



## Americans for Democratic Action

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*Where it's more than just politics. It's about taking a stand.*

### The Rationale for Research

Since its inception in 1947, educational equality has been one of Americans for Democratic Action's major goals. Today, America's economic future requires the nation to combat educational inequality. Many school districts, particularly those with higher-income families, provide excellent education while many big city and rural districts suffer from substandard education. High-income families have access to high quality college preparation while low income families do not. Given that disparity, the nation must act to guarantee access to post-secondary academic and vocational education and training for all high school graduates to meet their personal needs and the needs of a 21st Century high-tech economy. This ADA study examines public attitudes, nationally and among key demographic groups, regarding this goal with particular emphasis on public attitudes -- and perceived student access -- regarding publicly funded institutions, private non-profit institutions, and private for-profit institutions.

The American education system can be illustrated using two pyramids — Institutional and Access/Preparation.

#### Institutional

The Institutional pyramid is based on public perception of value. At the top of the first pyramid are the elite private institutions where a bachelor's degree costs upward of \$250,000 but seldom less than \$125,000. (There are now 58 private colleges with annual tuition of \$50,000 and up.) As the pyramid descends to the public flagship universities, bachelor's degree costs around \$100,000 then falling to \$50,000 or less at other public institutions. All of these institutions cater to full-time students and have entrance requirements that exclude students, (often students from low income families), with poor high school preparation. At the bottom of the pyramid are the open access community colleges, where a two year degree costs under \$10,000; and the for-profit institutions, where the cost of a bachelor's degree ranges from \$30,000 to \$50,000. Students who must work while going to school often choose a for-profit university because they offer convenience and the same degrees as traditional institutions.

#### Preparation/Access

The Preparation/Access pyramid mirrors income distribution. At the top are children from wealthier families that attend private schools from pre-school through high school, followed by schools in wealthy school districts, followed by middle class districts, and descending down to schools in the inner cities which are often starved for adequate funding. At each level the quality of preparation declines as does the percentage of qualified high school graduates and thus the percentage who enroll in college. At the top, private schooling qualifies all but the least able for college. In the lower income areas of our cities and rural communities more often than not only the truly gifted and exceptionally motivated can meet the academic qualifications for college. Children of

wealthy families, whether by preparation or legacy, have access to practically all levels of higher education. As family incomes fall the level of preparation falls and children enter at ever lower levels of the Institutional pyramid. When family incomes are too low to pay for access, high performing children of lower income families often receive scholarships to supplement the cost of tuition. Full scholarships for high performing students whose families can afford the tuition is restricted by capacity at every level as demand for higher education exceeds capacity. Increasingly, these qualified students must settle for community college. Families that cannot afford tuition, and whose children do not meet the entrance standards required for a tuition waver, must choose either a community college or a for-profit institution. For adults who were denied access either because of lack of preparation or family income, and now seek a college degree, find access at open enrollment institutions — a community college or a for-profit institution. Those working adults who desire a bachelors degree or higher often choose a for-profit college or university that can accommodate to a life of work, family duties and study.

There are those who defend this income based system as the envy of the world. True, most countries would love to have universities equal to our elite private and public flagship universities. However, no country we know of is trying to replicate our system of preparation and access based on wealth. On the contrary, most of our major competitors are working to provide universal access that will allow all students an opportunity to reach the top of the academic pyramid. The data are incontrovertible, intelligence is distributed equally across income and ethnicity which means that our current system is squandering the talents of millions of our citizens who lack access to higher education. These are talents America must have if it is to compete with societies whose citizens number in the billions. If America hopes to compete with societies whose goal is universal access to students at whatever level, then we must flatten the Preparation/Access pyramid and perhaps the institutional pyramid as well. This survey is ADA's first step in seeking to define and promote a higher education system that offers opportunity to the estimated 25 million Americans who currently lack the preparation and access. This is the first of three nationwide surveys among the general public on their attitudes toward higher education institutions, the preparation for and the access to these institutions. The survey was conducted by Lake Research Partners.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> **Methodology:** On behalf of Americans for Democratic Action Education Fund, Lake Research Partners designed and administered this survey, which was conducted by phone using professional interviewers. The survey was conducted among 2,250 American adults, including a base sample of 1000, and oversamples of 500 African Americans, 500 Latinos, and 250 lower-income whites. The survey was conducted October 4-13, 2009. The margin of error for the total weighted sample is +/-3.1 percentage points.



