



2018 SURVEY OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS

A STUDY BY INSIDE HIGHER ED AND GALLUP

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THE 2018 *INSIDE HIGHER ED* SURVEY OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS

A study by *Inside Higher Ed* and Gallup



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FOREWORD

Inside Higher Ed's fourth annual Survey of Community College Presidents seeks to understand how these leaders view the opportunities and challenges facing two-year colleges in the U.S.

This study addresses the following questions:

- What proportion of community college presidents report declines in enrollment?
- What steps are community college presidents taking to recruit more students?
- Do community college presidents predict continued expansion of free community college programs?
- What do presidents believe are the most significant barriers to having more community college students go on to earn bachelor's degrees?
- How do two-year-college leaders assess the emerging talent pool for future community college presidents?
- Are pressures to increase degree completion rates leading colleges to take steps to improve those rates in ways that do not improve learning?
- What do community college chief executives perceive are the biggest challenges for two-year colleges?

SNAPSHOT OF FINDINGS

- A majority of community college presidents, 57 percent, say enrollment is down at their college over the past three years. Twenty-two percent report an increase in enrollment, and 20 percent report no change.
- Slightly fewer presidents than in 2017 report a decline in enrollment. A year ago, 61 percent of community college presidents said enrollment was down at their college.
- Three-quarters of community college presidents say their college is adding new programs on campus and adding options to make it easier to transfer to four-year institutions as a means of recruiting new students.
- Twenty-seven percent of community college presidents, down from 38 percent in 2017, are freezing or cutting tuition to attract new students.
- The vast majority of community college presidents, 87 percent, expect to see continued expansion of free community college programs. They believe those programs improve the way people view their local community colleges.
- In contrast, community college presidents view free four-year public college tuition as harmful to community colleges.
- Nine in 10 presidents believe a lack of clear pathways for transfer students to gain credit for their community college coursework is a significant barrier to having more two-year-college students continue on to earn bachelor's degrees. Slightly more than half perceive a lack of student interest in getting a bachelor's degree as a significant barrier.
- An increasing number of community college presidents, 47 percent, up from 40 percent a year ago, strongly agree or agree there are not clear paths to prepare for the community college presidency.
- Community college presidents are not optimistic about the crop of future community college leaders — 28 percent strongly agree or agree they are impressed with the talent pool for future community college presidents. They are especially concerned there are too few female and minority candidates for community college presidencies.
- As they did last year, community college presidents are most likely to regard financial matters (71 percent) and enrollment management (68 percent) as big challenges for themselves and their peers.
- Presidents tend to agree that pressure to increase completion rates may lead to colleges taking steps that improve those rates but don't increase learning.
- Most community college presidents believe the case of City Colleges of Chicago, whose widely touted gains in degree completion may have been accomplished through questionable means, represents an isolated incident.



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METHODOLOGY

This report presents findings from a quantitative research study that Gallup conducted on behalf of *Inside Higher Ed*. The objective of the study is to learn the practices and perceptions of community college presidents on pressing issues facing associate-degree-granting institutions.

To achieve this objective, Gallup sent invitations via email to 882 presidents of associate-degree-granting institutions and sent regular reminders throughout the Jan. 3–Feb. 1, 2018, field period. Gallup collected 177 completed or partially completed web surveys, yielding a 20 percent response rate.

Gallup education consultants developed the questionnaire in collaboration with Scott Jaschik and Doug Lederman from *Inside Higher Ed*.

The results reported here are based on the subset of community college presidents surveyed in a larger survey of 618 college and university presidents using the most comprehensive sample information available. Gallup statistically weighted the data to correct for nonresponse by matching the obtained sample to targets for all U.S. colleges and universities from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System database.

Gallup ensured the weighted sample matched the universe of all colleges on institutional control (public or private/nonprofit), four-year or two-year degree offerings, student enrollment and geographical region. Therefore, the weighted sample results can be considered representative of the views of presidents at community colleges nationwide.

