



EDUCATION FEBRUARY 25, 2014

PRINT SHARE

Higher Education's Work Preparation Paradox

by Brandon Busteed

It doesn't matter who you ask -- the U.S. population, college freshmen, or parents of fifth- through 12th-graders -- they all say the same thing: the purpose of going to college is to *get a good job*. Getting a college degree is no longer enough. Americans have clearly made up their minds about the importance of colleges in preparing students to get good jobs, but measurements of this outcome are murky at best and nonexistent at worst.

A whopping 96% of chief academic officers at higher education institutions say their institution is "very or somewhat" effective at preparing students for the world of work. That's an awful lot of confidence, considering how U.S. business leaders and the American public judge higher education institutions on this same measure. Gallup found that a mere 14% of Americans strongly agree that college graduates are well-prepared for success in the workplace. And barely one in 10 (11%) business leaders strongly agree that college graduates have the skills and competencies that their workplaces need. There is clearly a massive disconnect between higher education and the marketplace in terms of what it means to be prepared for work.

It is possible that chief academic officers are operating with their heads in the sand. Or maybe Americans and business leaders are just being very tough critics. The truth is probably somewhere in the middle. The biggest problem is that no one really knows, because the level of intentional collaboration between higher education and employers is downright pathetic at the moment. Sure, there are wonderful examples of unique collaborations between universities and businesses, but they are rare. And there is certainly no evidence that leaders in higher education intentional collaboration between higher education and employers is downright pathetic at the moment. Sure, there are wonderful examples of unique collaborations between universities and businesses, but they are rare. And there is certainly no evidence that leaders in higher education are taking this work seriously or that employers see it as mission-critical to the future of our country, nor is it being brought to great scale. This needs to change in a hurry.

intentional collaboration between higher education and employers is downright pathetic at the moment. Sure, there are wonderful examples of unique collaborations between universities and businesses, but they are rare. And there is certainly no evidence that leaders in higher education are taking this work seriously or that employers see it as mission-critical to the future of our country, nor is it being brought to great scale. This needs to change in a hurry.

Right now, states and the federal government are cutting funding to higher education when they should be investing in it. Indeed, the pipeline for all jobs and job creation in the U.S. is our educational system. Without it, our economy dies. Our problem is that we are not aiming the educational system at jobs and job creation.

Too many degrees are conferred in fields that don't align with job opportunities. And too few students across all majors and disciplines are getting real world experience working on real problems. This is not about cutting art history or philosophy majors necessarily, but it *is* about making sure all majors provide relevant exposure to critical thinking, collaboration, application of knowledge, and real world experience. It's also about getting back to the fundamentals of great teaching -- caring deeply about student development and providing real mentoring. It will be about designing curricula that expose students to real work and real jobs at the very beginning of their education, instead of at the very end. Most of all, it will be a Herculean commitment on the part of higher education leaders and employers to build strong partnerships for sharing resources and facilities, creating curricula together, providing internships, mentorships, and much more.

We need to move toward a goal of shared responsibility for higher education in America. We all need to step up here -- students, faculty, institutions of higher education, and employers alike. We all want good jobs. We all value higher education. What we need to do now, is build the world's most effective bridge between the two.

The Work-Preparation Paradox



Sources: Lumina Foundation/Gallup Poll 2013; The 2013 Inside Higher Ed Survey of College & University Chief Academic Officers report

For more about findings from the Gallup-Lumina Foundation Poll on Higher Education, [click here](#).

Brandon Busteed is Executive Director, Education and Workforce Development, at Gallup.

GET ARTICLES IN RELATED TOPICS: [Education](#), [Gallup-Lumina Foundation Study on Higher Education](#), [Opinion](#), [The Gallup Blog](#)

GALLUP DAILY

REAL UNEMPLOYMENT
Department of Labor (U-6)

9.7% -

GALLUP GOOD JOBS
Percent of Adult Population

46.3% +0.1

ENGAGED AT WORK

35.0% +0.9

ECONOMIC CONFIDENCE

-9 +2

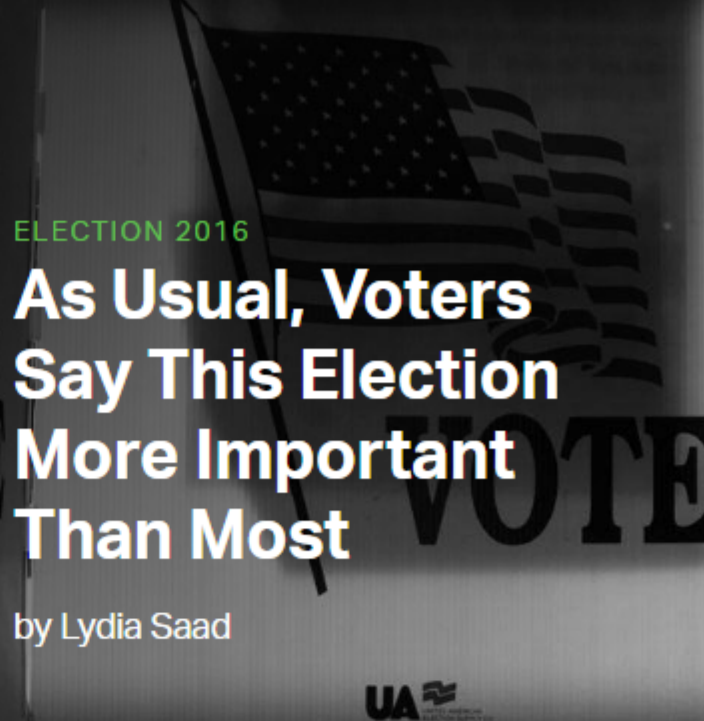
CONSUMER SPENDING

\$106 +3

OBAMA APPROVAL

54% -1

Updates daily at 1 p.m. ET; reflects one-day change



by Lydia Saad

REPORT

Diversity Gaps in Computer Science
Exploring why girls, blacks and Hispanics are underrepresented in the field of computer science

RELATED NEWS

HIGHER EDUCATION
Aiming Higher Education at Great Jobs and Great Lives

OPINION APR 24, 2015

America's "No Confidence" Vote on College Grads' Work Readiness

by Brandon Busteed

Ninety-six percent of Americans say it is "somewhat" or "very" important for adults in the country to have a degree or certificate beyond high school.

OUR COMPANY

- About Gallup
- Methodology Center
- George Gallup
- Careers at Gallup

- Senior Scientists and Advisers
- Global Offices
- Media & Speaker Inquiries
- Trends A-Z

INQUIRIES

- Questions, comments and observations
- Questions about your Gallup.com account
- Have a Gallup expert contact you
- Request a Gallup expert for a speaking engagement

FOLLOW US

