

"Why aren't students coming back? **How content marketing can help.**"



[About us: For over 20 years, Aperture Content Marketing has studied the changes in community college enrollment. We know prospective students are trying to navigate an economy in turmoil, and they often lack sufficient information about the opportunities available at their community colleges. Bridging the information gap to increase enrollment is our mission.]

The current crisis in community college enrollment has many factors. This report aims to summarize the latest polling data and assist schools in crafting their outreach to address the issues that prospective and stopped-out students are concerned with.

EAB Global, Inc., a consulting firm, has recently published a survey of more than 20,000 high school students asking why students are abandoning college in record numbers.

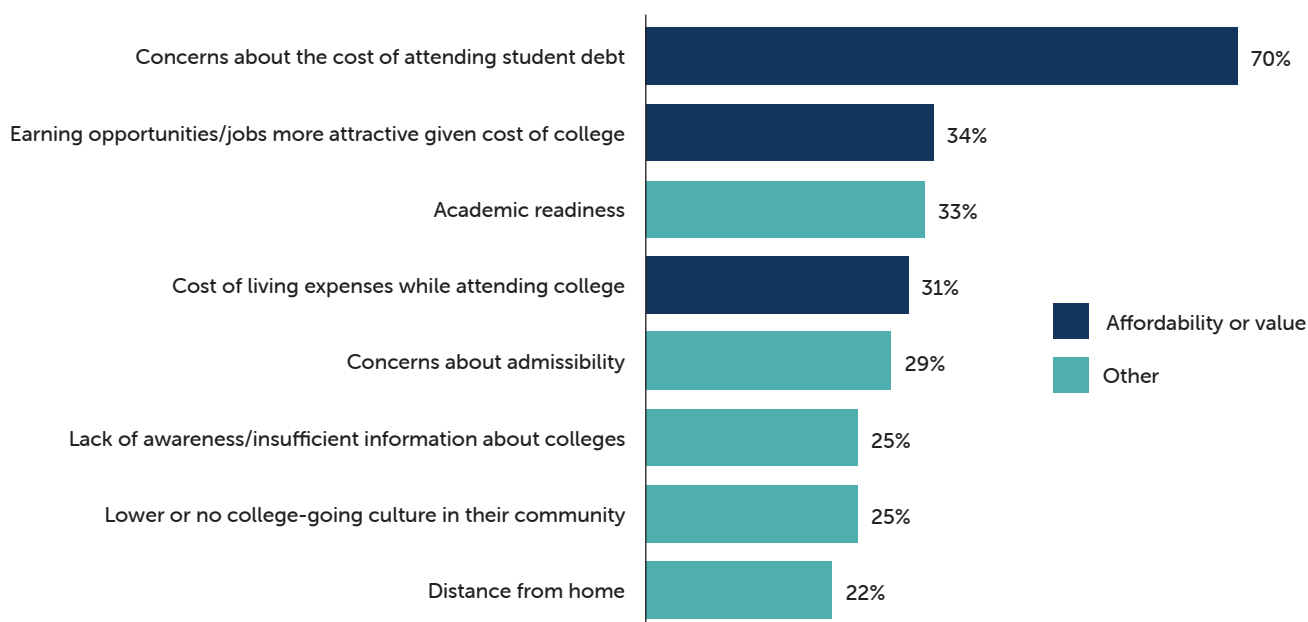
1 | Students need affordability.

Unsurprisingly, money is the number one reason students either do not enroll or stop out. Seventy percent of high school counselors named cost or debt as the primary reason their students would not enroll. Thirty-four percent said that getting a job was more attractive given the cost of college. Another 31 percent cited the cost of living while attending college.



