

PERCEPTIONS of BUSINESS LEADERS about MONTANA'S TWO-YEAR COLLEGES

Results of a Survey of Montana Economic Developers Association and Montana Ambassadors Executive Summary

Context

Between June 22 and July 8, 2009, members of Montana Economic Developers Association and Montana Ambassadors were invited to complete an online survey on their perceptions of Montana's Two-Year Colleges. A total of 185 individuals provided responses to the survey, a response rate of 46%. Approximately 2/3 of the respondents (66.3%) have a two-year college (community college, tribal college, or college of technology) in their communities. Over ¾ of the respondents (76.6%) have a community college either in their communities or within 30 miles.

To view the survey and responses, complete survey results are attached. What follows is a summary.

Results

- Only 30.9% of the respondents indicated that they frequently or constantly called on their nearest two-year college to assist in economic development efforts. By contrast, 44.4% responded that seldom or never called for this kind of assistance.
- Respondents rated the performance of their nearest two-year college on all queried aspects of the two-year mission as Excellent or Very Good. The highest average ratings indicate that respondents believe their nearest two-year college:
 - is a good place to start college (3.94 on a 4.0 scale)
 - serves students well (3.91 on a 4.0 scale)
 - provides high-quality career/technical programs (3.78 on a 4.0 scale)
- Responses suggest that:
 - The missions and offerings at Montana's two-year colleges should be clearer.
 - Information and support provided to Montana's high school counselors to assist their advising on the two-year education option should be improved.
 - Respondents see significant opportunity in online courses to expand access and engage adults in two-year education.
 - Montanans' perception that two-year colleges are primarily for the academically unskilled may still exist.
- As for strategies to improve utilization of Montana's two-year colleges, respondents ranked the following strategies the highest:
 - Increasing capacity for specific workforce programs (highly ranked by 88.8% of respondents)
 - Improving access for working adults (highly ranked by 77.1%)
 - Easing transfer between two-year and four-year campuses (highly ranked 71.4%)
- The following strategies were ranked the lowest:
 - Calling all two-year colleges "community colleges" (highly ranked by 7.4%)
 - Creating a statewide mill levy for two-year colleges (highly ranked by 14.5%)

Another Opportunity to Respond

Some respondents expressed disappointment that the survey included no opportunity for open comment. If you would like to clarify or elaborate on any aspect of this survey or the results, please provide written comment by **Friday, July 24**, to Mary Sheehy Moe, Deputy Commissioner for Two-Year Education, at mmoe@montana.edu

MEDA Survey / Two-Year Perceptions and Priorities

1. How close is the nearest two-year college (community college, college of technology, tribal college) to your community?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
In my community		66.3%	122
Within 30 miles		10.3%	19
Within 60 miles		11.4%	21
Not within 60 miles		12.0%	22
		answered question	184
		skipped question	1

2. How often do you call on your closest two-year college to assist you in your economic development activities			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Constantly		10.9%	19
Frequently		20.0%	35
Occasionally		25.1%	44
Seldom		20.0%	35
Never		24.0%	42
		answered question	175
		skipped question	10

3. Select the grade below that best reflects your evaluation of how the two-year college closest to your community (community college, tribal college, or college of technology) performs in the indicated areas.

	Very Poor				Excellent	Rating Average	Response Count
Is responsive to community needs	6.0% (9)	10.1% (15)	27.5% (41)	26.8% (40)	29.5% (44)	3.64	149
Is a good partner on local economic development	8.0% (12)	12.0% (18)	25.3% (38)	26.7% (40)	28.0% (42)	3.55	150
Provides high-quality career/technical programs responding to local workforce needs	4.0% (6)	8.1% (12)	24.8% (37)	32.2% (48)	30.9% (46)	3.78	149
Serves students well	2.7% (4)	4.7% (7)	20.9% (31)	42.6% (63)	29.1% (43)	3.91	148
Features up-to-date equipment and technology	2.8% (4)	11.1% (16)	24.3% (35)	38.9% (56)	22.9% (33)	3.68	144
Is a good place to start college	3.4% (5)	8.7% (13)	17.4% (26)	31.5% (47)	38.9% (58)	3.94	149
	<i>answered question</i>						153
	<i>skipped question</i>						32

