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EDUCATION

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"Big Six" College Experiences Linked to Life Preparedness

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Story Highlights

- Preparedness for life linked to six positive experiences
- Each additional "Big Six" item associated with more preparedness
- Big Six experiences linked to time to complete degree

WASHINGTON, D.C -- Just 3% of all college graduates in a recent Gallup-Purdue University study say they had all six of the experiences -- "Big Six" -- that strongly relate to whether they felt their colleges prepared them well for life and that might have bettered their chances of receiving their degrees on time.

The Undergraduate Experience: Support and Experiential Learning

	% Strongly agree
Support	
I had at least one professor at [College] who made me excited about learning.	63
My professors at [College] cared about me as a person.	27
I had a mentor who encouraged me to pursue my goals and dreams.	22
Strongly agree with all three support statements	14
Experiential	
I worked on a project that took a semester or more to complete	32
I had an internship or job that allowed me to apply what I was learning in the classroom.	29

I was extremely active in extracurricular activities and organizations while I attended [College].	20
Strongly agree with all three experiential statements	6
Strongly agree with all six statements	3

Gallup-Purdue Index

Feb. 4-March 7, 2014

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Together, and individually, the Gallup-Purdue Index finds these six experiences have a stronger relationship to long-term life outcomes such as employee engagement and well-being than the type of school these graduates attended (for example, public or private).

Of all six experiences, college graduates are the most likely to strongly agree that they had "at least one professor who made me excited about learning." The majority (63%) strongly agree that this was characteristic of their time as undergraduates. On the lower end, only 22% strongly agree they "had a mentor who encouraged me to pursue my goals and dreams," and 20% strongly agree they were "extremely active in extracurricular activities and organizations" while attending their college.

These results are based on the [inaugural Gallup-Purdue Index](#), a joint-research effort with Purdue University and Lumina Foundation to study the relationship between the college experience and college graduates' lives. The Gallup-Purdue Index is a comprehensive, nationally representative study of U.S. college graduates with Internet access. According to a 2013 Census Bureau report, 90% of college graduates in the U.S. have access to the Internet. Gallup conducted the Web study Feb. 4-March 7, 2014, with nearly 30,000 U.S. adults who had completed at least a bachelor's degree.

Big Six Experiences Linked to Preparedness for Life Outside of College

Generally, the percentage of college graduates who strongly agree their colleges prepared them well for life after graduation increases with every additional positive experience that graduates reported they had during their undergraduate experience. Eighty-two percent of graduates who strongly agree that they had all six experiences as an undergraduate also strongly agree their schools prepared them well for life outside of college. In contrast, 5% of those who do not strongly agree that they had any of these six experiences strongly agree that they were prepared well for life after college.

Relationship Between "Big Six" and Preparation for Life After College

"[College] prepared me well for life outside of college."

	None of Big Six	One of Big Six	Two of Big Six	Three of Big Six	Four of Big Six	Five of Big Six	All of Big Six
% Strongly agree	5	17	30	43	58	69	82

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Time Needed to Attain Degree Connected to Big Six

Among graduates in the inaugural Gallup-Purdue Index, 75% who strongly agree they had all six of these experiences graduated in four years, after controlling for demographic differences. Gallup finds significant differences in degree completion rates among alumni based on their experiences. While 75% of those who had all six experiences graduate in four years, 61% of those who could not strongly agree with any of the six experiences graduated in four years.

Implications

As colleges and universities strive to increase the number of students graduating in four years and prepare students for life after college, they should consider creating college experiences that include deep, experiential learning and faculty care and support. Creating an on-campus environment that harbors the necessary experiences that could increase preparedness and four-year attainment rates might also benefit students financially. Extending college beyond the "traditional" four years damages students' lifetime earnings profile, according to New York Federal Reserve researchers Jaison R. Abel and Richard Deitz. The net present value of an extra year of college is \$65,319. This figure includes tuition and fees and opportunity costs of extra time in school and wage earnings.

With over 2 million college students enrolled full-time needing an extra year of college, the fifth-year effect on the economy begins to mount with every passing graduating class.

Read more about these findings in "Is College Worth It? That Depends."

Survey Methods

Results for this Gallup-Purdue Index study are based on Web interviews conducted Feb. 4-March 7, 2014, with a random sample of 29,560 respondents with a bachelor's degree or higher, aged 18 and older, with Internet access, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia.

For results based on the total sample of bachelor's degree or higher respondents, the margin of sampling error is ± 0.9 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

The Gallup-Purdue Index sample was compiled from two sources; the Gallup Panel and the Gallup Daily Tracking survey.

Learn more about how the [Gallup-Purdue Index](#) works.

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