

UNIVERSITY OF PHOENIX WORKING LEARNER SPOTLIGHTS

EXTRAORDINARY COMMITMENT

**CHALLENGES AND
ACHIEVEMENTS
OF TODAY'S
WORKING LEARNER**

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Extraordinary Commitment: Challenges and Achievements of Today's Working Learner
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The University of Phoenix Knowledge Network produces publications on University of Phoenix working learners and the larger nontraditional student population they represent. With over 30 years of experience as an innovator and leader in higher education for working adults, the University of Phoenix occupies a unique position to publish real-life stories of working learners' challenges and accomplishments and to share best practices for serving this large and growing population. By presenting facts, figures, and students' perspectives, the University of Phoenix Knowledge Network promotes a deeper understanding of how working learners contribute to the workforce and society.

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Challenges and Achievements of Today's Working Learner

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FOREWORD

*By William Pepicello, Ph.D.
President, University of Phoenix*

In many ways, our country's foundation was built on a commitment to education. As each generation becomes more educated than the prior one, increased opportunities emerge in business, health care, the arts, academia, and countless other jobs and professions. With these advancements, our economy grows and our citizens prosper.

We are facing new challenges that make obtaining a college degree more important today than ever before. Global competition, technological advancement, and our country's shift toward a more service-oriented economy are among the factors that compel citizens to become more educated. These new realities of our global economy have been recognized by policymakers across the political spectrum. Higher education has taken center stage as President Barack Obama has set a goal for America once again to have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020 because, in his words, "countries that out-educate us today will out-compete us tomorrow."

Achieving these goals and becoming more competitive will require innovative approaches and educational policies that facilitate access and opportunity for students other than those we think of as "traditional." Students who go directly from high school into college, live on campus, and are financially dependent on their parents are in the minority, making up only 27% of undergraduates today, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. The majority of higher-education students today are in fact nontraditional working learners. These students have full-time jobs. They are parents, spouses, caregivers, and active members of the military. As adults with myriad responsibilities and demands on their time, working learners require an innovative kind of educational model—one that emphasizes quality, flexibility, support, and practicality.

These students are the future of higher education in America. Whether attending a community college, a college that offers a flexible blend of online and on-campus courses, or a part-time program at a traditional university, these students know and value the importance of higher education. They understand that education is the pathway to advancement and prosperity.

The books in this series provide background information and insights on working learners. As we consider educational policy options and alternatives, we must understand and recognize the needs and importance of this group. As a nation, we bear responsibility to provide working learners with educational program options that enable progress toward a degree even in challenging life circumstances. In return, working learners promote the nation's productivity and prosperity by advancing themselves and their families, organizations, and communities.

Phoenix, Arizona
September, 2010



1

The Next-Generation Learner

Today's College

Student Is Most Likely

a Working Adult

Say the words “college student,” and most people envision an 18- to 22-year-old who lives in a dorm room, crams for classes in the library, attends parties on the weekends, and turns to Mom and Dad for spending money. Yet “traditional” college-goers like these make up only 27% of students enrolled in higher education. The vast majority of today’s college students—a full 73%—are working adults.¹

Working learners—also called next-generation students or 21st-century students—are adults older than 23 who work part- or full-time while attending classes. This population is large and extremely diverse. Some working learners have never attended college before or have only taken a few classes, while others are pursuing advanced degrees. Some working learners are looking to move out of low-paying jobs in the service sector, while others want to move up the career ladder within their chosen field. Some are unmarried, some are parents of young children, and some are empty-nesters.

One way institutions of higher education can help the nation boost graduation rates is by paying more attention to the population that makes up the majority of today’s students—working learners.

Working learners may be in their mid- to late 20s, their 30s, their 40s, or even beyond. They come from all ethnic groups and income levels. Their professions run the gamut from nursing to manufacturing, from the military to business, from education to criminal justice and many other fields. All the members of this vast, heterogeneous group have one trait in common: They are not being adequately served by an educational system designed for the 18- to 22-year-old residential student.

President Barack Obama—observing that the United States has fallen from first to 12th place among the world’s top 36 developed nations for its college graduation rates—has set a goal to raise U.S. graduation rates to 60% by 2020.² To meet that goal, an additional 8 million students would need to earn college degrees over the next decade.³ One way higher-education institutions can help the nation boost graduation rates is by paying more attention to the population that makes up the majority of today’s students—working learners.

The purpose of this publication is to shed greater light on the vital yet often overlooked “nontraditional” segment of the American student body. Through facts, figures, and profiles of real-life working learners, this book presents both a broad overview and close-up glimpses of the everyday lives of these students. The book aims to reveal the obstacles these students face when pursuing higher education, the successes they enjoy, and the many ways they contribute to the workforce and society as a whole.

Working Learners Face Many Obstacles on the Path to a Degree

The most pressing challenge faced by working learners of all types and across all degree programs is time management. These students lead extraordinarily full lives. All of them work—many full-time—and most have children to raise, spouses or significant others to support, and other commitments, such as volunteering and eldercare responsibilities. The traditional scheduling of classes during weekdays and over the course of months-long semesters prevents many working learners from attending traditional colleges and universities because these students cannot afford to take time off from work or pay for childcare to attend classes. Beyond time-management issues, working learners face additional problems depending on their socioeconomic status, career goals, and education level. Following is an overview of a few key subsets of working learners. More details on each group are included in later chapters.

First-generation students. Many working learners are the first in their family to pursue higher education. Often these first-generation students emerge from backgrounds marked by low socioeconomic status and poor K-12 schooling. Many are minorities, especially African Americans and Latinos, and some are immigrants or the children of immigrants. The majority of first-generation students are women, and many are parents. Before obtaining their degrees, most first-generation students work in low-paying job fields.

First-generation students often lack information about how to enroll in college and apply for financial aid, and may need guidance about these procedures. These nontraditional students may also need to learn such vital skills as time management, studying, researching, and writing complex papers.

Reentry students. Many students drop out of college—and not only for academic reasons. Life events, such as having children, becoming sick or injured, needing to care for family

members, and having to work to support oneself or family, can interrupt a student's education. Many adult students are reentry or returning students who have reached a stable point in their lives and want to complete the degree program they started years before. These students may be nervous about returning to school after an extended absence and may require extra emotional support. They may also need some remediation to refresh their academic skills.

Professionals in search of career advancement. Not all working learners are new to higher education. Many already possess a degree but need additional education to progress to the next stage of their career. A licensed practical nurse, for example, may seek to improve her job prospects and salary by earning a bachelor's of science degree in nursing; an executive may pursue an MBA to be eligible for higher management positions. These students are pragmatic: They want to graduate within a reasonable time and immediately apply their learning to the job.

Career changers. Other working learners want to change job fields entirely. Military personnel, for example, may retire from the armed forces fairly young and seek careers in the civilian world. Other students may seek a master's degree in education so they can enter the teaching field. These students value degree programs that are timely, focused, and practical.

Researchers. A small but influential subset of working learners return to school to perform research at the doctoral level. These students are typically highly placed executives who have identified an organizational or societal problem to investigate using scholarly methods. Upon receiving their degrees, many give back to their employers or society by solving corporate or social problems, founding businesses or nonprofits, teaching, or continuing their career as researchers. As committed professionals who often have families to support, these students do not want to take time off from their jobs to complete a doctoral program.



How Colleges and Universities Can Meet the Needs of Working Learners

To best serve the working-learner population, colleges and universities need to rethink many of their educational processes. University of Phoenix, founded in 1978 as a university for working adults, is now the nation’s largest educator of working learners. Some of its best practices include:

Making classes accessible by scheduling short, intensive courses on a “rolling” basis.

Most University of Phoenix courses last five to nine weeks, and students generally enroll in one or two classes at a time. The classes are very focused and accelerated, covering a semester’s worth of content in about half the time. Students find the classes rigorous and challenging, but enjoy being able to focus on one subject at a time. Short classes mean students can complete degree programs efficiently. With shorter courses, the University can schedule many more iterations of the same class throughout the school year. Under this system, students do not have to wait half a year or more for a needed course to be offered, as they would at a traditional institution.

Providing students options by offering courses in on-campus, online, and hybrid formats.

Online classes allow students to complete coursework at a convenient time and place, whether during a lunch break or at night after household and parenting activities.

Students can take classes from home, spend more time with their families, and avoid lengthy commutes and extra childcare costs. Some students prefer face-to-face contact with classmates and faculty. On-campus classes or hybrid classes with both on-campus and online components are a better fit for these students.

Employing practitioner faculty. University of Phoenix requires its faculty members to have at least a master’s degree and substantial work experience in the field in which they teach. Many have doctoral degrees as well. These practitioner faculty bring real-world experience into the classroom and illustrate theories with examples from their careers. Practitioner faculty can serve as career role models for pragmatic working learners and assure students that their education will prove useful on the job.

Increasing support services and training staff to better serve working learners. Many working learners, especially those with little or no college experience, need help with the procedures and policies involved in attending college, such as enrolling, scheduling classes, and applying for financial aid. Working learners may be anxious about entering or reentering school, and may doubt their academic abilities. These learners can benefit from the support of a college or university representative, such as an academic counselor or a caring faculty member.

Support staff can make all the difference in a student’s decision to complete a degree or drop out. Working learners especially need to feel that someone cares about them and that they are “not just a number.” University of Phoenix academic advisors are trained to be proactive and make frequent contact with students, particularly when students experience academic difficulties. Time and again, working learners report that the prompt intervention of an advisor reinforced their commitment to stay in school and complete their studies.

Hiring faculty who are caring and approachable. Like support staff, faculty members can also provide a college or university with a “human” face. Working learners—like traditional students—now expect faculty to be available by email, instant messenger, or phone outside of class. University of Phoenix faculty are aware that nontraditional students may have more anxiety about their studies and may require more reassurance than traditional students. Because University of Phoenix faculty are also practitioners in their fields, student-faculty interaction often takes place in the evenings and on weekends, when working learners have more time to devote to their studies.

Educating Working Learners Means Providing for Our Nation's Future

Meeting the needs of the vast population of working learners is a critical challenge for higher-education institutions. Educating the working learner is vital to America's economic productivity and competitiveness, both at home and abroad. The American workforce faces a skills gap in the near future as baby boomers—the most educated generation in U.S. history—are retiring without enough educated younger workers to take their place.

Now more than ever, having a college degree is a prerequisite to securing a well-paying, stable job. Job sectors that once accepted workers with only a high-school diploma or associate's degree—such as manufacturing, health care, and law enforcement—now increasingly require applicants to hold at least a bachelor's degree. Working learners understand just how crucial a degree is for professional success. Many hold minimum-wage jobs in the retail and service sectors and hope, through education, to lift themselves and their families out of poverty.

Now, more than ever, having a college degree is a prerequisite to securing a well-paying, stable job. Job sectors that once accepted workers with only a high-school diploma or associate's degree now increasingly want applicants to hold at least a bachelor's degree.

An educated citizenry is also a more productive citizenry. Earning a degree improves students' critical thinking skills, resulting in smarter workers, parents, and voters. Education has been shown to come with a variety of ancillary benefits, such as improved health and quality of life. People with college degrees are less likely to divorce and commit crimes, and more likely to exercise, volunteer, and prepare their children well for K-12 schooling.

Education is an investment in our country's future. Increasing access to education for working adults is an investment proven to yield substantial, enduring rewards for individuals, organizations, communities, and society at large. This book promotes deeper understanding and respect for the value of that investment.

- 1 National Center for Education Statistics. (2002). *Special analysis 2002: Non-Traditional Undergraduates*. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2002/analyses/nontraditional/index.asp>
- 2 CNN Newswire. (2010, August 9). Obama touts education goals in speech at the University of Texas. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2010/POLITICS/08/09/obama.education/index.html>
- 3 CNN Newswire.



2

America's Workforce in Transition

The Crucial Role of
the Working Learner

America's workforce stands at a crossroads. Baby boomers—the most educated generation in American history—have reached retirement age. Yet not nearly enough educated younger workers stand ready to replace them. According to Deloitte & Touche USA, by 2012 the United States will have a 6-million-person gap between the number of students graduating from universities and the number of workers needed to replace retirees and cover job growth.¹

The immensity of the problem will require both public and private higher-education institutions to attract a large contingent of talented, hard-working individuals who want to better themselves but cannot participate in traditional degree programs due to professional and personal responsibilities. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, only 27% of undergraduates today are traditional students—those who go directly from high school to college, live on campus, and are financially dependent on their parents. The other 73% are nontraditional students, who now make up the vast majority of college enrollment.

Adults represent a vast segment of the population that higher education has yet to accommodate. Currently, more than half of American adults do not hold a college degree.² Forty million American adults have some college credit, but have not completed a degree program.³ Unless nontraditional students gain broader access to higher education, the nation cannot achieve the goal of having the highest proportion of college graduates in the world.

HELP WANTED: REGISTERED NURSES

The nursing profession is looking for a shot in the arm. The American Health Care Association reports that more than 135,000 registered nurse (RN) vacancies exist in the United States, a national RN vacancy rate of 8.1%.⁴ This shortage is expected to grow to 260,000 by 2025.⁵ Compounding the problem is the fact that many RNs are in their 40s and 50s and will retire fairly soon. In 2012, the average age of an RN will be 44.5.⁶ In a nursing management survey, 55% of nurses said they planned to retire between 2011 and 2020.⁷

Not Enough College Graduates to Close the Skills Gap

One of the leading problems in higher education today is low graduation rates. Over the past decade, only 57% of first-time undergraduates attending a four-year institution full-time completed their bachelor's degrees or the equivalent in six years or less. With low college-completion rates and a large percentage of American adults without college degrees, the nation's workforce is in peril. Higher percentages of adults need to return to college and complete their education to position America's workforce for the years ahead.

Rapid Changes in Technology Mean Workers Need More Skills

Twenty-first century technology is changing so rapidly that employees need to be flexible, computer-savvy, and always willing to update their skills. Education can invest workers with both the skills to operate today's technology and the critical thinking and research abilities to keep their knowledge base up-to-date.

Twenty-first century workers can expect a fast-paced, ever-changing work environment and a constantly evolving demand for new skills, new knowledge, and new ideas.

While the Industrial Revolution lasted over a century, and the scientific developments of the 1950s evolved over a generation, innovations today proliferate at an increasingly rapid pace, and technologies quickly become superseded. In the 1990s, improvements in the power of computer hardware and software, coupled with access to the World Wide Web, revolutionized the importance of computers in everyday life. Computers have become an essential part of every industry, and digital technologies are having an enormous impact on the world market. The service economy has now become an information economy. New products and services—and the new business and financial structures that support them—require workers capable of inventing, selling, and repairing new technologies and teaching people to use them.

Technology evolves so fast that future job-skills requirements are difficult to predict. However, it no longer seems likely that most employees will remain with the same company, or even with the same industry, for their entire career. Twenty-first century workers can

expect a fast-paced, ever-changing work environment and a constantly evolving demand for new skills, new knowledge, and new ideas.

Education Is Key to Raising One's Standard of Living

Education is crucial to the nation's economic productivity. Without a college degree, Americans have fewer opportunities to land a well-paying job and reach a state of economic security. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that people with college degrees can now expect on average to earn almost twice as much in their working lives as those with only high-school diplomas, while people with professional degrees can expect on average to earn more than twice as much as those with only college degrees.⁸ As the manufacturing sector continues to shrink, there will be fewer and fewer jobs for people with only high-school diplomas, and the income gaps will likely widen.

College graduates have much higher earnings over their lifespan, even though they start earning a few years later than those with only a high-school diploma. According to a Bureau of Labor Statistics report released in October 2009, the average wage for college graduates ages 25 and older is \$1,026 per week, compared with only \$621 per week for high-school graduates.⁹ The earnings difference between college graduates and high-school graduates over a lifetime has been estimated at \$1,512,942.

DEGREE	EXPECTED LIFETIME EARNINGS
High school	\$ 1.2 million
Associate's	\$ 1.6 million
Bachelor's	\$ 2.1 million

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

College graduates have much higher earnings over their lifespan, even though they start earning a few years later than those with only a high-school diploma.



Technology Enables Working Learners to Obtain Degrees

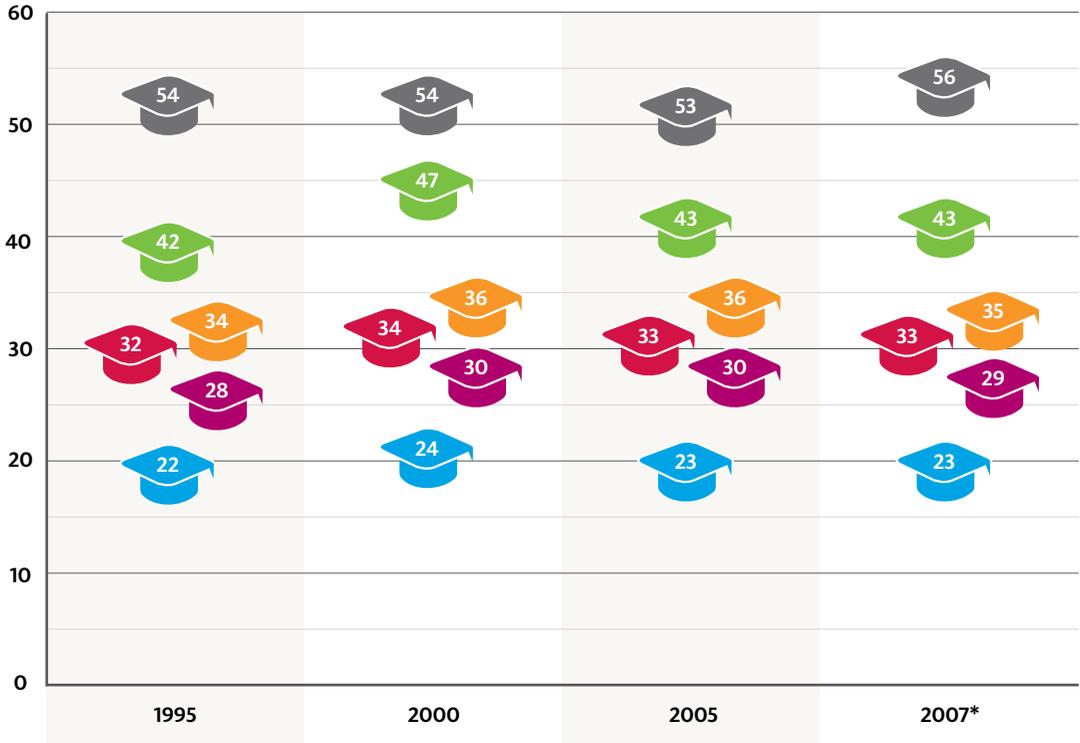
Work and family obligations often make it difficult for adult students to schedule and attend classes. Breakthroughs in technology, however, have expanded educational access for working learners. New technology in conferencing and information transfer allows students to attend college classes from any location and at times that suit their busy schedules. Distance-learning universities and flexible university programs have allowed people from all walks of life to earn college degrees, change careers, and earn advanced degrees without stopping work or moving their families to new locations.