4. Please give us your reactions to the following statements. Do you agree, disagree, or have no opinion?				
	Agree	No Particular Opinion	Disagree	Response Count
The best choice for a student seeking a college degree is a four-year college.	21.2% (31)	33.6% (49)	45.2% (66)	146
High school students receive good information about two-year programs from their teachers and guidance counselors.	5.5% (8)	45.2% (66)	49.3% (72)	146
The missions and offerings of Montana's different two-year institutions (community colleges, colleges of technology, tribal colleges) are clear.	22.8% (33)	27.6% (40)	49.7% (72)	145
Online courses are an excellent way to expand access to Montana's two-year colleges.	83.7% (123)	8.2% (12)	8.2% (12)	147
Online courses are an excellent way to get more adults to pursue two-year degrees.	87.1% (128)	7.5% (11)	5.4% (8)	147
Business and industry highly value Montana's two-year colleges.	46.6% (68)	25.3% (37)	28.1% (41)	146
Most Montanans believe that only the academically unskilled should go to two-year colleges.	38.1% (56)	21.8% (32)	40.1% (59)	147
	<i>answered question</i>			147
	<i>skipped question</i>			38

5. Looking ahead, how important do you think on-year certificates and two-year associate's degrees will be to Montana's economy?

	Very unimportant				Very important	Rating Average	Response Count
Importance	6.1% (9)	10.9% (16)	14.3% (21)	24.5% (36)	44.2% (65)	3.90	147
	<i>answered question</i>						147
	<i>skipped question</i>						38

6. Following is a list of possible improvements for two-year education in Montana. Please rank them according to the

	Least Important								Most Important
Ease transfers between Montana's various postsecondary institutions	3.2% (4)	5.6% (7)	2.4% (3)	5.6% (7)	11.9% (15)	8.7% (11)	15.9% (20)	15.1% (19)	31.7% (40)
Increase capacity for specific workforce training programs.	0.0% (0)	4.9% (6)	2.4% (3)	8.9% (11)	4.9% (6)	12.2% (15)	25.2% (31)	21.1% (26)	20.3% (25)
Improve access for working adults (workplace-based programs, alternative scheduling, etc.)	0.8% (1)	3.1% (4)	5.3% (7)	5.3% (7)	8.4% (11)	13.7% (18)	23.7% (31)	24.4% (32)	15.3% (20)
Expand dual enrollment opportunities for high school students	0.8% (1)	9.1% (12)	12.9% (17)	14.4% (19)	15.2% (20)	15.9% (21)	11.4% (15)	12.9% (17)	7.6% (10)
Expand online course offerings	1.6% (2)	5.5% (7)	5.5% (7)	15.7% (20)	15.7% (20)	23.6% (30)	7.9% (10)	17.3% (22)	7.1% (9)
Improve affordability	0.8% (1)	4.6% (6)	9.2% (12)	22.3% (29)	20.8% (27)	10.0% (13)	12.3% (16)	8.5% (11)	11.5% (15)
Call all two-year colleges "community colleges"	65.4% (89)	11.8% (16)	8.8% (12)	3.7% (5)	2.9% (4)	3.7% (5)	1.5% (2)	0.7% (1)	1.5% (2)
Create a statewide 2-mill levy for two-year colleges	12.6% (17)	32.6% (44)	24.4% (33)	5.2% (7)	9.6% (13)	4.4% (6)	4.4% (6)	3.0% (4)	3.7% (5)
Develop a long-term, focused marketing campaign for two-year education	5.7% (8)	17.1% (24)	19.3% (27)	15.7% (22)	13.6% (19)	10.0% (14)	2.9% (4)	6.4% (9)	9.3% (13)
	<i>answer</i>								
	<i>skipp</i>								