

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

Student Perspectives.....	2
Introduction to this Project.....	27
Part 12: The Need to Graduate.....	28
For Students.....	31
For Faculty and Staff.....	33
Conclusion.....	35

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

*-Excerpts-*

***“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.”***

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

***“The main reason for coming back to college is because I discovered what life and career goals I wanted and a college degree is necessary for me to do those things. I wanted to try yet again and so far, I am doing well.”***

—Female, 21, Southeast Asian (Cambodian), I am a first generation college student who regularly commutes an hour or so to the campus.

***“My own ambitions drove me back every time I’ve left”***

— Mexican, first generation student, 25, male, handsome lol, transferred as a junior

***“I need to get the degree.”***

—Anonymous

***“What’s keeping me here is that I made it a goal to further my education. I made it a goal to understand myself and find a career that helps me do that and helps others do that. I made it a goal to set the bar higher in my family for future generations.”***

—Hispanic, First generation college, 23 years old, Senior graduating this spring

***“I think about finishing my bachelors degree all the time. It is a lifelong goal of mine.”***

—36 years old. Caucasian. Senior year.

***“What kept me going the most was that I was actually almost there to graduate, so I just pushed myself further so I can reach my end goal.”***

— I am a 22 year old Chinese-Vietnamese first gen American. This is my final year in college, after 5 long years. I’m a Health Science major with a minor in Asian Studies.

***“It was hard. I persevered and kept going and I’m about to graduate.***

***(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you did leave college?) Perseverance and wanting to show my children you could face adversity and prevail. I also wanted to be the first of my family to graduate college.”***

—41-year old, first generation black male, parent. Senior.

***“After working for the past six years in cosmetology I burned out in that career. During the pandemic when person care business were shut down I realized how much to physical aspect of the job had taken a toll on me. This is when I decided I wanted to finish my degree and build a career that has the potential for longevity.”***

—31 years old, African American/mixed, Junior, first generation college student

***“What made me come back were my kids. I want to provide them a better life. I want to be a role model for them.”***

— I am a Hmong student and mother of two wonderful children. I am 30 years old and is in my Senior year, hoping to graduate next semester. I am currently work at Amazon Fulfilment center near the airport, and recently just got my California Life Insurance license, and will soon start working as a Life license agent as well.

***“I came back because I knew it was important to finish this degree if I wanted to have a better chance of succeeding later on in life”***

—21, African American, Son of Veteran, 4th year

***“I want to be able to help people like me in the future and getting my degree is the only way to do it.”***

—24 year old Hispanic female 1st generation student oldest of 3 siblings full time caretaker of grandparents and working part time about 20-30 hrs a week

***“Knowing that education will take me farther in life and provide a more comfortable one is a main reason why I stayed.”***

— A 22-year old Hispanic Female. Middle class, junior at SacState, divorced parents, highest academic level within my family.

***“I started something and now it's time to finish it. I want to show my kids that no matter how hard life gets, getting the proper education is never out of reach.”***

— I am going to be 46 in 20 days. This is my 3rd attempt at this college thing. I am from Micronesia so I am considered Pacific Islander. My parents both did some trade schools for college many many years ago. I'm a mother of 6, domestic violence survivor, I speak Chuukese and English and understand Spanish.

***“I know that a college degree will prove to people in the future if I wished to apply somewhere and I can proudly say that I am a college graduate instead a college drop out.”***

— I am a 22 year old Chinese student. I am currently a 5th year. My parents didn't go to college but I have an older sister who graduated from sac state a few years ago

***“I came back to college this time around because I was unhappy in my job, and wanted to set an example for my children.”***

—40 year old Asian woman

***“I came back to continue my education and get my four year degree as required for my desired career. Physical Education PE Teacher.”***

—22, African American, Italian, Irish, 5th year Senior

***“The things that are keeping me is getting the chance to better myself, make new friends, and experience life being a young adult.”***

— I am a young African American woman. I'm a 18 year old college freshman.

***“I came back because I was tired of putting myself last. I lost myself. Receiving my degree has always been an ultimate goal of mine.”***

—I am a 25-year-old Mexican- American. I am a first-generation college student. I began college in 2016 and transferred in 2019 to Sac State. I did not attend until Spring 2022

***“What is keeping me in school now is knowing that I am closer to my goals now than when I first started. I don't want the progress that I have made to be in vain.”***

— Black, Female, 31,Sophomore, first generation college student.

***“I wanted to continue my education because I find pride in my studies.”***

— Age: 29, Gender: F, Filipino, first generation student, senior in mechanical engineering

***“I eventually returned to college ... after the birth of my daughter. I wanted to get my Bachelor's to show her she can too.”***

— I am a first generation student, my parents were born in Mexico and I am the first born to the U.S in my family. I am a mother to one child.

***“I decided to take some criminal justice classes and I enjoyed them. I also did research and found out that a career in law enforcement could be very rewarding and pay well. If everything goes as planned, I will graduate in the Spring.”***

— Hispanic/Latino First-generation college student 21 years old Junior

***“The pursuit for a future that releases me from the shackles of struggling day to day life is what drives me to return to college. I hope to be able to create results with my life that aid others and create available health care to people in rural areas.”***

—I am a 24-year-old Mexican American first-generation college student who comes from a small farm worker town in the central valley.

***“I came back ... because I wanted to further my life with education and a better life.”***

— Hispanic/ Latino Male, Age 29, Senior, First Generation Student

**What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—  
or what got you to come back, if you left?**

***“Wanting to achieve getting my degree.”***

—24, female, mixed, Junior, first generation college student, and parent.

***“Spent too much money on school to not finish.”***

—Anonymous

***“Wanting to excel academically and to actually make a change in my generational history.”***

— Hispanic, single mother, 2022 and first generation student - 9 years in school, multilingual learner

***“My mom. Wanted to be the first to graduate college.”***

— Latina, bise cual, immigrant

***“To get a degree so I can do financially well in the future.”***

— Female, Asian, 22, First Gen, 4th year in college

***“Thirsty for knowledge I guess!”***

—I have dropped out of college so many times I cannot count, for whatever reason I continue to come back.

***“...for my parents.”***

—19, Japanese, and first generation college student.

***“I was not interested in working minimum wage jobs anymore....”***

—I am a 27 year old, first generation college student. I am a mother to two children and also a Guardian to my youngest sister. I am African American and White.

***“The possibility of being poor and the investment I've already made in my education (time and money, close to graduating).”***

—Anonymous

***“-My parents and family encouraged me to return to school.***

***-I got treatment for my mental health, so I felt a lot more confident in myself that I can finish school.***

***-I wanted to try again.”***

— I am a hmong woman that is 20 years old, and this is my second year. I am the oldest in my family, and my parents have their bachelors.

***“I realize that nowadays, the minimum qualification for a job is a college degree. Without a college degree, I was stuck working in sales, restaurant, or retail. I did not want to do those jobs anymore. I wanted something more stable with retirement and benefits.”***

— Hmong, 32 years old, a mother to two children, who graduated from high school in 2009, and a first generation college student.

