



Eleventh annual study of freshman attitudes

# 2016 National Freshman Motivation to Complete College Report

## Study identifies motivational barriers to college completion for incoming college freshmen

As they start college, the vast majority of incoming freshmen exude a strong desire to complete a degree, but many also express early concerns and attitudes that reduce their motivation and put them at risk for attrition. This report looks beyond standardized test scores and high school transcripts to explore a wide range of these noncognitive, motivational attributes that influence completion. The study is based on a national sample of nearly 100,000 freshmen who filled out a 100-item, college completion risk survey in 2015 at 308 colleges and universities across the United States.

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## Strong desire to finish college

College freshmen in 2015 began their first year highly motivated to complete their education, as shown in the table below.

### Proportions of incoming freshmen in agreement in 2015

<b>SAMPLE FINDINGS</b> (See all in Appendix)	<b>STUDENTS AT 4-YEAR PRIVATES</b>	<b>STUDENTS AT 4-YEAR PUBLICS</b>	<b>STUDENTS AT 2-YEAR INSTITUTIONS</b>	<b>MALE STUDENTS</b>	<b>FEMALE STUDENTS</b>	<b>OVERALL NATIONAL PERCENTAGES</b>
I have a very strong desire to continue my education, and I am quite determined to finish a degree.	<b>95.8%</b>	<b>95.6%</b>	<b>92.6%</b>	<b>93.5%</b>	<b>96.5%</b>	<b>95.1%</b>
I am very strongly dedicated to finishing college—no matter what obstacles get in my way.	<b>95.6%</b>	<b>95.6%</b>	<b>93.3%</b>	<b>93.8%</b>	<b>96.4%</b>	<b>95.2%</b>
I am deeply committed to my educational goals, and I'm fully prepared to make the effort and sacrifices that will be needed to attain them.	<b>92.2%</b>	<b>91.8%</b>	<b>89.8%</b>	<b>89.1%</b>	<b>93.7%</b>	<b>91.6%</b>

#### Highlights from the data

Overall, the vast majority of incoming freshmen were united in their strong desire to finish their education, including their willingness to make sacrifices needed to attain their educational goals. Note, however, the variances by sector and gender. For example, female students indicated higher degrees of commitment to completing a degree compared to male students.

#### Takeaway

The desire of freshmen to complete college is at its highest point as the first year begins. This strong desire should be channeled into intentional learning opportunities and interactions because the peak term of attrition follows soon after<sup>1</sup> (see page 4—attrition breakdown by term). Note, however, that motivation is multi-faceted, so to develop an informed strategy, it is important to dig further into the data.

#### About this study

Find information about this study in the back of this report:  
 Student sample information—page 13  
 Survey methodology/Invitation to replicate study—page 16

<sup>1</sup> Ruffalo Noel Levitz (2015). *Student retention indicators benchmark report*. Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Ruffalo Noel Levitz. Retrieved from [www.RuffaloNL.com/BenchmarkReports](http://www.RuffaloNL.com/BenchmarkReports).

## Desire to transfer/Sampling of college completion barriers

Already at the beginning of the first year, some incoming freshmen planned to transfer. Others expressed doubts or concerns about their decision to go to college.

### Proportions of incoming freshmen in agreement in 2015

<b>SAMPLE FINDINGS</b> (See all in Appendix)	STUDENTS AT 4-YEAR PRIVATES	STUDENTS AT 4-YEAR PUBLICS	STUDENTS AT 2-YEAR INSTITUTIONS	MALE STUDENTS	FEMALE STUDENTS	OVERALL NATIONAL PERCENTAGES
I plan to transfer to another school before completing a degree at this college or university.	<b>6.6%</b>	<b>13.1%</b>	<b>19.2%</b>	<b>11.7%</b>	<b>11.3%</b>	<b>11.5%</b>
I have no desire to transfer to another school before completing a degree at this college or university.	<b>70.6%</b>	<b>59.8%</b>	<b>53.5%</b>	<b>61.8%</b>	<b>64.3%</b>	<b>63.2%</b>
I often wonder if a college education is really worth all the time, money, and effort that I'm being asked to put into it.	<b>21.6%</b>	<b>22.5%</b>	<b>21.9%</b>	<b>25.8%</b>	<b>19.0%</b>	<b>22.1%</b>
I wish society did not put so much pressure on people to go to college, as I'd really rather be doing other things at this point in my life.	<b>13.0%</b>	<b>13.1%</b>	<b>15.8%</b>	<b>15.6%</b>	<b>11.8%</b>	<b>13.5%</b>
I dread the thought of going to school for several more years, and there is a part of me that would like to give up the whole thing.	<b>8.1%</b>	<b>9.2%</b>	<b>12.1%</b>	<b>9.4%</b>	<b>9.1%</b>	<b>9.2%</b>

