

WALDEN  
UNIVERSITY

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# Walden Financial Aid Experience

Survey Insights  
Q2 2024



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# Research Goal

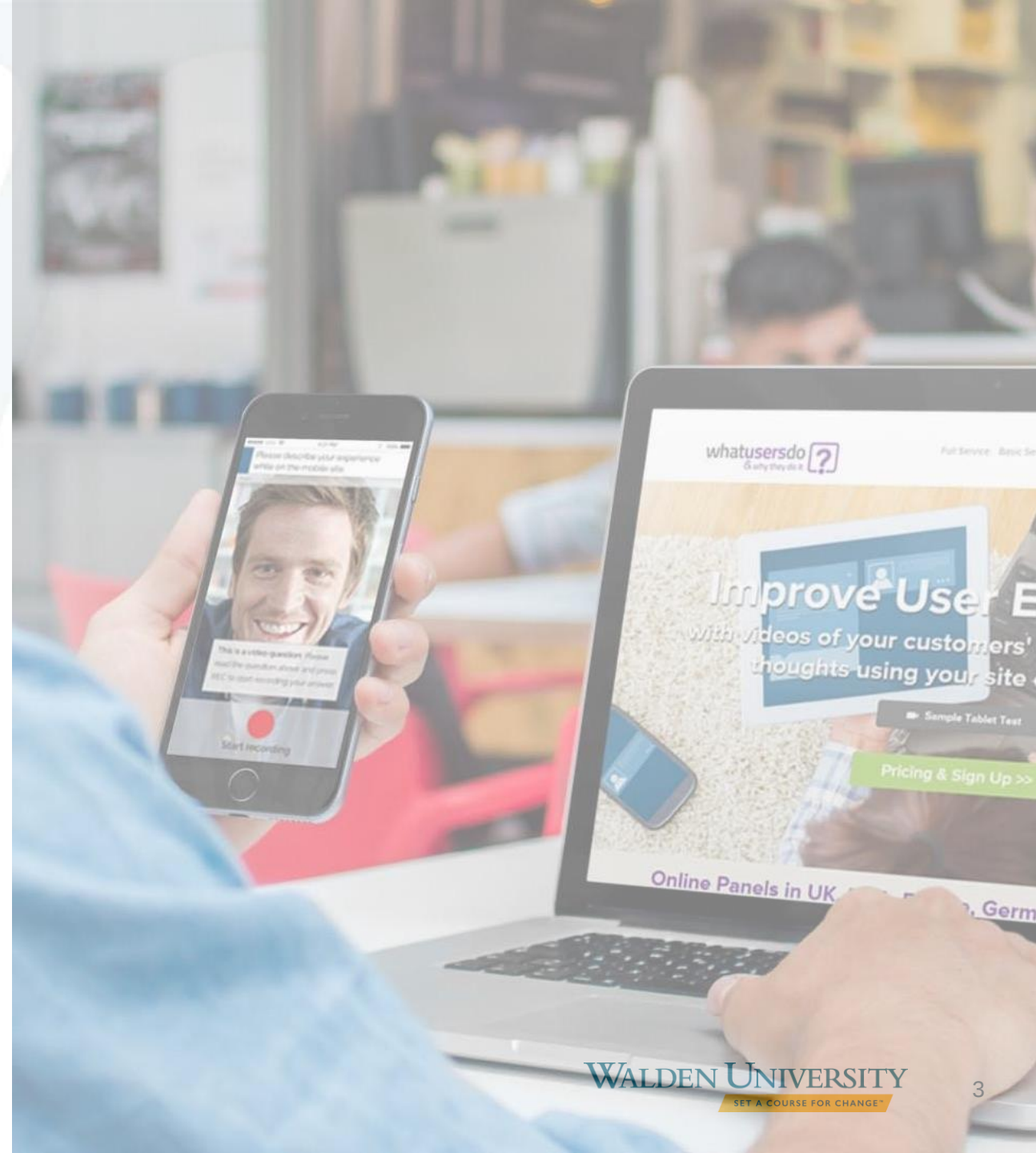
Understand the student experience at each stage of the financial aid application process, with the goal of creating a detailed journey map. This map will inform the development of an intuitive and user-friendly financial aid tracker within the student portal.

## ➤ Hypothesis Summary

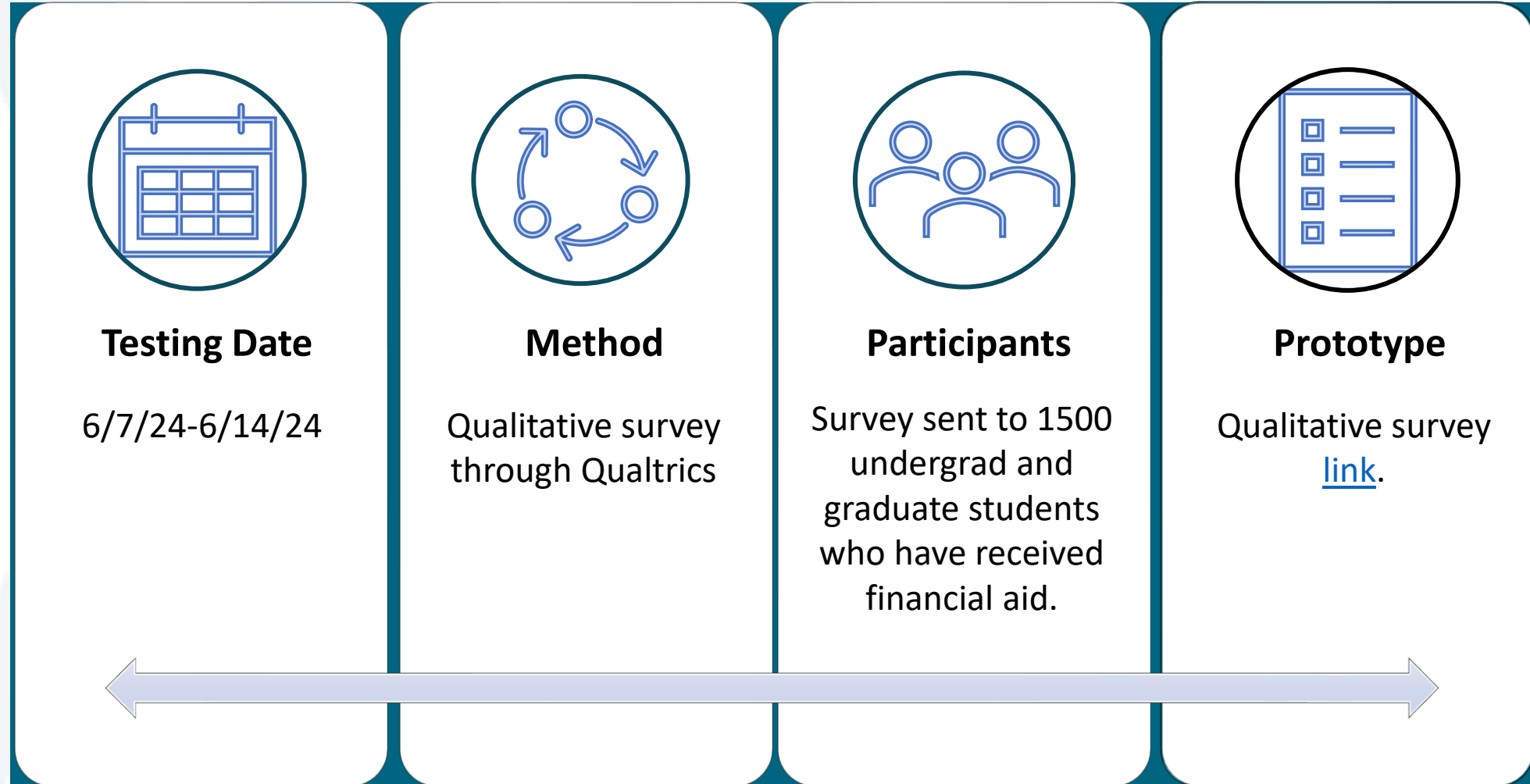
Students who are presented with an unclear financial aid experience will experience a higher frequency of delays and require greater support compared to students who receive a personalized experience with readily accessible information and up-to-date status updates.

