Working Learner College Students: A Diverse Not-So-New Majority

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Vanessa is a 19-year-old full-time community college student pursuing an Associate in Health Science degree who also works as a server part-time to help supplement the Pell Grant she receives to pay for tuition and to contribute to the rent her mom pays for the apartment she lives in with her cousin and two other siblings. Her 40-year-old immigrant mom is attending the same community college part-time while working at Walgreens in the hopes that a Pharmacy Technician certificate can help her move toward a job with higher income. Trevor is a 35-year-old divorced father who works in maintenance and receives tuition assistance from his employer to attend classes at the nearest public university to pursue a bachelor's degree in Computer Software Engineering. Karina is a 23-year old veteran who works at a help desk full time and is attending a for-profit college part time with the help of assistance from the G.I. Bill to pursue a Criminal Justice bachelor's degree online. Nick recently pledged a fraternity at the same selective private university where his parents met, and he balances his full-time college courses and paid internship at Merrill Lynch in the hopes of enhancing his resume to land a job in the financial/investment banking field and, at some point, earn an M.B.A. All of these are examples of working learners – a diverse set of students attending a diverse range of postsecondary institutions with diverse life circumstances, challenges, and trajectories.

The purpose of this brief is to identify who are the *working learners* of today – to develop a typology of sorts – in order to support a research agenda that can better aid in serving this population of undergraduates. Working learners can be defined as "students who balance learning in college with earning a paycheck," and this group currently comprises an astounding 70 to 80 percent of all undergraduate college students, representing the new norm, as the typical college student is now working and enrolled in postsecondary education, either in a certificate, associate's or bachelor's degree program or in a non-degree granting training program (Carnevale & Smith 2015, p. 10). Even more conservative estimates show that, among entering community college students, just under 70% work for pay (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2020).

Putting the working learner concept in historical context, it becomes clear that current attempts by college students to fuse work and learning are marked by a set of pivotal economic tensions that have been gradually evolving in the United States to impact historically marginalized groups. Following the success of the G.I. Bill and the activist push through the 1960's to systematically open up access to higher education beyond the previously young, wealthy, white, and mainly male beneficiaries of it, especially in the most elite spaces (Karabel, 2005; Soares, 2007), expansion at the bottom of the higher education hierarchy exploded over the next several decades. Junior colleges were transformed into comprehensive community colleges and the rapid growth of that sector occurred along with a less massive but substantial growth of broad access four-year institutions and the subsequent and more recent growth of the for-profit and online college industries (Stevens & Kirst, 2015). The present historical moment in the U.S. in which we now find ourselves is an unprecedented one in which we are striving even closer toward more universal access to higher education than we have ever seen (Brint &

Karabel, 1989; Rios-Aguilar & Deil-Amen, 2019). This expansion toward more universal access has not kept pace with the skyrocketing costs of higher education, and this has accelerated the growth of learners who work. Declining public tax support for postsecondary education and the resultant drastic increase in tuition and other educational costs relative to family income education has led to a rise in unmet financial need, explaining much of the proliferation of working learners we've experienced in recent decades. Many of those student populations formerly excluded now need to work to either afford the costs of college or to be competitive in entering the labor force post-degree acquisition, and most are clustered in under-resourced community colleges (Rios-Aguilar & Deil-Amen, 2019). The changing nature of work in the post-industrial era (Beck, 2000; Rose, 2005; Ross, 2003; Sennett, 1998) has also contributed to the growth of working learners, particularly in recent decades, as the low-wage service sector economy has grown rapidly employment structures have become increasingly flexible and jobs have become less permanent. More occupations lack a living wage with little earning power (Deil-Amen & DeLuca, 2010) and non-standard work arrangements (Kalleberg, 2011) that deviate from the full-time, permanent jobs held more prominently by previous generations. This has left many working learners scrambling to balance jobs in lower-wage and non-standard employment and in the secondary labor market with their attempts to use postsecondary training or credentials to gain a foothold into more lucrative or secure labor market positions.

The Who, Why, and What of Working Learners

Who are these working learners of today, why do they work, and what are the conditions and impacts of their working and learning behaviors? I have developed and detailed below a consolidation of the extraordinarily diverse set of working and learning characteristics that emerge by compiling together a modest variety of sources but rely mainly on the comprehensive

and recent work of Carnevale & Smith (2015) and Carnevale & Smith (2018). Therefore, those should be the assumed sources for the detailed information presented in this section unless otherwise noted.

