



National Adult Student Satisfaction and Priorities Report

A joint study by RNL
and Lumina Foundation



STUDENT SUCCESS



Introduction

Adult learners have grown into a large and important student population. They are defined as students age 25 and older. Some have no college credit; others have some college credit but stopped out before completing their degree. This key demographic makes up almost 40 percent of the national undergraduate population¹. They are also critical to addressing America’s talent needs and reaching the required national 60 percent attainment goal².

However, adult learners must contend with several competing realities while pursuing their credentials. They are often working full-time or multiple jobs. They have families, financial obligations, and additional responsibilities competing for their time and attention.

Student satisfaction assessment plays a critical role in providing institutions with data they need to support adult students. Satisfaction assessment can pinpoint challenges and opportunities so that institutions can take proactive steps to address roadblocks to completion and maximize outcomes for adult learners—who are at greater likelihood of withdrawing if they do not see value in pursuing education.

For more than two decades, the national standard for benchmarking student satisfaction in higher education has been the RNL Student Satisfaction Inventory™ (SSI). Since its beginning in 1994, this benchmark survey and its companion instruments for special populations have been used by more than 2,900 colleges and universities to evaluate students’ concerns that correspond with student success, college completion, student recruitment, strategic planning, and re-accreditation.

Lumina Foundation has taken a comprehensive approach and made several investments over the years aimed at improving adult learner completion, including competency-based education, reverse-transfer and degree-reclamation programs, and state-level initiatives promoting affordability and offering critical support services.

Lumina partnered with RNL to better understand the satisfaction levels of currently enrolled adult learners seeking their first degree. The focus of this report is on adult learners at community colleges and four-year private and public institutions, referencing traditional students as a point of comparison at all three institution types. The data at the four-year institutions is specific to undergraduate students only and doesn’t include any students who self-identify as being currently in graduate programs.

National context on serving adult learners

Adult learners differ from their traditional-aged counterparts³ in what they need from their higher education institutions to improve their chances of completing their degrees timely.

Due to the unique and competing demands on their time, adult learners enrolled in postsecondary institutions can benefit from⁴:

- Flexible learning options (e.g., competency-based, hybrid, dual enrollment, accelerated or online)
- Structured scheduling (e.g., block schedules, evening and weekend classes)
- Dedicated mentorship, action-based experiential learning, and/or intrusive coaching

¹Analysis of 2015-16 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:16) data, conducted by the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP). Computation by NCES PowerStats Version 1.0. Variables: AGE. Weight: WTA000. Undergraduate students attending 2015-16.

²“Lumina’s Goal,” <https://www.luminafoundation.org/lumina-goal>

³<https://ednote.ecs.org/27-is-the-new-18-adult-students-on-the-rise/> (cites joint RNL and CAEL report—2015-16 National Adult Learners Satisfaction-Priorities Report)

⁴<https://ednote.ecs.org/navigating-the-adult-learner-life-cycle/>

- Student supports (face-to-face and online tutoring options, paper review, as well as non-academic supports)
- Recognition of prior learning (work experience, military, etc.)
- Liberal transfer credit acceptance policy and mechanisms
- Low-friction application and admission processes
- Seamless articulated two-plus-two pathways for community college to bachelor's programs

Many colleges and universities are working to modify existing institutional policies and programs (or create new ones) to better meet these needs of adult learners.

Why student satisfaction matters

Student satisfaction is a key component of college persistence and educational completion. Students who are satisfied are more likely to continue their educational path. Furthermore, research from RNL suggests that institutions with higher graduation levels also have higher student satisfaction levels (Bryant & Bodfish, 2014)⁵. In addition, a link has been established between institutions with higher student satisfaction and higher alumni giving rates (Bryant, Bodfish & Stever, 2015)⁶.

Executive summary

These are the key observations from this report:

- Adult students (age 25 and over) were more satisfied than traditional students (those under 25) at community colleges and four-year publics. They were slightly less satisfied than traditional students at four-year privates.
- White students were most likely to be attending their first-choice institution across institution types.
- Geographic setting (location) was a more important factor in the decision to enroll for adult students as compared with traditional students at all three institution types.
- Personalized attention prior to enrollment was much more important as an enrollment factor to adult students of color than it was to adult white students.
- Faculty being fair and unbiased was identified as a challenge for African American students at all three institution types and for Hispanic students at four-year publics. It was not an identified challenge (or strength) for white students.
- The perception of campus run-around was a unique challenge item for adult students at all three types of institutions. (Traditional age students didn't identify it as a priority concern.) This was largely driven by the perceptions of white students more than the students of color.
- "There are adequate services to help me decide upon a career" was uniquely identified as a challenge for adult students at four-year public and private institutions.

