



To: Interested Parties

From: Global Strategy Group

Date: May 28, 2020

Re: Higher Ed Survey Highlights the Academic, Financial, and Emotional Toll of Coronavirus on Students

Global Strategy Group partnered with The Education Trust to conduct an online survey among 1,010 two-year, four-year, and undergraduate certificate students nationwide from May 14th to May 19th, 2020. The survey included additional interviewing to achieve 312 interviews among college students in California. Key findings from the research are outlined below.

Key Findings:

The coronavirus pandemic has been an extremely disruptive force in students' lives, and students of color have been disproportionately affected.

- More than three in four students (nationwide: 77%; CA: 75%) are concerned about being on track to graduate from their program. These concerns are particularly high among Black (84%) and Latinx (81%) students. Students also worry about what will happen after they graduate: 80% of students and 85% of students of color say they are very concerned about not being able to get the skills or work experiencing they need to get a job after they graduate.
- Nine in ten students nationwide (94%) have had at least some of their classes cancelled, including 95% of college students in California. 88% of students nationwide and 85% of students in California say that all or most of their classes are now being held virtually.
- Only around a quarter of students who were living in student housing prior to the crisis report that their college or university provided them with alternative housing options (nationwide: 28%; CA: 42%), so most students (71% nationwide and 77% in California) are now living at home with their parents. Parent-students are in an even more challenging position, with only 17% of those living in student housing before the pandemic having been provided alternative housing options by their college or university.
- There have been fewer class cancellations for 2-year associate degree students (91%) than for 4-year undergraduates (97%), with associate degree students of color experiencing cancellations (93%) at a similar level to students in general (94%). While their institutions have been closed, only a quarter of associate degree students of color living in student housing before the crisis have been provided alternative housing options (25%), while 65% of white associate degree students have had those options provided by their institutions.

Real financial insecurity is settling in for many students, particularly students from low-income backgrounds.

- The situation has gotten so dire for some that roughly one third of students (nationwide: 31%; CA: 33%) report having skipped a meal or reducing how much they are eating as a result of the pandemic. Low-income students are, again, unfortunately hit even harder, with more than two in five having skipped or reduced their meals (nationwide: 43%; CA: 45%).
- Nearly two-thirds of students (62%) are feeling uneasy about their personal finances over the coming few months, with slightly less uncertainty among California students (54% feel uneasy). Barely over half of students nationwide (53%) and even fewer students in California (49%) think they will be able to afford basic expenses like food, housing and tuition, if the coronavirus crisis persists for two more months. Low-income students nationally and in California are facing even tougher situations with more uncertainty when it comes to affording basic expenses (nationwide: 43%; CA: 46%).

The damage to students' mental health from the coronavirus crisis is deep and pervasive.

- Students across the country are experiencing highly elevated levels of stress, with roughly three quarters (72%) reporting their stress level is higher than usual and more than a quarter indicating it is much higher (26%). This is slightly less intense among California students (67% higher than usual). Students said “my anxiety has gotten so bad that I have gotten severe panic attacks and I’m depressed” and “I miss not living in constant fear.”
- At this time of elevated stress, students are particularly in need of mental health services from their college or university. More than three quarters of students nationwide (78%) indicate that their college or university making mental health services, counseling and emotional or psychological support accessible during the pandemic would be helpful, but just less than a third indicate their institutions have done so (32%) thus far. Black students report an even worse mental health support situation, with less than a quarter having these services available for them (24%).
- More than seven in ten students (nationwide: 73%; CA: 68%) are concerned with developing or worsening depression, anxiety, or other mental health issues during this time. Nationwide, these concerns are even greater for students from non-English speaking homes (82%), associate degree students of color (79%), and Latinx women (78%).
- These emotional health concerns also extend beyond just stress, anxiety, and depression. More than a third of students (nationwide: 36%; CA: 36%) are concerned about their risk of developing substance abuse or addiction during the pandemic. Nationwide, these concerns are disproportionately higher among low-income students (44%) and students of color (41%).

