

2010 Survey Of America's College Students

Conducted On Behalf Of:
The Panetta Institute For Public Policy

By Hart Research Associates

May 2010

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Introduction

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.

This year's survey explores a wide range of issues, including college students' feelings about President Obama and the direction of the country, the 2010 congressional elections, the state of the economy and students' job prospects, and interest in public service. These are among the highlights of this year's study:

- College students continue to express confidence in Barack Obama, and rate his performance much more highly than the country as a whole: 66% approve of his job performance, compared with 48% of the public in a contemporaneous survey. However, Obama's approval rating has declined 9 points since his 2009 "honeymoon" period.
- While two-thirds (66%) believe that Barack Obama understands college students' needs, just 21% say the same of Sarah Palin.
- College students continue to lean toward the Democrats as they consider the 2010 off-year elections, but there are clear warning signs for Democrats in this poll. Students are paying far less attention to this election than they were the historic 2008 presidential race—44% now, 82% in 2008—raising questions about college students' likely turnout in November. Moreover, Democrats' 12-point margin in the generic congressional ballot is much smaller than the 26-point lead they enjoyed at the same point in the 2006 cycle, and only slightly better than in 2002 (seven points) when Republicans elected congressional majorities.
- Students continue to view the economy as weak (83% say it is not so good or poor), and although they are not yet in the workforce, fully 40% say they have been personally affected a great deal or quite a bit by the economic downturn.
- Students' confidence in their ability to find an acceptable job after graduation, which declined in 2009, remains low: 36% of college students, including 45% of seniors, are just somewhat or not confident that they will find an acceptable job. The 64% expressing confidence is the lowest level the survey has ever recorded.
- Interest in a government career continues to rise among college students, with 42% now very or fairly interested—the highest mark we have ever recorded. While the recession may have contributed to this rise, there has been a fairly steady increase in this measure over the past nine years.
- The survey reveals a startling gender gap when it comes to interest in an eventual run for office, with men being twice as interested in running for federal office than women (men 36%, women 18%), and also more interested in pursuing local or state office (men 43%, women 28%).
- College students' support for same-sex marriage continues to grow, now reaching 65%, compared with just 52% in 2004.

- Students support a much more active government than the public as a whole, and they rate government's performance much more highly. By 51% to 30%, they say government should do more to solve problems, while among the public overall, 43% say government should do more and 48% believe the government is doing too many things.

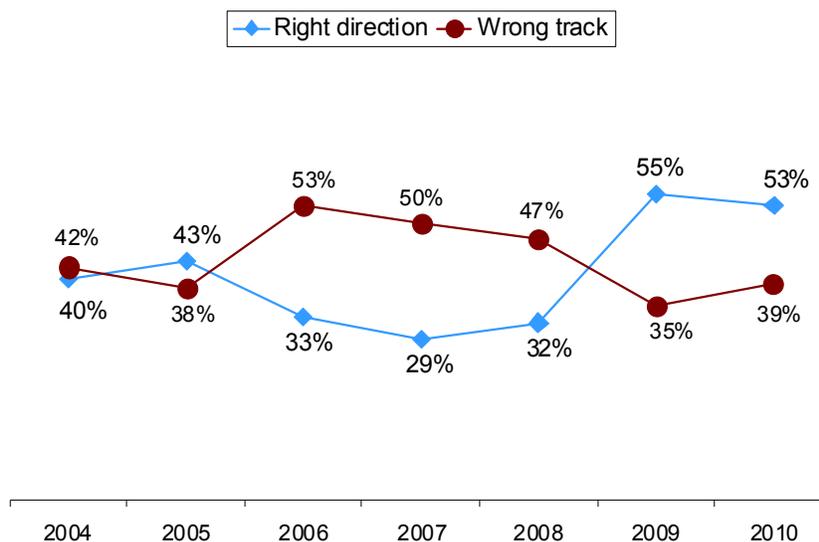
Methodology: In an effort to reach a fully representative sample of college students, the survey's methodology consists of interviews conducted by telephone and online. Hart Research interviewed 502 college students using traditional telephone interviewing based on list samples of college students at four-year higher-learning institutions nationwide. This list included a considerable number of cell phone numbers; approximately half the telephone respondents were reached 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 507 interviews were completed online, for a total combined sample of 1,009 college students. All interviews, whether by phone or online, were conducted from April 5 to 11, 2010. Some demographics were weighted in each sample to achieve representative samples of four-year college students nationwide. The margin of error is ± 3.1 percentage points for the overall sample and higher for specific subgroups.

The State Of The Nation And Issue Agenda

College students continue to hold a much more optimistic assessment of the country's direction than does the general public, and they feel much more upbeat than they did prior to 2009.

Today, a majority (53%) of college students say that the country is headed in the right direction, with 39% saying it is on the wrong track. By contrast, just 33% of adults nationally feel that the country is on the right track, while 59% say wrong track—a 20-point difference in both cases. The result among students is relatively unchanged from last year's survey (55% right direction, 35% wrong track), when there was a significant shift in attitudes from 2008 (32% right direction, 47% wrong track). Partisan divisions exist among college students, as we see with the public at large, majorities of Democrats (68%) and independents (53%) believe that the country is headed in the right direction, while a majority (64%) of Republicans feel things are off on the wrong track. Students who attend a public university (56% right direction, 37% wrong track) also are more sanguine about the country's direction than are their private school counterparts (45%, 47%).

Direction Of The Nation



While a majority believes that the country is headed in the right direction, a 56% majority also feels uncertain and concerned about the country's future, with just 41% saying they are more confident and secure. Again, partisanship governs one's outlook, as a majority of Democrats are more confident (52% more confident, 45% more uncertain), but independents (41%, 53%) and Republicans (24%, 75%) are both more uncertain. A gender gap also emerges, with women (38% more confident, 60% more uncertain) more concerned about the future than men (44% more confident, 51% more uncertain). And freshman (47% more confident, 51% more uncertain) are more mixed about the country's future, with upperclassmen (39%, 57%) holding a more pessimistic point of view.

