



# STATE OF THE STUDENT

**Dissatisfied, determined, and ready to be heard**

The voices of today's American students

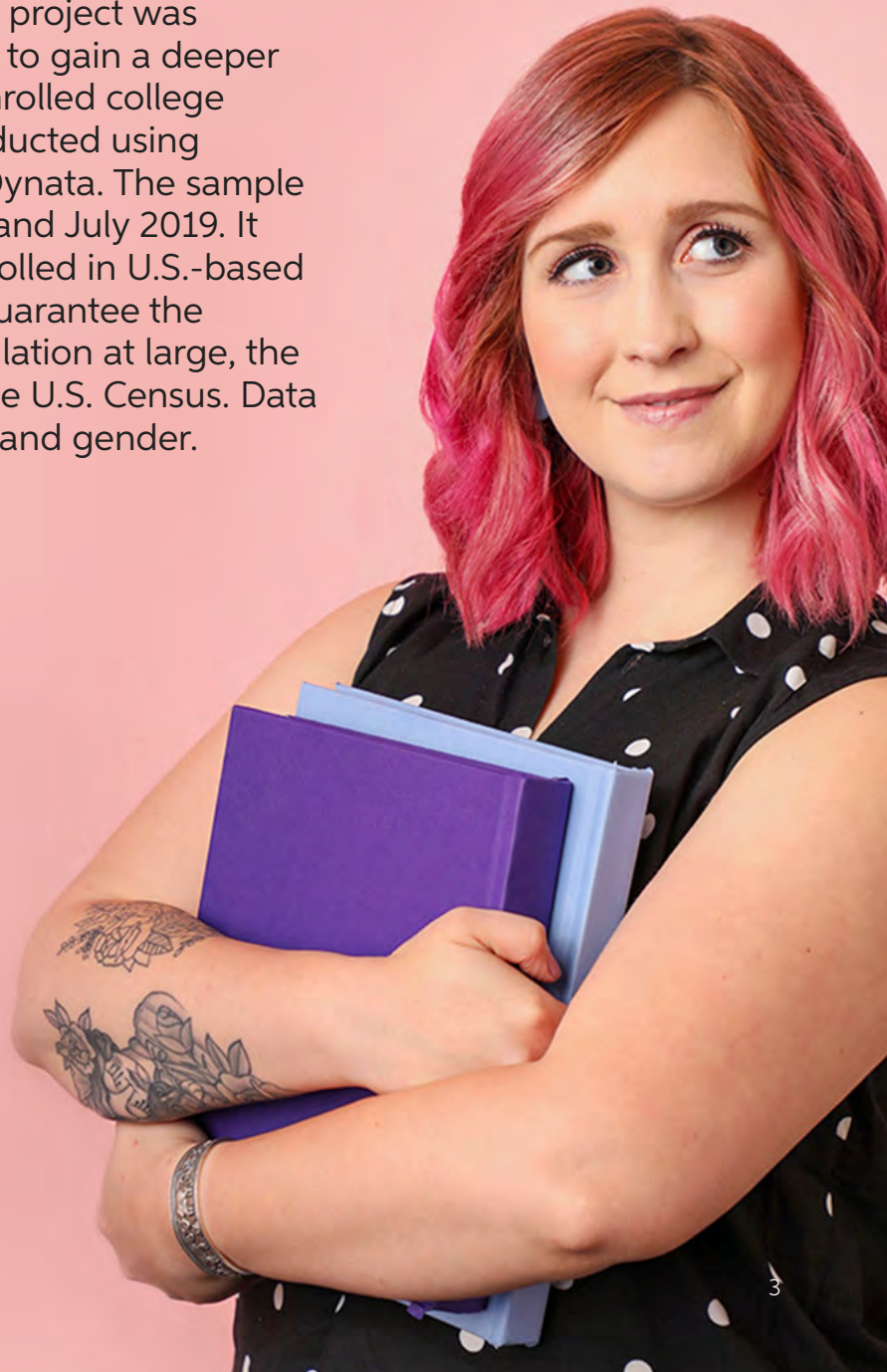
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## Methodology

The 2019 State of the Student research project was designed and managed by Chegg, Inc. to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of enrolled college students. The online research was conducted using empaneled respondents provided by Dynata. The sample for this research was collected in June and July 2019. It consists of 1,001 students currently enrolled in U.S.-based (two-year and four-year) colleges. To guarantee the sample is reflective of the college population at large, the data is weighted to match data from the U.S. Census. Data points used for weighting include: age and gender.



