Fostering College Fluency

Results from a National Survey of Community College Library and Campus Partners

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ITHAKA S+R

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Introduction

Navigating higher education requires more than attending classes and completing assignments; it requires "college fluency," a set of skills that enables students, faculty, and staff to effectively locate and utilize institutional resources.[1] College fluency can empower students, faculty, and staff to navigate the complex culture and bureaucracy of higher education, supporting students to advocate for themselves as they move through these systems. Libraries play a crucial role in fostering this college fluency by equipping students with the tools and resources for both their curricular and non-curricular needs.

Curricular and non-curricular support are essential components of a comprehensive educational experience, with curricular support encompassing the academic services and resources directly tied to course content and academic performance, such as tutoring, advising, and course materials. Non-curricular support includes services that address students' holistic needs outside of the classroom, such as mental health resources, housing assistance, and student engagement. It also includes supporting students in navigating the often-complex college bureaucracy successfully. Both curricular and non-curricular support are crucial, as student success encompasses not only academic performance, but also overall well-being and the ability to navigate the complexities of life while at college. Effective support systems must integrate both curricular and non-curricular elements to foster a well-rounded educational environment that empowers students to thrive.

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[1] Melissa Blankstein and jean amaral, "College Fluency Capacity Building," *Ithaka S+R,* 8 December 2022, https://sr.ithaka.org/blog/college-fluency-capacity-building/.

To better understand the current landscape of college fluency, and the challenges faced by institutions, Ithaka S+R and the Borough of Manhattan Community College, with support from IMLS, fielded a national survey to gather insights from administrators, librarians, and faculty and staff from academic and student affairs departments across community colleges in the US.[2] This survey aimed to explore the perceptions of college fluency, evaluate the effectiveness of existing support and resource referrals, and identify gaps in non-curricular information and resources available to faculty, staff, and students.

Key Insights

- While institutions value traditional indicators of success (e.g., graduation and retention), they often overlook the opportunity to reduce bureaucratic barriers to accessing college services and resources that could enhance students' ability to navigate college effectively.
- While the majority of respondents feel confident in their own college fluency, respondents consistently rated the college fluency skills of students and peer faculty and staff as only moderately proficient.
- When addressing non-curricular inquiries, departments prioritize providing information on technology needs, fostering a sense of belonging, and supporting mental health over other complex student needs, such as housing or transportation.
- Respondents of color reported greater confidence in providing cultural adjustment and fostering a sense of belonging for diverse student populations compared to their White counterparts. This underscores the need for institutions to hire and support staff of color and to train all staff to better support students from diverse backgrounds.
- Librarians prioritize providing students with access to technology and information, and most respondents, particularly the ones affiliated with academic affairs, view the library as a key resource for directing students to non-curricular inquiries. To maximize their impact, librarians can further embrace their potential role in

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[2] For more information on this IMLS-funded project [RE-252364-OLS-22] visit: "What Is College Fluency? – College Fluency Capacity Building," OpenLab BMCC CUNY, accessed 1 October 2024, https://openlab.bmcc.cuny.edu/college-fluency/what-is-college-fluency/.

guiding students to critical information about non-curricular support services.

- The most common challenges to supporting students' college fluency include insufficient staffing, bureaucratic complexity, and inadequate cross-departmental collaboration.
- Digital platforms like college websites, online portals, and email are the preferred channels to reach students, but their effectiveness depends on how they are integrated into departmental workflows and kept up to date with relevant information.

Methods

The National College Fluency Survey is designed to explore and further develop the emerging framework of college fluency and to understand the library's role within community college support services. Our approach employed an iterative process, grounded in the perspectives of key stakeholders essential to the framework's application. To ensure broad representation in the survey, we utilized multiple sources to gather a comprehensive sample of potential participants. We purchased two contact lists from Higher Education Publications (HEP) Inc. and Market Data Retrieval (MDR), and we supplemented these lists with an additional hand-gathered contact list.[3]

The development of the survey instrument involved careful review and feedback from project advisors. A draft questionnaire was created and refined following feedback, after which it was tested through a series of cognitive interviews. These cognitive interviews, conducted in February 2024 with six community college staff and leaders (including three librarians), were used to ensure that the survey questions were clear,

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[3] The majority of the finalized contact list comes from HEP (68 percent), followed by MDR (19 percent), with the remaining (13 percent) coming from the hand-gathered list.

easily understood, and consistently interpreted by respondents. This pre-testing process was essential for maximizing the reliability and validity of the final survey.

The final survey consisted of 27 questions, organized into six thematic blocks: institutional awareness and culture (two questions), communication and relationships (six questions), college fluency (eight questions), challenges and disruptions (three questions), data and feedback (two questions), and demographics (six questions). We administered the survey using the Qualtrics platform, cleaned and analyzed the close-ended questions using Stata, and analyzed the open-ended questions using NVivo to identify key themes and patterns.[4]

The population for this survey consisted of library faculty and staff, administrators, and other community college faculty and staff across student and academic affairs. The College Fluency Survey was distributed between March and April 2024, under the signatory of the two principal investigators of the study. The survey was sent to a sample of 4,116 individuals. A total of 364 individuals started the survey and the 190 respondents who completed at least 80 percent of the survey were retained for analysis, resulting in a 4.62 percent response rate. To encourage participation, respondents were offered the opportunity to receive the report of survey findings and to enter a random drawing for one of 18 Amazon gift cards valued at $100 each.

A significant portion of the respondents are librarians (45 percent), followed by administrators (36 percent),[5] with the remaining (18 percent) holding other roles within their institutions.[6] To gain deeper insights, some findings are stratified by the departments or offices with which respondents were affiliated: academic affairs (46 percent), student affairs (23 percent), administrative departments (9 percent), and interdepartmental services (21 percent). For further details on participant demographics, please refer to Appendix A.

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[4] Overall, 139 respondents in our sample completed the open-ended questions.

[5] Respondents that had selected "administrator" are categorized as "administrators," except those who indicated that they also oversee the library. Respondents who selected "administrator" and "librarian/library faculty/staff" are categorized as "librarians."

[6] Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

Findings

The College Fluency Survey covers a wide range of questions to investigate the practices and perspectives of community college leaders, faculty, and staff members related to their current college fluency skills. As higher education institutions continue to evolve in response to changing student demographics and needs, understanding the role of college fluency in supporting student success has become increasingly important. The following sections explore institutional priorities, challenges, and opportunities related to improving students' ability to effectively navigate the complex systems and bureaucracies that are often part of their college experience.

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Institutional Priorities and Culture

To gain an understanding of the respondents' perspectives on their institution's priorities and culture, we first asked them to rate how they perceive their college prioritizes different goals. Overall, the three top priorities according to the respondents include increasing student enrollment (93 percent), increasing student graduation (87 percent), and increasing student retention (86 percent) (Figure 1). These results indicate that community colleges are primarily focused on expanding their student base and ensuring that students not only enroll but also complete their degree.

Figure 1: In your opinion, how much of a priority are each of the following at your institution? Percentage of respondents who indicated each item as high priority and essential.

Priority	Percentage
Increasing student enrollment	93%
Increasing student graduation	87%
Increasing student retention	86%
Increasing course completion	81%
Fostering student engagement	65%
Improving institutional accessibility	58%
Increasing student transfer to four-year institutions after completion of associate's degree	54%
Helping students develop a sense of community	50%
Improving post-graduation student outcomes (e.g. employment, salary)	48%
Reducing bureaucratic barriers accessing college services and resources	47%
Addressing social justice imperatives	37%

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However, a key objective of college fluency—reducing bureaucratic barriers such as key administrative or procedural obstacles to accessing college services and resources—was rated as one of the lowest priorities, with only 47 percent of respondents rating it as a high or essential priority. A higher percentage (58 percent), however, rated improving institutional accessibility as a high or essential priority. This suggests that while institutions recognize the importance of traditional milestones and indicators of success, less emphasis is placed on addressing the administrative and procedural obstacles that can significantly hinder students' ability to navigate college successfully to achieve those outcomes. When we disaggregated this item by the respondents' role, only 34 percent of librarians believe that diminishing bureaucratic barriers is a high priority for their college, compared to 58 percent of administrators and 55 percent of respondents who were not administrators or librarians, such as student and academic affairs faculty and staff (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Reducing bureaucratic barriers accessing college services and resources

■ High & Essential

Administrator	58%
Librarian	34%
Not an Administrator or a Librarian	55%

0%　　　20%　　　40%　　　60%　　　80%　　　100%
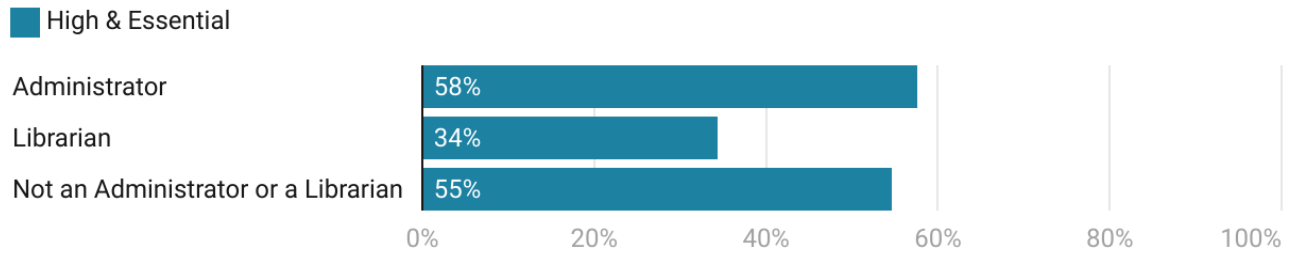
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The survey also included questions about existing institutional support to address students' curricular and non-curricular needs. When asked whether their institution offers excellent training and support for faculty and staff to effectively address students' curricular needs, half of respondents somewhat or strongly agreed.[7] A slightly lower share of respondents (40 percent) somewhat or strongly agreed that their institution offers excellent training and support when it comes to addressing students' non-curricular needs (Figure 3). These results suggest that community colleges may need to enhance their support and professional development to provide faculty and staff with the tools and resources necessary to support students both within and beyond the classroom.

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[7] For more information see: Sage Love and Melissa Blankstein, "US Instructor Survey 2024 Findings from a National Survey," *Ithaka S+R,* 22 August 2024, https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.321165.

Figure 3: Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Legend: Strongly Disagree · Somewhat Disagree · Neither Agree nor Disagree · Somewhat Agree · Strongly Agree

My institution offers excellent training and support for faculty and staff to effectively address students' curricular needs.
20% | 23% | 32% | 18%

My institution offers excellent training and support for faculty and staff to effectively address students' non-curricular needs.
10% | 27% | 22% | 29% | 11%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%
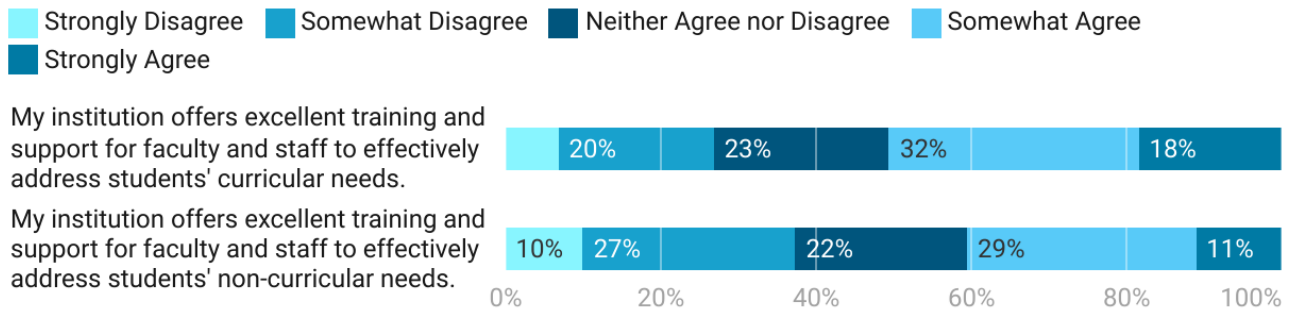
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College Fluency

This section delves into the findings related to college fluency—a critical skill set that enables students to effectively navigate the bureaucratic processes of higher education institutions to access necessary resources and services. We explore three main themes based on the respondents' perspectives: respondents' assessment of their own college fluency, how respondents perceive the college fluency of other faculty, staff, and students, and how college fluency is cultivated across departmental and institutional levels.

Self-Assessment of College Fluency Abilities

The survey asked respondents to assess their own ability to support students in navigating college resources and services. The findings suggest a generally positive self-perception, but with notable gaps in certain areas, such as locating resources for students' non-curricular needs, assisting students to secure affordable housing, and supporting non-US citizen students in navigating the complexities of adjusting to US higher education.

