

INSIDE
HIGHER ED

2017 SURVEY OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS

A STUDY BY INSIDE HIGHER ED AND GALLUP

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THE 2017 INSIDE HIGHER ED SURVEY OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS

A study by Gallup and *Inside Higher Ed*



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FOREWORD

Inside Higher Ed's third annual survey of community college presidents seeks to understand how these leaders view the key issues facing two-year institutions in the U.S.

This study addresses the following questions:

- What proportion of community college presidents report declines in enrollment?
- What steps are community college presidents taking to recruit more students at their institutions?
- What do respondents believe are the biggest challenges facing community college presidents at this time?
- What do presidents believe are the most significant barriers to community college students going on to earn bachelor's degrees?
- How do presidents assess the emerging talent pool for future community college presidents?
- What do presidents predict will happen to the free community college education movement now that President Obama has left office?

SNAPSHOT OF FINDINGS

- Six in 10 community college presidents report a decline in enrollment over the past three years, including 21 percent who say enrollment is down by 10 percent or more. Eighteen percent report an increase in enrollment compared with three years ago.
- Of various strategies to recruit students, presidents are most likely to say their college is adding new programs and options to make it easier to transfer to four-year institutions. Slightly less than 4 in 10 presidents say their college had reduced tuition or kept it the same.
- Eight in 10 two-year-college leaders regard "financial matters" as a big challenge. Nearly three-quarters say enrollment management is a big challenge.
- In assessing barriers to bachelor's degree attainment, over three-fourths of presidents believe a lack of clear pathways for transfer students to gain credit for their community college coursework is a significant barrier. Only about half perceive a lack of student interest in getting a bachelor's degree as a significant barrier.
- Seven in 10 community college leaders strongly agree they would pursue a career as a community college president if they had a chance to do it over again.
- Just 29 percent of presidents strongly agree or agree they are impressed with the field of potential community college presidents.
- Community college presidents are more inclined to disagree than agree that there are too few female candidates for community college presidencies. However, they tend to agree more than disagree that there are too few minority candidates.
- Very few presidents see much chance that free community college legislation will pass in Congress now that President Obama has left office. However, a majority expect to see growth in free community college programs at the local level.

METHODOLOGY

This report presents findings from a quantitative survey research study that Gallup conducted on behalf of *Inside Higher Ed*, with the goal of examining how community college presidents view pressing issues facing their institutions.

To achieve this objective, Gallup sent invitations via email to 883 presidents of associate-degree-granting institutions and sent regular reminders throughout the Jan. 5–Feb. 1, 2017, field period. Gallup collected 236 completed or partially completed web surveys, yielding a 27 percent response rate.

Gallup education consultants developed the questionnaire in collaboration with Scott Jaschik and Doug Lederman from *Inside Higher Ed*.

The results reported here are based on the subset of community college presidents surveyed in a larger study of 706 college and university presidents using the most comprehensive sample information available. Gallup statistically weighted data to correct for nonresponse, matching the obtained sample to targets for all U.S. colleges and universities from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System database. The weighted sample results can be considered representative of the views of presidents at community colleges nationwide.

