

COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

*How Does Greater Louisville Perceive the Value of
College?*

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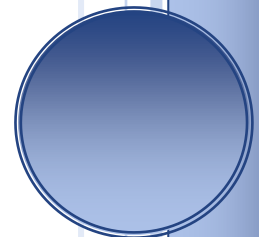
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*A Report Prepared by IQS Research for Business Leaders for
Education*

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Material Accuracy

The intent of this study and this subsequent report is to provide accurate and authoritative information about the attitudinal landscape of the community and general public in the Louisville area. IQS Research makes reasonable effort to ensure that all data is collected, analyzed, and portrayed in the most accurate and factual manner possible. However, there is no guarantee that this data is without flaws or that the use of this data will prevent differences of opinion or disputes and IQS Research bears no responsibility for its use or consequences.



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IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS AND FREQUENTLY USED TERMS

Likert Scale – an ordinal scale, used in this study as a five-point scale to measure perceptions, namely importance, difficulty, and obstacles.

Significant – when this term is used, it signals a level of statistical significance between data.

Highly Important – a term used to signify those respondents who indicated on a Likert scale either a “4” or “5-Extremely Important” response. Thus, highly important refers to the summation of those responses.

Highly Difficult – like highly important, a term used to signify those respondents who indicated either a “4” or “5-Extremely Difficult” response.

Not Difficult – a term used to signify those respondents who indicated either a “1-Not at all difficult” or “2” on a five-point scale.

Greater Louisville Area – Jefferson County along with its surrounding counties included in this study (Bullitt, Oldham, Shelby, and Spencer counties in KY; Clark, Floyd, and Harrison counties in IN).

Collegiate Discourse – refers to when a student began hearing about college. In this study, this is signified by grade and grade level.

Equal Access to College – heading referring to the question in the instrument: “Do you believe a college education is more available to some high school students than to others?”

INTRODUCTION

Background

Business Leaders for Education and the Mayor's Education Roundtable commissioned IQS Research, a research enterprise based in the Louisville community, to conduct a study that measures community perceptions of the value of a college education, with the community defined as the Greater Louisville area.

Greater Louisville Inc.'s Business Leaders for Education and the Mayor's Education Roundtable greatly acknowledge the financial support of the following foundations: Old National Bank Foundation, C.E. & S. Foundation, Inc., The Gheens Foundation, Inc., and the James Graham Brown Foundation.

Previous research suggests that the general population within the community does not place a high value on a college education. Thus, any efforts to increase the level of college attainment are confronted with unique and arduous challenges, as the environment to do so within the community is not conducive to such.

In order for this situation to improve, these unique and arduous challenges must be identified, targeted, and subsequently accounted for. Evidence suggests that surrounding communities have college attainment levels that surpass those in Louisville, and in order for the Louisville community to remain competitive in the market these disparities must be diminished.

Perceptions of college are affected by a variety of factors, factors that are both internal and external (Gorham, 1997)¹. Furthermore, these factors vary between students and adults (both parents and nonparents). The aim of this study, then, was to firstly identify perceptions surrounding the importance and difficulty of obtaining a college education, as well as the obstacles facing the community in the pursuit of that education. A secondary objective was to identify differences between students and adults across various demographics.

¹ Gorham, J. 1997. "A comparative analysis of teacher and student perceptions of sources of motivation and demotivation in college classes." *Communication Education*. 46(4): 245-261.

Methodology

The instruments for this study were developed with the sensitivities of the population in mind. Although a master instrument was developed to pinpoint the various areas that needed to be captured and analyzed, two specific surveys were developed aimed at two populations: students and adults. A series of open and closed ended questions were asked of each population. For the purposes of this study, students are those who are enrolled in 7th – 12th grades in the target geography. Adults are defined as those who are at least eighteen years in age within the targeted geography.

The target geography, generally, is the Greater Louisville area. More specifically, this includes Jefferson, Bullitt, Oldham, Shelby, and Spencer counties in Kentucky, and Clark, Floyd, and Harrison counties in Indiana.

The target audiences of the study, as previously mentioned, were students and adults. More specifically, 1,000 adults were included, 600 of whom reside within Jefferson County and 400 who reside in the seven surrounding counties. Some 300 students were included in the study, regardless of specific geography quotas. In both audiences, sample sizes were sufficient to provide statistical level of confidence and a minimal margin of error.

The surveys, which were conducted via telephone, at the broadest level, gauged perceptions surrounding the importance of and difficulty in attaining a college degree. More specifically, they gauged these perceptions through numerous metrics:

- Importance of high school students in the geographical area to receive a bachelor's degree.
- Difficulty for high school students to attain a bachelor's degree.
- Obstacles facing students, both high school and returning adults, in efforts to attain a college degree.
- Access to college among high school students in the geographical area.
- Exposure to the idea of college and the impact of that exposure.
- Importance of and difficulty in returning to college for working adults.

In addition to these areas of study stated above, demographic data was also collected. Demographics including gender, race, age, level of education (or in the case of students, grade level), and county of residence were collected to discover differences that may exist between or within demographics.

Telephone interviews commenced on January 14th, 2010, whereupon adults and students were contacted to participate in the study. The distribution of calls was randomly generated to ensure a representative sample was drawn from the population. To adhere to ethical and legal standards, any adult contacted was asked to verify that they were indeed 18 years of age or older. Likewise, students must have had parental or guardian approval before being interviewed for the survey.

Telephone interviews were conducted over a period of three weeks, and data collection concluded on February 4th, 2010.

Sample Demographics

Adult Sample

Among adults, well over half of the respondents, roughly 67%, were female. The majority of respondents identified as Caucasian (81%), and nearly 12% classified themselves as African American. Just less than one percent (0.70%) was Hispanic or Latino, and the same percentage identified as Asian. Nearly two percent of respondents refused to specify their race.

Table 1 specifically shows the characteristic demographics of the adult sample. The largest concentration of respondents, nearly 26%, was between the ages of 45 and 54, while another 24% were 65 years of age or older. Ten percent of respondents were between the ages of 18 and 34.

Only four percent of adults represented in this study did not graduate high school, while 21% stated that their highest degree earned was a high school diploma or GED. While 22% of adults interviewed have completed some college, 33% of them have gone on to complete either a Bachelor's or Associates degree. Nearly 20% of adults indicated an advanced degree.

As previously indicated, this study intentionally surveyed a larger proportion of residents of Jefferson County, as nearly 60% of respondents are residents of the county. The remaining 40% of respondents reside in the seven surrounding counties.

Table 1. Adult Demographics

<u>Gender</u>	
Male	32.60%
Female	67.40%
No Response	0.00%
<u>Race</u>	
Caucasian	80.70%
African American	11.40%
Hispanic/Latino	0.70%
Asian	0.70%
Other	4.70%
Refused	1.80%
<u>Age of Respondent</u>	
18-24	1.50%
25-34	8.90%
35-44	19.60%
45-54	25.50%
55-64	19.20%
65 or older	23.90%
Refused	1.40%
<u>Highest Level of Education</u>	
Some High School	4.10%
High School/GED	21.10%
Some College	21.50%
Associates Degree	10.50%
Bachelor's Degree	22.70%
Advanced Degree (MA/PhD)	19.30%
No Answer	0.80%
<u>Location of Residence</u>	
Jefferson County	59.90%
Surrounding County	40.10%

Student Sample**Table 2. Student Demographics**

<i>Gender</i>	
Male	45.33%
Female	54.67%
No Response	0.00%
<i>Race</i>	
Caucasian	78.33%
African American	11.67%
Hispanic/Latino	2.33%
Asian	1.00%
Other	4.00%
Refused	2.67%
<i>Grade of Respondent</i>	
7th Grade	12.33%
8th Grade	13.67%
Freshman	18.33%
Sophomore	21.33%
Junior	18.33%
Senior	16.00%
Refused	0.00%
<i>Which Parents Have College Degree?</i>	
Both Parents	40.48%
Mother Only	11.90%
Father Only	11.90%
Neither Parents	30.95%
Don't Know	4.42%
Don't Live w/ Parents	0.34%
Other	0.00%

As opposed to the adult sample, there is a tighter distribution of males and females (45% and 55%, respectively) within the student population. Just over three-fourths, 78%, of students were Caucasian, while 12% identified themselves as African American. Only two percent of students were Hispanic or Latino.

The largest concentration of students indicated that they were high school sophomores, 21%, and the remainder of high school students was nearly evenly distributed between freshmen, juniors, and seniors. More generally, 26% of students were in middle school at the time the survey was administered, and the remaining 74% were in high school. It should be noted that there was no target proportion between middle in high school students to be included in the study.

A large concentration of students, just over 40%, indicated that both of their parents have a college degree. Which college degree (i.e. Bachelor's, Associates, or advanced) was not specified. An equal percentage of students indicated that either their mother or father have a college degree (12% each), and

31% indicated that neither of their parents have a college degree. It should be noted that because only a very small percentage of students indicated that they have stepparents, stepparents are included as "parents" in the above table.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

This section will provide an in depth discussion on the findings of the study. It will progress by issue, i.e. importance of college, difficulty in attending college, obstacles to attending, etc. The results will be presented in aggregate form, as well as stratified by various demographics in order to show differences within samples. Furthermore, respondent comments will be presented to provide a qualitative scrutiny within community perceptions.

In addition to this, whenever appropriate, comments on the strength of any differences, from a statistical standpoint, will be commented upon within each section.

Thus, four main issues will be included in the discussion:

- ✓ Importance of Attaining Degree
- ✓ Difficulty to Attend College
- ✓ Obstacles of Attending College
- ✓ Perceptions of Equality in Attaining Degree

Furthermore, there will be a discussion on various other topics, such as where students *plan* on attending college should they go, as well as sources of information and awareness about college.

Importance of College

Both students and adults provided their opinions regarding the importance of college education, specifically a bachelor's degree for both high school students and adults in the workplace returning to college to complete their degree. In either case, importance was measured on a five-point Likert scale, where a "1" indicates that a degree is not at all important and a "5" indicates that a degree is extremely important. "High important" refers to those who responded with either a "4" or "5."

96.30% of students believe that college is important; 80.59% of adults believe so.

A college education, from the perspectives of both students and adults, is considered to be highly important. However, there are considerable differences between students and adults in the percentage of the samples that consider college to be highly important. High importance is defined as the sum of those respondents who indicated either a "4" or "5" on the importance scale. In light of this, 96.30% of students believe that attaining a bachelor's degree is

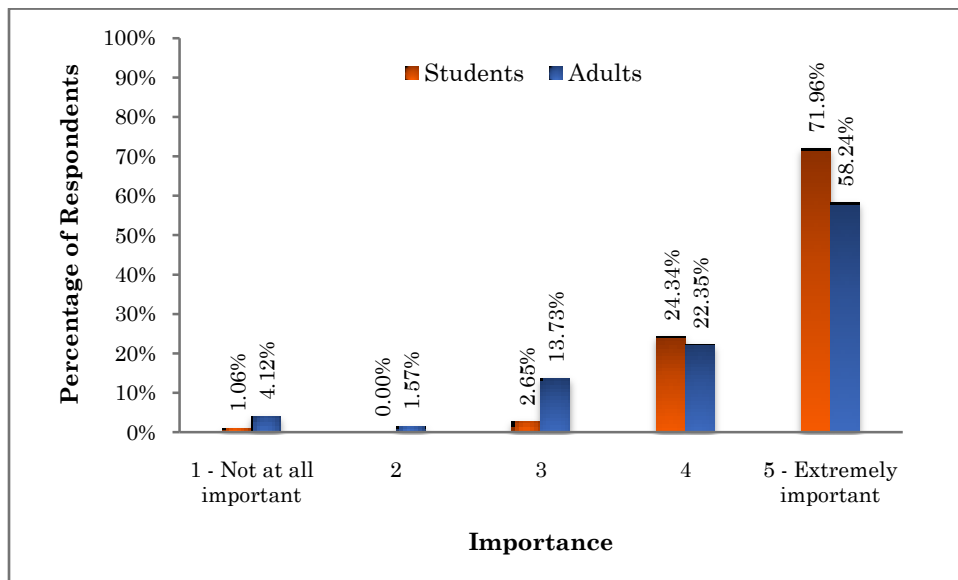
highly important, 71.96% of whom consider it to be extremely important (a 5 on a 5-point scale). In contrast, 80.59% of adults consider high school students attaining a degree to be highly important, 58.24% of who consider it to be extremely important. One can argue that even though a high percentage of both adults and students consider attaining a degree to be an important aspiration for high school students, there is a clear difference between the support of students and adults on this matter (a 16% difference to be precise).

