

2022

Wave V

Building brands that inspire, endure, and elevate
simpsonscarborough.com →

National Prospective *Student* Survey





Our fifth wave National Student Survey is a departure from our first four studies on upcoming college students. This time, we're examining emerging social, political, and economic trends that affect prospective students and their decisions to pursue college degrees.

While this study was conducted with high school juniors and seniors, we know the traditional demographics of higher education are rapidly changing. Namely, adult learners and transfer students now make up a considerable percentage of college-going populations.

With that said, our goal for this study is identifying the shifting expectations of prospective incoming first-year students. And, while some of this information isn't new (like concerns around the price of going to college), the data does reveal deeper, more substantive implications for the student experience—and for higher ed marketers.

You'll notice a shift in the way we present this research. To better illustrate and illuminate our findings, we've included several case studies that provide examples on institutions who are making strides in important student experiences on their campuses.

Ultimately, our hope for this study is that it gives you the critical information you need to inform your marketing strategies and messaging for the coming cycles. While it comes as no surprise that not all the news here is good, I think you'll find many opportunities to restore trust in higher education. It will take work from all of us, but we believe the empowerment of higher ed is worth it.

Jason Simon

CEO, SimpsonScarborough

Is there a disconnect in higher education?

Briefly stated: Higher education can be seen as out of touch.

Maybe it's the industry's origin of serving privileged white men. Or maybe it's how institutions have failed to innovate against changing demographics and motivations.

Either way, there is a common thread among these examples: Higher education has neglected to become student-centered. In order for it to thrive, evolve, and innovate, a shift in focus is needed. In this report, we are going to explore several shifts in which we hope you can gain some insight that will help your institution go FROM institution-centered TO student-centered.

Higher education has neglected to become student-centered.

In order for it to thrive, evolve, and innovate, a shift in focus is needed.



KEVIN TYLER / DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

EMMA MILLER / DIRECTOR OF INSIGHTS

SHIFT 01
PG 04

Be mindful of the money issue.

MOVE FROM a lack of price transparency and support for working students TO affordable educational opportunities in environments that are supportive of diverse financial situations.

SHIFT 02
PG 11

Make learning flexible for students.

MOVE FROM rigid time and location based student experiences TO opportunities that fit around students' needs and lives.

SHIFT 03
PG 15

Walk the DEI talk.

MOVE FROM homogenous student populations that boost rankings and DEI "window dressing" TO inclusive environments that welcome and support success of all students.

SHIFT 04
PG 21

Mental health is a top priority.

MOVE FROM not adapting or acknowledging students' mental health as part of students' overall success TO creating a holistic student success model that includes mental health.

SHIFT 05
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Higher education is not one-size-fits-all.

MOVE FROM expecting college-ready students TO recognizing individual students' specific educational and professional interests, needs, and challenges.

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Introduction

We found **42% of prospects** who plan to attend college believe colleges and universities care most about making money over the success of their students.

While we acknowledge colleges and universities need to make money and be financially stable to support students, it's disconcerting to see these numbers when most institution's missions, brand strategies, and key messages include dedication to student success.

About This Study

This report summarizes key findings from our recent online survey (n=1,605) of U.S. high school juniors and seniors, including both those who planned to attend college after high school and those who did not.



What We Say vs. What We Do

Are institutions being authentic about their commitment to student success?

→ Most institutions message a four-year graduation rate when we know **only 33% of students attending public colleges and universities and 53% of students attending private colleges and universities graduate in four years.**

!! In 2020, **6.6 million students could not obtain their transcripts from public and private colleges and universities for having unpaid bills as low as \$25 or less.**

Those are just two examples and it's understandable why prospects are skeptical over higher education's motives and their true purpose. It's clear higher education is being institution-centered.

Is there a disconnect in higher education?

Are people still interested in higher education?

→ According to a recent study by ECMC group, only **51% of Gen Z teens** are interested in pursuing a four-year degree as of January 2022. **This is down from 71% in May 2020.**

→ Our study found a dip in interest — but not one as drastic — with 74% of prospects looking to attend college right after high school. However, 12% are planning to attend college at some point, and 13% aren't sure or planning not to attend. **That is 1 in 4 students considering not attending college right after high school or not at all.**

While there are differences in these studies, the implication is clear: Options are expanding and students are considering choices that better align with their needs — and their lives.

Are we appealing to Gen Z?

They're savvy about marketing and picky about brands. They can see through bullshit.

→ Studies show Gen Z is more likely to use word of mouth. **86% of Gen Zers read reviews before making a purchase,** and for a decision as big as what college to attend, you bet they are scrubbing every platform to find perspectives from current students and prospects.

Move from a lack of price transparency and support for working students **to** affordable educational opportunities in environments that are supportive of diverse financial situations.

BE MIND- FUL OF MONEY.



Many students are not willing to exchange debt for a college degree.

63% of those who are unsure or not planning to attend college say they are hesitant because college is too expensive.

48% don't want to take on student loans.

This isn't new. There have been various reports and calls-to-action to change the financials of higher education. And as a marketing company, we don't have a solution or the power to affect that type of change.



I'M NOT FROM A WEALTHY FAMILY, we're not poor but we're not rich by any means. But the price for college is not worth it for me. My parents never finished college but they have pretty successful jobs. It makes me realize you don't need to go to college and have a life of debt to be successful.

PROSPECTIVE STUDENT



For many institutions, their biggest competitor isn't another school, it's not going to college. High tuition combined with decreasing 6-year graduation rates means that for many seeking education is an impediment to economic mobility, not a catalyst.

ALEX AHLSTROM / ANALYTICS DEVELOPER

Reasons for Hesitation About College

College is too expensive	63%
I'm burned out from school	54%
I struggled with classwork in high school	50%
I don't want to take on student loans	49%
I don't know what I want to do with my life	41%
I don't feel ready for college	38%
College takes too long	36%
I can achieve my goals without a college degree	36%
My test scores aren't good enough	31%
College is too difficult to get into	29%
I'm scared to go to college	29%
I don't know enough about the options available to me	19%
I'm not ready to leave my family	16%
I don't know how to apply for financial aid	16%
I'm worried I won't get into the schools I am interested in	15%
College campuses are too political	9%
Colleges are not supportive of diverse/underrepresented students	8%
My parents/guardians don't want me to go to college	3%
Other	2%
Don't know	2%

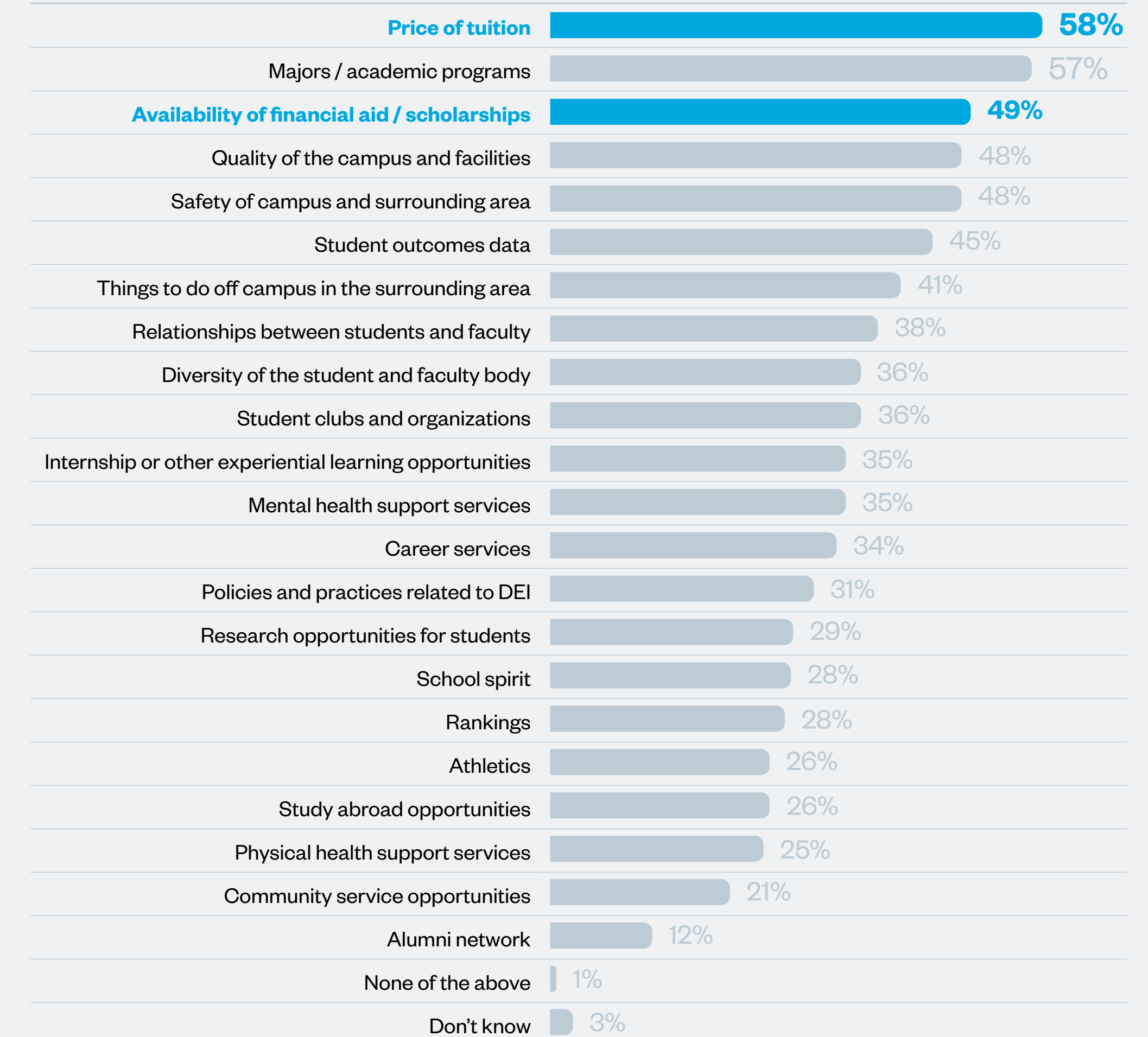
The average price of college has more than doubled in the 21st century.