The majority of respondents (83 percent) somewhat or strongly agreed that they know what non-curricular services are provided by other offices within their institution, and 86 percent expressed confidence in their ability to refer students to these services. Moreover, the majority of

respondents (68 percent) somewhat or strongly disagreed that they find it difficult to provide information on basic needs services. This confidence likely reflects a certain level of familiarity with these services within the institution.

Despite perceived confidence in their college fluency skills and abilities, many still find it difficult to locate the right service for students' non-curricular needs. Only half of respondents somewhat or strongly disagreed that they find it difficult to locate resources or support for addressing students' non-curricular needs within their institution, which leaves a significant portion of respondents who might still face difficulties in finding non-curricular resources and information, providing some contrary evidence on the perceived accessibility of these resources. Despite these potential challenges, it is especially encouraging that three-quarters of all respondents across different roles do not see supporting students' non-curricular needs as beyond their scope of responsibility, highlighting a strong willingness to support students holistically (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.
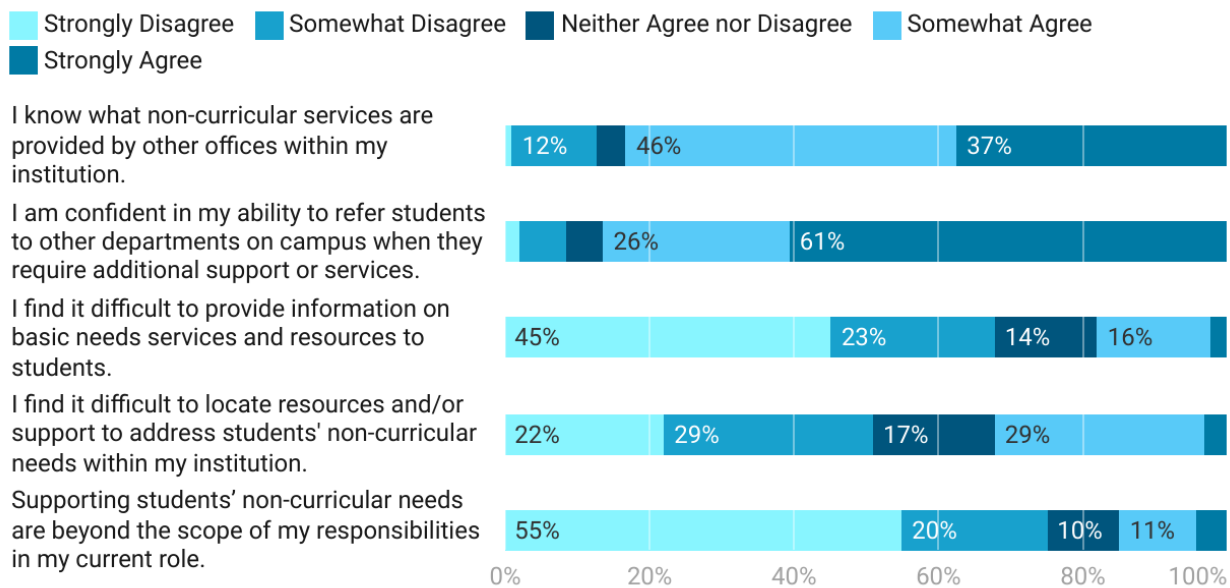
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Respondents were also confident in their ability to help students navigate a variety of non-curricular needs. Three quarters of respondents believe they are extremely or very well equipped to provide information on campus resources and services, and slightly more than half of respondents as answered that they were very or extremely well equipped to foster a sense of belonging for diverse study populations, helping new students transition to college life, or recognizing when students are in need of emotional or psychological support (Figure 5). A smaller share of librarians rated how well they were equipped to provide information on campus resources and services as very or extremely well (70 percent), compared to administrators (84 percent) and colleagues who are neither a librarian nor administrator (81 percent). As libraries are natural spaces for information seeking, this indicates a growing need for more college fluency development and programming within the library.

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Further, there are areas where respondents feel less capable, highlighting significant gaps in areas that are critical to student success, particularly for vulnerable populations. For example, 57 percent thought that they were not at all well equipped to help secure affordable housing for students, and a similar portion of faculty (58 percent) thought they were not at all well equipped to help with visa and immigration issues. Moreover, about half of the respondents (51 percent) felt they were only slightly well or not at all well equipped to support cultural adjustment for international and immigrant students.

While staff may be well-prepared to handle general resource referrals, as 76 percent rated themselves as very or extremely proficient with this task, they struggle with more complex, specialized student needs, which could be due to a lack of training, resources, or institutional support in these areas. These findings underscore a critical area for improvement: ensuring staff in different departments have adequate knowledge to direct students to the relevant non-curricular resources and follow-up to make sure they received appropriate support, particularly given the high prevalence of basic needs insecurity among students. This concern is further compounded by the fact that some student sub-groups, such as students

of color and parenting students, are at greater risk of facing these challenges.[8] Additionally, the growing number of immigrant and international students in US community colleges highlights the need for higher education institutions to improve their preparedness in providing adequate support for this population.[9] Investing in culturally responsive training and resources to better support students from diverse backgrounds will enhance the overall effectiveness of college fluency efforts for all students regardless of their backgrounds.

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[8] For more on these subgroups see: Bryce McKibben, Jiayao Wu, and Sara Abelson, "New Federal Data Confirm that College Students Face Significant—and Unacceptable—Basic Needs Insecurity," *The Hope Center*, 3 August 2023, https://hope.temple.edu/npsas; Motunrayo Olaniyan, Sarah Magnelia, Vanessa Coca, Melissa Abeyta, Marissa C. Vasquez, Frank Harris III, and Catria Gadwah-Meaden, "Two Pandemics: Racial Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurity Among College Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic," *The Hope Center*, 3 October 2023, https://hope.temple.edu/racial-disparities-basic-needs-insecurity-college-students-covid-19-pandemic; and Mark Huelsman and Leslie Rios, "Congress Needs to Address the Child Care Crisis for Parenting Students. Here's How," *The Hope Center*, 10 February 2023, https://hope.temple.edu/newsroom/hope-blog/congress-needs-address-child-care-crisis-parenting-students-heres-how.

[9] See: Jessica Blake, "Report Shows Gaps and Successes in Immigrant Student Support," *Inside Higher Ed*, 6 September 2023, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/quick-takes/2023/09/06/report-shows-gaps-and-successes-immigrant-student-support; and Kelly M. Ross and Sarah Wood, "Two-Year Colleges With the Most International Students," *U.S. News & World Report*, 19 August 2022, https://www.usnews.com/education/community-colleges/slideshows/community-colleges-with-the-most-international-students.

Figure 5: How well would you rate your own ability to help students with the following?

Legend: Extremely Well | Very Well | Moderately Well | Slightly Well | Not Well At All

Category	Extremely Well	Very Well	Moderately Well	Slightly Well	Not Well At All
Provide information on campus resources and services	38%	38%	20%		
Foster sense of belonging for diverse student populations	23%	28%	38%	8%	
Recognize when students are in need of emotional and psychological support	22%	30%	29%	16%	
Assist students looking to transfer to another college or university	21%	24%	26%	16%	13%
Help new students transition to college life	20%	31%	32%	13%	
Provide resources for addressing students' food insecurity (e.g., SNAP, TANF, food pantries, and meal voucher programs)	19%	23%	28%	19%	12%
Assist with technical issues and provide training to address technology needs	19%	23%	36%	14%	8%
Provide opportunities for students to connect to each other and share information	14%	24%	28%	23%	10%
Connect students with family responsibilities with relevant information and resources (e.g., family resource centers, on-campus childcare)	13%	24%	25%	24%	14%
Assist in finding and applying for scholarships	12%	24%	30%	19%	15%
Provide cultural adjustment support and aid in adapting to a new environment for international and immigrant students		21%	23%	28%	22%
Help with issues related to visa and immigration status for non-U.S. citizen students		11%	21%	58%	
Secure affordable off-campus or on-campus housing		18%	19%	57%	

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The findings from the respondents' self-assessment of their college fluency abilities reveal important differences when disaggregated by race and ethnicity. For example, 62 percent of White respondents report that they are not proficient at assisting students who are not US citizens with issues related to visa and immigration status, compared to 44 percent of people of color. A higher share (40 percent) of people of color believe they are very or extremely well equipped to provide cultural adjustment support to international and immigrant students than their White counterparts (22 percent). Similarly, 67 percent of people of color rate themselves as very or extremely well equipped at fostering a sense of belonging for diverse student populations, compared to 46 percent of White respondents.
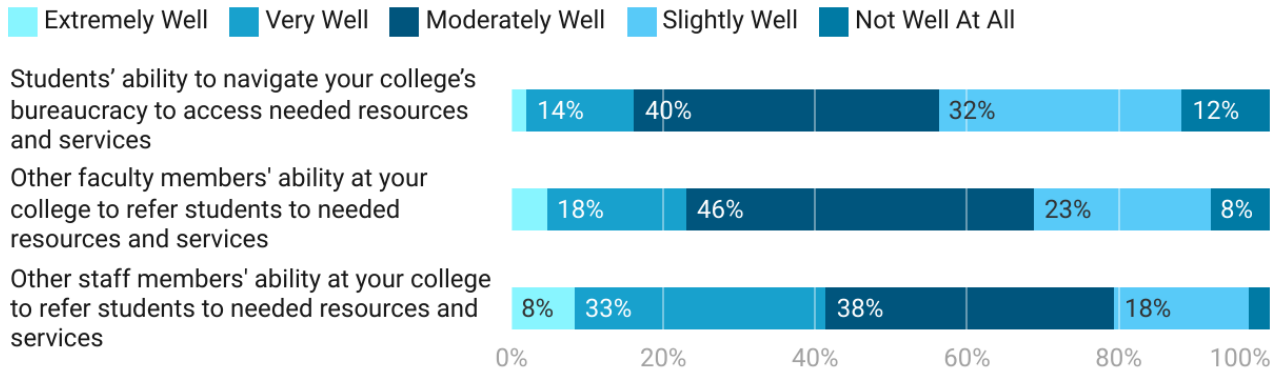
These findings underscore the significance of racial and cultural experiences in shaping individuals' perceived ability to help students navigate complex college systems. People of color, potentially drawing from their own experiences or closer connections to diverse student communities, may feel more confident in addressing the unique challenges faced by international and immigrant students. Fostering an inclusive campus environment that better supports the diverse needs of all students may require increasing the representation of people of color in faculty, staff, and leadership positions as well as greater training to increase staff competencies.

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College Fluency Among Students, Faculty, and Staff

Survey respondents were asked to evaluate the abilities of students, faculty, and staff at their institutions in navigating and referring others to college services and resources. The responses show that respondents perceive all groups to be moderately well equipped in these areas (Figure 6). Forty percent think their students are moderately well equipped to navigate their college's bureaucracy to access needed resources and services. Forty-six percent believe that other faculty members are moderately well equipped, and 38 percent believe other staff are moderately well equipped, to refer students to needed resources and services.
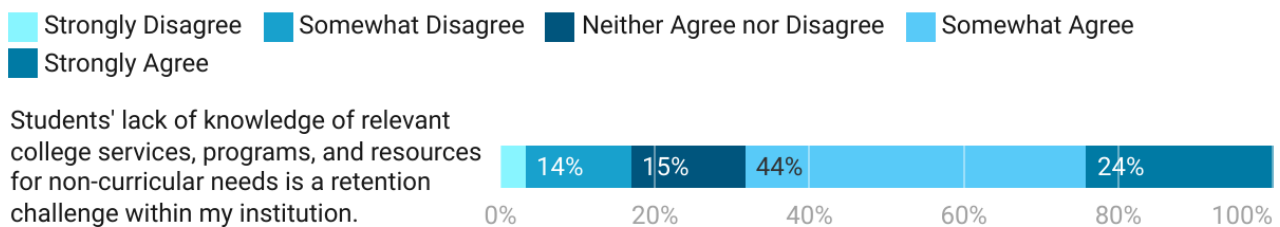
Figure 6: Respondents' ratings for the following abilities

Legend: Extremely Well | Very Well | Moderately Well | Slightly Well | Not Well At All

Students' ability to navigate your college's bureaucracy to access needed resources and services
| 14% | 40% | 32% | 12% |

Other faculty members' ability at your college to refer students to needed resources and services
| 18% | 46% | 23% | 8% |

Other staff members' ability at your college to refer students to needed resources and services
| 8% | 33% | 38% | 18% |

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

Created with Datawrapper

The fact that the majority of respondents believe their peers and students to be moderately well informed about their institution's bureaucracy, with a relatively low percentage of respondents rating students (16 percent) and faculty (23 percent) as being very or extremely well informed, highlights a systemic issue in how resources may be communicated and accessed. This consistent rating across students, faculty, and staff suggests there's room to grow the college fluency skills across campus. Moreover, a significant portion of respondents (68 percent) believe that a lack of knowledge about college services is a retention challenge (Figure 7). Therefore, better communication and training on non-curricular support could play a crucial role in retaining students, which is one of the main priorities of most community colleges (Refer to Figure 1).

