today's disengaged learner is tomorrow's adult learner

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Overview

A shifting economy, uncertainty during the pandemic and troubles within the higher education landscape are causing more traditional age students to disengage, sit-out, take a gap year, seek alternative forms of education, or go straight to the workforce. This joint study by StraighterLine and UPCEA examines a portion of the student population that disengaged with their institution after previous enrollment. The research focuses on what may have caused students to disengage and what might get them to reenroll. Participants were asked about their level of engagement with their institution, satisfaction with engagement, and likelihood of reengaging and reenrolling.

Understanding the situations and motivations that caused learners to disengage with their institutions is an important way for institutions to be able to be proactive about their engagement with their current students as well as after they leave the institution. As technology dominates the future of the workforce, more and more students are looking at higher education with less value than before. This potential trend can be reversed with better planning, systems, and programs to reengage the learner of the future.

Methodology

UPCEA and StraighterLine partnered to identify the reasons why individuals are no longer enrolled in a college or university. The results of this study focus on why new learners across different demographics and generations have disengaged with their institutions and how institutions can reengage with them. The survey targeted individuals between the ages of 20 and 34 who had college credits but are no longer enrolled in a college or university. In total, 3,236 individuals participated in the survey of which 1,021 met all study qualifications. The survey took place between April 30th and May 12th, 2021.

Executive Summary

To best represent and understand the generational and demographic differences of respondents, six personas were created and tracked to present six segments. These personas were utilized to demonstrate how generational and gender markers influence the behaviors, motivations, and preferences of disengaged learners. When considering why certain learners may have first chosen to enroll in their program, 62% of respondents said it was a personal goal, while 44% cited career advancement. Older groups were more likely to say they were motivated by personal goals than those younger. Those more recently disengaged were more likely to cite career advancement as a goal.

What Causes Learners to Disengage with Higher Education?

In order for higher education institutions to curb student disengagement early on, it is important to determine the reasons for their unenrolling. Thirty-two percent of respondents said they ultimately left their institution because of personal/family issues, while 24% said money, and 11% said work/pursue a career path. The youngest disengaged learners were most likely to say they left because they were disinterested or dissatisfied. They were also more likely to cite the pandemic. Those newly disengaged were less likely to cite money (18%) as the reason, compared to those intermediately disengaged (22%) or long-term disengaged (29%).

Respondents less satisfied with their institution were more likely to give multiple reasons for leaving, citing financial issues, not being a good fit with the institution, or a change in program delivery. Those who were more satisfied were more likely to cite family commitments as why they had to leave.

Engagement during a learner's time at school is important for long-term retention of a student. Respondents indicated that they were extremely (14%) or very engaged (27%) with the institution during their time as a student, while another 41% were somewhat engaged. As time away from the institution increased, respondents were more likely to say their institution was not very or not at all engaged with them during their time as a student and satisfaction also decreased. In total, 48% of newly disengaged learners were satisfied with their institution, compared to 39% of intermediately disengaged learners, and 28% of long-term disengaged learners.

How Does Institutions' Engagement with Learners Apply?

Respondents who said their institution was more engaged with them when they were a student were more likely to say they have reengaged with the institution. As engagement of the institution decreased, the percentage of respondents who were not interested in reengaging with their institution increased. Respondents newly disengaged (14%) were more likely to have reengaged with their institution than those who have been intermediately (10%) or long-term disengaged (9%). Respondents who were more satisfied with their institution were more likely to reengage with the institution.

Why Have Students Not Reengaged with Their Institution?

Among respondents who have not reengaged, 24% said it is because they are not interested/have no direct reason to, while 20% cited time/commitment issues, and 19% personal/family issues. Those who were more satisfied with their institution were more likely to cite time/commitment issues or personal/family issues, compared to those less satisfied.

What Could Institutions do to Reengage These Learners?
In order to prepare to reengage learners who have disengaged from their institution, administration needs to realize what learners hoped to see previously and what they can do to implement these initiatives moving forward. When asked what their institution could have done to keep them enrolled, 46% of respondents said there was nothing their institution could have done, while 20% said there was. Those who said their institution was less engaged or were less satisfied were more likely to say there was something the institution could have done to have kept them enrolled. For those who have reengaged, the most common method was to reapply or reenroll (16%), followed by engaging electronically (15%) or by phone (9%).

Respondents who indicated there was something their institution could have done to keep them enrolled were asked about the effectiveness of potential strategies and tactics. Providing a certificate for credits earned was seen as the most effective tactic for student retention (43% extremely effective), followed by providing a subsection of courses at a lower price (40% extremely effective), and providing workshops that address the struggles of being a student (32% extremely effective).

How Likely Would Potential Learners Reenroll and Continue Their Education?
Forty-three percent of respondents were extremely likely (21%) or very likely (22%) to continue their education. Those more recently disengaged were more likely to say they would continue. Those enrolled in a healthcare program had the highest percentage who were extremely or very likely to continue their education.

About a quarter of respondents were extremely likely (12%) or very likely (14%) to reenroll at their college or university. As time away from the institution increased, the percentage of respondents extremely or very likely to reenroll decreased.

Fourteen percent said their future career goal was to start/own a business, while 10% said to pursue a degree/certificate and further their education, and 10% said career advancement.

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Disengaged Learner Segments

To best represent and understand the generational and demographic differences of respondents, six personas were created and tracked to present six segments. These personas were utilized to demonstrate how generational and gender markers influence the behaviors, motivations, and preferences of disengaged learners.

Figure 1: Disengaged Learner Personas

	Valentina (21) *Gen Z Female*	Max (22) *Gen Z Male*	Elise (24) *Young Millennial Female*	Chen (25) *Young Millennial Male*	Carla (28) *Mid-Millennial Female*	Chris (31) *Mid-Millennial Male*
Job-Title	Customer-Service Rep	Mechanics Contractor	Team Manager	Executive Assistant	Public Service Rep	Technician
College-Level	Dropped Sophomore Yr.	Dropped Freshman Yr.	Dropped Junior Yr.	Dropped Sophomore Yr.	Dropped Senior Yr.	Dropped Junior Yr.
Field of Study	Arts	Healthcare	Business	Comp. Sci.	Business	Education
Last Time Enrolled	2019	2020	2017	2015	2013	2007
Engagement Level	Newly Disengaged	Newly Disengaged	Intermediately Disengaged	Intermediately Disengaged	Long-Term Disengaged.	Long-Term Disengaged
Future Career Goals	Valentina wants to pursue a higher arts degree and eventually get her MFA	Max wants to start his own contractor company	Elise wants to advance her career in the sales department	Chen wants to advance his degree in comp sci. and eventually get his MBA	Carla wants to get a public service certificate to become a team lead	Chris wants to take over his technician business and earn a higher salary

Respondents were divided into three generational segments: Generation Z age range 20-22 (29%), Young Millennial age range 23-26 (19%), and Mid-Millennial age range 27-34 (36%). The gender breakdown was composed of 63% female, 33% male, and 4% gender-variant, non-conforming, non-binary, or prefer not to say.

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Detailed Findings

What Caused These Learners to Disengage from Higher Education?

Key Insight: *Multiple factors, not just one, were cited as reasons respondents left their institution.*

Figure 2: Reason for Leaving Institution

Which of the following were reasons for leaving your institution? Please select all that apply. (n=992)
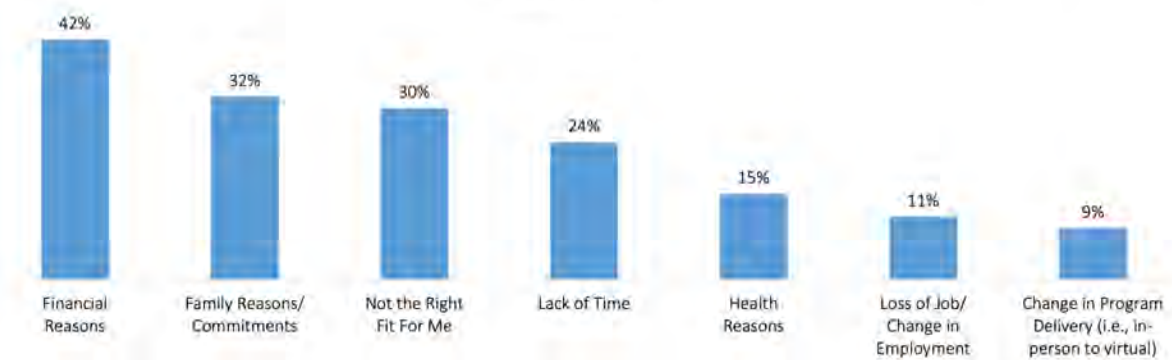
The three most cited reasons respondents left their institution were financial (42%), family reasons/commitments (32%), and not the right fit (30%).

Key Insight: *Overall, the youngest generation's primary reason was Not the Right Fit signaling their priorities aren't tied to financial independence like the older demographics.*

Figure 3: Reason for Leaving Institution - By Age

Which of the following were reasons for leaving your institution? Please select all that apply.

	Financial Reasons	Family Reasons/ Commitments	Not the Right Fit For Me	Lack of Time	Health Reasons	Loss of Job/ Change in Employment	Change in Program Delivery (i.e., in-person to virtual)
18 to 19 (n=31)	19%	39%	29%	36%	26%	7%	29%
20 to 22 (n=139)	35%	24%	43%	27%	13%	10%	11%
23 to 26 (n=210)	44%	31%	26%	19%	18%	10%	4%
27 to 29 (n=210)	43%	33%	33%	24%	16%	12%	8%
30 to 34 (n=409)	44%	35%	27%	24%	14%	10%	10%

Traditional-age college students (18 to 22) were much less likely to cite finances as a reason for leaving the institution. However, with older generations, financial reasons were most common (42%) followed by family reasons/commitments (32%) and not the right fit (30%).

Figure 4: Reasons for Leaving Institution - By Persona

The youngest generation's primary reason was "**Not the Right Fit**" signaling their priorities aren't tied to **financial independence** like the older demographics.

Legend:
- Financial Reasons
- Not the Right Fit
- Family Reasons/Commitments
- Lack of Time

42%*
32%**
30%***
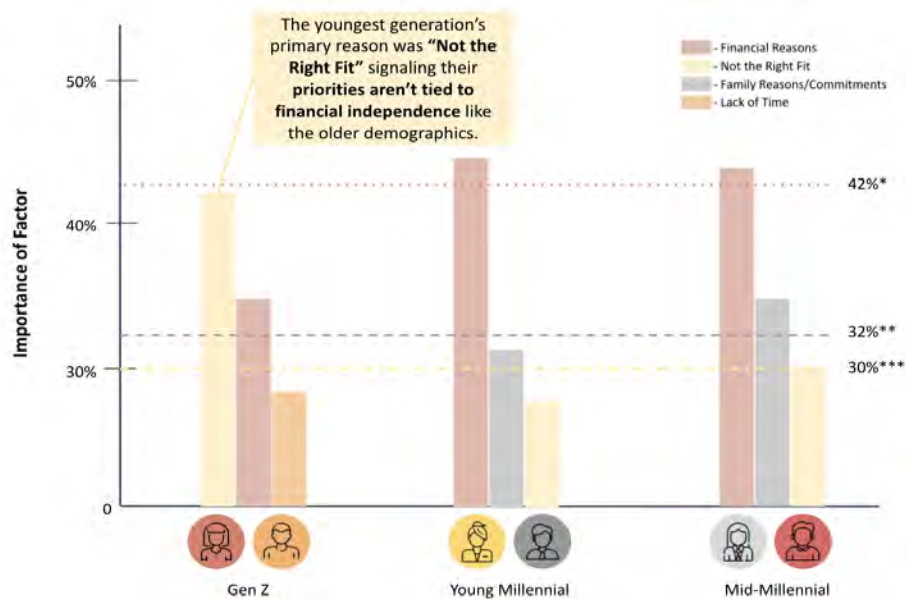
Key Insight: *Those newly disengaged were less likely to cite money (18%) as the reason they left their institution, compared to intermediately disengaged (22%) and long-term disengaged (29%) respondents. Additionally, newly disengaged respondents were more likely to say they were disinterested with their institution compared to intermediately disengaged (11%) and long-term disengaged (7%) respondents.*

Figure 5: Reason for Leaving Institution - By Date of Last Enrollment

Last Enrolled In:

Newly Disengaged (21.7%)	Intermediately Disengaged (31.2%)	Long - Term Disengaged (47.1%)
2019 - 2021	2015 - 2018	Before 2015
Financial Reasons 36%	Financial Reasons 40%	Financial Reasons 41%
Not the Right Fit 34%	Family/Commitments 32%	Family/Commitments 32%
Family/Commitments 32%	Not the Right Fit 28%	Not the Right Fit 32%
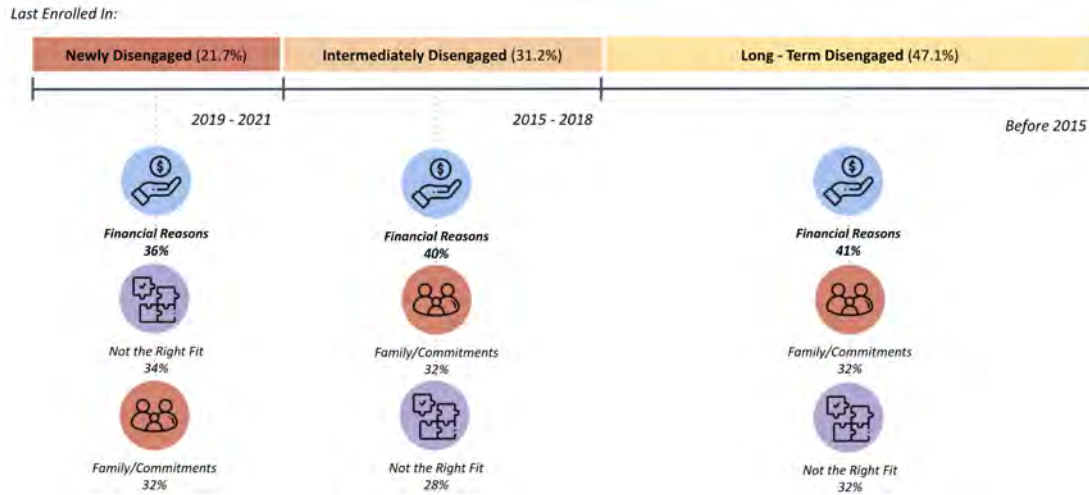
Key Insight: *Respondents less satisfied were more likely to cite financial reasons, not being a good fit with the institution, or a change in program delivery as reasons for leaving their institution. They were also more likely to give multiple reasons for leaving. Those more satisfied were more likely to cite family reasons or commitments as why they had to leave.*

Figure 6: Reason for Leaving Institution - By Satisfaction

Extremely Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Not Very Satisfied	Not at all Satisfied
15.3%	26.8%	39.1%	12.0%	6.7%
Family/Commitments 42%	Financial Reasons 41%	Financial Reasons 41%	Not the Right Fit 32%	Not the Right Fit 32%
Financial Reasons 35%	Family/Commitments 35%	Not the Right Fit 32%	Financial Reasons 35%	Financial Reasons 35%
Lack of Time 23%	Lack of Time 29%	Family/Commitments 32%	Lack of Time 23% Change in Program Delivery 23%	Change of Program Delivery 28%

Key Insight: *The four most commonly cited reasons for leaving an institution by engagement level were personal/family issues, time/commitment issues, financial problems, and no interest.*

