

Factors that influence adult success at community college

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Increasingly, less educated Americans are struggling with self-sufficiency. Low-end jobs are diminishing, and adults who left high school with education adequate to support themselves now find their marketable skills limited. Recent welfare reforms restrict assistance, leaving struggling workers with dwindling aid. Changing family structures result in rising numbers of families reliant upon a single parent. As a result, many adults are returning to academia out of necessity rather than choice. The article discusses circumstances common to many adult students, their challenges and supports.

Introduction

Many low-end workers need to enhance their skills to earn a living wage. Re-entry educational programs are likely to play a substantial role in promoting the self-sufficiency of such workers, but little research has been conducted on the experience of returning to school. The work of Lisa Matus-Groosman et al., “Opening Doors: Students’ Perspectives on Juggling Work, Family, and College” (2002), is research that the present study builds upon. What motivates adults to return to school? What challenges weigh most heavily? What supports are most vital? The author interviews the most knowledgeable sources—returning community college students, and the instructors, counselors, and administrators who work with them—revealing trends and insights which may help colleges better serve the countless adults who will require additional education in order to support themselves and their families.

The need for increased education

Changing job market

Over the past few decades the value of a high school diploma has dropped dramatically as companies turn to cheaper overseas labor and effective technological advances and immigrants have contributed to the population competing for low-end work. Jobs are available in mid-skilled sectors, but high school educated workers lack the training to fill them.

Concurrently, low-end wages have dropped. Between 1973 and 1995 real wage earnings dropped by nearly 20% for high-school educated men. Twenty percent of the American workforce earns at the poverty level while “fully 29 percent of working families with children earn less than the amount needed to maintain a basic standard of living” (Appelbaum et al., 2004, p. 27). In 1990 the National Center on Education and the Economy concluded that “America is headed toward an economic cliff, and we will no longer be able to generate economic growth because the education and training levels of our people are non-competitive” (Zeiss, 1994, p. 509).

Welfare reform

Recent welfare reforms intend to make recipients less reliant on assistance while promoting responsibility and independence (Bauer et al., 2000). In 1996 the Personal Responsibility and Work Oppor-

tunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) replaced Aid to Families with Dependant Children (AFDC) with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). PRWORA requires welfare recipients to be and remain employed, even if the wage is not enough to live on (Bauer et al., 2000). In fact, with costs of transportation, childcare, and work-appropriate clothing, people often find themselves poorer working than they were on welfare (Edin & Lein, 1997). PRWORA also increases work obligations for welfare recipients (Berlin, 2001) and restricts the “amount of time a welfare recipient can engage in vocational education to a maximum of twelve months” (Szelenyi, 2001, p. 95). Cash-assistance is limited to sixty months over a lifetime.

Changing family structures

The past thirty years have seen more out-of-wedlock births, divorce, cohabitation, remarriage, and single-parent families in America than ever before. From 1970 to 1995 the number of American children living with only one parent increased by over 50% (Amato, 2000). People with less education more often have children outside of marriage; the majority of single-parents have a high school degree or less (Amato, 2000). Significantly, nearly half of all single parents live in poverty (Amato, 2000), and families headed by women endure greater poverty over longer spans of time than any other family form (Taylor, 2002).

Response by community colleges

Community colleges use a variety of strategies to make education accessible to adults returning to school, from sequenced certificate programs and contextualized learning¹ to connections with local businesses and links with college and community support services.

Almost two-thirds of community college students attend only part-time due to work or family demands, which makes quick, relevant education a necessity (Kazis & Liebowitz, 2003). In response, colleges have developed short-term certificate programs that “bundle new and existing courses into skill-based certificate packages,” frequently covering months of material in weeks (Bragg, 2001, p. 11). Often certificates are sequenced, including “short-term training options or single courses that working students can take in a particular career area, and relevant job opportunities are connected to each ‘rung’ in the career ladder. Students can enter or exit at multiple points” (Matus-Groosman et al., 2002, online). These courses are frequently offered on evenings or weekends, times convenient for working adults.

The majority of community colleges are connected with businesses to varying degrees (Zeiss, 509). By working with local businesses, colleges can build programs that give

students the exact skills required for local employment, simultaneously supplying businesses with employees tailored to their needs.

