

# **Expanding Opportunity: Communicating about the Role of Community Colleges**

**Results of Public Opinion Research  
Conducted for  
Douglas Gould & Company**

**With funding from the Ford Foundation**

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## Introduction

Beginning with Joliet Junior College in Illinois at the turn of the nineteenth century, community colleges have spread across the United States to meet the ever increasing demand for education. Currently, there are over one thousand community and technical colleges providing an education to over ten million students.

In recent years, community colleges across the country have faced increases in enrollments and at the same time funding reductions. As states and local government struggle to balance budgets, community colleges have seen their financing slashed.

Given the current environment facing community colleges across the country, Douglas Gould & Company, with funding from the Ford Foundation, commissioned Belden Russonello & Stewart to conduct focus groups and survey research to learn how Americans perceive community colleges and how to raise the profile of these institutions. We designed a two-phase research project to meet these objectives: first a series of focus groups and subsequently a survey among 1,055 adults across the country, supplemented by state-wide surveys of 400 each in nine states. The following report discusses the results of the national research; the state level data will be reported separately.

## Methods

**Focus groups:** In May and June 2004, we held six focus groups in Seattle, Washington, North Olmsted, Ohio and Albuquerque, New Mexico. Two groups were held in each city and in each location, one group was comprised of suburban and rural residents and the other group included residents residing in urban areas. Group participants were screened to assure that they are voters and involved in their communities. All of the participants were between the ages of 30 and 55 years old. In each group, at least a few of the participants had attended a community college themselves and in some groups, most of the group members had attended a community college.

**Survey:** The focus group discussions were followed by a national survey and nine state surveys, conducted by telephone. Interviewing for the national and state surveys occurred from August 2 to 25, 2004.

The questionnaire for the survey was written by BRS in collaboration with Douglas Gould & Company and others. The national survey was carried out among a representative probability sample of 1,000 adults in the U.S. residents of Ohio, aged 18 and older and 400 adults in each of the states.

Professional fully trained and supervised telephone interviewers, using a computer-assisted telephone interviewing system, conducted the fieldwork. A briefing session was conducted to familiarize the interviewers with the sample specifications and the instrument for this study. The sampling frame was a list of randomly created telephone numbers (a technique known as random digit dial or RDD) for telephone exchanges across the U.S. or each state. Survey Sampling, Inc. provided the sampling frame. Interviewers randomly selected respondents by requesting to speak with the adult in the household who had the most recent birthday. All phases of interviewing, training, and data collection were supervised daily by BRS.

The demographic characteristics of the sample were matched to the most recent Census estimates. The national data have been weighted statistically in order to bring gender and age into its proper proportions. The margin of sampling error (or sampling tolerance) for the national survey is plus or minus 3.0 percentage points at the .95 confidence level. Tables in the report use many cross tabulations, based on smaller subgroups and thus the margin of error for these is higher.

**Reading this report:** Tables and graphs included in the text of this report highlight selected relevant survey findings and are expressed in percentages. The base for each table is all respondents (n = 1,055 for national; and n=400 for the states) unless otherwise noted. In reading these data, when the percent sign (%) appears at the top of a column, the numbers add vertically; when % appears at the left of a row, the numbers add horizontally. An asterisk (\*) indicates less than 1%; a double hyphen (-) indicates zero.

Due to weighting, rounding, omission of "don't know," "refused," and other responses, or, in the case of multiple response questions, percentages may add to more than or less than 100%.

Selected quotations from participants in the focus groups are used in this report to illustrate findings.

## Executive Summary

Community and technical colleges are an integral part of most communities and Americans need little justification to support them wholeheartedly.

The public holds highly favorable attitudes toward these colleges, many of those attitudes formed through first-hand experience. Indeed, over half the members of the public say they have taken classes at a community college or graduated from one.

Americans are likely to agree with increasing financial support for community colleges if asked, yet they are unaware of the struggles these institutions face as they try to meet increasing demands with fewer resources.

Community colleges are a uniquely American creation – and the public sees them as helping to fulfill a very American value: providing a source of *opportunity* for *individuals* to better themselves.

A winning communication strategy, according to the research, will center on reinforcing the opportunity-linked traits of community colleges that Americans already have for valuing them highly and educating the public about the challenges the institutions face. That strategy should spotlight opportunity for individuals to gain a college education or training for jobs, rather than spotlight the aid the colleges give to disadvantaged individuals.

### Familiarity and positive images

Over half of the public reports gaining a degree from or having tapped into the services of a community college at some time, and another quarter has family members who have taken advantage of these ubiquitous institutions. Only 19% the public have no such connection to a community college.

Strong majorities of the American public say these institutions provide a good education and good job training at affordable prices and in convenient locations. The public rejects accusations that community colleges have low standards because their admissions policies are so open.

## The desired role is the perceived role

Americans perceive community colleges as institutions simultaneously engaged in two areas -- promoting college education and providing direct job training -- for mainstream Americans. The colleges are seen only secondarily as providers of occasional classes or as resources for people on the margins, be they adults who cannot read or people who cannot speak English.

The functions the public thinks community colleges perform most are those most people hope they will fulfill. These include providing a stepping stone for individuals seeking a bachelor's degree and training and retraining people for jobs --precisely the same functions that the largest numbers think should be high priority. Conversely, relatively few believe community colleges today have many students who are immigrants trying to learn English, and indeed teaching ESL as well as adult literacy are lower priorities for community colleges among the public.

## Community colleges' distinctive nature

The research clarifies the point that comparisons of community colleges to four-year institutions are not credible nor are they productive. Most people say it is true that one needs a bachelor's degree to advance into many well paying jobs. Most believe it is true at least *some* of the time that community college students obtained high school grades and test scores that are too low to get into a four-year college, that the students lack the commitment needed for a four-year school, and that the courses are easier (although few believe these to be the case *most or all* the time).

Our analysis is that making comparisons to four year colleges are not useful. It was clear from the focus groups that people perceive community colleges as a different type of institution than four-year colleges. Every suggestion that community colleges might offer a better education by virtue of smaller classes and fewer teaching assistants was met with a counter argument. Therefore, background to the message strategy should not be that community colleges are there to compete with four-year colleges but rather that they support BA-conferring institutions by giving many students a start in college and supplement them by offering other people different types of training. This is a message that is credible and indeed already in people's heads.

## The values of opportunity and individualism

We often preach that successful communications start by calling on underlying values that people hold, reinforcing those that coincide with our objectives and avoiding those that clash. In the case of garnering support for community colleges, a clear path using this framework emerges from the research.

The value of opportunity for all leaps out of the research as the central idea around which to build communications. Opportunity is, of course, a fundamental value reflected in at least what we like to believe is inherent in many areas of American life. The public finds a very natural link between education and opportunity. The research shows that people perceive of community colleges as accessible, affordable and convenient – in a word, full of opportunity. In fact, most of the message-related language we tested that invokes opportunity scored well.

Of five statements about opportunity we tested, the two that garnered the broadest appeal are:

- Every person in America deserves an opportunity to get an education and community colleges are there to provide people with that opportunity; and
- Our society as a whole benefits when everyone has access to an education and community colleges give more people that access.

Once the overall value framework of opportunity is in place, providing the public with information about the role of these institutions should reinforce and illustrate the opportunity they bring. The focus groups discussions told us that the value of opportunity encompasses many ideas. And the survey confirms that statements about affordability, variety of courses taught, providing a stepping stone to a four-year degree, and flexibility all relate to the value of opportunity and are the likely to generate support from the public for funding of community colleges. As we have discussed, many of these attributes are ones the public already strongly ascribes to community colleges. Reminding the public of these characteristics within the framework of opportunity will be the foundation of building strong communications about the need to secure their future.

Opportunity . . . to me it encompasses most of those things. You have the opportunity to go because it's affordable, you have the opportunity to learn . . . You have the opportunity too with the convenience of scheduling. It's just the opportunity, opportunity, opportunity. – *Female suburban resident, in focus group in North Olmsted*

The other ideas tested are much less persuasive reasons to continue funding. These include statements about prospects for community college students' success in the future, statistics about community colleges, job training programs, remedial programs and those for new immigrants, and comparisons between community colleges and four-year institutions.

## Reality check

Few Americans believe that community colleges in their areas turn away students because they do not have enough spaces for them, but the great majority also supports increasing spending on them. Communications efforts that educate the public about the oversubscription and funding shortfalls in many community colleges should ratchet up support for policies to remedy these problems even higher.

## Detailed Findings

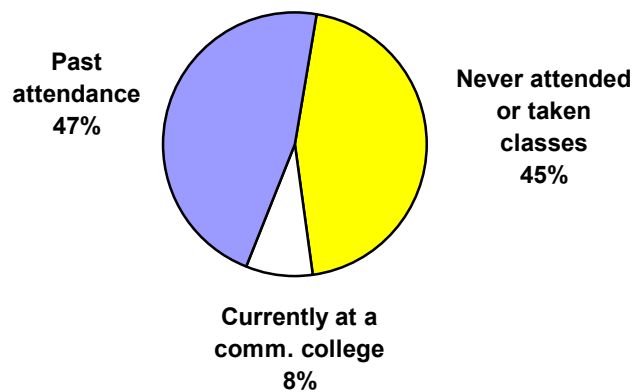
### A. Perceptions of Community Colleges

#### 1. Relationships with community colleges

Many Americans are familiar with community colleges through their own individual experiences. Over half say that they either currently take courses at a community college or have done so in the past (8% and 47% respectively). Additionally, almost two-thirds responded that they have children or close family members who have attended community colleges (63%). Taken together, a full 81% report a firsthand or family connection to community colleges.

#### Attendance at Community Colleges

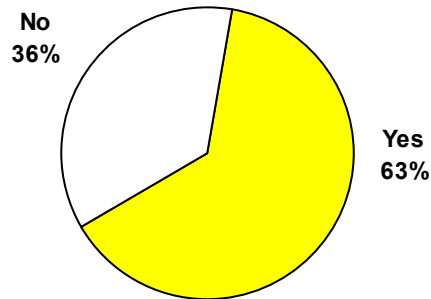
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Q62. Are you now or have you ever attended or taken a class at a community college?

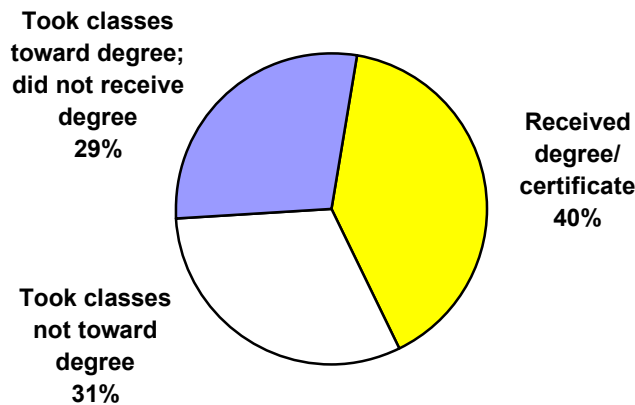
### Family Members at Community Colleges



Q63. Do you have any children or close family members who have attended a community college?

Of those who have attended a community college, 40% received a degree or certificate from a community college. The remainder are either currently taking or took courses toward a degree but have not received a degree (29%) or are taking non-degree related coursework (31%).

