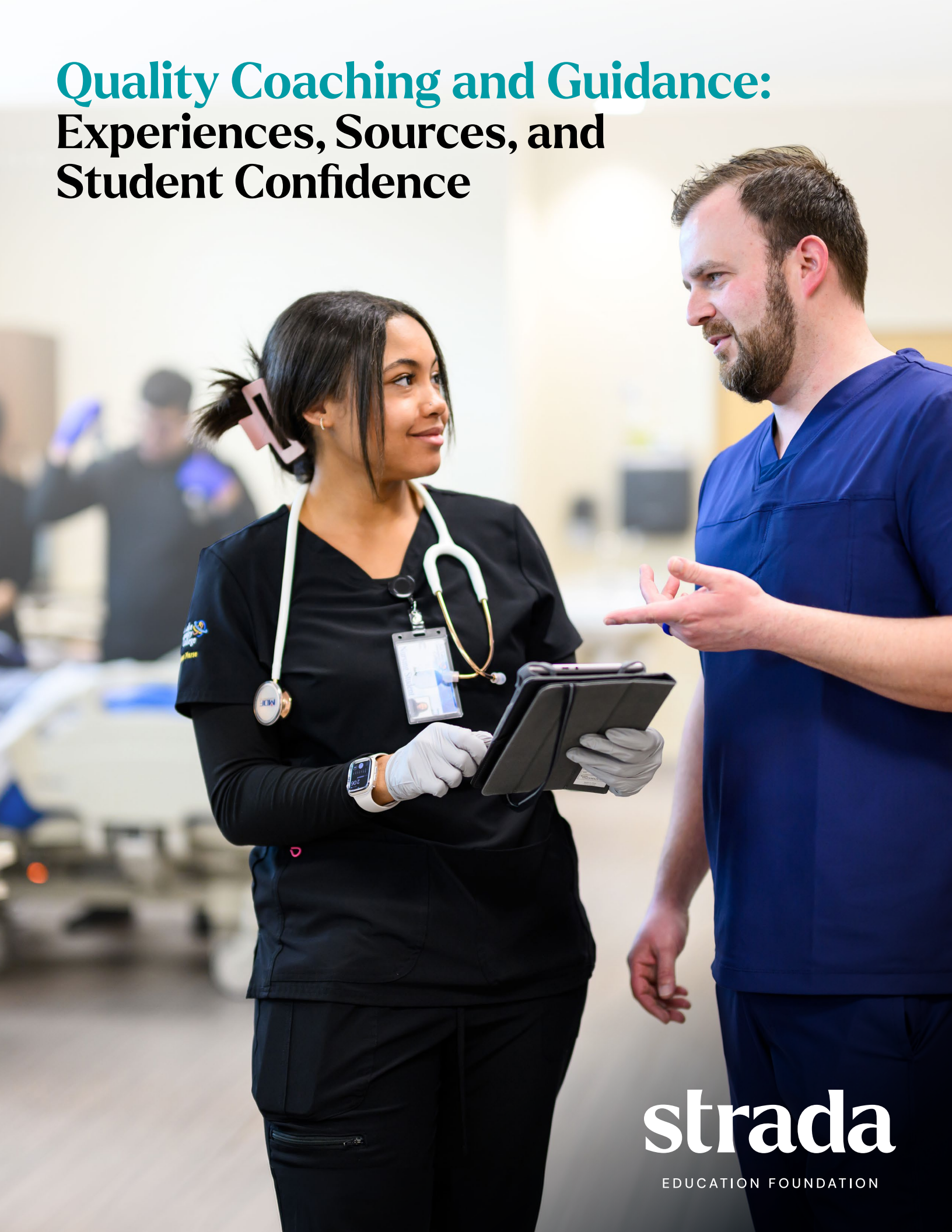
Quality Coaching and Guidance: Experiences, Sources, and Student Confidence



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Quality Coaching and Guidance: Experiences, Sources, and Student Confidence

Postsecondary students make many decisions that set and adapt the course of their education-to-career pathways. For key decisions, such as what institution to attend, what to study, and what cocurricular experiences to pursue along the way, they can benefit from both formal and informal guidance, information, and support to understand the connections between who they are, what they aspire to, and how to be successful in that quest. Among other aspects of the student experience, the 2025 State Opportunity Index Survey explored how they received Quality Coaching and guidance in preparing for success after graduation. Because this information is not available through widespread and standardized existing data sources, the State Opportunity Index Survey was developed to capture student self-reported experiences and perspectives on education-to-career guidance.

The education-to-career guidance provided by Quality Coaching helps learners understand their options, connect educational experiences to workforce opportunities, and navigate barriers along the way. The State Opportunity Index defines Quality Coaching as the combination of three core elements and categorizes states based upon what portion of students report having these experiences:

1. **Personalized Guidance:** Coaching or guidance to help students select the education that will prepare them for successful careers.

2. **Timely Labor Market Information:** Information about (a) education-to-career pathways that may be the best fit for their strengths and interests, (b) job opportunities, (c) earnings, and (d) career outcomes of students from their own institution, delivered either before enrolling or during their first year of education.

3. **Support:** Help with (a) setting education and career goals and developing a plan to achieve them, and (b) overcoming barriers to success.

