

REVIEW and Analysis

of the
Class of 2010 High School Senior **Opinions Survey**



West Virginia
Higher Education
Policy Commission

West Virginia Council for Community
and Technical College System



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Executive Summary

In spring 2010, a sample of West Virginia's seniors was asked to respond to a series of questions about their high school experiences and their plans after graduation. The questions were intended to provide teachers, principals, counselors, faculty, administrators, and policy makers across the state with the most current snapshot of the students' perspectives, experiences, and plans as they transitioned to life beyond high school. The report focuses on four key areas: academic preparation in high school, post-high school plans, financing a college education, and factors affecting college choice. Below we present data touchstones (or benchmarks) aimed to help inform efforts to increase the numbers of high school graduates with postsecondary credentials across the state.

Academic Preparation in High School

- About 8 out of 10 students said they had taken high school courses that prepared them for college.
- Roughly 9 out of 10 students took a sequence of math courses that prepared them for college.
- About half of high school seniors reported meeting the academic requirements established to receive the PROMISE Scholarship.
- About half of students who said they intended to major in a STEM field in college said they would have liked more STEM courses in high school. This is compared to 27 percent of all aspiring college goers.

Post-high School Plans

- Close to 8 out of 10 seniors reported plans to attend college while about 7 out of 10 said they would enroll in the fall immediately following high school.
- Estimates from the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission indicate that about 6 out of 10 seniors in the Class of 2009 enrolled in college in the fall following high school graduation. This suggests that a number of students plan on attending college but do not.
- About 9 out of 10 high income students aspire to a college degree compared to 8 out of 10 of their lower income peers.
- About 6 out of 10 high income students aspire to a graduate degree compared to 3 out of 10 lower income students.

Financing a College Education

- About 8 out of 10 high school seniors who aspired to college reported completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, a necessary step for receiving most forms of financial aid.
- Around 7 out of 10 low income students said their choice of college was influenced by affordability concerns compared to 5 out of 10 high income students.
- Just over 7 out of 10 students said they would rely on family to help pay for college.
- Nearly 8 out of 10 aspiring college students said they would work to help pay for school. Most (about 6 out of 10) said they would work 20 hours or less.

College Choice

- About 5 out of 10 aspiring college goers said they planned to attend an in-state, baccalaureate-granting institution.
- By comparison, 6 out of 10 students who said they would major in a STEM field said they planned to attend an in-state, baccalaureate-granting institution.
- Across income groups and first-generation status, about 9 out of 10 students said academic offering as well as affordability were factors in their choice of college.

Overview

In spring 2010, a sample of West Virginia’s seniors was asked to respond to a series of questions about their high school experiences and their plans after graduation. The questions were intended to provide teachers, principals, counselors, faculty, administrators, and policy makers across the state with the most current snapshot of the students’ perspectives, experiences, and plans as they transitioned to life beyond high school.

The sample was designed to be representative of the seniors enrolled in public high schools in 2010. In addition, because of considerable variation in sizes of high school, the sample was drawn to be representative across both small and large schools. A random sample of high schools was drawn from the 117 schools across the state. In addition, all West Virginia GEAR UP grant and GEAR UP comparison schools were purposefully sampled, resulting in a final sample of 61 schools. In total, 47 of the 61 (about 77%) of high schools had respondents. Responses from 4,592 students are representative of 18,472 high school seniors. A detailed description of the survey and methods used for this report can be found in the methodological appendix.

The report focuses on four key areas: academic preparation in high school, post-high school plans, financing a college education, and factors affecting where a student attends college. The goal is to present data touchstones that help inform efforts to increase the number of high school graduates with postsecondary credentials across the state.

