



2015 Students Speak Report on
**Federal Student Aid
& Job Readiness**

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N C L C
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Executive Summary

As policymakers at all levels of government consider options to address student loan debt and close the skills gap, the public increasingly expresses concern about whether college is worth the investment. Student body presidents are key players in campus-level decision-making and are often coveted as critical organizers among the policy advocacy community. This report investigates those student leaders' perceptions about student success and ideas for federal financial aid policy change.

The National Campus Leadership Council surveyed student body presidents at more than 250 colleges and convened student and business leaders across the country to explore how federal policies can better promote college access, degree attainment, and job readiness. The findings indicate a troubling knowledge gap about financial aid and misalignment of classroom and extracurricular incentives. According to student leaders nationwide, high college costs limit career development, and federal financial aid is not making the impact it could. Overall, student leaders are poorly utilized as stakeholders in higher education policymaking.

Student body presidents believe the high cost of college hinders post-graduate success.

- 58% say the most negative consequence of high college costs is limited college access
- 51% identify monthly student loan payments as the greatest threat to students' future financial success
- Student leaders feel high college costs limit students' ability to develop professional skills

Existing federal financial aid programs are poorly communicated and underfunded

- There is a wide gap between student leaders being aware of a financial aid program and feeling knowledgeable about the program. For example, 95% of student body presidents have heard of the Pell grant, but less than half them feel knowledgeable about the program
- 7 in 10 student body presidents personally use some form of federal financial aid, and they

tend to be more knowledgeable about federal aid programs than those who do not use federal aid

- Student body presidents who are knowledgeable about programs overwhelmingly support policies that expand eligibility and increase investment into the program (99% for Pell and Stafford Loans and 94% for Federal Work Study)

Student body presidents believe the federal government needs to solve the student debt crisis

- 69% of student body presidents believe the federal government has the greatest control over student loan debt, yet only 1 in 4 student body presidents feel they have any influence in discussions led by the federal government
- 60% of student body presidents believe their own institution has the greatest control over the net costs. While they feel three times as influential with their institution, they are skeptical about their influence specifically over tuition

Glossary of Frequent Terms

Essential skills – Refers to skills students need to succeed in the workplace, as identified in our roundtables and commonly studied by researchers. We use this term interchangeably with soft skills, critical skills, nontechnical skills, etc.

Federal Student Aid – Refers to all federal financial aid programs. Abbreviated as FSA.

Federal Work Study – The Federal Work Study program provides funds for part-time employment to help students finance the costs of postsecondary education.¹ Abbreviated as FWS.

Governing board – Highest institutional governing authority at an institution. Examples include but are not limited to the Boards of Trustees, Boards of Regents, and Boards of Governors.

Income-Based Repayment – Also known as income-contingent repayment and income-driven

repayment, these programs cap borrowers' monthly student loan as a percentage of discretionary income, and the percentage is different depending on the plan and when the federal student loans were issued.² Popular programs are Pay As You Earn (PAYE) and Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF). Abbreviated as IBR.

Net cost of college – Total cost to attend college after factoring in financial aid.

Student body president – Student leader, often elected, who represents a student body to institution administration and off-campus stakeholders. Throughout the paper, this will be used interchangeably with “student leader.”

Introduction

The value of a college education is under siege. As national policymakers weigh myriad options to address skyrocketing student loan debt and college costs, various studies and polls show growing public doubt as to whether college is worth the investment. Student leaders play a critical role in navigating student needs and college administration interests. Similarly, they can uniquely ensure potential policies and programmatic solutions focus on actual student needs. In early 2015, NCLC conducted a survey of student body presidents at more than 250 colleges followed by a series of roundtable discussions with student and business leaders in 15 cities in every region of the contiguous United States.

This report explores the perceptions, beliefs, and ideas of student body presidents and other student leaders nationwide with the goal of identifying important trends and how to best empower students in efforts to improve federal financial aid. As we approached this task, we decided to learn what student leaders know about existing federal programs and what they see as student success in higher education. Through surveys and small group discussions, this research accounts for information gaps, skills gaps, and support for federal policy change.

National Survey

Our survey, conducted in January 2015, focused on federal financial aid programs and student leaders' perceptions about influence and policy solutions. Questions were designed to probe student body presidents' familiarity with and thoughts about the main pillars of federal financial aid, including Pell grants, Federal Work Study, Stafford Loans, income-based repayment options, and higher education tax credits. The survey yielded complete responses from 254 student body presidents representing a diverse array of institutions.

Roundtable Discussions

Starting in Detroit on February 20, 2014, our “Students Speak Series” of roundtable discussions convened more than 200 student leaders and nearly 100 business leaders and employers in 15 cities around the country. The event locations ranged from major economic powerhouses like San Francisco and Boston to smaller cities on the rise like Albuquerque, New Mexico and Columbus, Ohio. We heard from leaders in northern industrial cities like Philadelphia and southern capitals like Columbia, SC (see Appendix A for full list of cities). Each discussion ranged from 12 to 30 participants, including student leaders from the region's four and two year public colleges, research universities, and private colleges. Business leaders often represented the region's largest employers, but we frequently heard from emerging companies, small start-ups, and industries that represent the future of local employment. Several of the discussions also included representation from college career services staff, relevant faculty, and economic development professionals.

