Trellis Strategies

Supporting Students with Some College, No Credential

December 2025

Topics Covered

This guide covers the following topics related to assisting students with some college, but no credential, re-enroll and graduate:

Step 1: **Assess Causes for Student Stop Out**
Understand why students have stopped out as a first step to supporting their return

Step 2: **Complete the Checklist**
Answer the questions to see how ready your campus is to re-enroll students with some college, but no credential

Step 3: **Identify Your SCNC Population**
After reviewing reasons for stop-out, create lists of student to invite back

Step 4: **Design Student Friendly Processes**
Create infrastructure to support re-enrollment

Step 5: **Begin Re-Engagement Outreach**
Reach out to students with a clear and easy path to re-enrollment

Step 6: **Provide Ongoing Support After Re-Enrollment**
Identify risks for stopping out again and monitor student progress

Step 7: **Assess Impact**
Create a feedback loop that allows assessement of the impact of outreach efforts

About Student Success Toolkits

The Student Success Toolkits from Trellis Strategies provide resources for colleges and universities to improve student outcomes.

About Trellis Strategies

We are a strategic nonprofit research and consulting firm dedicated to advancing postsecondary education and strengthening the workforce by delivering unparalleled insights into the modern learner experience, from application through graduation. With over 40 years' experience serving higher education institutions and helping students navigate complex processes, we have the knowledge, insight, and experience to help organizations turn their data into action and action into results.

The Modern Learner Journey

At Trellis Strategies, we understand the modern learner as someone whose educational journey is shaped by ambition, resilience, and the realities of everyday life. These students often balance multiple roles, such as working full time, caring for dependents, or being the first in their household to pursue higher education, all while striving to achieve their academic goals.

The pathway of the modern learner is rarely linear. Interruptions, restarts, and shifts in direction are common, reflecting the complex interplay of education with work, finances, and personal responsibilities. These nonlinear journeys reflect the persistence and determination these learners bring to higher education. By understanding their experiences, we can better support progress, re-entry, and completion–creating opportunities that align with both educational goals and workforce demands.

Overview

Institutions across the country are focused on helping individuals re-enroll in postsecondary education. This is likely due to the fact that there are over 43.1 million individuals with some college, no credential (SCNC) in the United States. This population of modern learners—around a third of whom are under the age of 35—represent a large market that has already shown an interest in postsecondary education which, in theory, should make them easier students to enroll. However, these students come with many unique and interesting roadblocks to enrollment.

Enrollment trends from 2020 through 2024 show some positive developments, according to data from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (NSCRC). The number of SCNC students re-enrolled each year has slightly increased, while the number of new stop-outs has decreased. However new stop-outs still substantially outpace re-enrollees, leading to steady growth in the overall SCNC population.

The number of re-enrollees as a percentage of the working-age SCNC population has remained steady over time, with an average re-enrollment rate of around 2.5 percent each year. Additionally, the number of recent stop-outs from private for-profit and primarily online institutions has continued to increase.

Among those SCNC students who do re-enroll, outcome indicators have remained consistent or dropped during the three most recent years reported by the NSCRC. Two years after re-enrollment, around 60 percent of re-enrollees have either completed a credential or remained enrolled. The two-year completion rate has fallen from 21.8 percent for those who re-enrolled in 2020-21 to 18.5 percent for those who re-enrolled in 2022-23.*

From registration holds (both academic and financial) to perceptions that they can't be successful in courses, institutions must provide robust support to help these individuals enroll. What follows is a guide to help you develop a strong strategy to engage, re-enroll, and support students with some college, no credential.

There are over **43 MILLION** individuals with **some college, no credential** in the United States.

Only 2.7% of working-age SCNC students re-enrolled in the 2023-2024 academic year.

The two-year **completion rate declined** among re-enrolled SCNC students, from **21.8%** of 2020-21 re-enrollees to **18.5%** of 2022-23 re-enrollees.

National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, Some College, No Credential Report Series, 2022-2025.
https://nscresearchcenter.org/some-college-no-credential/

Some College, No Credential Survey

Trellis Strategies administers the Some College, No Credential (SCNC) Survey to help colleges and universities better understand the experiences and motivations of students who left school before earning a degree. In 2025, the SCNC Survey gathered responses from more than 3,200 former students across 58 institutions in 13 states.