Across the board, working learners are slightly disproportionately women and the majority attend public two-year community colleges and are pursuing two- and four-year college degrees. Distance education is a fundamental component for working learners. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics' Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) prior to the pandemic reveals that in 2018, more than a third of all undergraduates were enrolled in distance education courses at degree-granting postsecondary institutions, with private for-profit institutions having the highest level of distance learning, at 73 percent, followed by public institutions at 34.1 percent (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Prior studies have consistently shown that the majority of online learners are post-traditional students balancing the competing demands of work, life, and college, many of whom are seeking to obtain more education for a better job or to change careers (Chen, Lambert & Guidry 2010; Clinefelter & Aslanian, 2015; Thompson, Miller & Pomykal Franz, 2013).

There are several ways to broadly divide the population of working learners, and two useful points of demarcation are income and age, and these boundaries are outlined in Table 1 below along with two other critical aspects added to consider when addressing how research can aim to inform a better understanding of this population – those working learners who finish degrees and those who do not, and the career-relevant work they engaged in while enrolled.

Regarding income, of the 14 million working learners, 43%, or 6 million, are considered *low-income*, defined as those with annual earnings at or below 200 percent of the poverty line ($23,540 for a single individual). These low-income working learners are more likely to have

Table 1: *Some key working learner characteristics*

Working Learner Population	Demographics/Characteristics	Outcomes
INCOME		
Lower income students	disproportionately Black, Latinx, Native; more likely to work full time and attend community colleges and for-profit colleges and enrolled in associates degrees or shorter term credentials; less likely to hold jobs relevant to their future career goals	low degree completion rates
Higher income students	disproportionately white and enrolled in bachelor's degree programs with jobs relevant to career goals	relatively higher completion rates
AGE		
Younger adult students (up to 29)	majority white, sales/office support and food/personal services, unmarried w/no dependents; majority in community colleges and pursuing academic transfer and business and applied majors, but more likely than mature to be in bachelor's degree programs, four-year colleges, social sciences, humanities, and sciences/math/agriculture	less than half of bachelor's degrees earn above $43K after degree completion (similar pattern with lower income for Associate's degrees).
Mature adult students (30-54)	majority white, in sales/office support and managerial, married, and have dependents; disproportionately Black; concentrated in community college Associates and certificate programs and for-profit colleges in technical programs pursuing business, health, and applied fields; many earning an additional postsecondary credential	60% of bachelor's degrees earn $60K or more after degree (similar pattern with lower income for Associate's degrees); obtain jobs post-degree that are more relevant to field of study.
RELEVANT WORK AND COMPLETION		
Students who do NOT complete a degree	disproportionately Black, Latinx, Native and lower income	higher debt and loan default rates
Students who complete degrees and have worked in jobs relevant to their field of study	disproportionately white and higher income	increased wages and career mobility and advancement

dependent children, and those who are unmarried with dependents are particularly likely to be considered low-income. They tend to enroll in certificate programs and attend either community colleges or for-profit colleges. These low-income working learners are, by a slight margin,

disproportionately Black and Latina/o/x (18 and 25% respectively) and women (58%). They are much more likely to be first-generation college students (47%) and those for whom English is not the primary language spoken at home, such as new citizens or residents of the United States.

Approximately one quarter to one-third earn only $7500 or less while enrolled, and only 1 out of 10 earn more than $42,000 while enrolled. Far more than half of working learners are employed in two main sectors of the labor market – sales and office support occupations (about a third) and food and personal services occupations (just over a quarter). Many working learners leave these often temporary or part-time jobs after completing their degree to acquire higher paying jobs. Only 10 percent or less of the working learner population is employed in blue collar, education, and managerial and other professional jobs, while even fewer (less than 5 percent) are employed in jobs in STEM, healthcare, technical support, and community and arts-based jobs.

Working while enrolled in college can result in clear benefits. Particularly, for those students who complete a degree, working while in college can yield many long-run advantages, especially if students work in a field directly related to their course of study. This is especially true for students with work experience relevant to their STEM, healthcare, business, or education bachelor's degrees, associate in applied science degrees, or their postsecondary vocational certificate (Bailey et al., 2015; Carnevale, 2012). Working learner completers, including those who participate in internships, and especially those who hold jobs relevant to their area of study, are more likely to advance professionally by shifting occupations or transitioning to managerial positions than workers who have not completed college degrees while working.

