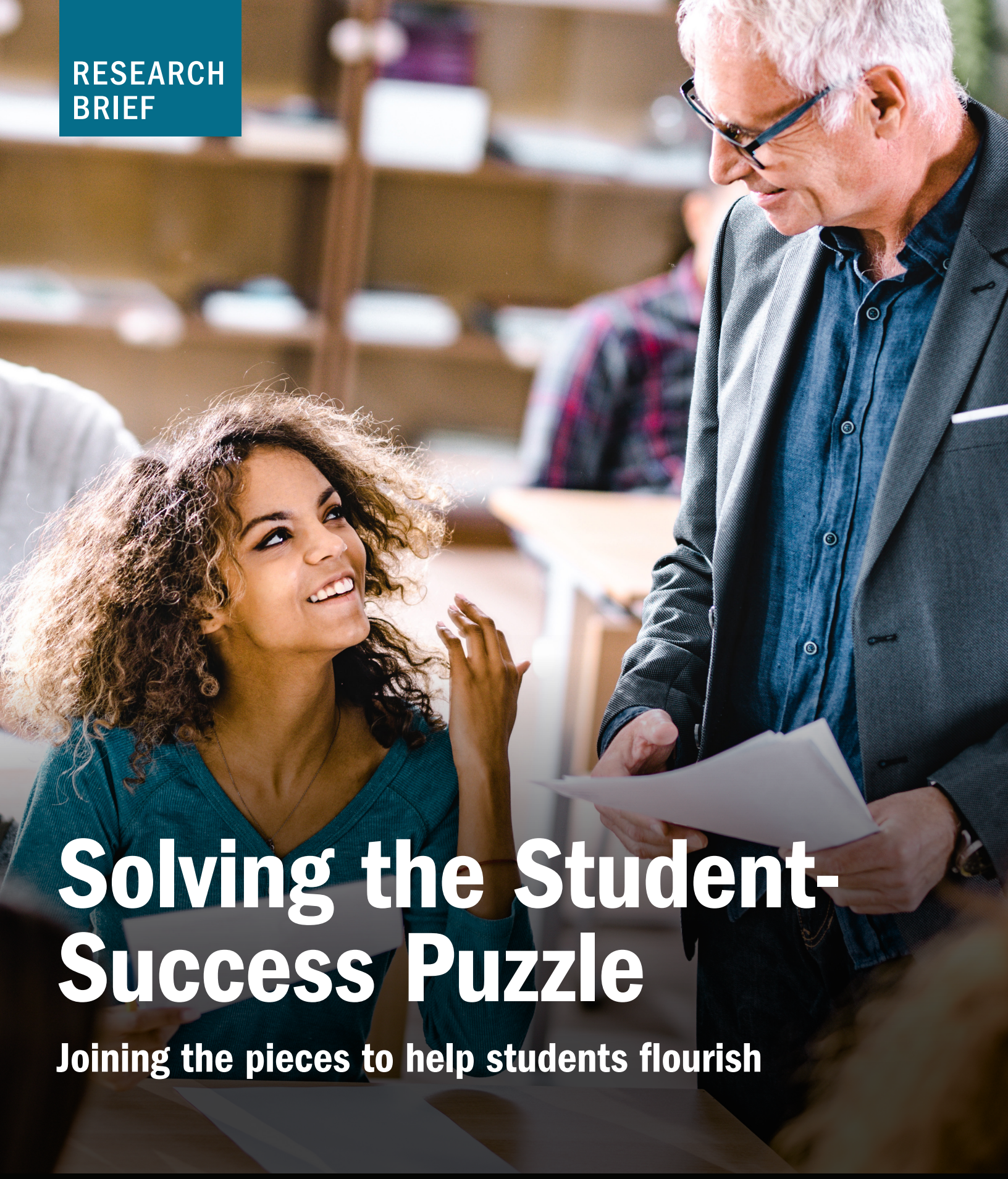
RESEARCH BRIEF



Solving the Student-Success Puzzle

Joining the pieces to help students flourish

WITH SUPPORT FROM aws

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION®

Solving the student success puzzle

Given the wide range of services and programs most institutions have in place to support students – from advising and tutoring, to mental health counseling and resources for the underrepresented – it is hard to understand why nearly one out of every three first-year college students fails to return. While such programs are well-intended, they often approach student success with a limited view and do not meet students where they are on their learning journey.

Colleges and universities are under pressure to address these shortcomings to meet the complex needs of a rapidly diversifying population of college applicants and students. As an Executive Education Advisor at Amazon Web Services (AWS), I have a front-row view of how many institutions are doing just that with the cloud.

For example, a prominent mid-western institution developed a machine learning based advising tool that helps students map out the shortest path to their degree. Another established western community college developed a financial aid tool that tracks applications and awards the way Amazon tracks purchases and deliveries.

Institutions all over the world are implementing cloud-based student lifecycle management solutions, virtual campus assistants, digital one-stop services, and solutions to support student wellness and mental health.

An integrated, intelligent, and personalized approach to meeting your students' needs is imperative to your institution's success. AWS stands ready to help you and your team meet that imperative.

Sincerely,

Mark

Mark C. Hampton, Ph.D.
Executive Education Advisor, Amazon Web Services

"Colleges and universities are under increasing pressure to provide integrated, intelligent, and personalized services to their students. AWS provides them with the tools to meet the needs of every student, wherever in the journey that student is."

Mark C. Hampton, Ph.D.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Solving the Student-Success Puzzle

Joining the pieces to help students flourish

Contact CI@chronicle.com with questions or comments.

