



SECOND EDITION

Connected Student Report

Insights into Global Higher Education Trends from
over 2,000 Students and Staff



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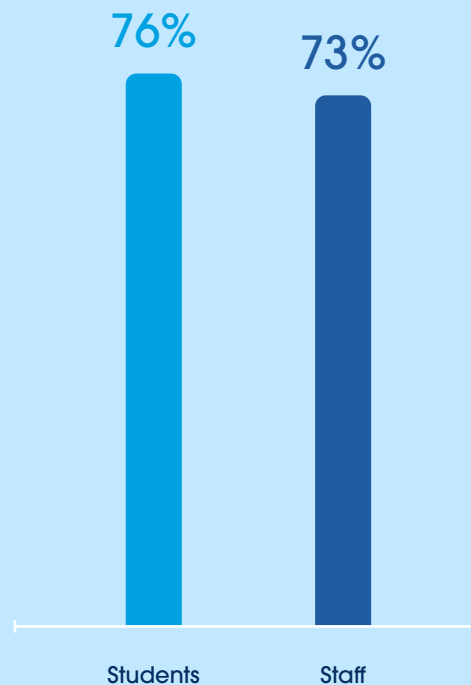
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The Connected Student Report, 2nd edition is based on a survey commissioned by Salesforce.org and conducted by Ipsos. This report was written by Michael Anf.

Students and Staff Report That Maintaining Their Wellbeing Remains a Challenge



Executive Summary

As COVID-19 circled the globe last year, it overwhelmed health systems, stalled national economies, and forced most higher education campuses to close. Institutions faced massive disruption as they sprinted to support students, faculty and staff in a new “learn and work from anywhere” world.

As challenging as the pandemic was, and continues to be, for higher education, the effects thus far have operated in the realm of “known knowns.” The changes institutions have undertaken are largely ones they had already begun or planned to make before March 2020. As echoed in this second edition of the Connected Student Report, COVID-19 has forced them to make those changes much faster.

In this report, a survey of 1,128 students and 1,076 staff in North America, Europe, and Australia found that the following issues are top of mind for students and institutional staff:

Student and Staff Wellbeing

Concerns about student mental health and wellbeing had already led many institutions to offer more services, including ones that students could access online. The anxieties and calamities faced by students, as well as faculty and staff, increased those worries **with 76% of students and 73% of staff reporting that maintaining their wellbeing remains a challenge.** As institutions consider how much of a role they will play in limiting classroom sizes and offering COVID-19 testing and vaccinations, they will need to continue to monitor the holistic wellbeing of their students and staff.

Flexible Learning and Working Options

One major takeaway from the report is the need for learning options that fit within students' busy schedules. In some nations, especially the United States, a large number of students are working full time as they learn. So, while many students, and a high percentage of staff, prefer a high level of face-to-face engagement, many students have seen the value in taking courses asynchronously or more conveniently from their homes. In fact, one in four students said that having more flexible courses and part-time offerings would help them succeed. Thus, even if most campuses reopen in the fall for in-person learning, institutions shouldn't cut back on their online options. This could also include more hybrid learning, which is the most preferred method of learning, and already offers a high degree of flexibility. Staff are also seeking more flexible work schedules, with close to half anticipating more remote work in the near future.

Student Career Pathways

Financial challenges and anxiety about the future are common amongst students. Unfortunately, the pandemic has only heightened these concerns, increasing economic woes and uncertainty. Students are looking even more toward higher education institutions to prepare them for careers. Many of them report that they expect institutions to do more to connect them with employers, internships, and virtual job interviews and training **with around four in 10 prospective students saying they would choose an institution based on future job or paid internship opportunities.**

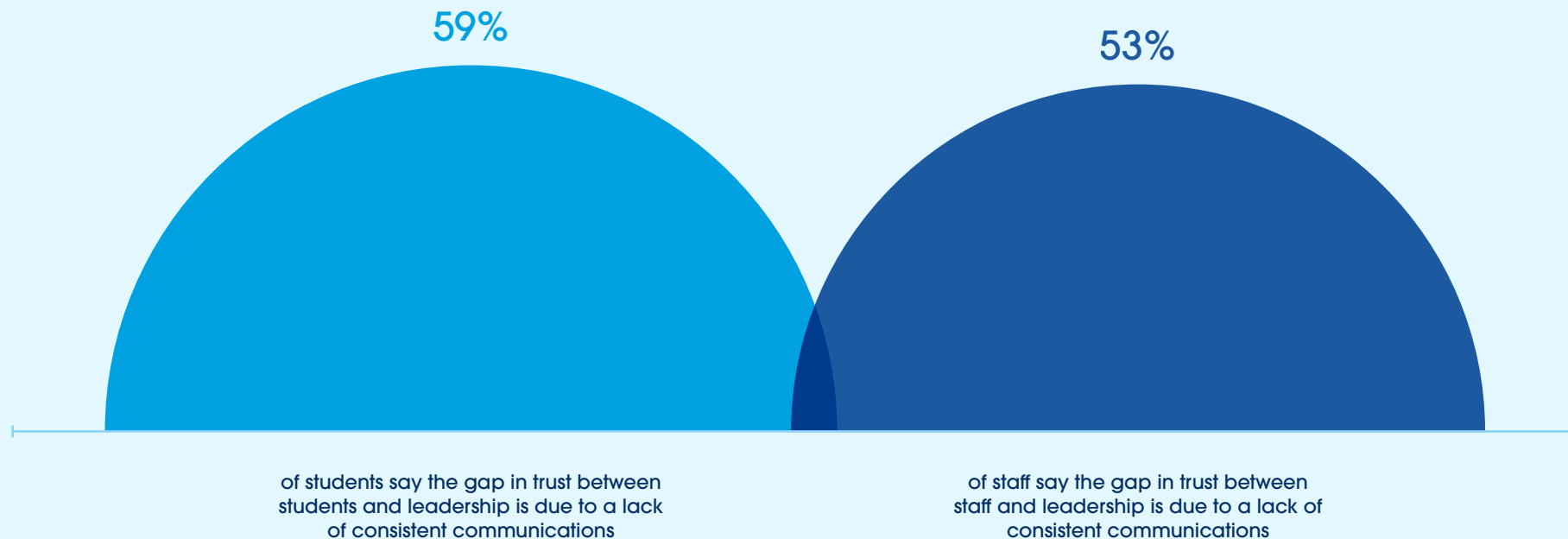


New Business Models

The COVID-19 era has led many institutions to make considerable adjustments to how they operate—changes that represent opportunities for growth and increased efficiency. Many have begun to change their business models to become more digitally flexible, offer students more online services, and develop more career preparation. In fact, 45% of staff said their college/university is implementing new business models coming out of the pandemic.

Learner and Institution Success

Many institutions are experiencing a gap in trust. Nearly six in 10 students say the gap between students and institution leaders is due to a lack of consistent communications; about half of staff agree. In addition to new communication approaches, institutions are exploring better ways to offer student advising services and manage their fundraising efforts.



About the Survey

This report, created by Salesforce.org and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, was designed to gain a better understanding of students around the world by asking them what aspects of their higher education experience are most important to them.

By also engaging staff, this research aims to learn more about their attitudes and how their institutions are engaging learners throughout the education journey, from recruitment and admissions to alumni engagement.

A total of 2,204 (1,128 students and 1,076 staff) interviews were collected from February 18 to March 25, 2021 via an online quantitative survey in 10 countries. For details, please see the [Appendix](#).

Qualified Respondents:

Students: adults age 18-plus, who are full-time or part-time students enrolled in a higher-education institution

Staff: adults age 18-plus, who are employed full-time or part-time at a higher-education institution (not including trade/vocational schools), and are in a faculty or management/leadership role



2204
total respondents

10
countries

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced institutions to safeguard their staff and students, utterly altering the landscape of higher education, resulting in quantum changes in how campuses operate.

When the pandemic arrived, officials wondered whether they could roll out high-quality online courses en masse, persuade students to take them, and get faculty fully on board to teach and assess them. That matter has been decided, with institutions and faculty showing considerable capacity to deliver remote education, and on the fly.

A New Education Experience

And yet, even as vaccine development has helped to slow the pace of COVID-19 in many nations, the pandemic presents higher education with a continuing set of challenges. As they look beyond the most dangerous phases of the virus, institution leaders are asking: How soon should they reopen campuses? How can they continue to support students and staff reeling from the changes in how education is delivered? How should they help students living in uncertain economic times and in an anxious emotional environment? How much can technology help students and staff

learn and work more flexibly, or help institutions run more efficiently? How can they show the value of learning from anywhere? What will “the new normal” look like?

The second edition of the Connected Student Report shows that these concerns remain urgent. The report also demonstrates that institutions are doing more to provide students with more support during a time when they are worried about their wellbeing. Institutions are working to upgrade campus operations so they are both more efficient and forward-looking. At the same time, many are preparing their campuses to reopen.

The good news for institutions is that a majority of students (56%) feel prepared to return to campus in the fall, while 58% say it should be safe enough for them to do so. And students still trust their institutions to a high degree. Less than 25% say they have lost confidence in their institution’s leaders during the pandemic.

But students expect their institutions to do more to help them remain well, prepare them for careers, and deliver learning options that go beyond on-campus attendance.

Ongoing Financial Anxiety

The economic fallout of the pandemic has heightened pre-existing attitudes among students toward career preparation and jobs. Students, many of whom work at least part-time, continue to express financial worries, as well as concerns over managing their overall workloads. This is reflected in their desire to make their academic schedules fit into the rest of their busy lives: **40% of students say that having more flexible learning options is very important.**

Both institutions and students report taking considerable financial hits during COVID-19. Nearly two-thirds of students surveyed say their income has decreased during the pandemic.

In Australia, the loss of international students banned from traveling during the pandemic threatened institutions that had become dependent on students from abroad, especially China. Those institutions have [faced total losses of around \\$2 billion AUS](#).

[A report](#) on U.K. institutions projected losses from the pandemic to total from 3 billion to 19 billion English pounds—up to half of their total annual revenue. And a [Chronicle report](#) found that COVID-19 has cost U.S. institutions \$183 billion.

Students Express Concern over Finances and Workloads



34%

of students say they need more help managing their course load and work/personal life

63%

of students say decreased income from losing a job is a challenge



Institutions Pivot Toward a Post-COVID Era

Survey results show that the pandemic has led many campus officials to move forward with changes that cast their institutions in new, more efficient, and more digital ways. Leaders and faculty members say that about half of institutions are in the midst of implementing new business models. More than six in 10 staff say their institutions are re-evaluating their staff support and service model because of the pandemic, with an eye toward improving staff skills so they can do their jobs virtually.

Two months after the survey was taken, optimism was returning in many nations. By May, several hundred institutions in the United States had announced plans to open campuses back up in fall 2021, according to Chronicle reports, with nearly 400 requiring that employees and students receive

COVID-19 vaccinations before returning. In Europe, as of May, plans for re-opening were more scattered.

Still, survey results indicate that there are likely some ongoing uncertainties about the safety of returning to campus. Though many observers have lauded institutions' ability to rapidly transform themselves in how they deliver education, succeeding in the near future will now hinge on other factors, including how well nations can keep COVID-19 in check.

Experts say that institutions must remain nimble, as the virus likely hasn't spoken its last word. "Colleges totally have the experience and know-how to offer their courses online now," says Bryan Alexander, senior scholar at Georgetown University. "Everyone is looking toward a more tech-infused fall in 2021 than we had in 2019. The degree to which that happens is really a matter of what happens with the virus."

