

# Oregon GEAR UP Evaluation Brief

## *What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' postsecondary plans?*

### INTRODUCTION

The goal of the Oregon GEAR UP program is to ensure that Oregon's low-income middle school and high school students are prepared for, pursue, and succeed in postsecondary education, whether that be a college degree, certificate, apprenticeship or other career training. To accomplish this, Oregon GEAR UP works with select middle schools and high schools over seven years to create a college-going culture by providing funding and technical assistance, professional development for educators, and enrichment opportunities for students. In 2019–20, the sixth year of the current federal grant, Oregon GEAR UP was implemented in 34 middle and high schools in 21 school districts and served over 8,300 students in grade 7 through grade 13 (the first year of postsecondary education immediately following high school graduation).

In May and June of 2020, Metis Associates administered a senior exit survey in 17 of the 22 participating GEAR UP high schools. A total of 529 students completed the survey (37% response rate). The survey asked students to identify their postsecondary plans (before and after the COVID-19 pandemic started), to reflect on their high school experiences, and to provide contact information so GEAR UP and the schools can continue to support them after transitioning out of high school.

This brief provides preliminary results from the senior exit survey on the impact of COVID-19 on students' postsecondary plans. In late fall, Metis will obtain and analyze college enrollment data from the National Student Clearinghouse. Students' postsecondary plans—as noted in the senior exit survey—will be compared to verified college enrollment data.

### CURRENT RESEARCH

Recent research suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted high school graduates' college plans. For example, a national study conducted by the Arts & Science Group (2020) concluded that about 27% of prospective students were concerned about having to change their first choice institution because it was no longer affordable for them. Similarly, according to an article published in Forbes, "New domestic applications are likely to go down as many students and their parents may no longer be in the position to afford tuition fees because of being laid off, furloughed, unable to pay off loans, needing to dip into their savings, etc."

Social distancing has proved to be vital in preventing the transmission of COVID-19. Therefore, many colleges were indecisive about whether to offer in-person instruction. This was a huge concern for many students. In fact, about 60% of students in the national Arts & Science Group study expressed no interest in obtaining their degree online. Furthermore, according to the NY Times, many students said they did not want to make a decision about the fall until they knew for sure whether campuses would reopen. Others planned to change the type of institution they would attend. For example, one student explained it didn't make sense for him to spend \$20,000 dollars on a virtual learning experience for a 4-year university, when community college was a much more affordable option. Results from the national study showed that 17% of students changed their college plans due to COVID-19 and, of those, 35% decided to take a gap year, some waiting to see if classes would resume in person after the pandemic subsided, and others so they could work to compensate for the losses in income brought by the pandemic.

## RESULTS

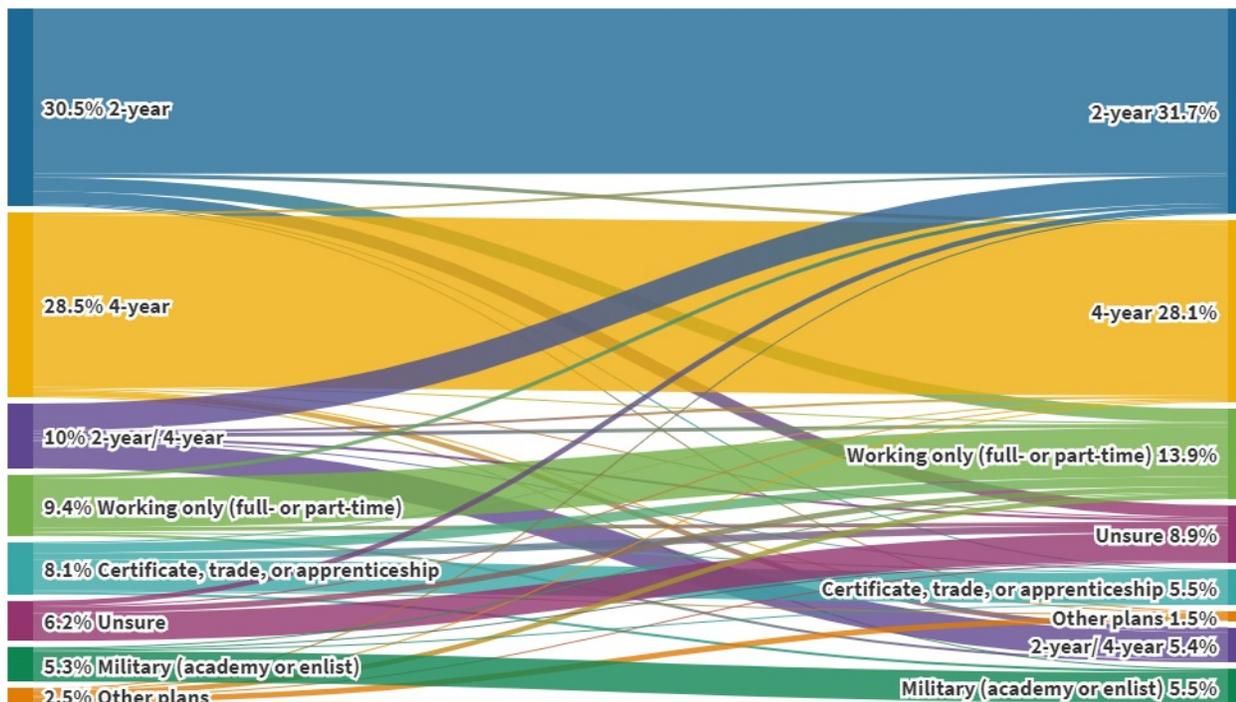
Results from the Oregon GEAR UP senior exit survey show how COVID-19 has impacted students' postsecondary plans. Specifically, 22% of seniors reported changing their plans as a result of the pandemic.

