

**today's
disengaged
learner
is
tomorrow's
adult
learner**

NOVEMBER 2021

straighterlinesm

UPCEA[®]

Overview

A shifting economy, uncertainty during the pandemic and troubles within the higher education landscape are causing more traditional age students to disengage, sit-out, take a gap year, seek alternative forms of education, or go straight to the workforce. This joint study by StraighterLine and UPCEA examines a portion of the student population that disengaged with their institution after previous enrollment. The research focuses on what may have caused students to disengage and what might get them to reenroll. Participants were asked about their level of engagement with their institution, satisfaction with engagement, and likelihood of reengaging and reenrolling.

Understanding the situations and motivations that caused learners to disengage with their institutions is an important way for institutions to be able to be proactive about their engagement with their current students as well as after they leave the institution. As technology dominates the future of the workforce, more and more students are looking at higher education with less value than before. This potential trend can be reversed with better planning, systems, and programs to reengage the learner of the future.

Methodology

UPCEA and StraighterLine partnered to identify the reasons why individuals are no longer enrolled in a college or university. The results of this study focus on why new learners across different demographics and generations have disengaged with their institutions and how institutions can reengage with them. The survey targeted individuals between the ages of 20 and 34 who had college credits but are no longer enrolled in a college or university. In total, 3,236 individuals participated in the survey of which 1,021 met all study qualifications. The survey took place between April 30th and May 12th, 2021.

Executive Summary

To best represent and understand the generational and demographic differences of respondents, six personas were created and tracked to present six segments. These personas were utilized to demonstrate how generational and gender markers influence the behaviors, motivations, and preferences of disengaged learners. When considering why certain learners may have first chosen to enroll in their program, 62% of respondents said it was a personal goal, while 44% cited career advancement. Older groups were more likely to say they were motivated by personal goals than those younger. Those more recently disengaged were more likely to cite career advancement as a goal.

What Causes Learners to Disengage with Higher Education?

In order for higher education institutions to curb student disengagement early on, it is important to determine the reasons for their unenrolling. Thirty-two percent of respondents said they ultimately left their institution because of personal/family issues, while 24% said money, and 11% said work/pursue a career path. The youngest disengaged learners were most likely to say they left because they were disinterested or dissatisfied. They were also more likely to cite the pandemic. Those newly disengaged were less likely to cite money (18%) as the reason, compared to those intermediately disengaged (22%) or long-term disengaged (29%).

Respondents less satisfied with their institution were more likely to give multiple reasons for leaving, citing financial issues, not being a good fit with the institution, or a change in program delivery. Those who were more satisfied were more likely to cite family commitments as why they had to leave.

Engagement during a learner's time at school is important for long-term retention of a student. Respondents indicated that they were extremely (14%) or very engaged (27%) with the institution during their time as a student, while another 41% were somewhat engaged. As time away from the institution increased, respondents were more likely to say their institution was not very or not at all engaged with them during their time as a student and satisfaction also decreased. In total, 48% of newly disengaged learners were satisfied with their institution, compared to 39% of intermediately disengaged learners, and 28% of long-term disengaged learners.

How Does Institutions' Engagement with Learners Apply? Respondents who said their institution was more engaged with them when they were a student were more likely to say they have reengaged with the institution. As engagement of the institution decreased, the percentage of respondents who were not interested in reengaging with their institution increased. Respondents newly disengaged (14%) were more likely to have reengaged with their institution than those who have been intermediately (10%) or long-term disengaged (9%). Respondents who were more satisfied with their institution were more likely to reengage with the institution.

Why Have Students Not Reengaged with Their Institution?

Among respondents who have not reengaged, 24% said it is because they are not interested/have no direct reason to, while 20% cited time/commitment issues, and 19% personal/family issues. Those who were more satisfied with their institution were more likely to cite time/commitment issues or personal/family issues, compared to those less satisfied.

What Could Institutions do to Reengage These Learners?

In order to prepare to reengage learners who have disengaged from their institution, administration needs to realize what learners hoped to see previously and what they can do to implement these initiatives moving forward. When asked what their institution could have done to keep them enrolled, 46% of respondents said there was nothing their institution could have done, while 20% said there was. Those who said their institution was less engaged or were less satisfied were more likely to say there was something the institution could have done to have kept them enrolled. For those who have reengaged, the most common method was to reapply or reenroll (16%), followed by engaging electronically (15%) or by phone (9%).

Respondents who indicated there was something their institution could have done to keep them enrolled were asked about the effectiveness of potential strategies and tactics. Providing a certificate for credits earned was seen as the most effective tactic for student retention (43% extremely effective), followed by providing a subsection of courses at a lower price (40% extremely effective), and providing workshops that address the struggles of being a student (32% extremely effective).

How Likely Would Potential Learners Reenroll and Continue Their Education?

Forty-three percent of respondents were extremely likely (21%) or very likely (22%) to continue their education. Those more recently disengaged were more likely to say they would continue. Those enrolled in a healthcare program had the highest percentage who were extremely or very likely to continue their education.

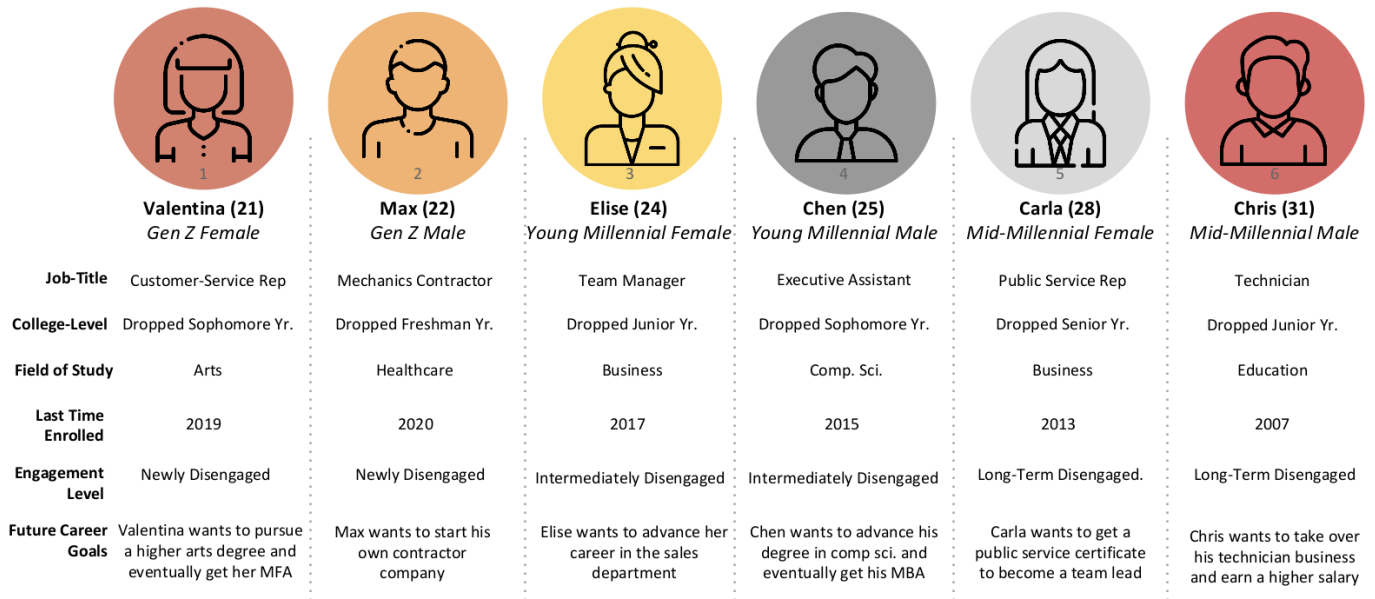
About a quarter of respondents were extremely likely (12%) or very likely (14%) to reenroll at their college or university. As time away from the institution increased, the percentage of respondents extremely or very likely to reenroll decreased.

Fourteen percent said their future career goal was to start/own a business, while 10% said to pursue a degree/certificate and further their education, and 10% said career advancement.

Disengaged Learner Segments

To best represent and understand the generational and demographic differences of respondents, six personas were created and tracked to present six segments. These personas were utilized to demonstrate how generational and gender markers influence the behaviors, motivations, and preferences of disengaged learners.

Figure 1: Disengaged Learner Personas



Respondents were divided into three generational segments: Generation Z age range 20-22 (29%), Young Millennial age range 23-26 (19%), and Mid-Millennial age range 27-34 (36%). The gender breakdown was composed of 63% female, 33% male, and 4% gender-variant, non-conforming, non-binary, or prefer not to say.

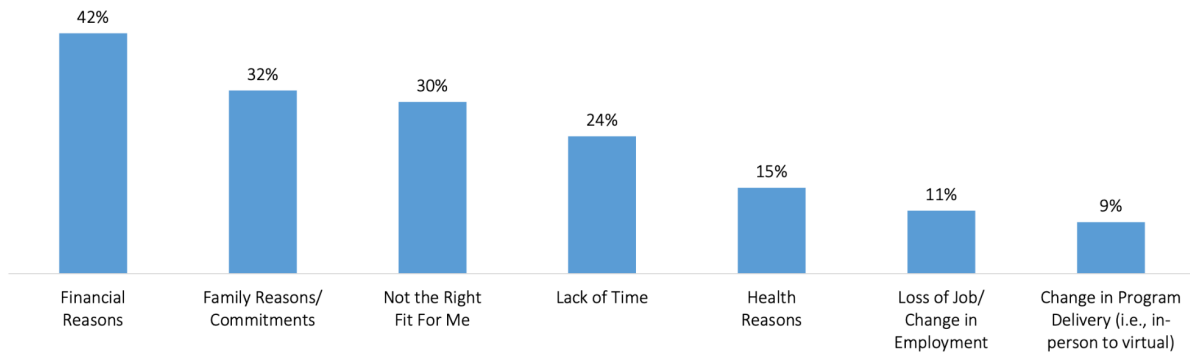
Detailed Findings

What Caused These Learners to Disengage from Higher Education?

Key Insight: *Multiple factors, not just one, were cited as reasons respondents left their institution.*

Figure 2: Reason for Leaving Institution

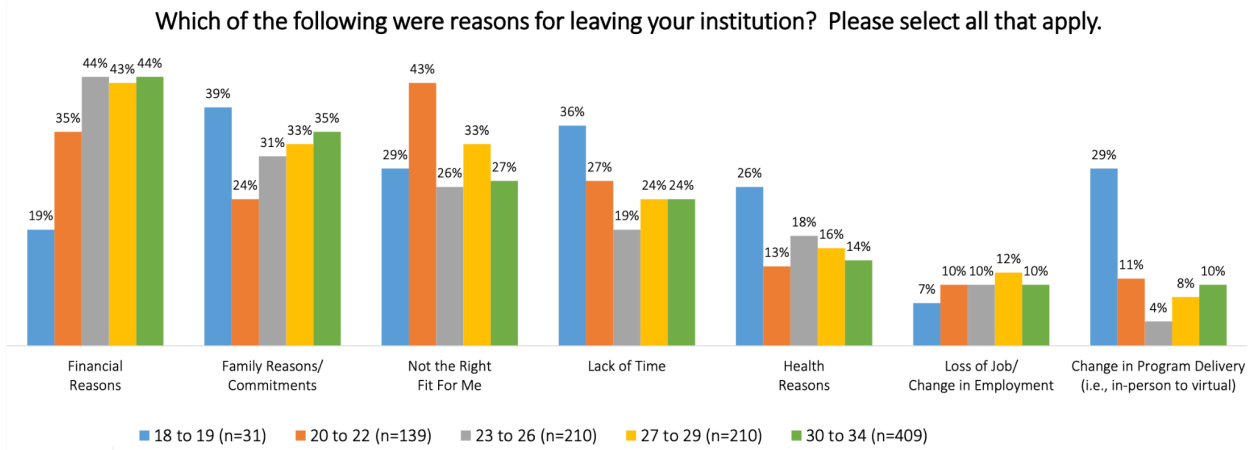
Which of the following were reasons for leaving your institution? Please select all that apply. (n=992)



The three most cited reasons respondents left their institution were financial (42%), family reasons/commitments (32%), and not the right fit (30%).

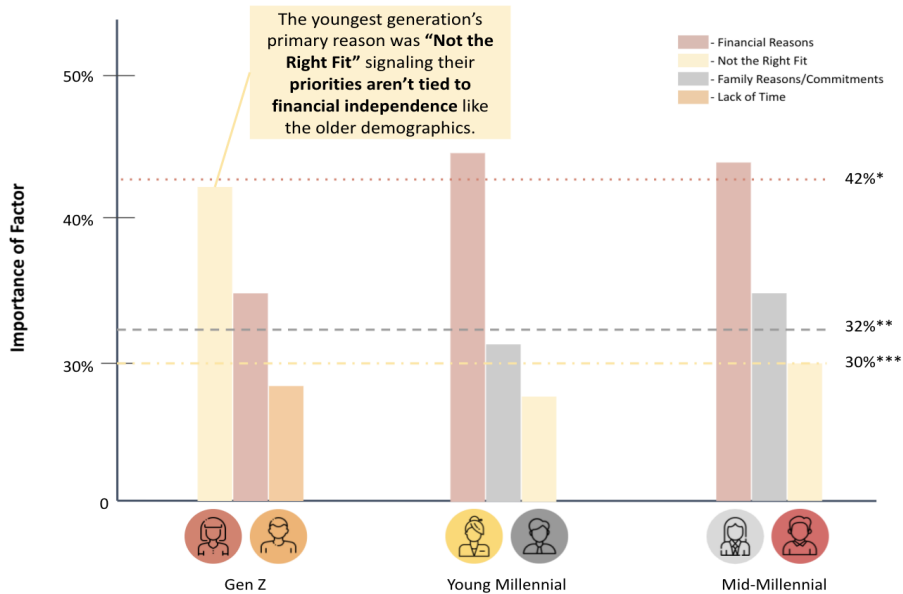
Key Insight: Overall, the youngest generation's primary reason was *Not the Right Fit* signaling their priorities aren't tied to financial independence like the older demographics.

Figure 3: Reason for Leaving Institution - By Age



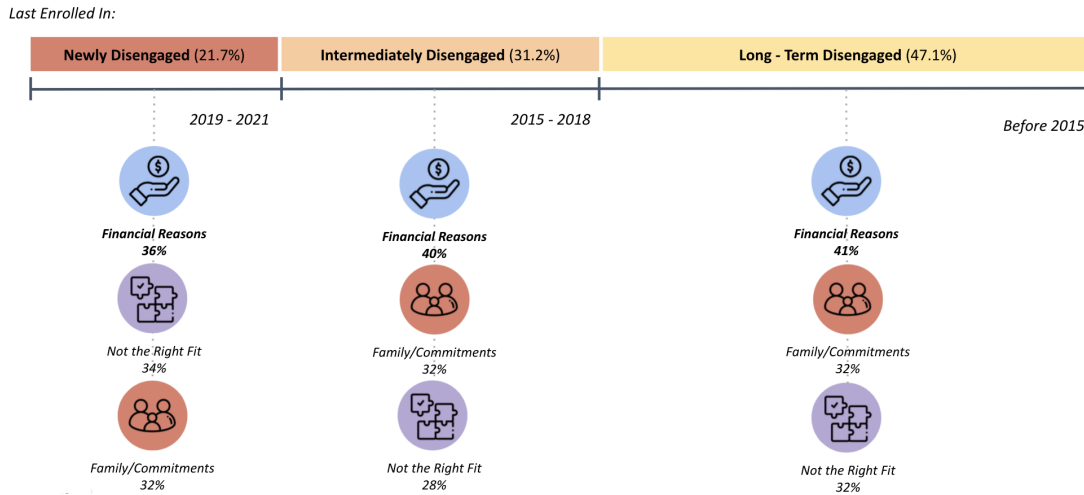
Traditional-age college students (18 to 22) were much less likely to cite finances as a reason for leaving the institution. However, with older generations, financial reasons were most common (42%) followed by family reasons/commitments (32%) and not the right fit (30%).

