

Comparison of Findings for Community College Students: Results from Trellis' Fall 2020 and 2021 Student Financial Wellness Surveys

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Key Findings

- A higher percentage of community college students felt their school made tuition and textbooks more affordable in 2021, compared to 2020.
- In 2021, fewer community college students agreed or strongly agreed they were worried about having enough money to pay for school compared to 2020.
- A larger percentage of respondents in the fall 2021 survey indicated they would recommend their school to a friend or family member compared to 2020.
- Fewer community college respondents reported experiencing low or very low food security in 2021, compared to 2020.

While enrollments across all higher education sectors decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic, this decline has been particularly steep for community colleges.¹ Many colleges and universities across the country instituted tuition freezes during the pandemic as a way to try to retain enrolled students and attract potential students, and relief funds provided by the federal government during the pandemic helped colleges maintain funding and provide students with emergency aid and support services.^{2,3} These measures provided relief to some students who may have been under financial strain during part of the pandemic.



they would recommend their school to a friend or family member. This increased to 56 percent in 2021, along with a decrease in the percentage of students giving low ratings (detractors) from 18 percent to 14 percent. The four-year sector has a lower average loyalty score compared to the community college sector, and saw a small decrease in loyalty between 2020 and 2021 with the NPS falling from 8.81 to 4.59.

Conclusion

Results from the Fall 2021 survey of community college students showed some positive signs compared to the Fall 2020 survey on the topics of perceptions of affordability of tuition and textbooks, worrying about paying for school, food insecurity, and overall loyalty. However, while there was improvement in these areas, there were still many students who were worried about their finances and had faced food insecurity. To better assist these students, resources like on-campus food pantries should be widely advertised, highly accessible, and stigma free. Emergency aid funds can also provide quick, direct assistance to students who find themselves in a financial bind that may negatively impact their enrollment. Providing students with needed support will help them continue to stay enrolled and graduate.

Measures

To better understand the experiences of survey takers, scales measuring school loyalty and food security were included in the instrument in Fall 2020 and Fall 2021.

Student Loyalty

To measure how loyal students feel toward their school, Trellis collected the information with a scale that allows

a Net Promoter Score (NPS) to be calculated for Project Success Schools. NPS is a method, grounded in extensive research, to benchmark customer satisfaction ratings across different services, businesses, and products. NPS uses a 0-10 scale. Those respondents who score 9-10 are promoters, 7-8 are passives, and 0-6 are detractors. $\%Promoters - \%Detractors = NPS$. A positive NPS (>0) is generally considered good, with highest performers usually between 50 and 80.

Food Security

To measure food security within the prior 30 days, a short-form, six-question scale designed by the United

States Department of Agriculture (USDA) was utilized. This short-form scale has been shown to identify food-insecure individuals and households with high sensitivity and specificity, and minimal bias.⁵ USDA methodology assigns levels of food security to individuals based on how many affirmative responses they give to certain questions. Under the short-form survey, individuals who give 2-4 affirmative responses have "low food security" and individuals who give 5-6 affirmative responses have "very low food security"; both are considered "food insecure." Respondents with 0-1 affirmative responses are characterized as having "high or marginal food security" or food secure.

⁵ United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). (2021). What is food security? <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/measurement.aspx>.



Recent Trellis Research publications

No food for thought: Insights on basic needs insecurities and mental health challenges from Trellis' Fall 2020 Student Financial Wellness Survey.

Cornett, A., & Fletcher, C. (2022). No food for thought: Insights on basic needs insecurities and mental health challenges from Trellis' Fall 2020 Student Financial Wellness Survey. Trellis Company. Retrieved from: <https://www.trelliscompany.org/portfolio-items/no-food-for-thought-insights-on-basic-needs-insecurities-and-mental-health-challenges/>

Student Financial Wellness Survey Report: Fall 2020

Webster, J., Fletcher, C., Cornett, A., & Kna , C. (2021). Student financial wellness survey report: Fall 2020. Trellis Company. Retrieved from: <https://www.trelliscompany.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/SFWS-Report-Fall-2020.pdf>

State of student aid and higher education in Texas.