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**To:** Michael J. Wilson  
Americans for Democratic Action Education Fund

**From:** Celinda Lake and Joshua Ulibarri  
Lake Research Partners

**Date:** October 2009

**Re:** Findings from Recent Education Survey

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### Strategic Summary

- Americans value a college education now more than ever. They know a degree is the new threshold for achieving the American Dream, and they know the country's future depends on more graduates and their innovations.
- Cost is the biggest frustration when it comes to higher learning. The cost of a college degree is getting more and more expensive and further out of reach, all while Americans are placing a stronger priority on college graduation.
- The public has a positive view of traditional as well as for-profit colleges and universities. They have a better sense of the work of traditional schools, but they think for-profit schools are doing an excellent or good job educating their students. They want a variety of institutions out there including community colleges and for-profits to offer the most opportunity to students and workers. People believe for-profits offer critical flexibility.
- The President's goal for graduating more college students than any other nation by 2020 is a major support point for more Americans to favor expanding the reach of for-profits and oppose the efforts others would make to restrict their growth.
- The biggest support point, other than cost, is that for-profit colleges and universities serve non-traditional students who cannot attend college fulltime on campus and underserved communities that may have received a poor education earlier in their life. Opportunity and flexibility are the strongest values to buttress the arguments against

faulty critiques and other efforts to restrict the growth of for-profit schools.

- The public does not buy arguments that for-profit colleges and universities exploit their students. Instead, they believe these institutions play a powerful role in making a college education more accessible to non-traditional and underserved students.
- Nor do Americans buy the attacks that for-profit schools provide a lower-quality education, though standards are important.
- The tax dialogue helps promote for-profit colleges and universities, since the taxes they pay help to offset the federal tuition aid their students receive.
- Voters support allowing for-profit colleges and universities to expand their reach and serve more students. They soundly reject the notion that these schools should be stopped and that their growth should be hindered, and many are willing to make it a voting issue.

In the end, as more and more non-traditional students return to college, the vast majority of Americans understand that for-profit colleges and universities are a good option for these students because they offer more flexibility and the opportunity to earn a degree that they would otherwise not have.

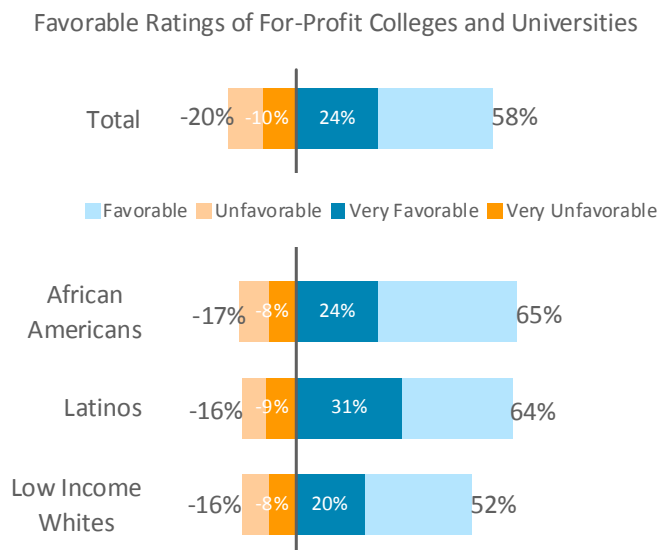
### **People Think Higher Education is Important in Today's World, and that Helps Drive Support for Expanded Access to For-Profit Schools.**

When it comes to personal progress, as well as the future of America, Americans have very little doubt about the importance of a college education – a degree is extremely important. Eight in ten Americans (82 percent) agree that the key to enhancing our economic competitiveness and capacity for innovation lies in providing every American the opportunity to afford and attend college. Ninety-three percent of Latinos agree with the statement, as do 88 percent of African Americans and 80 percent of lower-income whites. Support for this notion also extends beyond partisanship, with 90 percent of Democrats, 79 percent of Republicans, and 77 percent of independents agreeing that enhancing America's economic competitiveness depends on expanding access to affordable college. Along with partisanship, this notion extends beyond level of education. Eighty-five percent of non-college educated adults agree with the statement and 79 percent of college educated adults agree.

Americans also know the country's success depends on a more innovative workforce and that can only happen with more trained world class engineers and scientists (88 percent agree). Nine in ten African Americans (91 percent), lower-income whites (89 percent), and Latinos (88 percent) agree.