***“I came back to finish my degree. What keeps me here is telling myself it’s all for a reason and just believing that things will work out. I also have a failure is not an option motto.”***

— Female, 38 years old, Black, single parent. I am a senior, first time generation college student. I have two sons ages 17 and 6. My 17 year old is a senior in high school and my 6 year old is 1st grade. Both boys are coming into new phases of their lives and it is challenging. This is my second attempt at Sac State and my third attempts at finishing a degree.

***“When my son was born, I knew I had to prove myself, not only to myself but my son. I felt that if he had a role model to encourage him, he could do it for himself.”***

— Female, 36, Hmong American, First generation college student, Parent

***“Honestly what has kept me here is if I graduate my parents will know their sacrifices weren't in vain and were worth something. My family ultimately pushes me to continue my education, and it was for them that I returned. Finally just wanted to accomplish something so big for me and have something that I can say I worked hard for.”***

—21 yr old, First Gen College Student, Mexican, Part Time Student & Job @ Sac State

***“I need a bachelors degree at least to get a good paying job, though I have 4 associates already.”***

— Second year Sac State, I am a transfer student from Solano Community College. I am junior/senior credit wise. I am 24 years old and Latina. I am also multilingual student my parents are from Mexico. Though I was born here in the U.S and I am a lesbian.

***“The thought of being a failure in my future and the unknown of what would happen if I did leave and disappointing others is the main reason for me staying.”***

—18, black, first year, first/second gen college student

***“Finishing what I started; completing my personal goal of obtaining my B.A. degree is what is keeping me here. Also, the support of my husband and family are great factors helping encourage me to finish my goal.”***

—Cis-gendered heterosexual female, age 43, Senior status in school (graduating this May), African-American, married to a cis-gendered heterosexual male, first generational college student to ever graduate from college, mother of 3 school-aged children plus 1 adult step-daughter, homemaker/stay-at-home mom for the past 14 years.

***“I have always strived to accomplish my goal of being the barrier breaker in receiving my college degree. Now that I have children it is my desire to show my children that no matter how long it may take and what we may face in life to never give up in working toward your goal(s). Hard work pays off with time and dedication. To be motivated and driven for knowledge because it's the one thing no one can take from you. Knowledge is power and the key to opportunities. So, by any means necessary I will lead by example for myself and my family.”***

— A first generation college student (Senior), A Wife and Mother of three, An African American Female

***“What made me come back to school was I finally realized that in order to succeed, we must give up something. I am now a parent and want to be a good example for my son.”***

— Thirty-seven years old Mexican immigrant, first-generation college student, and parent.

***“I realized that I needed to push myself and go to work to pay rent and attend college so I can invest myself for a higher paying job in the future.”***

—Anonymous

***“My parents. Being the oldest of the family. I don't want to let them down and they keep me going even though they don't know it. Also I don't like to give up, I try my best to finish what I started.”***

— I am 20 years old and a first generation Latina student.

***“I'm the first person in my family to attend college. I'm going to be the first one to graduate college.”***

—I am a first-generation Latina college student. I am twenty-three years old and a very dedicated student.

***“My goal to get a career and provide a better life for my kids motivates me to get my degree. Being a role model for my children helps me for day to day coursework and studying. Wanting to feel pride and accomplishment for myself to finish my education.”***

— I am a first generation college student and parent. I am 41 years old with 3 children and work full time. I am a junior transfer student from community college. Mexican-American, 3rd generation born in the U.S. Bilingual English & Spanish.

***“I realized that more opportunities would be available to me and my family if I earned a degree.”***

— First generation college student, parent, working, age 36.

***“My parents want me to finish school and my significant other is pushing me to finish as well”***

—21 years of age first generation Mexican college student dependent of a veteran

***“All my younger siblings are looking up to me because I was the first to go to college.***

***I want to continue school because I'm close to finishing.”***

— A young self providing female who don't have all the support to go to school full time.

***“I stayed because I have to get a degree in order to get a good job.”***

—4.0 gpa student, early 20s, employed, spending time with family is important to me

***“I am staying here because I want to make so many people proud, especially my family.”***

— I am hispanic, 19 years old, and i'm a second year in college. I speak both English and Spanish, my parents are from central America and both attended college but i don't think they were able to complete their years to get their degree. I would probably be the first to graduate from college in my family if i continue.

***“I stayed because I felt my education was too important to give up.”***

— I am a 22 year old Asian American currently finishing up my fourth year. I am a second generation college student double majoring and minoring.

***“My 3 kids are my motivation to return to school. It has always been a personal goal that I wanted to accomplish. I want to show my kids how important education is.”***

— A parent returning to school

***“I wanted to leave because I almost lost my only parent and she was hospitalized for a month before I started my path to my degree. But I promised if she survived and made it out I would continue to go to school for her.”***

—22,Latina, senior (graduating in May) first generation college student, multilingual learner, from a single parent household.

***“I pushed through to be a role model for my sisters.***

***I stayed in school because I love learning & I wanted to make my family proud & I wanted to show I can be successful in school. Also wanted to show my sisters we are all capable of going to college.”***

— I am first generation Hispanic female. I attended college in 2015. I was raised by my grandparents after my father was deported in 2002. I am the oldest sister of 3 sisters. When my living situation changed I was placed in a special education class for 3 years. When I switched to regular classes my grandmother belittled me & would say I need to go back. When I graduated high school she didn't see college in my future because I was not bright in school. I stayed in college to prove her wrong & show myself that I can be successful.



**What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—  
or what got you to come back, if you left?**

***“determination to get a B.A. & love for knowledge”***

—27, indigenous latina & british mixed, middle child of 3, and a part time student who has been in and out of college for 9 years.

***“Healing trauma through a socially acceptable route of completing my bachelor's.”***

—33 years old, white, Latina, survivor of sexual assault and rape, working class

***“Fear of not making a better life for my family.”***

— A 32 year-old Hispanic first generation college college student who is also a parent of 3 and the primary income earner of my household. I also struggle with adhd.

***“Knowing that my life will be easier and better with a college degree.”***

— Commuting from Vacaville, CA. I'm a 22 year old Mexican female in my last year of college and I'm a first generation college student. I'm majoring in Deaf Studies and American Sign Language. Not married nor do I have children. I have been in college since I graduated high school in 2018. I attended Solano Community college and transferred to Sacramento State in Spring 2022.

***“Determination and stubbornness. If I start things, I like to finish.”***

— I am immigrant. I am employee. I am poor. I came from a poor family who needed, have needed, and still need my support financially. That is why I had to go back and forth in school. It had to quit when the situations get tough, and I come back when there is some relief. I was first accepted to university back in 2009, but I am still here at undergraduate program after 12 years! The time and years that passed speak for themselves. I was about 32 at that time, but today I am 46! It is okay. I think. The problem with higher education is that it is never ending, and it is expensive both time and money not to mention the energy it demands.

Sometimes, I think I don't belong here as a black man.

I got some loans and grants to offset the cost that was one of the reasons I had to come back plus I have been in college so long that it feels unworthy to leave it incomplete somewhere in the middle when I can see the light at the end of the tunnel.

I remember a quote from Danzel Washington, "When you fall down seven times, you have to get up the 8th time." What a noble quote!

