2024 National Student Satisfaction and Priorities Report

Focusing on class-level subpopulation results with data from nearly 400,000 students at 693 institutions

Why Assess Student Satisfaction?

Conducting satisfaction assessment is a way to show students that the institution cares about their perceptions and their educational experience, but an even more significant way that an institution can show that it cares is by actively responding to student-identified issues. Once data have been collected, actively reviewed, and shared throughout the campus, then initiatives can be identified to respond to student concerns. Data on the shelf (or left on the computer) has no power; data actively used to inform and drive decision-making can have the power to improve the success of the institution.

In the complex environment of today's higher education world, conducting satisfaction assessment is a way to ensure the vitality of the institution. Regular satisfaction assessment and active response to the issues reflect that the institution is providing good stewardship of scarce resources in an optimal way. This practice inspires trust among all the stakeholders, including students, parents, faculty and staff, boards of trustees, and even state legislatures.

It is also appropriate to note that satisfaction assessment should be a systematic process on campus, not a one-time event. Shifts in satisfaction and expectations that are tracked over time can identify where institutions are responding appropriately and what new issues are current priorities. Data that is timely and relevant will make the highest impact. Student characteristics and perceptions can change frequently, especially when changes are actively implemented at the institutional level, and campus leaders will want to understand these changes to meet the transforming needs and circumstances of the student body they are serving.

Satisfaction assessment enables institutions to strategically and tactically target areas most in need of immediate improvement. It facilitates the development of planning and intervention priorities specific to the students being served and helps institutions examine student transactions in all major aspects of their experience, including academic, registration, financial aid, and customer service.

Colleges and university leaders must understand how satisfied students are with their educational experience—both inside and outside of the classroom—to best serve those students. By collecting satisfaction data from students on a regular basis, campuses can determine where they are best-serving students and where there are areas for improvement.

Satisfied students are more likely to be successful students. Research indicates that institutions with more satisfied students have higher graduation rates, lower loan default rates, and higher alumni giving. Satisfaction with an institution includes a combination of academic factors as well as areas related to campus services. An institution needs to identify all the issues that are relevant to students. These may include their interaction with faculty, the service they receive from staff and administrators, the physical resources on campus, the policies that are in place, and the student's overall feeling of being welcome on campus.
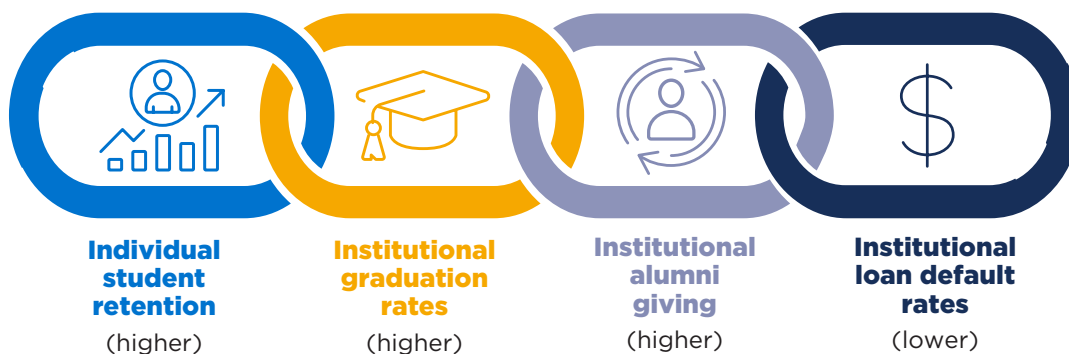
Why look at the data by class level?

This year's report examines the satisfaction levels of students within demographic subpopulations, with a focus on class levels. Satisfaction data results can become clearer and allow for better-targeted activities when they are sliced by demographic subpopulation indicators. Understanding the experiences of students based on who they are, how they are experiencing the institution, where they are on their educational journey, and what their area of focus is can be insightful for an institution, as well as on the national level. With a focus on retention and student success, a critical way to approach satisfaction data results is by class level.

As students advance in class levels, they often show declining levels of satisfaction and even sharper decreases in the likelihood to re-enroll. A variety of factors may lead to these satisfaction and re-enrollment differences as students get further into their college experiences. As students progress in their college careers, they may begin to feel the pressure of graduation. Post-college life—with its expectations to find a job, pay off any educational debts, and put one's education to use—may weigh heavier as graduation approaches. Students who have likely paid much more for their educations at private institutions are probably under more financial pressure and may be less likely to feel their educations were worth the effort as they reach their final years. These perceptions may impact graduating students' willingness to give back financially to the institution as alumni. Institutions may want to focus additional efforts on improving the satisfaction levels of upper-class students by focusing on the value of an education from the institution and by ensuring career placement.

Students who feel that their college or university is not performing well in the areas that matter most to them will be less satisfied with their overall experience and will be less likely to persist through graduation. Even those dissatisfied students who do graduate are not as likely to become positive spokespersons for the institution or generous donors to its programs. Understanding what is of greatest importance to students in general, as well as to particular subgroups of students, is essential to the process of improving the quality of the educational experience at a particular institution and, ultimately, to accomplishing the broader national goals of making our system of postsecondary education more accessible, affordable, and accountable.

Student Satisfaction is linked with:

Individual student retention
(higher)

Institutional graduation rates
(higher)

Institutional alumni giving
(higher)

Institutional loan default rates
(lower)

> "It's critical to better understand student satisfaction because it directly relates to student success, retention, persistence, and completion."
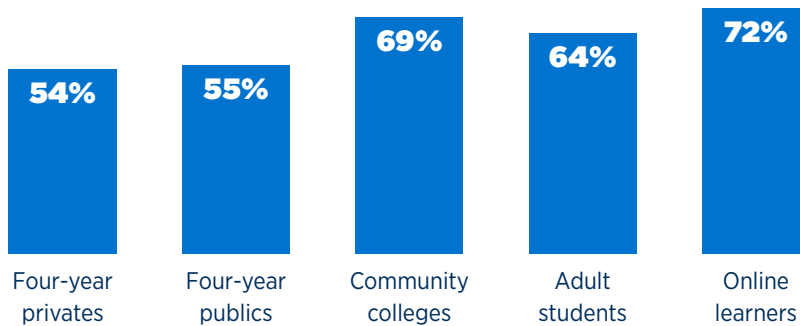>
> —*Darlene Dilley, Associate Provost, Enrollment Management, Utah Tech University, UT*

Overall National Student Satisfaction and Likelihood to Re-Enroll

Let's first look at the overall levels of satisfaction and the likelihood to re-enroll if they had it to do over for all students within these five national data sets. These charts reflect the overall satisfaction scores (satisfied/very satisfied) and the likelihood to re-enroll (probably/definitely) for students who responded from fall 2021 through spring 2024.