We asked open-ended questions intended to spur discussion about the purpose of higher education, the skills gap, and ways to improve college outcomes. Our assumption going into this research was that a main function of higher education is to prepare the future workforce. The discussions we hosted explored what skills employers seek most and what career goals students aspire toward as graduates. Our goal was to assess how student leaders, whose constituency wants to find good jobs after graduation, and business leaders, whose

constituency wants to find good talent among recent graduates, feel higher education is helping students success after graduation. We conducted a follow up survey with roundtable participants to further understand their perceptions.

About the Student Body Presidents

Student leaders, and student body presidents in particular, play an important role in the life of institutions of higher education. At a campus level, they contribute to institutional decision-making, often serving on committees and advising institution officials on student needs. At public institutions, student leaders are often tapped to share the student perspective during state higher education budget hearings. Nationally, student leaders are often recruited to lend a student voice and face to causes championed by advocacy organizations. Student governments exist in some form at nearly every accredited four-year institution and many two-year colleges.

The student body presidents in our national survey represent institutions of varying sizes and types. They use federal financial aid programs at a similar rate as the general student population, with about 4 in 10 personally using the Pell program and 6 in 10 personally borrowing Stafford Loans. Overall 7 in 10 student body presidents use some form of federal financial aid. About 60 percent are men and 40 percent are women. Roughly two-thirds identify as white, with the remaining third split between students identifying as African American (14

percent), Hispanic (8 percent), Asian (7 percent), and Native American (2 percent).³ Student body presidents in the survey are predominantly from four-year public institutions, while two-year institutions were underrepresented in the survey⁴ (Figure 1). They are overwhelmingly Millennials, with less than 4 percent being born before 1980 (Figure 2).

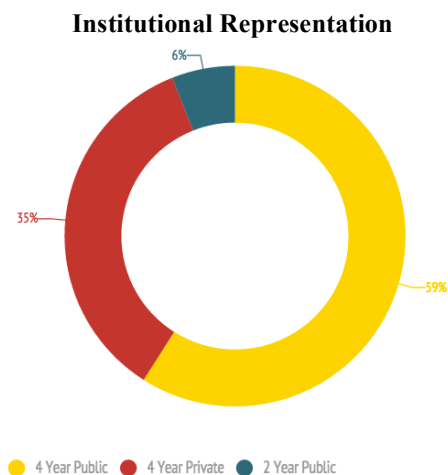


Figure 1

When Were the Presidents Born?

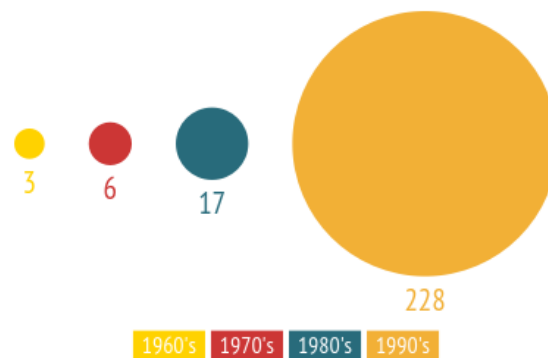


Figure 2

Perspectives on Student Success

“I can't save 50,000 dollars to put down a payment for a house because I'm paying loans. That's failing my generation, and then questioning why we're failing the economy.”
 - Student leader in Atlanta

At the roundtables, student leaders predominantly described success as a stable financial future with a promising career. While roundtable participants debated whether the purpose of higher education is individual career advancement or to further research and knowledge, students and employers invariably agreed that college must help students develop core competencies for a range of career paths and success in life (i.e., skills in critical thinking, application of knowledge, communications, negotiation, professionalism, etc.).

Though “career preparation” has an innately technical connotation, business leaders spoke to the necessity of the critical skills not always taught in a traditional classroom. Though technical skills are important, employers are primarily interested nontechnical skills. In the post-roundtable survey,

83 percent of employers indicated that they would hire a candidate with weak credentials and strong soft skills over a candidate with strong credentials and weak soft skills. When asked where students develop these types of skills, student and business leaders specified internships and extracurricular involvement. Student leaders frequently expressed concern that the cost of college and relatively inadequate financial aid may lock students out of those opportunities, especially when they are unpaid.

“It’s the whole co-curricular experience, and sometimes this doesn’t happen until our junior or senior year. And creating a partnership between specific departments and businesses could translate and train us in our classroom environment or in an internship.”
 - Student leader, Los Angeles

While a recent Gallup study draws a close link between these types of college experiences and workplace engagement and overall wellbeing,⁵ student leaders are deeply concerned about their peers’ financial stability. In our national survey, more than half of student body presidents reported that monthly loan repayments are the biggest threat to future financial success. In the post-roundtable survey, roughly two-thirds of student leaders said that inadequate financial aid negatively impacts a student’s workplace readiness.

Barriers to Student Success

Career Opportunity and the Skills Gap

While student and business leaders largely agree that success in the workplace marks post-grad success, there was broad concern that curricula and existing financial aid programs are not conducive to professional skills development. At nearly every roundtable, participants concluded that a disconnect exists between what is rewarded academically and what is valued after college. Student body presidents feel students are not adequately exposed to the career paths available to them. At each roundtable, student leaders expressed concerns about life after college, particularly in the area of job attainment. Student leaders agree that

“Today’s graduates are the smartest we’ve ever seen, but they lack basic skills: communication skills, common sense skills, skills that you really can’t teach in a classroom.”
 - Business leader, Philadelphia

success after college heavily depends on involvement outside the classroom. In Boston, one student leader remarked that the foundation for success comes from getting internships and “getting your foot in the door so you can show that you do have the necessary skills.” Students desire an immersive learning environment where they can be educated and prepared for the working world from day one. More than 70 percent of student leaders and business leaders believe that colleges should build work experience and exposure to career paths into curricula, according to our post-roundtable survey.

