

Top Hat Field Report



Student Perspectives on  
**Assessments,  
Career-readiness,  
Diversity &  
Inclusion**

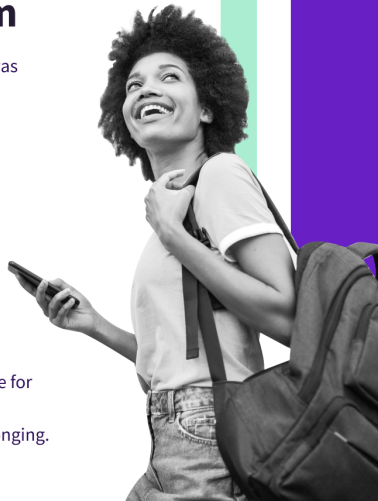
# 2,798 Students Discuss Assessments, Career-readiness, and Diversity & Inclusion in the Classroom

This edition of the *Top Hat Field Report* survey of 2,798 students in the United States and Canada was conducted in December, 2021 and investigates three key areas:

- The quality of the learning experience during the Fall 2021 academic term
- Student perceptions on job-readiness and educational ROI
- The impact of access, equity, diversity, and inclusion on student persistence, motivation, and engagement

Despite the challenges of providing high-quality learning experiences through remote teaching, students are excited about what they're learning and feel engaged and motivated to persist and succeed.

This report provides insights to help educators understand what's working and how to set the table for success. This includes focusing on diversity and representation in learning materials, flexible and empathetic assessments, delivering timely feedback, and creating a sense of community and belonging.



# Hope Amid the Uncertainty

Hard-won lessons from remote teaching, along with concerns about student well-being, have spurred faculty and institutions to embrace new tools and approaches to improve the higher education experience. And it's paying off. While perhaps not an 'A' grade, the learning experience for most students has been positive.

**69%**

My instructors make me excited about what I am learning.

**70%**

I am engaged and motivated in my coursework inside and outside of class.

**73%**

My instructors provide me with timely and helpful feedback to ensure I am successful academically.

**74%**

My instructors provide the flexibility I need to be successful academically.

**84%**

My instructors provide clear guidance on how to succeed in their courses.



# Ensuring Student Success After College

Career-readiness is a key priority for many students, and instructors are making a difference. The majority of students believe they are gaining the skills and knowledge to succeed in the workplace, and would recommend their school to friends and family members considering college.

**72%**

My instructors help me understand how what I'm learning will support my career-readiness after college.

**80%**

The skills and knowledge I am gaining are preparing me for success outside of college.

**86%**

I am developing transferable skills that will support my career readiness.





**76%** Overall I am seeing the value of my higher education investment.



**80%** I would recommend my school to friends and family members considering college.



# The Impact of Student Mental Health on Educational Success

**Six out of 10** students experienced challenges with mental health and well-being during the Fall 2021 term. Many say these struggles have been extensive enough to negatively impact their studies. This includes feeling less excited about learning, less engaged in completing coursework and feeling less confident participating in class.



Students whose mental health challenges affected their studies

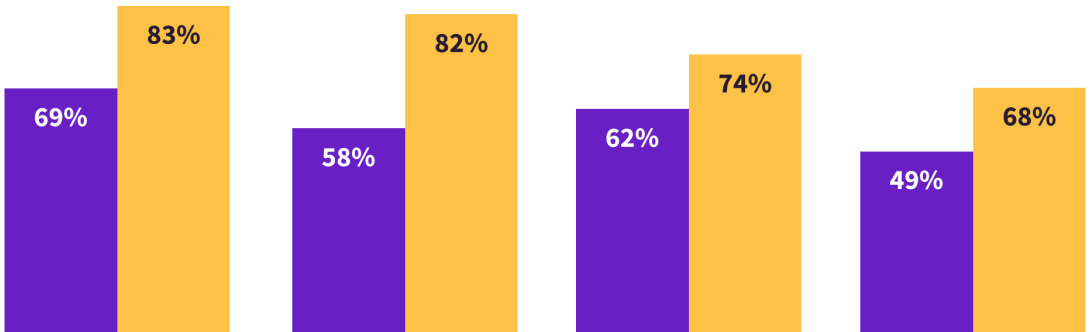
Students who have experienced no mental health challenges

Overall I am seeing the value of my higher education investment.