### Type of Attendance Among Community College Students



Q63. Which of the following best describes you? I received a degree or certificate from a community college; I am taking or took classes toward a degree or certificate but did not graduate; or I am taking or took classes but was not working toward a degree or certificate. (Base: N - 578 respondents who currently attend or have attended a community college)

The following table illustrates these outcomes for community colleges attendees by demographic and other characteristics. It reveals that there are few great differences, except that whites are most likely to have received a degree or certificate once they started, or to attend non-degree classes. In addition, African-Americans and Hispanics are most likely to have started but not completed a degree.

### Type of Experience with Community Colleges Among Respondents Who Have Attended a Community College by Cross Tabs

Q63: Which of the following best describes you? (Base: N - 578 respondents who currently attend or have attended a community college)

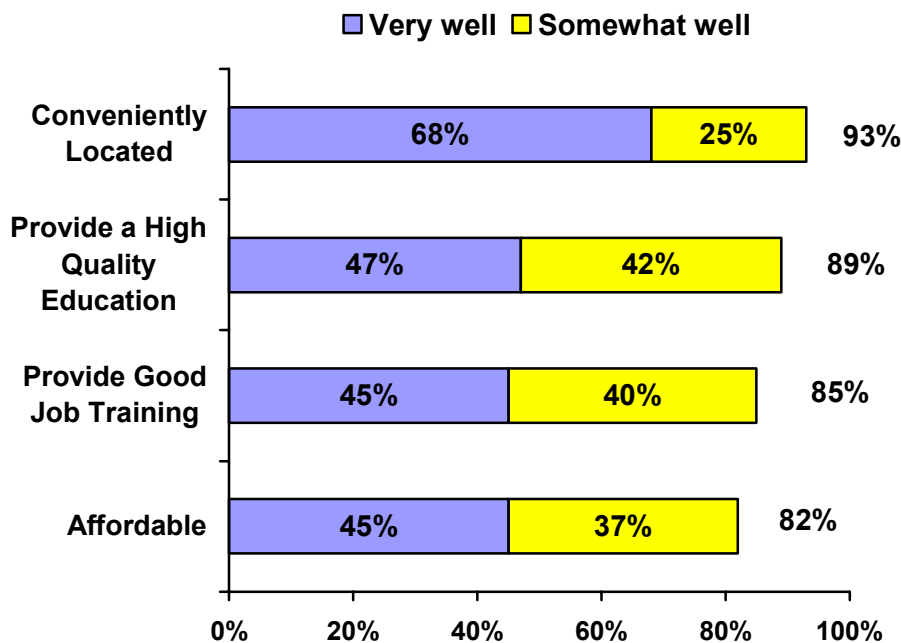
	Received a degree	Taking/took classes towards a degree but did not graduate	Taking/took classes but not towards a degree
<b>Total</b>	40%	29	31
Male	41%	29	30
Female	39%	29	31
18-24	30%	58	12
25-39	40%	34	26
40-49	43%	27	30
50-58	43%	18	40
59+	40%	16	44
White	42%	23	36
Black	38%	48	14
Hispanic	28%	49	23
<\$25,000	35%	39	26
\$25,000-\$49,000	38%	36	25
\$50,000-\$74,000	46%	22	32
\$75,000+	44%	19	37
Blue collar	44%	32	24
White collar	35%	30	35
Professional	47%	24	29
Registered to vote	40%	28	32
Democrat	41%	29	31
Independent	37%	33	30
Republican	43%	26	31
Liberal	36%	29	35
Moderate	40%	33	27
Conservative	45%	25	30
City	37%	33	30
Suburban	45%	23	32
Town/Rural	40%	28	32
Northeast	39%	26	35
Midwest	40%	24	37
South	44%	29	27
West	36%	36	28

## 2. Community colleges provide access to high quality education

Americans hold very positive impressions of community colleges and express appreciation for the contributions they make as affordable, convenient educational providers in their communities.

In addition to being conveniently located (93% say this describes them very or somewhat well), community colleges are viewed as providing a high quality education (89%), good job training (85%), and as being affordable (82%).

**Characteristics of Community Colleges in Own State**  
% describes community colleges



Q5-Q8. Please tell me in your opinion if each of the following words or phrases describes the community colleges in your state very well, somewhat well, not very well, or not at all. Q5. Affordable Q6. Conveniently located Q7. Provide a high quality education Q8. Provide good job training Age and education are important variables in attitudes about community colleges.

- Americans 40 or older and those who have a degree from a community college are more likely than others to say all these attributes describe community colleges very well.

There are also differences item by item. First, socio-economic status signals differences with regard to access.

- College graduates and community college alumni are most likely to agree strongly that community colleges tend to be conveniently located.

- There is a striking difference in perceptions regarding affordability. A majority of professionals, upper-income people and post grads say “affordable” describes community colleges very well – but only about a third of blue collar workers and people in the lowest income and education brackets agree.
- Views on the quality of the education also have some variations. Those with less than a post graduate education and lower household incomes more often say community colleges provide a “high quality education” – along side women, Americans 59 and older, moderates, and those living in a small town or rural area.
- Women, those with lower incomes, those living in towns and rural areas and people in the South are more likely than others to say community colleges provide “good job training.”

### Characteristics of Community Colleges in Own State by Cross Tabs

Q5-Q8. Does each of the following describe the community colleges in your state very well, somewhat well, not very well, or not at all:

% saying "describes very well"	Access		Quality	
	Conveniently located	Affordable	High quality education	Good job training
<b>Total</b>	68%	45%	47%	45%
Men	68%	45%	43%	41%
Women	68%	44%	51%	49%
18-24	58%	35%	39%	33%
25-39	64%	42%	40%	39%
40-49	71%	46%	47%	45%
50-58	71%	50%	49%	55%
59+	73%	48%	58%	53%
High school or less	63%	35%	49%	46%
Some college	68%	44%	50%	45%
College graduate	74%	51%	48%	46%
Post-graduate	70%	61%	35%	41%
< \$25,000	64%	39%	51%	49%
\$25,000-\$49,000	73%	44%	52%	47%
\$50,000-\$74,000	70%	47%	47%	44%
\$75,000+	65%	52%	41%	39%
Blue collar	66%	35%	50%	44%
White collar	69%	41%	46%	44%
Professional	69%	54%	45%	49%
Community clg degree	73%	50%	55%	55%
Classes taken at CC	67%	41%	45%	41%
Family member at CC	67%	45%	46%	45%
No connection	64%	42%	42%	41%
Liberal	67%	45%	42%	44%
Moderate	67%	42%	52%	44%
Conservative	68%	47%	45%	46%
City	67%	44%	44%	45%
Suburban	70%	52%	40%	38%
Town/rural	68%	42%	55%	50%
Northeast	62%	49%	44%	37%
Midwest	72%	39%	48%	45%
South	69%	49%	50%	50%
West	66%	39%	42%	44%

### 3. Student bodies seen as a broad range

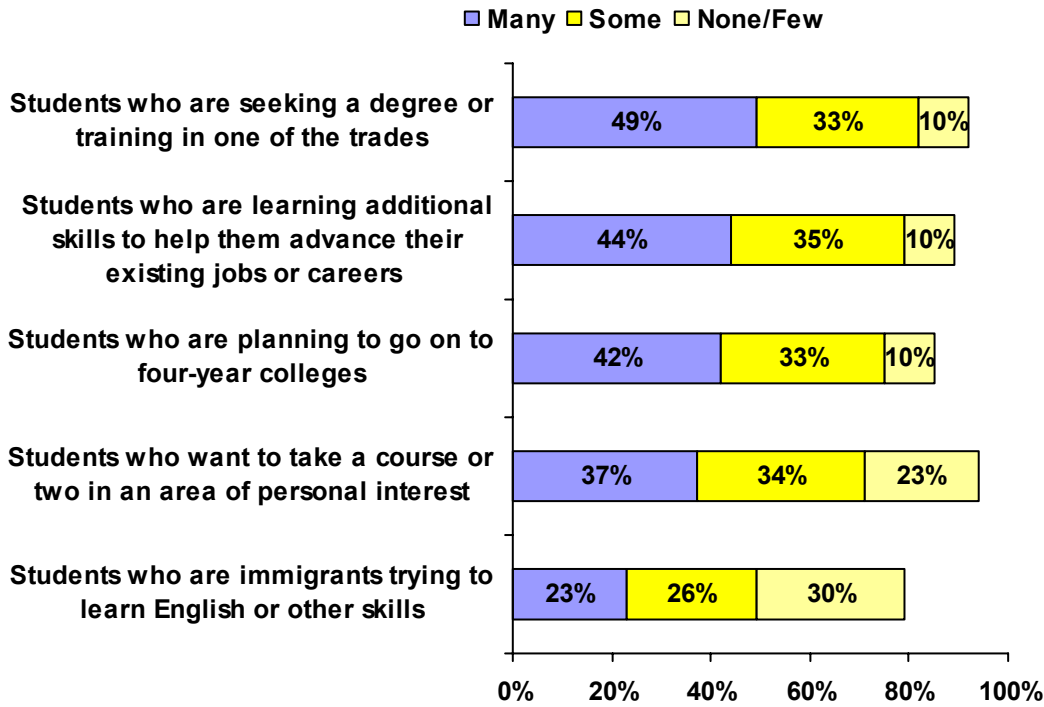
I think it's almost like a feeder and finish. Feeder for four-year and for some people it's a two-year for some trade certificate or whatever. So it offers both. - *Male urban resident, Seattle*

It's for working people. Or even for non-working people. It may help people back to work. It may help round out people. - *Female, suburban resident, Seattle*

The public recognizes that the student body of community colleges is comprised of a range of students -- from individuals who are four-year college bound to career changers. The following chart reflects that mixture, including the percentages who say they believe there are many students seeking a degree or training in one of the trades (49% say there are "many" such students in community colleges), individuals learning additional skills to help them advance in their existing jobs and careers (44%), and students who are planning to attend a four-year college (42%).

However, the public is less likely to think of community colleges as serving individuals outside the mainstream or the occasional student. Only about a third believe community colleges have many students enrolled just for a course or two in an area of personal interest (37%), and very few believe there are many immigrants trying to learn English or other skills in community colleges (23%).

**Student Composition in Community Colleges in Own Area**



Q9-Q13. Community colleges are different around the country in what they teach and who attends them. I would like to know if, as far as you know, the community colleges in your area have many, some, just a few, or no students in each of the following categories. Q9. First, as far as you know do the community colleges in your area have many, some, just a few, or no students who are planning to go on to four-year colleges? Q10. As far as you know, do the community colleges in your area have many, some, just a few, or no students who are learning additional skills to help them advance in their existing jobs or careers? Q11. How about people who want to take a course or two in an area of personal interest - many, some, just a few, or no students? Q12. How about immigrants trying to learn English or other skills they will need in this country, many, some, just a few, or no students? Q13. How about people seeking a degree or training in one of the trades - many, some, just a few, or no students?

Beliefs about the types of students in community colleges are similar across most segments of the population. (Thus no cross tab table included here.)

