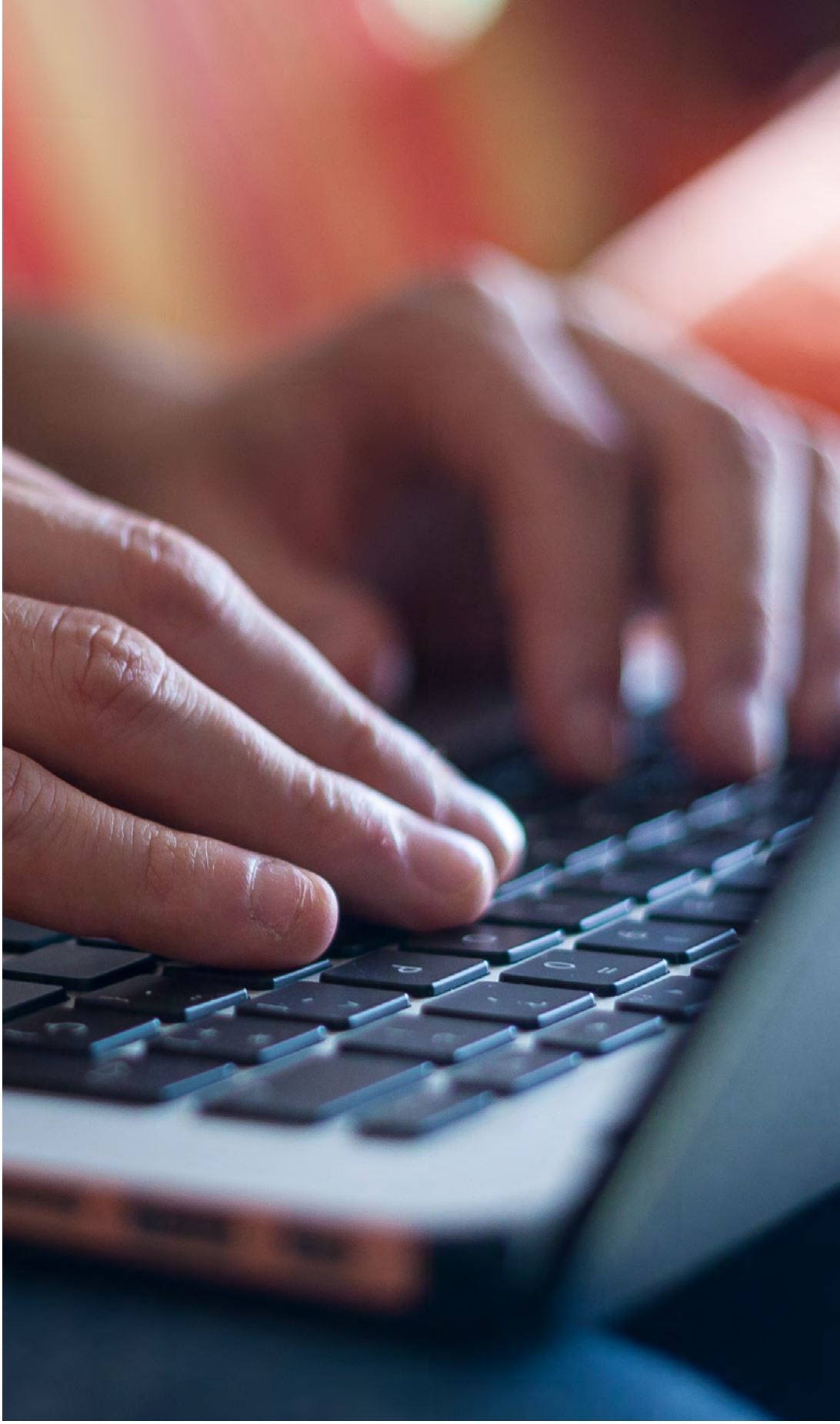
# STUDENT SPEAK 2020

## STUDENT VOICES INFORMING EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES



everylearner everywhere

GlobalMindED

THE EQUITY PROJECT LLC

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since mid-March, the least resourced students and their families have been most impacted by COVID-19. The Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) Indicators report of 2019 pointed to many alarming statistics when it was published in early spring 2020, including the fact that students who are both low income and First Gen have a 21% college completion rate in six years. The lowest income quartile cites degree attainment at 13% while 62% of the highest/wealthiest quartile attain bachelors degrees. Add to that the 2020 upheaval of employment fallout, the need to leave campus, tech and broadband insecurity, the move to remote learning in the spring semester, the uncertain fall semester landscape, and the revelation of generational racial injustices, and we face the prediction by a McKinsey report issued in June that this already fragile number of diverse graduates is likely to put an entire generation of learners/workers at risk. These promising students constitute our nation's diverse talent pool, and the circumstances they face with college, learning, the digital divide, mental health, family and financial issues—ranging from challenging to catastrophic—endanger their ability to learn and to access the career pipeline for which they are so sorely needed. Supporting the persistence, tenacity, faith, and endurance that these already at-risk students need at a time like this must be a top priority of policy makers, college leaders, and community and foundation funders. Nothing short of our nation's educational, emotional and economic viability is at stake.

In the following pages, we document a national snapshot of diverse college students, including many who are first-generation. We show that while these students have the greatest need to be heard and served, their voices are often neither included nor understood, a finding that for this group held fairly consistently across the country and across various types of institutions. We call on leaders at the highest level at all types of institutions across the nation (PWI, Land Grant, Private, State, R1, HBCU's, HSI's, MSI's, community colleges, on-line) to document these patterns by students across institutions, so that the educational leaders have the data necessary to respond to the most at-risk students during and after this crisis in ways that substantively address and promote equity.

