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MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of HESIG is to serve as an agent for constructive higher education policy change, by recommending strategic policy action aligned with a public agenda to serve the public good. Guiding principles include: enhancing college access, affordability, college completion, productivity, accountability, and building new partnerships to achieve these ends.



Measuring the Value of College and Encouraging Effective Policy

Recently, many studies have focused on the value of a college education. To government, its value depends on return for public investment; for businesses, the focus is on critical thinking, communication, and workplace skills developed to ensure productive workers; for individuals, the value correlates with getting a good job, making a living, and enjoying a higher quality of life.

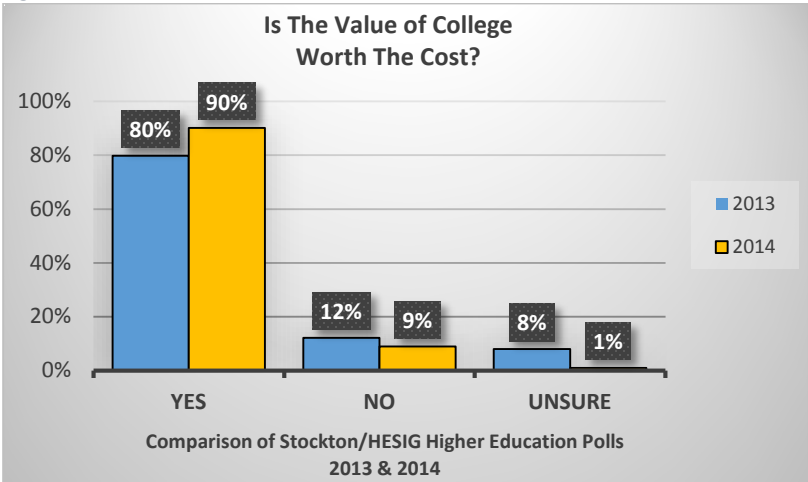
This year, HESIG, in conjunction with the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy, the Stockton Polling Institute, and with grant support from the Educational Testing Service (ETS) Center for Advocacy and Philanthropy, conducted a project entitled “Finding Solutions and Building Public Trust in an Era of Change.” It consisted of two executive roundtables and a scientific survey of more than 800 New Jersey residents, focusing on the value of a college education.

Even with rising costs, citizens find college opportunity critical to better jobs, careers, and quality of life; as highly valued and worth the cost; and have specific ideas about what they, and colleges, can do to increase the value of a degree.

With these distinctions about measuring the value of college as a public and private good, growing public concern about the cost of college, and growing personal debt to help pay for it, defining the value of a college education in the 21st century is a challenging exercise. Indeed, about one-half of New Jersey residents surveyed by HESIG during 2013 and 2014 believe that college is unaffordable. Roughly 70% see cost as the principal barrier to entering or completing college.

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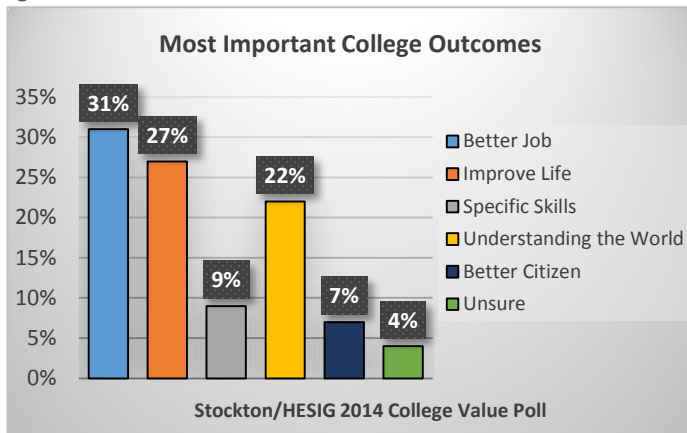
Figure 1



College - Highly Valued

Yet, 90% of 2014 survey respondents who had some college experience indicate that the value of college is worth the cost. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development research indicated in 2013 that, globally, a postsecondary education strongly correlates with better life conditions. The public clearly understands that there are both long-term economic and non-economic benefits from a college education.

Figure 2



The survey had three major themes: value for the cost, benefits of a college education, and changes required to increase the value of the experience. A major finding is that New Jersey residents believe strongly that a college education is worth the cost. Findings from the 2014 survey mirror those from 2013, as Figure 1 indicates.