The following sections present the findings of the survey. In some cases, reported frequencies may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding. “Don’t know” and “Refused” responses are excluded from the results.

DECLINING ENROLLMENT

The number of students enrolled in U.S. community colleges continues to decline, showing a 2 percent year-to-year decline in the most recent estimates after slightly larger declines in previous years. Consistent with those trends, the 2018 *Inside Higher Ed* Survey of Community College Presidents finds the majority of two-year-college leaders reporting declining enrollment at their college.

However, slightly fewer say enrollment is down than did so in the 2017 survey. Over all, 57 percent of community college presidents say enrollment at their college is down over the past three years, including 17 percent who say it is down by 10 percent or more. In the 2017 survey, 61 percent reported a decrease, with 21 percent indicating the decrease was 10 percent or more.

Meanwhile, 20 percent of presidents currently report enrollment is stable at their college, and 22 percent say it is higher. A year ago, 21 percent of presidents said enrollment was steady and 18 percent said it was up.

Many community colleges are now experiencing their second or third year of enrollment declines. Compared to three years ago, is your enrollment:	
Down by 10 percent or more	17%
Down by 5 percent up to 10 percent	26%
Down by less than 5 percent	14%
Stable	20%
Higher	22%

Asked about five approaches community colleges can take to recruit more students, community college presidents are most likely to say their college is adding new programs on campus (81 percent) and adding options to make it easier for students to transfer to four-year institutions (75 percent). Seventy-one percent report their college is adding online programs, while 58 percent are increasing marketing expenditures. Only 27 percent say their college is keeping tuition the same or cutting it.

Which, if any, of the following steps are you taking to recruit more students? Please check all that apply.	
Adding new programs on campus	81%
Adding options to make it easier for students to transfer to four-year institutions	75%
Adding online programs	71%
Increasing spending on marketing	58%
Keeping tuition the same or cutting tuition	27%
None of these	2%

DECLINING ENROLLMENT (CONT.)

Compared with the 2017 survey, fewer community college presidents say their college is freezing or cutting tuition to attract more students. A year ago, 38 percent reported holding the line on tuition or reducing it, compared with 27 percent this year. There has also been a decrease in the percentage of presidents who say their college is increasing spending on marketing, from 65 percent to 58 percent.

At the same time, slightly more community college presidents now (71 percent) than in 2017 (62 percent) indicate their college is adding online programs. Community college leaders are about as likely now as a year ago to say their college is adding new programs on campus or adding options to make it easier to transfer to four-year institutions.

Presidents who report declining enrollment, and those who report stable or climbing enrollment, are largely similar in their reports of their college's recruitment activities. They do, however, differ in the extent to which they say their college has increased marketing expenditures and kept tuition the same or cut it.

Whereas 67 percent of those who say enrollment is down at their college say they are spending more to market their college, 44 percent of those with stable or higher enrollment say the same. Also, 32 percent of those at colleges with declining enrollment indicate their college is cutting or freezing tuition, compared with 19 percent of chief executives at colleges where enrollment is steady or increasing.

Which, if any, of the following steps are you taking to recruit more students? Please check all that apply.			
	Total	Enrollment Is Down	Enrollment Is Stable or Higher
Adding new programs on campus	81%	77%	86%
Adding options to make it easier for students to transfer to four-year institutions	75%	75%	73%
Adding online programs	71%	68%	73%
Increasing spending on marketing	58%	67%	44%
Keeping tuition the same or cutting tuition	27%	32%	19%

THE FUTURE OF FREE COMMUNITY COLLEGE EDUCATION

One way community college enrollment could increase is to expand free community college programs, something former President Barack Obama favored while he was in office. Several states have free community college programs in place, and others are considering them.

Community college presidents expect the momentum toward free community college programs to continue. Eighty-seven percent say they anticipate continued expansion of such programs.