The Typical 21st-Century Student Is a Working Adult with a Family

The face of adult students in higher education has changed dramatically over the past few decades. In the 1960s the average student returning to college was a middle-class Caucasian housewife in her mid-30s seeking a degree in a traditionally female-dominated field.¹⁰ Today's adult students are much more diverse in terms of race, class, and career goals. Many of these students are minorities, and a sizable percentage are women. At University of Phoenix, for instance, 27.5% of bachelor's degree students in 2008 were African American, while 15.7% were Hispanic.¹¹ More than 65% of these students were female, and 25.9% of them earned less than \$20,000 a year.¹²

Starting Salary in Thousands of Dollars

A DEGREE'S WORTH



Over the course of a lifetime, projected income of college graduates is \$500,000 to \$1 million higher than that of high-school graduates.

*2007 is the most recent year for which data are available.



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 2009.

The very traits that characterize students as “nontraditional” often make it harder for them to earn college degrees. The Department of Education has identified the following risk factors for dropping out of a college or university: enrolling part-time, delaying entry into postsecondary education, holding a GED instead of a high-school diploma, having children, being a single parent, being financially self-supporting, and working full-time while enrolled in school.¹³ Educators need to be aware of these risk factors to be able to provide this population with effective pathways to academic success.

- 1 National Association of Manufacturers (2007). *Women in Manufacturing*.
- 2 Bureau of Labor Statistics (2009).
- 3 Bureau of Labor Statistics (2009).
- 4 American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2009). Nursing shortage fact sheet. Retrieved from <http://www.lchc.org/research/documents/NrsgShortageFS.pdf>
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- 6 American Association of Colleges of Nursing.
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- 10 Thomas, V. G. (2001). Educational experiences and transitions of reentry college women: Special considerations for African American female students. *Journal of Negro Education*, 70(3), 139–55.
- 11 University of Phoenix Research. (2009). Student Registration Survey (of those reporting) and Student Administrative Database.
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3

The 21st-Century Student

Today's Working Learners
Are a Diverse Population

Today's adult students are much more diverse than those of previous generations in terms of race, class, and career goals. They bring a variety of life and work experiences to their educational processes. The challenges today's working learners may face include scheduling courses around a full-time job, caring for children or elderly family members, and finding ways to spend sufficient time with a spouse or significant other. While some are middle-class professionals looking to climb the corporate ladder or former military personnel transitioning to the civilian workforce, other working learners emerge from underprivileged backgrounds. Many must contend with such complications as low socio-economic status, discrimination, lack of information about college admissions, and inadequate preparation for college-level academics.

Many Working Learners Are Also Working Mothers

Women, with or without children, comprise the majority of today's adult students. University of Phoenix 2009 enrollment data, for example, reveal that only 32.5% of enrolled students are men. Of the 67.5% of students who are women, 10.5% are married; 19% are single with no children; and 38% are single with children. This trend is growing. In 2005, 40.6% of University of Phoenix students were men and 59.6% were women. Of those female students in 2005, 10.8% were married, 22.5% were single with no children, and 26.1% were single with children.

Today's working learners are also:

- Parents and spouses
- First-generation collegians
- Students who can only attend part-time
- Stop-outs: students, often women, whose education was interrupted
- Students with GEDs
- Veterans who joined the military immediately after high school
- Economically disenfranchised students
- Students who are financially self-supporting

Trends in Enrollment at University of Phoenix: More Females, Fewer Males Are Enrolling

2009



Males
32.5%



Females
67.5%



Married
10.5%



Single,
with children
38.0%



Single,
no children
19.0%

2005



Males
40.6%



Females
59.6%



Married
10.8%



Single,
with children
26.1%



Single,
no children
22.5%

Source: Apollo Research, 2009

Working Learners Are Ethnically Diverse

Minorities are underrepresented in America's colleges and universities. In 2005, only 17% of African American adults ages 25 to 29 had obtained a college degree, compared to 33% of white young adults and 61% of Asian young adults who received degrees that year.¹ In addition, more than 14% of African Americans are high-school dropouts, compared with 6% of whites.

Many African Americans and Latinos are choosing to return to school to complete their degrees. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the number of 10th-graders of all races and ethnicities who said they hope to earn a bachelor's degree or higher doubled, from 40% in 1980 to 80% in 2002.² Educational aspirations rose the most among low-income students. In the last four decades, many minority students have continued their education beyond the bachelor's degree. Between 1976 and 2007, total graduate enrollment rose for each racial and ethnic group.³

DENISE WASHINGTON

Education as Self-Transformation

Denise Washington, age 55, is an example of a minority student who beat the odds by pursuing a college education. As a single mother who was working three jobs to make ends meet, Washington enrolled in Kellogg Community College in Battle Creek, Michigan, with plans to receive an associate's degree in accounting. She had to walk up to four miles from her home to school and back. Her family did not understand her desire to get an education and believed that she was wasting her time.

“When I began educating myself, I started loving myself. I went from having no self-esteem to believing I can do anything. Education is a privilege.”

Washington says that when a minority, especially a black woman, begins educating herself, she often jeopardizes her relationship with her partner and others around her. “I’ve had to walk away from a lot of friends, relationships, even family, because they just don’t understand,” she says. “They cannot understand why you sacrifice, why you go through all that you go through just to educate yourself because [they think] society won’t allow you to succeed anyway.”

But Washington persevered. She earned a bachelor's in accounting and business administration from Siena Heights University, graduating *cum laude*, then earned her master's degree from Siena, *summa cum laude*, with a thesis on the restructuring of the income tax collection system. In December 2006, she enrolled in the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) program at University of Phoenix and began research for her dissertation on employers' perceptions of what graduates contribute to their organizations. "When I began educating myself, I started loving myself. I went from having no self-esteem to believing I can do anything," says Washington today. "Education is a privilege."

New Forms of Education Reach the Underserved Latino Population

Members of the Hispanic community make up a rapidly growing segment of the working learner population. The Hispanic population in the United States is exploding, comprising 15% of the population and surpassing the African American population to become the largest minority group in the nation;⁴ the Latino population is expected to double in the next four decades.⁵ Many members of this demographic, especially Latino women, are poised to replace baby boomers in the workforce in the coming decades. To do so, they will need the proper education.

Currently, Hispanics lag behind other ethnic groups in attainment of high-school, college, and postgraduate degrees;⁶ Hispanic women, in particular, are increasingly choosing to pursue advanced degrees. Between 1995 and 2005, the number of Hispanic women enrolled in college grew by 73.7%,⁷ while enrollments of Hispanic men increased by 55.6%.⁸

University of Phoenix is one of the largest single university systems serving the Hispanic community, with almost 40,000 Latino students enrolled in its degree programs. Hispanic students make up 12.6% of University of Phoenix students—well above the national average. Seventy-eight percent of Hispanic students at University of Phoenix are women.

Hispanic women, in particular, face many challenges while pursuing their degrees. Most are nontraditional students who attend classes part-time while working full-time and raising children. Hispanic women often come from backgrounds marked by poverty and inadequate schooling. Family is crucial to these women, who often view their responsibilities to their families as more important than earning a degree.

Education dramatically improves a Hispanic woman's chances of climbing the socioeconomic ladder: Hispanic women with bachelor's degrees report earning 82% more than those with only a high-school diploma.⁹ At present, Hispanic women are disproportionately represented in low-paying fields such as service, sales, and administrative support.¹⁰ Earning postgraduate degrees will provide these women the opportunity to move into managerial roles and professional fields where they are now underrepresented. The following profiles highlight two Hispanic women's success stories.

OLIVIA LEYVA CASTRO

Cultivating Education for the Future

First-generation college student Olivia Leyva Castro can attest to how much an education can mean to a Hispanic woman. Her parents immigrated from Mexico in 1955 "with only the clothes and the shoes they were wearing," Castro notes. Her father received an eighth-grade education and worked as a laborer for the Santa Fe Railroad, while her mother reached only the third grade. "My mother loved school," Castro relates, "but my grandfather only let her attend when a female teacher was teaching. When a male teacher was teaching, he'd keep her out of school and send her to work in the fields."

Castro worked for a surgical manufacturing company for 21 years before leaving to pursue her dream of a college education. She received a bachelor's in business administration from Angelo State University and started working for Verizon in 2007. To increase her job security, Castro decided to take advantage of Verizon's tuition-assistance plan and earned an MBA. She graduated in July 2009.

"As a Hispanic woman with two children, I strongly believe education is the most important factor in our lives," Castro says. "If we begin molding ourselves first and paying more attention to our children's education, we can build a stronger culture, and our children will be able to contribute their knowledge to our country."

MARILINDA MARTINEZ

Education Opens Doors to Success

University of Phoenix alumna Marilinda Martinez also discovered firsthand that education is the key to success. Although her parents had only a grade-school education, she dreamed of earning a college degree. Following high school, Martinez attended college

for a year, but was forced to leave due to her mother's terminal illness. A decade later, she graduated with an associate's degree and landed a job with a major banking company.

Before long, several life changes motivated Martinez, who now had two children, to return to school for her bachelor's degree. An employer offered her a job in Florida, where her cultural background and fluency in Spanish would help better serve that state's large Hispanic population. Martinez chose to attend University of Phoenix, graduating with a bachelor's degree in September 2008.

"University of Phoenix [enabled] me to continue my education," Martinez says. "Through all the changes I have had in my life, University of Phoenix has been consistent in providing me the opportunity to continue my education while living my life." Martinez enjoyed school so much that she began pursuing an MBA in January 2009. "University of Phoenix has opened many doors for me that otherwise would not have opened," she says.

A Large Proportion of Working Learners Are First-Generation Students

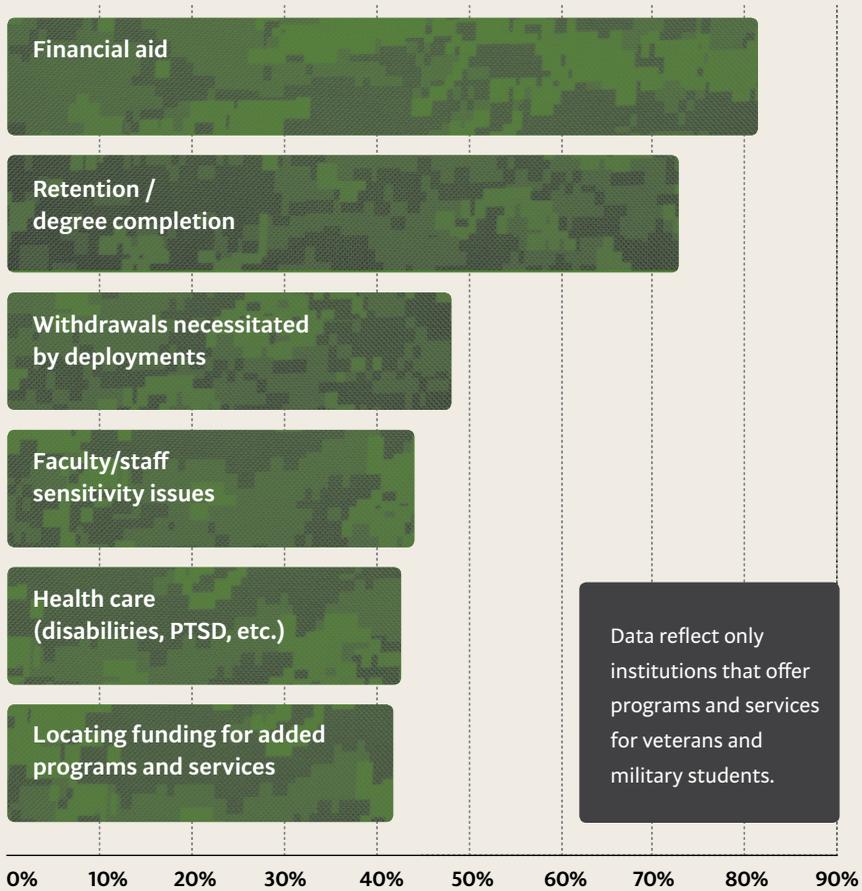
A sizable percentage of working learners are first-generation students—the first in their families to pursue higher education. First-generation students face many challenges when attending college. For instance, most lack the cultural capital—knowledge about how to apply for and succeed in college—that students from more privileged backgrounds possess. First-generation college students are at greater risk for dropping out simply because they do not have the experiences of friends and family members to guide them through the system. They may not know how to write a college admission essay, register for courses, interact with professors, write term papers, or schedule their study time—skills that are second nature for students who have been expecting to go to college since early childhood. First-generation students may also be unaware of the long-term personal and financial benefits of a postsecondary education.¹¹ As a result, they may come to believe that college is an unrealistic goal for themselves or their children.¹²

Military Personnel Pursue Education in Large Numbers

America's colleges and universities will soon face the largest influx of veterans since the end of World War II. Many of the 1.5 million members of the U.S. armed forces who have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan¹³ since 2007 will likely take advantage of the Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008, popularly known as "the new GI Bill." This

The Most Pressing Issues Faced by Institutions Serving Military Students

Percentage of schools reporting an issue as one of their top 3 priorities



Source: Cook, B. J., et al. (2009). *From soldier to student: Easing the transition of service members on campus*. Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education.

legislation is estimated to help more than 2 million veterans earn a college education.¹⁴ In fiscal year 2008, veterans used military tuition assistance to enroll in more than 700,000 undergraduate courses and more than 96,000 graduate courses.¹⁵ Many veterans would have limited options for funding their education without the military's support.

At University of Phoenix, one of the nation's largest educators of military students, 29% of military students are African American, and 13% are Hispanic. Most of the University's military students have at least one child or other dependent, and more than half have no prior college credits when they enter.¹⁶

Many higher-education institutions are not well prepared to meet veterans' needs. Most veterans fit the profile of the nontraditional student: Many are older, have work and family responsibilities, are first-generation college students, and come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.¹⁷ Many institutions do not have the support services in place to help veterans thrive in a collegiate setting. Only 57% of colleges and universities currently provide programs and services specifically designed for military students.¹⁸ Educators need to know what motivates these students to return to school, what problems and challenges they face, and how best to ensure that they thrive in the college classroom.

“As I progressed in my military career, I saw that I needed to further my education in order to improve my leadership skills and become a mentor to younger troops. Education helped me immensely.”

Among the problems nearly all military students face is the possibility of being deployed at any time. Members of the armed forces have to make complex arrangements with employers, faculty, and university staff involving their responsibilities while they are away. Many military students find it difficult to continue school when they return from deployment, concerned with issues such as being out of an academic environment for too long and losing their focus.

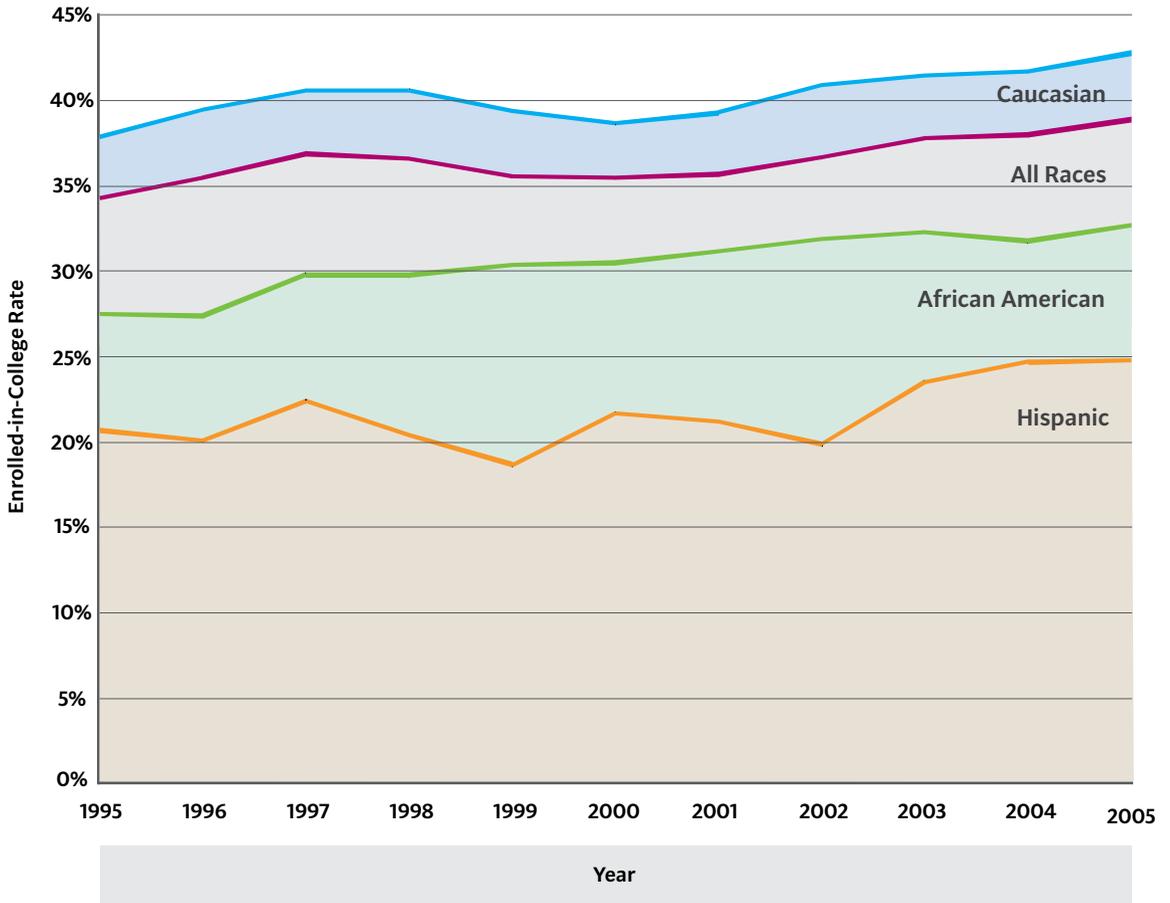
Mike Bibbee, former vice president of the military division at University of Phoenix, suggests two ways that institutions can help support military students: offering classes online and providing short, but intense, classes lasting only a few weeks that soldiers can easily fit around their deployment.