Figure 7: Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Legend: Strongly Disagree | Somewhat Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Somewhat Agree | Strongly Agree

Students' lack of knowledge of relevant college services, programs, and resources for non-curricular needs is a retention challenge within my institution.
| 14% | 15% | 44% | 24% |

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

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Institutional and Departmental College Fluency

The survey also explored respondents' views on how well their institutions and departments support college fluency. Overall, less than half of respondents (46 percent) somewhat or strongly agreed that their institution has an established process for students to articulate and advocate for their non-curricular needs, and an additional 27 percent neither agreed nor disagreed. At the department-level, the majority of respondents view their department to be collaborating with other departments effectively to improve student navigation of college services. This suggests that respondents recognize the importance of interdepartmental collaboration in enhancing college fluency, but that institutions need to develop processes for students to articulate and advocate for their needs (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.
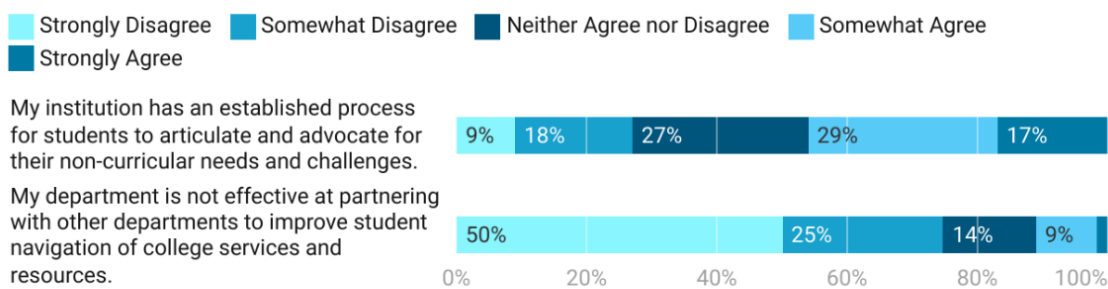
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When we asked about the importance of providing information about different student non-curricular needs, technology and well-being emerged as the respondents' top priorities, whereas information about basic needs related to housing and transportation were considered less important (Figure 9). Respondents rated technology and information access (78 percent), sense of belonging and engagement (72 percent), and mental health and emotional well-being (65 percent) as the most important priorities. Ninety-one percent of librarians rated technology information access as important or very important. A high majority of student and academic affairs staff rated a sense of belonging and engagement (85 percent) and mental health and emotional well-being (88 percent) as important or very important. Seventy-three percent of respondents who are not librarians or administrators responded that providing information about nutrition and food security is important or very important (73

percent). Much lower shares of all respondents rated housing security (33 percent) or transportation needs (38 percent) as important or very important, highlighting potential gaps in addressing these essential areas. The latest federal data from the National Center for Education Statistics(NCES) National Postsecondary Student Aid Study(NPSAS), confirms the high prevalence of postsecondary students, especially among systematically marginalized students (e.g., Black, Latiné, and Indigenous students, parenting students, and students with disabilities) experiencing basic needs insecurity.[10] These challenges are even greater for community college students,[11] who often face additional financial and personal barriers.[12] Transportation needs also present significant challenges for community college students, many of whom are commuters facing additional financial and logistical barriers.[13]

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[10] For more information on the NCES NPSAS visit: https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/npsas/. Additionally, see the Hope Center's analysis of the survey here: Bryce McKibben, Jiayao Wu, and Sara Abelson, "New Federal Data Confirm that College Students Face Significant—and Unacceptable—Basic Needs Insecurity," *The Hope Center*, 3 August 2023, https://hope.temple.edu/npsas.

[11] Sara Goldrick-Rab, Christine Baker-Smith, Vanessa Coca, Elizabeth Looker, and Tiffani Williams, "College and University Basic Needs Insecurity: A National #RealCollege Survey Report," *The Hope Center*, April 2019, https://www.insidehighered.com/sites/default/files/media/HOPE_realcollege_National_report_EMBARGOED%20UNTIL%20APRIL%2030%203%20AM%20EST%20(1).pdf.

[12] Stephen R. Porter and Paul D. Umbach, "What Challenges to Success Do Community College Students Face," *Revealing Institutional Strengths and Challenges (RISC),* 2019 https://risc.college/sites/default/files/2019-01/RISC_2019_report_natl.pdf.

[13] A. Schuette, "Transportation as a Barrier to Higher Education: Evidence from the 2022 Student Financial Wellness Survey," *Trellis Company*, July 2023, https://www.trelliscompany.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Research-Brief_Jul23_Transportation.pdf.

Figure 9: How important is it for your department to provide information for each of the following types of student non-curricular needs?

Legend: All Roles, Administrator, Librarian, Not an Administrator or a Librarian

Technology and information access
- All Roles: 78%
- Administrator: 70%
- Librarian: 91%
- Not an Administrator or a Librarian: 61%

Sense of belonging and engagement
- All Roles: 72%
- Administrator: 77%
- Librarian: 63%
- Not an Administrator or a Librarian: 85%

Mental health and emotional well-being
- All Roles: 65%
- Administrator: 71%
- Librarian: 51%
- Not an Administrator or a Librarian: 88%

Career development
- All Roles: 57%
- Administrator: 61%
- Librarian: 49%
- Not an Administrator or a Librarian: 70%

Nutrition and food security
- All Roles: 53%
- Administrator: 68%
- Librarian: 34%
- Not an Administrator or a Librarian: 73%

Financial aid (e.g., vouchers, emergency grants)
- All Roles: 51%
- Administrator: 73%
- Librarian: 26%
- Not an Administrator or a Librarian: 73%

Financial support (e.g., financial wellness education, information on public services)
- All Roles: 50%
- Administrator: 62%
- Librarian: 32%
- Not an Administrator or a Librarian: 70%

Physical health
- All Roles: 45%
- Administrator: 59%
- Librarian: 27%
- Not an Administrator or a Librarian: 61%

Transportation needs
- All Roles: 38%
- Administrator: 55%
- Librarian: 20%
- Not an Administrator or a Librarian: 48%

Housing security
- All Roles: 33%
- Administrator: 45%
- Librarian: 17%
- Not an Administrator or a Librarian: 47%
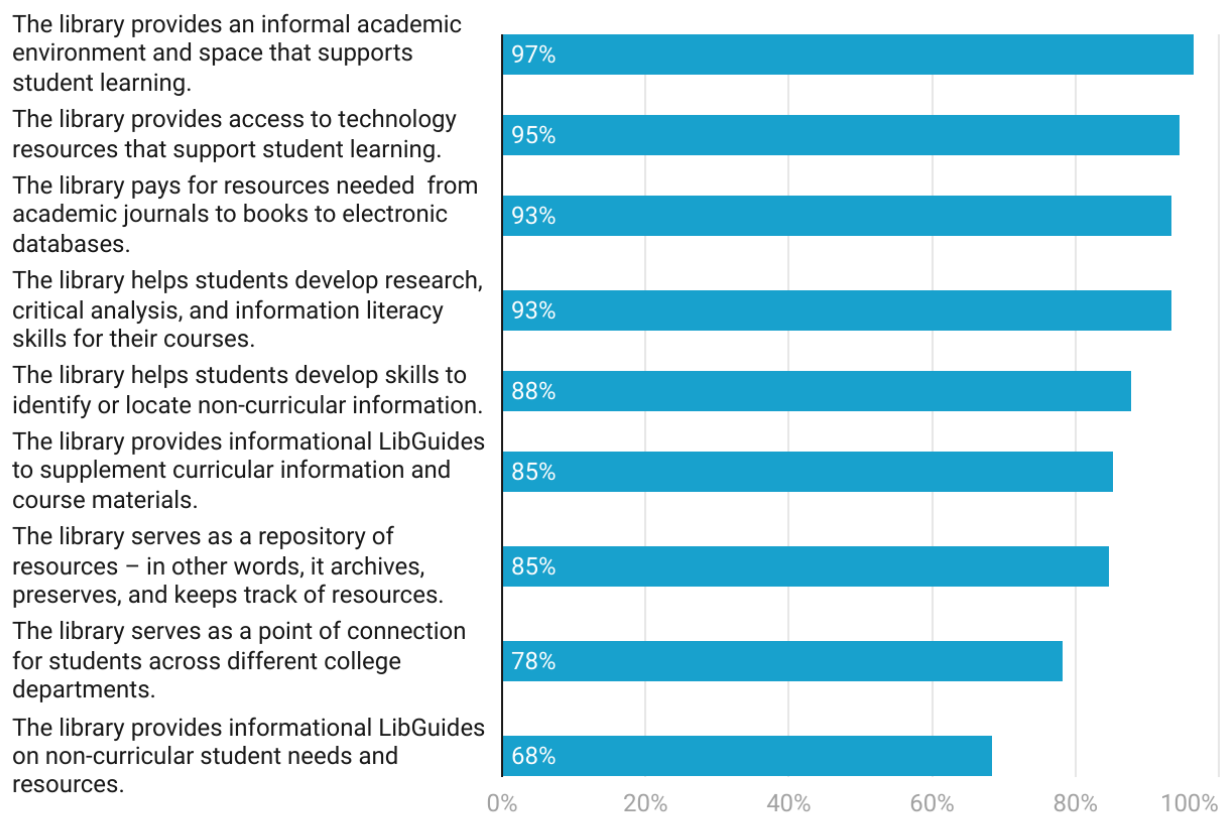
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Respondents also recognized the library's critical role in supporting college fluency through their physical spaces, technology services, and information literacy support (Figure 10). Nearly all (97 percent) of respondents rated the library's provision of an informal academic environment as important or very important, followed by offering access to technology resources (95 percent), and helping students develop essential research and information literacy skills (93 percent). College fluency extends the concept of information literacy, which includes the ability to find, evaluate, and use essential information, by equipping students with the skills to navigate institutional systems and locate both curricular and non-curricular resources.[14] Despite libraries' high potential for supporting students' college fluency beyond information literacy to navigate college to address non-curricular needs, the smallest share of respondents (68 percent) rated the library's role in helping students develop skills to identify or locate non-curricular information as important or very important compared to other curricular and information literacy needs.

The survey findings indicate that while 88 percent of respondents view the library's role in helping students develop skills to identify non-curricular information as important or very important, providing informational LibGuides on non-curricular needs was rated as the least important library function. LibGuides, which are content management and information-sharing tools, come at a cost, and libraries may well be creating similar resources like FAQ pages or subject guides more generally. These tools can be valuable in connecting students with essential resources and information, and there may be opportunities for libraries to explore how such resources could further support students' non-curricular needs.

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[14] ACRL Task Force on Information Literacy Competency Standards, "Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education," *Association of College & Research Libraries*, 2000.

Figure 10: How important is it to you that your college or university library provides each of the functions below or serves in the capacity listed below? Percentage of respondents who indicated each item as important and very important.

Function	Percentage
The library provides an informal academic environment and space that supports student learning.	97%
The library provides access to technology resources that support student learning.	95%
The library pays for resources needed from academic journals to books to electronic databases.	93%
The library helps students develop research, critical analysis, and information literacy skills for their courses.	93%
The library helps students develop skills to identify or locate non-curricular information.	88%
The library provides informational LibGuides to supplement curricular information and course materials.	85%
The library serves as a repository of resources – in other words, it archives, preserves, and keeps track of resources.	85%
The library serves as a point of connection for students across different college departments.	78%
The library provides informational LibGuides on non-curricular student needs and resources.	68%

Created with Datawrapper

# Communication Channels for Sharing Information about Services

Effective communication is a critical component in ensuring that students are aware of and can access the services, programs, and resources available to them, facilitating smoother navigation of higher education bureaucratic systems. According to the survey results, email emerged as the dominant and most preferred communication channel across departments, in addition to varying preferences for college websites or online portals and in-person or virtual meetings, depending on departmental focus. The findings also provide insights into the channels departments use to reach students, with email and college websites ranking highly. Recognizing these preferences allows institutions to refine communication strategies, ensuring that critical information about

services reaches both staff and students in the most effective and accessible ways. Moreover, the reliance on digital communication as a primary means of information sharing underscores the need to optimize digital communication tools to ensure timely and accurate information dissemination. Given the importance of communicating these resources accurately and effectively, both among faculty and staff and in their interactions with students, the following sections discuss how non-curricular information and resources are communicated across departments and to students directly.

