

Re-Building Trust in Higher Education: The Opportunity for Land-Grant Universities

Purdue University Retirees Association

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December 1, 2025*



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Finding Equilibrium: Two Economists on Higher Ed's Future

10 Questions Universities Should be Asking

Some Summer Homework for Faculty, Staff, and Leaders



JAY AKRIDGE AND DAVID HUMMELS
MAY 16, 2025



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Diminishing Trust...Questions of Value...

Americans Are Losing Faith in College Education, WSJ-NORC Poll Finds

Confidence in value of a degree plummeted among women and senior citizens during pandemic



People ages 18-29

EDUCATION JULY 8, 2024

U.S. Confidence in Higher Education Now Closely Divided

Nearly as many U.S. adults have little or no confidence as have high confidence

BY JEFFREY M. JONES

Is college worth it? Poll finds only 36% of Americans have confidence in higher education



REPUTATION TROUBLE

Americans' Confidence in Higher Ed Drops Sharply

By Karin Fischer | JULY 26, 2022

Percent of Americans who said colleges have a positive effect on the way things are going in this country:

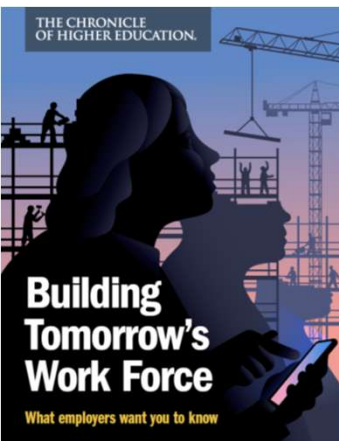
2021 53% 2022 55%

U.S. Public Trust in Higher Ed Rises From Recent Low

BY JEFFREY M. JONES

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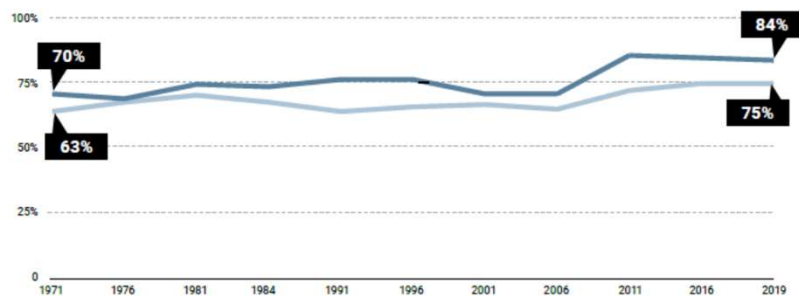
Value...Careers Matter...



Students Have Long Viewed the Purpose of College as Career Preparation

Percent of first-year students reporting reason as "very important" in deciding to go to college

■ Get a better job ■ General education/appreciation of ideas



Source: "Demonstrating Value in Times of Crisis," Lightcast

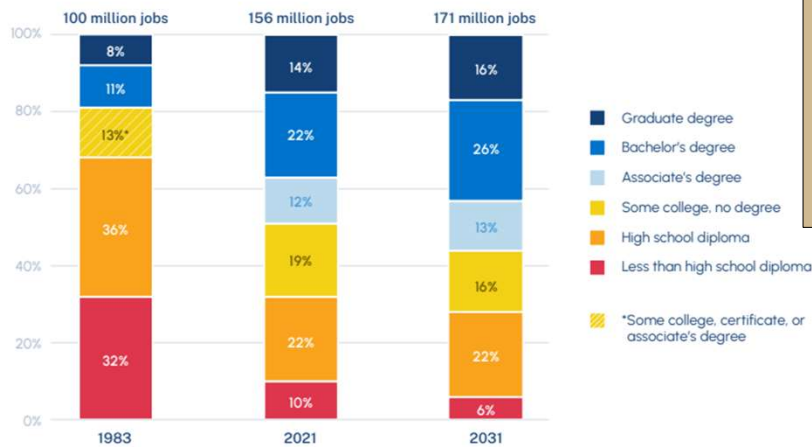
Source: Chronicle, Building Tomorrow's Workforce, page 13.