The SCNC Survey provides institutions with valuable insights into why students stop out and offers data-informed strategies to support their return. Unlike traditional methods of engagement, the SCNC Survey captures direct, qualitative feedback from former students, information that is often missing from existing research with this population.

Across participating institutions, students cited a range of reasons for leaving college, reflecting a complex interplay of personal circumstances and institutional factors. Common themes include:

- **Personal finances**, such as challenges covering living expenses, managing bills and debt, or lacking the funds to continue enrollment

- **Family or personal reasons**, including caregiving responsibilities, the need to financially support family members, or coping with the loss of a loved one

- **Employment issues**, such as work schedules conflicting with class times, needing to work to meet their basic needs, or questioning the relevance of their degree to career advancement

- **Cost of attendance and tuition**, including concerns about tuition affordability, overall costs, and limited access to financial support

	TWO-YEAR STUDENTS	FOUR-YEAR STUDENTS	TOTAL STUDENTS
	n=2,142	*n=1,039*	*n=3,181*
SELF-REPORTED REASONS FOR STOPPING OUT			
Personal finances (lack of funds, bills, living costs, etc.)	33%	38%	35%
Family or personal reasons	31%	32%	32%
Cost of attendance/tuition	20%	35%	25%
FUTURE PLANS			
Plan to re-enroll at former institution in the future	32%	19%	28%
Plan to re-enroll within the next year	62%	46%	59%
PERCEPTIONS OF INSTITUTION AND EDUCATIONAL VALUE			
Cost of college is a good investment	68%	58%	64%
Completing a degree would improve career earnings and potential	74%	71%	73%
Willing to recommend their former school to others	45%	24%	39%
Net Promoter Score (NPS)	8.9	-25.0	-6.4

Statistics sourced from the National Some College, No Credential Survey

www.trellisstrategies.org

Re-Enrollment Committees

FOCUS AREAS

- **Identification and Assessment**
  This working group is responsible for sourcing the necessary information to identify the students that have some college, no credential and will then transition to assess the effectiveness of any re-enrollment efforts.

- **Outreach and Support**
  This working group will coordinate the outreach to students and will assist in developing a seamless journey for students as they re-enroll and engage in their first courses. These efforts should include the development of a clear learner journey and the implementation of returning learner programming.

- **Institutional Policy**
  There are numerous institutional policies that impact re-enrollment on campus. This working group will utilize the toolkit to audit campus policies and procedures prior to beginning re-enrollment outreach. This will allow for the most efficient and effective re-enrollment outreach.

SUGGESTED OFFICES

- **Academic Advising**
  Structure the on-boarding process to maximize student credit hour applicability in relevant degree programs. Provides context and training to academic advising staff and supports campus conversations related to checkpoints for retention.

- **Academic Affairs**
  Identify programs for re-enrollment and assist with the development of flexible pathways to a degree. Assist in understanding opportunities for credit for prior learning and supporting academic related holds.

- **Admissions**
  Manages outreach to students with SCNC and provides counseling on the re-enrollment process.

- **Bursar**
  Assist in the understanding of the magnitude and resolution process for students with an outstanding balance.

- **Business and Finance**
  Help to understand the opportunities for balance forgiveness and/or institutional loan programs to offset financial holds. Develops formal for evaluating return on investment of SCNC efforts.

- **Enrollment Management**
  Champion the enrollment process including the learner journey for re-engagement, admission flow, and assessment of effectiveness of outreach.

- **Financial Aid**
  Proactively engages to support students with Title IV holds, SAP concerns, or other financial aid eligibility challenges.

- **Information Technology**
  Manages the necessary technology resources to create a seamless learner journey to re-enroll and obtain credit for relevant experiences.

- **Institutional Research**
  Develops the list, in conjunction with other support offices, of those students that would be included in the population and assist in developing assessment to understand why students left the institution.

- **Marketing and Communications**
  Assists with the crafting of the messaging for those with SCNC and assists in the development of specific outreach campaigns.

- **Orientation / First Year Experience**
  Assists in the development of specific content for re-enrolling students to welcome them back to the campus environment.

- **Registrar**
  Advise the committee on transcription, course registration, and degree awarding considerations. Suggest pathways for micro-credential and credit for prior learning awarding. Assist with the identification of the SCNC population.

Additionally, we recommend the inclusion of student voice into the main committee and the Outreach and Support and Institutional Policy working groups.

