

*Listening to Students*  
*Who Ever Thought about Leaving College*  
*or*  
*Did Leave College and Came Back*

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**Listening to Students  
Who Ever Thought about Leaving College  
Or Did Leave College and Came Back...**

*“I left college recently during the pandemic due to poor grades while taking virtual classes. My class performance was the reason for me being kicked out of the university. Also it took much longer to get back in to the university due to very poor advice from campus staff and advisors. I did poorly in classes that lead to my expulsion due to the pandemic, my mother passing away, and my long-term monogamous partner leaving. At the beginning of my time at Sacramento State, I worked at a job that took advantage of their employees and literally did not pay them, while often having to work until passed 2am, when I had organic chemistry the next morning at 8am. That, as well as depression, helped me to be more of a poor student.*

*What makes me want to leave college is a lot of the staff, and the lack of peer support as an older college student. I will never give up though, because I know I can do it.*

*There are also some helpful faculty and staff who have been encouraging. That is extremely helpful to me. Though many are the opposite of encouraging.*

*Also I love my classes and learning the material. Staff who listen have helped me get back into the university. Having financial aid would be a very big help, but I have never qualified for it since I transferred to this university due to excessive units and poor grades.*

*My living situation ... has been probably the greatest help to complete college. Subsidized rent at my own one-bedroom apartment a block from campus has been extremely valuable for me. I did not need to work much at all, nor commute to campus, nor deal with roommate drama. There should be more subsidized housing like this for students.*

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Accept any of my petitions for trying to get financial aid. I worked very hard on them and was very honest, but they are always denied at this campus. Have staff members and advisors who actually know what they are talking about; much better training please....”*

—male, who has been an undergraduate college student since he was 18. College has been my life for a very long time. Former foster youth student.... Half latino and half caucasian. Grew up in a rural and impoverished environment. I was "homeschooled" for the majority of the my k-12.

*“College is already hard as it is, keeping up with all the finances and trying to figure out yourself on this new journey is a lot to take in especially the fact I wasn’t properly prepared for college/transitioning into being more independent.*

*What keeps me here is my family’s hard work to make it possible for me to even attend college and I don’t want to turn down this opportunity they weren’t able to get.*

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Being more financially reasonable & having more resources to help with college finances”*

— I am a first generation college student at 18, coming from a Pacific Islander & Asian American household.

*“I came to Sac State for (a specific) program, and didn't find out until orientation day that the program had basically dissolved.... The whole reason I went back to school later in life was to further develop my skills (in this field), and now I have switched majors and am basically just getting a degree to have one. It has been a massive disappointment. Also it is incredibly expensive, I am racking up tens of thousands of dollars in student loan debt, and the education system is not set up for people like me who are Autistic ADHD.*

*Basically, I am stubborn and want to finish what I've started so that the potential regret of not finishing doesn't haunt me. Also, the slight possibility that having a BA might come in handy some day, even though at this rate I honestly don't know if it will have been worth it.*

*It would have been really great if there would have been some level of communication ahead of time about the change in program, before I literally uprooted my life and moved here. So I would suggest to make sure that happens if there are any other major changes like that in the future.*

*There should also be more effort to make the needs of students with disabilities a priority.*

*Making more classes available online would be massively helpful for a long list of reasons that don't seem to be taken seriously. If you were able to do it during the pandemic, why not now?”*

—I am a 32 year old, first generation, transfer student with a disability

*“Having a family and working full-time I did not transfer from community college. Later I attended University of Phoenix as there were few universities offering on line courses. I returned during the COVID shut down full-time since all classes were online.*

*The online CCE psychology program is the primary reason I chose Sac State and this is what is keeping me attending.*

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Student activities, meetings, workshops, etc. offered in the evening or later afternoon. More online programs. Graduate programs with evening courses.”*

—Hispanic first generation college student. Single mother over 40, senior undergrad.

*“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) I had a lot of student loans to pay.... So, I worked full time, got a great job and paid off student loans. 8 years later I decided to continue education.*

*The job that I have now is helping out with tuition, and my schedule allows me to go to school at the same time.*

*The struggle I have is when there are assignments where I have to physically be somewhere, when I'm not able to. I think those should be extra credit assignments, instead of main grade assignments.”*

—I'm a returning student. I am 33 years old who is technically in the 3rd year of college. My parents have gone to college. Caucasian.

*“I left college for almost three years before coming back. I earned my associates degree in psychology in community college and as much as I wanted to continue to a university and get a bachelor's, I needed to focus on work to be able to provide for my daughter. While in school I really had to cut back on working because as a single parent not working wasn't an option but cutting my hours really affected me financially and left me in debt. After I got my associates I had to work two full time jobs for a few years to save up to be able to afford to cut back my hours at work again so I could continue my college career.*

*What is keeping me in school this time around is knowing that I am so close to being done. Next semester I will be a senior so as much as I am struggling with being a parent, work and school, I know it doesn't make sense to give up now.*

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Have more night classes or online classes for people that have to work and have kids”*

—I'm 25 years old, Hispanic, Junior standing, first generation college student, parent, multilingual learner, full time employee

*“I left college halfway into my sophomore year of undergrad because I didn't know what major I wanted to choose. I became depressed because of this (and other life circumstances) and didn't have the mental energy to work on general education courses while I didn't know what I was working towards.*

*I decided to go back to community college to explore some courses in a smaller, lower-stress environment compared to a university. I found a major/field of study I found interesting, continued with my lower-division courses at community college, and transferred back to Sac State for my upper-division courses.”*

—The first U.S.-born child of Ukrainian immigrant parents in a family of 11 children, a 25-year-old female graduate student

*“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) Bullying*

*(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you did leave college?) The community, the teachers and good programs*

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Counseling”*

— White, Male

*“One thing that's making me want to leave is the college tuition and the concerns of public safety.*

*(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you did leave college?) Great friends who encourage me to keep going and because the college tuition.*

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Having to turned down the college tuition prices and professors giving us chance to turn in late work for family important matters/when sick/ timing that's too complicated with other assignments.”*

—Anonymous

*“The first time I personally took a semester off was due to issues within my college apartment with a roommate, but now I’m leaving college because I can’t afford to live in California and receive my education. I find that even within student living there’s the pressure of having to work full time while being a full time student and my schedule for both my job and my schooling doesn’t provide that for me. Most times I’m deciding on what necessities are worth spending on and which aren’t. I have decided I am not financially able to be a college student and work on maintaining the needs of my body/health.*

*I tried staying just to be in my career. I’m still here because I would rather have a year left than several to go. I stayed to be a role model for my younger siblings. I stayed because I wanted to prove to myself and others that I could do it. I stayed because I wanted nothing more than to serve those that fall under my intended career.*

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Promote free services more. Help students be more aware of their resources even before they are fully enrolled. As a pandemic student, I missed out on the basics of orientation and never have the right questions or the right place to go to ask questions about the things I can do.”*

—23, Black woman, third year

*“At the time that I graduated high school my home life was unstable. My parents were mostly checked out and I was forced to live on my own. My grandmother and older brother were my only support. I had major burnout from years of honors classes. I attended classes here and there but I ultimately took a break from college in 2015 to focus on working to pay rent.*

*Following the death of my grandmother I knew that I needed to get my degree. She was always so concerned with my lack of educational progress. For her growing up in 1930’s Japan, girls did not have the same opportunities that we are afforded in the United States. I want to make her proud. I am determined to finish school this time, the end is in sight so it would be horrible to quit now. I have worked very hard these last few years to acquire my degree and I hope to get my teaching credential so that I can inspire students to pursue an education.*

*I have actually loved my time at Sacramento State. I do think it would be nice to highlight how many older people are pursuing an education at Sac State. I always fear that I will be the ‘old’ person in class but I always find students that are my age pursuing their degrees. It’s interesting to learn about the adversity they may have faced and how they overcame it in order to get back into college.”*

—I am a female, Caucasian woman, 27 years old. I closely identify with my grandmother’s Japanese heritage as she made sure to immerse us in her culture when I was growing up. I am a senior this year and I have been in college for 9 years.