- Before COVID-19, the large majority of students were planning to attend a 2-year college (30.5%), followed by 4-year college or university (28.5%), and a 2-year/4-year institution<sup>1</sup> (10.0%). Smaller proportions were planning to work part-time or full-time only (9.4%)<sup>2</sup>, go into a certificate or trade program or apprenticeship (8.1%), were unsure (6.2%), join the military (5.3%), or had other plans (2.5%).
- The overall proportion of students planning to attend just a 2-year or just a 4-year institution, and those planning to enlist in the military, remained fairly consistent before and after COVID-19.
- In contrast, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were larger overall increases in the proportion of students who were planning to work only (from 9.4% before COVID to 13.9% after COVID) and those who were unsure what their plans were (from 6.2% before COVID to 8.9% after COVID).
- There were also overall decreases in the proportion of students who were planning for a 2-year/4-year institution (from 10% before COVID to 5.4% after COVID), those planning to enroll in a certificate or trade program or apprenticeship (from 8.1% before COVID to 5.5% after COVID), and those who had other plans (from 2.5% before COVID to 1.5% after COVID).

### CHANGES IN STUDENTS' POSTSECONDARY PLANS (BEFORE AND AFTER COVID-19)

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, what WERE your plans for the fall?

What are your CURRENT plans for the fall?



<sup>1</sup> These students were either planning to attend a 2-year college and transfer to a 4-year institution afterwards, were undecided between a 2-year or a 4-year institution, or were in a dual enrollment program.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that prior to COVID, 24% of respondents selected “Work (part-time or full-time).” However, if they also selected a 2-year and/or 4-year college, or a certificate or trade program, they were placed in those categories instead. After COVID, 26% were planning to work.

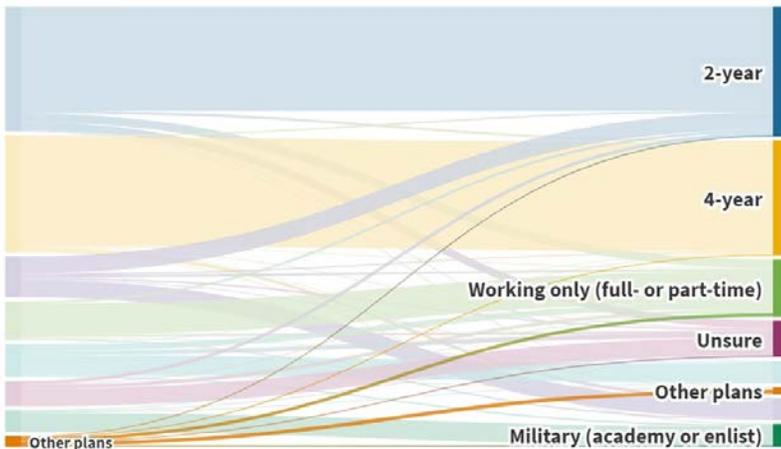
**Groups that were MOST impacted**

- ✓ Students who had other plans (62% of them changed their plans)
- ✓ Students planning to attend a 2-year/4-year institution (58% changed their plans)
- ✓ Students planning to enroll in a certificate or trade program or apprenticeship (42% changed their plans)
- ✓ Students who were unsure (30% changed their plans)

