



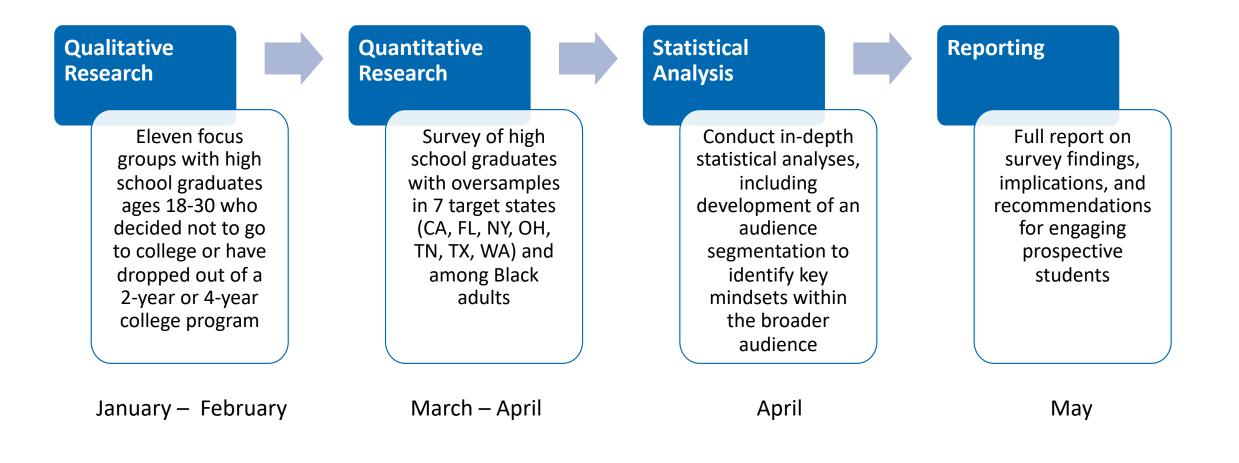
Exploring the Exodus from Higher Education

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





Survey Methodology



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.



This audience questions the value of a college degree.



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.

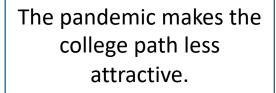
Finding

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.



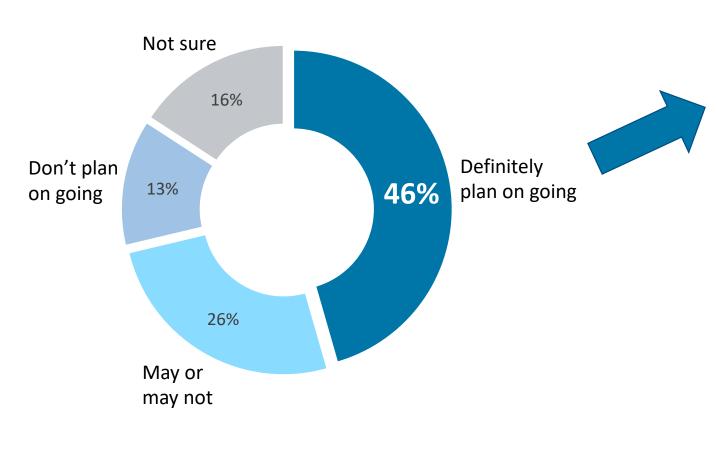


Potentially. Most notably, it complicates the question of value (i.e., are online classes "worth it"). But this audience remains open to hybrid and flexible education options that meet them where they are and may not have been as available before the need for online learning as a result of the pandemic.

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.