Supporting Student and Staff Wellbeing is Critical



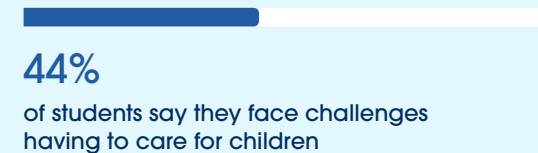
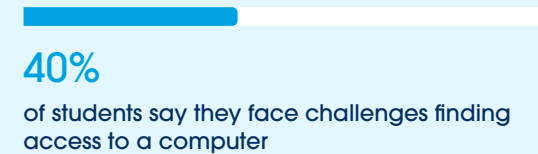
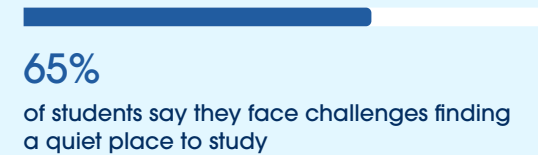
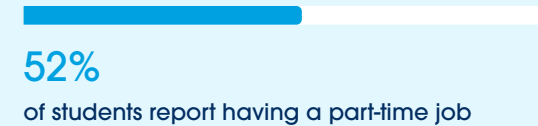
The Salesforce.org/Ipsos survey echoes many other studies that have found a heavy correlation between COVID-19 and wellbeing concerns. Even though anxiety about the pandemic may now be abating—more than half of students and staff say that they feel prepared and safe to return to campus—the coronavirus and its ripple effects still appear to be weighing upon them.

Around three-quarters of students say that maintaining their wellbeing represents a challenge, with students in Nordic nations most often citing this concern (91%), compared with students in Spain, who registered the lowest level (72%).

Students spend much of their time juggling obligations. More than half (52%) report having a part-time job, while 22% work full-time while attending institutions. American students work full-time at a much higher rate (42%) than students in other nations, with the Netherlands (14%) and Nordic nations (11%) at the other end of the spectrum. Despite the high levels of working students, nearly three in four report having financial concerns, and two in three earned less money during the pandemic than they had before.

Work-life balance and living situations also weigh on students. Slightly more than one-third of students say they need help managing their course loads, while a sizable number (65%) also say they face challenges finding a quiet place to study. Institutions should continue to find ways, either through more direct or self-service resources, to help students navigate through increasingly complex lives, experts say. [A separate study](#) conducted recently found that female students, students of color, and younger students have been especially vulnerable to mental-health woes during these times.

Wellbeing Challenges Can be Multifaceted



Survey results indicate that students want more from their institutions. Institutions could do a better job of communicating with students. Nearly six in 10 students say that a lack of consistent communication between leaders and students erodes the trust between them. Nearly 90% say they'd like as many or more alerts, emails, personalized messages, and reminders. And about half say they would like to receive more personalized communications from their institutions.

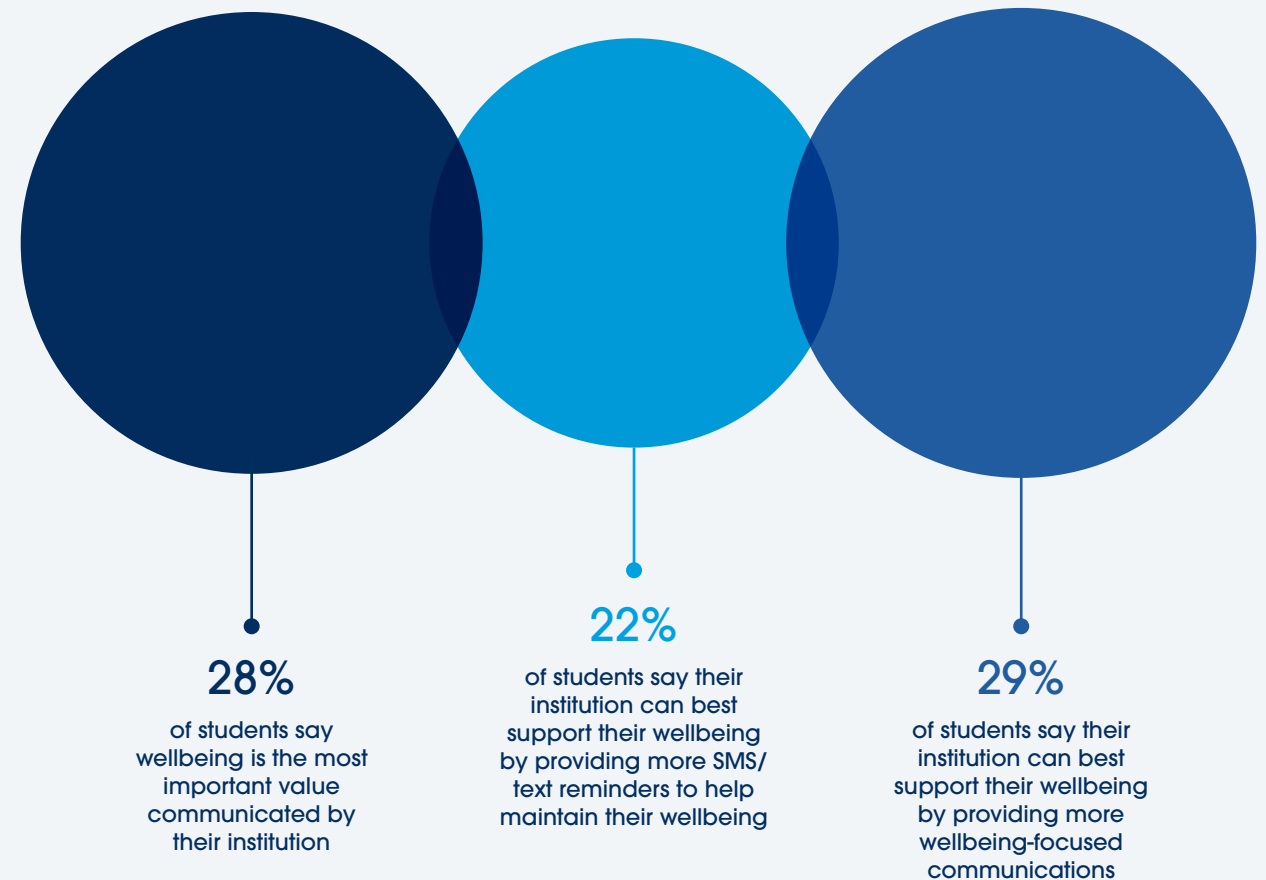
Mental health had become a focus for many institutions before COVID-19. Students' high level of concern about their isolation and mental health during the pandemic represents a significant escalation, experts say.

More than one-third of students say institutions can further aid their wellbeing by offering more opportunities to feel more engaged and less isolated, more online access to mental-health experts and telehealth services, and more wellness support overall.

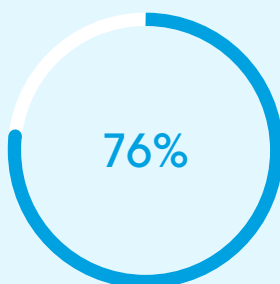
"Those three categories are real departures from the norm," says Asia Wong, director of counseling and health services at Loyola University New Orleans. "Students aren't asking for a new app or more communications from the president. These are big requests. **They want connection, they want help, and they want therapy.**"

Students report that only about one in five institutions offers access to online communities that are based on a student's academic interest or extracurricular activities.

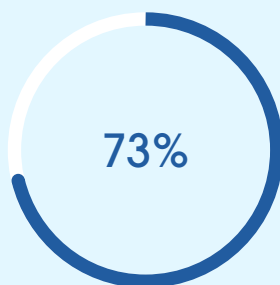
Tailored Communications are Critical to Student Wellbeing



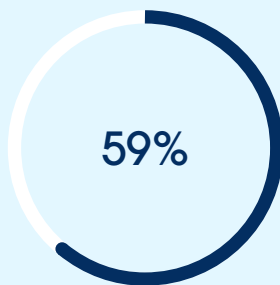
Top Challenges Facing Staff



of staff say that **maintaining a work-life balance** is a challenge



of staff say that **maintaining their wellbeing** is a challenge



of staff say that **the possibility of furlough** is a challenge

Results on survey wellness questions vary by country, though not all that widely. Students in the U.K. and U.S. seem to value wellbeing a bit more than students in other nations. “That may be because students in the U.K. and the U.S. pay more for education—they may expect more for their dollar,” says Hans de Wit, an international higher-ed expert and distinguished fellow at the School of Education and Human Development at Boston College.

Some European students ranked wellbeing as slightly less important due to cultural differences. “The French have less of a typical, physical campus environment than other countries,” adds de Wit. “They tend to be part of other communities that might be meeting their wellbeing needs. They might not need a university to do that.”

For staff, balancing life and work also became more difficult during COVID-19. Both faculty and management were forced to spend more time translating face-to-face educational experiences into online ones. They also needed to learn new ways to provide services to students. A strong majority of institutional staff (76%) say that maintaining a work-life balance is a challenge for them, as is maintaining wellbeing (73%). Nearly six in 10 staff report that the possibility of a furlough represents a challenge. Even faculty and campus leaders in countries with well-funded public education systems reported high levels of concern about temporarily losing their jobs.

“I’m a bit astonished to see that so many staff, including people in the Nordic countries, are concerned about a furlough,” says Michael Gaebel, director of the European University Association, an organization made of institutions and national associations from 48 European countries. European institutions appear to be healthy financially, even with the effects of the pandemic, and enrollment is growing or stable in most nations, he adds.

Institutions appear to be responding to student and staff concerns about wellness, as 45% of staff said more flexible work schedules would support their wellbeing. More than four in 10 staff say that institutions have made wellbeing support more available during the pandemic. About half of institutions have started fundraising campaigns with a focus on wellness and to offer help to students during the pandemic.

Most students (84%) say their institution offers an online student-services portal, while more than three-quarters of them rank their pandemic-era experience at an institution as fair or better. A similar percentage sees higher education as a good value. And students rank the academic support they receive highly.

But institutions can do better, some experts say. More than a quarter of students say they have to sign in to two or more platforms to access what they need to be successful every day. While they continue to anticipate students' needs, campus leaders and staff have so far done little more than "make huge guesses about what exactly to do for them," Wong says. Other experts say that institutions should be using data analysis platforms more often to learn what their students are facing.

A considerable number of students (45%) perceive a "trust gap" between campus leaders and students. Three-quarters of those students say that the gap has grown wider or stayed the same during the pandemic. Looking ahead, only about three in 10 say they expect their institutions to provide COVID-19 testing.



26%
of students say they have to sign in to two or more different platforms to find answers and access what they need to be successful every day



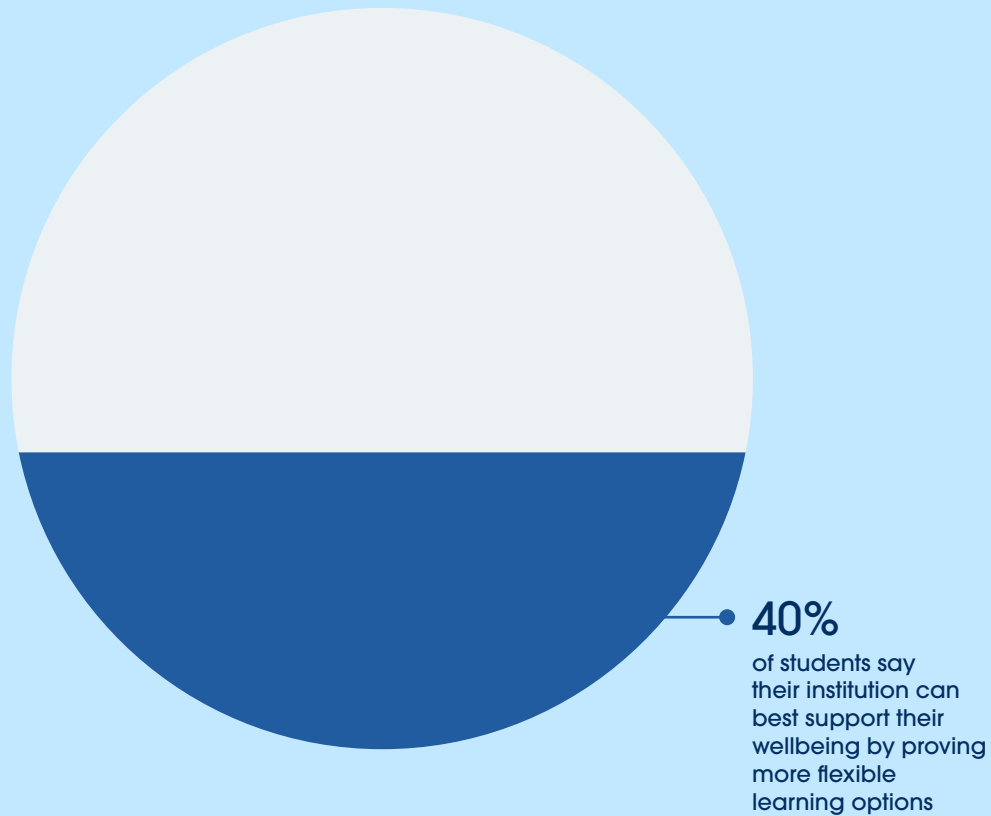
To bridge that chasm in trust and improve wellbeing, campus leaders need to learn more about their students, Wong says. “The student government [at Loyola New Orleans] recently voted to make student COVID-19 vaccinations mandatory for staff and students, which might make sense. But the institution hasn’t taken steps to learn what all its constituents want,” she adds. “We need clearer answers.”