*“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) \* Not available online classes, but requirement to study at campus for major classes; this is a problem because of family/kids/part-time job. So, I really tired of trying balancing between family, kids, work, and study as it's mostly provided on campus - not online!!!!!!!!!! Going to campus is really a waste of time, everything is possible to study from home!!!!”*

*(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you did leave college?) Lack of online classes in other places - only if in paid schools. The support of my husband and family, the desire to finally finish university as this gives me the prospect of working where I want. I am ready to live poorly now, but get more in the future.*

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) \* Give options of online classes \* Give priority for registration or have more classes available for registrations - I kept wondering why people I know without children, work, and with worse grades get the opportunity to register earlier. And I have two dependents, a job and a very high GPA, and my registration begins when all classes are already filled, later than everyone else... One semester I had to take only three classes instead of full-time only because all the classes were already filled, and I couldn't take others because I didn't fill out the prerequisites yet. It's not fair. I lost part of my grant and lost time... that semester I barely found 3rd class available; if there were only 2 available for me as it was - I would definitely quit. \* Solve the parking issue! It's dishonest to take money from students without providing quality service - and it's not cheap! \* Clean classrooms and bathrooms. The auditoriums are very dirty. In many places it is high time for renovations. The university charges high tuition fees, but the conditions are completely unsanitary. Shame for this...”*

—37yr, immigrant, not a native speaker, white, undergraduate, mom of 2 children

*“I left school due to financial concerns and came back when things were better.*

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Nothing. I am happy here.”*

—22

*“I never thought of leaving college. Transitioning from my community college being fully online for me and then moving to sac state where I had to take classes in person. It gave me anxiety and I did have thoughts about not going to college because I was afraid to go in person. I knew that if I quit now all my hard work would be wasted so I decided to keep going. I found in person classes to be not that bad as I thought.*

*What kept me going was the thought that I just had a few more years and all my hard work would pay off. I also thought about all the people who are attending college are like me and they are still going so I shouldn't let these negative thoughts get to me.*

*I think having more online class options would help me since I commute it is tough to go to campus all the time. Especially classes the classes which are required for the foreign language requirement most of those classes are 3-4 days a week which can be a lot for someone who commutes. Offering those courses online would be a big help.”*

—I am a multilingual individual! I am 20 years old and I am southeast Asian.

*“I originally left college because of an academic suspension during my first stint at community college. I am considering leaving college now because of the cost of education without a guarantee that I will be able to pay back my loans or find decent employment post-graduation.*

*I came back to school because I was able to afford it, but after 4 years that motivation is fading fast as the cost of living and tuition is going up. Education is a luxury, a privilege.*

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) LOWER OR FREEZE THE COST OF TUITION!!! Sacramento State makes money off of its students at every opportunity. The campus has contracts with vendors...that profit off of students, and the campus charges fees for everything. When I pay my tuition online, I am charged a convenience fee (for what?!) and I am Unable to pay in person with a credit card. The campus charges me a fee for the use of the WELL which I never do because I am trying to work and raise a family while going to school but that is part of my tuition and I don't have a choice! STOP TREATING STUDENTS LIKE PROFIT MARGINS THAT NEED TO BE SQUEEZED FOR THEIR MAXIMUM VALUE! This will hurt in the long run as more students drop out. The college will lose money and contracts. I know this is just me yelling into a void and business will go on as usual at sac state, tuition will go up, prices for on campus events and food will go up and quality of everything (from the food to the education) will also go down.”*

—I am a first-generation student, bilingual, immigrant, parent, and high school dropout, diagnosed with a learning disability.

*“Some of the things that make me want to leave college was of how hard it was and the overwhelming workload that I was given.*

*(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you did leave college?) Well for one thing, I did not want to give up just because it got hard to handle. I ended up making a plan to help myself deal with the heavy workload. Also, my parents are helping to put me through school so I knew that I could not just leave.*

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Honestly? I cannot think of anything that this university needs to do better for me.”*

—Age: 21 Year in school: senior Race: white

*“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) My ex-wife left me. I had to drop out to fight for custody of my daughters and get a divorce.*

*My divorce was finalized and the need to focus on custody of my children alleviated, so I returned to school.*

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) It provides me access to upper level class.”*

—53yrs. single white male.

***“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?)***

***1. Money - Paying for college is expensive, and on top of that, it takes time away from earning money. I'm one of the lucky ones who can afford to attend college, but... I've had at least one incident related to money where I've deeply regretted attending college. I had a boyfriend, the love of my life, who lives in Argentina. His dream is to move to the USA, but he cannot afford it. It would have completely changed my life if I could have been working to help him afford a life here instead.***

***2. Freedom & Happiness - I do not enjoy school. It often feels like I'm wasting my life by staying in school. I have virtually no control over any aspect of my school life, whether it be what classes I need to take or what pace I can learn at. I do not feel like an active participant in my own life while in college. I feel like I'm just waiting for it to be over so I can get started on my life. And I don't see that as a healthy way to be thinking.***

***(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you did leave college?)***

***1. Fear of Not Having The Degree - Employers need to see a piece of paper that says you know what you're doing. Otherwise, you may find yourself without a job, or at least without a job that pays you well enough to live. Having a skill without a degree may still not be enough to get you in the door.***

***2. Previous Investment - I decided maybe 3 years ago now that I was going to start college. And then I decided maybe 10 months ago that I was going to pursue a bachelors instead of leaving with an associates. It feels too late to change course.***

***(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?)* **IDK. Sac State does some good. The issues I've expressed concern school life in general, and are true in almost all schools. I guess one thing is: I much prefer online classes. They feel much more convenient and better for learning at my own pace. Sac State does not offer enough online class options post COVID lockdown.****

—Anonymous

***“I wanted to leave school when I was a junior in my undergrad of college. I had failed a core class multiple times and had been in school for 7 years by then. I had a wife and two kids that relied on my salary. I thought for a minute that I could just get some training at work and move up in the company a different way than college.***

***My wife and mom told me they wanted to see me finish what I was trying to work toward. I switched my major and did much better in that area of study and graduated a couple years later.***

***I did not study at Sac State in my undergrad. But the most impactful thing that happened when I was an undergrad at my university is when I took a semester off, they called me and asked if everything was okay. Asked if they could do anything for me, this made me feel that I was more than a number. They had noticed that I didn't sign up and cared. I will love the university for this simple reason.”***

— I am a graduate student, parent, full-time employee, white male.



*“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?)*

*-Depression*

*- The feeling of not accomplishing anything in 6 years. I have only been in school with only an AS to show for it. Which apparently does not do much in the industry I have chosen....*

*- Living with my parents.*

*-- My fathers view of the world.... He refuses to see anyone else's point of view which makes communicating with him next to impossible. Asking for help with funding for school or classroom materials is also impossible since ‘he was able to do it all on his own’ when he was in college.... Even at \$25 an hour for 5 straight years I was constantly redlining due to school and my inability to get grants or scholarships; and refusal to take out a loan.*

*-- My mother...she wants the world for my siblings and I. She is constantly buying things, thinking they will help us, but none of it does. She falls for the most basic phishing scams and I worry about leaving her alone....*

*- I care for my mother cause she worked so hard to raise us and her only request is that we pass college.*

*-Heart break, I unknowingly got into a relationship with a classmate. I didn't realize we were dating until they said they didn't want to see me anymore and I realized I had missed something that would have been amazing in my mind. Seeing them in class every day after that moment felt like a fog. I couldn't focus, I wanted to leave....*

*(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you did leave college?)*

*-Active learner: constantly asking questions in class and asking questions to see if two ideas are correlated.*

