



Revealing Institutional  
Strengths and Challenges



INSTITUTIONAL REPORT  
RISC STUDENT SURVEY SPRING 2021  
**IOWA WESTERN COMMUNITY  
COLLEGE**

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# RISC SURVEY OVERVIEW

01

## SURVEY DESCRIPTION

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

The survey first asks students about facing challenges 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.

Next, the survey asks students about their interactions with campus offices. Our research indicates that students want office staff who are accessible, concerned about helping them, and able to effectively solve their problem. Students describe five campus offices on these three dimensions; IWCC chose the specific offices that appeared in the survey. The survey used office names specific to IWCC, so that students saw office names they recognized.

Finally, students provide 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 enrollment goals, such as improving job and career opportunities or preparing for a four-year degree.

Students are also given two open-response questions, where they could write out an answer: what is IWCC's greatest strength, and if IWCC could change one thing to increase student success, what should it change? See your college contact for the written responses to these two questions.

The survey concludes with a section asking about student demographic information.

Interactive and printable versions of the survey can be found at:

**<https://www.risc.college/two-year-survey>**

## SURVEY ADMINISTRATION

The survey was administered in Spring 2021 to 3,285 IWCC students. There were 895 responses used in this report, for a 27.2% response rate. Median time IWCC students spent taking the survey was 8.3 minutes.

The table below provides some background information about your college's benchmark sample. Forty-two other community colleges participating in the survey during the past two years are used for the benchmark numbers in this report; each college is weighted equally when calculating benchmarks. Your benchmark sample has a total of 35,994 respondents.

**Table 1.1 Community colleges in the benchmark sample**

Carnegie classification		Urbanicity		Student enrollment	
High Career & Technical	22%	City	27%	Under 1,000	8%
Mixed	32%	Suburb	24%	1,000-4,999	41%
High Transfer	30%	Town	22%	5,000-9,999	22%
Other	16%	Rural	27%	10,000-19,999	24%
				20,000 and above	0%

# CHALLENGES TO STUDENT SUCCESS

02

## MAIN CHALLENGE AREAS

The RISC survey contains over 80 unique challenges that students face during college, and students can indicate they faced more than one challenge. The specific challenges are divided into five main areas:

- ▶ Academic support services
- ▶ Campus environment
- ▶ Finances and financial aid
- ▶ Success in courses
- ▶ Work and personal

The survey begins by asking students if they faced challenges in each of these areas, and then asks about more specific challenges, depending on how students initially respond. The challenge order is randomly assigned for each respondent.

For example, students are asked:

**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"/>
Working with financial aid office	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Military and employer tuition benefits	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Students choosing “yes” to one or more of these response options are coded as having a challenge with finances and financial aid.

Table 2.1 provides an overview of the main challenges students faced at IWCC in Spring 2021 in the five main areas. *Work and personal issues* is the area where your students most frequently reported having challenges, with 60% reporting one or more challenges in this area.

A negative number in the *Diff.* column indicates a lower proportion of students at your institution reported challenges in an area, compared to the benchmarking group. These are presented graphically with green bars. Positive numbers indicate a greater proportion of your students are reporting challenges, and are presented with red bars.

**Table 2.1 Major challenges to student success**

	IWCC % ○	Bench. % ■	Diff.	<i>n</i>	
Work and personal issues	60	59	+1	539	
Success in courses	55	59	-4	494	
Finances and financial aid	45	40	+5	404	
Campus environment	35	20	+15	315	
Academic support services	29	34	-5	256	

**Notes**

Green indicates that IWCC has a lower proportion of students reporting a challenge compared to the benchmark sample proportion; red indicates IWCC has a higher proportion. Bold indicates a statistically significant difference from the benchmark sample (two-sample test of proportions,  $p < .05$ ). Percentages do not sum to 100 because students could choose multiple challenges across the five topic areas. *n* in table row is the number of students choosing a challenge in that area at your college; overall sample  $n=895$ .

Tables 2.2 to 2.6 provide more detail about student challenges. For example, if a student answered “yes” to “Paying college and living expenses”, they were prompted with a follow-up question:

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

- ☐ Tuition and fees
- ☐ Paying college and living expenses
- ☐ Living expenses (housing, food, healthcare)
- ☐ Childcare
- ☐ None of the above

To help uncover where your students are facing challenges, we rank the major categories of challenges in descending order. We then rank the more specific challenges within each major category in descending order.