More students than adults believe that it is important for *high school students* to attain a degree. Conversely, more adults than students believe that it is important for *working adults* to return to college to earn their degree. More specifically, 65.41% of adults believe that it is highly important for working adults to return to college and attain bachelor's degree, compared to only 57.30% of students who consider this to be highly important. This difference is statistically significant. However, for both samples, respondents believe that it is more important for high school students in the area to attain their degree than it is for working adults without a degree to earn one.

More students than adults believe that it is important for *high school students* to attain a degree. Conversely, more adults than students believe that it is important for *working adults* to return to college to earn their degree.

The significant difference between adults and students with respect to the importance of high school students attaining a college degree lies in the number of those respondents claiming that a degree is “extremely important.” As figure 1 below indicates, nearly 72% of students claim that it is extremely important for a high school student to attain a degree, compared to only 58% of adults. Furthermore, roughly 14% of adults indicated a rather apathetic or uncertain response to importance, as they responded with a 3 on the importance scale, thus signaling that they are not completely sure how important a degree is. This is not a trivial percentage of respondents, particularly in light of the fact that a much smaller percentage of students responded with a 3, 2.65%.

Figure 1. Importance for High School Students to Attain a Bachelor’s Degree, Overall Response



To further illustrate the perception of importance, particularly student perception, nearly all students indicated that they *plan* on attending college. Just over 98% of them indicated this. What’s more, the majority of them could specify which college or colleges they are planning on attending. Of course, this percentage does not align with the actual number of students who do go on to college after high school, as other factors such as the reality of difficulty and obstacles comes into play, but it nevertheless exemplifies the importance students place on a college education.

98% of students
plan on attending
college.

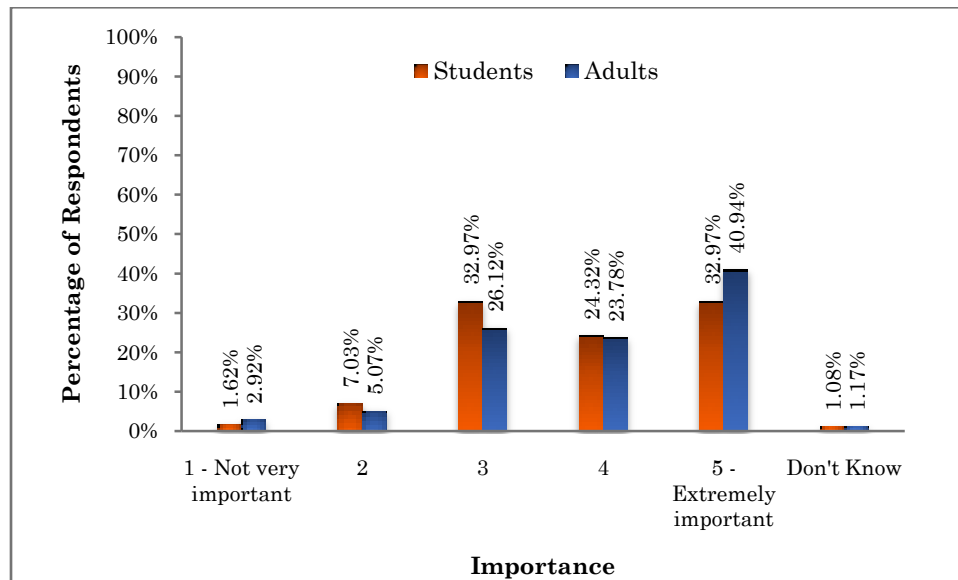
Whereas nearly all students believe that it is important for high school students to attend college and attain a bachelor’s degree, just over half, 57%, believe that it is important for adults in the workplace to return to college to attain a degree. Furthermore, nearly one-third indicate some uncertainty or apathy regarding this scenario, as 33% responded with a 3.

Both students and adults show a level of uncertainty for the importance of college for working adults; uncertainty not present when referring to high school students.

It was previously mentioned that a greater percentage of adults, in comparison to students, believe that it is important for adults to return to college to attain their degree. This difference between students and adults is illustrated in the figure below. There is an eight percent difference between adults who believe this is extremely important, 41%, and students who do, 33%.

As with students, however, there is a substantial percentage of adults who show some level of uncertainty (as indicated by a 3) with this issue, as 26% of adults indicated this.

Figure 2. Importance for Working Adults to Attain Bachelor’s Degree, Overall Response

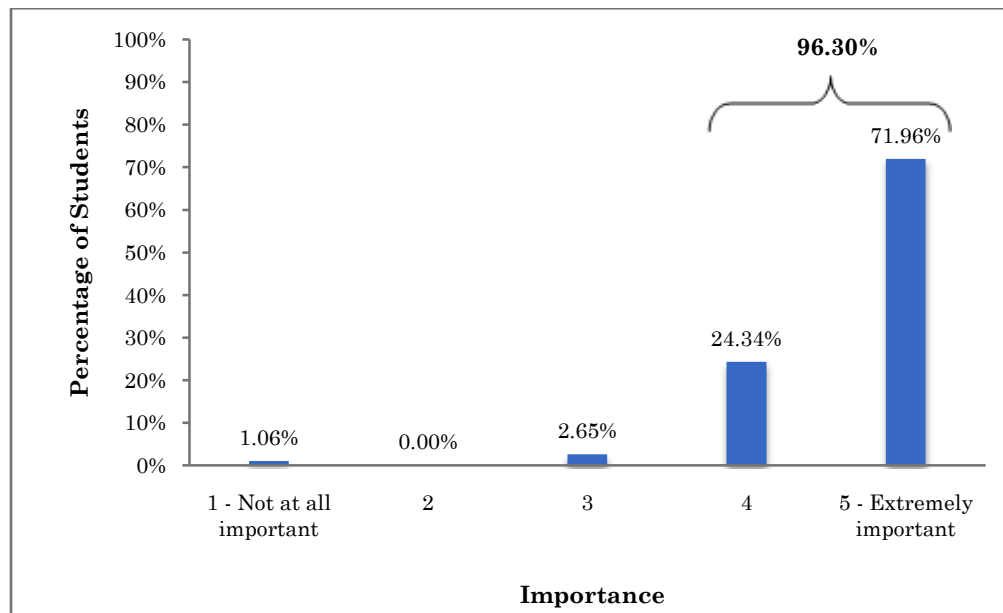


Importance of High School Students to Attain a Bachelor's Degree

Student Response

Just over 96% of students in the area indicated that it is highly important for high school students to attain a bachelor's degree. Figure 3 below specifically illustrates the distribution of responses.

Figure 3. Importance for High School Students to Attain Bachelor's Degree, Student Response



To gain a deeper understanding in this area, an analysis of the comments reveals that students are of the opinion that there is a growing importance of college education in the market and workforce. Most students, particularly those who believe a degree is extremely important, mentioned that college is necessary to attain a “decent” and “well-paying” job in today’s economy. They believe that such an education offers more opportunities, better pay, and the mobility needed to succeed.

Many students suggest that college is necessary to attain a “decent” job.

Students also seem aware of the economic hardships resulting from the recent recession, and this may indeed have an impact on their perceptions of the importance of college. And while few students referenced this specifically, the consensus appears to be that college is necessary for the lifestyles they aspire towards.

As is indicated, students do recognize the value of a college degree, which is certainly evident by the percentage of those who consider a degree highly important and the reasons behind their perceptions. Also, when comparing students along different demographics, the percentage of students claiming a degree as highly important remains virtually consistent. However, there are differences among the percentage of students who responded with a 4 or 5 on the importance scale (i.e. important vs. extremely important), particularly when comparing by gender *and* grade level.

To illustrate, Table 3 shows that there is very little difference between males and females in their belief that high school students attaining a college degree is highly important, 95.79% compared to 96.81%. However, whereas 75.53% of female students claim that a degree is extremely important for high school students, 68.42% of male students believe this (a difference of seven percent).

Table 3. Importance of Degree for H.S. Student by Gender, Student Response

Gender	Importance of College Degree					Highly Important
	1 - Not at all important	2	3	4	5 - Extremely important	
Male	1.05%	0.00%	3.16%	27.37%	68.42%	95.79%
Female	1.06%	0.00%	2.13%	21.28%	75.53%	96.81%

Likewise, there are differences along these same lines between students in different grade levels. When grouped by grade strata, i.e. middle and high school, there is a six percent decrease for high school students regarding the percentage of the population who believe a college degree is highly important. While this difference is not great, it should be noted that *all* middle school respondents indicated high importance on this measure, while 17.24% of juniors and 6.06% of seniors indicated responses other than a 4 or 5.

Table 4. Importance of Degree for H.S. Student by Grade, Student Response

Grade	Importance of College Degree					Highly Important	By Grade Level
	1 - Not at all important	2	3	4	5 - Extremely important		
7th	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	20.00%	80.00%	100.00%	Middle: 100.00%
8th	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	29.63%	70.37%	100.00%	
Freshman	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	29.73%	70.27%	100.00%	High: 94.17%
Sophomore	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	26.32%	73.68%	100.00%	
Junior	0.00%	0.00%	17.24%	24.14%	58.62%	82.76%	
Senior	6.06%	0.00%	0.00%	15.15%	78.79%	93.94%	

The fact that there are high school students, namely students who are perhaps more aware of the benefits of college, who do not perceive a bachelor’s degree to be highly

Some students believe that not all jobs need a college degree.

important begs the question as to why there are such opinions in high school, but do not exist among middle school students. A closer look indicates that some high school students believe that not all jobs require a degree, and thus the importance of a college degree is not applicable in all situations. In addition, there may be a lack of knowledge regarding the actual applicability of a college degree, as cited in the student

comments shown below.

1. There are some jobs that don’t require a degree.
2. Not sure what I want.
3. I can go out and do my own thing – start my own business – and I don’t really need a college education to do that.
4. It’s important to get a college degree if you were going to be a doctor. You’re going to need a degree, but I don’t think for every career you need a degree. You can survive through life without having a degree in some ways but in certain things you should have it. Not having a degree doesn’t make you more skilled for the job. Those who don’t have it usually work harder...

In most cases, a greater percentage of females believe a bachelor’s degree is extremely important, with the exception of 8th graders. There is nearly a 30% difference between 11th grade males and females regarding those who believe that a degree is extremely important (42.86% and 73.33%, respectively).

Table 5. Importance of Degree for H.S. Students by Grade and Gender, Student Response

Grade	Gender	Importance of College Degree				
		1 - Not at all important	2	3	4	5 - Extremely important
7	Male	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	23.53%	76.47%
	Female	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	12.50%	87.50%
8	Male	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	23.08%	76.92%
	Female	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	35.71%	64.29%
9	Male	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	33.33%	66.67%
	Female	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	28.00%	72.00%
10	Male	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	30.00%	70.00%
	Female	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	22.22%	77.78%
11	Male	0.00%	0.00%	21.43%	35.71%	42.86%
	Female	0.00%	0.00%	13.33%	13.33%	73.33%
12	Male	5.26%	0.00%	0.00%	21.05%	73.68%
	Female	7.14%	0.00%	0.00%	7.14%	85.71%

Juniors in particular do show some level of uncertainty towards the importance of a degree, as nearly one-fourth (21.43%) of males responded with a 3, and 13.33% of females did so (cf. Table 5). Also, seniors show a unique pattern, as they are the only grade level that indicates a percentage responding that a degree is not at all important. Just over six percent of seniors indicate this (cf. Table 4).

