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Research Spotlight

2361 - What's COVID Got To Do With Students' Transfer Trajectories?

Credits and Degree Pathways, Transition Programs and Services

Drawing from the experiences of nearly 8,000 transfer-motivated community college students during the COVID-19 pandemic, this session will share the effects the pandemic has had on students' transfer trajectories and experiences. In addition, reflections from transfer professionals will spotlight some of the practices they implemented to support their transfer students during the pandemic.

Darla Cooper, *Executive Director*

Katie Brohawn, *Director of Research, Evaluation, and Development*

The RP Group for California Community Colleges

What's COVID Got To Do With Students' Transfer Trajectories?



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Dr. Katie Brohawn, *Director of Research, Evaluation, & Development*



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with generous funding
from:



The RP Group

www.rpgroup.org

Mission: As the representative organization for Institutional Research, Planning, and Effectiveness (IRPE) professionals in the California Community Colleges (CCC) system, the RP Group strengthens the ability of CCC to discover and undertake high-quality research, planning, and assessments that improve evidence-based decision-making, institutional effectiveness, and success for all students.

Services: Research, evaluation, planning, professional development, and technical assistance—designed and conducted by CCC practitioners

Organization: 501(c)3 with roots as membership organization



Through the Gate

An Overview

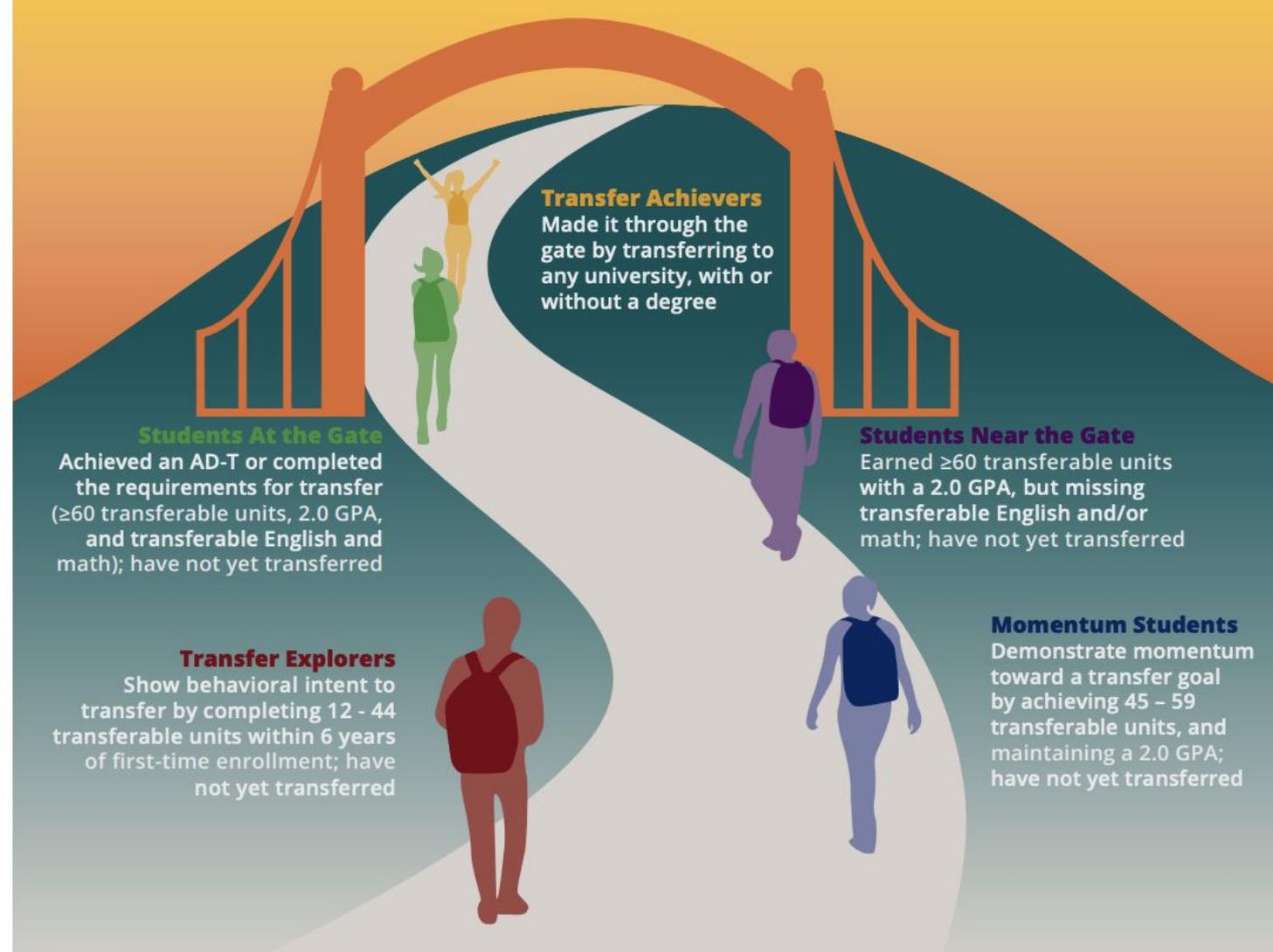


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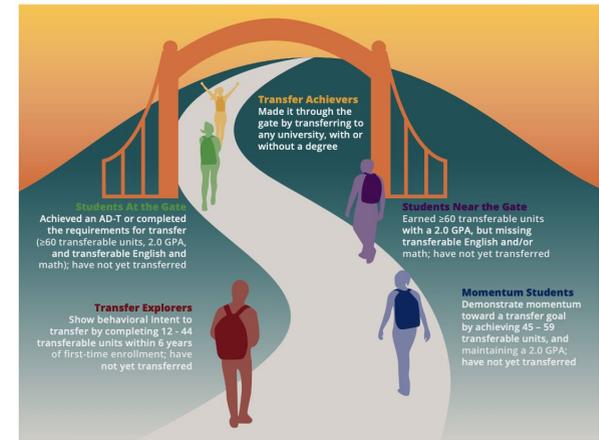
Through the Gate: Phase 1