Section One: Academic Preparation in High School

Students’ academic preparation for postsecondary education is among the most important components of attaining a postsecondary credential. Generally, the more rigorous a student’s preparation the greater the likelihood that student will be successful beyond high school. Students were asked which high school curriculum path they had selected. About 80 percent of students who responded to this question said they had taken a high school curriculum that prepared them for postsecondary education (See Table 1.1). Interestingly, 10 percent of students were unsure what curriculum they had taken. As might be expected, a higher proportion (92%) of those who intended to enroll in postsecondary education reported taking a college preparatory curriculum. When we look at responses for students who were in GEAR UP schools or those high schools most similar to GEAR UP schools (in terms of student body demographics and socioeconomic status), we find that a slightly higher proportion of GEAR UP participants (about 80%) reported preparing for college compared to 78 percent of students in comparison schools. The greatest difference between GEAR UP students and students statewide is that a greater percentage (32.6 compared to 21.2) reported preparing for entry into a two-year college.

Table 1.1 High School Curriculum

High School Curriculum	% of All Students	% of Aspiring College Goers	% of Students at GEAR UP Schools	% of Students at GEAR UP Comparison Schools
Professional (4 year college preparation)	60.8	74.3	48.2	53.9
Skilled (2 year college preparation)	21.2	18.2	32.6	23.7
Entry (Work-force preparation)	7.4	1.9	10.6	4.9
Unsure	10.5	5.6	8.6	17.5

High school GPA is another indicator of academic preparation. When students were asked to provide their best estimate of GPA, just over 54 percent indicated they had a B average or higher (See Table 1.2). Earning a B average is one of the requirements for earning a PROMISE Scholarship, as is a composite ACT score of 22 or higher. Some caution is warranted in interpreting these findings as grades and test scores are self-reported. By comparison about 61 percent of seniors who intended to go to college reported having a B average, followed by about 53 percent of students at GEAR UP schools and just over 51 percent of students at comparable schools.

Table 1.2 Cumulative High School Grade Point Average

Cumulative GPA	% of All Students	% of Aspiring College Goers Schools	% of Students at GEAR UP Schools	% of Students at GEAR UP Comparison Schools
Not reported	20.7	18.3	17.8	22.4
Less than 2.0	8.5	7.4	11.0	6.7
2.99 to 2.0	16.7	13.8	18.4	19.5
3.0 or Higher	54.1	60.5	52.9	51.0

Overall, 62 percent of respondents reported taking the ACT exam. Of those who took the exam, just over 50 percent reported earning a composite score of 22 or higher, necessary for the PROMISE Scholarship (See Table 1.3). A similar proportion of aspiring college goers, who took the ACT reported earning a 22 or higher, likely because most students who took the ACT intended to go to college. Students who attended GEAR UP or comparable schools tended to score lower on the ACT than their peers statewide with about 47 percent of student at GEAR UP comparison schools earning a 22 or higher and just over 36 percent of students at GEAR UP schools achieving the same mark.

Table 1.3 Composite ACT Score

CumulativeACT	% of All Students	% of Aspiring College Goers Schools	% of Students at GEAR UP Schools	% of Students at GEAR UP Comparison Schools
Not reported	3.9	3.5	7.4	4.9
Bottom Quartile, <19	20.8	20.5	33.0	22.2
Third Quartile, 19-21	24.8	24.6	23.9	26.1
Second Quartile, 22-23	17.3	17.4	14.6	17.5
Top Quartile, >=24	33.2	34	21.0	29.2

In order to prepare for college-level work, ACT recommends that high school students take at least three years of mathematics, encompassing a sequence of Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II. Among all respondents, about 88 percent indicated they had taken Algebra II or a higher level math course (See Table 1.4), suggesting they were prepared for post-secondary education. Again, a higher proportion of aspiring college goers was better prepared

in terms of math courses with 92 percent taking Algebra II or higher followed by 88 percent of GEAR UP Comparison school students, and about 80 percent of GEAR UP school students.