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US Jobs – 2031...

FIGURE 2. Forty-two percent of jobs in 2031 will require at least a bachelor's degree, while only 28 percent will go to workers with a high school diploma or less.



Forecast: 55% of all U.S. jobs in 2031 will require an associate's degree or higher

Source: After Everything: Projections of Jobs, Education, and Training Requirements through 2031. Georgetown University, 2023.

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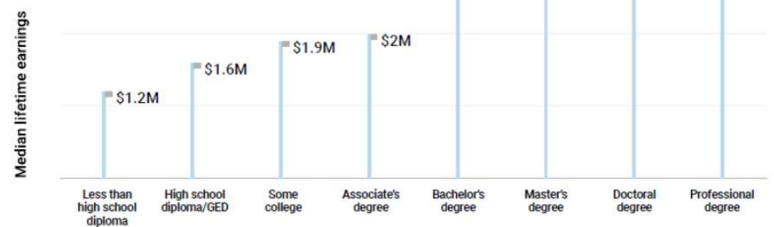
5

Value...



Figure 1. Median earnings rise with each additional level of education.

\$1.2 million lifetime earnings premium Bachelor's degree relative to high school diploma



Average IRR of college is 12.5%

Source: Abel and Dietz, Federal Reserve Bank of New York, 2025.

Source: The College Payoff, page 4.

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2009–2019.
Note: The figure is based on data for 25- to 64-year-olds working full-time, full-year.

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Value...

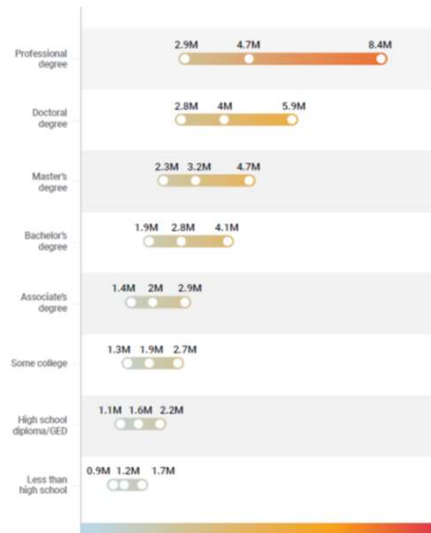


Source: The College Payoff, page 5.

25% of all college graduates earn an average IRR of less than 2.6%

Source: Abel and Dietz, Federal Reserve Bank of New York, 2025.

Figure 2. Substantial variations in earnings within education levels mean that some workers with less education can earn more than others with more education.



But...

28% of Associate degree holders and 16% with high school diploma earn more than 50% of those with a Bachelor's degree

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2009-2018.
Note: The figure is based on data for 25- to 64-year-olds working full-time, full-year.

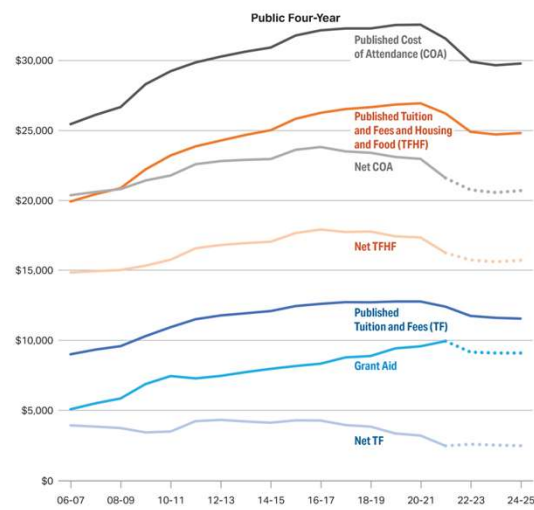
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Cost....