With an annual growth rate of 6.8%, it's become hard for families to ignore the rising prices. They want to understand the actual price of college.

When it comes to the most important factors of interest, 58% of respondents say price is a big factor they are paying attention to when researching colleges and universities. 49% say availability of financial aid/scholarships.

Yet, it's still incredibly confusing for students to find information around the true price of college. Typically, they have to wait until they get their financial aid packet, after they apply to schools, to truly understand the price. **Why not make it clear during their search phase how much college is going to be? How can we create student trust when the first interaction is lack of clarity around one of their biggest life investments?**

Factors that prospective students report paying attention to when researching colleges and universities



Shift 01

Be mindful of money.

Case Study

Cutting through the price confusion: St. Norbert College is clear about how much students will pay for an education there.

One example of price transparency is St. Norbert College, who dedicates a section on their website around affordability.

SNC weaves in outcomes data, such as their faster than average graduation rate that gets students in the work force quicker, which is aligned with what teens are seeking. They also include robust information on scholarships, grants, loans, student employment (we'll touch on student employment in a bit), and a Net Price Calculator.

The screenshot shows the 'Affordability' page on the St. Norbert College website. At the top, the college's logo and navigation menu are visible. The main heading is 'Affordability'. Below this, there is a sub-heading 'Making college affordable' followed by a paragraph explaining the college's commitment to affordability. A sidebar on the right titled 'In this section' lists various links like 'Apply for aid', 'Tuition and fees', and 'Net Price Calculator'. At the bottom, there are three colored boxes with icons and text: an orange box about graduation rates, a teal box about post-grad success, and a green box about low loan default rates.

Affordability

[/ Affordability](#)

Making college affordable

Your investment in your college education returns much more than a degree; it also provides you with opportunities and experiences that will shape your life. We know this because our alumni repeatedly tell us that their St. Norbert College education helped them achieve a better future. We see affordability as a way to help students achieve such a future.

To make college more affordable, we offer 97 percent of our students some form of financial aid, which can include [scholarships, grants, loans](#) and [work-study](#).

Simply in terms of cost, an education from SNC is competitive – both with other private colleges and with public ones. But because on-time graduation can also impact your wallet (more time equals more tuition, room and board, not to mention deferred entry into the workplace), it's important to know that SNC also has a [four-year graduation guarantee](#) and one of the best four-year graduation rates in the Midwest.

When you decide St. Norbert College is the right fit for you, we'll do all we can to help you get here.

[Apply for financial aid](#) [Contact us](#)

In this section

- [Apply for aid](#)
- [Tuition and fees](#)
- [Net Price Calculator](#)
- [Types of financial aid](#)
- [Your financial aid offer](#)
- [Secure document upload](#)
- [Satisfactory Academic Progress](#)
- [Meet our staff](#)

[File your FAFSA](#)
Don't delay, get started today!

Graduate faster with less debt

We have one of the best four-year college graduation rates in the Midwest. This means that you'll finish one to two years ahead of the national average. This also means earlier entry into the workforce or graduate school. It's so important to us that you graduate on time that we've created a four-year graduation guarantee.

Achieve post-grad success

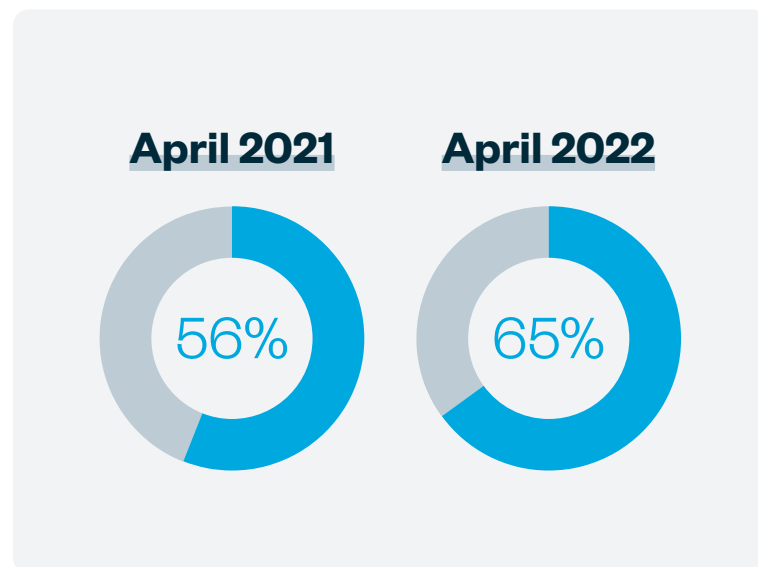
SNC graduates are the kind that find employment at Fortune 500 companies, become entrepreneurs or enter top-notch graduate programs. After one year, 95 percent of recent SNC alumni were working or attending grad school.

Low loan default rate

Almost 10 percent of the people who borrow money for college default on their loans, according to the U.S. Department of Education. SNC is proud to rank among the top colleges in the U.S. when it comes to low loan default rates. In fact, St. Norbert has the lowest college loan default rate of any college in Wisconsin: 1.6 percent.

More students are having to juggle jobs with college classes.

In addition to an understandable and extreme focus on price, more students compared to our last wave in April 2022 will need to work while in college to make their education financially possible. Seniors are reporting an increase of 6 points while juniors are reporting an increase of 13 points.



What does this mean for first-gen students and students of color?

There are deeper implications.

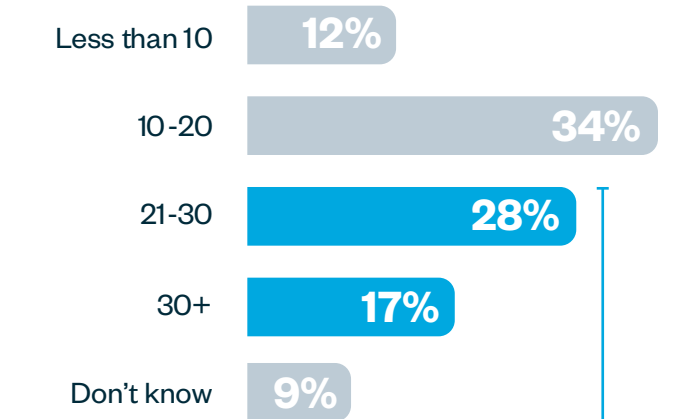
While a majority of respondents say they will need to work regardless of whether they're first-generation or not, the "yes" percentage is higher among respondents, Black/African American, Hispanic, and other URM respondents compared to white or Asian respondents.

Nearly 50% of students will work 20+ hours a week to afford their education.

45% of respondents will have to work between 21-30+ hours a week to make college financially work. **Hispanic prospects are more likely to work 30+ hours a week compared to other respondents.**

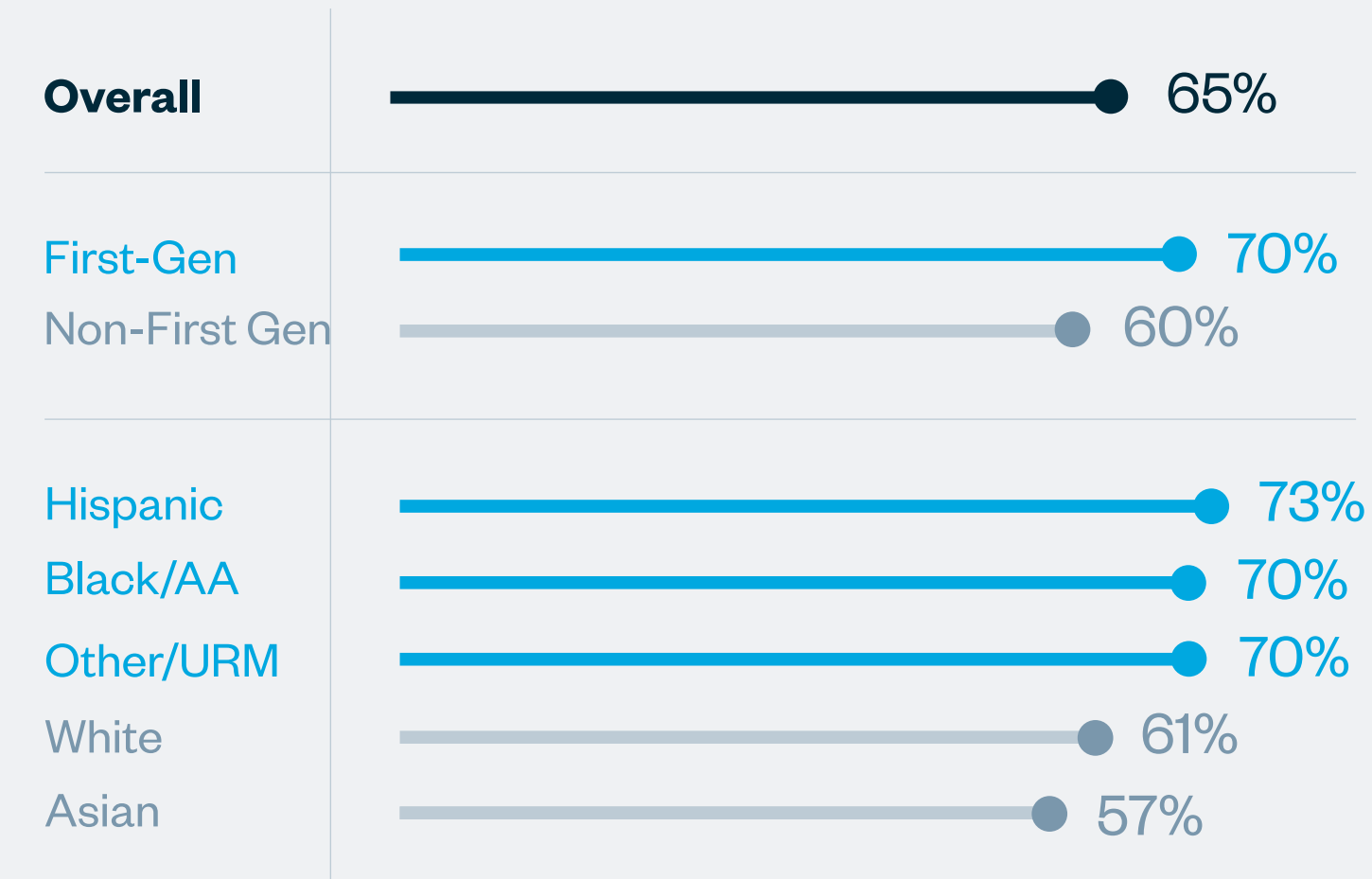
Almost half of respondents will have to work 21-30 hours a week in addition to a full class load. Perhaps they also have children or other family obligations. **When we think about how students are no longer just students, are we creating an experience that allows them to be successful?**