Finally, support centers link students with local welfare offices, community support organizations, childcare, and transportation. The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) reports that “community colleges are the local educational institutions with the greatest potential for helping low-wage workers earn skills and credentials that lead to both educational and career advancement” (Kazis & Liebowitz, 2003, online).

Methods

The author based her study on thirty in-depth interviews, twenty-two with community college students, eight with community college instructors, counselors, and administrators. Interviews span three California community colleges: Cabrillo College in Santa Cruz, Cañada College in Redwood City, and West Valley College in Saratoga. Interviews were conducted from February to April of 2004.

The author first contacted college administrators who had worked on grants serving disadvantaged student populations. Networking led to interviews with instructors, counselors, and administrators with three to fourteen years’ experience working with re-entry students.

¹ Contextualized learning “teaches basic skills in the context of meaningful academic and occupational content, often organized around career pathways” (Kazis & Liebowitz, 2003).

Administrators suggested program centers serving returning students as places to meet students willing to share their experiences. Additionally, the author composed a letter to community college teachers explaining the research and asking them to pass a sign-up sheet for students to provide contact information. Each of the 22 students interviewed was returning to school from either working or raising a family. They ranged from 20 to 57 years old, and were Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, and American Indian. Three were male. Sixty percent of students had a high school education or less upon entering community college. Two students possessed a Bachelor's Degree and were returning to school to enter a new field. Less than one in four of students' parents possessed a community college degree or more, though fathers were more educated than mothers (a third of fathers had completed community college or more, while over eighty percent of mothers had completed high school or less).

Students were studying a range of subjects, including Early Childhood Development (for teaching), paralegal preparation, occupational therapy, musical engineering, criminal justice, interior design, Spanish, psychology, business, and medical assisting. Students were working towards certificates, Associates Degrees, and transfer; many students reported that they had entered school planning to attain only a certificate, but had decided to pursue more education to further increase their employability.

All interviews were audio-taped on college campuses in empty classrooms or outdoors and transcribed word-for-word. Interview questions were intentionally open-ended and conversational thus allowing interviewees to discuss aspects of their experience most relevant to them. The interview outlines follow:

Student interviews

- What is your age, sex, race, and religious preference?
- What is your highest level of education?
- What is your parents' highest level of education?
- When did you start community college?
- What are you studying?
- What is your anticipated completion date?
- Why did you decide to return to school?
- What have been challenges to being and staying in school?
- What factors have helped you in being and staying in school?

College personnel interviews

- For how long and in what capacity have you worked with students returning to community college after either working or raising a family?
- What, in your opinion, motivates students to return to community college?
- What factors, in your opinion, impact the success of these students?

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- What do you see as these students' greatest challenges?
 - What supports or strategies do they use to overcome these challenges?
 - Do you know what impact community college has on students' job prospects following program completion?
 - Tell about efforts at your community college to meet the needs of these students.
 - What efforts do you believe are particularly successful in helping these students succeed?

Motivation to return

External Forces

Five students were pressured to gain education by circumstances outside of their control—two due to a change in certification requirements for their current employment, two due to physical disability, and one whose field of work had disappeared from the area. These five students were among the older students interviewed, ranging from 38 to 55 years old, with a mean age of 45.8 years (compared to the mean age of all interviewed students at 34.4 years). They left school longer ago and so are more likely to find their field of work changed or eliminated in the changing job market.

In the first case, adults working in early childhood education found that the job, previously requiring no specific education, now required a certificate. California has new certification requirements for working in early childhood

education to standardize the field, and community colleges offer the certification programs. They range from six to twenty-four units, and each certifies students for a different level of responsibility, from assistant to master teacher.

Two of the students were subject to new certification requirements and therefore had returned to school. One had received a four-year degree in elementary school teaching in Peru, but the degree did not translate to the U.S. Another student was working two jobs on top of teaching to support her family, but she was pushed to return by certification requirements. She said, "It is a big change, and I'm suffering for it." These students are motivated by a desire not to lose their current work.

Physical disabilities explain two students' return to school. One suffered from carpal tunnel syndrome and needed work that did not aggravate it. Another student injured her back, but had no credentials for less physically demanding work. She explained: "Since physically I'm limited, being a paralegal is as good as it can get."

Finally, one student lost her job and found that she could not find work as a physical therapy assistant; she returned to school to gain skills for work in a more available field.

