



2020 National Student Satisfaction and Priorities Report

Based on 506,110 student records from 793 institutions



STUDENT SUCCESS



SOURCE OF DATA



National sample of **506,110** students from **793** colleges and universities



FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE

156,852

students from **280** institutions

(26% Freshmen; 21% Sophomores;
23% Juniors; 24% Seniors)



FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC

78,669

students from **71** institutions

(21% Freshmen; 18% Sophomores;
25% Juniors; 27% Seniors)



COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGES

120,705

students from **157** institutions

(64% Full-time; 36% Part-time)



ONLINE LEARNERS

103,662

students from **150** institutions

(63% Undergraduate; 32% Graduate;
93% Primarily online; 7% Primarily on-ground)



ADULT UNDERGRADUATES

18,762

students from **135** institutions

(21% First year; 22% Second year;
25% Third year; 32% Fourth year)



ADULT GRADUATES

27,460

students from **135** institutions

(71% Full-time; 29% Part-time)

SATISFACTION ASSESSMENT: A CRITICAL COMPONENT OF CAMPUS SUCCESS

For 25 years, nearly 3,000 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.

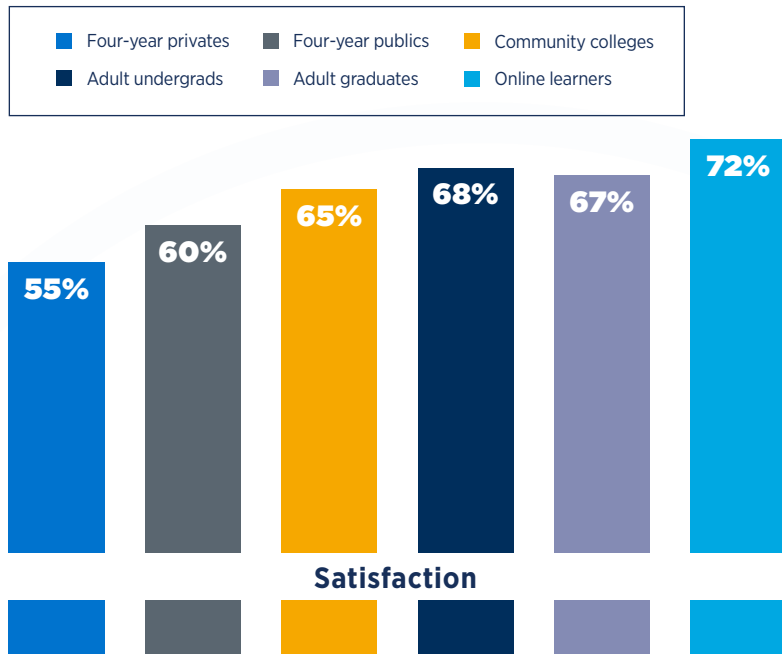
Why assessment and benchmarking will be more crucial than ever

This national report aggregates data from the 2017–18, 2018–19, and 2019–20 academic years. The majority of the responses are pre-pandemic, which makes this report a snapshot of student satisfaction before COVID-19. That means that these benchmarks provide insight into how much student satisfaction in the “new normal” compares to the last year of the “old normal.”

It also means that in this rapidly changing environment, assessing student satisfaction is more important than ever. What you thought you knew about your student population before the 2020 pandemic may not match up with their current perceptions and priorities—and you will not know unless you assess them. **Higher education will need to create new benchmarks for the post-pandemic environment**, as we begin to document how satisfied students are with institutional actions, support systems, online/hybrid instruction, and overall safety measures.

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

OVERALL SATISFACTION FOR SIX GROUPS OF STUDENTS



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 proportion of “satisfied” or “very satisfied” scores.

One-half to three-quarters of college students reported that they were satisfied with their experience overall at the institution they were attending.

Online learners, graduate students and adult undergraduates consistently report higher overall satisfaction levels, with online learners (72 percent) having the most satisfaction.

Students at two-year institutions reported higher overall satisfaction levels than students at four-year institutions.