Figure 4: Reasons for Leaving Institution - By Persona



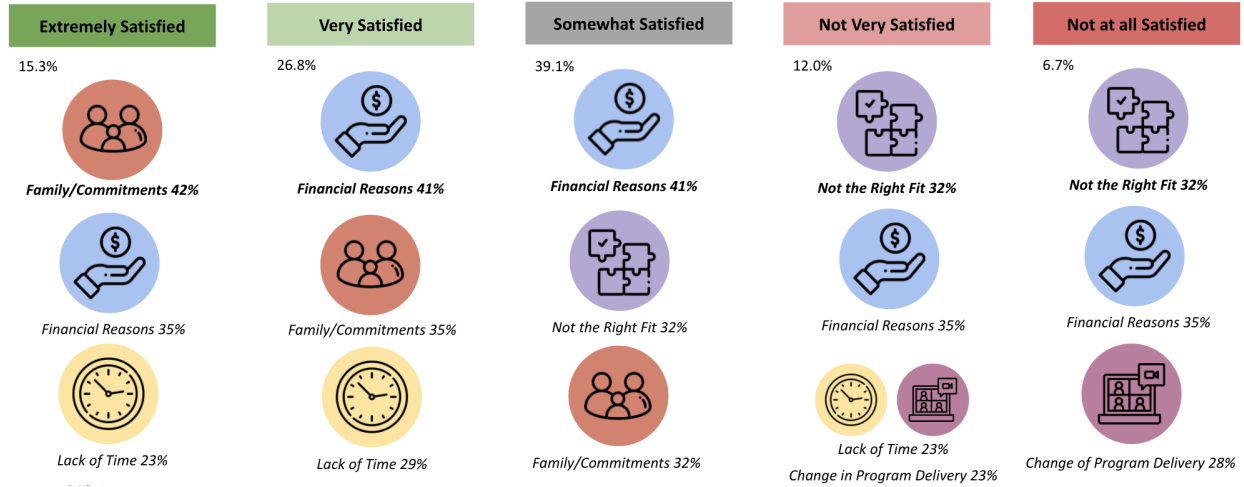
Key Insight: Those newly disengaged were less likely to cite money (18%) as the reason they left their institution, compared to intermediately disengaged (22%) and long-term disengaged (29%) respondents. Additionally, newly disengaged respondents were more likely to say they were disinterested with their institution compared to intermediately disengaged (11%) and long-term disengaged (7%) respondents.

Figure 5: Reason for Leaving Institution - By Date of Last Enrollment



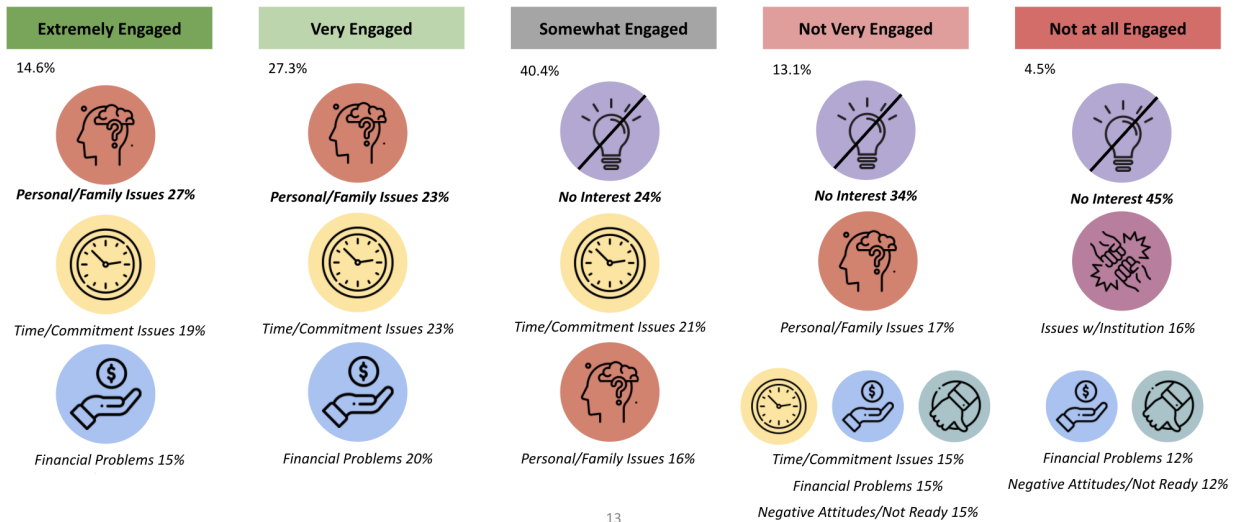
Key Insight: Respondents less satisfied were more likely to cite financial reasons, not being a good fit with the institution, or a change in program delivery as reasons for leaving their institution. They were also more likely to give multiple reasons for leaving. Those more satisfied were more likely to cite family reasons or commitments as why they had to leave.

Figure 6: Reason for Leaving Institution - By Satisfaction



Key Insight: The four most commonly cited reasons for leaving an institution by engagement level were personal/family issues, time/commitment issues, financial problems, and no interest.

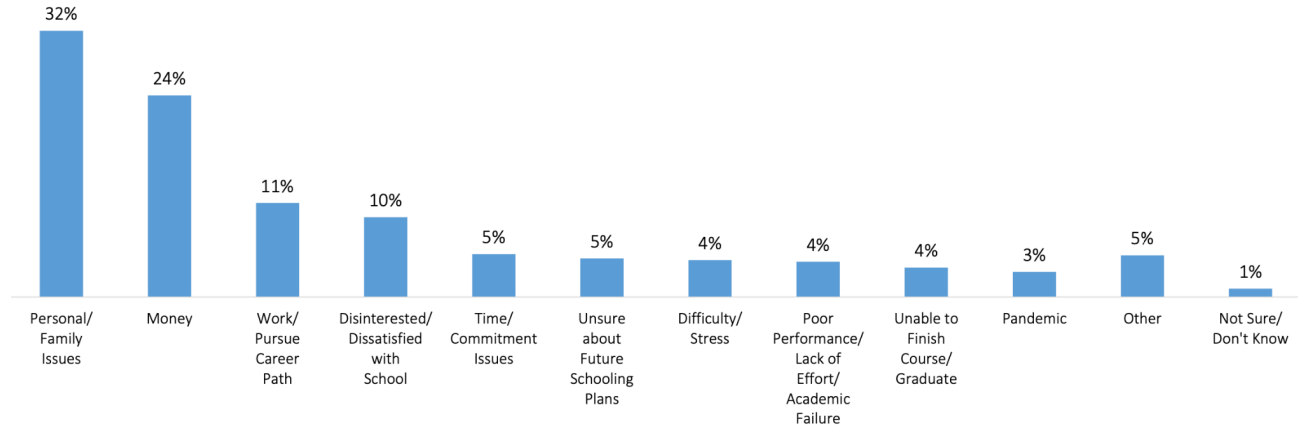
Figure 7: Reasons for Leaving Institution - By Engagement-Level



Key Insight: Respondents listed various reasons for their leaving their institution, signaling the importance of institutions' differentiating what reasons are actionable to reengage with their learners and what are out of their control.

Figure 8: Reason for Ultimately Leaving Institution

Why did you ultimately leave your institution? (n=992)

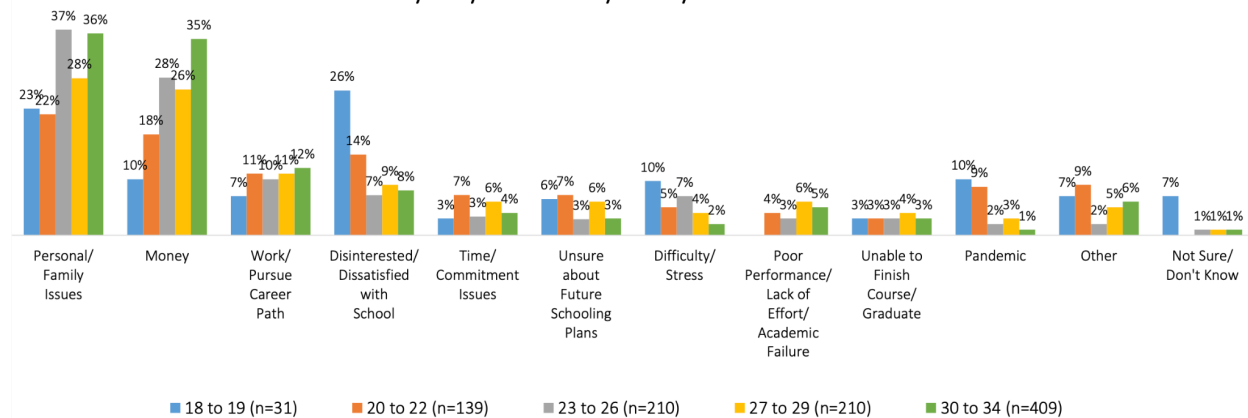


Thirty-two percent of respondents ultimately left their institution due to personal/family issues, while 24% cited money, 11% said work/pursue a career path, and 10% being disinterested/dissatisfied with school.

Key Insight: The youngest disengaged learners (18 to 19) were most likely to say they left their institution because they were disinterested or dissatisfied. Younger populations were also more likely to cite the pandemic.

Figure 9: Reason for Ultimately Leaving Institution - By Age

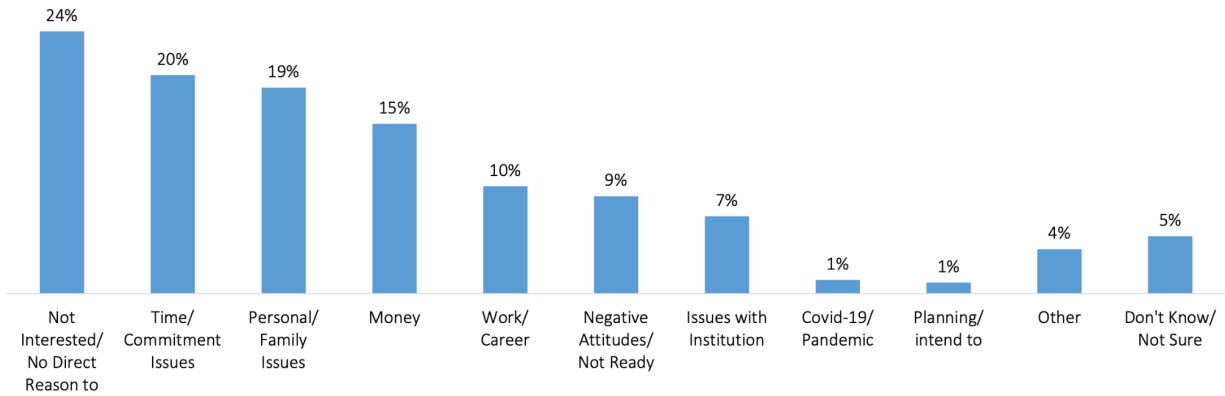
Why did you ultimately leave your institution?



Key Insight: As engagement of the institution decreased, the percentage of respondents who were not interested in reengaging with their institution increased.

Figure 10: Reasons for Not Reengaging with Institution

Why have you not reengaged with the institution? (n=888)



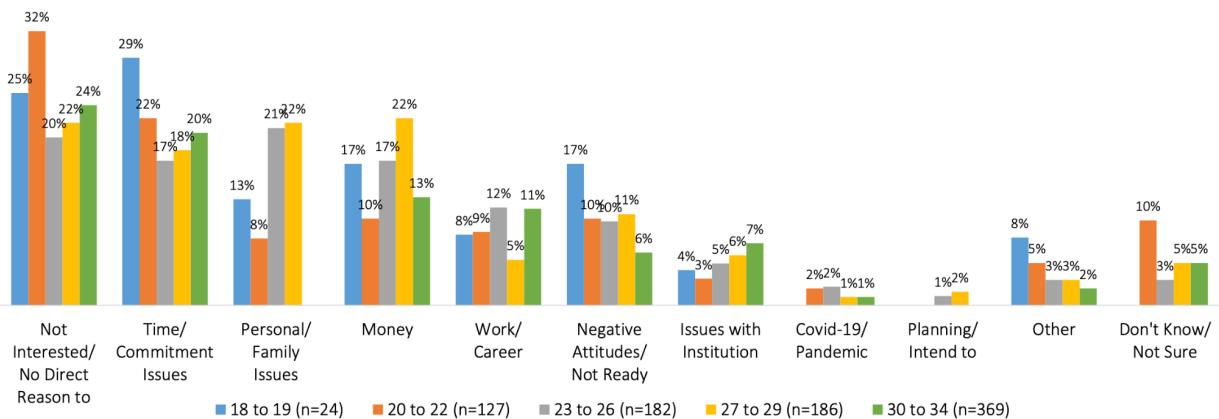
Among respondents who have not reengaged with their institution, 24% said they have not because they are not interested/have no direct reason to, while 20% said time/commitment issues, and 19% personal/family issues.

Key Insight: Older populations were more likely to cite personal or family issues as reasons for not reengaging with an institution, while younger populations were more likely to say they weren't interested or had time/commitment issues.

Across generations, the most commonly cited reasons were Not Interested/No Direct Reason to, Time/Commitment Issues, and among Mid-Millennials Personal/Family Issues as well.

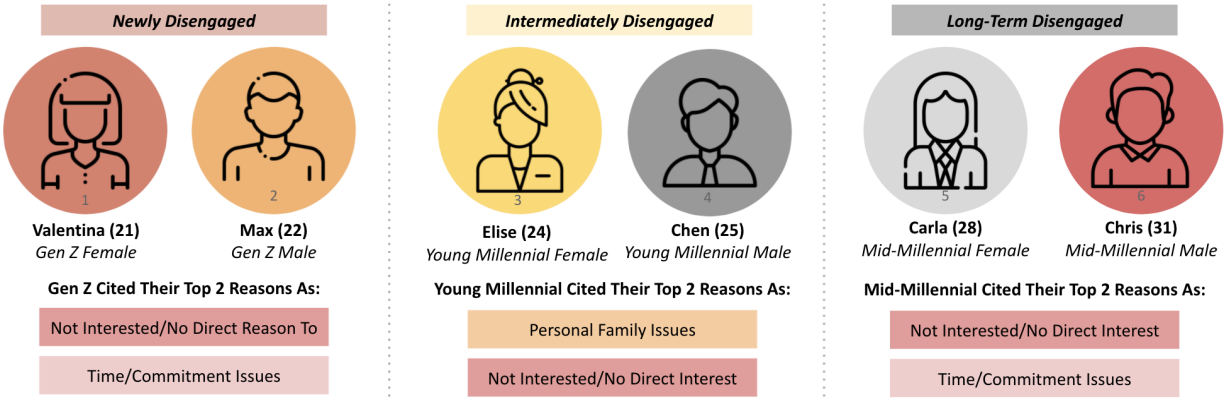
Figure 11: Reasons for Not Reengaging with Institution - By Age

Why have you not reengaged with the institution?



