New America

A summary of interviews with 24 college and university presidents and senior administrators and a roundtable discussion with 8 college and university presidents and senior administrators.
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Lake Research Partners conducted in-depth interviews among 24 college presidents and senior-level administrators across five sectors – community colleges, for-profit colleges, regional 4-year public colleges, private non-profit colleges, historically Black colleges and universities, and Hispanic-serving institutions – from April 19, 2021, through June 7, 2021, and conducted a roundtable among 8 of the participants on July 27, 2021. The full list of participants can be found in Appendix A.

Summary

Administrators describe their institutions as resilient, powering through nearly impossible situations with massive revenue and enrollment losses, while at the same time switching operating models to work online and supporting their students with the technology and basic necessities necessary to continue to stay enrolled at their school. Across sectors, institutions point to a level of flexibility and adaptability that was unique to their school that allowed them to continue operating during the pandemic.

They describe the greatest challenge in the past year as dealing with uncertainty: being able to stay open and figuring out how to continue to provide education under a new budget, operating model, and constantly changing guidelines to keep students safe. They describe the challenges students faced centering on a lack of access to technology and concerns over mental health.

Across sectors, especially among community colleges, institutions saw enrollment declines that greatly impacted their revenue stream, regardless of whether they were state-funded or not. The federal stimulus money compensated for much of that loss, and many administrators say that their institutions would not have continued to operate without it. Aside from the stimulus money, some schools froze hiring or laid off staff to make up for their lost revenue. Some could shift their budget around for what they saved in travel or on-campus services and utilities they no longer used to the extent that they were when they were in-person. In nearly every school, administrators gave federal stimulus funds directly to students, whether it be through alleviating debt, as direct checks, as additional scholarships any student could apply for so they could pay rent or bills, or to buy technology and internet access. Additional funds were put toward improving online technology, delayed infrastructural fixes, or other one-time operating costs.

To recruit new students, the few institutions that required standardized tests dropped their requirements and instead looked at the whole student for admittance. They also made all of their recruiting efforts virtual from virtual visits and tours to digital ads and marketing and a strong social media presence. Some are also offering larger and a greater quantity of scholarship packages and signing bonuses. Many institutions are planning on not requiring standardized testing in future years.

Most institutions were primarily in-person before the pandemic and within a few weeks shifted everything other than their lab and hands-on courses to be online. Transitioning to an online modality was difficult for both the faculty as well as the students. While some institutions had an online foundation through some of their graduate programs, others, particularly the HBCU’s who had a strong value in creating a welcoming on-campus culture, had a major lift to transition all of their courses online. Many institutions invested in professional development courses for teachers to learn how to build curriculum online and many used Quality Matters standards to guide their instruction.
Students also had difficulties adapting to online education, with one of the largest barriers being from a lack of technology, broadband, and internet access as well as the fact that many of the students who were already struggling academically were the ones falling further behind learning online.

However, administrators across sectors believe that online learning will play a bigger role, though many are unsure what role specifically. Some suggest using more technology in their in-person classes, while others suggest expanding their online offerings for adult learners and graduate programs or always having a hybrid or online option for class for when students are sick or occasionally cannot make it in person.

Student support services also moved online, and many administrators say the accessibility of the online support systems were a huge success that is going to outlast the pandemic. In addition to adding an online option for tutoring, applying for financial aid, and academic advising, most institutions greatly expanded their online counseling and health services, whether through hiring their own counselors or partnering with community organizations. Many institutions also expanded their programs to support the basic needs of their students, from setting up food banks to using the CARES money or school foundation to create funds for students to get money for rent, food, utilities, or other bills. Many say that while they tried to accommodate students with disabilities, this was an area they knew they fell short.

Long-term, administrators express a couple of changes they intend to keep at their institutions. First are the increased methods and frequency of communication. Many colleges, especially the community colleges, found new ways to reach out to students through texting campaigns both to recruit them as well as to give them information and connect them to the resources they need to apply to for grants, funding, and how to access basic necessities that the school provides by sending messages right to their phones reminding them of deadlines or asking them what other support they need to be able to continue their education. Second, administrators want to increase flexibility within their programs, whether that is specifically through increased online programs, a greater choice in terms of modality, or more options in program length and time. Third, administrators express a great need for state legislators to re-prioritize higher education, especially as many state legislators have been cutting funding for years, in order to prepare for the jobs of the future and encourage life-long learning.

**General Context**

Across sectors, presidents tend to describe their institutions as “resilient” or “struggling, but persevering” over the past year. They describe the hardships they have faced not only from a lack of revenue from decreasing enrollment and having to turn their operating models from primarily in-person to primarily online but also in the way they have provided for and navigated the needs of their students.

Administrators across sectors pointed to a level of flexibility and adaptability that was unique to their school that allowed them to continue operating the past year. They mention factors ranging from the culture of their leadership to their ability to pivot toward online education and the unique way their budgets are created.

- “My institution...only fared well because of an incredible amount of work, and the ability to actually change rapidly, and really adapt very quickly.” – Participant 18, For-profit college
Across sectors, presidents describe the overall experience at their college as one of resilience and perseverance. The past year was very difficult for all types of institutions, yet administrators describe how one way or another, they managed to maintain operations, sometimes even stronger than before. In particular, many of the college presidents who serve many Pell-eligible students cite how meeting the needs of the students is always a priority, so they needed to persevere and do what they could to continue to provide education and the services that these students have always needed, including before the pandemic, and some describe resiliency in more than just pivoting to continue operating their college, but pivoting to be able to provide for their students to make sure they could continue their education while also meeting their basic needs.

• “So in a public two year sector, our students have had incredible challenges. Particularly our students of color. Particularly our women. And our faculty and staff have also been challenged in trying to meet the needs of our student population. And yet we are still here. And still celebrate graduation. Still many students completed their programs and their training.” – Participant 16, HSI, community college

• “We’re surprisingly flexible, surprisingly able to meet the changed world that suddenly was thrust upon us. I think we struggled in the quality, I believe of, in some cases of instruction via new methods, although it did improve as time went on.” – Participant 23, Community college

• “I’d say weathered. It means we took some poundings and there’s a recovery necessary, but weathered is probably the way I would describe it” – Participant 8, Public regional 4-year college

• “Throughout the pandemic, you kept hearing the word pivot. I got tired of hearing the word pivot but we had to do a lot of pivoting like when we would have an outbreak things like that. So I was really proud of colleagues and they stayed positive and patient, and again, really worked hard to continue to provide services to our students.” – Participant 21, Public regional 4-year college

Greatest Challenge: Uncertainty

Many presidents describe constant uncertainty as their greatest challenge. Over the past year, rules and regulations from state and federal governments about how to operate and what the best practices to keep students safe as well as how to spend stimulus funds, were constantly changing and these institutions had to keep up and make adjustments.

• “We’ve never planned so much and had it change on us. I mean, you thought you’d be ready to open up here and it’s just this constant pivot, developing plans, and then just constantly modifying.” – Participant 5, HSI, community college

• “I think the greatest challenge has been the uncertainty of not having a pathway, that we knew for sure. Our whole focus was on safety and continuity of education, so we continued to really focus on those two points, as
we went through...There’s still a lot of uncertainty that we face. Our campuses are online, it changes monthly.” – Participant 12, For-profit college

• “Uncertainty was probably the most challenging thing for us. It wasn’t fiscal primarily. I think the uncertainty regarding almost at every level, from Congressional action to US Department of Education, guidelines that were imprecise to changes in the legislation, to the timing of when funding would come, to our enrollment patterns, and what to communicate to parents, to our faculty and staff who were scared and didn’t know whether the environment would be safe or not, and how to communicate that.” – Participant 4, Public regional 4-year college

• “The guidance in terms of dealing with the pandemic continue to change as we all did our best to figure out what we needed to do in order to create safe campus environments for the faculty staff and the students. So that challenge sort of layered on to the normal challenges and uncertainties of running a business during a global pandemic was something they don’t teach you in president school.” – Participant 2, Private non-profit college

• “I think one challenge was just the uncertainty. I mean, we knew what the science was, and we had pretty clear guidelines in New York state also from the state, which may not have been as true in other states. We had to file a reopening plan. But nonetheless, you don’t know exactly when it was going to work...We, like many other colleges decided to run continuously and not take any fall break and then close at Thanksgiving and send kids home at that point, and finish up reading and finals period in the last couple of days class remotely.” – Participant 24, Private non-profit college

Presidents also name student engagement, retention, and mental health concerns as some of the greatest challenges over the past year. Problems with engagement ranged from ensuring students had the technology to engage in their classes to actually keeping students enrolled in a fully online environment, especially in terms of ensuring that the students and their families had the support they needed in order for them to be able to continue their education.

• “Here became questions of engagement with students as enrollment dropped, and many of our students and their families were suffering medically, financially, just sort of day-to-day.” – Participant 17, HSI, community college

• “So we lost students. True story, student dropped out in their second semester, that’s this semester. They were first semester freshman last fall. They had a 3.3 GPA in the fall. Top student, city of Buffalo kid, minority student. In their family of six people, it turned out that they were the only ones to find employment. 50 hours per week at Amazon. Their choice. Go to college or work 50 hours and pay the rent, the heat and the food bills for their family of six...So this pandemic, again, was a magnifying glass for the challenges of that slice of the student body.” – Participant 2, Private non-profit college

• “Technology engagement. Again, if a student isn’t already connected it becomes impossible almost to connect to them remotely to say what do you need. So we did our best to handout laptops. We ramped up the wifi system around campus so students could come and park in the parking lot and have access to wifi. And things like that.” – Participant 2, Private non-profit college

Other institutions, particularly community colleges, also name communication with students as a major challenge.

• “The greatest challenge is communication with students. It’s hard to communicate with students. You see the communication leads to everything else. It leads to enrollment, but it also leads to students’ success.” – Participant 7, Community college

• “Communication has been another key challenge. It’s required extensive amounts of communication with both staff and students.” – Participant 22, Community college
Most of the presidents of HBCU’s represented small, private institutions with limited endowments. These institutions in particular expressed challenges that the pandemic posed to their operating models, especially as many said the needs of their students align most with in-person education and services.

- “It’s been tough all over for everyone, but I think for higher education, in particular institutions like my own, which are primarily residential colleges where much of what we do is predicated on face-to-face interactions between students, between students and faculty and so on, much of that has been railroaded because of the virus.” – Participant 14, HBCU, private non-profit college

- “The resilience...that’s the best way to start because it describes a lot of leaders in this context of a historically black college and university. Often they have to do with crises, quite frequently. Whether it’d be student-based or institutional-based, dealing with infrastructure such as buildings that are older, microbial growth, you just name it, there’s always an issue or crises that can put, not just the institution and the people at risk, but the finances of an organization. And so being able to come through the pandemic, dealing with crisis management, many of us fared fairly well. We find ourselves being resilient where we didn’t really open our institutions. In fact, we stayed open often as safe havens and support to others that might’ve been displaced. We also provided... We were creative enough to find resources to ensure those who had lost loved ones, who have fared ill themselves, or had nowhere to go because of travel restrictions, we found ways to treat and take care of them.” – Participant 13, HBCU, private non-profit college

The transition to online learning also presented a major challenge—both for smaller, resource-limited institutions as well as institutions with large portions of students who face connectivity issues, like affording broadband or living in a rural area with insufficient infrastructure. In particular, HBCUs and community colleges had always taught in person because their student populations learn best in-person, making the switch to online particularly difficult for them.

- “Adapting to an online environment. While we’ve done a very good job of providing technology hardware, not all of our students are going back to an environment where they have connectivity...So not only do they have skill level things to operate in a technological environment, they might not have the connectivity, and they’re going back, potentially, to a very chaotic environment that has distraction away from their academic pursuits.” – Participant 9, HBCU, private non-profit college

- “This institution particularly, we weren’t very versed in online-based education. We only had one or two courses or programs that were exclusively online, and it was more of an optional type of thing, literally had to pivot in less than a three-week period of time to make all programs exclusively online.” – Participant 13, HBCU, private non-profit college

- “Well, the greatest challenge has been figuring out how to wrap courses and academic support around students who are really smart, but just require a bit more hands-on. And so, figuring out how to get that kind of academic support in a time when a lot of it generally happens because on campus, you see people, you know when they’re struggling.” – Participant 14, HBCU, private non-profit college

- “Technology itself began to be an issue of inequity, because there are people who can come home to a home naturally, we hope that their internet access is easy, and that it’s solid and consistent. We have a lot of rural students where it’s sometimes not even that consistent, even pre-COVID... So just the digital technical infrastructure that people have, were exposed during COVID in a new way and the variation. So students ended up if they couldn’t get those connections, actually working off their iPhone or working off their smartphone.” – Participant 8, Public regional 4-year college

Community colleges were among the most impacted institutions this past year. Administrators discussed how the pandemic accelerated many negative trends in the sector that included enrollment and
budgetary problems that have already been occurring for years. These institutions also service some of the populations that were most impacted by COVID.

- “I think our students are struggling. We're under resourced. We were challenged initially in our responses, and this community college sector has been hit harder than any of the other sectors in higher ed. It's been significant...The impact of the pandemic has been destabilizing on community colleges who were just going along pretty happily.” – Participant 7, Community college

- “Because we're an open access, urban community college serving primarily the minority population and the pandemic and the economic consequences have adversely affected that population significantly more than folks of wealth and means.” – Participant 17, HSI, community college

Challenges for Students

Administrators across sectors made it clear that the past year has been devastating for students. While we spoke with institutions across six different sectors, nearly all of these institutions serve large proportions of students with high rates of financial aid. They recognize that before the pandemic, many of their students were already juggling their education with jobs and other family responsibilities. Now, with the pandemic and its economic impact, these students had additional challenges—both financial and familial—that they had to overcome, including economic, housing, food, mental health, and technological insecurities.

- “Well, I think it's been again, that unknown, but the financial challenges, the high unemployment. For our working students, having their kids at home and then trying to juggle that. And this has been a year of significant loss for our students.” – Participant 5, HSI, community college

- “For a significant number of our students, just having the time and the means and the wherewithal to go to college was a significant challenge. And then for a secondary group who might've been able to find the means and the time and all the rest of it, I'd say the value proposition. Setting aside time to study and to do work, all the rest of it in a period, especially through these modalities when the need for money was so great.” – Participant 16, Community college

- “I would say the biggest challenges for students were dealing loss of income, and poverty related issues, both health and financial, which including with their extended family. So we had a large number of students when their parents lost their jobs, they were forced to start working during COVID, even if they were in high school, and that played a role.” – Participant 18, For-profit college

- “They're tangible issues like Wi-Fi, food, and the living environments. You're living in a two-bedroom house with six brothers and sisters, and your mother, something like that. It's balancing the impact of COVID while they're going to school... It’s also other issues, it's isolation, loneliness. I can get to everybody with the food, the soft issues, those issues, those issues that are less quantifiable, are things that concern me even more than the food and the Wi-Fi issues. I'm concerned about student mental health.” – Participant 7, Community college

Institutions that service primarily adult students, such as for-profit institutions, highlight the acute impact of schools and childcare being closed. These adult students struggled to juggle parenting and supervising their children during hours of the day they previously devoted to their education or work.

- “Number one challenge for students was schools were closed. We have adult learners, the schools being closed was a disaster... The stress on single parents was unbelievable, and we lost students. As a result of that we saw students that didn't enroll because of it. But the stress over the course of the year with parents, particularly single moms having to deal with their kids at home was a disaster.” – Participant 6, For-profit college

- “Our students are almost all adult learners, that have pretty complicated lives...Most are living day to day, and so, we have already rebuilt education way before COVID, to work for them, to create modalities, so I think... To
be honest with you, this is just another piece of what they deal with. Yeah, there was a ton of people who lost jobs. We worked on putting them in new jobs while they worked in school...Actually, I would say, if there's one thing, it was childcare, because of the school's being closed.” – Participant 12, For-profit college

- “The majority of our students are working adults. Not necessarily older adults, but say in their mid 20s, and they're working in balancing college and career. And so those were major shifts for them, and where they lost half of their, things they were doing "professionally", either working or going to school. When the work part stopped, we felt like we had to really step in and help fill in some of that.” – Participant 4, Public regional 4-year college

Internet connectivity and access is another major challenge for students. Across sectors, administrators describe how students often lacked access to both the hardware needed to do online education as well as the internet access to do so. Connectivity problems ranged from a lack of rural broadband to students who could not afford to pay for internet or who had to share their router with multiple other family members.

