



# HOW 2020 CHANGED THE WAY AMERICANS VIEW HIGHER EDUCATION

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# How COVID-19 Made Higher Education Value a Top Priority

- Survey of **1,000 2020 voters nationwide**, with oversamples of **215 Hispanic voters, 185 African American voters, and 193 higher education institutional leaders.**
  - Conducted November 17 through December 1, 2020
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**Value of higher education remains high despite a slight shift in perception due to the pandemic.**

**Change in the perception on the return of investment of a degree after high school as “excellent” or “good” pre- and post-pandemic**

	Pre-Pandemic (%)	Post-Pandemic (%)	$\Delta$
Likely Voters (Nationwide)	76	67	-9
Black Likely Voters	79	69	-10
Hispanic Likely Voters	77	72	-5
Institutional Leaders	87	86	-1

**Source:** Third Way/Global Strategy Group national survey of 1,000 likely voters, with oversamples of 215 Hispanic voters, 185 African American voters, and 193 higher education institutional leaders, conducted Nov. 17– Dec. 1, 2020.

# COVID-19 has increased higher education value's standing as a top priority for voters.

**Has the pandemic made improving the value of a degree after high school a more important or less important priority?**

	<b>Nationwide (%)</b>	<b>Hispanic (%)</b>	<b>Black (%)</b>	<b>Institution Leaders (%)</b>
Much more important	20	22	27	25
Somewhat more important	20	27	22	41
No Change	47	38	37	26
Somewhat less important	11	10	10	7
Much less important	3	3	4	1
<b>MORE IMPORTANT (NET)</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>LESS IMPORTANT (NET)</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>8</b>

**Source:** Third Way/Global Strategy Group national survey of 1,000 likely voters, with oversamples of 215 Hispanic voters, 185 African American voters, and 193 higher education institutional leaders, conducted Nov. 17– Dec. 1, 2020.



# This is driven by economic concerns and a desire to make sure higher ed provides a return on investment.

For each, please indicate how important it is to you, personally.				Total	Hisp	Black	Leader
	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important		% net very important		
Ensuring students that receive a degree are able to repay their loans	66	25	9	+57	+56	+67	+76
Providing a degree that substantially increases a student's chances for socioeconomic mobility	59	33	8	+51	+49	+56	+64
Supporting students who are working full time, to ensure they complete their degree	58	33	9	+49	+55	+65	+67
Ensuring students complete college and receive their degree	58	32	10	+48	+55	+53	+63
Making access to college more equal across race and socioeconomic background	55	28	17	+38	+49	+63	+58
Ensuring students that receive a degree are able to have a stable career	55	37	8	+47	+54	+53	+57
Making community college free to all who are admitted	44	23	33	+11	+31	+56	+45
Eliminating the need for students to assume debt	43	32	25	+18	+32	+49	+28
Making college free to all who are admitted	31	28	41	-10	+15	+32	+10

Source: Third Way/Global Strategy Group national survey of 1,000 likely voters, with oversamples of 215 Hispanic voters, 185 African American voters, and 193 higher education institutional leaders, conducted Nov. 17– Dec. 1, 2020.



# One Semester Later

How Prospective and Current College Students'  
Perspectives of Higher Ed Have Changed between  
August and December 2020



THIRD WAY

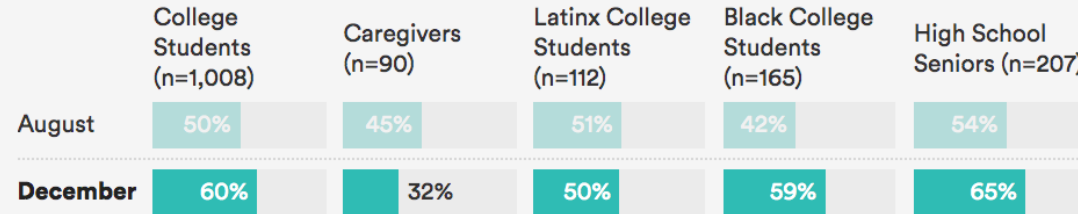


## Shift in Opinions from August to December of Challenges Students Face as Learning Shifts Online

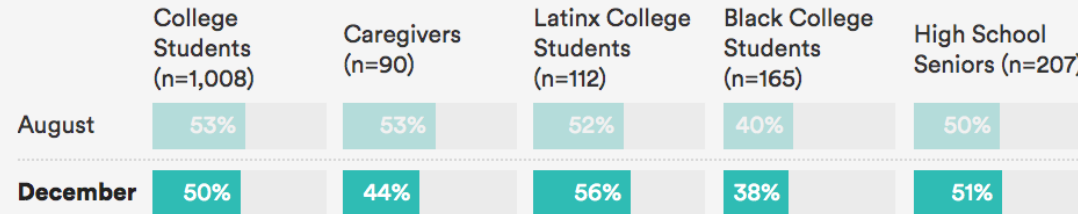
Percentage of students who consider the following items big challenges



