



Innovation Imperative: Enhancing Higher Education Outcomes

Northeastern University recently sponsored its second annual national survey to shed new light on Americans' attitudes toward the future of higher education in the United States. The survey provides insights on Americans' views on the role of higher education in producing desirable outcomes, particularly the ability of graduates to succeed in today's global economy.

KEY FINDINGS

Americans continue to believe in the importance of higher education, but express concerns about the system's ability to prepare graduates for success in today's competitive workforce.

- Americans rank level of education as the most important factor in determining a candidate's success in the job market, ahead of global economic forces and personal characteristics such as socioeconomic status, nationality and race.
- Nearly half of all Americans say colleges are not in tune with today's job market and are not preparing graduates accordingly.
- Just over 6-in-10 (62%) Americans say the higher education system is currently doing only a fair to poor job of preparing college graduates.

Despite the recent focus on STEM degrees, most Americans and particularly business leaders say it is more important for graduates to be well-rounded and possess broader capabilities such as problem solving and communication skills.

- Nearly 2-in-3 Americans and almost 3-in-4 business leaders believe that being well-rounded with a range of abilities is more important than having specific industry expertise.
- Only 4-in-10 business leaders say it's more important for today's college graduates to have math, science or technology skills than to be creative or abstract thinkers.
- At the same time, roughly half of Americans feel the government should do more to promote policies to increase the number of students graduating with STEM majors.

Americans express declining confidence in online education, and they remain divided over the long-term benefits and impact of Massive Open Online Course (MOOCs).

- A declining proportion of Americans say an online college program provides a similar quality of education as a traditional program; yet, more than half of all Americans continue to expect that an online degree will be equally recognized by employers in the next 5 – 7 years.
- There is consensus among Americans and business leaders that MOOCs will fundamentally transform the way students are educated, but less than one-third believes MOOCs provide the same quality of education as traditional, in-person courses.

Americans resolutely believe in the importance of experiential learning for long-term career success.

- Americans and business leaders agree that expanding professional work programs for college students is the single most important step the U.S. can take to better prepare students.
- Americans strongly attest to the value of internships in preparing students: nearly 9-in-10 Americans believe students with work experience from an internship or paid employment related to their field will have more successful careers in the long-term.
- In fact, among those that gained work experience during college, a large majority (82%) says it was valuable for their personal and professional development.

Americans are divided on whether the greatest responsibility for preparing recent graduates for success lies with employers, colleges/universities or the graduates themselves.

- Americans are mixed on whether the greatest responsibility for training recent graduates for success in the workplace lies with colleges/universities (29%), employees/graduates themselves (35%) or companies/employers (36%).
- More than a quarter (28%) of Americans believes that U.S. companies are struggling to find the right candidates because companies are not investing enough in training new hires.
- Nearly 9-in-10 (87%) Americans contend the higher education system must change to retain a workforce that is competitive with other countries, representing a slight upward trend from 2012 (83%).