Finances and family

Many students discussed the need for greater financial stability, and a community college instructor

reported that, indeed, she found students to be “more savvy about money” than in the past. Students asked how much money they could make with increased education and often set their goals based on potential earnings gains. One student explained:

I don't want to work in retail my whole life....I don't necessarily want to be rich, successful, but I don't want to struggle....I see the struggle that my Mom goes through and you know, she's a great person, but I don't want to struggle like she has. And I want to be fulfilled. I don't want to waste my life.

The desire for financial stability was closely tied to a desire for family stability. Eight students listed family as their main source of motivation for returning to school. These students were younger, ranging from age 20 to 30, and averaging 24.9 years. These were also of the least educated of the interview pool; only one had more than a high school education.

One student said her parents had been her main source of encouragement. Seven referred to their children as their inspiration: “I just knew that I had to do something for myself and my family.” The message came through repeatedly:

- I am a single mom of two school-age children. I want to be able to give my children the best life possible. Nowadays, the more education I have the better my pay will be.

- I've got two kids. I was like, “Man, I need to do something for them!”...[I need] a good paying job that's going to be able to support me and my kids.
- I was working and I just didn't like what I was doing....Plus at the time I had two younger children, and I just recently had my third child last semester. So I wanted to get in a career that I know will support my family.

Finding fulfilling work

Many students report a mix of influences on their return to school. The desire for more fulfilling work came through clearly in six interviews. One student came back, “because I had something I wanted to do.” Another student described her community college education as a series of small steps towards higher-level work. As she reached each new credential, she endeavored towards the next: “You set your short-term goals, and you accomplish them, and you want to set more and more.”

Two students had come to community college decades before to increase their earning potential and now again found themselves building new work opportunities. Community college had led one student into twenty years of managing her own catering company (through a hotel/restaurant management certificate), but she now needs additional skills to gain fulfilling work. The other student had enjoyed a two-decade career in welding following his last community college certificate. Having

found community college a successful avenue into welding, he was again taking night classes to move into a new career.

Challenges to staying in school

Students were surprisingly open in discussing their struggles, including strained finances, limited community college resources, limited English proficiency, uncertain transportation, a general fear of returning to school, and—most prominently—the struggle of balancing work, parenting, and school.

Strained finances

Nearly all students battle with insufficient funds. Financial struggle is the force behind the employee/parent/student juggling act, and it is a strain all its own:

- Just the money. You know, how do I afford [it]?...I've got savings I'm working off right now, and it's just going out and nothing coming in right now.
- Money. Trying to pay rent. I guess when I decided to leave [high] school I wanted to be more independent, so I wanted to move out on my own which meant getting a high paying job of some sort...[But] school's very expensive. So just money.

Language barriers

Learning English as a second language appears a major impediment to some students' success. Over a

quarter of students interviewed spoke English as a second language. Instructors reported an increase in limited English speakers in their classrooms over the past decade. One student, an emigrant from Mexico, expressed her struggle with language:

My main challenge is that I have a very hard time thinking in Spanish and trying to put my ideas and whatever I need to say in English. I was so afraid about my English because I'd never been at school like I am doing now. All these years I had been learning from my jobs and reading the newspaper, and so I put letters together and message and all that. I did my placement test, and I passed the math, and I'm taking reading 18-6 [a low-level class]. As you can see I'm not that good, but to be all these years without school, I think it's good.

Weary to return

Another challenge is psychological, and students recognize that potential barrier to success. One student described:

I guess not knowing if you'll succeed at it or not [is challenging]...I didn't know how well I was going to do, if I really wanted to do it. That was a huge challenge actually, just getting self-motivated. Getting motivated to do it again.

College counselors also spoke of the psychological barriers. A great

deal of their work is simply motivating students, encouraging them to take a risk:

Most people carry around baggage about school, so if they've had a negative experience they often feel like they're...not going to be able to do as well as other students. I think that they also feel that they're going to come to school and be the only older person here and they just don't realize how much it's changed.

A second counselor commented:

When you [as a student] don't think much of yourself, you don't think you can do anything. When you have problems in your personal life, very little things can discourage you. I think that the students who are successful feel connected to college, and I think that's a big part of being a student. When you feel that you matter, people care about you, and you ask for help.

Working students

Every interviewee struggles to balance school with work. Time and resources are stretched thin in such a juggling act, and students wrestle with meeting responsibilities. Maintaining full time work, completing homework, *and* studying prove a real struggle for many students. As one described:

I have three jobs. I work as "inclusion aid" from eight o'clock in the morning until two pm.

