

WGU Tennessee Education Survey

WGU TENNESSEE

Tennessee Opinion Survey Executive Summary

January 2019

By MP&F Strategic Communications

A survey of currently employed registered voters in Tennessee was conducted Jan. 8–15, 2019, for WGU Tennessee regarding attitudes and opinions on higher-education issues.

The survey was designed, managed, and analyzed by MP&F Strategic Communications of Nashville, and was conducted by Dallas-based Dynata (formerly Research Now/SSI of Shelton, Conn.). The study used a blended methodology: 350 randomly selected respondents were interviewed by telephone (35% landline, 65% cellphone), and 250 responses were completed through an online sample screened for demographics.

The major demographic groups within the sample were nearly proportionate to the actual adult populations in Tennessee: female 53%, male 47%; Middle Tennessee 38%, East Tennessee 37%, and West Tennessee 25%; white 81%, African-American 11%, and Hispanic/Other 5%; 18–34 years old 18%; 35–44 years old 23%; 45–64 years old 49%, and 65 and older 10%. Because the sample was screened for registered voters and those currently employed, the 18–34 age group was underrepresented and the 45–64 age group was slightly overrepresented. Also, African-Americans were slightly underrepresented.

The margin of error is plus or minus 4% at a 95% confidence level. All percentages have been rounded off for readability, and as a result some totals do not equal 100%.

WGU Tennessee Education Survey

INTRO: Hello, I'm (first name) and I'm with a market research firm that's conducting a survey about some important issues in Tennessee. I am not trying to sell you anything. Would you mind spending about 15 minutes answering some questions? Your answers will remain confidential.

S1. Are you currently employed, meaning you work at least 30 hours a week? (screen out those who answer no)

S2. Do you or does a member of your household currently work for a media outlet? (screen out those who answer yes)

S3. Are you or is a member of your household employed by the Tennessee state government? (screen out those who answer yes)

S4. Do you or does a member of your household work for a university or other institution of higher learning? (screen out those who answer yes)

S5. Are you registered to vote? (screen out those who answer no)

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 is:

1. Worth more than the cost of attending college	34%	Worth => costs
2. Worth less than the cost	36%	
3. Is about equal to what they pay for college	26%	
9. Don't know/Declined	5%	

Q2. In general, how important do you think it is for someone to have a college degree or a career-related certificate beyond a high school diploma? Would you say it is:

1. Very important	52%	Total important
2. Somewhat important	39%	
3. Not very important	6%	
4. Not at all important	2%	
9. Don't know/Declined	1%	

I'm going to read you some statements about education. For each one, please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with the statement.

(READ PROMPTS AS NECESSARY TO COMPLETE)

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

1. Strongly agree	39%	Total agree
2. Somewhat agree	38%	
3. Neither agree nor disagree	7%	
4. Somewhat disagree	9%	Total disagree
5. Strongly disagree	7%	
9. Don't know/Declined	1%	

WGU Tennessee Education Survey

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

1. Strongly agree	48%	Total agree
2. Somewhat agree	36%	84%
3. Neither agree nor disagree	6%	
4. Somewhat disagree	7%	Total disagree
5. Strongly disagree	4%	10%
9. Don't know/Declined	---	

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

1. Less than high school	1%
2. High school	17%
3. Some college	21%
4. Associate degree or certificate	15%
5. College degree	29%
6. Postgraduate degree (M.A, LLD, Ph.D.)	18%
9. Don't know/Declined [DON'T READ]	---

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

1. 2 semesters or less	36%
2. 3 to 4 semesters	33%
3. 5 or more semesters	30%
9. Don't know/Can't remember	2%

Q5. [ASK IF Q4==3|4|5|6] Do you currently have student loan debt?