***“I have been in and out of college for about 23 years.... But (what) was the defining moment for me to be a continuous student and when I made a commitment to myself, was when I was being passed up for promotions at work. I noticed the people promoted had degrees. They had less experience and were less qualified but their degree made them more appealing to the department.”***

— Chicana, Age 42, Senior, 1st generation student, parent and one child special needs (autism), multilingual learner, Disabled

***“I want to pursue my degree for the future career I want.”***

— First generation mexican student in a low income household.

***“After struggling with homelessness for a year and sleeping out of my car, college is my way out.”***

***How do I earn more money in this world? I don't need to be rich or extremely successful, I just want to be able to afford my own place and be able to pay all my bills on time.”***

— Male. 30 year old returning student. Bi-racial, Black and Hmong. Junior Year. Second generation college student. Returning to school after 7-8 years to finish BA.

***“I've decided to keep going for my family and myself. Yes I have been struggling, but I know at the end of the day what I want to do is make my family proud and to be something and someone that I myself am proud of.”***

— Female, 22, Latinx, 5th year senior

***“I had a professor who was very encouraging. Because of them I began to work hard and realized that getting my degree will be a great accomplishment.”***

—Cis-gendered, female. Twenty-two years. White. Transfer Student (junior). Working part-time while in school.

***“I do want a much better future for myself and this is the only way I know to achieve that.”***

— I am 18, Hispanic, Mexican, a first-year, first gen, and I come from a mixed status household

***“I wanted to achieve my dream of earning a bachelor's degree....”***

— Cis male and heterosexual., Former foster youth student/ former ward of the court, 33 years old , transfer student, I have been in college working toward my bachelor's degree consistently for fifteen years. I was at my city college for 9 years before transferring to Sac State in Fall 2017, I am planning to finally graduate this summer with a bachelor's in Biology, Half Mexican half Caucasian, Mother earned a bachelor's degree as a returning student after having kids, Father never earned a high school diploma, I am a fraternal twin, I am from a very rural area in Northern California, ... I was homeschooled for the majority of my K-12 education

***“Living in a rural town and working in retail without much prospect for growth and financial sustainability is what made me go back to school and stay in school. Also, the people that I surrounded myself with were not successful or likeminded. All in all, I felt like everything was a dead end and I needed growth.”***

— Hi, ... I am 28 years old and I am Filipina. I have been in school on and off for a total of 10 years. I am a first-generation college student and I know English, Japanese, and some Spanish. For the first eight years of college, I had an apartment and I transferred from Sacramento City College to Butte College, and then from Butte College to Chico State. At the start of covid, I was laid off from my job and had multiple mental breakdowns which caused me to come back to Sacramento and go to Sac State.

***“I came back because I realized that it is very hard to get a good paying job here without a college degree. That motivated me to pursue my bachelor degree once again.”***

— Female, 22, Mexican, bilingual, daughter of immigrants

***“I came back because my degree is not complete and I worked hard for the units I have already completed. I also want to obtain my teaching credentials.”***

— African American woman and single parent.

***“I always knew I would come back. During my semester away from college, I had the realization that earning a degree would help me learn a lot of things that I could use to improve my efficiency at my job while paving the way to a full-time career.”***

— AAPI, 21 years old, naturalized citizen

***“I return to school with a different major, psychology, than before (Business Management) because I am compelled to help at-risk youth experiencing mental health challenges.”***

— Hello, I am a 52 yr old black woman from San Diego, CA. I am a junior and a 1st generation college transfer student attending Sac State CCE Psychology Program.

***“I have no choice because I am the bread winner I need to help my family and I am already in I’ll finish this.”***

— I am an older adult student. A parent and first generation student. English is not my first language.

***“I remember starting college and thinking I was just going to take a class or two to see what interested me. Early in college I decided I wanted to earn a Bachelors degree but have struggled in narrowing it down. These days I hear masters program is where the classes get fun so that’s what I’m aiming for.”***

— Single parent & Hispanic

***“What is keeping me here is being told by many people that once am done will get a living-wage paying job. Another is that people say it's better to be older with a degree than without.”***

— Am 29 years old and come from Mexican parents. I was the first in my family to graduate from community college and get an associate. I was the first to go to university and hopefully be the first to get a bachelors. Both my parents have some elementary school education and one tried to go to college but sadly gave up after some time. I come from a poor household where my parents could not help pay for my college. I was in the FASFA program and was the only way I was able to pay off college even till now.

***“I always knew that going to college and graduating was my ultimate goal, thus I never gave up. My desire to have an education always kept me coming back.”***

—35, Mexican American, ~16 years on and off, first generation college student, bilingual.

***“I don't want to give up on college, I love the experiences.***

***My dad is the one telling me to keep going, even if we don't have the money. (FAFSA or not) I don't want to feel like I wasted my time.”***

—1st Generation, Latinx, 21, Transfer Student Junior.

***“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.”***

— 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

***“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.”***

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

***“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.”***

—32, Hispanic, female

***“Close to finishing, so I might as well do it. I've invested too much to give up.”***

— A first generation undocumented student

***“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.”***

—19, Asian, 1st year

**What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—  
or what got you to come back, if you left?**

***“The fact that I need better health care, wage, and access to more job opportunities.”***

— I am a 34 year old first generation college graduate. I am Hispanic, mom of two, my kids have special needs and I pushed myself to finish my educational journey because our health care system seems to think our kids with disabilities do not have any additional needs. I live in Modesto and commuting to Sacramento twice a week was definitely hard especially being a one income household.

***“My motivation and passion to become the Chemist at the company I work for.”***

— 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.

***“Figured out what I wanted to pursue and have a family I want to support by finishing degree”***

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

***“I want to finish my education and this is the only way to do it.”***

—A white, 24 year old woman in her third year of higher education

***“I am motivated to advance in my career and I like learning.”***

—Age: 28 Gender: Female Race or ethnicity: Hispanic Caucasian  
Education level: AS Marital status: Single Household income: 94,000  
Employment status: Full Time Location: Auburn, CA Sexual orientation:  
Bisexual Family size and composition: 3 person HH, 2 adults, 1 child  
Language spoken at home: English

***“My family support, they work extra hours to the extreme to help me pay for college and be able to live my twenties.”***

—20, white/Russian, 3rd year, first generation student

***“I want to pursue a career as a LMFT.”***

— I’m a 50 year old Spanish/Pacific Islander American. I am a senior in the CCE program. I am a mother of two adult children and one 4 year old grandchild.

***“The motivation to achieve my goals for a better future”***

—Age: 21 Ethnicity: Asian American Year in school: 4

***“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.”***

— 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.

***“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”***

— 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 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

***“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.”***

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

***“It is my goal to see things through and get my bachelor's degree. I see it as a challenge.***

***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.”***

— 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.

***“What made me come back was wanting to finish my degree.”***

—23 years old, female, Hispanic and first generation here in America.

***“I think that having a degree would be a great fall back in case somethings do not work out in my life.”***

—I am a 25 year old Filipino immigrant. I lived in the Philippines for 13 years, then moved here back in 2011, therefore I am bilingual. I'm currently a full time student and I do have work but it does not have a set schedule.