And then from 2:30 I baby-sit for another family, from 2:30 to six [or] 6:30. And then my classes start at seven, seven to 9:15. I took that [one class] on Saturdays. So that was why I took it, because Saturday is a free day for me. Two days in the afternoons I clean houses. So that's why this makes this very hard. And the only time I have to do my homework is weekends. And if something is in a rush or need to do it right away, I stay up late. Like maybe one [or] two in the morning. The money is the worst part, the worst challenge. Because of that I need to have these jobs.

Student parents

All but three student interviewees are raising children while functioning as working students. In such cases not only are time and resources spread thin, but interviewees have to find caretakers or activities for their children while they are working and attending school. They have to forfeit time with their children for work and school as well. Not only are children a major motivating factor for adults returning to school, they prove a major challenge in attaining a higher level of education:

The biggest challenge has been having enough time and energy to complete everything and still have time with my children. I am not always there to put them to bed at night. I work full-time and do get

stressed. A challenge has been to keep my kids separate from my stress. It is not their fault I am a single mom. Also, finding the strength to stay up late to study after putting the kids to bed. This way my grades will not suffer.

Community colleges under strain

In addition to many students' limited resources, community colleges themselves are facing dwindling resources:

- [My] challenges have been the cut in classes, the cut in financial aid, the cut of services offered for re-entry students, and for disability students.
- [There are] detrimental things making it harder to go to school...Like tuition is going to double...This is going to make it almost impossible for me to pay for it on my own.

Discontinuation of a federal loan program at a college brought one student to tears:

I'm a single mom with two sons. And this is not money for a student loan that I needed to go shopping at the mall; this was to eat and live. [Additionally,] some colleges are now running on a skeleton program...[which is the] bare necessities. So I don't know what it's going to look like for my summer enrollment.

A community college administrator put it simply: "Financial

barriers keep us from doing the programs we want."

Support for student success

The general frustration students expressed regarding their challenges was balanced by their open appreciation for their support systems. They expressed gratitude for family, friends, and supportive employers. They found valuable resources in their instructors and in college support programs. Financial aid was also a major contributor to students' success, from tuition and book stipends to child-care and transportation aid. Finally, reciprocal to the psychological challenges students faced, students perceived their own motivation and maturation since their last school experience as substantial contributors to their success.

Family and friends

Support networks were extremely important to students. Two students told of supportive friends helping care for their children and providing emotional stability. Over half reported their families' support as vital. Parents, children, siblings, husbands, and fiancés provided financial, mental, and emotional support. One student explained:

My family has been really supportive. [I have] three siblings and none of them have graduated from college, and so I think that my parents and also my siblings are supportive and really want me to finish. I lived with my Mom—I lived there

rent-free while I was going to school. There've been some very shady times where I was like going to family members houses [to get food].

Instructors and community college support services

Nine students reported instructors as a strong support in their success. Instructors made them feel they belonged at school, were responsive to their individual needs, and made classrooms a welcoming community in which to learn: "I have no complaint with the teachers. Every time I ask them something they're always there." Counselors and administrators also provide support: "The faculty here has been awesome. They're very supportive. They help me find the resources I need to stay here." Students reported:

- My professors—some really helped me by inspiring me to not give up and that it's never too late to finish school, and my counselors who were very supportive of my needs and challenges.
- My teachers here are all really nice, and they're all really understanding. I mean, I've had classes where I had to take a month off because my grandmother died, and you know, do all this stuff, so it wasn't fun. But you know, my teachers were all really mellow about it.

Interviews with college personnel reveal the other side of these

relationships, a perspective that complements students' perception of their support and further illuminates their efforts to serve student needs. Instructors were willing to teach evening, night, and weekend classes because enrollments were low during traditional school hours. They also reported:

- I think the main [element] is being successful in the class. Feeling that they're appreciated as returning students. That their experience of life is important. And I think just making a very firm connection with teachers will make a huge difference.
- I really support people to share with me their life experiences, their work experiences. The other thing that I think is really important is the evaluation of students. Not just to do it in a formal written exam method. When you're working with so many different cultures you have to find other ways to measure. I do a lot of group work...I do journals and they can write the journals in their native language...I do some visual biographies/autobiographies. Participation in class, and exercises, I keep track of everybody's involvement. Unfortunately what I'm also trying to do is create formality for them so that if they go on to a four year college, they'll be ready for that.