Figure 7: Reasons for Leaving Institution - By Engagement-Level

Extremely Engaged	Very Engaged	Somewhat Engaged	Not Very Engaged	Not at all Engaged
14.6%	27.3%	40.4%	13.1%	4.5%
Personal/Family Issues 27%	Personal/Family Issues 23%	No Interest 24%	No Interest 34%	No Interest 45%
Time/Commitment Issues 19%	Time/Commitment Issues 23%	Time/Commitment Issues 21%	Personal/Family Issues 17%	Issues w/Institution 16%
Financial Problems 15%	Financial Problems 20%	Personal/Family Issues 16%	Time/Commitment Issues 15% Financial Problems 15% Negative Attitudes/Not Ready 15%	Financial Problems 12% Negative Attitudes/Not Ready 12%

13

Key Insight: *Respondents listed various reasons for their leaving their institution, signaling the importance of institutions' differentiating what reasons are actionable to reengage with their learners and what are out of their control.*

Figure 8: Reason for Ultimately Leaving Institution

Why did you ultimately leave your institution? (n=992)
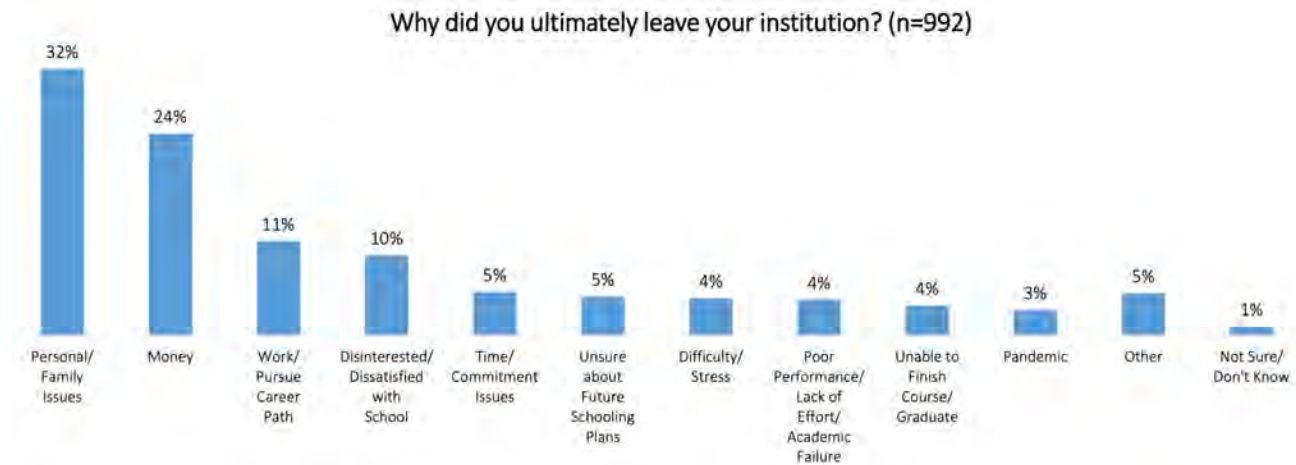
Thirty-two percent of respondents ultimately left their institution due to personal/family issues, while 24% cited money, 11% said work/pursue a career path, and 10% being disinterested/dissatisfied with school.

Key Insight: *The youngest disengaged learners (18 to 19) were most likely to say they left their institution because they were disinterested or dissatisfied. Younger populations were also more likely to cite the pandemic.*

Figure 9: Reason for Ultimately Leaving Institution - By Age

Why did you ultimately leave your institution?

18 to 19 (n=31)   20 to 22 (n=139)   23 to 26 (n=210)   27 to 29 (n=210)   30 to 34 (n=409)
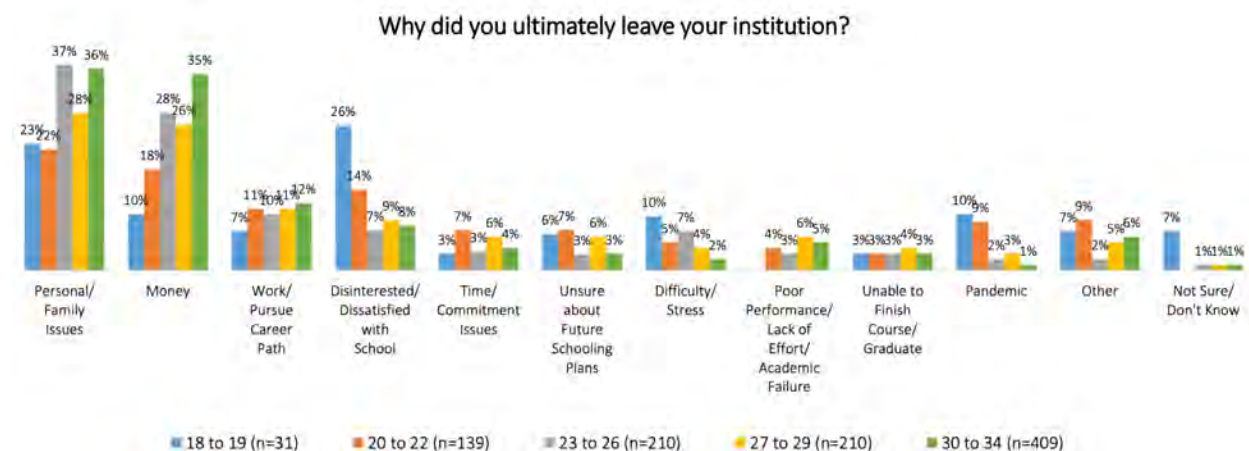
Key Insight: *As engagement of the institution decreased, the percentage of respondents who were not interested in reengaging with their institution increased.*

Figure 10: Reasons for Not Reengaging with Institution

Why have you not reengaged with the institution? (n=888)
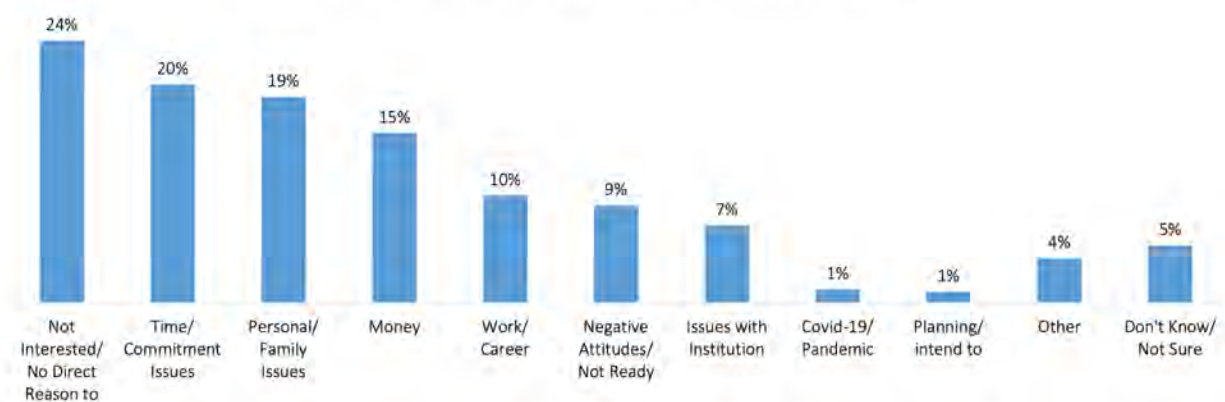
Among respondents who have not reengaged with their institution, 24% said they have not because they are not interested/have no direct reason to, while 20% said time/commitment issues, and 19% personal/family issues.

Key Insight: *Older populations were more likely to cite personal or family issues as reasons for not reengaging with an institution, while younger populations were more likely to say they weren't interested or had time/commitment issues.*

Across generations, the most commonly cited reasons were Not Interested/No Direct Reason to, Time/Commitment Issues, and among Mid-Millennials Personal/Family Issues as well.

Figure 11: Reasons for Not Reengaging with Institution - By Age

Why have you not reengaged with the institution?
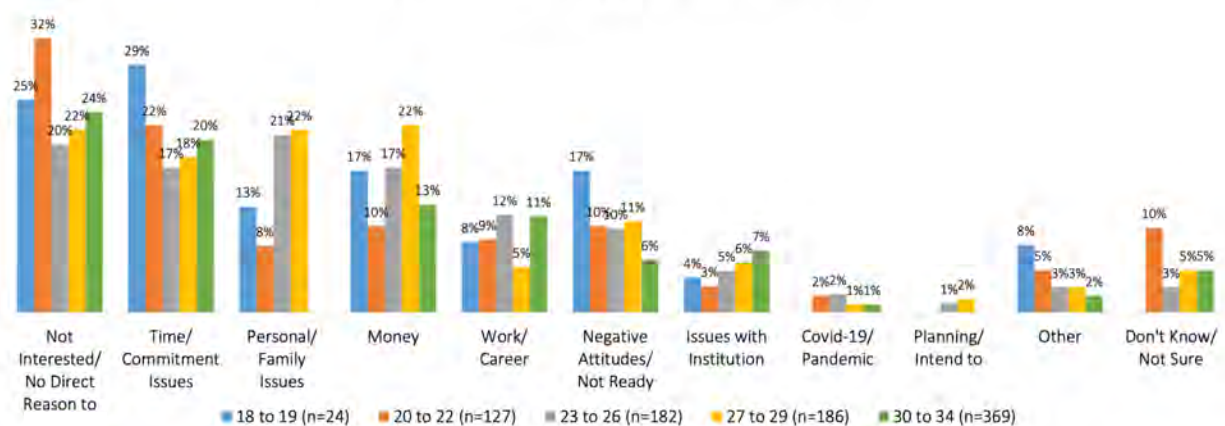
Key Insight: *Across all personas, the most commonly cited reason for not reengaging with their institutions was Not Interested/No Direct Reasons To. For Young Millennials, however, the primary reason was Personal Family Issues which may indicate early family obligations being more common than other generations.*

Figure 12: Reasons for Not Reengaging with Institution - By Persona
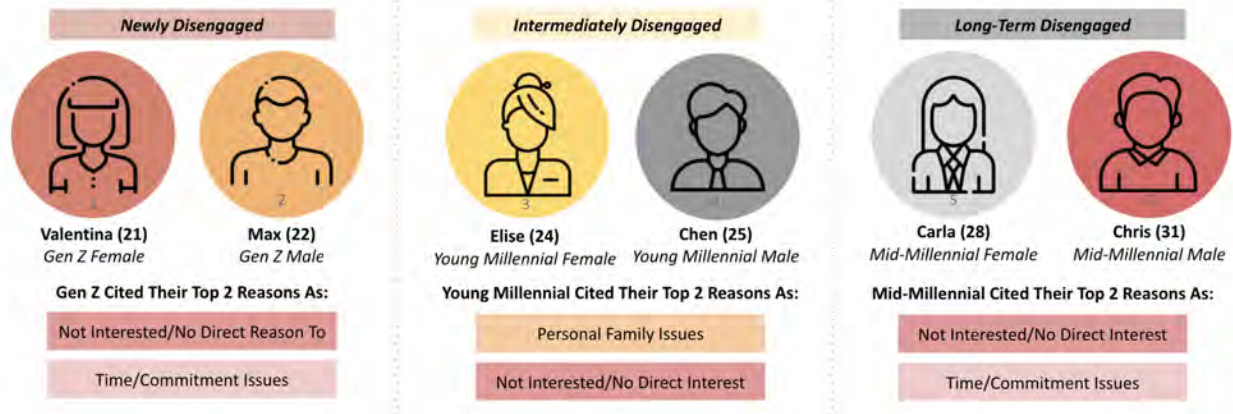
Newly Disengaged		*Intermediately Disengaged*		*Long-Term Disengaged*	
Valentina (21) *Gen Z Female*	Max (22) *Gen Z Male*	Elise (24) *Young Millennial Female*	Chen (25) *Young Millennial Male*	Carla (28) *Mid-Millennial Female*	Chris (31) *Mid-Millennial Male*
Gen Z Cited Their Top 2 Reasons As:		**Young Millennial Cited Their Top 2 Reasons As:**		**Mid-Millennial Cited Their Top 2 Reasons As:**	
Not Interested/No Direct Reason To		Personal Family Issues		Not Interested/No Direct Interest	
Time/Commitment Issues		Not Interested/No Direct Interest		Time/Commitment Issues	

Key Insight: *Respondents who were more satisfied with their institution were more likely to cite time/commitment issues or personal/family issues as reasons for not reengaging. Those who were less satisfied were more likely to cite issues with their institution, negative attitudes or being unprepared, and lacking interest.*

Figure 13: Reasons for Not Reengaging with Institution - By Satisfaction

Why have you not reengaged with the institution?

Legend: Extremely Satisfied (n=121), Very Satisfied (n=220), Somewhat Satisfied (n=367), Not Very Satisfied (n=117), Not at all Satisfied (n=63)
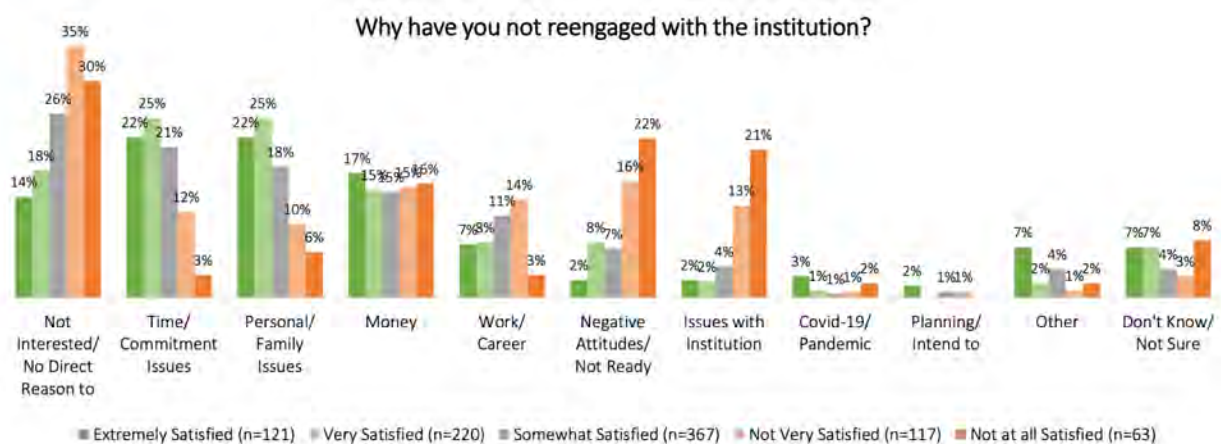
Key Insight: *As the level of engagement with the institution decreased, the percentage of respondents who were not interested in reengaging increased.*

Figure 14: Reasons for Not Reengaging with Institution - By Engagement Level

Respondents who said their institution was more engaged with them when they were a student were more likely to say they have reengaged with the institution since they left. Respondents who were newly disengaged (14%) were more likely to say they have reengaged than those who have been intermediately disengaged (10%) or long-term disengaged (9%). Respondents who were more satisfied with their institution were more likely to reengage with the institution.