- “A lot of our students did not have technology and so we tried to open up some dollars where we were buying some laptops for students and then distributing them to students.” – Participant 5, HSI, community college
- “Then the second is the technology challenge. And I'm always curious when people seem to dismiss off and this idea that there's a digital divide. Where do these people live? Of course, there's a digital divide. And it's of two kinds. It's either the students don't have the hardware needed. One of my students was trying to write an essay on an iPhone. I don't care that they have iPhones, that's not going to get you through. And the other is, it reliable access to broadband internet...The challenges are right exponential for our students. But again, the pandemic merely made clear patterns that have been there now, for a couple of years. Those challenges for our students are not new.” – Participant 1, Community college

Some of the presidents at HBCU’s discuss how their students especially struggled with the transition to online learning. They lacked the one-on-one interaction, in-person services and support networks that had been more readily available.

- “The pivot to the technology, the virtual-based education... Yeah. So, not having the face-to-face interaction with the faculty so that they get this wraparound services, such as individual coaching, in-person tutoring services, the things that happen outside of instruction that had actually aid to academic success or excellence.” – Participant 13, HBCU, private non-profit college
- “I think one was just getting used to a way of teaching and learning, that was just not familiar to them. And so, as we have surveyed students, there's about a third, they would be okay no matter what, and there's about another third that are like, "Okay, I'll do this, but..." And then there's another third that really struggled, just struggled with not having the kind of access to people on campus to really help them.” – Participant 14, HBCU, private non-profit college

Changes to Operating Model

Across sectors, the most common operational change administrators mention is the transition to an online environment. This includes both an online educational modality as well as a new online system for administrative and faculty operation, especially as most institutions have never had a work-from-home system in place before. Switching to an online modality also expanded beyond just providing education remotely. Some colleges needed to completely switch their operational systems online, which for some schools services like payroll had never been online before and required even more planning.
• “In a normal fall or spring semester, we would be about 75% of our offerings would be face to face. And so for last fall, the one we just completed, we were 84% online and for this spring, we're at 78% online. That is huge change for us” – Participant 5, HSI, community college

• “Well, we are maintaining financial investments, actually increasing, in our online support both for faculty, staff, students. In our online teaching, have improved. I believe the quality of our online teaching made a commitment to that in curriculum design in remote learning. We have absolutely changed our operating model in terms of hours and expectations for employees.” – Participant 16, HSI, community college

• “Going operationally to an online environment was new for us, and I suppose it created major changes, but to execute payroll and institutional advancement and those things operationally was different for our staff.” – Participant 20, HSI, private non-profit college

• “We are not a traditional college, in going to school four or five days a week, in what we're doing. We're all adult learners, so the majority of our classes are flip classroom. They only come in two days a week, so they can work their jobs, do all the things that single moms and others need to do to live, and also, it creates a lot more success for our students. I think the biggest change that we had was the fact that they were fully at home, other than coming in for their hands-on, clinical work.” – Participant 12, For-profit college

• “Operating will be physical infrastructure, both in the idea of what we do for technology and enhancing all of our technology, changing our learning management system, increasing our network infrastructure, moving our ERP to a web-based platform...And so we jumped quickly to what they call a J-One Platform, which is our web. That was done so that those employees who are working from home can access their desktops, can do all of their learning resources no matter where they are.” – Participant 13, HBCU, private non-profit college

**Finances and Enrollment**

**Last Year’s Impact on the Budget**

How each institution generated revenue and adjusted to changes during the pandemic varied considerably. One common theme across sectors was the sense of uncertainty that impacted their budget—particularly among public institutions that depend, at least partially, on state or local appropriations. While many of these institutions have been facing declining levels of state appropriations for higher education, the economic impact of the pandemic made the situation even more complicated and challenging.

- “[State] withheld part of its budget from the city university, so the city university withheld its budget from its colleges, including [Institution]. And so we did not get a budget until nine months into our fiscal year.” – Participant 19, HSI, public regional 4-year college

- “And state appropriations are about 24%, tuition and fees and property taxes are split about the rest of that. And so, we went in because we felt vulnerable in all those areas.” – Participant 5, HSI, community college

- “On the finance side, our state had an emergency session, legislative session to deal with some of the budget impacts. And higher ed in my state, we have a funding law that guarantees funding for everything except higher education, effectively...It's about 95% of the budget is on cruise control, and 5% of the budget is subject to legislative discretion. And that usually includes a lot of higher education. So we're the ones that when the budget needs to be rebalanced, it usually comes on the backs of higher ed.” – Participant 4, Public regional 4-year college

Revenue sources for institutional budgets vary widely both within and across sectors. All institutions rely on tuition to some extent, but other factors can play a larger role. All public institutions rely on state appropriations, but some also depend on local property tax rates or commercial property tax rates. Other institutions had created additional revenue streams by providing trainings to employers. And then many
institutions also had a variety of auxiliary revenue-generating services such as food services, stadiums, bookstores that experienced significant shortfalls.

- “So we have multi streams of income, of course, but about 30% of the revenues come from outside resources through, we do venture capitalists, we have grants, we have third-party vendors, because like at this school, we actually partner and create business opportunities for our community to come in and we generate revenues from that source, but we are 70% tuition-based.” – Participant 13, HBCU, private non-profit college

- “It has collapsed our business model. I am a public institution, and yet my public sources of funding, I'm already stagnant or in decline, pre-pandemic collapsed during the pandemic. I lost over a million dollars in state funding. I'm not complaining about that. I understand the reality that the state’s revenue collapsed, I got it. But because of that, I was suddenly in a position where I can't make up a million dollar loss in state funding. County funding held, but I don't know that it's going to hold in the future. My county allocation is based on ratables, both commercial and residential. Commercial real estate has collapsed, those ratables are going to go down...my auxiliary income collapsed. No food service. I have a 1000 seat theater on campus, and no theater. I have a planetary, no revenue from that.” – Participant 1, Community college

- “We have taken a budgetary hit primarily in areas I mentioned earlier, things like food service and childcare services, those user fee services of the institution...We do a lot of customized training for employers in the area and their employees. Many employers have not been allowing any outside organizations into their facilities due to COVID. And many of them still had wanted to do hands-on training. And of course, when you don’t have access, you’re going to be losing revenue, you’re going to be losing business in that area.” – Participant 22, Community college

- “Challenging in the sense that, as a public comprehensive institution, within the [State] system, we don’t have a large endowment to give us flexibility in what we can do. If you look at our budget, we focus mainly on enrollment because about 80% of our budget comes from enrollments, that’s tuition that is collected. And we get about another, I would say... The remainder is mainly from appropriations from the state, because we don’t have a large research infrastructure on our campus.” – Participant 10, Public regional 4-year college

Schools that saw enrollment declines also saw significant revenue declines from lost tuition. Several mentioned enrollment declines during COVID were worse than before but part of a longer term trend of decline. For-profit institutions experienced less of an enrollment decline than other sectors, so their revenue stream was not impacted as badly. They saw enrollment declines in the first months of the pandemic that they thought would continue.

- “We projected for enrollment levels to be down anywhere from seven to 13%, and we were in that range. So our tuition revenues were on target.” – Participant 16, HSI, community college

- “Probably a reduction of anywhere from 30-40% of revenue... And we’ve struggled with enrollment, I would say, for the past five years, but it became acute during the pandemic...And so from a financial standpoint, it’s been a big hit.” – Participant 9, HBCU, private non-profit college

- “So initially, we were anticipating a big impact in the first month, and we thought that many students would be dropping out, and we didn’t see that... So from a financial standpoint, everything has been pretty much flat from a tuition revenue side.” – Participant 6, For-profit college

- “$3.5 million, that’s the impact on a $36 million budget. And so significant we had in this last year about 500, close to $600,000 of non-tuition revenue loss. Housing refunds, food service decline, bookstore decline, all of our auxiliary accounts, of course when students are on campus those suffer. And then tuition loss to about two and a $3 million. Now can you attribute all of that to COVID? No, just enrollment's been going on down across the country at all institutions, but it was a dramatic drop from the trend this year in enrollment. It’s a dramatic loss of revenue.” – Participant 23, Community college

- “Well again, I mentioned we’ve seen an enrollment decline for the last 10 plus years. State appropriations have pretty much been cut with the exception of last year, they weren't. So there was a lot of concern with students
disengaging, not returning, fewer students, fewer freshmen because of the high school seniors last year. I mean, that was a tough year.” – Participant 21, Public regional 4-year college

- “We had a fiscal challenge in 2019, 20, but we made all of our difficult business decisions in terms of staffing cuts and operating budget cuts in 2019, 20. With the stimulus funds that we received with our clawing of the enrollment that we were able to manage because we had a fairly robust set of online programs already, we will actually be able to post a surplus this fiscal year. And we are optimistic about our ability to post a surplus next fiscal year as well.” – Participant 2, Private non-profit college

Relatedly, schools with residential dorms that relied on revenue from room and board also took a big financial hit that they were largely unable to mitigate.

- “From a budget standpoint, a big portion of our operating budget is room and board, and we've only had less than a third of students actually come to campus, so we took a big hit in that, in our budget for room and board. Revenue, we've had some dip in enrollment, not huge. We also saw a lot of students go to part-time, so that changes the configuration.” – Participant 14, HBCU, private non-profit college

- “Housing was just a big deal, when you have housing revenue loss of four, or five, six million, that is just a challenge to deal with.” – Participant 18, For-profit college

- “We immediately lost a large percentage of our students that would be in dormitories. So normally, we're actually over capacity in our dormitories and that as you know in the financing of colleges, there's the auxiliary funds that often sort of make up for anything that you might not be getting on what we call the ENG side. So the auxiliary funds, room board, those kinds of additional fees. And immediately that was cut in half. For us, we run it about $140 million total budget. That was a $10 million loss just in its own. Right? So a really strong hit. Without the federal money, it would probably take us several, probably three to five years to get out of that hole.” – Participant 8, Public regional 4-year college

Navigating Impact of Budget

The pandemic and consequent budgetary crisis forced institutions across sectors to try and reduce costs wherever they could. The federal stimulus money compensated for a lot of the loss that institutions experienced, though some cut their own budgets. What this meant in practice varied by institution, but overall, institutions entered a sort of “cost-cutting” mentality. They tried to reduce costs wherever they could to try to continue providing education.

- “Like I said, we're bare bones. Our full time faculty is teaching full course loads. Maybe even a little bit more... We've slimmed down on some of the other operations... We went from a three meal a day plan to a brunch and a dinner. Just some of those things...we've certainly trimmed some fat.” – Participant 9, HBCU, private non-profit college

- “Well, when I say we've come through, okay, it's not pretty good, but we've been able to weather the storm and we've taken financial hits. So we're cutting and cutting and cutting. On the other hand, the pandemic has taught us to act more, to be more efficient. Does that make sense?... And we've found efficiencies” – Participant 3, Public regional 4-year college

Across sectors, many institutions implemented hiring freezes or slowed down hiring overall. They put off scheduled raises and some even permanently eliminated certain positions. Various administrators also identified eliminating adjuncts as an easy way to cut costs or laid off some employees or have decided not to rehire vacant positions as faculty left.

- “We continue to be conservative. We've approved some positions. We had put a pretty significant hiring freeze in place. We didn't do raise last year.” – Participant 5, HSI, community college
“Again, we had some faculty positions that either were non-renewed or will not be replaced. We’ve had significant retirements occurring during this whole period. And we’ve made, in many cases, decisions not to replace those positions and sort of right size to the student enrollment basis. If you will.” – Participant 22, Community college

“Well, because of vacancy savings when we froze positions and didn’t rehire positions in the middle of the pandemic, and we had a number of instructors that classes didn’t run, so we didn’t need adjuncts for example, the teaching outdoor class that wasn’t running, we actually had a reduction in our overall operating expenses that exceeded our net loss in tuition.” – Participant 4, Public regional 4-year college

“In the spring of 2020, we eliminated a number of faculty and staff positions and we reduced the operating budget of the college by, let’s see here, 15 thousand, 18. So yeah, not quite 30%. Not quite 20%. So yeah, we just needed to significantly eliminate some spending and we needed to become a smaller institution. We offered early retirement incentive programs to faculty and staff, had about dozen or so folks take us up on that. We’re offering that again this year.” – Participant 2, Private NP

A couple of institutions—HBCU’s in particular—made it clear that it was a goal of theirs to not furlough or reduce any staff, and they took steps to be able to prevent that. One HSI institution expanded their services and support systems, such as the food bank, to their employees who were also experiencing hardships.

“Those are cuss words. We didn’t furlough at all. We figured out how to maintain. I had over 80% retention in my staff, did not cut.” – Participant 13, HBCU, private non-profit college

“So, fortunately we have been able to keep everyone employed through the pandemic, so we see ourselves clear through this budget year as well. So, we’ve been incredibly fortunate to not have to lay off anyone throughout this pandemic.” – Participant 14, HBCU, private non-profit college

“One other thing we did through the student services side was really ramped up our food bank pantries...And it wasn’t a matter of money because we have an agreement with the Houston Food Bank where they bring us all the food. We just had to staff it and advertise it and keep that up. And one thing that we did do too was added employees to the list that they could come get food as well because while, obviously they were still employed with us, many of them, their spouses had lost their jobs and things like that.” – Participant 5, HIS, community college

In addition to staffing changes, institutions across sectors frequently discussed how the pandemic led to decreases in discretionary spending and lower overhead costs. There was no more travel for faculty and staff when events like recruitment fairs became virtual, utility bills declined, contracts with third-party vendors weren’t necessary. While these costs individually may not have been huge, they added up to offset other costs.

“We certainly reduced discretionary spending. Some of that was easy to do with not being able to travel, and certainly a number of expenses that you wouldn’t undertake otherwise.” – Participant 16, HSI, community college

“When we sent everybody home to work remotely for a very long time, then operational expenses decreased, and then we could take those decreases and put it into COVID readiness, to put up the protocols, get the sanitizers, get the face masks for everybody, get the tests and everything. I guess I would say that there was a shifting of budget, but again, not necessary... It was I would say almost budget neutral in the end” – Participant 20, HSI, private non-profit college

“We have a thousand athletes, they all remained enrolled. We gave them on-site offering of conditioning, but all of the expenses of travel and play, which was in the millions disappeared, all student life disappeared, and then there is an invisible layer of cluster at an institution like ours, of part-time employees, night shift people, utilities dropped dramatically, repairs and maintenance dropped dramatically, because the buildings weren’t being used.
So all that, at a large facility institution, those expenses dropped more than the revenue dropped.” – Participant 18, For-profit college

- “Well, among the changes that we've made is we took a look at our budgets, projections that we made earlier in the year, for example. We've been able to actually save some money by not having all our buildings occupied all the time. So there've been a decrease in our energy usage, which has saved us some money. Also, as I mentioned, travel by our faculty and staff has basically been curtailed. We froze the hiring or filling of new positions as a way of saving some additional resources. So we try to use, whereabouts we can be more efficient, we've tried to use that approach to cut costs.” – Participant 10, Public regional 4-year college

One institution even tried to get creative by designing new sources of revenue, such as renting out their dorm space commercially.