Overall Satisfaction and Likelihood to Re-Enroll

STUDENT SATISFACTION

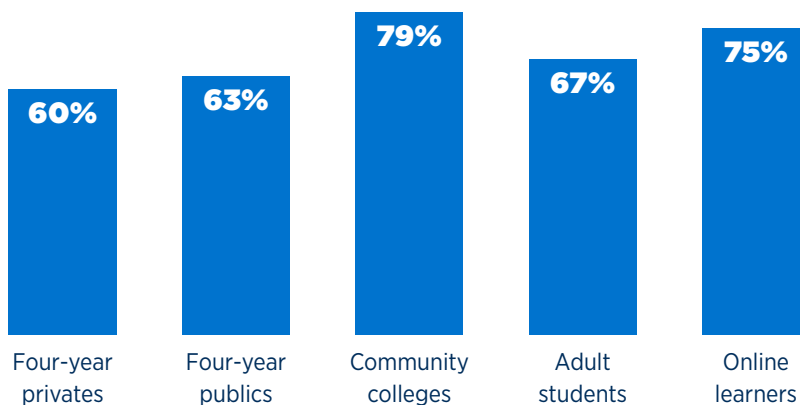| Four-year privates	Four-year publics	Community colleges	Adult students	Online learners
54%	55%	69%	64%	72%

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**

STUDENTS LIKELIHOOD TO RE-ENROLL

Four-year privates	Four-year publics	Community colleges	Adult students	Online learners
60%	63%	79%	67%	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**

There is value in seeing the big picture, but further clarity can come from looking within the larger populations to understand the satisfaction levels and priorities for demographic subpopulations.

The data reflected in this report

The data in this report reflect the responses from students who completed the **RNL Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI)** at community colleges, four-year public, and four-year private institutions along with graduate and undergraduate students who completed the **RNL Adult Student Priorities Survey (ASPS)** and the **RNL Priorities Survey for Online Learners (PSOL)**. The timeframe for completion is fall 2021 through spring 2024, reflecting three academic years.

The primary focus of the demographic subpopulation review is by class level, with separate scores for first-year, second-year, third-year, and fourth-year students where appropriate. The adult and online data sets also reflect separate results for graduate students, who make up a large portion of the surveyed population in each case. The community college results include first-year and second-year class level results, with the addition of subpopulations for the educational goal of an associate degree or plans to transfer to another institution, as well as data slices for students in the age groups of 19-24 and 25-34. These additional subpopulation views for community colleges provide more insight into the student experience than the class-level indicators alone.

While each of these survey instruments asks students to indicate a level of importance and a level of satisfaction, the analysis of the data found that what was important to students stayed consistent across subpopulations, but their level of satisfaction with the experience varied. This report focuses on the variation in satisfaction scores.

The **RNL Satisfaction-Priorities Surveys** provide institutions with identified strengths (items of high importance and high satisfaction) and challenges (items of high importance and low satisfaction). This analysis has also been done on the national data sets to indicate national strengths and challenges for each data set.

The data points that are included in this report for the subpopulation analysis are:

- Overall level of satisfaction (percentage satisfied/very satisfied) and likelihood to re-enroll (percentage probably/definitely).

- The importance scores (percentage important/very important) for the items that ask students about various factors in their decision to enroll at the institution. The clearest picture of what is driving enrollment at the national level will be seen in the responses from first-year students.

- The satisfaction scores for subpopulations (percentage satisfied/very satisfied) for the items that were identified as challenges (high importance/low satisfaction) for the total national data set.

- The satisfaction scores for subpopulations (percentage satisfied/very satisfied) for additional items where institutions may have some influence to improve the student experience. The drops in satisfaction between first- and second-year students are more pronounced at four-year institutions, public and private, along with those serving adult learners, where many 8 percent drops are noted in this report. At community colleges and those serving online learners, the point of difference for drops in satisfaction highlighted in these results is 5 percent.

> To have the biggest impact on retention, RNL recommends that institutions implement strategies and interventions for the first two years of the student experience to best position the institution to retain students in the third and fourth year. It is important to keep in mind that students are in transition at every stage of their college careers and institutions need to be able to support students throughout their experience. By viewing data results by class level and by other appropriate demographic subsets, institutions can identify and respond with initiatives when and where they will have the most impact. These types of data can assist institutions with re-yielding students year after year in multiple cohorts.

General observations on the demographic slices

- The **patterns reflected** in the summary satisfaction scores for the demographic responses tend to play out in the individual item satisfaction scores for the items as well, with satisfaction dropping or rebounding following the larger pattern.

- While not reported here, based on the analysis done with this year's data sets, the items identified as strengths and challenges for the larger national data sets are **consistent with the items identified as strengths and challenges** when isolated for demographic breakouts. This is not always the case for individual institutional data sets where unique challenges are more likely to appear by class level, enrollment status, and most often at the institutionally defined program level data (business program, nursing program, engineering, etc.).

- At **community colleges**, the satisfaction scores reflecting the experience of first- and second-year students are very similar. This was also true for full-time and part-time students, based on the analysis of the data (not included here). Differences were observed in levels of satisfaction between students with an educational goal of an associate degree as compared with students self-reporting that they are planning to transfer to another institution. The students planning to transfer have generally lower satisfaction scores. Different levels of satisfaction are also reflected in the data isolated by the age categories of 19–24-year-olds and 25–34-year-olds, where the younger students are less satisfied.

- At **four-year publics**, there are consistent drops in satisfaction between the first and second years, and then satisfaction scores level off for the remaining two years, with some slight improvements senior year. The biggest drop (9 percent) between the first and second years was in the perception that the institution shows concern for students as individuals.

- At **four-year privates**, the satisfaction drops between the freshman and sophomore years are even more pronounced, with typical drops of 7-8 percent and several of 10 percent or more. In many cases, satisfaction scores for these items continue to drop to reach a low point for seniors. This is especially concerning when we consider this population becoming future alumni who may be less willing to engage with the institution in the years ahead.

- Graduate students make up 58 percent of the **adult student data set** and drive most of the perceptions here, but the undergraduate satisfaction levels, when viewed across the first through fourth year, reflect similar declines as observed in the four-year public and private groups. There is a drop-off between the first and second years and then a consistent decline on many items, with the third-year students having the lowest satisfaction levels in the adult student data set.

- The **online learner national data set** has 32 percent graduate students, so while they do not dominate, they certainly make up a significant portion of the overall perceptions. When comparing scores among undergraduate students, satisfaction levels have fewer significant declines by class level, but there is still a drop in perceptions between the first and second years on many items.

> While we observe drops in satisfaction in many areas for second-year students, it is important to note that these are the students who decided to return to the institution. There were likely more students who were even more dissatisfied and decided not to re-enroll at the institution.

How can institutions respond to student priorities?

Enrollment factors

The data on the level of importance with the factors in the decision to enroll can provide insight into why students are selecting the institution. Different subpopulations of students may prioritize some factors more than others. By understanding the priorities as they currently exist, institutions can determine if they are reflective of the way they are positioning the institution and determine if they want to further emphasize any particular factors. In most cases, the responses from the first-year students are going to be most reflective of the enrollment factors since these students are closest in time to when they made the original decision to attend the institution.