*-Aggressive Tutor: I loudly proclaim that I can help those with a low grade, since I usually score and finish in the top 5% of the class. I only state that I can tutor others when I am in a good position in the class.*

*-I live with my parents, I do not wish to be here at home anymore. I can leave, but I would have to drop out of college or do only a single class a semester, neither of which I want to do.*

*I also recognize that I may not be payed as well if I drop out. Though at the rate of this economy I am starting to wonder if getting this degree will be worth while.*

*- My mom asked me to get a college degree, I will finish and get it.*

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?)*

*-Rethink the GE system. There are far too many GE course. It only prohibits students from learning their disciplines. Humanities are a good idea but the classes given for GE I do not think help.... Outside of redoing the GE system, CSUS is doing a pretty good job. Good amenities, good resources, currently reasonable price.”*

*— Ethnically by blood, White (British, USA Southern) and Filipino (Ilocano), age, 24, Culture, none, Year in school, 6 years in college, Generation of college, 2nd I believe, Veteran, no military experience, Parent, Dad college graduate BS, Mom attended college but did not graduate, Fluent Languages, English, Basic understanding of language, Spanish, Disiplin, Computer Science*

*“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) The same steps again, and told (another university’s) financial Aid office to cancel my aid package as I was unable to secure housing and would not be able to attend classes or pay for materials. Communications ... are misleading and my financial crisis deepened leading to my attempted suicide.... The pattern of communication has caused me financial calamity as well as acute psychological distress....”*

*I am receiving emails from the school with information and surveys like this which seem to address my concern. As well as communications about different opportunities that sound genuine and give hope that perhaps completing the last two years of my undergrad is worth trying. I also have not experienced the desire to start this painful process over with other institutions after getting so far with this one.... I guess I just really want to graduate and I want to believe and I don't like how it feels to know there is more I can try to finish. These kind of emails and surveys keep me coming back. Because they offer hope. I don't know who is writing the emails. I just know I keep getting them.”*

— African American Male, 36 years old, Gay Gender-nonconforming, A student with a diagnosed disability

*“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave?) Finances. It is difficult to choose between work and school.*

*“(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back to college if you left?) Wanting to earn my degree and better my situation*

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) More financial aid options, lower tuition, a variety of times for classes as they all tend to be on the same days and times which make registration harder.”*

—First generation, multi-language, self sustaining

*“I had to leave when I had to leave home for the first time to live on my own because my family was houseless for a while, my grandparents both died and my computer broke which exacerbated the fact that my mental health was taking a really bad downturn. I stayed away for a number of years because my mental health problems and Job responsibility made it impossible to do additional work, I was at the end of my capacity to cope.*

*I came back because leaving college was never my plan. My family always expected that of all my siblings, I would be the most well educated, and I was ashamed of not completing my bachelor's degree after so much time and effort.*

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) My educational goals are to get a bachelor's degree..., if sac state could have (my program’s) classes at night or online, that would really help me. Honestly online learning would Really Really help.”*

—I'm a 31 year old gay woman who grew up in a large impoverished family with parents who didn't go to college and also spent some of my childhood in jail.

*“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) Made my future goals seem impossible without sacrificing my soul first. Assignments backed up until my butt hurts from sitting down for so long and giving up again until I find the will to try again. Tired of spreading myself thin for little return if any.*

*(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you did leave college?) My father. And potential money from future job.*

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Provide more 1 on 1 therapy services. Online tutoring services or student discount on 24/7 tutoring services. Friend making events (entered college during covid) would be nice. School has a negative connotation for me.”*

—21, asian, first gen student.

*“The lack of breaks in the semester makes me want to leave. It is the 10th week of the fall semester and I feel burned out. Several of my classmates have also expressed their fatigue. The fatigue has gotten to the point where I have trouble sleeping at night because I am constantly thinking about my classwork and have not gotten a proper break. It would be great if we could get a week off from school in second half of the semester or at least a four day weekend. I think these will help reduce the fatigue and improve the mental health of students, especially first years who usually had more breaks in high school. It can be hard to adjust to this continuous schedule.*

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Give students a break during the semester, please.”*

—Filipino, age 18, first year in college

*“The schedule is terrible, college does not provide time for parents to go to school and get their degree. The school does not offer many afternoon classes or evening classes for parents to go to work and keep a roof over their children's heads and obtain their diplomas.*

*Not the college did anything to keep me taking classes, but work offered me to work with my schedule. I am thankful to my work to keeping at work and taking my classes. My experince with sac state is difficult and even I kept asking the chair department to help me keeping me taking classes and keep roof over my 5 kids head she did not help and does not want to. She keeps saying ‘well that all what we can afforded to you’.*

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Help with the schedule and provide more grant to students to get the help they need to finish their education. They don’t want to help their student. We are paying money to get our first degree and not getting what we need.”*

—I am a Mom of FIVE kids, working full time. I am a second language learner and the first generation college student. 41 years old women with 5 kids.

*“The only time I have thought about leaving college is when I felt overwhelmed by work and college, I felt like I couldn't balance the two and felt like I had to quit school since I was making money at my job*

*I was/am lucky enough to have a support system in place (my family and friends) that are there to help me through those tough times and help me persevere*

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Not many students know of the mental health services our campus offers at the WELL so maybe dedicating a day or week to help returning or new students know all the services beyond just gym services that the WELL offers”*

— I am 25, Hispanic, junior transfer from community college, I am the 2nd of 3 kids to go to college in my family

*“When I had graduated from high school I immediately signed up for junior college. I was happy with my classes and wanted to finish and transfer.... What happened was I met a guy that was just out of military service in college, we fell in love and we married. I hoped to continue my college but that was impossible because we needed both of our incomes to pay for rent and food. I didn't have anyone to advice me at that time.*

*After a divorce, and a remarry plus a relocation to Santa Barbara, the Bank that I was working for gave employees paid classes for computer programing and business classes. I jumped on this as a great opportunity, My 2 daughters were in high school, so I took some classes at the City College. I enjoyed it so much and started taking classes in Art. This was in 1990's. Again in 1999, I had an opportunity to leave my job for a better position in Utah, with another bank in Corporate Trust. I was hoping to continue my education, but there was not a college there that was convenient to attend. Not until I moved again back to California to Truckee, did I think about going back again this was 2010. Again money was a factor and the convenience of the campus. Unfortunately, in 2013, my husband passed away suddenly in Truckee and I had to move in with my daughter and her family. My granddaughter, had finished high school and wanted to attend a junior college. She wanted to know if we could go together. So I started at the age of 62, going back to finish my degree at Sierra College. I had a great counselor there and she directed me to the classes I needed to transfer to Sac State. Which I did in 2018. Then a friend of mine referred me to a friend of his that had lost his wife 3 years prior, We met and hit it off and I moved to his home in Agoura Hills. After the pandemic Sac State contacted me on a new program to get my degree.*

*Sacramento State has been wonderful to me, as far as getting the right classes and counseling me when problems sometimes arise. It is a great school and so happy I am almost there to graduate.”*

—I am a first generation college student in my family. I started right out of high school and attended Ventura Jr. College back in 1971. My older brother was able to get a scholarship to Long Beach State and received a BA in history. I wanted to follow in his footsteps. My mother only got to the 10th grade in high school, but this was because of the depression and had to work to help out with her family. My father graduated from school and attended a sign painting tech class that later he created a business that made signs for doors and buildings.

## **Introduction**

Millions of students enroll in higher education in the nation each year. Some will complete their educational journeys, yet many may struggle to stay and still others will go.

### ***Those Who Leave College***

The total number of people in the nation with some college but no completion of a credential or degree (SCNC) rose to 41.9 million, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center report, [“Some College, No Credential,”](#) for the most recent academic period studied. This includes the 2.3 million college students who stopped out of their studies in the year, an increase of almost 3% from the prior year. When focusing on working age adults (18 to 65 years old), the number is 36.8 million—close to 20% of the U.S. population in this age range who started college but did not finish. Nationally, for every 1,000 graduates, 2,156 Americans are in this SCNC population. And by state, California has the highest number by far, at 5.8 million SCNC students, 15.8% of the SCNC population.

