
Regional

College students want more campus mentoring

In previous articles I have summarized the latest results of opinion polls given to university presidents, faculty and the general public on the state of higher education. Yet, we rarely hear about opinion polls conducted on students about how they feel about higher education, not only in the United States but globally. This is an important factor not only because students are the ones supposed to be served by postsecondary educational institutions, but also because every year more and more international students come to the U.S. to pursue higher education. Since those students have become a major source of income to those institutions, their opinion is of great importance if we want to continue to attract them.

In 2014, Laureate International Universities, a consortium of 80 institutions of higher education in 30 countries, along with Zogby Analytics, an American public opinion polling company, partnered to conduct the largest survey ever of student attitudes toward higher education.

The results of that survey have just been published under the title of “2015 Laureate/Zogby Global Student Confidence Index” and are now available on the Internet. They surveyed more than 27,000 students from 22 countries in North America, Europe, Central America, South America, Africa, Asia and Australia.

The survey looked at two major areas: the extent to which students anticipate various educational innovations in the future (e.g., greater involvement of industry experts in creation, funding, and evaluation

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of course offerings) and their confidence in their own nations’ current education systems.

Almost 80 percent of the students surveyed said that a primary purpose of education is to improve employment prospects. Students were almost unanimous (93 percent) in agreeing that schools should provide mentors who can help with education job placement. This is not surprising for those of us who have been teaching students pursuing a professional career. One of the major concentrations of incoming students in higher education in this country consists of those interested in health related careers. They are always appreciative when you bring professionals to campus.

Another interesting – but not surprising – result of the survey is that students are very keen on innovation and entrepreneurship. Ninety-six percent of them believe that their institutions should foster an entrepreneurial atmosphere. We are seeing an increasing emphasis among students not to wait for someone to offer them a job but to create a job for themselves. That is why many colleges and universities now offer courses on entrepreneurship to non-business majors. Students are taught what needs to be done in order to create their own enterprise in areas as diverse as the arts

or technology.

As was the case with a survey conducted on the general population that I reported about earlier, most students taking this survey were confident that their higher education system provides a high-quality education, with students in the U.S. and Canada giving the highest marks. Students from Turkey and Morocco showed the lowest confidence about the value of their nation’s education systems.

In general students also reported that when it comes to career-oriented trends in higher education, most of them feel that certain career-oriented innovations will take place at least 15 years in the future. The countries where students feel these changes will most likely occur are Panama, Thailand and China. The countries where students feel these changes are least likely to occur are Turkey, Italy and Spain.

Several major conclusions can be drawn from this and other surveys. One is that despite all the talk in certain political circles questioning the usefulness of a higher education degree, students clearly think it is worthwhile.

A number of studies show that the more education you have the higher the chances you will have to be employed and earn a higher salary. Students seem to know that intuitively.

Another is that students do not see institutions of higher education as places where they go just to learn content. They really appreciate the opportunities that those institutions offer to provide mentoring through direct contact with experienced professionals that can

give them an insight of how to be successful in many different careers.

Also there is an increasing interest by students in learning skills that will allow them to become independent and to establish their own businesses. I think that is a healthy trend because it fosters innovation and less dependence on the fluctuations of the macroeconomic factors that affect the job market.

Finally, the other important conclusion is that students are not only open to – but expect – major innovations in the way institutions of higher education will provide them with the tools they need in order to become successful in life. In fact, more than half of those surveyed think that the professional and personal perspectives for the future are better today than they were in the recent past. More than 90 percent of them expect more mentoring and hands-on experiences at their postsecondary educational institutions.

One common answer (81 percent) by those surveyed was, “My education is preparing me for the world of work in the 21st century after my studies are completed.” Now it is up to us in higher education not to disappoint them and to ensure that colleges and universities are not just content-delivery places, but environments where real-life, transformative experiences take place.

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