

# 2017 National Student Satisfaction and Priorities Report

Based on 970 four-year and two-year, public and private institutions using RNL Satisfaction-Priorities Surveys



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### SOURCE OF DATA

## NATIONAL SAMPLE OF 683,000 STUDENTS FROM 970 COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

<p><b>FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE</b></p> <p>217,956 STUDENTS FROM 332 INSTITUTIONS</p> <p>27% FRESHMEN; 22% SOPHOMORES;</p> <p>21% JUNIORS; 23% SENIORS</p>	<p><b>FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC</b></p> <p>71,029 STUDENTS FROM 73 INSTITUTIONS</p> <p>25% FRESHMEN; 18% SOPHOMORES;</p> <p>24% JUNIORS; 25% SENIORS</p>
<p><b>TWO-YEAR PUBLIC</b></p> <p>162,081 STUDENTS FROM 195 INSTITUTIONS</p> <p>65% FULL-TIME; 35% PART-TIME</p>	<p><b>TWO-YEAR CAREER AND PRIVATE</b></p> <p>31,412 STUDENTS FROM 53 INSTITUTIONS</p> <p>86% FULL-TIME; 14% PART-TIME</p>
<p><b>ADULT LEARNERS</b></p> <p>72,124 STUDENTS FROM 153 INSTITUTIONS</p> <p>47% UNDERGRADUATE; 49% GRADUATE</p>	<p><b>ONLINE LEARNERS</b></p> <p>128,988 STUDENTS FROM 164 INSTITUTIONS</p> <p>62% UNDERGRADUATE; 34% GRADUATE</p> <p>94% PRIMARILY ONLINE; 6% PRIMARILY ON-GROUND</p>

## THREE ACADEMIC YEARS OF DATA, AGGREGATED

2014-15 | 2015-16 | 2016-17

See page 20 for information about the RNL Satisfaction-Priorities Surveys used for this study, including the RNL Student Satisfaction Inventory™ (SSI), the RNL Adult Student Priorities Survey™ (ASPS), and the RNL Priorities Survey for Online Learners™ (PSOL).

## HOW SATISFIED ARE TODAY'S COLLEGE STUDENTS? And what's most important to them?

For more than two decades, the national standard for benchmarking student satisfaction in higher education has been the **Ruffalo Noel Levitz Satisfaction-Priorities Surveys**. Since their beginning in 1994, these benchmark surveys have been used by more than 2,900 U.S. colleges and universities to **evaluate students' concerns that correspond with student success, college completion, student recruitment, strategic planning, and re-accreditation**.

What is unique about this assessment approach? Using the RNL Satisfaction-Priorities Surveys, colleges and universities take a broad look at the **student experience**, both inside and outside the classroom, compared to **peer institution benchmarks** for particular student groups. The surveys identify areas of strength, where students report **high satisfaction and high importance**, and areas of challenge, where students report **low satisfaction and high importance**.

### HIGHLIGHTED IN THIS 2017 NATIONAL STUDENT SATISFACTION AND PRIORITIES REPORT ARE:

- Students' overall satisfaction levels, reported separately for six groups of students ranging from traditional-age learners to nontraditional adults and online learners
- Areas of greatest importance to students
- Areas of strength
- Key challenges for improvement
- Top factors in students' original decisions to enroll, for recruitment and strategic planning

Three academic years of data, aggregated, provide a comprehensive view of student satisfaction in higher education encompassing 2014-15, 2015-16, and 2016-17. Most importantly, the benchmark data can be used to make positive changes to build and sustain a healthy and thriving campus community.

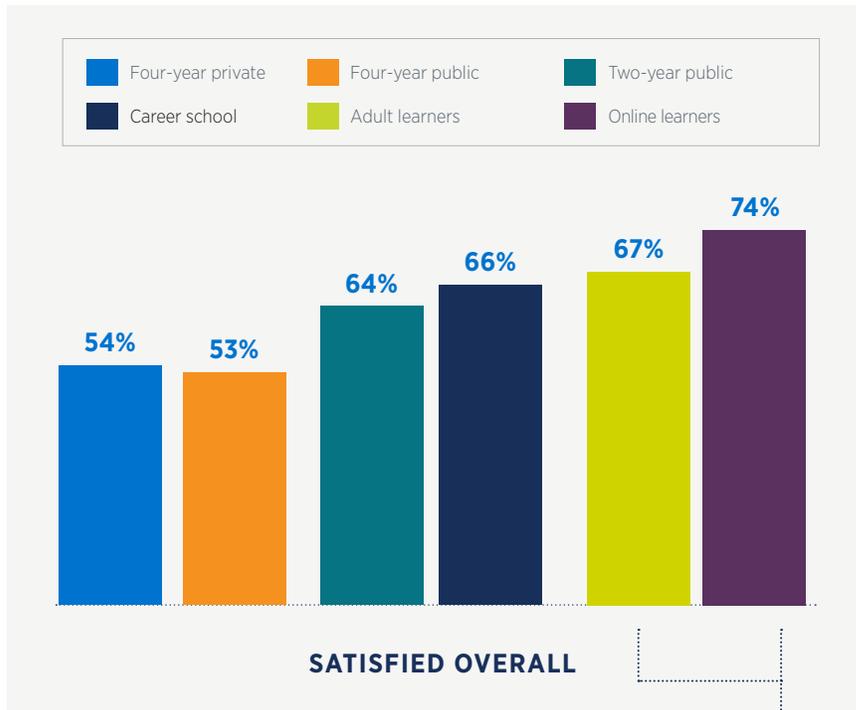
**Moving to Action** To learn how campuses use the satisfaction data to make positive changes, see page 18.



