

Strategic Research Associates
James Henson & Joshua Blank, Principals

DATE: 20 September 2016

TO: Western Governors University Texas

FROM: James Henson and Joshua Blank, SRATEX, LLC

SUBJECT: Key findings from the 2016 WGU Texas Higher Education Poll

Strategic Research Associates implemented a statewide telephone survey of 800 adult Texans conducted September 6 - 16, 2016, producing a margin of error of +/- 3.46 percentage points for the full sample. The methodology for the survey is described following the discussion of results.

KEY FINDINGS

Texans view student debt as a major problem in the United States, and cost as a major obstacle if they don't have a degree.

- 78 percent of Texans express the opinion that **student loan debt is a “major problem,”** 15 percent say that it is a “minor problem,” and only 6 percent say that it is “not a problem.”
- Among those without a college degree, 72 percent say that **cost is an obstacle** to obtaining one, the most-cited impediment.

The problem of student loan debt and cost do not contaminate Texans' views of higher education writ large. Rather, debt is a problem because they hold views of higher education that are positive and aspirational.

- Among the large majority of Texans who say that student loan debt is a major problem, 94 percent say that having a degree or certificate beyond high school is either “very important” (70 percent) or “somewhat important” (24 percent).
- Texans view a post-secondary degree as essential for **getting a good job** (81 percent); for **improving one's quality of life** (86 percent); and for **gaining a higher income** (89 percent).
- More personally, Texans believe that attaining a postsecondary degree or certificate **increases the respect that one receives from others** (78 percent) and is **a source of pride** (94 percent).
- A majority of Texans (62 percent) believe that the value of a degree is equal to (24 percent) or worth more than (38 percent) the cost of that degree.
- Among Texans who have earned a college degree, 79 percent say that the cost of their degree either has, or will, pay off.
- Among degree holders, 89 percent said that their college education was useful in preparing them for their job or career.

Texans overwhelmingly see an educated workforce as essential for Texas' economic competitiveness.

- 96 percent of Texans with a college degree, and 91 percent of Texans without a college degree agree with the statement: ***For Texas' economy to compete with other states, it is essential to have an educated workforce.***

Amidst concerns about cost and student debt, Texans believe it is important for the state to fund financial aid for all types of students.

- 93 percent of Texans think it is “extremely” (67 percent) or “somewhat” important (27 percent) for the state of Texas to **fund financial aid for first-time students from low-income families** seeking a college degree.
- 91 percent of Texans think it is “extremely” (52 percent) or “somewhat” important (39 percent) for the state of Texas to **fund financial aid for first-time students from middle-income families** seeking a college degree.
- 86 percent of Texans think it is “extremely” (50 percent) or “somewhat” important (36 percent) for the state of Texas to **fund financial aid for people with jobs** seeking a college degree or certificate that will help them keep their current jobs or advance in their current occupation.
- 85 percent of Texans think it is “extremely” (45 percent) or “somewhat” important (40 percent) for the state of Texas to **fund financial aid for non-traditional students seeking a college degree** – that is, students returning to school later in life after working or completing some college.
- Texans remain fiscally prudent about government spending, yet a plurality (49 percent) says that **Texas' state government spends “too little” on college education**, while another 29 percent says that it spends “the right amount”, and only 8 percent says that Texas' state government spends “too much.”

Methodology

The survey utilized a stratified probability sample design, with respondents being randomly selected at the level of the household. The survey also employed a randomized cellphone supplement, with 35 percent of completed interviews being conducted among cell phone only or cell phone dominant households. A Spanish-language instrument was developed and bilingual interviewers offered respondents a chance to participate in English or Spanish. On average, respondents completed the interview in 12 minutes. Approximately 5,500 records were drawn to yield 800 completed interviews. The final data set is weighted by race/ethnicity, age, and gender to achieve representativeness as defined by the Texas State Health Department's population projections for the 2016 Texas Adult Population. The overall margin of error for the poll is +/- 3.46 percentage points.

About SRA

The principals at SRA are James Henson, PhD and Joshua Blank, PhD. One or the other has played a primary role in most of the major public statewide polls conducted in Texas since 2007, as well as designed and executed polls and various research projects for numerous private clients over that period. They are based in Austin, Texas, and can be contacted at SRATEXLLC@gmail.com.

2016 WGU Texas Poll Toplines

Q1. In general, when thinking about the value of a college education today, would you say that the overall value most college graduates get back over their lifetime...

- | | | |
|----|--|-----|
| 1. | is worth more than what they pay for attending college | 38% |
| 2. | is worth less than what they pay for attending college | 31 |
| 3. | is about equal to what they pay for attending college | 24 |
| 4. | DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA | 7 |

Q2. In general, how important is having a degree or certificate beyond high school? Very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important?

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------|-----|
| 1. | Very important | 71% |
| 2. | Somewhat important | 24 |
| 3. | Not very important | 3 |
| 4. | Not at all important | 0 |
| 5. | DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA | 2 |

Would you say that you strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements:

[RANDOMIZE Q3A-Q3E]

Q3A. A certificate, certification, or degree beyond high school is essential for getting a good job.