## ➤ Objective

Collect financial experience feedback from students regarding the holistic process, and how those emotions, perspectives, pain points, and actions can be incorporated into a user journey map that informs further design optimizations.



# Research Landscape

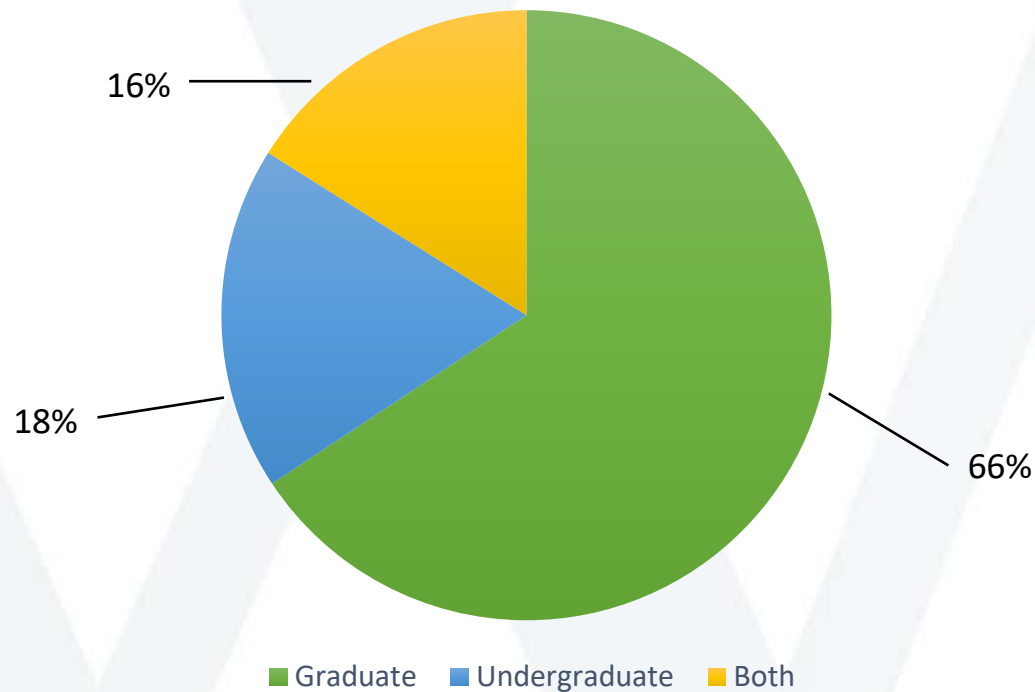


# Findings & Insights

## Key Findings Summary

Received responses from nearly 10% of participants.

**N=137**



Most students expressed positive feedback through each step of the process:

**67%**

were **more confident** to make an informed decision when presented with Walden financial aid information

**71%**

felt it was **easy to understand** what tasks and documents were needed to move forward

