2022
National Student Satisfaction and Priorities Report

Based on 362,555 student records at 639 four-year and two-year colleges and universities

WHAT DOES STUDENT SATISFACTION LOOK LIKE IN OUR POST-PANDEMIC WORLD?

This year's national report reflects cumulative data for three academic years: 2019-20, 2020-21, and 2021-22, with the majority of the responses collected following the onset of the pandemic in the spring of 2020. In addition, this report looks at the overall satisfaction scores by academic year for the most recent five-year trends to provide a better understanding of how perceptions have shifted in recent years. It also examines how institutions are performing on high priority items to show which institution types are meeting or failing to meet student expectations. Finally, the report takes a deeper dive into satisfaction levels for items related to the important category of campus climate to see how institutions are performing.

Satisfaction surveying is the best way to assess how students value their experience.

For more than 25 years, thousands of colleges and universities have used the RNL Satisfaction-Priorities Surveys to assess their students, strengthen the student experience, increase student success and completion, and prioritize campus planning initiatives.

The surveys are valued so highly because they reveal where institutions are succeeding and where they should focus their attention and resources. By asking students to rate their satisfaction and priorities, campuses can quickly uncover strengths and challenges.

STRENGTHS
- High satisfaction
- High importance

*Areas to **celebrate** and promote*

CHALLENGES
- Low satisfaction
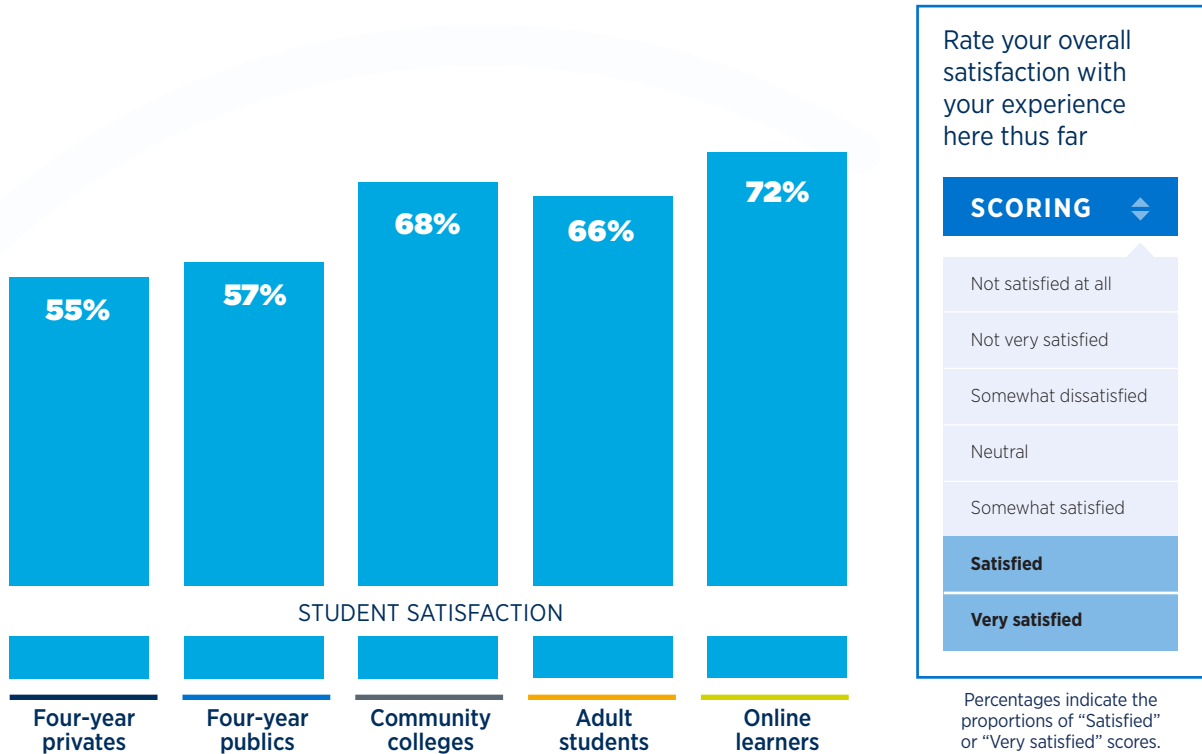- High importance

*Areas to **prioritize** for improvement*

The RNL surveys take a comprehensive look at the student experience, asking students for their feedback on issues inside and outside the classroom, and then provide peer institution benchmarks for specific student groups.

Here are just a few examples of the many ways campuses use satisfaction-priorities data.

- Determining which student success resources could most benefit students.
- Maintaining a quality student experience for all students, whether traditional students, online learners, adult undergraduates, or graduate students.
- Benchmarking the student experience against competing institutions.
- Improving campus efficiency and collaboration among departments.
- Prioritizing campus development projects.
- Documenting improvements year over year for accreditation purposes.
- Identifying campus strengths to promote in recruitment communications.

HOW SATISFIED ARE COLLEGE STUDENTS AND HOW LIKELY ARE THEY TO RE-ENROLL?

Overall satisfaction scores across institution types

55%	57%	68%	66%	72%
Four-year privates	Four-year publics	Community colleges	Adult students	Online learners

STUDENT SATISFACTION

Rate your overall satisfaction with your experience here thus far

SCORING ⇅
Not satisfied at all
Not very satisfied
Somewhat dissatisfied
Neutral
Somewhat satisfied
Satisfied
Very satisfied

Percentages indicate the proportions of "Satisfied" or "Very satisfied" scores.

Why measure student satisfaction and priorities?

Evidence-based research has documented strong links between students' scores on RNL Satisfaction-Priorities Surveys with several areas, including:
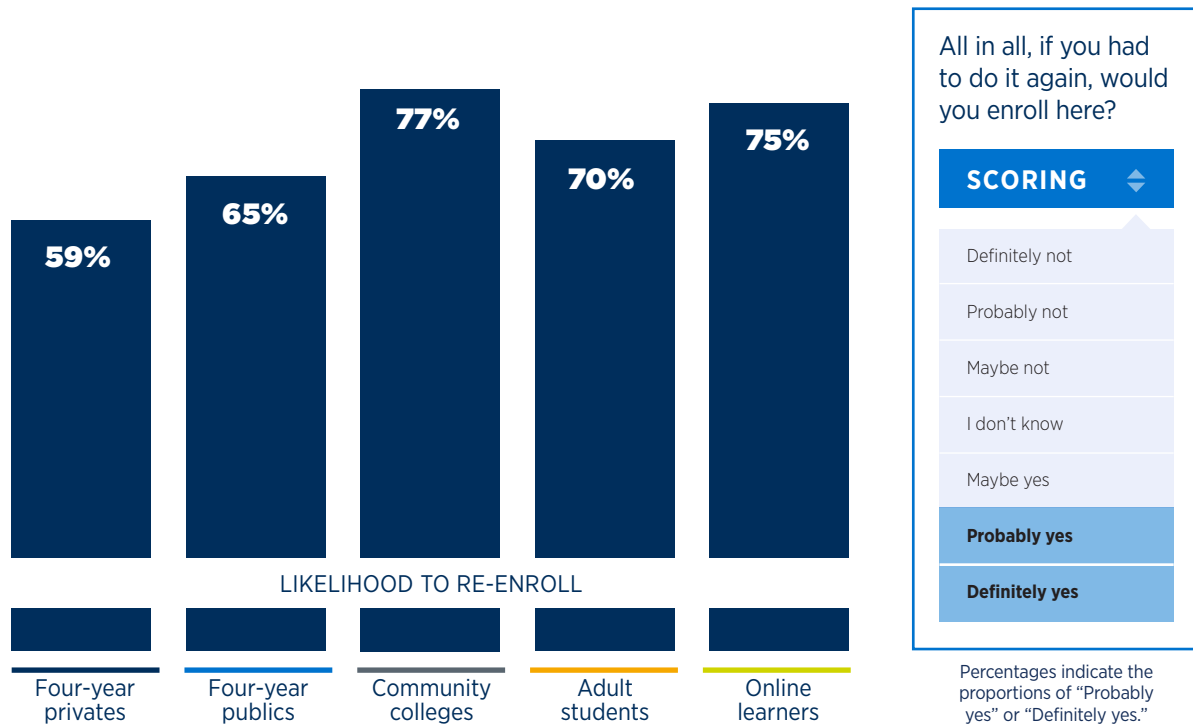
Student retention   **College completion rates**   **Alumni giving**

