

# **2012 Survey Of America's College Students**

Conducted On Behalf Of:  
**The Panetta Institute For Public Policy**

**By Hart Research Associates**

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Hart Research Associates  
1724 Connecticut Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20009  
202-234-5570

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## I. Introduction

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This report analyzes the findings of a survey among American college students conducted by Hart Research Associates for the Panetta Institute for Public Policy. Since 2001, the Panetta Institute has sponsored a yearly survey among U.S. college students that yields invaluable insights into their opinions. Because of the research's continuity and depth, it truly is one of the best barometers for measuring college students' attitudes. Hart Research is honored to have conducted this important research on behalf of the Panetta Institute, and we present the results in this summary of key findings.

The 2012 Panetta Institute survey explores a wide range of issues, including college students' feelings about the current direction of the country as well as their feelings about the future, ratings of President Obama, an assessment of the country's political leadership and the 2012 elections, how closely college students follow the issues of the day, the state of the economy and students' job prospects, social networking usage and related privacy concerns, and interest in public service. These are among the highlights of this year's study:

- College students have become a little more optimistic about the direction of the country from last year. While more students still believe that the country is off on the wrong track (46%) than headed in the right direction (43%), the margin is smaller than in 2011 when 50% said wrong track and 37% said right direction.
- Students continue to view the economy largely in negative terms, with 79% stating that the nation's economy is not so good (61%) or poor (18%) and only 21% saying that the economy is excellent or good. This is an improvement from last year's outlook (85% not so good/poor, 15% excellent/good), but students still have a bleak outlook.
- The economy is the most important issue for students in terms of the presidential election, with 43% saying this is the case, followed by domestic issues (35%), social issues (17%), and international issues (4%).
- Satisfaction with the quality of the country's political leadership has declined since 2011, with only 47% of students saying they are satisfied and 51% saying they are dissatisfied. In 2011 a majority were satisfied (56%) and 41% were dissatisfied.
- Related, students are paying less attention to the 2012 presidential campaign (66% a lot of some attention) than they did in either 2008 (82%) or 2004 (76%). And college students are less likely to be active currently in a presidential campaign than they were at this time in 2008 (7% compared with 16%).

- A majority (52%) of college students believe that the country needs a third political party. And 38% of college students identify with either the Occupy Wall Street or Tea Party movement.
- Barack Obama continues to receive strong support from college students both personally and professionally. Fully 57% of college students have positive personal feelings toward the president and 24% have negative feelings toward him. And 67% approve of the job that Barack Obama is doing as president.
- On the other hand, the Republican primary has had a negative impact on the Republican Party as 50% of college students say it has made them feel less favorable toward the Republican Party and 9% say it has made them feel more favorable toward it. And the four Republican challengers all are viewed more negatively than positively by college students, including the presumptive nominee, Mitt Romney (21% positive, 42% negative).
- Obama leads Romney in a general election matchup by 58% to 25%, which is on par with Obama's lead against John McCain in the 2008 Panetta Institute survey (59% to 27%).
- The proportion of students who rely on Internet news Web sites to receive most of their information about politics and civic affairs continues to increase, as 59% now say this the case, up from 54% in 2011, and up from 29% in 2001, the first time this was measured. Conversely, in 2001 21% of college students reported that they received most of their information from community or city newspapers and now this is down to 8%.
- Students also rely on the Internet, specifically social networking Web sites, as a major source of keeping up with friends and family (69%). Many also rely on social networking sites to stay informed about events and activities sponsored by organizations (24%) and receiving information about politics and civic affairs (12%).
- Despite their reliance on the Internet and social media Web sites, many college students are concerned about how much information is available about themselves on the Internet (49% worry about this).
- And college students are divided about whether the information about them that is available online should be a consideration for employers and universities to use as part of an application review process (49% should be a consideration, 49% should not be a consideration).

**Methodology:** In an effort to reach a fully representative sample of college students, the survey's methodology consists of interviews conducted by telephone and online. Hart Research interviewed college students using traditional telephone interviewing based on list samples of college students at four-year higher-learning institutions nationwide. This list included a considerable number of cell phone numbers; we reached more than half the telephone respondents on their cell phone. In addition, Hart Research contracted with an online survey vendor to

administer an identical survey to a sample of people currently enrolled in some type of post-secondary institution drawn from the vendor's multi-million-member respondent panel. In the online survey, screening questions limited participation to students enrolled in a four-year higher-learning institution. A total of 806 interviews were completed. All interviews, whether by phone or online, were conducted from March 27 to April 3, 2012. Some demographics were weighted in each sample to achieve representative samples of four-year college students nationwide. The margin of error is  $\pm 3.5$  percentage points for the overall sample and is higher for specific subgroups.

## **II. State Of The Nation And The Issue Agenda**

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Overall, college students have become more optimistic about the direction of the country since last year, but attitudes are mixed. Taking a longer term view about the future, students have become more pessimistic about the country and more concerned about what the future will bring compared with last year. Students are much more optimistic about their future than the country's future.

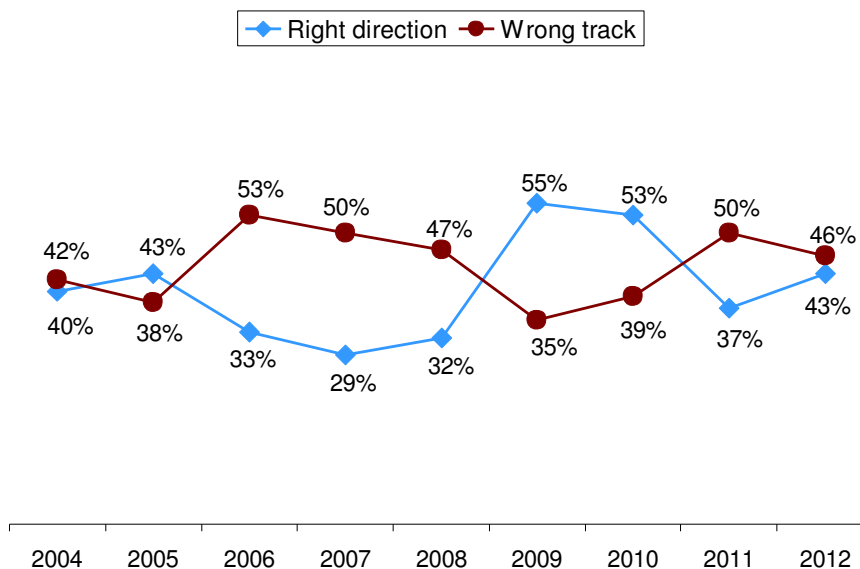
Today, 43% of college students say that things in the country generally are headed in the right direction whereas 46% feel that things are off on the wrong track. The proportion who says things are headed in the right direction has increased from last year's survey (37% right direction, 50% wrong track). Not only are college students more positive about the direction of the country than they were last year, but they also are more sanguine about where the country is headed compared with all adults, among whom just 33% say that the country is headed in the right direction and 59% say wrong track.<sup>1</sup> Attitudes toward President Obama and the economy do color perceptions of the country's direction. Among Democrats, 55% say that things are headed in the right direction, 36% wrong track, whereas both independents (35% right direction, 49% wrong track) and Republicans (31%, 59%) offer a more negative than positive assessment. For those who say that the economy is excellent or good, they believe that the country is headed in the right direction by three to one (66% right direction, 21% wrong track). Results are more mixed among college students who say that the economy is not so good (41% right

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<sup>1</sup> NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll conducted April 13-17, 2012

direction, 49% wrong track), and a negative outlook of the country's direction is provided by those who describe the economy as poor (27%, 63%).

