

Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education: Survey of Kentucky Adults with Some College

Executive Summary

The Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (KCPE) hired Stamats, a higher education marketing and consulting company, to conduct a research study among Kentucky residents who had attended college but did not complete a bachelor's degree.

The goals of the study were to determine the type of individual most likely to complete their bachelor's degree as well as determine communication messages and strategies that would compel these students to re-engage in their higher education pursuit.

To accomplish these goals, Stamats conducted a randomly sampled telephone survey among the target audience in May and June of 2007. The sample was drawn from the Council's comprehensive database. Accumulated credits of respondents ranged from less than 30 credit hours to 90 or more credit hours. A total of 1,610 surveys were conducted throughout Kentucky, stratified into four regions—Eastern Kentucky, Western Kentucky, Central Kentucky, and Urban Kentucky. The sampling error for this study is $\pm 2.4\%$ at the 95% confidence level for the entire sample and $\pm 4.9\%$ for the individual regions. However, it must be noted that the overall response rate was 7% compared to a standard marketing research response rate of 25%. Therefore, it is possible that a respondent bias toward individuals more interested in continuing their education may be present.

The survey instrument, designed in collaboration with KCPE, explored the following topics:

- Reasons for initial stop-out or drop-out from college
- Items prohibiting or impeding obtainment of a bachelor's degree
- Factors that would motivate students to re-enroll
- Potential college services that would increase the likelihood of re-enrollment
- Awareness of current resources available to adult students
- Overall likelihood of re-enrollment
- Majors or programs of most interest to respondents
- Class formats of most interest to respondents

Results of the research suggest there may not be as much of an interest in continuing education as expected. Among the sample, only 23% indicated being very likely to re-enroll in the future with many of those indicating that it would likely be two or three years before they re-enrolled.

However, three groups emerged as being more receptive to continuing their education:

- Blacks and Hispanics (though the small sample size must be considered)
- Those that entered college within the last 10 years that are currently working in a white-collar profession
- Unmarried individuals with 85 or more total credit hours

Among students likely to re-enroll in the near future, top programs of interest include nursing, business, and education.

As expected, the greatest barriers to re-entry are time and money. It is important to communicate how a college education can fit in with personal and professional obligations, as well as how an education can be financed. Encouragingly, additional expected deterrents did not arise as major concerns. Specifically, respondents do not appear to be worried about being able to fit in at college or do well. Additionally, access to a college or university is not a barrier. Even if it was, more than two-thirds of respondents indicated they would consider an online education.

Creating a sense of urgency appears to be the key to getting any segment of this population back to college. Currently, this does not exist as a large percentage do not feel pressured to earn their degree. Rather, it is an altruistic goal.

Potential messages that may resonate with this target market include:

- **You've done it before – you can do it again.** Most of the respondents had solid academic standing in their first college experience.
- **A bachelor's degree can dramatically increase your potential for higher income and career advancement.**
- **You need a change.** Nearly one-third of respondents reported that their main reason for getting a bachelor's degree is to change their current job.
- **Completing your degree is not as expensive as you think.** Many respondents overestimated the cost of college in Kentucky, particularly the cost of a public education.
- **Continuing your degree will “make me feel better about myself.”** Two-thirds of respondents somewhat or strongly agree with this statement.
- **Time management – home, work, and school – is possible and here's how these people have done it (and how you can too).**

When this population is ready to consider re-enrolling in college, Web sites such as GoHigherKY.org and the Kentucky Virtual Campus will be useful information sources. Roughly 70% of respondents indicate they would be likely to visit these sites if looking for information on college options. Additional top resources include general Web searches, self-initiated direct contact with an institution, and visits to specific institutional Web sites.

Finally, the research study discovered specific services that colleges and universities could offer to adult students that would increase their likelihood of completing a bachelor's degree. These include:

- Receiving college credit for work experience.
- Accelerated degree programs.
- Financial aid programs specifically for adult part-time students.
- Online learning programs.