

# Approaching the Intersection of Tradition & Innovation: Charting New Paths in Student Diversification at Liberal Arts Colleges



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## Presenters

**Rob S. Boone**, Chief of Staff, Columbia College (MO)

**Jason Cohen**, Higher Education Research Advisor, Hanover Research

**Peter Senkbeil**, Vice President & Special Assistant to the President,  
Concordia University Irvine (CA)

## Chair

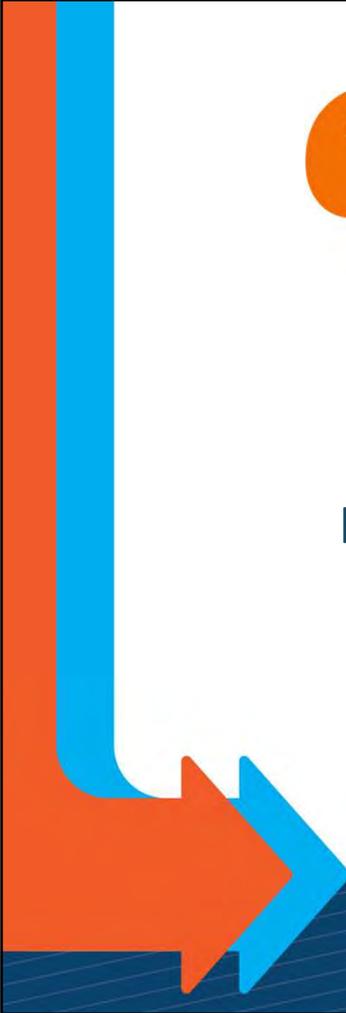
**Graciela Caneiro-Livingston**, Provost, Nebraska Wesleyan University (NE)

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“

“What if instead we say: These are our students, these are the strengths and the weaknesses they bring to our campus, now, how do we have to adapt so that they can learn and succeed?”

”

**Dr. Nathan D. Grawe**

*Professor of Economics at  
Carleton College*

*Author of The Agile College*

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# Case Study: Columbia College (MO)



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## Columbia College at a Glance



- 1851: Founded Christian Female College
- 1970: Transitioned to co-ed; changed name to Columbia College
- 1973: Established nationwide program serving adult and military-affiliated students
- 2000: Began offering online education
- Today:
  - Top-10 military friendly school
  - Top-10 military spouse friendly school
  - 1st to receive Silver Star Family of America Designation
  - Half of current CC students and 20,000 + alumni are connected to the military

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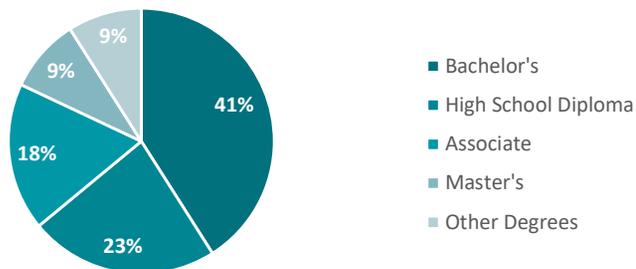
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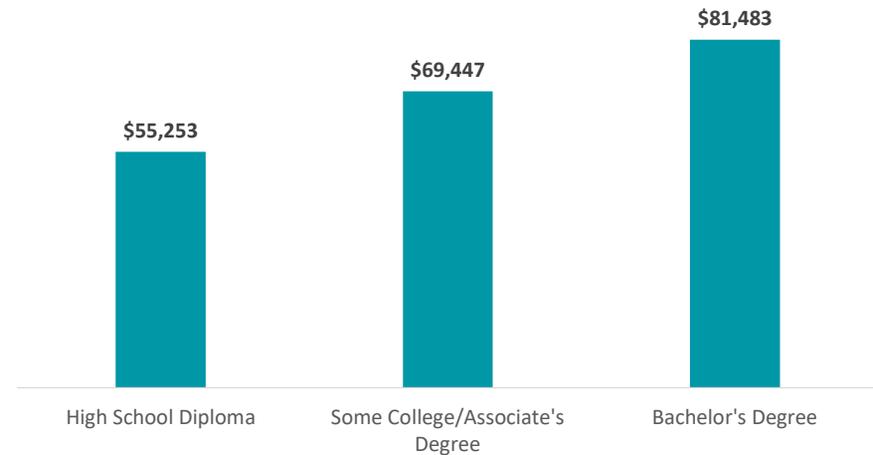
## General Military Demographics & Statistics

- 50% of military personnel have a **bachelor's degree** or higher
- 41% of military personnel have obtained a **high school or associate's degree** as their highest degree
- Less than 1/5 (19%) of those **without bachelor's degrees** report that access to **military educational benefits** drives their decisions.
- However, more than 1/3 of respondents with **some college but no degree** indicate that access to military educational benefits drives their decisions.



Source: [Zippia](#)

Annual median income drives educational decisions:



## Background & Previous Benchmark Research



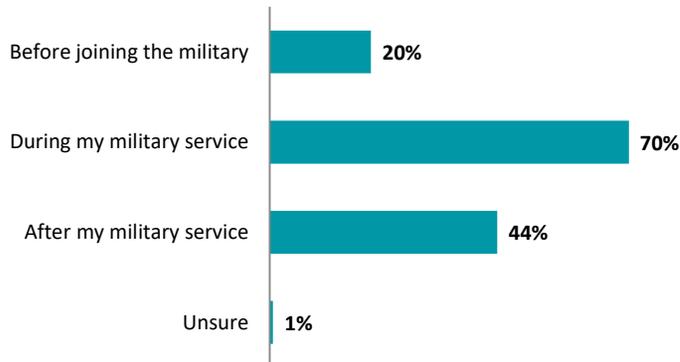
Develop **targeted career services messaging** directed at military and veteran students.



