2019 National Student Satisfaction and Priorities Report

A focus on trends over the past 10 years

Based on 856 four-year and two-year public and private institutions using the RNL Satisfaction-Priorities Surveys

STUDENT SUCCESS

How have changes in the student experience impacted student satisfaction?

Higher education has seen significant changes in the student experience in the past 10 years. For the past decade, everything from student attitudes about college to the technology they use every day has impacted their satisfaction with, and perception of, the college experience.

Is college "worth it?"

There has been more media emphasis than ever on the cost to attend college, student debt, which majors are more "valuable," and even a general question of whether college is worth the cost. Students and families—not to mention state and federal governments—demand more data and accountability on student outcomes, career placement, and other results that show the ROI of a college education.

The mobile revolution

The first iPhone launched in 2007, and in the 12 years since, smartphones have become a daily tool for students, parents, and campus professionals. This ability to be always connected and online has completely changed student behavior and expectations.

Engaging with the campus

Technology has also changed the nature of how students engage with the campus. "Campus run-around" now often has an online component as students deal with navigating websites and finding information, as well as faculty availability and more communication via email, texting, social media, and chat.

Nontraditional students are the new tradition

Enrollment in college by those older than 25 has been steadily increasing in recent decades. It increased by 11 percent between 2006 and 2016.[1] More than 7 million students ages 25 and older are attending college in fall 2019, according to federal data.[2] More and more students are also taking at least some of their classes online as well.

Greater concerns about student safety

The safety and security of college students has also become a bigger issue in the last 10 years, and institutions are under greater scrutiny and have greater expectations of making college safer for students.

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[1]National Center for Education Statistics (2019). *Fast facts*. http://nces.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=98

[2]National Center for Education Statistics (2019). *Fast facts: Back to school statistics*. https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=372

How student satisfaction assessment helps campuses deliver the best student experience

Staying aware of student satisfaction at both the campus and national levels helps campuses to stay ahead of student expectations and where institutions are meeting or failing to meet those expectations. Being a student-centered institution can help with student success efforts to keep students enrolled and with achieving graduation outcomes. Many institutions regularly assess student satisfaction and are working to improve the student experience. Campuses that do not are not just standing still, they are falling behind, as other campuses proactively work to respond in high priority areas.

Regularly assessing student satisfaction, working to gain a deeper understanding of how best to respond, taking action to change policies, procedures, or perceptions for students on campus, and actively communicating about the changes that have been made before surveying students again, as well as continuing the process regularly, helps campuses to stay on top of their student priorities and to be best positioned for student success as well as institutional success in these difficult times.

This report focuses on the 10-year trends

This report is a comparison of student satisfaction, separated by 10 years. Each data set includes student responses from three academic years: fall 2006 through spring 2009 compared with fall 2016 through spring 2019. Six different student populations are reflected in these comparisons:

- Students attending four-year private institutions
- Students attending four-year public institutions
- Students attending community colleges
- Adult undergraduate students at both four-year publics and privates
- Graduate students at both four-year publics and privates
- Online learners at four-year and two-year institutions

SOURCE OF THE DATA

Number of student records:

DATA SETS	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS	COMMUNITY COLLEGES	ADULT UNDERGRADS	GRADUATE STUDENTS	ONLINE LEARNERS
2006–09	253,294	84,638	184,145	42,285	34,273	68,593
2016–19	173,757	70,712	143,390	24,702	32,715	119,112

Number of institutions:

DATA SETS	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS	COMMUNITY COLLEGES	ADULT UNDERGRADS	GRADUATE STUDENTS	ONLINE LEARNERS
2006–09	368	87	222	215	215	87
2016–19	297	69	172	152	152	166

Note: RNL is not able to identify the number of adult undergrad and graduate schools separately.

It is interesting to note the substantial increase in the number of online learner institutions and student records over the past 10 years.

THE RNL SATISFACTION-PRIORITIES SURVEYS

Identify student satisfaction within the context of student expectations.

History

Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI)—available since 1994

Adult Student Priorities Survey (ASPS)—available since 2000

Priorities Survey for Online Learners (PSOL)—available since 2001

Surveys completed

6,578,882
since 1994

4,073,031
since 2009 (the span of this report)

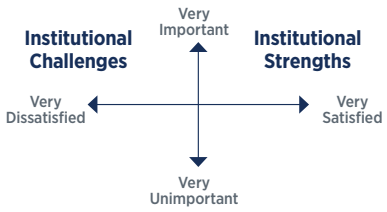
Institutions administering

2,837
since 1994

2,134
since 2009 (the span of this report)

How it's used

Measures student satisfaction and priorities to identify strengths and challenges; typically administered every other year.



PRIMARY CHALLENGES
(**high** importance, **low** satisfaction)

Top priorities for planning and improving the student experience

STRENGTHS
(**high** importance, **high** satisfaction)

Top priorities to communicate to prospective and current students

Student satisfaction informs campus activities in these four areas:

1. Student Success Efforts
2. Strategic Planning
3. Accreditation Documentation
4. Recruitment Marketing Messaging

WHY DOES STUDENT SATISFACTION MATTER?

