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Publication Date

2020-06-01

Data Availability

The data associated with this publication are not available for this reason: Protected by IRB

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UNSEEN COSTS

The Experiences of Workers and
Learners in Los Angeles County

UCLA Labor Center

dhi

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Los Angeles Community College District

UCLA Labor Studies

UCLA College | Social Sciences
Institute for Research
on Labor & Employment

June 2020

Unseen Costs: The Experiences of Workers and Learners in Los Angeles County

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Executive Summary

Today, over half of college students work. Their experiences as workers and learners are impacted by increasing college costs and often exorbitant living expenses, and compounded by low wages. Meanwhile, state funding for public institutions has decreased dramatically: in 2017, it was nearly \$9 billion less than in 2008.¹ Tuition and fees have increased across every institution of public higher education in California. Financial aid rarely covers the educational expenses of workers and learners, and students generally face an acute funding gap.² Workers and learners are concentrated in the low-wage service economy, and nine out of 10 worked more than 15 hours a week. Many simply lack the resources to pay for their tuition and fees, books, other necessary supplies, housing, and utilities.³

Yet this emerging reality has not produced a systematic infrastructure that might provide support and necessary accommodations for workers and learners. In fact, their schoolwork and engagement with academic opportunities suffers for their work commitments, and they are often penalized at work for attempting to meet their scholarly obligations and schedules.

This report explores how workers and learners in Los Angeles' public colleges and universities experience the competing demands of school and the workplace as they prepare for careers. We used a participatory and research justice approach, and worked with students, workers, and community partners to collect and analyze the data. Using mixed-sampling methodology, we collected a total of 869 surveys and 75 interviews. In addition, we analyzed government data and conducted an extensive review of existing policy and academic literature. The following are key findings from our research.

The Educational and Career Journey: Goals for School and Work

Workers and learners are well aware of the benefits of postsecondary degrees and the value of work in developing useful skills. But they face a disconnect between their jobs and their career goals, and one that is only furthered by the challenges in obtaining internships and work-study programs that move them further toward their future careers.

- **Workers and learners value completing their degrees.** The overwhelming majority (91%) think it is very important to complete their current degree, and 56% would like to earn a graduate or professional degree.
- **Some need to extend the timespan in which they complete their degrees.** One-in-five had to take time off from school, and 20% have been in school for more than four years, including one-third of CSU students.
- **They gain skills at their job, but their work is disconnected from their studies.** Students worked for financial reasons, but also to develop communication skills, gain experience in their fields, and develop career networks. Concentrated in service and frontline jobs, 68% reported that their jobs were not related to their future work or long-term careers, 59% said their jobs tasks were unrelated to their majors, and 52% reported that their courses did not relay skills related to their jobs.
- **Most do not have access to internships or work-study programs.** Three-quarters had never had an internship, and only one-in-10 had a work-study job, so that their work hours rarely aligned with their fields of interest and/or career goals.

Double Shift: The Penalties of Working and Learning

Workers and learners daily face difficult decisions on how to best meet the conflicting demands of work and school. Though they may intentionally choose jobs that grant them the flexibility to accommodate their class schedules, many are still unable to take advantage of academic opportunities to interact with faculty and peers. The persistent tension between meeting academic and work demands can result in high levels of stress and a sense of exclusion.

- **Workers and learners have full plates with classes and work commitments.** Our study focused on participants who worked 16 hours in the prior week. On an average week, learners were working significantly more hours. Nearly half worked between 20 and 29 hours and one-third worked 30 or more hours. Study participants also had to be enrolled in at least 6 college course units. Three-quarters were taking 12 or more units. Nearly one-quarter worked more than one job, while 29% had a second major or minor. Two-thirds have worked every single term of school.
- **Workers and learners report flexibility in work accommodations, but still experienced conflicts with school schedules.** Most workers reported getting the hours they want, a set schedule, and being able to adjust schedules at work. Yet, 69% missed school opportunities because of work, such as class sessions, late or missed assignments, study groups, and team meetings. Additionally, 71% had missed at least one academic activity, such as meeting with a professor, attending a campus program, talking to a teaching assistant, or receiving tutorial support.
- **Balancing competing expectations at work and school had negative repercussions for workers and learners' well-being.** 63% reported experiencing high levels of stress, and 40% have contemplated taking a break from school. Half of those who considered withdrawal said it was due to school or work pressures.

Finances and Hidden Costs

Workers and learners faced financial burdens and inadequate support. Many did not receive financial support from family members and were met with high living costs and expenses. As a result, they faced significant economic hardships.

- **Workers and learners face challenges with financing their education.** Three-quarters were concerned about their ability to afford their education. Though over half reported that they were classified as dependent students, 63% did not receive any financial contribution from their families.
- **Working learners spend their wages on more than just tuition.** More than half (57%) worked to cover basic living expenses (e.g., rent, food, and transportation), yet nearly two-thirds were either late or altogether missed payments.

- **Financial insecurity leads to housing and food insecurity.** One-in-two experienced food insecurity, which includes skipped meals, disrupted eating patterns, and lacking nutritionally balanced diets. And one-in-three faced housing insecurity, such as difficulty paying rent and the need to frequently shuffle living arrangements.

Recommendations

The academic progress and future careers of working students is threatened by the conflicting demands of their work and school lives. When asked what they would change about their situation, most expressed the need for access to free or affordable college and the opportunity to either not work or to earn higher wages. These challenges, inherently urgent, have produced a moment in which educational institutions and workplaces might be transformed so that workers and learners can thrive in pursuit of their educational and career goals. The following are recommendations to improve their academic and career experiences:

1. Support workers as learners and learners as workers.

Both labor and educational spaces require reconceptualizing how to better the conditions of working students.

- Provide worker rights training and protection** to all workers, including those who are also students.
- Acknowledge work and school commitments**, and provide institutional support and accommodations.
- Support student unions** and workplace organizing efforts alike.

2. Strengthen career and educational pathways for working learners.

Work can be a beneficial and productive experience for students, particularly when the hours are reasonable, the job can advance educational and career goals, and the two complement, rather than compete with, each other.

- Extend accessible career resources** and learning tools.
- Support paid internships** and training that advances career goals.
- Develop opportunities** for networking and mentorship.

3. Improve the financial agency of all workers and all learners.

Because students work primarily for financial reasons, they need to be more deeply empowered to manage their finances and the costs of education.

- Make college affordable** for all.
- Provide tools to easily navigate financial systems** for students and families.
- Expand work-study opportunities** to all students, and on a year-round basis.

4. Provide holistic support.

Because juggling school and work takes a toll, working students need greater access to support services and tools for financial management.

- Provide mental health and counseling support** to help them navigate their multiple responsibilities and identities.
- Address food insecurity** immediately.
- Increase awareness about food and housing** insecurity.
- Improve public transportation** across Los Angeles County.



1. Introduction

Today, many college students are pursuing an education while working long hours to cover their fees and the markedly high cost of living in Los Angeles. This report examines the challenges and hidden costs experienced by those who attend public colleges and universities while holding down low-wage jobs.

Prior to the 1980s, a student could graduate from college with little-to-no debt, a living-wage job, and a path to homeownership.⁴ A Federal Pell grant in 1975 covered nearly 80% of a student's educational cost (tuition, fees, room, and board), as opposed to 29% in 2017.⁵ In 2019, California graduates left college with over \$20,000 in student debt.⁶ University of California fees grew five times between 1977 and 2018, and California State University tuition rose 900%.⁷ And even as the cost of tuition gradually leveled, the cost of living continued to rise.⁸ Non-tuition expenses such as rent, food, insurance, and books have risen by 18% since 2012.⁹ Working class students who may have the majority of their educational costs covered still struggle to pay for living expenses.¹⁰

In 2018, half of college students worked, and that work was almost entirely in low-wage jobs.¹¹ Given the changing context at the national, state, and local level, workers and learners are a growing college student population across all college systems. Yet this emerging reality has not produced an infrastructure that might provide support and necessary accommodations for workers and learners. In fact, their schoolwork and engagement with academic opportunities suffer due to their work commitments, and they are often penalized at work for attempting to meet their scholarly obligations and schedules. How these students experience higher education is distinct: they may necessarily forego family commitments, sleep, the sense of exploration that should be inherent to college life, and even meals.

For many, completing a degree is almost prohibitively demanding. In our 2016 study of young workers in Los Angeles’s retail and restaurant sectors, census data showed that almost one-quarter had started, but did not finish, their education.¹² Workers enrolled in school often struggle to meet academic expectations when their employers afford them few accommodations. Nearly half (43%) of retail workers attending school in Los Angeles missed at least one class due to a work schedule priority.¹³

The burden of student debt profoundly impacts students and the choices they make about what jobs to take, how many hours they work, where they live, and whether or not they can complete their degrees. The need to earn a living can delay working students’ graduations or even compel them to drop out. In addition, they may not have the time or capacity to pursue internships, academic conferences, volunteer or partake in other extracurricular opportunities that could advance their educational and professional careers. A 2018 Georgetown University study concluded that overworking while enrolled in a postsecondary program decreases the likelihood of degree completion as well as impacts academic performance.¹⁴

The state of California has the responsibility to acknowledge that the face of the traditional student is changing, and higher education must change with it. Our colleges and universities need to ensure that learners have the necessary qualifications, credentials, and competencies to successfully enter the workforce upon degree completion. When students are working 15, 20, or even 30 hours per week in unrelated fields and low-paying jobs, they suffer a significant disadvantage in preparing for their futures.¹⁵ Researchers have called on educators, elected officials, and policymakers to strategically rethink connections between work and higher education.¹⁶ It is crucial to confront the challenges that lie at this intersection of higher education and labor, given that the new normal is workers and learners struggling to make ends meet in precarious labor conditions.¹⁷ By examining this intersection, we also shed light on the penalties workers and learners experience in their workplaces for being students and in their classrooms for being workers.¹⁸ We hope to start a conversation that recognizes the distinct needs and experiences of students as workers and workers as learners.

Workers and Learners

In the mid-2010s, a number of academics began to employ the term earners and learners to describe the experiences of college students who work. Most recently, Carnevale, Smith, and Melton developed iterations of this term, using working learners to refer to students who need to work, are young, and mature; and learning workers to refer to more experienced workers who also attend college.¹⁹ Blanchard Kyte also used workers and learners to convey the simultaneity of education and wage work.²⁰ Relatedly, we use workers and learners to highlight the contradictions and penalties of studying and working long hours.

We intentionally lead with worker, an identity often rendered as secondary in conversations about higher education. We want to highlight that students who work are essential to the California economy, link their experiences with those of other workers, affirm student work as real work, and connect the fight for students with the fight for all workers. Furthermore, we chose the broader term learner to encompass various kinds of students who may be young, old, returning, or part-time.

We will explore how workers and learners navigate structural constraints as they pursue rigorous academic and technical programs, participate in a variety of work experiences, and attend to their basic living needs. We hope to bring to light how educational institutions and employers penalize workers and learners, perhaps unintentionally, due to the limits they encounter as they attempt to meet the needs of both the university and employers.

About This Study

The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Labor Center and the Dolores Huerta Labor Institute of the Los Angeles Community College District, in partnership with the UCLA Institute for Research and Employment and the UCLA Labor Studies program, launched the Workers and Learners Research Project to contextualize the realities of this population and build broader engagement among community, educator, employer, and policy stakeholders. The project builds on previous UCLA Labor Center research on young workers in the region as well as our longstanding engagement with students at the community colleges, UCLA, and other public universities in the region. From August 2018 to September 2019, we collected 869 surveys and 75 interviews across the public university system in Los Angeles County. The study utilized a unique methodology, working with California Community College, California State University, and UCLA professors and students to implement the survey and participate in the data analysis. We recruited 454 students to participate in the research process, with six graduate student researchers and a core team of 22 undergraduate students who conducted additional research and analysis through independent study and a research seminar. In addition, we conducted an extensive literature review and scan of government data sources (see Appendix A).

Drawing from our extensive data, we have provided an analysis that accounts for the complex lives of workers and learners. Section 1 begins with an overview of workers and learners in Los Angeles, followed by a contextual overview of the issues that impact workers and learners today. The next three sections focus on research findings from the interviews and surveys. Section 2 describes the educational goals of workers and learners, the connects and disconnects between study and work, and the opportunities, or lack thereof, for college internships. Section 3 unpacks the challenges of balancing unstable work schedules with the demands of school and the emotional and mental health experiences that follow. Section 4 delves into the financial barriers they face, including funding shortfalls. The report ends with a series of recommendations based on our data analysis workshops and discussions with workers and learners.



1. Overview and Context of Workers and Learners

Workers and Learners in Los Angeles County

Students, from those in high school to those in graduate programs, are integral to the fabric of Los Angeles County, and comprised 2.7 million people and over one-quarter of the total population in 2018. Among all learners, 27% were in undergraduate programs, and the majority (82%) attended public colleges and universities. Among all students in Los Angeles County, 18% were employed, but 52% of undergraduates were working.

Figure 1: Undergraduates in Public Universities

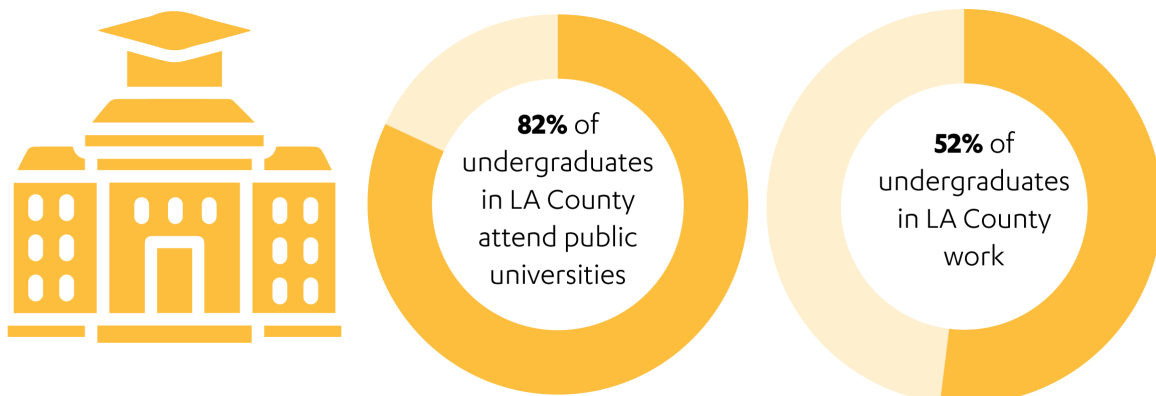
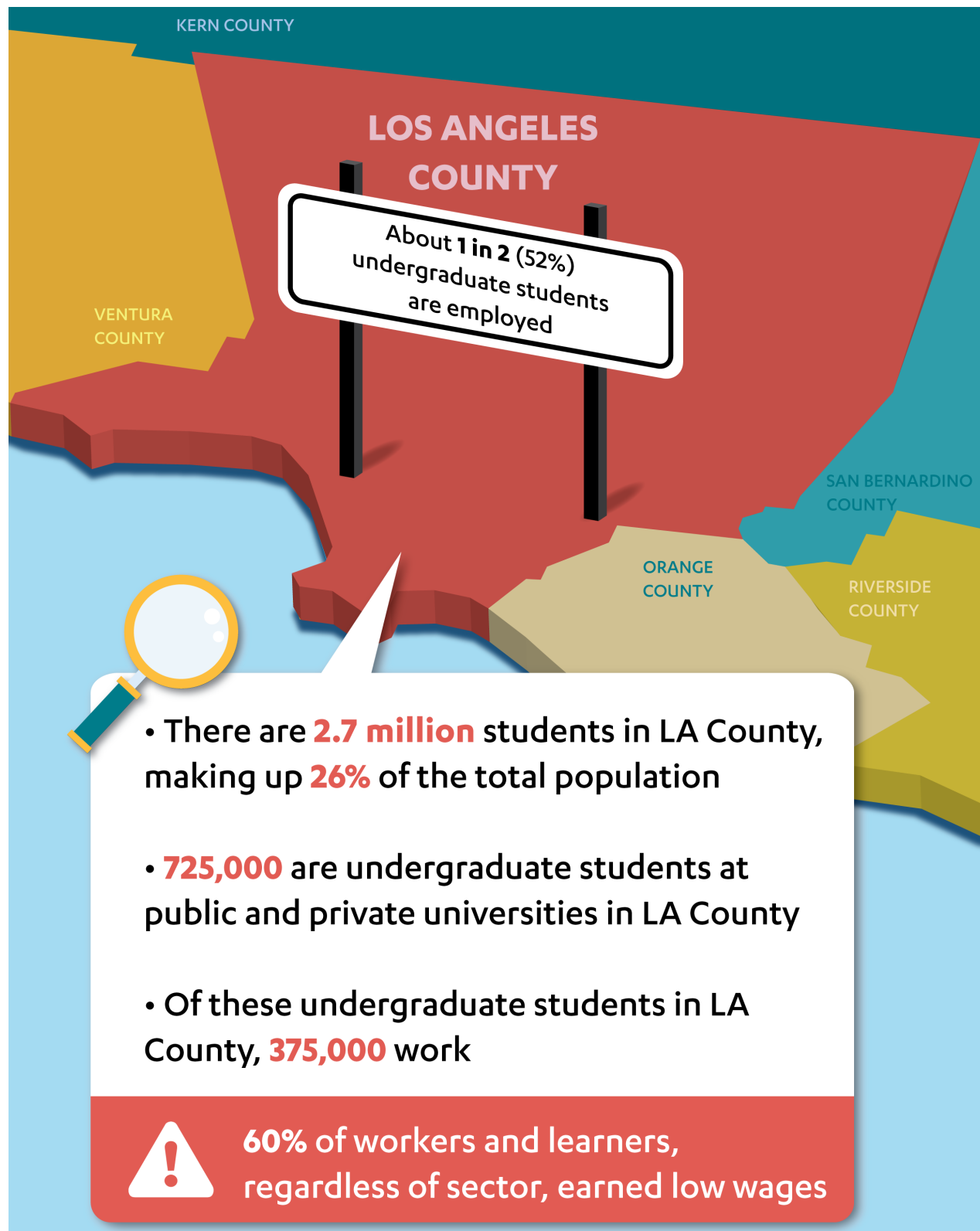


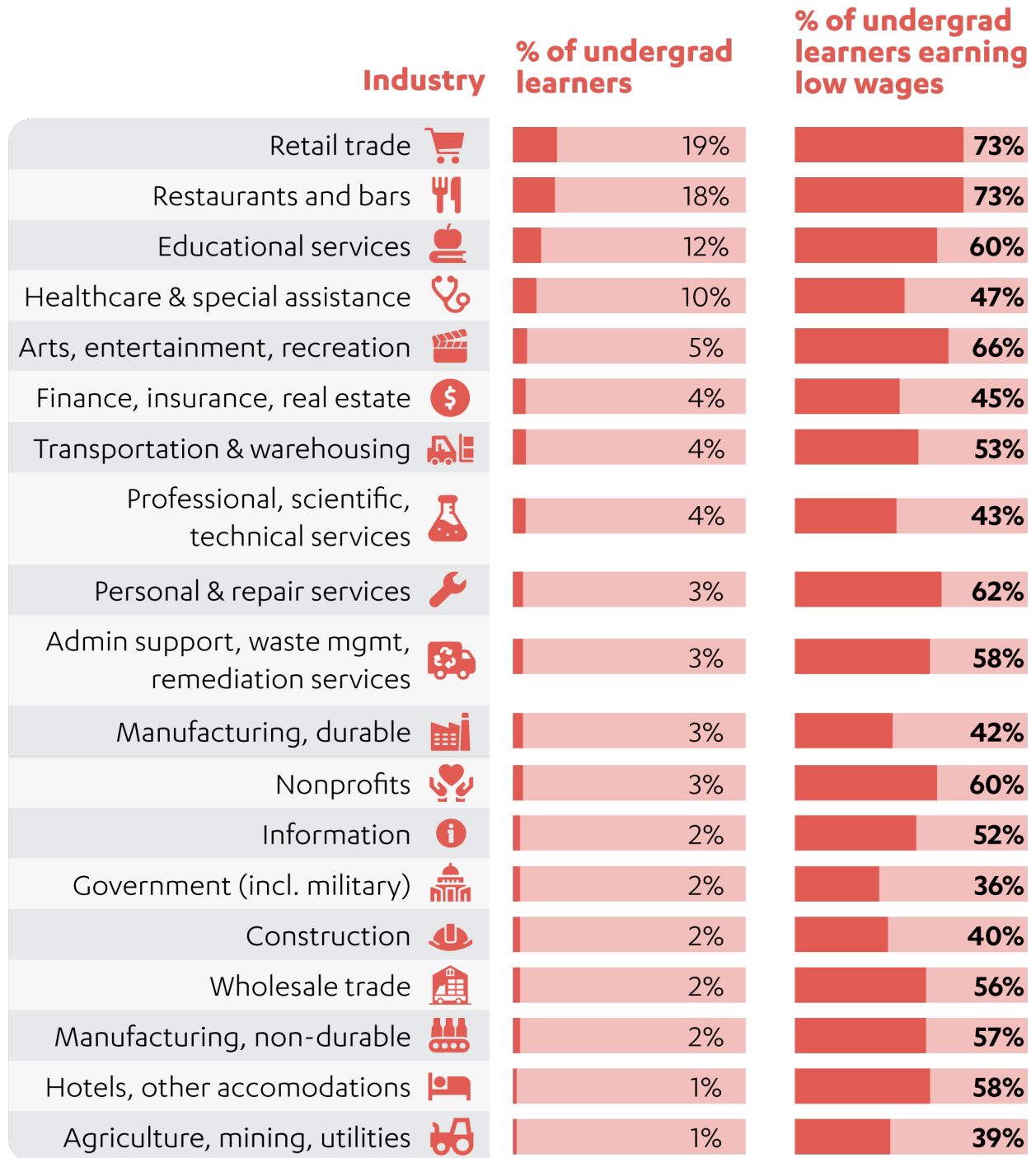
Figure 2: Overview of Workers and Learners in Los Angeles



Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey 5-year sample 2014–2018.

Workers and learners are concentrated in the low-wage service economy.²¹ Over one-third worked in retail and restaurant jobs, and the majority earned low wages (defined as two-thirds of the median area wage for a full-time worker).²² In fact, 60% of all workers and learners, regardless of sector, earned low wages.

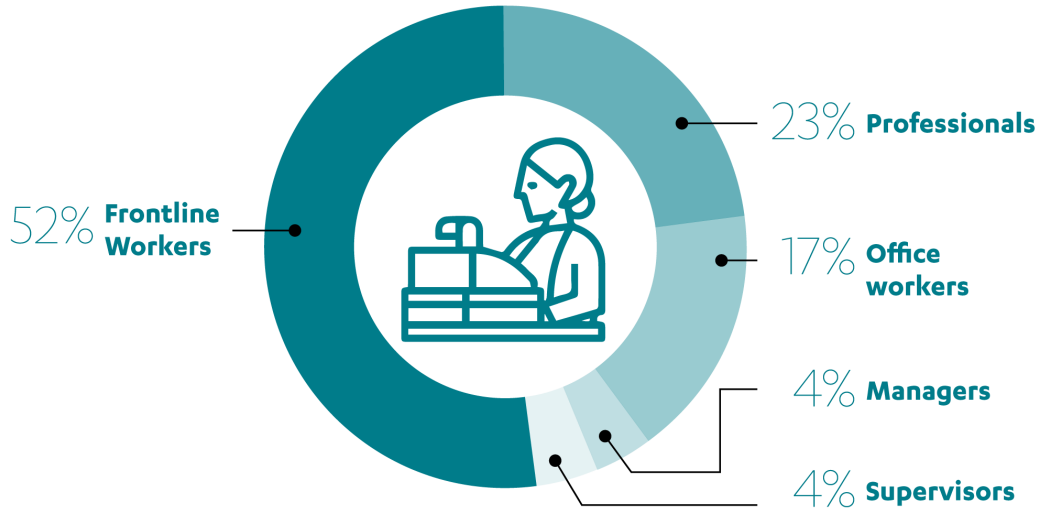
Figure 3: Industry Type and Low Wages for Workers and Learners²³



Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey 5-year sample 2014–2018.

Most workers and learners are in service occupations, such as salespersons, cashiers, stockers, and food workers, who labor on the shop floor or directly engage with customers.²⁴ More than half of workers and learners in Los Angeles are in frontline positions, with the rest in professional and office positions.

Figure 4: Type of Occupational Positions for Workers and Learners

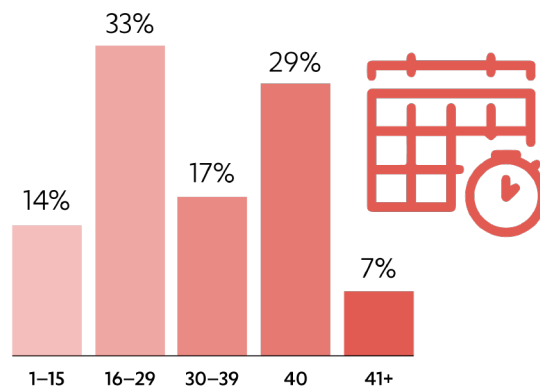


Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey 5-year sample 2014–2018.

Some studies have asserted that complimentary conditions for workers and learners can positively influence educational success and career advancement. Other studies, however, have found that students who work long hours—especially hours unrelated to their careers or campus experiences—have lower college completion rates.²⁵ For working-class learners in particular, working more than 15 hours a week has a detrimental effect on their education.²⁶ Even learners from middle-income households may work more hours to fund their education if their families earn too much to qualify for need-based aid but not enough to pay for higher education.²⁷

Among working public college students in Los Angeles County, 86% worked more than 15 hours a week, and one-third worked 40 or more.

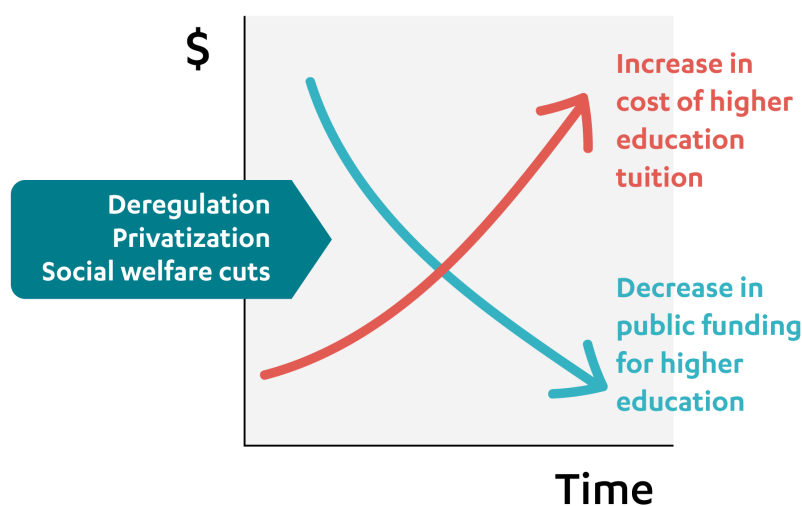
Figure 5: Average Weekly Hours for Workers and Learners in California



Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey 5-year sample 2014–2018.