Key Insight: *Overall, respondents were extremely (15%) or very satisfied (26%) with the institution in which they were previously enrolled. Young Millennial learners were the most satisfied (47%) while Mid-Millennial learners were the least satisfied (22%). Satisfaction with the institution tended to decrease with age.*

Figure 15: Satisfaction with the Institution - By Persona
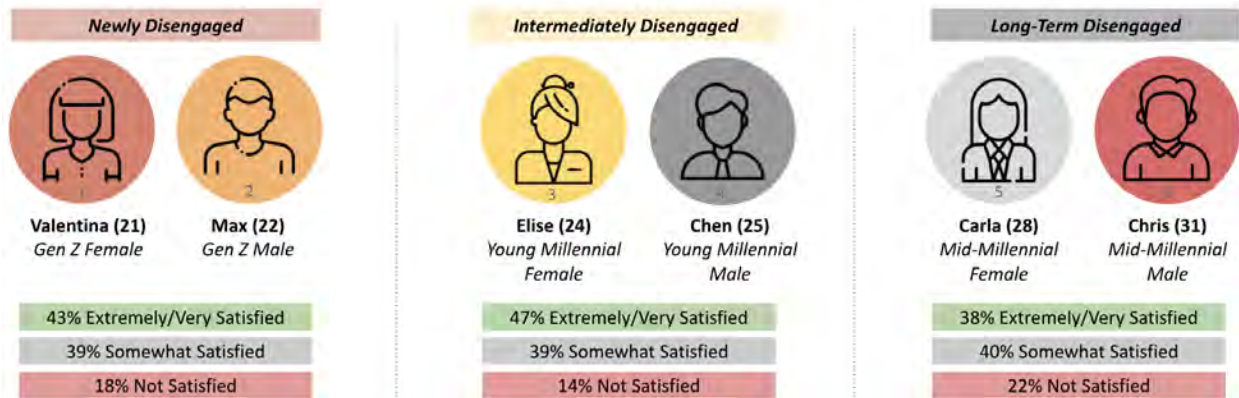
How Did Institutions Fail to Engage with These Learners?

Key Insight: *The majority of students did not feel strongly engaged with their institution during their time in higher education. Throughout the rest of the survey, those who indicated that they felt extremely or very engaged with their institution had greater positive sentiment towards learning and engagement with their institution. Somewhat engaged students may represent opportunities for reengagement.*

Figure 16: Level of Engagement with Institution
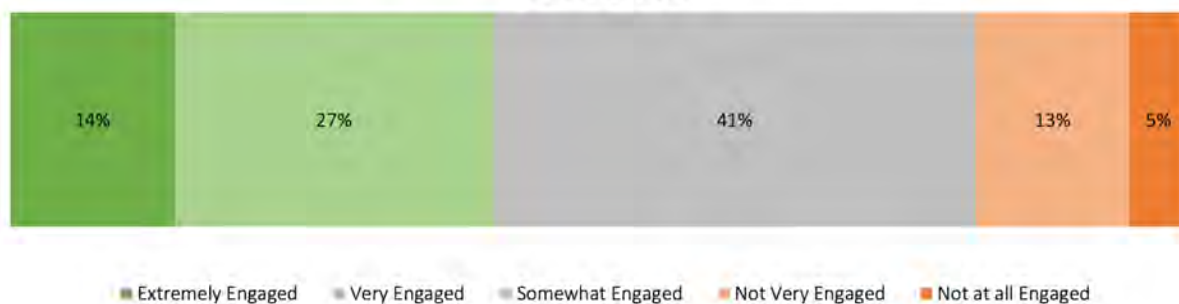
Forty-one percent of respondents were extremely (14%) or very engaged (27%) with the institution during their time as a student, while another 41% were somewhat engaged.

Key Insight: *Those 18 to 19-years-old were least likely to say that the institution was extremely engaged with them while 23 to 26-year-olds were most likely.*

Figure 17: Level of Engagement with Institution - By Age

Please rate the level of engagement the institution had with you during your time as a student.

	Extremely Engaged	Very Engaged	Somewhat Engaged	Not Very Engaged	Not at all Engaged
18 to 19 (n=31)	7%	29%	45%	13%	7%
20 to 22 (n=139)	14%	30%	40%	12%	5%
23 to 26 (n=210)	17%	29%	39%	13%	3%
27 to 29 (n=209)	13%	25%	45%	12%	4%
30 to 34 (n=403)	14%	25%	40%	15%	7%
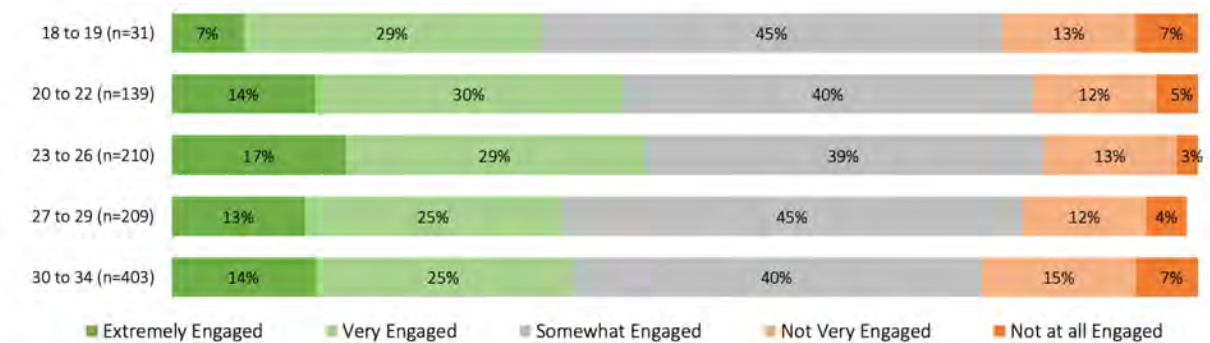
Figure 18: Level of Engagement with Institution - By Persona
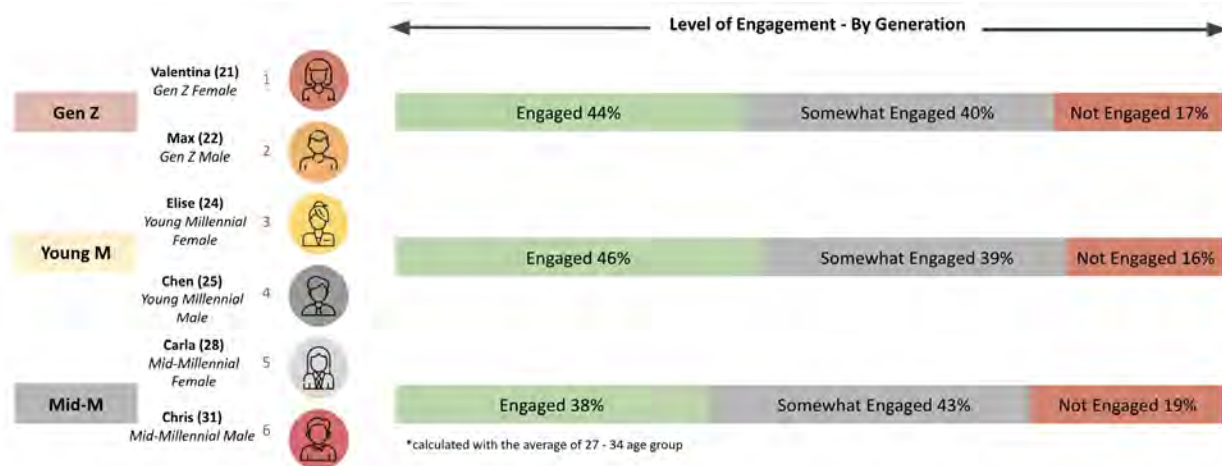
Level of Engagement - By Generation

Gen Z
- Valentina (21) Gen Z Female
- Max (22) Gen Z Male

Engaged 44% | Somewhat Engaged 40% | Not Engaged 17%

Young M
- Elise (24) Young Millennial Female
- Chen (25) Young Millennial Male

Engaged 46% | Somewhat Engaged 39% | Not Engaged 16%

Mid-M
- Carla (28) Mid-Millennial Female
- Chris (31) Mid-Millennial Male

Engaged 38% | Somewhat Engaged 43% | Not Engaged 19%

*calculated with the average of 27 - 34 age group

Key Insight: *As time away from the institution increased, respondents were more likely to say their institution was not very or not at all engaged with them during their time as a student.*

Figure 19: Level of Engagement with Institution - By Date of Last Enrollment

Please rate the level of engagement the institution had with you during your time as a student.

	Extremely Engaged	Very Engaged	Somewhat Engaged	Not Very Engaged	Not at all Engaged
Newly Disengaged (2019 - 2021, n=217)	14%	30%	41%	10%	5%
Intermediately Disengaged (2015 to 2018, n=303)	17%	29%	37%	13%	3%
Long-Term Disengaged (Before 2015, n=472)	13%	23%	43%	15%	7%
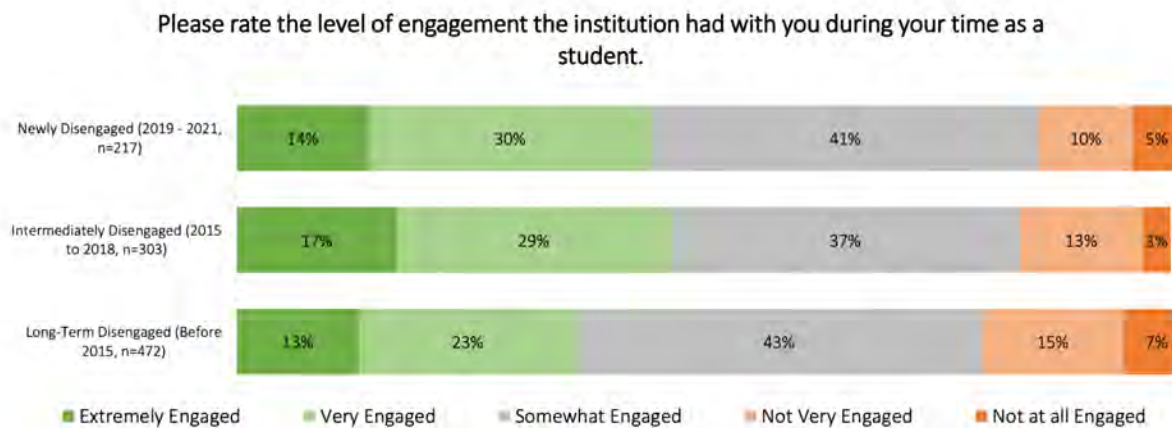
Key Insight: *Individuals who were more satisfied with their institution were more likely to say the institution had a greater level of engagement with them during their time as a student.*

Figure 20: Level of Engagement with Institution - By Satisfaction

By Satisfaction Level | Level of Engagement - By Satisfaction

| Extremely Satisfied | Engaged 70% | Somewhat 18% | Not Engaged 2% |
| 15.3% |
| Very Satisfied | Engaged 59% | Somewhat 39% | Not Engaged 6% |
| 26.8% |
| Somewhat Satisfied | Engaged 29% | Somewhat 53% | Not Engaged 18% |
| 39.1% |
| Not Very Satisfied | Engaged 13% | Somewhat 46% | Not Engaged 42% |
| 12.0% |
| Not at all Satisfied | Engaged 13% | Somewhat 27% | Not Engaged 61% |
| 6.7% |

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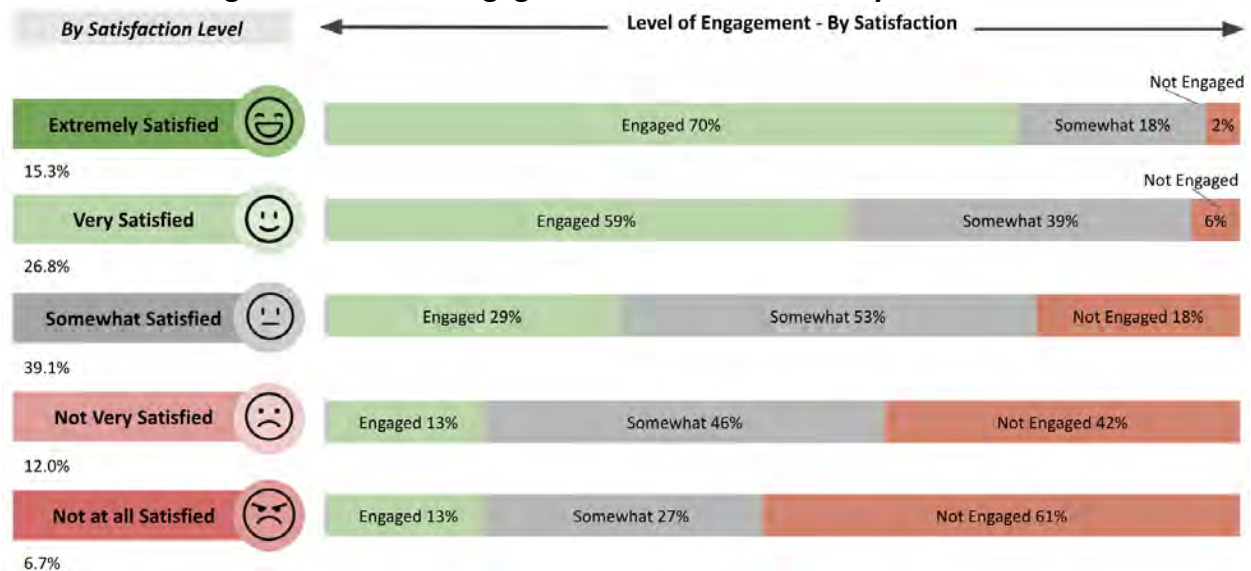
Key Insight: *Engineering students were most likely to say their institution was at least somewhat engaged, and the results show varied prioritization of students and their engagement by the institution.*

Figure 21: Level of Engagement with Institution - By Subject Studied

Most Engaged .... Least Engaged

Engineering	Healthcare	Business	Social Sciences	Education	Sciences	Law	Arts	Comp Sci & Math	Communications
55%	52%	42%	41%	41%	38%	37%	37%	32%	31%
41%	39%	39%	33%	45%	37%	45%	47%	44%	54%
5%	9%	18%	27%	15%	25%	19%	17%	23%	16%

- Very Likely*
- Somewhat
- Not Likely**
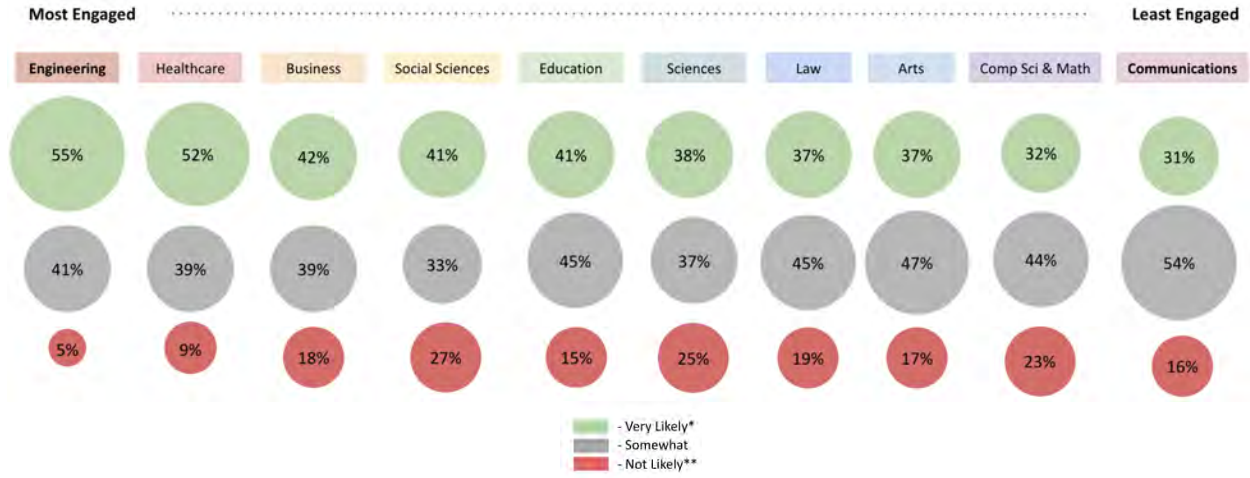
What Could Institutions Do to Reengage These Learners?