- | | | |
|----|----------------------------|-----|
| 1. | Strongly agree | 47% |
| 2. | Somewhat agree | 34 |
| 3. | Neither agree nor disagree | 4 |
| 4. | Somewhat disagree | 8 |
| 5. | Strongly disagree | 7 |
| 6. | DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA | 0 |

Q3B. A certificate, certification, or degree beyond high school leads to a higher income.

1.	Strongly agree	60%
2.	Somewhat agree	29
3.	Neither agree nor disagree	4
4.	Somewhat disagree	4
5.	Strongly disagree	2
6.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	0

Q3C. A certificate, certification, or degree beyond high school leads to a better quality of life.

1.	Strongly agree	56%
2.	Somewhat agree	30
3.	Neither agree nor disagree	5
4.	Somewhat disagree	6
5.	Strongly disagree	3
6.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	0

Q3D. A certificate, certification, or degree beyond high school increases the respect one receives from others.

1.	Strongly agree	41%
2.	Somewhat agree	37
3.	Neither agree nor disagree	7
4.	Somewhat disagree	7
5.	Strongly disagree	7
6.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	1

Q3E. A certificate, certification, or degree beyond high school is a source of pride for most people.

1.	Strongly agree	67%
2.	Somewhat agree	27
3.	Neither agree nor disagree	2
4.	Somewhat disagree	1
5.	Strongly disagree	1
6.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	1

Q4. How about you? What is the highest level of education that you completed?
[READ CATEGORIES AS NECESSARY]

1.	Less than high school	6%
2.	High school	16
3.	Some college	21

4.	Associate's degree or certificate	14
5.	College degree	29
6.	Post-graduate degree (MA, LLD, PhD)	15
7.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA [DON'T READ]	0

Q4A. [ASK if Q4==3] How many semesters did you complete? [READ CATEGORIES AS NECESSARY]

(n = 166, MOE is +/- 7.61%)

1.	2 Semesters or less	29%
2.	3 to 4 Semesters	36
3.	5 or more semesters	29
4.	Don't know/Can't remember [DON'T READ]	5

Q5. [ASK IF Q4==5|6] What year did you graduate from college? [OPEN-ENDED]

1.	1950-1959	6%
2.	1960-1969	13
3.	1970-1979	17
4.	1980-1989	17
5.	1990-1999	17
6.	2000-2009	17
7.	2010-2017	12

Q6. [ASK IF Q4==5|6] Thinking about what you and your family have paid for your education, would you say that your education has paid off for you, or not?

(n = 350, MOE is +/- 5.24%)

1.	Has paid off/will pay off	79%
2.	Has not paid off/will not pay off	18
3.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	3

Q6A. [ASK IF Q4==3|4|5|6] Do you currently have student loan debt?

(n = 627, MOE is +/- 3.91%)

1.	Yes	25%
2.	No	75
3.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	0

Q7. [ASK IF Q4==5|6] How useful was your college education in preparing you for a job or career? Would you say very useful, somewhat useful, not too useful, or not at all useful?

(n = 350, MOE is +/- 5.24%)

1. Very useful	60%
2. Somewhat useful	29
3. Not too useful	6
4. Not at all useful	4
5. DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	1

Q8. [ASK IF Q4<=3] For each of the following, please tell me whether or not it has been an obstacle to completing a college degree? [RANDOMIZE Q8A-Q8F]

(n = 338, MOE is +/- 5.33%)

	Yes	No
Q8A. Family responsibilities	69%	31%
Q8B. Job or work responsibilities	64	36
Q8C. The cost of a degree	72	28
Q8D. The difficulty of finding classes that fit your schedule	55	45
Q8E. The time it would take to complete a degree	63	37
Q8F. The student loan debt you would have to take on	66	34

Q9. Do you think of your current job as a career, a stepping-stone to a career, or do you think of it as just a job to get you by?

1. A career	42%
2. A stepping stone to a career	15
3. Just a job to get you by	24
4. DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	19

Q10. [ASK IF Q9==2|3] In general, do you feel you have the education and training necessary to get the kind of job or career you want, or do you need more education and training?

(n = 308, MOE is +/- 5.58%)

1. Have necessary education and training	31%
2. Need more	67
3. DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	2

Q11. [ASK IF Q9==1] In general, do you feel you have the education and training necessary to get ahead in your job or career, OR do you need more education and training?

(n = 340, MOE is +/- 5.31%)

1.	Have necessary education and training	70%
2.	Need more	27
3.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	3

Q12. Do you ever plan to return to school?

1.	Yes	32%
2.	No	52
3.	Maybe	14
4.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	2

Thanks for sharing your opinions about education with us. Now we would like to ask you a few general questions about college education in Texas.

Q13. How would you rate the options for attending college in Texas? Are they excellent, good, not very good, or poor?