Cover image: iStock

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For the past 15 years or so, "student success" has been a higher-education buzzword — and a moral and financial imperative for institutions. But all too often, the concept doesn't seem to encompass much beyond increasing retention and graduation rates. In order to improve student outcomes, higher ed needs a deeper and broader understanding of student success. Colleges have to define it more clearly, commit to finding ways to measure it more carefully — and do a better job of unifying campus efforts.

To learn how academic and administrative leaders, faculty members, and students view their own institutions' accomplishments and challenges in the area of student success, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* conducted an online survey, with support from AWS, from June 20 to July 1, 2023. We received 1,225 responses, about equally divided between academic and administrative leaders, faculty members, and students. All were employed or enrolled in two- or

four-year colleges in the United States. In addition, *The Chronicle* interviewed about two dozen people for this report.

Over all, the three groups surveyed feel positive about their institutions' abilities to retain students and help them navigate college, graduate, and then move on to a career.

Nonetheless, numerous barriers — budget constraints in particular — hamper colleges' making improvements in key areas linked to student success, such as academic-advising and mental-health services. Those working in all areas of higher education often feel caught in a continuing cycle of new data, initiatives, and programs with little sense of how the pieces connect to the whole.

But it is clear that there are many small victories. Change often requires comprehensive campuswide strategies, but it also rests in the hands of individuals. As one student responded in the survey, "having a faculty member or adviser who knows me and is willing to help me succeed was vital to my college experience."

Some colleges define student success as the number of students who stay in higher education and graduate within a reasonable number of years. And if that's the case, high retention and graduation rates spell success; low ones, not so much.

But by that bare-bones definition, a student could fly through college and graduate on time but still have a poor academic experience, feel no connection to the institution or other students, and leave with little idea of how to pursue a fulfilling future.

Few would call that a victory.

"Universities often underresource student success and student affairs," says Patrick Biddix, a professor of higher education and director of research and assessment for the division of student success at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. While retention can be measured, it's very difficult "to put a metric or a number or selling point on the importance of student engagement." He adds, "Sometimes we tie learning too much to the number of graduates or the retention rate and don't think about the bigger picture."

The focus on student success has changed and intensified over the years for a number of reasons. The student population has become much more diversified in terms of race, income and disability, and therefore so have students' needs and goals. Colleges have become more expensive and harder to pay for, putting more of a financial burden on students and their families. In response those families — and employers and state legislatures — want more hard data from institutions demonstrating how that expensive college degree

> "Sometimes we tie learning too much to the number of graduates or the retention rate and don't think about the bigger picture."

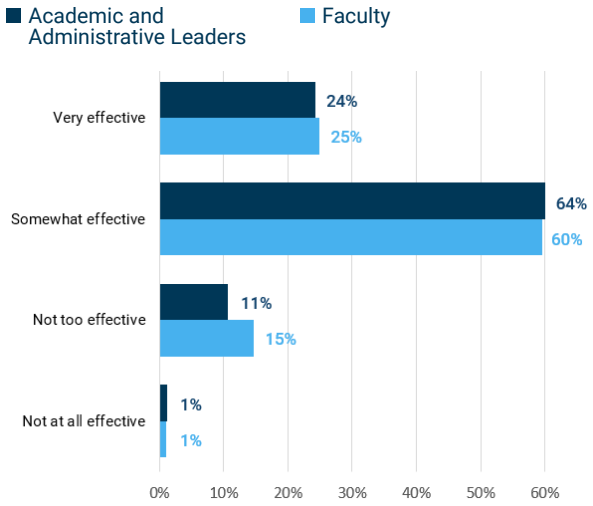
will lead to a decently paid and, hopefully, satisfying career.

Over all, administrative and academic leaders, faculty members, and students feel their colleges are fairly successful in meeting the areas of both retention and graduation; in the *Chronicle* survey, about a quarter of both academic and administrative leaders and faculty members said their institutions are "very" effective at retaining students, and almost two-thirds said their institution is "somewhat effective." Students are even more optimistic; 48 percent believe their college is "very" effective and 46 percent "somewhat" effective.

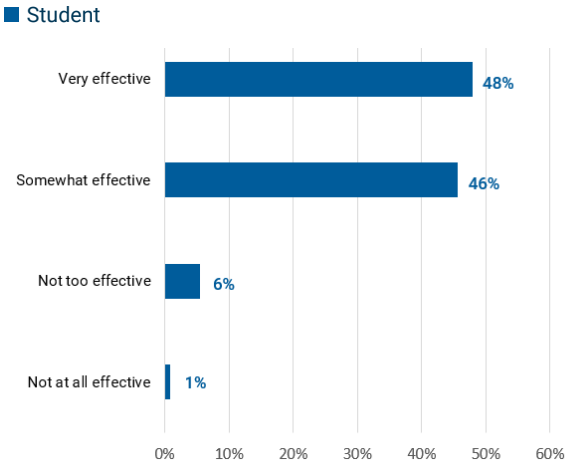
Respondents were even more positive when asked how effective they believe their college is in helping students navigate and reach graduation — about 90 percent of faculty members and academic and administrative leaders believe their college is "very" or "somewhat" effective.

But respondents were aware that their colleges have far to go. When asked which units or offices need to improve to help retain and

How effective do you think your college or university is at retaining students?