However, while considering these positive outcomes, it is important to keep in mind that income and degree completion remain tightly correlated. Among higher income working learner students, working is more likely to improve their future employment and earnings. This is

especially true for those working 15 to 20 hours a week or less. Higher-income students are more likely to have jobs directly related to their field of study or career goals, working at internships and apprenticeships to gain specific skills that benefit them when they seek jobs. Low-income working learners tend to work in jobs unrelated to their studies and not directly connected to their longer-term academic or professional goals.

Furthermore, it is absolutely crucial to recognize that working learners who do *not* earn a credential or degree can suffer severe consequences. Many are part of what Rosenbaum et al. (2015) refer to as "the new forgotten half" of community college students who enroll but do not complete degrees. Prior research has shown that, especially for online learners, who are disproportionately among working learners, community college, and for-profit students, work and life commitments and pressures are reflected in higher rates of non-completion (Meyer, 2014; Thompson et al., 2013). For a range of reasons, *low-income students working full time* while enrolled are the most disadvantaged group when it comes to credential and degree completion. They are disproportionately enrolled in the least resourced institutions and face a variety of family, poverty, health, and work-related challenges and instabilities, likely contributing to very low completion rates. Given the rising costs of postsecondary education, this lack of degree completion among low-income students, who are often employed in low-wage jobs, is highly problematic, since they tend to face excessive debt and financial loss, particularly those who enrolled in for-profit colleges, which have been legislatively targeted for the high loan default rates of their students. The problems faced by middle to low-income students who do not complete degrees in a higher education landscape marked by lack of affordability (Goldrick-Rab, 2016) cannot be overstated, especially those students who do not complete degrees at high cost for-profit institutions or at four-year public and private not-for-profit colleges and universities

and are saddled with tremendous debt (Hamilton & Nielsen, 2021), often re-entering higher education as community college students. Black students in particular have suffered the most when it comes to student loan debt (Jackson & Reynolds, 2013).

Distinguishing differences in the working learner populations by age, two main categories are pertinent. On the one hand, two-thirds of all working learners are 29 years old or younger, and these students are more likely to be pursuing Bachelor's degrees in four-year colleges in a wide variety of majors, including humanities, social sciences, business, and other applied fields. They are disproportionately white, 40% work full time, and only 20% have children. On the other hand, representing approximately one-third of all working learners are older undergraduate students who are at least 30 years of age and as old as their mid-50's (only very few over 55). Most of these "mature working learners" are what (Carnevale & Smith, 2015) refer to as "learning workers," experienced workers who are more established in the labor market and more commonly have a postsecondary credential but are attempting to acquire a new one in order to maintain their skills and position in their current occupations, professionally advance, or retrain for a new career. In other words, they are responding to the labor market demands to continuously require upgraded skills to adapt to new technologies and shifts in the organizing structures of occupations. They are more likely to pursue certificates or associate's degrees in healthcare, business, and other applied fields through enrollment in for-profit and community colleges. This older group of students is disproportionately Black, over 60% have children, and over three-quarters of them are working full-time. For these students who are financially independent working adults with relatively well-established adult financial responsibilities, their identity is one of workers who choose to enroll in college rather than college students who choose to work (Perna et al., 2007)

Mature working learners differ quite a bit from young working learners in other ways. They are nearly three times as likely to be employed in managerial and professional office positions, more likely to be in professional healthcare positions, and more or less half as likely to have jobs in food and personal services or sales and office support. Overall, half of mature working learners are employed in one of three career fields: sales and office support (20%), managerial occupations (17%), and education occupations (14%). For younger working learners, 60% are clustered in sales and office support (34%) and food and personal services (26%).

Whites make up the majority of both mature and young working learners at rates only slightly lower than their percentage in the general population, which is 64%. Latinx, Asian, and Native students generally seem to represent working learners at rates equivalent to their percentage in the overall population. However, Black students are disproportionately represented among mature working learners at 23%, whereas they constitute 12% of the general population. Family status differences are clearly relevant as well. Not surprisingly, mature working learners are much more likely to be married and have children. Most young working learners (60%) are single and do not have dependents, whereas it is nearly the exact opposite for mature working learners, for whom nearly two-thirds are married and nearly two-thirds have dependents, and nearly one in five are unmarried with dependents. However, it is still important to realize that nearly one in four mature working learners are unmarried with no dependents, and interestingly, approximately one third of young working learners are married, and only a very small fraction (4%) are unmarried with dependents.

