

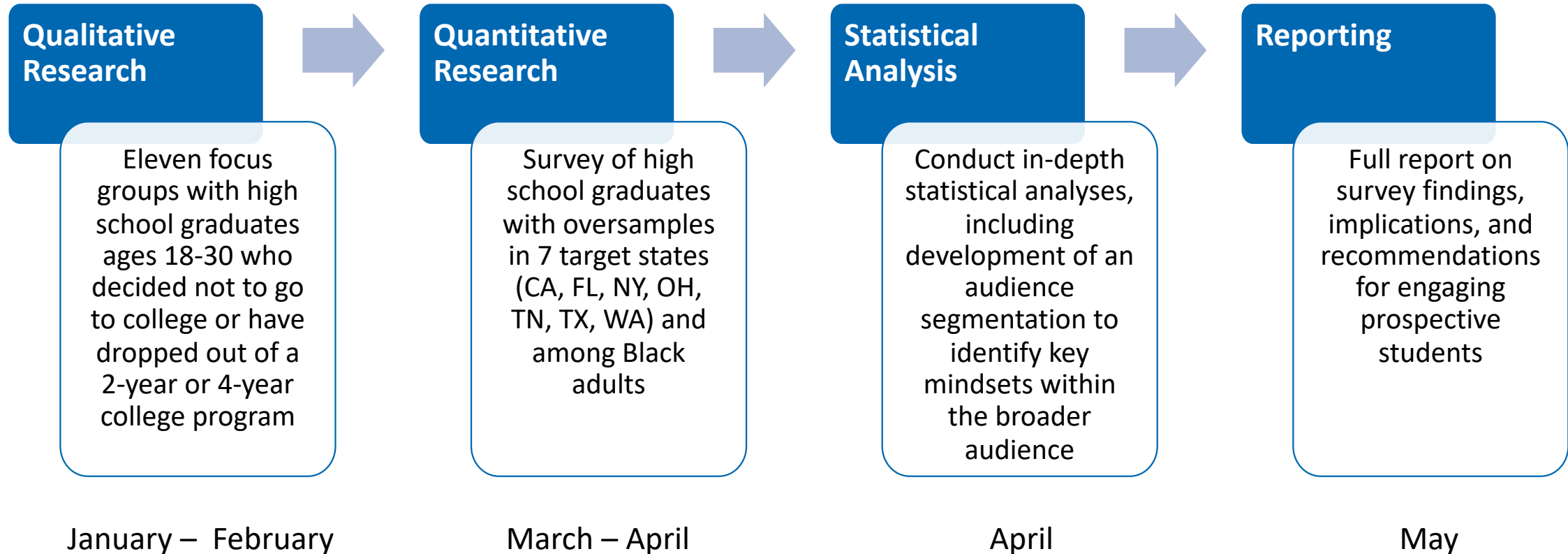


Exploring the Exodus from Higher Education

Findings from Focus Groups and a Survey of High School Graduates who have not completed college

May 2022 for the: **BILL & MELINDA**
GATES foundation

Research Process



Online survey of:

1,675 high school graduates ages 18-30 who had decided not to go to college or have dropped out of a 2-year or 4-year college program.

Including oversamples of:

- N=303 Black adults
- N=216 in California
- N=153 in Florida
- N=154 in New York
- N=153 in Ohio
- N=149 in Tennessee
- N=151 in Texas
- N=154 in Washington

Fielded:

March 18th to April 14th, 2022

Participants were recruited through three reputable non-probability panel providers. These panels are built using multiple certified sources, and survey respondents are validated/authenticated and incentivized for participation.

Quotas set and data weighted to be representative of adults ages 18-30 years with a high school but not college degree on age, gender, race, ethnicity and geography.

Edge Research is a member of Insight's Association and follows its best practices for survey sampling and research.

Blue/Red text throughout indicates **higher** and **lower** statistically significant differences within subgroups.

Hypothesis Review

Hypothesis

The decision against obtaining a degree is mostly financial.



Although dollars and debt are significant barriers, multiple factors impact this audience's ability and/or interest in getting a degree. They express limited life satisfaction, and many note they could not manage the stress/challenges associated with college. Addressing financial burdens alone will not solve the problem.

This audience questions the value of a college degree.



Yes, although this audience is not a monolith. Some need reassurance of the ROI. Others need supports to make the transition a success. That being said, the value proposition of finding oneself/one's passion misses the mark for many, especially with multiple other educational options at their disposal.

This audience is unclear about their next step.



Uncertainty looms large. There are a range of mindsets, with different needs and potential solutions. Segmentation helps to uncover which groups' hesitations have the greatest potential to overcome.

The pandemic makes the college path less attractive.

