campus?

When students have problems or concerns, they are likelier to seek out professors than administrators and to feel faculty members listen more to their perspectives.

By **Melissa Ezarik** // February 24, 2021

50%
of students are just slightly or not at all confident that if they had to raise an issue on campus, they would know which department could address it.

SHAUNL/ISTOCK.COM

Inviting feedback from college students doesn't necessarily mean they feel heard -- just as spelling out campus department functions online doesn't guarantee students know whom to turn to when an issue arises. With higher ed financial models relying on satisfied students who stay and complete their studies, those realities spell trouble.

Add COVID-19 to the mix, and there's even more reason for concern. Although higher ed institutions transitioned quickly last year to teaching and supporting students from a distance as COVID kept them apart -- and continued to enhance their offerings as pandemic life settled in -- many students have struggled to access needed help remotely.

The above truths emerge as key takeaways for higher ed from the inaugural Student Voice survey of 2,000 undergraduates from 114 two- and four-year colleges and universities. A few other notable findings from the survey:

- Just 21 percent of respondents say they have spoken up about a campus issue that was important to them -- with many saying they did not anticipate officials would act on the concern.

- More than two-thirds of students either strongly (28 percent) or somewhat (39 percent) agree that they feel comfortable sharing opinions in their classes. That's more true for liberal students than for right-leaning ones, with 74 percent of those identifying as "strong Democrats" and 53 percent of "strong Republicans" agreeing. Differences by race are minimal, with Black and white students at 65 and 66 percent, respectively, and Asian (73 percent) and Hispanic/Latino students (74 percent) moderately more comfortable.

- More than half (52 percent) of students feel it's extremely or somewhat likely that a professor would resolve a concern to their satisfaction, compared to 34 percent who say the same about administrators. International students have the most faith in professors resolving concerns, with 64 percent believing it's extremely or somewhat likely.

- Half of students are just slightly (32 percent) or not at all (18 percent) confident that if they had to raise an issue on campus, they would know which department could address it. Varsity athletes emerge as one group with more confidence than others, with 62 percent feeling they would know what department to turn to.

This initial Student Voice survey, fielded from Feb. 5 to 15, 2021, was designed to gauge whether and how much college and university students believe their perspectives are heard, and their concerns addressed, on their campuses. Because students responded as they and U.S. institutions are nearing the one-year mark of the start of the pandemic and ensuing recession, and half of the respondents were starting the spring semester with online-only classes, their concerns are closely linked to the current moment.

The cost of attending college, financial pressures facing students and student mental health emerged as the top three issues respondents (88 percent of whom are age 22 or younger) want their college to pay attention to. These same issues -- in reverse order -- top the list of concerns students feel most uncomfortable discussing with campus officials.
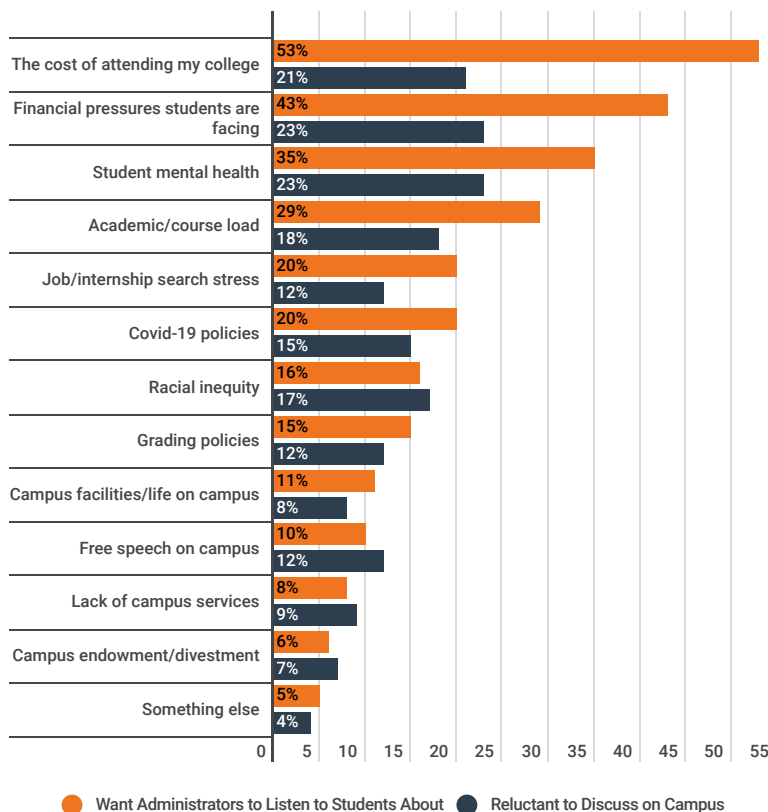
"As an industry, higher ed has been unbelievably responsive to the pandemic," says Kevin Kruger, president of NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. Colleges have provided internet access, emergency aid and food pantries, to name a few efforts.

As responsive as campuses have been, though, three-quarters of students report at least some difficulty getting help from their college due to COVID. That finding suggests there could never really be enough supports during this difficult moment, Kruger says. "It underscores how challenging this year has been to students. It's impossible to meet their needs in the way they would want."

Part of the issue is likely accessibility in a remote environment, says Aarika Camp, who joined Goucher College in Baltimore as vice president and dean of students in August 2020. Before, students could pop in to a student affairs office, or stop an administrator as they're eating lunch. "I can understand where the students are coming from," she says. "The accessibility

Top Concerns of College Students

What issues students want campus administrators to listen to students about compared to what issues students feel reluctant to discuss on campus

Issue	Want Administrators to Listen to Students About	Reluctant to Discuss on Campus
The cost of attending my college	53%	21%
Financial pressures students are facing	43%	23%
Student mental health	35%	23%
Academic/course load	29%	18%
Job/internship search stress	20%	12%
Covid-19 policies	20%	15%
Racial inequity	16%	17%
Grading policies	15%	12%
Campus facilities/life on campus	11%	8%
Free speech on campus	10%	12%
Lack of campus services	8%	9%
Campus endowment/divestment	6%	7%
Something else	5%	4%

Source: *Inside Higher Ed* / College Pulse survey of 2,000 college students
Presented by: Kaplan

has shifted. We're still available on Zoom, but it's more structured."

Student voices have contributed to recent campus decision making at Goucher, however. Its leaders, for example, along with many other colleges, originally planned a compressed spring 2021 semester that eliminated spring break. Through Goucher's app, which includes an Ask the President portal, many students expressed concern about needing that break to ease the kind of stress they recalled feeling in the fall.

"We've changed the semester because of it," says Camp. "Now we have a spring 'pause.'" With two Zoom-free days, students can break from classes, and some will be able to move into campus residence halls at that time.

Officials explained how accreditation would be at risk if they scheduled an entire week for a break, but the pivot showed that students were heard. "It's our responsibility if we're going to say no to explain why not, or explain why not right now," says Camp.

Following are additional insights from the Student Voice survey on what percentage of students are speaking up, whom they are turning to and how they perceive likely outcomes.

Only One in Five Students Speaks Up

When asked if they have spoken up about an issue of importance to them in college, just 21 percent of students affirm that they have. Seniors were more likely to have done so, with 30 percent of 2021 graduates saying they have expressed themselves. Slicing the data by political leaning, 28 percent of those identifying as "strong Democrats" have spoken up (compared to 13 percent of "strong Republicans"). Race may also come into play, with 29 percent of those identifying as being of two or more races, and 27 percent of Black students, having done so.

Kruger says students expressing themselves about societal and political beliefs is important, but that they also should speak up to bring about institutional change. One factor keeping them from doing so is how change tends to not happen rapidly on campuses unless stakeholders put significant energy into the cause. "The pace of change doesn't line up with the four-year degree," he says, adding that this can frustrate students.

Sean Stevens from the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) says the survey findings about students' academic class, political leaning and race are consistent with data from other research. Students tend to arrive on campus really looking to express themselves, and then speaking out may dip for sophomore and junior years before the student feels more comfortable as a senior and may bring issues to the forefront before graduating.

Studies from FIRE and elsewhere have pointed to multiracial students as feeling slightly more comfortable speaking up than others, adds Stevens, a senior research fellow for polling and analytics at the free speech group. As for politics, FIRE data from last fall's survey of free speech at 55 institutions show that the student body at most colleges is more liberal leaning -- and in that context students who match the popular political profile are more likely to speak up.

For Grant Loveless, a part-time student at Austin Community College and student advisory board member for the Student Voice project, speaking up has meant advocating for equity and inclusion and seeking safe spaces for all, both in person and online. He resurrected the Black Success Committee and now pursues his activism in part through the Black Representation of Achievement through Student Support (BRASS) program and the

Students tend to arrive on campus really looking to express themselves, and then speaking out may dip for sophomore and junior years before the student feels more comfortable as a senior and may bring issues to the forefront before graduating.

LGBT eQuity Committee.

Earlier, involvement in an engineering club spurred Loveless's passion for organizing programs -- in that case programs to help students explore STEM careers. "It amplified and told me to find my voice," he says.

Respondents to the Student Voice survey offered several reasons why they had (and hadn't) expressed themselves on their campuses, including that advocating is best done through a student organization and that since they haven't attended campus in person yet, they don't know what issues are present and relevant.

Some students expressed concern about administrators taking action. One student wrote, "I don't think the college would listen to me. You are encouraged to freely share your views but the college won't actually do anything about a problem unless it affects them financially."

Offering advice for others about speaking up, another student suggested approaching top administrators rather than "the little 'student concerns' offices in between" because such departments "just transfer you to other offices and you'll be exhausted."

Students Are More Likely to Raise Issues With Professors Than With Administrators

About one-third (32 percent) of students surveyed said they feel comfortable sharing their perspective on issues that are meaningful to them with their professors (second only to their peers, among the question's 11 possible responses). Besides academic advisers (at 31 percent), other staff options were not selected by many respondents.

"From the students' perspective, because the faculty is the first point of contact, it's not a surprising finding," says Tia Brown McNair, vice president for diversity, equity and student success at the Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Pandemic-era professors are especially on the front lines. Katarina Draskovic, another Student Voice advisory board member, has noticed her professors at Santa Clara University in California including contacts for mental health and tutoring support right in their syllabi.

"They are emphasizing the services more," says Draskovic, a 21-year-old commerce and business management major who was interviewed just prior to her graduation in March 2021. "Certain professors also spend time in class talking about it, or if they sense students are stressed, they'll say to remember the resources on campus or will be flexible with [assignment] timelines."

And as noted above, students are much less likely to believe an administrator would satisfactorily resolve a concern than a professor; that, however, does not apply to students at two-year colleges, who are likelier than their four-year peers to envision an administrator would resolve their concerns.

At his community college, Loveless says students know they can trust both professors and administrators, and both are involved in organizations such as student government.

Matthew To, interviewed during his last semester at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, has been close to professors but feels like he can approach campus leaders a bit more.

"I see from a front-facing perspective how responsive administration is," says To, who has been president of a professional business fraternity and vice president of a student entrepreneurship and innovation club. "But there is a bureaucracy. You have to go through many loops and holes to get through," he adds.

