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### Survey Finds Concern Over Education Cutbacks and an Overestimation of Tuition Prices

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Many Americans worry that cutbacks in spending on public colleges could diminish the quality of higher education in their states, and they continue to overestimate the cost of a postsecondary education, according to a national survey released today.

The survey is published biennially by the American Council on Education. This year's version, "Attitudes Toward Public Higher Education," found that the proportion of Americans who believe that the nation's colleges and universities provide a high-quality education and serve as an economic engine for their home states continues to rise. Seventy-seven percent of those surveyed believe that a college education is more important today than it was 10 years ago -- up from 73 percent in 2000, the last time the survey was conducted.

Eighty-nine percent of those surveyed said they think it is "very important" or "fairly important" to have good public colleges and universities in a state to help produce a well-trained work force. Other benefits cited by respondents were the ability to be technologically competitive (85 percent), to enhance research and technology in the state (85 percent), and to create jobs (83 percent).

Yet the vast majority of respondents -- 77 percent -- expressed "a great deal" of concern that cuts in state funds for higher education could impair the quality of education at their state institutions. Nearly two-thirds -- 64 percent -- worried that such cuts could lead to a reduction in financial aid, while 52 percent worried that it could result in fewer classes and majors being offered.

Although 4 in 10 respondents said they knew a lot about college prices -- more than double the number who said that in 1998 -- most Americans continue to grossly overestimate the cost of a college education. The average estimate of tuition at public institutions was \$11,637, up from \$10,449 in 2000 and more than three times the actual average price of \$3,754.

The survey polled 700 adults and was conducted in late October and early November. Its margin of error is 3.7 percentage points. Although the survey typically surveys respondents about both public and private institutions, the survey's authors decided to focus on public education this year, given the current downturn in the economy and its effect on state budgets nationwide.

The report can be downloaded at

[http://www.acenet.edu/news/press\\_release/2002/02february/national.data.ppt](http://www.acenet.edu/news/press_release/2002/02february/national.data.ppt) (This very large file, approximately 228K, must be viewed with Microsoft PowerPoint software.)