Unpacking Public Opinions on Higher Ed

CIMA-AAG Town Hall | April 19th, 2024
Presenters

Bao Le
Assistant Vice President, Data & Policy Analysis
APLU, CIMA Lead

Lindsay Wayt, PhD
Senior Director, Analytics
NACUBO, AAG Lead

Brian Powell, PhD
James H. Rudy Professor
Department of Sociology
Indiana University
Series Goals: Reframing Cost & Value of Higher Ed Using Data

1. Address and counter the negative narrative surrounding the cost and value of higher education using data.
2. Equip participants with tools, data, and strategies to effectively communicate the cost and value of higher education.
3. Foster a collaborative environment for sharing best practices and challenges.
Operating Assumptions

01 Addressing cost and value of higher education cannot be completed in silo; collaboration is essential among various institutional functions.

02 Data is a tool to support the work but it is not the only tool; it should be crafted into effective messages.

03 Understanding audience and context can facilitate effective communications.
In Town Hall 1

1. APLU and NACUBO shared 2 data tools addressing cost & value.
2. Gathered feedback for the tools.
3. Provided space for participants to
   a. Share challenges re: using data to communicate cost & value
   b. Discuss how the CIMA-AAG town hall series can help address the challenges.
Today’s Objectives

1. Provide overview of public perception data as well as considerations for use.
2. Share insights that can be used to interpret and gain deeper understanding of perception data.
3. Provide opportunity to practice engaging with perception data.
OVERVIEW: PERCEPTION DATA
Considerations for Reviewing Survey Findings