## 4. Common criticisms

Sometimes the attitude of people as far as how they look at community college compared to a major college like Ohio State... You get a different reaction from people when they ask you want college you went to. - *Male suburban resident, North Olmsted*

As we prepared for the research project reported here, we were told about many criticisms aimed at community and technical colleges. Yet in our focus groups participants suggested the problem is one more of perception than reality. That is, there is undeserving stigma attached to these schools.

The survey examined the strength of six possible criticisms of community colleges, and the results go a long way in demonstrating that the public does not hold these negative attitudes across the board. Rather most people say the criticisms are true of some institutions, but not all. In other words, not all community colleges are alike, and the weaknesses of one do not necessarily reflect on others.

On the other hand, the results demonstrate that comparisons to four-year colleges are counterproductive. The most commonly accepted disadvantage to a community college education is that one's advancement is limited with a degree from a community college, and that "most well-paying jobs require at least a bachelor's degree from a four-year college" (42% say this is true all or "most" of the time; and 46% say it is true "some of the time"). Our reading of this issue is that the statement seems factual than attitudinal: the public is aware that employers increasingly want candidates with bachelor's degrees or more. So in some sense, it is not a criticism of community colleges, but more a recognition of reality.

The public sees other criticisms as true of some community colleges but not many.

- Three quarters say it is true at least some of the time that "community colleges offer so many programs that their resources are spread too thin to be very good" (23% never true; 56% true some of the time; 14% true all or most of the time).
- Eight in ten agree that at least some of the time "The students who go to community colleges do not have high enough grades or test scores to get into a four-year college" (19% never true; 62% true some of the time; 17% true all or most of the time).

- Seven in ten believe it is true at least some of the time that “The students who go to community colleges do not have the commitment to attend a four-year college” (27% never true; 60% true some of the time; 12% true all or most of the time).
- Three quarters say “The college level courses at community colleges are easier than the same courses taught in four-year colleges” at least some of the time (27% never true; 46% true some of the time; 27% true all or most of the time).

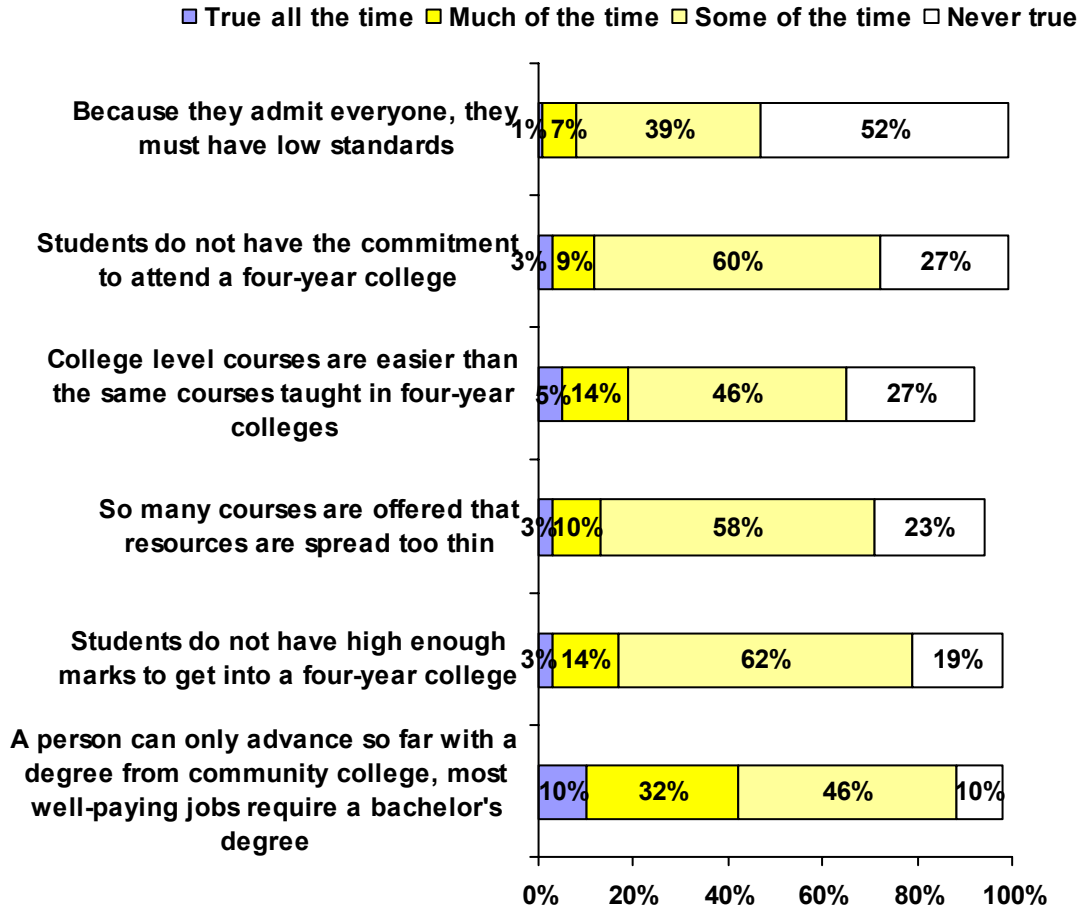
Even though the public agrees that at least some community colleges suffer from the problems expressed in the criticisms above, the public does not accept the notion that open enrollment translates to a poor education.

- Over half reject the idea that because “community colleges are willing to admit everyone, they must have low standards and do not provide a high quality education” (52% never true; 39% true some of the time; 8% true all or most of the time).

Few differences emerge across subgroups when looking at the criticisms we tested, with the exception that those who have no connection to community colleges are most likely to agree with a number of criticisms.

In summation, attitudes about the criticisms of community colleges tell us that making comparisons to four-year colleges is not a useful tactic.

**Criticisms of Community Colleges**



Q23-28. Now I am going to read some criticisms we have heard about community colleges. Please tell me if you think each statement is true all the time, much of the time, just some of the time, or never. Q23. The students who go to community colleges do not have high enough grades or test scores to get into a four-year college. Q24. The students who go to community colleges do not have the commitment to attend a four-year college. Q25. The college level courses at community colleges are easier than the same courses taught in four-year colleges. Q26. Community colleges offer so many programs that their resources are spread too thin to be very good. Q27. A person can only advance so far with a degree from a community college. Most well-paying jobs require at least a bachelor’s degree from a four-year college. Q28. Because community colleges are willing to admit everyone, they must have low standards and do not provide a high quality education.

## B. Priorities for Community Colleges

The kinds of students the public believes should be high priority for community colleges fall in line with the kinds of students the public believes are already attending these institutions in their communities. The top public priorities include providing stepping stones to four-year institutions and job training.

Top tier priorities include getting people started on a college education.

- People who want to complete the first two years of college close to home (81% call this a very high or high priority)
- Providing a place to start a college education for those cannot afford the cost of a four-year university degree (79%)

Another high priority is providing job training for a range of students.

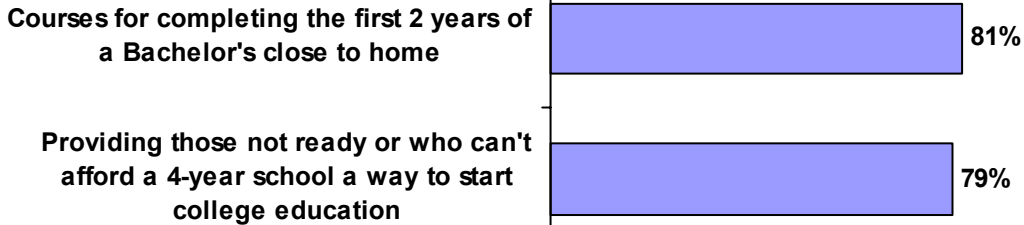
- For people who want to enter a trade or career not requiring a four-year degree (79%)
- For working people to become more skilled in their existing jobs (74%)
- To retrain people who have lost their jobs (64%)
- Generally providing local businesses with a trained workforce (71%)

Lower priorities deal with small populations with special interests.

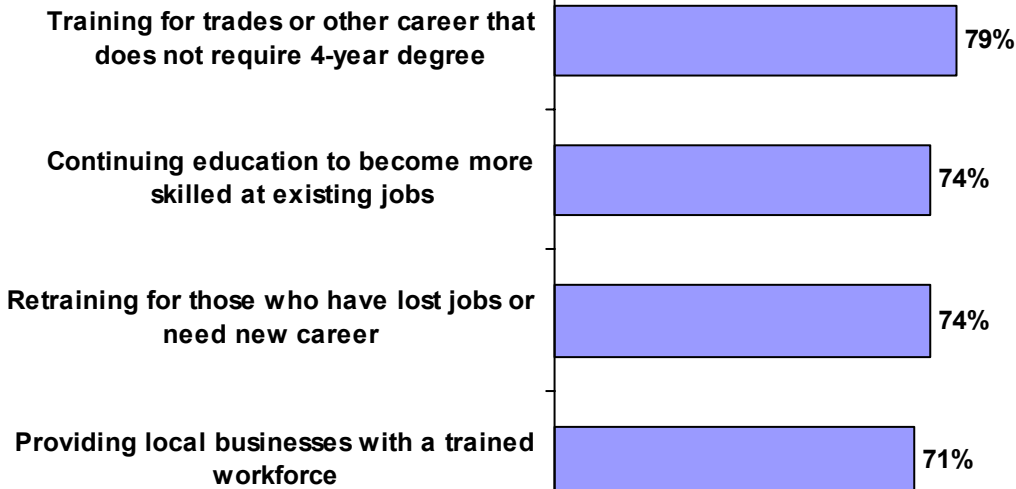
- Remedial education (62%)
- Programs geared toward immigrants (56%)
- Providing a place for people to take a course or two of interest to them but not seek a degree (49%)

**Desired Priorities for Community Colleges**  
**% very high and high priority**

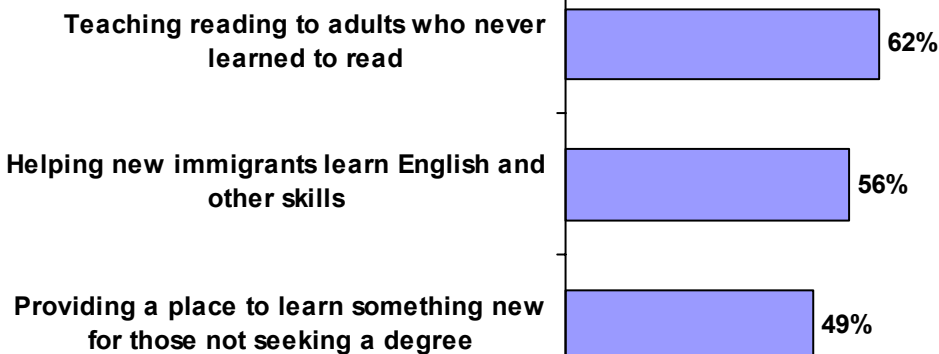
Stepping Stone



Job Training



Other



0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

Q14-Q22. Please tell me if you think it would be best if community colleges put a very high, high, middle, or low priority in each of the following areas: Q14. Providing people who are not ready or cannot afford the cost of a four-year university a way to start their college education. Q15. Providing people a way to complete the first two years of a four-year bachelor's degree at a college close to home. Q16. Providing training for people who want to go into a trade or career that does not require a four year degree. Q17. Providing retraining, for people who have lost their jobs or need a new career. Q18. Providing a place for people to take a course or two to learn something new, but who are not seeking a degree. Q19. Providing continuing education for working people to become more skilled at their existing jobs. Q20. Teaching reading to adults who never learned to read. Q21. Helping new immigrants learn English and other skills. Q22. Providing local businesses with a trained workforce.

