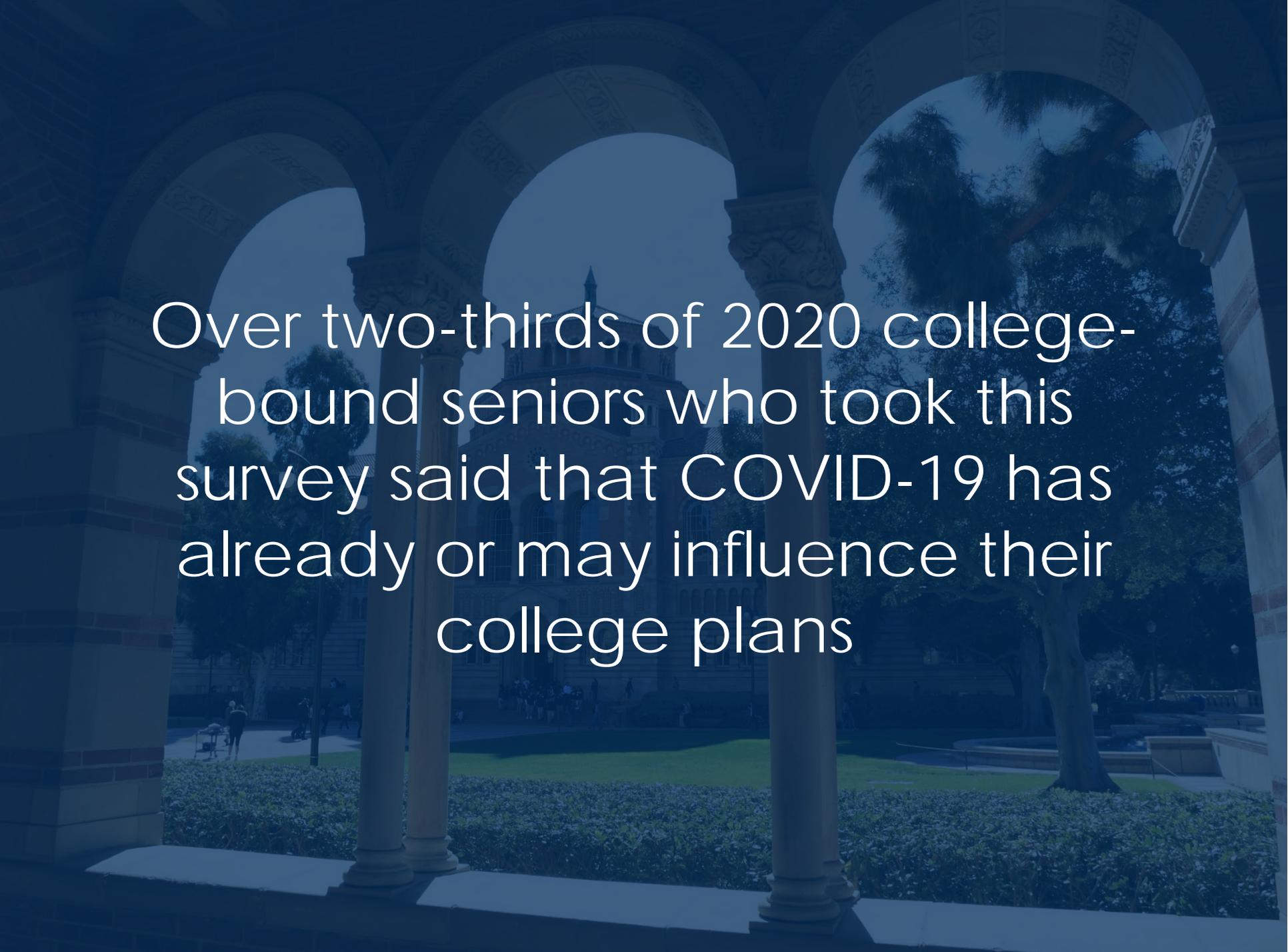




# High School Seniors on College Choice during COVID-19

Marketing and Research Services Team

*Ruffalo Noel Levitz*



Over two-thirds of 2020 college-bound seniors who took this survey said that COVID-19 has already or may influence their college plans

# Methodology

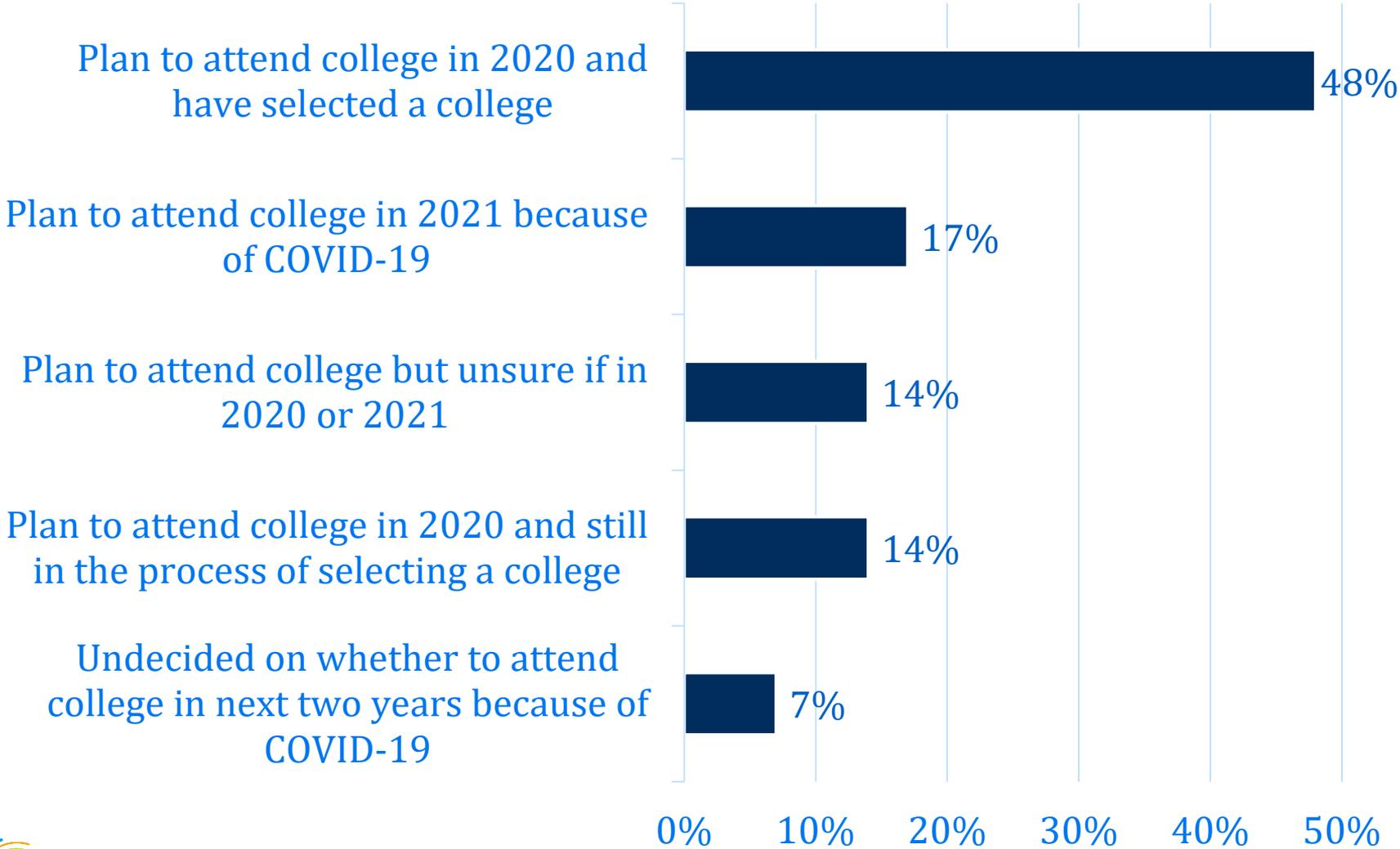
531 high  
school seniors



10 minute,  
online survey

- Partnered with Dynata to hear the voices of more than 500 prospective incoming freshmen
- Open April 7 – 8<sup>th</sup>
- Respondents had to be seniors in high schools who wanted to attend or are considering attending college in 2020 or 2021
  - If in 2021, their decision to attend in 2021 had to be related to COVID-19
  - If unsure if attending college in next two years, their uncertainty had to be related to COVID-19

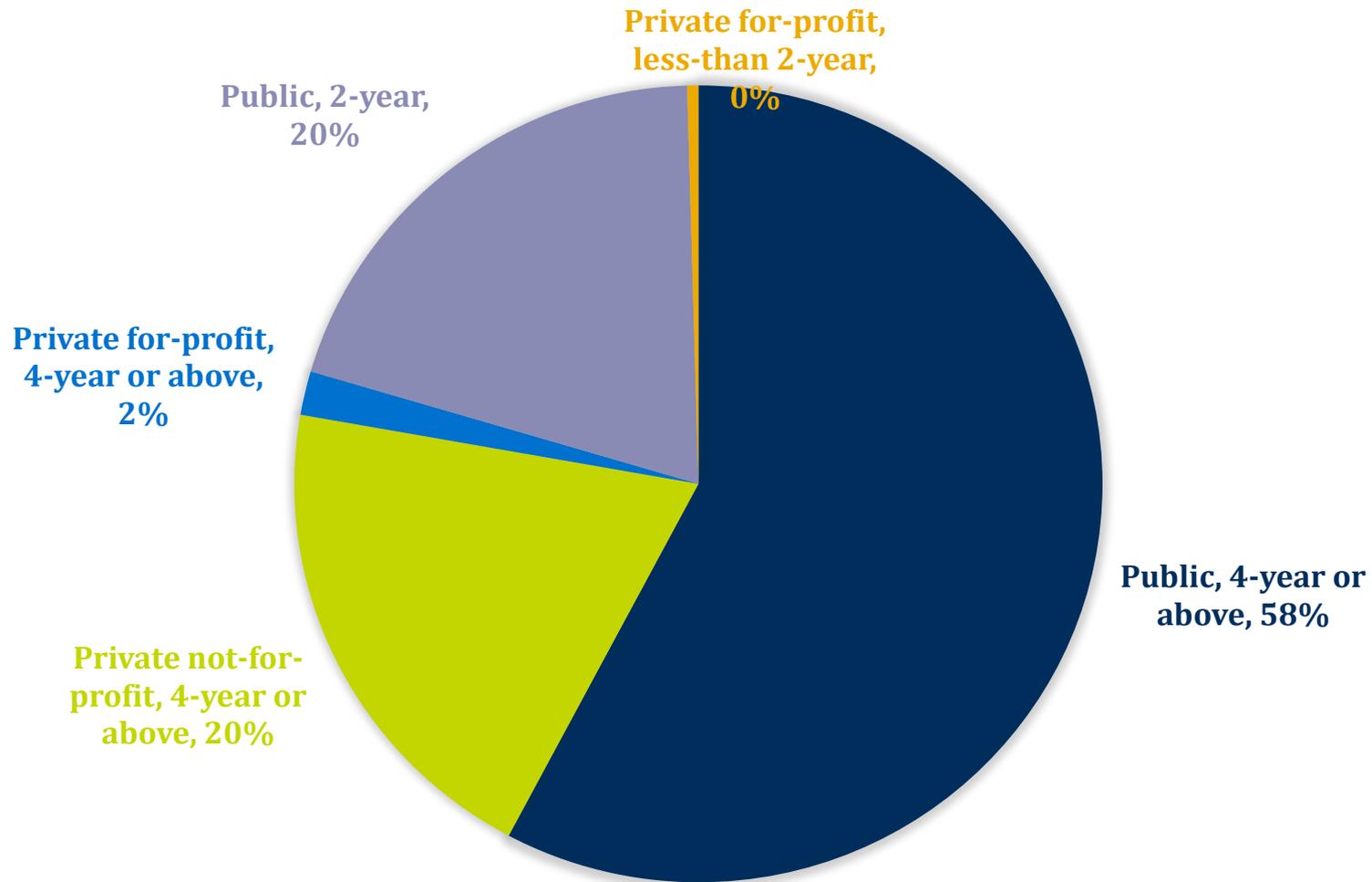
# Current College Plans





- One quarter of respondents attending college in 2020 are still considering which college to attend
- 82% of those students who do know which college they are attending have formally committed

