

## ***Strategic Research Associates, LLC***

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**DATE:** Tuesday, January 15, 2019

**TO:** Western Governors University Texas

**FROM:** James Henson, PhD and Joshua Blank, PhD

**SUBJECT:** Key findings from The 101: The Higher Ed Poll of Texas

### **Key Findings**

***Texans continue to consider the cost of higher education an obstacle to obtaining a degree and worry about student loan debt as both a personal and a policy problem.***

- Among those without a college degree, financial concerns top obstacles for not completing a college degree. The number one obstacle cited was “the cost of a degree” (75%), followed by job or work responsibilities (66%) and taking on student loan debt (65%).
- Both Texans with and without student loan debt see student debt as a major problem. Overall, 79% of Texans view the problem of student loan debt for people in the United States as a “major problem,” including 77% of those who currently hold no student loan debt themselves.

***Despite concerns about cost, Texans with degrees say that the cost was worth it in both economic and personal terms.***

- Sixty-five percent of those with associate’s degrees, 77% of those with college degrees, and 72% of those with graduate degrees say that the money they or their family has paid for their education has or will pay off.
- A majority of Texans with associate’s, college, or graduate degrees say that the value most college graduates get back over their lifetime is equal in value or worth more than what they paid for attending college.
- Large majorities of Texans also continue to agree that having a degree or certificate beyond high school is somewhat or very important (93%), and that those degrees are a source of pride for most people (93%); lead to a higher income (87%) and a better quality of life (83%); increases the respect one receives from others (81%); and are essential for getting a good job (78%).

***Texans continue to seek out more post-secondary education in various parts of the state’s higher education system.***

- More than a third of Texas adults (36%) say that they’ve explored enrolling in an educational program in the last five years, with 60% of those being over the age of 30.
- Among Texans who don’t view their job as a career, 60% say that they need more education and training; but even among those who do see their job as a career, 26% still say that they need more education or training.
- Twenty-eight percent of Texans say that they will enroll in an educational or training program in the next five years, with more than half of those being over the age of 30 (57%).

- Among those who say that they will seek out more education in the next five years, 35% say that they would do so at a 4-year public college or university, while 29% say that they would do so at a community college.
- Among those who say that they need more education and training to get the job or career that they want, roughly equal shares say they would do so at a community college (33%) as say they would enroll at a 4-year public college or university (35%), with 18% saying they would get more education at another type of institution.

***Most Texans don't think the state spends enough on higher education, and a large majority think it's important for the state to continue providing aid to students with financial need.***

- A majority (51%) of Texas adults say that Texas state government spends 'too little' on college education, while only 7% say that they spend too much.
- Forty-eight percent say the state doesn't provide enough financial aid for college students.
- Eighty-four percent say it is 'very important' for the State of Texas to continue providing state-funded financial aid for college students who demonstrate financial need.
- As in previous surveys, more than 90% of Texans agree that it is essential to have an educated workforce if Texas' economy is going to compete with other states.

### **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 50 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 conducted between January 7-13, 2019. 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 2018 Texas Adult Population. The overall margin of error for the poll is +/- 3.46 percentage points.

### **About Strategic Research Associates**

*The principals at Strategic Research Associates are James Henson, PhD and Joshua Blank, PhD. One or the other has played a primary role in most of the major public statewide public polls conducted in Texas since 2007. They are based in Austin, Texas, and can be contacted at SRATEXLLC@gmail.com.*

## Poll Summary

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...

	<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2015</b>
1. is worth more than what they pay for attending college	32%	40%	38%	42%
2. is worth less than what they pay for attending college	31	25	31	22
3. is about equal to what they pay for attending college	28	25	24	27
4. DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	9	9	7	9

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?

	<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2015</b>
1. Very important	67%	70%	71%	74%
2. Somewhat important	26	25	24	20
3. Not very important	3	3	3	4
4. Not at all important	2	1	0	2
5. DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	0	1	2	1

*Please tell us whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: (would that be somewhat agree/disagree or strongly agree/disagree)*

**[RANDOMIZE Q3A-Q3E]**

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

1.	Strongly agree	50%
2.	Somewhat agree	28
3.	Somewhat disagree	13
4.	Strongly disagree	8
5.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	1

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

1.	Strongly agree	58%
2.	Somewhat agree	29
3.	Somewhat disagree	7
4.	Strongly disagree	4
5.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	2

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

1.	Strongly agree	55%
2.	Somewhat agree	27
3.	Somewhat disagree	11
4.	Strongly disagree	5
5.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	1

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

1.	Strongly agree	42%
2.	Somewhat agree	39
3.	Somewhat disagree	10
4.	Strongly disagree	7
5.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	2

