

# NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT 2021

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**LEIGHTON UNIVERSITY**

107 EAST STATELINE RD  
SOUTHAVEN, MS 38671

AD VITAM PARAMUS



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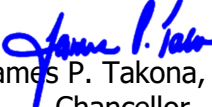
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## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

From the start, this work has been a collaborative project that reflects a shared endeavor of our partners whose contribution of ideas and resources made it a success. Evident in the report is the richness of information and findings that will support Leighton University's vision and mission. Thanks to everyone from these groups who helped contribute to this Study. Leighton University, Corp (LUCorp) hopes to use this resource to enhance students' experiences - a vital step toward ensuring our colleges are genuinely student-centered. The findings of this study will refine Leighton's initiatives to respond to prospective students' need for flexible, academically rigorous degree programs with a global reach.

The successful close of this study would not have been possible without so many outstanding stakeholders contributing to this study's success. Your generously of time to participate in the online survey, focus group interviews, and their generosity of time to frame and write, at various levels, the report. We extend our sincere appreciation to these individuals for their time to share their thoughtful contributions to this Study. We're immensely grateful to the students who took the time to provide valuable feedback about their student experience.

Thank you all for the input, constructive criticisms, and ensuring the teams kept the research well-grounded in practice. Special thanks to Brilliant Assessments, Inc (London, UK) for their generosity of time and involvement to see the success of this research. Also, but not least, to Anthony Kean for the great enduring care and diligence in providing excellent work on the transcriptions.

  
James P. Takona, PhD  
Chancellor

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Access to higher education, especially for specific segments of the general population, including adult learners/non-traditional students, low-income, minority, and rural students, is an insistent concern among policymakers, education professionals, and the general public. Barriers that include prohibitive costs, limited knowledge of financial aid options, the complexity of aid application procedures, personal health, child and senior care challenges, transportation difficulties are among the many barriers to enrollment and completion of postsecondary education. Existing within Mississippi are significant disparities among the college degree-holders for ages 25 and over, and in general, in the U.S [1]. This data was obtained by dividing the counts of graduates by the total number of persons 25 years old and over. As a young university, Leighton University has a commitment to education as a common social justice goal and a particular purpose concerning the successful education for non-traditional students. Thus, Leighton will be well-positioned to join and contribute to the State of Mississippi commitment to increasing degree-holders. There is no argument that individuals benefit by attaining a postsecondary education (PSE) in increased earnings and physical and mental well-being. These benefits ultimately extend beyond the individual graduate to improve the social and economic well-being of the wider community.

In the *2017 Mississippi Complete to Compete (C2C)* initiatives, launched by the Commissioner of Higher Education and Executive Director of Mississippi Community College Board, the central focus then, and still true today, was to increase the number of degrees awarded citizens of Mississippi. The initiative has been attentive to reducing, if not eliminating, barriers that keep adult learners from returning to complete their degrees. In support of this initiative, the Board supported the initiation of the C2C Grant, with the intended to help adult learners return to complete their degrees within a year. At the same time, Mississippi's public community colleges and universities expanded the number of online courses, programs, and student services personalized to provide greater access to working adults to higher education opportunities.

In support of the vision of the Commission and joining hands with the State's public and private institutions, Leighton University, a non-profit private 501(c)(3) organization, has a clear vision of increasing postsecondary education attainment in the State of Mississippi. Its vision gives a particular focus on adult learners with (a) no college experience or credits, (b) some college but no degree, and (c) adults with associate degrees who want to earn a bachelor's degree. Our focus is to access high-quality academic programs that offer traditional and non-traditional/adult learners' educational opportunities. These opportunities provide Mississippians, more options and access to quality learning experiences. In our vision to embrace and harness technology, Leighton will provide additional access and affordability to higher education, and it will position itself to meet a fair share of the State of Mississippi vital mission's services.

As a needs assessment effort, this Study required a comprehensive data set and analysis of factors that affect the design of our programs and the potential for success of its future graduates. The overarching study examined postsecondary need gaps from Mississippian and took a pulse reading of successes and challenges existing Mississippi 4-years institutions face. Through knowledge and discoveries made, Leighton will seek ways to bridge the gaps through a fully online institution. In addition, collected will provide insights into the development and implementation of programs while being to our stakeholders.

Our study approached this activity with a clear understanding that "need" refers to the gap between a present position (*what is*) and the desired positioning (*what should be*). In that case,

the need is neither the present nor the future position; but the existing gap between the two. Leighton University, a proposed institution, hopes to bridge the current gap by offering educational opportunities to an exceptional group of traditional and non-traditional students. Leighton University is likely to serve a proportionally larger share of underprepared students who thirst for post-secondary academic education and require assistance and opportunities to achieve their educational goals successfully. In the authors' assessment, Leighton University gained the capability to develop coursework to support various program scopes and knowledge requirements.

The needs assessment research team engaged in various roles in developing the study instruments. This small team possessed the expertise, resources, and authority to perform the needs assessment and publish the recommendations for implementation. To ensure accuracy of results, our data was collated from multiple streams of sources and took a critical approach to:

- Understand our specific "business" needs;
- Find the right research approach;
- Ensure that our insights are actionable.

Analyzing educational *vis-a-vis* state needs is essential in planning and providing academic programs primarily targeted to non-traditional students/adult learners. If an exercise on needs analysis is neglected, the quest for the development of educational programs and the associated support programs would be counterproductive. Leighton intentionally tasked itself to pursue both primary and secondary information sources. Information from these sources will support the development and implementation of (a) the institution strategic plans, (b) refinement of the proposed and future development of new academic programs, (c) enhancement student learning experiences, and (d) above all, support the University's mission and values.

## INTRODUCTION

This project's overarching goal is to provide a systematic and precise study of the educational landscape and use those findings to identify and strengthen an ongoing plan or develop academic programs and operation processes for Leighton University. Over a decade ago, Mississippi's collaboration of state agencies, corporations/private enterprises developed the *Blueprint Mississippi 2011* report that focused on strategies to increase the economic prosperity of its citizen. Through that initiative, Mississippi envisioned an assertive approach to improving the educational achievement level of Mississippians through strategic training programs and partnerships that will publicize career-building opportunities for Mississippians. Mississippi has the lowest literacy rate in the nation, and approximately 20 percent of Mississippi adults cannot read (see Appendix A). In addressing the Mississippi illiteracy case, targeted efforts have been given to raise Mississippian literacy from the bottom up. Leighton's vision is encapsulated in the institution's motto - *Ad Vitam Paramus* ("we are preparing for the future") by taking advantage of today's information-intense, knowledge-based society to reach a sizeable underserved adult student population that needs or wants the flexibility of completing an affordable, quality online degree program without having to quit their employment to attend traditional classroom sessions.

In its declaration, *Blueprint Mississippi 2011* report stated:

As Mississippi moves ahead into the 21st century, its success will depend most heavily upon its citizenry. Any changes made today will only thrive if Mississippi can compete tomorrow. That requires providing all Mississippians quality educations, keeping highly educated Mississippians in the state, and attracting and retaining highly educated people from outside the state. Improving education will have significant economic returns for the state and require bold initial investments [2].

To achieve the *Blueprint Mississippi's* ambitious goal, the higher education system must undertake far-reaching reforms to widen college access, improve college readiness, ensure quality, and accelerate college completion. The *Blueprint Mississippi 2011*, an extensive one-year research project focused on the 12 Blueprint States (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas), is now being implemented across the state based on its nine (9) Blueprint Goals, adds:

Promoting higher college completion rates is also extremely important for enhancing Mississippi's future growth prospects. Recognizing the need to increase the number of degree holders is a key to driving economic competitiveness in Mississippi. The Mississippi Legislature enacted the Graduation Rate Task Force in 2009, and the task force created the Education Achievement Council (EAC) to sustain attention to this effort [3].

While it is undoubtedly good news, building and rebuilding a resilient and will require new or renewed foundations that will safeguard and ensure that future economic disruptions do not have the same level of shattering impact that the COVID-19 catastrophe has had on the most vulnerable student populations, their families, and small businesses.

Over the past two or so decades, online (distance) education programs have grown at an astonishing rate. Moreover, web-based distance education has emerged to serve a diverse community. The rise of the COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly created many challenges for higher education institutions. It accelerated an alteration that was already underway for several years – this being a shift in which the rapid change is faster and often presents itself in more unpredictable ways. The current dynamics worldwide are here to stay, and they require that we creatively adjust the delivery of academic programs rather than simply responding to the complexities of change



as they present themselves. In establishing the proposed institution, the founders considered using the needs assessment as a living tool for making informed decisions.

Further, with the pandemic getting the attention toward recovery, a national economic recovery alleyway seems to be within reach. Nonetheless, the resounding question revolves around the foundations for a resilient and inclusive economy. Today, thousands of students are entering their fourth semester of remote instruction despite self-selecting for an in-person college experience. Recent research has made known that online learning can be ideally good or better than in-person learning for the students who choose it.

## DEVELOPMENT OF VIABLE PROGRAMS

Leighton University Founders recognize that building a resilient yet economical academic framework is not easy. The process requires reimagining how we currently conceive the creation of a new institution and its practices that focus on student experiences, curriculum development, and the expansion opportunities for all while recognizing the need to reduce the ever-growing “communities” roadblocks that often confront students who may also be adult learners.

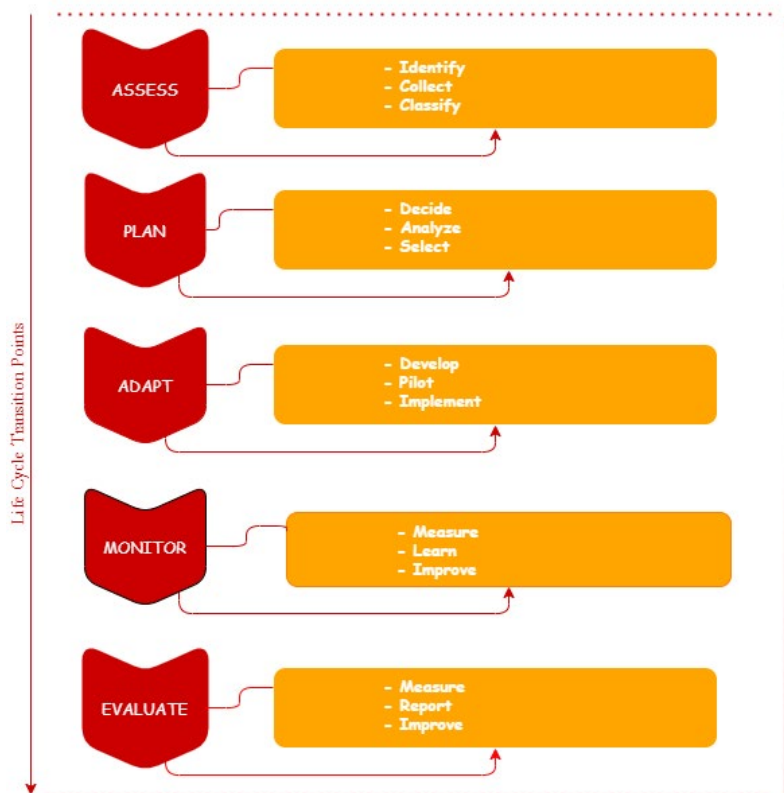


Figure 1: Leighton University Cycle of Data Review and Utilization Model

Figure 1.

The Founder expects that the Study’s findings will support Leighton in identifying priorities, possible challenges and determining pathways and criteria for solutions. The results of this study will enable Leighton, a young university, to make sound decisions and develop functional criteria in budget allocations, people, facilities, the teaching and learning instructional infrastructure, and other resources. In addition, Leighton University would gain a valuable perspective in prioritizing the identified needs to guide programming and planning decisions. Moreover, Leighton’s founder’s effort to understand our community’s needs as a basis for adequate will have a long-lasting impact on the success of the University in offering meaningful experiences to our students. To achieve this goal, Leighton has conceptualized a sequential Data Utilization model described in

## OVERALL STUDY APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

Leighton's *Needs Assessment Study* [LNAS] includes a systematic collection of perceptions through the following three methods: (1) use of survey tool, (2) use of focus group discussions targeting college/university student populations, higher education personnel, and faculty, and (2) use of published secondary sources. Using the three types of sources as integral components of the study adds to the importance of the preceding study.

### *Method #1: Administration of the Survey Tool*

The approach allowed respondents to share their perspectives on conditions affecting their region's workforce, community, and educational needs. A small number of open-ended items were also included. LNAS was designed to use a multi-pronged approach utilizing quantitative and qualitative approaches, and Leighton used an in-house developed survey Instrument tool to achieve the quantitative dimension. In addition, Leighton University invested in procuring a database of validated potential student subjects.

### *Method #2: Use of Focus Groups Discussions*

Leighton used the qualitative method, which included three small focus group discussions with university/college support areas staff, faculty, and students, and qualitative methods through focus group discussions (in-house questionnaires). Using a set of four questionnaires with the pre-determined question, Leighton invited groups of participants, solicited by email, through social media, and Leighton's website, to participate in a virtual meeting over a video virtual platform. An additional list of potential Student Focus Group Discussion was solicited which was limited to students only, was solicited through a question (Question #36) used under Method #1 in exchange for a small price.

### *Method #3: Use of Secondary Published Sources*

The third dimension utilized in the multi-pronged study approach was published secondary data. Our selection of secondary sources extracts from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) managed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The database consists of self-reported metrics from institutions mandated under Title IV of the Higher Education Act (HEA) and submitted annually. This database is usually published a year behind and features information highlighting nearly 4,000 two-year and four-year undergraduate institutions and graduate institutions throughout the United States. These institutions are mostly those identified as approved for Title IV (financial aid and grants funding). Published in the database is analyzed and summarized data extracted from colleges/universities' primary sources submissions. IPEDS data are published at the aggregated level from postsecondary institutions and do not have student-level information.

In our methodology, we incorporated the following principles:

- Foster participation and input by identified stakeholders
- Build on the knowledge shared to identify knowledge gaps
- Focus on empowerment
- Consider ethical consequences
- Incorporate evaluative thinking
- Link process and outcomes based on observed gaps between current achievements and the institution's desired future accomplishments.

## **PRIMARY DATA SOURCE I: STUDENT SURVEY**

Leighton University partnered with Europe-based Brilliant Assessment, Inc., to develop and administer the Surveys that serve as a significant component of LNAS. The survey was created to better understand Mississippi's student experience both inside and outside of the classroom by examining students' perceptions, challenges, and overall experiences in their pursuit of high education. The questions, primarily closed-ended, and a tiny number of open-ended items were incorporated into the survey instrument. These inclusions intentionally minimize the respondent's burden, commonly referred to as fatigue, in completing the survey. The Survey instrument was available only in the English language. Early drafts of the study were shared with key stakeholders to solicit feedback and make revisions. The survey was field-tested with a small group of individuals to identify any issues and allow for the opportunity to correct problems before the survey's launch.

### **Study Population Sample**

Leighton contracted Brilliant Assessments of London, United Kingdom, to provide contacts of university/college students and its platform to secure, through its databanks, 750 potential students currently enrolled in two-year and four-year colleges/universities located within the state of Mississippi. The sample population was 'harvested' students' names and contact information drawn from various social media platforms. The defined criteria for inclusion of a participant were based on several variables, including student is a resident, a State of residence, a current student pursuing a degree program, has an association to a Mississippi post-secondary institution, an existing member of a marketing database, among others.

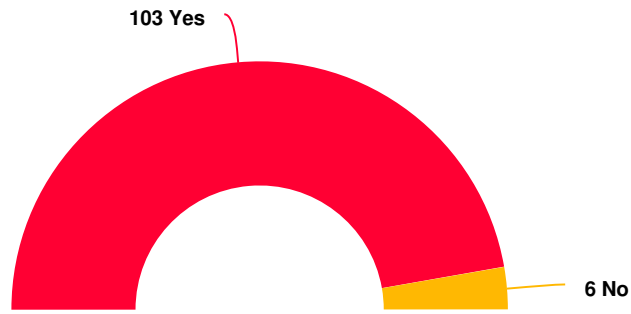
### **Survey Administration**

An invitation to participate e-mail was sent through Brilliant Assessments system, with a personal link for each e-mail address of the 750 participants. An email message that included an invitation to participate was forwarded through Brilliant's platform. The emails were customized and specified the name of the "sender" (as Leighton University). Participants were directed to follow a prominently included live link to the survey tool. Since each participant had a unique link, responses may be linked back to email addresses but remain encrypted in the system. For our study, data is considered confidential but not anonymous to some degree. This method enabled reminders to be sent only to those who had not taken the survey after the initial invitation. Nonresponding sample members with delayed returns sent two reminder emails.

Of the questionnaires distributed to potential responders, 110 were completed and returned. The questionnaire mostly used the Linkert scale, with some questions soliciting additional written-out responses. The LNAS Survey did not have an incentive system. Respondents completed the LNAS Surveys in a median time of 12 minutes, as calculated by the platform, to respond. A print-out version of the survey instrument administered is in Appendix B of this report.

## Study Survey Results

1. Are you currently enrolled at a college/university?

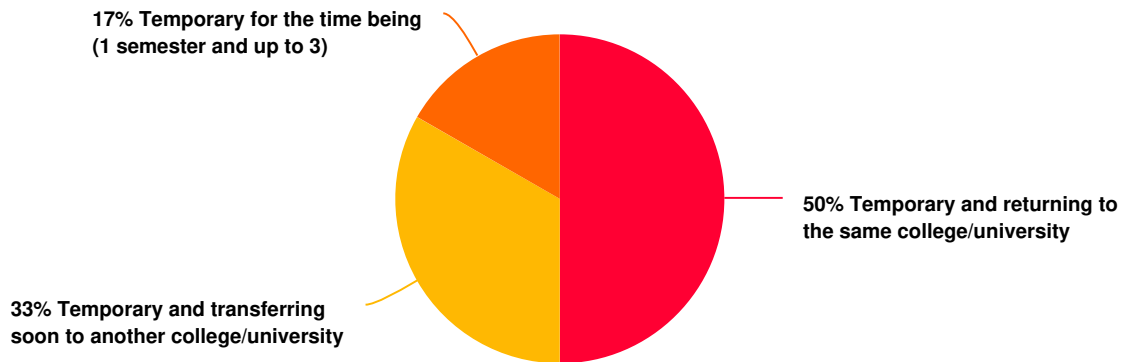


Value	Percent	Responses
Yes	94.5%	103
No	5.5%	6
		Totals: 109

### Statistics

Total Responses 109

## 2. Is your pause\_\_\_\_\_

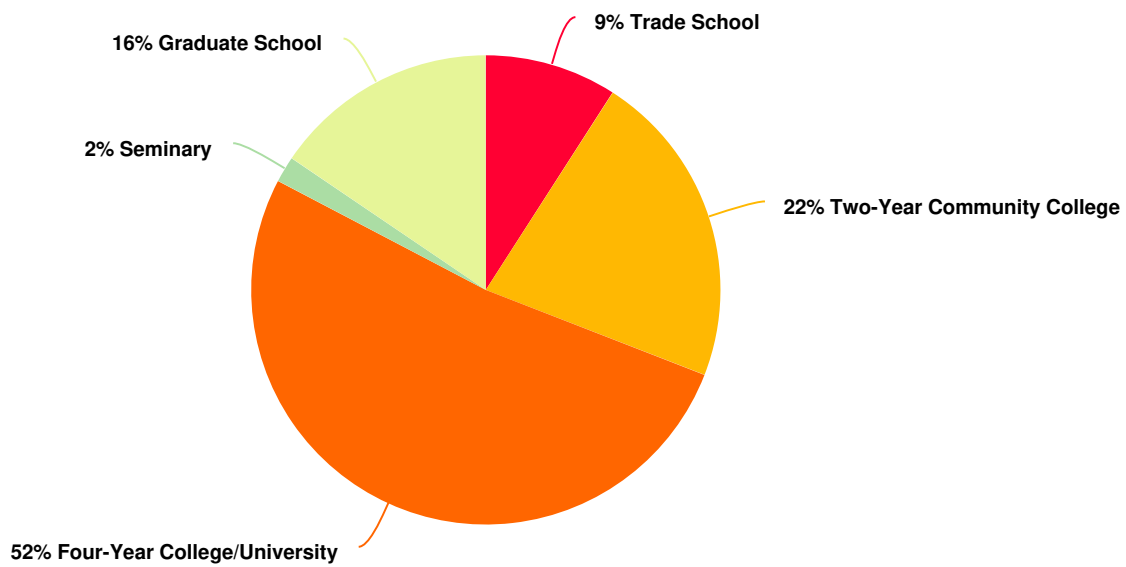


Value	Percent	Responses
Temporary and returning to the same college/university	50.0%	3
Temporary and transferring soon to another college/university	33.3%	2
Temporary for the time being (1 semester and up to 3)	16.7%	1
		<b>Totals: 6</b>

### Statistics

Hidden	22
Skipped	0
Total Responses	6

### 3. How would you describe your college/University



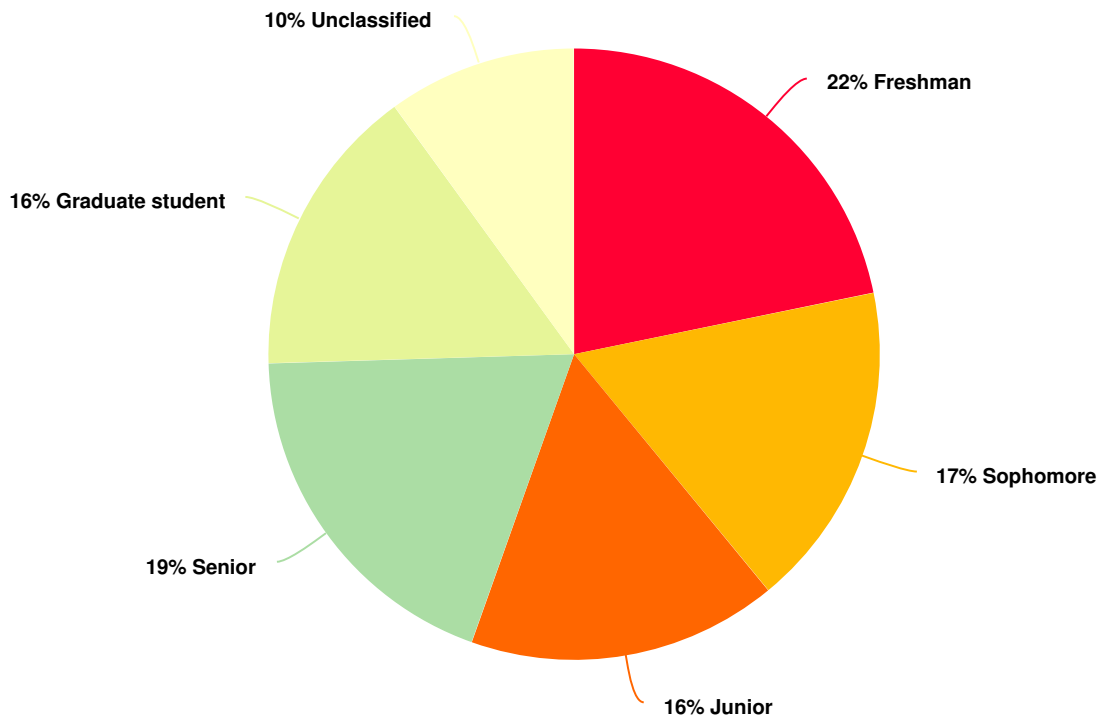
Value	Percent	Responses
Trade School	9.1%	10
Two-Year Community College	21.8%	24
Four-Year College/University	51.8%	57
Seminary	1.8%	2
Graduate School	15.5%	17

Totals: 110

#### Statistics

Skipped	0
Total Responses	110

#### 4. How would you classify yourself?



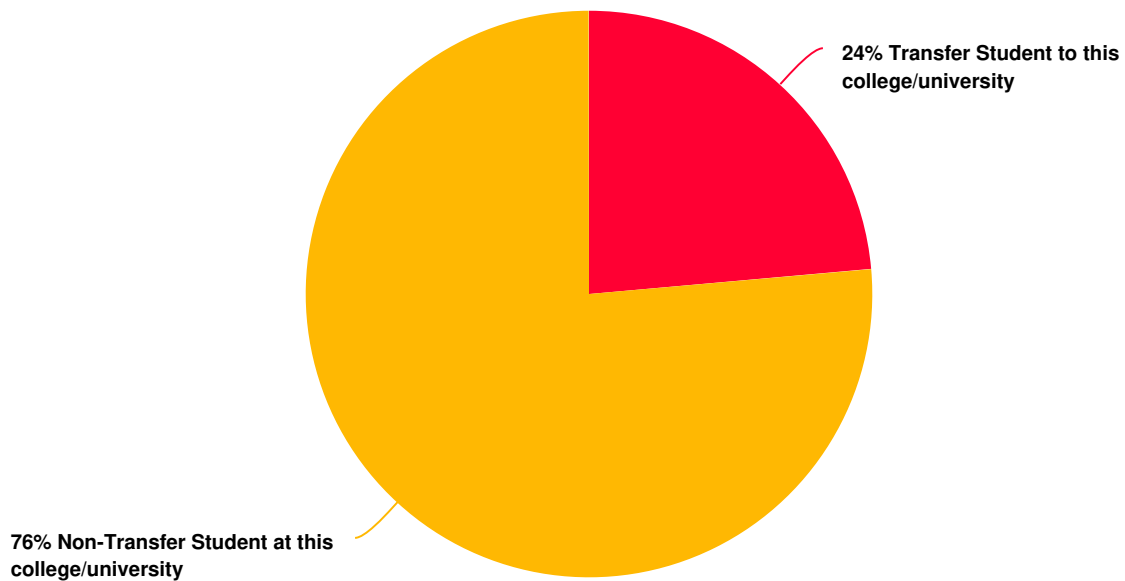
Value	Percent	Responses
Freshman	21.8%	24
Sophomore	17.3%	19
Junior	16.4%	18
Senior	19.1%	21
Graduate student	15.5%	17
Unclassified	10.0%	11

Totals: 110

#### Statistics

Skipped	0
Total Responses	110

## 5. How would you be classified in your current college/university?



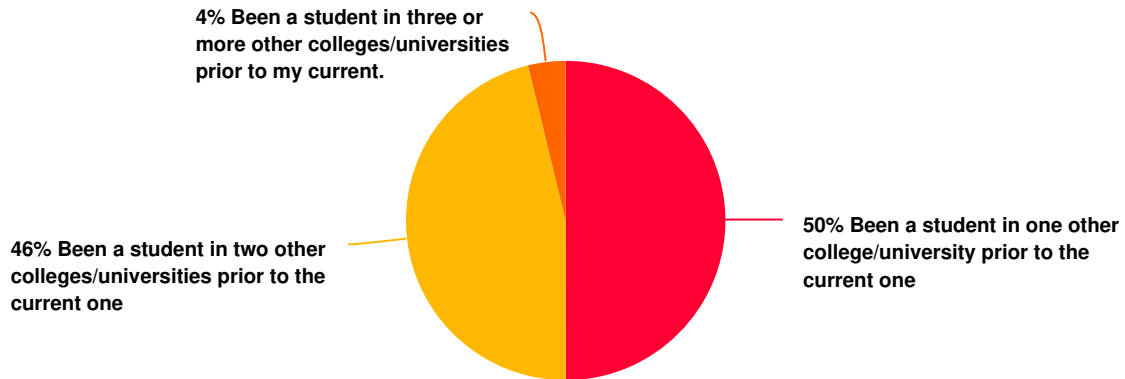
Value	Percent	Responses
Transfer Student to this college/university	23.6%	26
Non-Transfer Student at this college/university	76.4%	84
		<b>Totals: 110</b>

### Statistics

Skipped	0
Total Responses	110



## 6. Prior to your transfer to your current college/university, in how many other institutions other have attended?



Value	Percent	Responses
Been a student in one other college/university prior to the current one	50.0%	13
Been a student in two other colleges/universities prior to the current one	46.2%	12
Been a student in three or more other colleges/universities prior to my current.	3.8%	1
		<b>Totals: 26</b>

### Statistics

Hidden	84
Skipped	0
Total Responses	26

7. At times, it is necessary for a student to not register for one reason or another. Have you skipped a semester or so for any reason?

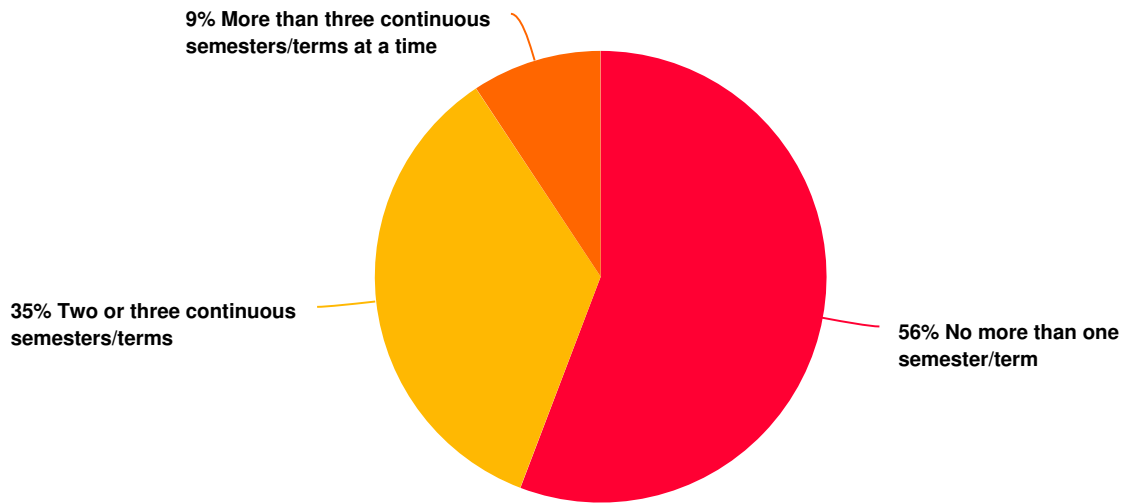


Value	Percent	Responses
Yes	39.1%	43
No	60.9%	67
		<b>Totals: 110</b>

### Statistics

Skipped	0
Total Responses	110

8. For how many semester (on the average) have you had to stop and not register for the semester on a continuous basis?

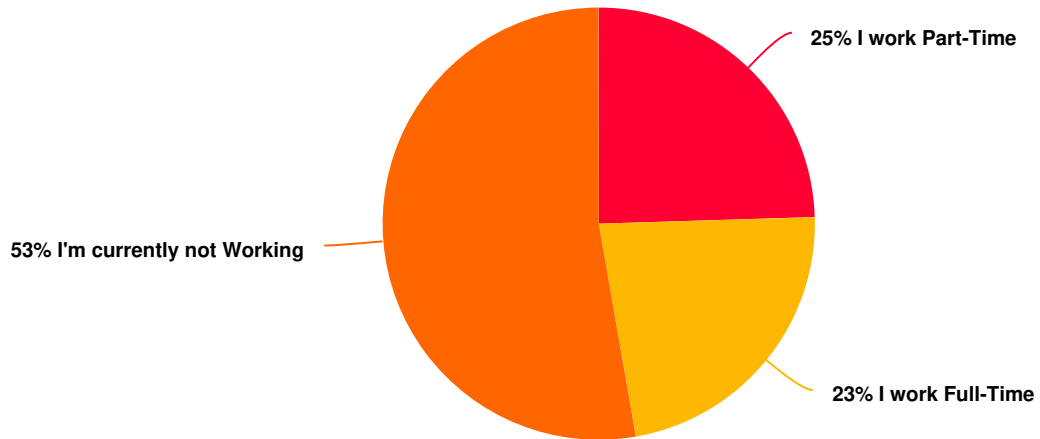



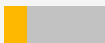

Value	Percent	Responses
No more than one semester/term	55.8%	24
Two or three continuous semesters/terms	34.9%	15
More than three continuous semesters/terms at a time	9.3%	4
		<b>Totals: 43</b>

### Statistics

Hidden	67
Skipped	0
Total Responses	43

## 9. What is your employment status

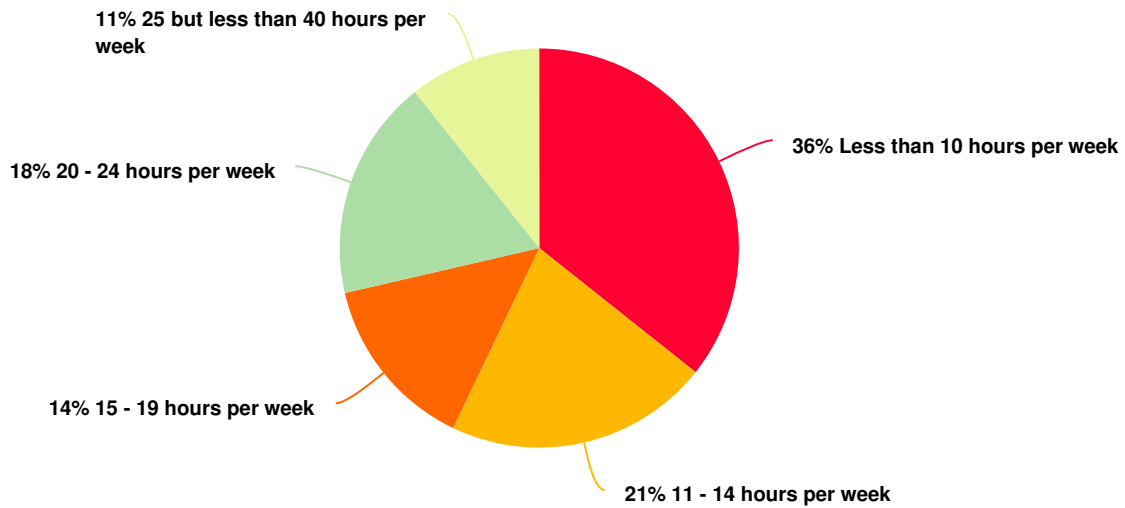


Value		Percent	Responses
I work Part-Time		24.5%	27
I work Full-Time		22.7%	25
I'm currently not Working		52.7%	58
			<b>Totals: 110</b>