# Foreword

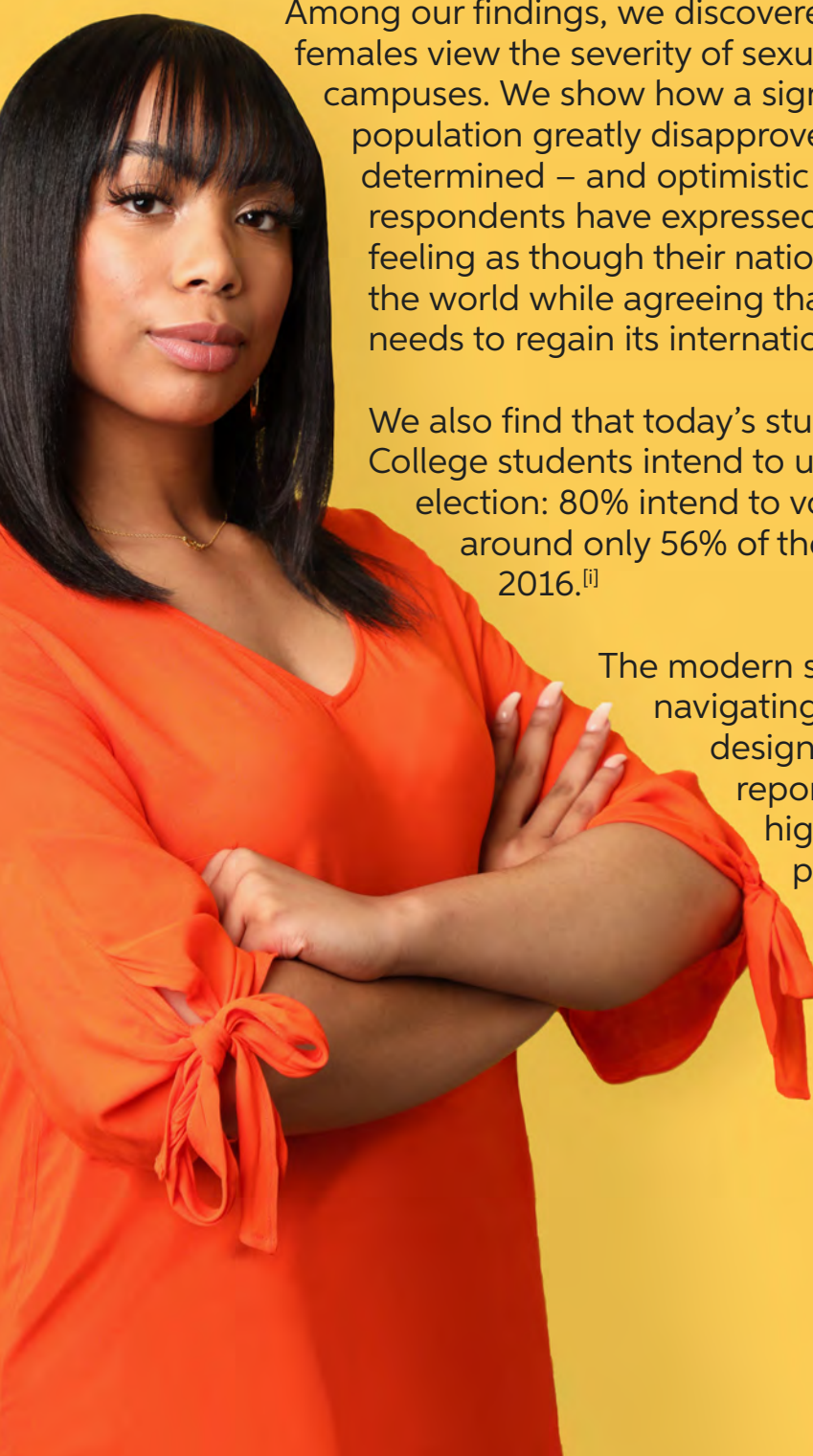
Today's students face tough new realities as education, employment, and politics transform around them.

In this report, our second annual study of the "State of the Student" in America – which highlights insights from a poll of over 1,000 students across a representative spectrum of demographics and colleges – we examine the most important issues facing students both on and off-campus, including the cost of education, and explore how students are rallying to address them.

Among our findings, we discovered a discrepancy around how males and females view the severity of sexual harassment issues on their college campuses. We show how a significant number of the student population greatly disapproves of the political status quo and remains determined – and optimistic – to bring about societal change. Our respondents have expressed their frustration with the U.S., many feeling as though their nation is no longer seen as a force for good in the world while agreeing that it used to be, and how the country needs to regain its international footing.

We also find that today's students are exceptionally politically active. College students intend to use their political voices in the 2020 election: 80% intend to vote in the upcoming election cycle versus around only 56% of the U.S. voting population as a whole in 2016.<sup>[1]</sup>

The modern student faces mounting pressure, navigating a higher education system that seems designed to put them deeper into debt. This report is intended to help policymakers, higher ed administrators, and business people understand more about the issues on the minds of young people in education, and to encourage them to find ways to ensure that we prepare and support our young people for the challenges ahead.



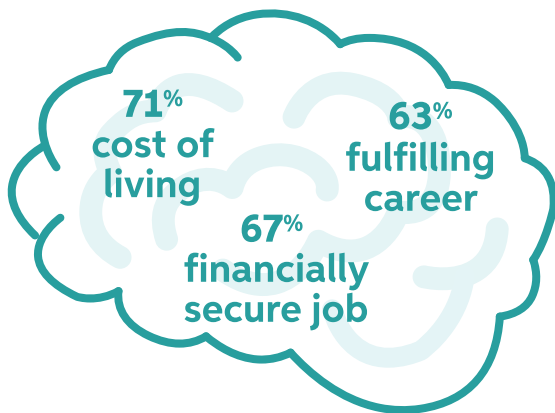
# Cost of living dominates campus concerns

As a generation, college students overwhelmingly felt that the cost of living was the dominant issue facing their lives today. Over 70% of students cited the high cost of living as the primary concern affecting them, and an additional 67% indicated that finding a job with financial security proved to be another frequent issue among their generation.<sup>[1]</sup> Over 40% of new college graduates, on average, are underemployed and about two-thirds of these graduates will remain in jobs that do not require a college degree five years after graduation.<sup>[ii]</sup>

way to achieve financial security, but also as a means to attaining an intellectually stimulating career highlights this generation’s juggling of a traditional dichotomous relationship between financial gain and career satisfaction.

With students overly focused on finding financially-fulfilling work post-grad, it is not surprising that 45% of respondents believe that the highest priority for their university’s leadership was to prepare students for a job after college, as opposed to exposing students to new and challenging ideas.<sup>[11]</sup>

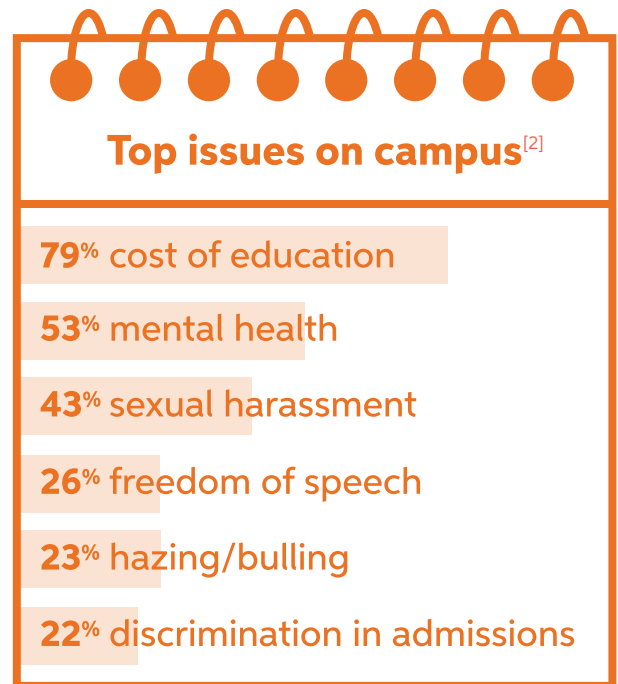
## Top issues on students’ minds<sup>[1]</sup>



“The cost of living is on so many students’ minds because most of their income is far from congruent with the cost of living,” said Annabelle, a University of Michigan master’s student.

