Higher Education, What is it Good For ?: Meeting Societally Expected Goals

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Abstract

Higher education exists as a private/public good. The Florida College System, comprised of 28 members, is the primary access point to higher education for Floridians, including recent high school graduates and returning adult students. The Florida Department of Education advertises its mission as providing access to high-quality, affordable academic and career educational programs that maximize student learning and success, developing a globally competitive workforce, and responding rapidly to diverse state and community needs. As recipients and consumers of a service vital to the welfare of an individual as well as the larger community, it is important to ask Floridians what they think the purpose of higher education is and is higher education achieving that purpose. In these changing times, limited research exists that examines public perception on present-day societally-expected higher education goals and their associated beliefs of institutional achievement. This study gathered Florida voters' perceptions on their perceived goal of higher education via questions posed in a statewide survey conducted by the University of North Florida Public Opinion Research Lab. Results illustrate that Floridians, like most Americans, believe statewide higher education serves the main purpose of transmitting career skills but believe the Florida College System to be only somewhat successful in achieving that goal.

Keywords: higher education, public opinion, goals, achievement

Introduction

The quest for educational institutions to stay agile and adaptable to the changing times has led to society imposing expectations and "cultural anxieties" on our nation's colleges and universities. Rudolph (1990), who wrote one of the foundational volumes in the history of higher education, asked a poignant question, "How and why and with what consequences have the American colleges and universities developed as they have?" (p. xxvi). He answers his own question many pages later at the beginning of his chapter "Reform and Reaction." His message sounds surprisingly familiar today, over fifty years after Rudolph first wrote this passage:

> What is an American college? War … the sudden instability of whole areas of knowledge, dynamic social and economic changes—these and a multitude of other developments have often thrown the American college back upon itself and forced upon it a moment, perhaps even an era, of critical self-assessment and redefinition…. A Country that [is] hurrying into the future [requires] colleges that [will] hurry along with it (Rudolph, 1990, p. 110).

Proof of colleges adapting to the changing times is evidenced by their ever-changing mission statements which highlight their main goals in providing educational programs (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). How well colleges adapt to the changing times can be gauged by looking at their enrollment statistics. Across the nation, enrollment in state colleges has dropped. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center reports community college enrollment dropped 9.5% the fall of 2021 with first-year enrollment down 19% (Sedmak, 2022). The drop in enrollment was even steeper among minority students, who comprise a disproportionate share of state college

enrollment. The decline was less pronounced in the Florida College System. Overall enrollment dropped 4.5% between 2021 and 2022 (Sedmak, 2022).

The Florida College System, comprised of 28 member colleges, plays a central role in providing 700,000 students with new training and accreditation programs needed to succeed in an evolving workforce (Patel, 2021). Section (s.) 1004.65, Florida Statutes (F.S.) establishes the primary mission and responsibility of Florida College System institutions as responding to community needs for post-secondary academic education and career degree education. This mission and responsibility include:

- providing lower-level undergraduate instruction and awarding associate degrees;
- preparing students directly for careers requiring less than baccalaureate degrees, including preparing for job entry, supplementing of skills and knowledge, and responding to needs in new areas of technology. Career education in a Florida College System institution shall consist of career certificates, credit courses leading to associate in science degrees and associate in applied science degrees, and other programs in fields requiring substantial academic work, background, or qualifications;
- providing student development services, including assessment, student tracking, support for disabled students, advisement, counseling, financial aid, career development, and remedial and tutorial services, to ensure student success;
- promoting economic development for the state within each Florida College System institution district through the provision of special programs, including, but not limited to enterprise Florida-related programs, technology transfer centers, economic development centers, workforce literacy programs;
- providing dual enrollment instruction; and
- providing upper-level instruction and awarding baccalaureate degrees as specifically authorized by law.