Findings

Building upon the state-by-state reporting in the State Opportunity Index, these additional analyses explore:

- Variations in experiences across student populations and fields of study;
- The sources and channels through which students experience education-to-career guidance; and,
- How Quality Coaching experiences are linked to student perceptions of the affordability, value, and career preparation of their college education.

Methodology

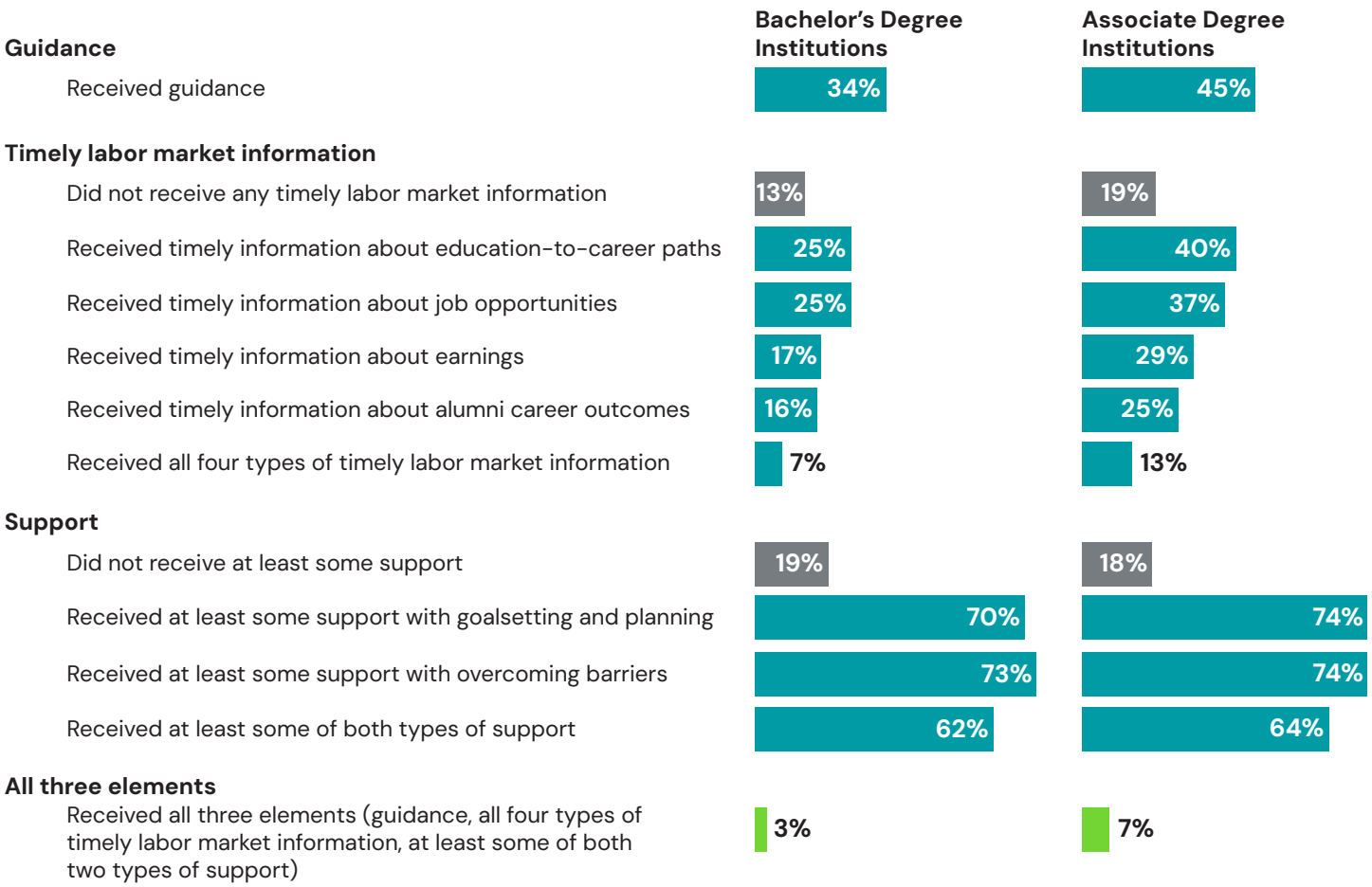
Strada partnered with College Pulse, Trellis Strategies, RTI, and Generation Lab to conduct an online survey to collect data on Quality Coaching experiences among students at public associate degree institutions (all students excluding dual-enrollment students) and seniors at public bachelor's degree institutions (students in their last year of study). Institutions are classified according to the College Scorecard designation of the predominant degree awarded.

The data are representative at national and state levels by race/ethnicity, gender, and field of study. The survey was fielded from February-July 2025. Results for students at associate degree-granting institutions are based on a sample of n=15,031, and those for students at bachelor's degree-granting institutions are based on a sample of n=41,359. This report presents the share of students receiving each of the three elements of Quality Coaching – Personalized Guidance, Timely Labor Market Information (LMI), and Support – as well as the share receiving every component of all three elements. This differs slightly from the State Opportunity Index methodology, which averages the percentage of students receiving each component and each of the three elements.

Finding 1: Relatively few students report a complete Quality Coaching experience.

