

2026 HEDS Returning Student Survey

This is a PDF representation of the online version of the survey. It includes all questions and response options, as well as notes (in italics) about how questions will display to survey takers.

[Institution Name] is using this survey to get a better understanding of the experiences, goals, and concerns of its students. Faculty and staff at [Institution Name] will use the information from this survey to see how they can help you get the most out of college.

The questions on this short survey will help you think about your reasons for completing your degree, what you're worried about, what your long-term goals are, and how your experiences at [Institution Name] are preparing you for those goals. In addition, this survey will give you the opportunity to set up a follow-up conversation with someone at [Institution Name] about your goals and strategies for success. We hope you take advantage of this opportunity to have a conversation about your goals for college and the future.

The survey will take about 10 minutes to complete. When you're done, you'll be able to see a summary of how other students at [Institution Name] responded to the survey.

Your responses to this survey will be shared with a handful of people at [Institution Name] who work to help [Institution Name] students succeed and improve teaching and learning. They are, of course, obligated to keep your responses confidential.

The [Institution Name] leader(s) of this survey effort [is/are] [name(s)], and [he/she/they] can be reached at [email address(es) and/or phone number(s)].

By clicking "Next," you acknowledge that you are at least 18 years old, have read the information above, and agree to participate in the survey. Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts. We appreciate it.

[Students see a "Next" button here.]

We have “[Student’s First and Last Name]” as your name in our records. We apologize if this isn’t right. If you’d like to revise your name for this survey, please enter the name you prefer here: _____

1. For you, what are the most important reasons to stay in college and complete your degree? (Select all that apply)

- To get a job that provides financial security
- To get a job that helps me start a meaningful career
- To learn new things and expand my horizons
- To become a more thoughtful and better-informed citizen
- To make life-long friendships
- To prepare for post-graduate education
- To make my family proud
- To build a good life for my children and/or family
- To improve my ability to give back to my community
- To be better prepared to make a positive impact on the world
- Other: _____

2. How often do you worry about the following?

	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Never
Doing well academically in college	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financial concerns (e.g., finding ways to pay for college, questions about my financial aid or on-campus jobs)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Thinking about what I’m going to do immediately after college (employment, graduate school, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Getting the right courses, internships, and experiences in college to set me up for my career	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Getting into the graduate school I need to build my career	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Paying off my student loans after college	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Finding a job that’s meaningful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Finding a job that gives me the resources I need to be comfortable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Settling for a job I don’t enjoy because it pays the bills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
National/global issues that impact society at large (e.g., climate change, the political environment, social inequality)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Maintaining my mental health and well-being	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Creating balance between work, family, friends, and my personal interests/hobbies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Knowing how to do “life stuff” (e.g., managing my finances, finding a good place to live, getting the right kinds of insurance)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having enough to eat day-to-day	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having a safe and secure place to sleep every night	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. What could [Institution Name] faculty and staff do this year to support you and help you be successful?

4. Imagine some point in the future, after you're done with school and you're leading a successful life. What does your life look like? What are you doing? How are you living? Don't be afraid to think big!

5. Looking back, in what ways have your goals for life after college changed?

Question 6 asks students to identify high-impact programs and/or experiences at your institution that have moved them toward their vision of a successful life. We've designed this question so that you can ask students about the impact of **up to nine high-impact programs/experiences** at your institution. If you're unsure what programs or experiences you might ask about, consider the following categories of high-impact programs developed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities and the National Survey of Student Engagement:¹

- First-year seminar and/or experiences
- Required set of common courses or experiences
- Learning communities
- Research opportunities with faculty
- Service learning/community-based learning programs
- Courses and programs focusing on diversity
- Internships/field experiences/practicums
- Short- or long-term study abroad/study away
- Culminating senior experiences

We'll ask you to provide your institution's names for your high-impact practices/experiences so that your students will know which programs/experiences the survey refers to. You may add up to nine institutional programs to Question 6 that you think have an impact on students. In addition to the programs that you list for your institution, Question 6 includes three programs/experiences that cannot be changed: "What I've learned in my major(s) and minor(s)," "Support from key faculty and staff at [Institution Name]," and "Another experience at [Institution Name] that's helping me prepare for success: (fill-in)."

The high-impact programs/experiences in Question 6 are shown in randomized order.

6. Which of the following experiences at [Institution Name] have **most** prepared you to accomplish your goals for living a successful life after college? (pick up to three)

- [High-Impact Program/Experience #1] (designated by institution)
- [High-Impact Program/Experience #2] (designated by institution)
- [High-Impact Program/Experience #3] (designated by institution)
- [High-Impact Program/Experience #4] (designated by institution)
- [High-Impact Program/Experience #5] (designated by institution)
- [High-Impact Program/Experience #6] (designated by institution)
- [High-Impact Program/Experience #7] (designated by institution)
- [High-Impact Program/Experience #8] (designated by institution)
- [High-Impact Program/Experience #9] (designated by institution)
- What I've learned in my major(s) and minor(s) (fixed response option, cannot be changed or deleted)
- Support from key faculty and staff at [Institution Name] (fixed response option, cannot be changed or deleted)
- Another experience at [Institution Name] that's helping me prepare for success: _____ (fixed response option, cannot be changed or deleted)

¹ See <https://www.aacu.org/trending-topics/high-impact> and <https://nsse.indiana.edu/nsse/survey-instruments/high-impact-practices.html>

7. You said that [student's answers from Question 6] have helped you move toward your vision of success in life. What made those experiences so beneficial?