In addition to securing the financial stability to navigate the ever-rising costs of living, college students are thinking critically about the nature of their future career paths. 63% of students noted that finding a fulfilling career path is a top-of-mind concern for their generation.<sup>[1]</sup> Viewing work not just as a

On campuses, however, the issues affecting students shift. Four out of five respondents indicated that the costs of education are the single biggest issue affecting students today.<sup>[2]</sup> With the levels of student debt increasing nationwide, it is easy to understand the source of the students’ worries.

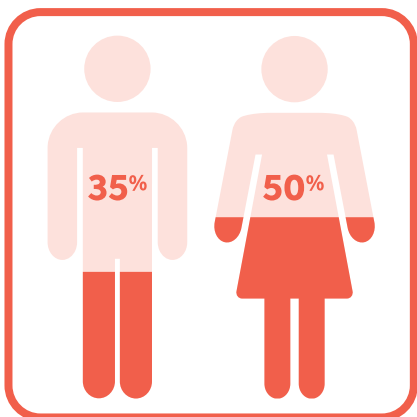


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**“Over 40% of new college graduates, on average, are underemployed.”<sup>[ii]</sup>**

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As a result of financial concerns and the usual academic pressure of university life, over half of the college students polled cited mental health as a top issue on campus. The American College Health Association reports that 25% of students say anxiety and 16% of students mention depression as affecting their academic performance.<sup>[iii]</sup> During the past 12 months, 85% of students reported feeling overwhelmed by the amount of work they had to do and another 53% said they felt hopeless as a result.<sup>[iv]</sup> In 2018, only 27% of students sought out professional help but, of the students who did seek this assistance, almost two-thirds said it helped in improving their academic performance.<sup>[v][vi]</sup>



**agree sexual harassment is a significant issue on campus<sup>[2]</sup>**

One of the more divisive issues affecting college campuses proved to be sexual harassment as male and female

respondents widely diverged in their views on the severity of the issue. Overall, 43% of students believe that sexual harassment is a major concern in their college;<sup>[2]</sup> however, the gender divide of the responses shows a slightly different interpretation. Half of the female students surveyed felt sexual harassment was a primary concern for them, but only 35% of males agreed with this sentiment.<sup>[2]</sup> Even in the post-#MeToo era, it appears that college women find it a challenge to convince the men on their campus to view the severity of sexual harassment.

**1 in 4**

**believe their fellow students should be able to carry guns on campus<sup>[13]</sup>**



Tragically, the number of school shootings in the United States continues to grow with the New York Times reporting that at least eight shootings have occurred in high schools or on college campuses in 2019 already.<sup>[vii]</sup> With this context and amidst the ongoing gun control debate in state and federal legislatures, 57% of students believe their classmates should not be allowed to carry guns on campus.<sup>[13]</sup> Even Southern students, where gun rights advocacy is much higher, agreed as 52% of Southern respondents also felt their classmates should not be allowed to carry firearms.<sup>[13]</sup>

“Our generation has been the most afflicted by school shootings, so it makes sense that each generation will align more and more with liberal policies on gun control,” said Meghan, a sophomore at

Duke University. “There’s no need for people to carry guns on campus; the negatives outweigh the positives when considering the mental well-being of every student on campus.”

Almost two-thirds of respondents say they will graduate with student debt.<sup>[6]</sup> In 2014, there were an estimated 43 million borrowers, with an average of \$27,000 in student loans.<sup>[viii]</sup> In addition to the rising costs of living, many students end up paying about \$400 a month towards these loans – a 60% increase since 2005.<sup>[ix]</sup>

graduates pay on average



towards their student debt<sup>[ix]</sup>

For nearly half of respondents, taking on student debt has a negative effect on their initial choice of major and their decisions around a future career path.<sup>[7]</sup> This debt forces the student to choose a major or career path that will result in the highest possible financial return in order to pay off their loans – not necessarily where the student’s interests may lie.

If they were without the financial responsibility of student loan repayments, over half of the students surveyed said they would continue with their studies and earn another degree.<sup>[8]</sup> It is unsurprising that this is an attractive option for many students, as the Bureau of Labor Statistics

reports graduate school degree-holders as having the lowest rates of unemployment and higher median wages.<sup>[x]</sup>

## 2 out of 3

students support lowering the cost of college in exchange for public service<sup>[9]</sup>



As a possible remedy to the growing student debt crisis, two-thirds of students supported significantly reducing the costs of college, or student debt forgiveness in general, in exchange for four years of public service (military, police, education, or government-related roles).<sup>[9]</sup> Democrat and Republican students alike support reducing the cost of college and a public service for debt forgiveness program, but students are stuck along partisan lines when it came to the issue of whether college should be free for all.<sup>[9]</sup> Nearly 80% of students who identified as Democrats supported the free college for all proposal, while half of college Republicans opposed the notion.<sup>[10]</sup>

Nonetheless, students are actively looking for ways to lower their debt levels even as other avenues for aid have stalled or failed completely. For example, more than 99% of those who applied for public service loan forgiveness have been rejected according to the U.S. Department of Education due to various factors ranging from incomplete applications to not meeting the program’s requirements.<sup>[xi]</sup>

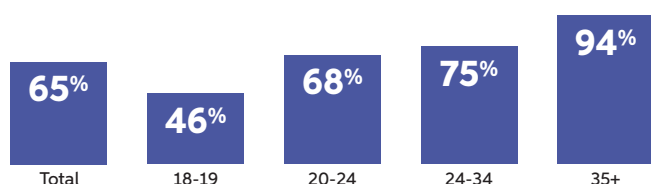
## Students optimistic despite political system doubts

Despite having significant concerns about the United States political system, college students have become an increasingly active voter bloc.

