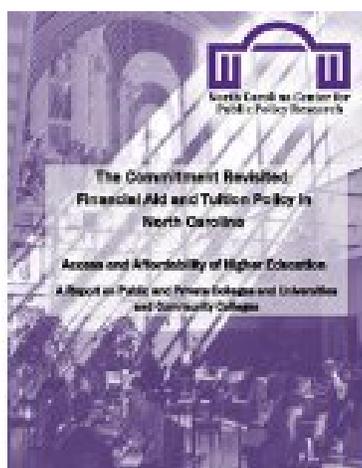# The North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research

Research ● Evaluation ● Education ● Engagement

2015/2016 Accomplishments

Research Released on Higher Education: Report on Financial Aid and Tuition Policy; Strategies to Increase College-Going and College Attainment; and Polling Data

Report on Financial Aid and Tuition Policy

In March 2015, the Center released a book-length report on financial aid and tuition policy, *The Commitment Revisited: Financial Aid and Tuition Policy in North Carolina – A Report on Public and Private Colleges and Universities and Community Colleges*, was published in PDF on the Center's website, and made available for download on the Kindle. The report looked at the scope of financial aid, trends in policy, and why it is important.

Nationally, the issues facing financial aid policymakers are both financial and structural. In North Carolina, the challenges are financial, structural, and constitutional. The Center examined a series of factors that could influence the direction policymakers can and should take related to financial aid policy. Trends influencing financial aid policy nationally and in North Carolina are:

- Trend #1: Shifting responsibility between the States and the Federal Government: In terms of dollars, both federal and state grant aid is increasing. However, the proportion of grant aid provided by the federal government is increasing, while the state proportion remains relatively stable.
- Trend #2: Need-based financial aid is recovering (as a proportion of the total aid basket), but does not always keep up with expenses: Of the grant money awarded in 2012-13, 75 percent was need-based. This is a greater proportion than seen in the mid-2000s, but does not return to the 2002-03 levels. However, the buying power of that funding is weakening. Often the states are the ones trying to make up the difference.
- Trend #3: Tuition and fee increases in recent years have dramatically elevated the cost of higher education, both nationally and in North Carolina. This potentially increases the gap between tuition and the ability to pay.
- Trend #4: Enrollment at the State's institutions of higher education is relatively flat across the UNC system and among private institutions. This suggests a new model of financial aid may be in order.
- Trend #5: Creation of forgivable education loans programs for targeted career paths. These programs are designed to address these shortages by providing money for college in exchange for an individual's commitment to work in occupations or regions that need more employees in these fields.
- Trend #6: Debt burdens of all types have continued to increase for students. The report also looks at the types and sources of financial aid, who makes policy, the history of NC's policy on financial aid, and academic research. We also looked at public opinion on the cost of college and financial aid, state financial aid for students in private colleges and universities, need-based grant programs in NC, forgivable education loans for service, tax-advantaged college savings plans, and financial aid in community colleges.

Report on College-Going and College Attainment in NC

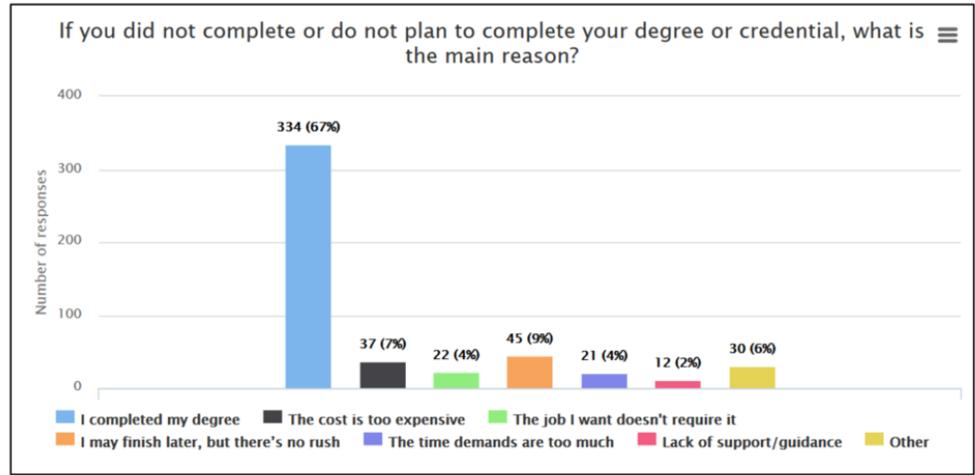The Center's second report was on college attainment, *A Strong Economy Through Post-Secondary Education*. The report examined strategies to increase attainment rates among specific groups of students who are most vulnerable to falling short of their educational promise. This included first-generation college students, students from rural parts of the state, and minority students. Without educational participation and achievement from North Carolina's entire population, our state risks falling behind in our ability to compete in the global economy. The report was featured on the Center's new website, and was made available for Kindle. The Center's new journal website provided a format to highlight individual chapters of the report, as well as specific stories and subsets of each chapter. The new website utilized audio and visual aspects of the report, allowing readers and website visitors' immediate, succinct views, with the opportunity to read more at their convenience. You can read the report at http://ncinsight.nccppr.org/2015/06/a-strong-economy-through-post-secondary-education-introduction/.