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

1.	Strongly agree	67%
2.	Somewhat agree	26
3.	Somewhat disagree	4
4.	Strongly disagree	2
5.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	1

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

1.	Less than high school	5%
2.	High school	14
3.	Some college	20
4.	Associate's degree or certificate	14
5.	College degree	25
6.	Post-graduate degree (MA, LLD, PhD)	20
7.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA <b>[DON'T READ]</b>	1

Q4A. **[ASK if Q4==3]** How many semesters did you complete? **[READ CATEGORIES AS NECESSARY]** (*N* = 157, *MOE* = +/-7.82%)

1.	2 Semesters or less	26%
2.	3 to 4 Semesters	42
3.	5 or more semesters	29
4.	Don't know/Can't remember <b>[DON'T READ]</b>	3

Q4B. **[ASK If Q4==4|5|6]** What type of institution awarded your highest credential? **[Read 1-5]** (*N* = 478, *MOE* = +/-4.48%)

1.	A Community College	16%
2.	A 4-year Public University	54
3.	A 4-year Private University	17
4.	A For-Profit University	3
5.	Another type of institution	10
6.	Don't know/Can't remember <b>[DON'T READ]</b>	1

Q5. **[ASK IF Q4==4|5|6]** And in what year did you earn your highest degree? **[OPEN-ENDED]**  
(*N* = 478, *MOE* = +/-4.48%)

1. 1950-1959	2%
2. 1960-1969	5
3. 1970-1979	9
4. 1980-1989	14
5. 1990-1999	16
6. 2000-2009	26
7. 2010-2018	29

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* = 478, *MOE* = +/-4.48%)

	<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2015</b>
1. Has paid off/will pay off	75%	82%	79%	86%
2. Has not paid off/will not pay off	24	17	18	13
3. DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	2	1	3	1

Q6A. **[ASK IF Q4==3|4|5|6]** Do you currently have student loan debt? (*N* = 635, *MOE* = +/-3.89%)

1. Yes	29%
2. No	71
3. DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	1

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?

	<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2015</b>
1. Very useful	54%	67%	60%	67%
2. Somewhat useful	32	21	29	24
3. Not too useful	6	6	6	3
4. Not at all useful	5	5	4	6
5. DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	2	1	1	0

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-Q8G]**

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Q8A. Family responsibilities	60%	38%
Q8B. Job or work responsibilities	66	32
Q8C. The cost of a degree	75	22
Q8D. The difficulty of finding classes that fit your schedule	53	42
Q8E. The time it would take to complete a degree	57	39
Q8F. The student loan debt you would have to take on	65	32
Q8G. Transferring hours or credits from one educational institution to another	47	43

Q9. Have you explored enrolling in an educational program in the last five years?

1. Yes	36%
2. No	63
3. DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	1

Q10. 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?

	<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2015</b>
1. A career	44%	49%	42%	44%
2. A stepping stone to a career	12	14	15	11
3. Just a job to get you by	25	20	24	23
4. DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	19	18	19	18

Q11. **[ASK IF Q10==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 = 299, MOE = +/- 5.67%)

	<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2015</b>
1. Have necessary education & training	36%	32%	31%	31%
2. Need more	60	62	67	67
3. DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	4	6	2	3

Q12. **[ASK IF Q10==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 = 350, MOE = +/- 5.24%)

	<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2015</b>
1. Have necessary education & training	69%	71%	70%	58%
2. Need more	26	28	27	39
3. DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	6	1	3	3

Q13. Do you think you will enroll in an educational or training program in the next five years?

1.	Yes	28%
2.	No	58
3.	Maybe	12
4.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	2

Q14. **[ASK IF Q11==2 OR Q12==2]** If you decided to get more education and training, what source would you be most likely to use? **[READ 1-5]**

1.	A community college	32%
2.	A 4-year public college or university	32
3.	A 4-year private college or university	6
4.	A for-profit college or university	0
5.	Another type of institution	22
6.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	7

Q15. If you were considering enrolling in an educational program, would each of the following factors be extremely important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important to your decision? **[RANDOMIZE A-I]**

	<i><b>Extremely important</b></i>	<i><b>Somewhat important</b></i>	<i><b>Not very important</b></i>	<i><b>Not at all important</b></i>	<i><b>Don't know</b></i>
Q15A. Cost of tuition	61	26	4	6	2
Q15B. Availability of financial aid	48	22	13	13	3
Q15C. Programs with online course options	32	42	11	12	3
Q15D. Proximity to your home or work	50	32	8	8	3
Q15E. Finding time in your current schedule	61	23	4	9	3
Q15F. Potential to improve your value to employers	53	29	5	10	3
Q15G. Your interest in the subject of the program	70	20	2	4	3
Q15H. Whether you fit in with other students	10	23	23	40	4
Q15I. Potential to advance your career	54	28	5	10	3

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

Q16. How would you rate the options for attending college in Texas? Are they excellent, good, not very good, or poor?

