

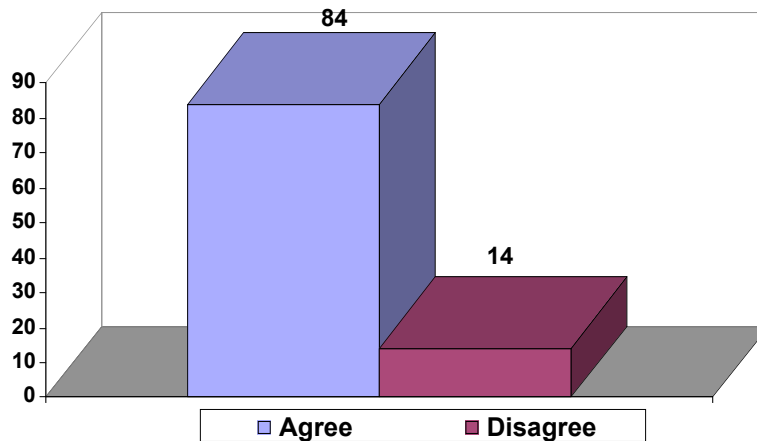
## **Poll Reveals Eight in Ten Voters Believe Vitality of America’s Colleges and Universities Critical to Future Economic Success**

Eighty-four percent of Americans believe investing in colleges and universities today will help solve future problems, according to the findings from a nationwide survey of 1,000 registered voters conducted for the American Council on Education (ACE).

“The public clearly understands the importance of higher education to the future and believes investments made now in higher education will make a difference in the quality of life 25 years from now,” said ACE President David Ward. “Better than eight in ten voters see the vitality of America’s colleges and universities as critical to our continued economic success in an increasingly global environment.”

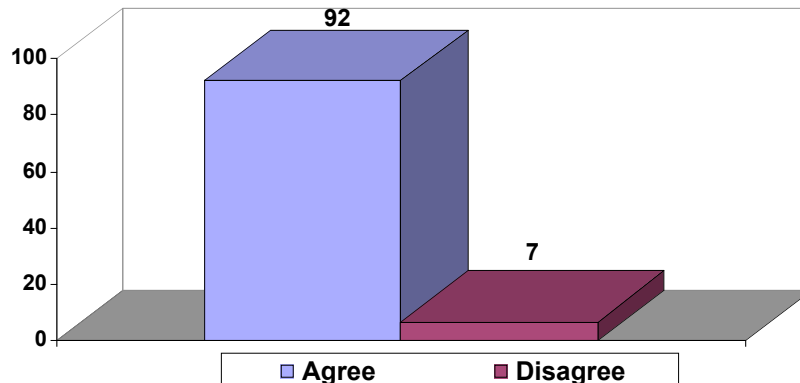
The survey, with a margin of error of +/- 3.1 percent, was conducted by The Winston Group and Peter D. Hart Research Associates during the period of January 15-17, 2006 in advance of *Solutions for Our Future*, a multi-year national public outreach campaign designed to raise awareness about higher education’s critical role in the future of our country. The campaign will utilize national television, radio and newspaper advertisements, an interactive web site ([www.solutionsforourfuture.org](http://www.solutionsforourfuture.org)), and the grassroots participation of member campuses and local stakeholders to convey how America’s colleges and universities teach the people who solve our problems and change our world.

**Actions We Take on Higher Education Today  
Will Be Critical to the U.S. Competitive Leadership in the  
World 25 Years from Now.**



While 84 percent of voters believe that investing in higher education today will be critical to solving many of the problems that face our nation in coming years (14 percent disagree with this statement), 92 percent agree that actions taken today on higher education policy will be critical to United States competitive leadership in the world 25 years from now.

**Actions We Take Today on Higher Education Policy  
Will Be Critical to the US Competitive Leadership in the  
World 25 Years from Now.**



According to the survey results, the social importance of higher education resonates well with Americans. Seventy percent of survey respondents say society as a whole benefits the most from higher education (combined first and second choices). Forty-eight percent say the students who get degrees benefit most, while 36 percent suggest the employers who hire college graduates, 28 percent answer the communities and regions where colleges and universities are located, and 11 percent respond those who work at colleges and universities get the most benefit.

