

GALLUP®



THE 2014 GALLUP-LUMINA FOUNDATION STUDY OF THE AMERICAN PUBLIC'S
OPINION ON HIGHER EDUCATION

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION ASPIRATIONS AND BARRIERS



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Lumina Foundation, an Indianapolis-based private foundation, is committed to enrolling and graduating more students from college — especially 21st century students: low-income students, students of color, first-generation students and adult learners. Lumina’s goal is to increase the percentage of Americans who hold high-quality degrees, certificates and other credentials to 60% by 2025. Lumina pursues this goal in three ways: by identifying and supporting effective practices, through public policy advocacy and by using communications and convening power to build public will for change.

More information is available at <http://www.luminafoundation.org>.

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INTRODUCTION

Americans understand that a postsecondary education is the key to finding a better job and building a better life. This lesson hit home during the recent recession, when four out of five jobs lost were ones that required a high school diploma or less.¹ Though the economy has improved, most U.S. adults say that a degree will be just as important or even more important in the future to getting a good job.

Hispanics and blacks are more likely than whites to say it is very important to increase the proportion of Americans with a degree or professional certificate beyond high school. Many say they have taken steps to attaining a degree, including completing a financial aid form, talking to a college adviser or recruiter and researching degree programs. However, blacks and Hispanics continue to lag behind the average degree attainment rate in the U.S.

Majorities of adults in the U.S. say that higher education is not affordable for everyone who needs it. They also note that graduates are not always adequately prepared for success in the workplace. To contribute to the dialogue surrounding postsecondary education in the U.S., Lumina and Gallup have gauged the American public's opinion over the past four years on the most pressing issues facing higher education today, including cost, access, quality and workforce readiness. This study can help inform what thought leaders and ALL Americans need to know about the value and opportunity that quality higher education affords.

Some questions addressed in the public opinion poll on higher education include:

- How important is it for adults in this country to have a degree or professional certificate beyond high school?
- How important is attainment of a degree or professional certificate in getting a good job?
- Are adults in the U.S. completing their postsecondary education?
- What are U.S. adults doing to pursue postsecondary education, both for themselves and for others?
- Do you think education beyond high school is affordable for everyone in this country who needs it?
- What is a reasonable amount of loan debt for an undergraduate student to accumulate to obtain varying types of degrees?

SNAPSHOT OF FINDINGS

- Nearly all (96%) say it is somewhat or very important for adults in this country to have a degree or professional certificate beyond high school.
- A majority (94%) say it is somewhat or very important to increase the proportion of Americans with a degree or professional certificate beyond high school.
- Most (93%) say that it will be just as important or more important in the future to have a degree or professional certificate beyond high school in order to get a good job.
- More than three-fourths (78%) agree or strongly agree that a good job is essential to having a high quality of life.
- Fewer than one in five (19%) agree or strongly agree that they are confident that having only a high school diploma can lead to a good job.
- Seventy-nine percent of adults in the U.S. say they do not think education beyond high school is affordable for everyone in this country who needs it.
- Eight in 10 (80%) agree or strongly agree that colleges and universities need to change to better meet the needs of today's students.

¹ Lumina Foundation: <http://www.luminafoundation.org/facts-and-figures>

SECTION 1: MAJORITY BELIEVE IN THE VALUE OF POSTSECONDARY CREDENTIALS

DEGREES AND PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATES WILL BE EVEN MORE IMPORTANT IN THE FUTURE

In today’s highly competitive global economy, nearly all U.S. adults (96%) say it is somewhat or very important to have a degree or professional certificate beyond high school. U.S. employees’ workplace skills are falling behind those of their counterparts in developed nations,² underscoring the need for a more educated working population to help the country compete on a global scale. About six in 10 (61%) U.S. adults say it is very important to increase the proportion of Americans who have a degree or professional certificate beyond high school, higher than the 51% who said the same in 2013³. The majority (69%) say a degree or professional certificate will be more important in the future to get a good job.

Hispanics (72%) and blacks (73%) say it is very important to increase the proportion of Americans with a degree or professional certificate beyond high school, compared with 56% of whites. Looking ahead, 78% of Hispanics, 74% of blacks and 67% of whites say having a postsecondary degree will be more important in the future to get a good job.