Concern for individuals

For each of the institutional data sets, we observe drops in student satisfaction on items related to the institution showing concern for the individual. These scores may reflect the need for more communication with currently enrolled students through a strong internal communication plan. Often institutions do a great job nurturing students through the recruitment process, paying attention to them individually, but then the institutions don't continue that level of connection once the student has enrolled. There are opportunities for improved hand-offs to faculty, staff, advisors, and counselors when students enroll, especially as they progress through their experience. Too often, students are left to themselves to find someone to nurture them to reach graduation.

Creating a sense of value for the tuition investment

The perception of tuition being a worthwhile investment is at its lowest satisfaction level for seniors/fourth-year students at four-year private and public institutions, as well as for adult and online undergraduate students. The fact that students are graduating from institutions not sure of the investment they have made for the past four years is concerning. If they are not feeling strongly about the value of their education, they may not enter the workforce confidently and they may not feel the pull to stay engaged as alumni. Institutions have an opportunity to build awareness of the value they are providing at every stage, with every student. The tuition value message ties into the ways the institution shows concern for the individual, with the quality of the academic experience, with the support for experiences beyond the classroom (academic and co-curricular), and with the financial support that is provided through scholarships and aid. This type of messaging can go beyond the students to the families who are supporting the educational efforts, directly or indirectly. When the experience gets tough, students will ask themselves, *Is this worth it? Will my education at this institution matter for my future? Do I want to continue to invest in myself this way?* You want the answer to those questions to be **yes**!

> **Taking action based on student feedback is a powerful way to influence student success.**

Community Colleges Results

These results reflect the responses from 86,680 students at 135 community colleges who completed the SSI from fall 2021 through spring 2024.

Student Counts by Population

CLASS LEVEL

29,959
First year

32,813
Second year

EDUCATIONAL GOAL

44,474
Associate degree

18,020
Transfer to another institution

AGE

32,600
19-24

15,404
25-34

Summary Satisfaction and Likelihood to Re-Enroll

COMMUNITY COLLEGE DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS

Demographic	Satisfied/very satisfied	Probably/definitely would re-enroll
Class level: First year	68%	78%
Class level: Second year	70%	79%
Goal: Associate degree	70%	79%
Goal: Transfer	68%	79%
Age: 19-24	65%	76%
Age: 25-34	73%	81%
Total population	69%	79%

Legend:
- Satisfied/very satisfied
- Probably/definitely would re-enroll
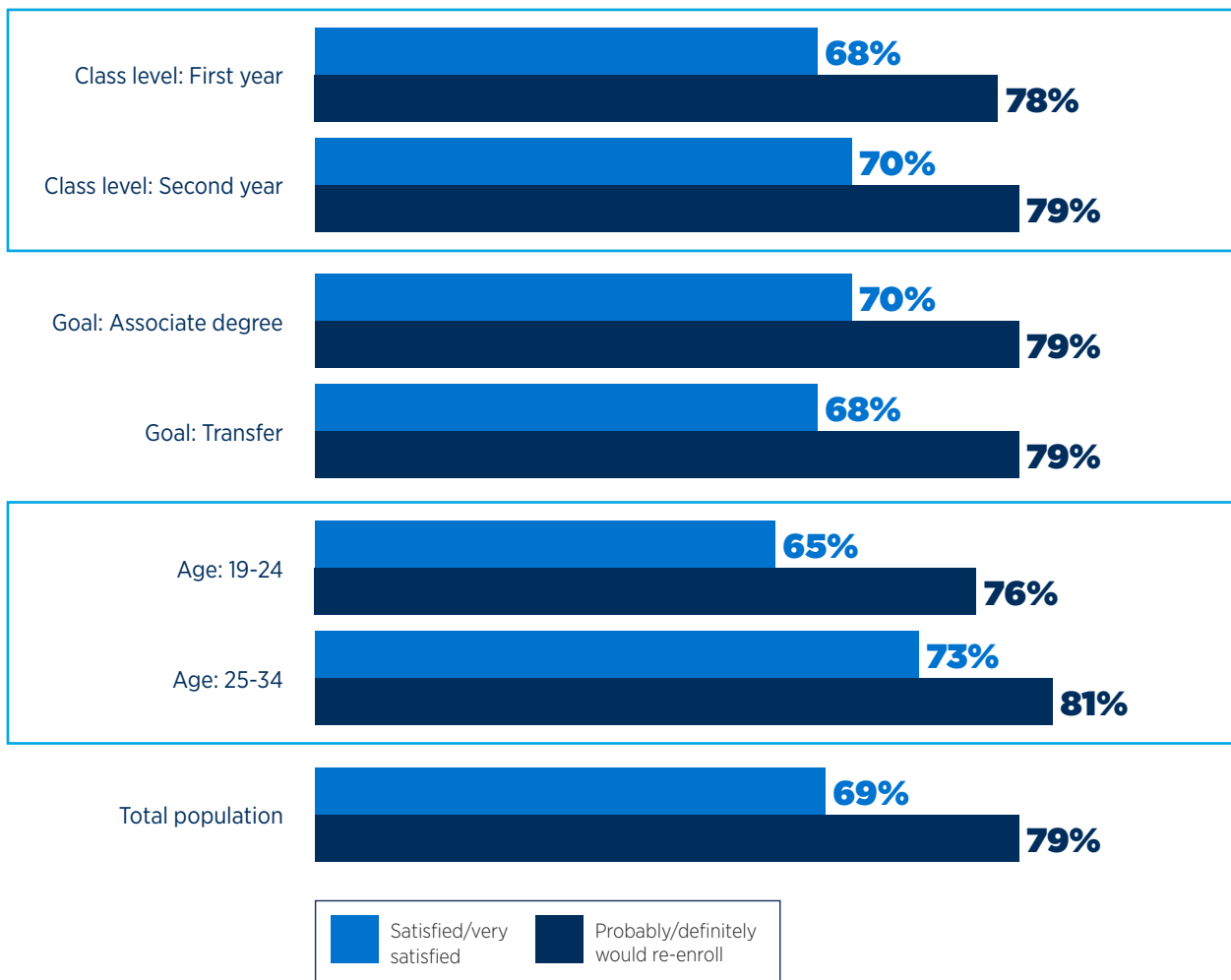
The satisfaction and re-enrollment scores for the demographic subsets at community colleges are more alike than dissimilar. The one notable difference is between the age groups of 19-24 and 25-34, where older students indicate much higher satisfaction levels and a higher likelihood of re-enrolling if they had it to do over again.

