

News Releases

Texans Value Higher Education Despite Concerns About Debt, New Statewide Survey Finds News Brief - 8/26/15

Cost, work, and family responsibilities pose greatest obstacles to earning a degree

AUSTIN — An overwhelming majority of Texans view a postsecondary degree or certificate as important to personal economic success, despite their concerns about student debt. Ninety-four percent of Texans view getting a college degree as important and essential for getting a good job, according to the WGU Texas Higher Education Poll, a just-released statewide telephone survey of Texans. Yet, many obstacles remain for Texans wanting to obtain a degree, the survey found. A strong majority of survey respondents cited high cost, family responsibilities, job responsibilities and time to complete a degree as their biggest challenges.

The [WGU Texas](#) Higher Education Poll measured Texans’ attitudes and opinions on a wide range of issues related to higher education. Of note, Texans’ overwhelmingly positive views of a postsecondary certificate or degree are not weakened by widespread concerns about increasing student debt. Among those Texans who think that student loan debt is a major problem, 93 percent still view obtaining a postsecondary degree or certificate as important.

“While the debate about the value in higher education continues in the United States, the WGU Texas Higher Education Poll found that Texans share a noticeably positive view about the importance of a degree for better jobs, improved quality of life, higher incomes, and pride,” said Veronica Vargas Stidvent, Chancellor of WGU Texas. “The survey results confirm that access to affordable, flexible higher education options is imperative for today’s students.”

For example, while most Texans share a strong appreciation for the value of higher education and importance of obtaining college degrees, the road to earning those degrees can be difficult.

“What Texans identify as obstacles to higher education are indicative of the changing face and demographics of college students today,” said Stidvent. “Nontraditional students are a new majority, and that means higher education must evolve and adapt to meet the needs of students who juggle full-time jobs, family responsibilities, and limited budgets.”

The WGU Texas Higher Education Poll found that among Texans without college degrees:

- Seventy-six percent cited cost as the leading obstacle to obtaining a degree;
- Family and work responsibilities were cited as challenges in obtaining a college degree for 71 percent and 69 percent respectively; and
- Sixty-eight percent noted that the time it takes to complete a degree presents obstacles to graduation.

The survey also revealed that those without a college degree were less likely to see their current job as a career as compared to those with a degree. Thirty-four percent of Texans view their current job as a “stepping stone” or as a means to “get by.” Of these, 67 percent said they need more education and training to get the kind of job or career they wanted. Even so, the survey found that more than half of respondents have no plans to return to school.

The business community praised the findings of the WGU Texas Higher Education Poll with Bill Hammond, CEO of the Texas Association of Business calling the survey’s findings “compelling and consistent with what the employer community has long believed.”

“To remain competitive and to meet our current and future workforce demands, Texas business needs more highly-skilled workers with college degrees,” added Hammond. “We must look for innovative ways to overcome the obstacles many students face on the path to obtaining a degree, and above all, we must graduate more Texans from universities, especially in high-demand fields like technology, healthcare and STEM education.”

The WGU Texas Higher Education Poll, developed and performed by SRATEX, LLC, was fielded between July 31 – Aug. 6, 2015. The statewide survey of 800 adult citizens had an overall margin of error of +/- 3.46 percent.

[WGU Texas Higher Education Poll Memo](#) (PDF)

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