## Direction Of The Nation



Although students' outlook on the country's direction has improved since last year, their attitudes about the country's future have declined from 32% who said that they were confident and secure about the country's future in 2011 to 24% in this year's survey who say the same, which also is the lowest proportion that we have recorded on this measure. Among those with larger declines in confidence from last year are men (from 38% to 24%) and Republicans (from 25% to 14%).

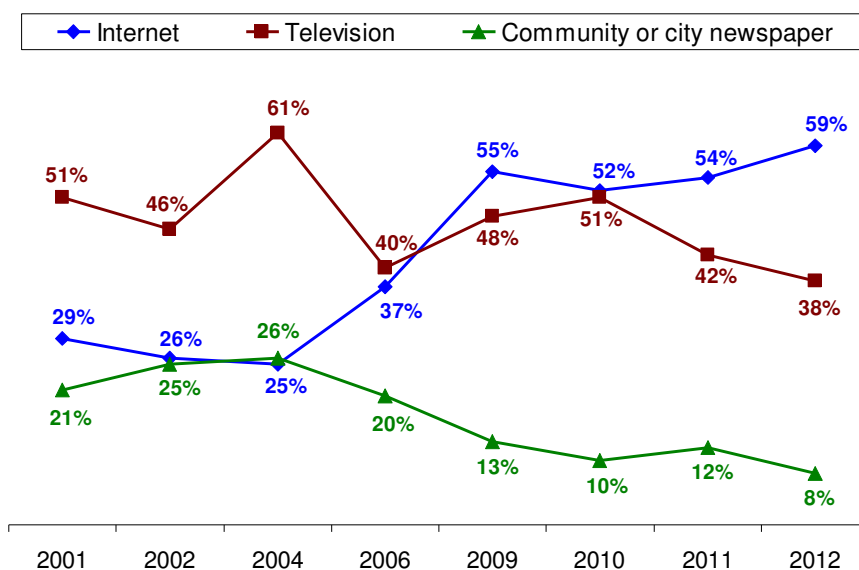
When asked to focus on their own future, college students are much more optimistic (49% confident/secure, 47% uncertain/concerned). Underclassmen are more confident than upperclassmen: freshman (53% confident/secure, 40% uncertain/concerned), sophomores (54%, 44%), juniors (46%, 51%), and seniors (44%, 53%). And students' economic ratings do color perceptions of their future outlook. For those who believe that the economy is excellent or good, 67% are more confident and secure about their future, 29% more uncertain and concerned; those who say the economy is not so good feel mixed (49%, 48%) and those who rate the economy as poor are pessimistic about their future (34%, 62%).

## News Sources And Attentiveness

The Internet, and specifically news Web sites, has become the predominant source for college students to receive information about politics and civic affairs. When it comes to specific news stories, college students are more closely following coverage about rising gas prices, the 2012 presidential elections, and the economy.

Going back to the 2001 Panetta Institute survey, just 29% of college students reported that they turned to Internet news Web sites for information about politics and civic affairs and today that proportion is 59%. Although television had been on par with the Internet for several years, it is now decidedly a second source for students at 38%. Family and friends have held relatively steady as the third most common news source (28%). And for the first year, Internet blogs have surpassed community or city newspapers as a news source (10% to 8%). Whereas the Internet has increased dramatically as a news source over the course of the survey's history, newspapers have declined significantly.

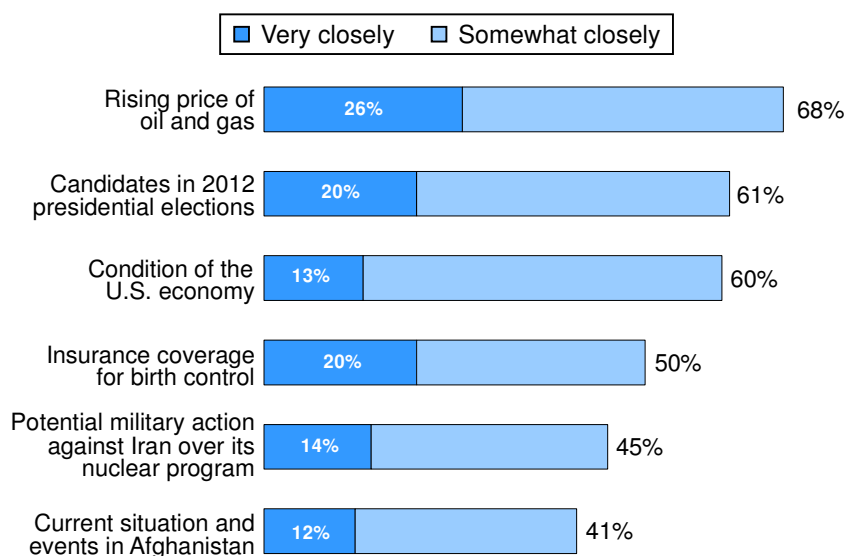
### Source Of Information On Politics And Civic Affairs



When it comes to news stories, college students are most likely to follow the rising price of gas (68% following very/fairly closely), the candidates in the 2012 presidential elections (61%), and the condition of the U.S. economy (60%). As is the case in general, students are more likely to follow domestic stories than international ones—with Iran's nuclear program (45%), Afghanistan (41%), and Syria (35%) further down the list. In general, students are not as likely to follow

stories closely compared with adults, for example, whereas 60% of students are following the economy closely 75% of adults are doing so. However, college students are following the 2012 presidential elections more closely than are adults (61% to 59%).<sup>2</sup> Seniors are more likely to follow the condition of the U.S. economy compared with just 51% for freshman. And women are more likely than men to closely follow the debate over insurance for birth control (57% to 42%).

## Following News Stories



### Focus On Domestic Issues

The previous results reveal that college students are more closely following domestic news stories than international ones; and college students also continue to believe that the problems that their generation will face are more national rather than international in scope. Students identify economic issues as the most important issue to them in determining their vote in the presidential elections.

Three in five (60%) college students say that most of the problems faced by their generation will be national compared with just 36% who say international. And this is relatively unchanged from recent surveys. In 2007, 44% of college students cited international problems while 47% believed their generation's problems would be national in nature. Since that survey, roughly three in five students believe problems for their generation will be national.

<sup>2</sup> Pew poll conducted March 15-18, 2012.



