

Connecticut State University System

Realizing Unfulfilled Academic Promise

JOHN H. MOTLEY
CSUS BOARD OF TRUSTEES



In Connecticut each year, there are more than ten thousand well qualified, thoroughly prepared students who graduate high school but do not go on to attend college. Their reasons vary, but a recent study suggests that many of them could be in college, if only they knew more about how to pursue a college education.

For them, and for our state, their absence from college classrooms is an opportunity cost of the first order – and a situation in dire need of a solution.

In a national study of college-qualified students who choose not to attend college, and their guidance counselors, the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) found that “perceived barriers include the lack of knowledge surrounding college cost and the availability of aid, the necessary steps needed to enroll in college, benefits to advance economically, and transparency about the amount and types of financial aid available.”

Anyone who has attempted to navigate the financial aid maze understands the difficulty. For students who face additional obstacles, such as language or low-income, or not having parents or close relatives who have gone through the process, college is often wrongly perceived as an unattainable goal, and quickly falls from the radar screen of post-graduation options.

Just think of the difference that thousands of academically-qualified students could make in our state if they elected to advance their education beyond high school, graduate and then enter our workplaces fully prepared.

As a state, we must work diligently and collaboratively across all levels of the education system to make college a real possibility for these students. Perception can become reality. If we can convince them to believe they can successfully gain admission and thrive in college, they may just seize that opportunity.

The Connecticut State University System (CSUS) knows first-hand of the struggles facing these students. Nearly half the CSUS student body – 49 percent – are the first in their families to attend college. That surprising number reflects remarkable dedication, with many surmounting difficulties of language, economic status, or family situation.

Increasingly, it is upon the shoulders of these students that Connecticut’s future rests. A landmark study of the changing demographics of this region, *New England 2020*, found that by 2020, more than a quarter of Connecticut’s working-age population will be comprised of minority populations, and nearly half of 25-29 year olds in Connecticut will be minorities.

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We simply cannot afford to let higher education slip away from students who could make the grade if given the chance.

As recently as 2000, according to a study for *Achieve, Inc.*, two-thirds of Americans believed that there were many ways to succeed without going to college. By 2007, that number had dropped to less than half.

One additional trend was cited in the IHEP data – only 15 percent of college-qualified students who did not enroll in college even applied to college; a mere 12 percent applied for financial aid, and only 10 percent took the SAT.

Those numbers suggest to researchers that the decision not to apply to college was often made long before high school graduation. That underscores the importance of efforts to provide middle school students with critical information about the college readiness process.

The sooner students believe that college is a real possibility, the less likely it becomes that college-qualified graduating seniors will turn away from post-secondary education.

Awareness of the dramatically increased earning power provided by each year of higher education, the study suggests, can be an important factor in deciding whether to

apply to college. Recognizing connections between post-secondary education and the job market is another. The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that jobs requiring higher education will grow by 22 percent between 2002 and 2012 – nearly double the rate of non-college jobs.

CSUS is committed to working collaboratively to respond to barriers real and perceived, replacing them with paths of genuine possibility. In the process, we hope to lay the groundwork for realizing academic potential that will make a difference in the lives of these promising students and our great state.

■ *John H. Motley, a partner in MotleyBeup, is a member of the Board of Trustees for the Connecticut State University System and Chairman of the Hartford School Building Committee. He is former president of the St. Paul Travelers Connecticut Foundation and lives in Hartford.*

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