### The Public Has a Positive Opinion of For-Profit Colleges and Universities, along with Other Institutions.

A strong majority of adults have a favorable opinion of for-profit colleges and universities, while very few hold unfavorable views. Overall, 58 percent of adults have a favorable opinion of these schools, including a quarter who have a very favorable opinion (24 percent very, 34 percent somewhat favorable). Only one in five has an unfavorable opinion (20 percent). Another one in five (22 percent) have no opinion or have never heard of “for-profit colleges or universities.” Latinos and African Americans are especially favorable (64 percent and 65 percent, respectively), while lower-income whites tilt toward holding a favorable attitude (52 percent) but are also among the most likely to not have enough information (32 percent do not have an opinion).



Americans also have a favorable attitude toward other institutions of higher learning. Eighty-six percent have a favorable opinion of community colleges in their community; 84 percent of Americans have a favorable opinion of state colleges and universities in their state (only 4 and 8 percent unfavorable, respectively). Public colleges and universities (83 percent favorable, 7 percent unfavorable) and taxpayer supported colleges and universities (73 percent, 11 percent unfavorable) are also viewed favorably. Americans view private colleges favorably (75 percent, 15 percent unfavorable), though they divide over colleges that only offer online courses and degrees (49 percent favorable, 29 percent unfavorable)

Americans view for-profit colleges and universities favorably and also think that for-profit schools do a decent job giving students the knowledge and skills they need to be competitive and succeed in today’s global market (50 percent say excellent or good, only 32 percent say just fair or poor, +17 net). More Americans tend to think traditional state and private colleges and universities do a good or excellent job (62 percent say excellent or good, 32 percent fair or

poor, +30 net), but the main difference is that three times as many Americans are unable to rate the job performance of for-profit schools, not because they think these for-profit college and universities are doing a poor job (18 percent do not know, compared to 6 percent for traditional schools). The lack of clarity many Americans have with for-profit colleges and universities leads a plurality to think traditional schools do a better job educating their students. Americans need to know that students at for-profits learn, the education is solid, and they graduate ready to compete for good paying jobs. Overall, half of voters (48 percent) either say the quality is about the same (37 percent) or they do not know (11 percent). However, among those who do have an opinion on whether one type of school is better than the other, traditional schools win. Thirty-nine percent believe traditional colleges and universities provide a better quality of education than for-profit schools (12 percent) for a differential of +27 points. The advantage for traditional schools is equally strong among lower-income whites (41 percent traditional schools, 9 percent for-profit, +32 net), Latinos (45 percent traditional schools, 14 percent for-profits, +31 net) and African Americans (41 percent traditional schools, 10 percent for-profits, +31 net).

Notably, what frustrates voters about for-profit colleges and universities is the same issue that frustrates them about all colleges and universities, and that is the cost of earning a degree. Seventy-one percent of Americans say the biggest problem with higher education is being able to afford the cost of tuition and other fees. Twelve percent say it is a lack of flexibility, 7 percent say the overall quality, and 6 percent believe it is being accepted into a school in the first place. Cost drives frustration, and frustration over costs is not a separation point between for-profit schools or taxpayer funded institutions. In either case, Americans worry that costs make a degree out of reach for many.

Competition does not worry Americans, in fact it motivates them on this issue; 69 percent have a favorable impression of for-profit institutions when they learn that more than one million students that cannot or choose not to attend a traditional or private college or university attend a for-profit school, competing with traditional schools (21 percent have an unfavorable opinion). Furthermore, 73 percent of Americans agree that for-profit colleges and universities should be allowed to grant liberal arts degrees in fields such as history, English, and political science. Only 15 percent disagree. This is true even when adults are told these degrees would be equivalent to liberal arts degrees granted at traditional state or private colleges and universities.

### **People Believe For-Profit Colleges and Universities are Important to Meeting President Obama's Goals.**

President Obama's goal that America should lead the world in college graduates is a strong motivating factor for allowing for-profit colleges and universities to serve more students. President Obama has stated it is his goal that by 2020 America will lead the world in the percentage of adults with a college degree. When adults hear that taxpayer funded colleges and universities have only increased enrollment by 2.5 percent per year while for-profits have increased enrollment by 47 percent, two in three (66 percent) favor for-profit colleges and universities. Only a quarter oppose for-profit colleges and universities (26 percent) after they

learn how little taxpayer funded colleges and universities are growing. Further, when adults learn that to reach the President’s goal only through taxpayer funded schools (and not through for-profit schools) would require billions more dollars in tax collections each year for a decade (75 percent support) and African Americans (68 percent) and a majority of lower-income whites (59 percent). Even when the goal is linked to President Obama, nearly two in three Republicans (64 percent) support allowing for-profits to expand and serve more students (Democrats and independents agree with 67 percent and 66 percent, respectively).