### Stay motivated to learn



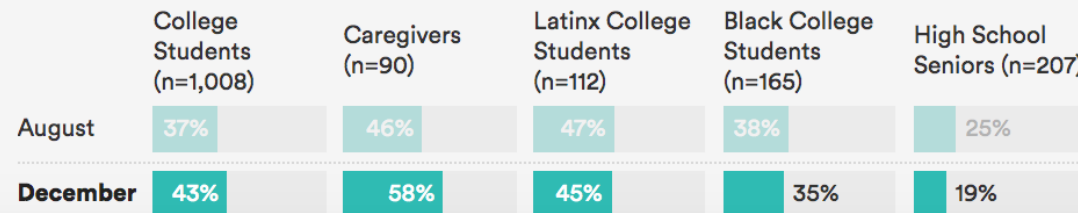
### Having access to labs, specialized equipment, clinicals, and internships



### Taking care of children while pursuing your education



### Having enough resources to pay for school

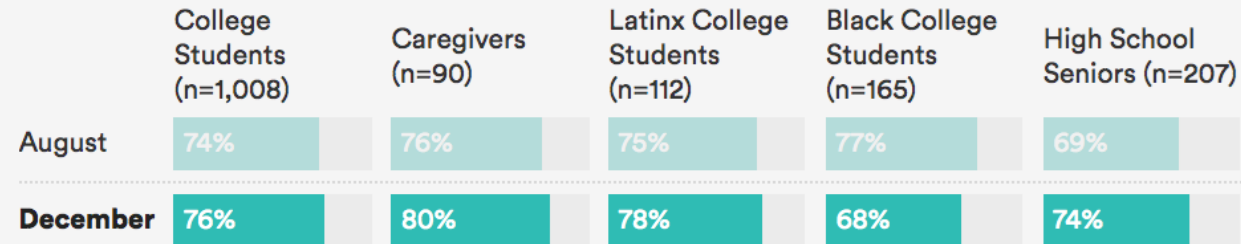




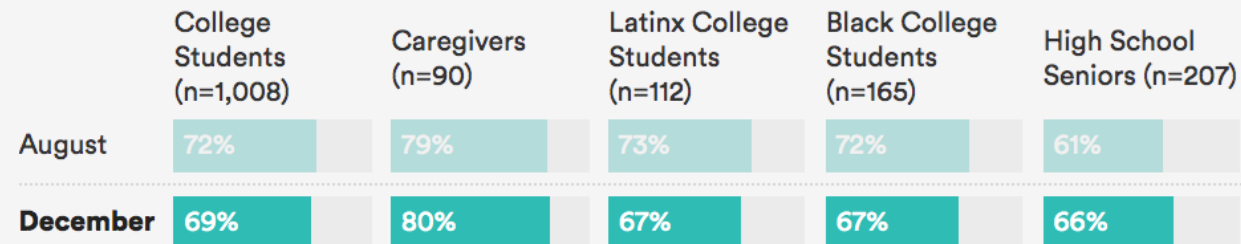
## Shift in Opinions from August to December of Actions Higher Education Institutions Could Take to Make Students More Likely to Enroll or Re-enroll

Percentage of students who think the following actions would make them more likely to enroll or re-enroll

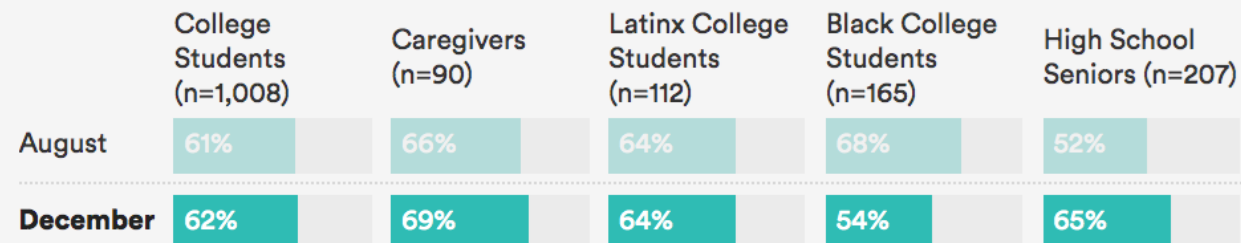
### Offering discounted tuition if students cannot attend class in-person




