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UNCERTAINTY OVER THE VALUE OF A COLLEGE DEGREE BUT SPORTS PROGRAMS SEEN AS A BENEFIT TO COLLEGES

New Jersey voters are divided over whether the cost of a college degree today is worth it, according to the most recent statewide poll of registered voters from Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind. Forty-five percent say the cost of a college degree is justified given the value that society places on the accomplishment, while 43 percent believe the cost is no longer worth it given a degree's declining value in society.

"With colleges and universities gearing up to begin the new academic year, this data suggests the decision to attend college was not a slam dunk," said Krista Jenkins, director of PublicMind and professor of political science at Fairleigh Dickinson University. "The increasing cost of college is clearly weighing heavily on the minds of Garden State voters. The experience of going to college and getting a diploma makes the experience that much more worthwhile."

College graduates (53%) and women (51%) are the most likely to believe in the continued value of a college degree, with those who lack a college diploma the most likely to say the cost exceeds the benefits. About half of all high school graduates (48%) and those with some college, but no degree (51%), say a college degree is no longer worth it.

"These results reflect a growing number of skeptics nationwide who question the worth of a college degree," said Fairleigh Dickinson University President Sheldon Drucker. "Still, studies continue to show that college graduates earn more than those with just a high school diploma, suffer less unemployment, enjoy better health and participate more in civic life. Therefore, colleges must demonstrate their value while doing all that's possible to keep their costs affordable."

When asked about the reasons behind the rising cost of college tuition, the only responses to this open-ended question to reach double digits involve the behavior of those who run colleges and universities. A third of respondents cite colleges themselves for the increased costs. Fourteen percent offered reasons that center on overpaid administrators and upper management bloat, with another ten percent who said something akin to fiscal mismanagement by colleges themselves, and eight percent who cited overall greed. The only other response to garner a higher percentage of respondents is the "don't know," or those who are simply mystified about the underlying causes of college unaffordability (20%).

Although big college sports programs often attract the ire of those critical of increased tuition, this was not cited by respondents. In fact, when asked what they think about the benefit of big college sports programs, like football and basketball, opinion is decisive. Two-thirds (67%) say these programs are good for colleges and universities, and another fifth (19%) say the opposite. Across virtually all groups polled, opinions vary little.

“Despite the often steep price tag associated with college athletics, it looks like most think these programs are beneficial,” said Jenkins. “Whether it’s revenue, school pride, or the benefits these programs bring to student athletes, there’s little public support for those who would like to see sports programs scaled back across our nation’s colleges and universities.”

The Fairleigh Dickinson University poll of 700 registered voters in New Jersey was conducted by telephone with both landline and cell phones from August 21 through August 27, 2013, and has a margin of error of +/-3.7 percentage points.

*Methodology, questions, and tables on the web at: <http://publicmind.fdu.edu>
Radio actualities at 201.692.2846 For more information, please call 201.692.7032*

Methodology

The most recent survey by Fairleigh Dickinson University’s PublicMind was conducted by telephone from August 21 through August 27, 2013 using a randomly selected sample of 700 registered voters who reside in New Jersey. One can be 95 percent confident that the error attributable to sampling has a range of +/- 3.7 percentage points. The margin of error for subgroups is larger and varies by the size of that subgroup. Survey results are also subject to non-sampling error. This kind of error, which cannot be measured, arises from a number of factors including, but not limited to, non-response (eligible individuals refusing to be interviewed), question wording, the order in which questions are asked, and variations among interviewers.

PublicMind interviews are conducted by Opinion America of Cedar Knolls, NJ, with professionally trained interviewers using a CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) system. Random selection is achieved by computerized random-digit dialing. This technique gives every person with a landline phone number (including those with unlisted numbers) an equal chance of being selected.

Landline households are supplemented with a separate, randomly selected sample of cell-phone respondents interviewed in the same time frame. The total combined sample is mathematically weighted to match known demographics of age, race and gender.

The following tables are based on all registered voters in the sample.

College value

Which of the following best describes your feelings, even if neither is a perfect statement: The value that society places on a college education is worth the price of a college degree today, or the price of a college degree is no longer worth it because of its declining value.											
		Party			Gender		Education			Race	
	All	D	I	R	M	F	HS	Some college	College	White	Nonwhite
Worth it	45%	50	31	43	39	51	36	35	53	47	41
Not worth it	43%	39	56	45	48	38	48	51	37	42	44
Both (vol)	5%	4	7	4	5	4	3	8	4	5	4
DK (vol)	7%	6	5	7	7	6	12	6	5	6	9
Ref (vol)	1%	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1

Reasons for cost increases

In your opinion, who or what is chiefly to blame for increasing college costs these days? [Open ended]							
	All		All		All		All
Professor salaries and benefits	7%	Just greedy	8%	College mismanagement	10%	Other	1%
Buildings & facilities	4%	Insurance/lawyers/liability	1%	Government ineptitude	7%	DK (vol)	20%
Excessive staff	1%	Sport programs	2%	Economy/inflation	7%	Ref (vol)	1%
Overpaid/too many administrators	14%	Not enough state money (governor, legislature)	5%	Inadequate financial aid	1%		
Health care costs	1%	Not enough federal money (president, Congress)	8%	Excessive financial aid	1%		

Value of sports

In general, would you say big time sports programs like football and basketball are good or bad for universities?											
		Party			Gender		Education			Race	
	All	D	I	R	M	F	HS	Some college	College	White	Nonwhite
Good	67%	67	67	68	66	68	76	65	65	64	76
Bad	19%	22	18	15	18	20	11	18	22	22	12
Neither (vol)	11%	8	14	13	13	9	9	13	10	11	10
DK (vol)	3%	3	1	4	3	3	3	2	3	2	3
Ref (vol)	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0

Exact Question Wording and Order

US1 and US2 withheld for later release

NJ1 through NJ4 released September 3, 2013

DIST1 and DIST2 withheld for later release

NJ5 through NJ9 released August 29, 2013

NJ10 withheld for later release

NJ11 and NJ12 released August 29, 2013

EDUC1 and EDUC2 released September 9, 2013

EDUC3 Which of the following best describes your feelings, even if neither is a perfect statement: The value that society places on a college education is worth the price of a college degree today; or, the price of a college degree is no longer worth it because of its declining value. [Randomize]

- 1 The value that society places on a college education is worth the price of a college degree today
- 2 The price of a college degree is no longer worth it because of its declining value
- 3 Both (vol)
- 8 DK (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

EDUC4 In your opinion, who or what is chiefly to blame increasing college costs these days. [Open ended]

EDUC5 In general, would you say big sports programs like football and basketball are good or bad for universities? [Randomize]

- 1 Good
- 2 Bad
- 3 Neither good nor bad (vol)
- 8 DK (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

Sample characteristics – Registered voters**Gender**

Male	48
Female	52

Age

18-29	11
30-44	26
45-59	31
60+	29
Refused	3

Race/Ethnicity

White	68
Black/African-American	12
Latino or Hispanic	10
Asian	5
Other/refused	5

Public employee household

Yes	21
No	78
Unsure/refused	1

Party identification

Democrat/Lean Democrat	48
Independent/DK/refused	20
Republican/Lean Republican	33