To meet these demands, the Florida Department of Education requested a modest 1.1% increase in spending for state colleges for 2021–22 (Patel, 2021). While Florida state revenue will be tight in 2022–2023, some might say that this is the right time to invest in colleges and a brighter future. But there are others who are not convinced. It is important to investigate what the people, as recipients of this public good and service, perceive the goals and quality of postsecondary public education to be. As such, this research investigates Florida voters' perceived goals of higher education and how public institutions of higher education have been doing in meeting those goals in the last year.

Theory and Background

American colleges and universities are in an era of self-assessment compounded by sharp criticism of their performance as teaching institutions and rising expectations about what they will contribute in demonstrable and useful ways to the economic and social development of our communities and the nation. Jo Sprague's (1999) work on the goals of continuous educational improvement helps in defining what higher education ought to strive for in meeting societal and individual needs. The four major goals the writer points to are: (a) transmitting cultural knowledge—passing on the great works of art, literature, and science of which any educated person should be aware; (b) transmitting intellectual skills—teaching how to learn, being that the mind is a muscle that must be exercised; (c) transmitting career skills directly applicable to obtaining employment, and (d) reshaping the values of society by critiquing and transforming the world and shaping a more just society. Sprague's (1999) rhetoric for constant improvement in higher education rings true considering the ever-changing context of postsecondary schooling.

Public Opinion on Goals of Higher Education

Higher education is a highly contested topic. A 2017 New America survey (Fain, 2017) revealed that 51% of the sample population believed that plenty of well-paying jobs do not require a college degree, despite solid evidence to the contrary. Of concern for institutions of higher learning is that only one in four respondents believed secondary schooling is functioning well. A contributor to the widespread belief that higher education too often does not deliver on its promise, the survey found that 50% of respondents believe colleges prioritize their own long-term interests over those of their students whom they are to serve. Similarly, a 2019 Pew Research Center survey found that there was a growing partisan divide in views on higher education (Parker, 2019). These views were said to be increasingly linked to partisanship as only half of American adults thought colleges and universities were having a positive effect on the way things were going in the country shortly before the pandemic. About 38% said they are having a negative impact (Parker, 2019). Those numbers have held steady. Perhaps because education is perceived as more of a local than a federal issue, Gallup has found only slight partisan distinctions in Americans' ratings of U.S. education across presidential administrations (Saad, 2019). Since 2017, under Republican Donald Trump's presidency, there has been virtually no partisan difference in Americans' satisfaction with U.S. education, unlike the partisan consistency seen from 2001 to 2008 under Republican President George W. Bush (Parker, 2019). A January 2020 analysis of social media chatter on higher education worldwide in 2021 (Asare et al., 2021) revealed topics like 'covid', 'learning', 'online', 'distance', 'students', 'schools' and 'pandemic' were the most mentioned words worldwide.

To understand the contention and divisiveness in public opinion concerning the goals, values, and expectations of higher education, it is helpful to think about the role of schooling in American life. Studies on the history of higher education tend to explore different intellectual and institutional models across time as well as changing relationships with the broader society (Ramaley, 2013). Americans have traditionally considered schools as a mechanism for social improvement, a way to guarantee a better society, and a pathway to "the good life" (Bowen & Fincher, 2018; Hanson, 2014; Hutcheson, 2011).

Over the last half-century, new pressures have challenged the traditional purpose and civic mission of higher education (Chan, 2016). Kızıltepe (2010) posited that some believe that higher education institutions have outlived their usefulness in the classic sense because knowledge has acquired a more utility-oriented meaning today than culture-oriented. Modern beliefs about their purposes caused universities to steer towards functional curriculums, downplaying the classic ones. Going along with Jo Sprague's (1999) third goal of higher education, the new purpose of higher education is to acquire new knowledge and to prepare one for the workforce. Society expects that degree-granting institutions will ensure that college students develop discipline-specific competence as well as general skills (e.g., communication, written, oral, tolerance, compassion) and dispositions (e.g., attitudes, beliefs, curiosity) at the completion of a bachelor's degree (Chan et al., 2014). With its policies, programs, and practices designed to help students prepare for a better job or meet state, regional, and local economic needs, higher education is now perceived as a private benefit rather than as a public good (Kızıltepe, 2010).