Public Four-Year Universities

- Net tuition/fees actually declining in real terms, as grant aid has increased
- Softening real cost of attendance



Source: College Board, Trends in College Pricing and Student Aid 2024, Figure CP-9 October 2024, Page 12.

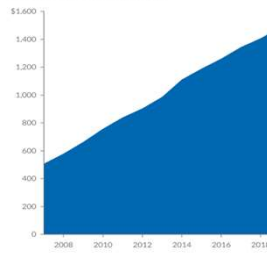
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Student Debt...

Student debt has been rising steadily

Total Student Debt (Billions of \$)

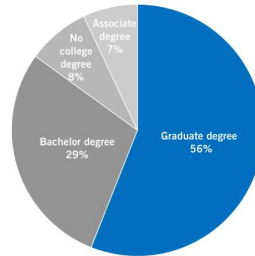


Source: Federal Reserve Bank of New York.
Note: Data are from the Q2 2014 report.



Those with a graduate degree account for over one-half of student debt

SHARE OF STUDENT DEBT OUTSTANDING, BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT



SOURCE: Brookings Institution. Who owes the most in student loans: New data from the Fed, October 2020.
NOTES: The data above are for households led by someone age 25 or older. Graduate degree refers to masters, professional, and doctorate degrees. The Brookings Institution based their analysis off of the 2019 Survey of Consumer Finances from the Federal Reserve.
© 2021 Peter G. Peterson Foundation

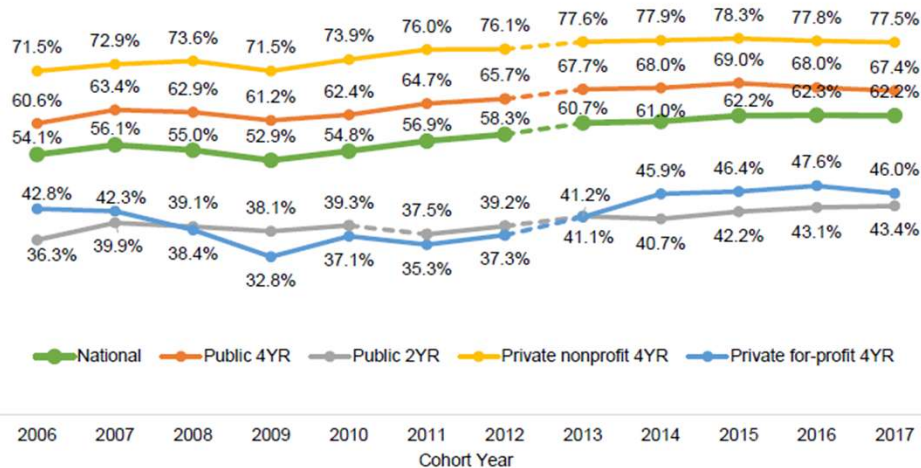
PGPF.ORG

- Annual borrowing down 10 straight years
- 75% of undergraduates have no federal loans
- **Graduate/professional students hold 56%**
- Associate degree students hold 7%
- 53% of borrowers owe less than \$20,000
- **7% of borrowers hold 38% of debt**

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Completion...

Figure 1. Six-Year Completion Rates by Starting Institution Type: 2006 – 2017 Entering



67% of students who enroll at 4-year public university complete a degree (from some institution) in six years

Source: Completing College: National and State Reports, National Student Clearinghouse, November 2023, Page 3.