Others say that in order to better serve students and staff, campus leaders should do more to gather and analyze data and quantify COVID-era health metrics. “There are a lot of people dealing with COVID in their families,” says Bryan Alexander, from Georgetown. “Survey results show that even in countries with terrific public benefits systems, as in the Nordic nations, there is a lot of concern. We don’t have good data on how many people who have been infected or who may be suffering from long COVID. We need to know more about what people are up against to deal with these issues of wellbeing.”

Even though many institutions repurposed campus offices that serve students (such as admissions, advising, communications, and enrollment) online, students say that the transition hasn’t always been smooth. Even as half of staff surveyed say students are asking for more advising help, primarily for reasons surrounding wellbeing, only about one-quarter of students say it was easy for them to make advising appointments online.

Despite widespread evidence of online service portals, longstanding shortcomings in serving students off-campus persist.

Flexibility is Essential for Student Wellbeing



“I’ve worked on accreditation standards for distance-ed. Consistently, we’ve found online student services to be lacking,” says Michael Truong, executive director in the Office of Innovative Teaching and Technology at Azusa Pacific University. “Schools are stepping up when it comes to offering more options for mental-health counseling and other services, but the pandemic era has shown they need to do more to fill these gaps. They need to embrace the mentality that students online need just as much support as on-campus students do.”

One in four students say they want a more personalized education experience that better meets their needs. There is a worry at some institutions that many students won’t want to return to campus. Though a majority in the survey say they feel safe to return to campus, more than 40% do not, Wong points out. What’s more, during the pandemic many students have come to enjoy the flexibility that can come with studying online.

On a list of seven choices, the highest number of students (40%) chose having more flexible learning options as the most important thing institutions can do to increase the level of wellness of students and staff. American students valued flexibility in learning most (at 47%), with European students assigning it less value (31% in France and the Netherlands).

“This is the single most significant finding in the entire survey,” says Wong. “There are a lot of other questions to be answered, post-pandemic, about what will affect students’ wellbeing. How many classes will continue to be pass/fail? How will we view people coming to school or work sick? But the fact that students need more flexibility points us in a strong direction.”

Flexible Learning and Working Options Are Here to Stay

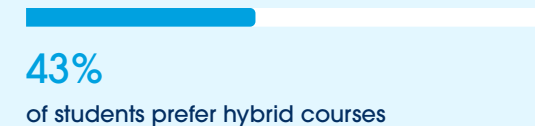
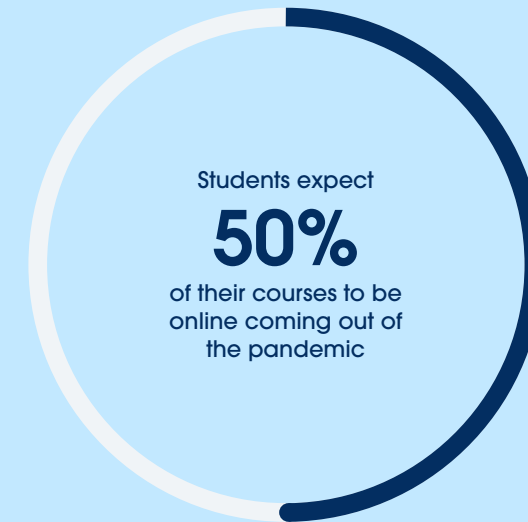


Many institutional leaders, optimistic that vaccines and overall immunity in their nations will allow them to reopen their campuses in the fall, see the waning of COVID-19 as an opportunity to once again fill dining, lecture, and residence halls and, perhaps, regain a firmer financial footing.

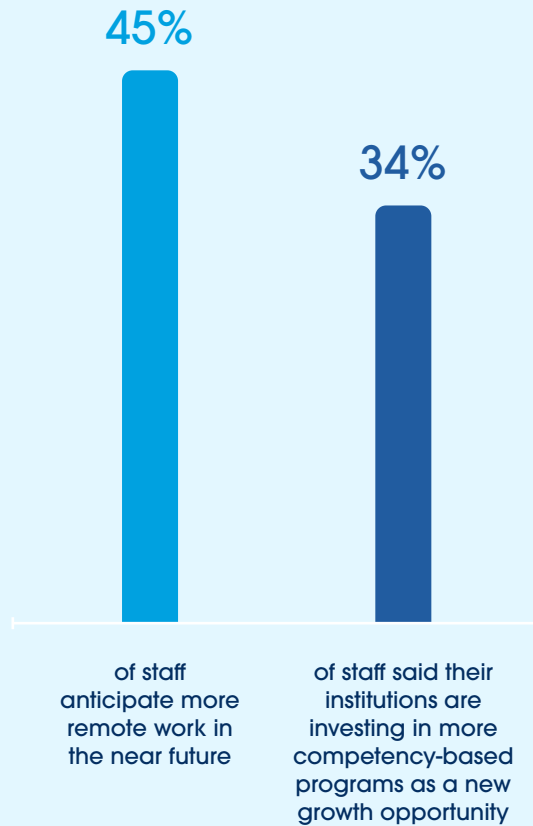
Many students will be happy to return to campus as well. Data from the second edition of the Connected Student Report shows a strong preference for all in-person learning—37% of students surveyed favor it. But survey results also indicate that the online options institutions turned to during the pandemic have won over a significant number of learners. In the U.S., the level of student preference for all-online learning is now on par with face-to-face education, at 28% for each.

“Many traditional-age students are craving the campus experience and student life, but they also want the increased flexibility that comes with a mix of online and campus courses, lower costs, and more personalized support,” says Lauren Keane, an associate vice president at Southern New Hampshire University.

Students and Staff Prefer More Flexible Learning Opportunities



Staff Anticipate More Flexible Working and Learning Options



As [last year's research](#) noted, students have become more accepting of online learning during the pandemic era. This year, 60% of staff say that their institutions had a pre-pandemic platform that allowed them to pivot quickly.

Students now report that nearly two-thirds of their courses are taught online. They expect half of their coursework will be available online in the future. Nearly two in three students expect future classes to have at least some online content or feature, either as online or hybrid courses. Additionally, 46% of staff anticipate more remote work in the near future and 54% prefer hybrid courses.

But it's important to note that most students won't take to an all-digital experience. Only 21% of global respondents to this year's report say they would prefer taking all of their classes online, with less than one in five students in Australia, France, the Nordic countries, and the United Kingdom stating a preference for an all-digital education.

Students desire more flexible ways to learn as well as a wider range of options for making students-services appointments online. But campus leaders should remember that domination of the higher-education landscape by virtual learning has been predicted before, and wrongly so.

"The idea that virtual education would be the future, an idea very strong before the pandemic, has proved to be a false idea," says de Wit, from Boston College. "The survey shows that students and staff want a real live community inside and outside the classroom, particularly at the undergraduate level."

Meanwhile, flexible options, including hybrid learning, are becoming increasingly popular, year over year.

“Students really missed the social experience of interactive teaching,” adds Graham Virgo, senior pro-vice chancellor for education at Cambridge University. “We have conducted surveys of our student body and found that while they are appreciative of the pivot to remote delivery, they miss in-person education. It is clear that the future model for residential education is hybrid learning and greater use of the flipped classroom. This had been already happening, but there is greater confidence now in rolling hybrid education out further.”

Survey results support that. **Twice as many students prefer hybrid classes to other learning approaches.** They do so at statistically the same rate this year (43%) as last year (46%), when it was also the most preferred mode of learning.

Currently, students take 54% of their courses online and only 26% in-person, with students in the U.K. and several European countries taking more than 60% of their courses online. In last year’s [research](#), students had anticipated taking a much smaller portion of their courses (40%) online. Coming out of the pandemic, students also expect 40% of their education to be online.

Students expect that only 24% of their courses will be offered in a hybrid format. But institutions appear to have taken student preferences for the mixed method of learning seriously. Even prior to the pandemic, there were signs that online learning and more course flexibility were becoming priorities. In many countries, higher education has been responding to what students tell them they need.

“European institutions have reported growing pressure to deliver learning more flexibly,” says Gaebel, from the European University Association.

Institutions shouldn’t assume that that means students want more online learning, however. “Students merely would like to have the choice,” Gaebel adds, citing the survey’s finding that **eight in 10 students prefer either fully in-person or hybrid situations.**





By giving students the chance to learn off-campus, hybrid learning can, on its own, create flexibility. “Students who lead busy lives are starting to see the advantages of studying online,” says Cathy Stone, an online expert and an associate professor of humanities and social sciences at the University of Newcastle, in Australia. “They might see flexible options, like taking part of a course online, as a way to take an extra shift at work or have more time to care for a family member.”

While residential colleges, still a dominant force in higher education (especially in the U.K. and the U.S.) focus more on getting younger students back on campus, some nations have developed more flexible courses and programs in order to reach older students. Nowhere are those older, “non-traditional” students more numerous per capita than in Australia.

Six in 10 Australian undergraduates are 30 or older (as compared with 25% of students in the U.S.). Lecture-class attendance has been declining over the past decade in Australia—an indication that courses taught entirely face-to-face aren’t always the best fit for working adults.

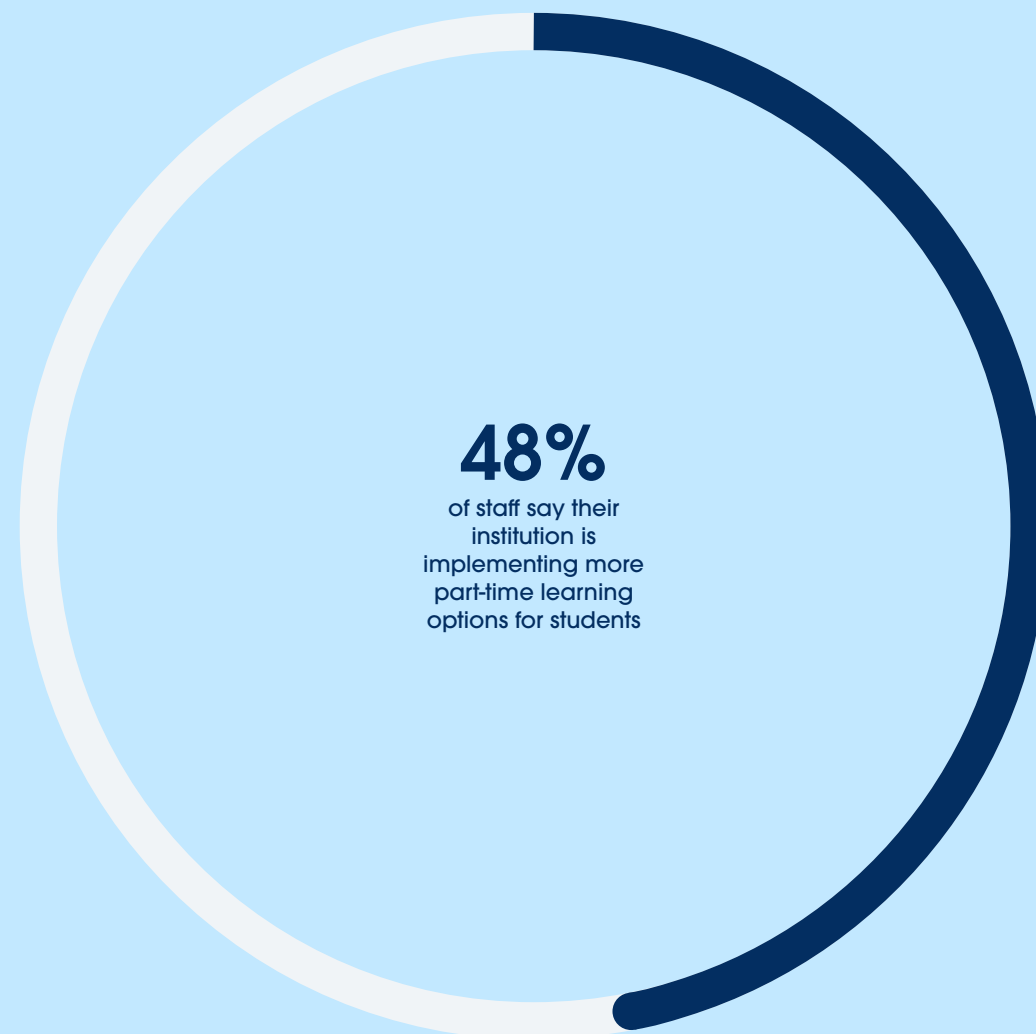
“We do know from research that **mature-age students particularly value the flexibility of online learning**,” Stone says. “Lectures and tutorials are not working as well as they once did. Outside of our selective Group of Eight universities, our institutions need to offer more flexibility, particularly as they try to make their offerings more equitable for native students and people with disabilities.”