With 65% of students voting in previous elections,<sup>[17]</sup> and 80% intending to vote in the upcoming cycle,<sup>[19]</sup> the student population will prove to be an important cohort for 2020 candidates.

However, students are not content with the political status quo. Nearly 70% of students polled believe that the two-party system either does not work (40%) or are not sure whether it works or not (29%).<sup>[16]</sup> Fewer than 30% of respondents noted their belief in the current political system.<sup>[16]</sup> Additionally, almost 60% of students are in favor of some type of Electoral College reform.<sup>[21]</sup>

Have you ever voted before? <sup>[17]</sup>

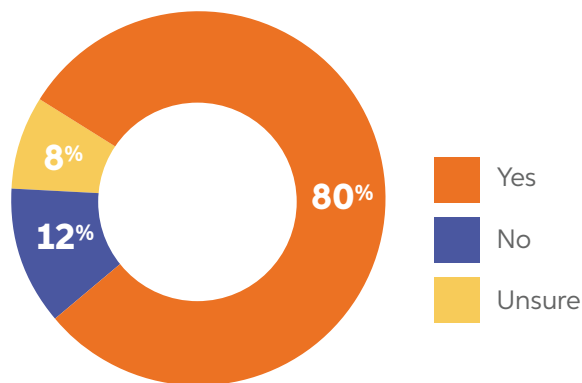


Although they desire election reform, college students are engaging in their political futures by voting. Of the 65% who have voted previously, 71% did so in a presidential election, while 54% and 48% voted in local and midterm elections, respectively.<sup>[17]</sup> Three out of four college students believe their vote actually matters; the optimism about their political futures is strong.<sup>[20]</sup>

"Our generation is empowered. With how heated politics are, college students feel

like it's their duty to make their voices heard," said Anaid, a Mount Holyoke College sophomore. "I also think that social media pushes students to vote, as it stresses the importance of all of our individual voices."

Do you intend on voting in 2020? <sup>[19]</sup>



Of the more than 1,000 students surveyed, over a third identified as an Independent, 43% as a Democrat, and 18% as a Republican.<sup>[29]</sup> Despite the fact that the majority self-identified with the two major political parties, 34% of respondents said that they feel neither party reflects their views.<sup>[14]</sup>

Martin, a Baruch College senior, commented, "the majority of students agree that we have different socio-political exposures and experiences with regards to topics like the environment, race, and government intervention, which are not being reflected by politicians today."

Despite a partisan-charged political atmosphere, college students are willing to join the political debate in order to alleviate the issues affecting their generation and begin improving the well-being of their fellow students.



## Societal issues and the gender divide

Although students are optimistic about their political futures and appear ready to embrace their civic duties, they remain divided on the role the United States currently plays within international affairs. In an almost even split, only 37% of college students believe the U.S. is currently a force for good in the world while 31% feel the country is not a force for good and 33% were unsure.<sup>[27]</sup>



The gender split among respondents is worth highlighting as only 27% of women agreed that the U.S. was a force for good in the world while half of the men felt the same.<sup>[27]</sup>

Considering today's political climate and America's actions abroad, this split is not surprising; however, when the results are compared to students' beliefs about the U.S.' international actions in previous eras then the findings are alarming. Roughly half of men (53%) and women (48%) agreed that the U.S. used to be a force for good in international affairs.<sup>[28]</sup>

It is clear that issues, both close to home and abroad, weigh heavily on students' minds. As cited in the previous State of the Student report, mental health, sexual harassment, and campus safety continue

to be top issues on campus. Mental health and sexual harassment stand out as two of the top campus issues for nearly half the student body – only to be topped by the cost of education.<sup>[2]</sup>

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**“Only 27% of women agreed that the U.S. was a force for good in the world while half of the men felt the same.”<sup>[27]</sup>**

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“Being one of the richest countries in the world, I would expect our country to be able to provide its citizens with basic human rights such as accessible healthcare and education,” said Celina, a UC Merced senior. “I think it so low for women because men regulate women, specifically their rights to their bodies.”

“Far more women are obtaining a graduate school degree than men, yet far more men are in positions of power. Moreover, when women get in a place of power and have an influence, it's difficult

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for them to bring up other women,” said Celeste, a Brigham Young University master’s student. “While I will never give up hope and to continue speaking out against these injustices, it is nevertheless discouraging to women’s overall perception of the U.S. being a force of good.”

Earlier this year, the college admissions scandal filled headlines and shocked the general public; however, our research shows that students do not seem to be as surprised about the news as others in society. 1 out of 4 college students polled saw the college admissions process as unfair,<sup>[3]</sup> with 60% of all students believing

### Reasons why college admissions is unfair<sup>[4]</sup>

- 60%** believe it favors the wealthy
- 34%** believe it favors those in institution's location/state
- 31%** believe it favors certain ethnic groups
- 21%** believe it favors international students

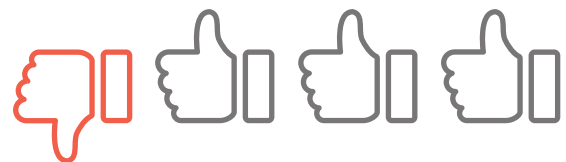
that the process itself favors wealthy applicants.<sup>[4]</sup>

These unfair advantages do not end at the conclusion of the admissions process, though, as students also see a college’s resources and leadership as a reflection on favoring certain types of students.

“I feel that low-income, first-generation college students like me are sold lies about resources that will be available to them when they arrive at college, and they are not as promoted,” said Celina, a UC Merced senior. “I think a discrepancy exists because people of color – specifically first-generation students of color – need more on-campus resources than white students. While many schools market resources such as free tutoring and one-on-one counseling with advisors, they often aren’t there or are very difficult to access.”

**1 in 4**

college students polled saw the college admissions process as unfair<sup>[3]</sup>



The disconnect between the marketed resources and the available resources is a challenging reality for students to face when they are already aware of higher education’s shift away from engaging students with new ideas to prepare them to be contributors to the evolving workforce of the future.

