## 70 percent see cost as obstacle to higher education in New Jersey

By Peg Quann Staff writer | Posted: Friday, April 12, 2013 12:00 am

The cost of a college degree is, by far, the biggest obstacle to getting one, say more than 1,000 New Jersey adults who participated in a poll conducted by the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey.

They were interviewed for the poll in late March, before the brouhaha developed over the April 3 firing of Rutgers University basketball coach Mike Rice Jr. and the \$1 million payout he received.

More than 70 percent of the respondents said the cost of attending and completing college is the biggest obstacle to higher education. The next-highest obstacle, at 7.6 percent, was not being prepared academically. Time spent away from work and family was another impediment mentioned by 7.4 percent of respondents.

"Cost is seen as a major barrier, and citizens expect state and college leaders to make needed reforms to boost college affordability and completion," said Darryl Greer, senior fellow at the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton in Galloway, Atlantic County.

Trust was also polled, with citizens trusting college leaders 2 to 1 over the governor and the state Legislature.

"While colleges share responsibility for making college less affordable, it seems the public continues to trust presidents and boards of trustees to continue to provide high-quality service and to make needed reforms," Greer said in remarking on data collected in the poll conducted March 15-31.

Interviewed Thursday, Greer said the situation at Rutgers most likely would not have changed the poll results, since they are similar to other polls, especially on the affordability issue.

And, he added, the poll shows that residents "have confidence in (college) presidents and trustees to make appropriate reforms" in "partnership" with elected officials.

According to the New Jersey Commission on Higher Education, there are 66 colleges and universities in the state, including community colleges. Current tuition rates vary by type, from less than \$5,000 annually at most community colleges to more than \$40,000 at some private institutions, according to commission statistics.

Rating the quality of higher education, 26.6 percent thought the state's colleges and universities did an excellent job, while 51.1 percent thought they did a good job. Only 7.6 percent believed the colleges and universities did a fair job, and a minuscule 1.1 percent rated higher education in the state as poor.

Despite 70 percent saying cost was the biggest obstacle, 47 percent of respondents described college in New