Australian students prefer hybrid learning to either all in-person education or online courses—and at a higher rate (52%) than students in other nations, where hybrid preference runs between 38% and 45%. Australia has had success teaching non-traditional students mostly online, while adding some days-or weeks-long in-person seminars and workshops to a course’s mix, Stone says: “Even people who work or care for families usually can get away to learn for a few days. These shorter in-person programs have been well-received by students.”

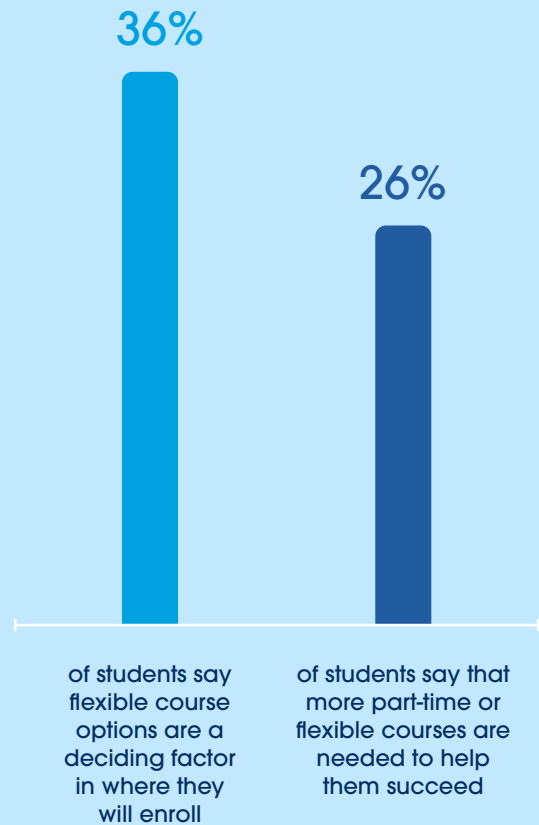
Nearly half of staff surveyed internationally say that their institutions have changed their business models during the pandemic to include more part-time learning options, with Australia leading the way at 64%. **Of the international total, 46% say their institution is offering more shorter-term courses and programs.**

“Those are signs that institutions are taking non-traditional students seriously,” says Truong, from Azusa Pacific. Institutions are seeing the value in making more options available to all types of learners. “They’re also realizing they can become long-term providers for education, as people need it throughout their lives,” he adds.

Institutions are Adopting New Models Focused on Part-Time Learning



Flexible Course Options Impact Student Enrollment and Success



Generally, flexible learning ranks highly among students for several reasons. A considerable number of student prospects (36%) say flexible course options are a deciding factor in where they will enroll. More than a quarter of students say that more part-time or flexible courses are needed to help them succeed.

Many experts see the preference for more learning options as a key takeaway from the report. But a few say that a preference in the survey for just one method of learning, and not a hybrid experience, is telling. More than half of students—**58%**—say they prefer either an **all-on-campus learning situation or all-online courses**.

Hybrid education, while on the rise, is still the most popular method for less than half of students, and those that prefer hybrid classes are far fewer than those that prefer education to be all in one mode or another. Still, the fact that popularity overall for hybrid learning is growing means that many, if not most, institutions, will emphasize a hybrid experience for students moving forward. Those institutions should keep in mind that hybrid situations don't always serve students best.

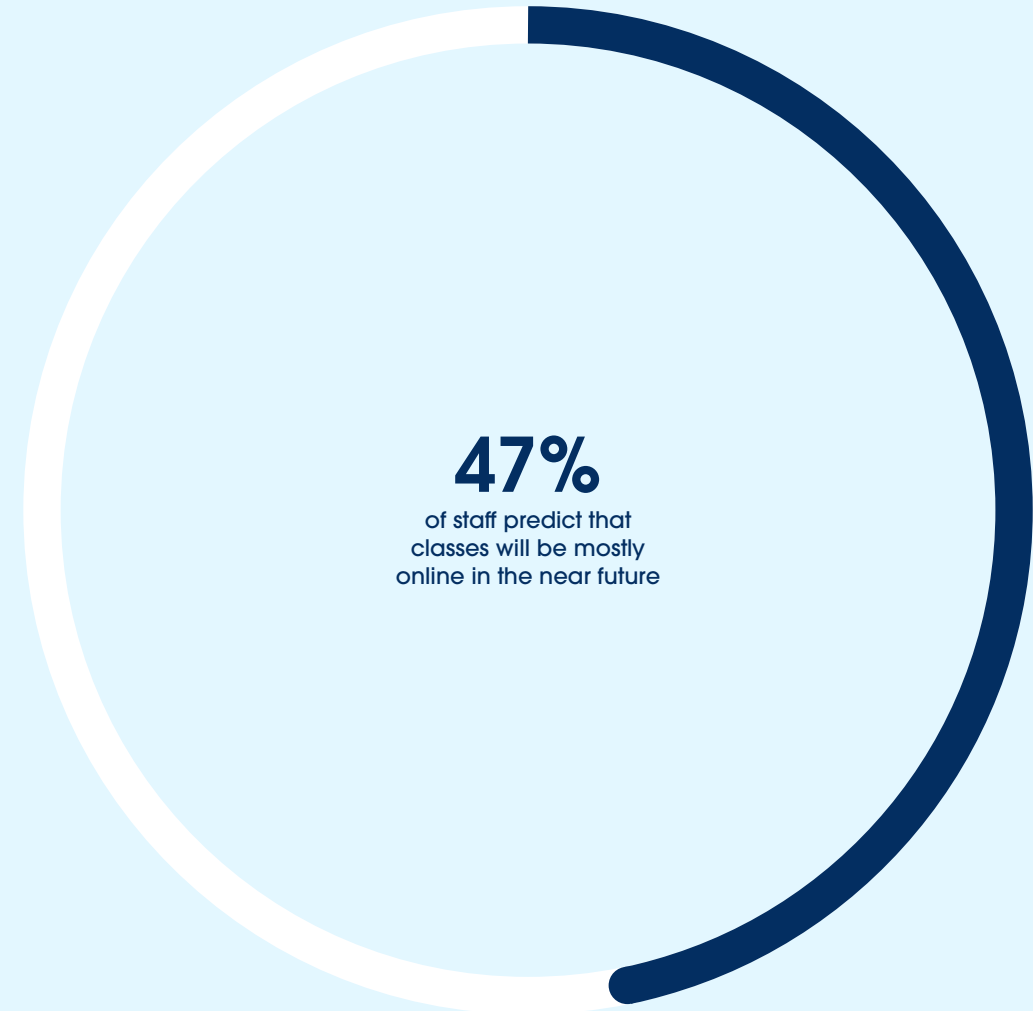
"Some hybrid modalities are the worst to be in, especially for students who do most of their work online," says Truong. "They often don't get the same materials, attention, or levels of service as other students."

Staff Predictions for Online Learning

Stone and Truong, among others, say that online education is growing in quality, especially now that faculty have had more time to gain experience developing online courses or repurposing traditional ones. But only one in eight staff members surveyed prefer online classes; more than half of them prefer hybrid education. Yet, 47% predict that classes will be mostly online.

While some observers question whether the pandemic-era shift in educational models will endure once most campuses have reopened, others say that the shift will continue, though likely not at the same breakneck pace that marked the spring of 2020.

“The genie’s out of the bottle regarding remote coursework and flexible learning,” Truong says. “We won’t go back to the old days once we get past the pandemic. It’s up to institutions to continue to make those options available. Students will hold them to account on that.”



Student Career Pathways Are Top of Mind



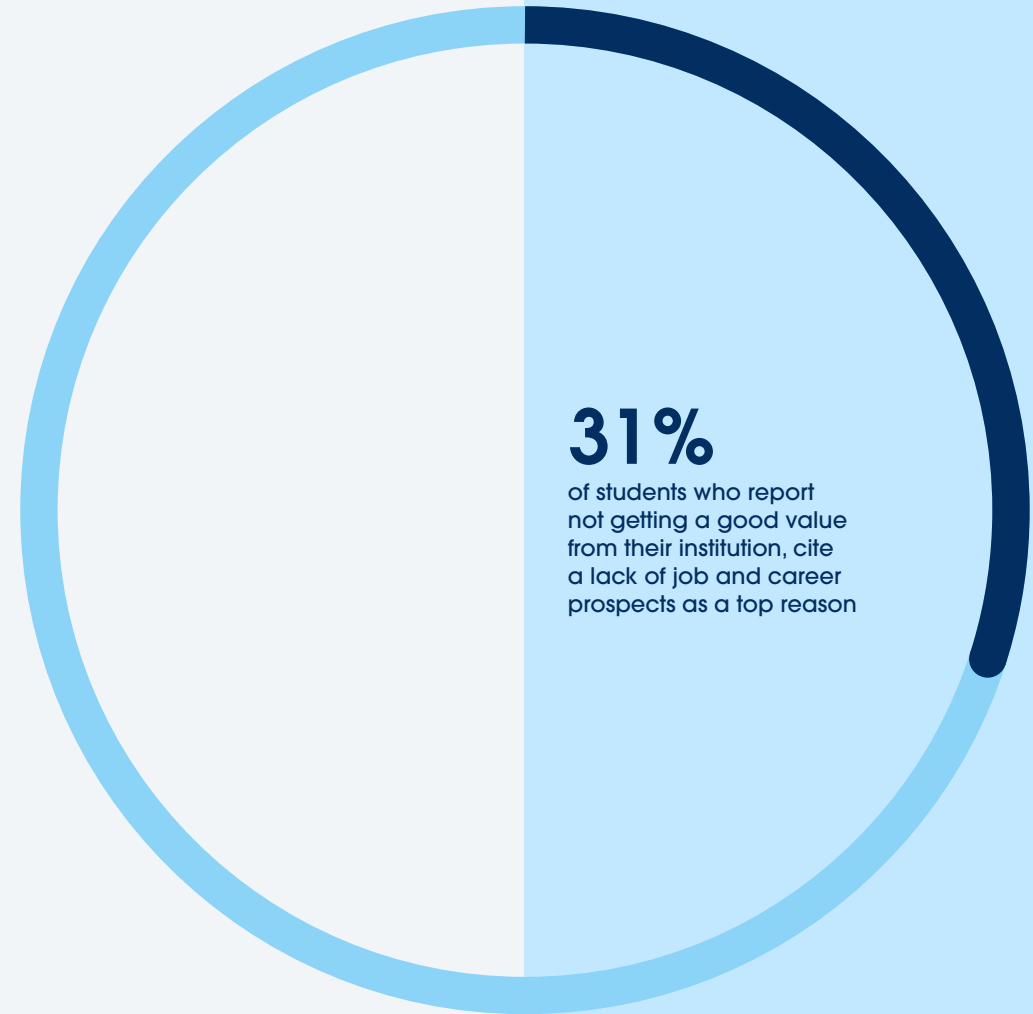
Students Value Career Prospects

Three-quarters of students report getting good value for their tuition. **Yet, concerns about how institutions are preparing them for jobs and careers remain high.** Such concerns will likely continue in the near future.

