



Quality Coaching

Helping Students Navigate the Journey From Education to Career



October 2024



As policymakers, education leaders, and families consider the multiple purposes and benefits of education after high school, strong career outcomes remain a persistent priority. For the past 40 years, students entering college have consistently placed two things at the top of their “Why go to college?” list: learning and the ability to get a better job.¹ Research shows that when forced to choose between the two, getting a better job dominates. Former students are more than twice as likely to identify employment outcomes over learning as the main reason they enrolled.²

Yet as they enter the labor market, many recent graduates falter in the early pursuit of their career goals.



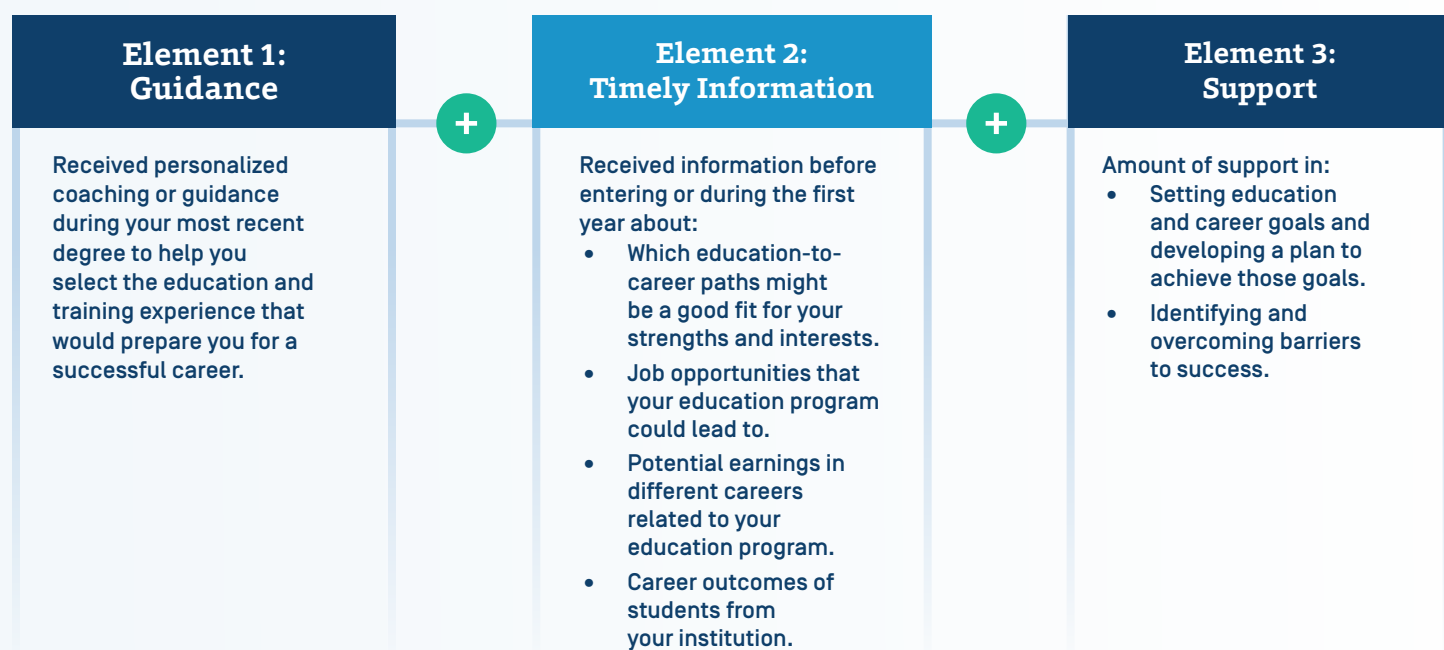


In “Talent Disrupted,” Strada Institute for the Future of Work and The Burning Glass Institute found that more than half (52 percent) of college graduates are underemployed a year after graduation, meaning that they are working in jobs that don’t typically require a bachelor’s degree.³ Even after a decade, 45 percent of graduates who did not pursue additional graduate or professional education beyond their bachelor’s degree are underemployed.⁴ They have college degrees — but not college jobs. **Among many potential solutions, education-to-career coaching stands out as a student-centered remedy to help them achieve their educational goals and position them for career success.**

A successful transition from postsecondary education into employment starts long before graduation. Connecting learning to students’ career development at each step in their education-to-career path strengthens students’ ability to make informed choices, follow through on their plans, and achieve their goals. Prior research has pointed to the benefits that career-inclusive, comprehensive advising and support interventions provide to students, and the [State Opportunity Index](#) provides a clear understanding of how many students are receiving this support nationally and in select states.⁵

This national overview of student experiences defines quality education-to-career coaching as consisting of three elements: **guidance, timely information, and support** (see Figure 1).⁶ Unfortunately, only 20 percent of recent graduates of public four-year institutions experienced quality education-to-career coaching.⁷ Students’ experiences across these dimensions of coaching also vary, and in this report, we examine these variations in the experiences of recent graduates. The report also offers insights to leaders, practitioners, and innovators seeking to improve students’ career outcomes.