# Anticipated Institution Type



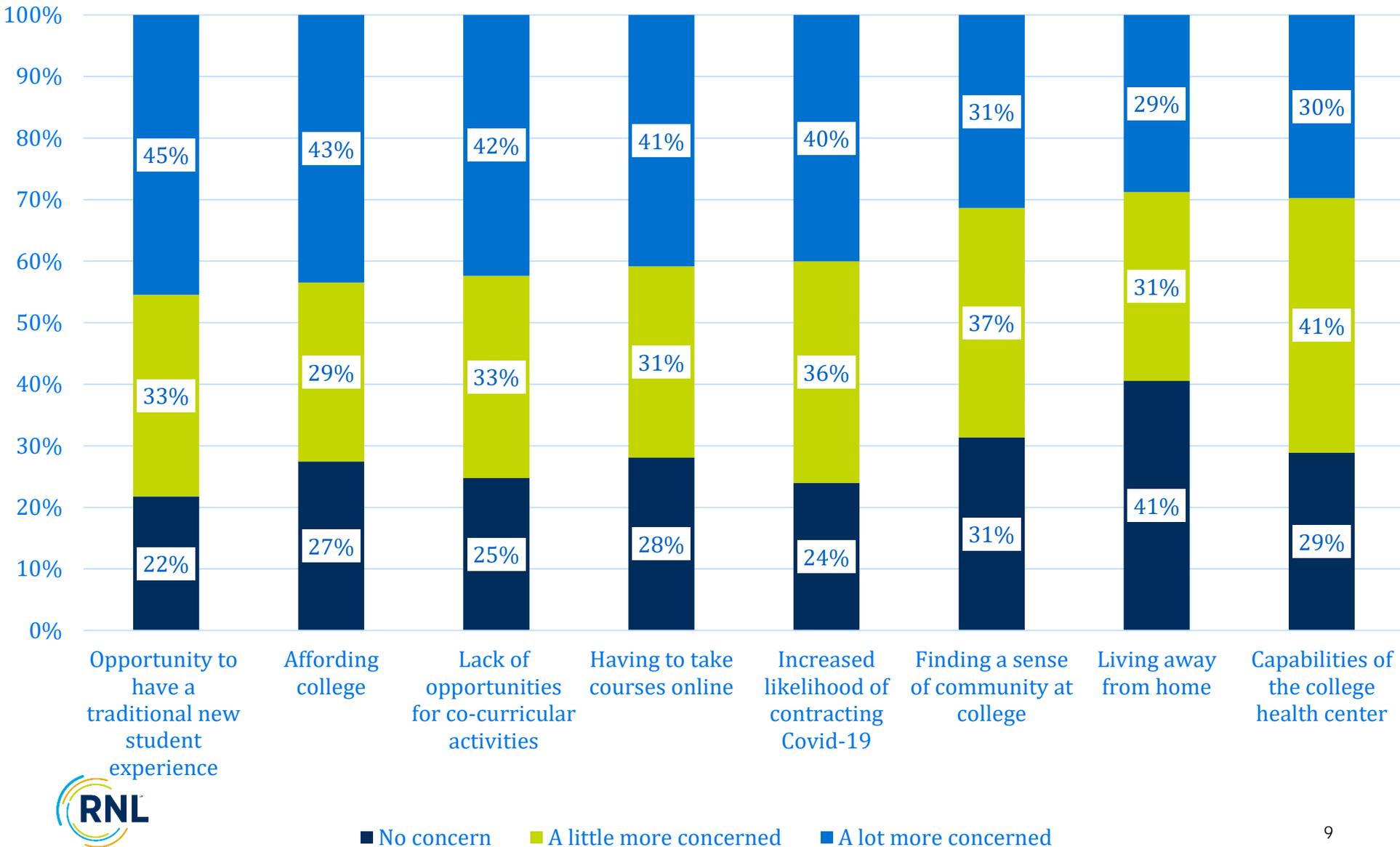


# Concerns

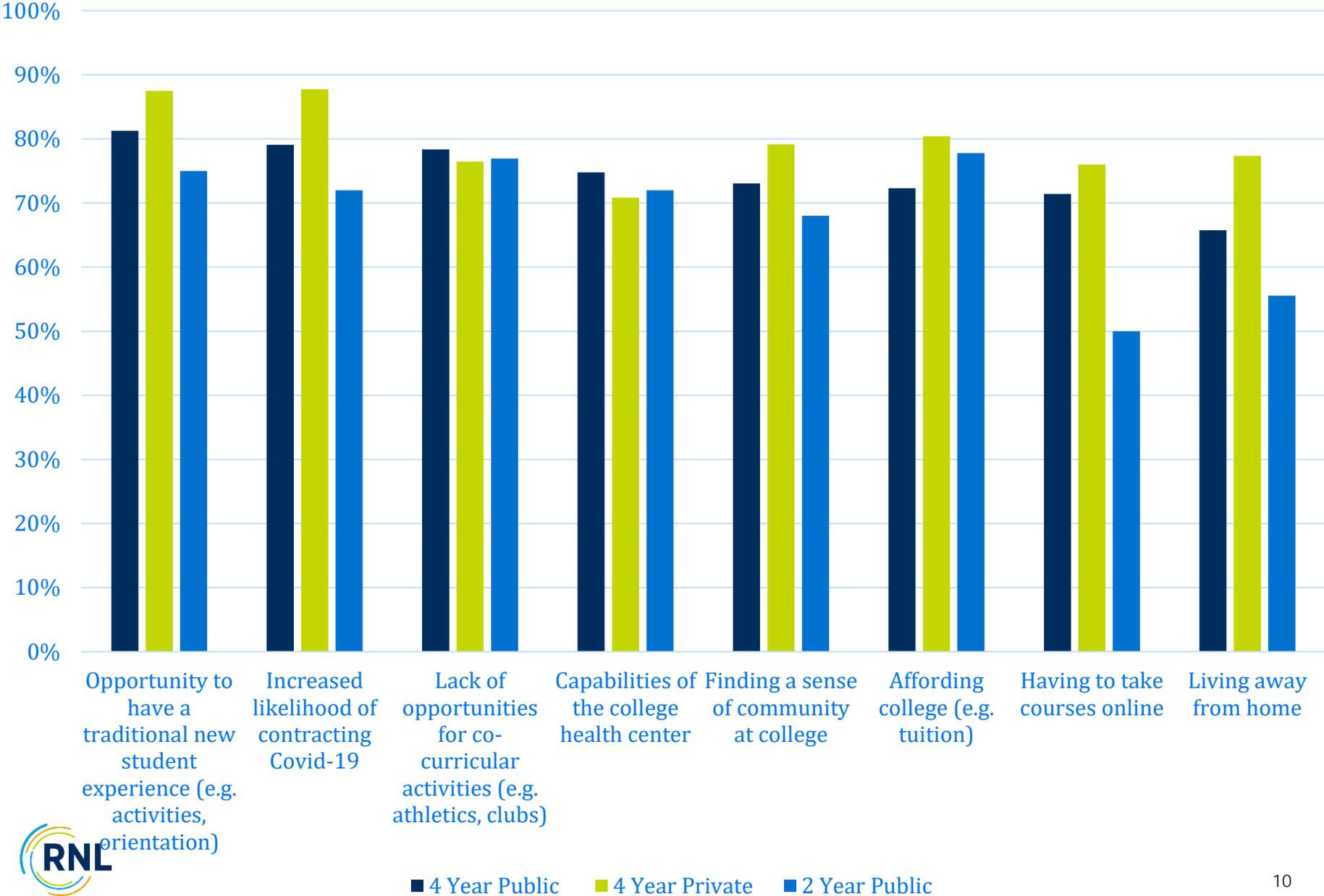


**Key Finding: Students worry they will not have a traditional college experience—orientation, forming new friendships, activities**

## How has the Covid-19 pandemic impacted your concerns, if at all, about attending college?

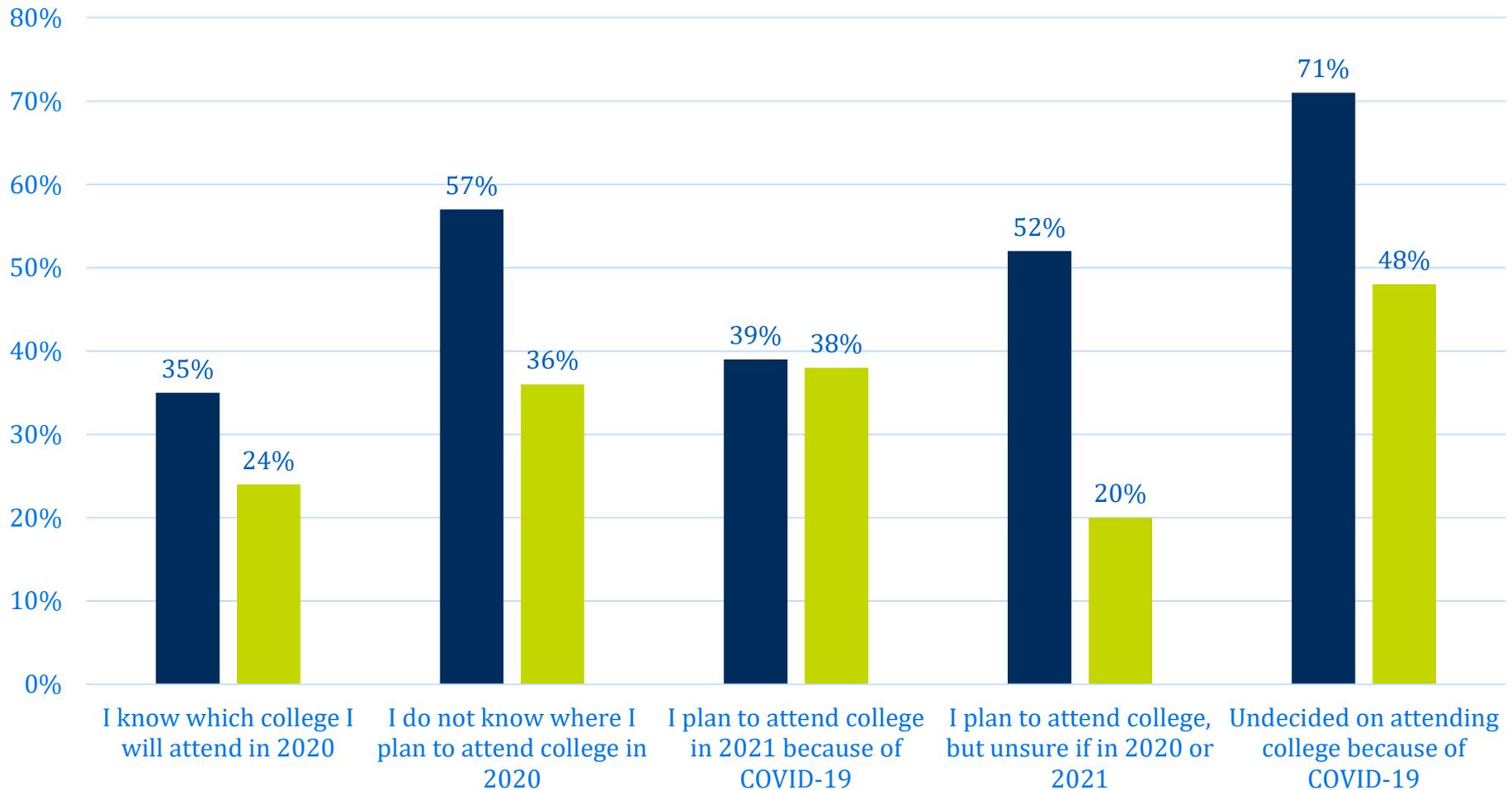


# Concerns by Institution Type



# Financial concerns have a larger impact than distance from home

## Concerns by Attendance Plans

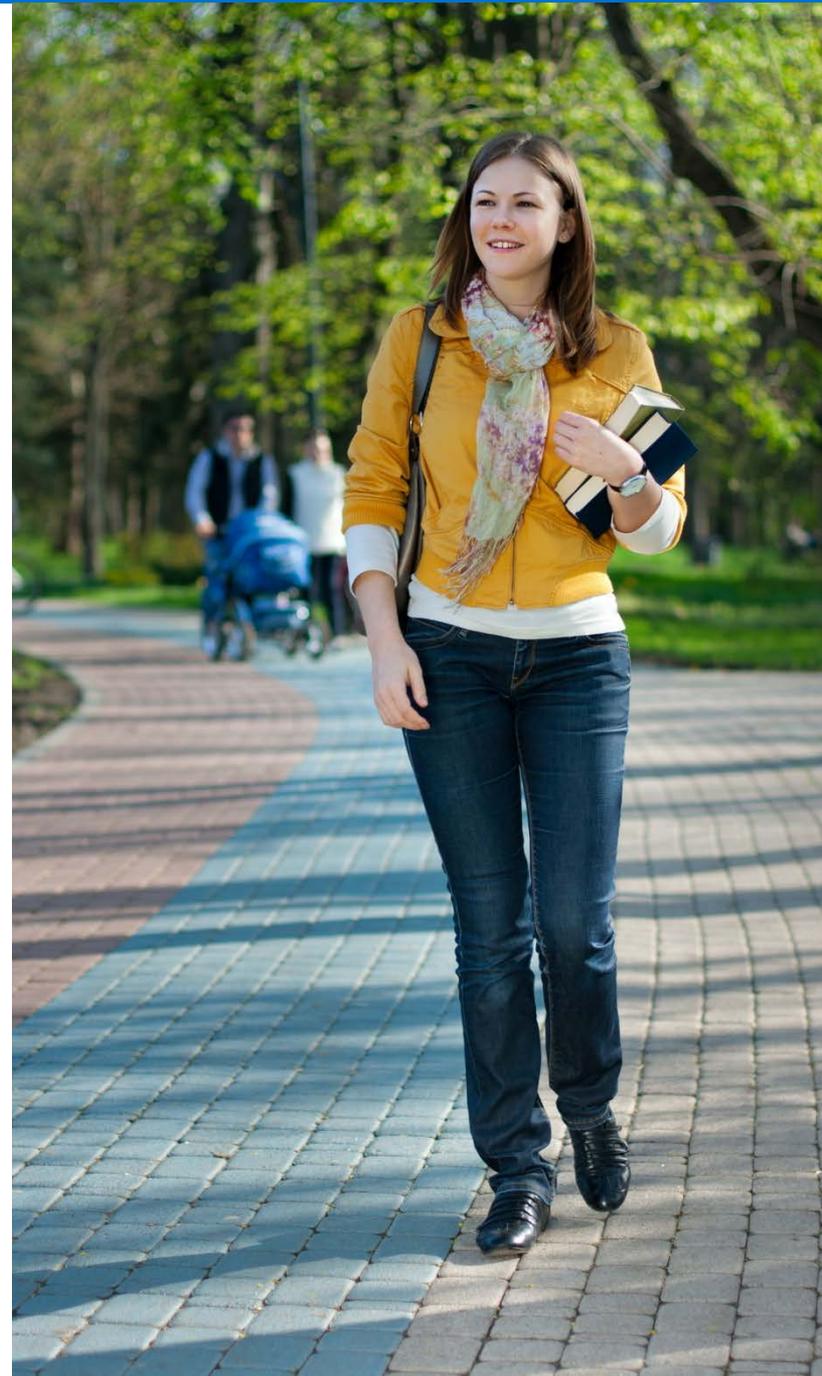


■ A lot more concerned about "Affording college"

■ A lot more concerned about "Living away from home"

# Comments

- *“I assumed I was going to get to meet new people and make friends. I was wrong. I thought orientation would be exciting. I don’t get to be housed in the dorms either this time.”*
- *“I have to find even more scholarships to cover the costs because I cannot work to save money up yet.”*