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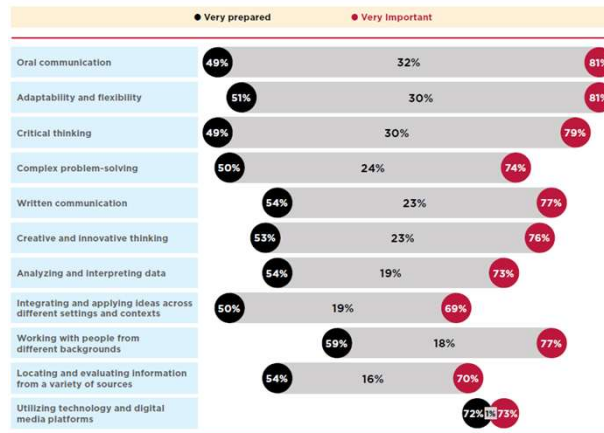
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Preparation...

Employers don't believe students are adequately prepared for the work world

FIGURE 19

Percentages of employers who indicated a skill was "very important" relative to perceptions that students are "very prepared" in that skill¹⁷



Source: The Career-Ready Graduate: What Employers Say about the Difference College Makes, American Association of Colleges and Universities, AAC&U, 2023.

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Preparation...

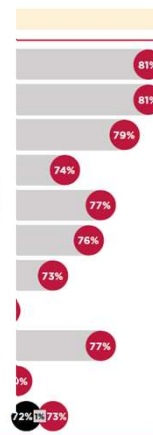
Employers don't believe students are adequately prepared for the work world

FIGURE 19

tant" relative to



media platforms



Source: The Career-Ready Graduate: What Employers Say about the Difference College Makes, American Association of Colleges and Universities, AAC&U, 2023.

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Research Questions...

CAREER NEWS | 20 January 2025

'Publish or perish' culture blamed for reproducibility crisis

Survey of more than 1,600 biomedical researchers also flagged small sample sizes and cherry-picking of data as leading causes of reproducibility problems.

"Faculty are promoted and rewarded based on a journal article process that reduces problems to the point that they are no longer relevant. Society demands relevant research" (AJAE, 1992, p. 1241).

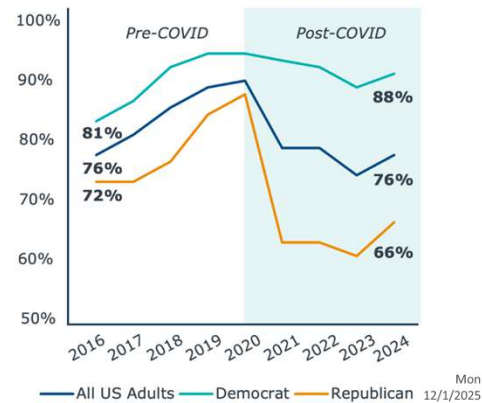
Working Paper

Reflections: Academia's Emerging Crisis of Relevance and the Consequent Role of the Engaged Scholar

Andrew J. Hoffman
Stephen M. Ross School of Business
University of Michigan

Public confidence in scientists is just starting to rebound from the big COVID-19-induced decline

Percentage of Americans who have a great deal or a fair amount of confidence in scientists to act in the best interests of the public

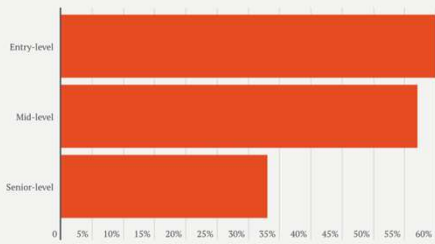


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Employers Dropping Degree Requirements...

Level Roles for Which Bachelor's Degree Requirement Was Eliminated



*Respondents could choose more than one answer

n=525

Intelligent.com

CNBC WORK

No college degree? No problem. More companies are eliminating requirements to attract the workers they need

PUBLISHED MON, APR 25 2022-10:30 AM EDT UPDATED WED, APR 27 2022-4:02 PM EDT




Dropping college degree requirements:

- Intelligent.com surveyed 1,000 U.S. hiring managers
- 53% of hiring managers company's bachelor's degree requirements were eliminated in some roles
- 76% say they are likely to favor experience over education

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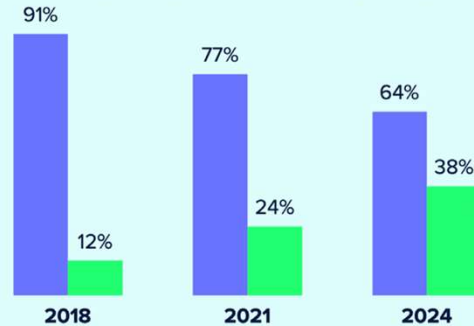
Non-degree Credentials...