I feel engaged in my coursework inside and outside of class.

My instructors make me excited about what I am learning.

I feel confident participating in class in-person.



# Rethinking Student Assessments

Over the course of the pandemic, many instructors adopted or increased the usage of “assessments *for* learning” rather than “assessments *of* learning.” Whether out of necessity, concern for student wellbeing, or the growing desire for more nuanced approaches to gauging student progress, the question now is whether these changes are taking root for the long term.





## Traditional Approaches Compound Student Anxiety

The vast majority of respondents indicate their instructors continue to rely primarily on high-stakes exams, contributing in part to the perception among half of students that their courses are designed to weed students out. This is hardly helpful to a cohort already contending with high rates of anxiety and depression.

**78%**

My instructors mostly rely on a few high-stakes assessments like midterms and finals.

**53%**

My courses are designed to weed out students.



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# Assessments for Learning

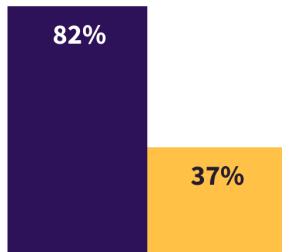
Instructors are increasingly embracing assessments that allow students to demonstrate the full scope of their learning. Students who are provided with these opportunities are more likely to say they feel excited about learning, and engaged and motivated by their coursework. They are also more likely to recognize that they are developing transferable skills to support their career-readiness.

**72%: My instructors assess my performance in ways that allow me to demonstrate the full scope of my learning.**

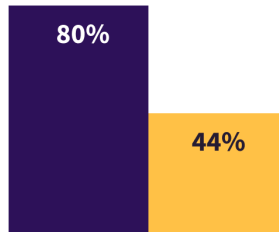


Students who ARE NOT able to demonstrate the scope of their learning

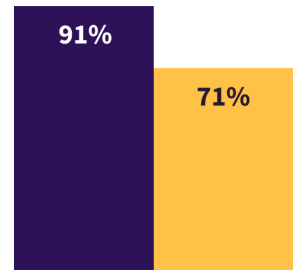
Students who are able to demonstrate the scope of their learning



My instructors make me excited about my learning.



I am engaged and motivated by my coursework.



I am developing transferable skills to support career-readiness after college.

# Helpful Feedback Shapes Confidence

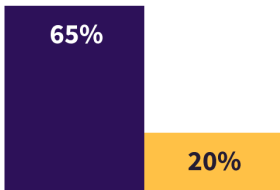
A core part of the value of an effective assessment strategy lies in the ongoing feedback opportunities this creates for students. Learners who receive timely, constructive feedback are significantly more likely to feel connected to their instructors, comfortable asking questions, and confident about their career-readiness.

**73%: My instructors provide me with timely and helpful feedback to ensure I am successful academically.**

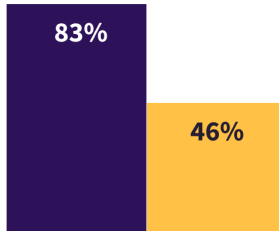


Students whose instructors provide timely and helpful feedback

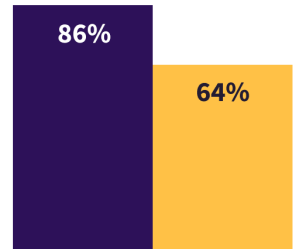
Students whose instructors DO NOT provide timely and helpful feedback



I feel connected to my instructors.



I feel comfortable asking questions if I'm feeling lost or confused.