Table 1.4 Highest Math Course Completed in High School

Math Course	% of All Students	% of Aspiring College Goers	% of Students at GEAR UP Schools	% of Students at GEAR UP Comparison Schools
Less than Algebra I	1.1	0.7	0.5	0.7
Algebra I	2.0	1.3	3.0	1.8
Geometry	8.9	5.1	17.2	9.2
Algebra II	36.0	33.1	31.2	36.7
Trigonometry	24.4	27.5	24.0	18.6
Pre-calculus	15.5	17.8	16.6	19.9
Calculus or above	12.1	14.4	7.4	13.1

Students were asked to report how well prepared they felt for life after high school. Overall and regardless of whether or not a student expressed intent to enroll in postsecondary education, students from GEAR UP schools felt the most prepared with just over 54 percent reporting feeling very prepared or prepared (See Table 1.5). Statewide, about 50 percent of students said they felt very prepared or prepared, followed by just over 52 percent of students at GEAR UP comparison schools, and just under 52 percent of aspiring college goers.

Table 1.5 Student Perception of the Level of Preparation From High School

Level of Preparation	% of All Students	% of Aspiring College Goers	% of Students at GEAR UP Schools	% of Students at GEAR UP Comparison Schools
Very Prepared	12.0	11.9	17.7	14.8
Prepared	37.2	39.9	36.8	37.6
Somewhat Prepared	37.2	39.0	36.0	34.3
Not at All Prepared	10.1	8.6	7.0	10.7
Not reported	3.5	0.6	2.6	10.7

The survey also asked students if they wished their high school had offered additional courses in various areas of study, such as math and science. In West Virginia, as is also the case in many other states, the cultivation of college graduates in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) is seen as vital to the development of the state economy. Among all students, just over 22 percent said they wished their high school had offered more STEM courses (See Table 1.6). For those students who said they would attend college, about 27 percent would like to have seen more STEM offerings. Interestingly, among students who said they would major in a STEM in college, just over 50 percent wished they had access to more STEM courses in high school.

Table 1.6 Percentage Wanting More STEM Courses

	% of Students Wanting More STEM Course
All Students	22.3
Fall College Goers	26.6
Intended STEM Majors	51.4

Section One: Summary

The majority of students reported taking courses in high school that were intended to prepare them for college, though students who attended schools with more low-income and first generation students (e.g., GEAR UP schools) were less likely to report taking classes that prepare for college. When we look at academic preparation as measured by self-reported high school GPA and ACT we find that roughly half of all students reported earning a B average in high school and only 62 percent reported taking the ACT exam (with just over half of those students earning a composite score of 22 or higher). When we look at academic preparation in terms of mathematics courses taken, we find that about 9 out of 10 students--regardless of whether they aspired to college or attended a GEAR UP or similar school--took a sequence of math courses that prepared them for college. Finally, we find that a modest majority of students reported feeling prepared for life after high school regardless of their post-high school plans. It is unclear whether this sense of preparation is a function of high schools attended or part of the uncertainty that accompanies life transitions, such as finishing high school.

Section 2: Post-High School Plans & College Participation

Respondents were asked about their plans following high school including whether or not they planned to attend college and to what postsecondary degree they aspired. Though plans and aspirations are not always achieved, they provide some indication of the intent of graduating seniors. It is also important to understand the reasons why students may choose not to attend postsecondary education. Students who did not plan to enroll in college after high school were asked what factors influenced that decision.

Postsecondary plans differed by socioeconomic status as measured by parental education and family income. Among all students, just over 77 percent said they planned to attend college with 68 percent overall indicating they would begin in the fall after high school (See Table 2.1). This is compared to the highest income students (from families with self-reported earnings over \$60,000), about 86 percent of whom said they planned to attend college. Higher income students were also more likely than their lower income peers to report plans to enroll in college immediately following high school. First-generation students (those whose parents have not attended any postsecondary education) were the least likely to report plans to attend college (70%).