Incorporate engaging **visual content fitted to Columbia College audiences, geographies, and areas of program strength.**

### When Students Take Higher Ed. Courses

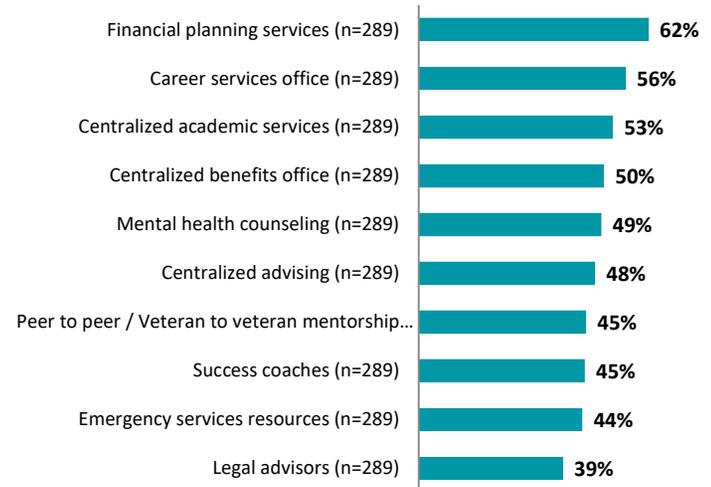
- Most planned to or took courses **during** their military service
- Only 20 percent planned to or took courses **before** joining the military



Note: n=289

### Importance of Types of Services

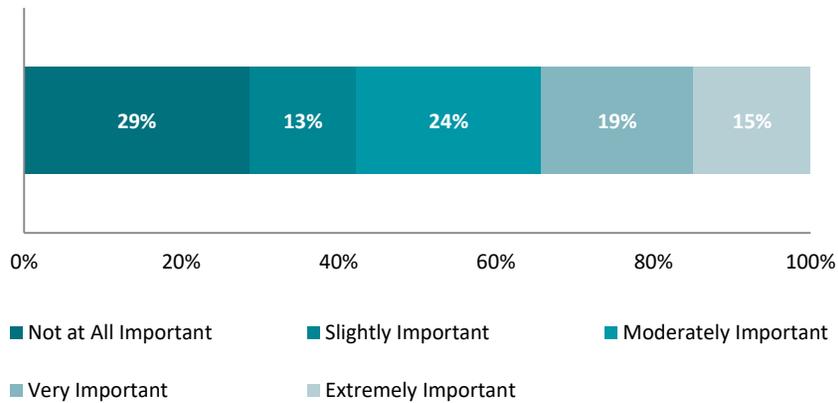
- **Financial planning services** were the most important type of support according to those surveyed with 62 percent
- **Career services** were second, with 56 percent



Note: n=287

### Importance of In-Person vs. Online

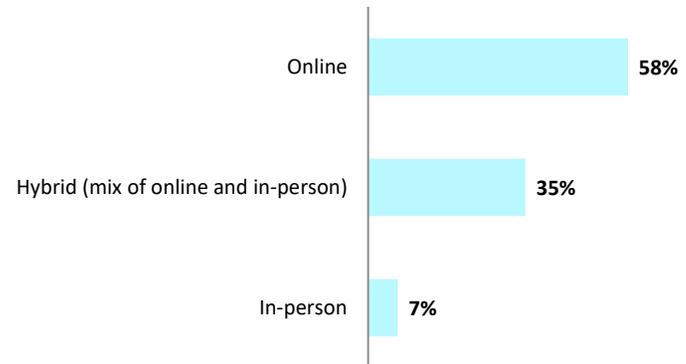
Significantly more current students (38%) than prospective ones (15%) report that it is **not at all important** that their program be in-person.



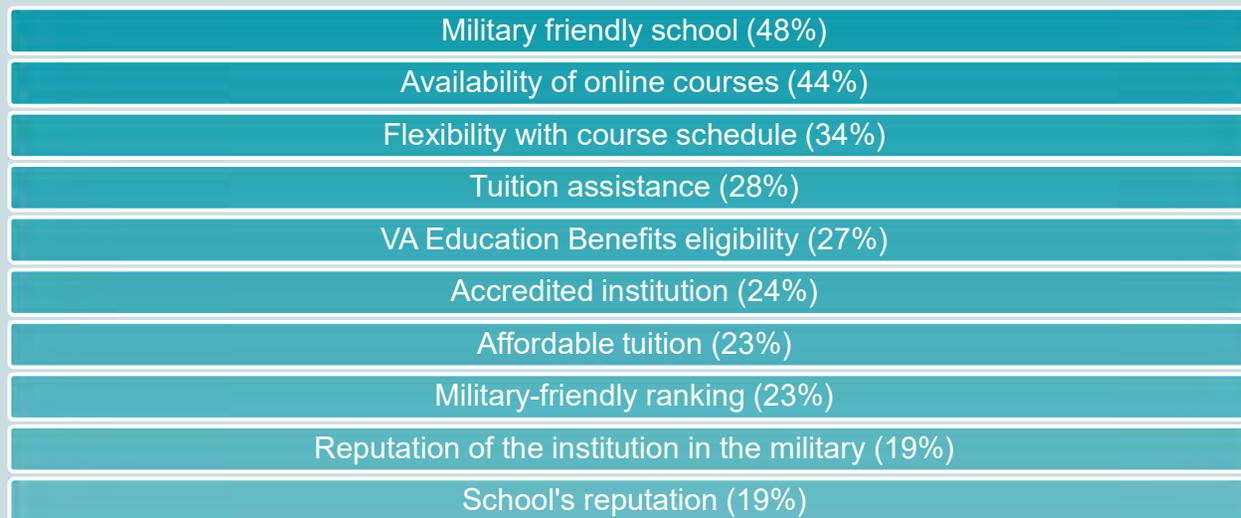
### Delivery Method of Courses Planned or Taken