HESIG's findings are consistent with a national survey done by the Pew Research Center in May of 2014, which found that 91% of all respondents believe that their undergraduate college education, considering what they and their families paid for it, has paid off, or will pay off. Holders of advanced degrees were even more likely to say that their degrees are worth the investment (96%).

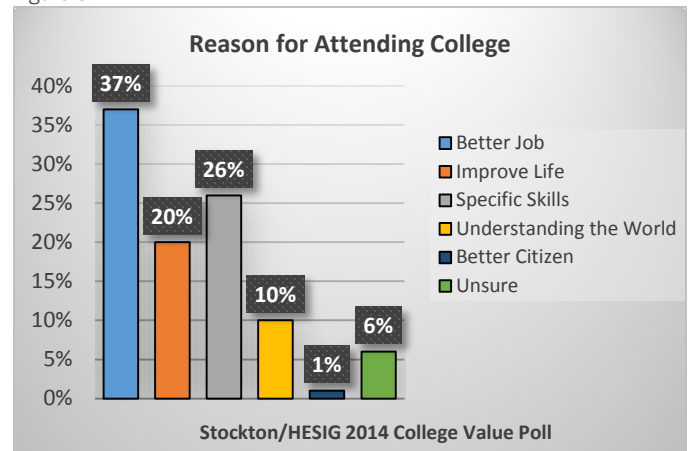
Economic/Non-Economic Benefits

New Jersey residents recognize both the economic and non-economic benefits of a college education, such as improving one's quality of life and gaining a broader understanding of the world. They were asked two questions: one regarding respondents' expected outcomes for college, and one regarding respondents' reasons for attending college.

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For both, the most frequent response was getting a better job (31% and 37% respectively), showing the economic focus many have on a college education. The most frequent responses after that indicate a strong focus on non-economic benefits of college experience. Quality of life was considered the next most important outcome of attending college (27%), followed by gaining a broader understanding of the world (22%). While the economic benefit of getting a better job was at the forefront of many respondents' minds, the non-economic benefits were frequently chosen responses regarding important outcomes of going to college (Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 3



Changes Needed to Add Value

A majority of residents surveyed (87%) indicate that colleges need to change educational and business practices a lot, or somewhat, in order to add value.

When asked to consider policy changes that institutions could make to add value to a college degree (Figure 4), respondents indicated that the most important change would be to add more practical experiences such as internships (33%).

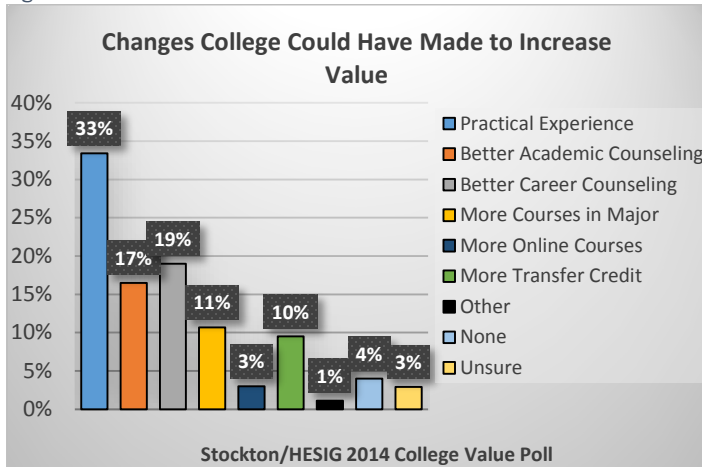
The second most frequent response was for institutions to offer better career counseling (19%). This closely relates to the third most frequent response, which is better academic counseling (17%). These responses provide an insight into possible policy recommendations for a closer relationship between what colleges teach and what businesses want in their employees, and reflect recent research findings by Northwestern University, 2013, and a Gallup-Purdue 2014

national study revealing the importance of engaged learning as an essential part of a college degree’s lifelong benefit.

Citizens think that colleges need to change; want access to more practical experiences, such as internships, while in college to add greater value; and want colleges to partner with business to accomplish this goal.

Regarding changes students could have made to increase value, top responses indicated the importance of finding internships (29%), studying harder (23%), and making better choices about courses (18%) (Figure 5).

