

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

Student Perspectives.....	2
Introduction to this Project.....	12
Part 6: The Need to End the Semester as Strongly as Possible.....	13
For Students.....	14
For Faculty and Staff.....	21
Conclusion.....	24

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

“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) Poor progress during college made me leave my studies. There was one course I had D which made me thought I’m not going to complete it as the courses will get harder. I also got demoralized because I wanted to perform well and keep my GPA higher.... Financial needs, supporting family, not enough time to concentrate on studies.

I knew I had the potential and always wanted to finish my studies that made me overcome the fear of failing. So I mustered all the courage and joined back after 9 years. I knew I deserved better job, so I started working to achieve higher education which was always my dream.

I’m currently enrolled in a course that I’m struggling with just to pass. I talked to my Professor which helped me understanding some concepts but I wish there could be something else like professors could layout a plan of how and where to focus on coursework or help students keep their spirits up if they know that students are reaching out to them out of concern. I never passed any course less than A-. So it’s also taking emotional toll.”

— Age:39, Senior, First gen college student, English as secondary language, Asian, Parent of 2

“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) Lack of access to tutoring or office hours to professors. Financial aid not provided. Care giver responsibilities to parents. Work overload in classes, specially right after spring break and Thanksgiving.

(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you left?) My motivation and passion to become the Chemist at the company I work for.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Offer more available resources to students who have a full time job. More accessible hours to tutoring centers, possibly open an online access. Gym hours to be extended too. Offer more opportunities of research or volunteering during weekends.

Access to workshops on the weekends: time management, job seeking, resume building, network, safety transition from academic to professionalism, etc.

Money, although I have a salary of \$45,000 a year, this is not enough to pay housing, bills, college, and in addition helping my parents.”

— Aged when left college: 24 yrs old, Aged when came back to college: 29 yrs old., Aged as of today: 31 yrs old. , Race/Culture: Mexican, Latino, Year in school: Senior, First generation student bilingual student working at professional level as lab technician, and DACA student.

“In 2015, I received my AA degree in English and, at the time, decided I did not need any more college. I wanted to be a writer and concluded that I did not need a 4-year degree to do that.

After years of working and also spending several years in the military, my goals in life changed. Being in the working world, visiting different countries, meeting people from all over the world, and my changing political views made me want to choose a new path in life.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Stop charging students for resources they never use, such as The Well.”

— Age 29, Filipino, veteran pressure to earn a degree. But I persisted and I never gave up, and I know I will have much more opportunities because of it.

“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) Money is the #1 reason. Mental health is #2. But #1 would fix #2.

(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you left?) Self motivation (knowing I'm making my family proud, achieving new things, breaking barriers)

I already use many of the resources offered (food pantry, etc.) but programs like those really help me because I struggle A LOT financially”

—21, mexican, junior year (transfer from community college), 1st gen college student and immigrant, multilingual (first/primary language: Spanish)

“The first time I dropped out of college, I worked hard and got accepted to a private university at 20 years old but was ineligible for all forms of aid and could not pay for it so I quit everything.

The second time I quit college I worked hard and got almost to the end of a degree and credentialing program in law enforcement but I realized I did not want to go into that field so I quit everything.

I got married at 27 and have a decent job but I know without an education this is as good as I'll ever do. I went back at 29 chipping away at it 2 classes at a time while working fulltime and taking care of my father. I'm sticking to it because both my wife and father need me to take care of them and with the job I have now I will not be able to do that very well.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Provide more resources to older students who work full time”

— First generation college student who went back to college at 29 and will get his first bachelors at 34

“I can't leave. But I hate school. I hate the commute, I hate the little financial cost to go to school. I hate the pointlessness it is. It wastes time, it makes us take classes we will never use, it makes us jump through bureaucratic hoops in order to be able to afford college. I'm anticapitalist, and college is very much a business.

(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you left?) I need education to get a job where I can barely scrape by.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Make college courses, parking, textbooks free.”

—27 year old white Mexican junior.

“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) I am part of the group that wishes to become an online influencer like Pokimane, Jacksepticeye, IronMouse and CDawgVA. They play games and live off of just streaming and talking with people online. Also, college is hard. I know I had to choose college or something else and I chose college but it surpasses my expectations of difficulty and commitment.

To make sense of what I am saying, I am genuinely someone who has gotten very lucky throughout school and life and when things became difficult, I lost motivation. I am doing better now but I can see that I must keep up with what I do in order to stay on top of things and ask for help when I run into a wall.

I stay here because I do not believe in myself to make good changes for myself. I feel as though I have to force the flow into my life. Over every summer, I did the same things over and over, nothing but watching anime and playing games. College has genuinely helped me do better. I even got a job to pay for my college books. College works as my cause and the effects that it has are mostly positive from a logical stand point for my life.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) The greatest thing would be to show more obviously that some classes fulfill multiple requirements for the education requirements and that some will allow you to take a certain class. This should be inside of the student center or the classes button should be in there. If there is already the class list button in the student center, it should be highlighted differently. The list format in the student center is a little overwhelming to me when it feels like nothing really connects. An example would be like when we look at the special writing courses that fulfil the weird writing requirement. If it said, when you scrolled over a course in a section, it would show where else an education requirement is fulfilled by taking that class.”

— I am Asian-American Hmong boy born here in Sacramento. Right now, 19 years of age in my 2nd year of college, living with both parents as a dependent. I am not a first generation college student.