• What goal(s) does the organization have?
• Were the questions part of a broader survey? Or was the survey specifically about higher ed?
• How were questions about higher ed phrased?
• Who is the target audience for the publication? And how did that influence selection of participants?
• When was the survey conducted? And why does this matter?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Wall Street Journal</strong></td>
<td>a “definitive source of news and information through the lens of business, finance, economics and money...” whose “audience is anyone who wants or has a job, a career, or an ambition.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>American Public Media Research Lab</strong></td>
<td>is “home to a team of researchers who inform the public with both original and curated research, facts, and analysis;” the work is “nonpartisan” and “equips journalists, civic and business leaders, and anyone else who wants to know what the best research says.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gallup</strong></td>
<td>a global analytics and advisory firm whose work is grounded in public opinion and survey research expertise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pew Research Center</strong></td>
<td>a “nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes, and trends shaping the world” that conducts “public opinion polling...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FiveThirtyEight</strong></td>
<td>originally a website that focused on opinion polls on politics, economics, and sports; an organization that uses “data and evidence to advance public knowledge.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Chronicle</strong></td>
<td>the “nation’s largest newsroom dedicated to covering colleges and universities.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bill &amp; Melinda Gates Foundation</strong></td>
<td>a philanthropic foundation that “works with local leaders and organizations to create a world where every person has the chance to live a healthy and productive life.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lumina Foundation</strong></td>
<td>an independent, private foundation “committed to making opportunities for learning beyond high school available to all.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GradGuard</strong></td>
<td>an “authority on protecting students and families from the risks of college life” and the “number one provider of tuition and renters insurance for college students.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New America</strong></td>
<td>is a liberal think tank that is “dedicated to realizing the promise of America in an era of rapid technological and social change;” research and policy recommendations focus on five thematic areas: education, economic security, global politics, political reform, and technology and democracy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source, Survey Participants, and Dates</td>
<td>High-Level Findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Wall Street Journal</strong>&lt;br&gt;1,019 adults&lt;br&gt;Surveyed March 2022, reported March 2023</td>
<td>Worth it: 42%&lt;br&gt;Not worth it: 56%&lt;br&gt;Response options: “College is worth the cost because people have a better chance to get a good job and earn more income over their lifetime” or “College is not worth the cost because people often graduate without specific job skills and with a large amount of debt to pay off.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>American Public Media Research Lab</strong>&lt;br&gt;1,003 adults&lt;br&gt;Surveyed Nov./Dec. 2018, reported March 2019</td>
<td>Worth it: 58%&lt;br&gt;Not worth it: 36%&lt;br&gt;Share of Americans who feel a four-year college degree is worth the cost.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gallup</strong>&lt;br&gt;1,013 adults&lt;br&gt;Surveyed June 2023, reported July 2023</td>
<td>Great deal or a lot of confidence: 36%&lt;br&gt;Some confidence: 40%&lt;br&gt;Very little confidence: 22%&lt;br&gt;Share of Americans with various levels of degrees of confidence in higher education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pew Research Center</strong>&lt;br&gt;5,140 adults&lt;br&gt;Surveyed January 2024, reported February 2024</td>
<td>Positive: 53%&lt;br&gt;Negative: 45%&lt;br&gt;Share of Americans who believe higher ed has a “positive” or “negative” impact on the country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FiveThirtyEight</strong>&lt;br&gt;1,796 likely voters&lt;br&gt;Surveyed August 2022, reported October 2022</td>
<td>Strongly or somewhat agree: 51%&lt;br&gt;Strongly or somewhat disagree: 43%&lt;br&gt;Share of likely voters who agree/disagree that a college education is the best way to get ahead in the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source, Survey Participants, and Dates</td>
<td>High-Level Findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Chronicle</strong></td>
<td>Worth it: 79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,025 adults</td>
<td>Not worth it: 21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveyed July/Aug. 2023, reported</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2023</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of degree completers (associates or higher) who believe the cost of getting their degree was worth it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bill &amp; Melinda Gates Foundation</strong></td>
<td>HS, 2-yr worth it: 69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4,848 individuals not enrolled in</td>
<td>NE, 2-yr worth it: 63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>postsecondary education</td>
<td>HS, 4-yr worth it: 72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveyed June 2023, reported</td>
<td>NE, 4-yr worth it: 57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2024</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of high school students and adult non-enrollees who think a two- or four-year who think higher ed is an “excellent or good” value.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lumina Foundation</strong></td>
<td>Never enrolled: 27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13,970 respondents (~6k currently</td>
<td>Previously enrolled: 42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enroll postsec, ~5k previously enroll</td>
<td>Currently enrolled: 39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not completed, and ~3k never enrolled)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveyed Oct.-Nov. 2023, reported</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2024</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of respondents who believe all or most people in the U.S. have access to a quality, affordable education after high school.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GradGuard</strong></td>
<td>Completely or very confident: 48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,000 respondents (mix of college students, high school students, and parents)</td>
<td>Some confidence: 35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveyed June 2022, reported July 2022</td>
<td>Not too confident or not confident at all: 16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of respondents and their degree of confidence that they will earn sufficient money to make the cost of college worth it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New America</strong></td>
<td>Positive impact: 59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,497 adults</td>
<td>Negative impact: 39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveyed March 2023, reported August 2023</td>
<td>Affordable: 48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not affordable: 51%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of adults who indicated postsecondary education is affordable from everyone who wants to pursue it and share who believe higher ed is having either a positive or negative impact on the country.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Considerations for Reviewing Survey Findings

• What goal(s) does the organization have?
• Were the questions part of a broader survey? Or was the survey specifically about higher ed?
• How were questions about higher ed phrased?
• Who is the target audience for the publication? And how did that influence selection of participants?
• When was the survey conducted? And why does this matter?

And what did respondents really mean by their answers?
WHAT DO PEOPLE REALLY MEAN?
Higher Education, Responsibility, and the Public

Brian Powell
James H. Rudy Professor of Sociology
Indiana University
powell@iu.edu

APLU/NACUBO Webinar
April 19, 2024
WHO

SHOULD

PAY?

Higher Education, Responsibility, and the Public

NATALIA QUADLIN
BRIAN POWELL
Who Should Have the MAIN Responsibility for the Cost of Education Beyond High School?