In addition to improving opportunities in civilian life, education can make military personnel better and safer soldiers. Military men and women benefit greatly from learning foreign languages and acquiring an education about the cultures they encounter. Sergeant Teresa de la Cueva, a master's-degree student at University of Phoenix, agrees. "Getting my master's degree really opened my eyes. It helped me see and understand different cultures and how to lead people from different backgrounds," she says. "It also made me a better leader. As I progressed in my military career, I saw that I needed to further my education in order to improve my leadership skills and become a mentor to younger troops. Education helped me immensely."

Education is also important to help the military conduct the war on terror, which is more complex than previous conflicts in which combatants were easier to identify and a soldier's objectives were more obvious. "Our military have to understand how to solve complex problems," says Colonel Don Gentry, commandant of the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy. "They have to be critical and creative thinkers, because the situations they are presented with in combat are much more complex than they have been in the past."¹⁹ According to Gentry, military personnel need more than knowledge and understanding. They need to evaluate and synthesize information to make strategic and tactical decisions.

In the long run, the education of military personnel is good for both the individual and the country. Most enlisted men and women leave the military by age 40, with some additional 20 years to contribute to America's workforce. Earning degrees while in the service can smooth the path to more challenging, higher-paying jobs long after military careers end.

College Participation Rates of 18- to 24-Year-Olds, By Race/Ethnicity, 1995 to 2005

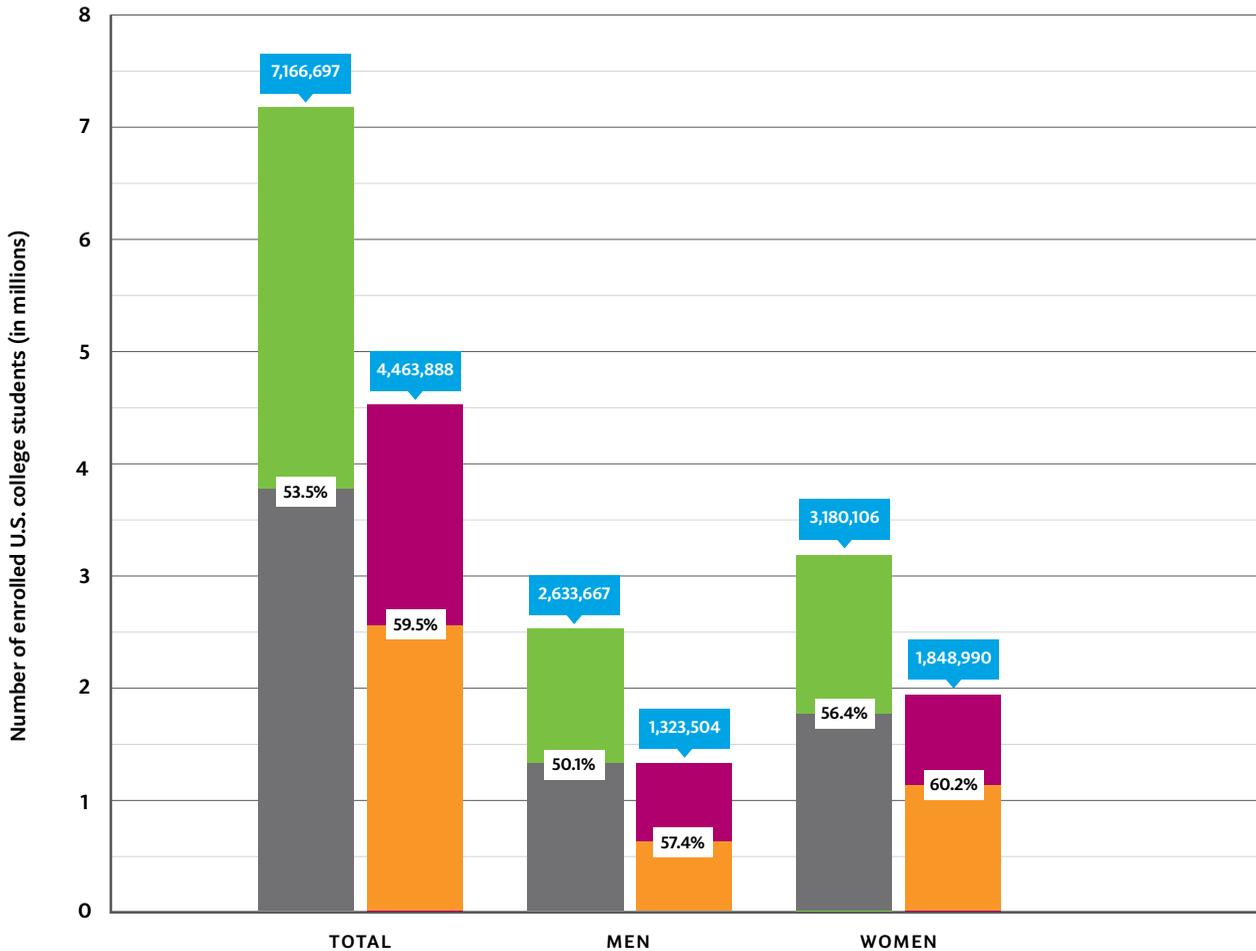


Source: Cook, B. J., & Cordova, D. I. (2007). *Minorities in higher education. Twenty-second annual status report; 2007 supplement.* Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education.

Graduation Days

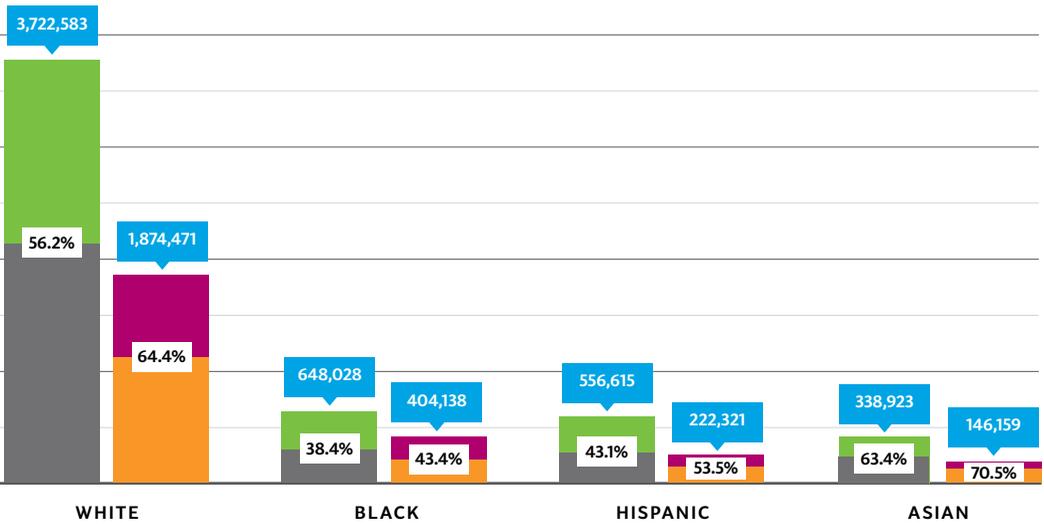
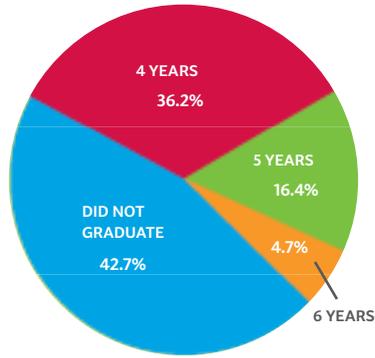
Based on the percentage of adults enrolled in college, the United States ranks seventh in the world—behind South Korea, Greece, Poland, Ireland, Belgium, and Hungary. In terms of the percentage of adults completing a college degree, the United States ranks 15th in the world.

The figure below shows enrollment and expected degree completion at public and private universities based on 2007-2008 data from the 6,790 institutions that participate in the Title IV federal student financial programs.



Source: National Center for Education Research, 2009.

How Long Does it Take to Graduate College?



- Expected to graduate public college
- Expected to graduate private college
- Not expected to finish public college
- Not expected to finish private college

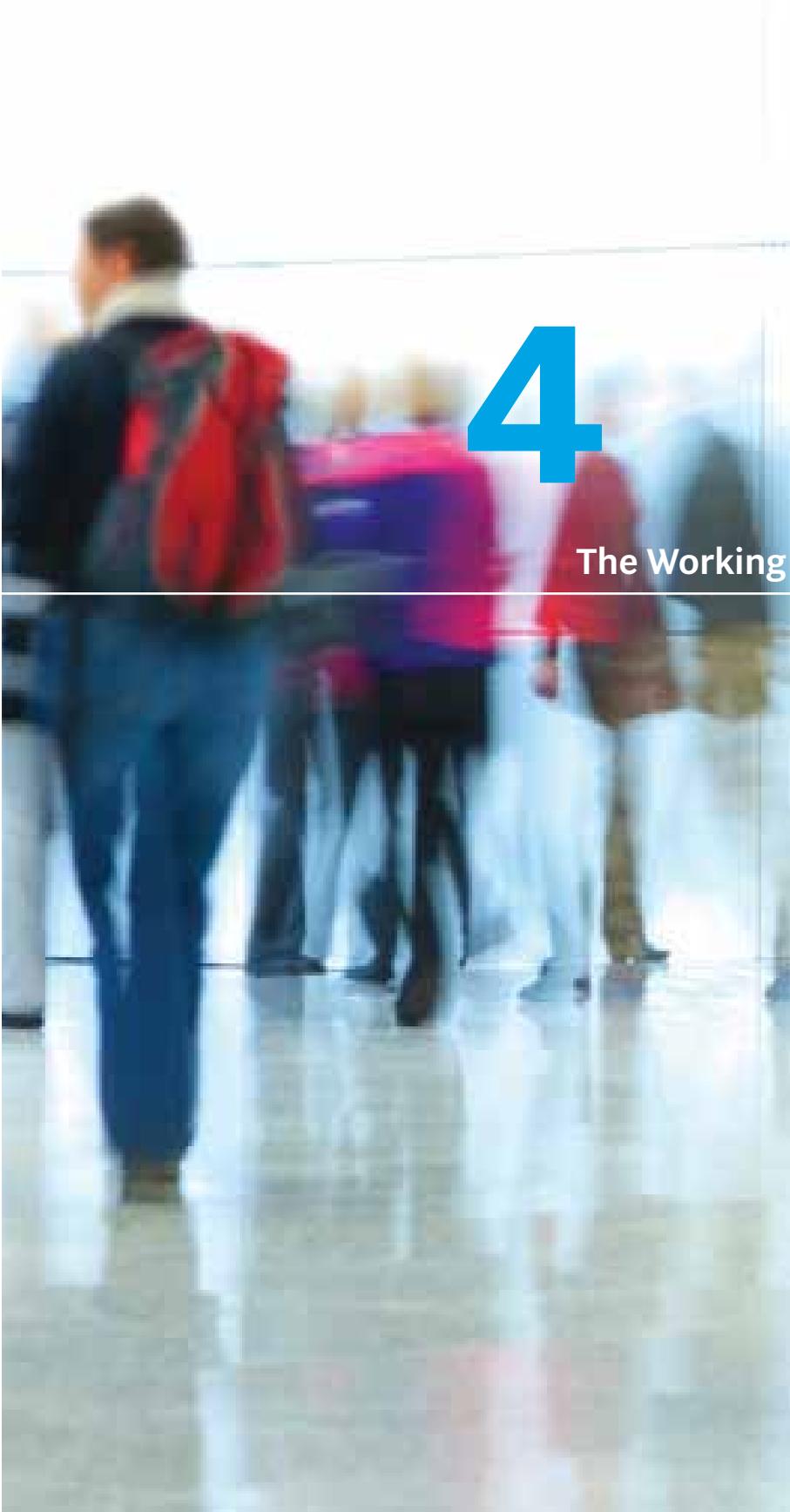


Baby Boomers Returning to School in Search of Second Careers

Yet another growing cohort of working learners is baby boomers, who are showing an increased interest in higher education. The Institute for Higher Education Policy found that the number of students age 40 and over has tripled since 1970. About 2 million of the 78 million baby boomers are now taking classes.²² One survey discovered that 53% of baby boomers continue to work because they need the income.

In many ways, baby boomers reflect the nontraditional student population as a whole. Most work at least part-time and have family obligations. They report the same kinds of time-management issues as other nontraditional students: in one survey, 80% claimed that time constraints were the single biggest obstacle to their academic success.²³ As a result, community colleges are popular with boomers, who enjoy the flexible class schedules, online classes, and open access these colleges offer. More than 1 million boomers are now attending community institutions.²⁴ Boomers differ significantly from the rest of the nontraditional student population in that they are, for the most part, wealthier and more educated.

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- 23 Portland Community College Taskforce on Aging. (2007). Boomers go to college: A report on the survey of students 40 and older conducted by the Portland Community College Taskforce on Aging. Retrieved from <http://civicventures.org/communitycolleges/PCCBoomerReport033007.pdf>
- 24 Portland Community College Taskforce on Aging.

A blurred photograph of a busy hallway with people walking. The image is out of focus, showing the lower half of several individuals in motion. A large blue number '4' is overlaid on the center of the image.

4

The Working Learner's Lifestyle

Adult Students Struggle
to Integrate Work,
Family, and School

Working learners fulfill multiple roles. They act as employees and students, and often as parents, spouses, caregivers, and contributors to their communities. These roles place heavy demands on adult learners' time and energy.

The Juggling Act: Working Learners Balance School with Career and Family

“The only reason for time,” Albert Einstein once observed, “is so everything doesn’t happen at once.” So it is for working learners, who cite among their greatest challenges finding the time for work, family life, and their studies.

Each subset of working learners faces its own set of challenges. For instance, single mothers are more likely than men or married women to live below the poverty line,¹ and are disproportionately employed in low-paying service-sector jobs that may not pay a living wage even for full-time work.² These types of jobs often have irregular scheduling and strict policies regarding lateness and sick days, which only compound the problems single mothers face in scheduling childcare.³

Time demands often lead to financial pressures, as parents must often place their children in daycare or with babysitters, or arrange care for their own elderly parents when studying or attending classes.⁴ “Work and childcare cancel each other [in terms of cost],” says University of Phoenix graduate Shannon Birman, a mother of four (see profile below).

Military working learners, who face the possibility of being deployed at any time, must meet special time challenges. Deployments can come at unexpected times, forcing military personnel to make arrangements with employers, instructors, and university staff involving responsibilities to be met during their absence. Sudden deployment can cause military students to interrupt or postpone their studies.

Challenges to Working Learners' Success

Adult learners are motivated, dedicated, and goal-oriented individuals. They have a passion for learning and a desire to succeed. Yet their busy lives and social pressures present challenges that can hinder the educational process. Educators and employers can benefit from understanding these challenges in order to design curricula and formulate work schedules to better serve this population.

Working learners often struggle to overcome the following challenges:

Language and academic deficiencies. A significant percentage of working learners, particularly first-generation students, are not well prepared for college. Forty percent of Hispanics in the United States, for example, are first-generation Americans, and 49% report that they do not speak English well.⁵ Twenty-seven percent of Hispanic children have parents who never received a high-school diploma, compared with only 4% of white children.⁶ Many first-generation students attended public, urban, or poor-quality schools that fell short of preparing them for college. These students may require remediation or other special preparation before they are ready for college-level academics.

Cultural and societal pressures. The cultures from which certain working learners emerge can act both as a source of strength and as a barrier to educational progress for these students. Though most Asian and white children from families of high or middle socioeconomic status (SES) grow up expecting to attend college shortly after they graduate from high school, many African American and Latino children (especially those of low SES) have no such expectation. Cultural and societal pressures influence Latino families, where the women are often expected to be caretakers, and girls and young women often view their obligations to family members as superseding their own desire for education.⁷ Latino men may see it as their duty to find work immediately upon graduating from high school and provide for their families, even if they must forgo higher education to do so.⁸

Working learners cite among their greatest challenges finding the time for work, family life, and their studies. Time demands often lead to financial pressures, as some students must arrange for childcare or eldercare while studying or attending classes.