Figure 1. Quality Education-to-Career Coaching Criteria



Criteria for comprehensive coaching is “yes” to the question on guidance; receipt of at least 3 of 4 types of information before entering or during the first year; and “quite a bit” or “a great deal” of support in the two support subcomponents.

The Quality Coaching Experience: Key Findings



Only 1 in 5 (20 percent) recent bachelor's degree graduates of public colleges and universities report receiving all three elements of quality education-to-career coaching: guidance, timely information, and support.

Recent graduates who experienced quality education-to-career coaching are more likely to report that their first job required a college degree. They also are more likely to report that their education had a positive impact on their well-being and helped them to achieve their goals.

Experiences with quality education-to-career coaching vary significantly by major. Recent bachelor's degree graduates who completed majors with direct professional alignment — for example, accounting, education, or nursing — are more likely to report they experienced quality education-to-career coaching. Recent graduates who pursued liberal arts, social sciences, or psychology majors are less likely to report having this experience. When graduates from liberal arts, social sciences, or psychology majors do experience comprehensive coaching, their likelihood of reporting that they secured a college-level job rises to the levels of their peers in majors more directly aligned with a profession.

Among the three elements of quality education-to-career coaching, recent graduates received timely information less frequently (38 percent) than they received guidance (53 percent) or support (67 percent).

Within the subcomponents of timely information, recent bachelor's degree graduates are most likely to have received information about education and career paths that fit their strengths and interests (60 percent), but less likely to have received labor market information about job opportunities (50 percent), potential earnings (49 percent), and the employment outcomes of graduates from their institutions (33 percent).

Recent graduates received timely information from a variety of sources. Digital platforms are the prevalent source of labor market information. Family, friends, faculty, and staff are more prevalent sources of guidance about the fit of potential career pathways.

Student experiences with timely information appear to be increasing. Current students (graduating classes 2024 to 2027) are more likely to have received information on career pathways, potential earnings, and employment outcomes compared to recent graduates (classes of 2020 to 2023).



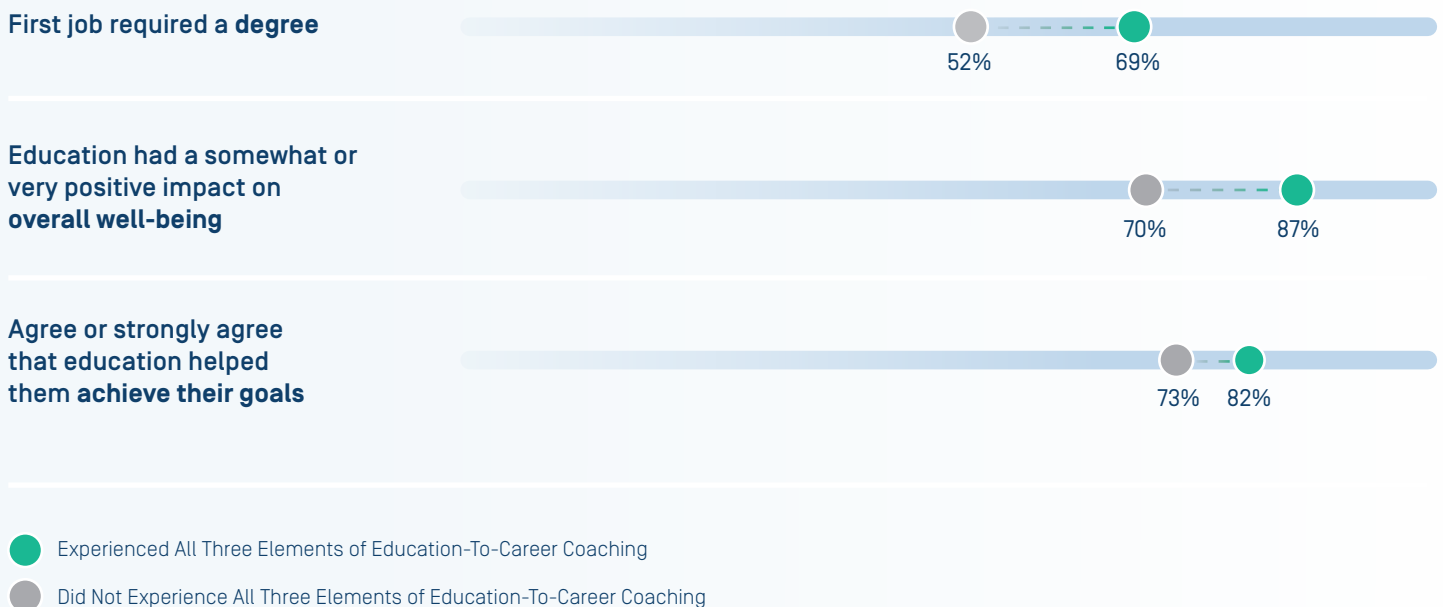
Taken together, the pattern of these findings suggests education-to-career coaching is a promising means to support students in their aspirations to secure better jobs and launch promising careers.