	% Not at all important	% Not very important	% Somewhat important	% Very important
How important is it for adults in this country to have a degree or professional certificate beyond high school?	2	3	27	69
How important is it to increase the proportion of Americans with a degree or professional certificate beyond high school?	2	4	33	61

In your opinion, how important will it be in the future to have a degree or professional certificate beyond high school in order to get a good job?	
More important	69%
Just as important	24%
Less important	7%

² Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development. (2013). “OECD Skills Outlook 2013,” <http://skills.oecd.org/skillsoutlook.html>

³ Lumina and Gallup (2013). “What America Needs to Know About Higher Education Redesign,” <http://www.gallup.com/services/176759/america-needs-know-higher-education-redesign.aspx>

GOOD JOBS AND GOOD LIVES

Gallup’s research shows that the ultimate outcome of an education is about living a good life, which includes having a good job.⁴ Many adults in the U.S. seem to be making this connection: About two-thirds (68%) agree or strongly agree that having a professional certificate or degree beyond high school is essential for getting a good job. Hispanics (84%) and blacks (76%) are more likely than whites (64%) to agree or strongly agree with this statement.

Just under three-quarters (74%) of U.S. adults agree or strongly agree that a college degree or professional certificate leads to a better quality of life. This includes roughly seven in 10 whites (71%) and eight in 10 blacks (80%) and Hispanics (83%). More than three-fourths (78%) of adults in the U.S. agree or strongly agree that a good job is essential to having a high quality of life. This includes 86% of Hispanics, 84% of blacks and 76% of whites.

	On a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.				
	%1 Strongly Disagree	%2	%3	%4	%5 Strongly Agree
Having a professional certificate or degree beyond high school is essential for getting a good job.	4	5	23	27	41
A college degree or professional certificate leads to a better quality of life.	3	5	19	31	43
A good job is essential to having a high quality of life.	3	5	14	26	52

⁴ Gallup Purdue Index (2014). <http://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/galluppurdueindex-report-2014.pdf>

SOME DEGREES ARE MORE CONDUCTIVE TO GETTING A GOOD JOB THAN OTHERS

When it comes to an educational experience that can lead to a good job, not all degrees, diplomas or certificates are equal in the public’s eyes. Just about one in 10 (12%) strongly agree they are confident that having only a high school diploma can lead to a good job, compared with 16% for only an associate degree and 20% for only a professional certificate. Adults in the U.S. are most confident that having only a bachelor’s degree (29%) can lead to a good job, with 44% of Hispanics strongly agreeing with this statement, compared with 27% of whites.

	Using a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.				
	%1 Strongly Disagree	%2	%3	%4	%5 Strongly Agree
I am confident that having only a high school diploma can lead to a good job.	32	26	23	7	12
I am confident that having only a professional certificate beyond high school can lead to a good job.	9	13	37	22	20
I am confident that having only an associate degree beyond high school can lead to a good job.	6	14	38	26	16
I am confident that having only a bachelor's degree beyond high school can lead to a good job.	4	6	20	41	29

President Barack Obama recently proposed making community college free to all Americans, saying it is a “chance to graduate ready for the new economy, without a load of debt.”⁵ But fewer than four in 10 (39%) adults in the U.S. agree or strongly agree that an associate degree is a well-respected degree in the U.S.

	Using a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.				
	%1 Strongly Disagree	%2	%3	%4	%5 Strongly Agree
An associate degree is a well-respected degree in the United States.	6	19	36	22	17

⁵White House (2015, Jan. 20), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/20/remarks-president-state-union-address-january-20-2015>

SECTION 2: ATTAINMENT RATES DO NOT MATCH STRONG BELIEF IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

NOT ALL WHO ASPIRE TO EARN A DEGREE ATTAIN ONE

Though there is strong agreement among U.S. adults that a postsecondary degree or certificate leads to a better job and a better quality of life, Lumina’s recent report, *A Stronger Nation Through Higher Education*, reveals that less than half of Americans (40%) aged 25 to 64 have at least an associate degree⁶. Still, many who do not yet have a postsecondary degree or credential say they have taken steps toward attaining one, including one-third who say they have completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form (35%) or have researched degree programs that award credits for prior learning (33%). Half (50%) of those without a postsecondary degree or credential say they have talked to a college adviser or recruiter, and nearly half (47%) have researched a degree program that would fit their needs. One-quarter (25%) without a postsecondary degree or credential say they have spoken with an employer’s human resources staff about tuition support or reimbursement.