Mapped California's transfer landscape, identifying a continuum of milestones for the student transfer journey and quantifying how many students were "near" or "at" the transfer gate



Through the Gate: Phase 1

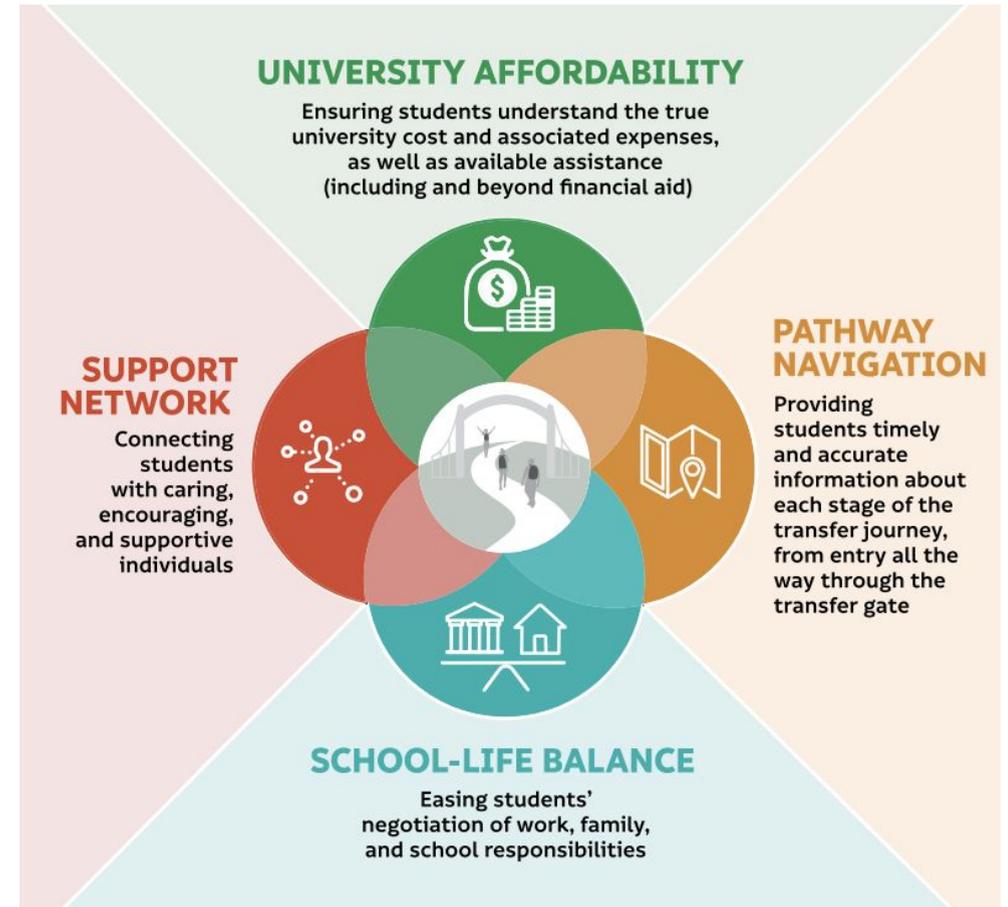
- More than half exit without credentials
- Math is a barrier
- Time is the enemy
- Once African Americans reach key milestones, they are most likely to transfer...but too few get this far
- Latinx students more likely to be At or Near the Gate than to have transferred



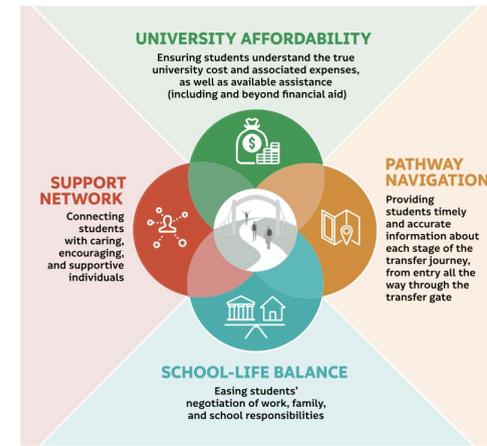
Through the Gate: Phase 2

Developed a framework for building students' transfer capacity, highlighting four issues community college students grapple with as they work toward their goal of a bachelor's degree

Student Transfer Capacity-Building Framework



Through the Gate: Phase 2



-  Students say finances are the *biggest* hurdle to transfer
-  Students are juggling numerous and often competing school, work, and family responsibilities
-  Students are missing accurate, timely information about pursuing a baccalaureate throughout their transfer journey—from *both* community colleges and universities
-  Students say the absence of social support negatively impacts their transfer decision-making and compromises their capacity for pursuing a bachelor's degree

The Current Study...



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Long-Term Questions

- How will the pandemic impact the educational trajectories of transfer-motivated students?
- What new or different supports will they need to attain their academic goals?



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Immediate Questions

- How were students' transfer plans affected by the pandemic?
- What issues did students who were close to transfer face during the pandemic?