Process

STEP 1: ASSESS CAUSES FOR STUDENT STOP-OUT

Core to developing re-enrollment related support is understanding your existing departing population. In this way, you can help support their return to campus when they re-enroll.

- **Retention Analysis**
  Institutions can regularly look at their departing students to identity risk indicators. These indicators are normally fairly stable (DFW in a course, unpaid balances, or a GPA under a 2.5), but further exploration can get to the root cause like individual stumbling block courses, unattainable levels of unmet need, an unrealistic or incomplete plan to pay tuition and institutional charges, and unfulfilled pre-enrollment supports, such as adequate advising, housing, or other issues.

- **Exit Survey or Some College, No Credential Survey**
  Exit surveys can be a valuable tool for gathering qualitative feedback, especially since many students do not participate in exit related interviews with campus staff. If surveying students at the point of departure is not feasible, consider implementing a Some College, No Credential Survey with Trellis Strategies. This instrument can be administered to multiple cohorts (up to 3–5 years post-enrollment) to explore why students left and how institutions might re-engage and re-enroll them. Response rates to these instruments are often low, but the feedback they yield can offer meaningful insights and highlight practical opportunities to strengthen student support.

- **Clearinghouse Analysis**
  It is highly encouraged that institutions run files against the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) student tracker database on an annual basis. This will allow institutions to see where, if anywhere, students subsequently enrolled. This data allows campus staff to better understand key profile variables like: institution type, price, location, and degree program mix. Additional analysis of matching to student personas can help to identify those that are eligible for re-enrollment.

- **Faculty and Staff Engagement**
  Data collection from students is very important to an effective campaign. However, faculty and staff also have numerous insights and perceptions from working with students. Administering feedback instruments (interviews and focus groups) with faculty and staff can provide valuable insight into campus policy, procedure, and practice.

- **Personas Developed**
  For campuses to effectively engage students, it is important to develop personas of those students that have left campus. This often includes three personas:

  - Students with academic barriers are students that have had some level of academic challenges that may be indicated through SAP, low GPAs, or DFW's in courses. Assessing the key drivers of this, including pre and post enrollment characteristics, can help to inform re-enrollment strategy and targets.

  - Students with financial holds have likely been barred from registering and may owe a balance to the institution. Understanding the level of unmet need that is manageable is key to re-engaging these students (including any potential balance forgiveness efforts) and preventing the stop out from occurring in the future. Students who were allowed to matriculate without being packaged at all are often another risk. Students with no holds are the most likely to re-enroll. It is important for institutions to understand if these students have enrolled elsewhere and to attempt to collect qualitative themes on why students left to inform messaging campaigns.

STEP 2: COMPLETE THE CHECKLIST

Students with some college, no credential represent a great opportunity to grow enrollment and fulfill your mission by serving students that have been encouraged by the promise of a postsecondary education but who have not yet completed what they started. These students have unique barriers that are different than those in your traditional enrollment process.

It is important to develop a robust support strategy that helps individuals navigate these barriers and successfully re-enroll in courses. The planning checklists that follow will help your campus to greatly improve the lives of students, enhances the institutions' mission, and helps to restore trust in postsecondary education.

Assess your readiness to support students with some college, but no credential, to return to campus and graduate. Answer the questions at the end of the toolkit to help your campus develop a strong re-enrollment process.

STEP 3: IDENTIFY YOUR SCNC POPULATION

Institutions should identify all individuals that have accumulated credit hours, but are not currently enrolled. Leadership can look at students based on duration of time separated from the institution as an initial filter. Additional filters include:

- **Run It Against NSC to Identify Current Enrollment**
  After identifying individuals with some college, no credential you can run these names through the National Student Clearinghouse to identify student's enrollment paths after your institution. This should focus on students who are currently enrolled at another institution.

- **Identify Students with Academic or Financial Holds**
  Following the removal of those students that are enrolled at other institutions, institutional data can further provide a profile of students who have paused their education. This should include number of credit hours completed, institutional financial holds, Title IV holds, and any academic related holds.

- **Develop Three Buckets**
  Putting together institutional and National Student Clearinghouse data will allow for the sorting of students into three buckets: Those with no barriers for re-enrollment, those with limited barriers, and those with significant barriers. This, combined with credit hour accumulation and time separated from the institution will assist in establishing an outreach priority and re-enrollment strategies.

