

FALL/WINTER 2015

POLICY TRENDS AND OPTIONS

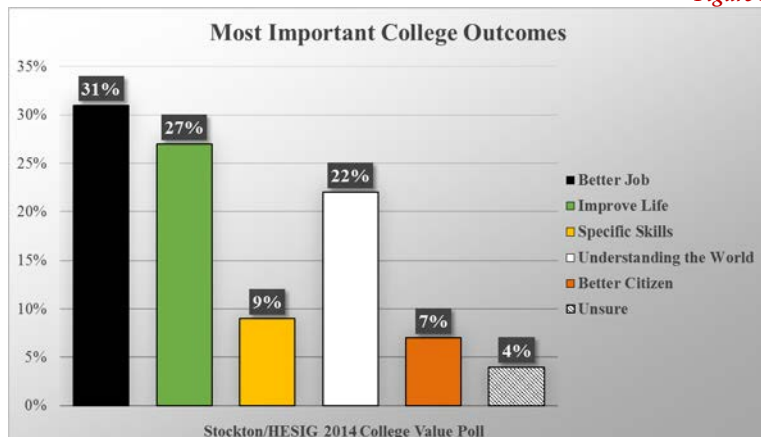
## Taking Stock on College Value, Taking Action on Needed Change

With a strong vote of confidence from Stockton University Interim President Harvey Kesselman, HESIG began its work nearly four years ago in 2012. HESIG has benefited from excellent support from Hughes Center colleagues, its Policy Steering Council consisting of New Jersey and national experts, partners such as the New Jersey Secretary of Higher Education, Rochelle Hendricks, and national organizations such as AGB, AACSB, NACAC, and ETS.

*HESIG research finds that citizens, as well as business executives, indicate that the skills and abilities most valued as a college outcome include: problem solving, oral and written communication, as well as workplace skills such as punctuality, teamwork, and tolerance of others.*

By conducting its own studies and building on available research on college value, expert advice, affordability and outcomes, HESIG has identified important trends affecting the emerging business model for higher education, and desire for needed change in policy and practice. In this process, HESIG has observed a disconnect between some of the stated goals of higher education, and means of achieving them in an era of dynamic change in the student population, finances and expectations of educational consumers, employers, and policy makers about college outcomes. Finally, we have gained some insight into what needs fixing, and how change can be made.

Figure 1



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This issue of **Policy Trends and Options** highlights what we have learned, what we need to know, what needs reforming, and prospects for positive change to increase the value of and public support for investment in higher education in New Jersey. Directly stated, HESIG, through the resources of the Hughes Center and other partners, aspires to provide leadership on informing a New Jersey higher education agenda for 2017 (a statewide election year) and beyond. This process serves the educational interests of citizens and the longer-term prosperity of the state, based on the principle that investment in education is an important means of achieving the lofty goals of liberty and equality for residents of the Garden State.

**What We Have Learned**

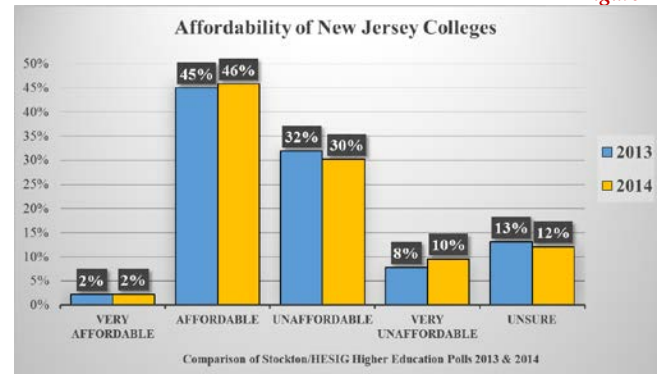
**Access:** With the maturation of New Jersey’s community colleges, and growing comprehensiveness of public and private regional institutions as universities, including Thomas Edison- New Jersey’s college for adults- the state has done much to provide broad access to its colleges. We know who chooses to go to which college, and why. Top reasons include location, program availability and price.