## Conclusion

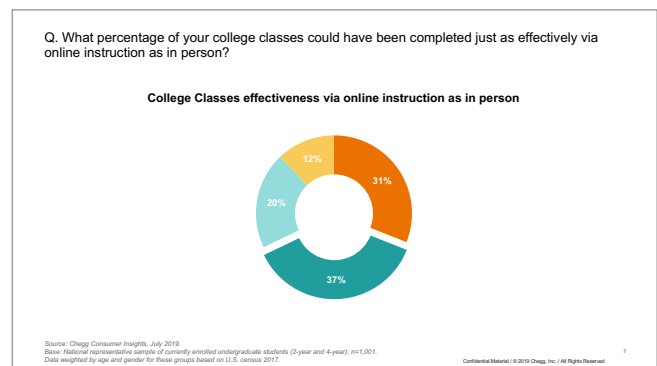
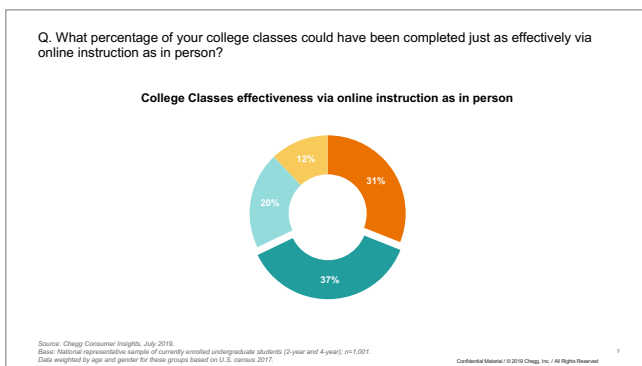
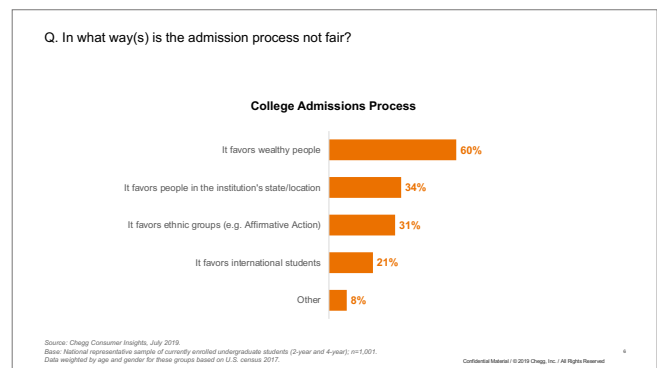
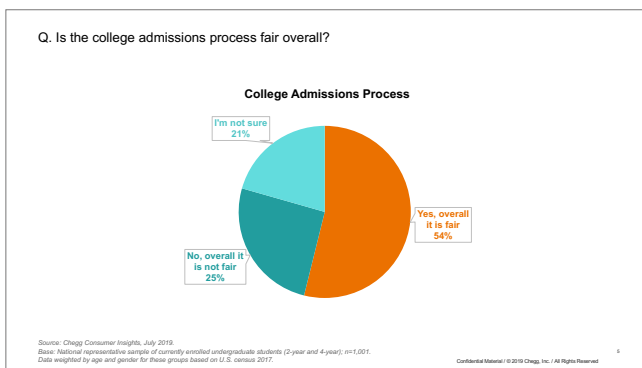
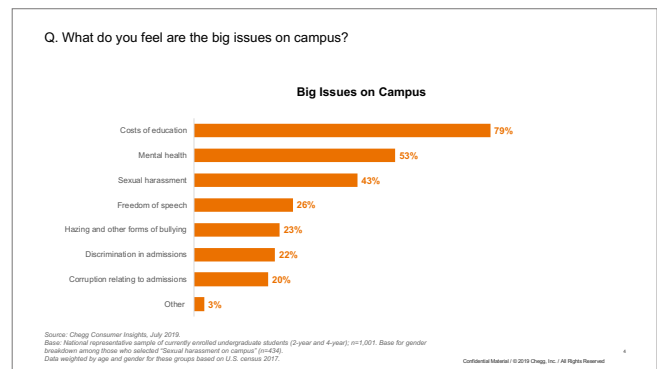
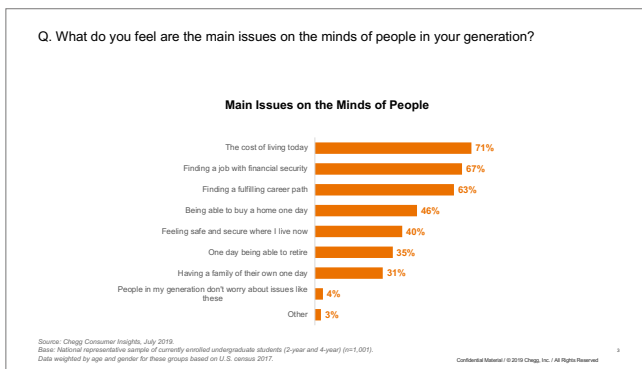
Today's college students defy stereotypes and are more invested in the political and societal ebbs-and-flows of daily American life than most would believe. Tasked with grappling the rising costs of living and higher education costs, college students are attempting to find a fulfilling career path that will set them up for a financially secure future amidst the backdrop of today's uncertain political and societal environment.

Despite a multitude of issues facing them, college students appear ready to make their voices heard. The 2018 midterm elections marked the entrance of the college student voter bloc onto the national stage, and this State of the Student Report shows this generation's political will is strong and they now, more than ever before, are ready to make an impact on society.



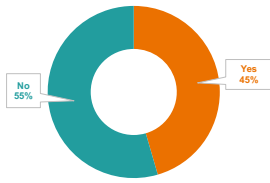
# Appendix

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Q. Has your student debt negatively affected your major and career choices?

Effect of Student Debt on Major and Career Choice

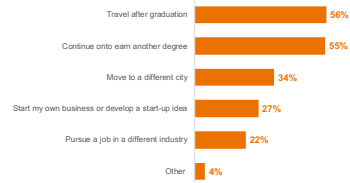


Source: Chegg Consumer Insights, July 2019.  
 Base: National representative sample of currently enrolled undergraduate students (2-year and 4-year); Among students who will have student debt; n=529.  
 Data weighted by age and gender for these groups based on U.S. census 2017.

