



**Inside  
Higher  
Ed**

# Redefining Postsecondary Value at a Time of Upheaval

*An Inside Higher Ed* *webcast*  
Wednesday, Oct. 25, 2023  
2 p.m. Eastern

# Presenter

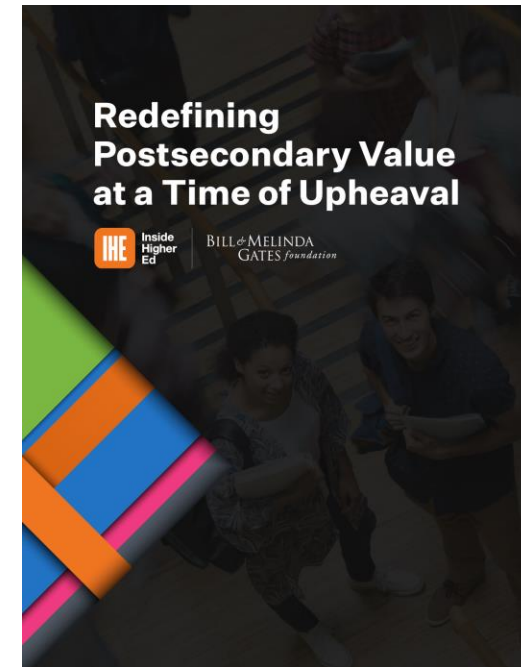


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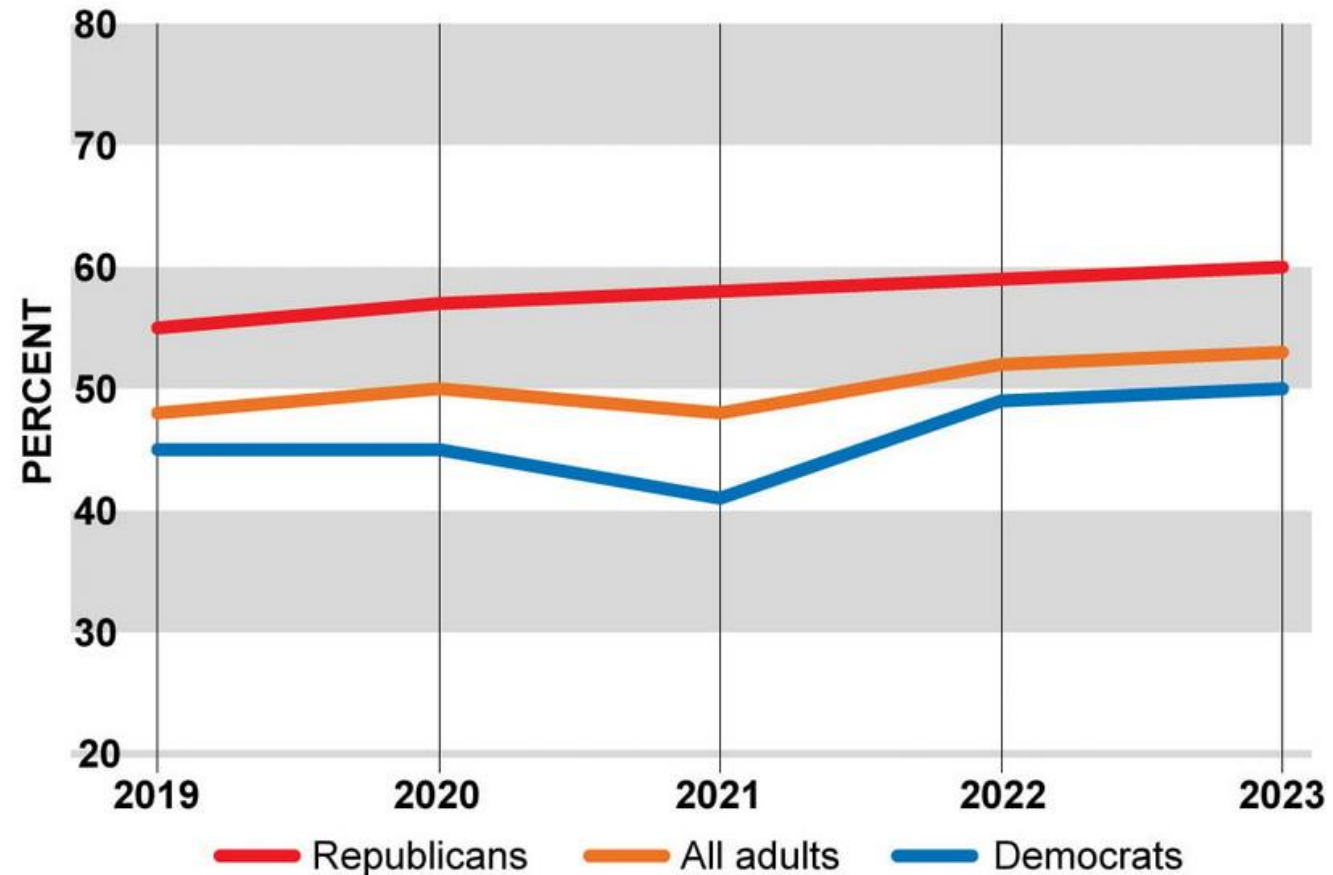
# ‘Value’ and Who Defines It?

- **The general public** in its impressions about higher education, the worthiness of going to college, pursuing specific degrees and programs.
- **Governments (federal and state)** in their oversight of higher education and their decisions about whether and how much to invest in it.
- **Politicians** (with their words).
- **Individuals** in decisions about whether to “consume” postsecondary education (and if so, what kind).
- **Researchers and policy analysts** with data.



