

Undergraduate Retention Interview Project

Prepared by Rachel Lahoff, M.A. and Allison M. Cantwell, Ph.D.

Colorado State University Institute for Research in the Social Sciences, August 2022

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Methods.....	3
Findings	4
Why Do Undergraduate Students Leave CSU?	4
How Does Campus Climate Contribute to Students Leaving CSU?	15
How Do Academic Experiences Contribute to Students Leaving CSU?	17
How Did the Pandemic Contribute to Students Leaving CSU?	19
What Can CSU Do to Better Retain Undergraduate Students?	20
Where are Former CSU Students Now?.....	24
Conclusion.....	25
Appendix A.....	26
Appendix B	27
Appendix C	29
Appendix D	31

Introduction

In October of 2021, Colorado State University's (CSU) Office of Institutional Research, Planning and Effectiveness (IRP&E) contracted the Institute for Research in the Social Sciences (IRISS) to conduct a qualitative study to understand why undergraduate students leave CSU before graduating and what types of supports or policies CSU can implement to retain students through graduation. To answer these questions, IRISS interviewed 23 student-facing staff members at CSU, then IRISS staff and some of the staff interviewees conducted interviews with 62 former first-time freshmen that left the university before their second year. Interviews were qualitatively analyzed and synthesized for inclusion in this report.

Methods

IRP&E and IRISS collaborated on designing the interview instrument used for both staff and former student interviews. IRP&E provided IRISS with the names and email addresses of potential CSU staff members for recruitment as well as the contact information for all first-time freshmen who started CSU in Fall 2018, Fall 2019, and Fall 2020 but left CSU before starting their second year. IRISS managed and coordinated recruitment efforts for both staff and former student interviews.

IRISS contacted 43 student-facing staff provided by the project team. Of the 43 contacted, IRISS interviewed all 22 staff who scheduled an interview between December 7 and December 17, 2021. Student-facing staff represented 15 departments. CSU staff were offered a \$10 gift card for participation. The interview questions for staff are included in Appendix A. Findings from the staff interviews were used to inform the interview questions for former students.

CSU staff were asked at the end of their interview if they would be interested in conducting interviews of former CSU students with whom they have personal connections. All 9 staff that volunteered to interview former students attended an IRISS-led interviewer training on the interview protocol and best practices in interviewing. CSU staff that completed the training identified 88 students from the list with whom they had a personal connection and recruited and interviewed those students that responded. Staff conducted a total of 7 former student interviews. Students that were not identified by CSU staff were then recruited by IRISS staff.

IRP&E provided several demographic attributes, including fall cohort year; college, department name, and major name; ethnicity, gender, and first-generation status. Of the 2,035 former students on the list, 343 had no email address or phone number leaving 1,692 to be contacted. Of the 1,692 former students, 148 had CSU email addresses that were no longer working due to these students leaving the university. The remaining 1,554 former students were contacted at least twice using a combination of emails, text message, and phone calls. Former students were offered a \$50 gift card for participation. The language for recruitment of students is included in Appendix B. The full set of interview questions for students are included in Appendix C.

IRISS and student-facing staff conducted 62 former student interviews from February 10 to April 1, 2022. All interviews were conducted virtually using either Zoom or Microsoft Teams and recorded for transcription with consent. Two participants did not consent to recording so IRISS interviewers took detailed notes of participants' responses. IRISS analyzed the detailed notes and interview transcripts using inductive coding to identify emergent themes from staff and former student interviews.

The breakdown of attributes for our former student interviews compared to the population of students who left CSU before starting their second year are listed below. Students who left CSU more recently participated in interviews more than students who left in Fall 2018. Our interviews closely represent the student body. There is a slight oversampling of men and non-white students who are generally less likely to participate in interviews. Our sample slightly underrepresents first generation students and slightly overrepresents students in Exploratory Studies, a major of particular interest to the client team.

Attribute	Interview Count	%	Population %	Difference
Fall 2018	17	27.4%	36.8%	-9.4%
Fall 2019	26	41.9%	33.6%	8.3%
Fall 2020	19	30.6%	29.6%	1.0%
Male	30	48.4%	46.6%	1.8%
Female	32	51.6%	53.4%	-1.8%
White	41	66.1%	69.8%	-3.7%
Non-White	21	33.9%	30.2%	3.7%
First Gen	20	32.3%	35.2%	-2.9%
Not First Gen	42	67.7%	64.8%	2.9%
Exploratory Studies	18	29.0%	25.9%	3.1%
Key Status	15	24.2%	13.7%	10.5%
C4E Status	10	16.1%	9.9%	6.2%
SDPS Affiliation	7	11.3%	4.2%	7.1%
Nonresident Status	21	33.9%	40.1%	-6.2%
Students Recommended for Support	16	25.8%	22.4%	3.4%

Findings

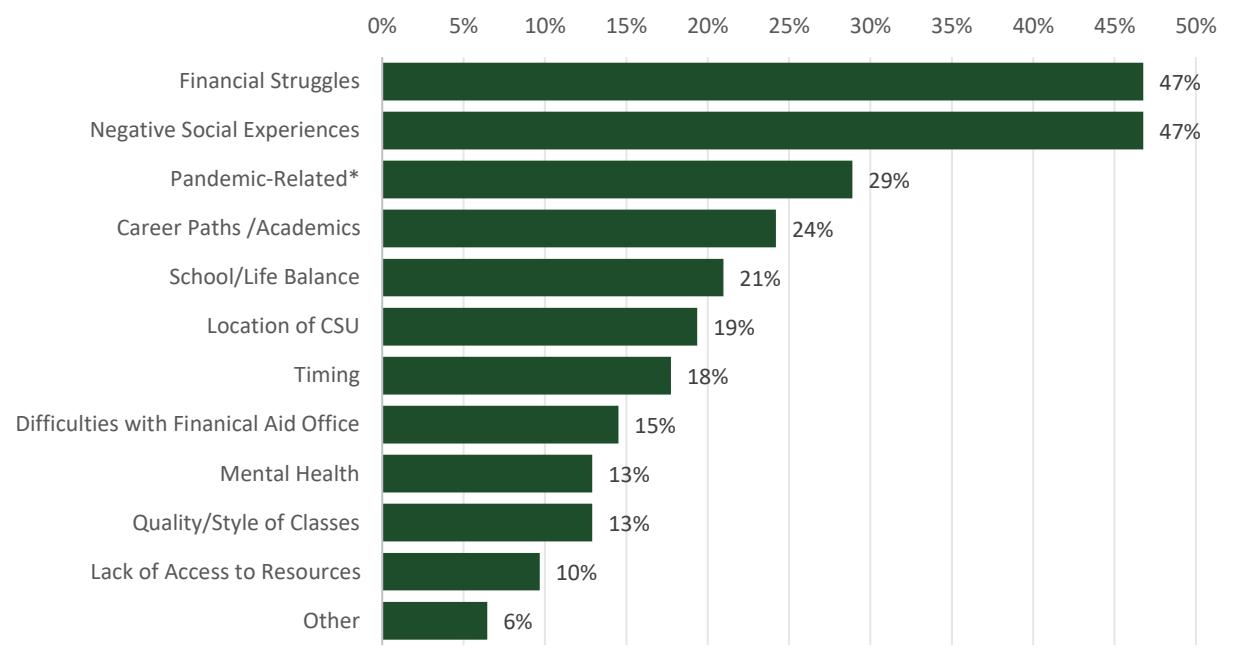
We show the findings of thematic analysis for both student and staff interviews in this section. Even though staff interviews were conducted prior to student interviews, there is a great deal of overlap in our findings. We prioritize the student voice and supplement our findings from students with those of staff, which are generally aligned. This alignment shows that our CSU student-facing staff have great insight into the needs and experiences of our student body and should be leveraged where the student voice may be hard to include directly. Where appropriate, interview responses were coded into multiple categories; therefore percentages in the sections below may sum to greater than 100%.

Why Do Undergraduate Students Leave CSU?

Former CSU students were asked to share their experiences at CSU and why they ultimately left the University. Responses to this question were coded into 10 primary themes. The chart below shows the frequency of each theme within the student responses to this question. The themes are defined in more detail in the sections below. CSU staff were also asked why they thought students leave CSU. Their responses generally mirrored what the students themselves said. Staff responses to this question are paired with the corresponding student theme.

Why Did You Ultimately Leave CSU?

N=62



Total may exceed 100% as students may have identified/been coded into multiple themes.