How Guidance, Timely Information, and Support Impact Post-Completion Outcomes

While recent graduates' experiences with quality education-to-career coaching are limited, those who do receive coaching experience better outcomes after completing their bachelor's degree. Coaching is associated with a 17 percentage-point increase in both college-level employment and in graduates' assessment of their education's impact on overall well-being, as well as a 9 percentage-point increase in respondents' feeling that their education helped them to achieve their goals (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Recent Graduates' Post-Completion Outcomes by Quality Education-to-Career Coaching Experience



Base (Employment): Alumni of the classes of 2020-2023 from four-year public institutions, who are employed. n ranges from 868 to 3,584 across groups.
(Impact): Alumni of the classes of 2020-2023 from four-year public institutions. n ranges from 1,148 to 4,950 across groups.
(Goals): Alumni of the classes of 2020-2023 from four-year public institutions. n ranges from 1,148 to 4,950 across groups.



Importantly, recent graduates who experienced all three elements of quality education-to-career coaching — guidance, timely information, and support — report better post-completion outcomes than their peers who experienced only one or two of the elements.

Additionally, each element on its own is associated with post-completion benefits. When recent graduates are matched on demographic and academic characteristics, as well as whether they experienced each element of quality coaching, the statistical comparisons reveal these independent relationships [see Table 1].⁸ Notably, guidance is associated with the greatest increase in having a first job that requires a degree, while support is associated with the greatest increases in alumni perceptions that undergraduate education contributed to their overall well-being and helped them achieve their goals. These findings highlight the importance of each element individually, while still underscoring the utility of creating comprehensive coaching experiences.

Table 1. The Association Between Elements of Education-to-Career Coaching and Post-Completion Outcomes Among Recent Graduates [percentage points]

	First Job Required a Degree	Education Had a Positive Impact on / Overall Well-being	Education Helped to Achieve Goals
Guidance	+15*	+9*	+5*
Timely Information	+10*	+5*	No effect
Support	+9*	+18*	+12*

Base: Alumni of the classes of 2020-2023 from four-year public institutions.

n ranges from 3,286 to 4,447 across groups.

**= Statistically significant difference at the $p < 0.05$ level.*

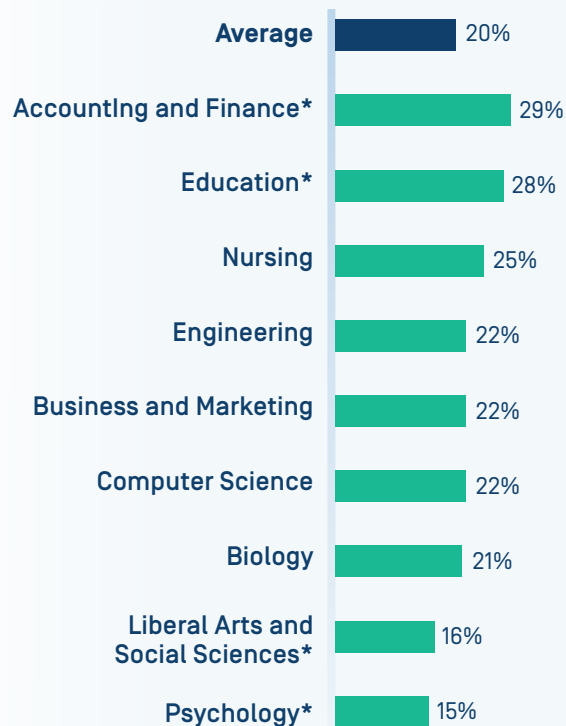


The Quality Education-to-Career Coaching Experience Across Majors

The share of recent graduates who received quality education-to-career coaching is consistently low regardless of demographic and personal characteristics such as gender, race, and first-generation status [see [State Opportunity Index Technical Appendix](#)]. Wider variation is found when comparing experiences across majors. Graduates with degrees in accounting, finance, and education are significantly more likely to experience education-to-career coaching, while psychology, liberal arts, and social sciences majors are significantly less likely to experience education-to-career coaching (see Figure 3). However, despite the significant variability of coaching experiences across majors, coaching is not widespread in any program of study. Less than one-third of students from any major report receiving all three elements of education-to-career coaching.