#### Highlights from the data

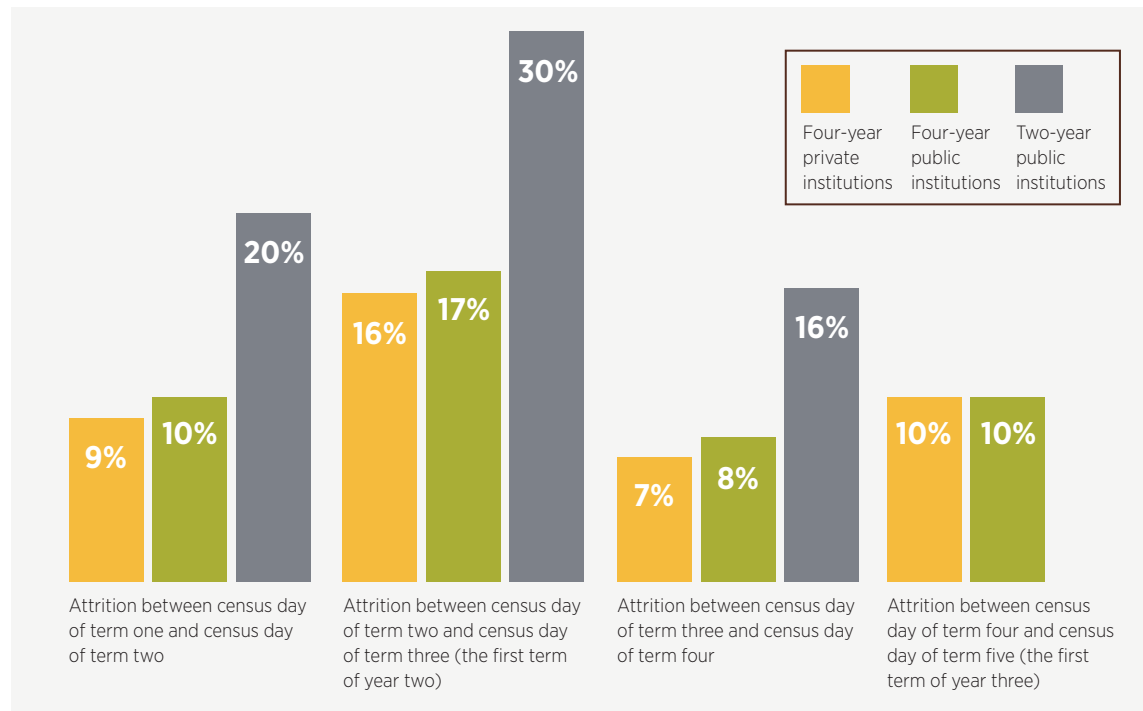
Overall, 11 percent of incoming freshmen planned to transfer, and 22 percent of incoming freshmen wondered if a college education “is really worth all the time, money, and effort that I’m being asked to put into it.” In addition, 37 percent of incoming freshmen overall were *unable* to affirm the statement, “I have *no* desire to transfer....” Again, variances by population types were evident.

#### Takeaway

Understanding incoming students’ intentions is a key component of developing strategies to improve retention. By knowing which students were intending to transfer, campuses that participated in this study were able to take immediate action to establish relationships with those students and help them determine whether transferring was really in their best interest or if committing to their initial institution was the most effective and efficient means to earning a college degree in a timely manner.

## Attrition: A term-by-term breakdown

Statistics from a separate, recent Ruffalo Noel Levitz study<sup>2</sup> show college student attrition continues throughout the first four terms:



### Highlights from the data

As shown here, undergraduate attrition peaks between census day of term two and census day of term three (second set of bars shown). Note that attrition in year two, shown in the last two sets of bars, is less than attrition in year one, but remains substantial. The statistics shown above for first-year attrition are generally in line with national retention rate data from ACT.<sup>3</sup>

### Takeaway

Like motivation, attrition changes over time. Hence, we recommend that institutions develop a first through fourth term college completion plan to address the substantial attrition that continues to erode enrollments.

<sup>2</sup> Ruffalo Noel Levitz (2015). *Student retention indicators benchmark report*. Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Ruffalo Noel Levitz. Retrieved from [www.RuffaloNL.com/BenchmarkReports](http://www.RuffaloNL.com/BenchmarkReports).

<sup>3</sup> ACT, Inc. (2015). *National collegiate retention and persistence to degree rates* (Iowa City, Iowa: ACT, Inc.), p. 3.

## Closing the gap between students' strong desire to finish and completion rates

Additional motivational barriers to completion, for specific populations, appear in the following table. These data do *not* appear in the Appendix but can be corroborated using the sources listed below.