TO LEARN MORE, DOWNLOAD THE INFOGRAPHIC AVAILABLE AT **RNL.COM/ASSESSMENT**

Overall re-enrollment scores across institution types

LIKELIHOOD TO RE-ENROLL

Four-year privates	Four-year publics	Community colleges	Adult students	Online learners
59%	65%	77%	70%	75%

All in all, if you had to do it again, would you enroll here?

SCORING ⇕

- Definitely not
- Probably not
- Maybe not
- I don't know
- Maybe yes
- **Probably yes**
- **Definitely yes**

Percentages indicate the proportions of "Probably yes" or "Definitely yes."

TAKEAWAYS

The summary satisfaction and re-enrollment scores provide the big picture on the student experience. Monitoring these important scores provides an indication of how institutions are performing based on the perceptions of their students. **Higher scores on these summary items typically correlate with higher institutional retention and graduation rates.**

In this year's data, nontraditional students had higher satisfaction and re-enrollment scores than institutions serving traditional students. This includes the adult student undergraduate and graduate data set, online learning students, and students at community colleges who are more likely to be nontraditional learners. The good news is there is a lot of potential for colleges to be able to serve these populations. However, throughout this report the data reflect that students at four-year public and private institutions have lower satisfaction scores than their counterparts at community colleges or adult and online serving institutions. We will see this further into the report with overall satisfaction levels and with satisfaction scores on individual items.

HOW HAS STUDENT SATISFACTION SHIFTED IN THE PAST FIVE YEARS?

The following charts show how summary satisfaction scores have changed over the past five years at different institution types. This section of the report compares the summary satisfaction scores by specific academic years for each institution type.
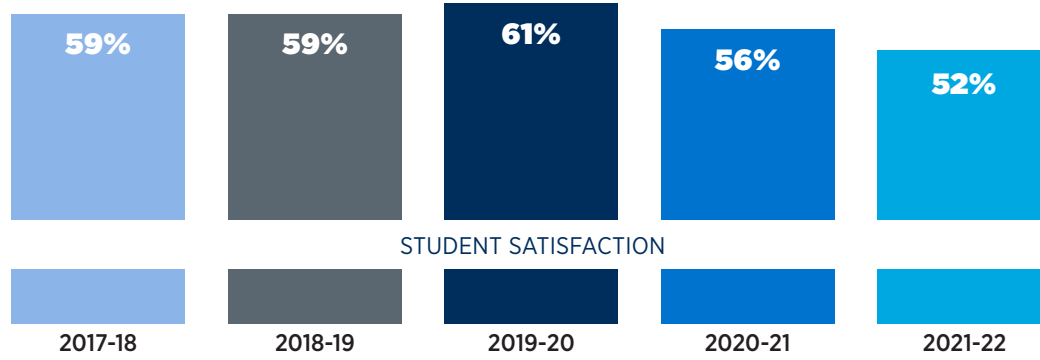
Four-year privates
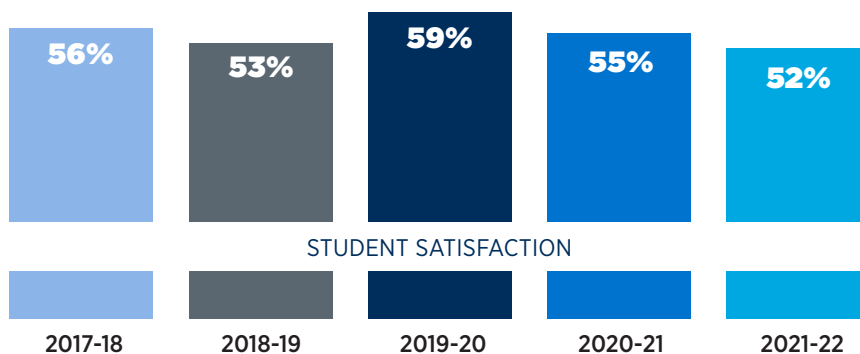
2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
56%	53%	59%	55%	52%

STUDENT SATISFACTION

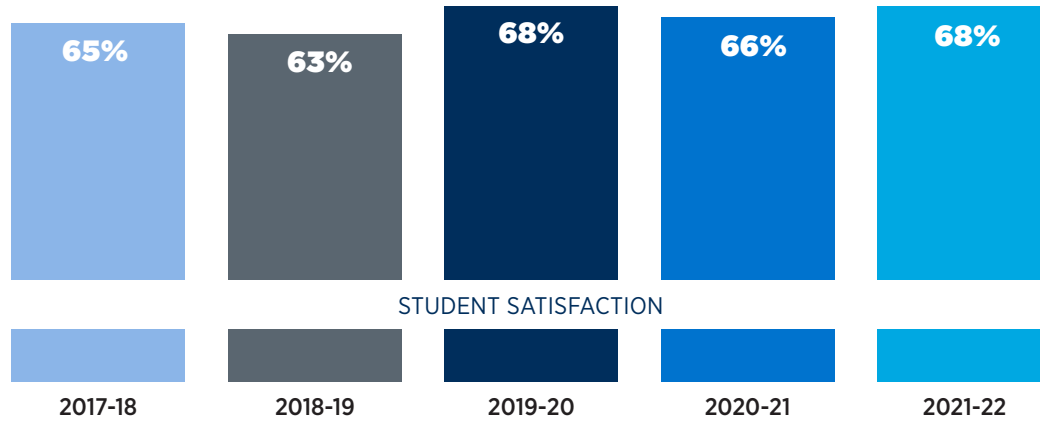Rate your overall satisfaction with your experience here thus far

SCORING ⬍

Not satisfied at all

Not very satisfied

Somewhat dissatisfied

Neutral

Somewhat satisfied

Satisfied

Very satisfied

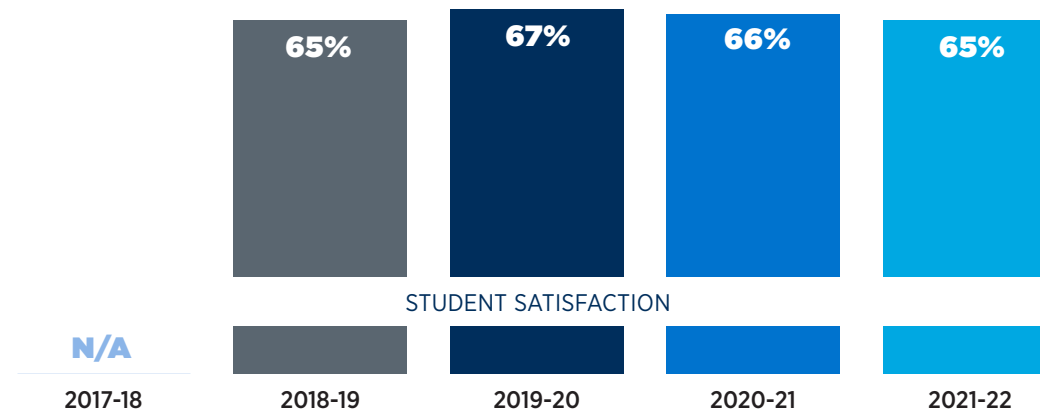Percentages indicate the proportions of "Satisfied" or "Very satisfied" scores.