This study was not designed to understand what accounts for these differences across majors. Future research can examine the degree to which professionally aligned programs tend to have additional internal capacity and resources for coaching or have developed a culture of career preparation with structured elements, such as support for internship and clinical placement requirements, relative to other fields of study. Individual student circumstances and characteristics related to accessing education-to-career coaching also merit examination. Our data do not capture motivation or reason for engaging in these experiences, nor do we know if students were proactively provided with guidance or if they intentionally sought it out. Nonetheless, taken together, the low overall levels and the variation across majors signal a need for foundational approaches to education-to-career coaching that reach all students.

Figure 3. Recent Graduates' Experience with Quality Education-to-Career Coaching by Field of Study

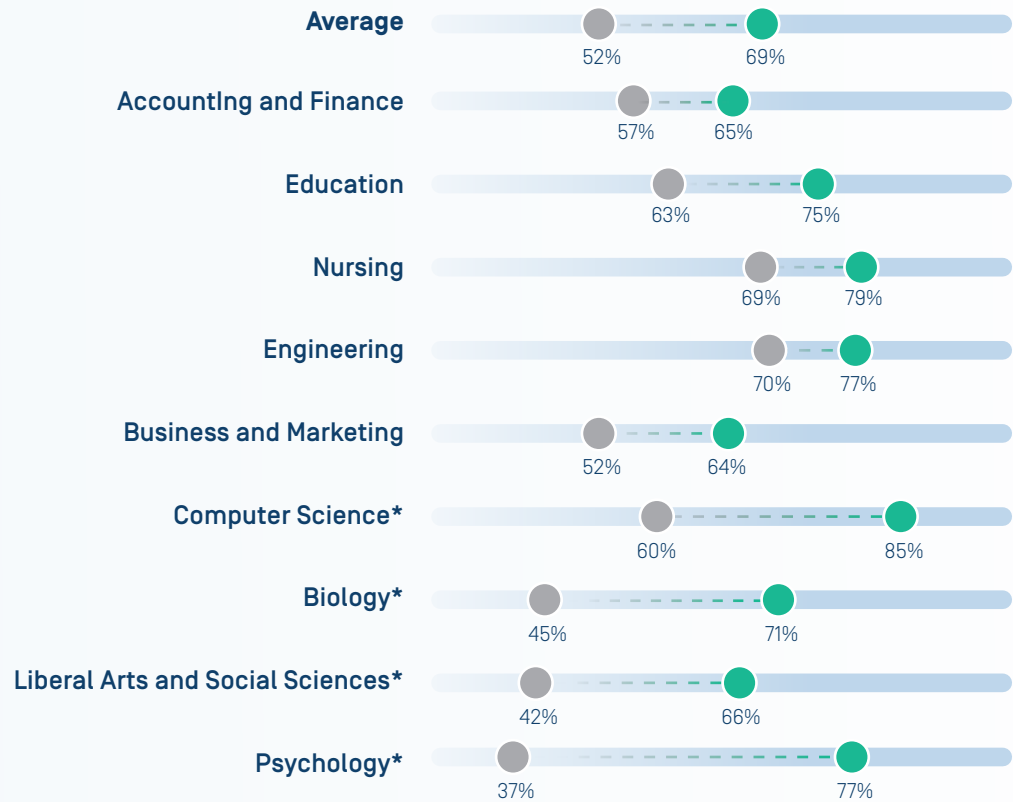


*Base: Alumni of the classes of 2020-2023 from four-year public institutions. n ranges from 297 to 7,013 across groups.
=Statistically significant difference from the average at the $p < 0.05$ level.

Recent graduates of fields of study where quality education-to-career coaching is least often accessed or less closely aligned with a particular career — psychology, liberal arts, and social sciences — also are among those who see the greatest increase in college-level employment when they experience quality coaching [see Figure 4].⁹ A notable exception is computer science, which is both career-aligned and one of the majors with the strongest boost in college-level employment when they experience quality coaching.

Figure 4. Recent Graduates' College-Level Employment by Education-to-Career Coaching Experience and Field of Study

- Experienced All Three Elements of Education-To-Career Coaching
- Did Not Experience All Three Elements of Education-To-Career Coaching



Base: Alumni of the classes of 2020-2023 from four-year public institutions. n ranges from a low of 24 to a high of 3,584 across groups.
* = statistically significant difference at the $p < 0.05$ level.



Frequency of Support from Quality Education-to-Career Coaching

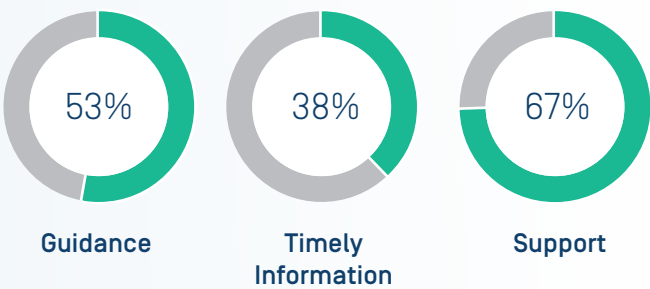


Among the three elements of quality education-to-career coaching, recent graduates report receiving timely information [consisting of information on education-to-career paths and labor market outcomes received by the end of the first year of postsecondary education] significantly less frequently (38 percent) than guidance (53 percent) or support (67 percent) (see Figure 5). As noted above, receiving timely information is significantly linked to college-level employment as graduates launch their careers. Practical and actionable information is a crucial element of education-to-career coaching, as it gives students agency to make informed decisions and anticipate opportunities associated with those choices.