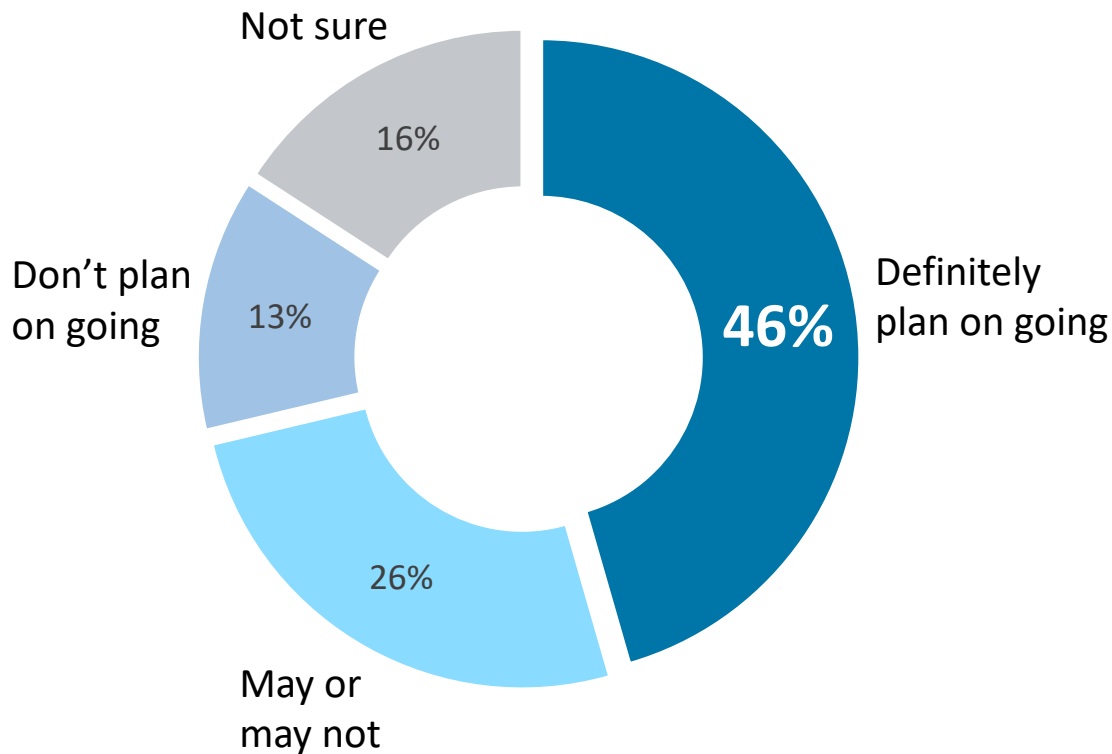


Potentially. Most notably, it complicates the question of value (i.e., are online classes "worth it"). But this audience remains open to hybrid and flexible education options that meet them where they are and may not have been as available before the need for online learning as a result of the pandemic.

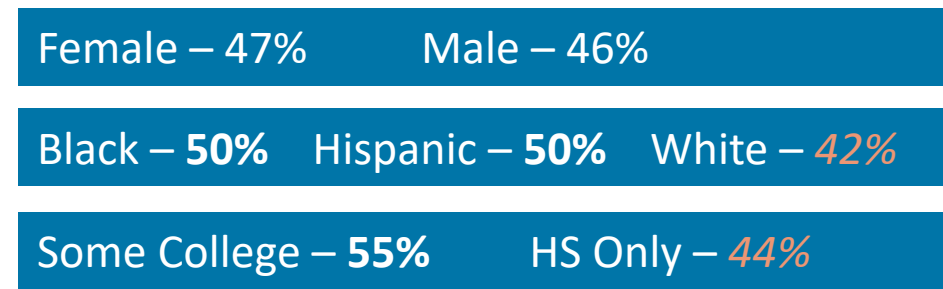
Just under half say they plan to go to college or finish their degree – those who started college are most likely

- It is vital to understand the difference between the “Definites” and those who do not fall in that camp.