Other scholars of higher education agree with Sprague's (1999) fourth goal and argue that institutions should be aiming for more ideal contributions to the commonwealth society (Dungy, 2012). Thus, dispositions and cognitive skills that enable graduates to be effective citizens should also be valued outcomes for students completing a bachelor's degree (Brown et al., 2014). Levine (2014) argues that the purpose of the liberal arts is to prepare people for responsible citizenship as engaged universities address many serious public problems, like unemployment, which matter to citizens and policymakers. Williams (2016) states that even with the changing definitions of public good in relation to higher education majors, the purposes of higher education institutions should be to promote "active citizenry" among their students. The knowledge that is created and shared should

contribute to the well-being and prosperity of humanity (Williams, 2016). Thus, in order to remain viable actors in a changing political, social, and economic environment, higher education should not only be concerned with the development of people, or of society, or of economy, but people, society, and the economy all together (Marginson, 2011). This requires interpersonal competence, multi-cultural understanding, skills in problem identification and problem solving, a sense of purpose, and the confidence that one can act in ways that make a difference (Solbrekke & Sugrue, 2020).

Institutional Opinion on Goals of Higher Education

Considering the need for change in higher academia as a way of adapting to the ever-changing needs of individuals learners and society at large, it is integral to ask what institutions of higher learning think their goals are and in what way and how well they communicate their goals to the populace. The clearest way for colleges to let students and their parents know what they stand for is through well-articulated mission statements (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). Mission statements are integral in higher education; accreditation agencies demand them, strategic planning is predicted on their formulation, and virtually every college and university has one available for review (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). Moreover, higher education institutions are constantly revisiting and revising their mission statements (Morphew et al., 2018). As recently as the mid-1990s, the Association of American Colleges found that fully 80% of all colleges and universities were making major revisions in their mission statements, goals, curricula, and general education courses (Morphew et al., 2018). Not having a mission statement begs the very legitimacy of a college or university.

Content analysis studies pertaining to American college mission statement support Sprague's (1999) third and fourth goals. According to Ozdem (2011) providing services for the education of a qualified work force are the most common mission statements of American universities. Similarly, Young et al. (2016) make attainment of tangible skill sets in the classroom the highest goal of educators and institutions at large. Study findings by Bayrak (2020) and Breznik and Law (2019) show that North American universities perceive college education as a service as the terms "service" and "serve" are among the most frequently appearing terms in their mission statements. For instance, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), speaks of "scholarship that will best serve the nation and the world in the 21st century," Princeton University alludes to "commitment to serve the nation and the world," the University of California speaks of "serving society as a center of higher learning," and Yale University makes reference to "educating aspiring leaders worldwide who serve all sectors of society" (Bayrak, 2020, p. 29).

Sprague (1999) placed high importance on the last two higher education goals of transmitting career skills directly applicable to obtaining employment and reshaping the values of society in making a better world for all. The emphasis on these two goals makes one wonder about the possible socioeconomic influences behind these imperatives. As neoliberal policies, practices, and ideas developed in the United States, a parallel process of neoliberal development occurred in U.S. public higher education (Baez & Sanchez, 2017). Throughout the past four decades, the economics, structure, and purpose of higher education, as well as the priorities and identities of faculty and students, have been altered to better align with neoliberal practices and ideology (Baez & Sanchez, 2017). More specifically, students as rational economic actors, changed their goals from what were largely intrinsic, such as developing a meaningful philosophy of life, to larger extrinsic goals including being very well off financially (Chan, 2016; Maiese & Hanna, 2019). All of these are direct results of individuals and institutions using neoliberal policies and an economic rationality to make educational decisions, including attempts to treat and govern the university just like any traditional business, its faculty as traditional workers, and its students as customers (Saunders, 2010).