## At a glance: How satisfied are today's college students?



### 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

Between one-half and three-quarters of college students reported they were satisfied with their experience overall at the institution they were attending.

Percentages indicate the proportions of "satisfied" or "very satisfied" scores.

**Adult learners and online learners consistently report higher overall satisfaction levels.**

**Also, students at two-year institutions and career schools 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:



**Individual student retention**



**College completion rates**



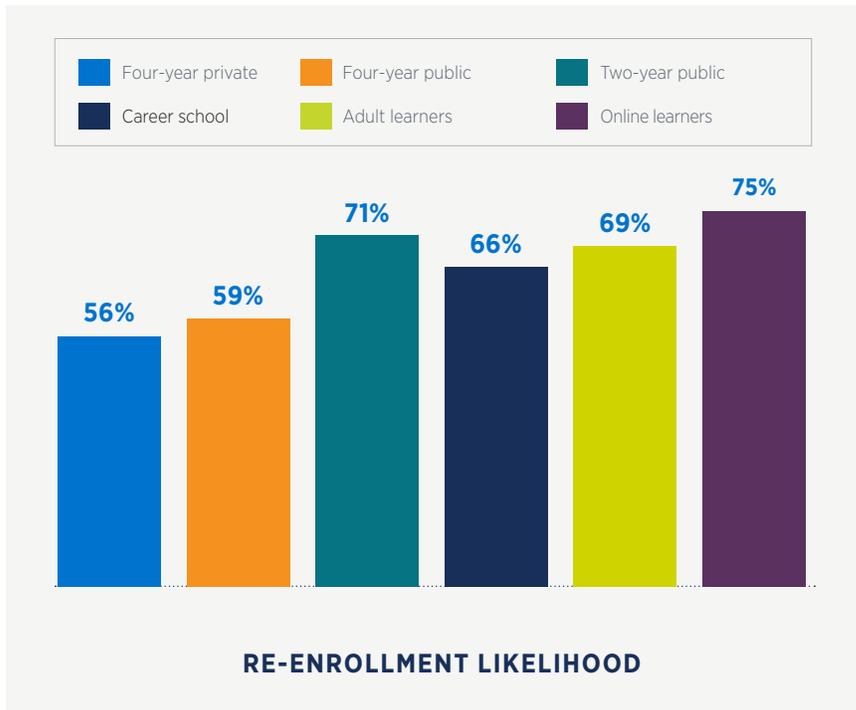
**Alumni giving**

In addition, **word-of-mouth referrals** are known to be correlated with high satisfaction, based on consumer research. (See "Recommendations from family/friends" under the sections titled "Top factors in students' original decisions to enroll" on pages 7, 9, 11, 13, and 15.)

## How likely would students be to re-enroll?



### LIKELIHOOD TO RE-ENROLL



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

**SCORING**

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

Between one-half and three-quarters of students, similar to the first table, reported they would be likely to re-enroll at the institution they were attending.

Percentages indicate the proportions of "probably yes" or "definitely yes."

### What's driving students' opinions?

For specific factors influencing students' views, see the following sections of this report, pages 6-17, and Appendix A.

## TAKEAWAYS

The best way to move the needle on the overall satisfaction and re-enrollment scores on individual campuses is to drill down into the survey items (see next pages) and to intentionally respond to the identified challenges.

Using a systematic assessment approach, institutions should select a couple of priority challenges for improvement, explore what students mean by those items through focus group discussions, and take deeper dives into the data. Once the institution has a better sense of what action can be taken, the changes should be implemented and communicated widely on campus so students know that the institution was responsive.



## Student satisfaction and priorities at **four-year private colleges and universities**

Based on a national sample of students at four-year private institutions who recently completed the RNL Student Satisfaction Inventory™

### Top 3 most important areas of the student experience

<p><b>1</b> Instructional effectiveness</p> <p><b>2</b> Academic advising</p> <p><b>3</b> Student centeredness</p>	<p><b>7</b> Recruitment and financial aid</p> <p><b>8</b> Registration effectiveness</p> <p><b>9</b> Service excellence</p> <p><b>10</b> Campus support services</p> <p><b>11</b> Campus life</p>	<p>These are the 11 scales measured by the RNL Student Satisfaction Inventory™.</p> <p>Three areas of the campus experience that matter <i>most</i> to students, from a big-picture point of view</p>
<p><b>4</b> Safety and security</p> <p>Concern for the individual</p> <p>Campus climate</p>		

 THREE-WAY TIE

### TOP 5 STRENGTHS (in order of importance)

Top strengths rated for four-year private institutions	Importance	Satisfaction
The content of the courses within my major is valuable.	91%	65%
The instruction in my major field is excellent.	90%	64%
Nearly all of the faculty are knowledgeable in their field.	90%	72%
My academic advisor is knowledgeable about requirements in my major.	88%	69%
I am able to experience intellectual growth here.	88%	67%

**Strengths are the survey items that students rated most important and among the most satisfying** from a total of 73 survey items. The top five strengths highlighted above were in the areas of instruction and advising. For ratings of all 73 survey items, please see Appendix A. For more detailed definitions of strengths and challenges, see page 19.