- “Our campus is beautiful and so we try to use it for conferences and events. That obviously was another stream of income that dried up but we're trying to get back in on that. We're actually Airbnb-ing out some of our properties now, because we're in the Finger Lakes region is very popular in the summers. So I think we learned to try to do things like that, that maybe we weren't pushing as hard to do before. But again, it requires people to still come here in physical space and enjoy the physicality of our location.” – Participant 24, Private non-profit college

Federal Support

The federal funding received from the government through the CARES Act and then the December 2020 stimulus was universally praised across sectors, and it was foundational for keeping many of the institutions, and their students, afloat. For many institutions, these programs were vital and allowed them to continue operating by covering the additional costs they incurred over the year along with the decreases in revenue as well as supporting students so they could continue to stay enrolled in the college. Some institutions are even expecting to come out of the fiscal year with a surplus.

- “We were fortunate to receive the CARES Act, or the two CARES Act. And then being an HBCU, there was two other allocations to our schools in particular that really helped us to balance our budget last year, and it helped us to manage the deficit this year. And we are due to be allotted more federal funds from the rescue plan, which we are hoping will help us to close the gap for this year, which is running about, it's in the millions. And we're hoping that the rescue plan allocation will wipe out that deficit for us, and offer us a small surplus to be able to move forward.” – Participant 14, HBCU, private non-profit college

- “It's allowed us to remain flat, basically...Right...The first one, we did receive some funds, but some of that we used to give the students... Yeah, we used some for student equipment, we dispersed some of our share to students, and then we had lots of investment in learning platforms.” – Participant 6, For-profit college

- “All I can say is right now, thank goodness, for the federal COVID relief funding support that the institution has gotten thus far and it is still looking forward to receiving, and that's helped us with some of that loss revenue and some of the areas...So it's been a significant hit, but overall hasn't been... we haven't been hit so hard that we've had to, for instance, tap into reserves or anything like that. We've tried to manage that through with managing expenses to adapt to the revenue changes.” – Participant 22, Community college

- “Certainly the federal CARES Act and the other federal dollars have been incredibly helpful because we had to spend money on additional staff, staffing. We had just opened the year before a student health center. I can't imagine if we hadn't done that prior to the pandemic, how we would have served our students and maintain safety on campus, but finances were definitely a concern and student engagement.” – Participant 21, Public regional 4-year college

- “Well, I'll tell you, first of all, top level that the federal programs, the CARES Act...and all the others, the one that we hope is coming out soon, have been extremely helpful. It hasn't made up the total amount. It's probably
helped us make up about 60 to 70% of the revenue that we’ve lost and that’s been extremely helpful.” – Participant 11, Private non-profit

• “I’ll jump in and start, the fact that my computer is able to run, because I have been able to pay the electric bill, let’s start with the basic needs. [Our] College received over $7 million in the three rounds of HEERF funding. Quite literally, without that, we’re not open. It was in fact, a stimulus and recovery that allowed us to stay in business.” – President (Roundtable), nonprofit 4-year college

Administrators note how the federal funds were also incredibly important for students. These funds were distributed to students across sectors to help with basic needs as well as alleviating debt, which allowed students to continue to be able to stay enrolled. Some administrators noted that these funds potentially even stimulated enrollment.

• “Number one, the most positive, 100% for sure, was the student emergency funds. We’re giving those to students for everything. To help with rent payments for their family living situations because they had lost their jobs, to unexpected medical expenses, to helping with food insecurity, so from a real human perspective and also from a retention budgetary issue, that was number one” – Participant 20, HSI, private non-profit college

• “As a result of the CARES Act, there were two benefactors of that. First was our students, and that is how we provided all of the technology support that they received. Second was providing them all with checks that they needed for their emergency-based living, personal expenses. And then third, many of the students use some of the resources they ask for additional funds for scholarship so that they could continue their education.” – Participant 13, HBCU, private non-profit college

• “So the CARES Act was, I would say crucial to our survival… We got a very large CARES Act based on our low-income population, but we were very quick to distribute it to students immediately. And we were able to distribute it to all students, because the college primarily enrolls a low-income population, so we did not have to exclude anyone, other than foreign students and undocumented students… that actually stimulated enrollment.” – Participant 18, For-profit college

• “I can’t tell you how much that helps our students who are struggling. I mean, I mentioned that this #RealCollege Survey when 50% of our students indicate they have some basic needs insecurity, that really makes it tough to retain and graduate students who are lacking food, housing. So that CARES Act. I just call it CARES one, two and three…but that’s tremendously helpful in being able to retain students. And it also provided the institution with some money to help with a lot of the COVID related expenses as well, staff, all the PPE, those kind of things.” – Participant 21, Public regional 4-year college

• “It’s also helped us help our students as we act as a pass through to give that funding to the students. So again, 6,000 schools, 6,000 ways of doing it, they said, “Here’s the money, you figure it out how you’re going to distribute it.” So we did and I thought we came up with an equitable, a fair and a model that did that. Every student got something. Then if you had additional crisis needs, then you could apply for that. We formed panels that dealt with it and they continue to do that.” – Participant 11, Private non-profit college

• “It allowed us to wipe out student debt, which grew. Our collections rate drops 10%, we were able to waive those debts for students and therefore keep them enrolled and keep ourselves in business.” – President (Roundtable), HSI, public regional 4-year college

• “Being able to provide direct funding to our students. We didn’t see quite the enrollment decline we may have because our students are already struggling financially and being able to provide them money for internet access, laptops, those kinds of things, were key to keeping them enrolled.” – President (Roundtable), public regional 4-year college

• “We never really closed. So the idea of opening plans was quite unique to us because we found ourselves serving as a support to our students and providing the resources they needed with basic amenities. Whether it was food insecurities, technology support that they needed to continue their educational learning. In addition to providing them with the resources that they might’ve needed for their families and themselves to continue. So the
resources and the finances that came through CARES was great for the immediate need...So it allows us not only to support to provide the infrastructure support that they needed, but to assist them in some of the debt that they may have hit so they can continue their education.” – President (Roundtable), HBCU, Private non-profit college

Administrators also used funds to set up safety procedures to be able to allow some students to continue to come onto campus who needed to by paying for PPE, improving ventilation systems, and hiring contact tracers.

- “I think one of the additions of this funding that probably wasn’t as large in terms of the money given, but certainly in the impact was the infusion of funds to help with safety on campus...As we’re discussing this, I just don’t want that fact to be lost...Everything on top of that, the masks, the testing protocols, we were able to test it and on a regular basis to catch infections before they spread. We had tracers that we hired to try and help us with that so that we could really track down that disease before it’s spread too far.” – President (Roundtable), public regional 4-year college

The federal funds were not just used to help cover COVID-related costs or make up for lost revenue. Some institutions were able to put it towards improved technology, delayed infrastructural fixes, or even new programs. In the roundtable discussion, participants stressed that some of the money went to operating costs to make up the deficit in terms of paying staff to make sure the students could actually receive the education they pay for.

- “With purchasing some of our software that we needed for online distance education. Even purchasing books that we could add, purchasing eBooks that were actually on the, for each class, for distance learning. So the students would not have to purchase some books. So that helped out quite a bit.”—Participant 15, HBCU, private non-profit college
- “So it’s going to give us some additional, I think about somewhere around 9 to $10 million, additional that we can now put into some DEI work that we’ve been wanting to do. Some major launch of some cultural audits and surveys and inventory that we want to do on some DEI work...A larger piece of the pie will also go to deferred maintenance, which really took a whack in the last two budgets as well.” – Participant 8, Public regional 4-year college
- “If they’re remote, if I have 2000 students, I have 400 of them on campus, but I still have 1600 of them who are looking to be educated, who are looking to also be able to use the kind of support we needed to wrap around them for the co-curricular things, the academic support, we still had to offer advising and we still had to offer opportunities outside of the classroom. We still had to manage financial aid. We still had to manage all the things that needed to be managed with the exception of offering food and board on campus. And so in order to do that, given the high percentage of the budget, that’s dependent on student tuition and fees to use the money to offset that, to actually keep people employed, to me seemed the best thing to do to make sure our students still received that education, even though our normal operations were so disrupted.” – President (Roundtable), HBCU, public regional 4-year college

While every administrator was appreciative of the federal money, several expressed some frustration with the regulations on how it can be spent. Federal regulations were constantly changing and uncertain. Many administrators found it difficult to know whether their decisions to help students were actually allowed. They said the guidance was unclear and in flux.

- “I was just going to say in the federal money, well, there’s so many rules attached to it that sometimes it's difficult to spend it.” – Participant 5, HSI, community college
- “Well, less restrictions on how we use money, recognition that this problem just because of pandemic ends doesn’t mean our problems end immediately. There are unknown ramifications, we’re worried about will
students return in the same numbers that they did pre-COVID...And we need people to recognize that support goes beyond just the two years here, and quit putting restrictions on how we run our business, and just that’s what I would ask for.” – Participant 23, Community college

- “So that first package that came out, the US Department of Education could not figure out how to provide coherent guidance to anybody about what it meant and how to use it... And by the time they did come out with coherent guidance, we were already into the second package. And so it’s like many institutions had already just made a decision to just forego the guidance and just use the money and move on. So I don’t know that that was as effective as it should have been or could have been.” – Participant 4, Public regional 4-year college

- “Initially when the CARES Fund Act was given, the Department of Education was changing the regulations on a daily basis. There were times when in the day they changed the regulations about how you could use the money, because there were times when we wanted to draw down some of the funds we were given, but we wanted to make sure we were using it for the right thing. For example, the other category that you just showed at 10% in Pennsylvania we have a union for faculty and in the collective bargaining agreement, faculty are supposed to get $20, extra pay cost that they teach online...But within two weeks, when we have to flip and pay bills to put all of our classes online, our faculty members had to be paid that money. So it actually increased the costs of delivery of instructions...I would say the guidance is a little bit unclear and I know I pitch ideas to our CFO and others. For example, facilities, our isolation space is in one of our older buildings that needs a new elevator. And I would argue that you could use money to fix up that elevator because we’re putting students, using it as an isolation and quarantine space. Others might disagree. It has been difficult knowing what is allowable and what’s not.” – President (Roundtable), public regional 4-year college

- “So you use creative thinking and then a year later, somebody comes back and tell you, you were absolutely wrong, even though they changed the rules on us, like every day. And so if we had waited in order for them to be able to really specify the rules, there would have been time and delay in getting those emergency grants to students...So it was really hard...but I still know institutions that are having a hard time spending it because all of our situations were so different. So that they can’t really figure out the right justification for us, for them in the way that we were able to say, well, we lost this revenue because of room and board, because of reduction in density therefore, that looks like a COVID response versus some other things that may have been also useful at the time, but harder to justify. Right?” – President (Roundtable), HBCU, public regional 4-year college

The president of one private non-profit institution expressed some frustration about how the money was distributed to his sector.

- “The implication was that the distribution was going to be the same as with the federal CARES money. Then the next week, the actual amounts came out on our sector got like pittance. I shouldn’t say pittance but it was very, very, very lopsided. Our sector as a sector, we’re mad. I get it that if it’s the state, and these are our institutions, their interest is to protect their own institutions. Our position was that if you’re giving money to help students survived COVID, it really shouldn’t impact on where they chose to get their education.” – Participant 11, Private non-profit college

Other Needs from Federal & State Assistance

Across sectors, administrators expressed a desire for additional funding. For public institutions, that can mean additional base allocations from the state. One community college president discussed the need to expand federal assistance for non-credit and training programs. This desire for additional funding also predates the pandemic. Many administrators, but especially those in the community college sector, express how state and local governments have been gutting their funding for years, and the pandemic only revealed the need for a serious investment in higher education. One community college president points out that when federal, state, and local governments cut funding for higher education, they are only
hurting the most vulnerable populations. The federal aid was lifesaving in terms of the impact from the pandemic, but it does not compensate for decades of states cutting funding to higher education.

- “An expansion of federal assistance for non-credit and training programs. I'd say more assistance to workforce boards, workforce training programs, apprenticeships. The programs that are in high demand, that industries value, that currently are not Title IV eligible. Or not eligible for financial aid. It’s particularly acute for part time working adult students.” – Participant 16, HSI, community college

- “So I think the federal government needs to come back in and the state government needs to come back in and realize the value that higher education can play. It's a tough sell because we've just gotten off that notion that public higher education is a public good. And so if you're asking me what the states could do, I think they could take that view and understand not only is that important for the pandemic, but for the future of the country as we're sitting here entering into industry 4.0 and to the digital age. We don't have the workforces prepared for the new economy.” – Participant 3, Public regional 4-year college

- “I think we need sort of guarantees that state appropriations are not going to continue to get cut. And in fact that we need more funding in higher education particularly at the four year level. Our state appropriations per student at the four year level is lower than what our community and technical colleges get. So there really needs to be a re-investment in higher education.” – Participant 21, Public regional 4-year college

- “The community college sector has been absolutely devastated by the pandemic in terms of both retention and enrollment. We are hemorrhaging students, and all of my colleagues here could contribute to that conversation…We really confront a very uncertain, unclear, fragile future for our students. I have lost 1,100 students between the Spring of 2020 and the Fall of 2020. It will be no surprise to anyone that they are our most vulnerable students. They are first generation, they are poor, they are students of color, they are immigrants, and they are undocumented students. I have got to figure...how we reach those students and get them back into higher education. But we are cratering and I am not going to thank legislators for handing me another $700,000. When in the past decade, you have robbed me of millions of dollars.” – President (Roundtable), Community college

- “Private higher education, public, two year, four year, the whole, all of those things play into how we see the history of higher ed funding at the state level around the country has been one of decline year after year, after year. So that's a whole topic in and of itself. And then you can layer on the pandemic without question.” – President (Roundtable), public regional 4-year college

- “Our legislature has cut higher ed for the last 15 plus years. The last two years, we've gotten a little bit of a respite. I do think though, that it will continue to get cut. And they'll say, well, you have all these Federal dollars helping you out, but it’s not going to restore funding from 10, 15 years ago. And we now have the lowest college going rate in [our state] at 48% that we've had in years. And one of the highest tuition increases in the country in [our state]. And I mean, we're putting it on the backs of our students. And I have to agree, until our legislators see what's happening. Yeah, enrollment's going to continue to decline, especially in places that serve high numbers of Pell recipients and low-income students.” – President (Roundtable), public regional 4-year college

Administrators suggest that highlighting the connection between investing in higher education and creating a workforce that is prepared for the future is a possible path to convince legislators to reprioritize higher education, claiming that they cannot create the programs that will prepare students for the jobs of the future if they do not have the funds to do so. Other administrators suggest the need for investments from businesses to train employees in their field of work as well as the need to position higher education as lifelong learning and retraining, rather than something for young adults after high school.

- “Are we positioned to be able to attract new industries into our communities, into our states...How do we get the legislature to give us additional resources, make higher ed a public good instead of a private good. That is the issue. And I think it is when states start realizing that we are not producing the labor force that they need,
Many also express the need for more investments from state and local governments because the federal stimuli are one-time payments, so the money can only be used for one-time projects, rather than ongoing support or investments that would help students the most. Those in higher education need investments that are long-term.