Key Insight: *When asked what their main motivation for initially enrolling in their program was, most respondents said their main motivation was to start a career or a business.*

Figure 22: Main Motivation for Enrollment
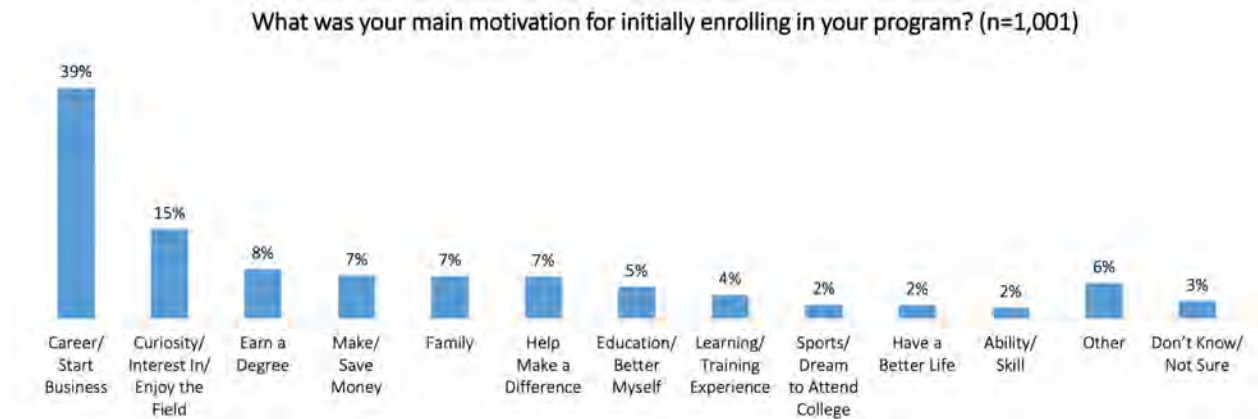
What was your main motivation for initially enrolling in your program? (n=1,001)

Most respondents said their main motivation for initially enrolling in their program was career advancement or business, while 15% said curiosity/interest in/enjoy the field. Responses varied across different categories.

Key Insight: *Overall, motivation for enrollment is relatively consistent regardless of the date of last enrollment. Newly disengaged respondents were more likely to say their initial motivation for enrollment was career advancement or to start a business, while those further removed from enrollment were more likely to cite curiosity or interest in the field.*

Figure 23: Main Motivation for Enrollment - By Date of Last Enrollment

What was your main motivation for initially enrolling in your program?

■ Newly Disengaged (2019 - 2021, n=219)   ■ Intermediately Disengaged (2015 to 2018, n=304)   ■ Long-Term Disengaged (Before 2015, n=478)
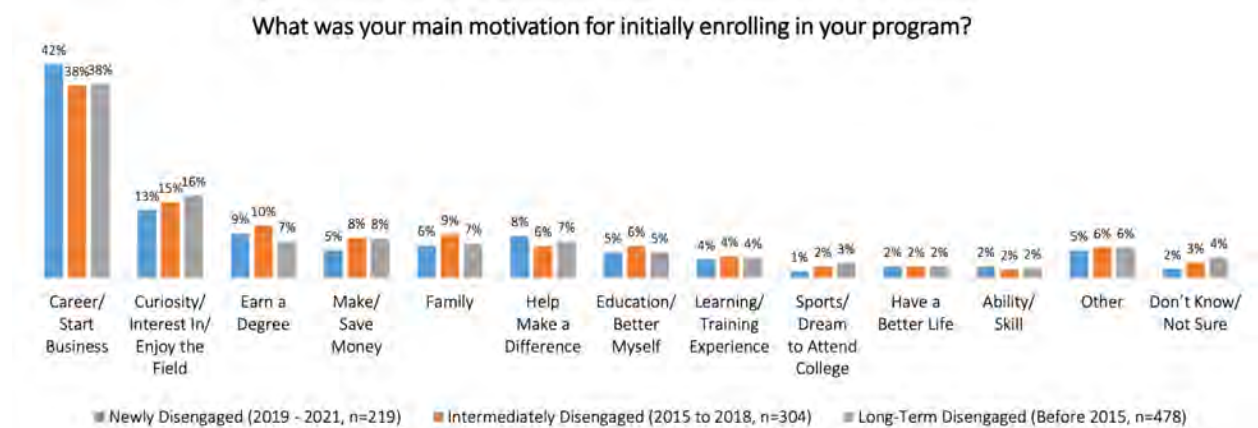
Key Insight: *Motivating factors for enrollment were similar to previous data where career/starting a business greatly dominated as the main motivation. Curiosity/interest in/enjoying the field followed.*

Figure 24: Motivating Factors for Enrollment

Which of the following were motivating factors or goals when selecting to enroll in a program? Please select all that apply? (n=1,003)

Personal Goal	Career Advancement	Love of Learning	Improve Salary	Strengthen Job Security	Career Change	Reskill	Reenter the Workforce	Other
62%	44%	42%	40%	29%	24%	10%	5%	5%
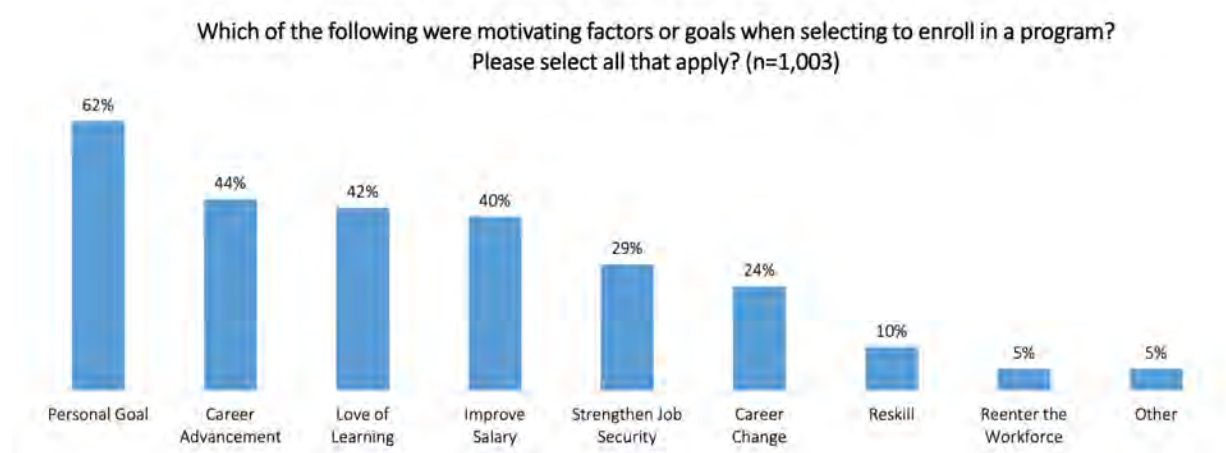
Sixty-two percent of respondents said it was a personal goal to enroll in a program, while 44% said their motivating factor was career advancement, and 42% said love of learning. Responses were coded for multiple answers.

Key Insight: *Those more recently disengaged with their institution were more likely to cite career advancement as a goal. Intermediately disengaged individuals were most likely to cite five of the nine categories.*

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Figure 25: Motivating Factors for Enrollment - By Date of Last Enrollment

Which of the following were motivating factors or goals when selecting to enroll in a program? Please select all that apply?

	Personal Goal	Career Advancement	Love of Learning	Improve Salary	Strengthen Job Security	Career Change	Reskill	Reenter the Workforce	Other
Newly Disengaged (2019 - 2021, n=220)	61%	47%	42%	40%	28%	24%	13%	3%	5%
Intermediately Disengaged (2015 to 2018, n=305)	63%	45%	49%	43%	30%	25%	13%	5%	5%
Long-Term Disengaged (Before 2015, n=478)	61%	42%	38%	37%	28%	23%	8%	5%	4%

19

Key Insight: *Older populations were more likely to say they were motivated by personal goals than those younger. Career advancement was most often cited by 18- to 19-year-olds.*

Figure 26: Motivating Factors for Enrollment - By Age

Which of the following were motivating factors or goals when selecting to enroll in a program? Please select all that apply?

Legend: ■ 18 to 19 (n=31) ■ 20 to 22 (n=141) ■ 23 to 26 (n=212) ■ 27 to 29 (n=210) ■ 30 to 34 (n=409)
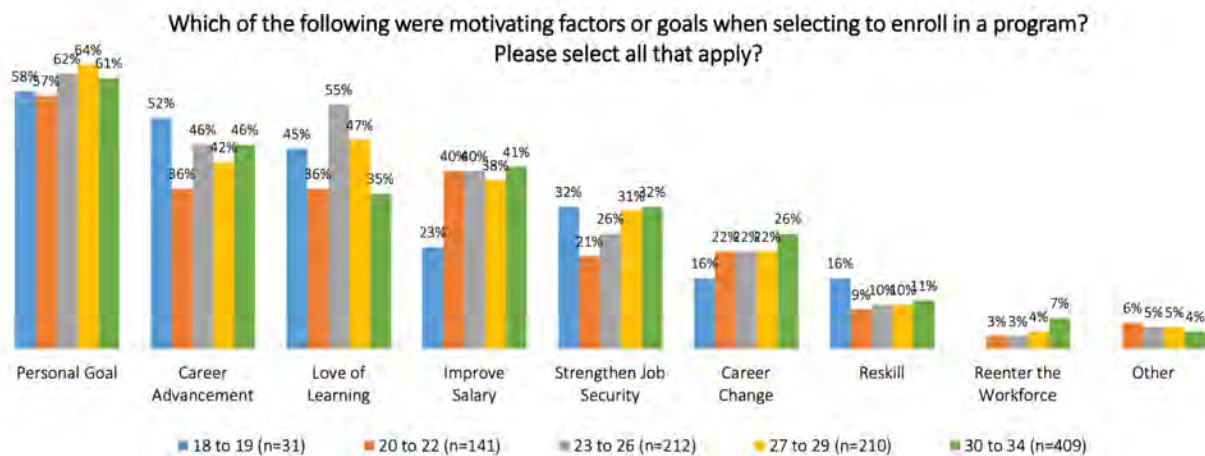
Overall, the top four motivations for learners when selecting a program were personal goal, career advancement, love of learning, and improving salary.

Key Insight: *The most important motivating factor for enrollment across all personas was that higher education was a personal goal of theirs. Love of learning and career advancement were the second and third-most cited motivating factors with Gen Z also indicating that improving their salary was significant as well.*

Figure 27: Motivating Factors for Enrollment - By Persona

Valentina (21) — *Gen Z Female*
Max (22) — *Gen Z Male*
Elise (24) — *Young Millennial Female*
Chen (25) — *Young Millennial Male*
Carla (28) — *Mid-Millennial Female*
Chris (31) — *Mid-Millennial Male*

Motivations for Enrollment:

Personal Goal (57%)
Improve Salary (40%)
Career Advt. (36%)
Love of Learning (36%)

Personal Goal (62%)
Love of Learning (55%)
Career Advt. (46%)

Personal Goal (63%)
Career Advt. (47%)
Love of Learning (44%)
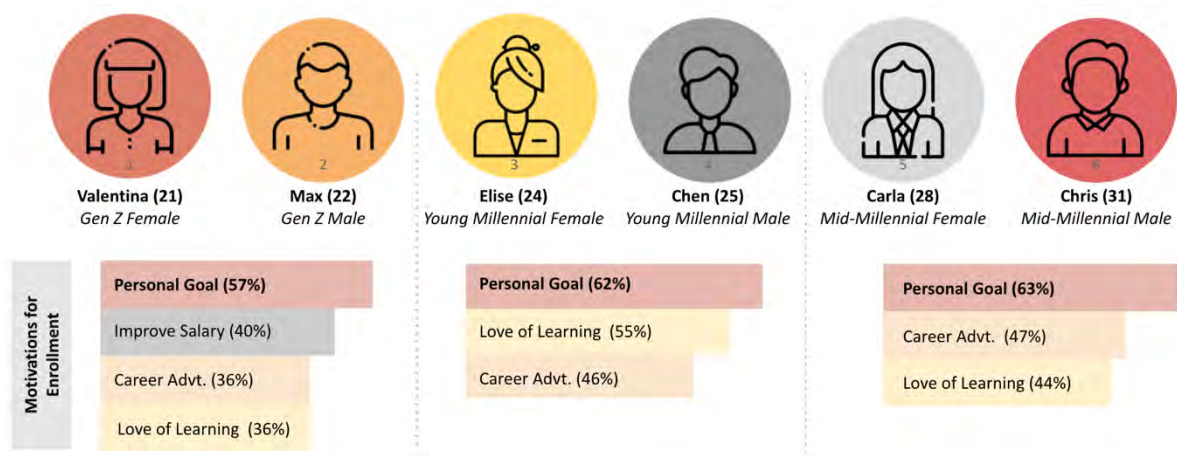
Key Insight: *Forty-six percent of respondents said no, there was nothing the institution could have done to keep them enrolled, while 20% said yes, there was.*

Figure 28: Institution Enrollment of Respondents

Is there anything the institution could have done to have kept you enrolled?
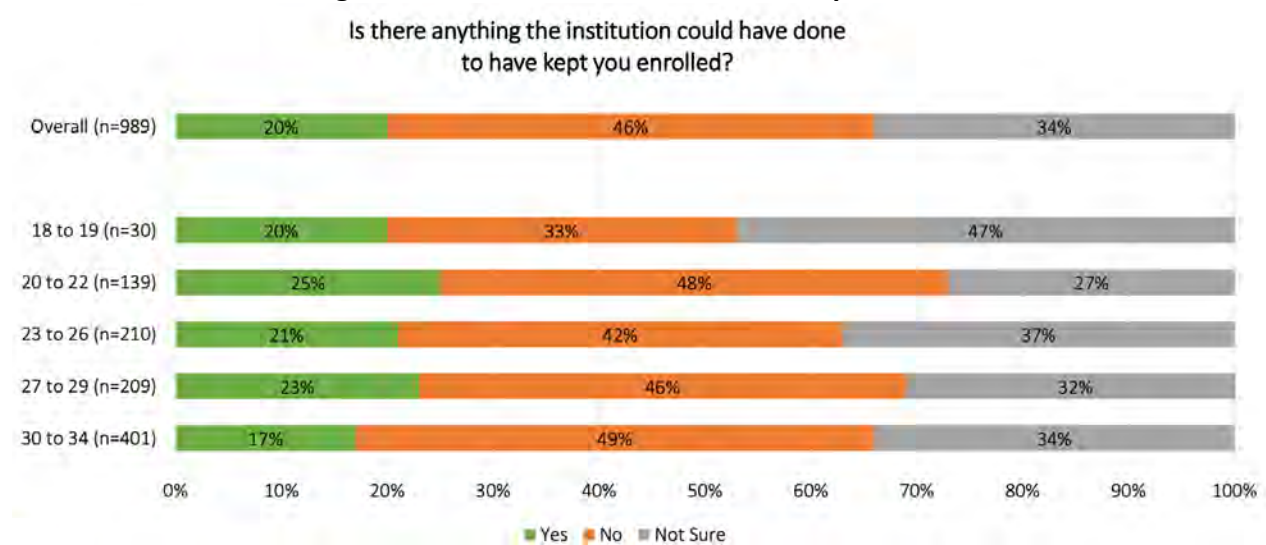
Key Insight: *When asked if there was anything their institution could have done to keep them enrolled, more respondents said no than yes. Younger generations were more likely to say that there was something that could have done than older generations.*

Figure 29: Institution Enrollment of Respondents - By Persona

We posed the question: Is there **anything the institution could have done** to have kept you enrolled?