The focus on free community college may be benefiting two-year institutions in other ways. Three-quarters of community college presidents say the movement toward free community college is having a positive impact on how community colleges are perceived in their states and communities.

New York recently became the first state to pass a program for free four-year public college education. Community college presidents see the adoption of free tuition at four-year colleges as harmful to two-year institutions. Seventy-nine percent say free four-year public higher education hurts community colleges a lot (44 percent) or a little (35 percent). Only 17 percent perceive free four-year education as helpful to community colleges, while 4 percent do not believe it will have an effect either way.

The idea of free community college tuition has expanded considerably in 2017. New York State adopted a program (that also involves four-year public institutions), California is moving in that direction, and many districts are also adopting initiatives.	
I anticipate continued expansion of free community college programs.	
Yes	87%
No	13%
The movement toward free community college is having a positive impact on the way community colleges are seen in their states and communities.	
Yes	76%
No	24%

The adoption of free, four-year public higher education —	
Helps community colleges a lot	3%
Helps community colleges a little	14%
Has no effect on community colleges	4%
Hurts community colleges a little	35%
Hurts community colleges a lot	44%

BARRIERS TO TRANSFER

A recent report found that about 40 percent of two-year-college graduates went on to earn a bachelor's degree. For many graduates, their educational goals end with obtaining an associate degree, as that may be sufficient to find work in their chosen field. Still, many proponents of higher education would like to see more community college students continue their education and earn a bachelor's degree.

Asked about potential barriers for community college students to earn bachelor's degrees, 90 percent of presidents say lack of clear pathways allowing associate degree holders to transfer two years' worth of credit is a very (42 percent) or somewhat significant barrier (48 percent).

Three-quarters of presidents think a lack of academic advising on how to prepare for transfer is a very or somewhat significant barrier to more community college students transferring to earn bachelor's degrees.

Majorities of presidents see four-year colleges' lack of accepting, or lack of supporting, two-year college students as an obstacle to more community college students earning bachelor's degrees. Sixty percent believe a lack of public four-year colleges accepting two-year transfer students is a significant barrier. Fifty-six percent say the same about private four-year colleges.

Community college presidents are more likely to see a lack of support for two-year transfer students from public (73 percent) and private (67 percent) four-year colleges as a significant factor in limiting the number of four-year degree holders who began their education at community colleges.

Slightly more than half of community college presidents, 53 percent, believe a lack of student interest in earning bachelor's degrees is a significant factor, but only 8 percent regard it as very significant. Slightly less than half, 46 percent, say a lack of programs at nearby four-year colleges that interest students is a significant barrier to two-year transfer students earning bachelor's degrees.

Many community college educators and others say that far more community college students should transfer to four-year colleges and earn bachelor's degrees than currently do.

How significant do you believe each of the following factors is in limiting the number of two-year students who go on to earn bachelor's degrees?

	Very significant	Somewhat significant	Not too significant	Not significant at all
Lack of clear "pathways" that assure community college graduates can transfer two years' worth of credit	42%	48%	9%	1%
Lack of academic advising on how to prepare for transfer	24%	51%	21%	3%
Lack of interest by four-year public colleges in supporting transfer students from community college	25%	48%	22%	4%
Lack of interest by four-year private colleges in supporting transfer students from community college	23%	44%	24%	10%

BARRIERS TO TRANSFER (CONT.)

Many community college educators and others say that far more community college students should transfer to four-year colleges and earn bachelor's degrees than currently do.				
How significant do you believe each of the following factors is in limiting the number of two-year students who go on to earn bachelor's degrees?				
	Very significant	Somewhat significant	Not too significant	Not significant at all
Lack of interest by four-year public colleges in accepting transfer students from community college	29%	31%	25%	14%
Lack of interest by four-year private colleges in accepting transfer students from community college	15%	41%	28%	16%
Lack of student interest in earning bachelor's degrees	8%	45%	34%	13%
Lack of programs at nearby four-year colleges that match student interests	13%	33%	40%	14%

The proportion of community college presidents who regard each of these eight potential barriers as significant is higher than in the 2017 survey, ranging from a five-point increase in lack of public four-year college support for two-year transfers and a six-point increase in lack of student interest in earning a bachelor's degree to a 19-point increase in lack of private four-year college support for community college transfer students.