While most segments of the public generally agree on the desired emphasis of community colleges, the survey uncovers some interesting differences:

- The role of community colleges as a stepping stone to four-year institutions is a higher priority for more women, those with some connection to community colleges, those higher on the socio-economic scale – attended college, middle and upper income, white collar and professional jobs – and voters.

Turning to job training, we find:

- Training geared toward a career in the trades is a particularly high priority among those with a connection to community colleges, whites, college graduates, professionals, late Baby Boomers (50 to 58 years old), voters, and liberals.
- Re-training people who have lost their jobs or need a new career is a high priority for those 25 and older, college graduates, Democrats, liberals, and voters.
- There are few differences on prioritizing providing local businesses with a trained workforce, with the exception that 18 to 24 year olds and suburbanites are least likely to rate this as a priority.
- Most segments consider training in the trades a higher priority than helping people become more skilled in their existing jobs. However, Hispanics, African Americans, and those earning less than \$25,000 per year put improving skills for existing jobs at or near the top of their list.

While those goals aimed at small populations are less important to the public in the big picture, there are pockets of support for each.

- Those under 40 years old, African Americans, earning lower income, city-dwellers, Democrats and liberals are more likely than are others to give priority to adult literacy and helping new immigrants learn English and other skills.
- Women and city-dwellers are slightly more likely than are others to rate taking a course to learn something new as a high priority.

### Top Desired Priorities: Stepping Stones and Job Training by Cross Tabs

Q14-Q17, Q19, Q22: Would it be best if community colleges put a very high, high, middle, or low priority in each of the following areas?

% saying high or very high	Complete first two years of BA near home	Way to start for those not ready or can't afford	Non- 4 yr degree trade or career	Continuing ed for existing jobs	Re-training after lost job	Providing local business workforce
<b>Total</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>71%</b>
Men	79%	75%	77%	77%	73%	70%
Women	84%	83%	80%	73%	75%	71%
18-24	81%	76%	73%	74%	66%	63%
25-39	82%	83%	77%	74%	77%	75%
40-49	79%	80%	79%	76%	77%	67%
50-58	84%	84%	86%	70%	73%	74%
59+	83%	75%	79%	78%	73%	72%
White	83%	81%	81%	73%	74%	72%
Black	80%	77%	69%	81%	72%	67%
Hispanic	82%	78%	74%	78%	74%	70%
HS or less	76%	77%	72%	75%	73%	71%
Some college	84%	76%	82%	75%	70%	64%
College graduate	84%	84%	82%	77%	79%	75%
Post-graduate	85%	85%	85%	74%	78%	75%
< \$25,000	77%	74%	71%	77%	75%	70%
\$25,000-\$49,000	82%	80%	81%	72%	71%	73%
\$50,000-\$74,000	88%	81%	83%	80%	77%	75%
\$75,000+	85%	84%	80%	74%	75%	68%
CC degree	86%	83%	82%	75%	77%	75%
Classes at CC	83%	82%	82%	77%	74%	68%
Family at CC	81%	78%	76%	76%	73%	72%
No connection	74%	73%	75%	69%	72%	68%
Blue collar	75%	72%	72%	73%	74%	69%
White collar	83%	81%	80%	74%	72%	69%
Professional	85%	83%	84%	77%	76%	74%
Democrat	81%	81%	79%	76%	78%	71%
Independent	81%	78%	77%	73%	71%	69%
Republican	84%	79%	81%	75%	71%	75%
Liberal	81%	83%	82%	75%	80%	74%
Moderate	83%	79%	78%	76%	73%	69%
Conservative	81%	78%	78%	74%	70%	70%
Reg. voter	83%	82%	82%	76%	76%	71%
Not registered	75%	74%	66%	68%	67%	67%
City	80%	78%	77%	78%	76%	71%
Suburban	84%	83%	83%	73%	74%	64%
Town/rural	82%	80%	79%	72%	72%	74%
Northeast	80%	79%	79%	79%	75%	66%
Midwest	83%	81%	78%	71%	76%	74%
South	79%	77%	78%	75%	74%	71%
West	86%	81%	81%	74%	71%	70%

**Second Tier Desired Priorities:  
Literacy, Immigrants, Personal Interest by Cross Tabs**

Q18, Q20-Q21: Would it be best if community colleges put a very high, high, middle, or low priority in each of the following areas?

% saying high or very high	Teach reading to adults who never learned	Help new immigrants learn English and other skills	Place to take a course to learn something new
<b>Total</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>49%</b>
Men	57%	53%	45%
Women	67%	59%	52%
18-24	68%	66%	45%
25-39	67%	58%	46%
40-49	56%	50%	52%
50-58	57%	56%	46%
59+	61%	55%	53%
White	60%	54%	48%
Black	73%	66%	55%
Hispanic	64%	61%	50%
HS or less	64%	59%	55%
Some college	63%	51%	46%
College graduate	62%	59%	51%
Post-graduate	57%	53%	40%
CC degree	59%	56%	54%
Classes at CC	62%	55%	50%
Family at CC	63%	57%	47%
No connection	64%	58%	46%
< \$25,000	67%	56%	47%
\$25,000-\$49,000	66%	63%	53%
\$50,000-\$74,000	55%	55%	48%
\$75,000+	57%	53%	45%
Blue collar	59%	56%	48%
White collar	59%	51%	47%
Professional	63%	58%	51%
Reg. voter	61%	55%	51%
Not registered	65%	57%	44%
Democrat	64%	58%	53%
Independent	60%	57%	45%
Republican	60%	57%	46%
Liberal	66%	62%	52%
Moderate	62%	55%	53%
Conservative	57%	55%	46%
City	66%	60%	54%
Suburban	57%	52%	41%
Town/rural	60%	52%	47%
Northeast	61%	54%	50%
Midwest	63%	52%	45%
South	65%	57%	51%
West	58%	60%	52%

## C. Fulfilling Values

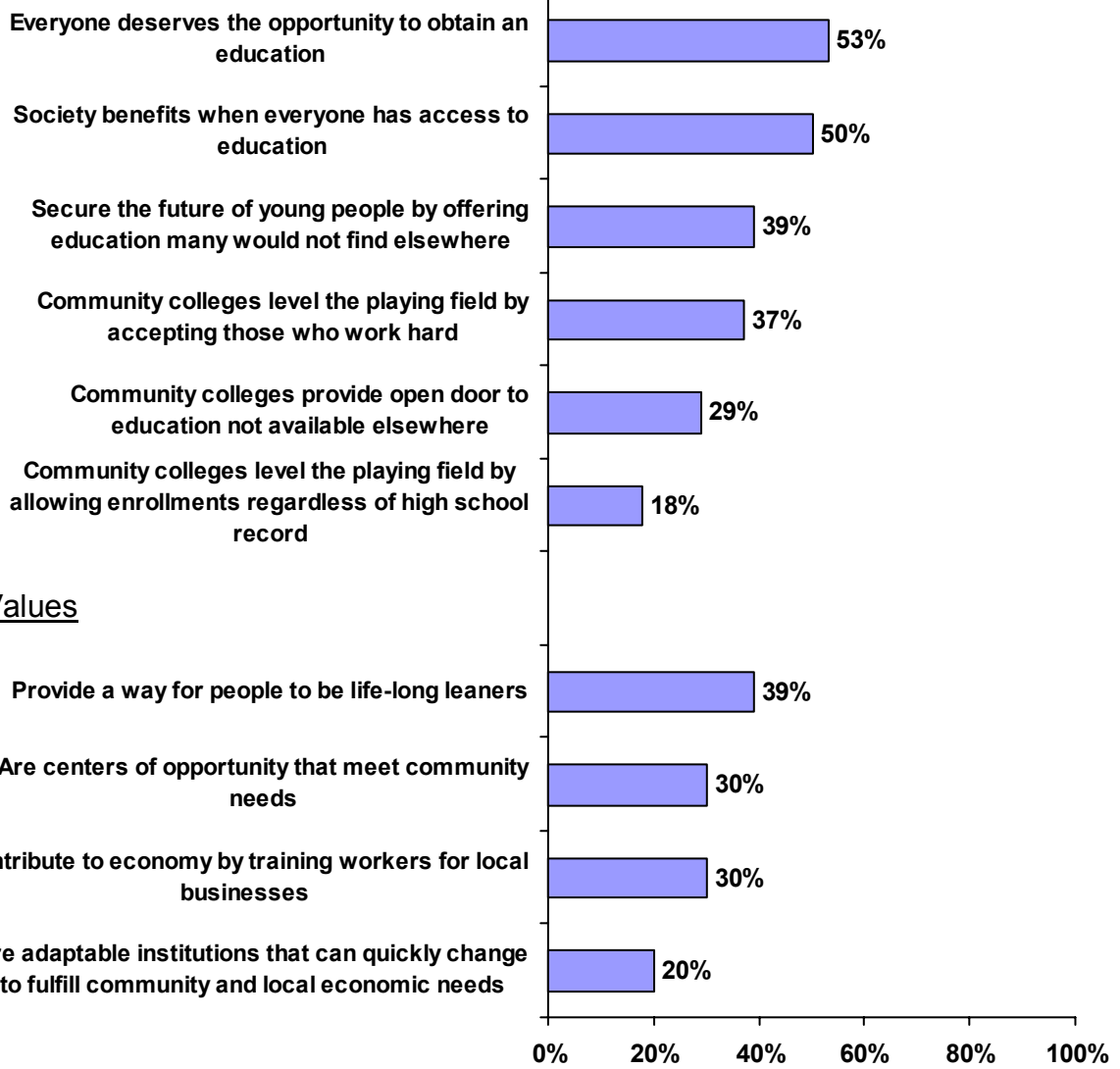
In raising the profile of community colleges and raising awareness of the needs facing these institutions, communications need to speak to the values that underlie the public's priorities and views. Building on what we learned in the focus groups, the survey examined the strength of four values frameworks: opportunity for all, community and economic benefits, enhancing the future of young people, and life-long learning. We particularly focused on opportunity, testing it several different ways, guided by the enthusiasm in the focus groups for this value.

Overall, the survey confirms the findings of the focus groups that the opportunity is the value that is clearly associated with community colleges. Also it demonstrates the importance of speaking to the value of *individual* self improvement: statements that describe providing the *opportunity* for *individual* self-improvement are the most persuasive reasons to support community colleges with tax dollars.

🎯 Of all the values tested, statistical analysis reveals that “every person in American deserves an opportunity to get an education” has the most influence over whether or not a person supports the expansion of community colleges. In other words, the more likely a person holds this value to be true, the more likely he or she is to support expanding community colleges.