As reported in the 2025 State Opportunity Index, students report significantly uneven experiences with the three core components that constitute education-to-career coaching and guidance experiences. Most students report receiving support – about 6 in 10 receive at least some support in both setting goals and developing a plan to achieve them, and in overcoming barriers to success; however, substantially fewer receive personalized guidance to help them select education and training experiences to prepare them for a successful career, and even fewer receive timely LMI about career pathways, job opportunities, earnings, and employment outcomes. As a result, only a small share of students experience comprehensive coaching combining all three elements. Figure 1 illustrates how these gaps accumulate. Although many students receive individual elements of coaching, only 3 percent of students at bachelor's degree institutions and 7 percent of students at associate degree institutions receive every element.

FIGURE 1:
Receipt of Quality Coaching elements and comprehensive Quality Coaching at bachelor's and associate degree institutions

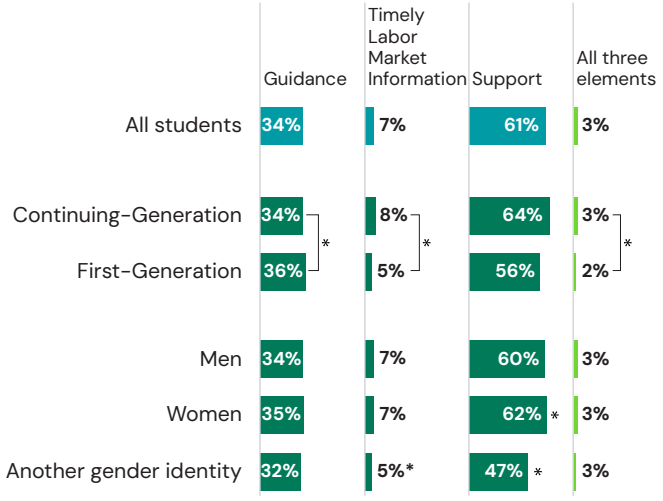


Although most students overall report receiving support, two specific populations are less likely to do so (see Figures 2-3).

- First-generation students in both bachelor's and associate degree institutions are nearly 10 percentage points less likely than their continuing-generation peers to report they experience support for setting education-to-career goals, making plans to achieve them, and in overcoming barriers to success.
- Students self-identifying as another gender identity also are significantly less likely than their peers to report experiencing support in their education to career goal setting, planning, and overcoming barriers.

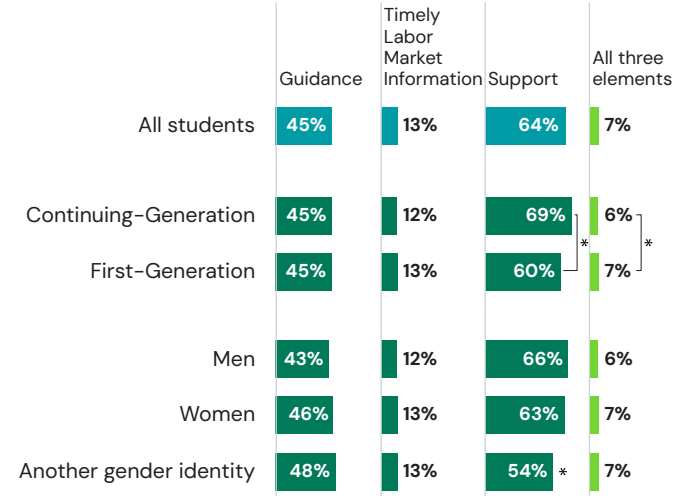


FIGURE 2:
Experience with elements of Quality Coaching by first-generation status and gender at bachelor's degree institutions



* denotes a statistically significant difference, p<0.05.

FIGURE 3:
Experience with elements of Quality Coaching by first-generation status and gender at associate degree institutions

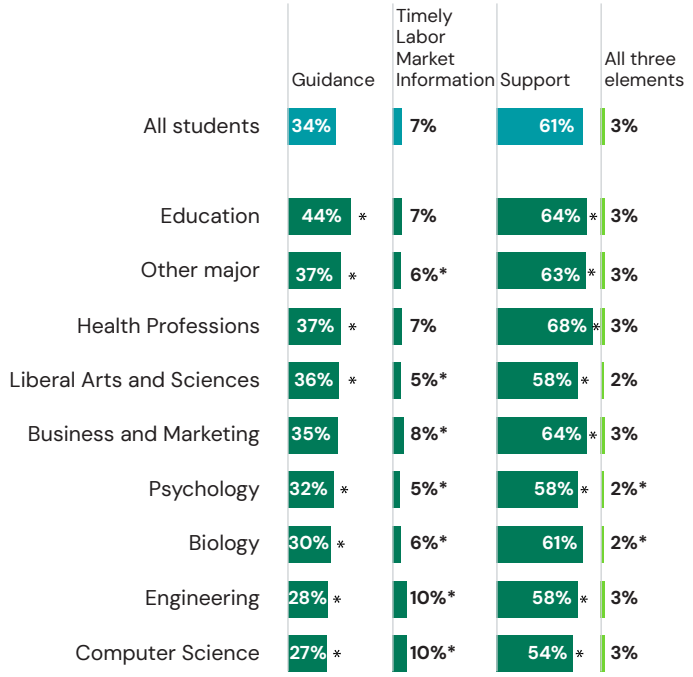


* denotes a statistically significant difference, p<0.05.