Table 2.1 College Plans by GEAR UP Participation, First-Generation Status, and Family Income

	College Plans	
	Will Attend % of Students	Will Attend Fall % of Students
All Students	77.2	68.2
GEAR UP Students	71.3	61.2
GEAR UP Comparison Students	78.8	69.6
First-Generation	70.0	59.1
Family Income \$30,000 or Less	74.8	63.5
Family Income \$30,001 - \$60,000	82.6	75.0
Family Income \$60,001 or More	85.5	80.5

Students were asked what people influenced their decisions to attend college. Parents or guardians were cited most frequently as being somewhat or very influential regardless of whether a student planned to attend college or was at a GEAR UP or comparable school (see Table 2.2). Interestingly, although aspiring college students generally cited friends as the next most frequent influence, students at GEAR UP and comparable schools more often said a teacher was somewhat or very influential in their decision whether or not to attend college.

Table 2.2 Influences on Students College Decisions

	% of All Students	% of Aspiring Fall College Students	% of Students at GEAR UP Schools	% of Students at GEAR UP Comparison Schools
Parent/Guardian	81.9	89.5	83.6	83.9
Friend	61.0	68.0	67.2	62.8
Teacher	59.0	63.5	74.3	64.6
Grandparent	55.9	60.2	60.1	60.7
Other family member	49.5	54.2	55.1	55.4
Guidance counselor	46.6	50.0	66.0	53.9
Sibling	42.5	46.2	46.0	44.7
College admissions counselor	36.6	43.3	45.0	40.7
Principal	32.6	34.4	50.1	42.0
Coach	29.2	33.8	36.4	32.0
Religious leader	27.0	29.4	34.2	31.6
Community outreach counselor	16.0	17.0	23.5	22.2

When asked how important various forms of media were in providing information to students about their college options, students most frequently cited college websites as an important or somewhat important source of information (see Table 2.3). Students at GEAR UP schools cited the CFWV.com college access portal as a somewhat or very important source of information more frequently than aspiring college students overall or students from GEAR UP comparable schools. Overall, media from colleges (their websites, direct mailings, brochures, and e-mails) were most frequently cited as somewhat or very important sources of college information among respondents.

Table 2.3 Sources of Information for Students' College Decisions

	% of All Students	% of Aspiring Fall College Students	% of Students at GEAR UP Schools	% of Students at GEAR UP Comparison Schools
College websites	72.7	86.5	75.1	72.8
Direct mail	58.7	69.1	63.8	59.8
Brochures	55.4	63.8	64.6	59.9
E-mail	52.0	61.2	59.2	54.1
College fairs	47.2	54.3	58.4	53.9
College planning websites	42.6	48.5	54.1	46.1
Television	33.1	34.3	47.2	38.6
CFWV.com	31.0	3.40	44.2	35.8
Signs, billboards, posters	29.6	33.4	43.4	36.5
Magazines	29.3	31.3	41.7	33.8
Newspapers	25.5	27.3	35.8	30.8
Radio	23.9	24.8	35.0	29.1

Differences by income emerge with respect to when students recalled first thinking about attending postsecondary education. Students were asked when they first recalled considering attending college. Among students who intended to go to college, about 76 percent of students from families with self-reported incomes greater than \$60,000 said they first considered attending college before they began high school (See Table 2.4). This compares to about 65 percent of students statewide. By contrast, just 56 percent of the lowest income students considered attending college before high school. Generally, prior research has shown that planning and preparing for college earlier than high school is associated with an increased likelihood of attending and earning a postsecondary credential.