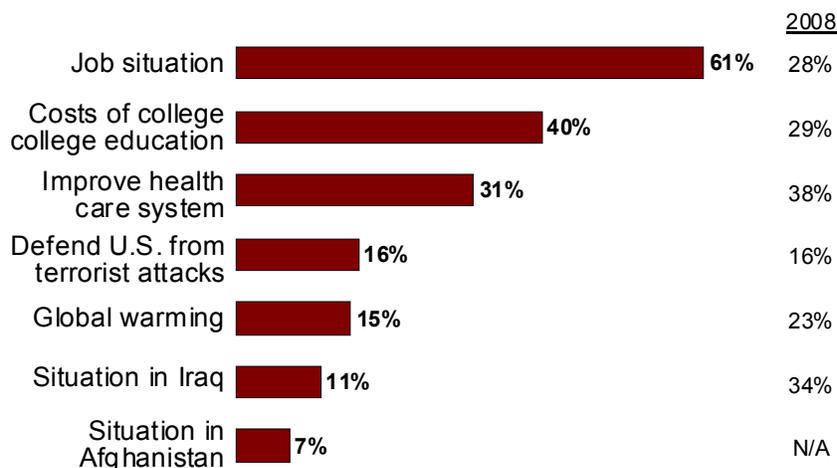
As they think about the future, college students focus much more on national than international concerns. By two to one (66% to 33%) they believe that most of the problems their generation will face will be national rather than international in nature.

Students' domestic focus also is evident in the issues they put at the top of their agenda. Consider that the issues they cite as being most important for them personally are domestic and finance-related: improving the job situation (61%), dealing with the costs of a college education (40%), and improving the health care system (31%). In particular, since the Panetta Institute's 2008 survey there has been a dramatic increase in the proportion who cite improving the job situation (from 28% to 61%) as well as dealing with the costs of a college education (29% to 40%). On the other hand, both global warming (23% to 15%) and dealing with the situation in Iraq (34% to 11%) have dropped in import among college students since 2008. In fact, the situation in Iraq was a close second to health care in the

2008 survey. Now Iraq ranks much further down the list, with only the situation in Afghanistan ranking lower (7%).

College Students' Issue Agenda

One or Two Issues Selected as Most Important



Democrats are more likely to cite global warming as a priority (21%) while Republicans are much more likely to say that defending the country from future terrorist attacks is important to them personally (31%). And perhaps based on their own current situation, seniors are most likely to say that improving the health care system is important to them personally (39%), while freshman are most likely to mention the costs of college education (50%).

This year's survey also explores some specific issues in greater detail, including health care reform, same-sex marriage, global warming, abortion, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Health Care Reform

College students are more likely than the general public to support passage of the recently signed health care reform legislation. By 60% to 37% college students say it is a good thing that this bill was passed, compared with 49% to 40% among all adults¹. As the chart reveals, significant cleavages emerge by political identification, as well as some smaller variations by gender and race, with women and minorities being more supportive of the recently passed legislation.

	Reaction To Health Care Reform Passage	
	<u>Good Thing</u> %	<u>Bad thing</u> %
All students	60	37
Men	56	42
Women	64	33
Whites	50	47
Hispanics	71	28
African Americans	93	6
Asians	78	18
Democrats	87	12
Independents	54	37
Republicans	22	77

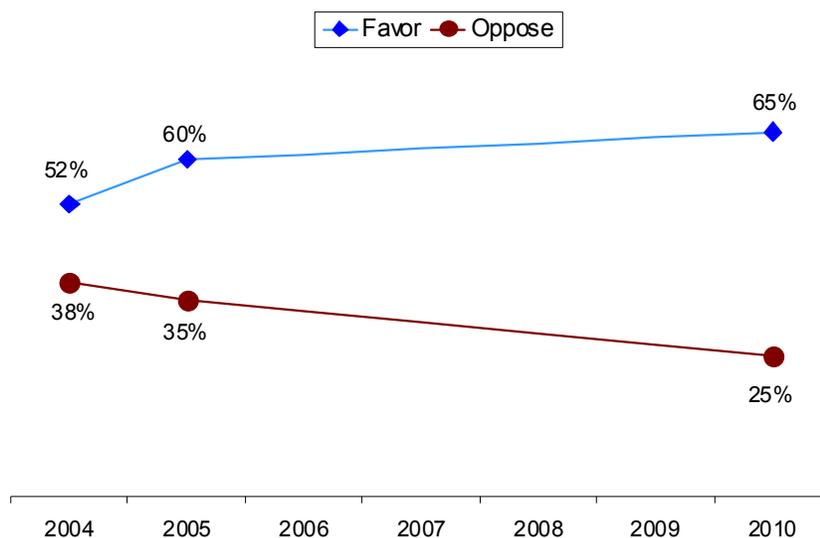
Same-Sex Marriage

The proportion of college students who favor allowing same-sex marriage has increased steadily over time, from 52% in 2004, to 60% in 2005, to 65% today. Freshmen (74%) are more supportive of allowing same-sex marriage than are upperclassmen (sophomores and juniors 60%, seniors 66%); and women (71%) are more supportive of it than are men (57%). And we see similar divisions by partisan affiliation, religiosity, and again to a lesser degree, region.

	Attitude Toward Same-Sex Marriage	
	<u>Favor</u> %	<u>Oppose</u> %
All students	65	25
Democrats	80	13
Independents	69	21
Republicans	37	47
Religiosity: Never attend	80	11
Religiosity: Occasionally	79	12
Religiosity: Once a month/more	46	43
Northeast	74	18
South	55	33
Midwest	61	25
West	74	22

¹ Data from Gallup poll, on March 22, 2010, the question was phrased, "As you may know, yesterday, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill that restructures the nation's health care system."