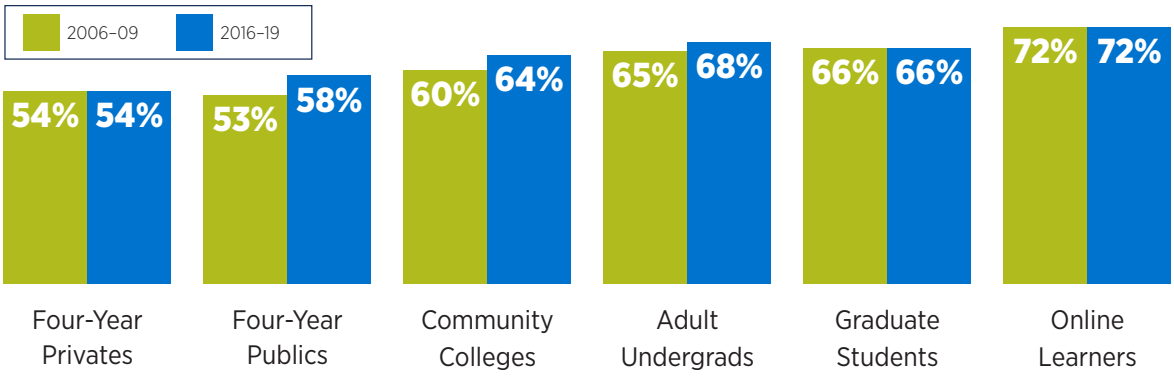
Student satisfaction has been positively linked to:

- **Individual student retention**
- **Annual giving**
- **College completion rates**

SUMMARY SATISFACTION SCORES ACROSS TIME AND STUDENT POPULATIONS

Student Satisfaction

Percentage of students who are satisfied or very satisfied



Student satisfaction has increased for students at four-year publics, community colleges, and adult undergrads. Student satisfaction has remained the same for students at four-year privates as well as for graduate students and online learners.

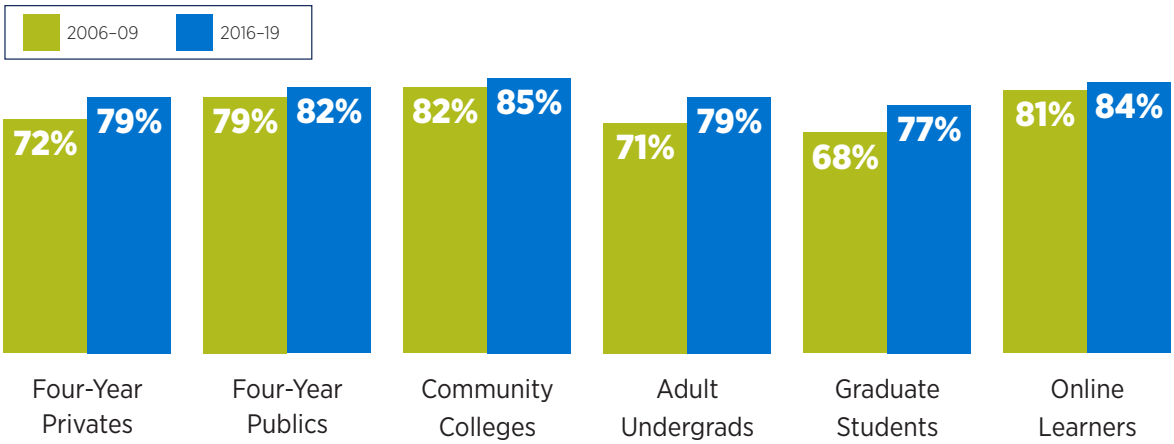
SUMMARY SATISFACTION TAKEAWAYS

- Summary satisfaction scores provide a bottom-line view of the student experience.
- Summary satisfaction scores vary for different demographic subpopulations (as documented in the 2018 National Student Satisfaction and Priorities Report available at **RuffaloNL.com/Satisfaction2018**).
- Individual campuses are able to move the needle on their summary satisfaction scores based on the actions they take to celebrate their institutional strengths and the way they respond to their institutional challenges.

ENROLLMENT FACTORS

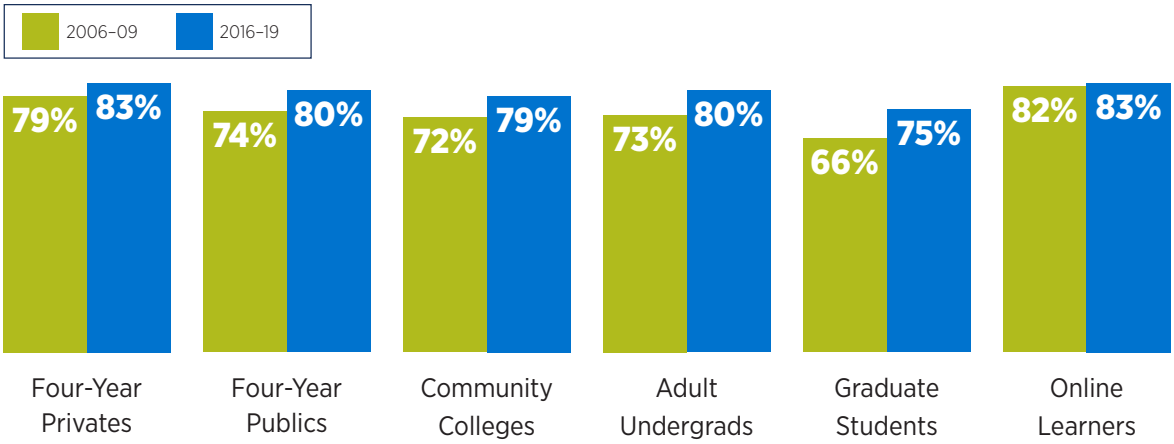
The following charts show the importance of key factors in a student's decision to enroll.