Four-year publics

2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
59%	59%	61%	56%	52%

STUDENT SATISFACTION

Community colleges

2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
65%	63%	68%	66%	68%

STUDENT SATISFACTION

Adult students

2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
N/A	65%	67%	66%	65%

STUDENT SATISFACTION
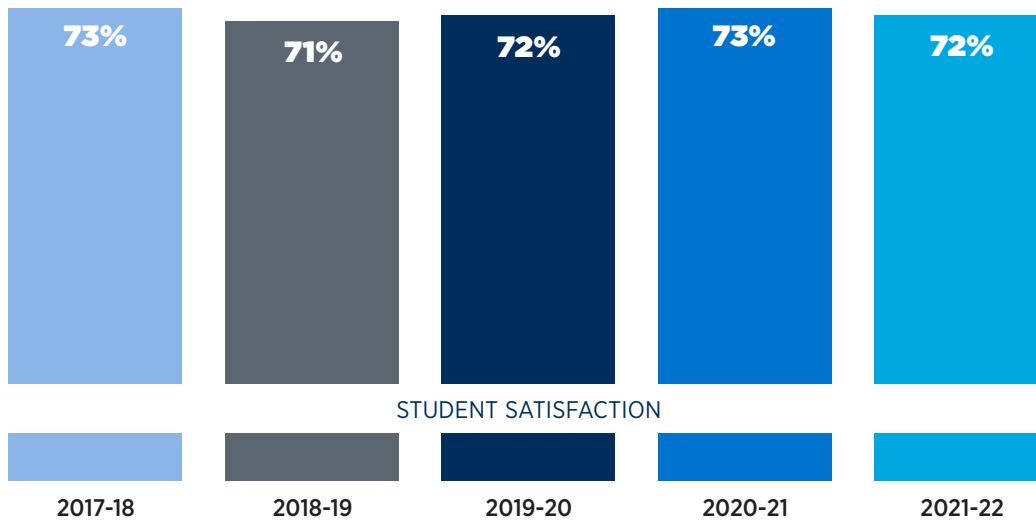
No data available for 2017-18 for the overall adult population (combined graduate and undergraduate students).

Online learners

2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
73%	71%	72%	73%	72%

STUDENT SATISFACTION

TAKEAWAYS

As we look at the patterns of satisfaction before and after the pandemic year of 2019-20, we can see that four-year private satisfaction levels declined in the past year and haven't returned to their pre-pandemic levels. Satisfaction at four-year public institutions is also well below pre-pandemic scores. However, at community colleges, post-pandemic satisfaction levels are higher than previous years and on an upswing. While there are no data available for the combination of adult undergraduate and graduate students for 2017-18 (because of how the data were reported), we can still see over the past four years that satisfaction scores have remained largely unchanged. The same is true for online learners where satisfaction levels have remained consistent.
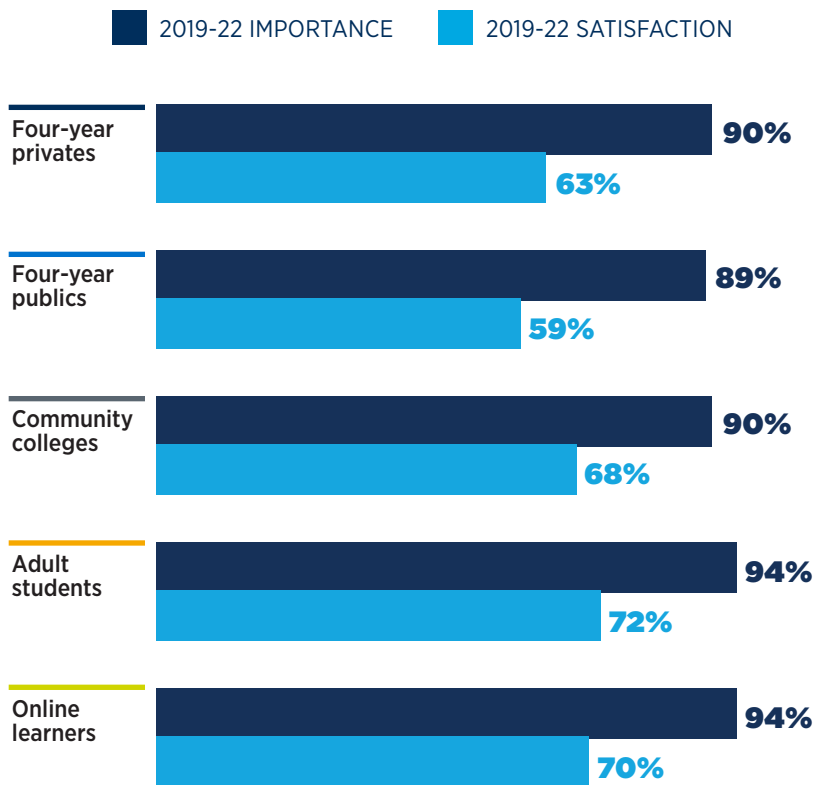
This raises the question: Should satisfaction be going up for online and adult students as institutions get potentially better with delivering services in a variety of modalities? Or have the experiences of these two populations been largely unchanged by recent shifts in higher education? It will be interesting to observe going forward if student expectations change as students across institution types have more exposure to online learning environments and their comfort levels increase with online instruction and online services.

It is also possible that the types of students who choose these modalities determines how likely they are to be satisfied with their experience. Students who choose online study or adult learners in undergraduate or graduate programs likely have different priorities and expectations compared to traditional undergraduates at four-year institutions.

HOW DOES STUDENT SATISFACTION COMPARE IN KEY AREAS OF THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE?

The data in this section reflect the total data sets for fall 2019 through spring 2022. These are items that are monitored on an annual basis because they are consistently very important to student populations across institution types.