How many hours a week do you think you'll need to work during the school year?



45% plan to work more than 20 hours

Who needs to work?



The research shows there are pros and cons for working students.

Daniel Douglas, co-author of a 2019 Rutgers Education and Employment Research Center paper and a visiting assistant professor at Trinity College in Connecticut, found interesting data on this topic. Namely, his research shows the more you work during your first year of college, the more you earn after college because you gain work skills valued by future employers.

You know about showing up on time, following directions given by a supervisor, and being generally diligent in your duties.

This leads to opportunity disparity between high- and low-income students.

Because of this, low-income college students with jobs are more likely to have lower grade-point averages and less likely to graduate than their higher-income peers. When diversity, equity, and inclusion are messaging and strategic messaging bedrocks of any institution's mission or branding, **why has higher education not adapted its experience to allow students to successfully pursue higher education while working?**

We need to acknowledge that if higher education truly wants to become student-centered, more needs to be done to provide resources to working students, along with providing equitable working opportunities for students that aligns with their career interests.

Case Study

Higher education built for students.

Western Governors University pioneered a new way of educating students based on their abilities, not credits.

A good example of an institution meeting students where they are is Western Governors University's **Competency Based Learning Model**. Instead of time based, it measures competency, which saves students money and allows students to fit education more seamlessly into their lives.

Reimagine the Path to Your Degree at WGU

*WGU average annual bachelor's tuition rates are 57% the national average, compared to national rates reported by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. WGU average rate does not include rates for WGU Bachelor of Science, Nursing Practicum program.

Student Flexibility

Competency-based education at WGU puts the student in the driver's seat of their education.

- **Efficient:** Education pathways are focused on learning not seat time. Students are able to spend time on areas where they need more understanding and accelerate where they already have knowledge.
- **Flexible:** Study happens whenever and wherever it works best for students. WGU learning resources are available anywhere internet access is.
- **Individualized:** Every student is different. At WGU, we believe the learning experience should be built around students.
- **Supportive:** Students have a whole team of navigators along for the ride—faculty, staff, even fellow students.

Affordable

Low, flat-rate tuition and the opportunity to accelerate programs allow students to have more control of total costs.

- **Low tuition:** Our commitment to helping students graduate with less debt starts with low tuition—about half* the average cost of other online institutions.
- **Flat rate:** WGU's flat-rate tuition links time and cost. This is central to how competency-based education can save students money: By speeding up programs, students can graduate faster with less costs.

Worthwhile

WGU is about real-world results—providing students an impressive return on their investment.

- **Competencies:** The hallmark of competency-based education are the competencies—the clearly defined skills and knowledge that students will master. Our competency-based approach is widely recognized by employers because it's an approach used by most corporations as the basis for promotions and advancement.
- **Proof:** A degree from WGU tells employers that our grads are proven experts and will be an invaluable addition to their team. After all, they earned their degrees by proving they've mastered the competencies that employers are looking for in an employee.

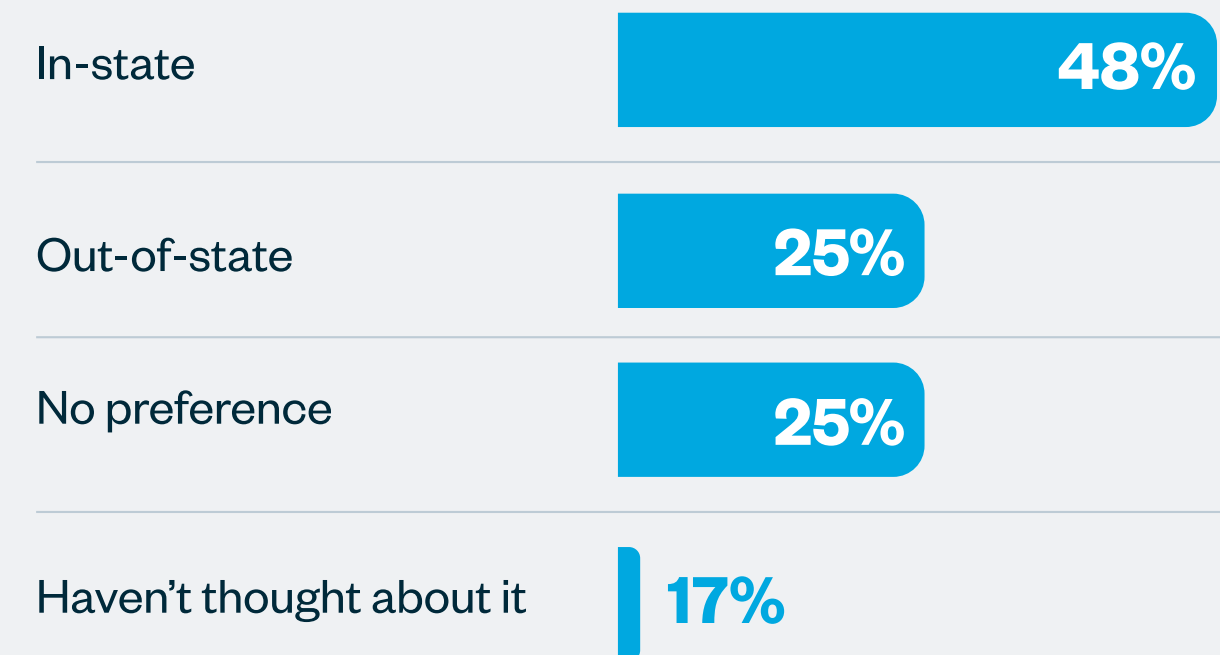
Where to attend: In-state vs. out-of-state

We've covered students' concerns over price and how they plan to pay for college. Now, we're focusing on where they plan to attend college, which aligns with overall affordability and price.

When asked where students would prefer to study, 48% would prefer to attend college in-state; 25% out-of-state; 25% have no preference.

Within that, 56% of Hispanic respondents would prefer in-state, which is higher compared to other race/ethnicities.

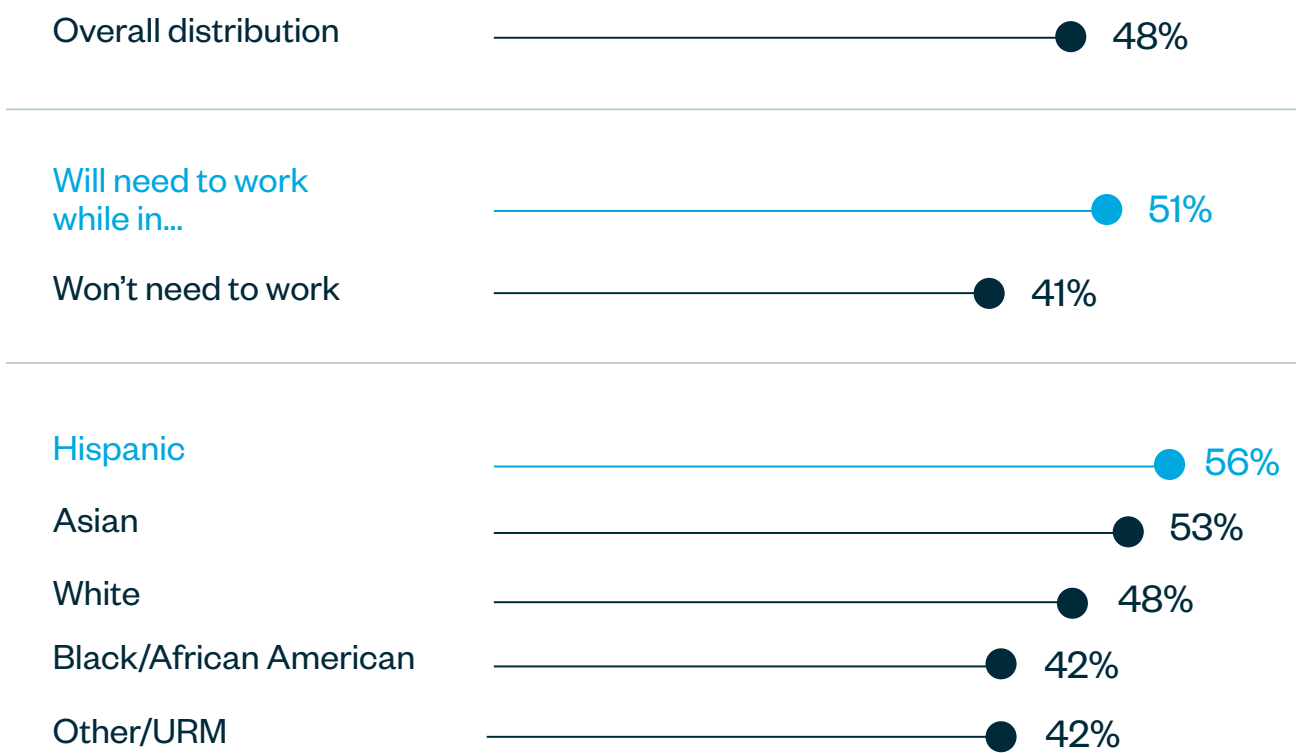
Would you prefer to attend college in-state or out-of-state?



