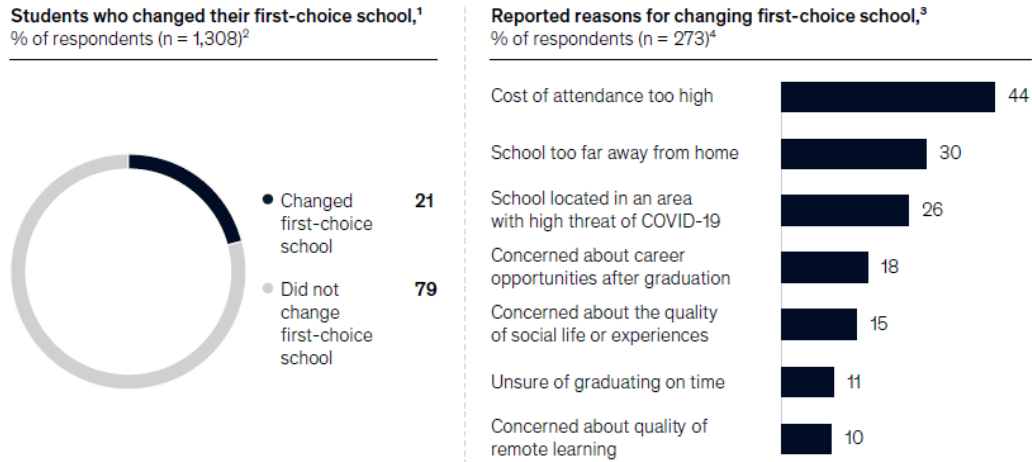


### **Impact of COVID 19 on US Higher Education**

An [online survey](#) of 2,094 high school seniors was conducted between April 21-28, 2020 by McKinsey & Company to provide insight into these students' college plans for the fall of last year. Underrepresented minority and students from low income households were oversampled in the survey to better elucidate the impact of cost associated with remote learning requirements. The survey found that the current enrollment numbers were unchanged but the reality of a remote fall semester in 2020 caused a significant change in college-bound students' choice of programs and campuses. In addition, their senior year of high school remote learning experience negatively impacted their feelings of preparedness for college.

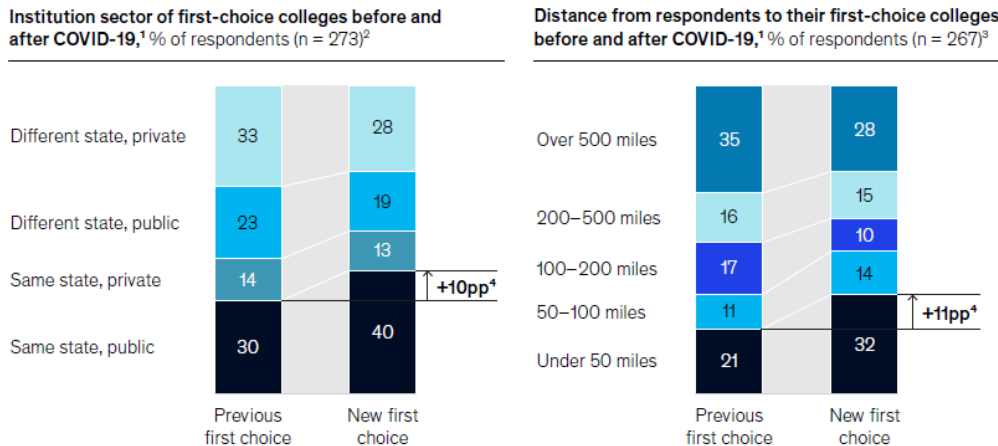
While the survey found that only 8% of the respondents had changed their plans to enroll in a bachelor's program opting to postpone higher education. There was an encouraging sense of optimism amongst these young adults with 37% expecting normalcy with a return to in-person learning within 3 months and 27% having a positive outlook after 5 months. The survey authors concluded from these findings that this positive outlook was the reason for fairly steady enrollment numbers in the fall of 2020. While the overall outlook remained relatively unchanged there was a notable change in students' first choice of universities to attend. Figure 1 shows that students' decision to attend an in-state public institution increased by 10% with one fifth of the respondents citing cost and location as their reasons. A lower cost of attendance was cited by 44% of the high school students who responded to the survey, 30% wanted to remain closer to home, and 26% cited wanting to avoid a COVID-19 hotspot (Figure 2). McKinsey & Company predicted that domestic first year enrollment could drop as much as 15 percent. These findings may potentially benefit the Wayne State University undergraduate enrollment because incoming freshman students may have opted to remain closer to home and commute to class.

