

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

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

*“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) Access to resources and financial hardships. Within this semester alone, I have had a few family members pass away, so delegating time for funeral preparations, paying off these debts, and making the time to attend and complete assignments has been difficult to say the least. Last semester, I was experiencing internet connection issues and due to the heavy rainfall, my home was flooded. The lack of internet and accessibility to canvas affected my grades for the semester. Despite, these challenges not much support was provided outside of advisors to talk to.*

*I stayed because I felt my education was too important to give up. Although I had to pick up additional jobs, did not sleep most nights, nor eat regularly, there was no guarantee I would be able to come back so I tried my best and continued on.*

*I feel that the institution could provide better support for students that are struggling with factors that are out of their control. Although there are classes that I would have done better in if the circumstances were not as they were, I am not sure what else could be done. Given the information I was aware of and the time I had within these situations, I did the best I could and continue to struggle.”*

— 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.

*“When I graduated high school my grandmother told me to stay in Mexico with my parents. That I was their responsibility now. I felt my future was being limited and I was not being encouraged to go to college because my family felt I wouldn’t succeed. I ran away from home & moved in with my bf at 18yrs old. That’s when I started college. After I completed my first semester of college my family tried again to keep me in Mexico. When I left again I learned my parents separated in which put me in a deep depression because my sisters are witnessing my parents separation & I was so far to comfort them or to know they are ok. My academics were effected & almost quit but 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.*

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Maybe do social emotional check ins in the quads or classes. And if we need someone to talk to we can reach out to the health center.”*

— 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.

*“I would say a lot of personal family issues made me want to leave college because the stress became too high. At times I would not be able to focus on my class as much because I had other things going on. I feel like if I didn’t have the stress of working multiple jobs and supporting my family I would have done better at sac state.*

*What kept me here is some of the connections with my Professors especially the one I had my freshman year. 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.*

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Nothing they have a lot of good programs but you might have to look hard for them. Not a-lot of students know about the programs available to them that can help them.”*

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

*“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) a toxic relationship & lack of money working part time*

*(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you left college?) determination to get a B.A. & love for knowledge*

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Nothing, I love it here!”*

—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.

*“It is hard navigating both work and school. I don't own a car so I take public transit so majority of my time is taken up trying to get from place to place. I hate being on campus. When I arrive I'm counting the minutes till I get home. I don't know why. I just get sad from time to time.*

*I like the knowledge i am getting from the classes. What i learn is fun. I am staying cause I want to prove to my family that we are more then 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.*

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) I am part of DACA so making it easier to find scholarships and financial aid help for us. Not just help but having financial aid seminar or class's for free to teach us about financial literacy. Also having department gathering for each college so that we can meet other in our major. Having people that have graduated from Sacramento state from different departments come and talk about their major and what they do for a living. Mainly people of color come and represent, cause I start to lose faith that I can make it. I would like to see people like me talk about my major since majority of faculty in my major is white.”*

— 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 had to take a break from school because I felt as if I tried all the prerequisites for my major and I still could not get into the program. I did not know what the next step was and since I come from a low-income family, I did not want to waste my financial aid from the state. Counselors would redirect me to a completely different major even though I still wanted to be in the medical field. I felt as if no one believed in me and I was starting to feel the same way.***

***I came back because I researched so many different pathways I could take. I read other students journeys and their experiences with the system. I feel as if I educated myself about taking different routes while still keeping my goal in mind- something that the counselors lacked.***

***I think hiring counselors with actual knowledge about major courses and substitutions would benefit students more. The counselors are good at understanding GE requirements but they will put you in random classes that are wasted credits at the end of the day.”***

— Age: 23, Hispanic/Latino, 4th year, First Gen.

***“The reason I left 20 years ago because I had to work to sustain myself and sister. We came from a broken family and I was the sole provider for my sister and I. When I got married, the responsibility of working full time and raising my children were priority over school. I did not want to leave college, life happened.***

***I have been in and out of college for about 23 years. I would take a (class) here and there at the community college level, when my children were little. 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 left college for about 2 years. During my second semester of my first year the pandemic started. I had a big responsibility over the well being of my family being the only one with a job and wasn’t able to focus on my classes.***

***I came back once my family was in a better financial standing and I want to pursue my degree for the future career I want.***

***(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) As I was trying to figure out what would be the best choice for me before dropping classes, it was difficult to access the help. So making the help more accessible.”***

— First generation mexican student in a low income household.

*“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) Mental health issues, the first time was in 2021 because my uncle passed away from covid and last semester because of depression and anxiety*

*The only reason I stayed was (a campus employee), she was the mother figure and support I needed.*

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Offer counseling even if you are out of state”*

— I'm a first generation college student, and I am a multilingual learner. Spanish is my first language, and my family lives in Chile.