Read the full report to learn more about these observations and how campuses can respond.



DEFINITIONS IN THIS REPORT

Adult students are those 25 and older

Traditional students are 24 and younger

⁵Bryant, J. & Bodfish, S (2014). The relationship of student satisfaction to key indicators for colleges and universities. Cedar Rapids: Ruffalo Noel Levitz.

⁶Bryant, J., Bodfish, S & Stever, D. (2015). The correlation between college student satisfaction and alumni giving. Cedar Rapids: Ruffalo Noel Levitz.

SOURCES OF THE DATA

1

Data Set One: Student Satisfaction Inventory Community College Data

133,531 student records from 185 institutions

COMMUNITY COLLEGES	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL
24 and under	81,903	61.34%
25 and over	51,628	38.66%
Total	133,531	100.00%

COMMUNITY COLLEGES	AFRICAN AMERICAN	HISPANIC	WHITE
24 and under	7,288	13,656	48,411
25 and over	6,581	5,564	29,778

2

Data Set Two: Student Satisfaction Inventory Four-Year Public Data

51,905 undergraduate student records from 60 institutions

FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL
24 and under	44,044	84.86%
25 and over	7,861	15.14%
Total	51,905	100.00%

FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS	AFRICAN AMERICAN	HISPANIC	WHITE
24 and under	5,860	4,149	27,604
25 and over	1,186	824	4,405

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Data Set Three: Student Satisfaction Inventory Four-Year Private Data

183,329 undergraduate student records from 318 institutions

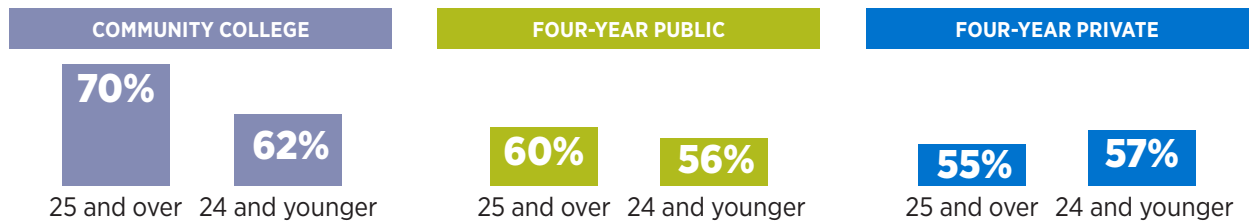
FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL
24 and under	156,889	85.58%
25 and over	26,440	14.42%
Total	183,329	100.00%

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES	AFRICAN AMERICAN	HISPANIC	WHITE
24 and under	15,408	18,185	98,220
25 and over	4,930	3,822	11,360

Note: Please see the separate appendix available for this report for demographic details on the data sets.

OVERALL SATISFACTION LEVELS

This is the percentage of students who indicate that they are satisfied or very satisfied with their experience overall.



Overall levels of satisfaction are much higher for older students at community colleges, slightly higher for adult students at four-year publics, and slightly lower for older students at four-year private institutions.

It is also important to observe that community colleges have the highest levels of satisfaction for adult students compared to four-year publics and privates.

SUMMARY SATISFACTION SCORES	OVERALL 25 AND OVER	AFRICAN AMERICAN 25 AND OVER	HISPANIC 25 AND OVER	WHITE 25 AND OVER
Community colleges	70%	72%	75%	71%
Four-year publics	60%	57%	66%	63%
Four-year privates	55%	59%	57%	58%

Note: The overall data set for 25 and over reflects other race/ethnicity students (Asian, Native American) as well as the African American, Hispanic, and white students.

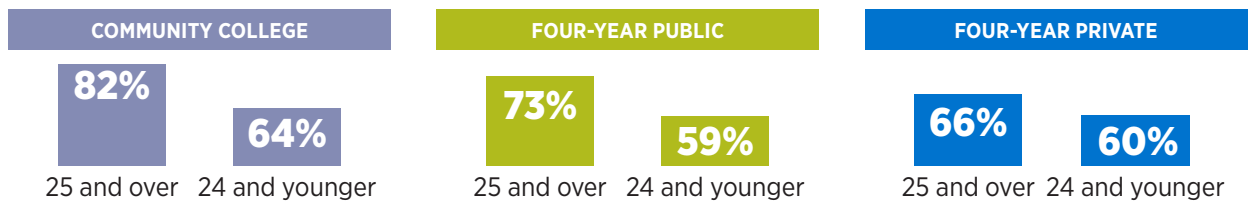
Race/ethnicity observations:

- Student perceptions of satisfaction are comparable across the race/ethnicity indicators at community colleges and four-year private institutions.
- Four-year publics have the greatest variation in satisfaction scores across the race/ethnicity designations, with Hispanic students with the highest satisfaction scores and African American students with the lowest.