**Online delivery** was preferred by a large percentage

In-person courses **were not favored** relative to more flexible options

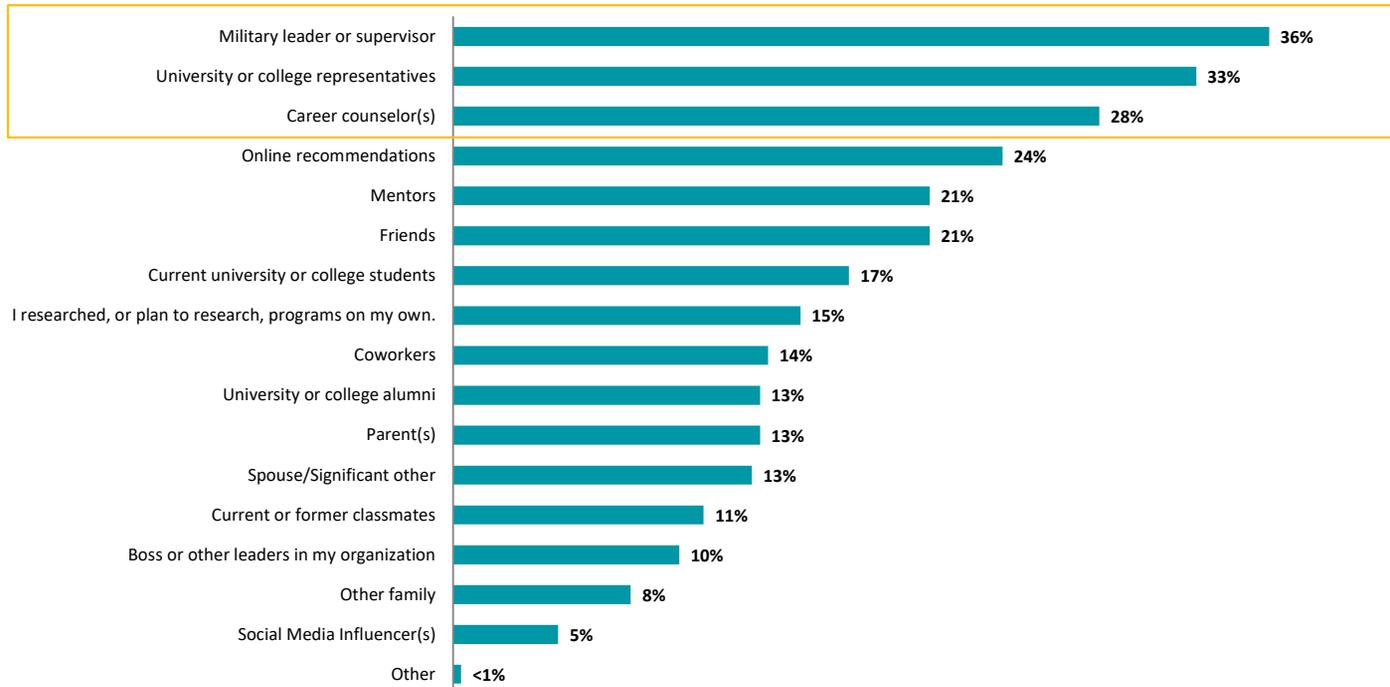


## Top-10 Student Enrollment Drivers

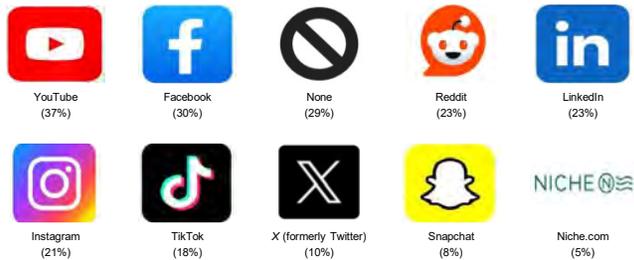


Note: Among currently enrolled students. Question included "select all that apply" option, so numbers total more than 100%; n=173

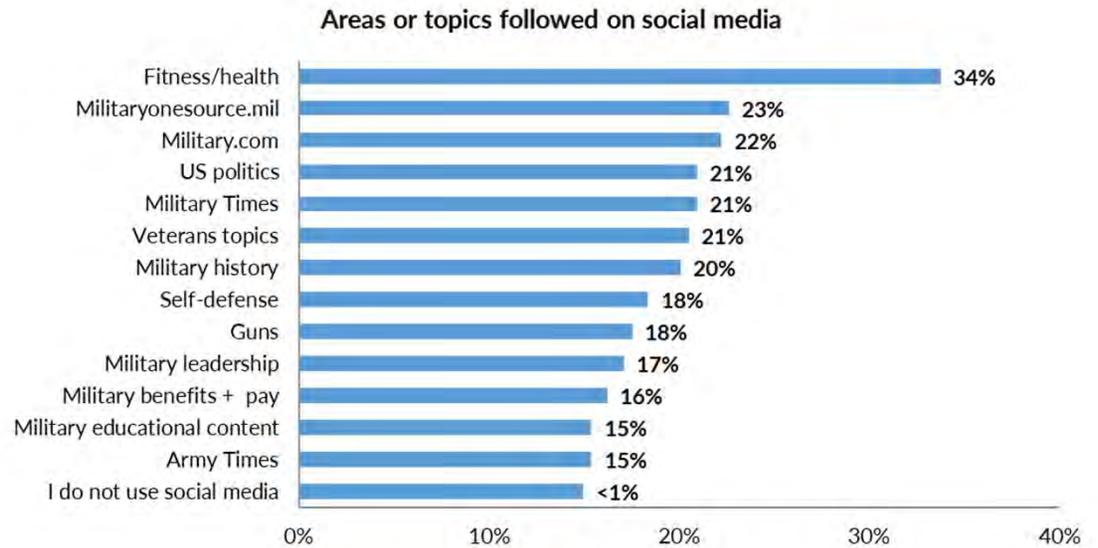
## Sources Consulted When Researching and Applying to Programs