Most Common Factors that Deter Students from Attending College

EAB High School Counselor Survey, Responses with 20% or More

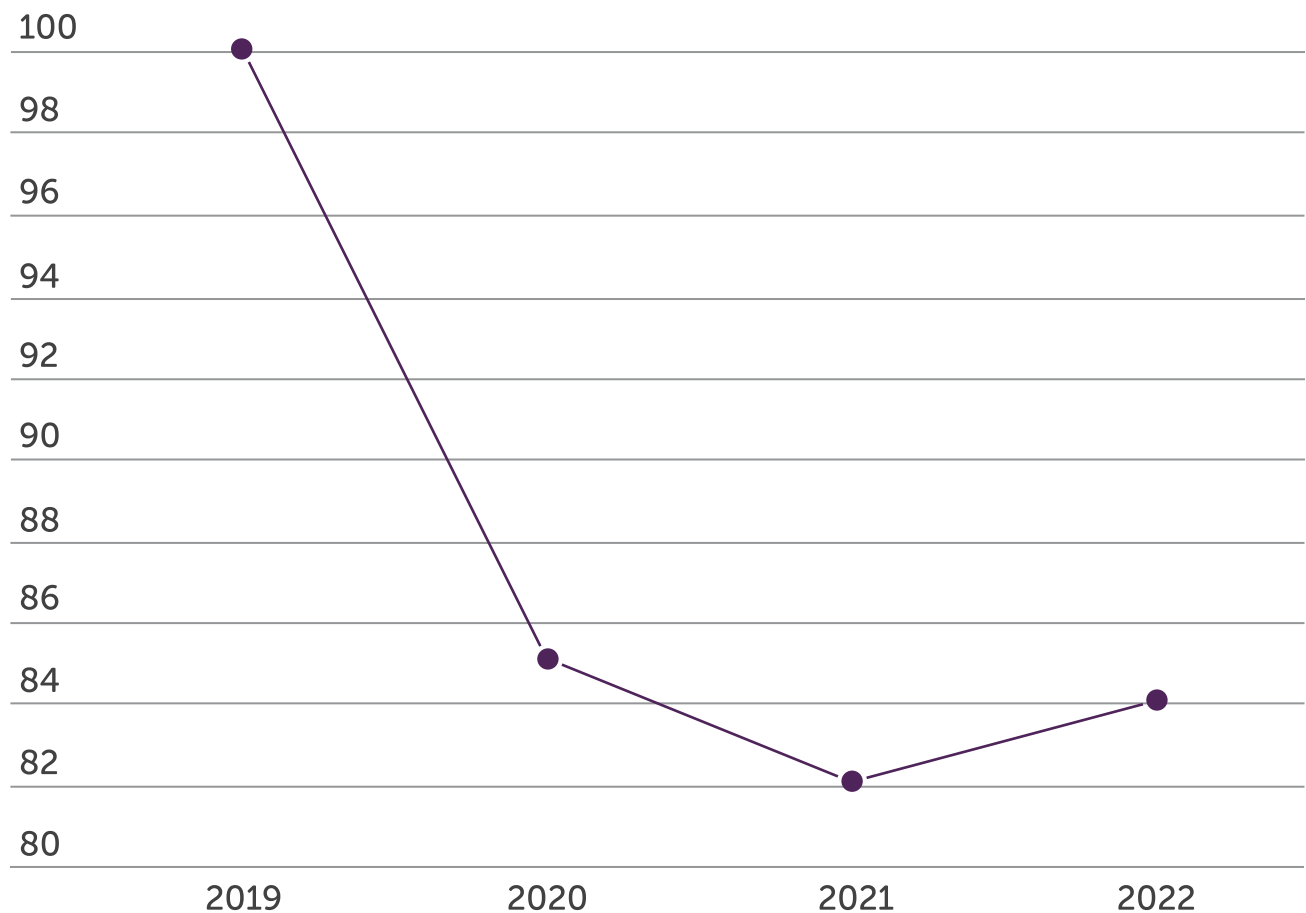


YPulse showed Gen Z is significantly less likely to go to college than in 2019, a 16 percent difference. Their study shows 80 percent of Gen Z middle school students and 85 percent of high school students now plan for college, compared to 100 percent pre-pandemic. Their latest polling shows that 68 percent of Gen Z students and 72 percent of Millennials do not believe a college degree is necessary to succeed.

Ian Gates, 22, a policy and program quality fellow of The Opportunity Project Tulsa, commented on the study to the news outlet "The 74," saying, "Gen Z knows people are graduating college with all these loans," Gates said. "They're taking that into account, especially those from lower-income families, and asking themselves if college is really worth it."

What percent of Gen-X are planning to go to college?