Disinvestment in Higher Education and Labor

The contemporary experiences of workers and learners largely arise from the economic and social world shaped by the neoliberal practices and policies of the 1970s and 1980s, along with the 2008 U.S. recession.²⁸ First, principles such as “the benevolence of the free market, minimal state intervention and regulation of the economy, and the individual as a rational economic actor” have dominated this period.²⁹ As a result, social welfare programs have been deregulated, privatized, and cut.³⁰ Unsurprisingly, educational institutions have experienced slashes in funding and have been especially susceptible to privatization.³¹ Over the last three decades, college tuition and fees have increased more than 500%, “outpacing the Consumer Price Index, gasoline, and even... health care.”³² In 2017, state funding for higher education was nearly nine billion dollars less than 2008 levels.³³ This precipitous rise in tuition has produced deep levels of student debt and forced learners to work longer hours in low-wage jobs. Since 2012, student loan debt has actually superseded credit card, housing, and medical debt.³⁵ Student loan debt has grown exponentially from \$600 billion in 2008 to more than \$1.5 trillion in 2018, signaling a fundamental change to the current U.S. university system and economy.³⁶



These economic and social policy transformations have ushered in an era of deindustrialization and deunionization that has impacted workers and the most basic ways by which work is organized.³⁷ Moreover, deunionization has resulted in a lack of job security, a growth in inequality, and a “casualization” of workplace arrangements.³⁸ The shift from full-time work with protections to part-time work with highly circumscribed benefits has left student workers with precarious, largely unprotected, and low-wage jobs. In other words, an array of policies have contributed to reframing not only students’ understanding of their responsibilities in their pursuit of higher education, but also those institutions’ sometimes dim expectations of their likelihood of success.³⁹

The mid-century imagination of a college degree as synonymous with individual advancement and social mobility in the U.S. has always been merely partial. For working students, particularly low-income students of color, higher education has long perpetuated class inequalities rooted in the lack of affirmative access, the cycle of debt from the costs of college, and the pressure of necessary commitments to low-wage labor.⁴⁰ The decline in available financial aid and the simultaneous rise in tuition and associated costs has exacerbated these already precarious circumstances.⁴¹

A 2016 report found that tuition comprised more than 61% of the total cost of attending a college, but that the cost of living had also increased by 80% since 1975.⁴² Even with a full financial aid package, low-income learners in 2011-2012 still accrued an average of \$12,000 in expenses.⁴³ For some students in the 1950s, a summer job could help pay for college tuition. In the 1960s and 1970s, college students could generally afford college on a minimum wage if they worked ten hours a week while in school and a summer job.⁴⁴ That window, however, has mostly closed.

At the very moment working students encounter increasing price tags for college, institutions are being pressured to improve measurable performance for the sake of funding from federal and state governments.⁴⁵ The California Community College (CCC) system, for instance, has implemented performance-based funding which measures, among other things, the number of students “earning associate degrees and credit certificates, the number of students transferring to four-year colleges and universities, and the number of students who complete transfer-level math and English within their first year.”⁴⁶

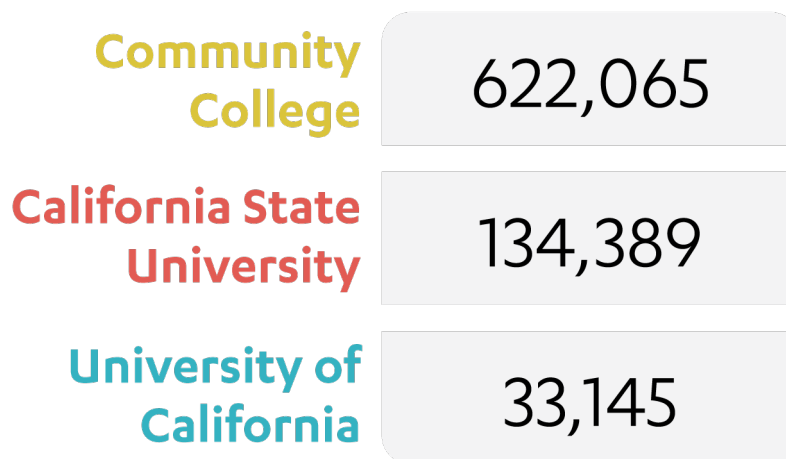
In this model, performance is linked to the student as an individual, and the inability to find a good job after graduating is registered as a personal failure rather than as a reflection on the state of the institution, economy, or relevant industry. Rather than focusing on “civic engagement, democratic education, and learning for its own sake,” the current university model has shifted its mandate to measure employability in a globalizing economy.⁴⁷ The goal of higher education is thus transformed into private advantage rather than mutual social benefit.⁴⁸

The California Master Plan and Its Public Universities

In California, there are three public higher education systems: the University of California (UC), the California State University (CSU), and the California Community College (CCC). Through the Master Plan for Higher Education adopted in 1960, the state invested in public education by coordinating these three systems. The UCs were intended for research and postgraduate education, the CSUs (formerly California State Colleges) would grant bachelor’s degrees and would be less selective, and the CCC system would be more open and provide vocational and paraprofessional training.⁴⁹ The overall concept was to invest not just in physical infrastructure, but to foster broad educational opportunities in the post-WWII era.⁵⁰ But the goals of the master plan have remained unchanged for over half a century.

There are more than 222,500 undergraduates across the UC system, as of 2018.⁵¹ The CSUs make up the largest university system in the nation, with 23 CSUs that enrolled 428,400 undergraduates in 2018.⁵² There are 115 CCCs, with 73 districts,⁵³ which enroll 2.1 million learners, as of 2018.⁵⁴ Los Angeles County has one of the highest concentrations of public colleges and universities in the state,⁵⁵ with 22 community colleges (including the nine community colleges in the Los Angeles Community College District), five CSUs, and one UC.

Figure 6: Number of Undergraduates at CCC, CSU, and UC in Los Angeles



Source: The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) 2017

Funding and Financial Shortfall

In 2017–2018, UC tuition and fees were \$13,887 a year, CSUs were \$7,217, and CCCs totaled \$1,104.⁵⁶ While rising costs have led to marginal tuition increases, the primary culprit is declining funding from the state. According to a report from the Public Policy Institute of California, state allocation from the General Fund to the UC and CSU systems has decreased while net tuition (the total amount of tuition paid minus institutional grants) rose from 2004 to 2014.⁵⁷

Funding cuts restrict the availability of financial aid. In addition, financial aid usually only covers tuition and does not account for costs like housing, transportation, and books, and can lead to significant financial barriers for lower income learners.⁵⁸ Much of the federal funding for higher education is distributed directly to students through Pell Grants. While these have kept pace with inflation in recent years—the average grant amount was \$4,010 in 2017–2018—the number of recipients in 2017–2018 fell for the sixth consecutive year.⁵⁹ The Pell Grant is key for low-income learners, though it is still insufficient: the maximum Pell Grant in 2018–2019 covered only 60% of average public 4-year tuition and fees and only 17% of private 4-year institutions.⁶⁰

California, which ranks in the top 10 states for financial aid programs,¹⁰ awarded \$2 billion in grants and scholarships in 2018.⁶² Cal Grants, managed by the California Student Aid Commission, are the most commonly awarded,⁶³ and cover up to the full cost of tuition at a UC or CSU and just over \$9,000 per year at a private California college.⁶⁴ The Cal Grant is a competitive and exclusive program with eligibility requirements that favor 4-year students and recent high school graduates. Other programs include the Middle Class Scholarship, which helps learners cover 10% to 40% of their tuition,⁶⁵ and the Chafee Grant program for foster youth, which grants scholarships of \$5,000.⁶⁶ While these programs help California students, they focus on tuition and fees, and do not account for living and other educational expenses.

Despite public and private assistance, many learners live paycheck to paycheck, leading to financial instability and housing and food insecurity. Scholars have affirmed that struggling to meet one’s basic needs with limited educational or financial support pushes students to work more hours at low-wage jobs and to accrue even more debt. As a result, they face difficulties completing their academic programs or improving their chances for social and economic mobility.⁶⁷

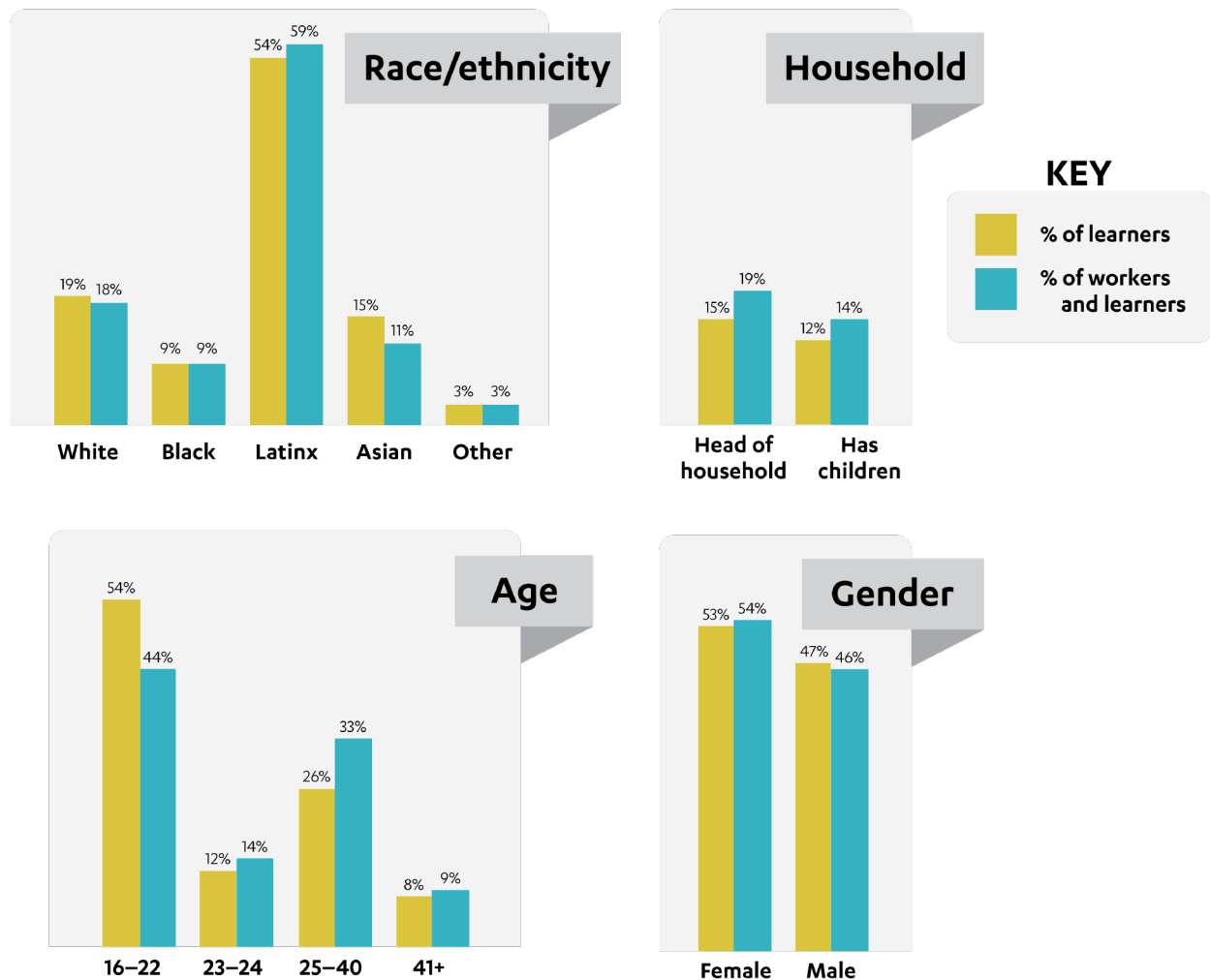
The California Student Aid Commission found that, in 2018–2019, the average California learner spent about \$2,000 a month to cover housing, food, textbooks, and other expenses, in addition to tuition.⁶⁸ Surveys collected in 2015 and 2016 of 30,000 students at 2-year and 4-year colleges revealed that, though most worked and received various forms of financial aid, one third of 2-year and 11–19% of 4-year college students experienced housing insecurity.⁶⁹ And those who reported food or housing insecurity also experienced mental and physical health issues that prevented them from focusing on school, work, and general self-care.

The failure to meet basic needs obviously hinders learning and higher skill development.⁷⁰ Though CCCs are an affordable alternative, given Los Angeles County’s tight housing market and ever-rising rents,⁷¹ it is not surprising that the California State Assembly Speaker’s Office of Research and Floor Analysis found that CCC students spent 43% of their income on housing and that one-quarter have experienced homelessness in recent years.⁷² Other research has shown that about 9% of students at CSUs,⁷³ 5% at UCs,⁷⁴ and 19% at CCCs have also experienced homelessness.⁷⁵

Not Your Traditional Student

The “traditional” student—one who is just out of high school, with some financial support from family, and few responsibilities outside the classroom—has increasingly become the exception in higher education. Students are now encompassed within a broad swath of economic backgrounds, educational pathways, racial/ethnic identities, and ages. The demographic profile of Los Angeles County exemplifies the nontraditional student: one-third were 25 years old or older, the majority were people of color, 15% were heads of households, and 12% were also parents. Single mothers in college have to spend substantially more time and money on childcare and home care than single women without children.⁷⁶ Parents may also have to choose between going to class or working to support their families. Learners no longer typically enter 4-year institutions immediately after high school. Rather, as scholar Deil-Amen reported, since the 1960s, 2-year colleges have increased their enrollment by twice the rate of undergraduate 4-year institutions.⁷⁷

Figure 7: Select Characteristics of All Learners and Workers in Los Angeles



Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey 5-year sample 2014–2018

In the next three sections, we draw from our surveys and interviews to highlight key aspects of the struggles and experiences of workers and learners.



2. The Educational and Career Journey: Goals for School and Work

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A WORKER AND LEARNER IN CONSTRUCTION

- 6:00 AM** I wake up
- 6:30 AM** I gather my work materials and head to my construction job
- 12:30 PM** It's lunch time! But I use the lunch break to head to campus
- 1:15 PM** I arrive to campus, head to the gym to shower, and grab something to eat from the vending machine
- 2:00 PM** I attend the first class of the day
- 3:00 PM** Class ends, and I head to the library to review homework
- 5:00 PM** I attend a 3-hour lab
- 8:00 PM** Class is done, and I head over to the gym to pick up my clothes
- 10:30 PM** I arrive home, and eat leftover dinner that my mother has prepared
- 12:00 AM** I head to bed after doing homework for tomorrow's class



Note: This is the daily schedule of a worker and learner who works and attends school on the same days.

As well-paying job opportunities for high school graduates continue to recede, a college degree has become key for securing a stable career. Among other long-term benefits, a degree is associated with job satisfaction, an increased likelihood that workers will see their jobs as careers, and a belief that there will be more opportunities for career advancement.⁷⁸ Furthermore, when faced with the challenges of unemployment, it takes less time for those with postsecondary degrees to find work, and they are more likely to find full-time employment with higher incomes.⁷⁹ For working students, higher education plays an integral role in expanding skill sets, shaping interests, furthering educational aspirations, and gaining access to lifelong learning and career resources.

This section explores how working students navigate obstacles to secure a degree. We also discuss commitments to internships and work-study programs that help lead to better work opportunities and conditions.

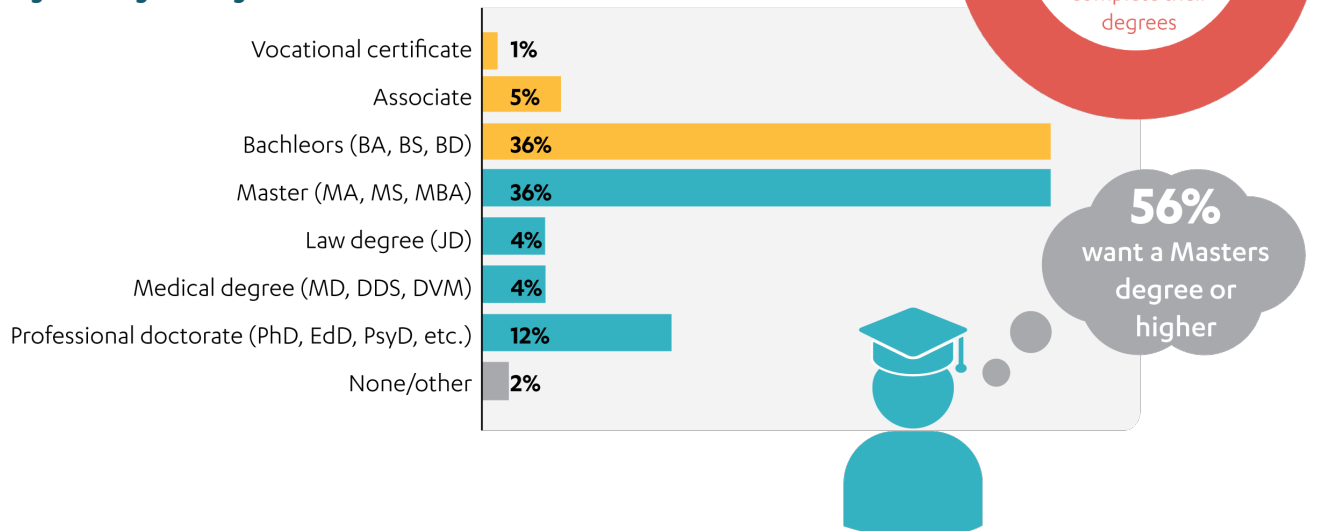
As a biology major, I look forward to working at a research lab upon my graduation. My goal is to use science to design tailored medical treatments that are capable of curing people. The mentorship I experienced working as a research assistant really motivated me to choose this career pathway. My mentor showed me what it means to be a researcher on a full-time basis working to solve real-life problems. Because of his guidance, I will be transferring to one of his colleague’s lab once I graduate to work there full-time. Having this type of job security as a senior is something for which I am grateful. I look forward to growing intellectually as well as expanding on my technical skills so that I can one day return to graduate school and make my dream come true of using science to help others.

Biology major working as a work-study research assistant in a lab¹⁰¹

Postsecondary Goals

In our study, one-third of working students were in the process of completing their undergraduate degrees, and 56% wanted to continue their education to earn graduate or professional degrees.

Figure 8: Highest Degree Students Plan to Obtain



I go to Cal State Northridge. It's been really good so far. I started working about two years ago in my sophomore year. My first year I didn't work because I wanted to get a feel about how school life was going to be. It wasn't until my second year that I decided to take a job because I believed I could balance work and school. I am studying geography with an emphasis on agriculture. After I graduate, I plan on going to veterinary school at UC Davis. Though I need the job to pay rent, I was lucky to find a job at a veterinary hospital where I have gotten exposure to what it's like to work with farm animals. Getting this hands-on experience has involved a lot of learning too, which is different from what I get in my classes. I definitely still look forward to graduating and going on to veterinary school.

Geography major at CSU Northridge¹⁰²

Workers and learners' degree plans differed by higher educational institution. Most noticeably, there were more workers and learners at UCs who planned to pursue a postgraduate degree, when compared to those attending a CSU or CCC. This distinction may be explained in part by differences in career and academic preparation as well as the resources available to students. Regardless of whether working students aspired to higher degrees or other professional certifications, their ultimate goal was to find stable, well-paying, and dignified jobs.

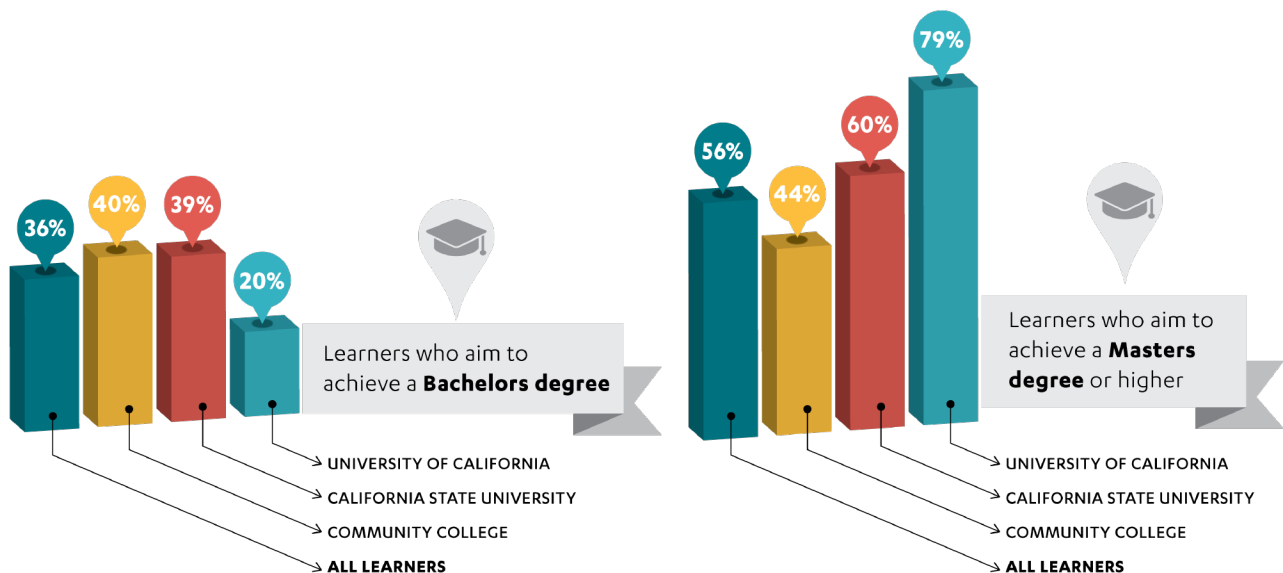


Figure 9: Degree Goals of Workers and Learners by School Type

One accounting major at CSU Long Beach (CSULB) explained that she was studying accounting to obtain the knowledge to become a business owner.⁸⁰ Naturally, a majority of working students selected their current educational goals to meet their future career goals, including occupations like social worker,⁸¹ teacher,⁸² nurse,⁸³ court interpreter,⁸⁴ and many others. Even those without specific career goals reported that they hoped their education would lead to “better job opportunities”⁸⁵ and a “better life.”⁸⁶

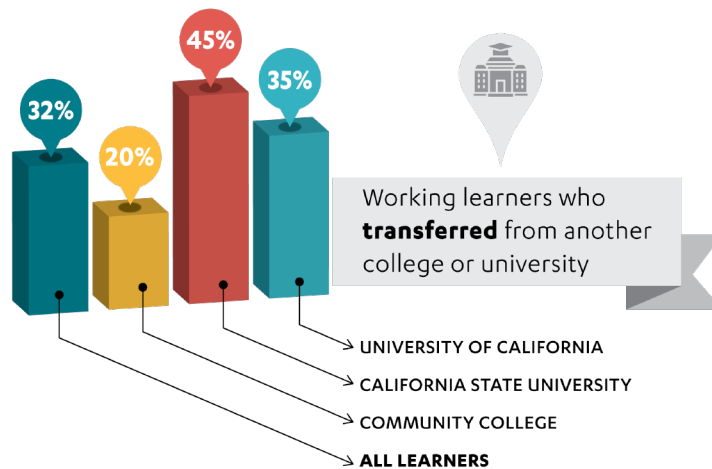
Along with acquiring the skills and experience to achieve their career goals, students also valued the development of critical thinking and the widening of their perspectives. A UCLA sociology major, with a minor in film, TV, and digital media, reported, “I hope to become a more educated person. Someone who knows what she’s interested in [and] just wants to learn more about the world.”⁸⁷

Some actively pursued scholar and activist Angela Davis’ expression of the educational process: the creation of “human beings who have human concerns, human beings who know and understand themselves, and are able to pass human judgments on what’s going on around them.”⁸⁸ Similarly, workers and learners expressed their desire to better understand the needs of their communities and to obtain careers that would allow them to address structural inequalities. “I am hoping to get a better understanding of the way that our community works to learn [and] eventually go into nonprofit consulting,” reported a transfer student at UCLA with a minor in labor studies.⁸⁹ Many wanted to use their future positions to create systemic change. A pre-med biology major phrased it, “I am trying to get a master’s in health administration to revamp the whole medical atmosphere [and] make sure that patients are being treated properly. That’s my goal.”⁹⁰

Achieving Goals

CCCs provide a launch pad for workers and learners on their way to 4-year degrees as well as opportunities to pursue other degrees and professional certifications that can help secure stable careers (e.g., associate degrees, certificates, and vocational and terminal degrees). One-third are transfer students, and for CSU students, almost half transferred.