Although To, who is also on the Student Voice advisory board, knows President Soraya Coley, he turns most often to the administrative support coordinator in the business school dean's office when issues come up. "She's a safe person for me to talk to," he says, adding that she goes above and beyond her formal role to empathize with and help students.

Camp has seen relationships between faculty and staff grow stronger because "faculty members are doing more triage than ever before," she says. "I think there's more mutual respect between the two populations on campus. We're understanding more the multiple roles of faculty, and faculty are understanding more the support mechanisms in place."

AAC&U, says McNair, is hearing from students that "they want to expand the group of people who have opportunities to address their

needs." And because every person on campus contributes in some way to the success of students, "everybody has the capacity to be an effective educator," adds McNair, who is currently working on a new edition of Becoming a *Student-Ready College: A New Culture of Leadership for Student Success*, the 2016 book she co-wrote.

Students' Perceptions of Outcomes Influence How They Speak Up -- or Decide Not To

For many students, sharing an opinion during classroom discussion is a somewhat low-stakes way to speak up. Diverse opinions are welcome in classes, say 69 percent of students surveyed.

Students, as it turns out, are a lot more likely to feel comfortable speaking up when all their classes are online, the survey found. One-third of respondents (32 percent) with full remote learning to start this semester agree strongly that they feel comfortable, compared to 17 percent of those with in-person-only classes and 20 percent with a hybrid format.

Loveless surmises that this may be due to many students feeling comfortable being at home, physically alone. "In my own experience, I've never had an issue speaking in the classroom," he says. "But it's comfortable when I can just click on my mic. And I don't need to look around at others' reactions to my opinion."

Political leaning appears to impact students feeling diverse opinions are welcome. While 14 percent of all students disagreed strongly or

Student Voice in the Classroom
What students say about opportunities to speak up
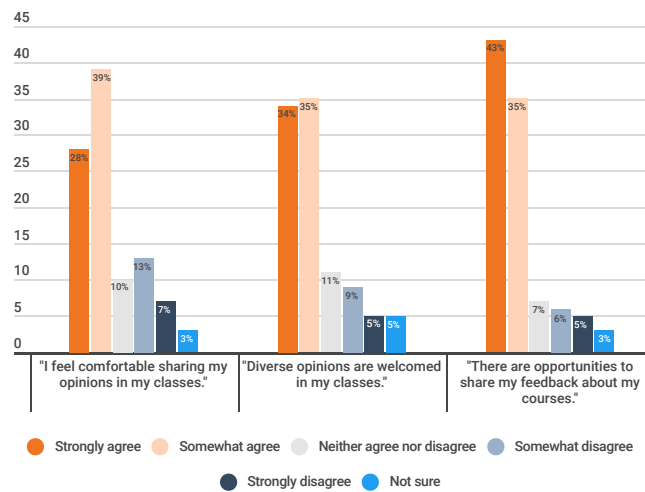
Source: *Inside Higher Ed* / College Pulse survey of 2,000 college students
Presented by: Kaplan

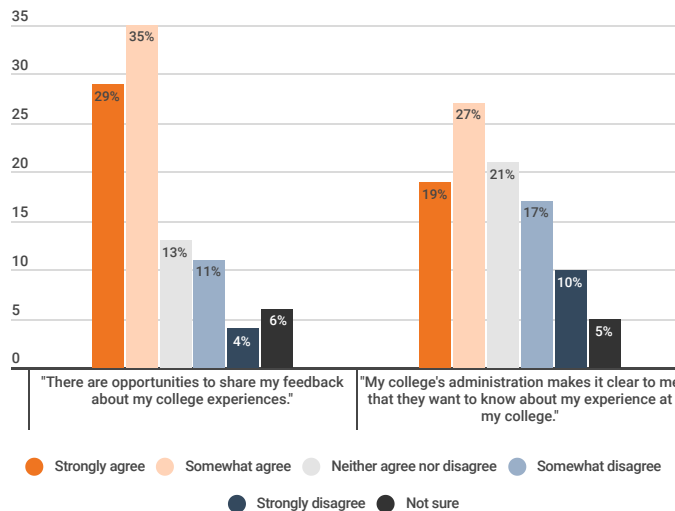# Student Voice Across Campus
What students say about opportunities to speak up

Source: *Inside Higher Ed* / College Pulse survey of 2,000 college students
Presented by: Kaplan

somewhat about professors and peers welcoming various viewpoints, conservative students were much more likely to disagree. Among respondents who identify as leaning Republican, 26 percent disagreed, as did 24 percent of those who are "weak Republican" and 23 percent of those who consider themselves "strong Republicans."

When asked about their comfort in speaking up about the overall college experience as opposed to

within classes, 64 percent of students agree somewhat (35 percent) or strongly (29 percent) that there are opportunities to share feedback. But they're much less likely to report that administration makes it clear they want to know about their experiences. While 46 percent agree with that statement, only 19 percent strongly agree.

Whom do students think campus leaders want to hear from? When asked what group their colleges are most likely to listen to, the top response was donors (42 percent), followed by faculty (30 percent) and finally students (25 percent). As NASPA's Kruger points out, "the public massively overestimates the influence of donors. It happens, but [mostly at] the elite institutions. With community colleges and regional publics, you just don't see the impact of donors in that way."

Whether or not an institution acts on student feedback, of course, depends on the situation. "If a student wants more cookies in the convenience store, that's easy," says Camp. "But it's not if you want a new science building on campus."

To, the Cal State Pomona student, realizes that some may feel ostracized for speaking up about institutional issues. "I do feel heard, but the harsh reality is that most students don't feel heard," he says. "It's so easy to blame administration for

Who Students Can Talk To On Campus

Individual and groups on campus that students feel most comfortable sharing perspective with about issues of importance
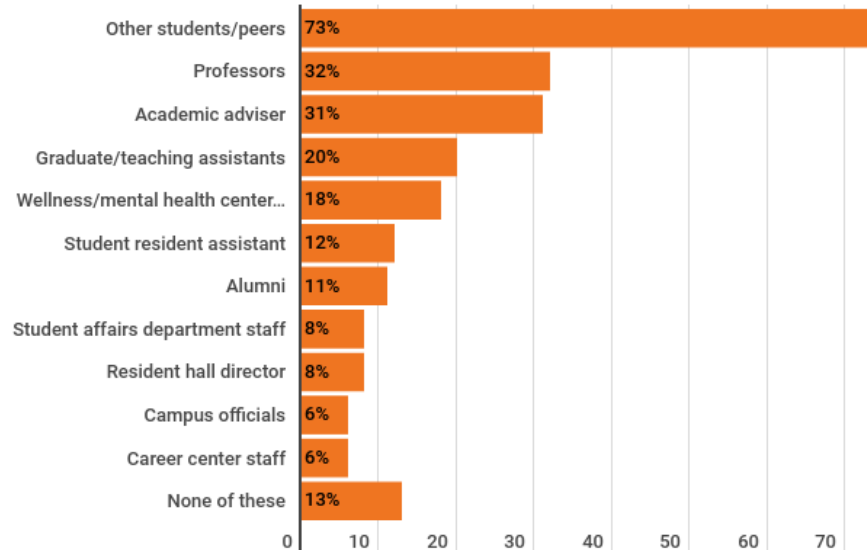
Source: *Inside Higher Ed* / College Pulse survey of 2,000 college students
Presented by: Kaplan

things that are out of our hands. It's extremely hard to solve all these issues, though. It often comes down to a lack of resources."

On the multiple occasions that Draskovic raised an issue at Santa Clara, she has also felt her opinions were heard. "Students are kept in the loop," she says.

Institutional officials can strive to narrow the gap between students feeling they have opportunities to provide feedback and feeling that campus leaders want to receive and act on it.

"It always should be an imperative to look for ways to seek students' input and break down any real or perceived barriers on the expression of divergent interests," says Kruger. "If we want a society that allows people to engage in differences in productive ways, we have to have that in the university."

And if colleges and universities can teach students to advocate for themselves, says Camp, "hopefully they can use those same tactics in a global setting to make sure their voices are heard." ∎

7 Ways College Can Help Support Students in Speaking Up

1 **Model respectful behavior during classroom discussions.**

A professor can encourage students to have difficult conversations by saying: "We can dive into controversial issues, provided we give each other respect," says Sean Stevens, a senior research fellow at the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE). Faculty can also model respective interactions with each other.

2 **Integrate real-world content into coursework.**

At Austin Community College in Texas, for example, one math instructor ties social justice and other community issues into his teaching. For a recent assignment, student Grant Loveless "analyzed how using math concepts to collect data negatively impacts communities of color in Austin," he shares.

3 **Promote inclusion through student organizations.**

Having student associations focused on various demographics, such as individual cultures and religions, helps create an inclusive campus culture where students feel safe speaking up.

4 **Be intentional about student engagement.**

Tia Brown McNair, vice president for diversity, equity and student success at the Association of American Colleges & Universities, is a proponent of more direct engagement between students and administrators, wherever possible. "Building those strong, caring relationships is the foundation for many of our students to be successful," she says.

5 **Ensure administrative job titles match what they do.**

Many students feel unsure about whom to turn to on campus for assistance. Aarika Camp, vice president and dean of students at Goucher College in Baltimore, says she wishes sometimes for titles like "This is the Help Person."

6 **Have a central place for assisting students.**

At Goucher, it's called the Office of Student Support & Outreach, and administrators established the easy-to-remember email address care@goucher.edu.

7 **Establish policies at the institutional level that promote a free-speech climate.**

This is an area FIRE uses in ranking colleges for free speech. Institutional policy should make it clear student free speech is protected, as opposed to restricting student speech.

Source: *Inside Higher Ed* survey of 2,000 undergraduate students from 114 two- and four-year colleges; 88% of respondents are age 22 or younger. Designed and conducted by College Pulse from Feb. 5-15, the survey has a +/- 2.5% margin of error.

Students Struggle But Don't Seek Colleges' Help

While students are still reporting COVID-19 mental health challenges, they are generally not taking advantage of counseling center services. As the following 12 ideas show, even centers strapped for resources can strive for better supports, both now and post-pandemic.

By **Melissa Ezarik** // April 14, 2021

47%
of students said they could have used some or a lot more support from their college since the pandemic started.

GRAFXART8888/ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES PLUS

For many students, going to college during COVID has felt like being on a sinking ship. They desperately search for a lifeboat and perhaps choose one that falters when lowered.

Campus counseling centers and their staffs, meanwhile, have been like the band on the *Titanic*'s deck, continuing to comfort others even as their own lives are at stake. That's how a friend of Barry Schreier, the communications chair for the Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors (AUCCCD), describes their pandemic position. "All the things students are going through, staff is going through," says Schreier, who is also director of the University Counseling Service at the University of Iowa. "It's been a harder lift for a lot of folks this year."

As students struggle, they may hear about counseling center supports but not take further action.

Campus efforts were strong. Even counseling centers with tight budgets quickly pivoted to virtual operations last spring. Many created student guides to mental wellness while at home, asynchronous content such as video series and workshops, and support groups, says Schreier.

However, the latest Student Voice survey, conducted by *Inside Higher Ed* and College Pulse and presented by Kaplan, indicates that a year into the pandemic:

- 65 percent of students reported having fair or poor mental health.

