

Georgetown University Maps Complexities of Measuring Postsecondary Value in New Report Series

As public scrutiny of higher education grows, this report series provides guidance for using value metrics across policy, research, and practice.

(Washington, DC, Sept. 24, 2026) New research from the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce (CEW) examines how stakeholders can better define, measure, and assess the value of postsecondary education and training. This research comes at a critical point: Economic projections indicate that workers will need more postsecondary education, *not less*, to succeed in future labor markets; meanwhile, public confidence in the value of higher education continues to decline. Growing calls for assurance about the value of higher education have motivated leaders and experts to develop new metrics for measuring the benefits of postsecondary credentials, resulting in a proliferation of value frameworks. The challenge for states, systems, and institutions is determining which metrics and definitions are appropriate for each audience and purpose.

CEW's new three-report series helps policymakers, researchers, practitioners, and administrators navigate the complex challenge of measuring postsecondary value. The series explores what various stakeholder groups expect postsecondary education and training to do, how these groups measure the outcomes of postsecondary education and training, and what changes in policy and practice need to happen next to ensure that postsecondary education delivers on its full potential as a private and public good.

- *From Mann to Markets: Evolving Ideas About the Value of Postsecondary Education and Training to Individuals and Society* (Report One) examines how earnings and return on investment (ROI) became the primary measures of postsecondary education and training success.
- *Measuring Postsecondary Value: A Model for Applying Research to Policy and Practice* (Report Two) helps leaders identify and measure how investments in higher education support the production of credentials that lead to monetary and nonmonetary value for both students and society.
- *A Framework for Assessing the Value of Postsecondary Education and Training: State Guidance* (Report Three) provides relevant recommendations to policymakers and analysts at the state level.

“Current conversations about the value of a college degree focus on earnings and costs. These monetary outcomes are a crucial baseline for holding postsecondary providers accountable and a central component of the value of postsecondary education and training to individuals and society. Measurement of these outcomes is necessary to protect and empower students,” said CEW’s Jeff Strohl, lead author of *From Mann to Markets*. “However, it’s also important to recognize that we would be far poorer as a society without higher education’s nonmonetary contributions, which are hard to quantify. A more complete measure of value would account for those broader benefits as well.”

The second report, *Measuring Postsecondary Value*, provides an organizational structure for the many existing value metrics. The report’s Postsecondary Value Model (PVM) organizes metrics into categories that generally align with educational inputs (e.g., investments) and outputs (e.g., credentials) that contribute to value-related

monetary and nonmonetary outcomes. The PVM includes six categories of inputs, outputs, and outcomes: investment, education, employment, earnings, wealth, and well-being. Within these six categories, the model provides a reference list of key value metrics, along with a detailed exploration of earnings and return-on-investment (ROI) metrics. The model also includes quality of life, physical and mental health, charitable activities, and civic engagement as additional measures for the outcomes of postsecondary education and training.

“To improve student outcomes, leaders of states, institutions, and programs need to understand not only how their education systems perform on value metrics such as ROI, but also how underlying factors drive these outcomes,” said Jennifer Engle, lead author of *Measuring Postsecondary Value* and director of policy and strategy at CEW. “Stakeholders should select metrics that are most relevant to their situations and audiences, whether they are seeking transparency for students and workers, accountability for leaders, or workforce development for employers.”

The third and final report in the series, *A Framework for Assessing the Value of Postsecondary Education and Training*, provides practical direction for defining and measuring postsecondary value to policymakers, policy analysts, researchers, and practitioners at the state level and includes technical guidance for two major use cases. The first use case is assessing the broad value that accrues to each state from a robust postsecondary education and training system; the second is applying transparency and accountability measures to ensure that institutions deliver on the value they promise to create.

“We focus the framework on these use cases because they are at the forefront of many state policymakers’ minds. Policymakers must make informed decisions about public investments in postsecondary education and also align their efforts with recent federal legislative and regulatory changes,” said Artem Gulish, lead author of *A Framework for Assessing the Value of Postsecondary Education and Training* and senior federal policy advisor at CEW. “States can use these federal changes as an opportunity to set their own specific accountability goals, build more robust data systems, and thereby improve postsecondary outcomes.”

In addition to providing technical guidance on the specific use cases, CEW researchers outline relevant metrics for measuring aspects of value using existing data and recommend improvements to the data infrastructure that would enable better measurement in the future. The report also explores topics that complicate postsecondary value assessment—for example, how to evaluate outcomes for workers who have low salaries but whose work generates invaluable contributions to society.

“These three reports offer a comprehensive overview of the challenges associated with measuring postsecondary value, the many scenarios in which such measurement is both useful and necessary, and detailed recommendations for specific use cases. Whether these reports are used to improve state data collection systems or program outcomes, we intend for them to serve as a road map to further strengthen the US postsecondary system, upon which both our economy and our democracy depend,” said Strohl.

To view the full series, visit: cew.georgetown.edu/postsecondary-value-series.

###

The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce (CEW) is a nonpartisan research and policy institute within Georgetown's McCourt School of Public Policy that studies the links between education, career qualifications, and workforce demands. For more information, visit cew.georgetown.edu. Follow CEW on X [@GeorgetownCEW](#), [Bluesky](#), [Instagram](#), and [LinkedIn](#).