Public Viewpoint: COVID-19 Work and Education Research

The Road Ahead for Community Colleges — Examining Enrollment, Completion, Purpose, and Value

January 27, 2021
Key Questions

• Why has enrollment at community colleges fallen?

• How might COVID-19 affect completion rates for those enrolled in community college?

• How are community colleges doing with helping students connect their education to a career?

• What makes for a valuable community college education?
Lack of Confidence
2020 job loss was less severe for those with more education

Number of Job Losses by Education Level

- Bachelor's degree or higher
- Some college/associate degree
- High school or less

Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (Basic Monthly), 2020
But people without degrees are skeptical of education’s value

Getting an **associate degree** is worth the cost.

- No degree: 10% Strongly agree, 25% Agree, 35% Disagree
- Has associate degree: 29% Strongly agree, 40% Agree

Getting a **bachelor’s degree** is worth the cost.

- No degree: 9% Strongly agree, 26% Agree, 35% Disagree
- Has bachelor's degree: 30% Strongly agree, 40% Agree

Skepticism about the value of education grew during 2020 among Americans without degrees

*Additional education would help you get a job in times of economic uncertainty.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Spring 2020</th>
<th>Fall 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definitely would</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably would</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably would not</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitely would not</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prospective students question their ability to pursue education and face many uncertainties

How challenging would each of the following be for you personally in pursuing education and training?

- Cost: 59%
- Balancing school with other responsibilities: 50%
- Fear I won’t be able to succeed/I’ve been out of school too long: 44%
- Uncertainty over coronavirus: 33%
- Uncertainty of the job market: 33%
- Health: 26%
- Uncertain which path to pursue: 23%
- Access to technology: 21%

These challenges translated into dramatically lower fall enrollment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Public 4-year total enrollment</th>
<th>Public 2-year total enrollment</th>
<th>Freshman enrollment</th>
<th>Transfer enrollment</th>
<th>Continuing enrollment</th>
<th>Immediate enrollment from low-income high schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public four-year institution</td>
<td>-1.9%</td>
<td>-9.5%</td>
<td>-18.5%</td>
<td>-18.9%</td>
<td>-7.7%</td>
<td>-37.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public two-year institution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, High School Benchmarks 2020 and COVID-19 Transfer, Mobility and Progress Fall 2020 Final Report
Completion
For current students, stress, anxiety, and cost concerns are pervasive

Which of the following have been challenges or struggles for you this fall?

- Stress or anxiety: 64%
- Paying for tuition, books, and other costs: 51%
- Keeping up academically: 43%
- Having a space that is good for studying: 42%
- Feeling lonely or isolated: 38%
- Having a space that is good for participating in online classes: 31%
- Taking care of people who depend on me while I’m in school: 28%
- Reliable internet and computer access: 26%

20% of community college students expect to delay their graduation because of COVID-19

Have you had to make any changes to your expected graduation date due to the impact of COVID-19?

- Definitely delay, 6%
- Likely delay, 14%
- Not sure, 24%

Purpose
Community college students feel more support connecting education to career

*How would you rate your college or university’s support for helping students connect their education to a meaningful career?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College or university</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Not very good</th>
<th>Poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community college</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Community college students are more comfortable asking professors for career advice or work connections

**Overall, how comfortable are you asking a professor for career advice or connections to a job or internship?**

- **Very comfortable**
- **Somewhat comfortable**
- **Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable**
- **Somewhat uncomfortable**
- **Very uncomfortable**

**Community college**

- 22% Very comfortable
- 27% Somewhat comfortable
- 24% Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable
- 17% Somewhat uncomfortable
- 10% Very uncomfortable

**College or university**

- 11% Very comfortable
- 26% Somewhat comfortable
- 21% Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable
- 29% Somewhat uncomfortable
- 13% Very uncomfortable

Strada-College Pulse survey, Sept. 10-25, 2020 Base: current college students enrolled at two-year and four-year institutions, n=4,862.
Value
Community college students are more likely to say their education will be worth the cost

My education will be worth the cost.

Community college

- Strongly agree: 36%
- Agree: 37%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 17%
- Disagree: 7%
- Strongly disagree: 2%

College or university

- Strongly agree: 16%
- Agree: 34%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 23%
- Disagree: 19%
- Strongly disagree: 8%

Students who think their community college is very good or excellent in connecting students to a meaningful career are three times more likely to strongly agree their education will be worth the cost.

Fifty-four percent of students who felt their college was excellent or good at connecting them to meaningful careers strongly agreed that their education would be worth the cost. Alternatively, only 19 percent of students who felt their support was not very good or poor strongly agreed that their education would be worth the cost. Strada-College Pulse survey, Sept. 10-25. Base: current college students enrolled at two-year and four-year institutions, n=4,863.
Key Findings

• **Individuals without college degrees are increasingly skeptical about the value of additional education.** Those who have completed a degree have, on average, suffered less job loss and feel more confident about the value of education. But people without postsecondary degrees lack confidence in education’s promise and in their own ability to successfully pursue an education to work pathway.

• **In addition to financial costs, anxiety and stress are pervasive challenges for current community college students, and 1 in 5 expect to delay graduation.** Sixty-four percent of students report feeling stress or anxiety this fall, and 51 percent are struggling to pay for tuition, books, and other costs. Cost pressure is being felt much more acutely for community college students compared to students attending four-year institutions, and cost is the biggest challenge for those who are not enrolled.

• **Though enrollment declines are greater for community colleges, their students are more likely to believe their education will be worth the cost than their peers at four-year institutions.** Community college students were more likely to say their college helped students connect their education to a meaningful career, to feel comfortable asking a professor for career advice or connections, and to feel their education will be worth the cost.

• **Education value and career connections are strongly linked.** When students see a direct connection between their education and a career, they are much more likely to say their education will be worth the cost.
Learn more at StradaEducation.org/PublicViewpoint or email consumervoice@stradaeducation.org
Methodology

- The Strada Student Viewpoint survey was fielded by College Pulse from Sept. 10 to 25, 2020, as an online survey of a panel of students enrolled at two-year and four-year institutions. Data are weighted based on the Current Population Survey on the basis of age, race/ethnicity, and gender; n=4,863. Theoretical margin of error +/- 1.7%.

- The 2020 Strada-Gallup Education Consumer Survey is a nationally representative mail and web-based survey of U.S. adults ages 18 to 65; n=13,904.

- Please contact Strada Center for Education Consumer Insights with questions or information requests at consumervoice@stradaeducation.org or learn more at StradaEducation.org/PublicViewpoint.