***“I stayed because I was determined to complete my education.”***

— Female, 46 years old, Married, Parent (2), Bilingual, Hispanic, First-generation college student, Last semester

***“What is now keeping me here is my desire for a better life, where I am happy to learn and that my education supports my skillset in prep for careers ventures.”***

—25 yo, female, African American student. I work full time and attend CSUS and community college full time

***“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.”***

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

***“What kept me in school is my children. I need a better path to a better future for them.”***

—Parent, full time career woman, 35-45 age range, mixed race, first gen

***“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.

***“After leaving college, I realized that continuing my education was necessary so that I could achieve and pursue my personal fiancial and life goals. During my time away from college, I gained a better understanding of ... myself, my interests and career aspirations, and the struggles of the real world. I recognized that obtaining a degree would be essential for achieving my goals.”***

— I am a first generation Hmong-American. I am a 26 years old male. I would consider this my 5th year in school attending Sacramento State and I am currently a Senior. I started my journey in Fall of 2014, and I left in Spring of 2018. Then I returned to Sacramento State during the Fall of 2022.

***“As I was working as a gigging musician, I got to work with high schools and middle schools for both their musical theatre programs as well as their choral programs. I was given the opportunity to teach voice several times using my experience working in the church. Several of the teachers I worked with/for informed me that if I completed a degree and teaching credential, they would recommend me for any job. Moreover, I found that I really enjoyed the work of helping budding musicians find their voice and develop their skills as musicians. For this reason, I was inspired...to return to school, but for a Music Education Degree and a Teaching Credential.”***

— Samoan/Filipino child of a Vietnam conflict veteran, musician.

***“I came back because I wanted to finish and change the college system to make to more accessible for students”***

—African-American Male mixed race who us a first generation working class student

***“I went back to school to become a counselor or therapist.”***

—Female, Latinx, 39 years old, Senior Year, 1st gen college student.

***“My educational goals are what is keeping me motivated to not leave school again. I am focused on my educational goals now, so that later I will have a career to focus on.”***

—I am a White American female. I am Irish, but not in any near generations.

***“I wondered if I really needed college because I found well paying jobs without it. But I realized that I wasn't attending college as a means to find a job, but more because finishing would fulfill a personal goal.”***

— Is a Black woman, Working full time, Recently back to college, In mid-late 30s, Has parents who attended some college but didn't graduate, Dealing with issues related to high-pressure work environment, school, racism and discrimination (mental health really impacts success in any environment including school!)

***“I came back after having my son. He gave me the motivation and determination of how important school truly is. I want him to graduate from college and even get his masters. I want to lead by example. As an older sister as well.***

***I graduate high school back in 2014 and will be graduating State in Spring 24. My academic journey took 10 years and I never thought I'd be this close to the finish line but I'm doing it and that's all that matters.”***

—I am 27 year old. I Hispanic and a first generation student. I'm the oldest. This is my senior year at state. I have a 2 year old son and am I single mother. Spanish was my first language.



**What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—  
or what got you to come back, if you left?**

***“The fact that I am so close finishing and the desire to obtain a degree.”***

—23 y/o female Undocumented Mexican Senior First-gen Oldest sibling  
Grew up with single mother

***“I promised my Mom I'd finish, also I also don't like quitting things.”***

—4th year, started working as a student assistant in 2021 for the  
California Dept. of Pub. Health and then took a year off of school to work  
full time for CDPH. Came back to finish my degree.

***“I have to get the units I need to be able to apply for a subbing credential.”***

— I am a 23 year old latina/hispanic. I am first generation college student.  
I am bilingual. I currently work in the education system as a team leader  
for kinder students.

***“My motivation to graduate and help the community.”***

—29 year old, Black female. First generation college student and graduate  
student.

***“Wanting to earn a degree and create a better life for me and my family.”***

—International student

***“My friends are in college and I don't want to disappoint my family and friends”***

— I am a first year college student, who is asian. I am 2nd? generation  
college student. My parents left college due to not being able to speak  
english well, and my sister graduated college a few years ago.

***“Self motivation (knowing I'm making my family proud, achieving new things, breaking  
barriers)”***

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

***“need to finish a degree program to qualify for the CLS training programs and/or Masters  
Degree programs.”***

—I am a multilingual learner. I am Pacific Islander and a returning college  
student in my late 40s. I am first generation to ever attempt to finish  
college. This is my senior year.

***“The fact that education can help us fight the types of oppressions, make us not dependent on  
anyone and make a living.”***

—Central Asian, first generation college student, multilingual, 18

***“I keep coming back because my father always wanted me to get a college degree. It was very important to him. He saw it as my ticket to a better life. He passed away when I was 10.***

***I'm hoping that with a college degree I can get a better job.”***

—42 years old White College Senior 1st generation college student Parent

***“I came back to...pursue my dream of becoming a Registered Nurse and applied to the BSN program.”***

—First generation Mexican-American who came to CSUS in 2000 at age 17. Was academically disqualified due to lack of support from faculty or staff. Returned at age 40 to complete Bachelors in Nursing with more wisdom and focus to achieve my dreams.

***“The end goal of obtaining my BA and gaining a salary increase in my current career is the incentive to stay in school and finish even with how expensive college is.”***

—Female, white, 38 years old, senior, parent, first generation college student.

***“When I had left community college for a semester it was the most eye opening experience and it made me want to achieve my bachelors degree.”***

—My demographics: female, 22 years old, Caucasian, junior-transfer student, my job is a department manager for a fast food chain.

***“I came back to college to obtain my degree to have the opportunity to gain better employment, improve my knowledge, skills, and abilities, and for personal growth.”***

—first generation college student

***“Stayed to get a degree and get into a grad program.”***

— Asian-American, 22, senior.

***“At 30 I thought to myself ‘you're too old to go back to school’ so I didn't. Then at 35 I was like ‘I'll kill myself if I work customer service for my whole life and I'm not too old!’. What keeps me going now is that ‘I want my life to have value and helping people will give my professional life value and I want to make the world a little better place’.”***

—biologically and mentally she/her/hers, 41, irish-american, sophomore (CRC(FLC) 2000-2002 2008, FLC 2018-2023 transfer degree, SacSt 2023-), 2nd graduate of college in family (grandpa did business school in Mass. 90 years ago, not a veteran, not a parent, not multilingual learner

***“My Dad was very persistent with me finishing school and I didn't want to disappoint him. I also had major FOMO when I started seeing students I went to School with graduating from Universities and already going back for their Masters. I didn't want to feel left out.”***

—26 year old Mexican American female and first generation student.

***“I returned because I did not want to settle with a low paying job or unfinished college education.”***

—Age: 28 Race: Asian (Vietnamese) Third year (I think) First generation college student Divorced, no children

***“I want my degree. I want a job that pays actual money, I want to do something worthwhile with my life, I want health insurance and my own apartment and a career that I can talk about at parties. I’m just tired of living the narrative of ‘trans neurodivergent dropout working in fast food and living with their parents’, lol. I love CSUS, but I’m here to graduate, preferably soon.”***

—24, a junior, transgender, queer, AuDHD/neurodivergent

***“While I was out of school, I pursued blue collar work. I was in pest control for three years and was a plumber for 2 years and although I was making the same amount of money as my contemporaries, I was working physically harder and putting in significantly more hours. I saw my friends that graduated college living with a better quality of life so I decided to return to school and pursue a degree in computer science.”***

—From the perspective of a student who comes from a low income household.