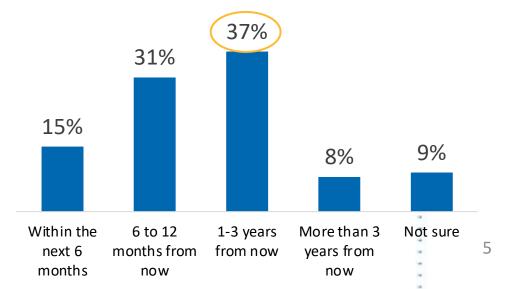


Future Plans Regarding College

% Definitely Plan on Going

Female – 47% Male – 46%			
Black – 50% Hispanic – 50% White – 42%			
Some College – 55%	HS Only – 44%		

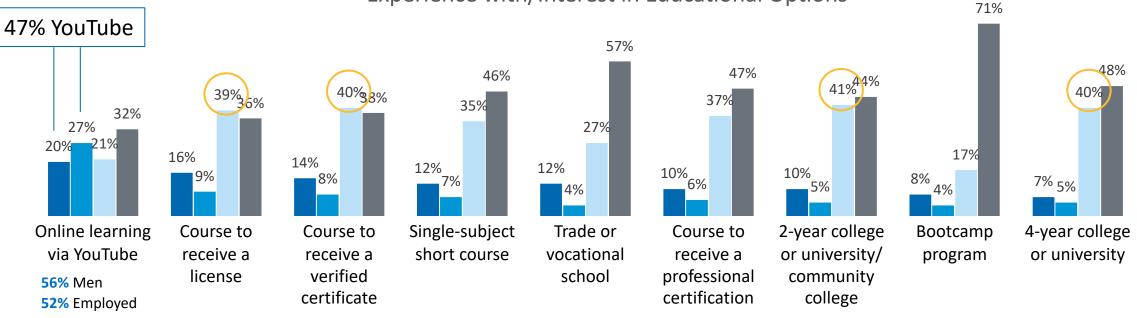
When do you plan to go to college? (n=1,206)



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



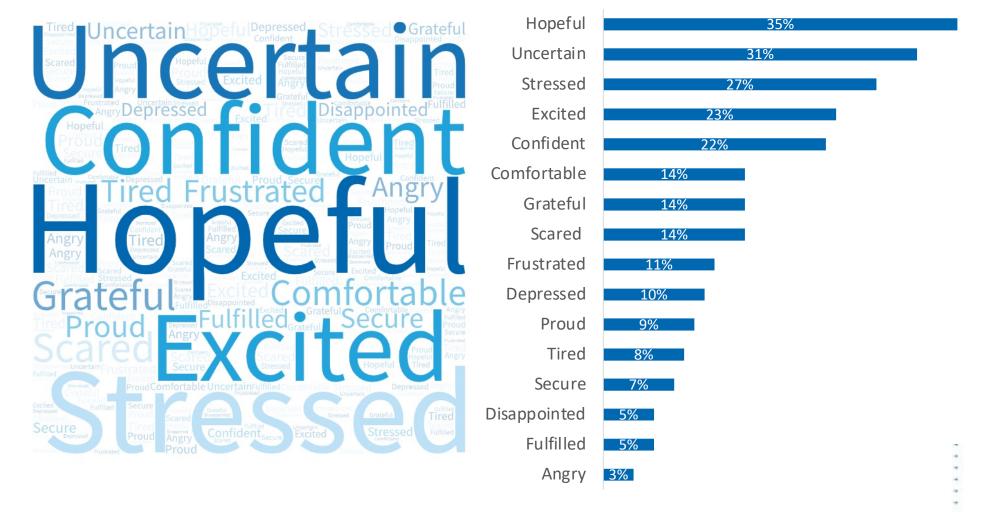
Experience with/Interest in Educational Options

■ Did ■ Doing ■ Plan to do ■ Not interested

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



Important Top Priority 87% 85% 80% 80% 79% 78% 76% 76% 72% 71% 67% 61% 59% 49% 48% 62% 56% 51% 51% 49% 49% 43% 42% 42% 42% 38% 38% 32% 29% 24% Being able Getting Getting a Being in a Feeling Earning Doing Continuing Having Finding a Owning Having a Having a Having the Having good place financially work-life set plan for your dream more to spend something to learn good job your own family ability to your own college emotionally/ stable time with and grow balance vour future you are home iob travel business degree money positive your family passionate personally mental health about