INSTITUTIONAL CHOICE INDICATORS

Students attending their first-choice institution



Older students at both community colleges and four-year publics are more likely to indicate that they perceive the institution to be their first choice. Adult students at four-year privates also have slightly higher indications of institutional choice than traditional students. Perceptions of the institution being a first choice have been linked to higher satisfaction indicators. The institutional choice indicators follow the similar pattern of student satisfaction scores observed in the previous table.

FIRST CHOICE INDICATION	OVERALL 25 AND OVER	AFRICAN AMERICAN 25 AND OVER	HISPANIC 25 AND OVER	WHITE 25 AND OVER
Community colleges	82%	77%	81%	85%
Four-year publics	73%	65%	70%	78%
Four-year privates	66%	65%	63%	71%

Race/ethnicity observations:

- African American students are the least likely to be attending their first-choice institution at community colleges and four-year public institutions.
- White students are most likely to be attending their first-choice institution.

CAMPUS OPPORTUNITIES:

- Consider options for positioning the institution as a first-choice institution in the recruitment process.
- Work closely with students of color to understand their perceptions and to show how the institution is a good fit for them. Develop race and ethnic personas using existing student success stories to improve the diversity recruitment efforts of Hispanic, African American, and diverse populations.
- Establish a choice-tracking mechanism during the enrollment process. For example, put choice questions on the application for admission.
- Communicate value and return on investment using lifelong earnings potential early and often, especially with students not at their first-choice institution, in the alerting system so that they can be nudged with value messages.
- Include choice as a pre- and post-enrollment variable used in your predictive analytics.
- Target non-first-choice students in your re-enrollment management plan by providing value messages early and often.
- Ensure non-first-choice students have ample opportunity to develop degree plans that are on time and help them to meet their longer term career goals.
- Provide advisors/coaches throughout marketing, recruitment, and retention lifecycles to promote high touch, continuous engagement to support adult students in overcoming attainment barriers and to proactively anticipate student needs.

ENROLLMENT FACTORS

The results below show the percentage of students who rated the following factors as important or very important in their decision to enroll.

FACTOR	COMMUNITY COLLEGE		FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC		FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	
	25 AND OVER	24 AND YOUNGER	25 AND OVER UNDERGRAD	24 AND YOUNGER UNDERGRAD	25 AND OVER UNDERGRAD	24 AND YOUNGER UNDERGRAD
Cost	85%	84%	80%	83%	73%	79%
Financial aid	80%	77%	80%	79%	79%	83%
Academic reputation	76%	70%	76%	74%	79%	78%
Geographic setting	70%	59%	67%	60%	66%	57%
Personalized attention prior to enrollment	62%	60%	57%	58%	68%	63%

While cost and financial aid are important for both age groups in all three data sets, financial aid is slightly more important to adult students at community colleges and to traditional-age students at four-year privates. There are higher levels of importance placed on perceived academic reputation for older students at community colleges, while this factor is similar for both age groups at the four-year institutions. Geographic setting (location) is understandably more important to older students at all three institution types. Personalized attention prior to enrollment is most important to adult students attending four-year private institutions.



Take a closer look at enrollment factors by race/ethnicity:

COMMUNITY COLLEGES 25 AND OVER	OVERALL	AFRICAN AMERICAN	HISPANIC	WHITE
Cost	85%	87%	88%	85%
Financial aid	80%	86%	84%	79%
Academic reputation	76%	84%	81%	74%
Geographic setting	70%	73%	71%	69%
Personalized attention prior to enrollment	62%	73%	71%	56%



FOUR-YEAR PUBLICS 25 AND OVER	OVERALL	AFRICAN AMERICAN	HISPANIC	WHITE
Cost	80%	85%	86%	78%
Financial aid	80%	85%	87%	79%
Academic reputation	76%	83%	80%	73%
Geographic setting	67%	70%	73%	67%
Personalized attention prior to enrollment	57%	70%	69%	50%

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATES 25 AND OVER	OVERALL	AFRICAN AMERICAN	HISPANIC	WHITE
Cost	73%	75%	78%	71%
Financial aid	79%	81%	83%	78%
Academic reputation	79%	81%	81%	78%
Geographic setting	66%	69%	70%	64%
Personalized attention prior to enrollment	68%	74%	76%	64%

Financial aid and academic reputation are slightly more important to African American and Hispanic students than white students. Where we really see a difference is in the importance of personalized attention prior to enrollment, which is much higher for African American and Hispanic students as compared with white students.