Immediate Questions

- What did students know about changes in the CCC and university segments designed to support their transfer journey, and how did they leverage these changes?
- How are the four factors from the *Transfer Capacity-Building Framework* currently impacting students' transfer experience?



Research Overview

Study participants:

- 7,894 high-leverage students
- 67 CCC (58%)

Study activities:

- Statewide survey
- 2 focus groups with students:
 - experiencing transfer success
 - with impacted transfer plans



2 out of 5 students' transfer plans were impacted by the pandemic

- Highest among non-binary, Native American, and Native Hawaiian
- Even among students who had been accepted for transfer, nearly one in 10 had either deferred or decided not to go



2 out of 5 students found it harder to access counselors/advisors during the pandemic

- In focus groups, students noted concern that they won't be prepared for the rigor of university-level work given the leniency of the present year
- Especially true of majors involving a lot of hands-on coursework

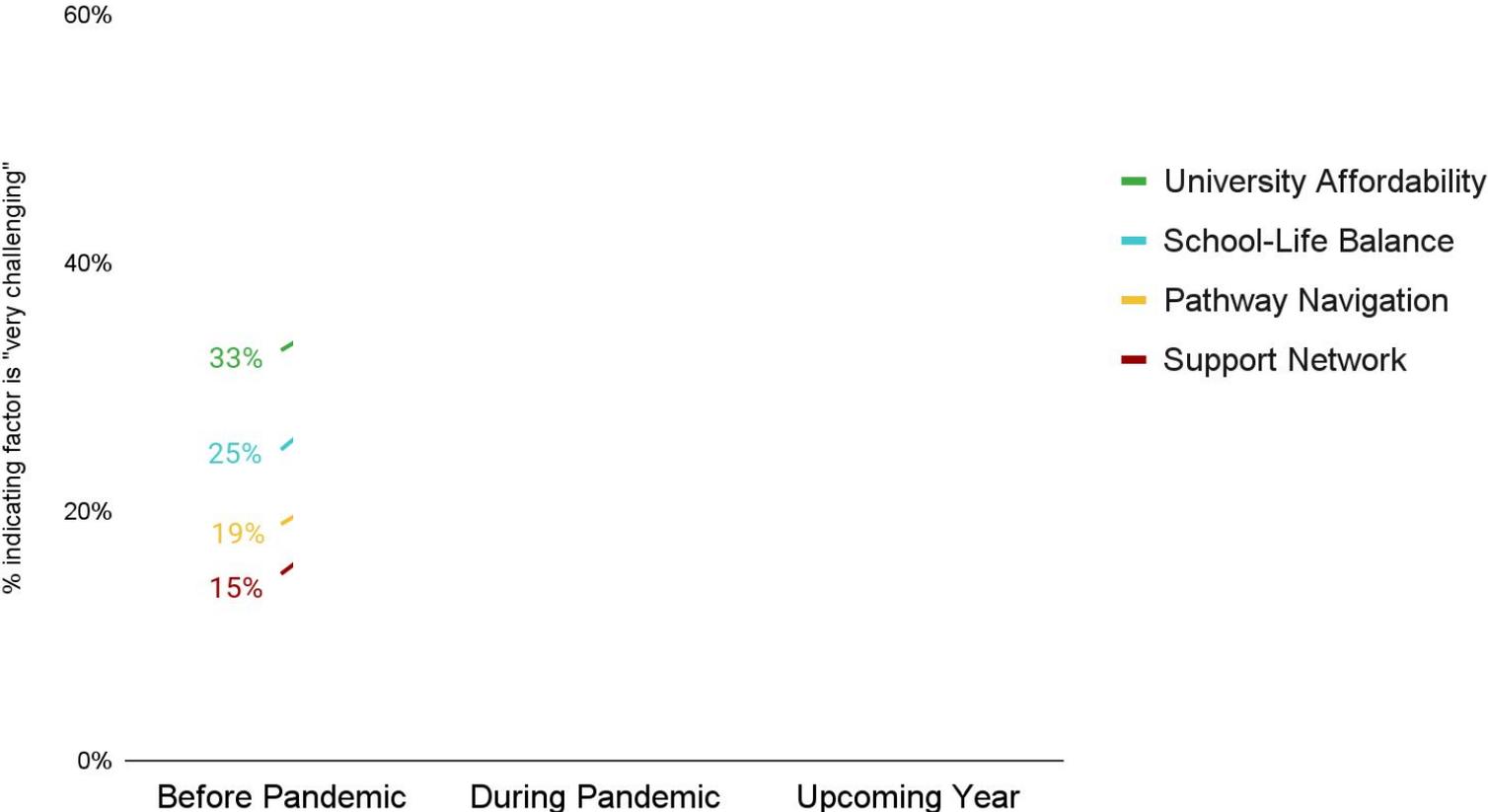


More than two-thirds of students not aware of changes to CCC, UC, and CSU transfer requirements

- Even among those who did know of these changes, fewer than one in five indicated that the changes improved their transfer experience
- Nice to know they exist as a safety net even if they don't use



The challenge of each of the four factors is substantially higher than before the pandemic, most notably University Affordability



Changes in the factors impacting students' transfer capacity varied among different student groups



University Affordability

University Affordability remains especially challenging for Latinx, Middle Eastern, female, nonbinary, first-generation, and older (50+) students.