- 63 percent of those who said it's poor would grade their college's response to student mental health and wellness services a C or lower (compared to 43 percent of all students).

- 47 percent said they could have used some (28 percent) or a lot (19 percent) more support from their college during this time.

■ Only 15 percent engaged in college-offered counseling in the past year.

"This should be a wake-up call. Even if it feels like we are starting to move back into a normal phase, students are still suffering," says Lisa Sontag-Padilla, a behavioral and social scientist at the nonprofit RAND Corporation who has written on helping college students manage COVID's mental health impacts.

The Student Voice survey, fielded from March 15 to March 25, 2021, collected responses from 2,002 students at 116 higher ed institutions (250 from two-year colleges, the rest at four-year colleges and universities) and asked about frequency of feeling anxious, worried or scared about life in the past six months. More than half of respondents reported worrying "constantly" (18 percent) or "often" (35 percent), with nonbinary and female-identifying students most likely to feel constant worries (35 percent and 23 percent, respectively).

Other research has explored sources of stress. For example, in interviews conducted for the Applied Cognitive Ergonomics Laboratory at Texas A&M University, "academic was the top anxiety," says postdoctoral researcher Xiaomei Wang.

Three out of four students recently surveyed by student telehealth provider TimelyMD said COVID's impact on the quality of their education has worsened their mental health.

One Student Voice survey respon-

College Counseling Services Used During the Pandemic

% of full sample compared to select demographic groups
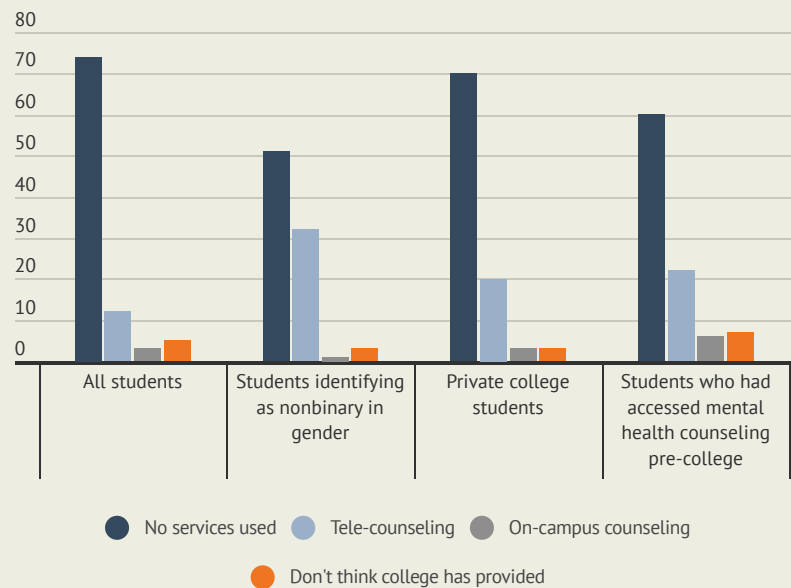
Source: *Inside Higher Ed* / College Pulse survey of 2,002 college students
Presented by: Kaplan

dent said the focus on mental health is all talk. "No one actively reaches out and makes sure students are doing OK, and no one takes action to address the root causes of the issues. No matter how anxious or depressed you are, that paper's still due on Friday."

Respondents, 46 percent of whom are currently taking all online courses from home, report greater mental health needs if they fall into certain at-risk groups. Forty-three percent of those identifying as nonbinary in gender, for example, say their mental health has decreased a lot since COVID (versus 32 percent of all respondents). The good news? These students were three times more likely than the full sample to have recently used college counseling.

LGBTQ+ students have felt particularly isolated during COVID, says Josh Altman, associate director of the Student Counseling Center at Adelphi University in New York. "Many had found community on campus, a source of nurturing. Some had to go back into homes where family may not accept their identity and where they had to, so to speak, go back into the closet."

Other groups seeking campus counseling more than other students are the one in four who had accessed mental health counseling and the one in five who had been prescribed medications for mental or emotional health before college.

These students were about twice as likely to use services.

Lingering stigmas may contribute to the small percentages of students who took advantage of mental health counseling this year.

"We've spent the last 20 years trying to reduce stigma, increase help seeking and train communities of people about mental health and to not be fearful about admitting you may be having a mental health problem," says Ben Locke, founder and executive director of the Center for Collegiate Mental Health (CCMH), a network of over 650 counseling centers.

To Laura Horne, chief program officer at Active Minds -- which supports mental health awareness and education for young adults and has a presence on more than 800 college campuses -- stigma has eased significantly. "Students are sharing that they've called a telehealth number or started seeing a therapist. We've had tremendous progress toward [students realizing they] can't just muscle through it on their own."

Students in Wang's interviews "know they're depressed and know counseling might help, but they just don't want to get it. Or they're suspicious about whether it would be helpful," she says. Back when she was a stressed student and friends suggested she connect with the counseling center, Wang was offered one 15-minute session monthly. She turned to a support group instead.

Locke, also senior director of Counseling and Psychological Ser-

vices at Pennsylvania State University, says colleges have "extended themselves to pretty incredible lengths to provide support," but that services must continue to be refined and improved.

Of the small number (8 percent) of Student Voice survey respondents identifying their mental health as excellent, men were three times more likely to use that rating than women (of note, twice as many women as men took the survey).

TimelyMD research found that women are four times more likely to seek mental health support than men. "We could use some better understanding toward marketing services to males," says Dr. Alan

Dennington, the company's chief medical officer. Men may be more willing to engage in self-care in other ways, such as through health coaching.

Haiden Smith, who heads up the Student Government Association's mental health committee at Indiana-based Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, says, "No one wants to admit they're doing poorly. We're approaching that era where people can speak up, but we're not quite there yet."

Smith, an electrical engineering major, wants to help his institution with mental health to limit peers' negative experiences with finding and using supports. "Mental health

Emotional Support During College Through COVID-19

Who students say they have relied on the most
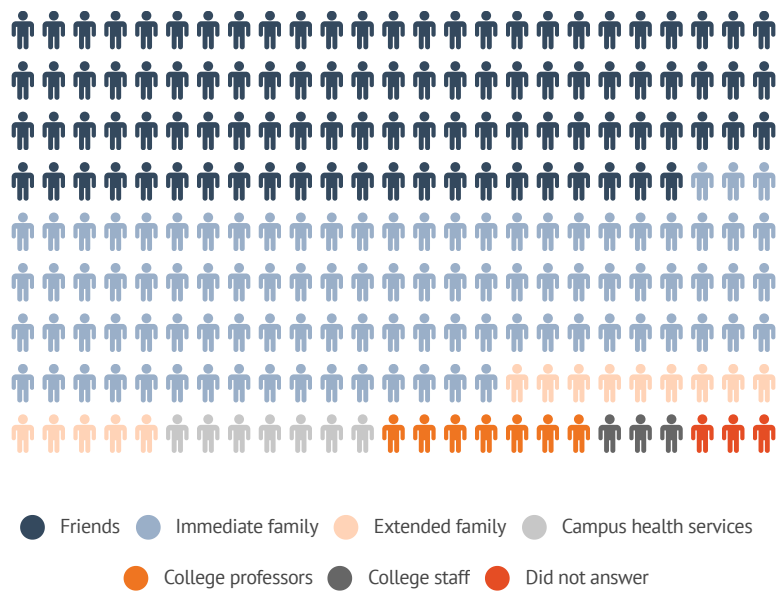
Source: *Inside Higher Ed* / College Pulse survey of 2,002 college students
Presented by: Kaplan

is personally something I've struggled with myself -- where I am, who I want to be, where I'm going," he says.

Greater awareness around why students struggle may help in planning effective outreach and programming. An Active Minds student focus group revealed that students may see counseling as only for those in crisis. "They think, 'Everybody is struggling. Life is terrible right now. What makes my problem big enough?'" explains Horne. Counseling centers could communicate about how no problem is too small to seek help.

Dennington thinks it's time for colleges to "double down" in making sure students feel connected. That can mean increasing clinic hours, adding more telecounseling and ensuring emergency care is in place. "When do you have a mental health crisis? It's not Tuesdays at 2 p.m.," he says, adding that 45 percent of TimelyMD telecounseling sessions are "after-hour visits."

Following are 12 ideas for improving mental health services and supports now and post-pandemic.

1. Critique how assistance information is shared.

Only 14 percent of Student Voice survey respondents who had made a college counseling appointment during COVID-19 found it somewhat or very difficult to find out how to do so. But among those rating their college a D or an F on mental health, more than one-third found it difficult. Could the process be explained more clearly or concisely?

Mental Health Report Card

How students graded their college on its response to student mental health and wellness services
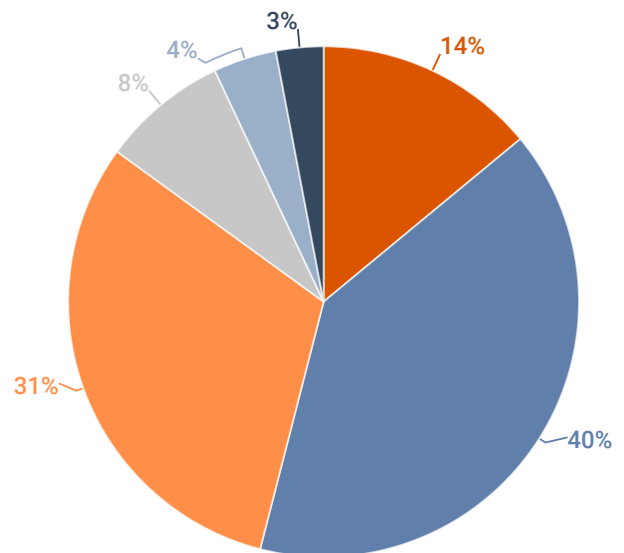
- A
- B
- C
- D
- F
- Something else

Pre-pandemic, 19% say the grade would be higher; 14% say it would be lower

Among those who say their mental health is "excellent," 45% gave their college an A

Among those who say their mental health is "poor," 11% gave their college an F

Source: *Inside Higher Ed* / College Pulse survey of 2,002 college students
Presented by: Kaplan

One survey respondent got conflicting advice from faculty members about "who to talk to, sending me in a circle." Also, a friend in crisis couldn't reach the counseling department because its website did not make it clear they were only responding to emails. Another respondent expressed frustration that counseling request forms could only be submitted between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m.

2. Offer private counseling spaces.

Students with no privacy at home or within a residence hall may avoid telecounseling, so some institutions have set up private spaces. At Adelphi University, which has about

8,000 full- and part-time undergraduate and graduate students, rooms within the counseling center serve this need, says Altman. The University of Iowa, with nearly 32,000 total enrollment, meanwhile, built an inventory of about 150 rooms across campus that can be reserved for virtual counseling or other private meetings. Users are asked to clean surfaces upon entry.

3. Provide immediate help options.

About one-quarter of survey respondents experienced no wait for a counseling appointment, but 10 percent waited between two weeks and a month. Nearly all centers advertise a crisis hotline, and telehealth providers may offer on-demand support. The important thing, says Sontag-Padilla from RAND, is that "you don't just say there's a wait list. You give them an alternative."