Gedye and Beaumont (2018) explored how students use a consumerist framework to define their relationship with the institution and the faculty. Students increasingly view themselves as purchasers of a product and demand a certain level of satisfaction, most fundamentally of which is the

marketability of their education (Gedye & Beaumont, 2018). As a result, students challenge institutional and faculty practices based on a consumer identity (Gedye & Beaumont, 2018). The pinnacle of the consumer identity are legal cases in which students sue their colleges for the full cost of their tuition and fees because they are unable to find a job after graduation. The neoliberal focus on wealth and economic success can help understand a radical shift in students' goals, motivations, and their purpose of going to college (Cheng et al., 2021). The economic focus of contemporary students is supported through further findings, including a 71% agreement with the statement "the chief benefit of a college education is to increase one's earning power," up from 54% in 1969 (Donald et al., 2018, p. 5). In addition, almost three quarters of students now indicate they are attending college to be able to make more money, up from one half in 1971 (Donald et al., 2018). Tymon (2013) notes that this trend began in the 1970s and peaked in the late 1980s, which matches the timeframe of the beginning of neoliberalism and its most dominant period.

Hypothesis, Variables, and Data Collection

In studying the perceptions of Florida voters on the goals of higher education and recent institutional efforts in achieving them, a proposed hypothesis, as supported by the existing literature, was created. It was proposed that Florida registered voters would predominantly find the transmission of career skills as the most important goal of higher education. Furthermore, considering the widely accepted view that moving to online learning decreased the overall quality of education, the hypothesis also included the belief that participants would see a lack in achieving the transmission of career skills by institutions of higher learning. The study's independent variables were participants' party affiliation, age, race, gender, religion, and level of education. The dependent variables were their perception of the most important goals of higher education and goal achievement efforts in 2021–2022.

Individual questions pertaining to the nature of the study were fielded on a survey conducted by the Public Opinion Research Lab (PORL) at the University of North Florida (UNF). The exact wording of the questions was as follows:

> The next few questions are about public, higher education in the State of Florida. I am going to read you four commonly cited goals of higher education. Please tell me which of the following goals is most important for public colleges and universities.
>
> 1. Transmit cultural knowledge
> 2. Transmit intellectual skills
> 3. Transmit career skills
> 4. Reshape the values of society
> 5. Don't know
> 6. Refusal
>
> Thinking of that most important goal, how well do you think that public colleges and universities are currently doing at accomplishing that goal?
>
> 1. Very well
> 2. Somewhat well
> 3. Not very well
> 4. Not well at all
> 5. Don't Know
> 6. Refusal
>
> Thinking about that same goal, how well are colleges and universities doing now compared to one year ago?
>
> 1. Better
> 2. About the same

3. Worse
4. Don't know
5. Refusal

The PORL, opened in 2001, is an independent, non-partisan center, a charter member of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) Transparency Initiative, and a member of the Association of Academic Survey Research Organization. As members of AAPOR, the PORL's goal is to support sound and ethical practices in the conduct of survey and public opinion research, thus all the ethical procedures associated with human research guidelines have been strictly upheld.

As the national legislature looks for novel ways to provide access to quality schooling given the constraints created by the pandemic and the policy discussions within academia that have received widespread media attention locally and nationwide, the UNF PORL Florida Statewide Poll comprised registered Florida voters. The survey of 685 individuals was conducted over a two-week period in February 2022, by the PORL at UNF. The focus was placed on Floridians, given not just the convenience of data collection but also the opportunity to focus on a real-world example of higher education development in action. The landline and cell phone numbers used for this survey were sourced from the December 2021 update of the Florida Central Voter File as the most convenient and accurate source of the sampling frame required for this study. Voters were chosen over the general adult population since voters have more influence on educational change through policy implementation. In other words, politicians cannot make policy without voter support.

Respondents were contacted by live callers via the telephone from 4:30 to 9:00 p.m. daily with up to two callbacks attempted. PORL interviewers administered surveys in both English and Spanish. Data collection took place at the PORL facility with its 27-station Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) system. The margin of sampling error for the total sample is +/– 3.74 percentage points. Upon reaching the individual as specified in the voter file through hand dialing, an interviewer asked the respondent to participate, regardless of landline telephone or cellphone.