Higher Education Polling

The Center conducted an online statewide poll in November and December to survey opinions on North Carolina adults' highest credential completed, student loan debt, and reasons why North Carolinians do not complete degree. Some of the survey results provide additional insight into the state-specific story of how individuals are pursuing higher education and what of barriers they are facing.

If you did not complete or do not plan to complete your degree or credential, what is the main reason?

- 334 (67%) I completed my degree
- 37 (7%) The cost is too expensive
- 22 (4%) The job I want doesn't require it
- 45 (9%) I may finish later, but there's no rush
- 21 (4%) The time demands are too much
- 12 (2%) Lack of support/guidance
- 30 (6%) Other

2014 their types The findings are included in the second report on attainment. You can read them here at http://ncinsight.nccppr.org/2015/06/polling-data-on-college-completion-and-tuition-in-north-carolina/.

The Center has also utilized a variety of media outlets to support these reports and contribute to the conversation on college tuition and attainment. The Center has published stories in the Durham Herald-Sun on college tuition increases and the UNC Board of Governors, and shared the information during a monthly radio talk show. Our blog often includes posts on higher education issues, and these pieces are shared through our Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn networks to extend the reach and conversation.

Improving Mental Health Services

In 2015, the Center continued to extend the reach of our previous work on mental health by highlighting our report on telepsychiatry on our new journal website and social media, updating research on the number of psychiatrists in each NC county, and by distributing our research to legislators and attendees at the 37th Annual Legislative Breakfast on Mental Health.

## The Center's Work on Aging Issues

During 2015, the Center continued to highlight the issue of fraud committed against the elderly with an interview with David Kirkman, Special Deputy Attorney General in the Consumer Protection Division. Kirkman discussed the new fraud legislation and the work of the Elder Fraud Unit, a group of four individuals dedicated to preventing and assisting elderly victims of internet, phone, and home repair fraud.

Other Aging Issues

Momentum to rebalance spending on long-term care services is growing in the country, and there is room for changes to the model in North Carolina as well. The percentage of state spending for individuals 60 years old and older directed toward institutional care vs. home- or community-based case has remained stable over the past ten years. Almost 43 percent went to institutional care in fiscal year 2012-13, compared to 40 percent in 2003-04. In comparison, the state spent 15.2 percent on home health and in-home care and 4.5 percent on adult home care in 2012-13, down slightly from 15.5 percent on home health and in-home care and 6 percent on adult home care in 2003-04.

In addition to the research on long-term care, the Center published work on the state's pension system, an explanation of the state's new legislation to help prevent financial fraud committed against the elderly, an interview with a representative from the Attorney General's office on the new law, and a survey of counties' experience with the aging services plan. We presented this issue of *NC Insight: Serving Our Seniors* in multiple formats -- in print, PDF, digital flip-book, and, for the first time, in Kindle format. We also unveiled a new website for our *NC Insight* journal. This new vehicle for our flagship product will enable us to provide a richer online experience, especially for our mobile readers.
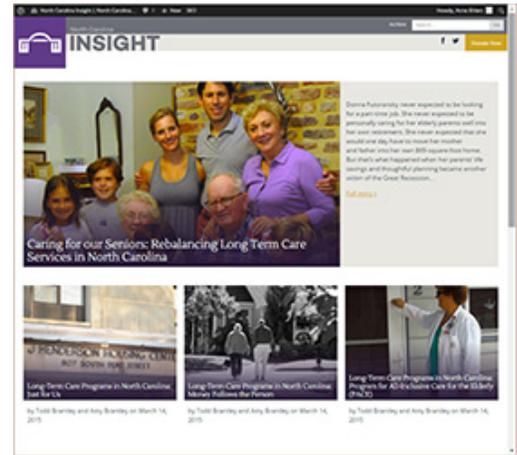
Alzheimer's Disease in North Carolina

The Center continued our research on issues affecting our aging, with a specific focus on the effect Alzheimer's disease has on our seniors, their caregivers, and how the rise in the prevalence of the disease will affect state programs in the future. In completing this research, the Center worked with Master's degree students at Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy.