### Proportions of incoming freshmen in agreement in 2015

<b>SAMPLE FINDINGS</b> (See more in sources cited below)	FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS	NON-FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS	HISPANIC STUDENTS	AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS	STUDENTS AGES 25 AND OLDER	STUDENTS UNDER AGE 25
I have found a potential career that strongly attracts me.	<b>81.3%</b>	<b>80.8%</b>	<b>81.9%</b>	<b>82.6%</b>	<b>89.0%</b>	<b>80.3%</b>
I have the financial resources that I need to finish college.	<b>36.4%</b>	<b>51.1%</b>	<b>37.5%</b>	<b>39.9%</b>	<b>45.4%</b>	<b>47.3%</b>
I don't enjoy reading serious books and articles, and I only do it when I have to.	<b>44.6%</b>	<b>44.0%</b>	<b>43.6%</b>	<b>47.0%</b>	<b>27.7%</b>	<b>45.3%</b>
<i>I would like to talk with a counselor about my general attitude toward school.</i>	<b>22.8%</b>	<b>16.8%</b>	<b>26.6%</b>	<b>29.2%</b>	<b>19.7%</b>	<b>18.3%</b>
<i>I would like some help selecting an educational plan that will prepare me to get a good job.</i>	<b>72.6%</b>	<b>68.3%</b>	<b>79.4%</b>	<b>78.1%</b>	<b>58.6%</b>	<b>78.2%</b>
<i>I would like to receive some training to improve my reading skills.</i>	<b>36.6%</b>	<b>27.8%</b>	<b>42.8%</b>	<b>43.2%</b>	<b>27.8%</b>	<b>30.3%</b>

#### Highlights from the data

These data illustrate the merits of digging further into the motivational attributes of specific populations.

**Red** = the most substantial differences between populations.

*Italicized items* highlight examples of incoming students' desire to take action to address specific barriers.

See more examples of students' desired actions in the Appendix, in sections titled "requests."

#### Takeaway

To close the gap between students' strong desire to finish and completion rates, it is critically important to keep identifying specific needs among specific subsets of students and identify ways to address those needs. At the same time, what needs do you notice are widely shared across groups? Interventions must work on both levels. One key piece: Make sure that advising is focused on educational planning—*not just course selection!* See more recommendations on the next page.

As stated earlier, it is important to take advantage of incoming students' strong desire to finish. Capitalize on their strong motivation at the beginning of college by guiding them to available resources to address their needs.

#### Find more data on special populations at [www.RuffaloNL.com/FreshmanReport](http://www.RuffaloNL.com/FreshmanReport)

*First-generation vs. non-first-generation* motivational data are available in the 2015 National Freshman Attitudes Report.

*Racial/ethnic* motivational data are available in the 2014 Addendum by Race/Ethnicity.

*Adult learner* motivational data will be available soon in the forthcoming 2016 report: Motivation of Adult Learners for Completing a College Degree, to be released in spring 2016.

## Recommendations for action

Based on the data, here are some recommendations.

Motivation is multi-faceted and must be understood in the context of the different populations of students on college campuses. Some over-arching themes, however, appear to be relevant across populations:

1. **Study students' intentions.** Institutions cannot assume that a strong desire to complete a college degree means that the student intends to earn that degree at their first institution. Collecting—and using—data that identifies which students are already considering transferring as they enter an institution empowers campus leaders to work with those students to clarify their goals and determine if transferring is really in their best interest.
2. **Focus advising on educational planning.** While students are coming into college with strong indications of their career directions, they are hungry for help with developing an educational plan to realize their goals for career, life, and degree(s). This points to the critical importance of focusing advising on educational planning—helping students develop a big-picture plan and then execute that plan to ensure timely college completion.
3. **Make counseling appointments for incoming students.** Campuses across the country are seeing a significant increase in the use of counseling services. The data from this national study indicate that 18 percent are entering college requesting counseling services. And while this varies by population, the need is clear. Adequate counseling services need to be available right from the beginning. Consider making the first appointment for students who request this type of assistance.
4. **Provide a reading lab.** There is still a need to provide skills development for entering students—in this year's study, we highlight students' requests for reading assistance on page 5. Most campuses have well-established writing centers and math labs, but it's time now to provide reading development support as well.
5. **Keep working on affordability for continuing students.** Financing their education continues to be a concern to students and their families. While institutions should be justifiably concerned about managing their financial aid awards, they must also be concerned with making the best use of awards to not just influence first-time enrollment, but continued enrollment as well. Creating opportunities for students to work on campus, developing completion grants and additional grant and scholarship programs for continuing students, containing the escalating costs of books and learning materials, and providing ongoing financial counseling and literacy programs are some of the additional strategies being used to help more students afford to not just start their degrees but complete them in a timely manner.

What else are the data suggesting? We encourage readers to spend time examining the Appendix. Keep in mind that the national aggregate data in this report do not necessarily hold true for individual campuses, individual students, or from year to year. To discuss any observations, or to assess the motivational risks of your next incoming freshman cohort using the same risk survey used in this study, call 800.876.1117 to speak with a student retention specialist or visit [www.RuffaloNL.com/CollegeStudentInventory](http://www.RuffaloNL.com/CollegeStudentInventory). See more information about the survey on page 16.

### **Curb costly losses**

For the average four-year college or university, \$10 million in revenue is lost annually to attrition,<sup>4</sup> while students at all colleges lose out on career and life aspirations and accumulate debt that can be difficult to pay back.

To calculate revenue from reducing attrition, use the Retention Revenue Estimator at [www.RuffaloNL.com/Estimator](http://www.RuffaloNL.com/Estimator).