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

(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you left?) idea of career

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) make fafsa easier, lower tuition, free”

—Mexican

“The first time I was attending college and had to leave was because I lost childcare and ... had no one that I could rely on. Most of the people in my family are or were on drugs and I didnt want to expose my daughter to that so that she grew up thinking that was an ok life to live. I went back to school because I have been in the healthcare field for 22 years and coronavirus has caused these past few years to be the most stressful that I have ever experienced. I have also been tempted to leave again because the stress of working full time, going to school fultime, and being a parent is overwhelming.

Basically the only thing that is keeping me in school right now is that I only have one more semester to go and I will graduate.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) It is really difficult with my a.d.d. to understand my ... teachers. Most of my ... teachers have a thick accent and it would help if somehow I could watch a video of the class with closed captioning that actually translated what they were saying. I am also hard of hearing so I have to translate what they are saying in my head to english then translate what they said to math, and it is really difficult.”

— I am 46 years old, of mixed race Black and Irish/German, am a senior this year, I am a first generation college student, I am the mother of 3: my oldest daughter is 26 years old, middle daughter is 7 years old and my youngest is 5 year old female identifying little girl (born male).

“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) Uncertainty of major when I left. Cost was too high to float around not sure. Did not have motivation to study. Had to work more and no online class options that were doable

(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you left college?) Figured out what I wanted to pursue and have a family I want to support by finishing degree

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Offer more online classes”

—30 years old, Mexican American, Senior, First Gen, Veteran, Parent, Multilingual (spanish and english)

“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) hard time balancing being a good & present parent, while working and keeping up grades in classes

I left for one semester because I was diagnosed with PPD after having my son in 2020.

Recently my motivation has significantly decreased, but what keeps me going is that I am so close to graduating. I don't want to feel like I wasted my time and leave college without a degree. All the time spent away from my children would be for nothing without receiving my degree.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) More support for students with children, not just during mornings or early afternoons. Most parents work during the day and have their children after 3 pm once they are out of school or daycare. Also most parents take afternoon classes.”

—32, Hispanic, female

“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) The experiences (described below), the cost was too much and because I had to work to pay for school, and not a lot of classes available in the evening.

(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you left?) Close to finishing, so I might as well do it. I've invested too much to give up. Also, it's local.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Not much anymore for me. But for future students who are undocumented, have them really understand how sac state can help and where they cannot. Have them understand before they invest into this money pit.”

— As a first generation undocumented student, I found it very difficult to get help through Sac State. I spent about 4-6 semesters not qualifying for financial aid or grants because I was not informed that I just simply do not qualify for any financial aid, grants and loans because of my status. I would be about a month into class and then needed to drop those classes. Even though classes were dropped I still owed Sac State about \$800. No one told me why I wouldn't qualify and I met with a lot of people in ... Administration throughout this time. If I would've known sooner about this then I probably would've graduated by now since I could change my game plan.

Not only that, but as a non-traditional student (Over 25 with a full-time job) professors in my department were not very accommodating. I could not put work aside since I needed the money to pay for school. Not a lot of night classes offered.

“I never wanted to attend college or thought much of it throughout my life. I did it to make my parents happy, but I am unhappy with my life, I always hated the stress in school, and going to college did not change anything about me or my thought process. I don't really have any close friends that I have made in college, only classmates and acquaintances. Most of the time I just feel lonely on campus and that is what I hate the most about it.

I only stay because of my parents. Since both never got a 4 year degree, they taught me that college is the most important thing to become successful. Its been embedded in my mind for so long that even though I hate it and myself, I still force myself to go through it in order to make my parents happy. Because in the end my parents being happy makes me happy, even if I have to sacrifice my own independence. I don't know what I want to do with my life, nor am I looking forward to it, I don't like thinking about my future. But I do want to repay my parents for all of the sacrifices they have made for me.

I don't think Sac State can do anything for me, I just have to do it myself. Until I start learning how to love myself then that's when I'll know that I'll be alright.

I just wanted to vent in this survey. In the meantime I'm just existing.”

—19, Asian, 1st year

“I left college for six years total because I was on and off with college. I left college because I needed to work to keep my apartment and playing softball while going to school on just a junior college tuition/ grant budget was not feasible. I also left the state a few times to help my paternal grandmother bury her daughters and help her get back on her feet.

What is keeping me here is the online asynchronous capability. Like I stated above I work full-time, therefore I work Monday through Friday 9 am to 530pm. My mother and maternal grandmother help me with the children.

I believe if had extended hours for childcare for single parents that would help many single parents who want to come back to finish. I also believe if there was more opportunity for evening or online learning this will help as well.”

— I am 28 years old, Black and Mexican American, culturally grew up in a Catholic, Christian Mexican family this is my Senior Year, I graduate in May. I am a first generation college student, I am working full-time, and I am a single mother including sole provider to two beautiful children age 7 and 1.

“I recently considered leaving college because I feel like the program, I'm currently pursuing is not what I expected it to be. I find that It's not a good program and I feel like I'm taking courses that don't have much to do with my major. Some of the courses are not challenging enough for me and I tend to get bored easily. I was hoping for a hands-on program and it's full of lectures and writing. Many of the professors I've taken can be discouraging instead of uplifting their students and are not always available for their students via email or office hours. Honestly, I was really excited about attending Sac State University, but it has been a disappointment for me, especially getting to be back on campus. All these things have made me consider leaving college.

What's keeping me here is that I will be receiving my BFA in the spring of 2024 and I'll have a certificate to go along with it. Being so close to receiving my BFA is what is keeping me here.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Develop a better program in (my department) and hire more professors for the program so that future students will have a bigger variety of professors to choose from. This could help with the professors being more available for their students, more encouraging, and not being so challenging getting into the courses within the program.”

— I'm 35 years old, Mexican, a Senior in college, and a first-generation college student.