### Demonstrating positive employment outcomes for students through job placement rates or average wages



### Offering new programs and certificates tailored to the new economy







# **Where Did All the Students Go?**

## Understanding the Enrollment Decline at Community Colleges During the Pandemic

# COVID-19 poses a serious health and economic threat that distracts from academics

Percent saying “Yes, experienced since the pandemic”	Continuers (n=501)	Stop-outs (n=500)	New Students (n=195)	Aspirants (n=500)
Fallen behind on a credit card, utility, loan, or other bill	38	44	35	49
Applied for public benefits	39	40	41	44
Received free food or meals from a food pantry or meal program	40	39	36	43
Received free food or meals from family or friends because you did not have money to buy food	41	38	36	40
Skipped meals because you did not have enough money to buy food	36	37	32	37

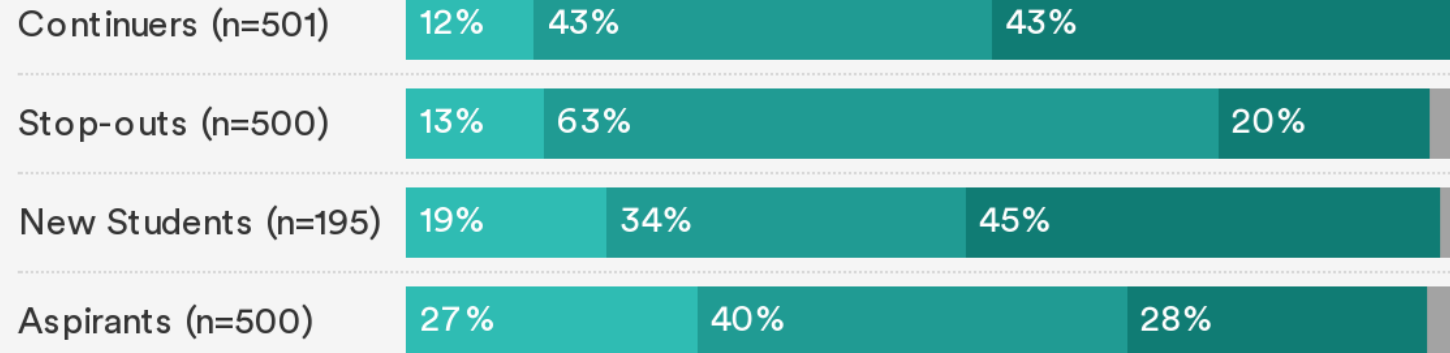
# Major reasons for not enrolling: financial concerns and uncertainty

Percent saying “major reason” why didn’t enroll	Stop-outs (n=500)	Aspirants (n=500)
Had to work	41	37
Could no longer afford a program	38	44
The overall uncertainty because of the pandemic	34	47
Had to provide care for another person in my household	33	37
Feared the safety of taking classes in-person	32	39
Felt the pandemic negatively impacted the career path I wanted to pursue	29	24
Had a health issue	24	20
Did not want to take classes online	23	15
Did not have the technology or internet access to take classes online	19	17
Other	25	22

# Degree aspirations may have played a role in who enrolled

## What is the highest level of education you want to complete?

■ High School/GED ■ Some College or Associate Degree ■ Bachelor's Degree or Higher ■ Prefer Not to Answer



Note: The numbers in this figure and the narrative may not match up due to rounding. In case of mismatch, please refer to the narrative.

Source: New America Community College Enrollment Survey (December 2020)

NEW AMERICA

# Borrowers' Opinions and Perceptions about Student Loan Repayment

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# Key take-aways from surveys and focus groups

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- Find repayment system **difficult to navigate**

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**2. Outreach could overwhelm repayment system this fall.**

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- Borrowers aware of the pauses, **confused about application**
- **~6 in 10**: Difficult to afford payments
- Outreach from **9+ million** borrowers

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1. Student loan borrowers find repayment system difficult to navigate, are anxious about their finances, struggle to access longer-term solutions.
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- 3. Americans back federal help for borrowers.**

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  - **81%:** Agree the government should make repayment easier



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- 3. Americans back federal help for borrowers.**
  - **81%:** Agree the government should make repayment easier
  - **Congress + ED:** Identify likely strugglers and provide targeted help



# **Confronting Race and Equity in Narratives in Higher Education**

February 16, 2021

Dr. Katherine Wheatle  
Strategy Officer for Federal Policy & Equity

SELF ASSESSMENT

# How should I talk about race?

Take this assessment of your values and your audiences to receive tailored advice to help you talk fearlessly and authentically about the need to achieve racial justice. You can adapt this Equity Frame to support communication of every kind for any audience.