The idea of closer partnership between industry and academia came up in each roundtable, and our post-roundtable survey found that 89 percent of student leaders believe college faculty must integrate industry into curricula. Nearly 9 in 10 student leaders in our post-discussion survey stated that working in a job or internship in college related to one’s field of study positively affects workforce readiness.

Unfortunately, many students cannot afford to take time to volunteer and involve themselves with unpaid internships because they are spending so much time working to pay tuition. In 2011, 71 percent of college students worked at least part-time in order to pay for college, and 20 percent worked full-time.⁶ Though 39 percent of student leaders who responded to the post-roundtable survey believe working in college positively affects workforce readiness, these “college jobs” are often unrelated to a student’s field of study or desired profession.

Business leaders do not believe that college graduates have the necessary skills and competencies to succeed in the workplace. In a recent Gallup survey, only 11 percent of business leaders and 14 percent of the American public “strongly agreed” that college is adequately

preparing graduates for today’s job market.⁷ Nearly all—96 percent—chief academic officers believe their graduates are prepared.⁸

Costs of an Expensive Education

Student body presidents worry that the high net price of college limits its value. In their role, student body presidents are acutely aware of their peers’ perception of their education’s value. According to our national survey, 58 percent of student body presidents believe the greatest negative consequence of high net costs is limited college accessibility. Student leaders also voiced concerns that high prices limit students’ ability to participate in skills-building activities that serve to prepare students for success after college. Thirty-eight percent of student body presidents believe that tackling these high prices must be a top priority of the federal government.

Student leaders believe financial aid is integral to preparing a generation of students for successful careers. Sixty-one percent of student leaders from the roundtable discussions believe adequate financial aid positively affects workforce readiness, allowing students to participate in internships or activities outside of the class-work schedule. At our New Orleans roundtable, student leaders spoke to the notion that success after college requires investment outside the classroom.

Ideas on Federal Student Aid

Federal financial aid exists to lower the financial burden that higher education places on students and their families and to increase access and completion rates. Most programs target the neediest students, however even some of the best-known programs remain under utilized.⁹ Our national survey suggests student body presidents use federal aid at similar rates to the general student population. Yet even as highly engaged students, few student leaders feel knowledgeable about more than one federal student aid program, which is usually the program they personally use.

“No one is [in school] to spend \$50,000 to do nothing... Higher education must be held accountable for what happens after school.”
 - Student leader in Detroit

A Knowledge Gap

Student leaders tend to lack the level of expertise about federal financial aid programs to effectively communicate their benefit to other students. While student body presidents have heard about most of the programs at relatively promising rates, far fewer feel knowledgeable about those programs (Figure 3). In fact, the best indicator of whether a student leader is knowledgeable about a program is whether they personally use the programs. Student body presidents who personally use a financial aid are 46 percent more likely to feel knowledgeable about it than those who do not use any program (Figure 4). This finding suggests that student leaders lack exposure to programs outside of personal use. Seven in ten student body presidents personally use some form of federal financial aid, a slightly higher rate than the general student population (Figure 5).^{10,11}