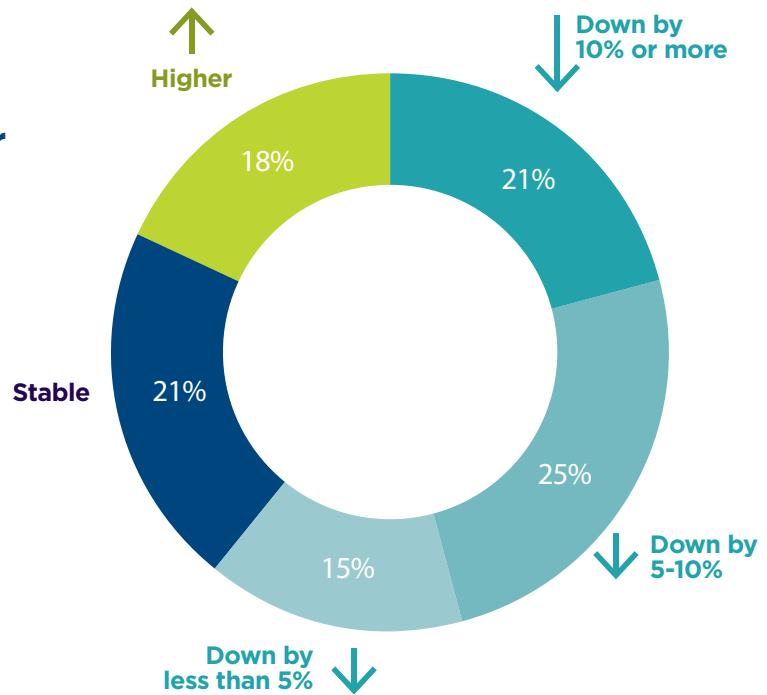
The following sections present the findings of the survey. In some cases, reported frequencies may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding. “Don’t know” and “Refused” responses are excluded from the results.

DECLINING ENROLLMENT

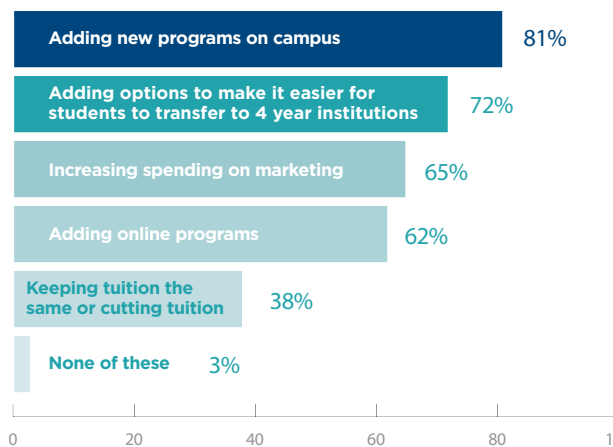
Community college enrollment has been declining in the nation over the past several years. The 2017 *Inside Higher Ed* Survey of Community College Presidents asked these leaders to report on the situation at their own institution. Consistent with national trends, the majority, 61 percent, say enrollment at their college is down at least somewhat over the past three years. This includes 21 percent who report declines of 10 percent or more.

Meanwhile, 21 percent of presidents report enrollment is stable at their college, and 18 percent say it has increased at their college in the past three years.

Many community colleges are now experiencing their second or third year of enrollment declines. Compared to three years ago, is your enrollment:



Which, if any, of the following steps are you taking to recruit more students? Please check all that apply.