This unique opportunity in time, at all levels of academia, government, business, and funders, sets a new, needed standard of listening to students, especially those with the greatest need and financial challenge. Achieving this new standard can help us to know, to listen, to respond, and to resource those students who have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-related digital, personal, health, professional, familial and emotional/

social challenges, especially in African American, Hispanic and Native populations. With students as our guides, they share these needs:

- Faculty who are trained in digital learning software and strategies and who demonstrate the ability to be student-centered and responsive
- Institutions to choose and implement platforms and software that provide as consistent and straightforward an experience as possible to learners
- Advisors and staff who, through their support of learners, can elevate value for an online-learning experience students find hard to justify financially
- Online access to workplace and career readiness support that helps them build a bridge to internships and jobs they fear won't be available in this climate or anytime soon
- Faculty who are educated on how to work with the least resourced in matters of D&I, equity, patterns of systemic racism, First Gen, and poverty cultures
- Financial help from institutions that can partner with funders to minimize student debt and increase business connections for strong jobs with their degrees
- Tech platforms and software providers to focus on simple, straightforward user interface and to engage student users in the development process, perhaps by building in feedback loops, so that students' lived digital experience and challenges are considered and incorporated.
- Peer to peer and peer to mentor support groups/clubs/activities virtually to be connected in ways that class alone may not allow.
- Access to technology and broadband for students learning from home who are tech and/or broadband insecure.
- Privacy and anonymity as some students are learning and studying in conditions filled with family members in small spaces or worse, those who are couch surfing or homeless. Zoom and other technologies reveal these realities to student's classmates, as well as showing students attending virtual classes in wealthy surroundings.

Our next step is with 25 Student Speak Ambassadors for GlobalMindED/Every Learner Everywhere who are now gathering through their networks of friends, wider inputs of need with 250+ unique inputs and feedback in a student to student model. We will share this report on December 1 as a follow up to this initial summary of the experience of the 102 Student Speak participants.

# LEARNING BETWEEN THE LINES

- Students felt spun out and unprepared to finish virtually as colleges scrambled to onboard faculty to digital delivery in spring 2020.
- Low income and First Gen were most adversely impacted by digital challenges as well as housing, food issues, job or family losses, transportation issues, and health worries for self/family.
- Students greatest support was from peers and, sometimes but not often enough, faculty. Colleges need more peer to peer networks and faculty trained in student facing issues of crisis and poverty and general, practical support.

# CALL TO ACTION BY AUDIENCE

## PRESIDENTS AND ADMINISTRATION

- Quarterly or monthly meetings with First Gen and low income students.
- Co-create an agenda and action plan with them.
- Listen to their issues and commit to solving them with your leadership team.
- Give students a voice and a platform—they are your D&I future.

## FACULTY

- Become schooled in digital and emotional/social student success strategies for low income/First Gen and students overall.
- Understand frameworks of privilege and lack outside the academy walls of privilege and power.
- In this crisis, students will have to come first before tenure, research and promotions.

## ADVISORS/SUPPORT STAFF

- Provide crisis coaching and guidance.
- Recruit student coaches and peers who are upper classmen to help, or vets, adult learners, or others.
- Ask questions to build rapport/connection with most vulnerable students and all Pell eligible.

## FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS

- Have sessions by audience and interest-affinity groups to get to know each other.
- Set standard for all faculty and administrators to work with freshman to know and access basic needs of First Gen and diverse students.
- Provide time for student voices and opinions in class and in written assignments tied to current events, BLM, Covid-19, sub challenges, etc.
- Assign newsletter like GlobalMindED for free daily access to role models, mentors, and other First Gen leaders.

## STUDENTS

- Form a strong bond with 1–3 students.
- Form a strong bond with at least 2 faculty.
- Use resources for mental health and other ways to stay strong, focused, motivated.