**Note: The pandemic-related theme is attributed to the 45 students in the Fall 2019 and Fall 2020 cohorts who attended CSU during the pandemic. Fall 2018 students are not included in the denominator of this 29%.*

Financial Struggles

Student Response (47%)

Students discussed the high cost of tuition, and they talked about the challenges of paying for college along with other costs associated with being enrolled as an undergraduate at CSU. Some students said they felt the out-of-state tuition costs were too high compared to their home-state school. Students discussed their concerns with taking on student loan debt in order to pay for CSU. Some students shared that the financial aid that they received was not enough for them to stay enrolled. Some students discussed pandemic impacts in conjunction with costs as a reason for leaving. For example, some students felt the switch to online classes was not worth the cost. Other students or their families were impacted financially by the pandemic, which made the high cost of tuition a factor in their leaving CSU. To see this theme disaggregated by certain attributes, see Appendix D.

- “With the experience, the college experience I was getting, there came a point where it wasn’t worth out-of-state tuition.” Female White Non-first Generation Nonresident Student, College of Agricultural Sciences
- “I guess the big reason why I left is, since COVID, a lot of classes were online. I didn’t feel like it was worth it paying out-of-state tuition for mostly online classes when the only classes I had in person were my labs. I am a much better learner in person rather than online.” Female Asian Non-first Generation Nonresident Student, Exploratory Studies
- “My parents paid for my school, but I think that led to some issues as well. I really did pay for everything else on my own...That was difficult at times too, because I was focused on school and not really focused on a job or things like that.” Female White Non-first Generation Resident Student, College of Health and Human Sciences

Staff Response

Staff identified various financial reasons for undergraduate students leaving CSU. Specifically, staff talked about the high cost of tuition and campus living costs as a barrier for students to stay at CSU. The cost of tuition is particularly salient with out-of-state students paying a higher rate for tuition than they would for their in-state school. Staff also discussed the high cost of living in Fort Collins, more generally, as a barrier for students. Staff said some students express anxiety at the thought of student debt, and some students have dependents or other family financial responsibilities, which poses a challenge to being in school. Staff shared that some students need to get jobs, which can impact how much time they can devote to their academic experience.

“I fell in love with the campus when I toured it. I’m into rock climbing, so I love the rock-climbing wall you guys had. I loved all my classes. I had a really great time, but the cost of CSU is what drove me away. I was offered money by UCCS, so I transferred down here and saved a lot of money, which was nice, but I do definitely miss a lot of CSU.” Male Hispanic Non-first generation Resident Student, Walter Scott, Jr. College of Engineering

Negative Social Experiences

Student Response (47%)

Former students said that negative experiences they had in their social life contributed to them leaving CSU. For example, some students discussed having difficult relationships with their roommates or that they did not enjoy their experiences in their residence hall. Other students discussed difficulties making friends or feeling like they do not fit in on campus. One former student said they came to CSU because they followed a partner to Fort Collins but left after their relationship dissolved. To see this theme disaggregated by certain attributes, see Appendix D.

- "I had a really bad roommate situation. I didn't particularly enjoy living on campus, but I think that's kind of everyone's experience, but my roommate, she was from Colorado, so she would go home on the weekends, and then she disappeared after a few months, and I texted her to make sure she was okay, and she just never came back, and she was always kind of mean to me, so that was also another thing. My experience wasn't the best. That was another contributor." Female White Non-first Generation Nonresident Student, Exploratory Studies
- "In terms of making friends, it was definitely difficult.... I didn't try and make a ton of friends in that major, because everybody was so cliquey, so I tried to make friends here and there, but, ultimately, I had my roommate, and that was about it." Female White Non-first Generation Nonresident Student, College of Agricultural Sciences
- "Living in a dorm I think contributed to some weird mental health stuff. It feels like prison. Honors dorms are so ugly inside, and I just feel like it's unsanitary to make people share bathrooms with ten other people and to be not visible from your roommate. I know that's just how college is, but I did not love that at all." Female Multi-Racial First Generation Resident Student, College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences

Staff Response

CSU staff said that undergraduate students leave CSU as a result of a lack of community. Specifically, staff said some students experienced feelings of isolation, which was exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting public health policies on campus. Some staff also shared that students might have lacked a sense of belonging, which could be particularly strong for students from minoritized communities. According to staff, these students needed to navigate a homogenous student body, which could lead to students of color or students from LGBTQ+ communities feeling excluded or experiencing incidents of bias from peers and staff at CSU. Regarding incidents of bias, staff said that CSU does not do enough to address these incidents related to antiblackness, transphobia, or homophobia, and to address student concerns related to sexual assault. Staff also talked more generally about students having difficulties socializing at CSU and that contributing to their departure.

"It's the residence halls that are for your specific majors. I was in a hall that was for all kids that were in my major. I also just didn't really fit within everybody in my residence hall. I had some conflicts with some people in the residence halls, and that, honestly, resulted in me leaving." Female White Non-first Generation Resident Student, College of Health and Human Sciences

Pandemic-Related

Student Response (29%)

Some former students from the Fall 2019 and Fall 2020 cohorts attributed their leaving CSU to issues related to the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, some students left because they did not agree with how the University handled the pandemic. Other students struggled with the lack of in-person experiences, such as in-person classes or in-person mental health services. Some students shared that the online class format or how professors chose to navigate teaching during the pandemic did not feel worth the cost of tuition. Students also talked about feeling isolated in their residence hall rooms and not getting to socialize with other CSU students. Students said that the lack of activities and events during the pandemic negatively impacted their experience at CSU and contributed to them leaving. In addition, some students left either because they were afraid of getting sick or getting a loved one sick. Because of the ripple-effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, several responses were coded into both this theme as well as other related themes.

“One of the biggest reasons why I ended up dropping out was not a CSU thing. It was the whole Covid thing, because that was the semester that I actually dropped out. And I was more so encouraged to drop out, because of Covid and everything going online...I think there would have been a good likelihood I would still be enrolled if the Covid thing never happened.” Male Black First Generation Resident Student, College of Liberal Arts

- “I feel like my decision to leave is pretty biased, because at the time that I joined CSU, it was the first year that anywhere in the country COVID was happening, so it was just very scary to be in the dorm knowing COVID was around, and I just felt more safe at home.” Female Hispanic First Generation Resident Student, College of Liberal Arts
- “I just decided to take a year off, and I also think in terms of tuition, who wants to pay thousands of dollars of tuition for professors that don’t know what they’re doing in a pandemic?” Female White Non-first Generation Resident Student, College of Liberal Arts
- “With the lockdowns, with all that kind of stuff, it was crazy. I ended up having to sneak out of the dorm so many times just to go to work. We’d be on lockdown for 14 days, and I can’t miss 14 days. That’s a whole paycheck.” Female Hispanic First Generation Resident Student, College of Agricultural Sciences

Staff Response

Staff talked about the timing of the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on class-style as a contributing factor for students leaving. Staff also discussed pandemic-related reasons for students leaving in the context of other themes described elsewhere. For example, staff talked about students leaving due to negative social experiences, which were exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Career Paths/Academics

Student Response (24%)

Former students discussed a number of academic-related reasons why they left CSU. Some students found it difficult to decide on a major, and their academic trajectory felt muddled and inefficient. Other students left CSU when they decided on a major that CSU does not offer. Some students shared that they found school to be too challenging and their poor grades were a reason they left CSU. Some students linked their academic reasons for leaving with financial reasons, saying they felt like they were wasting money on a program that was either not a good fit or too difficult for them. To see this theme disaggregated by certain attributes, see Appendix D.

- “Once I kind of slipped at first, I was going to classes on time all the time, getting all my things done, and I had one real slip-up, and it felt impossible to catch back up after that, and things just slipped further and further, and after a week of slipping, I was like, okay, I don’t know if I can do this.” Male Hispanic First Generation Resident Student, College of Natural Sciences
- I was there for a year, and I realized that I didn’t really like biology that much, and I wanted to go into architecture, and that’s the main reason why I transferred, because they didn’t have an architecture program, but they had one at CU-Boulder, so I transferred to CU.” Female Hispanic Non-first Generation Resident Student, College of Agricultural Sciences

“Academics-wise, I didn’t do well at all. I just felt like I had to start over somewhere new. At the school I’m at currently, only my credits transferred, not my GPA. I don’t have to worry about this really horrible GPA following me.” Female White Non-first Generation Resident Student, College of Liberal Arts

Staff Response

Staff also identified academic issues as a key reason why students leave CSU. They said that in some cases students were not sure which major to choose, and in other cases their major was not available at CSU. Staff also discussed students leaving because they struggled academically; students either choose to leave or were dismissed due to low grades. Some staff attributed academic struggles with students experiencing difficulties transitioning between high school and college learning styles. Staff also talked about students struggling to navigate academic systems or being intimidated by various career paths.