Data Analysis

This study had a 4% response rate. The AAPOR Response Rate 3 (RR3) calculation was used which consists of an estimate of what proportion of cases of unknown eligibility are truly eligible. While the low response rate may be troubling, it is important to point out the existence of a larger national trend in which typical telephone survey response rates have fallen to 7% and 6%, respectively (Kennedy & Hartig, 2019). But low response rates don't necessarily indicate that telephone polling is broken. Studies examining the impact of low response on data quality have generally found that response rates are an unreliable metric of accuracy. For instance, Pew Research Center studies conducted in 1997, 2003, 2012, and 2016 found little relationship between response rates and accuracy, and other researchers have found similar results (Kennedy & Hartig, 2019).

While low response rates don't render polls inaccurate on their own, they shouldn't be completely ignored, either. A low response rate does signal that the risk of error is higher than it would be with higher participation. To remedy the possible disparity in representation, the issue is corrected by standard weighting adjustment. For this reason, upon collection, data were weighted by partisan registration, age, race, sex, education, 2020 vote choice, and geography. Education weights were created from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) 2019 estimates for the percent of college-educated individuals within each stratum in the state of Florida, approximately 29% statewide. Partisan registration, sex, race, and age weights were created from the December 2021 update of the Florida Voter File to match the active registered voters in Florida. These weights are appropriate for the sample of responders as those are the main individual voter demographics that have been found by political science scholars to impact voter choice and are used by polling companies alike (Plutzer, 2017).

All weighted demographic variables were applied using the SPSS version 26 rake weighting function, which will not assign a weight if one of the demographics being weighted is missing. In this case, respondents missing a response for any of the demographic information were given a weight equal to their weight for the remaining demographics. There were no statistical adjustments made due to design effects. To ensure a representative sample of likely voters, the state of Florida was stratified into 11 strata. Miami-Dade County was separated from its designated media market area due to population density. Quotas were placed on each of these stratified areas to ensure a proportionate number of completed surveys.

Results and Discussion

Best States 2021 ranking, an interactive platform for citizens and government leaders developed by U.S. News for ranking states alongside news analysis and daily reporting about what social services need improvement across the country, illustrates hopes for higher education in the country. The metrics used for ranking states on their level of educational attainment comprised of sub rankings including the shares of citizens in each state holding college degrees, the time it takes students to complete both two- and four-year college programs, the cost of in-state tuition and fees, and the burden of debt that college graduates carry (Ziegler, 2021). Florida, home to three universities that rank among the 100 best colleges nationally, ranked first in the nation for higher education. The state was reported to be 40.6% college educated and ranked 2nd in 2-year college graduation rate, 6th in 4-year graduation rate, 7th in low debt at graduation, 29th in educational attainment, and 1st in tuition and fees (Ziegler, 2021).

The results of this research do not reflect the same type of enthusiasm held by Florida voters about the quality of their own college system. Thus, the proposed hypothesis was only partially proven. Higher Education goals used in this research, as modeled on Sprague's (1999) goals, were (a) transmitting cultural knowledge, (b) transmitting intellectual skills, (c) transmitting career skills, and (d) reshaping the values of society. Agreeing with Sprague's goal (c) and supporting literature about higher education being a conduit for career skill attainment used to form the first part of the hypothesis, almost half of the sample (45.3%) believed that the main goal of higher education is to transmit career skills. The second highest rating of 24.8% was given to the transmission of intellectual skills and the third with 16.9% to reshaping the values of society (see Table 1). Transmitting cultural skills, with only 6% response rate, is the least important goal of higher education according to Floridians (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics for "Goals": Goals of Higher Education*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Transmit Cultural Skills	41	6.0	6.0	6.0
Transmit Intellectual Skills	170	24.8	24.8	30.8
Transmit Career Skills	310	45.3	45.3	76.1
Reshape the Values of Society	116	16.9	16.9	93.0
Don't Know	37	5.4	5.4	98.4
Refusal	11	1.6	1.6	100.0
Total	685	100.0	100.0	

