

# 101: TODAY'S STUDENTS



## WHO ARE TODAY'S STUDENTS?

**37%**

OLDER THAN 25



**64%**

WORK WHILE  
IN COLLEGE



**24%**

PARENTING



**49%**

FINANCIALLY  
INDEPENDENT



**31%**

AT OR BELOW

FEDERAL  
POVERTY  
LINE

**13%**

LIVE ON CAMPUS



**40%**

PART-TIME



**57%**

ATTEND



**2-YEAR  
Colleges**

**STUDENT ENROLLMENT  
INCREASES 1996-2010:**

↑ 11% WHITE

↑ 240% HISPANIC

↑ 72% BLACK

## HOW ARE TODAY'S STUDENTS DIFFERENT FROM THOSE IN THE PAST?

Today's students are more diverse than any previous generation of college students: they're diverse in age, race, and income level. They're more mobile and may not live on campus. Most participate in the workforce, either full-time or part-time. Work and family responsibilities beyond the classroom—whether that is on-campus or online—often compete with today's students' educational goals. Younger workers are changing jobs as many as four times by age 32, so lifelong learning and continuing education are fast-becoming the norm.

Despite the changing demographic realities, the federal role in supporting postsecondary education is largely the remnant of policies designed for a time when most students graduated high school and immediately went to a four-year or trade school. Federal policy needs to be updated to support a system that works for everyone, including today's students – a system where postsecondary providers can deliver the skills and knowledge that employers seek, where programs are flexible and support student success, and all types of learning—on campus, online, competency-based, and more—are fully recognized.

## WHAT CHALLENGES DO TODAY'S STUDENTS FACE?

### AFFORDABILITY

49%

FINANCIALLY  
INDEPENDENT



31%

AT OR BELOW

FEDERAL  
POVERTY  
LINE

### PART-TIME VS. FULL-TIME

40%

PART-TIME



### COMPLETION

38%

OF STUDENTS



with additional  
financial, work,  
and family  
obligations  
**leave school in their  
first year<sup>2</sup>**

### WORK COMMITMENTS

64%

WORK WHILE  
IN COLLEGE



### PARENTING

24%



### EMERGENCY COSTS



Early data from the University Innovation Alliance (UIA), a coalition of eleven public research universities, shows that about **4,000 Pell-eligible college seniors**, who are in good academic standing, are at risk of being dropped from their classes or not allowed to graduate because **less than \$1,000 is owed to their institutions.**<sup>1</sup>

### VETERAN STATUS

4% OF STUDENTS  
ARE VETERANS



but they  
face unique  
challenges,  
such as applying  
competencies learned in  
military service to civilian  
careers and academics.

## HOW CAN FEDERAL POLICY HELP SET TODAY'S STUDENTS UP FOR SUCCESS?

Outcomes are critical for today's students—including completion, employment, equity, and value—to be gained from higher learning. Federal policy needs to catch up to the way that today's students are learning and reward institutions and systems that deliver the strongest career and educational outcomes.

**FEDERAL FINANCIAL AID** should be redesigned with a focus on the needs of a wide range of students, especially those who work full- or part-time, are financially independent, or need to enroll in courses outside the traditional two-semester approach. Redesign approaches could include rethinking Pell eligibility for workforce programs, or simpler loan repayment to match today's students' needs.

**DATA** gathered through federal, state, and workforce data systems should cover the full spectrum of today's students, not just first-time, full-time students. Today's students, families, schools, and taxpayers need clear information to make informed choices about higher learning.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.insidehighered.com/sites/default/server\\_files/files/Completion%20Grants%20release%208\\_16\\_17%20FINAL.pdf](https://www.insidehighered.com/sites/default/server_files/files/Completion%20Grants%20release%208_16_17%20FINAL.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/today-s-student.pdf>

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