

Transportation barriers and school loyalty: Results from Trellis' Fall 2021 Student Financial Wellness Survey

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Key Findings

- More than one in ten students feel that their school does not make transportation affordable.
- Over a fifth of students with cars don't believe that their car is reliable.
- Students who can't afford transportation are less likely to promote their school to others.
- A higher proportion of students who don't feel supported by their school on making transportation affordable are parents or caregivers to children, first-generation students, or female.
- Higher percentages of students with unreliable cars were first-generation college students, male, Black, or parents or caregivers to children.



Transportation costs (gas, car maintenance, public transportation, and parking) make up a large part (nearly 20 percent) of college students' living expenses.ⁱⁱⁱ Additionally, many students face long commutes because they lack access to a reliable car and/or rely on inconvenient public transportation.ⁱⁱⁱ Periodic car breakdowns can lead to missed classes and unexpected expenses.

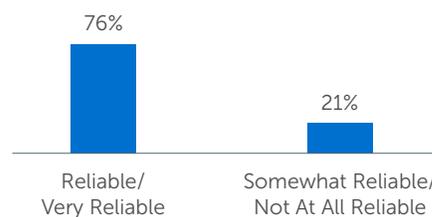
Studies conducted in 2021 found that when compared to students who have their transportation costs subsidized and who have access to safe and reliable transportation, students who do not receive subsidies and who do not have access to safe and reliable transportation are less likely to complete courses and finish degrees.^{iv,v}

SFWS Fall 2021:
 Percentage who agree or disagree
 that their school makes transportation
 more affordable.*



*Responses indicating 'Neutral' are not shown

SFWS Fall 2021:
 Reliability of car
 (of those with a car)*



*Responses indicating 'I don't know' are not shown



This brief examines transportation data from 63,751 students at 104 higher education institutions that participated in Trellis' Fall 2021 Student Financial Wellness Survey (SFWS) with a special lens on their loyalty to their school (see page 3 for the measures used) since research suggests that loyal customers are also more likely to continue their patronage.^{vi} Strategies to help students to stay in school and graduate should be informed by how their students get to school.

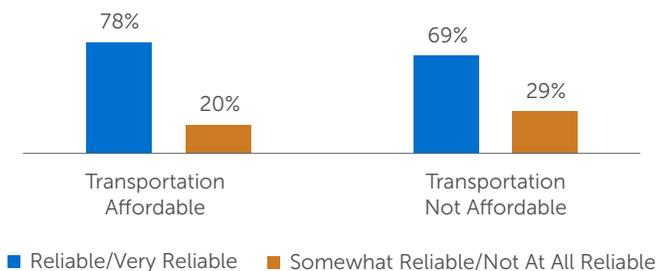
Transportation Affordability and Reliability of Survey Respondents

Postsecondary students sometimes feel that their schools do not help make transportation more affordable or reliable for them.

In Trellis' Fall 2021 implementation of the Student Financial Wellness Survey (SFWS), 15 percent of survey respondents felt that their school did not make transportation more affordable.

Over three-quarters of respondents (77 percent) reported that they do have a car. Of those with a car, 21 percent of students did not think that their car was reliable. Additionally, students with unreliable cars were less likely to feel that their school makes transportation affordable. Groups of students most likely to have unreliable cars include first-generation students, parents or caregivers to children, Black students, and male students. A higher percentage of those who did not feel like their school makes transportation more affordable said that their car was unreliable (29 percent), compared to those who did feel that their school makes transportation more affordable (20 percent). Certain groups of students were less likely to believe that their school made transportation more affordable. These include students who were parents or caregivers to children, first-generation students, or female students.

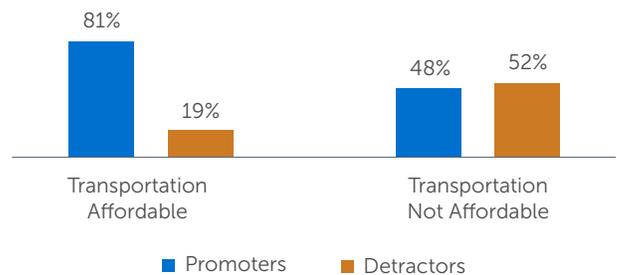
SFWS Fall 2021: Reliability of car by students' perception of if school makes transportation more affordable.



Student Loyalty

Students who do not believe that their school makes transportation more affordable are less likely to feel loyal towards their schools. In the Fall 2021 SFWS, respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed that their school made transportation more affordable were less likely to promote their school to others than students who agreed or strongly agreed that their school made transportation affordable.

SFWS Fall 2021: Perception of transportation affordability and student loyalty



Conclusion

With such high percentages of students facing transportation affordability and reliability issues, schools should develop interventions to make sure that these students stay enrolled. To better address the needs of these students, colleges and universities can collaborate with local transportation agencies to offer free or reduced transit passes funded by a combination of federal grants and student fees.^{vi,viii} Schools can also encourage students to carpool by creating incentives, such as premier parking spots, waived parking fees, and/or priority registration.^{ix} Relieving students' transportation cost burden in these ways can help students remain enrolled and complete their programs.



Measures

To better understand the experiences of survey takers, a scale for measuring school loyalty was included in the instrument.