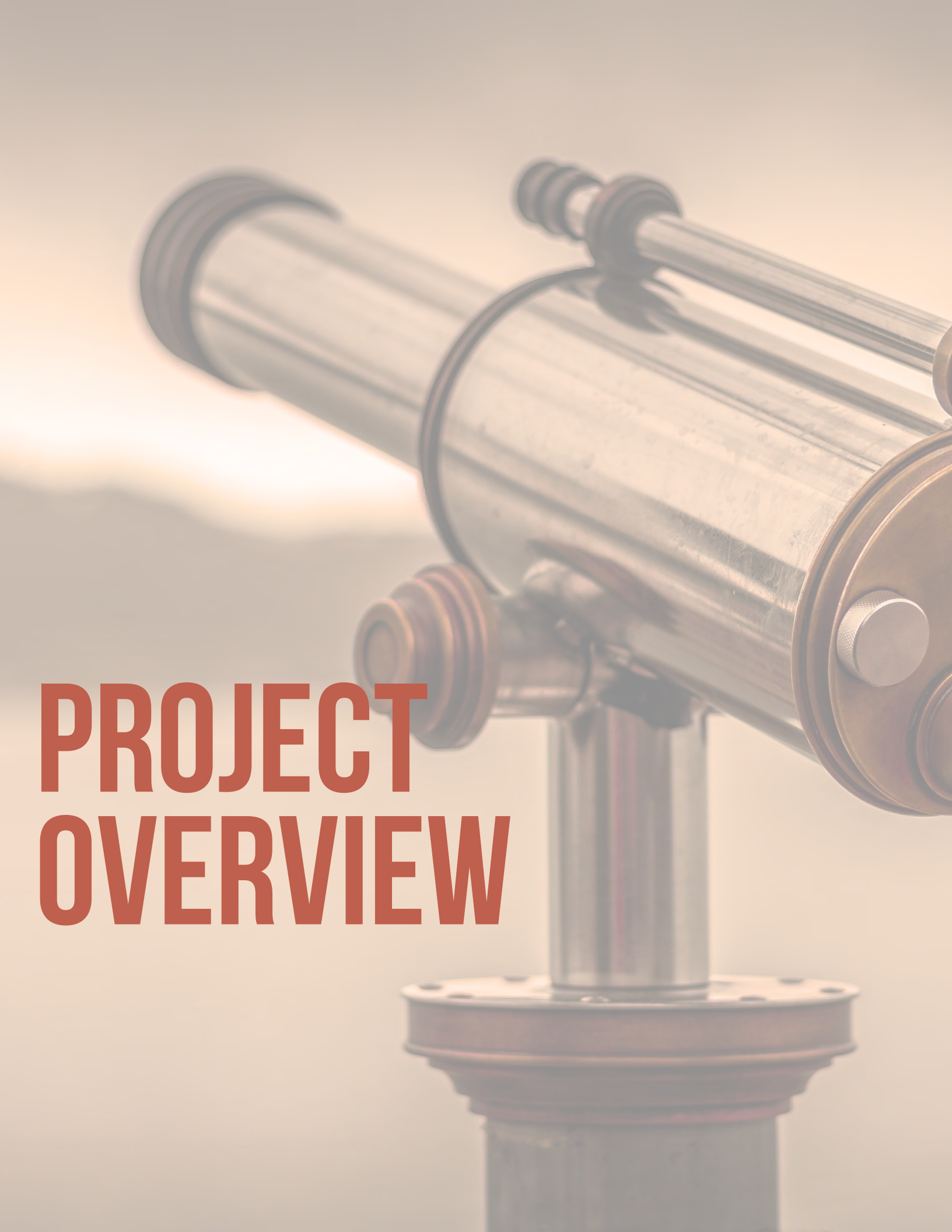
## POLICY MAKERS

- Equitable infrastructure providing broad access to everyone and tech giants to donate computers to student and/or institutions.
- Consider free transportation for students who need wifi that's unavailable at home.
- Increase commitment to job, work, and experience, where they can also carve out time for remote learning classes, saving hours of commuting on public transportation from school to work site to home.
- Consider Housing Authority programs for First Gen and low-income college students who don't have the safe space in a dorm this academic year and who have the added burden of childcare for younger siblings. These programs can provide technology and virtual college seniors and graduates to help students navigate these learning challenges remotely.
- Continue to provide work opportunities for students who have lost work on campus and/ or summer internships which did not become virtual. Virtual models can and should be led and encouraged by state departments of labor.

# STUDENTS SPEAK INSTITUTIONS REPRESENTED

**TOTAL STUDENTS: 102 • TOTAL SCHOOLS: 47 • NUMBER OF STATES: 22**

Arapahoe Community College
Bard College
Bentley
Bethune-Cookman University
Clark Atlanta University
Colorado Mesa University
Colorado State University Fort Collins
Colorado State University Pueblo
Community College of Denver
Eastern New Mexico University
El Paso Community College
Fort Lewis College
George Washington University
Georgetown University
Georgia Highlands College
Harford Community College
Jackson State University
Linfield University
Loyola Marymount University
Marshall University
Marymount University
Metropolitan State University of Denver
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Moorpark College
Motlow State Community College
North Carolina A&T University
North Carolina Central University
North Carolina State University
Northeastern Illinois
Regis University
Rutgers
San Jacinto Community College
Texas A&M University
Texas State University
Tougaloo College
University of Colorado Denver
University of Denver
University of Michigan
University of North Carolina Chapel Hill
University of Portland
University of Puerto Rico
University of Sourth Carolina
University of Southern Indiana
University of Tennessee at Chattanooga
University of Texas at Austin
West Virginia University Institute of Technology
William Paterson University



# PROJECT OVERVIEW

# PROJECT INTENT AND IMPORTANCE

In the August, 2019 Gallup publication, researchers found there to be a single issue consistently challenging campus leaders— the difficulties they face in serving the needs of the "New Majority" of college students. Dr. Elaine P. Maimon, president of Governors State University, in *Leading Academic Change: Vision, Strategy, Transformation*, defines the New Majority to include first-generation college students, students of color, adults, and military veterans. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges.

**This calls for immediate and focused attention and strategy to advance the retention, support and resilience of the New Majority.**

**This project set out to:**

- Expand Every Learner Everywhere's (ELE) understanding of the emerging student majority and their college experiences with advising, student success and digital learning by learning directly from them (Student Speak) through a variety of means including surveys, intensive workshops, and year-long follow ups.
- Seek input from a wide cross section of higher ed students attending diverse institutions ranging from community colleges to major research institutes, representing voices from as many states as possible and every audience of learners including Native, Latino/a, African-American, Caucasian Poor, Rural, LGBTQ+, Veterans, Returning Adults, Online, and ESL/Immigrant.
- Use the feedback to design systems to enhance college success and job readiness for this "New Majority" of students through GlobalMindED with a Responsive Plan based on the results of this work.
- Develop/deliver the Responsive Plan to improve first year success, internship and employment success through a high impact digital solution which we co-create with these students, including customization for each archetype of student who characterize the emerging majority.
- Through student focus groups, surveys, and other inputs the goal is to produce new learnings about students that help inform the foundation work on scaling transform-ation, particularly around student success and equity.

PROJECT
LEADERSHIP

# THE PROJECT CATALYSTS

**Dr. Jessica Rowland Williams** joined Every Learner Everywhere in October 2019. Prior to this role, she served as the Completion Grant Initiative project director for University Innovation Alliance. She also worked as program director in Georgia State University's Office of the Senior Vice President of Student Success. Prior to those roles, Williams was a diversity fellow at Princeton University's Office of Academic Affairs and Diversity, as well as program coordinator for the Princeton Summer Undergraduate Research Experience (PSURE). She holds a Ph.D. and an M.A. in Molecular Biology from Princeton University, and a Bachelor of Science in Biology from Spelman College. Through her personal and educational experiences, Jessica developed a passion for improving student outcomes among underserved, minority, and low income students. Jessica has devoted her career to advocating for equitable outcomes in U.S. higher education through advances in digital learning and studentcentered teaching practices.

