

Americans' views of college access varied, often inflated

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A study by Indiana University sociologists found that many Americans had inflated views of minority students' opportunities to attend college, yet a large contingent - around 43 percent of people surveyed - believed that low income students had fewer opportunities for college access.

The study, which will be discussed on Monday at the American Educational Research Association's meeting in New Orleans, found that Americans have varying beliefs when it comes to college access. A quarter of the people interviewed thought minority and low-income students held a better position than middle-class students when it came to college access. [Racial minorities](#), particularly African Americans, were more attuned to barriers in college access faced by disadvantaged groups.

"Understanding these perceptions is important because they have the potential to influence not only [educational policy](#) preferences, but also an individual's actions," said Kristin Jordan, co-author of the study "The Blind Side: Americans' Perceptions of Inequalities in College Access." "If you do not think you have the opportunity for a college education, you may not even apply."

Qualified students from low-income families were perceived as having less opportunity than other groups, according to the study, while qualified students who were racial or ethnic minorities were perceived as having more opportunities for a [college education](#) than other groups.

The study was based on an analysis of data from a national survey of around 1,000 adults conducted in 2007 by Public Agenda and by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, which are independent nonprofit research groups. Here are some key findings

- 43.4 percent said qualified students from low-income families have less opportunity than others to attend college.
- 26.9 percent responded that qualified [minority students](#) have less opportunity than others to attend college.
- 26.8 percent responded that qualified middle-class students have less opportunity than others to attend college.
- 24.4 percent reported that qualified students who are racial and ethnic minorities have more opportunity to attend college than others.
- 19.7 percent responded that students from low-income families have an advantage over others
- 10.2 percent said qualified students from middle-class families are better off than others when it comes to college access.

Jordan was intrigued by the finding that education levels, particularly whether someone earned a college degree, played little role in perceptions of college access across different social groups. Oren Pizmony Levy, another author of the study, said Americans see education as the 'great equalizer' or the best way to reduce inequality and help all people to become successful.

"Therefore, investigating how people think about opportunity to get

higher education is important," he said.

Provided by Indiana University

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