Meaningful differences in how students experience Quality Coaching also are present across fields of study. Among students at bachelor's degree institutions, 44 percent of education majors report receiving guidance, compared to just 27 percent of computer science majors. Support ranges from 68 percent among health professions students to 54 percent among computer science students. Across all majors, not more than 1 in 10 students receives all four types of timely LMI (career pathways that fit their strengths and interests, job opportunities in their field of study, potential earnings, and outcomes of graduates from their program). Looking at Quality Coaching across fields of study reveals the fields in which improvement is most needed, and opportunities to learn from examples of greater success.

FIGURE 4:
Experience with elements of Quality Coaching by field of study at bachelor's degree institutions

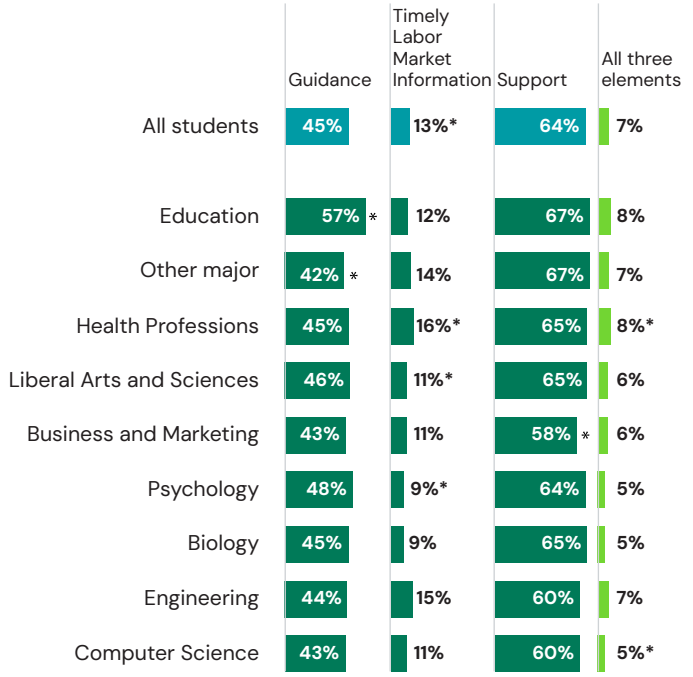
Bachelor's Degree Institutions



* denotes a statistically significant difference, p<0.05.

FIGURE 5:
Experience with elements of Quality Coaching by field of study at associate degree institutions

Associate Degree Institutions



* denotes a statistically significant difference, p<0.05.



Finding 2: Sources of Quality Coaching are widespread, with value concentrated in personal and institutional relationships.

Students report finding value in multiple sources of coaching, including advisors, faculty, family members, friends, employers, community organizations, online and digital tools, and others. Family, in particular, is cited most often as the most valuable source of Quality Coaching among bachelor's degree students who received it -- 25 percent cited family as their most valuable source (see Figure 6).

Tech-enabled platforms are positioned to complement rather than supplant relationship-based coaching, as students are less likely to report using them and less likely to identify them as their most valuable source of coaching.

FIGURE 6:

Sources of elements of Quality Coaching, and most valuable source of coaching at bachelor's degree institutions

Bachelor's Degree Institutions	Source of at Least One Element of Quality Coaching	Source of Guidance	Source of Labor Market Information	Source of Support	Most Valuable Source
Friends	72%	16%	45%	63%	13%
Family	71%	16%	44%	64%	25%
An advisor or coach at my school	56%	24%	40%	41%	15%
A faculty member at my school	55%	18%	43%	38%	18%
Social media	37%	7%	27%	20%	6%
A website/software tool provided by my school	32%	7%	24%	13%	5%
A website/software tool not provided by my school	30%	4%	24%	11%	7%
An employer or co-workers	30%	7%	20%	18%	5%
An organization in my community	16%	4%	9%	11%	2%
Another source	9%	2%	6%	5%	3%

FIGURE 7:

Sources of elements of Quality Coaching, and most valuable source of coaching at associate degree institutions

Associate Degree Institutions	Source of at Least One Element of Quality Coaching	Source of Guidance	Source of Labor Market Information	Source of Support	Most Valuable Source
Friends	65%	19%	40%	57%	27%
Family	60%	17%	36%	50%	10%
An advisor or coach at my school	57%	32%	41%	41%	20%
A faculty member at my school	46%	19%	34%	32%	15%
Social media	33%	11%	23%	17%	6%
A website/software tool provided by my school	32%	6%	23%	17%	6%
A website/software tool not provided by my school	26%	5%	19%	11%	6%
An employer or co-workers	24%	7%	15%	16%	4%
An organization in my community	13%	3%	8%	7%	4%
Another source	12%	4%	7%	8%	2%

Although students broadly find value in a mix of institutional and personal sources for coaching, the composition of those networks varies across student populations (see Figures 8-9).

- **Institution-based sources are broadly important.**
  More than half of both continuing-generation and first-generation students find value in coaching from advisors, coaches, or faculty. At associate degree institutions, advisors and coaches are particularly critical for first-generation students.

- **Differences emerge in the extent to which students draw on personal relationships.**
  First-generation students are less likely than continuing-generation students to find value in coaching from family members and, at bachelor's degree institutions, from friends.