<b>Who Benefits Most from Higher Education</b>	
•Society as a whole	<b>70%</b>
•Students	<b>48%</b>
•Employers	<b>36%</b>
•College communities	<b>28%</b>
•College employees	<b>11%</b>

Thirty-four percent of voters rate our country’s system of higher education as better than it was ten years ago, while 41 percent said it is about the same and 21 percent said worse. Among those who characterized it as better, the top reasons cited were: more students are going to college (28 percent), better technology (25 percent), higher quality (17 percent), and more opportunity (12 percent). Among those who answered worse than ten years ago (combined first and second choices), 40 percent cited lower quality as the reason, while 34 percent noted funding cuts, 32 percent answered that fewer students can afford it, and higher tuition (26 percent).

Among the other key results:

- In general, the brand images “colleges and universities” and “higher education in America” are very strong brands, with favorable-unfavorable numbers of 79-14 and 79-19, respectively.

- Twenty-six percent of those surveyed believe that the most important role of colleges and universities is to teach students how to learn and think critically. Twenty-one percent said the most important role is to prepare students for the problems that face our country, followed by prepare students for employment (18 percent), prepare students to be responsible citizens (14 percent), produce innovations that fuel economic development (8 percent), conduct research that benefits society (7 percent) and finally, serve the community (3 percent).

<b>Most Important Role for Colleges</b>	
•Teach students to think critically	<b>26%</b>
•Prepare students to solve problems facing our country	<b>21%</b>
•Prepare Students for employment	<b>18%</b>
•Prepare students to be responsible citizens	<b>14%</b>
•Produce innovations that fuel economic development	<b>8%</b>
•Conduct research that benefits society	<b>7%</b>
•Serve the community	<b>3%</b>

- The majority of those surveyed believe that college students are getting their money’s worth for their tuition (51 percent) while 45 percent say students do not. Interestingly, when the question is personalized and asked of those with some college, college graduates and those with postgraduate study, 87 percent believe that they did get their money’s worth for their tuition. Only 12 percent responded that they did not get their money’s worth.
- When it comes to who should be primarily responsible for financing colleges and universities, voters responded the federal government (34 percent), followed by students and their families (29 percent), followed by the state (25 percent), and private donors (7 percent).
- Forty-one percent of survey participants said colleges and universities should bear the primary responsibility for keeping college affordable to the average family, while 34 percent said the federal government, and 23 percent said the state.
- When asked what sector is the primary source of ideas for innovation and solutions in this country, 43 percent of voters answered business and industry, while 33 percent said colleges and universities, and 20 percent said government.

### **Challenges Ahead**

The survey results were not all positive for higher education. Collectively, U.S. colleges and universities do face some underlying challenges that could erode public support, including questions about values; quality/value for cost; effectiveness at preparing the workforce we need, and readiness to meet needs of future. Among the warning signs:

- Sixty percent of registered voters believe that America’s colleges and universities are prepared to meet the challenges of the future, while 35 percent do not.

- Fifty-eight percent of respondents believe that colleges and universities are presently creating the workforce in this country we need to succeed, while 37 percent believe they are not.
- A slim majority (51 percent) of those surveyed say that colleges and universities share the same values they do, while 43 percent said they do not.
- Forty-nine percent of registered voters believe that today's college professors are more ideological than they should be, while 40 percent disagree.

## **General Environment**

When asked whether the nation is headed in the right direction or seriously off on the wrong track, 39 percent of survey participants said right direction while 52 percent said wrong track. When asked about their own states, the response was 52 percent right direction and 40 percent wrong track. When respondents were asked about the direction of the nation 10 years from now, the results was almost even, with 42 percent saying right direction and 46 percent answering wrong track.

Americans are most concerned about foreign affairs issues (defense, terrorism, and international relations - 28 percent), followed by social issues (education, health care, and the environment - 24 percent), economic issues (taxes, budget and jobs - 23 percent) and finally, moral issues (prayer in school, abortion, and gay rights – 22 percent). When asked which issue set they were least concerned with, 36 percent answered moral issues, 22 percent responded social issues, 19 percent said economic issues and 15 percent answered foreign affairs issues.

When asked, longer term, to make a first and second choice as to which issues are most important to ensuring that the United States can sustain or improve the quality of life here, 44 percent of survey participants answered economy/jobs (44 percent), 32 percent chose national defense/foreign affairs/Iraq/terrorism, 25 percent said education, 23 percent healthcare/prescription drugs, and 16 percent answered social security/retirement.

In ranking a series of policy priorities, education emerged as a front runner, as improving K-12 schools scored an average of 8.45 on a scale of 1-10 and improving higher education rated an 8.12. The only other priorities in the 8 range had to do with social security and healthcare.