- “It’s undeniable that this huge influx of aid helped students tremendously and helped our institution at the time. My concern about some of this distribution reflected here is that there are still significant structural problems inherent in our funding model and in our economic and business model. I am terribly, terribly concerned, not about this year, perhaps not about next year, but in future years, I still confront a profound challenge that this money has not helped. My colleagues are absolutely right. It maintained student momentum, it engaged our most vulnerable students. My institution remains incredibly vulnerable in the future.” – President (Roundtable), public regional 4-year college

- “I think it is time that we make compelling arguments about how higher education is connected to the world of work...We need to use real-time data to understand labor market needs. Because whether we like to admit it or not, there's going to come a time when the lights are not going to go on in your house because your local utility has no linemen. And that's a reality...I also think embedded in [another president in the roundtable]'s point is this opportunity to craft new public-private partnerships. And I think if a corporation wants a workforce, let's say in a medical diagnostic field, then we need to get money out of that company to set up curriculum, to hire directors, to provide experiential learning opportunities and to hire our graduates. And that opportunity is life long. This notion that college is for 18 to 22 year olds, we have to blow that out of the water...I think it's a dynamic re-imagining of what we can offer and how we partner better with each other.” – President (Roundtable), public regional 4-year college
we expect we will have in our base budget in three years.” – President (Roundtable), HSI, public regional 4-year college

Long-Term Budgetary Impacts

There is a lot of uncertainty across sectors about how the past year will impact budgets long-term. Again, public institutions that rely on state appropriations are in an especially precarious position due to the uncertainty of state funding. Declining enrollments also pose a long-term question that impacts the budget. One president bluntly explained how institutions likely won’t know the long-term budgetary impacts of the past year for some time.

• “I really don’t know. I think I don’t anticipate a giant change one way or the other. I’m feeling somewhat positive over our ability to stabilize enrollment, which I think will help tremendously. But I think a lot hinges on what happens at the federal level.” – Participant 17, HSI, community college

• “This upcoming year largely is going to be dependent on what our state legislature does with funding. Because roughly a third of our funding now comes from the state government. And they’re, right now, debating what the next two years are going to look like from a biennial budget standpoint.” – Participant 22, Community college

• “Again, we’re really enrollment driven, and I think that I’m anxious to see what happens with the undergraduate population.” – Participant 20, HSI, private non-profit college

• “Because our budget is so tied to our enrollments, we are trying to make sure that we keep our enrollment numbers up. And if we are able to have our enrollment numbers where we expect them, then we will not be adversely affected by the pandemic going post pandemic.” – Participant 10, Public regional 4-year college

• “I’m going to be a pessimist, but I have a feeling the state’s going to continue to cut higher ed which will mean we will have to continue to make cuts whether that’s to faculty or staff or programs, we’ll see. We’re in an area that does not have a growing population either.” – Participant 21, Public regional 4-year college

Changes in Enrollment

Overall, enrollment generally decreased across sectors. Some sectors, like community colleges, saw larger declines. For some institutions, these declines were across the board. Many caveat that their institutions have been experiencing enrollment declines for years, and the pandemic has made them more dramatic, rather than having created them.

• “We have some smaller technology programs, like cyber security as an example, that really keep us going and biology has always been one of our strongest because we send a lot of students out to medical schools and health professions. We’re kind of in the social sciences realm and, yeah, students continue to be interested in those. Our strongest, strongest program is our social work program that leads students either into the social work field or into the counseling field, and those that... that just remains strong” – Participant 20, HSI, private non-profit college

• “The enrollment declines have been devastating. Enrollment declines from COVID, on top of pre-existing enrollment declines, at least in my region. I know there are a few states in the country that have had increases in community college enrollment since 2010. At least in [our state], and in the middle states regions, community colleges, our enrollments have been declining. Then, with COVID, super impose 10, 15% enrollment declines on top of that, enrollment declines of that magnitude are significant, and it’s not getting any better.” – Participant 7, Community college

• “And then, of course, enrollment collapsed. In significant, profound and troubling ways. We lost somewhere between 900 and 1,000 students between spring ‘20 and fall ‘20. They were overwhelmingly poor students, first generation students and students of color. And while we have made herculean efforts to reach out and try to get
those students back, it’s highly unlikely we’re going to recover some of those students. we should really be alarmed by that.” – Participant 1, Community college

- “We lost probably 11% of our enrollment over the last year, year over year. And yet this spring, we’re graduating the largest class of students that we’ve ever graduated. And a lot of that we attribute to kind of that free summer.” – Participant 4, Public regional 4-year college

Some institutions saw program-specific patterns. For example, some administrators saw increased enrollment in healthcare-focused programs.

- “Well, really the new students are enrolling. Well, the doctor, like I mentioned, the doctor of healthcare administration, because of them being adults. No kind of significant changes. Just the ordinary, but you expect from, graduate students.” – Participant 15, HBCU, private non-profit college
- “People want to get into nursing, so we’ve seen an increase in nursing, some of our other programs we’ve seen decreases. So nursing pretty much offset the other programs so that’s why it’s pretty much flat. But there’s been a big interest in nursing, people out there, they want to volunteer and get on the front lines, and they want to help out where they can. So we still see that.” – Participant 6, For-profit college
- “Every program declined except for Health Sciences…We just recently started respiratory care program, booming. Emergency medicine, paramedics, nursing is always booming, but we got a big boost in emergency, EMTs, and paramedics last year. Those hero workers got a lot of props. It drew more people to that. They did our advertising for us.” – Participant 7, Community college

A couple of institutions managed to keep their enrollment flat. Some of the for-profit institutions even saw overall enrollment increases largely due to the fact that they allowed students to enroll every month. Others saw decreased enrollment offset with new online programs.

- “Our new student enrollment increased on our undergraduate side, it was more than 3% increase in our traditional undergraduates and in fact it probably was the highest incoming class in the last three years on our freshmen. Of course, there was an increase on the graduate new student enrollment because we hit six new graduate programs to come in.” – Participant 13, HBCU, private non-profit college
- “So initially, we were anticipating a big impact in the first month, and we thought that many students would be dropping out, and we didn’t see that. We saw that enrollment stayed flat. So from our perspective, we pretty much are flat because we made a big impact, did a lot to try and keep students in school. But also because of the way we enroll, students could enroll every month, except for last year April, May, whatever.” – Participant 6, For-profit college
- “Undergraduate enrollment, let me get it. I think it’s down slightly, but relatively flat, with international and residential decreasing, and online increasing, at the same rate as the decrease, to keep us about flat.” – Participant 18, For-profit college

Institutions that provided technical training said those programs were among those hardest hit. Several programs had capacity limits due to in-person requirements complicated by the need to maintain social distancing. Other programs just could not be done in a remote setting.

- “The programs that have suffered the most have been our career technical education programs. And some of our allied health programs because of our healthcare restrictions that capped capacity. So I’m still not able to have full capacity rooms for our trades.” – Participant 16, HSI, community college
- “A lot of our programs at the college are like outdoor education. We have river rafting. It sounds like a recreation, but we actually train rafting guidance. Well, how do you do that in the middle of a pandemic? And when you put six people on a boat and… So those kinds of logistics became an issue and trying to rethink how and why we meet face-to-face, so we don’t take it for granted.” – Participant 4, Public regional 4-year college
Institutions that had graduate programs experienced a mix of enrollment patterns. Some administrators express that their graduate programs fared well because they already had an online foundation that the undergraduate programs did not. However, graduate programs also primarily make up adult learners who may have been harder hit with other responsibilities, such as child care, or economic insecurity.

- “So, we have a small set of graduate programs, yeah. All of those went to online. And it’s adult education, and it’s offered evenings and weekends. They were able to really easily pivot to that. But again, we saw some people just not do school this year because they just had so much other stuff to do. So, there we saw much more of a decrease in enrollment than we did in our traditional undergrads.” – Participant 14, HBCU, private non-profit college
- “In 2018-19, in graduate online hours we had 27 hundred. In 2019-20, the pandemic years, come on. Again, online graduate work went down because again the economy tanked and there wasn’t money from employers to reimburse and so on.” – Participant 2, Private NP

Changes in Admissions & Recruitment

The majority of the institutions interviewed were open-enrollment institutions,. A portion of these institutions required standardized test scores before the pandemic, either for admission or placement. Eliminating that requirement was one of the first admissions-related changes these institutions made. Some predicted that they will remain test-optional going forward. They said standardized tests didn’t predict success for some students, and they would instead connect students to academic support services.

- “Oh, well [institution] decided to go SAT/ACT optional, so we’ve had to develop an entirely different admissions rubric. It worked. At least we think so, we’ll find out really next year.” – Participant 19, HSI, public regional 4-year college
- “So, we’ve been in conversation previous to COVID-19, about the benefit of standardized tests. So again, historically students of color just haven’t performed as well on those tests, and they don’t predict success. So, we had already started thinking about that, but what we did was offer students the opportunity to apply and come under a new program that we’re calling LIFT, I don’t even know what LIFT stands for, but anyway, what they would do is not offer us any standardized tests, but that we would on admissions, wrap academic support services around them early on. And that’s going to serve as a really good pilot for us, as to whether or not you really even need tests going forward.” – Participant 14, HBCU, private non-profit college
- “Not anymore. Previously it was required to have your file complete, and now we could make decisions without the standardized test results.” – Participant 10, Public regional 4-year college

The past year has been incredibly disruptive for the admissions process. In addition to some institutions dropping standardized tests, many student profiles were not comparable to what schools had seen in previous year. As a result, many institutions began taking a more holistic approach toward admissions. Some institutions already did this before. They looked farther back in prospective students’ academic history, their GPA’s and transcripts for earlier years. They connected students with counselors early on in their college careers to provide them extra support.

- “Prior to our students coming in, we normally will have that counselors test them, prior to the test that we actually admit to all of our students, we normally have the counselors to assist us in doing that. We were unable to do that. And only thing that we could do as far as the admissions office wants to go back eighth grade and look at their math, English, those scores and kind of calculate to see where they were, and to try to best schedule classes that we thought would help them out.” – Participant 15, HBCU, private non-profit college
• “We’re an open enrollment institution so we weren’t selective to begin with. We were in the process however. Last year was our first year of doing holistic placement. So we have effectively all but eliminated remediation for our students.” – Participant 4, Public regional 4-year college

• “Oh, yeah. I mean, I don’t know how you would possibly predict based on this year, it’s such an anomaly... I mean, we did not anticipate the growth action enrollment that we have right now. Yeah, the model wasn’t really working.” – Participant 3, Public regional 4-year college

• “We looked at grade point average. Like everybody says, we look at the whole person kind of thing. We looked at transcripts. We have pretty good relations with our prospective students. We get the list and all that kind of stuff like everybody else, but we try to connect them with faculty members early on in the process and so forth. So sometimes faculty members or admissions counselors will advocate for a particular student and the ones that are on borderline, then we have a board that looks at that, and they talk about it.” – Participant 11, Private non-profit college

The pandemic was also incredibly disruptive to recruitment strategies. Admissions officers were not able to undertake their typical strategies such as attending college fairs, visiting high schools, or giving campus tours. The entire recruitment model had to move virtually. This meant virtual school visits as well as virtual tours. Many administrators claim that their campus and sense of community is a driving force that encourages prospective students to enroll, so creating that sense virtually posed a challenge.

• “So the use of technology, how we provide virtual-based experiences, looking at visitations, because it’s really about experience, as I mentioned to you earlier, right? The ideal of a student coming here and having the opportunity to see and feel culture and climate, that’s how they determine fit because they’re usually shopping when they get to us... So we had to rethink how to actually do prospect outreach using virtual-based platforms to engage these individuals.” – Participant 13, HBCU, private non-profit college

• “So number one, we went from a personal, we used to do personal visits to high schools, foreign countries and corporations, all that moved to virtual. But because the schools also were struggling, the college has offered many free services to high school students. So for example, as the president, I’m teaching with a former politician and Obama staffer, a social justice course to 150 high school juniors and seniors, that every week there’s a guest speaker, and every week we focus on George Floyd or Brianna Taylor. And what it did for the high schools is, it gave those students a little bit of a breath of fresh air, interesting class.” – Participant 18, For-profit college

• “Yeah, we did virtual tours, live virtual tours, where a missions rep would walk through on for like a FaceTime or Zoom platform, where the student or parents would be watching as that person went through. We did those asynchronous, did the 3D tour things like they do in real estate and help virtual fairs. Virtual where you could come and meet a faculty in a group setting on Zoom. And so again, if you can picture everything we pretty much tried to do face-to-face we adapted it, and made it a Zoom or a distant technology platforms.” – Participant 23, Community college

• “The number one business process that negatively affected our ability to run the business normally was our inability to be inside of high schools recruiting potential freshmen. And being on community college campuses recruiting transfer students.” – Participant 2, Private non-profit college

• “Well we were still open for tours the whole time. We would just do tours for individual families. We didn’t do group tours and we still had information sessions. But again, it was all one-on-one family to one person working with them. Instead of visiting secondary schools, we would do virtual visits and virtual college fairs where I think they would have breakout rooms...We had extended our deadline a month also for admitted students last spring. But there again, they just couldn’t travel at that point to come see us. I would say our campus is very dependent on people coming to see us and we have a very high application rate of students who actually come here. And then we have a fairly high take-up rate on students who at some point have visited campus, because we have a beautiful campus and until people come and see it and understand it, they don’t always understand the school.” – Participant 24, Private non-profit college
Some schools got creative and implemented new recruitment programs to try to both get new students and then ensure they actually make it to campus once they registered, such as using technology to highlight their digitally focused programs or offering additional scholarships. One non-profit college president details that their new digital recruitment strategies include Hulu and Facebook ads to geofencing so they can be even more targeted in their advertising to reach their adult or non-traditional students in specific areas.

• “We had been working on a niche, as I told you. And that niche was future readiness. So turning a Rust Belt into a digital belt based on entrepreneurial mindset, use of technology, and then future readiness training...Because now you’ve got every school in the country trying to get to these students through Zoom, how do you distinguish yourselves? We had a robot, we allowed them to drive the robot around and take a tour, we’re getting into augmented reality...We tried to do things that were a little different so that students could recognize the type of education we will build.” – Participant 3, Public regional 4-year college

• “So if [Student] signs up with us, we give you an automatic thousand dollars scholarship on signing. This was never really allowed in higher Ed...But what we’ve done is we’ve actually given them additional scholarships once they matriculate, they put down their first deposit and we give them X amount.” – Participant 8, Public regional 4-year college

• “The new president here is much more forward leaning into digital, because quite honestly, through traditional means of advertising, we don’t have the budget to compete with getting above the noise of larger institutions... We’re targeting adult degree completion folks through Hulu. On some other platforms where we target a specific age demographic, and then we are moving to a digital platform through Cumulus Media. Doing a lot of things that honestly at my age scare me, through voice recognition through your smartphone and your smart speakers, to geofencing and running ads through Facebook, and then other... Be it Hulu, Netflix. So much more strategic... Because we can narrow it down to our statistical metropolitan area. We can go to just Little Rock.” – Participant 9, HBCU, private non-profit college

Getting Students to Re-enroll

Across sectors, institutions struggled with student retention. Some of these schools, already struggled with this pre-pandemic, but the past year made it more difficult to retain students because they weren’t coming to campus where they could interact with peers, faculty, programs, and other services. In order to limit stop-outs, institutions focused on extensive personalized outreach to their students. Some institutions even established new programs this year for that purpose that focused on maintaining contact and fostering engagement.

• “So, we’re reaching out to them, we’re having... Faculty are reaching out to students who didn’t re-enroll. We’re putting a lot of resources from a standpoint of grant programs.” – Participant 5, HSI, community college

• “They have a lifetime email at this point, and we are keeping them apprised of summer school opportunities, and we are looking at hopefully counseling them through one on one relationships on why they stopped out...But really, we’re trying to recapture them as if we’re recruiting a new student, because they still are in the demographic of who we’re reaching out to and just making them aware that we’re still here, the door is still open, and came fall, we’re going to be, crossing our fingers, completely open and like it was before. So they’re in our constant contact email file, and we’re making sure that they’re aware of everything that’s going on with the college.” – Participant 9, HBCU, private non-profit college

• “We’ve been reaching out by phone calls and reaching out by email, texts. We have a one call system that we use, that is a mass message system that goes out to all of our students. And any type of new programs that we’re offering, new majors....We constantly send out either text messages or the mass mail into our students and making, plus we’ve also, we have advisors that actually make contact with them as well.” – Participant 15, HBCU, private non-profit college
“We set up an inbound and outbound call center. So that was the first time we did that. And at the same time, we reduced the steps to actually enroll to three. Now we need to do three things to enroll here. Or take a class. We also got rid of deadlines, late enrollment fees. And just we’re in the era of personalization now, right? So we did that. Most of our marketing, most of our student messaging is digital. It’s all online. It’s very targeted. And we ramped up that, we ramped up our texting of students through a platform we use. We also enlisted a lot of peer to peer mentoring groups to try to get to students.” – Participant 1, Community college

“We’re doing more calling to students...we set up a communications center because we’re trying to outreach, make those calls to students, the communications center is going to stay on. We do have some people who are working in the communications center, whether it’s on ground or from home, working in the communications center... Phone calls followed up by a postcard. Come on back. We want you back.” – Participant 7, Community college

In addition to extensive outreach, some institutions began offering incentives to keep students in school such as free courses and additional scholarship funds.