“During the early stages of covid I took a semester off because it was difficult for me to adjust to the online asynchronous/ synchronous learning. After finishing a semester during covid I decided to take a semester off because I felt burnt out and lacked motivation which affected my grades. I decided to take a break and work on my mental health in order for me to better succeed in my college career and obtain the grades I would be proud of.

I have always been determined to receive a higher education and earn a college degree. It has been a long time goal for my family and I that I graduate college. The proud feeling of beating the statistics as a first generation Latina student is unmatched. I am proud of my culture and feel so happy and honored to expand the diversity in the field of education. Growing up I never had teachers that looked like me or felt that my school environment represented me.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Offer more in person class courses. Provide a better description of courses in student center for students. Offer gas cards or free lunch for commute students.”

— I am a first generation Chicana college student. I was raised by an immigrant single mother and I am the oldest out of four children. I am a senior at Sacramento state, but was a transfer student. I am really proud of my family’s Mexican cultural background. I am a native Spanish speaker and didn’t learn English until grade school.

“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) No motivation. College (in itself as an experience) has no concept of time and it moves incredibly fast because students work on their studies before or by the due date of every assignment. As much freedom as we all have, it can be very mentally tiring

(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you left?) Understanding the consequences of taking a semester off or taking a gap year and understanding how much it can hold you back

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) be less strict on its attendance policy, and be less strict about it ‘gap year’ restrictions”

— Female (she/her), 18 years old, first year biomedical sciences

“I left in my early 20s. I was demotivated and could not pay for college. I had a single mom who was stressed out as well and told me to work full time to help with household expenses. I came back because I wanted to finish my education and become a physical therapist. I want to expand my opportunities, work with the elderly, and increase my income

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Definitely get better at recommending pre req courses for STEM classes.... The pre requisites... are no where near the level of math needed to understand the material....”

— Age:31, East Indian (Punjabi), Senior at university, My mother completed her masters degree in art in India, I am multilingual. I am proficient in Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu

“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) Multiple things:

- 1. I don't think the amount of money I'm paying for is worth the quality of education I'm getting.*
- 2. Some of the classes are too short for me to justify going to campus. For instance, I have a class that is only 50 minutes long but it takes me 30 minutes to just get there.*
- 3. I believe the classes are outdated. None of the ... classes I've taken so far have included programming to illustrate the concepts being taught.*
- 4. These micro transactions are draining. \$75 fee to pay my tuition fee via credit card online?? Really? \$180 for parking? Are you kidding me?*

I was lucky enough to land a job in my field and just like everybody was saying, school does not prepare you for a programming career. The pace of technological advancements is rapid, and it may not be practical to remain in college for four years, investing a significant amount of money, without any assurance of securing employment or gaining practical skills and knowledge for the real world.

I personally value higher education. While I do have my frustrations with the way things are, it is my goal to see things through and get my bachelor's degree. I see it as a challenge. And I believe that all adults who are capable, should strive to finish undergrad.

And also, the environment at Sac State resonates with me deeply. When I am on campus, it feels like I am in a sacred place dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge. I have had the pleasure of meeting many wonderful individuals there who share a common goal of contributing to a better future. I'm staying because I cherish these times.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) I don't like answering these types of questions because I know its not as easy. I've told you my problems so I'm sure you can figure it out yourself.

Thank you for allowing me to share my thoughts. I have no hope that things will change but please prove me wrong.”

— I'm an immigrant who moved here during the junior year of my high school from a very small country in South Asia. I'm first generation college student. I'm multilingual and have been fluent in English since I was a child so English hasn't been an issue.

I'm in my mid twenties.

“I took a break after COVID for about 2 years. I felt like it was best for me to be close with my family since they live 3 hours away to take care of myself mentally. I always planned to come back.

I love Sacramento State and I'll be graduating soon.”

— I'm a Hispanic female (25) and first generation.

“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) Started college at the age of 18, right out of high school. I took a semester off my first semester of the second year. I came back the next spring semester. I needed time off to decide what I wanted to do. I felt I had been going to college because it was expected of me rather than myself wanting to do it. I needed some time to re-evaluate my intention of being here at college. Another reason why I was thinking of not coming back is due to the vaccine. I did not like that the university was forcing me to get the vaccine. In my opinion, that should be my decision, not the schools or anyone else's. I did not like that the school was forcing me go against my values.

In addition, during the first two years it felt hard to adjust to the new school. I did not feel connected or involved with the school.

What kept me here at sac state is, I was already halfway through college and I wanted to finish what I started. In addition, I wanted to finish for myself and take advantage of this really great opportunity. I wanted to continue learning, meet new people, and become apart of sac state. Now I really enjoy being here on campus.”

—Anonymous

“I have left college multiple times. I come from a low income background and have never had stability or means even with financial aid to be able to finish more than a year of college

I end up working full time + some more every few years so that I can afford college the next time I attend

Loss of home is one of the main reasons I end up leaving because I don't know where I will be next.

I managed to save up enough money to finish my degree I actually transfered from a different university. Sac state was affordable and tuition didn't bleed me dry like other CSUs.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) More housing assistance would be nice. Affordable housing and assistance or teaching... to get on campus jobs”

—30 female first Generation American and first Generation college student junior Pakistani multilanguage learner

“I still do not know what I want to do as my career and want to experience more before making a decision. I also am spending so much money on classes and wish I could relieve some of the financial load that I have to pay for. I do not receive financial aid so that means I have to pay for it out of pocket

I am essentially pretty close to graduating. I only have about a year left before I get my bachelor's degree. Another side of me wants to just get it out of the way so I am not in school forever

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Stop accepting so many students when we do not have enough classes. Every class is impacted I shouldn't be a senior struggling to get classes that I need to graduate.”

