

## Revealing Institutional Strengths and Challenges Survey

The Revealing Institutional Strengths and Challenges (RISC) Survey provides detailed, actionable data about student success, using the latest advances in survey research and computing. Survey results pinpoint where college students experience obstacles and identify campus offices that excel in helping students succeed.

The survey has three main sections: challenges to student success, student-office interactions, and overall views of the institution.

The Challenges section asks students about challenges they face during the current semester in five broad areas: academic support services, campus environment, finances and financial aid, succeeding in their courses, and work and personal issues. Each section has multiple challenges, with over 80 unique challenges to student success across the five areas, such as errors with financial aid paperwork, not being told to take a course necessary for their degree, or difficulty using course technology in online classes.

The Student-Office Interaction section asks students about their experiences with five campus offices; the specific offices are chosen by the college. Office names are customized for each campus, so that students see office names they recognize. Our research indicates that students want office staff who are accessible, concerned about helping them, and can effectively solve their problem. Students describe the five offices on these three dimensions.

The Student Views of the Institution section asks students about their overall perceptions of the college. Students are asked if they would recommend the college to a friend, whether the college is a good value, and how well the college is helping them meet their goals, such as improving job and career opportunities or preparing for a four-year degree.

The survey is optimized for cellphone use; our research shows that college students typically answer web surveys using their cellphone (see Figure 1). Unlike other surveys, both questions and question responses are randomized for each respondent to avoid order effects. Although the survey has more than 100 questions, our unique branching approach allows most students to complete the survey in less than 10 minutes. This allows institutions concerned about survey fatigue to easily slot the RISC survey into their regular survey lineup.

For more information, please contact Steve Porter or Paul Umbach at [mail@percontor.org](mailto:mail@percontor.org).

## Survey Questions

[Note: Question numbers (e.g., Q1, Q1A) are used in this document to illustrate student pathways through the survey. They do not appear on the web version of the survey.]

### LANDING PAGE

[INSTITUTION NAME] wants to know about your experiences this semester, and what you think about the college.

The survey takes the average student less than 10 minutes to complete, and your responses will be confidential.

Like many students, you've probably faced some challenges. By challenge, we mean something that made it difficult for you to succeed in college.

Let's start with the first area where you may have had a challenge this semester.

### CHALLENGES SECTION

[Note: Questions 1-6 appear in random order for each respondent. For each *yes* response, respondents are then branched to the corresponding subquestion. Otherwise, they proceed to the next question. For example, a respondent choosing *no* for all three response options for Q1 (finances and financial aid) is sent to Q2. A respondent who chooses *yes* for *Working with financial aid office* and *no* for the other two response options is first sent to Q1B and then on to Q2. Response options for each question are also randomized to minimize order effects.]

Q1. Think about your **finances and financial aid**. Have you had any challenges in the following areas?

	Yes	No	
Paying college and living expenses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	[if yes → Q1A]
Working with financial aid office	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	[if yes → Q1B]
Military and employer tuition benefits	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	[if yes → Q1C] [if no for all → Q2]

Q1A. Where did you have issues **paying expenses**? Please check all that apply.

- Books, software, and other supplies
- Tuition and fees
- Living expenses (housing, food, healthcare)
- Childcare
- None of the above

Q1B. What issues did you have with the **financial aid office**? Please check all that apply.

- Gave me wrong information
- Process was unclear
- Unable to answer questions
- Errors processing financial aid
- Delays in getting money
- Difficult to meet with, speak to, or email staff
- None of the above

Q1C. What issues did you have with **military and employer tuition benefits**? Please check all that apply.

- Did not know process for obtaining benefits
- Experienced delays receiving benefits
- Received wrong information about benefits
- None of the above

Q2. Think about your use of **academic support services**. Have you had any challenges in the following areas?

	Yes	No	
Academic advising	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	[if yes → Q2A]
Registering for courses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	[if yes → Q2B]
Tutoring	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	[if yes → Q2C]
Computer and science labs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	[if yes → Q2D]
Library	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	[if yes → Q2E]
			[if no for all → Q3]

Q2A. What issues did you have with **academic advising**? Please check all that apply.