Awareness Does Not Mean Knowledge

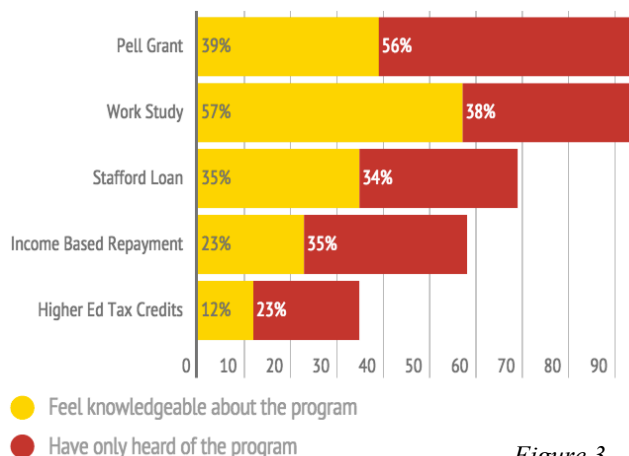


Figure 3

Aid Usage Indicates Aid Knowledge

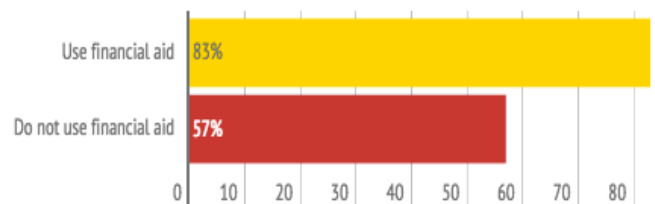


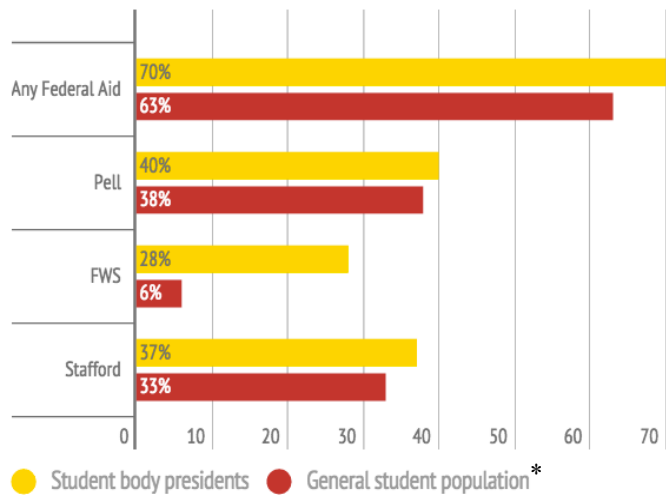
Figure 4

Of the 40 percent of student body presidents who use the Pell grant, 56 percent consider themselves knowledgeable about its policies. Of the 28 percent of student body presidents who use FWS, 85 percent feel knowledgeable about its policies, while 50 percent of those who do not use FWS feel knowledgeable about its policies. Of the 37 percent of student body presidents who use Stafford Loans, 66 percent feel knowledgeable about the program’s policies (Figure 6).

Student body presidents with federal loans are more likely to plan on using IBR, with 63 percent of student leaders who use Stafford Loans planning to use IBR in the future. Student leaders who borrow Stafford Loans are also more knowledgeable about IBR programs than those without federal loans. Stafford borrowers are 22 percent more likely than non-borrowers to feel knowledgeable about IBR. While this is an encouraging trend for increasing usage—and demonstrates good linkage between loans and repayment options—a large gap remains in ensuring more student leaders can educate their student bodies about IBR.

Among all student body presidents, relatively few feel knowledgeable about income-based repayment or federal education tax credits (see Figure 3). Fifty-eight percent of student body presidents are aware of income-based repayment, and just 35 percent are aware of federal education tax credits. Roughly a third of student leaders who have heard of any form of income-based repayment feel knowledgeable

Student Body President Financial Aid Usage vs. National Student Average



* Sources: NCES 2011-12 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study & CollegeBoard 2014 Trends in Student Aid

Figure 5

about its policies. Only 12 percent of student leaders feel knowledgeable about higher education tax credits. These trends help explain why usage for these programs is low nationwide and demonstrate a gap in how student leaders are utilized to increase program usage among the general student population.

While 73 percent of student body presidents feel knowledgeable about at least one federal aid program, just three percent feel knowledgeable about all five programs in our survey. Seventeen percent feel knowledgeable about at least three programs. This reinforces the concern that student leaders currently lack a comprehensive knowledge

Program Knowledge Among Program Users

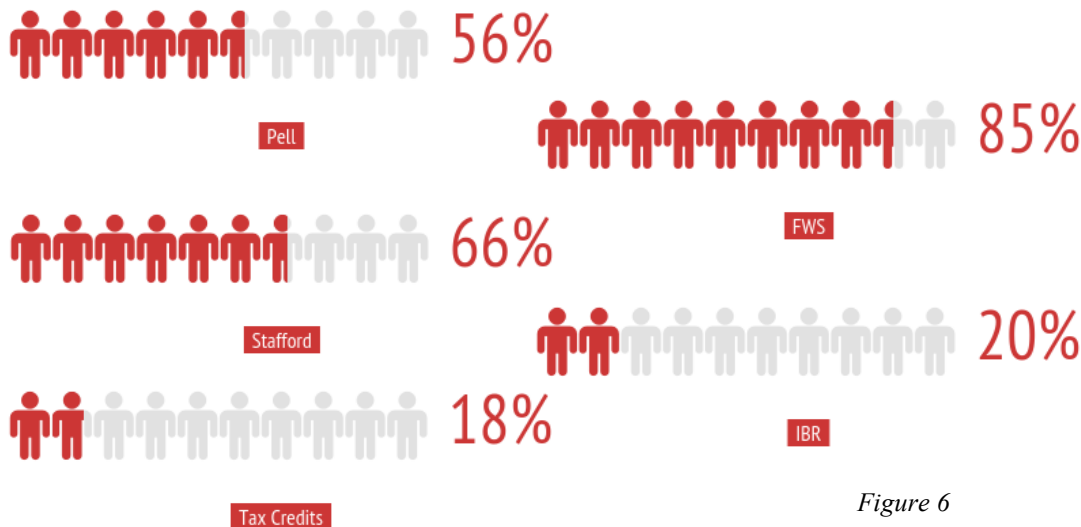


Figure 6

about federal financial aid.

Perceptions of General Student Knowledge

Student body presidents do not feel that their peers are well informed about financial aid programs. When asked to gauge how well informed they believe their student body is about these programs, student leaders’ responses suggest that their own knowledge gap likely permeates the general student population. Half of student body presidents surveyed believe their fellow students are “somewhat informed” about Pell, Stafford Loans, or FWS.

Fifty-six percent of student body presidents believe students are poorly informed about income-based repayment. This lack of knowledge, combined with a student loan default rate of nearly 14 percent, explains why student body presidents overwhelmingly believe that monthly loan payments are the greatest threat to their future success. Regardless of whether they are personally knowledgeable about the program, 21 percent of student body presidents believe the average student has no knowledge of IBR programs at all.