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



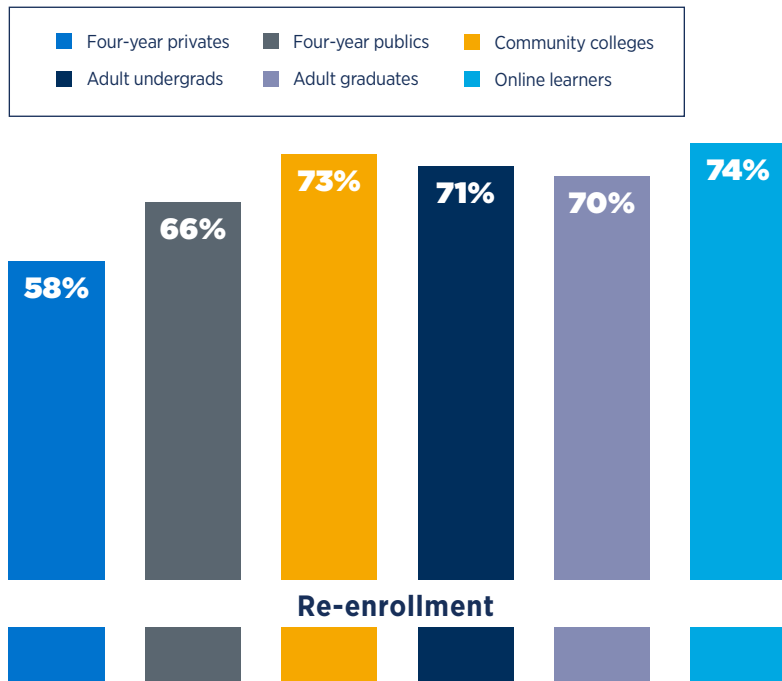
College completion rates



Alumni giving

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

LIKELIHOOD TO RE-ENROLL



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 proportion who said “probably yes” or “definitely yes.”

Knowing what they know now, would students re-enroll at their institution again? The majority of students said they would. Online learners were the most likely to re-enroll, and students from community colleges were much more likely to re-enroll than those at four-year institutions.

TAKEAWAYS

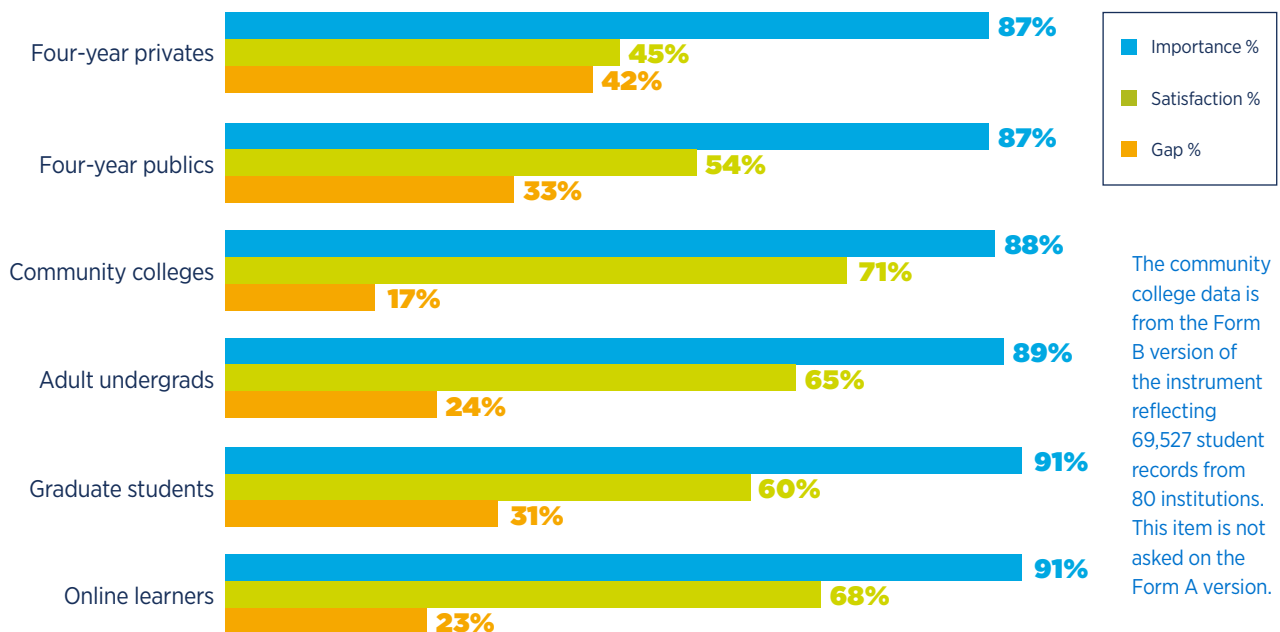
The summary satisfaction and re-enrollment scores provide the big picture on the student experience. These are important scores to monitor to provide an indication of how institutions are performing based on the perceptions of their students. **Higher scores on these summary items typically correlate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