**Knowing this, do you favor or oppose for-profit colleges and universities?**

President Obama has set a goal that by the year 2020 America will lead the world in the percentage of adults with a college degree. Currently, 30 percent of the U.S. adult population has a college degree, compared to the world leading nations at 40 percent. To reach Obama’s goal there will need to be a 30% increase of funding for higher education across all institutions. However, in the last ten years or so, taxpayer funded colleges and universities only increased enrollment by 2.5 percent per year while for-profit colleges and universities increased enrollment by 47% per year.

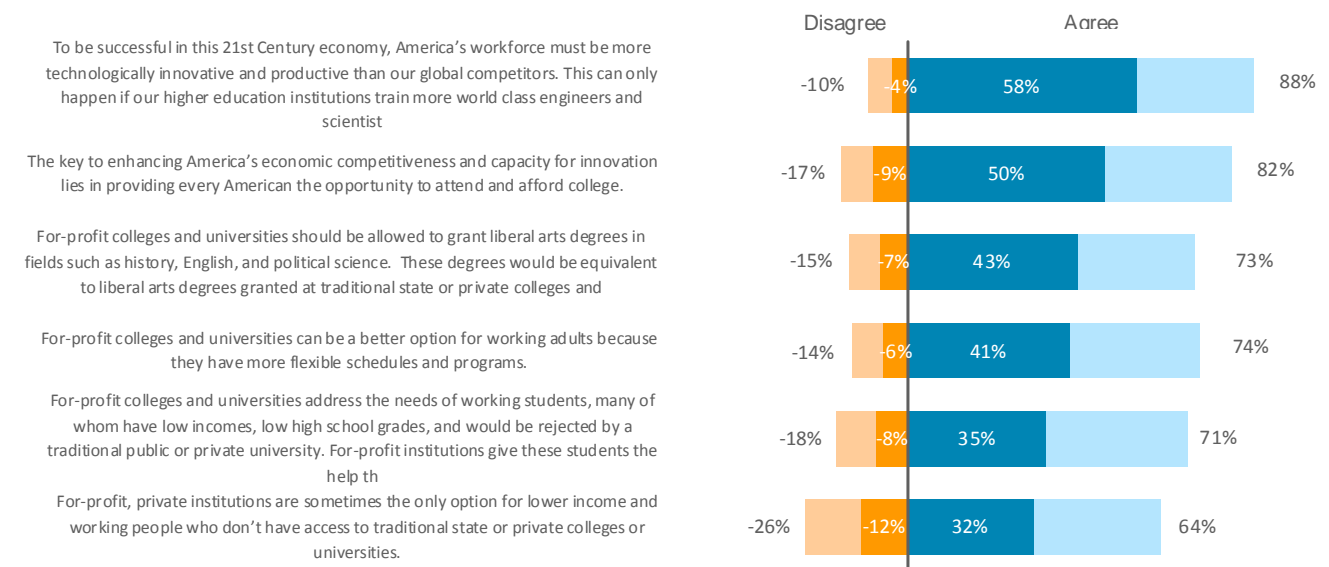
	Favor	Oppose	Net
<b>Total</b>	66%	26%	+40
<b>African Americans</b>	67%	25%	+42
<b>Latinos</b>	76%	18%	+58
<b>Lower-Income Whites</b>	63%	30%	+33

President Obama has set a goal that by the year 2020 America will lead the world in the percentage of adults with a college degree. Currently, 30 percent of the U.S. adult population has a college degree, compared to the world leading nations at 40 percent. Right now, this goal is at risk because in the last ten years, traditional state or private colleges and universities have only increased their enrollment by 2.5%. At that rate, the President's goal cannot be met. It will be even more difficult to reach if we limit the number of students for-profit colleges and universities can serve.

	Favor	Oppose	Net
<b>Total</b>	66%	24%	+42
<b>African Americans</b>	69%	23%	+46
<b>Latinos</b>	74%	19%	+55
<b>Lower-Income Whites</b>	66%	27%	+39

### People Believe Opportunity and Flexibility are Key Factors Motivating Their Support for Expanded Access to For-Profit Schools

Opportunity and flexibility are two key factors that buttress Americans’ support for for-profit colleges and universities (cost being the first). These institutions’ ability to reach out to non-traditional or underserved students is more important to them than arguments that these potential students are exploited or taken advantage of – they just do not buy those arguments. Seventy-four percent of adults agree that for-profit colleges and universities can be a better option for working adults because they have more flexible schedules and programs (only 14 percent disagree). Eighty-five percent of Latinos, 77 percent of African Americans, and 67 percent of lower-income whites agree with that statement and strong support does not drop below 34 percent across those groups. Furthermore, 71 percent of adults agree that for-profit colleges and universities address the needs of working students who might be “rejected” by traditional public or private universities and, in fact, give these students the “chance to earn a degree;” only 18 percent disagree with this statement. In this case, 80 percent of Latinos, 76 percent of African Americans, and 75 percent of lower-income whites agree that for-profit institutions give students the help they need and the chance to earn a degree. Americans understand how important a college degree is and they strongly want that opportunity for non-traditional students who cannot attend school full-time on campus or to underserved student populations who may have received a poor high school education.