The economy and jobs is the issue that is most important to college students in determining their vote in the presidential election (43% select this option). Domestic issues such as health and education rank in second place (35%), with social issues such as gay rights and abortion (17%) and foreign policy issues such as Iran and Afghanistan (4%) much further down the list. Significant partisan differences exist, with Republicans and independents much more interested in economic issues whereas Democrats are more focused on domestic issues. And business majors are much more focused on economic issues than are other college students. To underscore the fact that college students are much more interested in domestic than foreign policy issues, even among those who say their generation will face more international than national problems, just 9% mention foreign policy as the most important type of issue for them in choosing between presidential candidates.

### Most Important Issues in Choosing Candidate

	<u>All College Students</u> %	<u>Demo- crats</u> %	<u>Indep- endents</u> %	<u>Repub- -licans</u> %	<u>Social Sciences</u> %	<u>Human- ities</u> %	<u>Science/ Math/CS</u> %	<u>Business</u> %
Economic issues, such as jobs and economic growth	43	33	45	58	32	38	44	59
Domestic issues, such as health and education	35	41	35	23	36	36	38	20
Social issues, such as gay rights and abortion	17	23	12	11	25	23	13	15
Foreign policy issues, such as Iran and Afghanistan	4	3	5	7	6	2	4	5

### International Issues

Despite recent events in Afghanistan, students are more likely to believe that the war has been successful. Students are more likely to say that the United States should not initiate military action in Iran. And when considering American involvement with the recent uprisings in Arab countries, college students prefer that we maintain our current level of involvement, though are much more likely to prefer that we become less involved rather than more involved.

By 50% to 44% college students believe that the United States should not initiate military action if Iran continues its nuclear research and is close to developing a nuclear weapon. In a recent poll among adults, Americans support military action by 52% to 40%.<sup>3</sup> Among college students, Democrats are much more likely to oppose military action (32% initiate, 63% should not initiate), whereas independents show a slight preference for military action (47%, 44%), and Republicans strongly support military action (62%, 35%). While a majority of women oppose military action (41%, 52%), men are more evenly divided (47%, 49%).

A majority (54%) of college students now say that the war in Afghanistan against the Taliban and Al Qaeda has been successful, with 42% saying it has been unsuccessful. The proportion who says the war has been successful has increased by 10 points from the Panetta Institute's 2011 survey (44% successful, 55% unsuccessful). The proportion of women who feel that the war has been successful has increased by 14 points (37% to 51%) and Democrats have recorded a 16-point increase (31% to 47%) on this measure.

A slim majority (51%) of college students want the United States to maintain its current level of involvement with uprisings in Syria, Libya, Egypt, and other Arab countries. However, students are four times more likely to want the United States to become less involved than more involved (37% to 9%).

## **Social Issues**

Student attitudes remain largely unchanged from last year's survey on both abortion and same-sex marriage, with large majorities supporting both keeping abortion legal and allowing same-sex marriage.

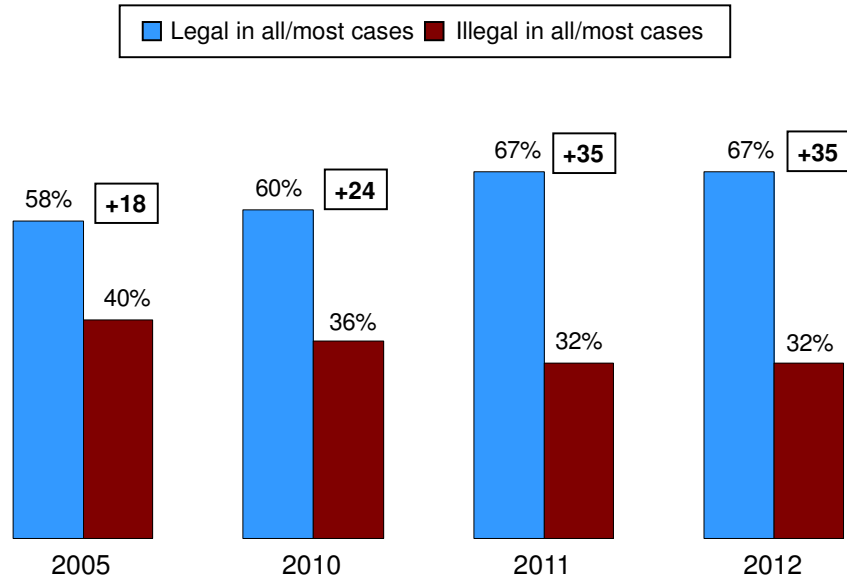
Two in three (67%) college students say that abortion should be legal in all (29%) or most cases (38%), with 32% feeling that abortion should be illegal in most (22%) or all cases (10%). Both men (68% legal, 31% illegal) and women (66%, 34%) largely support legal abortion. Students who attend a public institution (69%) are more likely than those that attend a private school (59%) to believe that abortion should be legal. Partisan and ideological divisions exist on abortion, with Democrats (82%, 18%) and liberals (86%, 14%) favoring legal

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<sup>3</sup> NBC News/WSJ poll conducted February 29-March 3, 2012.

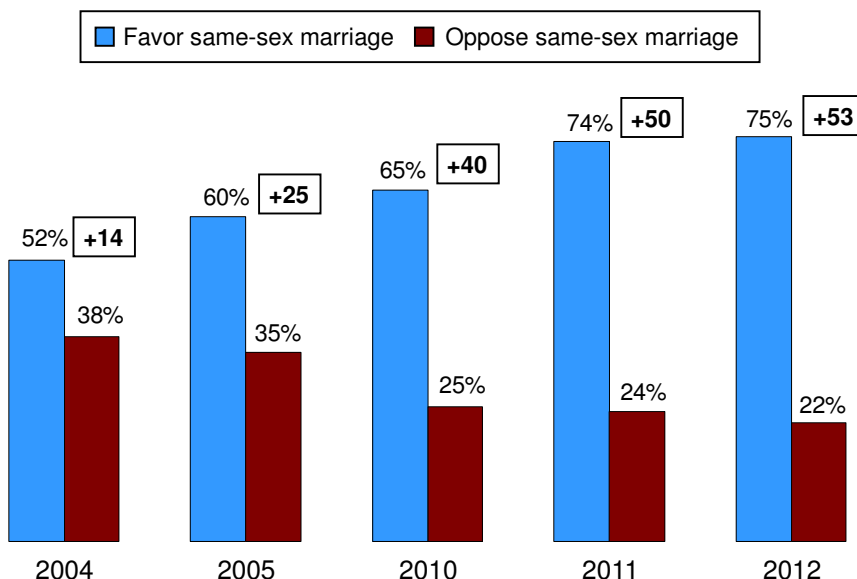
abortion and independents (60%, 39%) and moderates (65%, 34%) also more likely to favor legal abortion, but Republicans (48%, 51%) and conservatives (38%, 60%) are much less supportive.

## Position On Abortion



College students also continue to strongly support same-sex marriage (75% favor, 22% oppose). These results are holding stable from last year (74% favor, 24% oppose). We again see partisan and ideological cleavages on this measure with overwhelming support for same-sex marriage among Democrats and liberals (90% favor, 9% oppose; 93%, 6% respectively) and independents and moderates (71%, favor, 23% oppose; 75% favor, 20% oppose), with a more mixed rating among Republicans and conservatives (52% favor, 43% oppose; 43% favor, 53% oppose).