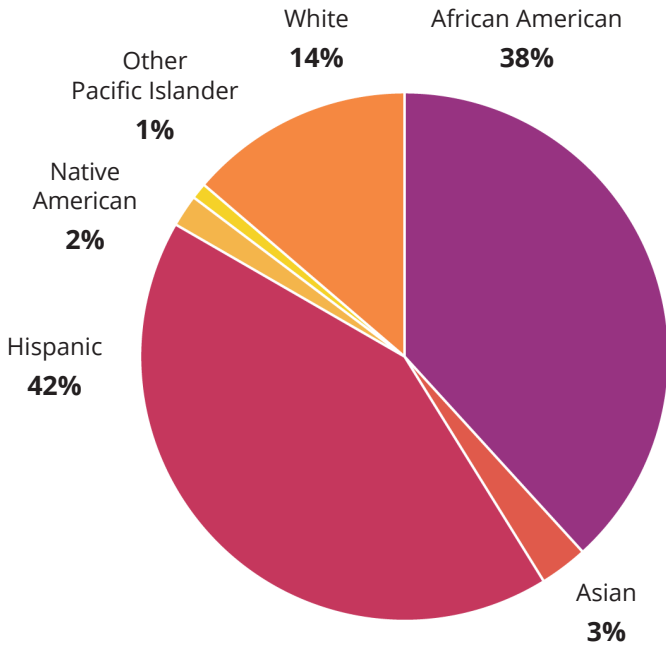
**Carol Carter** is a national and international student success author, speaker, and entrepreneur. She began her career in college publishing with Prentice Hall, and became the first female assistant vice president and director of college marketing at age 26. Later, as V.P. and publisher, she developed the widely acclaimed Keys to Success series to help college students connect their academic success to their future professional success. Carol's business experience and her international work help shape her unique perspective on how institutions of learning, youth development, and businesses can prepare students from all backgrounds and levels of learning to thrive in an increasingly complex world. In 2014 she founded GlobalMindED to bring together leaders in education, government, business, and social enterprise committed to improving access and equity to education, employment and health.

# THE PROJECT CATALYSTS

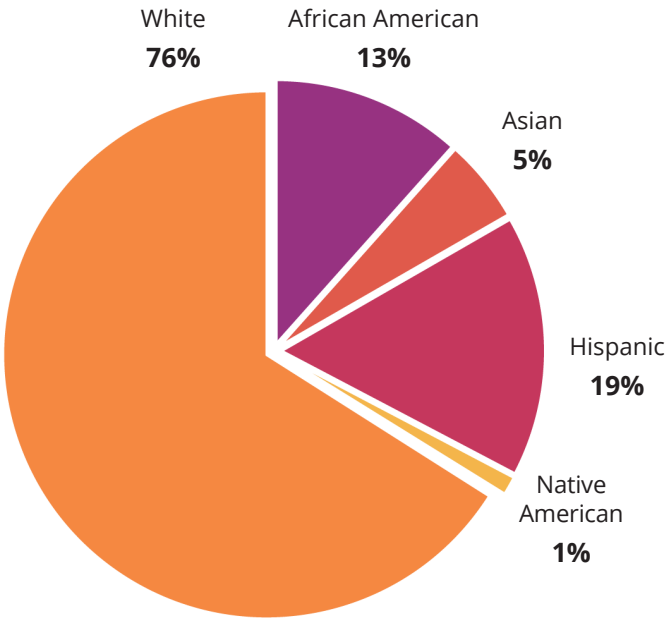
**Dr. Nita Mosby Tyler** is the Chief Catalyst and Founder of The Equity Project, LLC—a consulting firm founded in 2016 to support organizations across the globe develop strategies to advance equity, inclusion and diversity in all that they do. Before launching The Equity Project, she held Senior Executive roles in the field of Human Resources—including the Executive Director of Human Resources for the City and County of Denver and the Senior VP of Human Resources and Chief Inclusion Officer at Children's Hospital Colorado. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of Colorado, an M.A. in Management from Webster University and a B.A. in Education from the University of Alabama.

*And we would be remiss if we didn't share the most important catalysts . . .*

**The 100+ students who participated in this project in the most extraordinary ways!**




**Students Speak Diverse Participants**




**US Population by Ethnicity**

# THE PROCESS

# HOW WE GATHERED STUDENT INSIGHTS

**We hosted 13 facilitated focus groups centered on a combination of these questions:**

- How has the trifecta of COVID-19, job losses, and police brutality/related generational injustices influenced you?
- How have the events of this summer impacted your thinking about college and your fall priorities?
- As you reflect on last semester, was there anything that made learning online difficult for you? Please explain.
- Were there any new things your instructors tried remotely that you hope would be used again in the Fall or in future classes?
- How do you feel about learning online or using technology in the classroom? Have your experiences been positive? Negative?
- Do you trust that digital learning tools are created/ designed in a way that gives every student an equal opportunity to succeed using them? Why or why not?
- If you could give faculty any advice to improve the online learning experience, what would it be?What support did faculty provide during your online experience that was helpful?
- Were you aware or did you take advantage of any support outside of your instructors?
- At any point during the semester, did you reach our for help or support in your online class? If so, who did you reach out to and how did they respond? Were there any times during the semester that you did not receive the support you needed?

# 13

## TOTAL NUMBER OF FACILITATED STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS

Each two-hour focus group facilitated by The Equity Project, LLC was comprised of 10-15 students from across the U.S., vetted, recruited and confirmed by GlobalMindeED diverse/First Gen leaders from 2018 to 2020 leadership classes.

# 100%

## PERCENTAGE OF FOCUS GROUPS THAT REFLECTED THE "NEW MAJORITY"

Each focus group was representative of BIPOC members (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) identities, 1st generation college students, students living with disabilities, rural representation, white + socio-economically disadvantaged and non-traditional students.

# 25%

## PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO QUESTIONED THE FEASIBILITY OF RETURNING TO SCHOOL

The percentage of 102 students who expressed strong reservations about returning to school given struggles with distance learning experiences.

# 80%

## PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO DISLIKE THE ONLINE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

80% of the 102 students in the focus groups shared they didn't like the online learning experience. Much of the dislike was attributed to lack of innovation or responsiveness from faculty, internet concerns or poor physical environment conditions for learning.

# 90%

## PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO WERE COMFORTABLE USING TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM

Most students were comfortable with classroom technology, as they were using it to some degree before the abrupt Covid-required remote learning requirement. Though most shared the initial process of learning the ins and outs of new platforms, they overwhelmingly saw them as a benefit. Despite students' facility with the classroom technology, the barrier here was the fact that instructors were not actually using the technology as a mechanism to teach the courses.

# 75%

## TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS THAT EXPRESSED STRONG DISSATISFACTION WITH THE LEARNING PROCESS

Percentage of 102 students who said they felt the previous semester was mostly self-learning (i.e., teaching themselves) because of the lack of faculty effectiveness with remote learning techniques and tools.

# 47

## NUMBER OF INSTITUTIONS REPRESENTED IN THE PROCESS

Number of colleges and universities represented in this focus group process.