Perceptions of Policy Influence

Student body presidents tend to feel most influential with their own institutions’ governing boards. However, they feel more modest about their influence on higher education decision makers at the state and federal level. Student body presidents hold different groups of decision makers responsible for various policy challenges. The majority of student body presidents (60 percent) believe an institution’s

Student Opinions on Which Decision-Makers Have “High Influence” over Student Debt

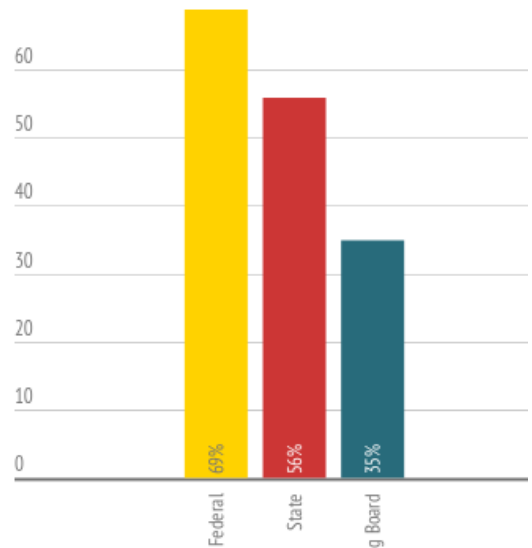


Figure 7

governing board has the highest influence over net cost of college. Sixty-nine percent of student body presidents believe the federal government has a high amount of influence over tackling student loan debt (Figure 7). Over half believe state governments have high influence over the net cost of college, and even more believe the state government has high influence over tackling the debt burden.

Though these issues directly affect the student population, student body presidents feel far more modest about their own influence. Their sense of influence is highest when considering their institution’s governing board and decreases with state and federal policymakers (see Figure 8). Three in four student body presidents believe they have almost no influence in discussions led by the federal

Student Leaders’ Sense of Influence with Decision-Makers

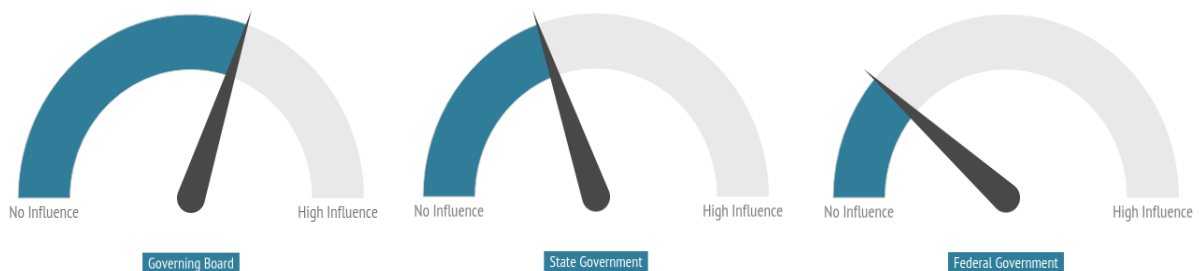


Figure 8

Federal Program Knowledge Indicates Sense of Federal Influence

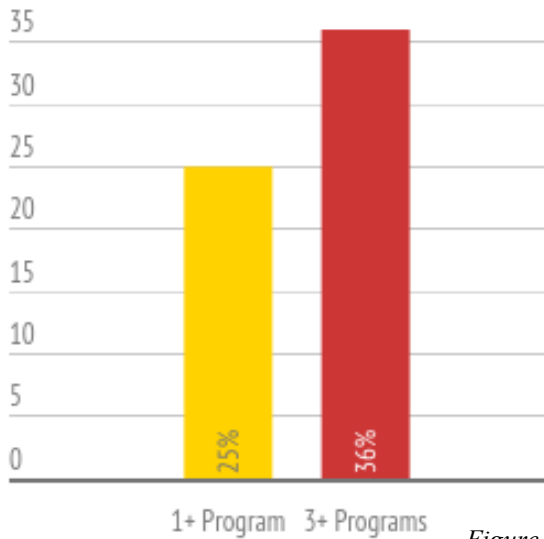


Figure 9

government. Student body presidents feel slightly more influential at the state level (48 percent believe they have some influence). Even at their own institutions, 1 in 5 student body presidents feel they have no influence with their governing board.

There is a modest increase in sense of influence with federal decision makers among student body presidents who feel knowledgeable about federal aid programs. Student leaders who feel knowledgeable about at least one FSA program feel 25 percent more influential with the federal government than those who do not feel knowledgeable about any FSA programs (see Figure 9). The increased sense of influence appears to fall among those who know about all FSA programs, however there are so few student leaders in that category that the data may be skewed.

Our national survey shows that students who do not feel knowledgeable about federal financial aid policies feel slightly more influential with more local governing bodies. The largest shift occurs at the governing board level, where two-thirds of student body presidents who do not feel knowledgeable about FSA programs feel they have some influence, slightly higher than the 59 percent of those student leaders who do feel knowledgeable. At the state level, 50 percent of non-knowledgeable student body presidents feel influential, as opposed to 47 percent of knowledgeable presidents. Though

these differences are small, they highlight a notable trend. When student body presidents are more educated in federal financial aid policy, they feel more influential with the decision makers who have the greatest effect over those programs.