**Values Underlying Attitudes toward Community Colleges**  
**% rating 10, “extremely important reason”**

Opportunity Framework



Q29-Q37. Now I have some statements made by people about why we *should* support community colleges with tax dollars. Please think of a 1-10 scale, where 1 means something is not at all a reason to you personally, and 10 means it is an extremely important reason to you personally to continue to fund the community colleges in your state: First on this 1 to 10 scale, how would you rate this statement: Q29. Every person in American deserves an opportunity to get an education and community colleges are there to provide people with that opportunity. 30. SPLIT SAMPLE: [A: Community colleges, level the playing field by letting anyone enroll regardless of how well they did in high school. / B: Community colleges, level the playing field by giving anyone who works hard a chance at a college education]. Q31. Community colleges provide an open door to education not available elsewhere. Q32. Our society as a whole benefits when everyone has access to an education and community colleges give more people that access. Q33. Community colleges provide a way for people at all stages of their lives to be life long learners. Q34. Community colleges contribute to the local economy by training workers for local industries and businesses. Q35. Community colleges are centers of opportunity that meet the needs of the local community. Q36. Community colleges are adaptable institutions that can quickly make changes to programs and curriculum in order to fulfill the needs of the community and the changing local economy. Q37. Community colleges help secure the future of more young people by offering an education many would not be able to find elsewhere.

## 1. Various expressions of the opportunity framework

Of the five statements tested under the banner of *opportunity*, the two that garner the broadest appeal are:

Every person in America deserves an opportunity to get an education and community colleges are there to provide people with that opportunity. (53% call this an extremely important reason to continue funding)

Our society as a whole benefits when everyone has access to an education and community colleges give more people that access. (50%)

Both of these opportunity statements are held by many across segments, but support is particularly strongly among women, Democrats, liberals and moderates. The first statement -- that every person deserves an opportunity to get an education -- is also called extremely important by majorities of African Americans, those under 59 years old, and people who have attended a community college.

As we heard in the focus groups discussions, statements implying that “anyone can attend” a community college or that community colleges provide an education not available elsewhere are less credible and raise questions about the quality of students attending community colleges rather than focusing the public’s attention on the mission of the colleges. Therefore, it is not surprising that the following statements are less persuasive:

Help secure the future of more young people by offering education not found elsewhere (39% extremely important reason to continue funding)

“Community colleges provide an open door to education not available elsewhere” (29% call this an extremely important reason to continue funding)

They “level the playing field by giving anyone who works hard a chance at a college education” (37%)

They “level the playing field by letting anyone enroll regardless of how well they did in high school” (18%)

These last two statements were each tested among half of the sample in the survey, to see which garners more support. The results clearly show greater support for opportunity linked to hard work rather than invoking educational performance in high school.

- As with other opportunity statements, these resonate most with women and African Americans. Additionally, lower-income Americans (< \$50K) respond particularly well to leveling the playing field by providing opportunity to people who work hard.

### Values: Opportunity Statements by Cross Tabs

Q29-32; Q37: Now I have some statements made by people about why we *should* support community colleges with tax dollars. Please think of a 1 to 10 scale, where 1 means something is not at all a reason to you personally, and 10 means it is an extremely important reason to you personally to continue to fund the community colleges in your state.

% saying "10 - extremely important"	Everyone deserves the opportunity to obtain an education	Society benefits when everyone has access to education	Secure the future of young people by offering education not available elsewhere	Level playing field by accepting those who work hard	Provide open door to education not available elsewhere	Level playing field by enrolling regardless of HS record
<b>Total</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>18%</b>
Men	49%	46%	31%	30%	25%	14%
Women	57%	54%	46%	43%	33%	21%
18-24	54%	45%	37%	40%	20%	15%
25-39	55%	48%	35%	38%	27%	19%
40-49	58%	52%	37%	35%	28%	17%
50-58	56%	54%	45%	38%	36%	18%
59+	45%	50%	42%	36%	32%	16%
< \$25,000	59%	50%	49%	43%	34%	19%
\$25,000-\$49,000	50%	45%	38%	45%	30%	15%
\$50,000-\$74,000	55%	52%	36%	28%	27%	19%
\$75,000+	53%	56%	40%	35%	26%	19%
White	50%	49%	36%	35%	26%	14%
Black	66%	56%	52%	50%	37%	34%
Hispanic	56%	47%	45%	36%	35%	22%
CC degree	60%	53%	42%	39%	32%	18%
Classes taken at CC	54%	47%	37%	36%	25%	19%
Family at CC	50%	50%	41%	41%	31%	16%
No connection	48%	51%	33%	32%	28%	15%
Democrat	61%	56%	46%	44%	34%	21%
Independent	52%	49%	37%	33%	28%	17%
Republican	46%	45%	35%	37%	23%	14%
Liberal	57%	55%	43%	41%	34%	20%
Moderate	58%	54%	41%	38%	30%	19%
Conservative	45%	42%	33%	33%	23%	12%

## 2. Other values

The other ways to frame the issue with values that we tested include: economic value and other benefits that community colleges bring to a community; securing the future of young people; and facilitating life-long learning. Less than four in ten call each of the following concepts an extremely important reason to continue funding community colleges:

Provide a way for people at all stages in their lives to be life-long learners (39%)

Are centers of opportunity that meet community needs (30%)

Contribute to local economy by training workers (30%)

Are adaptable institutions that can quickly change to fulfill community and economic needs (20%)

In summation, we are not suggesting that the less popular concepts we tested should never be used, but rather pointing out that they have less appeal and credibility than the top statements directly referencing opportunity and access for all.

## D. Practical Reasons to Support Community Colleges

We have looked at the wide appeal of the overarching value of opportunity, especially for individuals to improve themselves. We turn now to practical reasons that people may have for supporting community colleges, as we seek those tangible needs and ideas that can drive the message home. The survey measured public reaction to sixteen reasons to fund community colleges, and found statements about *affordability* and *flexibility* to be the most highly appreciated characteristics. These two characteristics fit neatly under the umbrella of opportunity, helping to fill out the concept in tangible terms.

### 1. Supporting the opportunity framework

The most popular statements about affordability, flexibility, and community colleges as stepping stones easily reinforce the opportunity frame to make the case for continued funding of these institutions.

Community colleges make education affordable for people who would otherwise miss out. (42% extremely important reason to continue funding)

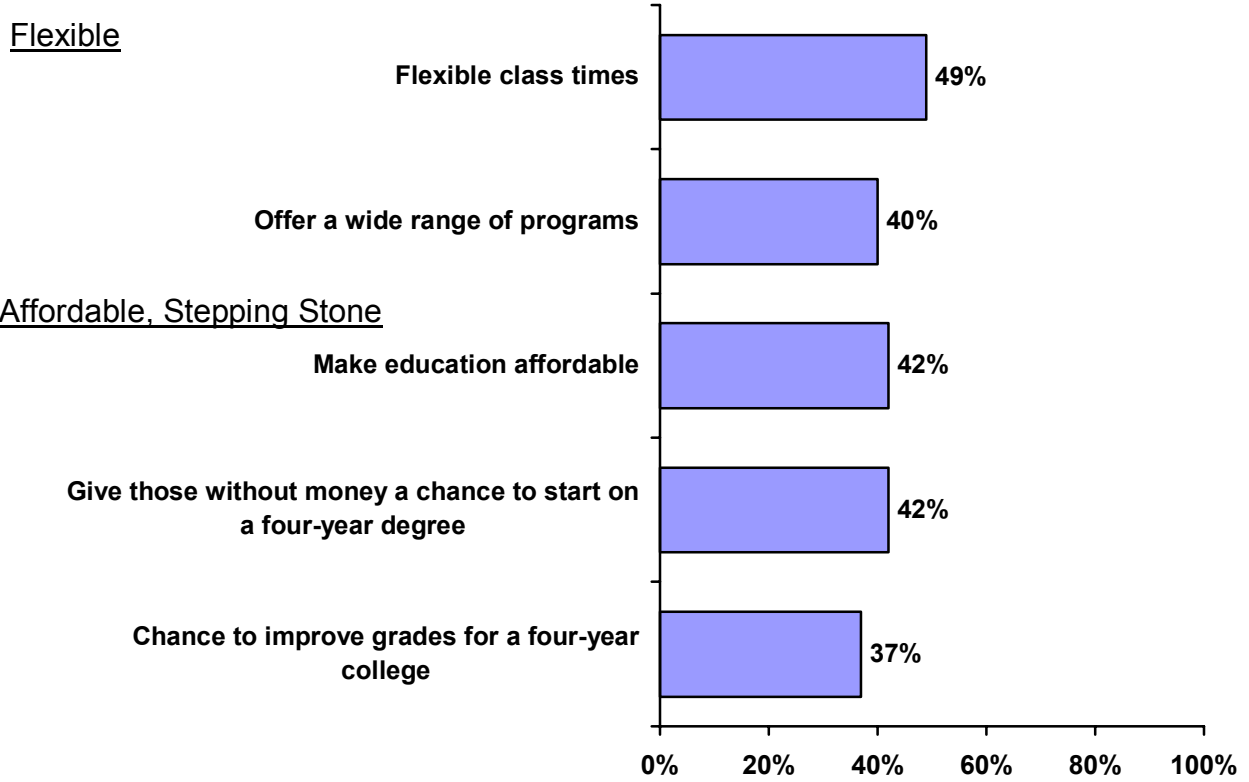
Community colleges give people without the money to attend a four-year college the chance to get started on a degree. (42%)

Community colleges are flexible and allow students to attend at night and on weekends. (49%)

Community colleges offer a wide range of programs from basic college courses to welding and engineering and computer programming to cooking and language classes for all different types of students. (39%)

Community colleges give students who are aiming for a four-year degree the chance to improve their grades and get into a four-year college. (37%)

**Most Persuasive Facts in Support of Continuing Funding**  
 % rating 10, "extremely important reason"



Q38-Q39, Q44-Q45, Q50. Still thinking of the 1-10 scale, where 1 means something is not at all a reason to you personally, and 10 means it as extremely important reason to you personally to continue to fund the community colleges in your state: How would you rate: Q38. Community colleges make education affordable for people who would otherwise miss out. Q39. Community colleges offer a wide range of programs from basic college courses to welding and engineering and computer programming to cooking and language classes for all different types of students. Q44. Community colleges give students who are aiming for a four-year degree the chance to improve their grades and get into a four-year college. Q45. Community colleges give people without the money to attend a four-year college the chance to get started on a degree. Q50. Community colleges are flexible and allow students to attend at night and on weekends.

All of these statements can be used within an opportunity frame, and directed at specific audiences for whom they resonate most. Across all five statements, there is particular appeal among women, African Americans, and those who have attended a community college. In addition, the following differences emerge within particular reasons:

- The statement that community colleges “make education affordable for people who would miss out” resonates with those who have less than a college degree, Democrats, liberals and moderates, and residents of the Northeast and South.
- The wide range of courses and programs community colleges provide holds appeal particular among Boomers, those with less than a graduate degree, and Americans earning the lowest incomes (< \$25K).
- The opportunity these colleges provide to improve high school grades plays particular well among 18 to 24 year olds, those with a high school diploma or less, and Hispanics.

It is easy to see a thread of self-interest woven through these figures. The interest is ratcheted up in each of the items above among types of people who stand to benefit because of one or another trait of community colleges.