# 22

## NUMBER OF STATES REPRESENTED IN THE PROCESS

The number of states represented by the colleges and universities involved in this process.

# 70%

## PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO TOOK ADVANTAGE OF SUPPORT OUTSIDE OF INSTRUCTORS

Percentage of 102 students who said they took advantage of some type of support system outside of instructors. This included peer mentors, academic advisors, clubs/organizations like GlobalMindED, and even family. Most examples highlighted the high numbers of students who relied on their peers for support as compared to more formal support systems offered by their college or university.

# 15%

## PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO HAVE SUFFERED JOB LOSS DUE TO COVID-19 IMPACT

Percentage of 102 students who said the COVID-19 crisis was the direct cause of their job loss, layoff or furlough.

# 96%

## PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO REACHED OUT FOR SUPPORT IN THEIR ONLINE CLASSES

The number of students who reached out for support related to connectivity, assignment clarification or questions or follow-up on missing grades.

THE
STUDENTS
SPEAK

# QUESTION 1 - HOW HAS THE TRIFECTA OF COVID-19, JOB LOSSES, AND POLICE BRUTALITY/RELATED GENERATIONAL INJUSTICES INFLUENCED YOU?

## General Themes:

- Students feel a sense of being overwhelmed, yet remain diligent in prioritizing their education.
- Students are very attuned to the societal and political context and impact to them personally.
- Employment was the most prominent concern for the majority of students. 15% of students in the focus groups experienced COVID-related job loss.
- Some students likened remote learning to substandard education and then related that to generational injustice.
- Some students said the social pressure actually motivated them to get their degree even more.

## Direct Quotes:

- "I am too distracted to learn."
- "My learning environment has completely changed. Everyone is at home now and they don't understand that I am in school and they are disturbing me."
- "My priorities have changed. I lost my job due to the pandemic and that is what I have to focus on now instead of school."
- "Everything seems overwhelming. I just keep trying to make it, but it is harder than ever."
- "This is not what I expected out of the college experience. It doesn't seem fair."

**The overarching observation** was students were carrying the weight of a complex time in history. They were being directly impacted, but using the impact as fuel to keep going. There was certainly a "press forward while weary" sentiment. Most students expressed the difficulty of navigating the unknown (i.e., the future, when/if in-person learning would begin, how to leverage academic resources while in a virtual environment, etc.). The drain of the balancing act of school, employment and societal and personal crisis was palpable.

# QUESTION 2 - HOW HAVE THE EVENTS OF THIS SUMMER IMPACTED YOUR THINKING ABOUT COLLEGE AND YOUR FALL PRIORITIES?

## General Themes:

- Students generally felt compelled to move through the academic process even with reservations and dissatisfaction.
- Some students frankly stated that the remote environment might mean they will graduate without actually knowing anything.
- Over 50% of the students felt some degree of discord with their institutions because they didn't feel they should be paying full price for what they considered a sub-standard remote learning experience.
- Over 25% of students questioned whether or not they would return to school because of their disdain for the remote environment and/or financial concerns.

## Direct Quotes:

- "The virtual environment feels like a waste of money."
- "I can't concentrate on my studies at home. My other responsibilities at home seem to take priority and no one understands that."
- "The colleges need to make sure they train faculty on remote learning before they subject us to it."
- "Nothing will get in the way of me graduating."
- "I will graduate. My fear is more about whether or not there will be jobs when I finish."

**The overarching observation** was students were dedicated to completing their education. However, it is important to note that those who were most at risk were students who had less than desirable experiences with faculty teaching methodologies. Some students said faculty were not using virtual platforms, were relying on email to teach and providing little to no support in answering questions or concerns. These issues made students feel like they were teaching themselves and each other.

# QUESTION 3 - AS YOU REFLECT ON LAST SEMESTER, WAS THERE ANYTHING THAT MADE LEARNING ONLINE DIFFICULT FOR YOU? PLEASE EXPLAIN?

## General Themes:

- Overwhelmingly, students shared that their physical learning environments made concentrating difficult. Most shared that the competing priorities at home negatively impacted their studies.
- Over 40% of students said not receiving timely feedback from faculty kept them from moving effectively through courses.
- Most noticeably, rural students shared lack of internet access or lack of stable internet access as a barrier to online learning.
- 15% of students in the focus groups were majoring in courses with lab expectations. These students shared how awkward and difficult it was to "practice" via video. These students expressed grave concern about their readiness to move on to higher level courses given their lack of hands-on experience.

## Direct Quotes:

- "I drive one hour to Starbucks in the next town to have internet access to complete my assignments."
- "The campus resources I was used to aren't available online, so I am really struggling now."
- "There is a time delay on almost anyone getting back to me. Sometimes I just give up or ask a classmate to help teach me."
- "I lost my connection to working in teams because instructors don't understand the virtual technology. They don't use it."
- "My instructors aren't grading assignments in a timely manner, so I don't know how I'm doing."

**The overarching observation** was students were struggling with lack of direction and timeliness from faculty. In essence, the virtual environment was not mirroring or upholding the most important elements of the in-person environment. In addition, there was a substantial challenge with internet access, internet stability and lack of physical conditions conducive to learning.

# QUESTION 4 - WERE THERE ANY NEW THINGS YOUR INSTRUCTORS TRIED REMOTELY THAT YOU HOPE WOULD BE USED AGAIN IN THE FALL OR IN FUTURE CLASSES?

**General Themes:**

- Overwhelmingly, the students who excelled most in remote learning were those who experienced the use of virtual platforms and applications used by faculty.
- Over 40% of students said their instructors used some form of platform like: Chalkboard, Zoom, Schoology or Udemy.
- The most satisfied students said their instructors posted regular virtual office hours to handle course Q&A. This was about 10% of students in the focus groups.
- 20% of students in the focus groups said their instructors used a mix of live virtual lectures, video supplemental talks and designated virtual office hours on a regular basis.

**Direct Quotes:**

- "I really appreciate scheduled office hours with my instructor. It gives me the same opportunity to ask questions like I did before remote learning."
- "Some of the campus resources I was used to leveraging are now being offered remotely. That changes things for me."
- "My instructors give me options and are not trying to make the virtual world just like the in-person world. They recognize that we need different things now."