School/Life Balance

Student Response (21%)

Students talked about the challenges of maintaining a balance between their academic life and their personal or professional life. For example, some students struggled to connect with peers because they were so focused on their schoolwork. Some former students held down jobs while in school, and this impacted either their ability to study adequately or to make friends and connect socially at CSU. In both of these situations, the struggle to balance school with other aspects of their lives impacted either their academic success or their social lives, which led them to leave. In one instance, a student left CSU because they had another job opportunity that was not conducive with them staying at CSU. To see this theme disaggregated by certain attributes, see Appendix D.

“Why I left, it just kind of got hard for me to keep up with the workload personally. The environment was kind of discouraging, in my opinion. My personal friend group in a way, we were really focused on not school, so it was tough to break out of that.” Male Hispanic First Generation Resident Student, College of Natural Sciences

- “I was working two jobs, and I was president of hall council and taking 15 credits, and then two other clubs, so it was a lot.” Male White First Generation Resident Student, College of Natural Sciences
- “I was in the system as homeless, so I started living on my own during high school, and so I had to work in order to pay for school, to be there, and then with the whole lockdowns and being in the dorms, it was really hard to go to work. I did get some scholarships, but I didn’t get as much. I just thought it was really hard with the whole balance between getting good grades in school and finding time to study and do really good on the exams, but also finding time to work and pay to be there, so that balance was just huge.” Female Hispanic First Generation Resident Student, College of Agricultural Sciences

Staff Response

Staff shared that some students left CSU because of non-school related obligations. For example, staff said some students needed to focus on their work, family, or health, which impacted their ability to stay on at CSU. Some staff also said that they feel CSU is not flexible enough within the academic requirements to accommodate students with other pressing obligations.

Location of CSU

Student Response (19%)

Participants discussed CSU's location as a reason for leaving the University. Some students talked about the challenges of being away from home and family. For example, some students discussed struggling with homesickness. Other students shared issues such as Fort Collins being too close to family, or they did not like Fort Collins. To see this theme disaggregated by certain attributes, see Appendix D.

- "I think I ultimately left, because it was too close to home. I had grown up in Fort Collins. I'd been around CSU my entire life. I would see my parents at school. It's weird. It just was not a good fit for me. I needed to kind of move away and start my own life, and I wasn't able to do that at CSU." Female White Non-first Generation Resident Student, College of Liberal Arts
- "I think the big thing for me about it was moving so far away from home, because I live in Missouri, and living so far away from home and not having a car, not having the freedom that I once had. It's still a great school, but I am happy where I'm at, because it's closer to home, and it's more the small school, kind of close to your teachers and fellow students type." Male White Non-first Generation Nonresident Student, College of Natural Sciences

"At the time, for me, I needed a change. I needed to get out of Colorado. I kind of decided last minute to leave, and it was a hard decision, because, like I said, I really did like CSU, but it has been really good, and I got to experience a lot of different things." Female White Non-first Generation Resident Student, College of Health and Human Sciences

Staff Response

Staff also discussed how the location of CSU can be a contributing factor to students leaving CSU. Staff talked about how some students struggle being too far from family, especially with a CSU requirement for students to live on campus their first year.

Timing

Student Response (18%)

Former students shared that the timing was not right for them to attend college. Some students said they felt that they were not ready for college or college was not the right fit for them at the time. Other students said that life circumstances arose that prevented them from continuing with school.

- "People ask me all the time, 'oh, did you leave, because you didn't like it?' I'm like, no, honestly, I loved it. I love Fort Collins. I love CSU. It just wasn't right for me, at the time. It's an interesting situation, because it was a lot of personal reasons that led me to leave rather than the school itself." Female White Non-first Generation Resident Student, College of Health and Human Sciences

"The reason I left was I just didn't want to go to school anymore...I just decided it wasn't for me and decided to go do something else. I just found out I did not like school as much as I thought I did and decided to leave." Male White First Generation Resident Student, Exploratory Studies

- “I had good teachers and everything, but I just kind of wanted to take a step back and go is this what I want to do? I don’t really know. That was part of it...It was me kind of figuring out what I wanted to go into.” Male White Non-first Generation Resident Student, Warner College of Natural Resources

Staff Response

Staff mirrored many of the timing-related reasons that the students discussed. Staff said that some students lack the maturity to stay at CSU, struggling to maintain their grades while away from home for the first time. Staff also talked about students being unready for school because they lack a vision for what they want to do in the long term. For other students, college might not be the right fit at this time for a variety of reasons including less common factors such as unplanned pregnancies or needing to move home to take care of family members. This may be because students find the college transition process overwhelming, or they lack family support. Staff also talked about how CSU can be inconducive with non-traditional students’ life situations.

Difficulties with Financial Aid Office or Policies

Student Response (15%)

Some former students discussed negative experiences with the financial aid processes, policies, or staff at CSU. Some students shared that it was difficult for them to have to pay their tuition bills up-front and then wait for reimbursement from the Financial Aid Office. Other students shared that the process for getting financial support was difficult to navigate, and some students did not feel well supported by the staff in the Financial Aid Office. To see this theme disaggregated by certain attributes, see Appendix D.

- “I went a lot and talked to a lot of different people [at Financial Aid Services], and I didn’t really feel supported. I think there was one person who made me feel supported, and that was when I leaving the dorms. She was helping me figure out a good solution to get back to CSU the next couple of years, but, other than her, everyone was pretty much just trying to tell me pay up, and then we don’t care what happens.” Male White First Generation Resident Student, College of Natural Sciences

Staff Response

Staff mentioned that some students do not have the financial literacy to manage their money or financial aid in a way that is conducive to being in school and that the tuition appeal process is lengthy and stressful.

Mental Health

Student Response (13%)

Participants discussed various ways that their mental health contributed to them leaving CSU. For example, some students struggled with anxiety or depression while at CSU. Some students' mental health was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on friends and family. Other students talked about needing therapy that went beyond what CSU provides.

- “Because when I was on campus, it was very hard to get services for mental health, because I didn't really have any friends at CSU. I don't remember what the exact name of the program was, but I contacted somebody at CSU, and they told me that I could get mental health services, but they were only online at the moment, just because of COVID, but I wanted more in-person.” Male White Non-first Generation Nonresident Student, College of Natural Sciences

“[I left] probably because I missed home and my friends that were here a lot, and I was having some trouble with anxiety and depression.” Female Multi-Racial Non-first Generation Resident Student, Exploratory Studies

Staff Response

Like former students, CSU staff talked about mental health challenges as a reason students leave the university. Specifically, some staff discussed students' struggles with dealing with crises while at school. Others talked about how some students are not mentally healthy enough to be in college. Staff also discussed the mental health strain that the college process can put on students.

Quality/Style of Classes

Student Response (13%)

Students shared critical feedback about the style and quality of the classes they took while at CSU. For example, they talked about online classes that were not as good as expected or their need to have more “hands on” classes. Where students discussed their dissatisfaction with online classes during the Covid-19 pandemic, those responses were coded both here and in the theme titled Pandemic-Related. Some students also expressed dissatisfaction with classes that covered what students perceived as “controversial” topics from a biased political perspective. To see this theme disaggregated by certain attributes, see Appendix D.

- “It was particularly noticeable in the math department going into calc 1, and I know a lot of other students felt the same, and continued to feel the same, is that they tried a new grading system, which, to an extent, I understand not going smoothly the first year, but they continued to apply it the second semester, and it was only struggling. Everyone I talked to, even the professors, trying to

“A lot of the classes are lectured-based, and I'm a very hands-on person...I do understand that there are some points where you need to talk about it, but I'm much more of a hands-on person, and there weren't too many easily-accessible ways that I could practice what I wanted to hands-on. I ultimately left, just because of the style of learning.” Female White Non-first Generation Nonresident Student, College of Liberal Arts

work with it didn't like it and didn't agree with how it worked." Male White Non-first Generation Resident Student, Walter Scott, Jr. College of Engineering

Staff Response

Quality and style of classes was not a key theme among CSU staff interviewed for this project. Staff did mention that some students were not happy with the online format of classes that were prevalent at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic and that the lecture-based model of teaching was not ideal for all students.