Figure 4



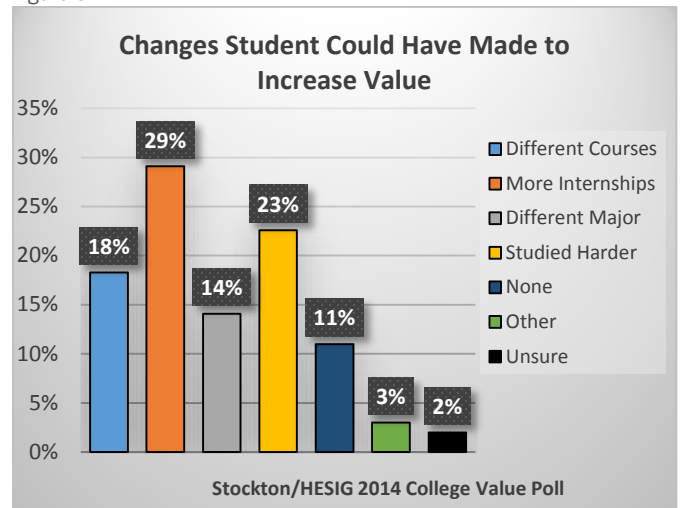
Responsibility for Change

Respondents indicated a strong preference for colleges to work with businesses to increase the value of a college degree (Figure 6). While 50% of respondents preferred colleges to work with businesses, 35% thought that colleges should work with the government to increase the value of a college degree; only 12% felt that colleges could do it on their own. This finding reinforces that New Jersey residents want colleges to work with businesses to provide more practical experience while in college, such as internship programs. Arguably such cooperation would help to shape better existing academic programs to ensure that graduates have the skills desired by businesses, thereby making graduates more viable candidates for jobs.

Showing consistency with the 2013 HESIG study, New Jersey residents expressed great trust in colleges’ non-partisan boards of trustees and presidents taking responsibility for improving college access, affordability, and quality (Figure 7). It seems that citizens favor achieving educational policy

change at the institutional level, rather than through the state capital.

Figure 5



Most Important Skills Gained from College

When asked about importance of eight skills and abilities acquired through college, skills chosen by 4 out of 5 respondents as “very important” included problem solving, writing clearly, and communicating orally. These responses indicate a need for colleges to provide strong cognitive and practical experiences, integrating general and content courses across academic disciplines. Significantly, the skills identified match the advice from the executive roundtables as the most important skills desired by employers.

Consistency with Advice from Executive Roundtables and Policy Directions

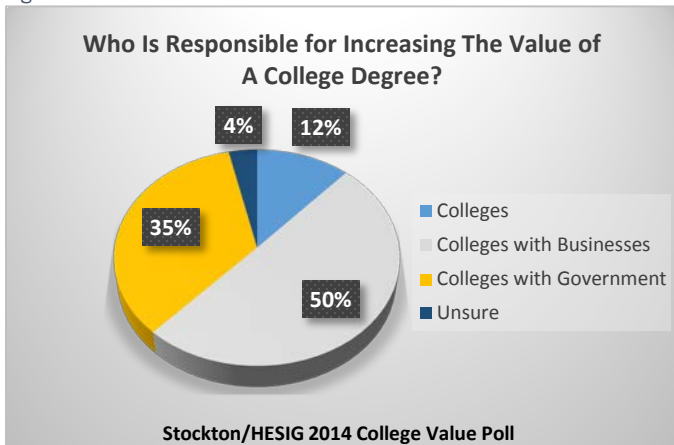
The purpose of the two executive roundtables at Stockton and New Jersey City University was to identify solutions to enhance college affordability, accountability, and value. Participants in the roundtables were asked to provide candid advice about defining college value in terms broader than economic payoff. Roundtables included leaders from business, media, schools, and colleges, as well elected officials. Roundtable participants and discussion summaries can be found at www.stockton.edu/hughescenter/hesig. Roundtable highlights which closely track several survey findings include:

1. Measures of value should include the ability to synthesize and apply information, inform effective decision making, work collaboratively toward a common outcome, and communicate effectively and confidently.
2. Development of effective interpersonal skills, such as tolerance of diversity of opinion, openness to multiple

approaches to problem solving, and application of high ethical standards should all be considered important outcomes of a college education.