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Q. What would you do differently if you didn't have student debt?

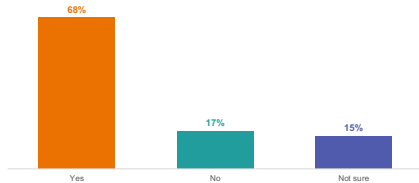
Potential aspirations without student debt



Source: Chegg Consumer Insights, July 2019.  
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Q. Would you support significantly reducing the costs of college or student debt forgiveness in return for four-years of public service. By public service we mean military, public service (e.g. police force, teacher, government), community service, service overseas (e.g. Peace Corps).

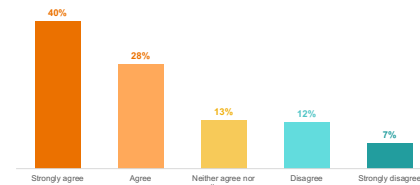


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Q. How much do you agree or disagree with this statement "College should be free for all"?

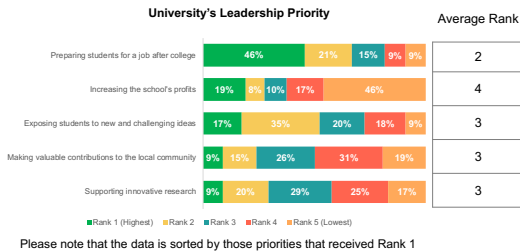
College should be free for all



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Q. Which of the following are the highest priorities for your university's leadership?

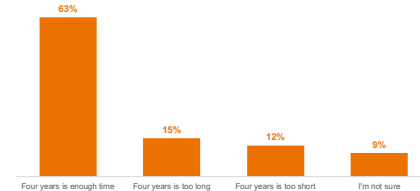


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Q. Do you feel that four years is enough time to fulfill requirements for a college degree?

4 Year - College Degree Requirement

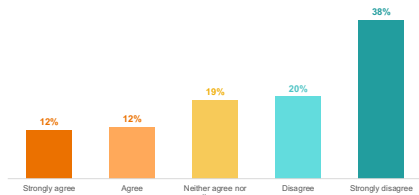


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Q. How much do you agree or disagree that your fellow students should be allowed to carry guns (open carry or concealed) on campus for safety?

Fellow students should be allowed to carry guns (open carry or concealed) on campus for safety

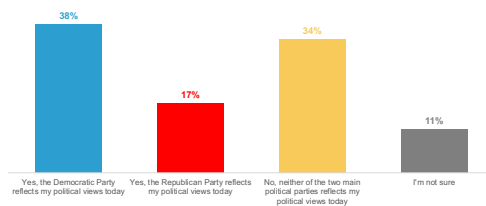


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Q. Do you feel that one of the two main political parties (Republican/Democratic) reflects your political views and values?

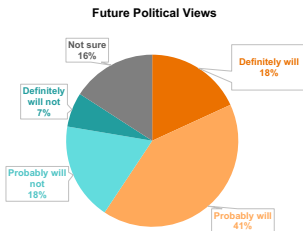
Political Views and Values



Source: Chegg Consumer Insights, July 2019.  
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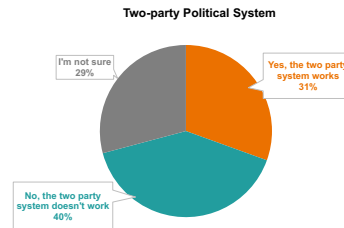
Q. Do you feel that one of the political parties (Republican/Democratic) will reflect your future political views?



Source: Chegg Consumer Insights, July 2019.  
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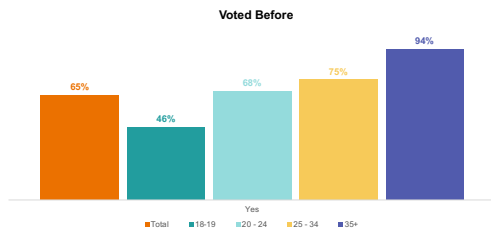
Q. Do you believe in a two-party political system?



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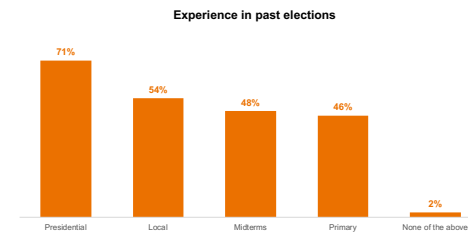
Q. Have you ever voted before?



Source: Chegg Consumer Insights, July 2019.  
 Base: National representative sample of currently enrolled undergraduate students (2-year and 4-year); n=1,001.  
 Data weighted by age and gender for these groups based on U.S. census 2017.

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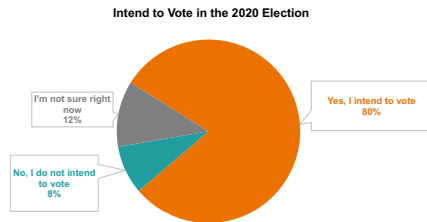
Q. In which elections have you voted before?



Source: Chegg Consumer Insights, July 2019.  
 Base: National representative sample of currently enrolled undergraduate students (2-year and 4-year). Among those who have voted before (n=66).  
 Data weighted by age and gender for these groups based on U.S. census 2017.

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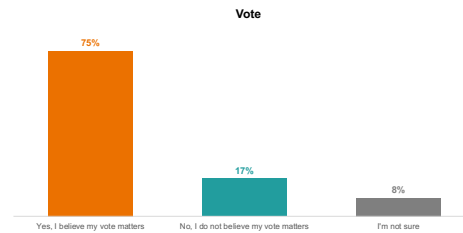
Q. Do you intend to vote in the 2020 election?



Source: Chegg Consumer Insights, July 2019.  
 Base: National representative sample of currently enrolled undergraduate students (2-year and 4-year); n=1,001.  
 Data weighted by age and gender for these groups based on U.S. census 2017.

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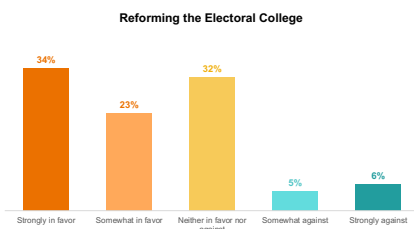
Q. Do you believe that your vote matters?