Persona	Said Yes	Said No
Valentina (21) Gen Z Female	26.5% said Yes	48.0% said No
Max (22) Gen Z Male	22.2% said Yes	48.9% said No
Elise (24) Young Millennial Female	24.8% said Yes	41.3% said No
Chen (25) Young Millennial Male	14.5% said Yes	43.5% said No
Carla (28) Mid-Millennial Female	18.0% said Yes	49.7% said No
Chrisl (31) Mid-Millennial Male	21.9% said Yes	41.0% said No

Key Insight: *Respondents who were intermediately disengaged (last enrolled 2015 to 2018) were most likely to say the institution could have done something to keep them enrolled (25%).*

Figure 30: Institution Enrollment of Respondents - By Date of Last Enrollment

Is there anything the institution could have done
to have kept you enrolled?

	Yes	No	Not Sure
Newly Disengaged (2019 - 2021, n=215)	22%	50%	27%
Intermediately Disengaged (2015 to 2018, n=303)	25%	39%	36%
Long-Term Disengaged (Before 2015, n=471)	16%	49%	35%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

■ Yes ■ No ■ Not Sure
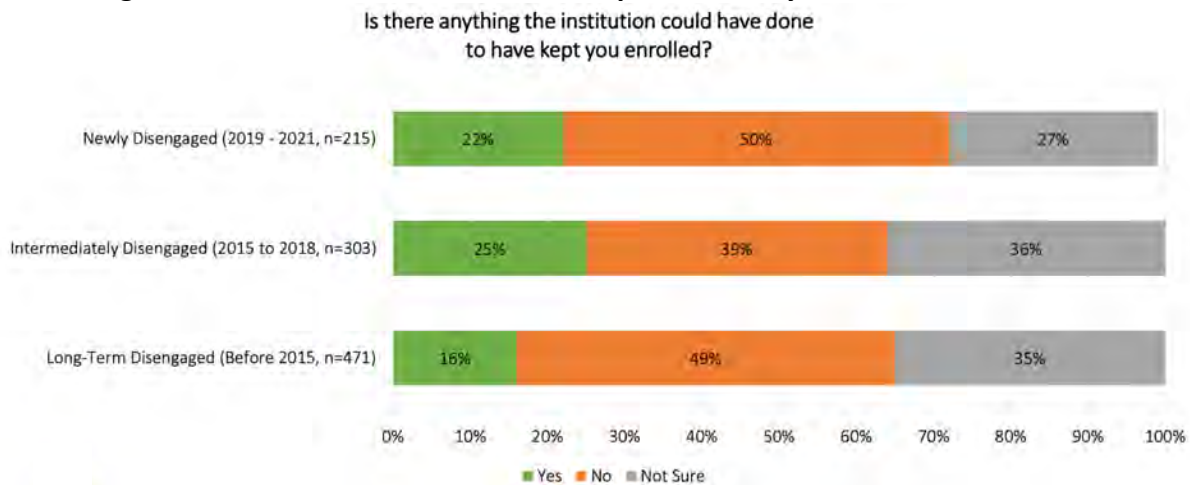
Key Insight: *Those who said their institution was less engaged were more likely to say there was something the institution could have done to have kept them enrolled.*

Figure 31: Institution Enrollment of Respondents - By Level of Engagement

By Engagement Level			
Extremely Engaged 14.6%	18% said Yes	29% said Not Sure	53% said No
Very Engaged 27.3%	16% said Yes	33% said Not Sure	51% said No
Somewhat Engaged 40.4%	20% said Yes	36% said Not Sure	45% said No
Not Very Engaged 13.1%	29% said Yes	34% said No / 37% said Not Sure	
Not at all Engaged 4.5%	24% said Not Sure / 30% said Yes		46% said No

0%   30%   60%

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22

Key Insight: *Those who were not very or not at all satisfied with their institution were more likely to say there was something the institution could have done to have kept them enrolled.*

Figure 32: Institution Enrollment of Respondents - By Satisfaction

Key Insight: *Respondents who had been enrolled in a science (biological and physical) or business program were most likely to say there was something the institution could have done to have kept them enrolled, while those in education were least likely. This may indicate more attention towards the STEM departments than those that lean towards liberal arts.*

Figure 33: Institution Enrollment of Respondents - By Subject

	Sciences	Social Sciences	Arts	Business	Law	Engineering	Healthcare	Education	Comp Sci & Math	Communications
Very Likely*	24%	23%	23%	24%	21%	19%	18%	13%	18%	15%
Somewhat	29%	37%	35%	29%	34%	27%	37%	37%	42%	27%
Not Likely**	48%	40%	42%	48%	45%	54%	45%	45%	40%	58%
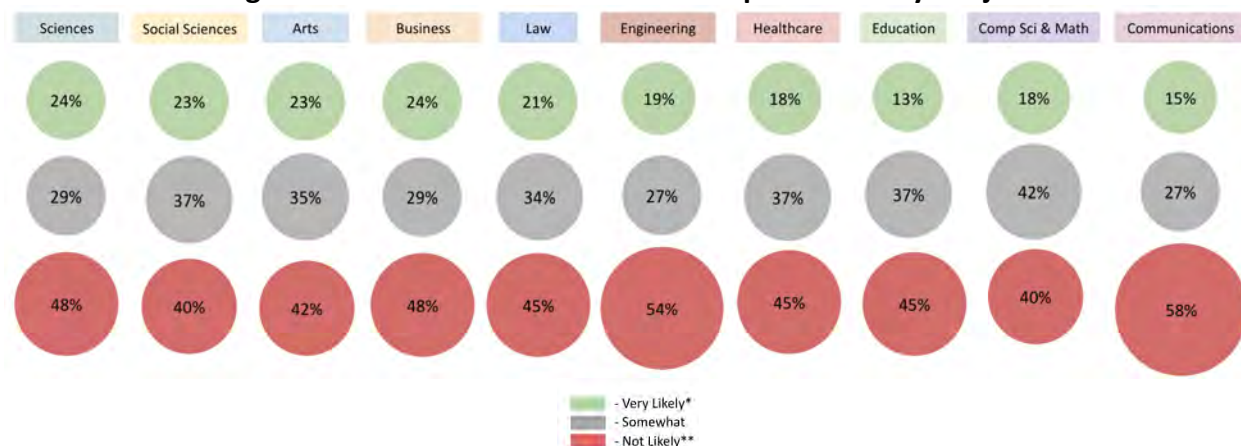
Communication and engineering students were most likely to say there was nothing that their institutions could have done to keep them enrolled.

Key Insight: *Respondents who indicated there was something their institution could have done to keep them enrolled felt providing a certificate for credits earned would be most effective for student retention.*

Figure 34: Effectiveness of Tactics for Student Retention

Please rate how effective the following tactics or strategies would have been to retain you as a student? (n=200)

Tactic	Extremely Effective	Very Effective	Somewhat Effective	Not Very Effective	Not at all Effective
Provide a Certificate for Credits Earned	43%	26%	18%	8%	7%
Provide You With a Subsection of Courses That You Could Take at a Lower Price	40%	21%	22%	10%	8%
Provide Workshops to Address Your Struggles as a Student.	32%	26%	23%	12%	8%
Providing Counseling to Reengage You	27%	28%	22%	13%	10%
Provide a Concierge Service That Would Help You	24%	24%	25%	17%	11%

■ Extremely Effective ■ Very Effective ■ Somewhat Effective ■ Not Very Effective ■ Not at all Effective

Providing a certificate for credits earned was seen as most effective for student retention (43% extremely effective), followed by providing a subsection of courses at a lower price (40% extremely effective), and providing workshops addressing the struggles of being a student (32% extremely effective).

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Key Insight: *By personas, generation Z males and young-millennial females were the most likely to find all strategies and tactics effective while mid-millennial females were least likely to find any strategy effective.*

Figure 35: Effectiveness of Tactics for Student Retention - By Persona

How Effective Would These Strategies or Tactics Be to Retain You As A Student?	Subsection of Courses @ Lower Price	Provide Counseling to Re-Engage You	Workshop to Address Struggles	Provide A Concierge Service to Help You	Provide A Certificate for Credits Earned
1 Valentina (21) Gen Z Female	✓ 65.4%	▬ 46.2%	✓ 57.7%	▬ 30.8%	▬ 65.4%
2 Max (22) Gen Z Male	✓ 70.0%	✓ 80.0%	✓ 70.0%	✓ 70.0%	✓ 70.0%
3 Elise (24) Young Millennial Female	✓ 76.7%	✓ 66.7%	✓ 66.7%	✓ 46.7%	✓ 86.7%
4 Chen (25) Young Millennial Male	▬ 50.0%	▬ 40.0%	✓ 70.0%	✓ 60.0%	▬ 60.0%
5 Carla (28) Mid-Millennial Female	▬ 50.8%	▬ 49.2%	▬ 47.6%	▬ 34.9%	▬ 65.1%
6 Chris (31) Mid-Millennial Male	✓ 69.2%	✓ 59.0%	✓ 61.5%	✓ 64.1%	▬ 69.2%
Avg %	62.4%	55.1%	57.9%	46.1%	69.7%

*averages were calculated with "Extremely Effective" and "Very Effective" responses

If respondents said yes, what strategies would help retain these students?

Key Insight: *Based off the strategies above, the effectiveness of tactics for student retention were able to address specific struggles that each learner persona faced and how institutions could address these issues in these example instances.*

Figure 36: Effectiveness of Tactics for Student Retention - By Persona

Reasons For Learners Leaving Their Institutions…

What Could Institutions Do?

Persona	Reason	What Could Institutions Do?
Valentina (21) *Gen Z Female*	Valentina ultimately left her institution due to her family moving out of the state she attended college in. Due to those family issues, she had to withdraw and leave her institution to help at home.	Valentina would value **a workshop to address her struggles** with her family issues
Max (22) *Gen Z Male*	Max originally enrolled in school because of his parents, however, after a short time in his institution, he didn't think that his institution was the right fit for him, so he dropped out of higher-ed.	Max would like to see his institution offer more **subsection courses that are engaging to him.**
Elise (24) *Young Millennial Female*	Elise dealt with a personal emergency with her family's business and had to unenroll from her institution temporarily and never got around to re engaging.	Elise would like to see her institution prioritize **counseling services to help re-engage her** after she left
Chen (25) *Young Millennial Male*	Chen set aside funding for his college education, but eventually ran out of funds. Without additional university or community support, Chen did not have the means to support himself at school.	Chen would value a **concierge service to help him** with his personal issues
Carla (28) *Mid-Millennial Female*	Carla had to leave her institution to make more money to support her and her family. She wasn't able to continue studying in her institution without a stable source of income.	It's difficult to re-engage Carla, however she would most value a **certificate program to showcase her credits**
Chris (31) *Mid-Millennial Male*	Chris dealt with some personal problems at school that he could no longer be a full-time student. He had to ultimately leave to focus on himself and work a part-time job until further notice.	Chris would like to see a **counseling service to help him work through his personal issues and re-engage him**

What is the Likelihood of Reenrollment and Continuing Education?

Key Insight: *Across all age groups, the majority of learners would be at least somewhat likely to continue their education. As age increased, learners were more likely to say that they were only somewhat likely. Twenty-three- to twenty-six-year-olds were most likely to say they would continue their education (27%) than any other age group*

Figure 37: Likelihood of Continuing Education
How likely would you be to continue your education?

Age Group	Extremely Likely	Very Likely	Somewhat Likely	Not Very Likely	Not at all Likely
Overall (n=980)	21%	22%	37%	15%	6%
18 to 19 (n=30)	17%	30%	40%	13%	
20 to 22 (n=138)	20%	24%	33%	15%	8%
23 to 26 (n=209)	27%	24%	29%	17%	3%
27 to 29 (n=206)	21%	25%	33%	14%	8%
30 to 34 (n=397)	18%	17%	44%	15%	6%
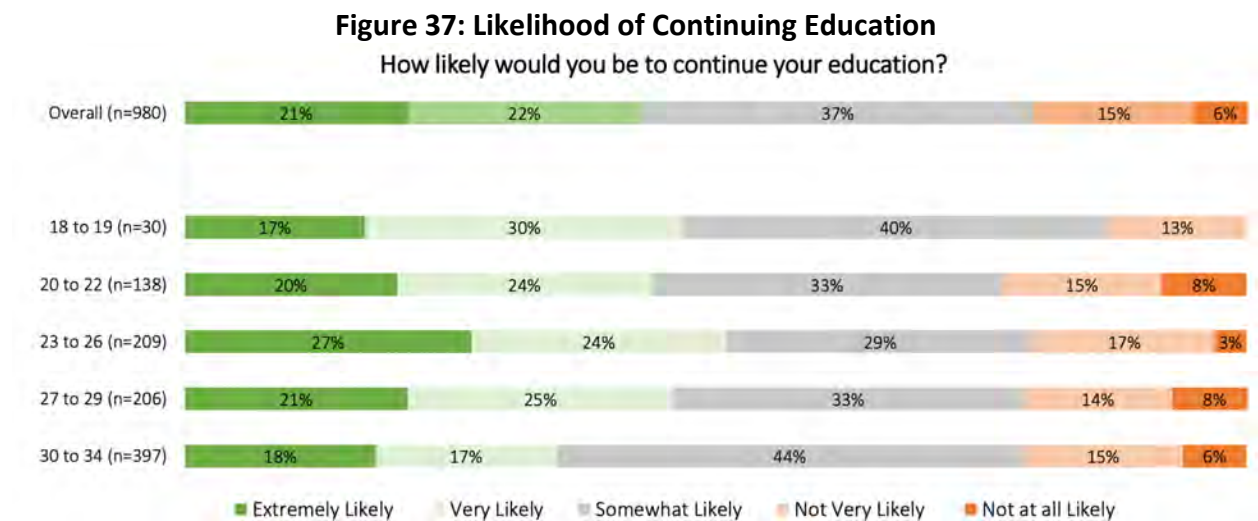
Overall, 21% would be extremely likely and 22% very likely to continue their education. Those 23-26 would be most likely (27%).