—Anonymous

“I am planning on leaving Sac State due to financial situation, but mainly because I got used to having online classes ever since covid. I didn't really get a good transition to go back to in person. However, the CAMP program did help me out a lot in the first year with classes and even gave me a small tour around campus. I took a semester off because I wasn't doing good in my classes and I felt like it was due to some personal issues. Being away from people for such a long time in person made me feel unmotivated. I felt intimidated going back to in person and I also had anxiety. I hope that community college will help me engage more into school life by feeling like I can start over.

It would be nice if Sac State could help out ... anyone in general to have motivation talks for when a student decides to quit or thinks of giving up.”

— I am a 20 year old hispanic, third year at Sac State and I am a first generation college student.

“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) Going to school full time and having to work 2 jobs to pay for school and my expenses etc. made it hard for me to focus on school. If I don't work my two jobs I won't be able to pay my rent which allows me to attend Sac State.

I am a second year so I always tell myself that every semester is closer to graduation. All those all nighters and late shifts can't be for nothing.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Offer more classes to be online. My main struggle is rushing from class straight to work and not having enough time in the week to finish my homework for all my classes.”

— I am 19 Years old, Hispanic, second year, and a first generation college student.

“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) The feeling of never being enough ... of trying my hardest and failing my classes and exams ... of expecting new beginning only to be isolated.

(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you left?) Nothing I can't go back in.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Better counseling”

—18 Hispanic first year

“Fall semester made me want to consider leaving Sac State as my mental health wasn't great. It was the first time that I've felt that I might want to leave since I thought I couldn't do well to get through that semester.

What kept me staying throughout the semester was my determination to finish out strong. Yes, I've second guessed myself during the Fall semester but I know my potential of wanting to fulfill my dreams cannot stop from there. It is the reason why I chose to keep going.”

— I am 19 years old and continuing my second year as a Sac State student.

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 number of Americans with some college but no completion of a credential or degree (SCNC) rose to 40.4 million, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center 2023 report, [“Some College, No Credential,”](#) for the most recent academic period studied. This growth of 1.4 million students “is due to a lack of re-enrollment among the 39 million previously identified SCNC students and the 2.3 million new SCNC students (recent stop-outs).” By state, California has the highest number by far, at 6.6 million SCNC students, and the 6% rate of recent stop-outs of the national total SCNC population is also in the higher range.

Those Who Consider 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 2023](#), based on a survey of students currently enrolled in college, 41% surveyed said that it was “very difficult” or “difficult” to remain enrolled in their program, up a bit from last year. When asked whether or not the student had considered withdrawing from their school for at least one term in the past six months, 41% 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

Once a student stops-out, they are statistically less likely to come back—and those who do are less likely to complete to degree. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center report, [“Some College, No Credential,”](#) notes that fewer SCNC students re-enrolled than in the previous year (down 8.4%, totaling 864,800 students) and fewer SCNC students persevered into their second year of re-enrollment (down 4.3%, totaling 508,700 students) from the previous year.

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 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. 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 is the unfolding of survey responses from students on this campus this 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 will focus on one key aspect of keeping students on-track and successful in college life through to completion.

This section, Part 6, focuses on the need for students to finish each term as strongly as possible.

Part 6: The Need to Finish Each Semester as Strongly as Possible

As the preceding section notes, 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.

Students may leave or consider leaving at any point in the semester but, as we know, the end of the semester 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.

While the preceding page lists the number of students who consider leaving and the potential consequences thereof, this page, in the section to follow, considers why students remain enrolled.

Why Students Stay

According to the Gallup/Lumina report, [“The State of Higher Education 2023:”](#)

When asked why they stay in college, the following were cited as important reasons for students choosing to continue pursuing their bachelor’s degree: To obtain knowledge or skills (73%), to get a higher-paying job (72%) or more fulfilling career (70%), and for more personal achievement or fulfillment (64%).

When asked what factors were important to their being able to remain enrolled in their college studies, some of the top factors were confidence in the value of the degree (52%) and enjoyment of the program, including course content and social interactions (also 52%).

And to explore further other factors and how important these are to all students versus students who had recently considered leaving college, students were asked how important each of the following were in being able to remain in their program:

Greater flexibility in course delivery: 33% of students who had not considered stopping out recently and 39% of students who had.

Support from a school counselor or mental health professional: 28% of students who had not recently considered stopping out and 36% of students who had.

Concern about losing your spot in the program if you took time off: 26% of students who had not recently considered stopping out and 34% of students who had.

Change in college, program, or major: 19% of students who had not recently considered stopping out and 27% of students who had.

In this Document

To follow, you will find suggestions for students, faculty, and staff to help students finish the semester as strongly as possible or to salvage a semester, for those who are struggling.

For Students
To Finish the Semester as Strongly as You Can

The last part of the semester can be difficult—but the end is in sight!

To each and every one of you—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 are 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.

For Inspiration

To remind you of why you are here and working so hard:

In addition to the invaluable experience, connections, and learning you will gain in college, the benefits of being a college graduate have been well-studied over the years. Here is a short list—

Professional Benefits of a College Degree—

College graduates have a greater range of employment opportunities and marketability to get the job—and once hired, typically greater job advancement and job security, better employment conditions and benefits, and higher earnings and job satisfaction.

Personal Benefits of a College Degree—

College graduates tend to have higher self-esteem, a better quality of life, and are healthier, exercise more, and live longer. College graduates are also more likely to better provide for their families and have children who go to college themselves someday.

Societal Benefits of a College Degree—

College graduates are more likely to vote, volunteer, contribute to charities, and become involved in the community.