**79%**

**felt confident** about their offer information and were able to make a decision

**69%**

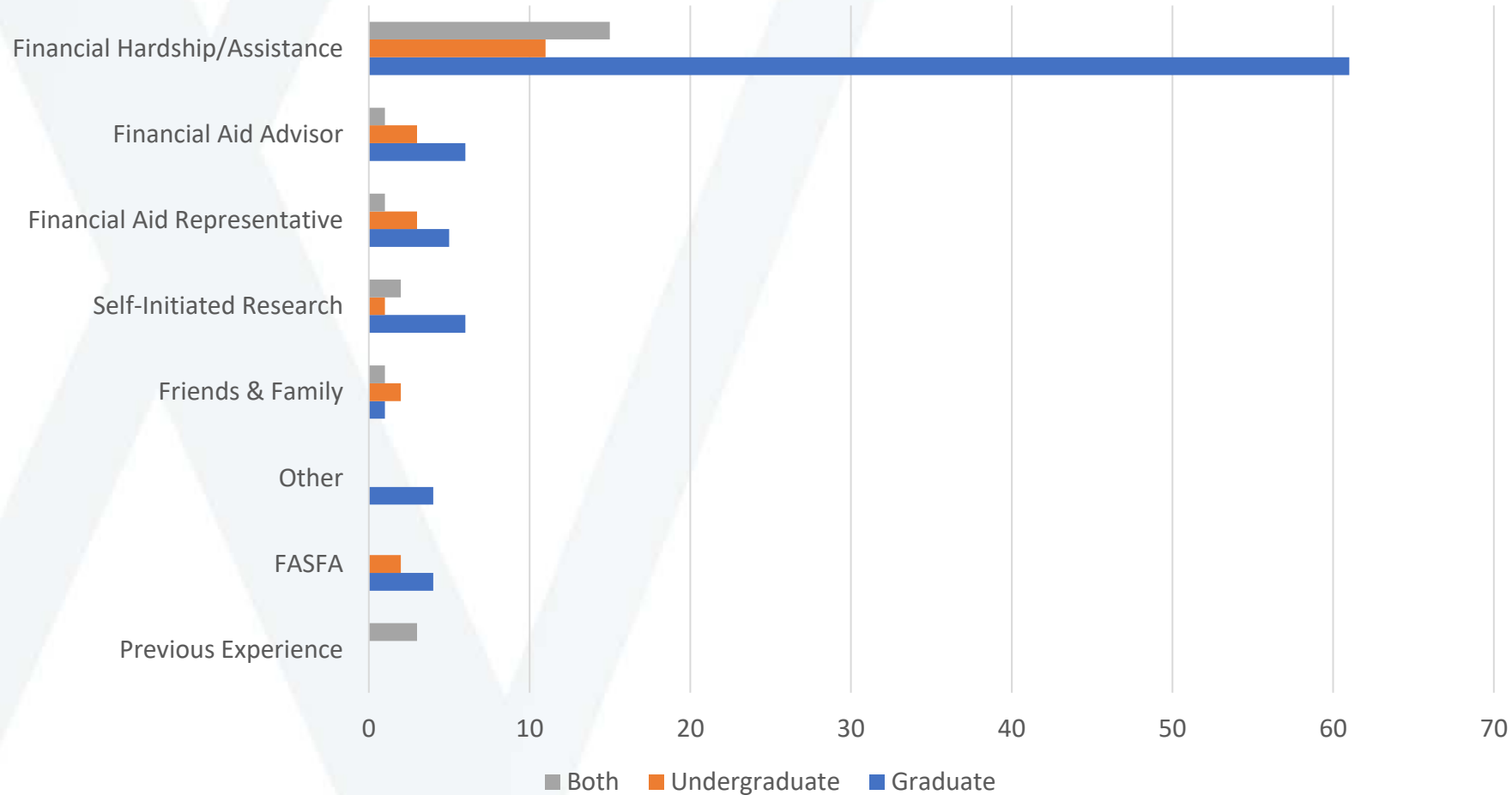
felt the communication from Walden throughout the process was **helpful overall.**

**Top areas of improvement across the experience:**

simplified steps and information-- clarity around timing -- better communication across each step -- a better website design.

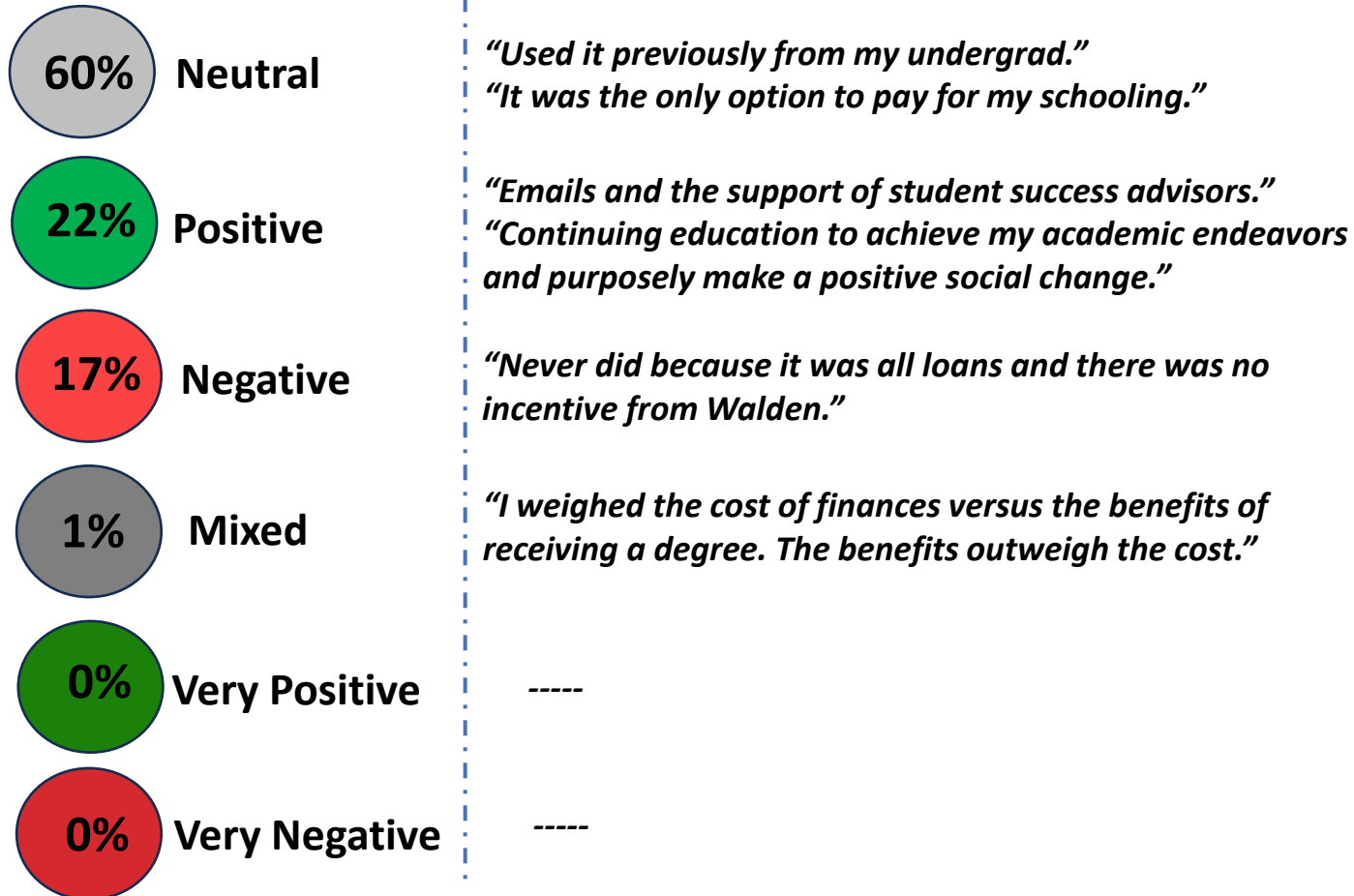
## Applying for Financial Aid

**Q. What helped inform your decision to apply for financial aid?**



Most students indicated that financial hardships or already knowing they would need financial assistance was their primary reason for applying.