	Apprenticeship	A formal program of study that blends paid work experience with a structured program of coursework.
	Boot camp	A short-term, specialized, intensive training program focused on technical skills for a career (such as a coding boot camp).
	Certificate	A credential issued as part of postsecondary study for credit or noncredit learning (such as a certificate in business from a college).
	Certification	A voluntary industry/trade credential (such as Certified Welder) that requires some form of competency-based assessment.
	License	A competency-based credential (such as a registered nurse license) required by a state to meet its occupational requirements.

More interest in non-college programs/credentials...

Education Plans Teens Are Considering, by Year

■ College Program ■ Non-College Program



Source: ASA: Next Steps An Analysis of Teens' Post-High School Plans, 2024; Beyond Degrees, American Student Assistance, 2023.

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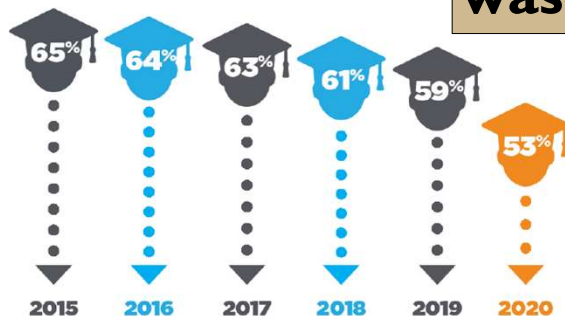
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Indiana College-Going Rate

53%

College-Going Rate High School to College

High Schoolers Going Straight to College
The rate of high school students enrolling in college



Indiana college-going rate was 51.7% 2023

IBJ
INDIANAPOLIS
BUSINESS JOURNAL

Editorial: In-depth study needed to know why students opt out of college

January 26, 2024

KEYWORDS [EDITORIALS](#) / [OPINION](#)

Source: ICHE 2023-2025 Budget Recommendation.


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Unprecedented Government Intervention...


All the Actions the Trump Administration Has Taken Against Harvard

The pressure campaign to try to force the nation's oldest and wealthiest university to fall in line with President Trump's agenda has sprawled beyond just one singular task force or agency.



Colleges Across the U.S. Fear Chill on Enrollments of Foreign Students

By Robert M. Weisbach, May 28, 2025



NIH funding cuts pose challenges to Institute's health research

15% cap would result in annual cuts of \$10 to \$35 million at NIH

By Robert M. Weisbach, Feb. 25, 2025

Ending Radical And Wasteful Government DEI Programs And Preferencing

The White House | January 20, 2025

E&W BLOG

Hearing Recap: "Beyond the Ivy League: Stopping the Spread of Antisemitism on American Campuses"

WASHINGTON, D.C., May 7, 2025

Indiana budget bill curbs university faculty power, ties tenure to new 'productivity' reviews

Multiple provisions baked into the new two-year spending plan will bring big structural changes to the state's higher education institutions.

Source: McKinsey (29), Page 2


In Texas, University Presidents May Soon Control Faculty Senates

A bill awaiting Gov. Abbott's signature would require college administrators to set procedures for faculty governing bodies and appoint their leaders, part of an effort to address "liberal faculty control over universities."

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AI: Direct and Indirect Impacts...