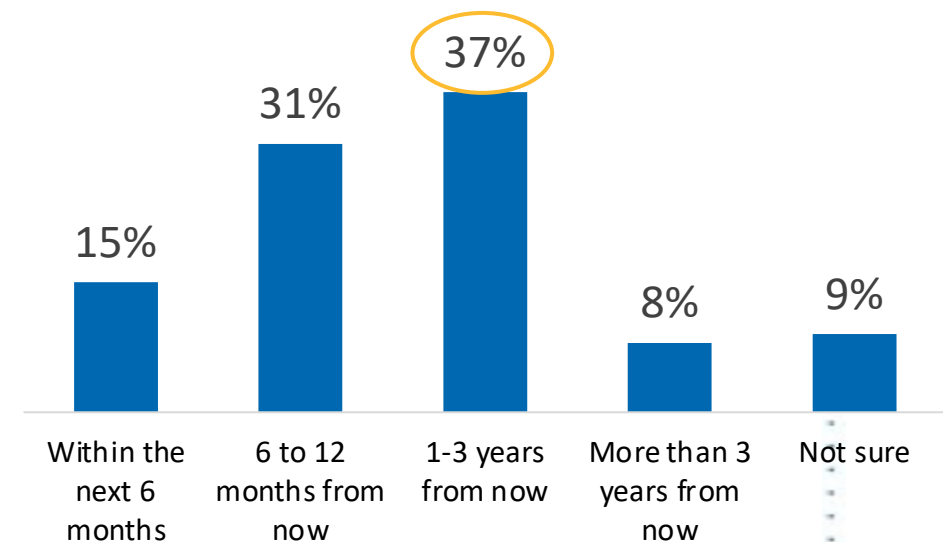
Future Plans Regarding College



% Definitely Plan on Going

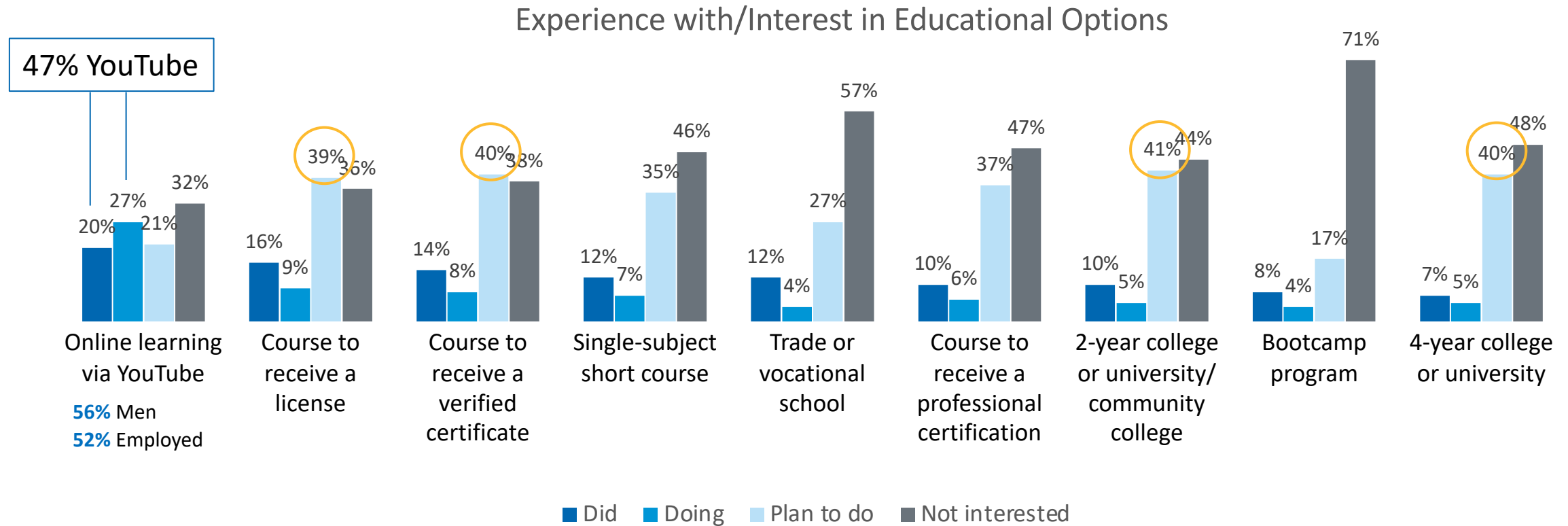


When do you plan to go to college? (n=1,206)



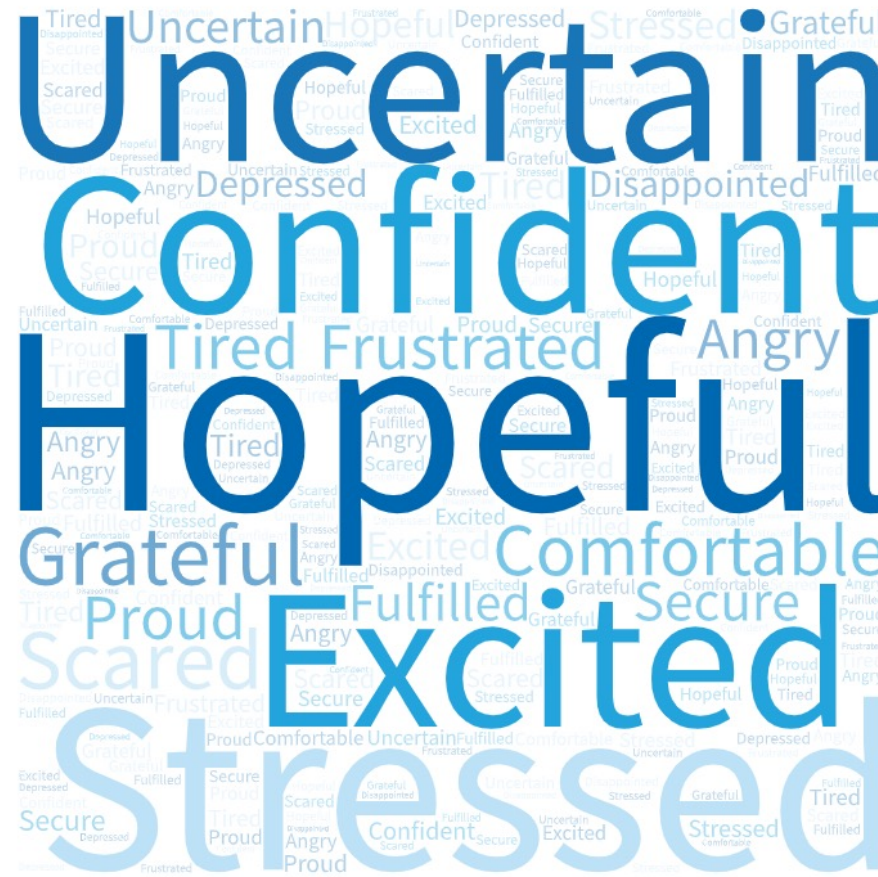
These young adults are exploring a variety of learning options: about 4-in-10 say they plan to do a course for a license/certificate, and/or attend a 2- or 4-year college