Source: Chegg Consumer Insights, July 2019.  
 Base: National representative sample of currently enrolled undergraduate students (2-year and 4-year); n=1,001.  
 Data weighted by age and gender for these groups based on U.S. census 2017.

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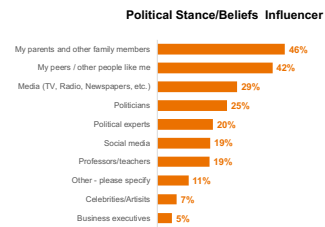
Q. Would you be in favor of reforming the electoral college?



Source: Chegg Consumer Insights, July 2019.  
 Base: National representative sample of currently enrolled undergraduate students (2-year and 4-year); n=1,001.  
 Data weighted by age and gender for these groups based on U.S. census 2017.

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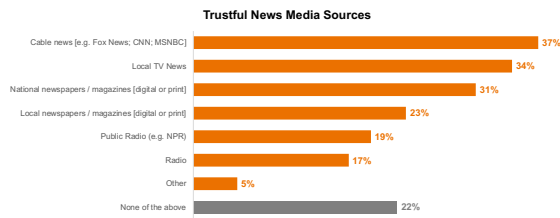
Q. Who influences your political stance/beliefs most?



Source: Chegg Consumer Insights, July 2019.  
 Base: National representative sample of currently enrolled undergraduate students (2-year and 4-year); n=1,001.  
 Data weighted by age and gender for these groups based on U.S. census 2017.

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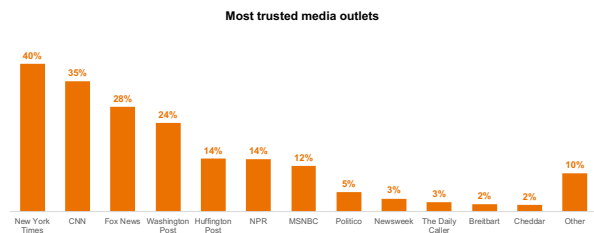
Q. Which mainstream news media sources do you trust?



Source: Chegg Consumer Insights, July 2019.  
 Base: National representative sample of currently enrolled undergraduate students (2-year and 4-year); n=1,001.  
 Data weighted by age and gender for these groups based on U.S. census 2017.

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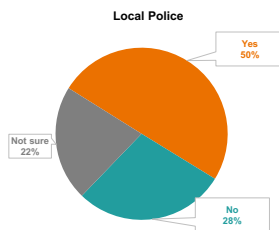
Q. Which mainstream media outlet do you trust the most?



Source: Chegg Consumer Insights, July 2019.  
 Base: National representative sample of currently enrolled undergraduate students (2-year and 4-year); n=1,001.  
 Data weighted by age and gender for these groups based on U.S. census 2017.

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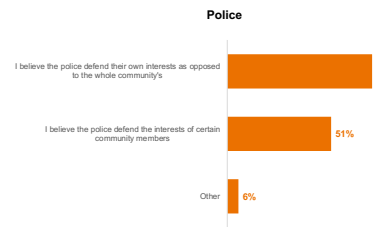
Q. Do you believe that your local police have your best interest in mind?



Source: Chegg Consumer Insights, July 2019.  
 Base: National representative sample of currently enrolled undergraduate students (2-year and 4-year); n=1,001.  
 Data weighted by age and gender for these groups based on U.S. census 2017.

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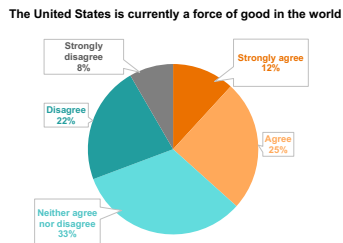
Q. You mentioned that the police do not have your best interest in mind. Please select the reasons why.



Source: Chegg Consumer Insights, July 2019.  
 Base: National representative sample of currently enrolled undergraduate students (2-year and 4-year). Among students who believe that police does not have best interest in mind in mind.  
 Data weighted by age and gender for these groups based on U.S. census 2017.

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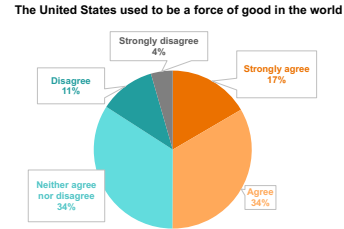
Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?  
 "The United States is currently a force of good in the world."



Source: Chegg Consumer Insights, July 2019.  
 Base: National representative sample of currently enrolled undergraduate students (2-year and 4-year); n=1,001.  
 Data weighted by age and gender for these groups based on U.S. census 2017.

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Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?  
 "The United States used to be a force of good in the world."



Source: Chegg Consumer Insights, July 2019.  
 Base: National representative sample of currently enrolled undergraduate students (2-year and 4-year); n=1,001.  
 Data weighted by age and gender for these groups based on U.S. census 2017.

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Q. Generally speaking, do you consider yourself...?



Source: Chegg Consumer Insights, July 2019.  
 Base: National representative sample of currently enrolled undergraduate students (2-year and 4-year); n=1,001.  
 Data weighted by age and gender for these groups based on U.S. census 2017.