**START  
QUIZ**

EQUITY AND JUSTICE FRAMING RESEARCH

**Learn more about our national survey.**



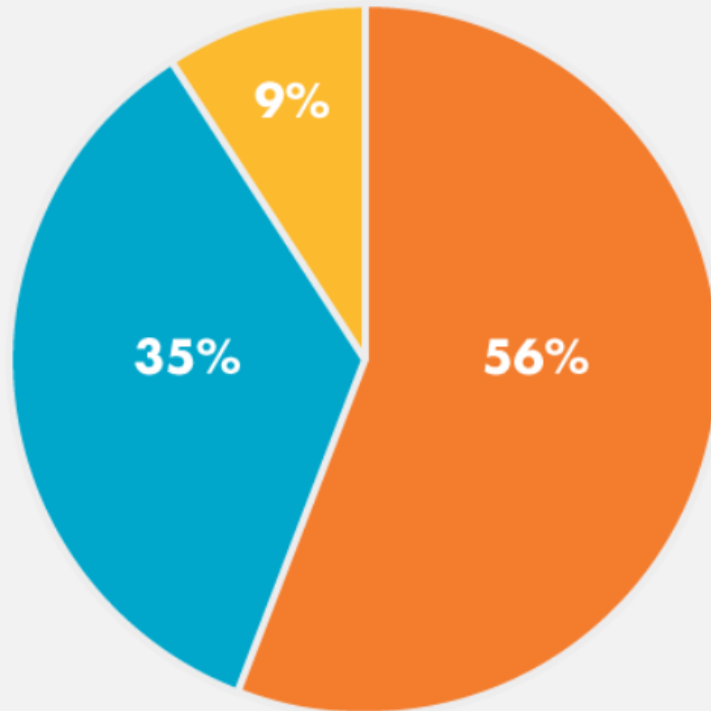
OUR STORIES

**Our experiences have shaped our attitudes, beliefs, and actions.**



[www.luminafoundation.org/talking-equity/](http://www.luminafoundation.org/talking-equity/)

# Here's what Americans believe about opportunity and the pitfalls of talking about "equity"



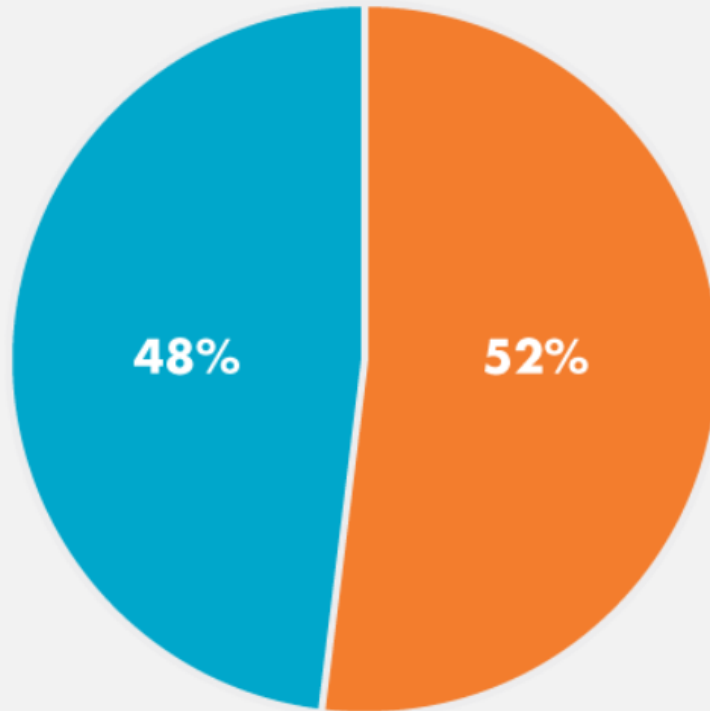
## How do people understand opportunity in the United States?

When asked which statement more closely reflects their point of view, 56 percent of U.S. survey respondents chose "Opportunity isn't equal in the United States." 35 percent indicated "Everyone has equal opportunity in America," and 9 percent felt neither statement reflected their view.

*2019 National Racial Justice and Equity Framing Survey*

- "Opportunity isn't equal in the United States."
- "Everyone has equal opportunity in America."
- Neither.