### Top Ten Social Media Sites Used to Research Programs



### Top Social Media Interest Areas



Note: "Select all that apply"; numbers total more than 100%; n=283.

## Takeaways

- Military personnel with **some college experience** prioritize education benefits
- Most plan to or take courses **during their service**, and they aim to **increase their earning potential**
- **In-person** courses are **less favored** by military personnel
- **Military-friendly schools, online course availability, and flexibility** are top reasons for choosing an institution
- **Military leaders/supervisors and university representatives** are the primary sources consulted when researching schools
- **Social media** channels with military-specific foci, particularly YouTube and Facebook, are widely used among military personnel

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# Case Study: Concordia University Irvine (CA)



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CONCORDIA  
UNIVERSITY  
IRVINE

**Embracing the HSI Mission  
at a Liberal Arts University**



## Concordia – An Overview

- A Lutheran Liberal Arts University, opened 1976
- Located in Orange County, California
- 1,300 traditional undergraduates – residential
- 2,300 graduate and non-trad (mostly online)
- 40 undergraduate majors and programs
  - Liberal Arts, Business, Education, Nursing
- Crossed the 25% HSI threshold in 2019
- Currently, 31% of undergrads are Hispanic
- Received our first \$3M Title V DSHI grant in 2022
- Received two additional HSI grants in 2023
- Five-year grants – US Education Department

Concordia University Irvine



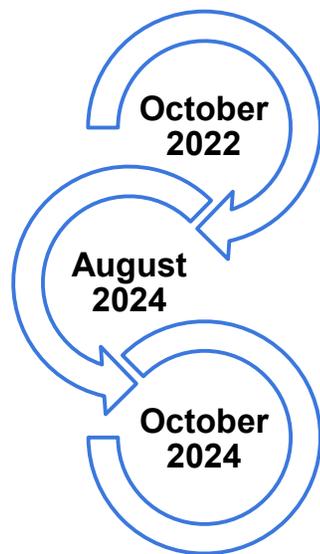
## Avanzando – DHSI Grant

- Grant goals for Hispanic and low-income students:
  - Increase enrollment and early success
  - Increase number of transfer students
  - create sense of belonging
  - Increase retention and graduation rates
- Grant activities:
  - Construct a student success center
  - Expand summer bridge programs
  - Provide success coaching, tutoring, career counseling
  - Professional development for faculty and staff
- Results to date:
  - Completed success center; enhanced summer bridge programs
  - Hired four full-time staff to provide student services
  - Offered monthly professional development lunches

Concordia University Irvine



## BACKGROUND: CUI ASKS HANOVER TO CONDUCT A PROGRAM ASSESSMENT FOR AVANZANDO GRANT-FUNDED STUDENT SUCCESS PROGRAM



*Concordia University Irvine wins a 5-year, \$3 million Department of Education Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) grant.*

*CUI and Hanover field a survey of student participants to assess their perceptions of the HSI Grant-funded "Avanzando: Access and Success" initiative.*

*Hanover delivers findings showing how students have perceived the program thus far and highlighting areas for improvement or additional investments.*

## PROJECT OVERVIEW: SURVEY AUDIENCE AND METHODOLOGY

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SURVEY GOALS



**UNDERSTAND ENROLLED STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING SUPPORT SERVICES ASSOCIATED WITH THE AVANZANDO GRANT**