Working mothers confront additional societal pressures. “You’re seen differently if you have children and have to leave work for school activities or appointments,” says University of Phoenix graduate Jacqueline Lukaszewicz, a mother of four. “You have to be more competitive, have more experience, and certainly have a degree to succeed as a working mother.”

Isolation. Several studies have found that minority students and older students often feel isolated in higher-education settings. Experts theorize these students develop independence as a “survival strategy” honed by years of living in a difficult environment.⁹ When given the proper support and opportunities to bond with classmates and faculty, minority working learners thrive. Military personnel, too, often isolate themselves in the classroom to avoid having to discuss the traumatic experiences of war. These veterans may view their traditional student peers—18- to 22-year-olds who are still financially dependent on their parents—as immature, undisciplined, and unduly entitled.¹⁰

Military Related Issues. Many veterans entering the civilian workplace for the first time have never written a résumé or experienced a job interview. Some soldiers find that their academic skills have diminished or become “rusty” during deployment, and may want to take refresher courses; others find they have lost their academic focus and need to relearn old study habits.¹¹

Many veterans returning from combat suffer from mental-health issues, especially post-traumatic stress disorder. The disorder—characterized by nightmares, flashbacks, irritability, sleeplessness, feelings of detachment, and trouble concentrating—can severely affect a veteran’s ability to complete an education, experts say.¹² Other veterans suffer from anger, depression, and alcohol abuse;¹³ many are reluctant to seek help or treatment for these problems.¹⁴

Jobs, Life Transitions Motivate Working Learners to Return to School

Despite the challenges they face, many working adults are wisely choosing to return to school. Their reasons are varied, though most cite wanting to improve their job prospects as a motivating factor. Alumna Roslyn Cross, for example, decided to attend University of Phoenix soon after her first child was born in 2000. “I was tired of working for \$8 an hour and not having any choices,” she says. “I wanted to ‘upgrade’ myself.” Today, Cross holds two degrees and runs her own healthcare business.

“To show my children how important college was, I had to toe the line and get my undergraduate degree. It’s important for them to see that I am living up to what I am teaching them to be as adults.”



Some mothers find that life events such as having children or caring for elderly parents alter their career goals. Cross, for instance, began pursuing a master’s degree in gerontology after her father was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease. Fellow University of Phoenix graduate Shannon Birman chose to study psychology while raising a son with a disability; she hopes one day to work as a developmental specialist and help other disabled children.

Some mothers pursue education partly to set a good example for their children. “I present everything as a life lesson,” says Jacqueline Lukaszewicz, whose four teenagers have special needs. “To show my children how important college was, I had to toe the line and get my undergraduate degree. It’s important for them to see that I am living up to what I am teaching them to be as adults.”

Degrees of Success: Portraits of Outstanding Graduates

Through perseverance and persistence, thousands of working adults have overcome social, financial, and personal obstacles to earn an associate’s, bachelor’s, or advanced degree. The following profiles highlight the outstanding achievements of a few of these graduates.

HOWARD AND RAQUEL GOOD

Doing Well While Doing Good

Howard and Raquel Good had two important reasons for returning to school to complete their college education: their children. The Florida couple felt that attending online

courses at University of Phoenix would inspire their son and daughter to study harder and more fully embrace their own educations. The results were profound.

Their son went from being an average student to achieving nearly straight A's by his senior year in high school, qualifying him for a full-tuition scholarship to an in-state university.¹⁵ "It is one thing to tell your kids they have to go to college," says Howard, a 2009 business management graduate. "But when they see both parents going back to school after so many years and going through the sacrifices and hard work like we did to achieve that goal, that really [drives] home for them how important a college degree is."

The National Center for Education Statistics reports that when parents like the Goods expect their children to attend and finish college, most of those children—86%—earn mostly A's.¹⁶ Other experts affirm that parents who strongly value education tend to have children with equal or greater educational expectations of themselves.¹⁷

Raquel Good, who earned a bachelor of science in nursing in 2006, says her and Howard's decision to complete their education strengthened the family unit. "The culmination of the degrees we received made us a better husband, a better wife, and a better family," she says.

Both husband and wife have talked about returning to University of Phoenix—he to pursue a certificate in human resources and she to earn a master's degree. Their dream is one day to open a women's health clinic together. "She and I are the kind of couple that like being around each other," Howard says. "The more time we are around each other, the better we will do."

MICHELE PASTORIUS

Change Gives Currency to Couple's Relationship

Michele Pastorius needed to look no further than the classroom for her inspiration to succeed in her studies at University of Phoenix. The course "Creating Change within Organizations," based on psychologist Kurt Lewin's change-management model, helped Pastorius and her husband Art endure the many physical and emotional changes they would undergo after Michele returned to school. Art was forced to assume many more of the household responsibilities while Michele poured her energy into her studies. Both also held full-time jobs.

“As I was going through school studying the processes of change, we recognized that change was happening to us [concurrently],” says Michele, who earned a master’s in nursing in 2009. Lewin’s model “helped us see the need for change in our shared chores to run our house and maintain our loving relationship while I was in school.”

Enrolling at University of Phoenix online rather than attending a nearby traditional college allowed Michele to spend more time at home and maintain a physical and emotional closeness with her husband. Art, a former construction-business owner who now works as a clinical supervisor at a drug and alcohol treatment facility, says he took comfort in knowing that Michele was in the next room studying while he attended to other business in the house. “I know if she had pursued her education at a traditional campus, we literally would not have seen each other at all because she would go to work and go to school all week, and then on the weekends, she would be reading and doing homework,” Art explains.

The couple says that when they chose the online program, they came to accept a new form of “quality time.” For example, Art used the reading and editing skills he had acquired to provide Michele with constructive feedback on her coursework and, in turn, found that his work-related communication skills improved. Art embraced the chance to take over most household chores and family finances while Michele evolved into a more studious individual with fewer home responsibilities, they say. However, Michele temporarily took on some of those same responsibilities when Art suffered a heart attack in 2008, from which he has since fully recovered. “He is a miracle man for putting up with me the last two years,” Michele says without hesitation.

LORIE VEGA

“A Lifetime of Savings in Every Aspect”

No stranger to happily lugging around a laptop for school, current MBA student Lorie Vega says she originally was more concerned with the convenience and flexibility online university courses offered than with their cost. But as she grows older and wiser, she says, she now recognizes the savings resulting from her decision to pursue online education.

Having spent her younger years forgoing education so she could raise her children—now in their 20s and parents themselves—Vega says it was more important for her to obtain an associate’s and later a bachelor’s degree without disrupting her family than it was to

save money. While pursuing her education, she also worked toward better job opportunities at her telecommunications firm.

“Costs were not a factor at that time. I was paying more attention to the flexibility and quality of the education at University of Phoenix so I could one day earn my associate’s degree. The convenience allowed me to take it a step further in pursuit of my BSIT [bachelor of science in information technology] and MBA,” Vega says.

Vega says growing more aware of the cost savings made her decision to enroll in the MBA program easier while she also assumed a newer role as a caregiver for elderly in-laws. “The benefits of an education coupled with flexibility definitely yielded a lifetime of savings in every aspect,” she says. “Gone are the days when flexibility was not an option.”

An analysis of MBA programs in Vega’s Texas area shows Vega saved at least \$17,980 on MBA tuition, books, and incidental fees compared to the \$37,260 she would have spent to attend a similar 18-course MBA program at the University of Texas at Dallas, for example.¹⁸

Vega’s costs could have easily multiplied had she chosen to hire someone to help provide eldercare, as she might have done had she opted for an on-campus program. Eldercare services come with a hefty bill, experts say. A 2007 study by the National Alliance for Caregiving and Evercare reports that informal caregivers without professional aid, like Vega, spend \$5,500 annually on daily eldercare expenses such as doctor visits.¹⁹

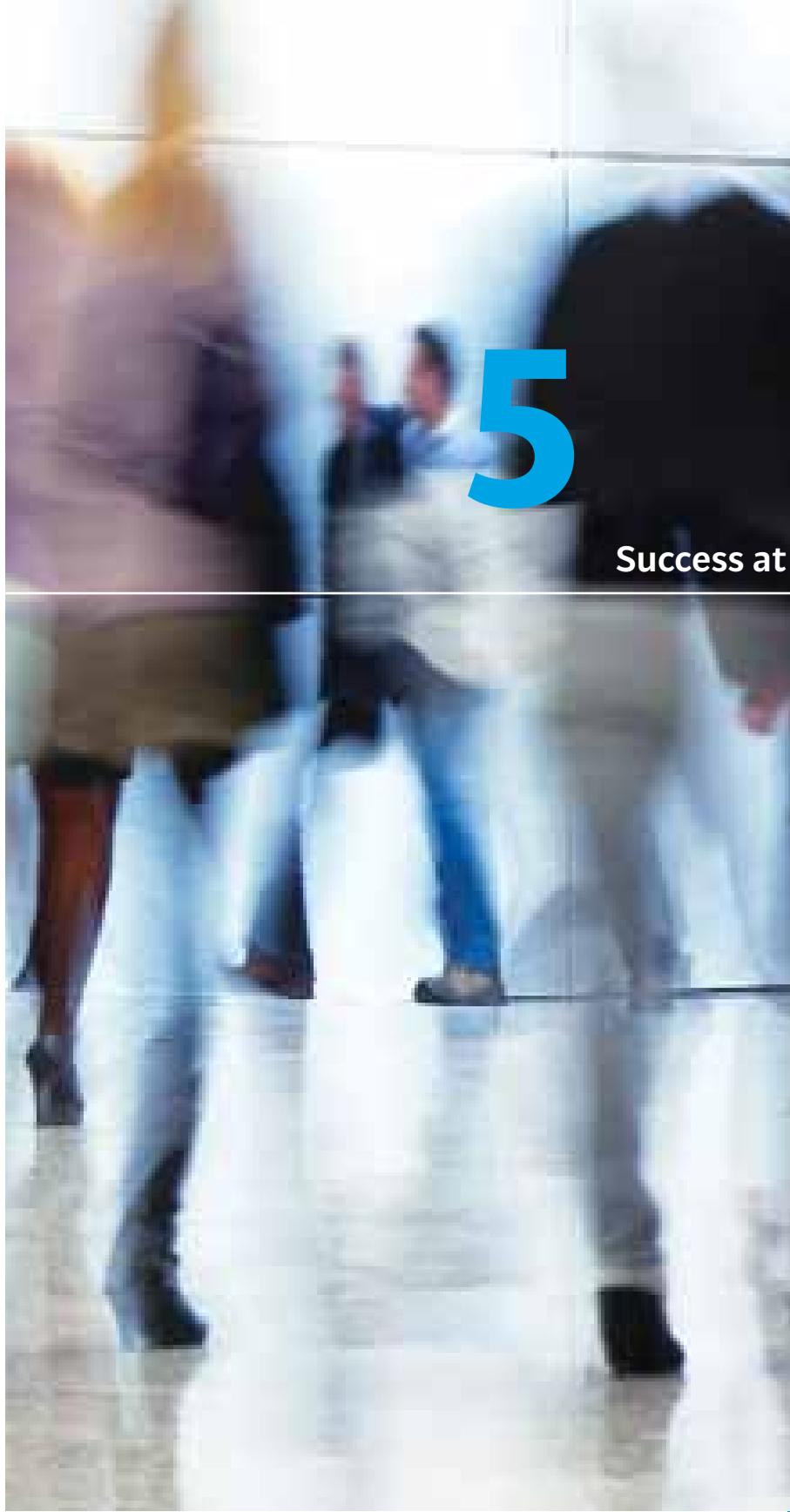
Having lower transportation costs is also important to Vega because, she says, lower costs instantly translate into savings for her adult children. She also appreciates how her online classes allow her to babysit her grandchildren with her computer close at hand. “I am able to sit in the evening with them or get off the computer should they need special attention, whereas a regular [on-campus] community college could not provide that flexibility for me,” says Vega, who adds that the emotional benefits of her program outweigh even the savings. “Sometimes it’s equally important to *qualify* the costs as it is to quantify the costs.”

Real Costs (Other Than Tuition) That Working Mothers Consider When Choosing Degree Programs



Source: University of Phoenix Knowledge Network, 2010.

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5

Success at Every Level

**Better Jobs,
Better Lives,
Better World**

What happens when working learners obtain a college degree? Often they achieve extraordinary success, as the following working learner profiles illustrate. These graduates advance the cause of national security and steer their companies through perilous economic times. They devise new learning models and lead and inspire our troops. They lay the groundwork for peace agreements and educate the world's poor. Though every graduate's career path is different, these stories show how working learners have improved their own lives and changed society for the better.

J. JEFF POIRIOR

Education Helps Make the Sale

When the telecommunications expense-management firm Valicom needed someone to lead the launch of one of its new products, it turned to University of Phoenix graduate J. Jeff Poirior. Already vice president of operations for the Wisconsin-based firm, where he oversaw business operations, strategic planning, and budgeting, Poirior was promoted to chief operating officer and given the additional responsibility of leading the company's sales and marketing force.

For his ability to keep his company competitive, Valicom COO J. Jeff Poirior credits the case studies, team projects, and seven-step problem-solving approach he learned while attending MBA courses at University of Phoenix.

“My academic experience was invaluable to me in terms of product and service launch,” says Poirior, who earned an MBA in 2008, “because I had not been exposed to sales and marketing before.”

For his new ability to adapt to business challenges and help keep his company competitive, Poirior credits the case studies, team projects, and seven-step problem-solving approach he learned while attending MBA courses at University of Phoenix. He says his education also gave him the added advantage of gleaning best practices from faculty and team members currently engaged in the marketplace.

The strategies and tools Poirior acquired during the MBA program, along with a “realistic benchmark” of other companies’ performance, allowed him to put his education to work for his company immediately, he says. “If I didn’t have my degree or wasn’t pursuing it,” Poirior says, “I probably would not have had an opportunity to share new thoughts and ideas to help expand the company in this economy.”

ARLEN “KEN” GRIFFEY

Working to Protect the Homeland

In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the United States embarked on an urgent initiative to secure and consolidate the nation’s critical information-technology systems and buildings.

One outgrowth of the project was the establishment of the National Center for Critical Information Processing and Storage (NCCIPS), a \$250 million federal shared-services data center housed at NASA’s John C. Stennis Space Center in south Mississippi. When completed, the facility will host data centers for the U.S. Homeland Security and Transportation departments, as well as the U.S. Navy’s supercomputers.

Tapped in May 2009 to serve as transition manager of the center was Arlen “Ken” Griffey, a longtime NASA executive and University of Phoenix doctoral candidate. He will oversee some 150 contractors and five to seven federal employees. “This is the kind of project responsibility that comes once in a lifetime,” Griffey says. “It’s a high honor, and I’m humbled that NASA would choose me for such a tough job.”

Griffey credits his coursework at the University of Phoenix School of Advanced Studies, where he is a full-time doctor of business administration student, with helping him lead the NCCIPS project. He says the process of writing a dissertation has honed his management and communication skills—both crucial to succeeding in a federal agency like NASA. “The discipline [of] framing [a research] problem has been very helpful to me, especially because NASA is a scientific and engineering community,” he says.

He praises his dissertation mentor, Ruby Rouse, for her encouragement and for keeping him on track to reach his dissertation milestones. “Working with Dr. Rouse has been one of the most enriching, [productive] education experiences I have ever had anywhere,” says Griffey, who holds degrees from Georgia Military College, Southern Illinois University, and Brenau University.

Rouse says she understands why Griffey likens the dissertation process to an executive's decision making. "Learners must identify pressing problems, collect data to research problems, and develop strategies and solutions to address problems," she says. "Ken embraced the dissertation research process with the same vigor he uses at NASA. It's no wonder he is a success."

FRED BENTLEY

Helping His Company Weather the Storm

In 2001, the once-thriving wheel manufacturer Hayes Lemmerz International was on the verge of bankruptcy. The Northville, Michigan-based company was forced to close its operations in Petersburg, Michigan, and Bowling Green, Kentucky, and file for voluntary Chapter 11 restructuring. Other plant closings and the liquidation of assets soon followed. In 2009, the company was delisted from NASDAQ and filed for Chapter 11 a second time.

Thanks to the steady hand of the company's management team, led by University of Phoenix graduate Fred Bentley, Hayes Lemmerz emerged from bankruptcy last December and is on a path to recovery. The company says it is expanding its global footprint, narrowing its product focus, diversifying its customer base, and focusing on growth through innovation and technology leadership.

"Fred's understanding of Hayes Lemmerz's core business, strategic growth plans, and the challenges faced by today's suppliers will strengthen Hayes Lemmerz as we continue to grow our world presence," says Curtis Clawson, the company's chief executive officer.

Bentley, who holds an MBA from University of Phoenix, rose through the ranks in the manufacturing industry. Prior to joining Hayes Lemmerz, he was managing director at Honeywell's Consumer Products Group for European and South African automotive after-market operations. Before that, Bentley was general manager of heavy-duty operations at AlliedSignal. Earlier in his career, he held several operations positions at Frito-Lay. Wherever he has worked, he has placed a strong emphasis on continuing education and career development. "Fortunately for me," he says, "I've worked for some very good companies that were interested in my ongoing development."



STEVE HARDEMAN

Innovation Fuels Passion for Green Initiative

Seeking to create a cleaner, more energy-efficient environment, the city of Norman, Oklahoma, last year hired Production Specialties, an Oklahoma-based engineering and consulting firm, to convert the city's methane gas produced during anaerobic digestion—a process widely used in wastewater treatment—into renewable biogas energy that could be used to fuel the treatment plant's generators.

Production Specialties tapped Steve Hardeman, a University of Phoenix MBA graduate, to help oversee the project. "We looked at this as a potentially great cost benefit for the city of Norman," says Hardeman, who directs the daily activities of the city's \$63-million advanced water-treatment facility. If the project is successful, Hardeman says, the plant's generator system will run on a plentiful and free waste byproduct, saving the city up to \$100,000 per year.