Does initial exposure to collegiate discourse have an effect on perceptions of importance?

Before concluding the section on student perceptions of importance for high school students to attain a college degree, the question of whether being exposed to the idea

The earlier a discourse is started about college with a student, the more likely they will be to consider attaining a bachelor's degree as extremely important.

of college earlier in life has an impact on perceptions of importance needs to be investigated. A clear pattern can be found with respect to this question. The relationship is this: *the earlier a discourse is started about college with a student, the more likely they will be to consider attaining a bachelor's degree as extremely important.* To illustrate this point, 81.48% of students who indicated that they first heard about college

in elementary school also indicated that attaining a degree is *extremely* important. Just over 69% of students who first heard about college in high school claimed that attaining a degree is *extremely* important.

Table 6. Importance of Degree for H.S. Students by Initial Exposure, Student Response

Level of School	1 - Not at all important	2	3	4	5 - Extremely important
Elementary	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	18.52%	81.48%
Middle	0.00%	0.00%	1.16%	26.74%	72.09%
High	2.78%	0.00%	4.17%	23.61%	69.44%

In relation to initial exposure to college, the two most frequently cited sources of awareness cited by students about college are from school counselors and parents/guardians (44.33% and 31.33%, respectively).

Does parental education have an effect on student perceptions of importance?

While there is not a clear pattern regarding this issue, and although *high importance* does not appear to be affected by the indicator of parental level of education, fewer students who indicated that only their father has a college degree stated that attaining a degree is extremely important. As Table 7 below illustrates, 58.33% of students whose only parent that has a college degree is the father claimed that a degree is extremely important.

Table 7. Importance of Degree for H.S. Students as a Function of Parent's Education, Student Response

# of Parents in Household with College Degree	Importance of College Education (Student Response)					Highly Important
	1 - Not at all important	2	3	4	5 - Extremely important	
Both Parents*	1.22%	0.00%	1.22%	21.95%	75.61%	97.56%
Mother Only	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	30.00%	70.00%	100.00%
Father Only	0.00%	0.00%	4.17%	37.50%	58.33%	95.83%
Neither Parents	2.08%	0.00%	2.08%	20.83%	75.00%	95.83%
Don't Know Don't Live w/ Parents**	0.00%	0.00%	11.11%	11.11%	77.78%	88.89%
Other	0.00%	0.00%	20.00%	20.00%	60.00%	80.00%

* "Parent" includes both Parents and Stepparents, just as "Mother" includes both Mother and Stepmother and "Father" includes both Father and Stepfather

** Only one respondent

Interestingly enough, students whose father is the only parent with a college degree indicated at a lesser rate that college is extremely important (indicated by a "5") than all other subcategories. This becomes even more intriguing when this group is compared to students who have no parents with a college degree. Just over 58% of students whose father has a degree indicated that college is extremely important, compared to 75% of students who have no parents that hold a degree.

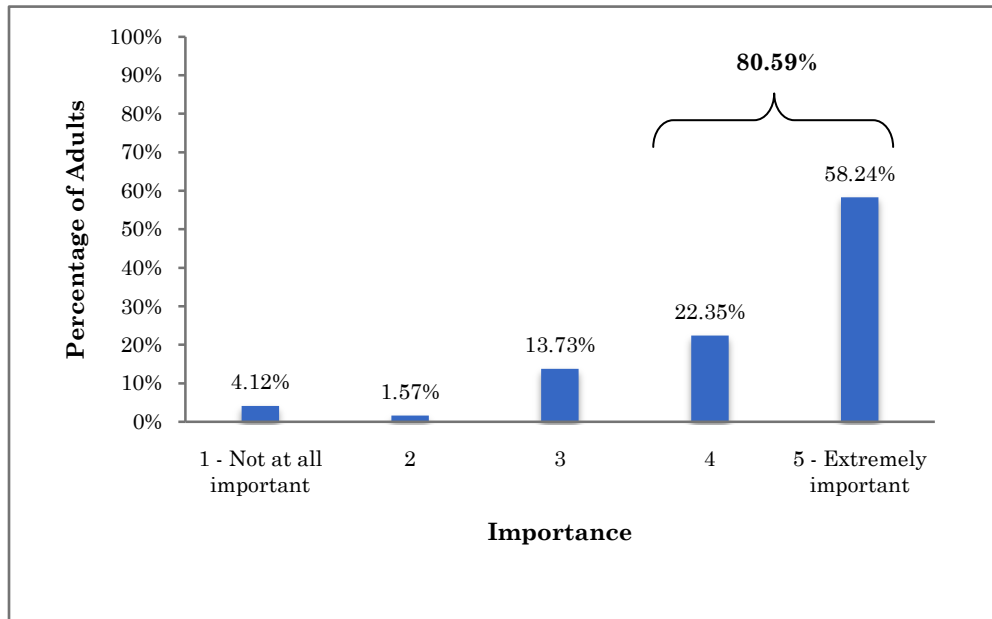
Of those students who have two parents with a college degree and those who have none, there is no difference in the percentage of students indicating that college is *extremely* important

Nearly 75% of students who have two parents that hold a college degree indicated that college is extremely important. This is virtually identical to the percentage of students who have no parents with a degree, 75%.

Adult Response

Just over 80% of adults believe that it is highly important for high school students attain a college degree. While this number does appear to be high, it is a considerable difference in the context of student perceptions of importance, where 96% of them believe that it is highly important to attain a degree. This disparity remains large when comparing the percentage of adults indicating that it is *extremely* important compared to students who indicate such (72%).

Figure 4. Importance for High School Student to Attain Bachelor's Degree, Adult Response



Reasons behind this perceived importance are not totally unlike students' comments. Adults who believe it is important reference the benefits that may come in pay and advancement in careers. Adults, like students, are aware of the need for a college degree to obtain a job in the market. In many respects, adults have strong opinions toward the importance of attaining a degree, despite the fact that fewer adults perceive it to be highly important to attain one. Comments given show a greater awareness of the manifestations a college degree can bring in the workforce, perhaps due to their personal experience and observations. Comments include:

1. I think it is important because it's necessary for society.
2. The job market is tight. People with college degrees get better jobs.
3. Because our education system is lacking, each of us needs the most education we can get to support ourselves, families, and give back to the country.
4. It's important to have a college degree to be able to think effectively.
5. I think that an education prepares a person for life...

Important differences do begin to appear, however, when parents and nonparents are stratified. Additionally, just as there were differences that appear between male and female students, there are differences that appear along gender lines among adults. Although the differences with respect to importance are not so striking between parental status and gender when these demographics are isolated, there is a seven percent difference between male nonparents and female parents. More specifically, 77% of mothers believe that it is highly important for high school students to attain a degree, compared to almost 84% of nonparent males. While this difference is not remarkable, it does perhaps show the role gender plays in perceptions of importance.

**IMPORTANCE OF BACHELOR'S DEGREE
(PARENTAL STATUS X GENDER)**

	Male	Female
Parent	80.00%	76.84%
Non-Parent	83.80%	80.28%

For the most part, and not unlike the student population, adults do believe that it is important for high school students to attain a college degree, regardless of gender or parental status. However, there is a nine percent difference between adults who reside within Jefferson County and those who reside in the surrounding counties. Furthermore, this difference is statistically significant ($p < .001$). Some 84% of adults within Jefferson County believe that it is highly important for high school students to attain a degree, compared to 75% of adults who reside outside of Jefferson County.

Table 8. Importance of Degree for H.S. Students by County of Residence, Adult Response

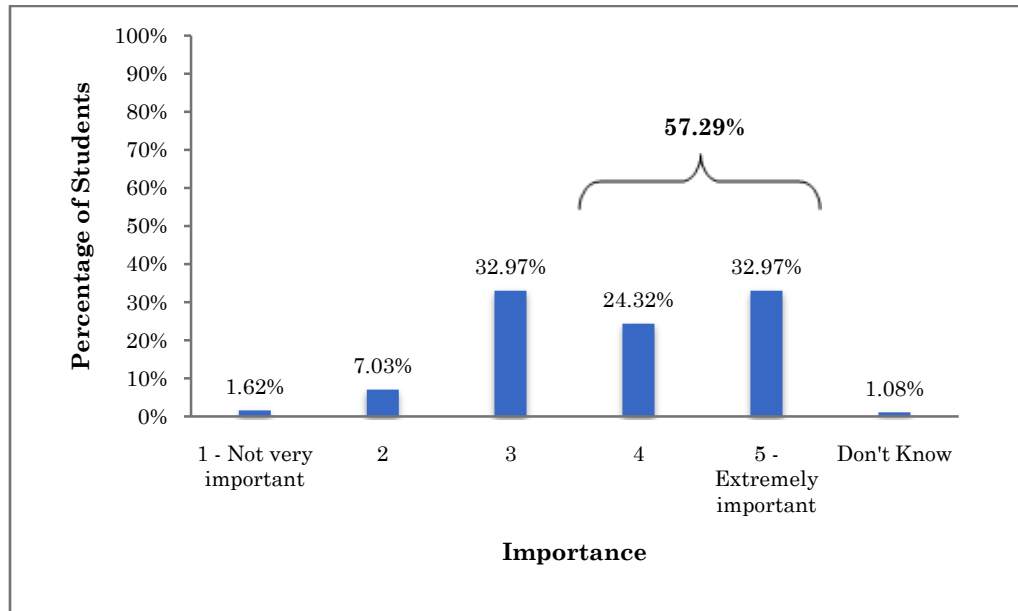
Location	1 - Not at all important	2	3	4	5 - Extremely important	Highly Important
Jefferson	1.97%	1.64%	12.13%	20.33%	63.93%	84.26%
Surrounding	7.32%	1.46%	16.10%	25.37%	49.76%	75.12%

Importance of Working Adults to Attain a Bachelor's Degree

Student Response

As indicated earlier, a smaller percentage of students believe that it is important for working adults to attain a college degree when compared to the importance for high school students to do so. Thirty-three percent (33%) of students believe that it is extremely important for working adults to attain a degree (compared to 72% who think that it is extremely important for high school students to do so). Nearly 33% of students also indicated a level of uncertainty and apathy regarding working adults attaining a degree.

Figure 5. Importance for Working Adults to Attain a Bachelor's Degree, Student Response



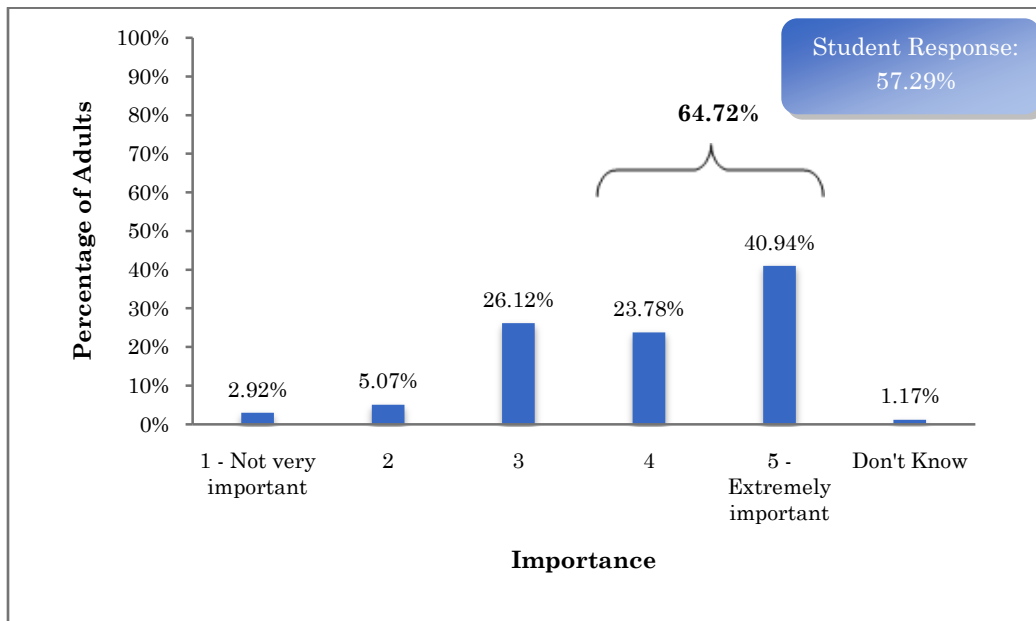
Students do recognize some obstacles facing adults who desire to return to college and attain their degree. For those who did show a level of uncertainty, i.e. the 33% who responded with a 3, they indicated that life circumstances (e.g. family, finances, etc.) may prevent working adults from returning to college. They also recognize that it can be positive for adults to return, but because their current life situations may prevent this from happening, they are reserved in their response to importance.