The way that individual colleges and universities can improve their summary satisfaction and re-enrollment scores is by celebrating their student-identified strengths (areas of high importance and high satisfaction) and by actively responding to improve the student-identified challenges (areas of high importance and low satisfaction). Reviewing the results by demographic subpopulations can also help to identify student groups who are more or less satisfied with particular aspects of their experience. The extra time spent with the deeper data review along with intentional actions to improve students’ priority concerns can raise student satisfaction with the overall experience.

HOW DO STUDENTS RATE KEY PARTS OF THE CAMPUS EXPERIENCE?

Tuition paid is a worthwhile investment

Monitoring students' perception of the value of their financial investment has become increasing critical as the cost of college has increased, and will continue to be as more and more students take online or hybrid courses.



Four-year privates, which typically have higher tuition costs, reflect the lowest student satisfaction score. This item is noted as a challenge (high importance and low satisfaction) in all of the national data sets except community colleges.

TAKEAWAYS

This item is frequently identified as a challenge item within individual data sets which indicates that it is a high priority area for institutions to address. In the year ahead, institutions will want to be sensitive to their tuition rates, how they are perceived based on the current educational environment and how the institution is best communicating the value they are providing.

While online learning populations reflect relatively high satisfaction, it should be noted that the majority of these students *chose* to be enrolled online. Students who expected an on-campus experience but were transitioned to an online or hybrid environment due to the pandemic may be less willing to pay the same tuition dollars—something for campuses to monitor during the 2020-21 academic year.

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

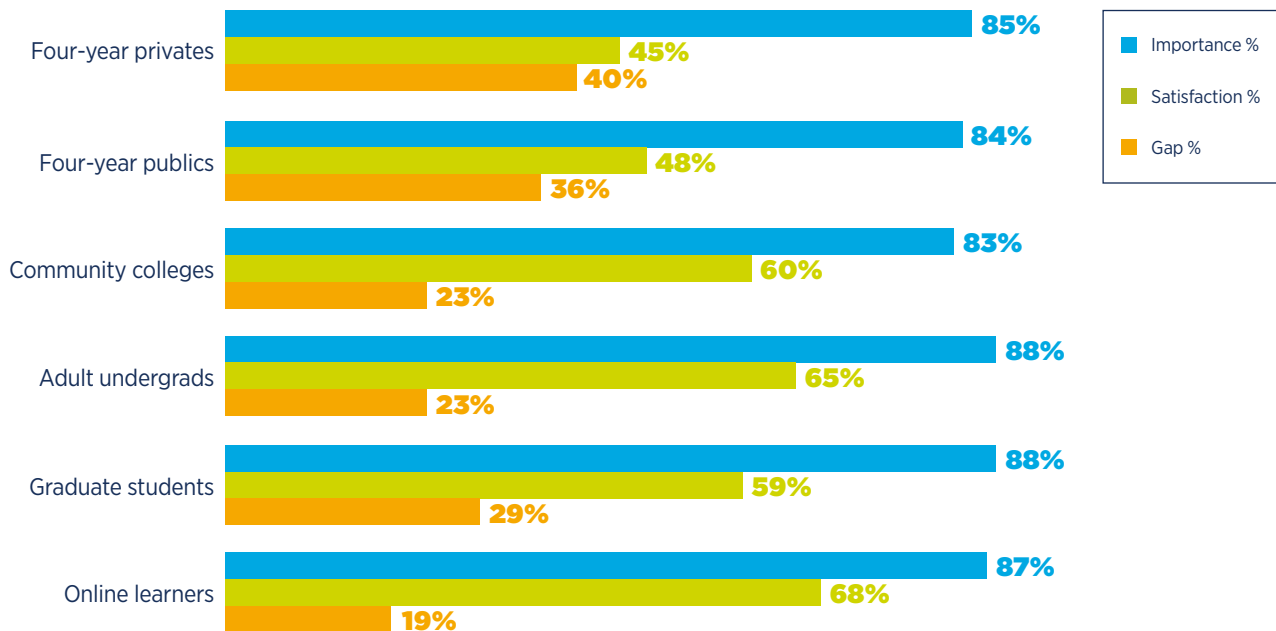
6 - Satisfied

7 - Very satisfied

Percentages indicate the proportion of students with scores of 6 or 7. The Gap score equals Importance minus Satisfaction.