# Attractions and Detractions

# Key Finding: College Characteristics that are More or Less Appealing

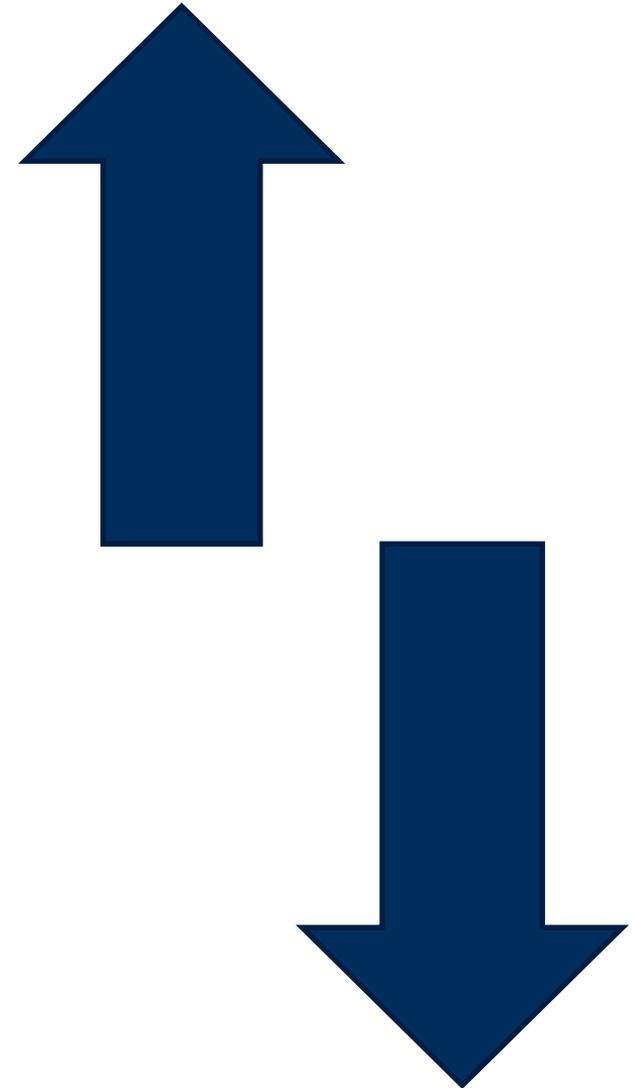
## More Appealing

- Affordability including tuition, aid, flexibility
- Communication and handling of COVID-19 changes and adjustments
- Closer to home options

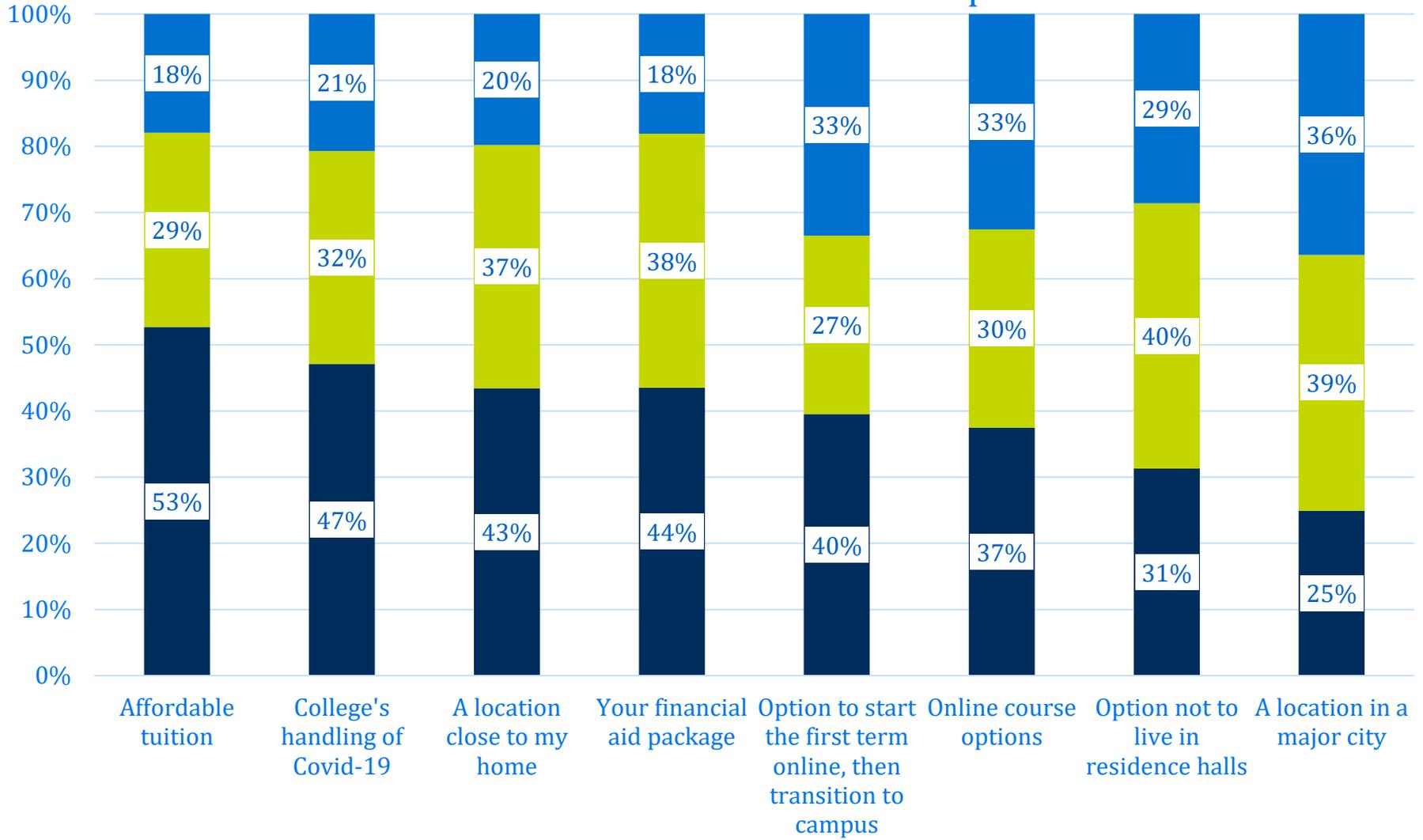
## Less Appealing

- A location in a major city

**Mixed: Online or Starting Online first semester option**

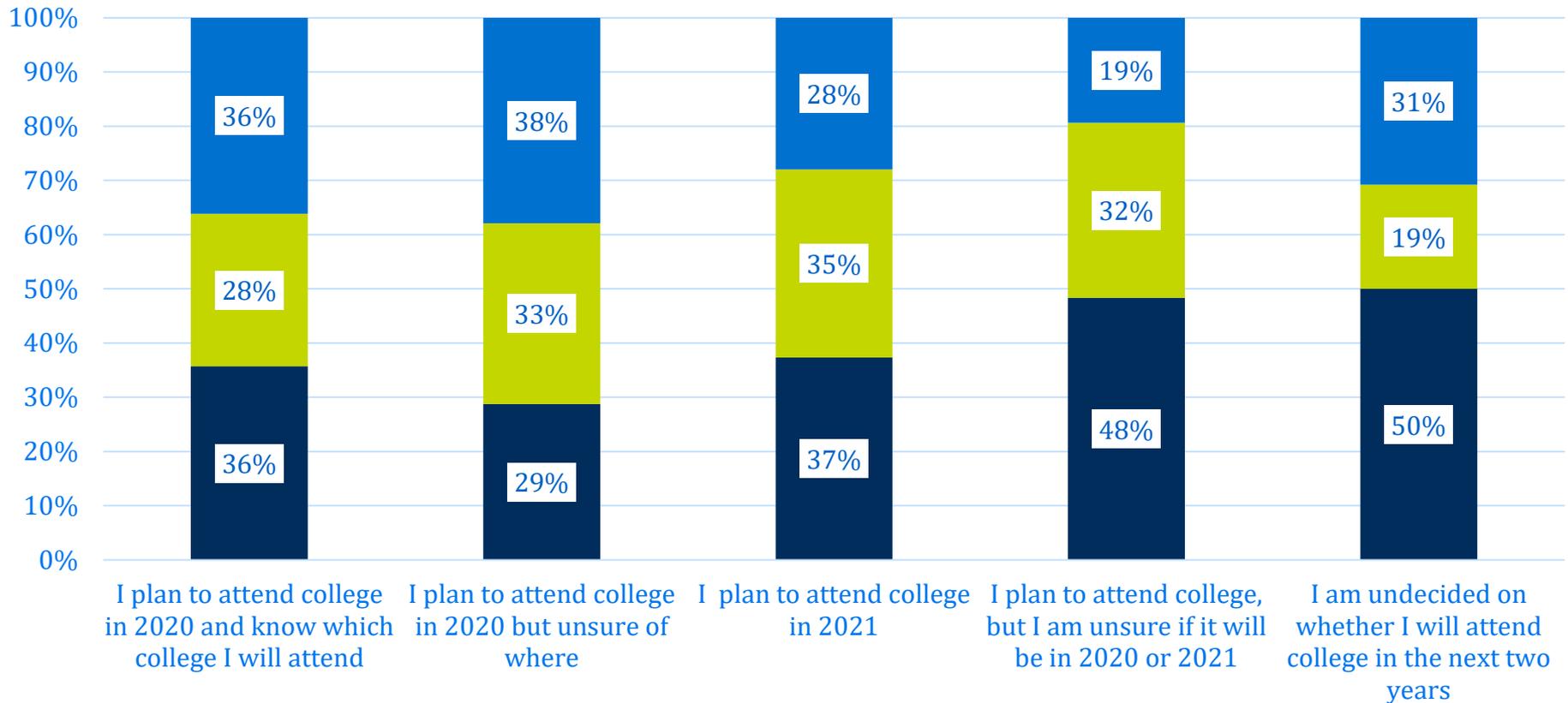


## Do the following characteristics or offerings make a college more or less attractive because of the Covid-19 pandemic?

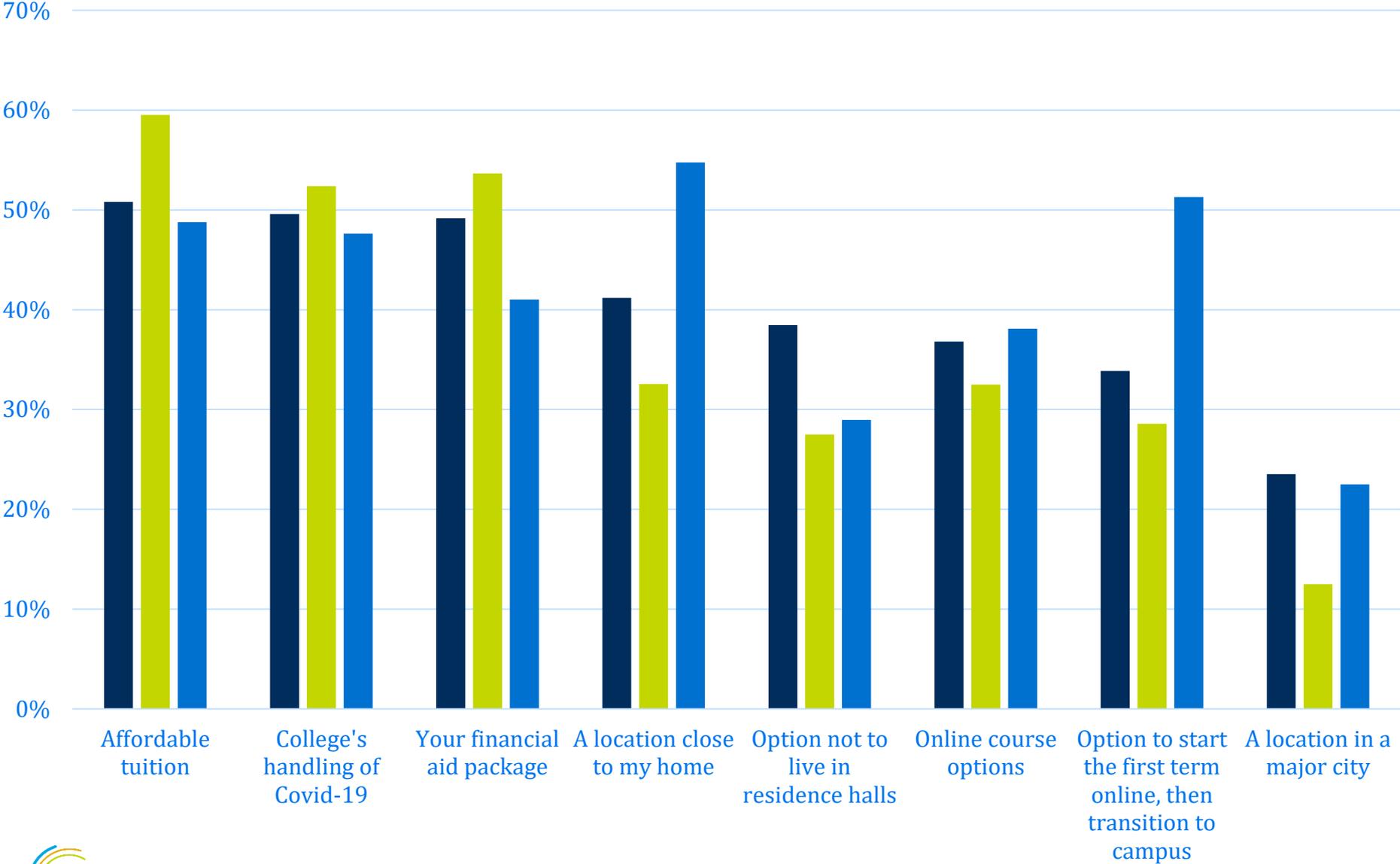


# Online courses appeal to uncertain seniors (considering deferral or starting online)

Do the following characteristics or offerings make a college more or less attractive because of the Covid-19 pandemic? “Online Course Options”



