

Higher Education Linked to Greater Wellbeing, Job Fit and Societal Progress, Lumina-Gallup Study Finds

U.S. adults with a post-high school education have better health and wellbeing, are more likely to have jobs that align with their natural talents and interests and increased civic engagement.

WASHINGTON, D.C. – August 30, 2023 – Despite enrollment and completion rates declining and Americans’ confidence in higher education falling, the economic case for earning a college degree remains solid. College graduates earn about \$1 million more on average over the course of their working years than U.S. adults with no college degree.

However, a college degree has value beyond financial gain. To date, most studies that attempt to find the value of pursuing post-high school education focus on a single outcome, like earnings or cognitive ability.

The latest [study](#) from Lumina Foundation and Gallup examines a wide range of economic and non-economic outcomes for U.S. adults across various levels of educational attainment. The “Education for What?” report tracks the association between each additional year of higher education and a variety of work and life outcomes and the extent to which Americans believe education promotes these outcomes.

The results show that additional years of education beyond high school make for healthier, more civic-minded individuals who are more likely to interact with neighbors and family members and find careers that align with their natural talents and interests.

The report finds that Americans believe that further education fosters greater innovation in terms of new scientific, medical and technological discoveries (81%), leads to higher household incomes (73%) and results in a more knowledgeable population (71%).

The study also shows a positive correlation between health and education level, with 60% of bachelor’s degree holders saying their health is either excellent or very good, compared with 43% of respondents with no higher education.

While education beyond high school has a significant impact on Americans’ earning potential, it also creates pathways into career fields where people can excel. Americans armed with an associate (71%), bachelor’s (80%) or graduate (87%) degree are more likely to say their job is a good fit for their personal talents and interests compared with those with either no (58%) or some (69%) education after high school.

In terms of civic engagement, U.S. adults with no education beyond high school exhibit lower rates of participation in civic activities — only 14% say they volunteered in the past 12 months, and 38% donated to a charity. In contrast, those with at least some college-level education demonstrate

greater involvement in community activities, with no less than 27% volunteering and 50% donating to charities. Across all civic outcomes, participation increases with educational attainment.

“These findings underscore the profound impact education has across all aspects of our lives, rather than income and work outcomes alone, which we typically focus on exclusively when we describe the value of higher education,” said Stephanie Marken, Gallup partner and executive director for education research. “The study also helps us know that most Americans associate these outcomes with higher education, despite falling enrollments that we know to be highly related to issues of cost and accessibility.”

“Most people are aware of the financial rewards of attaining a college degree. This study goes beyond that and provides a much more comprehensive look at the value of attaining a degree, providing both the economic and the vast array of non-economic benefits to individuals and to society,” said Courtney Brown, Lumina vice president of impact and planning.

About Lumina Foundation

Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation in Indianapolis committed to making opportunities for learning beyond high school available to all. We envision higher learning that is easy to navigate, addresses racial injustice, and meets the nation’s talent needs through a broad range of credentials. We are working toward a system that prepares people for informed citizenship and success in a global economy.

About Gallup

Gallup delivers analytics and advice to help leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems. Combining more than 80 years of experience with its global reach, Gallup knows more about the attitudes and behaviors of employees, customers, students and citizens than any other organization in the world.