*“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) The department and university has shown me that it is unwilling to work with students who need to work full time jobs to support themselves. I don't have the luxury of being able to attend classes when they occur at times that preclude me from working. No classes past 5pm, no online courses.*

*The way that grants are handled at this university is abysmal. I am still waiting to be paid from a grant that I've had since I transferred in to this university. I have been here 2 semesters.*

*Currently, I am only staying to finish the semester. I am moving to transfer back to my previous institution, who has committed to working with students like myself.*

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Pressure department chairs and college deans to offer more course modalities at times that would benefit a larger population of students. Pressure professors to not just teach at times that are only convenient for them....”*

— first generation, graduate student, 29 years old

*“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) The stress. Sometimes the stress of doing well gets to me. I have anxiety and depression so getting out of bed can be a challenge for me sometimes. When I go to school feeling like I can barely handle doing regular daily tasks, such as showering, eating properly, etc., I tend to stop doing my work in classes. Sometimes I am able to come back from it, other times I struggle immensely. Sometimes the professors are understanding and sometimes they're not. During times when they are not, it makes it extremely difficult to even want to come back from it knowing that there will not be a point.*

*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.*

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) I am not sure. The resources for mental health have gotten a lot better so I am unsure if there is very much that can be done.”*

— Female, 22, Latinx, 5th year senior

*“Before I didn't have the tools necessary to be successful at college. I didn't have a car, no laptop, no comfortable living situation, financial struggles, no family support. College courses moved too fast for me at the time and I was completely overwhelmed. I fell into another depression and started having anxiety attacks. So, I dropped out and got a job so I could ‘survive’.*

*Today, after returning to college I am still struggling. I have provided myself with more tools to be successful, but I still struggle with anxiety, depression, and my finances. Social anxiety has been a huge factor. I am intimidated by my professors, I am intimidated by my classmates.*

*I find it hard to stay engaged in class or with the material. I am a slow learner, so I need considerable time to do assignments. I don't feel professors give enough time for assignments. I'm sure Professors feel that they give more than enough time, but I don't. There are too many hard deadlines. Students should have more freedom and time to complete these assignments throughout the semester. The readings professors select are not interesting. There is too much group work and forced interaction in the classroom. Professors don't lecture anymore. They all want an 'active' class, while students want active lecturers. Having to do presentations is another reason I want to quit college again. The amount of classes outside your major that you have to take.*

*I never feel at ease because I am constantly in survival mode. There are not enough quiet spaces on campus.*

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

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Have more affordable food options. A student shouldn't go hungry because they can't afford the expensive food on campus. Students need more resources and easier access to those resources. Far too many things require you to apply and 'submit an application' or 'make an appointment' when the school already has most of our information. Increase Walk-In capabilities. Expedite all the processes. Hold more professors accountable. Professors should be required to post the syllabus before students enroll in classes. Simplify the student center. Hire more charismatic professors. Students or Faculty should not have to pay for parking. The professors who require books for their classes, should have their course material and assignments reviewed so students don't waste money on a whole book that they use 2-3 times a semester. If there is a low book usage rate, then Professors should just upload pdf's of those readings on canvas. Professors should be required to post and record lectures. Attendance should be a little more flexible. More study areas not in the Library or ARIC.”*

— 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 never actually wanted to leave. I wanted to achieve my dream of earning a bachelor's degree, but there were a number of times when I was made to take a semester off or a year, or a year and a half, before being able to come back and continue my degree. My consistently bad grades always made me need to leave school. Also, I think there was one semester when I couldn't afford my classes at Sac State. Overall I was very lucky that my housing situations and financial stability did not impact my ability to continue in school more than it did.***

***(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you left college?) Having a stable and inexpensive housing foundation that allowed me to be able to focus on school. Also having a community who believe that being in school is making the best decision for myself. And having college counselors and advisors who are knowledgeable about telling you your options in certain circumstances. I wouldn't be graduating if not for (staff members) who would check in on me and showed me a petition that I could use to be reinstated when others told me there was no option that I had to finish my degree.***

***(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) For college advisors and other staff to know their jobs, especially when they are in a role where they are expected to give advice and information. It would be wonderful if Sac State provided low income or affordable housing. Sac State acts way too much as a business.”***

— 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

***“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) Anxiety, uncertainty, confusion, money, expectations***

***(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you left college?) Interest, parents expectations”***

—21 years old, Mexican, Junior, multilingual, queer, trans

***“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) Having other goals/ambitions that does not necessarily involve getting a degree.***

***(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you left college?) Money invested into the university and living costs that come with it.***

***(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Help me transition out of uni so that I can pursue my goals.”***

— First generation Asian college student

*“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) The pandemic, missing out on family events, and multiple deaths in family. Ended up taking a break instead.*

*(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you left college?) The fact that I need to finish what I started and will absolutely not pay anything back (FAFSA)*

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) A lot of students don't know how simple it is to take a semester(s) off and don't think its an option. They think they need to take a whole year off. Personally, I think it should be looked into more. If I had continued to stay in school, I probably would've flunked or dropped out. Taking a semester off helped me keep my mind at ease and reflect”*

— Female, 22, first-gen sophomore student (started in Fall 2019).

*“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) Right now I'm struggling immensely financially*

*the only thing thats keeping me here is the encouragement of my father*

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) offer more jobs on campus that pay above minimum wage”*

— African American , fully independent, full time student

*“I was initially accepted into a 4-year university after I graduated from high school at the age of 17. I attended the university for 3 years and dropped out. My reasons for leaving included stress/mental health issues that stemmed from childhood trauma (which led to me failing my classes and being placed on academic probation), transportation setbacks, and an overall feeling of being overwhelmed with life's responsibilities.*

*I began my college journey again 20 years after I originally dropped out. Instead of going back to a 4-year university, I attended a junior college and graduated with my A.A. degree. Once I graduated from there, I transferred here to Sac State to complete my B.A. degree. 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.*

*Sac State could offer more online major courses. I understand this is a brick and mortar school, yet it is not easy to commute to campus on a daily basis when you are a parent with young children. Non-traditional students (older than 19, parents, full-time workers, etc.) are more common on college campuses everywhere, and we need to be considered when it comes to planning courses for each semester.”*

—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.