# More Attractive by School Type



■ 4 Year Public ■ 4 Year Private ■ 2 Year Public



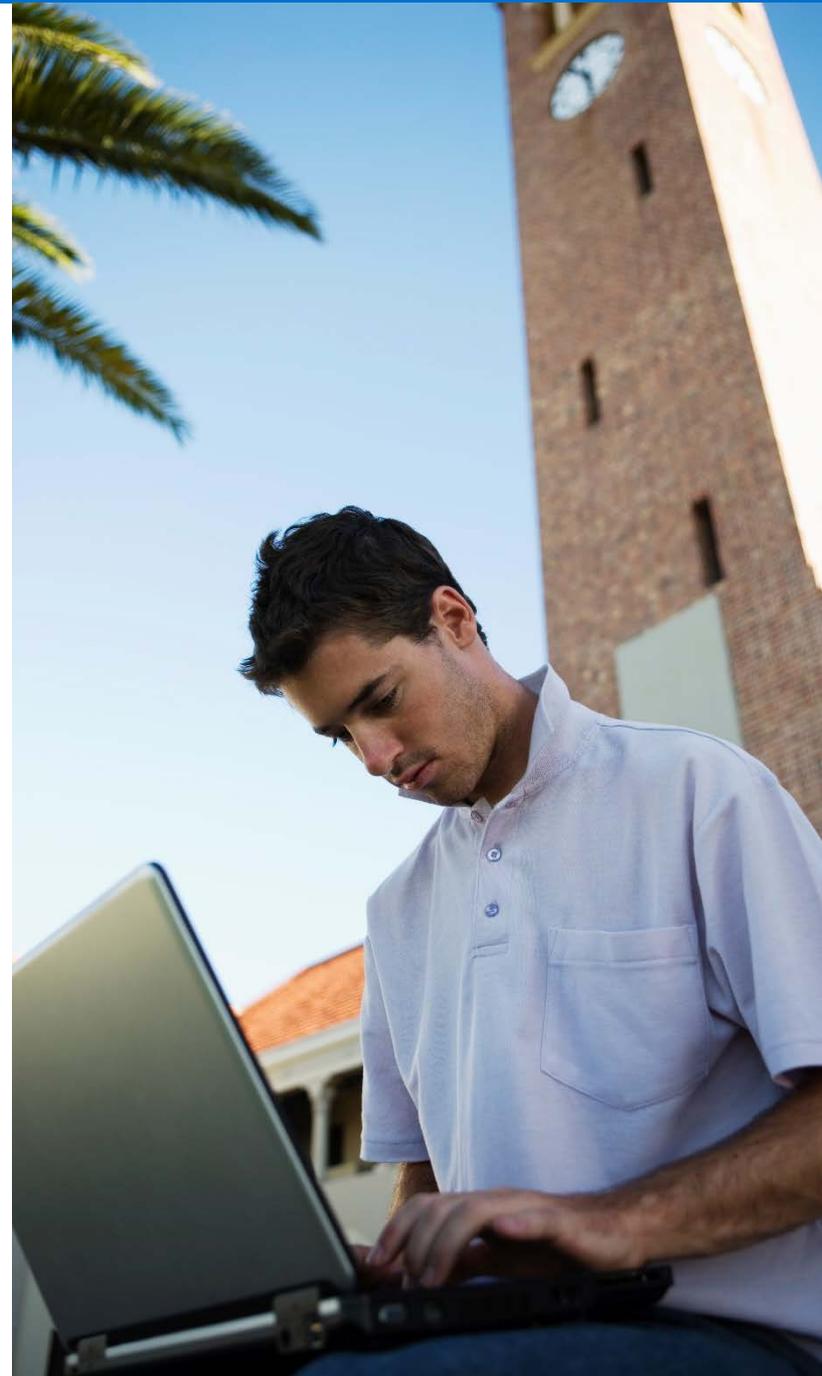
## Key finding: Colleges already listening & acting

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, has any college or university changed the scholarship or financial aid package they originally offered you?

**29% said Yes**

# Attractiveness Comments

- *“Greater flexibility, understanding, and communication among students.”*
- *“Option to take a gap year, but still have the acceptance we got this year.”*
- *“Increased financial aid for those affected by job loss due to COVID-19.”*



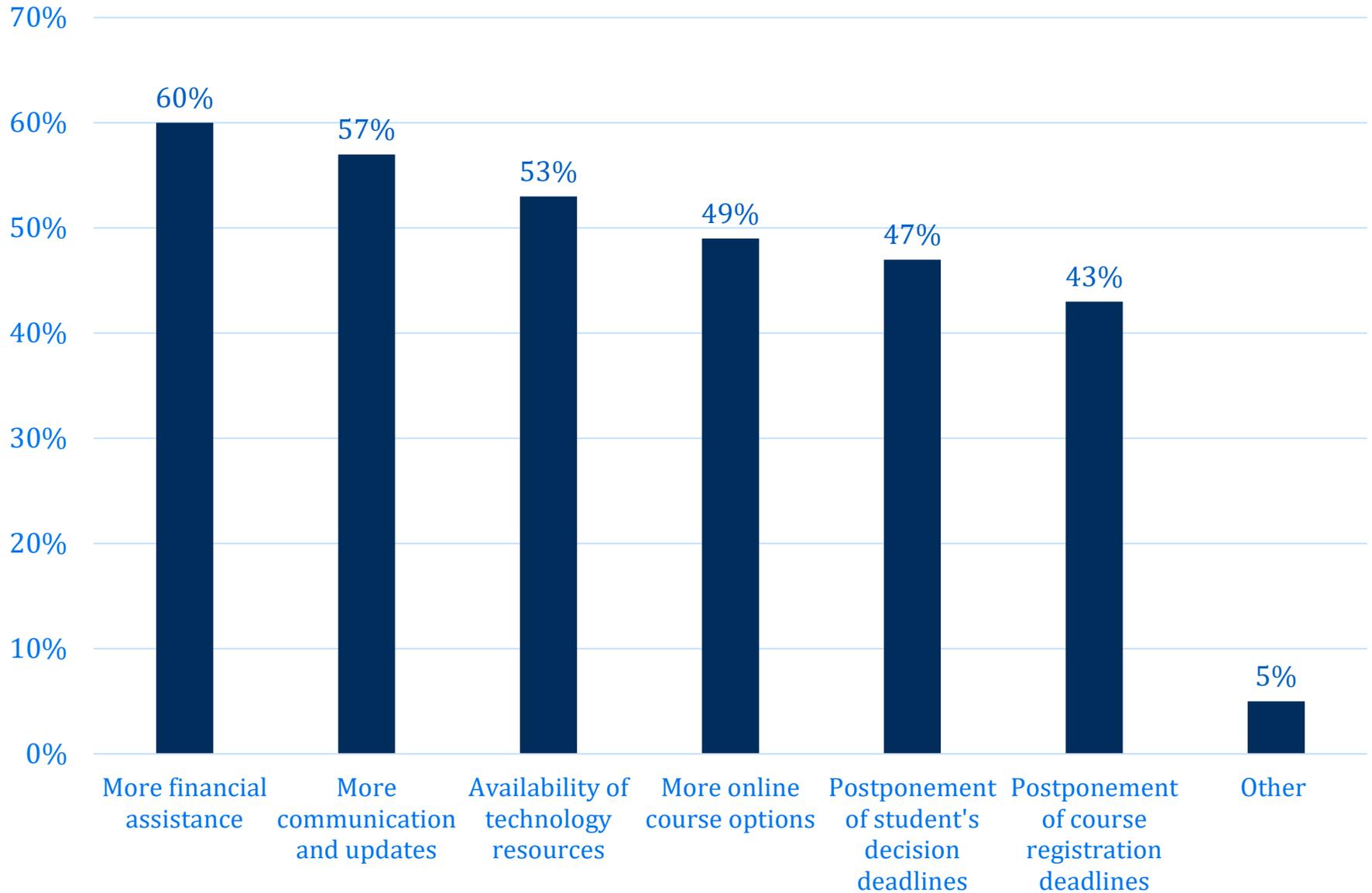
A blue-tinted photograph of three students in a classroom. A woman with curly hair is smiling and looking towards the left. A man is writing in a notebook in the foreground. Another student is visible in the background. The text is overlaid in the center.

What do students  
want to see more of  
from colleges?

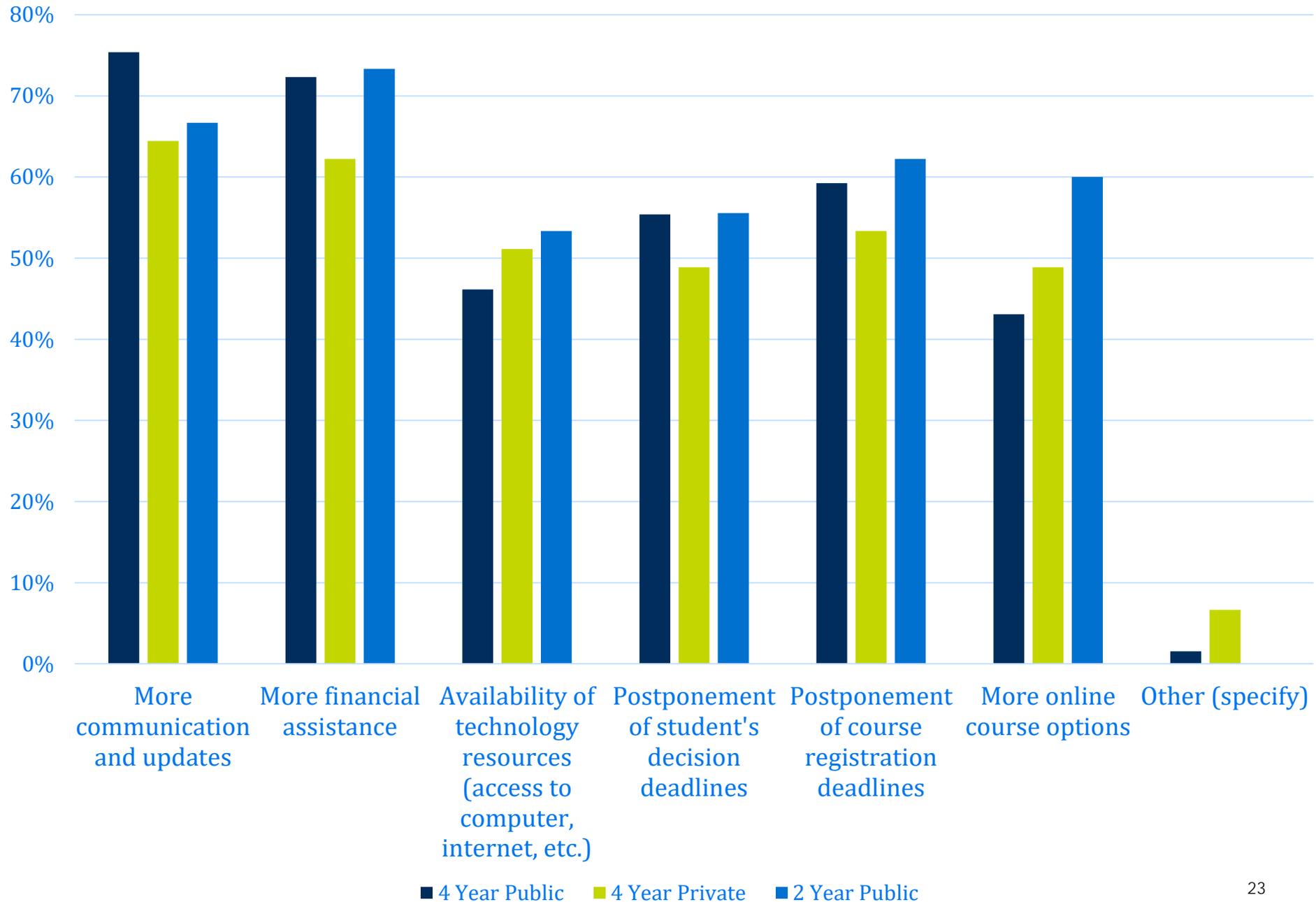


**Key Finding: More than half, 53% of seniors, would like more technological resources and 49% would like more online course options**