The value Americans place on opportunity and giving people the chance to achieve the American Dream is vivid and a strong underpinning of their support for expanding the number of students for-profit universities and colleges can serve. Sixty-four percent of people agree that for-profit institutions are the only option for lower income and working people who don’t always have access to traditional state or private colleges or universities. Lower-income whites are the most in agreement (71 percent) with this idea that these schools are often the only

option for underserved communities, followed by Latinos and African Americans (69 percent and 66 percent, respectively).

### **Americans Do NOT Buy the Critiques on Exploitation, Costs, or Quality**

Notably, Americans do not buy the arguments that these non-traditional and underserved communities are exploited by for-profit schools. In fact, the reverse is true; Americans value the ability of for-profit colleges and universities to reach out to the non-traditional students, students with diverse ethnic backgrounds, and students who would not otherwise enroll in college. Their belief that everyone deserves an equal opportunity to get ahead strengthens their support of for-profit schools. Two in three Americans (66 percent) believe that every high school graduate who is willing to work hard deserves a chance to earn a college degree; only 31 percent believe that only highly qualified students should be admitted based on scores and grades from high school. More than half of Americans (57 percent) believe that for-profit schools provide minority communities, single mothers, and others with an opportunity they would not otherwise have. Only a quarter (26 percent) says that these for-profit institutions exploit or take advantage of these non-traditional students and underserved communities.

For-profit schools must get accredited the same way traditional colleges and universities do, and these for-profit schools enroll students with higher risk factors. They may be single parents, have lost their job, come from a diverse ethnic background, or have been poorly taught in high school. When it comes to these students, however, only a third of people (33 percent) feel they are being exploited because they are not prepared and have to drop out, owing money and loans they cannot pay back. Instead, six in ten (60 percent) believe these students, despite their high school performance, deserve the chance to earn a college degree. Though some may drop out, that is the risk they themselves would take to go to college. For them, it is a small price to pay for all high school graduates to have a chance to earn a degree. African Americans and lower-income whites (58 percent each say worth it) believe more solidly that this is a small price to pay so that all graduates have a chance to earn a degree. Half of Latinos (50 percent) say it is worth it while 36 percent feel students are being exploited.

Additionally, Americans tend to believe that for-profit schools play an important role in higher education by providing an education to hundreds of thousand of students who don't have access to other colleges or universities and should be allowed to expand (57 percent). Less than a quarter (22 percent) believes these for-profits exploit these students by encouraging them to take more and more loans even though they never graduate.

After hearing this discussion on exploitation or opportunity, most people side with opportunity. Less than a third (31 percent) agree with those who have gone to government education regulators seeking to stop the growth of for-profit colleges and universities by claiming that they exploit students. Instead, six in ten (60 percent) disagree and think their growth should not be stopped. Fifty-eight percent of African Americans and Latinos and 56 percent of lower-income whites disagree with those who would shut down or curb the growth of for-profit colleges and universities.

Cost is so important to people, it is a potentially divisive element in this discussion. Arguments that focus on solely on the "profits" and "costs" wedges can divide people, but this is because of their feelings about higher education generally. This wedge loosens when the dialogue shifts to the key arguments Americans give for supporting for-profit schools: opportunity and flexibility. People divide on the profit questions with 48 percent agreeing that, by their very nature, for-profits will exploit their students because they will sacrifice quality for increased profits (42 percent disagree).

Americans are not moved when the quality of education these schools administer is critiqued. As we discussed earlier, a plurality of Americans think the education at for-profits schools is about the same as at traditional schools, so quality is not a concern to the public. Only 9 percent of people say “an inferior education” is the strongest reason to prevent for-profit schools from expanding (compared to 15 percent for “not making a profit” and “exploit [ation]”). Half of Americans disagree with the argument that the only way to maintain a high quality of education is to restrict enrollment to well qualified students who can attend schools full-time (49 percent disagree, 46 percent agree) and 49 percent also disagree with the statement that it is impossible to maintain a high level of quality when an institution enrolls students who are not qualified for admission to traditional state or private schools (44 percent agree). People lean against the idea that for-profit colleges or universities are “diploma mills” that produce students without real skills” (46 percent disagree, 42 percent agree).