Price and proximity to home are foremost in students' decision-making

We don't think it's a coincidence that nearly a majority of students seek in-state options, knowing they want to stay closer to home. In-state options also tend to be cheaper.

% who would prefer attending college in-state



Move from rigid time and location based student experiences **to** opportunities that fit around students' needs and lives.

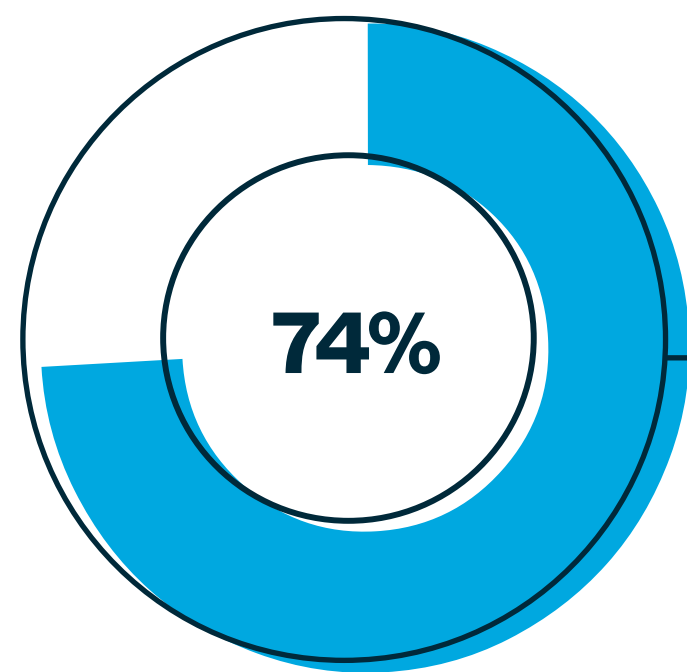
MAKE LEARNING FLEXIBLE FOR STUDENTS.



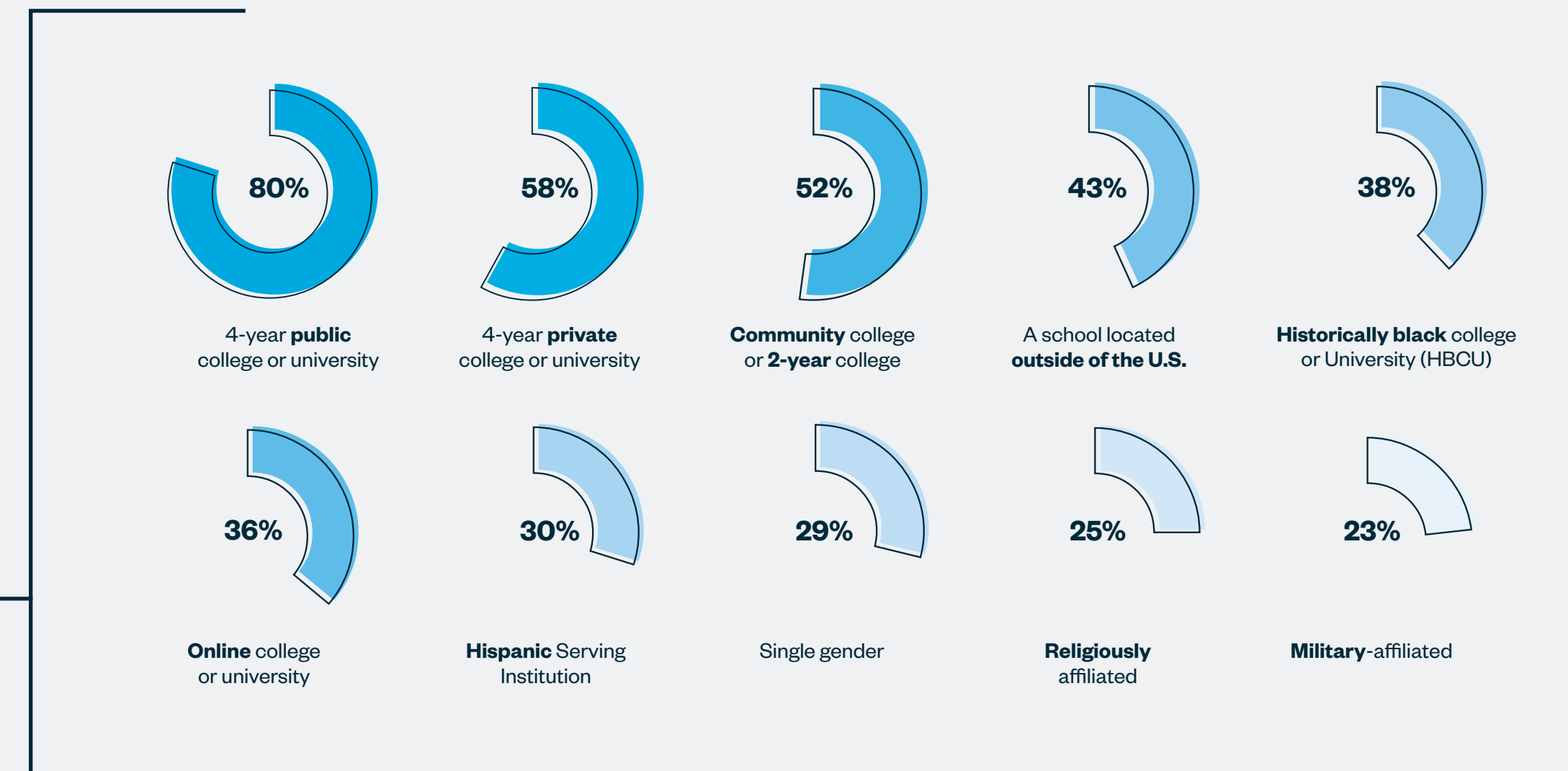
Students have demands outside of their education.

As mentioned earlier with respondents reporting a need to work while in college, recent studies have found that more than **1 in 5 students has a child** and a recent study found that at the University of North Carolina, **1 in 20 of their students are caregivers.**

Students deal with other responsibilities that makes it challenging to attend a traditional, four-year, in-person, full-time higher education institution.



Attending college right after high school



➔ Of the 74% who plan on attending college right after high school, **52% are considering a community college and 36% are considering an online college or university.**

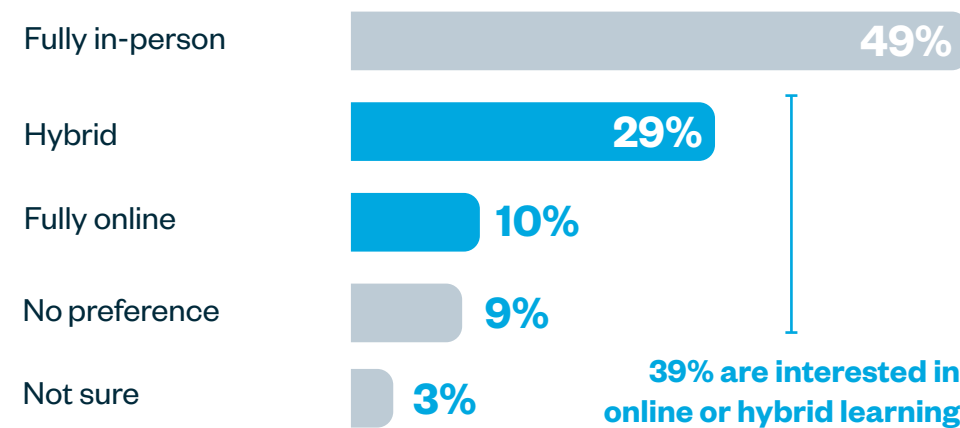
More than 1/3 of respondents want online or hybrid learning.

When asked about format, 39% of respondents either want a fully online or hybrid learning format.