- Almost half indicate they have taken or are taking classes on YouTube

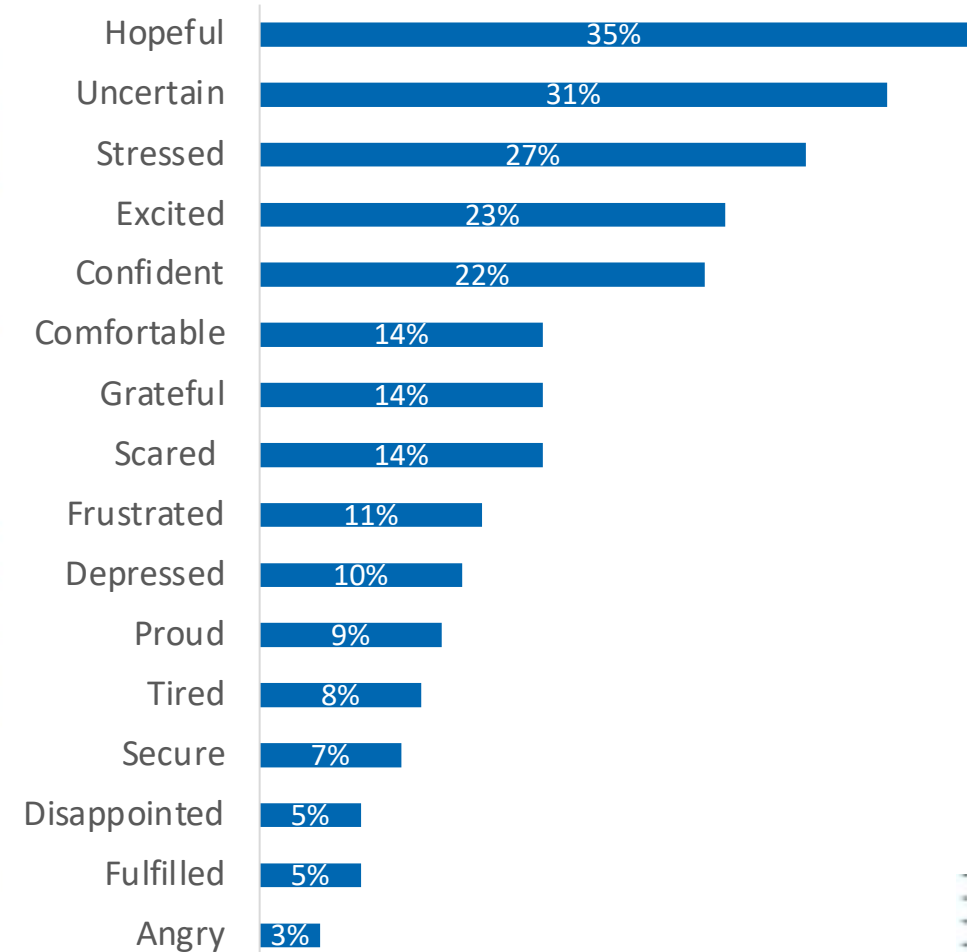


As they look to the future, feelings are a mix of hope and excitement, with uncertainty and stress

- Certainty of obtaining more education does not necessarily impact feelings about the future.