### LIKELIHOOD TO RE-ENROLL

**56% of students** reported they would re-enroll at their four-year private institution, if they had the opportunity to do it all over again

#### SOURCE OF DATA

217,956 students from 332 private colleges and universities completed the RNL Student Satisfaction Inventory Form A during academic years 2014-15, 2015-16, or 2016-17  
 27% of the students were freshmen; 22% were sophomores; 21% juniors; 23% seniors  
 61% were attending their first-choice school; 28% were at their second choice; 11% were at their third choice

#### 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.

**TOP 5 CHALLENGES** (in order of importance)

(Four-year private institutions, continued)

Top challenges rated for four-year private institutions	Importance	Satisfaction
<b>I am able to register for classes I need with few conflicts.</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>53%</b>
<b>Tuition paid is a worthwhile investment.</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>44%</b>
<b>It is an enjoyable experience to be a student on this campus.</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>58%</b>
<b>Security staff respond quickly in emergencies.</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>55%</b>
<b>Adequate financial aid is available for most students.</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>45%</b>

**Challenges are defined as the survey items that students rated as top-priority areas for improvement at four-year private colleges.** Students rated these survey items most important and among the least satisfying from a total of 73 survey items in the study. The five challenges highlighted above call attention to specific areas of registration, campus climate, safety and security, and recruitment and financial aid.

For more detailed definitions of challenges and strengths, please see page 19.

**Top factors in students’ original decisions to enroll**

Students were asked to rate the importance of the following nine factors in their original decision to enroll at their current institution.

Enrollment factors rated for four-year private institutions	Importance
<b>Financial aid</b>	<b>81%</b>
<b>Academic reputation</b>	<b>78%</b>
<b>Cost</b>	<b>77%</b>
Personalized attention prior to enrollment	<b>65%</b>
Geographic setting	<b>60%</b>
Campus appearance	<b>59%</b>
Size of institution	<b>58%</b>
Recommendations from family/friends	<b>45%</b>
Opportunity to play sports	<b>33%</b>

Students at four-year private institutions reported that financial aid was a very important factor in their original decision to enroll.



**OVERALL SATISFACTION**

**54%**  
of students, overall, reported they were satisfied with their four-year private institutions

**TAKEAWAYS**



The overall four-year private student satisfaction rate of 54 percent shows that the majority of students are satisfied, but there is still room for improvement. This coincides with retention and graduation rates at many private institutions, which also have room for improvement. With financial aid and cost top of mind for students, it is critical for four-year privates to ensure they are optimally priced, and implement awarding strategies that allow for student segmentation and take into consideration ability vs. willingness to pay. Additionally, institutions should communicate value and affordability early and often, beginning with the search process and continuing through completion. The value proposition should include the celebration of quality of instruction items that are designated as strengths at four-year private institutions.



## Student satisfaction and priorities at **four-year public universities**

Based on a national sample of students at four-year public institutions who recently completed the RNL Student Satisfaction Inventory™

### Top 3 most important areas of the student experience

- 1 Academic advising
- 2 Instructional effectiveness
- 3 Safety and security
- 4 Registration effectiveness
- 5 Recruitment and financial aid



- 6 Student centeredness
- Concern for the individual
- Campus climate
- 9 Campus support services
- 10 Service excellence
- 11 Campus life

Three areas of the campus experience that matter *most* to students, from a big-picture point of view

These are the 11 scales measured by the RNL Student Satisfaction Inventory™.

### TOP 5 STRENGTHS (in order of importance)

Top strengths rated for four-year public institutions	Importance	Satisfaction
The content of the courses within my major is valuable.	89%	60%
The instruction in my major field is excellent.	88%	59%
My academic advisor is knowledgeable about requirements in my major.	88%	65%
Nearly all of the faculty are knowledgeable in their field.	88%	67%
The campus is safe and secure for all students.	87%	60%

Strengths are the survey items that students rated most important and among the most satisfying from a total of 73 survey items in the study. The top five strengths highlighted above were in the areas of instruction, advising, and campus safety.

For ratings of all 73 survey items, please see Appendix A. For more detailed definitions of strengths and challenges, see page 19.



### LIKELIHOOD TO RE-ENROLL

59% of students reported they would re-enroll at their four-year public institution, if they had the opportunity to do it all over again

#### SOURCE OF DATA

71,029 students from 73 public universities completed the RNL Student Satisfaction Inventory Form A during academic years 2014-15, 2015-16, or 2016-17

25% of the students were freshmen; 18% were sophomores; 24% juniors; 25% seniors

60% were attending their first-choice school; 27% were at their second choice; 13% were at their third choice

### 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.

(Four-year public institutions, continued)

### TOP 5 CHALLENGES (in order of importance)

Top challenges rated for four-year public institutions	Importance	Satisfaction
I am able to register for classes I need with few conflicts.	88%	51%
The quality of instruction I receive in most of my classes is excellent.	87%	55%
Tuition paid is a worthwhile investment.	85%	50%
Faculty are fair and unbiased in their treatment of individual students.	84%	53%
Adequate financial aid is available for most students.	83%	43%

**Challenges are defined as the survey items that students rated as top-priority areas for improvement at four-year public universities.** Students rated these survey items most important and among the least satisfying from a total of 73 survey items in the study. The five challenges highlighted above call attention to specific areas of registration, instruction, campus climate, and recruitment/financial aid. For more detailed definitions of challenges and strengths, please see page 19.