It may not always feel like it, but *in working to achieve your college degree, you are blazing a brighter future for yourself, your future generations to come, and our community and country!*

Keep going strong, step by step, and should you need anything, there is support all around campus for you.

To follow, you will find suggestions for:

1. How to Finish Out the Semester as Strongly as Possible
2. What to Do When Worried About a Grade
3. What to Do When Struggling

To Finish Out a Semester as Strongly as Possible

Study hard and stay strong! *You are almost across the finish line—and then comes the break!!!*

Here are some suggestions for finishing out the semester well:

Take Advantage of Academic Support

Sac State has tremendously helpful academic resources, ranging from the [Peer and Academic Resource Center \(PARC\)](#), the [Reading and Writing Center](#), the [Math Lab](#), and [Smarthinking](#) (the 24-7 online tutoring for a number of subjects and writing) to tutoring centers in the many departments and programs of study.

Create Good Study Conditions

Find a quiet spot, with low or no distractions. On campus, the main places for doing coursework include the Library, the Academic Resource Building (AIRC), and the Union. Many of the different affinity centers provide designated study space for students, as well, such as the [Martin Luther King, Jr. Center](#), the [Asian Pacific Islander Desi American Student \(APIDA\) Center](#), and the [Serna Center](#). To prevent distractions, try to stay off the Internet entirely or open the Internet only to access the online classwork you need to do, and turn off notifications on your cell phone.

Don't Procrastinate on Studying and Assignments

It had to be said! At least half of students procrastinate, and that is a very conservative estimate. While a few students might say they do their best work at the last minute, the dangers, of course, are greater stress, adverse impact on physical health, and the likelihood of less-than-optimal performance on tests or assignments.

Remember Self-Care Is Important to You and to Studying

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. *Balance is important!* The [Student Health, Counseling, and Wellness Services](#) in the WELL offers so many medical, counseling, and wellness services, should you need, and most services are covered already (by the Health Services fee a part of your tuition) and available at no additional cost. There is also the [Meditation Room](#) and the [Relaxation Station](#) in the University Union.

Believe in Yourself and All You Can Learn to Do and Achieve

The role of self-efficacy—our belief in ourselves—in success is clear: It can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Lower self-efficacy can lead to paralyzing doubts or fears and students not doing the work at all or to the best of their ability. Higher self-efficacy means the 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. If you are doubting yourself, then talk with others about how you feel, seek out any academic support you need to achieve your goals, use proven strategies like positive self-talk, outlook, and visualizing success, and keep in mind that a good number of your professors doubted their abilities in some of their coursework, too, when they were students!

Utilize Success Strategies for Assignments

A few quick reminders:

Exams

Be sure to note the date and time of in-class final exams or meetings during Finals Week (which are usually different than regularly scheduled class times). Study smart, using any study guide or practice exam the instructor provides, and connect with classmates to see about study sessions or to collaborate on exam preparation. For online exams, read the instructor's directions carefully, and don't press the "Take the Quiz" start button until you're sure you're ready. If a timed test and you get kicked out, don't panic. The likelihood is that you can go right back in, but if not, take a screenshot and let your instructor know immediately what is going on. Lastly, try to take all exams on a laptop (rather than phone) and somewhere with strong and stable Internet service—[Student Tech Resources](#) can help with equipment use and wi-fi.

Papers

Be sure to review several times the assignment description requirements. Students can turn in papers that are beautifully done and full of thought, but not meet, for example, the minimum number of research sources or go a little bit off the paper topic and prompts. Remember, too, that immediate red flags to an instructor typically include writing less than the minimum page limit or word count and not proofreading for easily caught errors.

Presentations

The general guideline is that it takes an hour or two to effectively prepare for every one minute of speech, and best practice is eight to ten full rehearsal sessions for good delivery, greater confidence, and better ability to stay within time limits. Research tells us that practicing in front of friends, family members, and roommates leads to a higher grade on the assignment and more favorable audience response. We also know from research that most people will be the most nervous in the first minute—the start of the presentation—and after that their level of anxiety will go down.

Group Projects

If it seems like your group is taking forever to make progress on the work, don't feel too worried or discouraged yet—most groups take longer to get to know each other and settle into effective ways of working together on the task. When possible, build in rough draft deadlines to not only see progress made, but to also check to make sure each group member knows exactly what they need to do. If you have a group member who doesn't appear to be pulling their weight, then discuss the matter respectfully with the student in order to move forward constructively from there. You may find that the student felt uncertain about what to do for their part or had something going on in their lives taking time or causing stress—and they just needed a little group support to participate more fully. If discussion doesn't work, see what the instructor has said to do in such situations in the assignment description or syllabus policies. Lastly, communicate clearly and frequently, in person and in writing, through to the end of the group project so that nothing falls through the cracks or goes sideways with the work.

Technology

For technological difficulties, [Student Tech Support](#) offers help by phone, chat, service ticket, or walk-in assistance, as well as the [Student Technology Resources Canvas site](#).

For Students Worried About a Grade in Classes

Perhaps you want an A, but think you are earning a good or average grade, or perhaps you are worried you won't pass at all. *It's possible you are doing better than you think.*

Double-Check

A student may underestimate how well they are doing in a class, because Canvas courses are often set up to show overall course grades as a percentage of the points of assignments graded. This overall course grade percentage is not reflective of completed assignments not yet graded or later assignments yet to come in the course (or other types of grades that come at the end, often times, such as extra credit or participation points). This can result in some students who may have missed an assignment or not done well on an assignment to see that low course percentage in Canvas and think there is no hope of a higher or passing grade—not realizing that more and/or bigger point-value assignments are coming, with the potential to improve their grades greatly. It should also be noted that instructors with policies that drop the lowest test, quiz, or assignment grade usually wait until the end of the semester, when all of the assignments are in, to do this.