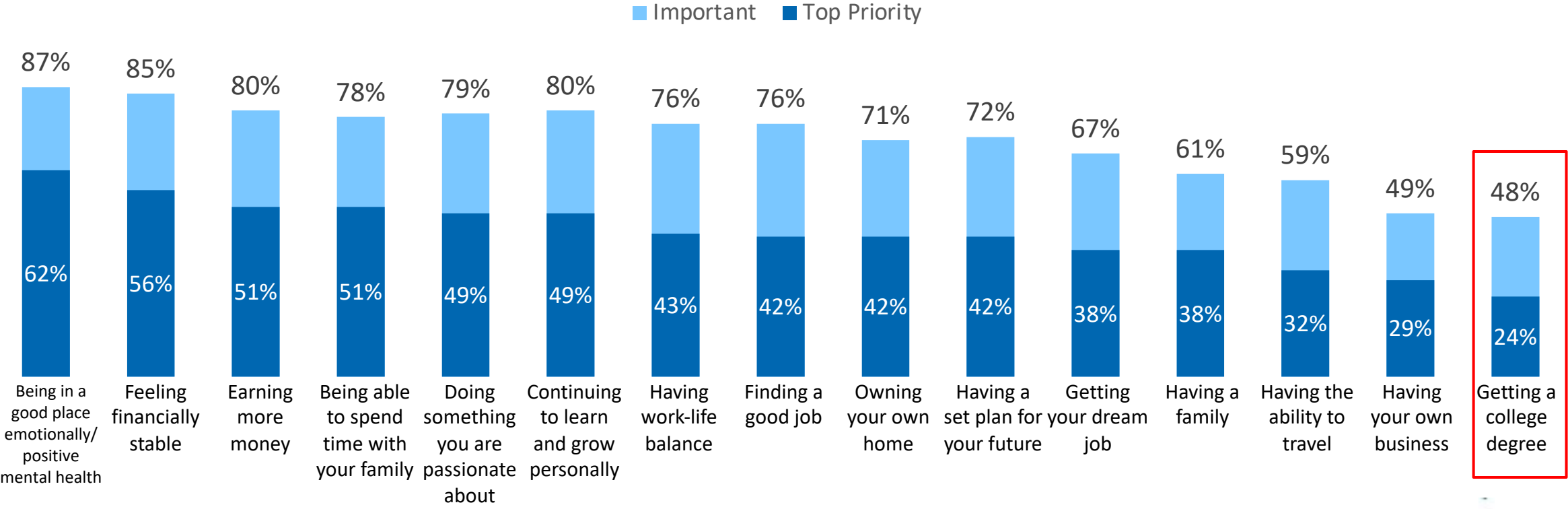


Feelings About Future



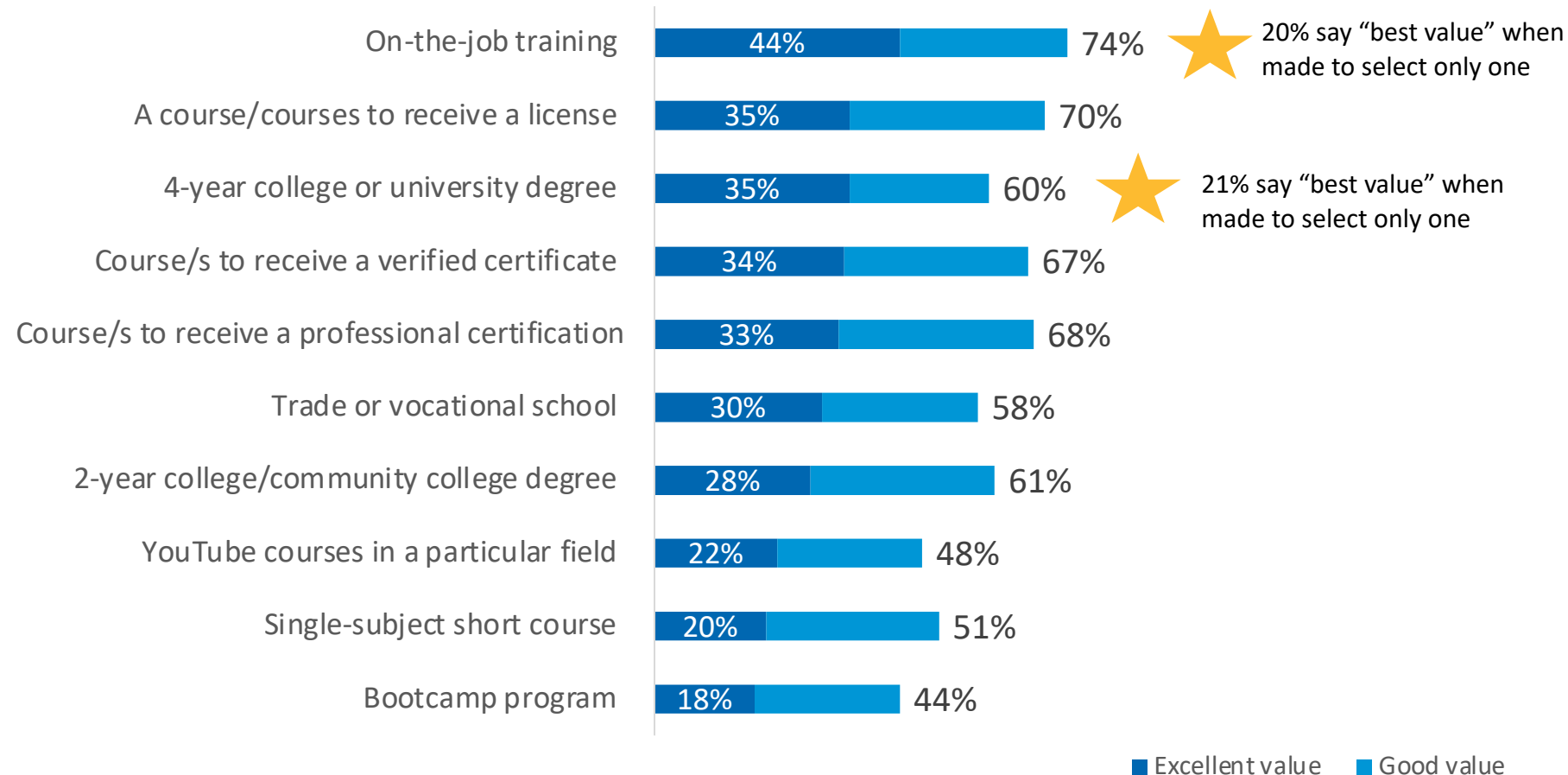
But when it come to priorities for the next few years, emotional and financial stability top the list, college is at the bottom