Figure 10: Transfer Students by School Type Currently Attending



Of those that transferred, the majority did so from a community college. While many college students aspire toward 4-year and graduate degrees in pursuit of their careers, others with 4-year degrees may return to CCCs for certification in technical fields such as nursing, accounting, and small business management.⁹¹

Figure 11: School Type Transferred From

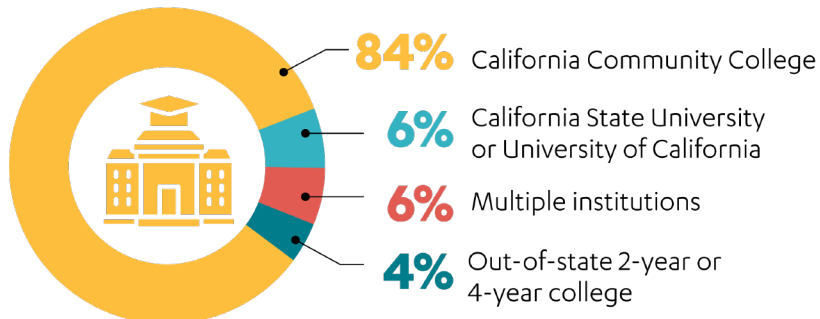
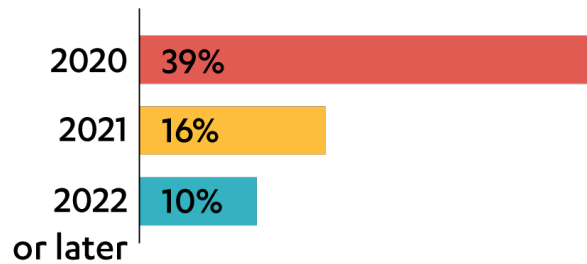
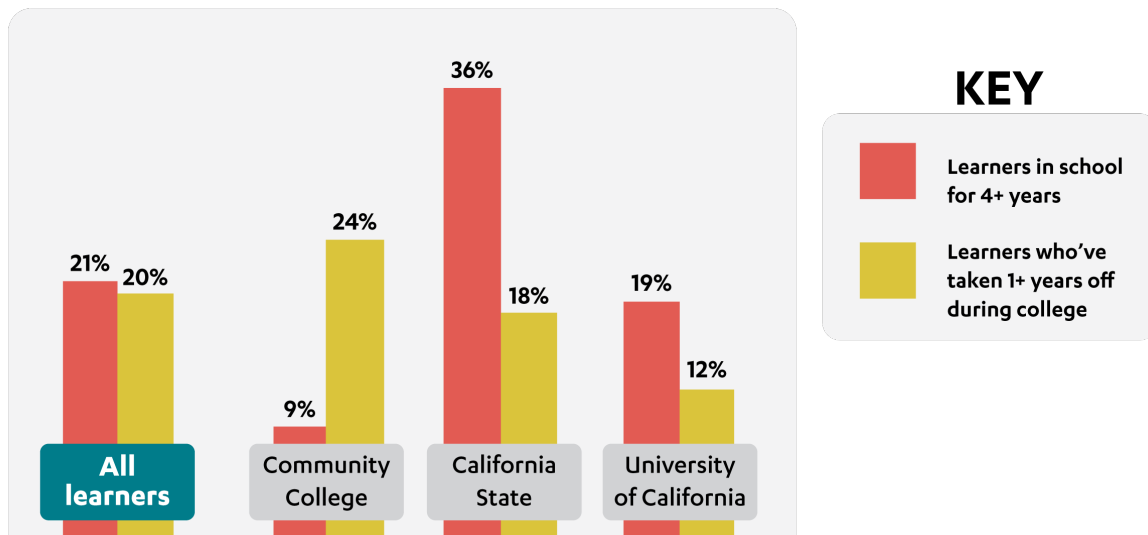


Figure 12: Year Working Learners Expect to Graduate



The paths of workers and learners are not always linear, as managing school and work presents a particular set of challenges. Our survey found that 20% have had to take time off from school, and 21% have been in school for more than four years. Those at CCCs and CSUs were much more likely to take time off than those at UCs. Taking time off obviously impacts graduation rates; in 2018, across the CSU system, only one-quarter of students who started a full-time degree program finished within four years, as opposed to the UC’s four-year graduation rate average of 68%.⁹² These pronounced distinctions illuminate the larger systemic issues many face, and the varying levels of resources and support available in systems of higher education.

Figure 13: More than 4 Years in College and Taken a Year Off by School Type

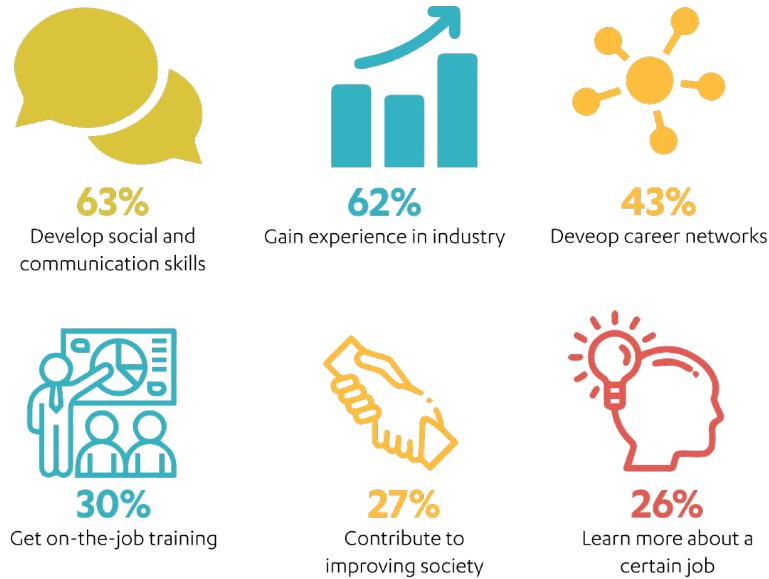


A working student at CSU Northridge (CSUN) explained that their educational journey of seven years was ongoing primarily because of financial aid challenges that forced them to work more hours. The working student said, “There was a lot of conflict, especially in the beginning, managing work and school. But then... once I figured out how to balance everything... the last three years, it’s been going real smooth. I’ve enjoyed it.”⁹³ Those in our survey who took a leave of absence from school cited high levels of stress as the primary factor. One Latinx learner at El Camino Community College studying nutrition and dietetics noted, “it came to the point where I couldn’t do both. I couldn’t work and go to school at the same time, and unfortunately I chose to work. Looking back, I would have wanted to—and even then, in the moment, I wanted to stay in school, but financial situations just did not allow it.”

Work and School Skills

While financial need is the primary reason most work while attending school, another motivation is the desire to gain valuable skills and experiences that can further career goals. For some, work provides career training and industry-specific experience, aids in developing diverse competencies, and provides access to professional networks.

Figure 14: Reasons for Working (Other Than Financial Need)



Our research participants emphasized the importance of work experience in helping develop and apply soft skills and aptitudes such as communication, organization, leadership, teamwork, and critical thinking. For example, a West Los Angeles College learner studying business while working in retail noted how they had to learn to overcome their social shyness.⁹⁴ Another Santa Monica Community College student, also working in retail, discussed how learning to communicate and work on a team on the job helped them to better communicate with professors.⁹⁵ Many emphasized gaining time management skills as particularly helpful. Reflecting on working in a packaging and delivery facility, a geography major observed that, “everything works really fast. You have deadlines to meet. So I guess that’s one thing that transferred into my academics and life. I’m always making sure I have enough time to finish what I have to finish.”⁹⁶ Learning to communicate well, work in teams, and meet deadlines are valuable skills for students moving forward in their careers.

There were also a few working students who had obtained technical skills that related directly to their field of study or career interests.⁹⁷ One studying criminal justice while working for a local police department described learning “how to use proper radio transmission, police codes—just basic police protocol procedures.”⁹⁸ Another noted the differences between work and school stating: “At work, I am getting the experience that I want rather than at school where it’s just classes, more about the science-y things that don’t actually go hand-in-hand with animals.”⁹⁹ While the majority surveyed foregrounded their acquisition of time-management and social skills, a smaller group reported that their jobs gave them concrete skills that can be transferred to their later careers.

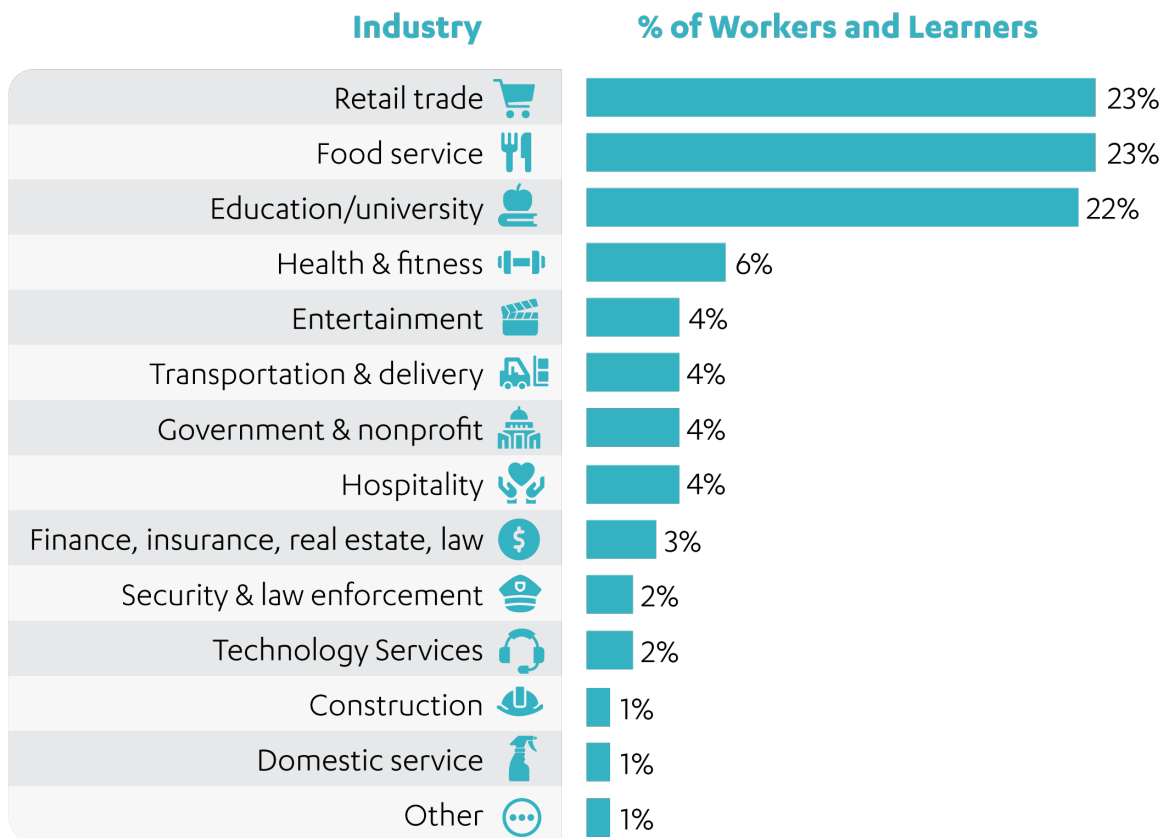
There are, however, some significant disadvantages associated with working while enrolled in school. An unintended consequence of needing to find jobs that can accommodate a school schedule is that it may not allow working students to develop technical skills that may assist their desired careers. Flexibility was a driving factor in choosing work that will best fit class schedules, which means that students were concentrated in service jobs in the retail and restaurant industries.

Despite other jobs being more lucrative, I opted to work at In-N-Out because of the flexibility I get with working around my school schedule. While I want to go into the programming industry and realize that many of my classmates are busy getting internships in tech companies, this job gives me the financial stability I need. There is no denying that the skills I am picking up at In-N-Out do not quite match up to the complicated math I am learning in class. To be honest, I worry that I might be falling behind others who are constantly seeking internships in coding. At least In-N-Out provides a hotline where I can call in case I am feeling stressed and need someone to talk to or need help budgeting for the month. It could be worse.

Computer science major at a local community college¹²⁸

Nearly half of working students were concentrated in retail and food service jobs such as restaurants and fast food places, followed by those working in education fields such as tutoring and administrative campus jobs. Though the jobs themselves may not align with learners' career goals, they provided scheduling flexibility designed to accommodate students. This kind of work, however, is determinedly low-wage.¹⁰⁰

Figure 15: Industries Workers and Learners Work in



Working gig jobs through platform applications was not common among the workers and learners we surveyed. Only 3% took on gig jobs—half of them as their first job, and half as a second job. A Postmates worker majoring in English reported that the hiring process was pretty easy. These kinds of jobs also provided a flexible schedule and income to “pay for... textbooks and help pay for rent and groceries and stuff.”¹⁰² And a CSU Los Angeles (CSULA) learner who aspires to be an attorney worked for Postmates and Doordash in addition to working as a tutor on campus and a mentor in the local community.¹⁰³

Figure 16: Percent Working in Gig Economy



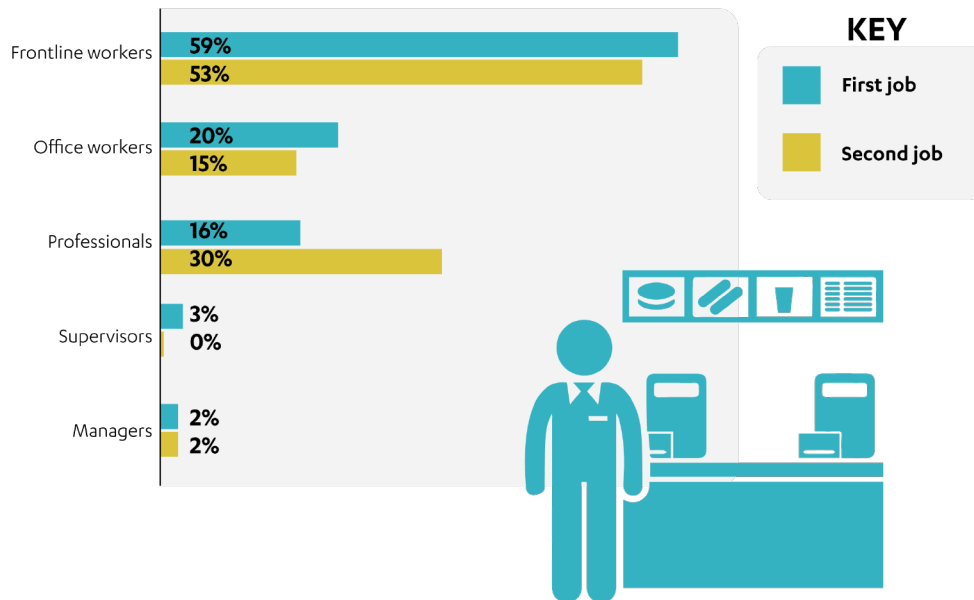
Despite importance of schedule flexibility, only

3%

of workers and learners participate in the gig economy as drivers and/or delivery people

Problematically, students rank low on occupational career ladders. In our sample, an overwhelming majority of workers and learners were frontline workers in floor positions and nonsupervisory positions such as cashiers, stockers, baristas, security guards, childcare providers, and restaurant servers. There were a smaller number of office workers engaged in occupations like customer service, bookkeeping, or clerical work. And a few reported working as professionals, including graphic designers, teachers and aides, tutors, financial staff, and consultants.¹⁰⁴

Figure 17: Type of Occupational Positions Held by Workers and Learners

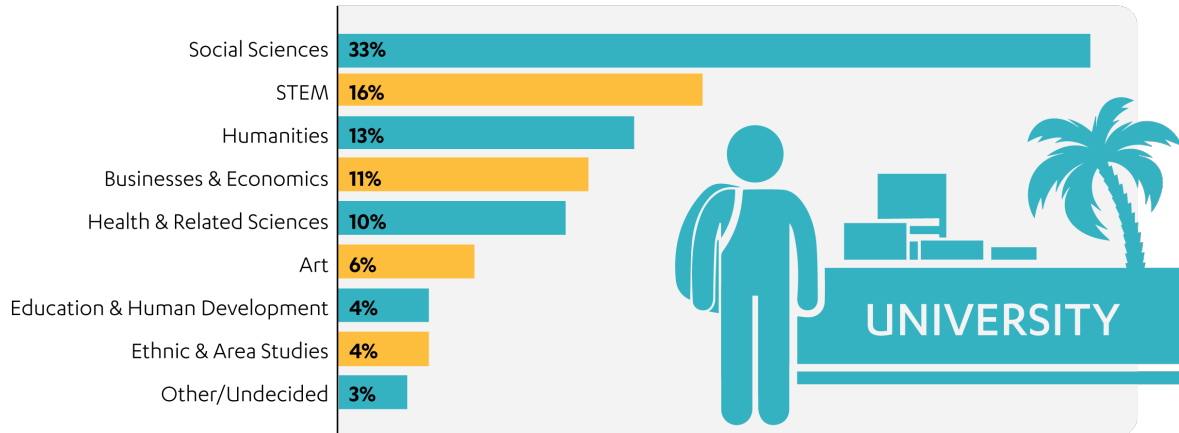


Frontline and office jobs have some long-term benefits. A sociology and education major working as a front desk receptionist at UCLA shared how her ability to interact with a diverse group of people might be valuable when she begins her career in education. While working can complement learning, many service job skills—especially those in the low-wage sector—are not relevant to later careers.¹⁰⁵

Dis/Connect Between School and Work

While tuition costs continue to increase and the pressure to find a job with a decent wage intensifies, working students feel an increasing disconnect between their jobs and their studies. The majority we surveyed are currently majoring in the social sciences or STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields, but work in unrelated low-wage service jobs.

Figure 18: Areas of Study



We found that those majoring in these fields are often motivated by a desire to better understand their own lived experiences and to serve their communities. One UCLA learner majoring in sociology with a minor in education reported, “The concepts that I learn in sociology classes and education classes like they are always at the back of my head, so I’m more conscious about [racism and inequality].”¹⁰⁶ In a similar vein, a UCLA student majoring in the social sciences wanted to expand their worldview concerning issues of immigration and global affairs.¹⁰⁷ Like their peers, STEM majors also wish to make a positive difference in the world. One learner majoring in biology discussed wanting to work on conservation efforts to protect oceans and animals.¹⁰⁸

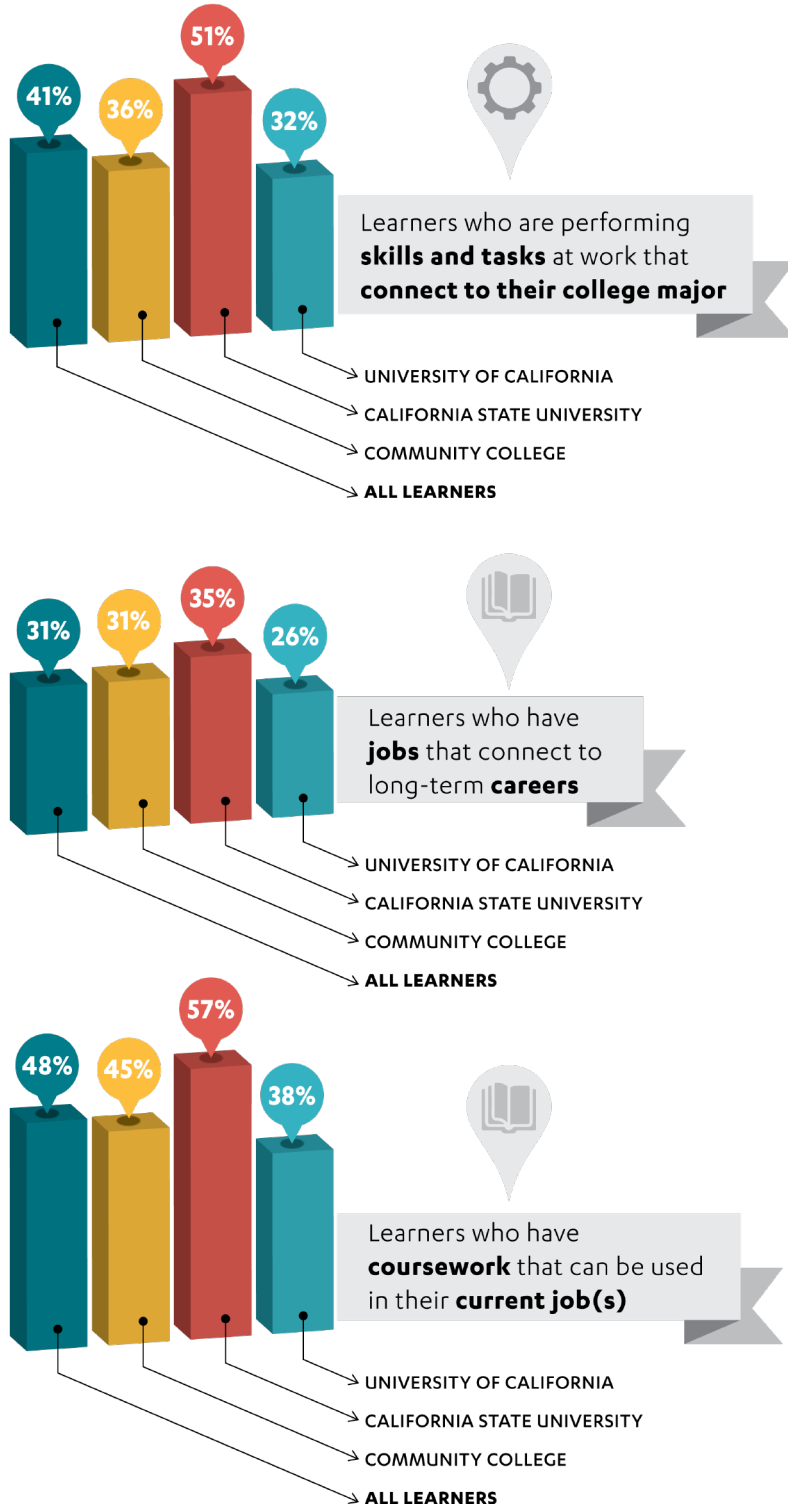
Although some working students are able to develop useful skills in service jobs, many feel that these jobs do not enhance, or connect to, their studies. Though many enjoy their studies, they also desire practical applications of what they learn in the classroom, such as that which could be gained through internships or work-study. Workers and learners in our study shed light on the disadvantages when they forfeit certain work experiences because of limited access to jobs in their field as well as work-study and paid internships on their college campus.

Figure 19: Lack of Connection Between School and Work



There were distinctions between institutions in their ability to provide meaningful connections between school and work. At least half of CSU students surveyed reported that their work skills aligned with their college majors, as opposed to only one-third of those at CCCs and UCs. Furthermore, when asked whether they felt their coursework provided skills that could be applicable in their workplaces, CSU students responded more positively than their counterparts.

Figure 20: Connection Between School and Work by School Type

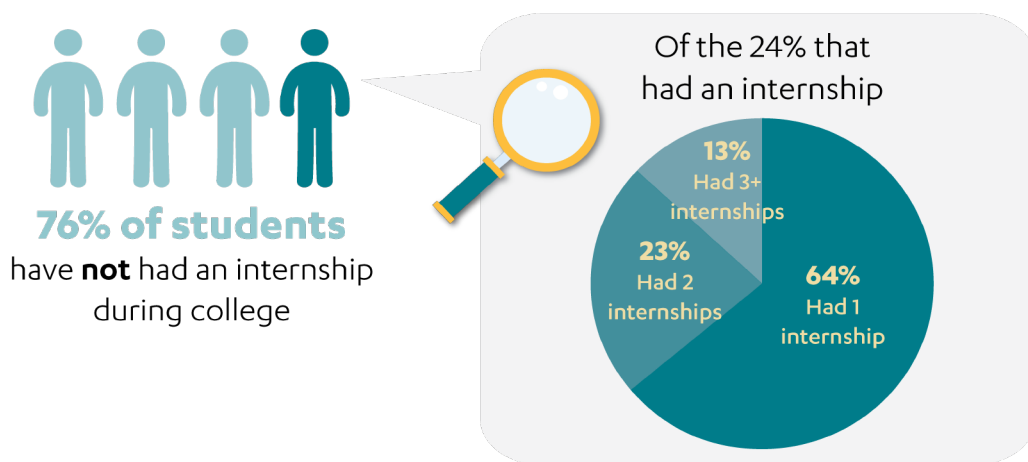


According to a recent CLASP report, nationally, many community colleges have recently begun to shift academic programs toward more career-focused fields through practices like course sequences tailored to specific careers and combining advising with career exploration. This model aims to “align adult education, human services, correctional education, workforce development, and postsecondary educational systems to produce better results for underprepared adults.”¹⁰⁹ States that pair academic reform with social and economic support provide greater access to institutional resources for learners, such as peer support, mentorship, and academic advising. Supporting learners comprehensively can provide them with more individualized experiences and a holistic approach to their careers as well as lend new perspectives to institutions on effective and beneficial services.¹⁰⁹

Internships

Greater symmetry between work and school experiences could reduce the amount of time and energy required for both, as well as alleviate some of the stress associated with conflicting demands. Internships can provide on-the-job learning that offers valuable experience related to long-term career goals and fields of study. But only one-quarter of workers and learners reported ever having an internship, and most have had only one.

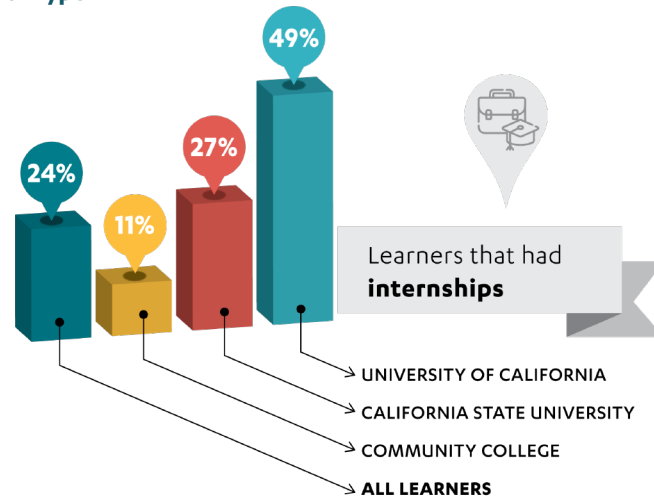
Figure 21: Internships



Internships provide an invaluable resource for workers and learners to find careers that are dignified and personally meaningful. Internships can also provide a foundation for entry into the professional world.¹¹⁰ For instance, a worker and learner with an internship at a social work nonprofit explained that, after learning about the field and the various services available to youth and families, her career aspirations shifted to becoming a social worker.¹¹¹ In addition, internships can expand access to social networks. One UCLA film major reflected on her internship experience by explaining that, “I’ve realized that there are people who are in higher positions than me who still want the same things as me... I’ve made several friends through the internships that are genuine friendships, not purely just for the network.”¹¹² Joining a company’s team and working alongside more senior leadership gives learners access to mentorship opportunities that can help them discover new interests and goals and learn more about the industry.