	Have you ever done any of the following things in order to further your education?					
	% Yes			% No		
	All	Associate Degree or Higher	Some College, No Degree or Less	All	Associate Degree or Higher	Some College, No Degree or Less
Talked to a college adviser or recruiter	63	79	50	37	21	50
Researched degree programs that would fit your needs	60	76	47	40	24	53
Completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form	45	57	35	55	43	65
Researched degree programs that award credits for prior learning	41	50	33	59	50	67
Spoken with an employer's human resources staff about tuition support or reimbursement	36	49	25	64	51	76

Despite many Americans taking these preliminary actions to further their education, fewer enrolled in college this past year. Lumina’s report revealed that U.S. postsecondary enrollment dropped by 600,000 students overall from 2013 to 2014, including a decline among black students while enrollment for Hispanics stayed flat.⁷

⁶ Lumina Foundation: http://www.luminafoundation.org/files/publications/A_stronger_nation_through_higher_education-2015.pdf

⁷ Lumina Foundation: http://www.luminafoundation.org/files/publications/A_stronger_nation_through_higher_education-2015.pdf

Yet, blacks, in particular, report completing most of the preliminary activities to starting college at a higher rate than the average U.S. adult. Seventy-two percent say they have spoken with a college adviser or recruiter, 72% have researched degree programs that would fit their needs, 61% have completed the FAFSA form and 55% have researched degree programs that award credits for prior learning. This shows a strong desire among blacks to obtain a college degree that belies this group’s low attainment rates. Lumina finds just 28% of blacks between the ages of 25 to 64 have a postsecondary degree, compared with 44% of whites. The Hispanic attainment rate, at 20%, is even lower.⁸

REACHING OUT TO HELP OTHERS ATTAIN A DEGREE

With many in the U.S. recognizing the importance of higher education, some have taken action to encourage others to attain their degrees. One-third (33%) say they have mentored a student who was enrolled in college. More than one-third (36%) say they have given money to a college or university to support future students. Nearly half (47%) say they have given money to an organization that awards college scholarships or grants, and a majority (60%) say they have encouraged an employer to provide training or education opportunities to employees.

	Have you ever done any of the following?	
	% Yes	% No
Encouraged an employer to provide training or education opportunities to employees	60	40
Given money to an organization that awards college scholarships or grants	47	53
Given money to a college or university to support future students	36	64
Mentored a student who was enrolled in college	33	67

⁸ Lumina Foundation: http://www.luminafoundation.org/files/publications/A_stronger_nation_through_higher_education-2015.pdf

SECTION 3: BARRIERS TO MAKING DEGREE ATTAINMENT A REALITY

AVAILABILITY OF EDUCATION BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL

If a college degree is essential to living the American dream, then the dream may be slipping away. Less than two-thirds (61%) of adults in the U.S. feel that education beyond high school is available to anyone in this country who needs it — a drop from 67% in 2013.⁹ Higher percentages of Hispanics (73%) say that an education is available to anyone in this country who needs it, compared with whites (58%).

Do you think education beyond high school is available to anyone in this country who needs it?	
Yes	61%
No	39%

AFFORDABILITY OF EDUCATION BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL

The average tuition bill for students at a public four-year college has increased by more than 250% over the past three decades — and rising costs are likely a big reason why higher education seems out of reach for many in the U.S.¹⁰ More than three-quarters (79%) of adults in the U.S. do not think that education beyond high school is affordable for everyone in this country who needs it, including 81% of blacks and 83% of whites. Hispanics are significantly more optimistic about the affordability of education beyond high school, with half (50%) saying yes, it is affordable to everyone in this country who needs it, compared with 17% of whites and 19% of blacks.

Do you think education beyond high school is affordable for everyone in this country who needs it?	
Yes	21%
No	79%

QUALITY AND SELECTION CRITERIA FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

When judging the quality of the country's colleges, factors most frequently cited as being very important are the faculty's qualifications (79%) and the percentage of graduates who are able to get a good job (70%). About half (49%) say the price of the college or university degree is very important to the overall quality of the institution, although Hispanics (71%) are more likely to say it is very important than whites (44%).