### ***Those Considering Leaving College***

And many of the students who are enrolled in higher education are struggling. According to the Gallup/Lumina Foundation report, [“The State of Higher Education,”](#) based on a survey of students currently enrolled in college, 38% surveyed said that it was “very difficult” or “difficult” to remain enrolled in their program. When asked whether or not the student had considered withdrawing from their school for at least one term in the past six months, 35% of students responded yes, a number that has risen steadily in the past few years the survey has been done.

### ***The Risks of Stopping Out***

A student may discontinue college for any number of significant reasons, especially in the wake of a global pandemic, continuing economic uncertainty, and mental health epidemic, and all of this in addition to the problems long associated with college enrollment, including cost, time, and competing work and/or family responsibilities.

Yet once a student stops-out, they are statistically less likely to come back and then risk losing so much. Research tells us that for the student, achievement of a college degree means more career paths and promotions available, greater likelihood of financial prosperity and security, and better health and quality of life. And there is more at stake: The nation needs its most educated workforce to maintain its standing in the world economy and for its judicial, political, healthcare, and education systems, and other important sectors of society. And we, as an institution, need our fullest, most diverse student body for the betterment of all our campus experiences, learning, and scholarship.

### ***This Project—and Our Work***

*Listening to Students Who Ever Thought About Leaving College or Did Leave College and Came Back* has been the unfolding of survey responses from students on our campus this past year and into this academic year, centering on the different factors in their difficulty in enrollment and consideration of leaving or actually leaving—and what gets them to stay or come back. Each section of the project has focused on one key aspect of keeping students on-track and successful in college life through to completion.

This section, Part 13, is the reminder to us all of the need for students to continue through to graduation and steps to help students persist and succeed in higher education.

### Part 13: The Need to Continue

As the preceding section notes, too many students leave their higher education, some never to return, and so many students currently enrolled in college have considered leaving academia, at risk of not returning once they do so.

*One in three students have thought about leaving their higher education in the past six months,* again according to the Gallup/Lumina Foundation report, [“The State of Higher Education.”](#)

#### ***Why Students Think About Leaving College***

When asked about the reasons why they consider leaving college in that report, students surveyed responded:

- Emotional stress (54%)
- Personal mental health reasons (43%)
- Cost of the degree program (31%)
- Coursework was too difficult (24%)
- Don't feel I belong (24%)
- Personal physical health reasons (16%)
- Don't feel prior schoolwork prepared me well for further education (14%)
- Got a new job (13%)
- Did not believe the degree would help me to achieve my personal goals (13%)
- The courses taken were not relevant to my future career (13%)
- Completing the degree was taking longer than expected (13%)
- No longer interested (13%)
- Don't believe the degree would help to achieve career goals (12%)
- Lack of remote learning options (12%)
- Child care or care for an adult family member or friend (10%)
- Lost a job (9%)
- Favorable job market (8%)
- Felt discriminated against or harassed (7%)
- The education received was low quality (5%)

#### ***What College is Like for Students Thinking About Leaving***

Another survey of college students, [How America Completes College](#), delves further into the experiences and mindsets of students who are contemplating leaving their higher education.

In comparison to students who have never thought about leaving college, students who have seriously considered leaving or are at risk of academic dismissal report:

Less preparedness for college-level coursework, with more having to take remedial or developmental courses, less ease in staying on track with classes and going to class, and greater difficulty managing their course workload. More of these students found their courses too hard and more had to withdraw from a course. They also reported less use of campus resources to help with academic challenges, as well as greater difficulty in getting in touch with their professors and less visiting their professors' office hours.

Less ease in registering for classes and less interaction with an academic advisor.

More difficulty in trying to meet the costs of living and college textbooks and tuition, and more difficulty trying to support themselves and/or family while in school. More of these students work—and work more hours—while attending college, as well.

More difficulty in living away from home or living with roommates.

More difficulty meeting new people and greater trouble making connections. These students also reported using less school resources to help adjust to college or meet other students and less attendance at on-campus activities.

More difficulty balancing school with work and with a social life.

More difficulty in staying healthy and prioritizing mental health and, indeed, these students reported lower ratings for their physical and mental health.

More uncertainty of the career or general field of study they wanted to pursue coming into college. More of these students changed their interests while in college and experienced difficulty in finding the right major/career path for them, yet reported less interaction with an academic advisor or Career Center staff.

More enrollment in only online courses or in hybrid classes, and less ease in managing these types of class modalities.

Less sense of support from professors and their family members during their time in college, and feeling less of a social support system in place.

Lower confidence in their ability to graduate from college, feeling less on track to earn their degree, and lower rating of their academic program and overall college experience.

### ***The Reasons Students Have for Staying in College***

And when asked about their reasons for wanting to pursue their higher education, according to that Gallup/Lumina Foundation report, [“The State of Higher Education,”](#) this is what current college students and prospective college students, including those who stopped-out of their studies, say:

- To obtain knowledge or skills (59%)
- To help get a higher-paying job (57%)
- To allow one to pursue a more fulfilling career (50%)
- For one’s personal sense of achievement (47%)
- To become a more competitive job candidate (36%)
- To help get a salary increase or promotion in one’s current job (27%)
- To have a more fulfilling life outside of work (27%)
- To make a difference in one’s community (21%)
- To learn from people who have different experiences than oneself (20%)
- To meet family or societal expectations (20%)
- To become a more informed citizen (17%)

### ***In this Document***

To follow, you will find suggestions to help students stay and succeed through to college completion.

## **The Pivotal First Year in College**

Research has long shown how critical the first year of college is for students in their decision to stay. About a quarter of students leave the first year, according to the [National Student Clearinghouse Snapshot Report, “Persistence and Retention.”](#) *One in four of our first-year students will not complete or come back from their first year.*

Most first-year students are coming straight from high school: About six in ten high school students come to college right after graduation. And they are at-risk of not finishing college more than ever, due to the impact of the pandemic on mental health and on their high school education, leaving so many with less preparation for college, in terms of knowledge and study skills, and doubt in their ability to learn and succeed in higher education. Yet students also stand to gain so much in their studies and experiences here and achievement of their college degree!

### ***For Students Transitioning into College***

*Welcome new students!* The learning and experiences you’ll have here will help to shape who you are and what you’re made of and can do, and open up doors to careers, other opportunities, and relationships that can last a lifetime. Here are some fundamental guidelines for getting off to a great start in college: Be okay with the uncertainty at first as you get used to college life—that learning curve can feel overwhelming, but you’ll get used to things in time. Forming connections with other students, faculty, and staff can help so much in the adjustment to college, and it can be so fun and rewarding to get to know others! Use the resources all around on campus if you have questions or need some help, as every student does, especially the first year. And a positive mindset goes a long way in helping to create the best experiences. *Enjoy this time in your life!*

### ***For Faculty and Staff to Help Students Have a Successful First Year***

College life can be overwhelming for new students at first, but we can be pivotal in helping them to more easily navigate the world of college and succeed in their first year and beyond. We can welcome new students to their higher education and Sac State, and share in the excitement of their new path in life to achieve their goals and set them up for a bright future. We can help new students to feel comfortable with us and their peers, through introductions and ice breakers, and with campus life, as well, through announcements and reminders of the many different campus programs, services, organizations, clubs, and events. We can also make sure new students are properly set up and familiar with campus technology, including understanding of Canvas and their Student Center. In teaching, we can craft a student-centered syllabus, welcoming in tone and clear in policies and course set-up. Faculty also often create a “Welcome” page or video to introduce themselves and the course, and a “Getting Started Module” to help get students situated in the class, understand how to progress through the Canvas tabs and modules, and provide helpful campus resources. A message or announcement out to the class of welcome and information about the class before or at semester start is also helpful and sets a nice tone. And getting students curious or enthusiastic on day one about what they’ll be learning in class can sure lay a strong foundation for their motivation and success through their studies!