Support for Policy Changes

Student body presidents have two clear priorities: reducing college costs and addressing student loan debt. More than half believe student loan debt is the biggest threat to students' future success, and they believe the federal government's top priority needs to be addressing college costs. They fear that college accessibility is threatened by high net costs and believe lowering these costs should be the federal government's top higher education priority. Similarly, they strongly think that monthly student loan payments are the biggest threat to students' financial futures and that the federal government is best poised to fix it. We asked student body presidents, who reported being knowledgeable about financial aid programs, to identify or suggest what policy changes they would like to see. Nearly all support policies that increase access and expand eligibility for Pell and FWS, and there is strong support for more borrower friendly policies for federal loans and IBR.

Federal Grants

Student body presidents overwhelmingly support reforms that increase investment in Pell and FWS. Nearly all support changes that require greater investment into Pell (99 percent) and FWS (94 percent). 64 percent of knowledgeable student leaders want to see the maximum Pell grant amount raised, and 69 percent wish to expand the program's eligibility criteria. Seventy-two percent of knowledgeable student body presidents want to see Pell expanded and applied throughout the year, including the summer (Figure 10). Student body presidents also widely favor expanding FWS and allowing more students to participate. Sixty-eight percent of students wish to see the number of on-campus FWS positions increase, and 62 percent want to see eligibility for the program increase (Figure 11).

Beyond funding and eligibility, 70 percent of student body presidents want to see FWS positions more closely align with participants’ fields of study. A recent Pew Research survey found that 50 percent of college students wish they had “gained more work experience” to better prepare for the job they want.”¹² Our roundtable discussions further reinforced this idea as student leaders in nearly every city expressed concern that students’ on-campus (and often off-campus) work experience did not match their career goals, or perspective employers’ needs. Participants in several cities also noted that on-campus jobs could be better leveraged with programs and curricula that support mentorship and skills development.

We found that student leaders who personally use Pell Grants are more likely to favor changes to the program than those who do not utilize the program. Seventy-four percent of student leaders who use Pell support raising the maximum grant amount, compared to 53 percent support from those who do not use Pell. Eighty-four percent of student leaders using Pell support allowing full-year use of Pell, and 58 percent of non-users agree. When asked if the program’s eligibility should be expanded, non-Pell users are more supportive, with 71 percent in support, while 67 percent of users support expanding eligibility (Figure 12).

Student leaders from public institutions—both four- and two-year—are the most supportive of Pell and FWS improvements. Three out of four student leaders from public institutions support expanding Pell eligibility, while 52 percent of student leaders from four-year private schools support the measure. When it comes to allowing Pell Grants to be used year-round, 83 percent of two-year public school student leaders and 73 percent of four-year public school student leaders are in support. Sixty-six percent of student leaders from public four-year institutions support expanding the FWS’s eligibility. They also show the greatest support for relating work-study jobs with students’ majors, at 73 percent.