“So we have this whole campaign called, We want you back! So first we increase the scholarshipping and the scholarship offers for those students to incentivize them financially to come back in case affordability was being one of the concerns, especially with families being displaced... So they did a lot of incentives and programs in the beginning of the years using that virtual-based platforms.” – Participant 13, HBCU, private non-profit college

“And then we’ve just been using the donor dollars that we have, to help the students who need to come back, be able to come back. So, a lot for us is closing the gap between the financial aid...And so, we’re able to help them with some of the previous balances that they left, and then give them a little boost to come back to manage anything that they’ll pick up.” – Participant 14, HBCU, private non-profit college

“One of the successes we had, we have an enormous dual... And well, big for us, we have a big dual enrollment program. And in the past, we haven’t done very much with dual enrollment, but we reached out to those students. We reached out to their high school counselors, we did things like, we’ll give you a free summer class, if you enroll in the fall.” – Participant 1, Community college

“Within about three weeks of the pandemic’s declaration, we decided to move very quickly and waive all tuition fees and books costs for summer term. And so like I said, we were toward the end of the semester, we knew the next term was starting. And we did that not for revenue, obviously, it cost us money. We didn’t make any money off of that. We did that for operational continuity... And so one of the things that we decided early on, was we needed to do a couple of things with the free tuition. One was we wanted to have operational continuity, so that we could just keep people’s jobs in place, keep the function of the college moving forward, not pull back dramatically on all the offerings... At the same time, we were able to, it was almost a retention effort to keep people in our communities.” – Participant 4, Public regional 4-year college

Across sectors, administrators also stressed the importance of maintaining a digital footprint when reaching out to students. Some of these institutions have invested extensively in bringing their marketing practices up to date. This includes both maintaining a strong social media presence as well as implementing more targeted digital marketing strategies. Ultimately, these strategies also help for recruiting new students.

“And then just continuing our marketing. I mean, advertising, geo fencing, letters to first time graduates from high school from last May to this May...at this point in time most of our marketing is through social media to the students and we do a lot of geo fencing also to certain areas where we know they went to an event or neighborhoods where we have a high penetration.” – Participant 5, HSI, community college

“We’re also starting a significantly larger digital media campaign to reposition ourselves to remind folks...that long-term financial wellness and health really requires higher education.”—Participant 17, HSI, community college
“We’re actually… The new president here is much more forward leaning into digital, because quite honestly, through traditional means of advertising, we don’t have the budget to compete with getting above the noise of larger institutions… We’re targeting adult degree completion folks through Hulu… Doing a lot of things that honestly at my age scare me, through voice recognition through your smartphone and your smart speakers, to geofencing and running ads through Facebook… So much more strategic… Because we can narrow it down to our statistical metropolitan area.” – Participant 9, HBCU, private non-profit college

“Just heavy social media presence, we’ve contracted with a branding marketing agency separate from our own team to help us.” – Participant 23, Community college

“We use… digital means as best as possible. With the change in the national admissions counselors and NACAC rules, what we do a lot more of now is we actually, when the national student clearinghouse releases data for a semester, they actually compile retention and matriculation data on a student ID basis. So we’re actually able to buy student IDs and names and contact information from the national student clearinghouse. And actually recruit from that list.” – Participant 2, Private non-profit college

Administrators have also deployed strategies to re-enroll students who dropped out during the pandemic. This includes sending texts, postcards, and emails or calling students who dropped out to find out why they dropped out, offer them the opportunity to come back eventually to finish their degree, and provide incentives for re-enrollment such as additional financial aid or the ability to retake a class at no cost.

“We’re doing all kinds… we do advertising. The advertising is all about come back to campus. We have marketing, all that stuff. Social media. Outreach like that. We’re also doing new things. Some program, I don’t even know what it was, it’s called Degrees When Due… and it involved harvesting or finding, finding students who have X number of credits, but never graduated. We got those lists… We have lists of students who used to come here, and we’re doing deliberate outreach to them. In some cases, phone calls. In other cases, postcards. We’re doing more calling to students. Part of what we did during COVID, and I failed to mention this earlier, was we set up a communications center because we’re trying to outreach, make those calls to students, the communications center is going to stay on… When we got those lists from the Degrees When Due, those are phone calls. Phone calls followed up by a postcard. Come on back. We want you back. We put them on a postcard because hopefully if it’s the husband, the wife will nag him. If it’s the wife, the husband will nag them. Or the mother will nag the kid. They’ve got so many credits, we want you to get your degree.” – Participant 7, Community college

“They have a lifetime email at this point, and we are keeping them apprised of summer school opportunities, and we are looking at hopefully counseling them through one on one relationships on why they stopped out, was it purely just because of the pandemic, are there some financial issues? But really, we’re trying to recapture them as if we’re recruiting a new student, because they still are in the demographic of who we’re reaching out to and just making them aware that we’re still here, the door is still open, and come fall, we’re going to be, crossing our fingers, completely open and like it was before.” – Participant 9, HBCU, private non-profit college

“We’ve just been using the donor dollars that we have, to help the students who need to come back, be able to come back. So, a lot for us is closing the gap between the financial aid… we’re able to help them with some of the previous balances that they left, and then give them a little boost to come back to manage anything that they’ll pick up.” – Participant 14, HBCU, private non-profit

“Faculty are reaching out to students who didn’t re-enroll. We’re putting a lot of resources from a standpoint of grant programs. Dual credit students, we’ll be offering if they failed a class last fall or spring, we’re going to give them a free class this summer, the classes that they failed to try to help them get back on their path.” – Participant 5, HIS, community college
Financial Aid in Prediction Models

All of the institutions, across sectors, have a majority of their student populations on financial aid. Some of these institutions have a majority of students who are Pell-eligible. Financial aid has historically played a major role, and that did not change over the past year. If anything, it played an even larger role.

- “You said, what role does it play? A significant, the dollar line becomes the cost for a family…As we move forward, though, aid is the number one factor. I mentioned that more than 78% of my students are Pell eligible, and so they need some type of financial support to afford a private school education…But I do believe that we have made our experience, as a private school, very affordable.” – Participant 13, HBCU, private non-profit college

- “Oh, it plays a big role. Not just financial aid, but need-based scholarships, so private dollars to close the gap. It was a problem before the pandemic, it’s even a worse problem during the pandemic, and we perceive that it’s going to be a problem going forward in trying to help students to close the gap. So, it is one of our top priorities and fundraising is to actually have people donate to a need-based scholarship.” – Participant 14, HBCU, private non-profit college

- “Huge. I mean, financial aid for us as a campus that is primarily targeting students in rural and Rust Belt America, obviously as one of the most expensive campuses or universities, we rely on financial aid a lot. And so we have a very robust fundraising function that helps us develop our own scholarships. [Our university] has scholarships to help. I think something like 80% of our class right now is on financial aid.” – Participant 3, Public regional 4-year college

Adult/Non-Traditional Students and International Students

Adult and non-traditional students make up significant portions of some of the institutions we spoke to. For those institutions, there were no real changes in outreach unique to that population. A couple of institutions implemented some digital marketing strategies to target these students. Other institutions established new graduate programs for them, though the programs were in development pre-pandemic.

- “We haven’t made any additional efforts. We do have a prior learning wing, we have a very large veteran population, so we are accustomed to adult learners, we don’t do particular rigorous outreach to them.” – participant 19, HSI, public regional 4-year college

- “Actually, not really because our adult and non-traditional students are mainly for the graduate programs, and we already have a small graduate program. So if anything, we’ve developed new programs in that area to attract them.” – Participant 10, Public regional 4-year college

Institutions across sectors worked toward recruiting international students pre-pandemic, but the pandemic devastated the market for international students, especially as students were unable to come to the physical campus. Many schools had to completely stop recruiting from that population. Some schools with on campus residencies were able to work with international students to provide temporary housing.

- “That is dormant. There was a period there where we were actually reaching out to international students and we stopped making efforts…The Trump administration policies which made it very difficult and unappealing for international students to come to [our state].” – Participant 19, HSI, public regional 4-year college

- “Other than, you’re not targeting international overseas, and we really slowed down a little bit with high school students who are interested in residence life, but that doesn’t mean we’re not focusing on them, the enrollment just declined.” – Participant 18, For-profit college

- “So the international sector is one that took a big hit during the pandemic for several different reasons, but we have very small international numbers. We were able to work … When you do, when you have small numbers,
you’re able to work one on one, so it’s a lot easier. So there was not that impact from an international standpoint...It’s a great thing to have but until everything shakes out, until international travel becomes a whole lot more reliable, a whole lot safer and things like that, I don’t think we will be pushing for that in a way that I may have otherwise.” – Participant 11, Private non-profit

Long-Term Recruitment Changes

The verdict is not out yet on the success of virtual recruitment programs. Some institutions expressed how they have not yet seen the impact of these programs, so it’s too early to evaluate them. Across sectors, many institutions expressed how they don’t anticipate continuing many virtual recruitment practices. The old methods worked.

- “I can’t see the impact of them as of yet, right? We won’t know until the fall begins, if they really worked. We do have a system as we develop our plans to tie each strategy through a benchmark, through a KPI, to determine if there’s a return on the investment or the objective. But I can’t see it now until we actually see how the enrollment fairs for our fall.” – Participant 13, HBCU, private non-profit college
- “That’s the process that we’re trying to go through now. It’s hard to fix the airplane when it’s in flight but we’re trying to look at what are the things.” – Participant 11, Private NP
- “When I have my meetings with my enrollment folks, they’re not talking about doing much different. We want to get back to in-person discussions with students and their parents. That’s what we were doing before and that’s what we’d hope to do later.” – Participant 20, HSI, private non-profit college
- “I think the only thing that would change, would actually be the testing... And I think that’s the only thing basically that we couldn’t really do, like we used to, was to test them. But as far as the system that we have for admissions is basically the same” – Participant 15, HBCU, private non-profit college
- “Absolutely not. It stayed exactly the same. Our campuses are anywhere from 30 to over 50% referrals, for our enrollments, so it’s ... A tremendous amount of this is just organic.” – Participant 12, For-profit college

At the same time, administrators recognized the importance of maintaining a strong and strategic digital presence to recruit students. It helps them reach and connect to students and present to audiences they might not have been able to visit physically.

- “I just think a more attentive, visible, online presence is going to be really, really important. It’s been there before, and there’s been a lot of word of mouth, but I just think in terms of how are we going to reach and connect to people, that’s something that we’re just going to have to pay more attention to on a consistent basis. CRMs and all that other stuff. It’s a super competitive environment out there anyway, so we have to put more resources to it.” – Participant 17, HSI, community college
- “Number one, so the other big changes, obviously if you’re talented virtually, there’s some major advantages to virtual presentations...I could present now to superintendents, who have all their high school principals on the zoom, about a new free program, where sometimes physically that was harder to accomplish.” – Participant 18, For-profit college
- “I think what this has done is shown us that we can reach out to students and in very different ways and get our story out. So hopefully in a year from now, you’ll be coming back and you’ll be able to wander down our hallway in a Zoom box from your office and be able to take a tour of the campus. Using that technology to really reach out to students and show them the campus in new ways, I think is something that’s going to happen.” – Participant 3, Public regional 4-year college
Future Enrollment

Across sectors, administrators were relatively optimistic about their future enrollment despite uncertainty. They are seeing positive trends in their fall and summer enrollments, but many caveat that that could easily change with the trajectory of the pandemic. Some even say that they are seeing higher enrollments than their usual fall counts.

- “Summer right now is actually trending slightly better than last summer, but we don’t know if that’s to be real or not. And then for the fall semester, there’s just been a significant uptick in fake applications. I don’t know.” – Participant 17, HSI, community college
- “We’ve made our freshman class and we’ve more than made our incoming grad students so we’re okay.” – Participant 19, HSI, public regional 4-year college
- “Yeah. I’m feeling a little bit more optimistic...So I’m looking at, for example, attendance at our virtual open houses, and it’s steadily gone up. I’m looking at our applications gone up, dramatically gone up late March to now. That’s good. I’m looking at our dual enrollment. Enrollments gone up tremendously. I’m looking at early summer enrollment data, trending very nicely. But I’m cautious because our summer enrollment was up last year. But it never translated into full enrollment. So I’m cautious.” – Participant 1, Community college
- “I think we can expect to see less of a drop. I’m hoping to see a bit of a recovery on enrollment. Again, I think conditions are going to determine what that looks like. And I think conditions are starting to look quite favorable. And I don’t see any reason why we can’t see some increasing of our enrollment. I don’t expect huge leaps, but I think slowly but surely, that that recovery will happen.” – Participant 22, Community college
- “And we are right now seeing trends that we are likely to be even with enrollment in the fall or slightly up, which again, that’ll be the first time in 10 plus years, if that happens.” – Participant 21, Public regional 4-year college

Online Education

Primary Learning Model

Almost all of the colleges we spoke to, across sectors, are currently operating mostly online or in hybrid models. Differences in the distribution of online vs. in-person often varied based on state and local regulations. In term of hybrid models, institutions often offered a mix of both asynchronous (educational instruction that does not occur in the same place or at the same time) and synchronous (educational instruction that occurs at the same time with an instructor and classmates) education. Many describe how their courses may be online with an in-person component, such as a lab once a week for nursing students.

- “So 25%, asynchronous, online. The other 75%, some have some remote synchronous, but for the most part, they all have a piece of their program related to a ground campus, and many of them, like nursing is 100% on ground.” – Part 6, For-profit college
- “The spring semester is 80%, it is online, traditional online, so not synchronous. It’s asynchronous. We do have some synchronous online. And we do have hybrid. And we’ve got about 19% of our classes on campus.” – Participant 1, Community college
- “Right now we remain approximately 70% online. Now some of that 70% does require some during the course of this semester coming in. So if a certain nursing program, for example, they might come in and use a simulation lab, et cetera.” – Participant 8, Public regional 4-year college
- “Because of the pandemic, we had in person classes beginning last fall. But we created a process for a request for remote, which we’re calling it different than online because we have programs that are online. And we have programs that are hybrid in nature. And then we have programs traditional, programs that are on ground. So we
allowed faculty to petition to teach remotely. And we allowed students to petition to learn remotely.” – Participant 2, Private non-profit college

One for-profit school in Texas primarily delivered health-services education and was able to stay open.

• “We were in the category of essential services, so the state ... In our state, in Texas, which we have nine ground campuses, each county had to approve the education continuing. What that meant was, our hands-on clinical work, was able to continue in our campuses during the height of COVID, as far as in a CDC compliant, COVID way. The reality is, we really did not shut down. We had ongoing practicums and clinicals that are happening in hospital systems, clinicals, urgent cares, imaging centers, so we were able to...We actually graduated 3300 plus students last year, and we placed 85% of them.” – Participant 12, For-profit college

While some of the institutions we spoke to had some sort of online presence before the pandemic, almost all of these institutions were primarily in-person institutions. Many institutions’ online classes pre-pandemic were primarily asynchronous, fully online courses that never had in-person commitments. Others had individual online courses that were standalone, and not part of a full course of study.