Factors in Decision to Enroll

FACTOR	CLASS LEVEL: FIRST YEAR	CLASS LEVEL: SECOND YEAR	GOAL: ASSOCIATE DEGREE	GOAL: TRANSFER TO ANOTHER INSTITUTION	AGE: 19-24	AGE: 25-34
Cost	85 %	86 %	86 %	86 %	84 %	88 %
Financial aid	83 %	84 %	85 %	84 %	83 %	86 %
Academic reputation	76 %	77 %	79 %	73 %	74 %	79 %
Size of institution	61 %	61 %	63 %	55 %	60 %	61 %
Opportunity to play sports	46 %	44 %	47 %	39 %	47 %	42 %
Recommendations from family/friends	61 %	59 %	62 %	53 %	60 %	60 %
Geographic setting	71 %	72 %	73 %	70 %	70 %	74 %
Campus appearance	62 %	62 %	64 %	57 %	62 %	62 %
Personalized attention prior to enrollment	68 %	67 %	69 %	63 %	66 %	69 %

Indicates the percentage of students who said the factor was important or very important.

For students at community colleges, the factors of cost, financial aid, and academic reputation are of top importance across the demographic data sets. The importance level for all factors is similar between first- and second-year students. Associate degree students place higher importance on academic reputation, the opportunity to play sports, recommendations from family/friends, campus appearance, and personalized attention prior to enrollment. Students ages 19-24 indicate the opportunity to play sports is more important, while students 25-34 say cost, academic reputation, geographic setting, and personalized attention have a higher importance.

Satisfaction percentages for overall challenge items

These items are challenges for the entire community college national data set, with the corresponding percentage satisfied/very satisfied reflected in the demographic breakouts. The items are presented in order of importance to the overall national data set. The scores highlighted in blue show differences within categories of 5 percent or more, with the lower score highlighted.

ITEM	CLASS LEVEL: FIRST YEAR	CLASS LEVEL: SECOND YEAR	GOAL: ASSOCIATE DEGREE	GOAL: TRANSFER TO ANOTHER INSTITUTION	AGE: 19-24	AGE: 25-34
Adequate financial aid is available for most students.	71%	70%	71%	67%	**67%**	72%
Classes are scheduled at times that are convenient for me.	71%	68%	70%	66%	68%	68%
I am able to register for classes I need with few conflicts.	73%	73%	74%	**69%**	71%	74%
The quality of instruction I receive in most of my classes is excellent.	70%	69%	70%	**65%**	**66%**	71%
Financial aid counselors are helpful.	72%	70%	72%	**67%**	69%	72%
Faculty are understanding of students' unique life circumstances.	72%	70%	71%	67%	68%	71%
Faculty provide timely feedback about student progress in a course.	72%	70%	72%	**66%**	**68%**	73%
This school does whatever it can to help me reach my educational goals.	72%	71%	72%	**67%**	69%	72%

Indicates the percentage of students who said they were satisfied/very satisfied with the item.

"We assess student satisfaction to identify areas for success and areas for improvement. We also like to see how we compare to the national comparison group."

—Casey Whalen, Manager of Institutional Research, St. Louis Community College, MO

A few other items of note:

ITEM	CLASS LEVEL: FIRST YEAR	CLASS LEVEL: SECOND YEAR	GOAL: ASSOCIATE DEGREE	GOAL: TRANSFER TO ANOTHER INSTITUTION	AGE: 19-24	AGE: 25-34
Most students feel a sense of belonging.	68%	68%	69%	**63%**	**64%**	71%
It is an enjoyable experience to be a student on this campus.	76%	75%	77%	73%	**73%**	78%
Students are made to feel welcome on this campus.	81%	80%	81%	78%	**78%**	83%
My academic advisor is knowledgeable about my program requirements.	77%	76%	78%	**71%**	74%	77%
My academic advisor is knowledgeable about the transfer requirements of other schools.	75%	73%	76%	**69%**	72%	76%
There are adequate services to help me decide upon a career.	73%	72%	74%	**65%**	**70%**	75%
Administrators are approachable to students.	75%	75%	75%	71%	**72%**	77%
I seldom get the "run-around" when seeking information on this campus.	69%	68%	69%	**64%**	**65%**	70%

Indicates the percentage of students who said they were satisfied/very satisfied with the item.

Advisor is knowledgeable

Students with an indicated educational goal of planning to transfer have lower satisfaction with advisor knowledge of the program and transfer requirements. It is understandable that these would be priority issues for them when they are focused on what comes next after their community college experience. Two-year institutions have opportunities to target better information and resources for students, if the school is intentional with knowing which students have this goal.

Sense of belonging, being made to feel welcome

It is interesting to note that students ages 19-24 have lower satisfaction than students 25-34 with feeling a sense of belonging on campus, being made to feel welcome and having an enjoyable experience. This is somewhat counter to what we might expect when we hear stories of older students feeling out of place with younger students. These results highlight the opportunities for community colleges to create experiences for traditional-age students to connect them with their peers and to provide them with a complete college experience while continuing to maintain these opportunities for older students as well.
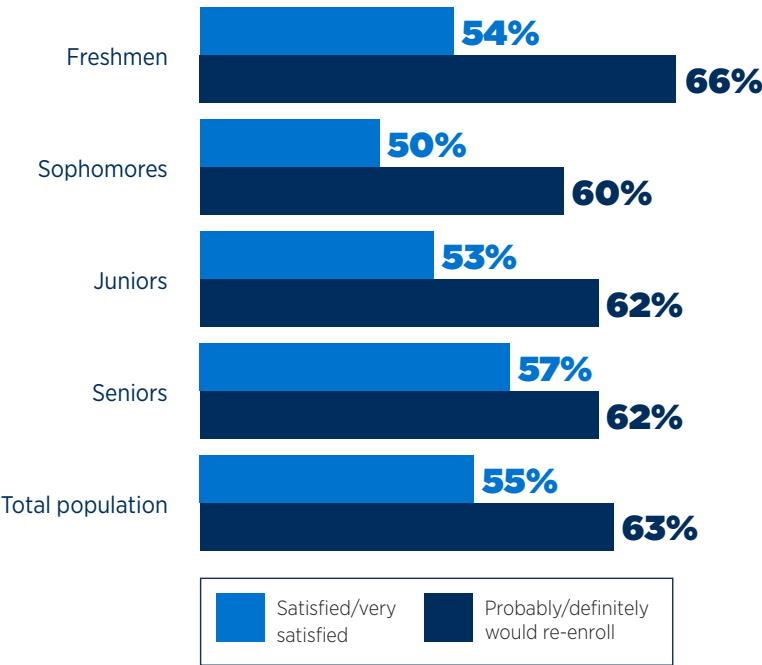
Four-Year Public Results

These results reflect the responses from 55,186 students at 66 four-year public institutions who completed the RNL SSI from the fall of 2021 through the spring of 2024.

Student Counts by Population

11,323
Freshmen

8,787
Sophomores

12,569
Juniors

12,541
Seniors

Summary Satisfaction and Likelihood to Re-Enroll

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC CLASS LEVELS

Class Level	Satisfied/very satisfied	Probably/definitely would re-enroll
Freshmen	54%	66%
Sophomores	50%	60%
Juniors	53%	62%
Seniors	57%	62%
Total population	55%	63%

Legend: Satisfied/very satisfied | Probably/definitely would re-enroll

The class-level data sets at four-year public institutions reveal that satisfaction scores decline between the freshman and sophomore years before rebounding to reach their highest level for seniors. In contrast, the likelihood to re-enroll score is at its highest point for first-year students before declining sophomore year and remaining steady for juniors and seniors.