Please see [“The Pivotal First Year in College”](#) for further information and suggestions for making the first year as successful as possible for students.



## **The Need to Return**

Some of our students new to campus can be those who choose to delay their entry into college after high school completion—they are now returning to their education. And some students have been on our campus before, but left and are now back. Returning students may have put off going to college or decided to leave college due to any number of factors, including financial pressures, job priorities, military service, family duties, and/or other personal circumstances or hardships.

These students, we know, can be at risk in terms of becoming accustomed to schooling once again, juggling the responsibilities of work and/or family with course load, and struggling to feel a sense of belonging with typically younger-age peers and confidence in academic skills that may feel rusty.

### ***For Returning Students Transitioning Into College***

Welcome! It is a significant step to reenter the educational realm—and an exciting one! *Here begins the journey to achieving the goals you have set that brought you here—and perhaps pursuing new, as yet unformulated dreams, as well!* It may have been a few years or a few decades or longer since you were last in an educational setting, and it can be a real adjustment to return to the classroom. Here are a few key suggestions to better transition and flourish here at Sac State: Remember all of the strengths, skills, life experience, and career knowledge you bring and maximize these in college life and classroom learning. Build a support system on campus (of students, faculty, and staff) and in your life (family, friends, mentors, and even work colleagues and bosses) to encourage you on. Explore your interests and expand your skill sets through the many opportunities to do so at the university and take full advantage of all the great Career Center services. Utilize the many resources on campus (many of which offer online services, as well as in-person support) to get assistance with academics, campus technology, financial and basic needs, and more. And let all of the reasons you came to college pull you through and inspire you on in stressful or difficult times that can come with college life.

### ***For Faculty and Staff to Help Returning Students Experience Greater Fulfillment in College***

Returning students have every incentive to achieve their educational goals, and we have so much to gain from their presence and success at this university! Yet returning, nontraditional students tend to find that college life is geared primarily to the traditional college student, the younger first-time, full-time students who are the majority of the undergraduate student population. This makes it especially incumbent upon us to help them to feel welcomed and valued on our campus by guarding against age assumptions in working with students, helping them to build connections with you and others on campus, and ensuring campus and class policies and modalities are conducive to students with busier schedules of work and family. We can also ignite passion for their studies with the more active learning that adults really need and the space for them to contribute their greater life experience, wisdom, and knowledge of the working world to enrich all of our learning. And we can reassure returning students that they made the right decision to come back to their education by reminding them of the tremendous benefits of achieving their college degree to themselves, personally and professionally, and to their own children now or in the future. *They are ensuring a brighter future for themselves and their generations to come.*

Please see [“The Need to Return”](#) for further information regarding returning students and suggestions for increasing their success and fulfillment on our campus.

## **The Need For Belonging**

We don't always realize the full importance of feeling a sense of belongingness at the institution. It isn't just a nice thing for students to have—it is essential. For decades now, research has shown the importance of belongingness to students staying and succeeding in college.

The towering leader in the field of student retention in higher education, sociologist professor Vincent Tinto, in his books, *Leaving College* and *Completing College* and other writings, developed this key proposition: One of the central factors in the decision to stay or go is how well the student is integrated into college life, both socially and academically. *Students with low or no sense of belongingness are more likely to feel isolated in college and leave, but students with a greater sense of belongingness are more likely to stay through to completion.* His work has been well-supported and a mainstay in scholarship and institutional efforts to increase student retention for almost fifty years.

### ***For Students to Forge a Greater Sense of Belonging in their College Journey***

If you didn't realize this before, please know now: *You belong here at this university.* We need and value you for all you are—your background and life experiences, strengths and struggles, personal qualities and potentialities—all you bring to this campus and to our learning! You should also know that there are so many valuable benefits to gaining a sense of belonging on campus, including greater comfort and success in college life and maximizing your learning, experience, and opportunities on campus. Here are some key guidelines to develop greater belongingness in your journey here: Connect with others—Smile or say hi to someone who sits down by you in class or out on campus, strike up conversation with someone waiting by you in line for office hours or campus services, and embrace opportunities in classroom and online discussion, campus groups, and events to get to know others and let them get to know you. And connect to campus life, too, by checking out the [Campus Calendar](#) of all the different types of events held throughout the semester and [Student Organizations and Leadership](#), which has close to 300 student-led clubs and organizations, including those that are academic, cultural, political, professional, recreational, religious, service, social, sports, and special interest in nature!

### ***For Staff and Faculty to Increase Student Belongingness***

A sense of belonging is one of our most fundamental human needs. Students connecting with each other, with you, and with the institution, in terms of campus life and resources, is key to student success, studies have shown time and time again. To help with this, we can facilitate student introductions and interaction with their peers and other faculty and staff. We can also strive ever harder to connect with students, ourselves: From something as simple as a smile, greeting, or a few words of support or encouragement to a student out on campus; to getting to know students and letting them get to know you more personally in one-on-one conversation or in classroom lessons, campus workshops and presentations; to giving the gift of your time and undivided attention, showing you care and are committed to their well-being and success at this institution; to following through and following up on the questions or concerns expressed to you in person or email correspondence; and choosing to mentor or do research or other work with students. We can also help them to find their place in campus life by announcing the many great programs, groups, resources, and events at the university.

Please see [“The Need for Belonging”](#) for further information about the benefits of a sense of belonging and suggestions for increasing this in college life.

## **The Need to Do Well and Feel Confident in Coursework**

How well students do in academics very much impacts their decision to continue in their studies or not—and how well they believe they can do may be just as or even more important! Yet we know from research that students are feeling more uncertainty about their academic preparedness for college and experiencing difficulty in their college classes.

In [“From Retention to Persistence,”](#) that seminal scholar on student retention in higher education mentioned prior, Vincent Tinto, notes that students not only need a sense of belonging, but also sees academic self-efficacy as a top factor in student persistence—students believing that they are, in fact, capable of succeeding in their studies. Studies have shown self-efficacy to impact student motivation and academic achievement, and there is research to show that having the knowledge and skills to perform a task is less important than the self-efficacy needed to actually put these to use in coursework and to overcome any obstacles encountered in the work.

### ***For Students Wanting to Feel Confident and Do Well in Their Coursework***

*Hornet Scholars, we are rooting for you and believing in you as you put in the hard work in your classes and pursue your field of study!* Here are a few tips for doing well and feeling confident in coursework: Be sure to regularly attend on-ground classes for the lessons and to build a network with classmates to succeed in the class, and be sure to put time regularly into online courses, as well, in order to stay on track with the class. Utilize faculty office hours and the academic support all around on campus when you need: [Peer and Academic Resource Center](#), the [Writing Center](#), the [Math Lab](#), [Smarthinking](#), and tutoring centers in the many departments and programs of study. Take very good care of yourself, because physical and mental well-being are significant factors in college student success. And remember that believing in yourself is important! Higher self-efficacy means a student will likely progress on the task, seek out any assistance and resources needed for it, persevere through the work as well as any obstacles encountered, and be more motivated, more engaged, and ultimately, more successful on that assignment or in that class. *Belief in yourself can become a self-fulfilling prophecy!*

### ***For Faculty and Staff in Fostering Academic Competence and Confidence***

We can contribute to our students’ academic success and self-efficacy in different ways: We can express our confidence in their capabilities—students will often say that such moments were a defining moment or turning point, how you stating belief in the student got them on or kept them on the path to academic success. We can impart “studenting” skills, those good learning and study habits and expectations for the classroom and coursework. We can encourage students on in their studies, whenever we see them hard at work in and outside of class, to give the inspiration they may need. Should a student not do well in coursework, we can remind them of the importance of a growth mindset and work one-on-one to support them in their struggles and/or connect them to resources to improve in their studies. And for faculty, whose central role in student academic success is always the true privilege and utmost responsibility of the profession: We can assess continually all we do, in every aspect of pedagogy and course administration, to create learning and performance situations that challenge students intellectually while also providing a framework of support, so that students see and experience themselves as successful learners. This, in turn, can carry forward to greater success in all their other courses, now and to come.

