Public Views of Higher Education 2006
The Good News

My State Colleges "High Quality"
No Major Changes Needed
HS Grads Should Go to College
"Confident" in HE Institutions
"Valuable" National Resource
College is "A Good Investment"
Economic Discontents

- Arbitrary Price Hikes
- Qualified Students Cannot Afford
- Universities Can Reduce Costs
- High Tuition "Very Serious" Issue
- Too Much Debt from College

Percent Agreeing
Economic Discontents: Concern among Disadvantaged Groups and Democrats

Significantly Greater Concern among:

• Families earning $50,000 or less/year
• Racial/ethnic minorities
• Democrats
Socio-Political Discontents

- Political Bias "Very Serious" Issue
- Liberal Bias in Classes
- Professors Distracted by Politics
- Colleges Favor Liberals/Radicals
- OK to Restrict Academic Freedom

Percent Agreeing
Socio-Political Discontents: Concern among Cultural Conservatives

Significantly Greater Concern among:

- Political conservatives (regardless of party)
- Evangelical Protestants
- High school educated people
- Older people
Educational Quality Discontents: A Mixed Picture

Favor Both Affordability and Accountability (Total 46%)

- Minorities (62%)
- Blue-collar workers (55%)
- Parents of K-12 students (52%)

More Accountability for Student Learning (Total 45%)

- High school educated people (57%)
- Political conservatives (53%)
A Causal Argument

Privatization creates vulnerability on issues of affordability and access and alienates lower-income groups.

Polarization creates vulnerability on issues of “bias” and motivates culturally conservative groups.

Institutional Priorities on graduate education and research and limited Institutional Resources create vulnerability on issues of educational quality and encourage “accountability” movements.
Challenges for the University in the Public Arena

“The University has been described as a Teflon-coated institution. Some of the Teflon has worn off.”

1) The focus of university leaders on economic benefits has led to doubts about their institutions’ sense of public purpose.

2) To the extent that universities walk away from their access mission, they risk losing part of their middle-class base.

3) A significant minority believes that college professors show political bias.

4) Educational quality may be an emerging issue of importance.
Access-Related Legislation in the New Congress?

- Democratic Party’s “New Directions for America” Point #3: “College Access for All” Program

- Cuts interest rates on many student loans in half

- Makes permanent the tax deduction for college costs of middle-income families

- Increases Pell Grants up to $5,800 over several years

- **Price tag**: $100 billion over 5 years
Sources