⁹ Lumina and Gallup. (2013). "What America Needs to Know About Higher Education Redesign," <http://www.gallup.com/services/176759/america-needs-know-higher-education-redesign.aspx>

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Education, <http://www.ed.gov/college>

	Please tell me how important each of the following factors are to the overall quality of a college or university.			
	% Not at all important	% Not very important	% Somewhat important	% Very important
The qualifications of the faculty	1	3	18	79
The percentage of graduates who are able to get a good job	1	4	25	70
The percentage of students who graduate from the college or university	1	5	35	59
The percentage of graduates who are thriving in many areas of their life	1	5	37	56
The price of the college or university degree	4	13	33	49

When selecting a college or university, adults in the U.S. are most likely to say the quality of degree programs is very important (81%). Respondents are least likely to mention the percentage of students who graduate from the college or university as very important (56%).

	Please tell me how important each of the following factors are for selecting a college or university.			
	% Not at all important	% Not very important	% Somewhat important	% Very important
The quality of college degree programs	0	1	17	82
Financial assistance for college education	1	2	18	79
The qualifications of the faculty	1	3	21	75
The percentage of graduates who are able to get a good job	1	4	23	73
The average amount of loan debt students have when they graduate from the college or university	1	4	25	70
The price of the college or university	1	5	26	68
The percentage of graduates who are thriving in many areas of their life	1	6	38	56
The percentage of students who graduate from the college or university	1	5	38	56

THE FAR-REACHING EFFECTS OF STUDENT DEBT

With postsecondary costs and student debt soaring, most cannot afford not to consider the price tag of higher education. Sixty-eight percent of adults in the U.S. say the price of the college or university is very important when selecting a college or university, and 79% say that financial assistance is a very important factor in that process. Seven in 10 (70%) say the average amount of loan debt students have when they graduate from the college or university is also very important to consider when selecting a school.

One study found that 77% of college and university admissions directors say they believe they are losing potential applicants because of apprehension about accumulating debt in college, suggesting that the prospect of potentially owing thousands of dollars in loans has become a significant barrier to postsecondary enrollment.¹¹ Nevertheless, 17% say that \$50,000 or more is a reasonable amount of money to borrow to earn a bachelor’s degree. Only 5% of adults in the U.S. think that under \$5,000 of debt is reasonable, with just 5% saying that no amount of loan debt is reasonable for a bachelor’s degree.

A recent Gallup-Purdue Index study¹² found that about one-fifth of recent black college graduates with a bachelor’s degree (22%) report leaving school with no loans — almost half the rate among white college graduates (39%). Nearly three in 10 recent black college graduates (28%) and the same percentage of whites say they borrowed up to \$25,000. Overall, 35% of 2000-2014 U.S. college graduates report graduating with more than \$25,000 in student debt, in inflation-adjusted dollars.

Many adults in the U.S. think that these figures are reasonable for students who graduate with a bachelor’s degree. More than half (62%) say that \$20,000 or more in debt is reasonable, and 40% say that \$30,000 or more in debt is reasonable for attaining a bachelor’s degree.

Suppose someone had to take out some student loans in order to attend college. What do you think is a reasonable amount of loan debt for someone to have if they graduate with a bachelor's degree?	
No amount of loan debt is reasonable.	5%
Under \$5,000	5%
\$5,000 to less than \$10,000	9%
\$10,000 to less than \$20,000	19%
\$20,000 to less than \$30,000	22%
\$30,000 to less than \$40,000	12%
\$40,000 to less than \$50,000	11%
\$50,000 or more	17%

AMOUNT OF REASONABLE DEBT FOR ASSOCIATE DEGREE

The amount of debt individuals find reasonable for graduates with an associate degree is lower than that for graduates with a bachelor’s degree. The majority (74%) say less than \$20,000 is a reasonable amount of loan debt for an associate degree, compared with 38% who say the same about a bachelor’s degree. More than four in 10 (46%) say less than \$10,000 in loan debt is a reasonable amount of debt to accumulate for an associate degree. Twenty-five percent say it is reasonable to obtain an associate degree with under \$5,000 in debt or no loan debt.