Enrollment Factor: Cost



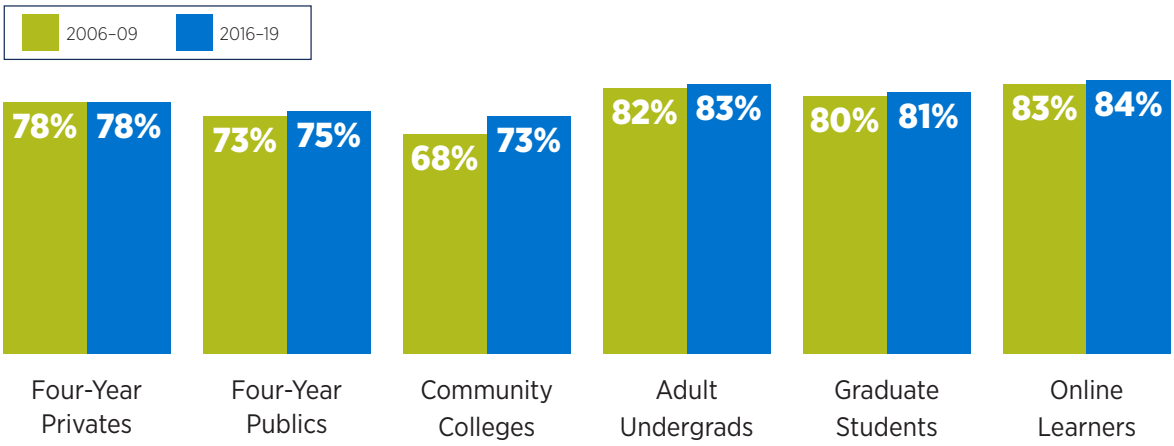
The importance of cost as an enrollment factor has increased for all six populations.

Enrollment Factor: Financial Aid



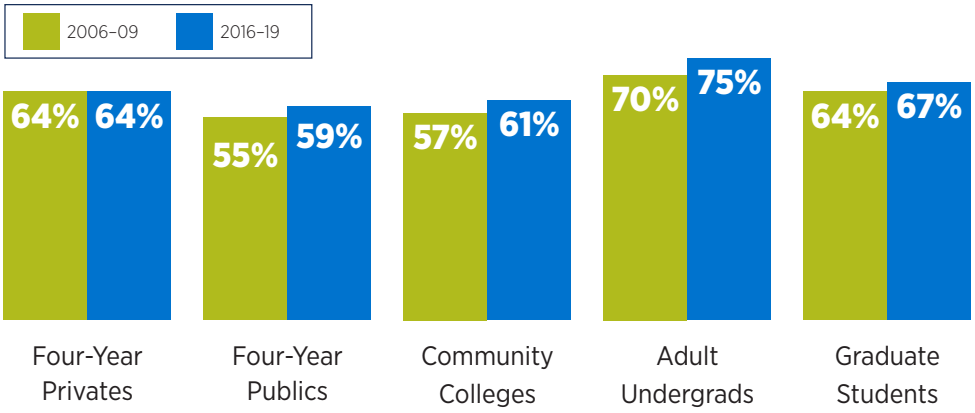
The importance of financial aid as an enrollment factor has increased for all six populations, with the biggest jumps for graduate students, adult undergraduates, students at community colleges, and students at four-year publics.

Enrollment Factor: Academic Reputation



The perception of academic reputation has held steady in importance for the majority of populations, with a notable increase for community colleges.

Enrollment Factor: Personalized Attention Prior To Enrollment



Note: this item is not asked for online learners

The importance of personalized attention has increased for all populations except students at four-year privates, where it has remained consistent.

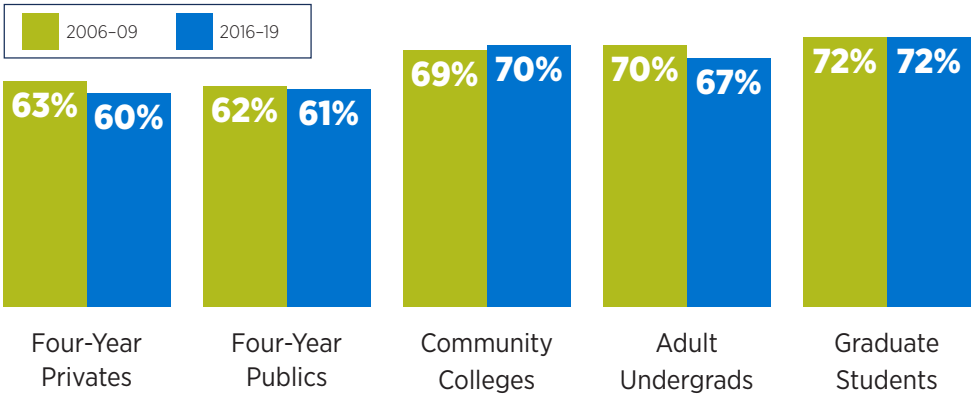
ENROLLMENT FACTOR TAKEAWAYS

- It is important for campuses to monitor institutional enrollment factors to understand the reasons that influence why students are selecting their institution. This can inform messaging to attract new students to the campus.
- When financial aid is of greater importance than the institution's academic reputation, students may be vulnerable for re-enrollment if financial aid awards are not matched for their second or third year.
- Celebrating academic-related, student-identified strengths can help to reinforce perceptions of the institutional academic reputation for enrollment and re-enrollment.
- Expectations related to personalized attention prior to enrollment can be addressed with technology support of personalization at scale.