## Views Of Same-Sex Marriage



### Health Care

While the Supreme Court's ruling on President Obama's health care legislation looms, on campus there still is widespread support for health care reform and opposition to repealing the law.

Three in five (61%) college students say it is a good thing that Congress passed the health care bill, with 33% who say it is a bad thing. This margin is relatively unchanged from the 2011 result (59% good thing, 35% bad thing). This is another issue for which major partisan and ideological differences exist, with strong majorities of Democrats (86% good thing, 9% bad thing) and liberals (85%, 11%) saying that it is a good thing that Congress passed the health care legislation and with majorities of independents (57%, 35%) and moderates (57%, 36%) also approving, whereas Republicans (23%, 71%) and conservatives (31%, 65%) largely are of the opinion that the health care bill's passage is a bad thing.

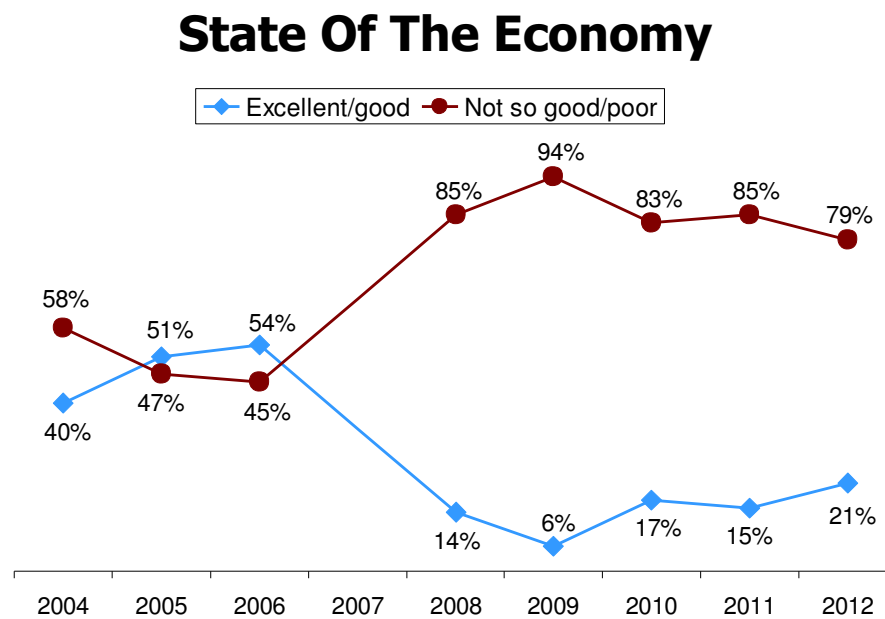
Majorities of college students also do not want to see the health care law repealed—by 59% to 33% students want the law kept as it is—and this is a stable result from last year's survey (55%, 38%). There also are similar partisan and ideological variations on this measure—Democrats (83% keep, 11% repeal) and liberals (79%, 14%), and independents (55%, 35%) and moderates (59%, 34%)

prefer the legislation kept as is with Republicans (20%, 70%) and conservatives (25%, 65%) firmly on the side of repealing the legislation.

## The Economy And Jobs

While other issues may have their day during the presidential campaign, it is extremely likely that for many college students and Americans, this election will come down to the economy.

College students continue to have a negative outlook on the nation's economy, though impressions have improved somewhat since last year's survey. Currently 21% describe the economy as excellent or good, up from just 15% in 2011. Still, students' evaluation of the economy remains quite low, as 79% say the economy is not so good or poor. And the downturn is particularly striking when looking back at the data prior to the great recession. In 2006 54% of college students offered an excellent or good rating of the economy whereas 45% said the nation's economy was not so good or poor.



Economic fairness also is a concern for many college students, as 50% say that the U.S. economic system is unfair and 45% believe that it is fair. This assessment mirrors attitudes among adults nationally (45% fair, 49% unfair).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Gallup poll conducted January 2012.

There are significant divisions on this question and this debate likely will be a significant part of the 2012 presidential campaign, with majorities of Democrats, independents, and Obama voters feeling that the economic system is unfair while Republicans and Romney voters believe the system is fair. Male students and college students who say they come from an upper or upper-middle-class upbringing are more likely to say the economy is fair but women and middle- and lower/lower-middle-class students are more likely to say the economy is unfair.

<b>Is the U.S. Economic System Fair?</b>		
	<u>Fair</u>	<u>Unfair</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
All students	45	50
Democrats	41	56
Independents	40	52
Republicans	56	38
Upper/upper-middle	57	35
Middle	43	53
Lower/lower-middle	33	63
Obama voters	41	55
Romney voters	56	40
Men	51	45
Women	39	55

Despite concerns about the economy, college students continue to prefer reducing the budget deficit to spending to help the economy recover by 62% to 35%. This is nearly unchanged from last year's survey (36%, 62%). And while the results are more mixed among Democrats, majorities across partisan lines prefer reducing the deficit—Democrats (53%), independents (58%), and Republicans (79%). While business majors are more likely to be Republican, they look more like Democrats on this issue, with 45% feeling that a greater priority should be placed on spending to help the economy recover and 51% say reducing the budget deficit.

In addition to a review of major issues of the day, college students also were presented with two questions to gauge their perspective on government involvement in cultural and economic issues. In cultural terms, students believe that government is too involved while in economic matters, students want to see government more involved.

Nearly two in three (65%) college students worry that government is getting too involved in the issue of morality while 33% say that government should do

more to promote morality in society. There is no partisan division on this cultural assessment as Democrats (64% government too involved), independents (66%), and Republicans (66%) all find common ground here.

However when it comes to economic matters, a slim majority of college students (54%) believe that we need a strong government to handle today's complex economic problems while 40% take the other side that states the free market can handle today's complex economic problems without government being involved. And the partisan unity dissipates on economic concerns as majorities of Democrats (68%) and independents (52%) agree that we need a strong government to handle economic problems while 63% of Republicans take the free market position.

What emerges from these two questions is a significant strain of libertarian attitudes among college students. In fact, three in 10 (30%) students take both libertarian positions on the economic and cultural statements. These libertarians are more likely to be Republican than the overall sample (45% compared with 28% overall) as well as white (72% compared with 65%). They are more likely to believe that the country is headed off on the wrong track (56% to 46%) and are net negative to all political figures with the exception of Ron Paul, who receives a 34% positive, 25% negative among these libertarian students. Even though nearly half are Republican, they only vote for Romney over Obama in the general election by 42% to 36%. In the Republican primary they divided their vote between Romney and Paul (31% to 30%). They believe that passage of the health care bill is a bad idea by 54% to 43%, but 64% say that abortion should be legal and 72% support same-sex marriage.