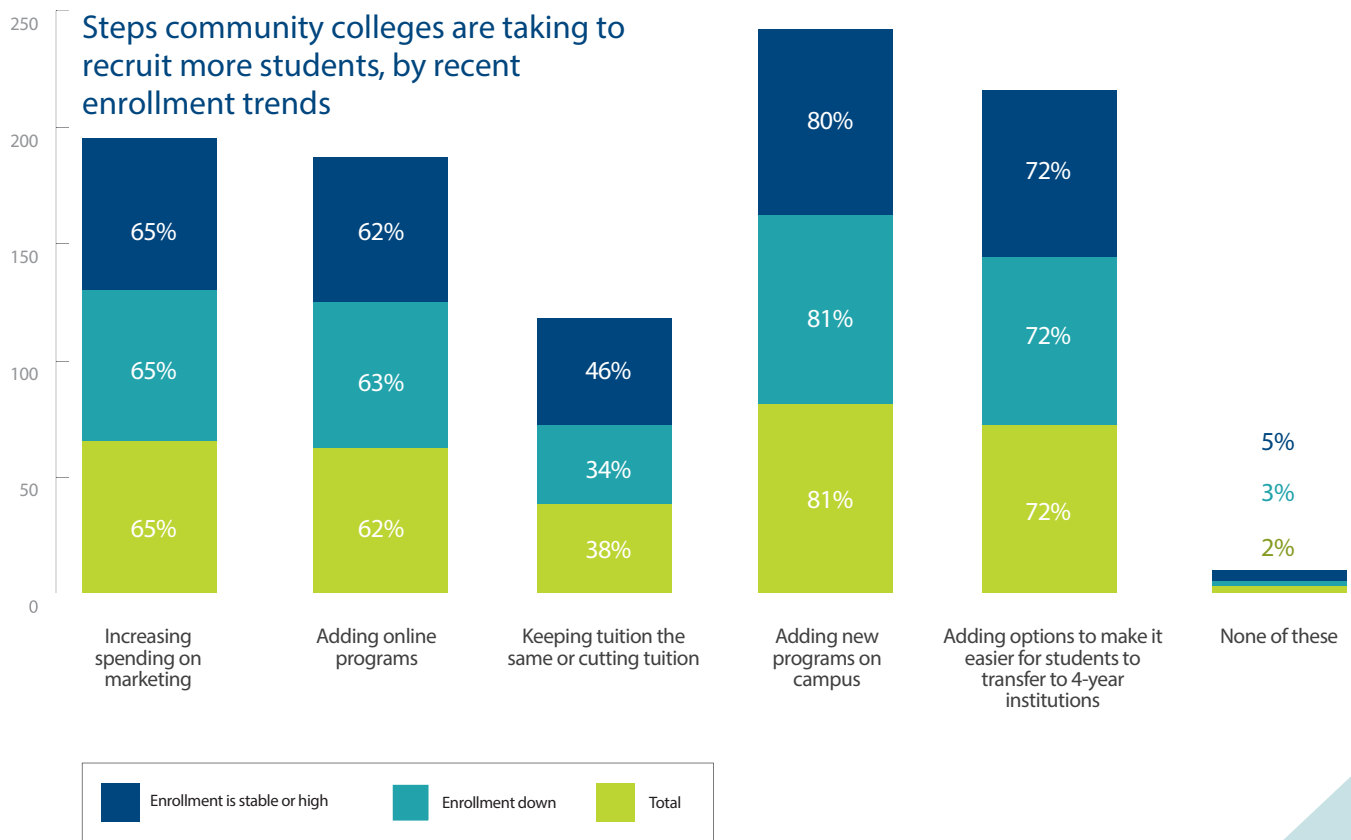


Among five common strategies employed to recruit more students, community college presidents are most likely to say their college is adding new on-campus programs (81 percent). Majorities also report their college is adding options to make it easier for students to transfer to four-year institutions, increasing spending on marketing and adding online programs. About 4 in 10 community college presidents say they are keeping tuition the same or lowering it to attract more students.

DECLINING ENROLLMENT (cont.)

Community college presidents who report declining enrollment are as likely as those who report stable or increasing enrollment to engage in most of these recruitment strategies.

The one exception concerns tuition: 46 percent of those whose enrollment is stable or higher say they have cut tuition or kept it the same, compared with 34 percent of those who say enrollment is down at their college. It is unclear whether tuition levels are contributing to the changes in enrollment at these institutions. It is also possible that there is greater pressure on colleges experiencing enrollment declines to compensate by raising tuition.



CHALLENGES FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Enrollment is undoubtedly one of community colleges' most important priorities. To underscore this, 74 percent of presidents describe enrollment management as a "big challenge" for community college presidents. Among six issues tested in the survey, enrollment management trails only financial matters (80 percent) as a big challenge for community college presidents.