- ⊙ Of the sixteen statements tested, statistical analysis reveals that “making education affordable for people who would otherwise miss out” is most influential in determining one’s support for expanding community colleges. Communicating affordability within an opportunity framework is key to building support for funding community colleges.

**Supporting the Opportunity Framework:  
Top Reasons to Fund Community Colleges By Cross Tabs**

Q38-Q39, Q44-Q45, Q50. Still thinking of the 1 to 10 scale, where 1 means something is not at all a reason to you personally, and 10 means it is an extremely important reason to you personally to continue to fund the community colleges in your state: How would you rate:

<b>% saying "10 - extremely important"</b>	<b>Flexible: nights and weekends</b>	<b>Wide range of programs</b>	<b>Affordable</b>	<b>Way to start 4-yr. degree w/o money</b>	<b>Chance to improve HS grades</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>37%</b>
Men	42%	32%	38%	36%	32%
Women	54%	47%	46%	48%	40%
White	47%	37%	40%	40%	34%
Black	53%	52%	55%	51%	48%
Hispanic	49%	42%	44%	45%	43%
18-24	46%	41%	46%	41%	42%
25-39	48%	33%	41%	33%	34%
40-49	49%	44%	38%	44%	38%
50-58	50%	45%	45%	45%	32%
59+	49%	40%	43%	40%	39%
High school or less	51%	44%	45%	42%	40%
Some college	48%	42%	45%	45%	39%
College graduate	49%	37%	38%	42%	33%
Post-graduate	44%	29%	37%	39%	29%
< \$25,000	49%	50%	49%	45%	40%
\$25,000-\$49,000	47%	38%	42%	41%	38%
\$50,000-\$74,000	52%	36%	46%	47%	42%
\$75,000+	51%	37%	42%	43%	35%
CC degree	55%	48%	47%	49%	47%
Classes taken at CC	48%	38%	42%	41%	35%
Family at CC	48%	38%	42%	41%	36%
No connection	43%	34%	38%	37%	27%
Democrat	52%	44%	48%	45%	40%
Independent	47%	40%	40%	41%	35%
Republican	46%	34%	36%	40%	34%
Liberal	50%	43%	47%	45%	37%
Moderate	50%	42%	46%	44%	39%
Conservative	46%	35%	35%	38%	34%
Northeast	52%	40%	49%	48%	36%
Midwest	47%	40%	36%	40%	33%
South	48%	40%	44%	40%	38%
West	48%	38%	38%	42%	38%

## 2. Other reasons

To a much lesser extent, the other statements tested are viewed as important reasons to continue community colleges funding. The statements include those about prospects for community college students' success in the future, statistics about the colleges, job training programs, programs for new immigrants, adult education, and comparisons between community colleges and four-year institutions. Each of these statements receives less than a third saying it is an extremely important reason to continue funding community colleges.

### Comparisons between community colleges and four-year colleges

- Community colleges provide the same quality instructions for the first two years as four-year institutions but at a lower cost. (29%)
- Community colleges have smaller classes so teachers are able to provide more personal attention to individual students than teachers at four-year colleges. (27%)
- Because of the quality education, hands-on training and range of courses offered, community colleges are a better value and give students more for their money than four-year colleges. (18%)

### Job training

- Community colleges retrain workers who have lost their jobs, as industries decline or employer leave an area. (27%)
- Community colleges work with local employers to develop job training programs to fit businesses' needs. (27%)

### Adult education and programs for new immigrants

- Community colleges help new immigrants learn English and skills they need to succeed in this country. (22%)
- Community colleges are the main way we have to teach adults who do not have basic math and reading skills. (23%)

### Statistics on students and community colleges

- Close to one-half of all college students in the US are in community colleges. (16%)

- One in five students earning four-year degrees started out in a community college. (21%)
- Getting a degree from a community college increases a person's lifetime earning by over 30%. (26%)

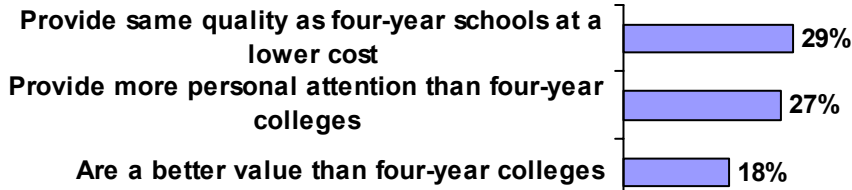
**Personal interest**

- Community colleges provide residents of a community a way to take courses in things that interest them. (31%)

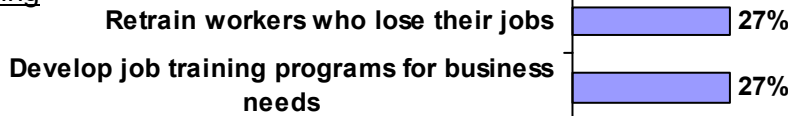
In summary, these rationales are not necessarily counterproductive but they are far less persuasive than flexibility, the stepping stone function, and especially affordability, in making the public enthusiastic about getting behind support and expansion for community colleges.

**Reasons to Continue Funding Community Colleges**  
**% rating 10, "extremely important reason"**

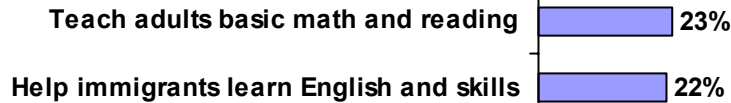
Comparisons to 4-Year



Job Training



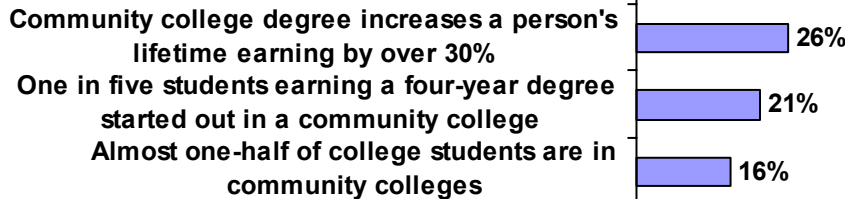
Remedial



Personal Interest



Statistics



0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

Q40-Q43, Q46-Q49, Q51-Q53. Still thinking of the 1-10 scale, where 1 means something is not at all a reason to you personally, and 10 means it as extremely important reason to you personally to continue to fund the community colleges in your state: How would you rate: Q40. Community colleges have smaller classes so teachers are able to provide more personal attention to individual students than teachers at four-year colleges. Q41. Because of the quality education, hands-on training and range of courses offered, community colleges are a better value and give students more for their money than four-year colleges. Q42. Community colleges help new immigrants learn English and skills they need to succeed in this country. Q43. Community colleges are the main way we have to teach adults who do not have basic math and reading skills. Q46. Community colleges provide the same quality instruction for the first two years as four-year institutions but at a lower cost. Q47. Community colleges retrain workers who have lost their jobs, as industries decline or employers leave an area. Q48. Community colleges work with local employers to develop job training programs to fit businesses' needs. Q49. Community colleges provide residents of a community a way to take courses in the things that interest them. Q51. Close to one-half of all college students in the U.S. are in community colleges. Q52. One in five students earning four-year degrees started out in a community college. Q53. Getting a degree from a community college increases a person's lifetime earnings by over 30%.

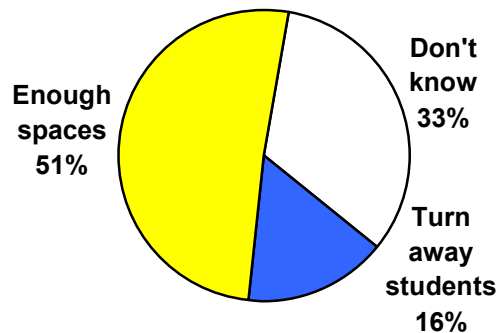
## E. Meeting the Demand: Support for Funding

The survey probed awareness, knowledge, and attitudes about funding to gauge support for community colleges as they face high demand and a lack of resources.

### 1. Awareness of demand

The public is largely unaware of the unprecedented demand community colleges face, with half (51%) believing there are enough spaces available for students who would like to attend, one-third (33%) saying they don't know, and just 16% reporting the community colleges in their area have to turn away some students.

#### Space in Community Colleges in Own Area



Q3. As far as you know, do the community colleges in your area have enough spaces for all the students who would like to attend them, or do they have to turn away some students because of a lack of spaces, or don't you know?

- Those who believe there are enough spaces tend to be younger (18 to 24), have more than a high school education, have attended and received a degree from a community college, and are moderates and conservatives.
- On the other hand, NPR listeners and residents of the West are most likely to report a lack of space in their local community colleges.

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### Space in Community Colleges in Own Area by Cross Tabs

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Q3. As far as you know, do the community colleges in your area have enough spaces for all the students who would like to attend them, or do they have to turn away some students because of a lack of spaces, or don't you know?

	Enough space	Turn away	Don't know
<b>Total</b>	51%	16	33
18-24	62%	23	15
25-39	50%	13	36
40-49	52%	15	32
50-58	50%	16	35
59+	46%	17	38
High school or less	45%	17	38
Some college	55%	15	30
College graduate	53%	14	33
Post-graduate	55%	19	26
Community college degree	57%	15	28
Classes taken at CC	50%	18	32
Family member at CC	53%	15	32
No connection	44%	14	42
Liberal	45%	18	36
Moderate	54%	13	33
Conservative	53%	17	30
Local paper	52%	16	31
National paper	53%	18	28
TV news	52%	15	33
Cable news	53%	15	32
NPR	50%	23	27
Northeast	52%	13	35
Midwest	54%	13	33
South	51%	16	34
West	48%	22	30

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## 2. Support for funding

Most Americans indicate support for financing community colleges with their own state's revenues. Nearly eight in ten (79%) say they would oppose cutting back spending on community college in the short-term in order to balance their state's budget. Less than two in ten (16%) support such cuts. Those most likely to oppose cutting back community college spending include:

- Those with more than a high school education;
- Americans with personal connections to community colleges (graduated from, taken course, family attended);
- White-collar workers and professionals;
- Democrats and independents;
- Liberals and moderates;
- Residents of the Northeast; and
- Residents of the West.

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### Cutting Back Spending on Community Colleges by Cross Tabs

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Q4. Given the limited funding and the number of other demands on tax dollars, would you favor or oppose cutting back spending on community colleges in your state in the short-term in order to balance the state budget?

	<b>Favor</b>	<b>Oppose</b>
<b>Total</b>	16%	79
High school or less	20%	74
Some college	12%	83
College graduate	17%	80
Post-graduate	13%	85
Community college degree	15%	83
Classes taken at CC	14%	81
Family member at CC	15%	81
No connection	24%	69
Blue collar	22%	71
White collar	14%	82
Professional	15%	82
Democrat	12%	84
Independent	16%	80
Republican	23%	73
Liberal	10%	87
Moderate	16%	81
Conservative	21%	73
Northeast	13%	82
Midwest	21%	74
South	16%	79
West	14%	82

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Support for tax-dollar funding of community colleges holds up, according to the survey, even when raising taxes is explicitly indicated. After being informed of the demand on community colleges, two-thirds (67%) support using tax dollars to expand the system even if it means raising tax dollars. Only a quarter (27%) prefer raising tuition and becoming more selective. Those likely to support the expansion include:

- Women;
- Younger (18 to 24);
- African-Americans;
- Hispanics;
- Those with a post-graduate degree;
- Democrats and independents; and
- Liberals and moderates.