### Statistics

Skipped	0
Total Responses	110

10. If you work part-time, approximately how many clock hours per week do you work?



Value	Percent	Responses
Less than 10 hours per week	35.7%	10
11 - 14 hours per week	21.4%	6
15 - 19 hours per week	14.3%	4
20 - 24 hours per week	17.9%	5
25 but less than 40 hours per week	10.7%	3

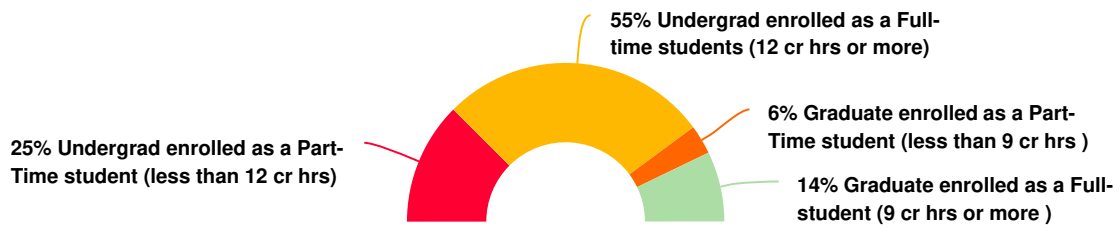
Totals: 28

## Statistics

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Min	0
Max	25
Sum	301.0
Average	10.8
StdDev	9.0
Hidden	81
Skipped	1
Total Responses	28

## 11. What is your enrollment status at you current institution?



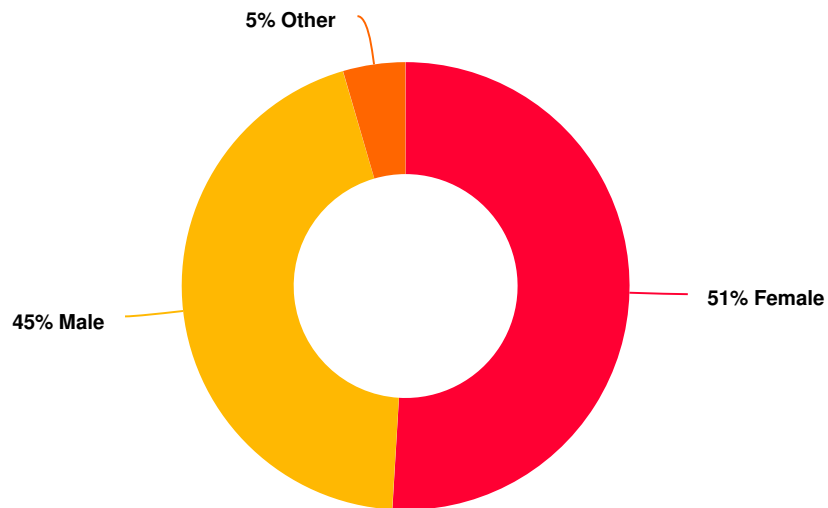
Value	Percent	Responses
Undergrad enrolled as a Part-Time student (less than 12 cr hrs)	25.0%	21
Undergrad enrolled as a Full-time students (12 cr hrs or more)	54.8%	46
Graduate enrolled as a Part-Time student (less than 9 cr hrs )	6.0%	5
Graduate enrolled as a Full-student (9 cr hrs or more )	14.3%	12

Totals: 84

### Statistics

Hidden	26
Skipped	0
Total Responses	84

## 12. What is your gender?



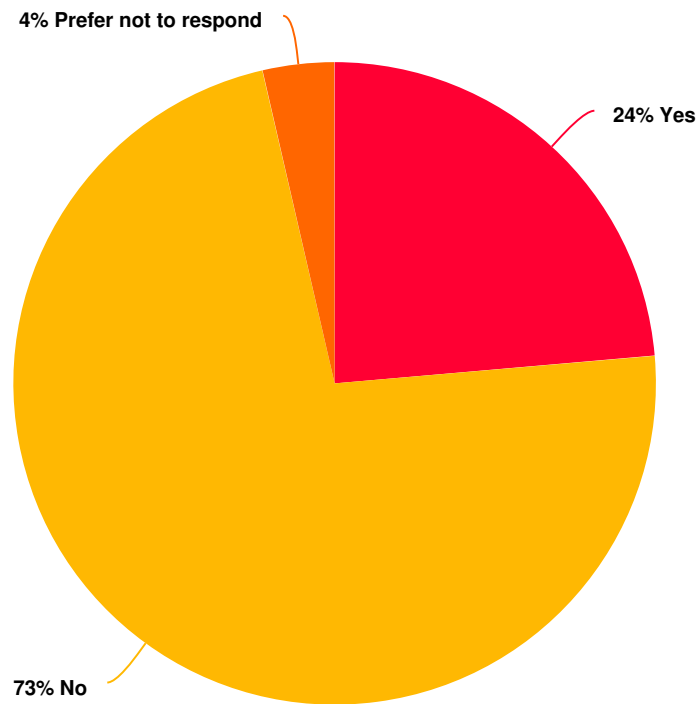
Value	Percent	Responses
Female	50.9%	56
Male	44.5%	49
Other	4.5%	5
		<b>Totals: 110</b>

### Statistics

Skipped	0
Total Responses	110



### 13. Do you have dependents?

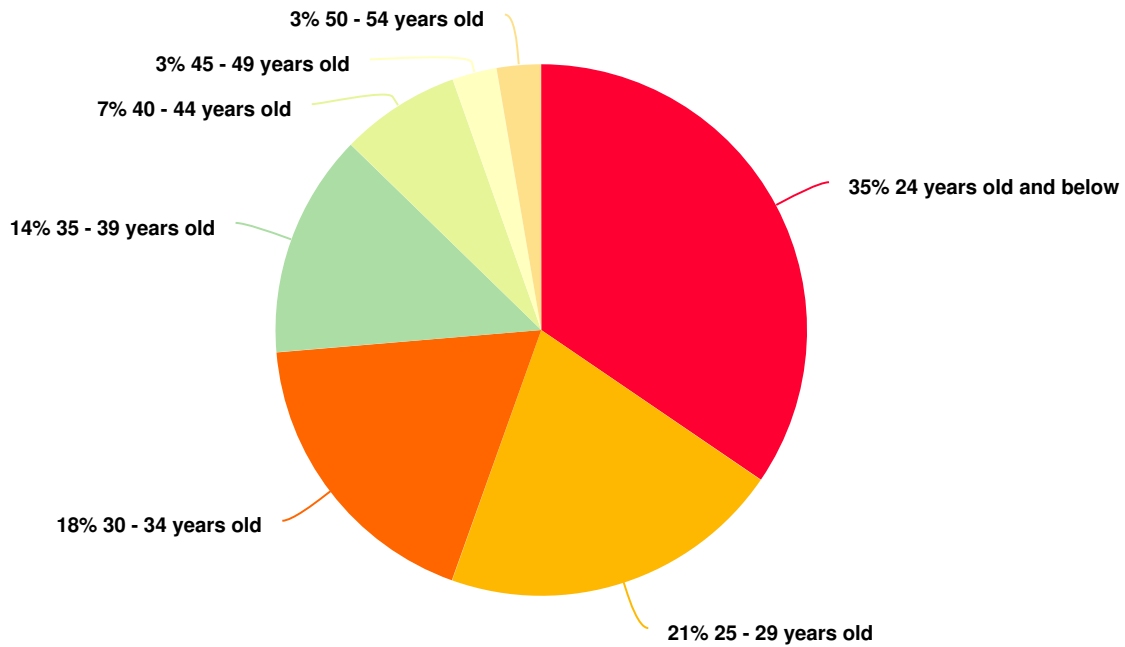


Value	Percent	Responses
Yes	23.6%	26
No	72.7%	80
Prefer not to respond	3.6%	4
		<b>Totals: 110</b>

#### Statistics

Skipped	0
Total Responses	110

14. Below are age brackets. Would you please identify your age bracket?



Value	Percent	Responses
24 years old and below	34.5%	38
25 - 29 years old	20.9%	23
30 - 34 years old	18.2%	20
35 - 39 years old	13.6%	15
40 - 44 years old	7.3%	8
45 - 49 years old	2.7%	3
50 - 54 years old	2.7%	3

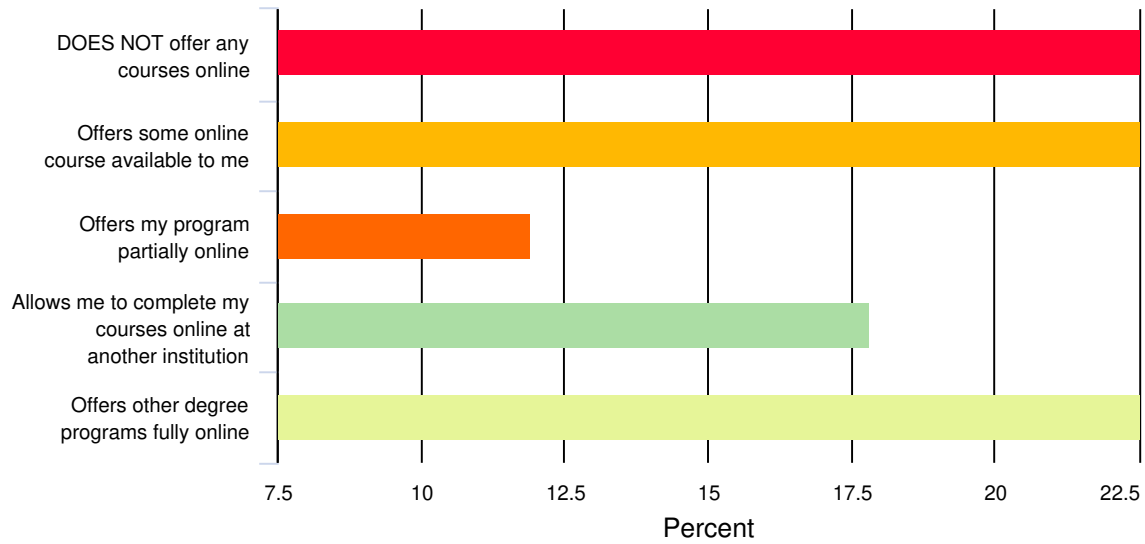
Totals: 110

## Statistics

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Min	24
Max	50
Sum	3,217.0
Average	29.2
StdDev	6.7
Skipped	0
Total Responses	110

15. Which of the following does your current institution offer?(check as many as needed)



Value	Percent	Responses
DOES NOT offer any courses online	33.7%	34
Offers some online course available to me	29.7%	30
Offers my program partially online	11.9%	12
Allows me to complete my courses online at another institution	17.8%	18
Offers other degree programs fully online	46.5%	47

Statistics

Total Responses 101

16. Have you ever taken one or more fully online classes?(Fully online course do not have face-to-face meetings in a classroom)

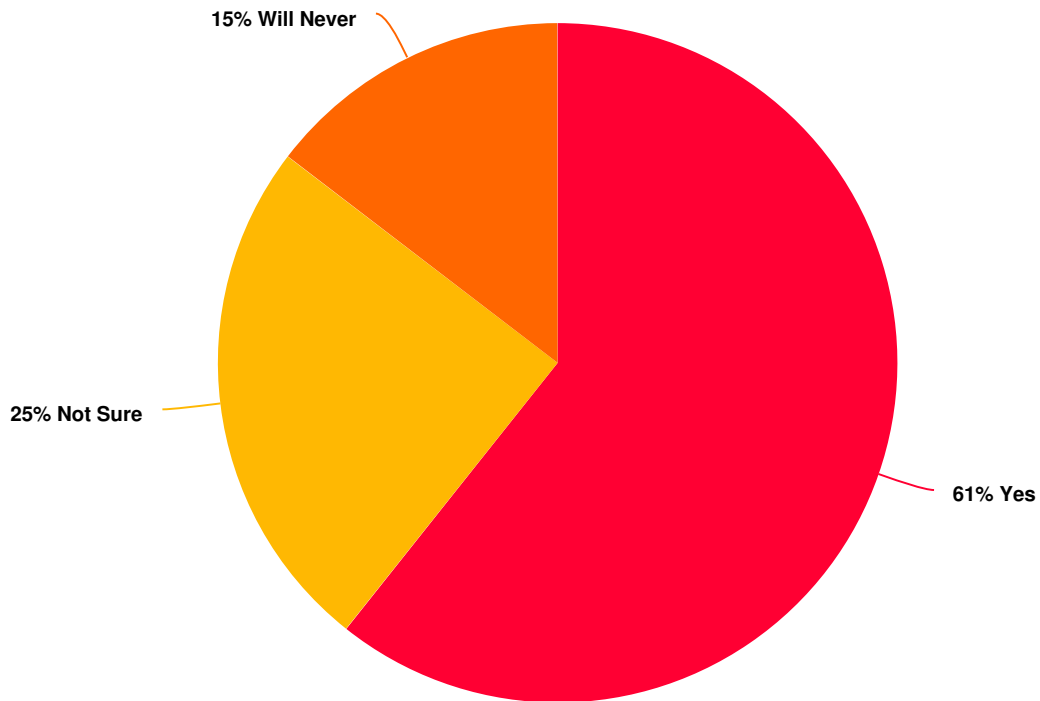


Value	Percent	Responses
Yes	62.7%	69
No	37.3%	41
		<b>Totals: 110</b>

### Statistics

Skipped	0
Total Responses	110

## 17. Would you consider in the future to take an online class?

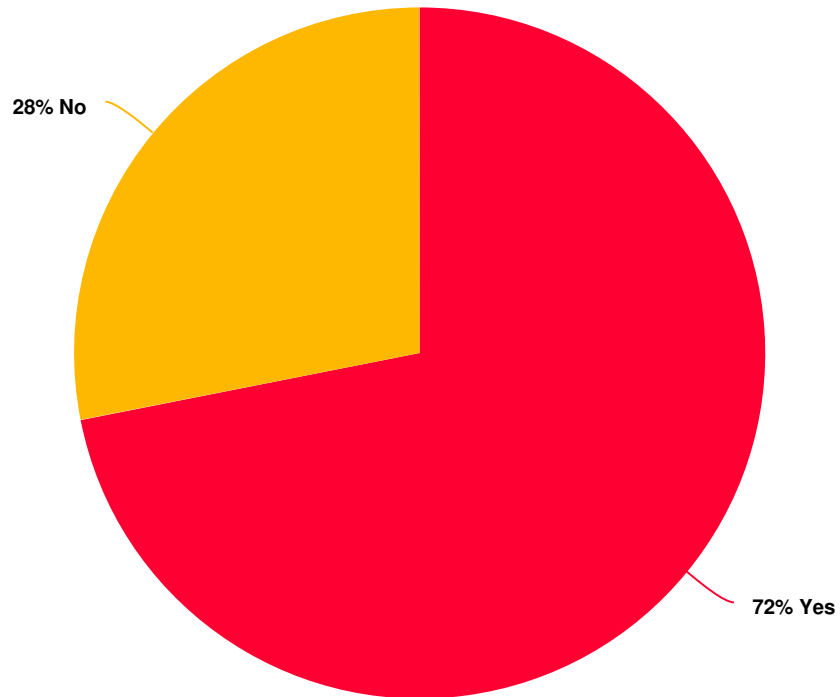


Value	Percent	Responses
Yes	60.7%	54
Not Sure	24.7%	22
Will Never	14.6%	13
		<b>Totals: 89</b>

### Statistics

Skipped	0
Total Responses	93

## 18. Was the class offered by your current college/university?

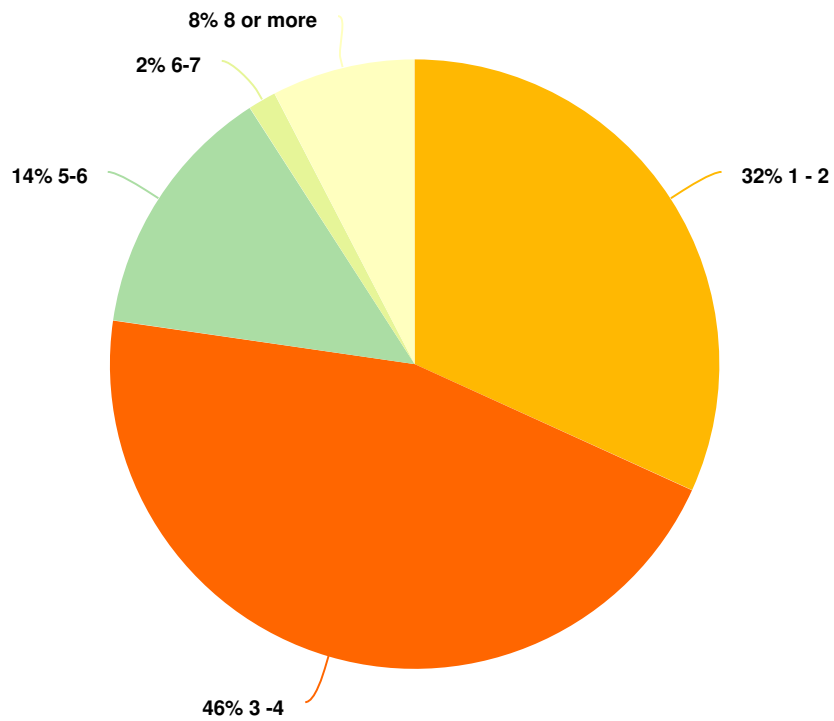


Value	Percent	Responses
Yes	71.9%	41
No	28.1%	16
		<b>Totals: 57</b>

### Statistics

Hidden	47
Skipped	6
Total Responses	57

19. How many online classes have you taken, including any in which you are currently enrolled?



Value	Percent	Responses
1 - 2	31.8%	21
3 - 4	45.5%	30
5 - 6	13.6%	9
6 - 7	1.5%	1
8 or more	7.6%	5

Totals: 66

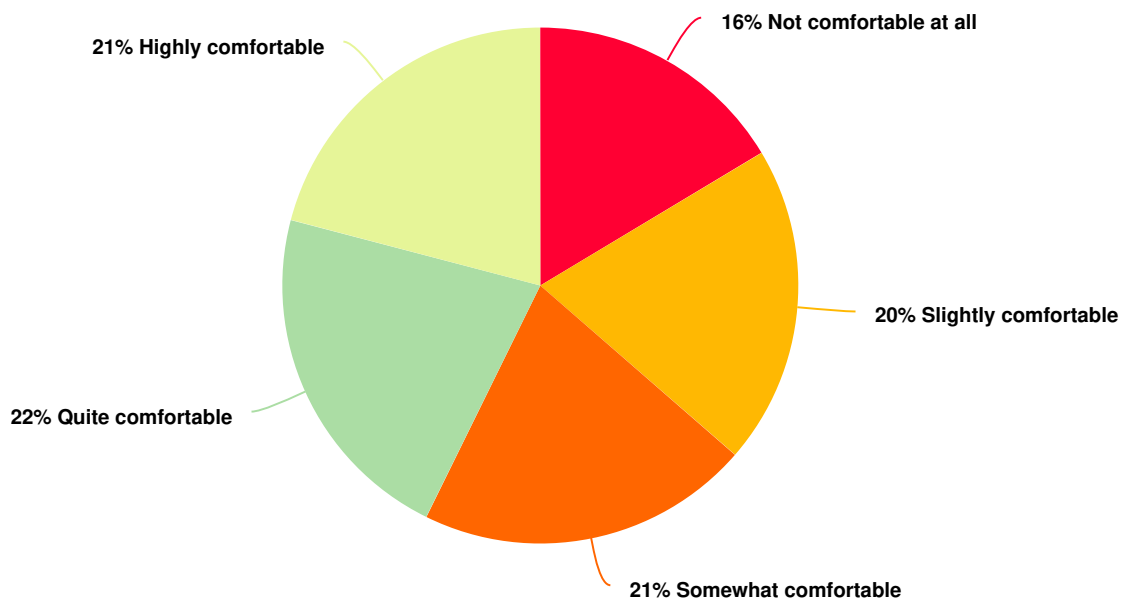







## Statistics

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Min	1
Max	8
Sum	202.0
Average	3.1
StdDev	2.0
Hidden	44
Skipped	0
Total Responses	66

20. Hypothetically, if you had not choice but to take an online course, what would your comfort level in taking an online class again?



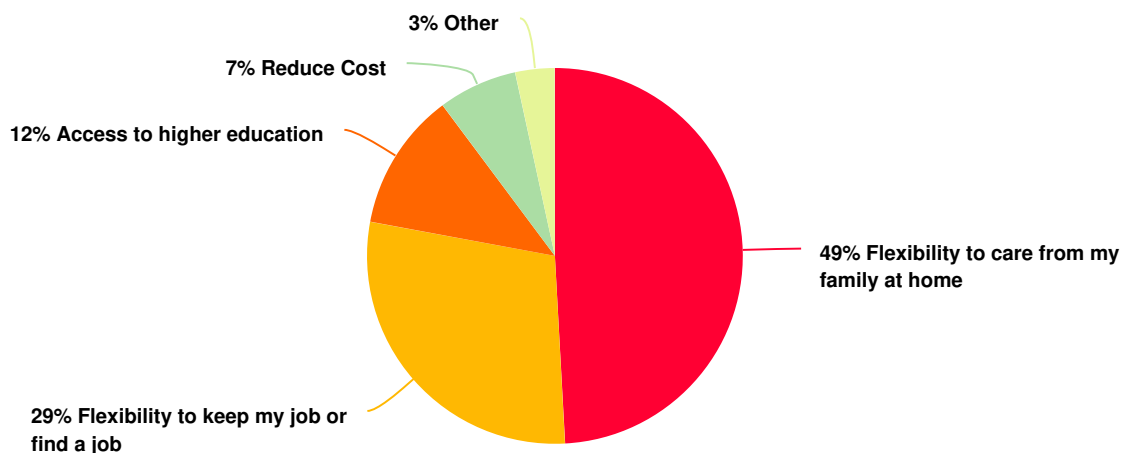
Value		Percent	Responses
Not comfortable at all		16.4%	18
Slightly comfortable		20.0%	22
Somewhat comfortable		20.9%	23
Quite comfortable		21.8%	24
Highly comfortable		20.9%	23

Totals: 110

### Statistics

Skipped	0
Total Responses	110

21. What attracts you to enroll in an online class again? (Select one response that rises in priority)



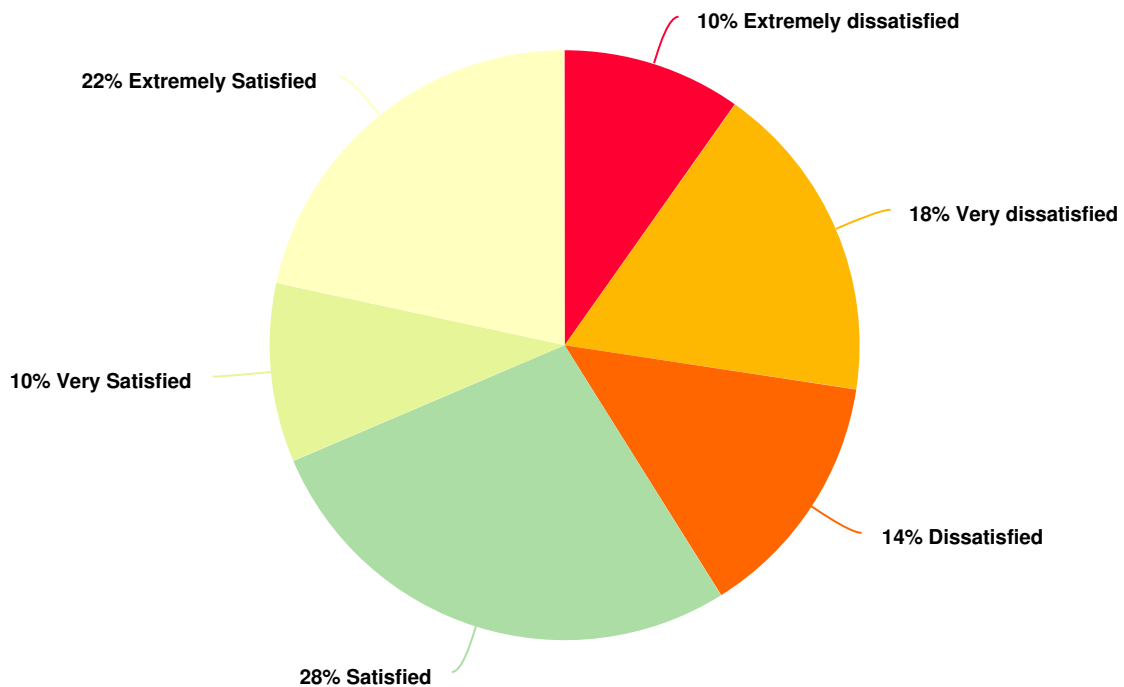
Value	Percent	Responses
Flexibility to care from my family at home	49.2%	29
Flexibility to keep my job or find a job	28.8%	17
Access to higher education	11.9%	7
Reduce Cost	6.8%	4
Other	3.4%	2

Totals: 59

Statistics

Hidden	50
Skipped	1
Total Responses	59

22. At your current college/university, how satisfied are you with finding online courses?



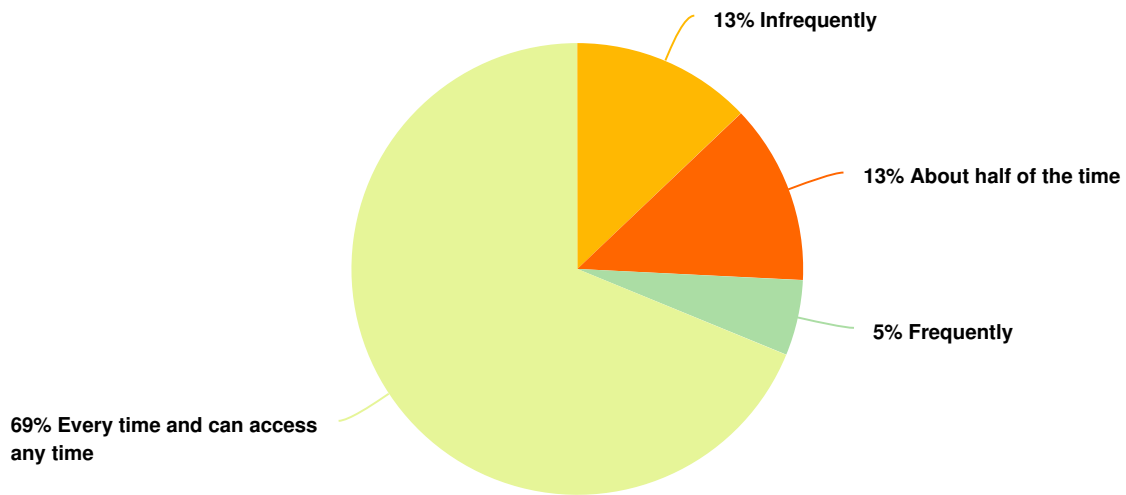
Value	Percent	Responses
Extremely dissatisfied	9.8%	5
Very dissatisfied	17.6%	9
Dissatisfied	13.7%	7
Satisfied	27.5%	14
Very Satisfied	9.8%	5
Extremely Satisfied	21.6%	11

Totals: 51

Statistics

Hidden	58
Skipped	1
Total Responses	51

23. How often do you have access to the technology you need so you can work on your online courses?



Value	Percent	Responses
Infrequently	12.9%	12
About half of the time	12.9%	12
Frequently	5.4%	5
Every time and can access any time	68.8%	64

**Totals: 93**

**Statistics**

Hidden	16
Skipped	1
Total Responses	93

## 24. RANK ORDER - In general, how helpful was each activity below for helping you learn the course material?

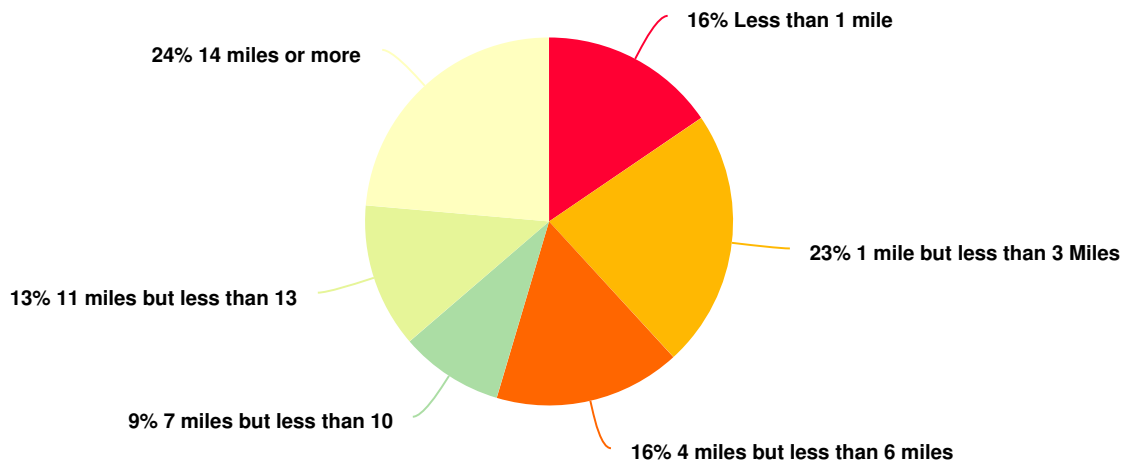
Item	Overall Rank	Rank Distribution	Score	No. of Rankings
Video Lectures	1		575	73
Discussion Forum	2		557	72
Individual Projects/Assignment	3		523	70
Quizzes/Tests	4		487	72
Whiteboard Teaching	5		461	66
Online Debate	6		412	65
Asynchronous (at your own time)	7		401	67
Storyboard	8		398	66
Large Group Activities	9		397	65
Small Group Activities	10		250	61
Synchronous (live scheduled time)	11		203	63

### Statistics

Total Responses

78

25. How far do you have to travel from home to get to your college/university?



Value	Percent	Responses
Less than 1 mile	15.5%	17
1 mile but less than 3 Miles	22.7%	25
4 miles but less than 6 miles	16.4%	18
7 miles but less than 10	9.1%	10
11 miles but less than 13	12.7%	14
14 miles or more	23.6%	26

Totals: 110

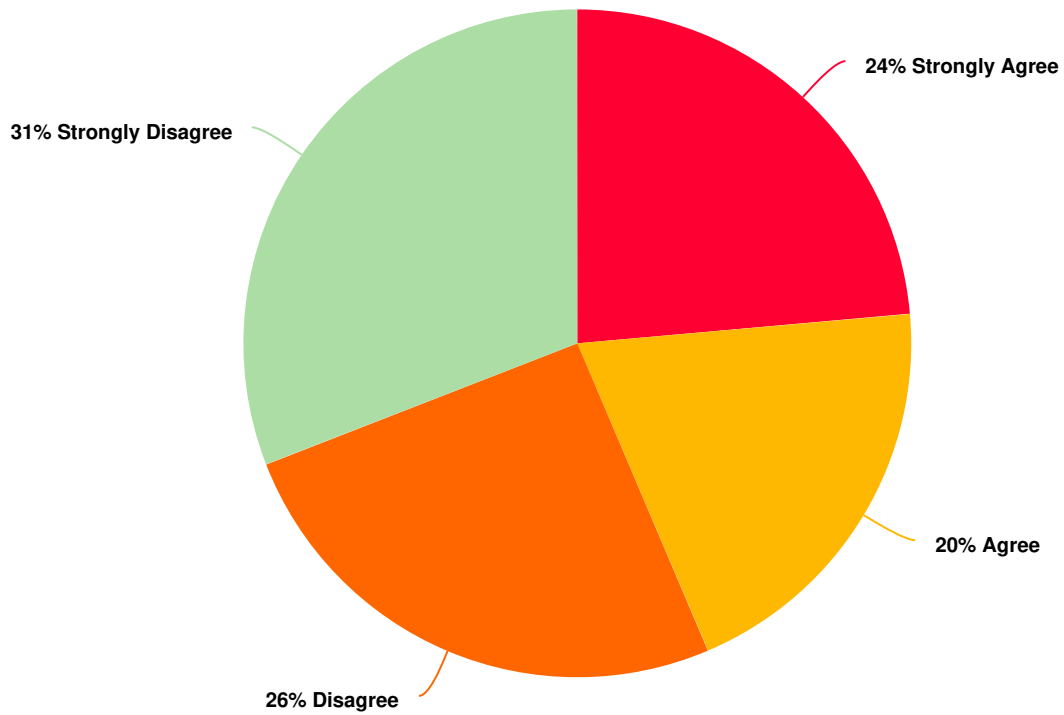
## Statistics





---

Min	0
Max	14
Sum	685.0
Average	6.2
StdDev	5.5
Skipped	0
Total Responses	110



## 26. Relocation to attend on-campus classes is an option for my education.



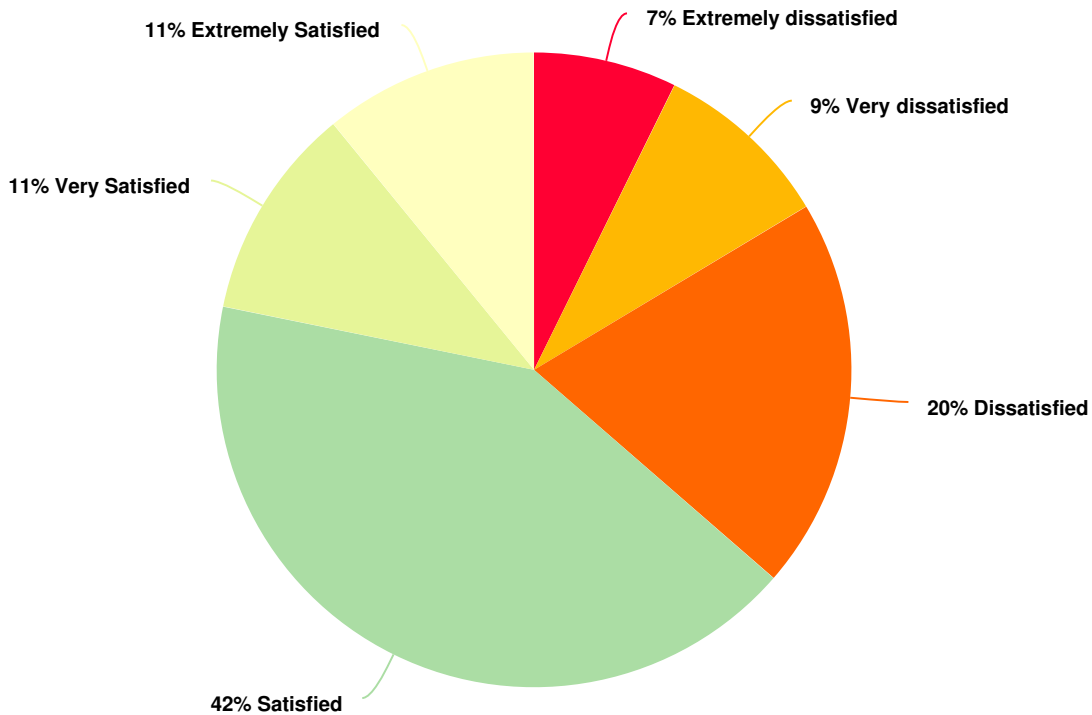
Value		Percent	Responses
Strongly Agree		23.6%	26
Agree		20.0%	22
Disagree		25.5%	28
Strongly Disagree		30.9%	34