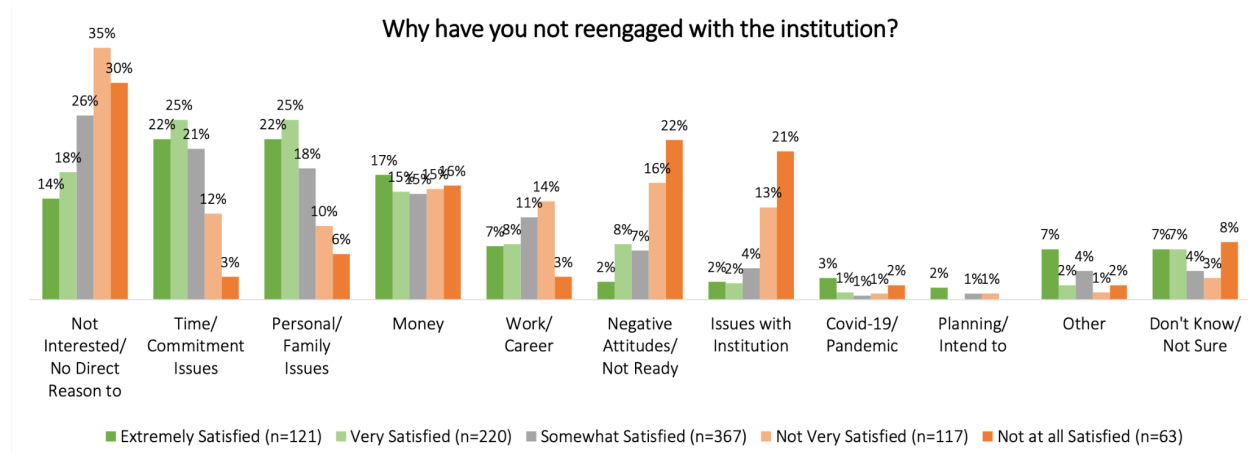
Key Insight: Across all personas, the most commonly cited reason for not reengaging with their institutions was Not Interested/No Direct Reasons To. For Young Millennials, however, the primary reason was Personal Family Issues which may indicate early family obligations being more common than other generations.

Figure 12: Reasons for Not Reengaging with Institution - By Persona



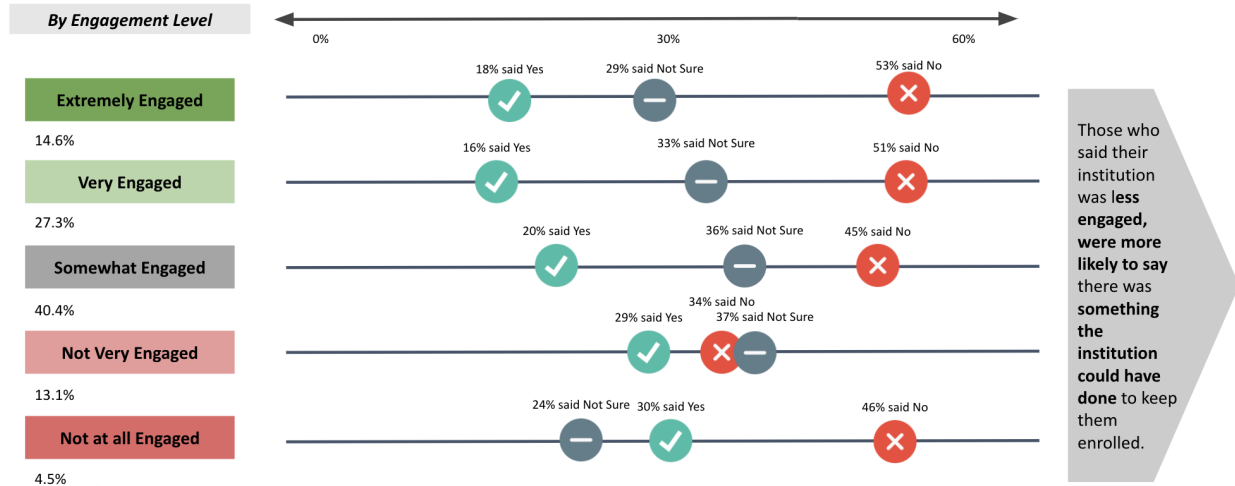
Key Insight: Respondents who were more satisfied with their institution were more likely to cite time/commitment issues or personal/family issues as reasons for not reengaging. Those who were less satisfied were more likely to cite issues with their institution, negative attitudes or being unprepared, and lacking interest.

Figure 13: Reasons for Not Reengaging with Institution - By Satisfaction



Key Insight: As the level of engagement with the institution decreased, the percentage of respondents who were not interested in reengaging increased.

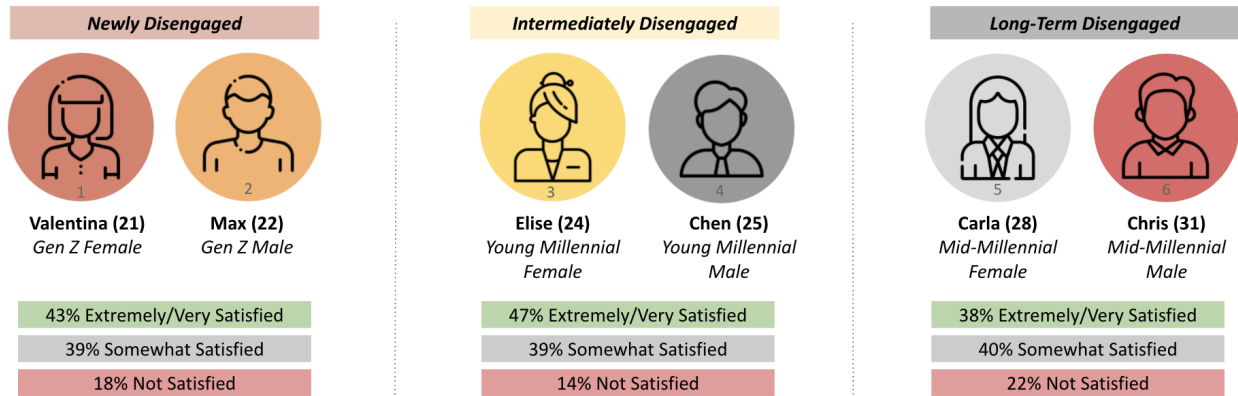
Figure 14: Reasons for Not Reengaging with Institution - By Engagement Level



Respondents who said their institution was more engaged with them when they were a student were more likely to say they have reengaged with the institution since they left. Respondents who were newly disengaged (14%) were more likely to say they have reengaged than those who have been intermediately disengaged (10%) or long-term disengaged (9%). Respondents who were more satisfied with their institution were more likely to reengage with the institution.

Key Insight: Overall, respondents were extremely (15%) or very satisfied (26%) with the institution in which they were previously enrolled. Young Millennial learners were the most satisfied (47%) while Mid-Millennial learners were the least satisfied (22%). Satisfaction with the institution tended to decrease with age.

Figure 15: Satisfaction with the Institution - By Persona

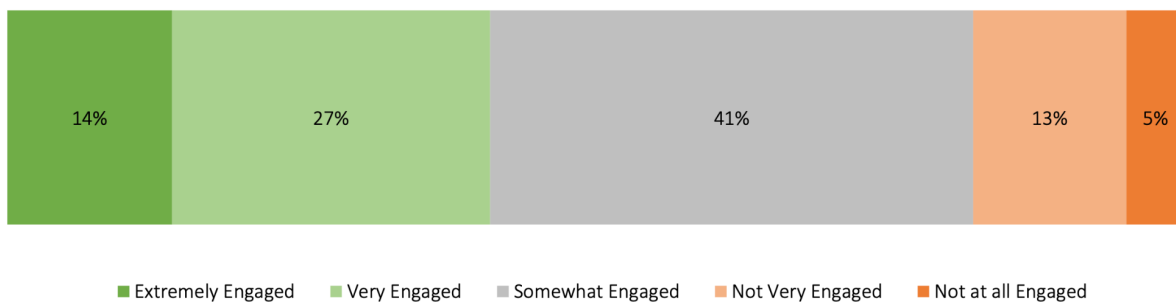


How Did Institutions Fail to Engage with These Learners?

Key Insight: The majority of students did not feel strongly engaged with their institution during their time in higher education. Throughout the rest of the survey, those who indicated that they felt extremely or very engaged with their institution had greater positive sentiment towards learning and engagement with their institution. Somewhat engaged students may represent opportunities for reengagement.

Figure 16: Level of Engagement with Institution

Please rate the level of engagement the institution had with you during your time as a student. (n=992)



Forty-one percent of respondents were extremely (14%) or very engaged (27%) with the institution during their time as a student, while another 41% were somewhat engaged.

Key Insight: Those 18 to 19-years-old were least likely to say that the institution was extremely engaged with them while 23 to 26-year-olds were most likely.

Figure 17: Level of Engagement with Institution - By Age

Please rate the level of engagement the institution had with you during your time as a student.

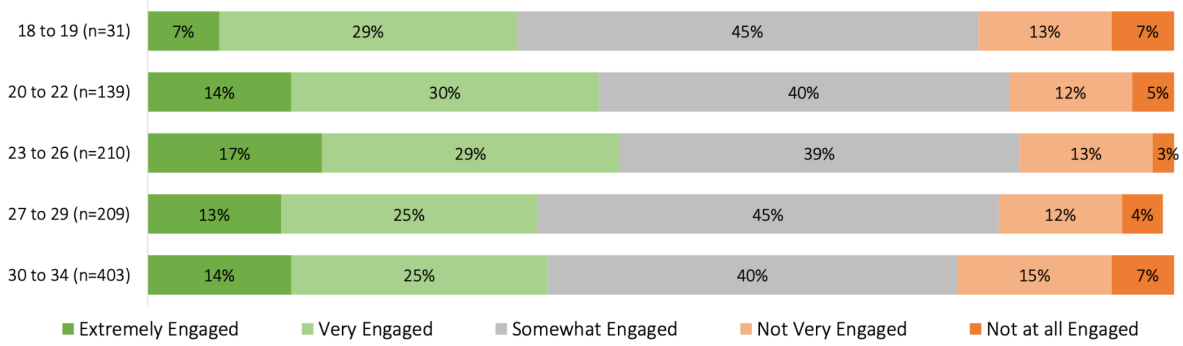
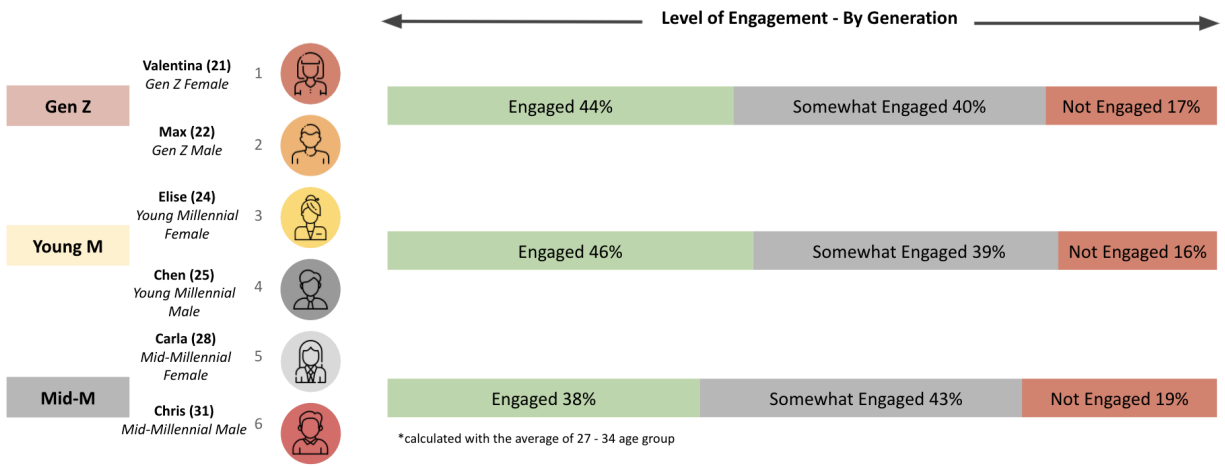


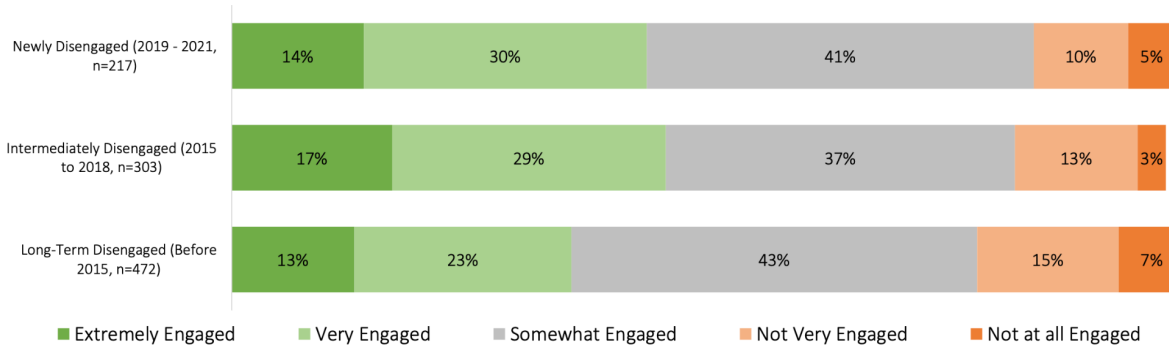
Figure 18: Level of Engagement with Institution - By Persona



Key Insight: As time away from the institution increased, respondents were more likely to say their institution was not very or not at all engaged with them during their time as a student.

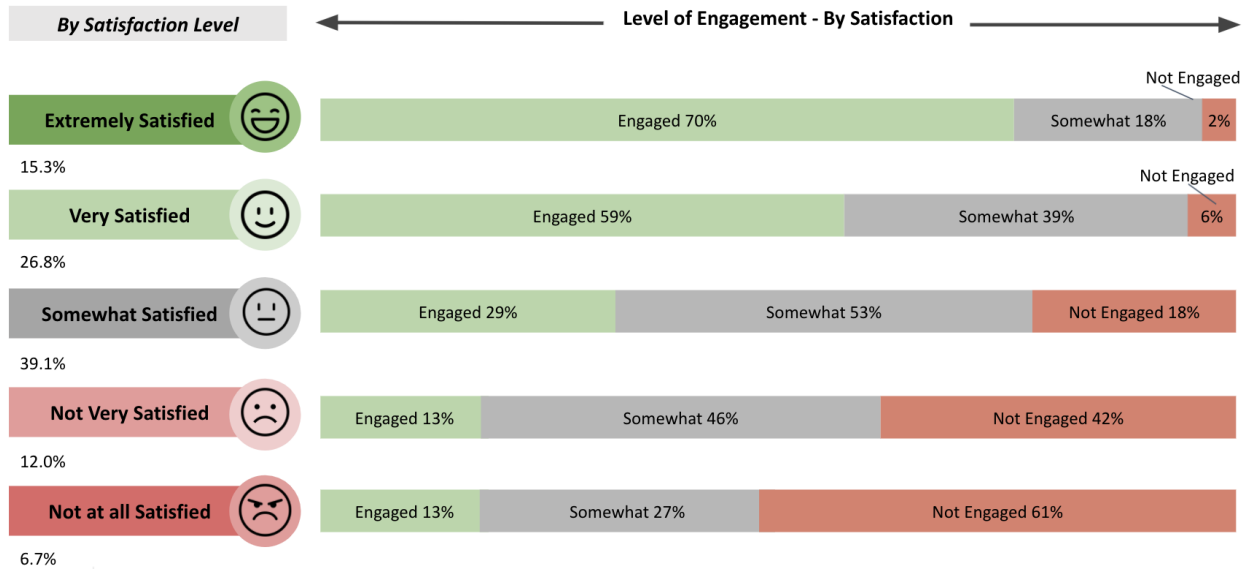
Figure 19: Level of Engagement with Institution - By Date of Last Enrollment

Please rate the level of engagement the institution had with you during your time as a student.