Personal Goals for the Next Few Years



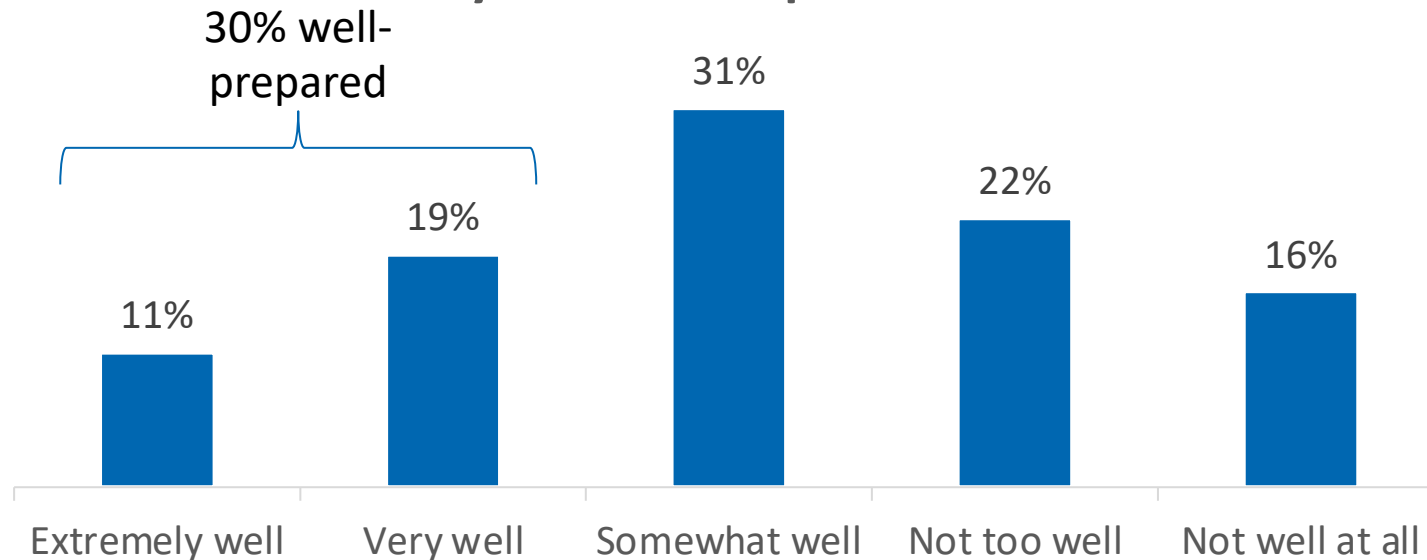
On-the-job training is considered the best value, although just as many choose college when forced to select one from the list

Value of Additional Education and Training Opportunities



Half say high school taught them how to get into college but not how to succeed there; few believe it prepared them for life

How well did high school prepare you for your next step in life?



“Extremely/very well” higher among:

- Black
- Hispanic
- Men

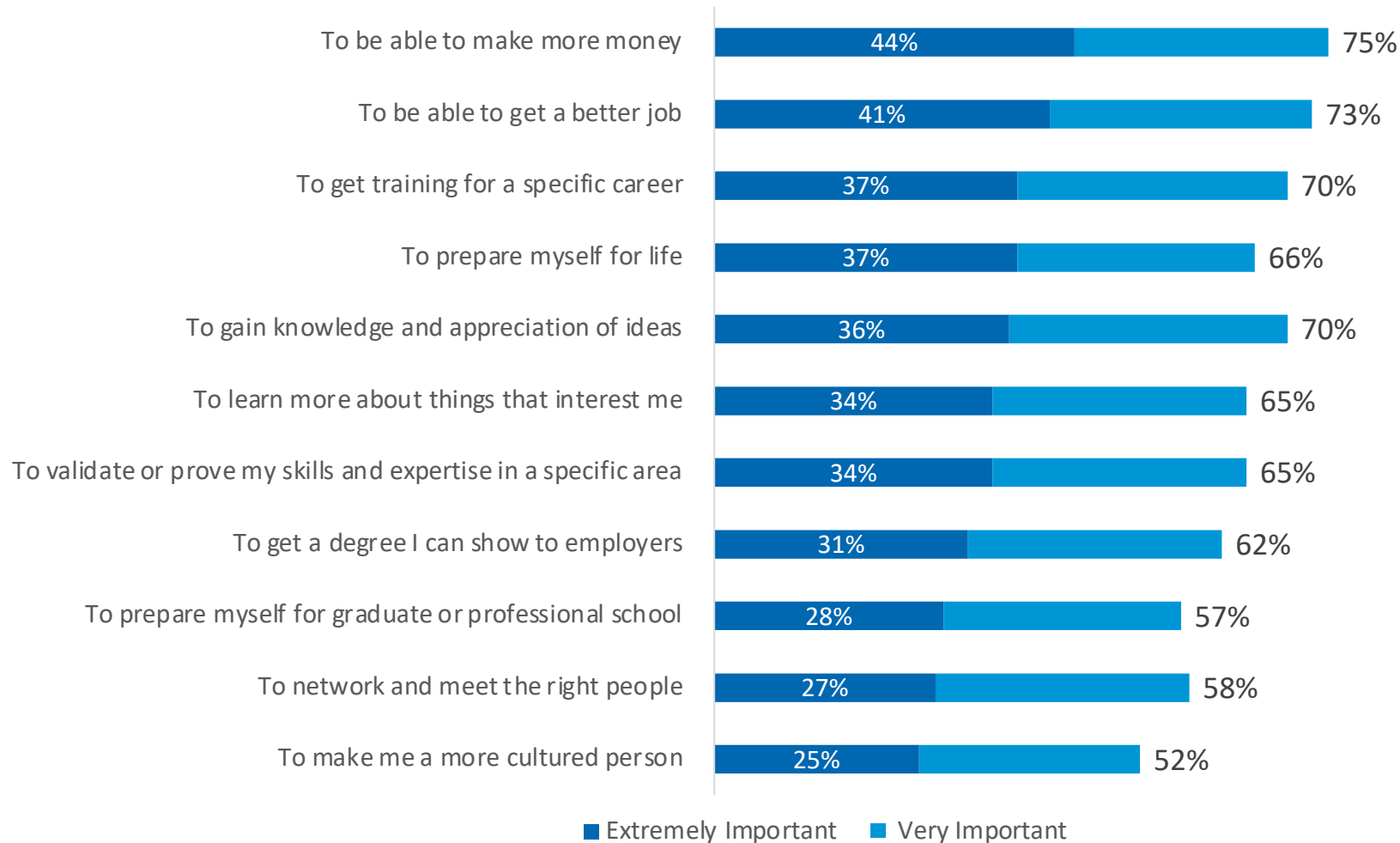
What they wish they learned in high school but did not:

