



College

Proud Sponsor of
America at its Best™

Survey Results

October 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

BVK 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.

Participants were engaged using Qualtrics, an online survey platform. They were first asked a series of questions to assess their current feelings about the value of higher education. They were then shown a variety of assets and messages from the Proud Sponsor campaign, after which they were asked to respond to the same questions again. Surveys were completed between October 21–30, 2024 using the National Consumer Panel.

Gender

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

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

Age

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

Education Level

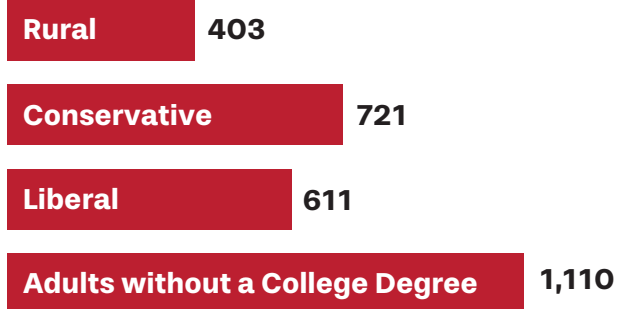
Non-college graduates are less likely to see the value in higher education compared to degree holders.

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.



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.

| | 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.]



Conservative Americans also responded well to Proud Sponsor. But the heaviest lift for the campaign is persuading this group 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



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