### **III. Attitudes Toward Political Leadership And Political Parties**

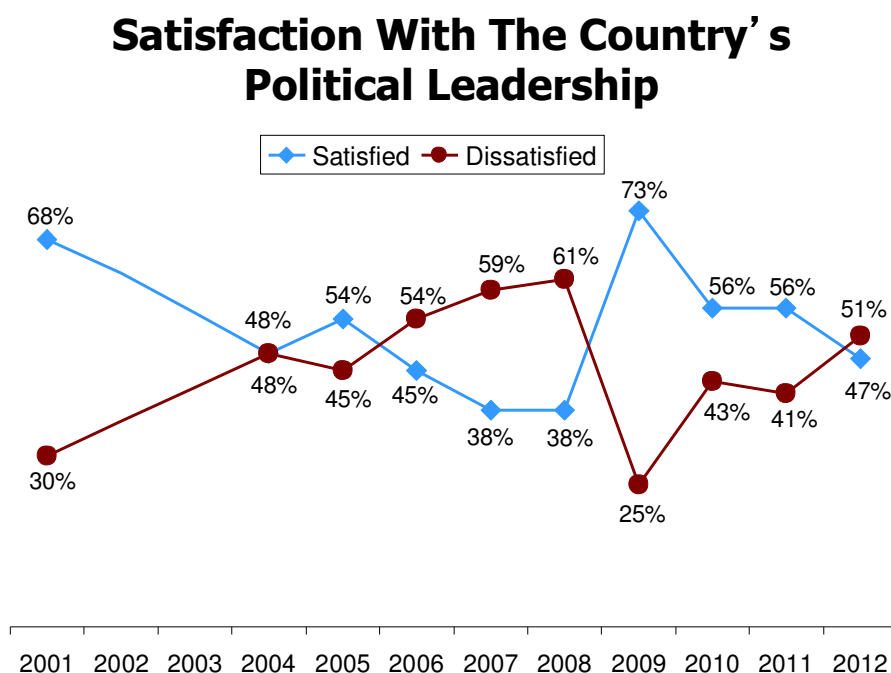
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As we approach the beginning stages of the 2012 general election campaign, for the first time since 2008 a majority of America's college students are dissatisfied with the country's political leadership. Students continue to provide Barack Obama with largely favorable personal and professional ratings, but offer negative evaluations of the Republican primary field. College students are less likely to say

that politics is relevant in their lives and a majority supports the creation of a third party.

While 47% of college students say that they are satisfied with the country's political leadership, 51% now say that they are dissatisfied. And this marks a significant shift from 2011 when 56% said they were satisfied and 41% were dissatisfied. The level of satisfaction among sophomores (from 60% satisfied to 43%) and those majoring in social sciences (60% to 46%) has declined further than among all college students. What should be particularly concerning for both parties is that the middle of the electorate and key subgroups have recorded larger decreases in satisfaction than the rest of college students:

- Independents are down 16 points (from 54% to 40%);
- Moderates are down 12 points (from 58% to 46%);
- Midwestern college students are down 14 points (from 62% to 48%);
- And Hispanics are down 16 points (from 63% to 47%).



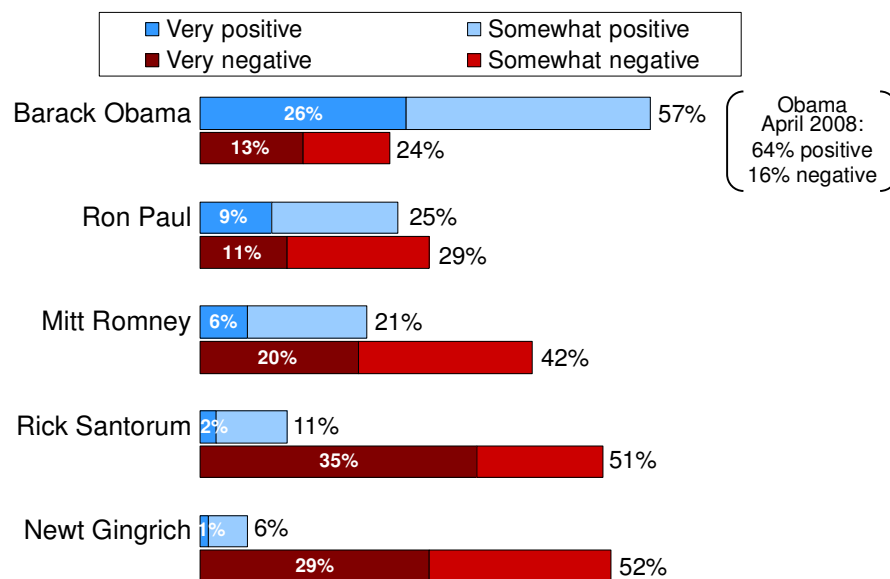
In looking at specific political figures, college students continue to have strongly positive personal feelings toward Barack Obama (57% positive, 24% negative). And while college students are a Democratic-leaning group in general, it should



concern Republicans that at the time of the survey their four remaining presidential candidates all had net-negative personal ratings among college students, including Mitt Romney, who is two to one negative (21% positive, 42% negative), Rick Santorum (11%, 51%), Newt Gingrich (6%, 52%), and Ron Paul (25%, 29%).

While Obama does fare much better than his potential Republican challengers, his personal ratings among college students have declined from 2008, prior to his election, from 64% positive, 16% negative to 57% positive, 24% negative. Still, 67% of college students approve of the job that Barack Obama is doing as president whereas 29% disapprove. This is a slight improvement from last year's survey (65% approve, 31% disapprove). And Obama's standing among college students is far better than it is among all Americans, among whom 49% approve, 46% disapprove of the job that he is doing.<sup>5</sup> Nine in 10 (90%) Democrats approve of the job that Obama is doing as president along with 63% of independents, while just 30% of Republicans approve.

## Feelings Toward Political Figures



Today, only half (50%) of American college students say that politics is very (18%) or fairly relevant (32%) in their life while 50% say politics is just somewhat (38%) or not at all relevant (12%). This is a new low and a significant decline in

<sup>5</sup> NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll conducted April 13-17, 2012.

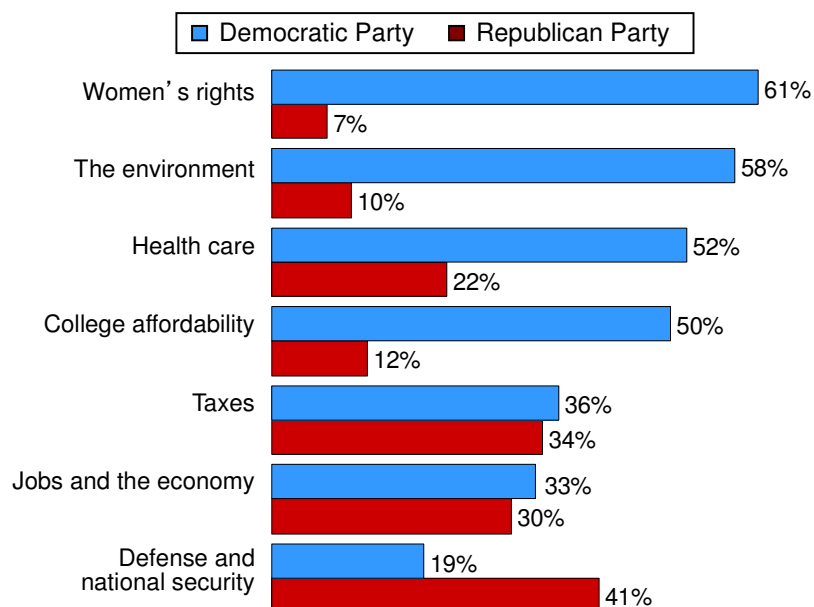
relevance from the last time this question was asked in 2006 (59% relevant, 41% just somewhat/not relevant at all).