Source: YPulse survey data Education survey 2019, 2020, 2021, & 2022



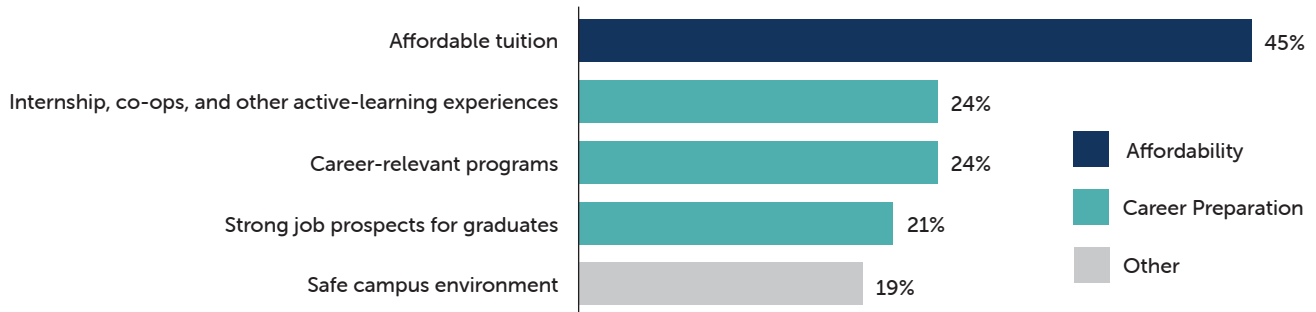
2 | Students want careers.

EAB states, “Before the pandemic, students were already shifting away from liberal arts degrees to those with more direct ties to specific careers,” noting that this change appears to accelerate during the pandemic. “Data from across EAB’s enrollment ecosystem reflects students’ strong preference for clear career preparation from their college...” Further, students want practical experience and career-relevant programs. They consider career preparation as the primary driver of value, according to the data.”

The nonprofit ECMC Group, in partnership with VICE Media, also conducted a June 2023 survey of youth 14-18, which emphasized the same points. Sixty-five percent of the “Question the Quo” respondents believed education after high school is necessary, but they want real-world skills, hands-on learning, and apprenticeships.

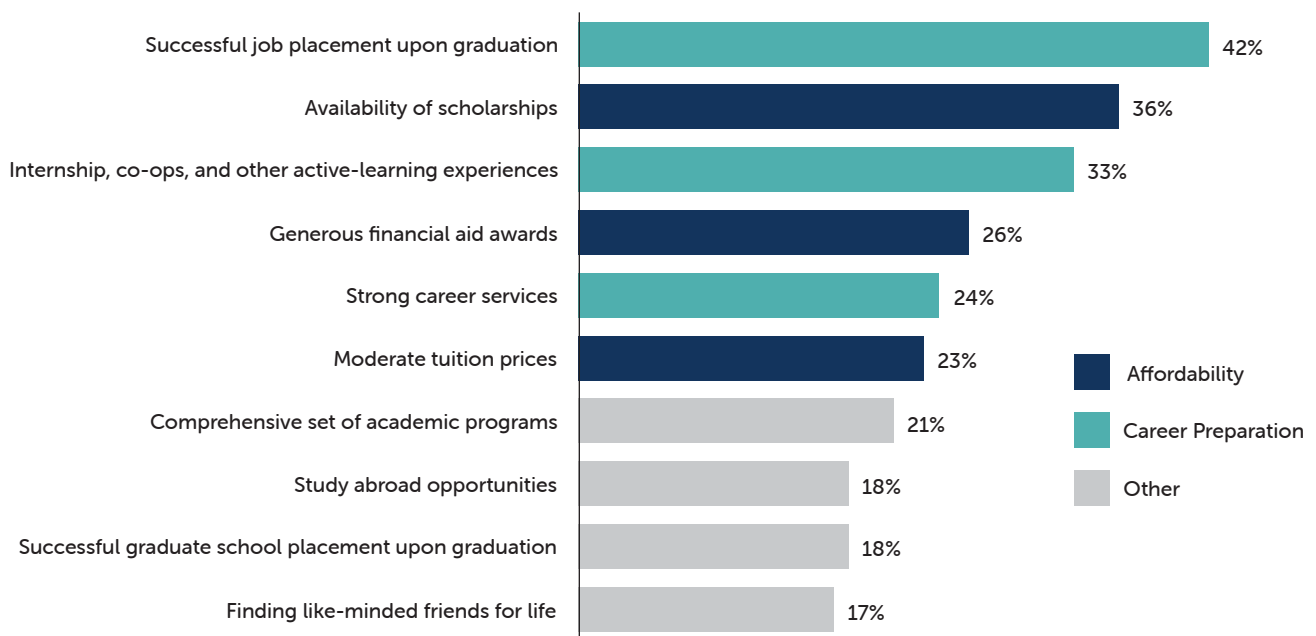
Affordability and Value Remain Top Priorities in College Choice

“What are you looking for in your college experience?”, Participants Could Select up to Three, Top Five Responses Shown, EAB Communication Preferences Survey



Students View Career Preparation as the Primary Driver of Value

“What Best Represents Value?” Participants Could Select Up to Five, EAB Communication Preferences Survey