¹¹ Jaschik, S. (2014, Sept. 18), Inside Higher Ed Survey of College and University Admissions Directors, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/survey/more-pressure-ever-2014-survey-college-and-university-admissions-directors>

¹² Black College Grads More Likely to Graduate With Debt, Gallup-Purdue Index, Feb. 4-March 7, 2014 <http://www.gallup.com/poll/176051/black-college-graduates-likely-graduate-debt.aspx>

What do you think is a reasonable amount of loan debt for someone to have if they graduate with an associate degree?	
No amount of loan debt is reasonable.	10%
Under \$5,000	15%
\$5,000 to less than \$10,000	21%
\$10,000 to less than \$20,000	28%
\$20,000 to less than \$30,000	16%
\$30,000 to less than \$40,000	4%
\$40,000 to less than \$50,000	3%
\$50,000 or more	4%

AMOUNT OF REASONABLE DEBT FOR NO DEGREE

For students who attend college but do not obtain a degree, the majority of U.S. adults (60%) say less than \$10,000 in loan debt is a reasonable amount. One in five (20%) say no amount of loan debt is reasonable under this circumstance. Hispanics (16%) are three times as likely as whites (4%) to say it's reasonable to accumulate more than \$40,000 in debt and not graduate.

What do you think is a reasonable amount of loan debt for someone to have if they take classes for several years at a college or university but do not graduate with a degree?	
No amount of loan debt is reasonable.	20%
Under \$5,000	20%
\$5,000 to less than \$10,000	20%
\$10,000 to less than \$20,000	20%
\$20,000 to less than \$30,000	10%
\$30,000 to less than \$40,000	4%
\$40,000 to less than \$50,000	3%
\$50,000 or more	3%

Despite the cost and the risk of taking on debt, adults in the U.S. seem to feel that some college is better than no college. Two-thirds of respondents agree or strongly agree that taking some college courses is a good idea even if one does not get a degree.

	Using a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.				
	%1 Strongly Disagree	%2	%3	%4	%5 Strongly Agree
Taking some college classes is a good idea even if you do not get a degree.	7	7	21	27	39

SECTION 4: CHANGING WORKPLACE DEMANDS REQUIRE EXAMINATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION STRUCTURE

NOT MANY FEEL A COLLEGE DEGREE PREPARES GRADUATES FOR WORKPLACE SUCCESS

A recent study of business and nonprofit leaders found that most employers felt recent graduates fell short in nearly all of 17 important outcome areas, including critical thinking and analytical reasoning, complex problem solving and ethical judgment and decision making — skills essential to excelling at work.¹³ Most U.S. adults share these sentiments: Just 13% strongly agree that U.S. college graduates are well-prepared for success in the workforce. The percentage of those with an associate degree or higher who strongly agree with this statement is even lower, at 6%. On the other hand, blacks and Hispanics are more optimistic, with 53% and 55%, respectively, agreeing or strongly agreeing that graduates are well-prepared, compared with 30% of whites.

About three-quarters of U.S. adults (73%) agree or strongly agree that employers value the knowledge and skills students obtain through the process of earning a college degree, including 70% of blacks and 73% each of whites and Hispanics.

	Using a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.				
	%1 Strongly Disagree	%2	%3	%4	%5 Strongly Agree
College graduates in this country are well-prepared for success in the workforce.	7	17	40	23	13
Employers value the knowledge and skills obtained through the process of earning a college degree.	2	6	20	36	37

When it comes to the factors organizations prioritize in deciding whom to hire, a strong majority of U.S. adults (81%) say that the job candidate’s knowledge and skills in the field is very important. Far fewer say the job candidate’s university major (47%) or the institution (31%) he or she graduated from are very important factors in the decision.

Hispanics are significantly more likely (74%) than whites (42%) to say that a candidate’s major in college is very important to employers in the hiring process. More than twice as many Hispanics (54%) as whites (26%) say the college or university that a job candidate graduated from is very important to employers when deciding whom to hire.