Personal Goals for the Next Few Years

8

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

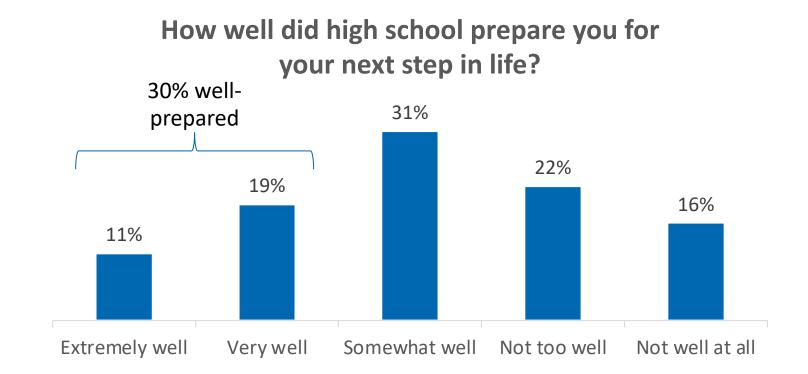


20% say "best value" when On-the-job training 44% 74% made to select only one A course/courses to receive a license 35% 70% 21% say "best value" when 4-year college or university degree 35% 60% made to select only one Course/s to receive a verified certificate 34% 67% Course/s to receive a professional certification 33% 68% Trade or vocational school 58% 30% 2-year college/community college degree 28% 61% YouTube courses in a particular field 48% 22% Single-subject short course 20% 51% 18% Bootcamp program 44%

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





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

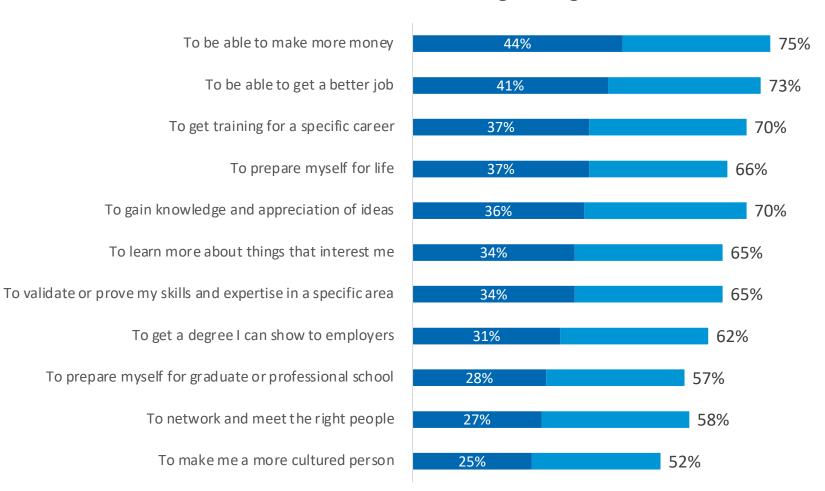
"Extremely/very well" higher among:

- Black
- Hispanic
- Men

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

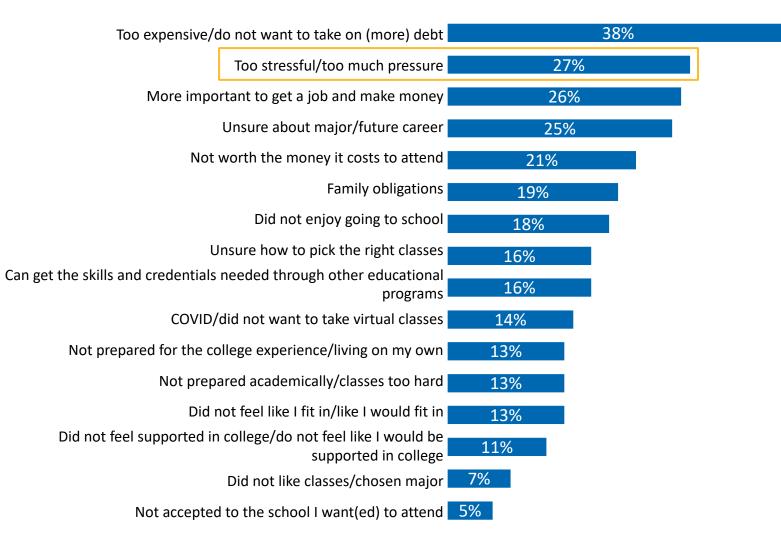
Respondents who definitely plan to go to college rate all reasons as more important

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



12

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

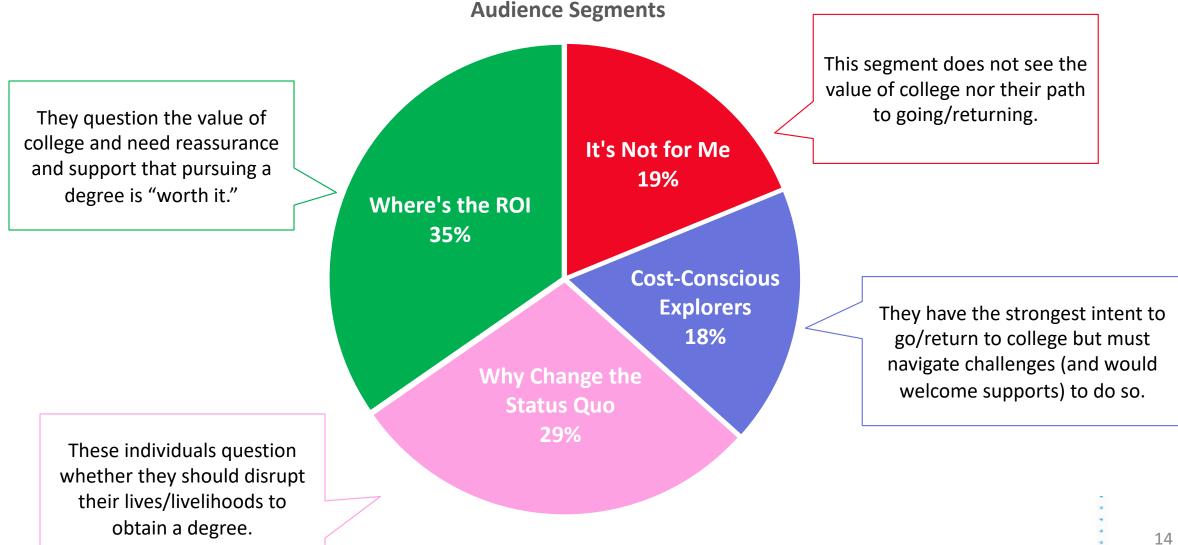


Helpful to get/complete degree

Being able to get more education without additional debt	53%	75%	
Having a free class for all new students on managing personal finances	46%	71%	
Being matched with a financial aid advisor who can help w. financial aid, scholarships, questions about money management	45%	75%	
Having more flexibility in programs to fit your life	45%	76%	, ว
Job counselor who will help you make connections, prepare for interviews, help you find job you are looking for	44%	73%	
Free technology, such as a laptop and internet access, when you enroll	44%	70%	_
Assistance with costs of living, such as childcare and free transportation, etc.	44%	70%	
Counselor to help you figure out what to study, dasses to take, meeting major requirements	42%	71%	
Having opportunities to get real-world, hands-on experience while in school	42%	72%	
Knowing that all of your classes will be in person	23%	44%	
	Extremely Helpful	Very Helpful	

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





Key Insights and Implications for the Field



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.



1

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.



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.



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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