CAMPUS OPPORTUNITIES:

- Recognize the importance of financial aid as a factor in the decision to enroll for students of all ages and provide appropriate support services throughout the process.
- Recruit adult students in the local geographic area.
- Ensure diversity is a part of your annual, strategic, and institutional enrollment plans with emphasis on continuous engagement and communication planning content when recruiting adult students of color. Be intentional in your outreach and engagement, providing personalized attention as much as possible.
- Establish conversations and events during the onboarding process that focus on how to pay for college in a way that is culturally sensitive to students of color and adult-student friendly.
- Clearly outline return on investment and value of the degree in terms of lifelong earnings. Reach out to campus departments to gather outcomes for adult learners specifically.
- Ensure that onboarding efforts intentionally address students’ end-game outcomes.
- Provide net price calculators and financial aid literacy early and often throughout the lifecycle of the adult learner to educate students on the difference between gross and net cost based on financial aid award. This could be the difference between starting and finishing a credential/degree.

How to read the results on the following tables

Students answered more than 70 items about their college experience, providing two ratings:

- A level of **importance** that the institution is meeting the expectation, on a seven-point scale.
- A level of **satisfaction** that the institution is meeting the expectation, on a seven-point scale.
- A **performance gap** is calculated to reflect the difference between the importance score and the satisfaction score.

STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES ARE IDENTIFIED IN THE TABLES

- **Strengths** are items with high importance, high satisfaction, and a low gap. Specifically, these are items in the top half of importance and the top quartile of satisfaction, relative to the data set. These are items noted as **strengths in green**.
- **Challenges** are items with high importance, low satisfaction, and a high gap. They are items in the top half of importance and the bottom quartile of satisfaction or the top quartile of the performance gaps for the data set. These are items in designated as **challenges in red**.
- Items that were neither a strength nor a challenge are reflected **in gold**.

Notice that strengths and challenges are relative to the institution type and the particular data set. What may be listed as a challenge or strength for one data set may not be a strength or challenge for another, even if the importance, satisfaction, and gap scores are identical.

Note: The breakouts by race/ethnicity are reflected for items that are challenges by institution type and/or when there are different indications of strengths and challenges across race/ethnicity subpopulations.

ITEMS OF STRENGTH AND CHALLENGE WITHIN CLUSTERS

Financial aid and satisfaction

FINANCIAL AID ITEMS	COMMUNITY COLLEGE		FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC		FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	
	25 AND OVER	24 AND YOUNGER	25 AND OVER UNDERGRAD	24 AND YOUNGER UNDERGRAD	25 AND OVER UNDERGRAD	24 AND YOUNGER UNDERGRAD
Adequate financial aid is available for most students.	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge
Financial aid awards are announced in time to be helpful in college planning.	Challenge	Neither	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge
Financial aid counselors are helpful.	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge


Financial aid items are a concern across all age groups and institution types.

RACE/ETHNICITY OBSERVATIONS FOR STUDENTS 25 AND OVER

ADEQUATE FINANCIAL AID IS AVAILABLE FOR MOST STUDENTS	OVERALL	AFRICAN AMERICAN	HISPANIC	WHITE
Community colleges	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge
Four-year publics	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge
Four-year privates	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge

FINANCIAL AID AWARDS ARE ANNOUNCED IN TIME TO BE HELPFUL IN COLLEGE PLANNING	OVERALL	AFRICAN AMERICAN	HISPANIC	WHITE
Community colleges	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge
Four-year publics	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge
Four-year privates	Challenge	Neither	Neither	Challenge

FINANCIAL AID COUNSELORS ARE HELPFUL	OVERALL	AFRICAN AMERICAN	HISPANIC	WHITE
Community colleges	Challenge	Challenge	Neither	Challenge
Four-year publics	Challenge	Neither	Challenge	Challenge
Four-year privates	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge

 Financial aid items were an issue for students 25 and older at community colleges across all employment categories: employed full-time, employed part-time, and not employed.

CAMPUS OPPORTUNITIES:

- Ensure that financial aid staff are trained at the highest levels to minimize any potential run-around especially for first-generation, students of color, and low-income students. Be proactive with these populations and provide key information even if students do not ask for it.
- Be intentional with continuing student awards. You should be awarding as the student completes the FAFSA. Don't hold continuing student awards until new students are awarded.
- Organize financial aid staff schedules so that you can meet the demands of the adult learner (example: evenings, weekends, and/or virtual hours)
- Begin to introduce financial aid literacy and content at the top of the funnel in the communication plan and filter throughout with continuous, multichannel engagement activities to include email, phone, text, visits, webinars, literacy sessions, etc. Conduct FAFSA engagement communication at the time of the admissions application to provide more ongoing support to begin and complete the FAFSA as part of the enrollment planning process.