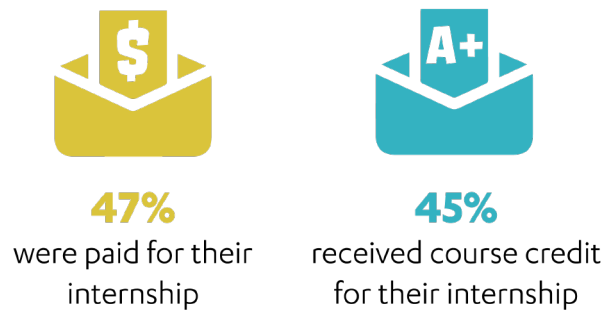
The lack of available internships is a problem across the public university system, and it is especially challenging for CCC and CSU learners. Only one-quarter of those at CSUs had access to internships, compared to half of those attending UCs. More troublingly, only 11% of CCC learners had any internship experience, though scholars have found that internships can be integral to career development.¹¹³ Internships help learners “focus their career choices [and] hone their job skills.”¹¹⁴

Figure 22: Internships by School Type



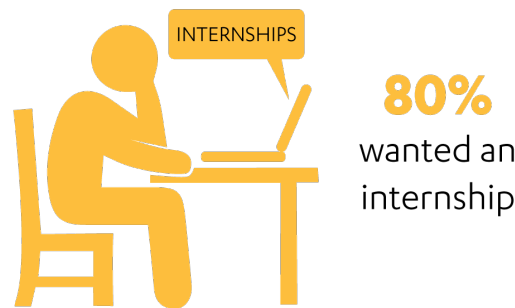
Workers and learners reported a lack of information about internships. As one UCLA worker and learner said, “I didn't really get the help I needed to get the unpaid or paid internships.”¹¹⁵ They were simply told that “internships are there.” Furthermore, for those who did have the opportunity, only 47% reported that their internships were paid, while 45% reported only receiving college credit at any of their internships.

Figure 23: Internship for Pay or School Credit



There is a clear discrepancy between learners who would like an internship, and those that end up completing one. Of the three-quarters who did not have internships, 78% said they would like one.

Figure 24: Wanting an Internship



Learners generally recognize how internships can fuse school and work experiences. Yet those who have limited schedules and also might attend colleges with less resources are doubly penalized for not being able to partake in internships, especially paid or credited internships.

Federal Work-Study

For some, Federal Work-Study positions can offset the inability to participate in internship opportunities, and some reported obtaining skills from work-study positions that pertained to their majors. One learner, who had not declared a major at the time of the interview, but was minoring in education and labor studies reflected on how his work-study position at the UCLA Labor Center informed him about “the kind of career paths that I’m interested in.”¹¹⁶ While working on a project that seeks to improve access to educational resources for children of garment workers, he was able to expand his classroom learning with a unique work experience.

Many learners, however, did not understand what Federal Work-Study entails or how to access it on their campuses. Among those surveyed, only one-in-10 had a Federal Work Study job despite the preference of almost half of them. In stark contrast, more than one-third at UCLA held a Federal Work Study job. Very few CCC and CSU workers and learners had a Federal Work Study job. This discrepancy between colleges surely results from the formula used to allocate Federal Work-Study funds, which is based on the amount an educational institution “received in previous award years, as opposed to the larger student body’s financial need.”¹¹⁷

Figure 25: Access to Work-Study Jobs by School Type

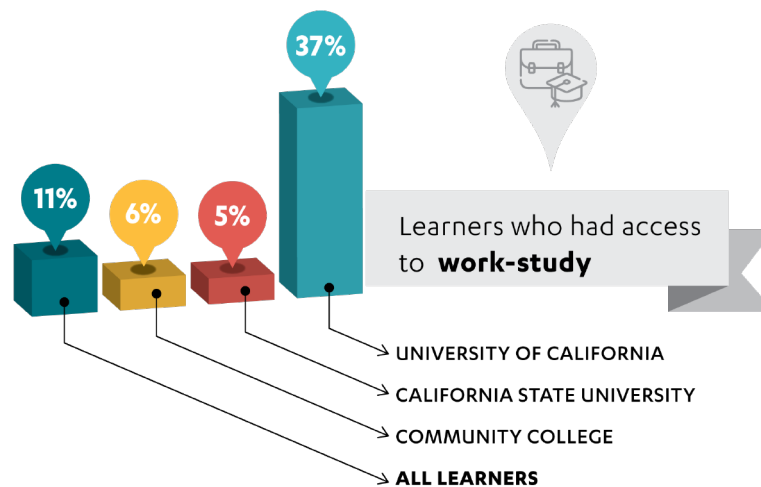
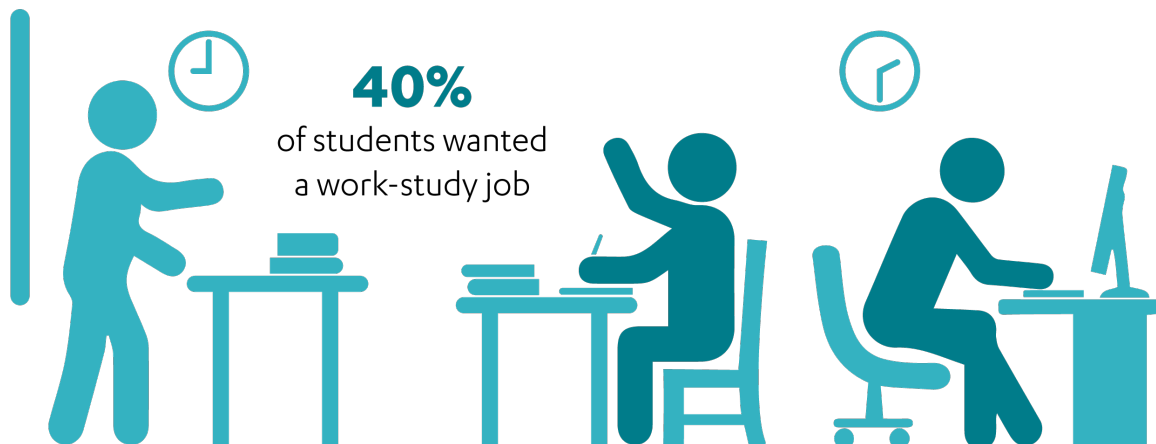
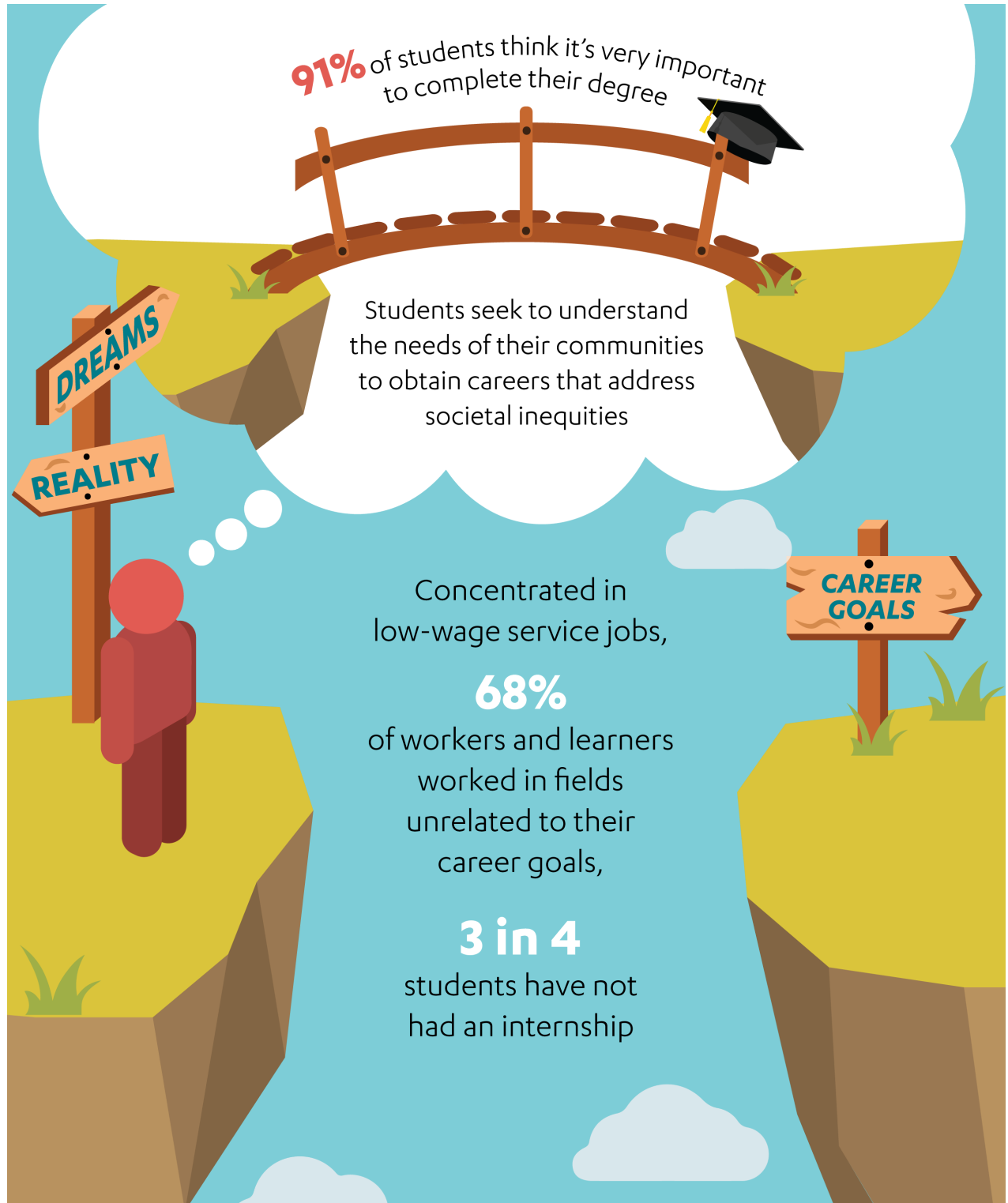


Figure 26: Want a Work-Study Position



Federal Work-Study has come under criticism for providing funds mostly to more established and expensive institutions.¹¹⁸ One report found that community colleges tend to receive the least amount of Federal Work-Study monies, though learners attending these schools make up more than one-third of all undergraduate enrollments and are disproportionately low-income.¹¹⁹

Figure 27: Key Data from Section 2





3. Double Shift: The Penalties of Working and Learning

A DAY IN THE LIFE... OF A WORKER AND LEARNER IN EDUCATION



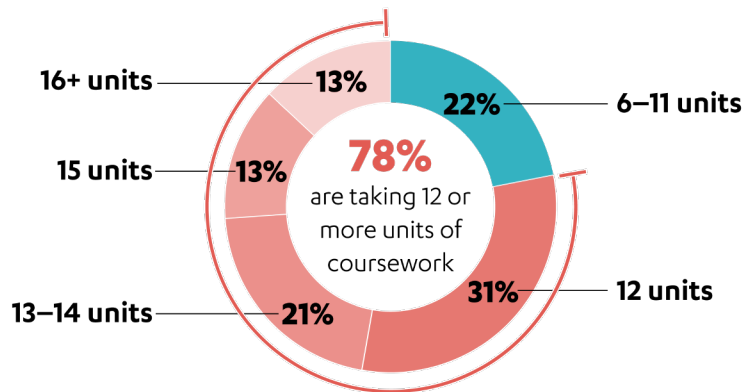
- 8:00 AM** I wake up and head to the gym
- 9:00 AM** I shower and prepare my backpack and lunch
- 10:00 AM** I attend my first class of the day
- 11:50 AM** Before I head to my next class at 12 PM, I eat my sandwich on the way there
- 2:00 PM** I am done attending my classes for the day
- 2:30 PM** I change into my work uniform
- 3:00 PM** I begin my work shift as a tutor at the local library
- 8:00 PM** I am done with my last tutoring session
- 9:00 PM** I have made it home, but still need to make dinner
- 10:00 PM** It is now time to complete homework and review lecture slides
- 12:00 AM** I go to bed

Workers and learners are faced with difficult decisions regarding how to best meet the conflicting demands of work and school. Even though workers and learners often intentionally choose jobs that grant them the flexibility to accommodate their class schedules, many are still unable to take advantage of academic opportunities to interact with faculty and peers. Partaking in activities that promote faculty-student contact is crucial for undergraduate achievement and retention.¹²⁰ Unfortunately, the persistent tension between meeting academic and work demands can result in high levels of stress and a sense of exclusion.

Workers and Learners Carry Full Plates

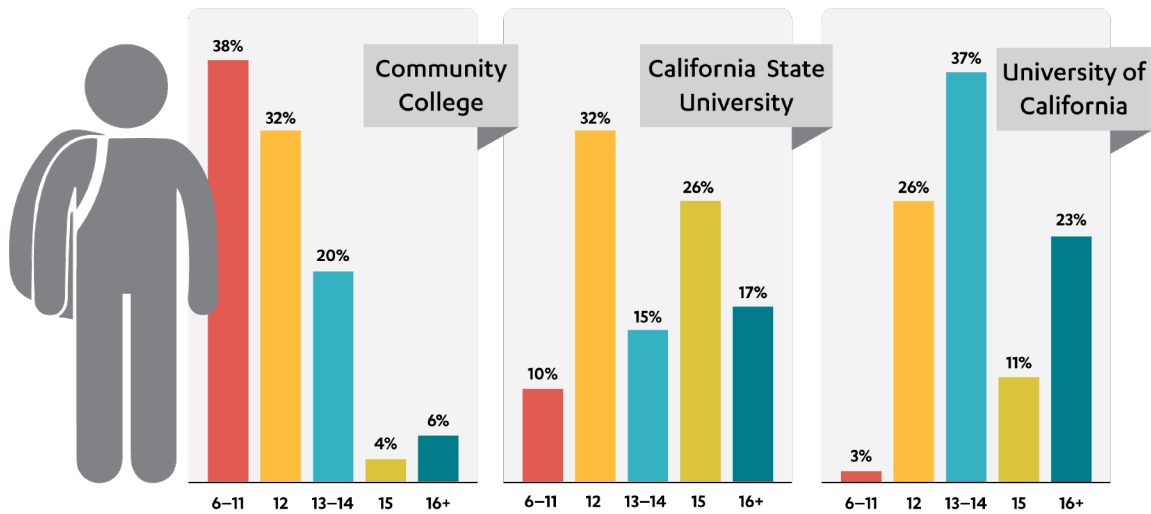
Variation exists between workers and learners in terms of the number of units they took, the number of jobs they worked, and the number of hours they worked weekly across different college systems. Though the minimum number of units to be enrolled in to participate in this study was six, three-quarters of workers and learners managed full class loads of 12 units or more of school.

Figure 28: Number of Units Taken by Workers and Learners



It is important to note that the recommended number of semester units to graduate in four years is 15 units.¹²¹ Yet only 1 in 10 of CCC learners were able to take that many, and two thirds took 12 units or fewer.¹²² CSU learners were more likely to take 15 units or more. UC learners in Los Angeles are on the quarter system, and are required to take a minimum of 12 units to retain full-time status.¹²³

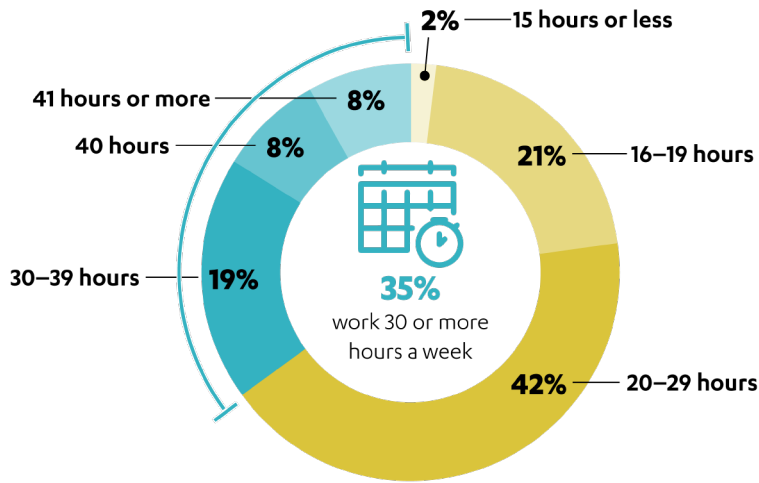
Figure 29: Number of Units Taken by Learners by School Type



Students attending the University of California, Los Angeles, enroll in classes that are taught on the quarter system as opposed to the semester system used by the California Community College and California State University system.

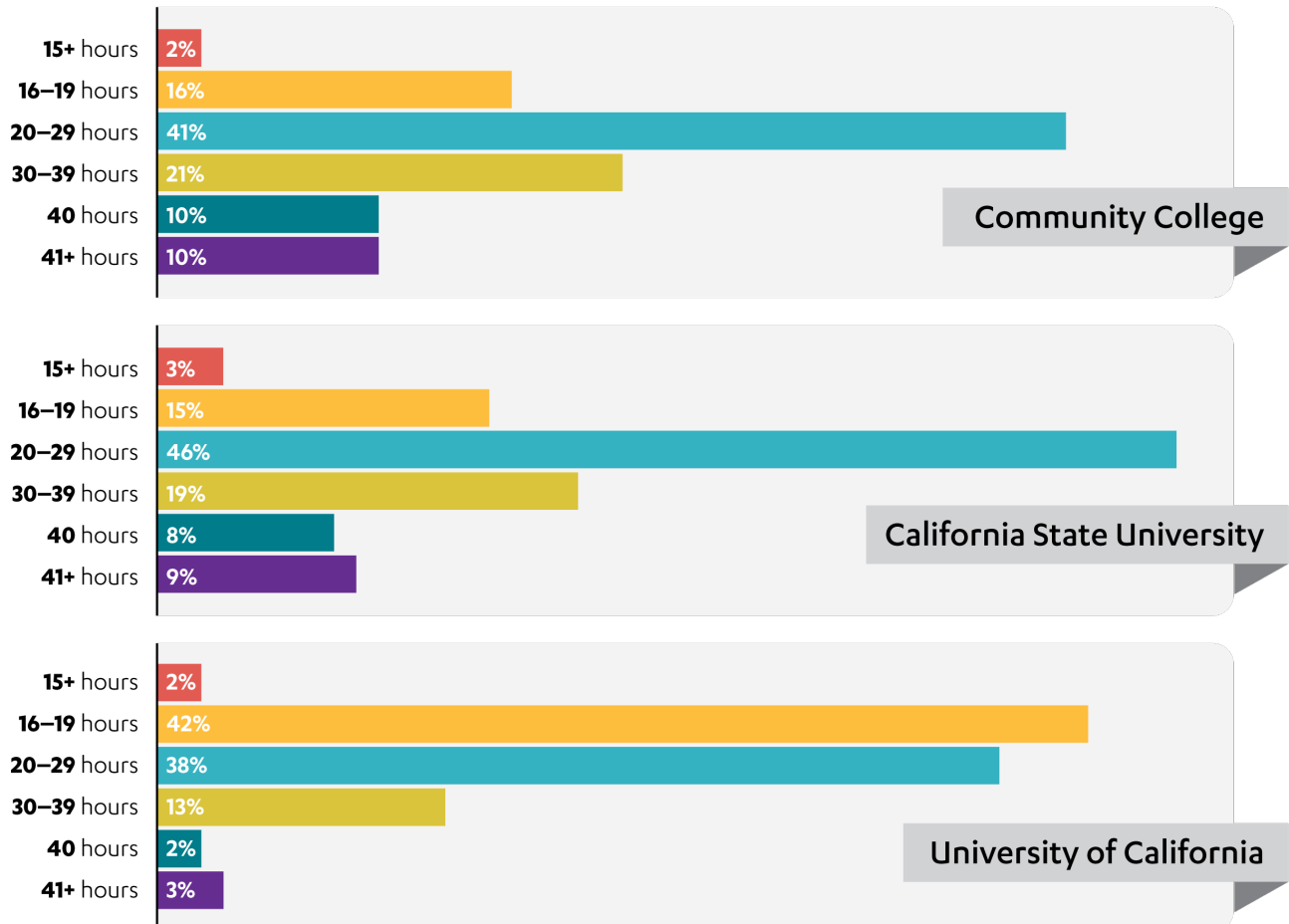
Our study focused on participants who worked 16 hours in the week before. On an average week, learners were working significantly more hours. Nearly half worked between 20 and 29 hours and a third worked 30 or more hours.

Figure 30: Average Weekly Work Hours at Any Job



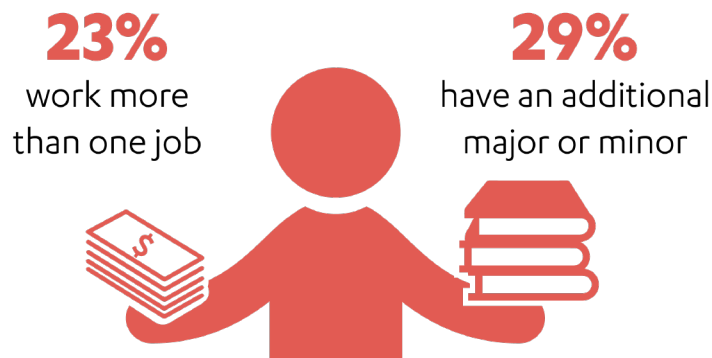
Across campuses, two-thirds of CCC and CSU students were working more than 20 hours a week, a higher rate than UC workers and learners. UC learners were concentrated in the 16-20 hours a week.

Figure 31: Average Weekly Work Hours at Any Job by School Type



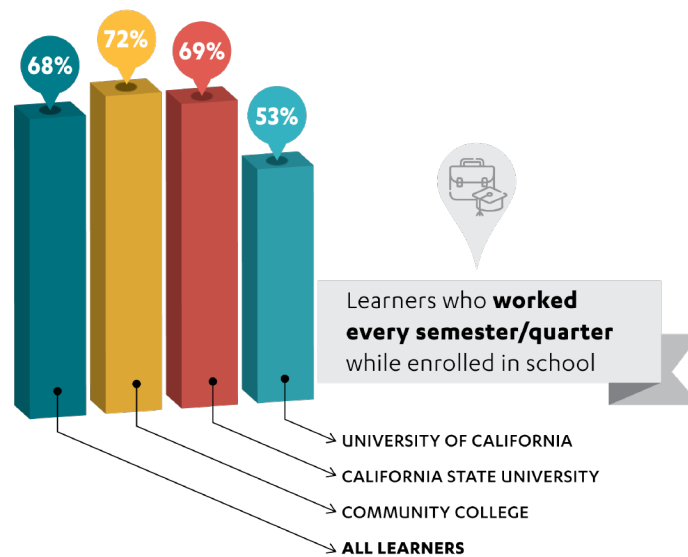
Finally, one-quarter of workers and learners balanced multiple jobs while pursuing more than one major or minor.

Figure 32: Work More Than One Job or Have an Additional Major or Minor



The need to work goes well beyond the occasional summer job; over two-thirds of workers and learners have worked throughout their entire educational careers. CCC and CSU learners had higher rates of working through their college enrollment than UC learners.

Figure 33: Worked Every Semester/Quarter While Enrolled in College



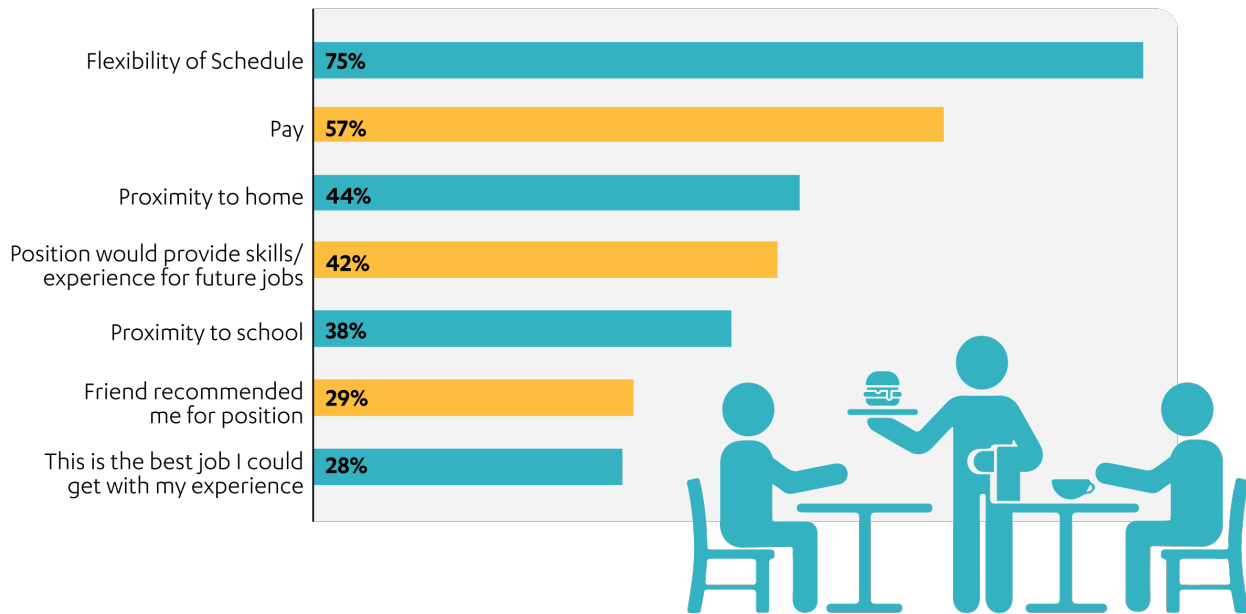
Many started work well before college. Among our respondents, 78% had graduated from high school in the last 5 years, and of those, 43% had started work while in high school.

Many spoke about their experiences juggling work and classes. A biochemistry major at UCLA captures the experience of quite a few in this study: “[My] college experience has revolved either around working or schooling... . Usually, I started my day with work, then I’d come back for classes, then I’d go back to work or have classes in between and work at some point. For the most part, it has been surrounded by work.”¹²⁴ One El Camino College learner working as a tutor noted that the reason that she works is mainly for “survival” stating: “I would not be doing it if I didn’t have to do it. I would love to just be able to go to school.”¹²⁵

Jobs with Flexibility

For those who balance work and school, flexible work schedules take priority over better pay and skills acquisition. Retail and restaurant work entices learners with flexible scheduling, but then provides low wages. And some studies have found that flexibility in these environments can be limited, and students are often compelled to prioritize work shifts over attending school.¹²⁶

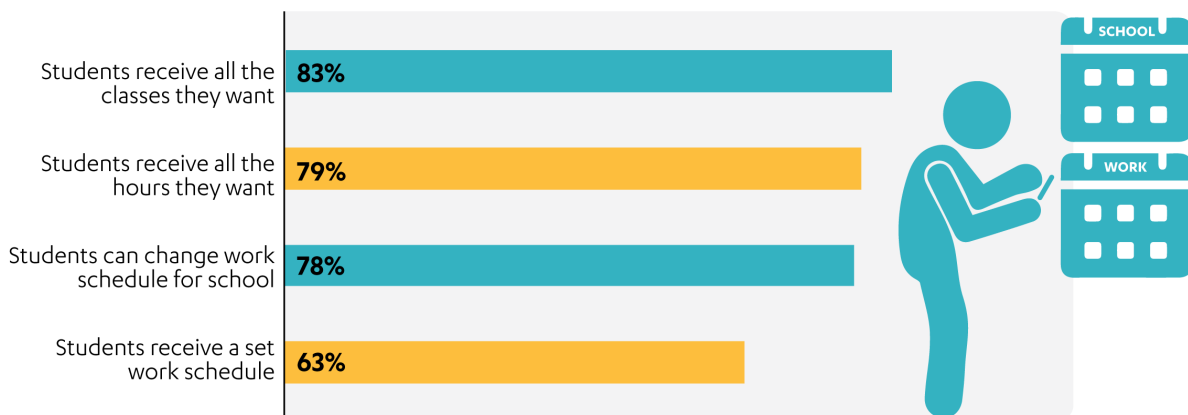
Figure 34: Reasons for Accepting Position



Balancing Schedules and Commitments

Most workers and learners reported having the flexibility to choose work and school schedules that were complementary. Three-quarters were able to get the work hours they wanted, and a little more than three-quarters reported the classes they wanted. More than half reported having a set work schedule with the same hours each week while more than three-quarters were able to modify their work schedules to adapt to their classes.

