# **HIGHER EDUCATION STRATEGIC INFORMATION AND GOVERNANCE (HESIG)/STOCKTON POLLING INSTITUTE STUDY ON COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY, COMPLETION; 1000 NJ ADULTS; MAR.15-31, 2013;** MARGIN OF ERROR (+/-) 3.1%

**SUMMARY HIGHLIGHTS:**

**CITIZENS VIEW NJ COLLEGES AS HIGH QUALITY AND VALUE, AND ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT TO JOBS AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT;**

**BUT SEE COST AS A MAJOR BARRIER; VIEW THE STATE AND COLLEGES SHARING RESPONSIBILITY ON AFFORDABILITY; AND TRUST COLLEGE LEADERS TO MAKE NEEDED REFORM.**

**1. Citizens perceive colleges as high quality (78%) and high value for the investment (80%).**

* A majority (52% combined) view jobs (27%) and workforce development (25%) as the major ways in which colleges help the state, and about 42% cite jobs (16%) and career development(26%) as the way college help them personally. Surprisingly, 25% say that college is not very important in helping their family.
* Overwhelmingly, citizens prefer traditional 4-year colleges to provide a high quality college experience (88%), over 2-year, or on-line options.

**2. College cost is viewed as the single biggest barrier to attending and completing college (70%).**

* Less than a majority (47%) finds college in NJ affordable, while roughly 40% say flatly that college in not affordable.
* A majority (54%) indicate that it is unlikely that student financial aid will be available to them or their families, adding a double whammy to the cost/ affordability issue.

**3. NJ colleges and the state of NJ share responsibility for rising college costs and for policy change to make college more affordable.**

* Citizens see state funding cuts and salary increases as about equal factors in the causing college costs to rise (26%/28%, respectively). Another factor driving cost in the public's mind is the cost of facilities and technology (15%).
* Citizens take a balanced view of responsibility for state and college reforms to improve college affordability and completion, with about 42% indicating that more state funding (20%) and student financial aid (22%) is needed, while about an equal number (45%) say that better college cost control (22%) and tighter reins on tuition (23%), such as tying tuition to rate of inflation, would help families afford college.
* Asked another way, regarding the most important way to improve college affordability, nearly 58% indicate more student aid and more government funding (32% and 26%, respectively), with 44% indicating managing college budgets better as most important.
* Other policy reforms to help complete college faster include easier transfer of credits (31%) and better information about job and career opportunities (21%). Among possible reforms to improve affordability and completion, it seems as if the public expects state and college leaders to stick to basics, and not get lost in policy weeds for reforms that help only marginally with college opportunity and completion.
* Regarding new modes of delivering college courses, it appears that new technologies will take time to be absorbed. Not only do citizens prefer traditional colleges over on-line programs, but also on-line delivery did not rank high (15%) as a fix for the affordability/completion challenge. Also, nearly 30% of citizens believe that only some NJ colleges should specialize in on-line degree programs. 54% think that all colleges should offer on-line programs. This response taken with the strong preference for traditional 4-year college instruction indicates that the public may favor a hybrid approach to college learning, not simply more technology.

**4. Finally regarding trust to take responsibility for improving college access, affordability and completion, citizens trust college leaders 2-1 over the governor and legislature (43%/21%/22%, respectively).**

* While colleges and the state share responsibility for making college more affordable, it seems that the public trusts presidents and boards of trustees to continue to provide high quality service, and to make needed reforms. It seems to that Trenton officials are making the right choice to work in partnership with colleges, as opposed to taking a punitive, regulatory approach to reform.

**More information at:** [**www.stockton.edu/hughescenter/hesig**](http://www.stockton.edu/hughescenter/hesig)

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