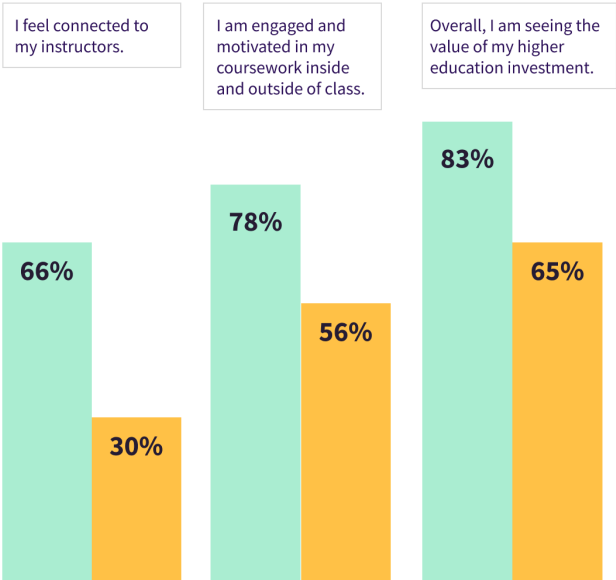
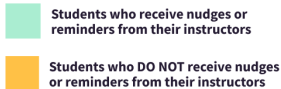


The skills and knowledge I am gaining are preparing me for success outside of college.



# Regular Reminders Build Connection and Engagement

Just like feedback, we found similar relationships for instructors who provide regular nudges or reminders to ensure students stay on top of assignments and other coursework.



# Access, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

Effective course design, including the use of learning platforms and relevant educational materials, is the foundation for accessible, equitable and inclusive learning. But what are the challenges and what factors are most important to students?



# Levelling the Playing Field Continues to be a Challenge

As we round out year 2 of the COVID-19 pandemic, accessible learning continues to be a challenge for many students. Issues such as tool proliferation and difficulty accessing and using ed tech solutions are significant obstacles. Financial barriers also remain a key area of concern with most students saying they don't feel their institution is doing enough to decrease student costs.

**15%**

Difficulty accessing online learning materials

**16%**

Difficulty navigating and using online learning tools

**20%**

Lack of regular and reliable access to Internet

**27%**

Being assigned too many different learning tools

Only

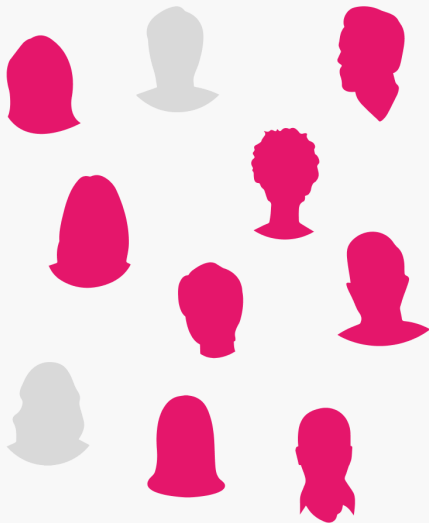
**1 of 3**

Students agree their institution is making an effort to decrease student costs



# Diversity and Representation in Educational Content is Top of Mind

**Eight out of 10** students say it's important or very important that the content they use to support their learning is inclusive of underrepresented groups, and 40 percent say it increases their motivation in the learning process. This is particularly important among students who identify as visible minorities and people who identify as female.



# Representation and Inclusivity Matter

**67%** of students say it is important or very important that they see individuals who represent their identity, background, or community included in their learning materials.

This is particularly important among historically underrepresented groups:

**78%**

of students who identify as visible minorities agree

**73%**

of students who identify as female agree





## Prioritizing Community in the Classroom is Critical

Creating environments of community, trust, and respect is critical to the student learning experience, and the vast majority of students feel that diverse opinions and perspectives are welcome in their classes. Even so, it's important to note that one in five do not feel comfortable sharing their own perspectives.