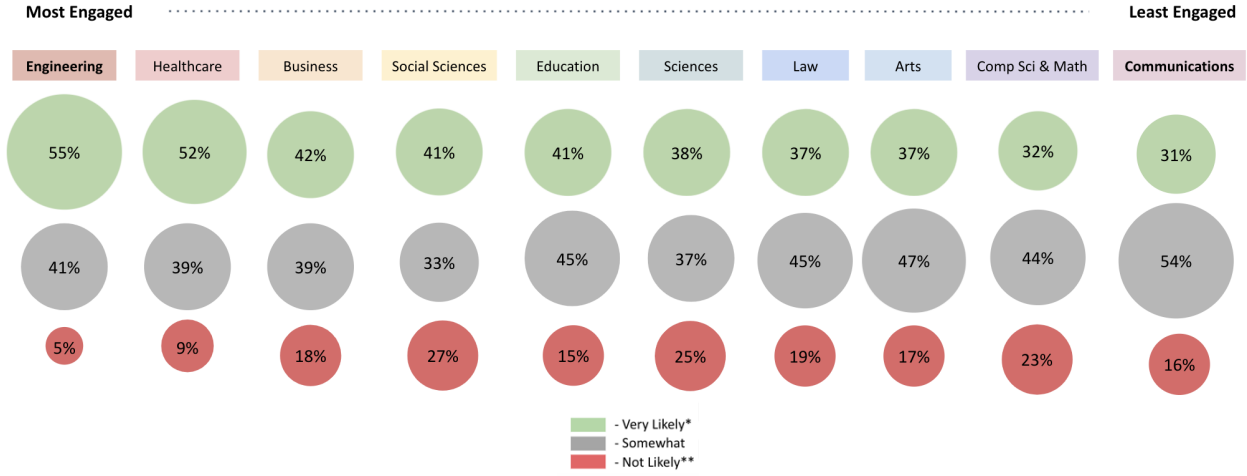
Key Insight: Individuals who were more satisfied with their institution were more likely to say the institution had a greater level of engagement with them during their time as a student.

Figure 20: Level of Engagement with Institution - By Satisfaction



Key Insight: *Engineering students were most likely to say their institution was at least somewhat engaged, and the results show varied prioritization of students and their engagement by the institution.*

Figure 21: Level of Engagement with Institution - By Subject Studied

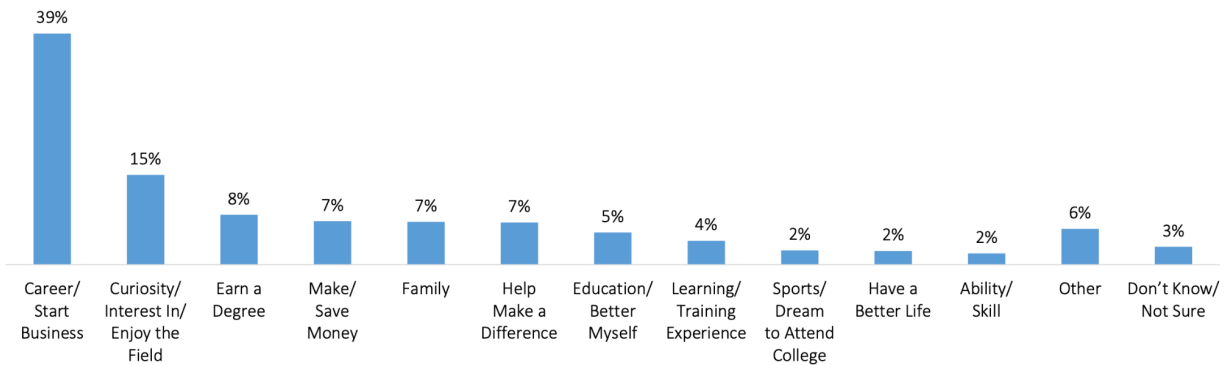


What Could Institutions Do to Reengage These Learners?

Key Insight: When asked what their main motivation for initially enrolling in their program was, most respondents said their main motivation was to start a career or a business.

Figure 22: Main Motivation for Enrollment

What was your main motivation for initially enrolling in your program? (n=1,001)

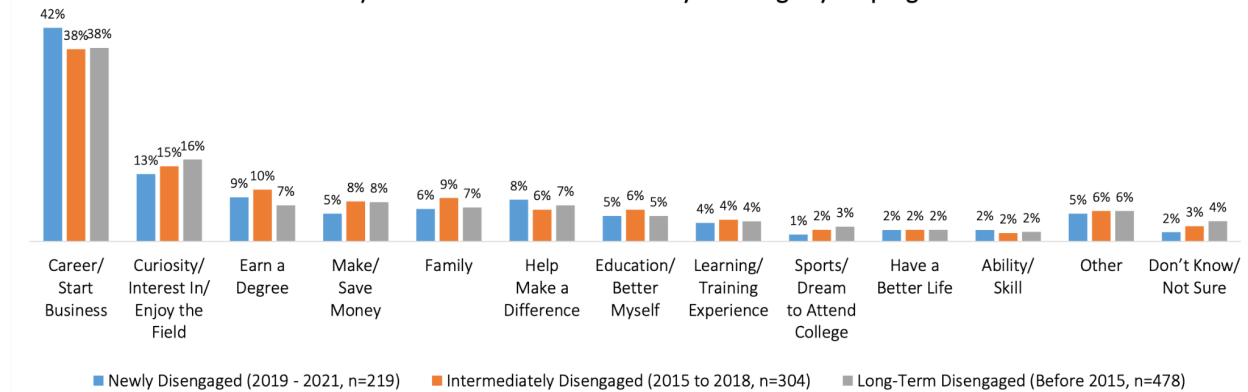


Most respondents said their main motivation for initially enrolling in their program was career advancement or business, while 15% said curiosity/interest in/enjoy the field. Responses varied across different categories.

Key Insight: Overall, motivation for enrollment is relatively consistent regardless of the date of last enrollment. Newly disengaged respondents were more likely to say their initial motivation for enrollment was career advancement or to start a business, while those further removed from enrollment were more likely to cite curiosity or interest in the field.

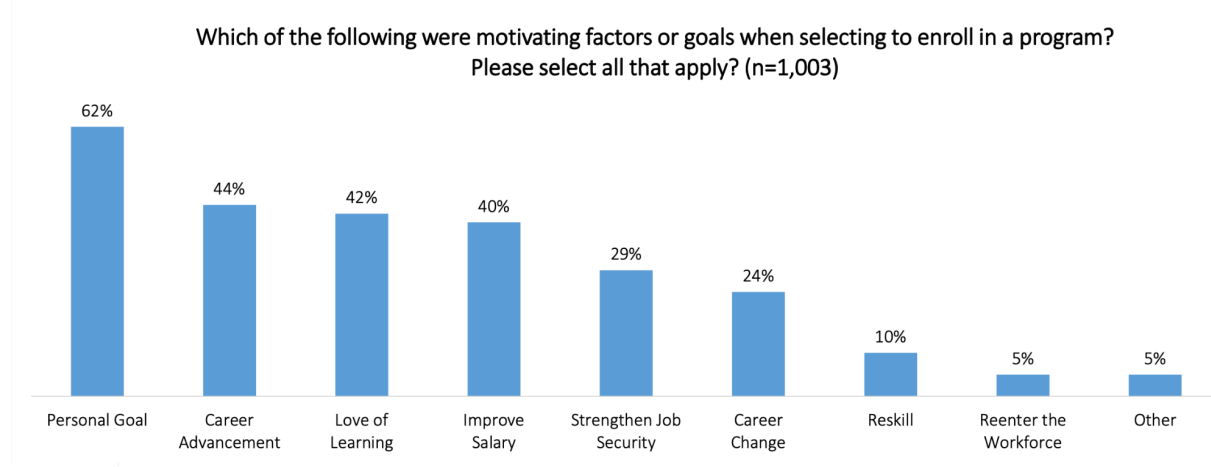
Figure 23: Main Motivation for Enrollment - By Date of Last Enrollment

What was your main motivation for initially enrolling in your program?



Key Insight: *Motivating factors for enrollment were similar to previous data where career/starting a business greatly dominated as the main motivation. Curiosity/interest in/enjoying the field followed.*

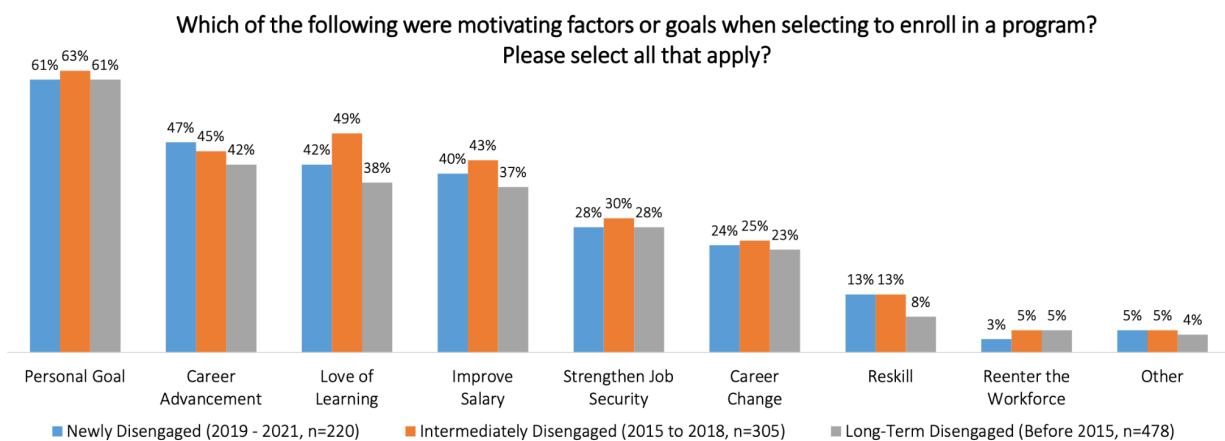
Figure 24: Motivating Factors for Enrollment



Sixty-two percent of respondents said it was a personal goal to enroll in a program, while 44% said their motivating factor was career advancement, and 42% said love of learning. Responses were coded for multiple answers.

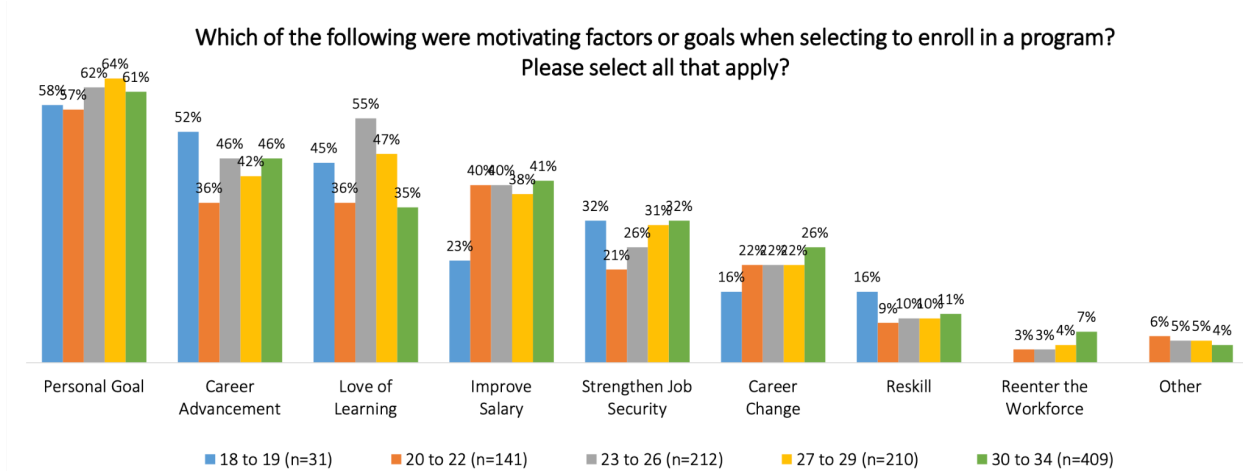
Key Insight: *Those more recently disengaged with their institution were more likely to cite career advancement as a goal. Intermediately disengaged individuals were most likely to cite five of the nine categories.*

Figure 25: Motivating Factors for Enrollment - By Date of Last Enrollment



Key Insight: Older populations were more likely to say they were motivated by personal goals than those younger. Career advancement was most often cited by 18- to 19-year-olds.

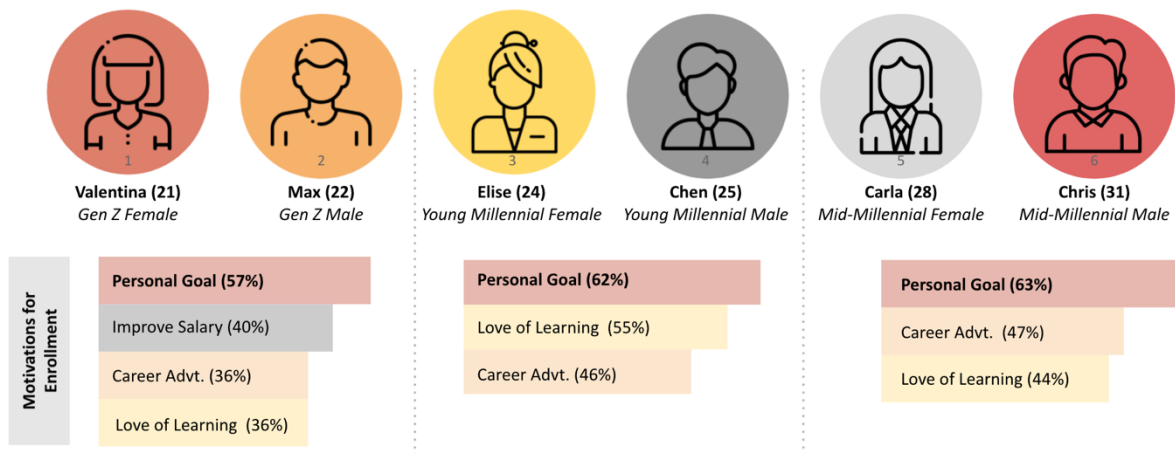
Figure 26: Motivating Factors for Enrollment - By Age



Overall, the top four motivations for learners when selecting a program were personal goal, career advancement, love of learning, and improving salary.

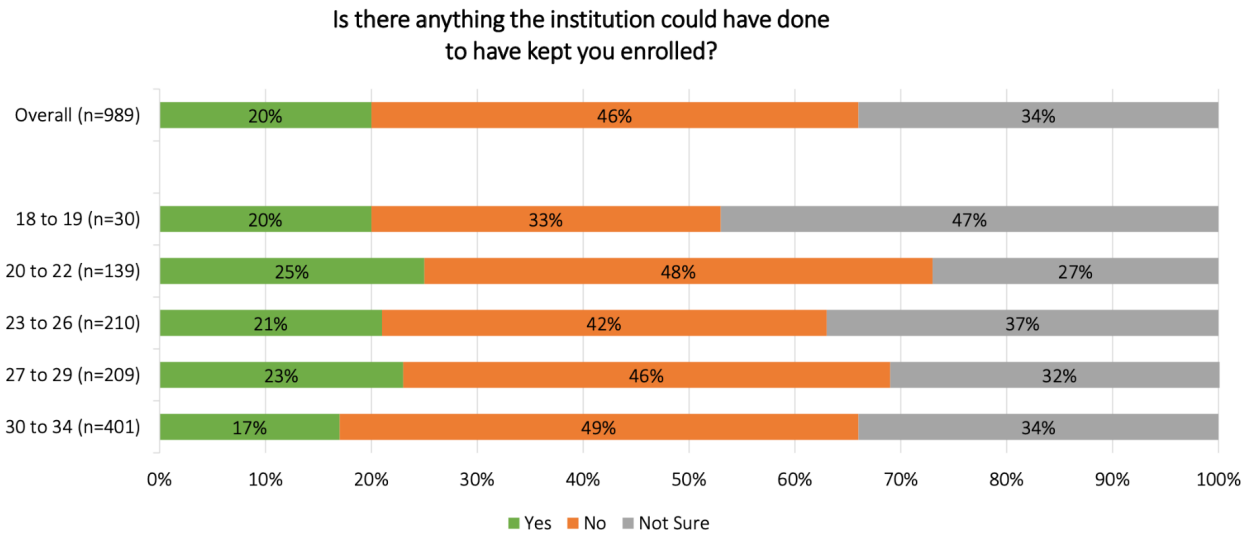
Key Insight: The most important motivating factor for enrollment across all personas was that higher education was a personal goal of theirs. Love of learning and career advancement were the second and third-most cited motivating factors with Gen Z also indicating that improving their salary was significant as well.