<sup>4</sup> Raisman, N. (2013). The cost of college attrition at four-year colleges & universities. *Policy Perspectives*.

The Educational Policy Institute. Retrieved from: [http://www.educationalpolicy.org/pdf/1302\\_PolicyPerspectives.pdf](http://www.educationalpolicy.org/pdf/1302_PolicyPerspectives.pdf).

## Appendix/Complete findings for all 100 items in the study

See page 15 for an explanation of the statistical processes used to produce these data.

### Proportions of incoming freshmen in agreement in 2015

Green Numbers = greater contrasts between male and female students

ALL SURVEY ITEMS:	STUDENTS AT 4-YEAR PRIVATES	STUDENTS AT 4-YEAR PUBLICS	STUDENTS AT 2-YEAR INSTITUTIONS	MALE STUDENTS	FEMALE STUDENTS	OVERALL NATIONAL PERCENTAGES
<b>Desire to finish college</b>						
I have a very strong desire to continue my education, and I am quite determined to finish a degree.	95.8%	95.6%	92.6%	93.5%	96.5%	95.1%
I am very strongly dedicated to finishing college—no matter what obstacles get in my way.	95.6%	95.6%	93.3%	93.8%	96.4%	95.2%
I am deeply committed to my educational goals, and I'm fully prepared to make the effort and sacrifices that will be needed to attain them.	92.2%	91.8%	89.8%	89.1%	93.7%	91.6%
Of all the things I could do at this point in my life, going to college is definitely the most satisfying.	84.2%	85.0%	80.2%	80.4%	86.7%	83.8%
I often wonder if a college education is really worth all the time, money, and effort that I'm being asked to spend on it.	21.6%	22.5%	21.9%	25.8%	19.0%	22.1%
I can think of many things I would rather do than go to college.	10.6%	10.8%	14.4%	14.7%	8.6%	11.3%
I wish that society did not put so much pressure on people to go to college, as I'd really rather be doing other things at this point in my life.	13.0%	13.1%	15.8%	15.6%	11.8%	13.5%
I dread the thought of going to school for several more years, and there is a part of me that would like to give up the whole thing.	8.1%	9.2%	12.1%	9.4%	9.1%	9.2%
<b>Attitude toward educators</b>						
The teachers I had in school respected me as a person and treated me fairly.	81.9%	82.5%	77.7%	80.1%	82.5%	81.4%
Most of my teachers have been very caring and dedicated.	81.4%	78.4%	78.7%	78.6%	80.6%	79.7%
I liked my teachers, and I feel they did a good job.	76.4%	75.6%	72.8%	74.2%	76.4%	75.4%
Most teachers have a superior attitude that I find very annoying.	15.6%	17.6%	13.9%	18.5%	14.2%	16.1%

Green Numbers = greater contrasts between male and female students

ALL SURVEY ITEMS:	STUDENTS AT 4-YEAR PRIVATES	STUDENTS AT 4-YEAR PUBLICS	STUDENTS AT 2-YEAR INSTITUTIONS	MALE STUDENTS	FEMALE STUDENTS	OVERALL NATIONAL PERCENTAGES
Most of the teachers I had in school were too opinionated and inflexible.	16.3%	16.0%	17.8%	18.7%	14.6%	16.4%
In my opinion, many teachers are more concerned about themselves than they are about their students.	13.5%	16.2%	13.0%	16.5%	12.9%	14.5%
<b>Intellectual interests</b>						
Over the years, books have broadened my horizons and stimulated my imagination.	55.2%	54.7%	51.4%	46.6%	60.6%	54.3%
I get a great deal of personal satisfaction from reading.	44.2%	45.3%	47.3%	35.8%	52.9%	45.2%
I don't enjoy reading serious books and articles, and I only do it when I have to.	45.0%	44.8%	40.6%	44.6%	43.8%	44.1%
Books have never gotten me very excited.	38.2%	37.8%	40.3%	47.0%	31.5%	38.4%
<b>Study habits</b>						
I take very careful notes during class, and I review them thoroughly before a test.	65.0%	65.2%	65.8%	54.3%	74.2%	65.2%
I study very hard for all my courses, even those I don't like.	60.9%	59.0%	62.4%	51.9%	67.4%	60.4%
I have developed a solid system of self-discipline, which helps me keep up with my schoolwork.	61.0%	58.5%	55.4%	54.8%	62.4%	59.0%
My studying is very irregular and unpredictable.	31.5%	34.8%	31.8%	37.7%	29.0%	32.9%
When I try to study, I usually get bored and quit after a few minutes.	29.1%	32.3%	28.9%	31.1%	29.8%	30.4%
I have great difficulty concentrating on schoolwork, and I often get behind.	18.7%	20.1%	25.2%	22.9%	18.4%	20.4%
<b>Math and science confidence</b>						
I have a very good grasp of the scientific ideas I've studied in school.	50.7%	52.7%	44.9%	54.5%	47.3%	50.5%
I have a hard time understanding and solving complex math problems.	43.2%	43.6%	49.0%	38.9%	48.9%	44.4%
Math has always been a challenge for me.	41.0%	41.6%	50.3%	36.9%	47.7%	42.9%



