

Professorial Polling Paradox

Contributed by Mal Kline, Accuracy in Academia

Polls that show public confidence in college professors as well as in grade and high-school classroom teachers are not inconsistent with other survey findings that show bias on the part of pedagogues everywhere. "In addition to doctors and teachers, those rounding out the top five of generally trusted occupations and professions are scientists (77%), police officers (76%) and professors (75%," the results of a Harris poll released on August 8th show. "Conversely, the five occupations that are least trusted to be truthful include actors (26%), lawyers (27%), stockbrokers (29%), trade union leaders (30%) and opinion pollsters (34%," Harris interactive goes on to somewhat ironically note.

"About half (48%) of U.S. adults generally trust that the President tells the truth—down substantially from 65 percent in 2002," the Harris people note. "However, 12 of the 22 professions measured by The Harris Poll® are trusted to be truthful by 60 percent or more of U.S. adults, with doctors (85%) and teachers (83%) topping the list."

"In addition, over half of the occupations measured have seen an increase in the eyes of the general public to tell the truth when compared to 2002," according to the Harris poll. "This is a turnaround from four years ago when most occupations saw a decrease in feeling about truthfulness."

But Gallup pollsters at a press conference Tuesday said it is not unusual for two-thirds of Americans not to have children in elementary, middle, junior or senior high school at any given time. After graduation, one-third of white Americans answering the Current Population Survey actually complete college.

In other words, the proportion of the public that thinks professors and teachers are doing a great job matches nicely with that segment of the population that has no contact with them, yet. Those on the front lines tell a different story.

As we surmised in a previous dispatch, even those public school parents who give their local schools high marks may be basing their assessment on the grades that their children, in turn, receive. As it happens, the Chronicle found in its polling that half of the freshmen surveyed—50.6 percent—say that "Grading in the high schools has become too easy."

At the same time, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni found that half of the students they surveyed report politically biased lectures whether the course itself was Political Science or not. This meshes nicely with the revelation from the Chronicle that 49.7 percent of freshmen in 2005 "participated in organized demonstrations," particularly since only 6.5 percent of them expect to "participate in student protests or demonstrations."

The Chronicle poll does not show who organized the demonstrations—students or faculty. Meanwhile the Chronicle's Almanac issue offers some interesting findings from its poll of the freshmen class of 2005.

Apparently, these days they arrive on campus disillusioned:

- 57.9 percent selected the college of their choice because it "has a very good academic reputation.
- 52.4 percent predict that they will "be satisfied with college."
- 31.2 percent said they based their choice on the notion that their "college has a good reputation for its social activities.
- 40.5 percent report being bored in class on a regular basis.
- Meanwhile, only 26.8 percent frequently "felt overwhelmed by all I had to do." They must not be liberal arts majors or have the time to go to all those demonstrations.

Malcolm A. Kline is the executive director of Accuracy in Academia.