

Perceptions and Persistence: Evidence from the Fall 2022 Outcomes Study

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As student pathways become increasingly nonlinear, the ability of colleges and universities to cater to the needs of more diverse student bodies often plays a large role in the satisfaction of students with their institution. A student's satisfaction may be derived from their individual satisfaction of various factors, such as the quality of institutional support services, financial aid offerings, faculty and more.

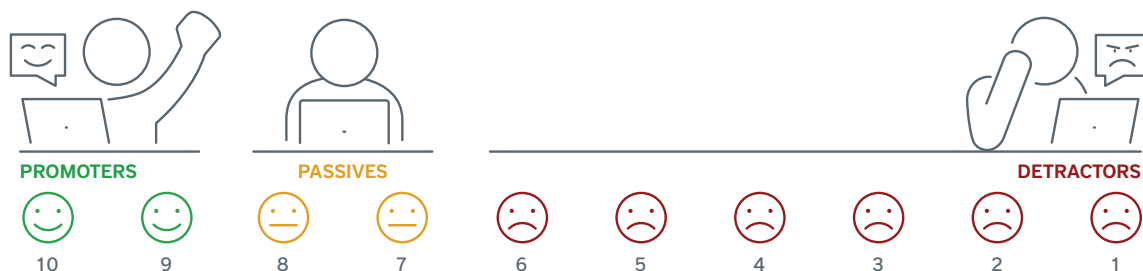
To assess the extent to which this holistic perception of a student's institution is related to persistence and retention, this brief analyzes data from Trellis' Fall 2022 Student Financial Wellness Survey (SFWS) and Fall 2022 Outcomes Study. The Outcomes Study connects the indicators of student financial wellness from the SFWS, issued each fall, to measures of success later in a student's academic career.

To participate, SFWS-participating institutions follow up with additional data covering the year following the SFWS. This data is then analyzed alongside students' original survey responses to better understand how finances, mental health and more impact subsequent academic success. The Fall 2022 edition of the Outcomes Study had over 8,000 student respondents from 10 participating institutions. Four of these institutions were 4-year schools and six were 2-year schools.

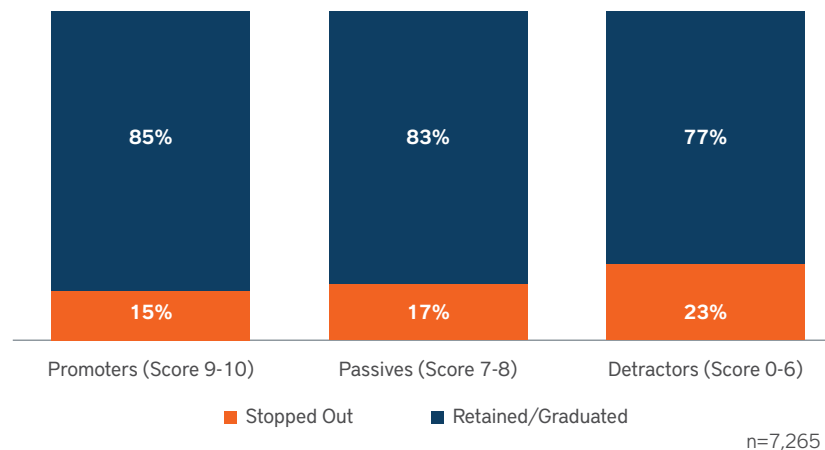


Customer Satisfaction Measurement

To assess student perceptions of their institution, Trellis utilizes a customer satisfaction rating within the SFWS that enables the calculation of a Net Promoter Score (NPS). NPS is a method to benchmark customer satisfaction ratings across different services, businesses, and products. NPS uses a 0-10 scale. Respondents who score 9-10 are promoters, 7-8 are passives, and 0-6 are detractors. The percentage of promoters minus the percentage of detractors equals the institutional NPS. A NPS greater than zero is generally considered good, with the highest performing institutions usually between 50 and 80. These



$$\text{Net Promoter Score (NPS)} = \% \text{ PROMOTERS} - \% \text{ DETRACTORS}$$

Fall 2023 Enrollment Status by Fall 2022 Net Promoter Score

scores have been confirmed to be relevant in higher education contexts, with students' academic and social experiences on campus playing a key role in determining their likelihood of recommending their institution.¹ In the Fall 2022 SFWS, the aggregate NPS was 3.1 for 4-year institutions and 36.2 for 2-year institutions.