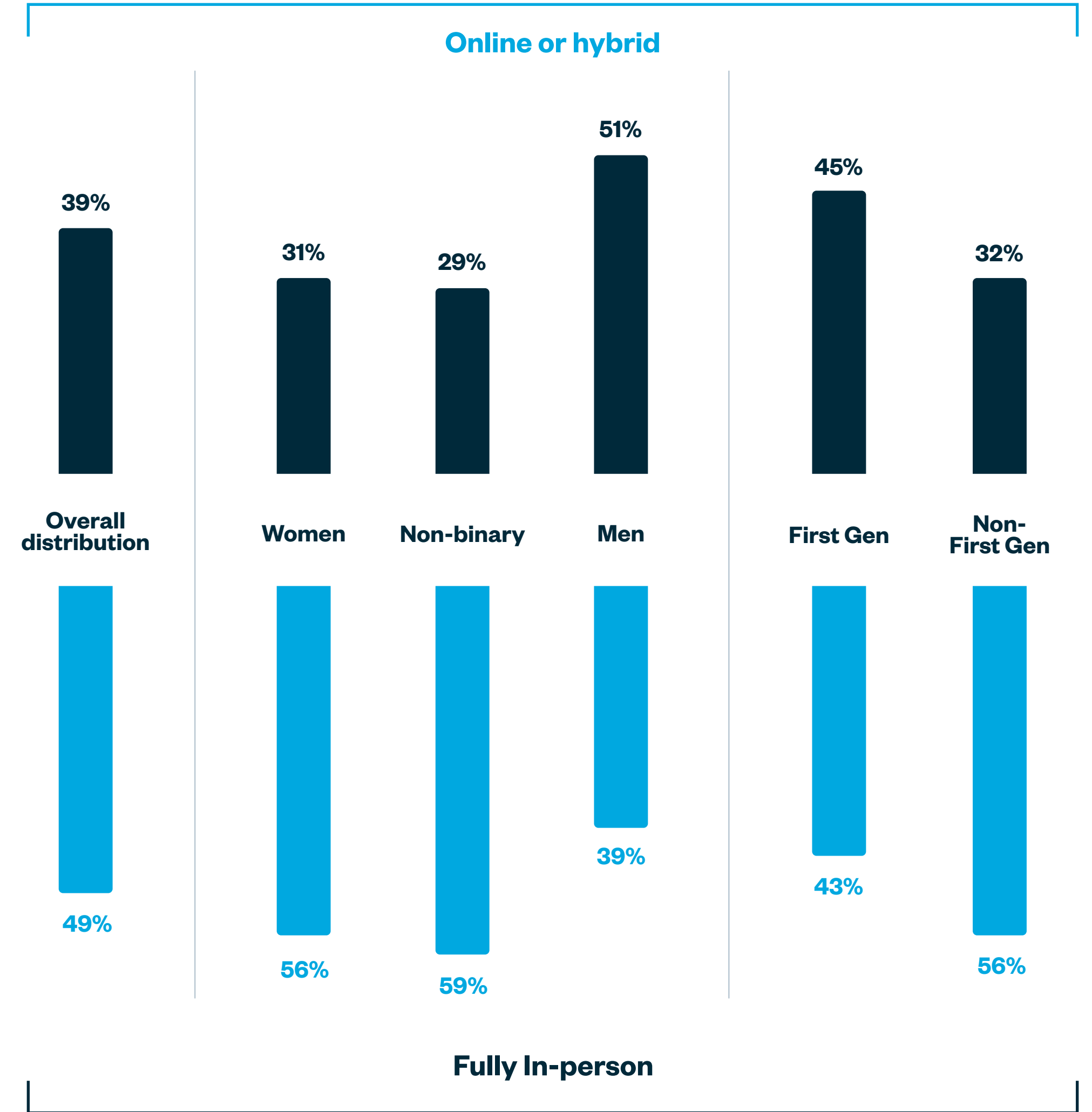
Women (56%) and non-binary (59%) respondents are looking for fully in-person options compared to men (39%). First-gen (34%) respondents are looking more for hybrid options compared to non first-gen (22%).

While community colleges and online schools do offer more financial accessibility for different types of students, there is more flexibility with online and community colleges, which current students need to fit their lives.

Overall, 39% of respondents want either a fully online educational format or hybrid format that combines in-person and online courses.



!!
Online institutions saw a 3.2% increase in undergraduate enrollment from the previous year, according to National Student Clearinghouse Researcher Center's Fall 2022 enrollment data.



Kerri Shook

Enrollment Strategist



Flexibility and affordability aren't just things students want, they're things students need. **Life no longer fits into a school schedule — school fits into life's schedule,** from time commitment to finances.

Students want flexible options.

A recent study found that 62% of teens want to forge their own educational path.

The same study found that 47% of teens agree that programs they can complete in a shorter time frame (within two years) make sense.

As the world moved towards a virtual or hybrid norm in the work world, the expectation is that college and accessibility to learning should not stay the same.

!! Offering only one type of learning format for everyone is not inclusive or accessible for all learners.

College courses on demand.

Education company **Straighter Line** provides college courses for a low subscription fee.

With the student body changing, there are competitors outside of traditional higher education that are offering cheaper, more flexible solutions for students to access education. For example, **Straighter Line** offers affordable online college courses starting at \$59 per class, with a \$99 monthly subscription, and a guarantee of full course credit and credit transfer.

How It Works

- 1 Choose Course**
Every course saves you money, time, and counts for credit towards your degree.
- 2 Get Support**
Your membership includes eTextbooks, tutoring, and live student support.
- 3 Transfer & Complete Your Degree**
41% more students who went through StraighterLine before entering college were successful completing their degree than those who didn't.
- 4 Earn College Credit**
All StraighterLine courses are recommended for credit by the American Council of Education (ACE).

Go at your own pace

Life gets busy, whether you're a parent or working student. That doesn't mean you have to give up on your goal of earning your degree. Get the flexibility to complete courses anywhere, anytime, on your schedule.

How It Works

Take as many courses as you would like with our \$99 monthly subscription fee. Our average student finishes a course in 33 days.

United States History I	Starting at \$59	+
3 Credits		
Introduction to Sociology	Starting at \$59	+
3 Credits		
College Algebra	Starting at \$59	+
3 Credits		
Western Civilization I	Starting at \$59	+
3 Credits		

Move from homogenous student populations that boost rankings and unfilled DEI plans **to** inclusive environments that welcome and support the success of all students.

WALK THE DEI TALK.



Students with disabilities think college isn't meant for them.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, students with disabilities are an increasing subpopulation at postsecondary institutions. In the 2015–2016 academic year, **the most recent data available**, 19% of all enrolled undergraduate students reported having a disability.

When asked if students believe if college is meant for them, 44% of respondents say college is not meant for them or they don't know if college is meant for them.

Open-ends varied, but one consistent and common theme was students either had a mental illness or disability in which they believed college would not support them.



I have autism. When I'm viewed as slow, I'm worried I'll be discriminated against while living a college lifestyle.



—PROSPECTIVE STUDENT FROM THE SOUTH



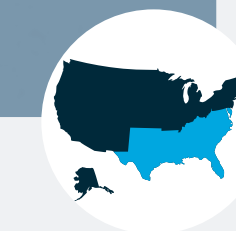
I'm probably still going to go to college so I can get a job but **I'm autistic and learn in a way that modern schools don't like supporting.**



—PROSPECTIVE STUDENT FROM THE MIDWEST



People like me (an autistic person), would most likely not have the correct accommodations for classes and the **American education system is more catered to children who are able-bodied and able-minded.**



—PROSPECTIVE STUDENT FROM THE SOUTH

As heart breaking as these quotes are, it's clear students are receiving messages that they are not meant for college because they are different.

Higher education should be accessible and inclusive no matter what.

Meeting neurodivergent students where they are.

Landmark College provides a higher education haven for students usually overlooked by traditional institutions.

Diversity is baked into the College's DNA, especially when it comes to including populations who are often left behind by much of the educational establishment. **Landmark focuses on educating students who learn differently, including those with ADHD, autism, and dyslexia.** These students are excluded by most higher education institutions because their learning differences often result in low standardized test scores and low grades, two metrics that play a big part in admission decisions, especially at highly competitive schools. Landmark doesn't just give these students an opportunity—they boost their chance of success by offering them the kind of support that's tough to find anywhere else. We think that's pretty cool. There's a lot to learn about the true meaning of DEIB from Landmark College.

Case Study



- ADMISSIONS
- ACADEMICS
- STUDENT LIFE
- SUMMER
- RESEARCH & TRAINING
- LC ONLINE

REQUEST INFORMATION

COVID-19 Update: Read latest guidance for Fall 2022 campus residential programs.



The College for Students Who Learn Differently

Dyslexia | ADHD | Autism | Executive Function Challenges



Marginalized students seek safer spaces.

Currently, minority students in the U.S. account for **46% of the college population**; a recent study found that by 2036, more than 50% of U.S. high school graduates will be people of color. However, a recent McKinsey report found that historically marginalized racial and ethnic populations—Black, Hispanic and Latino, and Native American and Pacific Islander—are still underrepresented in higher education among undergraduates and faculty and in leadership.