**Figure 1. Of incoming students, 21 percent have changed their first-choice school, most often citing cost and location.**



<sup>1</sup> Question: "You responded that your first-choice school has changed since COVID-19. Prior to COVID-19 (eg, Jan 2020), what was your first-choice school?"  
<sup>2</sup> Only 1,308 students gave recognizable inputs for both previous and current choices of school.  
<sup>3</sup> Question: "And why did you decide to change your first choice?" Multiple responses allowed.  
<sup>4</sup> Only includes students who input different colleges as their first choice before and after COVID-19 and chose four-year institutions as both their initial choice and as their new choice.  
 Source: McKinsey COVID-19 Higher Education Enrollment Survey: Wave I, conducted April 21–28, 2020

**Figure 2. Students who changed their first choice are increasingly opting for in-state public institutions and/or schools closer to home**



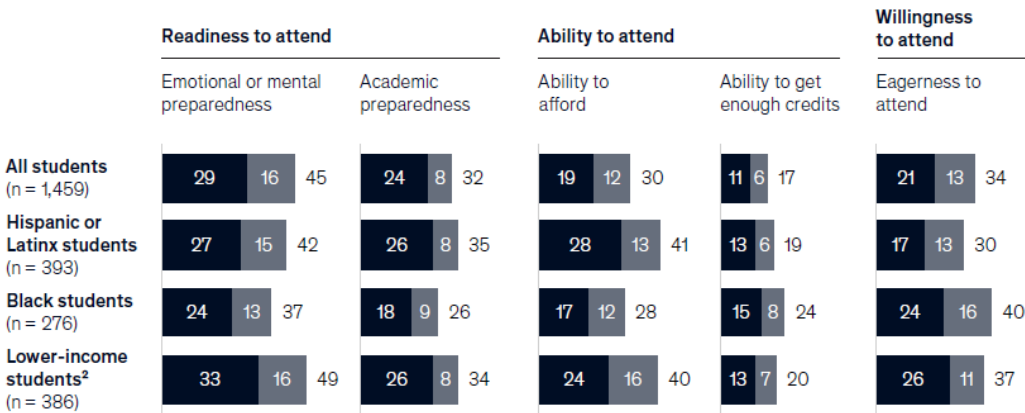
Note: Figures may not sum to 100%, because of rounding.  
<sup>1</sup> Question: "You responded that your first-choice school has changed since COVID-19. Prior to COVID-19 (eg, Jan 2020), what was your first-choice school?" "What is your zip code?"  
<sup>2</sup> Only includes students who input different colleges as their first choice before and after COVID-19 and chose 4-year institutions as both their initial choice and as their new choice.  
<sup>3</sup> Six respondents who changed their mind did not input valid zip codes and are therefore excluded.  
<sup>4</sup> Percentage point.  
 Source: McKinsey COVID-19 Higher Education Enrollment Survey: Wave I, conducted April 21–28, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic and shift to remote learning in high schools had a significant impact on the preparedness of incoming college freshman students. Data in Figure 3 shows that 45% of the survey respondents indicated that the pandemic had a strong or extremely strong impact on their readiness and willingness to continue their education at an institution of higher learning. Another 30% expressed serious financial concerns regarding their ability to attend school with lower income students expressing the greatest level of concern. In addition to the costs of tuition and housing, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the disparities of households unable to provide the infrastructure required to support distance learning with web-enabled devices and high-speed internet. College-bound students expressed a greater concern for the anticipated financial demands of supporting technology if college courses were to be delivered remotely in the fall of 2020. When asked if the fall semester would be remote, 48% said that they would defer college or look for a different school that provided in-person learning. This statistic reflects the respondents' frustration with distance-learning during their senior year of high school as well as their expectations for an on-campus experience as freshman college students. We can anticipate at the graduate level an observable impact as these students complete college and enter their next phase of education.

**Figure 3. A significant portion of students may continue to be at risk in terms of readiness, ability, and willingness to enroll**

Level of reported impact on college preparedness factors,<sup>1</sup>% of respondents

■ Had a strong impact ■ Had an extremely strong impact



Note: Figures may not sum, because of rounding.

<sup>1</sup>Question: "What, if anything, has been the impact of COVID-19 on the following aspects of your preparedness for college?"

<sup>2</sup>Includes students with an annual family income of less than \$50,000.

Source: McKinsey COVID-19 Higher Education Enrollment Survey: Wave I, conducted April 21–28, 2020

McKinsey & Company is an American management consulting firm that advises corporations, governments, and other organizations. They have published a series of articles addressing the future of universities primarily from a financial standpoint. Their research suggests that domestic first-year undergraduate enrollment may drop as much as 15% in the fall 2020 semester would have resulted in a \$7 billion tuition loss by all four-year higher education institutions across the United States. They qualify the conclusion by pointing out that these potential losses would impact institutions differently based on their reliance on tuition revenue. Those institutions with large populations of graduate and professional school students would see less of an impact. McKinsey & Company advises that university leadership transform finances by improving academic outcomes and more effective integration of technology. Over the longer term they suggest that a reimagining of higher education may be required involving the value proposition of higher education and by placing emphasis on diversity, inclusion, and the overall student experience. They call for universities to adapt different business models and delivery channels. As faculty and students of the basic sciences we will need to maintain a presence that ensures the quality of education at WSU in light of these proposed changes.