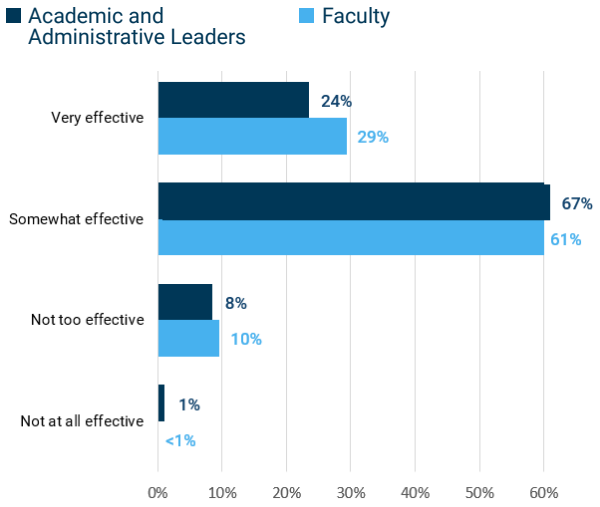
How effective do you think your college or university is/has been at retaining you/your fellow students (i.e., keeping you/your fellow students enrolled for the entirety of your 2-year or 4-year program)?



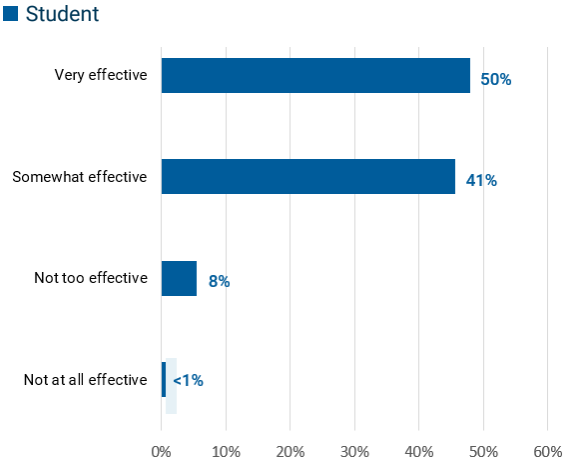
Source: *Chronicle* survey of 1,225 academic and administrative leaders, faculty members, and students

Note: Some percentages do not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

How effective is your college or university in helping students successfully navigate and reach graduation?



How effective is/was your college or university in helping you/your fellow students successfully navigate and reach graduation?



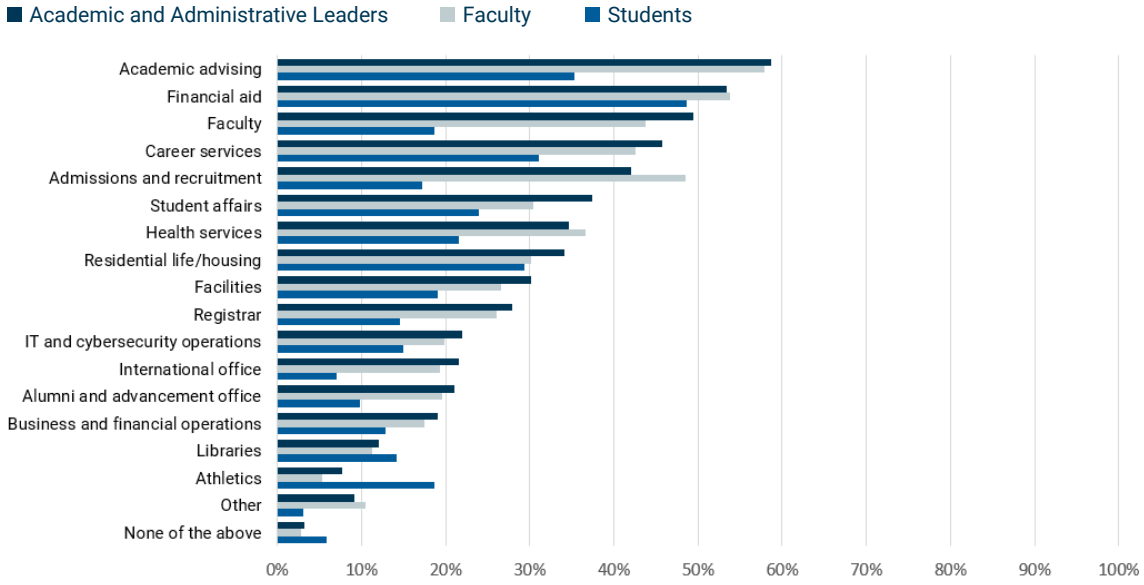
Source: *Chronicle* survey of 1,225 academic and administrative leaders, faculty members, and students
Note: Some percentages do not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

graduate more students, all three groups surveyed put academic advising, financial aid, and career services in the top five.

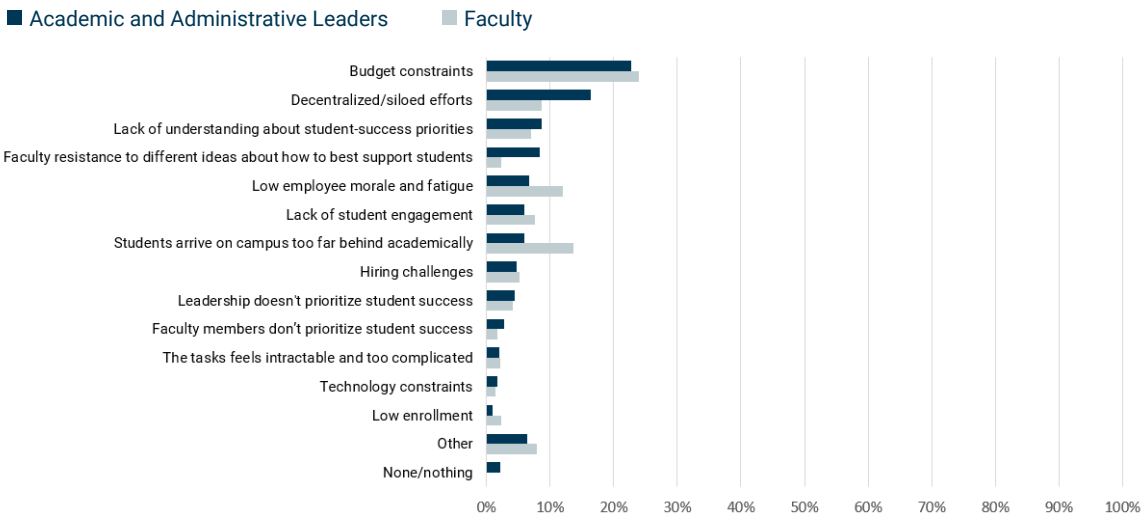
And, of course, academics can't get lost in the mix. Bringing underprepared students up to par while still motivating them to stay in college is a major challenge; when the *Chronicle* survey asked respondents what were the biggest barriers to improving student success on their campuses, budget constraints topped the list. But No. 2 for faculty members? Students arriving on campus too far behind academically.