THE FUTURE OF THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENCY

Many in higher education are concerned about the future of college presidencies, with an increasing number of presidents retiring or nearing retirement age. The turnover in presidents has been especially pronounced at two-year colleges. These concerns are compounded by uncertainty in whether there are sufficient candidates qualified and prepared to replace presidents who are retiring or choosing other career pursuits.

Amid these concerns, 47 percent of community college presidents strongly agree or agree there are not clear paths to prepare for a community college presidency, up from 40 percent a year ago. Meanwhile, 30 percent, down from 43 percent in 2017, disagree that there are not clear paths to becoming a community college president.

Community college presidents are not optimistic about the existing talent pool for future leaders in their role. More community college presidents strongly disagree or disagree (34 percent) than strongly agree or agree (28 percent) they are impressed with the pool of potential community college presidents. Thirty-seven percent are neutral. Those results are essentially the same as in last year's survey.

Community college presidents increasingly perceive a scarcity of minority and female candidates for the top leadership position at two-year institutions. Sixty-eight percent of presidents strongly agree or agree there are too few minority candidates for community college presidencies, and 45 percent say the same about qualified female candidates. Both percentages are up about 10 percentage points from last year.

At the same time, community college presidents are generally satisfied with their own career path. Ninety-four percent agree, including 77 percent who do so strongly, that they would pursue a career as a community college president if they had a chance to do it again.

Many experts predict that community colleges will see significant turnover of their presidents in the next few years. Using a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

If I had to do it again, I would still pursue a career as a community college president.	
5 / Strongly agree	77%
4	17%
3	4%
2	2%
1 / Strongly disagree	1%
I am impressed with the pool of potential community college presidents.	
5 / Strongly agree	2%
4	26%
3	37%
2	26%
1 / Strongly disagree	8%

THE FUTURE OF THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENCY (CONT.)

Many experts predict that community colleges will see significant turnover of their presidents in the next few years. Using a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

There are not clear paths to prepare for community college presidency.	
5 / Strongly agree	11%
4	36%
3	23%
2	16%
1 / Strongly disagree	14%
There are too few female candidates for community college presidencies.	
5 / Strongly agree	17%
4	28%
3	26%
2	18%
1 / Strongly disagree	12%
There are too few minority candidates for community college presidencies.	
5 / Strongly agree	33%
4	35%
3	16%
2	12%
1 / Strongly disagree	4%

Twenty-six percent of currently serving community college presidents say they plan to retire in the next two years. That is up from 18 percent in last year's survey.

Do you personally plan to retire in the next two years?	
Yes	26%
No	74%

About half of community college presidents who are age 60 or older, 46 percent, say they plan to retire within the next two years.

CHALLENGES FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Community college presidents regard financial matters and enrollment management as two of the biggest challenges they face, with roughly 7 in 10 citing those from among six issues measured in the survey.

Just under half of community college presidents, 47 percent, say politics and policy is a big challenge for them. Slightly more than one-third say the same about personnel management and staffing (36 percent) and competition from other institutions (34 percent). Community college presidents are least likely to regard educational matters as a big challenge, with 18 percent describing it as such.

The vast majority of community college presidents say each of the six issues is at least a moderate challenge.