The students investigated Alzheimer's disease in North Carolina, looking at the rates of the disease, caregiving options for patients, and looked to other states to learn about different options for comprehensive plans.

Our combined report, which includes recommendations for action in our state, was presented in a series of articles on our new *NC Insight* website, and was widely disseminated to our media partners and other stakeholders. The full series can be accessed here.

Recommendations for Addressing Alzheimer's Disease in North Carolina:
A. Low-Cost Recommendations
1. *Create a public-private coalition modeled after Minnesota's ACT* - This volunteer-driven coalition will give local authorities and communities the flexibility to identify their unique goals and challenges while preparing their communities for an increase in Alzheimer's cases. Evidence-based toolkits can guide communities through the process. North Carolina can borrow from ACT and adapt it to address North Carolina's unique challenges.

2. *Establish statewide standards of care for Alzheimer's patients in line with NAPA* -
Uniform standards of care will streamline the diagnosis and treatment of Alzheimer's, as well as improve patients' quality of care.

3. *Develop coordinated care plans for newly diagnosed Alzheimer's patients* - These plans include input from the patient, the patient's caregivers, and the patient's providers. The care plans will aim to prolong patient independence and community residency.

4. *Develop minority-specific outreach programs* - Minority-specific outreach programs will be important for increasing awareness of Alzheimer's, as well as improving caregiver resources in communities where the disease may be particularly stigmatized or under-diagnosed. Increasing awareness and early diagnosis in ethnic communities particularly susceptible to Alzheimer's can help caregivers and patients plan for the disease.

5. *Establish an early diagnosis and data collection protocol* - Early diagnosis will allow caregivers and patients more time to make informed decisions and weigh their options.

B. Cost-Effective Recommendations
6. *Expand Project C.A.R.E.* - Expanding Project C.A.R.E. will improve caregiver access to resources and respite care, especially in low-income and rural areas. Expanding the services that C.A.R.E. provides and budgeting for respite care will postpone nursing home placement.

7. *Increase the accessibility and capacity of adult day care and respite services* - Adult day care and respite services could be expanded by raising the enrollment cap on the CAP/DA waiver and increasing state funding for respite programs like Project C.A.R.E.

8. *Provide caregivers with tax incentives and unemployment benefits* - Caregiver incentives and unemployment benefits will increase caregiver flexibility and reduce caregiver stress. Caregiver benefits will also reduce reliance on Medicaid to care for Alzheimer's patients. With more financial stability provided by unemployment benefits and tax incentives, fewer caregivers may feel the need to spend down their assets in order to qualify for Medicaid.

C. High-Cost Recommendations

The following recommendations present high initial cost options. Yet they will be cost-effective in the long run as part of a wider legislative initiative.

9. *Create financial incentives to encourage new long-term care organizations* - North Carolina currently has a low Medicaid reimbursement rate that is unattractive to long-term facilities housing Medicaid patients. Financial incentives will attract long-term care organizations that use innovative care or payment model systems and have demonstrated cost savings in other states.

10. *Establish tax incentives for individuals working in geriatrics* - Tax deductions or credits for geriatric health care providers, direct care workers, and caseworkers will encourage expansion of capacity and care quality in these job fields.

Citizens' Guide to the Legislature App and Measures for Evaluating Legislators' Performance

In 2015, the Center produced *Article II: A Citizen's Guide to the North Carolina Legislature as an app*, the first of its kind in North Carolina. We also published the Guide as a PDF. As part of the Center's ongoing mission to educate the public about their elected officials and increase awareness and participation in the governmental process, the Center offers five different ways to learn about and assess the work of legislators – effectiveness, attendance, and voting participation, success in getting bills passed, and votes on the most significant bills in the last session. Through distribution in a biennial legislative guide as well as additional information following each legislative long session, voters are able to receive multiple reports on their legislators, learn more about state government, and use the measures to make informed voting decisions. The new app format allows now us to continuously update a legislator's information and gives us the ability to include the legislative rankings.