Figure 27: Motivating Factors for Enrollment - By Persona



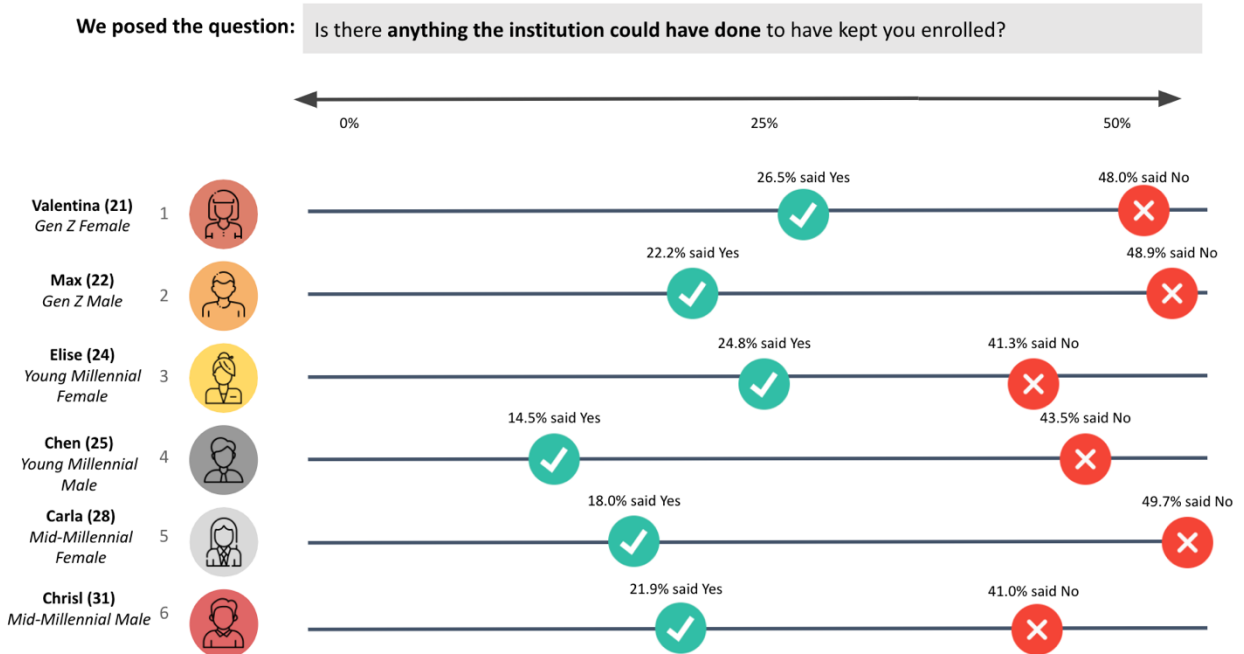
Key Insight: Forty-six percent of respondents said no, there was nothing the institution could have done to keep them enrolled, while 20% said yes, there was.

Figure 28: Institution Enrollment of Respondents



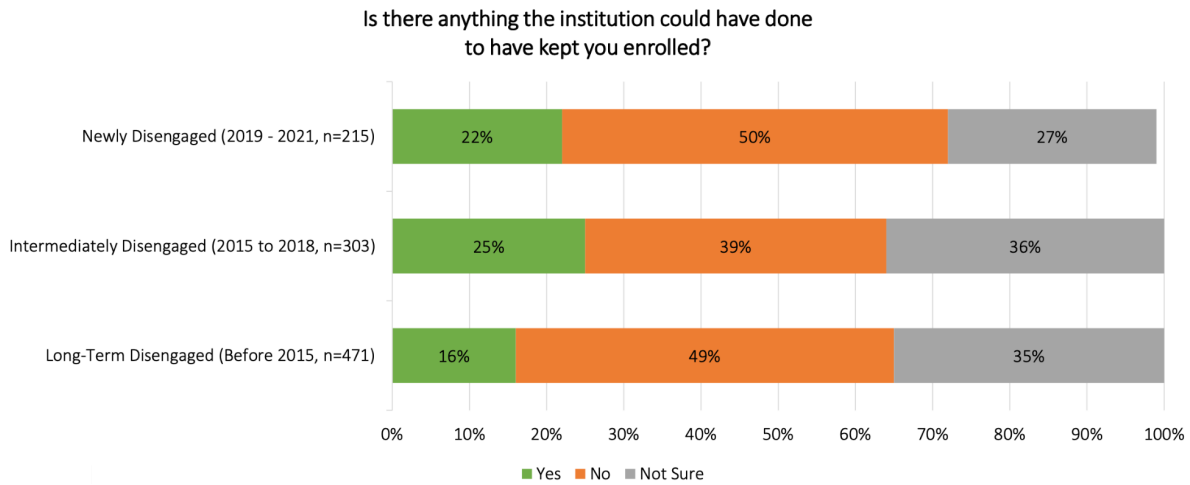
Key Insight: When asked if there was anything their institution could have done to keep them enrolled, more respondents said no than yes. Younger generations were more likely to say that there was something that could have done than older generations.

Figure 29: Institution Enrollment of Respondents - By Persona



Key Insight: Respondents who were intermediately disengaged (last enrolled 2015 to 2018) were most likely to say the institution could have done something to keep them enrolled (25%).

Figure 30: Institution Enrollment of Respondents - By Date of Last Enrollment



Key Insight: Those who said their institution was less engaged were more likely to say there was something the institution could have done to have kept them enrolled.

Figure 31: Institution Enrollment of Respondents - By Level of Engagement



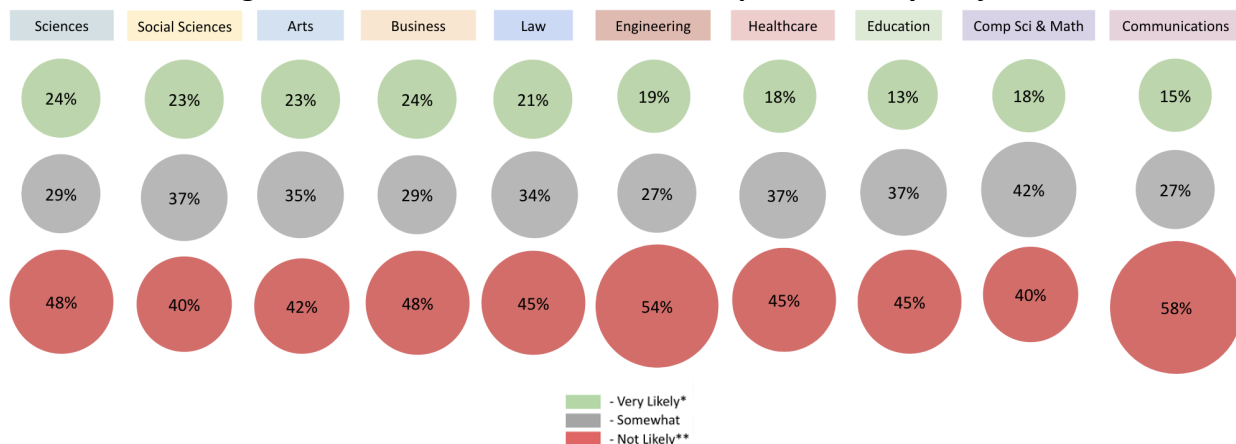
Key Insight: Those who were not very or not at all satisfied with their institution were more likely to say there was something the institution could have done to have kept them enrolled.

Figure 32: Institution Enrollment of Respondents - By Satisfaction



Key Insight: Respondents who had been enrolled in a science (biological and physical) or business program were most likely to say there was something the institution could have done to have kept them enrolled, while those in education were least likely. This may indicate more attention towards the STEM departments than those that lean towards liberal arts.

Figure 33: Institution Enrollment of Respondents - By Subject

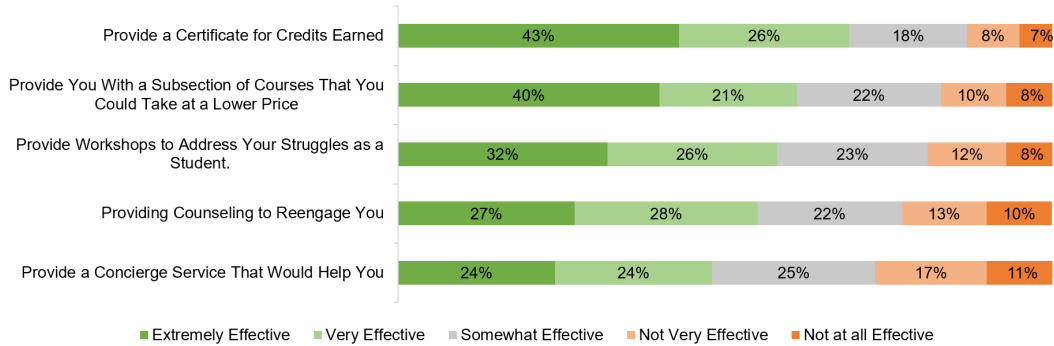


Communication and engineering students were most likely to say there was nothing that their institutions could have done to keep them enrolled.

Key Insight: Respondents who indicated there was something their institution could have done to keep them enrolled felt providing a certificate for credits earned would be most effective for student retention.

Figure 34: Effectiveness of Tactics for Student Retention

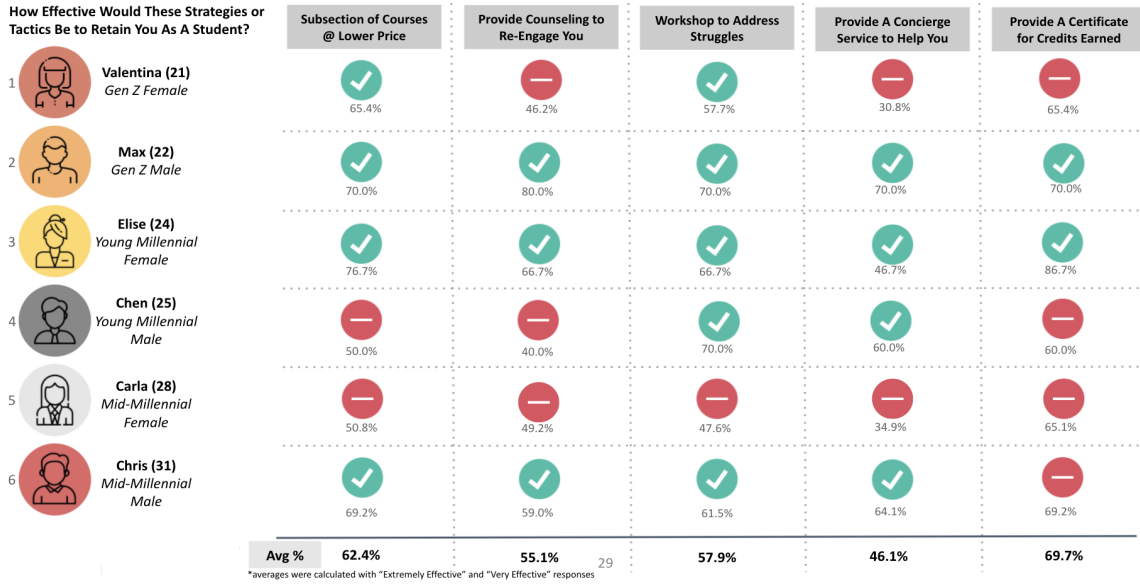
Please rate how effective the following tactics or strategies would have been to retain you as a student? (n=200)



Providing a certificate for credits earned was seen as most effective for student retention (43% extremely effective), followed by providing a subsection of courses at a lower price (40% extremely effective), and providing workshops addressing the struggles of being a student (32% extremely effective).

Key Insight: By personas, generation Z males and young-millennial females were the most likely to find all strategies and tactics effective while mid-millennial females were least likely to find any strategy effective.







Figure 35: Effectiveness of Tactics for Student Retention - By Persona



If respondents said yes, what strategies would help retain these students?

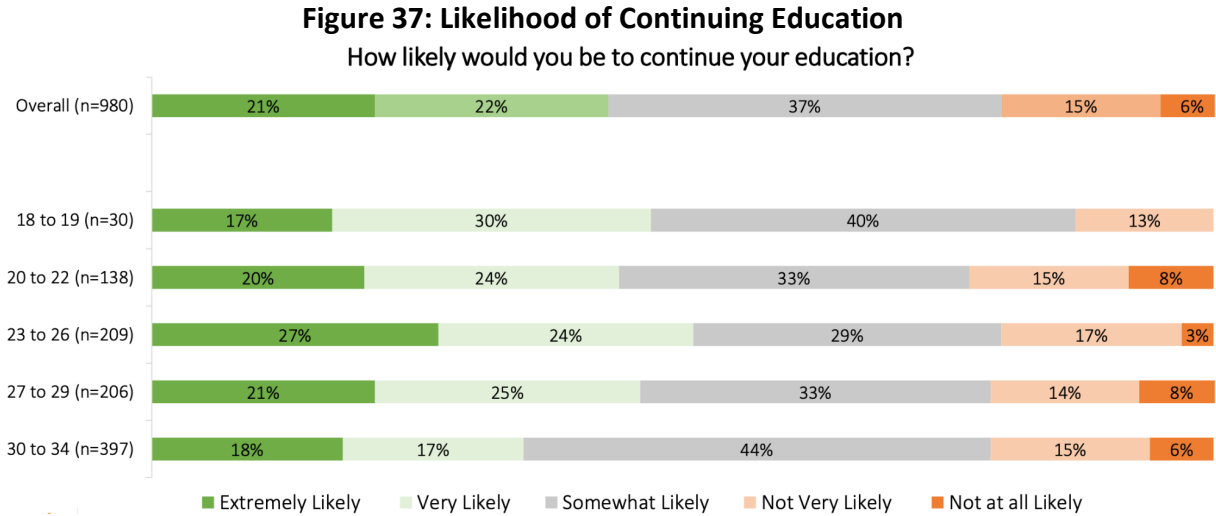
Key Insight: Based off the strategies above, the effectiveness of tactics for student retention were able to address specific struggles that each learner persona faced and how institutions could address these issues in these example instances.

Figure 36: Effectiveness of Tactics for Student Retention - By Persona

Reasons For Learners Leaving Their Institutions...		What Could Institutions Do?
Valentina (21) Gen Z Female	 Valentina ultimately left her institution due to her family moving out of the state she attended college in. Due to those family issues, she had to withdraw and leave her institution to help at home.	Valentina would value a workshop to address her struggles with her family issues
Max (22) Gen Z Male	 Max originally enrolled in school because of his parents, however, after a short time in his institution, he didn't think that his institution was the right fit for him, so he dropped out of higher-ed.	Max would like to see his institution offer more subsection courses that are engaging to him.
Elise (24) Young Millennial Female	 Elise dealt with a personal emergency with her family's business and had to unenroll from her institution temporarily and never got around to re-engaging.	Elise would like to see her institution prioritize counseling services to help re-engage her after she left
Chen (25) Young Millennial Male	 Chen set aside funding for his college education, but eventually ran out of funds. Without additional university or community support, Chen did not have the means to support himself at school.	Chen would value a concierge service to help him with his personal issues
Carla (28) Mid-Millennial Female	 Carla had to leave her institution to make more money to support her and her family. She wasn't able to continue studying in her institution without a stable source of income.	It's difficult to re-engage Carla, however she would most value a certificate program to showcase her credits
Chris (31) Mid-Millennial Male	 Chris dealt with some personal problems at school that he could no longer be a full-time student. He had to ultimately leave to focus on himself and work a part-time job until further notice.	Chris would like to see a counseling service to help him work through his personal issues and re-engage him

What is the Likelihood of Reenrollment and Continuing Education?