**83%**

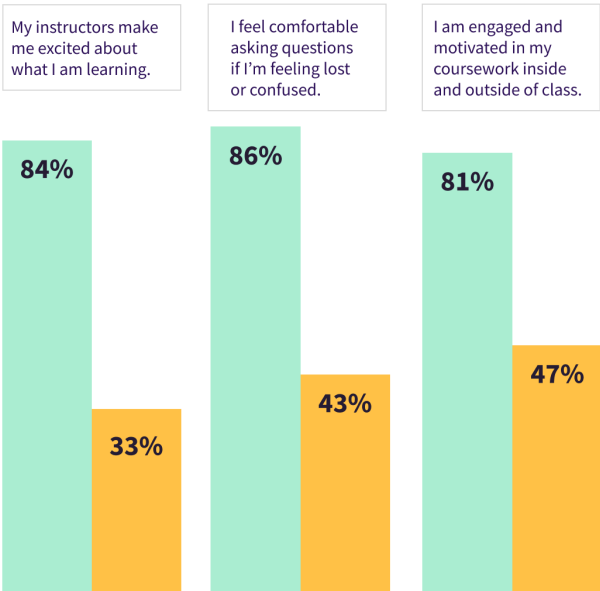
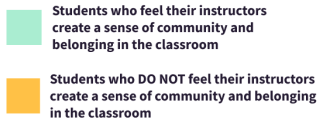
My instructors welcome diverse opinions and perspectives, even if they are different from their own.

**21%**

Nevertheless, one in five students do not feel comfortable sharing their own perspectives, opinions, and experiences.

# Community and Belonging Affect Student Engagement

Students who feel a sense of community and belonging benefit from inclusive learning environments that are fundamental to student engagement. In fact, they are significantly more likely to feel excited about what they are learning, and to say they feel engaged and motivated in their coursework.



**Takeaways**

# Improving Student ROI



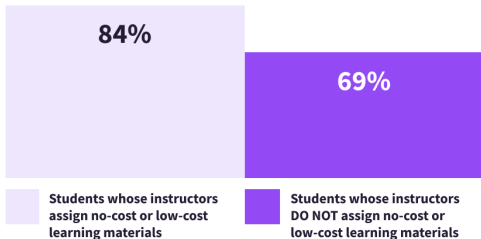


# Takeaways

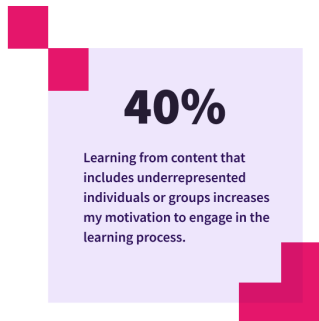
There are a number of opportunities to improve the overall student experience and with it, student perception of the value of their higher education investment.

## 1. Assign low- or no-cost educational resources to improve student ROI.

Students who feel they are getting value out of their higher education investment



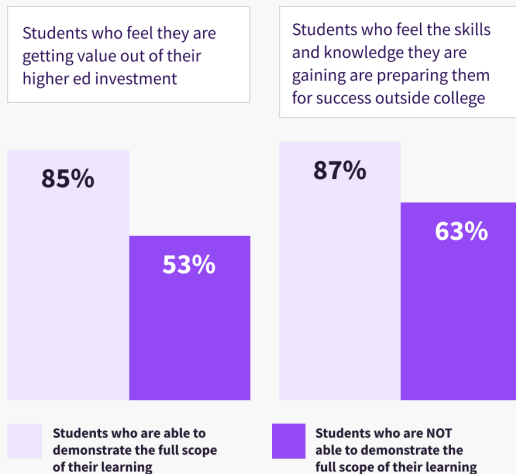
## 2. Ensure diversity and representation in learning materials to drive student interest and engagement.



**3. Focus on assigning fewer, more effective tools to reduce friction and lower costs for students.**



**4. Assess student performance in ways that allow them to demonstrate the full scope of their learning.**



## 5. Provide timely and helpful feedback to build confidence and connection.

Students who feel they are getting value out of their higher education investment

84%

55%

Students who feel the skills and knowledge they are gaining are preparing them for success outside of college

86%

64%

Students who get timely and helpful feedback

Students who DO NOT get timely and helpful feedback

## 6. Create a sense of community and belonging in the classroom.

Students who feel they are getting value out of their higher education investment

85%

55%

Students whose instructors create a sense of community and belonging

Students whose instructors DO NOT create a sense of community and belonging

# About Top Hat

Top Hat is a dynamic courseware platform that empowers educators to create and deliver meaningful, engaging learning experiences by bringing the classroom and educational content to life. Millions of instructors at 750 leading North American colleges and universities use Top Hat to teach and engage with students before, during, and after class, in any teaching scenario — in person, online, or in a blended setting.

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