***“The amount of work and money I put in. I understand that it is all for a better future I just wish there were more reasonable ways. Also the fact that I pile on so much stress with school while also trying to help myself as a person is all too much sometimes. When one lacks time management it can be the worst build up especially in college.***

***(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you left college?) The fact that I don’t know what else I would do. College is a scam but we are taught anything else but school. It was always pushed upon us to continue and continue with school. I do want a much better future for myself and this is the only way I know to achieve that.***

***(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) I really don’t know.”***

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

***“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) The idea that it would be easier to just stick to a job and stop studying so I can have more money.***

***(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you left college?) Knowing that my life will be easier and better with a college degree.***

***Make the transferring process more clear. I didn’t know I could only transfer 70 units and I did 90 at community college. Since I am a first generation college student, I am learning as I go and some processes, such as how to transfer, can be confusing.”***

— 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.

***“I was academically disqualified from CSUS after I struggled to continue school due to the loss of my father in 2008.***

***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.***

***(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Provide more flexibility with online classes due to the multiple schedules that a parent has to work around such as having full-time job, kids’ school schedule, and kids’ extra curriculum activities, and mommy duties.”***

— A parent returning to school

*“I want to leave college because i don’t feel connected to this school and i feel like i’m in too deep. I also feel unsafe at this school.*

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

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) They can do better with closing the campus to outsiders. At this point we’ve had a rapist (as a SA survivor this is extremely uncomfortable for me), pro lifers putting their hands on students (also as a domestic violence survivor this too is extremely uncomfortable for me), and in my own first day of class for this semester we had a homeless person in our class bickering with my teacher.”*

— a 19 year old black female

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

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

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Provide more guidance for students who do not know what to do next. Have seminars on burnout or stress in college.”*

— Asian-American, 22, senior.

*“I understand that Covid was a shock to our personal lives, and our academic lives. I understand that it forced a lot of changes. I had originally planned to move closer to Sac State with a roommate before Covid, but those plans fell through after Covid and it’s no longer a possibility for either of us. Quite honestly, my life has been a never-ending storm since Covid.*

*In my first semester (Fall 2020) at Sac State, I was a full-time student taking online courses, like many other students, but in the middle of the semester, my grandfather got sick. His gull bladder was having issues and he was down for a few months. Then a month into the spring semester his gull bladder completely failed and sent him into the ICU for a majority of the semester. Somehow he made it out of the ICU and began his very slow recovery. He still has a lot of complications from that event that he will carry for the rest of his life. My uncle had moved back in with my grandfather to help and keep an eye on him as he recovered.*

*However, during the fall 2021 semester, my uncle was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer stage 4 and he only had a month to live. My family has a long history of cancer and it has taken two previous family members, so this was a shock to all of us. My family has gotten smaller as of right now I only have two aunts who are here in the state, in my same town, and can help. My grandfather was still recovering and my aunts took care of him while my mom and I took care of my uncle. My uncle wasn’t married and he didn’t have kids, so he took on a parental role for me and my younger siblings. It was important for me as the eldest and his only goddaughter to be there for him. My uncle defeated all the odds and he made it until the second month of the spring 2022 semester. He had barely turned fifty when he passed away.*

*(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you left college?) The short answer is online classes. I know that my situation seems to have very little to do with online classes, but that’s not the case.*

*Taking my classes online from Sacramento State saved me in a lot of ways. It allowed me to be with my family and help out during my grandfather's recovery. It allowed me to spend as much time as I could with my uncle. My routine used to be: dropping off my siblings at school, driving to my grandpa's house, and spending the whole day with my uncle. I attend my classes from my grandpa's house with my uncle off to the side. He liked to listen to the different classes. He didn't get the chance to go to college, so it was very important to him that I continued my education. I'm the first person in my family to attend college. I'm going to be the first one to graduate college. The online classes also gave me the stability and routine that I needed, especially after my uncle's death. I had considered taking a leave of absence, but I couldn't do it, it didn't feel like the right move for me.*

*After my uncle's death, my grandfather had a stroke, it was his second one, luckily I was watching him at the time and was able to spot the symptoms and get him to the hospital in time. The decision was then made that my grandfather would move in with us. I really thought that we had made it through the worst of it but no, earlier this semester my aunt got the news that her cancer had returned. She had to have surgery and will go through chemo and radiation. My mom is still working and my eldest aunt was torn between being there completely for my grandfather and my aunt. Thanks to my online classes, I was able to give her a sense of confidence by stepping up and saying that I will take care of my grandfather, while my mom is at work.*

*When I was signing up for Spring 2023 classes I felt let down by the lack of online options, especially in the ... department. I love school, it has gotten me through everything. I need school, and I know that it is impossible and impractical to have every class online. I know that there is an eagerness to get back in person as fast as safely possible, but I am just asking that the school keep students like me in mind when those decisions are made. Trust me I would love to go to campus, but right now if by some chance I were able to go, if I bring something back, something as small as a cold to my house, it could kill my grandpa and aunt. I just can't take that risk. I'm asking that you please don't put me in a position where I have to choose between finishing school and my family's well-being. I will choose my family and they will carry that guilt with them. I'm just asking that you take into consideration students like me who are stuck. I didn't ask nor want any of these things to happen, and I didn't want any of these challenges, but I'm the one who has to navigate and deal with them.*