Key Insight: *Overall, forty-three percent were extremely likely (21%) or very likely (22%) to continue their education. Young millennials were the most likely to say they would continue their education and mid-millennial males were the least likely to continue their education. Overall females were more likely than males to indicate that they were very likely to continue.*

Figure 38: Likelihood of Continuing Education - By Persona
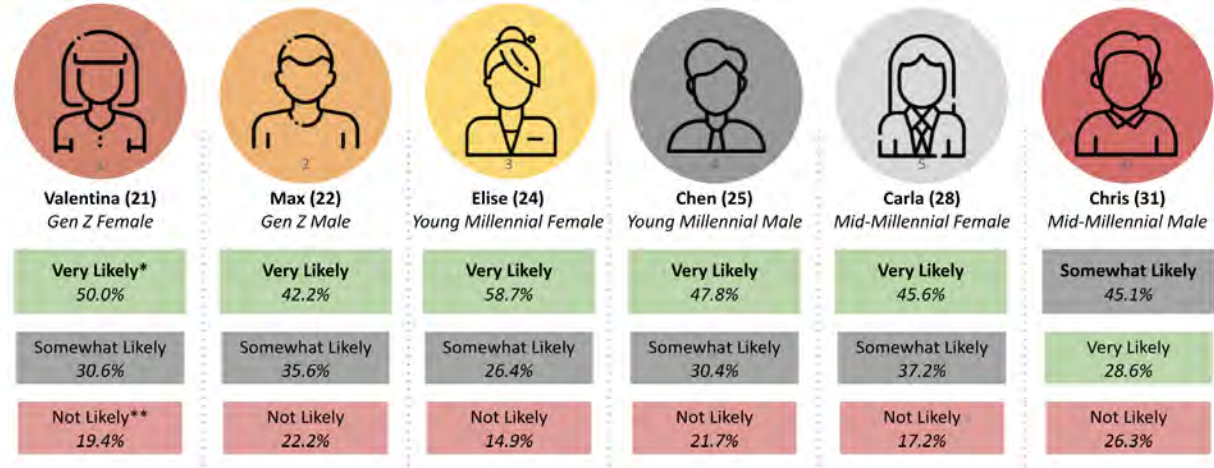
Valentina (21) Gen Z Female	Max (22) Gen Z Male	Elise (24) Young Millennial Female	Chen (25) Young Millennial Male	Carla (28) Mid-Millennial Female	Chris (31) Mid-Millennial Male
Very Likely* 50.0%	Very Likely 42.2%	Very Likely 58.7%	Very Likely 47.8%	Very Likely 45.6%	Somewhat Likely 45.1%
Somewhat Likely 30.6%	Somewhat Likely 35.6%	Somewhat Likely 26.4%	Somewhat Likely 30.4%	Somewhat Likely 37.2%	Very Likely 28.6%
Not Likely** 19.4%	Not Likely 22.2%	Not Likely 14.9%	Not Likely 21.7%	Not Likely 17.2%	Not Likely 26.3%

*calculated with the sum of "Extremely" and "Very" Likely responses
**calculated with the sum of "Not very" and "Not at all" Likely responses

Key Insight: *Those newly or intermediately disengaged are more likely to continue their education, suggesting that that if institutions want to get disengaged learners to reenroll, they need to reengage with them soon after they drop out.*

Half of those newly or intermediately disengaged would be very likely to reenroll, as opposed to only 1/3 of long-term disengaged individuals.

Figure 39: Likelihood of Continuing Education - By Date of Last Enrollment

Newly Disengaged (21.7%)	Intermediately Disengaged (31.2%)	Long - Term Disengaged (47.1%)
2019 - 2021	2015 - 2018	Before 2015
Very Likely 52%	Very Likely 50%	Somewhat Likely 42%
Somewhat Likely 30%	Somewhat Likely 34%	Very Likely 33%
Not Very Likely 19%	Not Very Likely 15%	Not Very Likely 25%
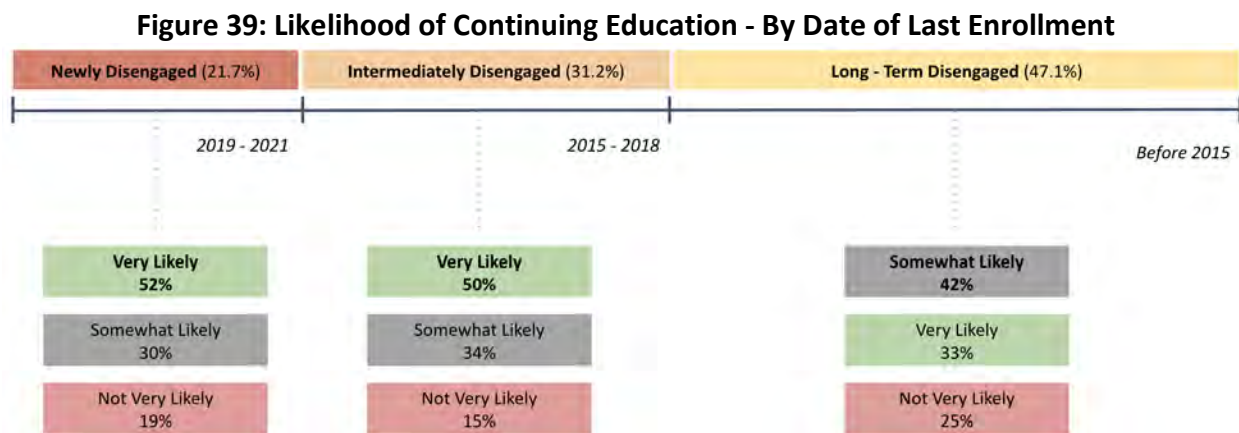
Key Insight: *All degree majors were at least somewhat likely to say they would continue their education.*

Half of healthcare and social sciences majors would be very likely to continue their education while only about a third of law and computer science and math majors would be.

Figure 40: Likelihood of Continuing Education - By Subject

	Healthcare	Social Sciences	Engineering	Education	Arts	Business	Sciences	Law	Comp Sci & Math	Communications
Very Likely*	50%	49%	46%	43%	43%	43%	43%	31%	34%	42%
Somewhat	29%	37%	30%	39%	37%	37%	40%	45%	44%	42%
Not Likely**	22%	14%	25%	18%	20%	21%	18%	23%	23%	15%

- Very Likely*
- Somewhat
- Not Likely**

*calculated with the sum of "Extremely" and "Very" Likely responses
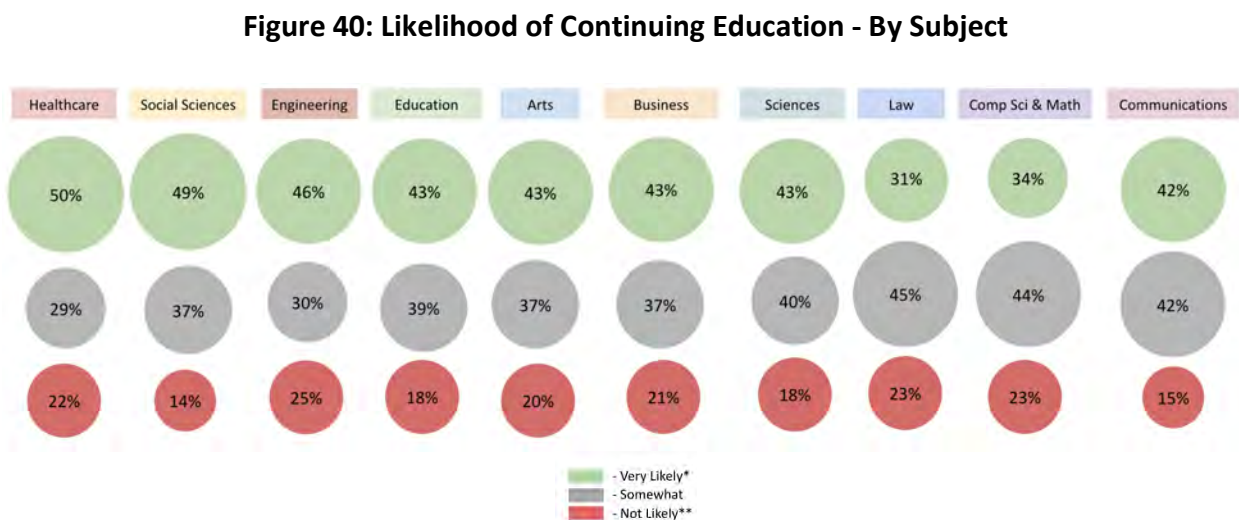**calculated with the sum of "Not very" and "Not at all" Likely responses

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Key Insight: *Overall, more than half of respondents would be at least somewhat likely to reenroll at their university, with 12% extremely and 14% very likely to do so. Younger individuals would be more likely to reenroll than those older.*
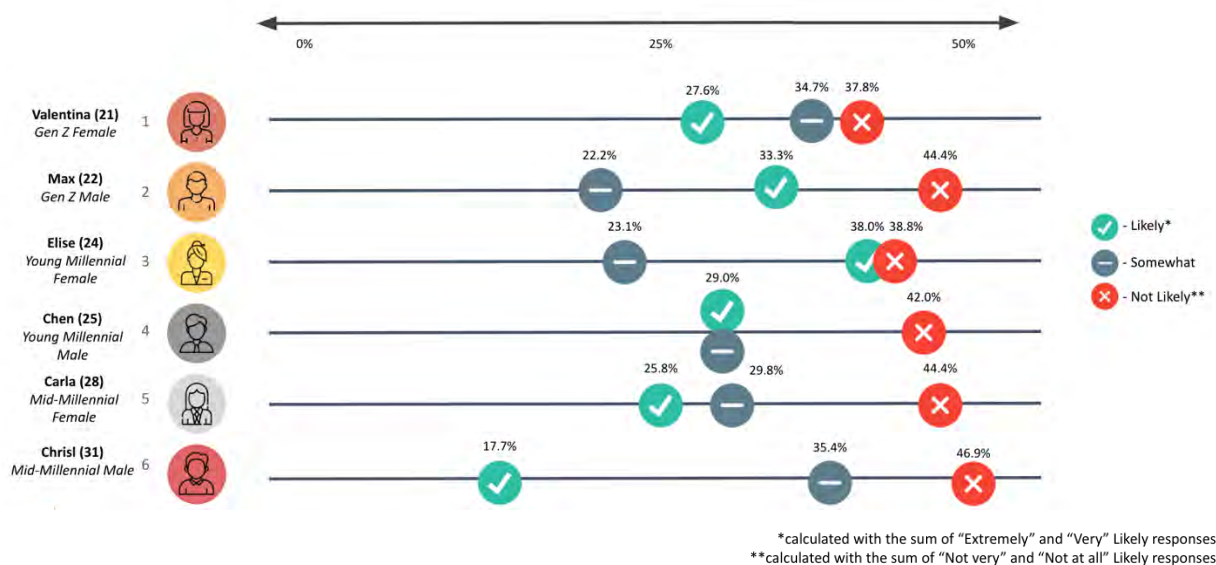
Twenty percent of respondents 23 to 26 would be extremely likely to reenroll at their college or university. Only 9% of those 27 to 34 would be extremely likely and 20% said they would be not all likely.

Figure 41: Likelihood of Reenrollment

How likely would you be to reenroll at your college or university? (n=980)

	Extremely Likely	Very likely	Somewhat Likely	Not Very Likely	Not at all Likely
Overall (n=980)	12%	14%	31%	26%	17%
18 to 19 (n=30)	13%	20%	33%	30%	3%
20 to 22 (n=138)	15%	15%	31%	27%	12%
23 to 26 (n=209)	20%	12%	26%	25%	16%
27 to 29 (n=206)	9%	20%	27%	25%	20%
30 to 34 (n=397)	9%	10%	35%	26%	20%

■ Extremely Likely ■ Very likely ■ Somewhat Likely ■ Not Very Likely ■ Not at all Likely
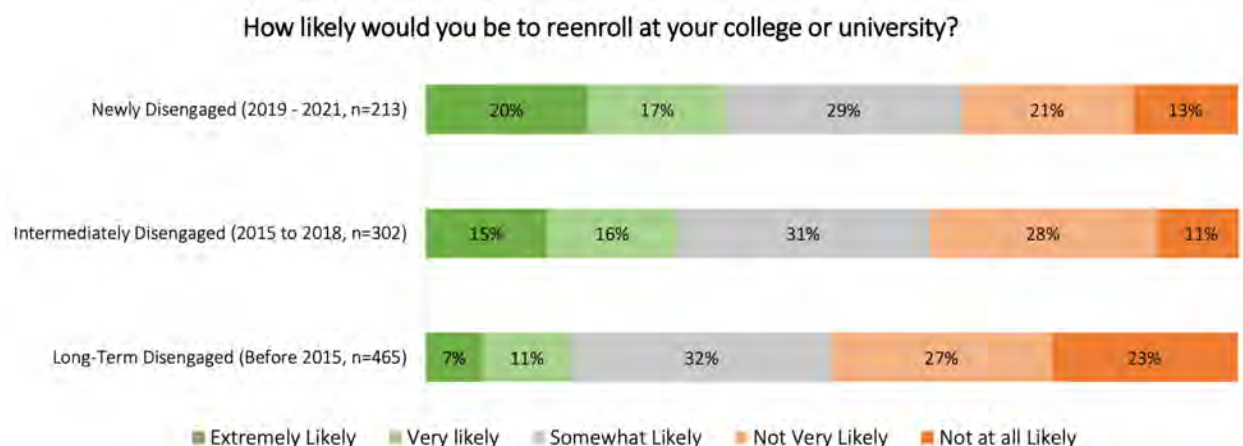
Key Insight: *Younger generations were the most likely to reenroll in their institution after they left with young millennial females saying they were very likely to reenroll (38%). The older generations were least likely to say they would be likely to reenroll in their institution indicating that the urgency of reengaging students by age can provide a more likely reenrollment outcome.*

Figure 42: Likelihood of Reenrollment - By Persona

*calculated with the sum of "Extremely" and "Very" Likely responses
**calculated with the sum of "Not very" and "Not at all" Likely responses

Key Insight: *As time away from the institution increases, the percentage of respondents who are extremely or very likely to reenroll at their college or university decreases.*

Figure 43: Likelihood of Reenrollment - By Date of Last Enrollment

How likely would you be to reenroll at your college or university?

	Extremely Likely	Very likely	Somewhat Likely	Not Very Likely	Not at all Likely
Newly Disengaged (2019 - 2021, n=213)	20%	17%	29%	21%	13%
Intermediately Disengaged (2015 to 2018, n=302)	15%	16%	31%	28%	11%
Long-Term Disengaged (Before 2015, n=465)	7%	11%	32%	27%	23%

Key Insight: *Respondents who were more satisfied with their institution were more likely to consider reenrolling at their college or university.*

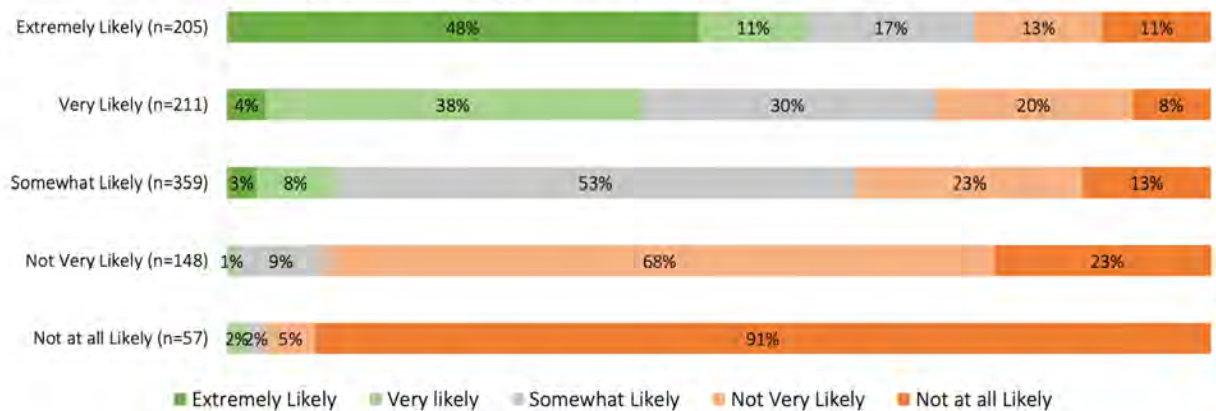**Figure 44: Likelihood of Reenrollment - By Satisfaction**

How likely would you be to reenroll at your college or university?