Academic advising and satisfaction

ACADEMIC ADVISING	COMMUNITY COLLEGE		FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC		FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	
	25 AND OVER	24 AND YOUNGER	25 AND OVER UNDERGRAD	24 AND YOUNGER UNDERGRAD	25 AND OVER UNDERGRAD	24 AND YOUNGER UNDERGRAD
My academic advisor is knowledgeable about program requirements/requirements in my major.	Challenge	Challenge	Strength	Strength	Strength	Strength
My academic advisor is approachable.	Neither	Neither	Strength	Strength	Strength	Strength
My advisor is concerned about success as an individual.	Challenge	Challenge	Neither	Neither	Neither	Strength

- Advising items are more likely to be a challenge for students at community colleges and are more likely to be a strength for students at four-year institutions.
- Adults at community colleges viewed their academic advisors' knowledge of program requirements as a challenge, while students at four-year publics and privates considered it a strength.
- Adult students at community colleges also questioned their advisor's concern for their individual success, while this was a strength for traditional students at four-year privates and not a priority to other student populations.
- At four-year public and private institutions, only traditional students considered their advisor being concerned about them as an individual as a strength; it was not a priority for the other populations at the four-year institutions.

RACE/ETHNICITY OBSERVATIONS FOR STUDENTS 25 AND OVER

ADULT STUDENTS AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES	OVERALL 25 AND OVER	AFRICAN AMERICAN 25 AND OVER	HISPANIC 25 AND OVER	WHITE 25 AND OVER
My academic advisor is knowledgeable about my program requirements.	Challenge	Neither	Challenge	Challenge
My advisor is concerned about my success an individual.	Challenge	Neither	Neither	Challenge

The overall challenge indicators are primarily driven by the expectations and perceptions of white students.



The majority of the academic advising items were consistent strengths for students of all race/ethnicities at four-year public and private institutions.

CAMPUS OPPORTUNITIES:

- Community colleges have opportunities for improving their academic advising systems to better connect with students of all ages individually and with accurate information. Advising is key for navigating the educational pathway, and students need guidance in knowing what classes to take when, in order to accomplish their goals.
- Implement a developmental academic advising model with related best practices, expectations for advisors, and responsibilities of advisees—instead of a registration model.
- Develop a sustainable academic advising professional development plan, and update and implement the plan each year. Embed cultural competencies within the model, and include outreach to students to educate them about using the advising process to their fullest advantage.
- Leverage the “guided pathways” initiative across community colleges to help students find the most optimal pathway to attainment through cohort modeling, similar to the “four year graduation plan” at traditional universities/colleges. Too many options create unnecessary confusion, delays, and barriers. Rather, guide and direct. Remove obstacles to increase potential for success.

Instruction and satisfaction

INSTRUCTION	COMMUNITY COLLEGE		FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC		FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	
	25 AND OVER	24 AND YOUNGER	25 AND OVER UNDERGRAD	24 AND YOUNGER UNDERGRAD	25 AND OVER UNDERGRAD	24 AND YOUNGER UNDERGRAD
Nearly all faculty are knowledgeable in their fields.	Strength	Strength	Strength	Strength	Strength	Strength
The quality of instruction in most of my classes is excellent.	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Strength	Neither
Faculty provide timely feedback about student progress in a course.	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge
Faculty are fair and unbiased in their treatment of individual students.	Neither	Neither	Challenge	Challenge	Neither	Challenge
Faculty are usually available after class and during office hours.	Strength	Strength	Strength	Strength	Strength	Strength

- Students of both age categories at all three types of institutions felt knowledgeable faculty and faculty being available outside of class were strengths at their campuses.
- All of the student groups considered the faculty’s lack of providing timely feedback a challenge.
- Faculty being fair and unbiased was considered a challenge by both age categories at four-year public institutions as well as traditional students at four-year privates, while it was neither a strength nor a challenge at community colleges.
- The strength/challenge perception differed on the quality of instruction. Adult students at community colleges and four-year public institutions considered it a challenge, while adult students at the four-year private institutions considered it a strength.

RACE/ETHNICITY OBSERVATIONS FOR STUDENTS 25 AND OVER

THE QUALITY OF INSTRUCTION IN MOST OF MY CLASSES IS EXCELLENT	OVERALL	AFRICAN AMERICAN	HISPANIC	WHITE
Community colleges	Challenge	Neither	Strength	Challenge
Four-year publics	Challenge	Strength	Strength	Challenge
Four-year privates	Strength	Strength	Strength	Strength

FACULTY PROVIDE TIMELY FEEDBACK ABOUT STUDENT PROGRESS IN A COURSE	OVERALL	AFRICAN AMERICAN	HISPANIC	WHITE
Community colleges	Challenge	Neither	Neither	Challenge
Four-year publics	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge
Four-year privates	Challenge	Neither	Neither	Challenge