FACTOR	FRESHMEN	SOPHOMORES	JUNIORS	SENIORS
Cost	82%	82%	83%	84%
Financial aid	82%	82%	82%	82%
Academic reputation	74%	71%	71%	71%
Size of institution	61%	56%	56%	55%
Opportunity to play sports	44%	38%	35%	34%
Recommendations from family/friends	55%	50%	49%	48%
Geographic setting	64%	64%	63%	64%
Campus appearance	65%	60%	60%	58%
Personalized attention prior to enrollment	63%	58%	59%	57%

Indicates the percentage of students who said the factor was important or very important.

The perception of the importance of cost, financial aid, academic reputation, and geographic setting stay fairly consistent across class levels. The opportunity to play sports drops by 10 percent between freshman and senior year, while all other areas have a slight decline.

> The 3,700 graduate students in the four-year public data set indicate high levels of satisfaction (65%) and likelihood to re-enroll (69%). Cost (87%), financial aid (83%) and academic reputation (78%) are the top factors in the decision to enroll for graduate students at four-year public institutions.

Satisfaction percentages for overall challenge items

These items are challenges for the entire four-year public national data set, with the corresponding percentage of satisfied/very satisfied reflected by class level. The items are presented in order of importance to the overall national data set. The scores highlighted show drops of 8 percent or more between the freshman and sophomore years, with the lower score highlighted in the sophomore column.

ITEM	FRESHMEN	SOPHOMORES	JUNIORS	SENIORS
The quality of instruction I receive in most of my classes is excellent.	59%	55%	58%	55%
I am able to register for classes I need with few conflicts.	63%	58%	58%	58%
The campus is safe and secure for all students.	62%	56%	60%	58%
Tuition paid is a worthwhile investment.	56%	49%	49%	48%
Adequate financial aid is available for most students.	53%	**45%**	47%	46%
Faculty provide timely feedback about student progress in a course.	56%	**48%**	50%	48%
This institution shows concern for students as individuals.	60%	**51%**	53%	51%
Financial aid awards are announced to students in time to be helpful in college planning.	55%	50%	51%	51%

Indicates the percentage of students who said they were satisfied/very satisfied with the item.

A few other items of note:

ITEM	FRESHMEN	SOPHOMORES	JUNIORS	SENIORS
Most students feel a sense of belonging.	52%	47%	50%	49%
Students are made to feel welcome on this campus.	69%	62%	63%	62%
It is an enjoyable experience to be a student on this campus.	64%	**56%**	58%	57%
Faculty are fair and unbiased in their treatment of individual students.	66%	**58%**	59%	56%
Channels for expressing student complaints are readily available.	55%	**45%**	46%	44%
I seldom get the "run-around" when seeking information on this campus.	55%	48%	49%	46%
Administrators are approachable to students.	60 %	**52%**	54%	51 %
There are adequate services to help me decide upon a career.	65%	58%	58%	54%

Indicates the percentage of students who said they were satisfied/very satisfied with the item.

Helping students to be seen

Despite attending what are typically larger institutions by enrollment numbers, students at four-year public institutions still expect to be treated as individuals and want to have a welcoming, enjoyable experience. Four-year public institutions often have the infrastructure to implement this for first-year students, but there are opportunities to expand the programming and support systems into the second year and beyond. This includes providing opportunities to express complaints/concerns along with meeting with administrators to discuss what is top of mind for the students. This could include establishing "office hours" for administrators, having visibility in high-traffic locations such as the student union, and creating special class-specific events for sophomores, juniors, and seniors.

> **"There are several reasons we assess student satisfaction: we want to ensure quality of the student experience; it helps overall with retention; we want to better understand the needed resources and best allocate them within our budget; student success often goes hand-in-hand with student satisfaction, and we want to see our students succeed."**
>
> **—Hannah Rieger,** *Director of Student Support Services, University of Oklahoma Norman Campus, OK*
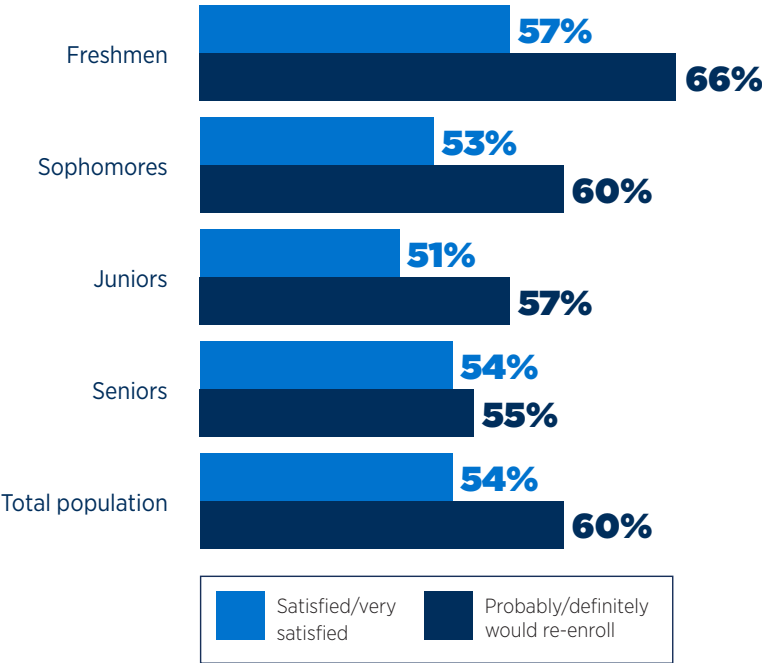
Four-Year Private Results

These results reflect the responses from 118,206 students at 239 four-year private institutions who completed the RNL SSI from fall 2021 through spring 2024.

Student Counts by Population

28,668
Freshmen

23,189
Sophomores

24,395
Juniors

24,820
Seniors

Summary Satisfaction and Likelihood to Re-Enroll

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE CLASS LEVELS

Class Level	Satisfied/very satisfied	Probably/definitely would re-enroll
Freshmen	57%	66%
Sophomores	53%	60%
Juniors	51%	57%
Seniors	54%	55%
Total population	54%	60%

The class level data sets at four-year private institutions indicate that satisfaction scores decline after freshman year, with a modest rebound senior year. The likelihood to re-enroll score declines each year, with seniors not as confident as freshmen that they would enroll at the institution again if they had it to do over.

Factors in Decision to Enroll

FACTOR	FRESHMEN	SOPHOMORES	JUNIORS	SENIORS
Cost	81%	81%	81%	81%
Financial aid	84%	85%	85%	85%
Academic reputation	77%	75%	75%	74%
Size of institution	62%	58%	58%	58%
Opportunity to play sports	46%	41%	40%	38%
Recommendations from family/friends	52%	48%	48%	47%
Geographic setting	63%	59%	59%	58%
Campus appearance	64%	60%	59%	59%
Personalized attention prior to enrollment	66%	62%	62%	61%

Indicates the percentage of students who said the factor was important or very important.