Erik Hayes, vice president for student affairs and dean of students at Rose-Hulman, says limited resources prevent more proactive outreach. "We provide top-notch education, but here we are with mental health, not meeting those needs," he says, noting that a three-week wait for care with a broken finger would never be acceptable. Smith and his peers have been talking with officials about getting a night shift counselor. And newly awarded grant funds will expand services.

4. Examine prioritization processes.

The rate of students receiving mental tal health treatment before college has increased annually for the past

decade, says Locke. This question is being asked widely: "If more people are accessing mental health care through health benefits, should it become the college's responsibility once they land there?" Where demand outweighs supply, center leaders must prioritize access. Should appointments go to those with precollege needs or to newly struggling students?

CCMH's Clinical Load Index comparing counseling center staffing

levels can be used to help optimize resource distribution.

5. Be transparent about care models.

Most campuses post a scope of services statement online, explaining a center's mission for supporting mental health, but students may not know or understand its impact, says Schreier of AUCCCD. "Some centers want lots of individual client care; others want [to offer] quick access with immediate response."

Wait Times for a Campus Counseling Appointment

% of each time block, as reported by students who have accessed telecounseling or in-person campus counseling
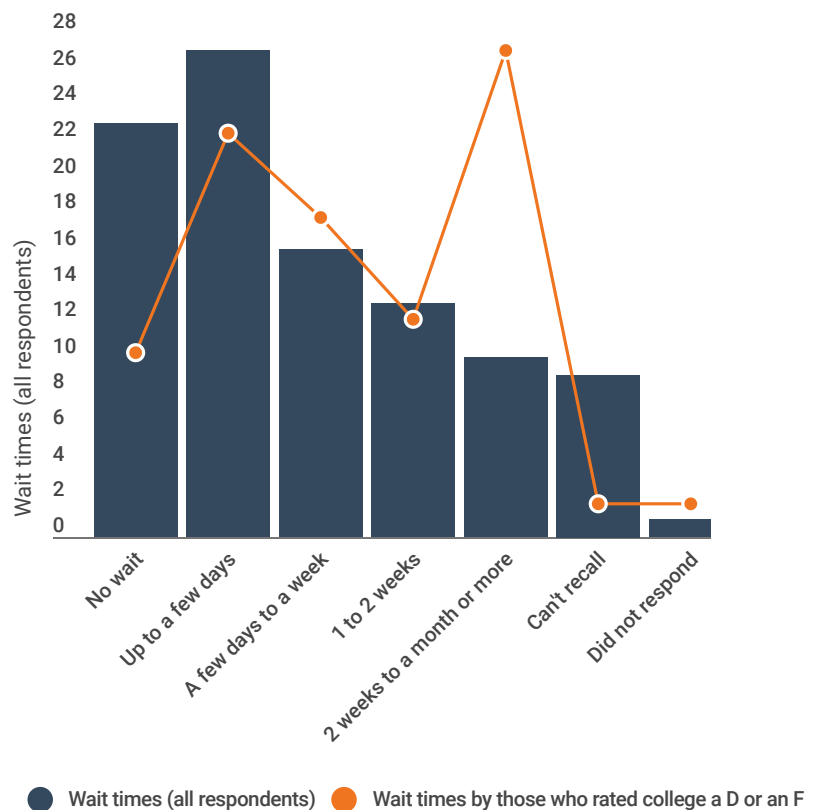
- ● Wait times (all respondents)
- ● Wait times by those who rated college a D or an F

Source: *Inside Higher Ed* / College Pulse survey of 2,002 college students
Presented by: Kaplan

Messaging must match the model, says Locke. An institution with funding only for crisis care and referral services shouldn't be telling incoming students, "Welcome to University of Unlimited Counseling Any Time You Want It!" he adds. Better would be something along the lines of "Welcome to the University of Limited Resources. We're able to provide most students with short-term counseling."

At Adelphi, a care coordinator uses a "step-care model," meeting with each student in need to determine treatment interventions, such as a stress management session, a workshop or individual counseling. "We had adopted this model before COVID so students could have an expedited experience," Altman says.

6. Consider screening tools.

Horne, who has seen colleges mandating mental health screenings for college freshmen, says success relies on resources being available to those who screen positive.

One tool is the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's Interactive Screening Program, involving a stress and depression questionnaire. Even when a campus counselor responds with suggestions and encouragement, students can remain anonymous.

Colleges could ask students if they want to connect with particular services, provided any information disclosed is utilized in a HIPAA-compliant way, says Dennington. Or students could be asked about medical needs the college should be aware of, Hayes suggests.

Some institutions encourage students to use an app for wellness self-checks. Wang's lab is developing one to monitor mental health plus direct students to counseling or resources.

7. Engage with all, not just the help seekers.

Multiple surveys have revealed how stressed college students are these days. "Students have different struggles, but everyone is definitely struggling," says Smith.

Assuming all students need support could help prevent challenges from escalating. "Even before the pandemic, experts had really been pushing for colleges to think about mental health proactively," Horne says.

"Convey the idea that human stress is normal, rather than pathological," advises Locke. Or, says Denning-ton, remind students that "mental health is not just about therapy, it's about wellness."

Schreier has observed some campuses implementing public health-level responses during COVID -- such as via mental health webinars suitable for students and their families.

Counseling centers can also train groups in grit. Altman created a "Road to Resilience" workshop that has been offered via classes and to athletic teams. "Challenge is inevitable, curveballs are going to happen in life and there are evidence-based skills that can be developed to help in difficult situations," he says.

8. Incorporate peer training and support groups.

Peer-to-peer programming, such as through Active Minds chap-

Proactive Support: Assuming ALL Need Help

Student asked: Has your college shifted from traditional "call us if you need help" to updated "we will teach everyone how to cope" approach?
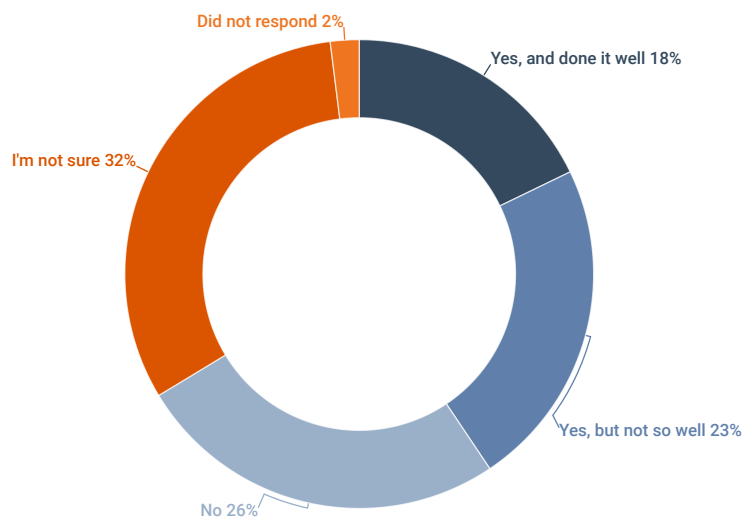
- Did not respond 2%
- Yes, and done it well 18%
- I'm not sure 32%
- Yes, but not so well 23%
- No 26%

Source: *Inside Higher Ed* / College Pulse survey of 2,002 college students
Presented by: Kaplan

ters, is another way to help students, who turn to each other when they're stressed. But students need training on having more productive conversations with peers, says Smith. "Best buddies don't always give the best advice."

Support groups also help counseling centers increase reach. West Virginia University, for example, started a group for students isolated due to COVID-19. "When I had COVID, I received at least three emails saying, 'We're hosting these group therapy sessions if you want to talk or listen,'" says Amaya Jernigan, the Student Government Association president-elect. She ultimately did not join the group. But the approach was proactive, adds Jernigan, who began her term on April 18 with plans to prioritize mental health.

9. Get student input.

Even colleges with the best intentions and solid mental health investments often misstep here, says Horne. "We don't see students as whole people who are adults, with skills and strengths. As stakeholders we often think of them as children. We're acting on them rather than acting with them as partners."

Jernigan believes "a lot of marks are missed because students are left out of conversations." Students may be eating, sleeping, studying and working out from their rooms on campus, so they are eager to participate in the right wellness activities. "Everything we do is in one box," she says.

One Student Voice survey respondent urges administrators to imag-ine the monotonous life of students right now. "Improving student mental health is done through so much more than canceling a lecture, extending a deadline and emailing us about yoga. It's done through making us excited to wake up and do it all again."

Jernigan appreciates that West Virginia's counselors leave their offices to meet students. Chatting with a therapist during an event "takes away the awkwardness," she says.

The Rose-Hulman SGA mental health committee has helped advertise counseling services by distributing Silly Putty with the center's logo, says Hayes. Students have also been working with officials on finding space for a campus dog park for emotional support animals living with students. Having the formal connection with administration, Smith says, has "tied together communication lines really well."

Presidents, says Sontag-Padilla, must go beyond using a mental health catchphrase in an email once a semester, but rather provide opportunities for students to constructively voice concerns and experiences.

Horne advocates for presidents reporting back to students on strategy and actions.

10. Diversify the counseling workforce.

One popular conversation in mental health circles, on and off campuses, is counselor diversity. A lack of it could account for why some students avoid pursuing support or don't connect with counselors. "Students want somebody who looks like them and understands them to be there to support them in their hardest times," says Sontag-Padilla.

Jernigan wrote legislation at WVU that resulted in the hiring of a Black, Indigenous and people of color counseling specialist and should increase team diversity further. "If I wanted to go seek help, no one would understand the experience of being a Black woman on the campus. That's unacceptable," Jernigan says. She hopes to see other new staff who specialize in supporting groups such as international students and transfers.

One survey respondent says, "The best thing my college has done in response to the pandemic was to bring an Asian American counselor to the wellness center team."

Diversity efforts can also extend to private providers. At the University of Iowa, case managers can connect students with a good-fit therapist rather than just provide any name, says Schreier. "We know the mental health practitioners around town. We are conscious about who of color is available, and who is within walking distance."

11. Partner for more resources.

Besides telehealth providers, counseling centers can partner with local therapists or even centers at other colleges.

Rose-Hulman is sharing $8 million in Lilly Endowment funding with DePauw University and Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College to expand

student mental health services via the MINDful College Connections nonprofit consortium. Shared services offer opportunities for colleges with limited resources to provide what they could not afford individually, says Hayes.

Within six months, the collaboration should have a DePauw-based director to hire staff who will eventually split their time between campuses. Hayes looks forward to having a full-time psychiatrist available to students. In the past, the wait to see an outside psychiatrist with a referral might be two months.

Along with enhancing treatment effectiveness, the grant will allow the three institutions to focus more on prevention. Within five years, the effort could expand, with other colleges paying to join the consortium, says Hayes.

12. Don't ease up post-pandemic.

As most professionals recognize, pandemic-related trauma won't just disappear, even when the virus is no longer a major threat.