	Extremely Likely	Very likely	Somewhat Likely	Not Very Likely	Not at all Likely
Extremely Satisfied (n=147)	37%	16%	28%	8%	12%
Very Satisfied (n=253)	13%	25%	32%	25%	5%
Somewhat Satisfied (n=393)	7%	11%	38%	29%	15%
Not Very Satisfied (n=120)	3%	4%	22%	40%	32%
Not at all Satisfied (n=67)	6%	2%	8%	21%	64%

■ Extremely Likely ■ Very likely ■ Somewhat Likely ■ Not Very Likely ■ Not at all Likely
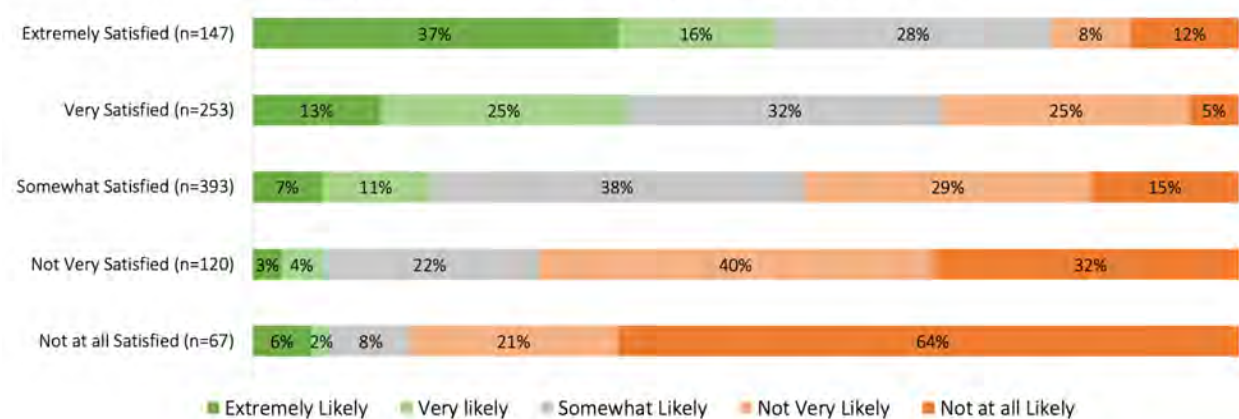
Key Insight: *Of respondents who would be extremely likely to continue their education, nearly half said they would be extremely likely to reenroll at their college or university.*
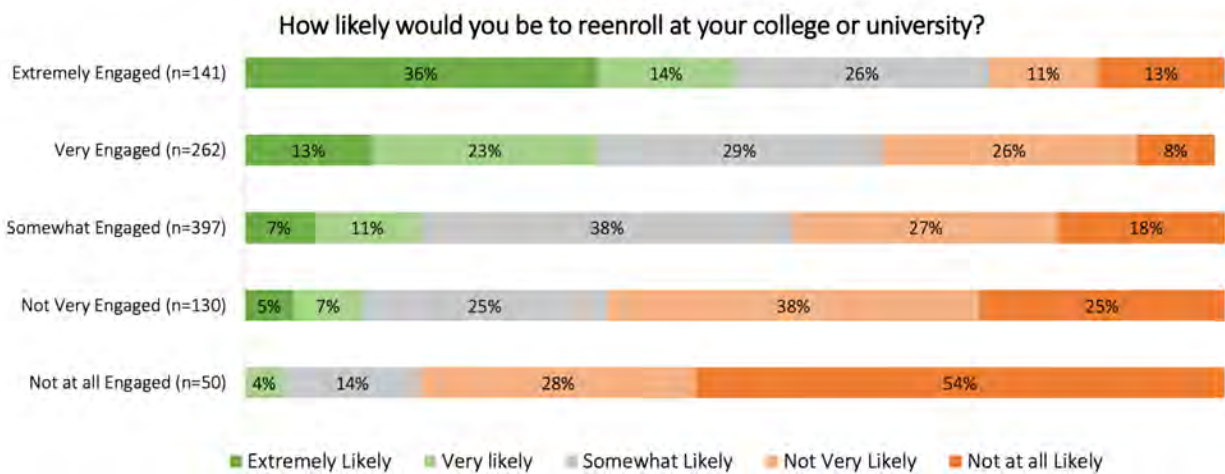
Figure 45: Likelihood of Reenrollment - By Likelihood of Continuing Education

How likely would you be to reenroll at your college or university?

	Extremely Likely	Very likely	Somewhat Likely	Not Very Likely	Not at all Likely
Extremely Likely (n=205)	48%	11%	17%	13%	11%
Very Likely (n=211)	4%	38%	30%	20%	8%
Somewhat Likely (n=359)	3%	8%	53%	23%	13%
Not Very Likely (n=148)	1%	9%	68%		23%
Not at all Likely (n=57)	2%	2%	5%		91%

■ Extremely Likely ■ Very likely ■ Somewhat Likely ■ Not Very Likely ■ Not at all Likely
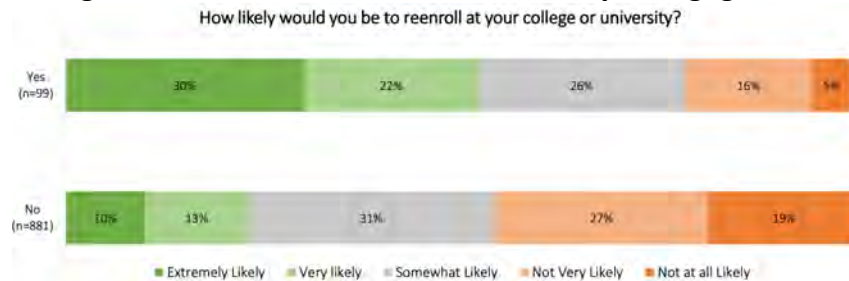
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Key Insight: *Individuals who felt their institution was more engaged were more likely to say they would reenroll at their college or university.*

Figure 46: Likelihood of Reenrollment - By Engagement-Level

How likely would you be to reenroll at your college or university?

Engagement Level	Extremely Likely	Very likely	Somewhat Likely	Not Very Likely	Not at all Likely
Extremely Engaged (n=141)	36%	14%	26%	11%	13%
Very Engaged (n=262)	13%	23%	29%	26%	8%
Somewhat Engaged (n=397)	7%	11%	38%	27%	18%
Not Very Engaged (n=130)	5%	7%	25%	38%	25%
Not at all Engaged (n=50)	4%		14%	28%	54%

■ Extremely Likely ▪ Very likely ▪ Somewhat Likely ▪ Not Very Likely ■ Not at all Likely
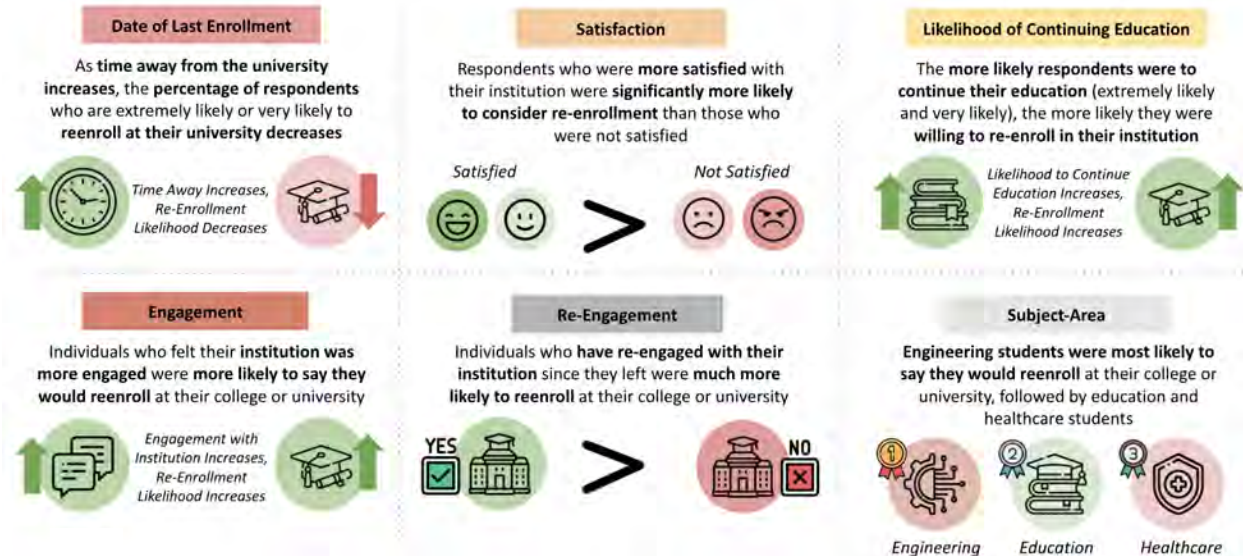
Key Insight: *Individuals who have reengaged with their institution since they left were much more likely to reenroll at their college or university.*

Figure 47: Likelihood of Reenrollment - By Reengagement

How likely would you be to reenroll at your college or university?

	Extremely Likely	Very likely	Somewhat Likely	Not Very Likely	Not at all Likely
Yes (n=99)	30%	22%	26%	16%	5%
No (n=881)	10%	13%	31%	27%	19%

■ Extremely Likely ▪ Very likely ▪ Somewhat Likely ▪ Not Very Likely ■ Not at all Likely

Key Insight: *There are many factors that play into the reenrollment. Those who were more satisfied and engaged while at school are more likely to reenroll at their higher education institution.*

Figure 48: Likelihood of Reenrollment - Composite Additional Drivers

How Can Institutions Keep Learners Engaged and Enrolled?

Key Insight: *Nine out of ten individuals have not reengaged with their institution. Respondents who said their institution was more engaged with them when they were students were more likely to have reengaged with their institution.*

Figure 49: Reengagement with Institution

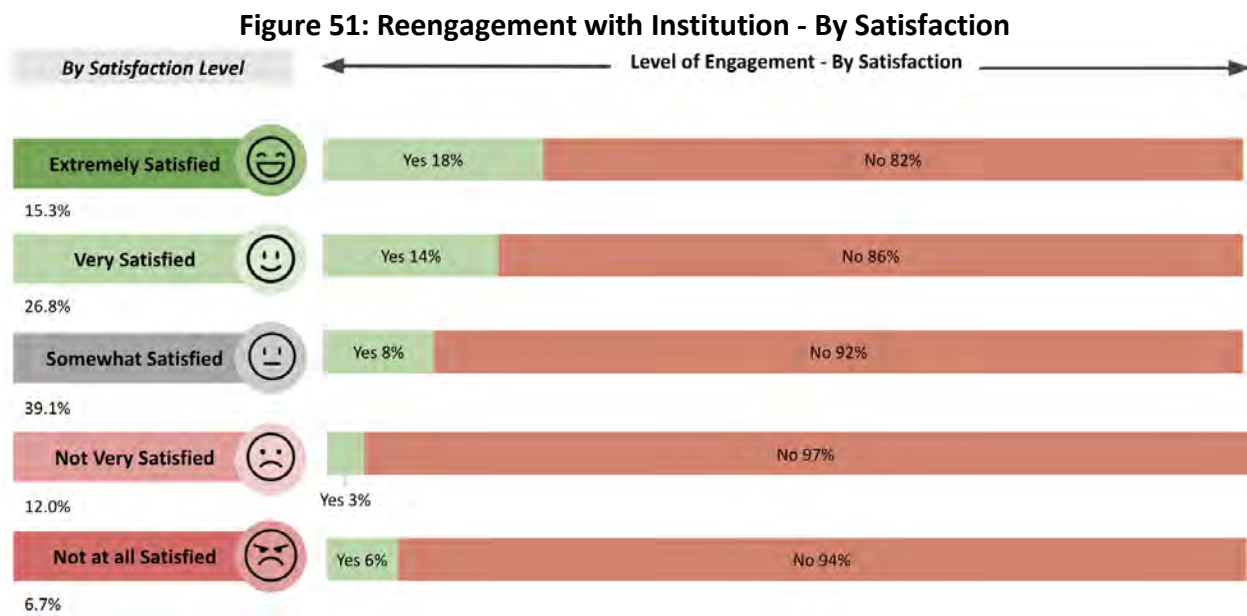Have you reengaged with the institution since you left?
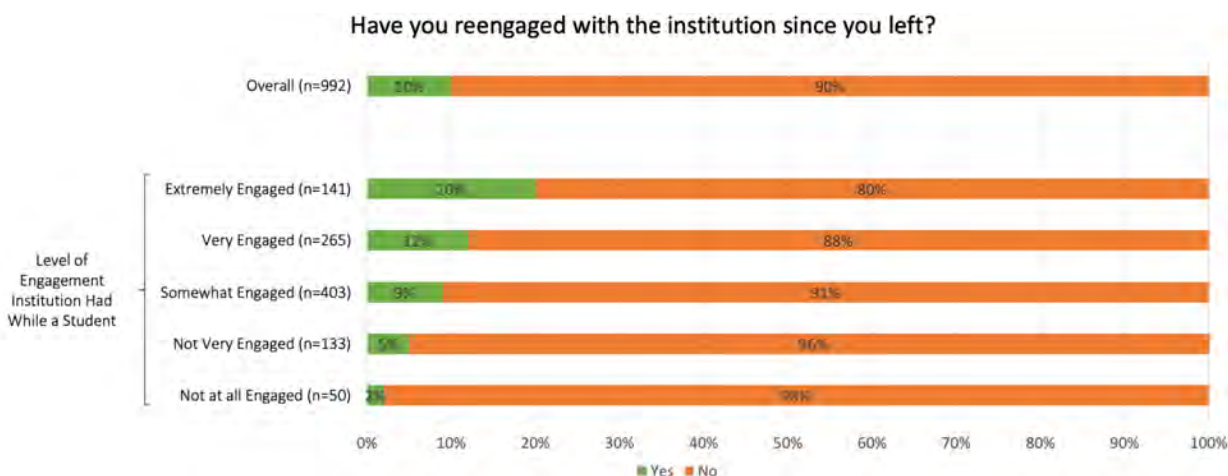
Key Insight: *The young millennial generation has had the highest engagement of the age groups, and younger respondents were more likely to have reengaged with their institution.*

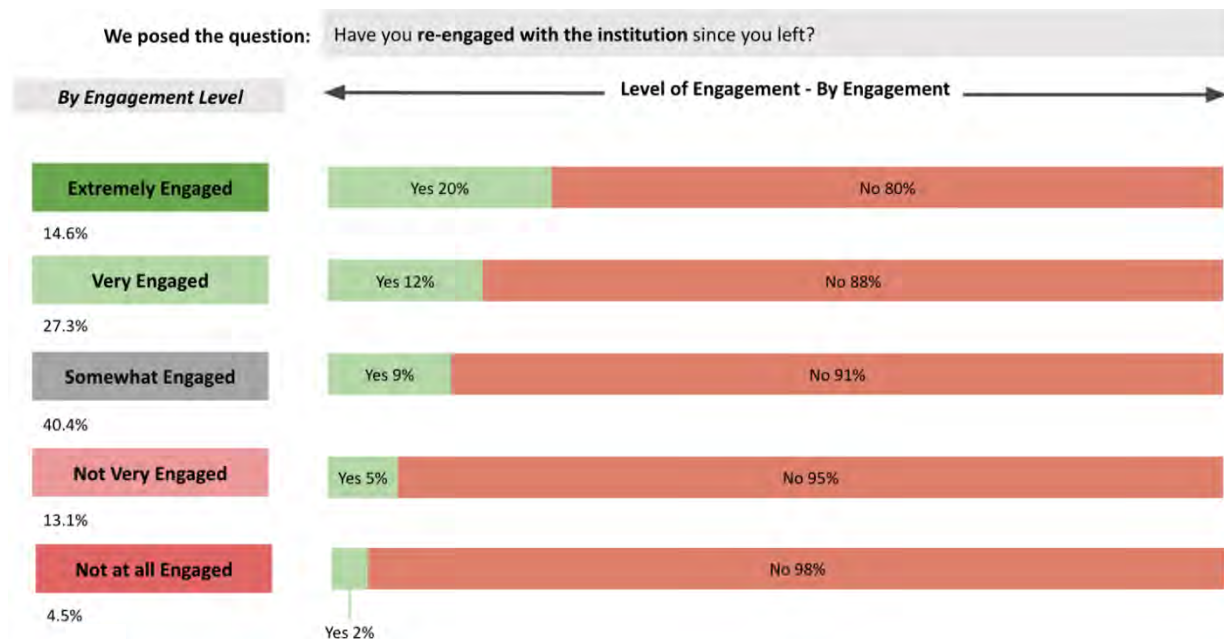**Figure 50: Reengagement with Institution - By Persona**