Support for Same-Sex Marriage



Global Warming

When it comes to attitudes toward global warming, college students resemble the general public, with 71% of college students stating that global warming is a very or somewhat serious problem, compared with 65% of all adults² who say the same thing. Democrats (83%) and independents (69%) both largely take the view that global warming is a very or somewhat serious problem. Republicans are much more divided on this question (53% very or somewhat serious, 47% not too serious or not a problem).

Abortion

Three in five college students (60%) believe that abortion should be legal in all (20%) or most (40%) cases, while 36% say that abortion should be illegal in all (11%) or most (25%) cases. By comparison, 52% of the public say that abortion should be legal and 45% say it should be illegal. Students' attitudes on abortion differ significantly by partisan identification, as well as religious attendance, and to a lesser degree, region of the country.

	Abortion Should Be...	
	Legal %	Illegal %
All students	60	36
Democrats	80	17
Independents	59	34
Republicans	28	68
Never attend relig. srvcs	80	17
Occasionally relig. srvcs	74	21
Attend once a month/ more	36	60
Northeast	72	26
South	52	43
Midwest	51	42
West	69	29

² Data from Pew poll conducted September 30-October 4, 2009.

Iraq And Afghanistan

A majority (57%) of college students believe that the war in Iraq has been unsuccessful, with 42% feeling that the war has been successful. Men are divided on this question (50% successful, 49% unsuccessful) while women are more likely to feel that the war in Iraq has been unsuccessful (35% successful, 64% unsuccessful). In partisan terms, Republicans are most positive toward the war in Iraq (64% successful, 35% unsuccessful) with independents (43%, 55%) and Democrats (27%, 72%) taking a less optimistic view. Regionally, college students in the Midwest are more likely to say that the war in Iraq has been successful (53%, 47%), and those in the South (43%, 55%), Northeast (38%, 62%), and West (33%, 67%) take the opposite point of view.

College students take a more mixed view of the war in Afghanistan, as 47% say it has been successful and 51% say unsuccessful. Men are more likely to say that the war in Afghanistan has been successful (56%) rather than unsuccessful (43%), and women take the opposite point of view (40%, 59%). As with the war in Iraq, we also find that Republicans mostly believe that the war in Afghanistan will be successful (60%, 38%), but here, independents are more divided than they are on Iraq (47%, 51%), with Democrats the opposite of Republicans (38%, 61%). Geographically, majorities of college students in the Midwest (57%, 43%) and South (51%, 47%) are more likely to say the war has been successful, compared with those in the Northeast (39%, 59%) and West (37%, 62%).

College students support Barack Obama's overall handling of the situation in Afghanistan (59% approve, 32% disapprove), but a majority disapproves of his decision to increase the number of troops in Afghanistan (42% approve, 57% disapprove). This is one instance in which President Obama receives Republicans' support (60% approve, 38% disapprove), and dissatisfaction from independents (37%, 62%) and Democrats (31%, 68%).

Student Loans

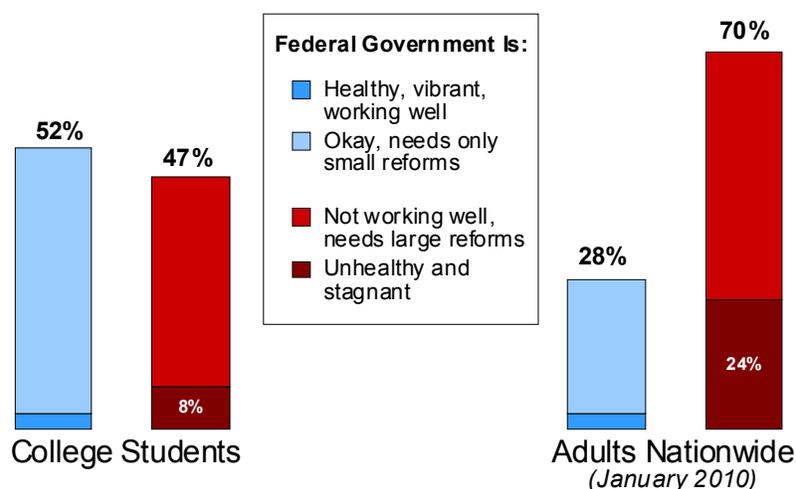
By more than two to one college students approve of the student loan policy change recently passed by Congress. Sixty-four percent (64%) of students approve of the change, even without being presented any information that describes the cost savings involved with this policy. Freshmen are the most supportive (71%), compared with 65% of sophomores, 58% of juniors, and 63% of seniors who approve of the change. Minority students (69%, Hispanics, 84% African Americans, 76% Asians) are more likely to approve of the change in loan policies than are white students (57%).

Attitudes Toward Government

College students today have a positive view of their government and the political leadership in this country. And their view of government is much more positive than that of the general public.

A majority (52%) of college students believes that the federal government is healthy and vibrant (3%) or okay and needs small reforms (49%), compared with 47% who say it is not working well and needs large reforms (39%) or is unhealthy and stagnant (8%). College students are much more favorable toward the federal government than are adults overall—among whom fully 70% believe that government is not working well and needs large reforms (46%) or is unhealthy and stagnant (24%).

Views Of The Federal Government



Students believe in the need for government even when juxtaposed against the power of businesses and individuals. When college students are presented with statements on either side, by 51% to 30% they believe that government should do more to solve problems and meet the needs of people rather than thinking that government is doing too many things better left to businesses and individuals. Forty-three percent (43%) of the public believe that government should do more, whereas 48% think it already is doing too many things. Looking at partisan breaks on this issue, Democrats are much more likely to come down on the side of government (71% to 9%), with independents more mixed but also supportive of government doing more (42% to 33%), and Republicans taking the opposite point of view (26% to 60%).

Barack Obama

More than a year into his term as president, Barack Obama continues to receive strong support from college students, though his standing has diminished since last year's survey, when he was still in his honeymoon. In general, most college students believe that Barack Obama has done about as well as they expected, but in terms of specifics, views of what Barack Obama has done are more mixed and the results demonstrate that there is much work yet to be done.