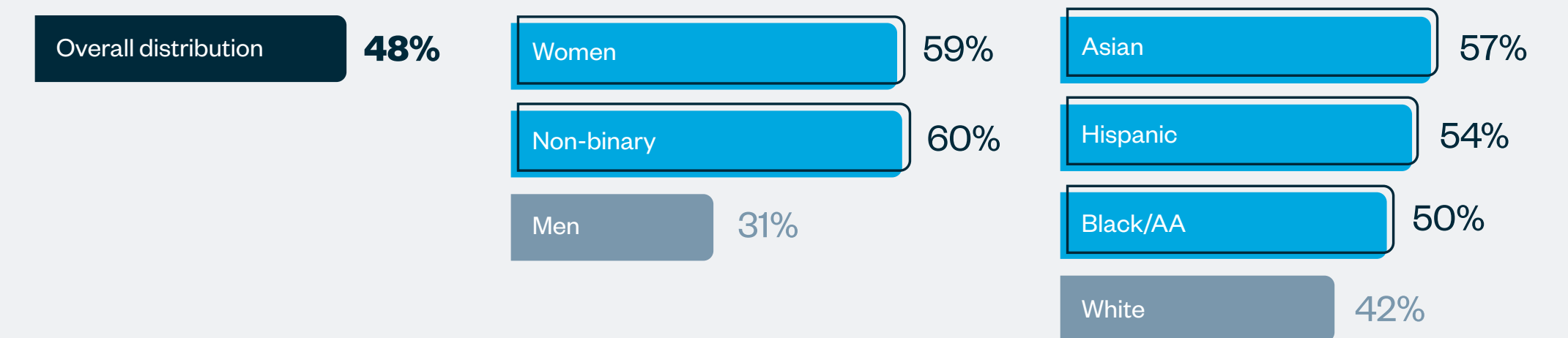
Given the above, in addition to the difficult political environment and tensions that exist among some college campuses and towns, along with the sexism and racism women and students of color face on a daily basis, it's no surprise these students seek options where they feel safe and have a supportive and understanding community.

Students of color, women, and non-binary students value safety.

When looking at what matters most to students, safety is more important to some students over others. Women and non-binary students were roughly twice as likely as men to say they are paying attention to safety (59% women, 60% non-binary, 31% men). Black, Hispanic, and Asian respondents were more likely to say safety is important to them compared to white respondents

Students of color, along with women and non-binary people, are seeking out education systems that are safer, will support their overall well-being, and provide a deeper sense of community as traditional, co-educational institutions have failed to cultivate such environment.

Paying attention to safety of campus and surrounding area during college search



Underrepresented students prefer institutions with established communities.

ff As of 2020 (the most recent data available), all of higher education contracted at about 5%. HBCUs contracted at about 4.8%.

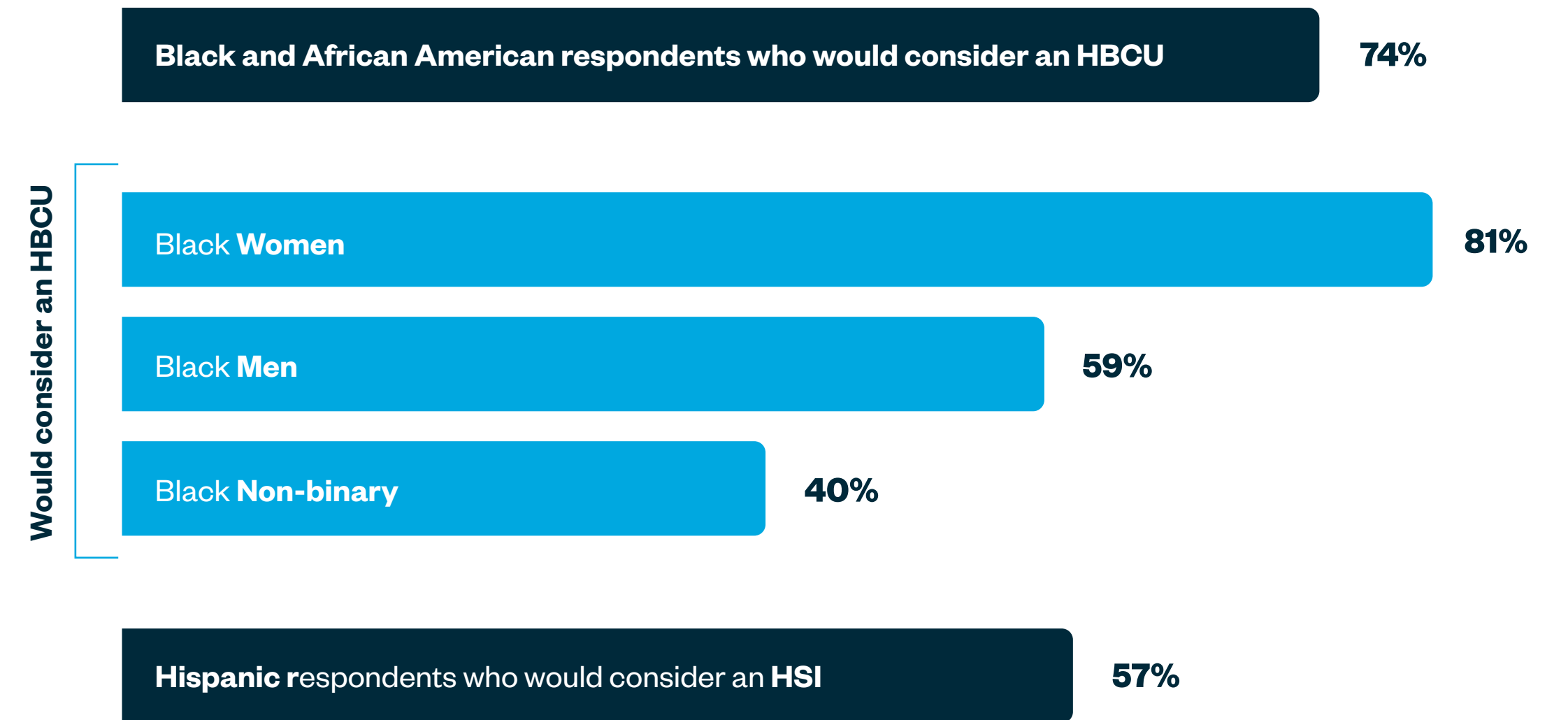
Black college-going students from 2015-2020 dropped 11%, and even with that significant drop, HBCUs still didn't contract as much. Which means there were fewer Black students going to college, but those who did opted to go to an HBCU.

—WALTER KIMBROUGH, ON NPR

SimpsonScarborough is seeing interest among affinity colleges and universities. 74% of Black and African American respondents would consider an HBCU. Broken out demographically: 81% of Black women, 59% of Black men, and 40% of Black non-binary people would consider attending HBCUs. 57% of Hispanic respondents would consider an HSI.

For underrepresented students, it makes more sense to attend institutions with supportive missions and tight-knit communities. Since so many institutions **still do not reflect underrepresented students**, there is a less compelling case to attend them.

Respondents who would attend affinity colleges



Using community data to solve community needs.

George Mason University's College of Education and Human Development [is using its own community-based data to implement anti-racist policies.](#)

Spurred on by outrage over the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police, the College embarked on an evidence-based initiative to realign their commitment to DEIB through the lens of anti-racism. Involving the entire College community, this initiative focused on using data gathered through a comprehensive equity audit, a needs assessment of the College's community members most likely to be negatively impacted by racism, and a custom-built data analysis tool designed to surface issues that needed to be addressed.

The end result was a comprehensive agenda to create an anti-racist environment at the College of Education and Human Development based in real-world data, not conjecture, and, as is often the case, emotion. As of now, it's still a work in progress, but we think it's a strong start.

GMU College of Education and Human Development affected stakeholder groups

The image displays a grid of 12 tables, each representing a different stakeholder group. Each table has columns for 'Findings', 'Recommendations', 'Responsible Parties', and 'Implementation'. The groups include: 1. All GMU students, 2. All GMU faculty, 3. All GMU staff, 4. All GMU administrators, 5. All GMU community members, 6. All GMU alumni, 7. All GMU parents, 8. All GMU donors, 9. All GMU employers, 10. All GMU vendors, 11. All GMU contractors, 12. All GMU service providers.

Move from not adapting or acknowledging student's mental health as part of student's overall success **to** creating a holistic student success model that includes mental health.

MENTAL HEALTH IS A TOP PRIORITY.



Reality check: Students are tired.

We are seeing themes around overall burn out and stress. In addition to price, another reason students are hesitant to go to college is because of burn out. In fact, 54% say they are burned out from school. **50% struggled with classwork and 38% don't feel ready for college.**

Prospect from the Northeast



I struggle a lot in school already, especially when it comes to my mental health, so **I don't see how the added stress of college is worth it.**

A recent McKinsey report showed that **one in four Gen Z respondents reported feeling more emotionally distressed (25%)**; almost double the levels reported by millennial and Gen X respondents (13% each), and more than triple the levels reported by baby boomer respondents (8%).

!! More than 60% of students surveyed during the 2020–2021 academic year met criteria for one or more mental health problems, a nearly 50% increase from 2013.

While some students face a lot more choices after high school, some of these choices are out of necessity of their well-being and mental health and they will seek out other options that support their well-being.

Reasons for Hesitation About College

College is too expensive	63%
I'm burned out on school	54%
I struggled with classwork in high school	50%
I don't want to take on student loans	49%
I don't know what I want to do with my life	41%
I don't feel ready for college	38%
College takes too long	36%
I can achieve my goals without a college degree	36%
My test scores aren't good enough	31%
College is too difficult to get into	29%
I'm scared to go to college	29%
I don't know enough about the options available to me	19%
I'm not ready to leave my family	16%
I don't know how to apply for financial aid	16%
I'm worried I won't get into the schools I am interested in	15%
College campuses are too political	9%
Colleges are not supportive of diverse/underrepresented students	8%
My parents/guardians don't want me to go to college	3%
Other	2%
Don't know	2%

Wellness matters

Centering programs around students' overall wellbeing will help institutions pull ahead.

