

## Survey: College seen as essential but costs prohibitive

BY KARLA SCHUSTER

More than half of Americans believe that it's impossible to succeed without a college education, but an even larger number say that rising college costs are shutting out many students, a national survey has found.

As the nation's economic crisis deepened last year, frustration over tuition costs went up, with 67 percent of adults saying that many qualified students don't have the chance to attend college, according to the survey called "Squeeze Play 2009" that gauges public perceptions about higher education.

By comparison, 62 percent of adults felt that way in 2007, and just 57 percent did in 2003, according to the survey by the nonpartisan, nonprofit groups Public Agenda and the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.

"College is simultaneously being perceived as more essential than ever, but also less available than ever," said John Immerwahr, a researcher at Public Agenda, which conducted a telephone survey of 1,009 adults nationwide over five days in December.

The survey also highlights a dramatic shift in public attitudes about financial aid that tracks with the spiraling economy: Sixty-seven percent of those surveyed strongly believe that students have to borrow too much to pay for college, compared with 60 percent in 2007.

Over the same period, the number of people who think loans and financial aid are readily available went down to 57 percent in 2008, compared with 67 percent last year.

"A lot of parents say it's really getting out of control - if you want to send your kid to a private college,

it gets very expensive," said Denyse Dreksler of Roslyn, who has one son in law school, another in a graduate nursing program and a third in high school.

College officials say the worst mistake families can make is assuming they can't afford higher education.

"We tell parents ... don't focus so much on the sticker price," said Joanne Graziano, assistant provost for enrollment services at the C.W. Post Campus of Long Island University in Brookville. "You can still qualify for types of aid that will reduce that sticker price to a net cost that is manageable."

However they pay for college, families seem skeptical about whether the cost is justified, the survey found. Fifty-five percent of those surveyed said colleges care more about the bottom line than providing a good educational experience. Just about the same proportion, 53 percent, believe colleges could spend less and still provide high-quality services.

"There's an openness to innovation and a belief that quality isn't defined in all the ways we have defined it in the past," said Patrick M. Callan, president of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. "People believe we can do better with the resources we have."

### Tuition squeeze

Some highlights from the Squeeze Play 2009 national survey on college costs:

55 percent of those surveyed believe that a college education is necessary for success, compared to 31 percent in 2000.

67 percent strongly believe students have to borrow too much to pay for college, compared to 56 percent in 2000.

Only 29 percent believe that the vast majority of people who are qualified to attend college have the chance to do so, compared to 45 percent in 2000.

SOURCE: Public Agenda and the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education