Yet, the second part of the hypothesis failed to be supported. In gauging Florida voters' perceptions on how well colleges are doing at the present time in achieving these goals, the frequencies of possible survey answers reveal that 37.8% of the sample expressed somewhat well, 21.5% not very well, 16.4% not well at all, 12.7% not knowing, and 1.9% refusing to answer (see Table 2). Only 9.8% saw higher education public institutions as effective in their goal achievement (see Table 2).

This shows that on average Floridians are divided on higher education's ability to teach valuable skills with 50.6% negative feedback and 47.6 % positive (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics for "Well": Present Goal Accomplishment*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very Well	67	9.8	9.8	6.0
Somewhat Well	259	37.8	37.8	47.6
Not Very Well	147	21.5	21.5	69.1
Not Well at All	112	16.4	16.4	85.4
Don't Know	87	12.7	12.7	98.1
Refusal	13	1.9	1.9	100.0
Total	685	100.0	100.0	

These dispersed statistics are also evident in higher education goals achievement ratings from today as compared to a year ago. Possible survey answer choices included (1) better, (2) about the same, (3) worse, (4) don't know, and (5) refusal. Collectively, 43.5% saw improvement and 20.3% perceived goal attainment as only having worsened (see Table 3). Almost a quarter of the population neither knew enough about the atmosphere of higher academia in the last two years to answer whether there was perceived improvement in goal accomplishment or refused to do so altogether (see Table 3).

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics for "Compare": Comparison of Goal Accomplishment in 2021–2022*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Better	88	12.8	12.8	12.8
About the Same	298	43.5	43.5	56.4
Worse	139	20.3	20.3	76.6
Don't Know	144	21.0	21.0	97.7
Refusal	16	2.3	2.3	100.0
Total	685	100.0	100.0	

This questions the level of interest Florida constituents attach to higher education issues and news and their level of knowledge on the topic. Yet when asked at the beginning of the statewide voter survey conducted by UNF's PORL about the state issues they find the most pressing, education was the 2nd most ranked, right below economy/employment (UNF Press Release, 2022). It is possible then, that while Floridians genuinely find education an important policy area, their opinions are not solid and stable enough to express more in-depth views.

Partisan registration, race, age, gender, education level and religion, as proven significant factors affecting poll outcomes, were also of interest as possible influences affecting constituents' perceptions of the goals of higher education. To test whether Florida voters' perceptions of higher education goals, the continuous dependent variable, is influenced by the above-mentioned independent categorical variables, one-way ANOVA tests at the significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ were conducted. These relationships yielded surprising results. Partisanship (Table 4), age (Table 5), gender (Table 6), and race (Table 7) were not strong predictors of Florida voters' opinions of the most important goal of higher education. This is rather surprising as one could assume that the specific reasons for obtaining a degree from institutions of higher learning would be more applicable and of high importance to younger voters.

Table 4. *Relationship between Goals of Higher Education and Partisanship*

Source of Variation	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	19.829	5	3.966	1.555	.171
Within Groups	1731.865	679	2.551		
Total	1751.693	684			

Table 5. *Relationship between Goals of Higher Education and Age*

Source of Variation	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	2.255	3	.752	.340	.796
Within Groups	643.046	291	2.210		
Total	645.302	294			

Table 6. *Relationship between Goals of Higher Education and Gender*

Source of Variation	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	3.205	1	3.205	1.252	.264
Within Groups	1748.488	683	2.560		
Total	1751.693	684			

Table 7. *Relationship between Goals of Higher Education and Race*

Source of Variation	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	2.004	3	.668	.260	.854
Within Groups	1749.689	681	2.569		
Total	1751.693	684			