Lack of Access to Resources

Student Response (10%)

Former students said they left CSU because of resource or facility-related issues. For example, one student said they could have benefited from financial aid services, but they did not seek them out. Another student said that the resources they needed to do their coursework were not available during the early part of the Covid-19 pandemic, which impacted their ability to complete their work. Several former students discussed not having adequate mental health resources, because they were cost prohibitive, not intensive enough for their needs, or were not available in-person due to Covid-19 policies. To see this theme disaggregated by certain attributes, see Appendix D.

"I didn't reach out to seek any other financial aid, which I wish I should have. My goal in attending college was to use the VA benefits and not let them go to waste." Male Hispanic/Latino Non-first Generation Non-Resident, Warner College of Natural Resources

- "I had all the resources I could while I was at the dorms... With the COVID pandemic thing, we were sent back. I couldn't do that. I couldn't use the resources, because everyone was sent back." Male Asian First Generation Resident Student, Exploratory Studies

Staff Response

Staff also spoke of a lack of resources or university support as a factor for students leaving CSU. Like students, they discussed a lack of mental health services and/or students experiencing difficulty receiving services in a timely and effective manner. Staff also echoed student perceptions that they did not know how to access services or who to ask for help. Staff attributed this in some cases to poor communication between staff and students and a lack of personal connection between students and staff. In addition to mental health services, staff also discussed a lack of services related to the disability center, childcare support for students with dependents, and support for Spanish-speaking students and their families.

Other

Student Response

Responses that did not fit into the above key themes were coded as "other." Responses that fell into this category were related to transportation-related issues within Fort Collins, poor physical health of the student, and a lack of playing opportunity within a sports program.

How Does Campus Climate Contribute to Students Leaving CSU?

As a follow-up to the general question on why students leave CSU, former CSU students were asked to comment specifically on the general climate at CSU, including experiences or factors that made them feel unwelcome on campus. Responses to this question were coded into seven primary themes. The chart below shows the frequency of each theme within the student responses to this question. Almost a quarter of former students (23%) said that **feelings of exclusion** contributed to them leaving CSU. These students said it was difficult for them to meet new people, and this was particularly an issue for some out-of-state students. Feelings of exclusion extended into fraternities and sororities, which some students felt played too large a role in social life on CSU's campus. Another climate-related issue that some students discussed was specifically about **diversity-related experiences** (15%) on campus.

Students viewed the university as a homogenous, white environment. This led to a feeling that CSU was white-centered and didn't handle diversity well, as there were instances of microaggressions and more outwardly racist actions. There were other students who felt that the campus focused too much on diversity. An equal number of former students said that **unsatisfactory extracurricular activities** (13%) and **negative classroom experiences** (13%) were climate-related reasons for leaving CSU. Related to activities, some students felt that extracurricular activities were available but that experiences were not always positive. This was partially attributed to the pandemic which necessitated meeting virtually. Some students were frustrated with the cancellation of club and intramural sports due to Covid-19. Other students said were not happy with what Fort Collins had to offer in terms of activities. Related to negative classroom experiences as a campus climate issue, some students said there was a lack of mentorship between individual professors and students and that there was not enough tutoring available for struggling students. Other students said they felt that fellow students created an unwelcoming environment in the classroom.

- “There were a lot of in-state students, and I knew a lot of people that already knew people. I think it was just a lot of people that I met at least had very different interests from me.” Female White Non-first Generation Nonresident Student, College of Agricultural Sciences
- “I think a lot of it was just there is a big demographic of white kids, usually with not poor parents at least, and especially as first generation and not white and not cisgender, it was just overwhelming, and I feel like, again, they were trying. I don’t know how much of it was them falling short or how much of it was just me definitely not fitting in.” Female Multi-Racial First Generation Resident Student, College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences
- “It was hard for me to make friends, partially because I didn’t really fit into the fraternity-like thing. I’d meet someone, and then they would kind of go and get involved with that, and then they were kind of involved in that clique, and I wasn’t so much.” Male White Non-first Generation Resident Student, Warner College of Natural Resources
- “Sometimes as someone who doesn’t hold any “diverse intersectionalities,” sometimes it feels like you’re getting left in the dust.” Male White Non-first Generation Resident Student, College of Business
- “While living there, I really did wish that there was a stronger Asian community, because there was an Asian office, Asian-Pacific Islander. There was that. I went there here and there, but it felt more of you go there, you hang out, and you go out. It didn’t feel like at home.” Male Asian First Generation Resident Student, Exploratory Studies

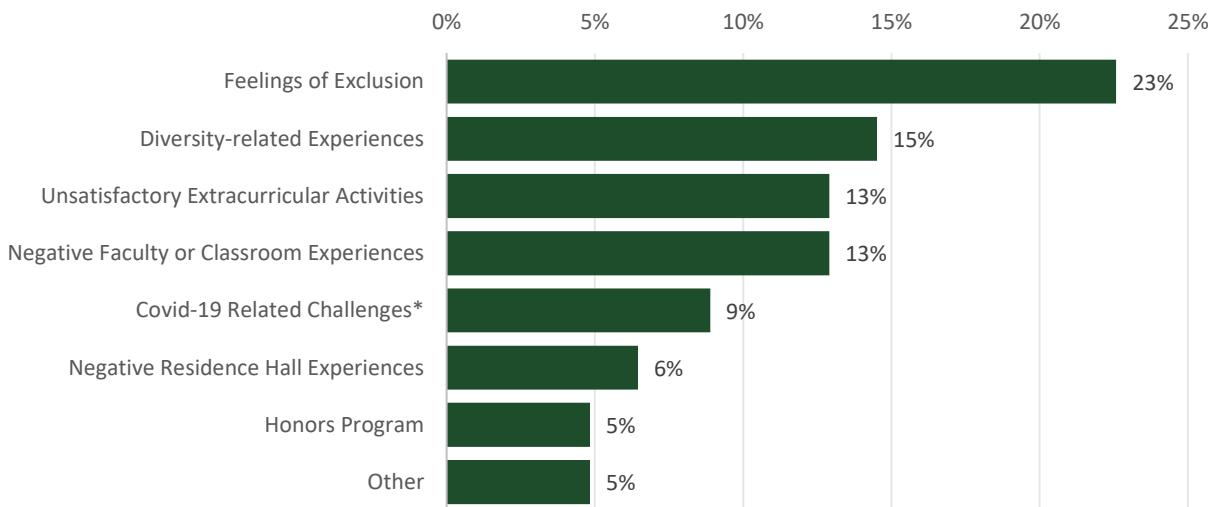
- “I wasn’t really too involved in a lot of campus life, so to speak, because a lot of meetings and stuff happened to be going on when I had class, so, unfortunately, it just wasn’t something that I was ever really able to get into while I was there.” Female White Non-first Generation Resident Student, College of Liberal Arts
- “There were some professors where I didn’t have enough help from them. If I reached out for help, they would get back to me within a week or so, and it would just make me feel like I was behind in my work, and I felt stuck...It kind of scared me for my upcoming classes that I would have to take. I would think to myself, oh, what if my professors are the same as the ones that I had my first semester who didn’t really respond to me or communicate with me the way that I wanted them to communicate with me?” Female Hispanic First Generation Resident Student, College of Liberal Arts
- “I had one of the poorest experiences with a professor at CSU...She did not create a very welcome environment in her classroom, which really bummed me out, because I was extremely interested in the program and really put in my best effort, and she wasn’t necessarily trying to help me or do anything for me. She just kept telling me that I was doing things wrong.” Female White First Generation Resident Student, College of Liberal Arts

Former students from Fall 2019 and Fall 2020 cohorts (9%) discussed ways that **Covid-19 related challenges** impacted campus climate. Students felt that the pandemic inhibited gatherings, which negatively affected relationship-building in the residence halls and on campus, in general. Students also discussed feeling that virtual interactions necessitated by the pandemic were not as enriching as in-person interactions. Students said this led to a feeling that the campus seemed like a “ghost town” during the pandemic. A smaller number of students said that **negative residence hall experiences** (6%) and the **honors program** (5%) contributed to a dissatisfactory campus climate. Some students felt their residence halls and roommates were unfriendly, and it was difficult to meet people, particularly in single-gender residence halls. Others felt the Residence Assistant was unfriendly or the residence halls were too loud. Related to the honors program, some students felt the program isolated the honors students or that it prioritized competitiveness and felt disconnected and separate from the rest of the campus academically and socially. A small portion of former students (5%) shared responses that were categorized as **Other**. These students shared experiences such as not feeling like they had enough interaction to thoroughly discuss the culture of CSU, the culture helped them religiously, and that the culture of CSU was too political.