The quality of instruction is excellent

2019-22 IMPORTANCE **2019-22 SATISFACTION**

Four-year privates
90%
63%

Four-year publics
89%
59%

Community colleges
90%
68%

Adult students
94%
72%

Online learners
94%
70%

SCORING

Level of Importance

1 Not important at all
2 Not very important
3 Somewhat unimportant
4 Neutral
5 Somewhat important
6 Important
7 Very important

Level of Satisfaction

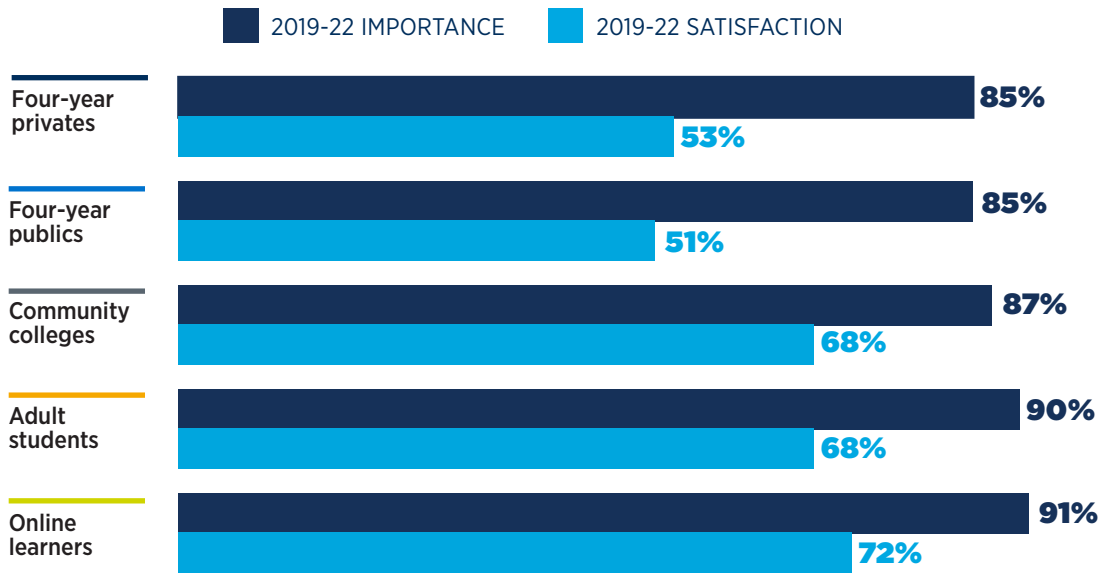1 Not satisfied at all
2 Not very satisfied
3 Somewhat dissatisfied
4 Neutral
5 Somewhat satisfied
6 Satisfied
7 Very satisfied

Percentages indicate the proportions of students with scores of 6 or 7.

This item continues to be a high priority item for students in all five populations. While the satisfaction scores appear to be relatively high, this item consistently appears as a challenge item (high importance, lower relative satisfaction)—meaning it is a priority area for campuses to address. This is especially true with the continued increases in online and hybrid modalities.

This may also stem from the perception of how faculty teach more than the subject matter they are teaching. Are faculty engaging with students and using a variety of methods to connect with students beyond lecturing? It can be especially helpful for institutions to unpack this item at the major, program, or departmental level to see where some faculty members may be excelling and where there may be room for improvement. Cross referencing the satisfaction data results with course evaluations may provide additional direction on the areas that should be targeted to encourage improvement on this item.

Faculty provide timely feedback

■ 2019-22 IMPORTANCE ■ 2019-22 SATISFACTION

Four-year privates
- 85%
- 53%

Four-year publics
- 85%
- 51%

Community colleges
- 87%
- 68%

Adult students
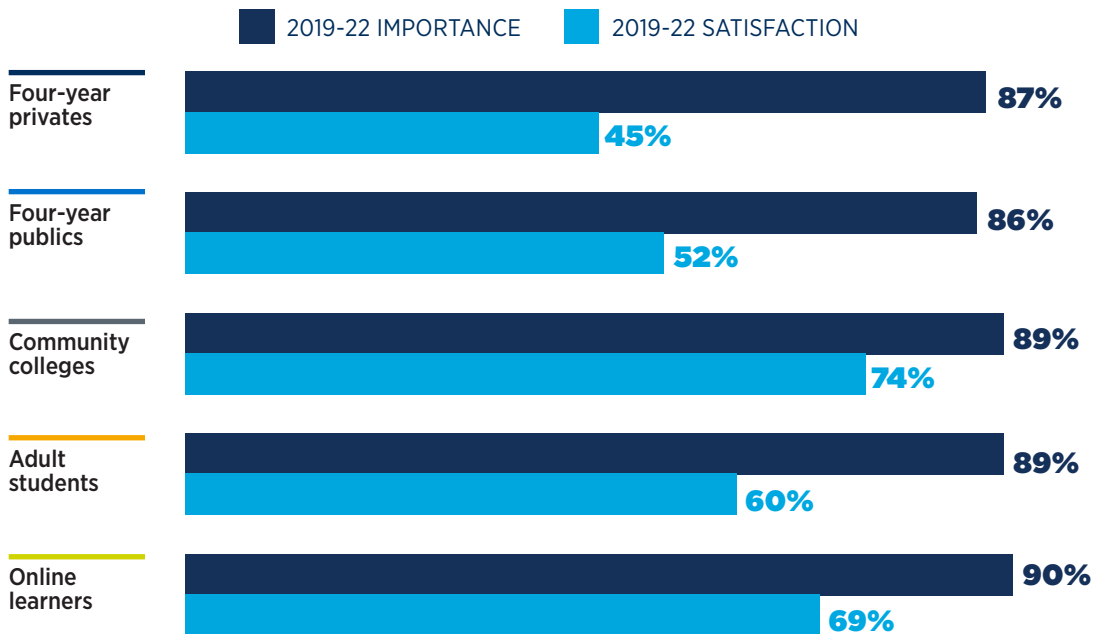- 90%
- 68%

Online learners
- 91%
- 72%

This is another item that repeatedly presents as a challenge for institutions. Students have high expectations for timely feedback even while their definition of what is considered "timely" may vary. Faculty can help to set expectations by providing regular updates to students on when they can expect to receive a response on test scores, grades on papers and projects, and the typical response time for email messages. Faculty may also be encouraged to provide feedback to students more quickly near midterms, finals, or major assignments. This is another item that can best be explored at the major, program, or department level to target improvements where they are most needed on a campus.