Given the decline in satisfaction with the country's political leadership and relevance of politics in their life, as well as the low personal ratings for the Republican field, it is not surprising that a majority of college students (52%) say that the country needs a third political party in addition to the Democratic and Republican parties. Independents (63%) and moderates (59%) are more likely to say that the country needs a third political party. Students who identify themselves as supporters of the Occupy Wall Street movement also are more likely to feel this way (61%). And men (58%) are more likely than women (47%) to feel the need for a third party.

Not only is there strong support for a third party among college students, but 38% consider themselves to be a supporter of the Occupy Wall Street movement or Tea Party movement, which demonstrates that a significant proportion of college students are trying to engage in issues outside of the two-party system. Overall, 28% of college students identify with the Occupy Wall Street movement. OWS supporters are much more likely to be Democrats (44%) than independents (23%) or Republicans (7%). On the other hand, 12% of college students identify as supporters of the Tea Party movement, which is down somewhat from 16% in last year's survey. Republicans (23%) are more likely to be Tea Partiers than are independents or Democrats (8% respectively).

Regardless of a downturn in satisfaction with the country's political leadership, college students remain a Democratic-leaning group, with 48% identifying as Democrats, 24% as independents, and 28% as Republicans. Students are asked to select which party would do a better job on seven issues and Democrats hold significant advantages on four of the seven issues, including women's rights (+54), the environment (+48), college affordability (+38), and health care (+30). On only one issue, defense and national security, does the Republican Party hold a significant advantage (+22). However, there are two issues where attitudes are divided and one of these is the most important issue facing the country—jobs and the economy, where students favor the Democratic Party by only 33% to 30%. There also is a mixed result on taxes—36% say the Democratic Party would be better, 34% say the Republican Party.

## Which Party Is Better On These Issues?



### IV. 2012 Elections

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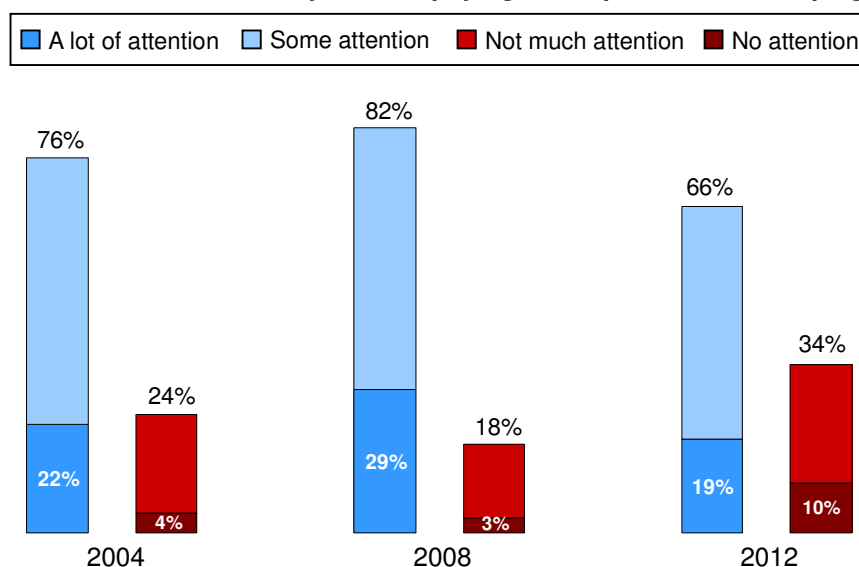
College students are paying less attention to the presidential campaign than they were in either 2008 or 2004 and fewer students report that they are active or plan to become involved in a campaign. The Republican primary has hurt the party far more than it has helped the party's image, and while Mitt Romney leads the race against the other Republican candidates, as many eligible Republican primary voters are undecided as support the former governor of Massachusetts. In the general election, Barack Obama holds a large lead over Mitt Romney, which is on par with his advantage over John McCain in 2008. Democrats have expanded their lead in the congressional elections from a low point in the 2010 mid-terms and now hold a 20-point advantage over Republicans.

Not only are college students less satisfied with the country's political leadership and relevance of politics in their life, but they also are paying less attention to the presidential campaign than they did in either 2008 or 2004. Given the historic nature of the 2008 campaign, it is not surprising that college students are less engaged than they were four years ago, but it is concerning that students are paying less attention to the campaign than they did in 2004. Today, 66% of college students say they are paying a lot or some attention to the campaign

compared with 82% in 2008 and 76% in 2004. Despite the fact that there has been a high-profile Republican primary, Democrats are slightly more likely to be paying attention to the campaign than Republicans (71% to 68%) while independents are paying less attention (54%). Asian students are much less likely to be paying attention than are other students (47%). And women are more likely to be following the campaign less closely than 2008 than other students, as their attention has dropped from 82% in 2008 to 61% now.

## Attention On Presidential Campaign

*How much attention have you been paying to the presidential campaign?*



Fewer college students say they have become active in a campaign or plan to do so compared with 2008. The 2008 Panetta Institute survey was conducted at a similar period of time in the campaign, and back then 16% of college students already had become active in a campaign and 20% planned to do so. Now just 7% have become active in a campaign and 21% plan to do so. And even though there has been a contested Republican primary, Democratic college students are just as likely to have become involved in a campaign as Republican students (8% and 7% respectively).

The Republican primary has hurt the party among college students. By 50% to 9% students say the Republican primary has made them less favorable rather than more favorable to the party, with 40% saying it has had no impact either way. Even Republicans are more likely to say that the primary has made them less favorable rather than more favorable by 29% to 16%.