Standards are important at for-profit colleges and universities. But people respond to the dialogue of opportunity and to an open enrollment policy that is more conducive to serving underserved and non-traditional students that are otherwise excluded from the current system. Overall, 67 percent of people think for-profit colleges and universities should apply admittance standards such as standardized tests and grade averages the way other colleges and universities do. Only a quarter (26 percent) think they should not use the same standards. On the other hand, when phrased differently, a large majority (59 percent) believe it is a good idea to have an open enrollment policy that admits students with a high school diploma or GED but does not require students to have high scores on tests or high grade point averages from high schools. A third (35 percent) believes it is a bad idea. Latinos (59 percent) and African Americans (58 percent) think an open enrollment policy that provides more opportunity is a good idea, while lower-income whites are more divided (51 percent good idea). For-profit colleges and universities’ strength is centered on access, flexibility, and opportunity.

### **The Tax-Dialogue Helps Promote For-Profits.**

Americans are frustrated that a college or university degree costs too much, so much that a degree is often out of reach for too many Americans. They are more frustrated in this regard when it is state and public colleges and universities that are getting pricier and pricier – schools that they support with their hard earned tax dollars. These frustrations lead to more support for for-profit schools that do not rely on tax subsidies, however, people are tax sensitive.

Overall, Americans divide on whether they would favor higher taxes to meet the demand at public colleges (48 percent support, 48 percent oppose). African Americans (60 percent support) and Latinos (56 percent) would support higher taxes to accommodate the demand at

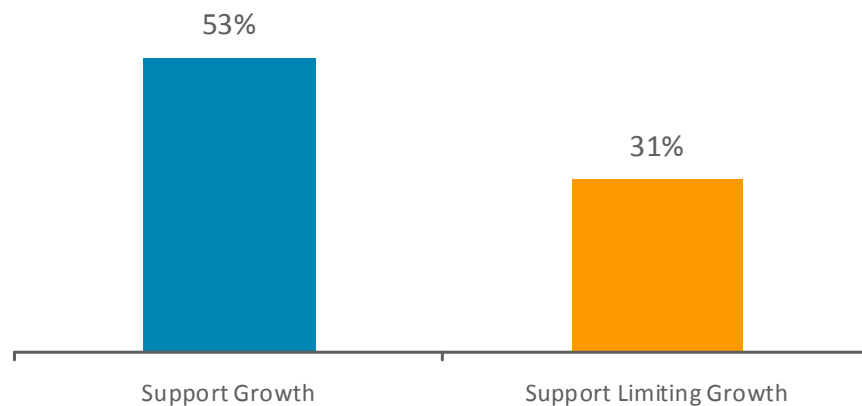
state colleges and universities while lower-income whites would oppose those higher taxes (41 percent support, 55 percent oppose).

When the dialogue shifts away from a purely philosophical debate about whether state colleges and universities need more financial support, and instead focuses on the good for-profits do in terms of government coffers, support for for-profit schools surges. When Americans learn that for-profit universities are unlike taxpayer supported institutions in that they cost taxpayers nothing and in fact pay more taxes every year than they receive in government subsidies, 71 percent say they have a positive feeling toward for-profit colleges and universities. Only 19 percent of adults hold a negative feeling after that information. Positive feelings extend across target groups with 76 percent of Latinos, 68 percent of lower-income whites, and 66 percent of African Americans holding positive views. In the end, when told that over one million students attend for-profit schools and to enroll them in state colleges or universities would come at an estimated cost of \$15 billion dollars in taxpayer money, 62 disagree with the notion that their growth should be stopped, while only 29 percent agree. Attitudes are consistent across race, with 59 percent of African Americans and Latinos disagreeing with stopping their growth, followed by 58 percent of lower-income whites.

People also strongly support including for-profit colleges and universities, in this case, in federal government tuition aid. Sixty-three percent of Americans support expanding for profit colleges and universities because even though students take tuition help from the federal government (and that money goes to the schools) that is more than offset by the taxes these for-profits schools pay back to the federal government (only 25 percent oppose expansion). Simply put, any argument that says for-profits should be stopped because they take federal money in terms of tuition aid is shunned by Americans; the argument that the taxes they pay offsets the tuition aid is demonstrably more powerful. It is so powerful that African Americans (58 percent), lower-income whites (60 percent), and Latinos (69 percent) support expanding for-profits after hearing this reasoning.