Students are generally supportive of their college or university's response to the pandemic, but they identify key areas of improvement moving forward.

- Students are generally supportive of their institutions' response to the pandemic (nationwide: 75%; CA: 75%). Students also give their college or university good ratings on their management of the shift to online learning (nationwide: 73% positive/25% negative; CA: 75%/24%). Black students nationwide are notably less positive (66% positive/30% negative) when it comes to these transitions.
- Despite these positive ratings, students identify key areas for improvement if online instruction continues through the fall. Instruction and course quality (53%), studying tools (51%), academic advising (43%), tutoring or other academic support resources (43%), and collaboration tools for group work or projects (41%) are identified as top areas of improvement needed to support student success. Relative to white students, students of color identify studying tools, academic advising, and tutoring as the most important areas for improvement if online learning is to continue into the fall. In California, similar priorities for improvements emerged, with instruction and course quality (51%), studying tools (51%), tutoring or other academic support resources (41%), academic advising (37%) and collaboration tools for group work or projects (34%) also landing as the top-five areas for colleges or universities to improve.
- As colleges and universities have looked for ways to adapt during the pandemic and support students, low-income students and students of color are less supported than students overall: 46% of low-income students and 43% of Latinx students say their college or university has provided virtual office hours or other ways to connect with faculty, compared to 53% of students overall. Half of students nationwide (50%) say their college or university has provided virtual office hours or ways to connect with academic advisors, but just 39% of Black students and 43% of low-income students say they have access to this.

Most students say they plan to return to college or university this upcoming fall, but they will need more support than before.

- Nearly nine in ten students nationwide (87%) are confident they will return to the same college or university this fall, and this confidence is largely consistent across regional and demographic groupings.
- Students across the country also report that they will need more support than they have in the past if they are to stay in college or university. More than half of students report they will need more financial aid (52% nationwide, including 57% of low-income students), help getting on track for their careers (50%, including 55% of Black students), help

finding a part-time job while in college or university (47%, including 51% of low-income students), and academic support (44%, including 48% of low-income students) than before the coronavirus crisis began.

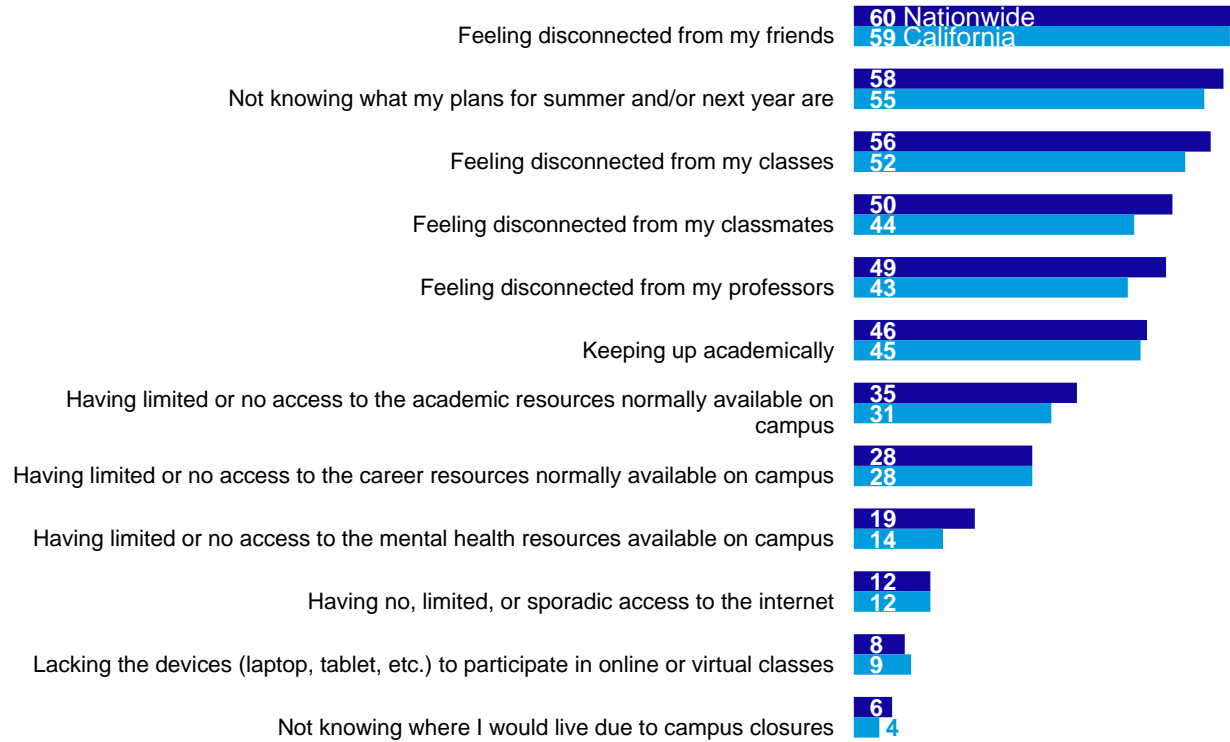
- Colleges and universities should look to close the existing gaps between what students are reporting will be most helpful to them and what they are aware their institutions are providing in order to best support their students as classes resume this fall:

Would be helpful	Institution is doing this	
87%	53%	Virtual office hours or other ways to connect with faculty
86%	50%	Virtual office hours or other ways to connect with academic or career advisors
85%	44%	Virtual office hours or other ways to connect with administrators
84%	52%	Tutoring, advising, or other academic support
83%	31%	Career advising and job preparation
82%	37%	Emergency financial aid or other financial support
78%	32%	Mental health services, counseling, and emotional or psychological support
75%	26%	Forums, portals, or other ways to connect socially with other students
74%	48%	Coronavirus safety and risk reduction information
73%	23%	Well-being services, like mindfulness and meditation services
67%	23%	Food support, like access to food pantries
62%	14%	Alternative housing arrangements

Students nationwide face widespread uncertainty and a profound sense of disconnection from their usual supports as they look to their futures.

- As the year comes to an end, students have had to adapt to dramatic changes to their summer plans. Almost one in four (23%) have had their job or internship cancelled, 35% have had their internship modified or changed, and 12% had to modify their plans to be able to support themselves or their families financially. California students have fared slightly better on this front, with 15% having had their internship or job cancelled and another 14% needing to modify their plans to be able to support themselves or their families financially.
- On top of all this, students are also worried about the safety of their friends and family during this time: 78% of students nationwide and 82% of students in California are worried about a family member or friends being infected with the coronavirus. Concerns about infection are particularly high among Latinx (82%) and Asian (81%) students.
- As the country and California digest staggering levels of unemployment, the implications for students and recent graduates are particularly dire. For students in the final year of their two- or four-year program, 49% say there are fewer job opportunities than they expected and two in five (20%) report their job offer or recruitment process have been cancelled because the company has cancelled the position all together.
- Students feel disconnected from their usual supports as they navigate this uncertainty. This lack of connection to friends, classes, classmates, and professors rises to the top of a list of potential crises during the pandemic for students, above challenges like keeping up academically or accessing the resources needed to fully participate in remote/online learning. While lack of connection to friends is viewed as the most challenging aspect of not participating in in-person classes during this time (60%), low-income students and students of color are report that not knowing what their plans are for summer and next year (low-income: 49%; students of color: 55%) is more of a challenge than this lack of connection (low income: 46%; students of color: 53%). In California, students are feeling similar hardships and strains are their greatest challenges at this time—though they report, generally, each is slightly less of a challenge than for the average student nationally:

Which of the following have been the most challenging aspects of being enrolled in school during the coronavirus pandemic for you personally?



About this poll: The survey had a confidence interval of +/-3.1% for the nationwide sample, +/-5.6% for the California oversample, and the confidence interval for subsamples is higher. All interviews were conducted via web-based panel. Care has been taken to ensure the geographic and demographic divisions of college students are properly represented.