Weaving all these elements into a student safety net can feel like a jigsaw puzzle where the pieces keep shifting and expanding. "It can be overwhelming," says Dan Scherr, an assistant professor of criminal justice and coordinator of the cybersecurity program at the University of Tennessee Southern. "We're trying to drive retention and give support, and they also want you to watch for this, and this, and this — and things keep piling on. Even as

Thinking specifically about what your college/university needs to do to help retain and graduate more students, which of the following offices or units, if any, do you feel need improvement? (Select all that apply)



What's your biggest barrier to improving student success on your campus?



Source: *Chronicle* survey of 1,225 academic and administrative leaders, faculty members, and students

part of a larger state system, our toolkit is constrained, and it can be difficult to gain faculty buy-in. Most wear multiple hats and have more tasks than time, so adding layers for student success is challenging, even when we want to do more to support them."

> Weaving all these elements into a student safety net can feel like a jigsaw puzzle where the pieces keep shifting and expanding.

He says that he doesn't "want to bash student success — I'm invested in it. But it would be nice to get some help — to understand what success looks like, what we are trying to measure, and how we can help."

This report will analyze the *Chronicle* survey findings, explore where administrators, faculty members, and students see opportunities and challenges, and examine four areas — advising, emergency financial assistance, career services, and mental health — that are of particular importance for colleges seeking brighter outcomes for their students.

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Advice on Advising

Zoë Jenkins, 19, loves attending the University of Virginia, where she is a junior. But she found that its advising systems hindered instead of helped in her first two years. As is the case with many students at the university, she had a faculty adviser during that time, not a professional staff member.

"My initial adviser was a lovely person and wanted to support me but couldn't answer questions about what classes to take, and in what sequences to apply to the education school," Jenkins says.

As a result, she applied to the education school during the second semester of her first year rather than in her sophomore year, because she thought it was the only way to take classes there — but she had incorrect information. And in doing so, Jenkins lost some benefits, such as priority registration, which she could have used as a member of the university's Echols Scholars Program.

The concern might not be retention or graduation rates — both are in the mid-to-high 90th percentile at the University of Virginia — but "it's a high-stress problem," Jenkins says. "Students need to feel confident that they're going to find the classes they need for their majors."

In the *Chronicle* survey, when asked which units need to hire more people, the top answer among

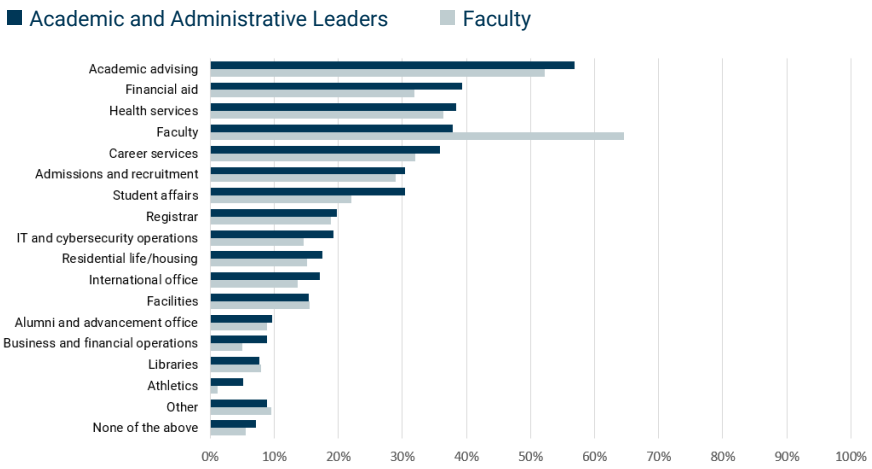
academic and administrative leadership was academic advising with 57 percent; it ranked second (below hiring more faculty) among faculty respondents at 52 percent.

Bethanie Glover, a deputy spokeswoman for the university, wrote in an email response that UVA has both faculty and professional staff in advisory roles. She also noted that as part of its 2030 strategic plan, the university aims to strengthen coordination between students and advisers, as well as between academic and non-academic advisers — in part through a new software platform — so that students benefit from the support of a cohesive team. For the fall semester, the university is planning to start a new "front door" website, to help students more easily access resources across the university.

> "It's a high-stress problem. Students need to feel confident that they're going to find the classes they need for their majors."