• “So by far, in person dominated, we did have an online footprint, all asynchronous, but again, very limited. This college, historically has been slowed with online offerings...Pre pandemic, you could not complete a program online.” – Participant 1, Community college
• “I would say 80% and that’s undergraduate. All of our graduate programs, master's programs are online.” – Participant 21, Public regional 4-year college
• “We did not have very many hybrid courses. We do have shared programs, so we do have some not hybrid, but some online components, for instance, they might have students from another campus...And so they’re accessing online in synchronous mode, the lessons, but nothing like what we’re doing now.” – Participant 3, Public regional 4-year college

The HBCU’s interviewed were among the most likely to not have much of an online presence before the pandemic.

• “Very little. Almost non-existent. And so the big load to get around was finding a way to do it online to start with. And so very little online instruction was taking place prior to the pandemic.” – Participant 9, HBCU, private non-profit college
• “We’re primarily a face-to-face campus. We have a small section of the curriculum that’s offered for online as a summer school option. It’s generally the courses that students either fail the first time, and need to retake, or it’s the gateway courses to help keep them on track. But our primary teaching model is face-to-face.” – Participant 14, HBCU, private non-profit college
• “We only had maybe less than a hundred students that were online at the time...majority of the students were on campus.” – Participant 15, HBCU, private non-profit college

Adapting to Online Education

Transitioning to a fully-online educational modality proved difficult across institutions. They had to quickly procure equipment and software, train students and faculty, and quickly re-think their operations. For some, it felt like establishing a completely new school. The transition was easier for institutions that had more experience with online education pre-pandemic, like the for-profit institutions.

• “We stayed open, we kept people engaged, we kept staff engaged, and we were ready to transition to remote learning because all of our education and all of our students and faculty have been using a learning management platform for the last 10 to 15 years. And so it was very easy for us to transition and keep that engagement level up by meeting with our students remotely, face to face.” – Participant 6, For-profit college
The transition to online was difficult for both students and teachers. Many were very resistant initially. Over time, institutions got better at delivering online education and figured out how to make it work. At the same time, many also learned that technology is a good supplement to have in the classroom, but it was no replacement for in-person instruction. The colleges that invested in professional development courses in online teaching for their faculty saw improvements. Some administrators also express how the hybrid model was even more difficult than a fully online or fully in-person class because they did not know how to navigate both spaces when a student might unexpectedly be sick and remote.

- “I think one was just getting used to a way of teaching and learning, that was just not familiar to them. And so, as we have surveyed students, there’s about a third, they would be okay no matter what, and there’s about another third that are like, “Okay, I’ll do this, but...” And then there’s another third that really struggled, just struggled with not having the kind of access to people on campus to really help them, just through things.” – Participant 14, HBCU, private non-profit college

- “In the Spring of 20, I thought what we gave to students was absolute garbage. I’d say that about higher ed across the board. You might have been in an online program, then it wasn’t garbage because you knew what you were getting into, and you knew it was good. The people who just had to jump to online, a lot of garbage out there. If anyone asked for a refund, I gave them a refund. I couldn’t defend it. I saw some of the crap that we were putting up there....Now, it’s much better. Now, as we move forward, we’re doing remote live training.” – Participant 7, Community college

- “Everybody was using Canvas as their course management system and so you can deliver a lot of material through Canvas already. They were mostly pretty comfortable with that so we just expanded use of that and got an upgraded Zoom license... It was challenging sometimes during the quarantine period because kids couldn’t always go to class it’s going to just go to class. And I think that’s maybe where people will think more going forward about how to be able to accommodate students who maybe aren’t going to be on campus on a
Faculty training played a fundamental role in these institution’s ability to deliver online education. The transition was difficult for faculty across the board, though some were more receptive than others, and while some administrators predict that the newer professors who grew up using this technology had an easier time, many say that the teachers who were innovative and really wanted to learn were successful, and the ones who were not were less successful. While some schools already had a portion of their faculty trained for online education, they still needed to ramp up. Schools took several steps to help such as increased internal training, giving faculty stipends to attend other trainings, and hiring specialists to help faculty.

- “From a faculty perspective, it seems that we have done so I’d say under great stress... So in our online setting, we increased our faculty training. So all faculty are teaching online. Anybody we hire now has to have a certain base level of familiarity with I’d say online quality standards and how our institution supports online learning. We've added programming in our Center for Teaching and Learning to help promote techniques, methods, tools for remote learning.” – Participant 16, HSI, community college
- “So we trained one third of our faculty in teaching online between last summer and fall. There were already a couple hundred who had been trained. So currently 50% of our faculty have been certified to teach online... We also did student support, so for new students we ran three week long how to learn online, welcome to college experience sorts of seminars that taught them how to do this whole thing.” – Participant 19, HSI, public regional 4-year college
- “We did do a lot of training on remote learning for our staff, just to make sure that they were comfortable with the delivery model. And so we had a lot of training that we did throughout the early months, about how to engage students in a better format, and in different ways. And then we also did a lot of simulation and virtualization that we invested in with the HEERF money because we felt that that was going to be the biggest impact to students, by giving them engaging types of scenarios in their classes.” – Participant 6, For-profit college
- “So there was still a lot of adaptability. But we have an educational technology group that was there, they had to ramp up like crazy, but they offered lots and lots of seminars. And we gave faculty stipends to attend lots of seminars on how to teach, what does it mean to teach with an online modality... And then as we collaborated around campus, there were faculty who felt very comfortable and confident in the online way. So they wound up being subject matter experts, advisors, and mentors for all other faculty as well.” – Participant 2, Private non-profit college
- “So the whole ideal of curriculum and instruction had to be re-introduced. We actually hired two individuals that we call their integrated technology specialist who assist the faculty in the training and development so that they can learn how to use virtual platforms in an engaging manner.” – Participant 13, HBCU, private non-profit college

Institutions also recognized the importance of following a set of quality standards for online education. In some ways, online education is even more difficult than in-person education and ensuring teachers are meeting a set of standards was important. Various institutions volunteered that they followed Quality Matters standards. Due to the newness of this educational modality for many institutions, they also had to develop best practices in real time as they navigated these new systems.

- “I think we have a long way to go. And again, we’re improving our online course quality. If I look at Quality Matters as the standards and our accessibility in terms of trying to achieve improved universal design. I’m sorry, universal learning design standards. And I think that proof is that our student success rates in courses hasn’t had...
“Yeah, we followed Quality Matters and that was in place before the pandemic, just in terms of before faculty were cleared, negotiating with the unions to do it. They had to go through Quality Matters training, and took classes, all the rest of it.” – Participant 17, HSI, community college

“We have taken this opportunity to hire a number of curriculum developers to support our faculty. We have modified some of our supervisory requirements for the people who supervise faculty, and evaluate them so that there are now more ways to evaluate in an online context and sort of see it from the students' perspective and give feedback in those ways. And training opportunities. We really had to increase very significantly the number of trainings and supporting our faculty, and we'll continue to do that.” – Participant 4, Public regional 4-year college

While the transition was difficult, some institutions expressed how it allowed them to experiment with hybrid educational models in ways they had wanted to in the past but had not had the opportunity to try out. Many of these institutions had already been wanting to create more programs that focused on the flexibility and needs of students, especially adult learners.

“This was really exciting when the pandemic broke because we've been talking doing that hybrid model for a while now. We've been thinking about how we could do it hybrid, so we wanted to experiment with having faculty in classrooms with students and having a class coming in online and a class coming in asynchronously because the vision is, is to offer students the ultimate flexibility within a semester to do what they need to do.” – Participant 20, HSI, private non-profit college

“For eight years, we've been trying to do online-based education and it never quite happened. Then the pandemic occurred and it occurred in three weeks. So we know that everybody's capable in doing it, and it was really important for us because we just got eight new graduate-based educational programs. And so hybrid and online-based education is definitely very amenable to an adult learner who definitely has to have flexibility in time and schedule, and so self-paced guided asynchronous, virtual-based learning often works in adult-based populations. And so we knew we were going to go that direction anyway” – Participant 13, HBCU, private non-profit college

Faculty Performance

Across sectors, administrators discussed how quality teachers are good at their job regardless of whether it is in-person or online. A faculty member who regularly engages with students, is willing to constantly improve, and works hard to deliver a quality education to their students is a good faculty member both online and in person. A willingness to adapt was also important.

“I would say that strong teachers are strong teachers. And while they may not have mastered the tools, they might have been master teachers. I'd say strong teachers, successful teachers. Engaging. Students perform well. Students have a loyalty to them and a following. Those teachers, if they were face to face teachers predominately, when they made that move to online teaching with the supports, with peer mentoring, we curriculum, help in curriculum design to get their materials online and then approved, now are still really good teachers. Their students are still excelling.” – Participant 16, HSI, community college

“So the traits were, I think, adjusting to a new daily routine. If you were able to be adaptable to change and adaptable, at least in the beginning, to ambiguity, if you're very set and staid, it was a very hard transition.” – Participant 9, HBCU, private non-profit college

“I think a lot depends on what their own actual experience with the technology has been. Those that were well-experienced obviously adapted more quickly and easily. Those who had never used any kind of an online format or even teams, for instance, or Zoom for meetings, it was much more difficult, and they still remain a bit
Many administrators also mentioned how older faculty were more likely to have a difficult time adapting. If someone had been a faculty member for 35 years, administrators felt it would be difficult to radically change their approach. Many institutions saw a spike in early retirements that they attributed partially to this challenge.

- “I do think that there's individual faculty who are not at a place in their career where they're ready to shift to online, just the whole skillset, the whole delivery model requires adjusting and they're just not in a place in their career where they want to make that adjustment at this time.” – Participant 20, HSI, private non-profit college
- “It also forced some people who should have retired 10 years ago, to retire. That's been a good change, too.” – Participant 7, Community college

Perceptions of Students Adapting to Online

The transition to online presented some difficulties for students, according to administrators. All institutions felt as though they did the best they could, and some thought student’s had positive experiences. However, many administrators believed students struggled. There was a steep learning curve for adapting to an online setting, particularly for first year students. One administrator of an HBCU explained that technology access problems were so acute in their school that they permitted students to physically mail assignments in.

- “Student evaluations have been pretty consistent to where they were before the pandemic. However their comments about faculty members caring for them, and I mean again, based on student surveys and their evaluations. Students appreciated the effort that faculty were making to provide high quality class experience.” – Participant 16, HSI, community college
- “It depends on the population that you're talking about. Graduate students have adapted just fine. Undergraduates not as well, especially in their first year or two. The students, the undergraduate students also say and indicate that the loss of socialization has really impacted their ability to be successful academically.” – Participant 20, HSI, private non-profit college
- “The learning curve, I think, is as steep for the students as it was for the professors. And again, we go back to did they have the connectivity? They had the hardware, but it’s a different methodology. Trying to convey sometimes college level coursework over 140 characters or a text message, just isn’t conducive to, at times, a good learning environment.” – Participant 9, HBCU, private non-profit college
- “I stepped in and actually had our professors and instructors to allow them to send out work by mail and those who, some of them may have had it on their phones, but it was very difficult for them to do that. So they basically were allowed the instructors mail packages to them, and they mailed it back to the instructors.” – Participant 15, HBCU, private non-profit college

Across sectors, administrators note how there is always a portion of the student population that would have succeeded regardless of modality. They are strong students and will do well in person or online. Administrators’ concerns were primarily aimed toward the rest of the student body that they felt were falling behind, and in an online setting it is much harder for teachers to see a student struggling if their camera is turned off, and it is harder to reach out to struggling students who log off.

- “Online learning, asynchronous, it depends on the student, the minute you force students into an online setting, you don’t know how they are going to react, and how well they’re going to retain the information. But we felt that a blended model, a hybrid model, where they did some remote and some in the lab, would help. And we did see that happen after we implemented that.” – Participant 6, For-profit college
Student engagement was a significant problem across sectors. Engagement has many components ranging from students actually absorbing what they are being taught, to paying attention in class, to their ability to interact with faculty, as well as the outside stressors that the pandemic had either caused or exacerbated which makes it harder for students to pay attention. Some administrators also were concerned about maintaining a high-quality education. Many administrators also stress that the personal connection between students and faculty becomes increasingly harder, as faculty are now missing the body language and social cues that indicate when students need help, and the students don’t have the support of their peers.

- “There’s something about the cognitive load of online learning where they’re not able to cover as much curriculum, as they have been. I think also everybody has been quite stressed and literally that limits the amount of learning that can occur.” – Participant 19, HSI, public regional 4-year college
- “For the students, I would say, even if you’re well-intentioned, it’s sometimes difficult to avoid distraction. So you can log into a virtual class, be logged in, but be going to the refrigerator and getting coffee and doing your thing. So I would say there’s challenges on both sides.” – Participant 18, For-profit college
- “For students, the personal contact. I mean, they’re struggling with engagement, so we cannot require students, and this is something that is an issue for the teaching. We can’t require them to turn on their cameras for instance, in class. And so you’ve got a faculty member trying to teach a course to a blank screen basically, with a bunch of pictures on it, not seeing any of the signs, that even when the students do have it on, they can’t really, eye-rolling or body language, et cetera, are not the same. But for students, it was even worse because they came in, they’re not connected to the institution, they’re not connected to each other...And so much of their learning takes place outside of the classroom.” – Participant 3, Public regional 4-year college
- “We hear a lot of students saying that they’re teaching themselves. And again that then begs the question of from what spot are they launching themselves? Because if they were a student who came from a very under-resourced high school and needed a lot of help, then the ability to get themselves through that was going to be more challenging...The haves and the have nots were just clearly much more clearly visible with the pandemic. You didn’t get a lot of suburb kids driving to Tim Horton’s to sit in the parking lot to do their homework on an iPhone.” – Participant 2, Private non-profit college

Future Role of Online Learning

Universally, administrators in all sectors believe that online education will play a larger role. What that means exactly is not totally clear, but both students and faculty have come to appreciate the flexibility associated with it. At the same time, administrators recognize that online education won’t replace face-to-face instruction. Some schools acknowledge that while they will always be institutions that are fully in-person, they will likely use online elements more, such as integrating technology in the curriculum. Other institutions are looking into more training for teachers to teach remotely as they look for more opportunities in remote learning, such as for adult learner and graduate programs. And others want to
expand and have an option for a student to take the same class online or in-person to best meet the needs of how that student learns.

- “We don’t see ourselves moving forward, offering much that’s fully online, meaning you just sort of go in and do your work. We do think going forward, faculty will supplement what they do more with technology, but our experience over the last year told us that we’re not a place where the experience and what we do can be replaced by online models.” – Participant 14, HBCU, private non-profit college

- “So I think we will use it more strategically. I think we’ll use it targeted for adult completion programs. I think for an opportunity at off campus or out of county students as a completion support for on campus students...And I think we’ll recognize that our teachers need more resources to be more an expert at online teaching.” – Participant 1, Community college

- “What we found was that prospective students and current students responded to it very, very well...Since the founding of the University of Phoenix, it’s been in the literature, that there are some students that feel that they do better online. Some students feel like they are able to talk more, they’re able to contribute more, they just get it more or they’re able to capture it because it’s online and look at it again, but some students, they really want to be in the classroom. So we’re trying to take advantage of both of those preferences for learning and don’t put the decision on me, we’ll put the decision on the students and we’ll offer as big a choice as we possibly can. So that’s our learning model.” – Participant 11, Private non-profit college

- “I think the way that we design classes, the curriculum will continue in that we will always be looking at ways to use technology simulation, virtualization, 3D animation, gamification in classes, because it’s a great enhancement to just the lecture podium situation.” – Participant 6, For-profit college

- “Before the pandemic, only 17%, one seven percent, of our classes were being delivered online. With the pandemic, we went 100%. And as we speak now in preparation for the fall semester, bringing students back to campus and assuming we can manage this Delta variant, we are really expecting that several faculty members would choose, dependent on the courses they teach in their department, their situation, to still leverage online or the virtual platform for their classes, I have some faculty members who said, ‘Well, in addition to the face-to-face time that I’m spending with the students, I have the platform there. I have everything ready to go, so I’ll be able to interact with my students more in the virtual space.’ And they talk about the fact that one of the benefits, in quotes, of the pandemic has been that more students are able to engage with them now than previously. Because during the face-to-face sessions in the classes, there were students who would never say a word...But since they pivoted to online, they are seeing more students’ interactions with them.” – President (Roundtable), public regional 4-year college

The flexibility afforded by hybrid models can be particularly attractive to graduate students, adult learners, and non-traditional students. It helps people who attend school while also working a job or caring for someone.

