



Proud Sponsor
of College Survey Results

November, 2024

Campaign Survey Results

Recent polls, including an ongoing survey conducted by [Gallup](#), reveal that Americans are increasingly questioning the value of higher education. This decline in perceived value persists despite widely available data demonstrating the personal return on investment that earning a degree provides—such as enhanced career opportunities, higher salaries, and increased lifetime earnings.

The Proud Sponsor Campaign aims to address this issue by reminding Americans of the broad, positive impacts college has on their lives, whether or not they earn a degree.



Methodology

Serve conducted a national survey of 2,004 demographically representative U.S. adults aged 35–64. The sample size allows us to analyze Americans based on key demographics that historically have influenced perceptions of higher education's value.

Gender

Men have experienced steeper declines in college enrollment compared to women.

Age

Younger Americans show less confidence in higher education than older generations.

Education Level

Non-college graduates are less likely to see the value in higher education compared to degree holders.

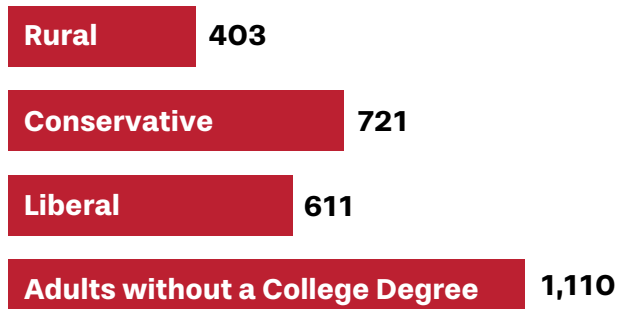
Political Affiliation

Republicans report lower confidence in higher education than Democrats.

Geography

Rural residents tend to have less confidence in higher education than those in urban areas.

In addition to gaining an understanding of the adult population, we also looked at these key subgroups:



Exposure to the Proud Sponsor campaign makes Americans feel more positive about the perceived value of higher education.

The Value of Higher Education

Across the general population, perceptions of the value of higher education improved after exposure to the campaign. In addition, positive feelings about higher education increased across several key demographics, including rural Americans, among individuals at both ends of the political spectrum, and among those without a college degree. The campaign proved effective regardless of the gender of respondents. Notably, the campaign led to an increase in the number of rural Americans and those without a college degree who view higher education as highly valuable to their communities.

	All Americans		Rural		Conservative		Liberal		No Degree	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
College education is high value to the individual	53%	65% ↑	49%	62% ↑	56%	68% ↑	63%	72% ↑	44%	62% ↑
Higher education is high value to the community	47%	61% ↑	40%	65% ↑	52%	63% ↑	54%	68% ↑	41%	58% ↑
Having a strong system of higher education is high value to the U.S. as a whole	51%	63% ↑	48%	59% ↑	56%	67% ↑	58%	70% ↑	49%	59% ↑
I would encourage my children to go to college	84%	86%	84%	84%	86%	88%	89%	90%	81%	83%
I feel very positive about using public tax dollars to fund higher ed	52%	57% ↑	47%	54% ↑	47%	55% ↑	66%	71% ↑	48%	55% ↑



Notably, the campaign led to an increase in the number of rural Americans who view higher education as highly valuable to their community.



The campaign also bolstered the value of higher ed to the community with respondents not holding a degree.

[↑ Indicates post-exposure number is significantly higher than the pre-exposure.]

Areas of Impact

The campaign effectively boosts perceptions of the impact of higher education. After exposure, beliefs about higher education's influence across the featured areas increased significantly. This holds true among rural Americans, those without a college degree, left-leaning individuals, and, to a large extent, right-leaning individuals. However, the campaign does not significantly persuade conservative Americans that higher education plays a critical role in maintaining a healthy democracy.

	All Americans		Rural		Conservative		Liberal		No Degree	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
Growing America's economic prosperity	55%	65% ↑	51%	62% ↑	58%	66% ↑	63%	72% ↑	52%	61% ↑
Maintaining availability of a skilled workforce	55%	65% ↑	49%	61% ↑	59%	69% ↑	62%	72% ↑	52%	62% ↑
Improving the population's health and wellbeing	52%	62% ↑	48%	56% ↑	53%	63% ↑	61%	69% ↑	47%	60% ↑
Keeping alive the American dream	52%	62% ↑	47%	62% ↑	56%	65% ↑	60%	68% ↑	49%	58% ↑
Maintaining a healthy democracy	49%	58% ↑	44%	54% ↑	49%	53%	60%	69% ↑	44%	55% ↑
Enhancing America's national security	47%	57% ↑	43%	55% ↑	50%	59% ↑	53%	64% ↑	42%	53% ↑

[↑ Indicates post-exposure number is significantly higher than the pre-exposure.]