For example, 60% of your students chose one or more challenges in the major category of *Work and personal issues*. The most common subcategory was *Work*, with 45% choosing challenges in this subcategory. The most common specific challenge within the *Work* subcategory was *Work hours do not leave me enough time to study*, with 28% of your students mentioning this as a challenge to their success. All percentages in these tables are calculated as the percentage of the entire respondent sample.

**Table 2.2 Challenges with work and personal life**

	IWCC %	Bench. %	Diff. %	<i>n</i>
Work and personal issues	60	59	+1	539
Work	45	38	+7	407
Work hours do not leave me enough time to study	28	22	+6	249
Pay is not enough to cover expenses while in school	21	15	+6	186
Work schedule conflicts with classes	16	13	+3	144
Work schedule prevents campus resource use	14	11	+3	129
Work schedule is not flexible during the semester	12	10	+2	109
None of the above	5	6	-1	48
Family	36	38	-2	320
Difficulty balancing demands of family and college	27	26	+1	242
Difficulty dealing with health of family	15	15	+0	138
Family does not support me going to college	4	3	+1	36
Difficulty finding childcare	4	5	-1	34
None of the above	5	6	-1	41
Health and disability issues	22	21	+1	201
Emotional/mental health issue	16	14	+2	147
Physical health issue	11	11	+0	99
Pregnancy and childbirth	1	1	+0	10
Faculty did not provide necessary accommodations	1	1	+0	8
Disability services did not provide necessary support	1	1	+0	7
Campus is difficult to navigate with my disability	0	0	+0	2
None of the above	2	3	-1	17
Transportation to campus	11	10	+1	94
Car or carpool not reliable	5	5	+0	46
Travel to campus takes a long time	5	4	+1	42
Public transportation system not reliable	1	2	-1	10
Campus transportation system not reliable	0	1	-1	4
None of the above	2	2	+0	16

**Notes**

Percentages do not sum to 100 because students could choose multiple challenges within this topic area. Denominator for percentages is the total number of survey respondents; *n* in table row is the number of students choosing a challenge in that area.

**Table 2.3 Challenges with success in courses**

	IWCC %	Bench. %	Diff. %	<i>n</i>
Success in courses	55	59	-4	494
Online classes	39	43	-4	349
Difficulty learning the material on my own	27	29	-2	241
Lack of interaction with faculty	23	22	+1	207
Difficulty keeping up because of no regular class times	19	20	-1	169
Lack of interaction with other students	18	19	-1	161
Difficulty using course technology	10	13	-3	93
Difficulty taking exams at testing center	3	4	-1	25
None of the above	4	4	+0	32
Faculty	21	17	+4	192
Did not teach well	14	10	+4	128
Not concerned about my academic success	10	7	+3	87
Not responsive to email	9	7	+2	85
Not helpful outside of class	9	6	+3	81
Took too long to grade assignments	9	6	+3	78
Feedback on assignments not helpful	9	7	+2	77
Not available to meet in person	2	2	+0	22
None of the above	3	2	+1	23
Developmental courses (math, reading, or writing)	17	22	-5	154
Courses were too hard	6	7	-1	54
Required to take too many	3	4	-1	31
Did not prepare me for college-level courses	3	4	-1	27
Courses were too easy	0	1	-1	4
None of the above	7	10	-3	62
Doing college-level work	14	19	-5	129
Not motivated to study	7	9	-2	59
Poor planning and time management skills	6	10	-4	52
Poor study skills	5	8	-3	49
Required level of math was difficult	3	5	-2	31
Reading or writing assignments were difficult	3	6	-3	28
Took too many classes	2	3	-1	17
Skipped too many classes	1	1	+0	9
None of the above	3	3	+0	28

**Notes**

Percentages do not sum to 100 because students could choose multiple challenges within this topic area. Denominator for percentages is the total number of survey respondents; *n* in table row is the number of students choosing a challenge in that area.

**Table 2.4 Challenges with finances and financial aid**

	IWCC %	Bench. %	Diff. %	<i>n</i>
Finances and financial aid	45	40	+5	404
Paying college and living expenses	41	32	+9	369
Living expenses (housing, food, healthcare)	30	20	+10	269
Tuition and fees	28	18	+10	251
Books, software, and other supplies	22	20	+2	194
Childcare	4	4	+0	40
None of the above	1	1	+0	13
Working with financial aid office	12	14	-2	108
Process was unclear	6	7	-1	55
Errors processing financial aid	6	5	+1	51
Difficult to meet with, speak to, or email staff	5	7	-2	42
Unable to answer questions	4	5	-1	37
Delays in getting money	4	5	-1	33
Gave me wrong information	3	3	+0	31
None of the above	2	2	+0	16
Military and employer tuition benefits	2	2	+0	16
Did not know process for obtaining benefits	1	1	+0	9
Experienced delays receiving benefits	1	1	+0	6
Received wrong information about benefits	0	0	+0	3
None of the above	1	1	+0	5

**Notes**

Percentages do not sum to 100 because students could choose multiple challenges within this topic area. Denominator for percentages is the total number of survey respondents; *n* in table row is the number of students choosing a challenge in that area.