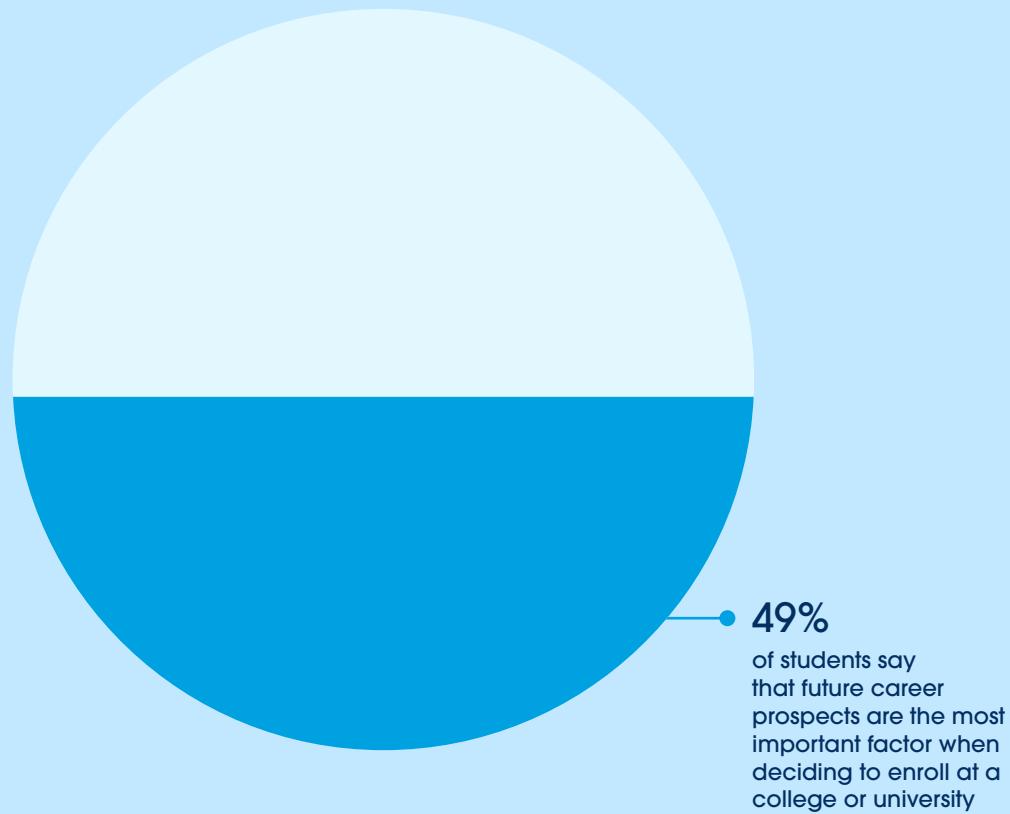
In nations that have high numbers of students with student-loan debt, such as the United Kingdom and the United States, uncertain career prospects have long been a major cause of anxiety.

Career concerns start long before students attend institutions. Job prospects are major factors in their decisions about where to attend. Nearly half of students say that future career prospects represent the most important factor when it comes to selecting an institution, with American students (57%) ranking it most highly and students in the Netherlands (41%) the lowest.

When asked which deciding factor would sway a student to choose a particular higher education institution, respondents ranked most highly an institution's ability to connect students to job opportunities and paying internships.



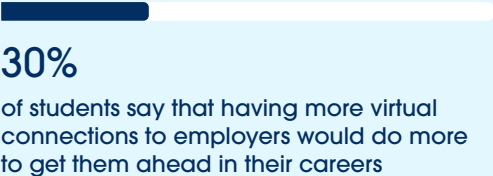
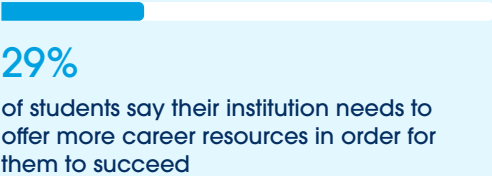
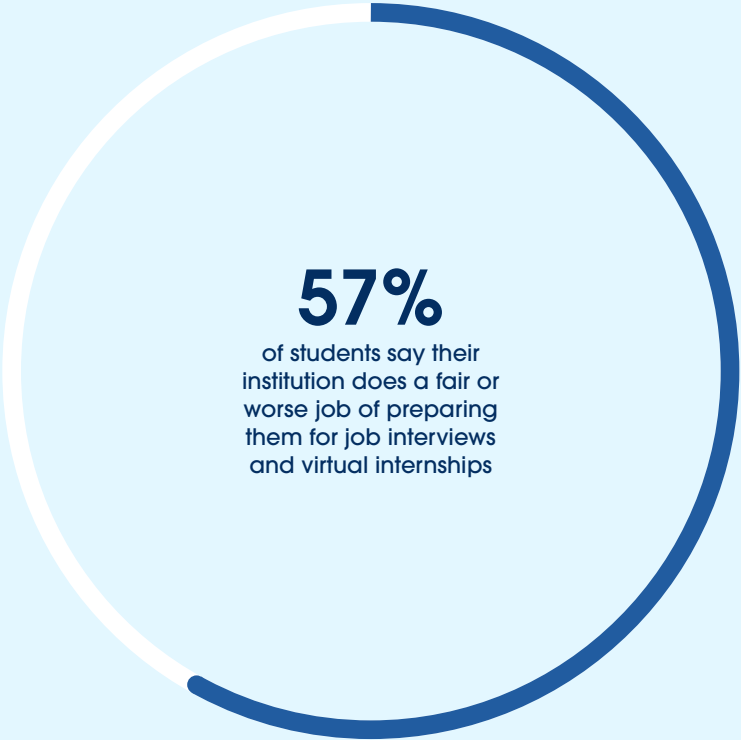
Prospective Students Consider Their Careers in Enrollment Decisions



Experts note that rising anxiety about careers during COVID-19 represents a continuing trend. Some link the prevalence of student career concerns back to the 2008-09 recession. Many national economies had only begun to recover from that jolt when the pandemic hit, says Gilles Bousquet, director of the Center for Interdisciplinary French Studies at the University of Wisconsin.

“In Europe, career services have been on the institutional agenda for the last decade or so,” adds Hans de Wit, from Boston College. “Students started requesting more help. Look at Spain, where there has been an unemployment crisis, or the U.K., with its high level of student debt. Students have real reasons to be concerned about their careers.”

Students Want More Career Resources



This year’s survey results give institutions a guide as to how to work to allay those concerns, he adds: **“More attention needs to be paid to internships, service-learning options, and toward creating more support mechanisms.”**

In last year’s research, 78% of students overall said that their institution helped them achieve their career goals. Yet, many students in this year’s survey say they need them to do more. Nearly one-third of current higher education students who report they are not getting good value from their institution cite a lack of job and career prospects as a reason. Nearly the same number say that institutions need to offer more career resources for them to succeed.

More than half of students (57%) say their institution does a fair or worse job of preparing them for job interviews and virtual internships. A similar number of students, and females in particular, cite the need for more one-on-one virtual interview prep sessions and virtual group workshops at their institutions. **Nearly one in three students say that having more virtual connections to employers would do more to get them ahead in the job world.**

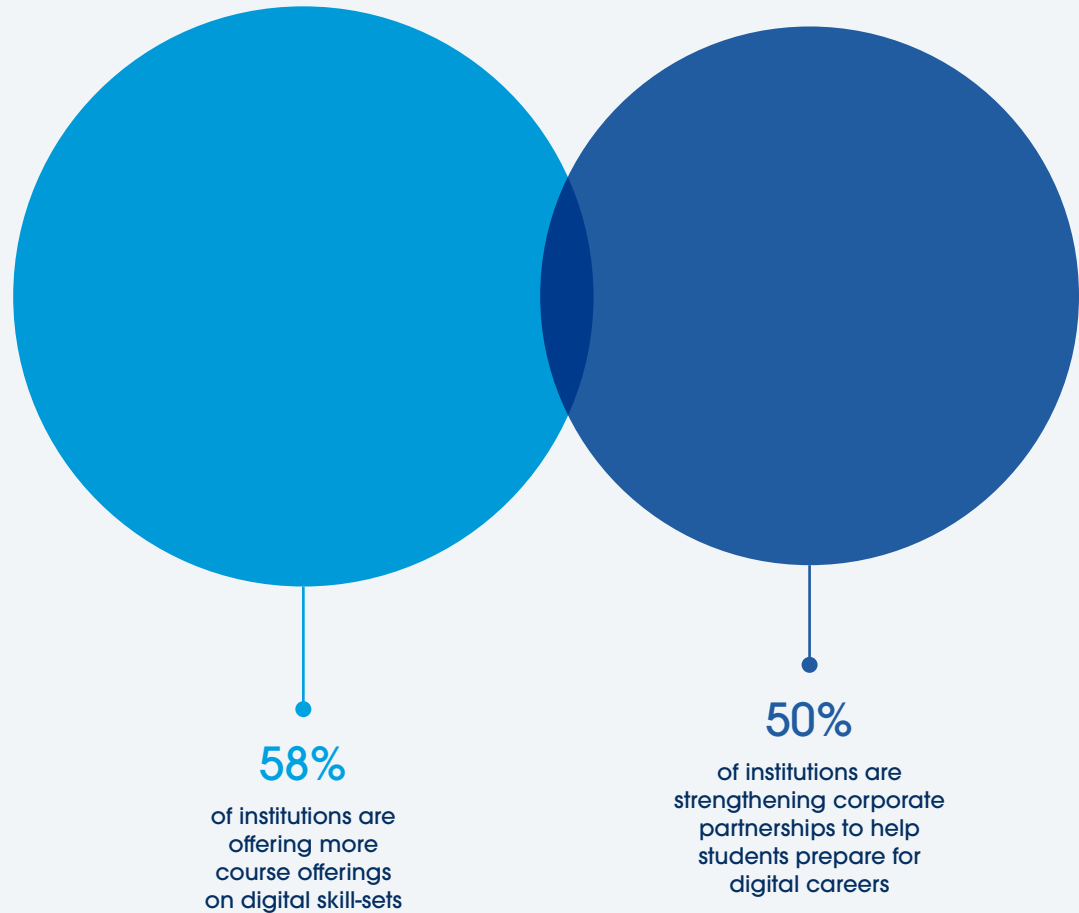


Institutions in many countries will need to respond more strongly to students' career concerns, in part to justify the cost of tuition. "Post-pandemic, students will push us more toward career preparation," says Bousquet. "Is college worth the money? Sure, but there's no question we have to build a stronger bridge not just to employment, but to careers."

In the U.S., where a college degree has become particularly essential to earning a middle-class living, the need for linkage between institutions and potential employers is crucial, though elusive, says Anthony Carnevale, director of the Georgetown University Center for Education and the Workforce.

"It's hell to be young in America, whether you're advantaged or not," he says. "But it's particularly hard for those who are on the bottom. And there's long been a worry that nobody's doing much of anything at the institutional level about it."