Canvas also has a “What If?” feature students have available to them which may help to calculate how many points they would need on one or more assignments to achieve a desired grade in the course. To learn more, please see this [quick overview of the What If? Canvas feature](#).

Talk with Your Professor and Get Academic Support

It's also good to go directly to your professor, to see if your concerns about a grade are valid or not, and, if you really aren't doing as well as you would like in the course, see what the professor suggests and go from there. Getting academic support is helpful, as well. These suggestions are further discussed in the section to follow.

For Students Struggling

Students may struggle with academics from time to time, for any number of reasons. *The important thing is not to struggle on alone!*

Reach Out for Help

Reach out to your professors, in person, by email, or both. Faculty have different policies and practices, but professors who understand what's going on and why you are struggling may decide to grant time extensions or allow late assignments with penalty, an assignment re-do, or extra credit in the course. They may 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 and circumstances.

Reach out to campus academic support mentioned earlier and here again—the [Peer and Academic Resource Center \(PARC\)](#), the [Reading and Writing Center](#), the [Math Lab](#), and [Smarthinking](#) (the 24-7 online tutoring for a number of subjects and writing) and tutoring centers in the many departments and programs of study. They can be tremendous help in raising grades! You may also reach out at any time to the [DEGREES Project](#) here on campus, a safety net for any student in need, academically or personally.

Consider Your Options

There may be things you can do when extenuating circumstances get in the way of academics and second chances when class grades are too low.

Please note that students should confer with advising to make sure the options below are good ones for them, as these may have impact on academic standing or financial aid.

When Grade Situations Become Serious Due to Extenuating Circumstances...

An ***incomplete*** may be granted to a student, in some situations.

An incomplete means that a portion of the assignments could not be completed by the student during the semester due to unforeseen and extenuating circumstances, and the student is allowed to finish the coursework within the timeframe set by the professor, up to a year later. To pursue an incomplete, the student must ask the instructor if they will grant an incomplete (no form or petition needed) and then complete the agreed-upon coursework within the stipulated time frame. The instructor will enter an I (for incomplete) for final course grades at the end of the term, and then submit an Incomplete Grade Completion Form once the coursework needed has been submitted and graded (or, if the Incomplete time frame lapses without that coursework being done, the grade will revert to the grade earned at the end of the semester the course was taken). Please see the [campus policy for incompletes](#) for further information. Please also note that many students never finish their Incomplete coursework—so please, if granted an incomplete, try to finish the assignment(s) as soon as possible, while the material is fresher in your mind and you're still in school-mode, rather than immersed in your break, when it may be harder to do schoolwork, or back from break, but busy with the new term's classes.

A ***class withdrawal*** may be granted to a student, in some situations.

This is a drop after the fourth week through to the end of the semester. Students may withdraw from a class (in the fifth to twelfth weeks) for no more than 18 units in their time here at Sac State, with some exceptions. Withdrawal requires the student to begin the process via OnBase by submitting the [Withdrawal Petition](#), which then goes to the faculty member, the department chair, and in later-semester Withdrawal Petitions, the college dean, for signatures.

- Withdrawal during the 5th and 6th week: Reasons for dropping during this period include medical circumstances, carrying an excessive course load, student's inadequate academic preparation for the course, or the student having significant job or career changes.
- Withdrawal during the 7th through the 12th week: Reasons for withdrawal during this period include only medical or work-related circumstances clearly beyond the control of the student. A student initiated job change, carrying an excessive course load, or inadequate preparation do not qualify.
- Withdrawal after the 12th week of instruction: This is allowed only in exceptional cases, such as accidents or serious illness, due to circumstances beyond the student's control. While not guaranteed, with adequate documentation of the extenuating circumstances and signatures, it's likely for the petition to be approved this late in the semester. Withdrawals approved during the last three weeks of the semester will not

count towards the 18 unit maximum, but a grade of W (Withdrawal) is still recorded on the transcript.

Please see the [campus withdrawal policy](#) for further information.

The *Academic Standards Committee Petition* may be something to consider, in certain cases.

The Academic Standards Committee has the capability to make retroactive changes to a student's account, such as deleting grades assigned for failing to complete a course for medical reasons [medical verification is required and, if approved, the grade(s) will be changed to a W], as well as approve petitions to extend the one year time limit on an incomplete and more. Students will find the [Academic Standards Committee Petition](#) for them to submit in OnBase and any questions may be emailed to the Registrar's Office at: Registrar@csus.edu.

When the Final Course Grade Won't Be a C or Above...

A good option may be *repeating the course*.

When students don't earn a C or higher in a class [they earn a C-, D+, D, D-, F, or NC (No Credit) or WU (Withdrawal Unauthorized)], they may be able to repeat the course to potentially earn a higher grade that replaces the original lower grade (called grade forgiveness). There's no form or petition to submit before or after a course is repeated—the student simply enrolls again in the class in a future term and then the Registrar's Office runs reports at the end of each semester to catch course repeats and ensure they are adequately updated to the student's transcript. Please see the [campus policy on repeating courses](#) for further information.

You might *request a WU from the instructor*.

A WU means that the student did not officially withdraw from a class. An instructor in such a situation at the end of the term may enter whatever grade the student has earned, such as an F, or an NC or WU. The WU may be assigned in the case where the instructor deems the student hasn't participated in the course or completed coursework sufficiently to earn a letter grade. For the purposes of GPA, a WU is the equivalent of an F—but for the first term that the student receives one or more WU grades, the student may ask an advisor to submit a petition on their behalf at this time or after (up to conferral of the degree) to have the WU grade(s) in this term dropped from GPA calculation (called a "Petition to Discount First WU Grade"). Please see [campus policy on unauthorized withdrawal](#) for further information.