### Top factors in students' original decisions to enroll

Students were asked to rate the importance of the following nine factors in their original decision to enroll at their current institution.

Enrollment factors rated for four-year public institutions	Importance
<b>Cost</b>	<b>82%</b>
<b>Financial aid</b>	<b>78%</b>
<b>Academic reputation</b>	<b>74%</b>
Geographic setting	62%
Campus appearance	58%
Personalized attention prior to enrollment	58%
Size of institution	55%
Recommendations from family/friends	46%
Opportunity to play sports	29%

Students at four-year public institutions reported that cost and financial aid were very important factors in their original decision to enroll.



**OVERALL SATISFACTION**

**53%** of students, overall, reported they were satisfied with their four-year public institutions

### TAKEAWAYS



The overall four-year public student satisfaction rate of 53 percent shows that the majority of students are satisfied, but there is still room for improvement. This is also reflected in the retention and graduation rates at many institutions, which also have room for improvement. Four-year public institutions have an opportunity to enhance the perception of academic reputation as a factor in students' enrollment decisions by celebrating and showcasing their instruction-related strengths. At the same time, the data reveal opportunities to increase access to classes and improve student/faculty interaction.



# Student satisfaction and priorities at **two-year community and technical colleges**

Based on a national sample of students at two-year public institutions who recently completed the RNL Student Satisfaction Inventory™

## Top 3 most important areas of the student experience

- TIED FOR SECOND**
- 1 **Instructional effectiveness**
  - 2 **Academic advising**
  - Registration effectiveness**
  - 4 Concern for the individual
  - 5 Admissions and financial aid

- TIED FOR SIXTH**
- 6 Safety and security
  - Academic services
  - 8 Student centeredness
  - 9 Campus climate
  - 10 Service excellence
  - 11 Campus support services

Three areas of the campus experience that matter *most* to students, from a big-picture point of view

These are the 11 scales measured by the RNL Student Satisfaction Inventory™.

## TOP 5 STRENGTHS (in order of importance)

Top strengths rated for two-year public institutions	Importance	Satisfaction
I am able to experience intellectual growth here.	87%	72%
The campus is safe and secure for all students.	86%	70%
Nearly all of the faculty are knowledgeable in their fields.	86%	70%
Program requirements are clear and reasonable.	85%	66%
There is a good variety of courses provided on this campus.	85%	69%

**Strengths are the survey items that students rated most important and among the most satisfying** from a total of 70 survey items in the study. The top five strengths highlighted above were in the areas of instruction and campus safety.

For ratings of all 70 survey items, please see Appendix A. For more detailed definitions of strengths and challenges, see page 19.



### LIKELIHOOD TO RE-ENROLL

**71% of students** reported they would re-enroll at their two-year public institution, if they had the opportunity to do it all over again

### SOURCE OF DATA

162,081 students from 195 community and technical colleges completed the RNL Student Satisfaction Inventory Form A during academic years 2014-15, 2015-16, or 2016-17

65% of the students were full-time, 35% were part-time

70% were attending their first-choice school; 21% were at their second choice; 9% were at their third choice

### 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.

(Two-year public institutions, continued)

### TOP 5 CHALLENGES (in order of importance)

Top challenges rated for two-year public institutions	Importance	Satisfaction
<b>The quality of instruction I receive in most of my classes is excellent.</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>64%</b>
<b>Classes are scheduled at times that are convenient for me.</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>62%</b>
<b>I am able to register for classes I need with few conflicts.</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>64%</b>
<b>My academic advisor is knowledgeable about my program requirements.</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>64%</b>
<b>Faculty provide timely feedback about student progress in a course.</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>59%</b>

**Challenges are defined as the survey items that students rated as top-priority areas for improvement at community and technical colleges.** Students rated these survey items most important and among the least satisfying from a total of 70 total survey items in the study. The five challenges highlighted above call attention to specific areas of instruction, registration, and advising.

For more detailed definitions of challenges and strengths, please see page 19.

### Top factors in students' original decisions to enroll

Students were asked to rate the importance of the following nine factors in their original decision to enroll at their current institution.

Enrollment factors rated for two-year public institutions	Importance
<b>Cost</b>	<b>85%</b>
<b>Financial aid</b>	<b>78%</b>
<b>Academic reputation</b>	<b>72%</b>
Geographic setting	<b>63%</b>
Personalized attention prior to enrollment	<b>61%</b>
Campus appearance	<b>55%</b>
Size of institution	<b>53%</b>
Recommendations from family/friends	<b>50%</b>
Opportunity to play sports	<b>29%</b>

Students at two-year public institutions reported that cost and financial aid were very important factors in their original decision to enroll.