3. Create more co-op experiences for students which would move them sooner from the classroom to practical, workplace experiences and problem solving.
4. Higher order skills should begin early, through school-level collaboration, with greater awareness of the needs of non-college bound students, and in partnership with business to expose students to needs and values of a workplace environment for participation in a democratic society.
5. Dual enrollment programs should be more widely offered and recommended. There should be strong collaboration between two-year and four-year colleges, recognizing the special role of community colleges in open access to education, training, and community service.
6. Involve business and nonprofit organizations more to help develop educational content, internship experiences, and to structure expectations about desired outcomes.
7. Involve community leaders to help define standards for community engagement and responsible citizenship in a democratic society, as a measure of value and return on investment.
8. Colleges should view jobs and economic prosperity as the important outcome. Colleges should focus more on how they help to spur economic development and job growth and should recognize community engagement and development as a core business focus, to improve the quality of life for individuals regionally, whether or not they attend college.

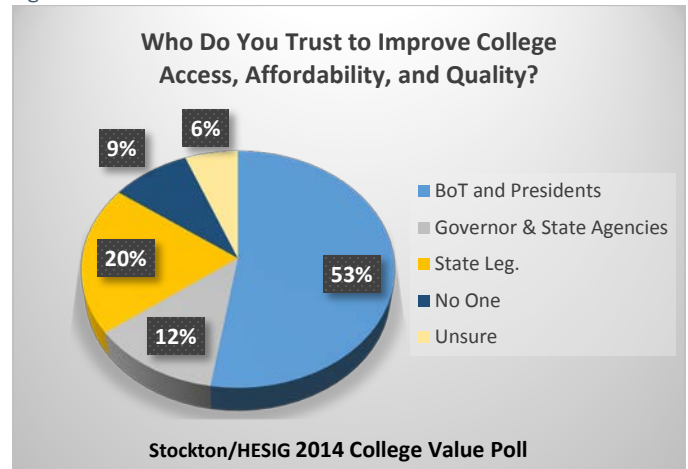
Figure 6



Policy directions suggested by the HESIG study, include:

- Partnerships with schools to teach subjects and skills needed to succeed in college and the workforce, and college-level credit available at the high school level to help shorten time to complete a degree and reduce cost.
- Close cooperation with community colleges to smooth course credit transfer and to build reverse degree programs that allow students to complete an associate's degree at a four-year college after transferring from a community college.
- Partnerships with business to help build programs that combine workforce and academic skills and create internships.
- Reducing the number of degree credits required for graduation by giving credit for knowledge gained outside of college.
- Establishing a clearly articulated set of specific skills college graduates are expected to master, such as effective writing, speaking, and decision-making.
- Reform of state funding to reward college performance, and student financial aid programs to meet the needs of students by type of institution and program of study, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, in order to help students afford college.

Figure 7



Flaw Suggested in Rating Colleges

HESIG's survey found that the top response for reason for choosing the college attended (Figure 8) is location (25%) followed closely by program offered (24%) and cost (20%). Quality was considered less important (14%).

This finding, which in large part is not surprising, signals that access to higher education is a local matter, meaning that most students seek to attend college locally and regionally. Location is an important factor that trumps price as a

consideration. Clearly, life circumstances affect choices about college attendance, but geography seems to be a paramount consideration, along with program offering.

Most students attend a college within about 150 - 200 miles of their homes, nationally. Yet it seems that we have built much higher education policy, especially regarding student financial aid, around a false assumption that there is a large and mobile national student market.

These factors hint that policy solutions stemming from a national perspective about college access, affordability and completion challenges, may be better found at the local and regional levels, closer to where student decisions are made, and where educational service is delivered.