Just as with the overall experience of quality education-to-career coaching, recent graduates from psychology, liberal arts, and social sciences are significantly less likely than recent graduates on average to receive timely information. Computer science and accounting and finance graduates are significantly more likely to receive timely information (see Figure 6).

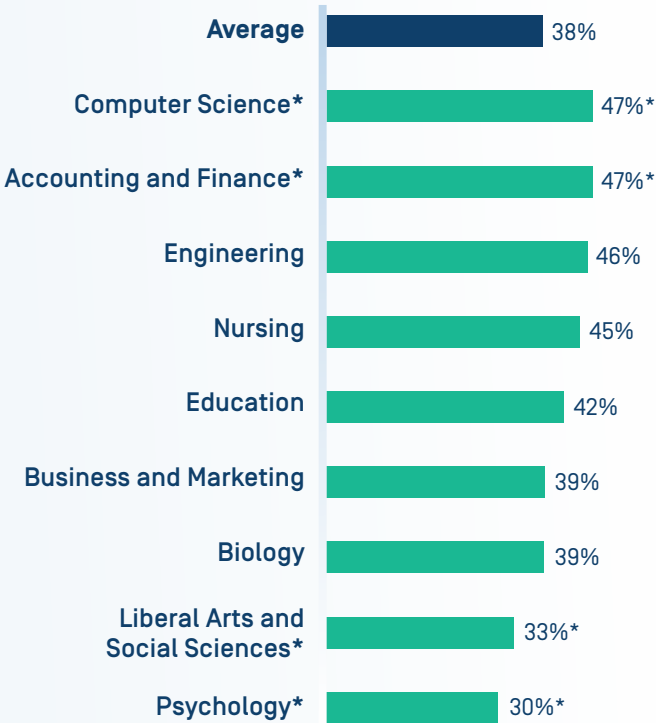
Within the element of timely information, graduates are least likely to receive information related to the labor market. Six in 10 recent graduates received information on education-to-career paths that could be a good fit for their strengths and interests. Fewer received information about job opportunities (50 percent) or potential earnings (49 percent). Only one-third received information about the career outcomes of alumni from their own institution (see Figure 7).

Figure 5. Frequency of Recent Graduates' Experiences with Elements of Quality Education-to-Career Coaching



Base: Alumni of the classes of 2020-2023 from four-year public institutions. Sample size (referred to as "n") ranges 7,017 to 7,019 across survey items.

Figure 6. Frequency of Recent Graduates' Experience with Timely Information by Field of Study



Base: Alumni of the classes of 2020-2023 from four-year public institutions. n ranges from 297 to 7,017 across groups. *= statistically significant difference from the average at the $p < 0.05$ level.