Table 2.4 First Consideration of Attending Postsecondary Education by Family Income

Point in Time	Will Attend Column %	Will Attend Fall Column %	\$30,000 or less Column %	\$30,001 - \$60,000 Column %	> \$60,000 Column %
Elementary School	42.1	50.4	32.5	43.3	54.1
Middle School	23.0	25.5	23.6	25.8	21.8
Freshman Year of HS	9.10	9.2	11.7	9.4	6.7
Sophomore Year of HS	3.4	2.9	4.0	3.4	2.3
Junior Year of HS	6.1	5.7	8.7	6.4	3.6
Senior Year of HS	6.2	5.7	8.2	4.9	4.3
Never Considered Going	9.9	0.35	11.3	6.8	7.3

Students who said they would not attend college in the fall were asked to indicate the importance of 15 different factors in their decision. The most common reason given by students for not attending college in the fall was that they needed a break from school (See Table 2.5). Overall, 45 percent of non-college goers said this was an important or very important reason. Money and affordability-related reasons were given as the next four most common factors. Just over 42 percent of non-college goers cited cost as a key reason in not attending college, followed by wanting to work to earn money (about 37%), having a well-paying job (about 35%), and working rather than attending college (about 35%).

Table 2.5 Reasons for Not Attending College in Fall Following Graduation

Reason for Not Attending College	% Students to Whom Factor Was Important or Very important
Need Break from School	45.0
Costs too much	42.3
Want to Start Work to Earn Money	36.9
Have a Well-Paying Job	35.2
Will Work Instead of College	34.7
Want to Attend Vocational/Technical School	30.7
Need to Support My Family	27.8
Uncertain About Major	27.1
College not Related to Desired Job	26.5
Uncertain High School Prepared Me for College	24.3
No College Nearby I Want to Attend	22.4
Want to Enter Armed Forces	21.7
No One In My Family Has Gone to College	17.9
Most Friends Not Going to College	17.5
High School Staff Advised Against College	14.1

Students were asked the highest academic degree they hoped to obtain. Of the students who responded to the question, about 82 percent indicated they hoped to earn some sort of postsecondary credential (i.e., Associate’s, Bachelor’s, Master’s, or Doctoral) (See Table 2.6). More GEAR UP participants hoped to earn a postsecondary credential than their peers at comparable schools (86% versus 81%). About 79 percent of the lowest-income students hoped to earn a postsecondary credential compared to nearly 88 percent of their high income peers. Notably, a much higher proportion (59%) of high income students hoped to earn a graduate degree in comparison to lower income students (33%).

Table 2.6 Degree Aspirations by GEAR UP Participation and Family Income

	% of All Students	% of Students at GEAR UP Schools	% of Students at GEAR UP Comparison on Schools	% of Students With Family Incomes \$30k or less	% of Students With Family Incomes \$30k-\$60k	% of Students With Family Incomes > \$60k
No Academic Degree	3.1	1.9	2.3	3.6	2.3	1.5
High School diploma/ GED	9.3	14.2	9.1	11.9	7.1	5.8
Vocational or undergraduate certificate	6.0	8.3	7.2	5.8	6.1	5.2
Associate's Degree	10	15.5	13.8	14.0	9.2	6.6
Bachelor's Degree	28	29.8	30.1	31.5	34.0	22.1
Master's Degree	27	21.1	24.1	21.7	28.5	35.4
Doctoral Degree	16	9.5	13.2	11.5	12.8	23.4

Section Two: Summary

The majority (77%) of students said they planned to enroll in college, though differences were apparent by first-generation status and family income. We also find that students from higher income families reported thinking about college earlier than their lower income peers. Differences were apparent with respect to degree aspirations as well. Higher income students overwhelmingly aspired to a college degree with nearly 60 percent of them aspiring to a graduate degree. These findings suggest that educational aspirations and attainment continue to be shaped by social and economic factors in West Virginia.