Adequate financial aid is available for most students

The availability of financial aid is a key factor in the decision to enroll for many students at all institution types and an ongoing opportunity for institutions to make improvements in the amount of financial aid provided, along with the customer service offered through the financial aid office.



This item is a challenge (high importance and low satisfaction) in all national data sets with the exception of online learners. While the importance scores are consistently high for this item, nontraditional students place a slightly higher priority on the availability of financial aid. Four-year private and public institutions have the lowest satisfaction scores on this item.

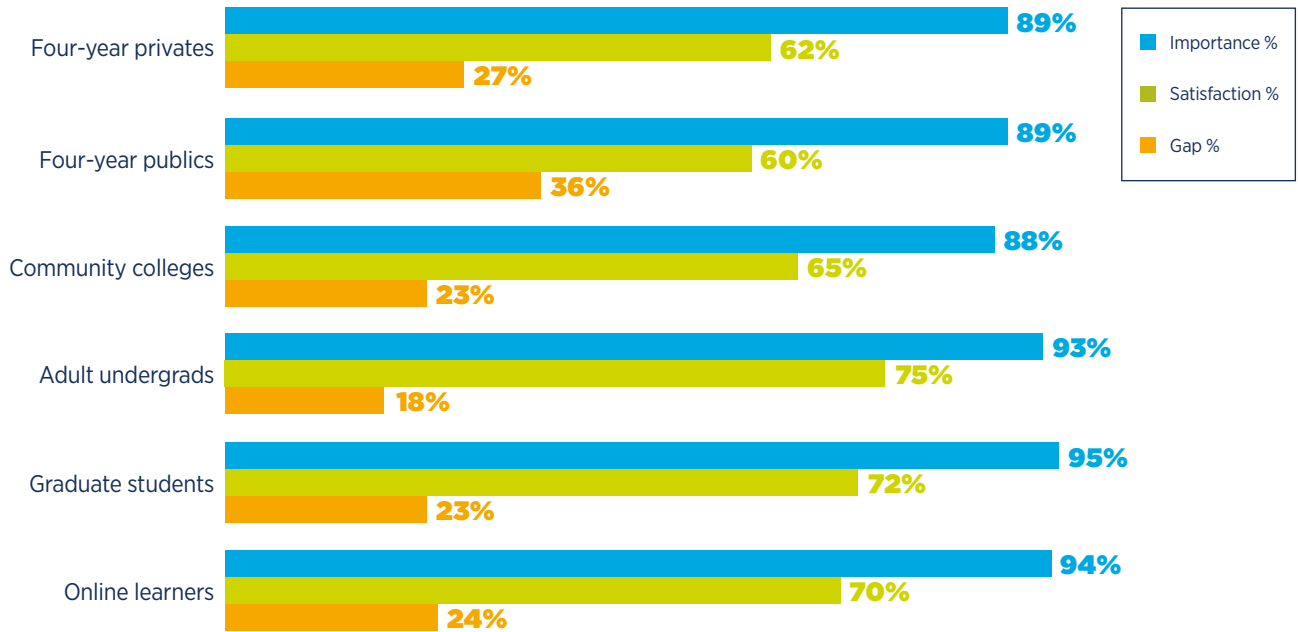
TAKEAWAYS

This is another item which frequently appears on individual institution's list of challenges, which may be a circumstance of students feeling like there could always be more financial assistance offered. It may also be difficult for students to completely separate their perceptions of the amount of financial aid provided and the customer service they receive (or lack thereof) from the financial aid office.

Financial assistance will be another area that becomes even more critical for students and their families who have suffered economically from the pandemic. Going forward during this academic year, institutions will want to be prepared for more demand on financial aid and on the potential for greater need among their currently enrolled students as well as the incoming students that are being recruited.