- How to do taxes
- How to maintain & establish good credit
- How to get a job
- How to keep a job
- Determining the best step for *each student* to take after high school

All key subgroups indicate making more money and getting a better job are top reasons to get a degree

- Getting a degree is less about becoming well-rounded and networking.

Reasons to get a Degree



Respondents who definitely plan to go to college rate all reasons as more important

Although money is the #1 obstacle, stress and uncertainty are also key barriers to college

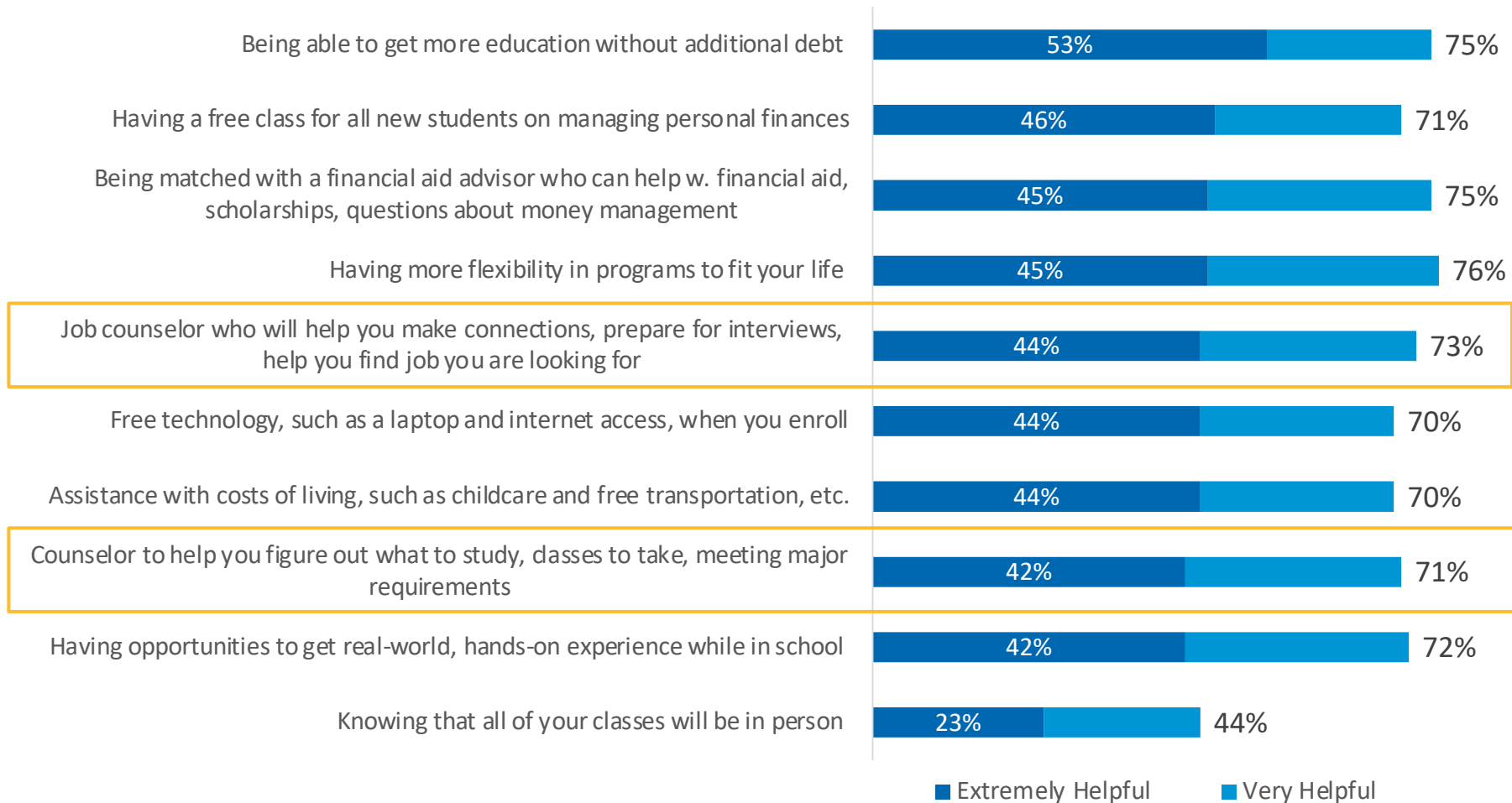
- Too much stress is a larger barrier for those who have already experienced college.