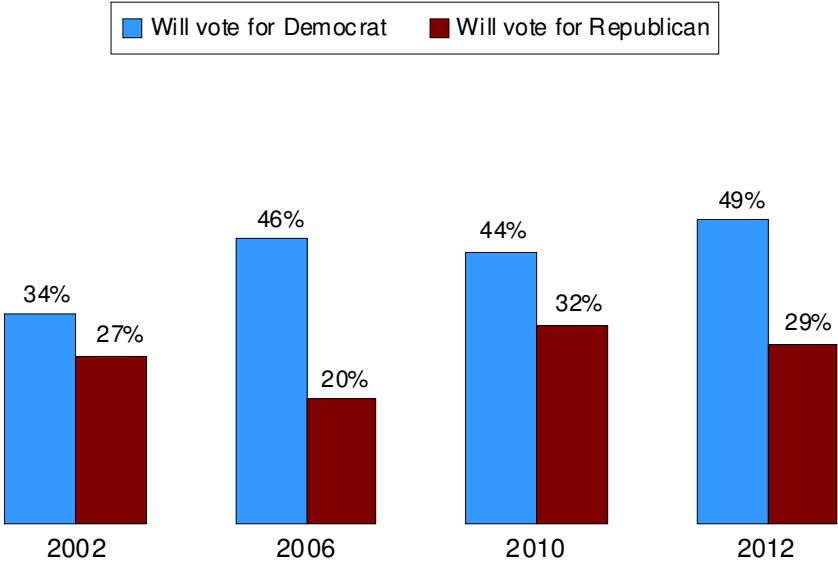
While Mitt Romney now looks to be the Republican nominee, the survey was conducted during a time when the primary was contested. Among all Republican and independent students, Romney led the race with 30%, followed by Ron Paul at 23%, Rick Santorum (9%), Newt Gingrich (4%), and 30% undecided, which underscores the issues with the Republican field. Ron Paul clearly has a following among some college students as also is demonstrated in his mixed personal ratings, compared with negative evaluations for the rest of the Republican field. However, his appeal in the primary is much more from independents than Republicans. Paul actually leads Romney by 30% to 20% among independents but loses to Romney by two to one among Republicans only (36% to 18%).

Turning to the general election, Barack Obama holds a 58% to 25% lead over the presumptive Republican nominee Mitt Romney. This is on par with his lead against John McCain in the April 2008 Panetta Institute survey (Obama 59%, McCain 27%). And as the following table illustrates, the breakdown among key subgroups today against Romney looks very similar to Obama's margins in 2008 against McCain, though Obama is trailing his 2008 margin among Hispanics and business majors. However, among the key group of independents, Obama is overperforming his 2008 margin.

<b>Presidential Trial Heats By Subgroup</b>				
	<u>Obama</u>	<u>McCain</u>	<u>Obama</u>	<u>Romney</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
All students	59	27	58	25
Men	58	29	58	26
Women	60	25	57	24
Northeast	64	21	65	21
South	62	24	56	25
Midwest	53	34	51	31
West	57	27	60	22
Whites	51	33	51	32
Hispanics	79	19	62	16
African Americans	87	4	82	5
Asians	68	17	69	8
Social sciences	65	27	57	26
Humanities	62	22	61	22
Science/math/CS	57	30	58	24
Business	60	26	49	30
Democrats	87	6	88	4
Independents	49	26	52	13
Republicans	15	68	10	70

Looking at the congressional elections, Democrats hold a 20-point advantage over Republicans among college students. This marks a significant improvement in Democrats' margin from a low-point in 2010 when Democrats held just a 12-point lead with students.

### Preference In Congressional Elections



Taking a closer look at the shift from 2010 reveals a number of subgroups that have returned to the Democratic fold. Most notably, in 2010 men were evenly split between both parties but are now voting for the Democratic candidate by 44% to 31%.

<b>Congressional Trial Heat By Subgroup</b>				
	<b>2010</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2012</b>
	<b>Democrat</b>	<b>Republican</b>	<b>Democrat</b>	<b>Republican</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
All students	44	32	49	29
Men	36	36	44	31
Women	51	29	53	27
Northeast	52	23	57	20
South	39	38	49	32
Midwest	43	38	42	36
West	45	26	49	26
Whites	38	39	41	37
Hispanics	47	25	56	23
African Americans	71	10	81	5
Asians	48	20	51	13
Social sciences	53	27	49	30
Humanities	48	29	56	23
Science/math/CS	38	31	49	29
Business	39	44	39	34
Democrats	78	5	85	2
Independents	24	18	31	18
Republicans	2	85	3	84
School size: Less than 5,000	41	40	51	30
School size: 5,001 to 20,000	46	29	49	33
School size: More than 20,000	45	31	49	28

College students also are asked their reactions on two issues related to the 2012 elections that have not yet become major issues of the campaign but have the potential to do so.

**Super PACs:** Two in three (66%) college students believe that Super PACs should not be legal while 29% feel that they should. Strong majorities of Democrats (74%) and independents (65%) say that Super PACs should NOT be legal while 54% of Republicans agree, but 42% of Republicans do believe that Super PACs should be legal.

**Voter ID Laws:** Two in three (67%) college students also say that new laws that tighten voter registration rules and require voters to show valid photo identification are a good thing, with 30% taking the alternative point of view and indicating that these are a bad thing. Fully 89% of Republicans say the laws are a good thing compared with 65% of independents and 55% of Democrats. Hispanic students are evenly divided about whether these new laws are a good thing or a bad thing (49% to 49%).

## V. Employment Opportunities And Public Service

Students remain confident about their ability to find an acceptable job after they graduate. Upon graduation, students are most interested in working in the private sector, but many also express high interest in working for government, a not-for-profit, or teaching. The proportion of students interested in running for public office remains relatively stable, with significant gender gaps continuing to exist as men are more likely than are women to say they would want to run for office. And nearly two in five students report that they would be interested in pursuing a service-oriented experience upon graduation.

In looking ahead to life after they receive their diploma, despite the challenging economy and concerns about the future of the country, college students remain confident in their own ability to succeed. Fully 69% of students are confident that after they graduate they will be able to find a job that is acceptable to them.

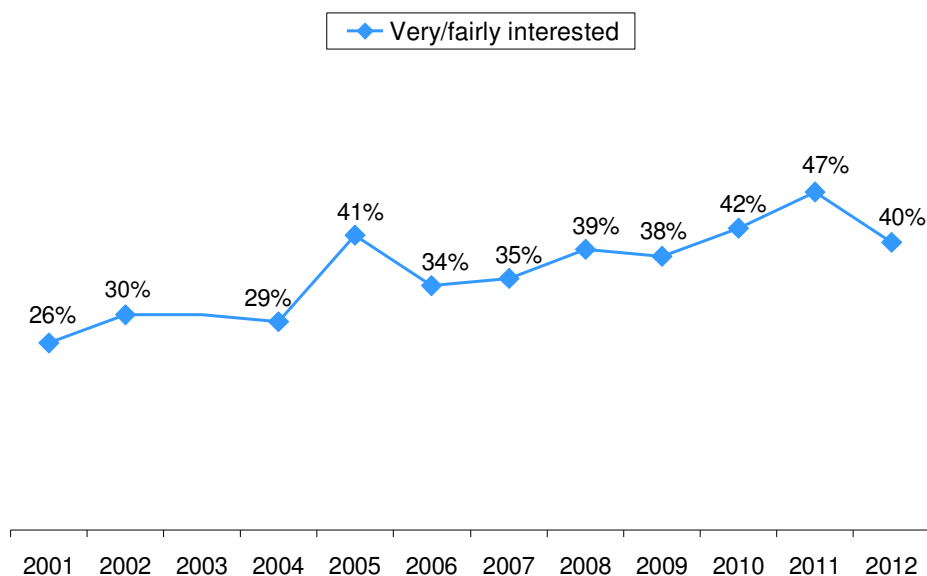
College students are most interested in working in the private sector (60% very/fairly interested), though significant proportions also mention high interest in working in the government (40%), working for a not-for-profit (38%), or teaching in a public school (27%). Roughly one in 10 (9%) students is very or fairly interested in serving in the military. As the following table reveals men are more likely to have interest in working in the private sector while women are more likely to have interest in working for a not-for-profit. And business majors are more likely to want to work in the private sector while those majoring in humanities are much more interested in teaching.

