

College Education is Still a Dream for Most Working Poor Adults

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College education is still a dream for almost 20 million of the nation's working poor adults, according to a report released on July 7 by the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP). IHEP reports that in 2005, working poor adults between the ages of 24 and 64 earned an average salary of \$19,000 per year compared to an average salary of \$56,000 for non-poor adults. Even with monetary aid, studying at a state university is beyond the means of most working poor adults. The average cost of tuition and fees at universities stands at about \$13,000, which is excessive for those with low incomes.

The government-funded report, "College Access for the Working Poor: Overcoming Burdens to Succeed in Higher Education," is built upon data from the U.S. Census Bureau and other federal sources.

IHEP's findings include the following:

- Heavy work and family responsibilities prevent working poor adults from attending college full-time even when they consider education their highest priority. In 2003-2004, only 37% of working poor adults enrolled full-time, while more than 50% of non-working or poor adults with less work enrolled in full-time courses.
- The financial aid that working poor adults receive is inadequate for college costs. According to statistics from the 2003-2004 academic year, working poor adults receiving financial aid had to shell out \$4,000 in personal resources to continue their education over the year.
- Patterns of part-time enrollment favored by working poor adults reduce their chances of receiving financial aid. The average grant received by 54% of working poor adults in 2003-2004 was \$3,000; an average grant of \$3,500 was received by 67% of non-working poor adults.
- Part-time enrollment poses a barrier to completing and performing well in academic courses. It was observed that 50% of working poor adult students left college without completing their courses or receiving credentials.

Recommendations made in the report include, among others:

- Provide tax relief for working poor students

- Offer additional institutional support for working poor students
- Focus on supporting single parents who are working poor adult students
- Provide extra institutional support for first-generation working poor adult students

The report can be downloaded at:

www.ihep.org/Pubs/PDF/College_Access_for_the_Working_Poor_2007_Report.pdf