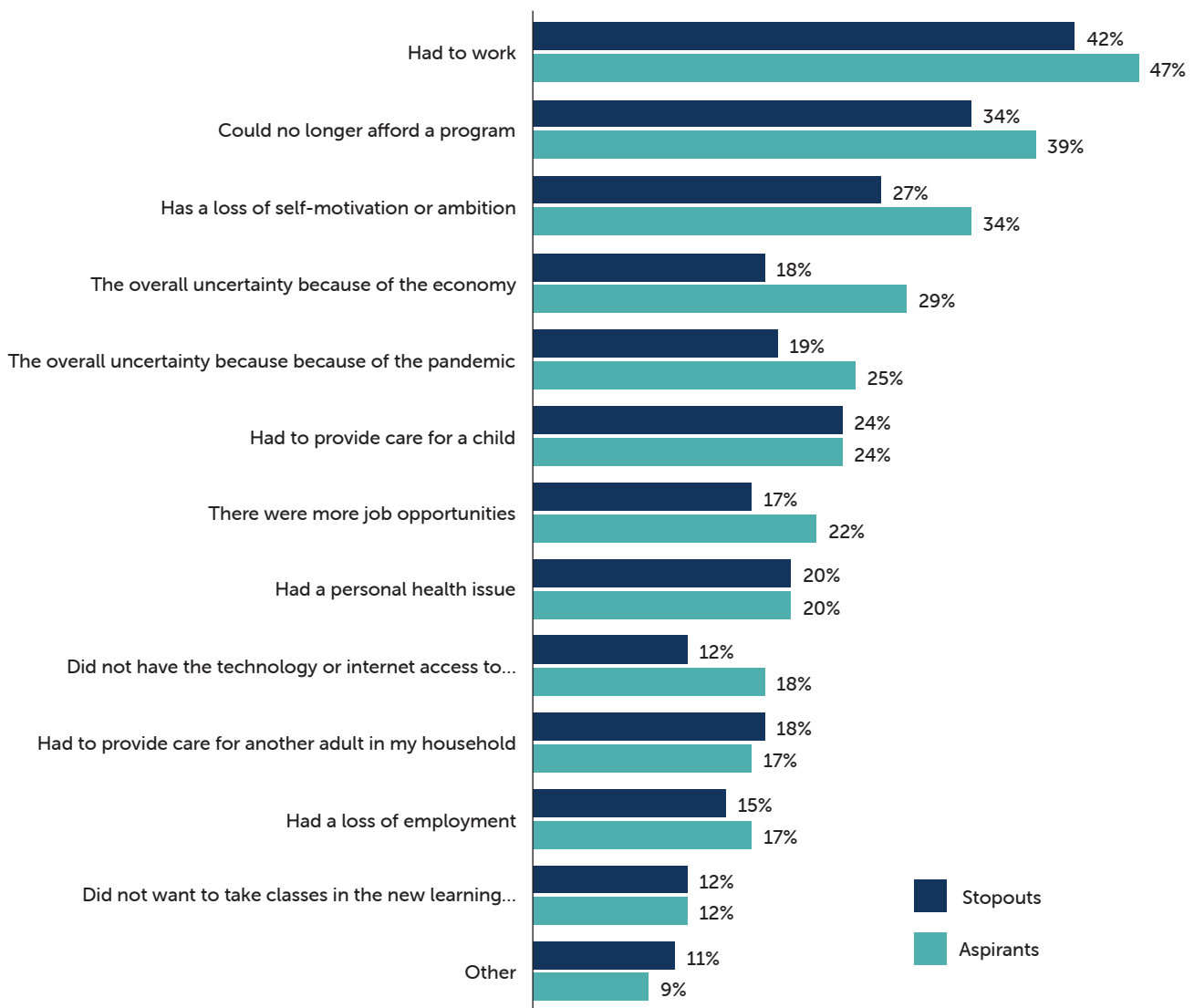


3 | The **exodus of students** from their programs also points to financial stress

The EAB survey compared stopped-out students' reasons to those of aspiring students. The percentages range in tandem. The top two reasons for students leaving their programs or never signing up in the first place were the "need to take a job or earn income" or the "inability to pay." Lack of internet or technology, as well as childcare issues, were also significant concerns—all of which revolve around financial necessity.

Why Aren't Students Coming Back?

Survey of 500 Stopouts and 500 Aspirants Show Similar Themes



1) Survey of 500 stopouts who had been enrolled between Spring 2021 and 2022 and were no longer enrolled "stopouts", and 500 prospective students who considered enrolling and didn't "aspirants". Conducted Nov 16-Dec 15, 2022

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New America, [Why didn't community college students come back? \(2022\)](#)

While the number of stopped-out students is on the rise—some 40.4 million as of July 2021, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center—their number one destination for re-enrollment is community colleges.