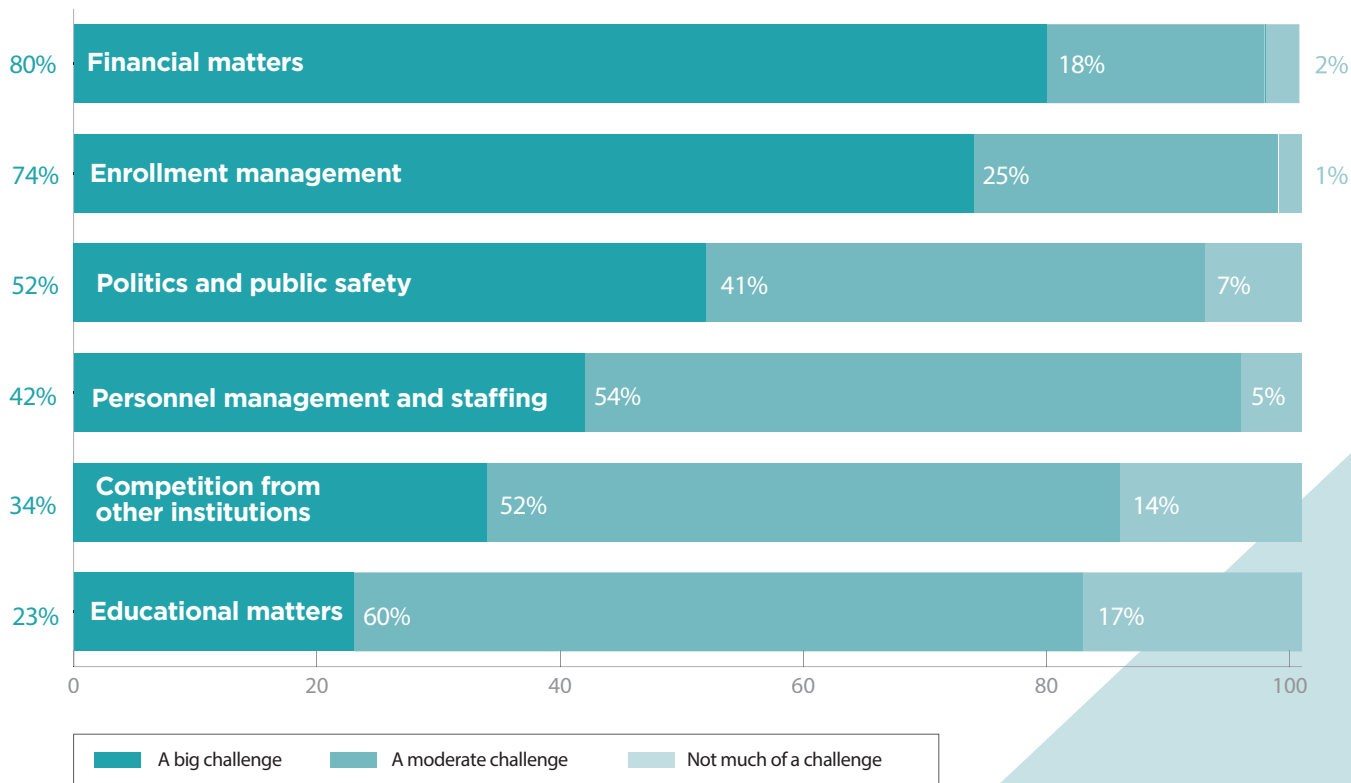
Presidents view four other issues tested in the survey as less challenging than finances and enrollment. The smallest percentage, 23 percent, view educational matters as a big challenge. Thirty-four percent say

competition from other institutions is a big challenge, even though for-profit institutions may be competing for many of the same potential students.

Two more mid-range concerns for presidents are politics and public policy (52 percent say it is a big challenge) and personnel management and staffing (42 percent).

The vast majority of presidents describe all six issues as "big" or "moderate" challenges.

How big of a challenge is each of the following for community college presidents?



BARRIERS TO TRANSFER

Community college students often do not transfer to four-year colleges and attain bachelor's degrees. The survey asked community college presidents to indicate how significant several possible barriers are to limiting the number of two-year students who eventually receive bachelor's degrees.

Chief among these is a lack of clear "pathways" that assure community college graduates can transfer two years' worth of college credit. Seventy-eight percent of presidents say this is a very (44 percent) or somewhat (34 percent) significant barrier to more community college students going on to earn bachelor's degrees.