During Horne's college years in New Orleans, Hurricane Katrina forced a temporary transfer. She recalls two hard transitions -- first, when she realized she couldn't go back to campus, and second, when she finally could. "I looked forward to getting back, but it was still an adjustment, and it was hard. It remains to be seen what [today's]

Colleges' Commitment to Mental Health

How much students agree or disagree that their college takes student mental health seriously (in %)
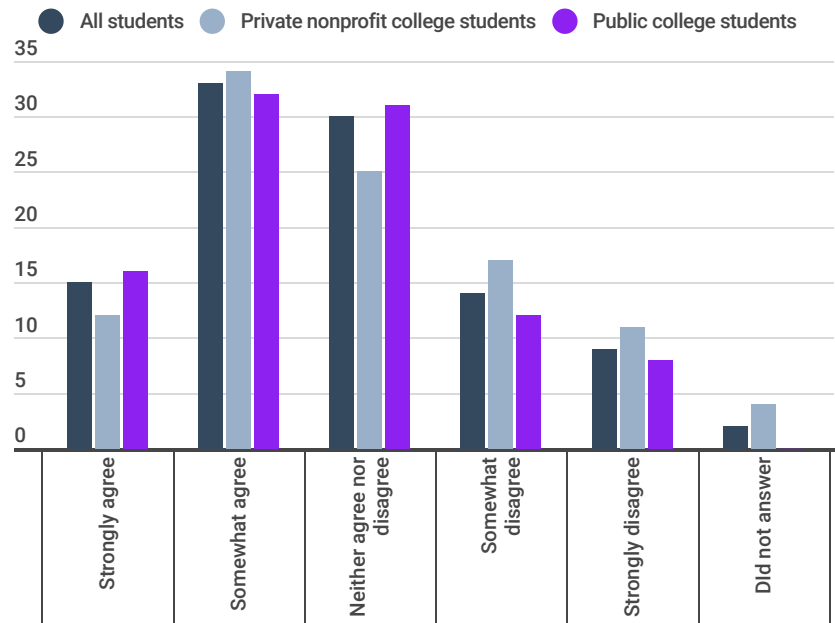
Source: *Inside Higher Ed* / College Pulse survey of 2,002 college students
Presented by: Kaplan

students are going to need when things go back to 'normal.'"

Some will prefer virtual counseling -- and one COVID silver lining is that centers have determined how to execute it, says Locke. He cautions, however, that using rule-out criteria, telecounseling may only be inappropriate for 30 to 60 percent of students.

This year has taught mental health professionals that a little flexibility, such as meeting a client outside, goes a long way, says Altman. He

expects to see radical flexibility from institutions and students, including a "spirit of open-mindedness about how things should be and could be."

Sontag-Padilla anticipates anxiety remaining. Administrators need to ask themselves, "What has the pandemic shown us about our mental health needs and how can we be more creative in providing support?" she says. "There's no easy fix. This is not a problem that's going away when the pandemic subsides." ∎

Next Steps, New Directions Emerge For Life Beyond College

Future plans and career preparation approaches have shifted for students during the pandemic. How have they turned to college supports for help?

By **Melissa Ezarik** //September 21, 2021

Only **23%** of students who have changed their major in part because of the pandemic are very confident they're in the right academic program, considering the current economy and job market.

SDI PRODUCTIONS/GETTY E+

Zakariya Abdullahi's internship with the Minnesota Legislature in the spring 2020 semester "was going great" until COVID-19 hit, when no vote or veto could keep the virus from halting nearly everything -- including the internship for Abdullahi and dozens of other students made possible by the Minnesota Capitol Pathways program. Without the infrastructure to operate its internship program virtually, the Legislature had no work for interns.

"They said they'd pay me to stay home," he recalls, adding that interns associated with Capitol Pathways at least got to network with each other through Zoom events.

Abdullahi had luckily completed three other internships prior to 2020, and after earning his B.A. in political science and government from Augsburg University in spring 2021, he started a job with the City of St. Paul and a master's program in development economics and international development at the University of Minnesota.

The pandemic did, however, postpone a planned trip to Somalia, where Abdullahi's parents were born and where he hopes to work one day. And his original goal of becoming a Fulbright Scholar after his undergrad experience became a pandemic impossibility.

Abdullahi is not alone in needing to be flexible about the launch of his career due to COVID-19. The latest Student Voice survey of 2,000 incoming sophomores, juniors and seniors (conducted Aug. 18 to 25) reveals that the pandemic played a role in:

■ Graduating earlier or later than planned (for one in four students)

■ Changing what they want to do after graduation (also for one in four)

■ Changing their major (17 percent)

■ Changing plans about grad school, either to attend or not attend (16 percent)

Fewer than one in 10 said the pandemic changed the college they attend or that it altered the level of credential they are pursuing.

Meanwhile, nearly half of respondents to the survey, conducted by *Inside Higher Ed* and College Pulse and presented by Kaplan, said the pandemic hasn't resulted in any of the changes mentioned.

James Phelan, who earned a mechanical engineering degree from Villanova in 2020 and completed a fifth year this past spring for his master's, attributes the significant

portion of students not making changes to individuals "being attached to the idea of the pandemic being temporary." Aside from those who may have discovered a passion for public health or epidemiology, he says, "people are trying to muddle through," sticking with program and career decisions already made.

The Student Voice survey also focused on whether the pandemic influenced choice of college and happiness with that choice, plus how well career centers did during the pandemic and what student expectations are for career services this semester.

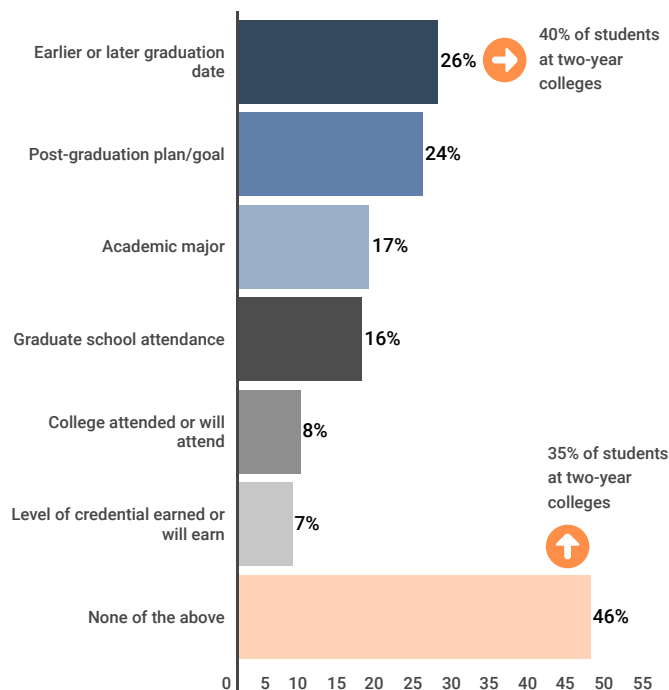Only 8 percent of students say they wish they chose a different college

because they're unhappy with how their institution handled the previous 18 months. And 61 percent agree at least somewhat (22 percent strongly) that their career center has had sufficient services and supports for students during the pandemic. Yet few students participated in virtual internships, and most students are worried about finding a meaningful first job after graduation.

Kim Churches, the new president of the Washington Center for Internships and Academic Seminars, says she "saw a lot of uncertainty, angst and worry" while examining the survey findings.

Read on for a closer look at how students' future plans and career preparation have shifted during this era of disruption.

Academic Choices and Career Plans

An opportunity with a start-up at Villanova allowed Phelan to contribute to research on an urgently needed product early in the pandemic: ventilators. Virtually and in person, Phelan assisted with development of NovaVent, a low-cost ventilator with capabilities similar to commercial machines that was designed as open source, allowing anyone in the world to reproduce it.

While Phelan accepted a full-time role after graduation in another area, process safety, he really enjoyed the research for NovaVent and the high-level discussions with professors that the project involved. "It's made me consider getting a Ph.D., although that's on the back burner for now," he says.

Several survey respondents shared

Student Decisions Due to Pandemic

Changes college students made or will experience at least in part because of COVID-19

Category	Value
Earlier or later graduation date	26%
Post-graduation plan/goal	24%
Academic major	17%
Graduate school attendance	16%
College attended or will attend	8%
Level of credential earned or will earn	7%
None of the above	46%

40% of students at two-year colleges

35% of students at two-year colleges

Source: *Inside Higher Ed* / College Pulse survey of 2,000 incoming sophomore, junior and senior college students; explore the data here. Presented by: Kaplan

how the pandemic influenced decisions to either pursue or turn away from the highly affected medical and education fields.

A student in Michigan who originally had med school aspirations wrote, "After seeing the hardships and dismissal of their professional opinion that physicians faced during the pandemic, I decided that was not the role I wanted to play in health care after all."

Data from the online education giant Western Governors University indicate a negative pandemic effect on interest in health services fields, says President Scott Pulsipher. From July 2018 through June 2021,

the number of Western Governors graduates increased across all colleges -- except for the College of Health Professions.

The university's typical student is a working learner, so progress to degree was likely delayed for these students because they were working in health care or as other first responders during the pandemic, says Emily Jackson, manager of communications. In WGU's Teachers College, meanwhile, students tended to graduate faster. From July 2020 to June 2021, the institution had a goal of 9,900 graduates for that school, but 12,500 students wound up earning diplomas during that period.

Of the 479 Student Voice students whose postgraduation plans changed because of COVID, 17 percent now plan to go into education, compared to 12 percent of the full survey sample. One of those students, at a Florida university, took a long-term substitute position in a middle school during the pandemic and now wants to join the teaching profession.
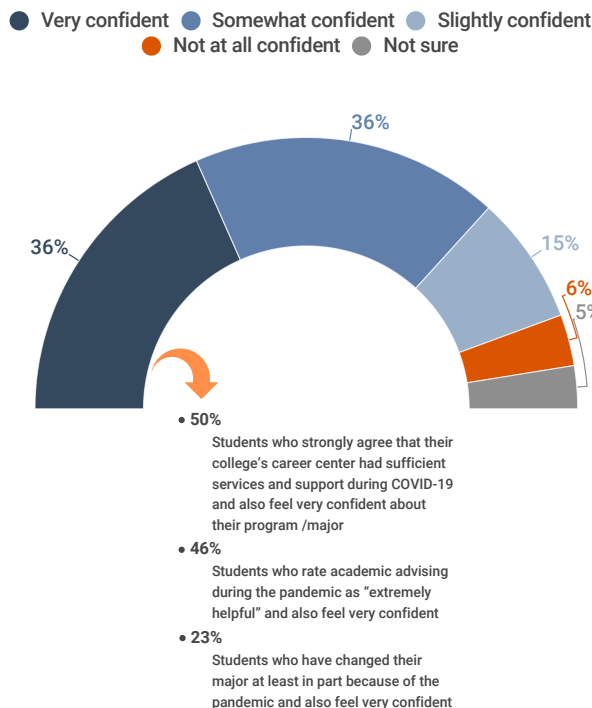
Many students involved in internship and career readiness experiences through the Washington Center, which has partnerships with 400 colleges and about the same number of employers, have been shifting their academic pursuits and career goals, says Churches. She is also hearing about students adding a minor, perhaps to become more competitive in the job market.

Among Student Voice survey respondents who changed their major or postgraduation plans because of COVID-19, only about one-quarter are very confident that they're now in the right academic program. Groups with the most confidence about their program choices are Republican-leaning students and students at private nonprofit colleges.