Those students who do not believe it is important to return (the nearly nine percent who responded with a 1 or 2) believe that it may not be necessary for working adults to attain a degree, as their positions in the workplace are stable and adequate.

Adult Response

There are differences between students and adults regarding their perceptions of the importance of attaining a college degree (cf. Figures 1 and 2). It was already revealed that, when compared to adults, a higher percentage of students believe that college is highly important for *high school students* (96.24% compared to 80.11). But when referring to *working adults*, a higher percentage of adults believe that college is highly important, 64.72% when compared to students (57.29%).

Figure 6. Importance of Working Adults Attaining a Degree, Adult Response



Whereas the differences along certain demographic lines, with the exception of county of residence, were virtually non-existent with respect to high school students attaining a degree, there are noticeable differences when looking at adult perceptions of the importance for working adults to attain a degree, particularly when taking race and gender into consideration. Again, such differences along these demographics are not present with respect to high school students attaining a degree.

As Table 9 shows, there is virtually no difference between Caucasian males and females in their perceptions about the importance for working adults to attain a degree. However, when isolating “extremely important” responses within Caucasians, there is a six percent difference, where more males consider it to be extremely important.

On average, a greater proportion of African Americans believe it is highly important for working adults to attain a degree when compared to Caucasians.

There is a significant difference, however when taking into consideration African Americans, both when comparing with Caucasians and between males and females. Whereas 91% of African American males indicate high importance for working adults to attain a degree, only 78% of African American females have this opinion. Likewise, there is a 26% difference between Caucasian males and African American males, 64% and 91%, respectively; there is a 15% difference between Caucasian females and African American females, 63% and 78%, respectively. Thus, on average, a greater proportion of African Americans believe it is important for working adults to attain a degree when compared to Caucasians.

Table 9. Importance of Degree for Working Adults by Race & Gender, Adult Response

		Importance of Adults to Return to College and Finish Bachelor's Degree					
		1 - Not at all Important	2	3	4	5 - Extremely important	Highly Important
Caucasian	Male	3.29%	9.21%	23.03%	21.71%	42.76%	64.47%
	Female	2.60%	2.97%	31.23%	26.39%	36.80%	63.20%
Afr. Am.	Male	0.00%	0.00%	9.09%	18.18%	72.73%	90.91%
	Female	4.88%	4.88%	12.20%	24.39%	53.66%	78.05%

Who Needs a College Degree?

Students and adults alike were asked whether or not everyone should receive a college degree. The question read: “Do you think everyone should get a college degree?” From there, they could respond with “Yes,” “No,” or “It depends.”

Student Response

Seventy-one percent of students claim that everyone needs a college degree, while another 20% believe that it depends on individual situations. The remaining nine percent state that not everyone needs a degree. These responses remained rather consistent regardless of gender and parental level of education.

Should everyone get a college degree?

Yes..... 71.43%
No..... 8.99%
Depends.... 19.58%

Nearly 1 in 10 students believes that not everyone needs a college degree.

The 29% of students who claimed that not everyone should attain a degree or that it would depend were asked to explain their response in greater detail. While responses did vary, students identified that those who are seeking trade professions or specialized jobs do not necessarily need a college degree. Thus, there is a belief among students that all careers do not necessitate a college degree. Despite this, *remember that nearly all students, 96%, believe that it is important to attain a degree nonetheless.* This further indicates that there is some difference in belief of what students think is important and a reality they may be facing in their own lives. Comments that illustrate this belief are provided below.

1. Those that have a trade that they can use in everyday life.
2. People working after high school.
3. People who go to trade school.
4. Depends on what you want to do in life.
5. People that work construction and at other businesses.
6. Working in factories or in gas stations.
7. Maybe someone who doesn't know what they want to do in life.
8. Those who do not strive to get a degree; those who pursue an interest in a job not requiring a degree.
9. People who inherit a family business or...get jobs out of high school.
10. Some people don't like school.

Many students, overall, also state that a person's success isn't fully determined by the possession of a college degree. They recognize there is a balance between education and personal ambition or drive. However, there was also a large number of students who are of the opinion that most people cannot be successful without obtaining a college degree, as they believe that college provides the necessary skills needed to perform well in the job market. Comments include:

1. If you have a degree you can get a job and live easier.
2. It provides an income that could support a family.
3. Getting a bachelor's degree or more can earn a person 10% or more money yearly on a salary.
4. More opportunity in the future.
5. It keeps them off the street.
6. Self respect and confidence.
7. Financial stability and security. Having the security of knowing you have a job you can keep for longer period of time. With a college degree you can get better jobs; with a high school degree it would be harder to move up the ranks than if you had a degree.
8. You need a college degree to be successful.
9. You can get better homes.
10. Helps people to be better citizens and looks better on your resume to get a job.

Students also associate having a college degree with better paying jobs and increased chances of finding a job after graduation. As previously mentioned, many students seem aware that the current market favors those who do have a college degree. Thus, awareness among students seems to be high as to *why* it is important to attain a college degree. Furthermore, this helps explain why more students believe it is important for high school students to attain a degree than working adults, as working adults have already, in their minds, established their lifestyle and a disruption may not outweigh the potential benefits associated with a degree.

Students seem firm on *why* they believe college is important.

Adult Response

There is a more rigid distribution of adults who claim that *everyone* should or should not receive a college degree; 48% believe that everyone should, compared to 42% of who claim that not everyone should. Remember that 71% of students believe that everyone should receive a degree. Thus, just over half of adults do not believe that everyone should attain a degree or that it depends.

Table 10. Opinions of College Attainment, Adult & Student Response

Should everyone get a college degree?		
	Adults	Students
Yes	48.34%	71.43%
No	41.91%	8.99%
Depends	9.75%	19.58%

Similar to students, most adults indicated that those who are going into trade or specialized professions are the ones who do not need to attain a college degree. They recognize that not all jobs in the market require a degree.

Does level of education affect opinions of who needs a college degree?

The answer to this question appears to be yes. There is a clear pattern between an adult’s level of education and whether they believe everyone needs a college degree.

The more one is educated, the less likely they are to believe that everyone needs a degree.

In general, the more one is educated, the less likely they are to believe that everyone needs a college degree. The only exception is among adults who have an associate’s degree. Whereas 78% of adults who have not graduated high school believe that everyone needs a college degree or that it depends, 37% of those who have an advanced degree responded in the same way.

When accounting for the associate’s anomaly, there is an average 10% decrease in those who respond either as “yes” or “it depends” between each level of education.

Table 11. Opinions of College Attainment by Level of Education, Adult Response

Should everyone get a college degree?					
	Some High School	High School/GED	Some College	Bachelor's Degree	Advanced Degree
Yes	66.67%	53.91%	49.57%	46.02%	27.78%
No	22.22%	34.78%	38.26%	46.02%	63.33%
Depends	11.11%	11.30%	12.17%	7.96%	8.89%
Yes/Depends	77.78%	65.22%	61.74%	53.98%	36.67%

Does race affect opinions of who should get a college degree?

There are stark differences between Caucasians and African Americans with respect to this issue. Furthermore, gender differences begin to show up as well. Some 88% of African American adults believe that everyone should attain a degree or that it depends, compared to only 54% of Caucasian adults. Within Caucasians, a larger percentage of females responded that everyone should attain a degree or that it depends than males (57.35% and 49.68%, respectively). In contrast, a greater percentage of African American males believe this than females (90.91% and 85.37%, respectively).

Table 12. Opinions of College Attainment by Race and Gender, Adult Response

	Should everyone get a college degree?			
	Caucasians		Afr. Am.	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Yes	41.29%	48.16%	72.73%	68.29%
No	50.32%	42.65%	9.09%	14.63%
Depends	8.39%	9.19%	18.18%	17.07%
Yes/Depends	49.68%	57.35%	90.91%	85.37%

What is also interesting is the low percentage of “No” responses among African Americans compared to Caucasians. Namely, 46.49% of Caucasians do not believe that everyone should attain a degree. This is a large difference in light of the only 11.86% of African Americans who believe so. African Americans were more likely to respond that it depends.

Summary of Perceptions of Importance

What has been shown rather clearly throughout this section is that the community *does* perceive that an attainment of a college degree is indeed important. Furthermore, a greater proportion of students, in relation to adults, perceive that college is important for them to aspire towards. Adults and students alike recognize the potential benefits associated with attaining a degree, but also realize that such a degree may benefit some over others. This pattern is seen with respect to both high school students attaining a degree and working adults returning to school to attain one.

Thus, to recap:

- A larger percentage of students perceive that attaining a Bachelor's degree is important for high school students, when compared to adults who believe this – 96% of students compared to 80% of adults.
- Both students and adults believe it is less important for working adults to return to the classroom and attain a bachelor's degree. However, whereas a greater percentage of students than adults believe that it is important for high school students to attain a degree, this relationship is reversed when considering adults returning to college.
- For students, the earlier in their childhood a discourse on college was started, the more important they will view attaining a college degree. Students who indicated that they first started hearing about college in elementary school responded at greater rates that attaining a bachelor's degree is highly important.
- Race does play a role in perceptions of importance, specifically among adults responding to working adults returning to attain a degree. On average, a greater proportion of African Americans believe it is highly important for working adults to attain a degree when compared to Caucasians.
- While race plays a role, gender and parental status does not seem to be an indicator affecting perceptions of importance among adults. However, location does play a role, as adults who reside in Jefferson County perceive college to be important at high rates than adults residing in surrounding counties.
- Students who indicated that only their father has a college education responded at lesser rates that attaining a degree is “extremely important,” compared to other subgroups of parental education.
- Finally, a greater percentage of female students responded that a college degree is “extremely important” than did their male counterparts.

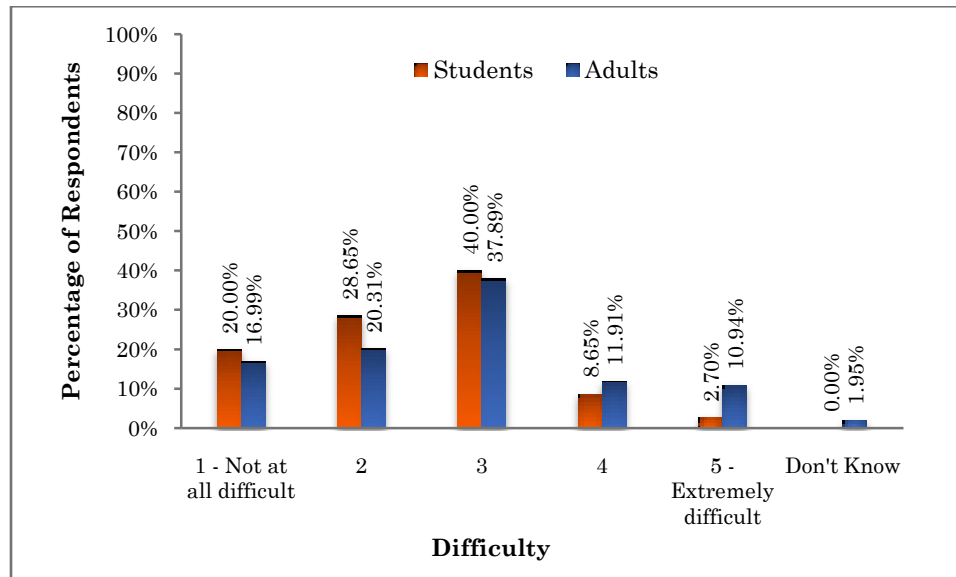
Difficulty to Attend College

This section of the report will focus on perception of difficulty of attaining a college degree within the community, as well as discuss differences within and across samples.