***“What made me come back to school was because I wanted to excel in life. Working at my previous company, it was hard to work my way up and make a comfortable living. Although education doesn't define success, you can never go wrong with having an education.”***

— I am a 30 years old Asian American female. I graduated high school in 2011 and went to community college for 2-3 semesters and then dropped out. In 2019, I went back to school during the summer semester at Los Rios and now I will be graduating in Spring....

***“The only thing that has kept me here is the desire to finish since I have already spent two and a half years here and it feels within my reach.”***

—A 20 year old who is paying for their own college and receives no aide from their family or the school because their family makes enough but their family refuses to help.

***“I haven't left college because of how passionate I am about public health and the support I have from my friends and partner.”***

***Everyday I think about the jobs I want in public health and how my bachelors will help.”***

— My demographics include Age 24, Multiracial (Black, Arab, White), Sixth year in college, second year at sac state, Queer

***“I feel like the biggest motivation for me now, is that I want something better for my future. In the difficult times we live in now, I see that it takes more than just experience to make it even further. Also, from many lectures and conversations with family and friends, it pushed me to finish what I have already started and possibly go even further with education. After seeing so many of my colleagues finish college has also inspired me a bit to finish college.”***

— I am currently a Sac State student and I identify as a Hmong male. I am currently a senior, currently finishing up with my last semester, majoring in Biochemistry. I don't necessarily consider myself a first-generation student because my parents have associate degrees. However, I am the third child out of six and coming from a family of eight. I am also a natural-born U.S. citizen, coming from Massachusetts, and I speak both English and Hmong.

***“Now that I’m back I discovered that I knew what I wanted and I’m trying my hardest since I took two years off.”***

— I’m a first generation Mexican student. I’m a gay male, firstly being a male in a Mexican American family meant within my family I had to succeed academically and provide for my family in the future and being gay only made that more stressful

***“I met a girl and realized I couldn't live at home forever. It's very difficult to make a living without a degree so here I am!”***

—I'm 43, married man

***“I want to leave again but when I looked at how much I went through and how many times I have tried to build a path for myself I could not give up halfway. I come back but it doesn't mean I stop dealing with self-doubt. It's an ongoing battle.”***

—female, 28, Asian, in a senior year, first-gen, a transfer student from a community college, an immigrant, ESL speaker.

***“I’ll be the first in my mom’s side of the family to get a bachelors degree.***

***I want to demonstrate to my child that education is important.”***

—Female, Mexican American, final year ish, mother, employee, eldest sister

***“I knew that going back to school would allow me to find what I was passionate about because I had resources that could only be accessed if I was a student there.... Knowing this, I enrolled at a community college and reflected on what I was good at which was consoling people. Through this, I talked to some counselors and took some intro Psych classes in which I decided that this was the major for me.”***

—27, female, Hmong, first generation college student

**What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—  
or what got you to come back, if you left?**

***“I have much more responsibilities that will eventually require a higher income and a career with stability and benefits for my future well-being.***

***Also I am very passionate about pursuing my selected degree.”***

— Chinese, 20-23/25 yo drop college dropout, first generation, estranged from family, working part-time always to 3 jobs at once. I felt I was unworthy to go back, didn’t have any direction with career outlook, didn’t have any passion for anything at the time.

***“I want money.”***

— First year student

***“The fact that I was almost done, and not someone that could have the courage to drop out.***

***My friends graduated last year and told me it's going to be me next time, and I didn't want to let myself down but also the people that were/are rooting for me to finish. So the main thing that kept me here is not letting people down, proving people wrong, and not giving up.”***

— A first-generation Mexican-American, 22-year-old 4th year spring graduate.

***“The jobs I desire with the pay that I desire require an education from a higher Ed institution.”***

—African American, female, age 30, first generation college student, reentry student, parent, graduating senior

***“FOMO”***

— 19

***“I don't want to struggle in life and be poor.”***

—I am a 19 year old Female Black, Cuban, and Punjabi student at Sac State. I am a first generation college student. My father is a Veteran, so I am a dependent that doesn’t know how to access my benefits.

***“Job potential and career goals. When working for the State of CA, there is only so far you can go without a degree and the time/experience needed in place of a degree is extensive. Plus, it is a personal goal to finish at Sac State and go on to higher education.”***

—I am a 35 year old, black, cis-het woman, 3rd generation college student

***“I came back because I learn that the world is hard and without a degree you will get low paying jobs or hard labor jobs if you don't have any connections in the world.”***

—Anonymous

***“I came back last year because I had always wanted to finish getting a degree and found a great program at Sac State for people like me.”***

—Male, 47 years old. Hispanic, parent to 2 children, bilingual. I am currently a senior.

***“I came back because I want to go to field school. I also have a passion for education.”***

—I am 29. I’m a female. I am also a junior.

***“I came back because I want to finish my degree and I am pursuing a Master degree to learn more. Also, to show my children that we can do it.”***

—I am a 40+ years old returning student. I am a first generation college student, parent and multilingual learner. My oldest son is a sophomore at Sacramento State too

***“I came back, because I need this degree to get a better job. So that, I can become self-sufficient.”***

— I am 56 years old African American women. I have been taking classes all of my life while I raise my children as a single mother. For ever learning. I am a first generation college student.

***“I came back because I was determined to show my children that no matter what you can still make your dreams come true.”***

— I am a 48 year old black woman, who has been married for 25 years. I have four children and 1 grandchild. I started my college journey in 2008 at ARC I graduated in May of 2011, then transferred to Sac State in the fall of 2011. In January 2012 my family suffered a tragedy in losing three family members in a car accident that left one member with brain damage. We adopted another family member who was in an abusive relationship. I had to leave school in 2015 due to financial hardships when I was close to graduating. It has taken me 8 years to get back into school. This semester I am taking my last two classes to finish my bachelor's degree....

***“I had to come back to get a degree that would leverage a better-paying job. After coming back, and getting a deep understanding of (my field of study), I now realize that I want to continue my education and become a leader that can help change and implement policies that impact students who may face challenges like the ones I did.”***

— Male, Mexican, 4th year, immigrant and first college generation student, US Veteran, bilingual, Spanish and English, and currently under the attention of the Students with disability due to Military Service Related conditions.

***“I stay because I need to finish my degree to get a job”***

—23 years old, in my 6th year

***“I am staying because I have come this far why stop with such few courses to take.”***

— Age 53, US Army veteran, super senior, Multi-racial

***“I’m staying here for now because i know that i need college if i want to have the life i want.”***

— a 19 year old black female

***“I wanted to stay in college because I wanted a better life for myself than the one I had growing up.”***

—I am a former foster child, first generation college graduate, USAF veteran and current parent from a Hispanic/Caucasian cultural background.

***“I mostly stayed because I enjoy what I'm being taught. Sure, an English degree would be wonderful for me and would perhaps allow me to get ahead of others in the workforce, but I'm in English because it makes me happy. Along with this, the courses and the professors of Sacramento State's English department helped me to realize why I enjoy literature so much and that there are so many avenues in life with literature that I never realized even existed.”***

— A 21-year-old, cisgender, and mostly white male who happens to be in his last semester at Sacramento State. As an additional note, I was enrolled in Sacramento State during the entirety of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

***“I am staying cause I want to prove to my family that we are more than just mothers and that we don't have to get married and have kids to have meaning in life. If we want it we can get it.”***

— I am first generation college latina women. I'm bilingual, speaking Spanish and English. I am a 3rd year transfer student. I am part of DACA.