**OVERALL SATISFACTION**

**64%** of students, overall, reported they were satisfied with their two-year public institutions



### TAKEAWAYS

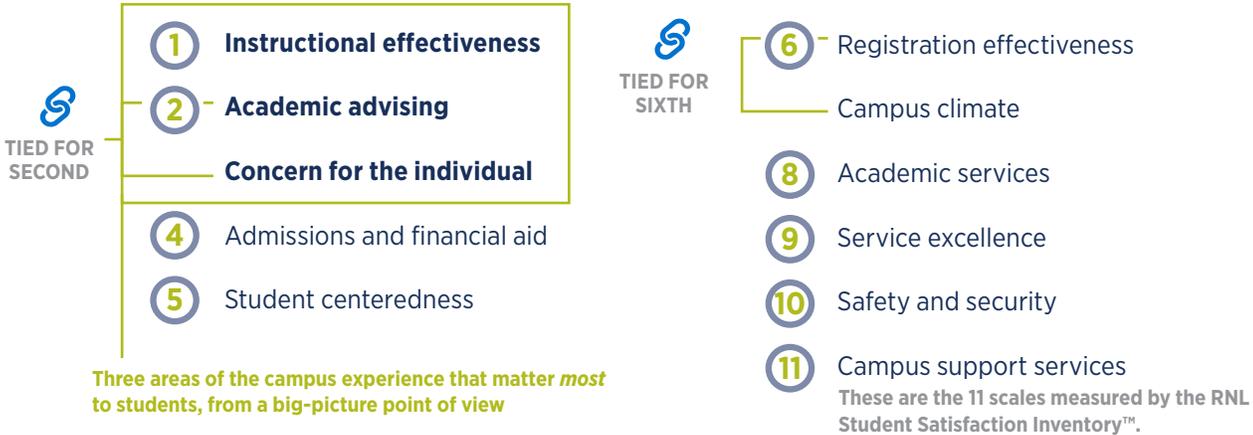
The overall student satisfaction rate of 64 percent for community and technical colleges reflects a substantial enrollment of adult learners, who tend to have higher satisfaction, and enrollees' high priority on affordability. Community colleges should celebrate offering students a variety of courses and an experience of intellectual growth at an affordable price. While community college students are generally satisfied, the priorities for improvement at community colleges center on access to courses at convenient times and improving student perceptions of the quality of instruction and the academic advising experience.



## Student satisfaction and priorities at **two-year career and private schools**

Based on a national sample of students at two-year career and private schools who recently completed the RNL Student Satisfaction Inventory™

### Top 3 most important areas of the student experience



Three areas of the campus experience that matter *most* to students, from a big-picture point of view

### TOP 5 STRENGTHS (in order of importance)

Top strengths rated for career and private schools	Importance	Satisfaction
Classes are scheduled at times that are convenient for me.	90%	75%
Internships or practical experiences are provided in my degree/certificate program.	90%	78%
Nearly all of the faculty are knowledgeable in their fields.	90%	76%
I am able to experience intellectual growth here.	90%	76%
My academic advisor is knowledgeable about my program requirements.	89%	75%

Strengths are the survey items that students rated most important and among the most satisfying from a total of 70 survey items in the study. The top five strengths highlighted above were in the areas of registration, instruction, internships, and advising.

For ratings of all 70 survey items, please see Appendix A. For more detailed definitions of strengths and challenges, see page 19.



### LIKELIHOOD TO RE-ENROLL

**66% of students** reported they would re-enroll at their career and private school, if they had the opportunity to do it all over again

#### SOURCE OF DATA

31,412 students from 53 career and private schools completed the RNL Student Satisfaction Inventory Form A during academic years 2014-15, 2015-16, or 2016-17

86% of the students were full-time; 14% were part-time

62% were attending their first-choice school; 30% were at their second choice; 8% were at their third choice

### 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.

(Career and private schools, continued)

### TOP 5 CHALLENGES (in order of importance)

Top challenges rated for career and private schools	Importance	Satisfaction
The quality of instruction in the academic programs is excellent.	89%	67%
This school does whatever it can to help me reach my educational goals.	88%	67%
Faculty are fair and unbiased in their treatment of individual students.	88%	67%
The equipment in the lab facilities is kept up to date.	87%	66%
Adequate financial aid is available for most students.	87%	66%

**Challenges are defined as the survey items that students rated as top-priority areas for improvement at career and private schools.** Students rated these survey items most important and among the least satisfying from a total of 70 survey items in the study. The five challenges highlighted above call attention to specific areas of instruction, advising, academic services, and admissions and financial aid.

For more detailed definitions of challenges and strengths, please see page 19.

### Top factors in students' original decisions to enroll

Students were asked to rate the importance of the following nine factors in their original decision to enroll at their current institution.

Enrollment factors identified for career and private schools	Importance
<b>Future employment opportunities</b>	<b>87%</b>
<b>Financial aid</b>	<b>82%</b>
<b>Academic reputation</b>	<b>82%</b>
Cost	<b>78%</b>
Personalized attention prior to enrollment	<b>78%</b>
Appearance of school	<b>71%</b>
Geographic setting	<b>70%</b>
Recommendations from family/friends	<b>68%</b>
Size of institution	<b>67%</b>

Students at career and private schools reported that future employment opportunities were a very important factor in their original decision to enroll.



**OVERALL SATISFACTION**

**66%** of students, overall, reported they were satisfied with their career and private schools



### TAKEAWAYS

The overall student satisfaction rate of 66 percent for two-year career and private schools reflects a substantial enrollment of adult learners, who tend to have higher satisfaction. Future career opportunities are top of mind for students enrolling at career and private schools. To support this priority, the data suggest that career schools are performing well by offering internships and practical experiences. Opportunities for improvement include the perceptions of instructional quality and providing up-to-date lab equipment.