But access to college opportunity is not evenly distributed statewide, as indicated by the Hughes Center study “Economic Indicators and Quality of Life in Southern New Jersey,” May 2015. This study reveals that residents of South Jersey are especially disadvantaged economically, as reflected by lower educational attainment and greater income equity. New Jersey faces a moderate downturn in its college-bound traditional-age student population, and unfortunately continues to be the nation’s #1 net exporter of young college-bound students, losing 30,000 students to other states. This puts New Jersey citizens and businesses at a competitive disadvantage, and drains important revenue from the state.

Little has been done in terms of comprehensive state policy to reverse this decades’ long trend. Appropriately, the Governor’s Advisory Council on Higher Education cites expanding the state’s post-secondary capacity as a continuing top priority. Even though New Jersey is a top performer in preparing students for college and graduating them, the state needs to add about 25,000 graduates

annually with at least an Associate’s degree to meet a Lumina Foundation goal of 60% of residents with a college degree by 2025.

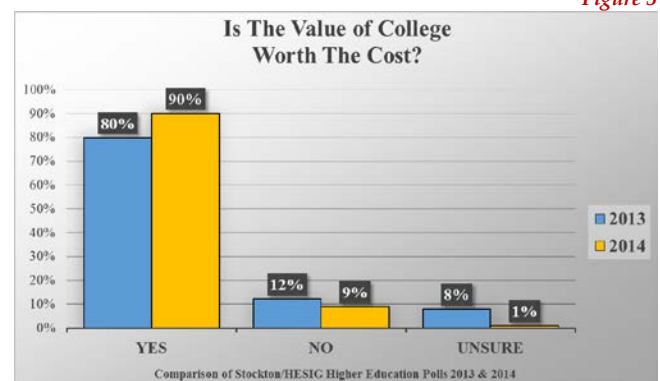
*Figure 2*



**Affordability:** Citizens view college as increasingly unaffordable, and continue to pay the largest share (now about 70%) of college educational cost.

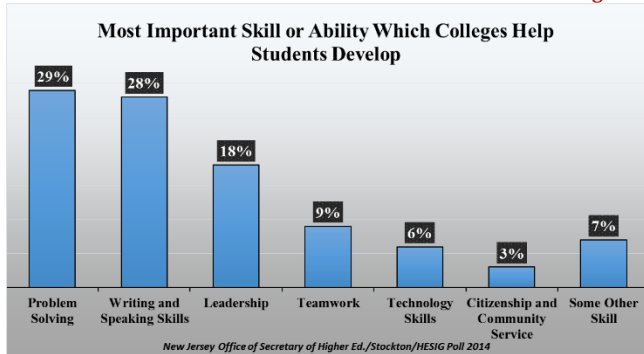
Tuition and fees for public colleges are among the highest nationally (top 5 states); and state appropriation cuts have been among the deepest since the 1990’s. Studies, such as those from the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) and Brookings Institution, reveal that New Jersey State revenue loss explains more than any other variable, why students are paying a rising share of college costs. Even with some of the nation’s most generous student financial aid programs, most New Jersey citizens view the cost of college as the single biggest barrier to attending. The disconnect between aspiration to attend college and the ability to pay for it, without acquiring large debt, creates significant stress on colleges’ ability to maintain public trust.

*Figure 3*



**Value:** Still, the good news is that college in New Jersey is seen as high quality, and is highly valued by citizens, as illustrated by HESIG 2013 and 2014 polls.

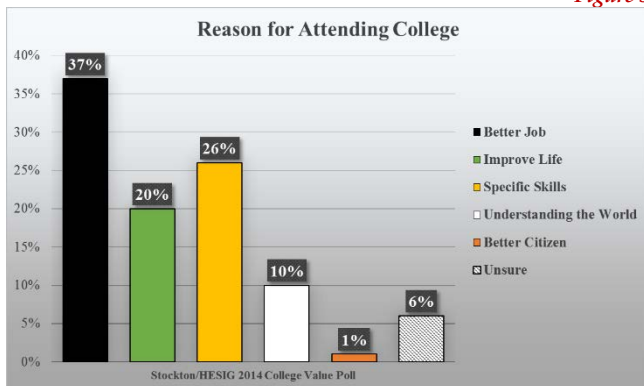
Figure 4



Residents value both the economic and non-economic benefits of college. HESIG research and roundtables reflect that citizens, as well as business executives, indicate that the skills and abilities most valued as a college outcome include: problem solving, and oral and written communication; as well as workplace skills such as punctuality, teamwork, and tolerance of others.