Figure 7. Recent Graduates' Receipt of Subcomponents of Timely Information

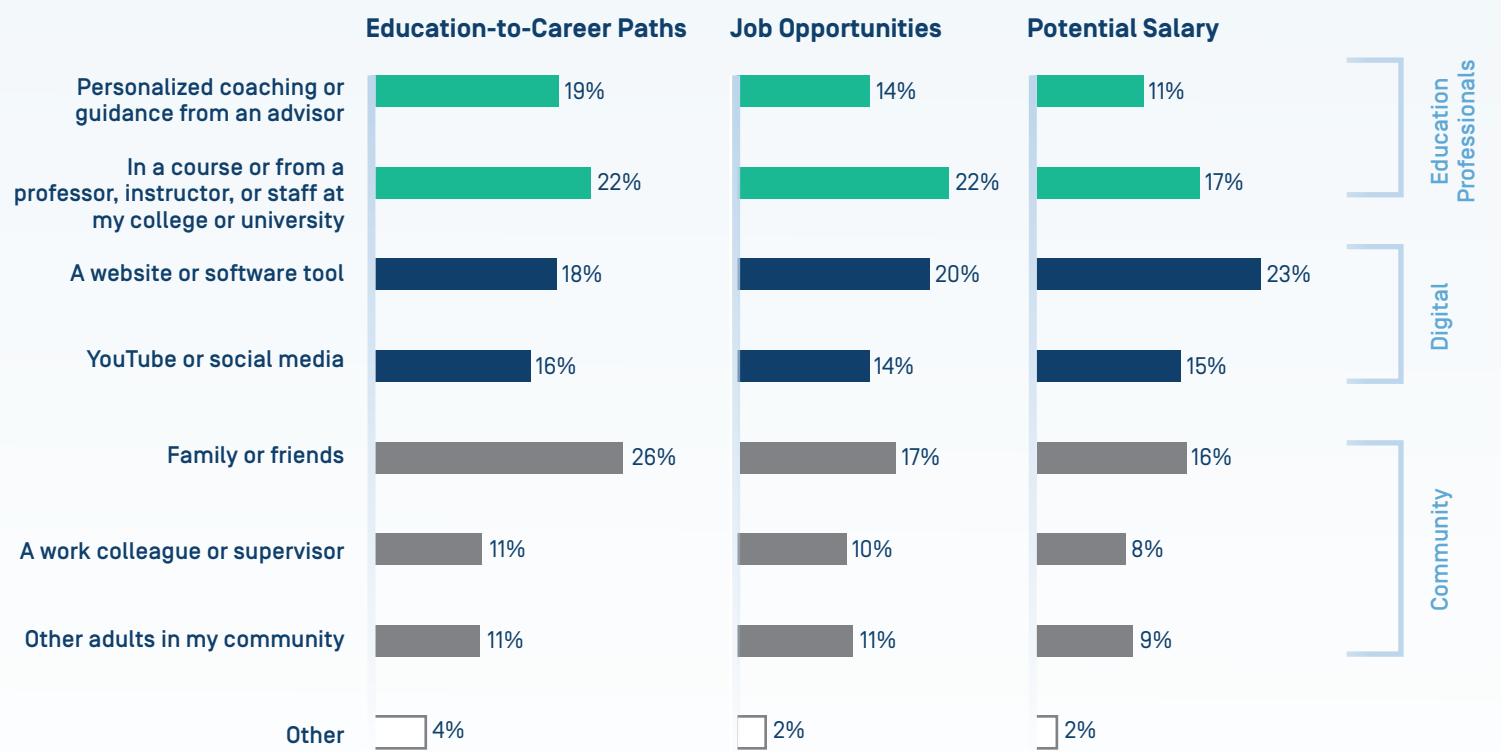


Base: Alumni of the classes of 2020–2023 from four-year public institutions. n ranges from 7,010 to 7,019 across survey items.

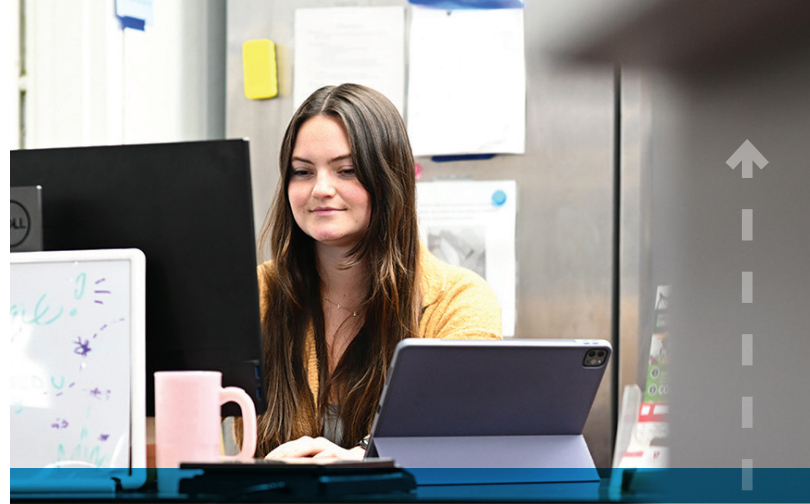
Sources for timely information are widely dispersed, with no majority of recent graduates citing any single channel as their information source. The sources vary by topic, and many alumni reported receiving information from multiple sources.¹⁰ The growth of online resources has made digital platforms their main source of information. Students may access these platforms through career advising centers

or independent of professional or peer support. However, when it comes to more personal insights into the potential fit and opportunities a path may hold, alumni reported relying more heavily on people — friends, family, faculty, and staff from their institution — than online resources [see Figure 8].

Figure 8. Recent Graduates' Reported Sources of Timely Information



Base: Alumni of the classes of 2020–2023 from four-year public institutions. n ranges from 7,018 to 7,019 across survey items. Respondents selected all that applied.