INSTITUTIONAL CHOICE SHIFTS OVER TIME

Attending First-Choice Institution

This is the percentage of students who indicate that they are attending their first-choice institution.



Note: this item is not asked for online learners

Four-year privates and adult undergrads have slight drops in the percentage of students who indicate they are attending their first-choice institution. The other groups have remained consistent or similar.

The percentage of students attending their first-choice institution is an important percentage to monitor because, as documented in the *2018 National Student Satisfaction and Priorities Report*, students who indicate that they are attending their first-choice institution are more likely to reflect higher summary satisfaction scores.

INSTITUTIONAL CHOICE TAKEAWAYS

- Similar to enrollment factors, it is important for institutions to monitor the percentage of students who indicate that they are attending their first-choice institution.
- Students in urban locations or in locations with higher numbers of education options may perceive institutions as second or third choices more frequently compared to students in markets with fewer local options, who may see those institutions as first-choice campuses or THE local choice.
- Institutions can intentionally position themselves as a first-choice institution during the recruitment process and also emphasize fit for students after enrollment to maintain or improve first-choice perceptions.

OBSERVATIONS ON KEY ITEM SHIFTS OVER TIME

Note:

- **Percentages in green** = more than a 5 percent positive shift.
- **Percentages in red** = a negative shift.
- Not all items are captured on all survey versions, so results are only presented where data has been collected.

Admissions and financial aid

Student perceptions of the institution often begin with their interaction with the admissions staff and the financial aid awards. Expectations have risen for one and remained steady in the second.

Admissions counselors respond to prospective students' unique needs and requests.

IMPORTANCE	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS	COMMUNITY COLLEGES	ADULT UNDERGRADS	GRADUATE STUDENTS
2006–09	73%	73%	73%	83%	81%
2016–19	77%	79%	79%	88%	86%
Shift	4%	6%	6%	5%	5%

SATISFACTION	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS	COMMUNITY COLLEGES	ADULT UNDERGRADS	GRADUATE STUDENTS
2006–09	47%	41%	48%	61%	62%
2016–19	57%	58%	62%	74%	73%
Shift	10%	17%	14%	13%	11%

Students at four-year publics and community colleges reflect the biggest improvements in satisfaction scores on this item. The expectations have also increased in all sectors on this item.

Adequate financial aid is available for most students.

IMPORTANCE	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS	COMMUNITY COLLEGES	ADULT UNDERGRADS	GRADUATE STUDENTS	ONLINE LEARNERS
2006–09	85%	84%	80%	87%	85%	85%
2016–19	85%	84%	83%	88%	88%	87%
Shift	0%	0%	3%	1%	3%	2%

SATISFACTION	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS	COMMUNITY COLLEGES	ADULT UNDERGRADS	GRADUATE STUDENTS	ONLINE LEARNERS
2006–09	40%	38%	51%	53%	55%	65%
2016–19	45%	46%	60%	63%	59%	68%
Shift	5%	8%	9%	10%	4%	3%

While the importance scores have not risen from their already high levels, four-year privates, publics, community colleges, and adult undergrads reflect gains in satisfaction on this item.

85% of parents say that financing a college education will be very difficult or somewhat difficult.

Source: *2019 Parents' Role in the College Process Report*, available at **RuffaloNL.com/Parents2019**

ADMISSIONS AND FINANCIAL AID TAKEAWAYS

- Admissions offices have the opportunity to use technology to their advantage to actively communicate with students regularly and personally to build relationships and improve the likelihood of students enrolling.
- Targeting financial aid awards through financial aid leveraging and personalized packages to attract the right class continue to be critical steps in strategic enrollment planning.
- Campuses need to help students understand the true cost of attending an institution and affordability, as well as the impact of student loans on future student debt.

Academic experience

The core of the student experience is the items related to their academic experience with the institution. These are often among the most important items to students. Expectations have remained high in these areas, with satisfaction shifts improving in some areas and remaining the same in others.

My academic advisor is knowledgeable about requirements in my major/program.

IMPORTANCE	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS	COMMUNITY COLLEGES	ADULT UNDERGRADS	GRADUATE STUDENTS
2006–09	88%	89%	82%	90%	90%
2016–19	89%	90%	86%	92%	92%
Shift	1%	1%	4%	2%	2%

SATISFACTION	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS	COMMUNITY COLLEGES	ADULT UNDERGRADS	GRADUATE STUDENTS
2006–09	63%	61%	57%	69%	70%
2016–19	71%	71%	67%	78%	78%
Shift	8%	10%	10%	9%	8%

Importance scores have held steady on this item, with high expectations for all populations. All five of these populations reflect similar gains in satisfaction scores.

I am able to register for classes with few conflicts.

IMPORTANCE	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS	COMMUNITY COLLEGES	ADULT UNDERGRADS	GRADUATE STUDENTS
2006–09	89%	90%	85%	92%	93%
2016–19	89%	89%	87%	91%	92%
Shift	0%	-1%	2%	-1%	-1%

SATISFACTION	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS	COMMUNITY COLLEGES	ADULT UNDERGRADS	GRADUATE STUDENTS
2006–09	49%	46%	59%	63%	66%
2016–19	53%	57%	66%	73%	76%
Shift	4%	11%	7%	10%	10%

Importance scores have remained consistent or dropped slightly for all populations on the ability to register for classes. Four out of the five populations saw good increases in satisfaction on this item.