Figure 35: Flexibility in Work and School Schedules

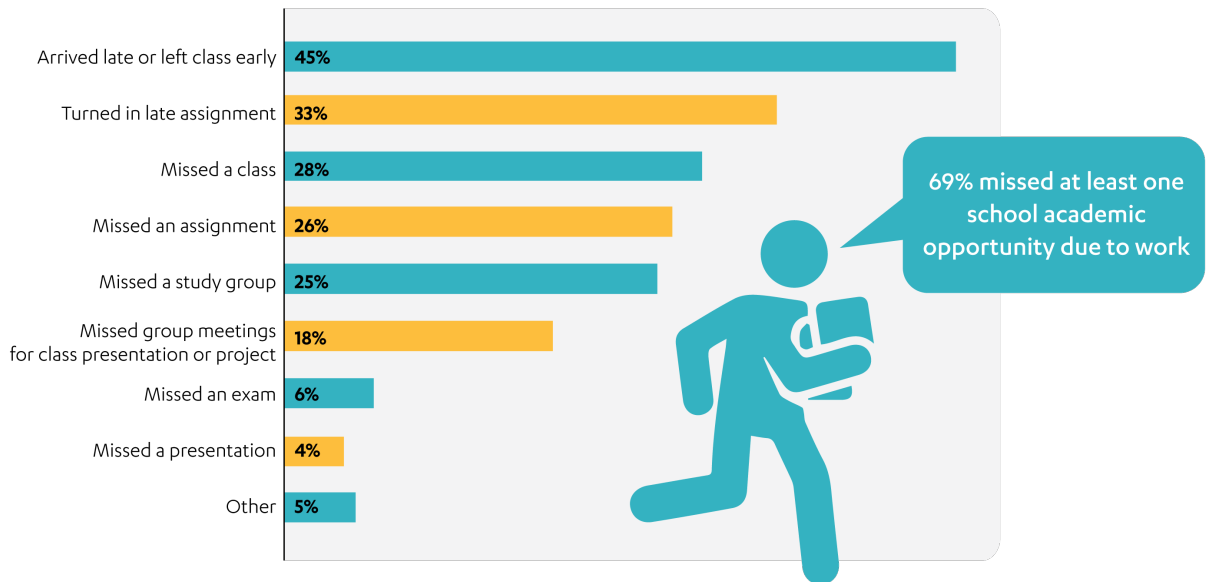


Many workers and learners were able to prioritize school over work. A political science major at UCLA reported that, after creating their school schedule, “my boss decides my hours based on my free time.”¹²⁷ But many also mentioned difficulties when unexpected academic commitments arose. For example, a life science major at UCLA, working in the dining hall, described how, when her academic schedule changed in the middle of the quarter, she was unable to change her work schedule.¹²⁸ The unwillingness of some supervisors to modify work schedules as academic demands evolve can make it harder to balance work and school.

Missing School Academic Opportunities

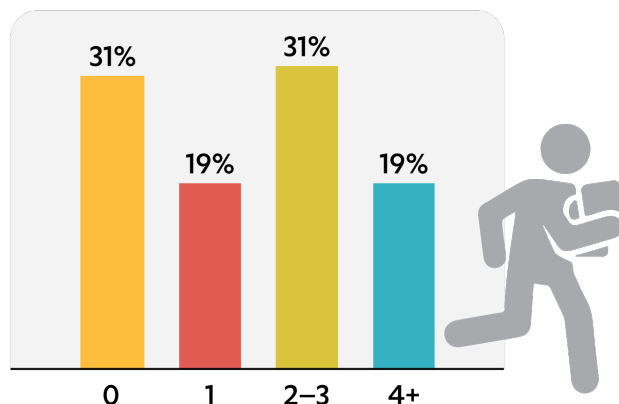
Though workers and learners sometimes report possessing accommodating schedules, many still experience interruptions of their school responsibilities due to work. At least 69% missed school assignments and opportunities because of work, and about half reported leaving class early or arriving late because of work, suggesting that scheduling at their workplaces is not as flexible as it may appear.

Figure 36: Missed School Academic Opportunity



Job demands can impact schoolwork on multiple levels.¹²⁹ Almost half of the learners missed two to three different forms of academic opportunities (assignments, study groups, meetings, exams, or presentations), and over one quarter had missed four or more.

Figure 37: Number of Academic Opportunities Missed Due to Work



A biochemistry major working at a coffee shop shared their rationale for prioritizing work over school:

I pretty much have to think of it this way: What is going to cause me more problems? So, if I don't show up to work, I know I'm going to be pulled into the office, and I know they're going to talk to me about my absences, my tardiness. And when I tell them that my reasoning is school, I know their response. They're going to say, "Well, change your availability." But when I change my availability, they cut my hours tremendously, to the point where I'm only getting eight to 12 hours a week. How is a college learner supposed to survive on eight to 12 hours a week with minimum wage and have to pay for school and transportation...? It's like that clashing thing, where there's no way of me getting out and hope for the best and eventually get to the finish line.

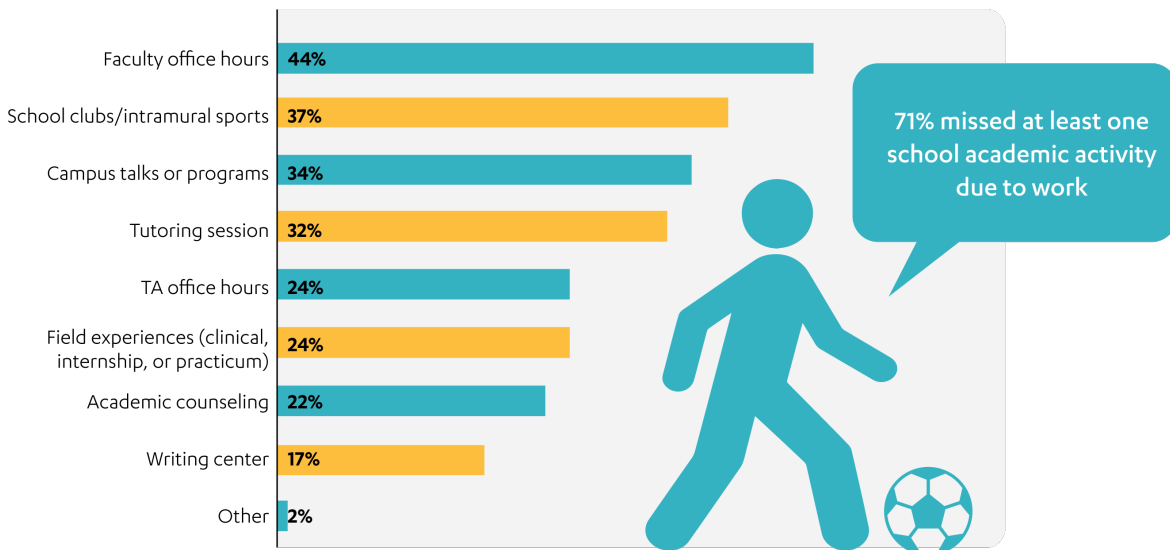
Biochemistry major¹³⁰

The consequences of leaving work early or asking for modified schedules might put workers and learners in academic jeopardy if they are no longer able to pay tuition. They are part of a "disposable or throwaway workforce," as one worker and learner phrased it.¹³¹ Employers do not necessarily invest in student workers and often view them as only temporary part-timers.¹³²

Missing School Academic Activities

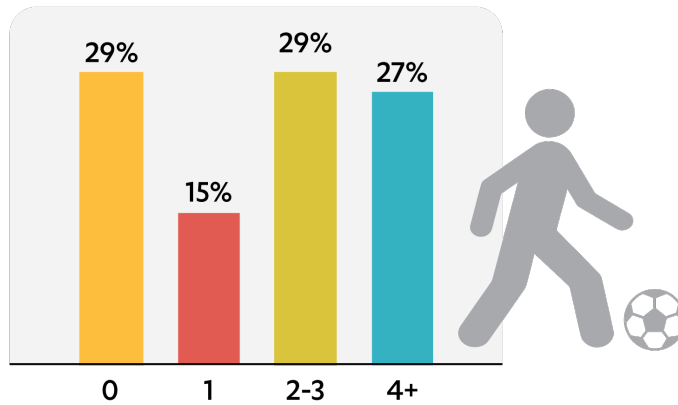
Navigating the demands of school and work requires much negotiation. Working disrupts the time that students have to invest in their academic development, and is an example of how workers and learners are penalized for trying to maintain that balance. Investing time to build relationships with faculty or teaching assistants across the college systems can be beneficial for learners. It can help build networks for careers, support learners with their current work, and be foundational in shaping career trajectories. Yet our survey found that 71% had missed at least one academic activity, such as visiting office hours, attending a campus program, talking to a teaching assistant, or receiving tutorial support.

Figure 38: Missed School Academic Activity



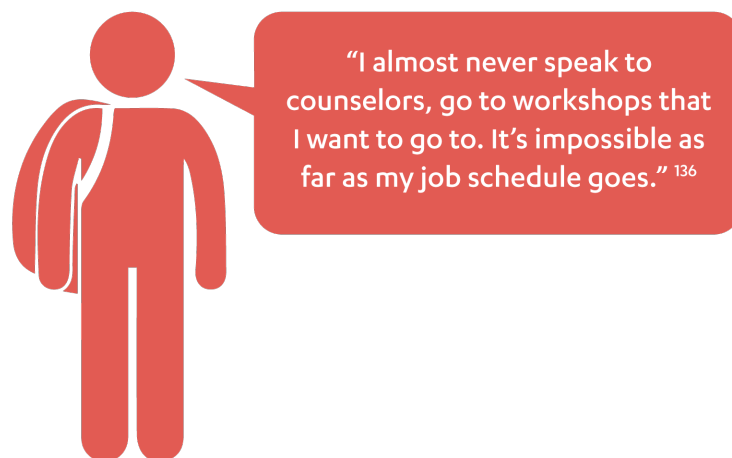
Over half have missed two or more of the above academic opportunities. In addition to office hours, other missed academic or social activities include school clubs and sports, tutoring sessions, field experience, academic counseling, and writing center support—all of which are key to academic success and future opportunities.

Figure 39: Number of Activities Missed Due to Work



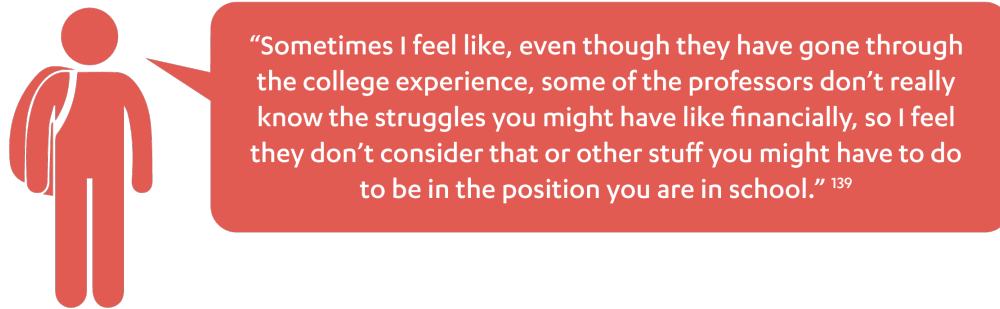
Spending a large portion of out-of-class hours at work means that many have little time for school activities and programs that support their learning. For instance, faculty office hours are a valuable chance for learners to work more closely with their instructor and review material at a more personalized pace. An English major at East Los Angeles College commented on how if it were not for working, “I would have more time to attend club meetings, office hours, study and do homework.”¹³³ A learner majoring in anthropology and film and television while working at a casting studio described how their work schedule did not allow them to attend their professor’s office hours.¹³⁴ Working learners experience lost instructional time because of their conflicting responsibilities.¹³⁵

For those whose jobs are full-time, or nearly so, missing out on these academic opportunities was a meaningful gap in their educational experience. A history and Spanish minor who also worked as a career technician in a local school district described the biggest drawback of working 40 hours a week:



They concluded that not being able to take full advantage of so many college resources is “part of the deal” that comes with working and studying on a full-time basis.¹³⁷ The repercussions of working more than 15 hours and balancing different schedules can limit learners’ participation in the larger college community, and prevent them from partaking in extracurriculars or academic opportunities that could accelerate their educational trajectory.

Many reported that they had reached out to their supervisors and/or faculty to obtain accommodations to meet both their academic and work demands. Midterms and finals can be especially stressful to navigate, and during these times, petitions for modified work schedules were common. A CSULA learner reflected on discussions with their work-study supervisor regarding their upcoming classes and tests, and their gratefulness for being granted the ability to leave work early.¹³⁸ Obtaining these types of accommodations from professors about work-school conflicts was more difficult. Reflecting on her experience with professors, one person shared:

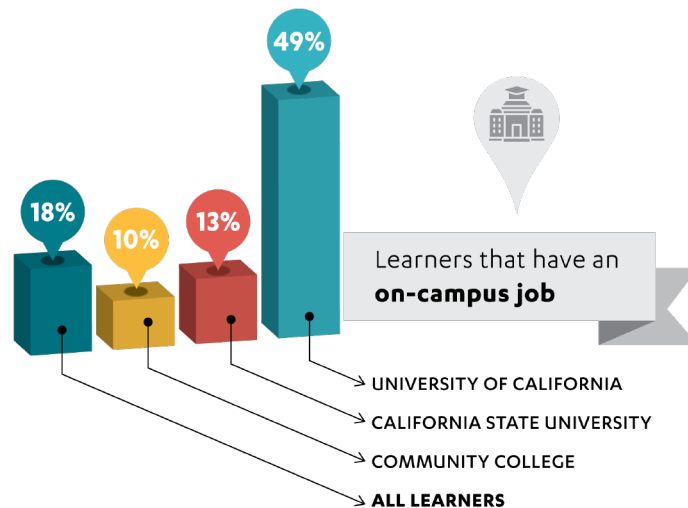


While some workers and learners might obtain accommodations from their employees, others might not receive flexibility from faculty and/or employers.

On or Off-Campus Jobs

Given the complications that can arise when requesting flexible work schedules, some looked for work on campus. One UCLA learner working in transportation explained, “I liked that my job was really close. It was literally on campus so that was very convenient.”¹⁴⁰ This on-campus job also granted her the ability to increase her wages by being able to work later in the evening as opposed to a traditional 9-5 work shift. These jobs, however, are difficult to obtain; in our survey, only 18% had campus jobs, and CCCs and CSUs had significantly lower rates of on-campus jobs.

Figure 40: Have a Campus Job by School Type

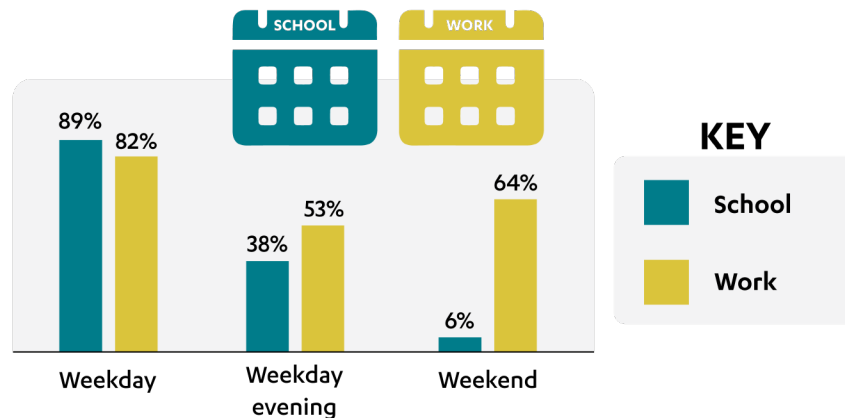


Off-campus jobs are more challenging to manage, as learners must consider commute times between campus and work. One learning worker majoring in anthropology suggested that an aspect of creating a balanced schedule is recognizing what things “you cannot change, like times that are just immovable, versus the things you can kind of move around, and how much time is appropriate or respectful to move around.”¹⁴¹ Time spent on the road or taking public transportation could be spent fostering deeper connections with faculty and peers.¹⁴²

Work and School Hours

The majority (89%) of those surveyed have work shifts that are scheduled during the day and compete with most class times. Two-thirds of workers and learners are able to work on weekends, and half on and evenings.

Figure 41: School and Work Schedules



A learner majoring in communications while working at a local bank explained how they maximized their hours by working “at least three days out of the week, [planning] to work weekends for sure, Saturday and Sunday, and then [trying] to find a way to work in between one of the weekdays.”¹⁴³ In terms of school schedules, there was less variability. More than three-quarters of learners reported attending classes during the day with one-third, mostly at the CCCs or CSUs, attending evening classes. One East Los Angeles College learner described how he would wake up at 4:00 a.m. to begin his shift as a Lyft driver, and then take classes from 2:00 to 7:00 p.m. to fulfill his English major prerequisites. Taking classes in the afternoon and evening allowed him to fulfill both his work and school responsibilities. As a transfer student at UCLA reported, the inflexibility at UCLA that workers and learners experience was more pronounced than when they attended a CCC, because the latter offered so many more evening classes.¹⁴⁴

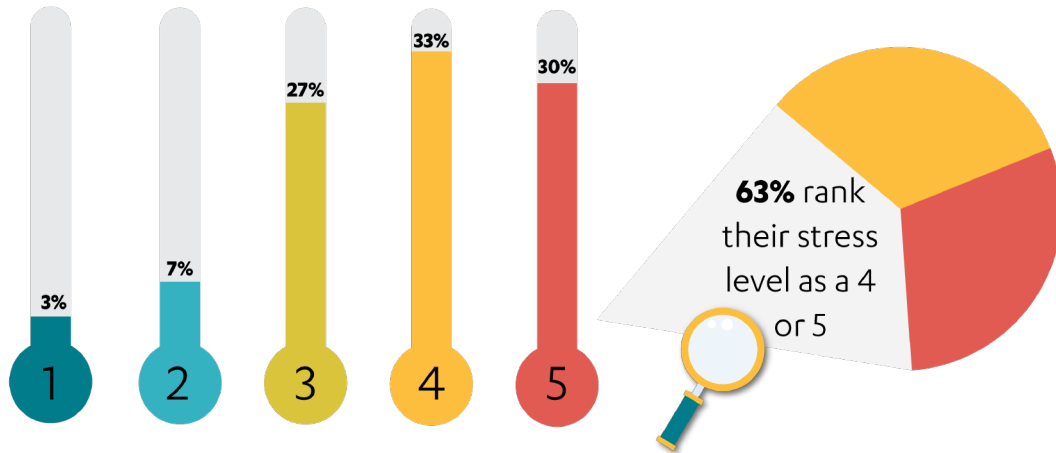
School hasn't been easy, man. I remember, it's been like a roller coaster, ups and downs. I got a job because I needed money to pay off my books and I really didn't want to ask my parents for money. I had a friend working in the library and he told me they had a pretty good, flexible schedule, which they do. So they work around your hours and stuff. That's why I got it. So pretty much, I work in between classes. So let's say I have a class that ends at two and another class at six, I work from 2 to 5:50 and then go to the other class. I tend to do that a lot. I tend to prioritize school first and then work. It's been difficult in the sense that I don't have free time. I don't have time to spare. What I do sometimes is I tend to just manage my time and mostly I get my work done at night once I am off work. Sometimes I have to sacrifice some sleep in order to finish my homework or do homework for a couple of days before it's due so that I have enough time to plan out everything. I feel like if I had not worked at all in my college career, I would have had better grades than I have right now.

Biology/Pre-med worker and learner²⁰⁶

Stress

Attending school today increasingly means juggling the demands of both school and work, which can lead to high levels of stress. Two-thirds of workers and learners reported experiencing stress balancing these demands.

Figure 42: Stress Level



College is not exactly what I expected. Obviously, you have to get things done but it's way more challenging and tiring, especially working and going to school at the same time. It's something I've been pretty bitter about sometimes like knowing that some people don't have to work and knowing how much that must be so nice to not have to work and go to school you know? That leaves so much time for schoolwork. There was a moment in time in my college experience where I felt really low and I felt like I couldn't do anything, like I couldn't do school, and I talked to one of my professors about it and they encouraged seeking help. I took a year off from school because I was just really stressed and feeling really low. I missed home, I was working full-time at my job and going to school full-time, and it was just a really bad time for me mentally.

History major at Santa Monica Community College working in retail¹⁴⁵

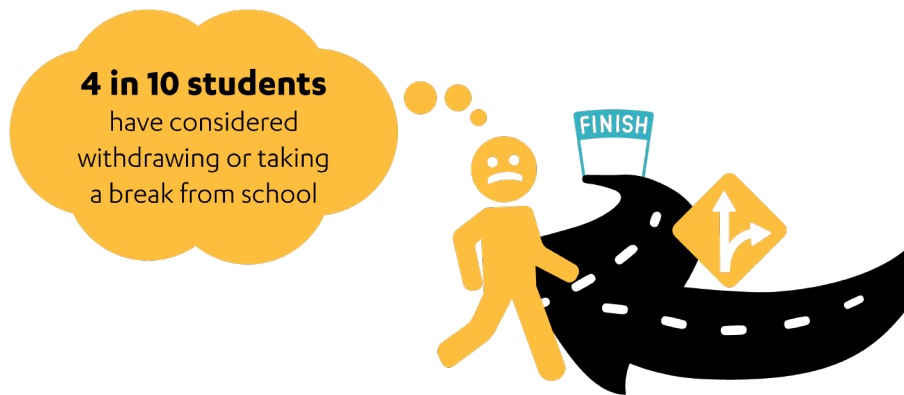
An overwhelming number of those surveyed experienced stress throughout their college lives. To alleviate this, they primarily relied on personal self-care practices rather than institutional resources. These self-care practices included breathing techniques, hanging out with friends, watching movies, and having nice meals. But many of these practices required them to have access to financial resources. For example, one worker and learner reported how "in Westwood, a lot of stuff is either pricey or like you have to find transportation there, which...takes money and time. It's always a toss-up of how am I going to just quickly de-stress so that I can get ready for my next workday or my next class for my next assignment, my next whatever."¹⁴⁶ Some noted how things like going out to the movies or going out with friends was only made possible if they had leftover money after paying living, personal, and school bills.

The inability to take advantage of mental health services was generally due to lack of time, work schedules, appointment hours, and commute. A student of color who worked 25 to 32 hours a week shared how their university, “is pretty good at offering resources for you to like get help or things like that if you are really stressed. But... it was also hard considering I was never really here... like I didn't really have the time to do those things... I kind of just took matters into my own hands.”¹⁴⁷

While some learners might know of professional help available to them, they still may rely solely on their family and friends. For example, one biology major explained, “I never really talk to a professional counselor or anything like that. Honestly, I will call my significant other, my friends, and hang out with them.”¹⁴⁸ In our interviews, only one worker noted that their workplace provided a hotline for mental health support.¹⁴⁹ Despite high rates of stress due to the challenges of balancing work and school responsibilities, there seem to be few institutional resources within academia and even fewer at the workplace to help address it.

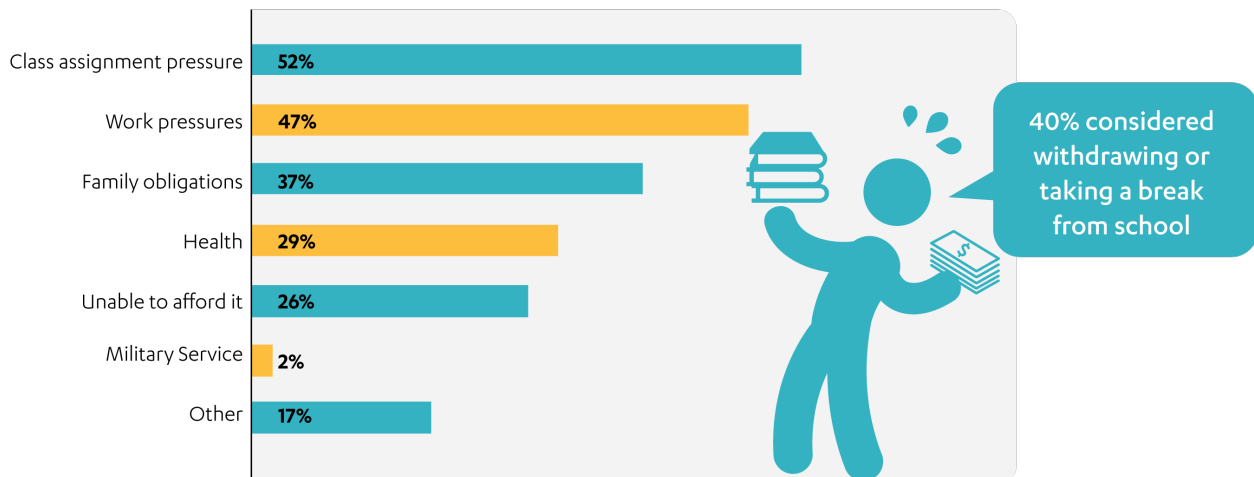
Not acknowledging and managing the stress workers and learners feel can have serious consequences for their college experiences. In our study, 40% of workers and learners have considered withdrawing or taking a break from school.

Figure 43: School Withdrawal



School and work pressures were the top reasons for needing to take a break from school. Another one-third reported family obligations, which is an aspect of life often made invisible at school and work. A little more than one-quarter reported health issues impacting their schooling, and another one-quarter reported being unable to afford their schooling as a reason to take a break from school.