***“I stayed because I had to find my voice and self advocate for myself. I stand and fight for myself and other students with disabilities that no one gets to tell us we do not belong.... My education is more important, I can't let anyone tell me I do not belong and I have a right to an equitable education. I have a legal right to learn and I will not let anyone tell me I can't.”***

—Hello, I am a student living with a disability, I am a parent of three children, first generation college student, multiracial, European and currently waiting to be approved as indigenous to the Cherokee Nation tribe, and transfer student year Junior.

***“I decided to stay for the sake of myself and my family as I know they sacrificed so much for me. I stuck it out, even if I did feel unmotivated most of the times. I wanted to make them proud and prove myself to be tougher and more resilient than anyone would expect me to.”***

— I am a first generation Latina. I am 23 years old and this is my 5th and last semester here at sac state. My first language was Spanish, so my learning ability could be affected at times.

***“I came back to school because of some hardships I went through. My older brother told me that he'll support me to stay in school because he believes in me and to take one for the team after I had figured out that I will probably be the only sibling that'll attend school. I didn't want to disappoint my parents of raising me and not going to college and for all of the things my older brother had sacrificed for me, I am willing to go back to earn a BA.***

***I want to prove to the public that having an art major is just as great as any other major. And that no one should be ashamed of themselves for it. I want to be the person to open doors for those who wants to be in the same route as me in the future.”***

— I am a 21 year old female, Hmong American that transferred to my 3rd year at Sacramento state. The estimated graduation year for me is 2024-2025. I am the fourth child out of five siblings and is attending the same campus as the last sibling. I am a second - generation college student that is single with no children and I'm a full time student.

***“I thought of leaving college many times, but I had goals I wanted to achieve. I stayed for my family and myself. I wanted to make them proud.”***

— I am a first-generation college student. It has been hard to balance school and work these past few years. My parents came to this country to give their kids a better life. They worked with what they had and knew. I, as a first-generation college student had to figure out a lot on my own, such as FAFSA, scholarship opportunities, finding a major that was in demand. Often, I struggled alone because my parents had other responsibilities and there was a major cultural barrier.

***“By participating in the employee fee waiver program, I'm able to attend 3 classes per semester and work towards my dream of running theater programs for the neurodivergent population.”***

—I started college in my late teens / early 20's back in the 90's. I now take classes as part of the employee fee waiver program.

***“Overall my personal college experience has been a journey of self discovery. It's helped me to develop in ways and enrich my experience but I've used it in ways that go beyond just trying to attain a piece of paper. I understand the value of a degree & I definitely want one but there were other things I needed to figure out and do for myself that had nothing to do with that. I had to resolve my mental health stuff. I feel like I've done a great job of that.***

***Now I'm in a space where I'm working a lot to support myself & im almost done with school & I want to have opportunities to maximize my earnings & I know that getting a degree can allow me to do so so I want to finish....***

***I have every intention of graduation with a college degree regardless and that will be a huge weight lifted but I don't and will not add pressure to myself or rush that because by the grace of God my needs are met and I'm self sufficient and able to support myself the way I desire to and that's the most important thing to me in addition to my happiness.”***

—Anonymous



***“I'm still continuing to get my bachelor's because that is what I want, it is my choice....***

***I am also doing this because I will be the first in my family to get my bachelor's, and was the first to get my associate degree as well. I am doing this for my family- I want to create a path for my siblings, letting them know that it's possible and that they can do it too. We have always been a low-income family and we grew up in poor areas of Stockton, and our parents advocate for higher education but aren't involved at all. It's easy to stay down once you've fallen because it takes more energy to try to pick yourself back up, and I don't want that to happen to my siblings or cousins. We are more than what people think of us, and what we try to convince ourselves that we are/are not.”***

— I am Asian, specifically a mixed Hmong and Mien American. I am also second generation American, first generation college student, age 21 and this is my first semester at CSUS after transferring from SJDC.

***“Two reasons keep me in school ...1. I want the diploma and 2. I want to work in neonatal nutrition.”***

— I am 31 years old. Originally from Orange County. I grew up in a very Catholic household and went to 15 years of catholic school. I am not the first person in my family to go to college, my dad went to CSULB and works as an engineer.

***“My deeply held value of education has kept me in college for all these years, and my personal life and career goals involve the attainment of higher education.”***

—Caucasian / Eastern European Age: 31 Year at CSUS: Senior First generation college student

***“I am too close to obtaining a degree to give up now.”***

—First gen return college student.

***“I am trying to accomplish this goal for my parents who came to this country with no college education.”***

—1st generation College student, Mexican-American

***“I want to become a teacher and help the community and I can't necessarily do one of them without an education.”***

— From the perspective of someone who has been battling anxiety, depression, and financial issues. Being a Latina, my parents never really guided us or talked to us about mental health issues and its affected me throughout my educational journey. As for financial issues, I dug that hole myself and I wish I had the knowledge I have now about to maintain finances and be responsible with money. I left college for two years. I was able to figure out what I wanted to actually do and it shifted my perspective on a lot of things. I commend myself for going back to school, but because of financial struggles, I have thought about dropping out again to focus on making ends meet. Its been hard but I am pushing forward.

***“I'm choosing to stay because I felt like maybe the experience of college is better than nothing. If I'm not in college, where else would I be able to learn what I am learning now. The classes are hard but they've gave me very new and important insights I've never known before. And school has taught me more skills than I would ever consider learning on my own. Staying in school would only improve me, so why not stay?”***

***I'm thankful that I am being provided with a proper education and I feel that maybe I should just stick with it. Also, a lot of jobs out there requires some sort of degree. Even if I still don't make it out there using my degree, it's better to have it than not. I want to try for a bachelor's degree and go on from there. The skills that I will develop along the way won't be all that I'll need in all of those future career goals, however, they will be the stepping stone to helping me get there. All of my research tells me that many people still have to return to college and higher education in order to chase after certain jobs anyway. If this is the case, why not earn the degree earlier and move up from there than doing it later. A bachelor degree and the skills I learn while in school does not guarantee me any sort of a perfect future, but it does give me an opportunity to better myself and gain respect from those around me. It'll be an invaluable learning experience. At my time and youth, all I have is time and I should use it wisely. I can't imagine using my time better anywhere else than going to college. Even if I work, I'd likely have to return to schooling anyways, so why not just keep at it. Life is hard and it'll only get harder. For every small choice you make, you'll always have a price to pay in one form or another. In choosing to stay in college, I'll lose a lot of time to build deep personal relationships, live a life without college stress, and I'll just be suffering a lot more mentally rather than physically. I'm a fairly frail, petite, and short type of gal. I'm not who one would consider to be the healthiest and strongest of people. Due to this, I know I won't be able to withstand a lot of laborious work that comes without a proper degree. I don't have many options here, and I think staying in college and getting some sort of degree would better prepare me for jobs that won't kill me off too fast.”***

— Hello there! I am a student at Sacramento State. I'm currently in my the second semester of freshman year as a first generation college student with the EOP program. I'm from a Hmong-American family, being the second oldest of five siblings. My family is considered to be quite the traditional Hmong Asian family. We believe and practice shamanism and the animist religion, which revolves around things like spirits, ghosts, souls, and other similar stuff to those things.