Section Three: Financing a College Education

Financing postsecondary education is an important area of concern for students, families, educators, and policy makers alike. Students were asked a number of questions related to their concerns about financing school as well as anticipated sources of financial support. Regardless of income level, the majority of students indicated that affordability played a very important role in their choice of postsecondary institution (See Table 3.1), though differences were apparent by income group. Close to 70 percent of low income students said affordability was very important compared to about 55 percent of high income students. By comparison, 62 percent of all aspiring college students cited affordability as very important in their choice of college. Finally, affordability was a slightly greater concern among students at GEAR UP schools than comparable schools (65% compared to 63%) (not shown in Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Importance of Affordability Among Aspiring College Goers by Family Income

Importance	% of All Students	% of Students With Family Incomes \$30k or less	% of Students With Family Incomes \$30k-\$60k	% of Students With Family Incomes > \$60k
Very Important	62.3	67.5	64.4	54.1
Important	29.6	22.4	28.1	32.4
Unimportant	6.0	5.6	5.0	8.6
Very Unimportant	2.1	4.6	2.5	4.9

Students were also asked how informed they felt about various methods for financing their education. Overall, a high proportion (84%) of aspiring college students completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The FAFSA is necessary to receive all forms of federal aid as well as state aid and many institutional or private scholarships. Completing the FAFSA is often the first step to financing school.

Among students who intended to go to college, the PROMISE Scholarship was the source of financial aid about which the most students felt informed. About 70 percent of students reported that they felt informed or very informed about PROMISE. Students also reported feeling informed or very informed about federal aid, specifically federal loans (58%), work study (50%) and Pell Grants (50%). Fewer respondents reported feeling informed about forms of state aid other than PROMISE. For example, just over a quarter of students said they felt informed about the Underwood-Smith Teacher Scholarship, a scholarship available to students interested in pursuing teaching (See Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 Awareness of How to Finance College

Type of Aid	% of Students Who Felt Informed or Very Informed	% of Aspiring Fall College-Goers	% of Students at GEAR UP Schools	% of Students at GEAR UP Comparison Schools
PROMISE Scholarship	69.5	80.9	71.4	69.1
Federal Loans	57.6	65.4	68.9	58.7
Work study	50.2	57.0	60.0	52.9
Pell Grants	50.1	57.8	67.0	54.9
West Virginia Higher Education Grant Program	46.1	51.7	62.1	48.2
College Savings Plans (529 Plans)	33.8	36.6	43.6	37.2
West Virginia Engineering, Science and Technology Scholarship	32.5	34.3	46.0	35.4
Tax Credits (e.g., Hope, American Opportunity)	28.7	30.2	39.1	33.8
West Virginia Higher Education Adult Part-Time Student Grant	26.5	27.3	38.3	32.1
Underwood-Smith Teacher Scholarship	25.7	26.9	37.4	29.6

Interestingly, although nearly 70 percent of aspiring college students reported feeling informed or very informed about PROMISE just over 36 percent reported knowing whether or not they would be eligible to receive the scholarship. The greatest proportion (41%) reported being uncertain (See Table 3.3). This suggests that students may be generally aware of PROMISE but not know specifically what steps are required to obtain the scholarship. Students at GEAR UP schools reported feeling informed or very informed about all forms of financial aid more frequently than their peers at comparable low-income, non-GEAR UP schools (See Table 3.2).

Table 3.3 Knowledge of PROMISE Scholarship Eligibility

	% of Students
Yes	36.2
No	17.7
Uncertain	41.4
No Response or Missing	4.67

Responses to sources of financial support suggest a degree of preferred self-reliance among students. Parents and relatives ranked as the most frequently reported source of financing postsecondary education among aspiring college students followed by personal savings (74% and 56%)(See Table 3.4). Sources of financial aid external to students’ families (such as loans and grants) were reported as intended sources of support by 42 percent of students or less. Although 70 percent of students reported feeling very informed about PROMISE, only 35 percent of students reported that they intended to use PROMISE to pay for school. This is similar to the proportion of students who said they knew whether or not they were eligible.