*I do hope that there is an increase in the number of online classes available next semester. I know that there are a lot of nuances to this issue and it is perhaps far more complex than I know, but I just needed to try.*

*I want to thank you for reading this far, I know that this is a lot and that there is only so much that can be done. However, I'm hoping that my situation will at least help the next student that is facing this problem.*

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

*“I have considered leaving college on multiple occasions. There were moments where it felt challenging and I felt that I was behind in my life. When I saw other young adults achieving the goals that I wanted, it felt discouraging. I asked myself if going forward, spending all this money on tuition, and just getting up to find parking to get to class was worth it anymore. In my life, there were personal problems that came into my mind to delay my BA road because I simply didn't want to exist anymore. I just felt that leaving the world was easier because it felt like I was going no where no matter how hard I tried. Although some professors were understanding, I felt that some took attendance seriously and wouldn't understand how family emergencies can happen. At one point I asked myself, ‘Am I really going to ignore this emergency or my health over a grade that I worked for?’ This question repeated in my head a lot because I was afraid of losing my A or B because of attendance or participation that played a part in the classes. I have chosen my education over health and that wasn't normal. It felt like the college didn't care even if they provide services that will ‘benefit’ students. In what ways did it really benefit the students? At that point I didn't want to attend college anymore because I didn't know what to do. It felt that some professors didn't care or the school didn't care. It felt like no one cared because there are so many students on campus. It made me feel that college made me choose my grades over my health. Even if it's a student that never skipped out on class, if missing one day counted towards their grades with the chance of lowering it one letter grade, they wouldn't take the risk. What was the point of working hard towards the grade only to lose it because of participation?”*

*(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you left college?) Recently, I came across professors that made me comfortable to voice my concerns. It was hard and as I mention being sick, I wouldn't tell anyone. However, one day I was not feeling well and my professor made me feel comfortable to say it was okay and to feel better. They didn't hold it against me and I felt safe again. Another part would be goal of reaching my career path because I felt that it would benefit me into becoming a better person but I am not too sure yet. I still have the thoughts here and there.*

*(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) I don't know. I just wish Sac State was more understanding. I don't have an answer to what they could do better, I just wish the higher ups in the University understood us.”*

— I am a 22 year old woman. I am currently finishing my last semester to achieve my BA before 2023 ends.

*“I left college because of the cost and hardship that I experience many years ago.*

*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. Even though, I dropped out of school is was not because I wanted to drop but it was because I did not have the resources and support to finish it.*

*I think that if Sacramento State University had the support and resources that they offering now, I would have graduated many years ago.”*

— 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

## **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 4, focuses on students dealing with stress and struggles while in college.

## **Part 4: The Need to Manage Stress and Cope with Struggles**

College can be a fun and exciting time, one of challenge, growth, and fulfillment. But students may also at any point experience stress or struggle with something going on inside or outside of academia.

Sometimes stress can be beneficial, focusing energy and spurring students to stretch themselves to do more or do better. But long-term stress and/or higher levels of stress can hurt physical and mental health, quality of life, and academic motivation, concentration, learning, and performance in coursework—and can even lead students to consider leaving college.

### *The Stress They Feel and the Struggles They Have*

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

When asked how often they experience stress, 48% of students pursuing their Bachelor’s degree reported frequently, 41% said occasionally, 10% said rarely, and 1% reported never. The report notes: “Though COVID-19 undoubtedly added to the stress facing U.S. college students, it only exacerbated a longer-term trend among teens and young adults,” citing research findings that “serious psychological distress” had increased over 70% among young Americans (aged 18 to 24).

According to the American College Health Association survey of college students, with findings provided in the [“Executive Summary for Undergraduate Students” \(Spring 2023\)](#), 43% of students reported stress in and of itself to be an impediment to academic performance.

With regard to problems or challenges experienced in the past year, students reported the following (listed by the report in the order appearing on the survey):

- 52% of students said Academics
  - with 88% reporting it caused moderate to high distress.
- 37% of students said Career
  - with 73% reporting it caused moderate to high distress.
- 51% of students said Finances
  - with 77% reporting it caused moderate to high distress.
- 77% of students said Procrastination
  - with 66% reporting it caused moderate to high distress.
- 13% of students said Faculty
  - with 50% reporting it caused moderate to high distress.
- 40% of students said Family
  - with 67% reporting it caused moderate to high distress.
- 40% of students said Intimate Relationships
  - with 64% reporting it caused moderate to high distress.

- 32% of students said Roommate/Housemate
  - with 57% reporting it caused moderate to high distress.
- 26% of students said Peers
  - with 46% reporting it caused moderate to high distress.
- 58% of students said Personal Appearance
  - with 59% reporting it caused moderate to high distress.
- 41% of students said Health of Someone Close to Me
  - with 63% reporting it caused moderate to high distress.
- 25% of students said Death of Family Member, Friend, or Someone Close to Me
  - with 74% reporting it caused moderate to high distress.
- 7% of students said Bullying
  - with 57% reporting it caused moderate to high distress.
- 4% of students said Cyberbullying
  - with 50% reporting it caused moderate to high distress.
- 1% of students said Hazing
  - with 47% reporting it caused moderate to high distress.
- 19% of students said Microaggression
  - with 36% reporting it caused moderate to high distress.
- 12% of students said Sexual Harassment
  - with 56% reporting it caused moderate to high distress.
- 12% of students said Discrimination
  - with 48% reporting it caused moderate to high distress.