- Covid-19 related: “We tried to have the hall meetings, which aside from how many people just wouldn’t show up, the people who did were still just looking at their phones and things like that, or having their cameras off and things like that. It’s just really hard to create any sort of friendly or welcoming environment that way.” Male White Non-first Generation Resident Student, College of Business
- “[In the Honors Program] they kind of separate you. To me, it made me feel very disconnected to the rest of campus. You’re in the honors dorm. You’re taking honors classes, all this stuff, and it creates a wall.” Female White Non-first Generation Resident Student, College of Liberal Arts

How Does Campus Climate Contribute to Students Leaving CSU?

N=62



*Note: The pandemic-related theme is attributed to the 45 students in the Fall 2019 and Fall 2020 cohorts who attended CSU during the pandemic. Fall 2018 students are not included in the denominator of this 9%.

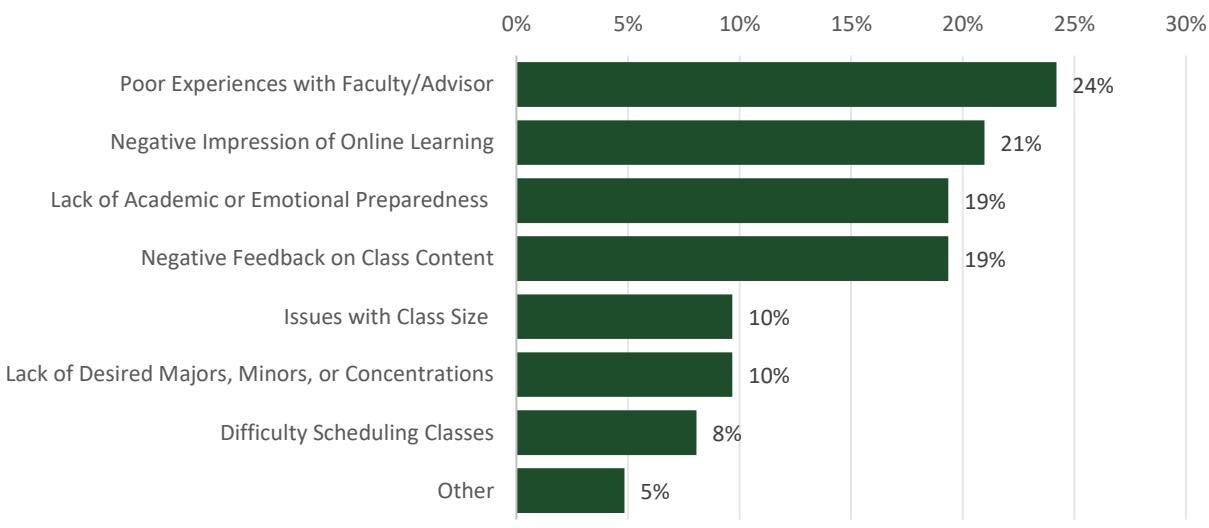
How Do Academic Experiences Contribute to Students Leaving CSU?

Former CSU students were asked to share their academic experiences at CSU and whether they contributed to them leaving the university. Roughly a quarter of former students (24%) said that **poor experiences with faculty or advisors** was a contributing factor for them leaving CSU. Specifically, students felt that professors and advisors were distant or unavailable, professors relied too much on technology during the pandemic, and advisors did not understand students' life circumstances. This feedback was skewed toward professors, with 73% of students that identified this issue commenting on professors and 47% commenting on advisors.¹ The second most common academic-related reasons for leaving included a **lack of academic or emotional preparedness** to deal with the rigors of school (21%) and a **negative impression of online learning** (21%). Students said that they faced unexpectedly high academic expectations and workloads and lacked self-accountability. Some students (19%) said that **negative opinions on the content of their classes** contributed to them leaving CSU. This included issues such as a lack of hands-on learning, overwhelming or underwhelming level of coursework, and dissatisfaction with the professor. Less common responses to this question included **dissatisfaction with large class size** (10%), **difficulty with managing class schedules** (8%), and **dissatisfaction with the majors, minor, or concentrations** that CSU offers (8%). A small portion of former students (3%) shared responses that were categorized as **Other**. These students discussed issues such as dissatisfaction with the prerequisite requirements at CSU and the effect of their mental health on their academic experiences.

¹ Percentages do not add to 100, because responses were double-counted where both were mentioned.

- “I had a couple of times where I ended up switching advisors, just because my advisor just didn’t really understand where I was at in my life, so I guess that was kind of the negative in that I had to switch advisors.” Female White Non-first Generation Nonresident Student, College of Agricultural Sciences
- “Some teachers, I think since everything was online, I just felt a little distant from my professors in general, since I never actually really saw them and interacted with them.” Female Asian Non-first Generation Nonresident Student, Exploratory Studies
- “I remember feeling in over my head. I was balancing all these classes with all these different schedules on high school where they’re kind of all the same schedule, so different meeting times, different requirements, different grading scales. It was all really, really difficult, and doing that online is so much worse.” Female White Non-first Generation Resident Student, Walter Scott, Jr. College of Engineering
- “I wasn’t doing too horribly, but the moment it all went online was the moment the ship started sinking. At that point, it was a thing where, say, I had ten classes; I only enjoyed two out of the ten, so I was just sitting there thinking to myself, at the time, not only am I not enjoying most of what I’m learning, but now it’s all online. At this point in time, I might as well just figure out other ways to focus on what I want to learn, if it’s going to be online.” Male Black First Generation Resident Student, College of Liberal Arts
- “I think I was in a lot of gen-ed classes really, and they just felt normal, very similar to my high school classes. Right now [not at CSU], I’m in senior classes right now...I enjoy my engineering classes right now more, because it’s a lot more hands-on. I don’t know if I would have gotten that at CSU, but I had a lab and it felt a bit tedious for physics and stuff like that.” Male White First Generation Nonresident Student, College of Natural Sciences
- “I would go to office hours to try and fix this and be like, something’s wrong, I need to fix this, I’m going to go to office hours, and it felt weird to me. The professor was like, I don’t even know who you are, and it was a foreign experience for me, for sure. I think just in general big class sizes is something I wasn’t prepared for or used to.” Male Hispanic First Generation Resident Student, College of Natural Sciences

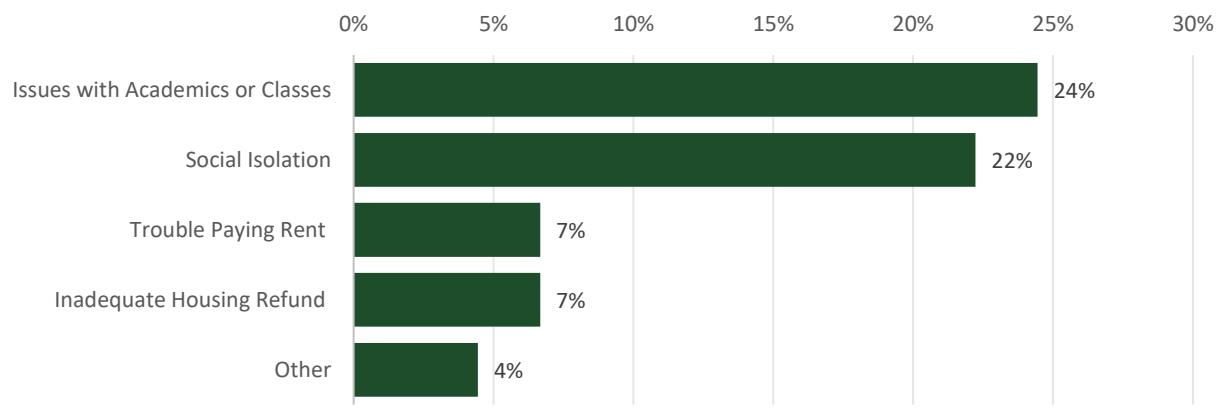
How do Academic Experiences Contribute to Students Leaving CSU? N=62



How Did the Pandemic Contribute to Students Leaving CSU?