Adequate financial aid is available

■ 2019-22 IMPORTANCE ■ 2019-22 SATISFACTION

Four-year privates
- 85%
- 48%

Four-year publics
- 84%
- 47%

Community colleges
- 86%
- 68%

Adult students
- 88%
- 59%

Online learners
- 85%
- 67%
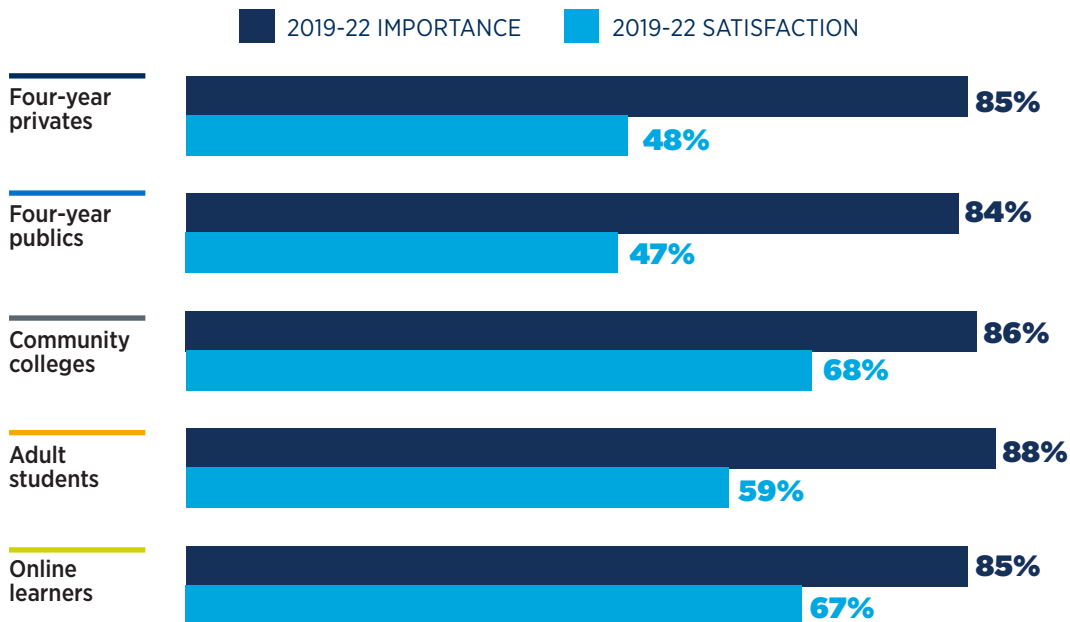
Financial aid is an area where students may never quite feel they have received enough assistance, so it is often an item that institutions need to address because it is so important to students. Student debt continues to be a hot button topic in our society, and the responsibility often rests with institutions to balance scholarships and aid with student loan expectations. This is true for the institutions that may seem more affordable (four-year and two-year public schools) as well as for the generally more expensive private institutions.

Tuition paid is a worthwhile investment

Legend: 2019-22 IMPORTANCE | 2019-22 SATISFACTION

Four-year privates: 87% importance, 45% satisfaction
Four-year publics: 86% importance, 52% satisfaction
Community colleges: 89% importance, 74% satisfaction
Adult students: 89% importance, 60% satisfaction
Online learners: 90% importance, 69% satisfaction

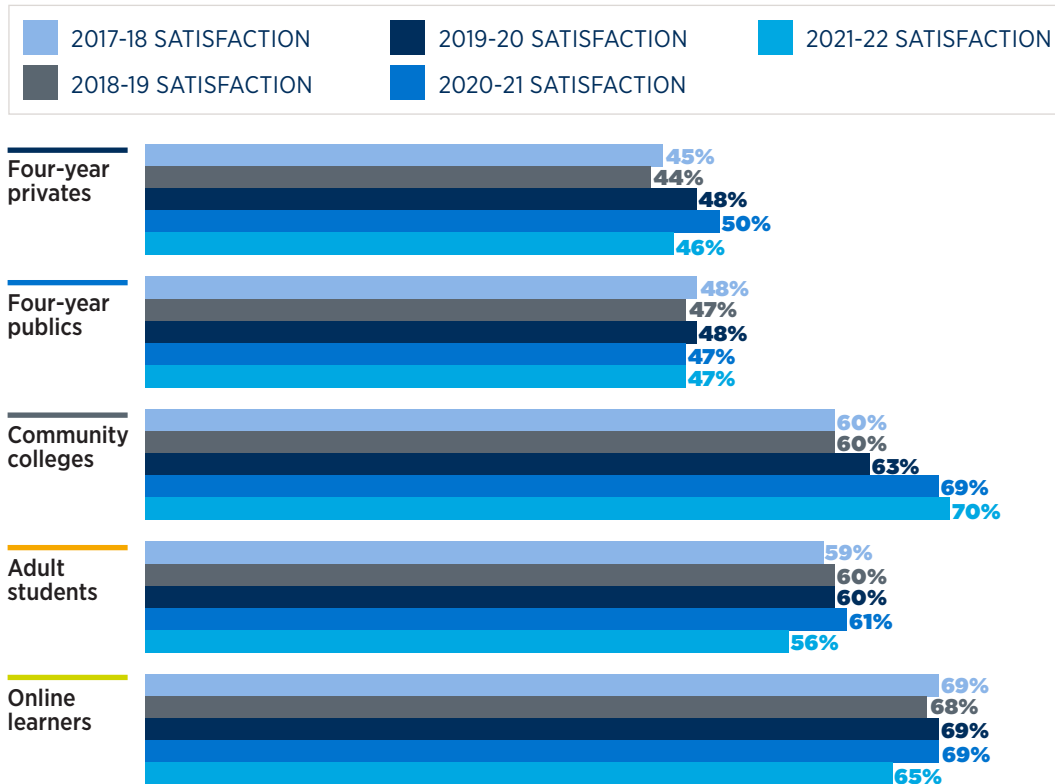*Note: Community college data taken from Form B with 59,057 student records from 72 institutions.*

The value of a college education has been under greater scrutiny as the cost of college has increased. The results here suggest that satisfaction with tuition being a worthwhile investment does increase as the cost of tuition decreases, with four-year privates having the lowest satisfaction and community colleges the highest. This is another area where sharing outcomes and information on the value of a degree from the institution can go a long way toward addressing satisfaction with tuition. Because of the high importance students place on it, institutions do need to address the issue.

FIVE-YEAR TRENDS WITH SATISFACTION FOR ADEQUATE FINANCIAL AID AVAILABLE AND TUITION PAID WORTHWHILE

While importance levels have remained high on these two items over the past five years, the satisfaction levels have varied.

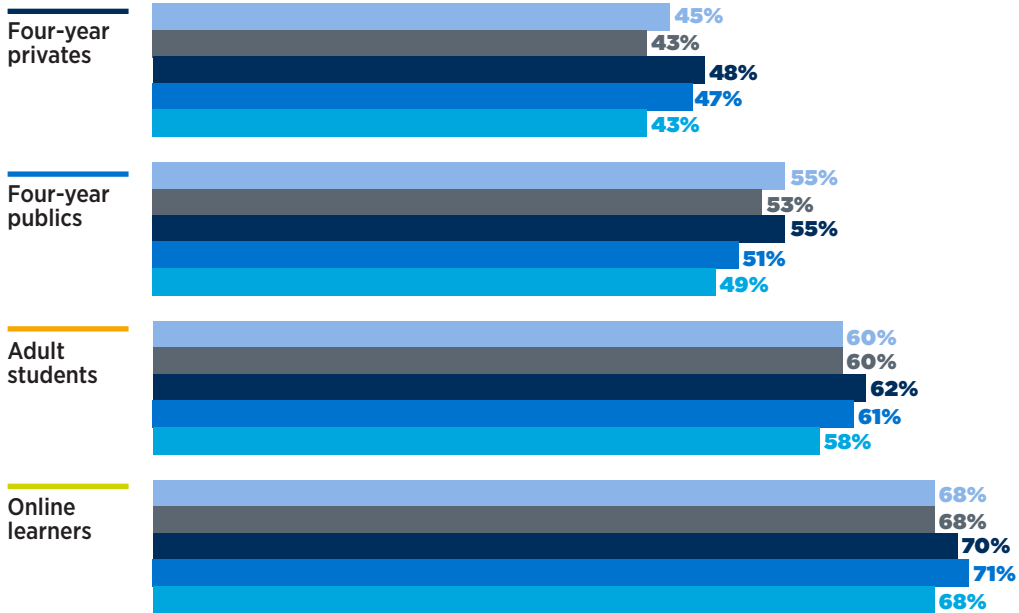## ADEQUATE FINANCIAL AID IS AVAILABLE

Legend	
2017-18 SATISFACTION	2019-20 SATISFACTION	2021-22 SATISFACTION
2018-19 SATISFACTION	2020-21 SATISFACTION	

Four-year privates
- 45%
- 44%
- 48%
- 50%
- 46%

Four-year publics
- 48%
- 47%
- 48%
- 47%
- 47%

Community colleges
- 60%
- 60%
- 63%
- 69%
- 70%

Adult students
- 59%
- 60%
- 60%
- 61%
- 56%

Online learners
- 69%
- 68%
- 69%
- 69%
- 65%

Note: 2017-18 trend data for adult students is for graduate students only (typically the majority population in this data set).