FIGURE 8:
Sources of Quality Coaching by first-generation status at bachelor's degree institutions

Source of at least one element of Quality Coaching, bachelor's degree institutions	Continuing Generation	First Generation	
Friends	76%	66%	*
Family	77%	60%	*
An advisor or coach at my school	57%	56%	*
A faculty member at my school	58%	53%	*
Social media	37%	38%	
A website/software tool provided by my school	32%	32%	
A website/software tool not provided by my school	30%	30%	
An employer or co-workers	32%	27%	*
An organization in my community	16%	16%	
Another source	9%	11%	*

* denotes a statistically significant difference, $p<0.05$.

FIGURE 9:
Sources of Quality Coaching by first-generation status at associate degree institutions

Source of at least one element of Quality Coaching, associate degree institutions	Continuing Generation	First Generation	
Friends	69%	63%	*
Family	61%	61%	
An advisor or coach at my school	55%	60%	*
A faculty member at my school	47%	47%	
Social media	34%	34%	
A website/software tool provided by my school	33%	32%	
A website/software tool not provided by my school	28%	25%	*
An employer or co-workers	23%	24%	
An organization in my community	11%	13%	*
Another source	12%	14%	

* denotes a statistically significant difference, $p<0.05$.

Student experiences in different fields of study largely are similar, but with some exceptions. Education and Health Professions students tend to be more likely to identify employer networks, advisors, and faculty as a source of any of the elements of Quality Coaching, while computer science and engineering students at bachelor's degree institutions tend to be less likely to get Quality Coaching from advisors or faculty. Figures 10 and 11 allow for closer examination of individual fields of study.

FIGURE 10:

Sources of Quality Coaching by field of study at bachelor's degree institutions

Bachelor's Degree Institutions	All Students	Biology	Business and Marketing	Computer Science	Education	Engineering	Health Professions	Liberal Arts and Sciences	Other Majors	Psychology
Friends	72%	74%*	73%	71%	72%	76%*	78%*	70%*	67%*	72%
Family	71%	73%*	74%*	64%*	72%	73%*	78%*	68%*	66%*	70%
An advisor or coach at my school	56%	56%	56%	46%*	64%*	48%*	62%*	59%*	53%*	59%*
A faculty member at my school	55%	53%*	51%*	44%*	64%*	51%*	61%*	61%*	53%*	55%
Social media	37%	38%	41%*	40%*	30%*	32%*	38%*	35%*	37%	37%
A website/software tool provided by my school	30%	33%*	29%	39%*	18%*	35%*	27%*	28%*	29%	31%
A website/software tool not provided by my school	30%	31%	35%*	38%*	22%*	34%*	28%*	30%*	30%	32%
An employer or co-workers	30%	27%*	31%	23%*	36%*	32%	36%*	29%	29%	28%
An organization in my community	16%	17%	15%	12%*	16%	14%*	16%	17%*	15%	16%
Another source	9%	9%	8%*	10%	10%	9%	7%*	10%*	9%	11%*

FIGURE 11:

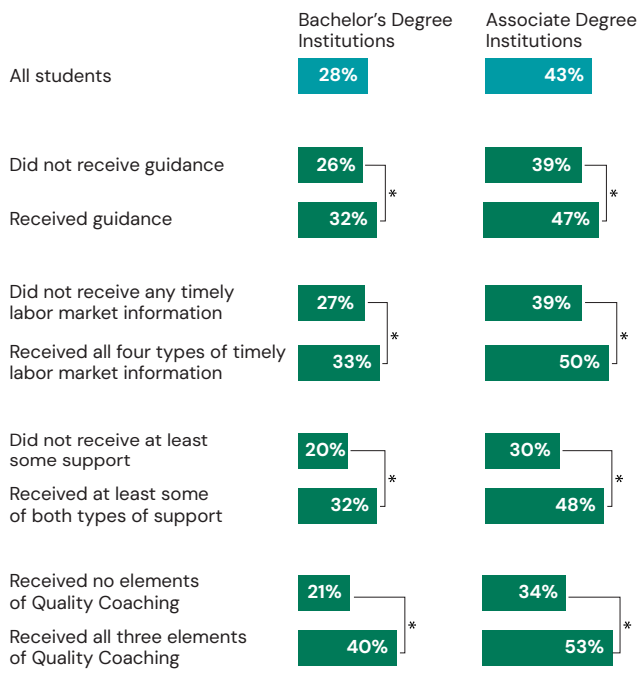
Sources of Quality Coaching by field of study at associate degree institutions

Associate Degree Institutions	All Students	Biology	Business and Marketing	Computer Science	Education	Engineering	Health Professions	Liberal Arts and Sciences	Other Majors	Psychology
Friends	65%	60%	68%	57%*	68%	61%	71%*	65%	62%*	71%*
Family	60%	59%	59%	54%*	64%	57%	67%*	59%	58%	63%
An advisor or coach at my school	57%	58%	57%	58%	66%*	57%	59%	57%	51%	64%*
A faculty member at my school	46%	44%	38%*	43%	44%	52%	51%*	51%*	45%	45%
Social media	33%	38%	38%*	37%	30%	34%	32%	34%	28%*	32%
A website/software tool provided by my school	32%	37%*	30%	32%	26%*	34%	31%	33%	31%	31%
A website/software tool not provided by my school	26%	35%*	28%	34%*	19%*	30%	24%*	25%	24%	21%
An employer or co-workers	24%	18%*	24%	20%*	32%*	21%	32%*	20%*	23%	16%*
An organization in my community	12%	12%	11%	11%	14%	14%	11%	13%	10%	14%
Another source	13%	8%*	13%	16%	10%*	12%	12%	15%	13%	17%

Finding 3: Quality Coaching experiences are associated with more favorable student perceptions of affordability, career preparation, and value, and higher participation in work-based learning.