Former CSU students in the Fall 2019 and Fall 2020 cohorts were asked to share how the pandemic may have contributed to them leaving the university. Almost a quarter of these students (24%) said that the pandemic lead to **issues with their academic experiences** which contributed to them leaving. Students had mostly negative opinions about the online learning environment, as they felt that some classes could not be done online, professors were assigning more work due to being online, and students felt they were teaching themselves. Just less than a quarter of students (22%) said that the **feelings of social isolation** resulting from the pandemic contributed to them leaving. Students commented on the struggles of meeting new people in a pandemic and how the cancellation of in-person events and activities created an atmosphere where there was nothing to do or no energy on campus. Less common responses to this question included the pandemic and corresponding lockdown policies leading to having **trouble paying rent** (7%) and **dissatisfaction with the housing refund offered** (7%). A small percentage of students (4%) shared responses that were categorized as **Other**. These included a student expressing fear over contracting the virus themselves and another student wanting to be closer to home in case their family members contracted Covid-19.

How Did the Pandemic Contribute to Students Leaving CSU? N=45



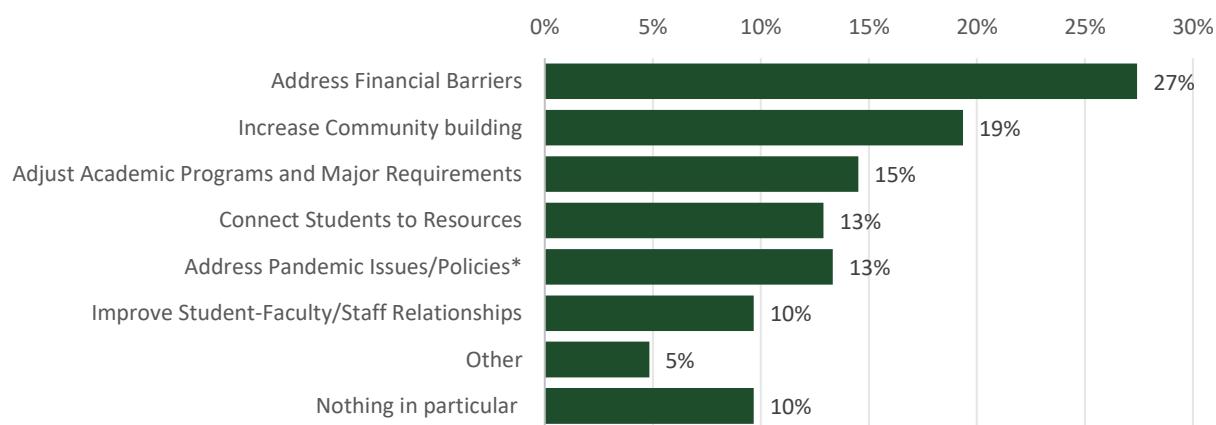
Note: This chart reflects the responses of the 45 students from the Fall 2019 and Fall 2020 cohorts only. Fall 2018 students did not experience the pandemic at CSU.

What Can CSU Do to Better Retain Undergraduate Students?

Former CSU students were asked to share what CSU could have done differently to keep them at the university. Responses to this question were coded into five themes. The chart below shows the frequency of each theme within the student responses to this question. The themes are defined in more detail in the section below. CSU staff were also asked what CSU could do to better support students, so they do not leave CSU. Their responses generally mirrored what the students themselves said. Staff responses to this question are paired with the corresponding student theme.

What Can CSU Do to Better Retain Undergraduate Students?

N=62



**Note: The pandemic-related theme is attributed to the 45 students in the Fall 2019 and Fall 2020 cohorts who attended CSU during the pandemic.*

Address Financial Barriers

Student Response

When asked what CSU could do to better retain undergraduate students, students reiterated that financial barriers, particularly tuition and other living expenses, contributed to them leaving CSU. While some students acknowledged the difficulty of CSU lowering the cost of tuition, they said that if that was done, they may have stayed at CSU.

Staff Response

CSU staff also discussed a need for CSU to address financial barriers to better retain students. Staff talked about increasing the amount of financial aid, including scholarships, for students from low and middle income families. Staff also discussed a need for financial counseling to address the fact that the process for financial aid is long and overwhelming and that resources are difficult to get in a reasonable amount of time. Staff also discussed challenges with financial aid in that a student's credit load affects their aid amount and that students are not able to carry-forward aid for previous semesters. Staff also shared ideas of offering financial programs that are not dependent on loans or having scholarships that offer a consistent amount from year to year.

Increase Community Building

Student Response

Students felt they would have stayed at CSU if there was more community building. Students desired for CSU to place more of a focus on social justice and awareness of social justice issues. Students also shared diversity, equity and inclusion-related efforts that CSU could promote such as more diversity on residence hall floors and stronger community building efforts for students of color. Also related to residence halls, students discussed a desire for CSU to connect or house students with similar interests together. Poor community relations in the Honors Residence Hall were also discussed. Some students discussed wanting more school-sanctioned events or activities. Students also discussed a need for adapting community-building efforts during the pandemic to include more socially distanced events.

Staff Response

Like former students, staff said that CSU needs to focus on student community building to better retain its students. Staff said there should be more community building activities for students living off campus, for example. Staff also discussed a need for CSU to update RamLink so that students have a better, more streamlined way to get involved in activities. Staff also felt there needed to be more opportunities for students to play sports without having to pay a fee to participate. CSU should also sponsor more community building events beyond the Ram Welcome and orientation. Related to diversity, equity and inclusion efforts, staff felt that CSU needs to increase funding to cultural centers to help those students have a better sense of community; create more community spaces for marginalized groups, and increase staff and faculty diversity.

Adjust Academic Programs and Major Requirements

Student Response

Students discussed the issues they had with programs or classes while at CSU that led them to leave the university. When asked what CSU could do to better retain students, they said they felt restricted by their major into taking major-specific classes. If CSU made it more feasible for students to take classes

outside their major, it would address this issue. Students also discussed wanting CSU to offer more smaller sized classes. Other students wanted a medical program, more work-study options, and mandatory study groups for the general education courses.

Staff Response

Staff also discussed the ways in which CSU's academic requirements and regulations could be adjusted so that students stay at CSU. For example, staff also mentioned smaller class sizes as a way for CSU to improve student academic experiences, as well as eliminating restrictions where students need to be a part of a major to enroll in class. Additionally, staff suggested that CSU rework the math placement process, create more engaging classes for first year students and allowing the Fresh Start program to be applied sooner for students. Because Fresh Start is not enacted until census, at the time class registration opens, students are not clear on their actual GPA and which classes will be dropped. Staff also discussed a need to revisit the policy of placing registration holds on students for academic or financial reasons. This creates an additional barrier for students to stay enrolled at CSU.

Connect Students to Resources

Student Response

Former students discussed the various resources and types of information that would have helped them stay enrolled at CSU. The most common was more or improved contact with health services. Additional comments were made for more support for first generation students and shy students. Former students also discussed a need for increased financial support services and a more robust welcome to campus.

Staff Response

Staff mirrored the student call for more resources to keep students enrolled at CSU. They identified second and third year students as particularly in need of additional resources such as resources related to living off campus and for students needing employment on or off campus. Like students, staff also discussed a need to rework the mental health services at CSU to be more readily available to students seeking or requiring support. Staff specifically mentioned that there are no full-time Spanish-speaking counselors in CSU's mental health system. Staff also discussed the need for more resources related to health care and jobs for students that are undocumented. Staff talked about the need for increased services for students from marginalized communities to create more opportunities for students to feel included and accepted. Staff also discussed the need to make student race and gender identity data further disaggregated. Staff felt that if student-serving staff had more detailed demographic data they would be able to better maintain marginalized students on campus, because they could provide more targeted support for students. Staff gave the example El Centro or Pride have more details around how students identify to help build communities for students. Staff also felt that students need more and better paying jobs on campus, childcare resources, mentor programs, and that CSU needs policies in place to address food and shelter insecurity for its students. Staff also said that students need resources related to life skills such as time management and financial counseling, and that more needs to be done to make students aware of CSU's resources and policies.

Address Issues Related to the Pandemic and Covid-19 Related Policies

Student Response

Students felt they would have stayed at CSU if the pandemic had not happened, whether that was because of the pandemic itself or CSU's policies towards combatting it. Some students accepted that the pandemic necessitated policies but felt disheartened by these policies. Other students did not think that CSU's COVID policies were appropriate. One student was dismayed by the lack of in-person classes. Staff did not discuss CSU's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic in relation to what CSU could do to better retain students.

Improve Student-Faculty/Staff Relationships

Student Response

Students discussed what they would change about mentors, advisors and instructors that would have kept them at CSU. Students wanted more advising and mentorship early in their academic career. They also wanted more contact from academic staff and advisors, as well as more opportunities outside of school to do internships. One student also discussed a desire to have more people of color in faculty positions.