Two-thirds of presidents also believe a lack of academic advising on how to prepare for transfer is a very or somewhat significant barrier.

About half of presidents, 47 percent, believe a lack of student interest in earning bachelor's degrees is a

significant factor explaining why many community college students do not complete four-year degree programs. Just one-third believe a lack of programs at nearby four-year colleges is a significant factor.

Community college presidents appear to see the actions of public four-year colleges as having a bigger impact on the lack of community college students completing bachelor's degrees than the actions of private four-year colleges. Majorities say a lack of interest by four-year public colleges in accepting (52 percent) and supporting (68 percent) transfer students from community colleges are significant factors in limiting the number of community college students who earn bachelor's degrees. Less than half say lack of interest by private four-year colleges in accepting (44 percent) and supporting (48 percent) community college transfer students are significant factors.

Many community college educators and others say that far more community college students should transfer to four-year colleges and earn bachelor's degrees than currently do. How significant do you believe each of the following factors is in limiting the number of two-year students who go on to earn bachelor's degrees?

Lack of clear "pathways" that assure community college graduates can transfer 2 years' worth of credit



Lack of interest by 4-year public colleges in supporting transfer students from community college



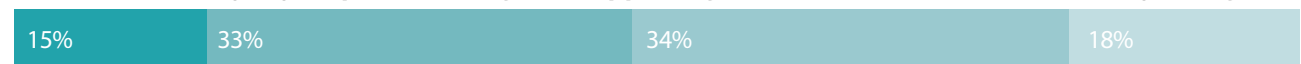
Lack of academic advising on how to prepare for transfer



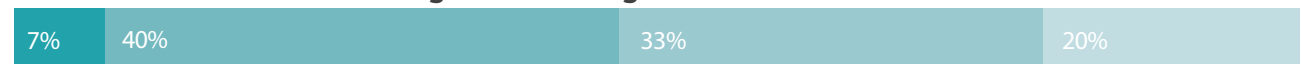
Lack of interest by 4-year public colleges in accepting transfer students from community college



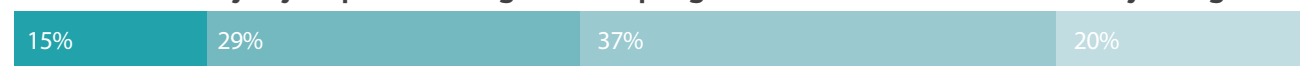
Lack of interest by 4-year private colleges in supporting transfer students from community college



Lack of student interest in earning bachelor's degrees



Lack of interest by 4-year private colleges in accepting transfer students from community college



Lack of programs at nearby 4-year colleges that match student interests



THE FUTURE OF THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENCY

In recent years, there has been substantial turnover in the leadership of two-year colleges. In 2015, nearly one in four community colleges replaced its president. That has led to concerns about whether there are enough capable and willing individuals to pursue the office of community college president.

Current community college leaders are divided on the talent pool that exists to fill positions like theirs. Twenty-nine percent strongly agree or agree, 38 percent are neutral, and 33 percent strongly disagree or disagree they are impressed with the pool of potential community college presidents.

They are also divided on whether there are clear career paths to prepare for the community college presidency — 40 percent strongly agree or agree this is the case while

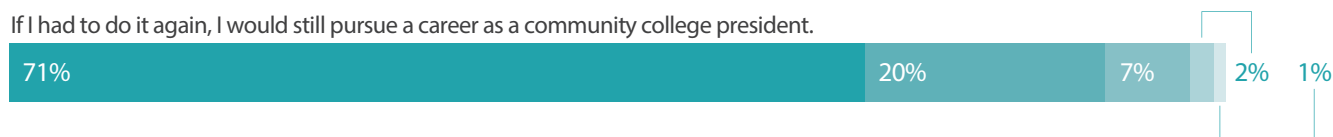
43 percent strongly disagree or disagree.

