

In Hard Times

More and more Americans – including Idahoans, Oregonians and Washingtonians – are seeking education and training that will help them land a job or start a promising career. Career colleges are playing a key role in meeting this demand.

As career college enrollments have grown, the schools have become targets for attacks, often based on misinformation and bias. A recent example is an article titled “In Hard Times: Lured into Trade School and Debt” and published in the Sunday New York Times.

In addition to errors, the story omitted critical information about career colleges such as:

- Career colleges were chosen by 2.8 million students, most of whom are working adults and many are veterans.
- The New York Times story dubbed career college students as the “new poor.” In fact, more than 75 percent of career college students work while pursuing their education. Three-quarters of career college students are financially independent, nearly half have dependents and 31 percent are single parents. They aren’t rich, but they are highly motivated.
- More than half of all graduates in the allied health fields attended career colleges. Nursing graduates from career colleges, which make up 10 percent of the nursing graduates nationally, passed required examinations at the same or higher rates as their contemporaries attending public institutions.
- The average retention and placement rates of career colleges were about 70 percent, according to a report by the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools. Public institutions aren’t required to track this kind of performance as part of their accreditation.
- The graduation rate at career colleges serving predominantly low-income students is nearly two and half times higher than community colleges serving similar populations. The public investment in career colleges, typically in the form of federal student aid, is a fraction of what community colleges receive.

Student debt and loan defaults are a concern, but not just for students who attend career colleges. A Government Accountability Office (GAO) witness testified before Congress that data shows student loan default rates track with socio-economic status, not the type of institution. Students from low-income families and minority students have higher default rates.

Career colleges educate this segment of our population to a larger degree than other higher education sectors. Around 25 percent of career college student enrollments come from families – often their own family – with less than \$20,000 in annual household income. When you look at the data, career college student default rates are comparable with rates from community colleges and other postsecondary institutions that serve low-income and minority students.

Attack by anecdote is a favorite tactic. However, the data and accounts from career college students tell a much different story – a story of hope and opportunity, a story of choice and success.

“Career colleges are playing an important role in helping the United States lower unemployment, boost competitiveness and fill jobs in key industries such as health care and information technology,” says Harris Miller, president of the Career College Association. “By increasing the number of college graduates, our schools are an essential part of the solution to restore this country’s global education and economic standing.”