With regard to financial aid, a *SAP Appeal* may be needed.

Students who are worried about not meeting SAP (Student Academic Progress) standards, which would disqualify them from financial aid, may have extenuating circumstances that could lead to a SAP appeal approved. Here is a [What is SAP and How to Appeal Video](#) to explain SAP policies and the appeal process, and please see [campus SAP policy](#) for further information. A SAP Appeal is submitted by the student after the grades for the academic year are in (June).

One Last Thing...***Don't Let a Low Course Grade Limit or Stop You
—Use This to Help You Grow!***

Growth mindset is work led by Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck and used in the field of education, as well as the business world, because it offers such value. In the book, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, she argues that there are two mindsets regarding intellect and talent:

- A fixed mindset is the belief you are born with intelligence and abilities that are set in stone (cannot be changed).
- A growth mindset is the belief that intelligence and abilities can grow (can improve and strengthen with learning and effort).

These mindsets can be seen as on a continuum and may change within an individual over periods of time and for various areas of tasks (such as math versus writing, for example).

Neuroscience tells us that our brains can change and strengthen over our lifetime! And research tells us that our mindset impacts us greatly in so many ways, especially in the academic setting:

With a fixed mindset, students may do well in school, until they encounter difficulties. Students with a fixed mindset tend to have lower motivation, lower engagement and effort, and lower success in the coursework, under-utilize resources to help them improve, and give up more easily when struggling on the assignment, in the course, or in the area of study. Even students doing well in their studies may be affected by limiting their goals, not putting themselves in situations that stretch and expand their abilities, ignoring constructive feedback, comparing themselves with others, and worrying about self-image in performance situations.

With a growth mindset, students are more likely to succeed academically—work harder, stay motivated and engaged in the coursework, enjoy learning, and see mistakes, failures, and constructive feedback as opportunities for growth. Brain activity measurement shows just how much our brains fire up when we work through and learn from our errors, and in sticking through and learning something challenging, we create and strengthen our neural pathways—making our brains smarter!

If you have a fixed mindset, here are a few key ways to cultivate that growth mindset so essential to continuing on in your learning, even in the face of difficulties, and growing stronger for it!

Understand that Mistakes Are a Part of Learning

Confusion, slower learning, lower performance, errors, failure...these are a part of the process as we learn new, more difficult things. Almost no one is perfect at something immediately. Even the most accomplished of people started out with lower ability in what they ultimately mastered and, some will say, their mistakes and failures along the way are precisely what fueled them to achieve greatness! When making mistakes or failing in something, take the time and care to work through what you did well and what you can learn from your experience and errors, come up with new strategies or steps to take, and try again, better fortified to progress and strengthen.

Embrace Challenges

Of the obstacles or difficulties that come your way, see these as opportunities for growth and learning. Moreover, strive to get out of your comfort zone and stretch yourself by seeking out new challenges for yourself—this will cultivate a growth mindset and strengthen your mind, as you exercise your brain and learn new things. *College is a great place to do this, full of opportunities in the classroom and out in campus life!*

For Staff and Faculty To Help Students Finish the Semester as Strongly as Possible

Students are tired, and so are we! But we, too, need to finish out the semester as strongly as possible in service to our students.

To follow are the things we do throughout the semester—yet reminders needed now, more than ever.

Encourage Them

This is something we can all do. “We think about educators as those who are in the classroom and those who are in Student Affairs, but from my training, I also see many of our custodial and janitorial staff and facilities staff as being absolutely a part of the educational process,” President Wood noted in his Fall Address. He recounted one of his first studies at another college, where he was interviewing students about their success and asking who they engage with inside and outside of class. The students’ answer, he found, was, “The person who tells me, *‘I’m proud of you. Keep going. Keep your head in the books. I’m here if you need anything’* was the janitors, the custodians, the food service workers, and the groundkeepers.” He adds, “So all of us here have the privilege of being educators.” An encouraging “you got this” or compassionate “I see you working hard,” can lighten hearts and fortify tired minds, and inspire students to keep on going through to semester completion.

Remind Them to Use Their Resources

Refer students to the great places to go on campus for academic help: [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. You may also refer a student struggling in your class to the [DEGREES Project](#), which serves as a safety net for all students from their first year through to graduation, with student success support including early intervention, academic advising, graduation support, mentoring, and connecting students to other valuable campus resources. Health, wellness, and stress reduction are essential for students, and campus resources to help with this include the [Student Health, Counseling, and Wellness Services](#), and the [Meditation Room](#) and the [Relaxation Station](#) in the University Union.

Support Them in Their Struggles

In conversations with students, when you ask how their classes are going, they may directly say or indirectly reveal through their voice or demeanor that they are struggling on an assignment or in a class, more generally. Helping students to locate and feel comfortable using the campus resources they say they need or you think they may benefit from can help the student to feel less alone in their struggles. So, too, can invitations encouraging students to come see you in your office, whether staff or faculty. Taking a moment to teach the basics to a student in need can mean so much, such as giving advice on how best to study for tests, research a topic or cite sources, outline a speech, or structure a paper. That one area that you helped the student in might have been the one thing hindering an assignment’s completion. That small amount of guidance on a fundamental college skill can be a turning point in the student’s sense of capability in academia and lead to a huge step forward in the student’s progress in college.