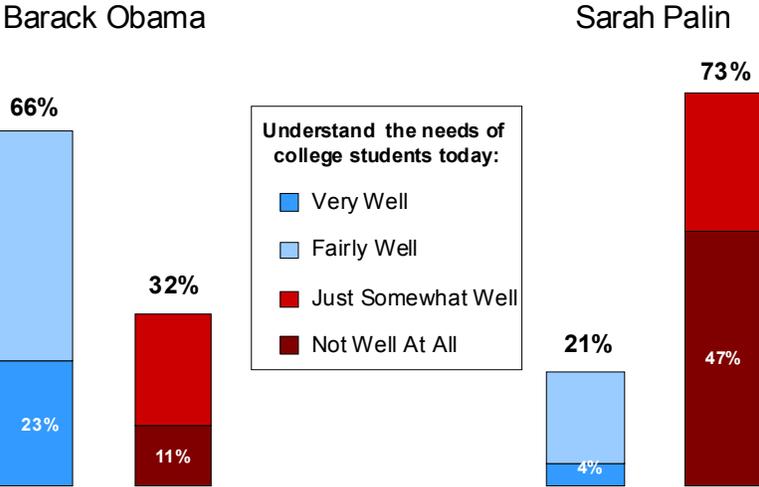
Two in three (66%) college students approve of the job that Barack Obama is doing as president, with 30% disapproving. Though this is still quite high, Obama's approval rating marks a decline since last year's survey when his rating was 75%. President Obama still receives strong support from Democrats (89% approve, 9% disapprove) as well as independents (64%, 27%). However, Republican support for Obama has declined significantly since last year's survey. In 2009, 44% of Republicans approved of the job that President Obama was doing and 48% disapproved. Today, just 30% approve and 66% disapprove. In addition to this partisan division, differences also exist by race and region of the country.

President Obama's Job Rating			
	Approve	Disapprove	Decline from
	%	%	2009
			±
All students	66	30	-9
Democrats	89	9	-3
Independents	64	27	-12
Republicans	30	66	-14
Whites	58	38	-12
Hispanics	75	20	-4
Blacks	93	6	+1
Asians	76	16	-13
Northeast	72	23	-8
South	61	36	-10
Midwest	61	35	-12
West	71	24	-7

President Obama receives steady ratings from college students on specific aspects of his job, including handling the economy (61% approve, 35% disapprove), handling the war in Afghanistan (59%, 32%) and the situation in Iraq (59%, 34%).

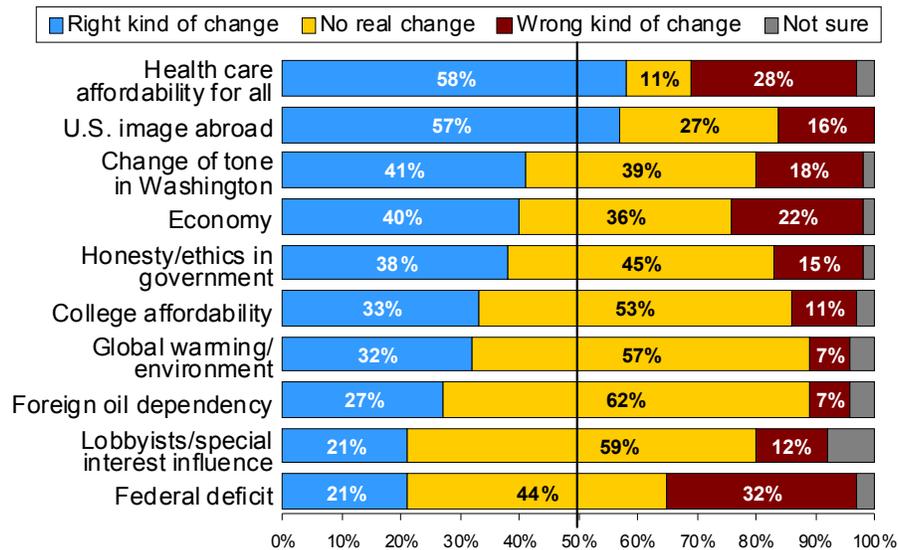
Fully two-thirds (66%) of students believe that Barack Obama understands the needs of college students today. The same is not true, however, for one of Obama's potential 2012 challengers. Just 21% say that Sarah Palin understands college students' needs. The former governor of Alaska clearly has not yet impressed the nation's students.

Understanding College Students



However, when college students focus on specific areas, it is clear that Barack Obama still has significant work to do. In only two of 10 areas does a majority of college students say that Barack Obama has brought the right kind of change: providing affordable health care for all Americans (58%) and improving America’s image with other countries (57%). Roughly two in five college students say that President Obama has brought the right kind of change when it comes to changing the tone in Washington (41%), getting the economy back on track (40%) and creating more honesty and ethics in government (38%). And close to three in 10 students believe that Obama has brought the right kind of change in ensuring that college is an affordable option for all Americans (33%), addressing environmental issues, such as global warming (32%), and reducing our dependency on foreign oil (27%). At the low end of the spectrum, Obama has significant work to do on reducing the influence of lobbyists and special interest groups (21%) and reducing the federal deficit (21%).

Perceptions Of Change Barack Obama Has Brought On Selected Issues



Despite winning the Nobel Peace Prize and the fact that a majority of college students believe that he has improved America's image with other countries, it is clear that college students believe President Obama still has more work to do internationally to mend fences. By 58% to 17%, college students believe that compared with the past the United States is less respected by other countries rather than more respected (24% say as respected as in the past). This is a significant improvement over the 2006 survey (3% more respected, 82% less respected), but college students believe that there is still work to be done, and Democrats (53% less respected), Republicans (64%), and independents (64%) alike share this view.