- “And then we also know that for some of our adult students, particularly our parents, they found the online to be really, really helpful, particularly as their kids couldn’t go to school. So we also have to be again, meeting the students where they are.” – Participant 17, HSI, community college

- “Having the flexibility of trying to learn, balance their personal lives and to take on a job, virtual education that is more flexible and fluid is really important. And so offering synchronous, as well as say synchronous, because some people need more structure even in an online environment, is the direction, we would definitely need to have more of those in our undergraduate as well as doing face-to-face. And so we are going to move into a hybrid as we enter into the fall of 2021.” – Participant 13, HBCU, private non-profit college

- “What I’ve found is that we have our grad programs in business and my grad programs in clinical psychology, the faculty pre COVID would routinely rotate between the traditional ground, which we’re kind of hybrid anyway and fully online programs. And because that faculty person had gotten really good at knowing how to facilitate online instruction before COVID, we actually saw an uptick in our online grad programs because students...
realized that middle one getting proper instruction, there’s when faculty went into the pandemic already
prepared to do online, boy, they, they shined because you could really tell a difference between somebody who
had prepped for that experience.” – President (Roundtable), public regional 4-year college

Several administrators reflect on the pandemic as having reminded them and their institutions of the
importance of place and community, that the campus and the people on campus create a community
that provides important supports for students.

• “Place and community have been rediscovered by me, actually. I think those answers show the strength of our
institutions... We really provide community for students. We provide a place for them to be. Often, it’s a place
where there’s heat, where there’s food, where there’s a companionship or a rest from work or whatever it is...And I’ve sort of been reminded of that throughout this, by my students. And I’m very grateful to them for
reminding me, we are important. We are place, we are home, whether we’re two year four year residential or
not as where they find themselves and where they define themselves.” – President (Roundtable), Community
college

• “So going back to being a liberal arts college, that’s 99% residential, where we serve a large majority of low
income students. One of the things that’s really hard to get some people to understand is that college is more
than just taking classes that for some of our students, the place in and of itself is what is transformative for
them. And I think when we had to sort of pivot and send everyone home...you could really see the devastating
impact that they had, that it had on the student’s ability to stay connected, to access the resources, really, to be
able to tune in. However, it increased their ability to be able to do other things in their home environment like
work and maybe make contributions to the family during a very important time, which we also saw having a
negative impact on their learning. So the numbers of our students who are trying to work full-time jobs and hold
up their phone and be in class or half in class, and then really looking at that correlation between that attention
and their ability to actually learn and perform on an exam. The correlation is quite hard...And so the challenge is
not whether or not online is going to be something that can be a significant whether or not students learn better
or, or have access to things in the same way through online or distance versus on campus.” – President
(Roundtable), HBCU, public regional 4-year college

Vaccinations

Across sectors, the majority of institutions interviewed were not planning on mandating vaccinations. All
were strongly encouraging and even actively working with local governments to set up vaccination sites.
Administrators expressed legal concerns over mandating as well as the difficulty of actually implementing
the policy given mandates from state governments that could jeopardize their funding. Only one
institution we spoke to said they were planning to mandate outright. At the time of the interviews,
vaccines only had received emergency use authorization by the FDA.

• “So, in [our state], you’re not allowed to mandate vaccinations and if you get federal or state funding, that is
definitely not something that will be done in about 24% of budget from the state. And so, we won’t be
mandating. We are encouraging” – Participant 5, HSI, community college

• “We are not requiring vaccinations, we will have to wait to see if our governor mandates it, that’s the only thing
we can do.” – Participant 19, HSI, public regional 4-year college

• “We’re going to encourage them to the extent we can. I was going down the path of mandating, but we’re
seeing significant resistance. I just haven’t done the research yet to see how deep it is, and what percentage it is.
And so, no matter what we’ll do, we’ll balance public health with accommodating students, faculty, and staff,
but we were going down the path of requiring vaccinations for on-campus classes, and dormitory.” – Participant
18, For-profit college
“Wow, you must have been on campus last week. So that’s proved, right? An enormous area of controversy. So I’m very clear about this. While I encourage all faculty, staff and students to get vaccinated. I am not going to mandate vaccinations. I can’t imagine the horror of trying to enforce that policy.” – Participant 1, Community college

“Strongly encouraging them, we’re a state institution so we’re not requiring them, we can’t require them. And so just strongly encouraging them. We constantly putting out emails of where they’re available, and singing the benefits of vaccination, but there’s no requirement.” – Participant 23, Community college

“Every Friday, I send out messages letting the campus know the status of and the number of cases on compost and promoting the vaccination, telling them that that is the only way that we can get back to normal. So we have actually have also applied for our campus to be a vaccination site. We haven’t received approval for that. But if we do, we are definitely going to promote students and faculty to get their vaccination on our campus.” – Participant 10, Public regional 4-year college

**Student Support**

Across sectors, student support services all transitioned online or phone-based. For many institutions, this transition was difficult because many of these services had never operated in this modality. They also found that students generally liked the expanded accessibility of online services, especially since many expanded their time outside of traditional school hours. While these services may have been able to transition online, some administrators expressed concerns over the quality of the services, such as the benefit of having the option for in-person tutoring or counseling sessions. In terms of transitioning applying financial aid and scholarships online, many students have found it to be immensely helpful to further streamline the process. Administrators also had to transition their career fairs and internship opportunities online as well. To further meet the basic needs of students, multiple administrators have said that they have hired additional social workers and increased their means of communication through phone, email, and online platforms to get students connected with people who can provide them with basic needs.

“Well, for a period it was all online…We saw that some students liked it and some did not. We have managed now, where we’re doing some virtual advising, we’re doing face to face advising…From the career services, exactly the same thing. All of that went online. Tutoring went online. Tutoring is offering a combo right now. Again, it feels like at this point the numbers are showing that there’s still more demand for virtual, but there are students who say they only want the face to face, but then they don’t show up. And so it’s trying to read what students are really telling us they want.” – Participant 5, HSI, community college

“So we’re really delving into the technology of what’s available from a virtual standpoint for career services, and tutoring academic support. So we’re leaning much more into technology where it’s available, and I’m hopeful that there’ll be a rubber band effect. That it’ll move back to everyone wants to get back to normal, but the new normal, in my mind, will be only more enhanced with the technology that we’re adopting.” – Participant 9, HBCU, private non-profit college

“It has taken the good majority of that work into a virtual or online format. We have found in that area, actually, that having accessibility to our counselors, advisors, academic support people virtually, as long as the student has technological access, is actually been a real benefit for a lot of students. They get a lot more personal touch, and the services are much accessible in that manner…And I’m thinking that, going forward, we’ll be offering those kinds of services, both virtually and in-person for the convenience and access of students.” – Participant 22, Community college

“We also added these virtual, international internships. I think about 40 kids did that in the spring so it was a way for people to get some language practice with native speakers and make up for the fact they weren’t actually able to travel abroad…Obviously we had grab-and-go food, pickup places for people who didn’t want to
While most institutions were able to transfer their services online, many expressed that there was no replacement to providing these services in person. Many institutions, across sectors, expressed how their institution emphasizes a personal connection that could not be replicated online. Additionally, many expressed how it was easier to identify potential problems students were dealing with in person. Across sectors, students had difficulty accessing these services. Some recognized how it was always a struggle to get students to reach out and ask for help, but the pandemic didn’t help. For institutions with larger rural populations, a lack of broadband was a significant barrier to access these services.

- “First of all, it’s probably been the most complicated area because there’s nothing like seeing somebody in person, to see how they’re doing. When we had everybody at home, it’s just like us, here on Zoom. You don’t really know exactly... Our thing is that, our students, we care about them and we’re making sure they’re accountable to learn what they need, to be successful in their career. But you really have to wrap that with respect and compassion for where they are, so that becomes a lot more difficult when you’re not face to face with somebody.” – Participant 12, For-profit college

- “But I guess, if there would be one thing, it would be that when they were on our campus, if they were hungry, we had food pantries. If they needed really good technology, we had labs, and support, and if they had an emotional breakdown, there were people there that would recognize it, and bring them to the counselor versus them having to have access, and proactively reach out. I guess those things would count as something that they would have missed.” – Participant 23, Community college

Across sectors, administrators expressed the importance of communicating with students. Communication was critical to be able to provide any sort of support service as well as ensuring that students knew these services were out there. While communication was always important, the past year really made these institutions re-evaluate the importance of communication. Many even started new programs to constantly communicate with students and ensure no one was falling behind or getting lost as a result of the pandemic. Relatedly, these institutions became increasingly aware of the need to provide wraparound services to student to ensure they have everything they need to continue their education. Some institutions implemented mass texting programs or call campaigns to reach out to students. One president of a for-profit personally texted the school’s 8,000 students and kept an open line of communication with them.

- “So, that’s where we’ve actually shifted around some of the resources that we have, to make sure that we can reach as many students as possible. So, luckily we have things in place like we use an early alert system called Grades First, so you can sort of see if a student is falling behind, and they could be put in a system so that somebody will pick them up and reach out to them to try to see what services we can get.” – Participant 14, HBCU, private non-profit college

- “Especially in the area of communicating with students, we’ve realized, phone and email is not effective, and we’ve implemented very effective, personalized texting systems. And those texting systems personalized, have worked very well. Similarly, all appointments now are on a new system, so people can make zoom appointments or admissions interviews. There must be 10 new technologies at the institution, that have been, or are being implemented, that changed the entire student experience, and faculty and staff experience.” – Participant 18, For-profit college

- “This barrier of understanding how the process worked. And so that is why our third priority became communicating. And so we continuously do town hall meetings, we continuously do onboarding and orientations, we have engagement services where they do like tricks and techniques at the beginning of all the
fun activities so that they understand how to use the support-based services.” – Participant 13, HBCU, private non-profit college

• “But the real academic support to the students who are in fact from low income families, from marginalized communities, and so on, the academic support we were sadly missing probably ten extra staff people that we didn’t have before the pandemic who could stay on and stay in touch with these folks. Because the real big issues that we were facing weren’t in the career services, academic advising. They are the food insecurity, the housing insecurity, the mental health issues... The real challenges to students were the consequence to them and their families of people get sick in their family, having people die in their family, having everybody lose work in their family and so on.” – Participant 2, Private NP

Mental Health

Across sectors, administrators expressed significant concerns over the mental health of their student populations, especially to meet the needs of students whose families have been directly impacted by COVID as well as to address the increased levels of isolation students felt during this time. They noted how their institutions saw increases in demand for counseling services, some so dramatically that administrators found it difficult to provide enough services for students. Some institutions had counselors on campus, while others referred students to local services. One president noted that access to mental health services became a barrier while students were remote due to insurance policies around mental health services crossing state lines for out-of-state students.

• “Well, we talked about the mental health services. That really did accelerate. Social services we’re finding that our students just need a lot more support outside of the higher education just navigating just basic life kinds of things.” – Participant 20, HSI, private non-profit college

• “Yes, massively. It is a tremendous problem. Our counseling center is overwhelmed with need. We used some of the CARES money, specifically allocated it to the wellness center for additional hours and additional therapists.” – Participant 19, HSI, public regional 4-year college

• “We expanded services pretty early on. I mean rural America, one of the major challenges in rural America is consistent mental health care across the board, regardless of the community, it is a huge need. It is something that we saw very consistently, and we did see very much an increase in the incidence of other identification of students who might need support or referrals to those who provide the services... We work with other parties or other organizations to deliver those services to our students.” – Participant 4, Public regional 4-year college

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Many institutions expanded their mental health services—to the extent that they could. For some that meant more counselors, for others it meant expanding pre-existing services. Many also added remote counseling services which allowed for students to access different types of counselors. Some also state
that they are training staff with better intervention tools, as well as ensuring that their faculty is also included ensuring that people have access to mental health services. Some provided activities and programs to boost mental health such as providing mental health days off as well as wellness days where students can participate in meditation, yoga, etc.

- “So two hires. We have a referral service currently in place with local contracts. We are hiring an individual to help coordinate a contract for telehealth services for students, which also will include referrals locally if needed, And then two, a staff person to coordinate that contract in addition to helping develop tools and training and perhaps intervention if needed. Help for faculty and staff to help address student needs. Or help to identify student needs.” – Participant 16, HSI, community college
- “So, definitely reaching out and getting the telehealth was really important. We also reached out for, we had a couple of what we call mental health days. So the students were like, "We just need a day off," so we just gave everybody the day off. And we reached out to services to do online yoga, and online meditation and online everything, just to have an opportunity to relax.” – Participant 14, HBCU, private non-profit college
- “Yeah. Well, we did. So we hired a third party vendor that provided additional services for our counseling, because we have one full-time counselor that normally works on staff. So she hired a third party that will support.” – Participant 13, HBCU, private non-profit college
- “We had to absolutely beef up psychological and therapy support services. There was a lot of depression, anxiety, both with COVID quarantining, and with black lives matter. And so we actually hired full-time staff just to do that.” – Participant 18, For-profit college
- “So we expanded the number of visits. So if a student used to be able to get three, if they were referred to the mental health support site, they might get three visits, we increased that to six. So we did effectively double the amount of availability of those services. Whether or not that was enough, I couldn’t tell you at this point.” – Participant 4, Public regional 4-year college
- “We did. So we only have one full-time counselor on campus, but she started providing telehealth options, telecounseling appointments, in addition to her in-person ones. We also provided a stipend to another social work faculty to provide some additional hours. Last year, even right before the pandemic actually, we had started a mental health committee on campus. And that group was really active throughout the last year, providing more workshops and things for students and for faculty and staff on how to identify students who are struggling with mental health issues and the resources to help.” – Participant 21, Public regional 4-year college
- “I think we are looking into having that because it does give us a 24/7 option. It also gives us the access to different types of counselors that we want to have, a more specialized or particular demographic types of counselors, so I think the plan is we will continue to offer that option going forward.” – Participant 24, Private non-profit college

Supporting Basic Needs

Across sectors, administrators were aware of the importance of ensuring students’ basic needs were met and federal funds played a key role in providing support. Some schools would not have been able to provide support otherwise. Generally, schools set up funds that students could request money from. Some schools just send checks and direct deposits to every student. Students used these funds for a wide variety of basic needs—housing, food, technology, etc.

- “Yeah. Again, we’re a pretty underserved population, so we use CARE Act and our own funds to make sure that students had hotspots, computing equipment that would handle their coursework, etcetera.” – Participant 20, HSI, private non-profit college
- “Well, through the CARES Act, there were portions of the CARES Act that went directly to students in cash grants. And so, we made sure that we got those dollars to the students, as soon as we were able to draw them down from the federal government.” – Participant 14, HBCU, private non-profit college
“I know that lots of institutions that are residential, like my own. When we were able to bring some students back even though we had greatly reduced density, one of those categories for me was always students who had home insecurity issues. Students who did not have a home, students who really did not have a home environment that was conducive to studying, where they didn’t have food, they were included as a high priority group to actually keep on campus even when we had to have everyone else go because of COVID indefinitely.” – President (Roundtable), HBCU, public regional 4-year college

“I think one of the biggest impact on institutions like mine with the kind of students we serve, was our students’ ability to really keep pace with their needing to be able to pay their bills. And I know that through my alma mater, through every kind of corporation there was out there, we were able to really greatly increase our need-based scholarship funds so that we could offer students some assistance to stay in school last year, and we’re looking to use some of those dollars to help bring students back this fall.” – President (Roundtable), HBCU, public regional 4-year college

“We didn’t just help with tuition. We helped pay the bills. So, we raised tens of student emergency funds that went to any student need of any kind, funerals for relatives with COVID, et cetera. We raised money. We’re a community. We supported the students financially.” – President (Roundtable), HSI, public regional 4-year college

In addition to the federal funds, some schools also had foundations or emergency funds that they used or set up to provide additional support for students.