Among former four-year public college students who re-enroll, 44.4 percent attend a community college. Similarly, community colleges picked up 37.5 percent of students from former proprietary school (for-profit) programs.

Community colleges need to make the case that returning to school will translate into long-term benefits. Studies consistently show that a certification or degree will translate into greater income, job security, and lifetime satisfaction.

EAB also highlighted the growth of mental health concerns as a significant deterrent to college enrollment.

“I’m not mentally ready” has become a significant reason for opting out. The percentage of these students rose sharply in 2023, “potentially reflecting the high mental health toll from the pandemic,” said the report.

Community colleges across the US are responding to the growing demand for mental health services. Tidewater Community College offers 24/7 mental telehealth to all students. Clovis Community College hosts several crisis hotlines and makes access to psychological services easy. Tarrant Community College provides short-term counseling for free. Many schools offer a team of dedicated counselors for veterans.

It is extremely beneficial for students to understand that once they enroll in community college, they will have access to mental health support alongside traditional academic counseling.



What does this new data mean for community college marketers?

Prospective and stopped-out students alike face real problems, some of which are unprecedented. They need more than a catchy sales pitch to motivate them.

Content marketing is a strategic approach. To win reluctant students in this new environment, it answers their questions, addresses their concerns, and demonstrates a path forward.

1. Marketing must be **focused on the end game**—solid careers with a stable future. It should open the eyes of prospective students to careers they may never have heard of and explain how college career pathways work. It should highlight possible internships and apprenticeships with local businesses.
2. **How to access financial aid**, which can be a daunting process, should be spelled out. Your outreach should provide engaging, detailed information on new financial aid opportunities to help prospective students reach their goals and improve their lives without breaking the bank.

Michigan increased its post-secondary credential attainment rate from 44 to 50.5 percent after launching “Sixty by 30” and specifically a Promise-style grant program, Michigan Reconnect. Nevertheless, tens of thousands of state residents qualify but don’t enroll. Many of them are unaware of the opportunity.

Over the past five years, these College Promise-type grants grew sixfold to 337 local communities in 47 states and throughout 31 states. However, many people are unaware of the opportunities due to the patchwork nature of these programs or their limited marketing. Your community college marketing is most effective when it **connects financial aid and careers together**.

3. Finally, marketing should feature your school’s **flexible course offerings and support services**.
 - The demand for online and hybrid learning continues to increase. Commenting on Changing Landscape of Online Education (CHLOE)’s January survey of about 317 chief online officers (COOs) at higher-ed institutions, Dr. Eric Fredericksen stated, “While national reporting has indicated a modest decrease in total enrollment in U.S. higher education, there continues to be robust growth in online enrollment.”
 - As the EAB survey indicated, community colleges that make mental healthcare free and accessible are meeting a critical social need. Marketers should inform potential students about these services and other social supports at your college, such as childcare or food pantries. Demonstrating campus life’s welcoming and supportive side can make all the difference.

Aperture Content Marketing is here to help your college’s marketing team accomplish all this and more. We have a library full of award-winning content to streamline your messaging and a system to strategically target specific demographics. Call us to schedule a demo and discuss how we can partner with your marketing department to increase enrollment.

Sources:

EAB Global, Inc., “Recruiting ‘Gen P,’ 6 Insights into How the Pandemic Has Altered College Search Behavior from EAB’s Survey of 20,000+ Students” 2023.

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The74, “What Gen Z Teens Are Asking About Education, Work and Their Future” by Bruno V. Manno, August 15, 2023

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A CONTENT MARKETING SOLUTION FOR YOUR COMMUNITY COLLEGE

At Aperture Content Marketing, we have a 20-year history of working with community colleges to improve their marketing strategies. We know which marketing strategies serve community colleges well and which fall short.

We will consult with your marketing staff and/or workforce development team to craft a campaign across multiple platforms and win new students. We will develop a career-focused content marketing strategy based on your demographic and local workforce priorities.

Community colleges who work with us have full access to our content library, which includes a range of career-oriented subjects that can be used as-is and customized to best suit your college. Our multi-channel content marketing service includes print and mail distribution, a microsite, and social media content. We can assist your college in identifying specific demographics in your service area and creating a strategy to target them for enrollment, tailored to meet the needs of your college and budget.

To request a free demo of our services, get in touch with us: info@aperturecm.com.



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