Community college presidents are more pessimistic about the pool of qualified minority candidates for the top leadership position at two-year institutions than they are about the pool of qualified female candidates. Whereas 55 percent of presidents strongly agree or agree there are too few qualified minority candidates, 34 percent strongly agree or agree there are too few qualified female candidates.

Very few community college presidents express regrets about their career path. Nine in 10 agree, including 71 percent who strongly agree, they would pursue a career as a community college president if they had a chance to do it again.

Many experts predict that community colleges will see significant turnover of their presidents in the next few years. Using a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

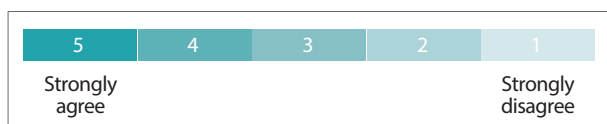
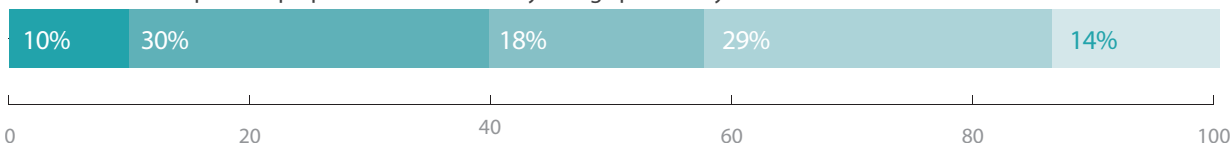
If I had to do it again, I would still pursue a career as a community college president.



I am impressed with the pool of potential community college presidents.

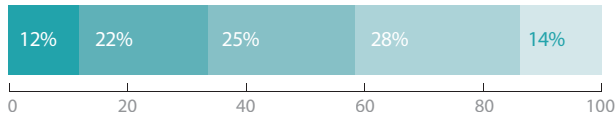


There are not clear paths to prepare for the community college presidency.

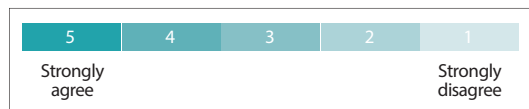
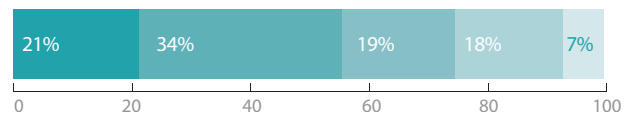


THE FUTURE OF THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENCY (cont.)

There are too few minority candidates for community college presidencies.

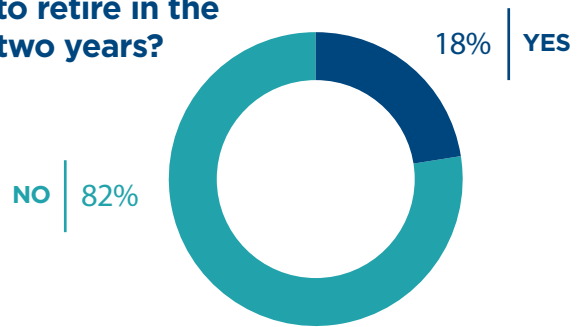


There are too few female candidates for community college presidencies.



Amid concerns about having enough qualified men and women to serve as community college presidents, 18 percent of currently serving presidents say they plan to retire in the next two years.

Do you personally plan to retire in the next two years?