While there are differences between adults and students in how difficult they believe it is to attend college, these differences are not large. Furthermore, the patterns seen in either population with respect to this issue are consistent regardless of the population. As Figure 7 shows, the largest concentration of respondents in either population indicated that difficulty to attend, on a 5-point scale, is a 3.

Overall, fewer students perceive attending college to be highly difficult than do adults (highly difficult refers to “4” and “5-Extremely difficult” responses). Again, these differences are not stark, but, for example, there is an eight percent difference between students and adults with respect to extremely difficult (three percent compared to 11%). Likewise, just under half, 49%, of students do not believe it is difficult to attend college, whereas only 37% of adults believe that it is not difficult for high school students to attend. “Not difficult” refers to those respondents who indicated either a “1-Not at all difficult” and “2” on the five-point scale.

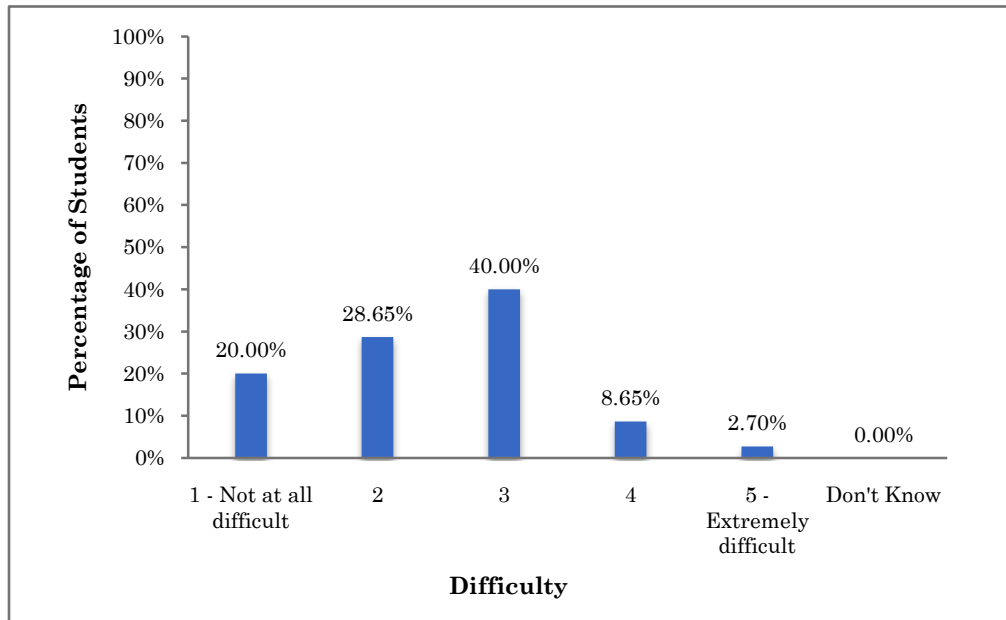
Figure 7. Difficulty for High School Students to Attend College, Overall Response



Student Perceptions of Difficulty for High School Students

It was previously discussed that fewer students perceive it to be difficult to attend college when compared to adults. The figure below is an isolated view of student response. Nearly 49% of students believe that it is not difficult to attend college. Another 40% have a level of uncertainty surrounding this issue.

Figure 8. Difficulty for High School Students to Attend College, Student Response



With respect to student response surrounding the difficulty for high school students to attend college, there are noticeable differences when taking into consideration parental level of education. These differences are starker when comparing those who do not believe college is difficult to attend. Those students whose father is the only parent in the household with a college degree do not believe college is difficult to attend at a greater rate compared to other subgroups relating to parental level of education. Remember also that this subgroup had the lowest percentage of students claiming that a Bachelor's degree is *extremely* important (cf. Table 7).

Nearly 62% of students whose father is the only parent in the household with a college degree indicated that college is not difficult to attend, compared to only 36% of students whose mother is the only college degree holder in the household, a difference of 26%. Some 55% of students who have two parents with college degree say that attending college is not difficult.

Table 13. Difficulty for H.S. Students to Attend College as a Function of Parent's Education, Student Response

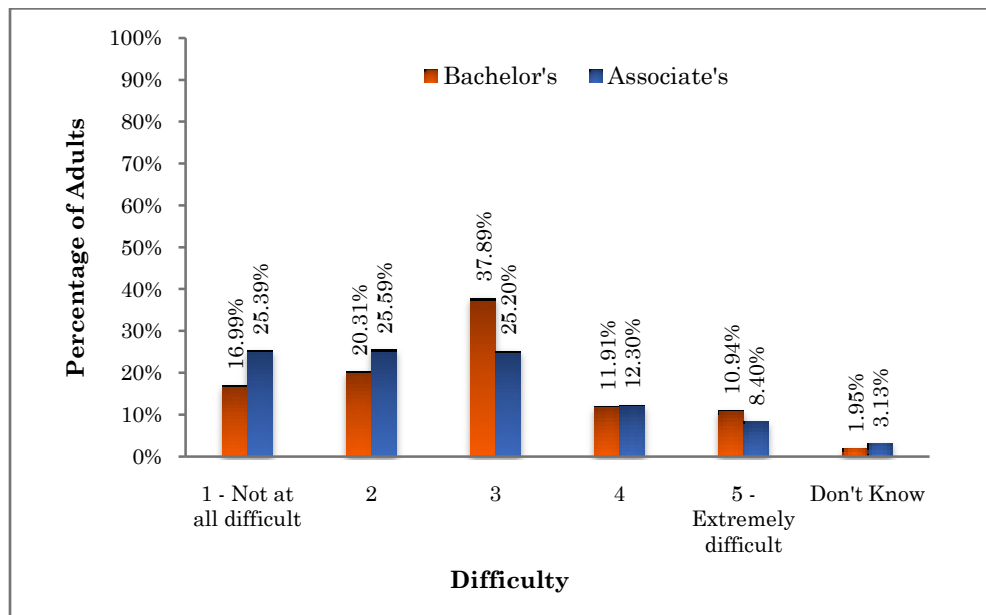
# of Parents in Household with College Degree	Difficulty to Attend College					Highly Difficult	Not Difficult
	1 - Not at all difficult	2	3	4	5 - Extremely difficult		
Both Parents*	24.64%	30.43%	33.33%	10.14%	1.45%	11.59%	55.07%
Mother Only	4.55%	31.82%	59.09%	0.00%	4.55%	4.55%	36.36%
Father Only	38.10%	23.81%	33.33%	0.00%	4.76%	4.76%	61.90%
Neither Parents	14.75%	31.15%	39.34%	11.48%	3.28%	14.75%	45.90%
Don't Know	16.67%	0.00%	66.67%	16.67%	0.00%	16.67%	16.67%
Other	20.00%	20.00%	60.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	40.00%

* "Parent" includes both Parents and Stepparents, just as "Mother" includes both Mother and Stepmother and "Father" includes both Father and Stepfather

Adult Perceptions of Difficulty

Overall, a greater percentage of adults believe that it is difficult for high school students to attend college than do students themselves. Furthermore, as Figure 9 shows, adults believe that it is more difficult for high school students to attend college for a bachelor's degree than for an associate's degree. This difference, however, is evident in the percentage of adults claiming that it is not difficult to attend, rather than those who claim that it is (i.e. those who respond with either "1" or "2" rather than "4" or "5"). To illustrate this, 37% of adults do not believe it is difficult to attend college to attain a bachelor's degree, compared to the 51% of adults claiming the same for an associate's degree. Furthermore, a larger number of adults display a level of uncertainty (i.e. a "3" response) surrounding perceptions of difficulty in attaining a bachelor's degree over an associate's.

Figure 9. Difficulty to Attend College (Bachelor's & Associate's), Adult Response

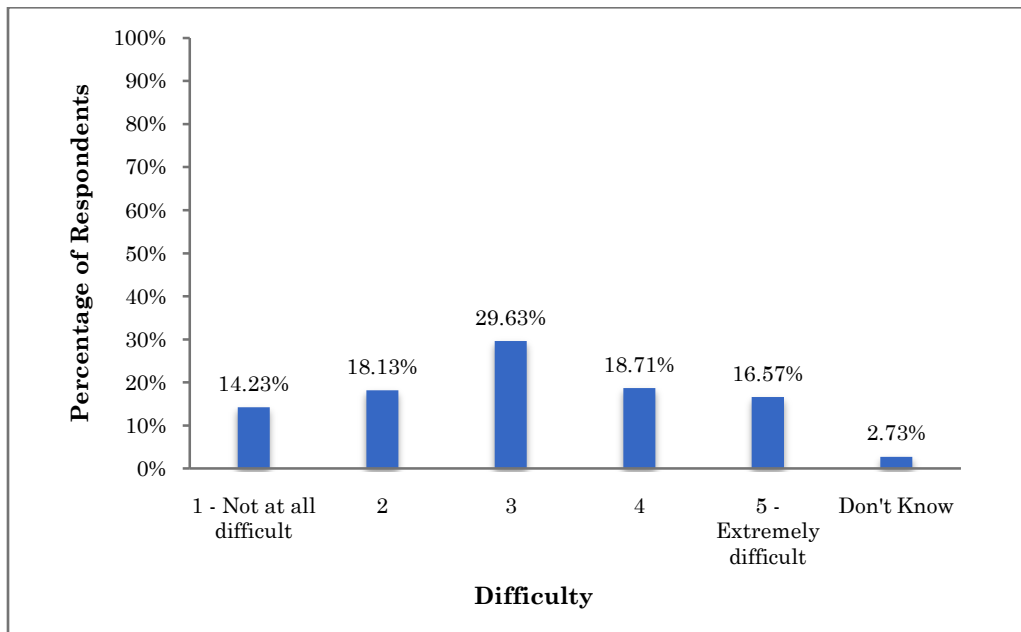


When weighting for parental status among adults, 23.75% of adults believe that it is difficult for high school students to attend college to obtain a bachelor's degree. There are differences between parents and nonparents, particularly among males. Specifically, there is nearly a 10% difference between fathers and nonparent males. Whereas 15% of fathers believe that it is highly difficult to attend college to obtain a *bachelor's degree*, 24% of nonparent males think so. Likewise, 18% of fathers believe it is difficult to obtain an *associate's degree* while 26% of nonparent males believe this. The difference between mothers and nonparent females are not significant.

Adult Perceptions of Difficulty to Attend College for Working Adults

Less than a quarter of adults believe that it is difficult for high school students to attend college and attain a degree. However, it is interesting to note that 35% of adults, when weighting for parental status, believe that it is highly difficult for working adults to attend college. This is nearly a 13% increase from their perceptions of difficulty regarding high school students attending college. While a direct comparison on this measure cannot be made with students, as the student sample was not asked to give their opinions about the difficulty for working adults to attend college, it should also be noted here that this is a 24% increase from the 11% of students who claim that it is difficult for students.

Figure 10. Difficulty for Working Adults to Attend College, Adult Response



Why should adults return to school to complete a bachelor's degree?

Adults were asked to indicate what they believe to be reasons why working adults should return to college and obtain his or her bachelor's degree. While responses varied, they do align with comments already discussed on the importance of a degree (both from students and adults), namely to advance their position and ability, to allow themselves greater mobility in the job market, and to better themselves individually (as college provides skills and knowledge needed to be successful). However, there were unique responses that relate to supporting their family and the ability to provide a role model for their children.

Provided below is a sample of comments outlining the mentioned patterns with respect to advantages of returning to college, despite some of the difficulties that working adults may face in doing so.

