



NEW JERSEY

Association of State Colleges and Universities

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QuickTakes!

What is a College Degree Worth?

This commentary by Stockton President Harvey Kesselman appeared in the Courier-Post on October 5, 2017

Our core values – not just earnings – should be key factors in determining the value of higher education. “More education leads to better nutrition, better health care, less crime and higher wages, leading to a stronger economy.”

October 6, 2017

Recent national surveys by such reputable organizations as Public Agenda and Pew Research indicate some American citizens are losing confidence in higher education.

The value of college is often measured only by earnings after graduation. This is a serious mistake that threatens our core values and hopes for a prosperous and secure future.

Higher education does lead to better lives and better societies, according to both national and global research.

For example, data collected by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development show that every country among the 15 analyzed does better on virtually every measure of quality of life the more educated the citizens are. More education leads to better nutrition, better health care, less crime and higher wages, leading to a stronger economy.

This does not mean that everyone should go to college, nor that higher education is responsible for all prosperity. But there is a strong correlation between higher learning, individual achievement, prosperous societies and contributions to the common good.

New Jersey citizens understand these connections. Research at Stockton University during the past five years indicate that college is highly valued in the Garden State. University presidents like myself, working with citizens, business, labor, government and community leaders, need to engage the issue of college value in a very public way. Knowing what we collectively expect from a college education determines how to calculate its value.

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I am fond of saying that my job is to make a Stockton University degree more valuable, every day. I know other university presidents share that commitment.

At Stockton, we work hard to enhance classroom learning with real-life experiences.

Throughout the campus we provide an environment in which diverse sets of students can live, learn and achieve.

We provide academic advising, career counseling, financial aid counseling and student life experiences that focus squarely on what students need not only to achieve academically, but also to succeed in life.

We offer internship and practical experiences tied to academic studies, and we are finding more businesses and alumni are eager to help.

We create opportunities for students to work in local communities on issues concerning public health, environmental protection and social justice. Our new campus in Atlantic City will serve as an “anchor institution” for community and economic development.

We are also keenly focused on making college more affordable.

We have made it easier for students to transfer credits from another college, earn credit for prior learning, and take more academic credits each term without paying more for tuition. All of these measures reduce the time and cost of a degree.

But the real measure of Stockton’s value must be based on a set of core values and principles that promote the academic quality sought by our students and parents.

We teach those values through what we call 10 Essential Learning Outcomes, or ELOs, which include critical thinking, ethical reasoning, teamwork, creativity and adaptability.

At Stockton, we promote to teach our students to adjust to change and live with others in a global society. We want them to leave knowing they can keep learning and compete productively. We hope they will lead successful lives and be good citizens. That is the real measure of the value of their degree.