- Difficult to meet with, speak to, or email advisor
- Told to take course not needed for major/to graduate
- Not told about course needed for major/to graduate
- Websites and handouts about courses and majors were incorrect
- None of the above

Q2B. What issues did you have **registering for courses**? Please check all that apply.

- Had a registration hold
- Course not offered at times I needed
- Course was offered but full
- Course not offered this semester
- None of the above

Q2C. What issues did you have with **tutoring**? Please check all that apply.

- Tutoring hours not convenient
- Tutors not available when I need assistance
- Tutoring not available in the subject area I needed
- Tutoring not helpful
- None of the above

Q2D. What issues did you have with the **computer and science labs**? Please check all that apply.

- Lab hours not convenient
- Lab busy when needed
- Problems using computers and equipment
- None of the above

Q2E. What issues did you have with the **library**? Please check all that apply.

- Staff not helpful
- Resources I needed not available online
- Hours not convenient
- Study spaces not available when needed

Q3. Think about the **campus environment**. Have you had any challenges in the following areas?

	Yes	No	
Interactions with other students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	[if yes → Q3A]
Parking on campus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	[if yes → Q3B]
Safety and crime	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	[if yes → Q3C]
Activities outside of class	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	[if yes → Q3D]
Housing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	[if yes → Q3E] [if no for all → Q4]

Q3A. What issues did you have with **other students**? Please check all that apply.

- Did not feel welcome due to my sexual orientation
- Did not feel welcome due to my gender identity
- Did not feel welcome due to my race or ethnicity
- Did not know many other students
- None of the above

Q3B. What issues did you have with **parking**? Please check all that apply.

- Parking on or near campus is too expensive
- Difficulty finding parking on or near campus
- Difficulty getting parking pass
- None of the above

Q3C. What issues did you have with **safety and crime** on campus? Please check all that apply.

- Campus not safe
- Was a victim of a crime
- Parking lots not safe
- None of the above

Q3D. What issues did you have with **activities outside of class**? Please check all that apply.

- Overcommitted to student groups (clubs, sports teams, Greek life)
- Spent too much time socializing
- Difficulty finding activities that interest me
- Difficulty finding activities that fit my schedule
- None of the above

Q3E. What issues did you have with **housing**? Please check all that apply.

- Roommate problems
- Live too far from campus
- Difficulty finding on-campus housing
- Difficulty finding off-campus housing
- None of the above

Q4. Think about your **success in courses**. Have you had any challenges in the following areas?

	Yes	No	
Doing college-level work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	[if yes → Q4B]
Faculty	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	[if yes → Q4C]
Online classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	[if yes → Q4D]
Being a transfer student	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	[if yes → Q4E]
Academic majors	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	[if yes → Q4F] [if no for all → Q5]

Q4A. What issues did you have **doing college-level work**? Please check all that apply.

- Poor study skills
- Poor planning and time management skills
- Required level of math was difficult
- Reading or writing assignments were difficult
- Not motivated to study
- Skipped too many classes
- Took too many classes
- None of the above

Q4B. What issues did you have with **faculty**? Please check all that apply.

- Took too long to grade assignments
- Feedback on assignments not helpful
- Not concerned about my academic success
- Not responsive to email
- Not available to meet in person
- Not helpful outside of class
- Did not teach well
- None of the above

Q4C. What issues did you have with **online classes**? Please check all that apply.

- Lack of interaction with other students
- Lack of interaction with faculty
- Difficulty taking exams at testing center
- Difficulty learning the material on my own
- Difficulty using course technology
- Difficulty keeping up because of no regular class times
- None of the above

Q4D. What issues did you have with **being a transfer student**? Please check all that apply.

- Some courses did not transfer in
- Courses outside major are difficult
- Courses in major are difficult
- None of the above

Q4E. What issues did you have with **academic majors**? Please check all that apply.