## Sentiments



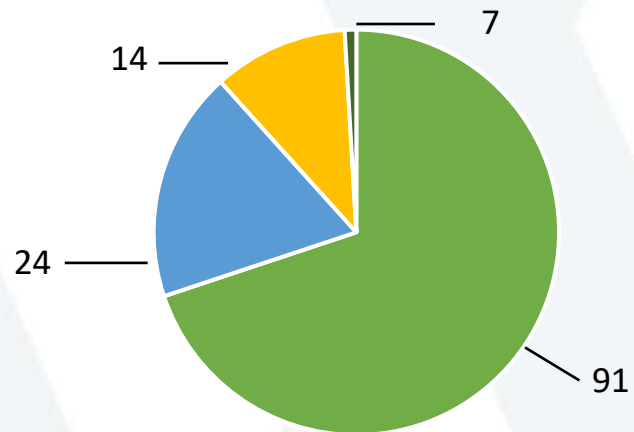
## Keywords

- Financial Hardship/Assistance
- Financial Aid Advisor
- Financial Aid Representative
- Self Initiative Research
- FASFA
- Friends & Family
- Previous Used
- Other

## Enrollment

Q. When presented with financial aid information, how did that make you feel?

67% felt more confident

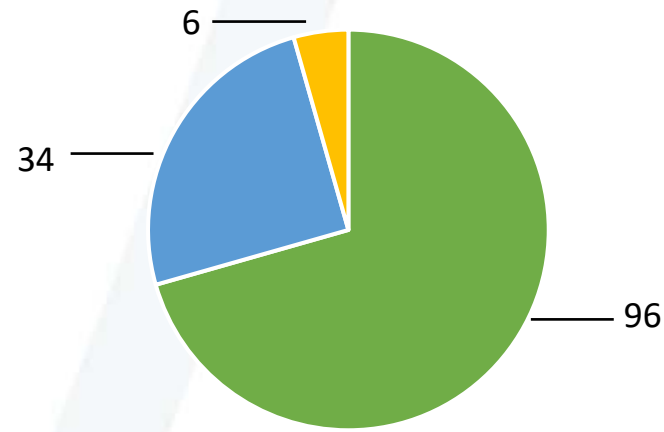


- More confident
- Helpful, but needed additional support
- Confused
- Other

Other: confused, frustrated, lack of information

Q. Was it easy to understand what tasks and documents were needed to move forward?

71% felt it was easy

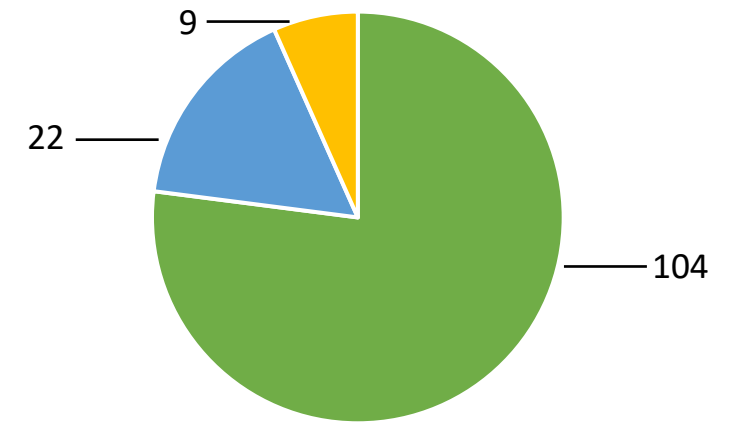


- Yes
- No
- Not Applicable

No: portal updates, overall website experience, unclear process

Q. Was it easy to understand how to submit the documentation needed?

77% felt it was easy



- Yes
- No
- Not Applicable

No: portal experience, navigation, communication

While most students felt positive toward the enrollment process and information provided, several areas of improvement were expressed.

## Sentiments

- **Financial Aid information presentation**
  - *"I felt **confident** with my choice, as I used it for my undergrad."*
  - *"I was given **conflicting** information over three calls/inquiries regarding the SAP appeal process."*
- **Tasks and documents needed to move forward**
  - *"**Yes, for the most part** but getting the exact information on the student portal is **not always easy to understand**."*
  - *"The portal does prompt with next steps once the financial aid has been received and links are then provided or documents depending on the step which made it **easy** for me to make sure my documents were submitted."*
  - *"The messages/tasks to be completed were not clearly noted, and there were no dates provided or logical sequencing of tasks, so it was **confusing** to know what needed to be completed or reviewed."*
- **myFinAid Document Portal document submission**
  - *"For the most part it was **easy**, but it still needs improvement. Too many steps to get answers."*
  - *"The To Do list is **easily accessible** with all of the requirement links to what's needed."*
  - *"The Walden University Financial Aid portal needs to be entirely done and made **more simplistic**."*

## Keywords

- **Financial Aid information presentation**

confident, confused, conflicted, frustrated, lack of information
- **Tasks and documents needed to move forward**

helpful, easy, detailed, user-friendly, clear, simple, issues, doesn't make sense, confusing, unclear, overload, terrible, tedious, poor communication
- **myFinAid Document Portal document submission**

Easy, comfortable, clear, accessible, self-explanatory, user-friendly, unclear, poor, traumatic, poor communication, help, more simplistic

## Offer Outcomes

Q. When you received your financial aid offer, how easy or difficult was it to find your offer details (ex. award amount, offer acceptance)?