Among students at both bachelor's and associate degree institutions, experiencing Quality Coaching is associated with a greater likelihood of reporting that it was affordable to attend college, even after controlling for family income and Pell eligibility. Students who receive all three elements of Quality Coaching are about 20 percentage points more likely than those who do not receive any of the elements to report that their education was very or extremely affordable (see Figure 12). They also are substantially more likely to report than college costs are easy to understand (see Figure 13).

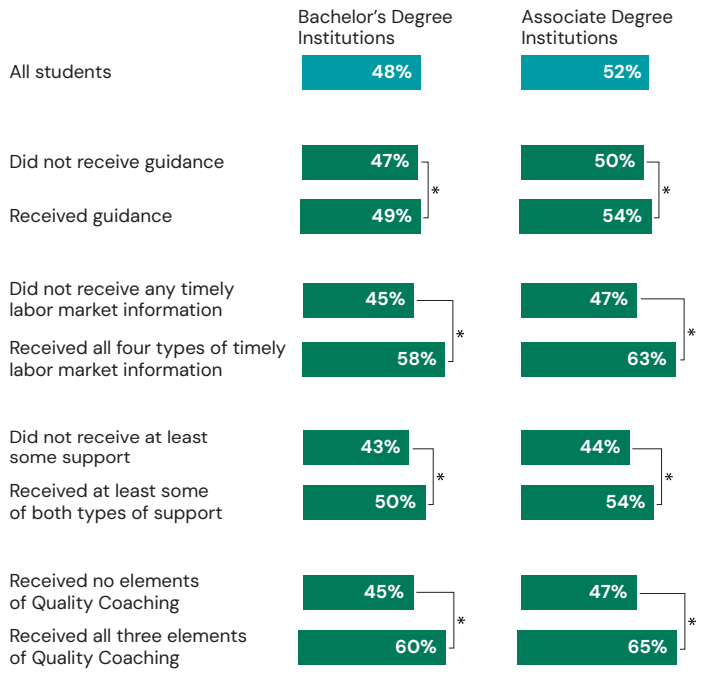
FIGURE 12:
Perceptions of college affordability by receipt of Quality Coaching elements



How affordable has it been for you to attend college? *(Very/Extremely affordable)*

* denotes a statistically significant difference, $p<0.05$.

FIGURE 13:
Understandability of college costs by receipt of Quality Coaching elements



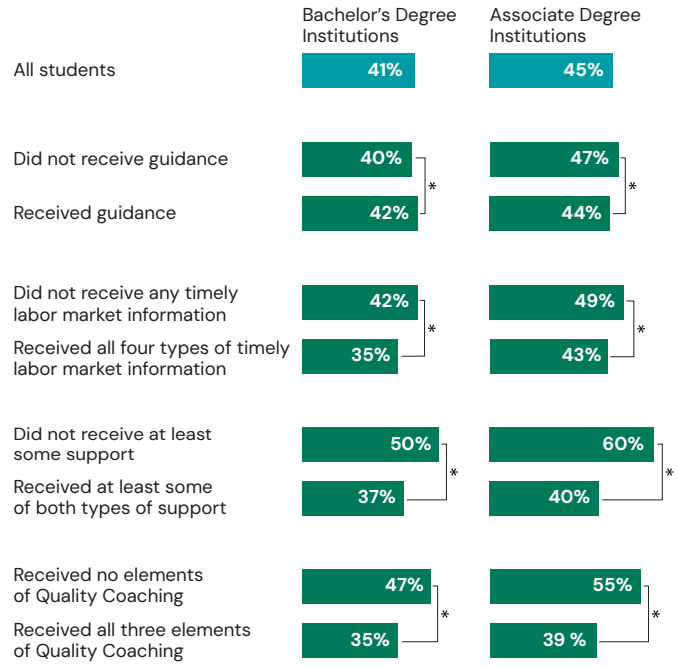
How easy was it to understand how much money it would cost to get your degree? *(Pretty/Very easy to understand)*

* denotes a statistically significant difference, $p<0.05$.

Students who receive Quality Coaching – regardless of family income – also are less likely to report that costs interfered with their educational choices or progress toward graduation. At bachelor's degree institutions, students who receive support are 13 percentage points less likely to report cost interference than those who do not receive support; at associate degree institutions, the difference is 20 percentage points (see Figure 14).

FIGURE 14:

Cost interference by receipt of Quality Coaching elements



Have costs interfered with your educational choices of your progress toward graduation?
(Yes)