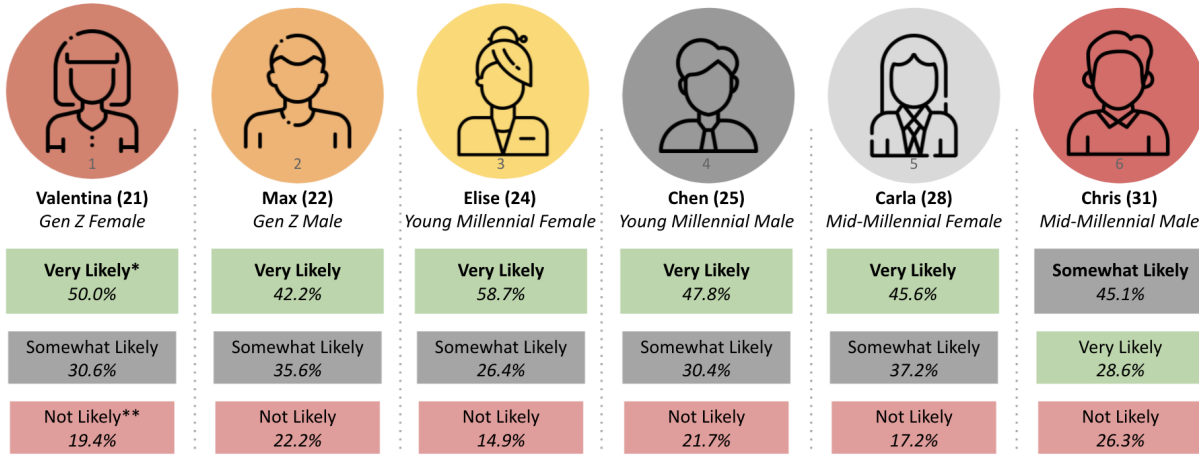
Key Insight: Across all age groups, the majority of learners would be at least somewhat likely to continue their education. As age increased, learners were more likely to say that they were only somewhat likely. Twenty-three- to twenty-six-year-olds were most likely to say they would continue their education (27%) than any other age group



Overall, 21% would be extremely likely and 22% very likely to continue their education. Those 23-26 would be most likely (27%).

Key Insight: Overall, forty-three percent were extremely likely (21%) or very likely (22%) to continue their education. Young millennials were the most likely to say they would continue their education and mid-millennial males were the least likely to continue their education. Overall females were more likely than males to indicate that they were very likely to continue.

Figure 38: Likelihood of Continuing Education - By Persona

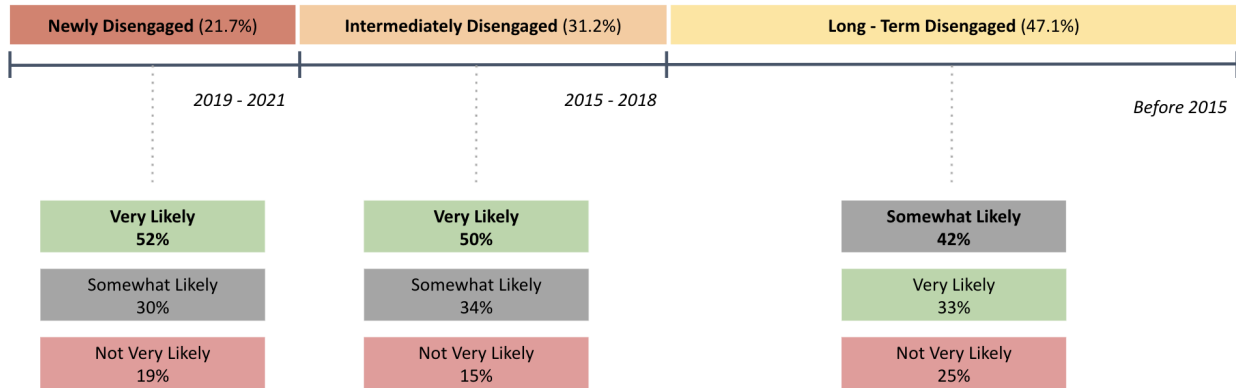


*calculated with the sum of "Extremely" and "Very" Likely responses
 **calculated with the sum of "Not very" and "Not at all" Likely responses

Key Insight: Those newly or intermediately disengaged are more likely to continue their education, suggesting that if institutions want to get disengaged learners to reenroll, they need to reengage with them soon after they drop out.

Half of those newly or intermediately disengaged would be very likely to reenroll, as opposed to only 1/3 of long-term disengaged individuals.

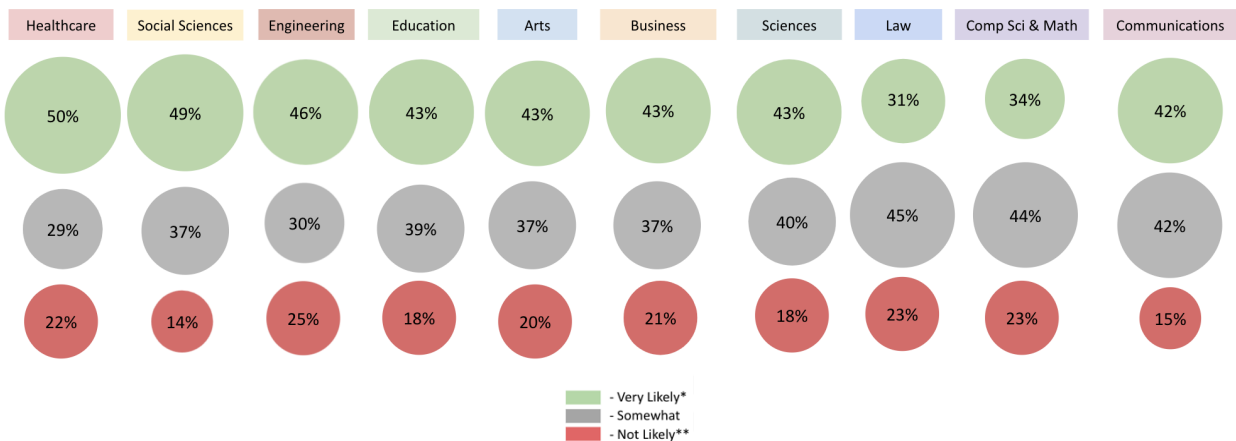
Figure 39: Likelihood of Continuing Education - By Date of Last Enrollment



Key Insight: All degree majors were at least somewhat likely to say they would continue their education.

Half of healthcare and social sciences majors would be very likely to continue their education while only about a third of law and computer science and math majors would be.

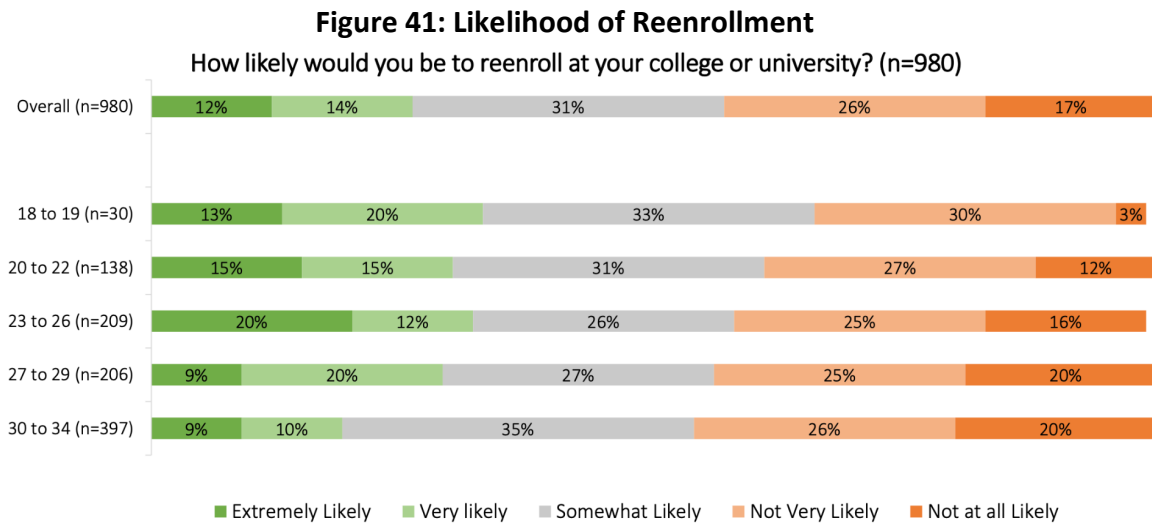
Figure 40: Likelihood of Continuing Education - By Subject



*calculated with the sum of "Extremely" and "Very" Likely responses
 **calculated with the sum of "Not very" and "Not at all" Likely responses

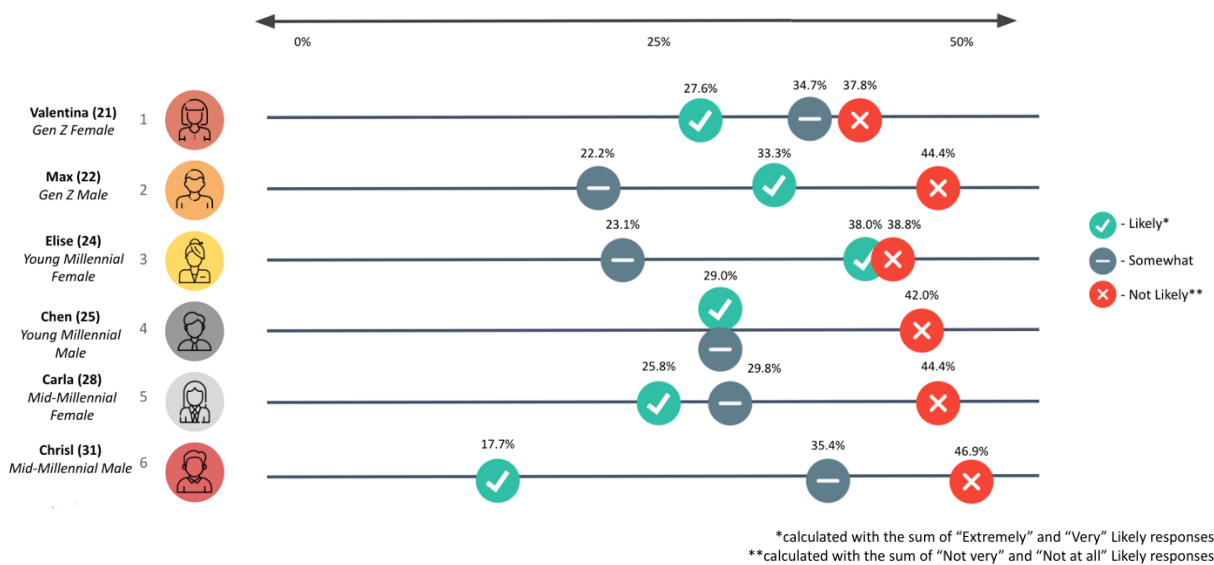
Key Insight: Overall, more than half of respondents would be at least somewhat likely to reenroll at their university, with 12% extremely and 14% very likely to do so. Younger individuals would be more likely to reenroll than those older.

Twenty percent of respondents 23 to 26 would be extremely likely to reenroll at their college or university. Only 9% of those 27 to 34 would be extremely likely and 20% said they would be not all likely.



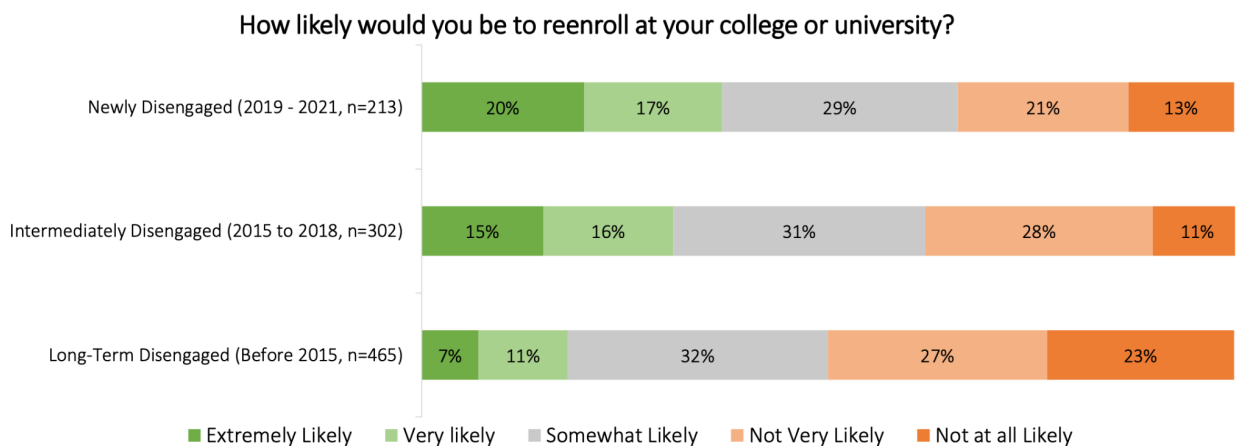
Key Insight: Younger generations were the most likely to reenroll in their institution after they left with young millennial females saying they were very likely to reenroll (38%). The older generations were least likely to say they would be likely to reenroll in their institution indicating that the urgency of reengaging students by age can provide a more likely reenrollment outcome.

Figure 42: Likelihood of Reenrollment - By Persona



Key Insight: As time away from the institution increases, the percentage of respondents who are extremely or very likely to reenroll at their college or university decreases.

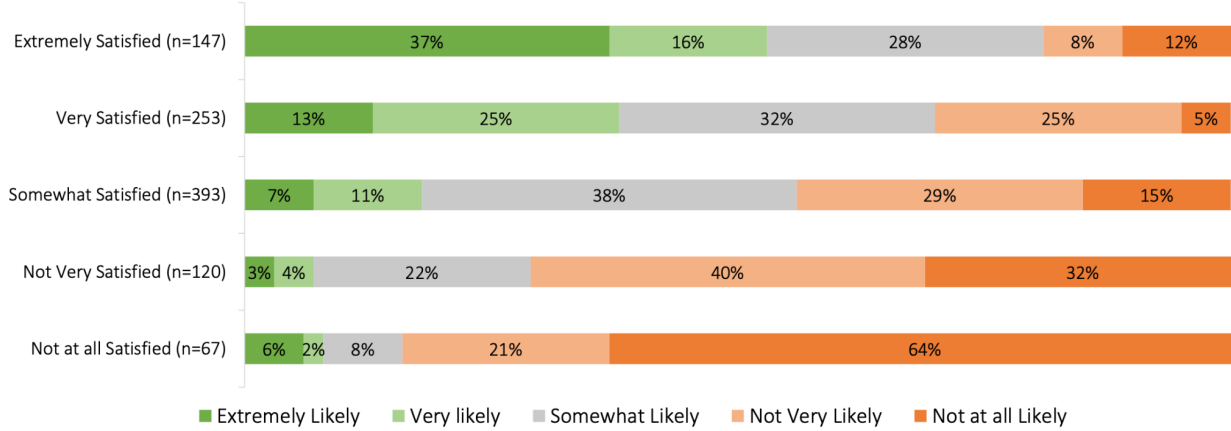
Figure 43: Likelihood of Reenrollment - By Date of Last Enrollment



Key Insight: Respondents who were more satisfied with their institution were more likely to consider reenrolling at their college or university.

