

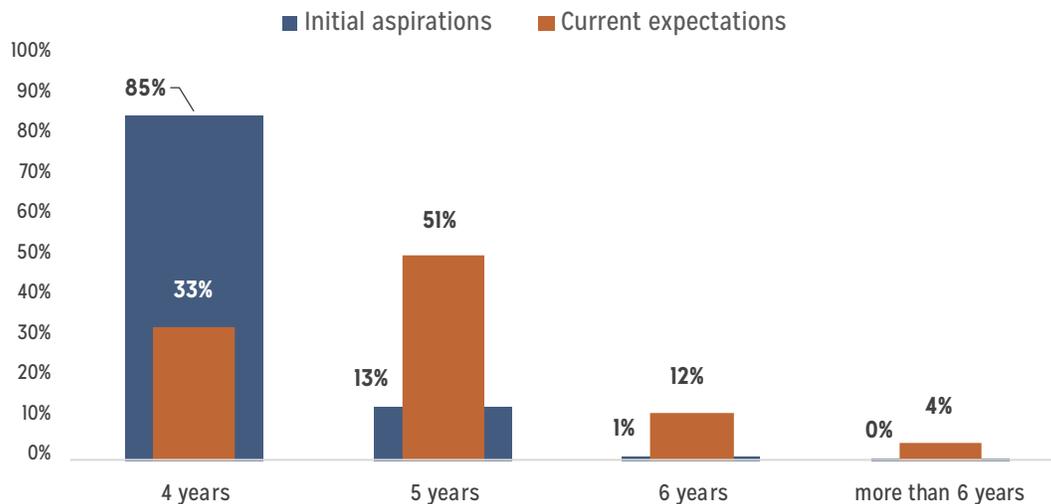
Research Summary

“Get Me from Point A to Point B:” Student Perspectives on Barriers to Timely Graduation at the CSU

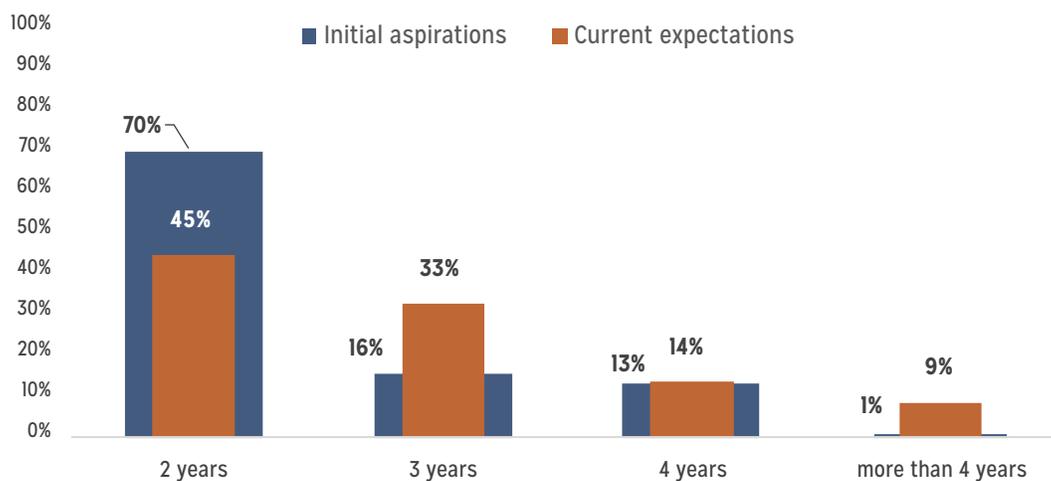
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Most students surveyed said they enrolled in the CSU intending to graduate in a traditional timeframe (four years for entering first-year students and two years for transfer students), but they revised their expectations while at the university (see figures).

Most first-year students (85%) enrolled in the CSU wanting to graduate in 4 years, but only one-third (33%) currently expect to achieve that.



Most transfer students (70%) enrolled in the CSU wanting to graduate in 2 years, but fewer than half (45%) now expect to accomplish that.



Why did students' plans change?

The study found that students revised their plans based on the following challenges, none of which are unique to the CSU, but mirror those cited by students in other university systems. These findings suggest, however, where CSU campuses can look to reduce student barriers to timely progression and completion.

Limited course availability topped the list of obstacles students reported. About half of surveyed students who enrolled as first-years (and somewhat fewer transfer students) said they often or very often were not able to enroll in a class they needed.

Students also described **financial concerns** as a significant challenge; about a quarter of students said that not having sufficient resources was a major obstacle to timely graduation.

Most students said that they work, and some students, particularly those who transfer, may be working enough hours to impede their academic progress. About a quarter of transfer students reported working off-campus more than 30 hours per week. Most students, however, said they work **no more than 20 hours per week**.

Caring for children or others requires substantial time from some students, with about one in six transfer students reporting that they spend more than 20 hours per week on family care.

Students are spending less time than faculty recommend preparing for class, with some students identifying their own **time management and study skills** as a barrier to making progress. Most students reported spending 10 or fewer hours per week studying and preparing for classes, regardless of their unit load.

About half the students surveyed said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the **advising** they received. In focus groups, students described difficulties in accessing advising and getting information they needed. They said they value connecting with faculty and peers who share their interests, which helps them stay engaged in their studies.

What suggestions did students offer?

Many expressed a desire for more **structure and clearer pathways** through the CSU, early help in developing a **clear plan for timely graduation, advising tailored to their plan, and support services to help at each phase** along their pathway. These suggestions also mirror findings from national studies examining other university systems.

“I just couldn’t see a reason to be here any longer [than two years]. I knew what I wanted, and when I transferred in I could see everything that I needed to take. So I was like, just get me from point A to point B.”

—CSU Campus Administrator

Key takeaway from the study for CSU campuses

CSU campuses do not need to worry about changing student mindsets about the time it should take to graduate; most CSU students surveyed already aim to graduate in a traditional timeframe. Rather, meeting the needs and graduation expectations of CSU’s diverse student populations requires creating institutions that are more student-centric. Addressing students’ biggest barriers to timely graduation will require campus-wide engagement and deep collaboration across institutional functions.

This summary is based on Get Me from Point A to Point B. A discussion guide is available to support campus conversations about the implications for CSU campuses. Findings are based on a survey of over 1,000 students at three CSU campuses and focus groups with a total of 54 students at those campuses. The research was conducted by the Education Insights Center (EdInsights) for the CSU Student Success Network.

The CSU Network creates spaces for CSU faculty, staff, and administrators to share ideas and take the lead in supporting equitable opportunities and outcomes for students. The Network is facilitated by EdInsights at Sacramento State, a research and policy center devoted to student success and the public benefits of education.



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