"If everything works as planned, this will be huge for the city and especially for wastewater treatment plants around the country," he says. "What a difference this could make for us as a country—we could reduce our dependence on foreign oil and expensive resources."

THAN LAM

Bridging the Business-IT Gap

When he came to the United States more than 30 years ago, Than Lam did not speak English. Today, he holds four degrees, including a doctorate in business administration from University of Phoenix, and is a lead member of the engineering staff at Lockheed Martin Mission Systems and Sensors in New Jersey. “This country provides everything,” Lam says of the United States. “It’s the ideal place for anyone who wants to work hard. Nothing here is free, but you can have it if you are willing to pay the price.”

Lam’s life story gives testament to his words. He fled Vietnam in 1979 and had to start his educational journey from the ground up. He earned a bachelor’s degree in electrical engineering from the State University of New York’s Maritime College, followed by two master’s degrees—in computer science and business administration—from Pennsylvania State University.

After working for about 15 years, Lam found himself “hungry for a doctorate,” he says, and enrolled at University of Phoenix. For his dissertation, he studied causes of and strategies for reducing the business-information technology gap, and used the results to create a model for improved business-IT operations.

Lam says completing the doctoral degree taught him to believe in himself. “Even though I had two master’s degrees, I never used to have enough confidence in my skills,” he says. “My dissertation changed me. After you get your doctorate, you are not as afraid to take risks because you know where to go and how to go about it. It gives you the courage to make mistakes.”

THERESA DE LA CUEVA

Inspiring the Troops through Leadership

Today’s successful soldier needs courage, honor, loyalty, integrity, discipline, judgment, mental and physical stamina—and education. Many military experts now argue that teaching soldiers “soft skills” such as human dynamics, negotiation, and interpersonal communication leads to better thinking and problem-solving skills across the ranks. These types of skills, experts claim, also improve soldiers’ interactions with civilians and nongovernmental organizations.

Sergeant Teresa de la Cueva, a master's degree student at University of Phoenix, agrees. "Getting my master's degree really opened my eyes," she says. "It helped me see and understand different cultures and how to lead people from different backgrounds. [My education] made a huge difference, especially when I was overseas."

De la Cueva, who has served in the Air Force for 17 years, says that pursuing her education has also made her a better leader; she returned to school, in part, for the sake of her troops. "As I progressed in my military career, I saw that I needed to further my education in order to improve my leadership skills and become a mentor to younger troops," she says. "Education helped me immensely in these [areas]."

DWIGHT B. REIMER

Shaping Lives and Influencing People

Raised on a farm in rural western Kansas, Dwight B. Reimer recognized early in his life the power of encouragement. At school, he watched quietly as his small-town teachers used their influence to foster in students such positive traits as citizenship, responsibility, trustworthiness, and the confidence to achieve their highest goals.

As a result, Reimer says, he went on to be the first in his family to earn a doctoral degree. He received a doctorate of management in organizational leadership from University of Phoenix in 2006, after serving there in various administrative and faculty positions from 1989 to 2004. In 1998, the University of Phoenix Colorado Campus named him Faculty of the Year. Today Reimer is director of administration and finance at Youth Unlimited Gospel Outreach in National City, California, south of San Diego.

Reimer believes positive influencers—whom he calls "thought leaders"—are as powerful in higher education as at the elementary level. He says every leader needs to know how to be a positive influencer in an organization, whether in education or business.

As part of a doctoral course at University of Phoenix, Reimer began to formulate a concept he ultimately saw as a cornerstone of thought leadership: the belief that small organizations often have a much greater impact on people's lives than large corporations. Reimer dubs this concept his "small systems theory."¹ Thought leadership, he explains, happens best when an organization is at a contained yet optimal size—one that does not limit potential growth.

Working Learners Put Their Education to Use for Social Justice

Members of the baby-boom generation are now reaching retirement age—but not slowing down. Many boomers—well-educated, financially well-off, and still healthy and strong in their 50s, 60s, and even 70s—have decided to return to school, volunteer, or take up second, or “encore,” careers, often with an eye to helping their communities and giving back to society. Some pundits claim boomers are creating a whole new stage of life: a “next chapter” between the midlife years of work and childrearing and true old age.²

Some 5.3 million to 8.4 million Americans have now embraced encore careers. Most of these career changers are idealistic boomers who hope to contribute to society in such fields as nursing, teaching, or leading businesses or nonprofits. Having experienced first-hand the social ferment of the 1960s, many boomers find that, having raised children and worked perhaps in a purely corporate environment for several decades, they now want to use their experience and education to benefit society as a whole.

JOHN R. BRYAN

Helping Create a New Uganda

After 25 years in the business world, John R. Bryan was ready for a change. His volunteer work for an organization that helped African refugees in San Diego led him to travel to war-torn Uganda, a landlocked East African nation beset by violence, abductions, and the displacement of an estimated 1.7 million people.

Bryan’s interest in Uganda developed when a friend—a political refugee from Uganda—asked him to help start a clinic that would serve the health needs of fellow refugees in the San Diego area. “My friend said, ‘I can’t pay you very much,’ but I wouldn’t have taken his money anyway,” Bryan recalls. “Now that clinic has been open two and a half years.”

When Uganda appeared on the verge of peace in 2006, Bryan, a University of Phoenix doctoral student, conjured a plan to turn his dissertation research into a working model for post-conflict leadership in the former British colony.³ The proposal, developed with the encouragement of Bryan’s dissertation mentor, Carolyn Salerno, quickly garnered international attention and drew the interest of several African leaders.

“With the people I knew in Uganda, and my background in doing strategic planning and organization,” Bryan explains, “it seemed like a natural idea to look at their leadership situation and help them proceed through their transition out of conflict.” His recommendations addressed issues of cultural change: reconciling with the opposition rebels, reintegrating the displaced population, reaching consensus on victim compensation, preparing for the withdrawal of human-rights organizations, and instituting a fair and workable justice system. He says the work has given his life “purpose and focus” and the opportunity to help society in ways he never previously imagined. “It’s a little unsettling and very humbling,” he says.

SALLY BAYNTON

Helping Ugandans Realize Their Own Possibilities

John Bryan is not the only University of Phoenix graduate to make a mark in Uganda. Four years ago, alumna Sally Baynton and her husband, Barr, traveled to the East African nation on a mission with their church. They were deeply affected by the poverty they witnessed.

“Some of the people we met literally had nothing but the clothes on their backs,” Baynton says. “They lived in 9-foot-by-9-foot mud huts. They don’t have bathrooms; they don’t have mirrors. Something as simple as taking their picture and turning the camera around to show it to them is really exciting because they’ve never seen what they look like before. Until you’ve had experience of that kind of poverty, you can’t really understand it.”

The Bayntons saw that many Ugandan adults, having grown up in displacement camps, lacked the skills to support themselves. The couple started Gulu Hope, a nonprofit organization that founds vocational schools in Uganda. The schools teach men and women to sew school uniforms and make fair-trade products such as jewelry, scarves, purses, and bamboo bicycle frames. Students also take Bible-study classes and learn English. “It made me cry to see how their world was opening up,” Sally Baynton says. “My passion is opening people up to their own possibilities.”

Baynton says her doctorate in management gave her the skills and confidence she needed to open a school and start a nonprofit: “[My education] really empowered me to be able to put a school on the ground, figure out how to organize it, hire people to manage it, and look for products to sell for funding.”

She now teaches online and puts all the money she earns into the ministry. “We rely on donations, and we’re looking at grants so that we can build more schools,” she says. “Five thousand dollars can do so much [in Uganda]. I’m 59 years old, and I see this as my future,” she adds. “It’s something I will do for the rest of my life.”

- 1 Reimer, D. B. (2002–2003). *Small systems theory concept for doctorate coursework*. Unpublished.
- 2 Goggin, J., & Ronan, B. (2004). Our next chapter: Community colleges and the aging baby boomers. *League of Innovations Leadership Abstracts*, 17(11). Retrieved from http://www.civicventures.org/publications/articles/community_colleges.cfm
- 3 Bryan, J. R. (2009). *Regional transitions from conflict to post-conflict: Observed leadership practices* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Digital Dissertations.



6

Changing Careers, Changing Lives

Working Learners'
Success Can Take
Many Forms



Employers Are Beginning to See the Value of Online Degrees

Working learners who have graduated from online and other nontraditional programs make a difference every day to employers around the country and throughout the world. In business, manufacturing, health care and many other fields, working learners contribute valuable skills to the American workforce. Using the innovative techniques and leadership principles they learn in the classroom (physical or virtual), these graduates help their employers save money, solve problems, improve business, and even win nationwide recognition. The working learner spotlights in this chapter demonstrate that working learners' contributions can take many forms.

“I believe I have a better understanding of how we run as a business now than before I got my degree.”

MARILINDA MARTINEZ

Helping Business Thrive

One case in point is the career trajectory of Marilinda Martinez, a University of Phoenix MBA who has led several major initiatives for her employer, Wachovia, a financial services giant. These initiatives include overhauling Wachovia's automated systems to simplify

Primary Skills, Knowledge, and Experience Employers Seek in MBA Graduates, by Percentage



Communication Skills

Oral & Written



Proven Ability to Perform

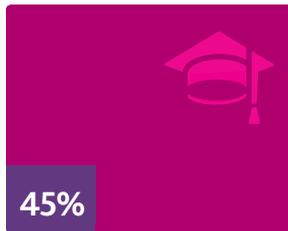


Strategic Skills

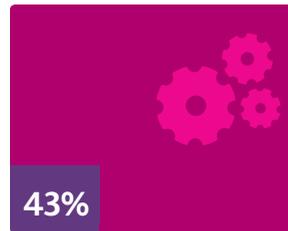


Core Business Knowledge

(Finance, Marketing, Operations, etc.)



Strong Academic Success



Industry of Prior Work Experience

Source: GMAC®, Corporate Recruiter Survey: 2009 Data Report.

online transactions and developing a series of presentations and seminars for prospective clients. The latter project resulted in the firm winning several new accounts and Martinez earning recognition as Florida's top relationship specialist.

Martinez credits her University of Phoenix education with giving her a foundation for success. Specifically, she cites her courses in developing business plans, understanding financial laws and regulations, and qualitatively and quantitatively assessing management criteria. "I believe I have a better understanding of how we run as a business now than before I got my degree," she says proudly.

DAVID FALATO

Making a "Brand" New Start

Some 2,500 miles to the west of Martinez's home office—in Los Angeles, California—University of Phoenix MBA David Falato is making a name for himself at the international marketing and promotional firm Jack Nadel International (JNI). Falato is one of 20 partners who assumed control of the company after the retirement of its founder and majority partner, Jack Nadel. The company develops innovative promotional gift campaigns and sales incentive programs.

Three years ago, Falato helped launch JNI's new Chicago office, which has since brought in an estimated \$4 million in new business.¹ "We are always trying to be ahead of the curve and capitalize on the next hot idea," says Falato, who in part attributes his ability to build creative, effective campaigns to the technical skill sets he polished during the MBA program.

"Once someone can make an association with your name and identify who you are, you can build your reputation and your world," Falato says. "A brand is no different. It creates uniqueness and buy-in power, resulting in sales and profitability." JNI recognizes that consumer expectations are growing as technologies and innovations quickly evolve. Falato says the company is constantly reinventing itself and its products to better serve clients' demands and strengthen their brand identities within the global market.

On the product front, Falato says he and JNI staff work hard to incorporate new techniques into clients' campaigns. For example, one of JNI's latest innovative products is a paper USB flash drive inserted into a brochure. Falato explains that the paper USB, an

environmentally friendly promotional product, is literally peeled out of a company brochure situated in paper products of the client's choice and then placed into a computer.

Industry innovation goes beyond promotional products and into successful business models, says Falato. JNI's online stores and incentive programs are becoming just-in-time businesses, meaning that JNI reduces costs by not carrying any merchandise inventory and offering a minimum order quantity of one piece for certain promotional items. "We use technology to link up with the largest retailer in the world so we can ship incentive merchandise in 24 to 48 hours all over the globe. Plus, we have zero overhead," Falato says.

PHILIP (PHIL) ROBESON

A Win-Win for Winn-Dixie

The benefits of an advanced degree have not been lost on technology worker Philip (Phil) Robeson or his boss at the Winn-Dixie grocery store chain, Jay Gray. When Gray joined the Florida-based company four years ago to supervise its team of top technology engineers, he quickly recognized that Robeson, a Navy retiree and father of two daughters, possessed an exceptionally logical and methodical work approach and strong writing and technology skills.

Robeson's knowledge and proficiency helped him quickly scale the promotional ranks to become the company's senior storage architect. That role has put him at the forefront of many of the department's most important projects. "Phil definitely takes a more active role in any sort of infrastructure changes, whether we are implementing a new technology, revamping something that needs a change, or improving upon something that already exists," Gray says. "That has really been a bonus [to our team]."

Gray attributes Robeson's success in part to his decision to pursue a master's degree in information systems (MIS) at University of Phoenix. "I tend to look for folks with a higher education," Gray says of his employee hiring preference. "Phil made the right decision when he acquired his MIS."

According to industry experts, the demand for technology workers is at its highest levels since the dot-com bubble burst in the late 1990s. Many IT managers are now nostalgic for the days when a plethora of talented workers were eager to populate their offices.

The shortage is not due to a lack of interested individuals. Rather, prospective employees simply do not possess the wealth of education and experience IT positions warrant, industry professionals say.

More than three quarters, or 77%, of chief information officers surveyed nationwide by the technology staffing firm Robert Half Technology say finding skilled IT workers in today's market is more difficult compared to a few years ago. Of those surveyed, more than half attributed their recruiting challenges to a deficit of IT qualifications among workers.

Winn-Dixie's Gray says he hopes to give other members of his department the opportunity to enroll at University of Phoenix. The school's information-technology program, which blends business, technology, and management education, could help lead his employees down the same path to success that Robeson traveled, he says.

PAUL FOX

Manufacturing an Edge Over the Competition

Even in manufacturing—an industry mistakenly perceived as a place for less-educated, lower-skilled workers—advanced degrees are becoming increasingly commonplace for those wishing to rise to the top of their profession.

In Corpus Christi, Texas, University of Phoenix MBA graduate Paul Fox caught the eye of his superiors at Horton Automatics, a leading manufacturer of automatic-entrance systems, soon after joining the firm in 2007. Fox's boss, Chris Manolis, described his prized employee as having the ideal skill set: a blend of technical ability, education, and maturity. Fox was given the responsibility of steering a contract between Overhead Door, Horton's parent company, and Actus Lend Lease, a private developer to the government, to provide garage doors for nine new military housing developments across the country.

Even in manufacturing—an industry mistakenly perceived as employing mainly less-educated, lower-skilled workers—advanced degrees are becoming commonplace for those wishing to rise to the top of their profession.

“Paul is strongest in terms of building projects,” Manolis says, “and his talents have been noticed throughout the company.” Manolis attributes Fox’s leadership and communication skills to his University of Phoenix education. “I’m sure [Fox’s high level of competence] is a learned behavior and not necessarily inherent,” Manolis says.

MICHELE PASTORIUS

Providing Just the Right Medicine

University of Phoenix graduates have also put their problem-solving skills and innovative techniques to work in the health professions. Michele Pastorius, the Pennsylvania nurse who earned a master’s degree online from University of Phoenix in 2009, changed the way her facility administered catheter insertions for men undergoing long-term cardiology treatments. Pastorius discovered that the long-held practice of using a 2% Lidocaine gel during the procedure provided no extra benefits to the patient. Discontinuing use of the product not only improved the facility’s medical procedures, but also saved the hospital approximately \$4,000 in one year.

GAIL BROWN

Benefits Go Well Beyond Turning Profits

Sometimes business success is defined by accomplishments outside the workplace. Gail Brown is living proof that giving back can be just as rewarding—and impactful—as turning a profit. By day, the University of Phoenix alumna and 2009 recipient of the University’s Spirit of Education Award is an accomplished nurse practitioner at St. Joseph’s Hospital’s obstetrics and gynecology department and Cancer Center in Phoenix. Outside of her regular nursing duties, she devotes hundreds of hours a year to treating low-income women who would not otherwise have access to quality health care.

Among Brown’s many volunteer projects: providing free cancer screenings for women at the hospital’s Cancer Center, free obstetrical care via a mobile women’s health clinic, and free breast exams through St. Joseph’s Breast Evaluation Center. Many of these screenings result in positive findings for cancer or abnormal mammograms, allowing St. Joseph’s to help prolong these women’s lives through cancer support and medical treatments. “No woman should have to die early because she could not obtain the proper access to preventive care that could give her an early diagnosis of breast or cervical cancer, or any other insight into a women’s health issue,” Brown says.

Experts estimate that more than 17 million women in the United States are uninsured, and that some 45,000 uninsured men and women die each year because they lack access to affordable health care. These statistics sadden Brown, but strengthen her resolve to help people in need. “Simple [basic] acts of health care should be available for women and men at some point of our lives,” she says. “People shouldn’t have to end up in the [emergency room] because they don’t have insurance.”