The trend over the past several decades, says Melissa A. Welker, a higher-education consultant, has been to move more toward professional academic advisers and away from faculty advisers. Welker, who formerly served as Northern Arizona University's executive director of student-success initiatives and programs, says that both kinds of counselors can be helpful, but colleges need to make sure all advisers are trained and that the roles are delineated.

Which of the following offices or units, if any, do you feel need to hire more people? (Select all that apply)



Source: *Chronicle* survey of 1,225 academic and administrative leaders, faculty members, and students

"One of the things that I see a lot of institutions missing — from the very beginning of any advising change — is defining each of the professional- and faculty-adviser roles, and how they are aligned to students' needs and demographics," says Welker.

Madison Stein, 22, who graduated from Western Washington University in 2023, says when she was trying to figure out what classes to take during her year studying abroad, she felt very much on her own. She recalls that her academic adviser, a professor, told her "his priority was his classes, not me." She was determined to study in England but says that "someone else, on the fence, might have given up."

A spokesman for Western Washington notes that, "we aren't aware of this specific case, but it is the priority of our advisers to ensure that our students are able to get access to the resources they need and to help them develop plans that support their academic and life objectives."

Many higher-education institutions are experimenting with teams that bring advisers together with other staff members to support students. Such an approach has helped push graduation and retention rates to their highest levels ever at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, says Amber Williams, the university's vice provost for student success.

The university's Vol Success Teams include academic advisers, academic coaches, and a one-stop-counselor — all with clearly defined roles. Depending on the student's college or major, the team might expand to include a faculty or peer mentor. The website not only explains what each member of the team can offer students but also clearly spells out how students should engage differently with — and what to expect from — each team partner.

> Experts say the role of advising — whether by faculty members or by professionals — is too often treated as inconsequential, with low pay and few promotion opportunities for professional staff and few incentives for faculty members.

Since the program began in 2020, the number of students who worked with the teams has grown significantly and the stress level for those students has declined, says Biddix, the professor at Tennessee at Knoxville. The impact also varied by subgroup; for example, men of color who partnered with the teams early in their college experience reported a greater sense of belonging.

"They weren't necessarily engaging with all three people on their team within the first few weeks," he says. But all three might reach out, and students gravitate toward the team member that supports their immediate need.

While it has become increasingly clear how critical academic advising is in helping students succeed, experts say the role of advising — whether by faculty members or by professionals — is too often treated as inconsequential, with low pay and few promotion opportunities for professional staff and few incentives for faculty members.

Terri Hayes, associate vice president for academic support at Northern Arizona University, is well aware of this problem. In 2016 the university began to centralize its advising staff to provide greater consistency for students. Things were better, but advisers kept leaving; Hayes says there were times when they turned over 40 positions a year — almost half her work force of about 100 advisers.

Everyone was affected. Students were confused and stopped seeing academic advisers because they had three different ones in a single year. Remaining advisers had to pick up the slack, and worried about students falling through the cracks because the heavy caseloads didn't give them the time they wanted with each student.

The only way to deal with the problem was with higher pay and a career ladder, Hayes says, because she wasn't only competing to keep advisers from moving to other colleges, she was even losing them to other positions in departments at her own university that paid more. For things to change, advising couldn't be seen as an entry-level, transitory role.

About three years ago, the university began phasing in salary increases, along with progressive tiers for promotion. And she now has only three open positions.

Similarly, some argue that faculty-advising roles should be taken into consideration when reviewing tenure and promotions.

Stein's experience at Western Washington University didn't sour her on her time there, but she is considering relating her experience to administrators about her experience. "I would tell them advising is just as important as teaching," she says. She recommends that the university specify whom students should contact, and how to contact them, for the problems they are having. "I was chasing people around, wondering who could help me."

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A Little Help Can Go a Long Way: Emergency Financial Assistance

Colleges are increasingly aware that a few hundred dollars can be what stands between a student too stressed to study and one who can enthusiastically participate, between a student continuing toward graduation and one who drops out.

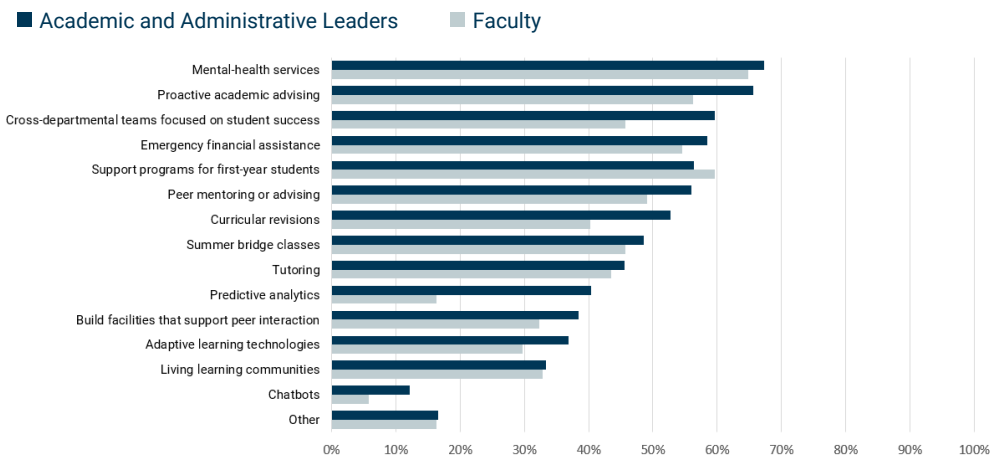
Asked what strategies or tools academic and administrative leaders and faculty members said they needed to add or expand to help students succeed academically, emergency financial assistance ranked No. 4 out of 15, for both groups of respondents.