- Graduation delayed due to changing major
- Course load too heavy due to changing major
- Can't decide on a major
- None of the above

Q5. Think about your **work and personal life**. Have you had any challenges in the following areas?

	Yes	No	
Work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	[if yes → Q5A]
Health and disability issues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	[if yes → Q5B]
Transportation to campus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	[if yes → Q5C]
Family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	[if yes → Q5D]
			[if no for all → Q6]

Q5A. What issues did you have with **work**? Please check all that apply.

- Work schedule is not flexible during the semester
- Work schedule conflicts with classes
- Work schedule prevents me from using campus resources (library, tutoring, labs, etc.)
- Pay is not enough to cover expenses while in school
- Work hours do not leave me enough time to study
- None of the above

Q5B. What **health and disability** issues did you have? Please check all that apply.

- Faculty did not provide necessary accommodations for my disability
- Disability services did not provide necessary support
- Campus is difficult to navigate with my disability
- Emotional/mental health issue
- Physical health issue
- Pregnancy and childbirth
- None of the above

Q5C. What issues did you have with **transportation to campus**? Please check all that apply.

- Campus transportation system not reliable
- Public transportation system not reliable
- Car or carpool not reliable
- Travel to campus takes a long time
- None of the above

Q5D. What issues did you have with **family**? Please check all that apply.

- Family does not support me going to college
- Difficulty finding childcare
- Difficulty dealing with health of family
- Difficulty balancing demands of family and college
- None of the above

## STUDENT-OFFICE INTERACTION SECTION

[Note: The five campus office names in Questions 6-10 are customized by the college, using whatever names are familiar to their students (e.g., “Academic Excellence Center.”) They appear in random order for each respondent. For a *yes* response, respondents are branched to the three subquestions that ask the student about their interactions with that particular office, and then they are sent to the usage question for the next office. For a *no* response, they are sent directly to the usage question for the next office.]

Now we’d like to ask you about some offices at [INSTITUTION NAME].

Q6. Have you contacted or interacted with [1ST OFFICE NAME] during this semester?

- Yes [→ Q6A]
- No [→ Q7]

Q6A. We'd like to ask you three questions about your experiences with [1ST OFFICE NAME]  
How **available** were [1ST OFFICE NAME] staff when you interacted with them?

- Very available
- Somewhat available
- Somewhat unavailable
- Very unavailable

Q6B. How **concerned** were [1ST OFFICE NAME] staff about addressing your issue?

- Very concerned
- Somewhat concerned
- Somewhat unconcerned
- Very unconcerned

Q6C. How **effective** were [1ST OFFICE NAME] staff when addressing your issue?

- Very effective
- Somewhat effective
- Somewhat ineffective
- Very ineffective

Q7. Have you contacted or interacted with [2ND OFFICE NAME] during this semester?

- Yes [→ Q7A]
- No [→ Q8]

Q7A. We'd like to ask you three questions about your experiences with [2ND OFFICE NAME]  
How **available** were [2ND OFFICE NAME] staff when you interacted with them?

- Very available
- Somewhat available
- Somewhat unavailable
- Very unavailable

Q7B. How **concerned** were [2ND OFFICE NAME] staff about addressing your issue?

- Very concerned
- Somewhat concerned
- Somewhat unconcerned
- Very unconcerned

Q7C. How **effective** were [2ND OFFICE NAME] staff when addressing your issue?

- Very effective
- Somewhat effective
- Somewhat ineffective
- Very ineffective

Q8. Have you contacted or interacted with [3RD OFFICE NAME] during this semester?

- Yes [→ Q8A]
- No [→ Q9]

Q8A. We'd like to ask you three questions about your experiences with [3RD OFFICE NAME]  
How **available** were [3RD OFFICE NAME] staff when you interacted with them?

- Very available
- Somewhat available
- Somewhat unavailable
- Very unavailable

Q8B. How **concerned** were [3RD OFFICE NAME] staff about addressing your issue?