Reasons not to go to college/finish degree



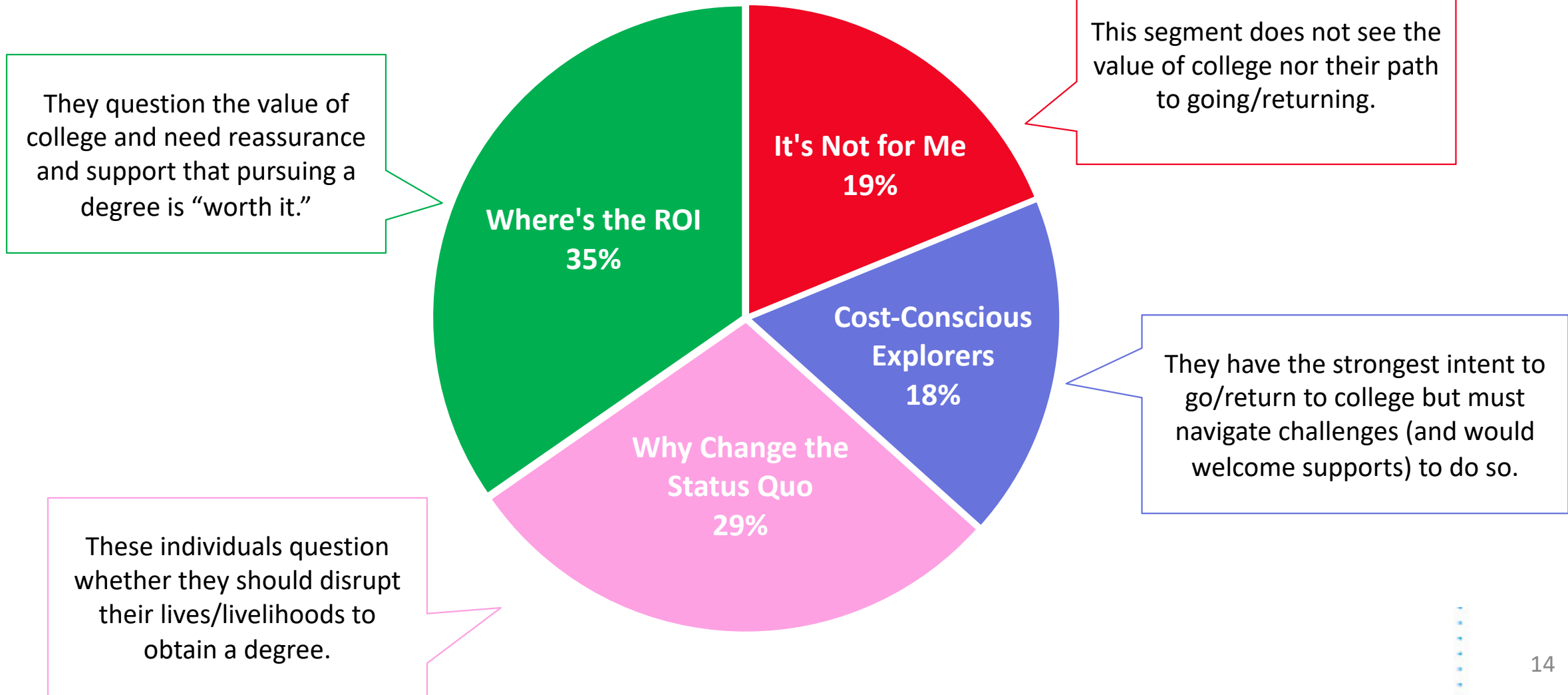
In addition to helping with debt, many of the solutions to help with college receive positive reactions

Helpful to get/complete degree



Segmentation Analysis, based on key psychographic variables, reveals targets for supports and intervention

Audience Segments



Key Insights and Implications for the Field

1

The question of those moving away from college is not solely one of demographics. Psychographics, such as satisfaction with ones' current life situation, confidence, as well as a "connection to college" (e.g., have previously taken classes and/or have a parent with a college degree) foster a greater likelihood to attend/return to college.

2

The education *marketplace* has fundamentally shifted. Of course, there are more education options than ever before. Whether through YouTube, stackable courses, certifications, or on-the-job training, this audience sees multiple avenues for learning outside of a college or university, and they have taken advantage of them. The reference to the arena as a "marketplace" is important to emphasize—this audience makes their decisions about education based on value, investment, and opportunity cost. As such, the traditional value proposition of college as a place of exploration and finding one's passion misses the mark for many.

3

The language and pathways associated with higher education do not resonate. This audience does not use nor understand the term, "Postsecondary Education," and as such, it fails to clearly communicate educational opportunities after high school. Also, this audience contends that high school should have done/do more to prepare and support students for paths other than college. Although they value the soft skills learned in high school, they identify little else that prepared them for the real world.

4

Obtaining a college degree is "off the table" for much of this audience; however, they desire a guarantee that it will be worth their time and money—both during school and after graduation. A majority of this audience is willing to pay for a college education if they know they will get something "real" in return. Creating such a successful path would include financial supports but also guidance to take the right courses and manage stress/anxiety while in school and assistance with getting a good job upon receiving their degree.

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