Figure 44: Reasons for Considering a Withdrawal from School

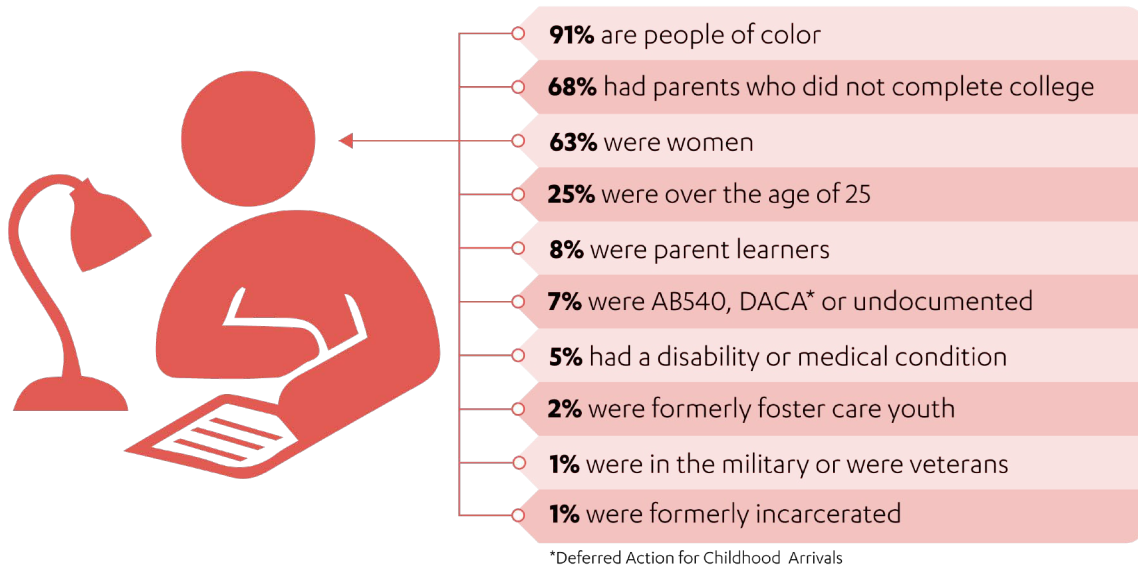


One double major in history and Chicana studies reported that the last time she almost left school was because “my personal life just kind of took over my academics... It was just so much that it was just so draining that I couldn’t keep going.” Similarly, one full-time worker and learner reported that they overworked themselves to the point where they could not dedicate “headspace” to school and opted to withdraw for a year.¹⁵⁰ Among those who made the difficult decision to leave school as they continued to work, the feeling of being overwhelmed by the competing demands of work and college was the primary reason.

Exclusion and Discrimination

Conflicting work and school expectations can be further complicated by a person’s multiple identities, such as being a worker and learner of color, a transfer student, older, a parent, an immigrant, a formerly incarcerated person, a foster youth, differently abled, and/or a military veteran. Strikingly, 91% of those surveyed were people of color. These factors mark a unique set of conditions learners must navigate in addition to studying and working. As we mentioned at the outset of this report, the demographic profile of working college learners has changed dramatically over the years. Navigating multiple identities, while not necessarily immediately visible, can pose greater challenges for learners to complete their goals.

Figure 45: Workers and Learners Select Characteristics



Workers and learners reported feeling discrimination at work and/or feelings of exclusion at school.

Figure 46: Experience of Exclusion and Discrimination



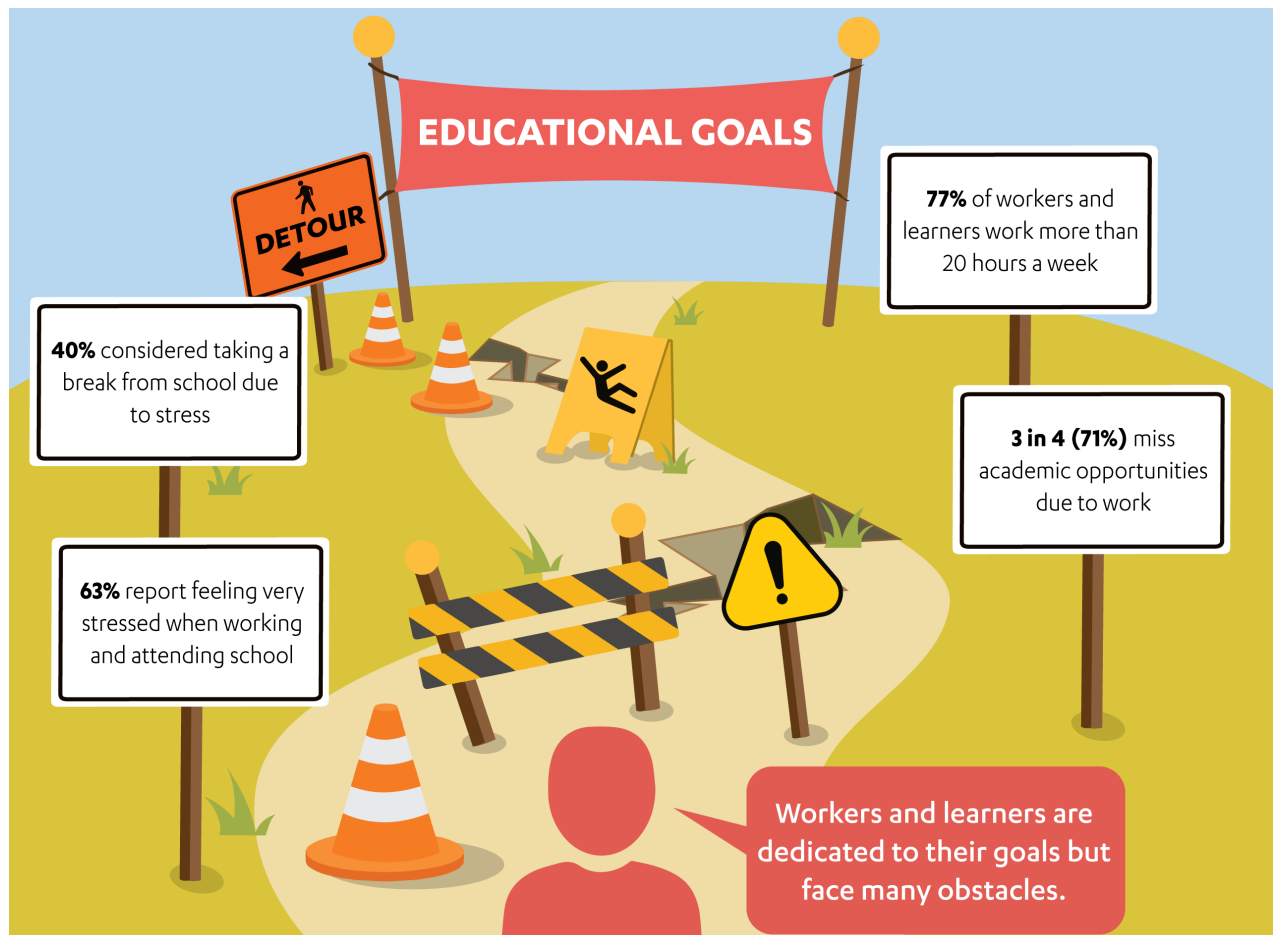
A few reported instances of discrimination based on race and gender at the workplace. One UCLA learner working on campus reported that “the guys catcall the girls... It’s kinda like sexual harassment, making me feel uncomfortable because I’m a girl.”¹⁵¹ Others attributed a lack of diversity to feelings of exclusion. Another Pasadena City College learner, working as a case manager, discussed how “being in an office that’s diverse is really good, but when it’s not diverse, it can definitely make you feel like an outsider based on race.”¹⁵² Similar feelings were even more prevalent among those who attended predominantly white institutions.

Some attributed feelings of exclusion or inclusion directly to their race/ethnicity. For example, one CSUN science major reported that while she did not ever feel discriminated against at work, “I definitely feel that race and gender tension because my major is mainly white males so sometimes they don’t understand our perspective when it comes to certain social situations.”¹⁵³ Similarly, an English major who attended both UCLA and a CCC reflected on their experience:

As a first year when I was at UCLA, I felt out of place, mainly because it was so different from my usual environment. I wasn’t used to being the only one, well not the only one, but one of the few people of color. So I felt out of place because of my race. When I transferred to my community college, I didn’t feel out of place anymore, I guess, because everyone was the same.¹⁵⁴

This learner’s sense of belonging was mediated by the demographics of the learner populations at their respective institutions. These examples show not only the different forms of discrimination and exclusion but also how they affected their experiences at school or in the workplace.

Figure 47: Key Data from Section 3





4. Finances and Hidden Costs

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A WORKER AND LEARNER

MON, WED, FRI

7:00 AM I wake up and shower and begin to get ready for the workday

8:00 AM I am at work to begin my 8-hour shift

5:00 PM My work shift is done

6:00 PM I grab dinner and study for tomorrow's class

8:00 PM I am able to sneak in some Netflix

10:00 PM I head to bed

TUE, THU

8:00 AM I am on campus for three 1-hour & 30-minute classes plus one 50-minute section until 4 PM

4:00 PM I am reviewing and doing my homework at the library

6:00 PM I have a club meeting

8:00 PM I head back to the apt to make dinner and prepare lunch for tomorrow

10:00 PM I head to bed

In this section, we examine the study findings by weighing the financial burden workers and learners encounter. We explore the costs of education (including tuition, books, school supplies, fees, and the necessity of a computer), living expenses (such as housing, food, utilities, and personal expenses) and financial hardships.

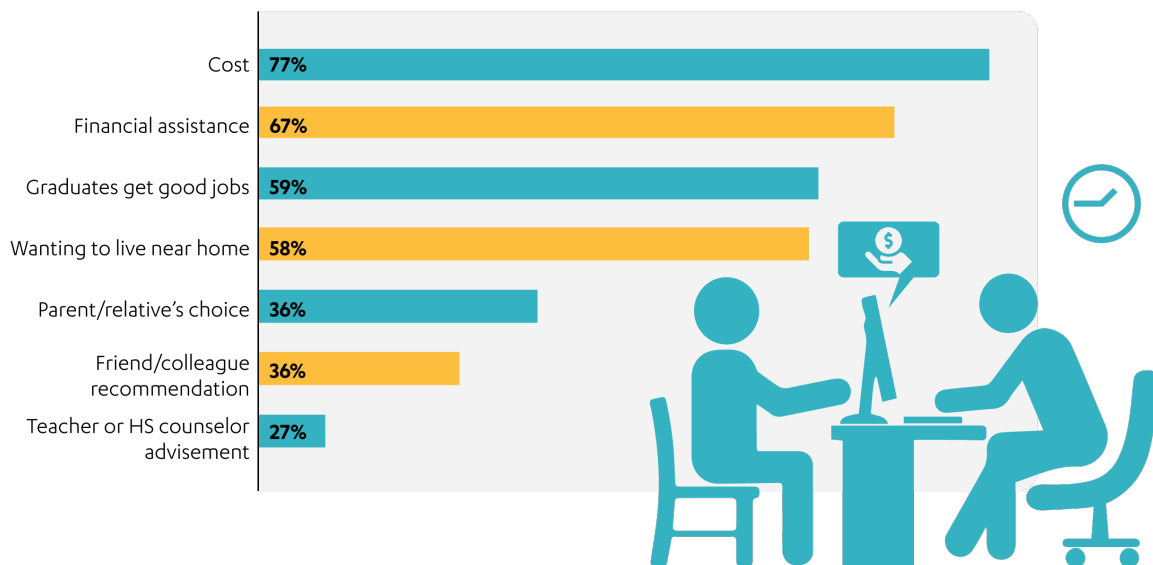
As a student at CSUN who has juggled many hours of work, I can tell you how stressful it is to worry about financing school and realizing that you need to work if you want to continue attending college. I am a communications major and behavioral science minor. I've been in school for 7 years because I have had to withdraw in order to work full-time to save up and pay for the upcoming semester. At times, I have been able to successfully or not so successfully manage working 60 hours a week and a full-time course load. I say not so successfully because at one point I was fired from my job and simultaneously failed my classes. My ultimate goal is to be a counselor, but I worry about my readiness for graduate school as I have not been able to participate in as many internship programs as my peers, especially, non-paid ones. To accept a non-paid internship would mean reducing work hours and this would be detrimental to my finances as I work to pay for all my living expenses as well. I just wish there were more paid internships available so that I could immerse myself in experiences related to my future career goals. Until then, I'll have to continue working long hours in order to complete my college degree.

Worker and learner since 2012 and aspiring counselor¹⁹⁶

Financing School and Life

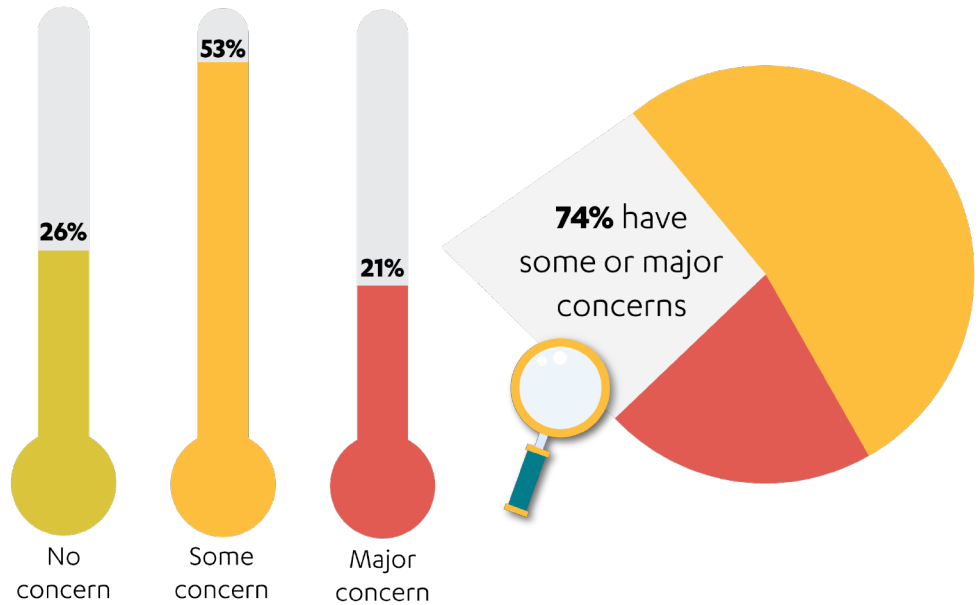
Tuition costs and financial assistance are primary factors that influence college enrollment. Other reasons include: proximity to home, their parent's influence, recommendations from friends, the advice of a counselor, and anticipated job prospects after graduation.

Figure 48: Reasons Students Chose to Attend Their College



Cost is a major factor in influencing choices around college, three-quarters of learners shared that they have serious concerns about their ability to finance their education.

Figure 49: Concern About Financing Education

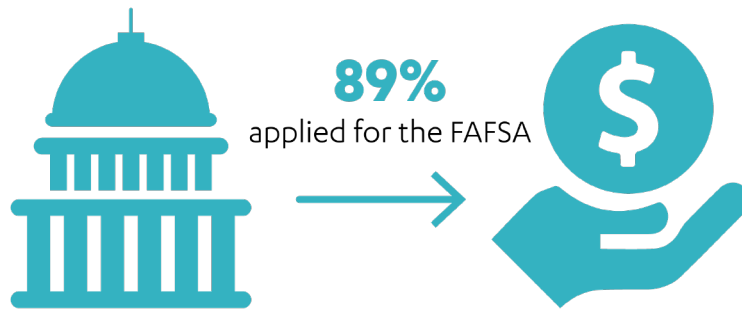


I started at a CSULA. I went straight to a four-year school but ended up transferring out to a community college. I did not know that financial aid was a one-year thing. I thought it was a one-time application. More surprising though was when CSULA wanted me to pay \$12,000 just to sign up for my courses and wanted me to pay before the semester started. I had no money to pay that and I remembered my high school advisor said I should save taking out loans if I was going to go for a masters or higher education. Without enough financial aid and studying electrical engineering which was becoming difficult, I decided to transfer from CSULA to LA Trade Tech and enroll in their electrician program. I still need to work because the only form of financial aid I get from college at the moment is fee waivers so I don't have to pay for the classes. But I still have to find a way to pay for my parking permit, gas, food, personal hobbies, phone bill, and internet bill, while also helping my parents out.

Electrician student at LA Trade Tech¹⁹⁷

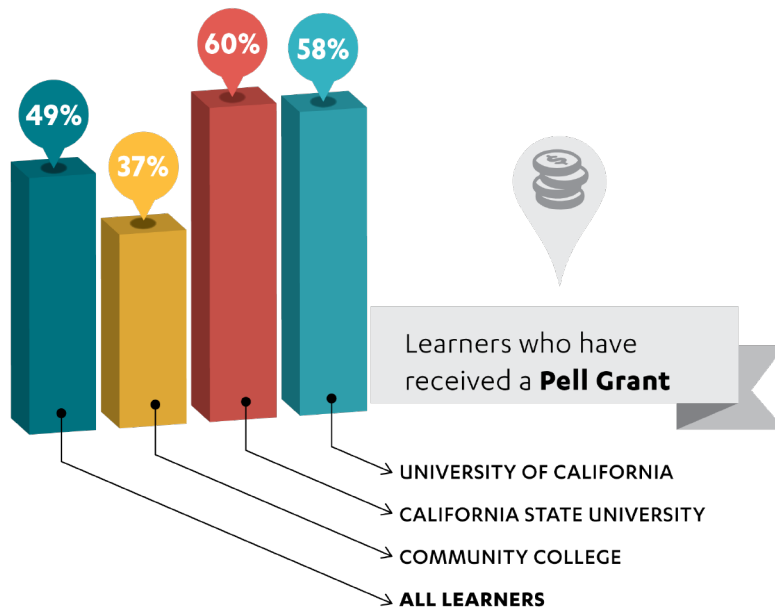
Our survey found that 89% of learners go through the process of submitting the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) in order to receive financial aid to pay for college. They must complete this application to determine eligibility for federal and state aid. The term “financial aid” can be misleading, because it includes government grants, scholarships, and loans as well as Federal Work-Study (FWS).¹⁵⁵ The two most prevalent forms of aid were grants and federal loans.

Figure 50: Free Application for Federal Student (FAFSA) Application



Half of those in our study received a Pell Grant, the largest source of federally-funded grants. A student’s eligibility for a Pell Grant is determined by a formula developed by Congress and their expected family contribution.¹⁵⁶ Aimed to provide assistance to the neediest learners, during the 2017-2018 school year, 7.1 million received an award that ranged from \$593 to \$5,920, totaling \$36 billion.¹⁵⁷ Unlike other types of financial aid, Pell Grants do not have to be repaid and can be used for both educational expenses and living costs, including books and housing. Only one-third of CCC learners surveyed reported receiving a Pell Grant whereas more than half of CSU and more than half of UC learners reported receiving an award.

Figure 51: Pell Grant Recipient by School Type



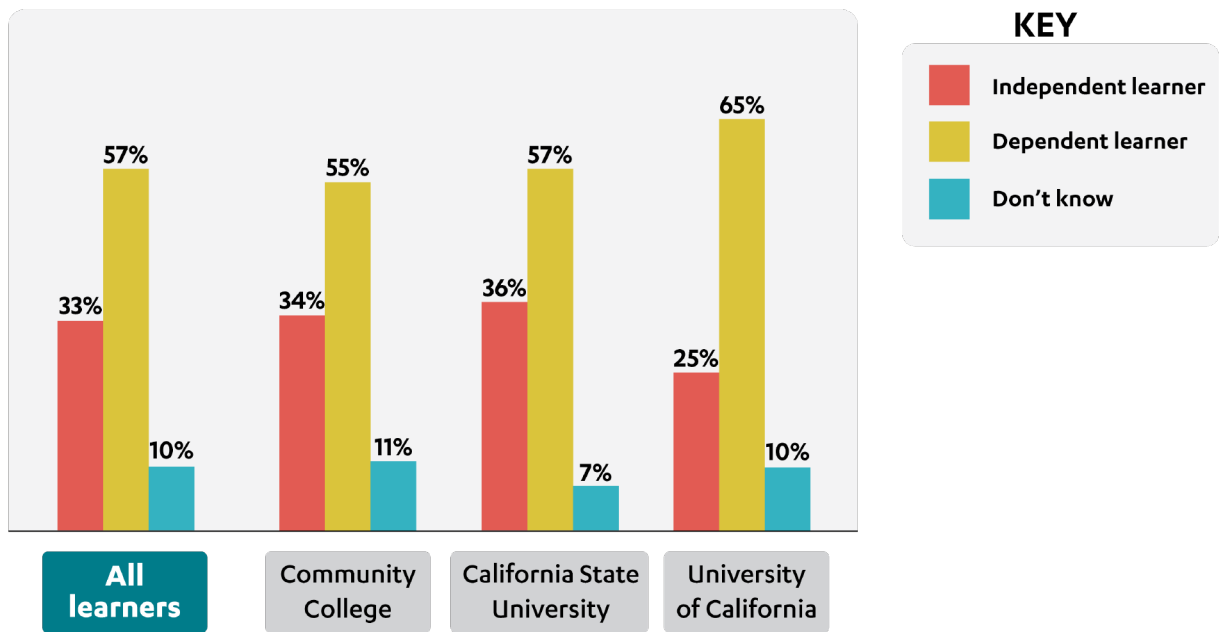
At the CCC level, there are many first-generation and low-income learners who would benefit from receiving a Pell Grant.¹⁵⁸ Yet almost \$130 million in Pell Grants at the CCC have been left on the table¹⁵⁹ because many eligible learners do not receive appropriate advice and become overwhelmed with the verification process.¹⁶⁰ The learners with the greatest needs are left to navigate a daunting process which oftentimes involves petitioning tax transcripts from the Internal Revenue Service, submitting low-income verification forms, and in some extreme cases providing a parent’s death certificate.¹⁶¹

Furthermore, respondents reported experiencing difficulty in making sense of their financial aid packets as well as how to navigate taking out student loans. A biochemistry major discussed how making sense of the financial resources available to him in his particular situation was complicated.¹⁶² Because his parents were disabled, it was difficult to report his unique family circumstance to financial aid officers. Furthermore, he commented on how confused he was that one of his two siblings received financial aid while the other did not, despite each experiencing the same financial situation.¹⁶³ The lack of assistance provided to workers and learners to improve financial literacy contributed to this misapprehension. As an education major at CSULA noted, their financial assistance did not go beyond receiving “money for school” and notices about scholarships they could apply for, which they termed “basic” assistance.¹⁶⁴ And as one Santa Monica Community College student working in the healthcare industry noted, “loans are a sticky thing because there’s different kinds.”¹⁶⁵

Dependent Status and Parental Support

While families tend to help support their children’s higher education, many struggle with rising costs.¹⁶⁶ We found that a little more than one-third of learners claim themselves as independents in comparison to more than one-half who classify themselves as dependents on the FAFSA application. Another one-in-10 workers and learners reported not knowing how they were classified on the FAFSA application. UC learners had lower rates of declaring independent status than those at CCCs and CSUs.

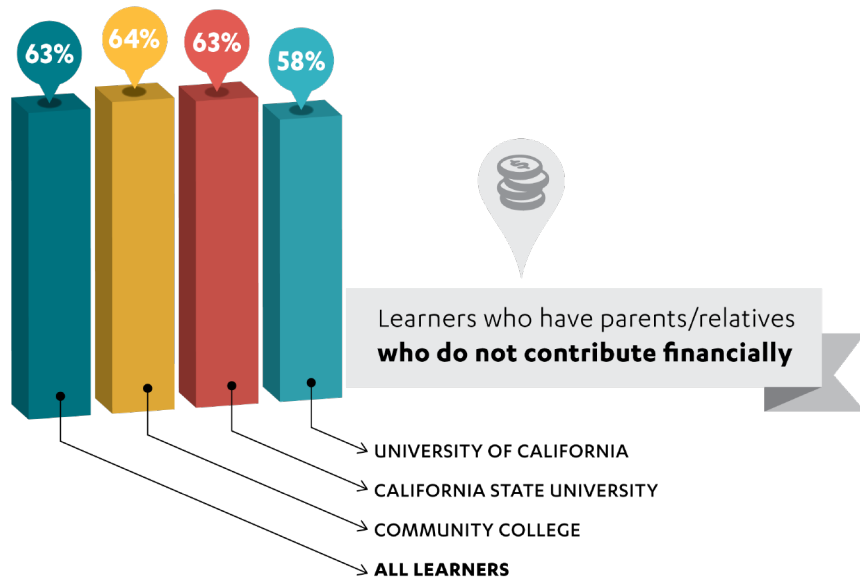
Figure 52: FAFSA and/or Tax Filing Status by School Type



FAFSA distinguishes between independent and dependent learners by identifying one as dependent who does not meet any of the criteria for being an independent learner, which includes: being at least 24 years old, married, a graduate or professional student, a veteran, a member of the armed forces, an orphan, a ward of the court, someone with legal dependents other than a spouse, an emancipated minor or someone who is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.”¹⁶⁷ This definition of dependency makes invisible the many workers and learners who are classified as dependents but work to fully support themselves and/or unable to count on their parents to cover any of their education or living expenses because of their family’s limited financial resources.

While more than half of learners in this study file as dependents, the majority, 63%, reported that their parents/relatives do not contribute to educational costs like tuition, fees, or books. This was true across school systems.

Figure 53: Parent Contribution to Education Cost by School Type



One observed, “My parents couldn’t financially help me anymore... So I had to get a job and help my parents pay off my dorm and meal plan.”¹⁶⁸ Another studying business at CSULB and working two jobs noted how they paid for their college books, rent, car, gas, for “literally everything,” and described themselves as “not dependent on my parents whatsoever.”¹⁶⁹ Others personally took on the financial cost of attending college so as not to burden their families. For instance, one UCLA student described her financial situation: “I have to provide for myself... My mom probably could help me, but I don’t want to put that burden on her because she has to pay for her own stuff, so I pay for my stuff.”¹⁷⁰ Workers and learners’ decisions to work are not only informed by their own financial circumstances but those of their families.