<b>Level Of Interest In Various Careers</b>							
<i>% Very/Fairly Interested</i>							
	<b>All College Students</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Social Sciences</b>	<b>Human- ities</b>	<b>Science/ Math/CS</b>	<b>Business</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Working in the private sector	60	68	53	57	54	64	71
Working in the government	40	42	38	49	40	40	30
Working for a not-for-profit community organization or foundation	38	29	46	49	42	34	31
Teaching in a public school	27	26	29	32	50	22	13
Serving in the military	9	13	6	13	7	8	2



Interest in working in government reached a new high in the 2011 survey but declined by seven points this year. Subgroups with larger declines include Hispanics (-10 points), men (-11), students in the Northeast (-15), conservatives (-15), business majors (-19), and Asians (-21).

## Interest In Working For Government



One in four (25%) students reports that they are interested in running for a federal elected office such as a Member of Congress or senator, which is a slight increase from 29% in last year's survey. As we have found in previous surveys, men (37%) are much more likely than women (16%) to be interested.

Three in 10 (30%) college students say they would be interested in running for a local or state elected office such as city council member or state legislator and this result is unchanged from last year. The gender gap at the local or state level is not as large as is found at the federal level, but men (34%) still are more likely to be interested in running than are women (26%).

Nearly two in five (38%) students have considered pursuing a service-oriented experience after they complete their undergraduate degree, such as Teach for America, VISTA, or AmeriCorps. Democrats (44%) are more likely than are independents (31%) or Republicans (34%) to consider a service-oriented experience, and those of an upper or upper-middle-class family background also are more likely to consider this (44%) than middle (39%) or lower to lower-middle-

class students (31%). And upperclassmen are much more likely than are underclassmen to have considered these experiences—freshman (29%), sophomores (28%), juniors (45%), seniors (48%).

Nearly one in two (47%) college students say that someone has spoken to them when they were either in high school or college about getting involved in politics or public service. Democrats (51%) are more likely to say this is the case than are independents (44%) or Republicans (41%). And men (51%) also are more likely to say someone talked to them about getting involved in politics or public service than are women (44%). Lastly, 49% of students who are registered to vote say this is the case compared with 38% for non-registered students.

And fully 77% of college students say that during their time in college they have been involved in activities that help the local community.

## **VI. Assessment Of Education**

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College students express high levels of satisfaction with the education that they have received in preparing them for life after graduation. More students report taking an online class for credit compared with last year's survey, though the perception that online courses do not offer the same quality of instruction continues to be a widely held belief.

The vast majority of students are satisfied with the education that they have received so far in college in helping them prepare for life after graduation as 86% report that they are either very (45%) or fairly satisfied (41%). This marks a slight improvement over last year's survey when 84% said they were satisfied.

The proportion of students who have taken online classes for credit has increased from last year and is up from 39% to 43% today. Just 19% of freshman report taking online classes, but these courses are much more prevalent among sophomores (42%), juniors (50%), and seniors (58%) and at public institutions compared with private schools (50% to 21%).

Most students continue to believe that online courses do not offer the same quality of teaching and learning opportunities as in-person classes (26% offer same quality, 71% do not offer same quality). In 2011, 21% of college students said online courses provided the same quality of instruction as in-person classes while 76% disagreed. However, those who have taken an online course are more likely

to say that it offers the same quality as an in-person class compared with students who have not taken an online class (33% to 19%).

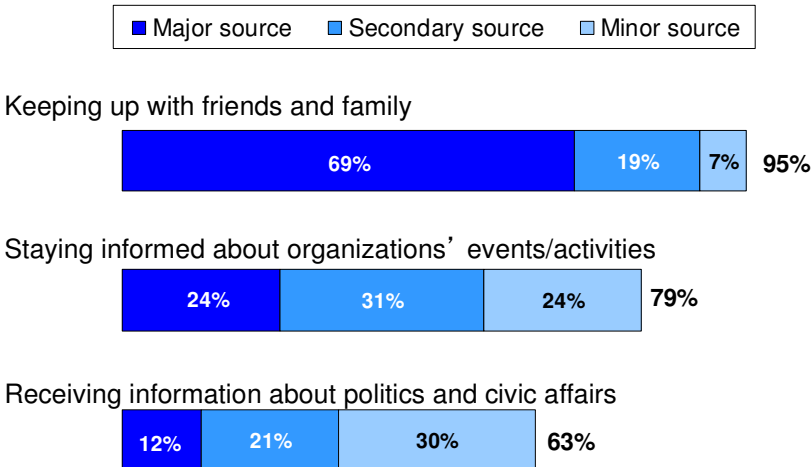
## VII. Social Networking And Personal Information

Social networking Web sites are a major source of information for students, particularly when it comes to interacting with friends and family. However, nearly one in two students worry that there is too much information available about them online. And college students are divided about whether the publicly available online information about them should be part of an application review process for their potential employers or graduate schools. Even so, most students believe that a review of this information would not make a difference either way for their chances of receiving a job or being accepted into graduate school, and more are likely to say this will help their chances rather than hurt them.

Most college students (69%) report using social networking Web sites as a major source for keeping up with friends and family. Significant proportions also use social networks as a major source to stay informed about events and activities (24%) and to receive information about politics and civic affairs (12%).

### Use Of Social Networking

*How much do you use social networking Web sites for each of these?*



While the use of social networking Web sites and the Internet in general is virtually ubiquitous among college students nearly one in two (49%) say that they

worry about how much information is available about them on the Internet. Women particularly are worried about how much information is available about them (55%) whereas men are less worried about this (41%).

College students are divided about whether employers or universities should consider applicants' online activities, such as their Facebook and Twitter accounts, as well as conducting a Google search, as part of the application process. Students are divided evenly at 49% who say this should be a consideration and 49% who say it should not be a consideration. There are significant divisions on this question across party lines, type of school, as well as between under- and upper-classmen, with students closer to graduation (and hopefully employment or graduate school) being less likely to say that a review of online activities should be a consideration.

<b>Should Online Activities Be Considered For Application Process</b>		
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
All students	49	49
Democrats	43	55
Independents	49	50
Republicans	59	49
Public school	46	52
Private school	59	40
Freshman	57	41
Sophomores	50	49
Juniors	45	54
Seniors	45	53

Despite divisions on whether a review of online activities should be a consideration, the vast majority of college students say that if a potential employer or graduate school received their online activity it would not really make a difference either way when it came to their chances of being hired or accepted. In fact, 74% say a consideration of their online activities would make no difference and students are more likely to say that a review would help their chances rather than hurt them by 17% to 8%.