Interdepartmental Communication

Interdepartmental communication plays a vital role in fostering collaboration and ensuring that faculty and staff across different departments are informed about the various services, programs, and resources provided by those other departments that are available to students. The survey explored the methods by which faculty and staff communicate with colleagues in other departments and their preferred channels for receiving such information. The findings reveal that email is the predominant communication channel across all four department categories, followed by meetings/workshops and informal conversations (Figure 11).

Figure 11: How do you communicate with faculty and staff in other departments at your institution to inform them about your department's services, programs, and resources available to students? Please select all that apply.
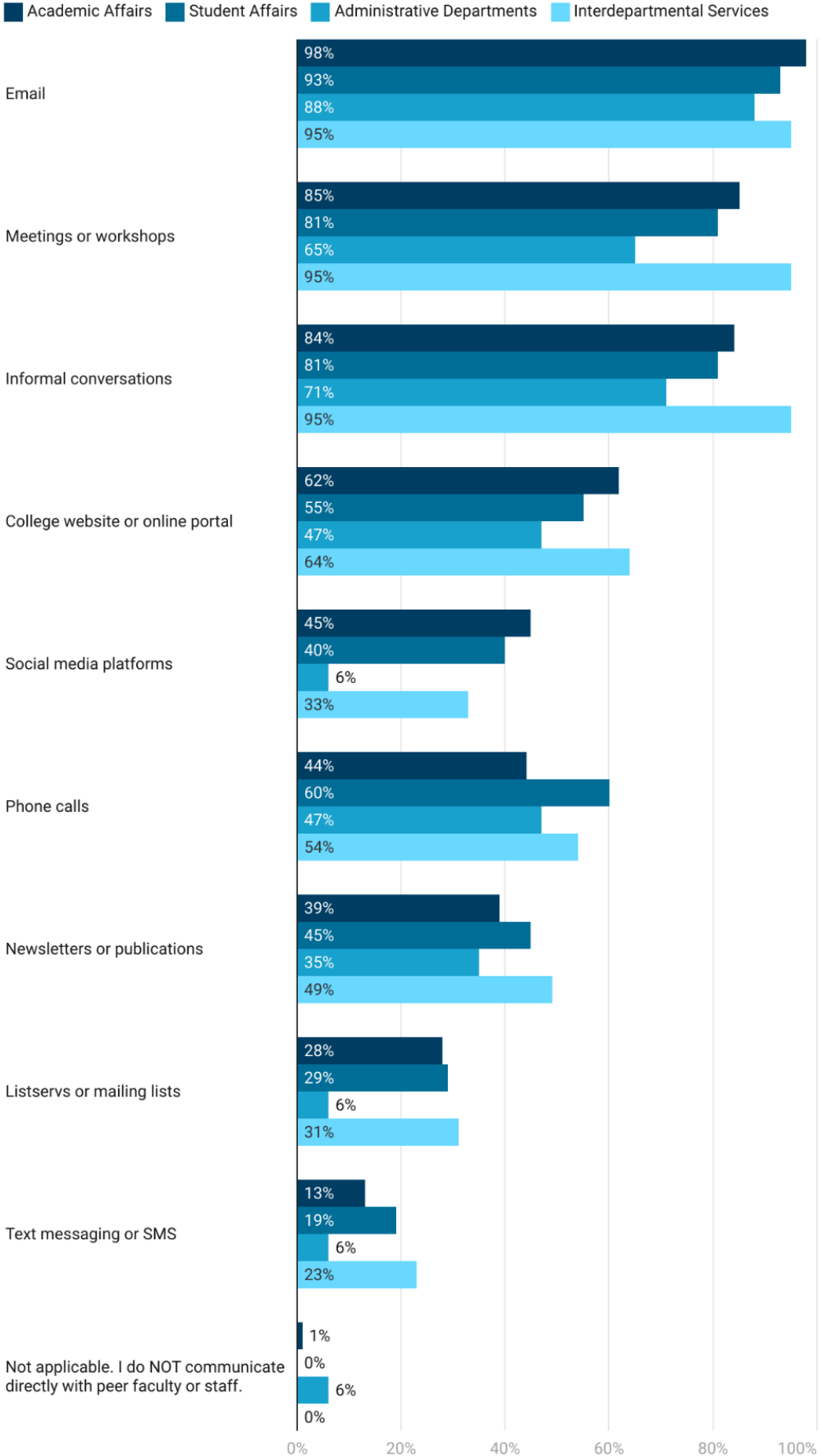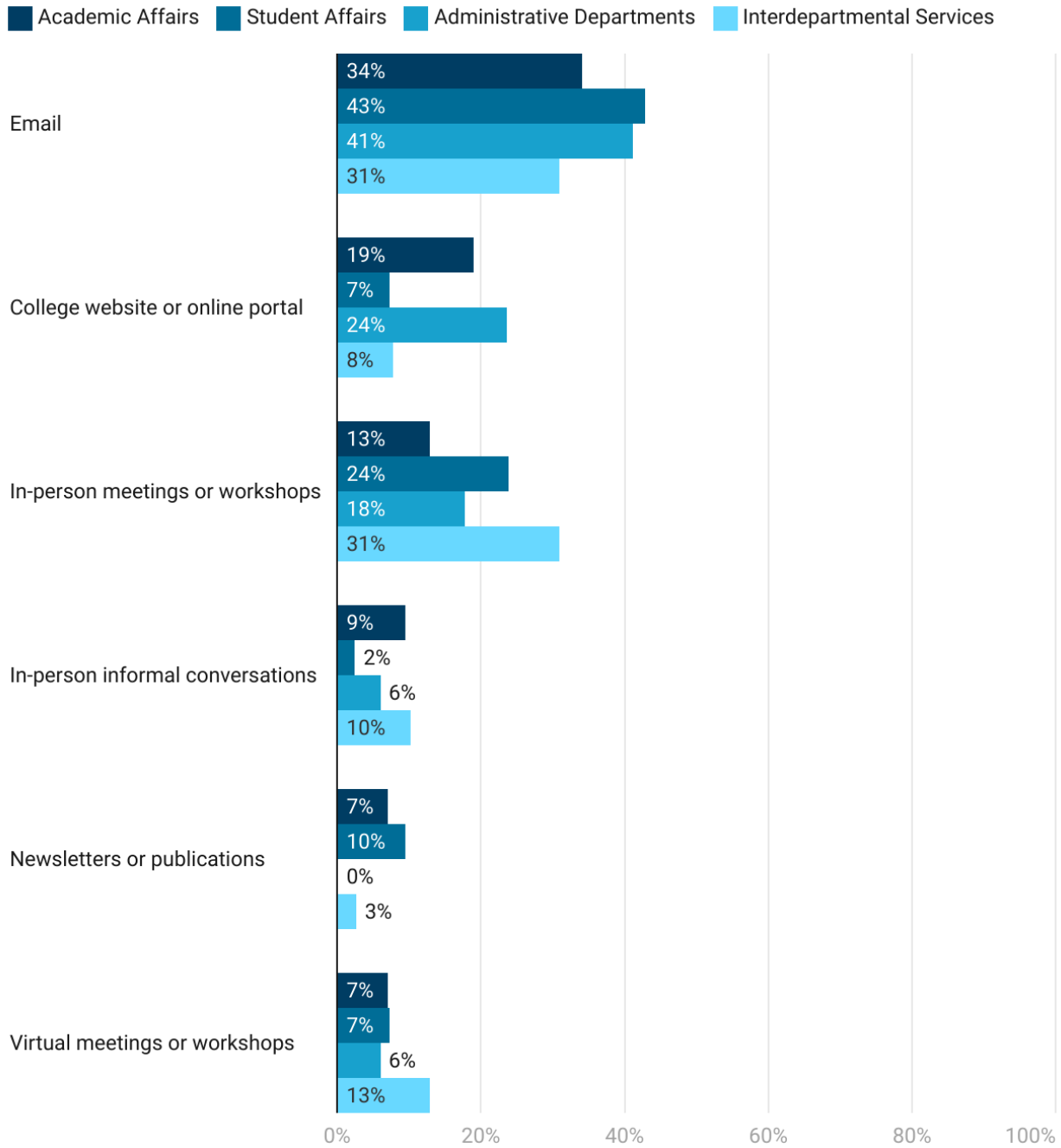
While respondents across department categories indicated a strong preference for email, other preferences varied somewhat by department. For instance, a larger share of respondents affiliated with academic affairs (19 percent) and administrative departments (24 percent) favor college websites or online portals after emails, than their colleagues in student affairs or interdepartmental services. For respondents affiliated with student affairs, in-person meetings/workshops (24 percent) and newsletters/publications (10 percent) are the second and third most preferred communication channels. Finally, respondents from interdepartmental services favor email and in-person meetings or workshops equally (31 percent), with virtual meetings/workshops (13 percent) also being notable. These results imply that while email remains the dominant channel for interdepartmental communication, there is also a considerable interest in more interactive methods, such as in-person or virtual meetings, which may facilitate richer, more collaborative exchanges (Figure 12). It is also important to note that five communication channels—listservs or mailing lists, text messaging, social media platforms, phone calls, and virtual informal conversations—were selected by fewer than five percent of respondents. As a result, these channels have been excluded from Figure 12 for clarity and relevance.

While email remains the dominant channel for interdepartmental communication, there is also a considerable interest in more interactive methods, such as in-person or virtual meetings, which may facilitate richer, more collaborative exchanges.

Figure 12: What methods of communication do you most prefer to learn about other departments' services, programs, and resources available to students at your college?

Legend: ■ Academic Affairs ■ Student Affairs ■ Administrative Departments ■ Interdepartmental Services

Email
- Academic Affairs: 34%
- Student Affairs: 43%
- Administrative Departments: 41%
- Interdepartmental Services: 31%

College website or online portal
- Academic Affairs: 19%
- Student Affairs: 7%
- Administrative Departments: 24%
- Interdepartmental Services: 8%

In-person meetings or workshops
- Academic Affairs: 13%
- Student Affairs: 24%
- Administrative Departments: 18%
- Interdepartmental Services: 31%

In-person informal conversations
- Academic Affairs: 9%
- Student Affairs: 2%
- Administrative Departments: 6%
- Interdepartmental Services: 10%

Newsletters or publications
- Academic Affairs: 7%
- Student Affairs: 10%
- Administrative Departments: 0%
- Interdepartmental Services: 3%

Virtual meetings or workshops
- Academic Affairs: 7%
- Student Affairs: 7%
- Administrative Departments: 6%
- Interdepartmental Services: 13%