One instructor in particular discussed her techniques for meeting students' needs. She was aware of the many responsibilities students

were juggling, the range of past experience they brought to the classroom, and the language barriers many faced. She was also attuned to cultural differences within the classroom:

It's really hard to get [some students] to speak out in class. That's not their culture, that's not their background, and that's not their comfort level. So you really have to work at, how can I vary the format to help them feel comfortable here, competent in what they do know, and set up the situation...so that they would participate? So you do a lot of pair and small group work.

She explains further:

The idea of doing a very detailed research paper is a big challenge to people who haven't done it before. You have a lot of people who went to school and in high school didn't learn those skills, either because of their age or where they went to school or the kind of student they were then. So, for instance, one of my colleagues takes her class to the library and has the librarian run a training session on how to use the library. You learn how to research, you learn how to write. Here's another thing: there are a lot of students who don't have access to computers. That's unheard of at most four year colleges. So what do I do about that? One thing is, I might not re-

quire that. Or figure out ways to get people to pair up: "Who has access to a computer and knows how to work it? Okay, find somebody whose hand is not up."

In one college struggling with funding for childcare services, an instructor exercised great flexibility: "I have parents in some of my classes here that sometimes bring their kids. Weekend classes I usually let them bring children if—not a lot, it's usually one or two."

Counselors also strive to meet students' needs with diverse strategies:

A great deal [of students] come with self-esteem issues....They need to hear that "We're there for you." My particular style is that I deal with them as a whole. I don't say, "You take these classes and it equals this degree and then you move on," because it's not. I ask, "How is your personal life going? Do you have childcare? How do you get here? Do you have money to buy your books?" We encourage in our program that this is home away from home for you.

Much of the good work of community colleges is seemingly on a personal level, with individuals making the fundamental difference in student success. Building on the idea of the importance of personal networks, one instructor discussed the community college student body as a supportive network. She heard students discussing their

struggles to balance work, school, and children and offering advice to each other for how to approach financial strains. Working while raising children can be isolating. These students are offered a community in which to share their struggles and realize they are not alone in their challenges, and this in itself may serve as a major support in student success.

Flexible, supportive employers

Though working while attending school proves a major challenge to students, flexible and supportive employers were noted by a quarter of interviewees as a source of stability. In cases where employers encouraged students to return to school in the first place (as noted earlier), employer support was perceived as particularly strong; but in these cases and in three others, students commented on their employers' flexibility or support contributing to their success at school. Although students were still caught in the balance between work and school, and often children as well, the scheduling flexibility and psychological relief of a supportive employer appears valuable. Additionally, four students were able to get jobs on campus, which further simplified their schedules and likely provided a supportive work environment.

Classes for English language learners

Community colleges use a variety of techniques to help students learn English including classes

offered in Spanish, tutoring, and encouragement to take classes in English to exercise their skills. One student told the story of enrolling in college because she knew she would be able to take a class in Spanish, only to find the class was full when she signed up. A counselor convinced her to take the class in English, and she reflected: "I'm glad I took it because it was a very big challenge to me to prove to myself that I could do it. I'm very happy. I'm impressed. And I say, 'Okay, if I can do this, I can move on.'"

Financial aid

A third of students interviewed found financial aid a major support in completing their programs. As one student expressed: "Financial Aid has been also a huge help. It has helped me to not have to take a second job to be able to afford everything that life demands." Another student reported that her supports were "those programs that are being cut, although financial aid is keeping me here." Unfortunately, many aid programs are being cut, and tuition is rising steeply. The comments of students interviewed suggest that eliminating these student supports may have a strong impact on their ability to return to school.

Maturity and self-motivation

When asked what their major supports were, many students listed themselves. Previously as students, interviewees had largely been un-

interested, unmotivated learners. They now found themselves ambitiously engaged in school: “What helped me is just the motivation of being able to do something better and being in a steady career.” Another said she was supported by “my focus on knowing what’s right for me. Absolutely. I know that I’m doing the right thing.” The theme came through repeatedly:

- I need to do this to get the job, but I’m also a lot more motivated now because I know what I want, I know what’s expected, which is not that eighteen-year-old mentality that you just come to school to meet people and to party. I’m a lot more self motivated.
- I’m certainly more focused than I was when I was in my twenties.... Being tied up to school and not knowing what it is I wanted to do with myself was excruciating. Any of the classes that I took at that time were done with a lot of anger and resentment.... I’m studying this for myself....I’m focused, really focused now. Because I already am on the other side and I know what it takes.