### **Americans Want to Expand, NOT Restrict the Growth of For-Profit Colleges and Universities**

While some in Washington move to restrict the number of students for-profit institutions of higher learning can serve, Americans disagree. Faced with a choice between some people who oppose for-profits and want to limit their ability to grow because they think they do not adhere to high standards and exploit some students, or some people who support for-profits because they serve an important role in helping hundreds of thousands of students receive a college education and take no taxpayer money, half (53 percent) support allowing for-profits to grow while only a third (31 percent) support limiting their growth.



It is worth noting that not only do Americans want to see for-profit colleges and universities expand the number of students they can serve, but many are willing to make it a voting issue. Just over a third of adults indicate they will hold officials accountable on this issue. Thirty-six percent say they will be more likely to support a candidate who supports allowing for-profit colleges and universities to grow. When asked differently, about the same share (37 percent) say they would be less likely to support a candidate who opposes their growth. Latinos are the most likely to support a candidate who favors for-profits (44 percent), but African Americans (38 percent) and lower-income whites (36 percent) are also ready to reward candidates who are willing to make it easier (not more difficult) for people to earn a college degree.

### **Belief Statements that Summarize How People Feel About For-Profit Colleges and Universities**

The top testing statements reflect the public's attitude that for-profit colleges and universities serve a purpose, now more than ever, as more Americans seek the opportunity and the flexibility offered by for-profit schools. Opportunity and flexibility are the two values that anchor much of the support for expansion of for-profit colleges and universities and this is reflected in the top statements. Statements that focus on the positive consequences of expanding for-profit colleges and universities are also convincing to the public, but they are better used as secondary arguments after advocates reinforce the stronger elements of opportunity and flexibility.

### **Top Tier Statements**

The top statement<sup>2</sup> focuses on for-profit colleges and universities' ability to provide underserved students an opportunity that they would otherwise not receive. Forty percent of Americans find this statement very convincing, with 78 percent indicating it is convincing overall. Among African Americans and Latinos, this statement is even stronger, with 47 percent of both African Americans (81 percent overall) and Latinos (82 percent overall) believing this statement is very convincing. Whites, particularly lower-income whites, find this statement less convincing than the public overall, possibly due to the racial focus of the language that specifically mentions African Americans and Latinos. Thirty-eight percent of whites and 36

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<sup>2</sup> Please see complete text of the statements at the end of this memo.

percent of lower-income whites find the statement very convincing, and 77 percent of whites and 74 percent of lower-income whites find this convincing. Notably, this is still the strongest statement to lower-income white adults, signifying the importance of emphasizing opportunity to all underserved communities.

Along partisan lines, independent voters find this statement even more convincing than both Democrats and Republicans. Nearly half of independent voters (43 percent) find the opportunity statement very convincing (79 percent overall). Forty-one percent of Democrats and 38 percent of Republicans find the statement very convincing (78 percent convincing overall to both Democrats and Republicans).

The effectiveness of the opportunity statement is evident. This is the top statement among men, women, younger adults, non-college educated adults, whites, African Americans, Latinos, unmarried adults, adults without children, the employed, the unemployed, people who make under \$50K, Democrats, independents, liberals, President Obama voters, and those in the Northeast and Western regions.

Along with opportunity, flexibility is another strong value that reinforces support for expanding the reach of for-profit colleges and universities. Thirty-eight percent of adults find the flexibility statement very convincing, and 81 percent find it convincing overall. Among African Americans and Latinos, the flexibility statement is just slightly less convincing than the opportunity statement. Forty-three percent of both African Americans and Latinos say the flexibility statement is very convincing, and 82 percent of both groups say it is convincing overall. Similar to the opportunity statement, whites are less likely than the overall public to indicate this is a very convincing statement, as 37 percent say it is very convincing (81 percent convincing). Lower-income whites are less likely than whites overall to find this statement convincing. Thirty-two percent of lower-income whites indicate the flexibility statement is very convincing, and 78 percent find it convincing.

Republican voters find the flexibility statement even more convincing than both Democrats and independents. Forty-three percent of Republicans find the flexibility statement very convincing (84 percent convincing), while 39 percent of Democrats say it is very convincing (79 percent convincing) and 33 percent of independents say it is very convincing (81 percent convincing).

The flexibility statement is the most convincing among older adults, college graduates, those who attended a for-profit college or university, those who attended a state college or university, mothers, retirees, married adults, McCain voters, Republicans, conservatives, adults who make over \$50K, and those in the Southern region.

Notably, among those who shift toward having a favorable impression of for-profit colleges and universities over the course of the survey, 42 percent find the opportunity statement very convincing (84 percent convincing) and 40 percent find the flexibility statement very convincing (90 percent convincing).