Please see [“The Need to Do Well and Feel Confident in Coursework”](#) for further information and suggestions for increasing student academic success and self-efficacy.

## **The Need to Be Engaged in Learning**

While the term has been conceptualized in different ways in the field of education, simply put, student engagement in learning is the amount of time and quality of effort put into subject learning and coursework: *How invested and involved students are in their studies* in terms of mental effort, interest, and motivation, and active engagement in class, coursework, and other activities to further the learning.

There is much research to show the need for learner engagement in college success—and now more than ever. Educators have noted with concern the lower level of engagement seen in students. The causes are myriad, including exhaustion and burnout from the past few years, increasing stress and mental health decline in society, lower attention spans due to greater technology use, and less academic preparation for college and student confidence in their academic abilities, due to past pandemic learning conditions.

### ***For Students for Greater Engagement in Learning***

*Better learning, better grades, better experiences in class and college life, and greater likelihood of staying and succeeding in higher education....* This is what comes with greater engagement in your studies, so here are some key tips: Set a good schedule for class and homework as much as possible, to give you the time and space to really engage in the learning. Strengthen your ability to listen actively in the classroom—an essential skill in academia, as well as in personal and professional life. Remember the potential value in all you are learning to stay engaged: A well-rounded knowledge on a variety of subjects allows us to explore myriad interests and abilities within us, and expands and enriches our understanding of the dynamic and complex world in which we live. Our minds are exercised in different ways by different academic tasks (such as course reading, writing, researching, test-taking, presenting, mathematics, and group projects), and our cognitive capabilities expanded, as well (such as analyzing, reasoning, critical thinking, creative thinking, problem solving, reasoning, and decision making). And ask yourself, what am I learning or doing now in coursework that might prove useful, directly or indirectly, in the short-term or long-term future and help me to progress toward my goals, grow in my thinking, knowledge, or skills, or contribute to my present and future well-being and success?

### ***For Staff and Faculty for Greater Student Engagement in Learning***

To increase engagement in their studies, we can ask students what they've liked or found useful in their learning and help them to connect that learning to their interests, goals, and lives. We can remind students that different courses will exercise different types of thinking and abilities, that their lower division courses help to build a broad foundation of knowledge, experience, and skills for progressing in their upper division and major courses, and that all coursework prepares them in different ways for the working world, engagement in their communities and the civic realm, and growth and fulfillment as a human being. We can also encourage engaging in learning experiences outside of class, such as attending the events and joining the organizations and groups in line with students' academic and career interests, and "high impact practices," such as [service learning](#), [internships](#), [studying abroad](#), and [research or scholarship with faculty or peers outside of class](#). And in teaching, we can remember that students may see theory as arcane, research studies as intimidatingly technical, historical aspects of a field as far removed in time and place, academic terminology dry, and whole bodies of knowledge without interest or appeal, unless we take the time and care to bring our subject matter to life and fuel intellectual engagement with active learning techniques.

Please see ["The Need to Be Engaged in Learning"](#) for further information and suggestions.

## **The Need to Find One's Path**

Choosing a major that the student feels is right for them carries tremendous benefit. The student has increased likelihood of succeeding in college, including greater engagement and enjoyment of their studies, and satisfaction and fulfillment in their college experience. Declaring a major, as well, feels like a real milestone for a student, a step up and into more of a direct line to their career goals, personal aspirations, and brighter future.

One of the most significant benefits of students choosing a major right for them is increased retention in college, research has long shown, as well as more recently. According to the Gallup/Lumina report, [“The State of Higher Education,”](#) when asked in a survey what was important to their being able to remain enrolled in their college studies, one of the top factors, reported by 52% of the college student respondents, was enjoyment of their program, including course content and social interactions. When exploring further, the report notes that 27% of students who had recently considered stopping out said a change in program or major was an important factor to their remaining.

### ***For Students Needing to Choose A Good Major and Career Path for Themselves***

Choosing a good major for yourself can give you greater purpose, direction, and meaning in college life. Choice in major shapes the courses you'll take, the knowledge you gain, the people you'll get to know, and the types of opportunities you will have here and after college. If you haven't yet decided on a major—or are unsure about the major you have chosen—then here are some key ways to explore majors and career paths right for you: Reflect on your goals, passions, strengths, and skills, and explore your interests and aptitudes further by taking exploratory classes, attending campus events, and participating in groups in campus life of interest to you. Look over [the departments and majors](#) to choose here, [research different careers](#) that you think you might like, and explore industries and occupations further through [internships](#). Discuss your thoughts about major and career paths with others, such as a [career counselor](#) or an academic advisor, family and friends, mentors, and work colleagues. And pick the path that best fits with what you want for your future, rather than making major or career decisions solely on the basis of money or what others may want for you. *Your dreams and happiness are important!*

### ***For Staff and Faculty to Help Students to Find a Good Path for Themselves***

Choosing the paths that are right for them can be an exciting, albeit uncertain process, and the role we play on that student's journey can be one of the most impactful things we do in our work. Here are some suggestions to aid students in this process: We can ask students about their academic and career goals, interests and abilities, and hopes and dreams for the future, and be a good sounding board—that person to whom the student talks out their thoughts on what they want to study and do for work someday, or why they're having second thoughts about the major they're in. We can also share our own story of choosing a path as an undergraduate, or what we like about the work we do now or field of study. We can encourage students to see their abilities and gifts, explore their interests, and pursue their passions while here in college, and also help students to see the connection of what they are learning and doing in college with the working world. Last but not least, we can *inspire students to embrace the major/career selection process and discovery of who they are and will be someday in their college studies and beyond!*

Please see [“The Need to Find One's Path”](#) for further information and suggestions for helping students to find their path in college.

## **The Need to Manage Costs and Financial Pressures**

At any point or throughout the entirety of their college journey, students may experience financial worry and difficulties, which can, we know from research, hurt their physical health, mental well-being, and learning and performance in coursework. For some students, their financial pressures can lead to lower GPAs and not meeting satisfactory academic progress (SAP) conditions to maintain their financial aid and good academic standing to even stay in school. For other students, financial stress and struggles can cause them to consider leaving college, no matter how well they may be doing in their studies. Students may feel forced to leave college, perhaps never to return. We lose them, and they lose the opportunity to obtain that college degree that will help to secure greater future financial livelihood.

According to the Gallup/Lumina report, [“The State of Higher Education.”](#) one in three students has considered leaving college in the past half-year, and of these, over half cite financial costs as a key reason. According to the Trellis Research [“Student Financial Wellness Survey,”](#) in the past year, 60% of students enrolled in four-year institutions were identified as not having one of the three basic needs met in the past twelve months: They were experiencing food insecurity, housing insecurity, or homelessness. Moreover, 28% of students were identified as having both food insecurity and housing insecurity, and 9% of students all three—food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness. *So many students are struggling.*

### ***For Students To Help with Costs and Financial Pressures***

We know college can be expensive and so can life outside of school! *But we hope you know all that this campus has to offer students:* [Financial aid](#) and [employment assistance, basic needs support, transportation to campus, technological services and equipment use, medical care, and psychological counseling](#). The campus also offers places for entertainment, socializing, hanging out, working out, and studying: the [University Union](#), the [AIRC \(Academic Information Resource Center\)](#), the [Library](#), and [the WELL](#). There’s also Sac State [events](#) and [athletics](#), which are almost always free to students. Tutoring on campus is also free of charge: [Peer and Academic Resource Center \(PARC\)](#), the [Reading and Writing Center](#), the [Math Lab](#), [Smarthinking](#) (the 24-7 online tutoring for a number of subjects and writing), and tutoring centers in the many departments and programs of study. Students may also find school supplies, testing materials, study snacks, and more in some of the campus Centers and programs of study, especially during midterms and finals.