Figure 44: Likelihood of Reenrollment - By Satisfaction

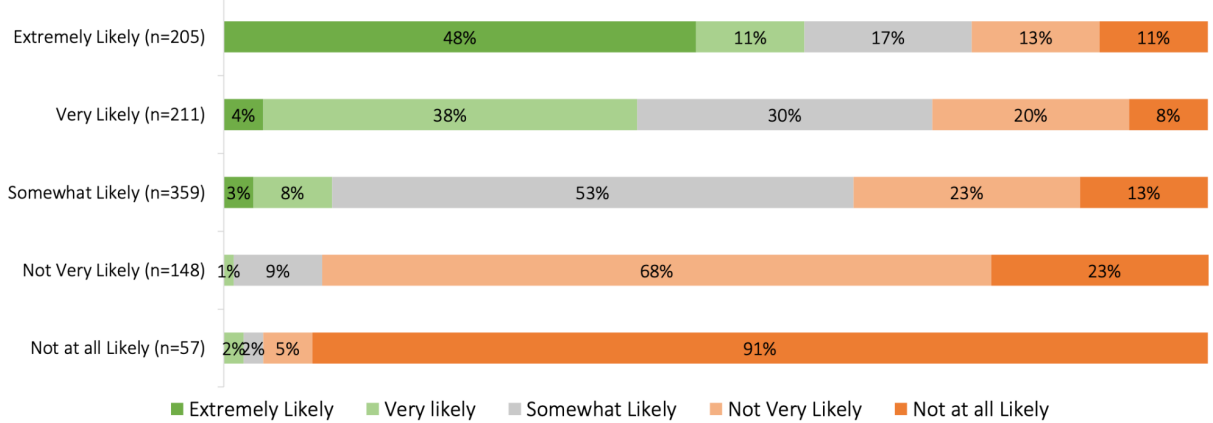
How likely would you be to reenroll at your college or university?



Key Insight: Of respondents who would be extremely likely to continue their education, nearly half said they would be extremely likely to reenroll at their college or university.

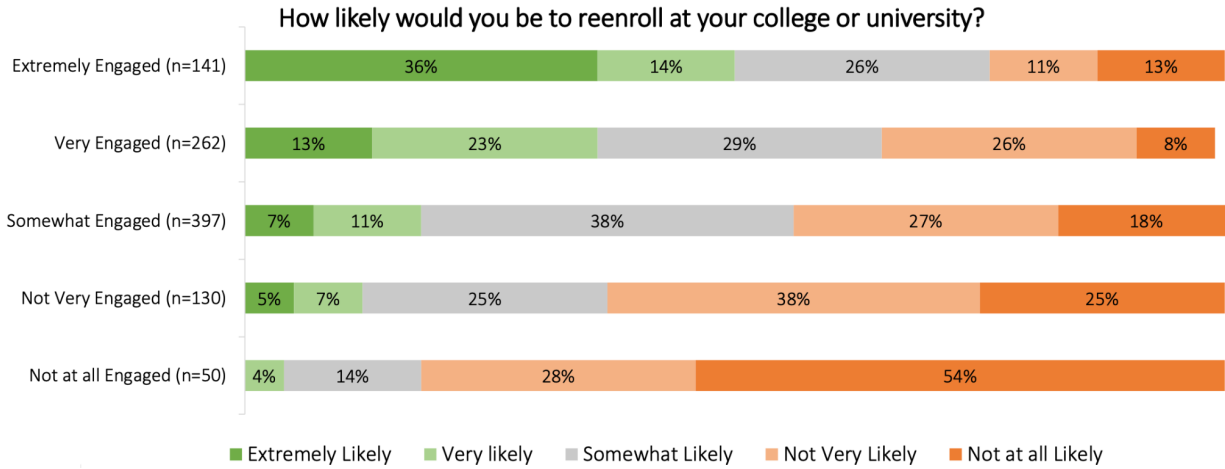
Figure 45: Likelihood of Reenrollment - By Likelihood of Continuing Education

How likely would you be to reenroll at your college or university?



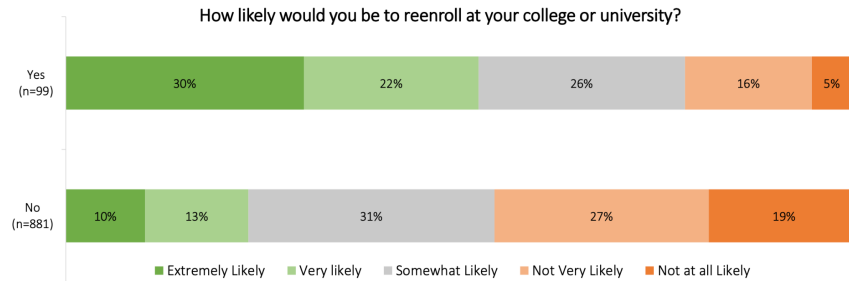
Key Insight: Individuals who felt their institution was more engaged were more likely to say they would reenroll at their college or university.

Figure 46: Likelihood of Reenrollment - By Engagement-Level



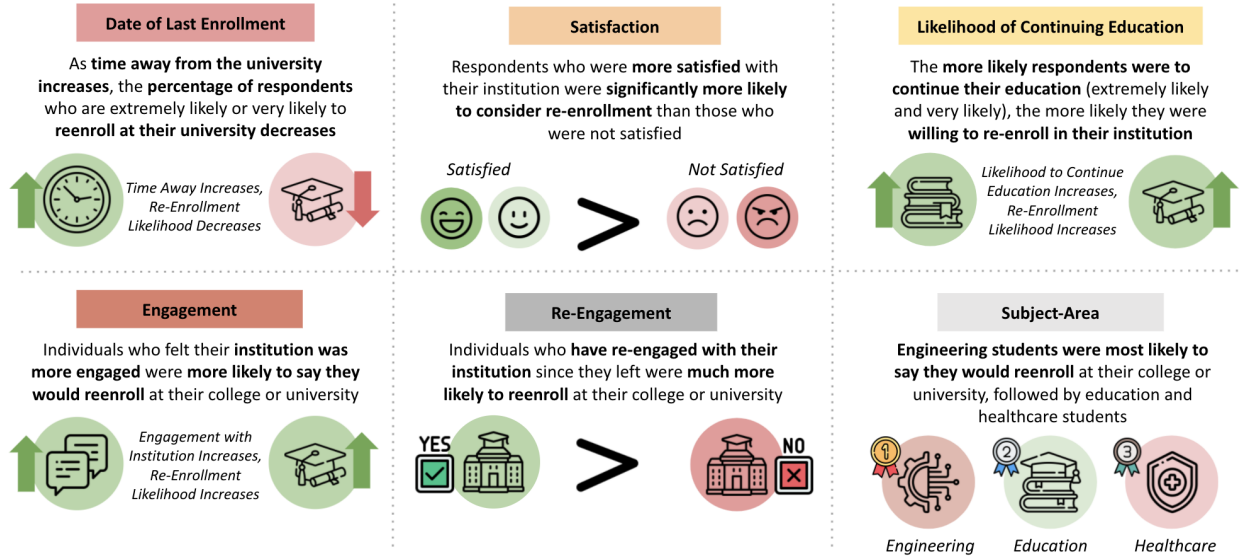
Key Insight: Individuals who have reengaged with their institution since they left were much more likely to reenroll at their college or university.

Figure 47: Likelihood of Reenrollment - By Reengagement



Key Insight: *There are many factors that play into the reenrollment. Those who were more satisfied and engaged while at school are more likely to reenroll at their higher education institution.*

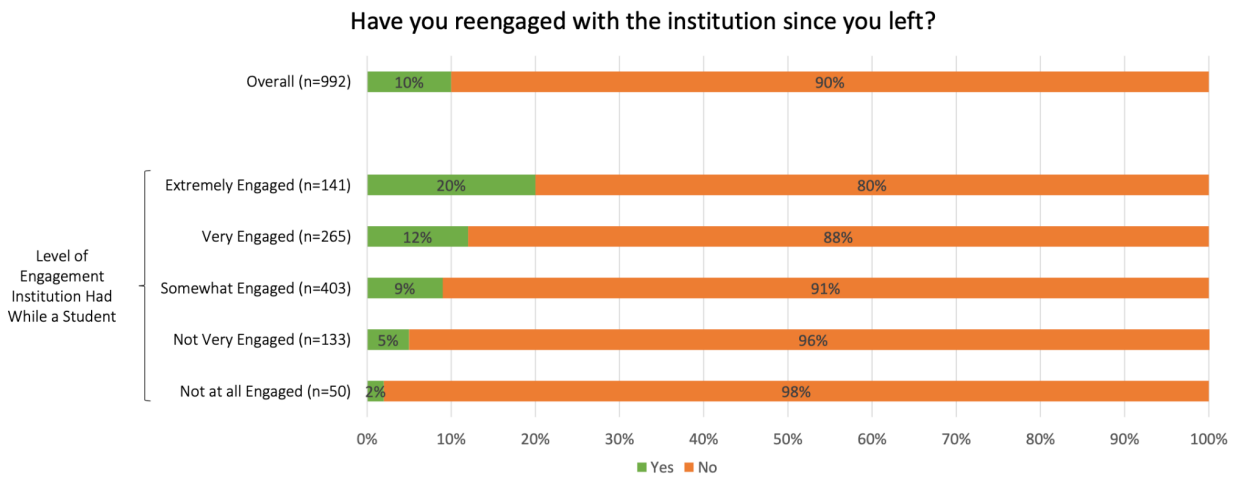
Figure 48: Likelihood of Reenrollment - Composite Additional Drivers



How Can Institutions Keep Learners Engaged and Enrolled?

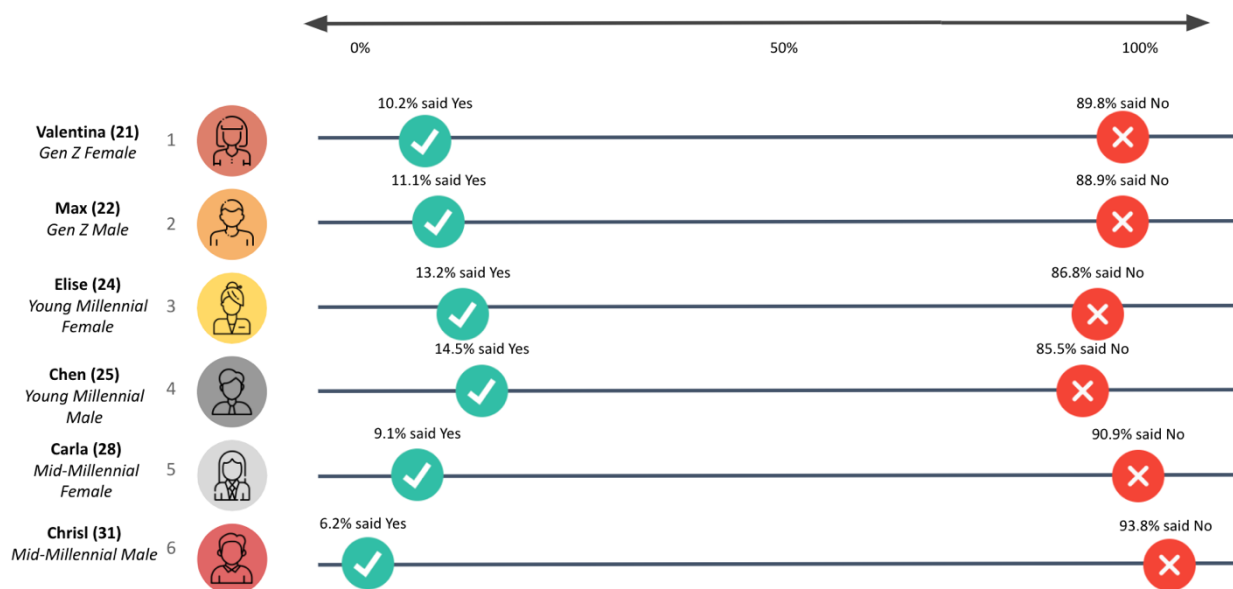
Key Insight: *Nine out of ten individuals have not reengaged with their institution. Respondents who said their institution was more engaged with them when they were students were more likely to have reengaged with their institution.*

Figure 49: Reengagement with Institution



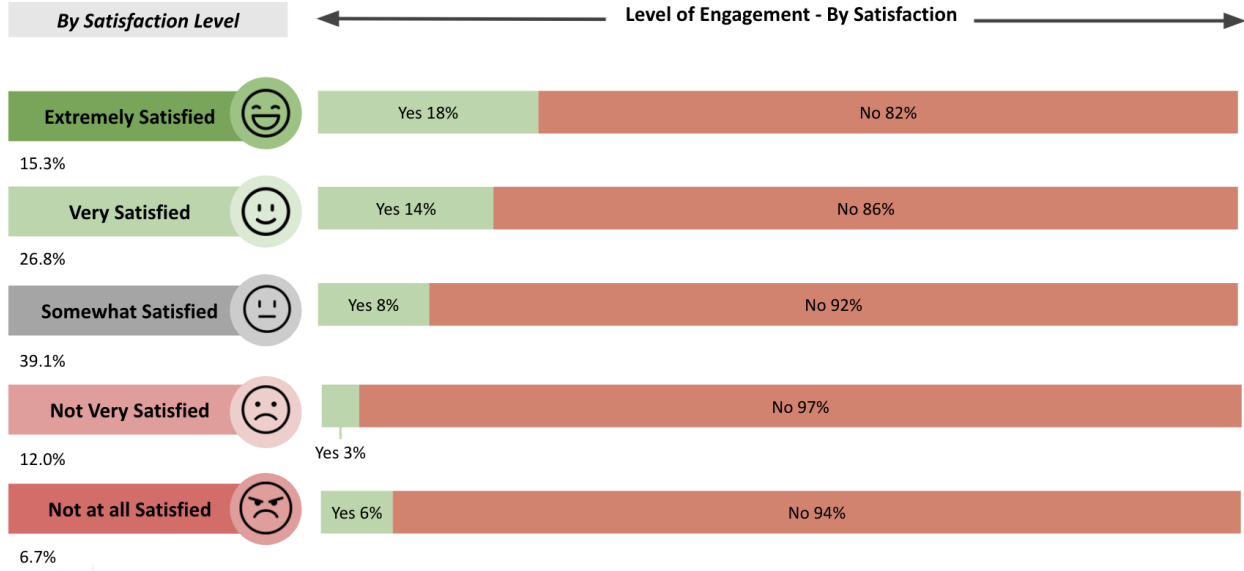
Key Insight: *The young millennial generation has had the highest engagement of the age groups, and younger respondents were more likely to have reengaged with their institution.*

Figure 50: Reengagement with Institution - By Persona



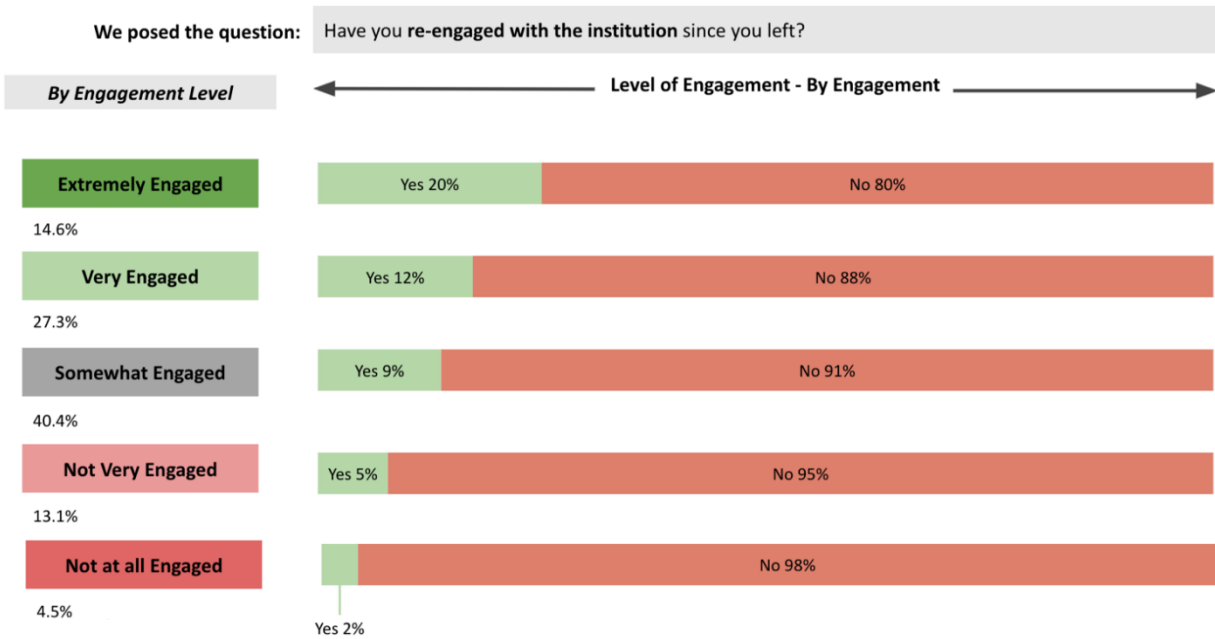
Key Insight: Respondents who were more satisfied with their institution were more likely to reengage with the school.