**Table 2.5 Challenges with the campus environment**

	IWCC %	Bench. %	Diff. %	<i>n</i>
Campus environment	35	20	+15	315
Parking	29	10	+19	260
Difficulty finding parking on or near campus	24	9	+15	218
Difficulty getting parking pass	2	1	+1	18
Parking on or near campus is too expensive	1	2	-1	9
None of the above	4	1	+3	34
Interactions with other students	11	10	+1	98
Did not know many other students	7	7	+0	66
Did not feel welcome due to my race or ethnicity	1	1	+0	13
Did not feel welcome due to my sexual orientation	1	0	+1	9
Did not feel welcome due to my gender identity	1	0	+1	7
None of the above	3	3	+0	27
Safety and crime	5	3	+2	47
Parking lots not safe	3	1	+2	26
Campus not safe	2	1	+1	22
Was a victim of a crime	1	0	+1	7
None of the above	1	1	+0	11

**Notes**

Percentages do not sum to 100 because students could choose multiple challenges within this topic area. Denominator for percentages is the total number of survey respondents; *n* in table row is the number of students choosing a challenge in that area.

**Table 2.6 Challenges with academic support services**

	IWCC %	Bench. %	Diff. %	<i>n</i>
Academic support services	29	34	-5	256
Registering for courses	17	16	+1	152
Course was offered but full	6	6	+0	58
Course not offered at times I needed	6	6	+0	55
Had a registration hold	5	4	+1	41
Course not offered this semester	4	4	+0	36
None of the above	6	6	+0	52
Academic advising	13	14	-1	112
Difficult to meet with, speak to, or email advisor	7	9	-2	67
Not told to take necessary course	5	5	+0	48
Told to take unnecessary course	3	3	+0	26
Course/program materials were incorrect	1	2	-1	13
None of the above	3	3	+0	24
Tutoring	6	8	-2	54
Tutoring not available in the subject area I needed	2	3	-1	22
Tutoring hours not convenient	2	3	-1	19
Tutors not available when I need assistance	2	3	-1	15
Tutoring not helpful	1	2	-1	9
None of the above	2	2	+0	14
Computer and science labs	5	7	-2	46
Problems using computers and equipment	2	3	-1	17
Lab hours not convenient	2	2	+0	14
Lab busy when needed	1	1	+0	5
None of the above	2	3	-1	17
Library	4	6	-2	37
Hours not convenient	1	2	-1	13
Resources I needed not available online	1	2	-1	10
Staff not helpful	1	1	+0	5
Study spaces not available when needed	1	2	-1	5
None of the above	1	2	-1	13

**Notes**

Percentages do not sum to 100 because students could choose multiple challenges within this topic area. Denominator for percentages is the total number of survey respondents; *n* in table row is the number of students choosing a challenge in that area.

# STUDENT-OFFICE INTERACTIONS

03

Table 3.1 shows the administrative support units your college chose for the RISC Survey. Unit names appeared on the survey exactly as they are listed in this report. Advising was the most commonly used office, with 67% reporting using the office during the Spring 2021 semester, followed by Admissions (33%) and Library (28%).

**Table 3.1 Office usage**

	IWCC %	Bench. %	Diff.	n
Advising	67	56	+11	
Admissions	33	32	+1	
Library	28	19	+9	
Housing/Residence Life	17			
Safety and Security	12			

If students indicated they interacted with an office during the semester, they were asked three questions about their interactions with staff:

## How available were [unit name] staff when you interacted with them?

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

## How concerned were [unit name] staff about addressing your issue?

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

## How effective were [unit name] staff when addressing your issue?

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

Results are presented in Table 3.2, which shows the percentage of respondents choosing the top category (*very available/concerned/effective*). Because each college chose the administrative offices for this set of questions, the table only presents benchmarks comparisons for an administrative office when at least five other colleges surveyed students about the same type of office.