Totals: 110

### Statistics

Skipped	0
Total Responses	110

27. At your current college/university, how satisfied are you with the registration process?



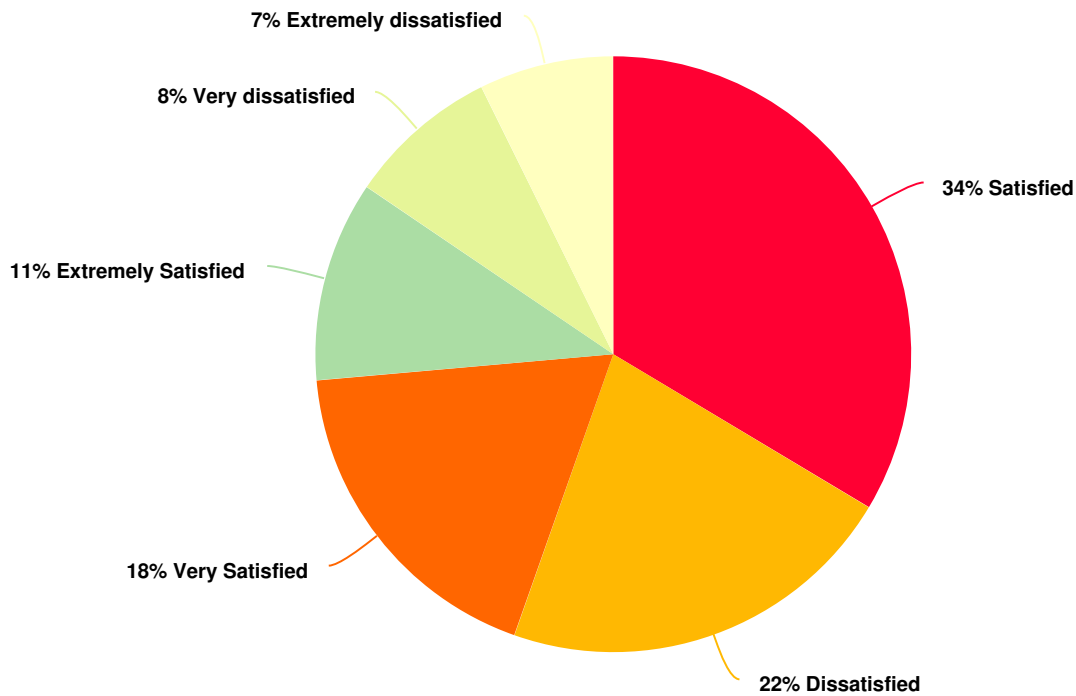
Value	Percent	Responses
Extremely dissatisfied	7.3%	8
Very dissatisfied	9.1%	10
Dissatisfied	20.0%	22
Satisfied	41.8%	46
Very Satisfied	10.9%	12
Extremely Satisfied	10.9%	12

Totals: 110

Statistics

Skipped	0
Total Responses	110

28. At your college/university, how satisfied are you in accessing the necessary resources from the Library?



Value	Percent	Responses
Satisfied	33.6%	37
Dissatisfied	21.8%	24
Very Satisfied	18.2%	20
Extremely Satisfied	10.9%	12
Very dissatisfied	8.2%	9
Extremely dissatisfied	7.3%	8

Totals: 110

Statistics

Skipped	0
Total Responses	110

29. What is the nature of obstacles that would most likely prevent you from completing your academic goals?(Note - More STARS assigned means having a greater NEGATIVE impact)

	Nature of Obstacle
Childcare	<p>★★★★☆</p> <p>Count: 109            Min: 1            Max: 5            Average: 3.4            Sum: 375            StdDev: 1.5            Not Applicable: 0</p>
Care for Elderly Family Member's)	<p>★★★★☆</p> <p>Count: 110            Min: 1            Max: 5            Average: 3.6            Sum: 395            StdDev: 1.5            Not Applicable: 0</p>
Family Medical Problems	<p>★★★★☆</p> <p>Count: 110            Min: 1            Max: 5            Average: 3.3            Sum: 366            StdDev: 1.5            Not Applicable: 0</p>

**Nature  
of  
Obstacle**

Recurring Health Concerns for me

★★★★☆  
☆  
Count: 110  
Min: 1  
Max: 5  
Average:  
3.1  
Sum: 342  
StdDev: 1.4  
Not  
Applicable:  
0

Afraid to Speak up in Class

★★★★☆  
☆  
Count: 110  
Min: 1  
Max: 5  
Average:  
2.6  
Sum: 283  
StdDev: 1.5  
Not  
Applicable:  
0

Always Feeling Tired

★★★☆☆  
☆☆  
Count: 110  
Min: 1  
Max: 5  
Average:  
2.4  
Sum: 267  
StdDev: 1.5  
Not  
Applicable:  
0

**Nature  
of  
Obstacle**

Trouble Sleeping

★ ★ ☆ ☆ ☆

☆

Count: 109

Min: 1

Max: 5

Average:

2.2

Sum: 238

StdDev: 1.6

Not

Applicable:

0

Early Destructed

★ ★ ☆ ☆ ☆

Count: 109

Min: 1

Max: 5

Average:

2.1

Sum: 231

StdDev: 1.7

Not

Applicable:

0

Alcohol and/or Drug Problems

★ ★ ☆ ☆ ☆

Count: 110

Min: 1

Max: 5

Average:

1.9

Sum: 212

StdDev: 1.8

Not

Applicable:

0

**Nature  
of  
Obstacle**

Feeling Depressed



Count: 110  
Min: 1  
Max: 5  
Average:  
1.8  
Sum: 203  
StdDev: 1.8  
Not  
Applicable:  
0

No Support from My family/friends



Count: 110  
Min: 1  
Max: 5  
Average:  
2.2  
Sum: 237  
StdDev: 1.6  
Not  
Applicable:  
0

Financial Difficulties



Count: 110  
Min: 1  
Max: 5  
Average:  
2.9  
Sum: 320  
StdDev: 1.4  
Not  
Applicable:  
0

**Nature  
of  
Obstacle**

Test Anxiety

★★★☆☆

Count: 108  
Min: 1  
Max: 5  
Average:  
2.0  
Sum: 218  
StdDev: 1.7  
Not  
Applicable:  
0

Work Schedule

★★★★☆

Count: 110  
Min: 1  
Max: 5  
Average:  
2.8  
Sum: 307  
StdDev: 1.4  
Not  
Applicable:  
0

Take Things Too Seriously

★★★☆☆

Count: 110  
Min: 1  
Max: 5  
Average:  
2.0  
Sum: 222  
StdDev: 1.7  
Not  
Applicable:  
0



**Nature  
of  
Obstacle**

Bad Grades

★★★☆☆

Count: 110  
Min: 1  
Max: 5  
Average:  
2.3  
Sum: 253  
StdDev: 1.6  
Not  
Applicable:  
0

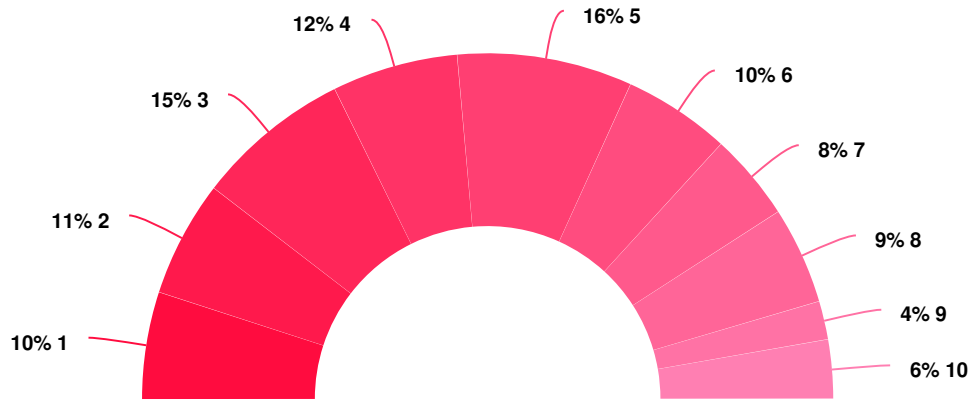
No close Friends at my College/University

★★★☆☆

Count: 110  
Min: 1  
Max: 5  
Average:  
2.3  
Sum: 249  
StdDev: 1.6  
Not  
Applicable:  
0

### 30. How confident are you with the following? (On the Slider Rate on a scale of 1 to 10)

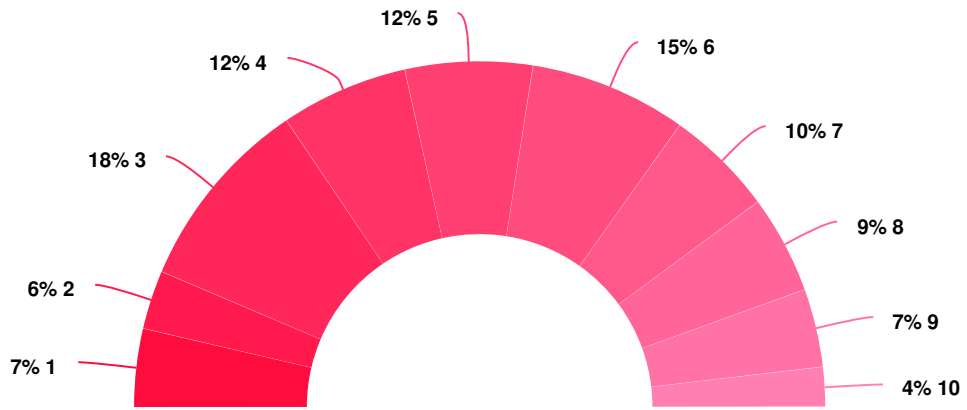
I do not have problem understanding the course registration process at my current college/university



#### Statistics

Min	1
Max	10
Average	4.8
StdDev	2.5
Skipped	0
Total Responses	110

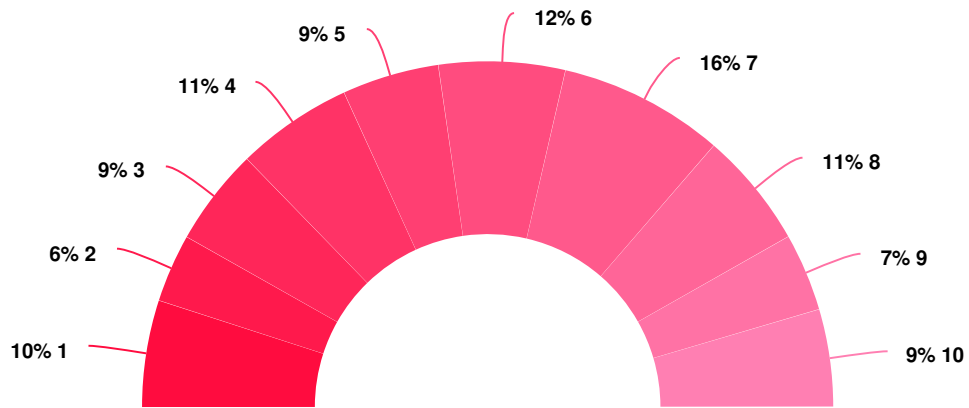
I do not have problem understanding the course withdrawal/drop process



## Statistics

Min	1
Max	10
Average	5.2
StdDev	2.4
Skipped	1
Total Responses	109

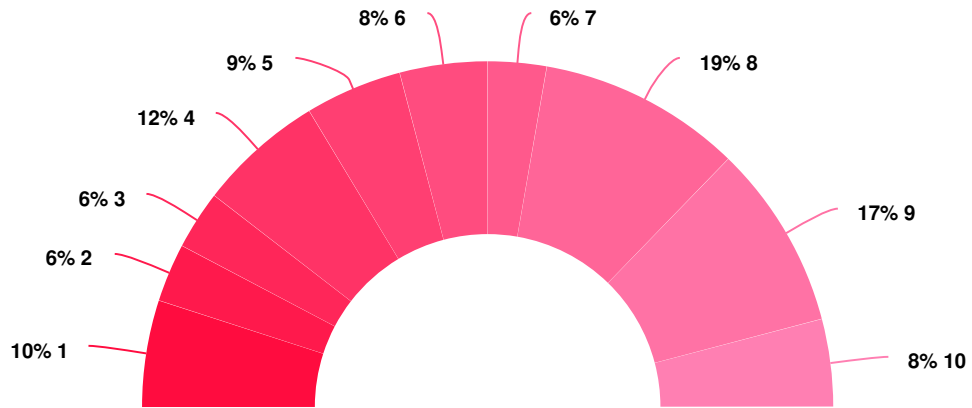
I do not have a problem understanding how pre-requisites affect my ability to register for courses



## Statistics

Min	1
Max	10
Average	5.6
StdDev	2.7
Skipped	0
Total Responses	110

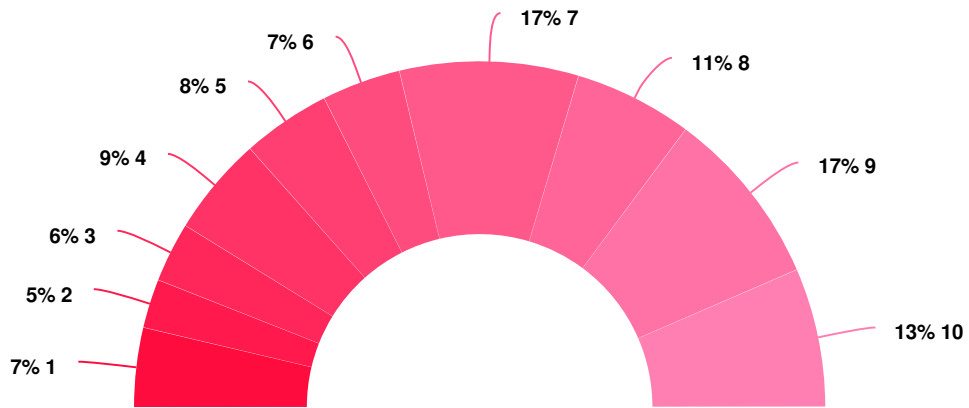
I do not have a problem understanding what is required of me to earn my degree



## Statistics

Min	1
Max	10
Average	6.1
StdDev	2.8
Skipped	0
Total Responses	110

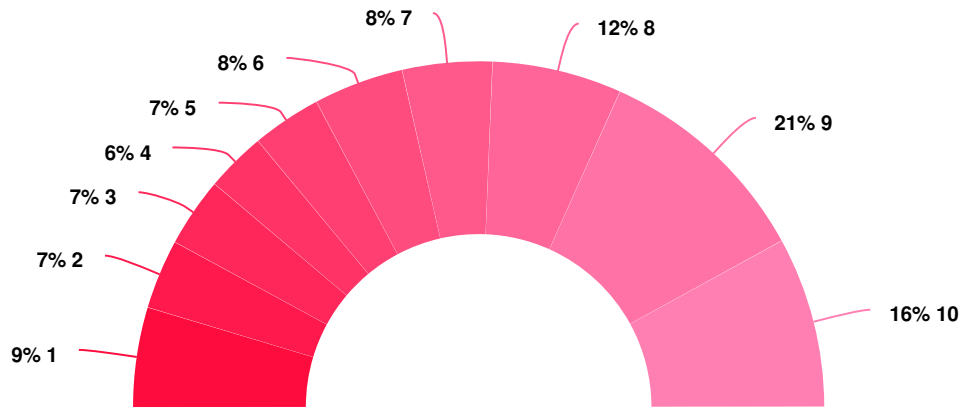
I HAVE A PROBLEM knowing where to find academic policies for my college/university?



## Statistics

Min	1
Max	10
Average	6.4
StdDev	2.7
Skipped	2
Total Responses	108

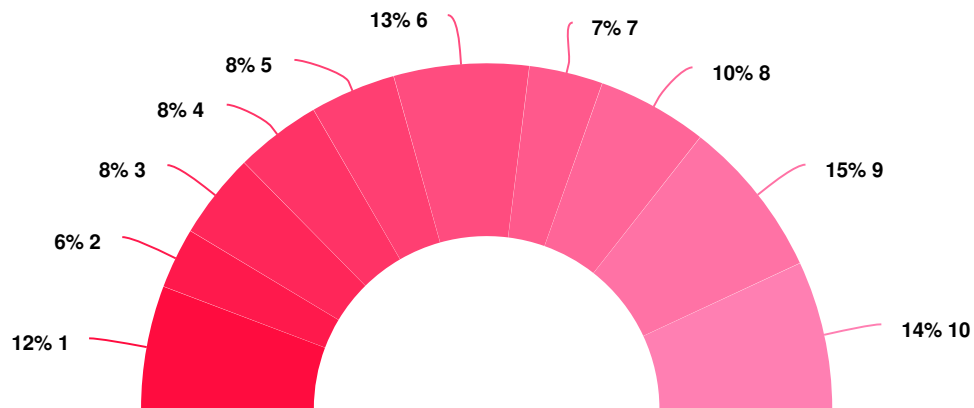
I HAVE A PROBLEM knowing how to contact my academic advisor



### Statistics

Min	1
Max	10
Average	6.5
StdDev	3.0
Skipped	3
Total Responses	107

## I HAVE A PROBLEM figuring out how to complete my degree within my intended time frame



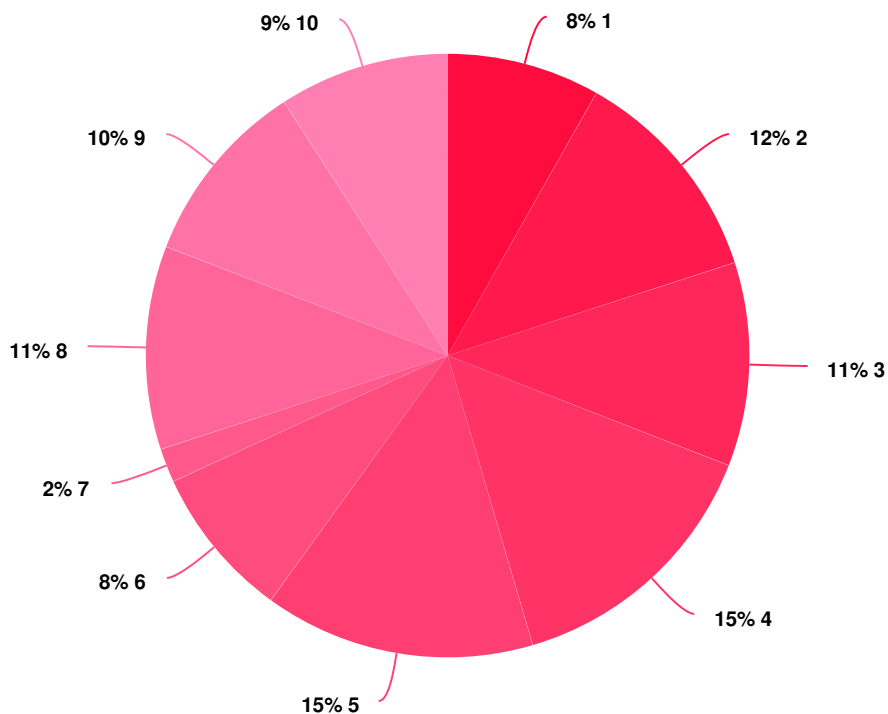
### Statistics

Min	1
Max	10
Average	6.0
StdDev	3.0
Skipped	23
Total Responses	87



31. The set of statements below are about your Living/Work Arrangements. Using the slider, please indicate your level of Agreement/Disagreement to each of the statements. (On the Slider Rate on a scale of 1 to 10)

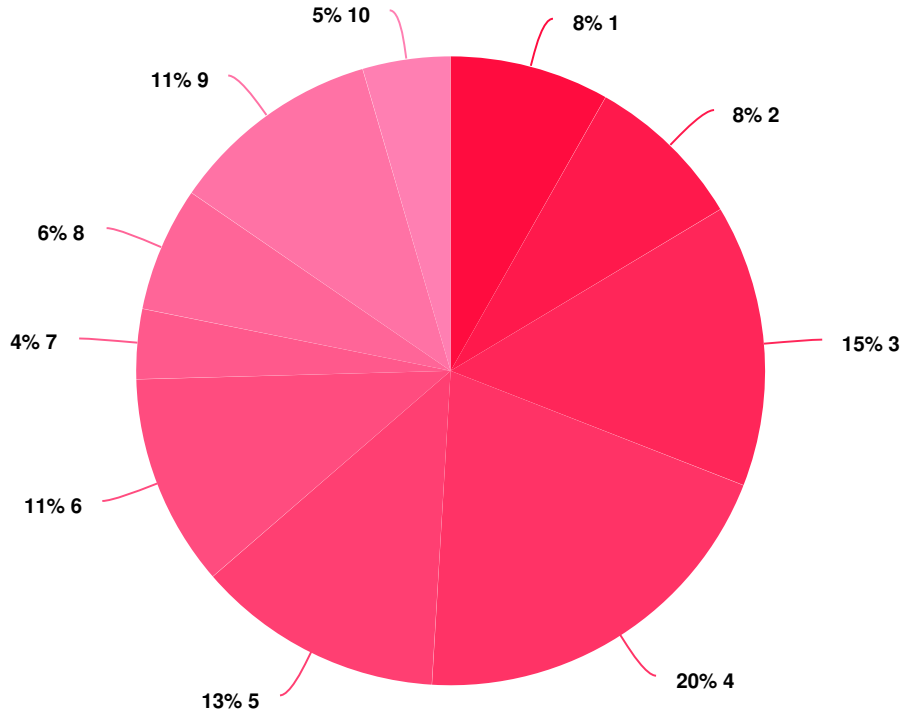
My living environment does not make my studying difficult



### Statistics

Min	1
Max	10
Average	5.3
StdDev	2.8
Total Responses	110

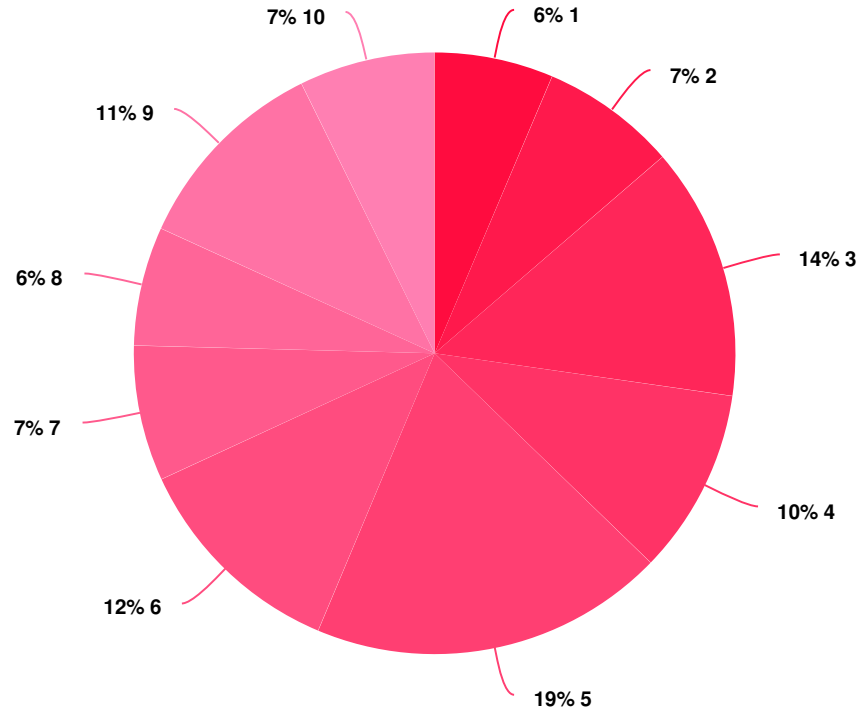
My work responsibilities do not interfere with my school responsibilities



**Statistics**

Min	1
Max	10
Average	5.0
StdDev	2.6
Total Responses	110

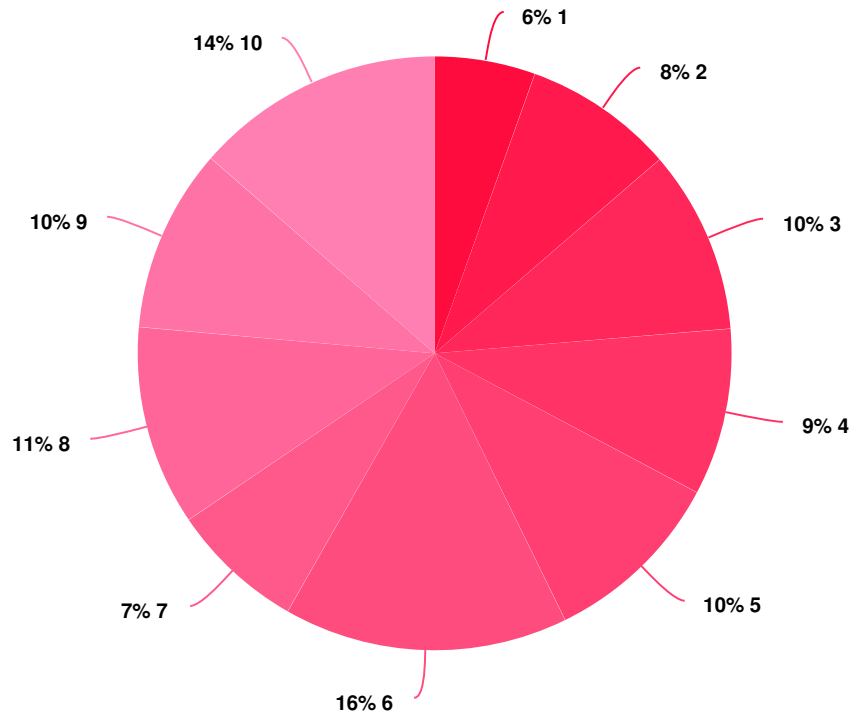
My job and school responsibilities I do not all me sufficient time to sleep or study



### Statistics

Min	1
Max	10
Average	5.4
StdDev	2.6
Total Responses	110

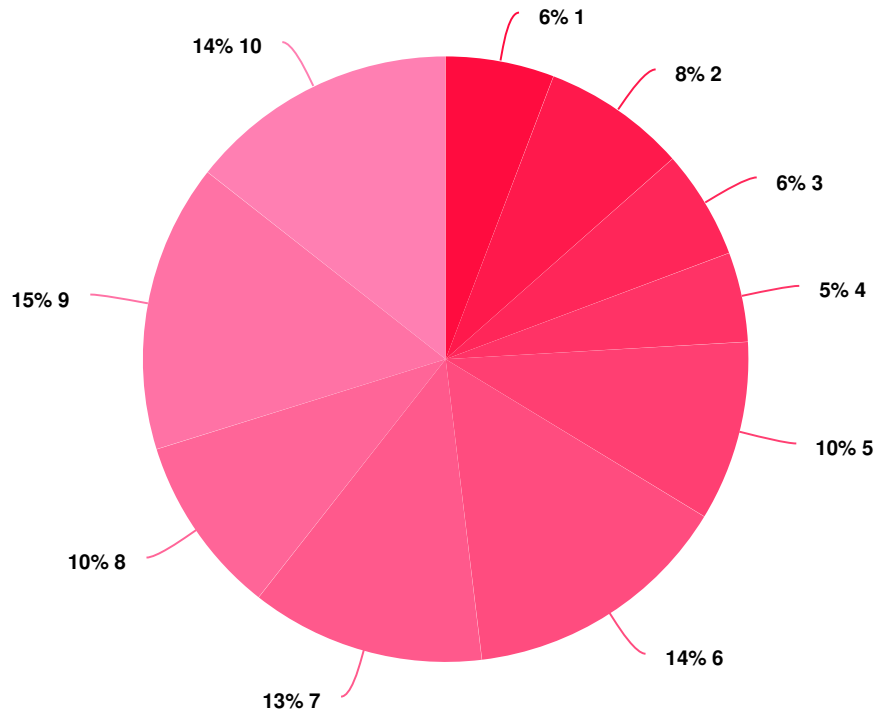
My family responsibilities take up all my study time.



### Statistics

Min	1
Max	10
Average	6.0
StdDev	2.8
Total Responses	110

My employer encourages me to complete my college degree



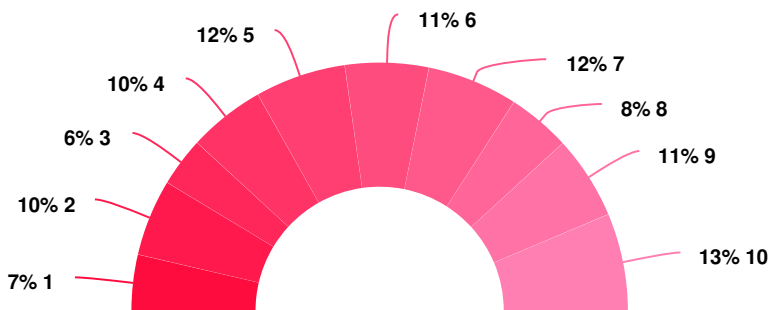
**Statistics**

Min	1
Max	10
Average	6.4
StdDev	2.7
Total Responses	104

32. The set of statements below are about Friends/Family Support. Using the slider, please indicate your level of Agreement/Disagreement to each of the statements. (On the Slider Rate on a scale of 1 to 10)

Filter: Link used was My New Web Link, Survey Audience – Dec 15, 2021 10:00 pm, Survey Audience – Dec 15, 2021 8:10 pm, or Default Link

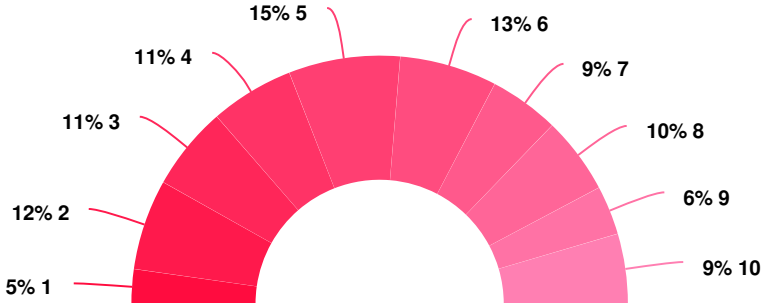
My friends and family encourage me to complete my college degree



### Statistics

Min	1
Max	10
Sum	643.0
Average	5.8
StdDev	2.8
Skipped	0
Total Responses	110

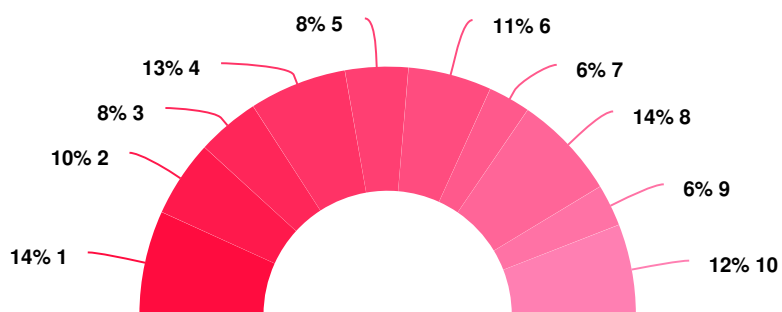
At least one person in my current college/university has shown real interest in my success.