STEP 4: DESIGN STUDENT FRIENDLY PROCESSES

Re-enrolling stopped out learners requires flexible and friendly policies and procedures for student support. Create simple processes, such as those below, that will make re-enrollment easier on returning students.

- **Re-Apply Application Flow**
Most campus have an "Apply Now!" button on their website to help students easily access the application. Fewer institutions have a "Re-Apply Now" or a specific application flow for those that have been enrolled elsewhere. This application flow can help the student feel more connected to the process.

- **Transcript Review**
Campuses need a timely and efficient way to review individuals transcripts for transfer credit and other prior learning activities. This should be embedded into the onboarding process.

- **Balance Forgiveness**
Many students leave an institution due to a past due balance. Enacting balance forgiveness, or deferred payment options, can assist students in navigating the financial hurdle to re-enrollment. New federal guidance may limit transcript withholding, but barriers remain for re-enrollment at the same institution due to past due balances.

- **Term Start Dates**
Individuals with some college, no credential have already been through the college process and are interested in re-engaging as soon as possible. Offering multiple term start dates to accelerate time to learning can help to reduce the risk of melt and make institutions more appealing for re-enrollment.

- **Course Scheduling**
Institutions should evaluate their current course schedule for alignment with modern learner needs. This includes examining the time slots that courses are offered, the predictability of semester-by-semester course time schedules, exploration of competency-based education offerings, and a wide range of online and hybrid courses.

- **Credit for Prior Learning**
Students with some college, no credential return to your institution with diverse experiences. To fully engage this population, campuses should have established processes for efficient awarding of credit for prior learning.

STEP 5: BEGIN RE-ENGAGEMENT OUTREACH

After identifying students who stopped-out (and the reasons), creating a list of those eligible to return, and designing student-friendly processes, it's time to begin outreach to students to invite them to re-enroll. The re-engagement outreach process requires separate and dedicated outreach channels. Key drivers:

- **Segmented Campaigns**
  Campaigns should be segmented to allow for targeting of those that have departed the institution within one term, two terms up to two years, and longer than two years. Additional variation should occur for students that were previously enrolled at the re-enrolling institution versus those that were enrolled elsewhere.

- **Multichannel**
  Outreach campaigns should be multichannel in nature with different intensity based on likelihood to enroll. Students that engage with the institution should have escalation to phone outreach to allow for intensive support. Campaign language is important with a strong need for acknowledgement of challenges in postsecondary education and desire for individuals to re-enroll.

- **Employment Opportunities**
  Outreach campaigns should center around opportunities that have alignment with regional workforce needs. Institutions should identify these programs and draft outreach materials aligned with increased economic opportunity.

- **Advisors**
  Students that express interest in re-enrollment should be quickly connected to an enrollment advisor within 24 hours. These individuals should be trained to support the student through the re-enrollment process and should have dedicated re-enrollment specific scripts for topics including various holds and Title IV eligibility issues.

- **Degree Mapping**
  As part of the re-enrollment process students should quickly be connected to a degree mapping tool, and human support, to assist in understanding the various paths (including cost, time, and credit portability) to a credential.

- **Melt Support**
  Even for institutions with frequent start dates, melt can be an issue for re-enrolled students. Frequent communication after confirmation of re-enrollment is essential to create a sense of belonging on campus.

- **Once Enrolled**
  After students have decided to re-enroll on campus it is important for institutions to continue to support them throughout this journey. Campuses can provide things like cohort models, dedicated re-enrollment advisors, and specific course sections each term of highly enrolled courses.

STEP 6: PROVIDE ONGOING SUPPORT AFTER RE-ENROLLMENT

Students who stopped-out before are at risk of stopping out again. Create systems for monitoring the progress of re-enrolling students so they can continue to graduation.

- **Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP)**
  SAP presents a strong opportunity to engage students in tutoring and other resources through the warning system. Creating an individual that is responsible for SAP warning processes and the effective avoidance of SAP is essential to developing robust campaigns.

- **Payment Plans**
  Payment plans are strong indicators of potential financial barriers for students. Proactively reviewing the accounts of students that are not making progress against their payment plans can provide insight into potential drop risk.

- **Non-Registered**
  Institutions should have a regular process for pulling individuals that are registered in an existing term, but not registered for future terms. Institutions should conduct campus wide outreach to these individuals with supplemental campaigns occurring with advising staff and, if possible, current term faculty.