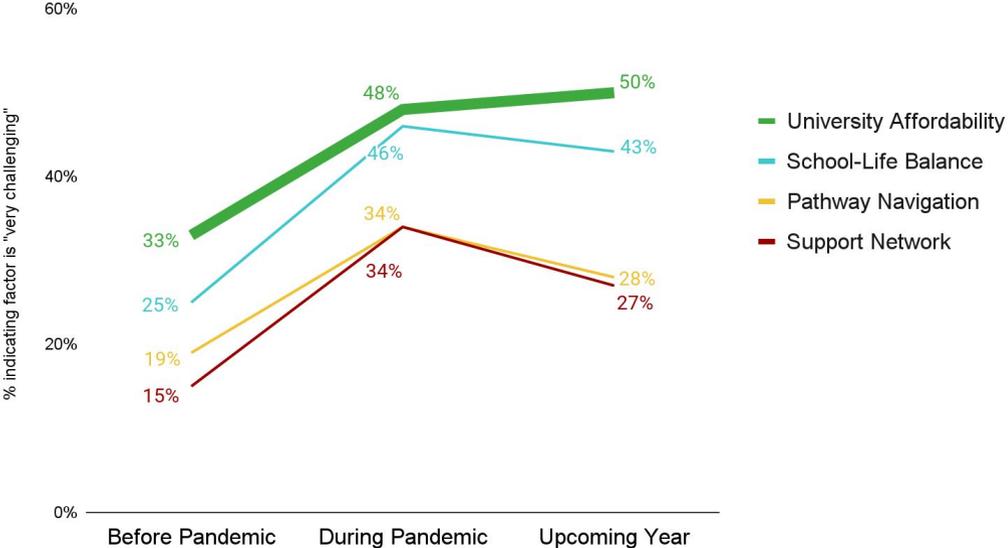


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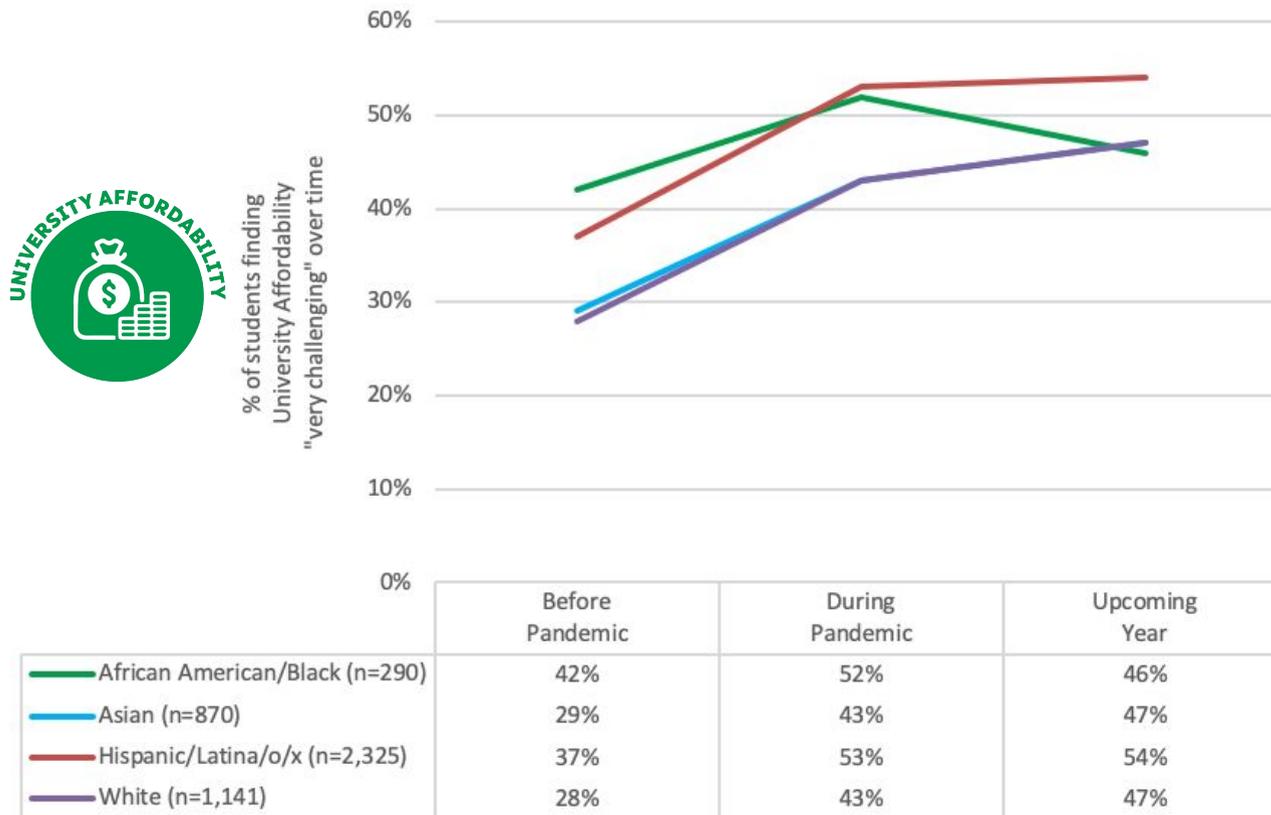
The challenge of University Affordability is higher than ever before

The uncertainty as to how next year will be is what is causing the most stress, I am currently working at a warehouse to afford food and pay bills but I work graveyard shift, not knowing if school will be back in person really stresses me out because I am unsure on whether to find a new job that will fit my future schedule or keep the one I have at the moment.