Public And Community Service

Working for the Government

Students' interest in working for the government continues to rise steadily. This year 42% of students say they are very or fairly interested in working for the government—the highest number we have ever recorded. Since 2006 interest has grown from 34%, an eight-point gain in four years. As in previous years, men are more interested in government work than are women (47%, 38%). Since last year interest among African Americans has jumped from 45% to 61%, while interest among whites also has gone up, from 34% to 40%. Students studying business are now the most interested, as 51% of business students express interest in working for the government. Upperclassmen are more

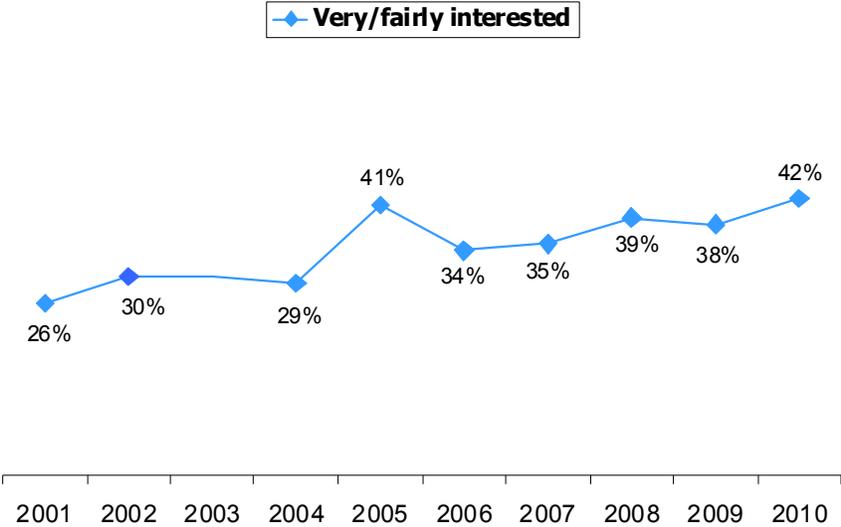
interested than are underclassmen, as 47% of seniors and 48% of juniors say they are interested, compared with just 38% of sophomores and 35% of freshman.

Concurrent with the trend in increased interest in working for the government, a recent Pew poll found that 56% of Americans would like to see their son or daughter who is just getting out of school pursue a career in

government, up from 43% in 2000. Not only are college students warming up to the idea of working for government, but it seems that their parents, as well as the public at large, also have become more interested in and open to the possibility.

Interest In Working For The Government			
	<u>Very/Fairly Interested</u>	<u>Just SW/ Not Interested</u>	<u>Increase In Interest from 2009</u>
	%	%	±
All students	42	58	+4
Men	47	53	+4
Women	38	62	+4
Whites	40	60	+6
Hispanics	34	65	-14
Blacks	61	39	+16
Asians	45	55	-1
Freshman	35	65	-3
Sophomore	38	62	+1
Junior	48	52	+7
Senior	47	53	+11
Social Sciences	47	53	-6
Humanities	36	64	+7
Math/Science	43	57	+8
Business	51	49	+8

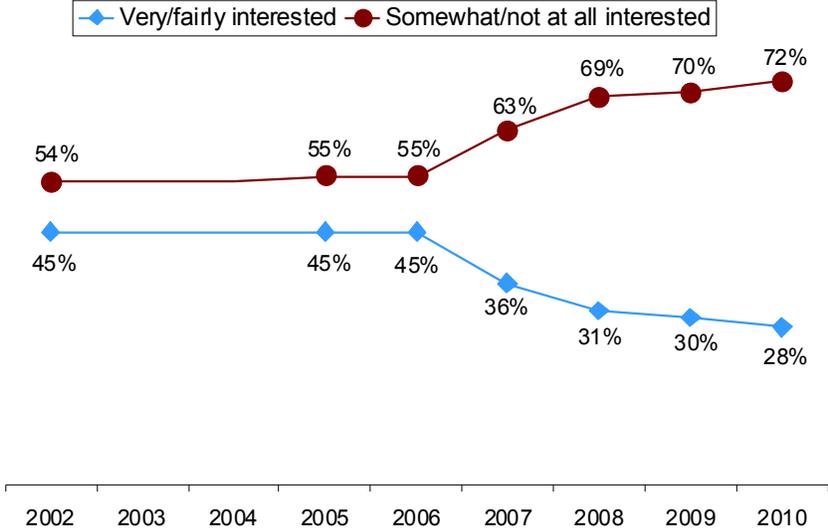
Interest In Working for Government



Other Specific Careers

Interest In Teaching Remains Low. Only 28% of students now express interest in teaching in a public school—the lowest proportion we have ever recorded. In 2006 we found 45% of college students giving serious consideration to teaching, including 22% who were very interested (results were similar in prior years). However, interest fell to 36% in 2007, and has continued to fall over the past three years³. Since 2006, there has been a 17-point decline in interest in teaching among all college students, with men (-17), private school students (-27), and students who attend a school with less than 5,000 students (-32) declining in interest more than other groups. Fully 47% of students say they do not have any interest in teaching, compared with just 28% who felt that way in 2002.

Interest In Teaching In A Public School



Community Service. Thirty-seven percent (37%) of students show interest in working for a not-for-profit community organization or foundation. This represents a small bounce-back from a 6-point drop in interest between 2008 and 2009. Serving in the military continues to be constant, with only 9% of students expressing interest, a number that has remained practically unchanged since 2005.

One in three (33%) students say they have considered pursuing a service-oriented experience after graduation, such as Teach for America, VISTA, or AmeriCorps. This proportion generally has remained consistent since 2007, with a slight increase since last

³ Prior to 2008, students were asked about their general interest in “teaching.” However, starting in 2008 students were asked more specifically about their interest in “teaching in a public school.”

year. Social science and humanities majors are more interested in these opportunities, with 47% and 38% respectively saying they considered such opportunities. Minorities consider service-oriented programs more than do whites (44% Asians, 38% Hispanics, 35% African Americans, 30% whites). While income level does not seem to play a significant role in affecting consideration, more students from private schools (40%) than public schools (31%) consider these opportunities.