- **Faculty and Advisor Referral Channel**
  Institutions are encouraged to create a visible referral channel for faculty and academic affairs staff to refer students to support services. This channel should allow the referring individual to briefly describe the students challenges and then be connected to appropriate referral resources which may be a triage student success counselor role.

- **Student Culture and Belonging**
  Institutions are encouraged to create a culture of engagement for re-enrolled students through the development of targeted advising programs, faculty mentoring programs, and structured touchpoints with these staff members. Additionally, institutions can develop specific targeted motivational messaging campaigns, engage in specific student organizations or cohort groups, and host end of semester celebrations for completing students.

STEP 7: ASSESS IMPACT

Campuses should create a feedback loop that allows them to assess the impact of their outreach efforts. This should include developing an understanding of the following:

- **Outreach Conducted**
  What mechanisms for outreach were most impactful? Did it vary by different student populations?

- **Enrollment Funnel**
  Where did individuals that indicate interest end up in the enrollment funnel? Did any leakage points emerge?

- **Re-Enrollment Success**
  For those students that did re-enroll: How many courses did they take? Did they stay enrolled in all attempted credit hours? Where there any academic or financial challenges? Did they re-enroll for an additional semester?

- **ROI**
  What was the total cost of the outreach? What was the cost per lead? This should be assessed against revenue metrics as determined by the campus budget model.

Some College, No Credential
Checklist

ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

The campus has:

Yes	In Progress	No	
☐	☐	☐	Deployed an exit survey to better understand student perceptions as they leave
☐	☐	☐	Deployed a survey to those with some college, no credential to understand their perceptions
☐	☐	☐	Conducted an analysis of National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) data to understand where students enroll after stopping out / dropping out
☐	☐	☐	Collected feedback from faculty and staff around reasons for student departures
☐	☐	☐	Collected feedback from faculty and staff on campus policies, procedures, and practice to assist in preventing student departures
☐	☐	☐	Determined the number of students that are not enrolled elsewhere, that have financial holds, academic holds, and/or Title IV holds to establish buckets for re-enrollment outreach and support
☐	☐	☐	Established four buckets of students for re-enrollment: No barriers to re-enrollment, financial barriers, academic barriers, and financial and academic barriers
☐	☐	☐	Identified the primary reasons for student departure and barriers to re-enrollment

STUDENT FRIENDLY PROCESSES

The campus has:

Yes	In Progress	No	
☐	☐	☐	Mapped an application flow for students that are re-applying to the institution
☐	☐	☐	Developed a specific web journey for students to re-engage with the institution
☐	☐	☐	Created a transcript review process to maximize the number of accepted credit hours and the various paths to degrees and credentials
☐	☐	☐	Initiated a process to engage students with degree mapping during the application process
☐	☐	☐	Developed communication scripts to assist with navigating financial barriers to re-enrollment
☐	☐	☐	Implemented a balance forgiveness program to help minimize the financial burden on those who left the institution because of unpaid charges
☐	☐	☐	Created staggered term start dates to assist with quickly enrolling students in credit experiences
☐	☐	☐	Developed opportunities for students to engage in non-credit activities prior to the start of credit activities
☐	☐	☐	Created a re-engagement communication strategy with segmented campaigns (see *the Trellis re-engagement campaign planning document*)
☐	☐	☐	Explored digital readiness in academic offerings including technology suite and availability of online and hybrid courses
☐	☐	☐	Implemented a robust and efficient process to evaluate credit for prior learning

PREVENTION PROCESSES

The campus has:

Yes	In Progress	No	
☐	☐	☐	Audited the SAP process to develop new channels for early alert, stakeholder training, and intervention promotion
☐	☐	☐	Developed a review process for students on a payment plan
☐	☐	☐	Created various interventions to serve students that are on a payment plan
☐	☐	☐	Implemented a process for reporting on students that have not registered for a future term and not applied for graduation
☐	☐	☐	Created outreach protocols to engage those students that have not registered for a future term and not applied for graduation
☐	☐	☐	Implemented a referral channel for faculty and staff to identify students at risk of dropping out
☐	☐	☐	Provided training for faculty and staff on how to engage with students that are discussing leaving the institution
☐	☐	☐	Created specific on-campus programming efforts targeted at students that have re-enrolled including orientation and first semester check-ins
☐	☐	☐	Developed cohort opportunities for students to connect with other students that are re-enrolling at the institution

Notes

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modern learner.

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