Amarillo College has seen how vital such funds can be. The majority of the community college's 10,000 students are first generation and low income. Under the auspices of its Advocacy and Resource Center, they have access to full-time social workers, a food pantry, and scholarships, as well as an emergency financial-aid fund.

Up to about $1,000 a semester is available from the fund to any student enrolled that semester for at least six hours, with a minimum 2.0 GPA. The money can be used to help with any kind of financial burden they're experiencing, says Jordan Herrera, the college's director of social services.

"We started with a very clear vision that we wanted to make this as easy as possible," she says. "We didn't want to put people in the position that they have to prove they're poor." Between the impact of the pandemic

What strategies or tools do you think your college needs to expand or add to help more students succeed academically? (Select all that apply)



Source: *Chronicle* survey of 1,225 academic and administrative leaders, faculty members, and students

and greater student awareness, the percentage of students making use of the center's resources has grown over the past 11 years from 6 percent to 55 percent, Herrera says.

The emergency financial aid is supported by several large gifts, as well as by the Amarillo College Foundation, which provides tuition scholarships and funding support for the college.

> "We started with a very clear vision that we wanted to make this as easy as possible. We didn't want to put people in the position that they have to prove they're poor."

The fund, along with a strong social-worker case-support system, has helped keep students in college. In 2020, Amarillo College's retention rate was 73 percent for students who used the Advocacy and Resource Center for students who enrolled in the fall. For the college as a whole, it was 56 percent.

Tammie Ray, 59, is in her second year at Amarillo and lives on disability checks. The assistance has been critical, she says, to her ability to remain in Amarillo. She uses the food pantry regularly, checks out a calculator so she won't have to buy one, and has received gas cards and assistance with rent.

"They support you in any way they can," she says.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A New Focus on Career Services

More than 70 percent of academic and administrative leaders and faculty respondents are "very" or "somewhat" confident that their institution "has the capabilities and tools to help students find a job after graduating," according to the *Chronicle* survey. Student confidence was even higher, with 84 percent responding affirmatively.

And some 88 percent of students surveyed said they were "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with their institution's capabilities to prepare them for a career.

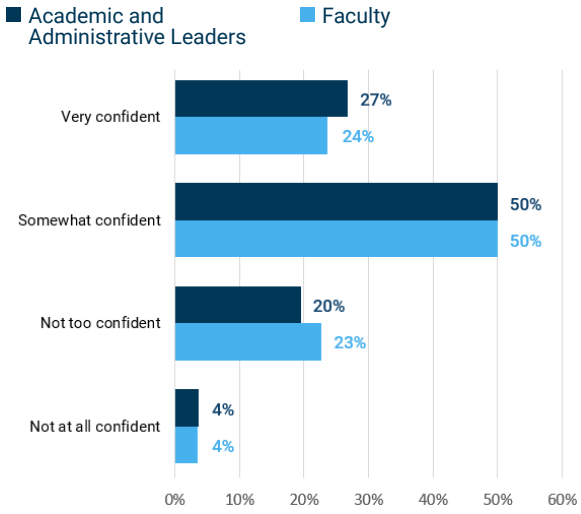
For experts in the field, that's a very upbeat assessment. Perhaps unrealistically so.

That's "very optimistic and misplaced," Welker, the consultant, says. "There's a missing connection between tools and actually helping a student find a job."

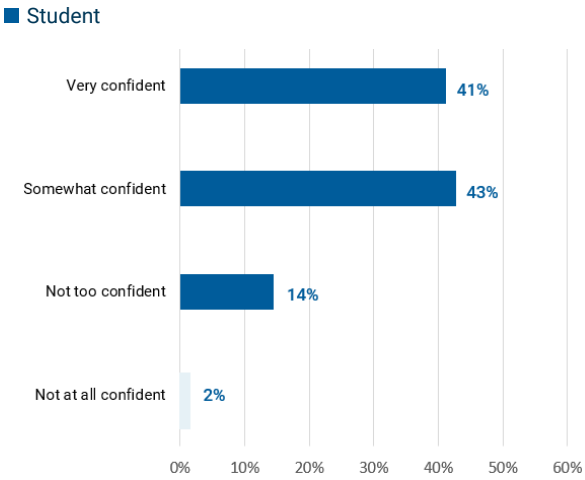
And, experts say, just like academic advising and mental-health services, career advising can't be limited to one office or to merely teaching skills, such as using job platforms, résumé writing, and interviewing techniques.

Many career centers have already begun to shift "from a model where 90 percent of our work is a one-on-one advising" to one in which 'we are career educators, and we educate not only our students, but faculty and staff as well,'" says Nick Cattin, senior manager of consulting and training for the Career Leadership Collective, a company that works

How confident are you that your college or university has the capabilities and tools in place to help students find a job after graduating?