FACULTY ARE FAIR AND UNBIASED IN THEIR TREATMENT OF INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS	OVERALL	AFRICAN AMERICAN	HISPANIC	WHITE
Community colleges	Neither	Challenge	Neither	Neither
Four-year publics	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Neither
Four-year privates	Neither	Challenge	Neither	Neither

- The quality of instruction is an identified strength for Hispanic students at community colleges, but a challenge for white students. There are similar observations at four-year public institutions, with the addition of African American students indicating it as a strength.
- Faculty providing timely feedback is a higher priority challenge item for white students at community colleges and four-year privates, but is consistently identified as a challenge for four-year public students.
- Faculty being fair and unbiased is identified as a challenge for African American students at all three institution types and for Hispanic students at four-year publics.

CAMPUS OPPORTUNITIES:

- Provide positive feedback to faculty on the student perceptions of knowledge and availability.
- Work with faculty to help them understand the students’ desire for more timely feedback and create systems to make this feedback more consistent.
- Support faculty in level-setting what ‘timely feedback’ means and what expectations are appropriate and humanly possible.
- Support faculty to assign early assignments with timely feedback (graded or ungraded) so that students know within the first three weeks if their preparation is effective.
- Be sure faculty are sensitive to perceptions of their being fair and unbiased with all of the students they interact with.
- Embed cultural competencies as part of faculty development programs.
- Provide faculty professional development for generational differences and their desires.
- Ensure that faculty development programs include high impact classroom practices, experiential learning, classroom assessment, and opportunities to learn with faculty outside of the classroom.
- Provide faculty training on best practices for teaching and supporting adult learners and the unique obstacles/barriers that impede attainment for adult learners.

Registration and satisfaction

REGISTRATION	COMMUNITY COLLEGE		FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC		FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	
	25 AND OVER	24 AND YOUNGER	25 AND OVER UNDERGRAD	24 AND YOUNGER UNDERGRAD	25 AND OVER UNDERGRAD	24 AND YOUNGER UNDERGRAD
I am able to register for classes with few conflicts.	Challenge	Neither	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge
There is a good variety of courses.	Strength	Strength	Neither	Strength	Challenge	Neither

- The ability to register for classes was an identified challenge across all categories, with the exception of the traditional students at community colleges.
- There were different perceptions on the variety of courses, which were identified as strengths for all students at community colleges and for the traditional students at four-year publics. Adult students at four-year private institutions identified this item as a challenge.

RACE/ETHNICITY OBSERVATIONS FOR STUDENTS 25 AND OVER

I AM ABLE TO REGISTER FOR CLASSES WITH FEW CONFLICTS	OVERALL	AFRICAN AMERICAN	HISPANIC	WHITE
Community colleges	Challenge	Neither	Neither	Challenge
Four-year publics	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge
Four-year privates	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge

At community colleges, the ability to register for classes is identified as a challenge primarily by white students.

CLASSES ARE SCHEDULED AT TIMES THAT ARE CONVENIENT FOR ME
Unique item on the community college version

COMMUNITY COLLEGE 25 AND OVER		COMMUNITY COLLEGE 24 AND YOUNGER
Challenge		Strength

- Convenient class times are an identified challenge for adult students at community colleges as compared with the traditional-age students who identify it as a strength.
- The finding of convenient class times as a challenge held across enrollment status (full-time and part-time) and race/ethnicity at community colleges.

CAMPUS OPPORTUNITIES:

- This is an opportunity for community colleges to identify what nontraditional students consider as “convenient times,” review course offerings for in-demand classes, and to position the institution as being sensitive to the school/life balance and unique needs of adult learners.
- Institutions have an opportunity to explore what conflicts students identify when it comes to registering for classes. Are these conflicts with pre-requisites, capacity, or with courses all being offered at the same time? Are there conflicts with their work schedules and family commitments? Issues with advisor guidance during the process to register for the “right courses” at the “right time” in their degree plan? Assessing conflicts with registration can reveal ways to resolve potential roadblocks to completion.
- Determine if hybrid or fully online courses/programs are more conducive for adult scheduling demands.
- Adult students want to be able to move through their curricula efficiently and effectively; institutions should work to ensure adequate sequencing of courses with adequate seats at times and in modalities that serve their adult populations.
- Publish a guaranteed schedule. Students often get off their guided pathway tracks when the sequenced courses are cancelled at the last minute.

