

EXPLORING MEASURES OF NON-ECONOMIC BENEFITS

The Postsecondary Value Framework

Pipeline to Equitable Value

For Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and AAPI students, students from low-income backgrounds, and women—and the intersectional identities within and across these groups



Economic returns are critical to building a financially secure future and promoting mobility for students. As such, the Postsecondary Value Commission focuses on measuring both the personal and public economic returns from higher education.¹ However, the commission also considers non-economic outcomes both because they are closely tied to economic returns and because non-economic benefits hold their own intrinsic value.

Even though most students attend college to get a good job, wages are not the only factor influencing whether they believe their postsecondary education was valuable.¹ In fact, there is

i For additional information on how the Postsecondary Value Commission examined personal and public economic returns, see Chapters 3, 4, and 5, respectively in: Postsecondary Value Commission (2021a). Equitable value: Promoting economic mobility and social justice through postsecondary education. Retrieved from: <https://www.postsecondaryvalue.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/PVC-Final-Report-FINAL.pdf>

considerable evidence that postsecondary education also delivers an array of non-economic benefits. For example, individuals with a college degree are more likely to vote and volunteer in their communities, have higher levels of wellbeing and better access to health and wellness care, and feel more engaged at work.² While many of these non-economic returns are likely made possible by the higher earnings associated with higher levels of education, it is clear that the value of postsecondary education extends beyond purely monetary benefits.

To this end, the Postsecondary Value Commission explored three important and interrelated non-economic benefits to postsecondary education: learning outcomes, skills, and wellbeing. Measurement of these three non-economic returns is challenging, especially in ways that would enable them to be measured within the commission's framework. As a result, the commission relied on experts in the field to better understand these important non-economic benefits, their relationship to equitable postsecondary value, and how the field is advancing in measuring them.

- *Learning Outcomes:* An array of initiatives, such as the Council for Aid to Education's Collegiate Learning Assessment, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities Excellence in Assessment, and the Social Science Research Council's Measuring College Learning project, attempt to measure student learning. Richard Arum and his team from the University of California, Irvine provide the Postsecondary Value Commission with a detailed look at one recent scholarly effort: The Next Generation Undergraduate Success Measurement Project, which uses diverse forms of data to assess undergraduate student experiences, behaviors, and attitudes over time.
- *Skills:* Developing the types of skills described in the learning outcomes paper are critical to preparing students for current and future job markets. Yet, students, institutional leaders, and employers hold differing perspectives about whether postsecondary credentials prepare students for jobs,³ shining a spotlight on the so-called "skills gap." The commission relied on the expertise of Michael Collins from JFF to better understand skills gaps and why they matter when assessing the value of postsecondary credentials.
- *Wellbeing:* The Postsecondary Value Commission tapped the expertise of Stephanie Marken from Gallup to assess graduate wellbeing and how it combines with job quality and other economic measures to capture the value that graduates receive from a college degree. These analyses demonstrate that wellbeing measures do influence graduates' assessment of postsecondary value beyond what income alone can explain.

Going forward, the Postsecondary Value Commission hopes that experts within and outside postsecondary education will continue to explore learning outcomes, skills, and wellbeing so that the field can come together on the best measurement practices for each. In so doing, we will better understand the full value that students—especially Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and underrepresented Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students, students from low-income backgrounds, and women—gain from postsecondary credentials.

ENDNOTES

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- 2 Carnevale, A.P., Campbell, K.P., Cheah, B., Fasules, M.L., Gulish, A. Quinn, M.C., Sablan, J.R., Smith, N., Strohl, J., & Barrese, S. (2021). The monetary value of economic and racial justice in postsecondary education: Quantifying the potential for public good. Postsecondary Value Commission. Retrieved from: <https://www.postsecondaryvalue.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/PVC-GUCEW-FINAL.pdf>

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- 3 Crabtree, S. (2019). Six college experiences linked to student confidence on jobs. Gallup. Retrieved from: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/246170/six-college-experiences-linked-student-confidence-jobs.aspx>

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