Table 1. Net Promoter Question	
How likely is it that you would recommend your school to a friend or family member?	
<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 10
<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 9
<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 8
<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 7
<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 6
<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
<input type="checkbox"/> 6	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
<input type="checkbox"/> 7	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
<input type="checkbox"/> 8	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
<input type="checkbox"/> 9	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
<input type="checkbox"/> 10	<input type="checkbox"/> 0
Not at all Likely	Extremely Likely

Student Loyalty

To measure how loyal students feel toward their school, Trellis collected the information with a scale that allows a Net Promoter Score (NPS) to be calculated for Project Success Schools. NPS is a method, grounded in extensive research, to benchmark customer satisfaction ratings across different services, businesses, and products. NPS uses a 0-10 scale. Those respondents who score 9-10

are promoters, 7-8 are passives, and 0-6 are detractors. %Promoters - %Detractors = NPS. A positive NPS (>0) is generally considered good, with highest performers usually between 50 and 80.

About the Data/Methodology

The Student Financial Wellness Survey (SFWS) is a self-reported, online survey that seeks to document the well-being and student success indicators of post-secondary students across the nation. While not nationally representative, responses were weighted to reflect the total student composition at participating institutions. The survey opened on October 25, 2021 and closed on November 15, 2021. One hundred four (104) institutions participated in the survey—71 two-year colleges, 20 public four-years, and 13 private not-for-profit four-years. A total of 715,545 undergraduate students were invited to take the survey, of whom 63,751 responded, yielding a 9.0 percent response rate.



ⁱ The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice. (2021). Impact of transportation supports on students’ academic outcomes: A quasi-experimental study of the U-Pass at Rio Hondo College. Retrieved from: https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/RioHondoReport_FINAL.pdf

ⁱⁱ Community College League of California. (2021). Affordability, food, and housing access taskforce report: Addressing affordable transportation needs. Retrieved from: https://cclleague.org/sites/default/files/cclc_transportation-report_2021.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ CityLAB UCLA. (2019). “My commute is hell”: UCLA students, extreme commutes, impacts, solutions. Retrieved from: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58e4e9705016e194dd5cdc43/t/5d8bb03f597be3780c8542bd/1569435766654/19-0924+MCIH_Final_Update.pdf

^{iv} The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice. (2021). Impact of transportation supports on students’ academic outcomes: A quasi-experimental study of the U-Pass at Rio Hondo College. Retrieved from: https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/RioHondoReport_FINAL.pdf

^v Community College League of California. (2021). Affordability, food, and housing access taskforce report: Addressing affordable transportation needs. Retrieved from: https://cclleague.org/sites/default/files/cclc_transportation-report_2021.pdf

^{vi} Grisaffe, D. B. (2007). Questions about the ultimate question: Conceptual considerations in evaluating Reichheld’s net promoter score (NPS). *Journal of Consumer Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction and Complaining Behavior*, 20, 36-53. <https://www.proquest.com/openview/0e0fc91a969ae53f2e87f6db8f79c815/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=46531>

^{vii} Community College League of California. (2021). Affordability, food, and housing access taskforce report: Addressing affordable transportation needs. Retrieved from: https://cclleague.org/sites/default/files/cclc_transportation-report_2021.pdf

^{viii} The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice. (2021). Impact of transportation supports on students’ academic outcomes: A quasi-experimental study of the U-Pass at Rio Hondo College. Retrieved from: https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/RioHondoReport_FINAL.pdf

^{ix} Community College League of California. (2021). Affordability, food, and housing access taskforce report: Addressing affordable transportation needs. Retrieved from: https://cclleague.org/sites/default/files/cclc_transportation-report_2021.pdf



Recent Trellis Research publications

No food for thought: Insights on basic needs insecurities and mental health challenges from Trellis' Fall 2020 Student Financial Wellness Survey.

Cornett, A., & Fletcher, C. (2022). No food for thought: Insights on basic needs insecurities and mental health challenges from Trellis' Fall 2020 Student Financial Wellness Survey. Trellis Company. Retrieved from: <https://www.trelliscompany.org/portfolio-items/no-food-for-thought-insights-on-basic-needs-insecurities-and-mental-health-challenges/>

Student Financial Wellness Survey Report: Fall 2020

Webster, J., Fletcher, C., Cornett, A., & Knaff, C. (2021). Student financial wellness survey report: Fall 2020. Trellis Company. Retrieved from: <https://www.trelliscompany.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/SFWS-Report-Fall-2020.pdf>

State of Student Aid in Texas

Fletcher, C., Cornett, A., & Webster, J. (2021). State of student aid and higher education in Texas. Trellis Company. Retrieved from: <https://www.trelliscompany.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/SOSA-2021.pdf>

Studying on empty: A qualitative study of low food security among college students

Fernandez, C., Webster, J., & Cornett, A. (2019). Studying on empty: A qualitative study of low food security among college students. Trellis Company. Retrieved from: <https://www.trelliscompany.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Studying-on-Empty.pdf>

Longitudinal fluidity in collegiate food security: Disruptions, restorations, and its drivers

Cornett, A., & Webster, J. (2020). Longitudinal fluidity in collegiate food security: Disruptions, restorations, and its drivers. Trellis Company. Retrieved from: https://www.trelliscompany.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Research-Brief_FSS_Longitudinal-Fluidity.pdf

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Trellis Company ([trelliscompany.org](https://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.

Trellis Research ([trelliscompany.org/research](https://www.trelliscompany.org/research)) provides colleges and policymakers insight into student success through the lens of higher education affordability. With more than three decades of experience studying key issues such as student debt, student loan counseling, and the financial barriers to attainment, our research team explores the roles of personal finance, financial literacy, and financial aid in higher education.

Interested in collaborations or need research expertise? Trellis Research welcomes opportunities to inform policymakers and help organizations address their analytical needs. For more information, please contact Trellis Research at Trellisresearch@trelliscompany.org or visit us on Twitter ([@TrellisResearch](https://twitter.com/TrellisResearch)).

