THE COMPLETION CRISIS: What Students Have to Say

We’ve heard the data: Only 4 in 10 young Americans earn a higher education credential by the time they are 25. We’re in a completion crisis, but what do students have to say about what would work? (Public Agenda spoke to our nation’s young adults—both those who have completed college and those in the non-completion pipeline) about the value of higher education, the barriers they have faced, and what would help them overcome these barriers.

REALITIES OF NON-COMPLETERS

7 in 10 don’t know what FAFSA is.

3 in 10 have loans to pay off.

only 27% say their loans were a good investment. No one said they were an excellent investment.

only 36% think it’s very likely they’ll be financially secure in their lifetime.

just over 50% think they need a higher degree than the one they have for their careers.

TOP REASONS STUDENTS SAY THEY DIDN’T COMPLETE COLLEGE

71% I needed to work and make money.

41% I didn’t have enough time for my family.

34% Some of the classes were too difficult.

STUDENTS TELL US WHAT WOULD HELP IN OBTAINING A COLLEGE DEGREE

Completers

1. Allow part-time students to qualify for financial aid.

2. Cut the cost of attending by 25 percent.

3. Have more programs for hands-on learning, apprenticeship and non-classroom work.

4. Learn good study habits in high school to prepare for college work.

5. Allow part-time students to qualify for financial aid.

Non-Completers

1. Offer more courses in the evenings, on weekends or in the summer so people can work while attending school.

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3. Have the government offer more college loans.

4. Cut the cost of attending by 25 percent.

5. Provide day care for students who need it.

STUDENT VOICES

For many young adults, Community College is the only feasible pathway to the American Dream. By according to the American Association of Community Colleges, less than half of community college students graduate or transfer within six years. We interviewed community college students and asked what they said would help in the pathway to completion. Here are some of their stories:

1. "You need someone who actually has a connection to the real-world experience. I mean, I know what I should do, but I didn’t know how to apply it to my college path."

2. "I think it’s really hard for people when they’re in and out of work and there’s no goal in mind to even continue to go, because you’re just probably going to get really frustrated and want to drop-out."

3. "If this information was easier to get to, and I knew sooner who to talk to, I might not have had to drop out and I might have been further along by this point."

4. "I think it still depends on it. You have that one person, that one advisor who actually cares about their job and seeing someone improve."

5. "I paid for four classes that are not going to go toward my degree. That kind of like, ‘Oh, my god, what are these people doing?’"