

IMPLICATIONS FOR
FACULTY AND
INSTITUTIONAL
PLANNING

HOW STUDENTS DECIDE IF COLLEGE IS “WORTH IT”

WHY ARE WE TALKING ABOUT THIS?

- Major initiatives require faculty engagement and leadership.
 - District Strategic Plan
 - Foothill 2030: Blueprint for Success
 - Technology Plan
 - Program Review
- To engage effectively, we need to understand the landscape:
 - How students make decisions
 - How “college value” is being framed externally
 - Where faculty expertise shapes institutional direction

HOW STUDENTS DECIDE: THE 3 CS

- Cost
 - Can I afford this pathway?
 - Tuition, fees, materials, lost work time, childcare, transportation
- Convenience
 - Can this realistically fit my life?
 - Location, schedule, modality, pace, support services
- Career
 - Will this lead to the work and wages I need?
 - Jobs, earnings, stability, advancement
- If one of these is unclear, enrollment and persistence are affected. – Is College Worth It?

RESEARCH CONSISTENTLY SHOWS

- **Cost:** Studies consistently identify cost and financial aid as top factors in college choice (Dynarski et al., 2023)
- **Convenience:** Location, ease of travel, schedule flexibility, and life-fit are significant predictors of enrollment (Ming, 2010)
- **Career:** Students cite work outcomes as their primary reason for pursuing higher education (Twenge et al., 2016)
- These factors are not new, but their weight has intensified.

THEN VS. NOW

- Earlier generations
 - Tuition: $\sim\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ of today's cost
 - Labor market: degree \rightarrow stable job
 - Default: full-time, on-campus
 - Gate: "Where should I go?"
- Today's Students
 - Tuition: 3–4 times higher in real terms
 - Labor market: varies by program
 - Reality: work, family, online needs
 - Gate: "Can I afford it? Fit it in? Will it lead to stability?"
- Understanding this shift helps us see through our students' lens as well as our own

THE EXTERNAL PRESSURE: ECONOMIC MOBILITY & ROI CONVERSATIONS

- National initiatives are pushing
 - Economic mobility
 - Program-level outcomes
 - Return on Investment
- These frameworks are influencing accreditation, funding, and public narratives.
- How do we interpret them in ways that align with our mission and equity commitments?
- Faculty leadership shapes the context of
 - Transfer intent
 - Equity commitments
 - Regional labor realities
 - Our academic mission



WONDERINGS

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR US?

