



WHO IS TODAY'S STUDENT?

THE NEW MAJORITY: PART-TIME STUDENTS, FULL-TIME PROVIDERS



When thinking of typical college students, most of us envision 18- to-21-year-olds fresh out of high school taking classes full-time on a sprawling campus. That is no longer true: full-time, 18- to 21-year-old students now make up just a third of the college population. Today's students represent a new reality.

They are older: Thirty-eight percent of today's undergraduate students are older than 25, with students in poverty less likely than their higher income peers to enroll right out of college. They're also balancing multiple commitments. About 40 percent of community-college students work 20 or more hours per week. Some 25 percent of students are raising children. And 40 percent of today's students attend school part-time – often squeezing in classes between other obligations on urban campuses convenient to their jobs or at their kitchen tables.



MORE RACIALLY DIVERSE – AND FACING GREATER FINANCIAL BARRIERS



Today's students are increasingly diverse: racially and socioeconomically. Enrollment among Hispanic students tripled over the last 15 years, and Black student enrollment grew by 72 percent. That trend is projected to continue through 2021, with Black enrollment growing by 25 percent, Hispanic enrollment increasing by 42 percent, and White enrollment growing by just 4 percent.

Today's students are more socioeconomically diverse, too. Almost half of today's students are on their own financially, and must juggle multiple expenses: the ballooning cost of college, rent, transportation, groceries and other basic living costs for themselves and in some cases for kids. Oftentimes, they're also struggling to make ends meet. Close to 42 percent of today's first-year students live near or below poverty.



LESS LIKELY TO GRADUATE



Between financial strains, work responsibilities and childcare, today's students have much more on their minds than just school, and many lack the social and emotional support they need to persist. Only 11 percent of

students living below the poverty line graduate within six years, compared to 55 percent of their higher income peers. Being a part-time student also shrinks the odds of success. Some 38 percent of students with extra financial, work and family obligations leave school in their first year – twice the rate of less encumbered peers. And even when given twice as long to complete, only a quarter of part-time students graduate.

HINDERED BY CAMPUS REALITIES



By and large, college is still structured as if 18- to 21-year-old, full-time students are the majority. Some colleges and universities have improved to meet today's students' needs by offering convenient class times, accepting

transfer credits and easing course registration. But there's still a big gap in areas such as housing and child care. Federal policy can play a powerful role in creating incentives for colleges and universities to provide greater support.

WITHOUT HIGHER EDUCATION, JOB PROSPECTS ARE GRIM

If today's students fail to complete their higher education, it's less likely they will get a job that pays livable wages or reach their full potential. Especially since the majority of jobs – 65 percent – will require postsecondary education of some form by 2020. Not earning an associate degree will cost a high school graduate half a million dollars in earnings, and not earning a bachelor's degree will cost \$1 million. This also has a major impact on our national well-being. Businesses can't thrive without a pool of qualified workers to fill open positions. Neither can our economy.

THIS CAN CHANGE

The good news is this: policy has the power to change the equation. Updating federal policy could help address factors at the root of challenges faced by today's students – such as finances, hours worked and family – and help boost all students' success. Needed changes include improving data collection, rethinking financial aid, and creating flexibility in federal policy so colleges and universities can innovate to meet today's students' needs. Visit luminafoundation.org/todays-student for more information.

To view all sources for data used in this document, please visit www.luminafoundation.org/todays-student-citations.

WHAT TODAY'S STUDENTS NEED

Today's college majority is different than it used to be –older, busier, more diverse and more financially strained. And too often today's students struggle under the burden of many stressors and too little support. While some colleges and universities have adapted their models to better serve today's students, federal policy has failed to keep pace and is no longer meeting the needs of the majority of college students. It's imperative that we adjust our practices and policies so that all students are equipped to succeed.

This is important to ensure every student has the chance to reach his innate potential and live a productive, fulfilling life. It's also critical for our nation's economy and future.

We can change the outcomes for today's students. Learn how:

LUMINAFOUNDATION.ORG/TODAYS-STUDENT