## What would you like to see from a college in response to the Covid-19 pandemic?



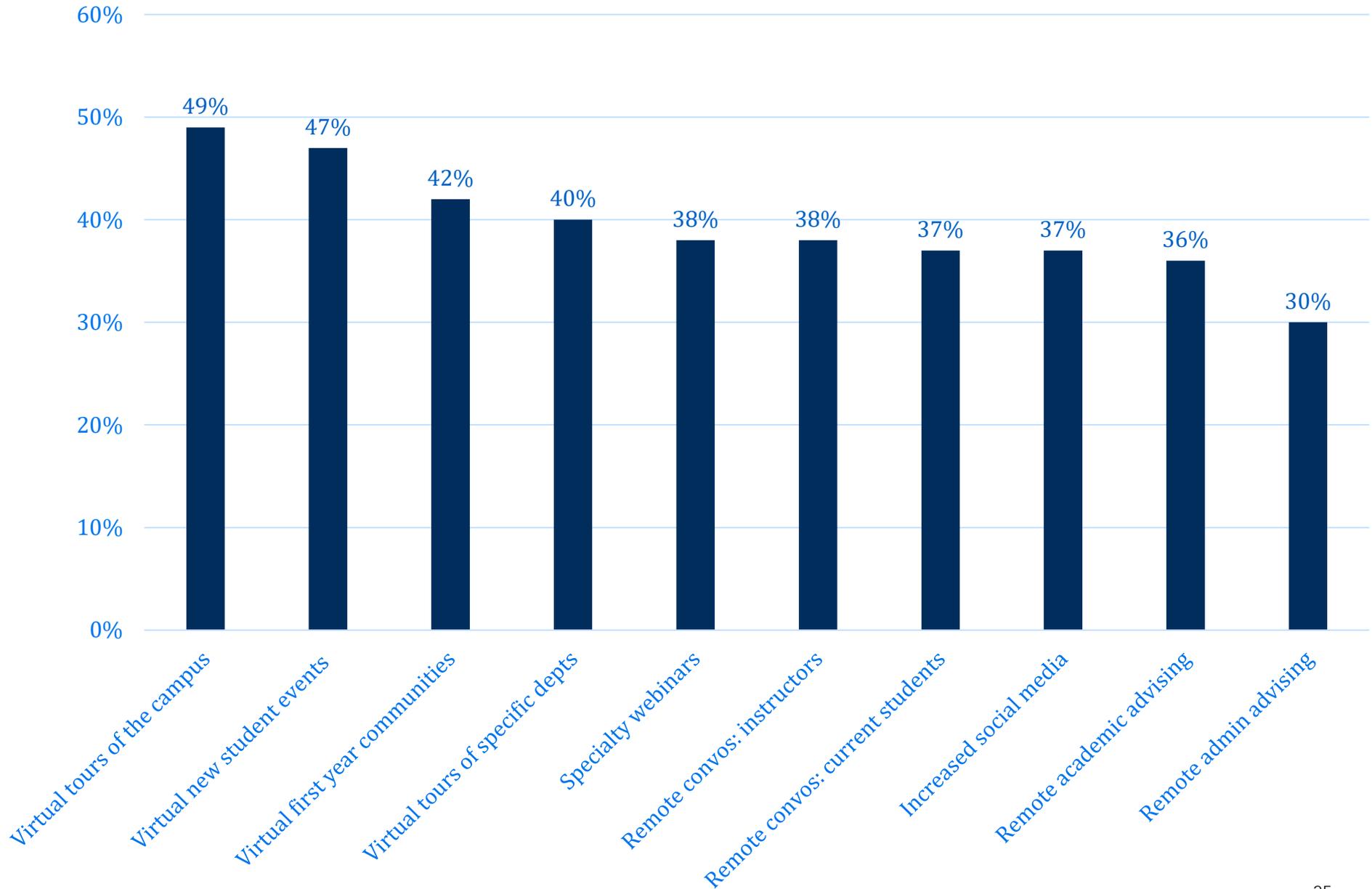
# Response Preference by Institution Type



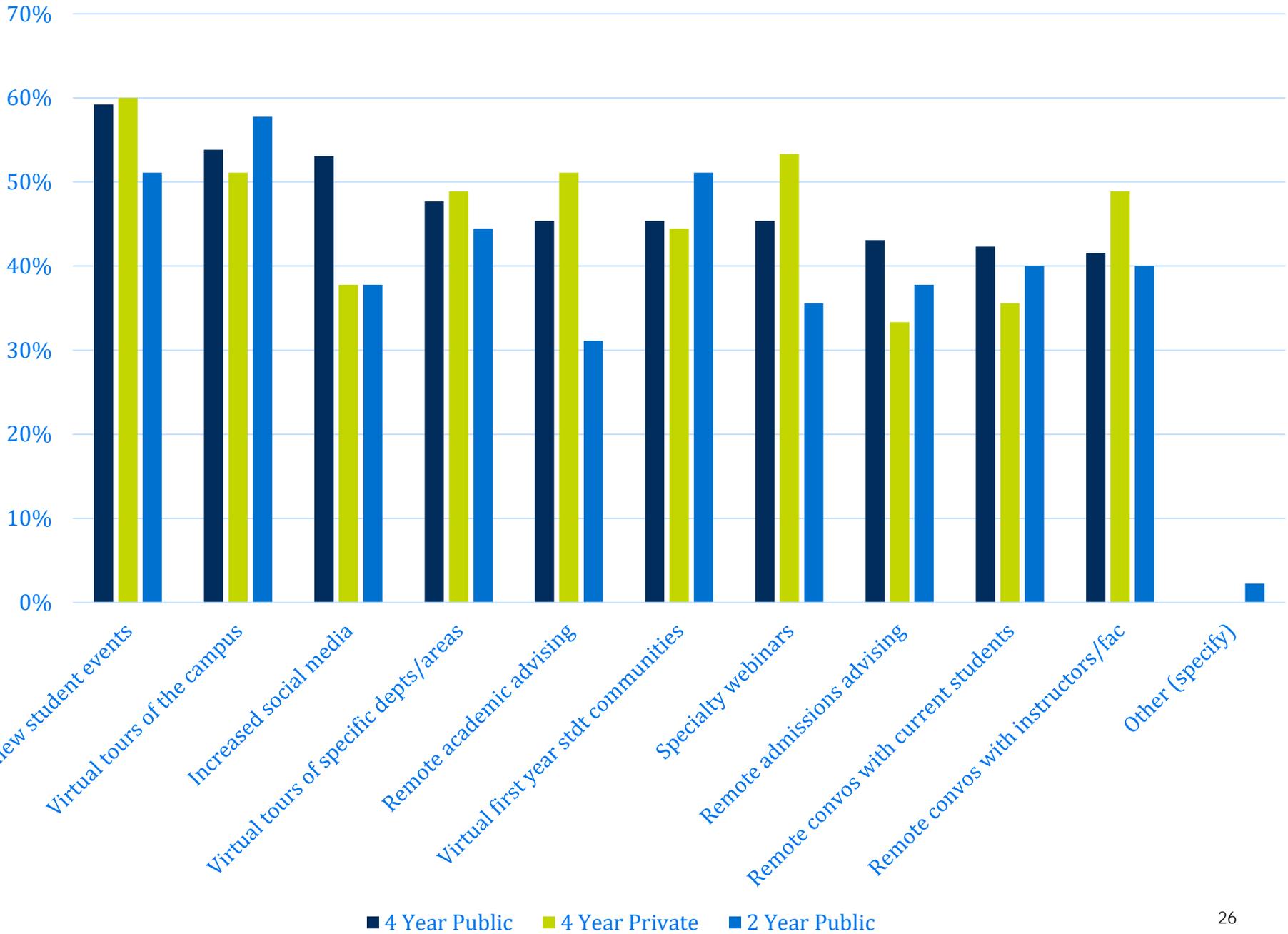
# Key finding: Virtual Tours and Events Critical



# As colleges navigate current government restrictions, what would you like to see offered to new students?



# Potential Offers by Institution Type



A photograph of three students sitting at a table, studying together. The image is overlaid with a blue tint. The student in the center is a young woman with curly hair, smiling and looking towards the left. The student to her right is a young man with short hair, looking down at a book or paper. The student on the far left is partially visible, looking towards the center. The text "College plans" is centered over the image in a white, sans-serif font.

# College plans

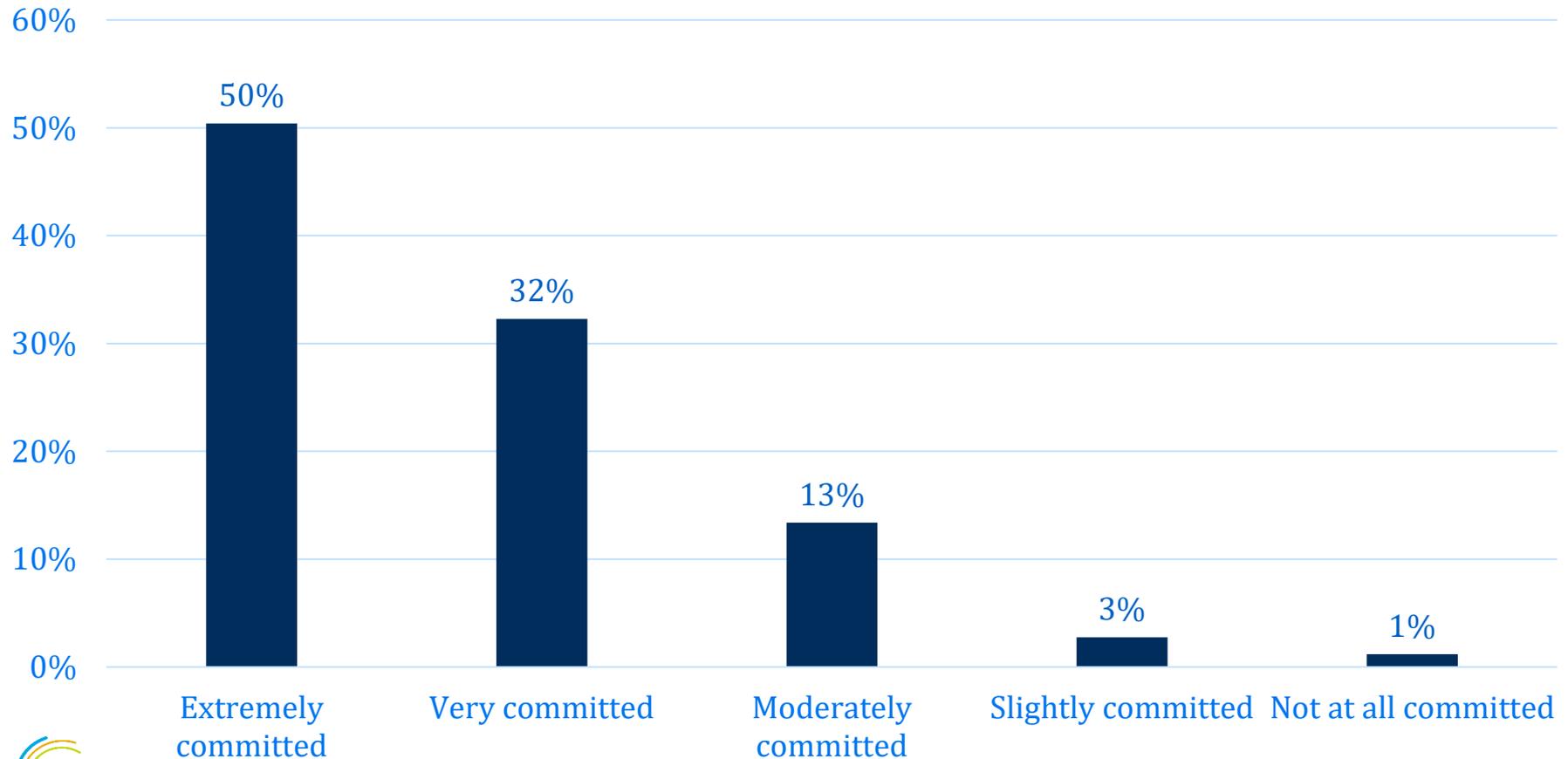
A photograph of three students (two women and one man) sitting around a table, looking at a document together. They appear to be in a study or classroom setting. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent dark blue filter. The text is centered over the image.

# Selected Where Attending College

N=257

# 82% of those who have selected a college are extremely or very committed to that choice

To what extent are you committed to your college choice?