Arizona State University's **Wellness program** has been recognized for its use of wellness technology and adapting to students' needs quickly. This is a good example of institutions providing value by offering helpful resources; they're not just saying "our students' mental health is important to us," they're backing it up with action.

ASU's approach is holistic, including physical, mental, intellectual, and community wellness services. Their options for support include open chats, support circles, and peer resources, along with health assessment tools and wellness goal setters.

ASU is inclusive, too—they provide adaptive recreation for students with physical disabilities, ensuring they don't get left behind. By improving wellness for students on campus, ASU is helping create a better campus culture and setting their students up for success.



Build Your Best You

ASU's Live Well Community is dedicated to supporting you in your health and wellbeing journey.

Live	Feel	Learn	Engage
Improve and maintain your physical well-being by making healthy choices on a	Your emotional, mental and spiritual well-being matter. Accept your feelings	Your mind is naturally curious. Learn something new every day and allow yourself	Engage in conversations and experiences with diverse individuals and

HIGHER EDUCATION IS NOT ONE-SIZE- FITS-ALL.

Move from expecting college-ready students **to** recognizing individual students' specific educational and professional interests, needs, and challenges.



Ready or not, here they come.

John Comerford,
President of
Otterbein University



Oh, well, these students aren't ready for college.' You don't hear that phrase here [at Otterbein]. **We talk about being a student-ready campus, not college-ready students.** Because the deficiency is not on those students. The deficiency is in us trying to understand how best to help them overcome whatever obstacle's in their path.

At SimpsonScarborough, we sometimes hear similar sentiments or frustrations from clients— that their students are not prepared for college. We need to think about it the other way around: colleges and universities are the ones not prepared.

We should be looking critically at what students are not prepared for, how to help them, their interests, and giving them experiences that bridge the gaps and encourage learning.



Appealing to Gen Z has to go beyond rankings. For them, an institution that takes pride in inclusivity over exclusivity is growingly important. They find great value in not just diversity, but also belonging. Institutions can bridge that gap by offering personalized experiences that speak to unique needs of its students and prospects.



Safaniya Stevenson
Associate Director, Marketing Strategy



Higher ed's hold on tradition can be a detriment. Today's students are facing different realities, stressors and traumas than past generations. Schools need to re-think how to serve these students, and it might be abandoning what was once accepted as 'tried and true'.



Marguerite Moore
Associate Director, Brand Strategy

Education exploration is expensive.



There are multiple areas of careers that interest me in life, which makes it difficult to settle on one major to study in college.

—PROSPECTIVE STUDENT FROM THE NORTHEAST

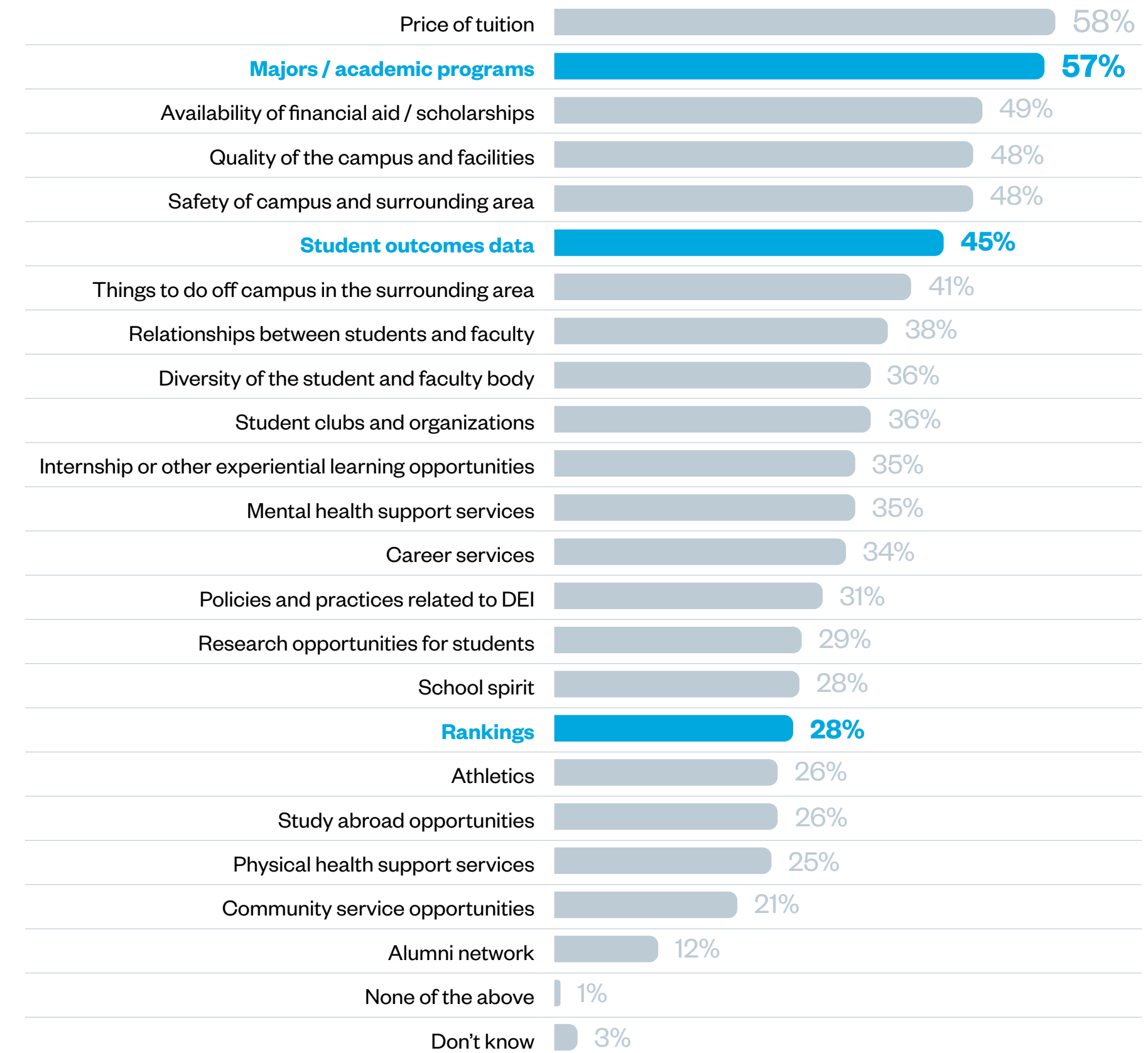
Higher education is interesting—we ask students to know what they want to study, and if they don't know, they have a year or two to figure it out. If they end up not liking what they chose to study, it takes them more time (and money) to figure out what they like and what they want to pursue.

It's truly a privileged approach to education that the majority of Americans cannot execute on.

In addition to personalization and aligning more to passions/interests, Gen Z is focused on career options sooner. **51% of teens think about their education and career path daily.**

Furthermore, 57% of respondents are paying attention to majors/academic programs when researching college and universities. Only 28% of respondents are paying attention to rankings.

Factors that prospective students report paying attention to when researching colleges and universities