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Student Outreach

The survey assessed multiple ways departments communicate and share information about resources and services with their students. According to the findings, college websites or online portals and email are among the most preferred channels across all four department categories. The prioritization of these channels, however, varied by department. Classroom visits (82 percent) are highly preferred by respondents in academic affairs, while those from student affairs prefer social media (79 percent). Respondents affiliated with administrative departments reported meetings/workshops (35 percent) as their third most preferred student communication channels, whereas others from interdepartmental services preferred informal conversations (90 percent) in addition to email and their college website or online portal (Figure 13).
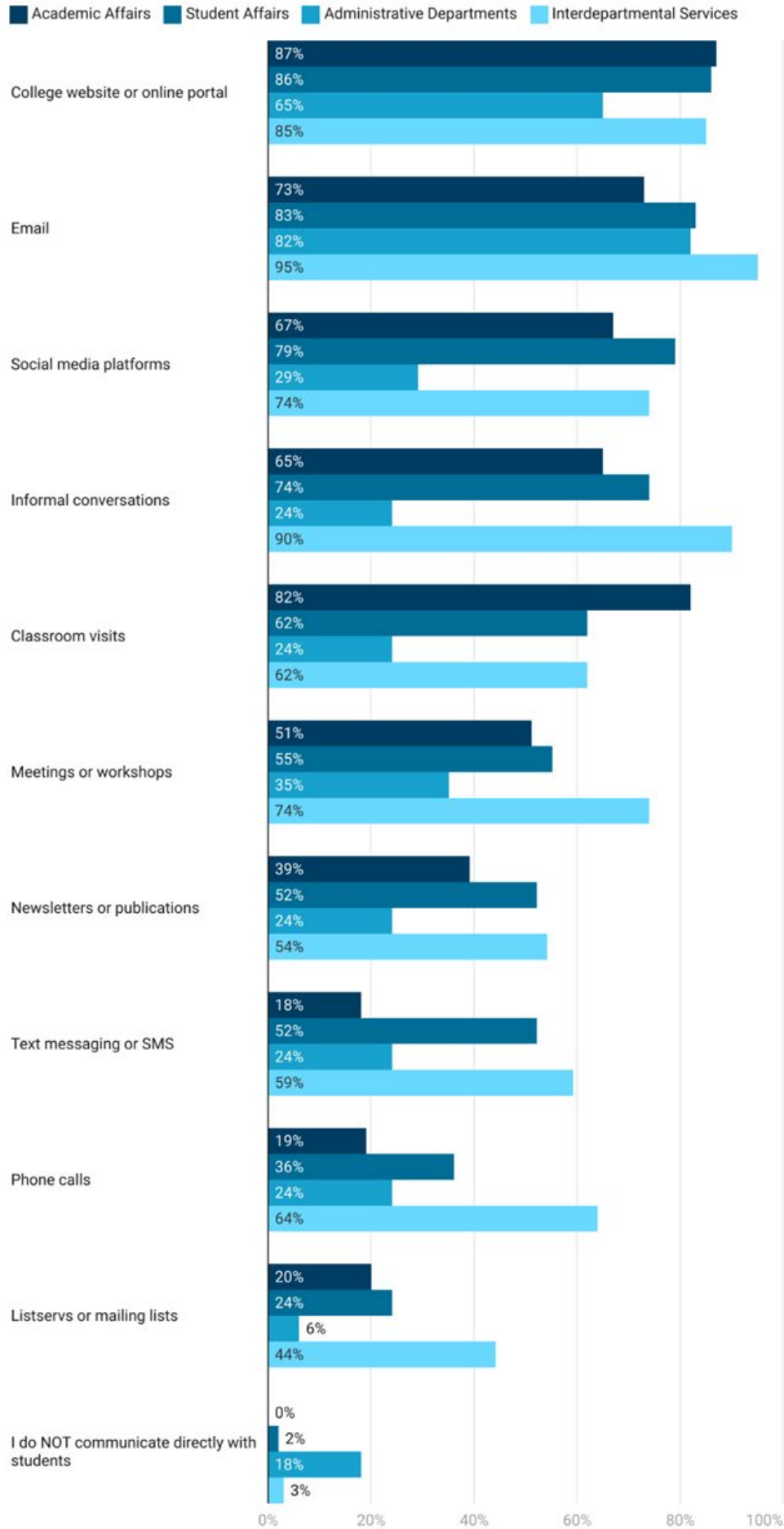
These findings underline how departments take various approaches to reach students, which include a mix of digital communication and personal interaction. The heavy reliance on email and online portals, such as the college website or Learning Management Systems (LMS), may suggest that these methods are seen as both effective and efficient, although the use of social media and classroom visits highlights the necessity of diversifying communication strategies to meet students where they are most likely to engage. Institutions also need to align their outreach methods with students' preferred communication channels. For instance, while social media is increasingly popular among students, preferences can vary depending on factors like age and years in college.[15] Additionally, many students expect universities to utilize a range of channels—including email, social media, and student portals—to ensure broad and effective communication that meets their diverse needs.[16]

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[15] "Communicating with College Students: Adapting Your Admissions Approach for Gen Z," *Collegis Education*, 18 November 2020, https://collegiseducation.com/insights/enrollment-growth/communicating-with-college-students/.

[16] David Gilani, "Student Attitudes and Preferences Towards Communications from their University–a Meta-analysis of Student Communications Research within UK Higher Education Institutions," *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 46, no. 3 (2024): 274-290 https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2024.2344234.

Figure 13: How does your department communicate with students to inform them about college services, programs, and resources? Please select all that apply.

Legend: Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Administrative Departments, Interdepartmental Services

College website or online portal
- Academic Affairs: 87%
- Student Affairs: 86%
- Administrative Departments: 65%
- Interdepartmental Services: 85%

Email
- Academic Affairs: 73%
- Student Affairs: 83%
- Administrative Departments: 82%
- Interdepartmental Services: 95%

Social media platforms
- Academic Affairs: 67%
- Student Affairs: 79%
- Administrative Departments: 29%
- Interdepartmental Services: 74%

Informal conversations
- Academic Affairs: 65%
- Student Affairs: 74%
- Administrative Departments: 24%
- Interdepartmental Services: 90%

Classroom visits
- Academic Affairs: 82%
- Student Affairs: 62%
- Administrative Departments: 24%
- Interdepartmental Services: 62%

Meetings or workshops
- Academic Affairs: 51%
- Student Affairs: 55%
- Administrative Departments: 35%
- Interdepartmental Services: 74%

Newsletters or publications
- Academic Affairs: 39%
- Student Affairs: 52%
- Administrative Departments: 24%
- Interdepartmental Services: 54%

Text messaging or SMS
- Academic Affairs: 18%
- Student Affairs: 52%
- Administrative Departments: 24%
- Interdepartmental Services: 59%

Phone calls
- Academic Affairs: 19%
- Student Affairs: 36%
- Administrative Departments: 24%
- Interdepartmental Services: 64%

Listservs or mailing lists
- Academic Affairs: 20%
- Student Affairs: 24%
- Administrative Departments: 6%
- Interdepartmental Services: 44%

I do NOT communicate directly with students
- Academic Affairs: 0%
- Student Affairs: 2%
- Administrative Departments: 18%
- Interdepartmental Services: 3%

When unsure how to support non-curricular inquiries, respondents most frequently refer students to the college website or online resources (62 percent), the library (57 percent),[17] and academic advising (54 percent) (Figure 14).

There are some notable differences in how respondents from different departments refer students. Those affiliated with academic affairs, referred students most often to the library (89 percent), highlighting the library's role as a central hub for student support within academic departments. This was followed by the college website or online resources (68 percent). These respondents also mentioned student affairs, success, or equivalent departments (43 percent) as their third most preferred resource to direct students, reflecting their role in addressing students' non-curricular needs. Student affairs respondents were more likely to refer students to more specialized support services; 64 percent selected both financial aid and counseling center/service, followed closely by the college website or online resources (63 percent). For respondents from administrative departments the counseling center/services (44 percent) emerged as the most frequently referred resource, followed by the college website/online resources (38 percent), and academic advising (38 percent). Finally, academic advising (85 percent) was the most frequently referred resource by respondents affiliated with interdepartmental services, followed by financial aid (67 percent) and student affairs, success, or equivalent (64 percent).

Less than 40 percent of respondents reported that they direct students to single stop services when unsure of how to respond to non-curricular needs and inquiries. This finding is important, given that many higher education scholars and practitioners emphasize the impact of single stop services in supporting students and fostering stronger service interactions across campus.[18] These services are designed to streamline access to a wide range of resources, which can assist in reducing the bureaucratic barriers that students often face when seeking help. Our finding suggests that staff may not know about these services or that they are

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[17] It is important to note that the library's high referral rate can be attributed to the fact that a significant portion of the survey respondents (45 percent) were affiliated with the library.
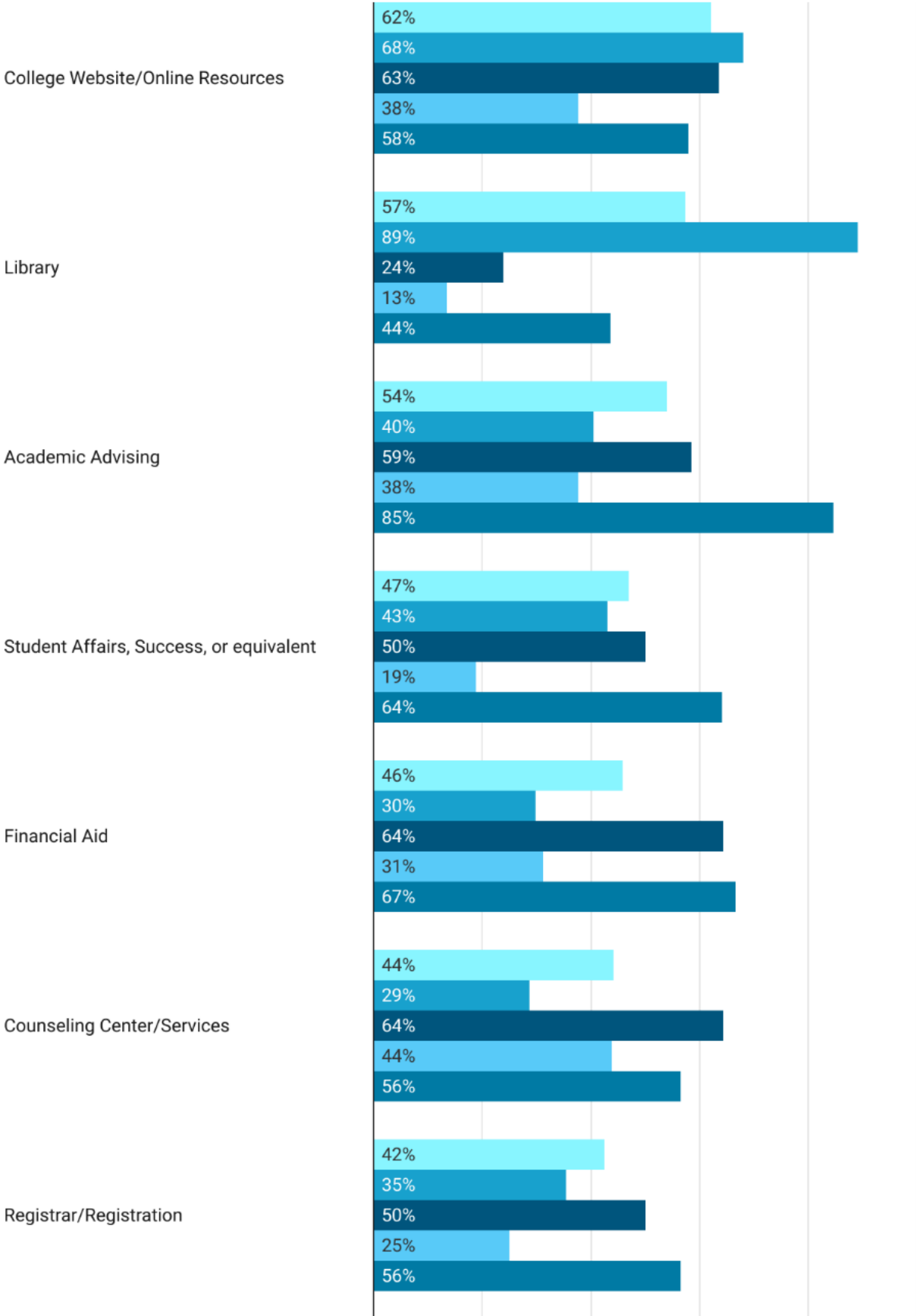
[18] Lindsay Daugherty, William R. Johnston, and Tiffany Tsai, "Connecting College Students to Alternative Sources of Support: The Single Stop Community College Initiative and Postsecondary Outcomes," RAND Corporation, 29 April 2020, https://americorps.gov/sites/default/files/evidenceexchange/New%20Profit_Single%20Stop_Final%20Report%20%20v.1_11.11.16_508_1.pdf.
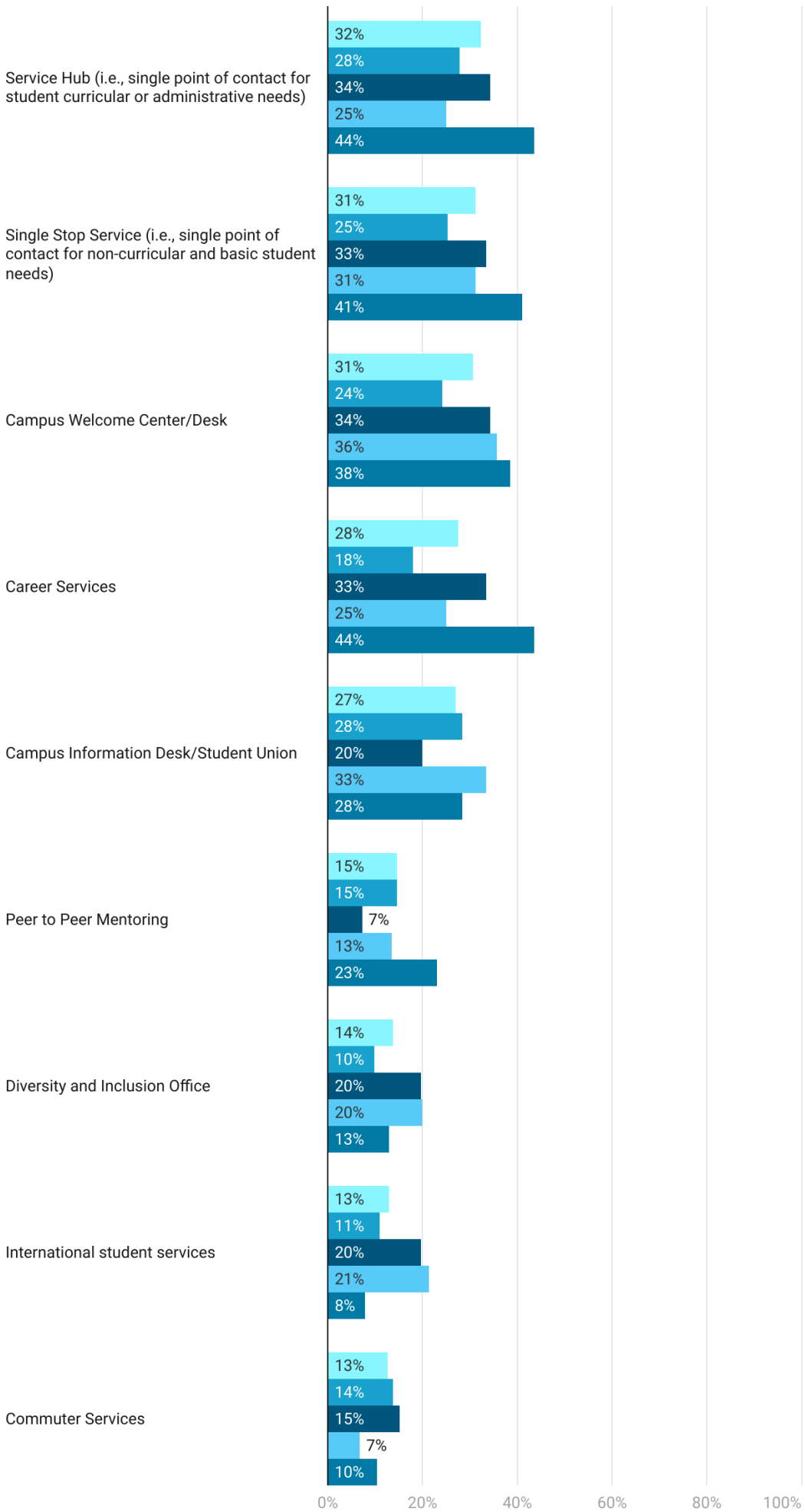
underutilized, potentially hindering students' ability to navigate college bureaucracies and access the support they need. Improving collaboration and communication about single stop services could enhance the effectiveness of student support systems.