1.	Excellent	37%
2.	Good	47
3.	Not very good	8
4.	Poor	2
5.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	6

Q14. Do you think that Texas's state government spends too much, too little, or about the right amount on college education?

1.	Too much	8%
2.	Too little	49
3.	The right amount	29
4.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	15

Q15A. How important do you think it is for the state of Texas to fund financial aid for first-time students from low-income families seeking a college degree? Extremely important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important.

1.	Extremely important	67%
2.	Somewhat important	25

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------|---|
| 3. | Not very important | 3 |
| 4. | Not at all important | 4 |
| 5. | DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA | 1 |

Q15B. How important do you think it is for the state of Texas to fund financial aid for first-time students from middle-income families seeking a college degree? Extremely important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important.

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------|-----|
| 1. | Extremely important | 52% |
| 2. | Somewhat important | 39 |
| 3. | Not very important | 5 |
| 4. | Not at all important | 3 |
| 5. | DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA | 1 |

Q15C. How important do you think it is for the state of Texas to fund financial aid for non-traditional students seeking a college degree – that is, students returning to school later in life after working or completing some college? Extremely important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important.

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------|-----|
| 1. | Extremely important | 45% |
| 2. | Somewhat important | 40 |
| 3. | Not very important | 9 |
| 4. | Not at all important | 6 |
| 5. | DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA | 0 |

Q15D. How important do you think it is for the state of Texas to fund financial aid for people with jobs seeking a college degree or certificate that will help them keep their current jobs or advance in their current occupation? Extremely important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important.

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------|-----|
| 1. | Extremely important | 50% |
| 2. | Somewhat important | 36 |
| 3. | Not very important | 9 |
| 4. | Not at all important | 5 |
| 5. | DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA | 1 |

Q16. Do you think that Texas's colleges and universities provide adequate financial aid for students who want to obtain a college degree?

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------|-----|
| 1. | Yes | 46% |
| 2. | No | 38 |
| 3. | DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA | 16 |

Q17. Do you personally view the problem of student loan debt for people in the United States to be a major problem, a minor problem, or not a problem?

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------|-----|
| 1. | Major problem | 78% |
| 2. | Minor problem | 15 |
| 3. | Not a problem | 6 |
| 4. | DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA | 2 |

Q18. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: For Texas' economy to compete with other states, it is essential to have an educated workforce?

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------|-----|
| 1. | Agree | 93% |
| 2. | Disagree | 6 |
| 3. | DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA | 1 |

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

AGE.

- | | | |
|----|-------|-----|
| 1. | 18-29 | 20% |
| 2. | 30-44 | 29 |
| 3. | 45-64 | 34 |
| 4. | 65+ | 17 |

EMPLOY. Which of the following best describes your employment status? [READ CATEGORIES]

- | | | |
|----|---|-----|
| 1. | Employed, working 40 or more hours per week | 43% |
| 2. | Employed, working 1-39 hours per week | 17 |
| 3. | Not employed, looking for work | 6 |
| 4. | Not employed, not looking for work | 8 |
| 5. | Retired | 20 |
| 6. | Disabled, not able to work | 7 |
| 7. | DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA [DON'T READ] | 1 |

MARRIED. What is your current marital status?

- | | | |
|----|---------------|-----|
| 1. | Never married | 25% |
| 2. | Married | 58 |
| 3. | Divorced | 8 |
| 4. | Widowed | 5 |
| 5. | Separated | 2 |

6. DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA. 1

CHILD. How many children are currently living with you?

1. One	16%
2. Two	16
3. Three	6
4. Four or more	5
5. None	56

PARENTS. Do either of your parents have a certificate, certification, or degree beyond high school.

1. Yes	47%
2. No	50
3. Don't know	3

INCOME. What was your total household income for 2014? [READ CATEGORIES]

1. Less than \$15,000	10%
2. \$15,000 - less than \$25,000	9
3. \$25,000 - less than \$40,000	13
4. \$40,000 - less than \$75,000	18
5. \$75,000- less than \$150,000	22
6. \$150,000 or more	12
7. DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA.	16

DEBT. [ASK IF Q4==3|4|5|6] Do you happen to know approximately how much money you borrowed to finance your education? Was it... [READ]?

1. Less than \$10,000	44%
2. Between \$10,000 and \$20,000	13
3. Between \$20,000 and \$30,000	6
4. Between \$30,000 and \$40,000, or	5
5. More than \$40,000	9
6. DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA. (VOL.)	23

MAJOR. [ASK IF Q4==5|6] What was your major field of study in college? [READ RESPONSE OPTIONS]

1. Science, Engineering, or IT	23%
2. Social Science, Liberal Arts, or Education	43
3. Business	26

4. Health 9

ONEDU. These days many colleges and universities offer courses online. Have you ever taken a course online?

1. Yes	38%
2. No	61
3. DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA.	1

RACE. Would you say that you are...

1. White/Anglo	46%
2. African American	11
3. Hispanic	37
4. Other	6

GENDER. (BY OBSERVATION)

1. MALE	48%
2. FEMALE	52