Student Leaders’ Opinions on Pell Reforms

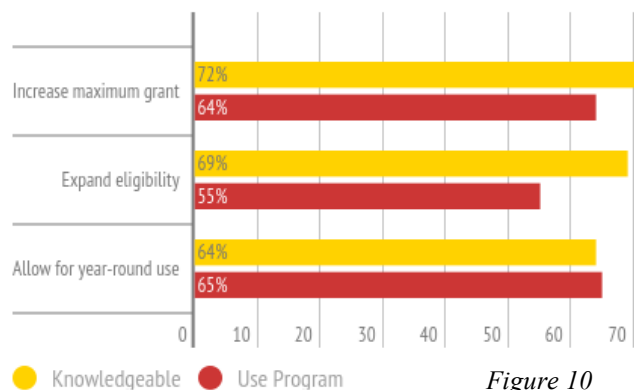


Figure 10

Opinions on FWS Reforms Among Student Leaders Who Feel Knowledgeable vs. Use FWS

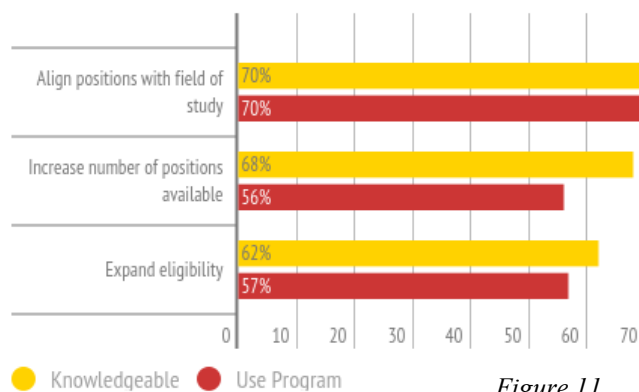


Figure 11

Support for Pell Reform Among Student Leaders Who Use Pell

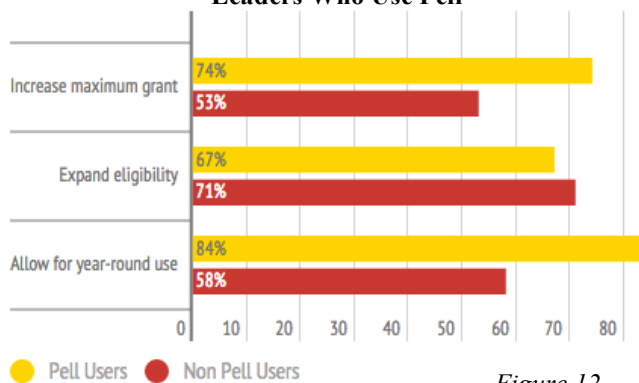


Figure 12

Student Leaders' Opinions on Stafford Reforms

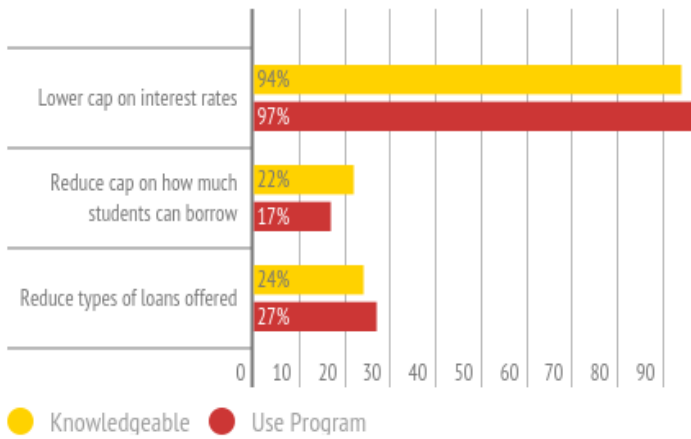


Figure 13

Support for Stafford Reforms Among Student Leaders Who Do vs. Do Not Use Stafford

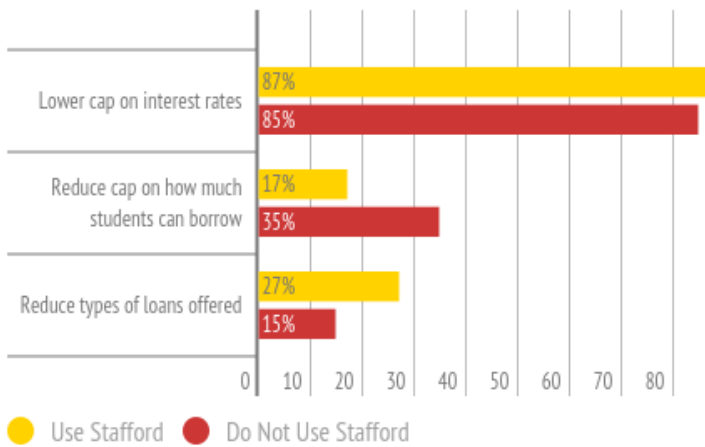


Figure 14

Student Leaders' Opinions on IBR Reforms

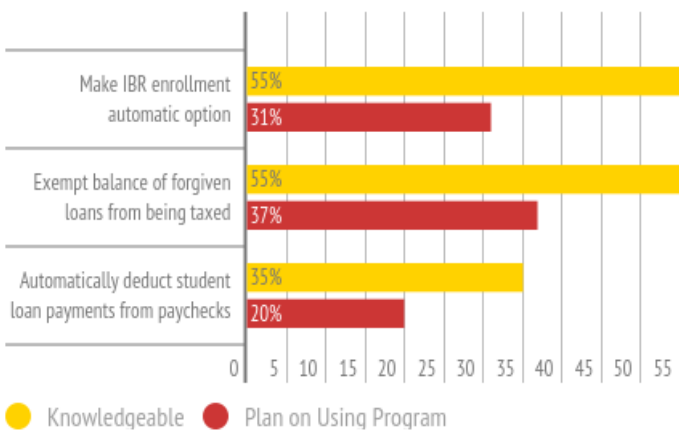


Figure 15

Loans & Repayment

More than half of student body presidents identified monthly student loan payments as the biggest threat to students' financial futures, and nearly 70 percent of them believe the federal government has a high level of influence over student loan debt. Ninety-nine percent of knowledgeable student leaders believe terms for Stafford Loans should be more borrower-friendly with lower interest rates and stronger borrower protections. Nearly all student leaders – 94 percent – believe that the cap on interest rates should be lowered, and just 22 percent of knowledgeable student body presidents believe the cap on the total amount that students can borrow should be lowered (Figure 13). Student leaders who personally use Stafford Loans are more likely to support the aforementioned reforms than student leaders who do not (Figure 14).

Though participation in and knowledge about income-based repayment is low, knowledgeable student leaders still expressed concern for the future of the program. Our national survey shows that 55 percent of knowledgeable student leaders support automatic enrollment in an income-based repayment program, which has been suggested by policy organization Young Invincibles to cut confusion and loan default rates.¹³ The majority of student leaders oppose placing a cap on how much outstanding debt can be forgiven at the end of the repayment process, and 55 percent of student leaders believe students with outstanding debt should be exempt from paying taxes on any debt that is forgiven upon completion of repayment program (Figure 15). Students planning on using IBR in the future support the proposed policy fixes at similar rates to those who do not plan on utilizing the service. The one notable exception comes in support for tax exemptions on forgiven loan amounts—37 percent of future users are in support, as compared to 41 percent of non-users.