**The overarching observation** was students appreciated faculty responsiveness more than anything else. There is a subliminal student belief that online learning is less credible than in-person learning, so extra attention from instructors strengthens the rigor and faith that students have in their online education. The more faculty promote innovation and intervention, the higher the learning approval and credibility rating from the student. This is a critical student performance and retention element.

# QUESTION 5 - DO YOU TRUST THAT DIGITAL LEARNING TOOLS ARE CREATED/DESIGNED IN A WAY THAT GIVES EVERY STUDENT AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY TO SUCCEED USING THEM? WHY OR WHY NOT?

## General Themes:

- Overwhelmingly, students did not feel digital learning tools were created with equal opportunity in mind. Students were able to provide examples that were either personal or or about their peers. These examples included:
  - Inconsistency in faculty use of solid technological tools and practices. In essence, if your instructor used good learning tools, you would likely fare better than students who had faculty that did not.
  - Lack of internet access.
  - Lack of internet stability.
  - Lack of ability to afford internet access.
  - Lack of a personal computer/laptop.
  - Due to COVID-19 restrictions, lack of available resources to borrow/use a personal device.
  - Language barriers that made use of digital tools difficult.

## Direct Quotes:

- "Spanish is my first language and sometimes the rapid nature of digital learning keeps me from fully understanding."
- "I have to work 10 times as hard as everyone else to even get connected to the internet. I will always be behind."

**The overarching observation** was all students recognized the disparities in the use of digital tools. From the inconsistent use of technology across faculty members to lack of internet access, students were fully aware that some students had a larger barrier than others to simply complete a course. It was apparent in the focus group that students saw this as an equity issue and did not find it fair.

# QUESTION 6 - IF YOU COULD GIVE FACULTY ANY ADVICE TO IMPROVE THE ONLINE LEARNING EXPERIENCE, WHAT WOULD IT BE? WHAT SUPPORT DID FACULTY PROVIDE DURING YOUR ONLINE EXPERIENCE THAT WAS HELPFUL?

**General Themes:**

- Students want to see a more consistent use of online technology. They do not want to see faculty using email as the default for virtual platforms.
- Students want faculty to have an opportunity to be trained on platforms before facilitating classes.
- Students don't want to feel like they are teaching themselves, so faculty engagement is critical.
- Students desire a blended model of an online learning platform + consistent virtual office hours to get questions and concerns taken care of.
    - When these items happen, there is higher engagement and satisfaction from learners.

**Direct Quotes:**

- "Email is not the answer to virtual learning."
- "When teachers provide lots of different learning options and opportunities in the remote learning world, things are so much better. Everyone doesn't learn the same."
- "My teachers are always available by email. I get contacted within one day."

**The overarching observation** was students want faculty to be finessed in the digital learning envi-ron-ment. When they are not, students feel alone in the learning process. Additionally, it is clear that students want diversity in the methods used to facilitate learning in the remote environment. They are asking for more intentional options—lecture, videos, simulations, Q&A sessions, etc.—as a way to adjust for the absence of, or even innovate around, some of the options present during in-person learning.

# QUESTION 7 - WERE THERE ANY TIMES DURING THE SEMESTER THAT YOU DID NOT RECEIVE THE SUPPORT YOU NEEDED?

**General Themes:**

- Over 50% of students in the focus group said instructor follow-up was poor.
  - In one isolated case, the student said they never heard back from their instructor anytime they reached out with questions.
- Students described times where the campus support systems (beyond the instructor) were absent or unavailable.
- One student shared that her teacher posted all assignments for the semester in an email and outside of grades, has had no contact since then.
- Students also shared that they are lacking support at home, as their families frequently don't understand the importance of a quiet and focused learning environment.

**Direct Quotes:**

- "My teacher posted the assignments and then disappeared. I'm teaching myself and still paying for classes."
- "I feel like teachers don't know what to do in this environment. I had the same teacher before the COVID-19 and he was fine, but in the remote environment he is pretty bad."

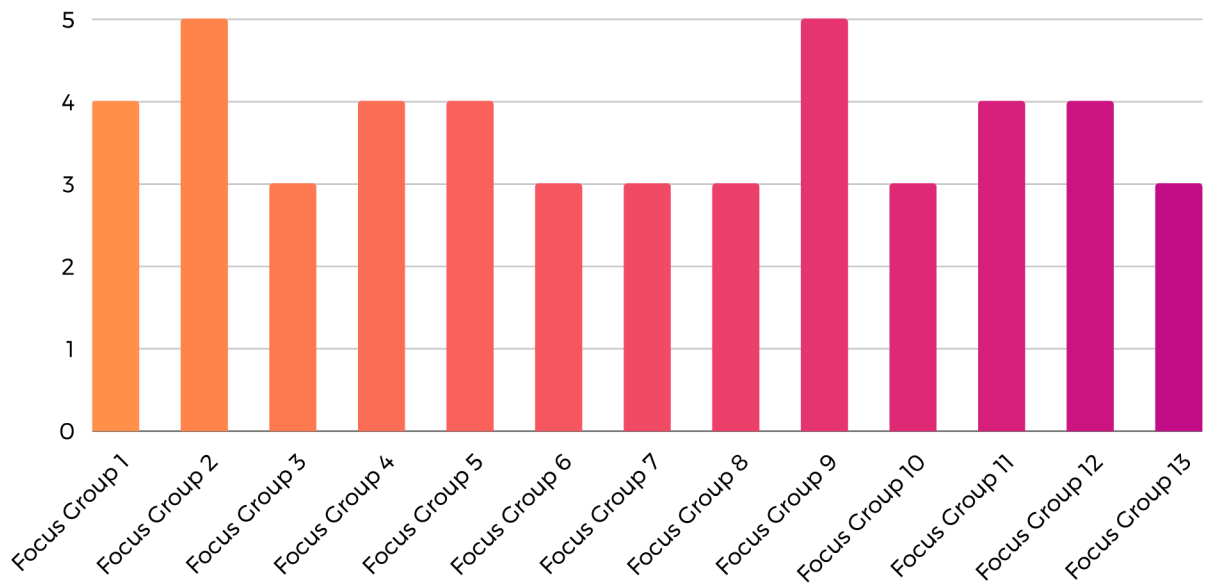
**The overarching observation** was students do not believe remote learning strategies are comprehensive, well-thought-out or effective. Most often, students placed the ownership on faculty; in some cases students held the college or university accountable. Students have heavily equated their learning experience and the cost of the course as being grossly out of alignment. When questioning this, students shared they have gotten little to no response or remedy.

