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Education

Higher-Education Poll

By [Josh Sanburn](#) | Oct. 18, 2012 | 2



VETTA / GE

The American public and senior administrators at U.S. colleges and universities overwhelmingly agree that higher education is in crisis, according to a new poll, but they fundamentally disagree over how to fix it and even what its purpose of higher education is.

According to a survey sponsored by TIME and the Carnegie Corporation of [New York](#), 89% of U.S. adults and senior administrators at colleges and universities said higher education is in crisis, and nearly 4 in 10 in both groups considered the crisis to be “severe.”

But half of the college leaders (52%) said the state of higher education is moving in the right direction, while the general public (54%) said it’s on the wrong track. The two groups also disagree over the value of a college diploma and how to curb the increases in tuition costs and [student-debt](#) loads.

(MORE: [The Student-Debt Epidemic: 1 in 5 Households Now Owe Student Loans](#))

The Web-based poll, conducted by GfK Custom Research North America from Oct. 1 to Oct. 8, surveyed a national sample of 1,000 U.S. adults and 540 senior administrators at public and private two- and four-year colleges and universities. The poll noted that the average debt load for college students who took out loans and graduated in 2011 was [\\$25,250](#). Three-quarters of college leaders (74%) said they thought this was a reasonable amount of debt for a college degree, but only 38% of the public agreed with them. A majority of the public (55%) thought this debt load was too high, compared with 24% of college leaders.

Likewise, members of the general population were twice as likely as college leaders to say that college isn’t worth the price: 80% of U.S. adults agreed that at many colleges, the education students receive is not worth what they pay. Only 41% of college leaders agreed with them.

Similarly, more Americans support federal price caps or controls on tuition (73%) than do college leaders (16%) because the public doesn’t seem to think colleges can control costs on their own. More than 90% of Americans think colleges aren’t doing enough to improve affordability. Only 56% of educators agreed, even as roughly the same percentage (58%) said they don’t think the cost of a college degree will ever stop rising.

(MORE: [Why College May Be Totally Free Within 10 Years](#))

There are a few areas in which the public and educators overlap, including the belief that “not everyone should be encouraged to go to college.” Fifty-eight percent of the public and 69% of college leaders said they agree with this statement.

Both the public (79%) and college leaders (69%) support the idea of making greater use of online classes. But only two-thirds of the general public (68%) said much of the teaching on college campuses can be replaced by online learning, whereas only 22% of college leaders agreed. Thirty-four percent of the adults surveyed said that either they or a family member had taken an online college course.

Even something as fundamental as the role of college isn’t agreed upon. Only 26% of the general public ranked “to think critically” as either the most important or second most important reason people should go to college, with close to two-thirds of college leaders (62%) who included critical thinking in their top two choices.

College leaders themselves aren't in agreement on a number of issues, and the differences often break down by those who work at public vs. private schools. For instance, 44% of senior administrators at public institutions say the cost of college is too high, while only 13% of private-school officials did. Similarly, 84% of leaders of public institutions agreed that there is too much emphasis on attending a four-year college as opposed to community college or vocational schools; 45% of private-school officials agreed with them.

(MORE: [Why College Tuition Should Be Regulated](#))

With such a wide gulf between educators and the public, solutions to fixing what both perceive to be an educational system in crisis will be difficult. When asked in the survey about the best, most radical idea they'd heard on how to control tuition costs, many college leaders suggested abolishing tenure. Others recommended eliminating college. Several pointed to massive open online courses (MOOCs).

John McCardell, vice chancellor and president of the University of the South in Sewanee, Tenn., suggested eliminating merit scholarships and awarding aid solely on the basis of need. Nancy Cantor, chancellor and president of Syracuse University, recommended getting public and private colleges and universities to share services, curriculum and facilities.

Another intriguing suggestion came from John Sexton, president of New York University. "The best idea to make college affordable for our graduates is the Australian model," he said. "Income-contingent loan repayment, with forgiving loans if students go into public-service careers." That's something that both educators and the general public might be able to agree on.

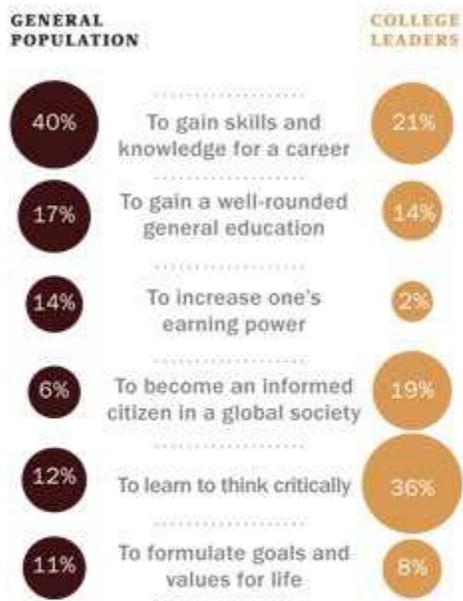
MORE: [MOOC Brigade: Will Massive, Open Online Courses Revolutionize Higher Education?](#)

Critical Thinking

The TIME/Carnegie Corporation survey asked U.S. adults and college leaders about the crisis in postsecondary education

The Value of Higher Education

What is the most important reason people should go to college?



At many colleges, there is too much of a disconnect between the courses offered and students' career goals



There is too much emphasis on attending four-year college as opposed to community college or vocational school



The government should tie funding to measurements of how much students

Cost of College

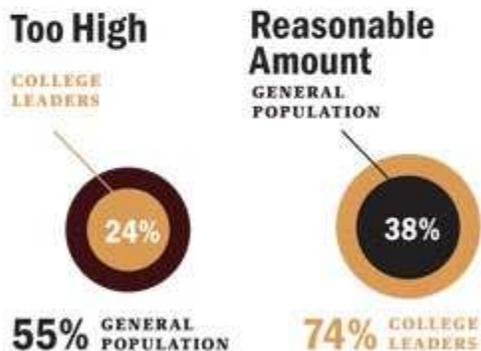
At many colleges, the education students receive is not worth what they pay for it



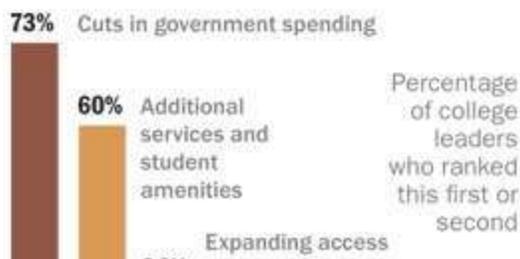
The average debt load for college seniors who took out loans and graduated in 2010 was ...

\$25,250

Is that ...



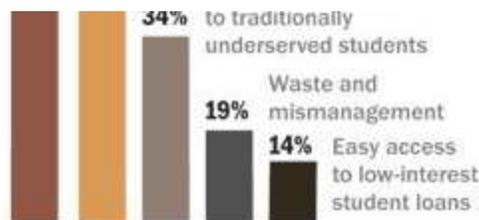
What are the biggest factors contributing to the overall rising costs of college?



learn in college



Strongly or somewhat agree



Online Education

Much of the teaching on college campuses can be replaced by online courses

COLLEGE LEADERS



GENERAL POPULATION

68%

Students will not learn as much in online courses as they will in traditional classes

GENERAL POPULATION



COLLEGE LEADERS

45%

Strongly or somewhat agree

The TIME/Carnegie Corporation of New York poll, conducted online by GfK Custom Research North America, surveyed a national sample of 1,000 U.S. adults and 540 senior administrators at public and private two- and four-year colleges and universities

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