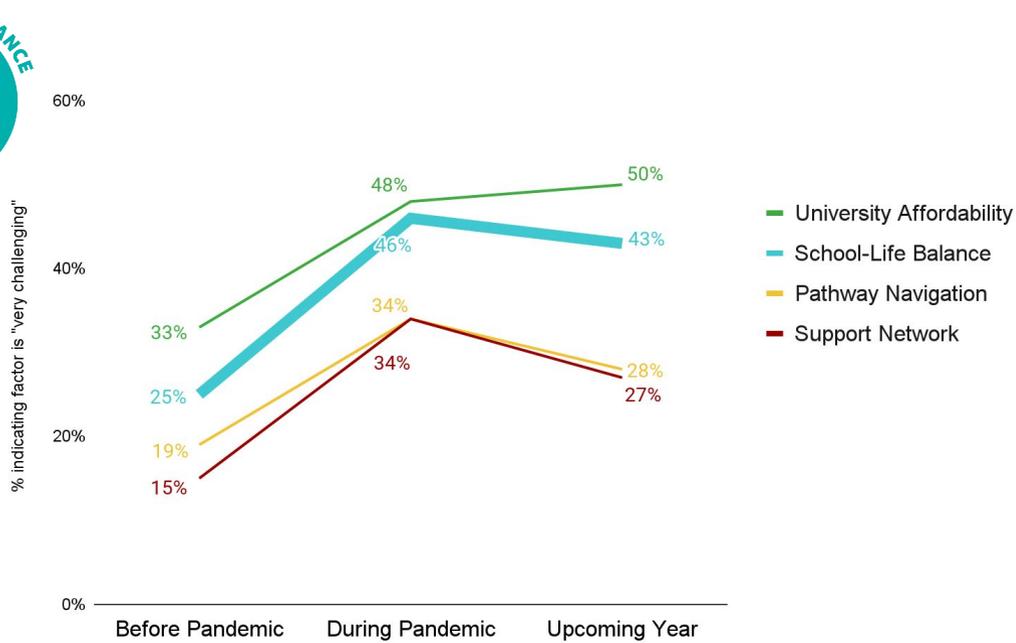
Hispanic/Latina/o/x students are most likely to indicate the challenge of University Affordability

Changes in the Challenge of University Affordability by Race/Ethnicity



The challenge of School-Life Balance rose substantially during the pandemic

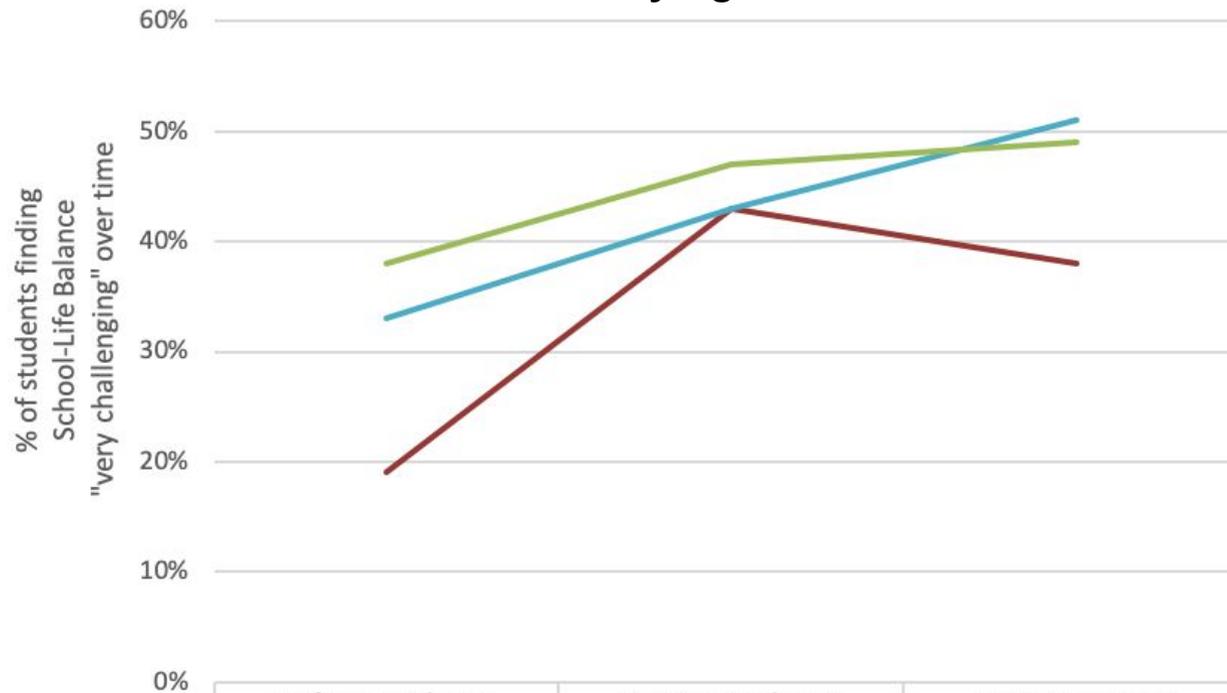
If everything will be closed my son will not be able to go to school, I will not be able to work and it will affect deeply my financial situation. Also, I will have problems studying because my son (who wants my attention all day long) will be always around me, and I will have to teach him myself when in fact I am not a teacher and don't know how to teach.