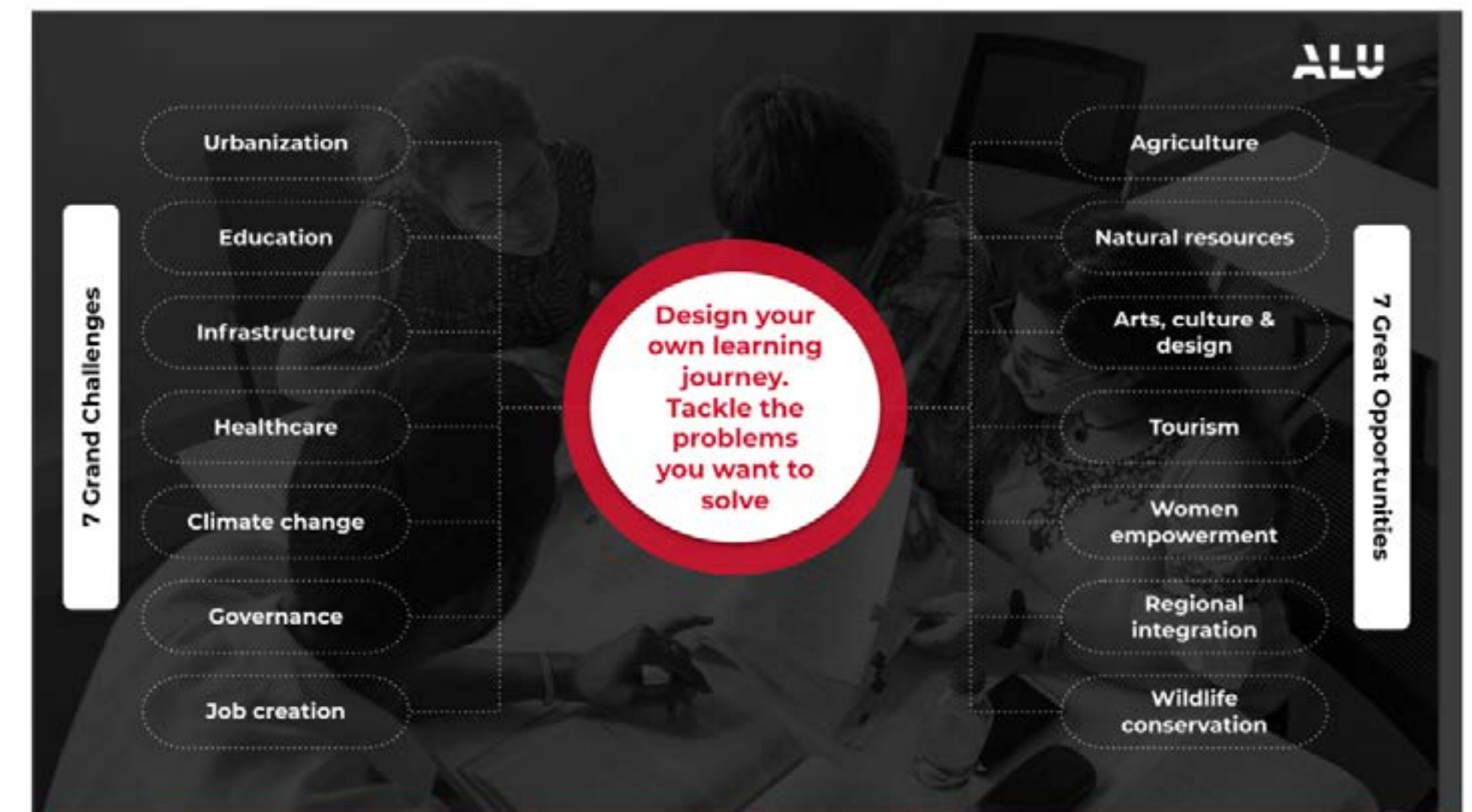


Customizing higher education.

A unique approach from the African Leadership Academy has **students declare a MISSION instead of a MAJOR, then a curriculum is built around that.** This type of approach is an innovation that is better aligned to the motivations and needs of teens.



ALU students find purpose and deeper meaning in this way of learning.



Without the constraints of majors and classroom walls, the world truly opens up for ALU students to prepare for a life of impact. Faculty mentor and guide students through a self-driven, personalized learning journey.

Looking forward, students value skills-based education.

In fact, in our findings, of the 13% who aren't sure or not attending, 54% are planning to work full-time and 22% plan to learn a trade.

The same report by ECOMC showed that 56% of teens believe a skills-based education (trade, STEM, nursing, etc.) makes sense in today's world.

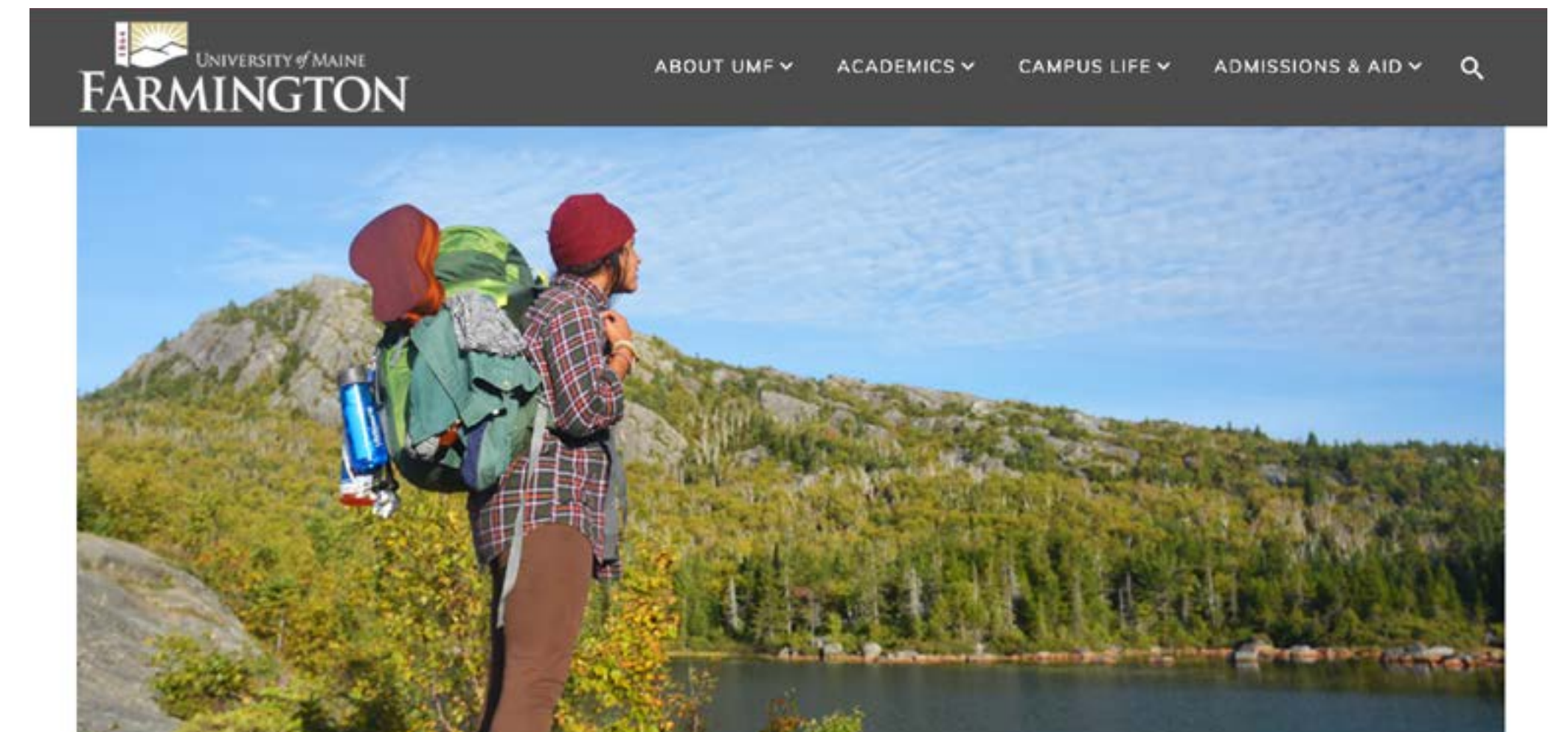
Post graduation plans if not planning to attend college right after high school



Getting students on the college path early.

→ Some higher ed institutions are adapting to Gen Z changes through consistent outreach to high school students.

One example is the University of Maine at Farmington. UMF has developed their Early College Pathways program, which allows high schoolers to explore careers, programs, and majors in a virtual setting that provides relevance now and once in college. This is a great way to get high school students interested and involved in higher education sooner, helping them make an informed decision around their choices.



Early College Pathways at UMF

Questions to Think About

What do our students want, need, and value, and how well are we serving against this?

How do you prioritize different student's needs?

Knowing they are career and skills focused, are we crafting the experience (digital and real life) to match this?

Are we still placing an emphasis on rankings? What is our reasoning behind that?

How can higher education adapt to give students what they want?

Conclusion

Personalized, student-centered approaches are far more valuable these days than the “casting-a-wide-net” approach — and there are plenty of opportunities for higher education to leverage:

- Build content that provides students with clarity on price and aid. Examine your tuition and price and financial aid web pages through a user experience lens.
- Create better options for working and neurodiverse students. Start by auditing the current experience to identify gaps and opportunities.
- Consider how to give working students new opportunities or incentives that reflect their experience in the workforce.
- Explore how your institution can fold in more modalities to be inclusive of students.
- If your institution prioritizes rankings, identify how that could impact (positively or negatively) the student experience. Ensure you're communicating it accurately.
- As always, make sure your brand promise and experience align with the programming and opportunities provided to students.
- Diversify your stories of success. You want to ensure different areas of interest are represented—not just STEM.

Methodology

Survey At-a-Glance

1,605 U.S. high school juniors and seniors participated in an online survey via a research panel between April 13 and May 14, 2022.

Gender Identity

Man	38%
Woman	55%
Non-binary	5%
Prefer to self-describe	1%
Prefer not to answer	1%

Grade Level

High school junior	36%
High school senior	64%

U.S. Region

Northeast	19%
South	38%
Midwest	20%
West	24%

Race/Ethnicity

American Indian or Alaska Native	4%
Asian	7%
Black or African American	23%
Hispanic or Latino	22%
Middle Eastern or North African	1%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1%
White	56%
Another race or ethnicity	1%
Prefer not to answer	1%

First-Generation College Student

Yes	42%
No	58%

Academic Areas of Interest

Health sciences	34%
Business	25%
Fine Arts	24%
Social Sciences	21%
Computer Science and Technology	20%
Lab sciences	19%
Education	19%
Engineering	18%
Humanities	14%
Mathematics	13%
Media and Communications	9%
Other	9%
None of the above	1%
Undecided / Don't know	2%

Political Views

Very conservative	5%
Conservative	12%
Moderate	29%
Liberal	22%
Very liberal	11%
Other	3%
Prefer not to answer	19%

→ Margin of error: ± 2.4 percentage points
→ Median survey length: 6 minutes

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Thank you.

SimpsonScarborough is a full-service research, branding, and marketing agency, and higher education's premier data-driven partner.

As champions and stewards of colleges and universities, we give higher ed brands the confidence to make informed decisions about their futures — a confidence that stems from our fully integrated approach. The cornerstone of our work is in-depth research that's rigorous and comprehensive, leading to insightful strategy, inspired creative, and human-centered digital. The trusting relationships we've formed and the campus communities we've brought together through are among our most valuable assets.

Individually, we've held nearly every job in the industry. As a fully remote agency, we hail from (and represent) almost every part of the country. Most of all, we're proud, professional students — curious by nature and compassionate by choice, constantly putting in the hard and smart work to shape the industry we love and the brands that shape our world.



Building brands that inspire and endure.
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