## Adult learner satisfaction and priorities

Based on a national sample of undergraduate and graduate adult learners who recently completed the RNL Adult Student Priorities Survey™

### Top 3 most important areas of the adult learner experience

- 1 **Instructional effectiveness**
- 2 **Academic advising**
- 3 **Campus climate**
- 4 Registration effectiveness

- 5 Service excellence
- 6 Admissions and financial aid
- 7 Safety and security
- 8 Academic services

Three areas of the campus experience that matter *most* to students, from a big-picture point of view

These are the 8 scales measured by the RNL Adult Student Priorities Survey™.

### TOP 5 STRENGTHS (in order of importance)

Top strengths identified by adult learners	Importance	Satisfaction
Nearly all faculty are knowledgeable in their field.	95%	82%
The content of the courses within my major is valuable.	94%	75%
There is a commitment to academic excellence at this institution.	93%	75%
Major requirements are clear and reasonable.	93%	75%
My academic advisor is knowledgeable about requirements in my major.	92%	77%

**Strengths are the survey items that adult learners rated most important and most satisfying** among 50 total survey items in the study. The top institutional strengths, as rated by adult learners, were in the areas of instruction and advising.

For ratings of all 50 survey items, please see Appendix A. For more detailed definitions of strengths and challenges, see page 19.



### LIKELIHOOD TO RE-ENROLL

**69% of adult learners** reported they would re-enroll at the institution they were attending, if they had the opportunity to do it all over again

#### SOURCE OF DATA

72,124 adult learners from 153 colleges and universities completed the RNL Adult Student Priorities Survey™ during academic years 2014-15, 2015-16, or 2016-17

47% of the students were undergraduates; 49% were graduate students

70% were attending their first-choice school; 24% were at their second choice; 6% were at their third choice

### 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.

(Adult learners, continued)

### TOP 5 CHALLENGES (in order of importance)

Top challenges identified by adult learners	Importance	Satisfaction
The quality of instruction I receive in my program is excellent.	95%	73%
Tuition paid is a worthwhile investment.	92%	60%
Faculty provide timely feedback about my progress.	91%	66%
Adequate financial aid is available for most adult students.	89%	60%
I seldom get the "run-around" when seeking information at this institution.	89%	65%

**Challenges are defined as the survey items that adult learners rated as top-priority areas for improvement.** Students rated these survey items most important and among the least satisfying from a total of 50 survey items in the study. The five challenges highlighted above call attention to specific areas of instruction, the campus climate, and admissions and financial aid.

For more detailed definitions of challenges and strengths, please see page 19.

### Top factors in adult learners' original decisions to enroll

Adult learners were asked to rate the importance of the following nine factors in their original decision to enroll at their current institution.

Enrollment factors identified by adult learners	Importance
Academic reputation	83%
Future employment opportunities	79%
Availability of evening/weekend courses	77%
Cost	76%
Financial aid/scholarship opportunities	76%
Campus location (close to home/work)	75%
Personalized attention prior to enrollment	72%
Recommendations from family/friends/employer	62%
Size of institution	57%

Adult learners reported that their institution's academic reputation was a very important factor in their decision to enroll, along with employment opportunities and course availability.



**OVERALL SATISFACTION**  
**67%**  
of adult learners, overall, reported they were satisfied with the institution they were attending



### TAKEAWAYS

Adult learners in higher education, and especially those in graduate school, typically report higher satisfaction levels than traditional-age learners. Undergraduate and graduate adult learners place an emphasis on the academic experience as a factor in the decision to enroll, along with career opportunities and the availability of evening and weekend classes. Adult students are very satisfied with the guidance they receive from academic advisors and clear requirements for their major. Since time is often tight for adult students who are managing multiple responsibilities (work, home, school), they place a priority on timely feedback and avoiding run-around when seeking information.



## Online learner satisfaction and priorities

Based on a national sample of undergraduate and graduate online learners who recently completed the RNL Priorities Survey for Online Learners™

### Top 2 most important areas of the student experience

<p><b>1</b> Institutional perceptions</p> <p><b>2</b> Enrollment services</p>	<p><b>4</b> Instructional services</p> <p><b>5</b> Student services</p> <p>These are the 5 scales measured by the RNL Priorities Survey for Online Learners™.</p>	<p><b>Two areas of the campus experience that matter most to students, from a big-picture point of view</b></p>
<p><b>3</b> Academic services</p>		

### TOP 4 STRENGTHS (in order of importance)

Top strengths identified by online learners	Importance	Satisfaction
Registration for online courses is convenient.	93%	87%
This institution responds quickly when I request information.	92%	77%
Billing and payment procedures are convenient for me.	91%	82%
Adequate online library resources are provided.	90%	79%

Strengths are the survey items that online learners rated most important and among the most satisfying from a total of 26 survey items in the study. The top strengths highlighted above were in the areas of enrollment services, academic services, and student services.

For ratings of all 26 survey items, please see Appendix A. For more detailed definitions of strengths and challenges, see page 19.