82% Easy

*"No issues. The portal is user-friendly, and it was simple to find the required information or communication/steps to submit additional information."*

*"Through the desktop it was **easy to access**, through the mobile phone the page does not show everything in view."*

13% Difficult

*"Kind of difficult. There was too many steps to get to the award. Then to have to scroll to the left to get to the accept. I had to reach out to someone for help."*

*"Difficult there are so many different places you use during the course of applying and receiving financial Aid."*

5% Confusing

*"Understanding how to accept the offer was a **little confusing**."*

*"It was **moderately easy**. Only because I've learned where to look through trial and error in the past. A **clearer format** would make it much easier to find."*

Q. Where did you look to find your financial aid offer?

| Keywords                                                                                      | Count | %   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-----|
| <b>Portal</b><br>(portal; myfinancialaid portal; walden student portal; financial aid portal) | 58    | 48% |
| <b>Email</b><br>(email; email communications; school email)                                   | 18    | 15% |
| <b>Offers</b><br>(offers tab; offers section; financial aid offers)                           | 18    | 15% |
| <b>Finances</b><br>(finances; finance tab; student finances)                                  | 12    | 9%  |
| <b>MyFinAid</b><br>(myfinaid; myfinaid page; myfinaid tab)                                    | 10    | 8%  |
| <b>Documents</b><br>(documents; documents section)                                            | 6     | 5%  |

## Offer Outcomes

**Q. From your experience, when presented with your financial aid offer, how did you feel about the way this information was presented?**

Current Award Year: 2022/2023

YOU ARE CURRENTLY LOGGED IN AS: HENRY ZZDEMOSTUDENT

HELP LOG OUT

Welcome

Documents & Messages

**Your Financial Aid Offers**

Financial Aid Offer By Term

Disbursements

Forms

Loan History

FAQ

To accept all aid listed below, click the "Accept All" button and then click "SUBMIT".

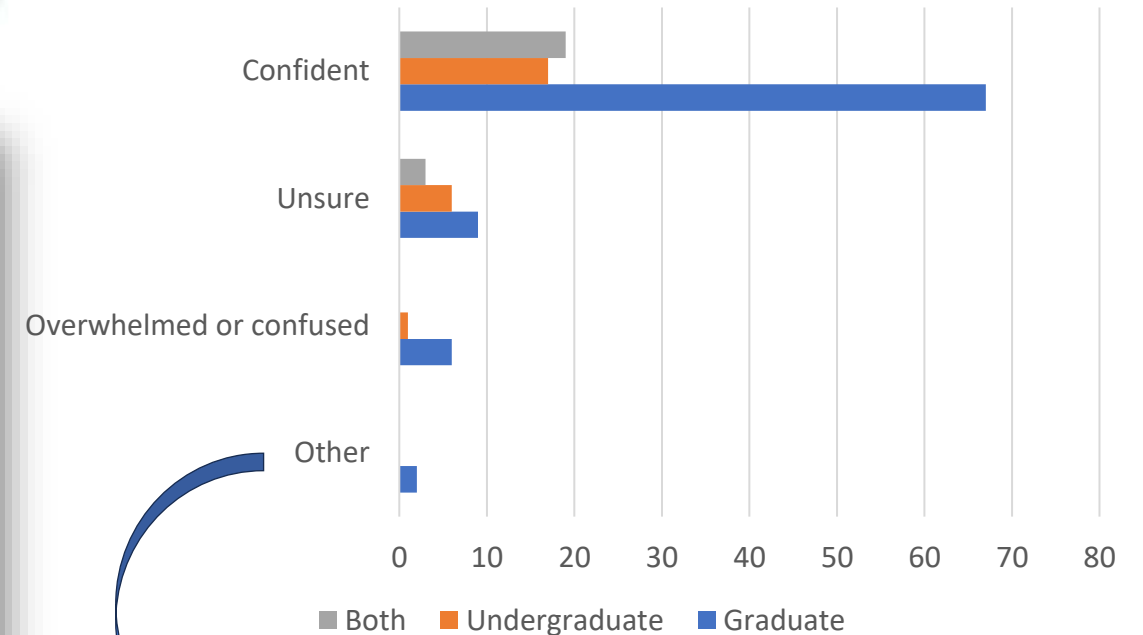
After you click the "SUBMIT" button below, please click the "Documents" page at the top to continue the financial aid process.

**Your Awards**

| AWARD               | 2022 WI Q  | 2023 SP Q  | 2023 SU Q  | TOTAL       | STATUS  |
|---------------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|---------|
| Outside Scholarship | \$500.00   | \$500.00   | \$500.00   | 1500        | Pending |
| Alternative Loan    | \$3,334.00 | \$3,333.00 | \$3,333.00 | 10000       | Pending |
| <b>Total</b>        |            |            |            |             |         |
| DECLINE ALL         | \$3,834.00 | \$3,833.00 | \$3,833.00 | \$11,500.00 |         |
| ACCEPT ALL          |            |            |            |             |         |

SUBMIT

The College Board. PowerFAIDS® Net Partner Version 28.3.0.39

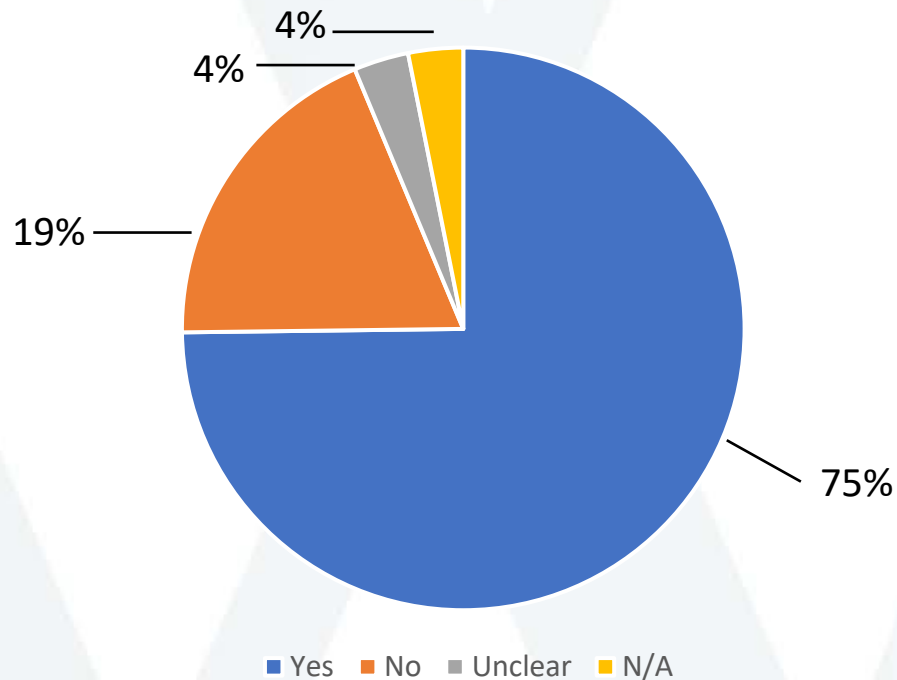


**Graduate:** "It was decent; it just takes time to go over all the information based on how it is broken up and provided on the page."