HÉLÈNE SAVARD

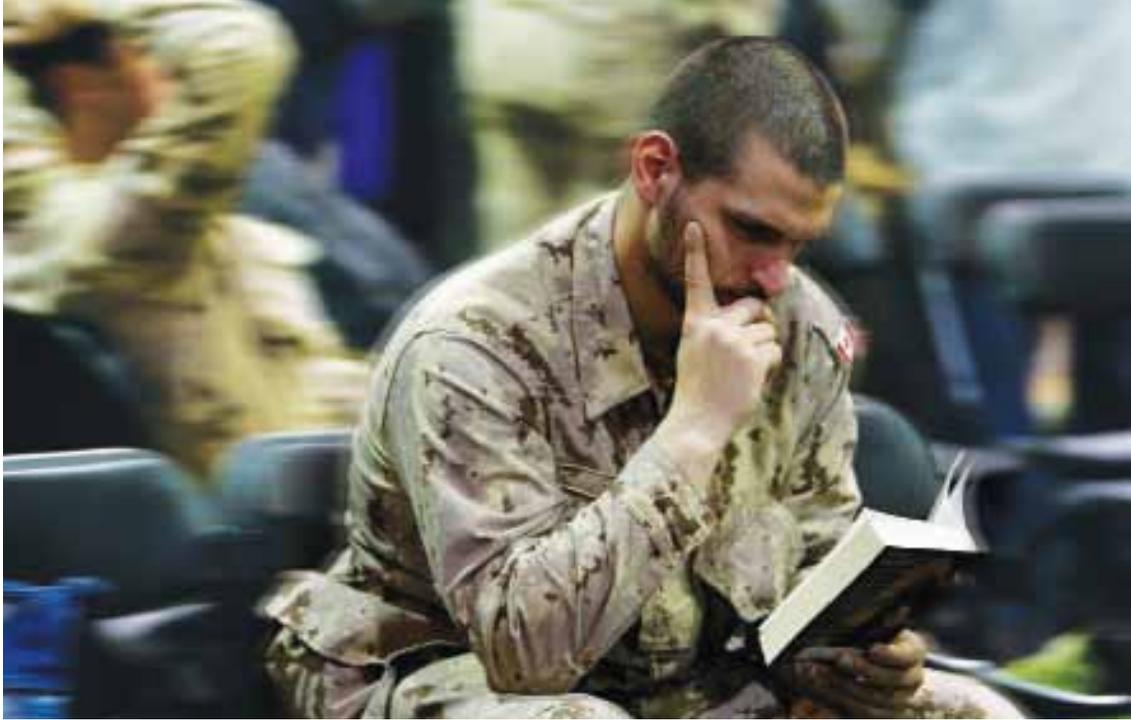
Creating a Harmonious Environment

University of Phoenix doctoral graduate Hélène Savard tackles quality-of-life issues from an environmental perspective. A professor at the School of Environmental and Natural Resource Sciences at Fleming College in Peterborough, Ontario, Canada, Savard developed an educational model for collaboration between environmentalists and corporations to protect the ecosystem. The model, which Savard outlined in her dissertation, stresses conflict resolution through communication, facilitation, and meeting planning.

Savard’s work is being taught to students at Fleming’s distinctive college community-based (CCB) program in ecosystem management—an initiative that sends undergraduates into the community to work with environmental professionals to produce original research—and at the Canadian University of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, where Savard formerly served as acting dean of the School of Environment and Health.

“With training, these students, when they graduate, will be able to resolve conflict with greater ease,” she says. “It’s a gift to know how to run meetings and bring in all the stakeholders—from the big companies down to the little old lady who needs field bark for her crafts.”

Savard has published her work in *EcoHealth Journal* and hopes other schools adopt the CCB program. The key to success, she says, is learning to resolve differences. “[Training] can help people understand that though they may not agree with one another, there are some things they have to accept,” she says. “It takes a lot of patience—we have to teach patience, too!”



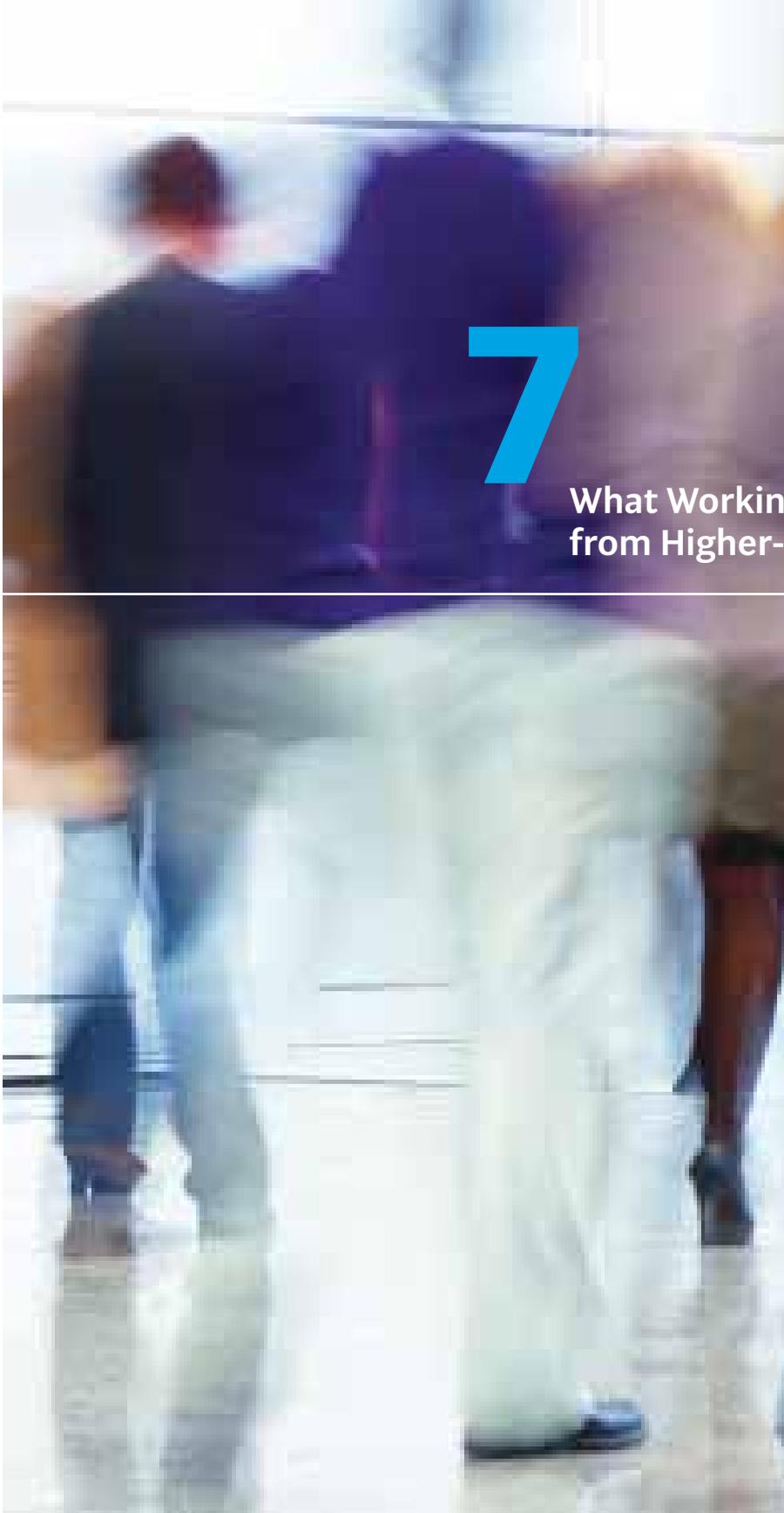
Educating Service People Is Good for the Military—and the Nation

No discussion on the impact of the working learner in society is complete without mentioning the contributions of servicemen and servicewomen. Studies show that enlistees perform at higher levels both during and after their military service if they receive a college education.² One study, for example, found that sailors who participated in the Navy’s Voluntary Education Program were more likely to reenlist than those who did not receive educational training. More than half of sailors receiving tuition assistance opt to reenlist when their terms of service are up, as opposed to the mean reenlistment rate of approximately 39%.³ For those who successfully complete at least one college course, the reenlistment rate is even higher (72.2%).⁴

In the long run, the education of military personnel is good for the country as well. Most enlisted men and women leave the military by age 40; they have approximately 20 more years to contribute to America’s workforce.⁵ Earning degrees while in the service can help them find more challenging, higher-paying jobs upon retirement from the military, and the skills they learn in the classroom will make them better, smarter workers.

“Veterans,” says Steven Kime, president emeritus of Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges, “bring maturity, discipline, and, if we [educators] do our jobs correctly, critical and broad-gauge thinking to the civil economy.”⁶

- 1 Yaremich, M. (2010). *Interview with David Falato* [University of Phoenix Knowledge Network]. Unpublished.
- 2 See also Garcia, F. E., Joy, E. H., & Reese, D. (1998). Effectiveness of the voluntary education program. Alexandria, V.A.: Center for Naval Analyses.
- 3 Barnard, D. L., & Zardeskias, E. F. (2007). *Voluntary education of enlisted service members: An analysis of program effects on retention and other outcome measures*. (Unpublished thesis, Naval Postgraduate School). Retrieved from http://edocs.nps.edu/npspubs/scholarly/theses/2007/Sep/07Sep_Barnard.pdf.
- 4 Barnard, D. L., & Zardeskias, E. F.
- 5 Mullane, L.
- 6 Mullane, L.



7

What Working Learners Need from Higher-Education Providers

Flexible Options
to Fit Busy Lives

As adults with many responsibilities and demands on their time, working learners require a special kind of educational model: one that emphasizes flexible scheduling, emotional and logistical support, and course content that can be put to use on the job.

Convenience and Flexibility Allow Working Learners to Return to School

Flexibility and convenience are two of the key factors working learners prioritize when selecting a college or university. Many opt to attend school online because Internet courses allow them to complete coursework at any time of day or night. Online students can complete assignments during their lunch hour, for example, or at night when their children are sleeping. Taking classes from home also allows working learners to spend more time with their families and less money on childcare. This flexibility enables these students to attend part time and progress toward a degree at a rate appropriate for their personal circumstances.

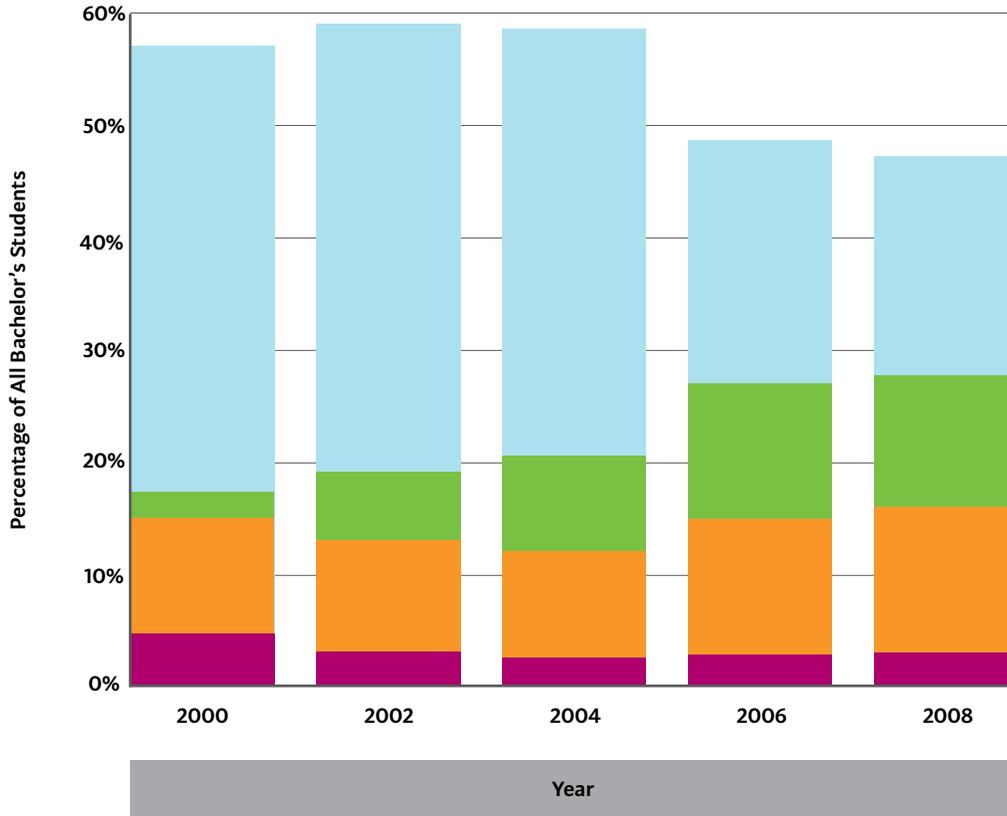
Working learners often need to be able to take periods of time off from school without being penalized. Adult students simply cannot always attend school from September through June without a break. The educational path of many of these learners, especially those with children, can best be described as a “winding road” characterized by periods of schooling interrupted by life events, such as getting married, raising children, dealing with death and loss, and caring for sick family members. Short, focused classes lasting a few weeks rather than a few months may be a good option. Online or hybrid classes also allow for study around work or childcare schedules.¹

Online Courses Are a Boon to Busy Moms

As we have seen, a sizeable percentage of working learners are also working mothers. Many of these women, like University of Phoenix 2008 business management graduate and current online student Jacqueline Lukaszewicz, say they chose the online MBA program at University of Phoenix because it offered them the best of both worlds: They could pursue their business degrees without sacrificing their family and work careers, and do so in a financially prudent manner.

“I am able to do the things I aspire to do to receive a business education,” says Lukaszewicz. “All I need is a laptop [computer]. It’s all about being able to complete education in a way that fits my life. I have written papers on my laptop in the back of the car while my children were at their hockey practices.”

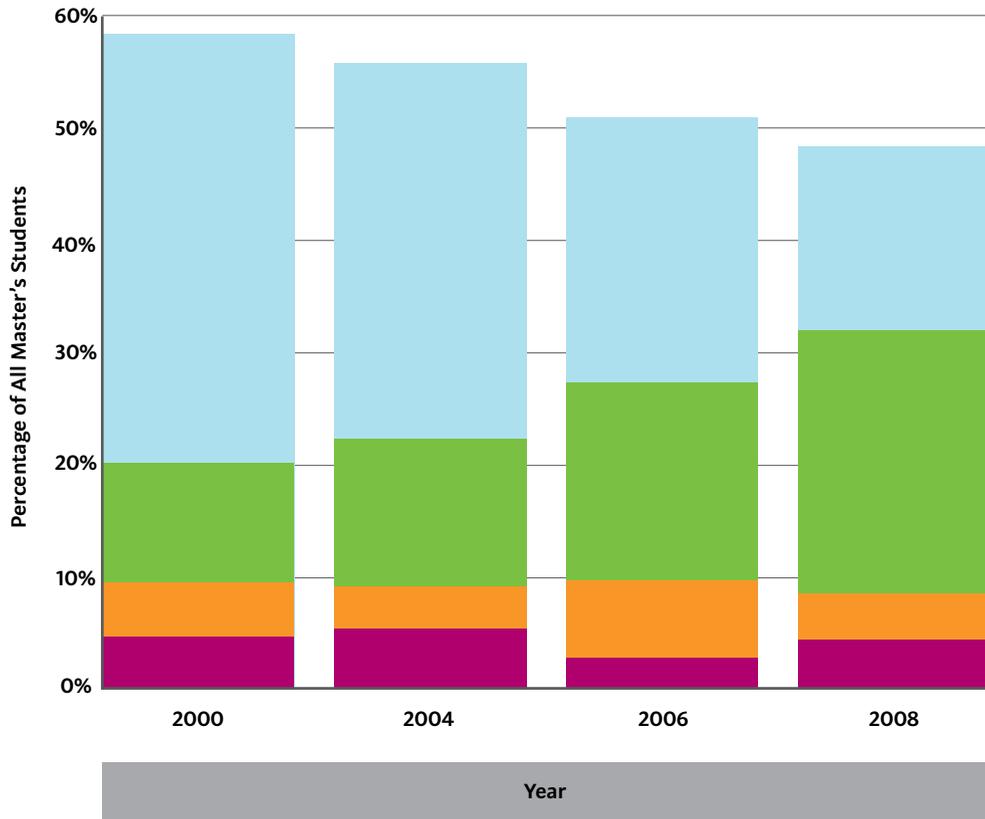
Bachelor's Students at University of Phoenix, by Racial/Ethnic Background, 2000-2008



- Caucasian
- African American
- Hispanic
- Asian

Source: University of Phoenix Student Registration Survey (of those reporting) and Student Administrative Database, 2009.

Master's Students at University of Phoenix, by Racial/Ethnic Background, 2000-2008



- Caucasian
- African American
- Hispanic
- Asian

Source: University of Phoenix Student Registration Survey (of those reporting) and Student Administrative Database, 2009.

Support Services Ease the Transition

Working learners require more support from their educational providers than do traditional students. Many working learners return to school having been away from the academic world for many years, and they may need help transitioning to the campus community.

Similarly, first-generation students often need a guide to help them through the application, enrollment, and financial aid processes. Schools should be aware that these students may lack knowledge about college-entrance processes, and should provide these students with increased guidance to help them “ramp up” into college with greater ease.

Older students may also feel out of place in an environment where they are surrounded by much younger classmates. Strategies to accommodate older students and make their new college experience fulfilling include one-on-one mentoring, personalized assessments of prior work and educational experience, and orientations designed for older students. Many returning students have expressed an interest in career exploration workshops tailored to adults over 40.²

“[For] older learners who are coming to school for the first time or returning after years,” says one student, “the culture is very different than it was [in the past].” To balance all their responsibilities and adjust to the demands of higher education, “[older students] need encouragement.”³

NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS THRIVE AT UNIVERSITY OF PHOENIX

University of Phoenix has been very successful in helping underprepared students earn their degrees. Though most University of Phoenix students enter with lower skills than the average undergraduate in the areas of critical thinking, reading, writing, and math, test scores prove that by the time they graduate, University of Phoenix students perform at comparable levels to graduating seniors from traditional four-year schools.⁴ Additionally, students with risk factors for dropping out, such as having children, working full-time, and attending school part-time, graduate at higher rates from University of Phoenix than the national average.⁵ For these students, many of whom are minority women pursuing higher education for the first time or after being away from school for many years, University of Phoenix offers a high-quality, consistent curriculum, experienced faculty, student support systems, and flexibility in scheduling classes.