One student discussed how succeeding in school was a disconnect with her culture, but had given her confidence and inspired her to encourage her children in their education:

[In] Hispanic culture pretty much the woman, you know, from the moment you can walk the mother starts preparing you to be the mother....

Coming back to school just gives you so much confidence for succeeding in life. I’m not saying don’t follow your culture, but to know that you also have an option to do other things too. Make something of yourself, not just you’re born and until your death be a housewife. And that you can be a housewife and you can do more, you can be more... That’s what I teach my kids.

From the basic need for money to complex developments in motivation and maturity, students draw on a wealth of resources. Unfortunately, many of the supports students discussed are shrinking or disappearing altogether. Instructors note that their office hours are being cut if not eliminated, financial aid programs are decreasing while tuition rises, and classes are being discontinued to meet budgets. Supportive personal networks may of course remain in place, and individual instructors strive to make up for what resources are lost, but neither can solve a systemic problem.

Implications

Many adult students are handling enormous challenges in hopes of improving their own and their children’s lives. These students are taking the initiative to gain necessary skills to support themselves in the new American economy, and their experiences could prove powerful educational tools for shaping future programs and policies.

Support for Students

Family and friends

Families and friends provide important interpersonal support networks, and colleges can supplement such support by hosting events to explain the content of student programs to families and friends and the work opportunities that follow in order to encourage their support.

Peers

In addition to building upon existing interpersonal networks, colleges can cultivate peer networks among students. On-campus centers for returning students would facilitate student sharing strategies for meeting challenges. Further, student mentorship programs could link returning students with successful students experienced in overcoming challenges. Such programs could provide an environment in which returning students would feel accepted and supported. In addition to helping entering students, mentors benefit from a supportive employer, the college.

Employers

Employers can provide support essential to student success. Working students have an opportunity to advocate for their own needs through effective communication. Many of these students come from working-class backgrounds, and research suggests they often have limited skills for communicating with individuals of higher social-status (Lareau, 2002). Providing

mentoring or communication workshops for working students could cultivate more supportive work environments. Finally, colleges can demonstrate that supporting employees returning to school is a win-win circumstance. If there is potential for students to move up in their current field of work, supportive employers could soon find themselves with a more highly skilled and loyal employee pool.

Finances

The issue of money was paramount in every interview. Students struggle to survive on their incomes, battle to keep their financial aid, and face steep rises in tuition. One administrator explained that California community colleges receive only half the government funding per student that universities receive, yet are expected to provide similar resources to a more needy population. She argued that funding ought to be distributed in the reverse, with community colleges getting more funding for their more economically disadvantaged population.

Support for staff

Creating community

Students' relationships with counselors, administrators, and especially instructors are important to their success, and indeed instructors reported varied and innovative techniques for meeting student needs. Instructors were also frustrated by their adjunct

relationship to the community college. Many instructors teach only part time, maintaining other “day-jobs,” and have limited opportunities to discuss their experiences with other staff. Therefore, in parallel to how students use the college community to share coping strategies and reduce isolation, instructors could share their own challenges and brainstorm strategies for overcoming them. To fill such a need, colleges could offer staff a regular meeting forum or establish an online community.

Education and training

Education and training for staff members could also prove a powerful tool. Colleges can raise staff awareness of the degree to which returning students see them as a significant support. Staff can be trained in best practices for addressing the needs of returning students (e.g., research on learning English, serving single parents, and balancing school with work). Additionally staff can be made

aware of resources available to students at the college and in the community, and the local job market for community college graduates. Workshops or carefully designed educational materials could serve to disseminate the information.

Conclusion

Though the results of the present study are qualitative and anecdotal, they confirm what many have long understood. In order to prepare the many Americans struggling with self-sufficiency for higher-end work, a breadth of strategies must be employed. Without a more educated and productive population the United States may face barriers to remaining competitive in the global economy; serving the needs of students is important not only for them as individuals, but for the country as a whole. Based on thirty in-depth interviews, the suggestions above could prove valuable approaches. Future research is necessary to develop these strategies and suggest new ones.



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