These findings highlight the varying roles that different departments play in student outreach and support. While the college website and online resources serve as a common referral point across departments, the library, financial aid, and counseling services also play crucial roles depending on the specific needs and contexts of the students. The data suggests that effective student support requires a network of resources, with departments relying on each other to ensure that students receive comprehensive guidance.

Figure 14: How often do you direct students at your college to the following departments or offices when you are unsure how to respond to their non-curricular inquiries? Percentage of respondents that indicated "often" directing students to the following resources.

Legend: Total | Academic Affairs | Student Affairs | Administrative Departments | Interdepartmental Services

College Website/Online Resources
- 62%
- 68%
- 63%
- 38%
- 58%

Library
- 57%
- 89%
- 24%
- 13%
- 44%

Academic Advising
- 54%
- 40%
- 59%
- 38%
- 85%

Student Affairs, Success, or equivalent
- 47%
- 43%
- 50%
- 19%
- 64%

Financial Aid
- 46%
- 30%
- 64%
- 31%
- 67%

Counseling Center/Services
- 44%
- 29%
- 64%
- 44%
- 56%

Registrar/Registration
- 42%
- 35%
- 50%
- 25%
- 56%

Service Hub (i.e., single point of contact for student curricular or administrative needs)
- 32%
- 28%
- 34%
- 25%
- 44%

Single Stop Service (i.e., single point of contact for non-curricular and basic student needs)
- 31%
- 25%
- 33%
- 31%
- 41%

Campus Welcome Center/Desk
- 31%
- 24%
- 34%
- 36%
- 38%

Career Services
- 28%
- 18%
- 33%
- 25%
- 44%

Campus Information Desk/Student Union
- 27%
- 28%
- 20%
- 33%
- 28%

Peer to Peer Mentoring
- 15%
- 15%
- 7%
- 13%
- 23%

Diversity and Inclusion Office
- 14%
- 10%
- 20%
- 20%
- 13%

International student services
- 13%
- 11%
- 20%
- 21%
- 8%

Commuter Services
- 13%
- 14%
- 15%
- 7%
- 10%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

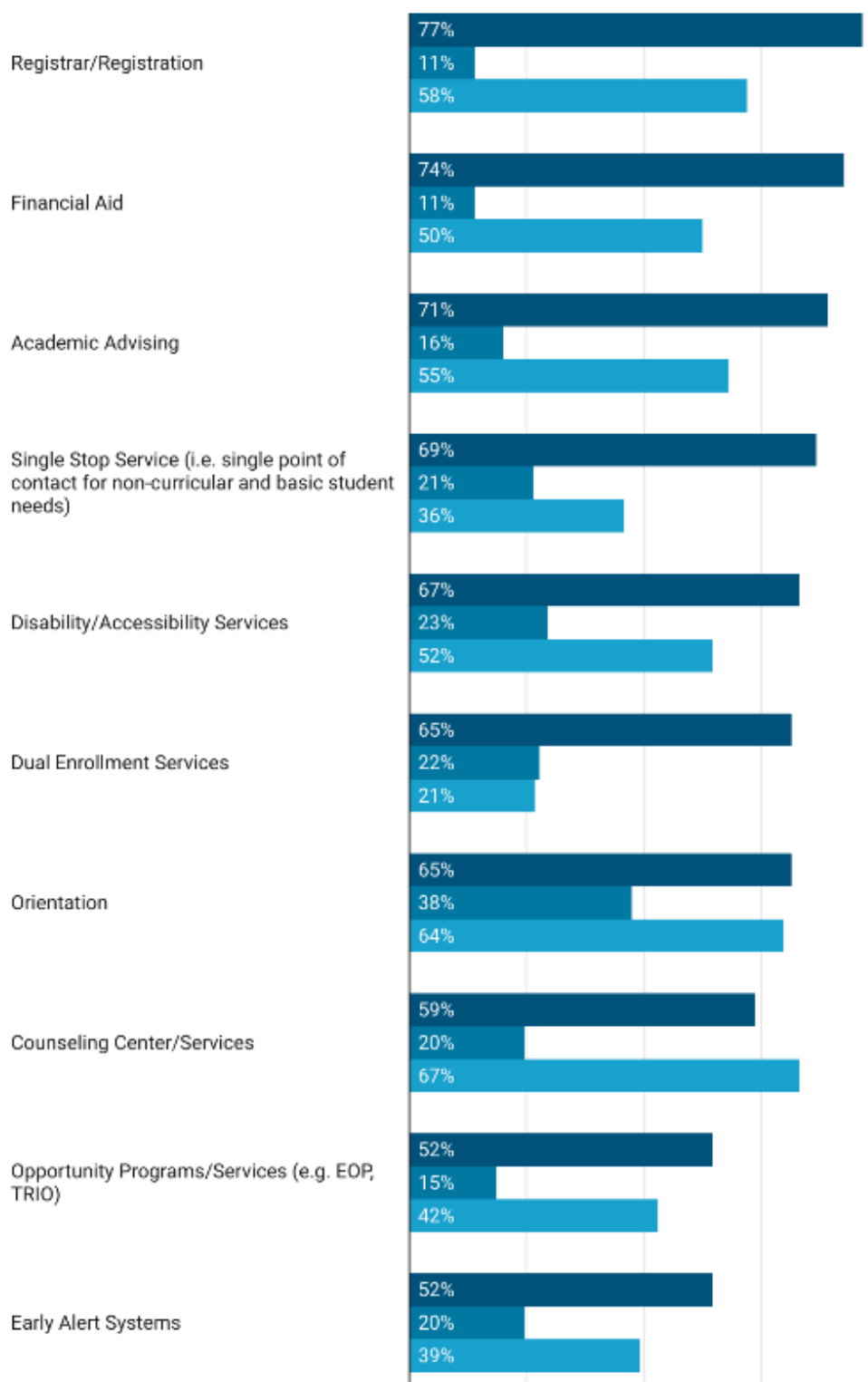# Interdepartmental Collaboration and Partnership

Interdepartmental collaboration and partnership are critical components of a well-functioning educational institution, ensuring that departments are working together to maximize their resources and provide holistic support to students, addressing both their curricular and non-curricular needs. Given the importance of these collaborative efforts, the survey results offer valuable insights into how different departments across community colleges partner to address student needs. The findings reveal variations in collaboration practices between administrators, librarians, and other faculty and staff; each group tends to partner with departments aligned with their sector of the college. By fostering partnerships between departments focused on enrollment, advising, accessibility, and other key areas, institutions can create a more integrated support system, ensuring that students receive the guidance and assistance they need and ultimately improving their ability to stay on track, achieve their goals, and persist in their college journey. This section also explores the primary forms of collaboration between departments.
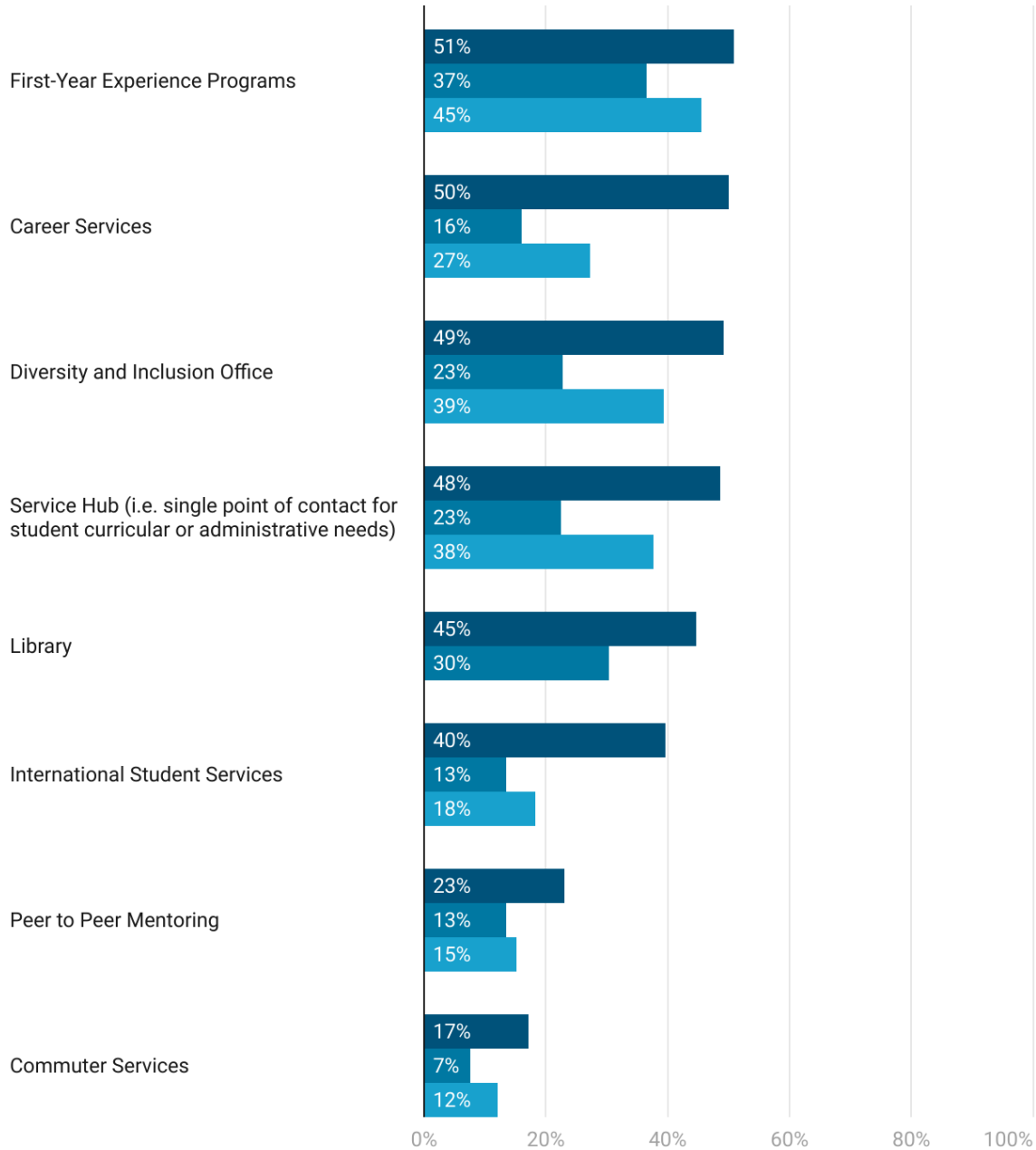
Librarians and non-library respondents tend to partner with different campus offices. Administrators most often partner with departments focused on student enrollment and retention: 72 percent often partner with the registrar/registration office, 68 percent with financial aid, and 67 percent with academic advising. Librarians most often partner with departments focused on supporting students in their transition to college and accessibility: 39 percent often partner with orientation programs, 38 percent with first-year experience programs, and 35 percent with disability/accessibility services. Finally, staff who are not administrators or librarians reported they most often partner with the counseling center/services (67 percent), orientation (64 percent), and the registrar/registration office (58 percent) (Figure 15).