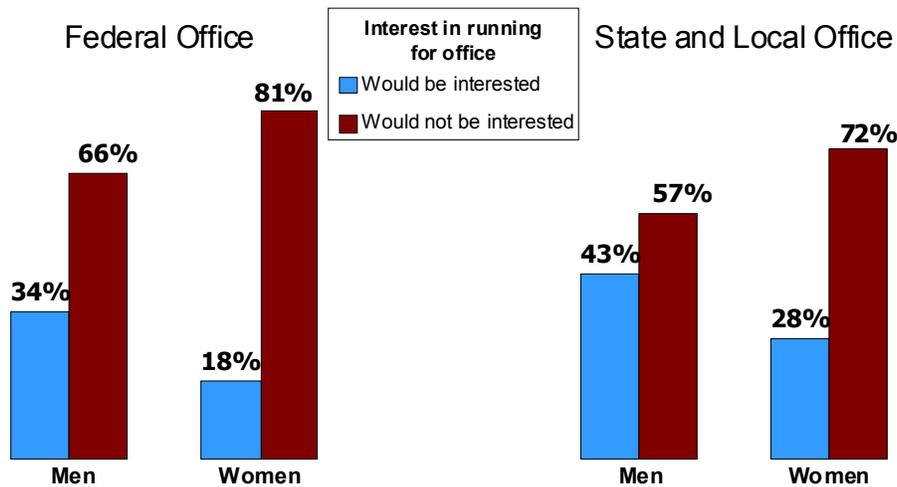
One area of concern is the drop in proportion of college students who say that someone spoke to them about getting involved in public service. Today, only 44% indicate that this is the case, down from 59% in 2007, the last time this question was asked. While there is good news in the survey about the number of college students who are interested in public service, we know that those who are asked to get involved are more likely to be interested in public service, so these numbers could be higher if more professors, mentors, advisors, and family members encouraged college students to get involved in public service.

Importance Of Asking Young People To Get Involved In Public Service....

	Someone Asked Me %	No One Asked Me %
Very/fairly interested in working for government	47	38
Interested in running for federal elected office	33	20
Interested in running for state or local elected office	42	28
Considered Teach for America, VISTA, or AmeriCorps	40	27

Gender Gap In Pursuit Of Public Office. A rather disturbing gender gap is apparent when we ask college students about their interest in eventually running for elected office. Today, slightly more than one in four (26%) students overall is interested in running for federal office. However, men (34%) are twice as interested as are women (18%). Thirty-five percent (35%) of all students express interest in running for local or state elected office such as city council member or state legislator. As seen in interest in federal offices, men (43%) are much more interested in running for local office than are women (28%).

Gender Gap on Running For Office



The 2010 Election

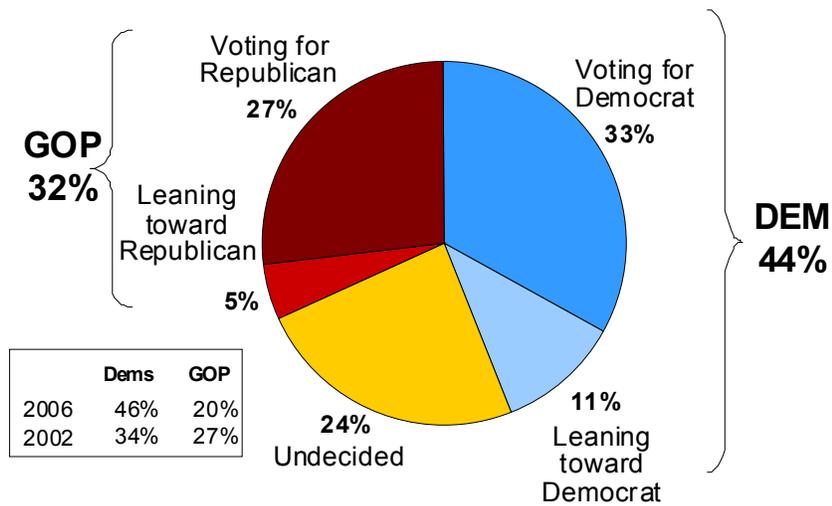
Nearly eight in 10 college students (77%) report that they are registered to vote at this time, which is on par with the results of the last mid-term poll, conducted in 2006. Groups that are significantly less likely to be registered are freshman (52%), independents (69%), Hispanics (64%), and Asians (61%).

However, college students are paying significantly less attention to this year's elections compared with the 2008 presidential election. Only 44% of college students say that they have been paying a lot (11%) or some attention (33%) to this year's elections, which is a major drop in attention compared with prior presidential years (2008: 82%; 2004: 76%). Given this low level of interest, it seems likely that college students will turn out to vote at a much lower level than in 2008. Upperclassmen, who were of voting age in 2008, a particularly energizing year for college students, are more likely to be paying attention compared with freshman and sophomores (51% upperclassmen, 36% freshmen/sophomores). Students who are majoring in social sciences (54%) and business (51%) also are more likely to be following the election than are those in the humanities or science, math, or computer science (37% respectively). Unlike many national polls that show a dramatic gap in attention in partisan terms, with Republicans being much more energized than Democrats, there is not a big difference here, though Republicans are a bit more likely to pay attention than are Democrats (48% to 44%). And African-American students also are more likely to be paying close attention to the election (54%).

In the 2010 congressional trial heat, college students give Democrats a 12-point

advantage over Republicans (44% to 32%). While this would be an impressive margin for Democrats among all voters, it should be a cause for concern among Democrats, who held a much larger 26-point advantage in the April 2006 poll. The current Democratic margin is only slightly larger than the seven-point margin in 2002, which was of course a good year for Republican candidates. Subgroups tell the story here, most notably, independents. As is the case nationally, Democrats struggle with independents, holding just a six-point lead with the group that they won by 24 points in our 2006 poll.

Preference For Congress



The following chart also highlights significant differences, most notably by gender, race, course of study, and partisan affiliation.