The quality of instruction in most of my classes is excellent.

IMPORTANCE	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS	COMMUNITY COLLEGES	ADULT UNDERGRADS	GRADUATE STUDENTS	ONLINE LEARNERS
2006–09	89%	88%	86%	94%	96%	94%
2016–19	89%	89%	88%	93%	95%	94%
Shift	0%	1%	2%	-1%	-1%	0%

SATISFACTION	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS	COMMUNITY COLLEGES	ADULT UNDERGRADS	GRADUATE STUDENTS	ONLINE LEARNERS
2006–09	58%	53%	62%	70%	70%	70%
2016–19	61%	59%	64%	74%	71%	70%
Shift	3%	6%	2%	4%	1%	0%

Importance scores stayed steady on this item, with high expectations for all six student populations. However, the only area where satisfaction has increased by at least 5 percent is at four-year publics.

Faculty provide timely feedback about student progress in a course.

IMPORTANCE	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS	COMMUNITY COLLEGES	ADULT UNDERGRADS	GRADUATE STUDENTS	ONLINE LEARNERS
2006–09	83%	84%	80%	89%	91%	92%
2016–19	84%	85%	84%	90%	90%	93%
Shift	1%	1%	4%	1%	-1%	1%

SATISFACTION	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS	COMMUNITY COLLEGES	ADULT UNDERGRADS	GRADUATE STUDENTS	ONLINE LEARNERS
2006–09	48%	45%	53%	60%	63%	65%
2016–19	50%	51%	61%	70%	65%	71%
Shift	2%	6%	8%	10%	2%	6%

This item reflects similar importance scores across the decade for all populations, with the biggest increase at community colleges. Community colleges, adult undergrads, and online learners are more satisfied on this item than four-year institutions.

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE TAKEAWAYS

- Providing knowledgeable advising to students in addition to building solid relationships with students and advisors or faculty can also help with overall student success efforts.
- Institutions have opportunities to stay student-centered with providing access to classes, recognizing that offering classes to students as expected is key for students to be able to graduate on time.
- Understanding student expectations on the quality of instruction and helping faculty to best utilize technology and to personalize their interaction with students in all settings may help to raise satisfaction levels on this item in the future.
- While we live in more of a 24/7 access world than we did even 10 years ago, the sense of higher expectations for faculty providing timely feedback is not reflected in the data, with the importance scores holding steady for all populations, showing high levels of expectation in both decades. Satisfaction scores are trending in the right direction for timely feedback, but only half of students at four-year institutions are satisfied in this area.
- There is an opportunity for institutions to set realistic expectations on timing for faculty feedback. This is an item that should be included in faculty training programs and recognized as part of accreditation priorities.
- The academic experience is truly the core of both the traditional and nontraditional student experience and a place where campuses can continue to work to make improvements.

Institutional support of students

Some of the greatest shifts in importance and satisfaction over the past 10 years have been in the areas outside of the classroom with items that relate to institutional support of students.

Security staff respond quickly in emergencies.

IMPORTANCE	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS	COMMUNITY COLLEGES	ADULT UNDERGRADS	GRADUATE STUDENTS
2006–09	80%	82%	71%	77%	77%
2016–19	86%	87%	80%	87%	88%
Shift	6%	5%	9%	10%	11%

SATISFACTION	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS	COMMUNITY COLLEGES	ADULT UNDERGRADS	GRADUATE STUDENTS
2006–09	43%	43%	39%	45%	44%
2016–19	57%	65%	58%	71%	70%
Shift	14%	22%	19%	26%	26%

The expectations on security staff responding quickly have risen for students at four-year privates, publics, and community colleges as well as for adult undergraduate and graduate students. The satisfaction improvements have been even higher for all five student populations.

Tutoring services are readily available.

IMPORTANCE	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS	COMMUNITY COLLEGES	ONLINE LEARNERS
2006–09	71%	73%	73%	67%
2016–19	78%	82%	81%	78%
Shift	7%	9%	8%	11%

SATISFACTION	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS	COMMUNITY COLLEGES	ONLINE LEARNERS
2006–09	55%	52%	56%	52%
2016–19	65%	68%	69%	67%
Shift	10%	16%	13%	15%

Importance scores for tutoring services have risen at four-year private, public, and community colleges as well as for online learners, along with gains in satisfaction scores.

Counseling staff care about students as individuals.

IMPORTANCE	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS	COMMUNITY COLLEGES
2006–09	73%	73%	75%
2016–19	80%	81%	81%
Shift	7%	8%	6%

SATISFACTION	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS	COMMUNITY COLLEGES
2006–09	44%	38%	50%
2016–19	57%	58%	63%
Shift	13%	20%	13%

Importance on this item has increased for traditional students, with positive increases in satisfaction as well.

There are adequate services to help me decide upon a career.