Students ages 26-49 continue to see an increase in the challenge of School-Life Balance



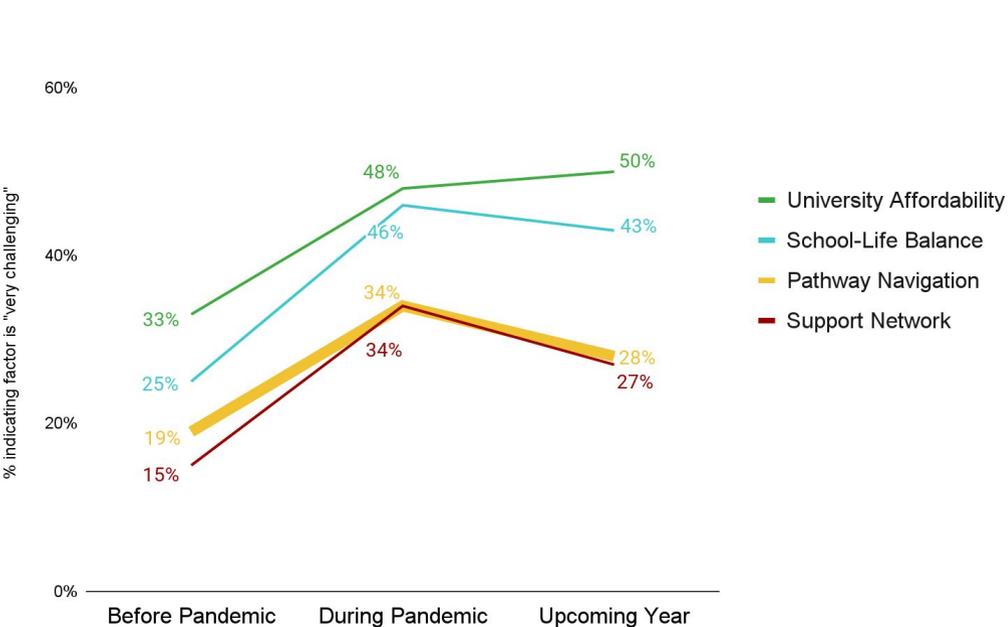
Changes in the Challenge of School-Life Balance by Age



	Before Pandemic	During Pandemic	Upcoming Year
Age 18-25 (n=3,369)	19%	43%	38%
Age 26-49 (n=2,183)	33%	43%	51%
Age 50+ (n=242)	38%	47%	49%

The challenge of Pathway Navigation rose during the pandemic, but is now trending back downwards

I was admitted to (a UC) for the Fall of 2020 but (the UC) withdrew my admission on the day of class registration saying I had to complete one more subject. I was communicating with them and had informed them because of COVID, office visits were not allowed, phones were off, and could not get a counselor to help me register for the class. I could not take that class. I had explained this scenario to (the UC) and they were okay until the day I needed to register for my classes they had me withdraw my application. My dream was crushed into million pieces...

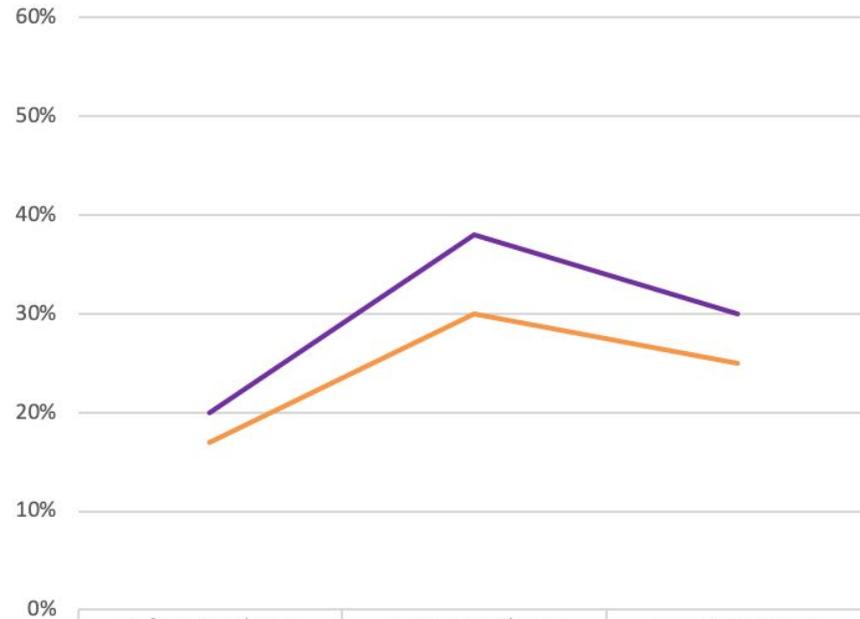


First generations students are more likely to indicate the challenge of Pathway Navigation than Non-First-Generation students