Several students expressed a positive pandemic factor: more time during COVID-19 to think through their career options. "Having to be more isolated does lend itself to more introspection," notes Kevin Grubb, executive director of the career center as well as associate vice provost for professional development at Villanova. "It's been an interesting opportunity for everyone to take stock of what's most important to them, and what they want to

Confidence About Chosen Academic Program/Major

How students feel, considering the current economy and job market

- ● Very confident   ● Somewhat confident   ● Slightly confident
- ● Not at all confident   ● Not sure

36%

36%

15%

6%

5%

- ● **50%**
  Students who strongly agree that their college's career center had sufficient services and support during COVID-19 and also feel very confident about their program /major
- ● **46%**
  Students who rate academic advising during the pandemic as "extremely helpful" and also feel very confident
- ● **23%**
  Students who have changed their major at least in part because of the pandemic and also feel very confident

Source: *Inside Higher Ed* / College Pulse survey of 2,000 incoming sophomore, junior and senior college students; explore the data here. Presented by: Kaplan

do next." And he doesn't just mean the pandemic. "Really what this has done -- the pandemic, the racial injustice we've seen, the political environment in this country -- all of these things have brought values to the fore. What do you value? Conversations are happening faster and more deeply than they ever have." A focus on personal values is a positive for career decision making, Grubb adds.

Pulsipher says students feeling like they might be in the wrong program shouldn't necessarily change their major. "I'm certainly not in the field I studied," he says. "Some of the things I value now were not in my program as an undergrad." So instead of a program pivot, students might work with career services on better preparing for their future work as well as finding the wisdom in liberal arts disciplines such as history, writing, the arts and the humanities.

Graduation Timing and Grad School Intentions

Breaking down Student Voice survey results by gender, respondents identifying as nonbinary are more likely than their peers to say the pandemic impacted their next steps after college. There were only 63 nonbinary students in the sample, but they are 24 percent more likely than their binary-identified peers to say it has affected what they want to do after graduation and 15 percent more likely to say it has affected grad school plans (either going or not going).

Simone Ispa-Landa, an associate professor in the School of Education & Social Policy at Northwestern University whose research interest

> *A common issue causing delay in anticipated graduation date was not being able to take required courses that must be or are better in person.*

areas include gender studies, explains that while it's hard to draw any definitive conclusions, the differences between binary and nonbinary students is interesting. "Narrow and binary constructions of sex and gender contribute to and intersect with other systems of privilege and disadvantage, like race and class," she says, adding that each of the systems shapes what tools and considerations come into play for binary and nonbinary students as they manage challenges associated with the pandemic.

Ispa-Landa believes higher education can do more to create gender-affirming career advising environments -- in which advisers "will compassionately acknowledge the barriers facing nonbinary students in society, and allow for productive conversations that do not leave students feeling misunderstood, embarrassed or harassed."

Students at two-year institutions, meanwhile (250 of the respondents), are most likely to report the pandemic has affected anticipated graduation timing -- 40 percent compared to 24 percent at four-year colleges.

"I want to get a job as soon as possible," wrote one community college student who intends to change plans from pursuing a

nursing degree to seeking a faster, less expensive program.

Others are taking longer to graduate. Several Student Voice respondents noted a delay in anticipated graduation because of the need to reduce their course loads during the pandemic. Another common issue was not being able to take required courses that must be or are better in person. One public university student's graduation is delayed because computer labs were closed and he was unable to run the specialty software needed for his academic program from his home.

Western Governors saw a significant increase in students opting for a one-term break from their studies, says Pulsipher. Examining data from March 2019 to February 2021, every month except for one had a higher percentage of students on term break during pandemic months compared to pre-pandemic, says Jackson.

Abdullahi's pivot to entering grad school came about because it seemed jobs weren't available for those finishing up college. The idea also came up in discussions during his senior thesis class. He's currently taking three graduate courses this semester as he works part-time.

A possible missed opportunity for students looking to complete stud-

ies or start a new or better job sooner involves alternative credentials. Just 14 percent of students surveyed know that their college offers digital badges or microcredentials, but 23 percent would be very interested in earning such credentials to promote their skills, experience and knowledge to future employers. The idea is especially attractive to Black and Latinx students.

Churches recalls a seven-week certificate program on diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace while in her previous role as CEO of the American Association of University Women. Participants, who had college degrees already, hungered for the additional credential and enthusiastically connected virtually during the pandemic to build out their networks. Pre-pandemic, networking as part of the job search was a different, simpler process involving, for example, alumni events. "When all of that is by Zoom … it's much harder to do," she says.
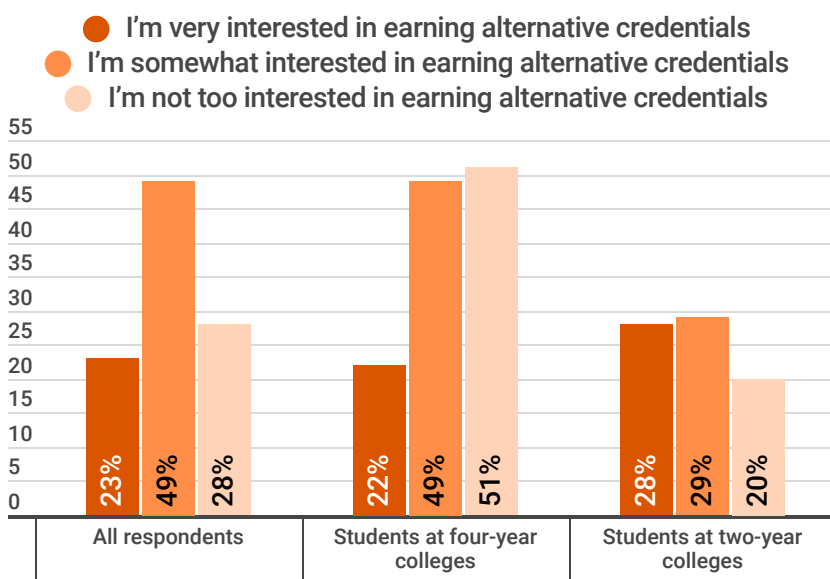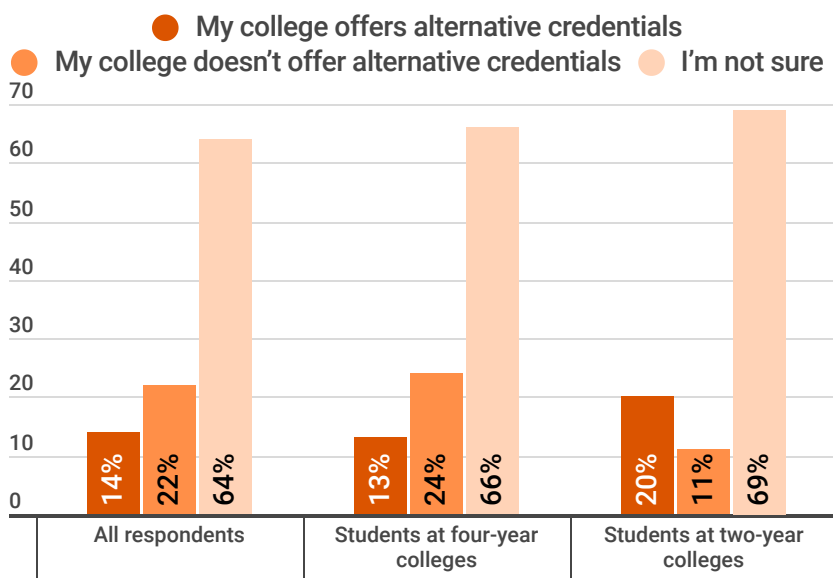
Advising Attitudes and Activities

Students generally report positive feelings about academic advising and career services offered by their institutions during COVID. About six in 10 students found academic advising extremely or somewhat helpful, with two-year students being much more likely than those at four-year institutions to rate these services as extremely helpful. In addition, about six in 10 of students over all agree strongly or somewhat that their career centers have had sufficient services and supports during this time.

When asked about career center programming focused specifically

Alternative Credentials: Availability and Interest

Students were asked if their colleges offer digital badges or microcredentials, and if they would be interested in earning them to help promote skills, experience and knowledge to future employers.

● My college offers alternative credentials
● My college doesn't offer alternative credentials   ● I'm not sure

	All respondents	Students at four-year colleges	Students at two-year colleges
My college offers alternative credentials	14%	13%	20%
My college doesn't offer alternative credentials	22%	24%	11%
I'm not sure	64%	66%	69%

● I'm very interested in earning alternative credentials
● I'm somewhat interested in earning alternative credentials
● I'm not too interested in earning alternative credentials

	All respondents	Students at four-year colleges	Students at two-year colleges
I'm very interested in earning alternative credentials	23%	22%	28%
I'm somewhat interested in earning alternative credentials	49%	49%	29%
I'm not too interested in earning alternative credentials	28%	51%	20%

Source: *Inside Higher Ed* / College Pulse survey of 2,000 incoming sophomore, junior and senior college students; explore the data here. Presented by: Kaplan

on preparing for a career or job search during a pandemic, nearly half of students surveyed were aware of such options, but only 13 percent could affirm both awareness and attendance. The 1,226 students who expressed at least some satisfaction with career services during COVID were more likely to report that COVID-specific programming was offered.

Here's how two university career centers approached COVID content:

- Villanova's career center worked with a team of industry advisers in spring 2020 to share what companies were hiring or pausing on hiring at the time. Students could click on various sections of a web portal based on their current situation, such as having study abroad disrupted or a research project halted. The site got thousands of views within a month, says Grubb. In addition, the center executed a campaign involving direct outreach to members of the Class of 2020 seeking employment or who had employment disrupted.

- The Carson Center for Student Success, which supports business college students at Washington State University, organized panels on "Resilience in Uncertain Times: The Impact of the COVID Recession" and "Nav-

igating Networking in a Virtual World." In individual advising sessions, students interested in online internships and jobs have gotten assistance in finding opportunities, says Suzi Billington, director of the center. Another hot topic during the pandemic has been how to articulate nontraditional experiences to show transferrable skills.
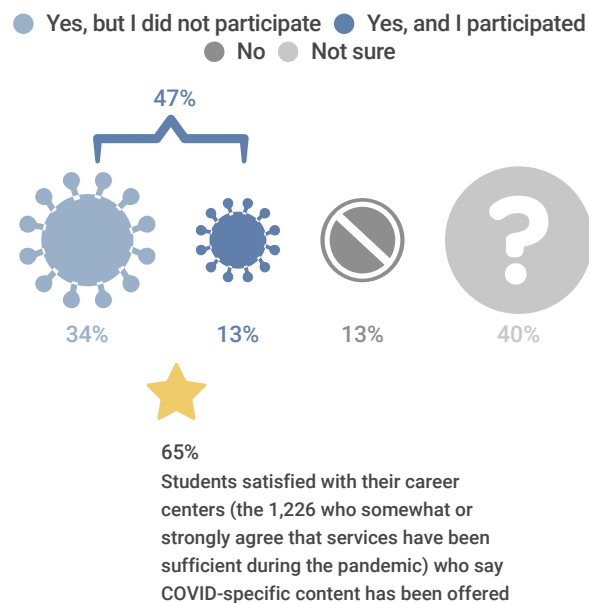
As virtual-only opened up to virtual or in-person advising options at many institutions, what did students choose? For the students Billington's office works with, in-person academic advising but virtual career consultations seemed to be preferred.