**Graduate:** "The font is too small of the amount of space on the screen."

## Offer Outcomes

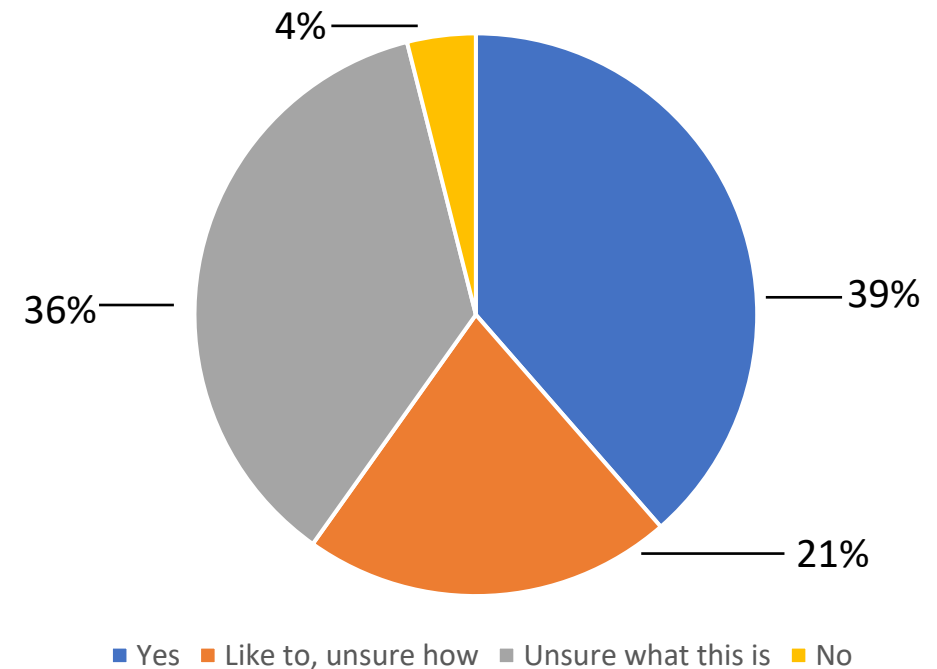
Q. Did Walden provide you with clear communications about the Master Promissory Note and Entrance Counseling?



**No:** "I did not receive emails related to the MPN or Entrance Counseling. I had to check the Financial Aid portal, which still did not provide a clear notification about what was outstanding or required to complete."

**Unclear:** "I just didn't know the details about what it was."

Q. Have you ever submitted a book advance request?



**No:** "I was not offered a book advance request."

**No:** "I'm currently in my dissertation and don't need any books."

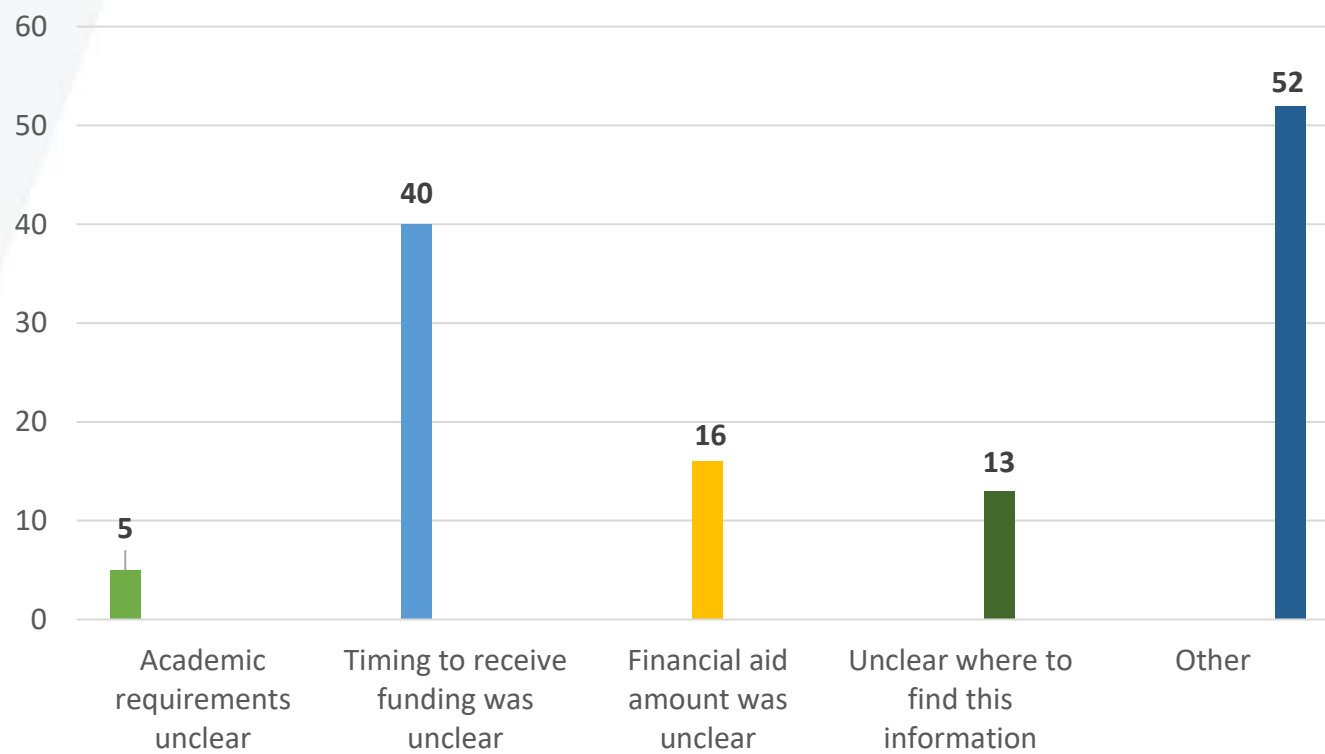
**No:** "Purchased my books from Amazon."