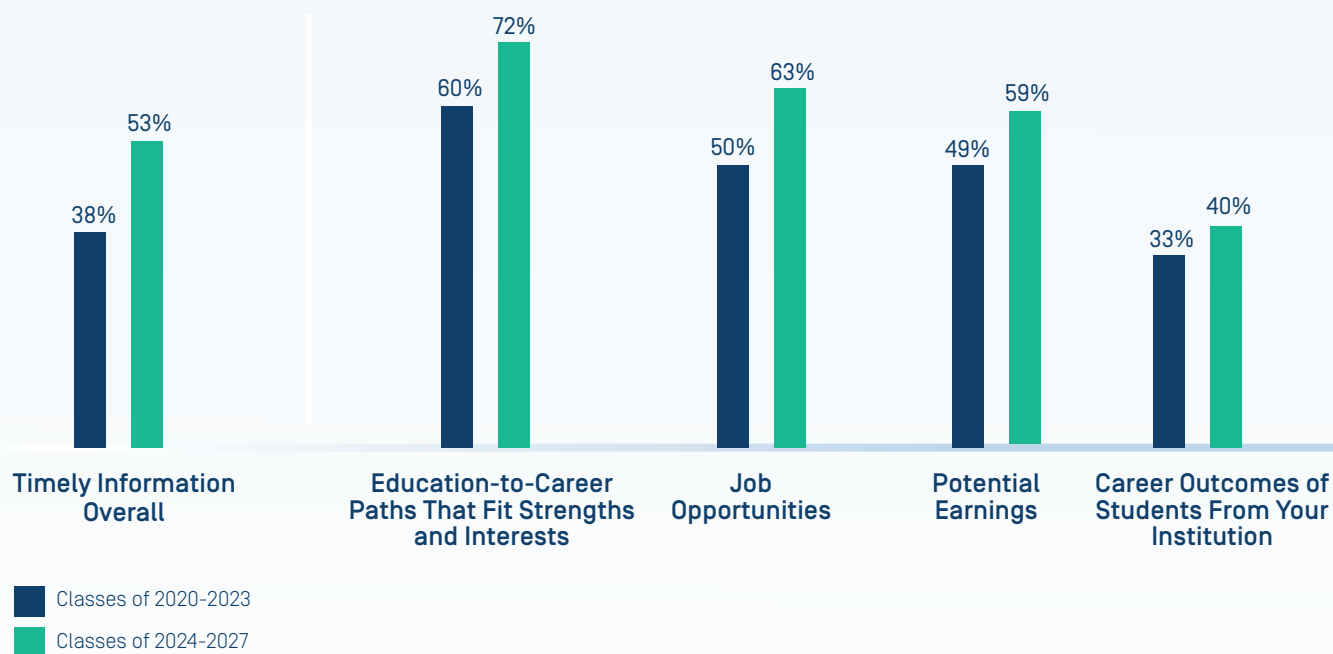


Preliminary data suggest that timely access to all types of information has increased in recent years. Current students (high school graduating classes of 2024 to 2027) are more likely to report receiving information compared to graduates from earlier classes [2020 to 2023] (see Figure 9). This difference simply may indicate that current students' recollections are more detailed compared with graduates a few years removed from postsecondary education. The pattern also may point to an interruption in coaching services during the COVID-19 pandemic and possibly, a return to normal, or even more active outreach with more recent cohorts as focus increases on students' outcomes after graduation.

Where graduates received information — whether it is about education and career paths, job opportunities, or earnings — varied based on their family's educational background. First-generation college graduates were less likely than continuing-generation graduates to receive information from family and friends, with a difference of 6 to 10 percentage points depending on the timely information subcomponent.

Gender also played a role in where graduates received information. Graduates of a gender identity other than men or women (i.e., non-binary) were 10 to 20 percentage points less likely to have received information from family and friends. Students' relationships with their families, and their families' experiences with education, may play a role in these differences.^{11,12} The information type with the largest differences is information on education-to-career paths that would be a good fit for their strengths and interests, while the smallest difference pertains to information on earnings, reflecting a more consistent reliance by all groups on online sources for this information. There were no significant differences in information sources by race and ethnicity across the four subcomponents.

Figure 9. Frequency of Receipt of Timely Information by Year of Graduating Class



Base: Alumni of the classes of 2020-2023 from four-year public institutions. n=7,017.
Students from the classes of 2024-2027 from four-year public institutions. n=7,946.

Recommendations



Based on the findings of this study, we recommend several actions for institutions seeking to help students better connect their academic and career aspirations to achieve more positive outcomes.

1

Provide incoming students timely information about the connections between their interests and educational choices, including possible fields of study, the labor market opportunities those can lead to, and employment and earnings expectations. This process will involve guided support to help students explore their interests and align them with education and career pathways, particularly for students early in their postsecondary education career. Timely information might be incorporated at orientation or initial advising sessions, and throughout first-year experiences and existing communication strategies that reach students.

2

Strive to reach every student where they already are — for example, in core courses and existing programs and services. Embedding education-to-career guidance in core courses required of all students reaches students who face obstacles to using the career center or other special offices and also ensures this support reaches students whose majors are less clearly linked to careers. Institutions should consider the ways technology can be incorporated to help achieve universal reach.