Shifts to Support Student Career Prospects

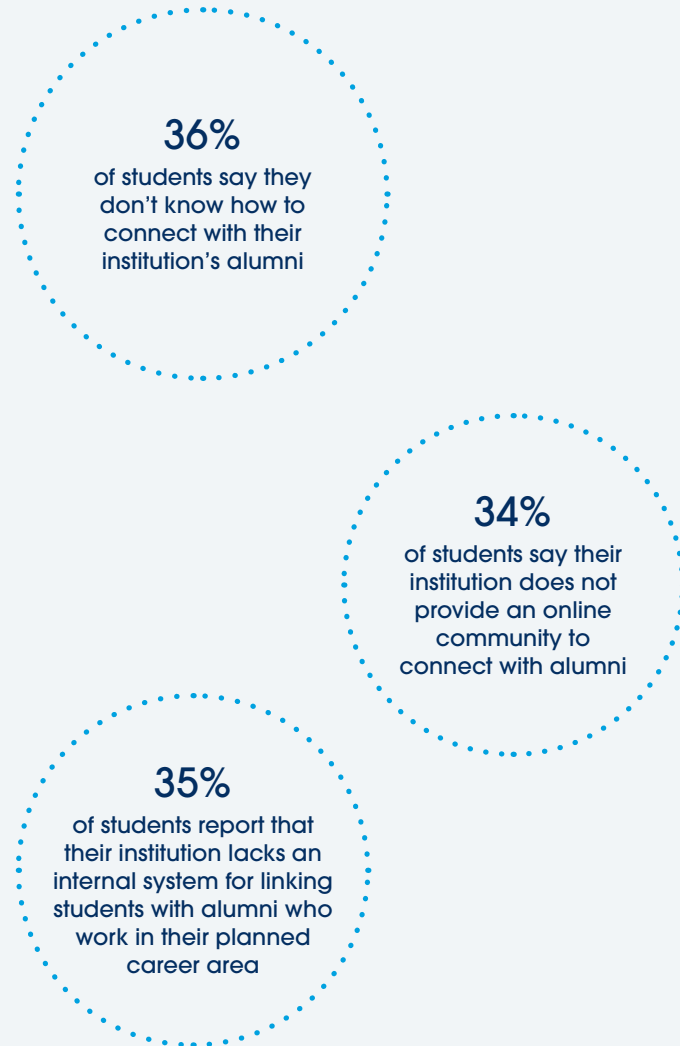


A couple generations ago, [seven in 10 high school grads in the U.S. could begin earning a middle-class living at around age 25](#). Now, about two-thirds of those jobs go solely to college degree holders—and they have to wait until they are in their 30s to begin seeing the same level of income. Rolling recessions in the U.S. have kept younger people, including college graduates, from climbing the economic ladder. And institutions have long distanced themselves from thoroughly embedding career-prep in their academic programs and student services offices.

“Higher education doesn’t have the capability or the resources...There’s no job training system in the U.S.,” Carnevale adds. “[Higher education’s] culture is about Shakespeare, not engineering or job training. This isn’t in their business models.”

This year’s report shows that institutions may be working to correct past shortcomings. **Nearly six in 10 institutions are offering more course offerings on digital skill-sets, and half are strengthening corporate partnerships** to help students prepare for digital careers. Nearly half of institutions are implementing new business models due to the pandemic.

Students are Missing Alumni Connections



Still, even institutions geared toward creating a well-prepared workforce have some work to do. About 40 percent of college students in the U.S. attend two-year institutions, ones that often include job prep in their missions. Even at those institutions, there remains a divide between higher education and vocational training, with students stuck in the middle.

“What most institutions don’t understand is that it’s not enough to hire a digital officer or maintain a careers office. **It’s also a matter of changing your culture,**” says Davis Jenkins, senior research scholar at the Community College Research Center at Columbia University. “How will institutions handle the academics-versus-career tension? It’s largely a class issue. On all levels, we have to get beyond the idea that we have to choose one or the other.”

One thing institutions can do now to improve students’ prospects is leverage a platform that allows them to better mine employment and jobs data, including statistics from the federal government. They can then train staff on how to use data to help match students with opportunities that fit their talents and education, Carnevale says.

Many institutions have become more aware of the issue, he adds, in part because of political pressures regarding how public education dollars are being used. Survey responses from institutional staff seem to confirm this. Four in 10 staff report that they now offer more online career advising to enrollees and current students. A similar percentage of staff say that investing more in partnerships with employers would represent a growth opportunity for institutions.

One time-honored way institutions have helped students get a leg up on a career is linking them with alumni in a particular field. But survey results show that students value those connections least among several categories that deal with impacting their career prospects, post-graduation. Though students at smaller institutions feel more tied to alumni than those at larger ones, few overall say that colleges provide them with those connections.

Survey results suggest that the reasons for building strong alumni/student connections may be dwindling, at least from the student perspective. “Virtual alumni mentorship opportunities” ranked 11th out of 11 factors students see as most vital to building a career. A majority of students across nations feel slightly or not at all connected to their institutions’ past graduates.

Many students (36%) say they don’t know how to connect with their institution’s alumni, while similar percentages report that their institution lacks an internal system for linking students with alumni who work in their planned career area. Also, few report the existence of online communities that match alumni with current students.

Many community college students and so-called non-traditional learners are adults who already maintain ties to employers and career networks. Alumni networks aren't essential to them, some observers say.

Still, some see the low rate of alumni/student linkage as a problem that needs fixing. They cite the value of using data networks to maintain communications with alumni. Detailed analytical tracking can allow institutions to build up their active alumni base and narrow the gap between alumni and students.

Bousquet has worked to reinvigorate the alumni network at his alma mater, Aix-Marseille University, in Provence, France, by using expertise from a tech company to set up a new constituent relations management (CRM) platform. After conducting a study on alumni in France, he learned that helping current students with their career prospects was more important to alumni than giving their alma mater a donation.

“In France, institutions take career development very seriously,” he says, adding that he continues to advocate for stronger alumni/student networks while teaching at Wisconsin. “One of the most valued aspects of matching students and alumni is connecting students to employment, internships, and professional networks.”





But many remain dubious about such initiatives. Institutions in the U.S. “raise money from alumni, but they don’t do much else with them,” Carnevale says. Courting alumni to gain students career help from companies might be a non-starter, at least in the U.S. “Corporations that don’t even want to give employees health insurance won’t put out the money to create internships. The good ones can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars,” he says.

Still, boosting alumni involvement with students should represent a plus for those institutions, Jenkins says: “A lot of former students want to give back—here’s a way they can do it.” Training in careers other than those in healthcare has declined markedly at U.S. community colleges during the past decade, he adds. Institutions that can find ways to re-engage alumni and keep in touch with them can improve the prospects of current students.

Too often programs are misapplied, Jenkins says, or ignore what students really need from higher education. Too many people graduate frustrated by their lack of career prospects. “A lot of people think students want to learn more practical skills, but in reality, what they want are skills offered within a degree program,” Jenkins says. **“Students want both job-ready skills and the ability to earn a degree or to transfer to a four-year degree program. We can’t push for one aspect—careers or academics—over another.”**

Universities Explore New Business Models



COVID-19 may not have created any new reasons for colleges to change how they do business, but the pandemic rapidly accelerated the process. Just in the U.S., the loss of dining hall income, residential and student fees and, in many cases, [tuition has likely cost institutions around \\$183 billion](#). Post-pandemic, institutions will need to do more than assure the safety of students and staff. They'll have to keep an eye on the bottom line as well.

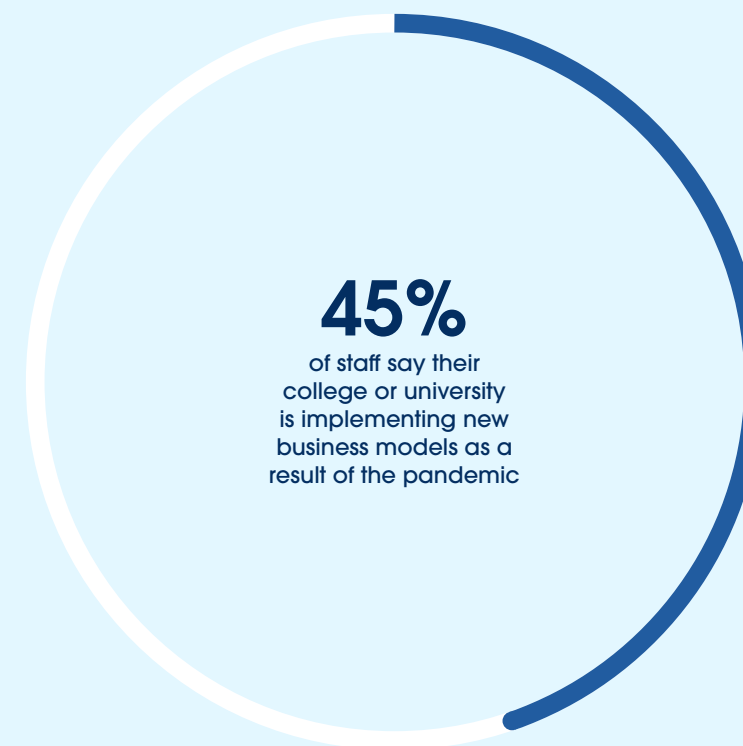
Findings show that many institutions are reworking their business plans to reflect this reality. **Nearly half of staff surveyed globally say their institution is more likely (at 45%) than not (35%) to be implementing a new business model.**

Some institutions, such as Southern New Hampshire University, are creating new models that make on-campus learning more affordable, while Cambridge announced in May that it will roll out 50 online courses over the next five years, with an eye toward increasing learning opportunities. As institutions look ahead, many have made shoring up their value proposition for future workers more of a priority.

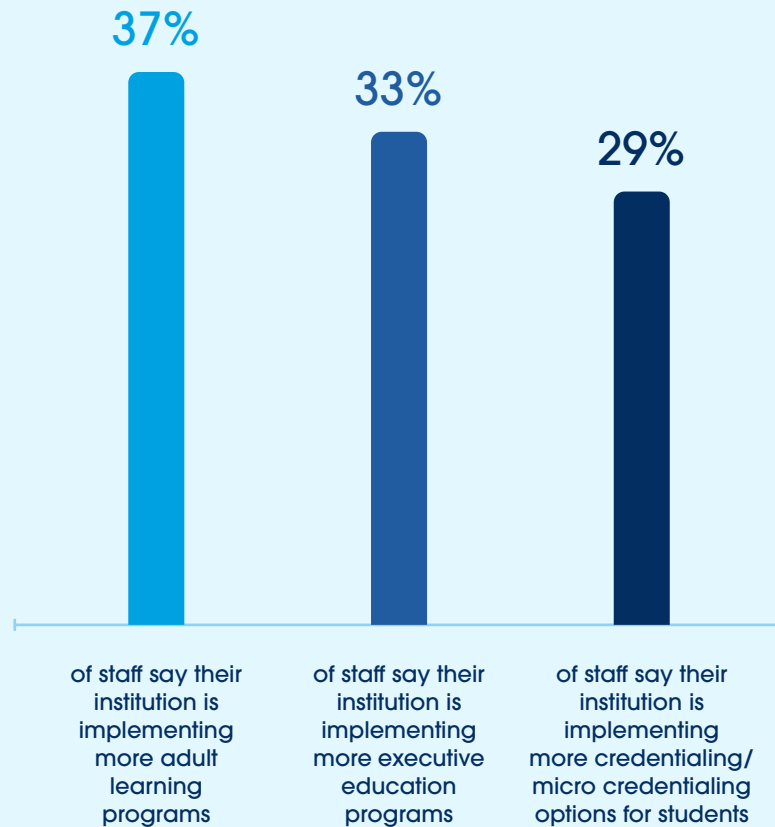
“There will be a **global focus on reskilling and upskilling**,” says Graham Virgo, at Cambridge. “In the U.K. and elsewhere, institutions will need to ensure they are contributing to that in a way that is consistent with their own missions.”

Nearly half of all institutions are implementing new business models due to the pandemic. Seven in 10 staff say their institutions are investing in new growth opportunities, chiefly more online learning options. About half of the total staff surveyed say those business model revisions involve the creation of more part-time learning options or shorter-term courses and programs—changes that reflect more of a concern for non-traditional learners and other working students.

Many Institutions are Implementing New Business Models



New Business Model Trends



“There is quite strong agreement across the sector that **the demand for shorter, more flexible, non-degree programs is rising**,” says Michael Gaebel, from the European University Association. “That represents the most frequent form of online programs in European higher education. There is a push to explore shared definitions and quality assurance as we grow these models.”

Many institutions have also worked to connect more with corporations. Nearly 40% of staff surveyed say they are seeing more partnerships between corporations and higher education. About half say that their institutions are engaging employers to help recruit students by managing corporate relationships on a single platform or by tailoring marketing campaigns to corporate partners—with France and the U.S. courting private companies at the highest rates.

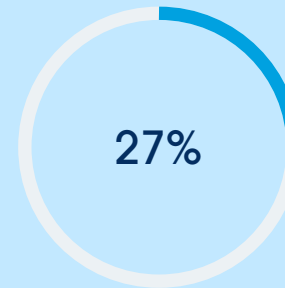
But institutions in some nations may be up against some strong cultural headwaters as they try to develop more relations with private companies. “Since the 1970s, the holy grail in higher education has been more employer involvement,” says Anthony Carnevale, at Georgetown. “But institutions aren’t built that way. Getting employers involved in academic institutions goes against our cultural grain.”