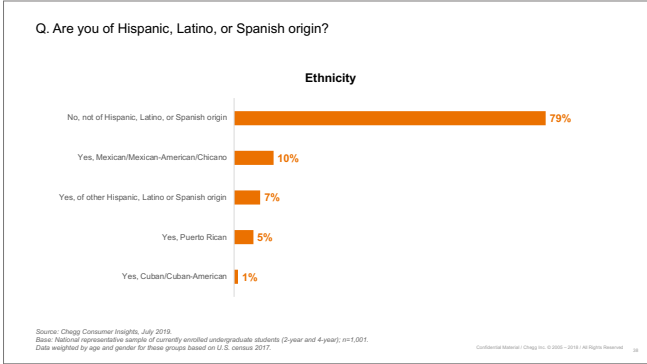
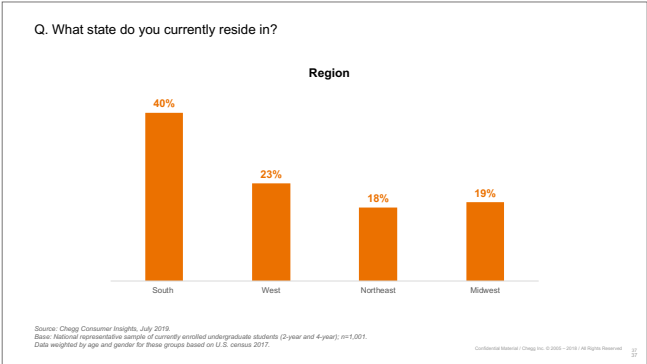
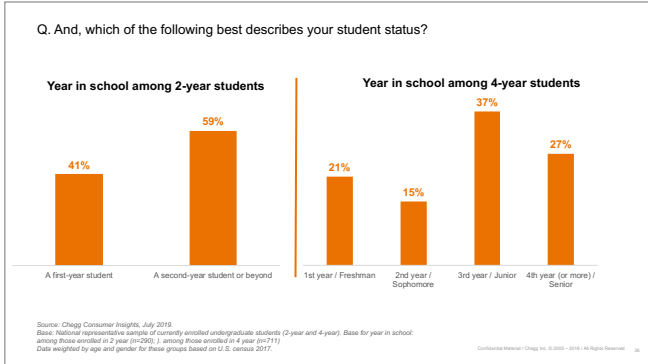
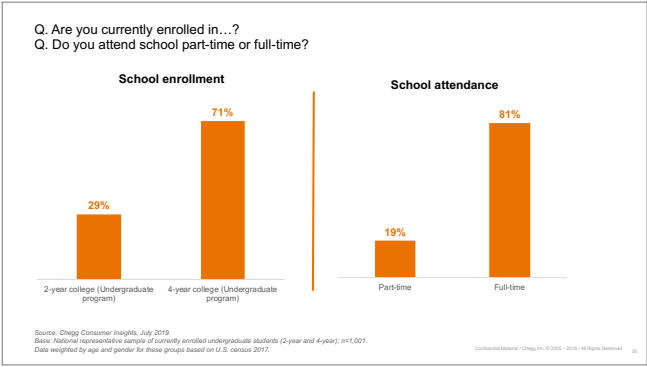
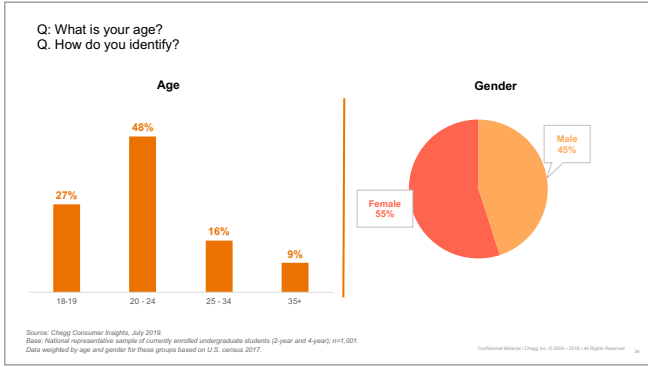
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Q. Which best describes your field of study?



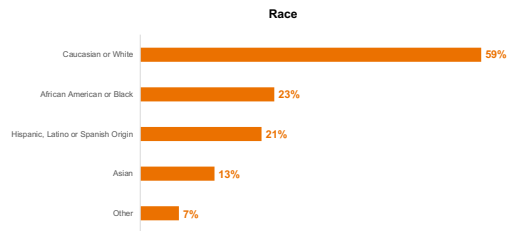
Source: Chegg Consumer Insights, July 2019.  
 Base: National representative sample of currently enrolled undergraduate students (2-year and 4-year); n=1,001.  
 Data weighted by age and gender for these groups based on U.S. census 2017.

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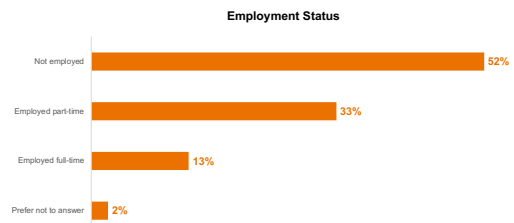
Q. What is your race?



Source: Chggg Consumer Insights, July 2019.  
 Base: National representative sample of currently enrolled undergraduate students (2-year and 4-year); n=1,001.  
 Data weighted by age and gender for these groups based on U.S. census 2017.

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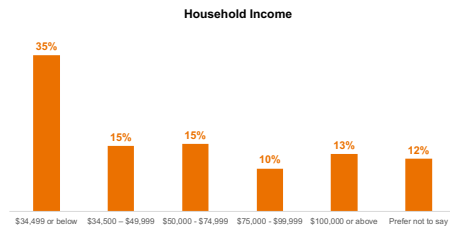
Q. Which of the following best describes your employment status?



Source: Chggg Consumer Insights, July 2019.  
 Base: National representative sample of currently enrolled undergraduate students (2-year and 4-year); n=1,001.  
 Data weighted by age and gender for these groups based on U.S. census 2017.

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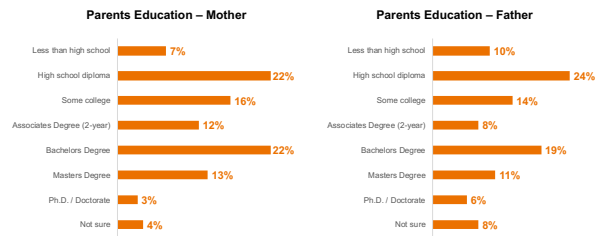
Q. How much total combined income do all members of your household earn before taxes?



Source: Chggg Consumer Insights, July 2019.  
 Base: National representative sample of currently enrolled undergraduate students (2-year and 4-year); n=1,001.  
 Data weighted by age and gender for these groups based on U.S. census 2017.

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Q. What is the highest level of education your parents have achieved?



Source: Chggg Consumer Insights, July 2019.  
 Base: National representative sample of currently enrolled undergraduate students (2-year and 4-year); n=1,001.  
 Data weighted by age and gender for these groups based on U.S. census 2017.

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