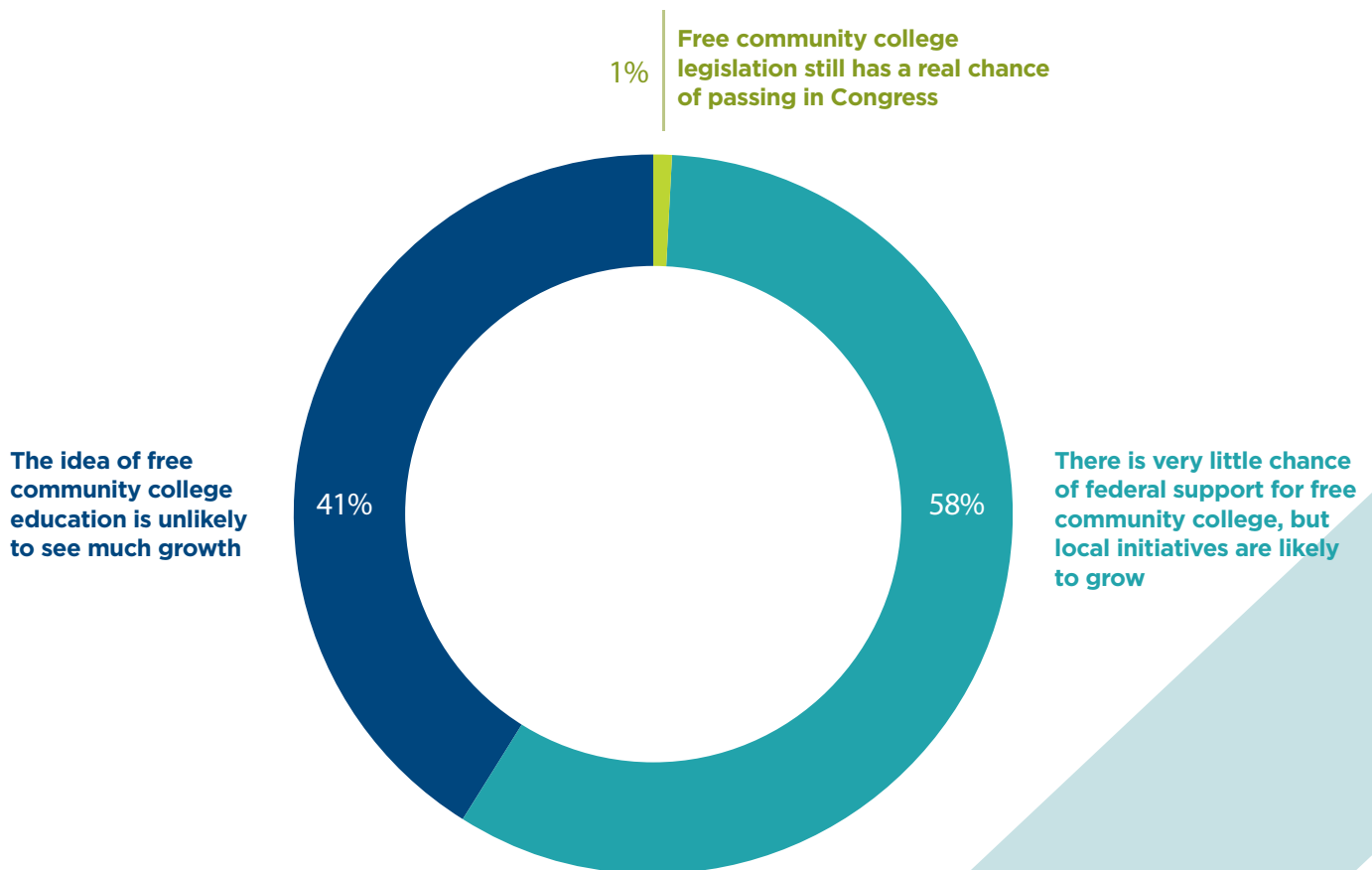


THE FUTURE OF FREE COMMUNITY COLLEGE EDUCATION

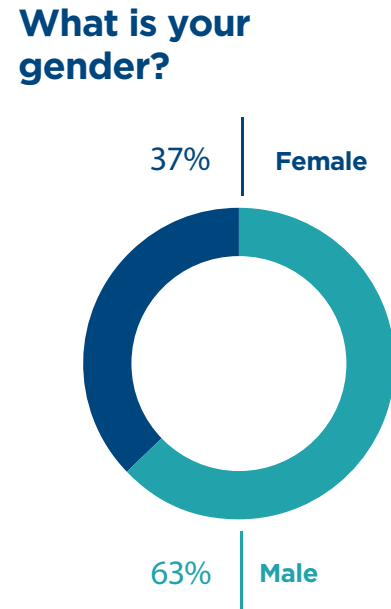
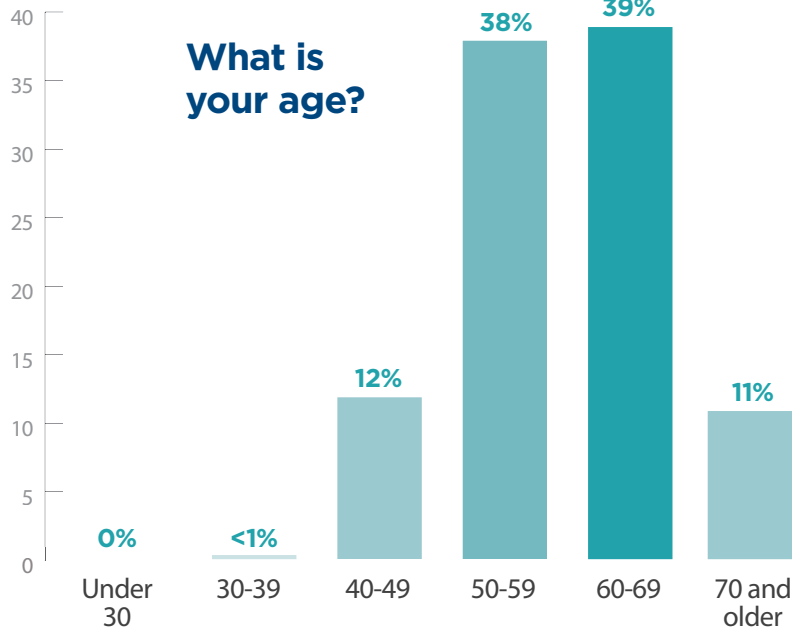
One of former President Obama's most notable higher education proposals was a program that would offer free community college tuition for students who met minimum requirements on attendance, degree progress and grade point average.

Now that President Trump has taken office and is working with a majority-Republican Congress, the fate of free community college is more uncertain. Only 1 percent of community college presidents now believe free community college has a