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What's AHEAD Poll # 12: November 2016 U.S. Election Results

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This report summarizes the results of a poll of members of the What's AHEAD trend-spotter panel (n = 387). The panel is made up of higher education leaders, including alumni of the Executive Doctorate program in Higher Education Management at the University of Pennsylvania, and members of NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. We received 131 responses during the 5 days in which the poll was open (November 9-13, 2016): 111 of 269 Executive Doctorate alumni, 17 members of NASPA, and three other higher education leaders. About half (50%) of respondents work at private not-for-profit four-year institutions, 18% work at public four-year institutions, 8% at public two-year institutions, 2% at for-profit institutions, 3% at non-US based universities, and 1% in administrative units (e.g., system offices). The remaining respondents (16%) work in organizations other than colleges and universities. Nearly half (38%) of respondents hold positions that focus on administration, 25% on academic matters, 18% in student affairs, 4% in finance, and 15% in other areas. Additional commentary is available at <https://ahead-penn.org/whats-ahead/commentary-november-2016>

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Keywords

College leader perceptions, 2016 election impact

Comments

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What's AHEAD draws on the expertise of higher education trend-spotters to offer insights into important issues in higher education management. Administered in the days following the November 2016 U.S. elections, this poll sheds light on higher education leaders' immediate reactions to the results.

Higher Education Leaders Expect Changes in Federal Policy

A number of respondents expressed uncertainty about President-elect Trump's priorities for higher education. Respondents commented: "Education does not seem to be a front burner issue," and "President-elect Trump doesn't have a known plan for higher education." Nonetheless, most (74%) of respondents agree or strongly agree that the November 2016 U.S. election results will bring major changes in federal higher education policy.

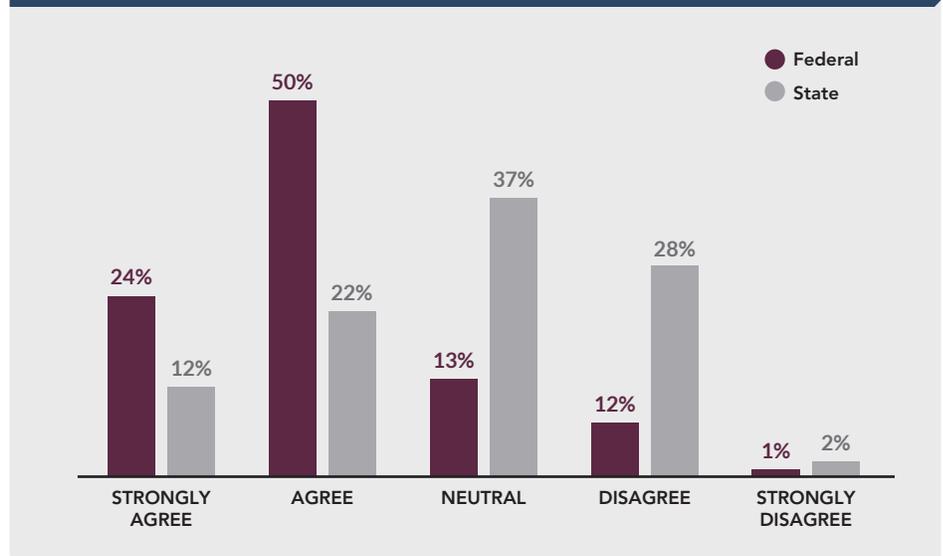
One respondent urged calm, writing, "Forget the ideology and dogma—the sky is not falling." A few respondents offered optimistic comments about potential changes, especially with regard to regulation and accreditation. In the words of one leader:

I hope that the Trump Administration can change the course of the Department of Education and get it out of higher education. The gross intrusion by the DoE into the accreditation process has done nothing but drive up costs with no discernible impact on quality.

Many more respondents, however, articulated general or specific worries. Especially common were concerns about social equity issues, diversity and inclusion, undocumented students, and international student recruitment, as well as "anti-intellectualism."

Respondents have more varied expectations for higher education policy at the state level, with 34% agreeing or strongly agreeing that there will be major changes and 30% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

FIG. 1 There Will Be Major Changes in Higher Education Policy



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Higher Education Leaders Expect Reduction in Federal Regulation But No Improvements in College Affordability or Completion

Few higher education leaders agree or strongly agree that President-elect Trump will provide leadership that improves college affordability (10%) or college completion (8%), or increases federal support for research (8%). More than half (57%) agree or strongly agree that he will reduce federal regulation and nearly half (42%) agree or strongly agree that he will increase federal accountability of higher education institutions. Representing the view of several other respondents, one leader expects: “more restricted federal funds for higher ed bricks and mortar institutions but increased support for online for-profits with no accountability.”

FIG. 2 Agreement That President-Elect Trump Will Provide Leadership That Achieves Various Outcomes

EXPECTED OUTCOME	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Improve Affordability	2%	8%	25%	50%	15%
Improve College Completion	0%	8%	23%	52%	18%
Increase Federal Accountability	6%	36%	17%	29%	12%
Reduce Federal Regulation	9%	48%	21%	16%	5%
Increase Federal Support for Research	0%	8%	25%	44%	23%

About This Poll

Members of the *What's AHEAD* trend-spotter panel were invited to participate in the poll (n = 387). The panel is made up of higher education leaders, including alumni of the Executive Doctorate program in Higher Education Management at the University of Pennsylvania, and members of NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. We received 131 responses during the 5 days in which the poll was open (November 9-13, 2016): 111 of 269 Executive Doctorate alumni, 17 members of NASPA, and three other higher education leaders. About half (50%) of respondents work at private not-for-profit four-year institutions, 18% work at public four-year institutions, 8% at public two-year institutions, 2% at for-profit institutions, 3% at non-US based universities, and 1% in administrative units (e.g., system offices). The remaining respondents (16%) work in organizations other than colleges and universities. Nearly half (38%) of respondents hold positions that focus on administration, 25% on academic matters, 18% in student affairs, 4% in finance, and 15% in other areas.

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