## Disbursement

Q. When it comes to the status of your financial aid disbursement, where do you typically go to check this information?

| Keywords                                                                                       | Count | %   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-----|
| <b>Portal</b><br>(myfinaid portal; main portal; walden portal, payment portal, student portal) | 39    | 32% |
| <b>Email</b><br>(email; email notifications; school email)                                     | 20    | 16% |
| <b>Finance</b><br>(financial aid page; finaid; finance tabs; finaid account)                   | 16    | 13% |
| <b>Disbursement</b><br>(disbursement tab; disbursement menu; financial aid disbursement)       | 12    | 10% |
| <b>MyFinAid</b><br>(myfinaid; myfinaid page; myfinaid portal)                                  | 10    | 8%  |

Q. During the disbursement process, what challenges, if any, did you run into?



While 50% of students indicated they did not run into any challenges during the distribution process, almost 40% expressed being unclear around the timing of when they would receive funding.

## Sentiments

### ➤ Timing

- *"I **didn't know the time frame** for the refund disbursement process. So, I call the financial aid office and they clarified the information for me."*
- *"I felt a **little anxious** waiting for the amount, as I was not sure if it would come in time to complete some necessary purchases."*
- *"There were no challenges. I understand that these things take time."*

### ➤ Communication

- *"There seemed to be a **lack of communication/minimal notifications** from Walden regarding financial aid."*
- *"I felt **good** because I was able to get help from the financial aid department."*
- *"I have called the financial aid office in the past and asked what date can I expect the funding and they seem to be the question."*

### ➤ Website

- *"Usually, **could never see or find** my disbursement amount. Had to just wait until I received it to know the amount. Makes it hard to plan things for the future."*
- *"When I accepted my offers I didn't realize it was coming from two different sources. The layout of the page is confusing."*
- *"There were no challenges, the process was quite clear."*

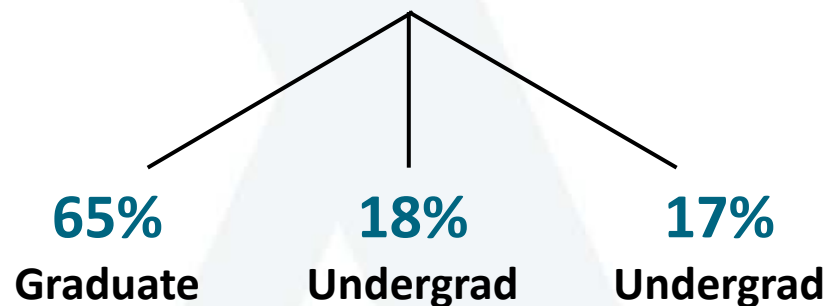
### ➤ SAP

- *"The SAP Appeal process is demeaning to students and is worded to blame/gaslight the student for "FAILURES" to make academic progress...SAP Policies and Procedures can be the source of adding additional trauma for already-traumatized students seeking assistance to complete their nearly-finished degree."*

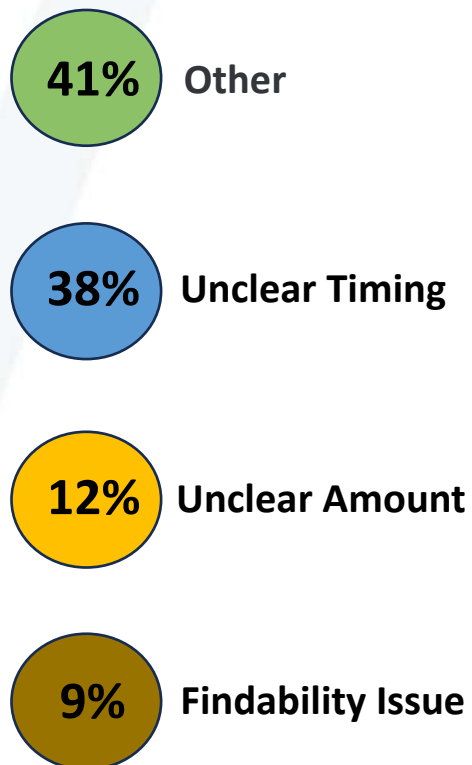
## Refunds

95%

Respondents that selected that they have received a financial aid refund



Q. During the refund process, what challenges, if any, did you run into? Select all that apply.



*"There were no challenges, the refund process was clear."*

*"Everything was clear, I did not run into any problems.."*

*"I felt anxious not knowing when I would get my refund."*

*"Lack of communication and notifications from Walden made the process unclear and confusing."*

*"I never knew the exact amount until it was in my bank account."*

*"All I had to do was call and the financial aid staff were very helpful."*

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## Communications

### Overall Communication Sentiments\*

**69%** Communication was helpful overall

**16%** Helpful in some areas, but not others.

- “My only issue is in the financial aid portal; items need to be dated and marked as completed or incomplete in the message and document section.”
- “The relationship between financial aid and the counselors. There are some loose ends pertaining to classes and things needed to receive aid.”
- “I received conflicting communications about whether I needed to re-apply for SAP Appeal / Funding after being awarded an extension.”