¹³ Associate of American Colleges and Universities. (2015, Jan. 20), <https://www.aacu.org/press/press-releases/2015employerstudentsurveys>

	Please tell me how important you think each of the following factors are to organizations when they decide whom to hire.			
	% Not at all important	% Not very important	% Somewhat important	% Very important
The job candidate's knowledge and skills in the field	0	1	18	81
The job candidate's college or university major	1	5	47	47
The college or university that the job candidate graduated from	3	14	52	31

INSTITUTIONS NEED TO CHANGE

Today's college students do not always fit the traditional mold: For instance, many are older, more racially diverse, more likely to live off campus and more likely to have jobs and families of their own than their conventional counterparts.¹⁴ Eight in 10 (80%) U.S. adults agree or strongly agree that colleges and universities need to change to better meet the needs of today's students. Overall, about four in 10 (42%) U.S. adults agree or strongly agree that colleges and universities are changing to better meet students' needs. Hispanics and blacks are more optimistic that this is happening, with 56% and 55%, respectively, agreeing or strongly agreeing, compared with 38% of whites.

	Using a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.				
	%1 Strongly Disagree	%2	%3	%4	%5 Strongly Agree
Colleges and universities need to change to better meet the needs of today's students.	2	3	15	25	55
Colleges and universities are changing to better meet the needs of today's students.	7	13	37	26	16

INSTITUTIONS AND PRIORITIES

When asked to weigh different factors that colleges and universities might prioritize, nearly three-quarters of U.S. adults (72%) say teaching students skills and knowledge that can be applied in the workforce is very important to these institutions, followed by increasing the graduation rate (69%) and providing support and services so that students can succeed in college (68%). A little more than half of those surveyed (54%) say that they believe it is very important to colleges and universities to have a diverse student population.

¹⁴ Pelletier. (2010). Success for Adult Students. http://www.aascu.org/uploadedFiles/AASCU/Content/Root/MediaAndPublications/PublicPurposeMagazines/Issue/10fall_adultstudents.pdf

	How important do you think each of the following factors are to colleges and universities?			
	% Not at all important	% Not very important	% Somewhat important	% Very important
Teaching students skills and knowledge that can be applied in the workforce	1	5	23	72
Increasing the graduation rate	2	5	25	69
Providing support and services so that students can be successful in college	1	4	28	68
Having alumni who can donate back to the school	2	4	31	64
Getting top students to attend	1	4	33	61
Having a diverse student population	3	8	35	54

When asked which of the factors they thought colleges and universities value most, 35% say teaching students skills and knowledge that can be applied in the workforce. Approximately one in five (21%) say having alumni who can donate back to the school is most important to institutions, and those with an associate degree or higher are significantly more likely to say this (26%) than those with no degree (16%). Individuals are least likely to say institutions value having a diverse student population the most (5%).

Which of these factors would you say colleges and universities value most?	
Teaching students skills and knowledge that can be applied in the workforce	35%
Having alumni who can donate back to the school	21%
Helping students succeed	14%
Getting top students to attend	13%
Increasing the graduation rate	12%
Having a diverse student population	5%

CHANGING THE PARADIGM

While about half of U.S. adults (51%) say that most of the time they subscribe to the traditional view of the college experience as a campus where students live and attend classes toward a four-year degree, some are expanding their perspective of what attaining a college degree can look like.

Approximately four in 10 (41%) say that their description of how they think of college most of the time includes students earning a professional certificate to use in their workplace. Three in 10 (30%) think of students working to earn a two-year associate degree and two in 10 (20%) think of an online learning environment where students log into classes most of time when they think about college.

	Please tell me whether each of these describe how you think of college. Do you perceive college as ...?		
	% Most of the time	% Some of the time	% Never
A campus where students live and attend classes with the goal of getting a four-year degree	51	34	15
Students working to earn a professional certificate to use in their workplace	41	41	18
Students working to earn a two-year associate degree	31	48	21
An online learning environment where students log in to classes	20	53	27

PERCEPTIONS OF QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Though ideas about what constitutes a college education are evolving, individuals still believe the conventional model of higher education offers the most quality. About three-quarters (74%) agree or strongly agree that traditional colleges and universities offer a high-quality education. In contrast, about six in 10 (61%) agree or strongly agree that community colleges offer a high-quality education, and about four in 10 (41%) agree or strongly agree that online colleges offer a high-quality education.

Online education continues to lag behind traditional institutions in quality perceptions. Gallup recently reported that “Americans tend to think it provides less rigorous testing and grading, less qualified instructors, and has less credence with employers compared with traditional, classroom-based education.”¹⁵ Yet, there is some indication that the cool reception toward online colleges is gradually thawing. In a 2011 Gallup-Lumina poll on higher education¹⁶, 10% strongly agreed that online colleges and universities offer a high-quality education, compared to 17% in 2014.