1. To get ahead and to make a new career for themselves, and to have a new interest.
2. More earning capacity and accomplishment.
3. Your kids - if you value your own education, your kids will as well.
4. To improve himself.
5. To be better educated and to get a better job.
6. To earn more money and to get a better job with a better schedule; to set a better example for your children.
7. To better themselves financially, emotionally, and spiritually; because people feel better when they are achieving something and that is an achievement.
8. Most important – I would think to be more able to function in the work place and for self confidence.
9. To broaden their views.
10. To support the family financially.
11. Greater income potential and setting an example for children.

Does race have an impact on how adults perceive difficulty?

There are considerable differences between Caucasians and African Americans regarding how difficult it is to attend college. Specifically, when accounting for gender, African Americans perceive attending college to be difficult at greater rates than Caucasians. There is a 12% difference between the two races with respect to the difficulty in attaining a bachelor’s degree. This disparity is virtually the same regarding an associate’s degree. In either case, African American’s perceive it to be more difficult than do Caucasians. Furthermore, when accounting for gender, the differences between Caucasian and African American males are greater than females regarding a bachelor’s degree (a 20% difference for males, a four percent difference for females).

African Americans perceive attending college, for high school students, to be difficult at greater rates than Caucasians.

Table 14. Difficulty for H.S. Students to Attend College by Race & Gender, Adult Response

		1 - Not at all difficult	2	3	4	5 - Extremely difficult	Highly Difficult
<i>Bachelor's Degree</i>							
Caucasian	Male	18.33%	30.00%	35.00%	9.17%	7.50%	16.67%
	Female	15.61%	20.82%	40.15%	13.01%	10.41%	23.42%
Afr. Am.	Male	22.73%	4.55%	36.36%	18.18%	18.18%	36.36%
	Female	9.30%	13.95%	48.84%	16.28%	11.63%	27.91%
<i>Associate's Degree</i>							
Caucasian	Male	24.58%	33.05%	21.19%	12.71%	8.47%	21.19%
	Female	25.66%	27.17%	28.68%	10.19%	8.30%	18.49%
Afr. Am.	Male	31.82%	13.64%	27.27%	22.73%	4.55%	27.27%
	Female	16.28%	18.60%	30.23%	23.26%	11.63%	34.88%

With respect to adults returning to college and attaining their degree, there is a large difference, particularly within African Americans regarding gender differences. Namely, 55% of African American males believe that it is highly difficult for working adults to return. Not only is this an increase over Caucasian males and females (by at most 19%), but it is also an increase of 32% over African American females (55% compared to 23%).

Table 15. Difficulty for Working Adults to Attend College by Race & Gender, Adult Response

Difficulty for Working Adult in Louisville to Attend College		1 - Not at all difficult	2	3	4	5 - Extremely difficult	Highly Difficult
Caucasian	Male	18.00%	16.67%	28.00%	24.00%	13.33%	37.33%
	Female	13.96%	19.25%	30.94%	18.49%	17.36%	35.85%
Afr. Am.	Male	0.00%	27.27%	18.18%	27.27%	27.27%	54.55%
	Female	10.00%	20.00%	47.50%	0.00%	22.50%	22.50%

When comparing Caucasians and African Americans in general, regardless of gender, the differences in perceptions of difficulty are not significant. However, when factoring in gender, one can see the stark differences between males and females within the African American community.

Summary of Perceptions of Difficulty

Responses regarding the difficulty to attend college, for both students and working adults seem to indicate that it is not very difficult to attend, particularly among student respondents. While 24% of adults indicated that they believe attending college is difficult for high school students, only 11% of students indicated such. However, adults do perceive it to be more difficult for working adults to attend college than it is for high school students.

To recap these findings:

- Adults believe that it is more difficult to attend and obtain a bachelor's degree than it is to attain an associate's degree.
- Compared to students, adults believe that it is more difficult to attend college.
- There are significant differences between Caucasian and African American adults in the perceptions of how difficult it is for both students and working adults to attend college.
 - Specifically, African Americans perceive attending college, for high school students, to be difficult at greater rates than Caucasians.
 - Compared to Caucasians, fewer African American females believe that it is difficult for working adults to attend college, but more African American males believe that it is difficult for them to do so.
- Adults cite caring for their families and securing better pay as reasons why working adults should return to college and attain their degree.

Obstacles Facing Students and Adults

Thus far, we have seen that, overall, both students *and* adults are of the opinion that attaining a college degree is indeed important, albeit a greater percentage of students believe this compared to adults. Furthermore, while there are differences between students and adults, the perception that it is difficult to attend college is not high among the Greater Louisville population. In light of these discoveries, the question still remains why Louisville lags behind our surrounding communities in college attendance.

There are obstacles facing students and adults alike in their attempts to become college graduates. As this section will discuss, these obstacles are present in attempts to *begin* a college career as well as *during* one's tenure as a college student, which in turn may lead to attrition. Students and adults alike identify many of the same obstacles, but there are some obstacles that are more unique to particular demographic groups, as well as between students and adults.

Both students and adults were asked to identify the impact of different obstacles they perceive various scenarios may have on one's attempt to attain a degree. For high school students, these scenarios were as follows:

- ✓ Knowing how to begin. For example, applying to college or the financial aid process.
- ✓ Graduating high school with the grades and test scores necessary to be accepted into a college.
- ✓ Being able to succeed academically in college classes.
- ✓ Paying for college.
- ✓ Having the skills to balance the demands of college with work and social lives.
- ✓ Having the family support to focus on education.
- ✓ Having peer support to encourage the student to succeed.

These scenarios were presented to both students and adults to determine how much of an obstacle these are to student success in college. Additionally, *adults* were asked their opinions on obstacles that may be facing working adults who return to college. Three additional scenarios were presented to them pertaining to working adults. These are:

- ✓ Having the support of an employer to attend classes.
- ✓ Finding class schedules to work around work schedules.
- ✓ Dealing with possible negativity associated with being an older, non-traditional student (i.e. the stigma associated with non-traditional students).

Obstacles Facing High School Students

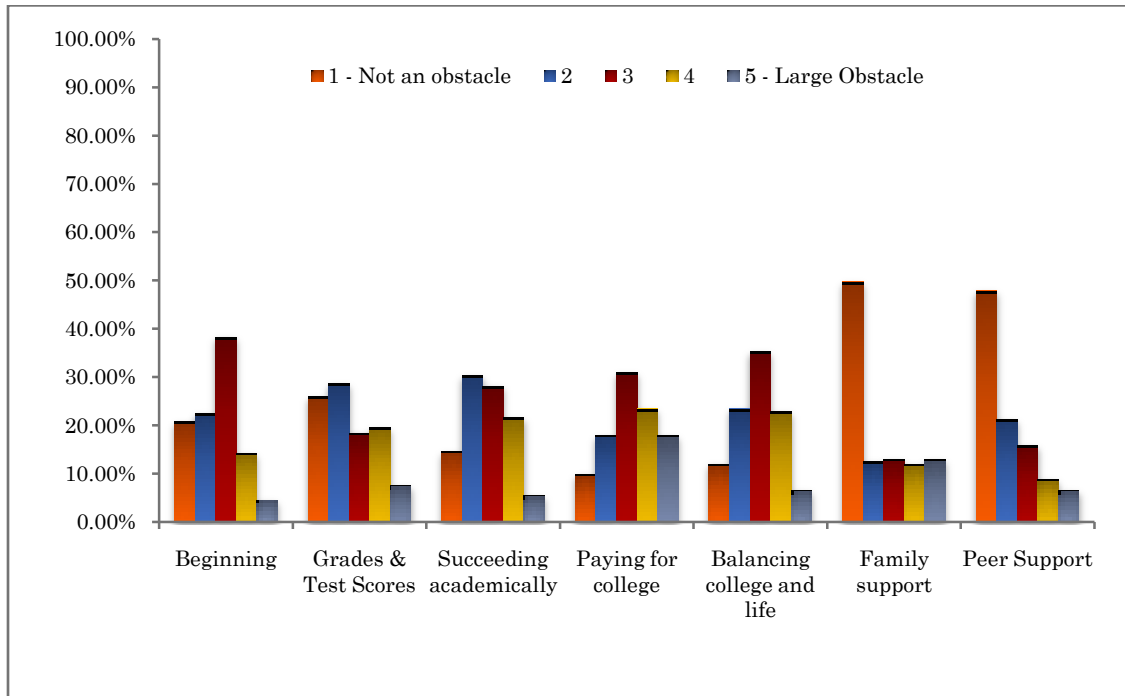
As Figure 11 shows, the two largest obstacles perceived by students are *paying for college* and being able to *balance life and the demands of college*. Also, adults perceive that all scenarios are obstacles at greater rates than students. Specifically regarding students, nearly half of students, 49.73% of them, do not believe that lack of family support is an obstacle. Furthermore, 47.83% of them do not believe lack of peer support to be an obstacle.

Below is the percentage of students who believe that each of the above scenarios is indeed an obstacle facing them when entering college. These figures are the summation of those who responded with either a “4” or “5-Large obstacle.”

**Table 16. Obstacles Facing H.S. Students,
Student Response**

Obstacle	% of Students
Paying for College	41.30%
Balancing College & Life	29.35%
Grades & Test Scores	27.03%
Succeeding Academically	27.03%
Family Support	24.86%
Beginning	18.58%
Peer Support	15.22%

Figure 11. Obstacles Facing Students, Student Response



As was noted earlier, adults tend to believe that high school students entering college are faced with more obstacles than what students indicated. Across all scenarios, a greater percentage of adults perceive this same set of scenarios to be an obstacle when compared to student responses.

68% of adults are concerned about high school students being able to pay for college. Another 48% believe that balancing life and college will be an obstacle students face.

While both students and parents believe paying for college is an obstacle facing high school students, 68.24% of adults stated that it is, compared to 41.30% of students. Similarly, 48.32% of adults indicated that being able to balance the demands of college with student life will be an obstacle facing students entering college, while only 29.35% of students believe so.

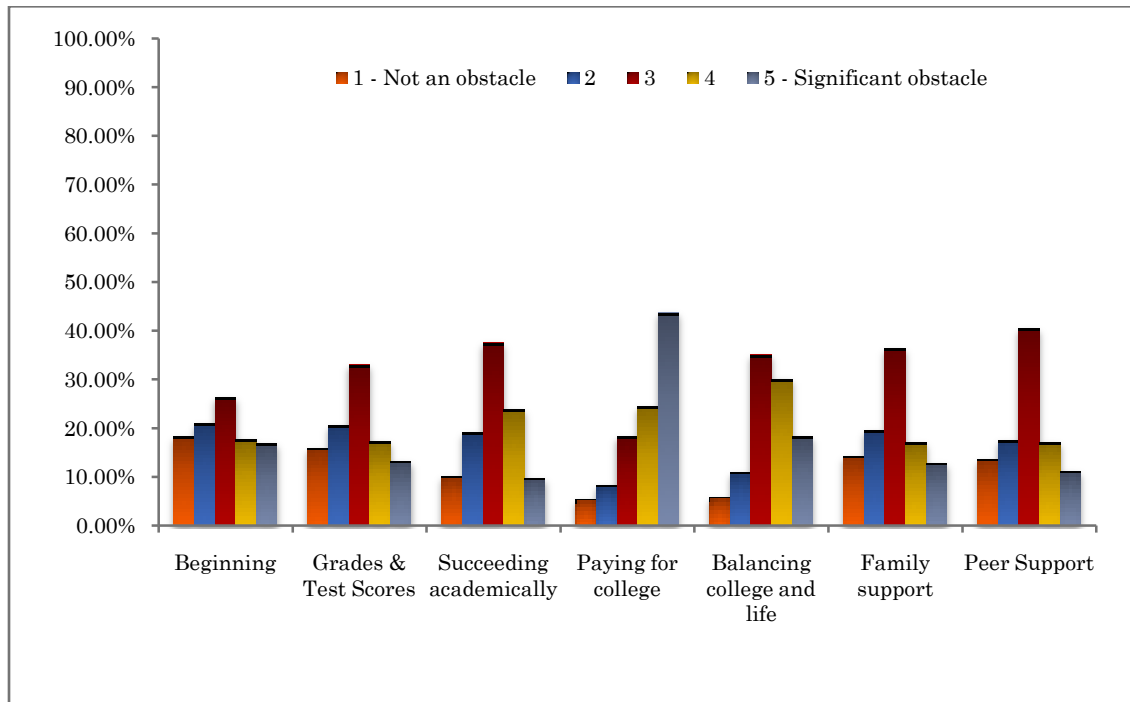
Regardless, these are perceived to be the two greatest obstacles according to *both* students and adults.