IMPORTANCE	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS	COMMUNITY COLLEGES	ADULT UNDERGRADS	GRADUATE STUDENTS	ONLINE LEARNERS
2006–09	81%	80%	75%	79%	76%	94%
2016–19	83%	83%	80%	85%	82%	94%
Shift	2%	3%	5%	6%	6%	0%

SATISFACTION	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS	COMMUNITY COLLEGES	ADULT UNDERGRADS	GRADUATE STUDENTS	ONLINE LEARNERS
2006–09	48%	45%	50%	51%	45%	61%
2016–19	56%	56%	60%	70%	62%	68%
Shift	8%	11%	10%	19%	17%	7%

Importance scores have gone up for community colleges, adult undergrads, and graduate students, with the biggest jumps in satisfaction for adult undergrads and graduate students. All populations reflected some satisfaction improvement on this item.

I seldom get the "run-around" when seeking information on this campus.

IMPORTANCE	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS	COMMUNITY COLLEGES	ADULT UNDERGRADS	GRADUATE STUDENTS
2006–09	78%	80%	75%	88%	89%
2016–19	75%	77%	77%	87%	88%
Shift	-3%	-3%	2%	-1%	-1%

SATISFACTION	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS	COMMUNITY COLLEGES	ADULT UNDERGRADS	GRADUATE STUDENTS
2006–09	40%	36%	49%	58%	57%
2016–19	46%	49%	57%	68%	64%
Shift	6%	13%	8%	10%	7%

Importance levels are down in all areas except community colleges, which are up only slightly for this item. Satisfaction levels are up in all areas, with four-year publics reflecting the greatest improvement.

TAKEAWAYS FOR INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT OF STUDENTS

- With campus security breaches and the awareness students have regarding their safety on campus, security staff are often perceived as being on the front line for responding quickly in emergency situations. Campuses need to be intentional with training security staff appropriately and in communicating with students and their families about the priority the campus places on student safety on campus. It is important to not take campus safety for granted.
- Tutoring services are a priority not only for academically-underprepared students but for many students who want to be successful in college. Institutions have opportunities to provide adequate tutoring services locally on campus as well as through technology-supported options. There are also opportunities to communicate with students about that availability.
- Traditional students have higher expectations on counseling services. These may be mental health-related services or general counseling support. Campuses can assess their own counseling support availability, staff accordingly, and communicate intentionally with students about the services that are available during the recruitment process and with currently enrolled students.
- Nationally, career services have made solid gains in student satisfaction, corresponding with the emphasis on outcomes with accreditation requirements. Colleges and universities can continue to provide appropriate career identification support, through online and on-campus services, as well as with internships and practical experiences to assist students with identifying their post-degree opportunities.
- Campus run-around may be slightly less important to students as they are able to access many types of information through the institutional website. This means it is important for colleges and universities to keep information current and searchable for students, as well as for faculty and staff to have access to the most reliable information to support students through in-person conversations.

The student experience

How students feel at the institution, especially for institutions serving traditional students, has increased in priority over the past 10 years.

Most students feel a sense of belonging here.

IMPORTANCE	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS	COMMUNITY COLLEGES
2006–09	70%	64%	58%
2016–19	77%	74%	68%
Shift	7%	10%	10%

SATISFACTION	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS	COMMUNITY COLLEGES
2006–09	51%	47%	53%
2016–19	50%	51%	60%
Shift	-1%	4%	7%

Students at four-year private, public and community colleges have higher expectations when it comes to feeling a sense of belonging. Satisfaction on this item has only risen notably at community colleges.

This item reflects the sense of fit for students, which has grown in importance over the past 10 years.

THE INTEREST OF INCOMING FRESHMEN IN MAKING CONNECTIONS WITH FELLOW STUDENTS

In RNL's annual survey of freshman motivations, three of the top 10 areas of requested assistance are related to social or student connections:

AREA OF DESIRED ASSISTANCE FOR INCOMING FRESHMEN

73% would like to meet new friends at an informal gathering (top request)

66% would like to find out more about clubs and organizations

56% meet an experienced student to seek advice

Source: *2019 National Freshman Motivation to Complete College Report*

Available at **RuffaloNL.com/FreshmanReport**

There is a commitment to racial harmony on this campus.

IMPORTANCE	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS
2006–09	74%	73%
2016–19	80%	81%
Shift	6%	8%

SATISFACTION	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS
2006–09	57%	52%
2016–19	62%	65%
Shift	5%	13%

This is a unique item on the four-year version of the SSI. Expectations have gone up at both four-year privates and publics, with the best gains in satisfaction at four-year publics.

Tuition paid is a worthwhile investment.

IMPORTANCE	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS	ADULT UNDERGRADS	GRADUATE STUDENTS	ONLINE LEARNERS
2006–09	87%	87%	92%	94%	91%
2016–19	86%	86%	89%	91%	91%
Shift	-1%	-1%	-3%	-3%	0%

SATISFACTION	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS	ADULT UNDERGRADS	GRADUATE STUDENTS	ONLINE LEARNERS
2006–09	42%	48%	57%	57%	65%
2016–19	44%	53%	64%	59%	68%
Shift	2%	5%	7%	2%	3%

Interestingly, importance scores have stayed the same or dropped slightly on this item in the past 10 years. The only two groups where satisfaction has gone up are four-year publics and adult undergrads.

STUDENT EXPERIENCE TAKEAWAYS

- Campuses have an opportunity to emphasize the sense of belonging students have once they have enrolled on campus through the recruitment process and to be intentional with building a community where students feel like they belong.
- As a reflection of the national conversations over the past decade, traditional students at four-year institutions have higher expectations for a campus focus on racial harmony. Institutions have an opportunity to continue discussions in this area and to encourage campus dialogue on the topic to be sure all voices are heard.
- While the media have emphasized tuition value over the past decade, student expectations, while still high, have surprisingly not increased on this item. Institutions have opportunities to be responsive on student priority items, as identified through regular students satisfaction assessments, as well as to provide context for how their investment in tuition will pay off once the student graduates.