## Second Tier Statements

The effectiveness of the flexibility and opportunity frames can be extended when adults think about the positive consequences of expanding for-profit colleges and universities. This provides an opportunity to pivot from opportunity and flexibility frames right to the impact of expanding for-profit colleges and universities, but is a secondary statement frame. Americans also want to hear about the positive consequences of expanding opportunity and flexibility to underserved and non-traditional students.

For instance, the statement that focuses on the money and infrastructure needed to grow rapidly and be prepared to enroll the millions of new students looking for a college degree and affordable education is almost as strong as the opportunity and flexibility statements. Thirty-seven percent of Americans find this statement very convincing while 74 percent say it is convincing overall. Latinos respond to this statement more than African Americans and lower-income whites. Forty-three percent of Latinos find this statement very convincing (81 percent convincing) while 34 percent of African Americans find it very convincing (75 percent convincing) and 32 percent of lower-income whites find it very convincing (75 percent convincing). As seen with all the statements, lower-income whites are somewhat more reluctant than whites overall to find this statement convincing.

The infrastructure statement is the strongest among independent voters – a key voting bloc to any policy debate and an often influential group of voters when influencing Congress. Forty-six percent of independents find this statement very convincing while 79 percent indicate it is convincing overall.

The role that for-profit colleges and universities can play in a global economy and keeping America competitive with countries like India and China is also an important consequence of expanding these schools. Thirty-six percent of adults find this statement very convincing, with three-quarters (75 percent) finding this statement convincing overall. This statement has particular resonance among Latinos, but is less convincing among whites and African Americans. Forty-four percent of Latinos find this statement very convincing (85 percent convincing). One-third (33 percent) of African Americans find this statement very convincing (75 percent convincing), and 35 percent of whites find it very convincing (74 percent convincing).

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In sum, Americans realize, now more than ever, the need to allow for-profit colleges and universities to expand the number of students they can serve. These students need more flexibility and deserve every opportunity that others receive to earn their college degree and reach the American Dream, especially as President Obama calls on more and more Americans to earn their degree and make America the leader in higher education. Americans do not buy the attacks that for-profit colleges and universities cost too much and should not make a profit, provide a lower quality of education, or exploit their students. Those who stand in the way or seek to restrict this growth misread the public and risk their own standing with voters.

**Text of Tested Statements:**

**Serves Different Students:** For-profit universities have an open enrollment policy that offers a post-high school education to many underserved communities – like African Americans and Latinos, who have often been shut out of other four year colleges, or students who may have suffered at a lower-performing high school, but can excel in college if given the opportunity. We shouldn't deny those students the opportunity to earn a college degree and become more employable.

**Flexibility:** Online for-profit colleges and universities offer students the flexibility they need to be successful and earn a college degree. These universities are tailored to an individual's work demands and lifestyle. They allow students to attend classes full-time or part-time, and do their course work from home, from their job, or at the college by offering online classes and classes at nearby campuses. That flexibility makes a degree more of a reality for many students.

**Infrastructure for President Obama's Goals:** For-profit colleges and universities have access to the money needed to expand and have developed the infrastructure needed to grow rapidly without lowering their educational quality. State taxpayer-funded schools, however, face tightening state budgets and higher tuition rates. Because of this, for-profit colleges and universities are better prepared to enroll the millions of new students looking for a college degree and affordable education. If we relied on ONLY taxpayer-funded schools, many students would miss out on the opportunity.

**Competitive in 21<sup>st</sup> Century:** To be competitive with countries like India and China in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy, the U.S. needs a more dynamic and flexible workforce that is unafraid to learn new skills and switch jobs and careers. This is a different economy—not one where you could work the same job for the same company for 20 years as many people used to do. For-profit universities allow more people to gain the new skills they need which will keep the U.S. competitive with other countries in this changing economy.

**Technology:** Many of these for-profit colleges and universities are pioneers in bringing technology to America's education system. They were among the leaders in using 21<sup>st</sup> century technology tools, such as online campuses, that link students to their university or college even though they may live further away. And, they help link students who work in the day but can attend an online class in the evening.

**Saves Taxpayers Money with Stats:** Unlike taxpayer-funded colleges and universities, for-profit institutions cost taxpayers nothing because all their revenue comes from student-paid tuition. In 2006, the total cost of taxpayer-supported college universities was 187 billion dollars. The annual average taxpayer per student cost ranged from 8,000 dollars at community colleges to 15,000 dollars at state universities. In contrast, for-profit institutions pay taxes which averages out to paying 15 dollars per student back to the taxpayers.