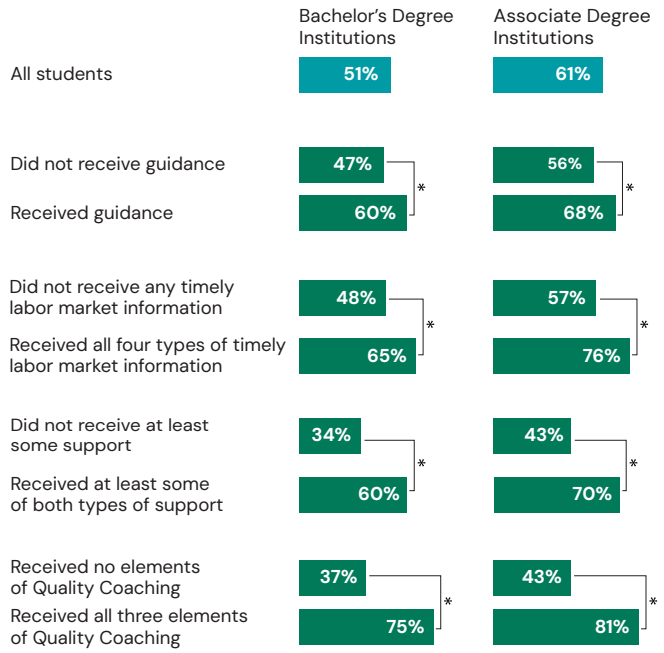
* denotes a statistically significant difference, p<0.05.



Students who receive guidance, timely LMI, and support also are much more likely to report confidence that their education is preparing them for their desired career, and are more likely to believe that their education will be worth the cost (see Figures 15-16).

FIGURE 15:

Confidence in career preparedness by receipt of Quality Coaching elements

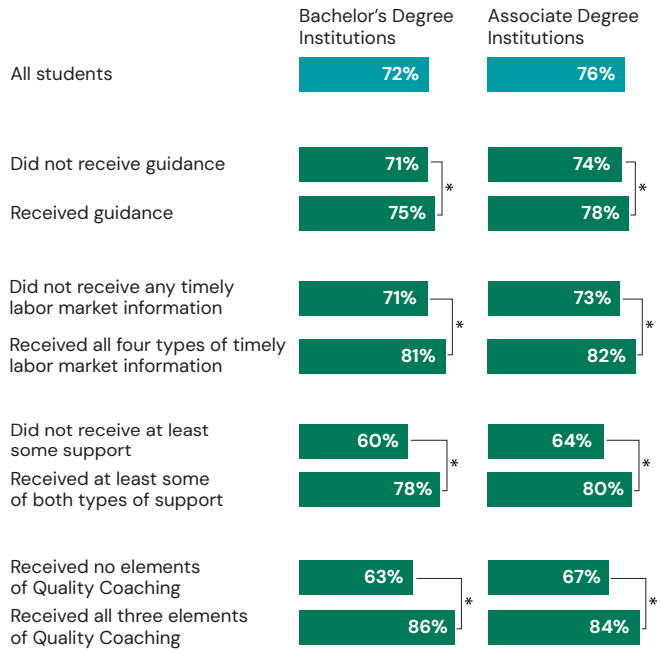


How confident are you that your studies have prepared you for your desired job? *(Very/Extremely confident)*

* denotes a statistically significant difference, $p<0.05$.

FIGURE 16:

Perceptions of educational value by receipt of Quality Coaching elements



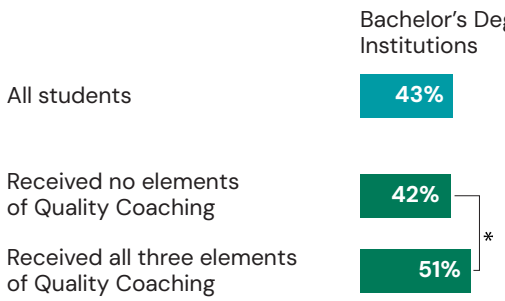
My education will be worth the cost *(Somewhat/Strongly agree)*

* denotes a statistically significant difference, $p<0.05$.

Finally, Quality Coaching is associated with higher participation in paid work-based learning experiences, including internships, apprenticeships, co-ops, practica, and undergraduate research, for students at bachelor's degree institutions. Students who receive all three elements of Quality Coaching participate in paid work-based learning at higher rates than those who received none of the elements of Quality Coaching (51 percent versus 42 percent), as shown in Figure 17. The association between Quality Coaching and Work-Based Learning is positive for both low-income students and middle and higher-income students.



FIGURE 17:
Participation in Work-Based Learning by receipt of Quality Coaching elements at bachelor's degree institutions



Participation in paid work-based learning
(Paid internship, paid apprenticeship, paid co-op program, paid practicum, paid undergraduate research experience)

* denotes a statistically significant difference, p<0.05.

Conclusion

While very few students report experiencing all three components of the education-to-career guidance that comprise Quality Coaching, there are strong indications that these components, individually and collectively, are associated with positive student perceptions about other aspects of their education. The variations in experiencing components of Quality Coaching overall, and across student groups — field of study, first-generation, and students who self-identify as "another gender identity" – highlight patterns that can inform prioritization for ensuring access. The fact that students get coaching from so many sources presents an opportunity to reach students in many different ways, and with many students already experiencing support, there is a solid foundation to add on the information and guidance components. To ensure that every student receives a comprehensive coaching experience, institutions may consider:

1. **Building commitment to a shared strategic vision for integrating education-to-career guidance across the student experience.** Academic departments, career services, student support programs, and institutional research all have a role to play in creating a career everywhere experience for students. Integrating coaching into the experiences that are part of every student's journey ensures that the benefits of coaching extend even to students who do not have the time or awareness to seek it out on their own. Collaborating with programs that serve specific student populations also may help ensure that education-to-career guidance is responsive to students' diverse backgrounds, experiences, and goals. At the same time, these efforts will benefit from being coordinated and led by an individual, such as a Chief Career Officer, to ensure accountability for results. The City University of New York's CUNY Beyond initiative infuses career guidance and career readiness throughout the student experience, leveraging advising, curriculum, and cocurricular experiences to enhance students' career readiness. The Chief Careers and Industry Partnerships Officer, a newly created role, leads this work at each institution, ensuring centralized accountability for campus-wide efforts.