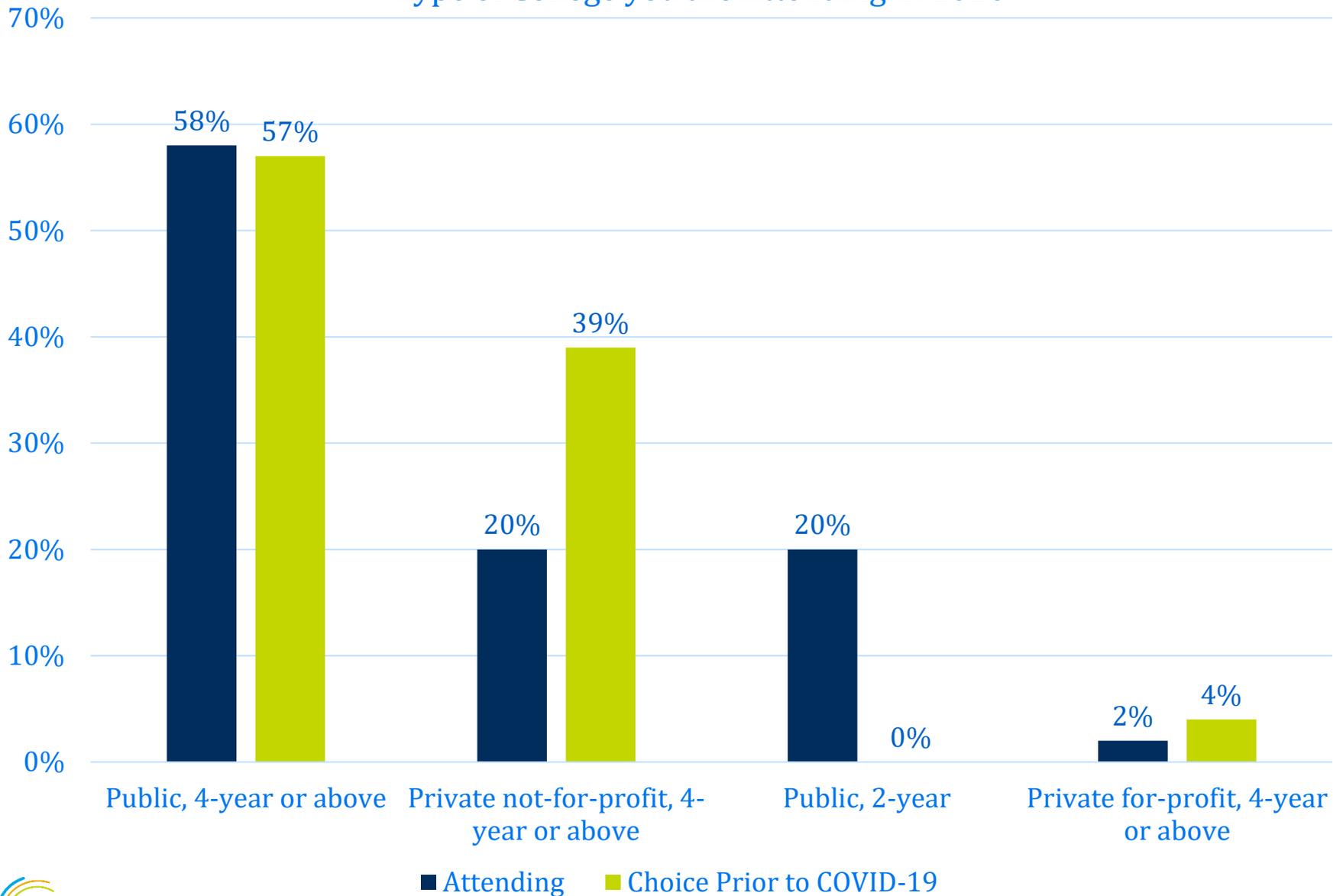


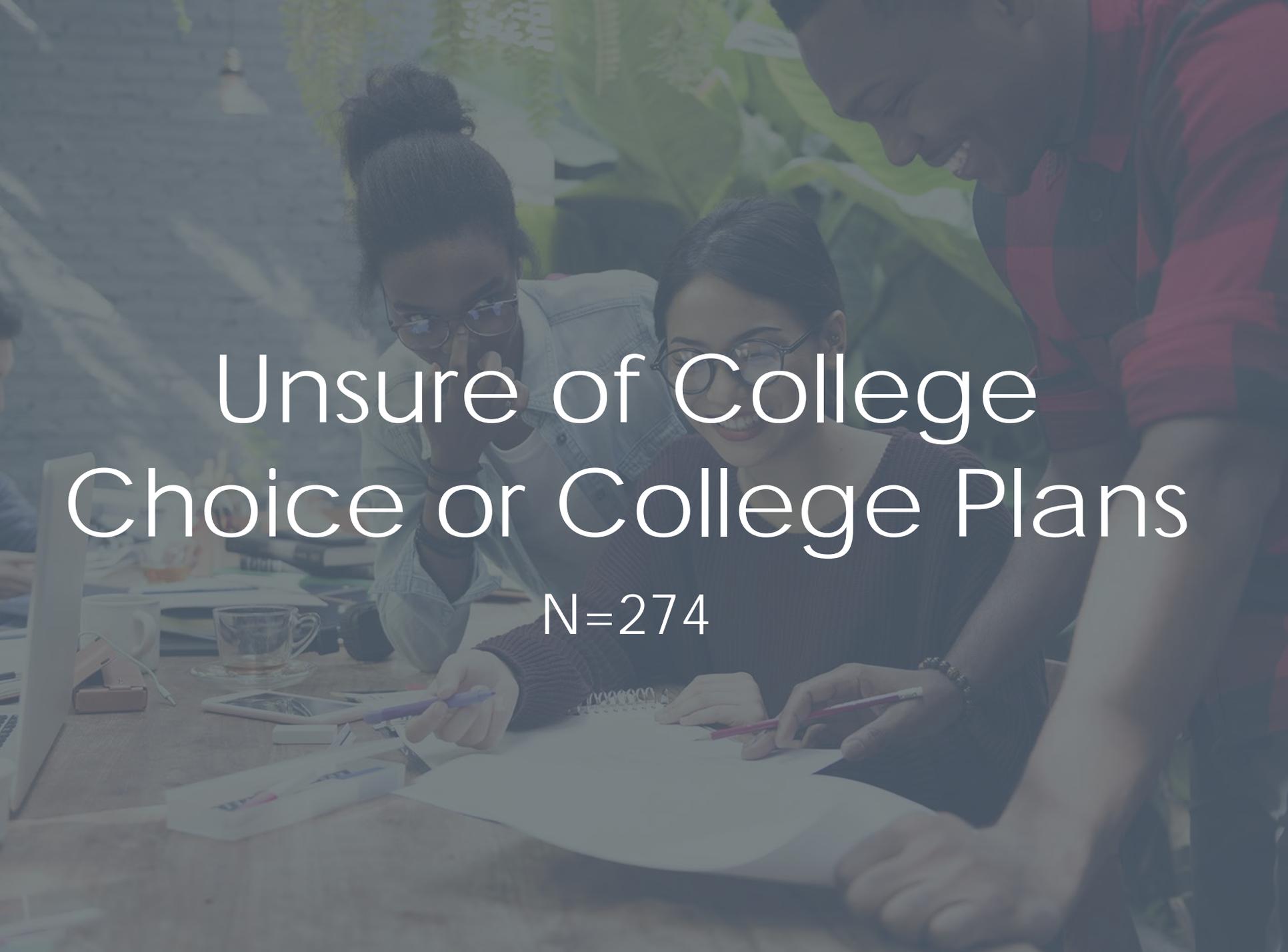
## Key Findings

More than one quarter (28%) of those who know where they are attending said that COVID-19 had changed their college choice.

Of those, more students will attend two-year publics and fewer students will be found at private four-year schools Fall 2020.

## Type of College you are Attending in 2020



A photograph of three students (two women and one man) sitting around a desk, looking at a document together. They appear to be in a study or classroom setting. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent dark blue filter. The text is centered over the image.

# Unsure of College Choice or College Plans

N=274



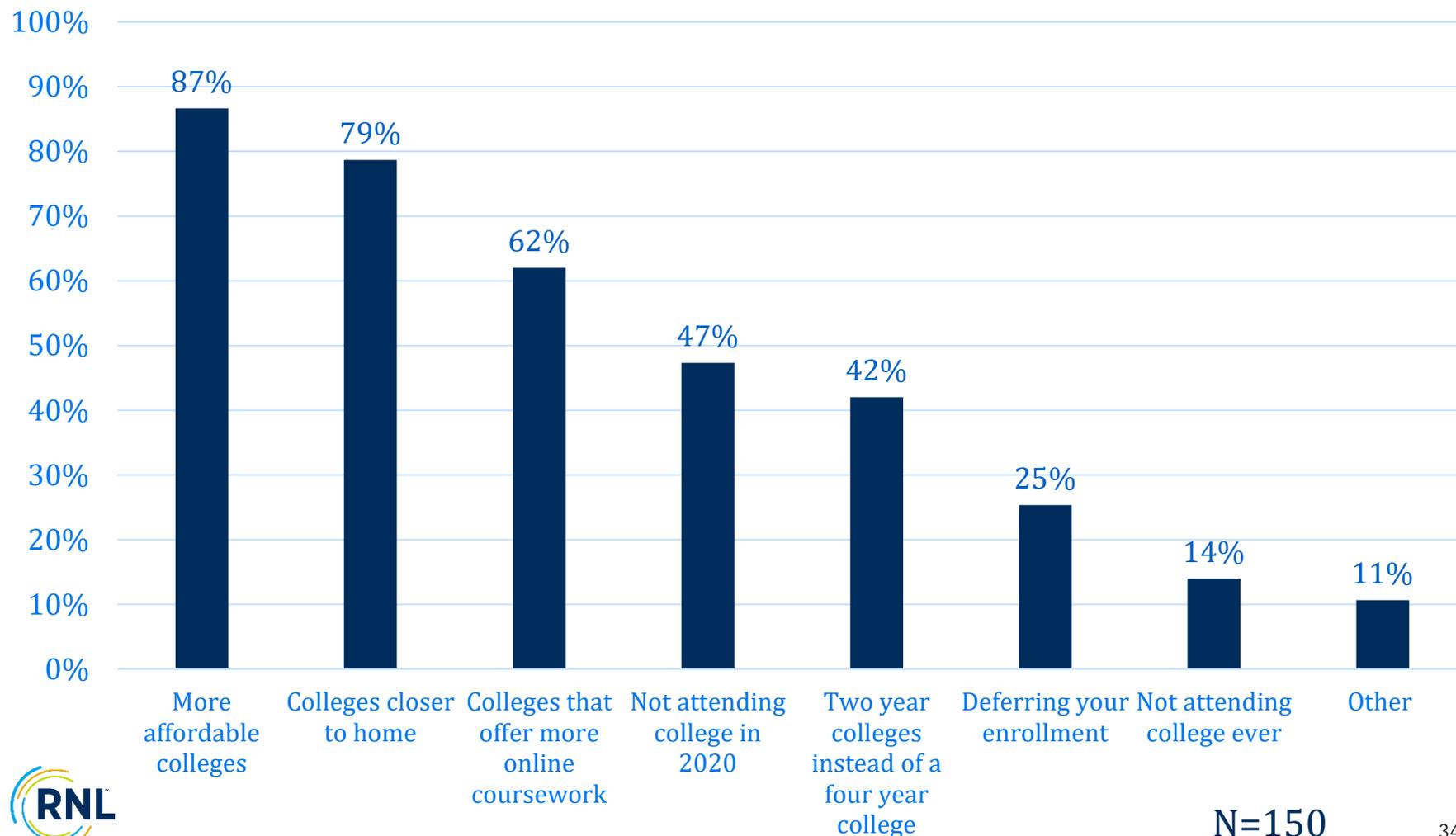
## Key Findings:

Because of COVID-19 those who are still unsure of their college or college plans are considering...

- ✓ More affordable schools and
- ✓ Colleges closer to home
- ✓ Colleges that offer more online course options

## Students with unsure plans who indicated Covid-19 has had an impact on your college plans explain they are looking at more affordable colleges and colleges closer to home because of Covid-19

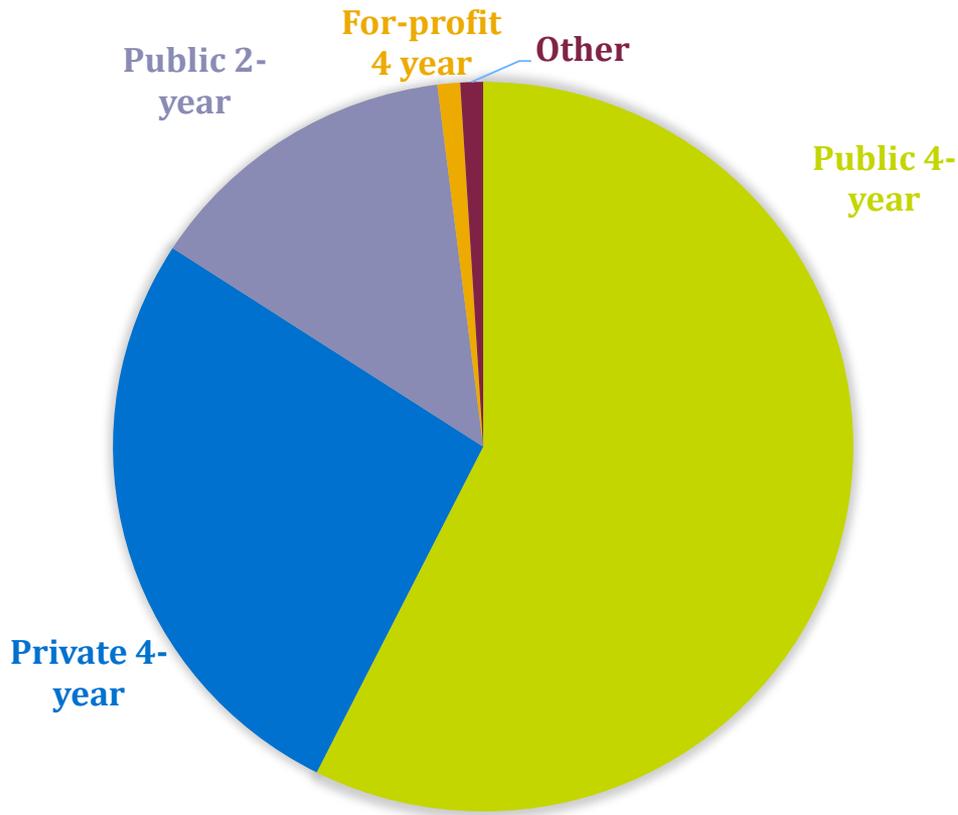
Has Covid-19 caused you to consider....?