TOP ITEMS OF IMPORTANCE, SATISFACTION, AND PERFORMANCE GAPS

Results from 2016–2019 data sets

The RNL Satisfaction and Priorities Surveys have students respond with a level of importance on a 1 to 7 range as well as a satisfaction score on a 1 to 7 range. The difference between these two scores is the performance gap.

- The following charts show the percentage of students who responded with a 6 (important/satisfied) or 7 (very important/very satisfied).
- The **gap** is the performance gap percentages, which are the importance scores minus the satisfaction scores for these items.
- **Green** items are strengths (top half importance and top quartile satisfaction for the data set).
- **Red** items are challenges (top half importance and top quartile of performance gaps for the data set).

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES: 2016–19

Highest items in importance

ITEM	IMPORTANCE %
The content of the courses within my major is valuable.	91%
The instruction in my major field is excellent.	91%
Nearly all of the faculty are knowledgeable in their field.	90%
The campus is safe and secure for all students.	89%
My academic advisor is knowledgeable about requirements in my major.	89%
I am able to register for classes I need with few conflicts.	89%
I am able to experience intellectual growth here.	89%
The quality of instruction I receive in most of my classes is excellent.	89%

Items with highest satisfaction scores

ITEM	SATISFACTION %
Nearly all of the faculty are knowledgeable in their field.	73%
My academic advisor is knowledgeable about requirements in my major.	71%
My academic advisor is approachable.	70%
Faculty are usually available after class and during office hours.	69%
I am able to experience intellectual growth here.	68%
Library staff are helpful and approachable.	68%

Largest performance gaps

ITEM	GAP %
The amount of student parking space on campus is adequate.	48%
There is an adequate selection of food available in the cafeteria.	47%
Living conditions in the residence halls are comfortable (adequate space, lighting, heat, air, etc.).	44%
Tuition paid is a worthwhile investment.	42%
Adequate financial aid is available for most students.	40%

FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS: 2016–19

Highest items in importance

ITEM	IMPORTANCE %
The content of the courses within my major is valuable.	90%
The instruction in my major field is excellent.	90%
My academic advisor is knowledgeable about requirements in my major.	90%
Nearly all of the faculty are knowledgeable in their field.	90%
I am able to register for classes I need with few conflicts.	89%
The quality of instruction I receive in most of my classes is excellent.	89%

Items with highest satisfaction scores

ITEM	SATISFACTION %
Nearly all of the faculty are knowledgeable in their field.	72%
My academic advisor is knowledgeable about requirements in my major.	71%
On the whole, the campus is well-maintained.	71%
Library resources and services are adequate.	71%
Faculty are usually available after class and during office hours.	70%
Library staff are helpful and approachable.	70%

Largest performance gaps

ITEM	GAP %
The amount of student parking space on campus is adequate.	57%
Adequate financial aid is available for most students.	38%
Living conditions in the residence halls are comfortable (adequate space, lighting, heat, air, etc.).	37%
There is an adequate selection of food available in the cafeteria.	37%
Student activities fees are put to good use.	36%

COMMUNITY COLLEGES: 2016–19

Highest items in importance

ITEM	IMPORTANCE %
The quality of instruction I receive in most of my classes is excellent.	88%
I am able to register for classes I need with few conflicts.	87%
The campus is safe and secure for all students.	87%
Nearly all of the faculty are knowledgeable in their fields.	87%
I am able to experience intellectual growth here.	87%

Items with highest satisfaction scores

ITEM	SATISFACTION %
On the whole, the campus is well-maintained.	76%
I am able to experience intellectual growth here.	74%
The campus is safe and secure for all students.	72%
Nearly all of the faculty are knowledgeable in their fields.	72%
There is a good variety of courses provided on this campus.	72%
Computer labs are adequate and accessible.	72%
Library resources and services are adequate.	72%

Largest performance gaps

ITEM	GAP %
The amount of student parking space on campus is adequate.	28%
Students are notified early in the term if they are doing poorly in a class.	27%
Financial aid awards are announced to students in time to be helpful in college planning.	26%
The quality of instruction I receive in most of my classes is excellent.	24%
Channels for expressing student complaints are readily available.	24%

ADULT UNDERGRADUATES: 2016–19

Highest items in importance

ITEM	IMPORTANCE %
Nearly all faculty are knowledgeable in their field.	94%
The quality of instruction I receive in my program is excellent.	93%
The content of the courses within my major is valuable.	92%
My academic advisor is knowledgeable about requirements in my major.	92%
There is a commitment to academic excellence at this institution.	92%
Major requirements are clear and reasonable.	92%

Items with highest satisfaction scores

ITEM	SATISFACTION %
Classroom locations are safe and secure for all students.	88%
I am able to complete most of my enrollment tasks in one location.	83%
Nearly all faculty are knowledgeable in their field.	82%
My academic advisor is accessible by telephone and email.	80%
I am able to register for classes by personal computer, fax, or telephone.	80%

Largest performance gaps

ITEM	GAP %
Tuition paid is a worthwhile investment.	25%
Adequate financial aid is available for most adult students.	25%
I receive complete information on the availability of financial aid.	23%
There are sufficient options within my program of study.	21%
This institution provides timely responses to student complaints.	21%
Billing policies are reasonable for adult students.	21%