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### Responding to Demand by Cross Tabs

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Q54. Currently there are more people who would like to attend community colleges than the colleges have space for. Here are two proposals to help solve this problem, please tell me which one you support more: A) Some people say that community colleges should raise tuition and fees and become more selective in whom they admit so fewer students can attend; or B) Other people say we should use tax dollars to expand the system of community colleges so more students can attend, even if this means raising state taxes.

	Raise tuition, admit fewer students	Use tax collars to expand system so more can attend
<b>Total</b>	27%	67
Men	29%	65
Women	25%	70
18-24	21%	77
25-39	26%	67
40-49	27%	68
50-58	26%	71
59+	31%	61
White	29%	65
Black	20%	77
Hispanic	21%	75
High school or less	30%	65
Some college	26%	66
College graduate	29%	67
Post-graduate	19%	75
Community college degree	25%	67
Classes taken at CC	27%	70
Family member at CC	25%	69
No connection	32%	61
Reg. voter	28%	65
Not registered	21%	75
Democrat	19%	77
Independent	29%	66
Republican	37%	54
Liberal	19%	79
Moderate	24%	70
Conservative	37%	55

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## F. Message Targeting to the Natural Allies

One heartening aspect of the results of this study is that there is a great deal of praise for community colleges among *all* groups. Communications campaigns, targeting selected types of individuals because they are influential players in a community, may use the main values themes and messages, with the knowledge that that the messages will resonate well across a variety of groups.

On the other hand, there are some particular messages that will be most helpful in seeking out especially strong supporters. Although there are many types of people across the country who are very favorably inclined toward community colleges and who believe they should be maintained, which ones are most likely to be spurred into action on behalf of community colleges?

To answer this question, we put a microscope on the two thirds of the public who support spending more on the community college system to allow more students a chance to attend – even if doing so means raising taxes. We examined four types of people who are most likely to fall into this supporter group.

### 1. Young, people of color

*Who are they:* One group of people who are especially inclined to support expansion of community colleges includes

- Young people, 18 to 24 year olds,
- African Americans and Hispanics and
- Non-voters.

This is a group of individuals whose own needs are directly affected by the presence of local, affordable educational opportunities such as community colleges. These individuals have lower incomes than others and are largely city residents.

Like most other Americans, they get their news from television (broadcast first, cable secondly) and local papers.

*Values:* The young, people-of-color group sees both individual and societal rationales for supporting community colleges. The most important value for the group is

offering every person in the nation an opportunity. While we have reported this is the top reason across all types of people, it is especially important to this group.

The members of this group also score high on the societal value: that society as a whole benefits when everyone has access to education.

*Practical considerations:* The young and people of color set agrees with others that chief practical reasons to support community colleges are:

- the flexibility of community colleges that allows students to attend at night and on weekends; and
- the fact that they make education affordable for those who might miss out otherwise.

However, they differ from Americans generally in giving two other practical reasons for supporting community colleges somewhat high scores:

- helping people with fewer financial resources get started; and
- the wide range of types of training community colleges offer, from welding to engineering and other areas.

In short, younger Americans and people of color see community colleges as possibly serving their own self-interest – and self-interest is always a primary reason for individuals to engage in support for an issue. As a heavily non-voter group they may be more difficult to engage in a civic affairs issue, but at the same time their personal stake in this particular issue makes them a good target.

## **2. Individuals with graduate educations**

*Who are they:* Another set of Americans who are among those who want to expand access to community colleges are people who attended graduate school or have graduate degrees. They have considerably higher incomes, are older than the norm, and are mainly white. This set contains more professionals and a higher proportion of individuals who are in positions with the authority to make hiring decisions in their jobs. They are liberal Democrats as well.

Their news consumption from all sources is high, but they are particularly more likely than the norm to read local and national newspapers, and listen to NPR.

*Values:* The members of the grad school group have quite a different approach than others as to why it is important to fund community colleges: they put societal benefit

above all other values. For them, the central individual opportunity value – tops with everyone else -- comes second.

*Practical considerations:* The graduate school group has as its top practical reasons for supporting community colleges the same reasons shared by other groups:

- the flexibility of community colleges that allows students to attend at night and on weekends; and
- the fact that they make education affordable for those who might miss out otherwise.

However, they feel less passionately about any of the rationales than most other types of people, and thus may be more difficult to draw into active participation.

### **3. Democrats and liberals**

*Who are they:* Liberals and Democrats are another group of individuals who are enthusiastic supporters of expanding community colleges through additional funding, rather than making them more selective. There are more women in this group, and it is somewhat more Black and Hispanic than the norm.

Their media habits are fairly typical of all Americans, although they are slightly more likely to be television news consumers and NPR listeners.

*Values:* The Democratic and liberal supporters of community colleges put individual opportunity at the top of their list of reasons to fund community colleges, closely followed by the belief that society as a whole will benefit when more people have access to an education. This makes their priorities more like the people-of-color/young group than the graduate school group. This also again suggests that for core supporters, both themes are important.

*Practical considerations:* The liberals and Democrats are generally more likely than other Americans to agree that all the various practical reasons we offered for continuing funding are compelling. Again, they share the same attitudes as the young, people of color group, making their priority list:

- the flexibility of community colleges that allows students to attend at night and on weekends; and
- the fact that they make education affordable for those who might miss out otherwise.

They also give somewhat higher scores than the norm to:

- helping people with fewer financial resources get started; and
- the wide range of types of training community colleges offer.

#### 4. Alumni

One final note on target audiences: The eight in ten who have a personal connection to community colleges- especially the 22% those who have received a degree from one - are strong advocates for their experience and for continuing support for community colleges. They demonstrate enthusiasm for community colleges again and again in the focus groups and the survey, from rejecting criticisms to supporting funding. This audience can be very useful in generating active support, because it is so large and community colleges may already have in place avenues to reach these supporters.

*Who they are:* Focusing on the graduates, many of the people who earned a degree or certificate from a community college have gone on to gain a four-year degree, and have higher income and hold more professional jobs than the population in general. Their distribution across race and gender groups is about on par with the general population.

*Values:*

- The community college alumni are by far the biggest boosters for the idea that everyone deserves an opportunity to obtain an education. This value clearly speaks to them.
- Also they exhibit more enthusiasm for community college's role in life long learning, than do other people.

*Practical considerations:* The alumni are more enthusiastic about all the reasons to continue to fund community colleges that we offered.

- Their top reason is the flexibility of the system,
- followed by affordability and the breadth of the education available in community colleges.
- In addition, they score giving students a chance to improve their grades much higher than other members of the public do - suggesting the personal stake many of them may have in these colleges.

The community college alumni are largely unaware of the current lack of space in the institutions. Thus, they are prime targets for educational campaigns that inform them about the resources crunch and calling on them for advocacy on behalf of their alma maters.

## G. Conclusions and Recommendations

Community colleges are strongly valued as places where individuals at all stages of life can obtain an affordable education. Efforts to increase active support for community colleges do not need to spend energy convincing the public of the value of these institutions. Rather, they should employ messages that reinforce the strong positive impressions the public already holds, and inform the public of the difficulties the institutions currently have in fulfilling the demands for their programs.

The survey data together with the focus group research point the way to a number of recommendations for community colleges to raise their profile and build a constituency around the need for greater funding and to expand the system.

Communication to support community colleges needs to aim first at increasing awareness of the urgent need for more funding for community colleges, then to identify, enlighten and fire up the natural allies.

1. **Lack of awareness:** Clearly, community and technical colleges have a positive foundation from which active support can be built, but the public is largely unaware of the funding shortfalls and over subscription facing these institutions. A main goal of a communication campaign should be to educate the public about issues that are not understood on a national basis or in the states where we over sampled.
2. **Opportunity afforded by community colleges:** The key value the public sees in community colleges is opportunity for any individual to gain an education and/or skill. There are many ways to express opportunity and the attributes of community colleges that create opportunity, including
  - their affordability (most importantly),
  - their convenience,
  - their flexibility and
  - the role community colleges play as a stepping stone to four-year degrees and successful jobs.

3. **Society that benefits from educational access for each person:** We can expand the message from individual opportunity into societal benefit when we assert that access (opportunity) for everyone (individuals) is good for society in general. This is a strong argument. However, using other general community arguments on their own (helping the economy, providing centers of opportunity to meet local community needs) are much less persuasive.
4. **Uniqueness:** It is important to let the unique character of community colleges shine though, rather than employing comparisons to four-year institutions. The survey and the focus groups demonstrate that it is not helpful to draw comparisons between community colleges and four-year colleges or to suggest four-year institutions are less desirable (bigger classes, use TA's, etc.). Community colleges are valued in their own right, as are four year colleges and universities. They are different and we should celebrate the differences.
5. **Other non-starters:** Some of the other concepts that are unproductive for communications on community colleges include these:
  - An emphasis on the practical benefits of community colleges for communities and the economy writ large.
  - Using language such as “*anyone* can attend” which suggests lower standards.
  - A focus on adult literacy or classes geared toward immigrants which are lower priority for the public in the survey, than help for mainstream students. Similarly, they proved a distraction when discussed in the focus groups as they raised anti-immigrant sentiments and demands to improve K-12 schools.
  - Again, comparisons to four-year colleges and universities.

**6. Messages:** Expression of the themes we recommend include the following:

Community Colleges: Opportunity Close to Home

Every person in America deserves an opportunity to get an education and community colleges are there to provide people with that opportunity.

Community colleges make education affordable for people who would otherwise miss out.

They are stepping stones for students aiming for a four-year degree and for those who are looking for high quality job training.

They are flexible and multifaceted. They allow students to attend at night and on weekends and offer a wide range of programs from basic college courses to welding and engineering and computer programming.

# **APPENDIX:**

## **Questionnaire with response totals**

## National Survey on Community Colleges

Interviewing conducted August 2 through 25, 2004,  
among N=1,055 adults living in the US.

The data have been weighted by gender and age.

The margin of error for is  $\pm 3.0$  percentage points.

Percents may add to 99% or 101% due to rounding.

\* indicates less than 1% , - indicates zero.

Hello, my name is \_\_\_ and I am an interviewer with Communications Center, Inc. We are conducting a public opinion survey about communities and education. Your telephone number was selected at random. We are not selling anything. May I please speak to the person 18 years old or older in your household who had a birthday most recently? (IF NECESSARY ARRANGE FOR A CALL BACK AND RECORD DATE AND TIME. REPEAT INTRO AS NECESSARY)

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1. In general, would you say things in the country are going in the right direction, or are they headed off on the wrong track?	Right direction	37%
	Wrong track	53
	DK	9
	REF	*

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This survey is about community colleges. In some areas these types of colleges are also known as technical colleges. For the purpose of this survey, we will use the term community colleges to mean both those colleges called community colleges and those called technical colleges. Community colleges are public institutions that award certificates and associate degrees, as well as offer a variety of classes to non-degree students.