Green Numbers = greater contrasts between male and female students

ALL SURVEY ITEMS:	STUDENTS AT 4-YEAR PRIVATES	STUDENTS AT 4-YEAR PUBLICS	STUDENTS AT 2-YEAR INSTITUTIONS	MALE STUDENTS	FEMALE STUDENTS	OVERALL NATIONAL PERCENTAGES
I have always enjoyed the challenge of trying to solve complex math problems.	34.3%	35.4%	33.1%	38.3%	31.5%	34.5%
I have a very good understanding of general biology (e.g., cell structure, metabolism, genetics, and the circulatory system).	40.9%	43.2%	37.7%	41.5%	41.1%	41.3%
My understanding of the physical sciences is very weak.	23.2%	22.5%	25.0%	19.2%	26.5%	23.2%
<b>Verbal confidence</b>						
I am capable of writing a very clear and well-organized paper.	64.5%	62.3%	57.5%	60.0%	64.3%	62.4%
I pick up new vocabulary words quickly, and I find it easy to use them in my speech and writing.	55.3%	56.7%	58.5%	59.2%	54.1%	56.4%
I am very good at figuring out the deeper meaning of a short story or novel.	51.8%	50.7%	50.5%	48.5%	53.2%	51.1%
I have difficulty organizing my ideas in a paper, and I tend to make a lot of punctuation and grammar mistakes.	29.9%	30.7%	34.0%	32.3%	29.9%	30.9%
In English classes, I've had difficulty analyzing an author's style and theme.	28.3%	29.4%	28.6%	30.6%	27.3%	28.8%
Learning new vocabulary words is a slow and difficult process for me.	17.4%	17.3%	17.6%	15.8%	18.8%	17.4%
<b>Career closure</b>						
I have found a potential career that strongly attracts me.	82.0%	78.5%	83.5%	79.8%	81.7%	80.9%
I have made a firm decision to enter a certain occupation and have begun planning my life around that decision.	64.2%	62.7%	69.3%	62.8%	65.9%	64.5%
I become very confused when I try to choose an occupation.	19.3%	23.0%	22.5%	20.6%	22.0%	21.4%
I am very confused about what occupation to pursue.	17.9%	22.1%	17.8%	19.0%	20.1%	19.6%
<b>Family emotional support</b>						
When I was a child, my parents usually understood me, respected my judgment, and treated me in ways that helped me grow.	79.3%	78.1%	71.4%	78.3%	76.7%	77.4%

Green Numbers = greater contrasts between male and female students

ALL SURVEY ITEMS:	STUDENTS AT 4-YEAR PRIVATES	STUDENTS AT 4-YEAR PUBLICS	STUDENTS AT 2-YEAR INSTITUTIONS	MALE STUDENTS	FEMALE STUDENTS	OVERALL NATIONAL PERCENTAGES
My family and I communicated very well when I was young, and we had a good understanding of each other's point of view.	68.8%	67.1%	61.8%	67.9%	66.1%	66.9%
My family had one way of looking at me when I was a child, and they didn't understand my feelings very well.	14.4%	15.1%	19.6%	14.7%	16.4%	15.6%
When I was a child, the other members of my family often said hurtful things that caused unpleasant feelings.	12.3%	12.6%	16.5%	10.5%	15.4%	13.2%
<b>Sense of financial security</b>						
I have the financial resources that I need to finish college.	48.8%	46.2%	45.6%	50.9%	44.1%	47.2%
I don't have any financial problems that will interfere with my schoolwork.	39.9%	37.4%	36.7%	41.9%	35.4%	38.3%
I have financial problems that are very distracting and troublesome.	25.9%	27.1%	30.3%	23.9%	29.8%	27.2%
I am in a bad financial position, and the pressure to earn extra money will probably interfere with my studies.	15.9%	17.4%	18.3%	15.7%	18.0%	17.0%
<b>Sociability</b>						
I greatly enjoy getting together with a crowd of people and having fun.	75.6%	76.3%	67.3%	73.2%	75.4%	74.4%
I am very adventurous and outgoing at social gatherings.	53.2%	54.0%	50.1%	52.7%	53.2%	53.0%
Participating in large social gatherings is of little interest to me.	27.1%	27.8%	34.6%	29.8%	27.9%	28.7%
It is hard for me to relax and just have fun with a group of people.	13.6%	13.8%	16.3%	12.8%	15.2%	14.2%
<b>Opinion tolerance</b>						
I get along well with people who disagree with my opinion openly.	58.0%	57.9%	62.1%	60.2%	57.5%	58.7%
I can feel comfortable with someone who thinks quite differently than I do on major social issues.	58.1%	59.4%	60.8%	61.4%	57.2%	59.1%
I find it easy to be friends with people whose political ideas differ sharply from my own.	50.5%	49.9%	52.4%	51.5%	49.9%	50.6%