Congressional Trial Heat By Subgroup		
	Democrat	Republican
	%	%
All students	44	32
Men	36	36
Women	51	29
Northeast	52	23
South	39	38
Midwest	43	38
West	45	26
Whites	38	39
Hispanics	47	25
African Americans	71	10
Asians	48	20
Social sciences	53	27
Humanities	48	29
Science/math/CS	38	31
Business	39	44
Income: Below avg.	48	26
Income: Avg.	44	31
Income: Above avg.	41	37
Democrats	78	5
Independents	24	18
Republicans	2	85
Political Leadership: Satisfied	58	17
Political Leadership: Dissatisfied	25	52
School size: Less than 5,000	41	40
School size: 5,001 to 20,000	46	29
School size: More than 20,000	45	31
Religiosity: Never	49	19
Religiosity: Occasionally	50	25
Religiosity: Frequently	36	45

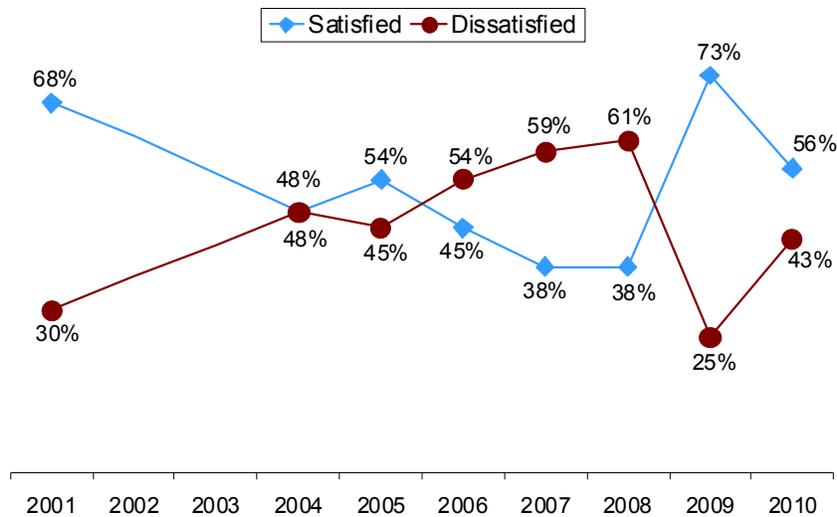
One reason for Democrats' modest electoral advantage is that college students have mixed opinions on both parties' performance in Congress. Democrats in Congress have the advantage on approval—Republicans in Congress have a net disapproval of 12-points (39% approve, 51% disapprove), while Democrats in Congress enjoy an 11-point net approval (53% approve, 42% disapprove). However, among political independents, Republicans in Congress have a slight advantage over Democrats in Congress. Forty-eight percent (48%) of independents approve of Republicans in Congress, compared with 46% who approve of Democrats in Congress. When asked which party understands their needs, Democrats beat out Republicans by a 15-point margin in general, and a slightly bigger 16-point margin

among independents.

Low marks for Congress likely explain the finding that students' satisfaction with political leadership in the country has declined from 73% in 2009 to 56% today, a 17-point drop. Notably, satisfaction among men has declined 21 points (69% to 48%). Overall, the high spike in satisfaction with political leadership witnessed in the months following the 2008 election seems to have receded somewhat, but remains far above the Bush era numbers.

Job Approval Of Parties In Congress		
	<u>Approve %</u>	<u>Disapprove %</u>
All Students		
Dems in Congress	53	42
GOP in Congress	39	52
Independents		
Dems in Congress	46	44
GOP in Congress	48	35

Satisfaction With The Country's Political Leadership

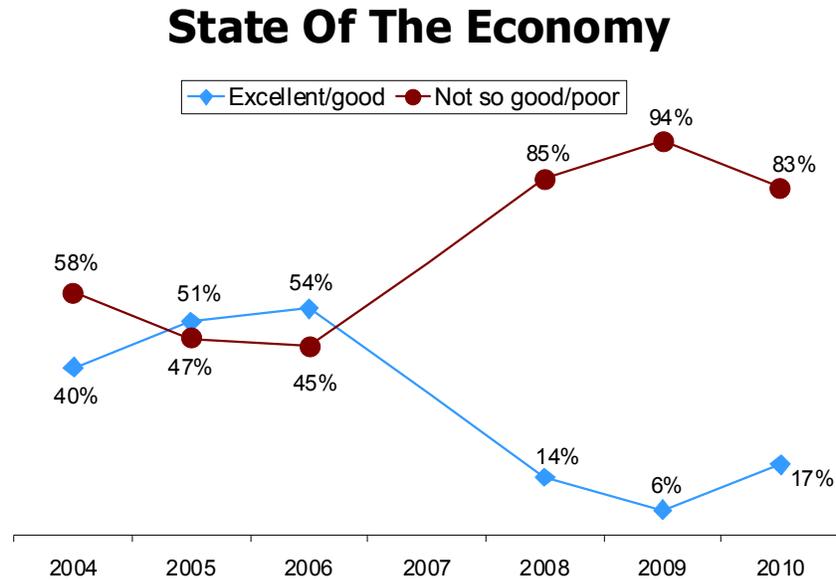


The Economy And Employment Outlook

As is the case with the nation overall, college students remain focused on the state of the economy, and though they remain personally optimistic, they do have significant concerns about what the future will bring.

