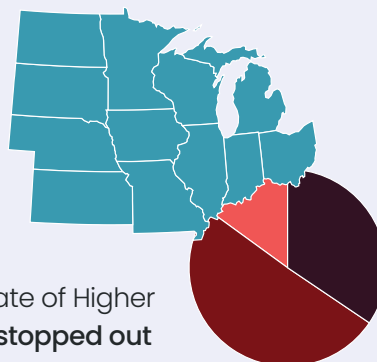


State of Higher Education 2026

MIDWEST

A data snapshot from the Lumina Foundation-Gallup State of Higher Education Study, surveying adults currently enrolled in, stopped out of, and never enrolled in a postsecondary program

**35%**Never enrolled
(625)**51%**Stopped out
(1,151)**15%**Currently enrolled
(1,269)

The Value of a Degree

91%

of enrolled students say their own investment in college is worth it

58%

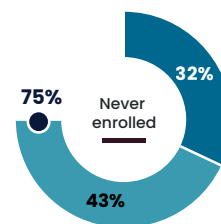
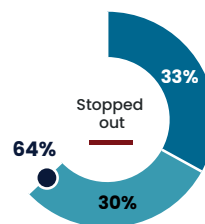
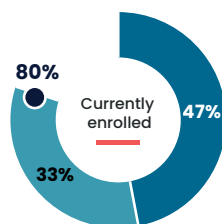
of not currently enrolled adults say a four-year degree would be worth it

77%

of not currently enrolled adults say a two-year degree would be worth it

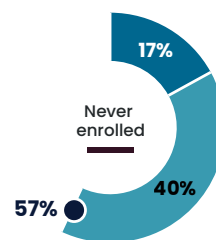
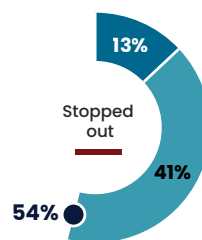
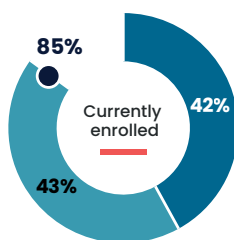
Compared to 20 years ago, how important is it for people today to have a two-year or four-year college degree in order for them to have a successful career?

- More important
- Equally important
- More important + equally important



How important is a four-year college degree for you to reach your career goals?

- Critical
- Important
- Critical + important



Midwest Adults' Interest in Enrolling

53%

of enrolled students say to get a higher-paying job

37%

of enrolled students say to become a more competitive job candidate

21%

of enrolled students say to get a salary increase or promotion in their current job

66%

of stopped-out adults considered a credential in the past two years

22%

of stopped-out adults are very likely to enroll in at least one program within five years and

32%

of stopped-out adults are likely to enroll in at least one program within five years

vs.

40%

of never-enrolled adults considered a credential in the past two years

14%

of never-enrolled adults are very likely to enroll in at least one program within five years and

21%

of never-enrolled adults are likely to enroll in at least one program within five years

vs.

Say financial aid is very important in enrollment decision

58%

Currently enrolled

62%

Stopped out

48%

Never enrolled

Degree Completion

58%

of enrolled students say they are very confident they will complete their program

31%

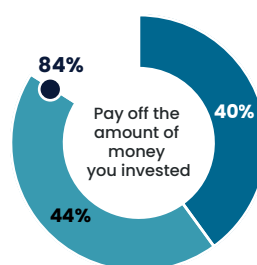
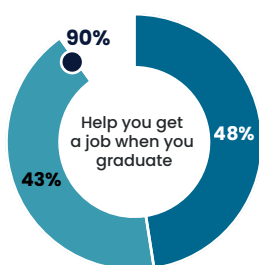
of enrolled students say they have considered stopping coursework (withdrawing from the program for at least one term)

Confidence in Degree

How confident are you that the degree or credential you are working towards will:

Among enrolled students

- Very confident
- Confident
- Very confident + confident



Return on Investment

How long do Midwest adults think it takes for a degree to pay off after graduation?

Among not currently enrolled adults

Bachelor's degree

9 years

vs.

Associate degree

6 years

Enrollment Decisions

Percentage of not currently enrolled adults who have considered enrolling in the past two years in ...

Select all that apply.

	Stopped out	Never enrolled
Industry certification	18%	12%
Certificate	23%	17%
Associate degree	30%	15%
Bachelor's degree	21%	8%
Other	2%	2%
None of the above	34%	60%

Percentage of not currently enrolled adults who are likely to enroll in the next five years in ...

Very likely + likely

	Stopped out	Never enrolled
Industry certification	15%	10%
Certificate	18%	15%
Associate degree	24%	13%
Bachelor's degree	16%	7%

Percentage of adults who cite these factors as very important to getting them to enroll in higher education:

	Stopped out	Never enrolled
Financial aid or scholarship	62%	48%
Greater flexibility in course delivery	44%	35%
Able to finish a program in a short time frame	46%	37%
Confidence in value	57%	47%
Mental health support	26%	29%

	Stopped out	Never enrolled
Student loans	39%	31%
Affordable student housing	23%	29%
Student loan forgiveness programs	48%	38%
Expected future job opportunities	64%	52%

How affordable do you think each of the following institutions or programs are:

Very affordable + somewhat affordable

	Stopped out	Never enrolled
Community colleges	81%	81%
Public flagship four-year colleges	22%	37%
Public non-flagship four-year colleges	37%	51%
Private not-for-profit four-year colleges	19%	34%
For-profit colleges	23%	38%

College Experiences

Thinking about the instructors you have had at [Institution], how many have:

Among currently enrolled

	All of them + most of them
Encouraged students to share their views, even if it might make others in the class uncomfortable	69%
Created a safe environment for students who might be upset by what someone else says in class	73%
Created a safe environment for students who express opinions that are not shared by most other students	74%

Do you approve or disapprove of the policies and proposals that each of the following are making that affect your campus/college:

Among currently enrolled

	Approve
The leadership (president/chancellor/provost) at your college	81%
State government leaders	57%
Federal government leaders	45%

59%

of currently enrolled students use AI for their schoolwork at least weekly

Daily Weekly Daily + weekly



48%

of currently enrolled students have given a great deal or fair amount of thought to changing their major because of the impact of AI

A great deal A fair amount A great deal + a fair amount



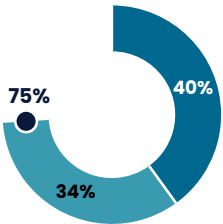
9%

of not currently enrolled adults applied to a college in the 2025-26 academic year

75%

of currently enrolled students agree they can express their opinions freely at school

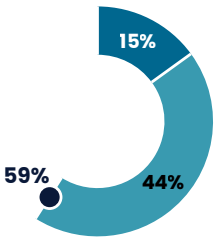
Strongly agree Agree Strongly agree + agree



59%

of currently enrolled students say their school leadership acts in students' best interests all or most of the time

All of the time Most of the time All of the time + most of the time



18%

of currently enrolled students have changed their major because of the impact of AI