The perception of cost and financial aid stay consistent in importance across class levels. The opportunity to play sports drops by 8 percent between freshmen and senior years, while all other areas drop slightly from freshman to senior years.

> **The 5,600 graduate students in the four-year private data set indicate high levels of satisfaction (60%) and likelihood to re-enroll (63%). Financial aid (83%), cost (81%), and academic reputation (81%) are the top factors in the decision to enroll.**

Satisfaction percentages for overall challenge items

These items are challenges for the entire four-year private national data set, with the corresponding percentage satisfied/very satisfied reflected by class level. The items are presented in order of importance to the overall national data set. The scores highlighted show drops of 8 percent or more between the freshman and sophomore years, with the lower score highlighted in the sophomore column.

ITEM	FRESHMEN	SOPHOMORES	JUNIORS	SENIORS
I am able to register for classes I need with few conflicts.	59%	53%	53%	54%
It is an enjoyable experience to be a student on this campus.	64%	**56%**	53%	52%
Tuition paid is a worthwhile investment.	53%	**43%**	41%	40%
Faculty are fair and unbiased in their treatment of individual students.	67%	**56%**	54%	52%
This institution shows concern for students as individuals.	64%	**55%**	52%	50%
Adequate financial aid is available for most students.	53%	**44%**	43%	43%
Faculty provide timely feedback about student progress in a course.	58%	**49%**	49%	49%
Financial aid awards are announced to students in time to be helpful in college planning.	61%	**53%**	51%	51%
Financial aid counselors are helpful.	60%	**52%**	50%	48%

Indicates the percentage of students who said they were satisfied/very satisfied with the item.

A few other items of note:

ITEM	FRESHMEN	SOPHOMORES	JUNIORS	SENIORS
Most students feel a sense of belonging.	52%	45%	42%	42%
Students are made to feel welcome on this campus.	70%	**62%**	60%	58%
There are adequate services to help me decide upon a career.	67%	60%	57%	53%
I seldom get the "run-around" when seeking information on this campus.	56%	**48%**	45%	43%
Freedom of expression is protected on campus.	68%	**58%**	55%	50%

Indicates the percentage of students who said they were satisfied/very satisfied with the item.

Addressing "the sophomore slump"

The dips in student satisfaction between freshman and sophomore years are most pronounced in the four-year private national data set. This reflects the opportunity private institutions have for creating a clear first through fourth-term retention plan to support and guide students during the critical first two years of their higher education experience. Faculty can play a critical role in this area, building relationships as students determine their majors and career direction. Ongoing financial support is another way that private institutions can facilitate making it possible for students to stay enrolled.

"The RNL SSI provides us with valuable feedback regarding what we're doing well and where we can improve."

—Wayne Herman, Vice President, Chief Academic Officer, Los Angeles Pacific University, CA
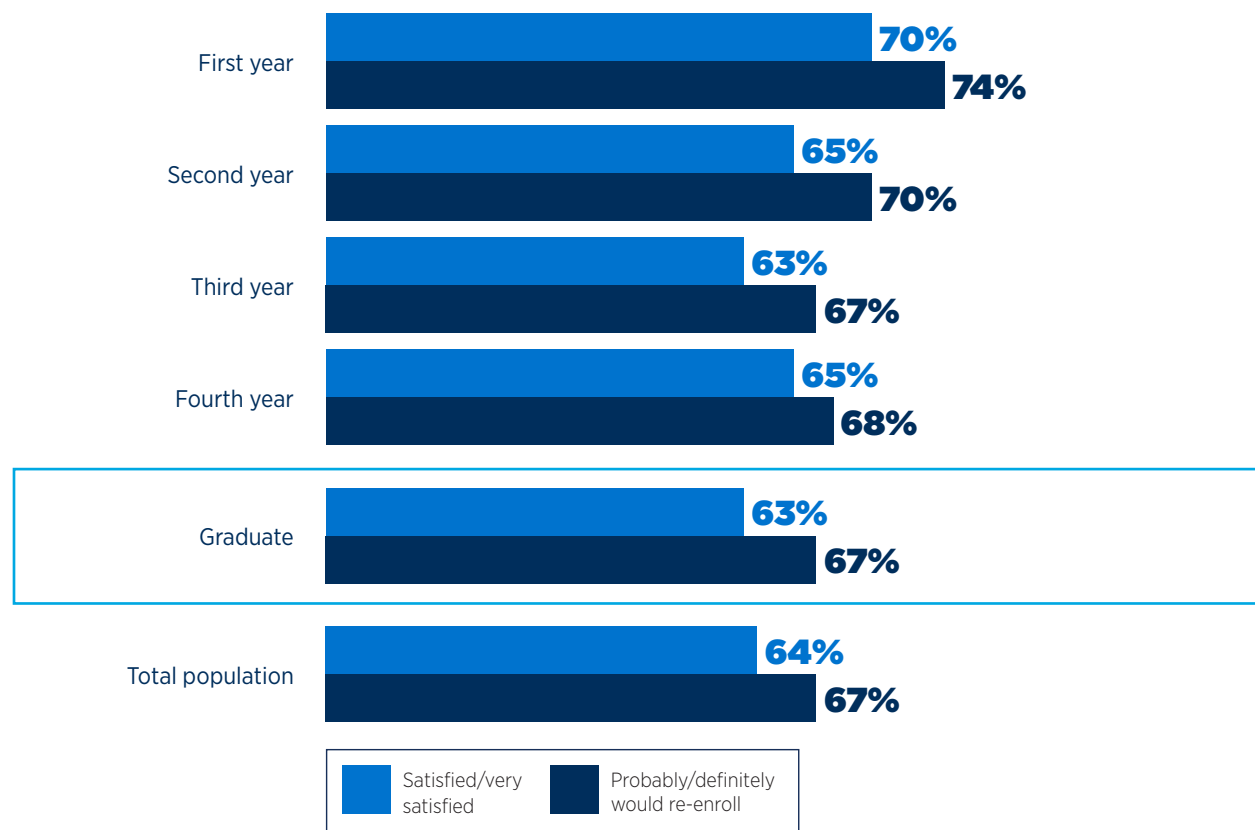
Adult Students Results

These results reflect the responses from 37,393 adult undergraduate and graduate students at 100 institutions who completed the RNL ASPS from the fall of 2021 through the spring of 2024.

Student Counts by Population

2,486 First year

2,104 Second year

2,620 Third year

3,093 Fourth year

22,003 Graduate students

Summary Satisfaction and Likelihood to Re-Enroll

ADULT STUDENT CLASS LEVELS

Class Level	Satisfied/very satisfied	Probably/definitely would re-enroll
First year	70%	74%
Second year	65%	70%
Third year	63%	67%
Fourth year	65%	68%
Graduate	63%	67%
Total population	64%	67%

For the undergraduate adult students (primarily 25 years of age and older), first-year students have the highest levels of satisfaction and likelihood to re-enroll. The scores drop in the second and third years before rebounding slightly in the fourth year. This is similar to the pattern observed in the four-year public national data set. Graduate students have lower satisfaction and likelihood to re-enroll than the undergraduate population, which is different than scores observed in past years where graduate students typically had higher satisfaction levels than their undergraduate adult counterparts.