The Center provides the public not only a glimpse behind the curtain, but a comprehensive set of measures to evaluate what legislators are doing during session in North Carolina. Citizens can then use these multiple ratings and data to better determine how well their own legislator performs.

For example:
- What makes a policymaker accountable to those who put him or her in office?
- How does the public know what legislators do at the legislature when session rolls around every year?
- Is my representative present and casting votes?
- How is my senator's effectiveness perceived by those who best know the N.C. General Assembly and the legislative process?
- How much legislation is my representative introducing and how many bills actually become law?
- Which way does my senator vote on the most important issues?

Typically, the public rarely receives information to answer these questions. The N.C. Center for Public Policy Research provides this information on a consistent basis using a variety of formats to educate citizens.

In April 2016, the Center released its biennial report *Rankings of Effectiveness, Attendance, and Roll Call Voting Participation for the North Carolina General Assembly*. This year's rankings mark the 20th time the Center has undertaken this comprehensive survey. The first edition evaluated the performance of the 1977-78 General Assembly. The Center's effectiveness rankings are based on surveys completed by the legislators themselves, by registered lobbyists who are based in North Carolina and who regularly work in the General Assembly, and by capital news reporters. These three groups are asked to rate each legislator's effectiveness on the basis of participation in committee work, skill at guiding bills through committees and in floor debates, and general knowledge

or expertise in specific fields. The survey respondents also are asked to consider the respect that legislators command from their peers, as well as his or her ethics, the political power they hold (by virtue of office, longevity, or personal skills), their ability to sway the opinions of fellow legislators, and their aptitude for the overall legislative process. This marks the eighth time the Center has tabulated rankings of attendance and roll call voting participation, using official records from the N.C. General Assembly. The rankings were released as a stand-alone publication online, and included in the Citizen's Guide App.
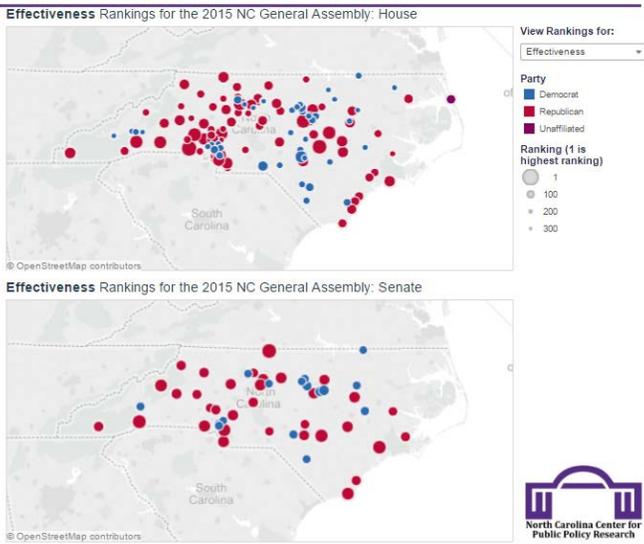
Some people like to visualize data, so we also created online maps from our recent report showing the rankings of effectiveness, attendance, and roll call voting participation for each of the members of the North Carolina General Assembly. Visitors can scroll over a dot to see a legislator's ranking, click on the party name to show rankings by party, and use the dropdown menus to switch between effectiveness, attendance, and voting rankings. The article and maps have more than 1,000 "shares" from our website and 750 post clicks from Facebook.

Public Policy Boot Camps to Increase Civic Engagement and Train Citizens How to be Advocates

The Center continued its efforts in citizen engagement with our Public Policy Boot Camp geared towards helping citizen groups become more involved in the development of public policies. This boot camp focuses on everything from how to get around in the legislative building, to how to contact individual legislators using our Citizens' Guide to the Legislature, to how to think strategically about pursuing a change in public policies. The Boot Camp has been distributed by Center staff to local and statewide citizen groups and organizations.

Leadership and Collaboration Workshop – Leading Ethically and Authentically in Public Policy
The Center, in partnership with the UNC Parr Center for Ethics, hosted a leadership and collaboration workshop on the

UNC-Chapel Hill campus. Sponsored by an IBM Impact grant, the day convened leaders from the business, nonprofit, academic, and foundation fields to focus on a shared vision of authentic and ethical public policy leadership. Throughout the day, attendees voiced shared challenges facing the policy discussion, organizational leadership, and experimented with methods to understand and better engage with fellow collaborators.

