

The Great Opt-Out:

19 Students,

19 Ways Colleges

Can Reconnect

As the number of students opting out of college continues to grow, understanding the diverse reasons behind their decisions has become more important than ever. This infographic introduces 19 students, each with distinct concerns that colleges and universities can address by adopting targeted recruitment tactics. From affordability and relevance to procedural hurdles and personal influences, this visual guide explores how institutions can rethink their strategies to better engage these nonconsumers and meet them where they are.

Engaging and Understanding Unique Student Needs

Focuses on meeting students where they are and addressing their specific backgrounds and concerns.

Clarifying and Assuring Cost and Value

Emphasizes the importance of clear information about the financial and career benefits of college.

Simplifying and Supporting the Path to Enrollment

Focuses on removing procedural hurdles and offering guidance through the process.

Concerns and Tactics

1



Ethan: “I feel like colleges don’t understand students from my community and our unique challenges.”

Tactic: Conduct an analysis to better understand the specific needs of your community’s nonconsumers, and tailor outreach to resonate with their unique experiences.

Concerns and Tactics

2



Lila: “I don’t think college is affordable for me.”

Tactic: Create a webpage that explains financial concepts to help families better understand the true cost of attendance.

Concerns and Tactics

3



Michael: “I feel overwhelmed by all the college information out there.”

Tactic: Reach students where they are, through creative, nontraditional marketing that cuts through the noise.

4



Zoe: “I feel like colleges are just pulling my info from tests, not really seeing me or my interests.”

Tactic: Conduct a channel portfolio analysis to find lead sources that go beyond test scores, ensuring more personalized and relevant recruitment strategies.

5



Zayn: “I don’t know what kind of jobs I can get after graduation.”

Tactic: Highlight real-world job placement and success stories, utilizing reliable tools to communicate value.

6



Danielle: “I applied and got accepted, but I wasn’t sure if college was the right fit for me. Now, I’m rethinking my decision.”

Tactic: Identify and target local students who might be rethinking their decision not to attend college.

7



Kia: “I don’t feel like colleges really care about people like me.”

Tactic: Build a personalized, empathetic approach that resonates with students from diverse backgrounds.

8



Diego: “I’m unsure about the value of a college degree.”

Tactic: Create messaging that appeals to their aspirations and emotional connection to education.

9



Amara: “I started my college search late, and by the time I figured everything out, most of the deadlines had passed.”

Tactic: Stay in touch with prospective students by keeping them engaged even after typical deadlines pass.

10



Sophie: “I don’t imagine myself fitting in at a traditional college.”

Tactic: Use messaging that reinforces how your campus can be a place where nontraditional students thrive.

11



Harper: “I don’t think college is worth the debt.”

Tactic: Present clear financial aid options up front to show the true cost of attendance.

12



Olivia: “My guidance counselor was great, but they were always so busy, and I felt like I didn’t get enough help figuring out my next steps.”

Tactic: Partner with high school counselors during the summer to support recruitment efforts, leveraging their insider knowledge to identify and guide students who are on the fence about enrolling.

13



Elijah: “No one in my family has gone to college.”

Tactic: Empower their support system by engaging parents early in the process.

14



Xavier: “The financial aid process is too confusing.”

Tactic: Offer students an estimate of their total aid package or the range in which it is likely to fall.

15



Sam: “I got accepted, but after that, it felt like I was on my own to figure everything out.”

Tactic: Reallocate counselor time to provide personalized coaching and support for admitted students, helping them navigate barriers to enrollment.

16



Mateo: “I’m not even sure if I’d get accepted, and applying to colleges feels way too stressful.”

Tactic: Reassure students via Direct Admission, which notifies them of their eligibility, simplifies the process, and provides aid info up front.

17



Ezra: “I’m already working, and I don’t think college will fit into my life.”

Tactic: Offer condensed schedules or evening classes to accommodate working students.

18



Maya: “The college application process feels like a lot of hoops to jump through, and it’s overwhelming.”

Tactic: Reduce perceived barriers by using an abbreviated “intake form,” which takes only a few minutes to complete, in lieu of a full application.

19



Aria: “I’m not ready to start college right away. I don’t want to miss out on the chance to see the world.”

Tactic: Provide structured gap-year programs that allow students to ease into college life on their terms.



Want to dive deeper into these insights?

Download our latest insight paper, “[The Great Opt-Out: Why More Students Are Forgoing College and What Enrollment Leaders Can Do About It](#)”, for a comprehensive analysis and actionable strategies.