“‘We heard students were trying to drop out and so we were just making these funds available on emergency basis, very simple application. You need funds, we’ll find it. And it was designed to keep our students in the classroom. Then when we got the COVID money, we were able to not use all those funds and move to the CARES funding from the federal government. But our foundation, again, has jumped in in the past in crisis.” – Participant 20, HSI, community college

“We created a student emergency relief fund. College put in $500,000.00, foundation raised $500,000.00, that combined with our COVID money, we just set up a team of people who are giving out the money. CARES Act money, plus our HERF fund money, Student Emergency Relief Fund money.” – Participant 7, Community college

“We have an emergency fund through our college foundation, and I’ve tried to make sure that students were aware that that support was available. Certainly through all of the federal COVID relief funding, we distributed millions of dollars to students as required by the federal government based on financial need, et cetera.” – Participant 22, Community college

Internet access was a huge issue across sectors. This includes lack of broadband in more rural areas or lack of Wi-Fi in urban areas. Some students also lacked the tech and took classes on their phones; other students had to share their internet with their whole family. Schools generally provided resources if they could. Parking lot hot-spots were typically the first move, then they gave out hotspots and laptops. If the school didn’t have the funding for it, they used CARES money to buy technology for the students.

“So we’ve taken a number of steps. Again, like many, we have added wifi hotspots to our parking lots and external parts of our campus. We set up a laptop/desktop loan program. 1,000 or more workstations, including speakers and cameras. On a rotating basis per term, we’ve increased financial aid to accommodate and allow for purchasing of technology or to help facilitate purchasing of technology.” – Participant 16, HSI, community college

“Right, so it is laptops, we’ve given out more than 1000 laptops, wifi hotspots. Thankfully [our state] has mandated that households below the poverty line, again which is more than a majority of our students, don’t have to pay more than 15 dollars a month for wifi. But literally we’ve delivered it to their homes.” – Participant 19, HSI, public regional 4-year college

“We provided them all with tablets when they went, but as much as we could try to provide internet service, but if they don’t have a router in their home or you know... That’s a burden even for a college the size that we were
when the pandemic first hit. And then subsequently didn’t rectify very quickly. It was just something that was unsustainable from a financial standpoint, to provide also then internet service. We’ve ramped up what’s around campus as much as we can socially distance and do things. We try to have work arounds, but connectivity for the most part was outside of what we were able to manage.” – Participant 9, HBCU, private non-profit college

- “So initially, we did a survey to find out what kind of connectivity students had, what kind of home equipment they had, whether they had a laptop, or whether it was an iPad. And we immediately started furnishing laptops. And so we got the technology, we made it safe, we loaded whatever we needed, information on there. But also, we tried to find out about the student’s connectivity at home and if there was an issue that somebody had poor connectivity, we would try and work with providers to make sure that they could get that connectivity.” – Participant 6, For-profit college

- “We did. Primarily equipment support. Hotspots, for instance, where that was a helpful solution in certain situations. We provided Chromebooks or laptops to any students who needed them with some of the grant funding that we received. So we distributed some volume of that out into the student population. We are putting in place, for the fall, kind of a technology loan program where students can loan, for either short term or longer term, things like laptops, hotspots, microphones, cameras, whatever they might need to be technologically equipped as needed.” – Participant 22, Community college

- “We built mobile hotspots in a number of our parking lots, so that families could drive in if they had children, they could actually watch their children sit in their car and do homework or participate in classes. And so those were available. And we were able to come up with actually mobile hotspots themselves that they could check out. They could come to the front desk, show them their ID, check out a mobile hotspot, say for a week, and then be able to use that on an ongoing basis so that we were able to help students in those ways.” – Participant 4, Public regional 4-year college

Food insecurity was also a big problem for some institutions. Many already had food banks or pantries on campus that they expanded. Others provided funds to students directly to spend on groceries.

- “We have a food bank and we have emergency funds. We've fundraised more than a million dollars for emergency funds for rent, food, medical bills.” – Participant 19, HSI, public regional 4-year college

- “Students on campus though, we have a food pantry, so even though we have food services here, students sometimes just want some more stuff, or snacks and stuff, so we make sure that that stay stocked.” – Participant 14, HBCU, private non-profit college

- “We have food pantries at every one of our campuses, but they’re place-based of course, so those were open, students could come to those food pantries. We did have emergency funds through both the CARES Act, and the CRRSAA, and institutional money. And we exhausted that every time. And so if there was a food security issue, certain insecurity issues, certainly people could access that emergency grant money.” – Participant 23, Community college

- “Yes. We kept our food pantry open. Even when everything was shut down last spring, we kept that open on campus and have expanded that somewhat too and have sort of a satellite pantry in our student center. We started a clothing closet for students that’s been popular.” – Participant 21, Public regional 4-year college

Housing assistance to students was more complicated. If an institution had dorms, they offered to house people. Otherwise, they provided federal funds and connected students to resources. Some schools stated they could not help people directly with housing and connected students to other community resources for assistance. Community colleges had more trouble assisting these students than institutions in other sectors.

- “As we distributed the COVID funding, the federal funding that was the biggest... If they checked the housing box, they got the most funding.” – Participant 5, HSI, community college
• “I would say we haven’t really focused on addressing those housing needs. Other than making sure we were able to give people, point them to the resource where there are housing vouchers. So vouchers to help pay rent, again, to help with utilities or work. And we did that through our counseling, our advising center. But we weren’t directly giving out vouchers for housing or that kind of assistance.” – Participant 16, HSI, community college

• “We never shut down the institution… We stayed open with probably about 500 students during the midst of the March pandemic… But we’ve never closed. I won’t close now. I have everything from international or students that don’t have homes and places to go. A lot of students, sometime couch surf and live in with friends or family, but a lot of people aren’t opening their homes. So that’s not going to happen for a portion of our population. So we are very conscious that this is their home, they are with us for four years. And so we leave it open.” – Participant 13, HBCU, private non-profit college

• “We would offer free housing to someone who was with homelessness. And then with homelessness, because we had it, we often had to talk to their faculty about additional flexibility.” – Participant 18, For-profit college

• “We don’t really have a lot of resources that we can support there, other than to refer those students to a variety of support agencies within our community that offers either low-income housing or housing for individuals that do not have a home. That sort of thing. So we have a number of community resources that we can refer to.” – Participant 22, Community college

• “That #RealCollege Survey, I didn’t realize how high that was on our campus. We had 37% indicated some housing insecurity and about 15% experienced homelessness. So we did with the emergency grant fund. I know we helped students who owed utility bills, rent those kinds of things but one of the goals is to provide more resources. I know there are some sort of statewide resources and helping students apply for a SNAP benefits because many would qualify. So we plan to do more to get students resources to help with those kinds of basic needs insecurity.” – Participant 21, Public regional 4-year college

Administrators say they did the best they could to accommodate students with disabilities, though it wasn’t easy. Many are meeting or expanding the same needs they’ve had before, such as expanding notetaking and closed captioning for classes. One administrator at an HBCU mentioned that they have seen more students request accommodations for needs they have not disclosed before now that they are remote. While it is a struggle to have the money to accommodate all of their students, some administrators, such as one at a for-profit college, said that they saw students with disabilities drop out when they went remote.

• “Yeah, we saw an uptick in our disability access center needs and there was again, cross-training and other stuff to help students with different modalities. So we’ve also projected that’ll be an increase for the coming year as well. More note takers, more use of adaptive technologies, all the rest of it.” – Participant 17, HSI, community college

• “It was a challenge. I know we have a couple of students with some visual impairments and things like that, but they’ve already had the technology resources to get through that, but just teaching them how to use it, not just for homework or others… We saw an increase in the number of students who did not disclose that they had learning disabilities, had to, right? Moving to the virtual-based platform, they needed that so that they can get the resources to be successful. And so we already have a full team though. Our university college is designed to support any of our students in that space.” – Participant 13, HBCU, private non-profit college

• “So, always a big challenge, but again, we have an obligation to reasonably accommodate, we always do it no matter what… And then there were some students who did have to leave school, because they just could not overcome what their challenge was.” – Participant 18, For-profit college

• “We’ve been spending more money on that… It’s been bad. A lot of money. I might have contested it, I might have contested it in the past, but we didn’t. We’re just doing more… This is an important point of emphasis for me, I want us to do what we’re supposed to do. We’ve been compelled to do more than I think we should do, just
because of the need to. It’s expensive. We’re spending more money on accommodating students with disabilities.” – Participant 7, Community college

- “Well, in some ways, for some of our students with disabilities, the online methodologies for advising educational services and all of that is actually been improved for that population, depending on what the disabilities might be. We also have another unit, a whole unit of staff that is designated to special needs, any kind of learning adaptations that have to exist. So basically, that staff goes on full support drive in a time of changing situations.” – Participant 22, Community college

Addressing Inequalities

HSI/HBCU administrators say they were hit particularly hard during the past year. All the institutions interviewed have a majority of students on financial aid. Most colleges express that they addressed inequalities by doing more frequent outreach to ensure that students of color knew about the assistance available. A few others note that they have also tried to make their school a better environment for students of color by hiring staff to work on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), but many administrators say that DEI is an area for improvement. Some HBCU’s and HSI’s also say their mission includes social justice, and they actively sought out resources for their students not only to address COVID, but to address stressors from the social climate, such as in response to the Derek Chauvin trial.

- “We are a Hispanic serving enrolling institution. We’re a Native American or Native serving institution designation. And so we certainly saw drops in enrollment and persistence. They weren’t disproportionate to our total population. What we’ve done to maintain connections was to, again, aware more assistance. To work with community organizations, tribal governments, to help provide that assistance.” – Participant 16, HSI, community college

- “Social justice is our education. That is our community that we service. As I mentioned in our entry, many of our students weren’t just going through the idea of isolation and community navigation, they were going through a mental convergence with all that was happening in the social climate of America, right?” – Participant 13, HBCU, private non-profit college

- “As an institution, we’ve been really concerned about supporting our students as they experience all the things that are going on. And so, offering opportunities to have conversations about what’s happening in the world. Right after the Chauvin verdict, we just held a vigil on canvas and live streamed it to the rest of the students, and decided to just really focus in on what our legacy and our mission has been for 167 years. It’s about being educated so you can be a strong fighter for social justice.” – Participant 14, HBCU, private non-profit college

- “First of all, the communities we serve have been getting hit hard for decades. COVID didn’t help anything, but this isn’t their first rodeo of living a complicated, difficult life. The biggest thing that we did for them, is we created a continuity of education. These were all aspiring professionals, folks who wanted to do something better in their lives, and we kept them moving...That to me is the biggest success because, you have all of these amazing, aspiring professionals, that now are professionals. It’s totally changed theirs and their families’ lives.” – Participant 12, For-profit college

- “I’m not sure that we have batted 1000 on this. So number one, the first. So we have a foundation that raises money for students. It’s a modest foundation. So their first campaign during the pandemic was called RV lives. And we’ve dedicated 50% of those funds to scholarships for students of color. That was one of the things we did because the economic hit on our students was profound, right?...And sadly, I don’t know that we’re addressing it as aggressively and as thoughtfully as we should be.” – Participant 1, Community college

- “Many of our students who are low income and are students of color are participants in student support services who again, did a lot of individual outreach constantly to their students. We really promoted our emergency grant fund because the student need was pretty overwhelming especially last spring, summer, fall before the CARES Act money got distributed. The institution did create a new position and I’m not going to get his title exactly right. But a director of diversity, equity and inclusion who’s working to provide more resources campus
Some institutions already had equity plans in place or designated departments to address systemic inequalities, while others are introducing new ways for their staff to talk about systemic racism within their own schools as well as how to make their institution more welcoming.

- “Our faculty, with the George Floyd murder, asked us to review our mission statement, so we immediately have gone into a year-long thing just to review with our community does our mission statement speak strongly enough to our commitment to social justice, etcetera. That’s ongoing. We also did a critical pedagogy. Out of that conversation that started with the faculty, they started a critical pedagogy series for this entire academic year where they talked about different issues with the Latinx, people of color, gender identity, and what we do in our classrooms and what we say in our classrooms that reflect our principles and our... I don’t want to call it our social justice mission, but our commitment to social justice.” – Participant 20, HSI, private non-profit college

- “After George Floyd was murdered last May, we had a renewed focus and conversation about social justice. The intersection of COVID, with social justice, has required that all of us be a little bit more careful, and a little bit more sensitive as we deal with these things. We’re having more conversations about social justice. More conversations about racism. More conversations about the impact of COVID on communities of color, on poor communities, which is what we see here.” – Participant 7, Community college

- “We, for many, many years, decades, in fact, have had a diversity, equity, inclusion office that is staffed up with roughly a dozen or so staff members whose entire purpose is to support our minority students, recruit those students, retain those students and identify what kinds of needs or barriers that they’re running into.” – Participant 22, Community college

- “The problem is, if you are an African-American right now in [MAGA] America, coming onto our campus to study, you have equity issues that are well beyond just the finances...So we’re spending a lot of time trying to figure out how to make things more welcoming on our campus, we have four committees that are looking at that, addressing for African-Americans and for Asian-American populations. Unless we find a way to deal with that in the area around us, this is going to continue to be a struggle.” – Participant 3, Public regional 4-year college

Long Term Support Service Changes

Schools came to recognize the importance of strong communication with students, and the increased levels of communication are something they are looking to adding to their budgets and operations long-term.

- “I expect it to continue. I expect the whole way we communicate through COVID, has made us a much better communicating organization, that all will continue.” – Participant 18, For-profit college

- “Just the connectedness with students, something we had started and we’ll continue to expand, how do you communicate with students is becoming more and more of a challenge. We’re doing more and more texting with students than we’ve ever done in our prior history. Because that’s about all we can seem to get responses to. They don’t respond to email, they don’t respond often to letters or to phone calls, and we’re trying to find methods to communicate more effectively with students that actually get them to be responsive and engage.” – Participant 22, Community college

- “I think I would look at the way that we actually added to our advising. Advising for our students, adding more additional staff, their responsibilities. We added a little more responsibilities to them, as far as them making contact with the students, assigning so many of them.” – Participant 15, HBCU, private non-profit college

Some institutions also expressed how they plan on maintaining the additional flexibility they had implemented in their support services. For the most part, institutions plan on keeping their online counseling, advising, and tutoring services as an option as well as longer hours for each of them.
• “And I think we’ve heard from some of our staff about the ability of a student to either be advised or obtain tutoring electronically, those will stay as an option. It was mentioned that a working parent could schedule a 30 minute tutoring session on their lunch hour versus probably never having the opportunity to come for that extra touch on the instructional side. So, same with the advising I would think.” – Participant 5, HSI, community college

• “That as well as the support services, which are centralized in 24/7. I think students now love it, and they’re going to come to expect it, we see that that improves their ability to do their homework whenever, on the weekends at night, and that there’s somebody always there to help them.” – Participant 6, For-profit college

• “Unquestionably distance services. I think we’ve served more people than we would when we would expect them to come to the office. Especially for our online students, I think we’re better prepared now to keep the way we had calendar appointments for online students...it’s this type of technology that certainly will be a game changer for us in the future.” – Participant 23, Community college
Appendix

In-depth Interview participants:

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*Participated in the roundtable discussion