**Table 3.2 Student-administration interactions**

	IWCC % ○	Bench. % ■	Diff.	n	
					40 50 60 70 80
<b>Admissions</b>					
Available	72	61	<b>+11</b>	293	
Concerned	56	53	+3	293	
Effective	70	66	+4	290	
<b>Advising</b>					
Available	67	64	+3	598	
Concerned	60	59	+1	597	
Effective	68	67	+1	595	
<b>Housing/Residence Life</b>					
Available	50			155	
Concerned	42			155	
Effective	47			154	
<b>Library</b>					
Available	80	71	<b>+9</b>	253	
Concerned	53	60	<b>-7</b>	247	
Effective	74	73	+1	247	
<b>Safety and Security</b>					
Available	67			106	
Concerned	56			106	
Effective	65			105	

### Notes

Percentage is the proportion of students rating an office in the top response category (*very available/concerned/effective*). Green indicates that IWCC has a higher proportion of students choosing the category compared to the benchmark sample proportion; red indicates IWCC has a lower proportion. Bold indicates a statistically significant difference from the benchmark sample (two-sample test of proportions,  $p < .05$ ).  $n$  in table row is the total number of students at your college rating an office on that dimension; i.e., the denominator for the row percentage.

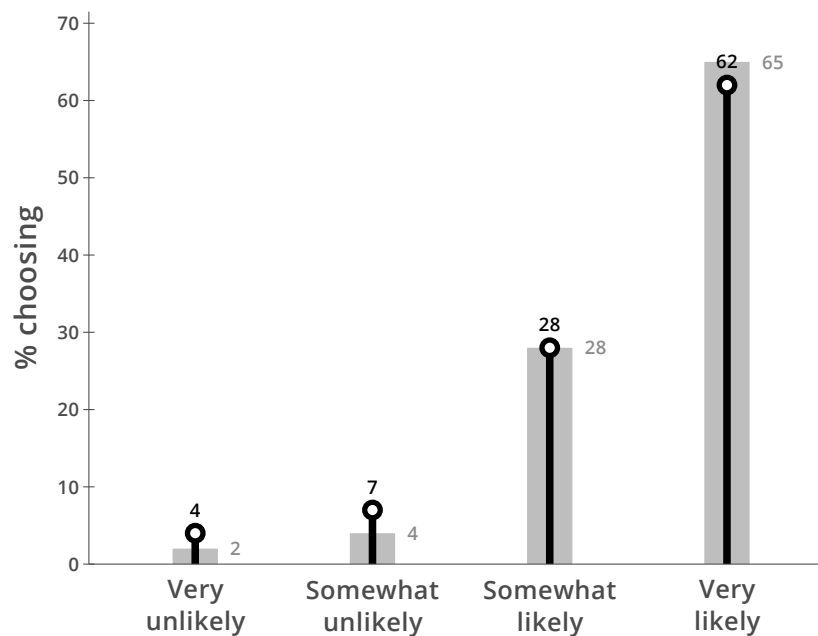
# STUDENT VIEWS OF THE INSTITUTION

04

Besides challenges and office interactions, students were asked several questions about IWCC overall.

The first question, “Based on your experiences, how likely are you to recommend IWCC to a friend?”, is a summative measure of how students view your institution. Results are presented in Figure 4.1, with IWCC represented by the black line and the benchmark sample by the gray line. 90% of your students would be somewhat or very likely to recommend IWCC. The IWCC distribution of responses is statistically significantly different from the benchmark sample.