GRADUATE STUDENTS: 2016–19

Highest items in importance

ITEM	IMPORTANCE %
The content of the courses within my major is valuable.	95%
The quality of instruction I receive in my program is excellent.	95%
Nearly all faculty are knowledgeable in their field.	95%
There is a commitment to academic excellence at this institution.	93%
Major requirements are clear and reasonable.	93%

Items with highest satisfaction scores

ITEM	SATISFACTION %
Classroom locations are safe and secure for all students.	87%
I am able to complete most of my enrollment tasks in one location.	85%
Nearly all faculty are knowledgeable in their field.	84%
I am able to register for classes by personal computer, fax, or telephone.	84%
Faculty are usually available for adult students outside the classroom by phone, by email or in-person.	79%
Registration processes are reasonable and convenient for adults.	79%
My academic advisor is accessible by telephone and email.	79%

Largest performance gaps

ITEM	GAP %
Tuition paid is a worthwhile investment.	32%
Adequate financial aid is available for most adult students.	29%
I receive complete information on the availability of financial aid.	29%
This institution provides timely responses to student complaints.	26%
Faculty provide timely feedback about my progress.	25%

ONLINE LEARNERS: 2016–19

Highest items in importance

ITEM	IMPORTANCE %
Instructional materials are appropriate for program content.	94%
Student assignments are clearly defined in the syllabus.	94%
Registration for online courses is convenient.	94%
The quality of online instruction is excellent.	94%
Faculty are responsive to student needs.	94%

Items with highest satisfaction scores

ITEM	SATISFACTION %
Registration for online courses is convenient.	86%
Billing and payment procedures are convenient for me.	81%
Adequate online library resources are provided.	80%
Appropriate technical assistance is readily available.	79%
My program advisor is accessible by telephone and email.	78%
The bookstore provides timely service to students.	78%

Largest performance gaps

ITEM	GAP %
The quality of online instruction is excellent.	24%
Tuition paid is a worthwhile investment.	23%
Faculty provide timely feedback about student progress.	22%
Instructional materials are appropriate for program content.	20%
Student assignments are clearly defined in the syllabus.	19%
Faculty are responsive to student needs.	19%
Adequate financial aid is available.	19%

Tips for monitoring trends in student satisfaction on campuses

These are suggestions for the best ways to monitor trends in student satisfaction on your campus.

Establish a cycle of surveying student satisfaction annually, every other year, or at once least every three years. Create a culture on campus where faculty, staff, and students are aware that the campus regularly assesses student satisfaction and that improvements are expected to be made in between times.

Assess student satisfaction at a similar time of year each time. Students in the fall tend to have higher satisfaction than students in the spring, so a consistent timeframe allows for identification of real shifts in satisfaction.

Be intentional with surveying similar student populations and with monitoring demographic distributions when comparing data sets over multiple years. Certain populations, such as female students, older students, and those attending their first-choice institution tend to have higher satisfaction levels, so if the population distribution has shifted in these areas and others, there may be corresponding satisfaction shifts. Ideally, the demographic distribution will be similar over time when monitoring campus-specific trends.

Pay special attention to the satisfaction shifts in areas where the campus has been intentional in changing a policy, procedure, or a perception. Celebrate where satisfaction levels have gone up as a result, providing positive feedback to campus personnel and students. Satisfaction improvements can also be included in accreditation documentation.

Track areas where satisfaction levels have declined to identify what may have changed in the student experience over time and respond accordingly.

Look to see which items have moved on and off the institutional lists of strengths and challenges, and tie these back to initiatives that have occurred or need to happen on campus.

Actively communicate on campus about the satisfaction trends observed on your campus, not just year over year, but longitudinally, to help create a culture at your institution that values student satisfaction.

CONCLUSION: SATISFACTION ASSESSMENT IS KEY FOR ELEVATING THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

As student populations on campuses continue to change, it remains critical to assess student satisfaction on a consistent basis. Regularly gathering student feedback allows campuses to stay in tune with student priorities and to be more responsive where students are placing a greater emphasis. Student satisfaction assessments are also a valuable way to document the improvements campuses have made in serving students, while also providing key data points for student success celebrations, accreditation documentation and as a way to attract new students to campus.

Doing what has always been done or doing nothing better to improve the student experience has the potential to negatively impact higher education institutions in the future. As student populations shift, so do their expectations. In order to best serve these students, campuses need to be proactive with gathering student feedback, and then respond with improvements in the areas that students care about.

Just looking at national trends is not enough. To best serve their own student populations, campuses need to assess how satisfied their students are and to track their own satisfaction shifts over time. Most institutions survey students on an every-other-year cycle in order to stay current with student perceptions and to document how initiatives have raised student satisfaction.

Learn more about the RNL Satisfaction and Priorities Surveys

The **Student Satisfaction Inventory** has unique versions for students enrolled at four-year institutions (with separate national norms for privates and publics) and at community colleges.

The **Adult Student Priorities Survey** is for adult undergraduate students at four-year private and public institutions and is also appropriate for students enrolled in graduate programs.

The **Priorities Survey for Online Learners** is for students enrolled in primarily online programs, at four-year and two-year institutions, undergraduate and graduate levels.

SEE SAMPLES AND LEARN MORE AT RuffaloNL.com/SatisfactionSurveys

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Download the Appendix to find the list of institutions included in this study.
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