Green Numbers = greater contrasts between male and female students

ALL SURVEY ITEMS:	STUDENTS AT 4-YEAR PRIVATES	STUDENTS AT 4-YEAR PUBLICS	STUDENTS AT 2-YEAR INSTITUTIONS	MALE STUDENTS	FEMALE STUDENTS	OVERALL NATIONAL PERCENTAGES
When someone's opinions strongly disagree with my own, I tend to develop unfriendly feelings and to avoid close contact with the person.	13.1%	13.0%	11.9%	12.6%	13.0%	12.9%
I feel uneasy and distrustful toward people whose way of thinking is quite dissimilar to my own.	9.8%	9.5%	9.0%	10.3%	8.9%	9.5%
Because they irritate me, I tend to stay away from people whose ideas are quite different from my own.	10.5%	10.6%	10.9%	11.3%	10.0%	10.6%
<b>Requests for academic assistance</b>						
I would like to receive some instruction in the most effective ways to take college exams.	76.6%	80.5%	73.8%	74.4%	80.4%	77.7%
I would like to receive some help in improving my study habits.	57.9%	65.9%	58.3%	59.3%	62.8%	61.2%
I would like to receive some individual help in improving my math skills.	45.3%	51.3%	51.1%	45.1%	51.8%	48.7%
I would like to receive some individual help in improving my writing skills.	47.2%	51.1%	42.8%	46.0%	49.7%	48.0%
I would like to receive tutoring in one or more of my courses.	45.6%	53.8%	42.9%	43.9%	52.2%	48.4%
I would like to receive some training to improve my reading skills.	28.9%	32.3%	28.3%	31.0%	29.5%	30.1%
<b>Requests for career counseling</b>						
I would like some help selecting an educational plan that will prepare me to get a good job.	69.2%	73.6%	60.6%	67.2%	71.3%	69.4%
I would like to talk with someone about the qualifications needed for certain occupations.	63.1%	70.0%	58.1%	63.1%	66.6%	65.0%
I would like to talk with someone about the salaries and future outlook for various occupations.	55.5%	60.5%	49.4%	58.3%	54.9%	56.4%
I would like to talk with someone about the advantages and disadvantages of various occupations.	49.2%	54.4%	42.1%	50.8%	49.4%	50.0%
I would like some help selecting an occupation that is well suited to my interests and abilities.	46.6%	52.7%	42.6%	50.0%	46.9%	48.3%

Green Numbers = greater contrasts between male and female students

ALL SURVEY ITEMS:	STUDENTS AT 4-YEAR PRIVATES	STUDENTS AT 4-YEAR PUBLICS	STUDENTS AT 2-YEAR INSTITUTIONS	MALE STUDENTS	FEMALE STUDENTS	OVERALL NATIONAL PERCENTAGES
<b>Requests for financial guidance</b>						
I would like to talk to someone about getting a scholarship.	63.9%	71.0%	60.2%	61.7%	69.7%	66.1%
I would like to talk to someone about getting a part-time job during the regular school year.	53.8%	55.8%	41.5%	51.1%	53.4%	52.4%
I would like to talk to someone about the opportunities available for summer employment.	49.9%	52.0%	44.0%	48.6%	50.6%	49.7%
I would like to talk with someone about getting a loan to help me through school.	27.5%	29.2%	27.9%	26.0%	30.1%	28.2%
<b>Requests for personal counseling</b>						
I would like to talk with a counselor about my general attitude toward school.	16.4%	20.2%	19.0%	18.0%	18.7%	18.4%
I would like to talk with a counselor about some difficulties in my personal relationships or social life.	11.8%	12.3%	12.5%	10.6%	13.3%	12.1%
I would like to talk with a counselor about eliminating an unwanted habit (involving food, drugs, cigarettes, or alcohol, etc.).	8.4%	10.2%	11.3%	10.1%	9.3%	9.6%
I would like to talk with a counselor about some emotional tensions that are bothering me.	10.1%	10.1%	10.0%	8.6%	11.3%	10.1%
I would like to talk with a counselor about some feelings of discouragement or unhappy thoughts that keep bothering me.	9.9%	10.4%	10.3%	9.1%	11.0%	10.2%
I would like to talk with a counselor about some family problems.	6.8%	7.1%	7.5%	5.8%	8.0%	7.0%
<b>Requests for social enrichment</b>						
I would like to attend an informal gathering where I can meet some new friends.	62.2%	62.8%	45.7%	55.4%	62.8%	59.5%
I would like to find out more about the clubs and social organizations at my college.	69.4%	72.4%	45.0%	60.9%	70.6%	66.3%
I would like to find out more about student government and the various student activities on campus.	50.0%	52.1%	36.5%	41.8%	53.8%	48.4%