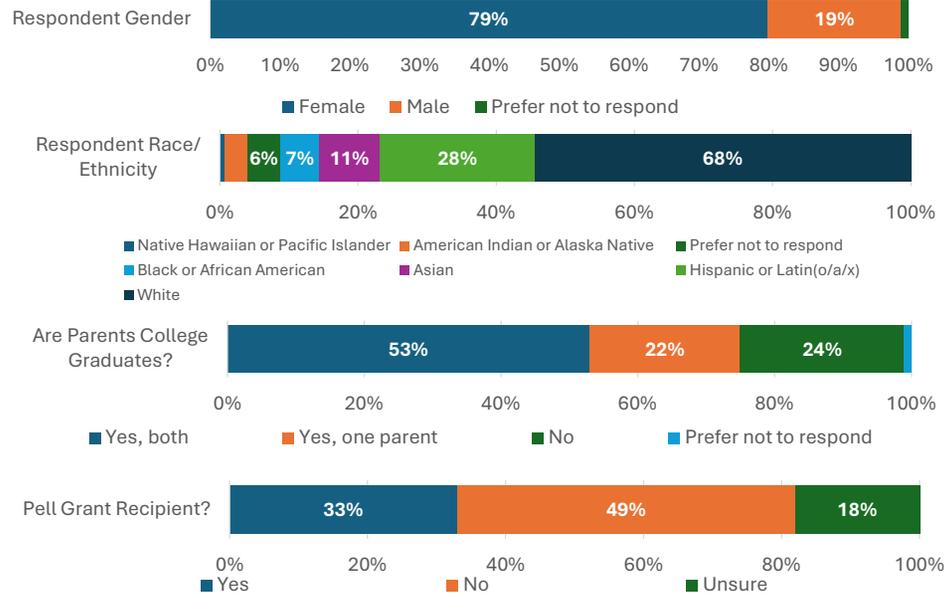


**ASSESS THE EXPERIENCE AND LEVEL OF SATISFACTION THAT ENROLLED STUDENTS HAVE WITH STUDENT SERVICES**



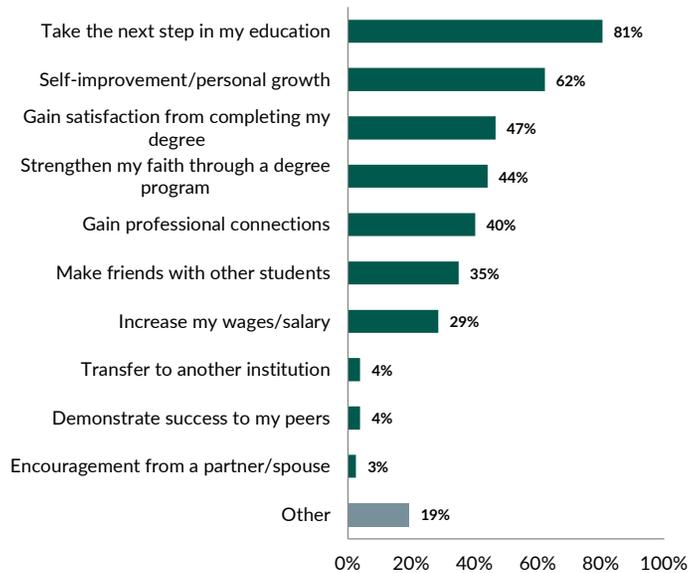
**IDENTIFY FACTORS THAT SHAPED RESPONDENTS' ENROLLMENT DECISIONS**

### STUDENT RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS – 77 RESPONDENTS AFTER DATA CLEANING



## Respondent Reasons for Enrolling at Concordia University Irvine

What are the main reasons you decided to pursue a degree at CUI? Please select up to five options. (n=77)

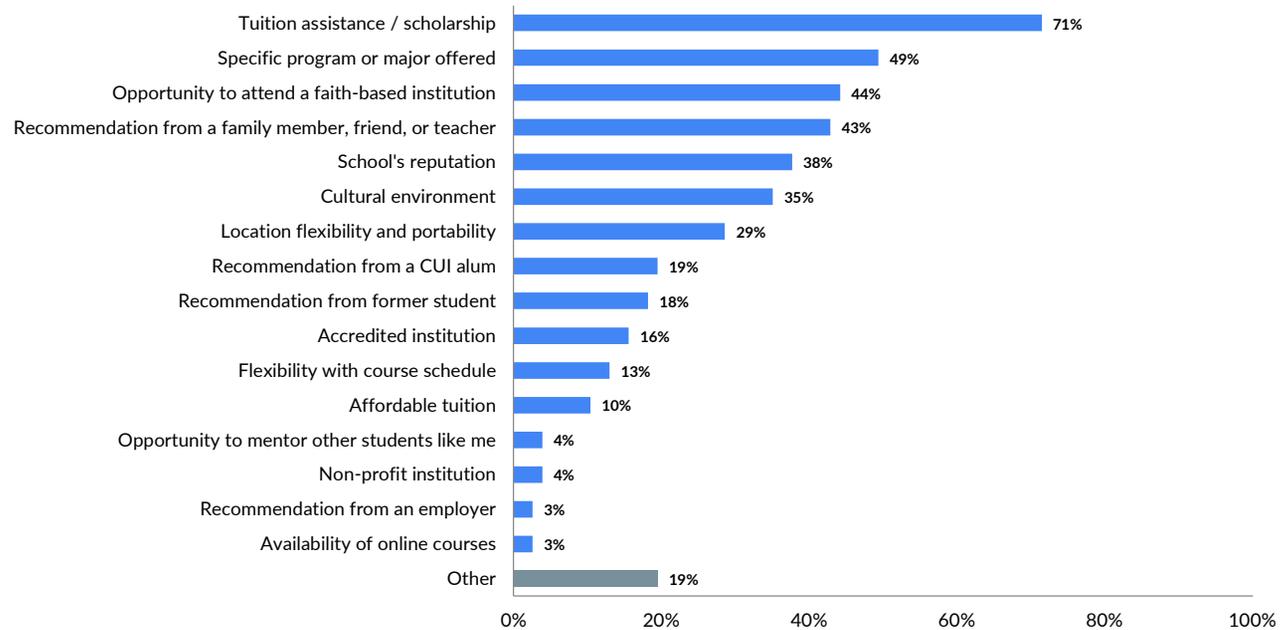


Which of the following do you hope to experience as a result of continuing your education at CUI? Please select all that apply. (n=77)