Please note the following with regard to the list above:

- 6% of students reported none of the above problems or challenges were experienced in the past year,
- 9% of students reported two of the above problems or challenges were experienced in the past year, and
- 79% of students reported three or more of the above problems or challenges were experienced in the past year.

The list of problems and challenges above were also reported as impediments to academic performance, as well as myriad others, including illness and medical conditions, injury, assault, sleeping difficulties, and mental health concerns, including:

- 27% of students reporting Depression
- 37% of students reporting Anxiety

When asked questions to determine level of psychological distress:

- 24% of students were found to have low or no psychological distress,
- 53% of students were found to have a moderate amount of psychological distress,
- 23% of students were found to have serious psychological stress.

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

Stress and struggles are clearly prevalent in the lives of students and have adverse impact on their success in college life.

To follow, you will find suggestions for students, faculty, and staff to better manage stress and cope with struggles.

## **For Students**

### **Managing Stress and Coping with Adversity**

Dear students,

*We hope you are doing well. That is our wish for you.*

But we also know that the life of the busy college student, with all the responsibilities inside and outside of school, can bring stress, and the toll of what has been and continues to be a very difficult time in society can make stress even worse.

To follow, you will find proven techniques for dealing with stress and adversity and campus resources to utilize.

#### ***To Manage Stress***

Stress in moderate amounts can give us the push we need to excel, but too much stress and long-term stress can harm your physical and mental health, quality of life, learning and academic performance, and even the decision to continue on in college.

This means we need to take stress seriously. There are numerous strategies to lower stress, but here are some top ways:

#### ***Be Good to Yourself***

Self-care is incredibly important. Good, nutritious food, good sleep, good walking and other forms of exercise, and good outdoor time in the sun and in nature are well-known ways to lower stress. Self-care also means taking the time to do what you find fulfilling, such as hobbies, interests, and creative outlets. Self-care also includes: Good times with friends and family members—the people and also pets in your life you care about. Good movies, books, games, and music for distraction, relaxation, and fun—laughter has proven benefits. Good time for yourself—be sure to unplug, quiet your mind, and simply be. And a good mindset: Do your best with school, work, and relationship responsibilities under the circumstances and conditions of your life at that time.

#### ***Use Good Coping Strategies***

Proven stress-reduction strategies include breathing techniques, mindfulness, meditation, and yoga, and journaling, finding or leaning into faith, and practicing gratitude for the better, brighter parts of daily life. *Ask yourself: What gives me hope, meaning, joy, peace, centering?* The answers may provide good ways to lower stress in your life.

#### ***To Cope with Adversity***

No life is perfect. We all encounter setbacks and struggles, misfortune and hardship.

Resilience theory is a body of work that began with this question: Why is it that in the face of adversity, some people do well and others do not? The answer, ultimately, was resilience.

Resilience is our capacity to effectively cope with adversity, to bounce back and even grow and strengthen in the face of it. You can be more or less resilient at different times in your life and with different types of stressors and hardships.

And resilience is something we can learn and build within ourselves, and use to better cope with future struggles. There are many ways to increase our resilience, including those to follow. Of course, every situation is different, so some strategies may work better for you than others.



## ***Do Some Reflection***

Processing what's going on is important. It's helpful to do some reflection:

### ***Of Yourself***

Think about the strengths you have and how you have overcome past difficulties. Ask yourself: *How have I gotten through tough times before? What qualities or skills do I have that will help me to persevere and bounce back in this situation?* This will help you to utilize your inner capabilities and problem solve to get through the situation. It's also important to do because research tells us a positive sense of self (self-esteem) and belief in ourselves (self-efficacy) are connected, and both are key to resiliency.

### ***Of the Situation***

Be sure to avoid the common perceptual outlooks identified by psychologist Martin Seligman in his work on how people cope with adversity, what he called the Three Ps:

- Personalizing a problem, as in “this is all my fault—I somehow caused this.” We often think that we're the cause of our problems, when we aren't at all or may be only partially responsible.
- Pervasiveness of the problem, as in “this problem will cause other problems for me down the road,” or even “all of my life is terrible.” Don't let one setback or struggle make you view all the other aspects of your life negatively.
- Permanence of the problem, as in thinking “This will never end.” Don't think that bad experiences will last forever.

You want to also be sure to try to see the situation in a more constructive light, when possible, using a cognitive tool called reframing. It depends on the specific situation, but in general, this might be thinking along the lines of: “This difficulty or setback gives me the push I need to take the steps to ... (make a needed or desired change).” Or “This is a good growth opportunity for me to learn more about who I am and what I'm capable of.” Lastly, thinking through the situation will allow you to assess your options, identify what you can control and do in that situation, and the steps needed for you to take.

### ***Of How You Feel***

Getting a handle on emotions is also important. Try to identify what exactly you are feeling and why: the specific emotion(s) and the reasons for these. Acknowledge that it's okay to feel badly, that you have the right to feel negative emotions in that struggle. Yet you also want to strive to be hopeful, to believe that things will get better. Remind yourself of other setbacks or obstacles you have gotten through before, and that you will get through this, too. Optimism is also a part of resilience.