**Groups that were LEAST impacted**

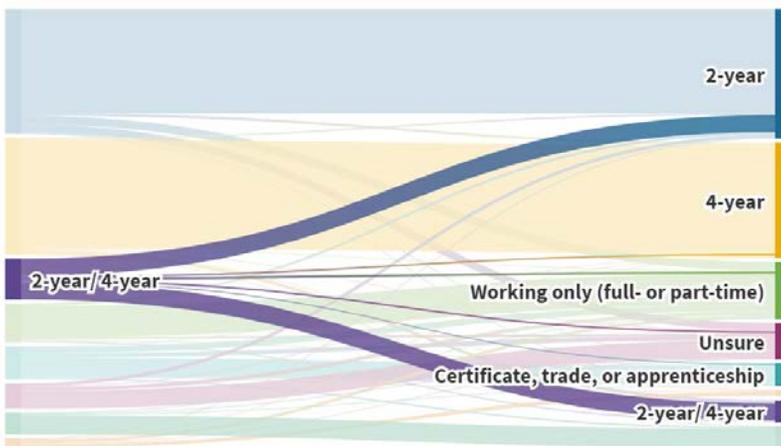
- ✓ Students planning to work only (18% changed their plans)
- ✓ Students planning to attend 2-year college (16% changed their plans)
- ✓ Students planning to enlist in the military (11% changed their plans)
- ✓ Students planning to attend a 4-year IHE (7% changed their plans)

A large proportion (62%) of **students who said they had “other plans”** (which included missionary work, travel or taking a gap year) changed their plans, including 31% who decided to work only instead. Smaller proportions became unsure what they would do (8%) or decided to enroll in a 2-year college (8%), 4-year college (8%) or military (8%).



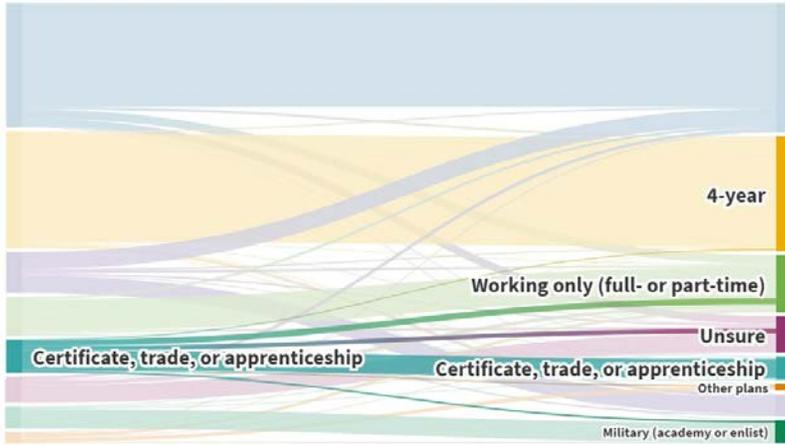
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*I'm staying home to go to school.*  
  
*I wanted to experience a normal mission and be able to serve when everything normalizes.*

Over half (58%) of **students who were planning on attending a 2-year/4-year institution** changed their plans, including 42% who decided to attend a 2-year institution only.

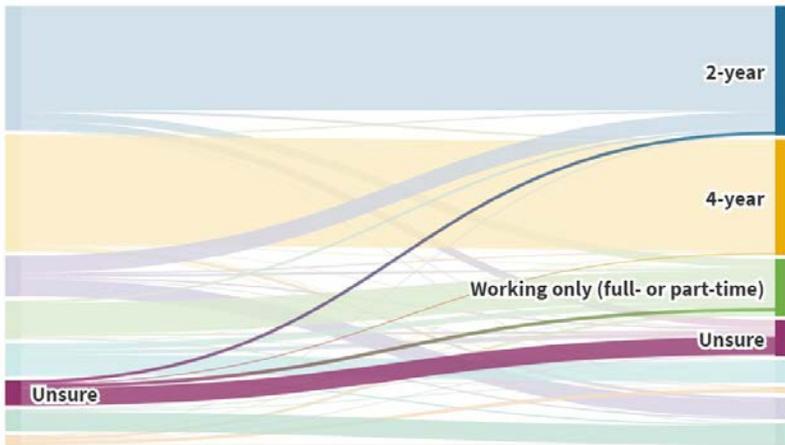


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*Because I wanted to attend school in person instead of online.*  
  