- Very concerned
- Somewhat concerned
- Somewhat unconcerned
- Very unconcerned

Q8C. How **effective** were [3RD OFFICE NAME] staff when addressing your issue?

- Very effective
- Somewhat effective
- Somewhat ineffective
- Very ineffective

Q9. Have you contacted or interacted with [4TH OFFICE NAME] during this semester?

- Yes [→ Q9A]
- No [→ Q10]

Q9A. We'd like to ask you three questions about your experiences with [4TH OFFICE NAME]  
How **available** were [4TH OFFICE NAME] staff when you interacted with them?

- Very available
- Somewhat available
- Somewhat unavailable
- Very unavailable

Q9B. How **concerned** were [4TH OFFICE NAME] staff about addressing your issue?

- Very concerned
- Somewhat concerned
- Somewhat unconcerned
- Very unconcerned

Q9C. How **effective** were [4TH OFFICE NAME] staff when addressing your issue?

- Very effective
- Somewhat effective
- Somewhat ineffective
- Very ineffective

Q10. Have you contacted or interacted with [5TH OFFICE NAME] during this semester?

- Yes [→ Q10A]
- No [→ Q11]

Q10A. We'd like to ask you three questions about your experiences with [5TH OFFICE NAME]  
How **available** were [5TH OFFICE NAME] staff when you interacted with them?

- Very available
- Somewhat available
- Somewhat unavailable
- Very unavailable

Q10B. How **concerned** were [5TH OFFICE NAME] staff about addressing your issue?

- Very concerned
- Somewhat concerned
- Somewhat unconcerned
- Very unconcerned

Q10C. How **effective** were [5TH OFFICE NAME] staff when addressing your issue?

- Very effective
- Somewhat effective
- Somewhat ineffective
- Very ineffective

## STUDENT VIEWS OF THE INSTITUTION SECTION

[Note: Questions 11-13 appear in random order for each respondent. ]

Finally, we'd like to know what you think about [INSTITUTION NAME] as a whole.

Q11. Based on your experiences, how likely are you to recommend [INSTITUTION NAME] to a friend?

- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Somewhat unlikely
- Very unlikely

Q12. Considering the overall value of the education you have received so far from [INSTITUTION NAME], is it ...

- A **good value**, worth more than you paid for it
- A **fair value**, worth what you paid for it
- A **poor value**, worth less than you paid for it

Q13. What is your primary purpose for taking courses at [INSTITUTION NAME]? Please choose the response that

best fits your purpose.

- Self-improvement [→ Q13A]
- Increase job and career opportunities [→ Q13B]
- Prepare for graduate study [→ Q13C]

Q13A. How well is your education at [INSTITUTION NAME] **helping you improve yourself**?

- Very well
- Fairly well
- Somewhat
- Not at all

Q13B. How well is your education at [INSTITUTION NAME] **increasing your job and career opportunities**?

- Very well
- Fairly well
- Somewhat
- Not at all

Q13C. How well is your education at [INSTITUTION NAME] **preparing you for graduate study degree?**

- Very well
- Fairly well
- Somewhat
- Not at all

Q14. Thinking about your experiences so far, please tell us what you think [INSTITUTION NAME]'s **greatest strength** is:

Q15. If [INSTITUTION NAME] could change **one** thing to help students succeed in college, what should it change?

## DEMOGRAPHICS

Please tell us a little about yourself.

Q16. Thinking about the current semester, are you currently enrolled full-time or part-time?

- Part-time (less than 12 credit hours)
- Full-time (12 or more credit hours)

Q17. How many total credit hours have you earned at [INSTITUTION NAME]? Please do not include courses you are taking this semester.

- None
- 1-15 credits
- 16-29 credits
- 30-45 credits
- 46 or more credits

Q18. What is your race or ethnicity? Please check all that apply.

- African American or Black
- Asian American or Asian
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Other

Q19. Which best describes your gender identity?

- Female/Woman
- Male/Man
- Transgender Female/Transgender Woman
- Transgender Male/Transgender Man
- Another gender identity

Q20. What year were you born?