Staff Response

Staff also spoke of the need for CSU to improve student relations with staff and faculty to better retain undergraduate students. Specifically, staff discussed the need to increase faculty and staff accountability. For example, staff talked about the need for CSU to hold faculty accountable for creating bias and microaggression-free environments; have repercussions for staff who have poor behavior; address student demands especially around social justice and inclusivity issues; address cultural issues within athletics that make some students feel unwelcome; ensure staff and faculty have trauma and de-escalation training; and to provide CSU staff with customer service and diversity training. Staff also shared the need for CSU to provide more hands-on learning opportunities for students with professors.

Nothing in Particular

These students would not change anything about CSU; they left for their own reasons, not because of something related to the university itself.

Other

Students who provided other areas of change for CSU to stay enrolled include feelings of resident assistants having too much power, the classroom incorporating too much politically biased content, and addressing what they felt was a toxic environment created by fraternities and sororities on campus.

Additional Staff Themes

In addition to the primary themes discussed above that students and CSU staff both shared, staff responses identified two additional unique themes related to protecting students and providing more support for CSU staff.

Protection of Students

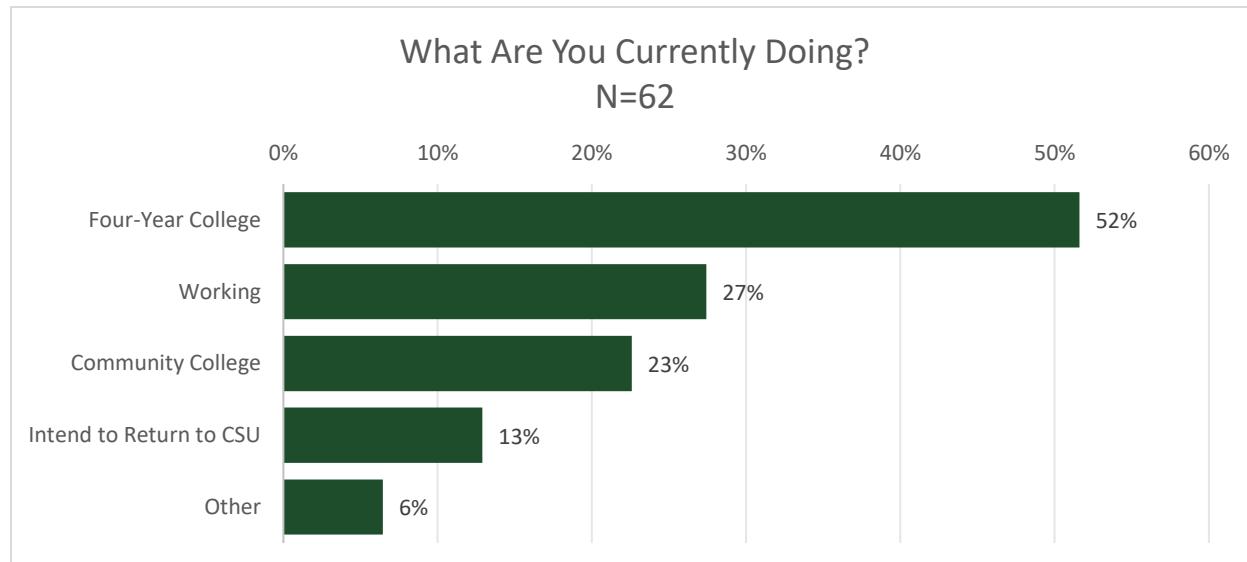
Staff commented that CSU has a dearth of policies related to protecting vulnerable students. One area where this is apparent is the lack of policies related to staff accountability. Specifically, staff shared that the bias reporting system has no accountability for staff reported as offenders in the portal. In addition, the diversity, equity, and inclusion training offered to ensure staff are more effective and inclusive are optional. Staff also said that CSU has no programs or policies to prevent events at CSU that go against the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Staff also discussed issues with the Title IX process and accountability at CSU, saying that survivors of sexual violence tend to drop out of the university more than alleged perpetrators. Staff feel the University does not do enough to prevent assaults on campus from occurring.

Staff Support

CSU staff discussed the ways in which CSU could better support its faculty and staff, which would have the knock-on effect of increasing retention at CSU. For example, staff salaries are lacking and higher pay for advisors would reduce turnover, so advising teams could maintain reasonable caseload and connect to students in a more meaningful way. Current advising loads are much larger due to turnover. Staff also mentioned that the student resources and healthcare units are understaffed and underpaid, which negatively impacts students seeking out those services.

Where are Former CSU Students Now?

Former CSU students were asked to share what they are doing now that they no longer attend CSU. The majority of students (52%) said they are currently attending a different four-year college or university. More than a quarter of students (27%) are working, and slightly less than a quarter (23%) are attending a community college. Some students (13%) said they are planning on returning to CSU at some point in the future. To see these categories disaggregated by residency, see Appendix D.



Conclusion

The three most prevalent reasons that students gave for leaving CSU mirrored the three most frequently identified ways in which CSU could better retain students. The most common factor that students identified was related to financial challenges. Almost half of the students interviewed for this project (47%) said that they left CSU because of financial struggles, and 27% said that if CSU was able to address financial barriers, they would more successfully retain undergraduate students. Staff interviewed for this project provided some suggestions as to how CSU could address the financial issues of students, including providing robust financial counseling services for students to help them understand the financial aid process and the resources available to them. Staff also discussed a need to provide more and better paying jobs for CSU students on campus to alleviate financial concerns. Students are interested in seeing tuition and fees associated with attending in the first year be reduced, especially for out of state students. Students also mentioned wanting more support and resources related to financial aid.

The second most common factor that students identified for leaving CSU and what they identified CSU as needing to address to retain undergraduates was related to negative social experiences (44% and 19% respectively). This theme related to feelings of isolation, negative experiences related to diversity on campus and extracurricular opportunities, as well as unsatisfactory experiences with residence halls and CSU student facilities. For some students in the Fall 2019 and Fall 2020 cohorts, this theme tied into the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic. Both students and staff suggested that CSU could combat these negative social experiences through actively facilitating community building among students. This included stronger community building efforts for students of color and students from other systemically minoritized groups including more or stronger affinity groups; connecting and housing students based on their similar interests; revamping and increasing the amount of school-sanctioned events such as game nights or tournaments and student-lead clubs and events post-pandemic; and increasing community building activities for students living off campus. Interviewees suggested combatting negative social experiences by connecting students to resources such as mental health services, orientation programs, and housing (on- and off-campus) resources.

The third most prevalent factor that students identified as a barrier to retention was academic-related concerns. Almost a quarter of students (21%) said they left CSU because of negative academic experiences, such as poor interactions with faculty or staff, a lack of academic preparedness, and negative impressions of class format and content. Students and staff suggested ways CSU could mitigate these issues including reducing restrictions on what classes students can take outside their major, decreasing class sizes, revisiting registration hold policies and the Fresh Start program, and offering more engaging classes and work-study options for first year students.

In general, the responses given by former students mirrored those given by CSU staff interviewed for this project. While both students and staff felt that there are some areas CSU has little to no ability to modify, they shared valuable insight into what is causing students to leave CSU and what CSU could do better to retain its undergraduate students.

Appendix A

Staff Interview Questionnaire

1. What do you perceive as the main reasons that undergraduate students leave CSU after their first semester or first year?
 - a. Probes based on their answer:
 - i. Tell me more about the types of family-related issues you've heard/seen.
 - ii. Tell me more about the financial issues you've heard/seen.
 - iii. Tell me more about the academic issues you've heard/seen.
 - iv. Tell me more about the health and well-being issues you've heard/seen.
 - v. Tell me more about the support system issues you've heard/seen.
 - vi. Tell me more about the campus culture issues you've heard/seen.
 - vii. Tell me more about the campus experiences you've heard about that led them to leave.
 - viii. Tell me more about transfer-related reasons you've heard about.
2. Are there particular policies, practices, or processes at the university that you see as contributing to students leaving CSU?
3. Are there any student stories that stand out to you as unique in why they decided to not return to CSU?
4. What do you think CSU could do better to retain their undergraduate students from year to year?
 - a. Probes:
 - i. Are there things that CSU could do related to financial hardship?
 - ii. Are there things that CSU could do related to academic support?
 - iii. Are there things that CSU could do related to social wellbeing?
 - iv. Are there things that CSU could do related to student sense of belonging on campus?
 - v. Are there things that CSU could do related to climate on campus?
5. Thank you for your thoughts. Is there anything else you'd like to share related to undergraduate retention issues at CSU that I have not asked about?
6. Over the next few months, we are interviewing undergraduate students that have left CSU. We are asking staff who have worked with some of these students to interview them, because the students may feel more comfortable sharing their CSU experiences with you. Would you be willing to interview select students for this project?

