

POSTSECONDARY VALUE COMMISSION

What is it?

The Commission on the Value of Postsecondary Education (Postsecondary Value Commission) is a national panel of leaders from inside and outside higher education that will explore the value of post-high school certificates and degrees. The panel began its work in April 2019 and will in early 2021:

- *Propose a definition of postsecondary value* to guide institutional improvement efforts and policy conversations about increasing post-college economic success and mobility for students.
- *Create a measurement framework* to gauge how programs at specific colleges and universities create value for students and where gaps exist by race and income.
- *Share an action agenda* with steps that college and university leaders, policymakers, and students and families can take to promote the improvement of value for all students, especially low-income students and students of color.

The commission's aim is to provide useful information—and a way of understanding that information—to help colleges and universities take a critical look at *how* and *how well* they are contributing to economic opportunity for today's students; aid policymakers in gauging *what* the public gets for its investment in higher education; and equip students and families as they consider *where* and *what* to study.

Who is Involved?

The commission is comprised of 30 [members](#) representing a wide range of higher education stakeholders, including college and university and state system leaders, researchers, business and community leaders, advocates, policymakers, and students. Sue Desmond-Hellmann, former CEO of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and [Mildred García](#), president of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, co-chair the commission and [Michelle Asha Cooper](#) at the [Institute for Higher Education Policy](#) serves as the managing partner for its work. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is providing funding support for the commission through its [Postsecondary Success](#) strategy.

Why a Commission? Why now?

Americans are increasingly concerned about the rising cost of higher education and the debt students are taking on to fund that education, which is impacting their view of the value of getting a certificate or degree. This is particularly important in light of trends pointing to rising income inequality.

Why is the commission only looking at economic returns to education after high school, especially since there are significant and measurable non-economic returns?

While the commission's work will focus on the economic returns of education after high school, members recognize that there are significant non-economic returns such as critical and creative thinking skills and enhanced health and civic participation, many of which are directly related to employment and career

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outcomes. The commission will acknowledge those benefits in its work and show the connection between a better living and a better life.

Higher Education: Right Direction or Wrong Direction



Major Reason for Wrong Direction (top 3)

Tuition Costs Too High



Students Not Getting Needed Skills



Too Much Focus on Protecting Students from Offensive Views



SOURCE: [Pew Research Center](#), July 2018

Students and their families are now raising important questions such as:

- What is a certificate or degree worth, especially given the rising cost? What is the return on investment?
- Is education after high school still a reliable path to a better career and life?

Newly available debt and earnings data are prompting much-needed conversations about whether—and how—colleges and universities are providing opportunities for economic mobility to their students.

The time is right to support public understanding of the value of education after high school, especially for low-income students and students of color, who experience greater challenges in achieving certificates and degrees and realizing their economic benefits. The commission is bringing together some of the nation’s leading experts and voices on this issue to weigh the evidence, offer perspectives, and create resources to focus attention on what students get for their educational investment, how value differs by race and income, and what colleges and universities can do to better ensure value for their students.

How Will the Commission Work?

The commission will explore a range of options for gauging the economic outcomes for students earning undergraduate certificates and degrees, including (but not limited to):

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- Post-college earnings in relation to ability to repay debt.
- Earnings premiums for students earning certificates or degrees over those not pursuing education after high school.
- Post-college economic mobility (moving to a higher income bracket).

Equity issues are at the center of the commission's work. As a growing number of colleges and universities strive to close student success gaps by race and income, it is essential to build understanding about *whether* and *how* institutions create value for all students, especially low-income students and students of color.

Who Can I Contact?

To learn more about the Postsecondary Value Commission and stay up to date on its work:

- Visit the Commission's [website](#).
- Visit the Gates Foundation's Postsecondary Success [website](#) and sign up for their e-newsletter.
- Follow the Gates Foundation's U.S. Program on Twitter: [@GatesUS](#)
- E-mail ValueCommission@ihep.org