3

Design multiple touch points and repetition in delivering education-to-career coaching, as students' ability to understand and make use of guidance, information, and support will vary at different points in their pathways. For example, strategic repetition of key information, such as providing labor market insights throughout the first year of study and revisiting them throughout the student's pathway, will ensure that as students progress academically, they also are refining and preparing to pursue their career goals. Key points in the journey may include the choice of major, choices around internships or other work-based learning opportunities, and ultimately choices around a first job or graduate school.

4

Empower staff, faculty, and peers from across an institution (and even beyond it) with tools and preparation so they can create a foundation for education-to-career coaching for students.

Students connect with a wide range of individuals throughout their education journey. Note that family or friends, including alumni, may be particularly trusted sources of education-to-career coaching and can benefit from access to additional information to support their role in the student's network of support. Additionally, employer relationships can be a valuable resource for institutions to better understand local labor market needs and accurately inform and advise students.

5

Increase faculty and staff capacity to access, understand, and confidently share labor market information.

Given that the element of coaching students received the least was access to timely information, this should be a priority for action. A first step is assessing institutional capacity to reach every student with timely education-to-career guidance. Some institutions can use available staff and faculty in new ways to achieve this aim, but others will find they do not have adequate capacity and need to make specific investments in education-to-career guidance in order to reach every student early in their program of study. Institutions may already be moving in this direction, given that recent student cohorts are more likely to report receiving timely information. Some states are leading the way when it comes to providing interactive resources that can help guide coaches, faculty, students, and families.¹³ Others have joined multi-state efforts with shared tools to better understand and publicize the outcomes of graduates.¹⁴



Every student pursuing education after high school would benefit from personal, timely, and supportive education-to-career coaching. Achieving this ambitious goal will require the participation of both faculty and staff. Although advisors and career center professionals have important roles to play, they need the assistance of others across the institution. **By investing in both staff and faculty, using innovative technology tools, and engaging in new approaches, institutions will be better equipped to help every student connect their academic pathways with their career aspirations and achieve the outcomes they seek.**

References

1 Ellen Bara Stolzenberg, Melissa C. Aragon, Edgar Romo, Victoria Couch, Destiny McLennan, M. Kevin Eagan, and Nathaniel Kang, "[The American freshman: National norms fall 2019](#)." (Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA 42, 2020).

2 "[Why Higher Ed?](#)" (Indianapolis and Washington, DC: Strada Education Foundation and Gallup, Inc., 2019).

3 "[Talent Disrupted: College Graduates, Underemployment, and the Way Forward](#)." (Indianapolis: Strada Education Foundation, 2024). [Please see appendix for a full description of how education requirements are calculated for that study. Ultimately, the classifications align with the occupational classification used for the Bureau of Labor Statistics for its typical education assignments by detailed occupation.]

4 "Talent Disrupted: College Graduates, Underemployment, and the Way Forward, 2024.

5 Amy Feygin, Trey Miller, Eric Bettinger, and Madison Dell. "Advising for College Success: A Systematic Review of the Evidence." Institute of Education Sciences and College Completion Network. (Arlington, VA: American Institutes for Research, 2022).

6 "[State Opportunity Index](#)." (Indianapolis: Strada Education Foundation, 2024).

7 These findings are from a nationally representative survey jointly conducted by CollegePulse and Strada fielded from June through August 2023. The data provided here are specific to the classes of 2020-2023 from public institutions (n=7,017 from four-year institutions and 823 from two-year institutions). For more information, see the [State Opportunity Index Technical Appendix](#).

8 Graduates were matched on race/ethnicity, gender, first-generation status, field of study, and receipt of the other elements of quality education-to-career coaching. The matching technique was "exact matching," using the Stata package kmatch. Analysis also was performed using propensity score matching and Mahalanobis distance matching with substantially similar results.

9 The statistically significant differences noted in Figure 4 take into account the variation in subgroup sample sizes that ranges from n=24 to n=3,584. Future analyses with larger sample sizes could further examine the magnitude of these differences.

10 Respondents were not asked about the source of information on career outcomes of students from their current institution, based on the assumption it would necessarily come from the institution.

11 Research suggests that trans or non-binary youth are more likely to be estranged from their families, thus limiting or eliminating this source of information or advice for some trans students. Sandy E. James, Jody L. Herman, Laura E. Durso, and Rodrigo Heng-Lehtinen, "Early Insights: A Report of the 2022 US Transgender Survey." (Washington, DC: National Center for Transgender Equality, 2024).

12 John Ecker, Tim Aubry, and John Sylvestre. "A review of the literature on LGBTQ adults who experience homelessness." Journal of homosexuality 66, no. 3 (2019): 297-323.

13 "[State Opportunity Index: Clear Outcomes](#)," 2024.

14 "[Post-Secondary Employment Outcomes Explorer](#)," (Washington, DC: United States Census Bureau, 2024).

Acknowledgements

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