Table 17. Obstacles Facing H.S. Students, Adult Response

Obstacle	% of Adults
Paying for College	68.24%
Balancing College & Life	48.32%
Beginning	34.51%
Succeeding Academically	33.40%
Grades & Test Scores	30.45%
Family Support	29.84%
Peer Support	28.35%

Furthermore, nearly half of adults, 44% of them, indicated that paying for college was a “significant” obstacle facing students, and only five percent of them believe that payment is not an obstacle *at all*.

Figure 12. Obstacles Facing Students, Adult Response



Differences between Adults and Students in Perceptions of Obstacles

As previously stated, more adults are concerned about obstacles facing high school students than the students themselves. However, paying for college seems to be a universal concern, albeit more of a concern among adults. Adults also seem to have a different set of prevalent concerns than that of students. For example, nearly half of adults indicated that they believe that students may have trouble balancing their lives with the demands of college. Compare that to less than a third of students who believe such and it becomes clear that adults have less confidence in students' abilities to face the pressures and demands of college than the students themselves.

Additionally, while the lack of peer support is the least of both the students and adults concerns, 28% of adults believe this will be an obstacle, compared to only 15% of students. There is nearly a doubling in the percentage of adults who believe that knowing how to begin will present itself as an obstacle when compared to students, but nearly an even percentage of students and adults are concerned about having the grades and test scores necessary for entry. Furthermore, neither group seems to be too heavily concerned with students receiving necessary family support to do well.

Table 18. Difference Between Students and Adults in Perceptions of Obstacles Facing H.S. Students

Obstacle	% of Students	% of Adults	Difference
Paying for College	41.30%	68.24%	26.94%
Balancing College & Life	29.35%	48.32%	18.97%
Beginning	18.58%	34.51%	15.93%
Peer Support	15.22%	28.35%	13.13%
Succeeding Academically	27.03%	33.40%	6.37%
Family Support	24.86%	29.84%	4.98%
Grades & Test Scores	27.03%	30.45%	3.42%

How do parents and students compare in their perceptions of obstacles?

Just as there are clear differences between adults in general and students in their perceptions of what obstacles students will encounter in the collegiate endeavors, there are some differences as well when students are compared with *parents*. However, the only significant difference between students and parents that deviates from the difference between students and adults in general is knowing how to begin the process of college. Whereas 34.51% of *adults* perceive this to be an obstacle, only 29.35% of *parents* think so. Thus, this lessens the gap between students and parents with respect to viewing beginning college as an obstacle.

Are there differences in perceptions when accounting for Race?

Race does play a factor in determining whether a specific scenario is perceived to be an obstacle, both for students *and* adults. For students, (1) graduating with the necessary grades and test scores, (2) succeeding academically in college courses, (3) having the skills to balance life and college, and (4) lack of family support all are perceived differently by Caucasians and African Americans. Specifically, these obstacles are indicated at a greater degree among African Americans than Caucasians. For example, there is nearly a 25% difference between Caucasians and African Americans in believing that graduating with the necessary credentials is an obstacle (22.92% for Caucasian students compared to 47.37% for African American students). Additionally, there is a 13% difference with respect to succeeding academically in college (24.31% of Caucasians; 36.84% of African Americans).

Race plays a role among adults, as well. The differences between races are prevalent in three of the four above mentioned obstacles seen with students, with the exception of having the skills to balance life and college. Both Caucasian and African American adults perceive this to be an obstacle at relatively similar rates. However, they do believe differently that high school students may lack necessary peer support. While 40.91% of African American adults believe this to be an obstacle facing students, only 26.14% of Caucasian believe so.

Table 19 below shows these racial differences in full detail.

Table 19. Obstacles by Race, Adult and Student Response				
Obstacle	Students		Adults	
	Caucasian	African American	Caucasian	African American
Beginning	18.31%	21.05%	34.34%	34.85%
Grades & Test Scores	22.92%*	47.37%*	26.58%*	50.00%*
Succeeding Academically	24.31%*	36.84%*	32.66%*	42.42%*
Paying	42.66%	42.11%	68.01%	65.15%
Balancing College & Life	26.57%*	36.84%*	48.98%	46.97%
Family Support	21.53%*	31.58%*	27.81%*	39.39%*
Peer Support	13.99%	15.79%	26.14%*	40.91%*

* represent significant differences with respect to race.

What about gender differences?

There are numerous differences between male and female students; namely (1) graduating with the necessary grades and test scores, (2) succeeding academically, (3) balancing life and college, and (4) having peer support.

Interestingly, males are more concerned that they will lack the peer support needed to do well in college (20.25% compared to 11.43% of females). In all instances, females perceive these to be less of obstacles than do males.

Table 20. Obstacles by Gender, Student Response

Obstacle	Male	Female
Beginning	15.58%	20.75%
Grades & Test Scores	34.18%	21.70%
Succeeding Academically	35.44%	20.75%
Paying	44.30%	39.05%
Balancing College & Life	37.18%	23.58%
Family Support	26.58%	23.58%
Peer Support	20.25%	11.43%

Gender does not play as significant a role among adults. In fact, the only significant difference between males and females is found in knowing how to begin the college process. Nearly 29% of males believe this is an obstacle facing high school students, compared to 37% of females. This eight percent difference illustrates that males are less concerned about knowing how to begin. Furthermore, most obstacles are perceived to be less of a concern among adult males than adult females. This pattern seems to be reversed among students, as Table 20 shows that, for the most part, more male students are concerned with the various obstacles than female students.

Gender plays a role in the perception of obstacles among students, but not among adults.

Does education also play a role in perceptions of obstacles?

Level of education does play a role in adults' perceptions of obstacles. While there are some differences between grade levels among students, there are significant differences when comparing adults along educational level lines.

For example, while 54% of adults with only some high school education believe that having a lack of peer support is an obstacle facing high school students, this is a concern among only 20% of adults with an advanced degree, and among only 22% of those with a bachelor's degree. *This is a 34% difference between the lowest and highest level of education.* In general, those with higher levels of education are less likely to perceive obstacles being a major barrier to high school students, with the exception of those with an associate's degree.

In general, adults with higher levels of education are less likely to perceive obstacles as being a significant barrier to high school students.

Table 21. Obstacles by Level of Education, Adult Response

	Some High School	High School/GED	Some College	Associate's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Advanced Degree
Beginning Grades & Test Scores	45.83%	40.78%	32.38%	34.04%	34.48%	27.93%
Succeeding Academically	66.67%	38.46%	26.67%	52.17%	18.97%	22.73%
Paying	58.33%	40.38%	28.57%	47.83%	24.14%	30.00%
Balancing College & Life	69.57%	64.42%	66.98%	72.34%	65.22%	73.87%
Family Support	58.33%	45.54%	44.76%	72.34%	38.60%	52.73%
Peer Support	50.00%	33.01%	36.54%	34.04%	18.58%	25.23%
	54.17%	34.62%	29.81%	36.17%	21.93%	19.82%

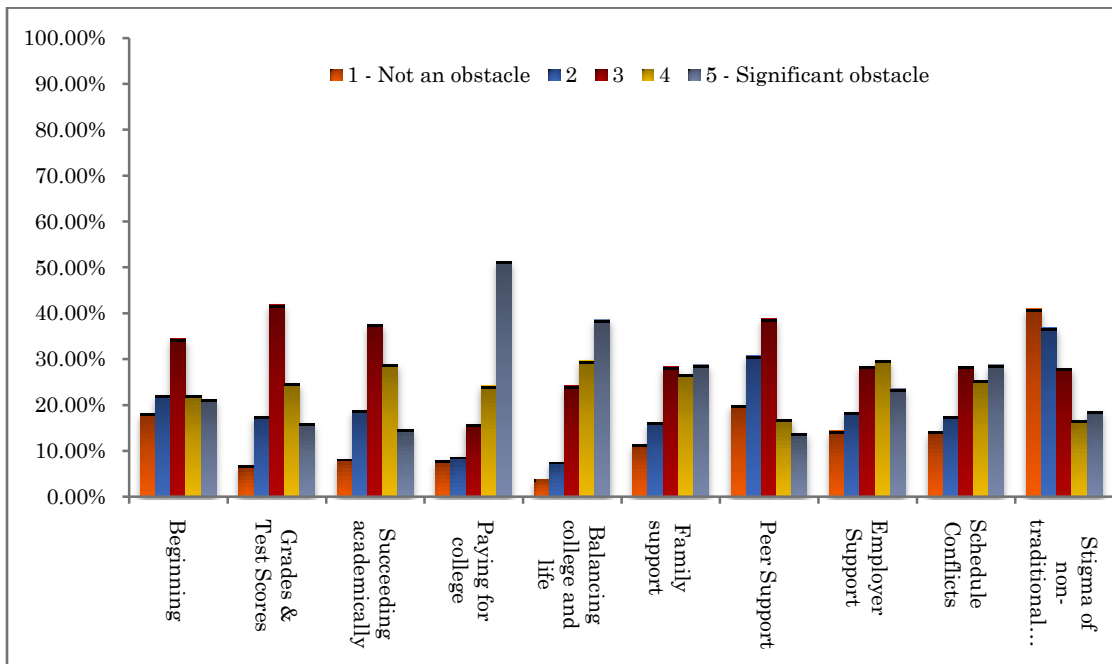
Paying for college is a concern for a majority of adults, regardless of education.

Notice also that paying for college is an obstacle cited by many respondents regardless of education. This holds true for students as well, regardless of grade level, though a smaller percentage of students perceive this to be a barrier (understandably so, given that adults often bear the cost of college).

Obstacles Facing Working Adults Returning to College

Adults were also asked to respond to obstacles facing working adults who may return to college. As previously mentioned, some of these obstacles were unique to working adults, but for the most part the obstacles they were asked to reflect upon mirrored those facing students. However, just as seen with obstacles facing students, obstacles facing working adults are perceived differently across various demographic characteristics.

Figure 13. Obstacles Facing Working Adults, Adult Response



Paying for college is the most commonly cited obstacle facing students, whether they are high school students or working adults.

Three-fourths of adults believe that paying for college is an obstacle facing working adults in their attempts to return and earn their degree. Again, just as with the adult and student response to obstacles facing high school students, *paying for college is the biggest perceived obstacle facing working adults as well.* Some 68% also believe that being able to balance life with college obligations is an obstacle. The percentage of adults who perceive each scenario

as an obstacle is presented on the next page.

Table 22. Obstacles Facing Working Adults, Adult Response

Obstacle	% of Adults
Paying for College	75.58%
Balancing College & Life	68.29%
Family Support	55.46%
Schedule Conflicts	54.04%
Employer Support	53.24%
Succeeding Academically	43.59%
Beginning	43.36%
Grades & Test Scores	40.59%
Stigma	35.18%
Peer Support	30.50%

A note on differences in perceptions for students and working adults.

Clearly, the community perception of working adults returning to college is that it is harder for them to do so than high school students initially entering college. Namely, across every comparable obstacle, adults believe that it is harder for working adults to return to college than it is for high school students to begin college. This is illustrated in the table below.