The quality of instruction is excellent

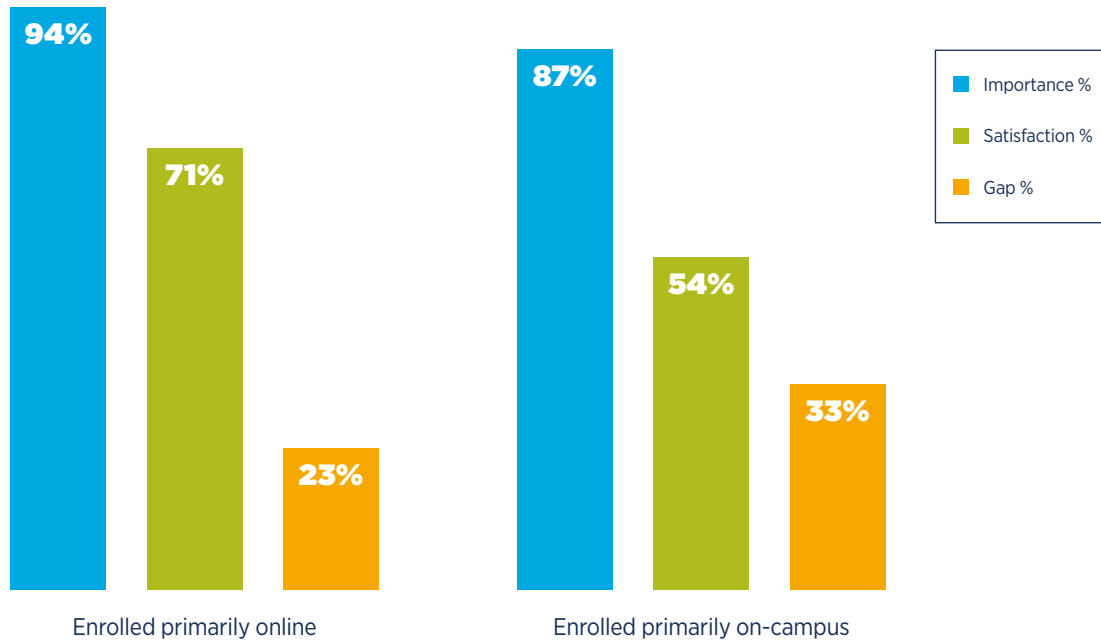
The perception of high quality instruction gets right to the heart of what most institutions expect to offer their students, but satisfaction levels can vary.



This item has consistently high importance scores and is identified as a priority challenge item for all institution types except four-year privates.

While satisfaction scores are relatively high for students enrolled in online learning programs, when the data are analyzed by the self-reported demographic response of whether the students consider themselves to be enrolled primarily online or primarily on-campus (while taking one or more online courses), a different perspective becomes apparent. Note: the item is specifically stated as “The quality of online instruction is excellent” on the online learner version.

The quality of online instruction is excellent (online-learners only)



Those students who view themselves as enrolled primarily on-campus while taking one or more online courses indicate much lower satisfaction scores with the quality of online instruction.

TAKEAWAYS

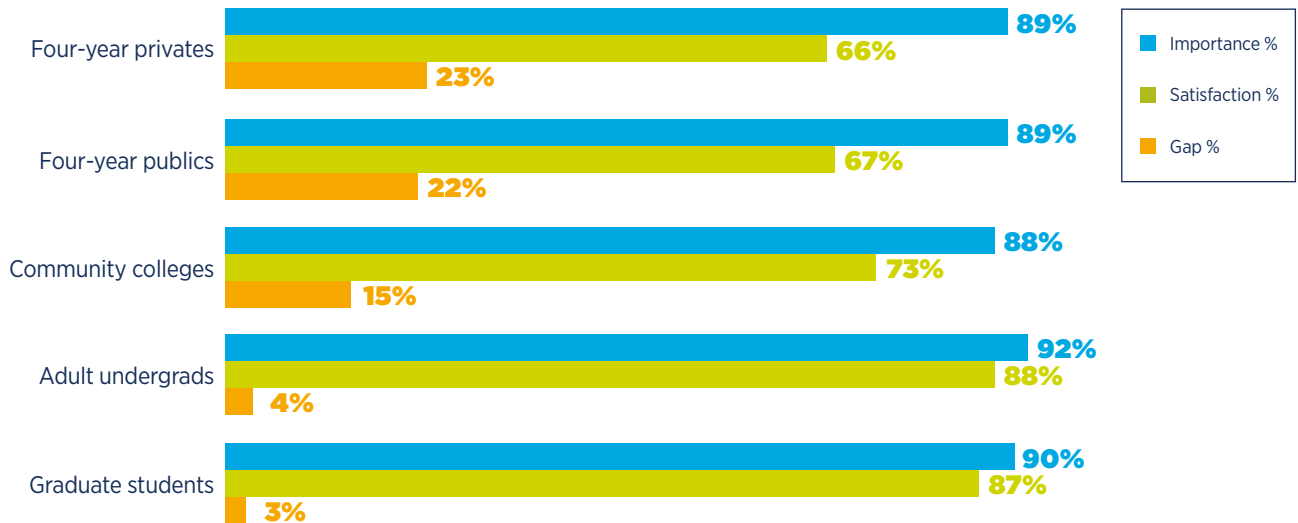
Understanding student perceptions in this area and being responsive to changes in student experiences and perceptions will be critical in the year ahead, particularly because students who expect to be enrolled with face-to-face instruction are more likely to be critical of online instruction.