Table 3.4 Sources of Intended Financial Support

Source	% Students Who Intend to Utilize
Parents/Relatives	74.1
Personal Savings	56.1
Scholarship from College	53.2
Federal Loans	42.5
Other Loans	38.6
Pell Grant	37.7
PROMISE Scholarship	34.9
Work-study	31.4
Private Scholarship	30.4
State Need-based Aid	30.1
Military Programs	8.1

Just over three-quarters of aspiring college students reported that they planned to work while enrolled. Previous research has found that working in college can have a positive effect on academic success but has diminishing returns as the number of hours worked each week pass a certain threshold, somewhere between 15 and 25 hours. Working too much can displace time spent studying or necessitate part-time enrollment, which lengthens time needed to complete a credential. Of those who intended to work, about 57 percent said they would work part-time (20 hours or less). About 24 percent said they would work 26 hours or more per week (See Table 3.5).

Table 3.5 Intended Hours Working Per Week While Enrolled

	% of Students
1-5	3.4
6-10	12.0
11-15	17.0
16-20	25.0
21-25	16.8
26-30	13.8
31-35	4.6
36 or more hours	5.8
No Response or Missing	1.6

Section Three: Summary

Affordability was a common concern among aspiring college goers and it influenced their decisions about where to attend college. Not surprisingly, costs were a greater source of concern for lower income students. Responses suggest that the majority of high school seniors take the initial step to finance their education, completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. Students felt most informed about the PROMISE Scholarship compared to other forms of aid (e.g., loans and grants), though only about two-thirds of students reported knowing whether or not they met PROMISE eligibility requirements. The top two most frequently reported forms of financial support for college were family and personal savings. Finally, most aspiring college goers intended to work while in school.

Section 4: College Choice

Students were also asked to respond to questions about where they intended to go to college and what factors influenced their decisions. Responses regarding institution type (i.e., baccalaureate-granting or community and technical college) and locale (in versus out-of-state) were disaggregated by whether a student intended to major in STEM and first-generation status. Most students (54%) intended to enroll in-state at a baccalaureate-granting institution, although the proportion was higher among those who intended to major in STEM (about 63%) (See Table 4.1). Baccalaureate-granting institutions were the most common choice (about 49%) among first-generation students as well, though close to 20 percent intended to enroll in a community or technical college. Intended STEM majors appeared to have preferences for in-state baccalaureate-granting institutions and out-of-state institutions over community and technical colleges.

Table 4.1 College Choice by Institution Type, STEM Major, and First-Generation Status

	% of All Aspiring College Goers	% of Intended STEM Majors	% of First-Generation Students
In-state, Baccalaureate-granting	54.4	62.7	48.8
In-state, Community & Technical College	12.8	7.3	18.8
Out-of-state	10.6	13.2	8.1
In-state, Independent	7.0	7.5	7.6
On-line	0.1	0.0	0.2
Missing or Did Not Reply	15.1	9.3	16.6

Finally, factors affecting students' first college choice were examined and disaggregated by first-generation status as well as income. Across all groups the academic offerings of an institution was cited as the most or second most frequent factor in choice. Affordability was similarly listed most or second most frequently (See Table 4.2). For low income students, affordability was the most common factor followed by academic offerings. The opposite was true for high income students. First generation students cited academic offerings and affordability almost equally.

Table 4.2 Impact of Various Factors on College Choice by First-Generation Status and Income

	% All Aspiring College Goers	% First Generation Students	% Low income Students (\$30k or less)	% High income Students (\$60k or more)
Academic Offerings	90.1	90.3	88.1	93.3
Affordability	89.2	90.9	89.6	87.9
Academic Reputation of Institution	72.7	68.2	66.4	78.6
Scholarship Offer	70.3	67.7	67.2	74.6
Marketing Material from Institution	69.0	70.3	72.4	67.8
Attractive Social Life	63.2	59.4	55.3	68.5
Close to Home	58.9	64.5	61.0	55.4
Part-time Employment Available at Institution	58.9	63.5	67.2	50.7