Factors in Decision to Enroll

FACTOR	FIRST YEAR	SECOND YEAR	THIRD YEAR	FOURTH YEAR	GRADUATE STUDENTS
Cost	84%	81%	80%	80%	80%
Financial aid/ scholarship opportunities	86%	82%	81%	79%	76%
Academic reputation	84%	82%	81%	79%	79%
Size of institution	65%	60%	54%	51%	49%
Future employment opportunities	84%	80%	78%	76%	77%
Recommendations from family/friends/ employer	71%	64%	60%	59%	57%
Campus location (close to home/work)	79%	76%	75%	73%	67%
Availability of evening/weekend courses	82%	78%	78%	79%	67%
Personalized attention prior to enrollment	81%	76%	72%	71%	64%

Indicates the percentage of students who said the factor was important or very important.

First-year adult undergraduate students emphasize financial aid, cost, and academic reputation, as well as future employment opportunities, followed closely by the availability of evening and weekend courses and personalized attention. Importance scores on all the items drop for upper-class adult students. For graduate students, cost was the primary driving factor, followed by academic reputation, future employment opportunities, and financial aid. The importance scores are lower for all factors for graduate students than they are for the undergraduate population.

Satisfaction percentages for overall challenge items

These items are challenges for the entire adult student national data set, with the corresponding percentage satisfied/very satisfied reflected by class level, including graduate students who make up a significant portion of the overall group. The items are reflected in order of importance to the overall national data set. The scores highlighted show drops of 8 percent or more between the first and second years, with the lower scores highlighted in the second-year column. The scores for the graduate population reflect the lowest levels of satisfaction as compared with the first through fourth year students on all items, which is a departure from observations in past years.

ITEM	FIRST YEAR	SECOND YEAR	THIRD YEAR	FOURTH YEAR	GRADUATE STUDENTS
Tuition paid is a worthwhile investment.	74%	**64%**	63%	60%	55%
Adequate financial aid is available for most adult students.	73%	**63%**	59%	61%	54%
Faculty provide timely feedback about my progress.	80%	73%	69%	67%	66%
The quality of instruction I receive in my program is excellent.	80%	**72%**	70%	69%	68%

Indicates the percentage of students who said they were satisfied/very satisfied with the item.

Note: Graduate students identified the same challenge items as the four indicated above for the total population, perhaps because graduate students make up 58% of the overall adult student population data set.

"RNL is a well-known brand for assessing the student perspective in higher education. Having an independent organization provide that perspective is hugely important to us. The data is valued by our Board of directors and by our accrediting organizations. It shows how we are performing when it comes to institutions that are similar to us."

—Ada Uche, *Director of Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness, Colorado Technical University, CO*

Additional items:

ITEM	FIRST YEAR	SECOND YEAR	THIRD YEAR	FOURTH YEAR	GRADUATE STUDENTS
Classroom locations are safe and secure for all students.	91%	88%	87%	87%	84%
Faculty are fair and unbiased in their treatment of individual students.	84%	77%	75%	73%	72%
I am able to register for classes I need with few conflicts.	81%	76%	73%	74%	76%
Adult students are made to feel welcome at this institution.	83%	78%	74%	74%	71%
I seldom get the "run-around" when seeking information on this campus.	73%	67%	64%	66%	60%
This institution responds quickly to my requests for information.	79%	74%	70%	71%	68%
This institution provides timely responses to student complaints.	77%	**67%**	62%	63%	58%
Career services are adequate and accessible for adult students.	82%	77%	71%	70%	65%
This institution offers a variety of payment plans for adult students.	79%	**70%**	65%	67%	61%

Indicates the percentage of students who said they were satisfied/very satisfied with the item.

Understanding different experiences for adult undergraduate and graduate students

When it comes to serving students 25 years of age and older, it is important for institutions to understand the different perceptions between the adult learner at the undergraduate level and the students who are pursuing their graduate degrees. While there are some drop-offs in satisfaction between first- and second-year adult undergraduates, most of the experiences are viewed similarly from one class level to the next. Adult undergrads are often very motivated and have clear goals for their enrollment, so if the institution is meeting the expectations that were set as part of the recruitment process and the institution is affordable for the student, they are likely to be satisfied. Providing clear avenues for these students to share their concerns and to get timely responses is a critical way to show this population that the institution cares about serving them. Graduate students have lower satisfaction scores on all the items reflected in this report which leads to questions on how institutions are supporting this population that may be more taken for granted as an enrollment source. If institutions are not serving the graduate students they have, they may have trouble building their graduate enrollment in the future, based on word-of-mouth and institutional reputation perceptions.
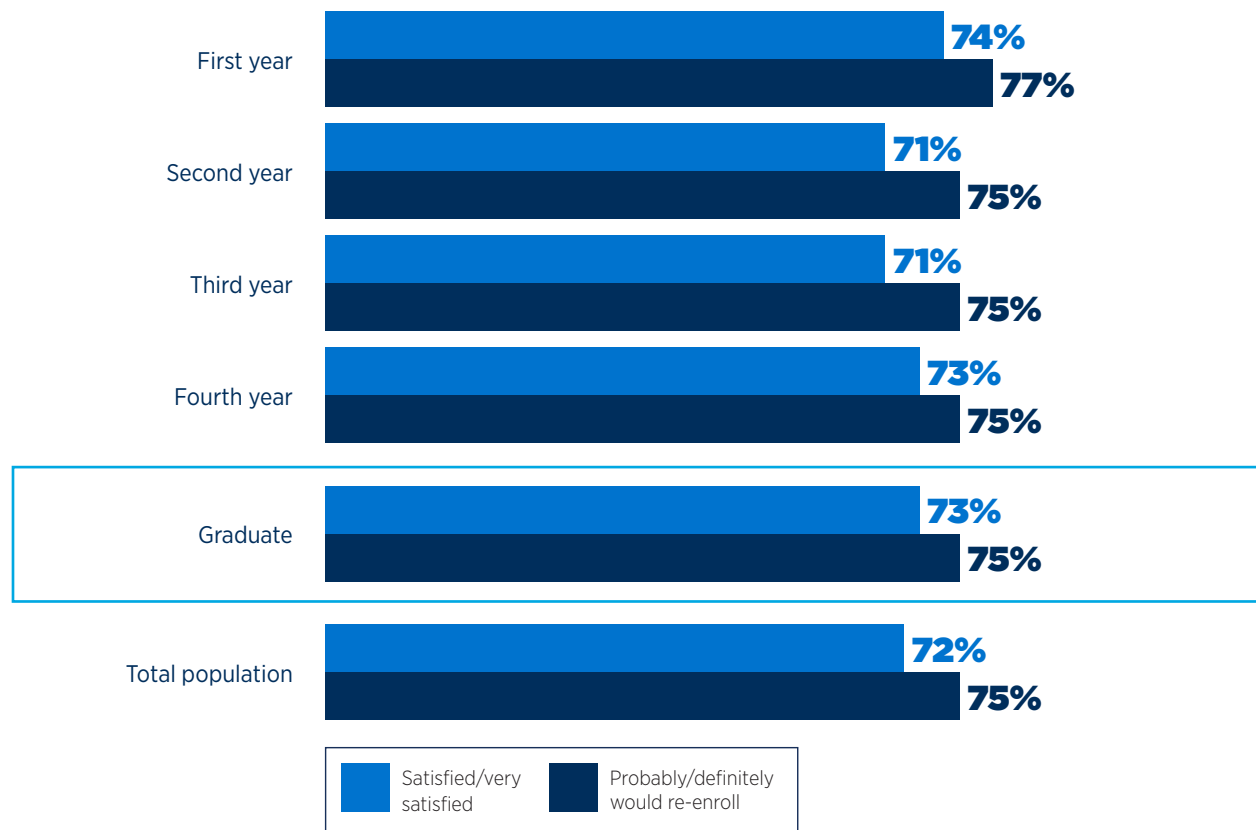
Online Learners Results