Key Insight: *Respondents who were more satisfied with their institution were more likely to reengage with the school.*

Figure 51: Reengagement with Institution - By Satisfaction

| By Satisfaction Level		Level of Engagement - By Satisfaction
Extremely Satisfied 😄	15.3%	Yes 18% / No 82%
Very Satisfied 🙂	26.8%	Yes 14% / No 86%
Somewhat Satisfied 😐	39.1%	Yes 8% / No 92%
Not Very Satisfied 🙁	12.0%	Yes 3% / No 97%
Not at all Satisfied 😣	6.7%	Yes 6% / No 94%

Key Insight: *When asked if respondents had engaged with the institution since they left, respondents who said their institution was more engaged with them when they were a student were more likely to have reengaged with the institution. This indicates that the more engaged institutions can be with students while enrolled, the more likely they are to re-engage with their institution after they unenroll or leave higher education.*

Figure 52: Reengagement with Institution - By Engagement - Level

Key Insight: *The longer it has been since an individual left their institution, there is less likelihood that they have reengaged with their school.*

Figure 53: Reengagement with Institution - By Date of Last Enrollment
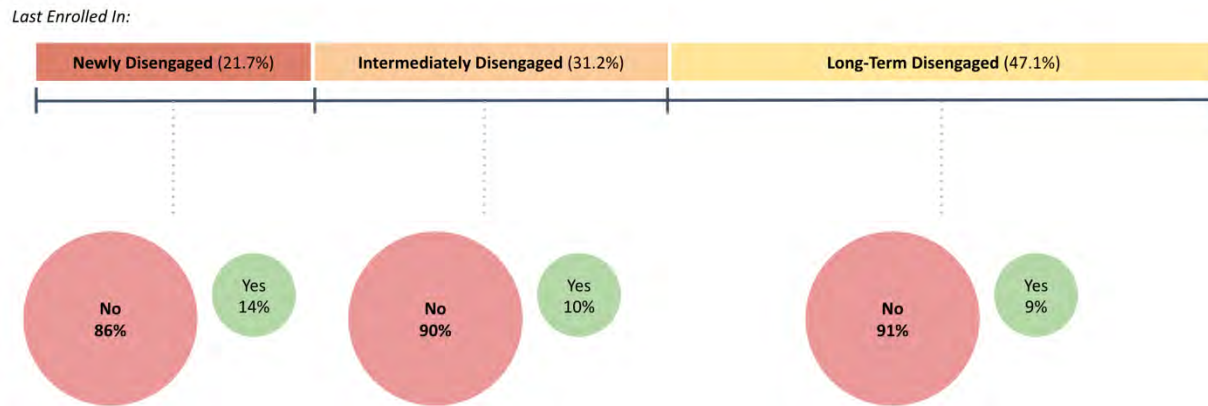
Respondents who were newly disengaged (14%) were more likely to say they have reengaged with their institution since they left than those who have been intermediately disengaged (10%) or long-term disengaged (9%).

Key Insight: *Respondents who were enrolled in a law program were most likely to reengage with an institution (18%), followed by education (16%), and communications (15%) students*

Figure 54: Reengagement with Institution - By Subject Studied
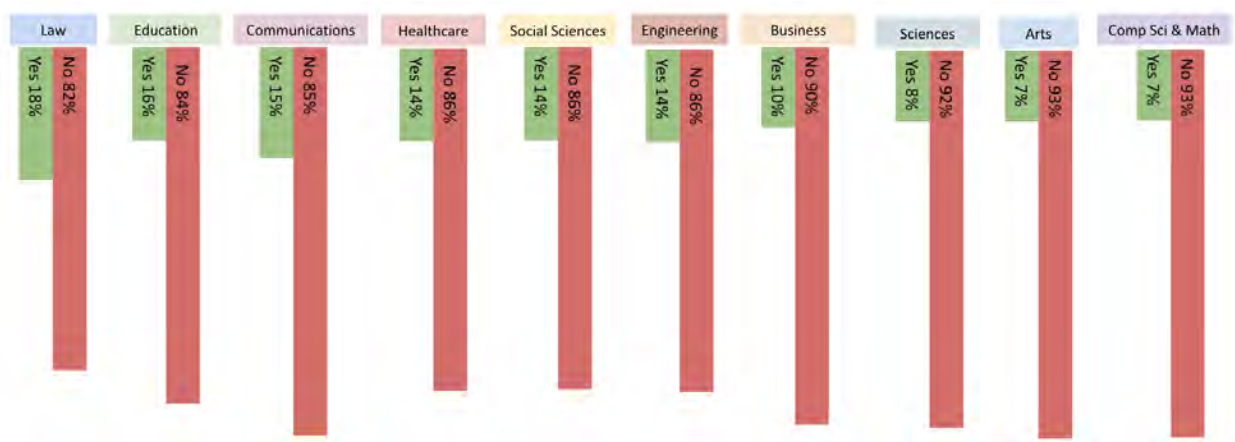
Key Insight: *The most common methods of reengagement were to reapply or reenroll, (16%), engaging electronically (15%), followed by reengagement by phone (9%).*

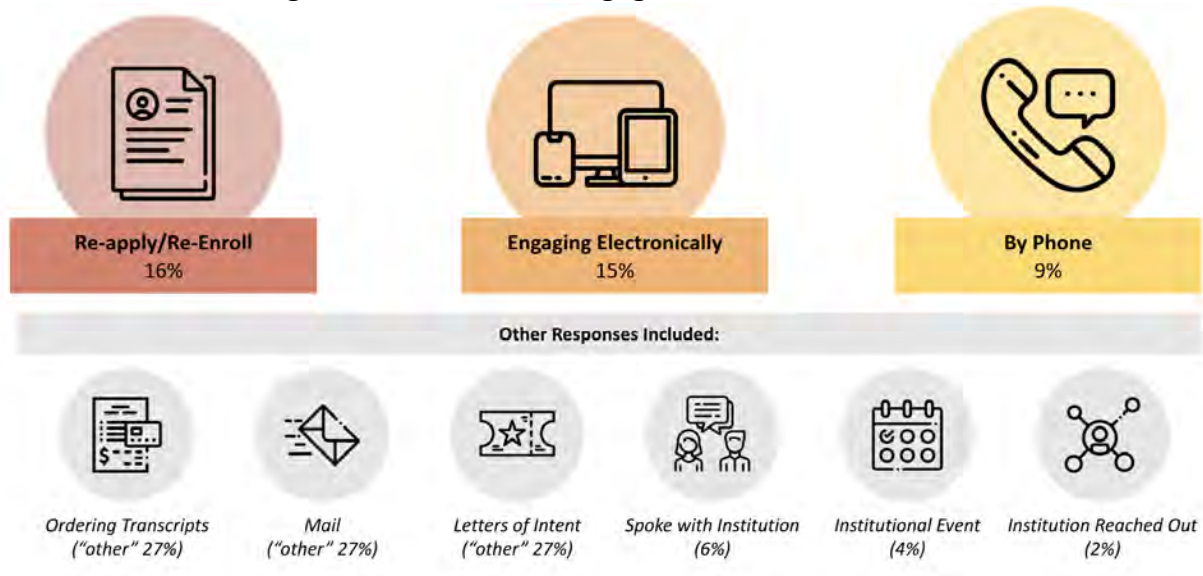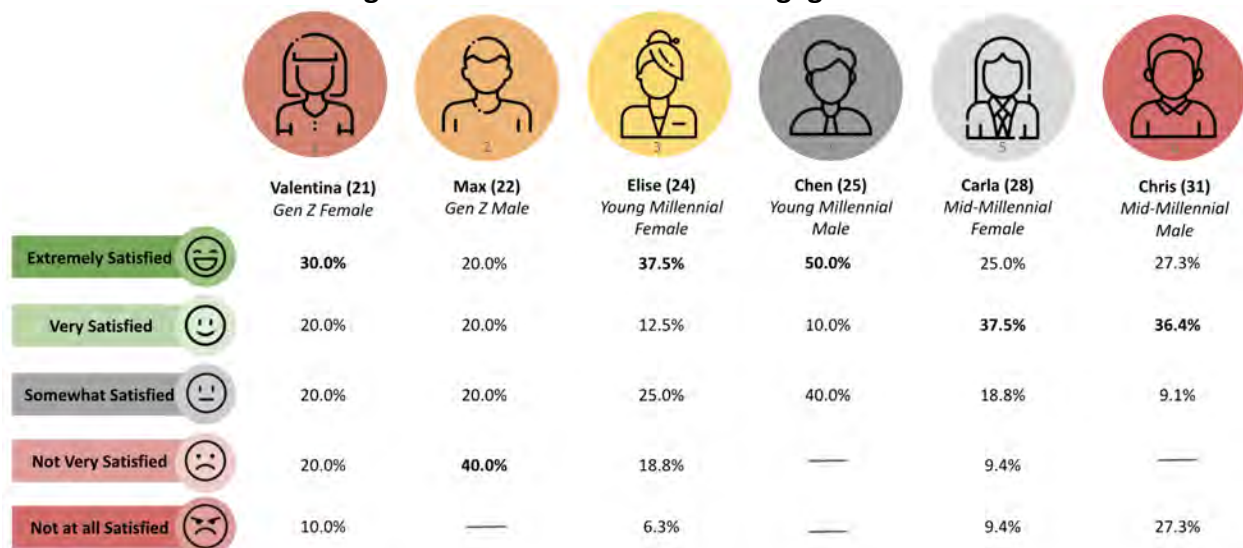**Figure 55: Means of Reengagement with Institution**

Re-apply/Re-Enroll
16%

Engaging Electronically
15%

By Phone
9%

Other Responses Included:

Ordering Transcripts
("other" 27%)

Mail
("other" 27%)

Letters of Intent
("other" 27%)

Spoke with Institution
(6%)

Institutional Event
(4%)

Institution Reached Out
(2%)

Key Insight: *Gen Z and Young Millennials have the highest extremely satisfied ratings. Mid-Millennials have the most very satisfied but also the greatest percentage not at all satisfied.*

Figure 56: Satisfaction with Reengagement

	Valentina (21) Gen Z Female	Max (22) Gen Z Male	Elise (24) Young Millennial Female	Chen (25) Young Millennial Male	Carla (28) Mid-Millennial Female	Chris (31) Mid-Millennial Male
Extremely Satisfied	**30.0%**	20.0%	**37.5%**	**50.0%**	25.0%	27.3%
Very Satisfied	20.0%	20.0%	12.5%	10.0%	**37.5%**	**36.4%**
Somewhat Satisfied	20.0%	20.0%	25.0%	40.0%	18.8%	9.1%
Not Very Satisfied	20.0%	**40.0%**	18.8%	—	9.4%	—
Not at all Satisfied	10.0%	—	6.3%	—	9.4%	27.3%

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How Can Institutions Prepare to Reengage and Retain Their Learners?

Key Insight: *Understanding the generational and behavioral differences that lead to a student's reason behind unenrolling from their institution is a key variable for how institutions can reengage those disengaged. For each different reasoning and generational differences, institutions need to look at what benefits and tactics can best suit their needs.*

Figure 57: How to Prepare Personas

Valentina (21)
Gen Z Female

As a Gen Z female, Valentina ultimately had to leave her institution due to **family/personal problems**. She would value a **workshop to address her struggles** with her family, and also is looking to be re-engaged with quickly after her withdrawal.

Elise (24)
Young Millennial Female

Elise had to deal with a **personal emergency** in her family's business and had to unenroll temporarily. To help re-engage her, Elise would like to see **counseling services to help her work through some of her issues**. Institutions should reach out to Elise fairly quickly after her withdrawal to aid her.

Carla (28)
Mid-Millennial Female

Carla had to leave her institution to **find a more stable source of income** with a new job. It is difficult to re-engage Carla because of her financial and familial obligations so she would value a **part-time certificate course program** to help her gain additional skills while still supporting her family.

Max (22)
Gen Z Male

Max began to **feel disinterested** in the field of study he was learning and decided that higher-education was not for him. To appeal to his needs, he would like to see the institution offer more **engaging content through a subsection of low cost courses.**

Chen (25)
Young Millennial Male

As a young millennial male, Chen ran into **financial issues** when his college funds ran out. He does not have the means to support himself, so he is looking for his institution to **bring in specialized services to help him navigate.**

Chris (31)
Mid-Millennial Male

Chris has been out of school for some time and requires engagement consistently and persistently in order to re-engage him. Some of the needed strategies and tactics include **counseling services and providing lower cost courses.**

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Impact on Higher Education

Over the course of the last decade, higher education has not held the same value for students as it has in the past. With technology dominating the landscape of the workplace and providing unique opportunities that didn't previously exist, students are disengaging from higher education at a higher rate. In addition, generational differences as well as the mental health effects of the pandemic are at play. These factors, coupled with a rapidly changing economy, are forcing students to question their investment in and commitment to higher education.

The reasons that drive why different generations disengage more than others demonstrate the importance of institutions focusing on the generational and demographic differences of their current and disengaged students. While much of the literature now focuses on the mindset of disengaged learners, the research of UPCEA and StraighterLine looks at how institutions can best understand the perception and reasons of those disengaged and change the trajectory of their offerings, engagement, and communication.

Overall, respondents indicated that the three primary reasons they left their institutions were finances (42%), family reasons/commitments (32%), and that it was not the right fit (30%). However, the younger generations indicated that their primary reason was not the right fit compared to older generations who cited financial issues as their primary reason for leaving. Institutions need to look at the reasons for disengagement and identify those on which they can tangibly take action. The survey indicates the more satisfied and engaged learners felt while still at school, the better the chances of their reengaging.

Overall, about a quarter of respondents were at least very likely to reenroll at their college or university, providing a basis on which institutions could begin to develop a reenrollment plan. To address what institutions could do to better prepare, it is important to identify what initially motivated students to enroll in their institutions. Across all generations, the primary motivation factor was their having a personal goal and wanting to advance their career. Institutions can learn from this data and establish key strategies and tactics to reengage their students. For respondents who indicated that there was something their institution could have done to retain them, providing a certificate for credits, a subsection of courses at a lower price, and workshops that address students' struggles were seen as effective strategies.

The findings of this study demonstrate the necessity of institutions dedicating time and effort to a wide variety of students while they are still at school and the urgency to reengage as soon as possible after they might disengage.

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