# Changes in college choice

*Which college was your first choice just **before** covid-19*

*Is this college still your first choice?*



**47% Yes**

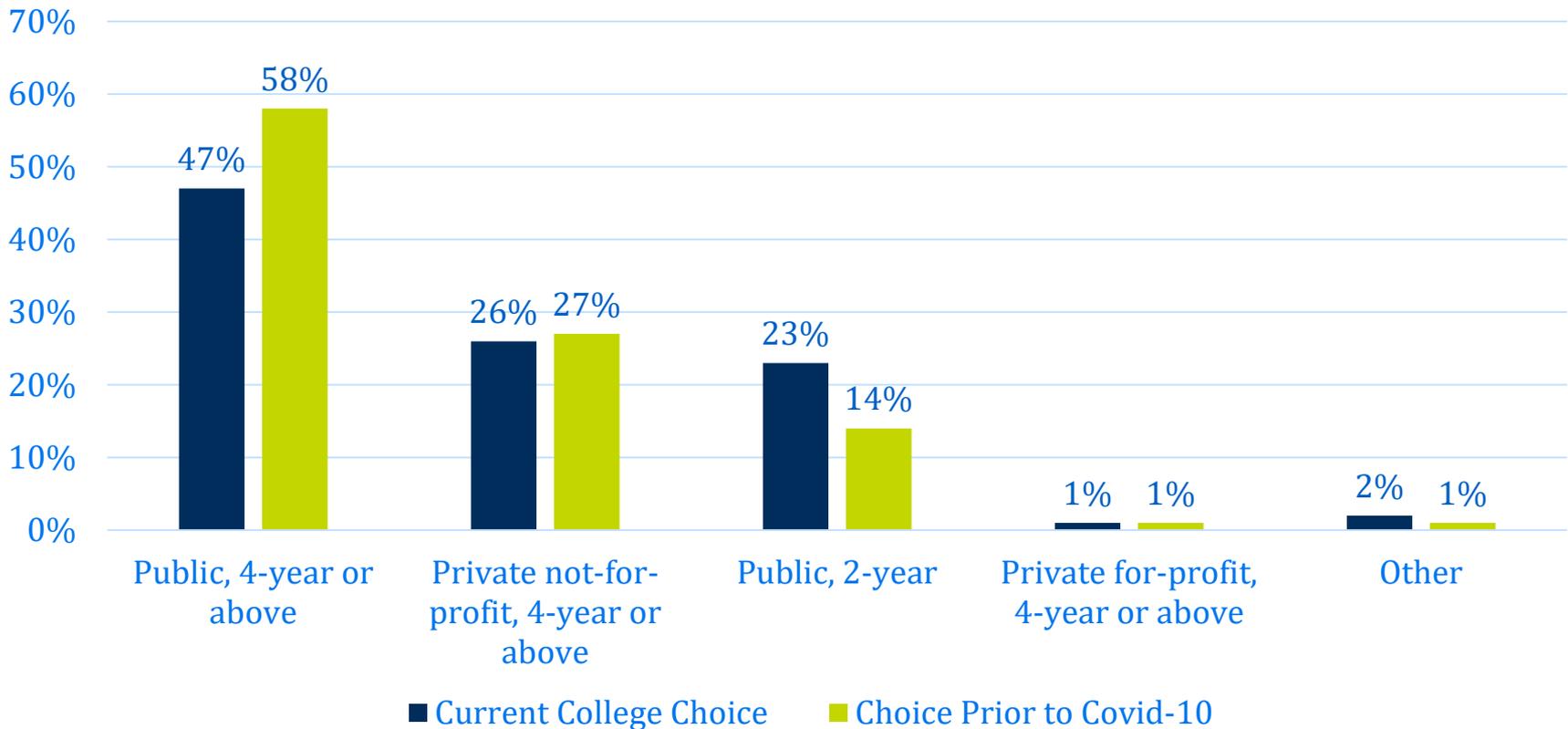
37% Unsure

12% No longer current first choice

# Right now those considering change

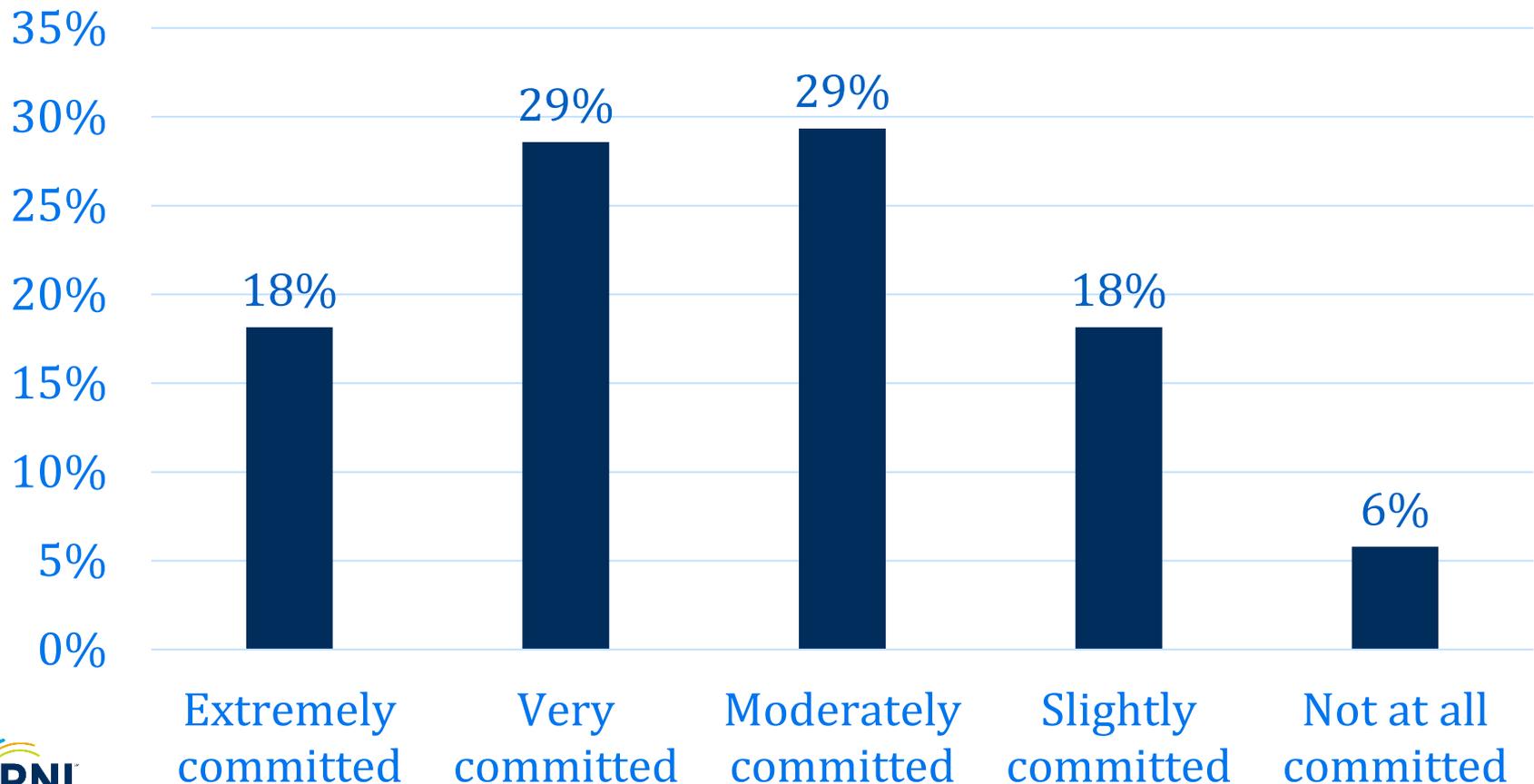
*Four year publics may lose a little; Community Colleges may gain*

Type of college by first choice if changed or and choice prior to Covid-19



# Less than half of students with unsure plans are very or extremely committed to any one college

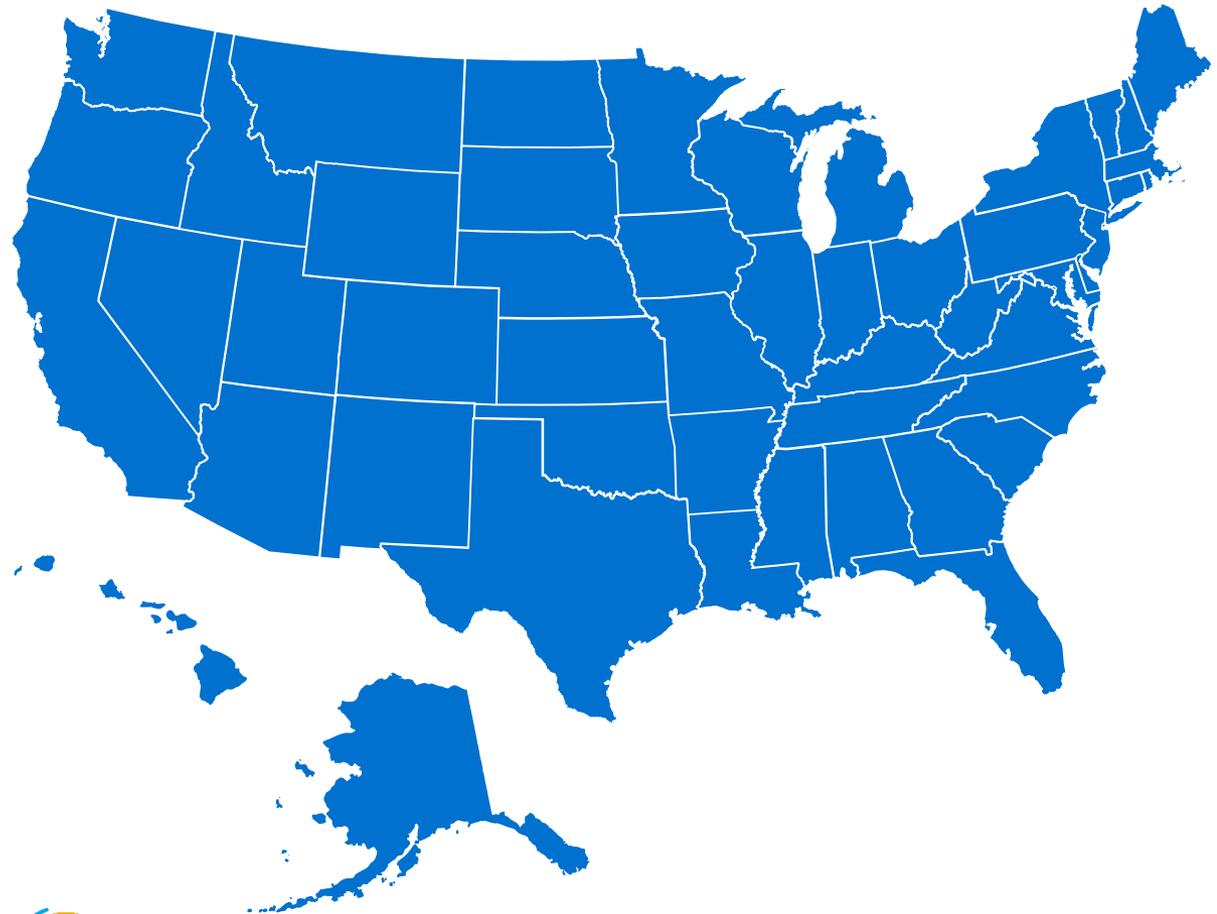
Unsure Plans: To what extent are you committed to your **current** college choice?



A group of three students are gathered around a desk, looking at a large sheet of paper. One student is pointing at the paper, another is smiling, and a third is leaning in. The desk has a laptop, a cup of coffee, and some papers. The background is slightly blurred, showing some greenery.

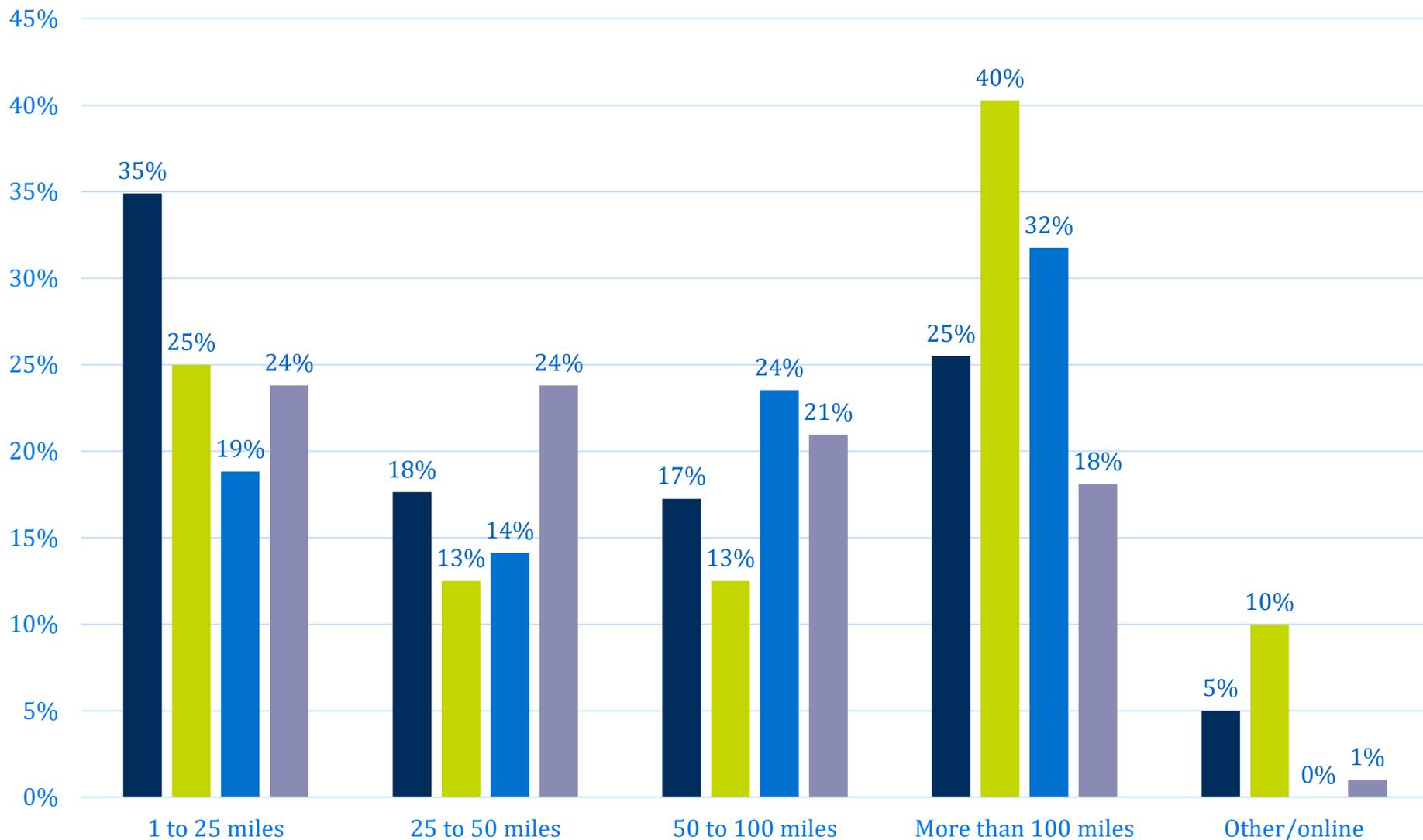
# Distance from Home

# Key findings: Do not dismiss students who live further away



53% of those unsure of plans say they are looking at colleges 50 miles or further