Observation

The satisfaction level patterns vary on this item across the five populations. Community colleges reflect increases in satisfaction. Adult and online learners as well as students at four-year privates reflect recent declines after steady levels or moderate increases. Satisfaction is steady for four-year public students.

TUITION PAID IS A WORTHWHILE INVESTMENT

■ 2017-18 SATISFACTION	■ 2019-20 SATISFACTION	■ 2021-22 SATISFACTION
■ 2018-19 SATISFACTION	■ 2020-21 SATISFACTION	

Four-year privates
- 45%
- 43%
- 48%
- 47%
- 43%

Four-year publics
- 55%
- 53%
- 55%
- 51%
- 49%

Adult students
- 60%
- 60%
- 62%
- 61%
- 58%

Online learners
- 68%
- 68%
- 70%
- 71%
- 68%

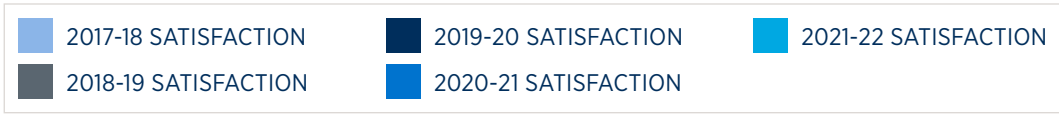*Note: No trend data available for community colleges on tuition paid worthwhile. 2017-18 trend data for adult students is for graduate students only (typically the majority population in this data set).*

Observation

Satisfaction levels are at or below pre-pandemic levels for all four populations on this item.

The campus is secure for all students

Four-year privates
90%
66%

Four-year publics
88%
64%

Community colleges
90%
81%
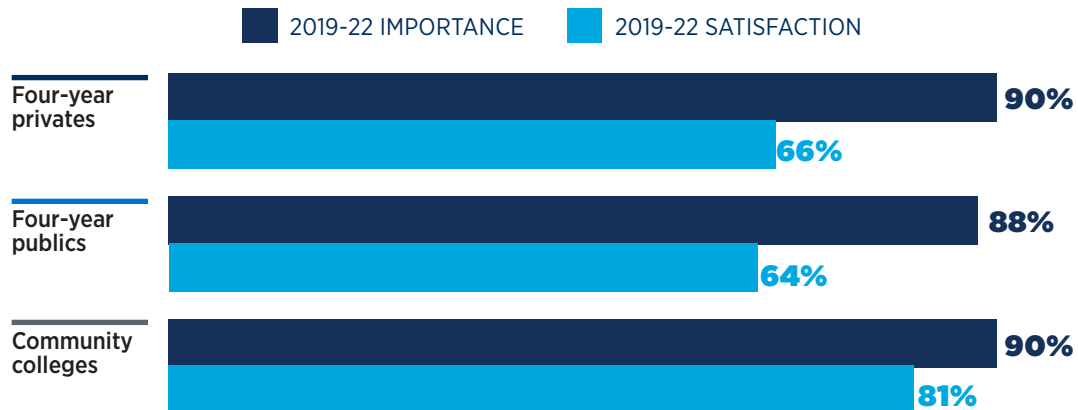
The focus of this comparison is on the data sets reflecting students who are likely to take the majority of their classes on campus rather than in online or hybrid environments. This item is usually a strength for institutions unless they have unresolved safety concerns for their student population. In recent years, the perception of students feeling safe has expanded to include medical health, mental health, and being safe from harassment, in addition to the traditional perceptions of physical safety on campus.

It is interesting to note that on all of these high priority items, four-year private and public institutions have the lowest satisfaction when compared with community colleges and institutions serving adult and online populations. This may be because nontraditional populations tend toward higher satisfaction levels (if they are not satisfied, they are likely not enrolled based on competing priorities in their life). It may also be the case that these institutions are better adapting to serve students in our current environment.

CAMPUS CLIMATE: ARE INSTITUTIONS MEETING STUDENT EXPECTATIONS?

This section examines the importance and satisfaction levels of several campus climate items for each student population.

Four-year privates

CAMPUS CLIMATE ITEMS

■ 2019-22 IMPORTANCE ■ 2019-22 SATISFACTION

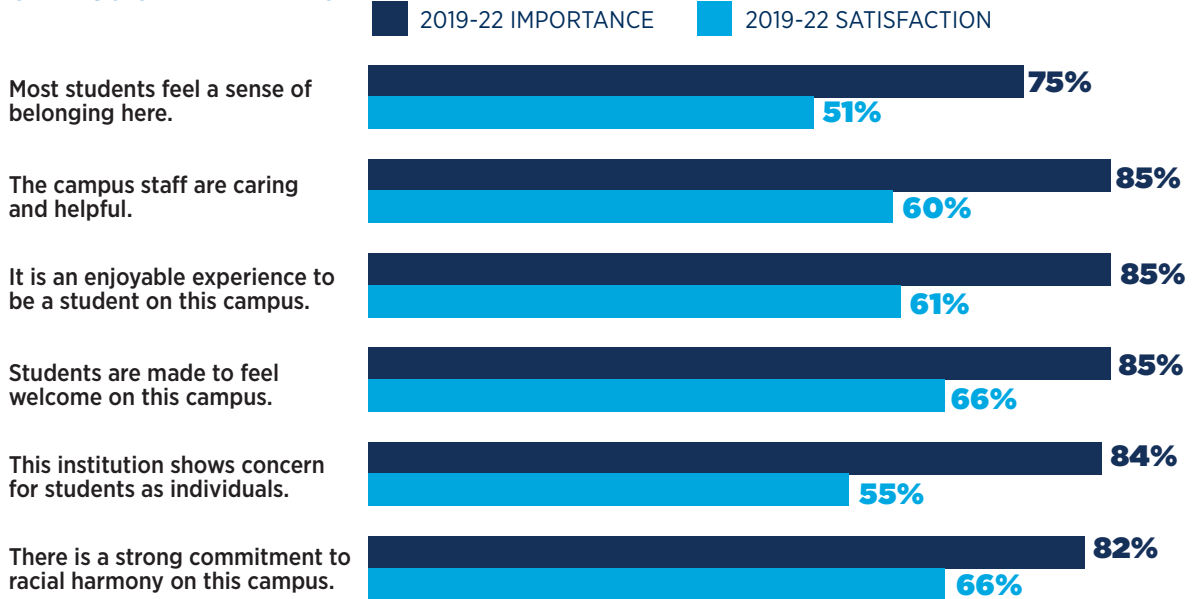| Campus climate item	Importance	Satisfaction
Most students feel a sense of belonging here.	80%	47%
The campus staff are caring and helpful.	87%	65%
It is an enjoyable experience to be a student on this campus.	88%	58%
Students are made to feel welcome on this campus.	87%	64%
This institution shows concern for students as individuals.	87%	58%
There is a strong commitment to racial harmony on this campus.	83%	62%

At four-year private institutions nationally, two of these items are identified as challenges, making both high priorities for improvement:

- It is an enjoyable experience to be a student on this campus.
- This institution shows concern for students as individuals.