At first glance, it would seem that Stafford users support IBR reforms at low rates. Just 16 percent believe students should be exempt from paying taxes on forgiven debt, and 11 percent believe in making enrollment in IBR programs automatic. Four percent of all Stafford users support an

initiative that would automatically withhold monthly loan payments from an individual's paycheck. These low numbers do not reflect low support for income-based repayment but instead illustrate just how little knowledge student leaders have about the program. Among Stafford users, 27 percent feel knowledgeable about IBR programs; and when we look at this small pool, we see much more fervent support for the initiatives that ease the repayment process. Among these IBR-knowledgeable Stafford borrowers, 68 percent believe students should be exempt from paying taxes on forgiven debt, and 64 percent believe in making enrollment in IBR programs automatic. Twenty four percent wish to see their payments withheld from paychecks. These numbers in particular highlight the need for better dissemination of information about financial aid programs.

Federal Higher Education Tax Credits

By far the least well-known program, just 12 percent of student body presidents feel knowledgeable about higher education tax credits. While it is a very small sample, 96 percent of knowledgeable student leaders support federal education tax credits and believe they should continue. When asked how the program could be improved, 81 percent of student leaders cited increasing the tax credit. Support for federal education tax credits is strong across the various types of institutions our student leaders attend. Over 80 percent of students from four-year public and four-year private institutions support increasing the tax credit limit.

Conclusion

Though our roundtable discussions and surveys brought together student leaders from a range of unique communities, several common themes emerged. In short, students want financial security after college, they want to find the right job, and they want to be good at that job. These three themes make up the core tenants of what student leaders define as post-graduate success.

Student leaders are poorly utilized

Student body presidents could significantly change how students learn about existing financial aid resources. It is worthy of concern for higher education advocates and policymakers that less than 1 in 5 student leaders feel knowledgeable about even three federal student aid programs. If the higher education community better equips student leaders with information, those leaders can help strategize and implement new methods to increase participation in underused programs like IBR and federal tax credits.

The more inspiring side of the same coin is that student body presidents who feel knowledgeable about a program also feel more influential in their role as a student leader. The higher education policy community must reimagine how it engages with student leaders as policy advocates and community figures. We must learn about how student body presidents, who are knowledgeable about policy but do not personally use a given program, develop their expertise. Moreover, our findings suggest further study is needed into student-centric and student-led financial advising programs.

Decision-Makers Need Student Input

This study demonstrates that student body presidents have clear concerns about the current state of college finances, outcomes, and federal student aid policy. Contrary to what many might assume, student body presidents are interested in the long-term impact of today's decisions, as evidenced by the fact that their top concern is that high college costs will limit college accessibility. Among knowledgeable student body presidents, we found strong support around specific policy ideas currently championed by many in the higher education community.

Researchers and decision-makers alike have an opportunity to further understand why that is by engaging student leaders in related discussions and activities. These insights are vital to a range of decision-makers and stakeholders, particularly business leaders who look to employ today's graduates and federal lawmakers who are considering policy and program reform. As higher

education stakeholders, we must identify meaningful methods of engagement to bring more student leaders into the discussion and ensure students have a platform to inform policies under consideration.

Methodology

The survey was conducted online through SurveyMonkey January 15 – February 18, 2015. The questionnaire was primarily delivered through email to 899 known student body presidents active in NCLC’s network of student body presidents with a 30.7 percent response rate. Of the 276 respondents who were current student body presidents (as of February 18, 2015), 254 fully completed the survey.

The roundtables were held in 15 cities in partnership with local chambers of commerce. We researched local employment and higher education trends at each host city and recorded and transcribed each discussion for insights. Roundtable participants received an online survey via email, including questions related to this study. The post-roundtable survey was conducted on SurveyMonkey and delivered via email to 263 roundtable participants with a 41.1 percent response rate.

About NCLC

The National Campus Leadership Council is a national nonprofit that empowers student leaders to engage in the public discourse. Launched in January 2012, NCLC works with a highly active and expansive network of student body presidents and their teams to address some of the biggest issues facing students today. The organization focuses on leadership development, policy analysis, and technical assistance as students navigate challenges at the campus, state, and national levels. During the 2014-15 academic year, NCLC worked with more than 1,500 student leaders at more than 500 colleges nationwide on college affordability, campus sexual assault prevention, mental health, and job readiness.

End Notes

1. Description based on U.S. Department of Education federal aid programs
2. *Ibid.*
3. Six percent chose not to respond
4. Traditional student government associations are relatively rare at two-year institutions
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Appendix A

Roundtable locations and partners

Date	City	Local Partner
February 20	Detroit, MI	Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce Workforce Intelligence Network of Southeast Michigan
March 4	Los Angeles, CA	Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce
March 17	San Francisco, CA	San Francisco Chamber of Commerce
March 18	Seattle, WA	Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County
March 25	Atlanta, GA	Metro Atlanta Chamber
March 26	Philadelphia, PA	CEO Council for Growth Campus Philly Temple University Career Center
March 27	Cleveland, OH	Northeast Ohio Council on Higher Education
March 30	San Antonio, TX	San Antonio Chamber of Commerce
March 31	Albuquerque, NM	Greater Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce
April 2	Boston, MA	Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce
April 6	Denver, CO	Denver Metro Chamber Leadership Foundation
April 7	New Orleans, LA	Greater New Orleans, Inc
April 8	Columbia, SC	Greater Columbia Chamber of Commerce
April 9	Raleigh, NC	Wake County Economic Development Capital Area Workforce Development Board
April 22	Columbus, OH	Columbus Partnership



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