Campus climate and satisfaction

CAMPUS CLIMATE	COMMUNITY COLLEGE		FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC		FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	
	25 AND OVER	24 AND YOUNGER	25 AND OVER UNDERGRAD	24 AND YOUNGER UNDERGRAD	25 AND OVER UNDERGRAD	24 AND YOUNGER UNDERGRAD
The campus is safe and secure for all students.	Strength	Strength	Strength	Neither	Strength	Strength
Students are made to feel welcome at this institution.	Strength	Strength	Strength	Strength	Strength	Strength
The campus staff are caring and helpful.	Neither	Strength	Neither	Neither	Strength	Strength
I seldom get the "run-around" when seeking information on this campus.	Challenge	Neither	Challenge	Neither	Challenge	Neither

- Overall, adult students and traditional-age students at community colleges and at four-year institutions felt welcomed and safe on their campuses.
- The campus staff are caring and helpful was noted as strengths for both age groups at four-year privates and for traditional students at community colleges.
- One challenge, as noted by adult students at community colleges, four-year public and private institutions, is the campus run-around. This item is not a priority for traditional-age students, but is definitely a concern for adult students at all three institution types.

RACE/ETHNICITY OBSERVATIONS FOR STUDENTS 25 AND OVER

THE CAMPUS IS SAFE AND SECURE FOR ALL STUDENT	OVERALL	AFRICAN AMERICAN	HISPANIC	WHITE
Community colleges	Strength	Strength	Strength	Strength
Four-year publics	Strength	Challenge	Neither	Strength
Four-year privates	Strength	Strength	Strength	Strength

The campus being safe and secure was a unique challenge for African American students at four-year public institutions.

I SELDOM GET THE “RUN-AROUND” WHEN SEEKING INFORMATION AT THIS CAMPUS	OVERALL	AFRICAN AMERICAN	HISPANIC	WHITE
Community colleges	Challenge	Neither	Neither	Challenge
Four-year publics	Challenge	Neither	Neither	Challenge
Four-year privates	Challenge	Neither	Neither	Challenge

Campus run-around was primarily an issue for white students more so than students of color at all three institution types. This may indicate that it is more of an issue of perception and higher expectations for white students, rather than an issue of how the campus is serving students. However, it is still an area that can be explored on campuses serving adult students.

CAMPUS OPPORTUNITIES:

- Campuses have an opportunity to identify areas of run-around for adult students. These may include processes and procedures, access to information on the website, support services providing timely information, and convenient access to onboarding. Adult students may be even more sensitive to these issues with the limited amount of time they have to manage school activities in addition to their work and family commitments.
- Ensure that transcript evaluation requests are completed and explained in a timely manner.
- Pay special attention to identifying unasked questions and make sure they are answered.
- Acronym usage should be minimized in any communications whether written, digital, or face-to-face.
- Implement a strategy designed to train faculty and staff to minimize the run-around at every stage of enrollment and re-enrollment. Place student-centered staff in front line positions, cross-train front-line staff (and provide access to relevant screens), and develop these individuals to ask questions in response to student questions to clarify issues students are trying to resolve.
- Create a dedicated, one-stop center or resource for your adult learners to minimize or eliminate run-around or being passed to someone else. In the traditional undergraduate setting there are first-time-in-college counselors. Dedicated adult counselors from each functional office (admissions, recruitment, financial aid, etc.) could minimize this issue.

TUITION PAID IS A WORTHWHILE INVESTMENT
Unique item on the four-year version

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC		FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	
Challenge 25 AND OVER UNDERGRAD	Challenge 24 AND YOUNGER UNDERGRAD	Challenge 25 AND OVER UNDERGRAD	Challenge 24 AND YOUNGER UNDERGRAD

This item is unique to the four-year version of the survey, but it is important to note that it is identified as a consistent challenge across all age groups at both types of institution.

RACE/ETHNICITY OBSERVATIONS FOR STUDENTS 25 AND OVER

TUITION PAID IS A WORTHWHILE INVESTMENT	OVERALL	AFRICAN AMERICAN	HISPANIC	WHITE
Four-year publics	Challenge	Neither	Challenge	Challenge
Four-year privates	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge

Tuition as a worthwhile investment is also identified as a challenge across the race/ethnicity indicators at four-year publics and privates, with the exception of African American students at four-year publics.

CAMPUS OPPORTUNITIES:

- This is an opportunity for institutions to communicate value to their students and to be intentional at being responsive to priority issues for students. Students are very aware of the “sticker price” for the tuition they are paying and have corresponding expectations based on that investment. Adult learners in particular may need additional proof of their return on investment given they are juggling responsibilities that compete for their time and focus.
- Clearly outline return on investment and value of the degree in terms of lifelong earnings.
- Know your institution’s social mobility impact and train front line staff, especially advisors, to be fluent in the impact and return on investment of the college degree.
- Begin telling success stories and promoting outcomes via program area early and often through varied marketing and recruitment channels to include the web and all communication plans. Align with industry and resources to offer and recruit for programs that align with statewide-national high priority occupations with high demand for graduates.