The workshop provided an opportunity to bring together a diverse group of leaders working in public policy to network, learn, and reflect on their own leadership — specifically how we lead authentically and ethically; and how we can collaborate to strengthen each other, to strengthen public policy, and ultimately benefit North Carolina. As one participant noted, *"You can't do everything yourself… You need help from others."*

North Carolina Priorities Project

As North Carolina enters a critical election year in 2016, the Center is launching a new project intended to give greater voice to our citizens in determining what the most pressing public policy issues are facing our state. Through targeted polling the Center will use citizen feedback to urge greater nonpartisan, fact-based conversations on the issues. Project plans include policy briefs, personal stories, research, and statewide community gatherings around the issues identified of most concern. With our media partners and through web and social media platforms, the Center's goal is to focus the debate on critical policy issues, encouraging candidates for statewide office to directly address these issues. Raising the level of political discourse can only benefit North Carolina's citizens as they enter the ballot booths next fall and make their choices for elected leadership.

As part of this project, the Center requested that the Elon University Poll ask North Carolinians, "What is the most important issue facing the state of North Carolina?" Shortly before the March 2016 presidential primary, the Elon University Poll surveyed North Carolina voters, and of the 1,530 likely voters who responded, nearly three out of 10 cited "education." Education, in fact, led the list of issues offered in answer to that open-ended question. NCCPPR and Education NC Board member Ferrel Guillory wrote an article highlighting education as the top issue, which the Center and Education NC jointly released. The Center published the article on our online journal, NC Insight, and distributed through social media. The article was shared more than 850 times from the journal site, and the Facebook post had over 1,000 post clicks.

Expanding Our Reach through Online Publications, Email, Social Media, an App, and New Journal Website

During 2015, we focused on expanding the Center's reach and impact by distributing our research in multiple online formats and creating a new website for our journal, *North Carolina Insight*. We also created an email newsletter, an app for our *Citizen's Guide*, and increased our use of social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Traditionally, we have released our reports in printed form, followed by a PDF version.

We experimented with releasing our book-length research reports and *North Carolina Insight* in a variety of online formats to give our readers more options for interacting with our content. We published our book-length research report on financial aid and tuition policy in PDF and Kindle formats. We released our research on college-going and college completion in Kindle and PDF formats, and in individual articles on our new *NC Insight* journal website. We released our issue of *Insight* on Aging as a Kindle publication, PDF, digital flipbook, and through multiple articles on our new journal website. And, we released our research report on Alzheimer's disease in North Carolina on our journal website. For each report or issue of *Insight*, we published several articles per week, and we complemented the articles with multiple posts on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn highlighting specific research, tables, or stories that linked back to the website. We implemented "share" buttons at the top and bottom of our website pages and included a space for comments.

We experimented with paid promotions or "boosts" on Twitter and Facebook to highlight specific research or products and to drive readers to our website. We found a significant increase in readership when we "boosted" an article on Facebook by using paid advertising. For example, an article on Alzheimer's disease at the county level was promoted on Facebook, but the posts highlighting the previous and subsequent articles were not. The promoted article was read and shared 16 times more often than the other two articles. We also experimented with targeting a specific audience when we boosted or promoted a post. In our series highlighting program to increase college-going and college completion rates we promoted posts about programs at Elizabeth City State University and Asheville-Buncombe Tech and targeted their specific areas of the state.

In the past, we have produced our Citizen's Guide to the Legislature in printed form. In 2015, we published the Guide in an app and made it available in both IOS and Android formats. By switching to an app format, we have increased usage four-fold so far. We used Twitter's paid promotions to encourage downloads of our app and our first ad garnered 138 downloads. As with other Center products, we have made the Guide available in PDF. By increasing the variety of formats and number of channels where we publish our work, and by utilizing paid social media promotions, we have seen an increase in the number of people reading and sharing our research.

In 2016, we plan to continue targeted experimentation with ways to most effectively disseminate our information through social media, the internet, and community gatherings. We also plan to investigate how the Center can better partner with other nonprofits, academic institutions, government entities, foundations, and other groups and individuals to expand our reach, become more effective, and increase our capacity.