Figure 8

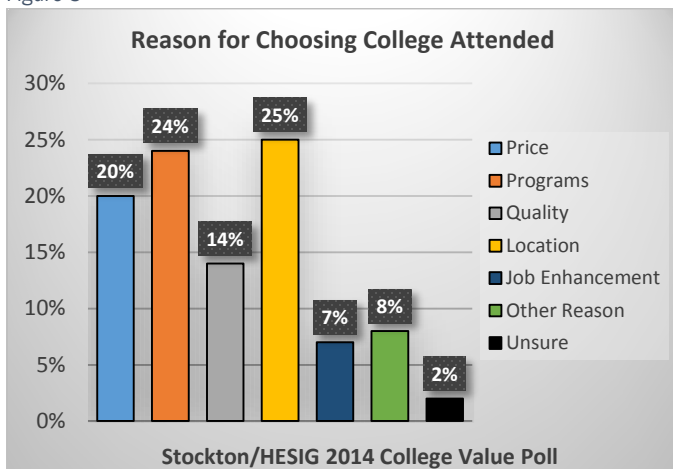
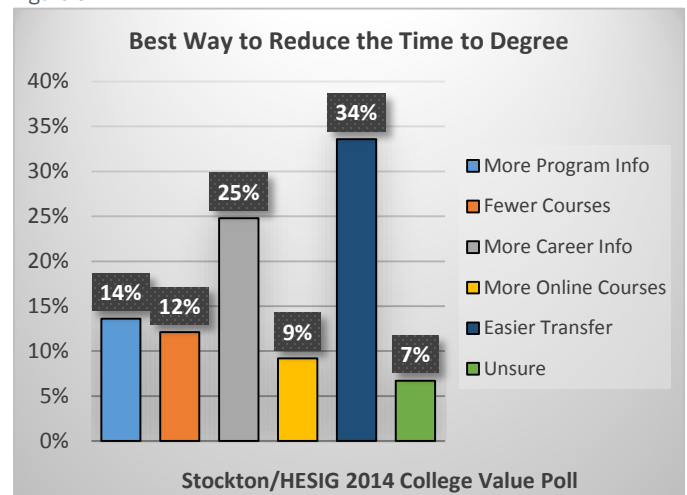


Figure 9, concerning actions that can be taken to reduce time to degree completion seem both to complement and reinforce this suggestion. Greater ability to transfer credits from one college to another, and more information about job and career possibilities are top responses. This seems to make sense, especially because jobs for college graduates are likely to be generated by the local and regional economy, as with college access.

These observations, perhaps reflected by the HESIG poll, if not directly supported by the data, hint that we might need to be concerned about growing interest in college “report card” and “rating” initiatives. This movement, in the name of accountability, seems to proliferate from the assumption that more comparative, consumer-driven information about college program quality, price and effectiveness, will lead to better consumer decisions; and that these choices by individuals will lead to better outcomes, including better college performance and improved affordability and completion rates.

There are many flaws in this assumption, starting with the notion that more comparative computer-based information, without appropriate professional guidance will help first-generation and underrepresented student populations. Little evidence exists that this is the case. Yet, another missing link is that more comparative information among different types of colleges, nationally, will lead to improvement in financial and educational performance. Under closer examination, this goal may be an elusive one to achieve through national rating systems.

Figure 9



Next Steps - Defining Legitimate Options, Building a Winning Strategy, Achieving Outcomes

HESIG’s mission is to evaluate and advocate policy and practice that enhance college access, affordability, completion, productivity, accountability, and public trust, in service of the public good. To achieve this mission, it is very important for HESIG to listen to citizens’ and opinion leaders’ perspectives about the purposes of higher education, and what needs to change in order to connect higher education to a broader public agenda.

In a nutshell, listening to citizens, testing concerns and possible solutions to policy problems, and providing feedback is the first important step to legitimize taking action. The next step is to propose concrete action, tied to a broader public agenda, backed with public confidence that change is possible, and that desired outcomes are achievable.

Defining what needs to be done and getting it done in New Jersey and elsewhere requires building an inclusive communications strategy based on sound principles and evidence, and ultimately on building greater public trust to support taking action to achieve shared goals.

With the help of many individuals since 2012, including insightful advice of the HESIG Policy Steering Council, HESIG has laid a strong foundation on which to recommend an action agenda.

This fall the Council will advise on how to achieve these “next steps,” including expanding the conversation through additional “executive roundtables,” engaging each segment of New Jersey higher education; and seeking input from key policy makers often overlooked in a strategy for change – college and university trustees.

The HESIG Policy Steering Council consists of top state and national higher education policy advocates, business executives, elected officials, college presidents, administrators, students and trustees. Its membership and charge can be found on the HESIG webpage.

Questions and frequencies for the HESIG College Value Poll are available at www.stockton.edu/hughescenter/hesig.

The Poll was conducted by cell and landline telephone; with 801 New Jersey adult residents, May 2014; with a margin of error of +/- 3.5%.



William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy

HESIG is affiliated with the [William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy](#) at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. The Hughes Center serves as a catalyst for research, analysis and innovative policy solutions on the economic, social and cultural issues facing New Jersey, and is also the home of the Stockton Polling Institute. The Center is named for William J. Hughes, whose distinguished career includes service in the U.S. House of Representatives, Ambassador to Panama and as a Distinguished Visiting Professor at Stockton College.

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