# What the Public Thinks

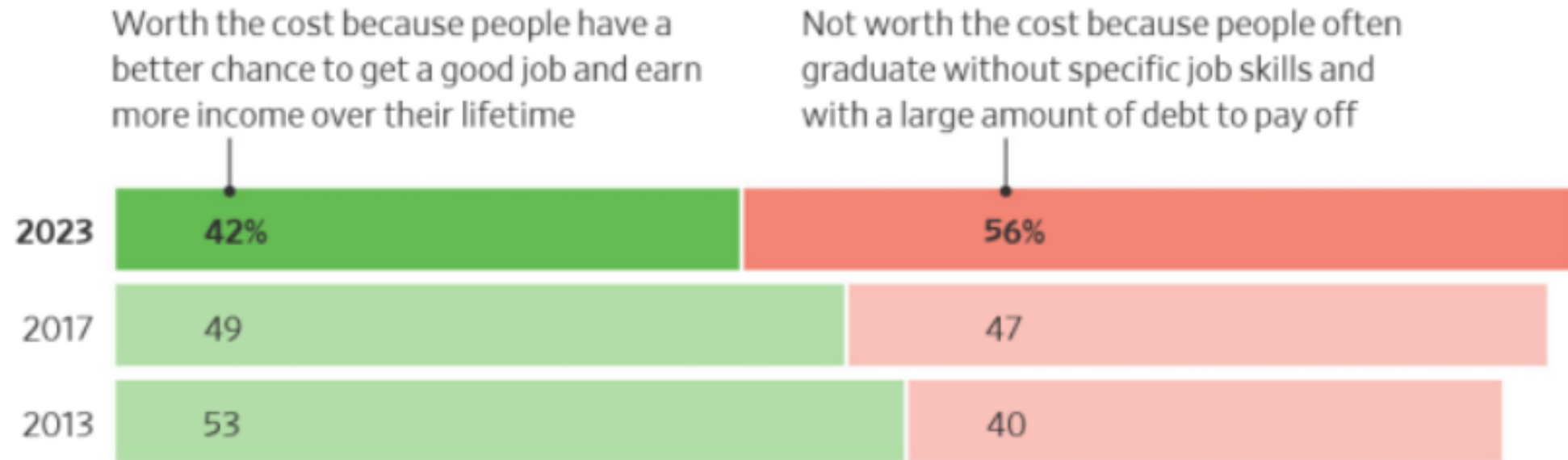
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement:  
Americans can get a high-quality education after high school that is also affordable?



*"Varying Degrees," New America, August 2023*

# What the Public Thinks (cont.)

When it comes to getting a four-year college degree, which of the following statements comes closer to your point of view? A four-year college education is...



The Wall Street Journal

# What Do the Data Actually Show?

Using the increasingly popular threshold of whether a program's graduates receive a "minimum economic return" (earnings > than average HS graduate in their state, over and above cost of their education):

- 83% of institutions (representing 93% of learners) meet that threshold
  - 97% of public-four year
  - 88.8% of public two-year
  - 82.6% of private nonprofit four-year
  - 67.5% of private nonprofit two-year
  - 43.0% of for-profit

["Rising Above the Threshold."](#) Institute for Higher Education Policy, June 2023

# Looking Beyond Earnings

“There are reasons students pick certain careers that have nothing to do with earnings. It’s about service and passion,” she said. “This whole discussion around earnings strips that idea of passion out of the equation and reduces the decision-making matrix to dollars and cents, which I think is frankly unethical.”

*--Patricia McGuire  
president, Trinity University Washington*

# Benefits Associated With College-Going

- Americans perceive that postsecondary credentials deliver outcomes: those with advanced degrees more likely to vote in federal elections, to rate their health as good or excellent, to have stronger relationships.
- On 49 of 52 metrics measured by Gallup and Lumina Foundation, people with postsecondary education expressed a stronger positive connection than those without.
- Correlation, not causation.



*iStock/Getty Images*



# Building Value Into Government Oversight

Federal and state policy historically focused on **accessibility**, **affordability**, and **“quality”** —the latter much harder to define and measure). (Would ideally measure **“learning.”**)

**“Value”** directly entered the policy lexicon over a decade ago through “gainful employment,” which tied a measure of price/student expenditure (loan debt burden) with an outcome measure (graduates’ average income).

Gainful was focused mostly on vocational programs, those most directly tied to jobs. Further afield you go, greater the pushback against such an economically focused measurement.



# Building Value Into Government Oversight (cont.)

Biden administration’s gainful employment and financial value transparency rules—softened from original proposal—would calculate whether graduates in all academic programs meet a “minimum economic return” level (Threshold 0).

Numerous states are getting into the act, too, with [Colorado](#) planning to calculate and report not only “return on investment” but also the opportunity cost of enrolling instead of working.



# The Importance of Equity

1. How do racism and classism shape students' access to campus career development resources?
2. How might seniors' sense of career preparedness vary across different identity markers?
3. How do the debt-to-income ratios of graduates vary across race, class and other intersecting identities?
4. How might systemic race and class barriers influence the postgraduate outcomes of our graduates, and how can we disrupt disparities through targeted support and advocacy?
5. What are Black, Latiné, Indigenous, Asian American and multiracial students' experiences in their first postgraduation jobs? What additional resources might we offer to young alumni?

[“Most Career Outcome Narratives Are Incomplete”](#)

Haley A. Haywood, assistant provost for organizational learning, Clark University

# How *Should* We Measure Value?



**Thanks**

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