

Work, Learn, and Earn

The majority of college students in the U.S. who are studying toward a coveted college degree are also working.

Nearly 60 percent of college students – are working learners.ⁱ

Additionally, 48 percent of high school students report working for pay outside of their home.ⁱⁱ

Individuals who work for pay and are enrolled in a formal learning program to earn a diploma, credential, or degree are known as working learners. With working and learning becoming increasingly common, it's important to understand who working learners are and what the effects of juggling the demands of working and learning are on the academic and career outcomes of underserved working learners.

Working Learners Are Made Up of Individuals with Diverse Backgrounds



Who Does (or Doesn't) Work Work For?

Six million working learners have incomes at or below 200% of Federal Poverty Level.ⁱⁱⁱ

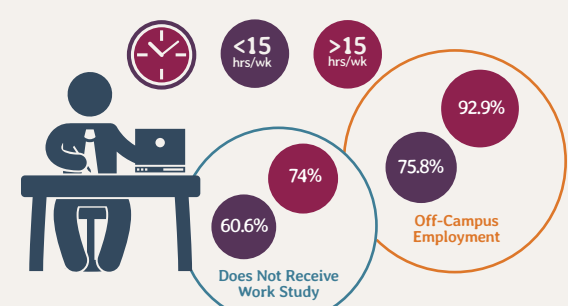
Working learners, particularly underserved working learners who balance demanding work schedules with college course loads, face academic and career disadvantages compared to their peers who work fewer hours while in college.

With rising tuition and total attendance costs, it's nearly impossible for today's working learners to work their way through college. Most students take out loans to cover the difference.

71 percent of students at four-year colleges and 20 percent of students at two-year colleges graduate with student debt.^{iv}

College Student Work Characteristics

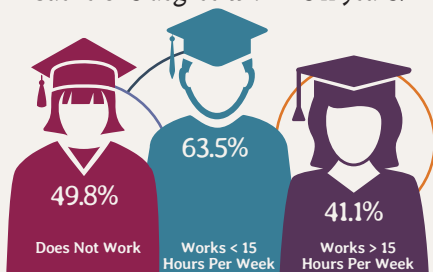
Students who work fewer hours benefit from work arrangements that accommodate the semester course schedule.



Yet, very few working learners have jobs on campus or through a federal work-study program.ⁱ

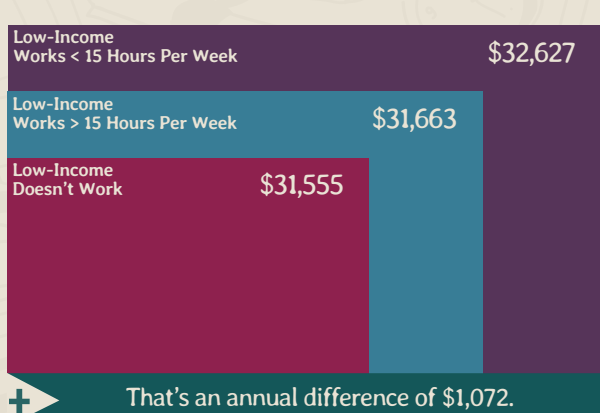
Bachelor's Degree Attainment 6 years After Enrollment

Only 41.1 percent of low-income working learners who worked more than 15 hours each week had earned a bachelor's degree within six years.ⁱ

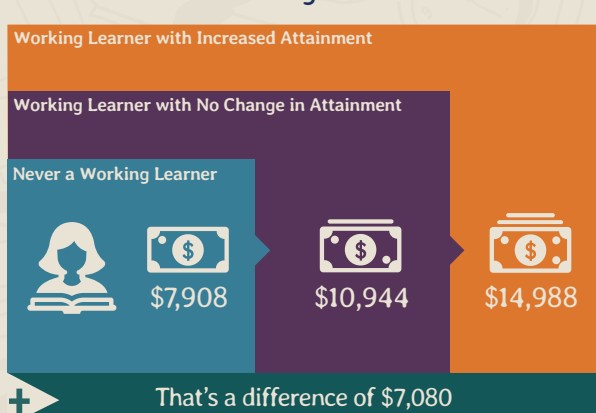


However, low-income working learners who work less than 15 hours each week are more likely to graduate in six years and have higher incomes early in their careers.ⁱ

Average Income for Low Income Working Learners Six Years After Enrollment



Working learners who increase their educational attainment level experience annual earnings increases.^{vi}



Policy Implications for Successⁱⁱⁱ

To improve achievement and career outcomes, working learners must have access to affordable higher education opportunities and resources to support them as they navigate their way through college as working students.