AB540, Undocumented, and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Learners

A number of federal and state policies have impacted the undocumented college learner population in California. The earliest of these AB 540 California Nonresident Tuition Exemption was passed in 2001 to allow “eligible undocumented, legal permanent resident and U.S. citizen learners to pay in-state tuition at public colleges and universities.”¹⁷¹ Later in 2011, the California Dream Act composed of AB130 and AB131 was signed to allow AB540 learners to receive aid “from private sources through California colleges and universities” as well as “from state sources that are not in conflict with federal law.”¹⁷² Finally, in 2012, President Obama announced the DACA policy which would defer the deportation of undocumented youth meeting certain requirements while granting them work permits.¹⁷³

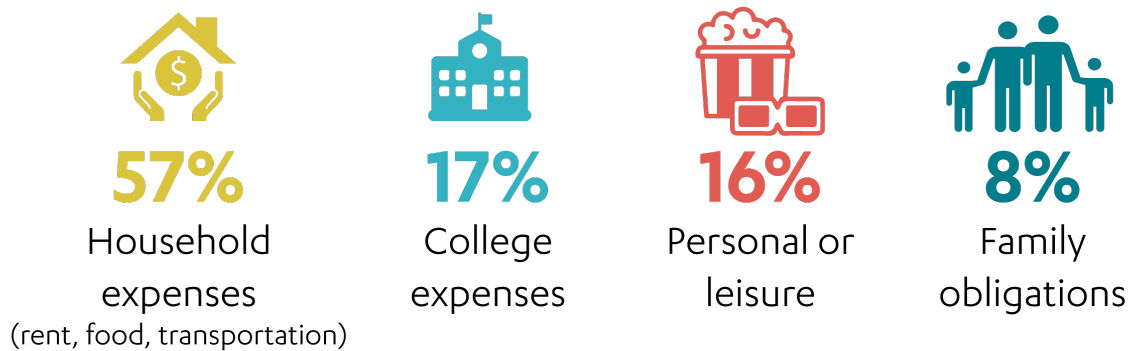
In our sample, 7% of learners reported being AB 540, DACA or undocumented. One worker learner majoring in history and Chicano studies discussed how the thought of attending college seemed implausible attributing this to her undocumented status.¹⁷⁴ It was not until she had a meeting with her college counselor that she was informed that she could attend college and apply for the California Dream Act. Throughout the process of applying to college and financial aid, frontline services providers like high school counselors are involved and can aid in securing in-state tuition and financial aid to cover tuition and other costs for learners.¹⁷⁵ Another worker and learner exemplifies how difficult it is to navigate financial struggles,

stemming from an unexpected legal problem that had ramifications for her entire family, and the need for educators who can advocate for undocumented learners. She described how she almost dropped out of college when her father was detained by U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement for six months causing her family to lose their main economic support.¹⁷⁶ With the encouragement of her brother and a professor who located emergency funds, she was able to remain in college and find on-campus work to cover her college and living expenses.¹⁷⁷ The process of applying for aid as an undocumented learner, especially, in emergency situations can be cumbersome. Adequate training on the policies, resources, and guidance for educators can improve undocumented learners' experiences.¹⁷⁸

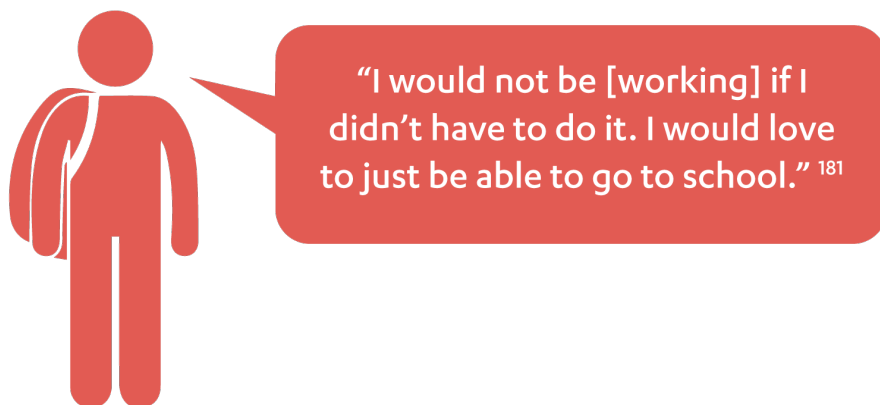
Struggling to Make Ends Meet

When learners were asked to name their main reason for working, they replied that it was to pay for household expenses such as rent and food, followed by college expenses.¹⁷⁹ This dispels the misconception that learners only work to pay for personal or leisure activities. Findings demonstrate that living expenses have become a driving factor for working while in school. In cities like Los Angeles, with high living costs, financial aid is not enough to cover these expenses.

Figure 54: Worker and Learners Primary Expense

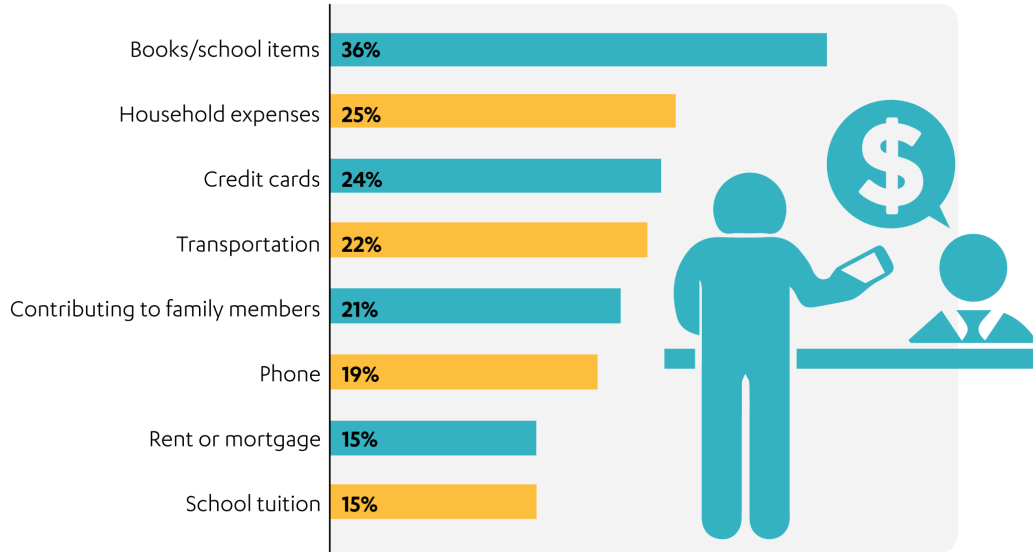


As more workers and learners struggle to make ends meet, many are resorting to jobs that pay bills rather than jobs connected to their academic interests or career field. One El Camino Community College worker and learner discussed her reasons for working strictly for survival purposes citing their need to pay food and help out family.¹⁸⁰ In a different financial situation, they noted,



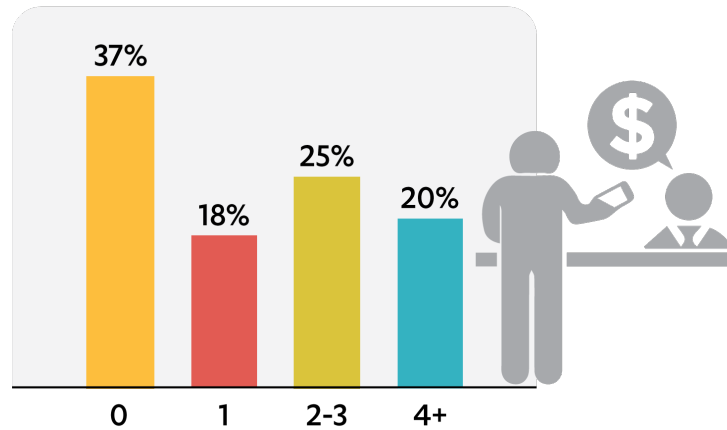
This sentiment was, of course, shared by many other workers and learners in this study. Despite taking on work, including long hours and/or multiple jobs, workers and learners are still not making ends meet. One-third had trouble paying for school materials and one-quarter with household items. And many also had trouble paying for transportation, a sometimes unacknowledged cost for those in commuter cities like Los Angeles. Other delayed expenses included supporting family members, credit cards, phone, rent, and tuition.

Figure 55: Expenses Late or Delayed Paying



Altogether, nearly two-thirds of workers and learners experienced at least one of the above financial hardships.

Figure 56: Number of Delayed or Missed Payments



A CCC learner taking more than 18 units a semester and working off-campus in an administrative position observed, “What I get for financial aid is not enough to survive on... I cannot afford to go to school and not work.”¹⁸² Another UCLA learner working in a FWS position at an on-campus food service job shared, “I have financial aid but it’s still not enough... I need to pay for rent, books, and food. I get food stamps, but it’s still not enough.”¹⁸³

Workers and learners in our interviews frequently mentioned the challenge of paying for summer session courses. For those aiming to transfer in two years and/or graduate in four years, attending summer sessions are vital for timely graduation. But to offset the costs of summer school, several workers and learners discussed taking out loans so that they could attend classes and pay for housing.¹⁸⁴ One double major in biology and Spanish shared how stressed she was when she realized that she would have to pay for her summer living expenses because financial aid did not cover it.¹⁸⁵ She resorted to taking out a loan which she described as a “sad” experience but justified it as necessary to progress in her academics.¹⁸⁶

I transferred into UCLA as a life sciences major but quickly changed my major to anthropology. Transferring to UCLA was not easy. I felt out of place and thought about quitting school. More than anything, I wish I had known that studying here would be so expensive and that I would have to work just to make ends meet. Financial aid only covered my tuition, but living expenses was all on me. As a low-income student, I did not want to burden my family with expenses related to college, so I began to work. I was now responsible for housing and food. I had initially thought I could be on a two meal-a-day plan, but I was getting hungry and had to upgrade to a different plan even if that meant more money to spend. Then there were all the academic things I had to spend money on like textbooks which are super expensive, especially for life science majors. I also had not factored in that visiting family would also be another expense. The gas money to visit family and the bus passes to go to work was something I had to spend money on. Riding the bus for two hours was a constant reminder that I was losing time at work and/or on campus going to office hours. I could drive but that would mean I would have to account for gas which is not at all cheap. I just hope that others know that financial aid is not always enough especially if you want to make the most of the year and go to school in the summer in order to graduate on time.

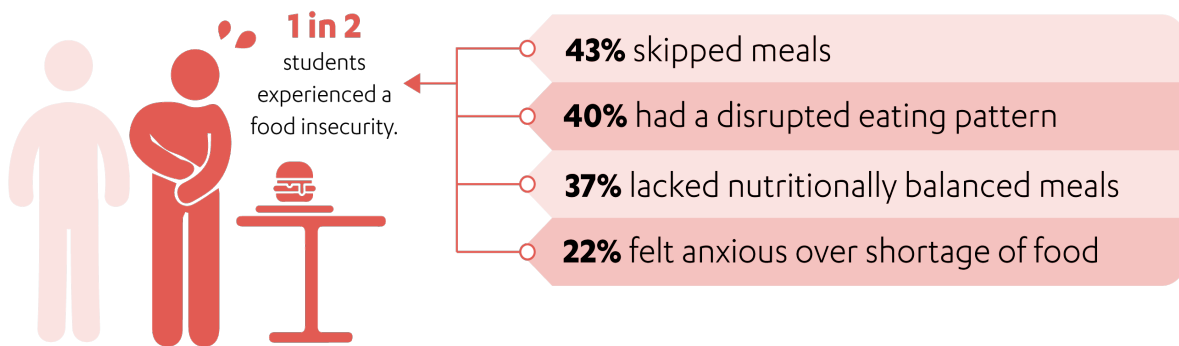
Doing so has cost me taking out both unsubsidized and subsidized loans. I hope in the end this all is worth it.

Anthropology major at UCLA¹⁴¹

Food Insecurity

Those who live in a county where rents continue to outpace the incomes of its residents face very real housing and food insecurity issues.¹⁸⁷ Over half experienced at least one type of food insecurity, and at least one-quarter were anxious that they might not have enough food.¹⁸⁸ Studies have shown that food-insecure learners show higher levels of perceived stress and a lower quality of sleep than their peers. They are also more likely to have poor health, low energy levels, and a greater likelihood of symptoms of depression than learners who are not constantly worrying about meeting their basic needs.¹⁸⁹

Figure 57: Experience of Food Insecurity



58% of these learners experience more than one type of food insecurity.

Figure 58: Number of Food Insecurities Experienced

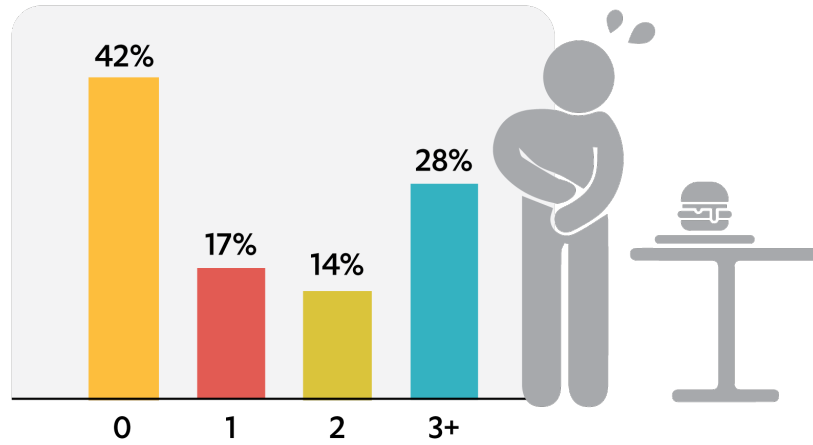
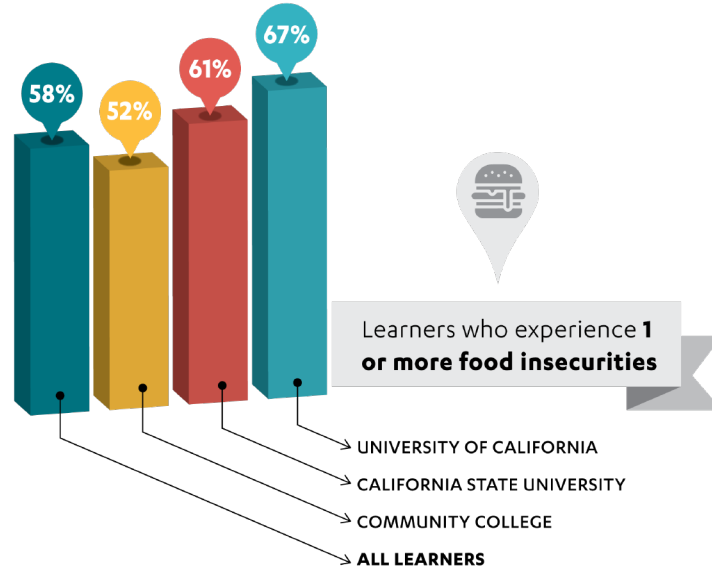


Figure 59: Food Insecurity by College Type



Workers and learners experienced food insecurity throughout the year even though they received financial aid and/or worked. As one UCLA Spanish major working at a resource center on campus explained how he helped students obtain meal vouchers and the intricate process students had to go through to receive help.

I provided students with the necessary information about the different programs on campus [like] the meal voucher program. Every student can receive a total of five meal vouchers if they proved [having] financial need. The maximum amount of vouchers students can get is 20. To receive the additional 15 vouchers, the student [had] to have the meal voucher evaluation form completed by the Financial Aid office, which would verify that all the financial help they offered had been utilized by the student (including all types of loans: subsidized loans and unsubsidized loans). Although the Financial Aid office staff let you know about the risks of getting every available loan, it was the only way for a student to obtain all the meal vouchers available for them. A student can only request a total of 20 vouchers, up to three quarters, while they are attending school.¹⁹⁰

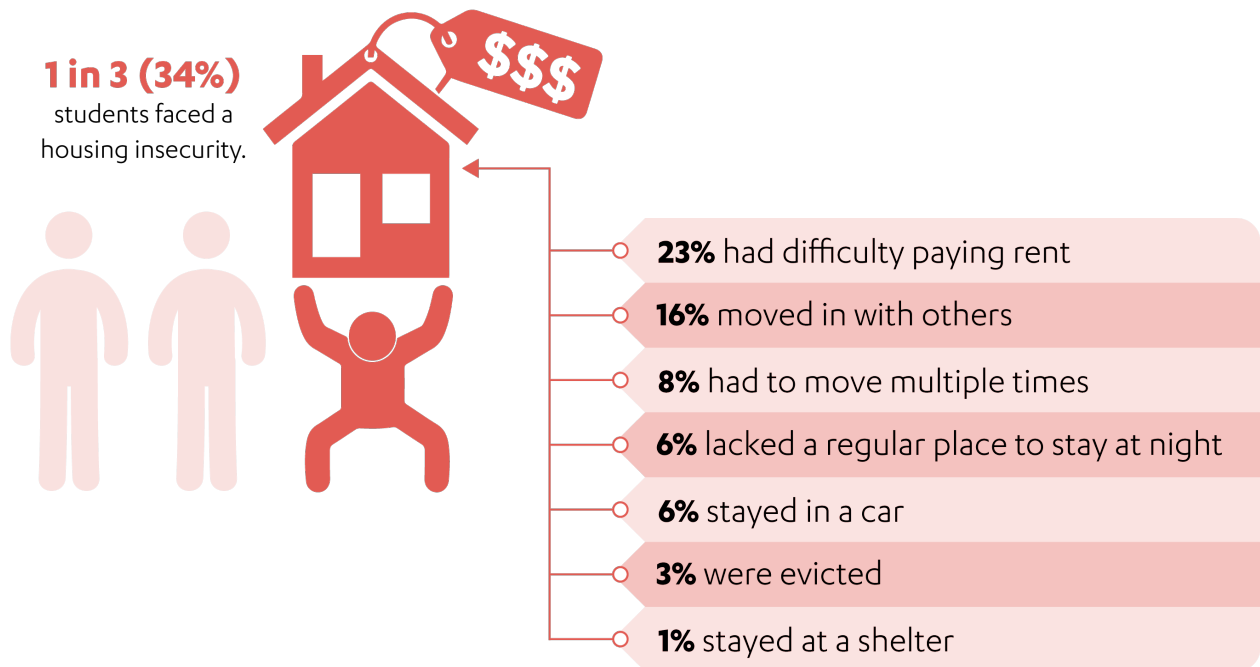
For some learners, experiences of food insecurity is further complicated by the burden to prove their financial need. Though this worker and learner helped others obtain these meal vouchers, he also reflected on the negative repercussions that come with declaring you have exhausted all your financial aid (taking out all loans available during one academic year) and qualifying for a total of 60 meal vouchers that year, but never being able to qualify for the meal voucher program in the coming years.¹⁹¹ Taking on more debt becomes the only way to ensure they had enough meals to get them through the year.

Interestingly, not all workers and learners were aware they were experiencing food insecurity. One described how they were financially secure but noted how, “they still don’t have enough money to pay for textbooks and groceries and other student necessities.”¹⁹² Others noted how staying on for a summer term and securing health and regular meals proved to be a challenging experience. They recount how their limited working hours and lack of financial aid created an scenario in which they “were starving because I couldn’t eat because I paid expensive ass rent.”¹⁹³ To offset their limited resources, some described receiving assistance from their families to purchase food. As one French and Linguistics major observed, their income from work would not be enough if their “parents [were not] helping me out with the basics of food.”¹⁹⁴ Without adequate financial aid, number of hours, living wages, and support from family, many are at risk of experiencing food insecurity.

Housing Insecurity

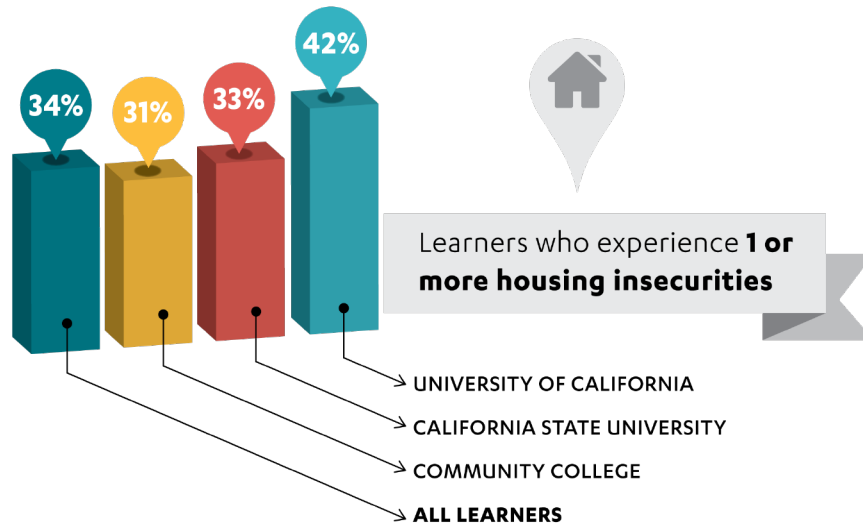
One-third of workers and learners experienced at least one form of housing insecurity, such as difficulty paying rent, having to move in with others, or moving multiple times throughout the academic year. A smaller portion of workers and learners lacked a regular place to stay at night, stayed in their car, had been evicted, and/or stayed at a shelter.

Figure 60: Experience of Housing Insecurity



UC students showed a higher rate of housing insecurity with a little less than one-half reporting experiencing one or more kinds of housing insecurity.

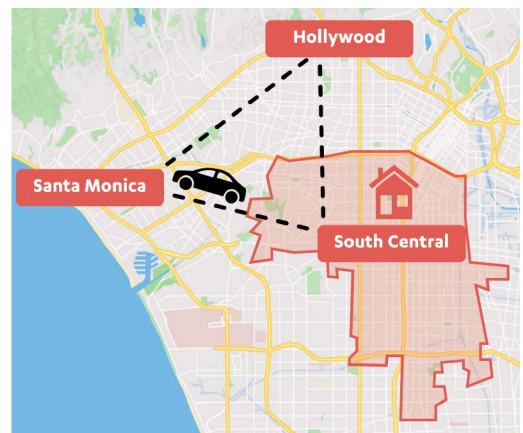
Figure 61: Housing Insecurity by College Type



One UCLA student discussed how his financial situation has fluctuated, and how his parents have been unable to support him because they live well below the poverty line.¹⁹⁵ He did not have a “stable home, bouncing back and forth, having to live between different family members and different people” due to his financial circumstances.¹⁹⁶

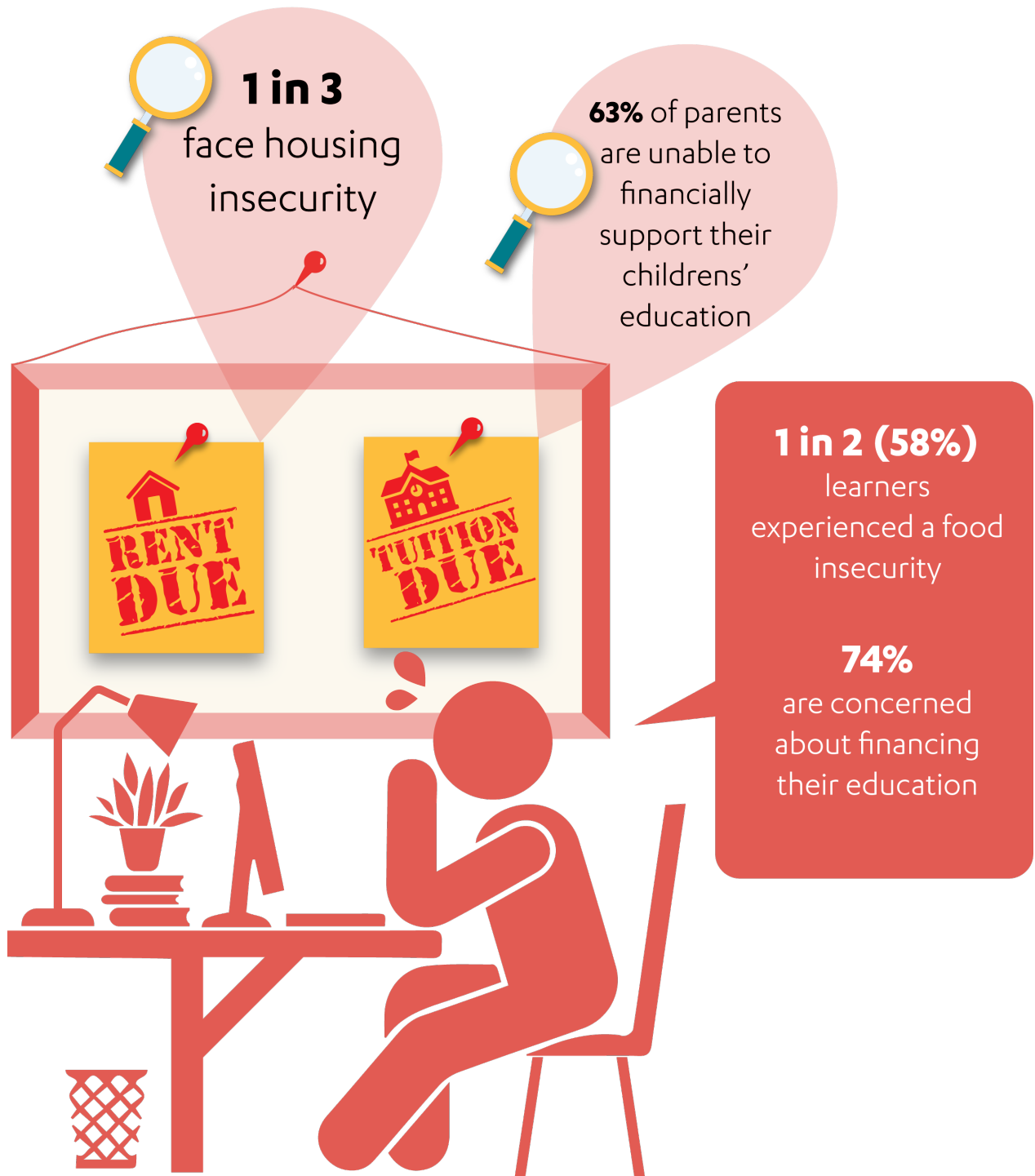
Another had to relocate because of remodeling to their apartment. This unexpected change in their living arrangement forced them and their roommates to face L.A. traffic, commute for two hours, rise early in the morning, and stay on campus until 8:00 p.m. and sleep “whenever you could at the library or a friend’s house” because they shared one car.¹⁹⁸

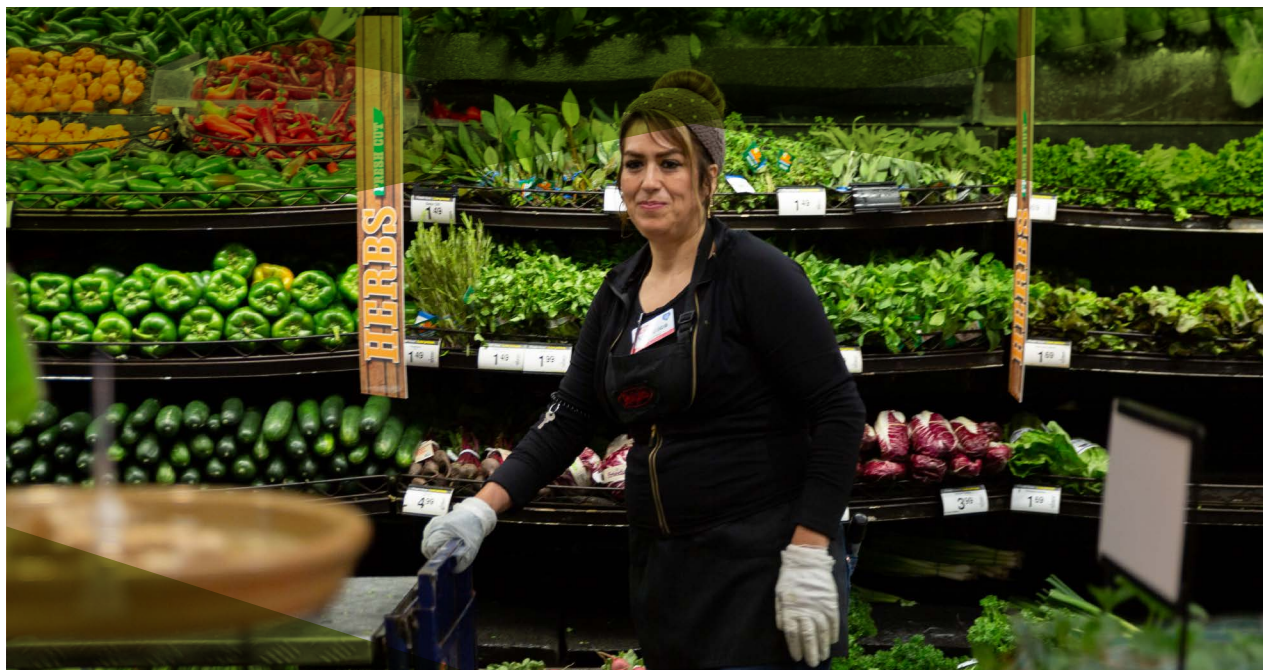
Commuters experience challenges exacerbated by L.A.’s inadequate public transportation and heavy traffic. A Community College learner working in retail describes her daily commute as “do[ing] circles” driving from South Central to Santa Monica to Hollywood and back again to South Central where they live with family.¹⁹⁹



A CSULA student described how, in addition to not being able to afford housing around her college campus, she was in need of money to cover the expense of “transportation because going back to L.A. from Chino everyday costs a lot.”²⁰⁰ When workers and learners cannot secure affordable housing, hidden costs emerge, such as car/transportation expenses. Lastly, another worker and learner at CSULB invoked both the cost of parking and how difficult it is to find parking on campus during peak hours. Although learners qualify for financial aid such as Pell and Cal Grants, these may not be sufficient to cover the costs of tuition, food, housing, books, transportation, parking, personal expenses, and family contributions. These essential material insecurities can have significant effects on college learners, including poor physical and mental health, a decline in coursework completion, inconsistent attendance, and lower credit attainment rates. Learners reported that food and housing instability negatively impacts their overall performance which can jeopardize their ability to stay enrolled in college.