Reach Out to Students in Need

Checking in with students, especially when they might appear to be struggling but don't come for help, can make a world of difference in terms of a student passing a class or failing it, in continuing on in their college education or dropping out. You reaching out and your support for the student can mean so much! You will often see faces lighten, the student showing up more often and more mindfully, and gratefulness for somebody reaching out. And when that somebody is your professor or a university employee wanting to make sure you're okay, that can mean so much.

Understand How Hard It Can Be to Ask for Help

Seeking help can be hard to do for just about anyone due to the sense of vulnerability of reaching out and opening up, feeling embarrassment, guilt, or shame. Now factor in the professional nature of the employee-student relationship, typically with a power differential, and it becomes even harder to open up for many. And younger people can be intimidated by faculty and staff, and ever more so these days find even the most routine of conversation a little awkward or difficult, much less disclosing something of a more personal nature, like academic difficulties or personal struggles. Lastly, consider the busy time of the end of the semester. All of this is to say that *if students are coming to you at the end of the semester, then chances are high they really need you and your support!*

Give Them Reassurance When They're Concerned about Grades

When students are concerned about their grades, simply encouraging students to keep going in the class, to finish the semester as strongly as possible, that their college education is important to their future and the future of their families and generations to come, will often transform their mindset. If faculty, then, as the situation permits, you can let them know that the remaining course assignments, if done well, will raise the grade significantly and you are happy to work with them or look over an assignment draft. You can offset dismay with course progress with the prospect of extra credit. Allowing an assignment "re-do" or late work for some credit are good ways to help a student salvage a grade and increase learning. If a student has fallen behind but catching up is possible in the course, then helping to prioritize assignment completion, one at a time, can prevent overwhelm and provide a clear way forward in the class.

Let Them Know Their Options if They're Struggling in a Class

Students with extenuating circumstances impacting academics may not be aware that they may be able to obtain a [course withdrawal](#) even late in the semester or see if the instructor will grant an [incomplete](#). They may also not know that they can file an [Academic Standards Committee Petition](#), which, if approved, deletes grades assigned for failing to complete a course for medical reasons and replaces these with a W, extends the one year time limit on an incomplete, and more. Students earning a grade lower than a C in a course may not realize they may be able to [repeat a course](#) for a potentially higher grade. Students who have stopped attending or participating in a class, but did not officially withdraw, may benefit from being given a WU grade, which is the equivalent to an F in GPA calculation, but which can be [petitioned for removal in the case of a first time WU](#).

Pick Them Up if They Fall

Students may really struggle in a course and fail an assignment, exam, or the class itself. The sense of shame or futility may be a real roadblock to moving forward in their other classes and/or

in the next semester. When a student stumbles academically, a few quick words or, better yet, sitting down and having that talk to try to mitigate the effects of a low or failing grade can mean a lot. It may be helpful to let them know that tests and other assessments are simply one measure of a student's learning, and not always an entirely accurate one at that, given the myriad factors in and outside of the class that can impact how well a student performs. You can also help the student to realize that sometimes the most valuable learning comes from mistakes made or that academic ability is much like a muscle that needs to be exercised and, over time, will grow and strengthen. This may set their mind at ease and give them badly needed encouragement to continue on in that class or educational path. Sharing your own stumbles in school or problems in learning can also show the student that even someone who works at a college can struggle academically and still get back on track, still be an intelligent person, still belong in academia.

In Teaching

In addition to the preceding, additional suggestions for faculty are:

Make it Easier for Them to Come Back to You

When a student is earning a lower final grade in the class, then you, their instructor, reaching out to let them know you will be happy to see them in that class or any other class again can be so helpful. Students who want to take other classes with you or repeat the class to do better may find it easier to take the class again with the same instructor, yet may be reluctant to do so without this encouragement from you.

Challenge Them with Support through to the End

We often set the course up with the bigger assignments coming due at the end of the semester, such as group projects, research papers, and other culminating assignments. Such coursework can create tremendous learning and skill-building, sense of self-efficacy and achievement, and meaningfulness and fulfillment! Yet students may not gain these rewards as much or at all if we pile too much on at the end, don't address questions and points of confusion about the work as clearly and quickly as possible, or don't provide the necessary resources to perform the tasks. Taking things easier at the end, allowing some class time for student work, and providing helpful resources, guidance, and inspiration can ensure students achieve all you envisioned when you first crafted these bigger assignments.

Finish Out the Semester Strongly

Closing out the semester on a strong note can be accomplished in different ways: You could, for example, refer back to any pre-course self-assessment of the knowledge and abilities students would acquire in the course or to any goals you had students set for themselves for the class at the start of the semester, so that they can see their progress in learning and skill development at the end. You can have students discuss or write about their important takeaways from the course or their thoughts on how they might use what they learned and experienced in the class in the future, academically, personally, professionally, and/or societally. You can provide further learning resources or information on classes, clubs, or other opportunities for interested students to learn more about the subject. And you can 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.

Conclusion

Each class, each semester, each year, year after year, it is a long haul—but the most stressful and in some cases most dire of times typically comes at the end of the term.

This section highlights the need to finish the term—every term—as strongly as possible, and the steps we can all take to make this happen.

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 prior sections:

- [“Part 1: The Pivotal First Year in College”](#)
- [“Part 2: The Essential 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”](#)

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

With so very much appreciation to Elijah Martin, Strategic Initiative Outreach Assistant - MLK Center / Student Academic Success & Educational Equity Programs, for his great skills and insight so invaluable to this project, and to Ruth Williams, DEGREES Project Associate Director, and Dr. Marcellene Watson-Derbigny, Associate Vice President, Student Retention and Academic Success, for their extraordinary support, assistance, and wisdom shared over the years in this work.