**7%** Did not receive enough communication

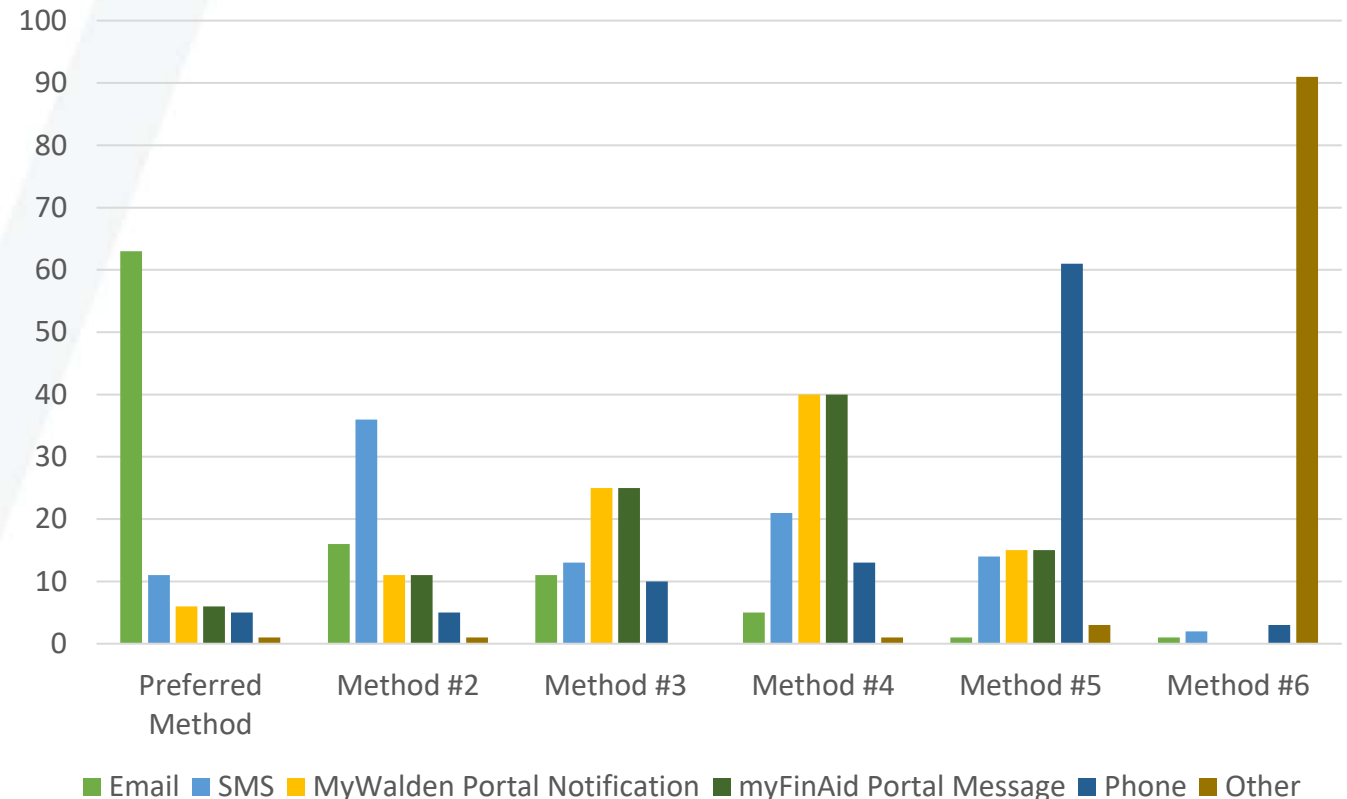
**6%** Communication was not helpful

- “Every time I get an email, I have to go to the website to see the information and then after a time of not finding it, I have to call during business hours to get the answer. Total waste of time.”
- “Everyone I spoke with told me something different than the person before.”

**2%** Overwhelmed by amount of communication

\*Approx. 88% of participants responded (121 of 137)

### Communication Preferences



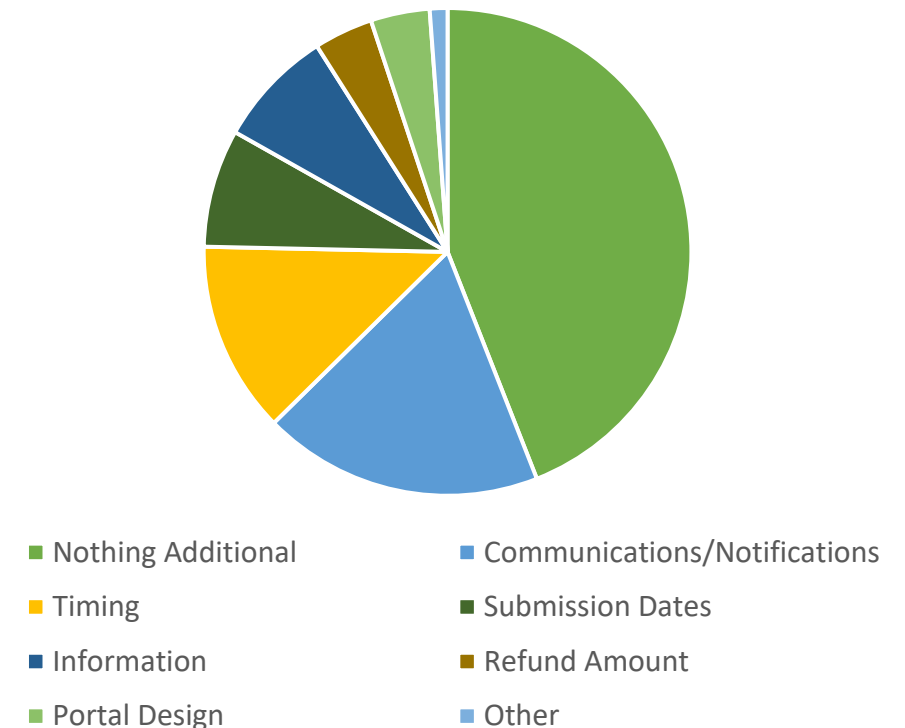
## Improvements & Experience

Q. What improvements and features would students like to see within the portal as it related to Financial Aid?\*

- Make **website content and layout** clearer and easier to understand throughout the process; content to be broken down and out more simply (less texts, pages, links).
  - Simplify navigation
- **Communication** across each step of the process needs to be more connected.
- More detailed **communications and information** around **timing** of submission dates, disbursements, and refunds.
- More **notifications and reminders** if required documents are not completed.

*\*Approx. 53% of participants responded (73 of 137)*

Q. Overall, what would make your Financial Aid Experience better?\*

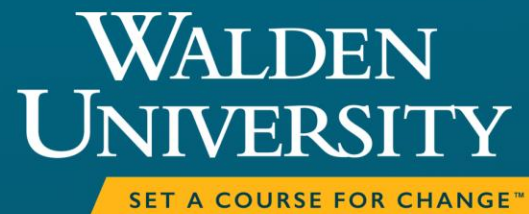


*\*Approx. 50% of participants responded (69 of 137)*

# Action Plan

## Next Steps

- **Develop a Financial Aid Journey Map**
  - Compile data from the research and business provided insights to clearly show stages, steps, student emotions, and pain points.
- **Identify and Prioritize Focus Areas**
  - Highlight areas where improvements could have the most impact on student experience and desired business outcomes.
- **Kick Off Design Phase**



**Thank You.**

# Appendix

## Resources

- 01. [Research Plan](#)
- 02. [Research Survey](#)
- 03. [Survey Dashboard](#)