- Students
- Parents
- State or Local governments
- The Federal government
Who Should Be the SECOND Most Responsible for the Cost of Education Beyond High School?

- Students
- Parents
- State or Local governments
- The Federal government
Other Questions in WHO SHOULD PAY? (and beyond)

- Why Should They Pay?
- Should College Be Free?
- Is College Accessible to All Who are Qualified?
- Is College Worth It?
- (And Beyond): Should Student Debt Be Forgiven?
  Is Student Debt or Free/Reduce Tuition More Important?
Responsibility for the Cost of Education Beyond High School: Combinations of Primary and Second Choice

• **College as a Private Responsibility**: Parents and Students

• **College as a Shared Responsibility**: Parents and Government, Students and Government

• **College as a Public Responsibility**: State/Local Government and Federal Government
Responsibility for the Cost of Education Beyond High School: Combinations, 2010

- Parents and Students: 65%
- Parents and Government: 16%
- Students and Government: 11%
- Government: 9%
OTHER TAKEAWAYS

• Large majority (>70%) in favor of **free tuition** (“Tuition at public colleges and universities should be free for anyone who is qualified to attend”)

• Large majority (>80%) agree that **college is not necessary** (“There are many ways to succeed in today’s work world without a college education”)

• But large majority (>60%) also agree that a **college education is worth the financial cost** it requires” (mostly somewhat agree).

• And a large majority (>85%) believe that “it is **easier to succeed** in today’s work world with a college education than without a college education.”
OTHER TAKEAWAYS

• A large majority (>70%) believe that “there are many people who are qualified to go but don’t have the opportunity to do so?”
• Mixed views regarding access to education (qualified “low-income,” “middle-class,” and minority students).
BUT WHAT DO THEY MEAN?
BUT WHAT DO THEY MEAN?

• “We are a black family living on supplemental income from another family and no matter what I do, I know my kids will not have the opportunity to make it to higher education. We can’t afford it.”
WHAT DO THEY MEAN?: Free Tuition

• AGREED: Yes, But

“I agree, but you still have to pay something.”

“…..but the students should be required to pay for some.”

“…..I don’t believe it should be completely free, however I do believe that it shouldn’t be as expensive.”

“I think we should pay something, but not too much.”

“…..free for some people.”
• AGREED: Yes, But

[SOMewhat APPROVED]:
“Well, think of it as birth control. Birth control allows just anyone to have sex without the consequences of having a kid. Same thing with free tuition. If everyone had that offer of free tuition, they would take advantage of it and would not make good decisions because it was handed to them.”
WHAT DO THEY MEAN?: Free Tuition

• DID NOT AGREE: No, But

“I don’t believe that anyone should be denied an education based on their lack of finances.”

“…lower tuition”
WHAT DO THEY MEAN?: Free Tuition

• Open-ended responses regarding tuition (and others) tell us why we did not ask about more specifics (e.g., Pell Grants, FAFSA).
• E.g., State coverage of expenses that lowers tuition.
WHAT DO THEY MEAN?: COLLEGE ACCESS OF “QUALIFIED STUDENTS FROM MIDDLE-CLASS FAMILIES”

• Compared to whom?
• “Boring” question
WHAT DO THEY MEAN?: COLLEGE ACCESS OF QUALIFIED STUDENTS FROM RACIAL OR ETHNIC MINORITIES, SUCH AS BLACKS OR LATINOS

• Is “qualified” seen as “qualified”?
• Does “same opportunities” really mean “same opportunities”?

“There’s actually more for minorities than there are for non-minorities. They can get grants and loans, especially grants, just based on the color of their skin.”

“There are more programs out there for them to qualify for than the, uh, standard White people.”
WHAT DO THEY MEAN?: IS COLLEGE WORTH IT?