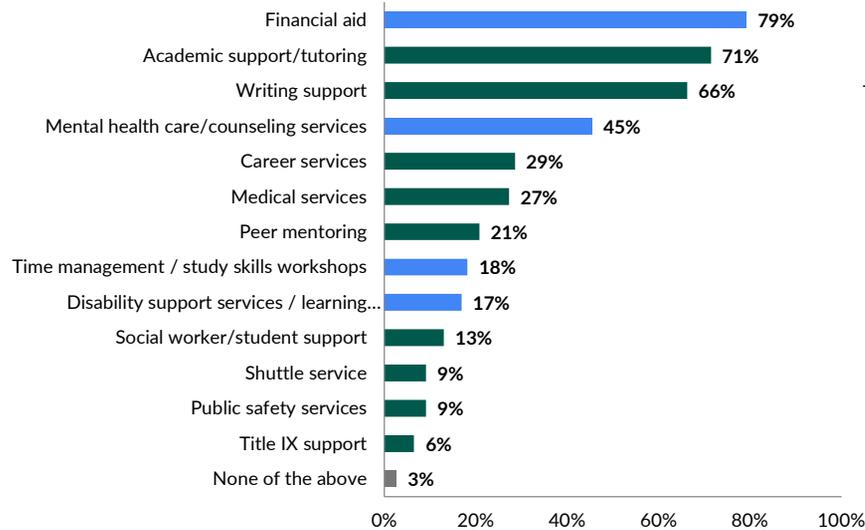
## Factors Influencing Respondents' Enrollment Decisions

What motivated you to enroll at CUI?  
Please select all that apply. (n=77)

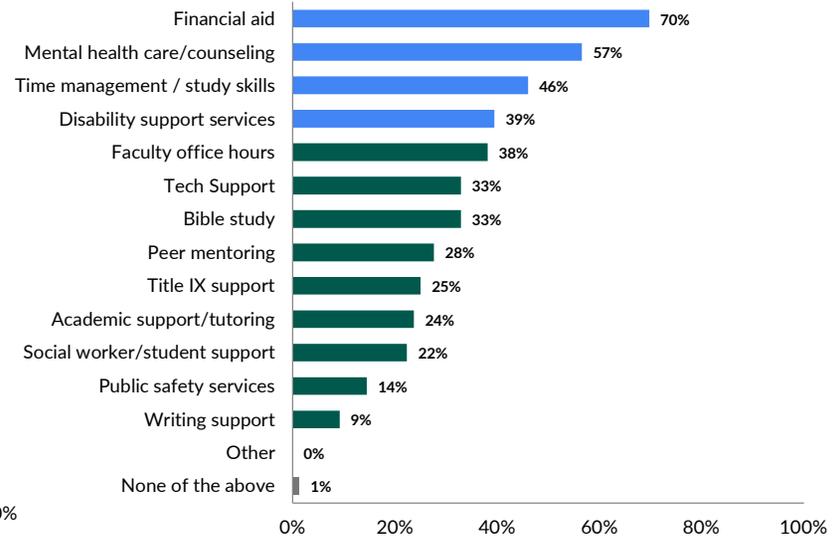


## Respondent Usage of Support Services and Preferences for Pre-Semester Offerings

Which of the following support services have you used since you enrolled at CUI? Please select all that apply. (n=77)



Which of the following support services do you think should be made available to accepted students before classes start? Please select all that apply. (n=76)



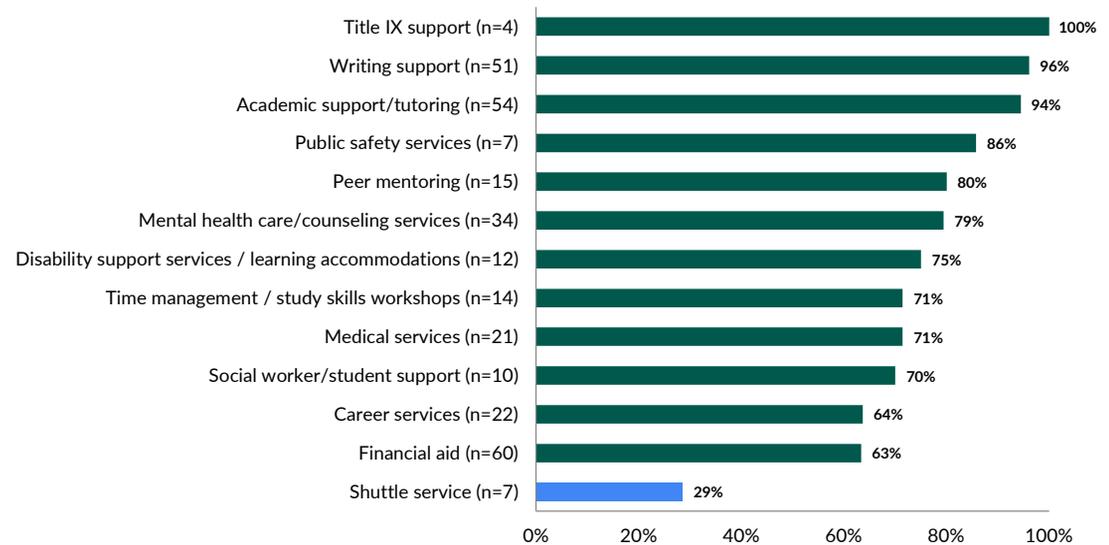
## Respondent Ratings of Student Support Services

***“The counseling services has been a great resource for me. The only reason I do it is because they make it affordable for the students. This has helped me seek out mental health services that I never would have before.”***

*Open-ended comment*

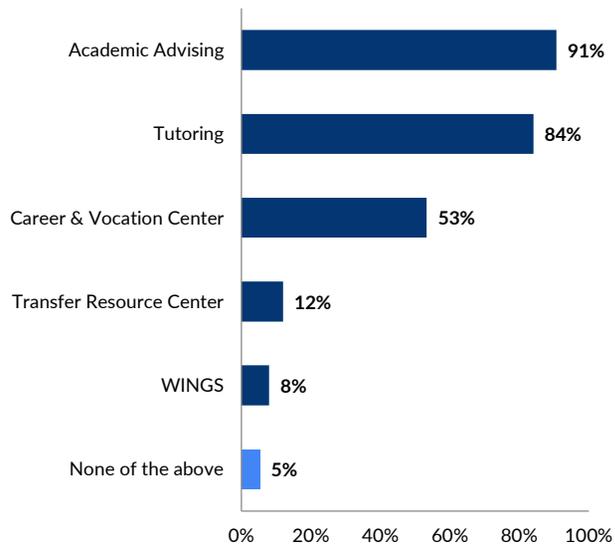
How would you rate the following support services?