Table 23. Differences in Obstacles Facing Students and Working Adults, Adult Response

Obstacle	Students	Working Adults	Difference
Family Support	29.84%	55.46%	25.62%
Balancing College & Life	48.32%	68.29%	19.97%
Succeeding Academically	33.40%	43.59%	10.19%
Grades & Test Scores	30.45%	40.59%	10.14%
Beginning	34.51%	43.36%	8.85%
Paying for College	68.24%	75.58%	7.34%
Peer Support	28.35%	30.50%	2.15%

As Table 23 shows, there is a rather large difference regarding family support. Adults believe that working adults will be more likely to face a lack of family support in their attempts to return to college (25.62% more adults believe that working adults will face this obstacle compared to students facing the same obstacle). Likewise, working adults may face a greater challenge when attempting to balance their life with college demands.

Respondents indicate that demands of the family may interfere with college.

Adults indicate that the demands of the family may interfere with collegiate responsibilities.

What are the differences in perception of obstacles facing working adults?

Just as with obstacles facing students, gender does not play a large role in how adults perceive obstacles facing working adults; though it is interesting to note that there is a significant difference between males and females in that females are more concerned about having employer support to return to school (50% compared to only 39% of males). However, parental status, race, and level of education most certainly do play a role.

Parental Status

Parents, for example, believe that paying for college is more of an obstacle for working adults than nonparents. Specifically, 75.25% of parents stated that the price of college is prohibitive for working adults, compared to 66.77% of nonparents. Likewise, 73.13% of parents believe that it will be difficult for working adults to have the skills needed to balance life and college, while 61.17% of nonparents believe so.

There are differences between parents and nonparents with respect to working adults paying for college and being able to balance life and college.

However, this pattern is reversed with respect to parental status regarding the stigma that is associated with being a non-traditional student. Whereas 28.34% of nonparents believe that this stigma is prohibitive of working adults returning to college, only 19.80% of parents believe so.

Race

In general, African Americans believe that working adults face more obstacles than what Caucasians believe. These differences are significant with respect to:

- (1) having the necessary academic skills for admittance;
- (2) succeeding academically in college;
- (3) having a lack of peer support;
- (4) having a lack of employer support; and
- (5) the stigma associated with being a non-traditional student in college.

In comparison to Caucasians, more African Americans believe that working adults face significant obstacles.

In each of the scenarios above, there is an average difference of 11.58% when comparing Caucasian with African American perceptions of these obstacles, where African Americans view them as obstacles at greater rates.

Level of Education

While the level of education adults have does seem to impact their perceptions of obstacles facing working adults, the disparity between levels are not as great compared to their responses surrounding the obstacles facing high school students.

Table 24. Obstacles by Level of Education, Adult Response

	Some High School	High School/GED	Some College	Associate's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Advanced Degree
Beginning	52.94%	39.82%	41.74%	33.33%	27.03%	36.67%
Grades & Test Scores	33.33%	42.11%	37.72%	41.38%	33.63%	35.96%
Succeeding Academically	44.44%	39.29%	47.37%	35.09%	40.18%	33.71%
Paying	72.22%	66.09%	71.93%	84.48%	62.83%	72.22%
Balancing College & Life	44.44%	57.52%	70.43%	63.79%	69.03%	70.79%
Family Support	72.22%	50.88%	46.09%	54.39%	46.02%	49.44%
Peer Support	58.82%	32.14%	25.22%	22.81%	21.24%	16.85%
Employer Support	61.11%	45.22%	47.37%	41.38%	50.44%	40.45%
Conflicting Schedules	50.00%	47.79%	45.22%	52.63%	41.59%	50.56%
Stigma	61.11%	36.94%	28.70%	18.97%	15.93%	10.00%

In many cases, just as seen when adults commented on obstacles facing high school students, the higher a respondent's level of education, the less likely they are to perceive these scenarios as obstacles to working adults. To illustrate this point, the greatest percentage of adult respondents with some high school students that claim something to be an obstacle is 72.22% (family support). The highest percentage response among advanced degree holders is 50.56% (conflicting schedules), a difference of 22%. (Paying for college is exempted, as all levels of education perceive this to be a big obstacle). Furthermore, in most instances, there is a gradual decrease in perception as the respondent's level of education increases.

A quick note on the obstacles facing associate's and bachelor's degree students.

Adults were asked if both high school students *and* working adults who were seeking either an associate's or bachelor's degree faced the obstacles in their pursuit. Regardless of whether comments were directed toward high school students or working adults, adult respondents, for the most part, believe that the same obstacles are faced regardless of whether the intended degree earned is a bachelor's or associate's degree.

With respect to working adults, respondents indicated that much of the obstacle is the transition from work to school, and that this is a challenge for both associate's and bachelor's students. Similarly, beginning either degree can be a challenge for high school students, as an adjustment must be made in a person's life regardless of which degree is earned.

However, some respondents, in either instance, stated cost variances, time consumption, and degree value, and given such variables, attaining a bachelor's degree has more obstacles associated with it.

Summary of Obstacles

While perceived obstacles facing both high school students entering college and working adults returning to college do differ at varying levels, there are commonalities present; namely, regardless of demographics, population, or whether a respondent is commenting on high school students or working adults, all respondents tend to believe that paying for college is an obstacle facing potential college students.

As was commented in the beginning of this section, both students and adults report that attending college was an important endeavor for students. Additionally, respondents do not believe that it is necessarily difficult to attain a degree.

In addition to this, working adults are believed to face more obstacles than high school students in their attempts to attend college. Thus, to recap:

- A higher percentage of adults, in relation to students, believe that high school students entering college face particular obstacles.
- Adults perceive that working adults face more obstacles than high school students when attending college.
- Race plays a role in perception of obstacles facing high school students, both among student and adult respondents.
- Among students, a smaller percentage of females perceive certain obstacles to be present when compared to males.
- Among adults, level of education plays a role in perceptions.
 - When referring to high school students, as level of education increases, the percentage of respondents claiming obstacles decreases.
 - When referring to working adults, respondents without a high school degree perceive obstacles to be present at a greater rate than all other levels of education.

Equality of Access to College

Both students and adults were asked if they believed that a college education was more available to some high school students than to others. In either population, there is an awareness and belief that some do indeed have an advantage over others with respect to access to college. Specifically, nearly 92% of students stated that they believe some high school students do have an advantage over others, while 74% of adults believe so. In either instance, a large majority of respondents believe that access to college is not equally distributed among high school students.

Perceptions of Who has Less Access to College

Student Response

In elaborating their response to who has less access to college education, a variety of responses were given. And although some students cite lack of personal responsibility of the student (i.e. lack of care or concern; laziness; etc.), many responses allude to external social factors, such as minority status, socioeconomic status, and stigmatization. Below are some comments that illustrate this awareness.

1. Poor kids, the ones that don't care, kids who families tell them to not go.
2. The ones that had trouble keeping up in high school. They may feel like it is too great of a challenge.
3. Kids that cannot afford college. Kids who do not make the grade.
4. Low class or kids that are pregnant or already have kids.
5. The poor students who have to make their way through.
6. Probably lower income families, just because on a whole it's harder for them to get by on a day-to-day basis, so a \$22,000 college tuition would be outlandish.
7. Uneducated lower class – if they were going to a university it would be harder to pay for tuition.
8. The ones that are less supported at home.
9. The ones that believe that are not good enough because they don't get good grades and the ones that can't afford to pay.
10. Minorities – mostly from disadvantaged families.

As illustrated above, many of the comments do allude to financial situations, which may be indicative of lack of awareness of external funding sources for college.

Adult Response

As previously stated, 74% of adults believe that there is an unequal access to college. What may be surprising is that this is an 18% decrease from student perception. A

A greater percentage of students responded that inequalities exist in access to college when compared to adults.

greater percentage of students responded that inequalities may exist in access to college when compared to adults, as is evident in the difference of responses. However, after an analysis of comments, adults cite external social factors as being an indicator of this unequal access to a greater degree than students. Furthermore, fewer adults cited personal responsibility on part of the students. Adults indicate factors such as race,

socioeconomic status, and lack of support as reasons why some high school students do not have the same opportunities as others with respect to attending college. Comments include:

1. Students not doing well because they are not encouraged to.
2. Poor kids – the kids with no money and the kids from the poverty areas.
3. Low income because they don't have the money to go.
4. Students who attend school like specific school in the areas. It depends on which school they have attended. Some schools are better than others and help them get into college better than others. The good schools have better curriculum and are known to be better schools.
5. Distance of travel to their school or living on campus. Some have to live on campus who live far away from home. Our child could commute, and we bought him a car and he goes back and forth to school.
6. The ones where they might lack family support and resources. It might be a kind of difference in world view: Is an education important to the family of origin of the student? Are they being pushed? And there are some schools that are better college prep schools that get students ready for college. A general atmosphere of the community that nurtures. We live in Floyd County and there is one of those presidential elite schools where kids are very encouraged to get the grades to go on to get a degree. That does not exist everywhere.
7. Students that come from poor families.
8. Finances can be a big obstacle. Motivation is another one.
9. Country people that can't afford to send them away.
10. Poor college students and high prices of college.
11. There are some high schools prepare them better than others.

Demographic Differences

There are only a few striking differences across various demographics. There is roughly a five percent difference between parents and nonparents in the percentage of adults who believe that some high school students have more access to college than others (70% of parents compared to 75% of nonparents). And while there is a difference between Caucasians and African Americans who have this perception, as 67% of African Americans think this compared to 75% of Caucasians, this difference is not very large. More so, the finding here is that more Caucasians believe that there is unequal access than African Americans.

Furthermore, there is only a six percent difference in this belief between adults who reside in Jefferson County compared to those who reside in surrounding counties (72% compared to 78%, respectively).

There is, however, a striking difference with respect to this belief when stratified by level of education among adults. Namely, 62.50% of adults with only some high school education are of the opinion that some high school students do have an advantage when it comes to access to college. This is compared to nearly 80% of adults possessing an advanced degree, thus indicating that level of education is a driver behind beliefs surrounding access to college.

Level of education is an indicator of awareness of inequality of access to college, among adults.

Table 25. Equality of Access to College by Level of Education, Adult Response

	Some High School	High School/GED	Some College	Associate's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Advanced Degree
Some have advantage	62.50%	73.08%	70.75%	74.47%	75.00%	79.28%
Everyone has same opportunity	37.50%	26.92%	29.25%	25.53%	25.00%	20.72%

There is not much of a difference between those who have a degree (regardless of type of degree). The difference lies in those who do have *at least* a high school degree or its equivalent and those who do not.

MAKING SENSE OF IT ALL

The purpose of this study was to develop a better understanding of why the Greater Louisville community falls behind neighboring communities in college attainment. What is interesting from the results is that importance of a college degree is agreed upon by students and adults alike. Essentially, the community does believe that college is an important endeavor. Furthermore, there is a belief that attaining such a degree is not an overwhelming task.

At first glance, namely referring to the statements above, there *should not* be a problem in Louisville with attainment. However, in between the intent to attend college and actually going, events in one's life may prevent this from becoming a reality. In other words, "life happens."

Ninety-eight percent (98%) of students surveyed indicated that they intend to go to college after completing high school. While this may be true, clearly there is a disconnection between intent and reality. An investigation of the obstacles facing those intending to go to college shows this reality in further detail. Clearly, paying for college is a real concern among students and adults alike. Also, there is anxiety surrounding being able to balance the demands of college with their own lives.

In essence, then, the question must be asked, "Is the community being equipped with the necessary information to ease its angst of seemingly significant barriers?"

More broadly, there seems to be a plurality of thought in one's belief about college. It may be beneficial to view this thought process as two different paradigms. In one paradigm of individual thought on this matter, the data seem to suggest that the community has a set perception surrounding college, namely that it is a worthwhile endeavor, one that can be achieved by all.

However, in a separate paradigm, individuals become confronted with real-life obstacles that may prohibit their attainment of further education, as seen by the concerns that the community has about college. These two modes of thought do not contradict one another, but rather clash once confronted with the real task of collegiate pursuit.

It is recommended that this report and its contents be used *in conjunction with* founded knowledge in the areas of education attainment and retention. Its full benefit will be revealed in the context of these areas.