# Student Willingness Indicators

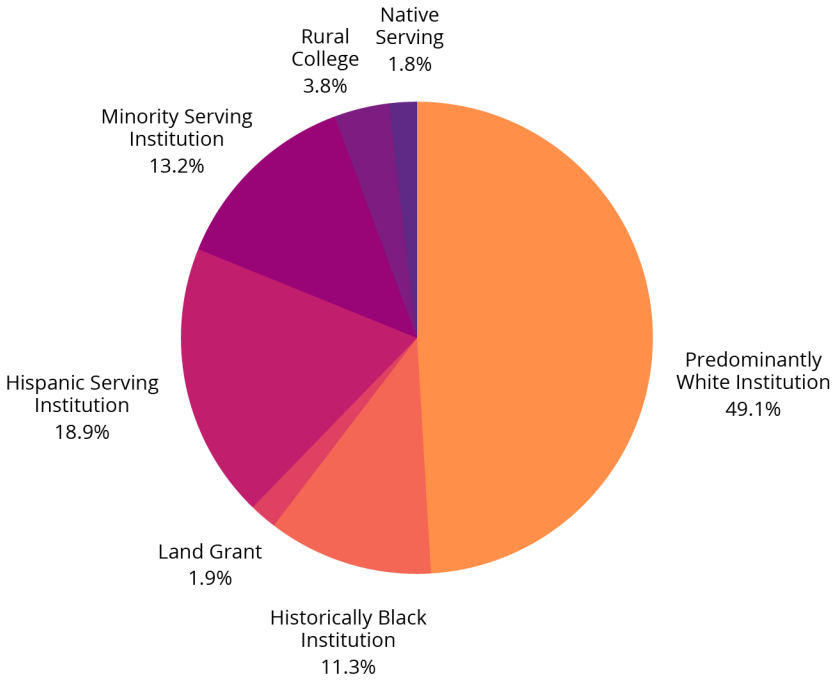
**Willingness to Continue the Remote Learning Educational Journey**

Based on assessment of student responses across 13 focus groups

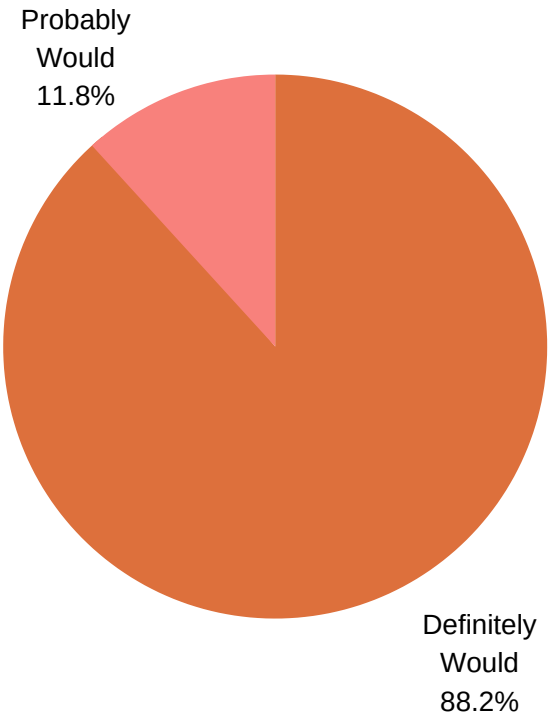
Scale 1 = Low willingness to proceed to 5 = High willingness to proceed




# Types of Institutions Represented in Focus Groups



# STUDENT TESTIMONIALS
## REACTIONS TO PARTICIPATING IN THE FOCUS GROUP




I would recommend Student Speak sessions to others

- *It was also comfortable talking to each and every one.*
- *Wonderful and I enjoyed being part of the event.*
- *I think the overall experience was great; allowing and accepting the conditions we are facing as a community or as students.*
- *I think it's important to acknowledge other individuals' personal points on certain topics. This is great because it allows others as well as myself to expand my thinking on what is best for us right now and how we can combat certain issues or what should be done better in the educational system with the pandemic; provides us a chance to be heard which is important.*
- *It was very informative, I learned so much about other peoples' situations*
- *I learned so much from being in a focus group like this.*
- *The sessions where students could give input were helpful for others to hear other points of view. It was pretty informative.*
- *I enjoyed hearing different students' perspectives from different schools.*
- *It was great many different students were able to discuss problems that we have been facing during the pandemic. I had an awesome time getting to know other leaders.*
- *I thought the student speak sessions were a great opportunity to share your experience on the issues that are going on and to hear from other students around the world that have maybe similar experiences with you.*
- *I loved that we were able to be honest and have deep conversations without judgment.*
- *It was a very interesting webinar that I look forward to participating in the future.*
- *I feel that the speak session was very productive. I appreciated being able to hear other's opinions and being able to voice my own.*
- *I love this students speak session it gave me a broad view on other aspects of learning during COVID and different things I could try and helped me learn to connect with others. I enjoyed it.*
- *It was interesting to hear about how other students across the country are dealing with change and what changes they would like to see.*
- *The student speak sessions were very inspiring and engaging. Everyone had a voice and every voice mattered.*
- *Amazing! I got to learn about other people's perspectives about the pandemic and school.*
- *The student speak session was a great experience, even though virtual. The conversations that many other students and I held during the session were meaningful to me.*