It will be interesting to see how perceptions of online instruction change as more high school students experience online environments before attending college. Future students will have more of a point of comparison when it comes to online instruction than students have had historically.

Slicing the institutional data sets by majors and departments can provide a clearer view if students have instructional concerns across the institution or in particular pockets, which will help direct the institutional response.

The campus is safe and secure for all students

The sense of being safe and secure on campus is typically one in terms of physical threats, but likely in a post-pandemic world, students' perceptions will be related to the ability of the campus to keep them safe from the virus as well.



Note: This item is not asked of online learners.

All five populations place a high importance on feeling safe and secure on campus, with nontraditional students indicating the highest levels of satisfaction with this item.

This item is a strength (high importance and high satisfaction) for four of the five national data sets, with the exception of four-year publics.

TAKEAWAYS

This is going to be an important item to monitor going forward, as the ways that students consider their safety adjust from physical security on campus and feelings of support for diverse populations to how the campuses are keeping students healthy during a global pandemic.

While students may be critical of how quickly security officers respond in emergencies, they have generally reported high satisfaction with feeling secure on campus, unless there has been a particular security breach on the campus. A sense of security is a baseline requirement for students to be able to appropriately focus on their instruction and their interaction with faculty and students.

There will likely be greater emphasis and higher expectations on this item in the year ahead as students consider the measures that campuses take to ensure the safety and well-being of the student population during the pandemic. The options for students with compromised health situations and the enforcement of health measures may be viewed as considerations with the overall feeling of being safe and secure at the institution.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ASSESSING STUDENT SATISFACTION IN OUR CURRENT ENVIRONMENT

As shared earlier, assessing student satisfaction now is more important than ever. Waiting until higher education returns to “normal” isn’t an option. Your student population will have had at least a portion of their educational experience online from the spring of 2020 as well as potentially into the 2020–21 academic year. They will have experienced how you responded to a crisis situation, what policies you implemented, what technical support you were able to provide, and the adjustments made to fees and financial assistance, along with the quality of education you provided during an evolving situation.

As you set your course going forward with potentially reduced budgets and bigger demands, understanding the priorities of your students will play a significant role in determining where resources are spent to best serve and retain your student population.



- **If you have a student satisfaction assessment cycle established, we recommend that you continue to gather student feedback during similar timeframes.**

Most institutions assess student satisfaction at least once every two years.



- **If you haven’t gathered student satisfaction in recent years, don’t wait for things to be “normal.”** Survey your population in either the fall or the spring of the 2020–21 academic year to have the most current data on how students feel about their experiences with you.

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 two 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 your students' satisfaction and priorities with RNL Satisfaction-Priorities Surveys?

It's easy to survey your students with RNL surveys.

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



SURVEYS SPECIFIC TO THE POPULATIONS YOU SERVE

The **RNL Student Satisfaction Inventory**, the original instrument, is designed for traditional-aged undergraduate students.

The **RNL Adult Student Priorities Survey** is available for adult undergraduate and graduate students at four-year institutions.

The **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.



Most surveys can be completed in just 15 minutes online.



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

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 or 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.

LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR SOLUTIONS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

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

- **Early-alert assessment instruments**
- **Student retention planning**
- **Student satisfaction and priorities assessments**
- **Yield and engagement to prevent stop-outs**
- **Resources for career services**
- **Predictive analytics for student retention**



Visit RuffaloNL.com/StudentSuccess

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Call **800.876.1117**

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