In addition, students have tended to be more prepared for career advising appointments than in the past. "We had fewer no-shows, and students who came were razor-sharp focused," Billington says. "They knew it was going to be difficult, that they couldn't just do what their friends did a year or two ago." ∎

COVID Content From Campus Career Centers

Students who say their career center offered services or programming focused on the pandemic's impact on careers and the job search

● Yes, but I did not participate ● Yes, and I participated
● No ● Not sure

47%

34%   13%   13%   40%

65%
Students satisfied with their career centers (the 1,226 who somewhat or strongly agree that services have been sufficient during the pandemic) who say COVID-specific content has been offered

Source: *Inside Higher Ed* / College Pulse survey of 2,000 incoming sophomore, junior and senior college students; explore the data here. Presented by: Kaplan

5 Questions (with Answers!) About Experiential Learning Challenges

In light of virtual internship and alternative career exploration experiences that occurred (or did not) during COVID, what supports do students now expect and need?

By Melissa Ezarik // September 22, 2021

32%
of students who had virtual internships during the pandemic say it was hard to tell if they would want to pursue that kind of work.

INSTA_PHOTOS/ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES PLUS

Just two weeks into this academic year, Suzi Billington could tell that students whose career preparation efforts and experiences may have paused during the pandemic were playing catch-up. "Typically, early in the semester it's a dead time for our career advisers, but not this year," says Billington, director of the Carson Center for Student Success, which supports business college students at Washington State University. Seniors in particular are realizing the job search process has changed and they need to jump right in. Some are getting pressure from their families as well.

The latest Student Voice survey of 2,000 sophomores, juniors and seniors, conducted Aug. 18 to 25, 2021, asked about pandemic-era internships and other career preparation activities, plus how students feel about participating in activities this year and their upcoming job searches. Conducted by *Inside Higher Ed* and College Pulse with support from Kaplan, the survey reveals that:

- About one-third of students think they would have participated in more career service activities and events had they been held in person.

- Only 15 percent participated in a virtual internship during the pandemic -- and many parts of the experience were less than positive.

- The vast majority of students are worried about finding a meaningful first job after graduation (with 24 percent extremely worried).

Here are answers to five questions about what students experienced during the pandemic and what they expect and need from their colleges this semester and beyond.

Did Students Take Advantage of Career Center Offerings in the Past 18 Months?

Although six in 10 students agree their career centers have had sufficient services and supports during
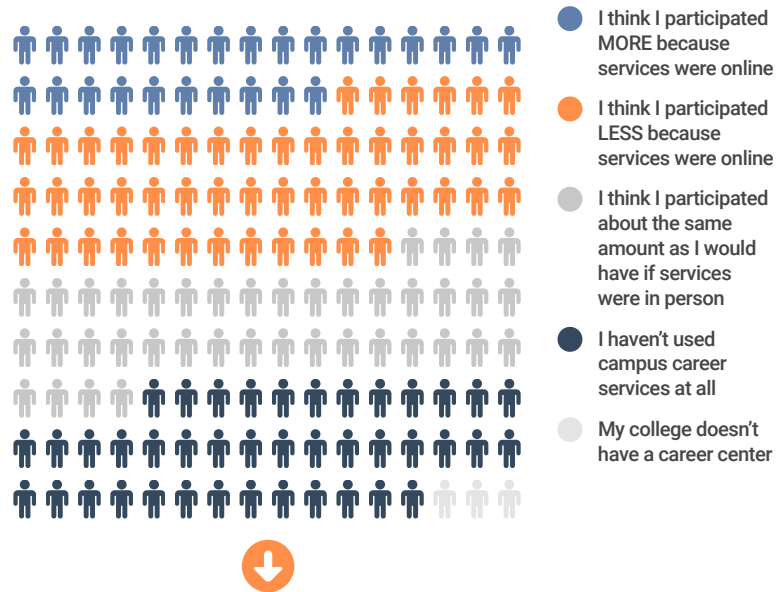
COVID, one in four haven't used the services during this time (compared to 9 percent who did not use academic advising). Thirty-one percent believe they participated less because offerings were online.

Four-year students are almost twice as likely as two-year students (33 percent versus 18 percent) to report less involvement than they think they would have had if activities were in person. That's in line with what Lakeisha Mathews is seeing at the University of Baltimore, a nonresidential institution whose students tend to have a mind-set similar to students at community colleges. "Students looking for a traditional college experience and traditional-age students seem to prefer in-person services," says Mathews, director of the Career and Internships Center.

The general lack of participation during the pandemic is probably not reflective of career center attendance across the board, says Salil Pande, founder and CEO of VMock Inc., which offers an AI assistant that manages mundane tasks for career center offices. "Some [centers] have been really successful in making sure services get utilized," he says, adding that folding career prep tasks such as building a résumé into course requirements is one strategy. As for service delivery, Pande is a proponent of career centers offering personalized digital services. "Digital itself is not going to be enough," he says, adding that students living "in the world of Netflix, Spotify and Instagram" won't find 1995- or 2000-era technology sufficient.

Participation in Online Career Services and Events

How students believe virtual formats impacted their engagement with activities and supports

- ● I think I participated MORE because services were online
- ● I think I participated LESS because services were online
- ● I think I participated about the same amount as I would have if services were in person
- ● I haven't used campus career services at all
- ● My college doesn't have a career center

Filtered by incoming sophomores, juniors or seniors, this lack of participation in campus career services remains nearly unchanged, between 26% and 28%

Source: *Inside Higher Ed* / College Pulse survey of 2,000 incoming sophomore, junior and senior college students; explore the data here. Presented by: Kaplan

Having to quickly move existing activities to virtual, however, has worked well for many institutions. In Billington's experience, for example, participation has remained steady since spring 2020. Thinking about events such as virtual networking panels, her team has seen attendance of 50 to 100, "just as high as pre-pandemic," she says. Virtual career fairs drew about the same crowd of 200-ish students as previous in-person fairs.

Her team did find it challenging to promote online events when students weren't on campus to see ads on digital signage, for example. At this fall's welcome week, students received a page with several QR codes, which took them right to the webpage for scheduling an appointment, such as for advising or scholarships information.

Kevin Grubb, executive director of the career center at Villanova University, has seen "great attendance numbers" during the pandemic, he says. "It was online or bust. But I'll be interested to see what happens this year because there's more choice."

Grubb's office did see some student foot traffic throughout the pandemic. His team converted rooms designed for in-person recruiters to meet with students to

high-tech interview suites for students to meet remotely with potential employers.

How Popular and Effective Were Virtual Internship Experiences?

About eight out of 10 respondents to the Student Voice survey did not have a virtual internship during the pandemic. Students at four-year colleges were twice as likely as those at two-year schools to have had that type of experience (16 percent versus 8 percent), and those are private nonprofits were slightly more likely than those at public colleges to have had one. Among racial groups, Asian students (one in four) were most likely to have completed a virtual internship.

In comparison, a 2017 survey from Strada Education Network and Gallup found that 40 percent of college students (and 60 percent of seniors) had had an in-person internship.

Kim Churches, president of the Washington Center for Internships and Academic Seminars, says the pandemic's virtual internship opportunities were a blessing to some. The format "absolutely helps to close barriers and gaps for students who would not be able to do an in-person internship." The center, which has partnerships with about 400 colleges and the same number of employers, worked with a lot of students recently who completed their virtual internship experiences while holding down part-time jobs.

The center's growth will involve maintaining its traditional eight- to 15-week residential-based internship program while reaching additional students through mini pro-
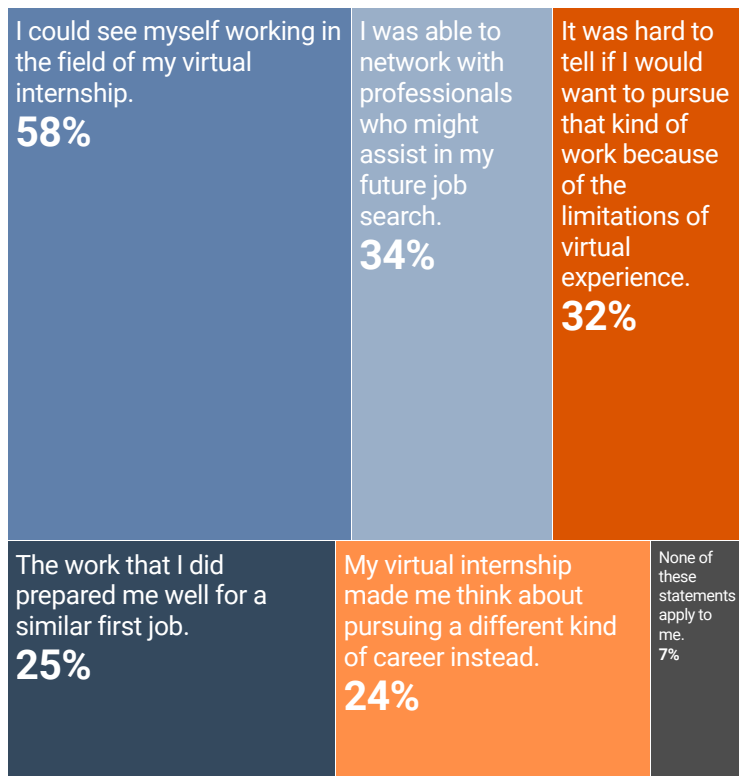
Internship Participation During the Pandemic

Students who had virtual or in-person interships in the past 18 monts

● All respondents   ● Class of 2022   ● Class of 2023   ● Class of 2024
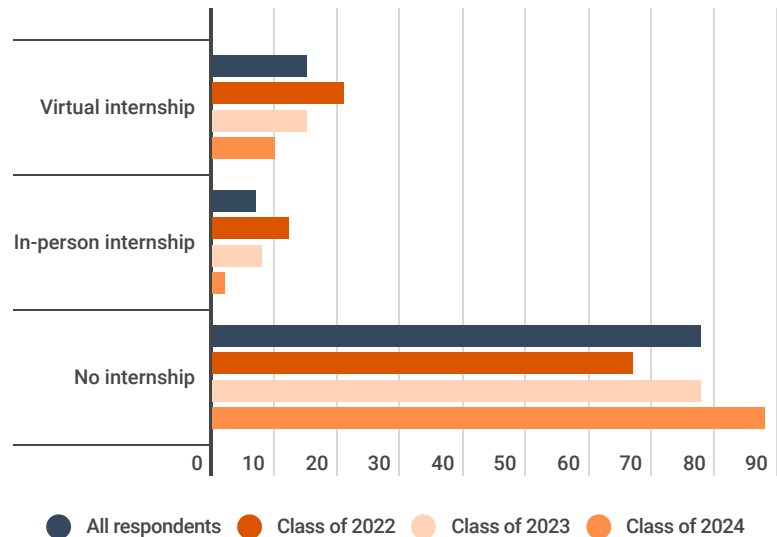
The Virtual Internship Experience

Statements that students who were virtual interns in the past 18 months say are true

I could see myself working in the field of my virtual internship.
58%

I was able to network with professionals who might assist in my future job search.
34%

It was hard to tell if I would want to pursue that kind of work because of the limitations of virtual experience.
32%

The work that I did prepared me well for a similar first job.
25%

My virtual internship made me think about pursuing a different kind of career instead.
24%

None of these statements apply to me.
7%

Source: *Inside Higher Ed* / College Pulse survey of 2,000 incoming sophomore, junior and senior college students; explore the data here. Presented by: Kaplan

grams as short as a single week.