Figure 15: How often does your department partner with each of the following?

Legend: ■ Administrator ■ Librarian ■ Not an Administrator or a Librarian

Service	Administrator	Librarian	Not an Administrator or a Librarian
Registrar/Registration	77%	11%	58%
Financial Aid	74%	11%	50%
Academic Advising	71%	16%	55%
Single Stop Service (i.e. single point of contact for non-curricular and basic student needs)	69%	21%	36%
Disability/Accessibility Services	67%	23%	52%
Dual Enrollment Services	65%	22%	21%
Orientation	65%	38%	64%
Counseling Center/Services	59%	20%	67%
Opportunity Programs/Services (e.g. EOP, TRIO)	52%	15%	42%
Early Alert Systems	52%	20%	39%

ITHAKA S+R

First-Year Experience Programs
- 51%
- 37%
- 45%

Career Services
- 50%
- 16%
- 27%

Diversity and Inclusion Office
- 49%
- 23%
- 39%

Service Hub (i.e. single point of contact for student curricular or administrative needs)
- 48%
- 23%
- 38%

Library
- 45%
- 30%

International Student Services
- 40%
- 13%
- 18%

Peer to Peer Mentoring
- 23%
- 13%
- 15%

Commuter Services
- 17%
- 7%
- 12%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

Created with Datawrapper

After selecting the departments they partner with, respondents were asked to provide a brief description of their department's partnerships. They shared how they try to address the varied needs of students, from academic support to connecting them with vital resources. As one

explained, "We have a great team that puts the students first. Each one of us has a role to help keep the students on track to help them succeed."

Three main forms of collaborative efforts were identified in the open-ended responses: campus events and activities, training and presentations, and supporting other departments. Each of these categories represents a different aspect of how respondents believe different departments within their institution work together to address students' needs, connect them to resources, and enhance their success.

Campus Events and Activities

Campus events and activities are among the most visible forms of collaboration across community colleges. Librarians play a significant role in these efforts, particularly first-year experience (FYE) programs and orientation sessions. Their involvement ranges from participating in and organizing events to providing an informal space in the library for student activities. For instance, several respondents noted that librarians contribute to campus activities by hosting and organizing events within the library, promoting student activities, and helping students connect with both curricular and non-curricular resources. One respondent provided a comprehensive response about their library's role within multiple collaborative efforts:

> The [Inclusion & Success Services] and the Financial Aid office have had "listening tables" in the Library where students could stop by and learn about their services & gain awareness of how they may benefit them. The Library offers a "Quiet Space" that encourages anyone seeking respite from the stress of the day, or a low-stimuli environment to come and enjoy peace, quiet and calmness; this space was developed after feedback from Student Services suggested that such a space could help our students navigate stressful moments while on campus. For curricular support, the Library partners with faculty to provide 90-100 information literacy instructions sessions per year to nearly 900+ students. In addition, the Library helps to support the annual Poetry Slam, and is hosting concerts in the Library in cooperation with the new music department and annually hosts the Student Art Show, providing the 2nd highest level of cash prize awarded to students.

Respondents from other departments also mentioned that the partnerships are usually structured around campus activities. In some cases, these are temporary, as one respondent observed that, "relationships tend to center around events rather than constant work together." These respondents frequently described orientation as an occasion for cross-departmental collaboration, a type of event that librarians are also heavily involved in. Some librarians reported simply participating in orientation while others described preparing materials (e.g., providing video orientation of the library) for these events. These collaborative partnerships have helped the library reach more students and have been crucial in reaching out to students and ensuring that they are aware of the various support services available to them from the outset of their college journey. Respondents also described additional collaborative activities, including visit days for potential students, DEI-focused book walks with children's books on campus, and more.

Training and Presentations

Respondents described how their departments frequently engage with other departments by attending advising and faculty meetings, visiting classrooms, and dropping by different departments. They also reported providing staff and instructor training sessions and workshops to inform different groups about available resources and how they can support students' many different needs. For instance, a staff member at a learning assistance center explained that the office of specialized services at their college "does many, many workshops for [their] tutors and coaches on working with students who have disabilities." These meetings, training sessions, and workshops help ensure that all stakeholders are informed about the resources available to students and prepare departments across the college to address the diverse needs of the student body. One respondent wrote,

> As a student affairs practitioner, my teams work strongly with other student support areas to make known the many resources available at the College. We often hear about challenges in having students access services and supports and work collaboratively to try to make them more visible, wide-known, and accessible to students.

In some cases, library collaborations might be limited to specific departments that focus on students' curricular needs. For instance, one of the library staff noted, "We partner mostly with academic departments,

not student services, in terms of collection development, info literacy classes, research papers, Zero Textbook Cost programs." This example indicates some partnerships may be more focused on supporting traditional academic milestones rather than students' non-academic needs.

Supporting Other Departments

Respondents described how they collaborate with other departments to support each other's workstream. In some cases, these collaborative partnerships are temporary, resulting from unforeseen challenges such as staffing shortages. An academic advisor noted,

> We partner greatly on students of concern and to offer a variety of resources. Because departments are regularly understaffed, we also regularly offer our services at their events and to provide their resources to students. For advising and New Student Services we help with campus tours, financial aid questions, and getting students registered. We have proctored tests for disability support services, and we help other departments as needed.

Librarians also play a crucial role in this regard, often taking on roles that extend beyond traditional library services. For instance, librarians may serve in advisory roles for student support initiatives or assist with student registration. In some cases, librarians work closely with specific departments, such as counseling centers, to advertise services or support students in particular academic disciplines. The library also serves as a physical space where other departments can share information about their services directly with students. According to a library director,

> We partner with the International Student Center regularly hiring international students to work in the library and as part of our international student snack program available to all constituents. We are currently partnering with the counseling center this academic year providing them space in a prime spot of the library to advertise their services to our constituency.
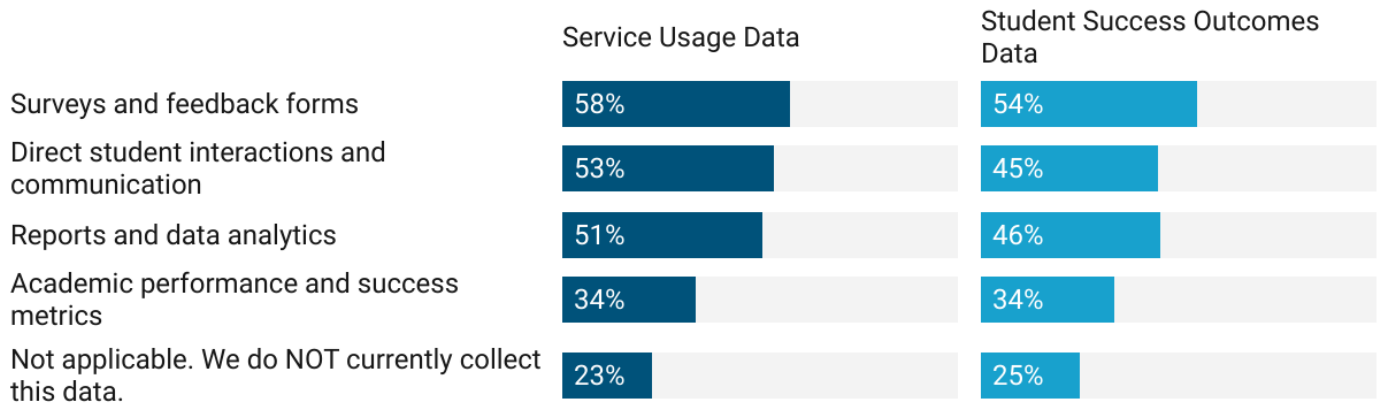
These collaborative efforts underscore the multifaceted role that librarians and other departments play in supporting students. By working together, they can create a more integrated and supportive educational environment that addresses the holistic needs of students, ultimately contributing to their success and retention.

Data and Feedback

Two survey questions focused on how departments measure the use of their non-curricular support services by students and their impact on student success outcomes (Figure 16). Fifty-eight percent of respondents use surveys and feedback forms to collect data about how and whether students are using non-curricular support services and programs, followed by direct student interactions and communication (53 percent), and reports and data analytics (51 percent). Another question asked what data, if any, the institutions collect to determine if non-curricular support services promote student success outcomes. The majority of respondents (54 percent) use surveys and feedback forms for this purpose, followed by reports and data analytics (46 percent), and direct student interactions and communication (45 percent). Another finding worth noting is that roughly a quarter of respondents reported not collecting usage or outcome data.

These findings suggest that various departments are leveraging a mix of qualitative and quantitative data to assess student engagement with support services. Surveys and feedback forms are frequently used, likely because they provide direct insights into students' experiences and perceptions, allowing departments to gather specific feedback on the accessibility and effectiveness of the services offered. Additionally, the reliance on direct student interactions and communication indicates that personal and real-time feedback is also valued, reflecting an understanding that informal or anecdotal data can complement more structured forms of assessment. The use of reports and data analytics shows that many departments are also focused on tracking and analyzing trends over time.

Figure 16: Data collection to assess non-curricular support services

	Service Usage Data	Student Success Outcomes Data
Surveys and feedback forms	58%	54%
Direct student interactions and communication	53%	45%
Reports and data analytics	51%	46%
Academic performance and success metrics	34%	34%
Not applicable. We do NOT currently collect this data.	23%	25%

Created with Datawrapper

Additionally, institutional research (IR) plays a crucial role in supporting collaboration across departments by providing valuable data collection, analysis, and research support. When asked how they collaborate with other departments, the respondents affiliated with institutional research and effectiveness departments reported their contribution to other departments' data collection and analysis, collaborating on data-driven projects, and providing data and research support to meet other departments' needs. They explained how they provide insights that help other departments meet their reporting needs and design targeted interventions. For instance, one respondent shared, "[We] work together to gather information and data needed for mandatory reporting purposes." According to another respondent,

> Institutional Research partners with various departments across the institution for many reasons. Often, we provide data for reporting or management/monitoring needs. We may also ask the department to verify or correct data in the system. We work with departments to help determine what can and should be stored in our SIS. We answer questions when they ask (if possible) and ask them questions when appropriate.

For libraries and student support services partnering with IR enables them to track and evaluate student needs more effectively, design evidence-based interventions, and ensure that resources and services—especially those addressing non-curricular needs—are aligned with the institution's broader goals for student success.

Challenges and Disruptions

Despite good intentions and collaborative efforts, there are significant barriers that continue to hinder college fluency and effective student support. These constraints include both internal challenges related to limited departmental capacities and processes and external ones stemming from the broader institutional environment and levels of student engagement.

Respondents were able to select up to three primary constraints on their ability to assist students in navigating college and achieving their goals. Thirty-five percent selected insufficient human resources, followed by complex bureaucratic processes and policies (32 percent), and inadequate cross-departmental collaboration and coordination (30 percent) (Figure 17). While respondents are noting both structural and operational hurdles, the findings also point to the importance of the institutional context. Insufficient human resources may limit the ability of staff at one college to offer the individualized support that many students need, but another college may be staffed appropriately.

Figure 17: What are the primary constraints, if any, on your ability to assist students in navigating college to achieve their goals? Please select up to three items that you find most challenging.