Figure 62: Key Data from Section 4





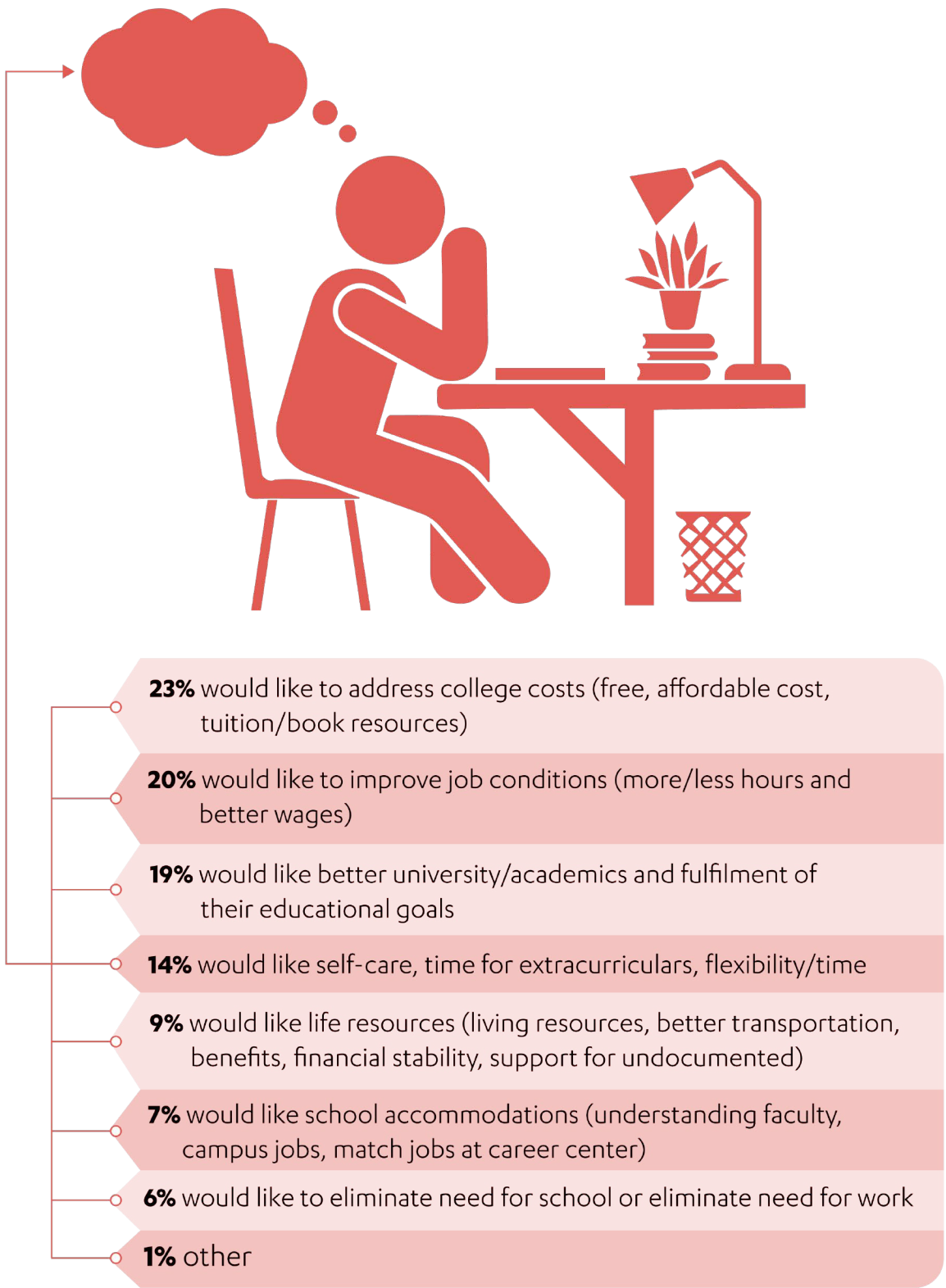
Recommendations

The rising population of California learners and workers requires that we ask education, labor, state, and community leaders to rethink how we best serve workers and learners.²⁰¹ The dual identity of workers and learners requires more than just “education-based solutions,” which fall short of transforming the complicated reality workers and learners are living today.²⁰² Rather, changes should “address and transform the actual and desirable relationships between education, work, inequality, and injustice in contemporary society.”²⁰³ This includes developing policies that are evidence-based, tied to jobs that pay family-supporting wages, and advance equitable plans for all.²⁰⁴ The following recommendations require collaboration among educational leaders, employers, and elected officials because as much as workers and learners are students, they are workers too.

What do workers and learners want?

When asked what they would change about school and/or work, the majority of workers and learners brought up the need to transform both college and work conditions. First and foremost, they want more affordable college, ranging from free or reduced tuition to better financial support for school-related costs. This was followed by the desire for better workplaces, better wages, and more reasonable hours (for some, more hours, for others, less).²⁰⁵ Workers and learners also wanted to see improvements at their schools, higher quality education, and institutions that facilitated them in reaching their educational goals. Many workers and learners noted the importance of time to take care of themselves and reduce stress, and some modicum of flexible time to do social and extracurricular activities.

Figure 63: What Would Workers and Learners Change About School or Work?



The following are recommendations from workers and learners that focus on ways to improve the educational and employment outcomes for workers and learners.

1. Support workers as learners and learners as workers

A paradigm shift must occur within the labor force and educational spaces to better the working and educational conditions of workers and learners. Educational institutions can empower workers and learners with additional resources and training regarding navigating the world of labor.

- a. Provide worker rights training and protection to all workers, including workers and learners.** College learners are workers too and are a core part of the labor movement and workforce. As such, they need the training and educational tools to advocate for themselves.
 - Policymakers and the labor movement should continue to advance protections that are inclusive of workers and learners.
 - Even before learners enter college, schools should provide K-12 students with a Know Your Rights training so that learners are aware of their worker's rights and workplace violations.
 - Labor rights and protections should be a part of the college curriculum as learners prepare with the necessary skills needed for future jobs and the tools to transform “bad” jobs into good ones.
- b. Recognize work and school commitments and provide institutional support and accommodations.** Faculty, staff, and employers should move away from penalizing workers and learners who are employed to sustain themselves as they pursue their goal of learning to transform themselves and their futures.
 - Professors and teachers' aides should understand the diversity of learners responsibilities and pressures when planning their class expectations and office hours. Class schedules should be expanded so workers and learners have more choice and flexibility.
 - Universities should provide faculty with training and tools to better accommodate workers and learners as well as compensation for providing flexible office hours.
 - Similarly, provide employers with managerial training courses that equip them with skills to respectfully manage learning workers, but also allow space for growth.
- c. Support student unions and workplace organizing efforts.** Workers and learners can come together and demand improvements for themselves and for students and workers broadly.
 - Institutions should support the establishment of a coalition of student unions to develop a cross-campus effort to articulate the pressing needs of workers and learners throughout the state's public higher education system.
 - Elevate student-led organizing efforts at the workplace.

2. Strengthen the career and educational pathways for workers as learners and learners as workers.

Work can be a beneficial and productive experience for workers and learners—particularly when the hours are reasonable—the job can advance educational and career goals, and the two can complement rather than compete with each other.

- a. Make career resources and learning tools accessible for workers and learners.** Expanding the time and places of resources and tools will allow workers and learners to access the many services available at school and work.
 - Career centers and counselors should offer appointments at variable hours, including via video conferencing tools and at nontraditional times.
 - Institutions should consider ways to make learning more accessible, such as increasing the availability of courses at nontraditional times, expanding satellite campuses, and shortening pathways to degree completion.
 - They should also ensure that all students have access to resources for degree completion, especially free internet and technology for course materials, online office hours, and tutoring.

b. Support paid internships and learning that advances career goals. Colleges and employers should be involved in creating paid internship opportunities and classes focused on skill developments in career fields of interest.

- Colleges can utilize public-private partnerships and partnerships with nonprofits to develop and subsidize internship programs. They can develop programs that connect underrepresented Angelenos to paid internships within industries that have historically lacked diversity and inclusion.
- Colleges and policymakers should provide further oversight over unpaid internships as well those not providing learners with core skills and a learning experience.
- Faculty should make higher education classes more relevant to the changing realities of the world. Classes should contain some hands-on learning opportunities and real-life applications such as case studies and labs that learners can directly participate in. These opportunities can help learners gain exposure and skills applicable to their current and future jobs.

c. Increase opportunities for networking and mentorship. Networking is a pipeline to good jobs in, and after, college but not everyone has access to these professional relationships—particularly workers and learners.

- Connect learners with alumni from different professional backgrounds that can benefit learners through mentorship opportunities, career advice, and internship opportunities.
- Colleges and policymakers should provide further oversight over unpaid internships as well those not providing learners with core skills and a learning experience.
- Employers and colleges should create institutional support and mentorship programs for workers and learners who may feel excluded. Employers and colleges can create programming that acknowledges workers and learners as a marginalized group, as well as their other identities such as undocumented learners, first-generation immigrants, formerly incarcerated people, and foster youth.

3. Improve the financial agency of all workers and all learners.

With learners working primarily for financial reasons, workers and learners need more power over financial management and costs of education.

a. Make college affordable for all learners. With learners working primarily for financial reasons, addressing the costs of education could help reduce work hours and allow learners to choose better work options or not work at all.

- The state and institutions should expand free college programs and increase grants and scholarships on the state and federal level.
- Institutions should make student loans less burdensome, including increased access to interest-free loan programs throughout the academic year, eliminating student loans that are unsubsidized and offer the opportunity for a learner's job at a university to be considered part of the 10-year repayment plan.
- Further, they should incorporate the cost of living of the immediate and surrounding areas into calculations pertaining to financial aid, such as using county-level data to adjust and determine local cost of living to determine state and institutional need-based grants.

b. Provide learners and families with the tools to navigate the financial systems. Figuring out the financial bureaucracy can be complicated for families—starting early and streamlining the process can help learners secure more aid.

- Schools should start college financial literacy training at the K-12 level. School counselors should provide financial literacy lessons which go beyond applying for the FAFSA and choosing an affordable college.
- Further, institutions should remove the financial aid verification process which creates barriers and prevents working class learners from accessing financial aid and streamline the financial aid process across campuses to improve financial aid distribution for all learners.




- c. Expand work-study opportunities to all learners, year-round.** Work study can be a vehicle to connect learners with jobs connected to their field and on campus.
- The program should consider expanding eligibility to more colleges, including CCCs and CSUs, so that more learners can participate in this program throughout the academic year including the summer.
 - Career services should assist learners in finding positions through Federal Work Study that align to their course of study.
 - The program should allow workers to reduce the total number of eligibility hours so that learners can both meet their financial obligations and go to school.

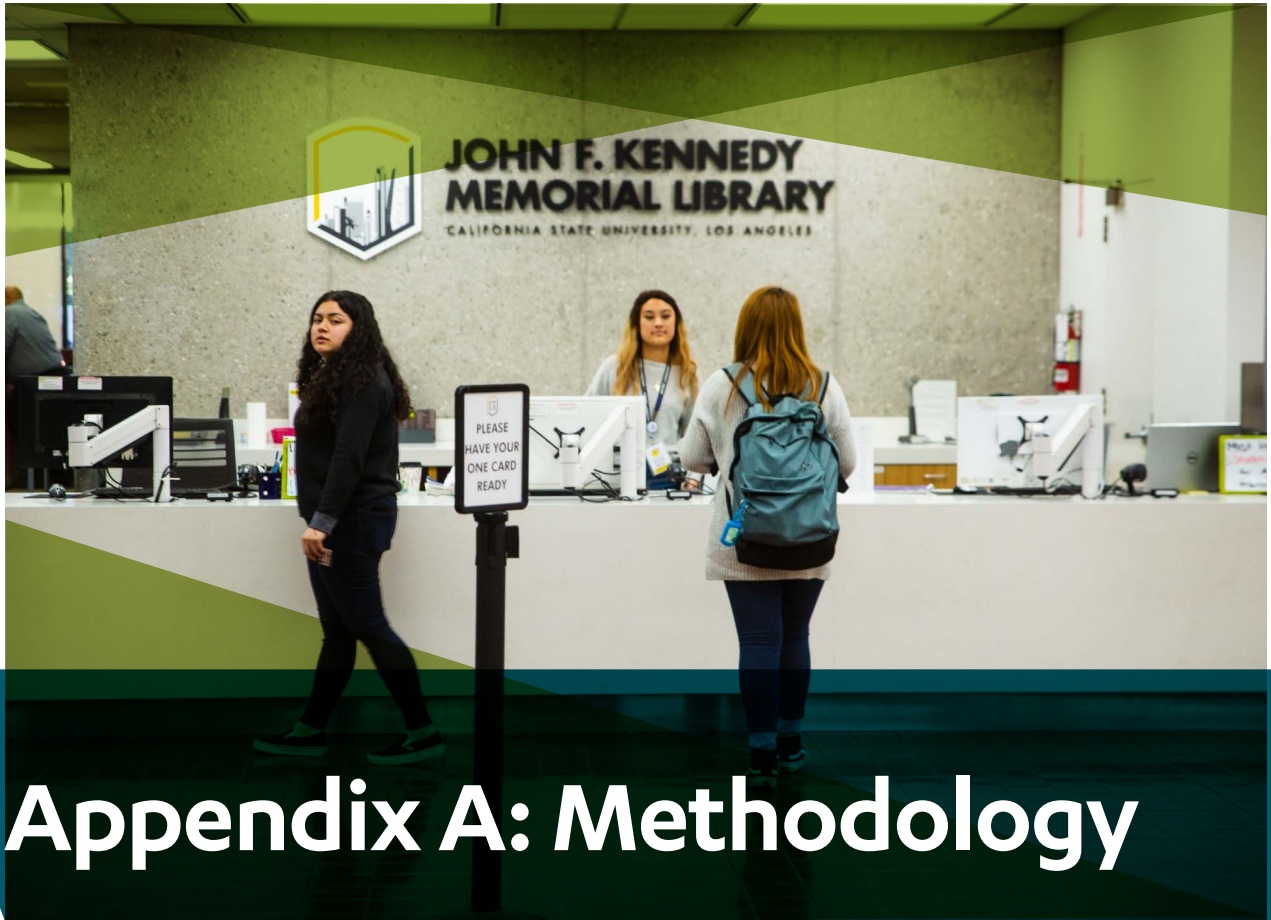
4. Provide holistic support for workers and learners.

Juggling school and work takes a toll on workers and learners. They need access to greater support services and financial support.

- a. Provide mental health and counseling support for workers and learners to help them navigate their multiple responsibilities and identities.** Colleges should increase accessibility to counseling and mental health services.
- Colleges should be cognizant of diverse working learners' identities. College should provide appointments with counselors on weekends, outside of 9am-5pm hours, and by offering services and appointments via video tools.
 - Employers and educational institutions should provide paid sick leave to workers and learners as a way to ensure access to health benefits including mental health/personal days.
 - Furthermore, colleges should incorporate the cost of living of the immediate and surrounding areas into calculations pertaining to financial aid, such as using county-level data to adjust and determine local cost of living to determine state and institutional need-based grants.
- b. Address food and housing insecurity.** With funding shortfalls and rising costs of expenses, policymakers and educational institutions need to address learners' increasing experiences with food and housing insecurity.
- Institutions should create alternatives to access on-campus food by planting urban gardens on college campuses and form partnerships with local farmers markets and/or grocery stores to ensure learners' access to fresh food and increase nutritious, healthy choices on campus.
 - Policymakers should also review enrollment requirements in CalFresh and other public assistance programs, and allow access to CalFresh for learners working 19 hours, which is the maximum number of hours work-study learners are allowed to work.
 - Colleges should consider collaboration between nonprofit organizations and philanthropic foundations to help learners health benefits including mental health/personal days.
- c. Increase awareness about food and housing insecurity.** The struggles of students to meet their food and housing needs to be destigmatized, recognized, and addressed.
- Policymakers and institutions should define food insecurity as a public health issue in terms of its lack of access to nutrition and significant impact on learner health, and destigmatize CalFresh.
 - Faculty and employers should be provided a list of resources that they can share with workers and learners regarding housing and food resources. Faculty should also include a requisite section in course syllabi acknowledging that workers and learners may face housing and food insecurity.
 - The voices and concerns of workers and learners need to be included and addressed in discussions about affordable housing and rent control in Los Angeles.
- d. Improve public transportation options across Los Angeles County.** In Los Angeles, transportation and its costs are a challenge for workers and learners.
- Policy makers and elected officials need to improve public transportation routes, schedules, and efficiency especially in getting to and from colleges and universities.
 - Colleges can make public transportation free for all learners and campus parking more affordable as well as ensure access to gas cards and tax deductions for commuting students.

Overall, our findings articulate three imperatives. First, the need to center the identities of workers and learners when creating holistic programs that support and alleviate the high levels of stress and the challenging experiences they face. Second, it is critical that employers and colleges create comprehensive outreach strategies so resources and training programs are readily available and accessible through simple systems and protocols. Third, workers and learners have less time to navigate such systems, so flexible, consolidated, nurturing, equitable, low-cost/free and worker-learner centered services and programs must become the norm in the workplace and on college campuses. These three overarching areas, we believe, will lead to solutions that can support workers and learners manage the complexities of their school and work lives.

- 1** Center the identities of workers and learners 
- 2** Create comprehensive outreach strategies 
- 3** Create low-cost/free services at work and school 



Appendix A: Methodology

The UCLA Labor Center, UCLA Institute for Research on Labor and Employment and the Dolores Huerta Labor Institute launched the Workers and Learners in Los Angeles County research project to better understand the experiences and challenges of students who work. The study used a research justice model and centered the experience and expertise of working students in the implementation of the project. This means students were involved in the design, fielding, analysis and dissemination plan.

We trained students across the UC, CSU, and CCC systems from August 2018 through May 2019 in Los Angeles County to conduct face-to-face surveys with workers and learners. For the purposes of this study, participants were included if they met the following requirements: an undergraduate in Los Angeles County, attend one of the selected public colleges or universities in Los Angeles, currently enrolled in six units (or more) at the college they attend, have worked 16 paid hours at any job in the past week, and be 18 years or older. The survey had five main sections: education/college experiences, work experiences, impact of “doing” both education and work, academic experience and demographics. The survey took 30 minutes to complete.

In addition, students from the Labor Summer Research Program (LSRP) classes conducted interviews over two summers. LSRP 2018 developed an interview guide that covered the topics of college experience (support leading up to college, field of study, resources, interactions with faculty/mentors), work experience (current job, reasons to work, skills), the experience of being in both (balance, schedule, impacts on each, commute, stress, resources), finances (expenses, grants/loans, support and shortfall) and solutions. We collected 45 interviews using this guide. LSRP 2019 delved into three specific areas—mental health, internships/work-study and discrimination/exclusions. We collected 10 interviews within each topic area for a total of 30 interviews.

Altogether, the project collected a total of 869 surveys and 75 in-depth interviews. Students and partners conducted surveys through their networks and conducted limited outside fielding. All surveys and interviews were conducted in English. Participants received a \$10 stipend for completing a survey, and a \$20 stipend (LSRP 2018) or a water bottle (LSRP 2019) for the interview.

Our diverse research team trained 454 students on the survey methods, fielding within their networks, and survey analysis. For most students, this was the first time they were exposed to survey methods, let alone a participatory research process that prioritizes student-worker leadership, and centers workers' and learners' voices. Our approach included reviewing research findings with all surveyors. In addition, a core undergraduate research team lead deeper analysis to synthesize the results through a series of UCLA Labor Studies research seminars.

Students entered surveys into Qualtrics, an online survey platform. A team of UCLA students reviewed each survey and checked for errors or discrepancies. The graduate student researchers conducted a second round of data cleaning once all the surveys were collected. The research team ran basic descriptives—frequencies and crosstabs—and checked for correlations. We developed data infographics and presented the data to students and other stakeholders through data analysis workshops.

We also conducted an extensive literature review and analyzed census data. We developed a stakeholder advisory group that included community partners, unions and college staff to review the research methods. We also worked with an academic advisory group to review findings and the report draft.

Table 1: Number of Surveys Collected by School

CCC (45%)		CSU (36%)	
Cerritos College (4)	Citrus College (12)	CSU Los Angeles (60)	CSU Long Beach (50)
College of the Canyons (3)	Compton College (2)	CSU Northridge (90)	Cal Poly Pomona (30)
East Los Angeles College (69)	El Camino College (20)	CSU Dominguez Hills (83)	
Glendale Community College (4)	Los Angeles City College (21)		
Los Angeles Harbor College (33)	Los Angeles Mission College (20)		
Los Angeles Pierce College (54)	Los Angeles Southwest College (38)		
Los Angeles Trade Tech College (21)	Los Angeles Valley College (34)		
Long Beach City College (11)	Mt. San Antonio College (2)		
Pasadena City College (3)	Rio Hondo College (4)		
Santa Monica College (24)	West Los Angeles College (12)		
Multiple colleges (3)			
		UCs (19%)	
		UCLA (160)	

Tables 2: Demographics of Survey Sample by School Type

		All	UC	CSU	CCC
Age	18–24	76%	85%	70%	77%
	25–45	23%	14%	30%	22%
	46 and older	1%	1%	1%	1%
Gender	Female	63%	76%	64%	58%
	Male	36%	24%	36%	40%
	Transgender or Gender Nonconforming	1%	-	<1%	<1%
	Other	<1%	-	-	<1%
Sexual orientation	Gay or Lesbian	5%	5%	4%	7%
	Straight	87%	86%	91%	85%
	Bisexual	5%	5%	3%	6%
	Other	3%	4%	2%	3%
Race/ ethnicity	Hispanic or Latinx	61%	60%	65%	59%
	Black or African American	9%	3%	7%	12%
	Asian	8%	11%	8%	6%
	White	7%	12%	5%	7%
	Multiracial	6%	6%	6%	6%
	Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	4%	3%	4%	4%
	No Response	3%	3%	2%	3%
	Other	2%	<1%	1%	2%
	Native American, Indigenous, or Alaskan Native	1%	<1%	-	<1%
	SWANA	1%	<1%	1%	1%
Vulnerable populations	Military/Veteran	1%	-	2%	1%
	Disability or Medical Conditions	5%	8%	4%	4%
	Formerly Incarcerated	1%	<1%	<1%	2%
	Foster care youth	2%	4%	<1%	2%
	Undocumented/DACA	7%	11%	6%	6%
Has dependents	Yes	8%	1%	8%	10%
	No	92%	99%	92%	91%



Appendix B: Acknowledgments

This report was a collective and participatory effort, and we thank all the students, teachers, and advisers who contributed and worked with tireless commitment on this project. We dedicate the report to the workers and learners of Los Angeles county.

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Sophia Ángeles, Mindy Chen, Jennifer Galvez, Janna Shaddock-Hernández, Preeti Sharma, Deja Thomas, Saba Waheed, and Michele Wong. (2020). *Unseen Costs: The Experiences of Workers and Learners in Los Angeles County*. UCLA Labor Center.

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