The two statistically significant influences on voters' perception of higher education goals were level of education (see Table 8) and religion (see Table 9). Thus, while age per se is not a strong predictor of what people think is the purpose of higher education, attending college or having obtained a college degree do play an important role in one's view of higher education objectives. In turn, the influence of religion as a factor for one's perspectives of the goal of higher education can be explained by a religious person's call for self-improvement and a strong work ethic. For instance, the Bible teaches Christians to have a godly work ethic that makes them the best possible employers and employees (Colvin & McCracken, 2017). As James, the author of the Book of James in the Christian Bible said, "Faith without works is dead." The Christian must live out their faith by the things they do (Colvin & McCracken, 2017). Thus, if one happens to be a Christian and a college student, as driven by their faith, it is fair to assume that they believe they must try their best.

Table 8. *Relationship between Goals of Higher Education and Education Level*

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between Groups	119.374	6	19.869	8.264	.000
Within Groups	1632.319	678	2.408		
Total	1751.693	684			

Table 9. *Relationship between Goals of Higher Education and Religion*

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between Groups	53.379	8	6.672	2.653	.007
Within Groups	1697.621	675	2.515		
Total	1751.000	683			

While individual sociodemographic factors such as partisanship, age, gender, and race are not direct factors influencing voters' views on higher education goals, they come into play in some capacity. For instance, UNF's PORL survey shows that out of the overall percentage of registered Florida voters polled who chose education as the top issue of concern in Florida politics, 14% were Republican and 12% had no party affiliation (UNF Public Opinion Research Lab, 2022). In contrast, the more widely recognized champions of social services, the Democrats, got 10%. Furthermore, Whites (14%) and Blacks (13%) perceived education as a more important issue than Hispanics (6%) or those who identified as Other (6%). Out of 685 participants, 20% of males and 22 % of females found education as the most important state issue, illustrating that both genders care about the education system working properly. Young and median age adults, 18- to 44-year-old (20%), were significantly more concerned about education than 45–65+ adults, who ranged from 3% to 9% only. An assumption can be made that those younger than 50 find education a personal issue because they are college students themselves, parents of such students, recent graduates, or active members of the workforce. Older voters may be less concerned with these issues because of their weaker personal attachment to it not having been in college for two decades and/or having retired.

Limitations of the Study and Implications for Future Research

While this research was relevant in gauging Florida voters' perception of the goals of higher education and their goal achievement between 2021 and 2022, there are certain study limitations that need addressing. As part of a larger UNF PORL Statewide poll, this research data was gathered with the use of three questions. The participant responses provided vital information that can be used by stakeholders like state and local politicians galvanizing support for educational policies and by higher education institutions seeking to improve the quality of the public/private service they provide and their image among the populace. Nonetheless, data is limited in scope based on the limited number of questions asked. Thus, this research should be used as a building block for further studies. Future research should include a singular survey entirely dedicated to voter views on the many aspects of higher education. It would also be helpful to know to what degree the study findings change if different goal choices are presented to the participants. Future research efforts should also give a larger focus to participant sociodemographic characteristics as possible influences behind their views of higher education.

Conclusion

Institutions of higher learning need to adapt to the changing times if they want to stay competitive in a global market for educational programs. In doing so, they must clearly articulate their professional goals. As a social service reliant for survival on student enrollment, oftentimes colleges and universities define their overarching objectives based on societal expectations and pressures. Believing it to be of pertinence for university and college administration, state legislators, students, and constituents alike, this research gauged the general level of satisfaction with higher education in the last year and investigated the most societally significant goal of higher education among Florida voters in a statewide 2022 poll. Based on four traditionally believed goals of higher education from Jo Sprague's (1999) writing, Floridians found transiting career goals to be the most pertinent to the practical aspects of student adult life. Yet, voters do not see much improvement in institutional efforts moving towards this goal in the last year. Public colleges across Florida should take the data gathered seriously and make it their basis for institutional self-reflection and a building block for positive change within the Florida College System.

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