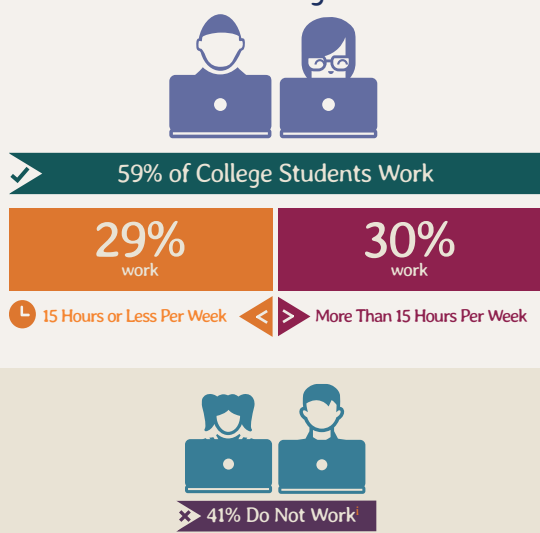
- 1 Making college more affordable
- 2 Expanding financial aid
- 3 Raising wages for hourly and service workers

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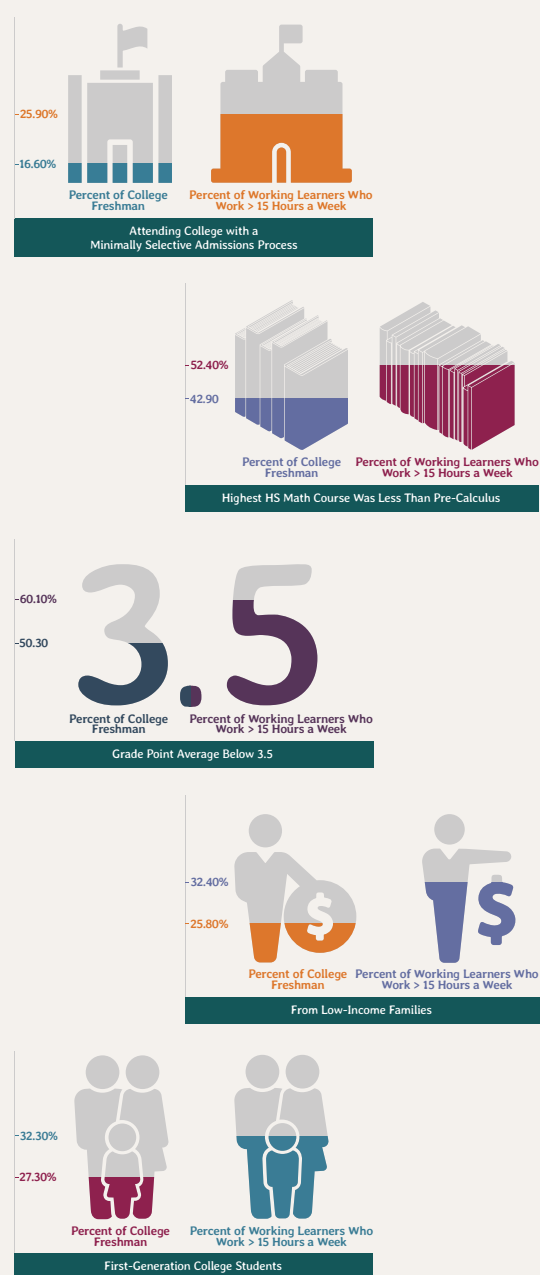
Colleges and universities can better support working learners by:

- 1 Adopting more holistic advising approaches that account for both coursework and paid work
- 2 Bridging the divide between campus career centers and the financial aid offices to help place students into jobs with long-term career benefits

Who Are Working Learners?

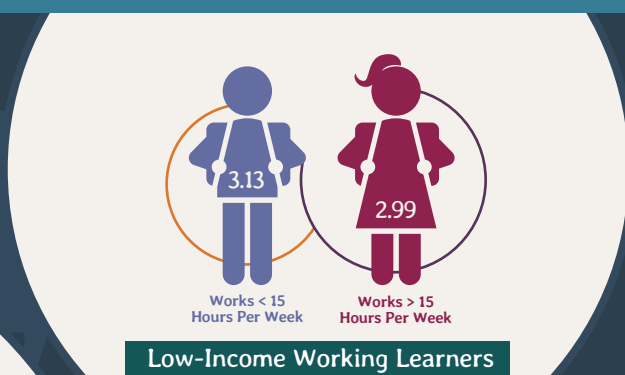


Underserved Students Are Overrepresented Among Those Working More Than 15 Hours Each Week



And students from low-income backgrounds often try to work more hours to offset their student debt, but working more demanding schedules hurts students from low-income backgrounds.ⁱ

GPA 2 Years After Enrollment



ⁱ Blanchard Kyte, Sarah (2017). Who Does Work Work For? Understanding Equity in Working Learner College and Career Success. Iowa City, ACT Center for Equity in Learning.

ⁱⁱ Blanchard, Sarah (2016). Getting Ahead, Getting Through, or Getting by? An Examination of the Experiences and Prospects of High School Working Learners. Washington, D.C. ACT Foundation.

ⁱⁱⁱ Carnevale, Anthony P., Melton, Michelle, Price, Eric W., and Nicole Smith (2015). Learning While Earning: The New Normal. Washington, D.C. Georgetown University.

^{iv} Carnevale, Anthony P. and Nicole Smith (2016). Learning While Earning: How Low Income Working Learners Differ From All Other American College Students. Washington, D.C. Association of American College Trustees.

^v The institute for college and student access, March 2014. http://ticas.org/sites/default/files/pub_files/Debt_Facts_and_Sources.pdf

^{vi} Blanchard Kyte, Sarah (2017). Equity in Working and Learning Among U.S. Adults: Are There Differences in Opportunities, Supports, and Returns? Iowa City, ACT Center for Equity in Learning.