### ***For Staff and Faculty to Help Students with Financial Struggles***

We can help with financial burdens by spreading the word throughout the semester about the valuable resources on campus for students in financial need, including [Financial Aid and Scholarships](#), the student [Food Pantry](#), and opportunities for employment, housing assistance, and emergency assistance through [CARES](#), and taking care to normalize the act of receiving support and the importance of this to the student’s well-being. Faculty can further help to offset financial obstacles to learning in their courses by considering no cost/low cost textbooks or putting course textbooks on Reserve, allowing or facilitating older, lower-cost editions of the textbook to be used, or offering an extra desk copy to loan students. We can also keep required supplies or other class expenses to an absolute minimum and be mindful about assignments or extra credit opportunities tied to anything that would incur costs.

Please see [“The Need to Manage Costs”](#) for further information and suggestions for helping to manage costs and financial pressures in college life.

## **The Need to Manage Stress and Cope with Struggles**

College can be a fun and exciting time, one of challenge, growth, and fulfillment. But students may also at any point experience stress or struggle with something going on inside or outside of academia. Higher levels of stress and/or long-term stress can hurt physical and mental health, quality of life, and academic motivation, concentration, learning, and performance in coursework—and even lead students to consider leaving college.

Over a third of students pursuing their Bachelor’s degree reported considering stopping coursework in the past six months (36%) in a Gallup/Lumina survey, and of these, almost seven in ten students say emotional stress is the top reason for thinking about stopping their studies (69%), followed by personal mental health reasons (59%), according to the Gallup/Lumina report, [“Stressed Out and Stopping Out: The Mental Health Crisis in Higher Education.”](#) When asked how often they experience stress, 48% of students pursuing their Bachelor’s degree said frequently and 41% said occasionally.

### ***For Students Struggling with Stress***

We know that the life of the busy college student, with all of the life circumstances and responsibilities in and out of school, can bring stress, and the toll of what has been and continues to be a very difficult time in society can make stress even worse. Here are some techniques for managing stress: First and foremost, be good to yourself, with good sleep, nutrition, and time spent on activities you enjoy, exercising, and being outdoors in nature. Use proven stress-reduction strategies, such as breathing techniques, mindfulness, and meditation, and journaling, finding or leaning into faith, and practicing gratitude for the better, brighter parts of daily life. Connect to others in your life and on campus—research is very clear in showing just how beneficial social connections and support are for dealing more effectively with stress. And connect to campus resources when you need, such as [Campus Counseling](#) and the [CARES Office](#). *Please don’t struggle on alone.*

### ***For Staff and Faculty To Help Students Manage Stress and Struggles***

College is a stressful enough time for students, with tests, assignments, and other responsibilities. Now factor in any number of adverse circumstances or challenges they may be experiencing in their lives off campus, causing further stress, and then add in the cumulative stress of the past few very difficult years in our society and the growing mental health crisis. If we want success for our students, then we must work to help students effectively cope with stress and struggles as much as possible. Here are some ways to do so: Check-in with students, to see how they are and if they need support or someone to listen. Promote self-care and campus resources for wellness, and resiliency skills for coping with adversity. Be mindful of high stress subject matter and assignments (like group projects, presentations, and big papers and exams) and mindful of high stress times in college and in life, including mid-term and the end of the semester, and times of conflict, controversy, or crisis on campus, or in the community or country. Keep in mind that stress can hinder memory of appointments and due dates and performance of coursework, and grace and flexibility may be needed, including having ways to salvage or raise a grade to give students peace of mind, such as allowing assignment re-dos and revisions or offering extra credit opportunities. Remember, too, that stressful times, tasks, and situations can show anyone at their worst, but our understanding, patience, and care for the student can mean so much.

Please see [“The Need to Manage Stress and Cope with Struggles”](#) for further information and suggestions regarding this topic.

## **The Need for Greater Mental Health**

The [National Institute of Mental Health](#) reports that over one in five people in the nation have a mental illness of some sort. Younger people are at greater risk, and this is growing. The U.S. Surgeon General issued the advisory [“Protecting Youth Mental Health,”](#) noting the concerning rise in mental health struggles.

Mental health struggles can harm physical and emotional well-being, and every other aspect of one’s personal, professional, and academic life. And sometimes we lose students from college enrollment, or, tragically, forever. The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) reports that suicide rates have increased about 36% in the past twenty years, and in the U.S. for the most recent year reported, there is approximately one death every 11 minutes.

### ***For Students with Mental Health Struggles***

If you have or think you may be experiencing a mental health struggle, then please know you are not alone! Almost 40% of college students experience a significant mental health issue and over half of us will experience a mental health condition in our lifetime, according to [Active Minds](#). And please don’t struggle with mental health challenges alone. *Reach out to others in your life and reach out for help.* Research shows just how beneficial social connections are for dealing with stressors, lowering the risk of mental health struggles and suicide, and helping someone to better cope, and treatment and support for mental health struggles are effective. So many people completely recover, and those with lifelong mental illness learn to manage symptoms, leading good and productive lives, including faculty, staff, and students all around you. Here at Sac State, you can reach out to a professor, advisor, or other campus employee and let them know you’re struggling and need support, and to [Campus Counseling](#), where you can start with one counseling visit or make more, choose individual counseling or group counseling, and receive urgent care when in crisis. Counseling is free to students (paid as a part of tuition) and confidential. *Even one counseling visit can be so helpful!*

### ***For Faculty and Staff to Help Students Struggling with Mental Health***

Mental health struggles can hurt class learning and performance, quality of college experience, and retention and graduation rates, making mental health awareness and advocacy a very necessary part of our work. And on a very human level, we want the best for our students, wanting to do our best for students, especially in times of greatest need. To help with the rise of mental health struggles, we can be mindful of mental health struggles and use trauma-informed practices in our work, forge a culture of caring that destigmatizes mental health and normalizes help-seeking, remind students of campus Counseling services, and reach out to students who show signs of distress or struggle. Research tells us that social connections are a wonderful protective factor when in place and a risk factor for mental health struggles and suicide for those without that support system, so building student-to-student connections and student-to-faculty/staff connections is also essential. And we can be there for our students when they come to us: Listening with an open mind and open heart can help a student to give voice to struggles, work through emotions, gain perspective on what they’re going through, and formulate the steps they might take—and feel they are heard and their humanity acknowledged.

Please see [“The Need for Greater Mental Health”](#) for further information and suggestions for helping with student mental health struggles.



## **The Need For Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice**

Too many students leave their higher education, some never to return, and so many students currently enrolled in college consider leaving, at risk of not returning once they do so. Research tells us that many are students of historically marginalized groups who experience myriad barriers in society and its institutions, including education. This is the fundamental reason why diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice are core principles and practices in higher education.

Due to the ever increasing diversity of students on college campuses across the nation, equity and inclusion principles and practices are essential—these help students to stay and succeed in their studies, and help the institution to maximize the myriad benefits of diversity for all. Justice is also needed to challenge the status quo, to ask the tough questions about whether what we do and how we do it produce or reproduce power imbalances and marginalization of groups of people on our campus and beyond, to strive for a better world for all. Here at Sacramento State, one of our Institutional Imperatives is [Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging](#), where “*building a just, diverse, equitable, and inclusive community*” is our stated commitment.