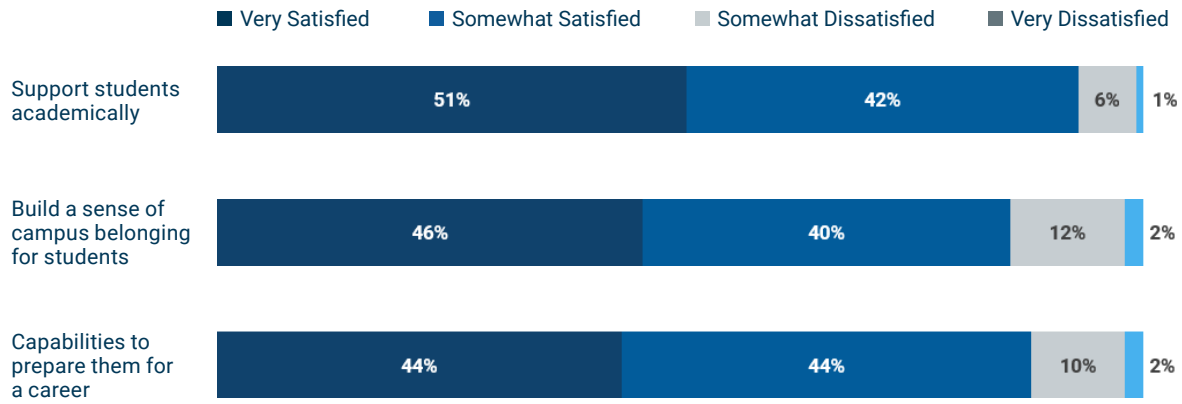
How confident are you that your college or university has the capabilities and tools in place to help you/your fellow students find a job after graduating?



Source: *Chronicle* survey of 1,225 academic and administrative leaders, faculty members, and students

Note: Some percentages do not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

How satisfied are you overall with your college's or university's capabilities to….



Source: *Chronicle* survey of 1,225 academic and administrative leaders, faculty members, and students

with colleges on career services. He says career services needs to move beyond the campus career center and "embed best practices into the curriculum and co-curriculum."

He emphasizes that faculty members do not need to undertake training to become de facto career counselors, but that they should receive help to better answer questions they're already being asked by students.

Since 2019, the Career Leadership Collective has conducted the National Alumni Career Mobility survey, which measures career mobility five and 10 years after graduation. Alumni from 40 colleges and universities participated in the 2022 report.

The findings have remained fairly steady over the past four years: Of those receiving advice, 92 percent said the most helpful came from employers, followed by faculty at 89 percent and career services at 75 percent. Other results were more disappointing: only 54 percent agreed that their institution helped them understand career opportunities, 41 percent that it helped them network with employers, and 40 percent that it helped create a career plan.

And that's a problem, Cattin says, because his company's research has shown that students who go to colleges where staff and faculty help them understand career opportunities, create career plans, and network with employers are more likely to have greater economic mobility and say their degree was worth the tuition spent.

Andy Chan, vice president for the office of personal and career development at Wake Forest University, was hired in 2009 as a cabinet member — which at the time was a highly unusual position for the head of campus career services — and still is 14 years later. According to the 2023 National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) Benchmarks Report, just over 3 percent of career-center leaders report to the office of the president.

Wake Forest was willing to make career services "strategic at the executive level," he says. "We wanted to make career development mission-critical for the students. Most colleges might say that," he says, "but will they show it by having a leader at the table and backed with resources?"

One of the many programs Wake Forest offers students is a series of half-semester, one-and-a-half credit College to Career courses, taught in the department of education. The courses are not mandated, but are always oversubscribed, Chan says, and focus on helping students become increasingly career ready from freshman to senior year.

Data show that those who take the class have more career confidence and preparation, and their stress levels are lower, Chan says. In addition, in the fall of 2022, his department started a first-generation ambassadors program, which trains first-gen students to reach out and coach their friends, urging them to attend career fairs and events and connect with resources. The year after the program started, Chan says, the university saw an 80-percent increase in first-generation students engaging with career events and his office.

Chan acknowledges that he lives in a rarified world, with more funding and staff than most career-services offices. But many institutions that have fewer resources to draw on are rethinking how to better serve students. In some cases, it's as simple as setting up tables at campus events or in classroom buildings, to have a presence where students gather.

"We wanted to make career development mission-critical for the students. Most colleges might say that, but will they show it by having a leader at the table and backed with resources?"

It can also include expanding career centers' office hours beyond 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. for working students, as Colorado's Community College of Aurora is planning to do. Reyna M. Anaya, the college's dean of student success and senior student-affairs officer, says her institution is in the process of redesigning its career services. Besides expanding hours, they plan to start career conversations earlier; for example, students can now begin their first semester by completing a survey that will assess their career readiness and guide their skill development throughout their college experience.

"We're working on preparing students through their whole journey to think about their goals, rather than in their last semester," Anaya says.

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Continuing Concerns Over Mental Health

More young adults than ever before — and therefore more college students — are feeling depressed and anxious, and more say they have contemplated suicide, according to an overview of data collected by the Healthy Minds Network, a nationwide group of top research organizations focused on adolescent and young adult health. The Healthy Minds annual survey is the most

When college leaders and faculty were asked in the *Chronicle* survey what strategies or tools their college needs to expand to help more students succeed academically, the No. 1 response for both was mental-health services.

comprehensive study of mental health in higher education.

In 2020-21, more than 60 percent of students met criteria for one or more mental-health problems, a nearly 50-percent increase from 2013. And the impact of the pandemic has only worsened the situation.

"Faculty anecdotally have said that last year was one of the most challenging in their teaching careers," says Anne Kearney, dean of student well-being at Le Moyne College, a private Jesuit college in Syracuse, N.Y. "We saw students not showing up, and it wasn't just for a day or two. It would be for two, three weeks, saying, 'I'm having a mental-health crisis.'"

No wonder, then, that when administrative and academic leaders and faculty were asked in the *Chronicle* survey what strategies or tools their college needs to expand or add to help more students succeed academically, the No. 1 response for both was mental-health services. (See chart, p. 18.)

The percentage of students receiving those services, particularly at institutions that have on-campus mental-health resources, has increased significantly over time, but that has been outpaced by the increase in the prevalence of mental-health needs, says Sarah Ketchen Lipson, associate professor of health law, policy, and management at Boston University, and principal investigator for the Healthy Minds Network.