1. Yes	24%
2. No	75%
9. Don't know/Declined	<1%

Q6. [ASK IF Q4==5|6] How useful would you say your college education has been in preparing you for a job or career? Would you say:

1. Very useful	47%	Total useful
2. Somewhat useful	38%	85%
3. Not too useful	10%	
4. Not at all useful	5%	
9. Don't know/Declined	1%	

WGU Tennessee Education Survey

Q7. [ASK IF Q4<=3] For each of the following, please tell me whether or not it has been an obstacle to you in completing a college degree. [RANDOMIZE Q7A-Q7F]

Q7A. Family responsibilities

1. Yes	63%
2. No	35%
9. Don't know/Declined	2%

Q7B. Job or work responsibilities

1. Yes	68%
2. No	29%
9. Don't know/Declined	3%

Q7C. The cost of a degree

1. Yes	62%
2. No	35%
9. Don't know/Declined	3%

Q7D. The difficulty of finding classes that fit your schedule

1. Yes	47%
2. No	48%
9. Don't know/Declined	5%

Q7E. The time it would take to complete a degree

1. Yes	53%
2. No	42%
9. Don't know/Declined	5%

Q7F. The student loan debt you would have to take on

1. Yes	58%
2. No	38%
9. Don't know/Declined	3%

Q8. Do you think of your current job as a career, as a steppingstone to a career, or do you think of it as just a job to get you by?

1. A career	60%
2. A steppingstone to a career	12%
3. Just a job to get you by	26%
9. Don't know/Declined	2%

WGU Tennessee Education Survey

Q9. [ASK IF Q8==2|3] In general, do you feel you have the education and training necessary to get the kind of job or career you would like to have, or do you need more education and training?

1. Have necessary education and training	55%
2. Need more	41%
9. Don't know/Declined	3%

Q10. [ASK IF Q8==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?

1. Have necessary education and training	79%
2. Need more	19%
9. Don't know/Declined	2%

Q11. Do you ever plan to return to school?

1. Yes	16%
2. No	60%
3. Maybe	22%
9. Don't know/Declined	2%

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

Q12. In terms of higher education and workforce development, how would you rate the following in terms of what should be the top priorities of Governor-elect Bill Lee's administration? Would you say they should be a top priority, a middle priority, a low priority, or not a priority at all?

12A. Access and affordability of college and technical training

1. Top	61%
2. Middle	28%
3. Low	7%
4. Not at all	2%
9. Don't know/Declined	3%

12B. College readiness

1. Top	51%
2. Middle	37%
3. Low	8%
4. Not at all	2%
9. Don't know/Declined	3%

WGU Tennessee Education Survey

12C. Student debt

1. Top	55%
2. Middle	25%
3. Low	11%
4. Not at all	5%
9. Don't know/Declined	3%

12D. Graduation/completion rates

1. Top	52%
2. Middle	34%
3. Low	9%
4. Not at all	2%
9. Don't know/Declined	3%

12E. Ability of graduates to succeed in the workplace

1. Top	63%
2. Middle	24%
3. Low	9%
4. Not at all	3%
9. Don't know/Declined	2%

Q13. Governor Haslam devoted a good amount of his time and resources to higher education and workforce development. Do you think Governor-elect Bill Lee's administration should spend more time and resources, about the same, or less than the Haslam administration on higher education and workforce development?

1. More	36%
2. About the same	53%
3. Less than	6%
9. Don't know/Declined	6%

Q14A. How familiar are you with Governor Haslam's Drive to 55 initiative? Would you say you are:

1. Very familiar	7%
2. Somewhat familiar	25%
3. Have heard of it but are not familiar	28%
4. Not familiar at all	41%
9. Don't know/Declined	1%

WGU Tennessee Education Survey

Q14B. Governor Haslam’s administration started the Drive to 55, which seeks to equip 55% of Tennesseans with a postsecondary certificate by 2025, primarily through free community college for all Tennesseans who do not hold degrees.

How should Governor-elect Bill Lee’s administration proceed with the initiative? Would you say he should:

1. Keep it intact as is	36%
2. Strengthen it by allocating more resources	41%
3. Replace it with a new approach	12%
4. End it entirely	4%
9. Don’t know/Declined	8%

Q15. How would you rate the options most people have for attending college in Tennessee? Would you say they are excellent, good, not very good, or poor?