% Strongly Agree Online Colleges and Universities Offer High-Quality Education



¹⁵ Gallup. (2013, Oct. 15) “In, U.S., Online Education Rated Best for Value and Options,” <http://www.gallup.com/poll/165425/online-education-rated-best-value-options.aspx>
¹⁶ Lumina Foundation/Gallup Poll 2011, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/151844/Lumina-Foundation-Gallup-Poll-2011.aspx> and What America Needs to Know About Higher Education Redesign, <http://www.gallup.com/services/176759/america-needs-know-higher-education-redesign.aspx>

	Using a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.				
	%1 Strongly Disagree	%2	%3	%4	%5 Strongly Agree
Traditional colleges and universities offer high-quality education.	1	3	22	41	33
Community colleges offer high-quality education.	3	6	30	35	26
Online colleges and universities offer high-quality education.	7	15	37	24	17

When asked if the quality of education from an online college or university is just as good as the education received at a traditional college or university, 39% agree or strongly agree. Half of Hispanics (52%) agree or strongly agree with this statement, compared with 36% of whites. This finding suggests relatively strong support of online higher education among Hispanics.

	Using a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.				
	%1 Strongly Disagree	%2	%3	%4	%5 Strongly Agree
The quality of education at an online college or university is just as good as the education received at a traditional college or university.	12	20	29	24	15

SUMMARY

The majority of adults in the U.S. continue to recognize the importance of having a certificate or degree beyond high school. Most see the connection between having a college degree and having a good job, and they relate having a good job with having a higher quality of life. They tend to place the most credence in traditional four-year colleges and universities to offer the highest quality education, and they are most confident that a bachelor's degree — as opposed to a high school education, professional certificate or an associate degree — will lead to a good job.

Many are broadening their acceptance of non-traditional higher education, including community colleges, professional certificates and online education, although they still feel a four-year degree offers students a better opportunity at attaining a good job. Still, many recognize that the high cost of postsecondary education is a barrier for students and that heavy loan debt can hinder graduates on the path to a better life. This could be spurring some Americans to view alternative, less traditional forms of postsecondary education as a viable alternative.

As workplaces evolve to compete with the demands of a global economy, most U.S. adults are not convinced that colleges are preparing students for job success. The majority feel the higher education system needs to change to better meet the needs of today's students, yet less than half believe that colleges and universities are doing so. In particular, institutions could do more to meet the needs of black and Hispanic students, whose degree attainment rates continue to fall short of the national average. While many have taken steps to research different higher education institutions and explore financial aid options available to them, most do not believe a postsecondary education is affordable to everyone.

METHODOLOGY

This paper includes results from a survey conducted by Gallup on behalf of Lumina Foundation. The study reported includes findings from a quantitative survey conducted to understand the perceptions of adults currently living in the U.S. about several important issues pertaining to higher education, including degree attainment, quality and value, costs, information access and workforce preparedness. Gallup conducted 1,533 interviews from a random sample of individuals using a dual-frame design, which includes both landline and cellphone numbers. Gallup samples landline and cellphone numbers using random-digit-dial methods.

Gallup conducted surveys in English and Spanish from Nov. 3 to Dec. 18, 2014. Multiple calls were made to each household to reach the eligible respondent.

Gallup weighted the sample to correct for unequal selection probability, nonresponse, and double coverage of landline and cellphone users in the two sampling frames. Gallup also weights the final samples to match the U.S. population according to gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education, region, population density and phone status (cellphone only, landline only, both and cellphone mostly). Demographic weighting targets are based on the most recent Current Population Survey figures for the aged 18 and older U.S. population. Phone status targets are based on the most recent National Health Interview Survey. Population density targets are based on the most recent U.S. Census.

The questionnaire was developed in consultation with representatives from Lumina Foundation and Gallup. All interviewing was supervised and conducted by Gallup's interviewing staff. For results based on the total sample size of 1,533 adults, one can say with 95% confidence that the margin of error attributable to sampling and other random effects is ± 3.3 percentage points. For subgroups within this population (e.g., education level, gender, race/ethnicity and income), the margin of error would be greater.