It is noteworthy that the largest proportions of working learners as a whole are enrolled in community colleges – nearly two-thirds of mature and just less than one half of younger working learners. Differences exist by age in that more than half of younger working learners (56%) are

enrolled in bachelor's degree programs, whereas the largest proportion of mature working learners are enrolled in associate's degree and certificate programs, and over 80% are concentrated in community colleges (63% compared to 46% of younger) and for-profits (20% compared to 10% of younger). It is important to realize, however, that a substantial proportion of mature working learners, about a third, are pursuing bachelor's degrees, even if disproportionately doing so within for-profit institutions. Also, the proportion of working adults overall who are pursuing credentials that are either not in a formal degree program or in a less than two year institution is extremely small, and only a small minority are pursuing certificate programs, which means the vast majority of working learners are pursing two and four-year degrees.

Differences by age exist with regard to field of study and patterns of works and income. On the one hand, nearly 70 percent of financially independent young working learners earn less than $20,000 annually, with nearly two thirds working fewer than 30 hours per week (and about a third working less than 20 hours/week), and 85% of them who are classified as "dependents" are employed part-time. For mature working learners, on the other hand, the opposite is true. Almost two-thirds work 40 hours or more per week and the largest proportion, around 40%, earn $42,000 or more, and nearly three-quarters earn $20,000 or more. After degree completion, working learners with a Bachelor's degree in both age groups work in similar occupations and work similar number of hours, with over three-quarters working 40 or more hours per week. They are employed most frequently in managerial and professional occupations (22% for both groups) as well as sales and office support, education/training/library, and STEM occupations. While about 20 percent of all entering community college working learners report being employed in the same field as their program or intended major or career, over 40 percent of those

who are aged 30–49 report the same, meaning that the mature working learners are more likely to be employed in jobs relevant to their field of study (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2020).

In addition to understanding working learners in broad strokes by income and age, it is also instructive to consider some key details that signal the complexity of this phenomenon. To begin with, it is important to understand that this transformation of the undergraduate student population is not completely recent; it is five decades old with nearly identical trends and patterns across the last three decades. The prevalence of college student employment as well as the number of hours college students work per week steadily increased through the 1970's and 80's then remained consistent since the 1990's until now, with 70-80 percent working 30 hours per week on average, with between 30 and 40 percent of *all* enrolled college students employed full-time and one fifth of *full-time* college students employed full-time.

The question of precisely why college students work while enrolled is also important to consider more carefully. The simple assumption that students work to pay for college provides only a small explanatory piece of a much larger and complex picture. There are a multiplicity of intersecting reasons for why students work while enrolled, including to pay tuition and other education expenses. However, working learners also prioritize gaining or maintaining valued occupational skills, building or enhancing their professional network, and exposing themselves to experiences that complement and reinforce classroom learning.

Deciphering the complicated relationship between financial aid and working while enrolled is an area where further research is needed to provide more clarity regarding the variety of different financing strategies students use to combine financial aid in the form of grants, student loans, working, and enrollment. For example, family wealth and income do not

necessarily predict who works and who doesn't. Close to three-quarters of financially dependent students from families with incomes over $90,000 also work while enrolled. Yes, they tend not to work full time, but about a third do work more than 20 hours per week (King, 2006). Community college students are more likely to choose to work while foregoing loans, and full-time students, regardless of the type of institution they attend, are more likely to borrow to pay for college (Cuccaro-Alamin & Choy, 1998). However, it seems that students tend to combine financial aid and working as a strategy whether that aid is in the form of grants or loans. As might be expected, how much students work tends to be related to financial aid in that students who receive financial aid work less than those not receiving aid, and those who take out student loans work the least. Overall, nearly one in five students who receive financial aid grants and loans still work full-time (Horn & Berktold, 1998), but more recent data and analyses on this topic are needed.

Rethinking Policy and Practice: Future Research Directions

Given the extreme diversity of today's working learners and their persisting and growing presence among undergraduates, some of the most pivotal directions for future research revolve around *identifying where federal and state policy and employer and postsecondary institutional practice converge to impact distinct subpopulations of these learners*.