Figure 51: Reengagement with Institution - By Satisfaction



Key Insight: When asked if respondents had engaged with the institution since they left, respondents who said their institution was more engaged with them when they were a student were more likely to have reengaged with the institution. This indicates that the more engaged institutions can be with students while enrolled, the more likely they are to re-engage with their institution after they unenroll or leave higher education.

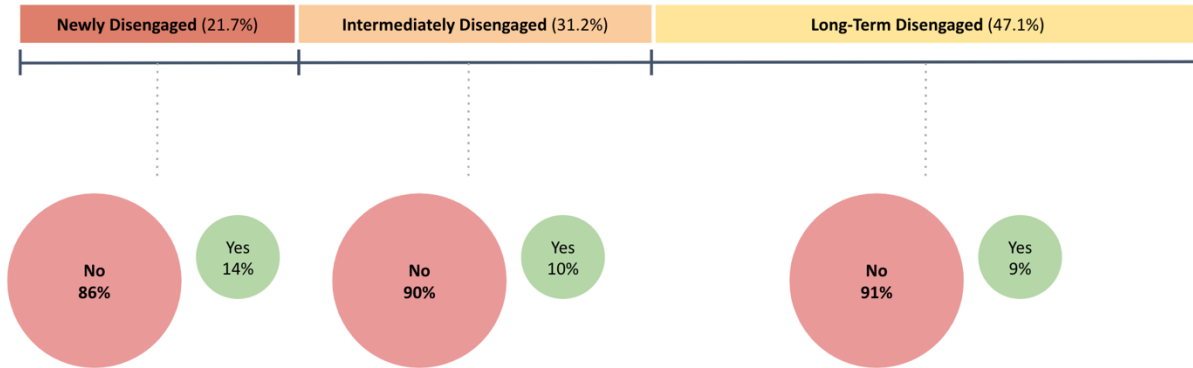
Figure 52: Reengagement with Institution - By Engagement - Level



Key Insight: *The longer it has been since an individual left their institution, there is less likelihood that they have reengaged with their school.*

Figure 53: Reengagement with Institution - By Date of Last Enrollment

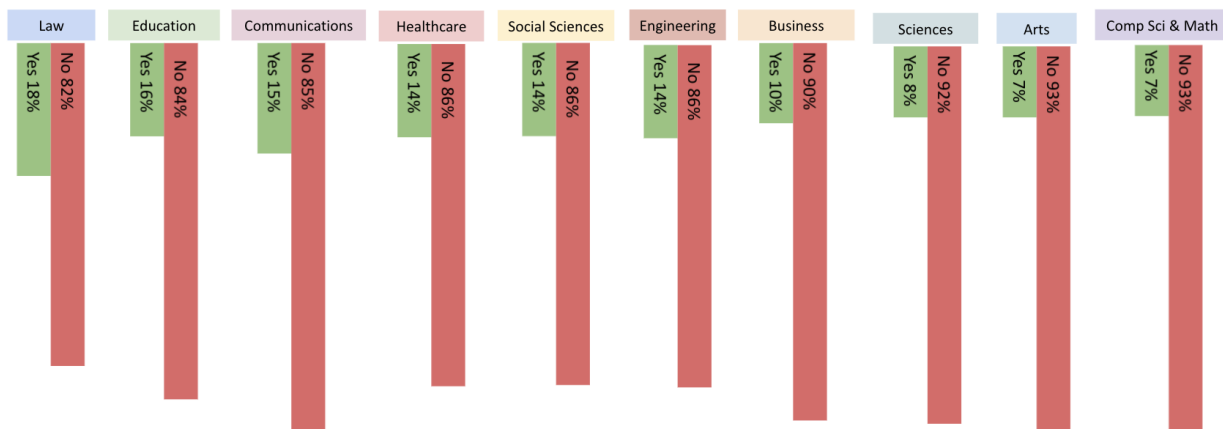
Last Enrolled In:



Respondents who were newly disengaged (14%) were more likely to say they have reengaged with their institution since they left than those who have been intermediately disengaged (10%) or long-term disengaged (9%).

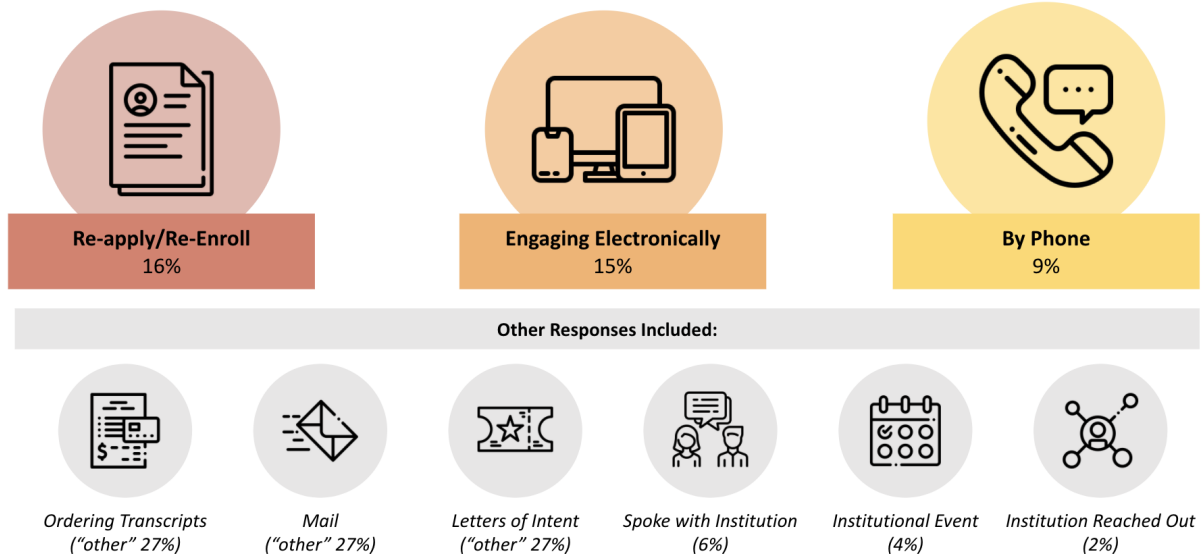
Key Insight: *Respondents who were enrolled in a law program were most likely to reengage with an institution (18%), followed by education (16%), and communications (15%) students*

Figure 54: Reengagement with Institution - By Subject Studied



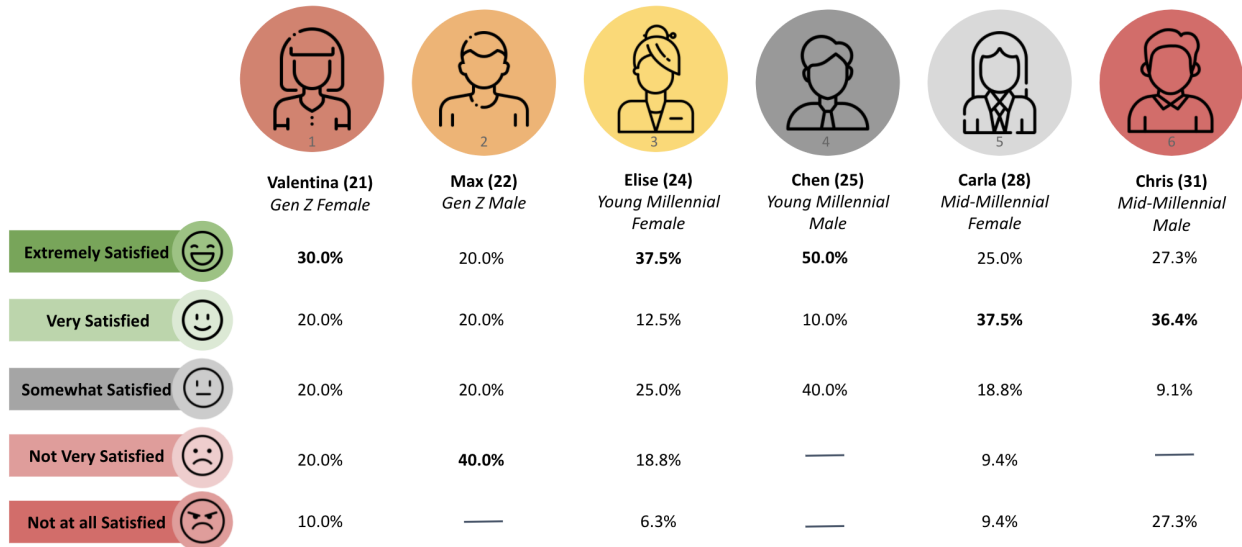
Key Insight: The most common methods of reengagement were to reapply or reenroll, (16%), engaging electronically (15%), followed by reengagement by phone (9%).

Figure 55: Means of Reengagement with Institution



Key Insight: Gen Z and Young Millennials have the highest extremely satisfied ratings. Mid-Millennials have the most very satisfied but also the greatest percentage not at all satisfied.

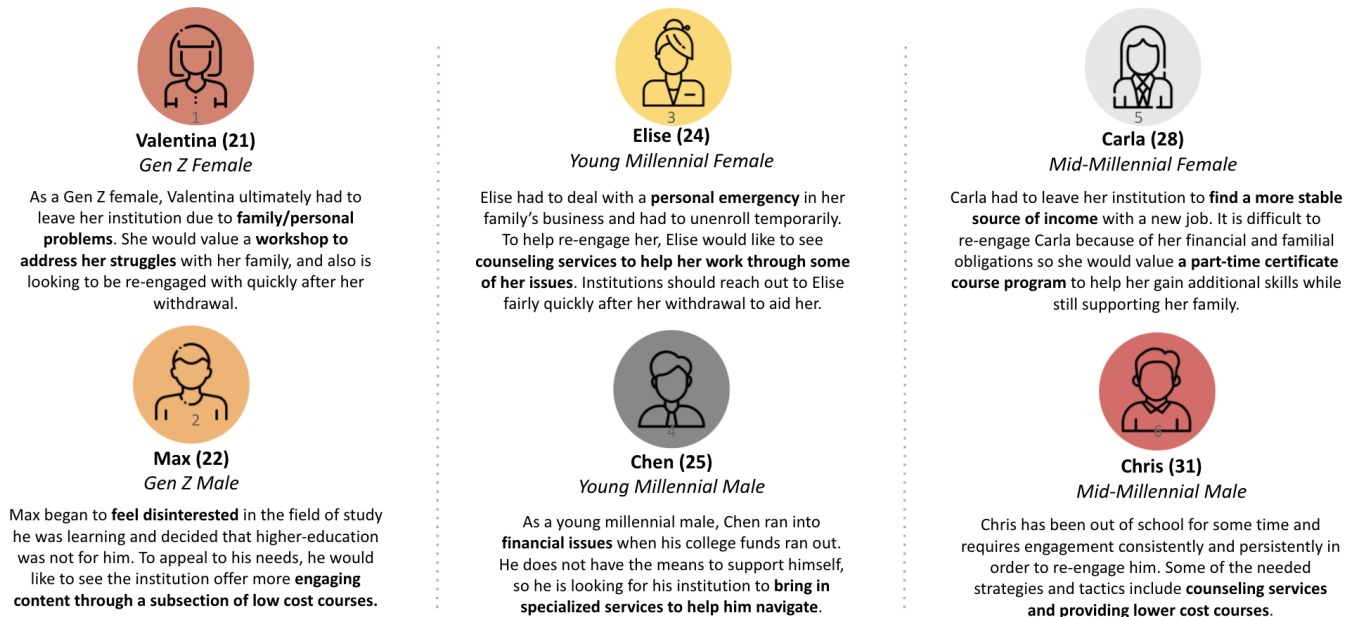
Figure 56: Satisfaction with Reengagement



How Can Institutions Prepare to Reengage and Retain Their Learners?

Key Insight: Understanding the generational and behavioral differences that lead to a student's reason behind unenrolling from their institution is a key variable for how institutions can reengage those disengaged. For each different reasoning and generational differences, institutions need to look at what benefits and tactics can best suit their needs.

Figure 57: How to Prepare Personas



Impact on Higher Education

Over the course of the last decade, higher education has not held the same value for students as it has in the past. With technology dominating the landscape of the workplace and providing unique opportunities that didn't previously exist, students are disengaging from higher education at a higher rate. In addition, generational differences as well as the mental health effects of the pandemic are at play. These factors, coupled with a rapidly changing economy, are forcing students to question their investment in and commitment to higher education.

The reasons that drive why different generations disengage more than others demonstrate the importance of institutions focusing on the generational and demographic differences of their current and disengaged students. While much of the literature now focuses on the mindset of disengaged learners, the research of UPCEA and StraighterLine looks at how institutions can best understand the perception and reasons of those disengaged and change the trajectory of their offerings, engagement, and communication.

Overall, respondents indicated that the three primary reasons they left their institutions were finances (42%), family reasons/commitments (32%), and that it was not the right fit (30%). However, the younger generations indicated that their primary reason was not the right fit compared to older generations who cited financial issues as their primary reason for leaving. Institutions need to look at the reasons for disengagement and identify those on which they can tangibly take action. The survey indicates the more satisfied and engaged learners felt while still at school, the better the chances of their reengaging.

Overall, about a quarter of respondents were at least very likely to reenroll at their college or university, providing a basis on which institutions could begin to develop a reenrollment plan. To address what institutions could do to better prepare, it is important to identify what initially motivated students to enroll in their institutions. Across all generations, the primary motivation factor was their having a personal goal and wanting to advance their career. Institutions can learn from this data and establish key strategies and tactics to reengage their students. For respondents who indicated that there was something their institution could have done to retain them, providing a certificate for credits, a subsection of courses at a lower price, and workshops that address students' struggles were seen as effective strategies.

The findings of this study demonstrate the necessity of institutions dedicating time and effort to a wide variety of students while they are still at school and the urgency to reengage as soon as possible after they might disengage.