How AI Is Changing Higher Education


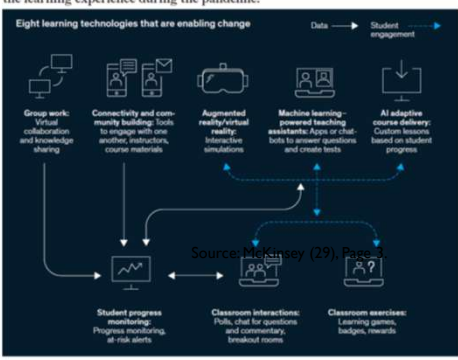


ILLUSTRATION BY THE CHRONICLE, ISTOCK

Exhibit 1

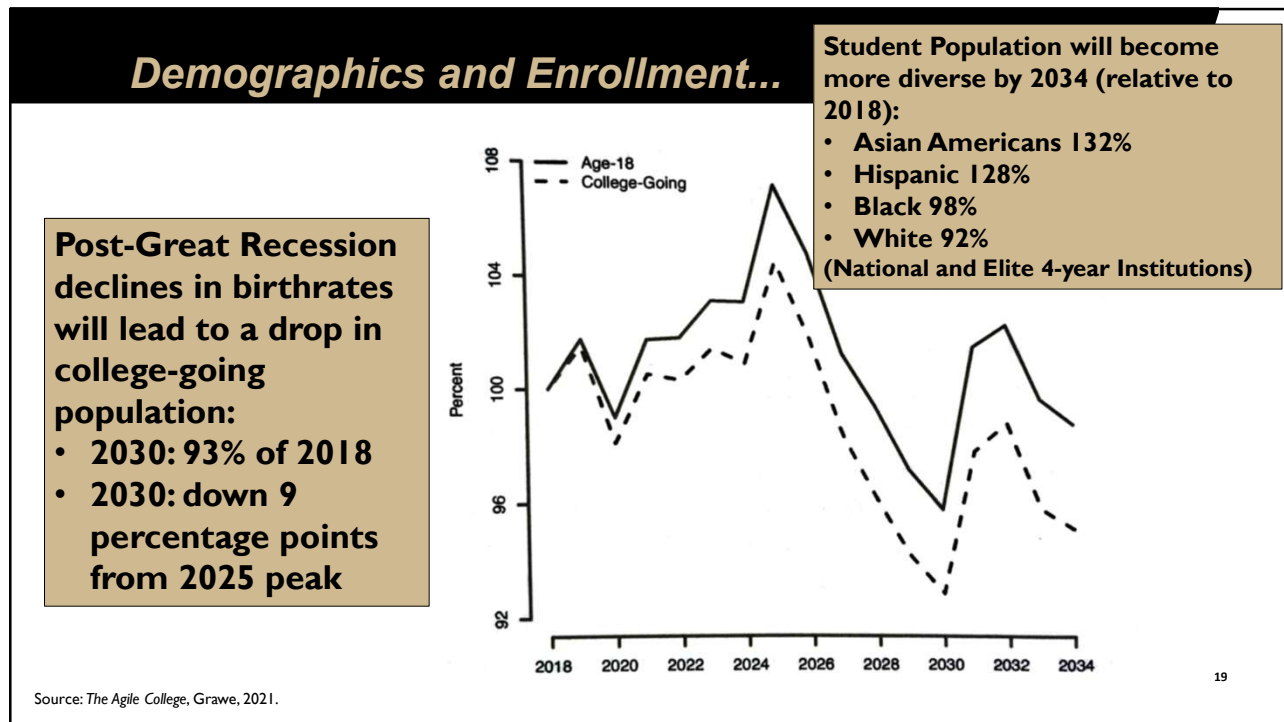
Higher-education institutions have leveraged technology to improve aspects of the learning experience during the pandemic.