1. Excellent	18%	Total positive 78%
2. Good	60%	
3. Not very good	14%	
4. Poor	4%	
9. Don’t know/Declined	5%	

Q16. Do you think Tennessee’s state government should increase its funding for college education, keep it about the same, or decrease the amount it spends?

1. Increase	46%
2. Keep it same	41%
3. Decrease	8%
9. Don’t know/Declined	5%

Q17. When it comes to ensuring that public schools prepare students for college-level work, would you say the Tennessee state government:

1. Should do more to ensure students are prepared	62%
2. Is doing a good job at its current level	26%
3. Or, is already devoting too much money and resources	6%
9. Don’t know/Declined (Do Not Read)	6%

Q18. If you were giving advice to a student entering their senior year of high school today on whether they should pursue a college degree, would you tell them:

1. They should definitely pursue a degree	47%
2. Probably should pursue a degree	38%
3. Doesn’t really matter one way or the other	9%
4. Definitely no need to pursue a degree	1%
9. Don’t know/Declined (Do Not Read)	5%

WGU Tennessee Education Survey

Q19. From what you know or understand, do you think Tennessee's colleges and universities provide adequate financial aid for students who want to obtain a college degree? If you don't have an opinion, just say so.

1. Yes	35%
2. No	28%
3. No opinion	30%
9. Don't know/Declined	8%

Q20. Do you personally view the problem of student loan debt for people in the United States to be a major problem, a minor problem, or not a problem?

1. Major problem	75%
2. Minor problem	18%
3. Not a problem	5%
9. Don't know/Declined	3%

Q21. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement: For Tennessee's economy to compete with other states, it is essential to have an educated workforce. Would you say you:

1. Strongly agree	64%	Total agree 93%
2. Somewhat agree	29%	
3. Somewhat disagree	5%	
4. Strongly disagree	---	
9. Don't know/Declined	2%	

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

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

1. Better	11%
2. About the same	47%
3. Worse	31%
9. Don't know/Declined	11%

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

1. The same	41%
2. Better	6%
3. Worse	40%
9. Don't know/Declined	13%

WGU Tennessee Education Survey

Q24. The nontraditional HOPE scholarship program, funded by our state lottery, provides tuition assistance for qualifying Tennesseans age 25 and older who are returning to college or enrolling for the first time. It is available for those attending two- and four-year colleges in Tennessee, and can be used to pursue degrees through online programs at those schools.

Some people argue that these HOPE scholarships should be available for students enrolled at other state-approved online universities. Would you say you:

1. Strongly agree	29%	Total agree
2. Somewhat agree	39%	68%
3. Somewhat disagree	16%	Total disagree
4. Strongly disagree	8%	24%
9. Don't know/Declined	8%	

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

GENDER. (BY OBSERVATION)

1. Male	47%
2. Female	53%

REGION

Do you live in East, Middle or West Tennessee?

1. West Tennessee	25%
2. Middle Tennessee	38%
3. East Tennessee	37%

AGE

1. 18–34	18%
2. 35–44	23%
3. 45–64	49%
4. 65+	10%

RACE

What is your race or ethnic group?

1. White/Anglo	81%
2. African-American	11%
3. Hispanic/Other	5%

WGU Tennessee Education Survey

Do you have children living in your residence?

1. Yes	44%
2. No	55%
9. Declined	1%

Do either of your parents have a degree or certificate beyond high school?

1. Yes	44%
2. No	54%
9. Don't know	2%

What was your total household income for 2018? Would you say: [READ CATEGORIES]

1. Under \$40,000	25%
2. \$40,000 to \$75,000	30%
3. More than \$75,000	40%
9. Declined/Don't Know	6%

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

1. Yes	37%
2. No	63%
9. Don't know/Declined	1%