In terms of how Student Voice respondents with virtual internships fared, nearly six in 10 could envision themselves working in that field.

But the internships fell short for many with challenges in networking and prep for a similar first job. That's especially true for two-year students, only 3 percent of whom reported the opportunity to network with professionals who might assist in a future job search through their virtual internships, compared to 36 percent of students at four-year institutions.

As Grubb notes, there's "some magic in those [internship] moments" when a student makes a professional contact in the elevator or can go out for coffee with a colleague.
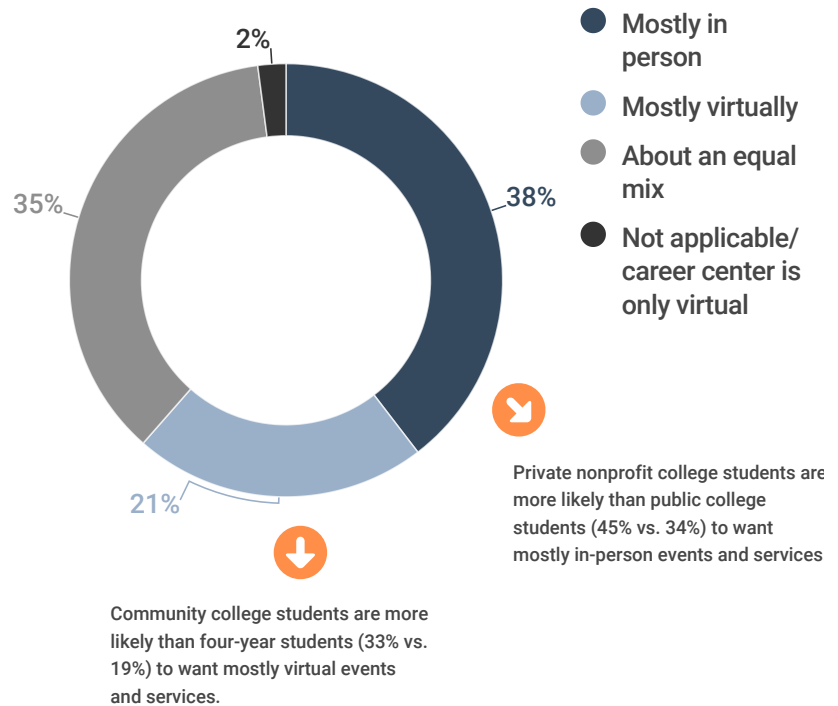
Still, says Billington, "for some it works out great. One student did a virtual Amazon internship recently, and she just flourished."

A Washington Center survey of 926 students who did virtual internships in the past year reflects that positive result. "Remote internships can be almost as valuable," Churches says. "I hope that through this we're getting over this myth that a virtual experience is less than." Seventy-six percent of the intern supervisors surveyed reported that they were equally satisfied with interns who reported for duty in person or online.

In a spring 2021 poll of 268 companies conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, the majority said they have plans to keep interns connected to

Career Center Activity This Fall: In-Person or Virtual

How students anticipated they would prefer to engage in career center services and events in fall 2021

- **Mostly in person** — 38%
- **Mostly virtually** — 21%
- **About an equal mix** — 35%
- **Not applicable/career center is only virtual** — 2%

Private nonprofit college students are more likely than public college students (45% vs. 34%) to want mostly in-person events and services

Community college students are more likely than four-year students (33% vs. 19%) to want mostly virtual events and services.

Source: *Inside Higher Ed* / College Pulse survey of 2,000 incoming sophomore, junior and senior college students; explore the data here. Presented by: Kaplan

their supervisors and organization this fall. For example, 85 percent planned to pair interns with a buddy/mentor, and 70 percent planned daily or near-daily check-ins from a supervisor. More than eight in 10 anticipated a hybrid (43 percent) or fully virtual (38 percent) internship format.

What Alternatives Do Students Have to Virtual Internships?

Some colleges are making a concerted effort to make students aware that internships aren't the only way to gain experience. "Our career advisers aren't just pushing internships," says Billington, at

Washington State. By the end of junior year, business school students there must complete a high-impact learning experience, which can mean an internship or participation in a business competition or certification program.

As students were forced back to their hometowns in spring 2020, Billington's team equipped students with information on approaching local businesses about assisting in some way as a volunteer.

Scott Pulsipher, president of the online institution Western Governors University, advocates for integrating career experiences into the

learning journey, such as through a practicum requirement. The key to success, he adds, is academic leaders not assuming that career prep is someone else's job.

What Do Students Expect From Their Career Centers This Year?

With the pandemic still raging, one might guess that students are seeking mostly virtual career center activities and services this fall. But only about one in five of those surveyed prefer that format. Demographic groups leaning toward virtual events include community college students and Black students, while groups preferring in-person events include students at private nonprofit colleges, students aged 20 or older and men. Besides being tired of doing everything online, a recent College Pulse survey of 1,500 undergraduates found that students seeking in-person career fair or recruiting events this fall often struggle to read other people's body language through a screen.

At Villanova, career services administrators anticipate both in-person and virtual programming. "We're all going to have to be nimble in that hybrid space, because of who else we're trying to engage in this work," says Grubb. It's not just about what the campus community wants but about also about what recruiters are planning, for example; some employers have expressed interest in continuing virtual recruiting because of its efficiencies. Staff members will also look at individual events to determine if there's more value to participants in holding them online or in person, as well as how decisions impact their goals of equity and access.

First Job Search Worries

How worried college students are that they will be able to find a meaningful first job after graduation, by select racial group
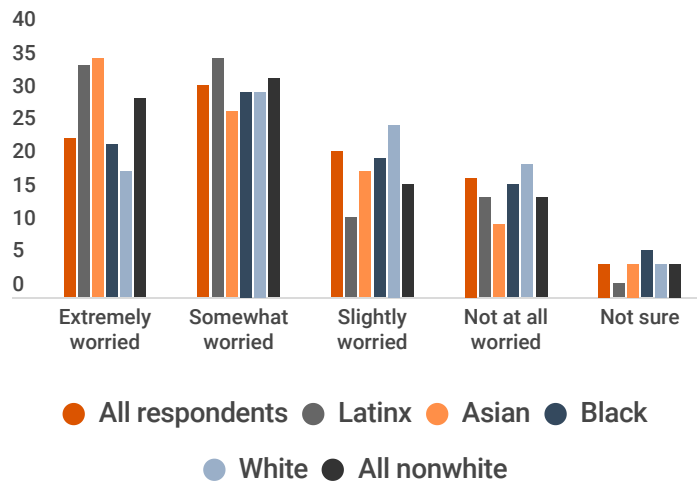
Source: *Inside Higher Ed* / College Pulse survey of 2,000 incoming sophomore, junior and senior college students; explore the data here. Presented by: Kaplan

"Preparing for work is going to look different versus five years ago, when students were deciding where to go to school," says Churches. "At a minimum, it'll be a hybrid experience. We're creating new norms and preparing students for working remotely full-time or partially going forward."

That work should involve examining what the typical day of a student studying from home looks like to ensure the career center is planning events at the best times and checking in on individuals when it's least likely to be disruptive, says Pande. "Keep working on this one thing, how to connect with students. Make yourself prominent in their minds, so they say, 'I've got a friend in the career center.'"

How Worried Are Students About Finding Work After Graduation?

Only about one in five students surveyed are not feeling worried at all about finding meaningful work after college. Greater levels of worry lie with public college students, students at four-year colleges and Latinx or Asian students. Several students mentioned wanting to take a year off to travel or volunteer -- or simply decompress -- after graduation before launching a career.

Grubb's team at Villanova is being deliberate about communicating indicators of job market improvement to students. "There's unease about the world being turned upside down," he says, adding that students are thinking, "Is it done? Is it right side up?"

"Definitely the worry is there. I can't think of a student we've met who isn't worried," says Mathews. "But the biggest thing students need to think about right now is how COVID impacted their industry. A lot of them don't do that sort of research." Perhaps they need to look outside the region for companies that are

hiring in their field. Or their field may have held strong. "Some industries never stopped hiring," she adds.

Alumni of Mathews's alma mater, the University of Maryland, can enroll in a career workshop she's teaching this fall to be more prepared for how COVID is changing the workplace and the national workforce. Available in three sessions, each geared toward a particular level of career professional, the master class will cover challenges such as job searching during a pandemic, starting a new job in a virtual environment and navigating diversity in the workforce -- all topics that can ease worries.

Pulsipher's positive spin on student

The pandemic suppressing certain fields "provides a catalyst for students to seek opportunities to be more self-determined and self-reliant in life." -Scott Pulsipher, Western Governors University

worries is that the pandemic suppressing certain fields "provides a catalyst for students to seek opportunities to be more self-determined and self-reliant in life. There's meaning in that." ∎

https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/09/22/survey-campus-career-center-supports-during-pandemic

Learning From Student Perspectives on Virtual Internships

Pros and Cons of Virtual Work Experiences

Pros
- Accessible from any location
- No need to pay for temporary housing, transportation or food in another city
- Flexibility in working hours
- Ability to collaborate easily with colleagues in multiple locations
- Messaging platforms such as slack tend to be already in place

Cons
- Feelings of isolation
- Onboarding processes designed for in-person environments
- Difficult to get to know other interns
- Can be more challenging to build professional relationships
- Less guidance/chances for feedback
- Zoom fatigue

Ideas for Supporting Students

✓ Organize a panel discussion featuring students who have already completed virtual internships.

✓ Provide assistance in scheduling dedicated work hours.

✓ Offer a reflection course for students currently taking a virtual internship.

✓ Encourage employers to provide project-based and team-based work.

Source: *Inside Higher Ed* / College Pulse survey of 2,000 college students; explore the data here. Presented by: Kaplan

Analysis of and commentary on 2021 themes, as of 10/31/21:

- Student Influence on Campus

- Mental Health Perceptions

- Racial Justice and Equality

- Student Health

- Student Success Beyond COVID

- Data Privacy Awareness

- Pandemic-Era Career Prep

- Student Mentoring

- *Coming Soon: Results of surveys on academic integrity …
  and on reflections of the fall semester*

About the Author

Melissa Ezarik, contributing editor at *Inside Higher Ed*, writes and manages content for the Student Voice news hub, launched in February 2021 and covering monthly surveys of under-graduate students. Melissa has been covering education since 2001 and higher education since 2005, with extensive experience writing and editing about student wellness issues and efforts, student career development, management and operation of student-facing depart-ments on campus, and effective design of campus facilities.

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