Continued

	% All Aspiring College Goers	% First- Generation Students	% Low income (\$30k or less) Students	% High income (\$60k or more) Students
Size of Student Body	57.7	58.2	58.1	58.9
PROMISE Scholarship Accepted at the Institution	56.9	52.7	50.3	63.8
Plan to Live and Work in Same State Post-Graduation	52.2	57.2	54.3	48.3
Friends Attending Same Institution	50.3	51.2	45.7	52.8
Easy to Gain Admission	49.8	53.0	54.9	43.5
Near Enough to Live at Home	48.2	55.6	55.1	41.5
Honors Programs	47.0	44.4	43.2	51.7
Parent Preferences	45.8	41.8	38.1	52.3
Attractive Athletics Program	45.3	42.7	39.1	52.4
Attractive Religious Affiliation or Program	34.7	36.3	33.2	35.4
National Rankings	33.1	26.3	27.3	39.1
Institution Recommended by Teacher or Counselor	31.8	34.2	34.5	29.3
Legacy	20.1	13.7	17.2	20.8

Section Four: Summary

Most students who planned to attend college said they would go in-state and most likely to a baccalaureate-granting institution. Intended STEM majors were the most likely to report plans to enroll in an in-state, baccalaureate-granting institution. By comparison, first-generation students were more likely than their peers to say they planned to attend an in-state community or technical college. Academic offerings and affordability ranked as the top two most frequently cited factors influencing college choice, even across income groups and first-generation status.

Methodological Appendix

The target population for the survey was all West Virginia students who were high school seniors in spring 2010. Respondents were selected through a random, stratified sample. High schools were the primary sample unit, with the sampling frame constructed from a list of all high schools (n=117 in 2010) maintained by the West Virginia Department of Education. High schools were stratified by the size of the senior class as well as the three U.S. Congressional districts in West Virginia in order to make the sample as representative as possible. High schools were assigned to Congressional districts based on the address of their main administrative office. To stratify by senior class size, each high school was assigned to a quartile. The lowest quartile had fewer than 86 students in the senior class, followed by 86 to 137, 138 to 197, and 197 or more. Data on senior class size were obtained from the U.S. Department of Education's Common Core of Data for 2009.

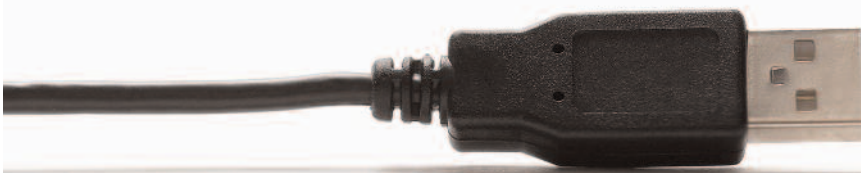
In addition, all West Virginia Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) schools (n=18) in West Virginia as well as their comparison schools (n=18) were sampled. GEAR UP schools are those that participate in the West Virginia GEAR UP program administered by the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission. Comparison schools for GEAR UP were selected prior to survey administration using Euclidean distance similarity measures. The percentage of tenth-grade students who achieved proficient levels in reading and math in 2008 WESTEST were used as matching factors (except Lincoln County High School, for which the 2009 data were used). Other key school level indicators (e.g., school size, graduation rates, percentage of low-income students, and proportion minority students) were also generally matched for each pair of schools.

Sampling was implemented via PROC SURVEYSELECT in SAS version 9.1. In total, 61 schools—including all GEAR UP and comparison schools were selected to receive the survey. The survey was administered via high school guidance counselors who were asked to distribute hard copies of the instrument during the homeroom period. To illicit a high response rate, three follow-up contacts were made with guidance counselors and principals. In total, 47 of the 61 (about 77%) of high schools had respondents. Overall, 4,592 students responded to the survey, representing about 25 percent of the target population (n=18,472) and 51 percent of the sample (n=9,071).

of the
Class of 2010 High School Senior **Opinions Survey**

**West Virginia Higher Education
Policy Commission**

1018 Kanawha Blvd. East
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