ALL SURVEY ITEMS:	STUDENTS AT 4-YEAR PRIVATES	STUDENTS AT 4-YEAR PUBLICS	STUDENTS AT 2-YEAR INSTITUTIONS	MALE STUDENTS	FEMALE STUDENTS	OVERALL NATIONAL PERCENTAGES
I would like to meet an experienced student who can show me around and give me some advice.	54.8%	58.9%	42.5%	51.0%	56.9%	54.3%
<b>Desire to transfer</b>						
I have no desire to transfer to another school before finishing a degree at this college or university.	70.6%	59.8%	53.5%	61.8%	64.3%	63.2%
I plan to transfer to another school before completing a degree at this college or university.	6.6%	13.1%	19.2%	11.7%	11.3%	11.5%
<b>Total number of students</b>	<b>39,630</b>	<b>38,186</b>	<b>16,888</b>	<b>42,474</b>	<b>51,996</b>	<b>94,704</b>
<b>Average age of students</b>	<b>18.8</b>	<b>18.4</b>	<b>22.7</b>	<b>19.4</b>	<b>19.3</b>	<b>19.4</b>

## Respondent demographics and additional findings

The following data are for freshmen who completed surveys in 2015.

RESPONDENT INFORMATION	STUDENTS AT 4-YEAR PRIVATES	STUDENTS AT 4-YEAR PUBLICS	STUDENTS AT 2-YEAR INSTITUTIONS	MALE STUDENTS	FEMALE STUDENTS	OVERALL NATIONAL PERCENTAGES
Number of respondents	39,630	38,186	16,888	42,474	51,996	94,704
Percent of respondents	41.8%	40.3%	17.8%	44.8%	54.9%	100.0%
Percent female	54.6%	57.7%	49.2%	0.0%	100.0%	54.9%
Percent male	44.8%	42.3%	50.8%	100.0%	0.0%	44.8%
<b>Racial/Ethnic origin</b>						
Black/African American	14.7%	16.3%	14.6%	14.3%	16.2%	15.3%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.7%	0.9%	1.8%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%
Asian or Pacific Islander	4.1%	5.4%	3.4%	4.7%	4.3%	4.5%
White/Caucasian	64.7%	54.0%	56.5%	60.7%	57.4%	58.9%
Hispanic or Latino	9.8%	16.9%	16.5%	12.7%	14.8%	13.8%
Multiethnic or other ethnic origin	4.0%	4.3%	3.9%	3.8%	4.3%	4.1%
Prefer not to respond	2.0%	2.0%	3.3%	2.7%	1.9%	2.3%

<b>RESPONDENT INFORMATION</b>	STUDENTS AT 4-YEAR PRIVATES	STUDENTS AT 4-YEAR PUBLICS	STUDENTS AT 2-YEAR INSTITUTIONS	MALE STUDENTS	FEMALE STUDENTS	OVERALL NATIONAL PERCENTAGES
<b>Highest education level of mother</b>						
8 years or less	2.2%	4.3%	5.9%	3.2%	4.1%	3.7%
Some high school	4.3%	6.2%	11.2%	5.6%	6.9%	6.3%
High school diploma	23.4%	24.9%	32.5%	25.2%	26.0%	25.6%
1 to 3 years of college	25.8%	26.2%	29.1%	25.1%	27.8%	26.6%
Bachelor's degree	27.9%	24.1%	13.3%	25.8%	22.1%	23.8%
Master's degree	12.5%	11.1%	5.1%	11.1%	10.1%	10.6%
Professional degree	3.6%	2.8%	2.5%	3.5%	2.7%	3.1%
<b>Highest education level of father</b>						
8 years or less	2.8%	4.8%	7.7%	3.8%	5.0%	4.5%
Some high school	6.7%	8.9%	14.4%	8.0%	9.8%	9.0%
High school diploma	28.8%	29.4%	36.4%	29.3%	31.4%	30.4%
1 to 3 years of college	21.2%	21.7%	22.7%	21.3%	22.0%	21.7%
Bachelor's degree	23.1%	21.0%	10.5%	22.0%	18.3%	20.0%
Master's degree	11.2%	9.6%	4.4%	10.1%	8.7%	9.3%
Professional degree	5.2%	3.9%	2.8%	4.6%	3.9%	4.2%
<b>Highest degree planned by respondent</b>						
None	0.1%	0.1%	0.4%	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%
1-year certificate	0.2%	0.0%	4.2%	1.2%	0.6%	0.9%
2-year degree (associate)	3.3%	0.5%	30.8%	9.7%	5.0%	7.1%
4-year degree (bachelor's)	40.9%	39.2%	35.3%	43.0%	36.0%	39.2%
Master's degree	34.5%	34.9%	17.3%	29.7%	33.2%	31.6%
Professional degree	21.0%	25.2%	12.0%	16.1%	25.2%	21.1%
<b>Time expecting to spend at work</b>						
0 (I have no plans to work)	25.9%	26.3%	18.2%	26.7%	23.1%	24.7%
1 to 10 hours per week	30.3%	24.5%	15.3%	22.4%	27.6%	25.3%
11 to 20 hours per week	28.9%	33.2%	29.5%	30.3%	31.1%	30.8%
21 to 30 hours per week	10.1%	11.9%	20.4%	13.3%	12.1%	12.7%
31 to 40 hours per week	3.8%	3.3%	12.3%	5.4%	4.9%	5.1%
Over 40 hours per week	1.1%	0.8%	4.2%	2.0%	1.1%	1.5%