**LIKELIHOOD TO RE-ENROLL**

**75% of online learners** reported they would re-enroll in their online program, if they had the opportunity to do it all over again

**SOURCE OF DATA**

128,988 online learners from 164 colleges and universities completed the RNL Priorities Survey for Online Learners during academic years 2014-15, 2015-16, or 2016-17

62% of the students were undergraduates; 34% were graduate students

94% were studying primarily online; 6% were studying primarily on-ground

**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.

(Online learners, continued)

## TOP 5 CHALLENGES (in order of importance)

Top challenges identified by online learners	Importance	Satisfaction
The quality of online instruction is excellent.	95%	72%
Student assignments are clearly defined in the syllabus.	95%	75%
Faculty are responsive to student needs.	95%	75%
Tuition paid is a worthwhile investment.	92%	69%
Program requirements are clear and reasonable.	94%	75%

**Challenges are defined as the survey items that online learners rated as top-priority areas for improvement.** Students rated these survey items most important and among the least satisfying from a total of 26 survey items in the study. The five challenges highlighted above call attention to specific areas of academic services, instructional services, and institutional perceptions.

For more detailed definitions of challenges and strengths, please see page 19.

## Top factors in students' original decisions to enroll

Students were asked to rate the importance of the following nine factors in their original decision to enroll at their current institution.

Enrollment factors identified by online learners	Importance
<b>Convenience</b>	<b>95%</b>
<b>Work schedule</b>	<b>92%</b>
<b>Flexible pacing for completing a program</b>	<b>92%</b>
Program requirements	88%
Cost	85%
Reputation of institution	85%
Financial assistance available	84%
Ability to transfer credits	83%
Future employment opportunities	81%
Distance from campus	61%
Recommendations from employer	59%

Online learners indicated convenience and flexibility were key factors in their decision to enroll in their online program.



**OVERALL SATISFACTION**

**74%**  
of online learners, overall, reported they were satisfied with their online program

## TAKEAWAYS



For online learners, it is all about convenience and balancing course work with life's other demands. Online program strengths center on support services for the online learners. There is room for improvement on the perceptions of the online academic experience, which is still often compared to the in-classroom experience with which most students are familiar. Institutions have an opportunity to explore different teaching methods that facilitate student and faculty interaction and collaboration.

## MOVING TO ACTION

### How do campuses use data from the RNL Satisfaction-Priorities Surveys to make positive changes?

**Student satisfaction surveys from Ruffalo Noel Levitz are designed to be actionable.** The surveys uncover priority items for improvement by identifying areas where students express a high level of importance along with a low level of satisfaction. Additionally, the surveys allow you to compare your findings to **peer institution benchmarks** and to monitor and track improvements in specific areas.

Actions that colleges and universities can deploy range from changing policies and procedures and communication practices with students to optimizing financial aid awarding structures and making changes to methods of instruction.

#### At a glance—the 4 main areas of impact for student satisfaction data

**FROM A BIG-PICTURE POINT OF VIEW, CAMPUSES USE RNL SATISFACTION-PRIORITIES SURVEY DATA FOR:**

- **Student success, retention, and completion**, to prioritize areas for improvement and to show students that their institution cares about their experience.
- **Strategic planning**, to include the student voice in the planning process.
- **Accreditation documentation**, to document areas where the institution has significantly improved the student experience over time.
- **Student recruitment and marketing**, to rank areas of institutional strength and important factors in students' enrollment decisions.

Findings from RNL Satisfaction-Priorities Surveys are specifically designed to be *used* and are based on **reliable and valid national norms**.

#### Here are 5 real-world examples for putting satisfaction data to work

**RNL suggests that campuses address their priority challenges with three key approaches:** Immediate responses, future action planning, and using information to change perceptions. The following five examples show how campuses can use RNL survey results to address areas which students have rated with high importance but low satisfaction scores:

##### **SURVEY ITEM: TUITION PAID IS A WORTHWHILE INVESTMENT**

**Immediate response:** While the perception of tuition value is a major concern in today's higher ed world, there are small-scale efforts that a college or university can undertake as a starting point. For example, work to improve the "little" but important and highly visible daily annoyances to students like Wi-Fi availability, printer access, sidewalk repair, etc., which students are apt to associate with tuition.

**Future plan:** Conduct price sensitivity research to assess how students feel about the cost to attend your institution.

**Change perceptions with information:** Track and publish employment outcomes for graduates, invite alumni to campus to share their successes in person, and use social media to highlight student success, educational quality, and other points that demonstrate your institution's value.

##### **SURVEY ITEM: FINANCIAL AID COUNSELORS ARE HELPFUL**

**Immediate response:** Implement customer service training for front-line staff in the financial aid office and remind them of the important role they play regarding initial and continued student enrollment.

**Future plan:** Budget for additional staff and systems to handle financial aid inquiries at key times in the term.

**Change perceptions with information:** Be transparent and clear in your financial aid communications. Break down complex information into easier sections (for example, use bullets instead of bulky paragraphs of text and avoid technical jargon or confusing abbreviations) and be sure students know who they can connect with on campus for questions.

##### **SURVEY ITEM: MY ACADEMIC ADVISOR IS APPROACHABLE**

**Immediate response:** Offer extra triage services to answer basic advising questions during high-demand time periods.

**Future plan:** Identify opportunities for advisors to build ongoing relationships with their advisees, beyond just signing a registration form. Offer incentives to faculty and incorporate guidance into student orientation.

**Change perceptions with information:** Post (and maintain) office hours for students to meet with advisors, especially during peak service periods. Also provide appropriate resources with accurate information on requirements and update these resources regularly.