These results reflect the responses from 101,925 undergraduate and graduate online learners at 153 institutions who completed the RNL PSOL from the fall of 2021 through the spring of 2024.

Student Counts by Population

18,460
First year

14,870
Second year

12,606
Third year

12,936
Fourth year

33,032
Graduate students

Summary Satisfaction and Likelihood to Re-Enroll

ONLINE LEARNERS CLASS LEVELS

Class Level	Satisfied/very satisfied	Probably/definitely would re-enroll
First year	74%	77%
Second year	71%	75%
Third year	71%	75%
Fourth year	73%	75%
Graduate	73%	75%
Total population	72%	75%

For undergraduate and graduate online learners, satisfaction and likelihood to re-enroll scores hover around the same percentages without much disparity. There is a bit of a drop from the first to the second year, where they hold steady before rebounding by the fourth year, matching the perceptions of graduate students.

Factors in Decision to Enroll

FACTOR	FIRST YEAR	SECOND YEAR	THIRD YEAR	FOURTH YEAR	GRADUATE STUDENTS
Ability to transfer credits	84%	86%	89%	90%	74%
Cost	85%	86%	85%	85%	84%
Financial assistance available	87%	86%	84%	83%	77%
Future employment opportunities	86%	83%	80%	79%	79%
Reputation of institution	84%	83%	82%	82%	83%
Work schedule	88%	88%	89%	90%	91%
Flexible pacing for completing a program	90%	90%	91%	91%	91%
Convenience	91%	91%	92%	92%	92%
Distance from campus	75%	72%	67%	65%	60%
Program requirements	86%	85%	83%	84%	86%
Recommendations from employer	72%	67%	61%	58%	55%

Indicates the percentage of students who said the factor was important or very important.

Many of the importance scores remain consistent across the undergraduate class levels, with convenience and flexible pacing being the primary factors influencing enrollment decisions. This is true for the graduate population as well. It is interesting to note that the ability to transfer credits has a higher importance score for fourth-year students. The perceptions of distance from campus and recommendations from employers as being important drop between the first- and fourth-year undergraduate populations. Work schedule is in the top three for all class levels, including graduate students, as a key factor in the decision to enroll.

Satisfaction percentages for overall challenge items

These items are challenges for the entire online learner national data set, with the corresponding percentage satisfied/very satisfied reflected by class level, including graduate students who make up a significant portion of the overall group. The items are reflected in order of importance to the overall national data set. The scores highlighted show drops of 5 percent or more between the first and second years, with the lower scores highlighted in the second-year column. The satisfaction scores for the graduate population, which makes up 32 percent of the overall online learning data set, fall right in the middle of the scores for the undergraduate class levels in most cases.

ITEM	FIRST YEAR	SECOND YEAR	THIRD YEAR	FOURTH YEAR	GRADUATE STUDENTS
Instructional materials are appropriate for program content.	82%	**77%**	75%	74%	76%
Faculty provide timely feedback about student progress.	78%	**73%**	70%	69%	72%
Tuition paid is a worthwhile investment.	76%	**71%**	68%	67%	69%
The quality of online instruction is excellent.	77%	**72%**	69%	69%	71%
Faculty are responsive to student needs.	80%	**75%**	74%	74%	77%

Indicates the percentage of students who said they were satisfied/very satisfied with the item.

One item is identified as a challenge when the data are isolated for just graduate students: "Student assignments are clearly defined in the syllabus" with 76% satisfaction. An item that is not a challenge for the graduate students only is "Faculty are responsive to student needs" with the satisfaction score noted here of 77%.

Additional items:

ITEM	FIRST YEAR	SECOND YEAR	THIRD YEAR	FOURTH YEAR	GRADUATE STUDENTS
My program advisor is accessible by telephone and e-mail.	82%	78%	79%	80%	78%
This institution responds quickly when I request information.	79%	75%	75%	76%	77%
There are sufficient offerings within my program of study.	80%	**74%**	73%	72%	74%
Online career services are available.	80%	**75%**	72%	70%	66%
Billing and payment procedures are convenient for me.	81%	80%	81%	81%	82%
Adequate financial aid is available.	73%	70%	65%	67%	62%

Indicates the percentage of students who said they were satisfied/very satisfied with the item.

Online learners are more alike than they are different: focus on academic quality

Online learners emphasize their academic experiences and the interactions they have with faculty members when they identify what is important to them. Those connections make up the core of the online learning experience, and they are also where institutions have the most opportunity to make improvements. Similar to the satisfaction scores for on-ground students, there is a drop in satisfaction between first- and second-year online students on the academic issues that matter most to them. The satisfaction variation across class levels is not as large in other supporting services for online learners. Institution should put the focus on starting first-year online learners out right with quality academic experiences and supporting their learning through a variety of support services. The institution can then continue to build on that support into the second year to help position the online programs to best serve and retain online learners.

> **"This tool is indeed a timesaver, expanding my ability to develop a wide range of reports to suit everyone's needs."**
>
> **—Roxianne Snodgrass,** *Director of Institutional Research, Columbia International University, SC*

Ready to Benchmark Your Students' Satisfaction and Priorities With the RNL Satisfaction-Priorities Surveys?

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• Student retention planning

• Campuswide planning projects

• Accreditation documentation

• Benefits that should be promoted in student recruitment

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

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 surveys can be completed in just 10-15 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.

> **"RNL has a longstanding tradition of quality tools, services, and support. We use the SSI to monitor key areas of the institution and to provide data regarding current initiatives."**
>
> **—Chris Choncek,** *Associate Vice President Institutional Research, Point Park University, PA*

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