2. As far as you are aware, are most community colleges funded with federal funds, state tax funds, local taxes, or by the tuition students pay? (ALLOW MULTIPLE RESPONSES)	Federal	19%
	State	40%
	Local	16%
	Tuition	48%
	DK	15%
REF	*	

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3. As far as you know, do the community colleges in your area have enough spaces for all the students who would like to attend them, or do they have to turn away some students because of a lack of spaces, or don't you know?	Enough space	51%
	Turn away	16
	DK	33
	REF	--

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4. Given the limited funding and the number of other demands on tax dollars, would you favor or oppose cutting back spending on community colleges in your state in the short-term in order to balance the state budget?	Favor	16%
	Oppose	79
	DK	4
	REF	*

Please tell me in your opinion if each of the following words or phrases describes the community colleges in your state very well, somewhat well, not very well or not at all? (RANDOMIZE Q5-Q8)

	Very well	Some what well	Not very well	Not at all	DK	REF
5. Affordable	45%	37	7	2	9	--
6. Conveniently located	68%	25	4	1	1	--
7. Provide a high quality education	47%	42	4	1	6	*
8. Provide good job training	45%	40	4	2	9	--

Community colleges are different around the country in what they teach and who attends them. I would like to know if, as far as you know, the community colleges in your area have many, some, just a few or no students in each of the following categories:

	Many	Some	Just a few	None	DK	REF
9. First, as far as you know do the community colleges in your area have many, some, just a few, or no students who are planning to go on to <u>four-year colleges</u> ?	42%	33	9	1	15	--
10. As far as you know, do the community colleges in your area have many, some, just a few or no students who are <u>learning additional skills to help them advance in their existing jobs or careers</u> ?	44%	35	9	1	10	*
11. How about people who want to take a course or two in an area of personal interest - many, some, just a few, or no students?	37%	34	22	1	7	--
12. How about immigrants trying to learn English or other skills they will need in this country - many, some, just a few, or no students?	23%	26	26	4	20	1
13. How about people seeking a degree or training in one of the trades - many, some, just a few, or no students?	49%	33	9	1	7	--

Please tell me whether you think it would be best if community colleges put a very high, high, middle or low priority in each of the following areas: (RANDOMIZE Q14-Q22 - PROGRAM SO Q14 AND Q15 ARE NOT CLOSE TOGETHER)

	<b>Very high</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>DK</b>	<b>REF</b>
14. Providing people who are not ready or cannot afford the cost of a four-year university a way to start their college education.	34%	45	15	4	1	--
15. Providing people a way to complete the first two years of a four-year bachelor's degree at a college close to home.	32%	49	13	4	1	--
16. Providing training for people who want to go into a trade or career that does not require a four-year degree.	32%	47	17	3	1	*
17. Providing <u>retraining</u> , for people who have lost their jobs or need a new career.	32%	42	19	5	2	--
18. Providing a place for people to take a course or two to learn something new, but who are not seeking a degree.	15%	34	34	16	1	*
19. Providing continuing education for working people to become more skilled at their existing jobs.	28%	46	21	4	1	--
20. Teaching reading to adults who never learned to read.	29%	33	20	14	4	--
21. Helping new immigrants learn English and other skills.	20%	36	23	15	5	*
22. Providing local businesses with a trained workforce.	27%	44	21	6	3	*

Now I am going to read some criticisms we have heard about community colleges. Please tell me if you think each statement is true all the time, much of the time, just some of the time, or never. (RANDOMIZE Q23-Q28)

	All the time	Much of the time	Some of the time	Never true	DK	REF
23. The students who go to community colleges do not have high enough grades or test scores to get into a four-year college.	3%	14	62	19	3	*
24. The students who go to community colleges do not have the commitment to attend a four-year college.	3%	9	60	27	1	--
25. The college level courses at community colleges are easier than the same courses taught in four-year colleges.	5%	14	46	27	7	--
26. Community colleges offer so many programs that their resources are spread too thin to be very good.	3%	10	58	23	5	*
27. A person can only advance so far with a degree from a community college. Most well-paying jobs require at least a bachelor's degree from a four-year college.	10%	32	46	10	2	--
28. Because community colleges are willing to admit everyone, they must have low standards and do not provide a high quality education.	1%	7	39	52	1	--

Now I have some statements made by people about why we *should* support community colleges with tax dollars. Please think of a 1 to 10 scale, where 1 means something is not at all a reason to you personally, and 10 means it is an extremely important reason to you personally to continue to fund the community colleges in your state: (RANDOMIZE Q29-Q37) First on this 1 to 10 scale, how would you rate this statement:

	<b>% 10-extremely important</b>
29. Every person in America deserves an opportunity to get an education and community colleges are there to provide people with that opportunity.	53%
30a. SPLIT SAMPLE A: Community colleges, level the playing field by letting anyone enroll regardless of how well they did in high school.	18%
30b. SPLIT SAMPLE B: Community colleges, level the playing field by giving anyone who works hard a chance at a college education.	37%
31. Community colleges provide an open door to education not available elsewhere.	29%
32. Our society as a whole benefits when everyone has access to an education and community colleges give more people that access.	50%
33. Community colleges provide a way for people at all stages of their lives to be life long learners.	39%
34. Community colleges contribute to the local economy by training workers for local industries and businesses.	30%
35. Community colleges are centers of opportunity that meet the needs of the local community.	30%
36. Community colleges are adaptable institutions that can quickly make changes to programs and curriculum in order to fulfill the needs of the community and the changing local economy.	20%
37. Community colleges help secure the future of more young people by offering an education many would not be able to find elsewhere.	39%

Still thinking of the 1 to 10 scale, where 1 means something is not at all a reason to you personally, and 10 means it is an extremely important reason to you personally to continue to fund the community colleges in your state: How would you rate:

(RANDOMIZE Q38-Q53)

	<b>% 10-extremely important</b>
38. Community colleges make education affordable for people who would otherwise miss out.	42%
39. Community colleges offer a wide range of programs from basic college courses to welding and engineering and computer programming to cooking and language classes for all different types of students.	40%
40. Community colleges have smaller classes so teachers are able to provide more personal attention to individual students than teachers at four-year colleges.	27%
41. Because of the quality education, hands-on training and range of courses offered, community colleges are a better value and give students more for their money than four-year colleges.	18%
42. Community colleges help new immigrants learn English and skills they need to succeed in this country.	22%
43. Community colleges are the main way we have to teach adults who do not have basic math and reading skills.	23%
44. Community colleges give students who are aiming for a four-year degree the chance to improve their grades and get into a four-year college.	37%
45. Community colleges give people without the money to attend a four-year college the chance to get started on a degree.	42%
46. Community colleges provide the same quality instruction for the first two years as four-year institutions but at a lower cost.	29%
47. Community colleges retrain workers who have lost their jobs, as industries decline or employers leave an area.	27%
48. Community colleges work with local employers to develop job training programs to fit businesses' needs.	27%
49. Community colleges provide residents of a community a way to take courses in the things that interest them.	31%
50. Community colleges are flexible and allow students to attend at night and on weekends.	49%
51. Close to one-half of all college students in the U.S. are in community colleges.	16%
52. One in five students earning four-year degrees started out in a community college.	21%
53. Getting a degree from a community college increases a person's lifetime earnings by over 30%.	26%

54. Currently there are more people who would like to attend community colleges than the colleges have space for. Here are two proposals to help solve this problem, please tell me which one you support more ...

A) Some people say that community colleges should raise tuition and fees and become more selective in whom they admit so fewer students can attend; or	Side A	27%
B) Other people say we should use tax dollars to expand the system of community colleges so more students can attend, even if this means raising state taxes.	Side B	67
	DK	5
	REF	1

Now I have a few final questions about you.

Please tell me if you do each of the following: regularly, now and then, or almost never:

	Regularly	Now and then	Almost never	DK	REF
55. Read a local daily newspaper	65%	24	11	*	1
56. Read a national newspaper such as the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, or USA Today	16%	34	49	--	1
57. Watch local or national television news, not on a cable network	71%	17	12	*	1
58. Watch cable news channels such as CNN, MSNBC, or Fox Cable News	51%	29	19	*	1
59. Listen to National Public Radio	27%	26	46	--	1
60. Do you have any children under 18 living at home with you?	Yes				39%
	No				60
	DK				--
	REF				1
61. What was the last grade of school you completed?	Less than high school				7%
	High school grad/GED				29
	Some college				27
	College graduate				21
	Graduate work				15
	DK				--
	REF				1

62. Are you now or have you ever attended or taken a class at a community college? (CODE CURRENT AND PAST SEPARATELY)	Yes - currently	8%
	Yes - in past	47
	No (Go to Q64)	45
	DK (Go to Q64)	*
	REF	1
63. IF YES: Which of the following best describes you:	I received a degree or certificate from a community college	22%
	I am taking or took classes toward a degree or certificate but did not graduate	16
	I am taking or took classes but was not working toward a degree or certificate	17
	DID NOT ATTEND CC (Q62)	45
	DK	--
REF	--	
64. Do you have any children or close family members who have attended a community college?	Yes	63%
	No	36
	DK	*
	REF	1
65. Are you registered to vote at your current address?	Yes	82%
	No	17
	DK	1
	REF	1
66. In terms of your political outlook, do you usually think of yourself as: [REVERSE ORDER] very conservative, somewhat conservative, middle of the road, somewhat liberal, or very liberal?	Very conservative	13%
	Somewhat conservative	22
	Middle of the road	33
	Somewhat liberal	20
	Very liberal	8
	DK	2
REF	2	
67. Do you consider yourself to be a Democrat, a Republican, an independent, or something else?	Democrat	37%
	Republican	26
	Independent	27
	Something else	2
	DK	5
REF	4	
68. Which of the following best describes the place where you live: a large city, a small city, suburb, town, or a rural area?	Large City	22%
	Small City	24
	Suburb	20
	Town	14
	Rural Area	19
	DK	*
REF	1	

69. What is your occupation?	Professional white-collar	28%
	Managerial white-collar	5
	Technical white-collar	6
	Sales white-collar	8
	Clerical white-collar	11
	Skilled blue-collar	10
	Unskilled blue-collar	15
	Homemaker	8
	Unemployed	*
	Disabled	*
	Student	5
DK	1	
REF	3	
70. IF EMPLOYED: In your job do you help to make hiring decisions? <i>Base N=706</i>	Yes	36%
	No	63
	DK	1
	REF	*
71. In what year were you born? 71b. IF REFUSED ASK CATEGORIES: Are you between:	18-34	31%
	35-44	22
	45-54	18
	55-64	12
	65+	17
72. Would you say you are white, black or African American, Hispanic, Asian or Pacific Islander, Native American, or something else?	White	73%
	Black	11
	Hispanic	11
	Asian	2
	Native American	1
	Something Else	1
	DK	--
REF	1	
73. Stop me when I come to the category in which your total HOUSEHOLD INCOME fell before taxes in 2003. Your best estimate is fine.	Less than \$15,000	8%
	\$15,000 to \$24,000	12
	\$25,000 to \$34,000	13
	\$35,000 to \$49,000	15
	\$50,000 to \$74,000	16
	\$75,000 or more	22
	DK	2
	REF	11
Gender	Male	48%
	Female	52