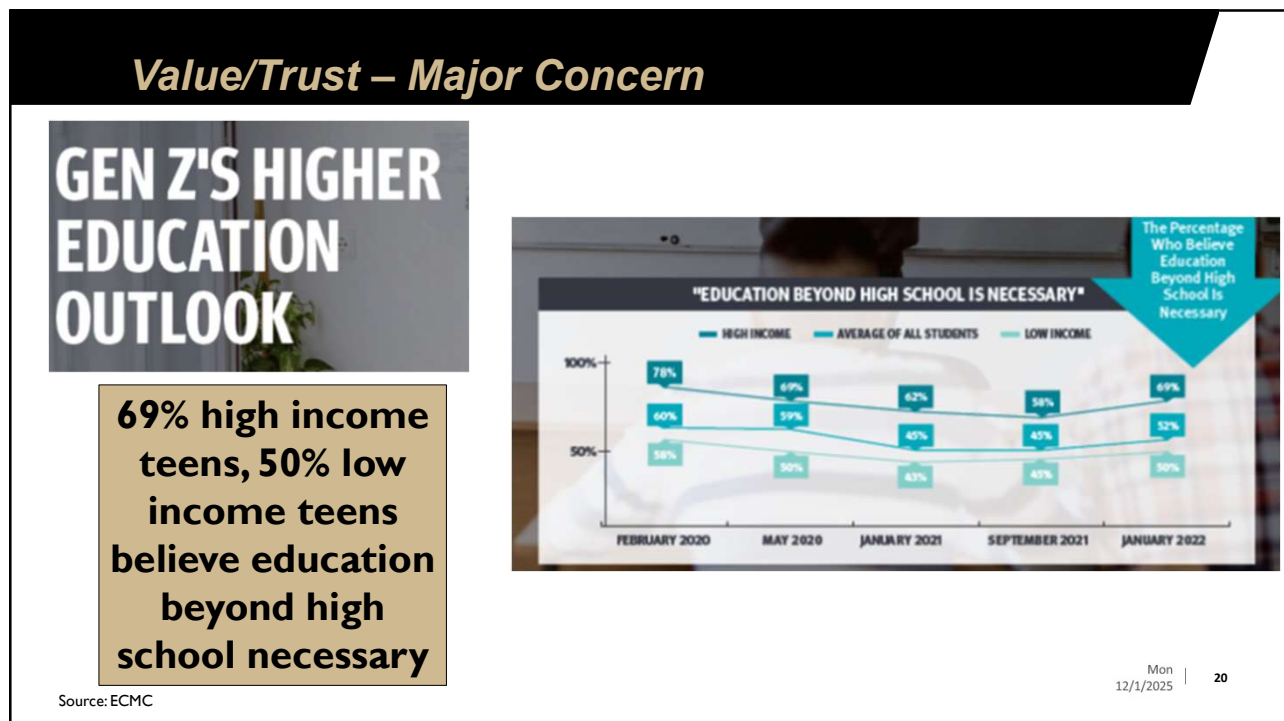
Source: McKinsey (29), Page 2

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Our Land-grant Foundation

“... the design comprehended not only instruction for those who may hold the plow or follow a trade, but such instruction as any person might need – with ‘the world all before them to choose’”

**Senator Justin Smith Morrill
Speech to Massachusetts
Agricultural College, 1887**



Courtesy Purdue University Libraries, Archives and Special Collections

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Our Land-Grant Foundation



Senator Justin Morrill
The Morrill Act, 1862

Learning

“...the leading object shall be, without excluding other scientific and classical studies and including military tactics, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts, in such manner as the legislatures of the states may respectively prescribe, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life.”

(Act of July 1, 1862, First Morrill Act)



Jonathan Baldwin Turner
“University for the Industrial Classes”

Discovery

“to conduct original and other researches, investigations, and experiments on and contributing to the establishment and maintenance of ... The agricultural industry in the United States, including researches basic to the problems of agriculture in its broadest aspects, and investigations as have for their purpose the development and improvement of the rural home and rural life and the maximum contribution by agriculture to the welfare of the consumer...”