## ***Reach Out***

If you are struggling for any reason, please know that you have a great big campus here for you. We are a Hornet Family and there are people all around you who care about you. What you may not realize fully as a student, but what becomes very clear when you start to work here, is this: *There are so many people working all across this university who are rooting for you, caring about you, wanting to make your learning and experiences here better, planning the best programs, services, and courses for you, and wanting you to reach out if you need anything at all.*

### ***Connect to Others***

Research is very clear in showing just how beneficial social connections and support are for dealing more effectively with stress and building resiliency. Please turn to family, friends, faculty, staff, and classmates, work colleagues, mentors, coaches, faith and spiritual leaders, and others in your life. *Please don't struggle on alone.*

Social connections provide that needed sense of caring, as well as an opportunity to talk out what you are going through, and get advice, encouragement, and support. Social support groups, as well, we know from research, are very helpful to feeling less alone in struggles and receiving valuable perspective and advice.

### ***Connect to Resources***

For students in need, please know how much this campus wants to support you through your struggles. *Please don't be afraid to ask for help!* There are numerous resources in terms of academics, counseling, basic necessities, financial aid, work, and more. Here are some of the key resources at Sac State for students in times of stress and struggles:

The [Student Health, Counseling, and Wellness Services](#) (SHCWS) in The WELL offers so many medical, counseling, and wellness services to help you get and stay healthy during your time at Sac State, physically and mentally, and most services are covered already (by the Health Services fee a part of your tuition) and available at no additional cost. *There is so much here to keep you well!*

[Campus Counseling](#) (a part of SHCWS) helps students to cope with such things as stress, academic difficulties, relationship issues, anxiety, depression, grief, post-traumatic symptoms, questioning sexuality and coming out, eating disorders, addiction and alcohol abuse, and negative treatment, threats, or subtler forms of oppression because of race or ethnicity, religion, country of origin, immigration status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other aspects of identity. Students can start with one counseling visit or make more, choose individual counseling or group counseling, and receive urgent care when in crisis. Counseling is free to students (paid as a part of tuition), and *even one counseling visit can be truly helpful.*

The [CARES Office](#) provides support to students who are experiencing challenges to their education or are in crisis. CARES gives referrals to campus and community resources and follow-up support to address a variety of issues, including but not limited to transportation barriers, mental or physical health and wellness, and financial, housing, and food struggles. The website also includes resources for students regarding financial aid and employment, food security, housing security, and more. *Help is just a visit, a phone call or an email away.*

### ***And to Help Others with Stress and Struggles—***

We may not always know exactly what to say or do to help when a friend confides in us that they are stressed or struggling. We want to do our best when someone is hurting, but may not know how. Active Minds, a leading nonprofit organization started by a college student and now leading the charge for mental health on college campuses across the nation, offers guidance in the following short video on [How to Help a Friend](#).

## **For Staff and Faculty To Help Students Dealing with Stress and Struggles**

Students may experience varying degrees of stress and different types of struggles in relation to academics, work, and/or personal life.

We may remember the stress we had in our undergraduate studies, and consider stress to be just a part of college life. Yet our students in the past few years have been doing what most of us, faculty and staff, have never had to do—progress in their education during a global pandemic, with all of the costs to self and consequences to daily life and functioning incurred. The accumulated stress and distress of that can continue to adversely affect a student in every sphere of life, including their academic success and emotional well-being here.

We may hang on to notions of “grit” when considering student struggles, work discussed in academia the past decade. But when considering the lives of the disadvantaged, some have called into question this work’s assessment of what grit is and how it’s measured in a person, and the resultant placement of the cause of not doing well or not persisting in college squarely on the student, rather than the myriad and significant structural and systemic inequities in education and society more widely.

And we may think our focus should be solely on academics. But stress can cause physical health and mental health problems and too much or too little sleep, and hurt academic motivation and focus, learning comprehension and retention, critical and creative thinking, and student productivity and performance.

### ***Help to Manage Stress***

If we want success for our students, then we must work to help lower their stress as much as possible, in our various spheres of responsibility in campus life.

#### ***Check In with Students and Acknowledge Stress***

Starting meetings or classes with “how-are-you?” check-ins allow students to share not-so-great days and receive support from others, while also showing all students, even the ones who choose not to share, that you care. This also may later help to open up dialogue for a student with you or with a peer. Check-ins also allow you to see who may be struggling so that you can keep an eye out or follow up later with the student(s), and/or offer words of empathy and encouragement then and there for that student and all students. You can also ask students to share in class or at campus events or gatherings what they do to lower stress in their lives, as a way to increase the sense of peer connection and support, as well as increasing awareness of different ways to manage stress. It may also be helpful to hear from faculty and staff about the stress they experienced as a college student or experience now, if a student employee, and how they dealt with it or their perspective on it.

#### ***Promote Wellness Practices and Resources***

We can announce and remind students of campus resources, such as [Student Health, Counseling, and Wellness Services](#), including [Campus Counseling](#), and the [CARES Office](#), as well as workshops on stress and wellness. Some faculty like to build student participation in wellness events and workshops into class assignments or offer extra credit as incentive to attend. In course creation, faculty may also be able to link assignments to, or select topics on, stress and wellness. For further ways to promote wellness, some faculty and staff like to begin events or classes with short mindfulness exercises to center and focus minds and ready students for the occasion or lesson to come. In class, some faculty incorporate short breaks for students, or include music before class, in a class break, or even during the class, at key times.