	<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2015</b>
1. Excellent	37%	33%	37%	37%
2. Good	47	51	47	49
3. Not very good	7	6	8	5
4. Poor	3	1	2	4
5. DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	5	8	6	5

Q17. Do you think that Texas's state government spends too much, too little, or about the right amount on college education?

		<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2015</b>
1.	Too much	7%	7%	8%	10%
2.	Too little	51	52	49	45
3.	The right amount	29	27	29	36
4.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	13	15	15	9

Q18A. Do you think that the state of Texas provides enough financial aid for students who want to obtain a college degree?

1.	Yes	40%
2.	No	48
3.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	13

Q18B. How important is it for the State of Texas to continue providing state-funded financial aid for college students who demonstrate financial need?

1.	Very important	84%
2.	Somewhat important	13
3.	Not very important	1
4.	Not at all important	2
5.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA <b>[DON'T READ]</b>	1

Q19. 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?

		<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2015</b>
1.	Major problem	79%	73%	78%	72%
2.	Minor problem	13	17	15	18
3.	Not a problem	7	6	6	8
4.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	1	4	2	2

Q20. 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?*

		<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2015</b>
1.	Agree	93%	90%	93%	93%
2.	Disagree	5	8	6	7
3.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	1	2	1	1

*Now I'd like to ask you about online education.*

Q21. If you were intending to get a college degree or certificate today, given your own circumstances, would you prefer to get that degree or certificate from a quality online program, or a quality, traditional, in-person program?

		<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2015</b>
1.	Online degree program	36%	28%	25%	31%
2.	In-person degree program	57	65	67	63
3.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	7	7	7	6

Q22. Generally speaking, do you think that online college degree or certificate programs are better, about the same, or worse than traditional, in-person programs?

		<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2015</b>
1.	Better	8%	7%	6%	10%
2.	About the same	54	42	49	50
3.	Worse	31	37	38	34
4.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	6	14	7	6

Q23. Generally speaking, do you think that employers rate an applicant who has received their college degree or certificate from an online program the same, better, or worse than a similar applicant who has received their degree or certificate from a traditional, in-person program?

		<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2015</b>
1.	The same	49%	36%	38%	41%
2.	Better	8	3	5	10
3.	Worse	43	47	46	41
4.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA	0	14	11	8

*We're almost done. The final questions are for statistical purposes...*

AGEG. In what age group do you fall...

1. 18-29	24%
2. 30-44	27
3. 45-64	32
4. 65+	17

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

1.	Employed, working 40 or more hours per week	49%
2.	Employed, working 1-39 hours per week	15
3.	Not employed, looking for work	5
4.	Not employed, not looking for work	7
5.	Retired	17
6.	Disabled, not able to work	4
7.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA <b>[DON'T READ]</b>	2

MARRIED. What is your current marital status?

1.	Never married	28%
2.	Married	51
3.	Divorced	9
4.	Widowed	6
5.	Separated	3
6.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA.	3

CHILD. How many children are currently living with you?

1.	One	20%
2.	Two	16
3.	Three	7
4.	Four or more	4
5.	None	53

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

1.	Yes	48%
2.	No	49
3.	Don't know	4

INCOME. What was your total household income for 2018? **[READ CATEGORIES]**

1.	Less than \$15,000	6%
2.	\$15,000 - less than \$25,000	9
3.	\$25,000 - less than \$40,000	15
4.	\$40,000 - less than \$75,000	21
5.	\$75,000- less than \$150,000	24
6.	\$150,000 or more	11
7.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA. <b>[DON'T READ]</b>	14

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	41%
2.	Between \$10,000 and \$20,000	14
3.	Between \$20,000 and \$30,000	7
4.	Between \$30,000 and \$40,000, or	5
5.	More than \$40,000	12
6.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA. <b>(VOL.)</b>	21

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

1.	Science, Engineering, or IT	25%
2.	Social Science, Liberal Arts, or Education	31
3.	Business	23
4.	Health	7
5.	Other	10

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

1.	Yes	40%
2.	No	57
3.	DON'T KNOW/REFUSED/NA.	3

RACE. Would you say that you are...

1.	White/Anglo	45%
2.	African American	12
3.	Hispanic	36
4.	Asian	5
5.	Other	2

GENDER. (BY OBSERVATION)

1.	MALE	49%
2.	FEMALE	51