### ***For Students***

Diversity makes us a better place and better people. Research shows that diverse groups and organizations typically show greater critical thinking and creativity, and more effective problem solving and decision making. Interaction with a variety of people increases our ability to communicate effectively with others, to gain the competency skills necessary to successfully working with different people and groups in the business world and the civic realm, and strengthening our understanding of others, making our campus, community, and country better. To fully achieve these benefits, be inclusive of others, continually learn about others different than you, and dialogue about those differences to expand your knowledge of the world and the many complex issues in it. To fight for greater equity and justice, take advantage of all the opportunities on campus to learn about the myriad issues of marginalization of groups, ways to get involved, and the steps to take to do our part in the fight for social justice. College is a great place to develop the skills needed for advocacy and meet others to join forces, show solidarity, become allies, and work for the causes you believe in to make our world a better place.

### ***For Staff and Faculty***

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice require different, sometimes overlapping, things from us in our individual spheres of campus responsibilities. The work is needed, continual, and sometimes difficult, yet also transformative for us, our students, and our institution. Continually learning about diversity enriches understanding of our students’ experiential knowledge and strengths, and understanding their different needs and challenges helps us identify what we must do to make education more equitable for all. To create good classes and campus spaces for all students to thrive, we can model the practices of inclusivity and teach in ways inclusive of a diversity of learner needs, preferences, and backgrounds. And to fight for justice, we can help to spread awareness, fight bias, show allyship and advocacy, and create needed change on campus and in the community. We can also help students to see the vital importance of social justice and nurture within them the communication and leadership skills needed to fight for societal reform. This is very much in keeping with our institutional mission: “*Sacramento State transforms lives by preparing students to lead, serve, and succeed.*”

Please see [“The Need for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice”](#) or further information and suggestions for fulfilling the campus Imperative of Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.

### **The Need to Finish Each Semester as Strongly as Possible**

The end of the semester is difficult, but for some students more so. Students may leave or consider leaving at any point, but, as we know, the end of the term is especially stressful, where students may stop showing up, stop trying, stop out, and, even, stop pursuing their higher education entirely.

This makes navigating through each semester to as strong as possible a finish imperative—in order to build student success semester after semester and, in some cases, to build motivation and perseverance to continue, even in the face of obstacles or setbacks.

#### ***For Students to Finish the Semester as Strongly as You Can***

*Be proud!* Each semester, with every class, every assignment, every exam, you are making it through, gaining strength, and achieving progress. Even with stumbles or mistakes, you learn and you grow! Someday when you're thinking back to these times when you were once a student, you will realize how much those experiences—the good and, yes, the not-so-good—helped to forge the person you are, achieve your college diploma, and lead you to a brighter future. To finish out a semester as strongly as possible, take advantage of the academic support all around you, and create a good schedule and good study conditions for hunkering down to the busiest time of the semester, when so many assignments and final exams come due. Remember that self-care is important to you and your studies, so stay strong, stay well, eat and hydrate to nourish your body and mind, take breaks, try to get good sleep, and find time for connection with others and humor, play, and joy. If you're worried about a class grade, then talk with the instructor. Professors who understand what's going on and why you're struggling may decide to grant time extensions or allow late assignments with penalty, an assignment re-do, or extra credit in the course, refer you to needed resources, look over rough drafts of upcoming assignments, give you study or assignment tips, and/or offer other forms of support, depending on your needs. If a grade situation becomes serious, you can also discuss with an advisor any options available to you, which may include asking the instructor to grant an Incomplete in the class or WU grade, withdrawal from or repeating the course, or petitioning the Academic Standards Committee for a grade deletion (please [university academic policies](#) for further information).

#### ***For Staff and Faculty to Help Students Finish the Semester as Strongly as Possible***

Students are tired, and so are we in the final weeks of the term! But we, too, need to finish out the semester as strongly as possible in service to our students. To do so, we can encourage our students on in the busy last part of the semester, remind them of all of the campus resources they have available to them, support students in their struggles, and help students understand how to salvage a grade in a class or move forward in their studies after a failing grade with a growth mindset. We can also close out the semester on a strong note: Encourage students on in their college education, including post-graduate work, wish them a wonderful break or congratulate them on graduating, and let them know that just because the course is over, you are still around, should they want to reach out to say “hi” or if they need anything in their remaining journey at Sac State or beyond. Taking a moment to appreciate the achievement of the semester's completion is also a wonderful way to end the semester for students who may not realize just how much they are accomplishing each semester and year of college.

Please see [“The Need to Finish Each Semester as Strongly as Possible”](#) for further information and suggestions for students completing each term in the best way possible.

## The Need to Graduate

Too many students leave their higher education, some never to return, and so many students currently enrolled in college consider leaving academia, at risk of not returning once they do so. And not staying through to degree completion comes with loss to the student, to our campus, and beyond.

The numerous and significant benefits of a college degree to the graduate, personally and professionally, have been well-documented, as well as the benefits societally, in terms of those graduates contributing to their communities and to our national economy and democracy.

### *For Students*

Earning a college degree can seem like an uncertain and unending process—but that college degree is so very worth it in terms of greater career options, lifetime financial stability, and quality of life! It may not always feel like it, but *in working to achieve your college degree, you are blazing a brighter future for yourself and your future generations to come!* So...keep going strong, step by step, semester by semester. Should you need anything, there is support all around campus for you. Someday it is going to be your last year, your last semester, your last week, your last class, your last assignment or exam. It will seem to take forever to get to the end...until it's suddenly here! And that's when you realize most clearly all you have been striving for—and all you will be gaining! In the meantime, hold on tight to your reasons for being here and draw upon those reasons when things get tough. Don't get so locked into your studies that you forget to take time for yourself, time to enjoy your college experience, time to appreciate your journey, and time to reflect on all you have been doing and are accomplishing that will lead up to one of the biggest achievements of all, your college graduation!

### *For Staff and Faculty*

College completion is one of the highest measures of our success in what we do, and each one of us, in our various roles on campus, plays an important part. The benefits of degree attainment are significant and numerous—to students, their communities, our nation, and the generations to come! There are numerous ways to support students in their college years through to graduation, including all the areas discussed in this work previously: Giving students a strong start in their first year of college or their first year back as a student returning to school, fostering a sense of belonging on campus, helping students to develop their academic capabilities and increase engagement in their studies, providing support for students in times of financial hardship, stress, and mental health struggles, helping students to find their academic and career paths, and pushing for greater diversity, equity, inclusiveness, and justice at our institution and beyond. And we can also help students to appreciate their success: Every course completed successfully means valuable learning about the subject matter, as well as self and society; skill development in areas that will serve the student well in future coursework, the working world, and personal life; opportunity to get to know other students, faculty, and staff in their educational journey; and progress toward degree, taking them closer to that college diploma that will change the trajectory of their lives!

Please see [“The Need to Graduate”](#) for further information and suggestions for helping with students stay on their journey through their higher education through to degree completion.

## Conclusion

Student by student, semester by semester, year by year, we need for students to continue.

And we need to continue all of the great work being done for student retention and success—and to continually grow in our efforts in service to our students.

*Best wishes for a wonderful academic year!*

For more perspectives from students and information regarding this work, “Listening to Students Who Thought About Leaving College or Left and Came Back,” please see the sections:

- [“Part 1: The Pivotal First Year in College”](#)
- [“Part 2: The Need for Belonging”](#)
- [“Part 3: The Need to Do Well and Feel Confident in Coursework”](#)
- [“Part 4: The Need to Manage Stress and Cope with Struggles”](#)
- [“Part 5: The Need to Manage Costs and Financial Pressures”](#)
- [“Part 6: The Need to Finish Each Semester as Strongly as Possible”](#)
- [“Part 7: The Need to Return”](#)
- [“Part 8: The Need to Be Engaged in Learning”](#)
- [“Part 9: The Need for Greater Mental Health”](#)
- [“Part 10: The Need for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice”](#)
- [“Part 11: The Need to Find One’s Path”](#)
- [“Part 12: The Need to Graduate”](#)

This work is part of the larger [\*Listening to Students\*](#) project done at this institution.

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