**Figure 4.1 Would student recommend IWCC to a friend?**

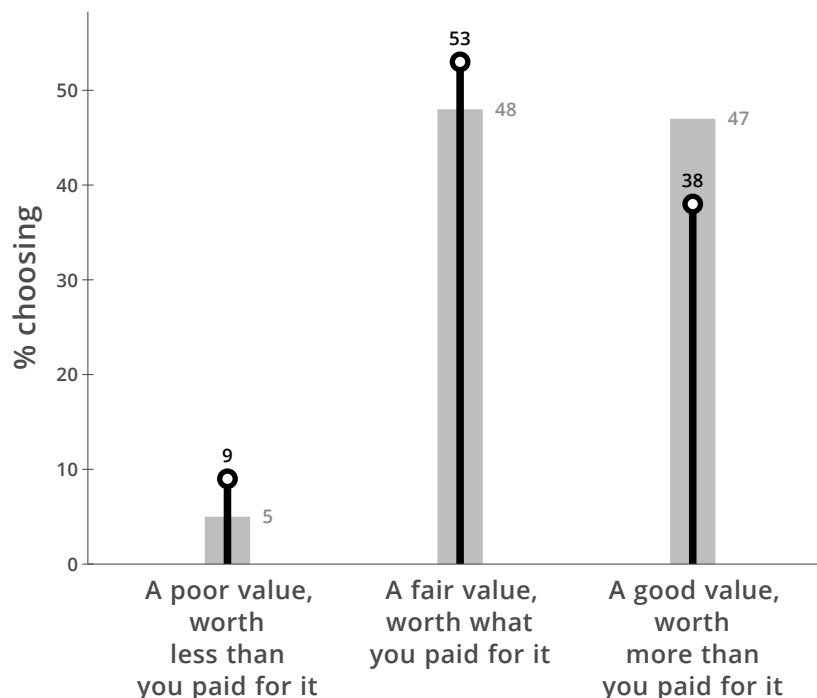


**Notes**

IWCC is the black bar; benchmark sample is gray.  $\chi^2 = 26.1, p < .01; n = 891$ .

Next, students were asked to rate the overall value of their education at IWCC (see Figure 4.2). 91% of your students believe their education is worth what they paid (or even worth more). The IWCC distribution of responses is statistically significantly different from the benchmark sample.

**Figure 4.2 Overall value of education?**



**Notes**

IWCC is the black bar; benchmark sample is gray.  $\chi^2 = 51.3, p < .01; n = 891$ .

The last set of questions asks students how well your college is doing in preparing students for their educational goals. The top half of Table 4.1 lists students' responses to their primary reason for attending IWCC. 47% chose *Increase job and career opportunities* as their primary purpose for attending your institution.

Students were then asked how well IWCC is helping them achieve the specific goal they chose. Students could choose from *very well*, *fairly well*, *somewhat*, or *not at all*. Responses from the top category are presented in the bottom half of Table 4.1. For example, 44% of the students who chose *Increase job and career opportunities* as their primary goal indicated that IWCC is doing *very well* in terms of increasing their job and career opportunities.

**Table 4.1 How well is education helping accomplish goals**

	IWCC % ○	Bench. % ■	Diff.	<i>n</i>	
<div> <div></div> <div>01020304050</div> </div>					
<b>Purpose of taking courses at IWCC</b>					
Increase job and career opportunities	47	42	<b>+5</b>	417	<div><div></div><div></div></div>
Prepare for a four-year degree	46	50	<b>-4</b>	414	<div><div></div><div></div></div>
Self-improvement	7	8	-1	62	<div><div></div><div></div></div>
<b>How well is education at IWCC ...</b>					
Increase job and career opportunities	44	45	-1	417	<div><div></div><div></div></div>
Prepare for a four-year degree	38	46	<b>-8</b>	414	<div><div></div><div></div></div>
Self-improvement	49	46	+3	61	<div><div></div><div></div></div>

**Notes**

Top panel row percentage is the proportion of students choosing one of the three educational goals. Bottom panel row percentage is the proportion of students choosing *very well* in response to the preparation question for that goal. Bold indicates a statistically significant difference from the benchmark sample (two-sample test of proportions,  $p < .05$ ). *n* in table row is the total number of students responding to the question; i.e., the denominator for the row percentage. Difference bars in the top panel of the table are in black, to reflect that schools may score high or low on these measures, depending on their institutional mission. In the bottom panel, green indicates that IWCC has a higher proportion of students reporting that IWCC is helping them achieve their educational goal compared to the benchmark sample; red indicates a lower proportion.

# RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

05

**Table 5.1 Gender identity**

	%	<i>n</i>
Female/Woman	70	609
Male/Man	28	240
Transgender Female/Transgender Woman	0	3
Transgender Male/Transgender Man	0	3
Another gender identity	1	12

**Table 5.2 Race/ethnicity**

	%	<i>n</i>
African American or Black	12	101
Asian American or Asian	4	35
Native American or Alaska Native	2	19
Hispanic or Latino	10	89
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	4
White	79	677

**Notes**

Percentages may not sum to 100 because students could choose more than one category.

**Table 5.3 Age**

	%	<i>n</i>
18 or younger	9	76
19-24	53	462
25-34	22	190
35-44	10	85
45-54	5	43
55 or older	1	9

**Table 5.4 Part-time/full-time status**

	%	<i>n</i>
Part-time (less than 12 credit hours)	29	252
Full-time (12 or more credit hours)	71	612

**Table 5.5 Total credit hours earned at IWCC**

	%	<i>n</i>
None	5	46
1-15 credits	25	215
16-29 credits	21	180
30-45 credits	21	184
46 or more credits	27	237