

Connections to Work

In today's globally competitive and ever-changing economy, low-income students, students of color, opportunity youth, and adult learners must acquire the education and training they need for family-sustaining jobs and careers. Since the Great Recession, the economy has added 11.6 million jobs, with 99 percent of them going to workers with at least some college education.¹ People without postsecondary credentials will have greater difficulty accessing good jobs in the future.

Millions of college students do not fit the "traditional" student profile of a full-time student transitioning directly from high school to a four-year college or university. Many of today's students are often juggling work and/or family obligations and need flexible schedules that meet their needs.² The Higher Education Act (HEA) must recognize the unique circumstances and challenges these college students face³:

- 64 percent work while in school.
- 49 percent are financially independent from their parents.
- 37 percent are adults age 25 or older.
- 46 percent are first-generation college students.
- 24 percent are parents.

Even when they have acquired a postsecondary credential, low-income students and students of color still face obstacles in securing high-wage, high-demand career opportunities in their communities. Historically, people of color have been locked out of job opportunities due to racial discrimination in hiring⁴ and may earn less than other racial and ethnic groups with comparable levels of educational attainment.⁵

Given these national trends and obstacles, HEA can promote connections to work through linkages to career pathways that support youth and adults with barriers to employment in attaining the postsecondary credentials that prepare them for jobs with the potential for advancement and family-sustaining wages. HEA can also support partnerships between higher education, the workforce system, and industry that lead to training programs that teach low-income students the skills and competencies they need to succeed in the workforce and beyond.

CLASP Principles for Connections to Work

- Encourage states to scale up work-based learning opportunities for low-income students and students of color that connect them to employers through paid internships, fellowships, and other work-based learning opportunities in their field of study.
- Encourage institutions to provide comprehensive career counseling and employment services to help current students and recent graduates get family-sustaining jobs in their communities.
- Increase funding for Federal Work-Study and encourage institutions to identify new and creative ways to expand work-based learning opportunities for low-income students in their field of study.
- Incentivize states and institutions to promote career pathways, dual-enrollment approaches, recognized postsecondary credentials, and strong employment outcomes for low-income students, adult learners, young adults, and immigrant youth who have been disconnected from school and work.
- Ensure quality and accountability standards for apprenticeships, short-term education and training programs, competency-based education, and on-line instruction at public, private, and for-profit institutions.

Recommendations

Fund State and Institutional Investments in Workforce Development. Provide funding to states and institutions to adopt frameworks that incentivize career pathways, dual-enrollment approaches, and recognized postsecondary credentials and employment outcomes.

Expand Pell Grant Eligibility for Short-term Training Programs. Expand Pell eligibility for students enrolled in high-quality short-term training programs that include at least 150 clock hours of instruction over a period of at least 8 weeks. Ensure that these programs are recognized as valuable by employers and/or industry partnerships; meet standards established under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA); equip students with licenses, certifications or credentials that meet the hiring requirements of multiple employers; and, encourage institutions to align these programs with broader career pathways.

Modernize and Upgrade Data Collection. Expand data collection and disaggregation by creating a student-level collection system to build a more complete picture of students who receive Pell Grants, are in developmental or competency-based education, or who mix their enrollment. A modernized system can provide data on labor market outcomes for programs of study. These steps would greatly expand our understanding of the experiences and market outcomes of students of color, low-income students, and underprepared students.

Clarify the Eligibility Requirements for Minimum Program Length. Many higher education institutions are unclear about what the current minimum program length durations mean for programs of study that are part of a career pathway and award an interim credential before those thresholds are met. Congress must clarify how these programs can be made eligible for financial aid.

Endnotes

¹ Anthony P. Carnevale, Tamara Jayasundera, and Artem Gullish, *America's Divided Recovery: College Haves and Have-Nots*, Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2016. <https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/Americas-Divided-Recovery-web.pdf>.

² Lumina Foundation, *Who is Today's Student?* Washington, DC, accessed online on February 8, 2019. <https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/today-s-student.pdf>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Lincoln Quillian, Devah Pager, Ole Hexel, and Arnfinn H. Midtbøen, *Meta-analysis of Field Experiments Shows No Change in Racial Discrimination in Hiring Over Time*, 2017, <https://www.pnas.org/content/114/41/10870.abstract>.

⁵ Lorelle L. Espinosa, Jonathan M. Turk, Morgan Taylor, and Hollie M. Chessman, *Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education: A Status Report*, February 14, 2019. <https://www.equityinhighered.org/>