Four-year publics

CAMPUS CLIMATE ITEMS

■ 2019-22 IMPORTANCE   ■ 2019-22 SATISFACTION

Most students feel a sense of belonging here.
75%
51%

The campus staff are caring and helpful.
85%
60%

It is an enjoyable experience to be a student on this campus.
85%
61%

Students are made to feel welcome on this campus.
85%
66%

This institution shows concern for students as individuals.
84%
55%

**There is a strong commitment to racial harmony on this campus.**
82%
66%

At four-year public institutions nationally, one item is identified as a challenge:

- This institution shows concern for students.

Community colleges

CAMPUS CLIMATE ITEMS

■ 2019-22 IMPORTANCE   ■ 2019-22 SATISFACTION

Most students feel a sense of belonging here.
75%
66%

The campus staff are caring and helpful.
86%
76%

It is an enjoyable experience to be a student on this campus.
85%
73%

Students are made to feel welcome on this campus.
88%
78%

This institution shows concern for students as individuals.
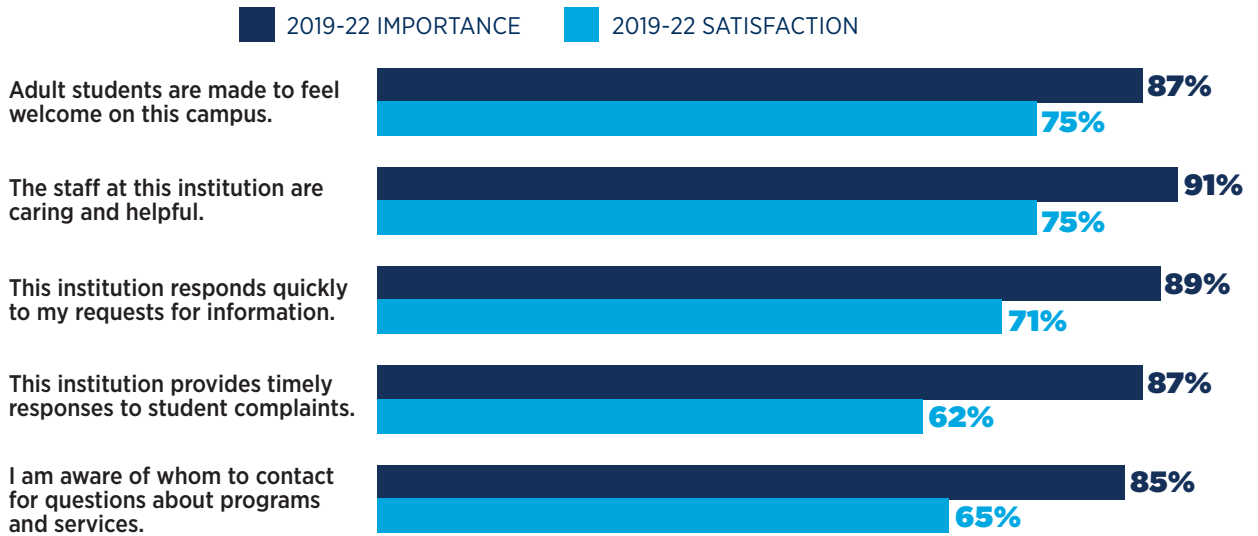83%
64%
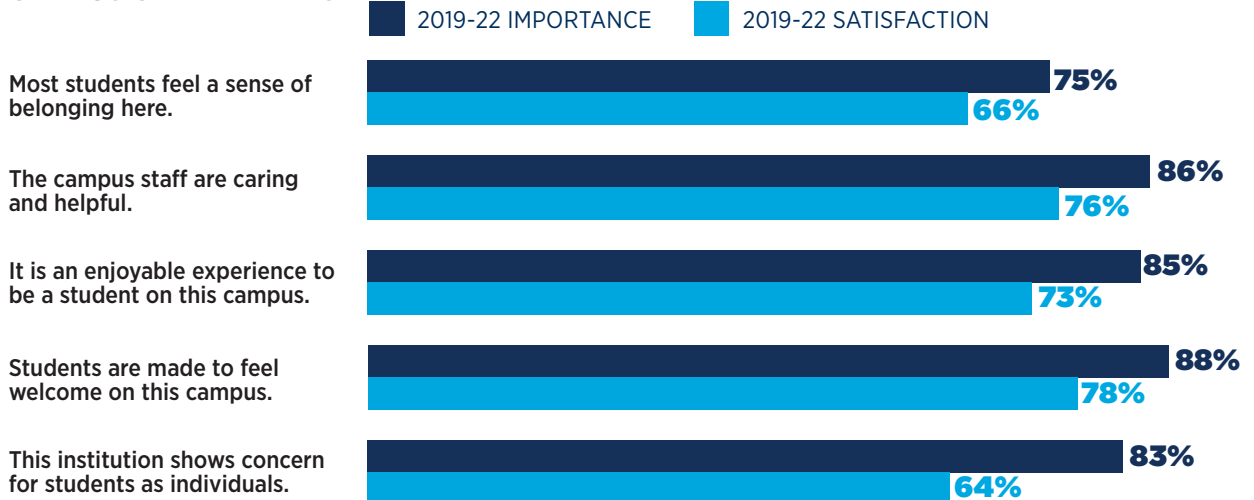
At community colleges nationally, two items are identified as strengths, indicating they are areas to celebrate:

- The campus staff are caring and helpful.
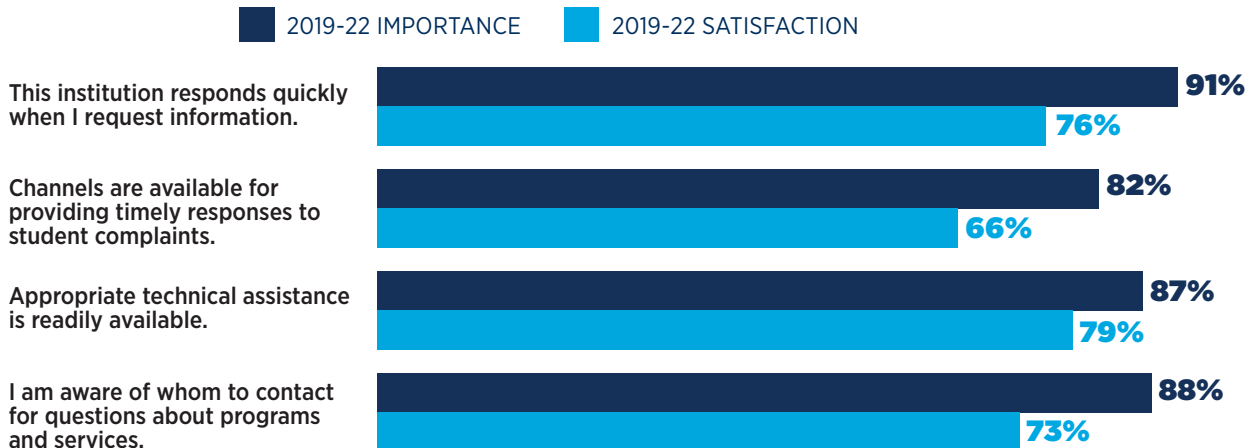- Students are made to feel welcome on this campus.

