



TRELLIS RESEARCH

Student Financial Wellness Survey (SFWS)

Understanding the connection between student finances and student success

What is the Student Financial Wellness Survey?

- An annual survey of college students conducted by nonprofit Trellis Company to help institutions empirically understand the scope, depth, and character of financial wellness issues among their students.
- A survey that has been administered on 187 campuses in 30 states to over 2 million students.
- A free service which results in a 40-page report, a technical supplement, a one-page infographic for executives, virtual presentations by Trellis experts, and access to campus-specific ad hoc reports.

Why participate?

- **Ground student success initiatives in campus-specific empirical evidence.** The SFWS informs efforts such as financial education programming, emergency aid administration, and resource referrals to public assistance programs, food pantries, student wellness officials.
- **Guide campus strategic planning.** Results from the SFWS are being used by leading institutions to drive institutional change, strengthen student enrollment efforts, and improve student satisfaction.
- **Benchmark against peer colleges.** The SFWS allows schools to benchmark key student financial wellness indicators with peer institutions, helping the school to identify programmatic gaps and highlight institutional strengths.

What schools receive

- All participating institutions receive a school-level report of findings with comparison groups from their school sector. The report includes sections on key aspects of financial wellness such as paying for college, financial challenges, student debt, financial decision-making, and basic needs security. Examples of research to practice efforts are included to drive student success innovation.
- One-page infographic containing highlights of the school report.
- Detailed methodology and tests for representation.
- Access to Trellis experts for virtual campus-specific presentations and ad hoc reporting.

How Trellis will use the survey data

- Trellis will use the SFWS data to produce campus-specific reports for participating institutions.
- Trellis will produce research reports on the aggregated data set to inform higher education leaders and policymakers on the financial issues facing college students today.
- Trellis will only share institution-level summaries with other organizations with the written consent of the school.
- At no point will Trellis share any student level data with any organization or person.
- Data security and student privacy is of the utmost importance to Trellis. This project uses procedures and protocols to safeguard student anonymity and confidentiality.



"The University of Oklahoma was extremely interested in participating in Trellis' Student Financial Wellness Survey in the Spring 2018 semester. By participating in the survey we hope to include our students' input into the national financial wellness data measures being collected. We plan to utilize this important research to further refine our various student financial services offered at the University of Oklahoma and to ensure we are addressing and targeting the actual needs of students as indicated in the final results."

Judi Voeller

Associate Director, Grants, Research and Special Projects

The University of Oklahoma,
Student Financial Services

How schools are using the data

Schools are using the information provided by the SFWS in a variety of ways to support student success.

Planning

- Better understand the connection between their students' finances and academic success.
- Develop baseline metrics to measure the effectiveness of campus resources and interventions.
- Implement staff/faculty training on the financial realities of their student body.
- Provide intentional programs and discussions on campus related to reducing some supplemental costs of education.

Financial education

- Provide students with support to financially plan for their degree.
- Get students enrolled in safe, financial services products (such as bank accounts).
- Evaluate the environmental factors that support healthy financial decision making, including campus policies and procedures related to student payments, collections, and debt products on or near campus.
- Evaluate messaging to students around college affordability, interventions, and campus resources.
- Inform topic areas and instructional design for student loan counseling and financial education interventions.

Financial resources

- Establish a resource center network that contains resources such as food pantries, clothes closets, counseling, temporary housing, case management, financial literacy, and access to emergency loans.
- Create student financial crisis intervention teams on campus, similar to successful mental health crisis team models.
- Implement emergency aid programs to support students that face an unexpected financial emergency and are considering withdrawing from college.
- Target scarce resources to address the populations of students facing substantial financial difficulties.

Fundraising and community engagement

- Demonstrate student and institutional need when fundraising or advocating for resources.
- Engage in the process of working with their community to develop partnerships and develop resources.

How to participate

Signing up is easy. And again, participating in this comprehensive survey is 100% free for schools. To get started, visit www.trelliscompany.org/sfws and complete the brief participation form. One of Trellis' research analysts will reach out to you about next steps. You can also contact Carla Fletcher directly at carla.fletcher@trelliscompany.org.

"At Palo Alto College, faculty and staff know that our students are struggling to make ends meet. We see it every day as we connect our students to available resources, but we know these are only the students who come forward for assistance. The Student Financial Wellness Survey provided the entire community with a firm understanding of the extent to which our students are struggling. When you see that 6% of your students are experiencing homelessness – that requires action, attention, and ultimately resources. With thorough analysis and clear language, this report made the financial challenges facing our students clear and helped galvanize community support for our students in overcoming the barriers to their educational success."

Katherine Doss

Dean of Student Success

Palo Alto College

About Trellis Research

Trellis Research provides colleges and policymakers insight into student success through the lens of college affordability. With more than three decades of experience on the forefront of issues such as student debt, student loan counseling, and financial barriers to attainment, our research team continues to explore the role of personal finance and financial aid in higher education.

About Trellis

Trellis Company (www.trelliscompany.org) is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation focused on helping people leverage the power of post-secondary education and learning to improve their quality of life and the communities where they live.