"So even though we've seen an increase in help-seeking behavior, the treatment gap or the proportion of students with untreated mental-health problems has actually continued to widen over time." she says.

Moreover, according to the Healthy Minds survey, the most common reasons students won't seek help are: They question how serious their needs are; they prefer to deal with issues by themselves; they don't have time; or they figure their problems will get better on their own.

These reasons reflect a lack of urgency around getting help — a reaction that holds true for millions of students, regardless of race, ethnicity, or type of institution, says Lipson. "And that's even among students

who report suicidal ideation or have the highest rates of major depressive symptoms." So adding more mental-health counselors and psychologists isn't enough. "We're never going to be able to staff our way out of this problem," Lipson says.

That means colleges need to reach students where they are — in classrooms, in resident halls, at extracurricular activities, and in student centers. And that outreach should take many forms, including information about digital mental-health resources, peer mentoring, and mindfulness training.

Faculty members play a key role, since instructors typically see students more frequently than do any other adults. Yet another study found that 73 percent of professors would welcome additional training on the topic of student mental health, 61 percent believe it should be mandatory that all faculty receive basic training in how to respond to students experiencing mental or emotional distress, and 21 percent said supporting students in mental or emotional distress has taken a toll on their own mental health.

Scherr, of the University of Tennessee Southern, who has taught a first-year-experience class at the university, has found himself grappling with students who are struggling. He wishes he had more understanding of how to help them.

"It's hard for an 18-year-old to look you in the eye and say, 'I'm stressed,'" he says. "Even if I see all the signs and ask them. They say, 'I'm fine.'"

Lipson notes that faculty members can make a difference just by being aware of logistics, such as the deadlines for papers. For example, her class projects are due at 5 p.m., rather than at midnight or in the early morning — and she doesn't stop there. She also tells students that that's the deadline because she wants them to have dinner, get a good night's sleep, and not have the class interfere with their well-being. "That's the message that any faculty member can deliver," she says.

> "We're never going to be able to staff our way out of this problem."

Le Moyne College, with about 3,500 students, was spurred to participate in the Healthy Minds survey for the first time in the fall of 2022 because college leaders felt they needed to understand students' mental health better. There have been four student suicides over the past four years.

"I think we were kind of naïve. We are a close-knit, tight community — but it can happen anywhere," Kearney says.

Christian Childs, 22, who graduated from Le Moyne in May, was

close friends with two of the four students who took their own lives and knew the other two. He and his peers felt that, while faculty members stepped forward to support students after the tragedies, college administrators were not doing enough to help.

After the third suicide, he and a friend organized a protest, saying that the painful events couldn't be ignored and asking the administration to offer students more mental-health support.

The college responded, Childs says. "The president of our college, Linda LeMura, came to the protest and told us the administration was already taking measures to help us."

Participating in the Healthy Minds survey was one of those steps, and it was very helpful, Kearney says. "In some areas we were higher than the national average and in some areas we were lower."

The college has also applied for and was recently awarded a $300,000 grant to develop a one-credit class on resilience. And Jesuit priests also became more visible on campus, to support and advise students, Childs says. They would pop into the dining hall during peak periods or walk around campus between classes, all in an effort to chat with students.

Childs co-founded a mental-health-awareness club in his junior year, with funding from the university. About 50 students regularly attended the biweekly meetings, and it helped that the head of student development was fully on board and pushed for more ambitious programming, he says.

"Students would come up to us after events and say 'I was in a really hard place. But you made me come out of my shell, you made me meet people, you made me tell them about myself, which I don't normally do. Thank you,'" Childs says. "I think students are much better off than I was freshman year."

CONCLUSION

One key takeaway about student success: Go where the students are. Don't wait for them to come to you, whether for academic advice, career services, mental-health support, or any other help they need to succeed in college.

> "The campuses that have done this well are the ones that have finally found a way to radically collaborate and have those conversations together."

Another takeaway: While the needs of each institution vary, the overarching goal, as Williams, the vice provost at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, says, is for a cohesive approach. And that is tough, as anyone in higher education knows, with staff, faculty members, and students often facing so many conflicting needs, goals, beliefs, and requirements.

"The campuses that have done this well are the ones that have finally found a way to radically collaborate and have those conversations together," Williams says.

That doesn't mean making everyone responsible for everything, but rather carefully spelling out what is expected of whom, and then helping them offer concrete assistance.

While it is tempting to reduce student success to the most measurable elements, such as retention and graduation, that's ultimately "a zero-sum game," says Biddix, the professor at Tennessee at Knoxville. "At some point, you're not going to move the needle no matter what you do."

And keep the bigger picture in mind.

"The external metric of success is a student becoming a contributing member of society," he says. "Internally, success, at the end of the day, is, 'Are we creating happy humans?'"

METHODOLOGY

The *Chronicle*/AWS nationwide survey of U.S. college officials, faculty members, and students employed or enrolled at a two- or four-year college was held online from June 20 to July 1, 2023. Of the 1,225 respondents, 404 were academic and administrative leaders, 418 were faculty members, and 403 were students.

Ninety-nine percent of the college officials worked full time, with 48 percent working at a four-year public institution, 38 percent at a four-year private institution, and 15 percent at a two-year public institution. Ninety-three percent of the faculty members worked full time, with 51 percent employed at a four-year public institution, 35 percent at a four-year private institution, and 14 percent at a two-year college. Eighty-one percent of the students were enrolled full time, with 79 percent attending a four-year college and 21 percent attending a two-year institution. Seventy-nine percent attended a public institution, while 21 percent attended a private institution.

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