(Hatch Act of 1887)

Engagement

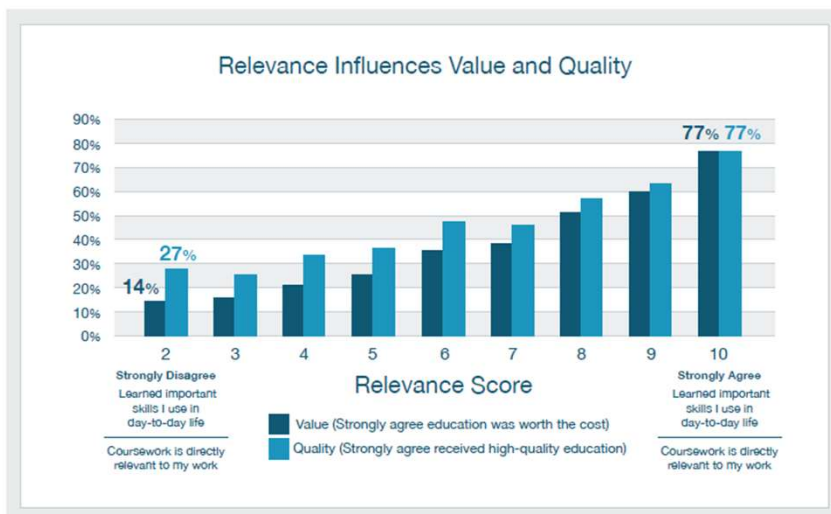
“Cooperative agricultural extension work shall consist of the development of and practical applications of research knowledge and giving of instruction and practical demonstration of existing or improved practices or technologies ...to persons not attending or resident in said colleges in the several communities and imparting information on said subjects through demonstrations, publications, and otherwise...”

(Smith-Lever Act of 1914)

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Perceived Relevance Correlated with Value and Quality



Perceived relevance of coursework/experience strongly correlated with value and quality...

Source: From College to Life: Relevance and the Value of Higher Education, Strada Education Network/Gallup, May 2018, page 5.

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A Blueprint: The Institution

- **Lever our Land-Grant Mission in Every Appropriate Way**
 - Establishing relevance: take full advantage of linkages between research, Extension, and teaching missions
- **Adopt an Outside-In Perspective**
 - Bring stakeholders inside through creative, intentional listening
- **Reframe Success Metrics**
 - Reward engaged scholarship, recognize traditional metrics won't hold
- **Be an Authentic Storyteller**
 - Communicate on stakeholder terms: what does it mean, why does it matter, how do they want to communicate?

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A Blueprint: Undergraduate Programs

- **Elevate the Teaching Mission**
 - Innovate, reward, celebrate, publicize teaching and learning
- **Rethink Access and Completion**
 - Simplifying communication of costs and benefits of college;
persistent barriers/gaps must be addressed
- **Career-Ready Focus**
 - Deep look at what is needed to prepare students for careers in a dynamic work world
- **Residential Must Be Experiential**
 - *Fundamental question: why should students come to a physical campus?*

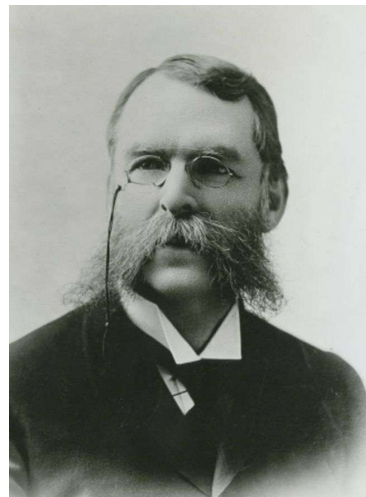
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Creating A Blueprint...

“If you ask me what are the characteristics of the new education, I reply that they are the characteristics of the ages in which we live.”

*James H. Smart
4th Purdue President
Lehigh University Club of Chicago
January 4, 1896*



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THANK YOU!



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