Satisfaction & Retention

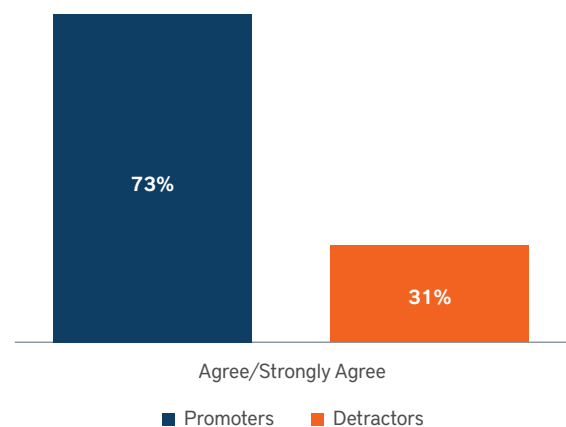
Among Fall 2022 Outcomes participating institutions, a statistically significantly greater proportion of students who were promoters of their institution in the Fall 2022 SFWS were retained in Fall 2023 or graduated between Fall 2022 and Fall 2023 than were students who were detractors of their institution. Eighty-five percent of promoters at institutions who participated in the Fall 2022 Outcomes Study were retained or graduated in Fall 2023, compared to 83 percent of passives and 77 percent of detractors. The NPS of those who were retained or graduated was 35.3, compared to a NPS of 20.9 for stop outs.

This finding provides evidence that students who are unsatisfied with their institution leave their institution at elevated rates and do so more often than students who are satisfied with or indifferent to their current college experience. In particular, students who are detractors stopped out of their institution much more than both passives and promoters, suggesting that there is a notable difference between detractors and passives when it comes to their feelings about their current institution. These findings are in-step with the existing body of research that exists regarding student perceptions and persistence measures. In 2025, the National Student Clearinghouse found that just over 86 percent of first-time college students from the Fall 2023 cohort returned for their second semester and 78 percent returned for their second fall.² A 2013 analysis of undergraduate students found that student satisfaction scores were very influential to students' likelihood of choosing the same institution

again if given the chance to revisit their college choice.³ Furthermore, a college's climate was identified as particularly important to student satisfaction, a result that has been identified repeatedly in research.⁴⁻⁸

Financial Assistance

Also important to students was how they felt their institution assisted them, especially with respect to finances. In the Fall 2022 SFWS, detractors more often reported experiencing financial difficulties while in college, but promoters more often agreed that their institution had the support services needed to help them address these financial challenges. Seventy-three percent of promoters agreed or strongly agreed that their institution had the support services needed to help them address their financial situation, compared to 31 percent of detractors. Trellis also asked several questions about how students feel their institution helped them to afford specific things, such as tuition, housing and food. The relationship between promoter scores and those questions follows a pattern; promoters were more likely to agree that their school made tuition, housing,

My school has the support services to help me address my financial situation.

food, transportation and textbooks more affordable than were detractors. For instance, 81 percent of promoters agreed or strongly agreed that their school made tuition more affordable, compared to 39 percent of detractors. Sixty-four percent of those who stopped out agreed or strongly agreed with that question, compared to 68 percent who were retained/graduated.

Conclusion

In conclusion, enabling students to feel valued and like they belong on campus and empowering them to take control of their finances, as evidenced through these examples of satisfaction

scores, can help students to reach their full academic potential in a way that often goes underappreciated within the circles of campus leadership. Utilizing data, such as that from the Outcomes Study, that enables leaders and policymakers to examine success across terms and how this success may be influenced by challenges students face early in their college lives is a valuable strategy to assess whether students are leaving their institution as a consequence of their being unhappy with the assistance and climate provided to them. In this way, institutions may be able to more quickly provide students with what they need to be successful both inside and outside of the classroom.

Works Cited

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