



## **Working Low-Income College Students are Less Likely to Attain a Bachelor’s Degree than their Higher-Income Peers, Finds New Georgetown University Research**

*Working more than 15 hours a week decreases the likelihood of good grades and completion for working students*

**(Washington, DC, August 28, 2018)** — Nearly 70 percent of college students work while enrolled, but while working and studying generally helps students from higher-income families, low-income students face steeper challenges in combining work and learning. New research from the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce (Georgetown Center) reveals that unequal access to support mechanisms and financial safety nets exacerbates challenges working low-income students face. *Balancing Work and Learning: Implications for Low-Income Students* explores the impact of hours worked, types of work, and completion rates by education level between low-income and higher-income working learners.

“You can’t work your way through college anymore,” said Anthony P. Carnevale, director of the Georgetown Center and lead author of the report. “Colleges need to do a better job of providing the right support services to ensure their working students have the means to reach graduation and gainful employment.”

As the number of hours worked goes up, the likelihood of good grades and completion goes down for working learners at any income level. However, higher-income working learners require less income to make ends meet, so they tend to work fewer hours. In fact, 65 percent of higher-income working learners who work less than 15 hours a week earn grades of B or higher. On the other hand, nearly 60 percent of low-income working learners who work more than 15 hours a week and on average earn grades of C or lower.

When they choose to work, while enrolled, higher-income students have access to the best jobs and work experience, such as internships and assistantships: 14 percent get jobs in a lucrative career field, such as science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), business, or healthcare, while only 6 percent of low-income students work in these fields. Low-income students are more likely than higher-income students to work in food service, sales, and administrative support jobs while enrolled. Work experience in these jobs provides basic skills like conscientiousness and teamwork, but does not provide the deeper technical and general skills that foreshadow good career entry-level jobs.

“Education leaders should focus on building stronger connections between education and work beginning in the K–12 years,” said Nicole Smith, chief economist at the Georgetown Center and co-author of the report. “Work experience provides the most value when it is connected to students’ long-term career goals.”

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Completion rates vary among working learners, but the starkest differences exist at the bachelor's degree level. Only 22 percent of low-income working learners complete a bachelor's degree within six years, compared to 37 percent of higher-income working learners. And among all levels of postsecondary attainment, 57 percent of lower-income working learners fail to earn a credential within six years, compared to 46 percent of higher-income working learners.

Other key findings include:

- Of the 14 million working learners, about 6 million (43%) are low-income students.
- Low-income working learners are disproportionately Black (18%) and Latino (25%), women (58%), and first-generation college-goers (47%), while higher-income working learners tend to be White (73%).
- Low-income working learners are more likely to enroll in certificate programs and attend either two-year public or for-profit colleges than higher-income working learners.
- Low-income working learners are less likely to earn a credential overall, even if they come from the upper end of the academic performance distribution, whereas higher-income working students are more likely to enroll in bachelor's degree programs and attend selective four-year colleges and universities.

Access the video and full report for *Balancing Work and Learning: Implications for Low-Income Students* at [cew.georgetown.edu/LearnAndEarn](http://cew.georgetown.edu/LearnAndEarn).

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