

THE HUMAN IMPACT OF AN ADULT FINANCIAL AID PROGRAM

By Elisabeth Sims and Hans A. Andrews

Student aid for adults in part-time postsecondary education may have received its strongest support as a result of a 1974 study by the American Council on Education.¹

Discrimination against part-time adult students in financial aid programs had been over the years perpetuated through a number of myths that had gone unchecked through any solid research. These myths, as they relate to financial aids for part-time students, were explored and corrected in the ACE study. The three major myths which were examined were that:

- (1) the part-time student is not serious enough to command the attention and resources of postsecondary education;
- (2) the part-time student is working and can afford to pay his own way;
- (3) in any case available resources are not sufficient to cover the added costs of financial aid for part-time students.

The ACE study provided extensive documentation to support the seriousness of part-time students and their limited family income. Limited income and the high cost of a postsecondary education are the main obstacles to part-time students furthering their education.



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¹ *Financing Part-Time Students, The New Majority in Postsecondary Education*, Washington, D.C., 1974, American Council on Education.

The Present Study

The present study was conducted with the objective of investigating the impact of an adult scholarship program of Kellogg Community College in Michigan as it related to the 1974 ACE report. One outreach effort of this institution has been to assist adults in the attainment of previously delayed, frustrated, or misdirected expectations of personal and career accomplishments. The college focused upon financial need as one of the last barriers in getting many adults to take advantage of community college courses which were offered both day and evening and at on and off-campus locations.

Target groups that the college identified as in need of financial aids were: adults in high school completion programs and adults completing high school equivalency through the General Education Development Test (G.E.D.). The scholarship aid program was aimed at reaching many of these adults who were recently motivated to raise their aspirational and educational levels.

The college's continuing education director and area community education directors worked together to identify those adults who had the potential to benefit from college work but lacked the necessary financial resources. This information was necessary to seek out possible donors for an adult financial aid program. A request for funds which outlined the needs, motivation, and frustrations of adult students lacking finances to continue their education was then sent to local foundations. As a result of this request, the college received its first substantial scholarship funds for adult part-time students in 1973.

One of the techniques employed by the college in the selection of motivated adults was to award scholarships to individuals completing adult high school in the area. Awards were also made to adults who scored well on the G.E.D. Test. Scholarships were to be continued if the recipient re-enrolled after receiving successful course completions. The college, aware that the adult low-income scholarship winners were from somewhat of a "high risk" population, provided counseling services to assist individuals in program planning and career exploration.

In November, 1975, a survey questionnaire was mailed to 78 adult recipients of part-time scholarships the previous spring semester. The survey posed five questions designed to study the impact of the scholarship program and how it related to the ACE study. A second questionnaire was sent to those who had not responded to the first request. Of the 78 questionnaires mailed, 56 were returned for a response rate of 71.8 percent.

The Findings

The results of the survey are presented in Table 1. The statistics clearly establish that the program of awarding adult scholarships to part-time students has reached and substantially filled felt needs of the recipients. Eighty-eight percent of the respondents completed the courses for which they received grants, and more than three out of every four indicated they would not have enrolled without the scholarship assistance. A check of the

TABLE 1

Impact Factors of an Adult Financial Aid Program (N = 56)

Questions	Number of Yes Responses		Number of NO Responses	
	(Yes)	(% Age)	(NO)	(% Age)
1. Would you have enrolled in college without the scholarship grant?	12	23%	43	77%
2. Has the experience changed your family's attitude toward you?	45	80%	11	20%
3. Has your work or career been changed because of the program:	24	44%	31	56%
4. Has your attitude toward life in general changed?	45	80%	11	20%
5. Did you complete the course?	49	88%	7	12%

records of the non-respondents indicated that only 39 percent were successful in completing their courses. This may account for a number of the non-respondents failing to reply. A total of five scholarship recipients could not be located at the time of the study.

A total of 80 percent indicated that the experience changed their family's attitude toward them. This particular response evoked much non-quantitative evidence that the change in family's attitude had a very positive impact upon the recipients' lives. Several letters of testimony accompanied the completed questionnaires. Some representative comments were as follows:

"Now I will be a respected person," wrote a mother of three children;

"I think my family looks up to me a little."

"When my daughter's face shines for me, I shine, too" wrote another. A farmer's wife wrote that she had learned to keep her family's accounts.

"The experience has changed my son because he did not like school, but when he sees me doing homework he will ask for paper to do some, too," wrote a woman with sole support of her two children.

Another wife wrote that her success had inspired her husband to complete a truck driving course which he had previously dropped.

Two recipients wrote that they had found work and thereby had been able to drop welfare benefits.

More than 40 percent of the recipients who returned the questionnaire indicated that their work or career had been changed because of the program. This was within six months of the time they enrolled. Comments on this section were varied. Some of them were as follows:

"I have a job now."

"The courses I took improved my work habits."

"I can see many things I had been doing wrong on my job."

"I can cope with domestic problems better now — school makes for a more fulfilling life."

On the question about "has your attitude toward life in general changed," there was a *yes* answer by 80 percent of the respondents. Although no written response was asked for here, several commented with "I have more assurance", or "more self-confidence", and "a more positive attitude about life".

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the questionnaire suggest that the availability of scholarship aid to attend college has had very positive impact upon the individual, family, and work lives of the recipients. Several felt compelled to write letters of testimony in addition to the questionnaire to discuss their new outlook on life.

The study also lends support to the American Council on Education's conclusions. The results of this study help to destroy further the same myths that the ACE study put to rest regarding part-time students. The results of this survey, as they assist in the destruction of those myths, can be summarized as follows:

1st myth: The part-time student is not serious enough to command the attention and resources of postsecondary education.

This study showed that part-time adults will apply for financial assistance to attend college, have recently improved themselves educationally through high school completion or the G.E.D. Test and have high motivation and, therefore, a high completion rate in their courses.

2nd myth: The part-time student is working and can afford to pay his own way.

The recipients of this program were selected on the basis of their very limited income. Many worked without the skills to command higher wages. Most of the respondents (78%) indicated that they would not have enrolled without the scholarship assistance.

3rd myth: Available resources are not sufficient to cover the added costs of financial aid for part-time students.

There are sponsors and donors willing to provide financial resources. They need to be appraised, however, of the nature, needs, and social-economic pressures of the adult part-time student. Kellogg Community College has been able to attract over \$25,000 in a three-year period of modest fund-raising activities.

For those who conceived of this program of adult part-time scholarships, and for those whose gifts made it possible, the statistics and the personal testimonials in this study offered conclusive proof that this venture in outreach had found and started to fill a compelling community need. It has further served to validate the results of the ACE study which supported need for part-time students to be in the mainstream of postsecondary financial aid programs.