**Outcomes:** With college getting high marks for value throughout a lifetime, perhaps unsurprisingly, the single most important reason for attending college is to get good jobs and careers.

Figure 5



Very importantly, students, citizens and employers view practical experiences such as internships tied with academic studies as a top concern needed for success. Unfortunately, HESIG’s unprecedented survey of 5000 undergraduate students at 31 colleges, conducted for the New Jersey Secretary, indicates that only about 20% of students have such experience in college, even though 40% are working at least 30 hours per week. This disconnection between a strongly held goal, and

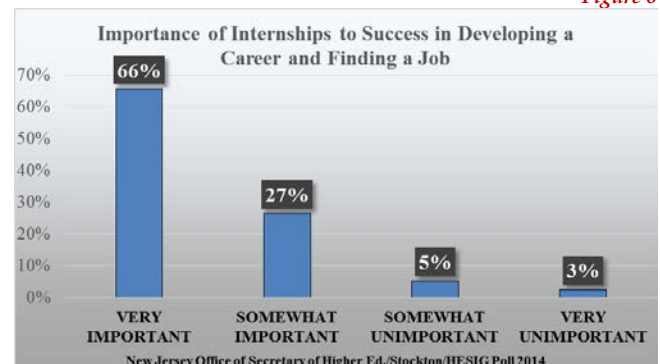
means of achieving it is perhaps the most compelling one facing students and colleges, and signals citizens’ strong perception of needed change.

### What We Need to Know and Do to Change

We have a good grip on trends affecting the college enterprise, but still need to learn more. For example, we need to know more about:

- Who will attend college in the next decade, with special focus on minority, immigrant students, and adults who will make up more of the college-going population.
- How many students we want to educate, in what emerging fields of study, and what special needs and support programs they need to succeed.
- How we plan to pay for college, and reduce the financial burden on students and families.
- How we accelerate reform of educational delivery, integrating academic and practical experience, new technology, and build new partnerships with businesses and others in the process.
- How we move postsecondary education to the top of a sustainable public agenda, tied to the long-term prosperity of individuals and society.
- How we strengthen governance of colleges to make them more accountable for outcomes, and to sustain public trust.

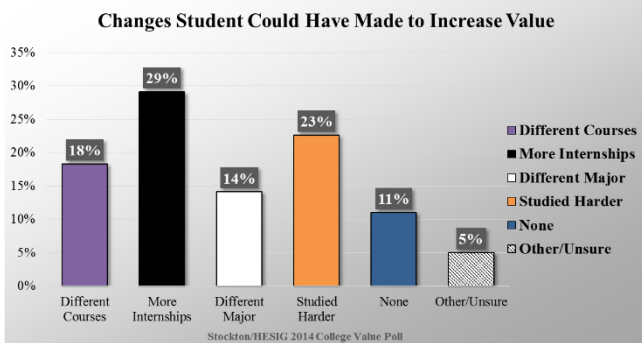
Figure 6



But even with these big questions to tackle, much has been learned about what we can do. To help bring about desired change to increase college value, to make it more affordable, and to achieve successful outcomes. Steps include:

- Work with schools to build and measure expected academic outcomes and workplace skills needed to succeed in college and beyond.
- Make it easier to transfer academic credits from community colleges; expand dual enrollment programs with schools and colleges; and grant more academic credit for prior learning through credit-by-examination programs.
- Promote partnerships that provide for internships and practical experience tied to academic studies and real-world problem solving; and involve business and community leaders in evaluating educational programs.