Appendix B

Student Recruitment Language

Recruitment Email: Students from IRISS

Subject Line: \$50 for your thoughts!

Dear _____,

We are reaching out on behalf of Colorado State University's Office of Institutional Research to see if you are willing to share some information about your experiences at CSU with us. CSU is trying to understand why students leave CSU and what we can do to better support our students to stay through graduation. We are conducting brief, 30-minute interviews with former CSU students, and we would appreciate hearing from you on this topic. We can offer a \$50 Amazon gift card for your time. If you would like to participate in an interview, please email me back at [your email address].

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at [cla_iriss@colostate.edu \(cla underscore iriss\)](mailto:cla_iriss@colostate.edu).

Thank you for your time,

[Your Name]
The Institute for Research in the Social Sciences
Colorado State University

Recruitment Email: Students from CSU Staff

Subject Line: \$50 for your thoughts! OR chosen by staff

Dear _____,

[Sentence of introduction that fits prior relationship]. I am reaching out on behalf of Colorado State University's Office of Institutional Research to see if you are willing to share some information about your experiences at CSU with us. CSU is trying to understand why students leave CSU and what we can do to better support our students to stay through graduation. We are conducting brief, 30-minute interviews with former CSU students, and I would appreciate hearing from you on this topic. We can offer a \$50 Amazon gift card for your time. If you would like to participate in an interview, please email me back at [your email address].

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or CSU's Institute for Research in the Social Sciences at [cla_iriss@colostate.edu \(cla underscore iriss\)](mailto:cla_iriss@colostate.edu).

Thank you!

[Your Name]
[Department]
Colorado State University

Recruitment Texts: Students from IRISS

Hi there! My name is _____ and I'm a student employee at Colorado State University. Would you be willing to participate in a 30-minute interview about your experiences on campus in exchange for a \$50 Amazon gift card? Text me back or check your email. Thanks!

Recruitment Texts: Students from Staff

Hi there! It's [NAME plus reminder of connection]. Would you be willing to participate in a 30-minute interview about your experiences on campus in exchange for a \$50 Amazon gift card? Text me back or check your email. Thanks!

EX: Hi there! It's Wendy, your old advisor from CSU.

Appendix C

Student Interview Questionnaire

- 1. To begin, can you tell me a little bit about your experience at CSU and why you ultimately left? [Probe as needed]**
 - a. How did you feel about attending CSU?
 - b. How did your family feel about you attending CSU?
 - c. How was your experience making friends on campus?
 - d. How was your experience with balancing school with personal life and responsibilities?
 - e. [IF FINANCIAL AID or OTHER SERVICES/OFFICES ARE BROUGHT UP]
 - i. Were you able to connect with the people at the Financial Aid Office?
 - ii. What was helpful about working with the financial aid office?
 - iii. What was not helpful?
 - iv. Can you tell me about your experiences with the staff within financial aid?
 1. How friendly were financial aid staff?
 - v. Did you have difficulties scheduling a time to meet with the office?
- 2. Tell me about the general culture on campus. For example, what are some things that made you feel welcome or unwelcome at CSU?**
[Probe as needed]
 - a. How did CSU help to affirm your identities and values? [Examples of identities include gender, cultural, religious, ethnic, national, disability].
 - b. CSU has a number of Student Diversity Program as well as student-led clubs and events. Can you tell me about any experiences you may have had with any of these programs or clubs?
 - i. If none: What would have been the best way to get you connected to these programs or events?
- 3. Tell me about your academic experiences at the university and whether you think these experiences contributed to you leaving CSU.**
[PROBE: This might include the kinds of support you received from your advisors, ASCs, or professors and instructors, or other students.]
 - a. How academically prepared did you feel when you arrived at CSU?
 - b. In what ways did you feel supported or not supported by your professors, advisor, or other people or departments on campus?
 - c. Can you tell me about any experiences or issues with course availability, scheduling, or classroom climate?
 - d. Which classes did you struggle to get into?
 - i. How did course availability effect your progress in the program?
 - e. Which classes felt difficult to attend due to scheduling?
 - i. Did your courses help you with your academic and career path?
 - ii. How would you describe the climate in your classrooms?
 1. Were there classes that made you feel more or less welcome?

- f. How, if at all, did the majors/minors available at CSU impact your reasons for leaving?
4. **How did the pandemic contribute to you leaving CSU?**
[PROBE: This might include challenges you faced switching to remote or hybrid classes, how connected you felt to your peers or the campus community overall.]
5. **What are you currently doing now that you are no longer enrolled at CSU?**
- If not attending another university/college: Do you plan to come back to CSU in the future? Why/why not?
 - [PROBE if there is sufficient time] If attending another university/college: Can you tell me a little bit about what made you decide to attend that university instead of CSU?
6. **If you could change one thing at CSU that would have helped you to stay enrolled, what would it be?**
7. **Thank you for your thoughts. Is there anything else you'd like to share related to your experiences at CSU that I have not asked about?**

Appendix D

Themes Disaggregated by Attribute

Financial Struggles

47% of student interviewees (29 former students) reported financial struggles. The percentage of those students that had certain attributes is shown in the table below.

Attribute	Number	Percent
Non Resident	15	52%
C4E Status	3	10%
Net Cost Ratio: 60% or Higher	22	76%
Net Cost Ratio: 59% or Lower	4	14%
Net Cost Ratio: No FAFSA	3	10%

Negative Social Experiences

47% of student interviewees (29 former students) reported negative social experiences. The percentage of those students that had certain attributes is shown in the table below.

Attribute	Number	Percent
First Generation	9	31%
Female	18	62%
Minority	8	28%
Learning Community Status	13	45%

Career Paths/Academics

24% of student interviewees (15 former students) reported dissatisfaction with career paths or academics. The percentage of those students that had certain attributes is shown in the table below.

Attribute	Number	Percent
Exploratory Studies	2	13%
Learning Community	9	60%
First Fall Academic Probation Status	2	13%

School/Life Balance

21% of student interviewees (13 former students) reported issues with school/life balance. The percentage of those students that had certain attributes is shown in the table below.

Attribute	Number	Percent
Net Cost Ratio: 60% or Higher	11	85%
Net Cost Ratio: 59% or Lower	1	8%
Net Cost Ratio: No FAFSA	1	8%

Location of CSU

19% of student interviewees (13 former students) reported dissatisfaction with the location of CSU. The percentage of those students that had certain attributes is shown in the table below.

Attribute	Number	Percent
Non Resident	5	42%
Not Rural	7	58%
Rural Status Unspecified	5	42%

Difficulties with Financial Aid Office or Policies

15% of student interviewees (9 former students) reported issues with the financial aid office or policies. The percentage of those students that had certain attributes is shown in the table below.

Attribute	Number	Percent
Non Resident	2	22%
C4E Status	3	33%
Net Cost Ratio: 60% or Higher	4	44%
Net Cost Ratio: 59% or Lower	3	33%
Net Cost Ratio: No FAFSA	2	22%

Quality/Style of Classes

13% of student interviewees (8 former students) reported dissatisfaction with the quality or style of classes at CSU. The percentage of those students by college is shown in the table below.

College	Number	Percent
College of Business	1	13%
Exploratory Studies	3	38%
College of Liberal Arts	2	25%
College of Natural Sciences	1	13%
Walter Scott, Jr. College of Engineering	1	13%

Lack of Access to Resources

10% of student interviewees (6 former students) reported a lack of access to resources. The percentage of those students by college is shown in the table below.

College	Number	Percent
College of Health and Human Sciences	1	17%
Exploratory Studies	1	17%
College of Liberal Arts	1	17%
College of Natural Sciences	1	17%
Walter Scott, Jr. College of Engineering	1	17%
Warner College of Natural Resources	1	17%

Where are Former CSU Students Now?

Former students said they were enrolled at a different four-year college (52%), working (27%), attending community college (23%), intending to return to CSU (13%), or a response that was categorized as other (6%). For each of those categories, the percent of those students that were residents and nonresidents of Colorado are shown in the table below.

	Resident		Nonresident		All Students	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Four-Year College	19	59%	13	41%	32	52%
Working	12	71%	5	29%	17	27%
Community College	7	50%	7	50%	14	23%
Intend to Return	5	63%	3	38%	8	13%
Other	4	100%	0	0%	4	6%