The heaviest lift for the campaign is persuading conservative Americans that higher education plays a critical role in maintaining a healthy democracy.

Direct Response to Campaign

The campaign was deemed believable by a large majority (84%) of Americans, with 51% rating it as highly believable—suggesting widespread acceptance of its message without the need for further persuasion. While rural Americans were the least likely to find it highly believable, nearly half still did. Additionally, the campaign positively influenced perceptions of higher education's value, with two-thirds of the audience reporting a more favorable view.

	All	Rural	Conservative	Liberal	No Degree
Found the campaign at least somewhat believable	84%	80%	85%	90%	81%
Found the campaign highly believable	51%	47%	55%	59%	50%
It makes my opinion of the value of higher ed more positive	65%	61%	68%	68%	65%
It makes my opinion of the value of higher ed a lot more positive	40%	38%	45%	43%	39%
I feel very positive about using public tax dollars to fund higher ed	52%	47%	47%	66%	48%

Ranking of Importance of Higher Education Impacts

The campaign's most compelling impacts include highlighting higher education's role in driving economic prosperity and ensuring a skilled workforce. These messages resonated equally with rural Americans, both liberal and conservative audiences, and with Americans who did not complete a degree themselves.

	All	Rural	Conservative	Liberal	No Degree
Growing America's economic prosperity	45%	47%	46%	45%	44%
Maintaining availability of a skilled workforce	43%	43%	43%	41%	42%
Keeping alive the American dream	35%	35%	38%	31%	38%
Improving the population's health and wellbeing	30%	27%	27%	34%	29%
Maintaining a healthy democracy	25%	24%	21%	32%	24%
Enhancing America's national security	22%	25%	26%	17%	24%

The most common immediate takeaways from the campaign are that a college degree is important and valuable, and that a college education benefits the country.

Main message from campaign

A college education is important to/will benefit America	21%
A college degree is important/has value	19%
It's about college / A campaign encouraging college	15%
A college education can help create a better/more successful future for you	14%
Getting an education allows you to succeed in a good career	9%
Makes room for innovation, advancements, endless opportunity	9%
A college education is important to/will benefit the world/future	8%
College helps to create/fill all kinds of jobs	8%
A college education creates future leaders/a talented workforce	5%
It helps nursing/will help end the nursing shortage	4%
College creates a productive/well maintained society/Benefits society	4%
Going to college can help make your dreams come true/you can achieve anything	3%
Fuels/grows the country's economy (better wages, less unemployment, etc.)	3%
College is accessible/available to anyone	3%
College is an important part of the American Dream	2%

After exposure, beliefs about higher education's influence across the featured areas increased significantly.

Respondent Profiles

Age		Education		Census Region	
35-54	49%	Two-year degree	18%	Northeast	17%
55-64	51%	Four-year degree	27%	Midwest	22%
		Some college credits	27%	South	38%
		No college experience	29%	West	23%
Sex		Marital Status		Children	
Female	51%	Single	29%	Have children under 25	41%
Male	49%	Married or living with partner	44%	No children under 25	59%
		Separated or divorced	22%		
		Widowed	5%		
Politics		Race/Ethnicity*		Household Income	
Conservative	36%	White	70%	Under \$50,000	55%
Independent	24%	Black/African American	20%	\$50,000-\$99,999	29%
Liberal	31%	Hispanic or Latino	8%	\$100,000-\$199,999	13%
No politics	7%	Asian	3%	\$200,000 or more	3%
		Native Hawaiian/Pacific Isl.	1%		
Urban/sub-urban	80%	Mixed	40%		
Rural	20%	Middle Eastern	30%		
		Other	30%		

* Respondents were able to choose multiple responses since many are of more than one race/ethnicity



whycollegematters.org



8909 N PORT WASHINGTON RD | MILWAUKEE, WI 53217 | 414.228.1990 | SERVEMARKETING.ORG