***“I believe in higher education. I am currently enroll this spring semester in my last class to complete my B.A in Ethnic Studies.”***

— I am a Afro-Latina that was born in Chetumal Mexico and was raised in Belize City. I migrated to the United States when I as sixteen years old. I enrolled at Sacramento State fall 2013 as a part time student while working full time.

***“I always dreamed of graduating from University.”***

—Latina first generation attending a university. Single mother at 14 years old and now 46 years old struggling to finish school.

## **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 12, focuses on the need for students to complete their college journey.

## **Part 12: The Need to Graduate**

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.

And not staying through to degree completion comes with loss to the student, to our campus, and beyond.

In recent years, public confidence has decreased in our many societal institutions, including higher education, due in this case primarily to the rising cost of college and questions of whether the time and cost are worth the investment or even needed to find a good job.

Yet while the general public may have doubts as to the value of a college degree, most current college students and college graduates do not.

### *What College Graduates Say*

According to a Chronicle of Higher Education survey, reported in [“What the Public Really Thinks about Higher Education,”](#) when asked to assess the costs of getting their college degree versus the benefits to themselves, 79% of college graduates said it was worth it. Also telling: 85% of college graduates surveyed said they would recommend family or friends to get their bachelor’s degree—including 57% of those who didn’t agree their own bachelor’s or associate’s degree had been worth it.

### *What College Students Say*

According to a Gallup poll of college students last year, reported in [“Current College Students Say Their Degree is Worth the Cost,”](#) 71% of currently enrolled students in four-year institutions in the nation strongly agree or agree that the degree they’re pursuing will be worth the cost (with only 8% strongly disagreeing or disagreeing). In further examination, Gallup found that the key factors predicting student confidence that their degree will be worth the price are: Preparation for life after college, the ability to express oneself freely on campus, how much students have the opportunity to interact with people with different views, perceptions of physical safety, how much professors care about students as people, and how much of a sense of belonging they feel. Also worth noting is that 75% of the students strongly agreed or agreed that their institution is preparing them well for life after college (with only 6% strongly disagreeing or disagreeing).

And for many this is why they stay—because of what they believe they gain. According to the Gallup/Lumina report, [“The State of Higher Education 2023,”](#) when students were asked in a survey 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%). 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%).

## *The Value of a College Degree*

The numerous and significant benefits of a college degree have been well-documented.

### *Financial and Career Benefits*

Although some wonder if the financial investment in college pays off with a good job and future financial livelihood, the research is clear in showing that it does. Here are a few of the many studies on employment and salary benefits for degree-holders, as well as to our nation:

In terms of getting a good job—

The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce report last year, [“After Everything: Projections of Jobs, Education, and Training Requirements,”](#) projects that by 2031, 42% of all jobs will require at least a bachelor’s degree, and that “growth in good jobs will coincide with growing demand for more educated workers for those jobs.” This year’s Georgetown University report, [“Learning and Earning by Degrees,”](#) calculates that 58% of good jobs go to workers with a bachelor’s degree or higher—and this number will rise to 66% by 2031.

In terms of greater earnings—

The [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) reports that last year people with a bachelor’s degree had median earnings of about \$500 dollars more per week than those with some college or an associate’s degree. Another Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce report, [“The College Payoff,”](#) notes the greater lifetime earnings, on average: “Postsecondary education pays off in the labor market. With each additional level of education, workers typically earn more throughout their lifetimes.” For bachelors’ degree holders, this means a median lifetime earnings of 2.8 million dollars for people ages 25 to 64 who work full-time, about a \$70,000 yearly job salary, on average.

In terms of job quality—

The American Enterprise Institute Center for Opportunity and Social Mobility report, [“The Value of a Bachelor’s Degree,”](#) also details several positive outcomes, including greater employability and lifetime earnings, as well as many others, such as better workplace conditions and perceptions of fair treatment, open and supportive work cultures, trust in bosses, mentoring, organizational social activities, reimbursement for an employee’s education or training, and more flexible schedules and work-from-home policies.

In terms of our nation—

It should also be noted that a shortage of college educated workers has been projected for our country for some time, especially with the many baby boomers retiring, the lower birth rate these past years, and the rising number of jobs requiring a college degree. For example, the industry and management consulting firm McKinsey and Company, in the report, [“Fulfilling the Potential of US Higher Education,”](#) states “The US economy is facing national skills shortages that pose risks to national security, public health, and economic competitiveness,” and “demand for skilled labor is expected to grow.” This means that every college graduate benefits our country, as well, in their preparation to step into and perform these needed jobs.

### ***And So Many More Benefits!***

Studies over the years have found a multitude of additional benefits of a college degree.

Last year's Gallup/Lumina study, [“Education for What?”](#) assesses over 50 different positive outcomes linked by research to higher education attainment, including:

- Cognitive ability (numeracy, literacy, and problem-solving skills)
- Character traits (such as persistence and self-confidence)
- Physical health and mental well-being (including life satisfaction and hope for the future)
- Relationships (with family, friends, and neighbors)
- Community and civic engagement (such as voting, volunteerism, charitable giving, membership in local groups and organizations) and care for the environment
- Work and income (including employment, salary, social mobility, job quality, and job satisfaction)

In its key findings, the report finds: “Of the 52 outcomes analyzed in the study, 50 show a meaningful statistical relationship with additional postsecondary education. In all but one case, more education is associated with a more positive outcome.”

The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce report, [“Learning and Earning by Degrees.”](#) cited previously in relation to jobs and earnings, also details the many nonmonetary benefits of college, including some of those described above, such as cognitive abilities, civic engagement, health, and happiness, while also noting still further benefits to, for example, a pluralistic society, healthy democracy, and national economic growth and innovation.

The American Enterprise Institute Center for Opportunity and Social Mobility report, [“The Value of a Bachelor’s Degree.”](#) also cited prior, discusses many of the benefits listed at the top of this page, and concludes: “A four-year degree remains a good investment” for both the individual degree-holder and their community.

We can also turn to the [National Survey of Student Engagement](#) survey conducted right here on campus to see what our own students perceive as some of the benefits of their education. To follow is the percentage of seniors who responded in the most recent year surveyed that they “very much” or “quite a bit” gained the following in their time here at Sac State:

- Thinking clearly and analytically (84%)
- Writing clearly and effectively (76%)
- Working effectively with others (74%)
- Understanding people of other backgrounds (73%)
- Speaking clearly and effectively (69%)
- Analyzing numerical and statistical information (67%)
- Developing/clarifying a personal code of ethics or values (66%)
- Solving complex real world problems (64%)
- Acquiring job- or work-related knowledge and skills (63%)
- Being an informed and active citizen (63%)

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

To follow, you will find further information regarding the need for students to stay on the path to achieving their college degree.

## **For Students**

Earning a college degree can feel like an uncertain and unending process—but that college degree is so very worth it!

In addition to all of 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, as noted previously.