# How far from home is the college you are attending or how far from home are you willing to travel for college?



■ College Decided

■ I plan to attend college in 2021

■ I plan to attend college in 2020 but unsure of where

■ Unsure of when, or if, attending

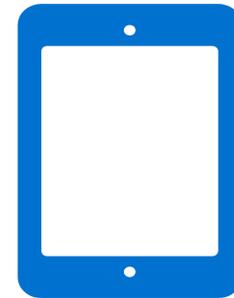


# Communication

# Email and telephone most desired communication medium



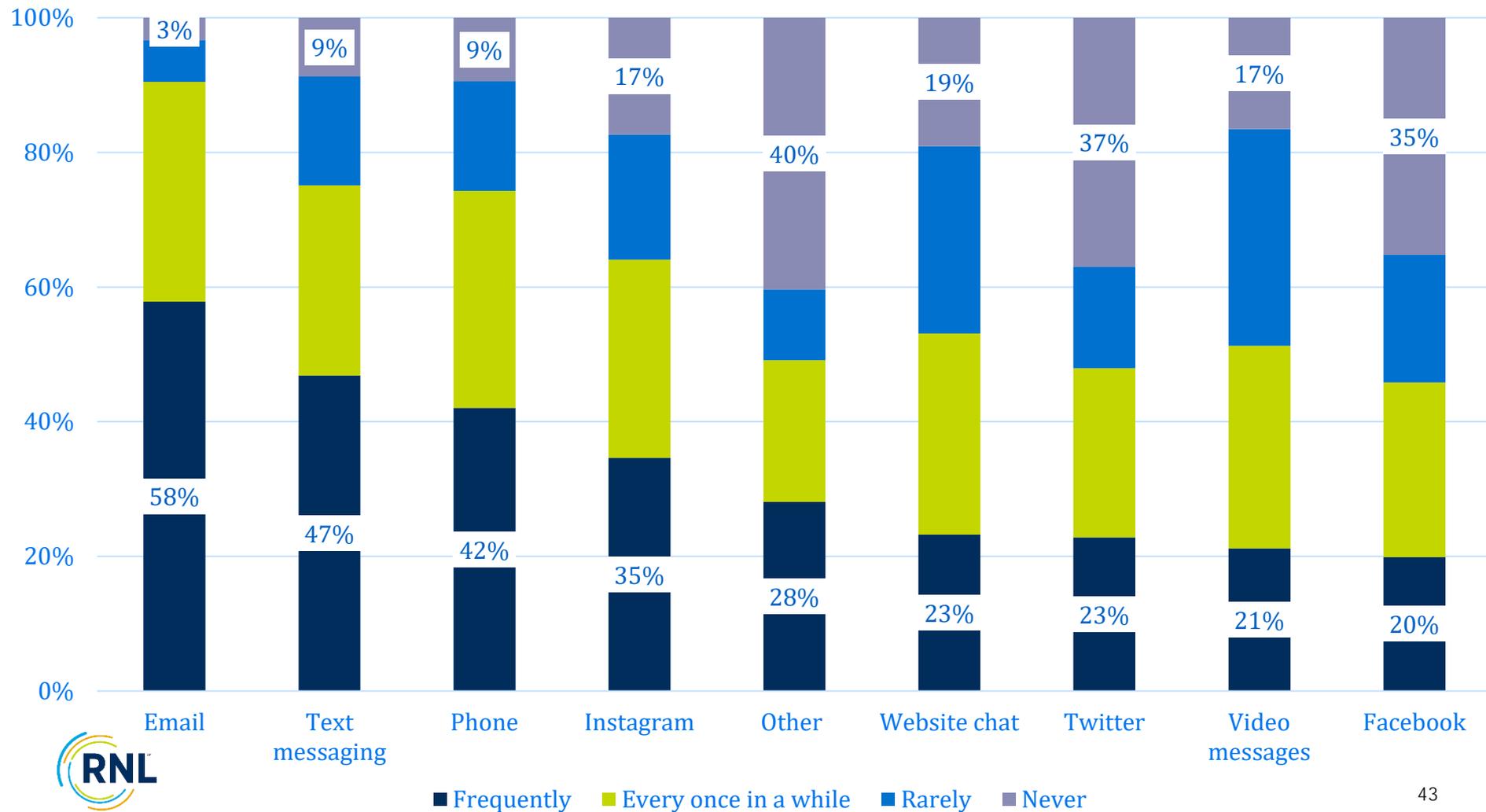
Students who are sure, as well as those unsure of where they want to attend college both report email as their most preferred method of communication.



Students who are sure prefer phone calls, where as students who have decided prefer text

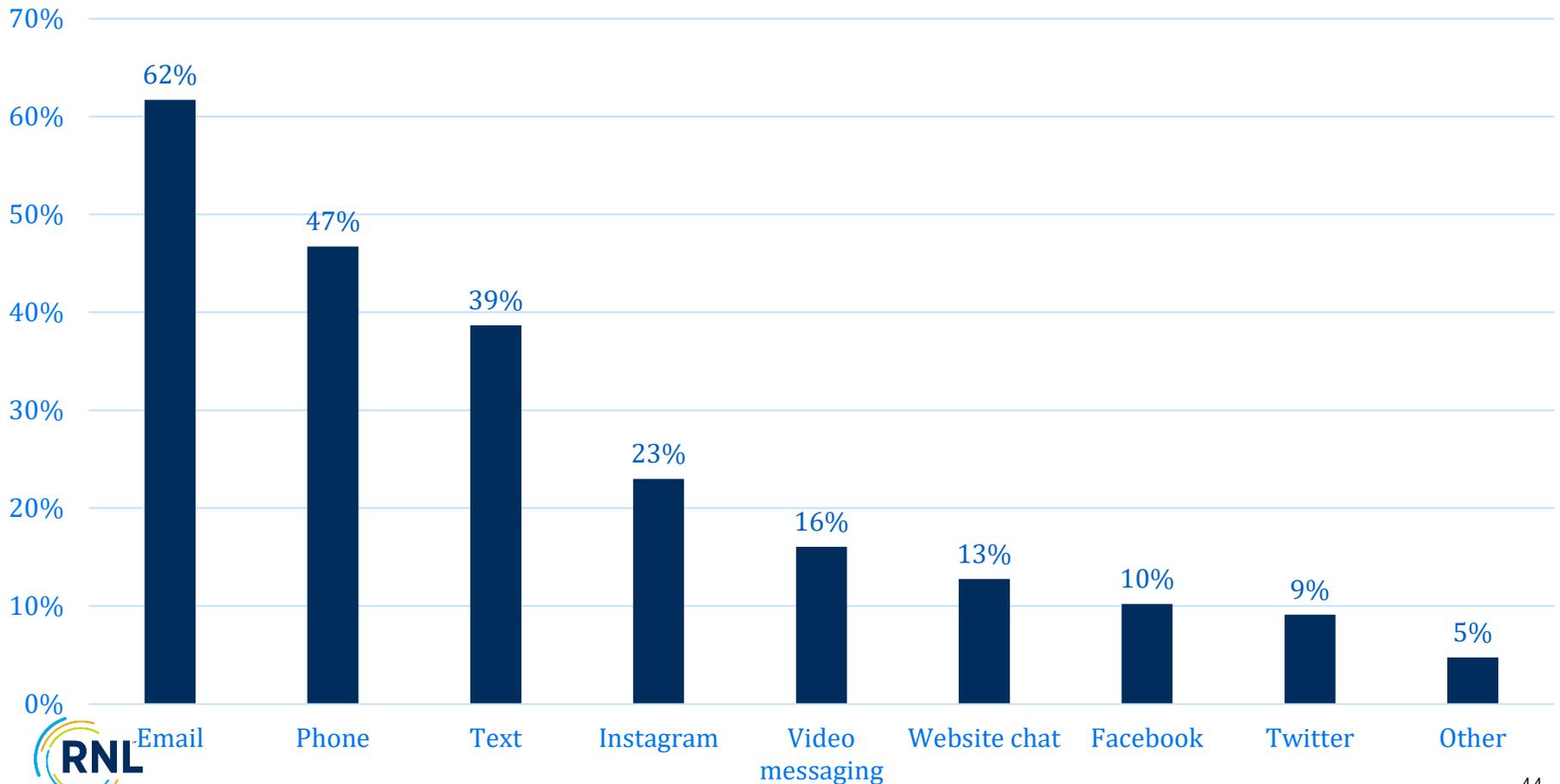
# Those who know which college they are attending prefer to be contacted frequently through email and text messaging

How, and how often, would you like to receive communication updates from your college?



# Those with unclear plans would like to be contacted via email

How would you like to receive communications from potential college or universities?



The image shows a large, empty lecture hall or auditorium. The seats are arranged in rows, with a central aisle leading towards a stage area at the far end. The seats are a light grey color. A prominent blue horizontal band is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the text "In their own words" in white. The floor is a light-colored, speckled material, possibly concrete or stone tiles. The overall atmosphere is quiet and empty.

In their own words

# Financial assistance, flexibility, safety

*Is there anything colleges or universities can do now to help you make a decision during the Covid-19 pandemic?*

*Open-end, themes:*

- Financial assistance (decrease tuition, increase financial aid, lower housing)
- Flexibility on decisions (enrollment, application)
- Safety (more broadly, increase space)
- Online education (move courses online, increase online offerings)
- Increase communication (from financial aid, on what makes their campus different, safety protocols, etc.)
- Make decisions for fall (moving online, housing, etc.)

An aerial photograph of a vast, snow-covered mountain range, likely the Himalayas, with the word "Recommendations" overlaid in a bright yellow, sans-serif font. The mountains are partially covered in white snow, and the surrounding landscape is a mix of dark and light blue tones, suggesting a high-altitude environment. The text is centered horizontally and vertically on the image.

# Recommendations

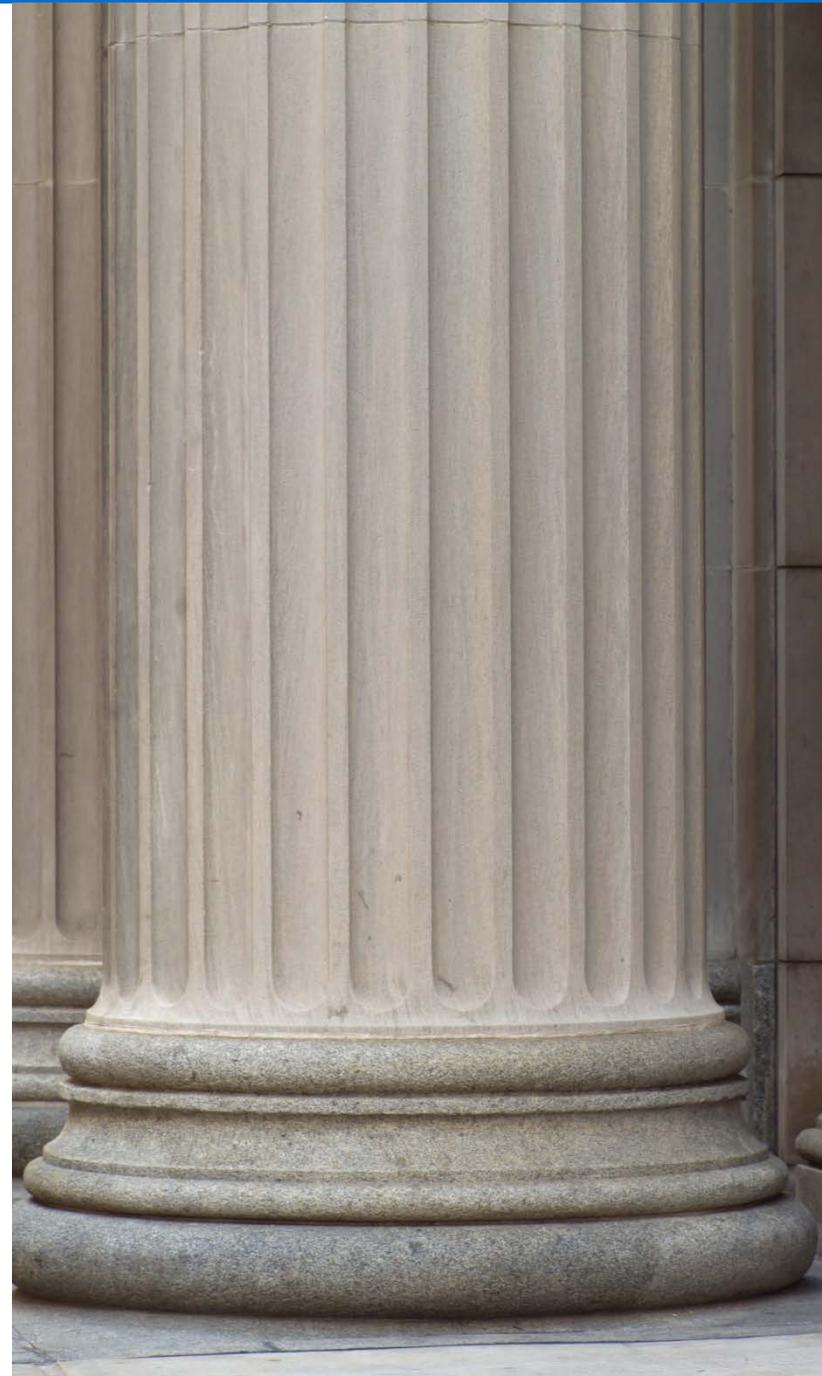


# So what more can colleges do?

- Flexibility: **where possible offer more aid**; flexible deadlines and/or Payment programs; Strengthen the tuition cost value proposition especially outcomes student's program of interest
- COVID-19: **communicate regularly** about COVID-19 changes, let them know they will be the first to know
- **Engage all students**: Distance is relative. Though students may be concerned about living away from home and report looking for college closer to home, more than 50% of those unsure are looking at schools more than 50 miles away. How can you make your school feel like home?

# Highlight uniqueness

- **Your campus and prospective students are unique.** Nothing can beat the feelings and connections made on campus, but bring that sense of belonging and uniqueness to students through virtual events and campus tours.
- Be more deliberate about **relationship building.** Plan ways to connect new students with each other and with peers and faculty.



# Pivot to meet the needs of rising seniors

## *Speak to concerns and new priorities*

- **Raise the visibility of online offerings.** Speak to the quality and breath of courses and programs.
- Promote **online courses and programs as an alternative to deferral.**
- Look at **strategies which emphasize local recruitment markets** in a new way. Local students who had previously intended to attend campuses further away may now be more interested.
- Communicate the **benefits of your campus setting**
  - Urban campuses have heavier burden to prove they can be safe
  - Suburban/rural campuses may be more attractive
- **Hear the voices of your prospect students.**

# Contact Us

*For questions or to conduct your own college bound senior survey, please reach out to us today:*

*[MarketResearch@ruffalonl.com](mailto:MarketResearch@ruffalonl.com)*