THERE ARE ADEQUATE RESOURCES TO HELP ME DECIDE UPON A CAREER

COMMUNITY COLLEGE		FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC		FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	
Neither	Neither	Challenge	Neither	Challenge	Neither
25 AND OVER UNDERGRAD	24 AND YOUNGER UNDERGRAD	25 AND OVER UNDERGRAD	24 AND YOUNGER UNDERGRAD	25 AND OVER UNDERGRAD	24 AND YOUNGER UNDERGRAD

One other notable challenge area for adult students at four-year public and private institutions is the expectation for assistance in deciding upon a career.

RACE/ETHNICITY OBSERVATIONS FOR STUDENTS 25 AND OVER

THERE ARE ADEQUATE SERVICES TO HELP ME DECIDE UPON A CAREER	OVERALL	AFRICAN AMERICAN	HISPANIC	WHITE
Community colleges	Neither	Neither	Neither	Neither
Four-year publics	Challenge	Neither	Challenge	Neither
Four-year privates	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge

The career services item indication of a challenge is consistent across race/ethnicities at four-year private institutions, but was uniquely identified by Hispanic students at four-year publics.

CAMPUS OPPORTUNITIES:

- It is important to target career resources to adult students, especially at four-year private and public institutions.
- Develop and embed career tools and support adult learners in each year of the student experience, culminating with a successful transition to a bachelor’s program, graduate school, or the world of work.
- Provide for Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) for adult students to strengthen the degree plan and career decision.
- Know your graduate outcomes by local, state, and national channels to utilize outcomes content and messaging throughout the student lifecycle and to proactively promote career planning.
- Community colleges in particular need to facilitate student movement from credit to non-credit programs and from non-credit to credit programs. Do not assume that because a prospective student came to the college for one kind of program, that they are in the right place.

Moving to action

What can you do with this information?

Examples of innovative ways to serve adult students from campuses

- Competency-based learning should be considered alongside credit-based learning.
- Ensure that the academic and student development offerings are friendly to the adult learner. Using a traditional approach will not suffice. An example would be virtual delivery of coursework along with virtual student support.
- Adopt a co-requisite model for students who require remediation or developmental coursework rather than getting stuck in the swirl of traditional developmental education.
- Make attainment a statewide effort. Partner with local community colleges, universities, colleges, and industry to develop guided pathways to attainment that align with industry demand and skillsets needed.
- Make re-enrollment and degree completion institution-wide priorities. It costs five times more to recruit a new student than to retain an existing student.
- Develop a taskforce or committee to provide additional resources/strategies to help adult learners overcome the obstacles and barriers to “return” or “stay” to complete.
- Campuses may want to be particularly aware of promoting outcomes to adult learners; look for ways to continue to market to your adult students on what employment and opportunities may be available to them when they complete their degree.



How do campuses use data from the RNL Student Satisfaction Inventory to make positive changes?

The Student Satisfaction Inventory from RNL is designed to be actionable. The surveys uncover priority items for improvement by identifying areas where students express a high level of importance along with a low level of satisfaction. Additionally, the surveys allow you to compare your findings with peer institution benchmarks and to monitor and track improvements in specific areas. The opportunity to focus in on student populations such as non-traditional students allows for a greater focus on certain populations and opportunities to implement targeted initiatives for specific groups.

Actions that colleges and universities deploy range from changing policies and procedure to intentionally communicating with students to change their perceptions.

4 KEY USES FOR THE RNL STUDENT SATISFACTION INVENTORY DATA:

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

Findings from the RNL Student Satisfaction Inventory are specifically designed to be used and are based on **reliable and valid national norms**.

Additional instruments in the RNL Satisfaction-Priorities Survey family include the **Adult Student Priorities Survey** for students in graduate and undergraduate adult-focused programs and the **Priorities Survey for Online Learners** for students taking courses in 100 percent online environments.



See survey samples at RuffaloNL.com/SatisfactionSurveys

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Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation in Indianapolis that is committed to making opportunities for learning beyond high school available to all. The foundation envisions a system that is easy to navigate, delivers fair results, and meets the nation's need for talent through a broad range of credentials. Lumina's goal is to prepare people for informed citizenship and for success in a global economy.

The Study Coordinators

This study was coordinated by Dr. Amia Foston and Dr. Wendy Sedlak from Lumina Foundation and by Julie Bryant from RNL.



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How to cite this report

Ruffalo Noel Levitz & Lumina. (2019). *2019 National Adult Student Satisfaction and Priorities Report*. Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Ruffalo Noel Levitz. Available at www.RuffaloNL.com/AdultStudent

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Download the Appendices to find additional data and results from this study

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