% Good + % Excellent

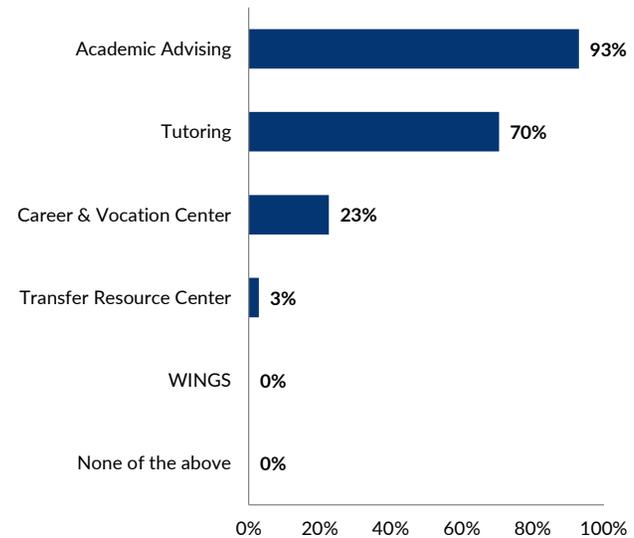


## Respondent Usage of Core Academic and Career Support Services

With which of these student resources are you familiar? Please select all that apply. (n=75)



Which of these resources have you accessed or utilized? Please select all that apply. (n=71)



## In-Depth Interview Participants' Perceptions of the WINGS Program

### Preparing to Study and Making Connections

*"I began my involvement with wings. Last year. I moved in a little bit earlier than other students just to get some knowledge about campus life as well as understanding how to use the resources here and also how I can connect better with the school. This also included [opportunities to connect] with other students [who] were Hispanic as well that are in a similar boat as I was. And I like that I was able to relate with some and bond with them too."*

*WINGS Participant ID1*

### Learning Core Academic Skills and Feeling Supported

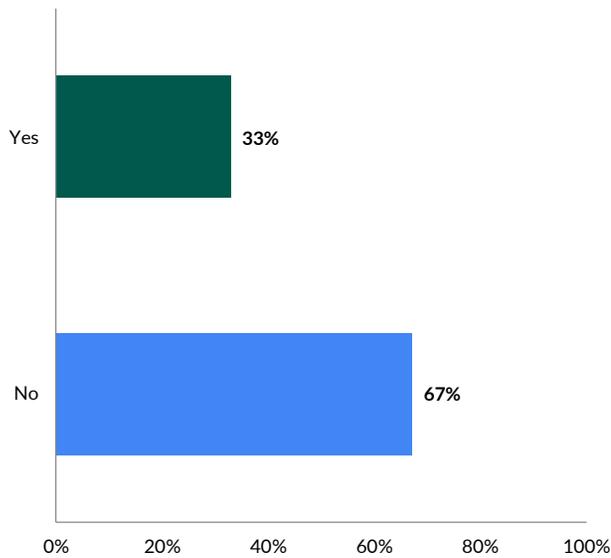
*"A definite benefit would be all the workshops that was provided for us throughout the program. It really helped me going into my freshman year. One of the workshops was a writing workshop and they taught us APA format and MLA format and that was a definite benefit of joining the program. And another benefit I would say is just getting to know the campus before everyone else...."*

*...I have a closer family besides from my family at home, so being here, getting involved in all these programs makes me feel like I have almost a second family away from my family."*

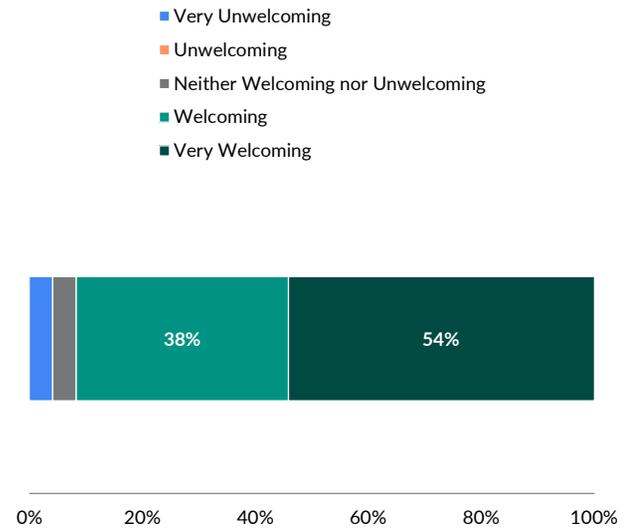
*WINGS Participant ID1*

## Respondent Perceptions of the Unity Center

Have you engaged with the Unity Center? (n=73)