Institutions have continued to upgrade their technology during the pandemic. That includes changing their management structures to include digital experts. More than one-quarter of staff says their institution has opened a position to oversee the digital experience for students and staff. Institutions in France are hiring heads of digital experience, chief innovation officers, and instructional designers at higher rates than those in other nations; U.K. institutions do so at the lowest rate.

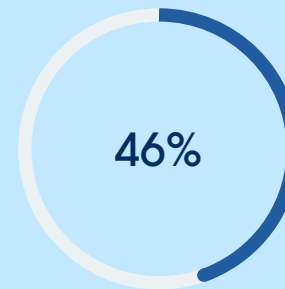
Slightly less than half of those on staff say that more people on campus are involved in making tech decisions, with more than half of those in the Netherlands and U.S. reporting the highest rates of collaborative tech decision making.

The digital competency of staff has become a priority for most institutions as well. More than six in 10 staff members say that the pandemic led their institution to re-evaluate their staff support and service models, as well as invest in training that would allow faculty and staff to do their jobs virtually.

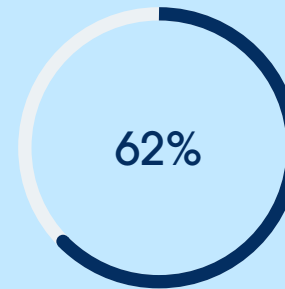
Institutions are Investing in New Technology, Leadership Roles, and Staff Service Models



of staff say their institution has opened a position to oversee the digital experience for students and staff

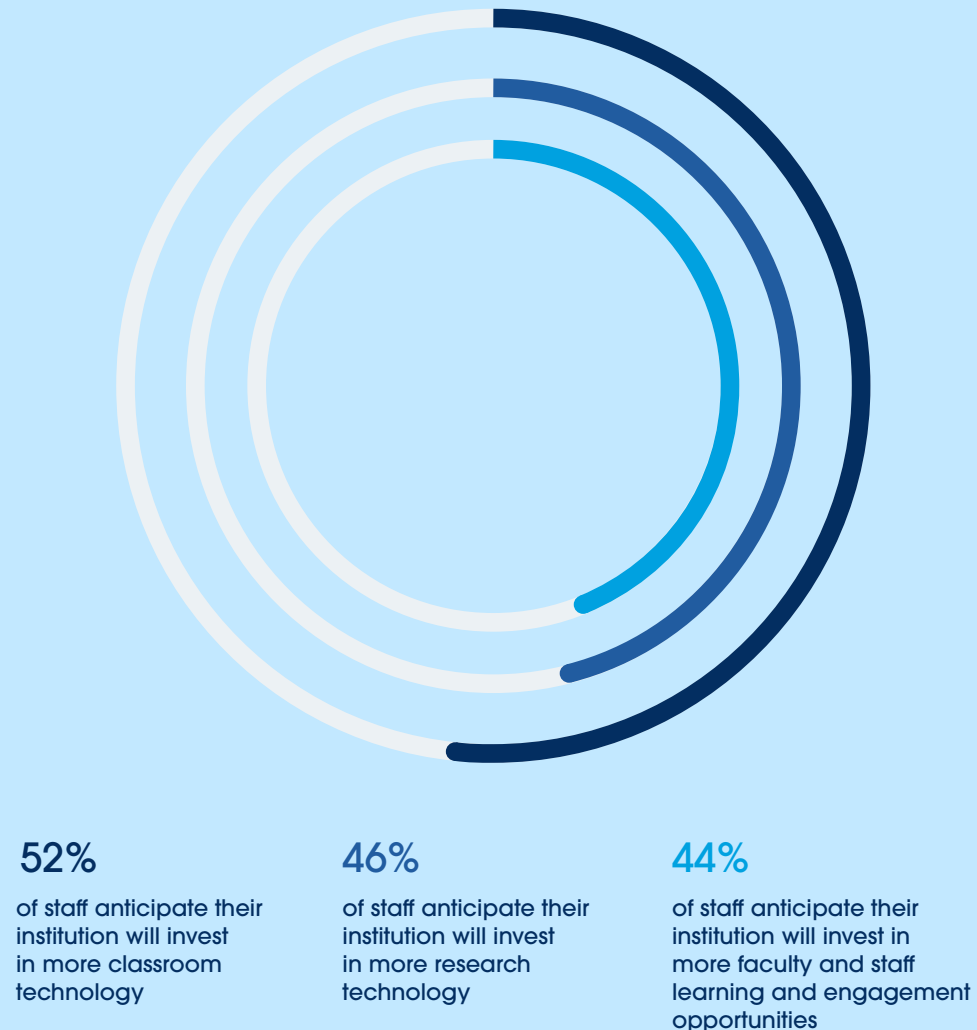


of staff say that more people on campus are involved in making technology decisions



of staff say that the pandemic led their institution to re-evaluate their staff support and service models

Staff Predict More Investments in Technology & Engagement Opportunities



More than half of staff (52%) anticipate their institution will invest in classroom technology, while a slightly lesser number (46%) expect to see more money going toward research tech. A considerable number (44%) anticipate investments in faculty and staff learning and engagement opportunities.

As far as shifts in marketing strategies, nearly half of staff (45%) say there has been an increase in digital advertising since the advent of the pandemic—a sign that enrollment and recruitment offices have changed how they reach out to prospective students. By a wide margin, students report that visiting an institution’s website is the most popular way to learn about it.

Staff say that live chat sessions, virtual events and campus tours, and webinars are the top tactics introduced during the pandemic for reaching and attracting new students. One-third of staff anticipate that virtual campus tours will continue post-pandemic.

Whether it be new sources of revenue or new areas of investment, institutions are evaluating how to create value from anywhere and what internal shifts they need to make to catalyze these changes.

Learner & Institution Success Requires Innovation



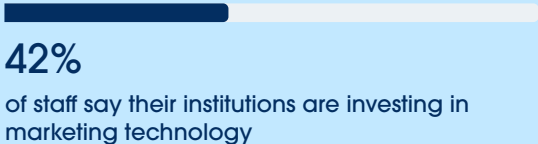
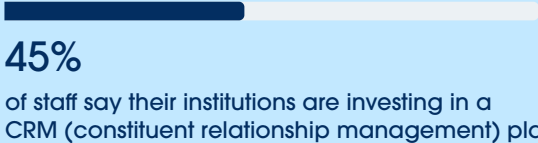
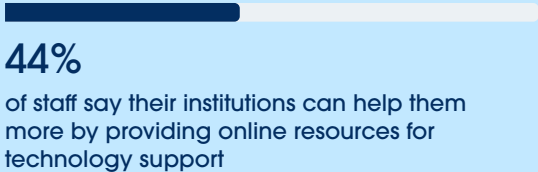
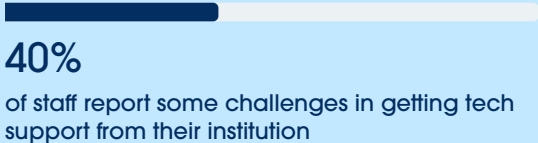
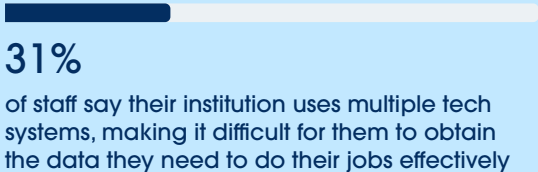
Some institutions could use a tech upgrade, according to observers. Too few of them use integrated systems to communicate with students, creating gaps in services and trust, says Bryan Alexander, from Georgetown. He pointed to trends in annual surveys from the Campus Computing Project, a U.S.-based research group, showing that colleges haven't put their systems to full use over the years.

Around one in three staff say their institution uses multiple tech systems, making it difficult for them to obtain the data they need to do their jobs effectively. Four in 10 staff report some challenges in getting tech support, with nearly half saying that institutions could help them more by supplying that support online.

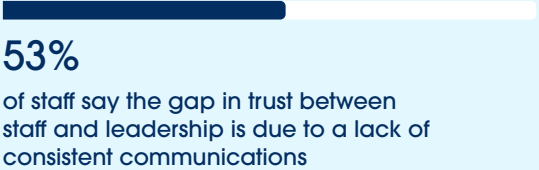
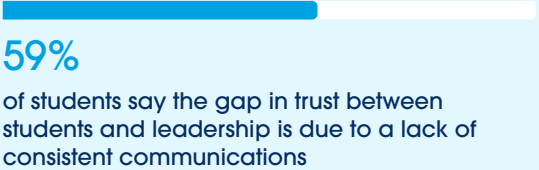
Less than half of institutions (47%) are prioritizing tech integration investments, while 45% are placing more of a premium on CRMs (Constituent Relationship Management Platforms). Only 40% are placing an emphasis on data-analytics technology.

“That’s an area that colleges should really look to improve in,” says Alexander. “There’s a lot of worries out there about virus surveillance and student privacy, but having real-time data analytics can make everyone’s experience safer, as well as increase student success.”

Technology Challenges and Investment Areas



Communications Can Help Build Trust
Within Higher Education Institutions



Despite students' ability generally to master a wide range of digital communication tools, **many surveyed preferred to receive institutional communications via email**, more so than texts, social media, or student-messaging systems. Students may expect institutions to behave differently than the other organizations they engage with online, says Michael Truong, from Azusa Pacific. "Students can go all in when it comes to their personal digital lives but become more cautious when it comes to dealing with a traditional entity," such as higher-education institutions, he says. "Email likely seems safest to them."

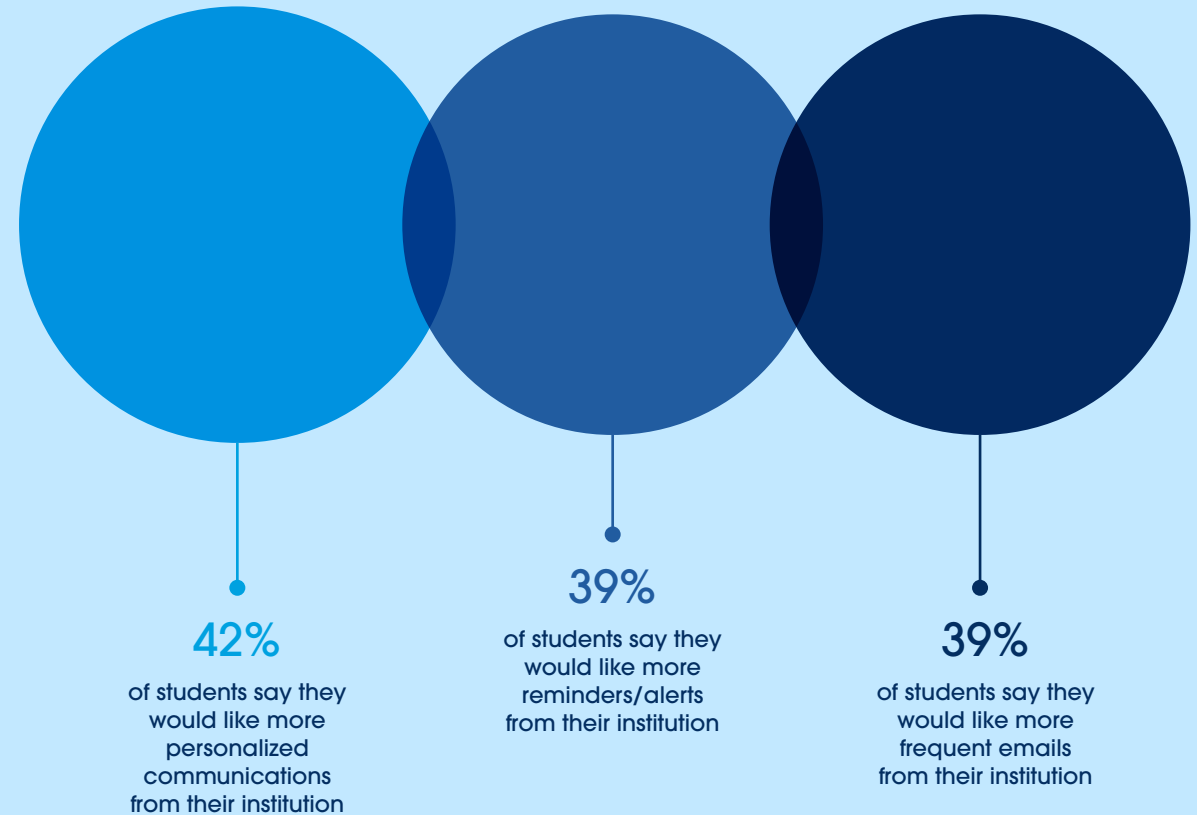
Institutional communications and trust remain an issue for students. Though most students have confidence in their institutions, around 40% say a trust gap exists between campus officials and students and between leaders and staff—about the same as in last year's survey. But a majority of students and staff believe their campuses will be prepared and safe for reopening in the fall.