Today, 17% of college students rate the nation's economy as excellent (1%) or good (16%) with 83% saying it is not so good (59%) or poor (24%). What is striking, and illustrates how bad the economy was last year, is that this actually is an improvement over the 2009 assessment made by college students, when just 6% said the economy was good (none offered an excellent rating) and 94% said the economy was not so good (57%) or

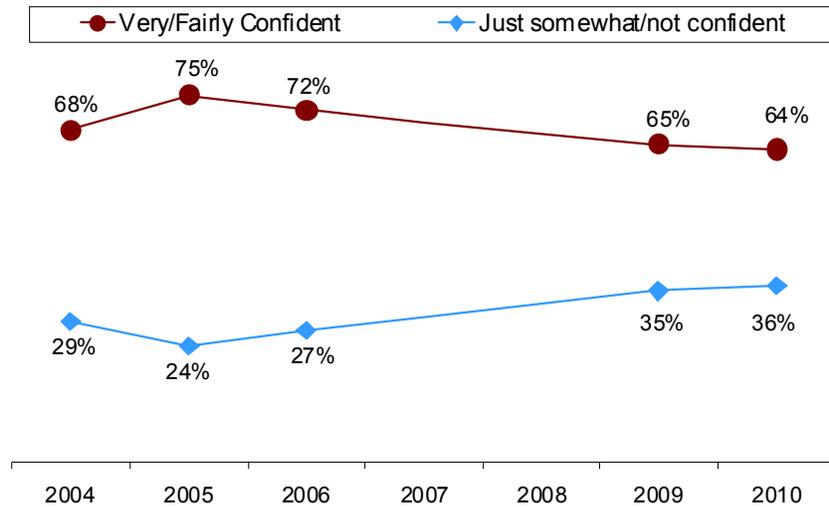
poor (37%). Seniors (13% excellent or good) are somewhat less likely to rate the economy positively compared with underclassmen (18%). And whites (13%) are less sanguine than are Hispanics (19%), African Americans (27%), or Asians (27%).



Two in five (40%) college students say that they have been affected personally a great deal (10%) or quite a bit (30%) by the economic downturn. Given that the job market generally does not yet affect college students, this high a proportion is particularly noteworthy, especially considering that among all adults the proportion is just 48%. Students with a below-average family income are most likely to be affected (50%), but significant proportions of students with average (38%) and above-average family incomes (34%) also say they have been affected by the economic downturn. And minorities (52% of Hispanics, 50% of African Americans, and 46% of Asians) also are more likely to say they have been affected by the downturn than are whites (35%).

Employment Concerns. Students' confidence in their ability to find an acceptable job after graduation, which declined in 2009, remains low: 36% of college students, including 45% of seniors, are just somewhat or not confident that they will find an acceptable job. The 64% expressing confidence is the lowest level the survey has ever recorded. Confidence is particularly low among seniors, who will first confront the job market, with nearly half (45%) feeling just somewhat or not confident.

Confidence in Finding Acceptable Job



As a result of this diminished confidence, college students are not waiting to find the “right” job. Three in four (75%) college students say that they will take the best job that they can find after graduation, compared with 25% who say that they are willing to wait a while to find the right job. And fully 89% say it is very (61%) or fairly important (28%) for their state or federal government to create job opportunities specifically for younger Americans. College students also are worried about their personal financial situation, with employment being the top concern for them. Fully 68% of college students worry very (37%) or fairly often (31%) about finding a good-paying quality job. And this level of concern is at an all-time high, up from 60% in last year’s survey. Seniors (74%) and those with a below-average family income (76%) worry about this more than others do.

Significant proportions of college students also worry very or somewhat often about having too much student loan debt (44% overall, 54% below-average family income), not being able to afford health care (31% overall, 40% women and 47% below average family income), and having too much credit card debt (25%).

Looking beyond graduation, 44% of college students plan to work at a full-time job, down from 48% in last year’s survey, with 39% planning to attend graduate school, unchanged since last year. Somewhat surprisingly given the economy, seniors are most likely to say that they plan to work at a full-time job (52%), with juniors not far behind (45%). Freshman (40%) and sophomores (45%) actually are more likely to plan to attend graduate school than work at a full-time job. By more than two to one, those majoring in business are more likely to plan to work at a full-time job than attend graduate school (61%

to 25%). For students in all other majors, graduate school is the most popular after-graduation plan.

Among those for whom a full-time job is not in the cards upon graduation, 39% indicate that the current job market affected their decision a great deal or quite a bit. Seniors (48%) are most likely to feel this way, as are those with below-average family incomes (45%) and minorities (51%).

Perhaps in part based on their own experiences in today's economy, college students are most likely to recommend a younger sibling or friend to pursue a degree in science or math (29%) or computer science (27%), though business majors are much more bullish on pursuing a degree in business, finance, or management (54% to 21% overall).

Despite these challenging economic times, college students remain optimistic that they will either be financially better off than (46%) or at about the same level as their parents financially (39%) with only 14% who say they expect to be worse off. College students with below-average family incomes (72%) and African-American students (71%) are much more likely to believe that they will be better off financially than their parents.

Assessment Of Education

Four in five (83%) college students say they are very (40%) or fairly satisfied (43%) with the education they have received so far in college to help prepare for life after graduation.

When given a chance to respond using their own words in an open-ended question, 20% of students say the one change they would make to improve their education is cost related—from lowering tuition and books, cutting general costs, and making school more affordable. The second most popular response (13%) centers on improving teacher quality, hoping they would be more qualified and knowledgeable. A third improvement (11%) focuses on practical classes that are relevant to the real world and could be useful in real life. Students also mention lessening general requirements (9%), smaller class sizes (6%), and improving and updating the curricula and making them challenging (4%).

Verbatim Responses

If you could change one thing to help improve the education you have received in college, what would it be?

- "Decrease tuition and increase financial aid so more youths can have access to education."
- "I would make education more affordable. It is outrageous how much people have to pay to attend college."
- "Make college more affordable, so I could focus on my studies instead of working two jobs to pay for college."
- "Make it more affordable! And stop cutting back on professors' pay. Good teachers don't work for free."
- "The thing that would have made my college education better is if some of the teachers had more experience in the field."
- "I would like professors to do a better job of making the material interesting for students. I find it highly disappointing that many of my teachers in high school did a far superior job than my professors do now."
- "Reduce budget cuts and keep the good teachers."
- "Better professors. I think they should have to have real world experience in the subject they are teaching and to stay current."
- "Taking what I've learned and applying it to the real world. "
- "Offer students more real life work experience, real world cases studies, etc."
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Although money is a major concern among students and is mentioned as the number-one change to improve their education, students widely agree that their education is worth the cost. Eighty-nine percent (89%) say the education they have received so far in college, based on the cost, is a very (35%) or fairly good value (54%). Private (88%) and public (89%) school students share this opinion.