### ***Practice and Role Model Self Care***

Self-care is essential, for us, of course, but also because you can only care for students best when you take care of yourself, as well. We, staff and faculty, are also recovering from the tumultuous past few years of pandemic and pivot to online education. Many are stretched thin in job responsibilities, and may be experiencing job burn out. Some, in working with distressed students, may be experiencing compassion fatigue. In addition to the many stress-reduction strategies available, it's also important to keep a good work-life balance, say "no" or "not right now" when needed, and take breaks amid the busy workday to walk, socialize, or anything that gives enjoyment and centers you. We can also show up to campus events and workshops on stress and wellness. In our position as university employees, we can model a commitment to wellness to show its importance to our students. *"If my professor, my advisor, this university employee, is actively practicing wellness, then I should, too,"* can be their takeaway.

### ***Keep Them on Track with Classes and Campus Responsibilities***

Remember that stress impairs memory: This means reminders are essential for students in terms of assignments and appointments—reminders ideally both said and written, via email or Canvas messaging. Stress can also create overwhelm, impairing the energy and focus needed to process information. This means taking the time and care to make more clear and concise complex campus or course policies, wordy assignment descriptions, and the like. It's also helpful to summarize the key points of a discussion held with a student in a meeting or appointment, and highlight clearly due dates, deadlines, and action items in communication or correspondence.

### ***Be Aware of High Stress Times in College Life***

There are times we know are more stressful for our students, including the start and end of the semester, class registration, choosing a major, the writing placement process, graduation application and commencement, and for some, academic probation. For the more confusing and pressure-filled tasks of students mentioned prior, clear answers to questions or step-by-step guidance can lower stress, confusion, and overwhelm, as can patience and warmth at such times. Creating a good transition for students into a new semester or course can get them off to a smooth start, and finishing out a semester or class in ways mindful of student stress can make such a difference.

### ***Be Aware of High Stress Assignments and Subject Matter***

There are also some more difficult courses for students that create stress, some subject matters within any course that students find stressful, and some general types of coursework that most students find stressful, including midterms and final exams, a big project due date, and having to give a presentation. These are all things that most students find stressful, but some more than others. Test anxiety, research anxiety, technology anxiety, math anxiety, science anxiety, public speaking anxiety, foreign language anxiety ... these are real. And this stress increases for students already experiencing greater levels of stress from other aspects of their lives or backgrounds. Research tells us a supportive classroom climate and a supportive instructor, as well as any teaching assistants and tutors, can help to lower anxiety.

### ***Be Understanding***

Stressful times, tasks, and situations can show anyone at their worst. Stress can cause irritability and shortness with others. When a student shows these signs of stress, our understanding, patience, and care for the student can mean so much.

### ***Prevent Further Stress in Communication***

Faculty and staff can intimidate many students, and some may come from a background of unsupportive or even punitive school staff or teachers, and now alert to any potential of the same treatment here. This makes ever more essential that we use our best verbal and nonverbal communication in face-to-face interaction, and are mindful of the potential for misinterpretation of how we come across in demeanor and wording at any time. This also means we're especially careful in written communication of emails, Canvas messaging, and grading feedback, where the crunch of work or correspondence can make us shorter in response, we can't rely on a smile or warm tone to show we care, and we don't have the opportunity to see how we're coming across to the student and adjust, as needed.

### ***Prevent Further Stress in Coursework***

Coursework can be stressful enough for students, but ever more so without attention to course schedule, assignments, due dates, and policies, including: Not too-high-of-stakes assignments that can make or break a grade in one go. Being mindful to schedule reading and course assignments due dates in a way that does not overwhelm, with understanding that your class is not the only class a student has and their responsibilities outside of academia, in work and family. Because student stress can hinder memory of due dates and performance of coursework, some grace and flexibility are needed, including willingness to accept late work. Having in place ways to salvage or raise a grade can also give students peace of mind, such as allowing assignment re-dos, offering extra credit opportunities, or dropping the lowest score of an assignment, quiz, or test in the class.

### ***Build a Network of Connections***

Research has long shown that connections with others can serve as a buffer for stress, struggle, and adversity. This makes building student-to-student connections and student-to-faculty/staff connections so essential. Icebreakers and introductions help students to feel more comfortable and open up conversation with their peers. Introducing students to one another in casual conversations in departments, offices, or out on campus is also helpful in forging connections. Highlighting the unique qualities, interests, and achievements of students, academic or otherwise, also offers a way for students to learn more about their peers, creating conversational openers and connection. You can provide further opportunities for students to continue to talk to one another and work together in campus workshops, events, and in the classroom, through discussion, pair or group learning activities, team projects, and more. We can also take the time to introduce the student to colleagues, and announce campus events and extracurricular activities for students to further engage with the campus community and build connection with others.

### ***Provide Opportunities for Fun, Joy, and Delight***

For some students, their studies can be a good distraction from their troubles, a place of intellection engagement and satisfaction, where they can lose themselves in the learning. But for other students, academia can be a more serious, cerebral space where they must trudge along in their stress or struggles, without respite or rejuvenation. But we can create spaces and places in our various spheres of work on campus that break through student stress and overwhelm, find and center scattered or lost senses of self, awaken playfulness and fun, and nourish the heart and soul. *Ask yourself: What can I do, what moment can I make, what do I bring to my work, what creativity or spark can I bring to my teaching, that can transform the realm of academia for a student in stress, transport the student away from their troubles, and bring them greater peace, lighter hearts, or renewed sense of meaning, purpose, and engagement?*

Sometimes, stress levels can go too high.