*I don't want to move into a bigger city, where COVID-19 cases are higher. I also don't want to have to stay in dorms and be exposed to many people.*  
  
*Need to work more than usual to go to college.*  
  
*I do not have enough money for a 4-year university for at least a year unless I get all the scholarships I applied for.*

Over a third (42%) of **students who were planning to enroll in a certificate or trade program or start an apprenticeship** changed their plans, including 19% who decided to work instead, and 14% who became unsure of what to do.



Less than a third (30%) of **students who were unsure what to do** changed their plans, including 15% who decided to work, and 12% who decided to enroll in a 2-year college.



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*I'm going to be moving in with my girlfriend and don't know what kind of trade school there will be there.*

*Yes, because now it will be hard to apply to any schools.*

*Plans did not change, however the timing of things did.*

*I plan to work to earn money and hopefully when COVID calms down a little then I can attend a trade school next fall.*

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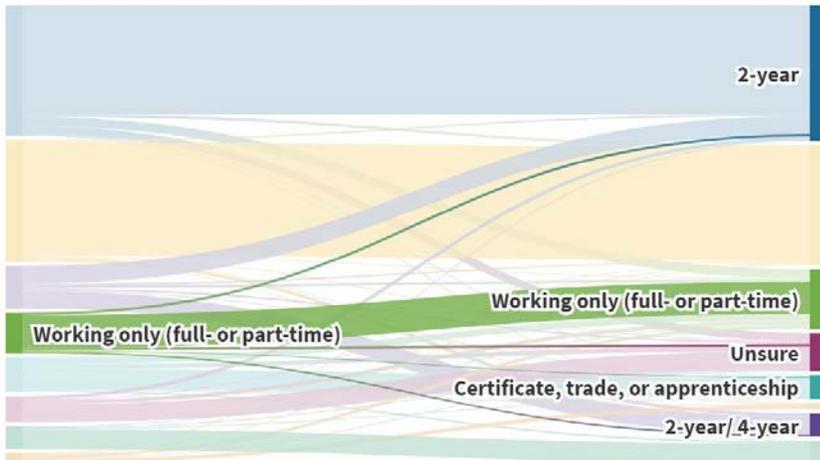
*Had to move to help my family.*

*I didn't want to travel because of the pandemic and before that my mom had a tumor so I didn't have a lot of time to worry about me and my family.*

*Was going to understudy a tattoo artist but now I need to work a minimum wage job to support my mom.*

*Life can change in a second so I plan to take advantage of the time I have, continue my education, and in the future enjoy a job that I like.*

Interestingly, almost one in five students (18%) **who were planning to work full-time or part-time in the fall** changed their plans, including 6% who decided to enroll in a 2-year institution, and another 6% who were unsure what they would do.

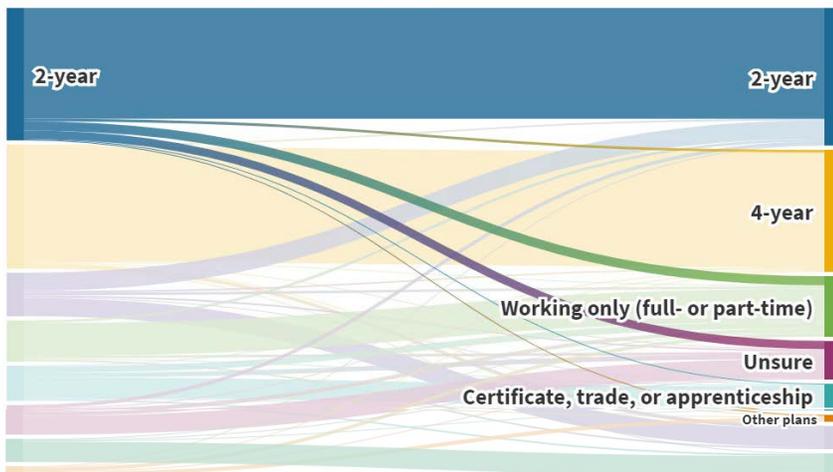


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*I plan to work for the school but if the COVID 19 is not over by then, then I'm not sure what is next.*

*I changed my plans for financial reasons and to stay closer at home.*

Of the **students who were planning to enroll in a 2-year institution** before COVID-19, only a small proportion (16%) changed their plans, including 7% who decided to work instead, and 6% who became unsure of what to do.