**Statistics**

Min	1
Max	10
Sum	600.0
Average	5.5
StdDev	2.6
Skipped	0
Total Responses	110

It would be difficult for me to see a professional counselor even when I could afford one

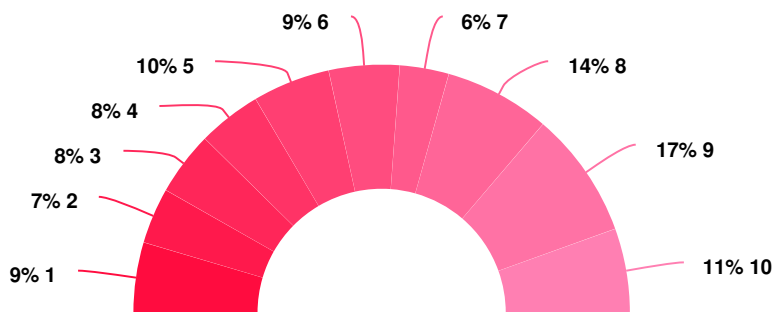


### Statistics

Min	1
Max	10
Sum	583.0
Average	5.3
StdDev	3.0
Skipped	0
Total Responses	110



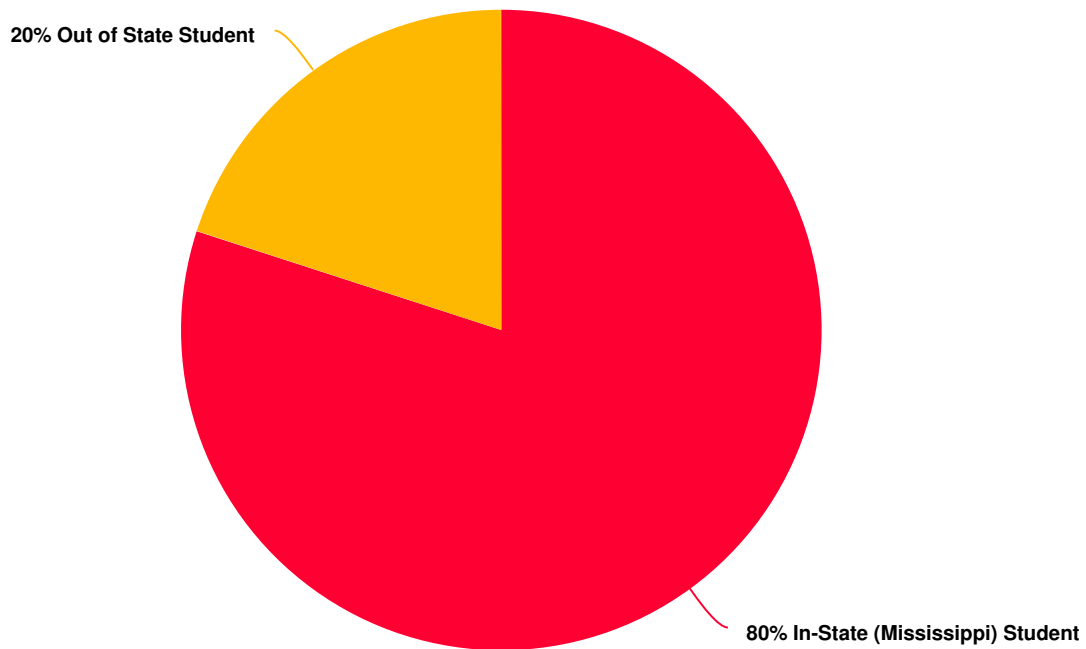
I do not get support from my friends or family are available to take care of my children while I pursue my degree



### Statistics

Min	1
Max	10
Sum	655.0
Average	6.0
StdDev	2.9
Skipped	1
Total Responses	109

### 33. At your college/university, is your status that of an:

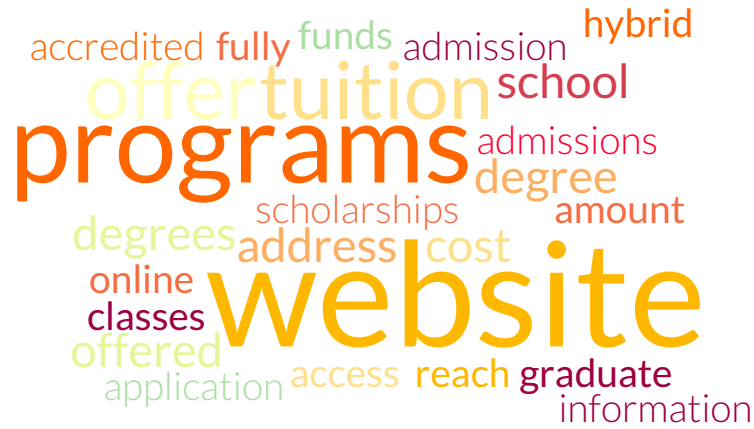


Value	Percent	Responses
In-State (Mississippi) Student	80.0%	88
Out of State Student	20.0%	22
		<b>Totals: 110</b>

#### Statistics

Total Responses	110
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34. An online University is being established in Mississippi. Is there a specific question or area of interest about the new University that you would like us to share more information?



Word clouds are more than just an attractive visual representation of words. The word cloud shows important common words and phrases survey-completers wrote in the open-ended responses in this survey. The word cloud also excludes some common words to highlight the critical words in responses. The dominant responses requested the website address, programs offered, questions on tuition costs.

35. Great input! We would like to invite you to attend a brief Skype Focus Group discussion that includes other students who have completed this Survey. To say Thank You for your participation in the scheduled [June 16, 2021 Focus Group Discussion](#), each participant will receive a small gift. Please indicate your interest by confidentially adding your email address below:

## PRIMARY DATA SOURCES II: FOCUS GROUPS DISCUSSIONS

### Methodology

Leighton University's concept of "needs" is defined as the difference, or gap, between "what is" and "what should be." Leighton University considered including a focus group discussion in a deliberate effort to have selected stakeholders (students, faculty, and staff) participate in a simplified discussion to obtain "consumer" perceptions about a specific area of interest that will form a basis for establishing planning priorities. The primary benefit of informal, formal focus group meetings is that they allow a two-way discussion between the University and groups and actively promote public participation. While it should be understood that the use of focus groups does not necessarily represent the view and experiences of the total population to be served; however, its use allowed the participant to share more in-depth reactions to their own experiences that would benefit the participant Leighton's founders.

From an equity standpoint, it was imperative to engage stakeholders as equal partners in understanding and translating results to actions that will create and improve accessibility to all students. It should, however, be noted that- this technique does not provide, nor was it intended to provide, a quantitative analysis of the respondent's opinions. However, the study aimed to reveal factors affecting the views and sentiments about overall educational experiences and the quality of services offered.

### Research Tools

This study's focus group discussions were structured around pre-defined open-ended questions directed to three (students, staff, faculty) small, homogeneous groups of people identified by preselected criteria. Participants received an emailed link to an online videoconference platform and had the option to participate via a webcam on their computer or phone.

### Administration of Focus Groups

Two researchers, a moderator, and a recorder were a part of the videoconferencing session. While the moderator was part of the research team, she asked the pre-developed questions and moved the discussion. The role of the discussion moderator was to lead the session and keep participants focused on the topic for discussion. It was understood that the moderator was not involved in the actual discussion. The role of the recorder was to take notes from the conversations as they occur in virtual sessions. Each session was also digitally recorded for quality assurance (i.e., verification and reliability) purposes. Digital recording was only done after there was consensus by all participants in the room. Participants were informed that the focus groups were confidential. Therefore, participants were asked to introduce themselves by name before the live or audio recording and encouraged not to mention the names of participants in the room. Focus group sessions were no more than 90 minutes. Collected discussion data was initially audio-recorded and later transcribed and written out utilizing Microsoft Word. Due to the richness of participants' contribution, the research team found it compelling to transcribe the audio recording word for word and present it in this report in the same manner.

Themes in the data were identified, and representative quotes were drawn from the data to illustrate the themes. Group discussion participants were assured that personal identifiers such as name or institutional affiliations would not be connected in any way to the information presented in this report. The focus group processes complied with guidelines. For example, it was made clear that Focus group members could withdraw at any time from focus group discussion without penalty or explanation. Thus, some quotes in the report may have slight alterations meant to preserve confidentiality.

The study design questions were prepared as guides to essential questions posed for the focus group. These questions were carefully designed to solicit the respondents' views. Participants shared experiences, perspectives, institutions' strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities within the focus group sessions. The discussion sessions mainly relied on preselected and scripted questions that did not significantly vary between the interviewed groups. Thus, focus group summaries were developed from audiotapes of ninety-minute sessions with college faculty, support staff, and students.

## FOCUS DISCUSSION GROUPS

### Focus Group Discussion I: Student

The main thrust in arranging the focus group discussion session was to understand students' opinions, perceptions, and expectations about online learning at the program level. Of the 43 students who responded to the invitation published on Leighton University's website following a lead on Facebook, 16 indicated an interest in participating in the online Focus Group discussion. In addition, of the 750 students reached via the survey to participate in the focus group discussion, 28 students responded and indicated their interest in the online focus group discussion. Each of these students received the videoconferencing link via the email address they disclosed. However, only eleven (11) undergraduate students actively joined the virtual discussion meeting. The researchers did not expect more than the obtained participation yield. Six (6) or 54.5% of the participants have taken an online course previously. Below in this section are captured notes of the findings from the focus group conducted with students.

**Question 1.1** - *Can you share your perspectives on what your college or University has done or would do to help you stay focused to achieve your academic or professional goal?*

**Response 1:** To me, I think there is much that I could have gained if I lived closer to my college; and that is just me. I have not had that extended experience outside my classes to interact with more people. If I were living in the dorm, I would say some of the experiences I wanted to have are learning other cultures and getting outside of my bubble while in college. I know that might be limited in my school as we do not have much diversity. However, I know schools like mine with programs like studying overseas in the summer or even longer. I would have enjoyed the world beyond just academics and thought about the connections that might help me learn and experience more.

**Response 2:** I consider myself an adult learner. I'm 32 years old and determined to get my degree, no matter how long this journey might be. I know that all kinds of adult students come to the university. Some of them have their degrees, and others don't. I have come across teachers, technologists, and self-employed individuals; each has its own needs. Some may be looking at

gaining specific skills they have their degrees. No matter what brings them to the university, their lives are hectic, and they are often pressed for time. As an adult learner who has many responsibilities at home and work, I don't have time to follow up on things on campus. The college administration respects our position as adult learners.

**Response 3:** I share the same sentiments as that other lady. I'm an adult learner too, and I sit in the same classroom with even much older students than I. They are certain things that the University has to do for adult students. I had a wish list to offer; I will include basic things like parking priority. I may not be correct, but I've not heard of any university in Mississippi that has priority parking for adult students. These are basic amenities that are of value to adults.

**Response 4:** I, too, believe that adult learners bring a wealth of knowledge and experience back into the college. In my mathematics class a few semesters ago, our professor pointed out that adults are more likely to pass the course as they have a wealth of skills. I see more than one dimension of a problem.

**Response 5:** Since enrolling at my current school, I have had more than three advisors. I have had experiences that are a lot better than some of my friends whose advisors did not care. They would give you courses for your schedule and get you out of the door. Some people like it that way. No, not me. I need to be valuable and focus on being given to my unique circumstances. I want my advisor to treat me as an individual to personally and professionally be interested in helping me. They need to know my work schedule, fit my classes in that schedule, and not just give me a list of types. I also want to have an advisor who listens constructively, attempting to hear how the combination of the previous semester worked.

**Response 6:** For me, a good advisor cares to know my program well, and I can just risk and take random classes that will not help me graduate. I don't need to spend money on things I do not want or care about. That advisor just needs to make sure that they know the program sheet and the catalog. Some advisors that I've been told all they want to do is get you enrolled and maybe out of pressure from their bosses. I need an advisor who will involve me in the selection of courses.

**Response 7:** I would be comfortable getting advised by someone who knows and can interpret departmental and university policies well and correctly. I have heard stories of a friend who was told to do one thing, which turned out to be wrong, and my friend wasted both his time and money doing something wrong. I also would be more comfortable seeing an advisor who can accurately provide the details of a policy and patient enough to refer to other sources like the University Catalog.

## Summary Notes

Participant responses to student services were mixed. It seems that when student services staff take time to meet the needs of students and foster relationships, students are generally more satisfied with services. In addition, the time-sensitivity of student services activities also appeared to impact participant experiences, as students reported negative experiences when discussing time-sensitive services. These questions generated several responses that focused on innovative strategies for greater retention, on-time graduation, and successful employment. We researched what makes students successful and found six factors that rose to the top. The six factors were that students are more likely to succeed when they feel connected, directed, engaged, focused, nurtured, and valued. This support will result in more satisfied graduates with a greater propensity to give back to their alma mater. Further, it is evident in the response gathered from the group that students who stay focused on their goals are more likely to succeed.

While there was agreement among the students, it was evident that some participant contributions tended to have held advisors as unfair or unable to understand the student's

situation. At times, advisors tend to compare students to their own past experiences as students themselves. It seemed consistent among students that advisors fail to consider their unique context in their encounters. For example, whether by intention or a 'slip in tongue,' one advisor stated, "I worked hard to get where I am - in my position." The unspoken implication in this part of a comment is that the student is not working hard enough.

**Question 1.2** - *What might you share with us regarding what you would consider a significant factor on your list on your fear-list that might complicate your continued enrollment?*

**Context:** The growing research field has given attention to FF (fear of failing), where many have focused on student-athletes. The fear of failure often presents itself in a mindset that desires success. Thus, Students who want to succeed are often afraid of failure. Nonetheless, academic failure does is not always triggered by the student alone. Many students find themselves in situations that cause their failure, often due to socioeconomic status and issues with education inequality. This question was crafted to gauge students' fear of failure and desire to succeed. Below are the captured responses:

**Response 1:** Funding, I think, is a struggle for everyone. The thought of going to grad school was the most significant decision factor that, for me, as it centered around funding. So, I mean, I'm going to hope I get the lottery, you know, that money. I mean, I'll get this associate degree for somewhere around five (\$5,000)to six thousand (\$6,500) dollars. That can be heavy for me to get my papers and then get the experience for a job.

**Response 2:** I m very fortunate; I thank God that I have a fiancé that supports us as a family. That's why I'm able to quit my job, you know because classes are during the day. Because of him and taking care of rent and everything, I can focus on school only and take care of my son.

**Response 3:** I may not have to worry about financial issues if I keep high grades. I have a good scholarship that covers almost everything towards my education. I fear most that stress and anxiety catch up as I feel tasked to do my best and not lose my funding.

**Response 4:** For me, it is about financing my education, and it's not that I cannot access financial aid, but I am afraid to take on debt from student loans to continue with my education, and I can't afford to take up a loan.

**Response 5:** My greatest fear is not my classes and grades but my work schedule. I make perfect money working part-time but on an irregular schedule. There is usually no telling when one's work schedule changes, and it can happen anytime. I fear what will happen to my family and me if my class schedule conflicts with my work schedule.

**Response 6:** I'm a single mother of two children under five years old. Mine is not a fear that will be arriving in the future; it is here with me. Already, I know that my road to graduation is more than four years due to the number of credit hours I take each semester. Child care is expensive.

**Response 7:** At \_\_\_\_\_(institution), we have a childcare center where one's eligibility as a parent depends upon your status, which is being currently enrolled. If one decides to stop attending classes, you must pull your child out. The part I don't really like is that you can have your child there if you are on campus. If you don't have classes on that day or have another activity on campus, then you can not drop your child at the center. So how is that going to help me? To have to centers for my child? That cannot help me. I have to work and when I'm not in class.



## Summary Notes

The participating students were very candid and specific while explaining why they have persisted and why others do not. They often leave the institution and pursuit for a college degree altogether. The students generously also offered suggestions on administrative and academic matters that they associate as components that can drive retention rates from the current levels. Some participants described their shared responsibilities at home. Several students described challenges for spouses working full-time to support the family, thus allowing the student the opportunity to focus on school. As an area with a significant rural population and a rising cost of living in urban centers, many participants cited transportation as a barrier to postsecondary education. With limited public transit options, students and potential students are often forced to foot the cost of personal transportation to access higher education.

Affordable and accessible childcare services were repeatedly mentioned as a barrier to moving through a university's degree program for many progressively. Those most impacted are female students of any given age. Participants noted that the minimal on-campus options for students in some institutions (if they have them at all) often are trim and primarily serve faculty and staff – if they exist at all. The most significant concern is the balance between a college degree's demands and those of their household.

**Question 1.3** - *Many students have to retool once again to prepare for college coursework. Did anyone have remediation courses, what was your experience, and how helpful was that experience?*

This question yielded the following verbatim transcriptions captured word-to-word as a reproduction of the recorded data on participants responses:

**Response 1:** I began community college in 2018, and I'm still only just maybe halfway through my degree in general studies right now. True, I stopped going to school for a few years and taking a course or two from time to time. You see, I'm not sure. In the first two semesters, they, like didn't advise me well to know that I needed regular classes to get financial aid. So each semester, I was denied financial aid and told to pay out of pocket. You know people run out of funds, and that was my case. Later, I found from another student that I should not be part-time and that financial aid can pay for remedial classes.

**Response 2:** I, too, completed one remedial course even though I found out I was not required to enroll in that course because of my ACT score. Even though I don't regret it, I don't blame nobody else for it. I know many people who advised themselves like me and signed up for remedial math for parts one and two. I could have saved myself tonnes of money and also time for myself to graduate quicker. The thing is, I did not get an advisor.

**Response 3:** I was not one of the few in a remedial class. Almost everybody has been enrolled in at least one course for remedial in my community college. I was enrolled in 15 credit hours of redial, thank God I finished them, but that limited me from regular classes. And these were not courses I could do in one or two-semester. It took me about two years to get through that. Many times I felt like giving up, even though I didn't. Many of those students in my classes had previously dropped out. It is one enormous burden that should never be placed on students. Why don't they retest us again? They told me I had to take every last one of those classes on my list.

## Summary Notes

The need for remediation is widespread. We were not surprised by responses from our students. In our literature review, we've learned that many college students enroll in remedial courses, and some of our literature sources have reported remediation for entering students rates surpassing

50 percent. From Response: 1, it is clear that a college or a university may need to create policies and processes that require implementing identified co-requisite courses. Students will gain more opportunities to enroll in degree-required coursework through this structure while receiving additional academic support immediately.

Response #3 reveals a need for colleges and universities to institute processes to help students avoid misplacing themselves in courses, particularly developmental courses that do not count toward a degree. The proportion of students participants who indicated that they enrolled in remedial level courses was observed at 61%. In retrospect, these findings do not, altogether, seem surprising. This distribution was not theatrical as data at the national level by the National Center for College Statistics indicated. Leighton is likely to serve a unique group of traditional and non-traditional students who may display a level of unpreparedness for college-level academics and require assistance and involvement opportunities to achieve their academic goals successfully. The University blueprint includes continued comprehensive learning assistance necessary to help students manage the academic demands.

**Question 1.4** - *Have you ever taken a class online? What are your thoughts about online courses?*

*Context:* Students who have completed online programs are a valuable source of information about the challenges faced along the way to graduation. The top reported roadblocks have been consistent throughout much of this study, led by “paying for higher education while minimizing debt” and “unexpected circumstances or events in my personal life.”

**Response 1:** We live in an area in rural Mississippi where internet access and WiFi are, in fact, hard to get. This lack of online facilities should have become visible to legislators when school children could not access reliable internet services to do their work. As for my situation – and this is just me - I’m not only stressed about school children and the school district, but I’m also anxious about myself that I’ll not be able to maintain a consistent level of access to online classes and assignments. The expense of gas money, wear and tear on my old clogger, and time investment to get to college now is astronomical.

**Response 2:** Yes, I’ve taken a handful of online classes, and I love online learning. The features online are just impressive. When I complete an online test, I get the test results within seconds recorded within the online program. My anxiety is waiting for my professor to grade it. I also get to complete my exams whenever I’m ready, but my professors assign the test within the duration space.

**Response 3:** My experience is similar to hers (Response 1). We, too, live in a small rural community with slow internet connections. Most of the time, it is ok, but it also turns to be wrong. Sometimes it turns it log me out of class, and I’d have to return to the links to log on again. While I enjoy the convenience of online courses, it gets frustrating as I have to lose my train of thought.

**Response 4:** I’ve taken several courses online, maybe 5 or 6 so far. Most of them were while I was a sophomore and lived at home. I had zero options for getting to school after my car died, and there was no public transportation along our road. At the time, I began asking people if online classes were more accessible, and I never got a definite answer, but still, I enrolled. I would take any online course now if I could. I like flexibility in test-taking and discussion boards. But you have to be disciplined and stick to a plan.

## Summary Notes

Of the responses received from the students participating in the Focus Group Discussion meeting, only three students indicated that they could not keep up with the coursework or found it challenging. Several students found the work boring or lost interest after internships or learning about engineering occupations and courses. One student had an awful time with their advisor, and another had a math professor who soured his interest in engineering.

Using a qualitative process, we discovered some common themes that cut across courses in an online program and new avenues for consideration. These include the conveniences of online classes, the need for consistency in course design across online classes, the importance of faculty presence, and students' perceptions of particular activities as "busy work."

**Question 1.5** - *Do you utilize any of the student support services such as the advisement center, career services, counseling, and others; how often, and what are your thoughts about that service?*

The following are sample transcriptions captured word-to-word as a reproduction of the recorded data on participants responses:

**Response 1:** I have used some of those offices that you listed once in a while. I would say I have used and be able to opinion about them. I use the time in the advisors' office to schedule my classes. I don't necessarily ask them to give me my classes. Usually, I select my classes and share them with my advisor. She agrees with me and signs off to complete my registration most of the time. A few times, she told me to change the classes. One time she said to me that I needed to wait for one semester to take other courses before I registered for that course. That was excellent advice because I could build a good foundation for my next accounting course. So that was excellent advice. I also used to use the Math Lab a lot when doing my Statistics course. I found this one tutor very helpful as he had previously helped me when I was doing developmental English. I would say those are excellent services for students depending on their needs.

**Response 2:** For me, I've used the Advising Center quite a bit. I have had good support from them as they keep me on track with my schedule, and also, I have found an advisor there who checks on my progress during the semester. Usually, he writes an email from time to time, and sometimes, he sends a calendar reminder with registration information. I typically keep track of that myself, but I'm sure some people need that reminder. That is really very good.

**Response 3:** I can tell you instances where "negative" information is exchanged during advising. The student may respond negatively to that advice even though the provided information and the appropriate interaction process were correct. In a situation like that, the students' perspectives are more likely to be grounded on the student's type of interaction.

**Response 4:** I have used the same services as mentioned. What I have not heard so far is about the counseling services. I don't know if others have such an office in their institutions. In mine, we do, and I had visited it a few times when I was new to the university. I may have been different, but I think I will not be wrong if I say if one is unique to the university, you will face some moments that you need to talk to someone who can help you in tackling your problems, such as the difficulty of adjusting to university life, anxiety problems and having a hard time making decisions. If you were like me, starting university life with a new environment can bring up all kinds of new challenges, getting you depressed. I mean depressed.

**Response 5:** There is a big difference between receiving good advisement and receiving excellence in academic advisement. And, I say this because I have had advisors who mean well; they are kind and try to help you; but know zero about programs, at least my program. And I mean, these are college advisors and had zero knowledge about stuff in your program. You all had good advisors. In my mind, what I need in an advisor, is someone who can assist first-generation students like me in planning a program and consider my abilities and interests.

**Response 6:** At my school, you are assigned to an advisor; to me, you just don't walk into the advisement center looking for one. You are assigned to one. The advisor can really be helpful. I know this may not necessarily, work for everybody - but it works for me. I've heard of students registering independently without an advisor's input, and they end up losing those credits as they don't help you finish your program. For me, I never register for my classes without first talking with my advisor. They are not just there to note you in classes. They can also help you build strong study skills because you will, by default, have some to be accountable to. Advisors can also help you manage test anxiety, set realistic goals, explore your transfer from one major to another. Don't ever change your major without consulting your advisor, as they can troubleshoot problems.

## Summary Notes

While all areas relative to the entire range of student support services, the question solicited divergent perspectives on the role of academic advisors and the advisement center. Several suggestions and exchanges of ideas express the students' experiences and perceptions. Where appropriate, help students define and develop realistic educational career plans through schedule planning for each semester and summer school. A point of importance that arose from the discussion was the need to issue an up-to-date academic schedule plan that a student can follow from entry through graduation among students' suggestions. This suggestion was triggered by some students concerned about their respective institutions "keep changing the goalposts without notifying" the students.

**Question 1.6** *If there was one hindrance that would force you to slow down on your degree path or quick college altogether, what would that be?*

The following are sample transcriptions captured word-to-word as a reproduction of the recorded data on participants responses:

**Response 1:** As you know, Mississippi is a large state, and it is also very diverse. You have urban areas and rural areas. I live in a kind of rural community, and I say that because I'm Leflore County and not too far from Itta Bena, just a short drive away. And even then, internet access is problematic. Luckier communities, including some further away from my house, may have internet connectivity, but unreliable and expensive. Mississippi is rural, and you know that. There is a for greater attention from our legislative leaders that we elect. These days, you really cannot live without communication and the internet.

**Response 2:** I am totally in agreement with the last comment. True, internet coverage in my part of Mississippi has many limitations, even on your cellphone. Reaching rural communities with access to higher education is extremely important for economic survival, especially now with Covid-19.

**Response 3:** I'm a single parent, and I've got a two-year-old and a four-year-old. My Aunt is the only one I can depend on to help me with the kids when I'm gone to school. If I didn't have her, I would quit my program. Yes, I got the Pell grant monies and the regular financial aid that everyone has, but I still cannot afford childcare for two babies. I just have to get this degree; hopefully get a better job to take care of my children and me.

**Response 4:** For me, my educational journey is made expensive by how much gas I need to buy to get me to school. I live 27 miles away from the community college, which is almost 60 miles I've to make to get to class and back home. You know what the cost of gas at the pump looks like. I've tried everything to save money, including trying classes Tuesdays and Thursdays. But that is

still expensive for the semester. That is about what I pay for my tuition, then spend the rest of my life paying off my financial aid.

## Summary Notes

Childcare affordability and accessibility were repeatedly mentioned as a barrier to moving through a university's degree program for many progressively. Those most impacted are female students of any given age. Participants noted that there are minimal on-campus options for students as these tend to be small and primarily serve faculty and staff – if they do exist at all. The most significant concern is the balance between a college degree's demands and those of their household.

## Focus Group Discussion II: Support Area Staff

In April 2020, Leighton University conducted three synchronous virtual focus groups (convenience sample) with 12 university personnel (7 academic advisors and included one (1), academic advisors from a non-Mississippi institution. Also included in the staff focus group are two members of an institution's admissions and recruitment area and three from counseling offices from two separate institutions) to gather specific questions. A discussion session was held to cast guiding questions to collect informal responses that may live among them in the forms of perceptions, beliefs, fears, and varied strategies to manage and provide optimum services to students.

In light of COVID-19 restrictions, Leighton successfully contacted virtual Focus Group Discussion sessions utilizing a videoconferencing platform. The sessions took slightly longer than the scheduled 45-minute duration. While some participants' connectivity was confronted by technological access, Leighton's researchers labored to engage as many participants as could be available and replicate human connections online. Below in this section are captured notes of the findings from the focus group consisting of college/university support staff.

**Question 2.1** - *From your experience, could you share your thoughts on what you would, perhaps, consider being an ingredient of good advisement?*

The following are sample verbatim transcriptions of responses captured a word-to-word as a reproduction of the recorded data:

**Response 1:** I believe that we're responsible for ensuring that students have full access to services that extend their development of "the whole person"; we must collectively instill in our students' aspects such as professional values. I think the way pushed this forward is by commitment. True, many students do not reach out to staff or faculty members for assistance with academic or social needs, and that I see all the time. Honestly, we have to work harder to gain their trust.

**Response 2:** In our case, it's different. Students sometimes tell us they felt forced into taking the online classes to fill their loads since in-person courses sometimes create conflicts with scheduling. Our traffic has often been from on-campus enrolled students, demonstrating that they trust us.

True, the good thing for us is that students don't get lost in the crowd, unlike in more prominent and well-founded universities. For us, we're a small institution, which lets us take a personal approach and interest in each student's success. So, in this case, the kind of people who work with students bring about students' success.

**Response 3:** Perhaps we'll never stumble upon that magic wand that will fix the lousy advisement that some students talk about. Nonetheless, as we wait for the creation of such a wand, we can do a few things that make the difference. One that may appear essential in fostering a level of care and collaboration where we will be willing to make referrals. If a student struggles with their courses related to study habits, non-academic challenges related to family, and financial difficulties, we should forget that we've got a prevalence of mental health issues. We must admit that advisors are great people and have more positions to interface with students and provide referrals. Students do trust us. We often ask the students to follow up with the advisor after attending the referrals.

**Response 4:** I agree with the earlier comment of Ms. \_\_\_\_\_, and my observation is that Student Affairs will need to be included in the budget process as I know very few institutions that, at least in my world, where Student Affairs is fully staffed. We tend to have large caseloads to reach a destination where Ms. \_\_\_\_\_ earlier mentioned full access to services. I know there is some difference between what you guys are looking for in your plans to open an online university - and what we often experience what we've got a mix of students in our setting. Some students decide to take all their classes, for example, online one semester or a combination of online and campus courses.

## Summary Notes

While these questions focused on good advisement, a rich conversation followed Response 3, where several participants talked about the importance of communication in multiple ways. While the thread of basic student communication skills emerged in more than one focus group, there was agreement among nearly all participants that most students come into the classroom with limited communication skills. Participants also noted that many students did not have a good sense of what it means to communicate professionally and effectively using technology. In response to these questions, participants indicated that basic skills such as writing emails, responding to emails promptly, and engaging in positive phone interactions help students improve their success.

**Question 2.2** - *Please share your thoughts on how and in what areas of student support might a new institution consider as a priority to advance the scope and quality of academic programs and remain consistent with its mission and stewardship of resources?*

*Context:* The dawn of online education has made it possible for students with busy lives and limited flexibility to obtain a quality education. Across the globe, there is no time in history when it has been so essential to acquire knowledge and possess flexible skills to participate successfully in the workforce. However, pursuing a college degree can be a daunting journey for underprepared students at all levels before post-secondary. Dismantling barriers that persist will require both "thoughts" and other resources." Below are participants thoughts on approaches and methods for institutional considerations:

**Response 1:** I'd say, in general, just about every last student at any university or college, as this urge to be treated with empathy, care, and understanding. Furthermore, they rightfully need to as the complex whole human beings that they are. They have to be treated with respect and all their identities and welcomed and supported. They need to be nurtured and given the necessary

attention from my perspective. When we have to identify the kind of services they need, we have to be very careful to recognize that students are individuals and come with various needs. The approach would be to make sure that we're not that selective as different students need different services that are coordinated.

**Response 2:** Covid-19 has taught us some lessons - when you think about it. And yes, guided by hindsight experience, current social, economic challenges, and institutional disruptions, we've quickly become aware of student needs that previously were commonly an amplifier for particular access inequity to higher education. Such inequities are rampant among minoritized groups, and our immediate response to the disruptions reveals and seeks to address the long-term inequality and injustices that pre-exist.

**Response 3:** For example, the university may offer counseling support as a part of the student service. Still, this service is not well known across populations who need such access. In my institution's counseling services provided are inadequate. Some of the challenges we face include understaffing, race imbalance among counselors, lack of ability to schedule same-day appointments and respond to needs as they present themselves, and counselors that can serve other marginalized individuals). Therefore, the university fails to provide comprehensive support despite some existing resources. Issues with educational technology are similar, and if a student is simultaneously challenged in both areas as many are, the impacts are amplified.

**Response 4:** With students on academic probation, I would first contact their instructors to receive their input and help identify any issues with their educational environment. If the problem seems external, I'll meet with my students to discuss and become familiar with the distractions to their academic success. However, I like to personalize my approach to student services and students if it's internal. Setting achievable goals and a roadmap to achieving them would be helpful.

## Summary Notes

One of the most profound observations made and supported by participants is the difficulty of constantly identifying students who need them. The claim is that most students helped are those who self-identify themselves. A variety of suggestions were offered that include practices implemented in other institutions. These include using the institution's LMS and building a predictive model using the data commonly associated with lack of retention. Some points of contention were noticed and included statements such as ". . . many institutions use predictive models for retention, but may not always generate from the LMS. Another idea raised commented on other institutions' practices that employ brief surveys at the start of each semester. This approach gives support areas a pulse on the students.

**Question 2.3** - *What are your thoughts on the opportunities and challenges for recruitment and retention, particularly for adult learners?*

*Context:* The primary objective of this question was to identify the challenges and opportunities for recruitment and retention, particularly for adult learners. Subsequently, the findings will be used to develop a comprehensive program proposal to establish, align, and/or integrate programs that support the Institution's recruitment and student retention activities. The discussion session captured the following statement:

**Response 1:** We're amidst a pandemic, and it's something that is so much beyond our control. It was not an option for us *as an institution* to take *that* leave of absence, *and we* needed to take it. Sometimes I feel like if it was mandatory, then those in charge of running the school need to be a little more flexible; they really must practice a little more leniency with it.

**Response 2:** Let me also add that, in March, they placed us on lockdown and were expected to do our work at home. Due to the pandemic, other university personnel, mostly temps, were placed on mandatory leave, shutting down everything. And, I can understand that. They gave us an issue to wait for our return date, August 10, and they never sent word to us after that. When they did, it was to tell us that they were withdrawing us all together from classes on the exact day we were supposed to return to campus.

**Response 3:** My previous life experience and exposure to processes indicate that there is always a reason to develop and support initiatives that foster: student success; create and strengthen early alert communications; enhance advising approaches, coordinate comprehensive student life cycle communications, and enhance collaboration among university's departments and faculty/student connections, keeping in mind the necessary background of the various student populations.

**Response 4:** I work in the Math Lab, and we're tasked to support students who need support and that one-on-one explanation. Nevertheless, it seems as though tutorial services are not a priority, at least in my institution. What you end up seeing are more and more students coming out of those remedial classes failing. I'd like to see more in the use of technology. We have many students who come for evening classes. As you would imagine, a center like ours that supports students closes at 5:30 pm when we know that students need support. I'm sure students who may not have time can receive support remotely during the day. We've learned a lot during the Covid-19 lockdown period and were able to look for creative ways of providing support to students who need it.