Nearly six in 10 students say the gap in trust between students and institution leaders is due to a lack of consistent communications; about half of staff agree. Slightly less than half of them say they are somewhat satisfied with institutions' methods of connection. More than half of staff members say they will rely on social media to better engage with students in the coming fall semester.

Nine in 10 students want institutions to communicate with them as often or more, and via email, personalized communications and alerts. Around four in 10 say they'd like communications to be more personalized, while 25% say they'd like a more personalized college experience overall.

Some responses show a need for specific improvements regarding student support and advising. One quarter of students say it is difficult for them to make advising appointments—this at a time when, a majority of staff reports, students are seeking out more appointments.

Top Three Ways Universities Can Improve Student Communications



Communication Channels Staff Say are Most Effective to Engage Alumni and Secure Major Gifts



These trends don't only impact current students. The ways in which advancement offices communicate changed during the pandemic as well. Major gifts officers and others necessarily replaced face-to-face encounters with videoconferencing and other digital tools to reach out to alumni and donors.

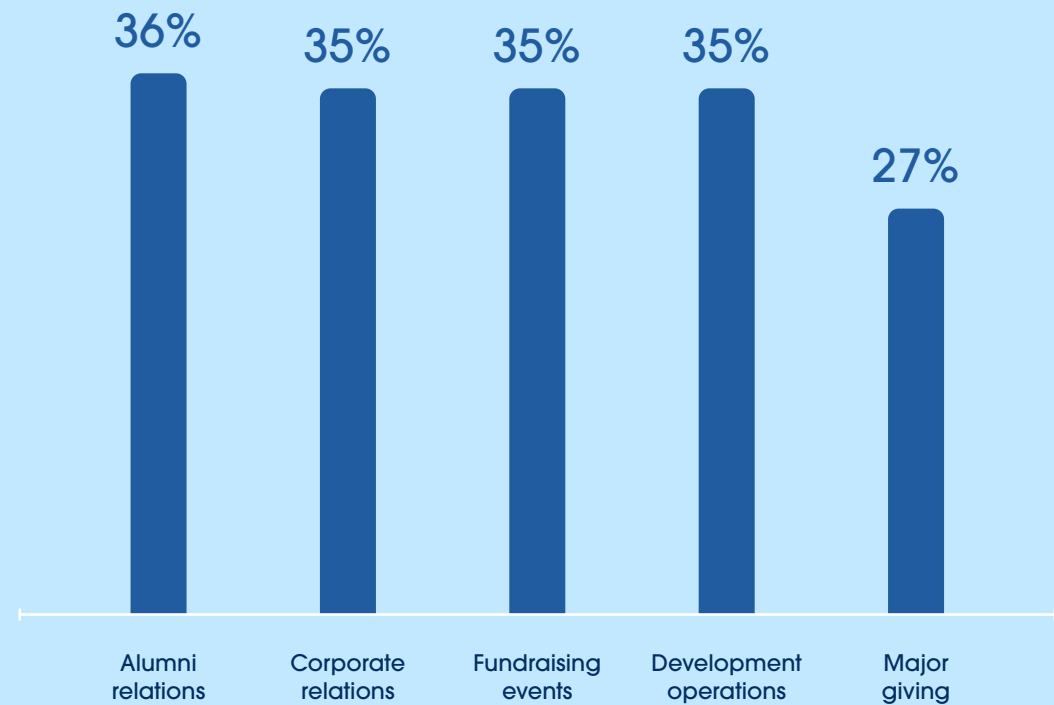
More than half of staff members say that email represents the most effective channel for communicating with alumni and others. Videoconferencing was rated as the highest for soliciting gifts during the pandemic, followed by email and social media. Fundraisers see those channels as the most important ones, post-pandemic.

"Obviously, we can't travel during the pandemic. So, we've done a lot more to reach people in other ways," says Monique Dozier, vice president for institutional advancement at Morehouse College. Most advancement offices had already begun regularly putting tech tools to work before COVID-19 struck. "I wouldn't say we've changed. We're more apt to complement the work we do with more virtual engagement," Dozier says.

Despite the seeming disconnect between alumni and current students, 36% of staff say that alumni relations have become more operationally efficient during the pandemic. U.S. staff reported gains in efficiency regarding alumni relations at the highest rate (42%) and the Netherlands the lowest (21%). Mentioned less often were corporate relations, fundraising events, development operations (all at 35%), and major giving (27%).

“Major gifts will still require in-person contact and we’ll do on-campus events,” says Dozier. “We’ll definitely re-evaluate in-person events for their strategic relevancy. But when we come out of COVID, we’ll continue to wrap our strategies around data and an integrated approach. That’s what has worked for us, both before and during the pandemic.”

Greatest Operational Efficiency Gains for Advancement Teams Compared to Before the Pandemic



Conclusion



As many higher education institutions make plans to return to campus-based education this fall, they should keep in mind that human societies have responded to global events like pandemics in unpredictable ways. Achieving a “new normal” based on what was once merely the higher-education normal may prove difficult.

That said, there is a unique opportunity to take this time to reimagine the future of education. While higher education institutions had to make dramatic, sudden shifts to support students, faculty and staff, many are looking to turn those fast pivots into long-term strategies.





The report's survey results indicated that institutions are already taking matters of mental health and wellbeing services, flexible learning and career prospects seriously. They are adapting existing programs, or building new offerings, to better support both traditional and non-traditional learners, faculty, staff and the broader community.

Institutions are investing in the digital infrastructure to meet these evolving needs as well. They continue to automate and otherwise modernize their technologies, with many hiring managers charged with improving the digital experience. Institutions now include more people in their technology decision-making processes.

As institutions plot a course through the pandemic and beyond, they are looking to weave technological innovations throughout a wide variety of campus functions— everything from admissions and alumni relations to communications and enrollment—and around larger strategies designed to help them and their students succeed.

Appendix



Methodology

Sample

Qualified respondents were:


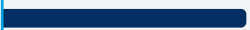



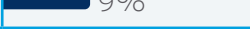
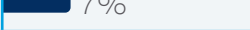
- Students: adults age 18-plus, who are full-time or part-time students enrolled in a higher education institution
- Staff: adults age 18-plus, who are employed full-time or part-time at a higher education institution (not including trade/vocational schools), and are in a faculty or management/leadership role





Data Collection

A total of n=2,204 interviews were collected from February 18, 2021 to March 25, 2021 via an online quantitative survey in 10 countries. The questionnaire was developed by Ipsos, in collaboration with Salesforce.org and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Programming logic/branching was included where appropriate depending on the audience. On average, it took 11 minutes to complete.

Country	Students	Staff
United States	177	176
United Kingdom	175	175
Netherlands	175	175
France	175	175
Spain	175	175
Australia	175	175
Nordics	76	25
Norway	25	10
Denmark	15	0
Sweden	22	0
Finland	14	15
Total	1128 Students	1076 Staff
2204 Total Respondents		

Institution Type (Students)

Type of Institution	Total	US	UK	NL	FR	ES	AU	NORDIC
	Base: n= 1128	177	175	175	175	175	175	76*
Undergraduate public college / university	 26%	20%	27%	26%	27%	27%	27%	29%
Community college / colleges / further education	 25%	17%↓	26%	26%	26%	26%	26%	26%
Online university	 16%	23%↑	15%	15%	13%	15%	15%	12%
Graduate school (e.g., MA/MBA/MsC/PhD/MD programs)	 14%	25%	13%	13%	13%	13%	8%↓	12%
Undergraduate private college / university	 9%	11%	11%	8%	5%↓	9%	11%	7%
Trade / vocational school	 7%	5%	5%	7%	9%	9%	9%	8%
Grande école & state schools	 4%	0%↓	4%	5%	8%↑	2%	4%	7%

Number of Students	Total	US	UK	NL	FR	ES	AU	NORDIC
	Base: n= 1128	177	175	175	175	175	175	76*
Less than 3,000	 24%	12%↓	25%	13%↓	36%↑	29%	26%	25%
3,000 to under 10,000	 41%	47%	38%	44%	41%	44%	35%	45%
10,000 to under 30,000	 24%	31%	29%	34%↑	14%↓	17%↓	21%	22%
30,000 or more	 11%	11%	9%	9%	9%	10%	18%↑	7%

Base: Total students; *Caution: Small base (<100)

↑/↓ indicates individual country is significantly higher or lower than global total at 95% confidence level

Student Characteristics

Full-time / Part-time Student	Total	US	UK	NL	FR	ES	AU	NORDIC
	Base: n= 1128	177	175	175	175	175	175	76*
Full-time student	<div><div></div></div> 72%	65%↓	82%↑	72%	85%↑	58%↓	70%	75%
Part-time student	<div><div></div></div> 28%	35%↑	18%↓	28%	15%↓	42%↑	30%	25%

Additional Demographic Information	Total	US	UK	NL	FR	ES	AU	NORDIC
	Base: n= 1128	177	175	175	175	175	175	76*
I work at a job full-time or part time	<div><div></div></div> 41%	61%↑	34%	43%	30%↓	39%	40%	43%
I am among the first generation in my family to attend a college or university	<div><div></div></div> 29%	19%↓	38%↑	32%	31%	30%	24%	28%
I was born outside of the country	<div><div></div></div> 17%	15%	17%	21%	9%↓	15%	26%↑	21%
I am a mother/father	<div><div></div></div> 15%	28%↑	10%	12%	9%	12%	21%↑	9%
I am an international student	<div><div></div></div> 14%	12%	15%	22%↑	9%	13%	11%	17%
I am a caretaker for a sick or elderly loved one	<div><div></div></div> 8%	8%	8%	11%	7%	6%	6%	12%
None of these	<div><div></div></div> 25%	24%	21%	15%↓	34%↑	33%↑	26%	21%

Base: Total students; *Caution: Small base (<100)
 ↑/↓ indicates individual country is significantly higher or lower than global total at 95% confidence level

Institution Type (Staff)

Type of Institution	Total	US	UK	NL	FR	ES	AU	NORDIC
Base: n=	1076	176	175	175	175	175	175	25**
Public college / university	<div><div></div> 39%</div>	41%	44%	19%↓	42%	47%↑	41%	36%
Community college / colleges / further education	<div><div></div> 25%</div>	12%↓	21%	52%↑	23%	26%	15%↓	36%
Private college / university	<div><div></div> 21%</div>	39%↑	18%	22%	6%↓	17%	25%	20%
Grande école & state schools	<div><div></div> 11%</div>	0%↓	12%	3%↓	26%↑	9%	18%↑	0%
Online University	<div><div></div> 4%</div>	8%↑	5%	5%	3%	2%	2%	8%

Number of Students	Total	US	UK	NL	FR	ES	AU	NORDIC
Base: n=	1076	176	175	175	175	175	175	25**
Less than 3,000	<div><div></div> 25%</div>	19%	26%	16%↓	32%↑	34%↑	17%↓	39%
3,000 to under 10,000	<div><div></div> 41%</div>	41%	41%	52%↑	34%↓	43%	37%	30%
10,000 to under 30,000	<div><div></div> 25%</div>	28%	23%	26%	27%	13%↓	35%↑	26%
30,000 or more	<div><div></div> 9%</div>	12%	10%	5%	7%	9%	11%	4%

Base: Total staff; **Caution: Small base (<30)

↑/↓ indicates individual country is significantly higher or lower than global total at 95% confidence level