% of students finding Pathway Navigation "very challenging" over time

Changes in the Challenge of Pathway Navigation by First Generation Status



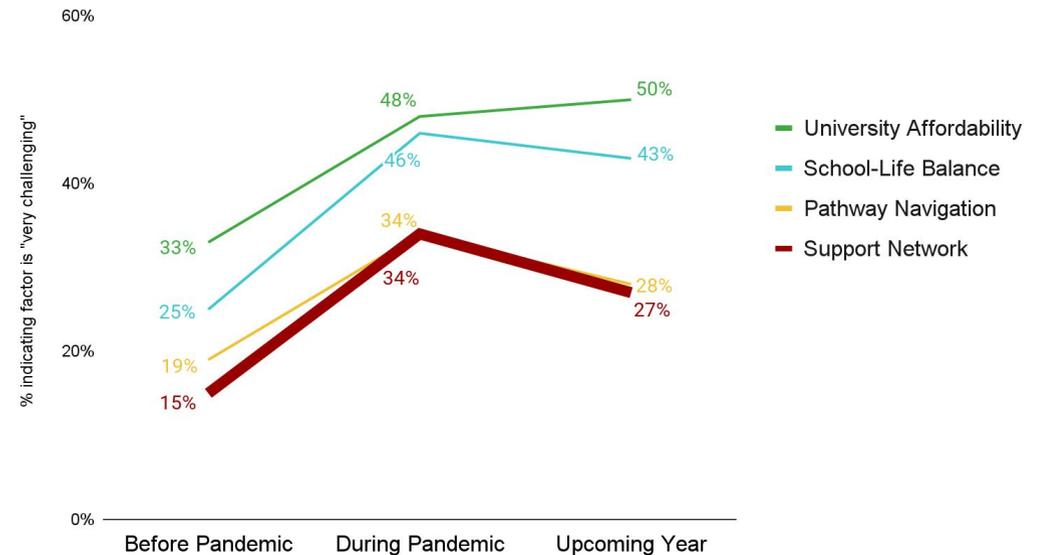
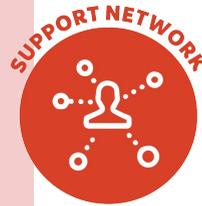
	Before Pandemic	During Pandemic	Upcoming Year
First Generation (n=2,761)	20%	38%	30%
Not First Generation (n=3,070)	17%	30%	25%



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The challenge of accessing a Support Network rose during the pandemic, but is now trending back downwards

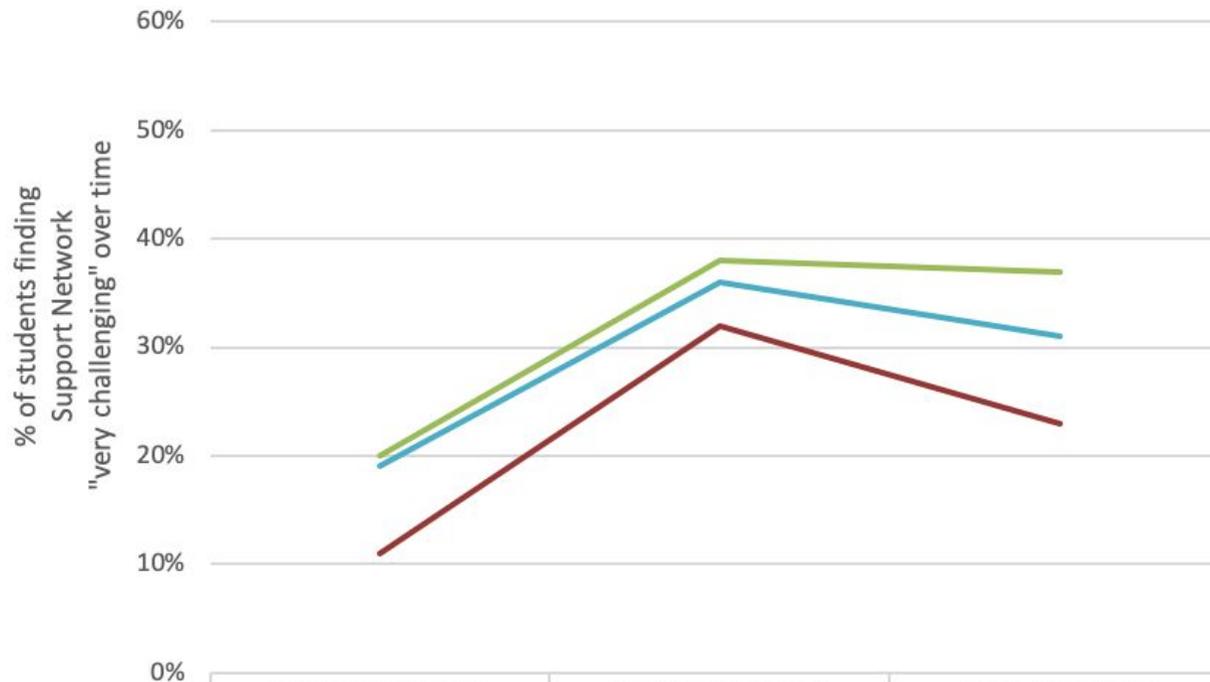
It has become harder to find support from friends and family to keep going. It seems more reasonable to stop trying to go back to school to pursue my interests and to find reasonable full-time work instead. Especially with myself and everyone having struggled with the pandemic, there is little support for doing something like school when working is so important right now.



Students ages 50+ are most likely to indicate the challenge of accessing a Support Network



Changes in the Challenge of Access to Support Network by Age



	Before Pandemic	During Pandemic	Upcoming Year
Age 18-25 (n=3,369)	11%	32%	23%
Age 26-49 (n=2,183)	19%	36%	31%
Age 50+ (n=242)	20%	38%	37%