Figure 7



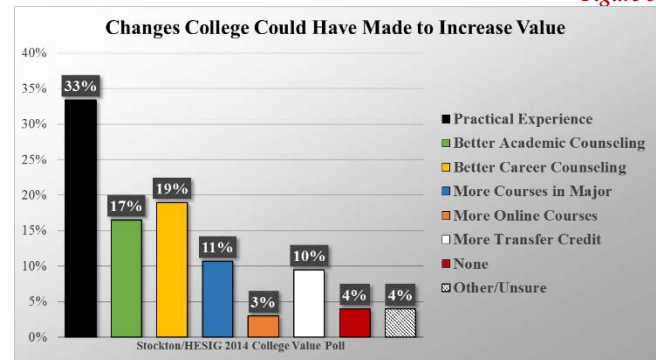
- Require intensive academic advising and career counseling for all students; add more content courses and fewer general education courses tied to essential learning outcomes; and closely monitor credits earned tied to an explicit plan for completing college.
- Monitor closely financial aid needs and debt accumulation tied to academic progress; and restructure student financial aid policy at the college and state levels, to meet the needs of a diverse student population and changing institutions.
- Build a rationale for state funding of higher education (where none currently exists) that supports predictable funding and outcomes tied to long-term state and institutional needs.
- Refocus college trustee governance to reflect a changing business/financial model, and to provide greater transparency regarding educational and related business activities of affiliated organizations.

### A Plan for Action

Looking toward 2017, when New Jersey will elect its next governor and legislature, much can be done in partnership with others, to highlight action required to achieve many of these goals in the interest of a successful public agenda for the state and its citizens.

By using Stockton University as a leading example, and in cooperation with the New Jersey Secretary of Higher Education, the New Jersey Presidents Council, segmental association leaders, business executives, labor and school leaders, HESIG will accelerate its collaborative research and forum activities under the Hughes Center banner to suggest a possible plan of action for 2017. The action plan will be informed by leaders within and outside of higher education, who are committed to expanding postsecondary opportunity in the Garden State, and making New Jersey a leader in educational effectiveness.

Figure 8



With guidance from HESIG and Hughes Center advisors, the means by which HESIG aspires to achieve this outcome include:

- Conducting more survey research and focus groups with citizens, students, educators and other contributors to expand an objective empirical base of information about needed change, options, and support required to sustain reform efforts.
- Convening regionally and statewide leaders from business, education, and public policy makers to build a consensus about shared responsibilities for taking action and defining expected outcomes.
- Preparing an agenda, policy priorities and measureable outcomes for higher education for the next governor and

legislature, linked to broader state needs and backed by citizens, educators and opinion leaders.

- Disseminating to higher education professionals, including presidents and boards of trustees, information that helps them create policy to lead and manage desired change, and to evaluate outcomes within a shared governance setting.
- Creating a network of individuals and organizations which can sustain a commitment to effective educational policy and practice that is directly accountable to citizens served by the institutions, and that benefit the public trust.

### Desired Outcome

As stated in the HESIG grant report to the ETS Center for Advocacy and Philanthropy, “Finding Solutions, Building Public Trust in an Era of Change” (Nov. 2014):

“In a nutshell, listening to citizens, testing propositions, creating common language for change, introducing possible solutions to policy problems, and providing feedback are important steps to legitimize taking action.

The next big 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 requires building an inclusive communications strategy based on sound principles and evidence, and ultimately, on building greater public trust to support and to sustain action to achieve shared goals.

This is the manner in which Stockton University and HESIG propose to move forward to serve the broader purpose of enhancing college opportunity, affordability, college completion, and accountability in service to the State of New Jersey and its citizens.

## Higher Education Strategic Information and Governance Council Members and Advisors

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**About the William J Hughes Center for Public Policy**

The William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University 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 University.

The Hughes Center can be found on:

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Blog: [blogs.stockton.edu/policyhues](https://blogs.stockton.edu/policyhues)



**Kevin Coopersmith**

William J. Hughes Center Clerk Typist, Associate Editor of HESIG Newsletter

**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.

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