• Two sides of the equation: benefit of college and cost of college
• The key side for views about “worth it” is the cost, not the benefit:
  “I think that an education is beneficial to everyone, but the cost of education is out of control. Something needs to be done to lower the cost of an education.”

“I somewhat disagree because I find it ludicrous to try to encourage my children to work hard to achieve the education that will hopefully help them begin a career of their choice, only to be working for the rest of their lives to pay off the debt of the education.”
WHAT DO THEY MEAN?: IS COLLEGE WORTH IT?

• Benefit goes financial advantage:
“A college education can lead to so many advantages besides financial. It can and does open the world to students who can travel and learn about other cultures. That college education and college degree opens so many windows that are otherwise totally unattainable for most people.”

“[College] exposes students to different ideas and encourages critical thinking. This in turn helps to see many sides of an issue rather than having tunnel vision. This benefits all of society.”
Public Views of the Value of College: Additional Evidence

• Parental educational aspirations for their children

• Perceptions of success with and without a college degree

• Importance of college today vs. a decade ago
“crippling debt”
“I feel sorry for the young people come out of college with enormous debts.”
“Because we should be seeing education as an investment. We shouldn’t be putting our students into debt. $1.3 trillion dollars in student load debt is one of the most crippling factors in our economy”
Changes in Discourse Over Time: Government, Debt and a Right

“Well, because it’s like a constitutional right. You should be able to—uh—get a free education in America. It’s just that I believe that everybody should have the chance to go to college if they want to, and you shouldn’t be put in debt for it.”
Changes in Discourse Over Time: Government, Spillover From Healthcare (ACA)

• Healthcare: “‘I think education is a right that every citizen has, and if you don’t have the economic resources, but you still have the right for an education… I think it’s the same way you have the right to have healthcare or have a place to live. You have the right to have an education.’”
WHO SHOULD PAY?

Higher Education, Responsibility, and the Public

NATASHA QUADLIN
BRIAN POWELL
Answer 4 questions to let us know your thoughts about today.

Use the QR code or this url: https://nacubo.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_01AcV9NBe5vWc2W
3RD TOWN HALL: EXISTING AND MISSING DATA FOR ADDRESSING COST & VALUE

May 10th | 1:00 - 2:00 P.M. EASTERN

Bao Le, ble@aplu.org
Lindsay Wayt, Lindsay.Wayt@nacubo.org
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Wall Street Journal</strong></td>
<td>A “definitive source of news and information through the lens of business, finance, economics and money…” whose “audience is anyone who wants or has a job, a career, or an ambition.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>American Public Media Research Lab</strong></td>
<td>Is “home to a team of researchers who inform the public with both original and curated research, facts, and analysis;” the work is “nonpartisan” and “equips journalists, civic and business leaders, and anyone else who wants to know what the best research says.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gallup</strong></td>
<td>A global analytics and advisory firm whose work is grounded in public opinion and survey research expertise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pew Research Center</strong></td>
<td>A “nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes, and trends shaping the world” that conducts “public opinion polling…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FiveThirtyEight</strong></td>
<td>Originally a website that focused on opinion polls on politics, economics, and sports; an organization that uses “data and evidence to advance public knowledge.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Chronicle</strong></td>
<td>The “nation’s largest newsroom dedicated to covering colleges and universities.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bill &amp; Melinda Gates Foundation</strong></td>
<td>A philanthropic foundation that “works with local leaders and organizations to create a world where every person has the change to live a healthy and productive life.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lumina Foundation</strong></td>
<td>An independent, private foundation “committed to making opportunities for learning beyond high school available to all.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GradGuard</strong></td>
<td>An “authority on protecting students and families from the risks of college life” and the “number one provider of tuition and renters insurance for college students.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New America</strong></td>
<td>Is a liberal think tank that is “dedicated to realizing the promise of America in an era of rapid technological and social change;” research and policy recommendations focus on five thematic areas: education, economic security, global politics, political reform, and technology and democracy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>