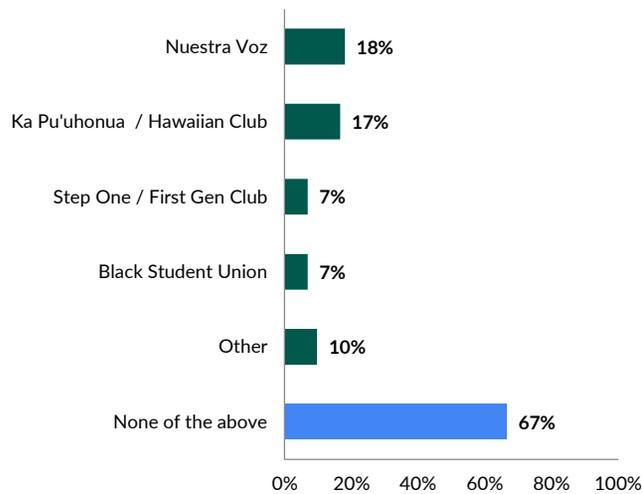


How welcoming or unwelcoming did you find the Unity Center? (n=24)



## Heritage Club Participation and Perceptions of Student Belonging

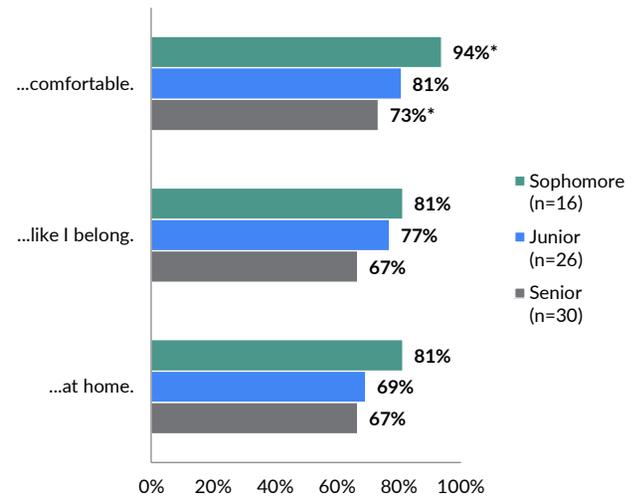
Which of the following clubs have you engaged with while at CUI? Please select all that apply.  
(n=72)



*“...these programs really helped me find others and...showed me that I'm not alone and that...we're all in this together and that I have a spot here at Concordia for a reason and that I belong here.”*

*WINGS Participant IDI*

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? At CUI, I feel...  
% Agree + % Strongly Agree



## One In-Depth Interview Participant Recounted the University's Response to Her Mother's Passing

### Learning Core Academic Skills and Feeling Supported

*“During this last year and a half, I've had, like my mom, was battling with cancer and basically not too long ago, she recently passed away. And **I feel like the University and overall – I feel like specifically the unity center, like the first generation people – have been super supportive and it's something that I will forever be grateful for and like just them reaching out and like giving me little cards and letting me know that I'm – they're there for me and that. Like if I ever need anything they're there for me.** So. I think that's something I'm super grateful for and that shows me how much I matter here. and it makes me feel really cared for.”*

*WINGS Participant ID1*

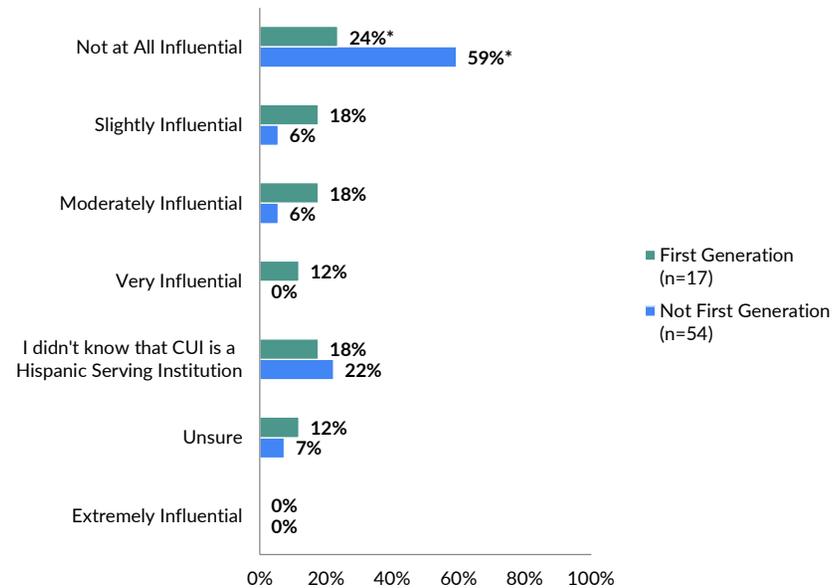
## Impacts of CUI's Designation as a Hispanic Serving Institution

**One Hispanic WINGS Participant Interview Respondent Described How the Unity Center has Made Her Feel Welcome on Campus**

***“Honestly, I really like this school. Like, it sort of feels like a community to me just because it’s...a very small campus and everyone kind of knows you and you have that opportunity to build those type of like bonds with one another. And then last year, I was a commuter. And this year, I live here on campus, so I feel like being a commuter was kind of hard for me. But the Unity Center was like a perfect place to...get to know people and connect with one another.”***

*WINGS Participant IDI*

How influential was CUI's status as a Hispanic Serving Institution in your decision to attend?



# Takeaways

- Students want support not only in financial aid **prior to the first term**, but also in areas like **counseling services + college skills**.
- **Important student enrollment factors** reflect campus culture.
- **If you build it, they still may not come**; refine and iterate programming to appeal to students.
- **Your data are human**. Critical data often require more than one source or methodology.

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**Q&A**



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**Thank you for attending  
this session!**



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