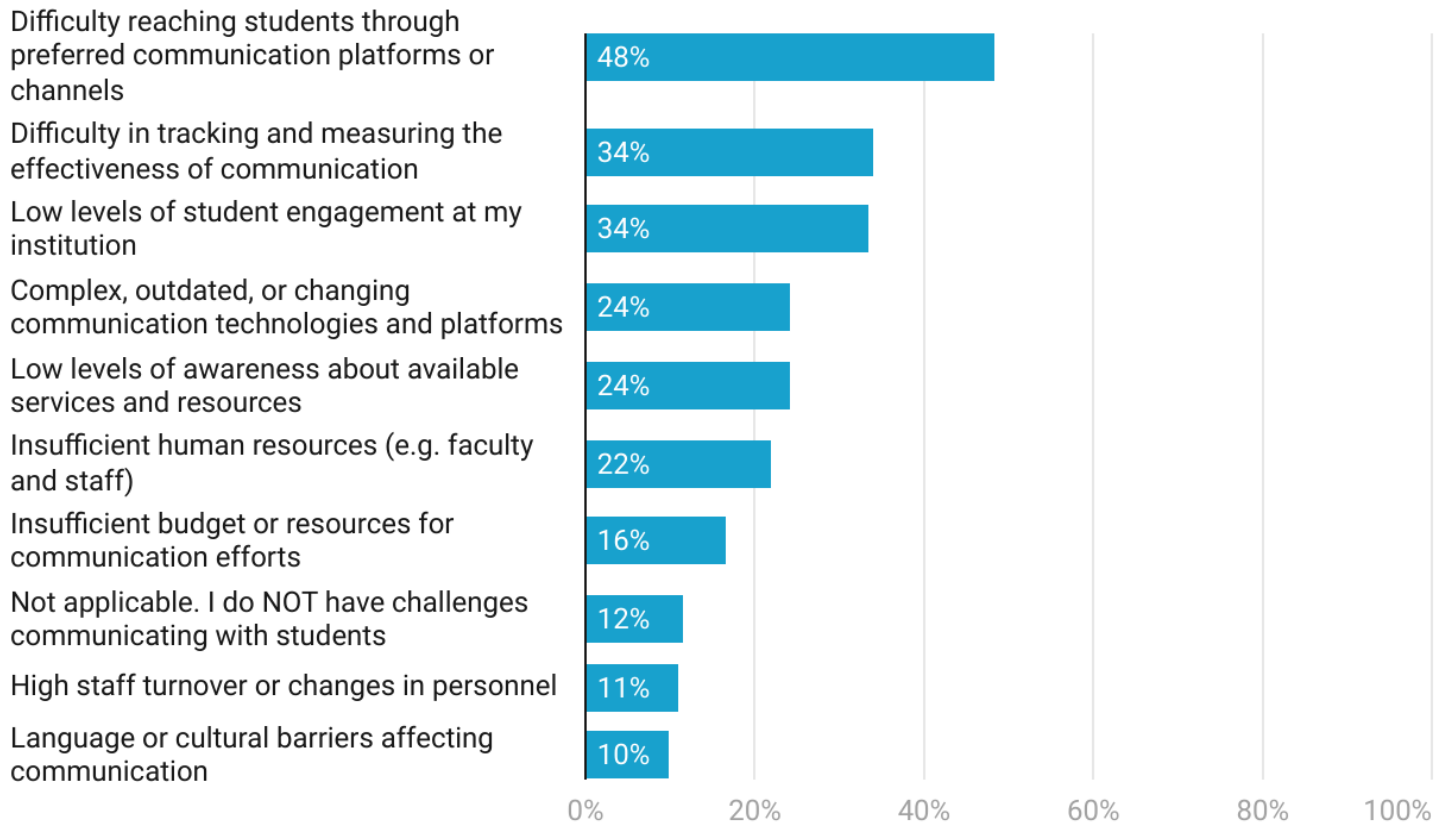|	
Insufficient human resources (e.g. faculty and staff)	35%
Complex bureaucratic processes and policies	32%
Inadequate cross-departmental collaboration and coordination	30%
Insufficient time	27%
High staff turnover and changes in personnel	26%
Complex, outdated, or changing communication technologies and platforms	23%
Insufficient staff training and professional development	18%
Conflicting information provided by different sources within the institution	17%
Low levels of student engagement in my role	17%
Insufficient support from superiors or administration	16%
Not applicable. There are no constraints on my ability to assist students in navigating the higher education system.	8%
Limited access to relevant student data and records	5%

Created with Datawrapper

In an open-ended question about establishing partnerships, a number of respondents noted that inadequate cross-departmental collaboration and coordination stem from multiple challenges, including communication barriers, relational and cultural issues, and rigid organizational structures. Respondents frequently described how a lack of communication and transparency about available services, poor information-sharing, and limited outreach efforts lead to duplicated services and inefficiencies. One respondent shared, "Our college needs some sort of asynchronous communication system, like Slack. Oftentimes, two departments will be working on the same sort of initiative while unaware of the other one, complicating an already difficult process."

Moreover, relational challenges, including low levels of trust in leadership and coworkers, further undermined the development of effective partnerships. Organizational rigidity, territoriality, and exclusion from decision-making processes were also identified as obstacles, with respondents highlighting the need for more cohesive leadership and strategic planning to facilitate collaboration. Additionally, high staff turnover, resource constraints, and limited staff capacity compounded the issue, making sustained collaboration difficult. A library staff member at a small community college mentioned, "I end up wearing a lot of hats—we've had a lot of turnover, so I've helped a lot with orientation, student placement, accreditation, etc." These challenges underscore why roughly a third of respondents perceive inadequate collaboration as a primary constraint on their ability to assist students in navigating college bureaucracies, ultimately hindering student success.

When asked about the communication difficulties departments face when interacting with students (respondents could choose up to three), 48 percent of respondents selected communication platforms or channels, 34 percent selected difficulty in tracking and measuring the effectiveness of communication, and 34 percent selected low levels of student engagement (Figure 18). These findings indicate that communication, a key element of student support, remains a persistent issue for many departments. The challenge of reaching students through their preferred platforms can lead to students missing important information or not fully engaging with available resources. Similarly, difficulty in tracking and measuring the effectiveness of communication could prevent targeted and evidence-based improvement of communication strategies and achieve desired outcomes. Low levels of engagement may further exacerbate these issues, as students who are less involved in institutional life are likely harder to reach and may require additional outreach efforts.

Figure 18: What are the primary challenges, if any, you face when it comes to communicating with students? Please select up to three items that you find most challenging.

Challenge	Percentage
Difficulty reaching students through preferred communication platforms or channels	48%
Difficulty in tracking and measuring the effectiveness of communication	34%
Low levels of student engagement at my institution	34%
Complex, outdated, or changing communication technologies and platforms	24%
Low levels of awareness about available services and resources	24%
Insufficient human resources (e.g. faculty and staff)	22%
Insufficient budget or resources for communication efforts	16%
Not applicable. I do NOT have challenges communicating with students	12%
High staff turnover or changes in personnel	11%
Language or cultural barriers affecting communication	10%

Created with Datawrapper

Together, these findings illustrate the multifaceted and diverse nature of the challenges departments face in supporting students, emphasizing the need for institutions to assess their unique circumstances and tailor solutions accordingly. Since primary challenges vary widely across institutions, addressing them effectively calls for targeted strategies that might range from investments in human resources to streamlined institutional processes and communication tools that align with the specific preferences and needs of their student populations.

Respondents also rated different strategies that could effectively enhance student navigation of non-curricular services and resources (Figure 19). Although 96 percent of our sample selected a different combination of listed items as their most effective strategies, no one strategy was selected by more than a third of respondents. Thirty-one percent selected systematically updating institutional websites with current information and resources, 30 percent selected conducting regular assessments to

identify student navigation challenges, and 29 percent selected
establishing cross-departmental collaborations and coordination to
improve information sharing.

Figure 19: In your opinion, what strategies would effectively enhance student navigation of non-curricular services and resources within your college? Please select up to three items that you would find most effective.

Created with Datawrapper

Given that many respondents rely heavily on digital communication, and outdated or inaccurate information on websites can exacerbate the challenges students face, updating websites is paramount, and this may be happening at the institutions of respondents who did not select this as a key strategy.

The call for regular assessments to identify student navigation challenges emphasizes a proactive approach to student support, highlighting the importance of continuously monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of existing services. Conducting such assessments can help institutions find out areas where students struggle the most and refine services to better meet their needs. This result also ties into the earlier challenge of measuring the effectiveness of communication strategies, as tracking and assessing student engagement can inform necessary adjustments.

Finally, establishing cross-departmental collaborations and coordination was identified as one of the strategies for improving information sharing. Some respondents see value in fostering stronger partnerships across departments to ensure that students receive more seamless and coordinated support. This finding speaks to the earlier concerns about the lack of adequate collaboration at some institutions and highlights the need for institutions to create formal structures that encourage interdepartmental communication and cooperation.

In sum, these findings underscore the importance of assessing each institution's unique context to develop targeted, data-driven, and collaborative solutions tailored to their specific challenges. Since no single approach was commonly suggested across institutions, effective strategies will vary by case, reflecting that there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Addressing these issues through a context-specific approach can enhance students' ability to navigate non-curricular services and improve institutional effectiveness in holistically meeting student needs.

Concluding Thoughts

"Fostering College Fluency: Results from a National Survey of Community College Library and Campus Partners" provides a national snapshot of how community college faculty and staff members perceive their own and their campuses' college fluency. The findings from our survey point to the necessity of fostering and enhancing college fluency, which encompasses the ability of students, faculty, and staff to navigate both curricular and non-curricular resources effectively. Overall, while faculty and staff generally feel confident in referring students to non-curricular services, such as technology and mental health services, they often struggle to support students' more complex issues, like housing, transportation, and the unique needs of specialized student subgroups. Additionally, respondents of color reported greater confidence in supporting the cultural adjustment of students and fostering belonging, highlighting both the value a diverse staff brings and the need for the importance of diversifying institutional staff, and comprehensive training to help all employees to better serve students of all backgrounds.

Libraries also play a critical part in fostering college fluency by bridging the gap between curricular and non-curricular support. By fully embracing their role as central hubs for supporting students holistically, libraries have the ability to further empower students to navigate institutional systems more effectively, reduce bureaucratic barriers, and increase their self-advocacy.

The College Fluency Capacity Building initiative aims to further explore how institutions are developing services and resources that promote college fluency. We have already published two case studies—one focusing on Sinclair Community College in Ohio and another on a small northeastern community college—and plan to publish two more before the initiative concludes. Alongside these survey findings, these case studies will provide valuable insights into innovative practices that strengthen college fluency services, helping institutions create a supportive and equitable environment where all students can thrive academically and holistically.

Appendix A: Participant Demographics

Participant Demographics	Frequency	Percentage
Role[19]		
Librarian	82	45
Administrator	66	36
Other Roles	33	18
Departments/Offices[20]		
Academic Affairs	85	46
Student Affairs	42	23
Administrative Departments	17	9
Interdepartmental Services	39	21
Role Duration		

[19] The role category reflects participants' responses to a multiple-choice question about their current role. Respondents who selected "librarian/library faculty/staff," regardless of whether they also selected other role options, are categorized under "librarian." The "administrator" category includes anyone who chose the "administrator" option, except those who also selected "librarian/library faculty/staff." Respondents who did not select either the "administrator" or "librarian/library faculty/staff" options are classified under "other roles."

[20] The departments/offices category reflects participants' responses to a multiple-choice question about the department(s) or office(s) that best align with where they report. Administrators were asked to specify the departments or offices under their purview. Respondents who selected academic advising, dual enrollment services, library, and/or academic affairs or equivalent are categorized under "academic affairs." The "student affairs" category includes those who chose single stop service, service hub, counseling center/services, commuter services, opportunity programs/services (e.g., EOP, TRIO), orientation and first-year experience programs, international student services, career services, and/or student affairs, success, or equivalent. Respondents who selected registrar/registration, institutional research and effectiveness, financial aid, and/or diversity and inclusion office or equivalent are categorized under "administrative departments." Those whose selections span across two or all three of the categories above are classified under "interdepartmental services."

Less than 2 years	24	13
2-5 years	33	18
6-10 years	40	22
11-15 years	30	16
More than 15 years	56	31
Gender		
Man	41	23
Woman	126	70
Non-Binary	3	2
Trans Man	1	1
Trans Woman	1	1
Prefer not to answer	9	5
Race/Ethnicity[21]		
White or Caucasian (e.g., German, Irish, English, Italian, Polish, French, etc.)	114	63
Hispanic, Latiné or Spanish origin (e.g., Mexican or Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Salvadoran, Dominican, Colombian, etc.)	7	4
Black or African American (e.g., African American, Jamaican, Haitian, Nigerian, Ethiopian, Somalian, etc.)	23	13

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[21] To disaggregate the findings based on race/ethnicity, a binary variable was used due to the small sample size. Respondents who selected only "White" as their race/ethnicity were placed in the "White" category. Those who selected "White" along with other racial/ethnic categories, or only non-White categories, were placed in the "People of Color" category. Note that these categories are taken from the US Office of Management and Budget's language for presenting race/ethnicity data across federal agencies. See Rachel Marks, "What Updates to OMB's Race/Ethnicity Standards Mean for the Census Bureau," *United States Census Bureau*, 8 April 2024, https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/random-samplings/2024/04/updates-race-ethnicity-standards.html.

Asian (e.g., Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, etc.)	6	3
American Indian or Alaska Native (e.g., Navajo Nation, Blackfeet tribe, Mayan, Aztec, Native Village or Barrow Inupiat Traditional Government, Nome Eskimo Community, etc.)	3	2
Middle Eastern or North African (e.g., Lebanese, Iranian, Egyptian, Syrian, Moroccan, Algerian, etc.)	1	1
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (e.g., Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Chamorro, Tongan, Fijian, etc.)	2	1
Two or More Races/Ethnicities	13	7
Prefer not to answer	12	7
Highest Degree Earned		
High School Diploma	1	1
Associate's degree	6	3
Bachelor's Degree	9	5
Master's Degree	108	59
Prof Degree Beyond Bachelor's	7	4
Doctorate Degree	51	28