**SURVEY ITEM: THE CAMPUS IS SAFE AND SECURE FOR ALL STUDENTS**

**Immediate response:** Gather information from various student populations through focus group discussions that focus on where and why students may not feel safe on your campus.

**Future plan:** Address the areas of concern with additional lighting, increase security staff, and implement campuswide safety alerts.

**Change perceptions with information:** Communicate with students (and parents) about how, and how quickly, the campus responds to safety threats (if appropriate, provide context for how few and far between the safety issues are on campus).

**SURVEY ITEM: BILLING POLICIES ARE REASONABLE**

**Immediate response:** Change policies so payments are not due until after financial aid has been dispersed.

**Future plan:** Add automatic withdrawal options for monthly payments.

**Change perceptions with information:** Send a communication to students (and to parents) regarding payment options six weeks prior to each semester's start date.

**23 areas of focus by division**

**RECRUITMENT, ADMISSIONS, AND MARKETING LEADERS SHOULD FOCUS ON THE FOLLOWING DATA ELEMENTS:**

Percentage of students who chose the institution as their first choice

Admissions and financial aid strengths and challenges compared to national norms

Top strengths for institutional marketing

Areas of higher satisfaction and importance vs. the national comparison group

**ACADEMIC AFFAIRS LEADERS SHOULD FOCUS ON:**

Overall instruction and academic advising strengths and challenges compared to national norms

Program-level breakdowns of their institution-specific results

Students' evaluations of their institution's commitment to academic excellence

The importance of their institution's academic reputation in students' original decisions to enroll

**STUDENT AFFAIRS LEADERS SHOULD FOCUS ON:**

Campus climate strengths and challenges compared to national norms

- Students' sense of belonging; how welcome students feel; students' sense that tuition paid is a worthwhile investment

**i See next page for more information about the RNL Satisfaction-Priorities Surveys**

Campus life strengths and challenges compared to national norms

- Students' ratings of residence halls, the cafeteria, and campus activities

Support service strengths and challenges compared to national norms

- Students' ratings of career services, orientation, and tutoring

**DIRECTORS OF RETENTION SHOULD FOCUS ON:**

Overall satisfaction and likelihood-of-re-enrollment scores, both of which are strongly correlated to retention and completion

Overall strengths to celebrate and overall challenges for improvement

Campus climate strengths and challenges compared to national norms

- Students' sense of belonging; how welcome students feel; students' sense that tuition paid is a worthwhile investment

Perceptions of institutional choice, because students who perceive themselves to be at their second- or third-choice institution tend to have lower satisfaction scores

**ACCREDITATION TEAMS SHOULD FOCUS ON:**

Satisfaction trends over time

Survey items mapped to regional accreditation criteria

Satisfaction levels compared with national and regional groups

Overall satisfaction and likelihood-of-re-enrollment scores

**INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCHERS SHOULD FOCUS ON:**

Program-level data

Satisfaction trends over time

Data points on satisfaction vs. engagement data points

Student voice data for strategic planning efforts

**DEFINITIONS**

**Strengths:** Survey items that students rated in the top half of importance and in the top quartile of satisfaction, relative to the other survey items.

**Challenges:** Survey items in the top half of importance and the bottom quartile of satisfaction or in the top half of importance and the top quartile of the performance gaps for the data set.

**Performance gaps:** The difference between the importance score and the satisfaction score.

## Ready to benchmark your students' satisfaction and priorities with RNL Satisfaction-Priorities Surveys?

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

The **RNL Student Satisfaction Inventory**, the original instrument, is designed for traditional students who are primarily enrolled on campus. In addition, the **RNL Adult Student Priorities Survey** is available for undergraduate and graduate students at four-year institutions, primarily enrolled on campus, and the **Priorities Survey for Online Learners** is for students enrolled online at four-year or two-year institutions, at the undergraduate or graduate level.

See survey samples at  
[RuffaloNL.com/  
SatisfactionSurveys](https://RuffaloNL.com/SatisfactionSurveys)

- Most surveys can be completed in just 20 minutes online or with paper and pencil.
- 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.

Learn more: [RuffaloNL.com/SatisfactionSurveys](https://RuffaloNL.com/SatisfactionSurveys)

## DISCOVER RNL COMPLETE ENROLLMENT™

Explore our advanced platform that helps you identify your ideal students and engage them from search to graduation with leading resources such as the RNL Satisfaction-Priorities Surveys.

### Building Demand

Maximize engagement through true multichannel experiences and generate genuine interest from your student search list with RNL Demand Builder™.

### Cultivating Applicants

Launch campaigns that build a stronger pool of qualified, interested applicants who are a great fit for your institution and goals using RNL Applicant Cultivator™ and RNL Forecast*Plus*™.

### Optimizing Yield

Align financial aid, yield, and revenue while communicating value to your admitted students using RNL Class Optimizer™, RNL Advanced FinAid Solutions™, RNL TrueCost Calculator™, and RNL Yield Campaign™.

### Student Success

Increase student retention and completion rates using RNL Student Success™, RNL Satisfaction-Priorities Assessments™, RNL Student Retention Predictor™, and RNL Retention Management System *Plus*™.

### Strategy Roadmap

Chart your course to success with consulting and research solutions: RNL Strategic Enrollment Planning™, RNL Consulting, RNL Web and Interactive Marketing, RNL Market Research, RNL Academic Program Demand Analysis™, and RNL Price Sensitivity Analysis™.

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