In the past, federal policies as far back as the Morrill Act of 1862 and 1890, the Smith-Lever Acts, and other examples such as the National Apprenticeship Act of 1957, the Higher Education Act of 1965 which established Pell Grants, the various HEA re-authorizations, general federal financial aid policies, the 1944 G.I. Bill and subsequent legislation to assist U.S. military veterans, government subsidized training programs, and the School-to-Work Opportunities Act

of 1994, gainful employment regulations, as well as a range of fair labor and minimum wage laws have intervened to either encourage, reinforce, or disrupt how postsecondary institutions and employers engage with working learners, and in turn, how postsecondary institutions and employers engage with each other at each nexus where higher education and the labor market intersect. The interrelatedness of economic and civic issues with higher education policies and practice has been salient throughout our nation's history, particularly regarding the sovereignty of Native nations and the acquisition of Native lands to establish land grant institutions, immigration, racial and civil rights, and anti-poverty legislation and programs.

Higher education institutions have acted and reacted to a civic, economic, and financial context in the United States that always has and continues to be racialized in other ways. For instance, Cole (2020) details how, from 1948 to 1968, white university presidents strategically initiated and shaped racial policies and practices internal and external to the higher educational sphere itself. In one example, they lobbied for urban renewal programs that displaced Black communities near urban campuses. White men who controlled decision-making at this time intentionally decided to open doors to poor and racialized populations through a purposefully planned expansion at the bottom of the postsecondary institutional hierarchy rather than creating more space at the top to facilitate upward mobility. "Master plans" were enacted to expand two-year public colleges to protect and preserve elite white academic spaces and institutional selectivity of (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Dougherty, 1994) while working class white populations and students of color, including veterans, clamored for more access. The recent shift in higher education toward working learners is no exception when it comes to how general policies impact racialized and poor populations. Some of the most recent policies, such as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education

Act of 2006, America's College Promise Act of 2015, and the 2020 and 2021 pandemic-related legislation to support higher education institutions and students as well as workers and the unemployed need to be further researched to better understand their impact on the experiences and outcomes of working learners.

Another related fruitful area of examination is the increased procedural complexity and surveillance of poor students' financial aid subsidies through practices like verification, disbursement timelines, and caps on the length of time and number of credits for which federal financial aid can be used (Campbell, Deil-Amen & Rios-Aguilar, 2015) have had implications for working learners for the past decades that have been understudied. Public funding for higher education, particularly the share of state taxes allocated, has declined precisely as more Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other students of color have constituted a higher proportion of the student population (Rios-Aguilar & Deil-Amen, 2019; Hamilton & Nielsen, 2021), and this has racialized implications for working learners. Policies operating at this macro level need to be interrogated, as they have direct and immediate impact for students navigating their way through various postsecondary spaces, especially for low-income students working full time. Approximately two-thirds of community college students report that working full time or lack of finances could cause them to withdraw from college (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2020).

At my own institution – the University of Arizona – the financial aid procedural complexity and administrative hurdles faced by community college transfer students and Native American students receiving some form of Tribal aid are especially striking. For transfer students (disproportionately Black and brown, first-generation, and low-income) who are pursuing a STEM pathway, the application of articulation agreements to STEM majors combined with how

financial aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress policies intersect to encourage fear and flight (Haeger & Deil-Amen, 2016) is another crucial example of where research needs to address how macro- and meso-level policy implementation influences the micro-level experiences, behaviors, and decisions of students, particularly those who are more likely to be working learners, such as disproportionately BIPOC community college and transfer students. Given that student workers are just as likely to have student loan debt (slightly over 40% of them) as students who do not work, and a third of them have debt over $25,000 (Carnevale & Smith, 2015), research on the intersection of financial aid and working is a crucial next step