Real-World Study for Real-World Careers

Working learners are explicit about what they do and do not want from higher education providers. These students show a marked preference for acquiring learning that they can put to use in the “real world.”⁶ Having already chosen a career path or vocation, they approach education pragmatically: Many wish to enroll quickly and easily, take only the purpose-driven courses required for their current or second careers, and graduate without the burden of fulfilling requirements that are not relevant to their job responsibilities.⁷

Jacqueline Lukaszewicz appreciated her University of Phoenix classes for precisely this reason. “Everything I learned in my classes I use every day,” she says. “It’s so relevant to everyday life in the corporate world. I can’t say the same about the classes I took at other schools. There were typical-aged [18- to 22-year-old] students in class getting the same information I was, and it wasn’t applicable to my professional life.”

WORKING LEARNERS MAKE THE SWITCH TO TEACHING

Among working learners is a cohort of returning students who have decided to enter teaching as a second career. With a serious teacher shortage anticipated in the foreseeable future, as up to a third of current teachers are set to retire and the attrition rate for new teachers continues to climb, those entering education as a second career are the fastest-growing sector of new teachers. Some scholars predict these career changers will make up one-third to one-half of new teaching hires.⁸

Programs for education as a second career began in the 1980s when a few states launched programs intended to be “a responsible way to get smart, talented individuals into the classroom without requiring them to earn a second bachelor’s degree.”⁹ Now, 47 states have alternative programs that train for education as a second career, and as many as one-fifth of new teachers enter the profession through these programs.¹⁰ Education as a second career draws people from various walks of life: former salespeople, businesspeople, and military officers, to name a few. Like all returning students, this group wants to use time and money wisely to advance on new career paths.



Faculty Support Is Essential to Academic Success

In addition to convenience, practicality, and support, the quality of the relationships that students form with faculty members is a key contributor to eventual success—both for working learners and for traditional students.

A dissertation by a recent University of Phoenix doctoral graduate sheds light on the problems minority students face when seeking higher education, and presents possible solutions, including the need for faculty support. Jocelyn Flowers-Ashton, who earned her doctorate in education in 2008, discovered that one of the key predictors of students' academic success or failure was the quality of their relationships with faculty. Students in her focus group reported that they wanted faculty to be more involved with them personally, to include more interactive tasks rather than lectures in class, and to rely less on teaching assistants. Flowers-Ashton notes that students may “interpret lack of personal involvement [by faculty] as a lack of support.”¹¹

Educating faculty about working learners' cultures and circumstances as well as students' learning and communication styles is essential. Faculty members may not be aware of how much students value interacting with faculty on a personal level. Interacting with students individually and getting to know them and their circumstances may help faculty better serve these students' learning needs.

To ensure that students receive appropriate support throughout their academic careers, University of Phoenix assigns each student an academic advisor who checks in with students at various points, providing guidance to ensure that students make steady progress toward degree completion. Many working learners have identified these advisors as the single most influential factor in their success. While offering such extensive support services requires a considerable institutional investment, the success of this program demonstrates that students can benefit from extra guidance. Having someone from the institution reach out to them also assures students that their college or university cares about them and is invested in their success.

University of Phoenix graduate Roslyn Cross enjoys speaking of her positive experience with her advisor. "I needed to feel that I was needed and that I wasn't just a number," she says. "My advisor made me feel important—she took the time to pick up the phone to see how I was doing." That support was crucial to her education, Cross adds: "There's a child in every one of us that needs that nurturing, attention, and motivation."

Veterans and Military Personnel Have Unique Educational Needs

Members of the military—who make up an important segment of working learners—have special concerns when starting or returning to higher education. "Typically, soldiers take classes in person on a base," says Mike Bibbee, former military division vice president at University of Phoenix. "Say, for example, you're sent to a base in the middle of a semester, and then you wait months to enroll, only to find out you're going to [the military's] leadership school in February. That sets you back even more, and all the while you're losing momentum and starting to forget what you've previously learned." Bibbee says that offering short classes and rolling enrollments are effective strategies to make education far more convenient for enlisted personnel.

Many veterans do not attend college because they are unfamiliar with the enrollment process or lack information about receiving tuition benefits. Colleges can help by making such information easily available on their websites, but also through other means, such as informational brochures available at financial aid offices, and by holding workshops for veterans. Getting enough information at the right time and more than once during transitional periods can determine whether veterans enroll in college—and stay enrolled.¹²

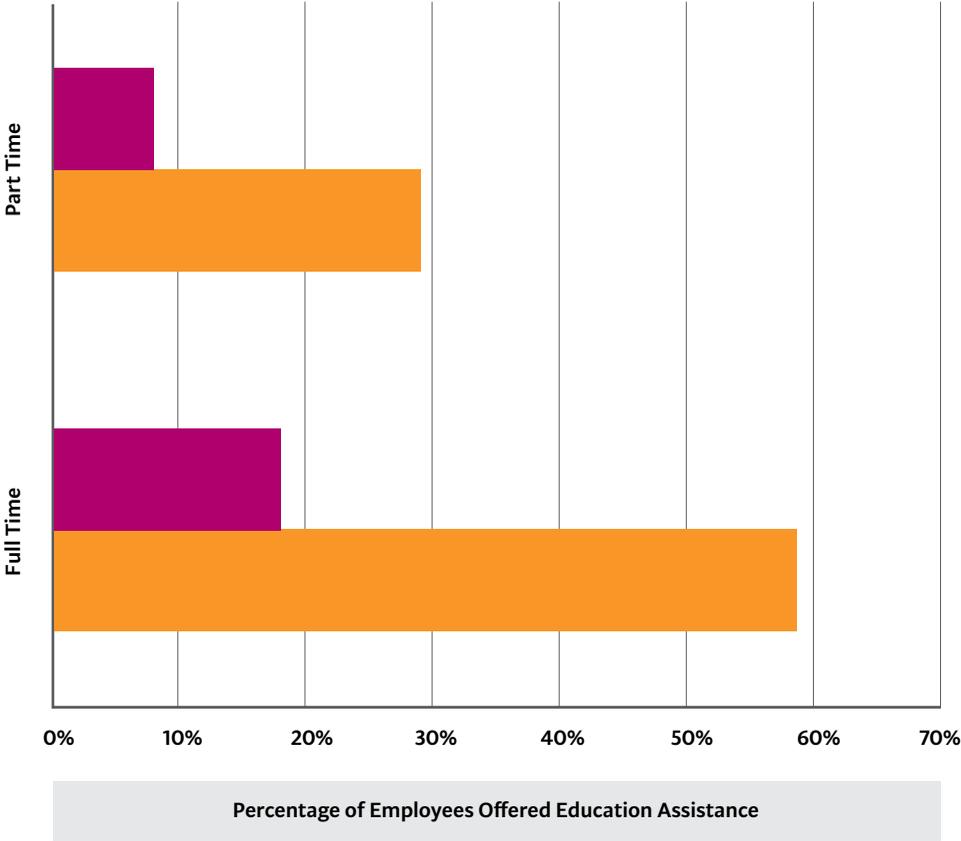
Because of their unusual circumstances, military personnel need coordinated services. Veterans may require such disparate services as financial aid, academic advising, psychological counseling, treatment for disabilities, and support or social groups consisting of other military students.

Online Learning Offers Value to Employees and Employers

As higher education works to tailor its services to the needs of working learners and other nontraditional students, employers are finding that online and distance learning can be an asset for their employees and organizations. Employers appreciate the quality of education and technological skills graduates of an online program bring to today's work environment. Even chief executive officers are recognizing that online university graduates are uniquely prepared to meet the demands of the 21st-century knowledge economy. In addition to possessing theoretical knowledge comparable to that of traditional university graduates, online university graduates bring to the workforce an understanding of how to communicate and collaborate effectively in virtual learning communities—a valuable skill in today's global marketplace.

A 2009 survey by Zogby International found that 50% of CEOs considered online degrees just as credible as traditional degrees. Three-quarters of those same CEOs reported having taken an online course, which may have helped them to better understand the value of online learning as an educational choice.¹³

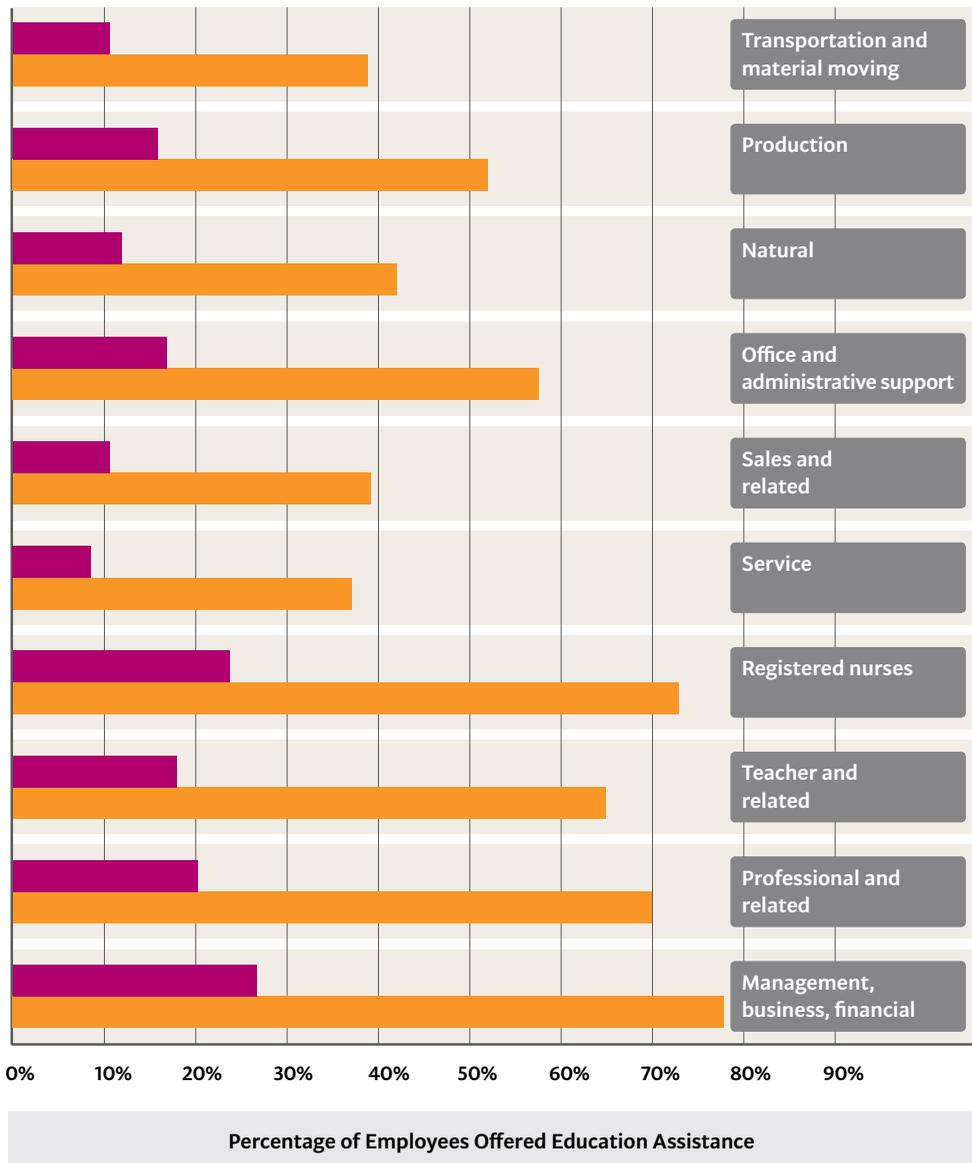
Employer-Offered Education Assistance for Full- vs. Part-Time Workers



- Work-Related
- Non-Work-Related

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Compensation Survey, March 2008.

Employer-Offered Educational Assistance by Job Type



■ Work-Related
■ Non-Work-Related

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Compensation Survey, March 2008.

Online and Hybrid Learning Come of Age

So how do students enrolled in online and hybrid programs (combining online and on-campus learning) fare compared with students pursuing a more traditional educational path? A major study published by the U.S. Department of Education reveals what many online educators have long suspected: Students in online classes perform better, on average, than those receiving only face-to-face instruction.¹⁴ The study also showed that a hybrid approach combining both online and classroom instruction was more effective than online or face-to-face teaching alone.¹⁵ Through meta-analysis of dozens of scholarly articles, researchers have found that online learning can effectively bring a broad range of educational content to a variety of learner types.¹⁶

The Department of Education study lends credence to a belief that University of Phoenix administrators and faculty have long held: Online education can be just as effective as on-site education, as long as educators put the same care and attention into their online offerings as they devote to classroom-based instruction.

A major study published by the U.S. Department of Education reveals what many online educators have long suspected: Students in online classes perform better, on average, than those receiving only face-to-face instruction.

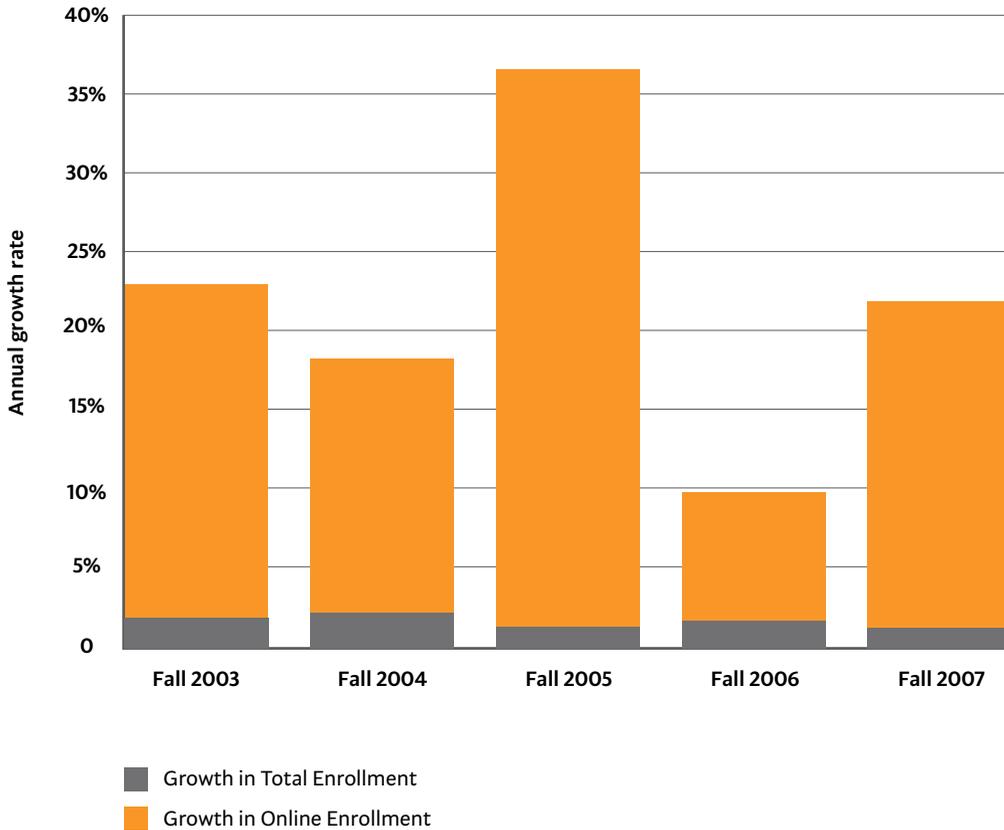
According to University of Phoenix provost, Adam Honea, online learning will emerge as the next leap forward in the evolution of education. “The classroom learning environment is still considered the gold standard,” he says. “But I think the question shouldn’t be, ‘Is online equivalent to classroom learning?’ but ‘Can people learn as well or better through this new method of delivery?’” As University of Phoenix has found, the answer to the second question is “Absolutely.”