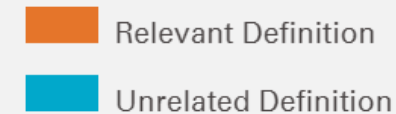
# Here's what Americans believe about opportunity and the pitfalls of talking about "equity"



## What comes to mind when you think about the word "equity"?

When given the opportunity to define equity, 52 percent of survey respondents offered some sort of social justice response, such as "equality" or "fairness." The other 48 percent offered other definitions, such as "home equity" and "money," or said they didn't know.

*2019 National Equity Framing Survey*





# [ The Borrowers of Color Working Group





# Changing the Narrative on Student Borrowers of Color

February 2021



## Black Borrowers:

### Building from a Better Narrative

By Fenabe R. Addo, Ph.D., and Dominique J. Baker, Ph.D.



Black-white disparities in student debt have received a lot of attention. The facts are pretty stark. Black borrowers tend to borrow the most, have higher loan balances and the highest rates of default and delinquency while in repayment (Baker 2019). Parent wealth is negatively associated with debt accumulation for white student borrowers, and young adults who are white pay their debt quicker (Addo, Houle, and Simon 2016; Houle and Addo 2019). Similar to other forms of economic inequality throughout U.S. history, racialized student debt disparities reflect institutional racism and policies stemming from a higher education system that was never designed for Black students. In this section, we review the false narratives and disconnected solutions that underlie much of the discourse on Black students' reliance on student loans.

#### False Narratives

As Black scholars who have, for many years, been studying the student loan crisis and raising awareness of the disproportionate burden within Black communities, we are familiar with the common tropes the public holds despite the evidence proving otherwise. It is also completely unsurprising to us that most of these narratives point to dysfunctionality among Black students and their families. Deficit narratives have a clear purpose. They serve to individualize problems that require structural solutions, thus excusing policymakers and the general society for failing to seek equitable solutions. The most common misconceptions we have include: (1) racial disparities reflect differences in financial literacy or access to

CHANGING THE NARRATIVE ON STUDENT BORROWERS OF COLOR

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## Latino Borrowers:

### Moving Beyond the 'Debt Aversion' Truism

By Denisa Gándara and Desiree Zurquara



Americans of Hispanic or Latino descent are often framed as being debt averse and lacking in knowledge, motivation, and purpose in pursuing higher education. This framing is incongruous and simplistic. Latinos attend college at high rates, and when they do, they often borrow at rates comparable to those among students from other racial/ethnic groups. This negative, persistent narrative about Latinos and higher education implies that Latinos are responsible for the challenges they face. This narrative not only contributes to the disservice of these students in higher education, it also ignores the grave implications of debt for this community, including high default rates. This section offers a fuller understanding of Latinos' experiences with student debt and the role of policy and practice in shaping these experiences. Our discussion is

informed by the body of research that has examined student debt among Latinos—research that is typically overlooked in policy discussions.

#### Understanding Latinos and Student Debt

Latino students are often excluded from conversations about student debt. When they are included in these discussions, the conventional narrative tends to focus on "debt aversion" as "one of the most persistent myths about students' financing of higher education" (Cunningham & Santiago, 2006, p. 8). While some older studies have highlighted lower rates of borrowing and debt among Latino students as compared to

CHANGING THE NARRATIVE ON STUDENT BORROWERS OF COLOR

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## Native Borrowers:

### Recognize It's Our Land, and Honor the Treaties

By Christine A. Nelson, Amanda R. Tachino, and Jameson D. Lopez



#### Your Institution is on Native Land

Prior to the establishment of the United States, Native peoples carved far, protected, and cherished every stretch of land. Native Nations continually held the United States accountable for the 370 treaties signed between 1778-1871 (NICAI, 2019). Treaties are the "supreme law of the land," which requires the federal government—at perpetuity—to provide health care, education, housing, and economic/agricultural assistance in exchange for the land occupied and protected by Tribal communities since time immemorial. The federal government has never fulfilled these obligations.

While the U.S. continues to materially benefit from Indigenous lands, the first peoples of this land (Native students) struggle to afford college and contribute to efforts to build the Native nations. Today, there are 574 sovereign Native nations. Each represents a diversity of Tribal citizens who seek (or hope to seek) higher education opportunities (Borjesson, et al., 2012). Yet, gaining access to higher education is challenging because of the dramatic increase in college costs. In this policy brief, we assert a land-based argument on how higher education policy and practice can address issues of access, college affordability, and equity for Native peoples. Simply put: Honor the treaties.

CHANGING THE NARRATIVE ON STUDENT BORROWERS OF COLOR

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**THIRD WAY**