How big of a challenge is each of the following for community college presidents?			
	A big challenge	A moderate challenge	Not much of a challenge
Financial matters	71%	27%	1%
Enrollment management	68%	28%	3%
Politics and public policy	47%	48%	5%
Personnel management and staffing	36%	58%	6%
Competition from other institutions	34%	53%	14%
Educational matters	18%	67%	15%

The rank order of these six issues is unchanged from a year ago. However, fewer presidents today than in 2017 regard all except competition from other institutions as big challenges. These changes include a nine-point drop in the percentage of community college presidents who say financial matters are a big challenge (80 to 71 percent), six-point decreases for enrollment management (74 to 68 percent) and personnel management and staffing (42 to 36 percent), and five-point declines for politics and public policy (52 to 47 percent) and educational matters (23 to 18 percent).

STANDARDS FOR SUCCESS

Community colleges face growing scrutiny and pressure to increase completion rates, given generally low levels of degree attainment among students who attend community colleges. City Colleges of Chicago was one two-year institution recognized for increasing completion rates significantly. Later, an investigation questioned whether those gains were legitimate.

Most community college presidents believe the Chicago case is an exception to how two-year colleges that have increased completion rates have accomplished that goal. Sixty-four percent of community college presidents strongly agree or agree that Chicago represents an isolated incident that does not reflect the way most community colleges have increased completion rates. Nineteen percent strongly disagree or disagree with that idea.

Community college presidents acknowledge that increased pressure to improve completion rates can have unintended consequences. A majority, 57 percent, strongly agree or agree that reforms proposed as part of the completion agenda may not result in increased learning. Eighteen percent strongly disagree or disagree. Also, 41 percent of community college presidents strongly agree or agree and 34 percent strongly disagree or disagree that pressure to show dramatic gains in graduation rates can create incentives for community colleges to cut corners on how they do so.

More than three-quarters of community college presidents strongly disagree (46 percent) or disagree (32 percent) that their own institution has taken steps that improve the way their completion rates look but don't necessarily improve student learning. Ten percent strongly agree or agree that is the case, while 13 percent are neutral.

In 2017, an exposé by the Better Government Association revealed that gains in completion rates at City Colleges of Chicago – gains that were hailed as a national model – were partly due to the colleges watering down curriculum requirements and bestowing thousands of degrees on former and current students who in many cases neither requested nor wanted them.

Using a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

Pressure to show dramatic gains in graduation rates creates incentives for community colleges to cut corners on how they do so.

5 / Strongly agree	5%
4	36%
3	25%
2	21%
1 / Strongly disagree	13%

STANDARDS FOR SUCCESS (CONT.)

In 2017, an exposé by the Better Government Association revealed that gains in completion rates at City Colleges of Chicago – gains that were hailed as a national model – were partly due to the colleges watering down curriculum requirements and bestowing thousands of degrees on former and current students who in many cases neither requested nor wanted them.

Using a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

I worry that some reforms encouraged as part of the "completion agenda" may not result in increased learning.

5 / Strongly agree	16%
4	41%
3	25%
2	13%
1 / Strongly disagree	5%

My community college has taken steps that improve the way our completion rates look, but don't necessarily improve student learning.

5 / Strongly agree	2%
4	8%
3	13%
2	32%
1 / Strongly disagree	46%

The Chicago case is an isolated incident and does not reflect the way most community colleges who have made gains in degree completion have accomplished that goal.

5 / Strongly agree	20%
4	44%
3	17%
2	15%
1 / Strongly disagree	4%

INSTITUTION AND PERSONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

What is your age?	Overall
Under 30	0%
30 to 39	1%
40 to 49	9%
50 to 59	35%
60 to 69	44%
70 and older	11%

What is your gender?	Overall
Male	64%
Female	36%

How many years have you served as the president at this institution?	Overall
Less than 6 months	0%
6 months to less than 3 years	36%
3 years to less than 5 years	15%
5 years to less than 10 years	29%
10 or more years	20%

How many years have you served as the president at any institution?	Overall
Less than 6 months	4%
6 months to less than 3 years	24%
3 years to less than 5 years	14%
5 years to less than 10 years	31%
10 or more years	28%

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