Better understanding such specific challenges faced by low-income working learners of this type and how they differ from higher SES and other working learner students with other types of privileges, such as those who have access to G.I. Bill or employer-based tuition assistance, is a key area for research agendas. Even within those populations, the balance of privilege and disadvantage is not well understood, especially how it gets enacted for poor and/or Black and Latinx and economically marginalized students whose aid is often exploited in various institutional spaces, such as for-profit colleges whose high cost is not justified by students' poor job outcomes (Cottom, 2017; Dache-Gerbino, Kiyama & Sapp, 2018). Additionally, too little research has explored the relationship between working and military connected students, a population with high rates of work behavior yet extreme diversity in terms of their income while enrolled and their risk factors when are disaggregated to distinguish between National Guard members, reservists, active duty personnel, and veterans (Molina & Morse, 2015). Generally, as highlighted earlier in this brief, distinctions by age and income as they play out within and between other aspects of diversity, such as race, gender, and institution type, should be carefully considered in teasing out the circumstances and conditions facing working learners. Teasing out

the extent to which working learners are among the group we know not enough about, those with 'some college' but no degree (Carnevale et al., 2020; Rosenbaum et al., 2015), and the nature of that experience and how policies perhaps unintentionally impact them is a key direction for future research.

Part of this effort should be a serious consideration of incorporating competency-based higher education in a legitimate *credit-bearing* way into a context in which 'seat time' has dominated the structure by which higher education credentials are awarded. The move toward a "career pathways model" (Schulte et al., 2017) reflects such ideological shifts and centers access and flexibility over tradition. Additionally, since working learners prioritize employment outcomes in their purpose for pursing a higher education degree, better career counseling and stronger ties between higher education and employment for students across all majors should be cultivated to facilitate transition to careers. Both of these changes are noted by Carnevale and Smith (2015) and supported by the American Council on Education (Soares, Gagliardi & Nellum, 2017; Soares, 2013). Such transformations challenge a system of higher education that has up to this point primarily advantaged privileged groups, many of whom rely on cultural capital and parent and other established social networks to reproduce their advantage in the transition through college and into professional careers (Hamilton, 2016).

Finally, the dominant models focusing on involvement, engagement, and integration for understanding what keeps students persisting to degree (Astin, 1984; Kuh, 2008; Melguizo, 2011) are overly biased toward a form of college-going that centers the traditional-aged residential four-year college student and marginalizes post-traditional populations, including those who are of non-traditional age, part of racially minoritized populations, have family and other financial obligations and pressures, are not first-time postsecondary students or degree

recipients, are incarcerated, commute to two or four-year colleges, attend online, and/or work full or nearly full-time (Braxton, Hirschy & McClendon, 2004; Deil-Amen, 2011; Lange & Stewart, 2019; Stuart, Rios-Aguilar & Deil-Amen, 2014; Tillapaugh, 2019). In particular, and especially since the recent pandemic forced online and remote learning into dominant status, systematic data on the exact percentages and modes of instruction currently in use specifically among working learners and their experiences in those spaces is scarce. Investment in such research specifically on working learners is needed to supplement the research being done about engagement generally in online and blended model spaces to identify patterns, disparities, and inequities (Paulsen & McCormick, 2020).

The growing popularity of culturally responsive and funds of knowledge informed approaches in higher education are inherently student-centered, asset-based, and relevant to students' cultures and lives. Several examples exist on how college faculty can use non-deficit approaches such as funds of knowledge and community cultural wealth (Mora & Rios-Aguilar, 2018; Solórzano, Huerta & Giraldo, 2018) to rethink career and technical education and to help other marginalized students succeed academically (Kiyama & Rios-Aguilar, 2017). There is no reason why defining what constitutes culture and community based on culturally responsive and sustaining paradigms (Paris & Alim, 2017) should not include students' work settings. Such approaches are fundamentally compatible with the idea of integrating employment/career and academic content more seamlessly into all postsecondary instructional spaces (Neri, 2017). Beyond the classroom and pedagogical/andragogical approaches, research conducted by the Center for Community College Student Engagement (2020) suggests that staff support for navigating the challenges of working while learning should be centered, including adequate advising available to help students decide how to balance the number of classes they take with

their employment demands and for helping students develop deep relationships, which have been found to matter. Since entering students who work are less engaged when they face challenges with course scheduling and course offerings, research needs to assist colleges to determine how they can make adjustments to policy and practice to meet more working students' needs.

Future research should continue to move beyond the dichotomous and binary thinking that defines traditional academics as incompatible with applied knowledge, in a way that reflects the growing "career pathways" (Schulte et al., 2017) and other similar frameworks that have been floating among scholars and administrators invested in continuing education efforts for the past several decades. Model building along these lines among researchers could attempt to create a structural and institutional foundation for systemically connecting academic credits, credentials, and work experience across the learner continuum for each student worker.

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