**Response 5:** When we look deeper into the causes of student attrition, we'll quickly note that those factors that influence student retention at a college are often rooted in the student's personal experiences and not necessarily academics. Those personal experiences include that outside of the classroom. When students are provided opportunities within a college setting, for example, it can increase the likelihood of student persistence through to graduation.

## Summary Notes

Discussants acknowledged the changing student demographics, new technologies, concerns with the cost of attendance, demands for greater accountability, etc.; colleges and universities experience ever-changing challenges in student life. Institutional approaches and responses to these challenges will likely shape our role in higher education. The choice of student life personnel can either be keeping a close eye on student life inside and outside the universities lecture halls or a retreat to the margins hoping that changes will eventually present themselves rather than engage in the "inconvenience" of evolution.

The consensus from the group pointed to the need for online adults students in the areas of information technology and procedures to access content and ways to establish and maintain communication avenues. Adult students need information on services available to meet their individual needs. A discussion in the meeting formed a constant theme in early and continuous follow-up and attention, within and outside the course in adult student retention. Beginning with recruitment, the adult learner should be a partner in a learning process that builds on motivations, counsels rather than quizzes and tests, emphasize relevance, and recognize resistance.

### **Question 2.4** *What do you have as the most common question you ask your advisees?*

The following are sample verbatim transcriptions of responses captured a word-to-word as a reproduction of the recorded data:



**Response 1:** Have you talked with your professor yet?" is a favorite question academic advisors ask their students. Two other inter-related questions I ask my advisees are "why do you want to change your major at this time; or are you trying to stay here longer?" "Have you decided yet on your major; why is it taking you so long?"

**Response 2:** As an academic advisor, I consider myself more than an advisor whose job description is academic advising, directing the student to the needed courses for the semester and making a recommendation. What is not in my job description is the human obligation to assist others in more or more minor personal areas. Students share changes and experiences. "Are you keeping up with your homework?" "Are you still associating yourself with those *frie—eeeends* you told me about?"

**Response 3:** "What do I need to do?" This is a common question. This question sometimes comes from the student's immediate circumstances. That is during the difficult periods of their lives. I recognize and acknowledge their challenges. But what is most important to me is to guide them and help them meet or exceed their educational goals. Forward-thinking students must first have confidence in themselves. In so doing, they become open to optimizing their college experiences. Sometimes, one has to do this seamlessly. To see yield in my students is very rewarding to feel. I enjoy knowing that I played a critical role in a future professional's academic and personal life. One who will realize a fruitful career.

**Question 2.5** *When you pursue that response further, what kind of response do you get back from the students?*

The Focus Group Discussion staff cited a typical response from students. The following are sample verbatim transcriptions of responses captured a word-to-word as a reproduction of the recorded data:

**Response 1:** It's is not uncommon to hear a student say something along these lines: "ve just not thought of that." Furthermore, they genuinely mean so. Moreover, when they say this, you know they need guidance and support to reach a solution. Others commonly say, "I do not talk to my professors on topics outside the course information." These are students who do not want to offend their professor thinking that it would offend the professor if it were, say, the subject matter in their classes." Students sometimes speak along various lines.

**Response 2:** For some reason, I get this recurring silent message from students, and you not only sense it, but you get it in many words. The unspoken statement "I was not sure if I should have spoken to your first before registration." Another silent one used "Should I have come to you sooner" and "I didn't know what to do, and it was ok."

**Response 3:** I think there is plenty more statements that students make, either verbally or as \_\_\_\_\_ called it silent statements. Some of these conversations occur by pointing out their tangible benefits and explaining that most of us have formed relationships. Furthermore, it doesn't matter which areas in student support services; most staff members in our areas have formed relationships with students. They enjoy working with them on a one-on-one basis. You know, students too are individuals and hold their trust in us.

**Response 4:** I'm sure if we went around and shared students' statements, we could probably spend the whole day narrating them. Students know what a great advisor looks like. Of course, some think that advisors are there to torture them; assign them a course that is not exciting and gives them burdens, but those are only a handful of students. Most students have a framework of characteristics of what great advisors look like. Many students might characterize good advisors as persons who know and understand individual programs, know their students' characteristics and needs, and be informed about their respective programs. Advisors see the program's requirements,

policies, procedures, rules, and regulations. Of course, many students out there will not agree with me or anyone of us on that statement.

## Summary Notes

From responses collected in this discussion, it is evident that many students do not seek to establish meaningful conversations with their professors outside the classroom. It is logical to suggest that when advisors help facilitate conversations between students and faculty members, they help the institution.

In a discussion about the unique functions of an advisor, supporting points of view were raised and addressed might be summarized in statements originating from by advisors (Response 3). Like any relationship, faculty members or advisors and students require nurturing. Participants provided ideas and appeared to agree that advisors who know their students' talents and understand the instructors' roles are more likely to help students grow and uniquely facilitate strong relationships.

### **Question 2.6** - *How strategic are you in your retention efforts?*

*Context:* In its *Persistence and Retention report series (2020)* [3], the National Student Clearinghouse Center noted that “each year, roughly two million students enter postsecondary education, however, eight years later, one-third of those individuals are no longer enrolled and have not earned any formal credentials.” (p.1). While there is more than one definition of persistence and retention, the meeting’s moderator defined that retention generally means continued enrollment at the same higher institution. In response to the question posed following were captured:

**Response 1:** As I had earlier mentioned, we have developed a comprehensive retention plan that includes goals, benchmarks, timelines, key strategies, responsibility, and budget is critical. We have yet to place a budget behind it and perhaps pilot it to see how it best measures outcomes and to identify essential benchmarks.

**Response 2:** At our institution, we recently rolled out the 2020-2012 strategic plan that included the retention of students. In the past, the student voluntarily completed a Leave of Absence form, and the copy was physically filed for record in the registrar's office. In implementing the university's strategic plan, the structure was redeveloped and automated on the web to capture and accessibility for both the student and relevant offices on campus. In addition, all students reporting their plan to take the leave to follow an intentional and systematic approach that requires a meeting with the Dean of Students and - where warranted - Counseling or Academic Advising office to address questions or challenges that might be motivating their decision.

**Response 3:** We all need reminders or a little nudge to see beyond the immediate. If we, at the college, get into the habit of posting random announcements and send out encouraging emails that may even include inspirational quotes, we to remind our students of their ability and promise for success. This comes if they are determined to succeed, and they will. Usually, students love to hear their professors believe in them, and they need to listen to their professors' confirmation messages. If we adopt this practice, I am sure we will be on our way to creating a pleasant and trusting learning environment where students feel valued and motivated to perform at their best.

**Response 4:** We talk a lot about three things on our campus -recruitment, retention, and graduation but I don't personally believe that we've done an excellent job in any of them. Do we know that there is bleeding, and I mean a whole lot of bleeding in the area of retention? Yes. And

have we instituted some programs based on specific visible needs? Yes. And I can go on and on this. We've not looked for solutions, and I happen to have served in the University's retention committee. I've contributed to it some of my thoughts and beliefs. One of them that might work for most institutions is to collect prospective students' data beyond the soft question typically asked the student in that one-pager application. And I'm talking about collecting data that allows us to a good picture of the applicant. This data can help us in many ways. Examples - enabling them to develop financial aid packages and create programs that can target and influence students who are also likely to consider dropping out or taking enrollment elsewhere seriously.

**Response 5:** I've not held this role for as long as everyone else here. However, I've observed that many students either don't know or just don't want to reach out to the right people, such as staff in a center like ours or faculty members in their classes or department for assistance with academic or social needs. Whatever the student's situation might be, it often leaves them feeling isolated and making those stupid retreats mistakes. I believe that receiving guidance and support from a professor or an academic advisor can mean the "delta" difference between a student learning to navigate through obstacles or giving up and dropping out. Perhaps a strategy that I might propose is having that constant reminder placed in the face of students. It could be periodic emails that check students' progress at various semester times.

**Response 6:** We've been very fortunate to develop a tool to connect our students. We've done some fantastic things on our campus to connect students with a small yet active mentoring program where they learn essential life skills and know-how and who and when and to whom they can direct questions as they reach out for help when needed. In addition to that support program, we utilize much technology to increase our resources for academic advising at our center. We connect within our area and schedule a meeting between the student and the advisor. We also make every effort to connect the student with faculty or other essential support staff to help students access available resources.

## Summary Notes

Several participants mentioned student attrition as having become an enormous challenge for students in post-secondary education. Participants pointed out that even were students' determination to complete is expressed, many take several years to reach completion. There is a need for more flexibility in mode and course offerings to meet the needs of the state – whether through fully online, hybrid offerings, increased evening and weekend class options. Participants noted an increasing number of students with outside obligations who would benefit from more flexibility in taking classes. Some speculated that this would increase an institutions' ability to compete with other providers.

To that end, there are many reasons why distance/online learning has become a popular form of acquiring a degree or other credentials at the postsecondary level. The online space offers unprecedented opportunities for people who would otherwise have limited access to education, as well as a new archetype for innovative institutions in which active courses of the highest quality can be developed.

**Question 2.7** - *Share with us how technology tools you use at institutions to capture applicants/student profiles at admission and through the matriculation experiences?*

The following are sample verbatim transcriptions captured a word-to-word as a reproduction of the recorded data on participants responses:

**Response 1:** Our college uses \_\_\_\_\_ [*an enrollment-specific software*] that is capable of managing inquiry and application information. The software has other functionalities such that our office can communicate sequentially with prospective students. We're also able to produce management reports that are very useful in monitoring our progress toward enrollment goals.

**Response 2:** This may not be important to others in this discussion. However, I will add that we also track applicants' enrollment behaviors patterns by various characteristics such as gender, age, cohort groups, program, ethnicity, and academic ability) in our work.

**Response 3:** Recently acquired CivitasLearn. I have been invited to a demonstration session a few times as the university customizes it to fit our needs. It seems like an excellent platform for our shop to use as it collapses student profiles from our existing student information system. I only wish that \_\_\_\_\_ (institution) would embrace and include consumer departments like us and others in the customization process. As for us, we use the CivitasLearning beyond advisement and reaching out to the student, and the great thing that I like is that we can view the student's life history from application through enrollment and on to exit. If I can say something about it, it has components that predict student persistence. We're very excited and can't wait to have it rolled out.

## Summary Notes

The use of automated recruitment systems among institutions was mixed, from no automation to full implementation of various online tools for prospective students. The recruitment platform usage was common even among the institutions not represented in the focus group discussion. The complexity in including constituents within the campus as users of this collaboration and partnership is cited as the biggest hurdle to implementing an online system that provides participation from stakeholders. However, the fact that several of the IHE's have automated systems in place highlights that these challenges can be overcome.

**Question 2.8** - *What aspects of their adult status usually come to mind when you think of adult learners and how to methodically approach them as admissions counselors and academic advisors?*

Context: A report published by the National Study Clearing Research Center (NSCRC) in 2019 observed a 7% decline in students enrolling in college immediately following their high school completion benchmark in 2019. This data reveals an unprecedented one-year decrease. For those that register, less than 60% achieve a six-year graduation mark.

**Response 1:** My observation is one that adult learners, particularly transfer students, face many challenges and barriers that may be less experienced by traditional students. These range from deconstructing hard-to-understand policies and procedures often associated with articulation agreements and accumulating excess credits to navigating the institution's website and other publications. You see, I've had a student who has experienced situations where \_\_\_\_\_ [institution] has outdated information that may not agree with the course catalog. Or agree with other printed resources. Moreover, don't forget that some of the challenges they face are institution-created issues. I often see struggles from students. But again, this is usually due to the lack of not just that support but also the lack of information they need to succeed."

**Response 2:** This is an additional complexity that adult learners, particularly transfer students, face. They may have had the seminar years back when they started, and the information in the freshman seminar taken may have been unique to the institution they attended.

**Response 3:** It's probably no surprise that adult learners, and particularly those who select to be online, are most challenged by finances and, definitely, unexpected life events. If I can add, these

challenges can quickly and boom; they impact each other. For example, you can have a student facing an unpredictable illness. For instance, that situation often comes with medical bills or a job loss that impacts employer-contributed tuition and subsequently impacts learning progress.

**Response 4:** Staying on track in online courses, often offered in short academic terms, can quickly become a roadblock to graduation. Understanding and acknowledging these challenges is the first step. Integrating educational curricula and online delivery with support services and targeted interventions may help students connect with the assistance they need as early as possible to improve their chances of graduating

## Summary Notes

Responses to this question brought active participation and comments from the group that included recognizing challenges often experienced by adult learners. An extended discussion that included participation from both advisors and the admissions areas dwelt around the absence of support programs that do not have adult learners' participation, particularly those who transfer in. Participants disclosed their observation that a large cross-section of adult learners come with transfer credit hours, and these credit hours often exceed the count (usually 25 credit hours) and thus exclude them from Freshman Seminar. Another participant also raised the complexities associated with and exacerbated by the pandemic. Both first-year adult-learners transfer students and including traditional students have faced the drawback of not being able to experience their new institution in person during the height of COVID-19.

An observation made by the research team and deserves mention in this Report includes a comment from one participant who described the self as having been an adult learning while pursuing an academic program. The participant comment included having to "*work hard to get where I am today.*" The statement can easily project an attempt to compare one's past experiences with advisees. While this participant's experience may bring a closer connection between the advisor and the large number of adult learners needing to earn a degree, it may also fail to keep the student's unique context. The least told implication is that the student is not working hard enough. A perspective as this may, in a sense, portray a measure of lack of empathy to a maty not be performing well or maybe approaching the institution's academic probation status. Participants acknowledge their roles in the discussion around approaches to adult learners, including "improving student's confidence through support services."

**Question 2.9** *Does your student support areas have a mission statement in addition to the institutions?*

Context: An institution needs to increase awareness of its student support services area and promote activities that educate advisors and advise administrators on the concepts of student support. A majority of participants confirmed that their service area has a mission statement.

**Response 1:** While our statement is perhaps more of a purpose statement and not a mission statement, as we do not necessarily call it, we have an idea that clarifies our purpose and who our clients are. Allow me to paraphrase it. I select to translate it as I might stumble of the wording of the mission. Our program's mission is to focus on the needs of undecided undergraduate students regarding the major they wish to declare and are classified as Undeclared. In addition, the Center advises students identified as Special Non-Degree. It serves as an academic resource to all undergraduate students.

**Response 2:** We have always known that to be necessary, so we've thought about that kind of display and still have plans to do so.

**Response 3:** We do have a missions statement. I know we do not have publicly displayed within our space on campus. But you will see it in our printed materials. I haven't personally memorized it but, it is straightforward and delivers our values and action.

**Response 4:** I can for sure say it was publicly posted at our old location. However, I'm somewhat unsure, and I wouldn't want to say it is also posted somewhere, beyond the website, for public consumption.

## Summary Notes

The response above and others generated by the question clarified that the institution's services must be published and directed to students using various modes and media to increase awareness, which may mean adjusting to messaging options. The overall contribution from the participants was convincing on the emphasis on the role of the university's advising to ensure that every student is empowered with the knowledge and confidence that enables them to create and experience the unique journey through an academic degree program, and ultimately, to value the role of advising is critical to ensuring student success.

Through a follow-up question, participants to inquire if their mission statement is publicly displayed for the consumption of advisors, students, and other institution members to view and become familiar with the area's goals. An institution needs to increase awareness of their student services areas need to promote activities that educate advisors and advise administrators on the concepts of student support.

Many opinions on how broad or narrow a mission statement should be. At least one participant suggested that a mission statement should "fit on a tee-shirt" yet remain readable. Other group members indicated that a mission statement is no longer than three sentences of twenty-five words. The mission statement was undoubtedly created with good intent, but it ends in obscurity almost immediately after being adopted. "It may still be viewed as an unhelpful document that can give guidance, and so it should prominently be displayed as a constant affirmation to all constituencies that deliver, receive, or support advising," one participant described.

**Question 2.10 –** *What are your thoughts about the role of the University's administration in supporting your work, which is the major reason your institution was founded in the first place?*

The following are sample verbatim transcriptions captured a word-to-word as a reproduction of the recorded data on participants responses:

**Response 1:** From my perspective, I've come to believe that the administration does not always see beyond the budget lines. It may look at online programs only to increase revenues and thus carry a minimal commitment to online education to provide convenient quality education to students who would have challenges accessing it. True, they look, sometimes at student success, but for a different reason.

**Response 3:** As the institution embraces and seeks to strengthen faculty/support services relationships, somebody should prioritize creating an academic advising community targeted at student learning, and success should be prioritized.

**Response 4:** As advisors, at least for me, we don't generally have much voice at an institution, but we know that we know our students better than most people in the University. More often than not, we're straight-out advocates for students. I'm sure we're more likely to expand our informal "leadership roles," yes "leadership roles," within our institution. Not that we have much

left time in our hands, but only if we're included as team members and supported to participate in committees like retention, budget plan, and many others that come and go. We're the voice of students.

**Response 5:** In our role as advisors, we can connect with our advisees and listen to their educational needs, which are often nuanced. And one must-have skill to do that. I think about this much constantly, and I believe that the skills that help advisors thrive are two; notably, interpersonal and communication abilities and time management and organization skills. Academic advisors often have a result-oriented mindset to help students achieve their educational goals.

**Response 6:** I'm sitting here and listening to others. What comes to mind is the need to establish and grow vital elements of a positive organizational culture - any university. Those elements will, in turn, have a sense of establishing a community where we have a constructive working relationship between and within various offices on campus.

**Response 7:** Let me briefly share my observation. However, I need to believe that it is unique for my institution. There is sparse faculty familiarity of some of the advisement aspects in my shop. This includes the processing of new students, mostly the freshman class, who often start their life at the university having no clue about academic advising. They typically come with faulty notions based on their own high school experience, and they assume that academic advisors must be social workers, guidance counselors, or psychological therapists.

## Summary Notes

In addition, one of the consistent themes projected through the focus group discussion is the difficulty of dispelling the equation that advising is registration. Suppose there was a consensus that students often misunderstand the meaning and use of academic advisement, the roles of many university personnel. Response 1 generated engaging conversations as they further supported the observation. One group participant's contribution on this topic was his observation that includes sparse faculty familiarity with advisement and its processing for new students and mostly the freshman class.

From participants' comments, work-based learning is unevenly provided, whether internships, apprenticeships, or other forms. Most often, they are more readily available in urban centers. However, it is not uncommon across the board. Employers are often unable or willing to offer opportunities to students. For that reason, partnerships/sites must be in place for work-based learning to be successful. While not the only way forward, potential solutions could include state work-study programs and freeing up institutional resources to forge the needed partnerships with business and industry. Ultimately, a successful strategy for work-based learning would be led by business and industry, supported by the university or college, and incentivize employers and education providers to participate. Importantly, students need to know about the opportunities that exist. Also, participants expressed that they felt pressure to be proficient in many areas, acquire multiple skills, and perform various activities in their liaison role, which is problematic given their other roles.

## Focus Discussion Group III: Faculty

To learn and understand institutional policies, practices, and processes that promote effectiveness and success of programs - including online programs and course section; and inquire faculty and their thoughts regarding innovative practices related to student learning and success. Faculty Focus discussion meeting was designed to facilitate collaboration and encourage discussion regarding implementing online/high-impact procedures that consider the large number of students who come in as underprepared students. The structure of the faculty focus groups was semi-structured - prioritizing the pre-selected questions - since consistency in the questions asked allowed our researchers to identify commonalities in students' experiences. However, the discussion moderator purposefully allowed the discussions to evolve organically and encouraged discretion in asking clarifying questions. This structure accommodates opportunities for the research to capture information and make recommendations beyond what was planned through the prepared set.

**Question 3.1** - *What are your thoughts regarding field-based work experiences as a part of an undergraduate degree program?*

The following are sample verbatim transcriptions captured a word-to-word as a reproduction of the recorded data on participants responses:

**Response 1:** Many seniors I've worked with begin their job search process before graduating. I typically recommend that seniors take advantage of courses that offer practical experience, research opportunities, or internship opportunities integrated within student coursework. This allows them to bolster their resumes as they embark on their job search and improve their portfolios before entering the job search process.

**Response 2:** I struggled early in my academic career to find what I wanted to do. I had several interests but also had difficulty narrowing my career path. A student with a great academic adviser helped me identify my strengths and weaknesses. With that discovery, I excelled in college. I realized that I also wanted to be an active source of reliable information and comfort for students in my charge who felt the same confusion I felt.

**Response 3:** I've heard of students becoming discouraged when they don't understand steps to reach their goals. Field-based experiences such as internships and apprenticeships/attachments help students gain firsthand experiences. They see the importance of that includes a preparation that involves them in the immediate application of their knowledge in "natural" industry settings – not just reading about it in a textbook. In addition, they get to measure their accumulated knowledge and skills against resources that help them reach their goals.

**Response 4:** I may not know much about a university's management and leadership process, but I know it is always a reminder in my institution that recruitment and retention are everyone's responsibility. If that is what university management holds, then it should follow that the retention of students can be influenced by the attitudes of both administrators and faculty as they are charged with nurturing their success, and it is their responsibility too. There is always a lot going for faculty.

**Response 2:** In such a case, a University that is not aware of the importance of adequate faculty development opportunities, essential instructor characteristics, class size limitations, and others will not immediately recognize the impact of these elements in achieving online program success yields student learning.

## Summary Notes



Over the past 10 to 15 years, a large cross-section of IHEs operating daycare centers have steadily decreased. This has come when a significant number of researches reveal that student parents who have access to childcare are more likely to return to school and three times more likely to graduate [4]. The paths Leighton University expects to take in its decision-making process will consider the ultimate destination of leading its students to degree attainment. The institution's goal will be to produce marketable professionals and enlightened individuals. During the interview, an aspect came through expanding childcare programs on campus. Participants acknowledge how life manifests itself to individuals, mainly the female student, and "how life seems to happen dramatically often and with more significant adverse effects to under-resourced adult learners."

**Question 3.2** - *What are your thoughts on groups of students in Mississippi that an online institution should consider targeting and recruiting?*

The following are sample verbatim transcriptions captured a word-to-word as a reproduction of the recorded data on participants responses:

**Response 1:** Adults are seeking college degrees in more significant numbers. Their "non-traditional" characteristics - part-time enrollment, full-time employment, financial independence, and parental responsibilities - create priority services that differ from traditional students. These services need flexibility at the institutional level in student support services that include intrusive advising responsive to student life and career goals and curricular and academic programs that acknowledge and recognize the experience and work-based learning that the student has already obtained.

**Response 2:** I have come across data collected through the Best Colleges periodical report. I believe you're right on target, looking at adult students that are a group that, I think, was considered the top of the list. Other target groups may be transfers students who may have had a pause. While not all of them may have left due to financial reasons, there is undoubtedly a large number of them left for that reason. When we get off this session, I'll see that I forward a copy to you.

**Question 3.3** *Share your thoughts on how your students engaged in online courses.*

*Context:* Maintaining student engagement is a challenge not only for face-to-face learning but also for distance education. However, applying some of the same traditional methods for engagement that incorporate the use of accessible and readily-available technology to engage students who may otherwise have minimal access to face-to-face online learning environments. Although the workload for the course instructor has undeniably increased as a result of the pandemic, engaging our students remains essential in this brave new world of education. The goal of this question was to inquire about valuable strategies that can assist online course instructors in overcoming the age-old issue of engaging *all* students.

**Response 1:** Ideally, students contribute to the course while taking away a unique mix of relevant information. These situations result in more minor discussions taking place simultaneously within the group. While students should read all their classmates' contributions, they actively engage in only those parts of the dialog most relevant to their interests. In this way, students take charge of their own learning experience and tailor the class discussions to meet their own specific needs.

**Response 2:** We all need to understand that a successful curriculum and teaching in on-ground instruction may not necessarily amount to a successful online degree program where learning and instructional paradigms are quite different and engaging. The online curriculum must reflect

student dialog (often in written communication), group interaction, and participation. Again, we understood that traditional classroom lectures might not necessarily equate to a successful online degree program.

**Response 3:** Having the experience of teaching using both modalities, I've always been impressed seeing introverts bringing their thoughts forward as they participate through the chat features, which gives them opportunities, in terms of time to craft, their ideas, rather than to be put on the spot to answer a question or comment on an issue. Education experiences of the highest quality are sure to ensue in an online program on the condition that the curriculum has been developed or adjusted to meet the needs of the online modality.

**Response 4:** In general, we see students who, individually, respond to course material. That is, content summaries, video presentations, and course books, and these are just examples. We end up seeing strongly content-based comments among students within an online discussion with much enthusiasm as they provide OK research material. This is amazing as you get to have a reassurance that students are learning, and of course, you are also teaching.

**Response 5:** My observation is that students typically respond to those topics within the broader conversation. Within those conversations, you can notice their thought patterns and their learning. Student responses give me a sense of where they are, and I'm able to work on my teaching. This helps me redefine misconceptions and, creatively, find ways to respond to their concerns or redirect their thoughts. It allows me to speak to their problems.

**Response 6:** I've taught many online sections of courses over the years. I love it, and I'm a great cheerleader for online instruction. I see the power of online teaching. As a graduate student, I completed several online classes myself. So I do know the effectiveness and efficiency of online courses. But the task is on the course instructor to provide unique opportunities to include alternative learning materials, not just what is in the textbook. Include tasks and activities to fit the individual learning styles of your students and preferences.

**Response 7:** The online environments allow me flexibility, which is a good thing, as I can take control of my schedule and even my own learning experience. Again, suppose you don't disengage with people and social interaction in the online course environment. In that case, you develop in many ways, and you know you need to discipline yourself and become more self-aware.

## Summary Notes

Improving online education outcomes has proved to be a complex and ongoing process. The consensus among faculty described the needs and challenges faced by online education students who may not have access to appropriate technologies to complete an online course. Some come to campus for their online course.

While not directly related to the question, an argument was made regarding the strength of online courses as a valuable tool in retention efforts. Discussions in the meeting pointed to the need to "designed, foster, and sustain student success while ensuring that current students will remain enrolled in their programs and complete them," said one participant. If enrollment planning is just about getting students and keeping them, it is unlikely to be strategic. It is also a powerful tool to address the state's need to increase access to higher education for communities in the flanked locations of the state and historically underrepresented and economically disadvantaged students.

**Question 3.4** *Who takes remedial courses in your institution? Are there observed demographic groups that tend to need remedial courses more than others?*

Excerpts following are representative of verbatim transcriptions captured word-to-word as a reproduction of the recorded data on participants responses:

**Response 1:** Typically, remedial courses are designed to support and strengthen students' academic skills. Most students diverted to these courses often happen to be that critical, a mass of students with limited academic preparation. Over the years, I have observed an ever-increasing number of students enrolling in either our mathematics sequence, reading, writing, or both.

**Response 2:** Although I do not have concrete numbers, I've been involved in the student support area for many years, and I can't give you those tricky numbers. However, my observation tells me that participation in remediation courses is more common among several demographic groups. These include minority students mostly from low-income backgrounds, and we also have many first-generation students, most of whom are females.

**Response 3:** I currently work at a University; however, I've to spend most of my college faculty career in community colleges. I'm tired of hearing people who know little about college other than their own experience as students. It shouldn't assume, as many do, that remedial education is a thing in low-income or disadvantaged communities. Much has been explained to me that the students who are most likely to take remedial classes are those out of public schools located in areas of poverty often reported as having lower levels of student performance. You may be shocked, then, to learn that 40-45% of students enrolled in remedial programs are from middle- and upper-income families and may have even been products of expensive private schools. In simple words also, remedial courses affect students at all income levels. And in my institution, the number of students enrolled in remedial classes isn't any fewer than what we had in the community college.

## Summary Notes

Several participants cited a need for more flexible course offerings – whether fully online, hybrid offerings, increased evening and weekend class options. Participants noted an increasing number of students with outside obligations who would benefit from more flexibility in taking classes. Some speculated that this would increase an institutions' ability to compete with other providers.

**Question 3.5** *Does your institution have an identifiable proactive program for students who are undecided about their program of study?*

Excerpts following are representative of verbatim transcriptions captured word-to-word as a reproduction of the recorded data on participants responses:

**Response 1:** We have not developed anything other than pointing students to the available majors that might work for them based on interest. However, I genuinely believe that this model would be politically and economically permit immediate implementation of such a model. I know we must do more than that without limiting students from "an opportunity" to engage in intentional self-discovery, align interests with real-world opportunities, and make informed choices based on future aspirations. It might be necessary to consider having cut-off dates on the university's calendar for major declaration events.

**Response 2:** I'm not sure if this would count, but I'd say it anyway. Still, the various aspects usually include transitional elements within programs and are evident in some courses identified by instructors. These include study skills assessment, introduction to student support services on campus, career planning, and other activities that tough on engagement in student life. Instructors expected and integrated these aspects as appropriate to the course content.

**Response 3:** The “Undecided” is one of the most popular major choices among many students who come to us, especially freshmen in the last few years. I have been a staff and a faculty in various universities over my long career in higher education, and I’ve heard widely varying opinions on this. Some say every student should go into college undecided to explore their interests without pressure. Others say that undecided students should first attend a community college before enrolling in a four-year college or university to avoid wasting time and money.

**Response 4:** This is a great question. I can speak for other campuses across the state; however, in my institution, there is a large proportion of people - - faculty, staff, and event administrators who hold the belief that being “undecided” is the same thing as being “at-risk.” To some degree, that is true, but that is not to say they are. During advisement sessions, I encounter many students who may not have an assigned major on PeopleSoft. However, they have an identified major and have keenly followed it. I think calling them “at-risk” students is an outcome that may also have evolved from an erroneous overgeneralization of what constitutes.

## Summary Notes

This question generated areas of consensus that included common questions often heard from the undeclared students. The question posed by that classification of students asks, *“What courses should I take at this time while I’m exploring my options as I decide on my major?”* Participants shared examples of actions that have been taken by their campus and included “our students are advised to take the courses in majors that best match their interests and skills.” Another described how each academic department recommends specific courses for those students considering a major in that department. Another participant noted their rule of thumb that requires counsel and requires the students always to confirm their course selection with their advisor before they register. Yet another participant described how her institution instituted a “meta major” for the undeclared. Students in the meta-major remain in that “major” they declared their choice of the major. Faculty describe the meta major as not as structured as a degree-granting program.

**Question 3.6** - *In your servicing of an online course, what strategies have you found to yield success?*

Context: The literature [5] affirms that students essentially build and sustain their perceptions of instructors' engagement in regular communications, which drives their engagement with the course and its material. An observable decrease in enrollment at both the college and university levels prompts an additional focus on recruitment and retention issues. Selected responses from the Focus group included the following statement:

**Response 1:** I have taught online on Blackboard over the years. My observation is one where I’ve noticed that students, individually, respond to the course material (lectures and course books, for example) and comments from others within an online discussion. Students usually approach an online course's interactive aspect enthusiastically and respond to their assigned topics. This says that there are ways that instructors can make online courses engaging and invite into an exchange of ideas and their thoughts.

**Response 2:** I have not had the unique experience of teaching a course online. However, I’ve personally taken courses online at the graduate level. From that experience, I believe that online instruction provides unique opportunities for learning materials, tasks, and activities to fit individuals into their lifestyle and learning style preferences. The possibility of asynchronous sessions gives students more flexibility to engage with the class materials in ways and in hours that work best for them and engage in them at their own pace. Also, and when it is meaningfully

implemented, discussion forums are a significant positive feature for many mature students who pursue a degree program and simultaneously take care of their households.

**Response 3:** Ideally, students contribute to the course, taking away a unique mix of relevant information. These situations result in more minor discussions taking place simultaneously within the group. While students should read all their classmates' contributions, they actively engage in only those parts of the dialog most relevant to their interests. In this way, students take charge of their own learning experience and tailor the class discussions to meet their own specific needs.

**Response 4:** Given that much of online teaching nationwide is asynchronous, that space can be deafening quiet. Any faculty who has taught online classes for quite a few years, I've given much attention to faculty-student interactions and vice-versa. While it generally occurs via email or a notification through the course's learning management system, effort needs to be visible at the instructor's level to ensure that students are aware of your presence. Failure to do this can estrange and disengage the class both from each other and from the instructor. However, even when the course instructor is competent enough to create a comfortable virtual environment where the course can operate, the lack of physical presence can limit an online program.

**Response 5:** Adult learners are almost always taking an online course or the entire program for specific reasons rather than just for fun. Most adult learners are anxious about adapting to and performing in a virtual learning environment. They serve one or more "adult" roles. These roles include an employee, spouse, parent, and citizen awareness of their rights and duties. One must step into their shoes to feel their needs and aspirations. Also, consider the demands of their jobs, so you know how to align their goals, know precisely what skills they need, and outshine in their professional duties. Focus on giving them what they want: answers to their real-world problems.

**Response 6:** No matter how you look at it, for me, a successful non-online instruction does not always translate to successful online education. If faculty are not adequately prepared in online delivery and methodologies, the success of the online program will be compromised. In addition, an instructor must communicate effectively in writing and the course's language.

**Response 7:** I've had adult learners in my classes over the years. Online learning often becomes a very lonely environment for many students. The presence and active involvement of the course instructor are essential and make a difference for the students; and students. When the presence of the course instructor is not visible, students also tend to slow down, which weakens the course. An online instructor recognizes and compensates for the lack of physical presence by creating a supportive environment where all students gain a high level of comfortable participating, especially where they know their course instructor is accessible.

## Summary Notes

Participants shared the value of academic support systems, notably a tutorial center, as "must be" support. It assists students in meeting an immediate need to be successful in a class or on a particular assignment and develops longer-term skills such as time management and study strategies. Many participants see the connection between passing an assignment or class to their ultimate success in finishing the educational goal. The consistency among participants was the idea of devoting time to visiting the tutorial center and periodically reviewing students' activities to meet an immediate need.