8. Overall, how satisfied have you been with your undergraduate education at [Institution Name]?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

9. If you had it to do all over again, would you choose to attend [Institution Name]?

- Definitely
- Probably
- Not sure
- Probably not
- Definitely not

*Question 10 asks students whether they would like to share their survey responses with someone on campus for a follow-up conversation. We've designed the survey so that a student will have the option of automatically forwarding their responses to **up to three people/offices** at your institution for a follow-up conversation. When you register for the survey, we will work with you to identify which people/offices at your institution students will have the option of sending their responses to. These options could include their academic advisor, class dean, coaches, the Career Services office, the chaplain, the Academic Support Center, the dean of student success, or other people/offices on your campus who play a role in helping your students consider their plans for college and beyond. Students also have the option of writing in the name of someone on campus that they would like to speak with. When a student writes in a name, the survey liaison will receive an email with the student's survey responses and the name of the person to forward those responses to. The survey liaison will be responsible for forwarding the email to the appropriate person.*

Please note, while the system we've created to forward students' survey responses to individuals at your institution is flexible, it is not infinitely flexible, and the range of options for forwarding your students' responses must fit within the constraints of our survey administration tools.

We suggest that institutions give students the option of forwarding their survey results to their academic advisor. We've provided an example below, but you can add in any people/offices at your institution that you think students might benefit from talking to.

10. Is there anyone at [Institution Name] that you'd like to have a conversation with about your responses to this survey or your plans for the future? Below we list a few options for people and/or offices at [Institution Name] that would be happy to have a conversation with you. You can also write in the name of anyone at [Institution Name] that you'd like to speak with. Please select as many options as you want. We will forward your answers to the preceding survey questions to the people you indicate below and ask them to contact you to set up a conversation.

- First person/office that the institution identifies (e.g., Jane Smith, your official academic advisor)
- Second person/office that the institution identifies (e.g., Career Services) – OPTIONAL RESPONSE
- Third person/office that the institution identifies (e.g., Academic Support Center) – OPTIONAL RESPONSE
- Write in the name and department or title of anyone at [Institution Name] that you'd like to have a conversation with: _____
- No, I don't want to have a follow-up conversation with anyone at this time.

In this section of the survey, we ask a few questions about your identity and background to help us understand how students with different backgrounds and experiences are thinking about college. If you have requested a conversation with someone at your institution in the previous question, the remaining questions in this survey *will not* be shared with them. Your responses to the following questions will only be shared with select people at your institution who are responsible for securely handling data that's used to improve your institution's support for students. You may choose to skip any of these questions, but you must get to the end and submit the survey for your responses to be sent to the person(s) or office(s) you selected.

11. What is your gender?

- Man
- Woman
- Nonbinary, please self-describe: _____
- Prefer not to respond

12. Are you transgender?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure
- Prefer not to respond

13. What is your citizenship status?

- U.S. citizen
- U.S. permanent resident but not a U.S. citizen
- Not a U.S. citizen or permanent resident
- Prefer not to respond

14. What is your race and/or ethnicity? (Select all that apply)

- American Indian or Alaska Native
For example, Navajo Nation, Blackfeet Tribe of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation of Montana, Native Village of Barrow Inupiat Traditional Government, Nome Eskimo Community, Aztec, Maya, etc.
- Asian
For example, Chinese, Asian Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, Pakistani, Hmong, Afghan, etc.
- Black or African American
For example, African American, Jamaican, Haitian, Nigerian, Ethiopian, Somali, Trinidadian and Tobagonian, Ghanaian, Congolese, etc.
- Hispanic or Latino
For example, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Salvadoran, Cuban, Dominican, Guatemalan, Colombian, Honduran, Spaniard, etc.
- Middle Eastern or North African
For example, Lebanese, Iranian, Egyptian, Syrian, Iraqi, Israeli, Moroccan, Yemeni, Kurdish, Palestinian, etc.
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
For example, Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Chamorro, Tongan, Fijian, Marshallese, Chuukese, Palauan, Tahitian, etc.
- White
For example, English, German, Irish, Italian, Polish, Scottish, French, Swedish, Norwegian, etc.
- Some other race or ethnicity: _____
- Prefer not to respond

15. What is the highest level of education completed by either of your parents or those who raised you?

- Did not finish high school
- High school diploma or GED
- Attended college but did not complete degree
- Associate's degree (AA, AS, etc.)
- Bachelor's degree (BA, BS, etc.)
- Master's degree (MA, MS, MBA, etc.)
- Doctoral or professional degree (PhD, JD, MD, etc.)
- Prefer not to respond

16. Have you ever received a Pell Grant during your time at college?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to respond

[If your institution chooses to add supplemental questions they will be inserted here, preceded by an introduction stating they are provided by your institution. You may customize this introduction, if you do not, we will use the following statement.]

You're almost done! [Institution Name] would also like to know:

[The following message appears after students click the "Submit" button.]

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. We hope that your next year in college is rewarding and helps you move toward your goals for life.

If you have requested a conversation with someone at your institution, we will forward your survey responses to the person(s) that you've identified, and they will contact you to schedule a time to talk. If you do not hear from them in the next few weeks, please feel free to reach out to them to initiate a conversation. We've also sent you an email copy of your survey responses.

In the meantime, you can see how your answers compare to the [responses of other students](#) at [Institution Name]. These results will be updated as more students complete the survey. We'll also include this link in the email with the summary of your survey responses, so you can check back as more students take the survey.

The [Institution Name] leader(s) of this survey effort [is/are] [name(s)], and [he/she/they] can be reached at [email address(es) and/or phone number(s)]. He/She/They can answer any additional questions you may have about the survey.