The Value of Community Colleges: Recent Students’ Motivations and Outcomes

September 7, 2023
The Strada Community College Outcomes Survey

- Developed in partnership with advisors from Dallas Community College, Honolulu Community College, Ivy Tech Community College, Northern Virginia Community College, and Rio Salado Community College.

- Topics include students' motivations for enrolling, their experiences, and self-reported benefits of their education.

- Nationally representative survey of 1,139 adults who attended a community college in the past decade and are not currently enrolled in postsecondary education.

- Online survey fielded December 2022-January 2023 by NORC at the University of Chicago.
Motivations & Goals
Recent community college students report diverse attainment goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EDUCATION LEVEL</th>
<th>PERCENT OF RECENT STUDENTS WITH THIS GOAL (RETROSPECTIVE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills for career</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal interest /enjoyment</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change careers</td>
<td>Not asked</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2023 Strada Community College Outcomes Survey, alumni from 2012-2022, n=1,139.
Majority of recent students report they completed what they sought

Source: 2023 Strada Community College Outcomes Survey, alumni from 2012-2022, n=1,139.
Among many reasons for enrolling, work benefits are the most common

Three Factors
- **Work**
- **Personal**
- **Community**

Source: 2023 Strada Community College Outcomes Survey, alumni from 2012-2022, n=1,139.
Student's work aspirations are the least likely to be fulfilled

Three Factors
- Work
- Personal
- Community

Source: 2023 Strada Community College Outcomes Survey, alumni from 2012-2022, n=1,139.
Reported Value
Students who complete an associate degree or successful transfer report strong value

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Worth the cost</th>
<th>Achieved goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree completers</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer, no associate</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate, no associate or transfer</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courses, no credential or transfer</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Value perceptions diverge at an earnings threshold of $48,000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quartile</th>
<th>Achieved goals</th>
<th>Worth the cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quartile 1 ($0-$34,000)</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quartile 2 ($34,001 to $48,000)</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quartile 3 ($48,001 to $75,000)</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quartile 4 (More than $75,000)</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2023 Strada Community College Outcomes Survey, alumni from 2012-2022, n=1,139.
Black and Latino alumni are less likely than white alumni to meet the earnings threshold

- White: 58%
- Latino: 47%
- Black: 35%

Source: 2023 Strada Community College Outcomes Survey, alumni from 2012-2022, n=1,139.
Students who go on to earn a bachelor’s degree are far more likely to meet the earnings threshold

Source: 2023 Strada Community College Outcomes Survey, alumni from 2012-2022, n=1,139.
Skill Development: A Key to Value
Key skill clusters

SYNTHESIS SKILLS
- Verbal communication
- Writing
- Critical thinking/problem-solving
- Ability to learn new things
- Leadership

COLLABORATIVE SKILLS
- Entrepreneurship
- Networking and building relationships
- Cultural awareness and inclusivity
- Creativity
- Teamwork

ANALYTIC SKILLS
- Data analysis or statistics
- Digital literacy
- Project management
- Math
Fewer than half of students strongly attribute their development of key skills to their community college education.

- **Analytic skills**
  - Project management
  - Digital literacy
  - Data analysis
  - Math
  - Entrepreneurship
  - Cultural awareness
  - Networking
  - Creativity
  - Teamwork
  - Leadership

- **Collaborative skills**
  - Writing
  - Verbal communication
  - Critical thinking
  - Ability to learn new things

- **Synthesis skills**

Source: 2023 Strada Community College Outcomes Survey, alumni from 2012-2022, n=1,139.
Margin of error: +/- 3%
Attribution of skill development to their education is closely tied to students' perceptions of value

“My education was worth the cost.”

Predicted percent agree or strongly agree

Perceived skill development

Source: 2023 Strada Community College Outcomes Survey, alumni from 2012-2022, n=1,139.
Attribution of skill development to their education is closely tied to students' perceptions of goal attainment.

“*My education helped me to achieve my goals.*”

![Graph showing perceived skill development](graph.png)

Source: 2023 Strada Community College Outcomes Survey, alumni from 2012-2022, n=1,139.
Key findings and implications

**QUALITY COACHING**

Community college students have **diverse goals**.

Personalized **coaching** can help students recognize and draw pathways to meet their unique goals.

**CLEAR OUTCOMES**

Perceptions of value diverge at an **earnings threshold**.

States, community colleges, and learners need to understand more about the **employment outcomes** of graduates, including earnings, the occupations students enter, and their career trajectories.

**EMPLOYER ALIGNMENT**

Perceptions of **skill development**, career benefits, and value are linked.

Institutions can serve students well by providing them with a combination of career-specific and transferable skills, while states can incentivize expansion of **high-demand fields**.