A strong statement captured from a faculty participant noted an assumption that may be common where the shift in technology often hopes that those who move into the online delivery method will also leave behind bad practices in face-to-face instruction. One participant warned by offering this statement. ". . . when institutions: transform programs' courses to benefit the online format, they must also reflect on their course objectives and teaching styles. Various qualities that make

an effective online facilitator are also enormously influential in the traditional classroom.” Many of the faculty contributions to the discussion were reassuring and would suggest that genuinely empathetic and hope to make adjustments to support and meet the learning needs of their students. They observed how unprepared their institutions were at the onset of Covid-19 even though they recognized that learning continued in a less-than-ideal situation.

**Question 3.7:** *Many institutions work hard to improve student retention and graduation. Is your University one of those institutions? How has your institution approached issues to affect student graduation?*

The feedback received from the student focus groups provided a wealth of information about obstacles and potential strategies for removing these barriers. Excerpts following are representative of verbatim transcriptions captured word-to-word as a reproduction of the recorded data on participants responses:

**Response 1:** We have a newly developed First-Year Experience Program at our campus. In collaboration with Vice President for Students Services, our Provost successfully brought personnel from the two areas to create a blueprint for retaining and graduating students. What happened then soon was strengthening specific initiatives on campus and carefully looking to expand the number of programs that already existed. For example, the first year’s Orientation Course and the committee introduces activities designed by departments in collaboration with folks in the Student Affairs area. Some of the programs that were either submitted or were strengthened included the Orientation to incorporate support for new student retention and success. The programs generally allow new students to learn about college resources and engage in activities with peers and faculty – similar in many ways to the goals of learning communities.

**Response 2:** One of the things that my institution did was to give a critical look at the college’s website. This was a couple of Fall semesters ago. There was nothing like new text added to the site, and it was only a significant reorganization of the existing data. Beyond being an attractive site now, you’ll be surprised what a difference made in sharing information. The navigation has poor logic to it.

**Response 3:** At my institution, we got our the Financial aid office redesigned, and some walls were brought down to allow more space and a very inviting environment. Students are now given access to fill their applications and check their accounts. They also have many comfortable seats; charming and cozy areas.

**Response 4:** The only thing that comes to my mind, mostly because I was so involved in it, was the revision of various programs requirements. We’ve many students that enroll in developmental courses, depending on how the student tests out of a remedial course. That student may have to take a whole set of development course before they are let loose to take a development course without losing a number of the semester on development courses., co-requisites that allows the student to take both a remediate and say a mathematics course that earns credits toward a degree. It is, perhaps, a matter of a few years before they see themselves in courses towards the degree.

## SECONDARY DATA SOURCE

Secondary data is a rich source of information and can provide valuable knowledge and insight into a broad range of issues. Leighton University included secondary data, and analysis of existing data can answer important research questions. For this need assessment study, Leighton relied on Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The IPEDS database is freely accessible under the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) management. The IPEDS was considered credible and provided comprehensive information at the national level, including

Mississippi. The data is public and easy to access. The study's secondary databases focused on public and private 4-year colleges and universities and did not include junior/community colleges. Future studies, however, need to have community colleges and, perhaps, certain identified trade schools on the rationale that they often serve as feeders to senior colleges and universities. Four key areas were of interest: tuition levels, size of an institution's distance education program, enrollment in online programs/courses, retention rates, and graduation rates.

## ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN - MISSISSIPPI INSTITUTIONS

### Enrollment

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted education facets, including instruction and assessment during the 2020-2021 school year. The number of Asian/Native Hawaiian, Hispanic and multi-racial students increased statewide in Mississippi between 2018-19 and 2019-20 school years. A further review of data indicates that Black students decreased slightly, and the number of white students enrolled has reduced since the 2017-2018 academic year (See Table ).

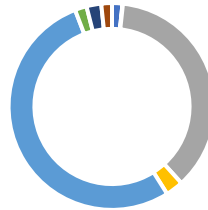
In general, women enroll in state universities at higher rates than men. Only two of Mississippi's eight public universities saw increased enrollment for fall 2020 as statewide enrollment numbers declined slightly from 2019 during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The annual number of students enrolled in postsecondary Mississippi institutions by Race/ethnicity Source: IPEDS

Year	Total	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian or Pacific Islander	Asian	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	Black or African American	Hispanic or Latino	White	Two or more races	Race/ethnicity unknown	Non-resident alien
2019-20	215,608	1,021	N/A	3,488	153	78,521	5,916	114,031	3,960	4,940	3,578
2018-19	216,502	1,025	N/A	2,883	151	80,225	5,584	115,487	3,777	3,659	3,711
2017-18	218,782	988	N/A	2,708	186	82,282	5,095	116,886	3,465	3,436	3,736
2016-17	222,560	924	N/A	2,581	144	84,763	4,874	117,968	3,591	3,657	4,058
2015-16	222,444	915	N/A	2,623	132	85,716	4,486	117,564	3,179	3,788	4,041

2019-2020 Mississippi University and College Student Enrollment by race/ethnicity

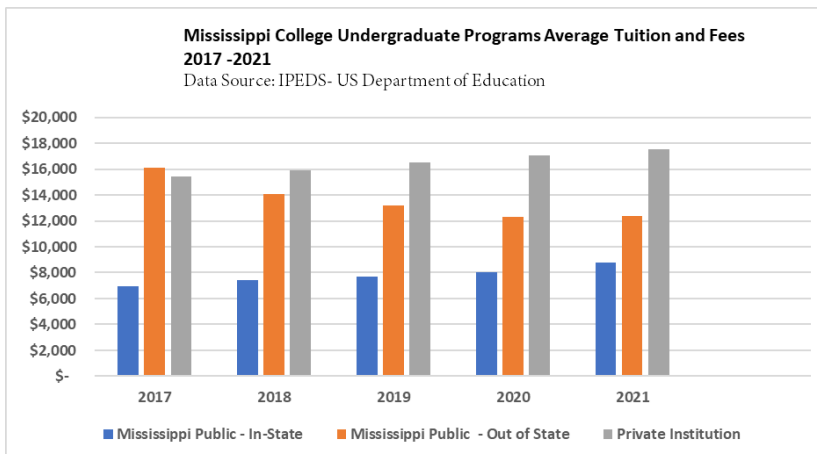
Source: IPED Report



- Asian
- Black or African American
- White
- Race/ethnicity unknown
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Hispanic or Latino
- Two or more races
- Nonresident alien

## Financial Cost

Universally, acquiring a college degree, be it an associate, baccalaureate, or higher, society has been viewed as an essential step toward career and personal success [6]. However, between forty and fifty percent of students enrolled at colleges and universities fail to complete a degree program [7] [8]. At least 50% of the weighting in the education rankings goes to higher education. A sub-ranking metric includes the shares of citizens in each state holding college degrees and the time it takes students to complete two-year college programs, the cost of in-state tuition and fees, and the burden of debt graduates carry. In 2018-2019, nearly 60 percent of full-time undergraduate students took out loans - an increase of 75 percent over the previous two decades - and these students borrow an average of (\$20,000) by Associate's degree completers and \$32,300 by those completing with bachelor's degree [9]



The cost of attendance in Mississippi's institutions is relatively lower than the national average. For the 2020-2021 academic year, the median Cost of Attendance (less room and board) for Mississippi HIEs ranges from 5,041 for in-state and \$12,417 for out-of-state undergraduates. Based on the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), public, four-

year universities' annual tuition and fees averaged \$9,349 in the 2019-20 academic year. During the same time frame, annual tuition and fees at private, non-profit, four-year institutions averaged \$32,769. The 2021 national average tuition & fees is \$6,540 for in-state students and \$17,871 for out-of-state students. For the most recent reported tuition and fees by the U.S.



Department of Education in the IPEDS reports, the State of Mississippi median cost is \$7,726 for in-state and \$13,198 for out-of-state. The amount is much lower than the national median cost pegged at \$9,580 for public in-state students and \$27,437 for out-of-state students [10]. It is noteworthy that Mississippi Valley State University is the cheapest school with tuition & fees of \$6,746. Alcorn State University (\$7,290) and Mississippi University for Women (\$7,525) are following it in the list of Mississippi Colleges with the Lowest Tuition and Fees.

## MISSISSIPPI INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION [IHE}

Among Mississippi higher education institutions, online instruction occurs in three modalities: Fully Online, Partially Online, and Hybrid. Partially Online classes represent the majority of online enrollments, compared to Partially Online and Hybrid enrollments. A significant variation in success rates among the online modalities is evident, but they have all improved. Before any online program can succeed, it must have students who can access the online learning environment. For economic or logistic reasons, lack of access will exclude interested and otherwise eligible students from the course. This is a significant problem in rural and lower socioeconomic neighborhoods. Internet access cause a high cost to users in some regions across the United States and other countries. Like surrounding states, Mississippi's institutions are the usual mix of large public institutions and community colleges, HBCUs, and private non-sectarian and religious schools.

In its use of secondary sources, it should be noted that Leighton's Need Assessment Study was particularly selective in the use of available data. Most of our information about each college comes from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and self-published details on the institution's websites.

### Mississippi Public Institutions

In the State of Mississippi, institutions of higher education (IHE) consist of the eight public universities (senior) under the statutory control of the Board of Trustees and 15 two-years community colleges (junior) under the statutory responsibility of the Mississippi Community College Board (MCCB). The eight institutions include Alcorn State University, Delta State University, Jackson State University, Mississippi State University, Mississippi State University, Mississippi University for Women, The University of Mississippi, and The Southern University of Mississippi. Collectively, these institutions serve approximately 77,000 students with an employee base of 29,000 individuals and offer more than 800-degree programs. An audit report discloses that these institutions awarded about 19,100 degrees in 2019 [11]. The Mississippi Board of Trustees of Mississippi's Institutions of Higher Learning governs all eight state's public four-year institutions.

This section of the Study presents summary profiles of State public institutions with special emphasis on admissions, retention, and the level of distance education exposure and opportunities to students and programs (undergraduate and graduate). Other key aspects also summarized in the Study include capacity aspects such as full-time faculty to student ratio, tuition costs and summary data on default rates for students. All these being important aspects for consideration in of an IHE.

## Key Profiles of Mississippi Public Institution

Institution	Undergraduate Tuition and Fees	Graduate Tuition & Fees	Acceptance Rate	Graduation Rate	Student/Faculty Ratio	Enrollment Size
Alcorn State University	7,290	7,290	37.7%	45%	5.2	3,230
Delta State University	8,121	8,121	99.6%	39%	20.5	2,999
Jackson Stae University	8,445	8,445	89.9%	44%	21.2	6,921
Mississippi State University	8,910	8,910	80.0%	64%	23.7	22,986
Mississippi University for Women	7,925	7,925	99.0%	46%	18.9	2,704
Mississippi Valley State University	6,746	7,364	82.7%	27%	19.4	2,032
University of Mississippi	8,828	8,828	88.0%	67%	11,2	21,014
University of Southern Mississippi	8,896	8,896	96.3%	50%	23.2	14,606

	Alcorn State University	Delta State University	Jackson State University	Mississippi State University	Mississippi University for Women	Mississippi Valley University	University of Mississippi	University of Southern Mississippi
Total Enrollment	3,220	2,999	6,921	22,986	2,704	2,032	21,014	14,606
Undergraduate Enrollment (N)	2,729	2,331	4,668	18,803	2,418	1,694	16,179	11,451
Graduate Enrollment (N)	501	668	2,253	4,183	286	338	4,835	3,155
Males	1,050	40.9%	34.4%	50.3%	20.1%	39.9%	42.0%	36.1%
Females	2,180	59.1%	65.6%	49.7%	79.9%	60.2%	58.0%	63.9%
Am. Indian or Alaskan Native	0%	0.2%	0.3%	0.6%	1.5%	.02%	0.3%	0.5%
Asian	0%	0.6%	0.2%	1.5%	2.5%	.03%	2.2%	1.4%
Black or African American	91%	29.6%	92.2%	17.4%	38.1%	94.8%	12.4%	28.8%
Hispanic/Latino	1%	3.0%	0.8%	3.4%	0.3%	1.9	4.0%	3.9%
Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Isl	0.	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1	0.1%	0.1%
White	2%	58.3%	3.2%	72.7%	56.3%	1.2	77.1%	60.5%
Two or more Races	2%	1.7%	1.3%	2.3%	0.0%	0.8	2.4%	3.4%
Race/ethnicity Unknown	0%	2.7%	0.0%	0.7%	-	0.0	0.3%	0.0%
Non-resident Alien	4%	3.8%	2.1%	1.2%	1.2%	0.7	1.5%	1.4%

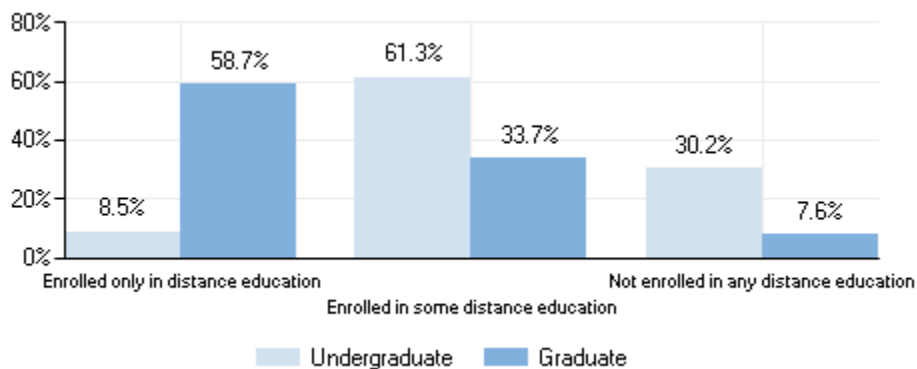
Demographic Profile of Public University – 2020-2021 Data Extracted from IPEDS Databases

## Alcorn State University

Alcorn State University, located in Alcorn State, MS, is one of the three historically black colleges and universities (HBCU) in Mississippi. The institution is classified as master's College and Universities (medium programs) by Carnegie Classification and services offering undergraduate and graduate-level programs. A review of the institution's website reveals the offering of 45 undergraduate degree programs and 14 at the graduate level. Further, of these programs, the distance learning opportunity is given to 1 major program at the undergraduate level, nine graduate master's level programs. The institution has 74% first to second-year retention (2019 fall cohort) and 33% for part-time students admitted and enrolled for fall 2020. Under the auspices of The Office of Online Education; a division of Academic Affairs. Of the 6,846 admission applicants for Fall 2020, 2,582 (37.7%) were admitted — the average standardized tests, including SAT scores of 885 and the average ACT score of 20. A published figure of 3,230 undergraduate students enrolled in Alcorn State University, where 2,729 students enrolled in undergraduate programs and 501 students for graduate programs. By gender, 1,050 male and 2,180 female students are attending the school, and it has much fewer students than similar colleges. Of these, 313 out of 485 graduate students have registered online exclusively.

The 2020 -2021 tuition & fees for Alcorn State for in-state students was \$7,290. 89% of the enrolled undergraduate students have received grants or scholarships, and the average aid amount is \$11,041. Alcorn State University is a public school, and however, the online program tuition is the same for all students. A total of 455 students out of 3,230 students enrolled online exclusively. Alcorn's 2019-2020 student-to-faculty ratio was 21.8 to 1. The most recent Alcorn State University's graduation rate of full-time, first-time, degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates within 150% of standard time to program completion, 2014 was observed at 45% for the institution. When broken down by gender, the graduation rate was 40% for men and 48% for women.

The bar chart below presents AY 2019-2020 data of proportion, in percentages of students, who enrolled in distance education programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels. It displays the proportions that pursued some distance education and the institution's enrollment at both levels who did not enroll in any program or course serviced through distance education.

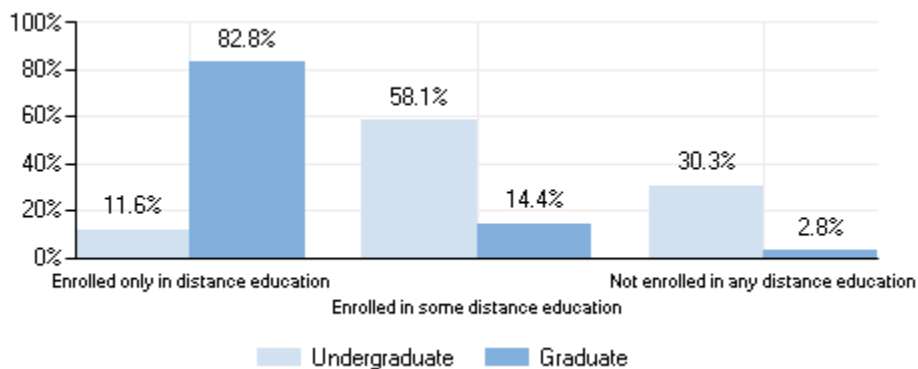


## Delta State University

Delta State University (Delta State), one of the eight senior public institutions located in Cleveland, MS. Delta State is classified as a master's College and University (more extensive programs) by Carnegie Classification. Its highest offering level is Doctor's degree-research/scholarship and professional practice. The 2021 tuition & fees of Delta State is \$8,121 for Mississippi resident undergraduate students and \$8,121 for out-of-state undergraduate students. 64% of the enrolled undergraduate students have received grants or scholarships, and the average aid amount is \$6,946. The estimated 2022 tuition & fees are \$8,597 for Mississippi residents and \$8,597 for out-of-state students based on the tuition changes over the past five years. The estimated 2022 graduate school tuition & fees are \$8,597 for Mississippi residents and \$8,597 for out-of-state students. For the fall 2019 cohort, the first to second-year retention rates of first-time bachelor's degree-seeking undergraduates was 64% for full-time students and 30% for part-timers.

DSU is a respected and accredited public state university that offers more than 19 online programs, including one online nursing program, the undergraduate and the remaining being graduate degree programs and certificates. It should also be noted that Delta State provides comprehensive undergraduate and graduates programs to a headcount of approximately 2,999 students representing many states and 50 different countries. The student-to-faculty ratio of roughly 20.5 to 1.

The institution has one undergraduate program (nursing) that is entirely online, with an 11.6% of the institution's enrollment pursued in Fall 2020. It has 14 graduate-level programs, where 1 is a doctoral level, and 2 are specialist programs in education. In addition, DSU has three nursing certificate programs (post-master's) and one geospatial certification certificated (post-baccalaureate). During the academic year 2019-2020, Delta State University appears to have close to 83% of its graduate programs serviced online 14.4% of its students were serviced in the traditional face-to-face. The bar chart below captures the percentage distribution of online enrollment of the institution's students. Specifically, the chart provides aggregated proportions, in percentages, of students who enrolled in entirely distance education programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The chart further displays the proportions that pursued some distance education and the institution's enrollment at both levels who did not enroll in any program or course serviced through distance education.



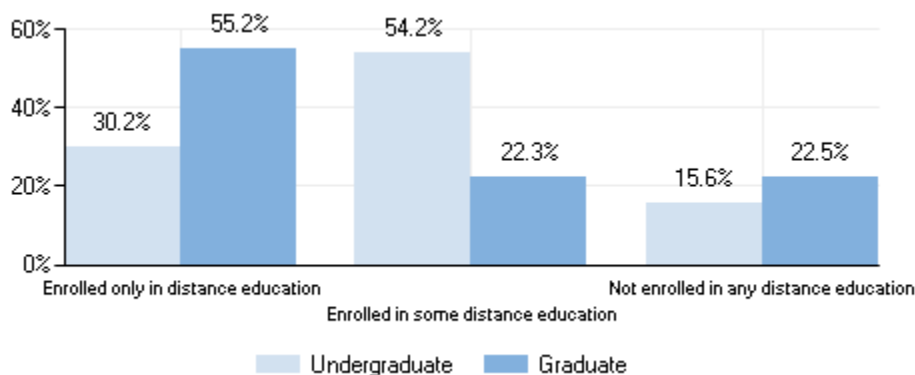
the institution. When broken down by gender, the graduation rate was 30% for men and 46% for women.

## Jackson State University

Jackson State University is a Public, four (4) or more years institution located in Jackson, MS. It is a historically black school. The Carnegie Classification identifies Jackson State as Research University (high research activity). Its most elevated level of offering is doctor's degree-research/scholarship. The cost of attendance for 2021 at the institution is \$8,445 for Mississippi residents and \$9,445 for out-of-state students. 74% of the enrolled undergraduate students have received grants or scholarships, and the average aid amount is \$7,925. The University had an enrollment of 6,921 in Fall 2020 and operated on a student-to-full-time faculty ratio of 23.7 to 1. For the fall 2019 cohort, first-time bachelor's degree-seeking undergraduates' first to second-year retention rates were 74% for full-time students and 42% for part-timers.

The institution has five (5) distance education programs at the undergraduate, 11 at master's level, and three (3) specialist programs in education with concentrations: counseling, special education, and psychometrics. 34.2% of its undergraduate students and 55.2% of its graduate students are enrolled entirely online. The graduation rate of first-time, full-time, degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates within 150% of standard time to program completion of the 2014 cohort was reported to the IPEDS as 44%. When separated by gender was 37% for males and 49%. Jackson State University is fully accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges.

During the academic year 2019-2020, Jackson State University enrolled many students, particularly for its graduate-level programs, a significant number of courses, and programs through distance education. The bar chart below captures the percentage distribution of online enrollment of the institution's students. Specifically, the chart provides aggregated proportions, in percentages, of students who enrolled in entirely distance education programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The chart further displays the proportions that pursued some distance education and the institution's enrollment at both levels who did not enroll in any program or course serviced through distance education.



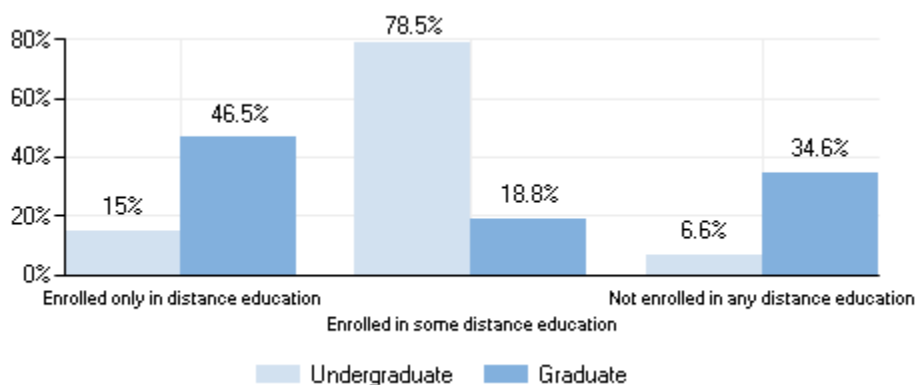
## Mississippi State University

Mississippi State University is a public, four (4) or more years school located in Starkville, MS. This Mississippi State is classified as Research University (high research activity) by Carnegie Classification. Its most elevated offering level is doctor's degree-research/scholarship and professional practice. Mississippi State University has a reported total enrollment of 24,449, and the student-to-faculty ratio of approximately is 23 to 1.

The University's cost of attendance in 2020-2021 is \$8,910 for Mississippi residents and \$23,950 for out-of-state students, including tuition and fees. In the last IPEDS reported data, 86% of the enrolled undergraduate students received grants or scholarships for AY 2019-2020, and the average aid amount is \$10 301.

For the fall 2019 cohort, first-time bachelor's degree-seeking undergraduates' first to second-year retention rates were 85% for full-time students and 67% for part-timers. Graduation rates of full-time, first-time, degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates within 150% of standard time to program completion of the 2014 cohort were reported to the IPEDS as 67%. When separated by gender was 63% for males and 69%. Mississippi State University has its regional accreditation through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges.

The bar chart below presents AY 2019-2020 data of proportion, in percentages of students, who enrolled entirely in distance education programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels. It displays the proportions that pursued some distance education and the institution's enrollment at both levels who did not enroll in any program or course serviced through distance education.



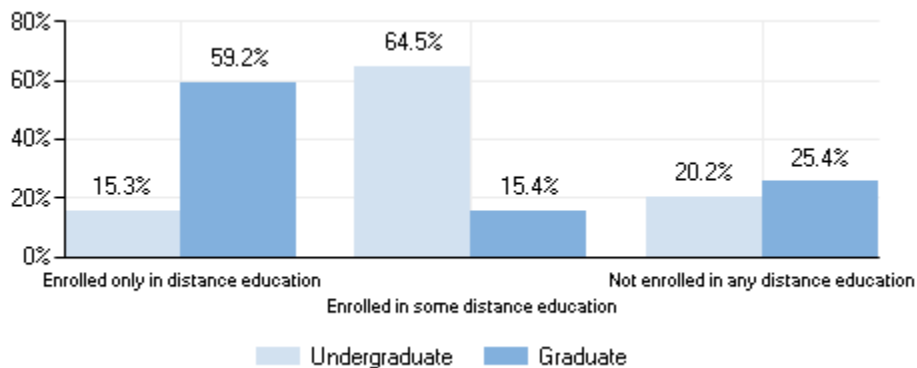
## Mississippi Valley State University

Mississippi Valley State University is a Public, four (4) or more years institution located in Itta Bena, MS. It is a historically black school. It is classified as a master's College and University (smaller programs) by Carnegie Classification. Its highest level of offering is a master's degree. The 2021 tuition & fees of Mississippi Valley State University is \$6,746 for Mississippi residents and \$6,746 for out-of-state students. 89% of the enrolled undergraduate students have received grants or scholarships, and the average aid amount is \$7,578.

The University has a total enrollment of 2,285, and the student to faculty ratio is 13 to 1 (7.69%). Mississippi Valley State University offers 39 major programs for degree-granting/certificate programs. In its IPEDS report, the institution reports first to second-year retention rates of first-time bachelor's degree-seeking undergraduates: 2019 fall cohort at 64% for full-time students and 13% for part-timers.

The distance/online education opportunity is given to 2 significant programs – a master's degree program in Criminal Justice and a Master of Business Administration (M.B.A.) program. In 2019, a cumulative total of 75 students had completed their degree/certificate program through distance learning. While the institution has a tiny number of degree programs offered fully through distance education, based on the institution's IPEDS data, many of its undergraduate students enroll in some distance education courses. Graduation rates of full-time, first-time, degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates within 150% of standard time to program completion of the 2014 cohort were reported to the IPEDS as 27%, and when separated by gender was 24% for males and 31%. The University accreditation is granted by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges.

At Mississippi Valley State University in AY 2019-2020, 84% of its graduate students enrolled in distance education classes. Of these, 59.2% were enrolled solely in distance education programs. In addition, the institution reported in its IPEDS report for Fall 2021 that it had 15.3 percent of its total undergraduate students enrolled solely in distance learning education. The bar chart below captures the percentage distribution of online enrollment of the institution's students. Specifically, the chart provides aggregated proportions, in percentages, of students who enrolled in entirely distance education programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The chart further displays the proportions that pursued some distance education and the institution's enrollment at both levels who did not enroll in any program or course serviced through distance education.



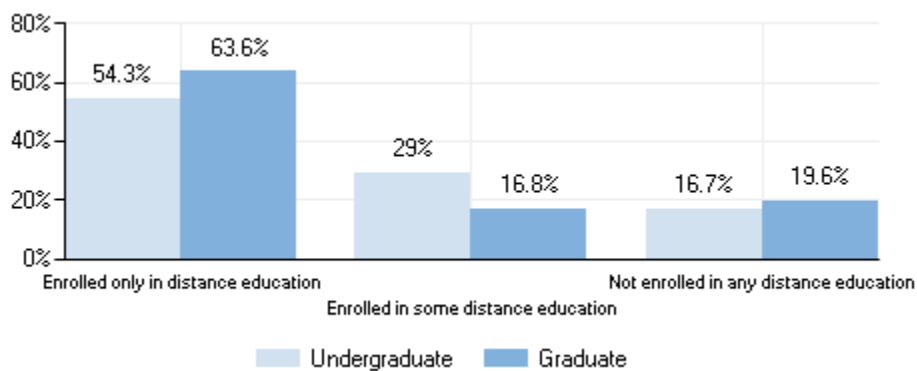
## Mississippi University for Women

Mississippi University for Women (MUW) is a public, four-year school located in Columbus, MS. The Institution is classified as master's College and University (smaller programs) by Carnegie Classification. Its highest level of offering is doctor's degree-professional practice. The MUW has a total enrollment of 2,704, and the student-to-faculty ratio is 13 to 1 (7.69%). Mississippi

University for Women offers 45 major programs for degree-granting/certificate programs. The distance learning opportunity (online degrees/courses) is given to 9 significant programs - 4 Bachelors' and 5 Masters. A total of 813 students out of 2,704 students had enrolled online exclusively. The university offers online graduate programs, and 63.4% of 286 graduate students enrolled online exclusively in Fall 2020. In 2020-2019, a reported total of 583 students completed their degree/certificate program through distance learning. The University had relatively high retention (79%) for its Fall 2019 cohort of full-time first to second-year retention rates of first-time bachelor's degree-seeking undergraduates. The cohort's part-timers were recorded at 40%

The Fall 2021 tuition and fees for Mississippi University for Women is \$7,525 for Mississippi residents and \$7,525 for out-of-state students. Also, graduate school tuition and fees are \$7,525 for Mississippi residents and \$7,525 for out-of-state students. 89% of the enrolled undergraduate students have received grants or scholarships, and the average aid amount is \$7,284. The graduation rate of first-time, full-time, degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates within 150% of standard time to program completion of the 2014 cohort was reported to the IPEDS as 46%. When separated by gender, the distribution is 36% for males and 48%. Mississippi University for Women is fully accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges.

During the academic year 2019-2020, Mississippi University for Women enrolled many students, particularly for its graduate-level programs, a significant number of courses, and programs through distance education. The bar chart below captures the percentage distribution of online enrollment of the institution's students. Specifically, the chart provides aggregated proportions, in percentages, of students who enrolled in entirely distance education programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The chart further displays the proportions that pursued some distance education and the institution's enrollment at both levels who did not enroll in any program or course serviced through distance education.



## University of Mississippi

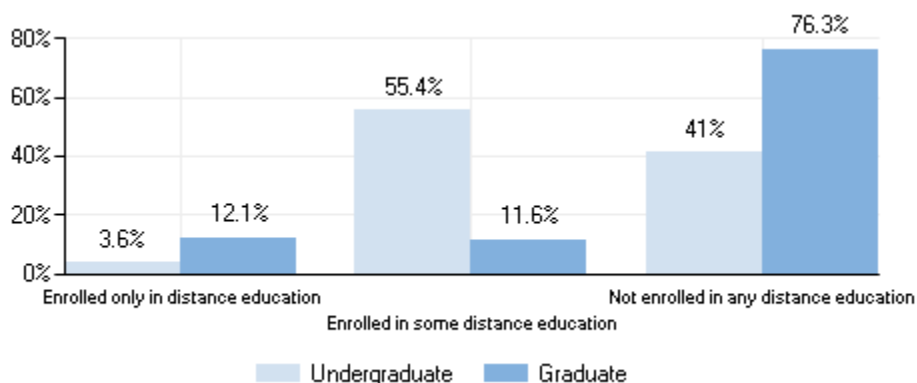
Commonly known as Ole Miss, The University of Mississippi is a public research university adjacent to Oxford, Mississippi. Including its medical center in Jackson, the University of Mississippi is its second-largest university by enrollment (21,014 in Fall 2020) and is Mississippi's flagship. The university's cost of attendance in 2021, which includes tuition & fees, is \$8,828 for Mississippi



residents and \$25,100 for out-of-state students. The University of Mississippi offers 178 major programs for degree-granting/certificate programs. The distance learning opportunity (online degrees/courses) is given to 18 major programs - 3 Bachelors (3.6% of the institutions undergraduate programs enrollment), 9 Masters, 4 Doctorate, and 2 Post-graduate Certificate; these graduate programs account for 12.1% of the graduate student enrollment. As a significant institution in Mississippi, the institution has less than 4% undergraduate and 12% graduate students enrolled entirely in distance education.

For the fall 2019 cohort, first-time bachelor's degree-seeking undergraduates' first to second-year retention rates were 86% for full-time students and 25% for part-timers. Graduation rates of full-time, first-time, degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates within 150% of standard time to program completion of the 2014 cohort were reported to the IPEDS as 67%. When separated by gender was 63% for males and 69%. The University of Mississippi has accreditations through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges.

The bar chart below presents AY 2019-2020 data of proportion, in percentages of students, who enrolled in distance education programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels. It displays proportions that pursued some distance education and the institution's enrollment at both levels who did not enroll in any program or course serviced through distance education.



## The University of Southern Mississippi

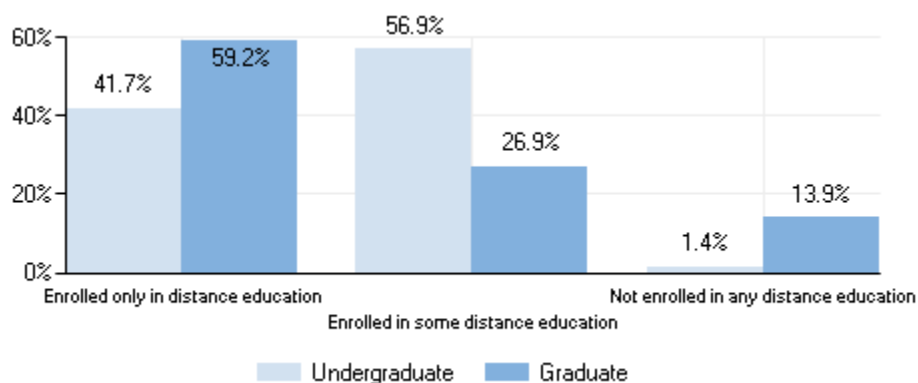
A public institution with oversight from the Mississippi Board of High Education, the University of Southern Mississippi, is a four-year institution located in Hattiesburg, classified as Research University by Carnegie Classification. The institution's highest level of offering is a doctorate. The Institution currently has 69 approved degree-granting/certificate programs that service 11,451 undergraduates and 3,155 graduate students. The distance learning opportunity (online degrees/courses) is given to 60 major programs, which 1 Certificate, 22 Bachelors, 21 Masters, 8 Doctorate, and 8 Post-graduate Certificate.