real chance of passing in Congress. At the same time, a majority, 58 percent, do not expect federal action on the issue but do expect local initiatives to grow. The remaining 41 percent do not believe there will be much growth in free community college programs.

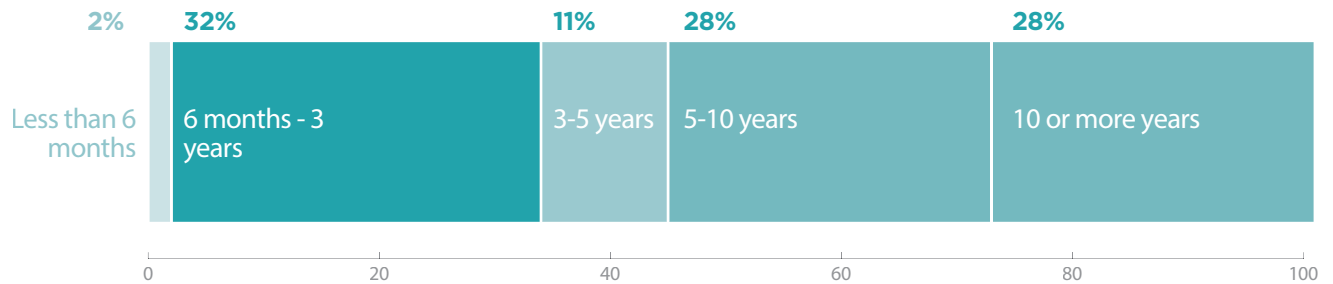
President Obama, who championed free community college [is leaving/has left] office. What are your expectations for the spread of free community college going forward?



INSTITUTION AND PERSONAL DEMOGRAPHICS



How many years have you served as the president at any institution?



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