2. **Prioritizing coaching at key choice points along the student journey.** In addition to an overall culture of education-to-career connection, there is an opportunity to explicitly integrate guidance, LMI, and support at natural milestones that take place well before soon-to-be graduates are looking for jobs. These milestones can include initial enrollment, declaring a major, registering for courses, reviewing academic progress, and pursuing internships and other forms of immersive work-based learning. At Georgia State University, career guidance starts early. Students take a first-year seminar based on their academic and career interests that introduces them to LMI and career outcomes data.

3. **Preparing students to access coaching and equipping their networks to provide it.** On the student side of the equation, learners can be encouraged to have conversations about their career interests with people they trust, and guided in identifying key questions to ask and understanding how to initiate these conversations. On the network side of the equation, institutions can provide resources and clear information to those whom students rely on, including not only advisors but also faculty, family members, peers, employers, and community organizations, so that they are in a position to provide informed guidance when called upon. For students without existing relationships, building a network of people they can rely on for support and advice, such as through providing peer-to-peer or other mentoring programs, can help fill in critical gaps. At Morgan State University, peer mentors offer tailored career and academic support to first-generation students. Housed in the Center for Career Development, the peer mentorship program provides targeted outreach and support to help first-generation students expand their networks and build leadership skills.

Appendix

Quality Coaching Elements

This report presents the share of students receiving each of the three elements of Quality Coaching – Personalized Guidance, Timely Labor Market Information (LMI), and Support – as well as the share receiving all three elements. The way the Timely LMI and Support measures are discussed in this report differs slightly from the State Opportunity Index (SOI). In the SOI, percentages were reported as the average of the percentages of students receiving each of the four sub-elements of Timely LMI, and the average of the percentages of students receiving the two sub-elements of Support. In this report, Timely LMI is reported as the percentage of students receiving all four LMI sub-elements described above either before entering or during their first year of study. Support is reported as the percentage of students receiving at least some support in both categories described above.

Quality Coaching Sources

This report discusses the sources students consult when receiving Quality Coaching. The source figures are percentages out of the entire student population (whether they received the element or not), and are based on all students who reported receiving the relevant coaching element, regardless of when it was received or the extent to which it met the Quality Coaching criteria. Source figures for LMI include all students who received one or more of the four LMI sub-elements at any point in their educational journey, regardless of whether the information was received before entering or during their first year of study; and source figures for Support include all students who received one or both of the two Support sub-elements to any capacity, regardless of whether it was "some support" or better.

First-generation

First-generation students have parents or guardians whose highest level of education is vocational or technical school or less.

Continuing-generation

Continuing-generation students have parents or guardians whose highest level of education is associate degree or higher.

Survey Questions

Questions for Key Metrics

Survey Question	Response Options
1. During or before enrolling in your current education program, have you received personalized coaching or guidance to help you select the education and training experiences that will prepare you for a successful career?	• Yes • No
2. During or before enrolling in your current education program, have you received these types of information? [Select all that apply]	• Information to help you understand which education-to-career paths might be a good fit for your strengths and interests • Information about job opportunities that your education program could lead to • Information about potential earnings in different careers related to your education program • Information about the career outcomes of students from your current institution • None of these
3. When have you received this information or guidance? [Select all that apply]	• Before enrolling • During my first year as a college student • After my first year as a college student but before my final year • During my final year as a college student
4. During or before enrolling in your current education program, how much support have you had in setting education and career goals and developing a plan to achieve those goals?	• No support at all • A little bit of support • Some support • Quite a bit of support • A great deal of support
5. During or before enrolling in your current education program, how much support have you had in identifying and overcoming barriers to success?	• No support at all • A little bit of support • Some support • Quite a bit of support • A great deal of support

6. Which sources of personalized education-to-career coaching or guidance have been valuable to you? [Select all that apply] *Please note that this question was repeated for the four types of information (information about education-to-career paths, jobs, earnings, and alumni career outcomes) and the two types of support (goal setting and planning, and overcoming barriers).*	• An advisor or coach at my college or university • A faculty member at my college or university • A website or software tool provided by my college or university • A website or software tool not provided by my college or university • Social media • Friends • Family • An employer or co-workers • An organization in my community (nonprofit, faith-based, etc.) • Another source

Additional Questions

Survey Question	Response Options
7. How confident are you that what you are studying in college has prepared you for the kind of job you want after you graduate?	• Not at all confident • Not very confident • Somewhat confident • Very confident • Extremely confident
8. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? My education will be worth the cost.	• Strongly disagree • Somewhat disagree • Neither agree nor disagree • Somewhat agree • Strongly agree
9. How affordable has it been for you to attend college?	• Not at all affordable • Not very affordable • Somewhat affordable • Very affordable • Extremely affordable
10. How easy was it for you to understand how much money it would cost to get your college degree?	• Very hard to understand • Pretty hard to understand • Neither easy nor hard to understand • Pretty easy to understand • Very easy to understand
11. Have costs interfered with your educational choices or your progress toward graduation?	• Yes • No

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