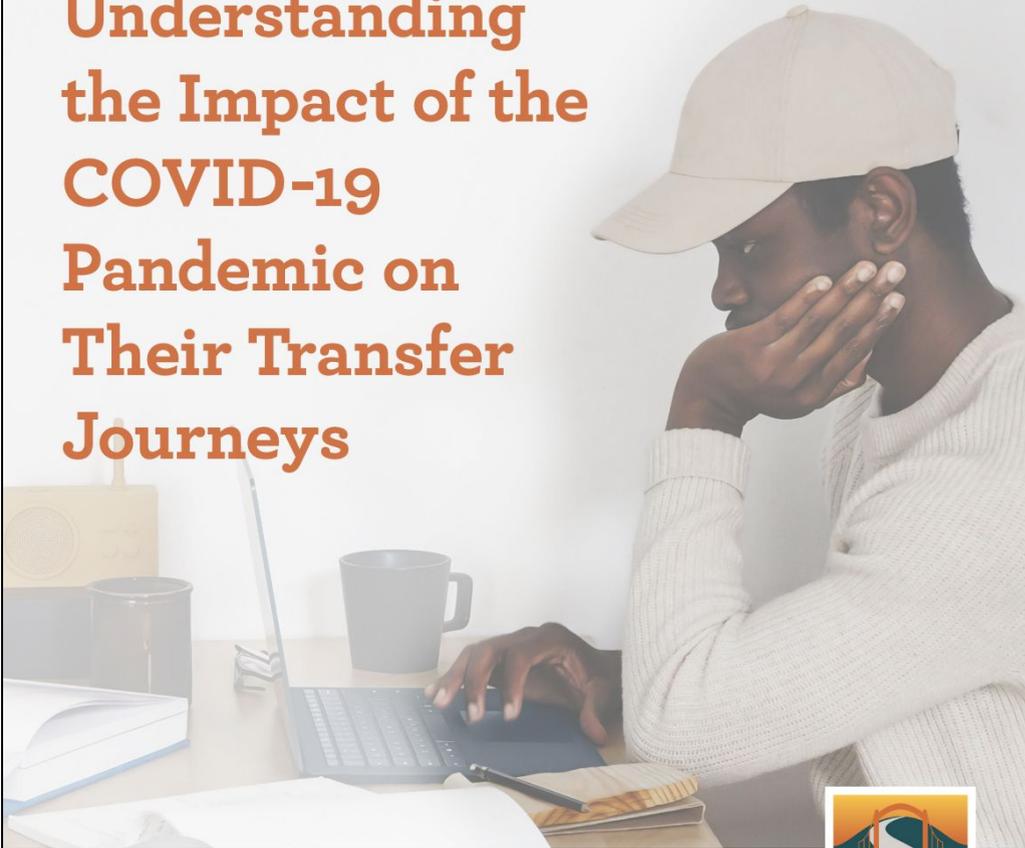
Now What?

- Get students back on their transfer path
 - Increase access to transfer resources
 - Track learning outcomes
 - Maintain student access to and awareness of relaxed transfer requirements
 - Provide holistic and integrated transfer support across students' community college journey
-

There is no precedence for this type of ordeal that we are going through so no one has the authority nor answers on how life will continue or go back to 'normal' after this and because of it, every day will be a continuous unknown and could possibly be another hindrance to progression.

-Student Survey Participant

Students Speak: Understanding the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Their Transfer Journeys



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October 2021

Transfer Leaders Speak: Keeping Transfer Students on Path during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond



The RP Group's *Through the Gate* research initiative focuses on identifying ways to increase transfer for a "high-leverage" group of community college students: those who are close to transfer but have not yet made it to university. *Through the Gate* launched in 2016 with funding from College Futures Foundation.

The RP Group's current COVID-19 *Pandemic Impact on Student Transfer* study (2021) builds on our original *Through the Gate* effort and includes...

- A spring 2021 statewide survey of nearly 8,000 California Community College students who completed ≥ 45 transferrable units as fall 2020
- Focus groups with students who both made it through the gate to university during this time as well as those who abandoned their transfer plans
- Interviews with transfer practitioners at colleges rated highly by students for their transfer services during the pandemic



This brief summarizes these interview insights, offering transfer practitioners and higher education leaders practical ideas for advancing transfer student retention and completion during these turbulent times.

¹ Insert reference to technical brief

² The RP Group interviewed transfer leaders at Berkeley City College, Cuesta College, College of San Mateo, Norco College, and Santa Ana College. While all fell within the upper quartile, we did not simply select the top five institutions rated highly by students as we wanted to ensure diversity in size and location.

Transfer Leaders Speak: Keeping Transfer Students on Path during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond
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Be a Transfer Advocate: How Student Support Professionals Can Help Students Address University Affordability Concerns



Students participating in the RP Group's *Through the Gate* transfer study cited **university affordability** as their top obstacle among four key factors impacting their transfer capacity — regardless of age, gender, or racial/ethnic background (see figure). Students reported confusion about the true cost of university and concerns about expenses outside of tuition. And, they had limited understanding about financial assistance options, including and beyond financial aid.

Students also shared that support professionals — counselors, advisors, and student services staff — are vital to providing the encouragement and information needed to transfer, including how to finance their baccalaureate. At the same time, community colleges cannot do this work alone. University involvement and intersegmental partnerships are also key to addressing transfer students' financial concerns.

Drawing on students' input, the RP Group and the California Community Colleges Chief Student Services Officers Association (CSSOA)¹ offer student support leaders and practitioners across segments the following ideas for helping students understand that achieving a bachelor's degree is something they can financially attain.²



Student Transfer Capacity-Building Framework

Community Colleges

- Articulate that *all* student support professionals — not just financial aid representatives — have a role to play in addressing students' financial concerns, and provide professional development to help practitioners know where to direct students for related information and resources
- Educate students about the basic differences between the cost of community college and university, including tuition, fees, and other associated expenses
- Help students access and use resources such as college-based true cost calculators, the California Student Aid Commission's *Student Expense Budget* (<https://www.csac.ca.gov/post/student-expense-budget>), and the US Department of Education's College Affordability and Transparency Center (<https://collegecost.ed.gov/>)
- Inform students about financial aid options when they are relevant in their journey (i.e., as they approach the transfer gate) and how they are similar or different at the community college and



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Q & A



Thank You!

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