Adult students

CAMPUS CLIMATE ITEMS

■ 2019-22 IMPORTANCE ■ 2019-22 SATISFACTION

Adult students are made to feel welcome on this campus.
- Importance: 87%
- Satisfaction: 75%

The staff at this institution are caring and helpful.
- Importance: 91%
- Satisfaction: 75%

This institution responds quickly to my requests for information.
- Importance: 89%
- Satisfaction: 71%

This institution provides timely responses to student complaints.
- Importance: 87%
- Satisfaction: 62%

I am aware of whom to contact for questions about programs and services.
- Importance: 85%
- Satisfaction: 65%

For the adult undergraduate and graduate student population nationally, no items are identified as strengths or challenges. This may be because adult students are more focused on other aspects of their college experience. That is not to say that institutions serving adult learners should be less concerned about how welcoming they are or the service they are providing.

Online learners

CAMPUS CLIMATE ITEMS

■ 2019-22 IMPORTANCE ■ 2019-22 SATISFACTION

This institution responds quickly when I request information.
- Importance: 91%
- Satisfaction: 76%

Channels are available for providing timely responses to student complaints.
- Importance: 82%
- Satisfaction: 66%

Appropriate technical assistance is readily available.
- Importance: 87%
- Satisfaction: 79%

I am aware of whom to contact for questions about programs and services.
- Importance: 88%
- Satisfaction: 73%

No items are identified as strengths or challenges for online learners nationally. For most online learners the emphasis is on their instructional interactions. The sense of campus climate is likely more focused on access to information and the resolution of technical issues.

TAKEAWAY: The value of a positive campus climate

Student focus and success have been priorities for campuses for years. It is now more in the forefront as institutions compete with many employment opportunities that do not require college degrees while also dealing with the demographic cliff that will increase competition for a shrinking pool of prospective students.

An institution's campus climate—which is another way of saying how students feel on the campus—can make a big difference in whether students choose to stay or leave. Attracting and keeping students with a positive campus environment becomes even more important. It is also relevant to consider that how students feel about their institution may play a bigger role when there are a variety of modalities and options for students to get a degree. Students are no longer place-bound in the way they were even 10 years ago.

Paying attention to campus climate items is one way for colleges and universities to manage what they can control by providing the best service to students, either in-person or virtually. Positive campus climates are also a way to keep students engaged with their educational experience and to potentially stay engaged as future alumni.

RNL has documented the links between student satisfaction with campus climate and individual student retention.

Student retention

YOU CAN LEARN MORE AT **RNL.COM/ASSESSMENT**

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ASSESSING STUDENT SATISFACTION

Regularly assessing student satisfaction on your campus has become even more critical in recent years. Assessment data inform student success efforts by providing insight into the minds of your students. Gathering and valuing student feedback to guide and inform decision making on campus can be the difference between institutional growth and populations shrinking.

However, just gathering the data is not enough. You need to be prepared to take action based on the priorities of your students, and you need to have strong communication plans in place to inform the campus community of the actions you are taking and why. Student satisfaction assessment is also not a "once and done" activity but something that should be implemented on a regular cadence of every other year in order to best understand the priorities of the current population of students you are serving. As our world continues to shift, as new modalities continue to come into play, the perceptions of our students can change quickly, and having the most current data to track and understand the students you are serving can put your institution in the best position to be responsive.

If you have gotten off cycle in your student satisfaction survey because of the pandemic, you are encouraged to reimplement the assessment in the academic year ahead. You need to understand any shifts in satisfaction and priorities for your students, especially given how much the higher education experience has changed for students in recent years. The collection of these data should remain a budget priority, and institutions need to make a commitment to fully use the results once they are received to see the best return on investment.

All survey instruments in the RNL Satisfaction-Priorities Survey family can be implemented with an online administration, inviting students via email to complete the survey electronically. RNL manages the email invitation and reminder messages on your behalf. Results are available via a reporting dashboard within three weeks, giving you national comparison data, year-over-year trend comparisons, and the ability to slice the data on all demographic variables.

Ready to benchmark the satisfaction and priorities of your students with RNL Satisfaction-Priorities Surveys?

Surveying is easier than ever.

By capturing both how satisfied students are, as well as levels of importance, the **RNL Satisfaction-Priorities Surveys** provide valuable insights for campus planning and strategy. Institutions can pinpoint their greatest challenges as well as areas of success that should be promoted. Colleges and universities use these surveys for:

- Student retention activities
- Campuswide planning projects
- Accreditation documentation
- Benefits that should be promoted in student recruitment

See survey samples at **RNL.com SatisfactionSurveys**

SURVEYS SPECIFIC TO POPULATIONS YOU SERVE

The **RNL Student Satisfaction Inventory** is the original instrument is designed for traditional students who are primarily enrolled on campus, with versions specific to the four-year and the two-year experience.

The **RNL Adult Student Priorities Survey** is available for undergraduate and graduate students at four-year institutions, primarily enrolled on campus.

The **RNL Priorities Survey for Online Learners** is for students enrolled online at four-year or two-year institutions at the undergraduate or graduate level.

WHY ADMINISTER THE SURVEY INSTRUMENTS FROM RNL?

They measure both the level of satisfaction and the level of importance, giving you results that show what truly matters to students.

The surveys capture perceptions of the student experience inside and outside of the classroom.

You can track institutional trends, year over year, to show improvements in student satisfaction.

You can slice the results by all demographic responses to see how particular subpopulations respond differently on key items.

Most survey instruments can be completed in 15 to 20 minutes online.

You receive benchmarks within three weeks that compare your students' scores to peer institutions, so you know where your students are significantly more or less satisfied.

SOURCE OF THE DATA

National sample of **362,555** students from **639** colleges and universities from the fall of 2019 through the spring of 2022.

Four-year privates

105,684
students from **217** institutions

25% Freshmen   **23%** Juniors
22% Sophomores   **24%** Seniors

Four-year publics

44,090
students from **52** institutions

23% Freshmen   **26%** Juniors
18% Sophomores   **25%** Seniors

Community and technical colleges

79,049
students from **128** institutions

60% Full-time   **40%** Part-time

Adult students

38,220
students from **96** institutions

39% Undergraduate   **61%** Graduate
74% Full-time   **26%** Part-time

Online learners

95,512
students from **146** institutions

67% Undergraduate   **33%** Graduate
94% Primarily online   **6%** Primarily on ground

Download the Appendix to find the list of institutions included in this study. **RNL.com/Satisfaction**

ABOUT RNL

RNL is the leading provider of higher education enrollment, student success, and fundraising solutions. More than 1,900 colleges, universities, and nonprofit organizations rely on RNL for advanced analytics, personalized engagement, and industry-leading insights to achieve their missions. The firm is distinguished by its powerful portfolio of solutions focused on the entire lifecycle of enrollment and fundraising, assuring students find the right college and university, graduate on time, secure their first job, and give back to support the next generation. RNL conferences, research reports, papers, and articles help clients stay on top of current trends.

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LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR SOLUTIONS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

RNL offers a full suite of solutions to increase student outcomes, including:

- Early-alert assessments
- Student satisfaction and priorities assessments
- Student success coaching
- Student retention planning
- Yield and engagement to prevent stop-outs
- Predictive analytics for student retention

....

Visit RuffaloNL.com/StudentSuccess
Email **ContactUs@RuffaloNL.com**
Call **800.876.1117**

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