A total of 2,539 students out of 14,606 students had enrolled online exclusively. Last year, a total of 1,660 students had completed their degree/certificate program through distance learning. The 2021 tuition & fees charges for attendance are \$8,896 for in-state undergraduate and graduate students and \$10,896 for out-of-state students of both levels. Approximately 77% of the enrolled undergraduate students received grants or scholarships, and the average aid amount is roughly \$7,458. The University has only a tiny percentage of students who have never enrolled in distance

education – less than 2% at the undergraduate levels and approximately 14% at the graduate level.

USM’s first to second-year retention rates of first-time bachelor’s degree-seeking undergraduates recorded 71 for the full-time 2019 fall cohort and 41 for the part-timers. The graduation rate of first-time, full-time, degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates within 150% of standard time to program completion of the 2014 cohort was reported to the IPEDS as 50%. When separated by gender was 43% for males and 53%. The University of Southern Mississippi has its accreditation granted through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges.

During the academic year 2019-2020, the University of Southern Mississippi enrolled many students, particularly for its graduate-level programs, a significant number of courses, and programs through distance education. The bar chart below captures the percentage distribution of online enrollment of the institution’s students. Specifically, the chart provides aggregated proportions, in percentages, of students who enrolled in entirely distance education programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The chart further displays the proportions that pursued some distance education and the institution’s enrollment at both levels who did not enroll in any program or course serviced through distance education.



## Mississippi Private NonProfit Institutions

The State of Mississippi has nine (8) 4-years private non-profit colleges/universities under the Mississippi Commission for College Accreditation (MCCA) supervision. Like similar institutions across the United States, Mississippi’s private colleges and universities tend to be smaller and more expensive than a public institution. In general, private non-profit institutions often pride themselves on their academic rigor. More often than not, private institutions are funded primarily through student tuition fees. As their student enrollment is usually low, private institutions admirably often have low staff-to-student ratios, translating to enhance student experiences and learning.

Public and not-for-profit colleges are often featured prominently in higher education policy debates, usually for different reasons. The ever-rising price tag at colleges has drawn national/public concerns about access to higher education. Similarly, public institutions have not

been spared as states have also cut back on taxpayer support to these institutions. Among Mississippi private non-profit institutions, Millsaps College ranks at the top on expensive tuition & fees of \$41,314. Southern Baptist College is at the lower end of the financial band for 4-years colleges and institutions, with the lowest tuition & fees of \$6,275.

In recent years, a noticeable decline in the percent of students in for-profit institutions has emerged. In contrast, the overall number of online students has continued to grow as a subset of the students retained. The number of online students in not-for-profit institutions has risen every year for the past few years - and the most recent figures indicate that more than a quarter of all college students are taking an online class. This hasty expansion in distance learning has prompted schools to increase online courses and topics, obtaining an online degree.

The Distance Education Enrollment Report 2017, conducted by the new Digital Learning Compass organization, reveals the proportion of college students who took at least one distance education course in 2015 now tops six million. Its report relied on data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS.) Digital Learning Compass observed that the number of students taking at least one distance course reveals a steep rise over time throughout fourteen annual reports. In Mississippi, the average undergraduate tuition & fees for Online Schools (searched) for 2020-2021 is \$5,164 for in-state and \$9,087 for out-of-state. A breakdown by Institution is included in the Profile charts below.

### Key Profiles of Mississippi Private Institution

Institution	Undergraduate Tuition and Fees	Graduate Tuition & Fees	Acceptance Rate	Graduation Rate	Student/Faculty Ratio	Enrollment Size
Belhaven University	27,025	27,025	49.0%	47%	66.7	4,999
Blue Mountain College	15,800	15,800	99.0%	51%	17:1	952
Millsap College	41,314	41,00	69.8%	68%	9.4	712
Mississippi College	19,308	19,308	28.7%	53%	23.3	4,667
Rust College	9,900	-	28.7%	28%	14	623
Southern Baptist College	6,275	-	56.0%	12%	-	82
Tougaloo College	10,861	10,611	71.0%	50%	11:01	736
William Carey University	13,650	13,611	55.2%	53%	12.4	5,472

	Belhaven University	Blue Mountain College	Millsap College	Mississippi College	Rust College	Southeastern Baptist College	Tougaloo College	William Carey University
Total Enrollment	4,999	979	712	4,667	623	62	775	5,472
Undergraduate Enrollment (N)	2,025	952	669	2,757	623	62	762	3,233
Graduate Enrollment (N)	2,974	27	43	1,910	-	0	13	2,239
Males	35.6%	43.4%	44.7%	40.0%	36.9%	72.6%	32.4%	32.6%
Females	64.4%	56.7%	55.3%	60.0%	63.1%	27.4%	67.6%	67.4%
Am. Indian or Alaskan Native	0.6%	0.4%	0.6%	0.4%	0.2%	8.1%	0.7%	0.3%
Asian	9.0%	7.0%	2.8%	2.3%	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	2.1%
Black or African American	38.2%	13.5%	24.5%	16.4%	94.5%	58.1%	95.9%	25.5%
Hispanic/Latino	4.1%	4.5%	5.2%	3.9%	0.8%	3.2%	0.5%	3.0%
Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Isl	0.1%	1.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.6%	0.0%	0.0%
White	38.0%	74.9%	61.1%	72.5%	0.6%	24.2%	0.4%	64.2%
Two or more Races	2.3%	2.6%	61.1%	1.5%	0.0%	3.2%	1.2%	0.0%
Race/ethnicity Unknown	6.9%	1.7%	61.1%	0.2%	2.7%	0.0%	0.3%	1.4%
Non-resident Alien	0.8%	1.5%	61.1%	2.8%	1.0%	1.6%	1.1%	3.6%

Undergraduate Profile of Private Colleges and University – Fall 2019 Data Extracted from IPEDS Databases

	Belhaven University	Blue Mountain College	Millsap College	Mississippi College	Rust College	Southeastern Baptist College	Tougaloo College	William Carey University
Enrollment	4,999	979	712	4,667	623	62	775	5,472
Default Rate	158	149	8	108	61	N/A	45	97
Default %	7.0%	7.3%	4.2%	7.3%	16.3%	N/A	13%	6.9%

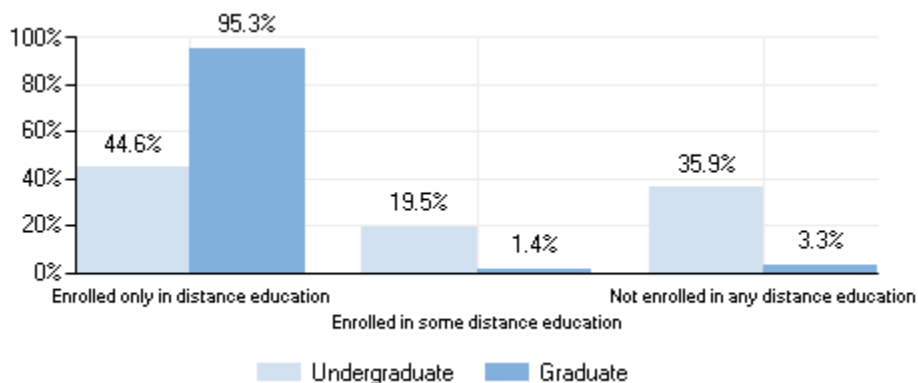
Table: Cohort 2018 Financial Aid Default Rates for Mississippi Private Non-profit Institutions – Fall 2020 Data Extracted from IPEDS Databases.

## Belhaven University

Founded in 1883, Belhaven University is a private not-for-profit, 4-year plus institution based in Jackson, Mississippi, that has a total enrollment of 4,999 and includes an undergraduate enrollment of 2,025 and a 2,974 for the graduate programs. The ratio of the student to full-time faculty (reported in IPEDS as 75) is 66.6 to 1. Its tuition and fees are \$27,025 per year. Belhaven offers two doctoral programs (one in business administration and the other in education Leadership), one specialist program (a post-master's degree in education leadership), ten online bachelor's degrees, an associate of arts degree (targets general education program), and several certification programs. According to IPEDS data, Belhaven has successfully graduated 287 students who, over time, have obtained their bachelor's degrees online.

For the fall 2019 cohort, the first to second-year, first-time bachelor's degree-seeking undergraduates were 64% for full-time students and 30% for part-timers across its programs. The graduation rate of first-time, full-time, degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates within 150% of standard time to program completion of the 2014 cohort was reported to the IPEDS as 47%. When separated by gender was 37% for males and 56%. Belhaven University is fully accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges.

The bar chart below presents AY 2019-2020 data of proportion, in percentages of students, who enrolled only in distance education programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels. It displays the proportions that pursued some distance education and the institution's enrollment at both levels who did not enroll in any program or course serviced through distance education.



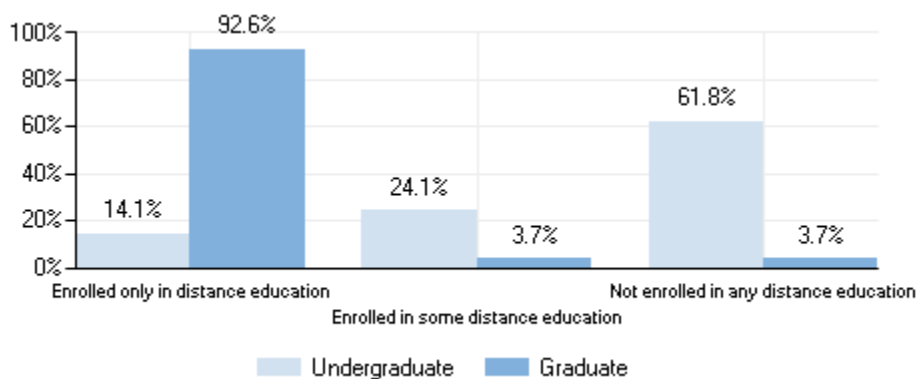
## Blue Mountain College

Blue Mountain College, founded in 1973, describes itself as "a Christian liberal arts institution supported by the Mississippi Baptist Convention." A review of its website further describes the small college of 952 students at an institution that is deeply committed to the education of its students who have presented a desire to pursue knowledge through a Christian worldview in a caring, person-centered environment. The tuition and fees at the institution are \$15,800 per year for the undergraduates and \$15,800 for graduate programs enrolled students. In its most recent IPEDS report, Blue Mountain College had eight students enrolled in its graduate programs

Blue Mountain College admissions are selective, with an acceptance rate of 99%. Half the applicants admitted to Blue Mountain College have an SAT score between 880 and 1180 or an ACT score range between 18 and 23. However, one-quarter of admitted applicants achieved scores above these ranges, and one-quarter scored below these ranges. Blue Mountain College has a rolling admissions application process without deadlines.

In its most recent IPEDS submission, the institution reported a first to the second-year recorded retention rate of 70% for its first-time bachelor's students and 49% within the 150% duration for the cohort of 2012. The institution raised the graduation rates to 51% for the 2014 cohort. As an established co-ed institution accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), its student body varies in age and background.

During the academic year 2019-2020, Blue Mountain College enrolled many students, particularly for its graduate-level programs, a significant number of courses, and programs through distance education. The bar chart below captures the percentage distribution of online enrollment of the institution's students. Specifically, the chart provides aggregated proportions, in percentages, of students who enrolled in entirely distance education programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The chart further displays the proportions that pursued some distance education and the institution's enrollment at both levels who did not enroll in any program or course serviced through distance education.

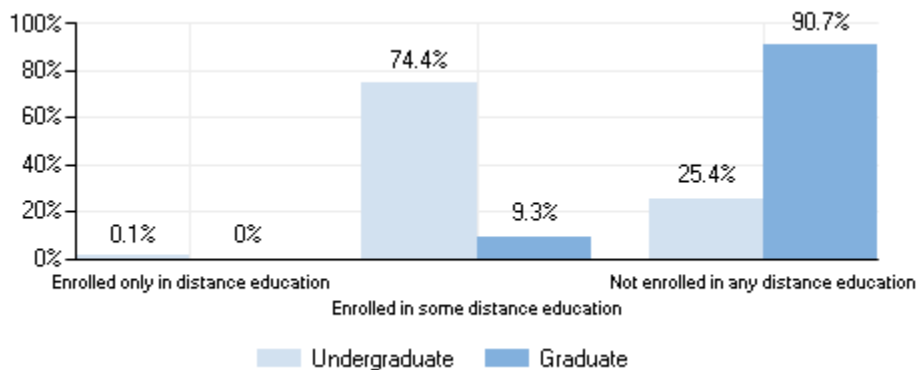


## Millsaps College

Millsaps College, a denominationally aligned institution that builds its mission and vision on this motto *Ad Excellentiam*, whose emphasis is exploring social justice, freedom of thought, and reflection on life's most important questions, has tuition & fees cost of \$41,314. Millsaps College offers 39-degree programs through bachelor's, master's programs, and none of its programs can be pursued to distance learning. The College reported 712 students, where 669 are enrolled as undergraduate students, and the remaining 30 are graduate students. Ninety-eight percent of the undergraduate students were 24 years old or younger, and 49% of its graduate students fall within that range. While 74.4% of its undergraduate student enrolled in some distance education learning, less than five undergraduate students were enrolled in a distance education degree program.

It could then be surmised that Millsaps College services mostly the traditional age population where 70% of its first time first-year cohort of 2012 graduated within the 150% time frame. The college is active membership accredited through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges (SACS).

The bar chart below presents AY 2019-2020 data of proportion, in percentages of students, who enrolled in distance education programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels. It displays the proportions that pursued some distance education and the institution's enrollment at both levels who did not enroll in any program or course serviced through distance education.

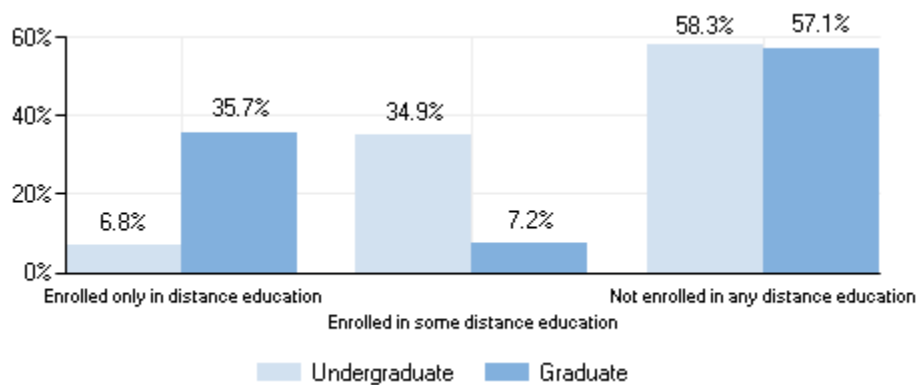


## Mississippi College

Mississippi College, located in Clinton, is the state's oldest institution of higher learning. It was established in 1826. the Institution is a private co-educational Christian College affiliated with the Mississippi Baptist Convention. Mississippi College had a total student enrollment of 4,667 in Fall 2020 and a student/faculty (full-time) ratio of 23.3 to 1. Mississippi College provides 144 major programs for degree-granting/certificate programs. The Institution offers (see table below) more than 80 undergraduate majors, over 50 graduate areas of study, two doctoral programs, a law school, and the physician Assistant program. Mississippi College has a Carnegie Classification as a master's College and University (more extensive programs). The highest degree level offered a Doctor's degree-research/scholarship and professional practice. The distance learning opportunity (online degrees/courses) is given to 40 major programs - 7 Bachelors, 23 Masters, 1 Doctorate, and 9 Post-graduate Certificate. Last year, a total of 636 students had completed their degree/certificate program through distance learning. The institution's first to second-year retention rates of first-time full-time bachelor's degree-seeking undergraduates for the 2019 fall cohort was 80%.

The 2021 tuition & fees of Mississippi College is \$19,308. 90% of the enrolled undergraduate students have received grants or scholarships, and the average aid amount is \$12,400. Mississippi College is an accredited institution with an active membership with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges (SACS). During the AY2019-2020, Mississippi College enrolled many students, particularly for its graduate-level programs, a significant number of courses, and programs through distance education. The bar chart below captures the percentage distribution of online enrollment of the institution's students. Specifically, the chart

provides aggregated proportions, in percentages, of students who enrolled in entirely distance education programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The chart further displays the proportions that pursued some distance education and the College’s enrollment at both levels who did not enroll in any program or course serviced through distance education.



## Rust College

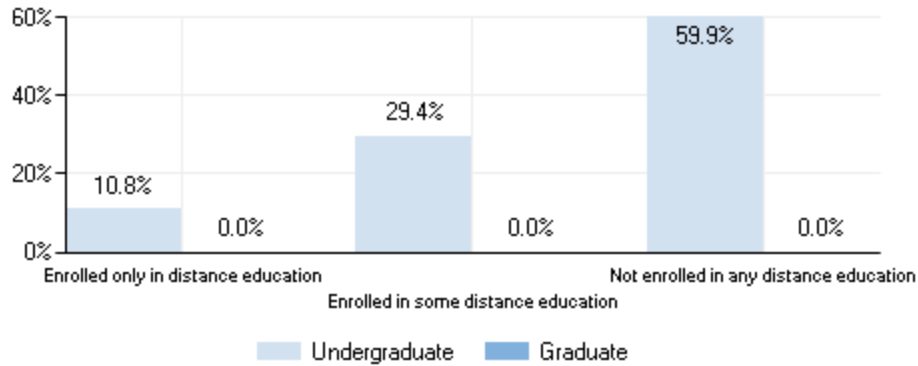
Rust College reports itself as a historically Black (HBCU), “co-educational, a senior liberal arts college founded in 1866 by the Freedmen’s Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church.” The College is located in Holly Springs in the northwestern part of Mississippi, situated approximately 40 miles southeast of Memphis, Tennessee. The application deadline is rolling yields a freshman retention rate of 65%. Rust College admissions actions are less selective, with an acceptance rate of 50%. For the fall 2019 cohort, first-time bachelor's degree-seeking undergraduates' first to second-year retention rates were 56% for full-time students and 24% for part-timers. In Fall 2020, Rust College had 623 students composed of 230 men and 393 women. A review of the IPEDS database indicates that 138 (56 men and 82 women) were transfer-ins. A majority of the total enrollment (565 students) is displayed as part-time, with only 58 enrolled as full-time students. For the transfer-in category, 124 were part-timers. Rust College had a small percentage (12%) of non-traditional students enrolled in Fall 2020.

Rust College does not have graduate programs, and however, it offers a small number of online courses in selected areas. For example, in the Fall 2021 semester, the institution's course schedule reveals the offering of 61 sections of online classes. The Institution’s graduation rate of full-time, first-time, degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates within 150% of standard time to program completion of the 2014 cohort was reported to the IPEDS as 20%. When separated by gender, it was 21% for males 19%.

The Rust does not offer any distance education programs or classes.

Rust College is fully accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges.



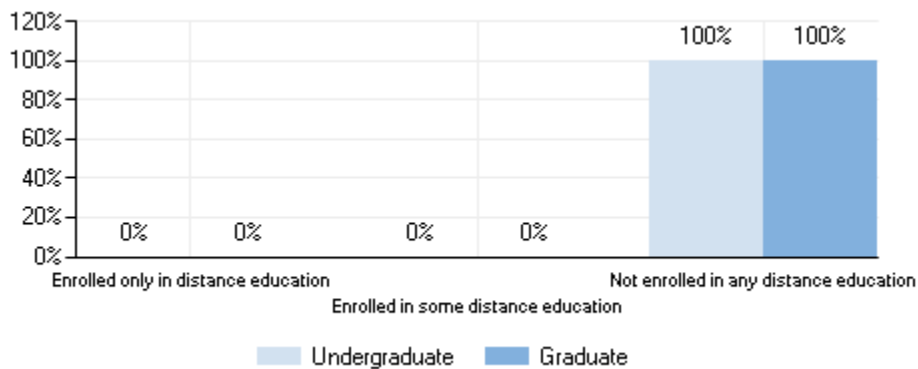


## Tougaloo College

Tougaloo College is a private HBCU that was founded in 1869. It has an enrollment total of 775 that breaks down to an undergraduate enrollment of 762. The remainder is a handful of graduate students. All are serviced at the institution’s location in a suburb of the City of Jackson, MS. The College utilizes a semester-based academic structure, and its tuition and fees are \$10,861. Tougaloo College admissions, whose deadline is July 1, is less selective, with an acceptance rate of 71%. The institution, however, had a first to the second-year retention rate of first-time bachelor’s degree-seeking undergraduates: the 2019 fall cohort reported as 70% for full-time students and 0% retention for the part-timers.

Tougaloo College is a member of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). The institution neither does offer any courses nor programs on distance education format. A 100% of its undergraduate and another 100% of its graduate programs’ courses are neither non-distance learning nor have they been engaged in individual classes online. The most recent Tougaloo’s Graduation rates of full-time, first-time, degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates within 150% of normal time to program completion, 2014 was observed at 41% for the institution. When broken down by gender, the graduation rate was 34% for men and 44% for women.

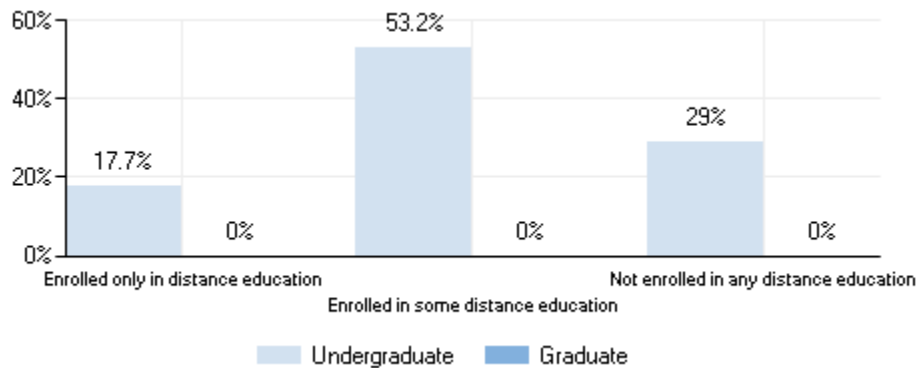
Touglou is the only private 4-year college in the state that neither has programs nor course services online. The chart below displays that the college offers courses utilizing the face-to-face approach.



## Southeastern Baptist College

Among the Mississippi's private, not-for-profit colleges and universities in the State of Mississippi, Southeastern Baptist College has the lowest tuition & fees of \$6,275. The institution has a close to 100% admissions rate. The institution had a small total unduplicated headcount of 62. The institutions' self-reported data for the IPEDS identifies only full-time faculty. Nonetheless, the institution had 23 part-time faculty, and the self-reported data show a count of 0 for full-time faculty. Most of the students pursue the program in the pastoral field. The institution operates an extended Credit program that provides a head-start for high school juniors and seniors who want to jump into the college experience before high school completion. The University services some online courses serviced slightly more than 30 students at the undergraduate level. Graduation rates of full-time, first-time, degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates (2014 cohort) for Southeastern Baptist College recorded at 12% graduating within the 150% of standard time to program completion.

The institution's AY 2019-2020 enrollment patterns in distance education are displayed in the bar chart below. The bar chart captures the percentage distribution of online enrollment of the institution's students. Specifically, the chart provides aggregated proportions, in percentages, of students who enrolled in distance education programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The chart further displays the proportions that pursued some distance education and the College's enrollment at both levels who did not enroll in any program or course serviced through distance education.



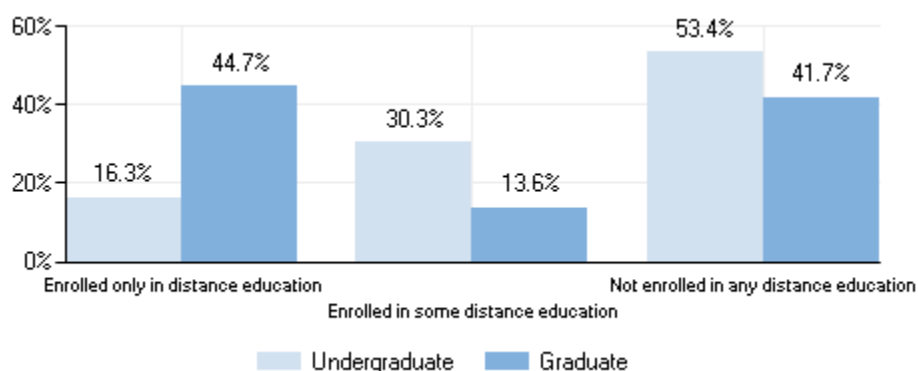
## William Currey University

WCU is a private nonprofit, Christian liberal arts institution whose main campus is in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. In 2020, William Carey University enrolled 5,472 students, where 1,055 were males and 2,178 were females. The institution's tuition and fees rate for undergraduates is \$13,650 and \$10,400 for the 2020-2021 academic year. 59% of its students receive some form of financial aid. Of these students, 39% are also recipients of the Federal Pell grants.

William Carey specializes in multiple concentrations in the education field, with programs in physical education, music education, educational leadership, and instructional leadership. In some cases, a student can earn both undergraduate and graduate degrees online based on their goals

and the accessibility of programs. The education, natural and behavioral science, nursing, music, and ministry studies offer 100 percent online degrees. Hybrid options are also available in the schools of education and nursing. In its 2020 IPEDS report, WCU reported servicing 16.3% of its 3,233 undergraduate students pursuing their programs entirely online, and 44.% of its 2,239 of its graduate students were reported for Fall 2020 as wholly enrolled in distance education. It is also observed that 53.4 percent of undergraduate and 41.7% of its graduate students did not enroll in any distance education course during the Fall 2020 semester. The institution, however, had first to second-year retention rates of first-time bachelor's degree-seeking undergraduates: the 2019 fall cohort reported as 89% for full-time students and 100% for part-timers.

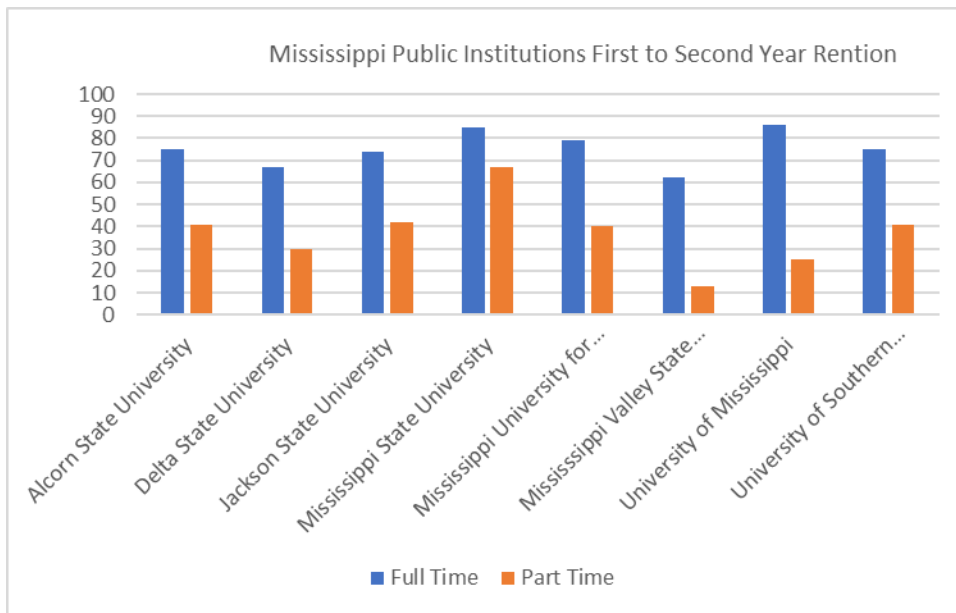
The bar chart below presents AY 2019-2020 data of proportion, in percentages of students, who enrolled in entirely distance education programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels. It displays the proportions that pursued some distance education and the institution's enrollment at both levels who did not enroll in any program or course serviced through distance education.



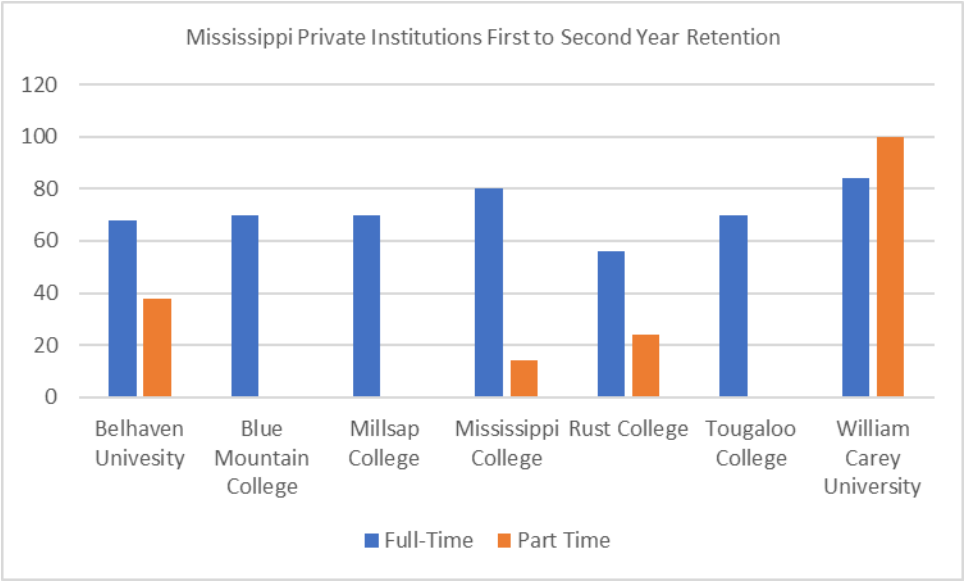
## OTHER ESSENTIAL AND INFORMING IHE METRICS

A first-year cohort has often been defined as all full-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students entering a college or university during the fall session. Mississippi public institutions, like all institutions, use the first-year cohort student count as the basis for calculating persistence and graduation rates mandated for reporting to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) through the IPEDS process. This Study observed disparities among institutions on their First-year persistence and retention rates. While not reported in this study breakdown in terms of students demographics (age, gender, race, and others), review data pointed to considerable differences by the age at which students enter college. However, we summarized our data based on student enrollment (full-time/part-time). For the fall 2019 cohort, students enrolled as full-time had the highest persistence and retention rates, respectively, and part-time students' rates were slightly above 37% for institutions under state control and at 44% for private institutions. For students full-time enrolled, our analysis from IPEDS' raw data produces 75.4% retention for state-controlled institutions and 71.1 for privates for the 2019 cohort. We ran an additional examination that included all 4-year colleges, generating the mean value. Our data indicate that 73.4% of first-time freshmen in Fall 2019 returned to either a Mississippi college or a university for their second year. This is an exact 2% decrease from the 2018 cohort 75.4% generated from the report we generated for the 2018 cohort through the National Center for Higher Education Management System.