Here is the 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 career advancement and job security; better employment conditions and benefits, including retirement; greater sense of trust, fairness, and support in their organizations and from management; more flexibility of work schedule and work-from-home policies; 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 a greater social network; spend more time on hobbies, leisure, and travel; and are healthier, exercise more, and live longer. College graduates are also more likely to get and stay married, own a home, better provide for their families, spend more time with their kids on educational and other activities, and have healthier kids who go to college themselves someday.

### ***Community Benefits of a College Degree—***

College graduates are more likely be on good relations with their neighbors and participate more in their community, including through volunteer work and membership in local groups and organizations. They spend more on goods and services, which benefits local businesses and their regional economy, and contribute more in taxes, resulting in greater funding for public works and services. This also helps to build a community that attracts business investment and brings more jobs to the region.

### ***Societal Benefits of a College Degree—***

College graduates are more likely to vote and be involved in politics, contribute to charities, and care for the environment. They tend to have lower prejudice toward others and greater adaptability in working with diverse others and points of views. College graduates perform many of the jobs needed to fuel a thriving society and strong nation, including those in education, healthcare, technology, government, law and order, and business and industry. Their labor, as well as their earnings and spending, contribute to one of the largest economies in the world, our nation.

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!*

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

***To each and every student—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 Students Not Yet Graduating***

Keep going strong, step by step, semester by semester. Should you need anything, there is support all around campus for you, including the following: For academics—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 all of the tutoring centers in the many departments and programs of study. For financial assistance and basic needs support—[Financial Aid & Scholarships](#) and the [CARES Office](#). For physical and mental wellbeing—[Student Health, Counseling, and Wellness Services](#).

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 or stress 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 Students Graduating***

***Congratulations!*** This is a tremendous accomplishment! And we are so excited for your bright future!!!

As you prepare for graduation, please remember to check on [Commencement](#) information so that you are ready for the huge end-of-the-college-journey celebration!

As you graduate and move forward in your life, please know Sac State is always here for you! You may wish to come back for assistance in the next phase of your life, such as applying to [Graduate Studies](#) or using [Career Center](#) services to find a job (this is available to you even after you graduate!). You can also continue to enjoy the campus community and events open to the public at your alma mater, and Sac State graduates can join the [Sacramento State Alumni Association](#), where membership is free and comes with a variety of benefits and opportunities.

With your graduation, you will be joining the total 56,350,000 people who have earned their bachelor's degree in our nation, according to the [National Center for Education Statistics](#). This puts you in the 34% of the population with their bachelor's degree or higher! And you will also be joining our university's 275,000 alumni, according to this year's campus [Factbook](#), and can now say you're "*Made at Sac State!*"



### **For Staff and Faculty**

Some students “Finish in Four” or are “Through in Two,” in the case of those transferring in, while other students graduate with their bachelor’s degree in five, six, or more years of college. In all cases, we, who are so invested in their success, are happy for them. A bachelor’s degree is a tremendous accomplishment!

Yet some students don’t finish. While Sac State has made some impressive gains in graduation rates these past years of the CSU Graduation Initiative 2025, we still lose students and equity gaps persist.

#### ***For Students Not Yet Graduating***

There are numerous ways to support students in their college years through to completion, including 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, inclusiveness, equity, and justice at our institution and beyond.

And because the end of the semester or year is a particularly tough time, here are two more suggestions to help students to finish out the semester:

#### ***Encourage Them On***

The last few weeks of the semester can be terribly difficult for students. Major assignment due dates come around, with papers and presentations to be done, group projects nearing the deadline, and final exam week imminent. Converging academic pressures may be compounded by any work, family, and/or campus commitments taking time and energy. The end of the semester is also a time when any ongoing personal problems in the life of a student frequently peak and conflicts or crises occur, causing further stress. A few words of encouragement and support from faculty and staff can make such a difference! Simple reminders to students that the end is in sight, the break is just around the corner, that they just need to hang on for a little while longer, can be so helpful. Say the words and you will usually see some of the worry fading from their faces, their posture strengthening, and the slight nods of the head. Sharing your own experiences as a student during the end of the semester can show them that you understand what they’re going through—and that all students experience that stress, even university faculty or staff members in their college days. You will see tired eyes becoming clearer and small smiles emerging as they feel your empathy.

#### ***Help Them to Appreciate Their Success***

Every single course taken of every semester is an achievement, yet students don’t always realize and appreciate that. 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 graduation. And that degree earned means greater career options, lifetime financial stability, and a better quality of life for students, as well as their future generations to come! Taking a moment to appreciate the full magnitude of the achievement of the year’s completion is a wonderful way to end the semester for students who may not realize just how much they are accomplishing in the blur of the last week of instruction and final exam time.

### *For Students Graduating*

Spring brings with it that important rite of graduation in higher education institutions around the nation.

Every year a little over two million students in the nation graduate with their bachelor's degree, according to the [Education Data Initiative](#), with close to a quarter of a million from California. Here on our campus, 7,389 bachelor's degrees were awarded from our 76 bachelor's degrees programs in the most recent year calculated in the [Sacramento State Factbook](#). And soon the Fall 2023, Spring 2024, and Summer 2024 graduates will be honored in the 2024 Commencement ceremonies!

As we close out the year, let's give our graduating seniors a good sendoff:

#### ***Express Your Gratitude***

*They have added so much to our university!* In their time here, they have contributed in myriad ways to the character and quality of our institution, and the learning, growth, and vibrancy of the campus.

#### ***Let Them Know You're Still Here for Them***

We can let students know that just because they are graduating, we're still around, should they want to reach out to say "hi" or if they need anything from us in the future.

#### ***Let Them Know the University is Still Here for Them***

They may want to pursue [Graduate Studies](#), as the next step they see for themselves. They may also need [Career Center](#) services for job search and interview assistance. Our University President, Dr. Wood, has stated that we should redefine student success as not only graduating with a college degree—but also achieving a good job with median earnings, because *"our whole goal is to help students create a better life for themselves and for their families."*

#### ***Let Them Know They're Always a Hornet***

They might not know that [Sacramento State Alumni Association](#) membership is free to graduates and comes with a number of great benefits and opportunities, or that they can still attend all of the great campus events open to the public, such as [Hornet Athletics](#) and [Sac State Theatre and Dance](#).

#### ***Let Them Know We're Here for the Community***

Because many of our students graduating will stay local, adding to the ratio of 1 in 18 people in the Sacramento region who are Sac State alumni, we can also hope to work with them in the future in some capacity, including through community employers who partner with the Career Center with jobs and internships, or who partner with Sac State, in its role as an [Anchor University](#) to engage and strengthen the surrounding community.

#### ***Let Them Know You'll Be at Commencement***

Just knowing you will be there may mean so much to graduating students, and [Commencement](#) is a celebration for us, too, in seeing our students walk the stage!

***And Congratulate Graduating Students on Their Achievement and Wish Them the Very Best!***

## Conclusion

This section of “Listening to Students Who Ever Thought About Leaving College or Left and Came Back” highlights the need for students to complete their college journey through to graduation.

College completion is one of the highest measures of our success in what we do, as faculty and staff, 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!

## *Congratulations*

*to this year's*

*Sacramento State University*

*Graduating Class*

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”](#)
- [“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”](#)

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

With so very much appreciation to Elijah Martin, Outreach Coordinator, Black Honors College, for his great skills and insight so invaluable to this project, and to Ruth Williams, Director, Black Honors College, 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.