SAILS (Standardized Assessment of Information Literacy Skills): University of Phoenix On-Campus Students vs. Online Students

SKILL SET	ON-CAMPUS STUDENTS' MEAN SCORE	ONLINE STUDENTS' MEAN SCORE
Developing a Research Strategy	569	586
Selecting Finding Tools	550	570
Searching	556	564
Using Finding Tools Features	635	643
Retrieving Sources	572	573
Evaluating Sources	594	610
Documenting Sources	569	581
Understanding Economic, Legal, and Social Issues	559	571

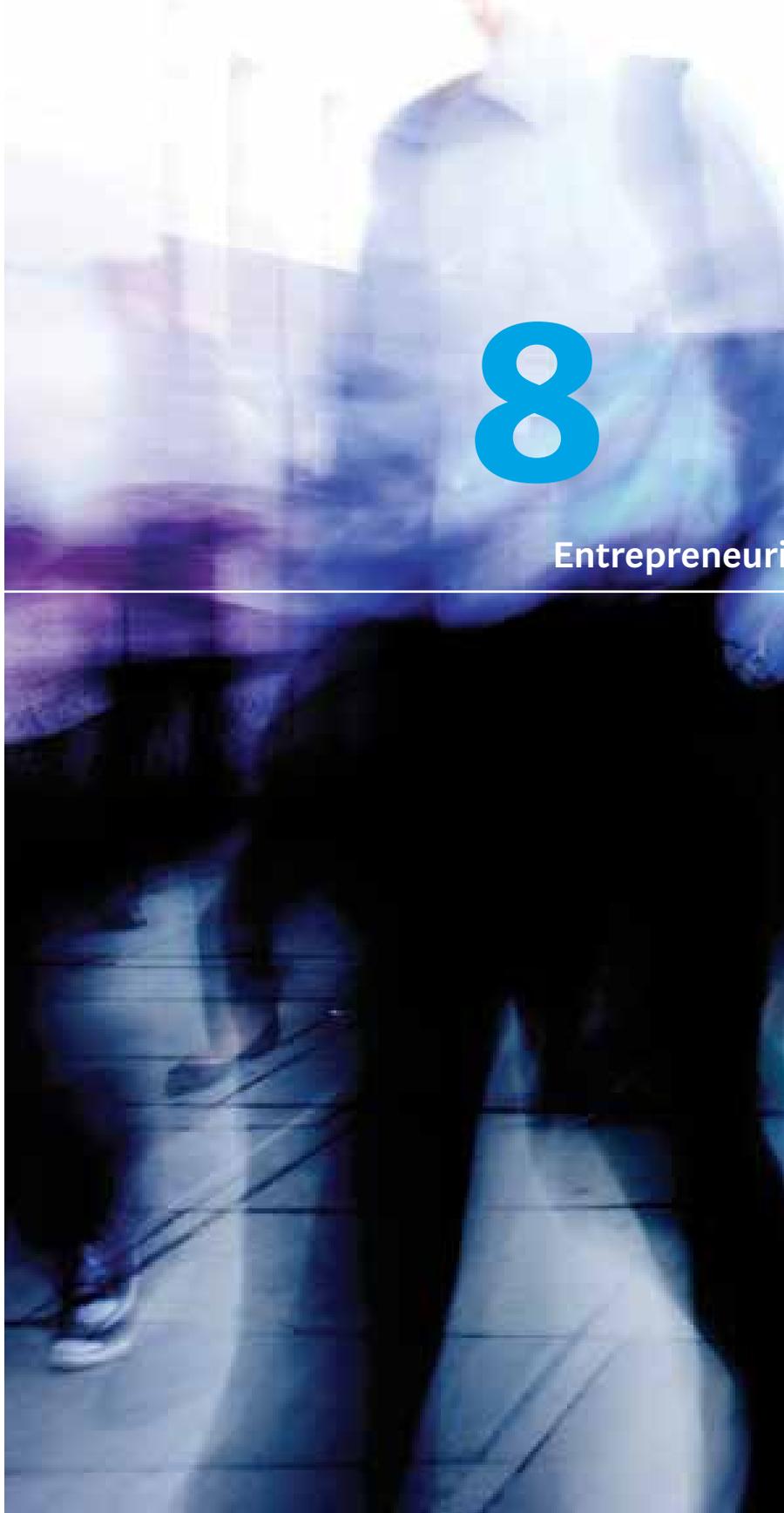
Source: University of Phoenix, Academic Annual Report, 2008.

Total and Online Enrollment in Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2002 – Fall 2007



Source: Allen, I.E., & Seaman, J. (2008). *Staying the Course: Online Education in the United States, 2008*. Newburyport, MA: The Sloan Consortium.

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8

Entrepreneurial Spirit

Working Learners Launch

Small Businesses

A listless economy and lack of consumer confidence have created one of the worst downturns in the job market since the Great Depression. For some working learners, the current economy has provided just the spark for pursuing a long-time dream: starting their own business.

No one will deny that launching a small business can be an uphill struggle, especially during an economic downturn, when capital assets and available health insurance remain two of the top concerns for small firms. Yet, as the Small Business Administration (SBA) suggested to President Barack Obama in 2009, small companies “also make important contributions to the economy through innovations and the creation of jobs, enterprises, and entire new industries.”¹ “If the past is an indication,” the SBA stated in its presidential report, small businesses “will likely help lead the economic recovery.”²

A 2009 study by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, one of the world’s largest foundations advocating entrepreneurship, states that more than half of the companies on the 2009 Fortune 500 list, and slightly less than half on the 2008 Inc. magazine list, were launched during a recession or a steady stock market decline, known as a bear market.³

Many working learners attend University of Phoenix and other schools because they want to acquire the knowledge necessary to start their own businesses. A sizeable percentage of those students are women and Latinos—two of the fastest-growing groups of entrepreneurs in the country.

Women Small Business Owners: A Growing Trend

There are an estimated 7.2 million majority-owned (51% or higher), privately held women-owned businesses in the United States.⁴ Women-owned businesses contribute nearly \$3 trillion to the national economy and create or maintain 23 million jobs, according to new research conducted by the National Women’s Business Council (NWBC), Wal-Mart Stores Inc., and the Center for Women’s Business Research.⁵ Additionally, women-owned companies employ or generate 16% of the country’s jobs and have continued to grow at twice the rate of all businesses for nearly three decades.⁶

Many women choose to start their own businesses for reasons of family and lifestyle. They want to be able to pick up their children from school, run errands, or have lunch with friends, even if that means working into the evening. The SBA reports that female



executives are also motivated by a desire for challenge and self-determination.⁷ Some have hit the glass ceiling in corporations and are seeking a more direct path to the top of the business ladder.

Women-owned businesses contribute nearly \$3 trillion to the national economy and create or maintain 23 million jobs.

Money plays a smaller role. According to a 2009 report by the U.S. Department of Labor, women who worked full-time in the labor force had median earnings of \$649 per week, or 78.9% of the \$823 median for men.⁸ The NWBC reported in 2007 that starting one's own business can bridge the wage gap, although women-led businesses are more concentrated in low-revenue industries, with retail trade having the highest number of women-led businesses among all races and ethnicities.⁹

No matter why women choose to start their own firms, they often realize that the entrepreneurial road is fraught with obstacles. According to the NWBC, the longstanding challenge of accessing capital has gone from “bad to worse” during the current economic downturn.¹⁰ Many women have trouble identifying potential funding sources

and securing lender or investor commitments. Some have difficulty finding affordable health-insurance plans for their employees. Others find the tax structure too complex to understand and lack knowledge of business finances and long-term financial planning.¹¹ Education about sound business practices can help fill these knowledge gaps and instill women entrepreneurs with the confidence and skills to be successful.

Educators Have a Role to Play in the Creation of Small Businesses

Surprisingly, many female entrepreneurs have not attended secondary education or pursued advanced degrees in business. According to the SBA's Office of Advocacy, between the years 2003 and 2006, 28% of these women had only a high-school diploma, while 33% had attended some college. Roughly 21% held a bachelor's degree, 10% had a master's degree, and less than 2% had a Ph.D.¹²

Education increases the likelihood that a woman will start her own business. The SBA concluded that women who had completed high school (32%), some college (58%), a bachelor's degree (73%), or more than a bachelor's degree (10.5%) were more likely to enter self-employment than women who had less than a high-school education.¹³

While self-employed women have more education and increase their education at higher rates than wage- and salary-employed women, the SBA reports that many female entrepreneurs could benefit from further education. Experts say education is essential to helping women improve their skills to start and run successful businesses. These businesses, in turn, can help stimulate the economy. Additionally, the SBA suggests that education and experience can have a positive effect on the profitability of women-owned firms.¹⁴ "Education and training are valuable for any entrepreneur, but meeting the unique needs of female students is critical to supporting the growth of women-owned businesses," says NWBC chair Carole Jean Jordan.¹⁵

The NWBC recommends an increase in government-supported entrepreneurial development centers and other learning resources for entrepreneurs, improved outreach and marketing of the resources already available, and supportive technical assistance and training programs for women business owners who need help with operational issues. The NWBC also recommends creating tax incentives for small-business job creation; providing tax incentives or tuition reimbursement programs to support working, training, and apprenticeship programs; and promoting the trade professions.¹⁶

Schools like University of Phoenix play a large role in educating women interested in starting their own companies. John Grabarczyk, campus chair of the John Sperling School of Business at the University of Phoenix Dallas/Fort Worth Campus, says classroom activities are “preparing women to move into entrepreneurial positions more than in the past.”

The Latino Business Boom

Latinos, too, are making their mark on the American economy by founding small businesses—in large numbers. The number of Hispanic-owned businesses grew 31% between 1997 and 2002—three times the national average for all businesses, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.¹⁷ These 1.6 million Hispanic-owned businesses generated nearly \$222 billion in revenue, up 19%, since 1997, making Hispanics an influential force in the U.S. economy.¹⁸ According to HispanTelligence, close to three million Hispanic-owned firms generated an estimated \$389 billion, and this number will grow to \$539 billion in 2012.¹⁹

“The growth we see in Hispanic-owned businesses illustrates the changing fabric of American’s business and industry,” said former U.S. Census Bureau director Louis Kincannon in a 2006 press statement. “With Hispanic businesses among the fastest-growing segments of our economy, this is a good indicator of how competitiveness is driving the American economy.”²⁰

Latinos start businesses for numerous reasons, including the desire for autonomy, though family influence seems to play the most prominent role. “Hispanics have an advantage—and that advantage is their culture,” says Neil Richards, graduate business chair of the John Sperling School of Business at the University of Phoenix in San Antonio. “They are very much a relationship-oriented culture, and when someone ventures out and starts a business, he will have every cousin, uncle, and aunt supporting the business and telling everybody about it.”

Despite their cultural strengths, Latinos of various backgrounds face many obstacles in their quest for self-employment, including discrimination, language barriers, and inadequate financial knowledge. The SBA found that asset levels, such as net worth, home ownership, or asset income, can increase the probability of self-employment. Yet often Hispanics’ lower asset levels create a barrier to starting their own businesses. According to the SBA’s report on minority business, the median income of Hispanic households



in 2005 was \$36,000, far below the \$51,000 median for non-Hispanic whites and the \$61,000 median for Asian households.²¹ The SBA reports that 71% of Hispanics who start their own business use personal or family savings to finance the venture.²²

Latinos, especially immigrants, have low levels of education when compared to other ethnic groups, which can translate into a lower rate of business launches. About 52% of immigrant Latinos and about 25% of native-born Latinos did not complete high school.²³ Education can help Latinos overcome some of the obstacles they face when starting a business, such as not knowing where to seek sources of capital. As University of Phoenix faculty member Chris Mendoza notes, some Hispanics feel unprepared to take on administrative challenges. “For instance,” Mendoza observes, “one owner reported he lost his first business because he did not understand the U.S. tax system and failed to make adequate payments.”

Clara Segarra-Roman, a business faculty member at the University of Phoenix in Puerto Rico, says most American colleges and universities “are not culturally sensitive to Hispanics’ needs,” but that her faculty colleagues have the “academic credentials and technological tools to stay abreast of the cultural needs that are unique to a Hispanic business environment.”

Successful Hispanics stress the importance of education, creating innovative products and services to address market needs, and accessing support organizations, like the National Hispanic Business Association. The newly formed National Hispanic Entrepre-

neurs' Organization in Charlotte, North Carolina, also provides know-how, networking, and mentoring resources to new and existing high-growth entrepreneurs.

Working Learners on the Path to Business Ownership

Many University of Phoenix alumni have gone on to found successful businesses, large and small. Below are just a few of their stories.

TEKEMIA DORSEY

Nurturing the Leaders of Tomorrow

Tekemia Dorsey, who earned a doctorate from University of Phoenix, was able to parlay the dissertation process into a new career. She founded a consulting firm, Creative Creations Consulting, LLC, which provides research support for students, faculty, and private industry. “When I was working on my dissertation, I started getting insight into other candidates coming up a year or two behind me,” Dorsey says. “I saw this was my niche—paying attention to detail and helping others.”

Dorsey has also combined her passions for education and leadership by starting a leadership program for children. Using the knowledge she gained by interviewing teachers for her dissertation, she developed a curriculum for a leadership institute for the elementary school-aged student and piloted the program in the 2007-2008 school year. Now, two schools in the Baltimore area are using her program.

“Most leadership programs for young people are conducted at the middle- and high-school level,” Dorsey says. “But I’ve found that you can teach leadership at any age.” Last year, Dorsey started a publishing company, CCC Publishing, and authored two children’s books about leadership, *The Spiritual ABCs of Transformational Leadership*, geared towards children in elementary school, and *The Spiritual Guide to Transformational Leadership*, aimed at middle- and high-school students. Both books are illustrated by Hana Albrecht and Gary Hines. “The whole premise behind the children’s books is that today’s youth are tomorrow’s leaders,” Dorsey says.

Dorsey’s list of accomplishments continues: Recently, she launched her own online radio show focused on youth, education, and leadership. “I hope to use the show as a platform to continue to advocate for youth,” Dorsey says. “Kids today are faced with so many

problems, like peer pressure and bullying. Hopefully, my program can provide parents and teachers with some solutions.”

In the future, Dorsey intends to publish several more books, including follow-ups to the books that emerged from her dissertation—*A Systems Thinking Approach to Bridging the Achievement Gap for All Students* and *Testimonies from the Knowledge Workers: Recipes for Educational Success*—as well as a children’s book on self-respect and self-esteem.

JULIE MCCALLSON

Fiscal Success through Physical Fitness

Single mother Julie McCallson decided to return to school at age 37 to earn a bachelor’s degree, and enrolled in the business management program at University of Phoenix. While she was studying and working in the advertising field, she was approached by investors who suggested she open a fitness school. The idea appealed to McCallson, who launched the National Personal Training Institute of Southern California. The school offers comprehensive programs for students interested in entering the field of fitness and training.

A few years later, McCallson and her partners opened a second school, and she eventually bought out her partners and opened fitness-training centers in two more Southern California locations. She now solely owns four profitable fitness training schools in Santa Monica, San Diego, Costa Mesa, and Murrieta, and employs eight people.

McCallson says her education at University of Phoenix was especially valuable because of the evening classes and additional offerings that other schools did not provide. “[At University of Phoenix, we learned] about ethics, treating your employees right, and that always rang in my head,” says McCallson. “I really felt University of Phoenix gave me the confidence I needed to be a part of the business world.”

DENISE RANSOM

A Big Heart Nurtures a Small Business

University of Phoenix alumna Denise Ransom of California says starting her own small business is proving to be one of her best life decisions. Ransom, 54, runs a visitation center for parents whose children are in the foster-care system.

After she and 60 coworkers were laid off from a local family-services agency, Ransom used her savings to launch the center, called From My Heart to Your Heart. Visitations take place at Ransom's community church. She would eventually like to afford a house where she can supervise the visitations.

While not all female entrepreneurs complete secondary or advanced education, Ransom says her time at University of Phoenix, where she earned a bachelor's degree in human services, was invaluable. "The advocating for others and the relationship-building—the approach to interacting with other people and increasing your network—was what [University of Phoenix] gave me," she says.

Ransom says she chose University of Phoenix because it provided "immediate access to education"—a quick induction phase—and because the school offered night classes. "When you're ready to attend, they will put you in a class next week," she says. So far, Ransom's organization is working with a few dozen families. She says she will not turn anyone away.

Strengthening America's Businesses, One Learner at a Time

Starting a business is one of the most direct ways working learners have an impact on society. By launching their own firms, the alumni featured in this chapter have created jobs, contributed to the economy, and improved their own financial status. Yet they are only a few of the thousands of working learners who have opened businesses—or who dream of doing so. Education can help prospective and current entrepreneurs gain the skills and knowledge they need to make their businesses thrive.

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CONCLUSION

Working learners are motivated individuals who recognize the value of education. By making an extraordinary commitment to school, work, and family, they hope to better themselves, and, in the process, raise their families' standard of living. By enhancing their skills and knowledge, working learners make greater contributions to their homes, workplaces, communities, and to society at large. They launch businesses, take on leadership roles, solve workplace problems, and make better informed decisions when voting, investing their money, and raising their children.

To help working learners achieve their important goals, educators should keep a few key principles in mind. First, adult students need *flexibility*. They must be able to fit education into lives already filled with responsibilities. Working learners may also need to take time off from their studies due to life events beyond their control, such as relocations, job changes, illnesses or injuries, and births or deaths in the family. Educators can accommodate these students' needs by providing them with options. For example, institutions can schedule sections of the same class both online and on-campus; offer courses that last a few weeks instead of an entire semester; and ensure that required classes are scheduled several times per year.

Second, working learners seek *practicality*. Most have clearly defined educational and career goals, and they want their coursework to be immediately relevant to those goals. Adults appreciate learning from faculty with experience in the same career fields as their own (or in fields they plan to enter). They value faculty who can demonstrate how to apply course-related concepts and knowledge in the workplace.

Finally, working learners need emotional and logistical *support*. Many have been out of school for years; some have no higher education experience at all. They may have never filled out a college application, used an online learning system, or selected a book from a campus library. Support staff and faculty need to be aware of the issues working learners face and offer assistance with a wide range of educational processes, including enrollment, course scheduling, and development of time management and study skills. Working learners may also be anxious about returning to school and lack confidence in their academic abilities. Supportive relationships with faculty and staff are important to them.

Caring, accessible faculty who respond quickly to adult students' concerns can have a powerful impact on learners' persistence and success.

To sustain their extraordinary commitment and succeed in their many roles, working learners embrace lifelong learning in the face of challenges. The fact that they willingly add study to their responsibilities as spouses, parents, and employees testifies to their belief in the transformative power of education. By adapting to meet working learners' needs, educators can smooth the path to academic and career success for this large and vital population.

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To learn more, visit the University of Phoenix Knowledge Network at www.phoenix.edu/knowledgenetwork or email knowledge.network@phoenix.edu

No longer is the average American college student an 18- to 22-year-old living on campus. Today, 73% of students at U.S. colleges and universities are working learners—adults pursuing degrees while working part- or full-time. These students must fit education into busy lives filled with responsibilities: They are employees, parents, spouses, and caretakers for ill and elderly family members. Higher education will need to adapt to better serve these students through flexible class scheduling, relevant course content, convenient access to class (including online classes), more intensive support services, and improved communication with faculty and staff.

The purpose of this book is to shed greater light on the often overlooked population of working learners. Through facts, figures, and real-life stories, the book presents a broad overview and many intimate glimpses into the everyday lives of these students. The book aims to reveal the obstacles these students face when pursuing higher education, the successes they enjoy, and the many ways they contribute to the workforce and society.

Learn more at the University of Phoenix Knowledge Network:

www.phoenix.edu/knowledgenetwork

or email knowledge.network@phoenix.edu