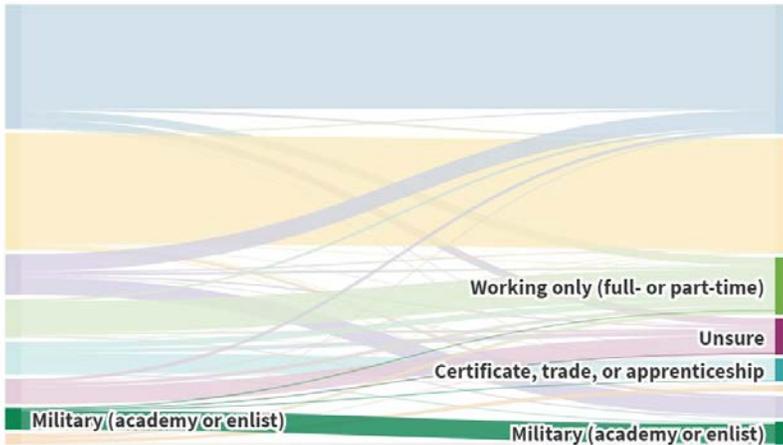
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*I was supposed to be working during the pandemic to save money for college but, since I haven't been working, I need to work when the pandemic is over so I can have money.*

*I don't know what the situation for LBCC is going to be next semester. I do not want to do college online.*

*I have to be careful of what I am exposed to because a member of my family is in the extremely vulnerable category for Covid-19, so I am not sure what I am going to do until there is a vaccine for the virus for her safety.*

A very small proportion (11%) of **students who were planning to enlist in the military** changed their plans, including 3.5% who decided to enroll in a certificate or trade program, 3.5% who decided to work instead, and 3.5% who were unsure what to do.

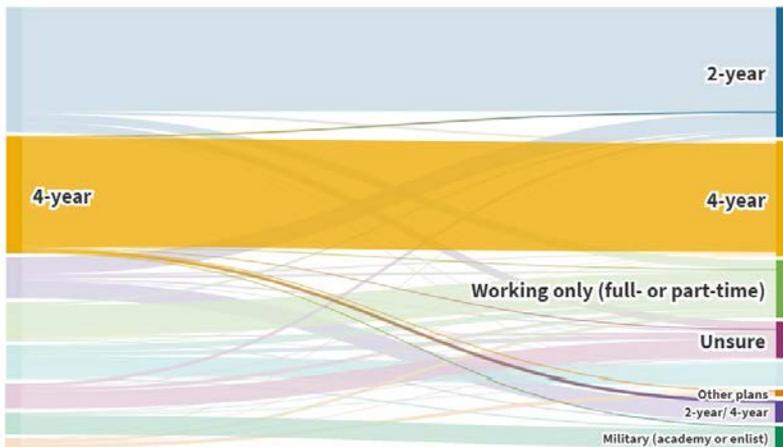


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*My plans have not changed.*

*Not contacting people.*

The most consistent group was composed of **students who were planning on attending a 4-year college**. A very small proportion (7%) of these students changed their plans, including 3% who decided to enroll in a 2-year institution (and then transfer to a 4-year) and 1% who decided to enroll in a 2-year college instead.



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*If I am going to be taking online classes all year due to the coronavirus I would rather go to community college because its more affordable.*

*They will only change if COVID continues towards the fall because I don't think I can do college online. So if it's still closed off then I might stay home and work.*

*I just decided to stay home. I'm not ready to just head off somewhere.*

*Honestly by the time college starts up in the fall I feel like the classes will all be online. I expected to be back at school by now to finish planning my future. But I've been home for 7 weeks and haven't been able to do anything.*

## CITATIONS

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