# MOST FREQUENTLY USED WORDS DURING THE FOCUS GROUP EXPERIENCE

# INSIGHTS AND SUMMARY

# FOCUS GROUP THOUGHTS AND INSIGHTS...

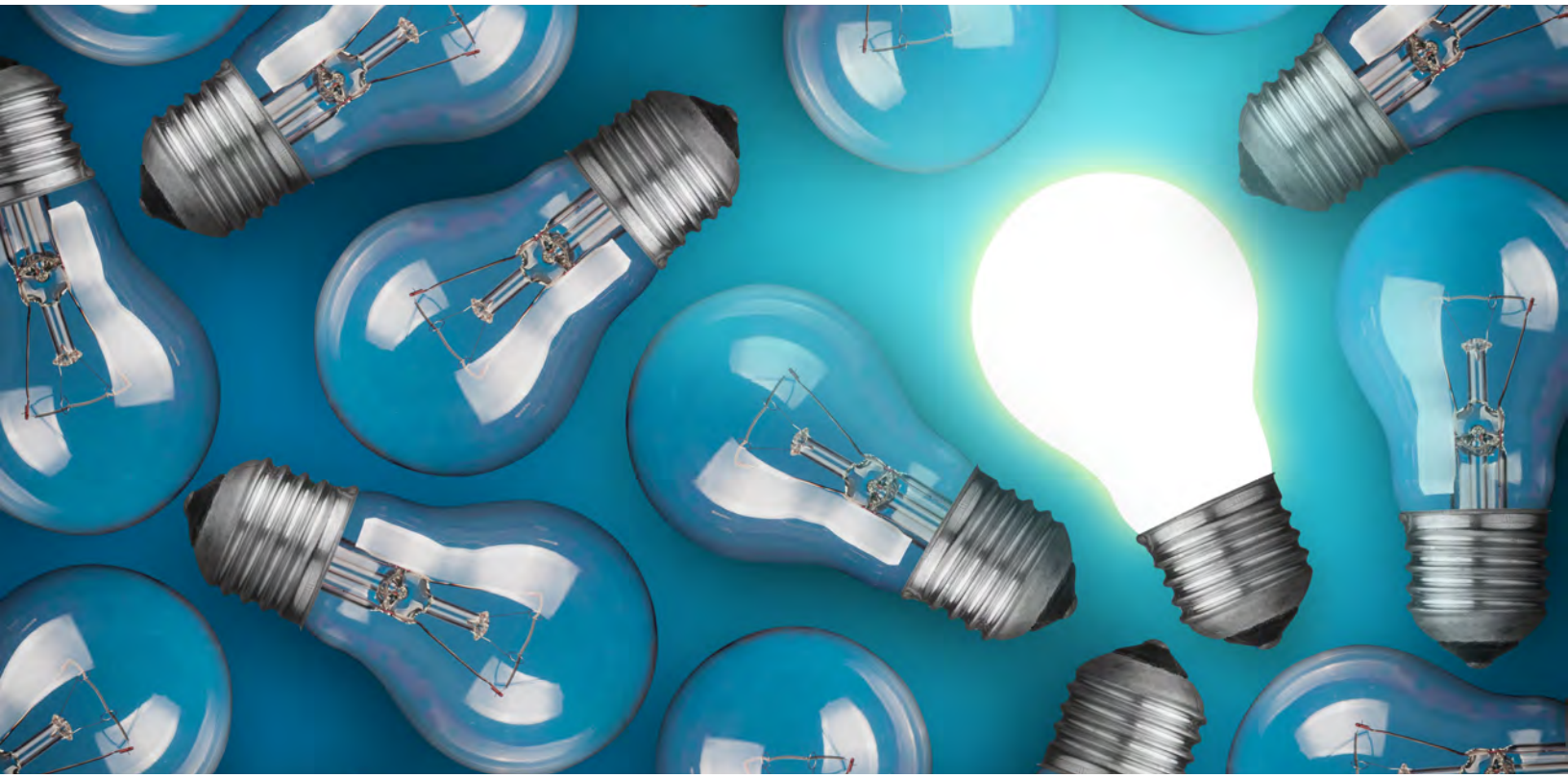
Students shared a high degree of resiliency in working through crises to move through their education journey. Through vulnerable dialogue, it was obvious that each student had 2 or more barriers in place, with severity ranging from unemployment to living with serious physical or mental disabilities.

Though a substantial number of students questioned whether the fall semester was going to be possible, only two (2) students said definitively that they would not return in the fall.

The focus groups revealed the need for more ways for students to connect and share beyond coursework. It was apparent in the focus groups that students were learning and growing by being together. This is even more important during times of social and physical distancing.

There is a growing sentiment that online learning is a lesser standard of excellence than in-person learning. Students believe pricing online courses at par or higher than in-person courses is unwarranted and unreasonable. This sentiment is creating some discord between students and their institutions.

The lack of access to the internet is a very present barrier to rural students and low socio-economically situated students. This barrier diminishes the ability for students to participate in extra teamwork or additional Q&A sessions with instructors, as access often requires inordinate travel to a Wi-Fi spot.



# MORE FOCUS GROUP THOUGHTS AND INSIGHTS...

- There is a clear opportunity for institutions to create standardization and support related to faculty competencies in administering a virtual learning experience.

- Institutions should monitor the availability of student support systems during the remote,  online learning journey. Many students revealed that systems that they previously relied on (i.e., tutors, systems to borrow computers, locations to study, etc.) have been unavailable.

- Student unemployment due to COVID-19 impact is a serious barrier to learning and continuing education. Institutions should begin to take inventory of the COVID-19 student impact.

- Students who have labs (i.e., clinical majors, engineering, etc.) are feeling particularly disadvantaged in missing the opportunity to do hands-on work in a facilitated environment. Based on focus group feedback, video instruction (to replace labs) seems to be insufficient and causes student insecurities.

- Along with internet access disparities, there were several examples of students with transportation concerns. One student took three (3) buses to get to campus. This is another area of support for institutions to consider.

- Students in the focus groups seemed to rely on their peers more than any other support system. There were some indications that these students weren't fully knowledgeable of all of the available support systems in their institutions.

- The focus groups illustrated a clear need for faculty to provide more Question & Answer spaces. Students shared that they didn't have a way to get questions answered on a regular or timely basis.

- In the focus group dialogue Black students articulated, more than others, a struggle with instructors who were (1) not comfortable with online platforms and technology and (2) not responding to questions in a timely manner.

- Rural white students tended to share access issues as the major barrier, but also reported high engagement and responsiveness from instructors.

# Notes

# Any Questions?

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