RESPONDENT INFORMATION	STUDENTS AT 4-YEAR PRIVATES	STUDENTS AT 4-YEAR PUBLICS	STUDENTS AT 2-YEAR INSTITUTIONS	MALE STUDENTS	FEMALE STUDENTS	OVERALL NATIONAL PERCENTAGES
<b>Average grades as senior in high school</b>						
A	23.8%	23.5%	8.8%	16.3%	24.8%	21.0%
A to B	38.6%	41.1%	31.6%	34.7%	41.3%	38.4%
B	18.3%	18.6%	19.0%	21.8%	15.9%	18.6%
B to C	14.9%	13.9%	28.0%	20.0%	14.3%	16.8%
C	3.0%	2.1%	7.4%	4.7%	2.4%	3.4%
C to D	1.2%	0.7%	4.1%	2.0%	1.1%	1.5%
D	0.2%	0.1%	1.0%	0.5%	0.2%	0.3%
<b>Self-assessment of academic knowledge</b>						
Highest 20%	19.0%	18.2%	10.0%	18.2%	16.2%	17.1%
Next to highest 20%	35.8%	37.1%	27.1%	35.3%	34.4%	34.8%
Middle 20%	43.2%	42.9%	57.5%	43.8%	47.2%	45.6%
Next to lowest 20%	1.7%	1.5%	4.4%	2.4%	2.0%	2.1%
Lowest 20%	0.2%	0.2%	0.9%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%
<b>Self-assessment of academic ability</b>						
Considerably below average	0.3%	0.3%	0.8%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%
Slightly below average	3.3%	3.2%	5.9%	3.7%	3.7%	3.7%
Average	27.8%	28.0%	43.4%	26.7%	33.9%	30.7%
Slightly above average	37.9%	39.3%	30.9%	38.0%	36.5%	37.2%
Considerably above average (top 20%)	28.0%	26.8%	17.1%	28.0%	23.6%	25.6%
Extremely high (top 5%)	2.7%	2.5%	1.8%	3.1%	1.9%	2.4%
<b>Timing of decision to attend chosen college/university</b>						
Decision made few days before	2.2%	1.7%	4.1%	2.8%	2.0%	2.4%
Decision made weeks before	12.0%	10.1%	20.1%	14.7%	11.1%	12.7%
Decision made many months before	85.6%	88.2%	75.7%	82.4%	86.9%	84.9%

**About the statistical processes**

Due to the large sample sizes, virtually all differences in the means shown in this report proved to be statistically significant based on either a t-test (using two-level variables such as male/female) or ANOVA analysis (using multi-level variables such as school type). To identify greater contrasts between male vs. female students (**the items that appear in green**), Cohen's d was used to identify items with small or medium effect sizes. Virtually all other differences between male and female students, although statistically significant, registered negligible effect sizes.

## About this study and the survey instrument that was used

In 2015, a national sample of 94,704 incoming freshmen attending 308 colleges and universities across the United States completed a 20-minute, 100-item, college completion risk survey, the **College Student Inventory, Form B**, of the Retention Management System *Plus*™. A profile of the student respondents appears on pages 13-15. To see sample copies of the survey, visit [www.RuffaloNL.com/CollegeStudentInventory](http://www.RuffaloNL.com/CollegeStudentInventory).

Students filled out the survey during orientation or within their first weeks of classes. Immediately afterward, findings were reported electronically to the respondents' college or university for early identification of student risks. The aggregated findings for each institution, along with the disaggregated findings for individual students, led the development of each institution's first-year programming and helped to prioritize academic support services and student success interventions for specific subpopulations and specific individuals. In addition, the findings were nationally aggregated to produce this report.

## Invitation to replicate findings

Readers of this report are invited to replicate the study's findings with their own student population(s) to identify risks to completion using the same instrument used in the study. Faculty, administrators, and student success professionals can use the findings to address students' specific strengths, weaknesses, needs, and concerns.

Because attrition continues beyond the first term, motivational risk follow-up surveys are available for administration to students at the beginning of the first term, at the midpoint of the first year, and as the second year begins. Using the findings of these surveys, educators are able to engage students in timely conversations and to proactively connect students with key services that make a difference.

Call **800.876.1117** or email [ContactUs@RuffaloNL.com](mailto:ContactUs@RuffaloNL.com) to discuss your interest in motivational assessment with a student retention specialist.

### About Ruffalo Noel Levitz

Ruffalo Noel Levitz provides higher education and nonprofit organizations with technology-enabled services, software, and consulting for enrollment and fundraising management. Since 1973, we have partnered with more than 3,000 colleges and universities and numerous nonprofit clients worldwide.

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### How to cite this report:

Ruffalo Noel Levitz (2016). *2016 national freshman motivation to complete college report*. Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Ruffalo Noel Levitz. Retrieve from [www.RuffaloNL.com/Motivation](http://www.RuffaloNL.com/Motivation).

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