### ***Be on the Lookout for Distress***

We can't always tell when a student may be going through something. The student outwardly may appear quite calm or content, but keep strictly hidden private struggles. There are, however, things to look or listen for:

#### ***Indications a Student May Be Going through Something—***

A downward slide in course performance, missing assignments, becoming tardy or absent more frequently, appearing exhausted or complaining of sleep difficulties, significant weight loss or gain, disheveled appearance (not taking care of themselves), mood swings, withdrawal or isolation, distractedness, frequent and marked preoccupation, apathy or extreme emotion (e.g., tearfulness, depression, panic), signs of substance abuse, concern for the student shown by classmates or peers.

#### ***Potential Triggers of Distress, Depression, or Anxiety—***

Extreme homesickness, loneliness, or difficulty adjusting to college life; pressure to succeed or the rigors of academia; high anxiety or uncertainty over finding a major or career path; personal illness or psychological difficulties; a bad situation where they work or live, in a class or relationship, or in family life; a painful break-up, falling out with friends, or ongoing roommate conflict or workplace strife; financial stress or legal difficulties; loss of their job, home, or someone they love.

#### ***Groups at Greater Risk of Stress or Distress—***

LGBTQ+ students, student veterans, multilingual learners, and students who are former foster youth, have disabilities, or are newer to the campus (first-year, transfer, reentry, and international students).

### ***Understand How Very 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, or the belief you should be able to handle stress and struggles on your own. Yet for some students, it can be even harder, including: First generation college students and students of color, who may already feel out of place or lacking in academia; student veterans, who are typically trained to be fiercely independent and always show strength; and young men, who can develop a hyper-masculinity, whereby seeking help is seen as weakness. 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.

### ***Let Them Know You Are Here for Them***

We may not always know when students are struggling unless they come to us. Being available as much as possible before and after class or meetings for student-talk, being available and present in office hours and emails, and being open and approachable in manner, all show you are there, should students need to reach out. Engaging in small talk opens lines of communication and asking how students are or what's going on in their lives shows interest in them, you caring.

Telling students directly—more than once—that you want to do all you can to support them in their college journey at any time, but especially in times of stress or distress in their lives, can mean so much. Letting students know that should they stop coming to class, stop doing well in the course, or stop seeming their usual self, you will be sure to reach out to make sure they're okay, this shows you are there and will be there for them.

### ***Reach Out to Students in Need***

At times, we may see students in stress or distress. We may become concerned for a student who appears to be struggling. Checking in with students can make a world of difference. 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.

### ***And Be There When They Need You***

This can mean different things, depending on the relationship with the student, the specific struggles they are experiencing, and your own comfort level and capacity at any given time for such a discussion, when so many staff and faculty already give so much to students.

With caring and compassion, we can make sure that students understand the specific campus resources to help them. This right there gives the student who comes to us the support they need. For students in times of stress or struggle, key resources are [Student Health, Counseling, and Wellness Services](#), including [Counseling](#), and [CARES](#). Doing more than simply providing the name or contact information for the resource could help the student to feel more comfortable and therefore more likely to use that resource. We can, for example, walk a student over to that service, or let the student know you'll call or email ahead to say you're sending them over or so that someone there will reach out to them. You can describe what that resource is like when you go in or use it (for example, how making an appointment for Counseling works). We can also say how we all may have need for help at this time, to normalize the act of getting help. Mentioning any times that you may have sought help when you were a student or in your present position may be just the encouragement needed for a student to seek the help they need. Lastly, following up later to see how they're doing shows even greater support.

We can also listen and respond supportively. Listening with an open mind and open heart can help a student to give voice to struggles, work through emotions, gain perspective on what they're going through, and formulate the steps they might take—and feel they are heard, and their humanity acknowledged. You can offer empathy and support for what the student is going through in the present, and optimism and hope for the future. You can help stressed or overwhelmed students toward a sense of calm and reassurance, help students with hurt or sorrow to feel comforted, help students lost or lonely to feel connection, help students feeling less than or without worth to feel cared for, help students feeling discouraged or defeated to see their inner strength, skills, and talents, and help students facing setbacks or obstacles to reflect on the situation constructively, take on a growth mindset, and cultivate resiliency in the face of adversity.

## Conclusion

When we think of student success, we may be thinking in terms of course grades and student retention, without fully realizing the tremendous impact of stress and struggles on student learning and performance, or their experiences and fulfillment here.

College is a stressful enough time for students, in terms of tests, assignments, and other academic responsibilities. Now factor in any number of adverse circumstances or challenges they may be experiencing in their lives off campus, causing further stress. And then add in the cumulative stress of the past few very difficult years in our society and the growing mental health crisis.

We may never know all students are going through as they sit in front of us in the classroom or across a desk or service counter, or how stressed or even distressed they may be.

But we do know we want to do our best for them, and this necessarily means addressing more than just academics. Student success means we need to attend to the whole student, including their stress and struggles in or outside of the institution.

This section highlights the challenges and pressures so many students experience—and the steps we can all take to lower stress, support students in times of distress, and build resiliency in the face of adversity.

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”](#)

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 Coordinator and Counselor, 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.