	Alcorn State University	Delta State University	Jackson State University	Mississippi State University	Mississippi University for women	University of Mississippi	University of Southern Mississippi	Average
Full Time	75	67	74	85	79	86	75	75.4
Part Time	41	30	42	67	40	25	41	37.4

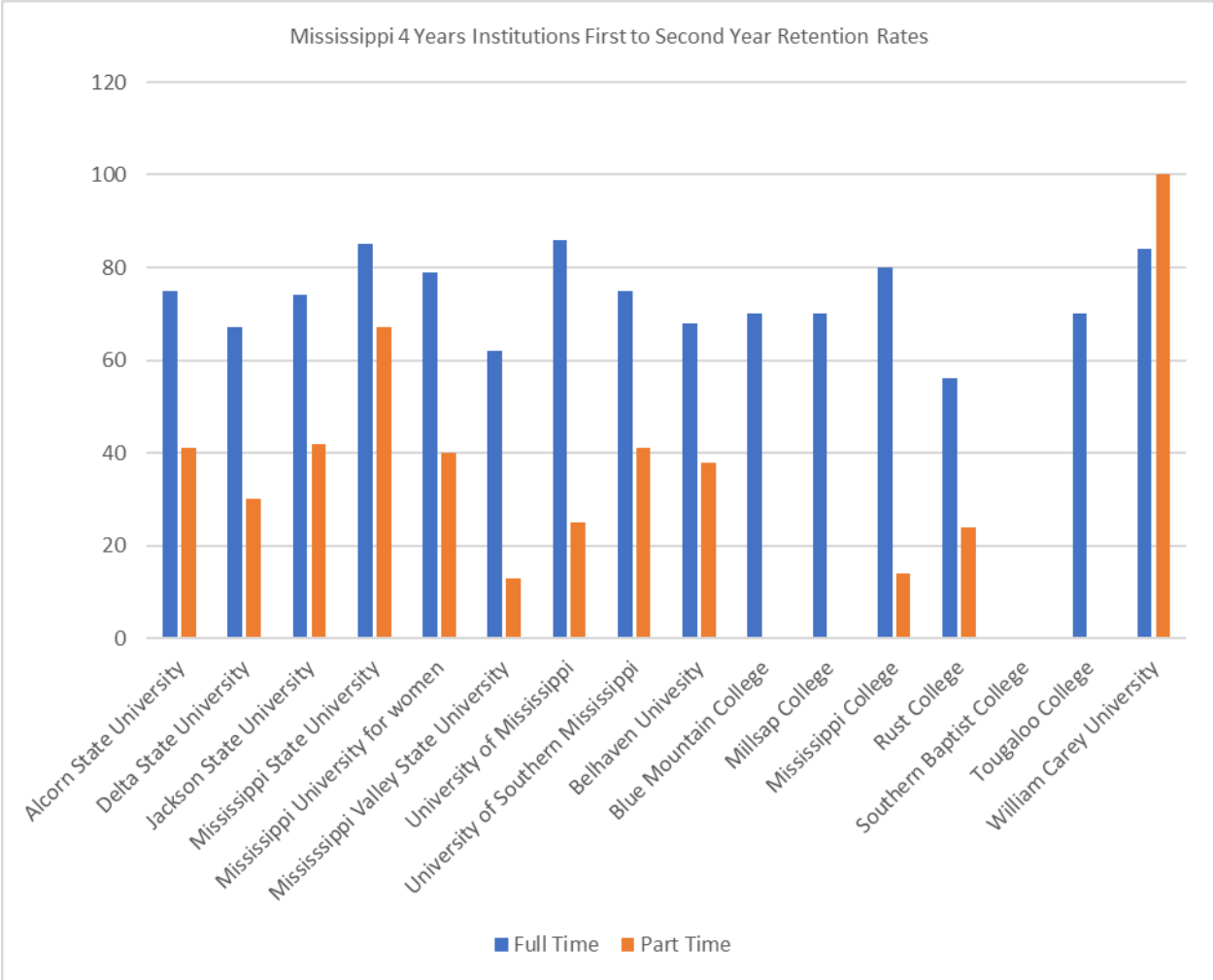


	Belhaven University	Blue Mountain College	Millsap College	Mississippi College	Rust College	Tougaloo College	William Carey University	Average
Full-Time	68	70	70	80	56	70	84	71.14
Part Time	38			14	24		100	44.00



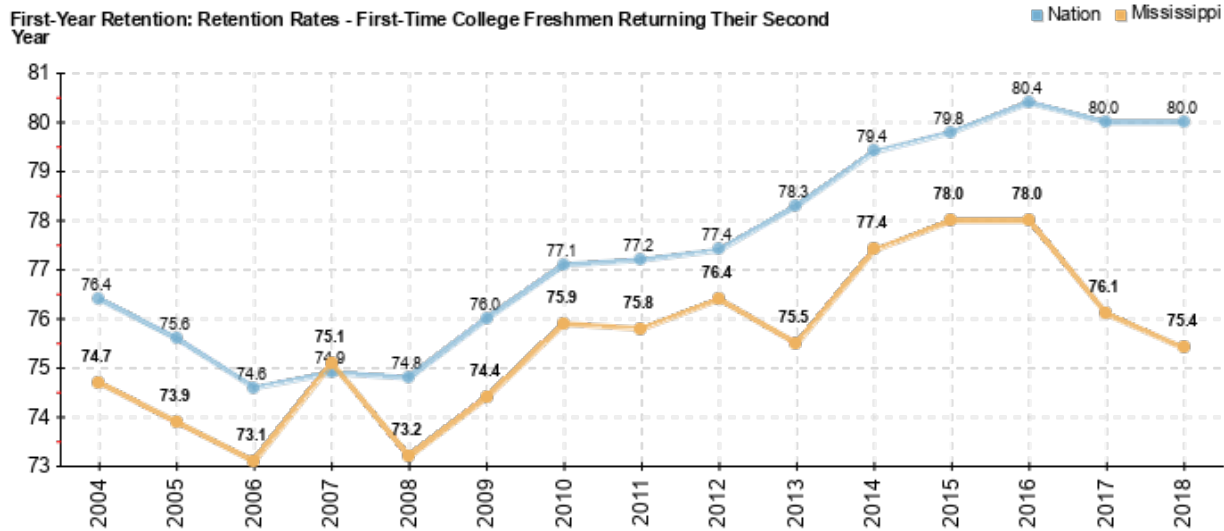
	Alcorn State University	Delta State University	Jackson State University	Mississippi State University	Mississippi Valley State University	University of Mississippi	University of Southern Mississippi	Belhaven University	Blue Mountain College	Millsap College	Mississippi College	Rust College	Southern Baptist College	Tougaloo College	William Carey University	Average
Full Time	75	67	74	85	62	86	75	68	70	70	80	56	N/A	70	84	73.4
Part Time	41	30	42	67	13	25	41	38	N/A	N/A	14	24	N/A	N/A	100	39.6

Source: Extracted IPED Annual Reports for 2020 and Analyzed



As an essential metric, these rates have several implications on the continued persistence of subsequent years. If an institution can implement policies and structures that include student support, it is highly likely to persist through graduation at more significant numbers. In general, first-year retention is often associated with many factors (high school course preparation, ACT and SAT scores, socioeconomic background, institutional support, etc.).

In our review of data we run utilizing the *National Center for Higher Education Management System* (NCHEMS), we looked at historical data through 2018 on student retention between their first year and the second year. We noted that students in Mississippi institutions have continued to decline year after year since 2016. We, however, recorded a strong surge in retentions beginning in AY2006/2007. It is worth noting that Mississippi’s performance in 2007 rose to levels above the national average. See chart below.



## Brain Drain

Also not included in this study are several policy issues to consider regarding educational attainment in Mississippi. Both State and privately controlled institutions do a good job educating and graduating students but then export large numbers of their graduates, primarily to states with more vibrant economies and higher-paying jobs. Conversely, States, across the country, including Mississippi, can perform relatively poorly in educating and graduating students while importing large numbers of educated citizens from other states. The genuine concern is that Mississippi is losing its population. Of particular concern is that college-educated Mississippians, and more so among the millennials, are leaving the state in search of greener pasture. The 2017 *American Community Survey* indicates that Mississippi has lost 10% of its college-educated millennial population [12]. This was the most significant decrease in the United States when Millennials became the largest generational group in the nation. Data published by the *U.S. Congress Joint Economic Committee* report [13] indicates that this drop continues as a long-term trend for the state. Using both the national census data and *American Community Survey* [15] information dating back to 1940, it is evident that Mississippi has not successfully been able to attract or retain educated individuals for decades.

## Retention and Progression

Adults are seeking college degrees in more significant numbers. Their "non-traditional" characteristics - part-time enrollment, full-time employment, financial independence, and parental responsibilities - create needs and priorities different from traditional students. Most often, these students need institutional and program flexibility support services, academic and advising services that are motivational and supportive of participants' life and career goals. Leighton's research team also examined *Prosperity Now 2020 Scorecard on Economic Well-being and*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Enrolled (%)</b>
2019	36.60%
2018	34.70%
2017	32.90%
2016	31.20%
2015	29.30%
2014	27.70%
2013	26.40%
2012	25.50%

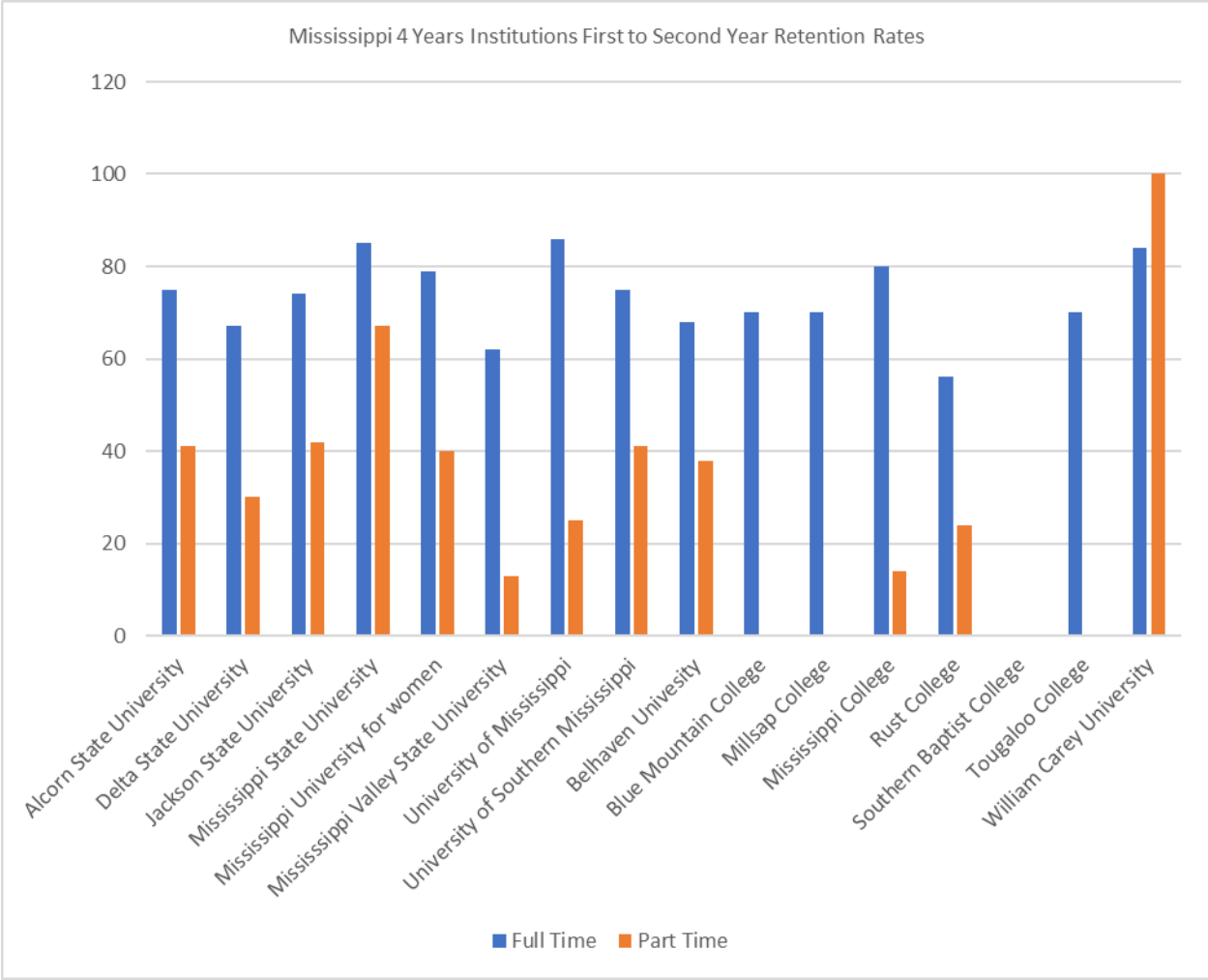
*Financial Health.* This periodical report was published by the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) [16]. It serves as an advocacy tool that compiles data on financial assets and income, employment, homeownership and housing, health care, and education by state, race, and gender. The Scorecard ranks state based on these data and provides state policies to improve economic well-being. The table below presents data collected from Title IV institutions in the United States.

### “More Students in College”

Extracted data included in the table below presents the percentage of students enrolled during the fall semester for the last reported years. The data published in the IPEDS annual, for example, conveys that the percentage of students enrolled in distance education courses in post-secondary institutions in the Fall was 36.6% as the total number of enrollees [17]. This data distribution does not consider those who enroll in distant education programs exclusively from those who take their courses exclusively online or selected.

Finding and implementing successful models to decrease poverty levels in Mississippi and helping more families enter the financial mainstream. Support initiatives aimed at investing and strengthening the current stream of financing education programs available to students, thus allowing more Mississippians access to a college education. Existing literature posits that adult learners' identity depends on the situation and setting. There are, however, many shared meetings that exist in higher education. More commonly, adult learners are both undergraduate and graduate students who meet an age bracket of 25 and older, as identified by the *National Student Clearinghouse Research Center* [18]. This segment of the student population is not a "uniform group." Instead, each individual is unique and possesses varied abilities, home and job responsibilities, educational backgrounds, including life experiences [19]. Also, in general, these backgrounds call upon post-secondary institutions to seek and keenly implement strategies to address their needs. Prudence in selecting areas informs practical and theoretical approaches to learning.





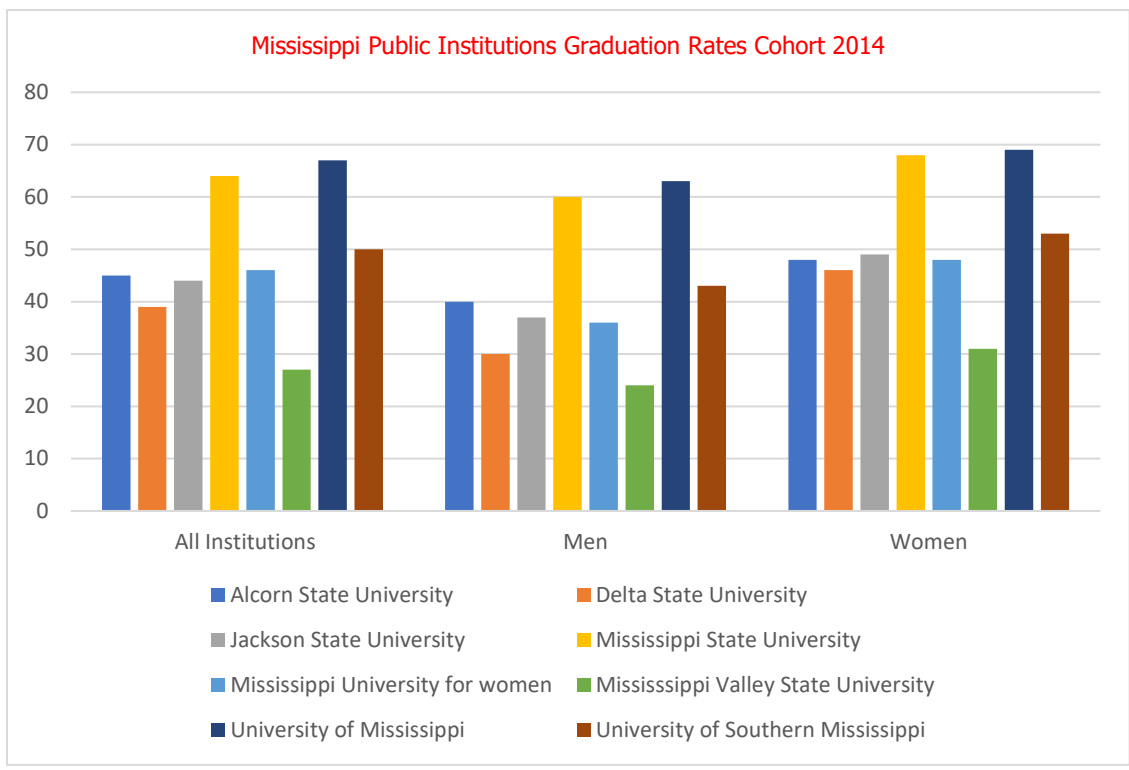
### 4-Year College Graduation Rates

Graduation rate within 150 percent of normal time for degree completion from the first institution attended for first-time, full-time degree/certificate-seeking students at 2-year postsecondary institutions, by control of institution and sex: Cohort entry year of 2014. Graduation rate within 150% normal time (6-years period for bachelor and 3-years for the associate degree) is typically is defined as the cumulative number of students graduating (out of a defined cohort group of students) at a college/university from a specified period to a specified period (usually a financial year in most institutions) in a specified academic plan. Based on an analysis of data drawn from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), in 2020, the overall 150% (6-years) graduation rate for first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began seeking a bachelor’s degree at 4-year degree-granting public institutions in Fall 2014 was 47.8% percent (see charts below).

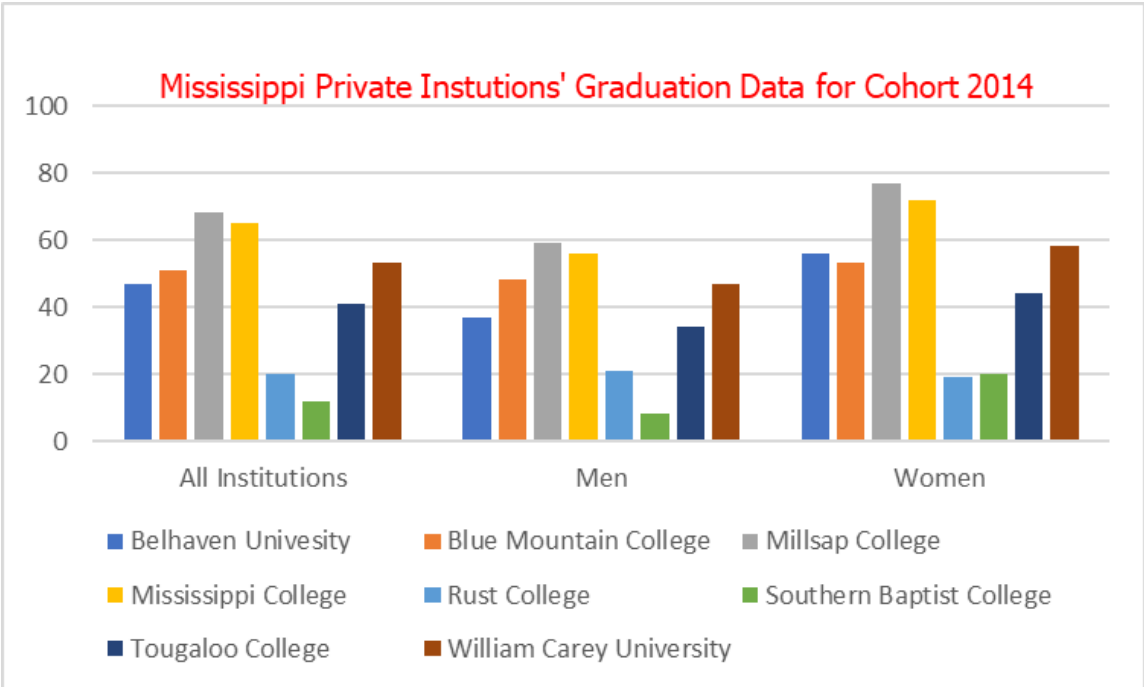
We extracted data reported on individual Mississippi 4-year institutions that both public and private controlled. The charts below provide summary data in percentages for the cohorts of 2014 for individual institutions and the cumulate average for all cumulative for all institutions combined. The charts also display a completion distribution relative to gender.

	Alcorn State University	Delta State University	Jackson State University	Mississippi State University	Mississippi University for women	Mississippi Valley State University	University of Mississippi	University of Southern Mississippi	Average
All Institutions	45	39	44	64	46	27	67	50	47.8
Men	40	30	37	60	36	24	63	43	41.6
Women	48	46	49	68	48	31	69	53	51.5

2014 Cohort graduation for Mississippi Public Institutions [Source: 2020 IPED Data

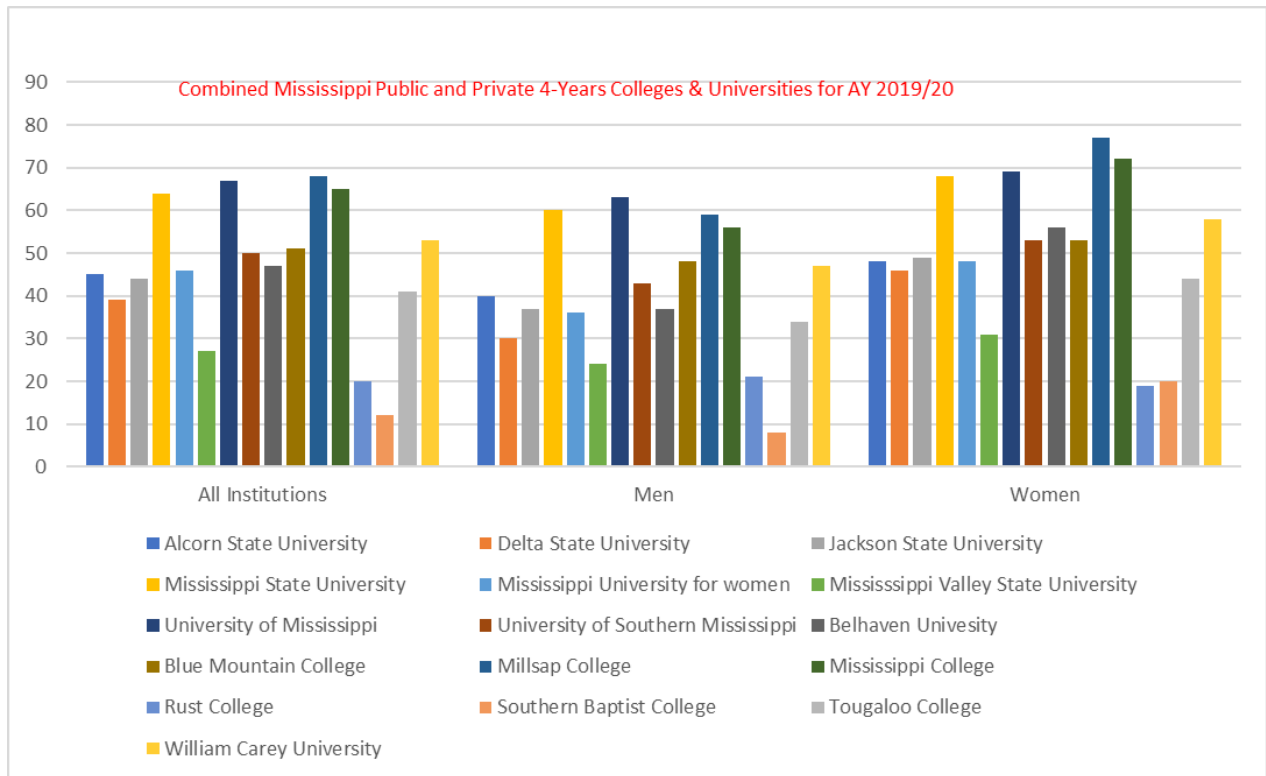


	Belhaven Univesity	Blue Mountain College	Millsap College	Mississippi College	Rust College	Southern Baptist College	Tougaloo College	William Carey University	Average
All Institutions	47	51	68	65	20	12	41	53	44.6
Men	37	48	59	56	21	8	34	47	38.8
Women	56	53	77	72	19	20	44	58	49.9



	Alcorn State University	Delta State University	Jackson State University	Mississippi State University	Mississippi University for women	Mississippi Valley State University	University of Mississippi	University of Southern Mississippi	Belhaven University	Blue Mountain College	Millsap College	Mississippi College	Rust College	Southern Baptist College	Tougaloo College	William Carey University	Average
All Institutions	45	39	44	64	46	27	67	50	47	51	68	65	20	12	41	53	46
Men	40	30	37	60	36	24	63	43	37	48	59	56	21	8	34	47	40
Women	48	46	49	68	48	31	69	53	56	53	77	72	19	20	44	58	51

2014 Cohort Graduation for Mississippi 4-Year Institutions [Data Source: 2020 IPEDS]



## References

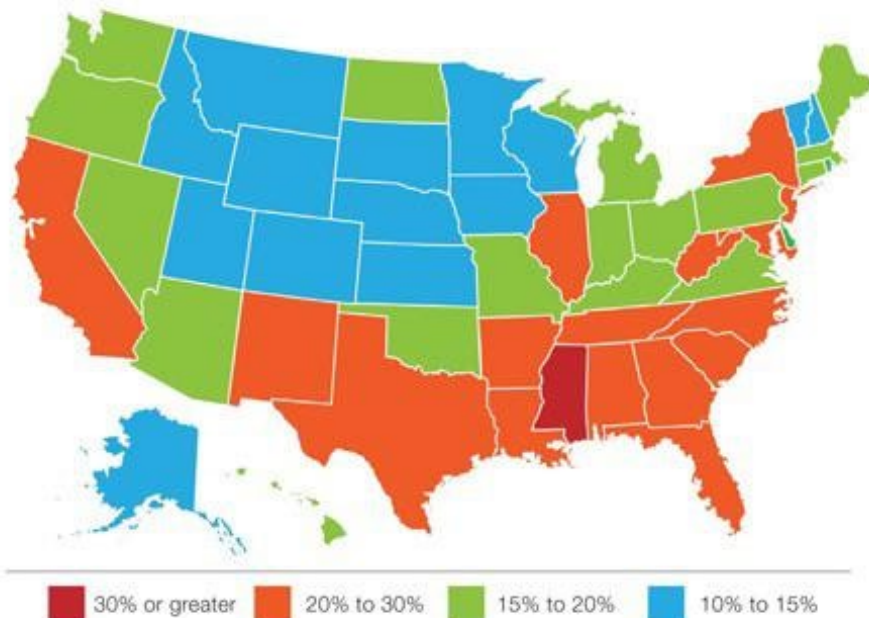
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## APPENDIX A

### U.S. READING LITERACY

PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION OF EACH STATE THAT HAS BELOW A FIFTH GRADE LEVEL OF LITERACY



SOURCE: NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS: NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF ADULT LITERACY



## NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY 2021

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### ABOUT THIS SURVEY

We want to know how your views as a college student, so we invite you to participate in a research study to learn more about your experiences as a college student. Your opinions are important. This questionnaire will take approximately 12 minutes to complete. **All of your individual responses are confidential.** We will use the results of the surveys to improve our understanding of online student experiences in the areas of learning, teaching, and flexibility.

Please read each question and mark the response that best represents your views of your online learning experiences as a student.

**1) Are you currently enrolled at a college/university?**

- Yes
- No

**2) Is your pause\_\_\_\_\_**

- Temporary and returning to the same college/university
- Temporary and transferring soon to another college/university
- Temporary for the time being (1 semester and up to 3)
- Permanent



**3) How would you describe your college/University**

- Trade School
- Two-Year Community College
- Four-Year College/University
- Seminary
- Graduate School

**4) How would you classify yourself?**

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Graduate student
- Unclassified

**5) How would you be classified in your current college/university?**

- Transfer Student to this college/university
- Non-Transfer Student at this college/university

**6) Prior to your transfer to your current college/university, in how many other institutions other have attended?**

- Been a student in one other college/university prior to the current one
- Been a student in two other colleges/universities prior to the current one
- Been a student in three or more other colleges/universities prior to my current.

**7) At times, it is necessary for a student to not register for one reason or another. Have you skipped a semester or so for any reason?**

- Yes
- No

**8) For how many semester (on the average) have you had to stop and not register for the semester on a continuous basis?**

- No more than one semester/term
- Two or three continuous semesters/terms
- More than three continuous semesters/terms at a time

**9) What was the circumstance that necessitated stopping out from enrolling?  
(you can select more than one reason)**

- Just needed a break
- Financial Reasons
- Work Schedule
- Childcare challenges
- Sickness
- Transportation
- Scheduling of courses
- Other - Write In:

**10) What is your employment status**

- I work Part-Time
- I work Full-Time
- I'm currently not Working

**11) If you work part-time, approximately how many clock hours per week do you work?**

- Less than 10 hours per week
- 11 - 14 hours per week
- 15 - 19 hours per week
- 20 - 24 hours per week
- 25 but less than 40 hours per week

**12) What is your enrollment status at you current institution?**

- Undergrad enrolled as a Part-Time student (less than 12 cr hrs)
- Undergrad enrolled as a Full-time students (12 cr hrs or more)
- Graduate enrolled as a Part-Time student (less than 9 cr hrs )
- Graduate enrolled as a Full-student (9 cr hrs or more )

**13) What is your gender?**

- Female
- Male
- Other

**14) Do you have dependents?**

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to respond

**15) Below are age brackets. Would you please identify your age bracket?**

- 24 years old and below
- 25 - 29 years old
- 30 - 34 years old
- 35 - 39 years old
- 40 - 44 years old
- 45 - 49 years old
- 50 - 54 years old
- 55 - 59 years old
- 60 years old and over

**16) Which of the following does your current institution offer?**

(check as many as needed)\*

- DOES NOT offer any courses online
- Offers some online course available to me
- Offers my program partially online
- Allows me to complete my courses online at another institution
- Offers other degree programs fully online

**17) Have you ever taken one or more fully online classes?**

(Fully online course *do not have* face-to-face meetings in a classroom)

- Yes
- No

**18) Would you consider in the future to take an online class?**

- Yes
- Not Sure
- Will Never

**19) Was the class offered by your current college/university?**

- Yes
- No

**20) How many online classes have you taken, including any in which you are currently enrolled?**

- none
- 1 - 2
- 3 -4
- 5-6
- 6-7
- 8 or more

**21) Hypothetically, if you had no choice but to take an online course, what would your comfort level in taking an online class again?**

- Not comfortable at all
- Slightly comfortable
- Somewhat comfortable
- Quite comfortable
- Highly comfortable

**22) What attracts you to enroll in an online class again? (Select one response that rises in priority)**

- Flexibility to care from my family at home
- Flexibility to keep my job or find a job
- Access to higher education
- Reduce Cost
- Other

**23) At your current college/university, how satisfied are you with finding online courses?**

- Extremely dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Satisfied
- Very Satisfied
- Extremely Satisfied

**24) How often do you have access to the technology you need so you can work on your online courses?**

- Never
- Infrequently
- About half of the time
- Frequently
- Every time and can access any time

**25) RANK ORDER - In general, how helpful was each activity below for helping you learn the course material?**

- Video Lectures
- Individual Projects/Assignment
- Quizzes/Tests
- Discussion Forum
- Whiteboard Teaching
- Online Debate
- Storyboard
- Large Group Activities
- Synchronous (live scheduled time)

Asynchronous (at your own time)

Small Group Activities

**26) How far do you have to travel from home to get to your college/university?**

- Less than 1 mile
- 1 mile but less than 3 Miles
- 4 miles but less than 6 miles
- 7 miles but less than 10
- 11 miles but less than 13
- 14 miles or more

**27) Relocation to attend on-campus classes is an option for my education.**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

**28) At your current college/university, how satisfied are you with the registration process?**

- Extremely dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Satisfied
- Very Satisfied
- Extremely Satisfied

**29) At your college/university, how satisfied are you in accessing the necessary resources from the Library?**

- Extremely dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Satisfied
- Very Satisfied
- Extremely Satisfied

**30) What is the nature of obstacles that would most likely prevent you from completing your academic goals?**

*(Note - More STARS assigned means having a greater NEGATIVE impact)*

	Nature of Obstacle
Childcare	<input type="text"/>
Care for Elderly Family Member's)	<input type="text"/>
Family Medical Problems	<input type="text"/>
Recurring Health Concerns for me	<input type="text"/>
Afraid to Speak up in Class	<input type="text"/>
Always Feeling Tired	<input type="text"/>
Trouble Sleeping	<input type="text"/>
Early Destructed	<input type="text"/>



Alcohol and/or Drug Problems	<input type="text"/>
Feeling Depressed	<input type="text"/>
No Support from My family/friends	<input type="text"/>
Financial Difficulties	<input type="text"/>
Test Anxiety	<input type="text"/>
Work Schedule	<input type="text"/>
Take Things Too Seriously	<input type="text"/>
Bad Grades	<input type="text"/>
No close Friends at my College/University	<input type="text"/>

**31) How confident are you with the following?  
(On the Slider Rate on a scale of 1 to 10)**

I do not have problem understanding the course registration process at my current college/university 1 \_\_\_\_\_ [ ] \_\_\_\_\_ 10

I do not have problem understanding the course withdrawal/drop process 1 \_\_\_\_\_ [ ] \_\_\_\_\_ 10

I do not have a problem understanding how pre-requisites affect my ability to register for courses 1 \_\_\_\_\_ [ ] \_\_\_\_\_ 10

I do not have a problem understanding what is required of me to earn my degree 1 \_\_\_\_\_ [ ] \_\_\_\_\_ 10

I HAVE A PROBLEM knowing where to find academic policies for my college/university? 1 \_\_\_\_\_ [ ] \_\_\_\_\_ 10

I HAVE A PROBLEM knowing how to contact my academic advisor 1 \_\_\_\_\_ [ ] \_\_\_\_\_ 10

I HAVE A PROBLEM figuring out how to complete my degree within my intended time frame 1 \_\_\_\_\_ [ ] \_\_\_\_\_ 10

**32) The set of statements below are about your Living/Work Arrangements. Using the slider, please indicate your level of Agreement/Disagreement to each of the statements. (On the Slider, Rate on a scale of 1 to 10)\***

My living environment does not make my studying difficult 1 \_\_\_\_\_ [ ] \_\_\_\_\_ 10

My work responsibilities do not interfere with my school responsibilities 1 \_\_\_\_\_ [ ] \_\_\_\_\_ 10

My job and school responsibilities I do not all me sufficient time to sleep or study 1 \_\_\_\_\_ [ ] \_\_\_\_\_ 10

My family responsibilities take up all my study time. 1 \_\_\_\_\_ [ ] \_\_\_\_\_ 10

My employer encourages me to complete my college degree 1 \_\_\_\_\_ [ ] \_\_\_\_\_ 10

**33) The set of statements below are about Friends/Family Support. Using the slider, please indicate your level of Agreement/Disagreement to each of the statements. (On the Slider, Rate on a scale of 1 to 10)**

My friends and family encourage me to complete my college degree	1	[ ]	10
At least one person in my current college/university has shown real interest in my success.	1	[ ]	10
It would be difficult for me to see a professional counselor even when I could afford one	1	[ ]	10
I do not get support from my friends or family are available to take care of my children while I pursue my degree	1	[ ]	10

**34) At your college/university, is your status that of an:\***

- In-State (Mississippi) Student
- Out of State Student

**35) An online University is being established in Mississippi. Is there a specific question or area of interest about the new University that you would like us to share more information?**

**36) Great input! We would like to invite you to attend a brief [Skype Focus Group discussion](#) that includes other students who have completed this Survey. To say *Thank You* for your participation in the scheduled Focus Group Discussion of **June 16, 2021**, each participant will receive a small gift. Please indicate your interest by confidentially adding your email address below:**

**Thank You!**